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PARLIAMENTARY DEBATES

(HANSARD)

SIXTH SERIES—VOLUME 426 (Part 1)

HOUSE OF COMMONS

OFFICIAL REPORT

THIRD SESSION OF THE FIFTY-THIRD PARLIAMENT
OF THE UNITED KINGDOM OF GREAT BRITAIN
AND NORTHERN IRELAND
FIFTY-THIRD YEAR OF THE REIGN OF
HER MAJESTY QUEEN ELIZABETH II

SESSION 2003–04

COMPRISING PERIOD
1 November—18 November 2004

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1 November 2004

THE
PARLIAMENTARY DEBATES
OFFICIAL REPORT

IN THE THIRD SESSION OF THE FIFTY-THIRD PARLIAMENT OF THE
UNITED KINGDOM OF GREAT BRITAIN AND NORTHERN IRELAND
[WHICH OPENED 13 JUNE 2001]

FIFTY-THIRD YEAR OF THE REIGN OF
HER MAJESTY QUEEN ELIZABETH II

SIXTH SERIES **VOLUME 426.**

TWELFTH VOLUME OF SESSION 2003–2004

House of Commons

Monday 1 November 2004

The House met at half-past Two o'clock

PRAYERS

[Mr. Speaker *in the Chair*]

Oral Answers to Questions

CULTURE, MEDIA AND SPORT

The Secretary of State was asked—

Theatres

1. **Chris Bryant** (Rhondda) (Lab): How many theatres in England and Wales receive public subsidy. [194566]

The Minister for the Arts (Estelle Morris): Some 236 theatres receive public subsidy from Arts Council England. In addition, local authorities invest more than £220 million in the arts each year, some of which goes to theatres. The figures for Wales are a matter for the Welsh Assembly.

Chris Bryant: Notwithstanding the fact that my right hon. Friend has no responsibility for Wales, I hope that she will visit the new millennium centre theatre in Cardiff soon. I believe that it holds the prospect of being one of best theatres in the land.

I want to ask my right hon. Friend about west end theatre. She knows that it is one of Britain's greatest assets, especially for foreign tourists. Yet 46,856 seats in London's west end theatres do not receive a single penny of state subsidy simply because they are run in the commercial sector, despite the fact that many are listed buildings. Is that fair? Is not it time that the Labour Government discovered some new way, perhaps a third way, of helping?

Estelle Morris: I look forward to visiting the new millennium centre—I wish it well. It is nice to go to places for which one does not have responsibility now and again.

I readily acknowledge the excellence, worldwide reputation and contribution to the nation's economy of west end theatres. That contribution is estimated at approximately £1.5 billion. As my hon. Friend knows, there is a genuine problem about publicly subsidising commercial theatres. However, I acknowledge theatres' problems and, earlier this year, the Secretary of State and I brought together all interested parties, including theatres, local authorities and our Department. We asked people to try to devise what might be a third way; we certainly hope that it will be a strategy. We look forward to the report, which we expect some time before Christmas.

Mr. Nick Hawkins (Surrey Heath) (Con): Does the Minister also appreciate that many important listed buildings provide wonderful productions throughout the country, not only in the west end? If the Minister and the Government are considering supporting great historic buildings in which theatres perform throughout the year, they should examine not only the specific problems of the listed theatres in London but of those throughout the country.

Estelle Morris: I readily accept that. Let us be clear: Ministers will not decide where the public funds go. Many buildings, including theatres that are listed and those that are not, are vital to their community and often need repair and refurbishment. It is a long haul because there are many theatres and not as much money to go round.

Approximately half the money that is believed to be generated through theatres comes from the west end. Although I do not belittle or fail to understand the importance of theatres in their communities, there is something extra special about the London west end. If we witnessed its demise, everybody, no matter where our constituencies are based, would view that as a cause for sorrow. Let us hope that we are considering a question of not either/or but, over the years, both.

Mr. Peter Pike (Burnley) (Lab): My right hon. Friend referred to the role of local government in supporting local theatres. I know that she has visited the arts centre in the mechanics building in Burnley but not the theatre. Does she acknowledge that councils such as Burnley find it increasingly difficult to fund such arts centres and theatres and need more assistance from the Government, especially when local council budgets are being squeezed so tightly?

Estelle Morris: It may be that some local authorities find it difficult but many make it a priority. When they decide that the arts and culture are essential to their community, the money is found. I congratulate and thank local authorities that have prioritised those matters and urge those that have not to do so.

Gambling Bill

2. **Simon Hughes** (Southwark, North and Bermondsey) (LD): What assessment she has made of the level of protection that the Gambling Bill gives to *(a)* young people and *(b)* other vulnerable persons. [194567]

The Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport (Tessa Jowell): The Gambling Bill, the Second Reading of which the House will debate later today, will provide significantly greater safeguards for children and vulnerable adults than the present law. The status quo is dangerous and unacceptable because the current law does not allow Government or the Gaming Board to regulate the many new technologies, such as video roulette machines, in betting shops or online gambling sites. Without the Bill, which has been strengthened by pre-legislative scrutiny, problem gambling is likely to increase. The safeguards will enable the regulator—the proposed new gambling commission—and the Government to keep the position firmly under control and to act swiftly to cut back the supply of gambling opportunities, should that prove necessary.

Simon Hughes: I hope that the Secretary of State accepts that the best estimate is that 300,000 people are defined as problem gamblers. During the scrutiny process, she told the Committee that, if the Bill produced more problem gamblers, it would have failed. Does she maintain the view that the 10 per cent. of the Bill that is controversial will not add one more problem gambler to the number? Given that no one else shares that view, will she reconsider the basis of her opinion?

Tessa Jowell: Maintaining the current low level of problem gambling is one of the Bill's objectives and protection from harm is a theme that runs all the way through the Bill. What has been lost in recent controversy about the Bill is the sheer scale of the gambling commission's power to wind back any liberalisation of the gambling regime in the event of harm being established. Moreover, through the gambling survey, we shall have clear figures providing a baseline on which we can judge future trends. The success of—and, indeed, continued access to—gambling technologies will be judged on their ability to provide entertainment rather than generating problem gambling.

I cannot tell the hon. Gentleman that, given more gambling opportunities, there will not be a single extra problem gambler. It would be ridiculous to say that. People are at risk now from gambling on the internet and from unregulated offshore sites. But—

Mr. Speaker: Order. Other Members may wish to ask questions.

Mr. Frank Doran (Aberdeen, Central) (Lab): Does the Secretary of State accept that the greatest protection for gambling addicts is related to the number of casinos? I support the broad aims of the Bill, but I am worried about the potential for increase.

Let me give an example from my constituency. Two casinos serve north-east Scotland and, so far, Aberdeen city council has had to deal with six applications for outline planning permission for future casinos. I am particularly worried about the local authorities that will be involved in the licensing. I want to ensure that they are protected properly, because at present they are squeezed between protecting the interests of local electors and the enormous cost of appeals. I want a robust licensing system. Can the Secretary of State reassure me?

Tessa Jowell: Let me make three quick points. In countries such as Australia, where problem gambling has become a major issue, the proliferation of machines rather than casinos has been responsible. We have learnt from that lesson. We also see the need for a tough regulator who can act to prevent harm. Finally, local authorities will have a clearly defined power to decide that they do not want any casinos in their areas. It will be effective for three years, and renewable thereafter.

Miss Julie Kirkbride (Bromsgrove) (Con): Can the Secretary of State explain why the gaming machines to be found in chip shops, for instance, which offer a £5 maximum payout for a 10p stake, are so corrupting to children? What evidence has she? Can she also explain why, given that local authorities already have power to ban such machines, they have not done so?

Tessa Jowell: I welcome the hon. Lady's newly discovered interest in gambling, but we are pursuing the Bill's key objective, which is to protect children from gambling and, in particular, from the risks of ambient gambling—chancing on a machine when they happen to be standing around doing something else. We intend to remove those risks from children, which is why the 6,000 entirely unregulated machines in chip shops, minicab offices and the like are to be withdrawn.

Mr. Bill Olner (Nuneaton) (Lab): I welcome much of the Bill, but I find it offensive that large American companies will be able to buy planning permission for casinos from local authorities. Will my right hon. Friend assure me that that will be dealt with in Committee, and will not happen?

Tessa Jowell: American companies are already considerable investors in the United Kingdom economy. We will accept American investment, Japanese investment and Australian investment, but we will subject it to a British regulatory regime that is right for the people of this country and acceptable to them.

Mr. Malcolm Moss (North-East Cambridgeshire) (Con): All the experts, including the Secretary of State's own Ministers, agree that accessibility to gambling opportunities is the key factor contributing to a rise in problem gambling. How then can the Secretary of State claim to be increasing protection for children and the vulnerable when greater access is to be encouraged by withdrawing the membership rules, allowing ambient access to unlimited-prize category A gaming machines for the first time ever in this country, and when regional planning policy, run through the Office of the Deputy Prime Minister, positively skews the location of the new regional casinos towards the greatest density of population in our city centres?

Tessa Jowell: To deal with the third point first, that is not necessarily the case because the gambling commission may well decide to issue advice to local authorities by which they will be bound about the criteria that should be applied when considering the location of the very large casinos. But that is a perfectly reasonable question.

With regard to getting rid of membership rules, modern gambling is not about membership of gentlemen's clubs. People gamble as a leisure pursuit in ever increasing numbers, so we seek to strike a proper boundary between the legitimate right of adults to choose to spend their leisure time as they wish within the law, while at the same time regulating for human frailty, protecting the vulnerable, and, in particular, protecting children from the harm that gambling can create.

David Winnick (Walsall, North) (Lab): I recognise that perhaps as much as 90 per cent. of the Bill can be supported, but is my right hon. Friend aware that there are two anxieties—that there is no maximum number of casinos and, that that, inevitably, along with other clauses in the Bill, is bound to increase gambling? Why should we be involved in doing so, when already too many vulnerable people are in gambling debt and that can only increase? There is a great deal to be said for the Cabinet and my right hon. Friend reconsidering the controversial aspects of the measure and then coming back to the House. As it stands, some of us will find it impossible to vote for it at 10 o'clock.

Tessa Jowell: I respect my hon. Friend's views. I know that gambling is an issue that will divide the House on other than the normal party political lines and I respect the views of those who feel that gambling is quite simply wrong. But in relation to the very large casinos that have been the subject of much of the controversy and publicity in the last week or so, the estimate—it is an industry estimate, not a Government one—is that there are likely to be between 20 and 40. I will not now but later set out in detail the tough regulatory regime, a combination of the role of the gambling commission and the planning regime, that will determine whether they develop in any part of the country at all.

Gambling in this country is lawful and it is increasing. Millions of people choose to gamble as a leisure activity. The urgent need is for regulation to ensure that we do not see an increase in problem gambling and that people are not exploited.

Darts

3. **Bob Russell** (Colchester) (LD): What progress has been made in making darts an officially recognised sport. [194568]

The Minister for Sport and Tourism (Mr. Richard Caborn): Decisions as to whether particular activities and pastimes should be recognised as sports for official and funding purposes are made by unanimous agreement between the sports councils. I understand that the sports councils are unlikely to reach a consensus on the recognition of darts as a sport in the foreseeable future.

Bob Russell: Does the Minister agree that millions of people who play darts regard it as a sport, as do local and national newspapers and television? Is it not time that the sports bodies in this country recognised darts as a sport, as millions of people believe it to be, and stopped behaving in an elitist—[HON. MEMBERS: "Snobbish."]—and snobbish way?

Mr. Caborn: I know that the hon. Gentleman feels strongly about this, but I refer him again to the Sports Council, which is certainly not elitist and does an extremely good job, as he knows. The definition goes back to the Physical Training and Recreation Act 1937. I ask him to reflect on whether darts fits into the category of "physical training and recreation". The sports bodies say no, and that was confirmed in a review in 1997, and again by UK Sport in 2000, as he has been told on previous occasions.

Public Service Broadcasting

4. **Nick Harvey** (North Devon) (LD): If she will make a statement on the recently published Ofcom review of public service broadcasting, with specific reference to its implications for regional television. [194569]

The Minister for the Arts (Estelle Morris): The second phase of Ofcom's public service television review, published on 30 September, represents an important contribution to the debate about the future of public service broadcasting. All Ofcom's proposals, including those relating to regional television in England, are currently out to consultation, following which Ofcom will publish its final recommendations in due course.

Nick Harvey: What is the Government's vision for the future of ITV? Does the Minister understand the concern of the people working in regional ITV and watching it about Ofcom's proposal to reduce the obligations and its warning that even that reduced level may not be sustainable? Does she want ITV to continue into the longer term as a regional broadcaster? Given that, after digital switchover, the licence will not have its previous value, what system of sticks and carrots could she bring to bear to ensure that ITV remains a regional broadcaster?

Estelle Morris: The vision is one that continues ITV's current regional obligations. Members of Parliament will well know the importance of regional broadcasting as a means of communicating, at least from this place, to people elsewhere. After digital switchover, whenever it arrives, things will change, and I see the paper that Ofcom has published very much as an opportunity to discuss important issues about what regional programming might look like in the future. It is not for Government to comment now. The consultation is still open, and Ofcom will reflect on it and let us know its decision. There is a statutory framework that means that regional programming obligations will continue, but how they are manifested is not set in stone. We must keep our minds open about what changes may be necessary in the light of technological advances.

Jim Knight (South Dorset) (Lab): The creative industries are among the most important industries in the south-west, working closely with higher education establishments in places such as Plymouth, Bristol and Bournemouth. Those establishments in turn have a strong and important relationship with regional broadcasters, which help to sustain them as institutions. Will my right hon. Friend assure me that she will be robust with Ofcom to ensure that regional TV production is retained, in order to support the important creative industries in my region?

Estelle Morris: I acknowledge the importance of the creative industries as a sector that is growing at twice the rate of any other industrial sector in our country, so of course we must ensure that we train for it and establish links from universities into its work. I do not foresee a future with no regional programming obligations on either ITV or the BBC, and I believe that the Ofcom report made that clear, but we are in a period of change, and change brings uncertainty. With digital switchover on the horizon, it would be silly to bury our head in the sand and think that those regional obligations could continue in exactly their current form, but I am sure that Ofcom will bear in mind the important and valuable point that my hon. Friend makes.

Mr. Tim Boswell (Daventry) (Con): Does the Minister accept that regional television, including regional news, is as clear a case as can be of public service broadcasting, as it would simply not be provided for profit, and is not Ofcom therefore entirely right to point out that the old matching inducement of cheap analogue spectrum to finance it is of diminishing value? Will she be prepared to bite the bullet and at least not rule out in advance any sensible and imaginative means of finding the resources to fund this essential local programming when, before very long, it becomes necessary?

Estelle Morris: I agreed with the first two thirds of the hon. Gentleman's question, but it is too early to go beyond the consultation on the Ofcom document. It would be unwise, while that consultation continues, to say what the Government's plans are. The nature of the consultation is to listen. Let there be no misunderstanding: the proposal in the document concerned a reduction from three hours to one and a half affecting non-news items at off-peak hours only. He did not mention it, but I share his great concern that regional news should be covered at a regional level. That is an important element of a strong democracy, with strong accountability. Let me put it on the record that Ofcom has not suggested any change on that.

Ian Lucas (Wrexham) (Lab): Is the Minister aware of real concern in Wales about the possible loss of an independent terrestrial broadcaster, and is she aware in particular of the important role of independent TV news? Will she assure us that she will not countenance a situation in which the BBC operates the only regional TV news network in Wales?

Estelle Morris: I take my hon. Friend's point; the BBC has an important part to play in regional broadcasting, but there is an issue about making sure that more than one organisation has that obligation. I will reflect on his comments and make sure that they are fed back as part of the consultation process.

Mr. Simon Thomas (Ceredigion) (PC): Further to that answer, does the Minister agree that ITV in the Welsh context is not just a regional broadcaster but the national English-language broadcaster? There is more to culture and nation than simply news: in fact, most people do not listen to the news but to drama and light entertainment, which also help to inform their views about democracy. From that perspective, is it not vital that we retain a commercial interest and a commercial station broadcasting in Wales, and in the regions of England?

Estelle Morris: The hon. Gentleman is right in some ways. In the regions of England, it probably is the news that is most important and of most interest. The position in the other countries is different from that in England, and Ofcom recognised that in its consultation document and is giving the point special attention. I join the hon. Gentleman in saying that regional television in Scotland, Northern Ireland and Wales is important linguistically and culturally, and I am pleased that that has been reflected in the consultation document.

Olympic Games

5. **Mr. Andrew Love** (Edmonton) (Lab/Co-op): If she will make a statement on progress with the 2012 Olympic bid. [194570]

The Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport (Tessa Jowell): The London 2012 Olympic bid is making excellent progress and was given a huge boost by the presence of more than 10,000 British sports fans at the Athens games in August, along with exceptional support from the Prime Minister, the Sports Minister, Ken Livingstone, Lord Coe and myself. The candidate file for the bid will be presented to the International Olympic Committee on 15 November, and we have already begun planning for the crucial IOC evaluation commission visit, which will take place from 16 to 19 February next year.

Mr. Love: My right hon. Friend will be aware of the recent poll showing 70 per cent. support for the Olympic bid. We all also welcome the fact that 200,000 people turned out in London to welcome home our Olympic athletes.

All the evidence from both Athens and Sydney is that we will need a large number of volunteers to make the Olympics successful. In Sydney, for example, 50,000 volunteers were needed, and I suspect that that figure will translate to 60,000 for London. What efforts are my right hon. Friend and the bid partners making to ensure we get that level of support and have enough volunteers when the Olympics come here?

Tessa Jowell: The bid team is already beginning work on recruiting volunteers, and we estimate that 70,000 to 80,000, from all over the country, are likely to be needed. What is important about our bid, as my hon. Friend made clear, is that support in London is beginning to take off, and we have to ensure that that support is echoed all around the country. The members of the International Olympic Committee will need to be confident that they are awarding the games to a city in a country that really wants them. The message we want to send out loud and clear is that Britain really wants the Olympics, and London really wants the Olympics.

Mr. Mark Field (Cities of London and Westminster) (Con): As a fellow London Member, does the Secretary of State regard it as acceptable that the Mayor of London has signed a blank cheque on behalf of all Londoners for the overrun costs of the Olympic games? Is this in fact a London or a national Olympic games?

Tessa Jowell: It is the London Olympics in the United Kingdom. We have always been absolutely clear about that, and that is the basis on which Opposition parties have supported the games. It simply is not true to say that the Mayor of London has signed a blank cheque. He has made very clear the level of council tax that Londoners will pay—

Mr. Field *indicated dissent.*

Tessa Jowell: That, frankly, is the old Tory trick. The Mayor has set out the position absolutely clearly—38p a week. If the hon. Member for Cities of London and Westminster (Mr. Field) wants to stand up for the bid in London, he will stop playing political games with it.

Pete Wishart (North Tayside) (SNP): On the poll that the Secretary of State referred to, she will have noted that support in Scotland for a London Olympics is significantly lower than in the rest of the United Kingdom. There are some good reasons for that. She must explain clearly to those in Scotland what is in this for them. What would she say to the Scottish people who remain concerned that the use of lottery funds should not mean that our charities, grass-roots sports and good causes are raided to pay for a London Olympics?

Tessa Jowell: London, along with all the other parts of the United Kingdom, including Scotland, will benefit from the Olympic games. Support has not been as high as we would have liked, but there is an opportunity for every Member who represents a Scottish constituency, or who goes to Scotland, to talk up the benefit of the bid, not only for London, but for the whole UK.

Mr. Don Foster (Bath) (LD): May I take this opportunity to reiterate our support for the 2012 Olympic and Paralympic bid as something that will benefit all parts of the United Kingdom? The Secretary of State will be aware that the current plans require a great deal of the funding for the bid, if successful, to come from the Olympic lottery that is to be introduced. Is she aware that the regulatory impact assessment for the Gambling Bill shows that, if that Bill goes ahead, the receipts to the Olympic lottery will be cut, possibly by as much as £27 million a year, which is more than £100 million over five years? How does she plan to plug that gap?

Tessa Jowell: We will discuss the detail of the Gambling Bill later. Suffice it to say that maintaining the strength of the lottery was an important consideration in judging the legislative proposals in that Bill—hence our rejection of Sir Alan Budd's recommendations that side betting on the lottery be allowed or that there be a single regulator.

Hugh Robertson (Faversham and Mid-Kent) (Con): Nobody who saw the Athens Olympics could doubt the benefits that hosting the games brings to any city. However, given that the Sydney games overspent by £1.3 billion and that Athens has overspent by nearly £3 billion to date, will the Secretary of State confirm that any overspend on the London bid will be split between the lottery and London council tax payers? The cost to both could be considerable.

Tessa Jowell: Neither the Sydney games nor the Athens games had the degree of budgetary detail established at the point at which we are now. We have substantial contingency in the estimated call on the public finances, through both council tax and the lottery, and we are confident that a London games will be run within the budgetary limits that will be set out in the candidate file.

Digital Television

6. **Mr. Adrian Sanders** (Torbay) (LD): If she will make a statement on the date for the switch-off of analogue television transmission. [194571]

8. **Mr. Alistair Carmichael** (Orkney and Shetland) (LD): If she will make a statement on digital switchover. [194573]

The Minister for the Arts (Estelle Morris): My right hon. Friend the Secretary of State issued a statement in July 2004 on the progress being made towards digital switchover. She noted that although broadcasters had not reached a full consensus, some had suggested that 2012 might be the most appropriate date for the completion of switchover. However, a final decision on the timetable has not yet been taken.

Mr. Sanders: What is the Government's response to pensioners in my constituency who get a free TV licence but who will not be able to receive any television pictures when the digital switchover takes place? Will they get a bit extra in their pensions to compensate?

Estelle Morris: I apologise if I have not quite understood the hon. Gentleman's question, but one of the requirements for switchover is that anybody who receives terrestrial television now will be able to receive digital television. On helping vulnerable groups, he referred to elderly pensioners in his constituency, but as he knows, we have asked that a committee be set up to advise us on that. Consideration of the help that vulnerable groups may need will be one of the factors influencing our decision about when switchover will take place.

Mr. Carmichael: The Minister may be aware that, in many parts of my constituency, we do not have an adequate analogue service and few people believe that that situation will improve come the digital switchover. There is serious concern in the northern isles that, come the digital switchover, we will again be left behind. Will she and her colleagues therefore give some consideration to the proposals from the independent consumer expert group that at least 99.5 per cent. of the population in each region, and not just in the UK as a whole, should be able to receive a digital signal at the point of switchover?

Estelle Morris: I shall certainly consider the recommendations of any group that is looking into this matter, because I accept that it is important. The hon. Gentleman and the hon. Member for Torbay (Mr. Sanders) both have constituencies in which reception of the analogue signal is not great and digital reception is even worse. That situation will remain until switchover. The dilemma of the hon. Gentleman's constituents is that, unless we can get more spectrum, we will not be able to aid them. This is an important switchover to make, but it is absolutely right that we do not make it until we are in receipt of all the information, and that we do it in an orderly and proper way.

David Cairns (Greenock and Inverclyde) (Lab): As a Member from a constituency that also has large areas without an analogue signal, I hope that we do not delay the matter indefinitely, as no resources are being spent on upgrading the analogue signal in advance of digital switchover. As well as the geographical criteria, there is an affordability criterion, which the Government recognise in providing free television licences for over-75s. I appreciate that my right hon. Friend will not want to blight the market at this stage, but will she at least acknowledge that the Government understand that some older and poorer people may need assistance in respect of the set-top box, or whatever the technology is by 2012, to help them to make the digital switchover?

Estelle Morris: Of course I accept that there is an issue, otherwise the Government would not have acted as they have done to introduce free television licences for vulnerable groups. That is exactly why we have set up Ofcom's independent consumer panel to look at how the whole of digital switchover may affect vulnerable groups. I am not in a position to say more than that, merely because we are awaiting the report of that panel, but my hon. Friend can rest assured that the matter is on our mind—although that is not a commitment as to exactly what we will do.

Michael Fabricant (Lichfield) (Con): The Minister will be aware that ITV3 launches tonight on digital terrestrial television—that is, freeview—but is she aware that the launch of that new channel will cause problems because of the lack of bandwidth on freeview? Is she aware that, even at present, the system used for compressing technology and television on freeview is already out of date? She said that 2012 might be the time for digital switchover. Will she consider before the next election whether we will use the current system of digital terrestrial television or a system that can increase the number of channels threefold or fourfold?

Estelle Morris: The hon. Gentleman's question is incredibly technical, and I would not claim to match his knowledge on that point. The key issue is that we need more spectrum. Unless we get more spectrum, nothing will change, and we will neither help the constituents of the hon. Members for Torbay and for Orkney and Shetland (Mr. Carmichael) to receive the analogue signal nor enable the 25 per cent. who cannot currently receive digital switchover to do so. That is exactly why the Government have set up bodies, organisations, panels and consumer and broadcast interest groups to make recommendations and advise us on the technicalities. The hon. Gentleman can rest assured that we will take all those matters into account before finally announcing the date of switchover.

National Lottery

7. **Mr. Peter Luff** (Mid-Worcestershire) (Con): If she will review the criteria for the allocation of lottery funds to good causes. [194572]

The Minister for the Arts (Estelle Morris): The criteria for the allocation of lottery funds depend on the distributing body and the individual funding programme concerned. We have set the framework in policy and financial directions for the distributors and they have drawn up strategic plans and funding policies.

Mr. Luff: The general taxpayer has often paid for many good causes through his or her taxes, particularly health and education. The purpose of the lottery is to provide money for other things that general taxation did not pay for—in particular, arts, the Community Fund, heritage and sport. So why is arts funding down £160 million a year under this Government, the Community Fund down £140 million, heritage lottery funding down £120 million and sports down £140 million, while the New Opportunities Fund, all of which should be paid from general taxation, is up £450 million?

Estelle Morris: Part of the reason why the revenues to the original funding streams have changed is that, not this year, but previously, sale of tickets had decreased. There is a direct correlation: if not as many people buy tickets, not as much money is sent to the good causes. I accept the thrust of the hon. Gentleman's question, which I think was additionality. Of course, education, health and the environment have statutory funding, but let me take, for example, two of the things that have been funded from the New Opportunities Fund—after-school homework clubs and the fruit initiative in schools. Those have never been funded out of general taxation for citizens. That expenditure has gone on at exactly the same time as there has been a massive increase in the amount of taxpayers' money—public funding—going to the education and health services and environment. It cannot have replaced direct funding from the Government because Government funding for each of those key services has increased far more than ever it did under the Government whom the hon. Gentleman supported.

Jim Sheridan (West Renfrewshire) (Lab): During the review, will my right hon. Friend ensure that all hon. Members are made aware of applications, whether successful or unsuccessful, in their constituencies, so that a proper assessment can be made of where the money is being spent? Could she also reinforce the principle that lottery funding should go to community-based projects that affect people's lives?

Estelle Morris: I will do that. It is important that feedback is given to Members of Parliament. Many right hon. and hon. Members have been helpful in working with the lottery distributors to make sure that their constituents get what might be termed a fair share of the resources. I agree that money doing direct to community use is of great benefit. As my hon. Friend will know, more than half the awards go to the 100 most deprived local authorities. I am sure he shares my pleasure at that.

Mr. John Whittingdale (Maldon and East Chelmsford) (Con): Will the Minister acknowledge, first, that the national lottery is a Conservative success story? Is it not the case, as my hon. Friend the Member for Mid-Worcestershire (Mr. Luff) pointed out, that under the Government more and more money is siphoned off to pay for Government projects—I regard both those that she mentioned as Government projects—with the result that the money given to the original good causes last year was less than half the amount it was when the last Conservative Government left office? The Government's own report estimates that the increase in other gambling as a result of the Gambling Bill may lead to a further loss of up to £70 million from the lottery. Is it not sad that on the lottery's 10th anniversary, the Government seem intent on inflicting still further damage to the good causes?

Estelle Morris: I can well understand the hon. Gentleman, seven years later, trying to find something to claim credit for under the previous Conservative Administration. I give credit to him. I seem to remember, but I may be wrong, that the introduction of the lottery received support from all parties in the House. Never mind; it was a good initiative and it has brought a great deal of much-needed funding to good causes and to other services as well. All I have to say in addition to the answer I gave to the hon. Member for Mid-Worcestershire (Mr. Luff) is that if my memory serves me right, we made it clear in our 1997 election manifesto that we would look at what were defined as "good causes". I would bet—given that it is a day for gambling talk—that people who buy lottery tickets think it is a good thing to spend lottery funding on many of the causes that we have added to the legislation, such as education, health and environment.

10. **Sir Teddy Taylor** (Rochford and Southend, East) (Con): What the latest figure is for the number of national lottery tickets sold weekly; and what the figure was *(a)* 12 and *(b)* 24 months ago. [194575]

The Minister for the Arts (Estelle Morris): Average weekly sales for the first half of this financial year were £90.5 million. The average weekly sales for 2003–04 were £88.7 million and the average weekly sales for 2002–03 were £87.9 million.

Sir Teddy Taylor: If there is such a huge unmet demand for gambling, as the Government seem to argue in the Bill coming before us, why does the Minister think sales of lottery tickets have not been soaring, in view of the prizes of several million pounds? Does she accept that over the past few years, sales have decreased rather than increased?

Estelle Morris: Whereas last year the question could have been asked why lottery sales had decreased, I am sure the hon. Gentleman will be pleased that they have increased in the past year—a 4.7 per cent. increase on the figure for the same time last year. That is a result of the fact—not my own opinion—that Camelot has diversified the games on offer. It is cautious, and I am not being over-optimistic that it has turned the corner or that more funding will come in for distribution to good causes, but it does not become any of us not to acknowledge that after a period of declining sales, we have seen an increase in sales. I for one am pleased about that, because it will mean more money going to good causes.

Mr. Tony Banks (West Ham) (Lab): May I suggest to my right hon. Friend that one of the ways that perhaps she could do something about the declining revenue from lottery ticket sales and the declining amount of money that has gone to good causes would be to ask my right hon. Friend the Chancellor of the Exchequer to give up his share of the lottery? The Chancellor wins every week. When the original proposal was brought forward, people did not anticipate that we would be giving so much money to the Treasury.

Estelle Morris: My hon. Friend can suggest that to me but I would merely say that that is a matter for the Treasury.

Football Association

11. **Andy Burnham** (Leigh) (Lab): What recent discussions she has held with the Football Association on *(a)* its structure and *(b)* governance of the sport. [194576]

The Minister for Sport and Tourism (Mr. Richard Caborn): As with all governing bodies, the Government's aim is for them to be fit for purpose. The Football Association is no exception. The FA has been discussing a review of the organisation, including its structure and governance, since the spring of 2004. The events of the summer have underlined the need for a review, and the board and council are committed to one headed by an independent person, who will want to take a view on when they will be able to report. My right hon. Friend the Secretary of State wrote to the FA in August this year, and I have been in regular contact with the FA during this time.

Andy Burnham: I think that my right hon. Friend the Minister must have gone for extra time on this question.

Is it not the clearest sign that the Football Association desperately needs reform that supporters have no voice on its council yet a place can be found for Cambridge and Oxford universities and the public schools? Does my hon. Friend share my concern of reports that talk of reform is being used by some of the big clubs to grab yet more power? Does he agree that that is the last thing that football in this country needs?

Mr. Caborn: Very much so. We must question why we have the Independent Football Commission. We must question also why we have an organisation for the fans. Further, we must ask why we have separate funding for grass-roots football through the foundation. Any review would consider the good regulation and governance of this important sport that is our national game. I hope and believe that the FA, within the terms of reference and given the person that it appoints, will bear that in mind. The FA will then be fit for purpose and will be a governing body of which we can all be proud.

CHURCH COMMISSIONERS

The hon. Member for Middlesbrough, representing the Church Commissioners, was asked—

Church Repairs

20. **Miss Anne McIntosh** (Vale of York) (Con): If he will make a statement on the level of funding for church repairs in the current financial year. [194586]

Second Church Estates Commissioner (Sir Stuart Bell): English Heritage and the Heritage Lottery Fund are making available £25 million for 2004–05 towards repair grants for listed places of worship of all faiths. This needs to be set against the £93 million spent in 2002 by the Church of England alone.

Miss McIntosh: Can the hon. Gentleman confirm newspaper reports that funding is insufficient to keep up with the repairs that are required?

Sir Stuart Bell: If I may quote the words of Aneurin Bevan, the reading of newspapers remains for me a source of "continuous fiction". I am not able to comment on that particular newspaper report.

If I may make a plug for my own constituency, we have Holy Trinity church, North Ormesby, where by way of church repairs we have a new multi-purpose church-run community centre. This has been a major catalyst for regeneration of the area. I was present when the Archbishop of York opened the centre. This is an example of what the hon. Lady supports for the rural communities that she represents, where she devotes a great deal of energy—more, I dare say than on the reading of newspapers.

Mr. Peter Pike (Burnley) (Lab): Does my hon. Friend recognise that churches such as St. Peter's in the town centre of Burnley—an ancient church that is a focal part of the town—has had to find £65,000 recently to repair the pinnacles? It has been one thing after another. About £1 million has been spent over recent years. English Heritage rightly insists on certain conditions being maintained but is not able to assist with the finance for the essential repairs to be undertaken.

Sir Stuart Bell: I am grateful to my hon. Friend for his reference to his constituency and for drawing attention to the dilemma that we face, first, in repairing our churches and, secondly, in having them a part of a community. I refer him to the remarks of the Bishop of London in the other place on 25 October, and particularly to the statement of Lord McIntosh, when he said that the Government will respond positively to the Church Heritage Forum's report in due course. We accept a good deal of the analysis of the problem and many of the solutions. There is a problem in my hon. Friend's constituency and there is a solution, and that is to the benefit of his community.

Pensions

21. **David Taylor** (North-West Leicestershire) (Lab/Co-op): What assessment the Church Commissioners have made of the first report of the Pensions Commission; and if he will make a statement. [194587]

Second Church Estates Commissioner (Sir Stuart Bell): The report is an authoritative analysis of a problem facing pensioners, the pensions industry and Government. The Church of England pensions board will discuss the report at its next meeting on 24 November.

David Taylor: Ministers of religion do not seek or receive the fame and fortune accorded to Ministers in government, so it is crucial that those called to lead our worship, our parishes and our communities at least receive decent treatment at the end of their working lives. Will my hon. Friend assure the House that the Church Commissioners will respond positively to the challenges and choices flagged up by the Turner report, so that potential priesthood recruits are not deterred by prospective poverty in retirement?

Sir Stuart Bell: My hon. Friend has made a valid and pertinent point. We are not here to discuss the pension rights of ministers of religion, but he will be aware of the Church's commitment to a defined benefit scheme, which is more generous than the money purchase schemes to which many employers are switching—in effect, money purchase schemes switch the risk to employees. I also remind my hon. Friend that the Pensions Commission's report does not offer detailed conclusions, and the final report is due in 12 to 18 months' time. On encouraging recruits to the priesthood, the numbers who have joined encourage us, and those recruits were not put off by the pension schemes for clergy on retirement.

Mr. John Bercow (Buckingham) (Con): How many retired members of the clergy are dependent on means-tested benefits?

Sir Stuart Bell: The hon. Gentleman obviously reads the newspapers, where he can also read his own comments. I will be glad to give him an answer, if I can, and place it in the Library.

Westminster Abbey

22. **Mr. James Gray** (North Wiltshire) (Con): When the builders' yard between Westminster abbey and St. Margaret's Westminster will be removed. [194589]

Second Church Estates Commissioner (Sir Stuart Bell): The Dean and Chapter intend to proceed with removing the builders' yard and, as soon as practicable, landscape the area.

Mr. Gray: That answer is extraordinarily welcome, and I am most grateful to the hon. Gentleman for it.

ELECTORAL COMMISSION COMMITTEE

The hon. Member for Gosport, representing the Speaker's Committee on the Electoral Commission Committee, was asked—

Electoral Registration

23. **Mr. Mark Lazarowicz** (Edinburgh, North and Leith) (Lab/Co-op): What recent steps the Electoral Commission has taken to bring about a higher level of electoral registration. [194590]

Mr. Peter Viggers (Gosport) (Con): It is the duty of electoral registration officers to maintain the electoral registers, while the Electoral Commission has a statutory duty to promote public awareness. The commission directs pre-election reminders at the entire electorate and runs campaigns targeted at specific groups such as home movers, students and young people outside formal education. It also provides advice on the local promotion of electoral registration.

Mr. Lazarowicz: Although the way in which we register electors in this country does not have the same variety as in some other countries that we could mention, different local authorities approach electoral registration in different ways, which no doubt affects the number of people who are registered. Will the hon. Gentleman ask the commission to examine how to encourage local authorities to adopt best practice in order to ensure the highest possible level of registration? In particular, will he consider asking the commission to give guidance to local authorities on ensuring that they produce publicity and advertising material in all appropriate languages other than English?

Mr. Viggers: Yes; I understand that the commission operates in seven languages. The commission published a guidance manual in 2002 that suggested methods that registration officers could use to encourage registration, and it included a practical guide to planning and running a registration campaign. The commission continues to respond to requests from registration officers for advice in that area. In addition, the commission produces an annual canvass and other registration publicity materials, which are available on demand by registration officers.

Mr. Andrew Tyrie (Chichester) (Con): My hon. Friend is already aware of the alarming fall in the registration of men and women in the armed services caused by a change in rules by the Electoral Commission, which now requires servicemen to re-register annually. Does he consider it a disgrace, particularly at this time, that so many servicemen may find themselves without a vote at the next general election? What action has the Electoral Commission proposed to try to rectify that?

Mr. Viggers: I am grateful to my hon. Friend for identifying that important point. If I tell him that in the borough of Gosport the number of service-registered voters has fallen from 4,370 in 2000 to 474 in 2004, he will recognise that I personally share his concerns. Perhaps rather surprisingly, I am advised by the Electoral Commission that it has no direct powers to investigate the statistics. However, when I spoke to its chairman this morning, he told me that he will approach the Ministry of Defence with a view to working together to assess the extent of the problem of non-registration of service personnel and to consider what steps might appropriately be taken. The Ministry of Defence has confirmed that it is very much seized of the issue.

Mr. Harry Barnes (North-East Derbyshire) (Lab): Will the hon. Gentleman bring the Electoral Commission's attention to several measures that I put before the House from 1993 onwards in an attempt to improve electoral registration, especially in terms of rolling registers? As we have a highly mobile society, registration should follow people around to ensure that they are on the register.

Mr. Viggers: There are currently no centrally held data on that in relation to Britain. In Northern Ireland, Electoral Commission research found that rolling registration resulted in an increase of 2.1 percentage points in the number of names on the register during the six-month period between December 2002 and May 2003. The commission's current research project on electoral registration in Britain will investigate the impact of rolling registration by using case-study evidence from a selection of local authorities. The project is expected to be completed by the spring or summer of 2005.

CHURCH COMMISSIONERS

The hon. Member for Middlesbrough, representing the Church Commissioners, was asked—

Cathedrals (Lottery Funding)

24. **Michael Fabricant** (Lichfield) (Con): What steps the commissioners are taking to ensure that adequate funding is made available from lottery funds to maintain the fabric of English cathedrals; and if he will make a statement. [194591]

Second Church Estates Commissioner (Sir Stuart Bell): With your permission, Mr. Speaker, I shall refer to the question of the hon. Member for North Wiltshire (Mr. Gray). I am grateful for his reference to Westminster abbey, because that enables me to draw the House's attention to the tercentenary celebrations this Thursday. It is 300 years since the Church got its money back from the Crown, and this will be a worthy celebration.

In response to the hon. Member for Lichfield (Michael Fabricant), that is a matter for individual cathedrals and the Association of English Cathedrals.

Michael Fabricant: I am grateful to the hon. Gentleman for that answer. However, does he share my surprise that the paper by the Department for Culture, Media and Sport—I am pleased to see the Secretary of State in her place—on culture and regeneration makes absolutely no mention of English cathedrals?

Is the hon. Gentleman aware that a recent Ecotec survey says that cathedrals generate in the order of £150 million each year in total local spend for their regional economies, yet only one eleventh of all the money available for the maintenance of the fabric of English cathedrals comes from lottery funds? Given that these are often listed buildings that are 900 or 1,000 years old, is not that rather inadequate?

Sir Stuart Bell: We should

"render unto Caesar the things that are Caesar's".

I will leave it to the DCMS to respond appropriately to the first part of the hon. Gentleman's question. On his second point, according to my information cathedrals generate at least £91 million a year for the national economy. They need to spend £11 million a year on repairs and maintenance, but from 2005 they will receive just £1 million a year in repair grant. If I may end with another quote from the Bible,

"Those who have ears will hear".

Simon Hughes (Southwark, North and Bermondsey) (LD): Given the nature of the crisis in funding across English cathedrals of all denominations, is the hon. Gentleman willing to convene a meeting with a Minister from the Department for Culture, Media and Sport, somebody from the Heritage Lottery Fund, and representatives of the cathedrals to assess and agree the cost of the work that needs to be done, and then to find a better means of raising the money to do it?

Sir Stuart Bell: I would be happy to take up the hon. Gentleman's suggestion and to include him in any meeting.

ELECTORAL COMMISSION COMMITTEE

The hon. Member for Gosport, representing the Speaker's Committee of the Electoral Commission Committee, was asked—

Electoral Registration

25. **Chris Bryant** (Rhondda) (Lab): What study the Electoral Commission has made of the feasibility of introducing a single harmonised national electoral register. [194592]

Mr. Peter Viggers (Gosport) (Con): The commission reported last year that electoral registers should continue to be compiled and managed locally but should form part of an electronically maintained national register. To date, it has not undertaken any study of the feasibility of introducing a single harmonised national electoral register.

Chris Bryant: One of the difficulties is that, because different parts of the country manage the electoral register in very different ways and are sometimes susceptible to the vagaries of local party politics, we end up with an electoral register that is very unreliable in many areas. Moreover, because many people move much more frequently than they used to, some accidentally or deliberately appear on the register at two different addresses instead of just one. Would not it make far more sense to move swiftly towards a single harmonised register?

Mr. Viggers: That issue is very much in the mind of the Commission. I understand that it believes that creating a national version of the register based on local registers that comply with national data standards should help to ensure that voters' details are accurate and up to date. It would also help to underpin improvements to the registration and electoral systems. A national version of the register should also provide more efficient access to those individuals and organisations that are legally entitled to copies of the electoral register.

Points of Order

3.30 pm

Mr. David Heathcoat-Amory (Wells) (Con): On a point of order, Mr. Speaker. In proceedings on the Domestic Violence, Crime and Victims Bill last week, the Home Secretary said that he would make an announcement on Third Reading, and issued a press release to that effect. Third Reading never took place, however, owing to the incompetence of the business managers. In justifying his action, the Home Secretary alleged, at column 1542 of the *Official Report* of 27 October, that the Opposition had "filibustered". No such filibuster could possibly have taken place, however, since the House was voting during the time allocated for Third Reading. His allegation is also an attack on the authority of Madam Deputy Speaker, since any filibustering would have been ruled out of order under Standing Order No. 42. Will you therefore require the Home Secretary to apologise to Madam Deputy Speaker for his completely false allegation, and to apologise for his discourtesy to the House in making entirely false and mischievous allegations?

Mr. Speaker: I say to the right hon. Gentleman that it is not for me to bring a Minister here to apologise. I have looked at the events of that day, however, and discussed the matter with my deputies. If any hon. Member had been filibustering, the Chair would have pointed it out to the hon. Member concerned. The fact that it was not pointed out means that there was no filibustering.

Miss Julie Kirkbride (Bromsgrove) (Con): On a point of order, Mr. Speaker. As a champion of Back-Bench rights who enables us to do our job of holding the Executive to account, will you offer me some advice? You may have seen press reports last week that the Prime Minister was refusing to answer my questions, and those of other hon. Members, about the meetings that he has had with representatives of the international casino industry, as well as the domestic gaming industry. Many people in the domestic industry believe that the international industry has been given more favourable treatment. It is therefore relevant that we should know whom the Prime Minister has met, and that he should answer our questions on this matter. Surely there should be some independent adjudication as to which questions the Prime Minister should answer. Will you help me, through your good offices or perhaps those of the Cabinet Secretary, to ascertain who decides which questions the Prime Minister should answer?

Mr. James Gray (North Wiltshire) (Con): Further to that point of order, Mr. Speaker—

Mr. Speaker: Order. Perhaps I can reply to the hon. Lady first. I am very pleased that she regards me as a champion of the Back Benchers. It is nice to have a vote of confidence now and again. I would say to her, however, that we are debating the Second Reading of the Gambling Bill today, and she can take these matters up during the course of that debate if she is lucky enough to catch my eye. Does that answer help the hon. Member for North Wiltshire (Mr. Gray)?

Mr. Gray: More or less, Mr. Speaker, but further to that point of order, I understand that, on Friday last week, the lawyers in the Department for Culture, Media and Sport and Labour party political advisers were seeking legal methods of avoiding answering questions tabled by my hon. Friend the Member for Bromsgrove (Miss Kirkbride) and me on this important subject. This morning, however, in the No. 10 briefing, the Prime Minister has answered those questions. He told the press that he had not had meetings with representatives of the gambling industry. Surely it is very strange to go to great lengths to avoid my hon. Friend's and my questions, and then to answer them straightforwardly in the press briefing this morning.

Mr. Speaker: I would not know anything about Labour party officials: I do not belong to the Labour party. I reiterate that the debate is about to start, and the hon. Gentleman may well have an opportunity to catch my eye.

Orders of the Day

Gambling Bill

Order for Second Reading read.

Mr. Speaker: I should inform the House that I have selected the amendment in the name of the Leader of the Opposition.

3.34 pm

The Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport (Tessa Jowell): *I beg to move, That the Bill be now read* a Second time.

I know that passions are running high about this Bill, both in the House and outside. But I hope that our debate can be based on the facts, on concern for the public interest, and nothing else. The Bill addresses a subject that has not been properly scrutinised for more than 40 years, because of the policy of previous Administrations, which, where gambling was concerned, was to sidestep the big issues and be content to tinker. That is a luxury that we can no longer afford. We need to address the challenges that are caused by new technology, by the internet and by the steady growth in consumer demand. We need to keep gambling crime-free by giving regulators new powers and new duties. We need to make sure that our desire to give adults freedom to gamble if they wish is not at the cost of children or the vulnerable.

Kate Hoey (Vauxhall) (Lab): It might be helpful if the Secretary of State were to tell us clearly whether this Bill, as it is now, was in this Government's manifesto.

Tessa Jowell: Certainly, we undertook in the Queen's Speech to publish a draft gambling Bill.

The proposals contained in the Bill have been developed over a five-year period—I cannot recall whether the proposals were in the manifesto, because work on developing the proposals started in the previous Parliament, when this was the responsibility of the Home Secretary—beginning with Sir Alan Budd's review, and followed by a White Paper, a draft Bill considered by a Committee of both Houses, and the Bill today.

Until recently, there was cross-party consensus for reform led by the work of the Scrutiny Committee on the draft Bill, which was ably chaired by the hon. Member for Ryedale (Mr. Greenway), to whom I would like to pay tribute. As is often the case, consensus in dealing with what is a difficult contemporary social issue was replaced by the opportunism of a passing bandwagon. If the House gives the Bill a Second Reading, every proposal will be considered on its merits in Committee. I give the House my assurance that I will give every consideration to suggestions from right hon. and hon. Members that are genuinely intended to improve the Bill.

Mr. John Gummer (Suffolk, Coastal) (Con): The right hon. Lady mentioned the vulnerable earlier. Will she explain why she characterised Labour Back Benchers, Opposition Members such as me, the hierarchy of the Catholic Church and the Salvation Army as snobbish, because we stood up for the vulnerable? How does she say that when that would mean that most of the historic Labour figures were snobbish because they too stood up for the vulnerable?

Tessa Jowell: Had that been what I said, it would have been deeply offensive, and I would have apologised for it. I respect entirely the fact that people, on ethical, religious and other grounds, are opposed to gambling. I did not describe people as snobs—I referred to a whiff of snobbery pervading this debate, which is quite different from the allegation that the right hon. Gentleman is making.

Mr. Kevin Hughes (Doncaster, North) (Lab): My right hon. Friend has found out over this weekend that there is never a shortage of do-gooders telling people how to spend their leisure time. No doubt she will hear more of that in the House today. Does she agree with me that the British people are intelligent and sophisticated enough to make their own choices about what they do with their cash and leisure time? I hope that the Bill gets its Second Reading today.

Tessa Jowell: I agree with my hon. Friend. Neither this debate nor the British people are served by the kind of patronising attitude that doubts people's ability to make choices about how to spend their marginal income or leisure time.

Bob Russell (Colchester) (LD): Will the right hon. Lady give way?

Tessa Jowell: No, I want to make some progress; I will then take further interventions.

Scrutiny has improved the Bill to date, and I want to make it absolutely clear that the Government will listen to the views of right hon. and hon. Members, particularly when they offer constructive proposals that contribute to, or strengthen, the Bill's three underlying objectives: to protect children and the vulnerable, to ensure that gambling is conducted in a fair and open way, and to keep gambling in this country crime-free.

Mr. Nick Gibb (Bognor Regis and Littlehampton) (Con) *rose—*

Tessa Jowell: The key principle will be that of social responsibility—a condition that is the test of each element of the Bill.

Mr. David Clelland (Tyne Bridge) (Lab): Is the Secretary of State aware that these days, children have access to the internet and, through computer games, to gratuitous violence in the most graphic sense, in the privacy of their own rooms? Does she really think that they will be protected by banning the penny arcade?

Tessa Jowell: We are not banning the penny arcade in this Bill and yes, we do have to address the risks that children face, but not by taking disproportionate action in respect of matters for which there is no evidence of harm.

Mr. Gibb: Will the right hon. Lady give way?

Tessa Jowell: I will give way on that point.

Mr. Gibb: I am grateful to the right hon. Lady. Why does the Bill impose a maximum stake on family

[Mr. Gibb]

amusements such those that enable children to win a teddy bear by picking it up with a crane? In Bognor Regis, the stake for such machines is 30p a go; if a 10p maximum is imposed, such amusements will be rendered unviable. Will she look again at this provision, so that the Bill does not have the unintended consequence of bankrupting family amusement arcades in seaside towns, only for them to be replaced by hard gambling outlets?

Mr. Speaker: Order. The hon. Gentleman must not make a speech.

Tessa Jowell: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I ask the hon. Gentleman to contain the impatience that he expressed solely on behalf of Bognor Regis; he will hear reassuring words from me later.

I recognise that gambling is a controversial, difficult and complex matter. That was true when betting shops were legalised, it was true when the Conservatives introduced the national lottery and the associated multi-million pound jackpots 10 years ago, and it is certainly true now. There are some people in this country—including, indeed, Members in all parts of the House, as I have said—who have a sincere and profoundly held objection to gambling. They would rather that gambling did not take place at all, and they certainly do not think that the state should sanction it. They may take this view for ethical, philosophical or religious reasons, or even because of family or personal experience, and I completely understand and respect it.

Miss Julie Kirkbride (Bromsgrove) (Con) *rose*—

Tessa Jowell: There are other people who do not have a fundamental objection to gambling, but who choose not to gamble themselves and are happy for others to have the freedom to do so, provided that certain safeguards are in place to ensure that children and vulnerable adults are properly protected. That happens to be the view that I share.

There is a further group of people who do gamble. For them, it is just part of life—a source of enjoyment and a freedom that they value. Yes, they want safeguards to be in place, but they regard gambling as an activity in respect of which the restrictions should be kept to a minimum.

Bob Russell *rose*—

Tessa Jowell: Judged by their behaviour, this group is perhaps the largest of the three. Each year, some 4 million people visit the country's 700 bingo clubs. Each month, an estimated 4 million Britons log on to a gambling website. Each week, more than 1 million people bet on horse races. Last year, visitors to casinos staked £4 billion. If the national lottery is included, 70 per cent. of the population gamble regularly.

Several hon. Members *rose*—

Tessa Jowell: So views on gambling vary enormously, and the purpose of this Second Reading debate is to allow those views to be heard.

The House should recognise, however, that gambling is at the boundary between personal freedom and state intervention. On one side of the boundary is the reasonable expectation of adults who, within the law, exercise their right to live their lives as they choose. On the other is the role of the state: to recognise human frailty, and in particular to respect its duty to protect children and the vulnerable. As a Government and a society, we have three options in that respect: prohibition, a free-for-all or regulation. We have no doubt about choosing the regulatory route. The question for the House is how best to apply the regulatory framework for the benefit of society as a whole.

Bob Russell: Can I ask the right hon. Lady how many residents of Dulwich and West Norwood have asked her to provide that part of London with a super-casino?

Tessa Jowell: As of yet, the provisions governing super-casinos are not on the statute book. The hon. Gentleman may have encountered all sorts of wild speculation about planning permissions being granted or applied for, but not a single planning permission for a new casino under the new regime has yet been granted.

Donald Anderson (Swansea, East) (Lab): I do not know whether I fall into the category of an opportunist or a snob, but I would certainly accept do-gooder as the definition of someone who tries to do good in this matter. Do-gooders are certainly better than do-badders. Does my right hon. Friend not see the world of difference between ordinary folks who want to go to bingo halls and the proliferation of mega-casinos, which must be the intended effect of what she is proposing? Why cannot she have a few pilots in order to test her own views against what will happen in the real world?

Tessa Jowell: My right hon. Friend falls into the particular category of very talented and important Members of the House.

Mr. Ken Purchase (Wolverhampton, North-East) (Lab/Co-op): Better than being a do-badder.

Tessa Jowell: My right hon. Friend did not expect a tribute. If proliferation were to be the consequence of these proposals, my right hon. Friend would have reason for concern, but if he will allow me to develop my argument, I hope to persuade him that his prediction will not, in fact, be realised. Let me just set out briefly how we reached this Bill—

Geraldine Smith (Morecambe and Lunesdale) (Lab) *rose*—

Tessa Jowell: I shall give way now, but then I want to make some progress.

Geraldine Smith: On children, clause 56 specifically states:

> "The Secretary of State may by order create an offence of inviting, causing or permitting a child or young person below a specified age to use a Category D gaming machine."

Are the Government seriously suggesting that a parent could be prosecuted for allowing her child to go into a seaside amusement arcade and roll a 10p piece down a shoot to win a cuddly toy? If so, it is the nanny state gone mad.

Tessa Jowell: If that were the case, my hon. Friend would be absolutely right that it would be an example of over-zealous and interventionist government. I shall explain at the appropriate point later in my remarks exactly why that provision sits in the Bill.

Mr. John Bercow (Buckingham) (Con) *rose—*

Tessa Jowell: I am not giving way yet.

Let me briefly recap how the Bill came about. New regulation is, by common consent, undoubtedly necessary. Every year and every week sees new developments in the gambling market, often in poorly regulated environments. The danger of the status quo lies not in more of the same, but in the current growth of poorly regulated gambling with little or no protection for those who play. Those who argue against the Bill cannot, if they are concerned about protection, defend the status quo.

We have recently seen roulette machines installed in betting offices against the wishes of the Gaming Board and similar machines proliferating in bingo halls and amusement centres. Since 1968 there have been many deregulatory measures affecting gambling. They have been brought forward on a piecemeal basis. That has been the problem. They included measures to allow the advertising of bingo, to allow betting offices to have clear windows and to increase the number of jackpot machines in casinos. Most came under the deregulation orders following the Deregulation and Contracting Out Act 1994. We can all remember who was in power at that time.

The Lords deregulation Committee pointed out how unsatisfactory a piecemeal approach can be and initiated the process that led to the establishment of the gambling review body in the late 1990s, under the chairmanship of Sir Alan Budd. So the Bill is not a radical departure. It is a continuation of adapting to change since we last legislated for gambling 36 years ago, but this time, the Bill does so comprehensively rather than in fragments.

Part 1 of the Bill provides definitions, including the new licensing objectives that I have set out. Part 2 establishes the gambling commission, which will control commercial gambling to ensure that it is fair and safe. Parts 3 and 4 consolidate and modernise gambling offences. Part 4 concentrates on the new offences to protect children, which I know are of concern to the House. Parts 5, 6, 7, 8 and 9 set out the new licensing system to be administered by the gambling commission and local licensing authorities. The commission will take over the Gaming Board's responsibilities for casinos, bingo, gaming machines and the lottery.

Mrs. Joan Humble (Blackpool, North and Fleetwood) (Lab): Will the Secretary of State explain how the rules on licensing can be linked to planning arrangements, because one of the major fears of many Members, even those like me who support the introduction of the Bill and regional casinos, is that of proliferation? How will planning arrangements be linked to the excellent provisions on licensing in the Bill?

Tessa Jowell: I promise my hon. Friend, who I know has taken a great interest in this matter, that I will deal with it in some detail. I know that it is of such concern to Members to understand how the triple lock will operate in order to prevent the proliferation of new casinos.

The gambling commission will regulate through conditions on operating and personal licences, and for the first time, anybody who is licensed to run gambling premises will be obliged to pursue social responsibility as a condition of their operating licence. If operators breach the terms and conditions, they will face very tough sanctions. Unlike the Gaming Board, the new gambling commission will have the power to impose unlimited financial penalties on operators who breach their conditions. Local authorities will take on the licensing of premises under the guidance of the gambling commission. In Scotland, licensing boards will license premises.

Part 10 establishes a new regime for gaming machines that accommodates the developments in technology that have occurred since 1968. Part 11 provides for a new regime for charity lotteries. Parts 12, 13 and 14 deal with gambling that is small scale, incidental to other entertainment, or non-commercial. Part 15 provides new powers for effective inspection. Part 16 addresses advertising, and part 17 gambling debts. Lastly, part 18 deals with Bill-wide provisions.

Mr. Peter Viggers (Gosport) (Con): The right hon. Lady's Department said that the Bill would be revenue-neutral, implying a very substantial reduction in gambling duty. Although that statement was later slapped down, was the reduction in gambling duty discussed when the Labour party fundraiser Lord Levy met representatives of the international gambling industry?

Tessa Jowell: No, it was not. Secondly, the reference to revenue-neutrality was an error. It was a term in common use that was misunderstood. *[Interruption.]* Let me explain. The point being made was that revenue is not a motivator for this legislation. It is my job as Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport to establish the regulatory framework; it is the Treasury's responsibility to establish the taxation regime. [HON. MEMBERS: "Ah!"] Precisely. The taxation regime will follow once the regulatory regime is in place. I do not think that anything has changed very much on that front in the past seven and a half years.

To reduce the risk of harm, the Bill provides new powers to regulate the way in which gambling is offered. Our controls are currently limited to specifying what can be offered and where that can happen. The Bill will give us powers to change the way in which gambling is offered to avoid harm.

We have a low level of problem gambling in Britain. Approximately 0.6 to 0.8 per cent. of adults report the types of behaviour that are associated with problem gambling. However, for them, gambling can be a dangerous and destructive addiction. It can ruin the

[Tessa Jowell]

lives and livelihoods not only of gamblers but of their families. As with other forms of addiction to legal activities, we have to balance carefully the citizen's right to act freely with the state's duty to minimise harm and warn of the risks.

Mr. Andrew Miller (Ellesmere Port and Neston) (Lab): The problem of dealing with internet gambling and those who have become addicted through it is an example of risk that falls outside much of the scope of the Bill. What discussions has my right hon. Friend held with credit card and escrow companies to try to tackle that difficult subject?

Tessa Jowell: As we make online gambling legal for the first time in this country, my hon. Friend will welcome provisions that allow offshore sites to return to this country to operate in a proper regulatory framework that protects both the interests of individual players and ensures that children cannot play on the internet. It also takes precautions in relation to the credit risk, about which my hon. Friend expressed concern.

Several hon. Members *rose—*

Tessa Jowell: I want to make progress.

There is a parallel between alcohol and gambling. Both are legal pursuits, both carry an associated risk of addiction and the state has chosen not to proscribe but to shape supply. The Bill gives Ministers and the commission the power to respond to new risks, increase controls and avoid harm. We will get evidence, through a substantially increased programme of genuinely new research, which has already started. A national gambling audit will take place every three years. The first will happen before the Bill takes effect.

Sir Brian Mawhinney (North-West Cambridgeshire) (Con): I have been reflecting on the right hon. Lady's reply to my hon. Friend the Member for Gosport (Mr. Viggers). Is she telling hon. Members that she wants the Bill on the statute book before any information is released about inducements that the Government may have offered to mega-casino owners?

Tessa Jowell: No inducements have been offered to mega-casinos. We will get the measure on the statute book because millions of people are at risk unless that happens.

Several hon. Members *rose—*

Tessa Jowell: I shall not give way. *[Interruption].*

Mr. Speaker: Order. The Secretary of State is not giving way.

Tessa Jowell: Just as there will be a baseline against which we can judge the impact of all our reforms, there will be not one but two further gambling studies before we even consider any calls for further relaxation of the new regime. We shall thus have a proper baseline, which tells us how many people gamble, and against which we can monitor closely, through the gambling commission, the impact of any of the changes. If evidence of harm emerges through the research and monitoring that is undertaken, we will act swiftly to toughen the controls.

We have powers throughout the Bill to withdraw or move back from the liberalisation if there is evidence of harm.

Mr. James Gray (North Wiltshire) (Con): Will the Secretary of State give way?

Tessa Jowell: No, I must make progress.

Much of the comment on the Bill claimed that the country wanted no more gambling and no more casino games. Although I respect the views of those who wish that demand did not exist, I ask hon. Members to examine the evidence. Many hon. Members know about the growing popularity of roulette machines in betting offices. From none two or three years ago, there are now more than 20,000, and the number continues to rise. As I have said before, the machines are on probation. Under the Bill, they will be under effective legislative control for the first time.

I suspect that all Members will have seen the countless advertisements for internet casinos and for poker rooms. Companies that conduct research into the internet estimate that some 16 per cent. of Britons visit an internet gambling site every month. Three years ago, 250,000 British people travelled to Las Vegas; next year, that is likely to double to 500,000.

What is more, many of the problems that we have faced over the past few years have arisen because gambling companies have been trying to install casino games on non-casino premises such as betting offices, bingo halls and amusement arcades. Anyone passing a betting office in the high street today is likely to see a huge poster inviting them to bet roulette. They are just as likely to see that as to see a picture of a horse. The industry is doing all that it can to get roulette into the high street, because wherever it succeeds in doing so roulette proves very popular.

Some, I accept, would react to that evidence by suggesting that we prohibit such choices; but if we have learnt anything at all about the history of regulating gambling, it is that if the law does not allow people to gamble safely, they will find ways of gambling at higher risk. We do not want to drive gambling underground or offshore. Expenditure on gambling is rising by about 3.5 per cent. each year, and it is predicted that that rate of increase will continue, with or without the Bill. People will go on choosing casino games whether we like it or not; the question for us is, how do we direct that demand?

Mrs. Betty Williams (Conwy) (Lab): There is a saying in Wales: three attempts and she might hear.

There is currently a requirement for an unstimulated demand test to be met before new casinos can be approved. I understand that the Bill would scrap that. Does my right hon. Friend agree that such action would make it more difficult for local planning authorities to reject huge casino applications?

Tessa Jowell: That was a timely intervention, as I am about to deal with the role of casinos in the Bill—in the context of a clear undertaking that there will be no new casinos if local people do not want them. I want to explain what is in the Bill, how we intend to achieve our aims, and how rigorous the safeguards are.

The Bill will certainly remove some of the more outdated restrictions on casinos. It will abolish the permitted areas that limit casinos to 53 former county boroughs, including those that had populations of 125,000 or more between December 1970 and October 1973. That explains why, believe it or not, it is possible to have a casino in Mayfair but not in Greenwich. The Bill will also abolish the membership rules requiring a 24-hour wait between joining a casino and playing games.

We consider it reasonable for British consumers to be allowed access to casino games on properly regulated casino premises. We would rather people gambled on machines in the carefully controlled environment of a casino than on dodgy internet sites at home. Our strategy, however, is intended to avoid the mistakes made by other countries such as Australia, which allowed a widespread proliferation of high-price machine gambling in the high streets. What we propose for the casino industry in Great Britain is a restrained modernisation that protects the public from problem gambling.

Clive Efford (Eltham) (Lab): My right hon. Friend mentioned my borough, Greenwich. Several planning authorities in the Thames gateway area may be attracted to the idea of having a casino; what is the best way of deciding which should have planning permission? *[Laughter.]* I think we should treat the issue a bit more seriously.

How do we decide whether regional planning priorities should determine where a casino goes, or whether it should be a matter for the local planning authority? Should there not be a national criterion enabling us to designate an area suitable? The local authority would have to demonstrate that it had consulted local people and referred to both its own unitary development plan and the regional development plan, and had received support, before it could proceed to the next phase and develop a casino?

Tessa Jowell: My hon. Friend makes a full and important intervention, but if he will bear with me I will answer his very good points in due course.

Sir Alan Budd, in his review, recommended a minimum customer area for new casinos of approximately 200 sq m to discourage too many small casinos. However, the Government have decided that the minimum size should be considerably larger—over three times larger—at 750 sq m. The net effect will be fewer new casinos than Sir Alan proposed, and only the largest casinos, with a minimum area of 5,000 sq m, will be entitled to house the new style machines. We will cap machine numbers in all casinos, and we will keep the present £2,000 prize limit for the two smaller categories of casino.

A number of casino operators have announced proposals for new leisure developments in different parts of the country, although the figures given in some newspapers for new regional casinos are wildly off the mark. Of course, these are all just proposals; almost none of them has gambling licences or planning permission. If the developments go ahead on the scale envisaged, they will no doubt bring significant economic and employment benefits to the areas in which they are located. For instance, the company that proposes a £125 million development on disused land in a regeneration area will, if it is approved, provide a host of new leisure facilities, of which a casino would be a relatively small component. Overall, the development would provide hundreds of construction jobs, employ over 1,000 staff and provide significant support to Leeds United football club.

Let me set out clearly for the House the very tight framework within which such new casinos will be allowed. I have spoken before about the triple lock that applies, and I want to explain each step in turn. I am very aware that there are calls from some quarters for a national cap on the number of the new regional casinos. The Joint Committee looked carefully at the issue and did not recommend a cap. I share the objective that regional casinos should be relatively few in number, but I do think that a cap may be a blunt instrument. My preferred alternative is for tough planning and licensing tests that may well be difficult for a number of proposals to pass, but do allow some flexibility for local communities. I am dirigiste only about the ends, not the means, and all sides agree that this cannot be left purely to the market, so let me set out how the regime would work.

The first lock is the operating licensing system. Anybody who wishes to operate a casino in the UK must apply to the gambling commission for an operating licence. Applicants will be rigorously tested to ensure that they measure up to the three statutory objectives in the Bill: to protect children and vulnerable adults, to keep gambling crime free and to ensure fair play for consumers. The gambling commissions's job of assessing licence applications will not be a question of ticking a box. Each and every application will have to go through careful and rigorous consideration.

The second lock is the premises licensing system, for which local authorities will be responsible. The Bill requires every local authority to have a gambling licensing policy that covers all gambling and betting premises, including casinos, and it empowers local authorities to consult the public on their licensing policy, including the casino element of it.

I understand the concerns that right hon. and hon. Members have expressed about local authorities finding the development benefits too tempting, so I will listen closely to the argument that the power to consult on the licensing policy should be replaced with a duty. That duty is already implicit in the planning procedures, but I am happy to consider making it more explicit. At this point, or at any time it chooses, a local authority may resolve, under clause 157, not to allow any new casinos in its area. It has a wide discretion to exercise that power, and in deciding whether to exercise it, it may have regard to "any principle or matter", and the power lasts for three years and is renewable. The Joint Committee did not recommend the power of resolution. I decided to add it to the Bill because I wanted local authorities that do not want new casinos to be able to say so clearly and categorically, and to be protected from any of the risks that might follow.

[Tessa Jowell]

The Bill allows any local authority to impose a blanket ban on new casino development, and I am sure that the House will support that, but even if an authority does not decide to apply such a ban it still has strong powers to reject a specific application for a casino development, whether large, small, or regional. Local authorities can and must test any application for a premises licence against the three licensing criteria in the Bill and can refuse any application that does not meet them.

Mr. Bercow: I understand the triple lock, and I see what the right hon. Lady means by her preferred alternative, but surely there is something to be said for a backstop position. Given that she envisages only between 20 and 40 super-casinos but that her critics predict a very much larger number, I put it to her that introducing a limit in the Bill on the total number, as well as being right in itself, would help to facilitate the smooth passage of this important Bill, which in other respects she is entirely right to champion.

Tessa Jowell: I know that there will be a lot of discussion about this aspect of the proposals both here and, if the Bill secures a Second Reading, in Committee. The practical obstacle created by a cap is that the whole thrust of the regulatory and planning system is to leave decisions about new casinos to local people, but if an arbitrary limit is imposed, what do we say to those local authorities—there may be a significant number—that present applications for new casinos just as the cap is about to be reached, and—*[Interruption.]*

Mr. Speaker: Order. The House must come to order and allow the right hon. Lady to speak.

Tessa Jowell: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I am trying to explain what I believe is one of the issues of contention at the heart of the Bill, and it is important that, if hon. Members raise concerns about it, they should listen to the answer. This is not the end of the story, and I expect further discussion in Committee.

Mr. Frank Field (Birkenhead) (Lab): Will my right hon. Friend ensure that there is no appeal against the veto on super-casinos that she is giving to local authorities; otherwise, authorities will be overruled, will they not, by the Secretary of State?

Tessa Jowell: As the provisions stand, there is no appeal against the provisions in clause 157, but my right hon. Friend may wish to return to this point at another time.

Several hon. Members *rose*—

Tessa Jowell: I intend to make some progress by returning to the licensing and planning regime.

If a casino application was considered to be too close to, for instance, a residential area or a school, it could be refused on the social responsibility criteria in clause 1. That is the case even before the planning regime and the third lock become effective.

The planning system is crucial. I am grateful to my right hon. Friend the Deputy Prime Minister and his Department for working so closely with me and my Department on the interaction of licensing and planning policy. He and I are happy to give the House a firm undertaking that the licensing and planning regimes will be fully aligned to ensure that the Bill is implemented in a cautious and responsible way that respects the wishes of local authorities and local communities. The Deputy Prime Minister and I will make sure that detailed advice is available about the transition period.

Mr. John Greenway (Ryedale) (Con): What the Secretary of State is saying is helpful to the House, but what is the Government's current thinking on the Joint Committee's recommendation that there should be a separate planning use class for regional casinos?

Tessa Jowell: If the hon. Gentleman will bear with me, I shall have more to say about that.

As Secretary of State, I have the power to commence the Bill in such a way that the gambling commission is got up and running and there is reasonable time to put in place appropriate local and regional planning frameworks before premises licence applications are made, and that is what I shall do. For regional casinos, we will make sure, under the provisions of the new planning regime, that regional spatial strategies are updated to take account of the Bill. Regional authorities will be able to analyse the best locations for regional casinos from the point of view of economic growth, tourism promotion and regional sustainability, as well as existing regional development plans.

Regional authorities will identify broad locations for regional casinos, but the local authority—the licensing authority—will have the final say, assuming that it has not already exercised its right to ban all new casinos in its area under clause 157. We will also make sure, for small and large casinos, that local development frameworks are updated to take account of the Bill, again assuming that a local authority has not imposed a blanket ban. All the usual safeguards and protections in planning law will be available to local authorities and local communities. Local communities will be consulted about any planning application for a new casino. They will make their views known, and there will be a public debate.

Some Members and, as the hon. Member for Ryedale said, the Joint Committee, have expressed concern that some casinos may bypass the planning system because of the absence of a separate use class for casinos in planning law. The current law theoretically allows any leisure facility, such as a swimming pool or cinema, to be converted into a casino without triggering planning controls, although, obviously, a premises licence—therefore, the planning regime—would be invoked. After the Joint Committee's second report, my right hon. Friend the Deputy Prime Minister undertook to review the possibility of a new use class for casinos and invited comments by the end of October. I am delighted to announce today that he and I have agreed in principle to require change of use to a casino to be subject to planning control. Subject to further detailed consideration of the outcome of the review and the usual consultation, we are minded to amend the use class order.

Mr. Mark Lazarowicz (Edinburgh, North and Leith) (Lab/Co-op): Given that planning in Scotland is, of course, devolved to the Scottish Parliament and Scottish Executive, has my right hon. Friend had discussions with Scottish Ministers to ensure that similar planning protection is given to local authorities and communities there, and will she make sure that the Bill does not come into effect in Scotland until such changes are made in the relevant Scottish legislation?

Tessa Jowell: I assure my hon. Friend that there have been ongoing discussions with Scottish Ministers as the policy has developed, and that those discussions will continue.

Mr. Don Foster (Bath) (LD): I suspect that there will be pleasure in all parts of the House at the news that the Secretary of State just announced. Will she confirm that what she is announcing is a separate use category for all casinos, not just for the super-casinos?

Tessa Jowell: Yes, I can confirm that.

Subject to further consultation, the process will proceed. I assure the House that the establishment of a separate use class is evidence that the Government do not want casinos to be allowed in by the back door. We aim to ensure that new casinos are taken forward through the development of the plan-making process.

That is the triple lock that we are putting in place for casinos. The system is robust and will, I hope, reassure the House and concerned communities throughout the UK that there will be no proliferation of casinos, whether small, large or regional. The system will allow local communities to ban all casinos or to reject specific casino plans that do not measure up to the social responsibility criteria in clause 1 or the requirements of planning law.

The nature of the new system is precisely why most economic and industry analysts expect the British market to be able to sustain only between 20 and 40 regional casinos. They have reached that conclusion because the policy that we have designed is so stringent and because they do not think that demand will be any higher. If demand is lower than analysts expected, there will be even fewer than 20 to 40 regional casinos.

Rob Marris (Wolverhampton, South-West) (Lab): My right hon. Friend has been generous in giving way. She mentioned that research indicates that the market will bear only up to 40 super-casinos. In that case, will she explain why having a cap in the Bill is undesirable? I would suggest that having one would be very desirable.

Tessa Jowell: Because there is a difference between a cap set by Government and the range of the likely levels of development set by industry forecasts based on the regulatory framework that the Government are establishing and the three elements of that regulatory system that I have set out.

Several hon. Members *rose—*

Tessa Jowell: I am aware that many hon. Members wish to speak in the debate, so, although I have taken many interventions, I now intend to make progress.

There will be three opportunities for consultation, two of which, on the licensing policy and on planning permission, will be obligatory. There will also be the opportunity to consult on the possible use of the resolution.

I hope that hon. Members on both sides of the House will regard the framework as well considered and robust. I assure hon. Members that on every aspect of the Bill the Government are listening and are open to proposals that will improve the protections in it. If hon. Members have suggestions about how the triple lock can be strengthened, proposals will be carefully examined at later stages.

Mr. Gordon Prentice (Pendle) (Lab) *rose—*

Tessa Jowell: Perhaps my hon. Friend did not hear that I was referring to the later stages of considering ways to strengthen the Bill.

Mr. Prentice: The Government have told the Joint Committee:

> "These unlimited prize machines are new to the UK, and there is no reliable evidence as to the impact of these machines."

Surely that is a classic case for having some pilot casinos, so that we can test the impact of such fantastically large pay-outs.

Tessa Jowell: That is precisely why we rejected the recommendations of the Budd review, which would have introduced high-value, high-prize machines everywhere. That is also why we rejected the recommendation of the Joint Committee, which would have meant introducing such machines in all casinos, and why we are limiting them to regional casinos. I should also make clear, for my hon. Friend's information, that the way in which such machines operate and are manufactured—their design—will be subject to the oversight and scrutiny of the gambling commission. They may come from any part of the world, but they will have to conform to the British regulatory system. We will also monitor very closely any evidence that the availability of these machines is leading to an increase in problem gambling, in which case we will take action through the gambling commission to address the matter.

Several hon. Members *rose—*

Tessa Jowell: I shall not take any more interventions.

I should like to move on quickly to protections for children; I know that the House attaches great importance to keeping children away from harmful gambling. Children should never get involved with gambling that will harm them.

Lynne Jones (Birmingham, Selly Oak) (Lab): Will my right hon. Friend give way?

Mr. Speaker: Order. The Secretary of State has stated that she will not be giving way.

Tessa Jowell: That is in respect of the many hon. Members who wish to speak in the debate.

[Tessa Jowell]

There is no more important area to keep children away from harm than the internet. The evidence published over the summer that some British companies were failing in this area is profoundly disturbing. Any internet operator seeking a licence from the gambling commission will need to demonstrate precisely how it intends to exclude children from play.

I want to say a few words about our approach to the lowest-prize gaming machines, which children can use. These machines are found in leisure sites such as seaside fairs and funfairs, but they are also available in a wide range of premises such as fish and chip shops and taxicab offices. I have received many representations from those who disagree with children being allowed to use gaming machines at all, and I have sympathy with those who observe that Britain is unusual in allowing children to play on any category of slot machine, but I think that it would be wrong of the Government to ignore the fact that children have been permitted to use amusement machines for many decades without clear evidence of an impact on the level of problem gambling among children.

Such amusement machines have also been a traditional and well-loved part of the family leisure and seaside experience. We have not yet seen sufficiently compelling evidence to ban children from using these machines altogether. I know that the Joint Committee considered this matter very carefully and also reached that view. We must remain vigilant and cautious in relation to future risks, so I assure the House that on this issue and every other aspect of the Bill I will listen very carefully to the views of hon. Members.

Lawrie Quinn (Scarborough and Whitby) (Lab): I am grateful to my right hon. Friend for giving way. In the context of the many seaside communities around the country, is it not her experience, as it is mine and that of many hon. Members who represent those communities, that the family businesses that run such arcades have a high level of enforcement and make an important contribution to measures to stop antisocial behaviour at the seaside? Is that not the higher standard that we are trying to achieve in this Bill?

Tessa Jowell: My hon. Friend is absolutely right. It is because those high standards of supervision are exercised in so many of these arcades that the evidence of problem gambling among children has not been produced. We want that vigilance to increase. That is why there is a reserve power in the Bill to be used should evidence of problems arise some time in the future, but as my hon. Friend made clear—I know that many hon. Members with constituency interests have found this—by and large, the regime in seaside arcades and family entertainment centres is very responsible. By withdrawing category D machines, as they are called, from fish and chip shops and minicab offices, we deal with the risks of ambient gambling and of exposing children to gambling.

Let me move to a conclusion. Gambling is a legitimate industry that requires fair and proportionate regulation. It is an industry where the freedom to operate is important, but only when the public are properly protected. The Bill will protect the public at a time when technology threatens to overwhelm us with new, poorly regulated gambling opportunities. It provides vital new powers to protect children and put an end to socially irresponsible practices. It puts Parliament and the regulators back in control, with the power to toughen controls and the evidence on which to act. Crucially, it puts power firmly in the hands of local communities. New casinos will come to their area only if they want them—full stop.

The Government know that adults should be allowed to exercise their personal freedom, that vulnerable people must be protected and that everyone should be protected from the unregulated consequences of the free market in an area such as gambling. We have always recognised that opinion on gambling cuts across normal party political divides. That is why we have sought to continue the long practice of the House of developing policy in an open and, where possible, a non-partisan way.

That is why we welcomed many of the recommendations of the Joint Committee chaired so ably by the hon. Member for Ryedale. It is why we agree with the Leader of the Opposition when as Home Secretary, rather than as Leader of the Opposition jumping on the opportunistic bandwagon, he announced plans to free casinos and bingo halls from outdated and restrictive rules. It is why we agreed with the words of the then junior Home Office Minister responsible for gambling when he asked, "Why should we stop people choosing to spend their evenings playing roulette?" It is why we understood the hon. Member for Henley (Mr. Johnson), the Opposition spokesman on culture, when in his day job as editor of *The Spectator* he wrote—I paraphrase: "Opposition to the Gambling Bill is nothing but low protectionism and in the case of the *Daily Mail*, a knee-jerk reaction to absolutely anything the Government does, dressed up as moral principle".

The Government have approached the Bill with a determination to do what is best for the British public. The Bill will protect the weak and the vulnerable. It will give the United Kingdom the most modern and the toughest regulatory regime for gambling anywhere in the world. For those reasons I commend the Bill to the House.

4.32 pm

Mr. John Whittingdale (Maldon and East Chelmsford): I beg to move, To leave out from 'That' to the end of the Question, and to add instead thereof:

"this House declines to give a Second Reading to the Gambling Bill since it fails to take account of the recommendations of the Joint Committee on the Draft Bill with regard to regional casinos; consequently fails to impose adequate controls on the number and location of such casinos and on the number and type of gambling machines contained; does not give local authorities sufficient powers to reject specific casino applications; opens the door to an influx of overseas-owned super casinos in our towns and cities, close to where people live; and is likely to promote gambling and lead to further diversion of funds from the National Lottery, severe disadvantage to the existing UK gaming industry and a significant increase in problem gambling."

May I begin by expressing our appreciation to the Secretary of State for her coming to the House to move the Second Reading? We are aware that she suffered a family bereavement recently and it is very good of her to be here this afternoon.

As the Secretary of State suggested, the Bill has been a very long time in its gestation. It originates from the Budd report, which was published some three years ago, and since then there has been a huge amount of debate, scrutiny and consultation. I join the right hon. Lady in paying tribute to my hon. Friend the Member for Ryedale (Mr. Greenway). He and his Committee did a fantastic job in taking evidence from every possible interest group affected by the Bill, and there is no doubt that the Bill was much improved by his work. Indeed, it would be an even better Bill if the Government had chosen to accept all the Committee's recommendations.

Given all the attention that the Bill has had over the past three years, it is extraordinary that at this eleventh hour the Secretary of State had to come to the House this afternoon to announce last-minute concessions so that she might be able to persuade some on her own side to give it their support in the vote this evening.

Mr. Tony Banks (West Ham) (Lab): Of course, if my right hon. Friend had not made any announcements, the hon. Gentleman would accuse her of being arrogant and insensitive to opinion, so she cannot win in either case. In view of the announcements that she made during her Second Reading speech, do the Government intend to withdraw their amendment opposing Second Reading?

Mr. Whittingdale: The hon. Gentleman is a little premature. We are not quite in Government yet. It is true that the Secretary of State has announced some concessions that we welcome, but there are still major points of concern that she has not addressed, which are spelled out in our amendment. The right hon. Lady has said that she is in listening mode. We hope that she will continue to listen during the debate and when we consider the Bill in Committee. There are still major flaws in the Bill.

Until now, the history of gambling regulation has been one of gradual and cautious liberalisation. For 30 years, the UK industry has been a model of responsibility. It has been largely free of organised criminal activity and the level of problem gambling is much lower in this country than elsewhere. It was for that reason that the previous Conservative Government felt able to introduce measures to liberalise the rules.

In 1994, the waiting period for membership of casinos was reduced from 48 hours to 24 hours and casinos were allowed to apply to serve alcohol after midnight and to accept debit cards, but not credit cards. Two years later, the Home Office issued a consultation paper on proposals to allow limited local advertising and to extend the number of permitted areas for casinos to 21, in order for them to be allowed to be established in some seaside resorts and conference towns. I point out to the Secretary of State, in response to her remarks at the end of her speech, that the Government said specifically at that time that there was a need to maintain tight control of casino gaming and that they did not support allowing resort-style casinos in this country.

David Wright (Telford) (Lab): The hon. Gentleman acknowledges that the Conservative Government accepted a proposal to allow 21 more casinos in 1996–97. Thankfully, that was stopped by the Labour Government when they took office. Does he agree that the Conservative proposal for new casinos was to be achieved through deregulation, whereas this Bill is primary legislation? The Conservative proposal would have been legislation through the back door, rather than constructive consultation within the industry.

Mr. Whittingdale: The measures to which I referred, which were implemented by the previous Conservative Government, were subject to enormous consultation. They represented a modest step forward. We are faced today not with a modest step forward but with a massive change that will completely alter the nature of gambling in this country. The hon. Gentleman refers to the industry having been consulted. The industry is deeply unhappy with many of the recommendations and feels, in particular, that the new rules suddenly announced in response to the second report of the Scrutiny Committee were subject to no consultation whatsoever.

There is much in the Bill that we support. There is no doubt that during the past seven years a huge change has taken place. In particular, there has been the growth of interactive and online gambling, which is completely unregulated. We therefore agree that the time has come for gambling legislation to be overhauled and brought up to date.

We welcome the establishment of the gambling commission as a new unified regulator for betting, gaming and lotteries. However, the reported decision to locate the headquarters of the commission in Newcastle has led to complaints that it will be far away from the industry that it is regulating. I understand that the chairman of the Gaming Board for Great Britain has attacked the proposal. I would be grateful if the Secretary of State would confirm whether that is the case.

We welcome the creation of the new offence of inviting, permitting or causing a child to gamble, as well as the action taken by the industry to establish a responsibility—

Mr. Kevan Jones (North Durham) (Lab): I am not sure what the hon. Gentleman has got against Newcastle. I can say, as a former councillor, that it is a fine city with at least three casinos, two of which were established under the Tyne and Wear development corporation, an invention of the previous Conservative Government.

Mr. Whittingdale: The concern of the chairman of the Gaming Board is that very few of the existing members of the board will want to transfer to Newcastle. That is a serious concern.

An area where regulation is most urgently needed is that of remote gaming. Gambling on the internet has become a huge business in the space of a few years, and it is predicted that the industry will be worth £10 billion globally within the next five years. At present, such gambling can take place only on websites hosted outside the UK—it is, of course, impossible to stop such gambling, as has been found in Australia and the United States, where they have tried to do so. Many offshore sites offer no player protection and few safeguards against under-age access or criminal activity. It therefore makes sense to have a licensed and regulated UK-based industry, where players can be certain that their bets will be honoured and that operators will be

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above board. We therefore support the provisions of the Bill dealing with remote gambling and agree that they must be enacted as soon as possible.

Other elements of the Bill concern us. The Government's attitude towards fixed-odds betting terminals remains uncertain. Will those machines be treated like other category B machines and allowed in adult gaming centres and bingo halls? Having listened to the Secretary of State's speech this afternoon, that concern will grow because she appeared unwilling to accept the agreement between the Association of British Bookmakers and the Gaming Board.

Equally, the point at which users of betting exchanges will be considered as conducting a business—which could potentially make them subject to licensing requirements—rather than as recreational users is still unclear. The bingo industry is also looking for reassurance that games currently permitted under section 21 of the Gaming Act 1968 will be allowed to continue. We will seek clarification on all those issues in Committee.

We also have reservations about the Government's decision to disallow the lowest stake category D machines from non-licensed premises such as fish and chip shops and minicab offices. Although the Joint Committee suggested that approach, little evidence exists that the existing arrangement has resulted in harm, yet the proposal will deprive many small businesses of an important source of revenue.

Mr. David Heathcoat-Amory (Wells) (Con): Does my hon. Friend agree that the powers taken in the Bill effectively to drive out traditional, family seaside arcades make it impossible for those businesses to plan ahead? The contradiction between the highly restrictive powers at the small end of the market and liberalism at the heavy, casino end of the spectrum wrecks any attempt at fair-mindedness in the Bill. Will my hon. Friend go a little bit further in his determination to protect the traditional seaside arcade against an uncomprehending Government?

Mr. Whittingdale: My right hon. Friend speaks for many operators in seaside arcades and amusement centres who are deeply concerned about the powers in the Bill to prevent children from continuing to use machines such as penny-falls and cranes. The Secretary of State has said that the power will be reserved, but many people feel that there is no evidence that such machines have ever led to any harm. While that reserved power is in the Bill, such people will continue to believe that the Government will impose controls at a future date. I say to my right hon. Friend the Member for Wells (Mr. Heathcoat-Amory), my hon. Friend the Member for Boston and Skegness (Mr. Simmonds) and the hon. Member for Morecambe and Lunesdale (Geraldine Smith), who have all raised the same point, that we continue to believe that that particular clause is unnecessary and that it should be removed.

Mr. Henry Bellingham (North-West Norfolk) (Con): This morning, I went around a number of arcades in my constituency, including one in Hunstanton. I spent a certain amount of money playing with the crane machines and the pushing machines. I heard from the owners of that arcade that those machines do not corrupt; all those machines do is give a lot of amusement to young children, which is an historical tradition in seaside resorts. Does my hon. Friend agree that the Government must make their plans clear because such arcades currently face a great deal of uncertainty?

Mr. Whittingdale: I agree with my hon. Friend and hope that he won a teddy bear from the crane. However, I do not think that the experience will have corrupted him or led him to gambling addiction. It is extraordinary that the Government appear determined to take powers to prevent children from using cranes and penny-fall machines, when they are prepared to open the door to huge regional casinos filled with up to 1,250 unlimited prize machines.

I come now to the most controversial issue—the measures further to liberalise the laws relating to casinos. Conservative Members accept that there is a case for a further relaxation in some aspects, such as restrictions on advertising, the confinement of casinos to permitted areas and the 24-hour delay before membership is granted. However, regional casinos of the kind proposed have never been seen before in this country—nor, until now, have we permitted the introduction of category A gaming machines. Those machines, which have unlimited stakes and prizes, have proved to be the biggest cause of problem gambling in Australia following the liberalisation that took place there, so it is absolutely essential to proceed cautiously in that respect.

Jim Knight (South Dorset) (Lab): Is it not the case that the relaxation of restrictions on casinos was included in the White Paper that was published in March, and that the March edition of "Conservative News" welcomed plans to liberalise the laws on gambling? What has changed since then?

Mr. Whittingdale: As I said, we are not opposed to liberalisation of the laws of gambling, but we believe that we need to proceed cautiously. The announcements that the Government have made since the publication of the Joint Committee report have given rise to our greatest concerns, because they show that in those areas the Government are clearly not proceeding cautiously.

Mr. Kevan Jones *rose—*

Tessa Jowell *rose—*

Mr. Whittingdale: I give way to the hon. Gentleman.

Tessa Jowell *rose—*

Mr. Deputy Speaker (Sir Michael Lord): Order. The hon. Gentleman has given way to Kevan Jones.

Mr. Jones: In fact, the Government are proceeding cautiously, because the Bill will not liberalise high-jackpot machines, but will limit them to certain casinos— unlike in Australia, where things have gone wrong because of their unlimited use.

Mr. Whittingdale: The Bill takes us from a situation in which there are no such machines to one in which there may be 50,000. That is not, in my view, cautious liberalisation—*[Interruption.]* The Secretary of State asks where we get the figure of 50,000 from. She has said that there will be up to 40 regional casinos. There may be up to 1,250 machines in each of those, so that equals 50,000.

Tessa Jowell: It is absolutely essential that this debate is conducted on the basis of fact, not fantasy, myth and mistaken beliefs. The expectation is that about 10 per cent. of machines in regional casinos will be category A machines that do not have a specified stake or prize. If there is any evidence that they are causing harm, it will be for the gambling commission to reduce the stake and the prize. That deals with the hon. Gentleman's concerns. Whether in relation to this or to my very clear assurances on seaside arcades, it is important that he sticks to the facts instead of writing a novel.

Mr. Whittingdale: The fact is that regional casinos will be allowed up to 1,250 machines, which, as they can be of any category, could all be category A; it is not sufficient for the Secretary of State merely to say that her expectation is that they will not be. I hope that she will take seriously my suggestions on how further limits could be imposed.

Mr. Nick Hawkins (Surrey Heath) (Con): As my hon. Friend knows, I have been following these issues for many years. The Government have not accepted the concerns expressed by many people in the industry and on both sides of this House and in the upper House, as reflected in the excellent report by the Joint Committee chaired by our hon. Friend the Member for Ryedale (Mr. Greenway), that if the Government's proposals are proceeded with we will lose the regenerative effect of the casinos on some of our run-down resorts, whereas if the Committee's recommendations were accepted we could ensure that the regenerative effect occurs. Does my hon. Friend agree that the real problem is that the Government have ensured that there can be huge casinos in major cities, not only in resorts?

Mr. Whittingdale: My hon. Friend is absolutely right; I wish to deal with that point later.

I want to return to my point about the Government's original intention, which, as the hon. Member for North Durham (Mr. Jones) suggested, appeared to be based on cautious liberalisation. We were first told that there would be a limited number of resort destination casinos and that they were so called because they would be located in seaside resorts and away from centres of population. Limiting the accessibility of jackpot machines was said at the time to be crucial to the Government's objective of protecting children and the vulnerable. However, the Government have been seduced by the prospect of the millions of pounds of investment being offered by the overseas operators who want to come and set up in this country. According to some of those companies to which I have spoken, they are willing to invest tens, if not hundreds, of millions of pounds in each one of the new mega-casinos; in doing so, they would provide thousands of jobs. Of course that is a tempting prospect, but those companies are not proposing to make that investment out of altruism. The return on their investment will come from the 20,000 people they are hoping to attract through the doors of each casino every week.

Chris Bryant (Rhondda) (Lab): I wonder whether the hon. Gentleman has had time to look at the report of the Culture, Media and Sport Committee, which looked at the original draft of the Gambling Bill some time before the Joint Committee, chaired by the hon. Member for Ryedale (Mr. Greenway), produced its report. The Select Committee—which included several of the hon. Gentleman's Conservative colleagues, none of whom demurred for an instant at the time, although they are now doing so—listened to the Bishop of Blackburn putting very clearly the argument in favour of the regeneration of Blackpool. He wanted to see that financial investment being made. Does the hon. Gentleman think that the bishop has succumbed to temptation?

Mr. Whittingdale: I would say two things to the hon. Gentleman. First, the proposals on the table today are very different from those that were on the table when his Select Committee was examining the issue. Secondly, he cites the Bishop of Blackburn, but I hope that he is not suggesting that the Churches generally support the Bill. He only has to look at the remarks of a number of archbishops, and of representatives of the Methodist Church, the Salvation Army and many other religious groups, to see that they are bitterly opposed to many of the provisions in the Bill.

Mr. Nigel Evans (Ribble Valley) (Con): Does my hon. Friend accept that while the Bishop of Blackburn might want to see Blackpool being regenerated through the possibility of one resort casino being established there, that is a very different matter from splattering casinos around every major city and town in the United Kingdom? There are so many questions that need to be answered on the Bill, particularly in regard to the super-jackpot machines. If we were to pilot these new casinos in a small number of areas—perhaps Blackpool could be one—we could test their impact on the country.

Mr. Whittingdale: That very sensible suggestion has also been made by my hon. Friend the Member for Buckingham (Mr. Bercow).

Miss Kirkbride: I think that the hon. Member for Rhondda (Chris Bryant) chose to misinterpret the conclusions reached by the Conservative members of the Select Committee, of whom I was one at the time to which he referred. The simple fact is that, as my hon. Friend the Member for Ribble Valley (Mr. Evans) has said, establishing a resort destination casino in Blackpool while we test the market is one thing, but introducing casinos with category A gaming machines in 40 cities across the country is very different.

Mr. Whittingdale: I am grateful to my hon. Friend for setting out her position, and to the other Conservative members of the Committee. As several of my hon. Friends have suggested, the original hope that this proposal might lead to the regeneration of seaside resorts such as Blackpool will actually be undermined

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by the proposals before us, as there is no doubt that the operators of the casinos would much rather locate them in central Manchester or Liverpool, for example, than in Blackpool, if they had the opportunity to do so.

Mrs. Humble: I thank the hon. Gentleman for giving way, especially as he is talking about Blackpool. Does he believe that the regional casinos could lead to the regeneration of towns such as Blackpool? If so, will he tell me how his voting against this Second Reading would enable that to happen?

Mr. Whittingdale: We are concerned that the original intention to locate the casinos in seaside resorts and other places that need regeneration will be undermined by the shift in the Government's strategy towards locating them in centres of population. That is one of our deep concerns about the Bill, and one of the reasons why we cannot support it this evening.

Jim Knight: The logic seems to be that the Bill will receive its Second Reading tonight and that we shall then have an opportunity to improve it in Committee. If the hon. Gentleman supports the 90 per cent. of the Bill that is in favour of protecting people from gambling, I cannot understand why he is opposing it on Second Reading.

Mr. Whittingdale: If the hon. Gentleman reads the reasoned amendment that we have tabled, he will see that it sets out clearly why we cannot support the Bill tonight. As I conceded earlier, the Bill contains some proposals that we support, but at the moment, it is fatally flawed in several respects, and there is a real danger that it will lead to an increase in gambling addiction and will fail to provide the protection that the Government claim that it will provide for children and the vulnerable.

Andrew Selous (South-West Bedfordshire) (Con): Does not my hon. Friend think it strange that the Government pray in aid the need for super-casinos to bring economic regeneration to many parts of the country when they might look instead to sports, film and arts venues, particularly for young people who are poorly served, if they really want to see such regeneration?

Mr. Whittingdale: I agree with my hon. Friend.

Why have the Government decided to throw caution to the wind, give up on the slow and gradual approach to liberalisation, and instead fling open the doors? The first indication that we had was that the new approach represents a pot of gold for the Treasury. The Secretary of State said this afternoon that her adviser's comment that the tax regime would be revenue-neutral had been somehow misunderstood. In fact, the Minister for Media and Heritage told a conference last year that a key aim of the Bill was to raise tax revenue for the Treasury. We also know that the parliamentary Labour party brief on the Bill states:

> "Parliamentary Labour Party members should bear in mind that some of the towns and cities that want to use a casino as part of a broader leisure, tourism and regeneration strategy are key Labour seats".

Those are the real reasons why the Government have abandoned their previous approach and are now desperate to get this Bill on the statute book before the next election.

The Secretary of State has said that she is prepared to listen to Members' concerns during the passage of the Bill. Many of our concerns, however, were identified by the all-party scrutiny Committee in its report in July. It proposed specific safeguards against proliferation, yet those were rejected by the Government. If the Secretary of State had listened at the time, many of the problems could have been averted. In particular, the scrutiny Committee proposed limiting the number of casinos by increasing the minimum non-gambling area from 1,500 to 4,000 sq m. Doing so would have helped to ensure that casinos were closer to leisure complexes offering a different range of attractions, rather than simply giant gambling dens. More importantly, it would have increased the size of total investment required, which in the Committee's view would have limited the likely number built to about 20 to 25.

The Secretary of State has said this afternoon that her proposals will result in 20 to 40 regional casinos being built. The truth is that the Bill does not provide for any upper limit, and as the Government's response to the scrutiny Committee states,

> "estimates of the number of regional casinos likely to be developed are necessarily speculative".

That is why Members on both sides of the House are saying that if the Secretary of State is proved wrong—by her admission in her report, she might be—there is a case for having some kind of cap on the figure so that we do not see a proliferation of such regional casinos, which are of a kind that we have never seen previously.

Rob Marris: In spite of the hon. Gentleman's reservations about other less controversial parts of the Bill, would he and his colleagues support the Bill if it included such a cap?

Mr. Whittingdale: That would be a considerable step forward, but the Secretary of State has already rejected it this afternoon, so it does not seem likely. I hope that the Secretary of State and Ministers will address several concerns in Committee. We will examine it when it comes back from Committee to see whether it is improved.

Mr. David Watts (St. Helens, North) (Lab): Does the hon. Gentleman agree that it is not the number of casinos that matters? We all know that the vast majority of people can gamble without becoming addicted, but a small number become addicted and need help and support. Would it not be better for him to concentrate on, for example, controlling credit betting and ensuring that services are available to help the small number of people who would become addicted, regardless of the number of casinos, or of any other gambling establishments?

Mr. Whittingdale: There are steps that need to be taken, particularly to try to increase the protection available to those people, a point to which I shall return.

Mr. Bercow: This is, after all, a Second Reading debate on the Bill's general principles. Given that it seeks a balance between freedom and protection, that the Joint Committee said that there is no justification whatsoever for delaying its introduction, and that my hon. Friend has himself said that arcane and anomalous gambling laws are holding back our businesses, how does he answer the charge that a decision to oppose the Bill outright on Second Reading would represent not principled opposition, but political expediency?

Mr. Whittingdale: I answer that charge by saying that the Bill as drafted has got it wrong. The Government have had ample opportunity to build in the safeguards for which hon. Members from all parts of the House have been calling—in particular, those set out clearly in the report of my hon. Friend the Member for Ryedale and his Committee. If the Government had been willing to listen then, the Bill would have been considerably better and more deserving of support. However, they were not willing to listen, which is why we are unable to support it this evening.

Chris Bryant: Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

Mr. Whittingdale: I will give way on the subject of caps.

Chris Bryant: I am grateful to the hon. Gentleman for giving way; he is being very generous. Several hon. Members have argued that the Bill should include a cap on the number of super-casinos, but is that not illogical? Only if the Government or a central body decide the location of each super-casino can one impose a national cap. If we allow local and regional authorities to make those decisions, it is difficult to set a national cap.

Mr. Whittingdale: The Government have already said that regional planning bodies will play a key role in the process. It would be perfectly sensible to suggest an initial cap of, say, one or two casinos per region. It would then be for the regional planning bodies to decide where they should be located. That would represent co-operation between national Government and regional planning bodies, and it would be up to local authorities to determine particular sites. That seems a perfectly sensible way forward.

The Secretary of State laid great stress on the role of local authorities and their powers to reject casino developments. However, it is difficult to see a local authority resisting the temptation of the tax revenue and potential planning gain that an investment of this size could bring, especially if it takes the view that if it turned it down, the neighbouring authority would simply take the benefit instead.

Mr. Don Foster: Will the hon. Gentleman share with the House his views about whether planning circular 1/97 of the national planning policy should apply? It clearly states:

> "Planning obligations should never be used as a means of securing for the local community a share of the profits of the development".

If it should apply, does that not mean that regeneration benefits will be much smaller than the Government say?

Mr. Whittingdale: I do think that it should apply, and I have been disturbed by one or two reports suggesting that it may have been contravened.

The one concession that the Secretary of State made this afternoon, which is welcome, was her agreement to introduce a separate use class for all casinos. A number of us were concerned that one of the drivers towards proliferation would be the ability of leisure facilities within the same use class to convert to casinos. So she appears at least to have closed off one option this afternoon, and we welcome that.

Another concern about which the scrutiny Committee heard evidence was that one of the major contributors to increased problem gambling is convenience. Professor Peter Collins said:

> "from a problem gambling point of view, there is no doubt that it is better not to locate casinos in town centres. There is no question of that".

It is for that reason that we in the scrutiny Committee regard it as essential that regional casinos should not be on high streets, but located away from where people live. We had understood that that was originally the Secretary of State's own view, but in deciding the most suitable areas for regional casinos, regional planning bodies have been told explicitly that they must take account of planning guidance that requires major new facilities to promote the vitality and viability of existing town centres.

The letter that the Minister sent to the scrutiny Committee confirmed that PPS6 and PPG13 together

> "direct casinos towards the most central and accessible locations".

He even went as far as to suggest that any applications that did not follow that guidance were likely to be called in. The scrutiny Committee concluded that there was an inconsistency between the policy objectives of the Department for Culture, Media and Sport and those of the Office of the Deputy Prime Minister. I have to say that "inconsistency" seems to me to be a considerable understatement. If the Secretary of State is to deliver the Bill's objective of protecting children and the vulnerable, it is essential that the planning guidance for the location of new casinos should be changed.

Another difference between the draft Bill and the one before us today relates to new category A, so-called "million pound" jackpot machines. Originally, the Government proposed that they should be allowed in all casinos and be subject only to the machine-to-table ratio. They also proposed that in regional casinos there should be no limit on numbers at all. Although it was not a recommendation of the scrutiny Committee, the Government then decided to restrict category A machines to regional casinos alone and impose a cap on the number of machines at 1,250. By doing that, they will increase the attraction of regional casinos and severely disadvantage existing UK operators. Those companies rightly point out that they will be unable to compete if they are prevented from offering any category A machines in their existing casinos while the new regional ones can contain up to 1,250 such machines. The pressure on them to convert into regional casinos will be enormous and will lead to still more proliferation.

The answer, as the scrutiny Committee again pointed out, is to allow a limited number of category A machines into small and large casinos, or alternatively to increase the maximum stake and prize that category B machines

[Mr. Whittingdale]

can offer. That would help to address the problem of the cliff edge that the Government have created between large and regional casinos.

As I said earlier, however, we also believe that there is a case for further limiting the number of category A machines. Most operators predict that the maximum number of 1,250 machines in regional casinos will, as the Secretary of State confirmed, contain a mix of different categories. We believe that, within the overall limit, it makes sense to impose a further restriction on category A machines so that we can monitor the effect of their introduction in this country.

There is one more measure of protection that we believe is necessary. At present, the membership requirement for UK casinos allows operators to bar from their premises those who are known to be problem gamblers. It is another important safeguard to try to stop gambling addiction. Yet by scrapping the membership requirements, that protection will be lost. The lack of any form of identification requirement also removes a vital safeguard against money laundering. Indeed, it may well be in breach of the EU's third directive on money laundering. According to the press yesterday, a senior civil servant wrote to American casino companies asking what dispensations they wanted under the legislation. The companies then made it clear—

Tessa Jowell: The hon. Gentleman may want to withdraw that comment and I undertake to write to him separately about it. The allegation is untrue.

Mr. Whittingdale: I am grateful to the Secretary of State for her assurance that those reports were untrue. I, of course, accept her word on that, but it does not change the fact that the Government are proposing to exempt large casinos from the requirement to identify those who are involved in transactions of more than £700. I would be interested to know whether the Secretary of State also denies the report that the Association of Chief Police Officers has protested about that. Is that also wrong?

Tessa Jowell: I am very happy to say that, given that one of the objectives of the Bill is to keep gambling crime-free, we have of course consulted the police throughout. Discussions on the money laundering directive are a matter for the Treasury and still continue. In its final shape, the Bill will ensure that we keep crime out—money laundering or any other crime that could infiltrate gambling in this country.

Mr. Whittingdale: The most effective way of preventing money laundering is to retain the requirement that those undertaking large transactions must provide identification. Under the Bill, that safeguard will be lost. The safeguard against money laundering and the membership requirement, which would provide an additional layer of protection for those who are suffering from gambling addiction, are to be removed simply because they do not happen to satisfy the American business model.

Jim Sheridan (West Renfrewshire) (Lab): The hon. Gentleman is talking about measures to protect vulnerable people from being seduced by gambling. There has been a furore in the popular press about the Bill having the effect of increasing and enhancing gambling among vulnerable people, but does the hon. Gentleman agree that if that same popular press were really concerned about protecting people from being seduced by gambling, they could play their part by removing the racing sections from their papers, which not only encourage people to gamble, but advise them on how to do so?

Mr. Whittingdale: We are concerned about the Bill partly because it represents a completely new and different form of gambling from anything that we have seen before. It is for that reason that we are urging caution. I am interested that the Secretary of State said that my comments on the membership requirement were incorrect. In that case, perhaps she will reconsider whether it would be wise to retain a membership requirement both to tackle problem gambling and to deal with the danger of money laundering.

Mr. Banks: Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

Mr. Whittingdale: If the hon. Gentleman will forgive me, I must wind up my remarks.

The Bill initially enjoyed widespread support, but by refusing to listen to those who have advocated a cautious approach combined with sensible safeguards, the Government have managed to unite almost everyone against it. People are against the Bill, not because of snobbery but because it will disadvantage responsible and long-standing UK companies, lead to a proliferation of casinos in our towns and cities and risk creating a massive increase in problem gambling. The Secretary of State has said that she is listening and is prepared to amend the Bill. It is a pity that she was not willing to do so earlier.

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Before I call the next speaker, I remind the House that Mr. Speaker has placed a 10-minute limit on Back-Bench speeches, which will apply from now on.

5.13 pm

Mr. Frank Dobson (Holborn and St. Pancras) (Lab): My right hon. Friend the Secretary of State has had a difficult task introducing the Bill today. As we have been good friends for more than 33 years, I hope that we will remain so at the end of this debate and of future ones. I feel fairly confident that she was not referring to me in her reference to a whiff of snobbery, and I hope that she will excuse me from any charge of opportunism.

I support most of the Bill because we clearly need to modernise the laws on gambling, but I oppose the proposal to make it easier for multinational casinos to rip off hard-working British families. There is no public demand for the provisions in the Bill. Before there was any unstimulated demand, shall we say, opinion polls showed that more than 90 per cent. of the population believed that there were enough opportunities for gambling already. People have come to my advice surgeries about housing, schools, pensions, passports and policing, but in 25 years I cannot recall one person coming to see me because they wanted us to increase the opportunities for gambling. I have, however, had quite a lot of people coming to see me because their lives have been ruined by their spouse's gambling away all the family income. We should not do anything that is likely to increase the opportunities for that. There is no public demand for the changes, so we appear to be changing the law to make it easier for casino companies to tempt hard-working British families to lose their money so that they can make profits. It is worth remembering that the casinos cannot make profits unless most punters lose their money.

In future, we shall permit extra temptations that are not currently on offer. It will be possible to walk into a casino with no cooling-off period of 24 hours. There will be an enormous number of machines and prizes of possibly £1 million in those places. We are lifting the restriction on advertising so that casinos can deliberately stimulate demand that does not exist without such stimulation. That will increase gambling, especially through slot machines, and the evidence shows that slot machines are a major source of problem gambling and of people getting hooked.

I am not only worried about those who may get hooked on gambling. I believe that, at a time when we are discussing the need for more people to save, be careful with money and put money aside for their pensions and for the future, it is foolish of the Government to say, "We're going to make it easier for you to blow it at a casino."

The Government claim that there will not be a large increase in the number of casinos but just 20 or 40 new ones. Ministers have referred to those figures as "a modest increase" on the existing 134. An increase of 40 on 134 is 30 per cent. If the trade unions presented a proposal for a 30 per cent. increase in the national minimum wage, I do not believe that the Cabinet would regard it as a modest increase that should be approved.

Mr. Win Griffiths (Bridgend) (Lab): Will my right hon. Friend give way?

Mr. Dobson: I would rather get on because others want to speak.

The problem is not only 40 more casinos but that they will be much larger. If they are allowed 1,250 slot machines each, it means, as I understand it, that each new one will have more slot machines than those in all the existing casinos put together. That increases the opportunity for gambling. The bigger prizes on offer make it more likely that people will gamble and that there will be more gambling.

We are told that the Bill will permit the regeneration of inner cities. Have we reached the stage when the only way in which we can regenerate our inner cities depends on inviting American casino companies to bail us out? That is not the best way to achieve regeneration. If we stick it on top of 24-hour drinking, the combination will not greatly assist the prevailing situation in many of our inner cities.

We are told that there will be not only a casino built at each location but hotels, restaurants and entertainment facilities, as if they would tempt people away from the tables and machines. They will not. The hotels, restaurants and entertainment will be there to attract people to the casinos so that they go to the restaurant and afterwards to the tables; stay at the hotel and go to the tables, and go to a show and subsequently to the tables. Things that are presented as a means of amelioration are there to make the casinos more attractive.

Mr. David Marshall (Glasgow, Shettleston) (Lab): Will my right hon. Friend give way?

Mr. Dobson: I should prefer not to because others want to speak.

I have every sympathy with the people of Blackpool and of other holiday resorts. It would be a good idea if the Government acknowledged that Blackpool and one or two other places might benefit from one of the new casinos. They could choose the places—I have never objected to central Government's making a few decisions now and again. If that happened, we could ascertain how the casinos worked. A private Bill that covered several places could subsequently be promoted or a measure could be introduced from the centre. That might show us what could be done and bring benefits to those areas.

However, if there are to be big casinos in every major centre of population, the holiday resort casinos can forget the massive improvement in takings that they expect because people will not go to Blackpool if they can go to a casino nearer home in Manchester. All the points that I have made so far concern the public. Let me say something about the harm that I believe the proposals are doing to the reputation of the Labour party and the Labour Government. They are putting off a lot of people whom we would do well not to put off—a lot of concerned people who are already unhappy about one or two aspects of the Government's policies.

People come up to me and ask "Why is he doing it?" I think they are referring to the Prime Minister. They consider the Bill to be contrary to the Labour party's normal slightly paternalistic, slightly puritan image. It is also rather at variance with the greater emphasis on religious belief that has been common in Government in recent times. And it is contrary to things that the Chancellor and others are saying about the need to save and put money aside for pensions.

There is no public demand for the Bill. The demand is coming from American gambling companies. They may have changed; but in the eyes of the British public—who may remember films made years ago—they are connected with organised crime, money laundering, drugs and prostitution. That is the sort of word association that occurs to people, and I think it is very damaging to our party. It does make people wonder "Why are they doing it?" I think that that question itself is very damaging to us as a party.

I believe that the Bill would be bad for the country, bad for hard-working families and bad for the party. It is the worst possible political combination: it is both wrong and unpopular.

5.21 pm

Mr. Don Foster (Bath) (LD): I join the hon. Member for Maldon and East Chelmsford (Mr. Whittingdale) in thanking the Secretary of State, and indeed expressing admiration of her for coming here today in the light of her recent bereavement.

[Mr. Don Foster]

The hon. Gentleman was right to praise the work of the Joint Committee, and in particular its Chairman, the hon. Member for Ryedale (Mr. Greenway). The Secretary of State has accused the Bill's opponents of grabbing opportunism from a passing bandwagon. She fails to understand that many people who initially supported much more of the Bill were influenced by the Government's failure to note some of the Committee's recommendations.

The hon. Member for Maldon and East Chelmsford summarised his party's concerns. We share many of them, as our amendment makes clear. It explains why we will vote against Second Reading, notwithstanding one welcome U-turn by the Secretary of State about which I shall say more later.

As others have observed, much of the Bill is welcome. It provides a much-needed updating of existing legislation. Like many other people, we are pleased about the stronger, broader regulation that will result from the replacement of the Gaming Board with the gambling commission. It will be stronger because the commission will have greater powers to rescind licences, impose higher fines and enter and inspect premises. It will be broader because it will cover remote gambling such as internet, betting-exchange and interactive television gambling.

Mr. Banks: The hon. Gentleman was good enough to acknowledge one concession made by the Secretary of State, among a number of others. But how can he say that he supports at least 90 per cent. of the Bill, and then vote against its Second Reading? He could try to make further improvements during a Committee stage that he will deny the Bill if it is not passed tonight.

Mr. Foster: First, the Secretary of State's concessions are not actually in the Bill. Secondly, we are concerned about many other matters, which I shall enumerate shortly. Thirdly, as I shall explain, in many instances we feel that the Government's basic premises are seriously flawed. For those three reasons, we will vote against the Bill.

I was referring to the need to have control over remote gambling. The Secretary of State rightly points to the 3 million to 4 million people involved in internet gambling. We note that those involved in providing it—for example, Sportingbet—are reporting significant increases in turnover. Yet at the same time it is deeply worrying to learn that it is very easy for children and young people to become involved in that. A recent survey showed that an 11-year-old girl was able to register with 30 out of 37 internet gambling sites, so we accept entirely that regulation is needed to protect the vulnerable and to ensure integrity.

Mr. Bill Tynan (Hamilton, South) (Lab): If the hon. Gentleman sincerely believes that the Bill cures the problems to which he has just referred, how can he support opposing the Bill at this stage? I could understand his party voting against it on Third Reading if the improvements that he desired had not been made, but how can he possible justify it at this time?

Mr. Foster: I think that I have already answered that question in reply to the hon. Member for West Ham (Mr. Banks), but while 90 per cent. of the Bill may well be good, and I believe that it is, if the 10 per cent. is so very bad and continues to be so, I am sure that the hon. Gentleman would not accept that we should support it, and I want to deal now with my serious concerns about it.

May I refer in passing to the broader remit of the gambling commission? I welcome the fact that it will require casinos and others to have higher standards in respect of social responsibility and that those involved have agreed to a target of a £3 million contribution to a fund to alleviate some of the problems caused by gambling, but I remind the House that that figure is only 0.035 per cent. of the £8.5 billion that is spent annually in this country on gambling, and I suspect that it is unlikely to prove to be a high enough figure, so I welcome the fact that the Secretary of State will have reserve powers to impose a levy if that is the case.

To return to the point that has just been made, I am concerned about some aspects of the Bill, particularly those proposals relating to the new super-casinos and the enormous number of unlimited-prize machines that there might be within them. We are worried about the likely number of such casinos, their location, the speed of their introduction and the controls over them. We are particularly worried about the introduction of the unlimited-prize machines in such large numbers without any significant research having been done into the likely effects that they will have on problem gambling. The Secretary of State has told us that only 10 per cent. of machines in super-casinos may be of this type, but even if that is the case—I suspect that it will be far more—we will still be introducing 5,000 of these machines in this country without any sort of trial. I am also worried that the Secretary of State in response to the hon. Member for Maldon and East Chelmsford said that it will be for the gambling commission to decide what that percentage will be. For the sake of anyone thinking of investing in these new super-casinos, I hope that the gambling commission will be up and running and have made a decision on what that proportion will be, because presumably that will directly impact upon a potential investor's decision whether to set up such a casino.

Jim Knight: The hon. Gentleman could have made many of these criticisms when the White Paper was published in March, yet in a Liberal Democrat press release his colleague, the hon. Member for North Devon (Nick Harvey), said:

> "At last Britain is moving with the times, giving British resorts the opportunity to challenge America as a destination for casino holidays."

Does he now disagree with his hon. Friend?

Mr. Foster: No, I entirely agree with my hon. Friend the Member for North Devon (Nick Harvey), but I hope that the hon. Gentleman will read the end of that press release, which points to the issue of problem gambling. He read it out accurately and I am grateful to him for doing that because my hon. Friend specifically referred to destination casinos. One of the key problems is that the Secretary of State and her Government have changed the clear recommendation on destination casinos that my hon. Friend was supporting at the time.

Mr. Kevan Jones: The hon. Gentleman said that he realised that online betting and access by children to that is a real problem, with which I agree. Why therefore will he and other Liberal Democrats vote against the regulation of that tonight? Thanks very much for giving us another soundbite for a leaflet.

Mr. Foster: Thank you very much to the hon. Gentleman for giving Liberal Democrats the soundbite that he is happy to go ahead with unrestricted regional casinos that 93 per cent. of the British public do not want. Of course, if he intends to vote against the Bill, he has the same problem that he alleges I have.

Mr. Jones: The hon. Gentleman must wait until I make my contribution. I shall certainly argue for some limitations on the Bill. Is that not what he should be doing, rather than throwing everything out, including some very welcome provisions to protect the most vulnerable in our society, namely children, which clearly the Liberal Democrats do not want to do tonight?

Mr. Foster: The hon. Gentleman wants to have his cake and eat it—but he is entitled to do that.

We have some concerns and some suggestions about how the Bill could be improved. As the right hon. Member for Holborn and St. Pancras (Mr. Dobson) said, recent opinion polls show that people do not want increased gambling opportunities, not least because of the inevitable increase in problem gambling that they will create. Many people do not want regeneration in their area if it comes on the back of creating significant misery for many people locally.

We already have more than 300,000 gamblers—probably far more—and the Bill as it stands will inevitably increase that significantly. Everyone seems to believe that—every independent commentator—except the Secretary of State. The whole House will surely have been surprised when she said to the Joint Committee:

> "If this legislation gave rise to an increase in problem gambling then it would have failed and it would be bad legislation."

We have had rash statements before. We all remember the Deputy Prime Minister's promise to reduce the number of car journeys within five years: a tall order, but hold me to it, he said. Many of us will recall John Patten—now Lord Patten—making the wonderful promise that he would eat his hat garnished if he did not meet his targets in relation to grant-maintained schools. The real question is what the Secretary of State will do if the Bill fails under the criteria that she set. I am sure that we all desperately hope that it will not involve her parading as a croupier. She at least tempered what she had said when she told my hon. Friend the Member for Southwark, North and Bermondsey (Simon Hughes) that nobody could say that there would not be at least one more problem gambler. I suspect that there will be far more.

Bob Russell: Will my hon. Friend ask the House to reflect on the fact that 300,000, which is the number of problem gamblers already known about, is three times the number of soldiers in Her Majesty's armed forces? That puts in context the sheer volume of problem gamblers already out there.

Mr. Foster: My hon. Friend is right to draw attention to one way of showing just how large a number a third of a million people is. He will be well aware that the clear evidence is that with the introduction of what could be 5,000 highly addictive category A machines the number is likely to increase significantly. It is not only the public and politicians of all parties who are concerned about this but the British businesses that will be affected. The Government said in the White Paper that

> "the legitimate interests of all parties should be taken fully into account".

It is strange, then—perhaps the Minister can explain it to the House—that the Government plan to remove category D machines from fish and chip shops and taxi offices but there has been no consultation whatever with representatives of those businesses, although estimates show that up to 600 of them are likely to close as a result. In passing, he might explain what the difference is between ambient gambling in a fish and chip shop or taxi office and in a motorway service station. Many people are confused about that aspect of the legislation.

Businesses are also concerned about what appears to be preferential treatment for American casino operators. The British casino industry is understandably worried that the odds are being significantly stacked in favour of the Americans. It is the British businesses, not the American ones, who have, over 40 years, built an enviable record of integrity, fairness and social responsibility. They have raised issues of integrity about membership. We are not talking about a return to the 24-hour rule, but about having at least a membership requirement so that a record is kept of all those who enter premises. Surely the Minister and the Secretary of State have been consulting the police, and I would be amazed if the Minister tells us that the police and others have all said a membership registration scheme would not assist on money laundering or on the issues of problem gambling.

The final version of the Bill came as a huge shock to many people, including the casino industry, and there are more shocks still to come. The Bill contains many references to numerous, as yet unavailable, codes and regulations and to 32 additional powers for the Secretary of State. Many people have real concerns, some of them very basic.

The Government's arguments for more casinos do not seem to add up. They cannot even tell us how many casinos there are. Last week, on the Floor of the House, the Prime Minister told us there are 120. The DCMS website says there are 122. In response to the Joint Committee, Lord McIntosh said there were 126. More recently, in a press release, he said there were 130. The House of Commons Library, whose figures I prefer to believe, says that the figure is none of those, but is 131. If the Government cannot even get the basic facts right, how can we have confidence in other things they say?

We have been told that the Bill would be revenue-neutral, but that statement has been withdrawn, which is not surprising because the regulatory impact assessment says that the Bill should

> "increase casino turnover and therefore (all being equal) tax/duty revenue".

[Mr. Foster]

There is confusion, too, about the number of jobs that will be created. The Prime Minister, again on the Floor of the House last week, and in a press briefing, said there would be 80,000. The Secretary of State says in articles in today's papers that there will be 85,000. Leaving that aside, in the run-up to the Bill jobs have actually been lost. British gaming machine manufacturing jobs have been lost to America, and further job losses are predicted. The Henley Centre claims that there will be "no significant employment gains" as a result of the Bill. It argues that

> "certain sectors of the leisure industry, for example pubs, restaurants and hotels, will be put under great pressure in their competing leisure offerings with casinos."

In other words, it is likely that super-casinos will merely displace jobs, not create new ones.

If the super-casinos are going to take away some existing gambling business, a threat is also posed to such things as the national lottery. What will be the impact on good causes? As I said at Question Time, what will be the impact on our Olympic funding package? The regulatory impact assessment is quite clear that there will be implications. Even if national lottery sales decline by just 2.5 per cent., that would lead to a loss of almost £50 million a year for the good causes, of which £27 million would be from the Olympic lottery fund. Over five years, that figure would be more than £100 million. The Minister must explain how the funding gap will be closed in our plans for the Olympic bid.

The case for regeneration, however seductive it may be, frankly has not been made.

Mrs. Humble: Is the hon. Gentleman aware of a report commissioned by the Northwest Development Agency and the Lancashire West partnership for the eight councils in west Lancashire on the regeneration potential of regional casinos? It has identified a substantial increase in net jobs and investment into the local area, and I recommend that the hon. Gentleman reads it before he makes further comments about regeneration.

Mr. Foster: I am grateful. The honest and truthful answer is that I was not aware of the report, but if the hon. Lady will make it available, I shall be delighted to read it. My point, though, is a simple one: there are conflicting bits of evidence about the issue, and it is wrong of the Government to claim categorically that all the additional jobs will be created when there is conflicting evidence about that. Surely, as many hon. Members have suggested, a far better way forward, adopting the precautionary principle, would be to move slowly, possibly by having just one new super-casino in each region. Then, we will have an opportunity to judge whether the hon. Lady's evidence or the Henley Centre's evidence or the Prime Minister's evidence is correct.

The other worry that the House should have about the Bill relates to the opinions of Lord McIntosh, who for a while has fronted up the Government's views on the Bill. He told the Joint Committee:

> "I see gambling reform, which would be introduced by the Gambling Bill, as having three aspects: one is regulation, and that is clearly what the Bill is about, and that is most of what you have been covering; the second is the tax regime; and the third is the location regime. You will not fully understand the gambling reform unless you have all those three legs of the stool in place."

I am sure that he is absolutely right, but there is nothing in the Bill about the tax regime, which Lord McIntosh said was crucial if we were to understand the reform. The Secretary of State told us from the Dispatch Box only an hour ago that the tax regime for gambling was nothing to do with her and that it was all to do with the Treasury. However, if we do not have a clear understanding of the tax regime, how can we know how many new super-casinos there will be? Lord McIntosh agrees with me, but there is nothing in the Bill.

Lord McIntosh said that the location regime was the second of the three legs, but what there is on that is wholly inadequate, confusing and flawed. So basically, we have a Bill that is two legs short of a stool. We simply cannot understand the reform, as Lord McIntosh said, unless we have the other details.

We are also expected to be confident that the industry will ensure that there will be only between 20 and 40 of the new casinos. That is what the Prime Minister and the Government have claimed. The Government say that that range is an industry prediction, but I would be interested to know which part of the industry made that prediction. When I ask people in the industry whether they made it they say, "No, it's what the Government have told us, and because we find it so difficult to decide how many it should be, we haven't disagreed with them." I hope that the Minister can say which parts of the industry have told the Government that the range will be between 20 and 40. If he cannot say now, perhaps he will put the answer in the Library, because people in the industry are not capable of making such a prediction.

When people in the industry try to work out the figure and find how difficult it is they take into account the fact that there have been about 100 planning applications already, and the fact that it is reported that MGM has recently said that 10 per cent. of its global profits would come from the UK alone. Will the figure be only between 20 and 40? Who knows? But let us not be so complacent as to believe that it will be.

That is why it was so bizarre when the Secretary of State said only a few days ago in her press notice introducing the legislation:

> "This is a Bill about new protections, not new casinos."

What nonsense. This is a Bill about new casinos—that is the bit of the Bill that everyone is so concerned about. The Secretary of State is deeply wrong. We are concerned about the new casinos, how many there will be, where they will be and whether the profits from them will disappear from this country and end up in America. The Bill fails in the location regime in so many ways.

Mr. Adrian Sanders (Torbay) (LD): Is it not the case that the Bill originally was about one resort casino, possibly in Blackpool, and that it had broad support? Now that the Bill has grown like Topsy there is less support. Surely if the Government want the Bill to go through, they ought to return to the original concept.

Mr. Foster: My hon. Friend is brilliant at moving me on to the next part of my speech, which is about destination casinos. The Joint Committee argued for the very point that my hon. Friend made. We should not be talking about regional casinos, but about leisure destination casinos. The Committee recognised the danger of super-casinos on the high street because of the clear link between casual, "walk in and play" gambling and problem gambling. The Government initially appeared to agree, which is why so many of us are so shocked at what has happened in the final stages of drafting the Bill.

In giving evidence to the Joint Committee at the end of last year, Lord McIntosh appeared to agree with the merits of making "a positive decision" to go gambling, rather than

> "casual gambling which is thrust at you at the street corner".

Well, he seems to have changed his mind, although in the press release that he issued two days ago, he suddenly talked about destination casinos again, so whether that was a U-turn or merely a blunder, we do not know.

Fundamentally, the Government have missed the point about the type of super-casinos in limited numbers in which people might be interested. We simply do not know whether the benefits to which the Government refer—not only jobs, but economic regeneration—will come. In an earlier intervention, I quoted circular 1/97, which states:

> "Planning obligations should never be used as a means of securing for the local community a share in the profits of the development."

In other words, councils cannot expect exceptional planning gain to occur. The Minister will say that circular 1/97 is out of date and has been superseded by the new Planning and Compulsory Purchase Act 2004, but when he looks at that measure, he will see that the principle has not been changed. Can he confirm whether I am correct that councils will not be able to get exceptional planning gain when such applications are made?

David Hamilton (Midlothian) (Lab): On several occasions, it has been suggested that local authorities are the safeguard on the Bill. Are not the turnovers of some of the companies involved triple or quadruple the amount that most local authorities have? Local authorities will not be in a position to challenge what is proposed. How can one local authority reject a proposal when another will be waiting at the sidelines to accept it?

Mr. Foster: The hon. Gentleman is right to be concerned about that issue—the potential for bribing, as it has sometimes been unfairly described. It is vital that the Government consider the point that I have made in relation to the so-called section 106 agreements and what will and will not be permissible under that legislation. He raised the issue of the power of local authorities. Of course, the Government have suggested that authorities will be all-powerful in this matter. They have certainly been helped by today's announcement of the U-turn on the creation of a separate use class for all casinos. I welcome that very much, but I point out that the Bill as drafted still creates problems for individual local authorities in respect of whether they can reject specific casino proposals.

I accept entirely that it is possible under clause 157 for local authorities to reject all casinos over a period of three years. In passing, I say to the Minister that I think that he will find that there is a difficulty with the clause, which specifically states:

> "A licensing authority may resolve not to issue casino premises licences."

It goes on to state:

> "In passing a resolution under subsection (1) a licensing authority may have regard to any principle or matter."

The Secretary of State has written on the front of the Bill that she believes that the provisions are compatible with the Human Rights Act 1998, but I suspect that, with the inclusion of that provision, which allows a local council to consider any matter, she will find herself in difficulty. When one lawyer looked at the provision, he said to me, "I see prosperity staring me in the face." I suspect that he is likely to be right.

I accept that a council can reject a proposal for a three-year period, but the problem is that if they want to consider the merits of having a small casino in their area that they think might bring benefits, they will be in much greater difficulty. They will not have the ability easily to say yes or no. As hon. Members have said, the demand test has been rejected. Local authorities will not have powers to talk about public nuisance, as they do in respect of licensing, or to address saturation. Many local authority powers will be undermined, and councils do not have the specific powers to say yes or no to a specific casino proposal, notwithstanding clause 157. As I said, however, I am delighted at the change in use categories that the Secretary of State announced today.

I began my speech by welcoming the goods parts of the Bill: regulating remote gambling, enshrining social responsibility, protecting children and establishing a new and more powerful regulator. Despite those provisions, we still need measures that will control the proliferation of super-casinos, perhaps by allowing one or two per region to start with, and we need to consider delaying the introduction of category A machines until further research has been undertaking; to reintroduce the concept of super-casinos as destination casinos to increase control of them, perhaps by introducing a membership requirement again; and to provide strong and absolute powers to local councils to specifically reject individual casino applications. Only if the Bill contained such measures could we continue supporting it. They are not in the Bill at present, which is why we will vote against it.

5.50 pm

Janet Anderson (Rossendale and Darwen) (Lab): The Bill contains three licensing objectives that underpin the functions that the gambling commission and licensing authorities will perform: to protect children and other vulnerable persons from being harmed or exploited by gambling; to prevent gambling being a source of crime or disorder, being associated with crime or disorder or being used to support crime; and to ensure that gambling is conducted fairly and openly. I am astonished by the attitude of the Opposition parties. Whatever they say about parts of the Bill that they support, they cannot have it both ways. If they vote against Second Reading tonight, we can conclude only that they do not support those aims of the Bill.

[Janet Anderson]

The third objective—that gambling should be conducted fairly and openly—is surely important. It is a recent development that, to some extent, gambling is hidden away—remote gambling—but it is a growth industry and is an increasingly popular pursuit for women. The Bill recognises and accommodates the significant technological changes that have occurred in the past 40 years. It requires regulation where the player is not present on the operator's premises. For example, operators based in Great Britain must obtain an operating licence to authorise the provision of gambling via remote communication—for example, via television or the internet. Moreover, the new licensing system has quite sensibly been designed to keep pace with technological developments so that, subject to appropriate parliamentary approval, gambling delivered by new, unforeseen methods can be regulated in the future.

That area of gambling is currently unregulated, so for that reason alone doing nothing is not an option. We must ensure that children and young people are properly protected, and the Bill will, for the first time, impose restrictions on such gambling.

My principal interest in the Bill is as a former Minister for Tourism and the current secretary of the all-party parliamentary group on tourism. Our tourism industry is worth a staggering £80 billion to the UK economy, yet our tourism deficit stands at around £14 billion. For every pound spent in the UK by a tourist from overseas, Britons spend £2 abroad. The number of visits abroad by UK residents is approaching three times the number of overseas visits to the UK. There is a desperate need to reverse the trend by offering better value for money and a more innovative product.

That is particularly true of our seaside resorts. As the British Resorts Association pointed out in its excellent report, "Behind the Façade", serious pockets of deprivation are hidden behind the façade of the sea front, because of the seasonal nature of employment and the declining quality of the tourism product on offer. Let us take Blackpool as an example. I make no apology for citing Blackpool. It is situated in my region, the north-west, and many of my constituents know it well. Over the past 15 years it has seen little private investment and no major interventions to ignite regeneration and transform the resort product.

Annual visits have decreased from 13.2 million to 10.6 million, visitor nights from 16 million to 10.5 million, and spending by overnight visitors from £800 million to £500 million. The resort's income profile has become more seasonal, with the summer season becoming shorter and the peak less pronounced. The average annual hotel occupancy rate has fallen to 22 per cent., and more than 20,000 bedrooms have transferred lawfully or unlawfully to the private rented residential sector. I will not dwell too long on the facts about the town as my hon. Friends who represent Blackpool are much more knowledgeable about local circumstances than I am.

I single out Blackpool because the town has risen to the challenge of reinventing its tourism product. The Blackpool master plan proposes a multiple gambling, leisure and entertainment product packaged in a unique "Blackpool experience". This destination gambling environment would import revenue into the local economy, rather than recirculate existing revenue. It would transform a seasonal economy into a year-round economy. It would become the catalyst for economic regeneration that would transform decline into growth and prosperity—

Miss Kirkbride: Will the hon. Lady give way?

Janet Anderson: No, I will not give way because, as the hon. Lady knows, we are short of time.

The economic regeneration would import pounds and euros into the north-west regional economy. The proposals anticipated the Government's decision to modernise outdated gambling legislation and create opportunities to introduce large casino-based leisure experiences to the UK market. The proposals have received wide support from the local community and from all political parties in the town. Opposition Members who have announced their intention to oppose the Bill would do well to remember that. Their colleagues in Blackpool will not thank them for their attempts to derail the legislation.

Let us not get too carried away about the extent to which the plans would be based on casinos. Yes, the proposals for resort, destination or regional casinos, however we choose to describe them, are at the heart of the plan, but casinos represent a mere 8 per cent. of the development. They would, however, provide direct employment for 7,500 people and ignite a resort-wide regeneration programme that would include residential, retail, professional services, leisure and entertainment development, airport expansion and transport infrastructure development, and support about 27,300 jobs.

Blackpool's plans are well advanced. That is one reason why I believe such resorts should be given special consideration, but there is another and perhaps more important reason. Much concern has been expressed that the Bill will result in a proliferation of gambling dens. We must ensure that that does not happen. I therefore welcome the Government's acceptance of the scrutiny Committee's recommendation that the new regional casinos should be limited to 1,250 machines. I also welcome the comments of the Secretary of State and the Minister that the Government are willing to listen.

The Casino Operators Association of the UK has called for a limit to the number of regional casinos, believing that that will help to combat an increase in problem gambling. Blackpool borough council suggests limiting regional casino development to five locations during the first nine years. It also recommends that tourism-based casino developments should be favoured where there is potential to grow net revenue rather than displace and recirculate existing local spending.

The Joint Committee was encouraged by the comments of the Minister, the noble Lord McIntosh, who stated that his Department's policy aim was to reduce the number of premises that can have category A machines to

> "limit the accessibility of jackpot machines in order to reduce the potential for problem gambling".

As the Committee stated in its final report:

> "We believe the Government is right to proceed with caution",

but it also concluded that the legislation is "necessary and urgent."

I welcome what the Secretary of State said today about a separate use class order. I am sure that that will be widely welcomed. The Bill is broadly a good Bill. I will support it in the Lobby tonight. I urge Opposition Members to think again about their decision to vote against it because, as I said, they need to think carefully about how that will be interpreted outside.

In conclusion, I hope that the Government will agree to think again by limiting the number of larger regional casinos, initially, perhaps to one or two per region, with particular regard to the tourism and regeneration potential. By doing so, they will help to allay a number of the concerns of hon. Members in all parts of the House and reassure the public.

5.59 pm

Sir Brian Mawhinney (North-West Cambridgeshire) (Con): In the 25-plus years in which I have been privileged to be a Member of the House, I have been called many things, particularly during the years that I was privileged to stand at the ministerial Dispatch Box, but until the Secretary of State came along, no one had ever called me a snob. In so doing, she told us more about herself and her attitudes than she informed the House about me.

In the time that is available, I want to put on record the views of some fellow snobs—the Evangelical Alliance, with more than 4,000 church members, the Christian Institute, with hundreds of members, the Methodist Church and the Salvation Army.

I had the privilege of listening to Sir David Frost interview the Secretary of State yesterday, and listening to John Humphrys interview her this morning. She made a point about the need for more regulation—she made it today—with which I agree. However, four questions were repeatedly put to the right hon. Lady that she could not or would not answer. She went on about the Bill being 90 per cent. about protection and only 10 per cent. about casinos. She was asked, perfectly reasonably, "Why don't you split the Bill into two? Do the 90 per cent. regulation, on which there is broad agreement across the Floor of the House and in the country, and then have a separate provision under which the other matters can be dealt with in some detail?" Never once did the right hon. Lady answer that question.

It is not just my question. The Evangelical Alliance says:

> "No one disputes that problem gamblers exist. But the Government has no answer to the logic that an increase in the availability of gambling will inevitably increase problem gambling".

Why not separate the two areas of the Bill? Why not put a Bill through Parliament with which all of us can agree, and then deal with the second issue in the longer term?

The second question that the Secretary of State could not or would not answer was the benefit to the Treasury, which has varied from nothing—the right hon. Lady tells us that that was a mistake—to £3 billion. When asked about it she said, "Well, of course, that has got nothing to do with me. That is for the Chancellor of the Exchequer." It is as though she or the Chancellor were semi-detached from the Government. They are both part of the Government; they have collective responsibility. We know that, for internal Labour party reasons, the Government would like the Chancellor of the Exchequer to be seen as semi-detached, but that is not a good enough answer when we come to a fundamental question. If we do not know the tax regime and if we do not know what has been promised to Las Vegas, mega-style casino operators, the Government cannot be surprised if there is general scepticism throughout the country.

The Evangelical Alliance says that

> "the initial tone of the draft proposals promised deregulation not regulation. Otherwise why would gambling interests spend an alleged £100 million on lobbying unless they believed they would stand to gain from the proposals?"

The third question put to the Secretary of State by Sir David Frost, by John Humphrys, by my hon. Friend the Member for Maldon and East Chelmsford (Mr. Whittingdale) from the Opposition Front Bench and by others, to which the right hon. Lady had no compelling answer, was, "Given this level of concern, why not put a control on the numbers and introduce more stringent planning controls?" The right hon. Lady made a small concession today—it was a small one given the range of planning issues raised by the Bill, but it was welcome. I pay tribute to her for doing so. I wish that I could believe that she had done so because she was persuaded by the logic of the argument rather than because she was trying to entice a few of the Labour Members sitting behind her to go into the Lobby with her this evening.

There is a fundamental disparity. The Secretary of State says, "Don't worry, it will be all right. There will only be 20 to 40 casinos." There is not one regulatory power in the Bill that enables the right hon. Lady to say with confidence that there will be only 20 to 40. There are widespread media reports that so far there are 175 different proposals. When push comes to shove—given some of the people who will be involved in this business, the House should be sure that push will come to shove—20 to 40 casinos seems like so much else that the Government have predicted over the past seven years, and that is pie in the sky. It will not happen. I know that I will not be in this place to be made to eat my words if I am wrong, but I confidently tell the House that over a period 40 casinos will seem but a distant memory of some Secretary of State who was trying, to the best of her ability, to get legislation through the House about which there was considerable concern.

The Christian Institute says:

> "The scrapping of the 'demand test' (which currently limits the number of casinos and betting shops) will make it very hard for local councils to reject planning applications. The formal legislation of Fixed Odd Betting Terminals in casinos and betting shops is equally worrying."

That is the third question that the Secretary of State cannot answer and that the Bill does not accommodate.

The fourth question put to the right hon. Lady by Sir David Frost and by John Humphrys—it was put to her in the House today—has still not received an answer. It is that the Bill will increase addiction and gambling problems for real people. I think that this view is shared

[Sir Brian Mawhinney]

across the Floor of the House. I take no delight from the fact that there are 300,000 problem gamblers in this country.

Jim Knight: Will the right hon. Gentleman give way?

Sir Brian Mawhinney: No.

None of us takes pride from that figure. It is as certain as day follows night that it will rocket as a consequence of the Bill.

> "There is no public demand for an increase in gambling opportunities",

say the Salvation Army and the Methodist Church.

> "The national opinion poll commissioned by the Salvation Army showed that 93 per cent. of the population think that there are already enough opportunities to gamble in the UK. Regulations should be brought up to date but there is no appetite for an explosion of hard forms of gambling."

That was the point made by the right hon. Member for Holborn and St. Pancras (Mr. Dobson), and I join him in affirming that Methodist Church and Salvation Army point.

The Methodist Church and the Salvation Army also said that they

> "do not believe that a rise in problem gambling is a price worth paying."

The difficulty about a debate around technology as complex as that included in the Bill is that it is all too easy to lose sight of the real people in real families in real households and in real communities who will be damaged—many of them beyond repair—as a consequence of the Bill.

It used to be said of the Labour party that it was the Methodist Church at prayer. That is no longer the case if the Bill reflects current Labour party thinking. However, in one respect the Bill does go with the flow of new Labour, for its outcome will be gambling problems for the many, not just for the few.

6.8 pm

Mrs. Janet Dean (Burton) (Lab): The Government's aim of protecting those who are vulnerable, as well as children, by introducing the Bill is welcome. The development of new forms of gambling, such as those on the internet and on mobile phones, shows that there is a clear need to update our gambling laws. The new gambling commission will have significant powers to investigate and prosecute where necessary. It will be able to monitor the areas of problem gambling.

There is much that is good in the Bill but I have concerns, which I hope will be addressed during the passage of the Bill. Many jobs in my constituency rely on the gambling industry in one way or another: Uttoxeter is one of the best local race courses in the country and is home to the Midlands grand national, while in Burton upon Trent, the brewing industry has led to the development of not only Marmite, but pub companies and gaming machine companies such as Leisure Link. I am concerned that long-established, home-grown UK businesses should not inadvertently lose out under the Bill.

The likely effect of an unlimited number of regional casinos would be the demise of small casinos. The competitive inequality of machine entitlement and allowing only regional casinos to have category A machines will greatly favour incomers rather than the incumbent UK operators. The potential proliferation of regional casinos, with their unlimited-prize payouts, will bring them too close to centres of population, with the resultant risk of increasing problem gambling. Although I accept that it will be for local authorities to decide whether to allow regional casinos, it will be difficult for them to decline the prospect of financial benefit to their communities.

Representatives of the gaming machine companies have made suggestions to address the concerns expressed by many hon. Members about the potential proliferation of regional casinos. One suggestion is that the number of regional casinos should be restricted. The gaming machine companies have also suggested that the minimum size of the regional casinos should be increased, but that no category A slot machines should be introduced until after the second prevalence study, and then in small numbers only.

The UK gambling industry is used to maximum prizes, and the doors should not be thrown open to the unlimited cash prizes offered by category A machines without a consideration of the consequences. Category B slot machines could carry increased stakes and prizes, in which case we could maintain the principle of controlled stakes and prizes in this country. Such action would protect our home-grown gaming machine companies and the associated jobs in constituencies such as mine.

Another concern is the number of machines that will be allowed in pubs under the Bill. Although the Bill sets a maximum number of two machines by right, with more by application to the local authority, the principle of grandfather rights was established throughout the first drafts of the Bill and the submissions by the Joint Committee. Concerns have been raised because the Bill provides for grandfather rights in premises that are

> "primarily for the sale of alcohol".

Does that mean that a country pub that has adapted to serve food and that may rely on the income from machines to remain viable cannot benefit from grandfather rights? What will be the definition of

> "primarily for the sale of alcohol"?

The gaming machine industry accepts that machines should be removed from non-licensed premises such as fish and chip shops and taxicab offices to ensure that children do not have access to them. However, I hope that that principle will not extend to premises such as pubs and bowling alleys, which might fall foul of the definition of

> "primarily for the sale of alcohol".

The UK has one of the best records on problem gambling and the gambling industry has been kept free from crime since the 1960s. Traditionally, we have had low-stake, low-prize machines in pubs, arcades, betting shops and a small number of casinos. It is therefore ironic that those traditionally well-regulated and socially responsible activities could be hit by the proposals in the Bill, while the Bill, as proposed, will allow an unlimited number of regional casinos with unlimited-stake and unlimited-prize machines.

I hope that Ministers will have regard to the views of home-grown industries such as those based in my constituency and accept that their interest complements the desire to maintain a gambling industry that is free from crime and that maintains its comparatively good record on problem gambling.

6.14 pm

Mr. John Greenway (Ryedale) *(Con): I thank the* Secretary of State, my hon. Friend the Member for Maldon and East Chelmsford (Mr. Whittingdale) and the hon. Member for Bath (Mr. Foster) for the tributes that they paid to the Joint Committee's report and to my chairmanship. In turn, may I pay tribute to the Committee and to our excellent Clerks, without whom we would not have been so effective?

I remind the House of my entries in the Register of Members' Interests as a consultant to College Hill, a public relations company whose clients include the Tote. I am also a long-standing adviser to the Institute of Sales Promotion, which supports the objective of stronger enforcement against illegal lotteries, an aspect of the Bill that no one else has mentioned.

Most of the increase in gambling in Britain today is in unregulated, remote gambling on the internet, which, surveys suggest, includes children and young people under 18. That activity is supported by wholesale advertising, which would be illegal for more traditional forms of gambling. That cannot go on. Even fixed-odds betting terminals in betting shops exist because the current law and regulations do not reflect what new technology has made possible.

Had this debate taken place six months ago, our proceedings would have been dominated by concern about betting exchanges, which were associated with allegations of race fixing. Initiatives to improve integrity, which are presently being done voluntarily, must be secured in the longer term with the passage of this Bill. The betting exchanges want such an improvement because they recognise the danger of offshore sites, which give no protection to punters, no prospect of a fair contribution to racing or other sports and unequal treatment between different sorts of betting.

The major gambling charity, Gamcare, welcomes the Bill and supports the Committee's view that

"should the Bill be delayed, or even fail, the volume, availability and complexity of gambling would continue to grow but with no commensurate increase in the services which Gamcare provides."

It knows that protection and prohibition are two different things and that prohibition leads to illegality with no protection at all. Many of our leading charities, including the hospice movement, want the Bill to help to protect the income stream that they enjoy from lotteries. In Committee, hon. Members must pay attention to the reworded provisions on illegal lotteries masquerading as prize competitions.

During our visit to Blackpool, Churches and faith groups told us that they welcome the proposals for resort casinos as a means to create jobs and restore Blackpool's economic fortunes through better hotels, theatres, restaurants and other entertainment. Our visit left us in no doubt about the importance of a proper partnership between the casino operators and the local community in securing genuine and lasting regeneration, which would be undermined by the proliferation of major casino developments in the communities from which Blackpool traditionally draws its visitors.

That danger of proliferation has attracted most of the current criticism. The outcome of our first report was to remove many of the potential dangers in the initial White Paper. The concept of the third category of casino—the regional casino—with a maximum of 1,250 gaming machines also results from the first report. I am disappointed that the Government have not accepted the framework for regional casinos that we offered in our second report, which I still believe provides a sound basis from which to proceed.

A mistaken perception exists that every new casino development will be a Las Vegas-style regional casino, which is not what much of the industry wants or wanted. However, the decision announced in June not to allow existing casinos any entitlement to unlimited-prize category A machines has had the perverse consequence of encouraging UK operators to ratchet up their plans to develop large regional casinos. The Committee saw that coming, which is why we recommended that the Government should not concentrate on limiting the number of casinos with category A machines, but instead should focus on how many of those machines will be available in aggregate, where they will be located and who will operate them.

Are category A machines more harmful? No one knows. They are certainly untested in the UK market, and we need proper research based on their operation. It is not strictly necessary for a regional casino to have 1,250 machines all in category A. As Mr. Tobin Prior of Kerzner Casinos admitted to us,

"there is a misplaced fear that all Category A machines are going to have some amazingly high jackpot which is going to lead to compulsive behaviour which is not borne out in reality. It is not a sustainable business strategy and a mix of lower frequency lower pay out machines will predominate on the gaming floor in the £10,000 to £20,000 pay out category."

The Committee saw those volumes, albeit in euros, during our visit to France. Of course, even a £10,000 payout is five times the £2,000 maximum that is currently available on category B machines in casinos and which the Government intend to retain.

The Government have the opportunity to achieve several objectives by making relatively modest amendments to the Bill. First, as the Committee recommended, they could increase the category B maximum payout to at least £5,000, or perhaps £10,000. That could be done through the regulations. Secondly, they could restrict the number of category A machines in regional casinos to no more than, say, 250—a fifth—with the rest being category B and C. That could be achieved by amending clause 163(3). The Government's decision to limit the number of premises with unlimited-prize category A machines would be preserved, but there would be greater fairness to the existing industry, as well as a removal of much of the incentive in favour of big regional casino developments that might lead to more modest proposals.

However, changes to machine entitlements alone will not be enough to convince a sceptical public that Britain is not about to become the Las Vegas of Europe. I doubt whether there is a market for more than 20 regional casinos over the next 10 years. My preference would be

[Mr. John Greenway]

for national strategy to achieve no more than that number, not through a cap in the Bill, but through a planning strategy. The likely locations are already well known, and guidance to regional planning bodies could limit numbers to two casinos per region, with perhaps three or four in London, making 20 in all. That could be achieved through planning policy statement 6. It is essential to prevent anyone from circumventing planning policy by introducing a separate planning category for regional casinos. I warmly welcome the Secretary of State's remarks about that.

Planning guidance needs to err on the side of caution and to reflect the fact that regional super-casinos should not—must not—be located in largely residential areas or be included in mixed-use developments, including new housing. I therefore warmly welcome the Government's decision to allow local councils not to issue any new casino licences in their district. Conservative councillors are now predominant in local government, and I am confident that they will have the wisdom to implement that where appropriate. The Minister may laugh, but I say that because one would think from reading some of the newspapers that they are incapable of making decisions. That is not so. There is a snag, however. If they say no to all casinos, that is fine, but if they say yes to one or two they could end up with significantly more. The Government still have not addressed the danger of the floodgates opening to a larger number and the problems of saturation that that would bring. Such saturation would undermine the statutory objectives of the gambling commission, which should be the focus of everything that we decide to do through the Bill.

The Government, across all Departments, must give priority to the Bill's statutory objectives; otherwise, they will not succeed in what they wish to do. If there is cross-departmental co-operation on the issue of planning and control, there is no reason why the Bill should not succeed in its joint aims of strengthening the protection of children and the vulnerable while allowing new opportunities that are sensibly controlled and robustly regulated.

6.24 pm

Mr. Eric Illsley (Barnsley, Central) (Lab): It is a pleasure to follow the hon. Member for Ryedale (Mr. Greenway), who made an excellent contribution to the debate. His comments injected a certain sense of reality, especially in relation to the numbers of regional casinos, and highlighted the need for the Bill to be given a Second Reading and allowed to go into Committee, where all the issues can be debated in full.

I shall not detain the House for long, but I should mention at the outset that I am honorary adviser to the northern Licensed Victuallers Association.

One of the problems that many of my hon. Friends have faced in relation to the Bill is that it is based 90 per cent. on regulation and 10 per cent. on new forms of gambling. The obvious worry is that we may give a green light to increasing problem gambling. I was pleased to hear the hon. Member for Ryedale give a sensible explanation of what his Committee has done. We are faced with a situation in which the Bill has become necessary. As many hon. Members said, it is required for the purposes of regulation, especially in relation to remote and internet gambling. We have heard examples of young people being able to access gambling through the internet; that activity appears to be completely unregulated.

I am concerned about regional super-casinos being used for regeneration purposes, especially if we are to end up with 40 of them. I am glad that the hon. Member for Ryedale thinks that there will be a maximum of 20. Leeds is the nearest city to me with a casino. There would be perhaps two or three super-casinos in a city of that size. Leeds could not accommodate that; the demand simply would not be there. Operators would be unlikely to start building these things to compete with each other in a city of that size because they would not want to involve themselves in that amount of competition. I presume that the same would apply in Liverpool, Manchester and Birmingham.

Mr. Marshall: My hon. Friend mentions cities of a comparable size to Leeds. My city of Glasgow, which is one such, already has six casinos, and plans are in the pipeline—two are already in the public domain—for five massive casinos. Far from regenerating the city, they will degenerate it. Does my hon. Friend share my concern about that?

Mr. Illsley: I certainly do. I cannot for the life of me see how a city the size of Glasgow would cope with 11 casinos, five or six of which will be super-casinos. I cannot understand how operators could create so many; it is the economics of madness to suggest that they are likely to want to compete to that extent.

Miss Kirkbride: Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

Mr. Illsley: No. I have given way already and will not do so again.

If we use the legislation sensibly we can steer ourselves towards a limit by way of the economic and planning aspects. That is the obvious way in which to achieve a cap—it does not need to be included in the Bill.

I have a great deal of sympathy with hon. Members' comments on regeneration. Casinos may not create huge numbers of jobs in themselves, but other developments such as restaurants and hotels will follow on.

I am worried by the idea of destination casinos. It seems strange that people who want to gamble in, say, south Yorkshire, should have to travel some distance to Blackpool or another such resort to gain access to such places. I would support their being situated in regions around the country, not restricted to seaside locations.

My other points resemble those made by my hon. Friend the Member for Burton (Mrs. Dean) on the so-called grandfather rights of existing establishments in regard to their provision of slot machines. Some organisations are concerned that pubs, clubs and other facilities that provide such machines will be discriminated against due to the increasing value of the new machines being introduced. Many of these organisations believe that they are likely to be regulated and will lose the existing facility to keep their machines. Many clubs—working men's clubs, private members' clubs, and so on—rely on this type of machine for a substantial part of their income and, if the Bill gets into Committee, I would ask hon. Members to examine the effect on existing establishments of the new proposals.

I have noticed in the Bill the provision for reducing the prizes in amusement-with-prizes machines from £8 to £5 and to cap the prizes at that maximum. I have some sympathy with the arguments of those hon. Members who represent seaside constituencies that introducing such a small prize could be a retrograde step. I hope that the House gives the Bill a Second Reading this evening, because there is a lot in it that is essential, and a lot that can be worked out in Committee if we take a sensible approach to it.

6.31 pm

Mr. Richard Page (South-West Hertfordshire) (Con): In my office, there are two piles of paper. One is approaching 2 ft high; the other has just gone past the 1 ft barrier. I have not had any matter brought before me in my capacity as a Member of Parliament over the years that has generated so much paper and so much enthusiasm as this legislation and the work that has flowed from it.

I am not a fan of this Government. In fact, I do not trust them too much, and I do not have much faith in them. They have done one thing, however, that has brought great advantages: they have introduced the consultative Committee work on Bills that are going to come before the House. I served on the Joint Committee and I pay tribute to my hon. Friend the Member for Ryedale (Mr. Greenway) for the effective way in which he chaired it. He jollied us along with good humour and made sure that there were no conflicts or arguments, and a unanimous report was the result each time. He is to be congratulated on that. The task was made more difficult by the fact that we did not have a full Bill to start with. It came along in dribs and drabs, which illustrates the difficulty that the drafting team at the Department for Culture, Media and Sport had in getting the full Bill to us. Eventually, however, we got it.

The argument as to why we should do something about these issues has been fully made. Those who feel that we should leave things as they are and do nothing are living in cloud cuckoo land. The internet is with us, and there is internet gambling. There is even virtual reality racing, which is one of the saddest things that I have ever seen in my life, but some people must bet on it. We also have betting exchanges. These are reasons why we have to have the Bill, but we need considerably greater assurance than we have had so far.

Out there in the world, there is an immense income to be made from betting and gaming. If this country has the right regulations, we will get that world business. Without that control, however, we will lose it. It is far better that those regulations should be controlled in this country through the integrity that comes from our laws; if they were, it would be of benefit to everyone and we could go forward.

The Gaming Board has done a very good job over the years, but technology has moved on, and we have to move on. The gambling commission is required, and the sooner it comes into force the better. I hope that the Government will make available sufficient money to enable it to be up and running when the Bill becomes law. One reason why we need these changes is that, for the first time, betting exchanges can trace a bet right the way through the piece. They can find out who put the money on, and to see that there is an integrity in gambling. That has not been the case before. However, they need the resources to be able to follow that up. In the past, the Jockey Club, for example, has not had the resources to enable it to do this vital work, so we welcome the proposals on that issue.

Along with everyone else, I welcome the setting up of support for problem gamblers. My only objection is to the exciting name for the organisation in question: the Responsibility in Gambling Trust does not exactly trip off the tongue, although I very much welcome the fact that it is to be chaired by Sir David Durie, who was a very effective official at the Department of Trade and Industry when I was there.

Concerns about the whole question of gambling have been expressed today and, for me, this boils down to the argument about freedom of choice versus state diktat. There are close similarities between these arguments and those relating to the production and sale of alcohol. The role of the state is surely to ensure that the activity is properly regulated and to provide care and help for those who cannot cope. The Responsibility in Gambling Trust will be able to do that well, because it will have the advantage of funding and the ability to introduce a statutory levy if required. I am very much in favour of the setting up of the new trust.

There has been a lot of confusion about category A machines. People have the idea that there are going to be 1,250 such machines in each of the resort casinos, but that is absolutely untrue. There will be a range of machines. Not everyone will want to put in £5, £2 or whatever, to try to win £3 million. There will not be 1,250 machines designed for that in every casino; there will be a range of machines.

We must also look carefully at the existing casinos and raise their limits considerably, because we do not want them to ratchet up their operations to try to become destination casinos in their own right. That would bring about a huge proliferation in gambling. We put £1 on the lottery to try to win several million. I see no difference between that and allowing the smaller casinos to have much larger limits on their payouts. People know that if they put in their £1, they are more likely to win £10 than £10 million. That is common sense.

In the short time that I have left, I want to talk about the present media frenzy. The Government have only themselves to blame in this regard. The Joint Committee that scrutinised the Bill in its draft form made it abundantly clear that the Government had not got their act together on national guidance for regional leisure and destination casinos. The DCMS had one set of priorities, the Office of the Deputy Prime Minister had another, and the Treasury was, as usual, lurking in the background with its own aims and objectives. Our report highlighted those conflicts, but unfortunately, they have not been adequately resolved. In our final submission to the Government, we said:

> "While we acknowledge the Government's reluctance to publish national guidance relating specifically to regional leisure/destination casinos, we believe that it could help to ensure a consistent approach between regional authorities and avoid the need for applications to be called in".

[Mr. Richard Page]

In their response, the Government said that they accept

> "that national planning policy guidance should, where it is appropriate, deal with casinos . . . and the two joint statements already provide a comprehensive policy framework."

That is not strictly true; it is misleading and I believe that it is completely responsible for the situation that we find ourselves in today. That is why the Government have the wrath of the media on their head, and why a great many hon. Members are so concerned. The confusion over the location and number of casinos likely to be built is just one of the consequences of that. Inadequate guidance offered over planning policies and lack of detail over the prospective regulatory regime have led to wild statements in the press and widespread public concern.

The Secretary of State has already made some concessions. Those may not be enough, however. The long-standing confusion remains. In 2003, the Government were claiming that the market would determine the location, number, size and character of casinos. In June this year, they were saying that their strategy was

> "based upon the direction of regional casinos to the most suitable areas."

That is a U-turn in anyone's language.

I do not believe that the contradictions in the Government's position have yet been adequately resolved. On the one hand, they have been arguing since the summer that

> "a relatively low number of regional casinos"

is likely, even though *The Times* revealed on Saturday that at least 41 out of the 172 casinos currently being planned will fall into that category. The Secretary of State has said that local authorities can say no. But what happens if local authorities say yes, yes and yes? What will control the numbers and the applications that come through?

In the event of conflicts between regional planning bodies or development agencies and local authorities, I can see that the decision will end up being taken in the Office of the Deputy Prime Minister—the very thing that Ministers have said consistently that they do not want to happen. I am afraid that it is order, counter-order and disorder. I return to the issue of lack of trust—this Government cannot be trusted on this matter. I cannot agree to a flood of casinos, and until I see the specifics of protection on numbers in relation to regional policy, I regret that I must vote against the Bill.

6.41 pm

Mrs. Joan Humble (Blackpool, North and Fleetwood) (Lab): First, I very much welcome the Bill, which will offer protections for children and the vulnerable, set up the gambling commission, and introduce all the modern regulation that is needed in today's gambling industry. People have been debating this Bill as if it existed in a vacuum—as if the world has not changed. Well, the world has changed since the last piece of legislation on the matter in 1968. We must have this Bill, with all its regulations and protections.

Later in my speech, I will raise some of my specific concerns about regional casinos, but the debate should not be hijacked by such concerns, and unless we give this Bill a Second Reading, all its good aspects will be lost. Many Members who have said that they will vote against Second Reading have also anticipated later discussions and put in bids for aspects that they want changed. To me that is illogical. It is not the stance that we should take.

The nature of Second Reading debates means that we tend to gloss over the aspects of a Bill that we like, and concentrate on those areas about which we have concerns. The Minister will not therefore be entirely surprised if I mention one or two matters that will need further consideration as the Bill proceeds.

First, I have been contacted by some bingo operators in Blackpool who are concerned about section 21 games and whether they will continue to be allowed to offer them, as they are not games of equal chance, as set out in the legislation. Equally, they have drawn my attention to mechanical cash bingo, which they think will be caught by the new machine classification. Finally, they are concerned about the issue of retaining roll-overs so that they can generate high prizes, which was proposed by Budd, and confirmed in the White Paper, but is not mentioned in the Bill. I am sure that my right hon. Friend will consider that kind of detail.

We have heard some interesting contributions about regional casinos this evening and I want to concentrate on how they could be harnessed for regeneration purposes. I was reassured when my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State said that she expected only 20 to 40 regional casinos to be built. But why does she expect only 20 to 40, how does she expect that, and where does she expect them to be? There are some genuine concerns about proliferation.

Mr. Andy Reed (Loughborough) (Lab/Co-op): Is not the crux of the matter that regional super-casinos could be regulated through planning or other measures, and that such measures could be introduced in Committee? Tonight, therefore, we should give the Bill its Second Reading, and concentrate all our efforts on making sure that we prevent such super-casinos from being created. As the hon. Member for Ryedale (Mr. Greenway) suggested, powers are available to do that.

Mrs. Humble: I can throw away the rest of my speech, as that is exactly what I will suggest to the Minister.

I have talked to my constituents in Blackpool about the development of what were originally resort casinos, what they would prefer to be destination casinos, and what are currently called regional casinos. Interestingly, they would only want them in the town if they were part of a genuine regeneration effort. Blackpool council is to be applauded, as it conducted an extensive consultation exercise back in 2002, as did our local newspaper, *The Gazette*, and people were fairly evenly split on whether they were in favour of resort casinos coming to Blackpool. When they were asked about the regeneration potential, however, the number of those in favour went up markedly.

The other question is: what do we mean by regeneration? No definition of regeneration has been offered and I would urge both Ministers in the Department for Culture, Media and Sport and their colleagues in the Office of the Deputy Prime Minister to provide one. To me, regeneration means attracting new jobs, new schools and new opportunities, and it must be part of a much wider package. We cannot just build developments—development and regeneration are different. New regional casinos are different from swimming pools, ice rinks or velodromes, which can just be deposited in areas of a town or city—casinos are large complexes offering entertainment 24 hours a day, with large high-value jackpot machines. They are major enterprises and must be part of a much larger plan to achieve the regeneration for which my constituents would look.

The Government are relying on regional planning organisations through their regional spatial strategies, but I must ask the Minister whether that is enough. In the north-west, I am pleased that the regional development agency, the regional assembly and the Government office for the north-west have come together and commissioned a research paper, from which they will develop an interim policy framework, which will help inform their regional spatial strategy. Are other regions doing the same? What happens if individual policy framework documents conflict with each other? How will the RSS interact in different regions? The Government should consider developing a national policy framework within which regional planning bodies can operate. If we are given a definition of regeneration, we can all work from it, and the process will offer transparency.

I was going to mention concerns about use class orders, but I am pleased about the Secretary of State's announcement earlier, and her statement about pulling together a policy document before new casinos are allowed. There was a real fear that some casino developers would take advantage of the lack of existing planning rules, and sneak in their proposals via local authorities that would welcome whatever money they could get. I spent 12 years in local government, yet I find myself saying—for perhaps the first time in this place—that local authorities should not necessarily have that key role, because it could lead to a proliferation of large casinos. There must be a national strategy and a regional perspective, but of course, it is local authorities that could and should consult their local communities, and which understand them best.

But even if the RSS worked properly, if agreement were then reached at regional level to have as many as seven large regional casinos in each area, 90 per cent. of people in this country would be half an hour away from such a casino. How can regeneration be achieved on the back of that? We must also consider concerns about the resulting proliferation of gambling. If those who might be addicted to gambling are half an hour away from a large regional casino, the dangers associated with such addiction will be greatly increased. Some in Blackpool have argued to the Joint Committee that destination casinos can address that problem. When people have to travel further, they plan how they are going to spend their time and money. That would be a much better system, and hopefully it would address some of the concerns that many Members have expressed.

If we can deal with planning and look again at destination casinos, we can allay many fears and build on what local communities want. My hon. Friends have been waiting for me to mention Blackpool—*[Interruption.]* And Fleetwood. Blackpool is unique among local authorities and it is still the premier resort in the country. It has spent five years developing a strategic master plan that incorporates not only casinos, but other businesses and the public and private sectors. It is also looking to expand airports and other transport mechanisms. It is into precisely such settings that regional casinos should be placed to enhance what resorts have to offer and provide jobs for local communities and a better tourism product.

Surely we should be using the Bill to link RDAs' regeneration plans, regional tourism strategies and local government frameworks. The report shows that Blackpool—

Mr. Deputy Speaker (Sir Alan Haselhurst): Order.

6.53 pm

Sir Teddy Taylor (Rochford and Southend, East) (Con): The hon. Member for Blackpool, North and Fleetwood (Mrs. Humble) expressed fairly and clearly the dangers that many of us feel could arise from regional casinos. The most worrying aspect of this debate is that neither the Government nor anyone else have made a convincing case as to why we require such casinos at all; nor have they explained convincingly that we can be certain that casinos will not impact adversely on communities.

We need to look at the evidence in considering the unwelcome and unreasonably optimistic view that this proposition will somehow bring great benefits. Some 25 years ago, the inhabitants of Atlantic City, in New Jersey, were told that wonderful things would happen if they went in for the big casinos. They were told that things would be terrific—that what was a pleasant and prosperous little place would become very exciting. In fact, in the first nine years following their introduction, crime rose not by 10 or 20 per cent., but by 107 per cent. Businesses closed down all over the place, and the number of hotels reduced dramatically. Where before there were 2,100 hotels and businesses in Atlantic City, now, only 60 independent hotels remain. Unemployment, far from disappearing, got into a bad way. In 2002, unemployment in New Jersey as a whole was running at only 3.8 per cent., but in Atlantic City it was 9.9 per cent. What was promised to be great proved not to be great at all.

Why on earth are we doing this, and if we are going to do it, why not try out such casinos in one place—Blackpool, for example—to see what the impact is? My fear is that we will do enormous damage to existing casinos. I represent Southend-on-Sea, which has three casinos. I was not terribly happy when the first one came, but in fairness, thanks to the activities of the current and previous Governments, gambling in Britain is run in a remarkable way, and more sensibly and properly than in almost any other country. As someone who lives locally and who travels quite a bit, I have not received a single complaint about any of the three casinos, except for complaints from two people who claimed that they had been excluded from them because of bad behaviour. Those casinos operate on the basis that people cannot simply walk in. They have to be members and to apply for membership 24 hours beforehand, and if they do not follow the rules they can be excluded.

[Sir Teddy Taylor]

I hope that the Government realise that thanks to their efforts and those of the previous Government, we have an extremely good system that works very well indeed and produces a great deal of employment and growth. The gaming and betting industry employs 82,000 people, and last year it generated an income of £1.76 billion. It is a big industry that works extremely well. I hope that the Government will say whether they have given any thought to the impact on existing casinos—of which there are many—of these dramatic new regional casinos. Such casinos are huge and will cost a fortune. If they offer massive prizes from their wonderful machines—one Member congratulated the Government on ensuring that they will contain only 1,250 such machines—the effect on existing casinos could be devastating. That does not seem sensible. Why on earth are we going for such a major change without trying it out first?

Some people will say that there are those who always object to change and who are unduly pessimistic. But we should try out such casinos in one place to see what their impact is. Will they help to revive communities and bring new and exciting prospects, or will they damage existing businesses? My fear, as a pessimist, is that it is not a good idea. If we go ahead with what are a substantial number of regional casinos, the effect could be devastating. Of course, they could also increase the amount of gambling; indeed, in order to pay for the new premises, there would have to be a huge increase in gambling.

I am sorry that this is not a free-vote issue. Most Members to whom I speak—from all parts of the House—think this a very unusual move. I hope that the Government will endeavour to give us a reason why we should go ahead with this plan, and to explain why it would not be better to try out such casinos in one area, to see what the implications are. My fear is that, as often happens, the long-term effect could be very serious, and one that we will live to regret.

There is one more point that I wish briefly to make, concerning the Bill's impact on existing operations in Southend. Like many seaside towns, Southend has lots of arcades. The impression that I gained was that under the proposed minor changes, young people would not be able to use certain machines. Such a proposal seemed very unusual indeed. Apparently, young people were to be prevented from using category D machines, such as cranes that grab toys, coin pusher games involving 10p and 2p coins, and redemption machines that issue tickets as prizes.

The Government then explained that those activities would not be prevented, but that they wanted reserve powers, which could be brought in, if necessary. I wonder whether the Government think that that is sensible. How would they like to run a business employing many people and spending much money, if all the time they were subject to the danger of a Government bringing in new regulations that could put them out of business? It seems to me that that is a daft proposal and that it should be scrapped in Committee.

I apologise to Members for going on far too long [HON. MEMBERS: "No."], but I hope that both sides of the House can agree that the proposal for regional casinos could be madness and could be daft. It could do great damage if we go ahead with those casinos without careful and precise planning. Why not have a trial operation before we make the great change? I believe that that provides the best way forward.

7 pm

Mr. Anthony D. Wright (Great Yarmouth) (Lab): First, I want to express my admiration for the hon. Member for Ryedale (Mr. Greenway), who chaired the Joint Committee.

Over the past few weeks, considerable criticism—some justified, some not—has surrounded the publication of the Bill. I was a member of the pre-legislative scrutiny Committee and I certainly found the whole exercise very positive in helping to create, by and large, a good Bill. I remain cautious, however, about some of the Bill's provisions and I will want amendments in certain areas before I give it my wholehearted support.

One of the criticisms is that the Bill is being rushed through, but I do not accept that. To counter it, I would say that, over the past 30 or 40 years, the gambling laws have been tidied as deemed necessary at the time. For instance, when casinos were first permitted in the early 1960s there were more than 1,000 of them, but serious problems about their legitimacy led to their being regulated and reduced to a realistic number soon afterwards. According to Library statistics, we now have some 131 casinos.

Another review was conducted at the time of the Gaming Act 1968, but it was not until the mid-1990s that it became apparent that serious reform was required. Indeed, it could be said that the Gambling Bill before us now was initiated in 1996 by the Gaming Board's call for substantial reform of the 1968 Act. In March 1997, the then Conservative Government were in the process of significant deregulation of the casino industry via two deregulation orders, which were introduced to avoid the need for primary legislation. It is worth noting that a significant element of those orders was to increase the number of casinos in the UK by 21 without primary legislation, so I am surprised by the Leader of the Opposition's current stance, especially given that he was Home Secretary at the time.

The Bill clearly provides more protection for the vulnerable and children while allowing for a more regulated industry, coupled with possible regeneration of many areas of the UK. The safeguards and benefits have largely been absent from previous reforms. Fortunately, the general election stopped the Conservatives' proposals for 21 more casinos being passed without the proper scrutiny of primary legislation, hence the Bill before us today.

After the election, the Minister, my hon. Friend the Member for Knowsley, North and Sefton, East (Mr. Howarth), announced that there would be no change in respect of permitted areas and their extension, but did accept that minor changes, such as the ability to join a casino by post, were acceptable. The Gaming Board still urged major reform, spurred mainly by technological progress and by people's ability to gamble in a less regulated and protected environment through the relatively new betting exchanges, remote gambling and betting on horse racing via TV from the comfort of their own homes. In other words, we were in an era of 24-hour, seven-days-a-week gambling, much of which was unregulated.

When the Gaming Act was enacted in 1968, none of those technologies was available. The original scope of the Act addressed the issues very well, but the industry has moved on. I was pleased, therefore, when, in 1999, the Home Secretary announced the setting up of an independent review body to look into all aspects of the gambling industry, which led to the publication of the Budd report in 2001. After significant consultation, the pre-legislative scrutiny Committee was formed last year and reported earlier this year, leading to the Bill before us today. I certainly do not intend to go into too much detail, as many right hon. and hon. Members either have, or will, raise their particular issues of concern. I intend to be brief to allow other hon. Members to express their views.

The concept of resort, regional or destination casinos, as the Committee wanted to call them, provides an opportunity for the regeneration of many areas of the UK, particularly seaside resorts, by enabling local authorities to make gains from section 106 moneys for other add-on facilities. However, the number of casinos must be restricted: it is no good allowing market forces to dictate how many and where they will be put. There must be an element of direction, and I suggest that a maximum of two resort casinos in each region would be more than enough, as they would represent a fair geographical spread of the investment. Perhaps as an interim measure, we could restrict the number to one per region.

That investment would result from regional planning bodies being able to determine the permitted areas, taking into account the regional economic strategy and, just as importantly, discussion and consultation with the local planning body and the local community. If we allow market forces to determine the location of resort casinos, without a regional spread, I will certainly have to consider whether I can support this part of the Bill.

Another area of concern that directly affects my constituency and those of many other hon. Members are the new restrictions on existing family amusement centres, which have been an integral part of the British seaside resort for many years. I can remember when I was a child visiting the amusement arcades during the summer months. Even then, anyone under 14 was summarily kicked out by the attendant for being under age—not that I was, of course, I hasten to add.

In my view, the British Amusement and Catering Trades Association's code of conduct protects children, who will not, I believe, face any more risk of becoming problem gamblers under the Bill. Currently, children under 16 have to be accompanied by an adult, which provides even more insurance that such venues will not turn children into the problem gamblers of tomorrow. I am sure that there will be some isolated cases against that argument, but the experience and knowledge that I have gained from having lived in Great Yarmouth all my life lead me to believe that these centres are an accepted, well regulated and necessary part of the British seaside resort.

Another matter of concern is the restriction to be placed on family amusement centres, which could reduce their viability. Members of the Joint Committee visited Blackpool and Great Yarmouth and found that one problem relates to category D machines and the new definition of "amusement with prizes". It is proposed to lower prizes to a maximum of £5 instead of the current £8, and to reduce the maximum stake for cash machines to 10p from the current 30p maximum. There is no evidence to suggest that problems are being created for children or for whoever plays these machines. I would certainly welcome funding for a report to look further into that matter. Another issue is the protection of existing amusement centres through "grandfather rights"—a matter of great concern to many working in the industry at seaside resorts. Those and other issues must be dealt with in Committee.

Overall, it would be foolish for us not to agree with many of the measures that the Bill will introduce. Recent negative press reports have whipped up hysteria based on fears rather than facts and have done no service to the debate on a serious issue. Indeed, comments from across the spectrum—from the industry itself to the charities that deal with problem gamblers—have welcomed many of the Bill's proposals, which in some cases give real protection to the vulnerable in our society and to children for the first time. The critics tell us that if the Bill goes through, it will create another "Australian model" with a huge increase in problem gambling, when the truth is that there is more chance of the Australian model coming to the UK if the Bill fails.

I have already outlined some of the changes that I want, and other changes will follow. I am confident that we will end up with a Bill that not only delivers what the Gaming Board asked for back in 1996–97—more protection for children and the vulnerable—but takes into account much of the technological advance that we have seen since. It will also provide real opportunities for regeneration. I shall support the Bill on Second Reading, but I will press for amendments on the issues that I have highlighted—unless, of course, the Tories and Liberals have their way and stop the Second Reading. In that case, there will be no Bill and no further protection for children and the vulnerable from such problems as internet gambling.

7.9 pm

Mr. Simon Thomas (Ceredigion) (PC): My colleagues and I will vote against Second Reading for the reasons set out in our reasoned amendment. I want to say something about the tenor of the Bill, and the philosophy behind it, that is more personal than political.

I find the Bill deeply unsatisfactory. I intend no disrespect to the Joint Committee, which did a good job of scrutinising the Government's proposals and the Budd report. It is dispiriting that we have a Government who set out a vision of being a world leader in all fields of gambling activity, because it shows poverty of imagination and leadership.

One thing that we have not acknowledged in the debate so far is the harm that gambling does to society and to families throughout the country. We have mentioned the 300,000 problem gamblers as though they were some select group of people whom we can put to one side and treat separately. Gambling pervades society, and it harms society.

Governments are no longer prepared to tolerate the harm caused by alcohol and tobacco, yet the Government are prepared to be lobbied and bullied into extending and facilitating gambling, which is very dispiriting and unfortunate. The mothers and fathers of

[Mr. Simon Thomas]

socialism would find it particularly dispiriting. It is not patronising, elitist or snobbish to stand up and say that gambling harms society and the poor and the working class disproportionately—indeed, when one did so it used to be called socialism and fighting for one's class and a better society. Now, the Government are smuggling through the back door a change in regulation that will control and alter the way in which we run society, which is very unfortunate.

It is also deeply dispiriting that the Government's vision of the regeneration of our seaside towns is based on making money from gambling—from a mug's game, by fleecing people. We are considering regeneration not based on education, skills, manufacturing, libraries or culture but built on gambling. What a lack of imagination. What a poor state we are in when the only thing we can offer our decaying seaside towns, including some in my constituency, is regeneration based on gambling and on taking from those who do not have and giving it to those who have plenty.

People talk of reality and say, "Support the Bill. It's only 20 or 40 super-casinos—nothing much." The reality is that gambling is already growing exponentially. Last year alone, 12 million people gambled via the red button on the Sky interactive service. Gambling is being introduced into our homes, making it easier than ever before to participate. Before long, it will be possible to gamble on a mobile phone. [Hon. Members: "It is now."] Perhaps it is; it is not something that I use. Where are the controls on young people's access to that? There is increasing evidence that suicide, bankruptcy and domestic violence have risen in towns and cities where casinos have opened.

The Government say that the purpose of the Bill is to regulate the growth in remote, online gambling, but the basic question is whether such gambling should be happening in the first place—whether it is good for society. Any Government, and certainly the House of Commons, should be asking that question. Should we not be thinking of different ways to tackle the problem? We live in a society where debt is increasing by £1 million every four minutes. While I am on my feet for my 10-minute speech, there will be a £2.5 million increase in personal debt in this country.

Mr. Banks: Sit down then.

Mr. Thomas: No doubt personal debt will increase even more if the hon. Gentleman gets his way and makes a speech, as people are driven out to gamble.

Gambling is founded on misery and on broken dreams for many, and it is a broken dream for a Government to promote it. Let us look at some of the parts of the Bill. We are told that we will see only 20 to 40 super-casinos, but that is a margin of error of 100 per cent. I cannot trust such figures. We are talking about a 1 or 2 per cent. margin in the US presidential election, so why should we trust a margin of 100 per cent.? If the gates have opened, I have no doubt that lobbyists will force the legislation through. Super-casinos will do for gambling what super-pubs have done for binge drinking. They will increase gambling rates and the amount of problem gambling. Allowing super-casinos to provide some form of regeneration is like expecting supermarkets to regenerate our town centres—it ain't going to happen.

The Government talk about a triple lock on the development of super-casinos. From what I see in the Bill, that lock will be about as effective as a Krooklok on a dodgy Ford Escort in an unlit car park. There needs to be considerable strengthening of regulation of super-casinos. In particular I want local authorities to be able to say no, not for three years before facing court cases, pressure and lobbying, but on behalf of their populations and for it to mean no. I want membership of casinos to remain a requirement, although perhaps not 24-hour membership. I do not want alcohol to be served at gaming tables, because that befuddles people's minds and leads to more betting. Lines of credit should not be offered in super-casinos either. That would merely facilitate people's reliance on gambling. We should look again at grandfather rights, too. Perhaps we shall have an indication of that happening.

Online betting is growing. I know that because I received some spam e-mail from *The Daily Telegraph* on Friday, which said:

> "Dear Simon, Try your hand at fantasy poker today. If the image of smoky back rooms and high-stakes are putting you off playing poker, then playing online might be just right for you . . .
>
> Online poker rooms offer a safe environment to learn and practise.
>
> Online poker rooms suit women well"—

I do not know why the e-mail was sent to me—

> "they are encouraged by the low stakes and low commitment. Women's personality traits give them an advantage in poker."

There is no way that *The Daily Telegraph* could have known in sending me that e-mail, encouraging me to link to an online gambling site, that I was over 18 years old. Instead of asking whether we should regulate such betting, we should be asking ourselves whether it should be possible at all. At the moment, online gambling based on a UK website is illegal. Perhaps we should keep it that way. People would not lose their money online—fine. We should not be making it easier for people to gamble in that way.

I want also to address the problem of lotteries, because the Bill could have an effect on good-cause lotteries. I have been contacted by Tŷ Hafan children's hospice in Wales, which is concerned about pseudo-lotteries—the sort of thing on television that plays a video of Robbie Williams singing "Radio" and invites people to phone in at £1.50 a minute to name his latest single. That is supposed to be a competition; that is a lottery.

Chris Ruane (Vale of Clwyd) (Lab): What is it?

Mr. Thomas: "Radio". I have just mentioned it; the hon. Gentleman was not listening. Such prize-based competitions that are heavily promoted on television are a form of gambling. The Bill addresses that, but I want to ensure that it makes such gambling much more difficult to engage in.

We heard from the hon. Member for Great Yarmouth (Mr. Wright) about family and holiday centres. I share some of his concerns about places such as Quay West in my constituency where gaming is not the primary purpose. We need to see what happens. The Joint

Committee suggested that an evidence-based report be commissioned on what happens when children enter such places. I agree with that suggestion.

The Bill represents a return to Victorian values—that is the pattern that is emerging. The Licensing Act 2003 promoted binge drinking, and this Bill promotes easy gambling. We will see what happens about smoking. It is curious that the Government are thinking of banning smoking around gaming tables while making it easier to gamble. That shows that the nanny state has got its knickers in a twist.

The Secretary of State is dealing the cards of regulation and asking us to look at what is being done to protect children under the Bill—her card trick—but we should be looking at the magicians' cabinet behind her. In there lies the spectre of more gambling, more problems and more harm to society. I very much hope that a true socialist, a true Labour person and anyone who believes in a better society will reject the Bill tonight.

Several hon. Members *rose—*

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Order. May I say to hon. Members who are desirous of catching my eye that it would be useful if they stood to speak in their usual places?

7.19 pm

Mr. Win Griffiths (Bridgend) (Lab): I approach the debate in something of a dilemma. I am sorry that I did not pay more attention to what was happening during pre-legislative scrutiny. I have a seaside resort in my constituency and, when Mr. Budd's report was first published, I wrote a piece for one of my local papers in which I stated that I did not believe that the Budd concept of mega-casinos would help in the regeneration of a seaside town in south Wales. After examining the Bill last week I wrote another article, which was for Labour party members. It stated that I did not believe that the proposals for super-casinos in the Bill would help to regenerate Porthcawl or any other town in my constituency.

Mr. Lindsay Hoyle (Chorley) (Lab): Does my hon. Friend believe that we would benefit from trials of perhaps four super-casinos, in, for example, Blackpool, which has an airport, and that they should constitute the only trials in the country?

Mr. Griffiths: I have signed the early-day motion that proposed a trial, which my right hon. Friend the Member for Birkenhead (Mr. Field) tabled. Four is excessive. Ideally, we should not have super-casinos at all, but if the Government genuinely want to test the concept let us go for it in one resort, perhaps two in extremis. I am a Methodist and my Church suggested to me that there are many good things in the Bill, for example, regulating new forms of betting and strengthening some of the regulation on existing forms. However, when I listened to my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State, I had the feeling that the Government would not change their minds about some of the provisions to which I would support significant change. For example, although it is not acceptable to me, some hon. Members would accept a cap of 20 to 40 mega-casinos. I would not accept that, but the Government were not even prepared to accept the need for a cap.

I find myself in the position of supporting the better regulation of new and existing forms of gambling but totally opposing anything that would allow mega-casinos to get a toe hold in the United Kingdom. It is as though a farmer had decided to repair all the fences in his field to protect his animals, but simultaneously decided to make a huge gap in all the better hedges to allow the animals to roam wherever they please.

I am moving towards voting against Second Reading. My original idea was to make a speech and say that the Bill contained good provisions that must be supported, others that were terrible and that I could not support, but that it should be allowed to proceed to Committee and, if the changes that I supported were not accepted, I would vote against Third Reading. However, from what I have heard this evening the prospect of significant change in Committee is diminishing.

I have been a Member of Parliament for some years and I know how Committees are composed. The idea of the Government appointing a majority of Members who want the changes that I support will not be realised. While I remain on the horns of a dilemma, I must tell my right hon. Friend the Minister for Sport and Tourism that I am inclining towards voting against Second Reading.

The polls on whether sufficient gambling opportunities exist show that most people believe that they do. Most people also believe that if we provide further gambling opportunities, we will create further gambling problems. When we consider the aid that is available through voluntary effort—organisations such as Gamblers Anonymous and GamCare do fantastic work—and the pitiful contribution of Governments to that since we have had casino gambling, I have to take with a pinch of salt the letters that I have read about how the industry will put money into trying to counsel people who experience problems to ensure that they do not become problem gamblers. The efforts that are made to tackle problem drinking are inadequate and getting worse rather than better. Even if the proposals are tweaked here and there, they will result in gambling problems for more people.

The fixed-odds betting terminals are a disaster in that they encourage people to bet. We will allow them, if not to proliferate, to be available in plenty of places with a modicum of regulation.

Mark Tami (Alyn and Deeside) (Lab): A figure of 300,000 is used for the number of problem gamblers. Does my hon. Friend agree that not only they but their families are affected and that the problem is perhaps greater than it is presented?

Mr. Griffiths: Yes. To those 300,000-plus people, one has to add at least three or four family members who are damaged by the process. Beyond that, others are affected. I am therefore sceptical about our ability to say, "Look, we're only acting like mature adults in giving people an opportunity to gamble in regulated circumstances. We'll make sure that they won't get into any severe gambling problems." The evidence is to the contrary.

[Mr. Griffiths]

I am surprised—having been on the fringe of developments and given the amount of pre-legislative scrutiny that the draft Bill received—that so many people are dissatisfied with the final product. Perhaps the Government have been searching for compromises and, in trying to satisfy everybody, have satisfied nobody except those who want the mega-casinos.

Kate Hoey: I share my hon. Friend's concern about the vote. Does he agree that, given the all-round support for many aspects of the Bill, the Government could solve the difficulty by withdrawing the provision on the mega-casinos, thus allowing the regulation provisions to have all-party support and progress through the House quickly?

Mr. Griffiths: That is a brilliant idea, which I would happily support. If the Government said that they had decided to do that in fairness to the views expressed, I would be happy. Pigs may fly and I am waiting. However, at the moment I am veering towards voting against Second Reading. Earlier, I thought that I would vote to allow it to proceed to Committee, but the possibility of genuinely significant change appears to diminish as the night goes on.

7.29 pm

Miss Julie Kirkbride (Bromsgrove) (Con): It gives me great pleasure to follow the hon. Member for Bridgend (Mr. Griffiths). I agree with his views and he amply articulated the reasons why Her Majesty's Opposition will vote against Second Reading. They will do that for many of the reasons that he outlined.

I am delighted to be called to speak because the Bill heralds one of the most profound social changes in our society that I have witnessed in my seven years as a Member of Parliament. I am therefore pleased to put my arguments on the record and I shall be equally pleased, if I am chosen, to serve in Committee.

Many Members, including the Secretary of State, have given personal freedom to gamble as a good reason for the Bill. In fact, the United Kingdom already has liberal, adult, fair and reasonable gaming laws that have stood the test of time, as is shown by the fact that, in relative terms, we have fewer gambling addicts than other jurisdictions. It is possible to win many millions of pounds on the lottery. It is possible to put any amount on a horse at a bookmaker's and—in the case of those lucky enough to pick all the right horses—to win many hundreds of thousands of pounds. There are plenty of opportunities to gamble, and that includes casinos, of which there are already 130. I see no overwhelming reason to change the gambling laws more profoundly than they have been changed already, and my view is strongly supported by the results of public opinion polls.

Many Members, including the hon. Member for Vauxhall (Kate Hoey) and my right hon. Friend the Member for North-West Cambridgeshire (Sir Brian Mawhinney), have suggested that we can all agree with 90 per cent. of the Bill. I hope the Minister listens, because much of what he wishes to do is very relevant. The Bill could have a fair passage through both Houses if he chose to proceed with that 90 per cent. rather than the 10 per cent. that relates to the casino industry. I fear that he will not listen tonight, but given the House's expectation of a general election next year and a possible clearing of the decks by March, when the shutters come down the 90 per cent. may well go through on the nod and the 10 per cent. may well be dropped. It is a shame that so much engagement must take place on measures that I think are unlikely to be passed.

Mr. Hoyle *rose—*

Miss Kirkbride: Does my hon. Friend wish to intervene?

Mr. Hoyle: The hon. Lady's hon. Friend is very pleased that she has given way. She is opposed to 10 per cent. of the Bill, but—although this relates to that 10 per cent.—may I ask whether she would accept one or two super-casinos on a trial basis?

Miss Kirkbride: I am happy to pre-empt my speech. I would prefer one super-casino on a trial basis, although I would probably accept two. I would like to take the argument further, but I am happy to give a direct answer to a direct question.

Let me now focus on my disagreements with the Government. The main one relates to their argument that their principal aim is to protect children. I do not think that it stacks up. At Question Time, the Secretary of State failed to answer my question about how the Bill would benefit children. In fact, the Department has done no research that shows what harm is done to them by the existing gaming laws. I see no reason to prevent fish and chip shops and cab firms from retaining their modest slot machines offering a £5 payout for a 10p stake. Local authorities already have the right to ban machines from such premises, but they do not choose to do so. Why are the Government choosing to do it now? This seems a vindictive measure, given that it will affect small businesses that work hard to make a profit.

The Government claim that they want to regulate the internet in order to protect children, but as they cannot regulate internet sites outside the UK's jurisdiction, there is no real argument for that either.

I am particularly worried about the possible effect on seaside slot machine arcades. Many seaside communities already face serious economic challenges, and such arcades do no obvious harm to children. I remember gambling in them as a child—and I assure the Minister that I am not a gambler now by any stretch of the imagination. We are talking about a harmless pursuit that promotes economic activity in seaside resorts. The Minister denies that there would be a problem, but there is a problem: his intention to put a black spot on seaside arcades by creating a power that could shut them down overnight. Any seaside arcade owner thinking of investing in gaming machines will be deeply worried, not just by that part of the Bill, but by measures to cut the stake to be levied and the value of the potential prize. I hope very much that the Minister will think again.

Kate Hoey *rose—*

Miss Kirkbride: I will happily give way to my hon. Friend—as she is, on this issue.

Kate Hoey: Given her former responsibility, does the hon. Lady share my concern about the many sports clubs throughout the country that use gaming machines as a direct means of raising income? They are licensed to have the machines, but do not allow children under 18 to use them. Will not the Government have to find a way to replace the money that many small amateur sports clubs will lose?

Miss Kirkbride: That is a good point. Last year, the Government rightly gave sports clubs of that kind rate relief, but depriving them of the machines could do more damage than depriving them of the relief.

Members have mentioned the changes relating to category A gaming machines. My hon. Friend the Member for South-West Hertfordshire (Mr. Page), who has left the Chamber, said he did not see how the new regime would make a difference, but it would produce an environment very different from the one to which we are accustomed. Category A machines are programmed by very clever people to be enticing, hypnotic and addictive. The player feels that he is one point, or one fruit, away from the £1 million prize: he need only chase his losses, and everything will be all right on the night. That is very different from gambling on the horses, because the bookmakers close. It is very different from gambling on the lottery, which can be done only twice a week. These premises will be open 24 hours a day and can be visited by people on their way to work and on their way back. Even on the Government's estimate, they will be available in up to 40 towns and cities.

The hon. Member for Barnsley, Central (Mr. Illsley) said that he thought casinos should be available in every region, and what was the problem? The problem is this: people who are addicted to gambling will be able to play addictive slot machines every hour of the day, every day of the week, every week of the year. Again, that is very different from what we have been used to.

The hon. Gentleman gave an interesting response to the hon. Member for Glasgow, Shettleston (Mr. Marshall) about the number of casinos already in Glasgow. I was surprised to learn that Glasgow already supports six casinos and that planning is under way for five super-casinos. The Government's proposals will do great damage to existing casinos because as they are not allowed to operate category A machines, they will be wiped out by the new regime—not that I am suggesting that they should be allowed category A machines.

There is clearly an incipient demand for casinos of this kind, especially in poorer communities, and the idea that no great social change will ensue from the Government's proposals is strictly for the birds. With 40 super-casinos across the country, the bulk of the population will have regular access to such gaming. I think that that will herald serious social changes. It will also displace many existing businesses. It will damage pubs, clubs and restaurants in town centres. In order to recoup investment in casinos they will have to drag the punters in by offering cheap booze and meals and free entertainment. Those who do not gamble will have a very nice time, but those who do will be in deep trouble. Their names and addresses will be taken down, and when they have not been there for a week they will be reminded that if they go in they can have £10-worth on the slot machine free—and hey presto, they will end up spending much more than they expected to. I do not think that people appreciate just how such organisations work and it will come as quite a shock as and when the proposals are unleashed.

Money laundering has not been referred to in the debate to my knowledge since it was mentioned by the Secretary of State. It is shocking that the Government are even considering changing the money laundering regulations in order to allow people to take away their chips. If any hon. Member goes to the bank, we have to take our birth certificate and everything else to prove that we exist just to put £5 into an account, yet we will be able to take away thousands of pounds worth of chips with no questions asked. It is quite wrong, but clearly it is the only way that the big American casino operators will be persuaded to come to Britain. It is disgraceful that that should even be considered.

The quintessence of new Labour's confusion is that it can on the one hand say that these are great proposals, using all the buzz words such as regeneration, modernisation, that it will all be fantastic and that the casino operators will come and spend hundreds of millions of pounds tarting up our seaside resorts and town centres, but make no mention of those who will provide the return on that investment. Who will provide the returns on the investments made by the casino operators in our town centres? It will be those who can least afford it, the people who think that their lives can be changed by a big win on the category A machines, and it has to be a lot of people if tens or hundreds of millions of pounds of investment is to be recouped.

To answer again the point made by the hon. Member for Chorley (Mr. Hoyle), I very much favour the early-day motion tabled by the right hon. Member for Birkenhead (Mr. Field) suggesting that we should trial one of these resort destination category A casinos in one place—I would be more than happy for it to be Blackpool, which has made a good case for itself—and I hope that my words and those of other hon. Members will be listened to tonight.

7.41 pm

Mr. Tony Banks (West Ham) (Lab): I assure the hon. Member for Bromsgrove (Miss Kirkbride) that a large category A win on a machine would certainly change my way of life, and I do not share the nightmare scenario that she has just described. I certainly do not know where she heard some of these wilder accusations about deals being done with the US casino industry by the Government. As an ex-journalist, her imagination is fertile, as are those of so many of her erstwhile colleagues.

I declare my interests in this issue. I sat on the pre-legislative scrutiny Joint Committee and I pay tribute to the hon. Member for Ryedale (Mr. Greenway) who chaired it with skill and great fairness. I have also recently completed an Industry and Parliament Trust fellowship at Ladbrokes. I hasten to add that my only financial involvement with Ladbrokes is that of a small albeit consistent contributor to its profit margins through my eternally optimistic betting on Chelsea winning 10-nil each week. One day it will come up and I will clear up as well. I might not have learnt how to beat the odds while I was at Ladbrokes, but I did come to appreciate how efficient, profitable and socially responsible a business Ladbrokes is, and I am certain that those attributes are also shared by other bookmakers such as William Hill and Paddy Power.

While at Ladbrokes, I was afforded access at all levels, from boardroom through to betting shop, and I was left with the clear impression that the British gambling

[Mr. Tony Banks]

industry is one of the best regulated, and most orderly and efficient in the world. For those who have a moral objection to gambling, such virtues will be of no consolation, but gambling remains a leisure activity for the vast majority of those who participate, and it is essential that they should have confidence in the industry's probity. One of the main attractions of the British gambling industry for those at home and overseas is that it is overwhelmingly free of corruption and is not controlled by criminal interests. I wholeheartedly support the Bill because I believe that it will reinforce such a well-merited reputation.

The reaction to the Bill, especially in the media, has bordered on the grotesque. I will always respect those with a moral track record against gambling, but spare me the anti-Government moralising of the *Daily Mail*. If the Prime Minister was declared to be the son of God, and there are some Labour Members who believe that he is, the *Daily Mail* would undoubtedly be whipping up support for the devil. On gambling, as on many other social issues, I am a libertarian. Providing an individual's activities do not imperil, attack or destroy the lives and interests of other individuals or species—or species—Government involvement should be minimal.

Life is not of course simple and straightforward, and there will always be those who take any activity to excess, whether it is gambling, drinking, smoking, eating, shopping, or, indeed, sex. Such people need help, but I assume that we would not seriously consider banning the activities in order to protect the obsessive minority to the detriment of the responsible majority. In such situations, the Government's job is to offer advice and information to enable people to make informed choices, and where necessary the Government should regulate. That is precisely what the Bill sets out to do.

I particularly welcome those parts of the Bill that seek to update casino rules that are both silly and patronising. The 24-hour membership rule is the most obvious example, but membership of a casino should be retained and that can be considered in Committee. I know that the British Casino Association would support that. However, if the Bill is defeated on Second Reading and there is no Committee stage, many of the good points made tonight cannot possibly be addressed.

I find it strange that in London, for example, only certain boroughs, such as Westminster, Camden and Kensington, are allowed to have casinos. I personally would like to see a casino in the east end as part of leisure and recreational facilities. Indeed, in 1990 when I proposed in the House the idea of a directly elected mayor for London, which I believe was not universally welcomed at the time, I also proposed that part of the resources available to the mayor should derive from gambling profits in London. I recommended then, 14 years ago, the liberalisation of gaming laws to allow the setting up of municipally owned casinos in London and elsewhere, operated by others maybe and under licence, particularly riverboat casinos on the Thames, which would add to the attraction of the city. It is right that the city should be able to benefit from such things.

I might add that one of the things that we should be doing instead of just granting licences is auctioning them, because one way of testing the market is by seeing how much people are prepared to pay. I saw, indeed see, no reason why local authorities should not derive substantial income and benefits from casino and other forms of gambling, and that is why I support the Bill.

Much of the opposition to casinos, which we have spent much time discussing, has centred on their possible proliferation and the likelihood that this part of the industry will be dominated by American big business. The first objection is addressed by the Government's assurances with regard to regional local authority determination, although there is good support on both sides of the House for a planning strategy for casinos, and that too should be considered closely in Committee.

The idea that the American industry will take over the whole of the British casino and gambling industry is alarmist. I have been reading newspaper stories about £100 million being lavished by US gambling interests on lobbying in this country, but I think that that is sheer fantasy and I can find no evidence of that whatever, and no one has put forward any evidence that that sort of sum has been spent, but it somehow fits in well with the semi-demented accusation by the *Daily Mail* that the Government are

"sacrificing the most weak and vulnerable to the high priests of gambling".

Such purple prose is rarely written before lunchtime.

It might well be that the highly developed US casino industry will wish to invest heavily in the UK, but before it does, the Government should insist on a quid pro quo. At the moment, bookmakers in this country cannot accept sports wagers from US residents, either online or by telephone, nor do they accept casino, poker or other kinds of gaming. The federal legislation, the Wire Act, explicitly prohibits sports betting and, it is claimed, internet casino wagering as well.

As we know, internet gambling is the fastest growing unregulated part of the British gaming industry, and it seems right that we should regulate it, but we should also try to persuade the United States to bring its gambling laws up to date. It is wrong that the Americans should have the right to refuse a business operation based in London, Gibraltar or elsewhere, and we should push them hard on that. If they are to have access to our gambling industry, we should insist that they bring their laws in line with ours. Officially, one cannot bet online or on sports fixtures in the US, but anyone in any bar in New York knows that in fact one can. The American gambling regime is much like ours before 1961.

Under controlled and well-regulated conditions, gambling on football, racing and the lottery, and over the internet and in casinos, can be both harmless and fun. The Government should press ahead with the Bill, and I hope that my hon. Friends will not join the Opposition parties in voting against Second Reading, because if the Bill does not go into Committee, we cannot improve it. It will no doubt emerge improved, and in a few years' time people will wonder what all the fuss was about. I would certainly put money on that.

7.51 pm

Mr. John Horam (Orpington) (Con): The debate so far has been fascinating. The best speeches have come from the Back Benches. In particular, the hon. Member for Ceredigion (Mr. Thomas) was fluent and moving on the problem of gambling, and the hon. Member for

Bridgend (Mr. Griffiths) made a remarkably honest speech and seemed to be moving in the right direction. My hon. Friend the Member for Bromsgrove (Miss Kirkbride), who knows a lot about this, was also extremely good, and even the hon. Member for West Ham (Mr. Banks), who usually tries to whip us up, tried to calm us down and said some very interesting things.

For myself, I am wholly opposed to the Bill. It is a bad Bill that promotes gambling, and it should be scrapped. The mood of the House has been clear, and even those who have supported the Bill in broad terms have said that there is quite a lot wrong with it. The hon. Member for Vauxhall (Kate Hoey) offered the most sensible compromise solution when she said that all the stuff relating to casinos should be scrapped and the rest kept. I might be prepared to go along with that, but the fact remains that this is a very bad Bill.

The Government's strongest argument is that the status quo is indefensible, and they have attempted to portray all those who seek to defend it as fantasists. Frankly, there is not much wrong with the status quo. For the past 40 years or so, gambling has been well regulated and we have had fewer gambling addicts than in other countries. The situation is reasonably under control and people can enjoy themselves without going to the extremes seen in countries such as America and Australia. Of course, the status quo gets out of date from time to time, and I understand that internet gambling must be controlled, but why not have a Bill devoted to that subject alone? Let us deal with it head on. There is no need to change radically the whole basis of gambling regulation.

The situation in this country is fundamentally satisfactory, and with occasional tinkering—perhaps quite major tinkering from time to time—we can avoid throwing out the baby with the bathwater and keep what is good about the current set-up. Other countries are envious of what we have achieved: a balance between the liberal approach of allowing people to gamble if they want to and avoiding the damaging consequences that have become obvious in many other countries.

The Bill will inevitably lead to a proliferation of super-casinos. Let us not forget where all this started: the mob wanted somewhere to launder their money, so Bugsy Siegel and Meyer Lansky founded the casinos that are the forefathers of today's. Then America took it a step further and casinos were built in depressed places such as Atlantic City in the recession of the 1980s. I have full sympathy with the seaside resorts argument, and there is undoubtedly a problem in places such as Blackpool, but let us deal with that specifically—there is no need to change the whole scenario. Again, the Americans set up casinos on Indian reservations to help their depressed economies, and we have seen the consequences of such ideas in Australia as well.

When the Government are told of the appalling growth of gambling addiction in Australia, they say, "Oh well, it would be different here." Frankly, I doubt it. Whatever regulation we have, I bet the inevitable market forces will break through and make maximum use of any gaps left in the legislation. I am the realist on this, not the Government. If they think that they can staunch the problem by regulation, they are living in cloud cuckoo land. The weight of demand will burst through.

The Bill will inevitably lead to more crime. It was said in one newspaper—I do not think it was the *Daily Mail*—that in Atlantic City casinos equal crime, and crime equals casinos. It is a natural relationship because of money laundering, and drugs and prostitution follow. Atlantic City is a perfect example of what could happen in this country in areas around the casinos.

As the hon. Member for Ceredigion said, it is not a light matter that there are 300,000 gambling addicts in the country, and that number will inevitably be added to, despite what the Secretary of State says, by a growth in gambling. It is a great tragedy.

I agree with those who have spoken about poverty. The fact is that the poor will suffer most from these measures, and it is a great pity. It is not patronising to say so—it is facing facts.

There is clearly some truth in the regeneration argument, but at what cost? I suspect that casinos will be like the banyan tree: they will flourish at the expense of all around them. That is certainly true in Atlantic City, where there are 43-storey casinos surrounded by a wasteland of sleazy bars and so forth. My hon. Friend the Member for Rochford and Southend, East (Sir Teddy Taylor) pointed out how many hotels and restaurants had closed as a consequence of such development. It may look like regeneration, but it is not really. The idea that we have to rely on gambling to regenerate our inner cities is bankrupt. Surely we can do better.

I am surprised that it is the Labour party that has introduced this idea—a party that owes more to Methodism than to Marx and once prided itself on its moral standpoint; a party once led by John Smith. Would John Smith have introduced such a Bill? I very much doubt it. This is the Government who introduced 24-hour drinking. What sort of society are they creating? This is the party that sneered at the encouragement of private enterprise when the Tories were in power, and they have now gone to the trashiest and commercial end of the unacceptable face of capitalism. That shows the real moral vacuum of new Labour, which just does not know where it stands.

The Government and the Secretary of State have mishandled the Bill. All the evidence of the shenanigans of the past few days shows that she went too far in the direction of what the American and British companies wanted and had to pull back under pressure from the House and from public opinion. I applaud her willingness to pull back and to be flexible, but she was forced into it. I do not blame her alone: the Cabinet had some responsibility. They should have put their foot down and said that this would not wash.

Mr. Simon Thomas: We do not have Cabinet Government any more.

Mr. Horam: I quite agree. Under Conservative Governments, we had a Willie Whitelaw factor—someone who said, "No, I don't think this will wash." Perhaps Labour now needs a Frank Dobson factor, with someone saying, "Look, this is not what the Labour party is about." I am very surprised that old or new Labour can support such a Bill. The Government should think again, scrap this Bill and introduce a new one to do the sensible things that are a part of it.

7.59 pm

Geraldine Smith (Morecambe and Lunesdale) (Lab): The fact that the country's gambling laws need to be tidied up and brought up to date is not in dispute. Most Members will also welcome the proposal to consolidate into a single Act of Parliament all the legislation relating to the various categories of gambling. I am equally confident that the formation of a gambling commission to license operators and key personnel working in the gaming industry with significant powers to regulate, supervise and enforce high standards of conduct and social responsibility throughout the industry will be welcomed. The measure of democratic control given to local authorities by conferring on them responsibility for licensing gaming premises also has the broad support of Members of Parliament and of much of the gaming industry and the public at large.

Having said all that, I believe that that is where consensus on the Bill in its present form comes to an end. The Bill's publication has triggered an outcry from Church and religious groups as well as charitable institutions and welfare organisations. It has caused anger and resentment in many parts of the leisure and gaming industry, and it has caused great alarm in the minds of many Members and among the public.

The issue of greatest concern to us all is problem gambling. The British gambling prevalence survey suggested that we have somewhere between 275,000 and 370,000 problem gamblers. Gambling addicts, like those who suffer from alcohol and drug addictions, are usually in denial of the problem. Those who accept that a problem exists are keen to hide it. It is not unreasonable to assume, therefore, that the official estimate of the number of problem gamblers significantly understates the problem. Even if we accept the official estimates, taking the mid-range figure of one third of a million problem gamblers, most of those people will have parents, spouses, partners and children, and it is perfectly reasonable to assume that in excess of 1 million of our citizens' lives have already been blighted by problem gambling.

The Budd report highlighted many, but by no means all, the potential negative consequences of problem gambling, including financial hardship, debt, exposure to loan sharks, bankruptcy, resorting to theft, imprisonment, neglect of family, the breakdown of relationships, domestic and other violence, poor health, absenteeism, stress, depression, anxiety, suicide, burdens on charities and burdens on the public purse. We can all imagine the psychological scars left on the children of families whose lives are shattered as a result of a parent's gambling addiction.

It seems to me that a top priority for the Bill should be the introduction of measures aimed at reducing the incidence of problem gambling and procedures designed to mitigate the effects of gambling. We must ensure that the Bill's passage does not exacerbate the situation by bringing about a significant increase in problem gambling.

The Bill starts well enough. The measures to establish a commission and protect young people and children, as well as the promise of a gambling prevalence study every two to three years, show a commitment by the Government to tackle problem gambling. However, the lack of detail on what is to be done and how the Bill will be applied makes an objective assessment of those measures' effectiveness impossible. If the Bill were simply about establishing a gambling commission to oversee and regulate all aspects of gambling in Britain and to introduce measures to tackle problem gambling, protect children and transfer the licensing of premises from magistrates to local authorities, I would, even given the lack of detail, be more than happy to support it.

Of course, the Bill does much more than that. It removes a number of regulatory measures, which will allow a significant expansion of gaming in Britain. The only limits to expansion appear to be market demand and local authority resistance. On one hand, we are considering a series of non-specific measures designed to tackle problem gambling, while, on the other, we are considering removing existing regulations to allow an unknown, but probably sizeable, increase in gambling. That will undoubtedly lead to a significant increase in problem gambling. To allow a virtually uncontrolled expansion of gambling without having put in place and tested the protective measures that the gambling commission may introduce is, frankly, a recipe for disaster. I could not support that.

Surely a far more sensible approach, as many hon. Members have said, would be to allow a limited number of pilot projects in designated areas and to evaluate their impact on gambling behaviour. That would present an opportunity to identify and address any problems that arose before the Bill's full provisions were introduced throughout Britain.

It is self-evident that just as alcoholics do not become alcoholics by choice or overnight, but do so through repeated heavy drinking, so gambling addicts become that way because of repeated participation in gambling activities. It logically follows that increased participation in gambling among the population will involve a proportionate number of people who have the social, psychological and emotional characteristics that make them vulnerable to gambling addiction.

I shall make a couple of observations about the Government's proposals for casinos. The first relates to the decision to allow alcoholic drinks to be served at gaming tables. I am very uneasy about the wisdom of that decision for two reasons. First, casinos tend to have a highly charged atmosphere, in which it is easy to get carried away. Consuming alcohol while gambling is fraught with danger, and it should not be encouraged. Secondly, having to leave the gambling area to have a drink provides an opportunity for punters to chill out and take stock of their situation. I ask the Minister to give further thought to that.

The other issue that I wish to raise regarding casinos has caused much anger and concern in the gaming industry. It is the arbitrary and prescriptive way in which casinos have been classified. I am unable to detect any logical, moral or commercial imperative that led the Government to draw up their plans for casinos. I believe that those plans should be removed from the Bill and that the gambling commission, local authorities and the industry should be allowed to develop a limited number of pilot projects that meet the needs of the area in which they operate as well as those of the operators. They should be able to support the objectives of the gambling commission as stated in the Bill.

Finally, I raised earlier this afternoon an issue that concerns me as the Member of Parliament for a seaside town and which causes similar concern to businesses that have amusement arcades in Morecambe and BACTA, which represents them. Clause 56 states:

> "The Secretary of State may by order create an offence of inviting, causing or permitting a child or young person below a specified age to use a Category D gaming machine."

I must ask once more, because I do not think I had a sufficient answer earlier, whether the Government are really contemplating bringing in a law under which a parent could be prosecuted for allowing a child to roll a 10 pence piece down a chute or operate a crane in an attempt to win a small cuddly toy. If they do not intend to do that, why can they not remove clause 56? For what reason should it remain if it is not to be implemented?

I hope that the Government will work with BACTA—

Mr. Deputy Speaker (Sir Michael Lord): Order. The hon. Lady has had her 10 minutes.

8.10 pm

Mr. Jonathan Sayeed (Mid-Bedfordshire) (Con): I congratulate the hon. Member for Morecambe and Lunesdale (Geraldine Smith) on her speech. I wish to be equally frank and put my cards on the table.

I do not believe that legislating to allow the proliferation of gambling is in the interests of individuals, communities or the country. Gambling is a particularly pernicious activity when it affects poorer members of society who cannot afford to lose, but who will always do so. The problems with the Bill are synonymous with the problems with gambling itself: it gives a little, but takes far more back and on an ever-increasing scale. The result? Only the Treasury in the short term and the casino companies in the long term are winners.

The only value in the Bill is the attempt to modernise and streamline gambling laws that have been unreformed for 40 years. I welcome the establishment of a more powerful gambling commission and the extension of the legislation to cover internet gambling, although the proposals duck the worldwide nature of internet gaming. However, I fear that any winnings that could be reaped from such reforms will not be banked but lost, as deregulation permits a rash of super-casinos to be created across Britain, making the inclusion of measures to protect children appear no more than a sop to our conscience.

The Prime Minister has estimated, we are told, that in the absence of a statutory limit the Bill will lead to between 20 and 40 new super-casinos with 24-hour access and unlimited jackpots. The Government have rejected the Joint Committee's proposals for higher minimum casino sizes and non-gambling facilities, even though those proposals would limit the number of casinos and where they could be. The Bill would leave casino corporations free to use section 106-type agreements to seduce cash-strapped local authorities and pave the way for what I would call a plague of casinos throughout the country, despite the Prime Minister's reassurances.

Increased ease of access to gambling is the key problem. People will be able to gamble day or night across the country immediately they choose to do so. Prior to the Bill, the 48-hour, then 24-hour, cool-off period during which new members could not use casino facilities was deliberate. It ensured that the decision to gamble was a considered choice. The removal of that safeguard will allow people to act immediately, lured by the false promise of financial gratification or acting on impulse.

Previous legislation was also based on the premise that gambling facilities would be sufficient to meet the unstimulated demand for them. In contrast to that, the Bill will sanction the development of casinos across the country, and that increased supply will in itself stimulate demand. That is a complete reversal of what went before.

The Budd report recognised the link between deregulation of gambling laws and an increase in problem gambling. That connection has been well proven in Australia, where deregulation of the gambling industry, and in particular, the increased immediacy of access through slot machines at casino entrances has become a major cause of poverty. The cost to the community in Australia is 5.6 billion Australian dollars, on top of the 1 billion Australian dollars already staked and lost. The logic is indisputable. If something is more widely available, it is more easily available to people who risk becoming involved beyond their means. One does not need to be a bookmaker to realise that that is not a very good bet for this country.

Problem gambling is defined as

> "gambling to a degree that compromises, disrupts or damages family, personal or recreational pursuits",

and it affects some 350,000 individuals and their families across Britain. It would be splitting hairs to try to distinguish between problem gamblers and people with problems who gamble. The net effect is the same. Gambling addiction is best considered as a continuum—a slippery slope made more greasy as more opportunities to gamble exist. Ease and speed of access is provided and the pernicious promise of unearned, instant gratification is promoted.

I am not an absolutist. I recognise that there is a considerable difference between a weekly £2 flutter on the football pools and gambling in casinos or online. However, the general principle remains. Gambling does not do individuals any good, nor is it to the common good. It does not increase the wealth of the nation, but sucks in and makes more destitute the poorest in our society, leaving them with nothing except the desire to try their luck again.

Although I accepted the national lottery with some reluctance—we were told that otherwise we would be invaded by foreign lotteries—I continue to oppose, as I did then, scratch cards. The market at which they are aimed is nearly always those who can least afford them.

Responsible opposition to the deregulation of the gambling industry should not be derided, as it has been, as an illiberal extension of the nanny state or snobbery. However, the fact that such initiatives are coming from the Department for Culture, Media and Sport raises the question: what type of culture the Government are trying to promote? Do we really want a culture that penalises saving and actively encourages the waste of

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gambling? My motivation for opposing the Bill is not puritanical but utilitarian. Any Government have a duty to reduce the harm that individuals can do to themselves and their families rather than to facilitate it.

Why are the Government therefore legislating to deregulate casinos? We know that the promised regeneration that doing so may bring will not be cost-free, and will be undermined by the accompanying social degeneration. We know that 93 per cent. of the population are against the Bill and that the vast majority opposed casinos opening in their neighbourhood. In this instance one can acquit the Government of trying to be populist.

The Bill, particularly the provisions on casinos, seems to be driven by a financial consideration, whether as an objective or a welcome side effect. Her Majesty's Customs and Excise collected £1,530 million in gambling duty between 1998 and 1999—22 per cent. of the gross gain in yield. It is estimated that by 2010 deregulation of gambling will have delivered at least £400 million a year more in taxes.

Tax revenues from gambling, combined with the regenerative measures that casino companies will have to implement in exchange for planning permission mean that the Government's pockets will be lined by the deregulation. I can see no other reason for that relaxation in gambling. However, in years to come, the inevitable damaging impact of gambling will have to be dealt with and paid for. If the Bill becomes law, expensive initiatives will have to be developed and financed to combat the effects of gambling on individuals and society.

The financial myopia of the Bill, and a desire for taxation by stealth, typifies the Government's entire strategy. They give with one hand, then take back far more with the other, while ignoring the harmful side effects. I hope that the House will reject this damaging, short-sighted and blinkered proposal, which would do some good, but would do a great deal of harm as well.

8.19 pm

Mr. Frank Field (Birkenhead) (Lab): I salute the Secretary of State for being here today, given the sadness that she has been through recently, and for the example that she sets to others on the Treasury Bench. In her opening speech she said that she was prepared to listen, although the normal procedure is that when Secretaries of State have finished speaking and the Opposition start, they do not appear again until the winding-up speeches.

Having listened to the debate, my right hon. Friend will know that there have been two themes that have knitted together almost every contribution to it. The first theme has been that there is no contention but that most of the Bill is needed to bring up to date the legal framework within which gambling operates in this country. Equally, there has been a concern about the possible or likely side effects of licensing mega-casinos, and I wish very briefly to develop three themes that bear on the consequences of those mega-casinos.

It is significant that, in the arguments that the Government have used in defending the existence of that part of the Bill, they have not been playing the ball; they have been kicking the players. A number of allegations have been made against those who may oppose the introduction of mega-casinos in this country. It has been suggested that we might be against gambling. The record shows that I have supported every gambling Bill that the Government have introduced since I have been a Member of Parliament.

It is also said that there is more than a whiff of anti-Americanism about those who oppose the casino proposals. When the Government are really under pressure on the Iraq war, they sometimes give the nod to the Lobby that I am prepared to go out and defend them. I willingly do so; I am proud of the special relationship that we have with America. I am just so sad that it is not strong enough for us to convince our American colleagues that there is a difference between policing and bombing. I speak as somebody who is very pro-American and who knows that Europe is free because of the lives that Americans gave, so there is no hint of anti-Americanism in what I have to say.

Neither am I part of that lobby—it has had some recent conversions, thank God—that believes that people should not spend their own money. I cite just one example. Back in 1975, which I know is before many of my hon. Friends were born, I tried to persuade our party that our policy should be to sell council houses and use the revenue to build new stock. I was told that our supporters were not capable of managing their own homes. I find it just slightly galling that some of the people who say I am being patronising in opposing the new super-casinos opposed the sale of council houses in those early days in the belief that our supporters were not up to spending their own money and running their own lives.

So none of those arguments holds as far as I am concerned, but the Welsh nationalists put a very serious argument earlier. What does it tell us about the Government's regeneration schemes if we now have to depend on mega-casinos to reach those parts of our poorest areas that none of our other regeneration policies has touched? I use the phrasing from a lager advert, which shows that I am a drinker as well. We have to accept the argument that the Welsh nationalists put in saying that, despite all the initiatives that the Government have taken to try to bring some of our poorest areas towards the level of the average areas of our society, let alone the richest ones, we have not succeeded as we had hoped.

There is therefore an attraction for me in the Government's argument that we should think of mega-casinos as an agent of regeneration, but I do not believe that they can hold that line unless they are prepared to concede a cap on the number of casinos. If we have more than one casino in the north-west, no casino will be situated in Blackpool, despite the eloquence of my hon. Friend the Member for Blackpool, North and Fleetwood (Mrs. Humble). They will go to Manchester, Liverpool or some of the other richer places. Indeed, if more than one licence were granted, and one casino went to Blackpool and another went to Manchester, the Secretary of State would need all the resources that the armed forces have in this country to drive people up the motorway away from the Manchester casino and into Blackpool. Regeneration will not take place in the areas for which she is holding out hope in the Bill unless she is prepared to limit severely the numbers of super-casinos for the whole country, and I believe that she should limit them to one per region. I know that some of my hon. Friends will think that I am weak in thinking that we might have six or so pilots around the country, but I believe that experiments should be tried in each of our regions.

Mr. Martin Salter (Reading, West) (Lab): Will my right hon. Friend consider another measure to which the Secretary of State—I say this while she is in her place—might like to like to give some thought? If the Government are serious about ensuring that the super-casinos can happen only with the will of the local communities and authorities, they should write into the Bill in Committee the ability for local authorities solely to determine any planning application and not allow the casino operators the right to go to appeal. We all know what happens when giant corporations can, in many ways, hold local councils to ransom over the planning appeal process.

Mr. Field: We know precisely that, but I intervened on the Secretary of State earlier because of my fear that, under the European convention on human rights, she will not be able to hold the position of not allowing appeals. Although the Government will have a lesson dealt out to them by the referendum in the north-east—I think that we will get the result this week—I believe that the only way of guaranteeing that local people will have a say will be to give them a vote on this matter in a referendum. Even in the European Court, there would not have to be an appeal if the people themselves so decided.

If we are serious about using the Bill as another agent of regeneration where all our other policies have failed, we cannot have more than one casino per region. Otherwise, the casinos will not go to the poorest areas; they will naturally go to those that are most attractive. *[Interruption.]* I shall speak very slowly so as to use the whole of the nine minutes and 43 seconds that I now apparently have. I had wanted to come within the target.

My last point is about whether we should vote against the Bill on Second Reading. We heard a most helpful intervention from the hon. Member for Buckingham (Mr. Bercow), who specialises in strengthening his own Front Bench, but I fear that his skills have beguiled some of my colleagues. The thought is that we are involved only in high politics, but our concern on Second Reading is on the principle. As to the thought that we might vote against the Government to try to influence them and risk the Bill, that is precisely what I ask my hon. Friends to do this evening. We have never defeated the Government. They know that, if they have a tough time on Second Reading, a number of us are prepared to vote against them in the Lobby and many more are prepared to abstain, and their hand will be weakened on Report. If my hon. Friends seriously believe they will get concessions from the Government severely limiting the number of super-casinos, the lessons of this Parliament teach them that they would not have got concessions on top-up fees or foundation hospitals. They may consider it a matter of principle that we vote for Second Reading, but we can argue with the Government and deal with the matter on Report.

Mr. Kevan Jones: I have listened carefully to my right hon. Friend and agree with some of the points that he is making, but will he explain to me what principle would be served by throwing the Bill out tonight, together with all the good things in it, on which hon. Members from all parts of the House agree—the protection of children from internet betting and other issues that the public would support? What kind of principled stance would it be to throw all that out?

Mr. Field: We will never throw the Bill out. We have never been able to throw out a Government Bill on Second Reading, but the more of us who tell the Government that we are unhappy with their proposal and that we will vote against it or abstain, the more power we will have on Report. Of course the whole House wants, say, 90 per cent. of the Bill. Should there be a major uprising and should the Government be defeated, we know perfectly well that they would announce from the Dispatch Box that they would introduce that 90 per cent. tomorrow in a separate Bill. They will not be defeated. That is not the issue. We do not wish to defeat the Government. What we need is a large vote against and an even bigger abstention, so that when we come to the Report stage the Government hand is so weakened that our wish will carry the day.

8.30 pm

Mr. Gary Streeter (South-West Devon) (Con): It is a great pleasure to follow the right hon. Member for Birkenhead (Mr. Field) and to agree with many of the points that he made. However, the award for the most profound and impressive speech tonight should go to the right hon. Member for Holborn and St. Pancras (Mr. Dobson), who captured the mood of the nation in his opposition to the Bill. The Labour Front-Bench team do not know quite what they are doing by introducing a measure that engenders so much deep opposition among so many of our communities throughout the land.

I made my decision several weeks ago that, whatever my party said on the Bill, I would vote against it. I did not reach that decision lightly but I made it because I so profoundly disagree with the contents of the Bill and its potential impact, particularly on vulnerable people. I am extremely concerned that if the Bill becomes law, as I hope it does not in its current form, one of the obvious and almost immediate consequences will be a significant increase in the number of people who suffer from gambling debts and gambling addiction. I certainly did not come into this place to make life more miserable for our constituents.

There is something about the Bill that takes the country in the wrong direction. I do not want to major on that tonight, but in addition to our many existing social problems, the impact of the Bill is not what we need. Following the right hon. Member for Birkenhead in his advice to colleagues on how we should go forward, I used to be in the Whips Office when we were in government and I know a little about how these things work. Colleagues who believe that we can vote for the measure tonight and that the Government will make

[Mr. Gary Streeter]

major concessions in Committee, with the inbuilt majority that they will have on that Committee and with colleagues who are surprisingly placed to serve on the Committee for very particular reasons, are living in cloud cuckoo land. I strongly urge all hon. Members to follow the leadership of the right hon. Member for Birkenhead and vote down the measure.

Of course we want some of the better aspects of the Bill. I want them too, but, as has been said, they can be brought back very quickly either tomorrow or in the Queen's Speech and, with all parties supporting them, they can make speedy progress through the House and become law within the same time scale as is currently envisaged. Those who have profound reservations, as I do, about the impact of the Bill on vulnerable people have only one course of action open to them tonight: not to support the Bill, and to vote against it.

I would support some kind of pilot scheme, whether in Blackpool or Great Yarmouth. Both places have massive attractions. Something that has never been tried in this country before should be tested, and there should be a pilot. I would not object to that, but what the Government are proposing is wrong.

Like most of my hon. Friends, freedom and individual choice are my starting point in approaching a subject of this nature. We must also recognise that many people out there suffer disproportionately from the impacts of some of those choices. In respect of smoking, drinking alcohol, drug taking, access to credit and gambling we already restrict people's choices. We have laws about drugs, tobacco advertising, alcohol sales and gambling because of the individual and social consequences that would flow from a free-for-all. I make no apologies to those from the libertarian camp when I suggest that by continuing to restrict gambling, we are becoming or continuing to be a nanny state. We start from freedom and individual choice, but that is not the end of the matter. There must be protection. Freedom must be tempered with responsibility and order.

It has been said that our current gambling regime is one of the tightest in the developed world. We also know that we have one of the smallest proportions of people with a gambling addiction and gambling debt. Those two facts are not unrelated and we disconnect them at our peril. If we were to vote the Bill into law, we would see a significant increase in gambling debt and addiction.

I am not against gambling as a whole. I am not a great supporter of it, but I have the occasional flutter on the lottery or the Grand National. As far as I recall, I have never won anything. I am not in one of the Secretary of State's categorisations of people who are against gambling on principle. However, I am not in favour of the explosion of gambling that the Bill represents.

As we have heard, up to 400,000 people have a problem with gambling and that means that many other people suffer within the circles of their families. Proposals to introduce super-casinos in accessible places—whether 20, 30, 40 or even more—and unlimited-prize machines, and to remove the 24-hour cooling-off period, are bound to increase the number of people who gamble and, therefore, the number of people who fall into gambling addictions.

Whether we like it or not, gambling disproportionately affects those with the least disposable incomes. Recent research has shown that more than three times as many problems arise for gamblers in households where there is an income of less than £15,000 compared with those in households with an income of £32,000 or more. This July, personal debt in the United Kingdom topped £1 trillion for the first time. Citizens Advice tells us that it has seen a 44 per cent. increase in the number of people seeking help with debt problems over the past six years. Average household debt, excluding mortgages, is now £7,000 per household. Problems of personal debt are becoming worse by the day and the Bill would only add to the numbers of those who become mired in gambling debt and fall into unsustainability.

Why would that happen if we passed the Bill? Experience in this country and elsewhere shows that, if we make it easier for people to do something, more of them will do it, even though that might harm them and their families. If the Bill becomes law, it will make it easier for people to drop into a super-casino that is placed in a highly accessible location, either in the high street or out of town. Is it fanciful to imagine that new super-casinos might be placed in a new development with a supermarket on one side and some sort of cinema complex on the other? They will be placed where people will be enticed to pop in once they have done their shopping or, even worse, before they have shopped for the family for the week.

Many new players will be attracted by the prospect of a life-changing jackpot from category A machines. Less time to reflect on the consequences of stuffing money that someone can ill afford into a one-armed monster will mean that more people will, on impulse, do precisely that. The Bill will lure more people into casinos, and some of them into the swamp of addiction and debt.

What will be the gain? Where does the pressure to allow these super-casinos and unlimited prize machines come from? Where are the public demonstrations in London demanding more gambling rights? Is this why we face every day the protest in Parliament square? Is that the noise that is being made? Are people demanding more gambling rights? I do not think so. The pressure, as we have heard, is coming from international gaming corporations that want to open our markets for their profits, as they have elsewhere.

There is nothing wrong with making profits, but why should we open ourselves up to the inevitable social consequences that will follow just to add further to the already bulging waistlines of foreign fat cats? We should not go down that route.

We have heard about the Australian experience. Of course, it is different from what we are discussing. Although the Secretary of State has tried to reassure us that there will be some sort of restriction because of market or industry predictions about the number of super-casinos, if no restrictions are placed in the Bill there is no guarantee that over the next five or 10 years there will not be a major casino in every community.

The House feels strongly about this matter. The right thing for the House to do is to vote down the Bill on Second Reading. The right thing for the Government to do is to listen, take note and bring back a better Bill.

8.39 pm

Mr. John Grogan (Selby) (Lab): I am a gambler. I love gambling. I love the thrill of being beside the rails at a race track cheering my horse home or tearing up my betting slip in frustration. I love going to casinos to play roulette and I love going to Walker's bingo hall in Selby, which is one of centres of the community where people meet their friends. When the great Selby floods occurred three or four years ago, the community met in the bingo hall to discuss its response because the bingo hall was the only building big enough for the purpose.

I hope that I will not be accused of being a snob or do-gooder if I express my profound doubts about aspects of the Bill. To paraphrase a former American President, "It's the machines, stupid." Frank Fahrenkopf, the president of the American Gaming Association, told the Joint Committee that slot machines are now the economic driver for the casino industry. The hon. Member for Bromsgrove (Miss Kirkbride) was right that the Bill will be a massive culture change. At the moment, casinos in this country contain 800 category B machines with a maximum payout of £2,000; one new super-casino will contain more machines than that. No one in the British industry wants those machines.

In the past few days, the British Casino Association has said that its reputation for integrity and honesty, the need for a low level of problem gambling and the recent public debate mean that no category A machines should be located in this country. The other casino operators' associations have long held that view, as has the British Amusement Catering Trades Association, so no British organisation based in the gaming industry advocates those machines.

It is not hard to see why British gaming associations take that view. The Secretary of State discussed prevalence studies and examining experience, but experience around the world, whether in Australia or in America, shows those machines' potential addictive capacity. The Bill will allow rows and rows of machines to be situated in gambling warehouses. The machines are designed to mesmerise people and keep them making three or four pulls a minute to try to win £1 million.

I do not want to be distasteful, but some big casino warehouses in the States change their carpets every three months, because some gamblers are so keen not to miss out on a win that they do not go the bathroom and stand in front of the machine all night. *[Interruption.]* It is distasteful, but it is true, and that is how addictive some of those machines are. We must examine whether we want category A machines in this nation and whether we should restrict them.

One argument is that if one has doubts about the Bill, one is elitist and is stopping the emancipation of the working classes by preventing them from going to casinos. If one examines who goes to casinos—I do—it is a cross-section of the British population. Only 7 per cent. of people currently go to casinos, and BACTA conducted a survey of their social class: 26 per cent. are A/B; 31 per cent. are C1; 22 per cent. are C2; and 22 per cent. are D/E. People who go to casinos are spread around the regions, one third of them are women and they are ethnically mixed, so casinos currently attract a small but diverse percentage of the population. The argument that some parts of the country do not have access to casinos is strong, and I can understand changes to the permitted area system and having some new casinos, but not in the way envisaged in the Bill.

I want to say a word about the Bill's implications for bingo. The bingo industry has tried, with some success in recent years, to build upon its strengths. What will happen to bingo as a result of the Bill? One cannot mix bingo, roulette wheels and machines in small casinos, but one can mix those activities in large casinos and really big regional casinos. The Government's regulatory impact assessment says that

> "the regulations may lead to the formation of combined bingo clubs and casinos with a gaming floor of over 1,500 square metres",

which

> "might lead to an increase in machine gambling among C2, D and E income earners and a reduction in bingo admissions."

It goes on to say that

> "a widespread conversion of bingo clubs to casinos, which offer greater opportunities for machine gambling for their profitability, presents a risk of an increase in problem gaming among present bingo players."

We must think seriously about the extent to which soft and hard gaming should be mixed up. There is no need to be elitist about this. We can learn from the American experience—60 per cent. of all profits at Atlantic City are made from pensioners. The big casino companies bus in pensioners, offer them a couple of free games of bingo, then say, "You've got an hour to wait until the bus home—why not have a game on the slot machines?" That is the economic driver. If we do not have such a mix in small casinos, why should we have it in large ones?

The question of whether size matters has been debated. As the Secretary of State said, the Government have raised the minimum size of small casinos to 750 sq m. They rejected the Committee's view that for regional resort casinos it should be raised to at least 7,500 sq m. If size matters among small casinos, why does it not matter at the top end of the market as well?

This has been a fascinating debate in which virtually every Member—bar two, I think—supported a limit, to some degree, on large resort casinos. Almost no one adopted the Government position that it should be left to the market, because most of us recognise that this is a major, radical change that will, according to the regulatory impact assessment, benefit the casino industry but harm much of the rest of the gambling industry. There will be a series of unintended consequences across much of our social fabric. For example, many community pubs depend on small category C machines, and it is not clear whether those that serve food as well alcohol will be able to keep them.

I urge the Government to think again and to put a cap on the number of super-casinos—a move that would have widespread support in the House. I take the leadership of my right hon. Friend the Member for Birkenhead (Mr. Field), whom I will be proud to follow into the Lobby. We need to send the Government the message that unless they compromise in Committee or on Report, an amendment will be tabled to try to impose such a cap; and, given the tenor of today's debate, that could turn out to be an interesting vote. I therefore

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appeal to them to think again and to legislate in the interests of the entire nation—those who gamble and those who do not.

8.47 pm

Mr. Robert Syms (Poole) (Con): I agree with the hon. Member for Selby (Mr. Grogan) that this has been an interesting debate. The speeches made by hon. Members on both sides of the House show that there are substantial differences between us. The subject certainly stirs up a lot of passion. It makes a refreshing change to come into a Chamber that is relatively full by the standards of today's House. I know that many of those who want to participate may not have the opportunity because of time constraints, but it makes a substantial difference if Members are here listening to the arguments and a certain amount of dialogue takes place across the Chamber.

As Members of Parliament, we all, through our constituency surgeries and mailbags, get a good handle on where there has been bad law in the past and what should be a Government priority in future. Gambling is not necessarily an area that I would have said we needed to jump into. I have learned a great deal during the debate from Members who have lived with the issue over a period of time. The legislation that the House has passed previously, which goes back principally to the 1960s, has done a pretty good job for this country and has lasted very well.

At that time, the aim was to create a legal industry and to keep it away from crime. We have created a very successful industry in which last year £63.8 billion was gambled in one form or another, of which £7.8 billion resided with the industry—£3 billion for gaming, £2.3 billion for the national lottery and £2.5 billion for horse-racing associated gambling. There are also 130 casinos and a quarter of a million gaming machines in the country, so we do have a pretty successful industry. We have been left, however, with a bit of a compromise, in that gambling is available to those who go and look for it, but we do not have the kind of in-your-face casinos that entice us in with flashing lights and fountains that we see in foreign countries and places such as Las Vegas.

The 24-hour membership rule means that people have to be pretty committed and think through the consequences before they go in and start gambling. This has been an impediment. I have always thought that that rule was a bit like the warning on a cigarette packet. Anyone who is tempted is made to think again and consider their position before they start to participate.

I am sure that most of our citizens, being sensible people, like a bit of fun. We have heard that quite a few Members of Parliament like to have a bit of fun gambling small sums of money. However, gambling can be addictive, and some people have a problem with it. I think that we have all come across people who have gone out in the evening with their car and arrived home without it, or who have ended up having to pile up loans on their house. As politicians, we must pay attention to the fact that the consequences of the Bill could be very dire indeed for some people. The Henley Centre has suggested that there are about 400,000 addicted gamblers in this country, and has expressed concern that these proposals could lead to a considerable increase in that number. I do not think that we, as legislators, should lightly walk away from the possible consequences of what we are doing.

The legislation that we already have on the statute book has passed the test of time pretty well and left us with a robust industry that is free of crime and works pretty well. We all understand, however, that the internet, remote communication and online gambling have changed the name of the game, and that there now needs to be a change in the law. I am sceptical, however, about whether we need to redo all the legislation. The moment we start to do that, we shall find that the vested interests of all sorts of people who benefit from the present legislation will be threatened. This applies to quite a lot of fish and chip shop owners in Poole, as well as to people who run takeaways and minicab firms, who might be surprised to lose their gaming machines.

There is also widespread concern in the leisure industry, including the ten-pin bowling industry, and among certain pub people that, under the Bill as it is presently framed—we hope that it will be amended in Committee—they, too, could lose their gaming machines. Many of these are small businesses that derive a good percentage of their income from these machines, so the changes that the Government are trying to push through present them with a challenge.

Members on both sides of the House have talked about the penny-pushers and the grab-a-toy and grab-a-gift machines in seaside town entertainment centres, which provide relatively harmless fun. These, too, could be encompassed by the legislation if we are not careful. Almost all the small businesses that have written to me have expressed some concern and many have made a pitch for grandfather rights in regard to keeping particular privileges. I hope that the Committee, when it gets to work on the Bill, will look carefully at the interests of the small businesses that will be affected by it.

I have concerns about the super-casino concept because it would change the culture of this country. We must therefore be very careful about how we proceed. The history of our legislating on this matter is to be gradual and cautious, but the Government are departing from that in their present proposals. The suggestion of the Joint Committee that we should limit the number of casinos per region was probably more sensible, and the proposals from hon. Members on both sides of the House for pilot schemes in certain areas also have their attraction.

Mr. John Hayes (South Holland and The Deepings) (Con): The Secretary of State has argued that the opposition to the Bill is born of snobbishness. It certainly is not; it is born of a concern for aesthetics, and for what we want our towns and cities to look like. I certainly do not want them to be dominated by pubs and clubs where people can drink all day, and by casinos where they can gamble all day and night. This debate is about what we want for our country, in terms of amenity and quality of life.

Mr. Syms: My hon. Friend makes a good point, and many in the country would agree with his sentiments.

There are difficulties in relation to what may be a massive increase in the number of machines and the increase in the number of casinos. We may be moving a little too fast, and I would want such development to slow down. As we have heard, if, as it appears under the current proposals, super-casinos can go to centres of population, they may go to more prosperous areas, which may mean that places such as Blackpool, which have been looking forward over the years to such leisure visitors, may lose out if centres such as Manchester are allowed to develop super-casinos. There is a dilemma over to how we allow larger casinos to develop.

I am not a fundamentalist on this matter. In some of our seaside resorts, if casinos provided people with an added reason to visit, hotel rooms would be upgraded and the salaries of many local employees would increase, which might be a boon. If that development were replicated all over the country, however, it would not have the advantages of a place such as Blackpool because it would rely purely on local trade.

The point made by my hon. Friend the Member for Ryedale (Mr. Greenway) was important—a local authority can reject any casino in its area. Once it gives permission for one, however, it is pretty much impossible to stop permission being given for further casinos. He also raised the problem of saturation. Of course, there is a market reason why there may not be saturation, but equally it may be that all the casinos pile into one area. On the south coast, for example, Poole might decide that it did not want casinos, whereas two miles down the road, Bournemouth might be saturated. That may be a decision of Bournemouth borough council, but it might have an implication for good or ill on my constituents in Poole. I see the hon. Member for South Dorset (Jim Knight), who represents an area a little further along the coast, is nodding. Those issues must be examined in detail in Committee.

Other aspects of the Bill are welcome, such as tidying-up some of the lottery legislation, particularly, as was mentioned, in relation to hospices. I welcome parts of the Bill, but I have concerns about the general thrust and the spin that the Government have put on it, and which has caused such concern in some of our national newspapers. I suspect that we will debate the finer details of the Bill for some time. If I am lucky enough to be chosen to sit on the Standing Committee for the Bill, I hope to do my best to protect some of the small businesses in my constituency.

8.58 pm

Jim Knight (South Dorset) (Lab): It is a great pleasure to follow my neighbour, the hon. Member for Poole (Mr. Syms), whose contributions in the House are always thoughtful. I refer the House to my entry in the Register of Members' Interests as chair of the all-party leisure group. In that capacity, I enjoy the services of the group's secretariat as provided by Business in Sport and Leisure, whose members include those who will be affected by this Bill.

In addition to representations from the industry, like many other Members, I have received briefings from the Salvation Army and the Methodist Church, among others, as well as representations from constituents concerned about the negative effects of gambling and, conversely, from those wanting to protect their amusement arcade businesses. I very much welcome the Secretary of State's assurances on that earlier.

While I do not envisage a super-casino adorning the shores of South Dorset, my constituents will of course be affected by the Bill. For example, if the Bill is passed, children in Weymouth will no longer have access to fruit machines suitable only for adults, kids in Portland will no longer be able to gamble on the internet as easily, and if a child in Swanage should manage to side-step those regulations, for the first time, those responsible for allowing that child to gamble will be liable to prosecution.

Just as I welcome those new protections for children, I welcome the regulation for the first time of betting exchanges and fixed odds betting terminals. I also welcome the new industry-funded trust of £3 million each year to counter problem gambling, and the creation of a gambling commission that will monitor problem gambling and have the power to investigate, prosecute and enter premises, seize goods, void bets, levy unlimited fines and remove gambling licences. These new protections are essential in an industry that has been transformed by technological advance since legislation last came before this House in any substantive manner, more than 30 years ago. The legislation has to be modernised now, as many people have said, and we would be sleeping on the job if we did not act.

I have been concerned for some time with problem gambling, hence parliamentary questions that I tabled in January about plans to ensure that the gambling industry funds a trust to help those with such an addiction. I have therefore observed from afar the problems in Australia, which some Members have mentioned. The recent modernisation of gambling in Australia is often cited as a reason not to enter into such a process in this country.

In fact, the Australian model has served to demonstrate the dangers of unrestricted liberalisation under the banner of modernisation, and has proved a timely example of what not to do here in the UK. Problem gambling has soared in Australia because of the decision to allow high-end gambling machines in everyday high street locations, such as pubs, bars and restaurants. For example, in Victoria and New South Wales, there are no restrictions on these "pokie" machines, so exposure has risen dramatically. In contrast, the Gambling Bill proposes that machines be removed from 6,000 unlicensed high street locations. This is a completely different form of modernisation from the Australian pig in a pokie.

Many Members would prefer that this issue simply go away, but contrary to what the media would have us believe, we are not introducing gambling to the unsuspecting UK consumer. Gambling is here now; it is popular and it is not going away. Many Members may not be aware of the extent of prizes currently available in bingo halls. My hon. Friend the Member for Selby (Mr. Grogan) spoke eloquently about bingo halls and I am sure that he has played the national bingo game. Some 500-plus licensed bingo clubs link up every night except on Christmas day, and prizes of £100,000 on weekdays and £200,000 on Sunday nights—the Sabbath—are offered. On selected occasions, prizes can range from between £500,000 and £1 million, and the highest pay-out so far in a bingo hall was £985,000. Indeed, it is ironic that although companies such as Gala

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and Rank offer those prizes as part of a national game of bingo, under this Bill such prizes in their casinos will be limited to only £2,000.

Mr. Mike Hancock (Portsmouth, South) (LD): What does the hon. Gentleman expect the average spend to be in an evening in a bingo hall? I suspect that it will be no more than £15, whereas the average spend in a large casino in the United States is some $150 per person.

Jim Knight: I am delighted that the hon. Gentleman asks that question, and I can tell him that the average spend in a bingo hall is £30 a week, and £60 a month in a UK casino. Individual punters in this country spend more on bingo than they do in a casino.

Ultimately, most people realise that the best way to leave a casino with a small fortune is to go there with a large one. Despite all the opportunities that we currently have to gamble, the two angels have not yet descended on the gates of Sodom, and society is still intact. The UK has a successful and highly responsible industry, as many Members have said. The national debate thus far has seemed oblivious to this fact, and we can improve the Bill by building on the success of our domestic industry.

Put simply, it is not the role of Government to restrict unreasonably or to suppress artificially an industry that has shown itself to be responsible. Rather, it is their rôle to create an environment in which business can thrive and individuals can act free from constraint, and in which regulations and safeguards ensure that the vulnerable are protected, and that the integrity of our social fabric is maintained over the long term. The Bill aims to strike that balance and I will vote in favour of it this evening. Given that 90 per cent. of it increases public protection from the negative effects of gambling, it is surely logical for Members from all parts of the House to give it a Second Reading tonight, and then to thrash out our differences over the other 10 per cent. during the remaining stages.

In the second half of my speech, I will focus on that 10 per cent. I share the concerns expressed about letting the market determine the number of regional casinos. I am worried that we seem to be standing ready to throw the doors open to a plethora of relatively unknown, untested and outsized casino operators, with unproven social responsibility credentials here in the UK. I am concerned that the market free-for-all that the Bill would create in respect of regional casinos will compromise its aims.

We currently have one of the lowest rates of problem gambling in the developed world. If we are to preserve that, we surely need to be able to monitor the situation as it unfolds. The currently favoured big-bang approach would not allow that, and it could therefore negate some of the protections introduced by the Bill, consigning them to the status of mere retrospective measures. We have the opportunity now to adopt a more gradual roll-out, allowing the progressive relaxation of regulations, while monitoring the effects and ensuring that the protections are effective. Why not take that opportunity?

Huw Irranca-Davies (Ogmore) (Lab): Does my hon. Friend agree that a more gradualist approach would also allow our indigenous business sector, with its well-deserved reputation for integrity, to leap in as a builder of this sector? It would allow our businesses to benefit themselves, as it is not open only to international investors. Internationally, not just America, but South Africa, Europe and others will be involved.

Mr. Knight: I quite agree; that is precisely the tenor of what I am saying. A gradual roll-out would allow the established British industry to adapt to the new regulatory framework and to compete on more equal terms. Its solution would be to delay the introduction of category A machines or the capping of their stakes and prizes for an initial period. Meanwhile, the stakes and prizes for category B machines could be raised, perhaps up to £10,000, effectively narrowing the gap between large and regional casinos.

I can see the self-interest in those proposals and I am cautious in case it negates the regenerative effect while allowing the later proliferation of category A machines in the existing 130 casinos. Their limited size would mean fewer actual machines than in the regional casinos, but I understand the Government's view that we should restrict the number of outlets and their geographical spread. Personally, I am attracted to the Joint Committee's alternative proposal of an aggregate national cap on the number of category A machines, as outlined earlier in the debate. However, those in the industry who argue that we should retain membership are correct. In that respect, I agree with those on both sides of the House. I believe that the directive on money laundering will require proof of identity, so there would be little extra regulatory impact in requiring membership. I agree with removing the 24-hour rule, but believe that membership adds a moment of reflection for the individual and a helpful form of control for the operator.

Some sort of cap on the number of regional casinos, at least in the short term, would assuage fears of a gambling explosion and allow us to test the market over time. My constituent, Mr. Dave Harkison of Swanage, e-mailed me last week, suggesting a limit of two per region, which I think is pitching it in roughly the right place. That limit might be best achieved through planning.

I very much welcome the effective veto that will be granted to local authorities to determine whether or not they will allow casino development in their area. I am pleased that the Government will introduce a new planning class use—a very helpful step forward. We must ensure that regional planning boards are effective and provide a strategic lead on planning. I support the proposal of the hon. Member for Ryedale (Mr. Greenway) that regional planning guidance should provide the mechanism.

Despite many questions and concerns that remain at this stage, I find much to welcome in the Bill. I regret that its purpose has been so misrepresented in the media and that media sensationalism has stymied real debate over the important issues. The blurring of the Government's message may account for some of the more extreme press coverage that we have seen, but we must reverse the process and inform the public of the Bill's true value. As I see it, the Bill provides more protection, more freedom and huge potential investment for the regeneration of downtrodden towns and resorts. I support the aims of the Bill. I look forward to working with my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State, voting with her this evening and then seeing what can be done to limit the number of super-casinos.

9.8 pm

Mr. Nick Hawkins (Surrey Heath) (Con): First, I have followed the debate on this area of the law throughout my time in the House. As the Minister and other hon. Members are aware, I have, not once but twice, been the shadow spokesman for my party on gambling—first when the Home Office was the responsible Department and again until May this year now that gambling is the responsibility of the Department for Culture, Media and Sport. My first involvement was as the Member for Blackpool, South in my first Parliament.

I should refer hon. Members to my entry in the Register of Members' Interests, as many other hon. Members have done, but point out that the major part of my speech this evening will be about casinos. The British company that asked me to do some consultancy work for it after I left the Opposition Front Bench in May is not involved in that field, so there is no conflict of interest when I speak about casinos.

My involvement in considering the original plans for resort casinos began when I was approached in the very early 1990s by Leisure Parcs, which was the pioneer of the concept in the UK. The main people behind the company—Mr. Trevor Hemmings and Mr. Marc Etches—came to the House at that time and gave briefings on more than one occasion to Members of all parties who had an interest in the matter. They pointed out the way in which resort casinos in other countries, particularly in parts of the USA, had successfully been used to create regeneration.

The main burden of my views throughout the history of the Bill—the Budd report, the Government's White Paper, all the work of the wonderful Joint Committee, which as many have said has been so ably led by my hon. Friend the Member for Ryedale (Mr. Greenway), and all the work by Members of all parties—has been to try to ensure regeneration. I share that view not only with my hon. Friend the Member for Ryedale, but with my hon. Friends the Members for Maldon and East Chelmsford (Mr. Whittingdale), who is on the Front Bench and for South-West Hertfordshire (Mr. Page), as well as with the hon. Member for Blackpool, North and Fleetwood (Mrs. Humble) who is on the Government Back Benches.

If the Bill is not right by the end of its parliamentary process, the great irony will be that the very people who have spent years trying to promote the idea of resort casinos might find that the areas where they have been trying to pioneer the concept do not benefit. As Members from all parties have said, if we do not get it right and mega-casinos are allowed to proliferate everywhere, the run-down resorts that most desperately need regeneration will not end up with super-casinos and will not be regenerated. That is why the Government were so unwise not to accept all the recommendations of the Joint Committee.

In the short time available to me, I want to address one or two points that have not been mentioned so far, although the debate has been of high quality. Many influential Government Members in another place were members of my hon. Friend's Joint Committee. I welcome the concessions that the Secretary of State has announced today on such things as use class orders, and I want to consider the Bill constructively. I hope that I am lucky enough to serve on the Committee that will consider the Bill. I expect that it will be given a Second Reading because of the Government's huge majority, despite some Government Back Benchers voting against it, but I should point out that the Labour peers who served on the Joint Committee made it clear in all their work that they cared about regeneration just as much as I do. I therefore hope that in Committee the Government will be prepared to accept—at least to consider seriously—many amendments, because I suspect that if they do not do so, they will have to accept amendments from those influential Labour peers who served on the Joint Committee.

Throughout my time dealing with the industry, I have worked closely with the British Amusement Catering Trades Association—BACTA. Its concerns, on behalf of small arcades and machine manufacturers whose businesses are not restricted to seaside resorts but can be in any town in the country, must be safeguarded. I share the concern that hon. Members have expressed that if we end up with a Bill that damages the existing casino, arcade or racing industries, the Government will have done a very bad day's work. I hope very much that we will not end up with such a Bill.

I recognise in particular the importance of a national strategy on planning guidance, as the hon. Member for Blackpool, North and Fleetwood and my hon. Friend the Member for Ryedale have rightly said. I hope that the Government will think carefully about how the Bill can be amended to ensure that casinos can provide regeneration and that they are located where that regeneration is needed most.

I doubt whether I am the only hon. Member to suspect that the Government ignored the Joint Committee's recommendations because of the dreaded influence of Her Majesty's Treasury. One can imagine the Chancellor of the Exchequer, with all the disapproval that he might initially have felt, given his background in the manse, for expanding casinos, telling Ministers in the Department for Culture, Media and Sport, "If you must do this, I've at least got to maximise the tax take." I believe that that is why the Government have decided not to accept the Joint Committee's recommendation. The Chancellor of the Exchequer is desperate for new tax revenue to plug the black holes that are becoming increasingly apparent in the rest of his policies.

We support something that has a positive benefit, especially for run-down seaside resorts. We must be careful that the Office of the Deputy Prime Minister does not get the planning guidance wrong. The planning confusion that the Joint Committee's report clearly sets out poses a genuine danger.

Regeneration must happen in a way that is similar to successful examples in some cities in the United States. With other hon. Members, I had a presentation from the mayor of one of those cities. If I recall correctly, the right hon. Member for Manchester, Gorton (Sir Gerald Kaufman), who chaired the Select Committee on Culture, Media and Sport, on which I now sit, said that

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the Bill should include something akin to a section 106 agreement. Such a provision would enable the money that the casinos make to be hypothecated so that local communities get it. The Treasury and Governments of both parties have had a fixed objection to anything that smacks of hypothecation. However, it needs to happen. We now have some forms of hypothecation, for example, the use of money that is raised by speed cameras and the congestion charge.

The Secretary of State has been under huge pressure from her Back Benchers about the needs of the seaside arcades, the need to keep crane machines and coin-push machines, the potential problems for pubs and the need perhaps to allow the lowest category of machines to stay in fish and chip shops and pubs. On the basis of research, we do not perceive any great danger from those but there are potential difficulties, in the view of many trade associations, in the case of a massive proliferation. Several hon. Members have spoken about the dangers of organised crime and the problems of the so-called FOBM and FOBT machines.

I agree with the comments made early in the debate by the hon. Member for Rossendale and Darwen (Janet Anderson). She spoke about the need for Blackpool and similar resorts to reinvent themselves. If the Bill is amended sensibly in Committee and the Government accept the sort of proposals that my hon. Friend the Member for Ryedale and the Joint Committee made, we can get the measure right and provide for regeneration.

I want briefly to make a couple of other points. The British Horseracing Board suggests that the Bill provides an opportunity to deal with so-called sleeper bets. As a long-standing member of the all-party group on racing and bloodstock, I believe that the Committee stage could helpfully deal with that.

All those with an interest in racing will be worried by the news last week from a senior police officer, who is in charge of the current inquiry into some people who are involved in racing, that further arrests have taken place and that those under investigation now number more than 100. The huge inquiry will continue well into 2005. I shall not comment on any matters that are sub judice, but for the good name of racing, it is crucial that it is perceived to be a clean sport. I believe that it is 99 per cent. of the time. However, the Bill could stop betting on horses or dogs to lose. That would be helpful.

9.18 pm

Mr. Andrew Dismore (Hendon) (Lab): I am not much of a gambler. The last bet that I placed was on the outcome of the 1997 election—I like to bet on certainties. However, I am a trade unionist and I want to approach the debate from a slightly different angle: the perspective of the casino worker. I declare an interest as a member of the GMB, which supports my constituency party and is one of the main unions that organise casino workers in the United Kingdom. Currently, 90 per cent. of casino operators in the UK are trade union-organised.

In partnership with the Transport and General Workers Union, the GMB has formed an alliance with Unite Here, the United States trade union that organises casino workers on the other side of the pond. It has provided valuable advice and assistance to the UK unions in approaching the debate. It showed that casinos can be significant creators of new jobs. We are considering not only jobs at the gaming tables but a range of ancillary services, for example, in catering and hotels. Those staff and services make a wider contribution to the regional economy. That, however, depends very much on how the industry is regulated, and the approach to the work force. A good employer can create worthwhile careers and decent conditions for casino workers; a bad employer means exploitation, poverty wages and appalling working conditions.

That is illustrated by two examples from America. In Mississippi, the superficial reality is that when casinos were allowed tourism increased, as did tax revenues for local communities; unemployment declined, and there were more jobs. The real reality, though, is that the fastest-growing jobs were low-wage jobs; erratic and round-the-clock work schedules made child care difficult; and jobs were of poor quality, with unstable work loads, limited prospects for long-term stable employment, and little hope of career advancement.

Contrasting evidence comes from Atlantic City, about which we have heard a good deal in a different context. All 12 casinos there are union-organised. Between 1977 and 1996, the income of casino workers—cooks and housekeepers—increased by more than 100 per cent., compared with only 16 per cent. for similar workers in the state of New Jersey more generally.

I believe that companies with bad employment records should not be allowed to operate in the United Kingdom. An example is the Las Vegas Sands casino, whose chief executive is a man called Sheldon Adelson. I have seen a detailed briefing on his activities, provided by Unite Here's research department. It is pretty horrific. He has been described by the *Las Vegas Review-Journal* as

"perhaps the most vilified man in Nevada."

He has been involved in repeated conflicts with governmental and regulatory agencies. Earlier this year the Nevada Gaming Commission imposed a $1 million fine on the Venetian casino, which he owns, for rigging contests and violating other Nevada gaming regulations. He is in ongoing litigation with the United States Equal Employment Opportunity Commission over issues dating back to 1999. He is an extremely litigious individual. I suspect that the Government's triple-lock proposals would lead to a number of legal challenges and judicial reviews should he be allowed into the UK.

Mr. Adelson has come under fire over working conditions, for failing to remit proper back pay, and for attempting to have workers and their supporters arrested for protesting. He subcontracts a substantial number of jobs, with substandard wages and benefits. He uses his wealth to try to oust politicians who cross him—so I am probably on his hit list now, as some other Members may also be after tonight. He has repeatedly been characterised as difficult to work with, and as

"terrorizing those who get in his way."

That is the sort of person whom we could end up dealing with. We must ensure that such operators have no place in the UK's gaming industry.

The gambling commission must be required to take into account a casino operator's previous employment practices—overseas if necessary—when deciding on an application. I believe that there should be at least two employee representatives on the commission to represent the interests of the workers in the industry. An applicant should be required, in particular, to show that he has enhanced family-friendly policies to compensate for the unsocial hours that casino workers have to endure, and that he pays due consideration to the health and safety of staff—especially as casinos will no longer be "member only", and there could be much looser controls of customers and the risk of assaults by dissatisfied customers. There should be help with travel arrangements for those who must work late and antisocial hours; and there ought to be a smoke-free workplace for those who must work such long hours.

Operators should also be expected to provide decent careers and training opportunities. There are good examples of that in Las Vegas, where a scheme administered jointly by the union and casino operators has financed a job training school for catering workers. Some 2,500 students take advantage of the programme each year, and the number is expected to double over the next couple of years. That is a good example, but I think a training levy would be a more effective way of ensuring that those who work in casinos have proper career opportunities.

It is likely that national lottery income will fall if people use other forms of gambling. I think that casino operators should also be expected to replace any losses sustained by the lottery through a levy for a good causes scheme to support charities that might otherwise lose out.

I share many of the reservations that have been expressed about the expansion of the casino industry with the regional super-casinos. It is important that we consider the number of casinos that will allowed, but if, as I think is inevitable, there are more casinos, whether on a pilot scheme or regulated by legislation or the market, we must ensure that those who work in the casinos are properly looked after, that their interests are represented by the gambling commission and that we do not import into the United Kingdom rogue operators, but operators who will provide a decent working environment for their staff, with decent careers and decent job opportunities.

If casinos are properly regulated, they can make a major contribution towards employment in Britain and towards economic regeneration, but that depends on their being properly regulated. I hope that those views will find favour with the Government and that we will see some amendments to the Bill as it proceeds to protect the interests of casino workers.

9.25 pm

Mr. Adrian Sanders (Torbay) (LD): The origins of the Bill were to provide Blackpool, and probably no more than Blackpool, with a resort destination casino, and for the past two and a half to three years, Blackpool has campaigned hard to be considered for that resort destination casino.

If one looks at resort destination casinos in Las Vegas, one sees an interesting product, which is not just about the gambling floor but which offers a wide range of entertainment to people of all ages, with subsidised restaurants to attract families and with subsidised accommodation so that people spend as much as possible on the gambling floor. I do not think that anyone here has an objection to the high quality environment that exists in Las Vegas being transported into the United Kingdom. The objections come when we move to the Bill where the idea of one resort destination casino has changed to possibly 20 or 30, and, it has even been said, 40 regional casinos.

I am pleased that the Government have listened to at least one part of the protest that has raised its head in these proceedings, and, in particular, what Liberal Democrats were calling for in relation to category D machines, which the Government have now conceded can continue to operate, but, according to the Secretary of State, a reserve power will be kept. There is a problem with that in that an amusement arcade operator will think twice about investing in future category D machines. That power could well lead to uncertainty, and we may have pushed the Government halfway there to at least conceding that category D machines should not be included in the Bill, but we now need to push them a bit further not to have that reserve power in the hands of the Secretary of State so that those amusement arcades are safe.

I want to raise an issue that no one else has raised and that is the position of offshore water-based gambling on ships. Would a vessel that is permanently moored be a regional casino under the Bill and, if it was moored in one place and then moved to another, which local authority would license it? It is not beyond the realms of possibility that an entrepreneur could convert a vessel into a casino and moor it within our territorial waters, providing a shuttle service to land in order to maximise the reduced costs of operating a casino at sea and to get round some of the tighter regulation that the Government rightly pride themselves on having included in the Bill. I should like to know whether the Government have considered that possibility. There is also the possibility of riverboat casinos, which may be small casinos, but the question remains as to which local authority would grant the licence.

We have heard that the Bill creates a new gambling commission, which will have responsibility for regulating all forms of gambling. The Secretary of State said that it would have the duty to oversee those who wish to enter the gambling industry. As the Government's proposal for lots of casinos is aimed at bringing in money from overseas—mostly from the United States—I wonder whether it should be based in Las Vegas rather than in Newcastle upon Tyne, at least for that part of its work that involves investigating the background of those who want to operate casinos in this country.

The Government say that the Bill will increase opportunities for adults to gamble, while decreasing opportunities for children to gamble. They say that the expansion will bring economic and regenerative benefits. In a few resorts, casinos may well do that, but I cannot see—I have not heard a strong case for it tonight, nor have I seen any evidence to support the Government's case—that 20, 30 or more regional casinos would bring such benefits.

The new casinos could be huge buildings incorporating not only gambling facilities but restaurants, stage entertainment, retail outlets and even housing, and unlike other casinos, they will be allowed to have category A gaming machines with unlimited

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jackpots. Those who have not visited a category A environment, as found in the United States, do not know what they are letting themselves in for. These places are geared to maximise the amount of money that people spend, and they operate for 24 hours a day in a windowless environment with no clocks in sight.

There is clearly a need to reform our gambling laws, which pre-date the internet and the concept of online betting. There is also a case for relaxing the 24-hour membership rule for small-stakes bingo, whereby holidaymakers in my constituency, for example, have to be turned away from bingo halls unless they applied 24 hours in advance. Nobody argues that the laws do not need some reform, and we welcome parts of the Bill, but we have major concerns about the casino proposals. It strikes us that it is no coincidence that the UK, with the tightest rules on gambling in the world, has the lowest rate of gambling addiction per head of population.

The right of individuals to choose whether to use casinos has to be balanced against the potential social cost of gambling, and especially so-called problem gambling. Indeed, it has been estimated that each problem gambler costs the state £35,000. Government research shows that casinos in accessible locations that offer casual gambling pose a heightened threat of gambling addiction.

Other social costs can include late-night noise and disturbance, but local authorities do not have sufficient powers to consider those factors in licensing casinos, while in contrast, the new alcohol licensing laws allow for refusing planning permission on the grounds of public nuisance or saturation. I hope that that can be considered in Committee, if the Bill gets there.

I fear that, unless it can be amended, the Bill will open the door to mainly US-run and owned super-casinos with no real stake in the community other than a mission to extract as much money as possible from punters' pockets. With it could come the associated crime and criminality of the Las Vegas underworld. I fear that the Government's claim that they wish to encourage economic regeneration will in fact lead to social degeneration. The idea that seaside resorts were at the heart of the original proposals will fall by the wayside. If major cities are allowed to have super-casinos, that is where the punters will stay. They will not be attracted to the seaside resorts.

I suspect that the Government are going down this route because they are looking for a mechanism to achieve the economic regeneration of, mostly, inner cities without having to increase taxes. We on the Liberal Democrat Benches know that you get what you pay for. The Bill could be something for which we end up paying a very high price indeed.

9.35 pm

Mr. Gordon Prentice (Pendle) (Lab): I have only a few minutes in which to sway the House with a couple of points. My hon. Friend the Member for Bridgend (Mr. Griffiths) asked rhetorically whether there were not enough gambling opportunities in Britain already. I remind the House that Britain has more casinos than any other European country except France. There are more casinos here in London than in any other capital city. The Government now invite us to add more regional casinos, which is the big bone of contention that divides so many of us on the Labour side and the Opposition from the Government.

The solution is to split the Bill in two: 90 per cent. of it is non-contentious—let it sail through. If we are told in few moments' time that that cannot happen, I shall vote against my own Government with a very heavy heart. I shall not vote for Second Reading. *[Interruption.]* Some of my colleagues are chortling, as they would, but let me tell them why I will do that. They will have read the briefing from Citizens Advice on the link between gambling and over-indebtedness. It said that the Bill will be a real kick-start to compulsive gambling in this country, and that is not funny at all.

As my hon. Friend the Member for Selby (Mr. Grogan) said, we are talking about a completely new phenomenon—one-armed bandits with unlimited payouts. Someone on the Opposition Benches spoke of a gambling environment where people cannot distinguish between night and day: that means 24-hour gambling and the glittering promise of multi-million pound prizes that will draw people in. We—a Labour Government, for God's sake—should not be doing that. We have more important things to concentrate on.

People talk about problem gambling. The Henley Centre tells us we have about 370,000 problem gamblers, and it forecasts that that number will rise to 700,000 by 2007. Without the Bill, it says, the increase would be much shallower. If we pass the Bill—let us not kid ourselves—we will see an exponential increase in problem gambling. People ask why that should happen here where we have tightly regulated gambling. Just look at what happened in Australia, which does not have such constraints. About 0.8 per cent. of United Kingdom gamblers are problem gamblers, but in Australia it is 2.3 per cent.

I am not being disloyal to my own Government; I think I am being a candid friend in saying that they should let us have two Bills. If they will not do that, we must vote the Bill down.

9.38 pm

Mr. Malcolm Moss (North-East Cambridgeshire) (Con): I pay tribute to my hon. Friend the Member for Ryedale (Mr. Greenway) and his Committee for their outstanding work. It has been said more than once that if the Government had listened more carefully to the Committee's recommendations, particularly those in its second report, they would not be in the mess they find themselves in.

Modernisation of the gambling laws is long overdue. The current law has been overtaken by technological changes such as the availability of internet gambling and betting exchanges. We accept the need for change to address such issues. We also support the Bill's stated objectives of protection from harm, fairness and prevention of crime and disorder resulting from gambling.

As our reasoned amendment sets out, we do not support the parts of the Bill that discriminate against our indigenous British industry, which has worked hard over the past 40 years to establish a reputation for responsibility, probity, integrity and safety. It is surely the role of Government, when introducing new legislation, to promote a level playing field and a licensing and regulatory regime that does not discriminate against British-based operators in favour of foreign-based investors.

Inward investment is welcome, but it should be balanced, fair and complementary. It is disingenuous to argue, as the Government do, that new investment in regional casinos is open to all, when one group of potential investors is working with one hand tied behind its back. Existing casinos will not be able to compete if the Bill remains unchanged, since it denies them any category A machines. It is generally accepted that the presence of such machines will bring the punters over the threshold. Indeed, so crucial are such machines to the development of the resort or regional casinos that the Americans have told us that they would not contemplate investing here unless they had access to them.

To continue that theme, concern has been expressed in the press about special treatment being afforded to foreign-based casino operators, largely American, who have perhaps been offered the carrot of favourable tax treatment on the one hand, and on the other a strong Government lobby to improve anti-money-laundering EU directives. That point was made by my hon. Friend the Member for Bromsgrove (Miss Kirkbride). The Association of Chief Police Officers has also made representations to the Government about money laundering. It is vital that the Government assuage any fears in the industry that they are doing anything that could be interpreted in any way as favouritism.

There is also the question of the Government's true motivation in introducing the Bill now, which several hon. Members raised. Indeed, there seems to be confusion at the heart of the Government over why they are doing so. The Government told the Joint Committee that a key aim of the Bill was to raise revenue, which was a point that my hon. Friend the Member for Surrey Heath (Mr. Hawkins) raised. However, a special adviser in the Department for Culture, Media and Sport contradicted that by saying that the expansion of regional casinos would be revenue-neutral.

The Government make much of the potential for regeneration. Indeed, at times they seem to be positively seduced by the prospect of substantial investment in deprived areas. Regeneration, however it comes, seems extremely attractive on the face of it, not only to run-down and deprived areas but to the many local authorities that are looking to promote economic development in their areas.

The hon. Members for Blackpool, North and Fleetwood (Mrs. Humble) and for Bridgend (Mr. Griffiths) posed the essential question: what is the definition of regeneration? Is it to be consistent and recognisable in each region of the country? Does the planning system allow for measurable benefits to accrue from permissions for regional casinos?

To move on from that point, but to remain with planning, there is an unanswered question about section 106 agreements. Are they morally right? My right hon. Friend the Member for North-West Cambridgeshire (Sir Brian Mawhinney), the hon. Member for Great Yarmouth (Mr. Wright), my hon. Friend the Member for Orpington (Mr. Horam) and the right hon. Member for Holborn and St. Pancras (Mr. Dobson) talked about planning permissions being predicated on handouts and enticements generated from the profits from gambling.

Perhaps the key question relating to regional casinos is that of proliferation—a matter raised by many hon. Members on both sides of the House, including my hon. Friend the Member for Ryedale and the hon. Members for Great Yarmouth and for Selby (Mr. Grogan). The Joint Committee sought in its second report to address that problem by setting for regional casinos threshold sizes of a minimum overall floor area of 7,500 sq m, of which 4,000 sq m would be used for non-gambling activities. The Government chose not to accept that recommendation, but in doing so failed to address the potential for proliferation. That is where their public relations started to go badly wrong.

Given the problems of gambling addiction, which my right hon. Friend the Member for North-West Cambridgeshire, my hon. Friend the Member for South-West Devon (Mr. Streeter) and the hon. Member for Ceredigion (Mr. Thomas) raised, it is surely necessary for the Government to have a view on the potential accessibility of gaming machine gambling. That means that they should not only have a clear view of what would be an appropriate number of regional casinos—and hence on accessibility of category A machines—but establish and promote clear unequivocal mechanisms in legislation that will achieve their objectives. Many hon. Members spoke out against leaving that to market forces, and the Government's failure to give a clear steer on that question is at the heart of their credibility.

Several hon. Members argued that the control of numbers could be achieved by putting in the Bill a cap on the number of casinos. That could be done in a number of ways, either as an absolute number overall or as a limit per region—say, two—with regional planning authorities and local authorities determining the location of casinos through existing or amended planning legislation.

Other hon. Members asked for pilot schemes or trials in one or two locations, but these proposals are light years away from the Government's expectation of having from 20 to 40 regional casinos. Who came up with these figures? Many hon. Members—the hon. Member for Bath (Mr. Foster), the right hon. Member for Birkenhead (Mr. Field) and the hon. Member for Torbay (Mr. Sanders)—questioned the rationale behind the assertion made, and no conclusive arguments were forthcoming from the Government, so we are left concluding that there is no rationale, and the Government are left looking at best disingenuous and at worst incompetent and uncaring. We are being asked to take a quantum leap into the dark, and I get the strong impression from tonight's debate that a significant number of hon. Members are not prepared to give the Government the benefit of the doubt on this issue.

Labour Members have challenged the Opposition many times during the debate not to vote against Second Reading. If they really want reasons for voting against it, they should look no further than the excellent speech made by the hon. Member for Bridgend or, for that matter, the voting intentions of some of their own Back Benchers. Given the track record of this arrogant Government, why should we trust them to allow the

[Mr. Malcolm Moss]

fundamental changes that we require in Committee to the clauses that we strongly oppose, which chiefly relate to regional casinos?

This Bill leaves too many unanswered questions. What is to be the tax regime? When will the Treasury publish its proposals? What could be the effect on indigenous British casino operators? How many regional casinos will there be? Why should we believe assurances of close working with the Office of the Deputy Prime Minister on planning issues? What is the scale of potential increase of gambling addiction? These and other questions trouble the House as a whole. They may cover only a proportion of the Bill, but they are disproportionately represented in the scale of their potential impact. Given the record of this Government, we believe that the only way to bring about change is to challenge their fundamental thinking head on. That is why we shall not support them on Second Reading this evening.

9.46 pm

The Minister for Sport and Tourism (Mr. Richard Caborn): This has been an encouraging and, to a large extent, constructive debate. Some 30 Members have contributed, for which I thank them. The quality of the debate reflects the concerns and interests of hon. Members on both sides of the House. The right hon. Member for North-West Cambridgeshire (Sir Brian Mawhinney) and my hon. Friend the Member for Bridgend (Mr. Griffiths) put a very strong case in arguing for no change to a large extent. That reflects an attitude something like that of my mother, who is a very strong Methodist and is 87. She gave me a lecture when I took her to church a week last Sunday on why there should be no change. Such matters split families as well as the House, but I genuinely look forward to continuing the lively debate in Committee, because I believe that that is where these changes can start to take place.

I want to remind the House where we have come from in the past five years. Five years ago, Professor Budd was asked to look at gambling in this country. The Lords deregulation Committee asked him to do so, and many people were concerned at the time that remote and internet gambling had to be brought under control and addressed in law. In 1968, a Labour Government had to legislate to bring gambling under control, remove it and clean it up. Indeed, I believe that Budd, "A Safe Bet for Success" and the pre-legislative scrutiny Committee—I congratulate the Committee, which worked under the able chairmanship of the hon. Member for Ryedale (Mr. Greenway)—brought to the House considered work, along with a Bill that will restore control over gambling. That has been central to the Government's thinking, as it was in the 1960s. We must do the same at the beginning of the 21st century. More importantly, we must look at legislation that can respond to the ever-changing needs of society as it is today.

I ask Labour Members who are thinking of voting against the Bill to look at Budd, the work of the pre-legislative scrutiny Committee and what we said in "A Safe Bet for Success". This is about protecting the vulnerable. The three principal parts of the Bill are protecting children and vulnerable adults, keeping gambling crime free and making sure that gambling is fair and open. That has been the bedrock of this—

Andrew Mackinlay (Thurrock) (Lab): The candyfloss society. That is what Harold Wilson called it.

Mr. Caborn: It might have been the candyfloss society in 1968 when Harold Wilson introduced the Gaming Act and brought gambling under control, as we will.

Let me deal with the key points raised by hon. Members on the capping of regional—

Mr. John Smith (Vale of Glamorgan) (Lab): Will my right hon. Friend give way?

Mr. Caborn: Unfortunately, I cannot give way. I have only 10 minutes left. Those on the two Front Benches have tried to get as many Back Benchers in as possible. That was the condition.

Some have suggested that the national cap on regional casinos ought to be 20 or 30. My right hon. Friend the Secretary of State explained the tough triple lock that we are putting in place through the Bill. First, there will be the gambling commission. Then, under clause 157, there will be local powers for a licensing authority to say no if it wants no new casinos. Finally, there will be a tough planning system. We are confident that this combination will put casinos in the right place, run by suitable people, and keep them out of places where they are not wanted.

A number of hon. Members spoke about the Government acting together. The combined planning and licensing systems will achieve regeneration in the right place. Regional planning bodies will be able to specify suitable locations for regional casinos. Several hon. Members asked how those could be directed to places of need. If casinos are proposed outside the appropriate areas, the proposal can be referred to the Office of the Deputy Prime Minister.

We have strengthened the planning regime further with the announcement from the Secretary of State of the use class order, so there will be no escaping the location controls that we envisage. Suitable locations for regional casinos will be considered by regional planning bodies. If they think regional casinos can help to regenerate seaside resorts, they can guide developments to those areas.

It has been interesting to hear the numbers bandied around. The hon. Member for Bath (Mr. Foster) suggested a formula for one or two casinos per region. With nine regions, that would make 18 regional casinos, plus Scotland and Wales, which would give a total of 22. The bottom line proposed by the industry is about 20—between 20 and 40. The official Opposition Front Bench spokesman spoke of regionalisation. The official Opposition and the Liberals intend to vote against Second Reading, claiming that we will not direct the proper number of casinos to the regions, yet their proposals would produce more regional casinos than projected by those in the industry.

The risk to problem gamblers was another topic of concern. If there is a risk to problem gamblers because of the location of casinos, the gambling commission can advise against licensing them in those locations. The licensing authority must have regard to such guidance. I am trying to answer serious questions that were posed about the potential for development on estates in built-up areas to encourage problem gambling. That would be covered by the commission's guidance on licensing, and we would expect it to act accordingly.

The hon. Member for Bath asked about individual applications and how they could be rejected. They can be rejected under clause 157. We have said clearly that that would not contravene any European measure. To suggest otherwise is to mislead the House. The provisions of the Bill would enable local authorities to take action so that casinos were not located in built-up areas.

If we had taken the Budd review at face value and incorporated its recommendations in the Bill, many Opposition Members would have argued forcefully against the proliferation of casinos, because that would have meant many more small casinos than proposed in the Bill. The Joint Committee's recommendations would have meant more casinos, with category A machines being used in the large casinos. It is estimated that the recommendations would have doubled the number of casinos. We have taken a cautious approach, and a number of Members asked us to do so. We estimate that the increase will be about a third. Given the Budd report, the outcome of the scrutiny Committee and the contents of the Bill, we have taken a cautious approach.

There are real concerns, and there are some who have had the opportunity to visit Australia, where gambling has got out of hand. The Australians deregulated in a way that even they wish they could roll back, but that is difficult. We took a great deal of advice from people in Australia and throughout the world, and that is why we have adopted our approach. One of the recommendations from the Joint Committee that we did not accept was a 3:1 ratio for machines to tables. We have proposed 2:1. We tightened up on that recommendation. The Joint Committee recommended category A machines in all casinos and we have recommended such machines in only regional casinos. Again that is a cautious approach and a tightening up of the process.

The Joint Committee recommended an increase in stake and prizes for machines in small and large casinos. We have kept them at their present level, which we believe is the right approach. Via the gambling commission there can be an incremental release over a period if it thinks that that is necessary. We have, as it were, moved back from the Budd report and from the Joint Committee and we have a much more cautious Bill than the measure that would have been if the recommendations of those two bodies had been taken forward.

The hon. Member for Bath talked about the Human Rights Act 1998 being used to resolve local conflicts. We have checked that through and we believe that what the hon. Gentleman said was incorrect. Local authorities are allowed to consider more than the three licence objectives when resolving local issues on casinos. They are able to take the views of local communities into account. They are unable to do anything that is unlawful or irrelevant to them.

Some red herrings were raised. My hon. Friend the Member for Vauxhall (Kate Hoey) said that sports would be denied revenue from the machines. That is totally untrue. The situation will be exactly the same as it is now. There was a lot of debate about working men's clubs—

Kate Hoey: Will my right hon. Friend give way?

Mr. Caborn: I said that I would not give way to anybody, so there are no exceptions to that.

Working men's clubs, Conservative clubs and British Legion clubs made representations. We shall ensure that they are protected and will continue to be protected.

The Budd report recommended removing arcades from seaside resorts. We have not done that. I believe that there are effective proposals for the regeneration of casinos within the Bill. We can get on with regional regeneration in a way that many would want, particularly those in resorts.

Registration for casinos and members' clubs is allowed. Any casino that wants to run a registration system can continue to do so. The matter could be up to the gambling commission. If it believed that that was desirable within the licensing structure, it could ensure that that would be the position.

The Bill sets out a clear direction for bringing gambling under control again, as we did in the 1960s. If Members vote against Second Reading, they will be allowing young people—children—to be exposed to internet gambling, to remote gambling, in a way that would be wrong and irresponsible. We can take the other parts of the Bill on board. We can deal with the issues relating to regional casinos in Committee. I am sure that we can find a solution to the problems that have been raised.

Question put, That the amendment be made:—

The House proceeded to a Division.

Mr. Speaker: Order. I see an hon. Member using a mobile phone. I instruct him to leave the Chamber.

The House having divided: Ayes 183, Noes 293.

Division No. 296] [9:59 pm

AYES

Ainsworth, Peter *(E Surrey)*
Amess, David
Arbuthnot, rh James
Atkinson, Peter *(Hexham)*
Baldry, Tony
Barker, Gregory
Baron, John *(Billericay)*
Barrett, John
Bellingham, Henry
Beresford, Sir Paul
Boswell, Tim
Bottomley, rh Virginia *(SW Surrey)*
Brady, Graham
Brake, Tom *(Carshalton)*
Brazier, Julian
Breed, Colin
Brooke, Mrs Annette L.
Browning, Mrs Angela
Bruce, Malcolm
Burns, Simon
Burnside, David
Burstow, Paul
Burt, Alistair
Butterfill, Sir John
Cable, Dr. Vincent
Calton, Mrs Patsy
Cameron, David
Campbell, rh Sir Menzies *(NE Fife)*
Carmichael, Alistair
Chapman, Sir Sydney *(Chipping Barnet)*
Chope, Christopher
Clappison, James
Clifton-Brown, Geoffrey
Collins, Tim
Conway, Derek
Cormack, Sir Patrick
Cotter, Brian
Cran, James *(Beverley)*
Davey, Edward *(Kingston)*
Davies, Quentin *(Grantham & Stamford)*
Davis, rh David *(Haltemprice & Howden)*
Djanogly, Jonathan
Doughty, Sue
Duncan, Alan *(Rutland)*
Duncan Smith, rh Iain

Evans, Nigel
Ewing, Annabelle
Fabricant, Michael
Fallon, Michael
Field, Mark *(Cities of London & Westminster)*
Flight, Howard
Foster, Don *(Bath)*
Fox, Dr. Liam
Garnier, Edward
George, Andrew *(St. Ives)*
Gidley, Sandra
Goodman, Paul
Gray, James *(N Wilts)*
Green, Damian *(Ashford)*
Green, Matthew *(Ludlow)*
Greenway, John
Grieve, Dominic
Gummer, rh John
Hague, rh William
Hammond, Philip
Hancock, Mike
Harris, Dr. Evan *(Oxford W & Abingdon)*
Harvey, Nick
Hawkins, Nick
Hayes, John *(S Holland)*
Heald, Oliver
Heath, David
Heathcoat-Amory, rh David
Hendry, Charles
Hogg, rh Douglas
Holmes, Paul
Horam, John *(Orpington)*
Howard, rh Michael
Hughes, Simon *(Southwark N)*
Hunter, Andrew
Jack, rh Michael
Jackson, Robert *(Wantage)*
Jenkin, Bernard
Kennedy, rh Charles *(Ross Skye & Inverness)*
Key, Robert *(Salisbury)*
Kirkbride, Miss Julie
Kirkwood, Sir Archy
Knight, rh Greg *(E Yorkshire)*
Laing, Mrs Eleanor
Lait, Mrs Jacqui
Lamb, Norman
Lansley, Andrew
Letwin, rh Oliver
Lewis, Dr. Julian *(New Forest E)*
Liddell-Grainger, Ian
Lidington, David
Lilley, rh Peter
Llwyd, Elfyn
Loughton, Tim
Luff, Peter *(M-Worcs)*
McIntosh, Miss Anne
Mackay, rh Andrew
Maclean, rh David
McLoughlin, Patrick
Malins, Humfrey
Maples, John
Mates, Michael
Maude, rh Francis
Mawhinney, rh Sir Brian
May, rh Mrs Theresa
Mercer, Patrick
Mitchell, Andrew *(Sutton Coldfield)*
Moore, Michael
Moss, Malcolm
Murrison, Dr. Andrew
O'Brien, Stephen *(Eddisbury)*
Ottaway, Richard
Page, Richard
Paterson, Owen
Pickles, Eric
Portillo, rh Michael
Pugh, Dr. John
Randall, John
Redwood, rh John
Rendel, David
Robathan, Andrew
Robertson, Hugh *(Faversham & M-Kent)*
Robertson, Laurence *(Tewk'b'ry)*
Robinson, Mrs Iris *(Strangford)*
Robinson, Peter *(Belfast E)*
Roe, Dame Marion
Rosindell, Andrew
Russell, Bob *(Colchester)*
Sanders, Adrian
Sayeed, Jonathan
Selous, Andrew
Shephard, rh Mrs Gillian
Shepherd, Richard
Simpson, Keith *(M-Norfolk)*
Smith, Sir Robert *(W Ab'd'ns & Kincardine)*
Smyth, Rev. Martin *(Belfast S)*
Soames, Nicholas
Spelman, Mrs Caroline
Spicer, Sir Michael
Spink, Bob *(Castle Point)*
Spring, Richard
Stanley, rh Sir John
Steen, Anthony
Streeter, Gary
Stunell, Andrew
Swayne, Desmond
Swire, Hugo *(E Devon)*
Syms, Robert
Tapsell, Sir Peter
Taylor, Ian *(Esher)*
Taylor, John *(Solihull)*
Taylor, Matthew *(Truro)*
Taylor, Dr. Richard *(Wyre F)*
Taylor, Sir Teddy
Teather, Sarah
Thomas, Simon *(Ceredigion)*
Thurso, John
Tonge, Dr. Jenny
Tredinnick, David
Turner, Andrew *(Isle of Wight)*
Tyrie, Andrew
Viggers, Peter
Walter, Robert
Waterson, Nigel
Webb, Steve *(Northavon)*
Whittingdale, John
Widdecombe, rh Miss Ann
Wiggin, Bill
Wilkinson, John
Willetts, David
Williams, Hywel *(Caernarfon)*
Willis, Phil
Wilshire, David
Winterton, Ann *(Congleton)*
Winterton, Sir Nicholas *(Macclesfield)*
Wishart, Pete
Yeo, Tim *(S Suffolk)*
Young, rh Sir George

Tellers for the Ayes:
Mr. David Ruffley and
Mr. Crispin Blunt

NOES

Adams, Irene *(Paisley N)*
Ainsworth, Bob *(Cov'try NE)*
Alexander, Douglas
Allen, Graham
Anderson, Janet *(Rossendale & Darwen)*
Armstrong, rh Ms Hilary
Atherton, Ms Candy
Atkins, Charlotte
Bailey, Adrian
Banks, Tony
Barron, rh Kevin
Battle, rh John
Bayley, Hugh
Beard, Nigel
Beckett, rh Margaret
Begg, Miss Anne
Bell, Sir Stuart
Benn, rh Hilary
Berry, Roger
Betts, Clive
Blackman, Liz
Blears, Ms Hazel
Blizzard, Bob
Blunkett, rh David
Boateng, rh Paul
Bradley, rh Keith *(Withington)*
Bradley, Peter *(The Wrekin)*
Bradshaw, Ben
Brennan, Kevin
Brown, rh Nicholas *(Newcastle E Wallsend)*
Browne, Desmond
Bryant, Chris
Buck, Ms Karen
Burden, Richard
Burgon, Colin
Burnham, Andy
Byers, rh Stephen
Byrne, Liam *(B'ham Hodge H)*
Caborn, rh Richard
Cairns, David
Campbell, Alan *(Tynemouth)*
Campbell, Mrs Anne *(C'bridge)*
Campbell, Ronnie *(Blyth V)*
Caplin, Ivor
Casale, Roger
Cawsey, Ian *(Brigg)*
Challen, Colin
Chapman, Ben *(Wirral S)*
Clark, Mrs Helen *(Peterborough)*
Clark, Dr. Lynda *(Edinburgh Pentlands)*
Clarke, rh Charles *(Norwich S)*
Clarke, rh Tom *(Coatbridge & Chryston)*
Clelland, David
Clwyd, Ann *(Cynon V)*
Coaker, Vernon
Coffey, Ms Ann
Cohen, Harry
Colman, Tony
Connarty, Michael
Cook, rh Robin *(Livingston)*
Cooper, Yvette
Corston, rh Jean
Cousins, Jim
Crausby, David
Cruddas, Jon
Cummings, John
Cunningham, rh Dr. Jack *(Copeland)*
Cunningham, Jim *(Coventry S)*
Cunningham, Tony *(Workington)*
Curtis-Thomas, Mrs Claire
Darling, rh Alistair
Davey, Valerie *(Bristol W)*
Davies, Geraint *(Croydon C)*
Dawson, Hilton
Dean, Mrs Janet
Denham, rh John
Dhanda, Parmjit
Dismore, Andrew
Doran, Frank
Dowd, Jim *(Lewisham W)*
Eagle, Angela *(Wallasey)*
Eagle, Maria *(L'pool Garston)*
Efford, Clive
Ennis, Jeff *(Barnsley E)*
Etherington, Bill
Farrelly, Paul
Fitzpatrick, Jim
Fitzsimons, Mrs Lorna
Flint, Caroline
Flynn, Paul *(Newport W)*
Follett, Barbara
Foster, rh Derek
Foster, Michael *(Worcester)*
Foster, Michael Jabez *(Hastings & Rye)*
Gapes, Mike *(Ilford S)*
Gerrard, Neil
Gibson, Dr. Ian
Gilroy, Linda
Godsiff, Roger
Goggins, Paul
Griffiths, Jane *(Reading E)*
Griffiths, Nigel *(Edinburgh S)*
Hain, rh Peter
Hall, Mike *(Weaver Vale)*
Hall, Patrick *(Bedford)*
Hamilton, Fabian *(Leeds NE)*
Hanson, David
Harman, rh Ms Harriet
Harris, Tom *(Glasgow Cathcart)*
Havard, Dai *(Merthyr Tydfil & Rhymney)*
Healey, John
Henderson, Doug *(Newcastle N)*
Henderson, Ivan *(Harwich)*
Hendrick, Mark
Hepburn, Stephen
Heppell, John
Hesford, Stephen
Hewitt, rh Ms Patricia
Heyes, David
Hill, Keith *(Streatham)*
Hodge, Margaret
Hood, Jimmy *(Clydesdale)*
Hoon, rh Geoffrey
Hope, Phil *(Corby)*
Howarth, rh Alan *(Newport E)*
Howells, Dr. Kim
Hoyle, Lindsay
Hughes, Beverley *(Stretford & Urmston)*
Hughes, Kevin *(Doncaster N)*
Humble, Mrs Joan
Hutton, rh John
Iddon, Dr. Brian
Illsley, Eric
Irranca-Davies, Huw
Jackson, Helen *(Hillsborough)*
Johnson, rh Alan *(Hull W)*
Johnson, Miss Melanie *(Welwyn Hatfield)*
Jones, Helen *(Warrington N)*
Jones, Kevan *(N Durham)*
Jones, Lynne *(Selly Oak)*
Jowell, rh Tessa

Joyce, Eric *(Falkirk W)*
Kaufman, rh Sir Gerald
Kelly, Ruth *(Bolton W)*
Kemp, Fraser
Kennedy, Jane *(Wavertree)*
Khabra, Piara S.
Kidney, David
King, Andy *(Rugby)*
King, Ms Oona *(Bethnal Green & Bow)*
Knight, Jim *(S Dorset)*
Ladyman, Dr. Stephen
Lammy, David
Lawrence, Mrs Jackie
Laxton, Bob *(Derby N)*
Lazarowicz, Mark
Lepper, David
Leslie, Christopher
Levitt, Tom *(High Peak)*
Lewis, Ivan *(Bury S)*
Liddell, rh Mrs Helen
Linton, Martin
Lloyd, Tony *(Manchester C)*
Love, Andrew
Lucas, Ian *(Wrexham)*
Luke, Iain *(Dundee E)*
McAvoy, Thomas
McCabe, Stephen
McCafferty, Chris
McCartney, rh Ian
McDonagh, Siobhain
MacDonald, Calum
MacDougall, John
McFall, rh John
McGuire, Mrs Anne
McKechin, Ann
McKenna, Rosemary
McNulty, Tony
MacShane, Denis
Mactaggart, Fiona
McWalter, Tony
McWilliam, John
Mahmood, Khalid
Mallaber, Judy
Marris, Rob *(Wolverh'ton SW)*
Marsden, Gordon *(Blackpool S)*
Martlew, Eric
Meale, Alan *(Mansfield)*
Merron, Gillian
Michael, rh Alun
Milburn, rh Alan
Miliband, David
Miller, Andrew
Mitchell, Austin *(Gt Grimsby)*
Moffatt, Laura
Mole, Chris
Moonie, Dr. Lewis
Moran, Margaret
Morley, Elliot
Mullin, Chris
Munn, Ms Meg
Murphy, Denis *(Wansbeck)*
Murphy, Jim *(Eastwood)*
Naysmith, Dr. Doug
Norris, Dan *(Wansdyke)*
O'Brien, Bill *(Normanton)*
O'Brien, Mike *(N Warks)*
O'Hara, Edward
Olner, Bill
O'Neill, Martin
Organ, Diana
Osborne, Sandra *(Ayr)*
Pearson, Ian
Perham, Linda
Picking, Anne
Pickthall, Colin
Pike, Peter *(Burnley)*
Plaskitt, James
Pond, Chris *(Gravesham)*
Pope, Greg *(Hyndburn)*
Prentice, Ms Bridget *(Lewisham E)*
Primarolo, rh Dawn
Prosser, Gwyn
Quin, rh Joyce
Quinn, Lawrie
Rammell, Bill
Rapson, Syd *(Portsmouth N)*
Raynsford, rh Nick
Reed, Andy *(Loughborough)*
Reid, rh Dr. John *(Hamilton N & Bellshill)*
Robertson, John *(Glasgow Anniesland)*
Robinson, Geoffrey *(Coventry NW)*
Rooney, Terry
Ross, Ernie *(Dundee W)*
Roy, Frank *(Motherwell)*
Ruane, Chris
Ruddock, Joan
Russell, Ms Christine *(City of Chester)*
Ryan, Joan *(Enfield N)*
Salter, Martin
Sarwar, Mohammad
Sawford, Phil
Shaw, Jonathan
Sheerman, Barry
Sheridan, Jim
Simon, Siôn *(B'ham Erdington)*
Singh, Marsha
Skinner, Dennis
Smith, rh Andrew *(Oxford E)*
Smith, Angela *(Basildon)*
Smith, rh Chris *(Islington S & Finsbury)*
Smith, Jacqui *(Redditch)*
Smith, John *(Glamorgan)*
Southworth, Helen
Spellar, rh John
Starkey, Dr. Phyllis
Stevenson, George
Stewart, Ian *(Eccles)*
Stinchcombe, Paul
Stoate, Dr. Howard
Strang, rh Dr. Gavin
Straw, rh Jack
Stringer, Graham
Stuart, Ms Gisela
Sutcliffe, Gerry
Tami, Mark *(Alyn)*
Taylor, rh Ann *(Dewsbury)*
Taylor, Dari *(Stockton S)*
Thomas, Gareth *(Clwyd W)*
Timms, Stephen
Tipping, Paddy
Touhig, Don *(Islwyn)*
Trickett, Jon
Turner, Dennis *(Wolverh'ton SE)*
Turner, Dr. Desmond *(Brighton Kemptown)*
Turner, Neil *(Wigan)*
Twigg, Derek *(Halton)*
Twigg, Stephen *(Enfield)*
Tynan, Bill *(Hamilton S)*
Vaz, Keith *(Leicester E)*
Vis, Dr. Rudi
Ward, Claire
Watson, Tom
Watts, David
White, Brian
Wicks, Malcolm
Wills, Michael
Winterton, Ms Rosie *(Doncaster C)*
Woodward, Shaun
Woolas, Phil
Worthington, Tony
Wright, Anthony D. *(Gt Yarmouth)*
Wright, David *(Telford)*

Tellers for the Noes:
Mr. Nick Ainger and
Paul Clark

Question accordingly negatived.

Main Question put forthwith, pursuant to Standing Order No. 62 (Amendment on Second or Third Reading):—

The House divided: Ayes 286, Noes 212.

Division No. 297] **[10:14 pm**

AYES

Adams, Irene *(Paisley N)*
Ainsworth, Bob *(Cov'try NE)*
Alexander, Douglas
Allen, Graham
Anderson, Janet *(Rossendale & Darwen)*
Armstrong, rh Ms Hilary
Atherton, Ms Candy
Atkins, Charlotte
Bailey, Adrian
Banks, Tony
Barron, rh Kevin
Battle, rh John
Bayley, Hugh
Beard, Nigel
Beckett, rh Margaret
Begg, Miss Anne
Bell, Sir Stuart
Benn, rh Hilary
Berry, Roger
Betts, Clive
Blackman, Liz
Blears, Ms Hazel
Blizzard, Bob
Blunkett, rh David
Boateng, rh Paul
Bradley, rh Keith *(Withington)*
Bradley, Peter *(The Wrekin)*
Bradshaw, Ben
Brennan, Kevin
Brown, rh Nicholas *(Newcastle E Wallsend)*
Browne, Desmond
Bryant, Chris
Buck, Ms Karen
Burden, Richard
Burnham, Andy
Byers, rh Stephen
Byrne, Liam *(B'ham Hodge H)*
Caborn, rh Richard
Cairns, David
Campbell, Alan *(Tynemouth)*
Campbell, Mrs Anne *(C'bridge)*
Campbell, Ronnie *(Blyth V)*
Caplin, Ivor
Casale, Roger
Cawsey, Ian *(Brigg)*
Challen, Colin
Chapman, Ben *(Wirral S)*
Clark, Dr. Lynda *(Edinburgh Pentlands)*
Clarke, rh Charles *(Norwich S)*
Clarke, rh Tom *(Coatbridge & Chryston)*
Clelland, David
Clwyd, Ann *(Cynon V)*
Coaker, Vernon
Coffey, Ms Ann
Cohen, Harry
Colman, Tony
Connarty, Michael
Cook, rh Robin *(Livingston)*
Cooper, Yvette
Corston, rh Jean
Crausby, David
Cruddas, Jon
Cummings, John
Cunningham, rh Dr. Jack *(Copeland)*
Cunningham, Jim *(Coventry S)*
Cunningham, Tony *(Workington)*
Curtis-Thomas, Mrs Claire
Darling, rh Alistair
Davey, Valerie *(Bristol W)*
Davies, Geraint *(Croydon C)*
Dawson, Hilton
Dean, Mrs Janet
Denham, rh John
Dhanda, Parmjit
Dismore, Andrew
Doran, Frank
Dowd, Jim *(Lewisham W)*
Eagle, Angela *(Wallasey)*
Eagle, Maria *(L'pool Garston)*
Efford, Clive
Ennis, Jeff *(Barnsley E)*
Etherington, Bill
Farrelly, Paul
Fitzpatrick, Jim
Fitzsimons, Mrs Lorna
Flint, Caroline
Flynn, Paul *(Newport W)*
Follett, Barbara
Foster, rh Derek
Foster, Michael *(Worcester)*
Foster, Michael Jabez *(Hastings & Rye)*
Gapes, Mike *(Ilford S)*
Gerrard, Neil
Gibson, Dr. Ian
Gilroy, Linda
Godsiff, Roger
Goggins, Paul
Griffiths, Jane *(Reading E)*
Griffiths, Nigel *(Edinburgh S)*
Hain, rh Peter
Hall, Mike *(Weaver Vale)*
Hall, Patrick *(Bedford)*
Hamilton, Fabian *(Leeds NE)*
Hanson, David
Harman, rh Ms Harriet
Harris, Tom *(Glasgow Cathcart)*
Havard, Dai *(Merthyr Tydfil & Rhymney)*
Healey, John
Henderson, Doug *(Newcastle N)*

Henderson, Ivan *(Harwich)*
Hendrick, Mark
Hepburn, Stephen
Heppell, John
Hesford, Stephen
Hewitt, rh Ms Patricia
Heyes, David
Hill, Keith *(Streatham)*
Hodge, Margaret
Hood, Jimmy *(Clydesdale)*
Hoon, rh Geoffrey
Hope, Phil *(Corby)*
Howarth, rh Alan *(Newport E)*
Howells, Dr. Kim
Hoyle, Lindsay
Hughes, Beverley *(Stretford & Urmston)*
Hughes, Kevin *(Doncaster N)*
Humble, Mrs Joan
Hutton, rh John
Iddon, Dr. Brian
Illsley, Eric
Irranca-Davies, Huw
Jackson, Helen *(Hillsborough)*
Johnson, rh Alan *(Hull W)*
Johnson, Miss Melanie *(Welwyn Hatfield)*
Jones, Helen *(Warrington N)*
Jones, Kevan *(N Durham)*
Jones, Lynne *(Selly Oak)*
Jowell, rh Tessa
Joyce, Eric *(Falkirk W)*
Kaufman, rh Sir Gerald
Kelly, Ruth *(Bolton W)*
Kemp, Fraser
Kennedy, Jane *(Wavertree)*
Khabra, Piara S.
Kidney, David
King, Andy *(Rugby)*
King, Ms Oona *(Bethnal Green & Bow)*
Knight, Jim *(S Dorset)*
Ladyman, Dr. Stephen
Lammy, David
Lawrence, Mrs Jackie
Laxton, Bob *(Derby N)*
Lazarowicz, Mark
Lepper, David
Leslie, Christopher
Levitt, Tom *(High Peak)*
Lewis, Ivan *(Bury S)*
Liddell, rh Mrs Helen
Linton, Martin
Lloyd, Tony *(Manchester C)*
Love, Andrew
Lucas, Ian *(Wrexham)*
Luke, Iain *(Dundee E)*
McAvoy, Thomas
McCabe, Stephen
McCafferty, Chris
McCartney, rh Ian
McDonagh, Siobhain
MacDonald, Calum
MacDougall, John
McFall, rh John
McGuire, Mrs Anne
McKechin, Ann
McKenna, Rosemary
McNulty, Tony
MacShane, Denis
Mactaggart, Fiona
McWalter, Tony
McWilliam, John
Mahmood, Khalid
Mallaber, Judy
Marris, Rob *(Wolverh'ton SW)*
Marsden, Gordon *(Blackpool S)*
Martlew, Eric
Meale, Alan *(Mansfield)*
Merron, Gillian
Michael, rh Alun
Milburn, rh Alan
Miliband, David
Miller, Andrew
Moffatt, Laura
Mole, Chris
Moonie, Dr. Lewis
Moran, Margaret
Morley, Elliot
Mullin, Chris
Munn, Ms Meg
Murphy, Denis *(Wansbeck)*
Murphy, Jim *(Eastwood)*
Naysmith, Dr. Doug
Norris, Dan *(Wansdyke)*
O'Brien, Bill *(Normanton)*
O'Brien, Mike *(N Warks)*
O'Hara, Edward
Olner, Bill
O'Neill, Martin
Organ, Diana
Osborne, Sandra *(Ayr)*
Pearson, Ian
Perham, Linda
Picking, Anne
Pickthall, Colin
Pike, Peter *(Burnley)*
Plaskitt, James
Pond, Chris *(Gravesham)*
Pope, Greg *(Hyndburn)*
Prentice, Ms Bridget *(Lewisham E)*
Primarolo, rh Dawn
Prosser, Gwyn
Quin, rh Joyce
Quinn, Lawrie
Rammell, Bill
Rapson, Syd *(Portsmouth N)*
Raynsford, rh Nick
Reid, rh Dr. John *(Hamilton N & Bellshill)*
Robertson, John *(Glasgow Anniesland)*
Robinson, Geoffrey *(Coventry NW)*
Rooney, Terry
Ross, Ernie *(Dundee W)*
Roy, Frank *(Motherwell)*
Ruane, Chris
Ruddock, Joan
Russell, Ms Christine *(City of Chester)*
Ryan, Joan *(Enfield N)*
Salter, Martin
Sarwar, Mohammad
Sawford, Phil
Shaw, Jonathan
Sheerman, Barry
Sheridan, Jim
Simon, Siôn *(B'ham Erdington)*
Smith, rh Andrew *(Oxford E)*
Smith, Angela *(Basildon)*
Smith, rh Chris *(Islington S & Finsbury)*
Smith, Jacqui *(Redditch)*
Smith, John *(Glamorgan)*
Southworth, Helen
Spellar, rh John
Starkey, Dr. Phyllis
Stewart, Ian *(Eccles)*
Stinchcombe, Paul
Stoate, Dr. Howard
Strang, rh Dr. Gavin
Straw, rh Jack
Stringer, Graham
Stuart, Ms Gisela
Sutcliffe, Gerry
Tami, Mark *(Alyn)*
Taylor, rh Ann *(Dewsbury)*
Taylor, Dari *(Stockton S)*
Taylor, David *(NW Leics)*
Thomas, Gareth *(Clwyd W)*
Timms, Stephen
Tipping, Paddy
Touhig, Don *(Islwyn)*
Trickett, Jon
Turner, Dennis *(Wolverh'ton SE)*
Turner, Dr. Desmond *(Brighton Kemptown)*
Turner, Neil *(Wigan)*
Twigg, Derek *(Halton)*
Twigg, Stephen *(Enfield)*
Tynan, Bill *(Hamilton S)*
Vaz, Keith *(Leicester E)*
Vis, Dr. Rudi
Ward, Claire
Watson, Tom
Watts, David
White, Brian
Wicks, Malcolm
Wills, Michael
Winterton, Ms Rosie *(Doncaster C)*
Woodward, Shaun
Woolas, Phil
Worthington, Tony
Wright, Anthony D. *(Gt Yarmouth)*
Wright, David *(Telford)*

Tellers for the Ayes:
Mr. Nick Ainger and
Paul Clark

NOES

Ainsworth, Peter *(E Surrey)*
Amess, David
Arbuthnot, rh James
Atkinson, Peter *(Hexham)*
Baldry, Tony
Barker, Gregory
Baron, John *(Billericay)*
Barrett, John
Bellingham, Henry
Beresford, Sir Paul
Boswell, Tim
Bottomley, rh Virginia *(SW Surrey)*
Brady, Graham
Brake, Tom *(Carshalton)*
Brazier, Julian
Breed, Colin
Brooke, Mrs Annette L.
Browning, Mrs Angela
Bruce, Malcolm
Burns, Simon
Burnside, David
Burstow, Paul
Burt, Alistair
Butterfill, Sir John
Cable, Dr. Vincent
Calton, Mrs Patsy
Cameron, David
Campbell, rh Sir Menzies *(NE Fife)*
Carmichael, Alistair
Chapman, Sir Sydney *(Chipping Barnet)*
Chaytor, David
Chope, Christopher
Clappison, James
Clifton-Brown, Geoffrey
Collins, Tim
Conway, Derek
Corbyn, Jeremy
Cormack, Sir Patrick
Cotter, Brian
Cousins, Jim
Cran, James *(Beverley)*
Davey, Edward *(Kingston)*
Davies, rh Denzil *(Llanelli)*
Davies, Quentin *(Grantham & Stamford)*
Davis, rh David *(Haltemprice & Howden)*
Djanogly, Jonathan
Dobson, rh Frank
Doughty, Sue
Drew, David *(Stroud)*
Duncan, Alan *(Rutland)*
Duncan Smith, rh Iain
Evans, Nigel
Ewing, Annabelle
Fabricant, Michael
Fallon, Michael
Field, rh Frank *(Birkenhead)*
Field, Mark *(Cities of London & Westminster)*
Fisher, Mark
Flight, Howard
Foster, Don *(Bath)*
Fox, Dr. Liam
Garnier, Edward
George, Andrew *(St. Ives)*
Gidley, Sandra
Goodman, Paul
Gray, James *(N Wilts)*
Green, Damian *(Ashford)*
Green, Matthew *(Ludlow)*
Grieve, Dominic
Griffiths, Win *(Bridgend)*
Grogan, John
Gummer, rh John
Hague, rh William
Hammond, Philip
Hancock, Mike
Harris, Dr. Evan *(Oxford W & Abingdon)*
Harvey, Nick
Hawkins, Nick
Hayes, John *(S Holland)*
Heald, Oliver
Heath, David
Heathcoat-Amory, rh David

Hendry, Charles
Hinchliffe, David
Hoey, Kate *(Vauxhall)*
Hogg, rh Douglas
Holmes, Paul
Hopkins, Kelvin
Horam, John *(Orpington)*
Howard, rh Michael
Hughes, Simon *(Southwark N)*
Hunter, Andrew
Hurst, Alan *(Braintree)*
Jack, rh Michael
Jackson, Robert *(Wantage)*
Jenkin, Bernard
Jones, Jon Owen *(Cardiff C)*
Kennedy, rh Charles *(Ross Skye & Inverness)*
Key, Robert *(Salisbury)*
Kirkbride, Miss Julie
Kirkwood, Sir Archy
Knight, rh Greg *(E Yorkshire)*
Laing, Mrs Eleanor
Lait, Mrs Jacqui
Lamb, Norman
Lansley, Andrew
Letwin, rh Oliver
Lewis, Dr. Julian *(New Forest E)*
Lewis, Terry *(Worsley)*
Liddell-Grainger, Ian
Lidington, David
Lilley, rh Peter
Llwyd, Elfyn
Loughton, Tim
Luff, Peter *(M-Worcs)*
McDonnell, John
McIntosh, Miss Anne
Mackay, rh Andrew
Mackinlay, Andrew
Maclean, rh David
McLoughlin, Patrick
Mahon, Mrs Alice
Malins, Humfrey
Maples, John
Marshall, David *(Glasgow Shettleston)*
Mates, Michael
Maude, rh Francis
Mawhinney, rh Sir Brian
May, rh Mrs Theresa
Mercer, Patrick
Mitchell, Andrew *(Sutton Coldfield)*
Mitchell, Austin *(Gt Grimsby)*
Moore, Michael
Moss, Malcolm
Murrison, Dr. Andrew
O'Brien, Stephen *(Eddisbury)*
Ottaway, Richard
Paterson, Owen
Pickles, Eric
Portillo, rh Michael
Prentice, Gordon *(Pendle)*
Pugh, Dr. John
Purchase, Ken
Randall, John
Redwood, rh John
Rendel, David
Robathan, Andrew
Robertson, Hugh *(Faversham & M-Kent)*
Robertson, Laurence *(Tewk'b'ry)*
Robinson, Mrs Iris *(Strangford)*
Robinson, Peter *(Belfast E)*
Roe, Dame Marion
Rosindell, Andrew
Russell, Bob *(Colchester)*
Sanders, Adrian
Sayeed, Jonathan
Sedgemore, Brian
Selous, Andrew
Shephard, rh Mrs Gillian
Shepherd, Richard
Short, rh Clare
Simpson, Keith *(M-Norfolk)*
Skinner, Dennis
Smith, Llew *(Blaenau Gwent)*
Smith, Sir Robert *(W Ab'd'ns & Kincardine)*
Smyth, Rev. Martin *(Belfast S)*
Soames, Nicholas
Spelman, Mrs Caroline
Spicer, Sir Michael
Spink, Bob *(Castle Point)*
Spring, Richard
Stanley, rh Sir John
Steen, Anthony
Streeter, Gary
Stunell, Andrew
Swayne, Desmond
Swire, Hugo *(E Devon)*
Syms, Robert
Tapsell, Sir Peter
Taylor, David *(NW Leics)*
Taylor, Ian *(Esher)*
Taylor, John *(Solihull)*
Taylor, Matthew *(Truro)*
Taylor, Dr. Richard *(Wyre F)*
Taylor, Sir Teddy
Teather, Sarah
Thomas, Simon *(Ceredigion)*
Thurso, John
Tonge, Dr. Jenny
Tredinnick, David
Turner, Andrew *(Isle of Wight)*
Tyrie, Andrew
Viggers, Peter
Walter, Robert
Wareing, Robert N.
Waterson, Nigel
Webb, Steve *(Northavon)*
Whittingdale, John
Widdecombe, rh Miss Ann
Wiggin, Bill
Wilkinson, John
Willetts, David
Williams, Betty *(Conwy)*
Williams, Hywel *(Caernarfon)*
Willis, Phil
Wilshire, David
Winnick, David
Winterton, Ann *(Congleton)*
Winterton, Sir Nicholas *(Macclesfield)*
Wishart, Pete
Yeo, Tim *(S Suffolk)*
Young, rh Sir George

Tellers for the Noes:
Mr. David Ruffley and
Mr. Crispin Blunt

Question accordingly agreed to.

Bill read a Second time.

GAMBLING BILL (PROGRAMME)

Motion made, and Question put forthwith, pursuant to Orders [28 June 2001 and 6 November 2003].

That the following provisions shall apply to the Gambling Bill:

Committal

1. The Bill shall be committed to a Standing Committee.

Proceedings in Standing Committee

2. Proceedings in the Standing Committee shall (so far as not previously concluded) be brought to a conclusion on 11th January 2005.

3. The Standing Committee shall have leave to sit twice on the first day on which it meets.

Consideration and Third Reading

4. Proceedings on consideration shall (so far as not previously concluded) be brought to a conclusion one hour before the moment of interruption on the day on which those proceedings are commenced.

5. Proceedings on Third Reading shall (so far as not previously concluded) be brought to a conclusion at the moment of interruption on the day on which proceedings on consideration are commenced.

6. Sessional Order B (programming committees) made by the House on 28th June 2001 shall not apply to proceedings on consideration and Third Reading.

Other proceedings

7. Any other proceedings on the Bill (including any proceedings on consideration of Lords Amendments or on any further messages from the Lords) may be programmed.—*[Mr. Heppell.]*

The House divided: Ayes 309, Noes 172.

Division No. 298] **[10:28 pm**

AYES

Adams, Irene *(Paisley N)*
Ainsworth, Bob *(Cov'try NE)*
Alexander, Douglas
Allen, Graham
Anderson, Janet *(Rossendale & Darwen)*
Armstrong, rh Ms Hilary
Atherton, Ms Candy
Atkins, Charlotte
Bailey, Adrian
Banks, Tony
Barron, rh Kevin
Battle, rh John
Bayley, Hugh
Beard, Nigel
Beckett, rh Margaret
Begg, Miss Anne
Bell, Sir Stuart
Benn, rh Hilary
Berry, Roger
Betts, Clive
Blackman, Liz
Blears, Ms Hazel
Blizzard, Bob
Boateng, rh Paul
Bradley, rh Keith *(Withington)*
Bradley, Peter *(The Wrekin)*
Bradshaw, Ben
Brennan, Kevin
Brown, rh Nicholas *(Newcastle E Wallsend)*
Browne, Desmond
Bryant, Chris
Buck, Ms Karen
Burden, Richard
Burgon, Colin
Burnham, Andy
Byers, rh Stephen
Byrne, Liam *(B'ham Hodge H)*
Caborn, rh Richard
Cairns, David
Campbell, Alan *(Tynemouth)*
Campbell, Mrs Anne *(C'bridge)*
Campbell, Ronnie *(Blyth V)*
Caplin, Ivor
Casale, Roger
Cawsey, Ian *(Brigg)*
Challen, Colin
Chapman, Ben *(Wirral S)*
Chaytor, David
Clark, Mrs Helen *(Peterborough)*
Clark, Dr. Lynda *(Edinburgh Pentlands)*
Clarke, rh Charles *(Norwich S)*
Clarke, rh Tom *(Coatbridge & Chryston)*
Clelland, David
Clwyd, Ann *(Cynon V)*
Coaker, Vernon
Coffey, Ms Ann
Cohen, Harry
Colman, Tony
Connarty, Michael
Cook, rh Robin *(Livingston)*
Cooper, Yvette
Corston, rh Jean
Cousins, Jim
Crausby, David
Cruddas, Jon
Cummings, John
Cunningham, rh Dr. Jack *(Copeland)*
Cunningham, Jim *(Coventry S)*
Cunningham, Tony *(Workington)*
Curtis-Thomas, Mrs Claire
Darling, rh Alistair

Davey, Valerie *(Bristol W)*
David, Wayne
Davidson, Ian
Davies, rh Denzil *(Llanelli)*
Davies, Geraint *(Croydon C)*
Dawson, Hilton
Dean, Mrs Janet
Denham, rh John
Dhanda, Parmjit
Dismore, Andrew
Dobson, rh Frank
Doran, Frank
Dowd, Jim *(Lewisham W)*
Drew, David *(Stroud)*
Eagle, Angela *(Wallasey)*
Eagle, Maria *(L'pool Garston)*
Efford, Clive
Ennis, Jeff *(Barnsley E)*
Etherington, Bill
Farrelly, Paul
Field, rh Frank *(Birkenhead)*
Fitzpatrick, Jim
Fitzsimons, Mrs Lorna
Flint, Caroline
Flynn, Paul *(Newport W)*
Follett, Barbara
Foster, rh Derek
Foster, Michael *(Worcester)*
Foster, Michael Jabez *(Hastings & Rye)*
Gapes, Mike *(Ilford S)*
Gerrard, Neil
Gibson, Dr. Ian
Gilroy, Linda
Godsiff, Roger
Goggins, Paul
Griffiths, Jane *(Reading E)*
Griffiths, Nigel *(Edinburgh S)*
Griffiths, Win *(Bridgend)*
Hain, rh Peter
Hall, Mike *(Weaver Vale)*
Hall, Patrick *(Bedford)*
Hamilton, David *(Midlothian)*
Hamilton, Fabian *(Leeds NE)*
Hanson, David
Harman, rh Ms Harriet
Harris, Tom *(Glasgow Cathcart)*
Havard, Dai *(Merthyr Tydfil & Rhymney)*
Healey, John
Henderson, Doug *(Newcastle N)*
Henderson, Ivan *(Harwich)*
Hendrick, Mark
Hepburn, Stephen
Heppell, John
Hesford, Stephen
Hewitt, rh Ms Patricia
Heyes, David
Hill, Keith *(Streatham)*
Hodge, Margaret
Hood, Jimmy *(Clydesdale)*
Hoon, rh Geoffrey
Hope, Phil *(Corby)*
Howarth, rh Alan *(Newport E)*
Howarth, George *(Knowsley N & Sefton E)*
Howells, Dr. Kim
Hoyle, Lindsay
Hughes, Beverley *(Stretford & Urmston)*
Hughes, Kevin *(Doncaster N)*
Humble, Mrs Joan
Hurst, Alan *(Braintree)*
Hutton, rh John
Iddon, Dr. Brian
Illsley, Eric
Irranca-Davies, Huw
Jackson, Helen *(Hillsborough)*
Johnson, rh Alan *(Hull W)*
Johnson, Miss Melanie *(Welwyn Hatfield)*
Jones, Helen *(Warrington N)*
Jones, Jon Owen *(Cardiff C)*
Jones, Kevan *(N Durham)*
Jones, Lynne *(Selly Oak)*
Jowell, rh Tessa
Joyce, Eric *(Falkirk W)*
Kaufman, rh Sir Gerald
Kelly, Ruth *(Bolton W)*
Kemp, Fraser
Kennedy, Jane *(Wavertree)*
Khabra, Piara S.
Kidney, David
King, Andy *(Rugby)*
King, Ms Oona *(Bethnal Green & Bow)*
Knight, Jim *(S Dorset)*
Ladyman, Dr. Stephen
Lammy, David
Lawrence, Mrs Jackie
Laxton, Bob *(Derby N)*
Lazarowicz, Mark
Lepper, David
Leslie, Christopher
Levitt, Tom *(High Peak)*
Lewis, Ivan *(Bury S)*
Liddell, rh Mrs Helen
Linton, Martin
Lloyd, Tony *(Manchester C)*
Love, Andrew
Lucas, Ian *(Wrexham)*
Luke, Iain *(Dundee E)*
McAvoy, Thomas
McCabe, Stephen
McCafferty, Chris
McCartney, rh Ian
McDonagh, Siobhain
MacDonald, Calum
MacDougall, John
McFall, rh John
McGuire, Mrs Anne
McKechin, Ann
McKenna, Rosemary
Mackinlay, Andrew
McNulty, Tony
MacShane, Denis
Mactaggart, Fiona
McWalter, Tony
McWilliam, John
Mahmood, Khalid
Mallaber, Judy
Marris, Rob *(Wolverh'ton SW)*
Marsden, Gordon *(Blackpool S)*
Marshall, David *(Glasgow Shettleston)*
Martlew, Eric
Meale, Alan *(Mansfield)*
Merron, Gillian
Michael, rh Alun
Milburn, rh Alan
Miliband, David
Miller, Andrew
Moffatt, Laura
Mole, Chris
Moonie, Dr. Lewis
Moran, Margaret
Morley, Elliot
Mullin, Chris
Munn, Ms Meg
Murphy, Denis *(Wansbeck)*
Murphy, Jim *(Eastwood)*
Naysmith, Dr. Doug
Norris, Dan *(Wansdyke)*
O'Brien, Bill *(Normanton)*
O'Brien, Mike *(N Warks)*
O'Hara, Edward
Olner, Bill
Organ, Diana
Osborne, Sandra *(Ayr)*
Pearson, Ian
Perham, Linda
Picking, Anne
Pickthall, Colin
Pike, Peter *(Burnley)*
Plaskitt, James
Pond, Chris *(Gravesham)*
Pope, Greg *(Hyndburn)*
Prentice, Ms Bridget *(Lewisham E)*
Prentice, Gordon *(Pendle)*
Primarolo, rh Dawn
Prosser, Gwyn
Purchase, Ken
Quin, rh Joyce
Quinn, Lawrie
Rammell, Bill
Rapson, Syd *(Portsmouth N)*
Raynsford, rh Nick
Reed, Andy *(Loughborough)*
Reid, rh Dr. John *(Hamilton N & Bellshill)*
Robertson, John *(Glasgow Anniesland)*
Robinson, Geoffrey *(Coventry NW)*
Rooney, Terry
Ross, Ernie *(Dundee W)*
Roy, Frank *(Motherwell)*
Ruane, Chris
Ruddock, Joan
Russell, Ms Christine *(City of Chester)*
Ryan, Joan *(Enfield N)*
Sarwar, Mohammad
Sawford, Phil
Shaw, Jonathan
Sheerman, Barry
Sheridan, Jim
Short, rh Clare
Simon, Siôn *(B'ham Erdington)*
Simpson, Alan *(Nottingham S)*
Singh, Marsha
Skinner, Dennis
Smith, rh Andrew *(Oxford E)*
Smith, Angela *(Basildon)*
Smith, rh Chris *(Islington S & Finsbury)*
Smith, Jacqui *(Redditch)*
Smith, John *(Glamorgan)*
Southworth, Helen
Spellar, rh John
Starkey, Dr. Phyllis
Stewart, Ian *(Eccles)*
Stinchcombe, Paul
Stoate, Dr. Howard
Strang, rh Dr. Gavin
Straw, rh Jack
Stringer, Graham
Stuart, Ms Gisela
Sutcliffe, Gerry
Tami, Mark *(Alyn)*
Taylor, rh Ann *(Dewsbury)*
Taylor, Dari *(Stockton S)*
Taylor, David *(NW Leics)*
Thomas, Gareth *(Clwyd W)*
Timms, Stephen
Tipping, Paddy
Touhig, Don *(Islwyn)*
Trickett, Jon
Turner, Dennis *(Wolverh'ton SE)*
Turner, Dr. Desmond *(Brighton Kemptown)*
Turner, Neil *(Wigan)*
Twigg, Derek *(Halton)*
Twigg, Stephen *(Enfield)*
Tynan, Bill *(Hamilton S)*
Vaz, Keith *(Leicester E)*
Vis, Dr. Rudi
Ward, Claire
Watson, Tom
Watts, David
White, Brian
Wicks, Malcolm
Williams, rh Alan *(Swansea W)*
Williams, Betty *(Conwy)*
Wills, Michael
Winterton, Ms Rosie *(Doncaster C)*
Woodward, Shaun
Woolas, Phil
Worthington, Tony
Wright, Anthony D. *(Gt Yarmouth)*
Wright, David *(Telford)*

Tellers for the Ayes:
Mr. Nick Ainger and
Paul Clark

NOES

Ainsworth, Peter *(E Surrey)*
Amess, David
Atkinson, Peter *(Hexham)*
Baldry, Tony
Barker, Gregory
Baron, John *(Billericay)*
Barrett, John
Bellingham, Henry
Beresford, Sir Paul
Boswell, Tim
Bottomley, rh Virginia *(SW Surrey)*
Brady, Graham
Brake, Tom *(Carshalton)*
Brazier, Julian
Breed, Colin
Brooke, Mrs Annette L.
Browning, Mrs Angela
Bruce, Malcolm
Burns, Simon
Burnside, David
Burstow, Paul
Burt, Alistair
Butterfill, Sir John
Cable, Dr. Vincent
Calton, Mrs Patsy
Cameron, David
Campbell, rh Sir Menzies *(NE Fife)*
Carmichael, Alistair
Chapman, Sir Sydney *(Chipping Barnet)*
Chope, Christopher
Clappison, James
Clifton-Brown, Geoffrey
Collins, Tim
Conway, Derek
Cotter, Brian
Cran, James *(Beverley)*
Davey, Edward *(Kingston)*
Davies, Quentin *(Grantham & Stamford)*

Davis, rh David *(Haltemprice & Howden)*
Djanogly, Jonathan
Doughty, Sue
Duncan Smith, rh Iain
Evans, Nigel
Ewing, Annabelle
Fabricant, Michael
Fallon, Michael
Field, Mark *(Cities of London & Westminster)*
Flight, Howard
Foster, Don *(Bath)*
Fox, Dr. Liam
Garnier, Edward
George, Andrew *(St. Ives)*
Gidley, Sandra
Goodman, Paul
Gray, James *(N Wilts)*
Green, Damian *(Ashford)*
Green, Matthew *(Ludlow)*
Grieve, Dominic
Gummer, rh John
Hague, rh William
Hammond, Philip
Hancock, Mike
Harris, Dr. Evan *(Oxford W & Abingdon)*
Harvey, Nick
Hawkins, Nick
Hayes, John *(S Holland)*
Heald, Oliver
Heath, David
Hogg, rh Douglas
Holmes, Paul
Horam, John *(Orpington)*
Howard, rh Michael
Hughes, Simon *(Southwark N)*
Jack, rh Michael
Jackson, Robert *(Wantage)*
Jenkin, Bernard
Kennedy, rh Charles *(Ross Skye & Inverness)*
Key, Robert *(Salisbury)*
Kirkbride, Miss Julie
Kirkwood, Sir Archy
Knight, rh Greg *(E Yorkshire)*
Lait, Mrs Jacqui
Lamb, Norman
Lansley, Andrew
Letwin, rh Oliver
Lewis, Dr. Julian *(New Forest E)*
Liddell-Grainger, Ian
Lidington, David
Lilley, rh Peter
Llwyd, Elfyn
Loughton, Tim
Luff, Peter *(M-Worcs)*
McIntosh, Miss Anne
Mackay, rh Andrew
McLoughlin, Patrick
Malins, Humfrey
Maples, John
Mates, Michael
Maude, rh Francis
Mawhinney, rh Sir Brian
May, rh Mrs Theresa
Mercer, Patrick
Mitchell, Andrew *(Sutton Coldfield)*
Moore, Michael
Moss, Malcolm
Murrison, Dr. Andrew
O'Brien, Stephen *(Eddisbury)*
Ottaway, Richard
Paterson, Owen
Pickles, Eric
Portillo, rh Michael
Pugh, Dr. John
Randall, John
Redwood, rh John
Rendel, David
Robathan, Andrew
Robertson, Hugh *(Faversham & M-Kent)*
Robertson, Laurence *(Tewk'b'ry)*
Robinson, Mrs Iris *(Strangford)*
Robinson, Peter *(Belfast E)*
Roe, Dame Marion
Rosindell, Andrew
Russell, Bob *(Colchester)*
Sanders, Adrian
Sayeed, Jonathan
Selous, Andrew
Shephard, rh Mrs Gillian
Shepherd, Richard
Simpson, Keith *(M-Norfolk)*
Smith, Sir Robert *(W Ab'd'ns & Kincardine)*
Smyth, Rev. Martin *(Belfast S)*
Soames, Nicholas
Spelman, Mrs Caroline
Spicer, Sir Michael
Spink, Bob *(Castle Point)*
Spring, Richard
Stanley, rh Sir John
Steen, Anthony
Streeter, Gary
Stunell, Andrew
Swayne, Desmond
Swire, Hugo *(E Devon)*
Syms, Robert
Tapsell, Sir Peter
Taylor, Ian *(Esher)*
Taylor, John *(Solihull)*
Taylor, Matthew *(Truro)*
Taylor, Dr. Richard *(Wyre F)*
Taylor, Sir Teddy
Teather, Sarah
Thomas, Simon *(Ceredigion)*
Thurso, John
Tonge, Dr. Jenny
Tredinnick, David
Turner, Andrew *(Isle of Wight)*
Tyrie, Andrew
Viggers, Peter
Walter, Robert
Waterson, Nigel
Webb, Steve *(Northavon)*
Whittingdale, John
Widdecombe, rh Miss Ann
Wiggin, Bill
Wilkinson, John
Willetts, David
Williams, Hywel *(Caernarfon)*
Wilshire, David
Winterton, Ann *(Congleton)*
Winterton, Sir Nicholas *(Macclesfield)*
Wishart, Pete
Yeo, Tim *(S Suffolk)*
Young, rh Sir George

Tellers for the Noes:
Mr. Crispin Blunt and
Mr. David Ruffley

Question accordingly agreed to.

GAMBLING BILL (CARRY-OVER)

Motion made, and Question put forthwith, pursuant to Order [29 October 2002 (Carry-over of Bills)],

That if, at the conclusion of this Session of Parliament, proceedings on the Gambling Bill have not been completed, they shall be resumed in the next Session.—*[Mr. Heppell.]*

The House divided: Ayes 295, Noes 172.

Division No. 299] **[10:40 pm**

AYES

Adams, Irene *(Paisley N)*
Ainsworth, Bob *(Cov'try NE)*
Alexander, Douglas
Allen, Graham
Anderson, Janet *(Rossendale & Darwen)*
Armstrong, rh Ms Hilary
Atherton, Ms Candy
Atkins, Charlotte
Bailey, Adrian
Banks, Tony
Barron, rh Kevin
Battle, rh John
Bayley, Hugh
Beard, Nigel
Begg, Miss Anne
Bell, Sir Stuart
Benn, rh Hilary
Berry, Roger
Betts, Clive
Blackman, Liz
Blears, Ms Hazel
Blizzard, Bob
Boateng, rh Paul
Bradley, rh Keith *(Withington)*
Bradley, Peter *(The Wrekin)*
Bradshaw, Ben
Brennan, Kevin
Brown, rh Nicholas *(Newcastle E Wallsend)*
Browne, Desmond
Bryant, Chris
Buck, Ms Karen
Burden, Richard
Burgon, Colin
Burnham, Andy
Byers, rh Stephen
Byrne, Liam *(B'ham Hodge H)*
Caborn, rh Richard
Cairns, David
Campbell, Alan *(Tynemouth)*
Campbell, Mrs Anne *(C'bridge)*
Campbell, Ronnie *(Blyth V)*
Caplin, Ivor
Casale, Roger
Cawsey, Ian *(Brigg)*
Challen, Colin
Chapman, Ben *(Wirral S)*
Chaytor, David
Clark, Mrs Helen *(Peterborough)*
Clark, Dr. Lynda *(Edinburgh Pentlands)*
Clarke, rh Charles *(Norwich S)*
Clarke, rh Tom *(Coatbridge & Chryston)*
Clelland, David
Clwyd, Ann *(Cynon V)*
Coaker, Vernon
Coffey, Ms Ann
Cohen, Harry
Colman, Tony
Connarty, Michael
Cook, rh Robin *(Livingston)*
Corston, rh Jean
Cousins, Jim
Crausby, David
Cruddas, Jon
Cummings, John
Cunningham, rh Dr. Jack *(Copeland)*
Cunningham, Jim *(Coventry S)*
Cunningham, Tony *(Workington)*
Curtis-Thomas, Mrs Claire
Davey, Valerie *(Bristol W)*
David, Wayne
Davidson, Ian
Davies, Geraint *(Croydon C)*
Dawson, Hilton
Dean, Mrs Janet
Denham, rh John
Dhanda, Parmjit
Dismore, Andrew
Dobson, rh Frank
Doran, Frank
Dowd, Jim *(Lewisham W)*
Drew, David *(Stroud)*
Eagle, Angela *(Wallasey)*
Eagle, Maria *(L'pool Garston)*
Efford, Clive
Ennis, Jeff *(Barnsley E)*
Etherington, Bill
Farrelly, Paul
Fitzpatrick, Jim
Fitzsimons, Mrs Lorna
Flint, Caroline
Flynn, Paul *(Newport W)*
Follett, Barbara
Foster, Michael *(Worcester)*
Foster, Michael Jabez *(Hastings & Rye)*
Gapes, Mike *(Ilford S)*
Gerrard, Neil
Gibson, Dr. Ian
Gilroy, Linda
Godsiff, Roger
Goggins, Paul
Griffiths, Jane *(Reading E)*
Griffiths, Nigel *(Edinburgh S)*
Griffiths, Win *(Bridgend)*
Hain, rh Peter
Hall, Mike *(Weaver Vale)*
Hall, Patrick *(Bedford)*
Hamilton, David *(Midlothian)*
Hamilton, Fabian *(Leeds NE)*
Hanson, David
Harman, rh Ms Harriet
Harris, Tom *(Glasgow Cathcart)*
Havard, Dai *(Merthyr Tydfil & Rhymney)*
Healey, John

Henderson, Doug *(Newcastle N)*
Henderson, Ivan *(Harwich)*
Hendrick, Mark
Hepburn, Stephen
Heppell, John
Hesford, Stephen
Heyes, David
Hill, Keith *(Streatham)*
Hodge, Margaret
Hood, Jimmy *(Clydesdale)*
Hoon, rh Geoffrey
Hope, Phil *(Corby)*
Howarth, rh Alan *(Newport E)*
Howells, Dr. Kim
Hoyle, Lindsay
Hughes, Beverley *(Stretford & Urmston)*
Hughes, Kevin *(Doncaster N)*
Humble, Mrs Joan
Hurst, Alan *(Braintree)*
Hutton, rh John
Iddon, Dr. Brian
Illsley, Eric
Irranca-Davies, Huw
Jackson, Helen *(Hillsborough)*
Johnson, rh Alan *(Hull W)*
Johnson, Miss Melanie *(Welwyn Hatfield)*
Jones, Helen *(Warrington N)*
Jones, Jon Owen *(Cardiff C)*
Jones, Kevan *(N Durham)*
Jones, Lynne *(Selly Oak)*
Jowell, rh Tessa
Joyce, Eric *(Falkirk W)*
Kaufman, rh Sir Gerald
Kelly, Ruth *(Bolton W)*
Kemp, Fraser
Kennedy, Jane *(Wavertree)*
Khabra, Piara S.
Kidney, David
King, Andy *(Rugby)*
King, Ms Oona *(Bethnal Green & Bow)*
Knight, Jim *(S Dorset)*
Ladyman, Dr. Stephen
Lammy, David
Lawrence, Mrs Jackie
Laxton, Bob *(Derby N)*
Lazarowicz, Mark
Lepper, David
Leslie, Christopher
Levitt, Tom *(High Peak)*
Lewis, Ivan *(Bury S)*
Liddell, rh Mrs Helen
Linton, Martin
Lloyd, Tony *(Manchester C)*
Love, Andrew
Lucas, Ian *(Wrexham)*
Luke, Iain *(Dundee E)*
McAvoy, Thomas
McCabe, Stephen
McCafferty, Chris
McDonagh, Siobhain
MacDonald, Calum
MacDougall, John
McGuire, Mrs Anne
McKechin, Ann
McKenna, Rosemary
Mackinlay, Andrew
McNulty, Tony
Mactaggart, Fiona
McWalter, Tony
McWilliam, John
Mahmood, Khalid
Mallaber, Judy
Marris, Rob *(Wolverh'ton SW)*
Marsden, Gordon *(Blackpool S)*
Marshall, David *(Glasgow Shettleston)*
Martlew, Eric
Meale, Alan *(Mansfield)*
Merron, Gillian
Michael, rh Alun
Milburn, rh Alan
Miliband, David
Miller, Andrew
Moffatt, Laura
Mole, Chris
Moonie, Dr. Lewis
Moran, Margaret
Morley, Elliot
Mullin, Chris
Munn, Ms Meg
Murphy, Denis *(Wansbeck)*
Murphy, Jim *(Eastwood)*
Naysmith, Dr. Doug
Norris, Dan *(Wansdyke)*
O'Brien, Bill *(Normanton)*
O'Brien, Mike *(N Warks)*
O'Hara, Edward
Olner, Bill
Organ, Diana
Osborne, Sandra *(Ayr)*
Pearson, Ian
Perham, Linda
Picking, Anne
Pickthall, Colin
Pike, Peter *(Burnley)*
Plaskitt, James
Pond, Chris *(Gravesham)*
Pope, Greg *(Hyndburn)*
Prentice, Ms Bridget *(Lewisham E)*
Prentice, Gordon *(Pendle)*
Primarolo, rh Dawn
Prosser, Gwyn
Quin, rh Joyce
Quinn, Lawrie
Rammell, Bill
Rapson, Syd *(Portsmouth N)*
Raynsford, rh Nick
Reed, Andy *(Loughborough)*
Reid, rh Dr. John *(Hamilton N & Bellshill)*
Robertson, John *(Glasgow Anniesland)*
Rooney, Terry
Ross, Ernie *(Dundee W)*
Roy, Frank *(Motherwell)*
Ruane, Chris
Ruddock, Joan
Russell, Ms Christine *(City of Chester)*
Ryan, Joan *(Enfield N)*
Sarwar, Mohammad
Sawford, Phil
Shaw, Jonathan
Sheerman, Barry
Sheridan, Jim
Simon, Siôn *(B'ham Erdington)*
Simpson, Alan *(Nottingham S)*
Singh, Marsha
Skinner, Dennis
Smith, rh Andrew *(Oxford E)*
Smith, Angela *(Basildon)*
Smith, rh Chris *(Islington S & Finsbury)*
Smith, Jacqui *(Redditch)*
Smith, John *(Glamorgan)*
Southworth, Helen
Spellar, rh John
Starkey, Dr. Phyllis
Stewart, Ian *(Eccles)*
Stinchcombe, Paul
Stoate, Dr. Howard
Strang, rh Dr. Gavin
Straw, rh Jack
Stringer, Graham
Stuart, Ms Gisela
Sutcliffe, Gerry
Tami, Mark *(Alyn)*
Taylor, rh Ann *(Dewsbury)*
Taylor, Dari *(Stockton S)*
Taylor, David *(NW Leics)*
Thomas, Gareth *(Clwyd W)*
Timms, Stephen
Tipping, Paddy
Touhig, Don *(Islwyn)*
Trickett, Jon
Turner, Dennis *(Wolverh'ton SE)*
Turner, Dr. Desmond *(Brighton Kemptown)*
Turner, Neil *(Wigan)*
Twigg, Derek *(Halton)*
Twigg, Stephen *(Enfield)*
Tynan, Bill *(Hamilton S)*
Vaz, Keith *(Leicester E)*
Vis, Dr. Rudi
Ward, Claire
Watson, Tom
Watts, David
White, Brian
Wicks, Malcolm
Williams, rh Alan *(Swansea W)*
Williams, Betty *(Conwy)*
Wills, Michael
Winterton, Ms Rosie *(Doncaster C)*
Woodward, Shaun
Woolas, Phil
Worthington, Tony
Wright, Anthony D. *(Gt Yarmouth)*
Wright, David *(Telford)*

Tellers for the Ayes:
Mr. Nick Ainger and
Paul Clark

NOES

Ainsworth, Peter *(E Surrey)*
Amess, David
Baldry, Tony
Barker, Gregory
Baron, John *(Billericay)*
Barrett, John
Bellingham, Henry
Beresford, Sir Paul
Boswell, Tim
Bottomley, rh Virginia *(SW Surrey)*
Brady, Graham
Brake, Tom *(Carshalton)*
Brazier, Julian
Breed, Colin
Brooke, Mrs Annette L.
Browning, Mrs Angela
Bruce, Malcolm
Burns, Simon
Burnside, David
Burstow, Paul
Burt, Alistair
Butterfill, Sir John
Cable, Dr. Vincent
Calton, Mrs Patsy
Cameron, David
Campbell, rh Sir Menzies *(NE Fife)*
Carmichael, Alistair
Chapman, Sir Sydney *(Chipping Barnet)*
Chope, Christopher
Clappison, James
Clifton-Brown, Geoffrey
Collins, Tim
Conway, Derek
Cotter, Brian
Davey, Edward *(Kingston)*
Davies, Quentin *(Grantham & Stamford)*
Davis, rh David *(Haltemprice & Howden)*
Djanogly, Jonathan
Doughty, Sue
Evans, Nigel
Ewing, Annabelle
Fabricant, Michael
Fallon, Michael
Field, Mark *(Cities of London & Westminster)*
Flight, Howard
Foster, Don *(Bath)*
Fox, Dr. Liam
Garnier, Edward
George, Andrew *(St. Ives)*
Gidley, Sandra
Goodman, Paul
Gray, James *(N Wilts)*
Green, Damian *(Ashford)*
Green, Matthew *(Ludlow)*
Grieve, Dominic
Hague, rh William
Hammond, Philip
Hancock, Mike
Harris, Dr. Evan *(Oxford W & Abingdon)*
Harvey, Nick
Hawkins, Nick
Hayes, John *(S Holland)*
Heald, Oliver
Heath, David
Hendry, Charles
Hogg, rh Douglas
Holmes, Paul
Horam, John *(Orpington)*
Howard, rh Michael
Hughes, Simon *(Southwark N)*
Jack, rh Michael
Jackson, Robert *(Wantage)*
Jenkin, Bernard
Kennedy, rh Charles *(Ross Skye & Inverness)*
Key, Robert *(Salisbury)*
Kirkbride, Miss Julie
Kirkwood, Sir Archy
Knight, rh Greg *(E Yorkshire)*
Laing, Mrs Eleanor
Lait, Mrs Jacqui
Lamb, Norman
Lansley, Andrew
Letwin, rh Oliver
Lewis, Dr. Julian *(New Forest E)*
Liddell-Grainger, Ian
Lidington, David
Lilley, rh Peter
Llwyd, Elfyn
Loughton, Tim
Luff, Peter *(M-Worcs)*
McIntosh, Miss Anne
Mackay, rh Andrew
McLoughlin, Patrick
Malins, Humfrey

Maples, John
Mates, Michael
Maude, rh Francis
Mawhinney, rh Sir Brian
May, rh Mrs Theresa
Mercer, Patrick
Mitchell, Andrew *(Sutton Coldfield)*
Moore, Michael
Moss, Malcolm
Murrison, Dr. Andrew
O'Brien, Stephen *(Eddisbury)*
Ottaway, Richard
Paterson, Owen
Pickles, Eric
Portillo, rh Michael
Pugh, Dr. John
Randall, John
Redwood, rh John
Rendel, David
Robathan, Andrew
Robertson, Hugh *(Faversham & M-Kent)*
Robertson, Laurence *(Tewk'b'ry)*
Robinson, Mrs Iris *(Strangford)*
Robinson, Peter *(Belfast E)*
Roe, Dame Marion
Rosindell, Andrew
Ruffley, David
Russell, Bob *(Colchester)*
Sanders, Adrian
Sayeed, Jonathan
Selous, Andrew
Shephard, rh Mrs Gillian
Shepherd, Richard
Simpson, Keith *(M-Norfolk)*
Smith, Sir Robert *(W Ab'd'ns & Kincardine)*
Smyth, Rev. Martin *(Belfast S)*
Soames, Nicholas
Spelman, Mrs Caroline
Spicer, Sir Michael
Spink, Bob *(Castle Point)*
Spring, Richard
Stanley, rh Sir John
Steen, Anthony
Streeter, Gary
Stunell, Andrew
Swayne, Desmond
Swire, Hugo *(E Devon)*
Syms, Robert
Tapsell, Sir Peter
Taylor, Ian *(Esher)*
Taylor, John *(Solihull)*
Taylor, Matthew *(Truro)*
Taylor, Dr. Richard *(Wyre F)*
Taylor, Sir Teddy
Teather, Sarah
Thomas, Simon *(Ceredigion)*
Thurso, John
Tonge, Dr. Jenny
Tredinnick, David
Turner, Andrew *(Isle of Wight)*
Tyrie, Andrew
Viggers, Peter
Walter, Robert
Waterson, Nigel
Webb, Steve *(Northavon)*
Whittingdale, John
Widdecombe, rh Miss Ann
Wiggin, Bill
Wilkinson, John
Willetts, David
Williams, Hywel *(Caernarfon)*
Willis, Phil
Wilshire, David
Winterton, Ann *(Congleton)*
Winterton, Sir Nicholas *(Macclesfield)*
Wishart, Pete
Yeo, Tim *(S Suffolk)*
Young, rh Sir George

Tellers for the Noes:
Mr. Crispin Blunt and
Mr. Peter Atkinson

Question accordingly agreed to.

GAMBLING BILL *[MONEY]*

Queen's recommendation having been signified—

Motion made, and Question put forthwith, pursuant to Standing Order No. 52 (Money resolutions and ways and means resolutions in connection with Bills),

That, for the purposes of any Act resulting from the Gambling Bill, it is expedient to authorise the payment out of money provided by Parliament of—

(1) expenditure of a Minister of the Crown in connection with the Act, and

(2) any increase attributable to the Act in *sums payable out of money provided by Parliament under* another enactment.—[*Mr. Heppell.*]

Question agreed to.

GAMBLING BILL *[WAYS AND MEANS]*

Motion made, and Question put forthwith, pursuant to Standing Order No. 52 (Money resolutions and ways and means resolutions in connection with Bills),

That, for the purposes of any Act resulting from the Gambling Bill, it is expedient to authorise—

(1) the imposition of a levy to be paid by holders of operating licences and to be expended on social projects connected with gambling,

(2) the imposition of a penalty on holders of operating licences who fail to ensure compliance with licence conditions, and

(3) the payment of sums into the Consolidated Fund.—[*Mr. Heppell.*]

Question agreed to.

EUROPEAN COMMUNITY DOCUMENTS

Motion made, and Question put forthwith, pursuant to Standing Order No. 119(9)(European Standing Committees),

GENERAL ARRANGEMENTS FOR EXCISE

That this House takes note of European Document No. 8241/04, Commission Report and draft Council Directive relating to Directive 92/12/EEC on the general arrangements for products subject to excise duty and on the holding, movement and monitoring of such products; and welcomes the principle of reducing administrative burdens for businesses but supports the United Kingdom Government's position that the 'distance-purchasing' elements of the current proposal are unacceptable, as they weaken the United Kingdom's law enforcement and revenue-raising ability.—*[Mr. Heppell.]*

Question agreed to.

DELEGATED LEGISLATION

Motion made, and Question put forthwith, pursuant to Standing Order No. 118(4)(Standing Committees on Delegated Legislation),

NATIONALITY, IMMIGRATION AND ASYLUM

That the Nationality, Immigration and Asylum Act 2002 (Specification of Particularly Serious Crimes) Order 2004 (S.I., 2004, No. 1910), dated 22nd July 2004, be referred to a Standing Committee on Delegated Legislation.—*[Mr. Heppell.]*

Question agreed to.

DEFENCE

Ordered,

That Mr. Crispin Blunt be discharged from the Defence Committee and Richard Ottaway be added.—*[Mr. McWilliam, on behalf of the Committee of Selection.]*

Schools (Field Work)

Motion made, and Question proposed, That this House do now adjourn.—*[Mr. Heppell.]*

10.53 pm

Dr. Ian Gibson (Norwich, North): There seems to be a conspiracy among the authors and authoresses of school textbooks that publish information that is never close to being interesting. There are of course exceptions. The writers believe in formula, which dulls interesting phenomena such as climate change and questions such as why are there seasons; the mists, why; the storms, why; and why do birds know the prospects of weather change even more sharply than Penny Tranter or even *Michael Fish—if I want to know the* weather I watch the birds rather than the BBC or ITV? Do people really contemplate the planet we live on? Are we mystified about where we come from? The Queen is worried about climate change. Did hobbits with small brains once roam the earth? Other questions include, how did the Norfolk broads form, and how do our brains and hearts function?

That is what school teaching, and higher education, too, should be about. It should be attractive, because we really want to know. The fault lies, I think, in our education, which is still seen by many as a chore, something that they really have to suffer.

School trips and field trips are an important part of education. They give us the opportunity to view our heritage, to be inspired and to be instructed. We can understand where we come from and the county where we live, enabling us to feel proud. I want to talk particularly about science field trips to such places as the Norfolk broads and the Holt and Wells study centres, which are a small part of what goes on in Norfolk. What we do in our counties can help with how we handle issues on the planet.

I have been sent evidence from the Norfolk environmental education service, and I conclude that it is struggling to advance its services to our young people. For example, it operates two outdoor education centres—the Eagle canoe club and Filby water activity centre, near Great Yarmouth. It is working with Whitlingham trust, just outside Norwich, to deliver water-based learning opportunities in the new Whitlingham country park, which has had great amounts of money from the New Opportunities Fund and Sport England's active England programme. It is being overseen by the Norwich rivers heritage trust, which is full of good folk from the region who are interested in young people going to that new outdoor centre.

From the environmental education service, I learn that minibuses are in decline, that the centre needs more support and help and that more people are unable to fund field work opportunities at A-level. Interestingly, it says that pupils cannot afford that, but I think it is the schools are having the trouble. They are cutting back and having trouble with visits and exercises in the field.

We are all very proud of the investment in education and the new schools, but why not involve young people in the schools in planning the new buildings so that they can feel proud about how the buildings can be constructed to deal with the environmental problems that are created? What a good way that would be to learn about environmental policies and science.

Let me return to school visits. Outdoor centres are fine, but my experience as a governor of schools and from trips that we have set up—and, of course, as a constituency MP; people write to us and we are lobbied by the Field Studies Council, the British Ecological Society, the Royal Geographical Society, the Royal Society for the Protection of Birds and so on—is that there are many problems. Many people are frightened by health and safety legislation. I deprecate what the NASUWT has said about the problems and its encouragement to teachers not to involve themselves in vibrant courses that are part of the education process. Other unions do not feel quite as bad.

We need to note that accidents are pretty rare. Figures *I have seen from the Adventure Activities Licensing* Authority show that there have been 57 deaths on school trips, 19 of which occurred during adventure activities between 1985 and 2004. The figures are not increasing, but the perception and fear of litigation remains a serious concern for teachers, provoked by organisations that ought, in my opinion, to know better. Risk can never be avoided in life, but what a chance field trips offer for students to think positively, examine risk and learn about risk and management as part of life skills.

Bird migration, frog spawning and similar issues can be raised. Why are there four seasons, I often ask myself. Do other people ask that, too? Why not five, for goodness' sake? I cannot think what the fifth might be, but it is interesting that those are questions people may ask.

There is a new subject called phenology, and I find that there are science centres—one at Bayfordbury in Hertfordshire—where the study of nature's calendar is very important. There they find that, for example, chestnut trees bloom sooner, and many other things happen at different times of the year—and they ask why. We cannot just say, "Climate change," to people without them asking, "What is climate change?" I think that we should be able to expect our young people—our kings and queens—to understand climate change, but they will not be able to unless they can observe, ask the questions and do the experiments during their education.

We often live in a world of fear, and it is time to dispel that feeling. When an Education Minister, a colleague of my hon. Friend the Minister who is here tonight, told me that people do not need to see the milky way for real because they can watch it on a computer screen, I started to think of phrases such as "heathen" and "poor soul". People need to see the thing for themselves.

Mr. Andrew Miller (Ellesmere Port and Neston) (Lab): My hon. Friend will know of my involvement with geology in a previous life. Does he agree that one of the great ways of exciting young people about the science of geology, and to get them to think about the planet on which they live, is to take them to some of the more exciting rock outcrops and show them some of the great fossil deposits? That cannot be done in a lab.

Dr. Gibson: I absolutely concur. Although there is great stuff on the media, such as the programmes made by the BBC unit in Bristol, that is not enough. There is nothing like seeing things for oneself and asking questions. That is what inspires, and makes people want to study science and get involved in some of the mysteries of life—because we definitely have not found out everything yet, and more ought to be done about it.

There are other factors that inhibit people from doing field trips. At key stage 2, participation in field work is rather sporadic and varying, and individual school commitment is often dependent on a specific member of staff; when that individual leaves the school there is a vacuum.

There is a need to bring back field work in biology. It is statutory in geography but only "recommended" for science. Very little field work is undertaken at key stage 3, despite the national strategy for science, and the situation is little better at key stage 4. The skills shortage of biologists with field work experience in schools will be perpetuated unless biologists themselves provide access to specialist field courses; I compliment organisations such as the Field Studies Council, which is doing that.

My figures say that the uptake of A-levels in biology and geography is falling nationally, and that there is difficulty in planning field courses because students will not commit themselves to A2 until they know their AS results. It is often easier not to teach ecology-based modules.

Funding has become a major issue. It is difficult when parents decline to contribute voluntarily, as is often asked of them. As a governor, I know about that—and of course, the poorer kids do not get encouragement from home, because of financial restrictions. School budgets are often too small to remedy deficits. When the money comes through from central Government to school budgets, often that money is not used for field courses, but is diverted into other pathways—worthwhile pathways, no doubt, but we miss out on that particular type of activity. Schools withdraw from making residential visits, and that means that inclusion and fair opportunity for all in education becomes a real issue.

There is also a lack of training to prepare teachers. This is an essential argument, I say to those weary willies who argue that health and safety is an issue. Risk management, and teachers going out of the classroom, is important both for initial teacher training, when people have the opportunity to study field sciences, and for serving teachers. There is a need for all key stage 2 teachers and all science specialists at key stage 3 and above to receive some training during ITT.

Serving teachers are doing a wonderful job in the classroom—but gosh, we could do a lot more in their training to make them want to get out there and see the world as it really is, to understand the patterns of life and impart them, and to instruct young people and give them the enthusiasm that takes them onwards. We have a history of academic field work in our education system; it is a learning mechanism and helps personal development. We want to ensure that quality can be delivered in an atmosphere of safety, allowing all pupils the opportunity, and the right, to such experience. I say that it should be for the many, not the few—a phrase that will be familiar to those who are present.

I do not think that the answer that I often get from my schools about sponsorship of the school pond by a local industry is enough. Of course, that is fine, but I want to see ring-fenced moneys to ensure that our young people are sent out there to look at things in a safe environment. In that way, we will solve many of the problems that everybody talks about, holding their hands up and saying, "Why don't young people want to do these interesting subjects?" If we do not give them the chance to go out, see things and ask the questions, and if we do not have a curriculum that encourages them to do so, is it any wonder?

11.5 pm

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Education and Skills (Mr. Stephen Twigg): I congratulate my hon. Friend the Member for Norwich, North (Dr. Gibson) on securing this important debate, which is also timely, considering that this subject has been under consideration by the Select Committee on Education and Skills.

Shortly before the summer recess, my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State set out our Department's five-year strategy for children and learners. As part of that strategy, we place great emphasis on the challenge for every school to be an environmentally sustainable school with a good plan for school transport encouraging walking and cycling, an active and effective recycling policy and a school garden or other opportunities for children to explore the natural world. We also say in our challenge for secondary schools that we want to widen opportunities beyond the classroom. Those opportunities often provide some of the most memorable experiences at school, such as being involved in the school trip or drama production, or playing in the school team.

I would like to place tonight's debate very much in the context of those commitments in the five-year strategy. There is a relevance across the curriculum, as I think my hon. Friend set out powerfully in his speech, in science, geography, personal social and health education and citizenship. There is an enormous challenge, of which he reminded the House, to make science in the curriculum exciting and attractive for children and young people throughout their school days.

The 10-year science and innovation framework sets out the Government's ambition, and in particular, the contribution to be made to economic growth and public services by science. Clearly, science education is absolutely central. My hon. Friend referred to the national network of science learning centres for teachers and technicians. There is a major £51 million partnership between the Government and the Wellcome Trust to enable those centres to be established and to act as a focal point for the profession, pulling together regional resources to help improve science teaching and learning. The first three regional centres opened their doors on 1 October this year, with others already offering courses on other sites in the interim, and all nine due to be open at the beginning of the next school year, next September.

One aspect of the work of those centres is enabling young people to learn about and use field work, to manage interesting experiments in the laboratory and to have confidence to use a range of strategies together with in-depth subject knowledge. We have funded both the Association for Science Education and the Geographical Association to develop training courses

[Mr. Stephen Twigg]

that will increase teacher skills and confidence in leading outdoor learning. That will be achieved through some of the science learning centres starting next year.

Clearly, freeing up teachers to teach is at the heart of the work force reform changes in our schools. The extra role for support staff is very important and can contribute to the encouragement and organisation of outdoor activities. Such staff can contribute by acting as local environmental volunteers, for example, or providing cover for a teacher who is out on field work, away from school.

In the 10-year science and innovation framework, we are committed to training a new cadre of higher level teaching assistants so that every secondary school in England can recruit at least one by 2007–08. Of course that is not enough. We also need to recruit more science teachers to enable the work to continue into the longer term.

My hon. Friend rightly reminded the House of the importance of involving children and young people in these areas. He referred in particular to the challenge of building new schools and involving young people in some of those decisions from an early stage. We have an ideal opportunity to do that with the "Building Schools for the Future" programme, which aims to rebuild or refurbish all our secondary schools over a 15-year period. As a Government we must rise to the challenge of ensuring that children and young people in our schools and in our communities are part of those decisions right from the beginning.

Last year we published, "Excellence and Enjoyment", our strategy for primary schools. That strategy encourages a rich and exciting curriculum, with better use of resources and opportunities in and beyond the classroom, to make learning more flexible and imaginative. Outdoor learning is central to the agenda of "Excellence and Enjoyment". I am pleased at the welcome that the document received not only in education, but in terms of the environment and outdoor learning. Getting children out of the classroom to explore the natural world is a powerful way of making science and the broader curriculum come alive. I tread with care when I disagree with my unnamed ministerial colleague whom my hon. Friend mentioned in his speech. I have no doubt that there can be no substitute for the excitement of outdoor learning and seeing the natural world with one's own eyes.

There is an exciting joint project between science learning centres and the Woodland Trust to tie in with the BBC's spring theme. Each of the regional centres is providing training for primary school teachers on how the arrival of spring can be measured by identifying trees in bud and the appearance of insects. Schools will be able to record their results on the Nature Detectives website as part of a national experiment. These are projects that we want to encourage, so that we can see the flowering of outdoor learning and field work, about which my hon. Friend rightly spoke.

I turn to the important topic that my hon. Friend mentioned—some of the barriers that exist or are perceived to exist to outdoor learning. It is important that we build the case for such learning. I concur with my hon. Friend in paying tribute to the Field Studies Council for the work that it does. The study that it published earlier this year provides us with substantial evidence that field work effectively planned, well managed and well taught can offer learners opportunities to develop their knowledge and skills in ways that add value to the everyday educational experience in the classroom.

Our own programme, "Growing Schools", is funding further research, including in-depth case studies at outdoor sites, and investigating teaching and learning processes, learning outcomes and wider benefits. We are also conducting action research with a group of teachers, field centre staff and farm educators to trial teaching and evaluation strategies. That will report in April next year.

I very much agree with my hon. Friend about the importance of school trips. I recognise that there are barriers to schools doing field work. There are practical issues and others that are less tangible. I am keen to send out the message that we want to help and support teachers in realising that by following good practice, we can ensure that visits are as safe as possible, and we can be confident that unfair accusations against teachers and other staff can be swiftly dismissed. Our own investigations through "Growing Schools" show that there is a generally shared view of the barriers to schools undertaking learning outside the classroom. We want to work with everyone—the teacher unions, the head teacher associations, the other unions, the "Growing Schools" national advisory group and the whole range of national organisations—to make sure we get this right. I would also like to put on record my thanks to the subject associations, especially those involved with geography and science, for the important role that they are playing in supporting us in developing this important work.

We have produced practical and well-received guidance on health and safety, with five booklets aimed at specific target audiences for local education authorities, for schools and for group leaders, and these are available on our teachernet website. We are doing all that we can to manage the risks. There are risks—my hon. Friend is right—but it is possible for the current system to be harnessed in the way that he described to the educational benefit of children and young people in our schools.

Some people are also keen on the idea of a statutory entitlement to a set number of days of outdoor learning and I can see some attractions in that sort of approach. What we want to do, and what we are doing as a Department, is to work closely with a wide group of partners towards a common vision. A number of our partner organisations have put to us the idea of an outdoor learning manifesto and I am keen to explore that further.

I am grateful to my hon. Friend for giving me this opportunity to respond on behalf of the Government and for making a powerful case this evening for the importance of field work in science, in geography and throughout the school curriculum at every stage. I join with him in saying that I think there is a continued and, I hope, growing role for that excellent work in the outdoor classroom.

Question put and agreed to.

Adjourned accordingly at sixteen minutes past Eleven o'clock.

House of Commons

Tuesday 2 November 2004

The House met at half-past Eleven o'clock

PRAYERS

[MR. SPEAKER *in the Chair*]

Oral Answers to Questions

HEALTH

The Secretary of State was asked—

Hospital-acquired Infections

1. **Ann Winterton** (Congleton) (Con): If he will make a statement on the *(a)* incidence and *(b)* cost to the NHS of hospital-acquired infection in the last period for which figures are available. [194999]

The Secretary of State for Health (Dr. John Reid): Because we were the first Government to introduce mandatory surveillance of the incidence of hospital-acquired infections, previous data are not as robust as we would wish. However, previous surveys and estimates indicate that the proportion of patients who acquire an infection in hospital is around 9 per cent., which is largely unchanged from a survey conducted 24 years ago in 1980. The rates of infection in most other European countries range between 6 and 10 per cent. The best available estimate is that hospital-acquired infections cost the NHS £1 billion a year.

Ann Winterton: Hospital-acquired infection is currently a massive problem in this country, and the Government's solution is to reintroduce the matron. Will the Secretary of State confirm that matrons will be taken from experienced nursing staff, will be properly trained and will therefore have the authority and professional standing to close wards for thorough cleaning, to recruit additional infection-control nursing staff and to train others in infection control? Does he agree that if those safeguards are not introduced, the matron's charter will be yet another piece of meaningless spin, which will be costly for patients?

Dr. Reid: I regret the hon. Lady's choice of last sentence. I accept that hospital-acquired infections are a major challenge for the NHS and for all of us. I do not regard the matter as a party-political issue, which is why I invited the Conservative spokesman, who has accepted the invitation, to discuss the matter and share ideas and proposals. I confirm that we will examine all proposals.

It is not true that we have been involved in spin. We are the first Government to collect the data, which are admittedly limited—it is difficult to obtain some data for international as well as domestic reasons. However, we are passing power to front-line staff and the chief nursing officer has been put in charge. We want to make sure that nurses and matrons are in control of not only hygiene, but hospital cleaning, and that they are involved in writing up contracts. Hospital-acquired infections are a long-standing, complex issue, and I hope that all hon. Members share my determination to tackle them.

Joan Ruddock (Lewisham, Deptford) (Lab): Last week, I visited three wards in Lewisham hospital, each of which contained two patients with methicillin-resistant Staphylococcus aureus. Those patients had entered the hospital with the condition. Has my right hon. Friend any advice on community action to try to reduce the incidence of that condition and, in particular, for nursing homes, where far too many elderly people may unfortunately be subject to that infection?

Dr. Reid: My hon. Friend is right. Staphylococci are present outside hospitals, and methicillin-resistant Staphylococcus is, of course, the most difficult Staphylococci to tackle. MRSA is dangerous in hospitals because the people there are, by definition, ill, weak and, in many cases, elderly, and it is so dangerous for vulnerable patients. We will examine all ways in which to tackle MRSA, and those areas of hospitals where people are vulnerable, critical or elderly are key.

There are many reasons why it is difficult to overcome MRSA. We must tackle issues such as shortages of trained staff, old buildings with single rooms, high capacity, an emphasis on cost rather than cleaning and the bacteria's immunity. New hospitals, more staff, single rooms and hospital design are important, as well as hygiene training, infection-control nurses on the ground and control by front-line staff. All those measures are available, along with scientific research. We are tackling all those issues, and I hope that all hon. Members who have any ideas about how to put those measures into practice—in some ways, MRSA is the biggest challenge that we face in our hospitals—will join us. I welcome all ideas from all quarters.

Sir Michael Spicer (West Worcestershire) (Con): Why has the incidence of MRSA increased so quickly in recent years?

Dr. Reid: We estimate that the rate has risen by about 5 per cent. over the past couple of years, so the increase is about 2.5 per cent. a year. *[Interruption.]* We have collected data on bloodstream bacteria MRSA only for the past couple of years. The data are limited, but we have never collected them before.

As far as we can see, the incidence of MRSA is rising, and it is a major problem for us, but I issue two pleas to hon. Members to put this in proportion. First, it is not rising at 100 per cent. per annum, as some newspapers are suggesting. Secondly, the overall rate of hospital-acquired infections, which is estimated to be about 9 per cent., is roughly the same as 25 years ago, and probably 50 years ago, although we do not have the empirical data to verify that. There is no internationally-classifiable coding for deaths caused specifically by bacteria-led MRSA. Another reason why our data collection is less adequate than I would like is that MRSA is normally a contributory factor and is often not cited on death certificates. We want to see improvements in that respect, as well.

Mr. Andrew Lansley (South Cambridgeshire) (Con): Last August, hospital cleanliness scores were published. This year they have not been published. Why not?

Dr. Reid: That matter has been passed to the Healthcare Commission and the scores will feature as part of the star ratings.

Mr. Lansley: More talk from the Secretary of State, but no action. Perhaps he would like to admit that the reason is that last year the hospital cleanliness scores suggested that no hospital in the whole national health service had an unacceptable level of cleanliness. That did not accord at all with patient experience and illustrated the fact that the system is discredited, as the Healthcare Commission subsequently found.

Let me try the Secretary of State with another one. Last December, the chief medical officer said that there should be a rapid review process to consider new products and processes, 50 of which have been presented to the Department. A meeting took place on 24 August. On 11 August, the Minister in the other place said that reports on just six would be published by mid-October, but that has not happened—why not?

Dr. Reid: Since the hon. Gentleman said at the time that we were not independent when assessing hospital cleanliness and suggested today that the reports are discredited—I do not accept that, but it is his view—I should have thought that he would welcome the fact that we have asked the independent Healthcare Commission to estimate cleanliness in hospitals. It seems that if we do it, it is wrong, and if we ask an independent body to do it, it is wrong. That is a sign of bias rather than objectivity on the hon. Gentleman's part; he is so much better when he puts party politics aside.

On his other question, let me say in my normal balanced fashion that I would have liked the study of these materials and treatments against MRSA to have started more quickly than it did. He is right about that. The organisation has met only once and is meeting again this month. The list of six that it has considered is scheduled to be published, and that will happen very soon. It is running a couple of weeks late, but I hope that it will not be much more than that.

Mr. Lansley: I am afraid that, as we have demonstrated many times in this House, the Government's response is one of a lack of urgency and delay. The data from the patient environment action teams are not being published. When we asked why not, we were told that it was because they were awaiting ministerial approval. That has nothing to do with the independence of the Healthcare Commission.

Let me return to the point at which the Secretary of State started—that we need more data. More than four years ago, the National Audit Office said that the mandatory scheme should be extended to include all parts of the voluntary surveillance scheme that predated it and should be done on the basis of clinical specialty; but Ministers said no. Where is the National Audit Office's recommended national infection control manual, on which the Department started work in 2001? Even the matron's charter, which was mentioned by my hon. Friend the Member for Congleton (Ann Winterton), said that people would be able to refer to a model cleaning contract, yet that does not exist. Why are the Government all talk and no action? Why cannot people see the action that needs to be taken to deliver cleaner hospitals and a safe environment for patients?

Dr. Reid: Over the past few years the Government have been acting to deal with some of the very issues that the hon. Gentleman raises. He says that we are not putting out data. In fact, in July we issued data on bloodstream MRSA infections. I have to say, again in a balanced spirit, that an objective observer would recognise that during the 20 years in which they were in power the previous Government refused to publish any data. We are the first Government to have mandatory surveillance, the first Government to collect and publish the data, and the first Government to ensure that hospitals are judged on their cleanliness.

Earlier, we discussed the potential contributory causes of MRSA. On old hospitals, we have the biggest building programme in history. On lack of staff, we have brought in 100,000 more doctors and nurses. On the immunity of the bug, within a month we are bringing the best international minds to this country to tackle the problem. We are putting nurses back in charge. We have just issued the matron's charter, and the chief nursing officer is taking this over. On cleanliness, above all, I am the Secretary of State who said—

Mr. Speaker: Order. Perhaps I can make an appeal to the Front Benches. It is now quarter to the hour, and we are still on Question 1. I need sharper answers and sharper questions. Perhaps Paul Burstow can help us.

Mr. Paul Burstow (Sutton and Cheam) (LD): Thank you for that instruction, Mr. Speaker. The Secretary of State says that this Government are the first to do anything about MRSA. Surely that does not absolve them, however, if they are not doing enough to tackle the problem and there is still more to do. I certainly want to take him up on his offer of a meeting to discuss that issue. In July, he published a report promising cleaner, safer hospitals and action to deal with that. I have asked questions about that report, because it came just two days before a very critical report by the National Audit Office about the Government's performance in relation to hospital infections. The answer that the Minister gave me was that the report was a hastily cobbled together report on work in progress and contained nothing about new policies. Is that the case—

Mr. Speaker: Order. It would be helpful if the Secretary of State could provide a sharp reply. At this rate, we shall only get four questions into the hour.

Dr. Reid: The answer to the first part of the hon. Gentleman's question is yes; the answer to the last part is no. The answer to the middle part is that I look forward to seeing him at the meeting.

Hospitals (Wakefield)

2. **Mr. Bill O'Brien** (Normanton) (Lab): When he last met the chairman of the Mid Yorkshire Hospitals NHS Trust to discuss new hospital provision in the Wakefield, Pontefract and Dewsbury area; and if he will make a statement. [195000]

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Health (Miss Melanie Johnson): The Minister of State, Department of Health, my right hon. Friend the Member for Barrow and Furness (Mr. Hutton) met the chairman of Mid Yorkshire Hospitals NHS Trust and local MPs in July to discuss a number of issues, including the hospital development plan. Those discussions have continued since then.

Mr. O'Brien: I thank my hon. Friend for that reply. Does she accept, however, that we have particular problems with the new development, especially at the Pontefract general infirmary—the PGI? In a local press statement on 12 August, the chairman promised that there would be a review of the proposed bed reductions at Pontefract, because he was concerned about that. On 3 September, at a meeting of the health and social partnership, a promise of 100 beds at the PGI was made, but it was withdrawn in October. Patients who have received major surgery at the PGI are now being told that they might have to go to Dewsbury to complete their treatment, which would be a great imposition on their families, who might have to catch three or four buses to get there. Will my hon. Friend take an interest in the points that I have raised, and investigate them so that a more friendly service can be provided?

Miss Johnson: Of course I take an interest in the points that my hon. Friend has raised. As he is well aware, there is a need to get the trust back on track in regard to its financial deficit, and work is going on to achieve that. We are committed to finding a sustainable solution that will give affordable and appropriate health care to the local community, and of course I shall be interested to listen to any further points that my hon. Friend would like to make on this issue.

Jon Trickett (Hemsworth) (Lab) *rose—*

Mr. Speaker: Order. I say to the hon. Gentleman that Dorset is just a bit too far away from Dewsbury.

Patient Choice

3. **Hugh Bayley** (City of York) (Lab): What steps he is taking to give NHS patients more choice about which *(a)* doctor and *(b)* hospital treats them. [195001]

The Secretary of State for Health (Dr. John Reid): We are committed to giving patients greater choice within the national health service. We are already offering a choice of hospital to patients facing long waits for surgery, and we are extending choice to patients in regard to how they access treatment, advice and care within primary care, all of which is free at the point of need.

Hugh Bayley: I am glad to hear what the Secretary of State says about primary care, because 80 per cent. of doctor/patient consultations in the NHS involve general practitioners rather than hospital doctors. Does he accept, however, that not all GPs are the same? They have different specialist interests and training, and they perform to different qualities of care. Meaningful choice for patients depends on the patient having reliable information about the clinical practice and quality of care of individual doctors. What steps are the Government taking to provide better information to patients about primary care, so that they can have real power and a real choice about which doctor treats them?

Dr. Reid: My hon. Friend is absolutely right: if we are to give more power, information and choice to patients, we cannot restrict that to the secondary sector. Of course, we are now getting greater capacity in primary care: some 4,200 more doctors than previously; more specialisms, with some 1,300 doctors now specialising; new walk-in centres, which do not require an appointment; new commuter centres placed conveniently next to where people travel; and new roles for nurses, nurse practitioners, specialists and consultants. All of that opens up capacity, and therefore choice, in primary care.

Mr. Peter Lilley (Hitchin and Harpenden) (Con): Does the Secretary of State recall that one of the first acts of the incoming Labour Government was to abolish the last vestiges of the right to choose which NHS hospital one wanted to go to, which had existed since 1948? Does he now propose to rescind the regulation introduced in 1999, which stopped the funding of a person's choice to go to a hospital other than the one chosen for them by the bureaucracy? Does he recognise that the current talk about choice is a welcome whiff of a U-turn on his part, but unless the Government are prepared to allow genuine choice, rather than a limited choice among hospitals selected by the bureaucracy, there will be no real choice and no return to the choice that was endemic in the health service when it was set up?

Dr. Reid: There is no legislative bar to extending choice, and as from next December, patients will be able to choose from a range of five shortlisted by the primary care trust. Increasingly, as we put in capacity, that will be extended so that by 2008, as the right hon. Gentleman said, any patient in England will be able to choose from any hospital in England, whether in the independent, charitable or NHS sectors, provided that it meets NHS standards and prices. I merely make one point: that can be achieved only because of our investment in capacity. It is a cruel deceit to promise people that capacity will be taken out of the NHS and that a greater degree of choice will still be given. We have heard for centuries that we are all free to dine at the Ritz, and only the lack of money prevents us from doing it. It is the same in the NHS—his party taking money out of the NHS will reduce choice, not extend it.

Jim Sheridan (West Renfrewshire) (Lab): Does my right hon. Friend agree that if people are to have real choice in terms of which hospital they attend, accessibility must be a major factor in the criteria? Does he also agree that if people cannot afford to travel to hospitals, or there is no public transport infrastructure, they cannot have that choice?

Dr. Reid: Yes on both counts, which is why we provide both capacity and travel facilities. The truth is that most people want easy and quick access to quality services as locally as possible. But the fact is that after 60 years, that is not available to everyone, so we must extend it so that people can go where they choose. I merely say one thing: we do not extend choice by saying that it will be available only to those who can pay half of the cost of their operation. The charges for operations that the Conservative party would introduce represent the cruellest deceit ever perpetrated on people in this country, especially the old and most vulnerable.

Dr. Jenny Tonge (Richmond Park) (LD): Does the Secretary of State agree that patient choice would be enhanced if patients held their own records? Patient-held records would remove the need for complicated IT systems, because the doctors whom the patient had chosen would always have access to the information that they needed about that patient.

Dr. Reid: In theory, that sounds like an advance from the current position, in which big files often get lost. Were we all asked to keep such big files, I suspect that the same thing might happen. Now that this country is at the forefront of information technology, surely the answer is to reduce such large files to a format that can be transferred easily between providers, so that when a patient decides to go to that hospital rather than this hospital, or that doctor rather than this doctor, there are no excuses and no physical bars to that transfer. Information technology will therefore become a source of information, power and choice to patients in a modern national health service.

NHS Dentistry

4. **Mr. Parmjit Dhanda** (Gloucester) (Lab): If he will make a statement on the availability of NHS dental services for *(a)* children and *(b)* older people. [195002]

The Minister of State, Department of Health (Ms Rosie Winterton): Approximately 6.5 million children and 2.9 million adults aged over 65 are registered with NHS dentists. We will improve on those figures by making an additional investment of £368 million in NHS dentistry, and by recruiting an extra 1,000 dentists over the next year.

Mr. Dhanda: I thank my hon. Friend, and invite her to visit Gloucester and see why we need some of that generally much-needed investment. Does she know about my constituent Terri Selby and her daughter Eleanor? My constituent was recently told that for her daughter to be given NHS dental treatment at a local practice, she herself would have to sign up to become a private patient there. Will my hon. Friend take measures to ensure that such blackmailing of people to join the private sector is prevented in my constituency and, indeed, in constituencies throughout the land?

Ms Winterton: My hon. Friend is absolutely right: that is unacceptable behaviour. When such offers are made, there is rarely anything in writing. Moreover, some dentists are telling patients that they must pay a registration fee of about £40 before being taken on by the NHS. That too is unacceptable. Dentists are independent contractors and have the right to refuse to accept NHS patients if they wish, but we will discuss with the General Dental Council whether further action can be taken, in particular by means of the section 60 order that we are presenting to the House.

My hon. Friend's area is one of those receiving special support from the Department. I should be delighted to go there to see how matters are progressing.

Dame Marion Roe (Broxbourne) (Con): Given the recent announcement of an increase in the number of places at dental schools, is the Minister confident that there are enough academic dentists both to train students and to engage in research?

Ms Winterton: I have had discussions with the chairs of dental schools about how we can handle the academic side. I am very confident that our announcement of 170 extra training places, backed up by £20 million of extra investment, sends a clear message about our commitment to NHS dentistry and to training more dentists. I am also confident that it will play a big part in attracting academics to training and teaching.

Jim Dobbin (Heywood and Middleton) (Lab/Co-op): I thank my hon. Friend for her recent visit to the Langley dental practice in my constituency, where Mr. Tariq Drabu provides 100 per cent. NHS dentistry for young and old. She will have noted the close working relationship between Heywood and Middleton primary care trust and the practice.

Mr. Drabu conducts outreach surgical sessions at the local clinic, with the support of local staff. Would my hon. Friend consider encouraging other dentists to emulate that model? It might return dentists from the private sector to the NHS.

Ms Winterton: Visiting the Langley clinic and meeting local dentists was a very encouraging experience. I know that my hon. Friend's PCT has received about £83,000 in extra support this year, and is using it to give some 5,000 more patients access to NHS dentistry.

I agree with what my hon. Friend says about that practice. It is increasing the number of patients who register, while also ensuring that dentists go into the community to reach those who do not want to register—for there will always be such people. Outreach services are important. The PCT's way of dealing with some local access difficulties is certainly impressive, and should be passed on to those in other areas.

Dr. Andrew Murrison (Westbury) (Con): What success has the Minister had in recruiting dentists from European Union accession states, and how many dentists have been recruited internally as a result of her Department's £100,000 advertising campaign?

Ms Winterton: The first 30 Polish dentists will arrive in January 2005. Recruits have already come from Spain, and have been allocated to specific areas. Following discussions with the GDC, everyone from outside the EU who was on the waiting list to take the international qualifying examination to start work as dentists will have been offered a place before the end of the year.

In terms of responses to the recruitment campaign, I do not have the figures on me. I think that, about a month ago, there were about 180 responses to the initial campaign and they were being followed through at individual PCT level. It is a start, but we have a long way to go. I certainly would not deny that but, as the hon. Gentleman knows, we are also moving towards local commissioning—more than 2,500 dentists have already moved to that—with additional capacity being provided too. As we have said, we will recruit 1,000 extra dentists by October 2005, which will go a long way towards solving many of the problems that we inherited from the previous Administration.

Anne Picking (East Lothian) (Lab): Does my hon. Friend agree that we need to find some mechanism that places an obligation on dentists to provide NHS dentistry? After all, it is the NHS that trains those people and supports them through their training. It is time that they gave something back. We need to introduce a quota system to do that.

Ms Winterton: My hon. Friend is right. People feel strongly that, when training is provided out of the public purse, there should be a commitment to the NHS. As I am sure she is aware, there are difficulties in doing that because dentists are independent contractors and there are issues around restraint of trade, but we have tried to look at other ways, for example, golden handshakes, to organise commitment to the NHS. As we move towards local commissioning, there is the ability within the new contracts to specify longer time limits for dentists who work for the NHS to remain within it.

Tariff-based Trust Funding

5. **Steve Webb** (Northavon) (LD): What assessment he has made of the effects of his proposals for tariff-based funding of NHS trusts on the financial position of *(a)* the North Bristol NHS Trust and *(b)* the South Gloucestershire primary care trust. [195003]

The Minister of State, Department of Health (Mr. John Hutton): NHS trust income will move to tariff-based funding by 2008–09. Financial modelling on the impact for NHS providers will be completed by December. For primary care trusts, the introduction of payment by results will be cost neutral.

Mr. Webb: I am not sure that that response told me anything. North Bristol NHS Trust has run up cumulative deficits in excess of £40 million in the past few years and is now undergoing financial recovery, which involves some difficult decisions about current services. The movement to tariff-based funding will affect a relatively high-cost trust particularly badly coming on top of financial recovery. I am aware that the Minister plans to phase in the move to tariff-based funding but will he pay particular attention to trusts that are in financial recovery, lest he wreck the very financial recovery that they are trying to achieve?

Mr. Hutton: Yes, we will certainly do that.

Health Check-ups

6. **Simon Hughes** (Southwark, North and Bermondsey) (LD): What plans he has to provide the opportunity for a regular NHS health check-up for NHS patients in England. [195004]

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Health (Miss Melanie Johnson): NHS patients already have the right to request a health check-up from their general practitioner if they have not been seen by their GP in the previous three years. People aged 75 or more can request a check-up if they have not been seen by their GP in the previous year.

Simon Hughes: I am grateful for that reply. While I share the Secretary of State's view that the last thing we want is a nanny state, will the Minister tell us how her proposals will ensure that the people who are most vulnerable and least likely to go to see a doctor are encouraged to have the check-up? What is the difference between the policies this month and the ones that were announced by the Prime Minister in July 2000?

Miss Johnson: We accept that people want more support to improve their health and we are looking at a range of ways to do that, which will be announced in the White Paper. My hon. Friends have also made some announcements in relation to health checks for people with mental health and learning disability.

Mr. David Chaytor (Bury, North) (Lab): Does my hon. Friend accept that, if a regular health check is good enough for Members of Parliament, it should be good enough for every citizen in the United Kingdom, and that this is the biggest single change that could bring about the transition from a national sickness service to a national health service? What more can the Government do to encourage GPs to take such screening seriously?

Miss Johnson: We have just undertaken the biggest ever consultation on prevention and public health and there will be a White Paper coming out before the end of the year. I am sure that that will address the point that my hon. Friend has made. In addition, the contract itself already incentivises quality checks, and GPs are already operating within that new framework.

Mr. David Tredinnick (Bosworth) (Con): Does the Minister not think that these health checks should look carefully at the likelihood of allergies developing, given that some 250,000 children in this country suffer from them? A Health Committee report was highly critical of the Government's ability to deal with allergies. What is she going to do about this issue?

Miss Johnson: The chief medical officer and the Secretary of State will look at the Health Committee's report very carefully over the next few weeks, and we will publish a detailed response as soon as possible.

Mr. David Kidney (Stafford) (Lab): With advice, we can all do more to look after our own health through a healthy diet and regular exercise. When will the new White Paper on healthy living be published?

Miss Johnson: Before the end of the year.

Chiropody

7. **Mrs. Jacqui Lait** (Beckenham) (Con): What measures he is taking to improve access to chiropody services. [195005]

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Health (Dr. Stephen Ladyman): An increasing number of chiropodists are working in the NHS and entering training. Since 1999, the number of qualified chiropodists and podiatrists employed in the NHS has increased by 13 per cent., and the number of students has increased by 33 per cent.

Mrs. Lait: The Minister's robust defence of NHS chiropody provision is interesting, but if what he says is so, why are so many people being forced to leave the NHS and to go private for chiropody?

Dr. Ladyman: People are not being forced to leave. Many primary care trusts are choosing to focus specialist podiatrist services on those in greatest need, while organising other methods of access to services such as nail cutting. That is the change that is taking place, and it is a perfectly rational one.

Mr. Andrew Miller (Ellesmere Port and Neston) (Lab): I accept my hon. Friend's point that the change is a rational one, but does he agree that somebody who is suffering pain as a result of such a condition should not be excluded from NHS treatment?

Dr. Ladyman: Yes.

Mr. John Baron (Billericay) (Con): Despite what the Minister says, the latest Government figures clearly show that the number of patients receiving chiropody care in the NHS has fallen significantly in recent years, and that many hundreds of thousands of mostly elderly patients are being denied any form of NHS foot care altogether. The Society of Chiropodists and Podiatrists has confirmed that many patients are simply being bumped off waiting lists. I put it to the Minister that there is a lottery in chiropody care, as a result of which many elderly patients are needlessly suffering. Will he now stop blaming the PCTs, which have to juggle a number of Government targets and priorities—chiropody is not one of them—stop ignoring the situation, and do something to put it right?

Dr. Ladyman: It sounds to me like the hon. Gentleman is asking for a target. The figures that we collect cannot be used in any way, shape or form to draw the conclusions that he draws, which are a complete distortion of, and misuse of, those figures. What the statistics do show is that the level of access to chiropody services is stable and has been for many years.

NHS Dentistry

8. **Mr. George Mudie** (Leeds, East) (Lab): If he will make a statement on the numbers of NHS dentists. [195006]

The Minister of State, Department of Health (Ms Rosie Winterton): More than 19,300 dentists currently work in general dental services and personal dental services, but not all have a full-time commitment to the NHS. That is why we are increasing that figure by 1,000 whole-time equivalent dentists by next October, and increasing the number of dentists in training by 25 per cent.

Mr. Mudie: I thank the Minister for that reply. Faced with the latest withdrawal from the NHS of a large dental practice in my constituency, I have been saddened by the PCT's slowness in assuring patients that replacement NHS facilities will be provided, and its slowness in telling them that they should not sign expensive private dental treatment contracts. Will the Minister join me in reassuring my constituents in that regard, and in helping to persuade the PCT to act a little quicker and more positively in dealing with their genuine concerns?

Ms Winterton: I certainly sympathise with my hon. Friend's point. Sometimes a PCT's ability to communicate with patients can depend on the amount of notice given by the dentist, and dentists do not always stick to giving the amount of notice that should be given. I am sorry that the practice has decided to leave the NHS, particularly when we are putting significant new investment into the service. I also understand, however, that the PCT has made arrangements for other dentists across the east Leeds area to take on additional patients. All the patients deregistered by that practice will be able to find a new dentist. I accept my hon. Friend's point about ensuring that PCTs move quickly in such circumstances.

Dr. Richard Taylor (Wyre Forest) (Ind): Despite the Minister's assurances about numbers, the availability of NHS dentistry to our constituents does seem to be declining. Has that been mirrored by a decrease in spending on NHS dentistry?

Ms Winterton: One of the difficulties that arose in the past when NHS dentists moved away from the service was that the money reverted from local to national level. In changing how the contract operates, we are now trying to ensure that, if a dentist leaves the NHS, the amount of money that he would have been paid remains at local level. That will stabilise the situation. On top of that, we have also announced an extra 20 per cent. of growth money—something like £368 million—that will go into NHS dentistry from October next year. Putting in those very necessary extra resources will bring about a vast improvement in the position.

Andy Burnham (Leigh) (Lab): May I tell the Minister about the shock that hundreds of patients in Leigh felt when, without warning, they received a letter from their dental practice announcing that it was opting out of the NHS and that patients would have to pay £15 a month? As she knows, my constituency, like hers, is not an area where most people are readily able to afford such fees. I would make two suggestions. We could have more salaried dentists, making it easier to control their work load, or we could have much more widespread water fluoridation and put all these dentists out of business.

Ms Winterton: My hon. Friend is absolutely right on the first point. When we move towards local commissioning, we are able to increase the number of salaried dentists because local PCTs will be able to make a judgment about what is most appropriate for their area. On the second point, I know that my hon. Friend feels passionately about fluoridation. He is right that, where water fluoridation is introduced, we expect the number of children with no dental decay to increase by about 15 per cent. within five to 10 years. As he knows, strategic health authorities are now looking into the wishes of local populations and we shall be setting out regulations soon. I am sure that my hon. Friend will continue to play an active part in promoting water fluoridation in his constituency.

Mr. James Gray (North Wiltshire) (Con): Dentists covering the area of Box and Colerne in my constituency have recently joined a long string of dentists who have completely withdrawn from the NHS. That means that there is simply no NHS dentistry available at all in large parts of my constituency. Does the Minister remember that on 28 September 1999 the Prime Minister promised at the Labour party conference that an NHS dentist would be available for all who wanted one within two years—in other words, by 2001? Will the Minister now update us on when the whole population of Great Britain will have access to an NHS dentist?

Ms Winterton: As the hon. Gentleman probably knows, we have set up some 47 dental access centres, increased the availability of one-off and emergency treatments for patients, and provided the option to ring NHS Direct, so people can access a dentist. However, the situation is unsatisfactory, as I would be the first to accept. That is precisely why we are taking the measures that we are at the moment. SDA estimates mean that approximately 700,000 extra places will be found by using short-term access money. We estimate that the overall figure is about 2 million, but as we move to local commissioning, we are confident that it can be achieved.

Ms Joan Walley (Stoke-on-Trent, North) (Lab): May I tell my hon. Friend that Stoke-on-Trent has been identified as an area where more NHS dentists are urgently needed? There is now a proposal for an outreach teaching centre in Stoke-on-Trent under the auspices of the Birmingham dental school. Will she take account of the urgent need to establish such a training centre for new dentists in the town as soon as possible?

Ms Winterton: Outreach centres are certainly an issue we have been looking at. A lot of evidence suggests that dentists tend to cluster around dental schools, so in considering training it is important to look at how we can put people into different areas. I have had some discussions about that with the chairs of the dental schools, and proposals will be put forward. A working group has been set up between the Department of Health and the Department for Education and Skills to look at some of the issues, and I shall make further announcements shortly.

Delayed Discharges

9. **Mrs. Annette L. Brooke** (Mid-Dorset and North Poole) (LD): What assessment he has made of progress in reducing delayed discharges from hospital. [195007]

The Secretary of State for Health (Dr. John Reid): The report "Better Health in Old Age", published today by Professor Ian Philp, highlights the progress already made on delayed discharge, which has fallen from 6,419 adults delayed in acute hospital beds in December 2001 to 2,619 in June 2004. That is a fall of almost 60 per cent. in less than two years, which has released capacity of 1 million bed days a year. That is equivalent to building eight district general hospitals.

Mrs. Brooke: The Commission for Social Care Inspection has found that pressure to free up beds is forcing staff to transfer people into nursing homes when a home care package might be preferred. Is the Secretary of State content that the needs and wishes of vulnerable older patients are fully taken into account when targets are pursued? Should we consider whether the target or the needs and wishes of the people should take precedence?

Dr. Reid: I beg to differ with the hon. Lady: the report found no such thing. It contrasted bad practice with good practice, and we want all local authorities and everyone involved to follow the good practice that it highlighted.

Mr. Jim Cousins (Newcastle upon Tyne, Central) (Lab): I congratulate my right hon. Friend on his efforts. In the city of Newcastle, the problem of bed blocking has largely been resolved over a period of 12 months.

That said, at a meeting in about four hours' time, the new Liberal administration in Newcastle will declare the position of director of social services redundant. That gives me some concern about whether our developments and progress will be maintained. Will my right hon. Friend keep a close eye on that?

Dr. Reid: I am surprised and disappointed to hear that. As my hon. Friend pointed out, we have made fantastic progress on delayed discharges and have put in very high real-terms increases for social care funding. The national delayed discharge grant of £100 million has assisted with that. I am pleased to reassure my hon. Friend that there is still a statutory obligation that means that someone will have to be appointed to be in charge of adult social services.

Rev. Martin Smyth (Belfast, South) (UUP): While I congratulate the Minister on the decline in the number of those requiring to be discharged from hospital, what total and what percentage of those discharges are now being dealt with by intermediate carers?

Dr. Reid: There has indeed been a very welcome increase in intermediate care, and I hope that that will continue. I do not have the exact figures, but we have put great effort into making sure that the transition from hospital to home in the community is one that has been facilitated by resources and capacity. If I may, I shall write to the hon. Gentleman with the exact figures.

Mr. Bill Olner (Nuneaton) (Lab): I congratulate the Secretary of State on the improving figures on people being held in hospital instead of going home or to other places. It is the case, though, particularly around this time of year, that a lot of elderly people suffer accidents, and there are other winter problems. What capital or other resources are being put into local hospitals so that they are better able to provide for the elderly at this time?

Dr. Reid: My hon. Friend is right to say that we are putting tremendous effort into making sure that hospitals are prepared for the winter. Although we have coped extremely well over the past three winters—some of the terrible sights that we previously saw did not appear, which is to the credit of NHS staff—we should never take that for granted. One bad viral infection or the spread of something like a variant of flu can always make things very difficult, which is why I am glad that, despite the problems with Chiron, we are now on stream with flu vaccines so that anyone who wants one should certainly be sure to get one.

Other very simple things could be done, such as our efforts to protect old people from falls. Some 400,000 old people a year seriously damage themselves through falls. We have a simple programme, laughed at by some aesthetes, called the sloppy slipper programme. Those 400,000 often injure themselves because of faulty footwear, which can be simply remedied, with a great deal of relief for everyone. There are also intermediary care facilities in which 330,000 people, many of them old folk, are assisted between hospital and home.

Royal United Hospital, Bath

10. **Mr. David Heath** (Somerton and Frome) (LD): If he will make a statement on the financial situation of the Royal United hospital, Bath. [195008]

The Minister of State, Department of Health (Mr. John Hutton): The trust is working with the Avon, Gloucestershire and Wiltshire strategic health authority to achieve a recurrent balanced financial position. In order to assist in this process, the Department has deferred the repayment of deficits and provided significant and sustained direct financial support through the SHA in each of the past three years.

Mr. Heath: Anyone who knows the RUH gives credit for the standard of surgical and medical nursing care there and pays tribute to the efforts of the management team, in combination with the Government, in putting things right. The fact remains, however, that patients at the RUH still pay a penalty for the management mistakes of years ago. In a context of increasing resources for the NHS, surely it makes sense for the RUH to start with a level playing field from which it can build, rather than a deficit from which that is more difficult.

Mr. Hutton: I think we all agree in principle with the hon. Gentleman. The truth is, however, that the money has to come from somewhere. If he is going to wipe out a deficit, it has to be paid for by other parts of the NHS. To imagine that anything else is possible is the fantasy-land politics that large sections of the Opposition inhabit.

Health Trust Funding

11. **Matthew Taylor** (Truro and St. Austell) (LD): What account is taken of local wage rates in allocating funds to health trusts; and if he will make a statement. [195009]

The Minister of State, Department of Health (Mr. John Hutton): NHS allocations policy has taken account of differences in local wage rates since 1976. The market forces factor, within the funding formula, addresses variations in costs in delivering care, such as higher recruitment and retention costs. The formula is reviewed by an independent body, the Advisory Committee on Resource Allocation. Decisions on the 2006 to 2008 allocations have still to be made.

Matthew Taylor: What the Minister does not say is that historically the impact of different wage rates in the private sector in the wider community have been mitigated both by a balancing factor, so that neither the highest nor the lowest is fully factored in, and by counting the poorest 46 of the 177 wage areas as one group, effectively raising the poorest areas—Cornwall has the lowest wages of any—up 46 places in the rankings. Why is the Minister determined to implement, through the tariffs, a system that will tie the amounts paid to local hospitals one to one to local wage rates, when national pay scales apply in the NHS, leaving the poorest areas to get the least NHS funding—with, I understand, no academic research to back that up? Will he at least place the detailed research to justify that in the House of Commons Library?

Mr. Hutton: Ministers act on the advice of the independent experts who have historically provided that sort of information to us. We are trying to be fair to everyone across the NHS. My hon. Friend the Member for Falmouth and Camborne (Ms Atherton) recently discussed that with my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State.

I am surprised by the hon. Gentleman's impression that something is fundamentally flawed with the market forces factor and that it should not be taken into account. He might want to read paragraph 4.63 on page 25 of Liberal Democrat policy paper No. 68, which says:

"Funding will be"—

Mr. Speaker: Order. I instruct the Minister not to waste the time of the House.

Ms Candy Atherton (Falmouth and Camborne) (Lab): There have been real improvements in Cornish health care in recent years, and I am grateful to the Government for that. However, there is concern in the county about the issue. Will my right hon. Friend reassure me and my constituents that the vital investment in Cornish health services will continue?

Mr. Hutton: I am certainly prepared to have a serious discussion with my hon. Friend about that, but I can tell her that the Liberal Democrats have no answer to the problem.

Mr. Owen Paterson (North Shropshire) (Con): In my constituency, there are two enterprising sets of GPs—in Ellesmere and in Oswestry—who want to take advantage of competitive local wage rates and expand the service and the number of people they employ, but they also depend on allocations of funds from central Government to the primary care trust. The Minister's colleague, an Under-Secretary of State for Health, wrote to me on 15 June saying that those allocations to PCTs would be made "in the autumn". Today is 2 November. When in NHS terms does autumn end and winter begin? When will we know about those figures?

Mr. Hutton: We hope to make allocations to primary care trusts very soon, but we are waiting for figures from the Office for National Statistics on population growth. Given the representations that Ministers have received, it is important that we base the allocations on the most up-to-date information about population growth, because they are capitation payments. We hope to be able to do that in January.

Linda Gilroy (Plymouth, Sutton) (Lab/Co-op): I thank my right hon. Friend for the £233 million increase in strategic health authority funding since 1997, which has allowed us to have nearly 2,000 extra nurses and about 84 general practitioners. On the market forces factor, I thank him for the discussions that he has held with me since I raised that matter in March. It is my understanding that there has been some progress over the summer and I hope that he will continue to discuss it with us, as he has just indicated. Does he agree—

Mr. Speaker: Order. That is about the third supplementary question that the hon. Lady has asked. There should be only one supplementary question.

Mr. Hutton: We shall certainly continue those discussions with both my hon. Friends. In fact, the NHS in the south-west peninsula has received additional funding of nearly £400 million and I doubt very much whether that would have come from any of the Opposition parties.

Mental Health

12. **Sir Nicholas Winterton** (Macclesfield) (Con): If he will make a statement on the future provision of care for mentally ill mothers with babies in the north-west of England. [195010]

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Health (Dr. Stephen Ladyman): Mental health services throughout England are going through a radical programme of modernisation to improve access to effective treatment and care, reduce unfair variation and raise standards. National standards for mental health have been set through the mental health national service framework and the standard of care for mothers in the children's national service framework.

Sir Nicholas Winterton: Will the Minister give some indication of what assessment he has made of the effect on patients and their families of the proposed closure of the mother and baby unit in the mental health unit of Leighton hospital, which serves the Macclesfield constituency? With the closure of that facility, will he confirm what specialised provision there would be for mentally ill mothers with babies in Cheshire, Wirral, Merseyside, north Wales, Shropshire and the north Staffordshire area? That matter is very important to my constituents.

Dr. Ladyman: I am sure it is, but it is also very important that mothers with such problems in the hon. Gentleman's constituency receive the right sort of care, and usually that is best provided at home. The decisions that have to be taken are local and my understanding is that the local trusts are increasing provision at home, which means that there has been decreasing demand for those beds, so trusts have to take a view as to how best to provide in-patient services. That is what they are doing and I encourage the hon. Gentleman to engage in that consultation.

General Practitioners (Bedfordshire and Hertfordshire)

13. **Alistair Burt** (North-East Bedfordshire) (Con): What his estimate is of the number of general practitioners needed in the Bedfordshire and Hertfordshire strategic health authority over the next 20 years. [195011]

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Health (Dr. Stephen Ladyman): It is the responsibility of Bedfordshire and Hertfordshire strategic health authority to analyse the local situation regarding GP numbers and vacancies and to develop plans to provide the best possible primary care services for its residents. That process began in April 2004. Currently, there are 957 GPs in the SHA area, an increase of 74 since 1997.

Alistair Burt: The Minister's brief may also tell him that an internal paper from the Bedfordshire and Hertfordshire strategic health authority states that the number of vacant GP posts in the area, currently 72, is expected to rise to 139 within three years and to 233 by 2011, and that over the next three years the SHA needs to recruit and retain the equivalent of 332 full-time GPs. That is long before the completion of the 160,000 new houses anticipated for the area by 2031. Where will those GPs come from, and is not the pressure to build new houses in the area so great that it is stretching precious infrastructure—physical and human—just too far?

Dr. Ladyman: If the hon. Gentleman had bothered to read the report to which he referred a little further, he would have seen that there are detailed plans on where the GPs will come from. The plan was produced because the local primary care trust was doing its job and forward planning to ensure that it could meet the challenges in his constituency.

Barbara Follett (Stevenage) (Lab): I know that my local primary care trust congratulates the Minister on his forward planning in this area. It is certainly aware of the need to provide extra GPs to meet the requirements of extra housing. However, it is worried about the effect that section two of the new GP contract—the provisions on payments for meeting quality targets—will have on its ability to fund GPs in the future. With that in mind, will my hon. Friend have another look at how the payments are funded?

Dr. Ladyman: The payments have been agreed and about 80 per cent. of GPs voted for the new contract. The financing of the specific provision in the contract is being fully resourced and an extra £1.8 billion is being provided from the centre to ensure that quality requirements can be met with the contract fully funded. The local primary care trust is predicting the challenges that it will face in the years ahead and ensuring that it can respond to them, and I am delighted that my hon. Friend accepts that such planning is being done appropriately.

Post Offices (Pensions and Benefits)

12.31 pm

Sir Robert Smith (West Aberdeenshire and Kincardine) (LD): I beg to move,

That leave be given to bring in a Bill to amend the procedures for collecting pensions and benefits from Post Offices.

The Bill would provide for a simpler process for opening a Post Office card account, prohibit pressure from being put on those who opt for such an account to switch to using a high street bank and ensure that all applicants clearly understand that an exceptions service is available.

These are times of great change not only in terms of the way in which our constituents receive their pensions and benefits, but for the Post Office, because the changes introduced by the Government have an impact on our post offices' economics and how they operate. Traditionally, our constituents have been able to use girobooks to collect their pensions and benefits from a post office, but the Government are withdrawing that system in favour of direct payment. The method of direct payment according to which people may go directly to a post office to access payments is the Post Office card account, which is a substitute for the girobook, but the Government are encouraging people to switch to using bank accounts, although they offer an exceptions service for those who cannot cope with either service.

The Government are forcing the pace of change because, as we know, people had the option to use their bank accounts prior to the Government's encouragement of that method, but they chose not to exercise it. We should respect the way in which our constituents wish to receive their pensions and benefits. We should understand that they have their own ways of budgeting and running their lives instead of forcing the pace of change for ministerial convenience. It is important to legislate on the matter to allow choice given the many other ways in which we have tried to persuade the Government to see the error of their ways and understand our constituents' need for genuine choice, rather than forcing choice on them.

There are consequences of a system that forces people to switch the way in which they handle their cash and finances from that with which they grew up. It is extremely dangerous for the Government to push people who are used to weekly budgeting with cash into using bank accounts against their wishes. Many people who currently collect cash from a post office have a bank account, but use it only for saving or to draw rainy-day amounts, rather than for day-to-day budgeting. If such people prematurely switch to receiving their pensions in their bank accounts, owing to the way in which the Department for Work and Pensions handles those people, and try to manage all their weekly budgeting through those accounts, they could get into any kind of muddle. That could lead to an overdraft, and they would thus be faced with letters from banks costing £20 or £30. A Post Office card account, however, cannot be overdrawn. It is a simple replacement for the girobook. People who use the account may still use their post offices and budget with cash.

The changes to the system also have consequences for our post offices—both rural and urban. The Government have had to recognise the additional pressures on rural post offices as they lose their traditional business of handling girobooks and they have had to come up with a subsidy of £150 million a year. That will continue until 2008 as an attempt to protect the rural post office network.

The Post Office has also had to undergo a major reorganisation of its urban branches. Only this week we have learned that Crown post offices are to face reorganisation. It is concerning to our constituents that the urban reinvention programme—the re-planning of the urban network of sub-post offices—went ahead without including the Crown reorganisation, as many will have assumed that, having lost their traditional urban post office, a Crown post office would provide the safety net.

For many communities, the post office is the last vital link with public services. It is the last meeting point and the last shop in many a rural village. People collecting their pensions also give such shops business. Using the post office sustains any other economic enterprise in the branch. The Government have promised that people will be able to continue to use their post office to collect pensions and benefits, but that will be a hollow promise if the post office is no longer there to use. It is therefore extremely important that we maintain the economic viability of post offices.

Primarily, my Bill aims to protect individuals. Following an inquiry last year by the Trade and Industry Committee into the way in which the Government handled the transition to direct payment, I am extremely worried about the way in which our constituents appear to be pressurised into switching to the use of bank accounts—the Government's preferred method—to receive their pensions or benefits. I seek to redress the balance.

The danger of switching to a bank account is not only that people might become overdrawn but the fact that many bank accounts cannot be accessed at a post office. HSBC, Halifax Bank of Scotland and the Royal Bank of Scotland group still have not provided a link to their current accounts through the Post Office. Therefore, encouraging the use of bank accounts—especially those I have just mentioned—automatically means that people can no longer use their post office. The Bill sets out a procedure to enable a neutral choice to be made.

The National Federation of Sub-Postmasters has highlighted such a choice in its 2004–05 manifesto. Hon. Members will find the document extremely useful in understanding the needs of our sub-postmasters and how best we can take forward a viable post office network. My Bill addresses the key part in the document on access to pensions and benefits in which the federation requests that the system be simplified. Currently, there are about eight steps to opening a Post Office card account. On receipt of a letter from the Government asking whether one wants to switch from the girobook, one has only to fill in one's bank details in order to use a bank account, but eight hurdles must be crossed in order to open a Post Office card account.

The claimant receives an invitation pack for direct payment from the Department for Work and Pensions. The claimant then has to phone the Department's euphemistically named customer conversion centre where, as many of our constituents will attest, they have to fight quite hard to insist on their right to a card

[Sir Robert Smith]

account. The Department then sends the claimant a personal invitation document; the claimant takes the personal invitation document to the post office; the post office gives the claimant a card account application form; the claimant completes the application form and returns it to the sub-postmaster, who sends it to Post Office Ltd; Post Office Ltd then sends the claimant account details, a personal identification number and a pick-up notice for the claimant to pick up the card at the branch.

The Government slightly improved the service over the summer. The claimant used to have to fill in the account details from the Department's direct payment invitation pack, but at least the Government have short-circuited that last stage, and details can now be sent directly to the sub-post office, where the form will have already been filled in.

The federation suggests a far simpler system. When mailed at the end of the girobook system, the constituent is presented with a simple choice of whether to tick the box to say that they want to use an account at the post office, and to take the pre-completed form that has arrived at the same time to the local sub-post office to open an account. Alternatively, they can tick a box to indicate that they want to use a bank or building society account, in which case they may fill in a bank mandate. Thirdly and importantly, the federation suggests a third option of the exceptions service, under which someone may receive regular payments by girocheque through the post. It suggests that it should be made clear that if the constituent fails to respond, the latter option will automatically be enabled. Many constituents find the new system worrying and may well prefer to use the exceptions service.

It is vital to have a simple process for the future, because conversion applies not only to current claimants; all new claimants will have to consider their options and it is essential that they are aware that they can still use the Post Office and open a card account. There will be a clear statement in the Bill on the procedures to be followed for a DWP customer to open a card account. Hon. Members on both sides of the House have concerns about the pressure that is being put on people to switch to bank accounts and the Bill will state clearly that no pressure should be put on people using the service to switch from a Post Office card account. The Post Office should be driven by customer choice, not departmental convenience.

The House must exert its authority and insist that pensioners and those on benefits have a fair choice as to how they collect their cash in future. I commend the Bill to the House.

Question put and agreed to.

Bill ordered to be brought in by Sir Robert Smith, Mr. Roger Berry, Malcolm Bruce, Richard Burden, Mr. Edward Davey, Mr. Nigel Evans, Kate Hoey, Mr. Lindsay Hoyle, Mr. John Randall, Mr. Alan Reid, Mr. Andrew Robathan and Mr. Peter Viggers.

POST OFFICES (PENSIONS AND BENEFITS)

Sir Robert Smith accordingly presented a Bill to amend the procedures for collecting pensions and benefits from Post Offices: And the same was read the First time; and ordered to be read a Second time on Friday 19 November, and to be printed [Bill 170].

Children Bill [*Lords*] (Programme) (No.2)

Motion made, and Question proposed,

That the programme order of 13th September 2004 in relation to the Children Bill [*Lords*] be amended as follows—

1. Paragraphs 4 and 5 of the order shall be omitted.

2. The Proceedings shown in the first column of the following table shall (so far as not previously concluded) be brought to a conclusion at the time specified in the second column.

TABLE

Proceedings	*Time for conclusion of proceedings*
Proceedings on New Clauses standing in the name of a Minister of the Crown and proceedings on New Clauses relating to Part 1.	2.30 p.m. on the day on which proceedings on Consideration are begun.
Proceedings on remaining New Clauses, other than New Clauses relating to the reasonable punishment of children.	4.15 p.m. on that day.
New Clauses relatinmg to the reasonable punishment of children and remaining proceedings on Consideration.	6.00 p.m. on that day.

3. Proceedings on Third Reading shall (so far as not previously concluded) be brought to a conclusion at 7 p.m. on the day on which proceedings on Consideration are begun.—[Margaret Hodge.]

12.42 pm

Tim Loughton (East Worthing and Shoreham) (Con): The Opposition do not want to hold up the Chamber's work this afternoon because we have a lot of business to get on with, which is why we cannot agree to this programme motion. We are about to discuss no fewer than 43 amendments and 16 new clauses; to tackle the important subject of new clause 2, which was completely emasculated in Committee, new developments on fostering, which have appeared since Committee, and serious outstanding problems on databases in clause 12; and we want to give a proper airing to parental access, and the whole subject, which we were fortunate enough to avoid in Committee, of smacking. The time allocated, as we have suggested all along, is really not sufficient to tackle these substantial issues. For that reason we cannot accept the programme motion.

Mrs. Annette L. Brooke (Mid-Dorset and North Poole) (LD): Liberal Democrats find the programme motion unacceptable because we have some important issues to consider and, unlike the hon. Member for East Worthing and Shoreham (Tim Loughton), I do think that we need to discuss the issue of reasonable chastisement in great detail today. We would not seek to divide the House because we would prefer to spend the time on debate, but in the event of a Division we could not support the motion.

Question put:—

The House divided: Ayes 258, Noes 148.

Division No. 300] **[12:43 pm**

AYES

Adams, Irene *(Paisley N)*
Ainger, Nick
Ainsworth, Bob *(Cov'try NE)*
Allen, Graham
Anderson, rh Donald *(Swansea E)*
Armstrong, rh Ms Hilary
Atherton, Ms Candy
Austin, John
Bailey, Adrian
Baird, Vera
Barnes, Harry
Barron, rh Kevin
Battle, rh John
Bayley, Hugh
Beard, Nigel
Beckett, rh Margaret
Begg, Miss Anne
Berry, Roger
Betts, Clive
Blackman, Liz
Boateng, rh Paul
Bradley, rh Keith *(Withington)*
Bradley, Peter *(The Wrekin)*
Bradshaw, Ben
Brennan, Kevin
Bryant, Chris
Burden, Richard
Burgon, Colin
Burnham, Andy
Byrne, Liam *(B'ham Hodge H)*
Cairns, David
Campbell, Alan *(Tynemouth)*
Campbell, Mrs Anne *(C'bridge)*
Casale, Roger
Caton, Martin
Cawsey, Ian *(Brigg)*
Challen, Colin
Chapman, Ben *(Wirral S)*
Chaytor, David
Clapham, Michael
Clark, Mrs Helen *(Peterborough)*
Clark, Dr. Lynda *(Edinburgh Pentlands)*
Clark, Paul *(Gillingham)*
Clarke, rh Tom *(Coatbridge & Chryston)*
Clelland, David
Clwyd, Ann *(Cynon V)*
Coaker, Vernon
Coffey, Ms Ann
Cohen, Harry
Colman, Tony
Corston, rh Jean
Cousins, Jim
Cranston, Ross
Crausby, David
Cruddas, Jon
Cryer, John *(Hornchurch)*
Cummings, John
Cunningham, rh Dr. Jack *(Copeland)*
Cunningham, Jim *(Coventry S)*
Cunningham, Tony *(Workington)*
Curtis-Thomas, Mrs Claire
Davey, Valerie *(Bristol W)*
David, Wayne
Davidson, Ian
Dawson, Hilton
Dhanda, Parmjit
Dismore, Andrew
Dobbin, Jim *(Heywood)*
Dobson, rh Frank
Donohoe, Brian H.
Doran, Frank
Drew, David *(Stroud)*
Eagle, Angela *(Wallasey)*
Eagle, Maria *(L'pool Garston)*
Ennis, Jeff *(Barnsley E)*
Etherington, Bill
Farrelly, Paul
Field, rh Frank *(Birkenhead)*
Fisher, Mark
Flint, Caroline
Flynn, Paul *(Newport W)*
Follett, Barbara
Foster, Michael *(Worcester)*
Foster, Michael Jabez *(Hastings & Rye)*
Gapes, Mike *(Ilford S)*
Gerrard, Neil
Gilroy, Linda
Goggins, Paul
Griffiths, Jane *(Reading E)*
Griffiths, Nigel *(Edinburgh S)*
Griffiths, Win *(Bridgend)*
Grogan, John
Hain, rh Peter
Hall, Mike *(Weaver Vale)*
Hall, Patrick *(Bedford)*
Hamilton, David *(Midlothian)*
Hanson, David
Harman, rh Ms Harriet
Harris, Tom *(Glasgow Cathcart)*
Havard, Dai *(Merthyr Tydfil & Rhymney)*
Healey, John
Henderson, Doug *(Newcastle N)*
Henderson, Ivan *(Harwich)*
Heppell, John
Hesford, Stephen
Hodge, Margaret
Hood, Jimmy *(Clydesdale)*
Hope, Phil *(Corby)*
Hopkins, Kelvin
Howarth, rh Alan *(Newport E)*
Howarth, George *(Knowsley N & Sefton E)*
Hoyle, Lindsay
Hughes, Beverley *(Stretford & Urmston)*
Hughes, Kevin *(Doncaster N)*
Humble, Mrs Joan
Hurst, Alan *(Braintree)*
Iddon, Dr. Brian
Illsley, Eric
Irranca-Davies, Huw
Jackson, Glenda *(Hampstead & Highgate)*
Johnson, rh Alan *(Hull W)*
Johnson, Miss Melanie *(Welwyn Hatfield)*
Jones, Helen *(Warrington N)*
Jones, Jon Owen *(Cardiff C)*
Jones, Kevan *(N Durham)*
Jones, Martyn *(Clwyd S)*
Jowell, rh Tessa
Joyce, Eric *(Falkirk W)*
Kaufman, rh Sir Gerald
Kelly, Ruth *(Bolton W)*
Kennedy, Jane *(Wavertree)*
Khabra, Piara S.
Kilfoyle, Peter
King, Andy *(Rugby)*
King, Ms Oona *(Bethnal Green & Bow)*
Knight, Jim *(S Dorset)*

Lawrence, Mrs Jackie
Laxton, Bob *(Derby N)*
Lazarowicz, Mark
Leslie, Christopher
Levitt, Tom *(High Peak)*
Lewis, Terry *(Worsley)*
Linton, Martin
Lloyd, Tony *(Manchester C)*
Love, Andrew
Lucas, Ian *(Wrexham)*
Luke, Iain *(Dundee E)*
McAvoy, Thomas
McCafferty, Chris
MacDougall, John
McFall, rh John
McGuire, Mrs Anne
McKechin, Ann
McKenna, Rosemary
McWilliam, John
Mahmood, Khalid
Mahon, Mrs Alice
Mallaber, Judy
Mann, John *(Bassetlaw)*
Marris, Rob *(Wolverh'ton SW)*
Marshall, David *(Glasgow Shettleston)*
Martlew, Eric
Meale, Alan *(Mansfield)*
Merron, Gillian
Michael, rh Alun
Milburn, rh Alan
Miliband, David
Miller, Andrew
Moffatt, Laura
Mole, Chris
Moran, Margaret
Morgan, Julie
Morley, Elliot
Mudie, George
Munn, Ms Meg
Murphy, Denis *(Wansbeck)*
Murphy, Jim *(Eastwood)*
Naysmith, Dr. Doug
O'Brien, Bill *(Normanton)*
O'Brien, Mike *(N Warks)*
O'Hara, Edward
Olner, Bill
O'Neill, Martin
Organ, Diana
Osborne, Sandra *(Ayr)*
Owen, Albert
Perham, Linda
Picking, Anne
Pickthall, Colin
Pike, Peter *(Burnley)*
Plaskitt, James
Pond, Chris *(Gravesham)*
Pound, Stephen
Prentice, Ms Bridget *(Lewisham E)*
Prentice, Gordon *(Pendle)*
Primarolo, rh Dawn
Prosser, Gwyn
Purchase, Ken
Quinn, Lawrie
Rapson, Syd *(Portsmouth N)*
Raynsford, rh Nick
Reed, Andy *(Loughborough)*
Reid, rh Dr. John *(Hamilton N & Bellshill)*
Robertson, John *(Glasgow Anniesland)*
Roche, Mrs Barbara
Rooney, Terry
Ross, Ernie *(Dundee W)*
Roy, Frank *(Motherwell)*
Ruane, Chris
Ruddock, Joan
Russell, Ms Christine *(City of Chester)*
Sarwar, Mohammad
Sawford, Phil
Sedgemore, Brian
Shaw, Jonathan
Sheerman, Barry
Sheridan, Jim
Shipley, Ms Debra
Simpson, Alan *(Nottingham S)*
Singh, Marsha
Smith, rh Andrew *(Oxford E)*
Smith, John *(Glamorgan)*
Smith, Llew *(Blaenau Gwent)*
Southworth, Helen
Starkey, Dr. Phyllis
Stewart, Ian *(Eccles)*
Stinchcombe, Paul
Strang, rh Dr. Gavin
Stringer, Graham
Stuart, Ms Gisela
Tami, Mark *(Alyn)*
Taylor, rh Ann *(Dewsbury)*
Taylor, Dari *(Stockton S)*
Thomas, Gareth *(Clwyd W)*
Timms, Stephen
Tipping, Paddy
Touhig, Don *(Islwyn)*
Trickett, Jon
Truswell, Paul
Turner, Dennis *(Wolverh'ton SE)*
Twigg, Derek *(Halton)*
Tynan, Bill *(Hamilton S)*
Vaz, Keith *(Leicester E)*
Vis, Dr. Rudi
Walley, Ms Joan
Wareing, Robert N.
Watts, David
White, Brian
Wicks, Malcolm
Williams, rh Alan *(Swansea W)*
Williams, Betty *(Conwy)*
Winnick, David
Winterton, Ms Rosie *(Doncaster C)*
Woodward, Shaun
Woolas, Phil
Worthington, Tony
Wright, Anthony D. *(Gt Yarmouth)*
Wright, David *(Telford)*

Tellers for the Ayes:
Jim Fitzpatrick and
Joan Ryan

NOES

Ainsworth, Peter *(E Surrey)*
Amess, David
Baldry, Tony
Barker, Gregory
Baron, John *(Billericay)*
Bercow, John
Blunt, Crispin
Boswell, Tim
Brady, Graham
Brake, Tom *(Carshalton)*
Brazier, Julian
Breed, Colin
Brooke, Mrs Annette L.
Browning, Mrs Angela
Bruce, Malcolm
Burns, Simon
Burnside, David
Burstow, Paul
Burt, Alistair
Cable, Dr. Vincent
Calton, Mrs Patsy
Cameron, David
Carmichael, Alistair
Cash, William
Chapman, Sir Sydney *(Chipping Barnet)*
Chope, Christopher
Conway, Derek
Cormack, Sir Patrick
Cotter, Brian
Davis, rh David *(Haltemprice & Howden)*
Djanogly, Jonathan
Doughty, Sue
Duncan Smith, rh Iain
Evans, Nigel
Ewing, Annabelle
Fabricant, Michael
Fallon, Michael
Field, Mark *(Cities of London & Westminster)*
Flight, Howard
Foster, Don *(Bath)*
Garnier, Edward
George, Andrew *(St. Ives)*
Gibb, Nick *(Bognor Regis)*
Gidley, Sandra
Goodman, Paul
Gray, James *(N Wilts)*
Green, Damian *(Ashford)*
Green, Matthew *(Ludlow)*
Greenway, John
Grieve, Dominic
Gummer, rh John
Hague, rh William
Hammond, Philip
Hancock, Mike
Harvey, Nick
Hawkins, Nick
Hayes, John *(S Holland)*
Heald, Oliver
Heath, David
Heathcoat-Amory, rh David
Hendry, Charles
Hogg, rh Douglas
Holmes, Paul
Horam, John *(Orpington)*
Hughes, Simon *(Southwark N)*
Jenkin, Bernard
Keetch, Paul
Kennedy, rh Charles *(Ross Skye & Inverness)*
Kirkbride, Miss Julie
Knight, rh Greg *(E Yorkshire)*
Laing, Mrs Eleanor
Lait, Mrs Jacqui
Lansley, Andrew
Laws, David *(Yeovil)*
Lidington, David
Lilley, rh Peter
Llwyd, Elfyn
Loughton, Tim
Luff, Peter *(M-Worcs)*
McIntosh, Miss Anne
Mackay, rh Andrew
Maclean, rh David
McLoughlin, Patrick
Malins, Humfrey
Maples, John
Mawhinney, rh Sir Brian
May, rh Mrs Theresa
Mercer, Patrick
Moore, Michael
Moss, Malcolm
Murrison, Dr. Andrew
Oaten, Mark *(Winchester)*
O'Brien, Stephen *(Eddisbury)*
Öpik, Lembit
Ottaway, Richard
Page, Richard
Paterson, Owen
Pickles, Eric
Portillo, rh Michael
Randall, John
Redwood, rh John
Rendel, David
Robathan, Andrew
Robertson, Hugh *(Faversham & M-Kent)*
Robertson, Laurence *(Tewk'b'ry)*
Russell, Bob *(Colchester)*
Sanders, Adrian
Sayeed, Jonathan
Shephard, rh Mrs Gillian
Shepherd, Richard
Simpson, Keith *(M-Norfolk)*
Smith, Sir Robert *(W Ab'd'ns & Kincardine)*
Smyth, Rev. Martin *(Belfast S)*
Spelman, Mrs Caroline
Spicer, Sir Michael
Spink, Bob *(Castle Point)*
Spring, Richard
Stanley, rh Sir John
Streeter, Gary
Stunell, Andrew
Swayne, Desmond
Swire, Hugo *(E Devon)*
Syms, Robert
Tapsell, Sir Peter
Taylor, Ian *(Esher)*
Taylor, John *(Solihull)*
Taylor, Matthew *(Truro)*
Taylor, Dr. Richard *(Wyre F)*
Taylor, Sir Teddy
Thomas, Simon *(Ceredigion)*
Thurso, John
Tonge, Dr. Jenny
Tyler, Paul *(N Cornwall)*
Tyrie, Andrew
Viggers, Peter
Walter, Robert
Waterson, Nigel
Watkinson, Angela
Webb, Steve *(Northavon)*
Whittingdale, John
Wiggin, Bill
Williams, Hywel *(Caernarfon)*
Williams, Roger *(Brecon)*
Wilshire, David
Winterton, Ann *(Congleton)*
Winterton, Sir Nicholas *(Macclesfield)*
Wishart, Pete
Yeo, Tim *(S Suffolk)*

Tellers for the Noes:
Andrew Selous and
Mr. Peter Atkinson

Question accordingly agreed to.

Orders of the Day

Children Bill [*Lords*]

As amended in the Standing Committee, considered.

New Clause 11

SHARING OF INFORMATION

'(1) The Assembly and the Children and Family Court Advisory and Support Service may provide any information to each other for the purposes of their respective functions under this Part and Part 1 of the Criminal Justice and Court Services Act 2000 (c.43).

(2) A Welsh family proceedings officer and an officer of the Service (within the meaning given by section 11(3) of that Act) may provide any information to each other for the purposes of any of their respective functions.'.—*[Mr. Touhig.]*

Brought up, and read the First time.

12.57 pm

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Wales (Mr. Don Touhig): I beg to move, That the clause be read a Second time.

Mr. Speaker: With this it will be convenient to discuss the following:

Amendment No. 5, in clause 25, page 19, line 39, at end insert—

'(g) Wales Joint Education Committee.'.

Amendment No. 6, in page 19, line 39, at end insert—

'(h) the governor of a prison or secure training centre in Wales (or in the case of a contracted out prison or secure training centre, its director).'.

Amendment No. 7, in clause 27, page 21, line 8, leave out from 'officer,' to ', for' in line 9.

Amendment No. 8, in page 21, line 11, leave out from 'members,' to ', to' in line 12.

Government amendment No. 40.

Amendment No. 33, in clause 65, page 42, line 36, at end insert

'but such an order must be made before the end of a period of nine months beginning with the day on which this Act is passed'.

Mr. Touhig: Given the way in which Bills are usually drafted and considered, it is unusual for a Minister who speaks about Welsh issues to be on his feet first on Report, particularly when some of the amendments are minor and technical. However, the Bill will benefit the children and young people of Wales, and I am delighted to open the debate.

Before turning to the first technical Government amendment, however, I should like briefly to reflect on the Bill's passage through both Houses of Parliament. The Bill was introduced in the other place, where it was well received and described as a small Bill with a big heart. Although almost 600 amendments were tabled, many of them were probing amendments and the Bill's core remains unchanged. It is testament to the thinking behind the Bill's central provision—to establish a commissioner to help improve the lot of children—that it has attracted general support in this House.

I pay tribute to the good work by members of Standing Committee B on the Bill. The debate was well informed and constructive, and the Government were able to respond positively on a number of areas—I am sure that the contributions to this afternoon's debate will be equally positive. A number of issues have followed the Bill through both Houses, and I have no doubt that they will be touched upon in the debate.

I shall discuss Government new clause 11 and Government amendment No. 40 now and respond to amendments moved by hon. Members afterwards. New clause 11 provides for the effective sharing of information between the Assembly and the Children and Family Court Advisory and Support Service—CAFCASS. Following the transfer of CAFCASS in Wales to the Assembly under part 4 of the Bill, it will be important for both to have a facility that will allow them to share information relating to individual cases. For example, there are likely to be cases involving children of families living on either side of the border who have separate family proceedings officers, both of whose tasks would benefit from sharing information about the two cases.

1 pm

Similarly, a child made the subject of an order in Wales may at a later date move to England, so that if there are second proceedings in relation to that child, a different family proceedings officer will be appointed. Again, there will be considerable benefit from the Welsh family proceedings officer being able to share information about the first case with their counterpart in England. In addition, following the transfer, it will clearly be in the interests of both services for there to be ongoing liaison on good practice and management issues. Certainly, it would be desirable for CAFCASS and the Assembly to be able to share centrally held information concerned with organisational issues.

Government amendment No. 40 simply corrects a drafting error. As the Bill stands, clause 27(2)(a) requires a local health board to appoint a lead officer for children and young people's services for the purposes of the board's functions under the co-operation arrangements in clause 25 and the planning requirements in clause 26. The reference to clause 26 is incorrect. Although, under clause 25, the local health board would be involved in the planning consultation for children's services, the duty to prepare and publish a plan under clause 26 rests with the children's services authority. The amendment therefore restores the duties of a local health board under clause 27 to those originally intended.

I shall confine my remarks at this stage to the Government's proposals and respond appropriately when hon. Members have spoken to the other amendments.

Mr. Roger Williams (Brecon and Radnorshire) (LD): There is much in the Bill that Liberal Democrat Members can support, including the transfer of CAFCASS to Wales. However, the Minister will know that we have reservations about several issues, and we look to the Government to be more accommodating on those than they have been in the past.

I wish to speak to amendments Nos. 5 to 8, which stand in my name and in that of my hon. Friend the Member for Mid-Dorset and North Poole

[Mr. Roger Williams]

(Mrs. Brooke). Amendment No. 5 follows recommendations made in the Clywch inquiry into abuse in schools. In one case, a schoolteacher devised inappropriate drama activities as part of an examination curriculum whereby children were encouraged into activities that were, because of their sexual content, entirely inappropriate for their age and maturity. The examining board—the Welsh Joint Education Committee—provided examiners to go into the school to investigate the activities on its behalf and to evaluate them in terms of their dramatic merit in classifying pupils for exam results. Those examiners should have reported that something was going on in the school that was giving them great concern, but unfortunately they did not do so. As a result, some of the abuse and harm went on for much longer than was necessary.

Amendment No. 8 would therefore require that the Welsh Joint Education Committee be one of the partners that co-operates with the children's departments of local education authorities to ensure the welfare of children. In a plenary session of the Welsh Assembly, Jane Davidson, the Minister for Education and Lifelong Learning, said:

> "Jane Hutt and I have written to Charles Clarke proposing that examination boards be added to the list of bodies that the Bill requires to have regard for the need to safeguard and promote the welfare of children."

I hope that the Minister will take that on board. It is important that examination boards have a role to play, especially where practical activities are concerned.

Amendment No. 6 would require that governors of prisons or secure training units in Wales—or directors of contracted-out prisons or secure training units—also become partners in promoting the welfare of children and young people.

Amendments Nos. 7 and 8 are minor amendments that would give discretion to local authorities in naming the lead member or lead officer responsible for the functions in the Bill.

I should like the Minister to respond particularly to Amendment No. 5, which experience in Wales has led us to believe should be included in the Bill.

Mr. Martyn Jones (Clwyd, South) (Lab): I rise in support of new clause 2, which was tabled in the name of the hon. Member for Mid-Dorset and North Poole (Mrs. Brooke) and to which I am co-signatory, and amendment No. 34, which stands in my name. They are complementary. My amendment would remove the role of the children's commissioner for England from the Welsh equation—*[Interruption.]*

Mr. Speaker: Order. The hon. Gentleman is a little too early. I think that he is talking about the next group of amendments.

Mr. Jones: I am sorry, Mr. Speaker.

Mr. Speaker: That is all right—we all make mistakes.

Mr. Touhig: I listened carefully to the points made by the hon. Member for Brecon and Radnorshire (Mr. Williams)—and by my hon. Friend the Member for Clwyd, South (Mr. Jones), although I am sure that he will return to those a bit later.

Amendment No. 5, which stands in the names of the hon. Members for Mid-Dorset and North Poole and for Brecon and Radnorshire, proposes the inclusion of the Welsh Joint Education Committee—WJEC—in the list of partners in clause 25 who must co-operate with children's services authorities in Wales to improve the well-being of children in the area. The intention of clause 25 is that, taken with clause 26, it will provide a statutory basis for the work of the children and young people's framework partnerships in planning local services. It is difficult to see how the WJEC could be included with the clause 25 partners, because it is different in nature from the other bodies listed. It is a company limited by guarantee and owned jointly by the 22 local authorities in Wales. It has an office base in Cardiff but no regional or local presence in Wales, and it would be difficult to support its attendance at meetings of local partnerships. Its functions are highly specialised and narrow in comparison with the other bodies named as partners, which include the police, the probation service and health services. The National Council for Education and Training for Wales is included as a partner in recognition of the significant role that it plays as a local education and training provider.

I am of course aware of the criticisms of the WJEC by the Children's Commissioner for Wales in the Clywch inquiry report that he published a little while ago. I take this opportunity to pay tribute to his valuable work in carrying out that inquiry. I do not believe, however, that the amendment would adequately address his concerns. Apart from the inappropriateness of the WJEC being involved in 22 sets of local planning arrangements, many other awarding bodies operating within Wales would have to be brought into the equation. The vast majority are England and Wales awarding bodies, and the commissioner clearly had that wider field in mind when making his recommendation to my colleagues in the Assembly. He recommended that the Welsh Assembly, in partnership with the Department for Education and the Awdurdod Cymwysterau, Cwricwluwm ac Asesu Cymru—ACCAC—and the equivalent qualifications, curriculum and assessment authorities in Scotland, Northern Ireland and England consider the role of examining bodies across the UK with regard to child protection arrangements. The Government and the Assembly are committed to working together with the regulatory authorities in England and Wales to produce a practical response to the commissioner's recommendations, and we have established a steering group to take that work forward. I therefore hope that the hon. Member for Brecon and Radnorshire will concede that his amendment is a bit premature, because it is important that we have this wider consultation.

I have some difficulty with amendment No. 6 as well. The arrangements in clause 25 for promoting co-operation are focused mainly on children and young people who are permanently resident in the local authority area concerned. There would be little purpose in requiring a prison or secure training centre to take part in local arrangements with local agencies if few of the young people in its care were likely to come to their attention. However, clause 25(1)(c) places a duty on the children's services authorities to promote co-operation with

"such persons or bodies as the authority consider appropriate",

which I hope will give some comfort to the hon. Gentleman. If the authority considers it appropriate for a prison governor or a director of a secure training centre to be involved in the co-operation arrangements, the authority must seek that involvement. The outcome will be a matter for local arrangement, and will depend on local circumstances. It would be inappropriate, and perhaps disproportionate, for such governors and directors automatically to be required to become involved in local co-operation arrangements.

In regard to amendments Nos. 7 and 8, there are a number of differences between the provisions for England and Wales in the Bill, which serve to build on the distinctive approach to developing services for children and young people that has been taken by my colleagues in the National Assembly. In Wales, no change is planned in the responsibility for service provision by requiring the appointment of a children's services director. There is no requirement for children's trusts. Instead, clause 27(1) requires each local authority to appoint a

"lead director for children and young people's services"

to co-ordinate and oversee co-operation arrangements to improve their well-being, and to designate a member for the same purpose. These lead directors and the lead members required to be designated will be responsible for taking forward arrangements for partnership planning to ensure that it acts as the strategic driver for action. I hope that, in the light of these assurances, the hon. Gentleman and his colleagues will feel able not to press their amendments to a vote.

We are somewhat confused about the intention behind amendment No. 33, tabled by the hon. Member for East Worthing and Shoreham (Tim Loughton) and his hon. Friends. It might help if I explain the reason for the difference in commencement arrangements for clause 28 for the devolved and non-devolved bodies in Wales. The duty on agencies to ensure that their functions are discharged, having regard to the need to safeguard and promote the welfare of children, is placed on a range of agencies in Wales by clause 28, and in England by clause 11.

Tim Loughton: May I save the Minister some breath? This amendment would be more appropriately tabled in relation to the private fostering arrangements, but it has not been. On that basis, I was not proposing to move it, so I hope that I can save some of the Minister's time.

Mr. Touhig: I am grateful to the hon. Gentleman for his intervention, which has saved us some time. I also hope that the hon. Member for Brecon and Radnorshire will feel able not to press the Liberal Democrats' amendments to a vote, and I urge the House to accept the Government's new clause 11 and Government amendment No. 40.

Question put and agreed to.

Clause read a Second time, and added to the Bill.

New Clause 17

PAYMENTS TO FOSTER PARENTS

'(1) The appropriate person may by order make provision as to the payments to be made—

(a) by a children's services authority in England or Wales or a person exercising functions on its behalf to a local authority foster parent with whom any child is placed by that authority or person under section 23(2)(a) of the Children Act 1989 (c.41);

(b) by a voluntary organisation to any person with whom any child is placed by that organisation under section 59(1)(a) of that Act.

(2) In subsection (1)—

"appropriate person" means—

(a) the Secretary of State, in relation to a children's services authority in England;

(b) the Assembly, in relation to a children's services authority in Wales;

"local authority foster parent" and "voluntary organisation" have the same meanings as in the Children Act 1989 (c.41).

(3) In section 23(2)(a) of the Children Act 1989 (c.41), at the end insert "(subject to section [payments to foster parents] of the Children Act 2004)".

(4) In section 59(1)(a) of that Act, at the end insert "(subject to section [payments to foster parents] of the Children Act 2004)".'.—*[Margaret Hodge.]*

Brought up, and read the First time.

The Minister for Children, Young People and Families (Margaret Hodge): I beg to move, That the clause be read a Second time.

Mr. Speaker: With this it will be convenient to discuss the following:

New clause 10—*National fostering allowance*—

'The Government shall by regulations establish a national minimum fostering allowance payable by all children's services authorities in England.'.

Amendment No. 31, in clause 44, page 32, line 6, at end insert—

'(aa) the circumstances in which a person may be permitted to foster privately a child previously known to him without being registered;'.

Amendment No. 32, in page 34, line 29, leave out clause 46.

Government amendments Nos. 41 to 43.

Margaret Hodge: I know that Government new clause 17 and the consequential amendments standing in the name of my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State will be welcomed by foster carers and by organisations such as the Fostering Network that promote foster care and work on behalf of foster carers. I intend to speak to the Government amendments and then respond to the amendments tabled by other hon. Members.

During our discussions on the Bill, strong arguments were advanced by foster carers and their organisations. We have listened to those arguments and are now in a position to respond positively to them. All hon. Members recognise the importance of foster carers, particularly in providing stability and a loving home for the most vulnerable children in our community—those who are looked after by the state. If we are to meet our objective of ensuring greater stability for more looked-

[Margaret Hodge]

after children, it is key that we try to recruit and retain more foster carers in the foster care work force. To do that, we need to put in place a range of measures.

1.15 pm

We have already achieved a lot, but I recognise that there is more for us to do. For instance, we are supporting local authorities in recruiting local foster carers in their local communities and we have prepared a pack for local authorities to use for that purpose. The recruitment of foster carers is most sensibly carried out locally and the job for the Government is to support local authorities in that task. We are also supporting the training of foster carers in the local community. For foster carers to feel valued and to feel that they have an important role to play, it is important that they receive continuous professional development and training, to give them a feeling that theirs is a proper profession.

We have also improved the tax and pensions position for foster carers, which has made a welcome change over the past few years. We are putting other measures in place, too. For example, we are developing a national telephone helpline for foster carers, and we hope to provide better support for foster carers who face allegations. We also want to celebrate excellence in foster carers through the introduction of a national award scheme.

For all that, we have had strong representations about what is perceived to be the unfairness resulting from the variability in the allowances paid to foster carers across the country. Those allowances do vary. I have looked at the Fostering Network's figures and seen variations from £60 to £250 in the costs awarded to foster carers for looking after an eight-year-old child. There are even variations within regions, which is difficult to explain. For example, in the north-west region, the allowance paid for looking after an eight-year-old varies from £60 to more than £200 per week.

The Government want to ensure that the allowances for foster carers fully meet the costs of caring for a looked-after child. We want to ensure greater transparency and consistency in the way in which local authorities calculate those allowances. That is why we are introducing the new clause and the amendments that go with it. Over the coming months, we will work closely with the local authorities and all the other stakeholders to come to a sensible view of how we should proceed on these issues.

We must all recognise that there will be variations in the cost for caring for a looked-after child. There will be variations according to the child's age, for example, and regional variations reflecting differences in housing costs up and down the country. There will be legitimate differences in the costs involved in looking after a looked-after child, depending on the complexity of the issues facing a particular child. We need to address what precisely the allowances should cover and decide what should legitimately be included in an allowance and what is perhaps less fair. We also need better to understand the relationship between allowances and the payments that some authorities give to foster carers for looking after children.

We want to examine other issues relating to payment over the coming months. For example, is there sufficient clarity in each local authority about entitlements? Do foster carers face difficulties when claiming one-off grants? Are there inefficiencies in various local authorities in regard to providing information or responding promptly to claims by foster carers?

Mr. Hilton Dawson (Lancaster and Wyre) (Lab): My right hon. Friend rightly differentiates the remuneration of foster parents and payment for skills. Does she propose to introduce some national scale on which foster parents could be paid for the skills that they bring to their work?

Margaret Hodge: That is one of the many issues on which we want to consult local authorities and other stakeholders, including those organisations that represent foster carers, to make sure that we have a scheme that is workable and fair, and that enables us to recruit and keep more foster carers looking after children.

We already have resources available, about which some local authorities have expressed concern. For example, we have set aside £113 million over this spending review period under our "Choice Protects" programme, which puts a focus on fostering. If we consider the comprehensive spending review settlement, an extra £1 billion will be invested in children's services by the end of the period 2004–05 to 2007–08. We need to discuss local authorities' priorities with them.

I hope that the new clause and amendments are generally welcomed by the House. I look forward to working through the issues with all stakeholders, so that we can create fairness and equity and thereby support all the efforts that we all feel are important to build a stronger foster care work force.

Tim Loughton (East Worthing and Shoreham) (Con): May I start uncharacteristically by congratulating the Minister and the Government on the new clause and corresponding amendments? We did not discuss foster carer payments in Committee. I have supported such payments, because we face a drastic problem. We spoke in Committee about foster carer registration schemes, which I shall deal with later in relation to our two amendments in this group.

The situation is dire and has got worse over the past year or so. It is now estimated that there are about 10,000 foster carer vacancies at a time when demand is certainly not lessening. There is great confusion about the amounts paid by varying local authorities to foster carers and no real benchmark for assessing whether local authorities are really paying the full cost. Figures produced by the Fostering Network show the enormous disparities, region by region, in relation to the percentage of local authorities paying below the minimum allowance: in the east midlands, 100 per cent. were below the minimum allowance, whereas in London, the figure was as low as 19 per cent. There is enormous confusion and variation in how fostering is remunerated up and down the country, which is one of the problems associated with the current shortage of foster carers. Perhaps more worrying is the way that we lose foster carers: the cost of training a foster carer is calculated as £12,000, so it is a false economy not to do everything that we can to keep good-quality foster carers in place once we have them.

I therefore welcome the fact that the Government have at last addressed this problem. There was a high-pressure campaign and many of us were e-mailed incessantly by foster carers all over the country calling for a new scheme for minimum allowances. Clearly, that work has paid off. But as the Minister said, much work still needs to be done to define how this scheme will operate in practice. I want to raise a few questions, most of which I am sure she will already be aware of. Perhaps she will give some initial responses as to the Government's current thinking, particularly in relation to how the scheme will be funded through local authorities.

The Deputy Prime Minister agreed at a Central Local Partnership conference of councillors two weeks ago that the Government would not impose additional burdens on local authorities if they were unfunded. That was a clear commitment given to the Local Government Association and local councillors. We therefore hope that it will be clear to local authorities how the scheme will be funded over the longer term. What reserve powers will the Minister have to invoke to put the scheme in place? When is it likely to be introduced? We hope that it is not just a wish list for several years hence. The Minister mentioned that £113 million is already allocated to "Choice Protects", much of which is targeted at the training of foster carers, and providing information to foster carers, but not at allowances. It does not therefore tackle directly the problem of proper funding of the scheme.

The Minister rightly referred to the problem of local authorities doing different things in different areas of the country. Certainly, variations for different costs of living up and down the country would be desirable. What discussions has she had with the LGA on putting that into effect? In a letter, the LGA stated:

> "It has the potential to cut across the ability of the local authority to develop different arrangements for paying allowances, expenses and other specific grants for costs such as holidays or school trips to foster carers. Taking account of local variables such as the age profile of looked after child population, or the regional variations in the cost of living are important in determining allowances locally."

I hope that all those considerations will be taken on board when the scheme is finalised.

The British Association for Adoption and Fostering has also raised questions, referring to

> "how the allowance will be calculated, the implementation date and whether a new ring-fenced grant will be made available to local authorities to ensure that this measure is funded."

It has launched a campaign to ensure that.

I welcome the Government amendments, but we want to see the beef, and we want to see it soon. We want to make sure that all those questions are being addressed, rather than have the Minister or her successor come back to the House in a few years' time still considering how the scheme will work.

That is only half the deal—we had some time in Committee to address the other half, which is the whole subject of a registration scheme. Extraordinarily, the Minister set her mind completely against that, despite the fact, to remind her, that every report that the Government have commissioned over the past five years confirms that privately fostered children are very vulnerable, and that a registration system involving the approval of private foster carers would protect their interests better than the current situation in which private foster carers are required only to notify local authorities about arrangements. I tackled her in Committee about how many people have fallen foul of the law as it currently stands. She was unable to answer that, largely because the number is tiny. The system is not working at the moment, and still too many people—we do not know the extent of it, because it is unquantifiable—are entering into private arrangements, particularly with vulnerable girls from west Africa who, as we know all too well, come into the country, disappear into the system and are open to all kinds of abuse and neglect, ending up in the sex industry or effectively as domestic slaves.

The Opposition still cannot understand why the Government have proved so inflexible on this issue. Their additions to the Bill do not address the problem—they are tokenism of the worst kind. Our amendments Nos. 31 and 32 therefore set down that the regulations must define

> "the circumstances in which a person may be permitted to foster privately a child previously known to him without being registered".

In effect, we have attacked the problem from the other end, because the Minister was not responsive to setting up a registration scheme, with the question: when will private fostering be allowed, permissible and promoted by the Government if that arrangement is not registered? That is a different question to address the same problem, and I hope that the Government start to have the sort of conversion that they appear to have had on fostering allowances and become more open-minded on going the whole hog. I shall then be absolutely delighted to congratulate the Minister doubly, which is doubly unexpected from me.

That would help to give much more protection to a host of children whose fostering arrangements are inadequate and ensure that legitimate fosterers are properly remunerated, incentivised and trained. They will then be able to take on much more of the work load that we need them to take on, especially with difficult children, so that such children can be given a second chance of a stable upbringing rather than being condemned to the outer reaches of the system—far-flung children's homes where they are not best looked after—or condemned to failure in the sphere of education or health.

I congratulate the Minister on her new clause and amendments, but may I push her further? Now that she has opened the door, let us have all the beef and not just half of it.

1.30 pm

Mr. Dawson: I wholeheartedly welcome what my right hon. Friend the Minister has said. It marks excellent progress for not just foster carers but the entire care system. If we are to have a really effective system, we must ensure that foster carers are properly valued. That involves recompensing them for all the costs of looking after children and rewarding them for their skills. Those skills vary, but some carers operate very

[Mr. Dawson]

professionally, providing tremendously good care for some of the most vulnerable and disadvantaged children. All foster carers are doing an invaluable job: they are key partners in the system.

I am delighted that this good news has been welcomed by the hon. Member for East Worthing and Shoreham (Tim Loughton). Having managed a family placement team during the last eight miserable years of Conservative government before 1997, I can tell him that the rates paid to foster carers then were an absolute disgrace, and carers prevailed on me regularly to do something about it.

Tim Loughton: Can the hon. Gentleman confirm that those eight so-called miserable years were years in which there were rather more Labour councils than there are now, and that it was left to councils to pay the carers? It is entirely down to the hon. Gentleman's party that those years were so miserable.

Jonathan Shaw (Chatham and Aylesford) (Lab): We were starved of resources.

Mr. Dawson: My hon. Friend was in a similar position. We were indeed starved of resources. Let us get real: the problem has been around for probably 50 years, but it was certainly much worse under the Tory Government. It has taken this Government to provide real resources and show real determination.

Mr. Mike Hancock (Portsmouth, South) (LD): The hon. Gentleman has a good deal of experience, but is there is not also a responsibility to ensure that local authorities have enough resources to support the foster carers whom we hope to recruit? Past failure has been due to a lack of resources at the centre to pay those taking on the task that the hon. Gentleman describes so eloquently.

Mr. Dawson: I agree. Thanks to "Choice Protects", at last some real investment—good money—is being spent on the training and ongoing support of foster carers, and we will see that that continues.

I am pleased that my right hon. Friend is going to consult. There are difficult issues to be teased out. They vary in different parts of the country and in different parts of the care system. What I would insist on is the development of good practice. I hope that we will not end up with a basic service providing the bare minimum. What foster carers want, need and deserve is quality—quality support, quality training and quality remuneration. They do not want to have to undergo endless bureaucratic processes just to identify the odd bit of money that they have paid on a child's behalf.

Looked-after children are the children of corporate parents, the local authorities. Those 60,000 looked-after children are our children. We owe it to them, via their foster carers, to treat them generously and give them all the life chances that every child should have the right to enjoy. That is our duty.

I will not say much about private fostering today. I voted against the Government on that in Committee, I disagree with the line that they are taking and I hope that they will quickly realise that the present notification scheme is completely inadequate. A registration scheme would be effective, simple and in the interests of privately fostered children, their parents and the fosterers. Today, however, we should celebrate the progress that is being made, and look forward to consultation and the involvement of all parties in making the care system much better than it has been in the past.

Mrs. Annette L. Brooke (Mid-Dorset and North Poole) (LD): I too congratulate the Government. I am glad that we have embarked on this stage in a spirit of celebration. We all recognise the vital role of carers in giving some of the most disadvantaged children the opportunity of a stable family life and, indeed, other opportunities. We should value the wonderful people who offer those services, and show that we value them.

The Government's new clause and amendments make our new clause redundant. We are pleased about that, and pleased about the response to debate in the other place. I particularly appreciate the Minister's assurance that there will be more emphasis on training: I think that professionalisation is part of the valuing of the skills from which we are benefiting as a society and as corporate parent. What is clear is that we have failed looked-after children in many respects, and we can do much better.

I am glad that there is to be consultation in an attempt to agree on the details. It will be a difficult process, but it is the only way to deal with vast discrepancies for which it is hard to find any explanation. While acknowledging the complexities and the hard work involved, I would find it helpful if the Minister gave us an idea of the time scale. People need to know whether we are talking about six, 12 or 18 months.

I am afraid that local authorities in my part of the world pay less than the minimum, no doubt because of pressure on resources. We will need to be reassured that there will be new resources to cover this new measure. I do not think that referring to pots of money that are already accounted for is sufficient.

I, too, lament the fact that we did not manage to persuade the Government that private foster parents should be registered now rather than at some indefinite time in the future. I hope that we shall be able to return to that, although I accept that we debated it at length in Committee.

Hywel Williams (Caernarfon) (PC): I am sorry to disappoint hon. Members who may be looking for some dissent here but I too welcome the words of the Minister. I have long been in favour of establishing minimum fostering allowances. As a very young social worker in the mid-1970s, I found it extremely difficult to recruit foster parents, one of the reasons being that the rates were so insufficient. Only last year, I met with the fostering network in my constituency in Caernarfon, Gwynedd, and found the same concerns surfacing yet again, some 28 years later.

Foster parents are in short supply. Often they are out of pocket, and willingly so because they are committed to the work that they do. They play an invaluable role on behalf of us all. That should be recognised properly. The state should not be, by default, taking advantage of those people's commitment to their calling, and I am glad that the Minister will remedy that.

There is something of a postcode lottery in Wales, as the rates vary in the 22 local authorities. I will be glad to see the establishment of minimum rates, so that the rates paid do not depend on the local authority's ability to pay. I and the hon. Members who have contributed so far may have been reading the same brief. I think that the questions that have been raised already are important: how will the rates be calculated—I say "rates" because I assume that there will be a number—when will they be implemented and will local authorities be certain that a ring-fenced grant is available to ensure that the measure is properly funded?

Mr. Hancock: Like other hon. Members, I am delighted that we have this measure. It would be foolish of anyone here to doubt its necessity, or the pleasure that the whole House must have in seeing the new clause and indeed the Bill come into force. However, there are real issues.

I had 35 years' experience in local government of trying to recruit and encourage people to foster. It was not just the initial rate for the job that was a problem, but the failure of local authorities to support foster parents once in a position to take care of children. They always had to fight for the foster child's right to have the money to go on a school trip or to have the school uniform provided. Local authorities always saw foster care and fosterers as at the bottom end of social services' responsibilities. There was never great enthusiasm, mainly because too many social services directors thought that they knew best and held children's homes as a solution to the problem. It has taken a generation to change that.

I am delighted that the director of social services for Portsmouth city council, Mr. Rob Hutchinson, has been actively involved in much of the work that we are discussing. It is to his credit that he brings his reputation and the experience that he has gained both in Portsmouth and in Hampshire to bear on this matter, but the issues do not end there. Hon. Members are right to raise some doubts: the length of time it will take clearly to establish a minimum rate that will be universally acceptable and the need for flexibility on top of that, because it will still be difficult to recruit. In London, it will for ever be difficult to recruit foster parents. In some regions of the south-east, because of the economic climate, it will be difficult because it will be better for a family who need the resources to go elsewhere. Therefore, we must ensure that the judgment made on the minimum rate is right, and that local authorities have flexibility to allow extra payments to be made to take care of local needs. That must be a requirement.

On the point about local authorities ring-fencing not only the fostering element but their responsibilities towards fosterers, one cannot increase the number of fosterers if one does not increase the amount available to local authorities to manage, recruit, train and supervise what is happening properly. Too many local authorities will recruit as many fosterers as they can to take care of these vulnerable children in what they consider now to be the best way, yet not resource their central advisers to fosterers properly.

1.45 pm

Sadly, private fostering has often come to the fore in my area. Local authorities face dilemmas in trying to deal with that, as do any of the authorities, such as the police, that may want to get involved but find it difficult to do so. I am at a loss to understand why the idea of a compulsory legally enforceable register for private fostering is not at the forefront of the Bill, because the real dangers are to those children.

Most children in local authority care will stand a reasonable chance of having their progress properly monitored and their futures clearly marked out for them but, in lots of instances, private fostering relationships are recipes for personal tragedies for the children. For that not to be recognised is a failure. Some way of having proper control over those arrangements and over the monitoring of those children is essential if we are to give them a fair chance in life. It is simply not good enough to suggest that what we have at the moment is satisfactory, because it manifestly is not.

That said, I welcome what has been said. I hope that the consultation is speedy, but I do not want it to neglect some of the real issues that need to be dealt with. Some of them may have to be dealt with by future legislation because I do not think that they can be remedied as easily as some of us may want.

Margaret Hodge: It is a delight to see such consensus not just across the Chamber, but on the Government Benches. I welcome that enormously. Perhaps we should stop our business now.

Hon. Members have raised perfectly legitimate issues and demonstrated some of the complexity of the detail that we need to deal with as we take forward our intent to set a national foster care allowances system in process. The letter that was sent by the Association of Directors of Social Services said:

> "The devil is very much likely to be in the detail. The ADSS would expect that should the Bill be so amended"

as we are doing today

> "there would be detailed discussions about a staged implementation between the Government and local government."

It is because of the complexity of the issues and because we want to take our partners with us—the people on the front line who will have to implement the national scheme—that we are looking at a staged implementation. To help hon. Members, I will tell them what our thinking is, although it is early days.

We want to spend the early part of 2005 in extensive consultation with all interested partners. We hope at the end of that process to be able to set the rates and to publicise them. We hope that that in itself will move things forward and that a number of authorities will improve their rates after we have taken them through the discussion on what is a fair rate for looking after a child. During 2006, we hope to work with local authorities in implementing the rates, as set in 2005. We will then, probably at the beginning of 2007, invoke the power, should that be necessary, if local authorities are not complying with the rates that have been agreed with them. I hope that that gives hon. Members some clarity about the timetable.

[Margaret Hodge]

On costs, I accept the commitment given by the Government that were we to impose additional burdens, we would provide the necessary funding but I hope hon. Members will agree that looked-after children have to be placed. There is a legislative imperative to do so. If we do not have sufficient foster carers, particularly in the local community, an on-the-spot decision tends to be taken. Often, the looked-after children are placed in extremely expensive residential accommodation out of the borough. My officials and I will need some convincing during our discussions that setting an appropriate and proper minimum foster care allowance will constitute an additional expense. It could lead to a change in the way in which we spend money, and to an expenditure saving that we could then reinvest in other services that support foster carers or looked-after children. We will keep this issue at the forefront of our minds, but we do not necessarily agree that such an allowance will lead to an increase in expenditure on looked-after children in whom local authorities already invest money.

I do not want to suggest, as I had to do in Committee, that on these issues we are the libertarians and the Opposition are the Stalinists. However, we will not consider using a ring-fenced grant as a mechanism for implementing a minimum foster care system. We will have discussions with the Local Government Association, the Association of Directors of Social Services, and the various voluntary organisations that represent foster carers. We want, in that partnership environment, to work through what are very complex issues and to establish a workable system.

Tim Loughton: I do not wish to appear too Stalinist, but is the Minister saying that there will be a saving, which I agree there will be? As we discussed in Committee, we are talking about private children's homes that cost £2,000 a week upwards compared with foster carers who cost several hundred pounds, but surely there has to be a lead-in process. Will the Minister make sure that the money is available for local authorities to ensure that foster carers are trained and in place—doing so will indeed cost money—even if the savings will come a few years down the line, when we will no longer have to rely so much on out-of-area placements?

Margaret Hodge: That is just the sort of detailed conversation that we need to engage in with our partners. It was in the light of such issues that I alluded to the "Choice Protects" grant and to the additional resources that we are putting into children's services during the comprehensive spending review period.

Jonathan Shaw: Does my right hon. Friend agree that it is very easy simply to say that we will reduce the number of out-of-borough placements to the private sector? In fact, we need all these services, including specialist residential provision, so it is not a case of having one or the other. It is essential that we have such provision, and that it has the capacity to develop services for the most damaged children.

Margaret Hodge: I agree with my hon. Friend and I certainly respect his experience, which was gained during many years on the front line as a social worker. But equally, I hope that he agrees with me that it is in the interests of more looked-after children to provide them with the stability of a placement in a loving home with a foster carer. Whatever the shortages, if we can increase the number of such carers—we need to establish a far better basis for doing so than currently exists—using the creation of a national foster allowance system as one mechanism for doing so, that will improve the lives of looked-after children for whom such an environment is appropriate. Over time, that should lead to some savings for local authorities that currently do not commission in a particularly rational way the places that they require for such children.

Given that Members want to speak about other issues, I shall deal briefly with the registration of private foster care. I agree with the House that this is a very important issue that we need to get right, which is why we have secured the relevant power through what is known as a sunset clause. As a result, if we cannot improve the current notification scheme, we can move immediately to a registration scheme without needing to return to the House to obtain primary legislation. The whole House agrees, as do I, that the current notification scheme is not working and is inadequate. But I hope that in the light of the additional powers that we are taking—powers to insist that awareness of the scheme be promoted, and that local authorities monitor their own notification schemes—Members will agree that it is worth allowing time to see whether the system works. With the best will in the world, even a registration scheme might not provide the safeguards and protection that we all seek for such children, who are sometimes the most vulnerable in our communities.

Jonathan Shaw: My right hon. Friend knows my views on this matter. What criteria does she envisage the Department using to assess whether her proposed scheme is successful, particularly given that the number of private foster carers is not known because the figures are not collated?

Margaret Hodge: This is a difficult issue, but those authorities that are making huge efforts to ensure that the notification scheme works have a far greater number of notifications than those that, in my view, are not making adequate efforts. So monitoring the number of notifications will be just one of the mechanisms that we will use. However, my hon. Friend is right to draw our attention to this issue. We do need to get a better handle on the quantum of the problem, and to focus on the most vulnerable among the broad group of children who come under private fostering arrangements.

I warmly thank Members for their welcome for the new clause. Rather than dividing on this issue I hope that we will unify, so that we can ensure that foster carers are rewarded properly, that they are not out of pocket in caring for looked-after children, and that we grow the foster care work force.

Question put and agreed to.

Clause read a Second time, and added to the Bill.

New Clause 1

CHILDREN'S COMMISSIONER: FUNCTIONS

'(1) The Children's Commissioner has, subject to the following provisions of this Part, the function of promoting and safeguarding the rights and interests of children in England.

(2) The Children's Commissioner may in particular under this section—

(a) encourage persons exercising functions or engaged in activities affecting children to take account of their rights, views and interests;

(b) advise the Secretary of State on the rights, views and interests of children;

(c) review and report on the effectiveness of—
  (i) advice and advocacy services;
  (ii) complaints procedures; and
  (iii) inspection and whistle-blowing arrangements,

so far as relating to children;

(d) review and report on any other matter relating to the rights, views and interests of children.

(3) The Children's Commissioner must take reasonable steps to involve children in the discharge of his functions under this section, and in particular to—

(a) ensure that children are made aware of his function and how they may communicate with him;

(b) consult children, and organisations working with children, on the matters he proposes to review and report on under subsection (2)(c) or (d);

(c) ensure that the content of any material issued by the Commissioner or his staff, whether printed or in electronic or other form, which is intended to be used by children, takes account, so far as practicable, of the means of communication, level of understanding and usual language of the intended recipients.

(4) The Children's Commissioner must for the purposes of subsection (3) have particular regard to groups of children who do not have other adequate means by which they can make their views known.

(5) The Children's Commissioner or a person authorised by him may for the purposes of his function under this section at any reasonable time—

(a) enter any premises, other than a private dwelling, for the purposes of interviewing any child accommodated or cared for there; and

(b) if the child consents, interview the child in private.

(6) Any person exercising functions under any enactment must supply the Children's Commissioner with such information in that person's possession relating to those functions as the Children's Commissioner may reasonably request for the purposes of his function under this section (provided that the information is information which that person may, apart from this subsection, lawfully disclose to him).

(7) The Children's Commissioner may provide assistance to a child to bring legal proceedings where the child is unable to bring legal proceedings; and it appears to the Commissioner reasonable to do so and there is no other person or body likely to provide such assistance or take such action (or both).

(8) In considering for the purpose of his function under this section what constitutes the rights and interests of children (generally or so far as relating to a particular matter) the Children's Commissioner must have regard to the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child.

(9) In subsection (8) the reference to the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child is to the Convention on the Rights of the Child adopted by the General Assembly of the United Nations on 20th November 1989, subject to any reservations, objections or interpretative declarations by the United Kingdom for the time being in force.'.—*[Mrs. Brooke.]*

Brought up, and read the First time.

Mrs. Brooke: I beg to move, That the clause be read a Second time.

Mr. Deputy Speaker (Sir Alan Haselhurst): With this it will be convenient to discuss the following:

New clause 2—*Powers of consideration and representation by Children's Commissioner for Wales—*

'(1) Section 75A of the Care Standards Act 2000 (c.14) (additional powers of consideration and representation) is amended as follows.

(2) Omit subsections (1) and (2) and insert—

"The Commissioner may consider, and make representations about, any matter affecting the rights and welfare of children in Wales to—

(a) the Assembly, and

(b) where the matter is not devolved and the Commissioner considers it appropriate, to the responsible United Kingdom Minister of the Crown or Government department.".'.

New clause 3—*Requirement to review working of Part 1 of the Act—*

'(1) The Children's Commissioner shall—

(a) keep under review the working of Part 1 of this Act and in doing so consult with children and representatives of organisations concerned with children's rights and interests;

(b) make reports on it to the Secretary of State in accordance with the following provisions of this section.

(2) The first report under this section shall be made as soon as is practicable after the third anniversary of the coming into force of this Part.

(3) A subsequent report under this section shall be made at such time as the Children's Commissioner thinks fit, not being earlier than three years after the making of the last previous report.

(4) A report under this section—

(a) shall include the views of the Children's Commissioner on the adequacy and effectiveness of this Part; and

(b) may contain recommendations as to amendments to this Part which in the opinion of the Children's Commissioner are necessary or desirable.

(5) The Secretary of State shall as soon as is reasonably practicable lay a copy of every report sent to him under this section before each House of Parliament.'.

New clause 13—*Children's Commissioner: functions (No.2)—*

'(1) The Children's Commissioner has, subject to the following provisions of this Part, the function of promoting and safeguarding the rights and interests of children in England.

(2) The Children's Commissioner may in particular under this section—

(a) encourage persons exercising functions or engaged in activities affecting children to take account of their rights, views and interests;

(b) advise the Secretary of State on the rights, views and interests of children;

(c) review and report on the effectiveness of—
  (i) advice and advocacy services;
  (ii) complaints procedures; and
  (iii) inspection and whistle-blowing arrangements,

so far as relating to children;

(d) review and report on any other matter relating to the rights, views and interests of children.

[Mr. Deputy Speaker]

(3) The Children's Commissioner must take reasonable steps to involve children in the discharge of his functions under this section, and in particular to—

- (a) ensure that children are made aware of his function and how they may communicate with him;
- (b) consult children, and organisations working with children, on the matters he proposes to review and report on under subsection (2)(c) or (d);
- (c) ensure that the content of any material issued by the Commissioner or his staff, whether printed or in electronic or other form, which is intended to be used by children, takes account, so far as practicable, of the means of communication, level of understanding and usual language of the intended recipients.

(4) The Children's Commissioner must for the purposes of subsection (3) have particular regard to groups of children who do not have other adequate means by which they can made their views known.

(5) The Children's Commissioner or a person authorised by him may for the purposes of his function under this section at any reasonable time—

- (a) enter any premises, other than a private dwelling, for the purposes of interviewing any child accommodated or cared for there; and
- (b) if the child consents, interview the child in private.

(6) Any person exercising functions under any enactment must supply the Children's Commissioner with such information in that person's possession relating to those functions as the Children's Commissioner may reasonably request for the purposes of his function under this section (provided that the information is information which that person may, apart from this subsection, lawfully disclose to him).

(7) In considering for the purpose of his function under this section what constitutes the rights and interests of children (generally or so far as relating to a particular matter) the Children's Commissioner must have regard to the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child.

(8) In subsection (7) the reference to the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child is to the Convention on the Rights of the Child adopted by the General Assembly of the United Nations on 20th November 1989, subject to any reservations, objections or interpretative declarations by the United Kingdom for the time being in force.'.

New clause 18—*Exercise of functions in relation to children in Wales, Scotland and Northern Ireland*—

'(1) It shall be the sole responsibility of the Children's Commissioner for Wales to—

- (a) hold an inquiry on any matters as regards children in Wales; and
- (b) consider, and make appropriate representations about, any matter affecting children ordinarily resident in Wales.

(2) It shall be the sole responsibility of the Commissioner for Children and Young People in Scotland to—

- (a) hold an inquiry on any matters as regards children in Scotland; and
- (b) consider, and make appropriate representations about, any matter affecting children ordinarily resident in Scotland.

(3) It shall be the sole responsibility of the Commissioner for Children and Young People in Northern Ireland to—

- (a) hold an inquiry on any matters as regards children in Northern Ireland; and
- (b) consider, and make appropriate representations about, any matter affecting children ordinarily resident in Northern Ireland.'.

Amendment No. 1, in page 1, line 6, leave out clause 2.

Amendment No. 11, in clause 2, page 2, line 18, leave out 'take reasonable steps to'.

Amendment No. 12, in clause 2, page 2, line 19, leave out 'section' and insert 'Part'.

Amendment No. 44, in clause 4, page 2, line 24, at end insert—

'(c) ensure that direct services provided to children by the Commissioner or his staff in Wales whether formally or informally are provided in Welsh or English or both according to the wishes of the intended recipients.'.

Amendment No. 13, in clause 2, page 2, line 31, at end insert—

'(6A) In carrying out his functions under this section the Commissioner must take steps to ascertain the views of parents and other persons caring for children in improving the well-being of children.'.

Amendment No. 4, in page 4, line 1, leave out clause 4.

Amendment No. 34, in page 4, line 24, leave out clause 5.

Amendment No. 45, in page 4, line 24, leave out clauses 5 to 7.

Amendment No. 24, in clause 5, page 4, line 29, leave out '(12) of section 2' and insert—

'(9) of section [Children's Commissioner: functions]'.

Amendment No. 25, in clause 6, page 5, line 6, leave out '(12) of section 2' and insert—

'(9) of section [Children's Commissioner: functions]'.

Government amendment No. 28.

Amendment No. 26, in clause 7, page 5, line 38, leave out '(12) of section 2' and insert—

'(9) of section [Children's Commissioner: functions]'.

Amendment No. 27, in clause 9, page 7, line 7, leave out '2(11) and (12)' and insert—

'[Children's Commissioner: functions](8) and (9)'.

Government amendment No. 30.

Amendment No. 9, in schedule 1, page 44, line 19, at end insert—

'(1A) The Secretary of State must take reasonable steps to involve children and representatives of children's organisations in the process of appointment of the Commissioner.'.

Amendment No. 10, in schedule 1, page 45, line 31, leave out

'and on such conditions (if any).'.

Mrs. Brooke: I think that the consensus has come to an end. I rise to speak to new clause 1 and amendment No. 1, which would delete clause 2, as amended in Committee, to consequential amendments Nos. 24 to 27, and to amendment No. 4, which would leave out clause 4. My hon. Friend the Member for Brecon and Radnorshire (Mr. Williams) very much hopes to speak to new clause 2, and on other issues pertaining particularly to Wales. As we are short of time, it might help if I said at the outset that we want to press new clauses 1 and 2 to a vote.

The Minister will be aware that a wide range of organisations and individuals are enormously disappointed with the amendments to clause 2 that were recently passed in Committee. During the debate, it became apparent that the Government's views on the functions and role of the children's commissioner were fundamentally different from those who opposed the amendments, with little hope of convergence. Given the widespread welcome for a Children's Commissioner for England—I do indeed welcome the concept—it is surely right that we revisit the issues and reflect on the cross-party support given in the other place to a clause similar to new clause 1. Indeed, new clause 1 is also very similar to new clause 13, as proposed by the Conservatives.

As a consequence of the Government's amendments, the children's commissioner now has the function of

"promoting awareness of the views and interests of children".

That contrasts with the much stronger statement resulting from cross-party amendments made in the other place, which would have given the commissioner the function of

"promoting and safeguarding the rights and interests"

of children. As the Children's Commissioner for Wales said:

> "What sort of 'champion' is it that does not advocate for the rights of the group of people they are championing?"

We welcome the fact that the Government accepted at a very early stage an amendment in the other place whereby the commissioner "must"—rather than "may"—have regard to the United Nations convention on the rights of the child. But the Government also required that the commissioner be concerned "in particular" with the five "outcome goals". The Joint Committee on Human Rights concluded:

> "We consider that the confusion engendered by reincorporating in the Bill a duty to have regard both to the Convention and the five outcomes will risk downgrading the Convention from a framework to a background to the Commissioner's work . . . We conclude that it is unnecessary for the five outcomes listed in clause 2(3) as originally introduced to be reinstated. If the Government feels they must, they should be clearly placed within the context of the CRC."

The Minister told the Committee that if the focus were simply on rights, it would limit the work that the commissioner could do on behalf of children. That is a point with which we have considerable difficulty.

2 pm

There is nothing narrow about the proposed focus on rights and interests. The convention on the rights of the child covers all aspects of childhood and we ratified that convention in 1991. It gives all babies and children a comprehensive set of economic, social, cultural, civil and political rights, 40 in all. Because of constraints on time, I shall not run through them all, but they cover education, health, sexual exploitation, adoption, children in trouble with the law and so forth. The convention provides a wide framework for the children's commissioner and it is not limiting in the way the Minister suggested. It is, indeed, a foundation on which everything else can be built.

We oppose clause 4 because it gives the Secretary of State the power to direct the commissioner to undertake an inquiry. The Government have given assurances that they foresee the power being used only in cases of extreme significance. However, the Secretary of State can already convene such an inquiry under existing powers.

Ms Debra Shipley (Stourbridge) (Lab): Does the hon. Lady recall that, in Committee, the Minister for Children argued in favour of the Secretary of State having powers to direct? Does she agree that that is totally wrong and that the Secretary of State should not have such powers? The Secretary of State can already instigate inquiries and it is vital that the children's commissioner be independent of Government and free to comment on Government inquiries. Can the hon. Lady envisage circumstances in which a Government inquiry could have a specific political dimension, making the independence of the children's commissioner absolutely vital?

Mrs. Brooke: I thank the hon. Lady for her intervention and I could not agree more with her, so I will cut a bit out of my speech. It is indeed vital that we have a genuinely independent children's champion.

In Committee, the Minister said that the changes that she was proposing would

> "ensure that we have the very best commissioner in the world, built on our experience of the workings of commissioners in other countries."—[*Official Report, Standing Committee B*, 12 October 2004; c. 16.]

All members of the Committee wanted the best commissioner in the world, but which other commissioner anywhere does not have the basic right and duty of promoting and safeguarding children's rights? None. The model proposed for our commissioner is far weaker than those that exist in Wales, Scotland and Northern Ireland. I understand that the European Network of Ombudspersons for Children has written to the Minister expressing concern at the weakness of the legislation, suggesting that the Children's Commissioner for England might not be able to join the network. In other words, we cannot be part of the club.

On Second Reading in the other place, my noble friend Baroness Walmsley said:

> "I was horrified to discover that the budget per child for the Northern Ireland Commissioner is £3.80, for every Welsh child it is £2.11, every Scottish child 98p, but the anticipated expenditure on every English child is only 24p"—[*Official Report, House of Lords*, 30 March 2004; Vol. 659, c. 1220.]

Suspicion remains that the limiting of the role of the English commissioner is financial. I believe that that is quite fundamental.

Briefly, we welcome Govt amendment No. 30—the Government were listening there—and also have considerable sympathy for new clause 3. I am mindful that many other hon. Members have important contributions to make, so I shall end there.

Mr. Martyn Jones: I rise this time, I hope, to speak to the correct group of amendments. It all shows how keen I am to get my views on the record. [HON. MEMBERS: "Excellent."] I support, as do other members of the Committee, the hon. Member for Mid-Dorset and North Poole (Mrs. Brooke). We are co-signatories in respect of her new clause and of mine; they are complementary.

My amending provision is designed totally to remove the role of the Children's Commissioner for England out of the Welsh equation. At the same time the other extends the role of the Children's Commissioner for Wales to fill the gap and provide a comprehensive service to children from Wales wherever they are in care

[Mr. Martyn Jones]

or in need of care. Sadly, the Government have refused to deal with that matter to the satisfaction of the Committee, of non-governmental organisations across Wales and of the Children's Commissioner for Wales himself.

The Government say that they do not want to extend devolution on this matter, but extending powers at this stage would not affect the current devolution settlement one iota. Acceptance of the amendment would not give a single additional power to the National Assembly for Wales, but would allow the Children's Commissioner for Wales to carry out his duties properly and to help Welsh children in all aspects of their lives, wherever they are in the UK.

I cannot emphasise enough to the House that the Children's Commissioner for Wales is an independent body and not a National Assembly body and neither is the commissioner's role to be an adjunct to the Welsh Assembly Government. He stands alone and should not be mixed up in the devolution process, as the Government seem to fear is likely to happen.

Members of the Welsh Affairs Committee have rehearsed the arguments on many occasions over this specific point. Indeed, the Committee conducted a report, "The Powers of the Children's Commissioner for Wales", and we took evidence from the Minister for Children herself. The amendments advocate a logical and sensible move for the children of Wales, and I can assure the House that everyone in Wales agrees with what they propose. I would not have added my name to the amendments and new clauses if I were swimming against the tide of Welsh opinion. Children's organisations and the National Assembly for Wales believe that this is the right move for Welsh children and that the Government are wrong on this specific issue. I am sure that the Minister would agree that the acid test is how legislation operates in practice.

Mr. Touhig: I congratulate the Committee on its excellent work, as reflected in the report, but is my hon. Friend aware that, in his annual report, the Children's Commissioner for Wales made it plain that he was able to make representations to the Government on any matter affecting children in Wales? It works.

Mr. Jones: I have no doubt that he will attempt to make it work, but I also know from the evidence that he gave to the Committee—my hon. Friend the Under-Secretary is being selective—that he does not accept that the drafting of the legislation would make his job any easier. In fact, he said that it would make it more difficult.

Mr. Martin Caton (Gower) (Lab): Does my hon. Friend agree that the debate shows that we are not asking the Government to move very far? We are asking only to formalise and make proper an arrangement that already exists informally. The point is that the Children's Commissioner for Wales is not a creature of the Assembly—it is completely independent—so the huge constitutional crisis that Ministers seem to fear will not arise.

Mr. Jones: Indeed. There is no crisis. The Children and Family Court Advisory and Support Service has already been devolved to the Assembly. We are talking about something that is far less of a move than that. I simply cannot understand why the Government are so intransigent on this matter. I know that the Minister wants what is best for children in Wales, so she should listen more to what the NGOs and charities in Wales are saying; they want the same thing.

I am a huge supporter of the concept of draft legislation, but if the Government want Select Committees to undertake detailed pre-legislative scrutiny, they will have to accept that they should listen on occasions to what those Committees say. This is one such occasion and I ask the Government to accept the amendments in order to make a good and well-intentioned Bill even better.

Tim Loughton: The consensus is well and truly over at this stage, and the great melange of amendments and new clauses in the group covers a wide range of subjects about the children's commissioner. I shall speak briefly to new clause 1, proposed by the hon. Member for Mid-Dorset and North Poole (Mrs. Brooke), which we shall support. It is similar to our new clause 13.

In Committee debates about the children's commissioner, we applied five principles. First, the new children's commissioner should be independent of the Government and a champion for children. Secondly, the commissioner should be powerful enough to do his or her job properly, regardless of Government schemes and funding shortfalls. Thirdly, he should fully engage with children and young people and also gain their confidence, as Baroness Ashton said in the other place. Fourthly, the children's commissioner should have a clear status in the context of other UK commissioners and other agencies and interested parties. Fifthly, the commissioner should be accountable to all of the above.

I fear that the way in which the Government have emasculated the powers of the commissioner has spoiled the cross-party consensus. I see the Minister for Children responding with an enormous Cheshire cat grin on her face as though she has just killed the biggest rat of all. There was enormous cross-party consensus to put together a comprehensive new clause 2 in the Lords. She has completely torn the guts out of it.

Let us remind ourselves of what the Government have reversed. They have completely left out the mention of children's rights. Instead, the children's commissioner will be promoting awareness of children's views. Children have no rights in the Bill; it is rights-lite, rights-free. In Committee, I offered the Minister the comparison of considering how feeble the Disability Rights Commission would appear if its general function were simply to promote awareness of the views of disabled people. The same would be true of the Commission for Racial Equality or the Equal Opportunities Commission.

The Minister made a series of amendments rather than just replacing new clause 2, and I have never been sure why she did that. The Bill dilutes the review and reporting powers, removing the advocacy and whistleblowing arrangements. It declines to beef up the children's commissioner's obligations to make children aware that they can consult him, and restores the Government's limited checklist on what sort of children's views and interests—not rights—he can take notice of. It reinforces the commissioner's inability to undertake inquiries into individual cases, even when they have implications for children generally. That is why the original clause, to which the Government have reverted, was described in the upper Chamber as discriminatory and castrated and as giving the children's commissioner the powers of a glorified public relations consultant. All along, the Government have claimed that they have done what children wanted, but nowhere have they provided evidence of that.

Five references to children's rights have been removed. The provision to support individual children was removed. The references to reviewing and reporting on the effectiveness of advice and advocacy and on whistleblowing and inspection arrangements were removed. The Government reinserted their outcome goals in part 1 of the Bill.

The Minister said that, in Committee, Ministers stated that the Government would ensure that they had the best commissioner in the world, built on their experience of the workings of commissioners in other countries. The Children's Rights Alliance has been completely unable to find a commissioner anywhere who does not have the basic duty of promoting and safeguarding children's rights, which means, by the looks of things, that the Children's Commissioner for England will not be permitted to be part of the European network.

We want to restore the original clause 2 that was inserted in the Bill in the upper House, as it has been emasculated. We will support new clause 1 in endeavouring to do that, although we think that new clause 13, removing subsection (7)—about which we, and the Government, have some qualms—would be the best way to do that.

Amendments Nos. 11 and 12 are all about involving children, which is what the Bill is supposed to be all about. Amendment No. 11 would take the short phrase "take reasonable steps" from subsection (4) so that the children's commissioner must involve children in the discharge of his functions. That is what we have assumed all the way along, so why must "reasonable steps" be placed in the way of the commissioner's doing that?

In the first schedule to the Bill, we want to involve children much more in the selection of the children's commissioner in the first place. Amendment No. 9 says that the appointment of the commissioner should involve children and children's organisations. Consider the status of the other children's commissioners. In Wales, the appointment is made by the First Secretary of the National Assembly after taking account of the advice of the relevant committee, the views of relevant children and the advice of a selection panel independent of the Assembly. In Northern Ireland, the commissioner is appointed by the First Minister and Deputy First Minister jointly, independently of the Government. In Scotland, the commissioner is appointed by the Queen on the nomination of the Scottish Parliament. But in England, he will be appointed by the Secretary of State. That is very different from the arrangements that pertain in the rest of the United Kingdom, which is why the English commissioner is not going to be the best in the world. In a phrase often quoted in the House of Lords, it is all about big ears and no teeth.

2.15 pm

Among the other amendments, one originally tabled by Lord Northbourne places in the Bill a necessity for the children's commissioner to take into account the views of parents and carers when dealing with children. Parents have a very special status, the most special status. The Government trotted out the usual routine about it being iniquitous to specify one set of people or organisations, but we think that that is tosh when it applies to parents, who clearly have a special status, hence amendment No. 13.

The Government have dealt disgracefully with all the hard work that went into putting together a comprehensive new clause 2 that had support across the upper House and has support on all Benches in this House, other than the Government Front Bench. That work was about making the children's commissioner a real children's champion who would stand up to represent children and be a part of their lobbies. The Government have taken away all those additional powers that would have made the Children's Commissioner for England the most powerful and impressive of all, and that is a missed opportunity.

I shall not refer at length to concerns about the Welsh dimension. I share them, and we tabled amendments on that in Committee. There will be enormous confusion over the relationship between the English commissioner and those of the other three nations of the United Kingdom. Given that we have devolution, let us have a system under which the four commissioners can talk to each other equally without treading on each other's toes, as will invariably happen. We foresee great problems in the future, which is a pity. This is a missed opportunity, and I ask the House to support new clause 1.

Julie Morgan (Cardiff, North) (Lab): I speak in support of amendment No. 34, tabled by my hon. Friend the Member for Clwyd, South (Mr. Jones), and new clause 1.

We discussed issues relating to Wales at length in Standing Committee and in the Select Committee on Welsh Affairs. We have taken a lot of evidence, as my hon. Friend, who chairs the Committee, has said. The Government should listen to the Welsh Affairs Committee, whose views have been totally ignored. It is shameful that the Government have not taken more notice of what we have said.

The Government should also have taken more notice of the first children's commissioner to be set up in the United Kingdom, Peter Clarke, who has been in post for three years now. They did not even consult him about the shape and form of the new Children's Commissioner for England. That was a terrible failing. This is a good Bill and it is sad that issues remain that could have been sorted out. There is much to rejoice in, including today's good news from the Government, but it is sad that we have had to raise the Welsh dimension again today.

The overwhelming view in Wales is that the Government's proposals in clause 5, which amendment No. 34 aims to delete, would undermine the Children's Commissioner for Wales and be confusing to children in Wales. The Northern Ireland and Scotland commissioners also find the proposals undermining.

Clarity and simplicity seem to be the keys to any successful office. The Children's Commissioner for Wales has had a big impact and made a lot of difference

[Julie Morgan]

to consideration of children and their rights. The Government have not consulted him or listened to him. What is happening is undermining him. Their proposals are a setback for Wales.

The Children's Commissioner for Wales already has the power to listen to any concerns raised by children. He has been into prisons to see children and he has related his findings to the police and worked hard on such non-devolved matters. Clause 5 gives the English children's commissioner the function of promoting awareness in Wales about non-devolved matters, without any proposal for him to have even a base in Wales.

Mrs. Betty Williams (Conwy) (Lab): Is my hon. Friend aware that the president of the European Network of Ombudspersons for Children recently wrote to my right hon. Friend the Minister for Children emphasising that, under the job description that has been given, it is unlikely that the commissioner would be able to join the network. Not only is the commissioner in England likely to be a watered-down version of the commissioners already in place in the other UK nations, but the protection afforded would compare badly with what is offered by counterparts in Europe. I do not believe that English children are uniquely undeserving of a real commissioner.

Julie Morgan: I thank my hon. Friend for that intervention, and I support what she says.

The English children's commissioner will operate without knowledge of the Welsh context or of the interface between devolved and non-devolved matters. Peter Clarke and the children's commissioners for Scotland and for Northern Ireland have condemned the proposed model and said that it is a recipe for confusion. Peter Clarke said that if he visited secure accommodation in Neath and saw two children, he would be responsible for the one who had come in through the care system but not for the other if that child had come in through the juvenile justice system, because the latter child would come under the remit of the English children's commissioner.

That is bound to cause problems and difficulties. Our duty is to children in Wales, and we must ensure that those who have problems are clear about where they should take them. It is very sad that we have been unable to come to an arrangement that is satisfactory to everyone in Wales.

Clause 5 also allows the English Secretary of State to direct the English children's commissioner to undertake inquiries in Wales. That means that an English Minister can ask the English children's commissioner to conduct an inquiry, in Wales, into a case involving a Welsh child. That is a recipe for confusion, and it calls into question the independence of the Children's Commissioner for Wales. I do not see how a person who can be directed by a Secretary of State can be called "independent".

The Government are pinning their hopes on the commissioners being able to liaise with each other by means of a memorandum of understanding. This House should be giving out the clear message that the arrangements that we are making will best serve the interests of children in Wales. I am sorry that the Government have not listened to the Welsh Affairs Committee, the Children's Commissioner for Wales or to children's organisations in Wales, because it means that they have not listened to those who work most closely with children in Wales.

The Welsh Affairs Committee produced an excellent report on this matter, but the Government's response was very disappointing. I hope that my right hon. Friend the Minister will tell the House what she intends to do to tackle those problems.

Margaret Hodge: I want to begin by assuring all hon. Members that the Government have listened to other opinions, throughout this debate and in connection with every clause in the Bill. The range of amendments that the Government have tabled, in respect of the children's commissioner and of other matters, is proof of that. Not every interested party will agree on every aspect of the Bill, but that is another issue. We have been engaged in a thorough process and have tried to listen to all the issues that people have raised.

In the little time that remains, I want to go back over the principal issues, and the question of whether we are establishing a powerful and strong champion for children. I shall then turn to the issues raised by those of my hon. Friends who represent constituencies in Wales.

I repeat what I said in Committee: I believe that the commissioner for English children that the Bill establishes—who will also have responsibility for British children on non-devolved issues—will be an extremely powerful and effective champion on behalf of children. In framing the commissioner's powers and duties, we have had regard for the UN convention on the rights of the child, which is why we listened to the arguments in support of amendments tabled in the upper House. As a result, the commissioner must have regard for the UNCRC, which proves that his work has its basis in children's rights.

However, we have also said from the start that we do not wish to establish in England a commissioner whose primary purpose is to police individual rights. A panoply of structures exists already—in the courts and various tribunals—that ensures that individuals can pursue their rights. The commissioner will have the duty to oversee those systems, ensuring that the complaint mechanisms and tribunals work and that the courts defend individual rights.

Yet we also want the commissioner to do more. We want him to look at the outcomes that children and young people say are important, and at the much wider picture of children's lives. He would report to Parliament and elsewhere on all those important matters. As I said in Committee, if a commissioner were in place today, he would be looking at matters such as how children and young people are portrayed in the media, their position in the criminal justice system, and child obesity. The commissioner may well also look at other important issues, but if he had to focus on policing individual rights, he would have no time to do anything else.

I assure the House that under the general functions laid out in clause 2 the commissioner will be independent and able to look at any issue or question.

He will be able to initiate inquires into any case that has wider significance and public policy implications. That is another example of how the Government have listened.

The commissioner will have total discretion over the budgets that he commands, except for the normal considerations of propriety. Another sign of the Government's willingness to listen is the fact that the commissioner will have access to children—a provision that we introduced to the Bill. In addition, the Government have amended the Bill to ensure that the commissioner can seek responses to the inquiries and recommendations contained in reports that he compiles. The commissioner will report annually to Parliament, and I hope that the relevant Select Committees will hold him to account.

Finally, I remind the hon. Member for East Worthing and Shoreham (Tim Loughton) that the word "rights" does not appear in the legislation setting out the functions of the disability rights commissioner.

I turn now to the issues raised by those of my hon. Friends with constituencies in Wales. Like them, the Government are anxious to ensure that children in Wales are no less well served by their children's commissioner than their counterparts in England would be. However, we must work within the devolution settlement as it stands. I know that some of my hon. Friends find that difficult, but we do not want the children's commissioner—who will report every year to this House through the Secretary of State for Education and Skills—to relinquish all responsibility for matters in Wales that remain the responsibility of Westminster.

Certain hon. Members have argued that we cannot change the devolution settlement in the context of this debate. I agree, and that is why we tabled three new clauses in Committee to clarify the role of the children's commissioners in Wales, Scotland and Northern Ireland, and to enable all the UK commissioners to work together on non-devolved matters. Those amendments were accepted and now form part of the Bill.

We envisage that, in practice, the commissioners will draw up informal ways of working together on non-devolved issues that will be child friendly while at the same time remaining within the terms of the devolution settlement. To deprive children in Scotland, Northern Ireland or Wales of the services of the children's commissioner in respect of non-devolved matters would not enhance those children's national identity or culture. They will simply lose the services of a commissioner who has a general overview and represents all our children in matters affecting the United Kingdom as a whole that are decided in Westminster. They will therefore be worse off than their counterparts in England. I cannot believe that that is the wish of my hon. Friends in tabling those amendments or of the House, and I hope—

It being half past Two o'clock, MR. DEPUTY SPEAKER, *proceeded to put the Question already proposed from the Chair, pursuant to Order [this day].*

Question put, That the clause be read a Second time:—

The House divided: Ayes 166, Noes 286.

Division No. 301] [2:30 pm

AYES

Ainsworth, Peter *(E Surrey)*
Atkinson, Peter *(Hexham)*
Barker, Gregory
Baron, John *(Billericay)*
Bercow, John
Beresford, Sir Paul
Best, Harold
Blunt, Crispin
Boswell, Tim
Brady, Graham
Brake, Tom *(Carshalton)*
Brazier, Julian
Breed, Colin
Brooke, Mrs Annette L.
Browning, Mrs Angela
Bruce, Malcolm
Burns, Simon
Burnside, David
Burstow, Paul
Burt, Alistair
Cable, Dr. Vincent
Calton, Mrs Patsy
Campbell, rh Sir Menzies *(NE Fife)*
Carmichael, Alistair
Cash, William
Caton, Martin
Chapman, Sir Sydney *(Chipping Barnet)*
Chope, Christopher
Clappison, James
Clifton-Brown, Geoffrey
Conway, Derek
Cormack, Sir Patrick
Cotter, Brian
Cran, James *(Beverley)*
Davey, Edward *(Kingston)*
Davis, rh David *(Haltemprice & Howden)*
Dawson, Hilton
Doughty, Sue
Duncan, Alan *(Rutland)*
Duncan Smith, rh Iain
Edwards, Huw
Evans, Nigel
Fabricant, Michael
Fallon, Michael
Field, Mark *(Cities of London & Westminster)*
Flight, Howard
Fox, Dr. Liam
Garnier, Edward
George, Andrew *(St. Ives)*
Gibb, Nick *(Bognor Regis)*
Gidley, Sandra
Goodman, Paul
Gray, James *(N Wilts)*
Green, Damian *(Ashford)*
Green, Matthew *(Ludlow)*
Greenway, John
Grieve, Dominic
Gummer, rh John
Hague, rh William
Hammond, Philip
Hancock, Mike
Harvey, Nick
Hawkins, Nick
Hayes, John *(S Holland)*
Heald, Oliver
Heath, David
Heathcoat-Amory, rh David
Hendry, Charles
Hogg, rh Douglas
Holmes, Paul
Horam, John *(Orpington)*
Howard, rh Michael
Hughes, Simon *(Southwark N)*
Jenkin, Bernard
Jones, Martyn *(Clwyd S)*
Keetch, Paul
Kennedy, rh Charles *(Ross Skye & Inverness)*
Kirkbride, Miss Julie
Kirkwood, Sir Archy
Knight, rh Greg *(E Yorkshire)*
Laing, Mrs Eleanor
Lait, Mrs Jacqui
Lamb, Norman
Lansley, Andrew
Letwin, rh Oliver
Lewis, Dr. Julian *(New Forest E)*
Lidington, David
Llwyd, Elfyn
Loughton, Tim
Luff, Peter *(M-Worcs)*
Mackay, rh Andrew
Maclean, rh David
McLoughlin, Patrick
Malins, Humfrey
Maples, John
Maude, rh Francis
Mawhinney, rh Sir Brian
May, rh Mrs Theresa
Mercer, Patrick
Moore, Michael
Morgan, Julie
Moss, Malcolm
Murrison, Dr. Andrew
Oaten, Mark *(Winchester)*
O'Brien, Stephen *(Eddisbury)*
Öpik, Lembit
Ottaway, Richard
Owen, Albert
Page, Richard
Paterson, Owen
Pickles, Eric
Portillo, rh Michael
Pugh, Dr. John
Randall, John
Redwood, rh John
Rendel, David
Robathan, Andrew
Robertson, Hugh *(Faversham & M-Kent)*
Robertson, Laurence *(Tewk'b'ry)*
Robinson, Peter *(Belfast E)*
Rosindell, Andrew
Ruffley, David
Russell, Bob *(Colchester)*
Sanders, Adrian
Sayeed, Jonathan
Selous, Andrew
Shephard, rh Mrs Gillian
Shepherd, Richard
Shipley, Ms Debra
Simpson, Keith *(M-Norfolk)*
Smith, Sir Robert *(W Ab'd'ns & Kincardine)*
Smyth, Rev. Martin *(Belfast S)*
Spelman, Mrs Caroline
Spicer, Sir Michael
Spink, Bob *(Castle Point)*
Spring, Richard
Stanley, rh Sir John
Streeter, Gary
Swayne, Desmond

Swire, Hugo *(E Devon)*
Syms, Robert
Tapsell, Sir Peter
Taylor, Ian *(Esher)*
Taylor, John *(Solihull)*
Taylor, Matthew *(Truro)*
Taylor, Sir Teddy
Teather, Sarah
Thomas, Simon *(Ceredigion)*
Thurso, John
Tonge, Dr. Jenny
Tredinnick, David
Tyler, Paul *(N Cornwall)*
Tyrie, Andrew
Viggers, Peter
Vis, Dr. Rudi

Walter, Robert
Waterson, Nigel
Watkinson, Angela
Whittingdale, John
Wiggin, Bill
Williams, Betty *(Conwy)*
Williams, Hywel *(Caernarfon)*
Willis, Phil
Wilshire, David
Winterton, Ann *(Congleton)*
Winterton, Sir Nicholas *(Macclesfield)*

Tellers for the Ayes:
Mr. Andrew Stunell and
Mr. Roger Williams

NOES

Abbott, Ms Diane
Adams, Irene *(Paisley N)*
Ainsworth, Bob *(Cov'try NE)*
Allen, Graham
Anderson, rh Donald *(Swansea E)*
Anderson, Janet *(Rossendale & Darwen)*
Armstrong, rh Ms Hilary
Atherton, Ms Candy
Austin, John
Bailey, Adrian
Baird, Vera
Barnes, Harry
Barron, rh Kevin
Battle, rh John
Bayley, Hugh
Beard, Nigel
Beckett, rh Margaret
Begg, Miss Anne
Benn, rh Hilary
Berry, Roger
Betts, Clive
Blackman, Liz
Blizzard, Bob
Blunkett, rh David
Boateng, rh Paul
Bradley, rh Keith *(Withington)*
Bradley, Peter *(The Wrekin)*
Bradshaw, Ben
Brennan, Kevin
Browne, Desmond
Bryant, Chris
Buck, Ms Karen
Burden, Richard
Burgon, Colin
Burnham, Andy
Byers, rh Stephen
Byrne, Liam *(B'ham Hodge H)*
Cairns, David
Campbell, Mrs Anne *(C'bridge)*
Campbell, Ronnie *(Blyth V)*
Caplin, Ivor
Casale, Roger
Cawsey, Ian *(Brigg)*
Challen, Colin
Chapman, Ben *(Wirral S)*
Chaytor, David
Clapham, Michael
Clark, Mrs Helen *(Peterborough)*
Clark, Dr. Lynda *(Edinburgh Pentlands)*
Clark, Paul *(Gillingham)*
Clarke, rh Charles *(Norwich S)*
Clarke, rh Tom *(Coatbridge & Chryston)*
Clelland, David
Clwyd, Ann *(Cynon V)*
Coaker, Vernon

Coffey, Ms Ann
Cohen, Harry
Colman, Tony
Cook, rh Robin *(Livingston)*
Corbyn, Jeremy
Corston, rh Jean
Cousins, Jim
Cranston, Ross
Crausby, David
Cruddas, Jon
Cryer, John *(Hornchurch)*
Cummings, John
Cunningham, rh Dr. Jack *(Copeland)*
Cunningham, Jim *(Coventry S)*
Cunningham, Tony *(Workington)*
Curtis-Thomas, Mrs Claire
Davey, Valerie *(Bristol W)*
David, Wayne
Davidson, Ian
Davies, rh Denzil *(Llanelli)*
Dean, Mrs Janet
Denham, rh John
Dhanda, Parmjit
Dismore, Andrew
Dobbin, Jim *(Heywood)*
Dobson, rh Frank
Donohoe, Brian H.
Doran, Frank
Dowd, Jim *(Lewisham W)*
Drew, David *(Stroud)*
Eagle, Angela *(Wallasey)*
Eagle, Maria *(L'pool Garston)*
Efford, Clive
Ennis, Jeff *(Barnsley E)*
Etherington, Bill
Farrelly, Paul
Field, rh Frank *(Birkenhead)*
Fisher, Mark
Flint, Caroline
Flynn, Paul *(Newport W)*
Follett, Barbara
Foster, Michael *(Worcester)*
Foster, Michael Jabez *(Hastings & Rye)*
Gapes, Mike *(Ilford S)*
George, rh Bruce *(Walsall S)*
Gerrard, Neil
Godsiff, Roger
Goggins, Paul
Griffiths, Jane *(Reading E)*
Griffiths, Win *(Bridgend)*
Grogan, John
Hain, rh Peter
Hall, Mike *(Weaver Vale)*
Hall, Patrick *(Bedford)*
Hamilton, David *(Midlothian)*
Hamilton, Fabian *(Leeds NE)*

Hanson, David
Harman, rh Ms Harriet
Harris, Tom *(Glasgow Cathcart)*
Havard, Dai *(Merthyr Tydfil & Rhymney)*
Healey, John
Henderson, Doug *(Newcastle N)*
Henderson, Ivan *(Harwich)*
Hendrick, Mark
Heppell, John
Hesford, Stephen
Hewitt, rh Ms Patricia
Heyes, David
Hodge, Margaret
Hood, Jimmy *(Clydesdale)*
Hoon, rh Geoffrey
Hopkins, Kelvin
Howarth, rh Alan *(Newport E)*
Howarth, George *(Knowsley N & Sefton E)*
Hoyle, Lindsay
Hughes, Beverley *(Stretford & Urmston)*
Hughes, Kevin *(Doncaster N)*
Humble, Mrs Joan
Hurst, Alan *(Braintree)*
Iddon, Dr. Brian
Illsley, Eric
Irranca-Davies, Huw
Jackson, Glenda *(Hampstead & Highgate)*
Jackson, Helen *(Hillsborough)*
Johnson, rh Alan *(Hull W)*
Johnson, Miss Melanie *(Welwyn Hatfield)*
Jones, Helen *(Warrington N)*
Jones, Jon Owen *(Cardiff C)*
Jones, Kevan *(N Durham)*
Jones, Lynne *(Selly Oak)*
Joyce, Eric *(Falkirk W)*
Kaufman, rh Sir Gerald
Kemp, Fraser
Kennedy, Jane *(Wavertree)*
Khabra, Piara S.
Kilfoyle, Peter
King, Andy *(Rugby)*
King, Ms Oona *(Bethnal Green & Bow)*
Knight, Jim *(S Dorset)*
Lammy, David
Lawrence, Mrs Jackie
Laxton, Bob *(Derby N)*
Lazarowicz, Mark
Leslie, Christopher
Levitt, Tom *(High Peak)*
Lewis, Ivan *(Bury S)*
Lewis, Terry *(Worsley)*
Liddell, rh Mrs Helen
Linton, Martin
Lloyd, Tony *(Manchester C)*
Love, Andrew
Lucas, Ian *(Wrexham)*
Luke, Iain *(Dundee E)*
McAvoy, Thomas
McCabe, Stephen
McCafferty, Chris
McDonnell, John
MacDougall, John
McFall, rh John
McGuire, Mrs Anne
McKechin, Ann
McKenna, Rosemary
Mackinlay, Andrew
Mactaggart, Fiona
McWilliam, John
Mahon, Mrs Alice

Mallaber, Judy
Mann, John *(Bassetlaw)*
Marris, Rob *(Wolverh'ton SW)*
Marsden, Gordon *(Blackpool S)*
Marshall, Eric
Meacher, rh Michael
Meale, Alan *(Mansfield)*
Merron, Gillian
Michael, rh Alun
Miller, Andrew
Mitchell, Austin *(Gt Grimsby)*
Mole, Chris
Moonie, Dr. Lewis
Moran, Margaret
Morley, Elliot
Morris, rh Estelle
Mudie, George
Munn, Ms Meg
Murphy, Denis *(Wansbeck)*
Murphy, Jim *(Eastwood)*
Naysmith, Dr. Doug
O'Brien, Bill *(Normanton)*
O'Brien, Mike *(N Warks)*
O'Hara, Edward
Olner, Bill
O'Neill, Martin
Organ, Diana
Osborne, Sandra *(Ayr)*
Perham, Linda
Picking, Anne
Pickthall, Colin
Pike, Peter *(Burnley)*
Plaskitt, James
Pollard, Kerry
Pond, Chris *(Gravesham)*
Pope, Greg *(Hyndburn)*
Pound, Stephen
Prentice, Ms Bridget *(Lewisham E)*
Prentice, Gordon *(Pendle)*
Prosser, Gwyn
Purchase, Ken
Quin, rh Joyce
Quinn, Lawrie
Rapson, Syd *(Portsmouth N)*
Raynsford, rh Nick
Reed, Andy *(Loughborough)*
Robertson, John *(Glasgow Anniesland)*
Roche, Mrs Barbara
Rooney, Terry
Ross, Ernie *(Dundee W)*
Roy, Frank *(Motherwell)*
Ruane, Chris
Ruddock, Joan
Russell, Ms Christine *(City of Chester)*
Ryan, Joan *(Enfield N)*
Sawford, Phil
Sedgemore, Brian
Shaw, Jonathan
Sheerman, Barry
Sheridan, Jim
Simpson, Alan *(Nottingham S)*
Singh, Marsha
Skinner, Dennis
Smith, rh Andrew *(Oxford E)*
Smith, John *(Glamorgan)*
Smith, Llew *(Blaenau Gwent)*
Southworth, Helen
Starkey, Dr. Phyllis
Stewart, Ian *(Eccles)*
Stinchcombe, Paul
Strang, rh Dr. Gavin
Stringer, Graham
Stuart, Ms Gisela

Sutcliffe, Gerry
Tami, Mark *(Alyn)*
Taylor, rh Ann *(Dewsbury)*
Taylor, Dari *(Stockton S)*
Taylor, David *(NW Leics)*
Thomas, Gareth *(Clwyd W)*
Timms, Stephen
Tipping, Paddy
Touhig, Don *(Islwyn)*
Trickett, Jon
Truswell, Paul
Turner, Dennis *(Wolverh'ton SE)*
Turner, Neil *(Wigan)*
Twigg, Derek *(Halton)*
Tynan, Bill *(Hamilton S)*
Vaz, Keith *(Leicester E)*
Vis, Dr. Rudi
Walley, Ms Joan
Ward, Claire
Wareing, Robert N.
Watts, David
White, Brian
Wicks, Malcolm
Williams, rh Alan *(Swansea W)*
Wills, Michael
Winnick, David
Winterton, Ms Rosie *(Doncaster C)*
Woodward, Shaun
Woolas, Phil
Worthington, Tony
Wright, Anthony D. *(Gt Yarmouth)*
Wright, Tony *(Cannock)*

Tellers for the Noes:
Mr. Nick Ainger and
Jim Fitzpatrick

Question accordingly negatived.

MR. DEPUTY SPEAKER *then proceeded to put forthwith the Question necessary for the disposal of the business to be concluded at that hour.*

New Clause 2

POWERS OF CONSIDERATION AND REPRESENTATION BY CHILDREN'S COMMISSIONER FOR WALES

'(1) Section 75A of the Care Standards Act 2000 (c.14) (additional powers of consideration and representation) is amended as follows.

(2) Omit subsections (1) and (2) and insert—

> "The Commissioner may consider, and make representations about, any matter affecting the rights and welfare of children in Wales to—
>
> (a) the Assembly, and
>
> (b) where the matter is not devolved and the Commissioner considers it appropriate, to the responsible United Kingdom Minister of the Crown or Government department.".'.—*[Mr. Roger Williams.]*

Brought up, and read the First time.

Motion made, and Question put, That the clause be read a Second time:—

The House divided: Ayes 175, Noes 283.

Division No. 302] **[2:44 pm**

AYES

Ainsworth, Peter *(E Surrey)*
Atkinson, Peter *(Hexham)*
Baker, Norman
Baldry, Tony
Barker, Gregory
Baron, John *(Billericay)*
Bercow, John
Beresford, Sir Paul
Blunt, Crispin
Boswell, Tim
Brady, Graham
Brake, Tom *(Carshalton)*
Brazier, Julian
Breed, Colin
Brooke, Mrs Annette L.
Browning, Mrs Angela
Bruce, Malcolm
Burns, Simon
Burnside, David
Burstow, Paul
Burt, Alistair
Butterfill, Sir John
Cable, Dr. Vincent
Calton, Mrs Patsy
Campbell, rh Sir Menzies *(NE Fife)*
Carmichael, Alistair
Cash, William
Caton, Martin
Chapman, Sir Sydney *(Chipping Barnet)*
Chope, Christopher
Clappison, James
Clifton-Brown, Geoffrey
Conway, Derek
Cook, rh Robin *(Livingston)*
Cotter, Brian
Cran, James *(Beverley)*
Davey, Edward *(Kingston)*
Davis, rh David *(Haltemprice & Howden)*
Dawson, Hilton
Djanogly, Jonathan
Doughty, Sue
Duncan, Alan *(Rutland)*
Duncan Smith, rh Iain
Edwards, Huw
Evans, Nigel
Fabricant, Michael
Fallon, Michael
Field, Mark *(Cities of London & Westminster)*
Flight, Howard
Foster, Don *(Bath)*
Fox, Dr. Liam
Garnier, Edward
George, Andrew *(St. Ives)*
Gibb, Nick *(Bognor Regis)*
Gidley, Sandra
Goodman, Paul
Gray, James *(N Wilts)*
Green, Damian *(Ashford)*
Green, Matthew *(Ludlow)*
Greenway, John
Grieve, Dominic
Gummer, rh John
Hague, rh William
Hammond, Philip
Hancock, Mike
Harvey, Nick
Hawkins, Nick
Hayes, John *(S Holland)*
Heald, Oliver
Heath, David
Heathcoat-Amory, rh David
Hendry, Charles
Hogg, rh Douglas
Holmes, Paul
Horam, John *(Orpington)*
Hughes, Simon *(Southwark N)*
Jenkin, Bernard
Jones, Martyn *(Clwyd S)*
Keetch, Paul
Kennedy, rh Charles *(Ross Skye & Inverness)*
Kirkbride, Miss Julie
Kirkwood, Sir Archy
Knight, rh Greg *(E Yorkshire)*
Laing, Mrs Eleanor
Lait, Mrs Jacqui
Lamb, Norman
Lansley, Andrew
Laws, David *(Yeovil)*
Letwin, rh Oliver
Lewis, Dr. Julian *(New Forest E)*
Lidington, David
Llwyd, Elfyn
Loughton, Tim
Luff, Peter *(M-Worcs)*
McFall, rh John
Mackay, rh Andrew
Maclean, rh David
McLoughlin, Patrick
Malins, Humfrey
Mann, John *(Bassetlaw)*
Maples, John
Maude, rh Francis
Mawhinney, rh Sir Brian
May, rh Mrs Theresa
Mercer, Patrick
Moore, Michael
Morgan, Julie
Moss, Malcolm
Mudie, George
Murrison, Dr. Andrew
Oaten, Mark *(Winchester)*
O'Brien, Stephen *(Eddisbury)*
Öpik, Lembit
Ottaway, Richard
Owen, Albert
Page, Richard
Paterson, Owen
Pickles, Eric
Portillo, rh Michael
Pugh, Dr. John
Randall, John
Redwood, rh John
Rendel, David
Robathan, Andrew
Robertson, Hugh *(Faversham & M-Kent)*
Robertson, Laurence *(Tewk'b'ry)*
Robinson, Peter *(Belfast E)*
Rosindell, Andrew
Ruffley, David
Russell, Bob *(Colchester)*
Sanders, Adrian
Sayeed, Jonathan
Selous, Andrew
Shephard, rh Mrs Gillian
Shepherd, Richard
Shipley, Ms Debra
Simpson, Keith *(M-Norfolk)*
Smith, Sir Robert *(W Ab'd'ns & Kincardine)*
Spelman, Mrs Caroline
Spicer, Sir Michael
Spink, Bob *(Castle Point)*
Spring, Richard
Stanley, rh Sir John
Streeter, Gary
Swayne, Desmond
Swire, Hugo *(E Devon)*
Syms, Robert
Tapsell, Sir Peter
Taylor, Ian *(Esher)*
Taylor, John *(Solihull)*
Taylor, Matthew *(Truro)*
Taylor, Sir Teddy
Teather, Sarah
Thomas, Simon *(Ceredigion)*
Thurso, John
Tonge, Dr. Jenny
Tredinnick, David
Turner, Andrew *(Isle of Wight)*
Tyler, Paul *(N Cornwall)*
Tyrie, Andrew
Viggers, Peter
Walter, Robert
Waterson, Nigel
Watkinson, Angela
Whittingdale, John
Wiggin, Bill
Williams, Betty *(Conwy)*
Williams, Hywel *(Caernarfon)*
Willis, Phil
Wilshire, David
Winterton, Ann *(Congleton)*
Winterton, Sir Nicholas *(Macclesfield)*
Wright, Tony *(Cannock)*
Yeo, Tim *(S Suffolk)*
Young, rh Sir George

Tellers for the Ayes:
Mr. Andrew Stunell and
Mr. Roger Williams

NOES

Abbott, Ms Diane
Adams, Irene *(Paisley N)*
Ainsworth, Bob *(Cov'try NE)*
Allen, Graham
Anderson, rh Donald *(Swansea E)*
Anderson, Janet *(Rossendale & Darwen)*
Armstrong, rh Ms Hilary
Atherton, Ms Candy
Atkins, Charlotte
Austin, John
Bailey, Adrian
Baird, Vera
Barnes, Harry
Barron, rh Kevin
Battle, rh John
Bayley, Hugh
Beard, Nigel
Beckett, rh Margaret
Begg, Miss Anne
Benn, rh Hilary
Berry, Roger
Best, Harold
Blackman, Liz
Blizzard, Bob
Blunkett, rh David
Boateng, rh Paul
Bradley, rh Keith *(Withington)*
Bradley, Peter *(The Wrekin)*
Bradshaw, Ben
Brennan, Kevin
Browne, Desmond
Bryant, Chris
Buck, Ms Karen
Burden, Richard
Burgon, Colin
Burnham, Andy
Byers, rh Stephen
Byrne, Liam *(B'ham Hodge H)*
Cairns, David
Campbell, Alan *(Tynemouth)*
Campbell, Mrs Anne *(C'bridge)*
Campbell, Ronnie *(Blyth V)*
Caplin, Ivor
Casale, Roger
Cawsey, Ian *(Brigg)*
Challen, Colin
Chapman, Ben *(Wirral S)*
Chaytor, David
Clapham, Michael
Clark, Mrs Helen *(Peterborough)*
Clark, Dr. Lynda *(Edinburgh Pentlands)*
Clark, Paul *(Gillingham)*
Clarke, rh Charles *(Norwich S)*
Clarke, rh Tom *(Coatbridge & Chryston)*
Clelland, David
Clwyd, Ann *(Cynon V)*
Coaker, Vernon
Coffey, Ms Ann
Cohen, Harry
Colman, Tony
Corbyn, Jeremy
Corston, rh Jean
Cousins, Jim
Cranston, Ross
Crausby, David
Cruddas, Jon
Cryer, John *(Hornchurch)*
Cummings, John
Cunningham, rh Dr. Jack *(Copeland)*
Cunningham, Jim *(Coventry S)*
Cunningham, Tony *(Workington)*
Curtis-Thomas, Mrs Claire
Davey, Valerie *(Bristol W)*
David, Wayne
Davidson, Ian
Dean, Mrs Janet
Denham, rh John
Dhanda, Parmjit
Dismore, Andrew
Dobbin, Jim *(Heywood)*
Dobson, rh Frank
Donohoe, Brian H.
Doran, Frank
Dowd, Jim *(Lewisham W)*
Drew, David *(Stroud)*
Eagle, Angela *(Wallasey)*
Eagle, Maria *(L'pool Garston)*
Efford, Clive
Ennis, Jeff *(Barnsley E)*
Etherington, Bill
Farrelly, Paul
Field, rh Frank *(Birkenhead)*
Fisher, Mark
Flint, Caroline
Follett, Barbara
Foster, Michael *(Worcester)*
Foster, Michael Jabez *(Hastings & Rye)*
Gapes, Mike *(Ilford S)*
Gerrard, Neil
Godsiff, Roger
Goggins, Paul
Griffiths, Jane *(Reading E)*
Griffiths, Nigel *(Edinburgh S)*
Grogan, John
Hain, rh Peter
Hall, Mike *(Weaver Vale)*
Hall, Patrick *(Bedford)*
Hamilton, David *(Midlothian)*
Hamilton, Fabian *(Leeds NE)*
Hanson, David
Harman, rh Ms Harriet
Harris, Tom *(Glasgow Cathcart)*
Havard, Dai *(Merthyr Tydfil & Rhymney)*
Healey, John
Henderson, Doug *(Newcastle N)*
Henderson, Ivan *(Harwich)*
Hendrick, Mark
Heppell, John
Hesford, Stephen
Hewitt, rh Ms Patricia
Heyes, David
Hodge, Margaret
Hood, Jimmy *(Clydesdale)*
Hoon, rh Geoffrey
Hopkins, Kelvin
Howarth, rh Alan *(Newport E)*
Howarth, George *(Knowsley N & Sefton E)*
Hoyle, Lindsay
Hughes, Beverley *(Stretford & Urmston)*
Hughes, Kevin *(Doncaster N)*
Humble, Mrs Joan
Hurst, Alan *(Braintree)*
Iddon, Dr. Brian
Illsley, Eric
Ingram, rh Adam
Irranca-Davies, Huw
Jackson, Glenda *(Hampstead & Highgate)*
Jackson, Helen *(Hillsborough)*
Johnson, rh Alan *(Hull W)*
Johnson, Miss Melanie *(Welwyn Hatfield)*
Jones, Helen *(Warrington N)*
Jones, Jon Owen *(Cardiff C)*
Jones, Kevan *(N Durham)*
Jones, Lynne *(Selly Oak)*
Joyce, Eric *(Falkirk W)*
Kaufman, rh Sir Gerald
Kemp, Fraser
Kennedy, Jane *(Wavertree)*
Khabra, Piara S.
Kilfoyle, Peter
King, Andy *(Rugby)*
King, Ms Oona *(Bethnal Green & Bow)*
Knight, Jim *(S Dorset)*
Ladyman, Dr. Stephen
Lammy, David
Lawrence, Mrs Jackie
Laxton, Bob *(Derby N)*
Lazarowicz, Mark
Leslie, Christopher
Levitt, Tom *(High Peak)*
Lewis, Ivan *(Bury S)*
Lewis, Terry *(Worsley)*
Liddell, rh Mrs Helen
Linton, Martin
Lloyd, Tony *(Manchester C)*
Love, Andrew
Lucas, Ian *(Wrexham)*
Luke, Iain *(Dundee E)*
McAvoy, Thomas
McCabe, Stephen
McCafferty, Chris
McDonnell, John
MacDougall, John
McGuire, Mrs Anne
McKechin, Ann
McKenna, Rosemary
Mackinlay, Andrew
Mactaggart, Fiona
McWilliam, John
Mahon, Mrs Alice
Mallaber, Judy
Marris, Rob *(Wolverh'ton SW)*
Marsden, Gordon *(Blackpool S)*
Martlew, Eric
Meacher, rh Michael
Meale, Alan *(Mansfield)*
Merron, Gillian
Michael, rh Alun
Miller, Andrew
Mitchell, Austin *(Gt Grimsby)*
Mole, Chris
Moonie, Dr. Lewis
Moran, Margaret
Morley, Elliot
Morris, rh Estelle
Munn, Ms Meg
Murphy, Denis *(Wansbeck)*
Murphy, Jim *(Eastwood)*
Naysmith, Dr. Doug
O'Brien, Bill *(Normanton)*
O'Brien, Mike *(N Warks)*
O'Hara, Edward
Olner, Bill
O'Neill, Martin
Organ, Diana
Osborne, Sandra *(Ayr)*
Perham, Linda
Picking, Anne
Pickthall, Colin
Pike, Peter *(Burnley)*
Plaskitt, James
Pollard, Kerry
Pond, Chris *(Gravesham)*
Pope, Greg *(Hyndburn)*
Pound, Stephen
Prentice, Ms Bridget *(Lewisham E)*
Prentice, Gordon *(Pendle)*
Prosser, Gwyn
Purchase, Ken
Quin, rh Joyce
Quinn, Lawrie
Rapson, Syd *(Portsmouth N)*
Raynsford, rh Nick
Reed, Andy *(Loughborough)*
Reid, rh Dr. John *(Hamilton N & Bellshill)*
Robertson, John *(Glasgow Anniesland)*
Roche, Mrs Barbara
Rooney, Terry
Ross, Ernie *(Dundee W)*
Roy, Frank *(Motherwell)*
Ruane, Chris
Ruddock, Joan
Russell, Ms Christine *(City of Chester)*
Ryan, Joan *(Enfield N)*
Sawford, Phil
Sedgemore, Brian
Shaw, Jonathan
Sheerman, Barry
Sheridan, Jim
Simpson, Alan *(Nottingham S)*
Singh, Marsha
Skinner, Dennis
Smith, rh Andrew *(Oxford E)*
Smith, Llew *(Blaenau Gwent)*
Southworth, Helen
Starkey, Dr. Phyllis
Stewart, Ian *(Eccles)*
Stinchcombe, Paul
Strang, rh Dr. Gavin
Stringer, Graham
Stuart, Ms Gisela
Sutcliffe, Gerry
Tami, Mark *(Alyn)*
Taylor, rh Ann *(Dewsbury)*
Taylor, Dari *(Stockton S)*
Taylor, David *(NW Leics)*
Thomas, Gareth *(Clwyd W)*
Timms, Stephen
Tipping, Paddy
Touhig, Don *(Islwyn)*
Trickett, Jon
Truswell, Paul
Turner, Dennis *(Wolverh'ton SE)*
Turner, Neil *(Wigan)*
Twigg, Derek *(Halton)*
Tynan, Bill *(Hamilton S)*
Vaz, Keith *(Leicester E)*
Vis, Dr. Rudi
Walley, Ms Joan
Ward, Claire
Wareing, Robert N.
Watts, David
White, Brian
Wicks, Malcolm
Williams, rh Alan *(Swansea W)*

Wills, Michael
Winnick, David
Winterton, Ms Rosie *(Doncaster C)*
Woodward, Shaun
Woolas, Phil
Worthington, Tony
Wright, Anthony D. *(Gt Yarmouth)*
Wright, David *(Telford)*

Tellers for the Noes:
Mr. Nick Ainger and
Jim Fitzpatrick

Question accordingly negatived.

New Clause 4

APPEALS ABOUT INFORMATION HELD ON DATABASES

'*The Secretary of State shall establish an* appeals procedure by which individuals referred to on a database established under regulations under section 12 (explicitly or implicitly) in respect of a child whose case has been referred to that database may challenge the inclusion of information.'.—*[Tim Loughton.]*

Brought up, and read the First time.

Tim Loughton: I beg to move, That the clause be read a Second time.

Mr. Deputy Speaker: With this it will be convenient to discuss the following: New clause 16—*Procedures in relation to the processing of personal data*—

'(1) This section shall have effect in relation to the provisions described in section 12 and the processing of personal data.

(2) The Secretary of State may not make any regulations under the provisions of section 12, or issue guidance or a direction under those provisions, unless the Information Commissioner has been provided with the opportunity to make representations as to any degradation in the protection afforded to data subjects or to any degradation in the effectiveness of any data protection principle which would be caused by the implementation of that regulation, guidance or direction.

(3) If the Secretary of State issues regulations, guidance or direction under the provisions of section 12 which, in the view of the Information Commissioner, degrade the protection afforded to data subjects or degrade the effectiveness of any data protection principle, the Information Commissioner may publish any relevant information, correspondence, document or advice which relates to the degradation in question.

(4) For the purposes of this Act, section 10(2) of the Data Protection Act 1998 (c.29) (exemptions from right to prevent processing likely to cause damage or distress) shall apply as if it read as follows—

> "(2) Subsection (1) does not apply in a case where any of the conditions in paragraphs 1, 2 or 4 of Schedule 2 is met."

(5) Personal data processed by any data controller for a purpose specified in regulations, guidance or direction made or issued under the provisions of section 12 shall not be processed for any other purpose unless that purpose is also specified in regulations made under powers authorised by this Act.

(6) For the purpose of this Act, "personal data" shall mean any data which relate to a living individual who can be directly or indirectly identified—

(a) from those data, or

(b) from those data and other information which is in the possession of, or is likely to come into the possession of, the data controller.

(7) For the purpose of this section—

(a) the definition of "data", "processing", "data controller" and "data subject" shall be the same as in section 1 of the Data Protection Act 1998;

(b) the "data protection principles" are the principles described in Schedule 1 to the Data Protection Act 1998;

(c) the "Information Commissioner" is the Commissioner established by the Data Protection Act 1998 and the Freedom of Information Act 2000.'.

Amendment No. 46, in page 9, line 32, leave out clause 12.Amendment No. 17, in clause 12, page 9, line 39, leave out 'one or more databases' and insert

'a United Kingdom-wide database and facilitate regional databases where appropriate'.

Amendment No. 2, in clause 12, page 10, line 15, leave out paragraph (g).

Amendment No. 18, in clause 12, page 10, line 15, leave out from 'of' to end of line 16 and insert

'concern for his welfare, such basis for concern having been set out in national guidance;'.

Amendment No. 3, in clause 12, page 10, line 17, leave out paragraph (h).

Amendment No. 38, in clause 12, page 10, line 39, at end insert—

'( ) The requirement to disclose information for agencies specified in subsection (6)(b) will not apply if disclosure would be detrimental to the child's welfare or safeguarding.'.

Amendment No. 19, in clause 12, page 11, line 2 , at end insert—

'(7A) The requirement to disclose information for agencies specified in subsection (6)(b) will not apply if disclosure would be detrimental to the child's welfare or safeguarding.'.

Tim Loughton: We now come to what could be, barring the smacking debate that we shall hold later, the most contentious part of the Bill and the one about which the Opposition have the most concerns. I want to talk to clause 12 as a whole. Amendment no. 46 would delete it, but other amendments in the group, as well as new clause 4 itself, would improve and make acceptable the whole section about databases.

This is an important part of the Bill. In Committee, we spent more than a morning on it, rightly, yet at the end of that time we had few assurances from the Minister for Children, Young People and Families about how the provisions would work, so we subsequently decided to vote against the whole clause. The upper House made some improvements to the clause, but although they were welcome they did not go nearly far enough.

In Committee, the Minister mentioned that she hoped our fears would be assuaged by the publication of the consultation document on the whole database system, which duly took place last week. We are grateful for that consultation document, but that is all it is—a consultation document. It is not a White Paper; it does not show a firm direction for the Government to take. The responses will not be in until the end of January, yet we are being asked, at this late stage of the Bill's progress, to write the Government a large blank cheque to set up powerful databases that would include each and every one of the more than 11 million children in this country.

The 10 trailblazer projects—pilots—being set up to try to investigate how such schemes could work are only halfway through their task. That work is being extended until March 2005 and the projects have just been granted second-tier funding, yet we are being asked to give the Secretary of State enormous powers to set up databases, about which there remain a lot of

[Tim Loughton]

unanswered questions. The Government do not even know what the final identity and nature of those databases will be.

Even more worrying is the fact that only in the last week or so have we started to hear details about the Government's integrated children's systems, which, I gather, are to replace child protection registers by December 2005. They will be more detailed than child protection registers and will contain children's social care case records. They will operate in parallel with other case record systems, such as the NHS care record system for health practitioners.

The Minister has pledged £30 million to the project over the next two years, yet that was not mentioned once during the entire proceedings of the Bill in the upper House, on Second Reading or in Committee. Not once did the Minister allude to the fact that another much larger database is being constructed, for which money is already committed, and which will replace child protection registers.

Why was that not mentioned? How will the new system interact with the databases that we are discussing in the Bill? How will information be transferred? What arrangements have been made for security of access under the new systems? In answer to my written question

"what arrangements are already in existence to register children on a national register",

the Minister replied:

"There are no arrangements in existence to register children on a national register."—[*Official Report*, 13 January 2004; Vol. 416, c. 634W.]

Why was that?

What is this proposal if it is not a national register? We need much more information than we have been given so far.

Yet more alarm bells are sounding. The Information Commissioner, Richard Thomas, warned in an article in *The Times* earlier in the year that we risk

"sleepwalking into a surveillance society".

The arrangements have already been referred to as "Big Brother for children" in *The Guardian. Children Now* magazine recently warned:

"We need to avoid making professionals slaves to technology by placing undue burdens on them to record information. And we should question whether the benefits of storing copious information about children are offset by the disadvantages of information overload and creeping surveillance."

I share those worries.

3 pm

We said from the start that we are not against the principle of databases. We need databases to protect vulnerable children, but they should contain only minimal information and should not be a substitute for professionals talking to each other. Their scope should be limited to vulnerable children, rather than every single child in the country, because the system will otherwise be impractical and unworkable.

Liz Blackman (Erewash) (Lab): The hon. Gentleman has acknowledged Lord Laming's recommendation that information sharing is absolutely vital. He clearly welcomed the amendments to the provisions proposed by the Lords. He was complimentary about some of the information that is coming from his own trailblazer. He has asked for details about the consultation process throughout the passage of the Bill, and he now has them. Is he not just grandstanding when we should be getting on with cracking these thorny issues and making information sharing a reality for the safety of all our children?

Tim Loughton: The hon. Lady is absolutely right that it is essential to make information sharing a reality, but although we are told that the method in the Bill is the only way of doing that, we do not know exactly how it will work. Information sharing is a sensitive subject, as I shall illustrate with comments made by the British Medical Association and sexual health clinics. We need to get the system right or it could be entirely counter-productive. People will not present themselves if they do not want information to be shared by others, so although the principle of information sharing is right, we need a proper system. We have said all along that we do not understand how putting the names of 11.5 million children on a database—we do not yet know the extent of the other details that might be included—will benefit the tens of thousands of children who could realistically be described as children at risk or vulnerable children.

Mr. Dawson: The hon. Gentleman is entirely missing the point, which is surely that it is difficult to define the children who are at risk. The Government's proposal would flag up causes of concern among professionals, which would help to identify the children who are missed under existing systems—they will certainly be missed under any of his proposals.

Tim Loughton: We will come on to the definition of "cause for concern" in a moment because that is another worry. I still cannot understand how overloading a system with the details of 11.5 million children would help those who are most at risk. Many of the missing children to whom the hon. Gentleman rightly often refers—we debated them in Committee—will remain missing if such databases are in place because their parents, carers or private fosterers often want them to remain missing, but that is an entirely separate issue.

I want to pose some more questions to the Minister, although I want other hon. Members to have the opportunity to speak. She has said:

"we are not good at establishing IT systems"—[*Official Report, Standing Committee B*, 21 October 2004; c. 240.]

We do not know how close we are to having available for the database information technology that would be interoperable with other services. We have received no assurances about security of access. We do not know which identifying marks will be used—will they be NHS or national insurance numbers? Clause 12(4)(h) is a catch-all provision that states that

"information of such other description, not including medical records or other personal records, as the Secretary of State may by regulations specify" may be included on the databases. What does that mean? What could be included? How long will the information be kept on the system? How will the system address the Soham loophole? Will information on children be kept after they reach 18?

Several problems have emerged due to conflicts in the proposals since the publication of the consultation document. A range of listed persons or bodies will be compelled to disclose information. There will be no caveats or exceptions to that requirement, except for the medical ones that I mentioned. When the Minister was asked in Committee about professional judgment, which we support, she said that permitting it would

> "cause confusion because it would mean that practitioners would have to think about whether they should enter the fact that they are working with a child on to the database. The practitioner would have to apply a test whether disclosing the information that they were being asked to disclose would be detrimental to the child's welfare. We want to provide practitioners with certainty about using the database, not uncertainty."—[*Official Report, Standing Committee B*, 21 October 2004; c. 263.]

That effectively overrides the essential need for professional judgment to be applied, although we were promised that throughout the passage of the Bill. What will be the penalties for non-disclosure? Who will judge whether a case of non-disclosure was intentional or accidental? What will happen following a case of non-disclosure?

It is interesting to note that paragraph 2.19 of the consultation document states that a practitioner can override a professional duty of confidentiality to place a flag on the database. However, paragraphs 2.22 and 3.25 say that a practitioner may not be able to share information because of a duty of confidentiality. That raises the amusing possibility that two practitioners could flag the database and contact each other, yet be unable to discuss their reasons for doing so—such is the craziness of the consultation document and the Minister's proposals.

We have received strong expressions of concern from many professionals. The BMA asked:

> "How do Ministers envisage collating information required under Clause 9 . . . Will they use the route of the automated Exeter Registration System . . . run by the PCOs to collate the information? Whose responsibility will it be to provide the information—primary care organisations or individual GP practices? What impact will the requirements have on GP practices and primary care?"

It understands that

> "the database is expected to include the GPs' name and contact details for every child under 18 on their lists rather than for children about whom practitioners have a concern. The Minister appears to be saying that it is also the practitioner's responsibility to notify the data manager each time a child leaves a practice list, and every time a child registers with a new practice . . . Each practice could have around 440 children on its list and the BMA will need to explore with the Department of Health"

how the logistics and any extra work load requirements will be addressed.

I recently received a letter from Brook Advisory Centres saying:

> "We are particularly concerned that young people's attendance at sexual health services might have to be notified to information databases. This concern was not allayed by the amendment during the Bill's passage through the House of Lords . . . Research has consistently demonstrated that confidentiality is of paramount importance for young people using contraceptive and sexual health services. Concerns about how far confidentiality is protected in General Practices and other sexual health services are among the issues most frequently raised by users of the Brook Young People's Information Service, which is accessed by 17,000 young people a year."

As one user of the service said:

> "I think it is an utter disgrace. Next they will be printing barcodes on the insides of your wrists. I know I would think twice about seeking any help or advice, instead of listening to street tales about contraception etc. It would be ridiculous and a bad move."

Brook and many children's charities are worried about how the database system will work.

Given that the Government are proposing such an important step change to the way in which we put information about each of our children on systems, they need to be better prepared and further down the road than they are at present. If they do not give us the real assurances that we need, they should consider removing the clause from the Bill. They could then do the work on it that is required and bring it back as a part of a criminal justice Bill. Such legislation could address the Soham loophole and related problems with databases that we have at the moment.

New clause 4, which we did not get to discuss in Committee, would set up an appeals procedure. There is no appeals procedure in the Bill that relates to any of the databases. There is therefore no defence against wrong information being placed on a database—wrong information that may be vexatious, which has been placed there as a result of a complaint made by a child against a teacher or a parent. Those records—we do not know the extent of what may be kept—may be kept for an indeterminate period and if used may count against the person mentioned. Surely, as with any other such database, there should be a mechanism by which people who want to challenge the veracity and relevance of the information stored about them can do so. There are no safeguards in the Bill, and that is a deep worry. Wrong information about people could be placed on the database either accidentally or intentionally, and their lives and records could be unjustifiably blighted as a result.

None of that detracts from the requirement, the necessity and the desirability of placing on the database worrying information about those who might be dangerous to vulnerable people. That is what databases should be about. However, we need proper checks and balances. At no point during the passage of the Bill have the Government provided reassurances on how an appeals mechanism could work and how long the information will be kept.

Amendment No. 17 would limit the Secretary of State to setting up one database. We now know why the Government resisted a similar amendment in Committee, saying that it might be appropriate for other databases to be set up. We are to have databases coming out of our ears, it would appear. The Minister claimed that accepting the amendment would prevent the Secretary of State from setting up a regional or a London-wide database, for example. There is a strong case for a London-wide database because of the nature of and interaction between all the boroughs in London, and the Climbié case clearly underlined that. I have no problem with that, but the Bill as it stands could facilitate it through co-operation between authorities.

[Tim Loughton]

In order to allay the Minister's objections to the amendment that we moved in Committee, we have slightly changed the wording so that it refers to facilitating "regional databases where appropriate". As we have gone that far to accommodate the Minister's concerns, perhaps she will tell us which other databases, about which we do not yet know, she envisages the Secretary of State will need to set up and which the amendment would prevent.

Amendment No. 18 is about the definition of "cause for concern". Hon. Members have mentioned the reference to it in clause 12(4)(g). This strange phrase has come out of the blue. To what types of concern does it refer? It would appear that it is intended to be all-encompassing: any concern about a child's behaviour, circumstances or developmental progress. By what standards are children and parents to be measured and a judgment on concern to be made?

As the Barnardo's briefing said:

> "Cause for concern is not a recognised criteria and will include unclear and subjective information of unproven worth, which may lead to inappropriate interventions while leaving vulnerable children at risk. Cause for concern is not a standard used or understood by the caring professions. Nor does it appear in any other child welfare or health legislation."

It certainly does not appear in the Children Act 1989. That contains

> "clear definitions of where local authorities can and must act when the child is in need. The child-in-need threshold is defined in statute and is associated with a range of additional powers in the supporting schedule. The Bill as currently drafted does not give professionals a common standard of that kind."

We need qualification of what the phrase really means. If we do not know what it means, practitioners in the field who will have to put the legislation into practice daily—GPs, social workers, teachers, the school nurse, the police—will be confused. They need to operate under one standard—hence the amendment suggests that we identify "cause for concern" and that a basis for it should be set out in national guidance. As I said in Committee, that guidance should be distributed among the professional bodies concerned, to ensure that all professionals sing from the same song sheet and operate under similar thresholds.

Amendment No. 38, which we have co-signed with the Liberals, and amendment No. 19, which we have tabled alone, are about not disclosing information if it would be detrimental to the child's welfare. That is self-explanatory, and we went into it at length in Committee. Extraordinarily, the Minister again did not take the point on board, although it is clearly in the interests of vulnerable children that such a provision should be in the Bill. We hope that the slight re-wording will make it more acceptable.

3.15 pm

Mr. David Hinchliffe (Wakefield) (Lab): I have listened carefully to the hon. Gentleman's comments on databases. Obviously, I was not privy to discussions in Committee, but I have followed carefully his arguments on Second Reading and this afternoon. Do I understand him correctly in assuming that he is arguing that there should be a London-wide database and regional databases—such as one in west Yorkshire, for example—but not a national database? If so, what assumption is he making about the lack of mobility of families? The database that he suggests would not cover somebody moving from London to Leeds, but in my experience that happens quite regularly.

Tim Loughton: The hon. Gentleman is absolutely right, which is why I have been suggesting exactly the reverse throughout proceedings on the Bill. We are in favour of local databases that join up local professionals and which would probably come under the aegis of the director of children's services. We need greater clarification of how that information would be submitted and acted on, and at what point an intervention by social workers would be triggered. I am in favour of that for vulnerable children, such as those on the at-risk register and those who are looked after.

For exactly the reasons mentioned by the hon. Gentleman, I am also in favour of a national database—information for which would be passed from authorities that flag up children on their own databases. The most vulnerable children are usually the most mobile. A child on the radar of Newcastle social services who disappears and ends up in Brighton would need to be the subject of a central exchange of information, so that the social services director in Brighton could check on a national database for any form. The decision on whether intervention should occur should be left to the relevant authorities in the area where the child resides, with or without parents. We absolutely need a national database, but 11.5 million children do not need to be on it. We must concentrate on the most vulnerable children, to whom the most resources should be devoted. That is the great difference between us.

Clause 12 is very important and we shall certainly be pressing our amendments to the vote unless we receive some severe assurances from the Minister.

Harry Cohen (Leyton and Wanstead) (Lab): I wish the Minister well with the Bill. Children need the protection afforded by this legislation. There have been too many horror stories of the system failing to co-ordinate the activities of professionals and children have been killed or abused as a consequence. However, there needs to be augmented protection of individuals from Ministers taking sweeping powers in establishing one or several information databases, which could interfere with private and family life—which, after all, is protected under article 8 of the United Nations convention on human rights. Therefore, my sole intervention on proceedings on this Bill is the tabling of new clause 16, which would go a long way to addressing the concerns expressed by the Joint Committee on Human Rights. The Committee warned of the human rights problem in paragraph 109 of its 19th report, which states:

> "We remain concerned about the lack of detail contained on the face of the Bill and the breadth of the regulation-making powers being conferred on the Secretary of State in a context involving serious interferences with Article 8 rights."

Another reason why the Minister should accept my new clause is that she may have been misdirected a little by her officials' analysis of the Data Protection Act 1998.

For instance, in her written evidence to the Joint Committee, published in the Committee's report on page 24, in reply to the question:

> "What is the proposed relationship between this legislation and the Data Protection Principles in the Data Protection Act?",

she said:

> "We expect the databases to fully comply with the Data Protection Act and do not want to make any special arrangements under data protection for them."

To my mind, that answer is clearly wrong, as clause 12 contains a host of special arrangements such as the wide-ranging ministerial powers that can be used to neutralise the data protection principles.

Let me give a background example to show why subsections (2) and (3) of new clause 16 are needed. In Scotland, the collection of dates of birth on the poll tax form was not deemed excessive because it was prescribed in regulations. In England and Wales, a tribunal ruled that it was excessive, because there was no need to collect everybody's date of birth. That did not conform with the data protection principles. That is what happened in England and Wales when the Data Protection Act applied. In Scotland, the opposite happened under ministerial regulations. Therefore, statutory prescription specifically weakened the privacy protection afforded by the Act, and I think that the same will happen under this Bill.

In clause 12, we see statutory provisions that could weaken data protection principles. Under subsection (6)(a), the Secretary of State has the flexibility to specify personal data that could be excessive for the purpose, and that neutralises the third principle of the 1998 Act. Under subsection (6)(b) to (f), the Secretary of State has the flexibility to specify in regulations disclosures that could otherwise be incompatible with the purpose of collection, and that neutralises the second principle. Under subsection (6)(g), the Secretary of State has the flexibility to specify in regulations a long, or even infinite, period of retention of data, and that neutralises the fifth principle. Under subsection (6)(h), the Secretary of State has the flexibility to specify in regulations criteria that allow inaccurate or out-of-date personal data to be retained on the database, and that neutralises the fourth principle.

Under subsection (13)(a) to (c), the Secretary of State can specify a level of security that is lower than the appropriate managerial level, and that neutralises the seventh principle. Under subsection (13)(d), the Secretary of State can transfer data abroad, outside the European economic area, and that neutralises the eighth principle.

In effect, the Bill gives the Minister control over how virtually all the data protection principles apply to personal data. The Information Commissioner cannot effectively enforce the principles if the Minister has used her powers in a way that degrades the protection afforded by each principle.

It will not be satisfactory for the Minister to give reassurance about consultation with the Information Commissioner. The point that I am raising is that there is no counterbalance in the Bill to stop any future Minister using the powers to set aside or degrade the protection afforded by the data protection principles. That is why, when the Minister told the Joint Committee that

> "We expect the databases to fully comply with the Data Protection Act and do not want to make any special arrangements under data protection for them",

I think that she is wrong. She is seeking powers that could be used to undermine any of the principles.

Subsections (2) and (3) of new clause 16 require the Secretary of State when issuing guidance or drafting regulations to allow time for the Information Commissioner to make representations on whether the protection afforded by the data protection principles or the protection in relation to data subjects is likely to be degraded. The Information Commissioner is also empowered to publish any relevant material that in his view shows degrading of the protection afforded by the Data Protection Act caused by a ministerial decision. That would also enable Parliament to be kept informed and have a debate if that was deemed necessary.

New clause 16(4) removes the Secretary of State's ability to override the right to object, which is granted in the Data Protection Act, and slightly to widen the right to object to meet the Joint Committee's concern. The right to object in the Act applies only in exceptional circumstances. There are two tests: the processing has to cause substantial distress and damage, and that distress and damage has to be unwarranted or unjustified. In many cases, there may be distress that is not substantial, or there may be distress but the processing is completely justifiable.

Such cases have been identified by the Joint Committee in paragraph 114 which states:

> "The information which may be included on the database about a child goes beyond purely objective facts about a child, such as their name, address and date of birth. It includes information, such as contact details of persons providing services including health services, which may reveal very sensitive information about the child, such as the fact that a seventeen year old girl has been referred to family planning services. It also includes 'the existence of any cause for concern' about a child, which is an extremely subjective and open-ended phrase which is almost bound to include very sensitive information about a child."

In paragraph 115, the Committee states:

> "We remind the Government that Article 8 requires that there be adequate procedural safeguards regulating the disclosure of sensitive personal information, and these may require participation by the person who is the subject of the information in decisions concerning the inclusion and disclosure of certain types of information".

My subsection dealing with the right to object meets the Committee's need for a safeguard, by removing the Secretary of State's ability to overrule the right to object. At present, it is a judicial process that determines whether there has been substantial distress and whether that processing should cease because it is unwarranted. In contested cases, it is the courts that determine the balance between the interests of those who run the information databases and those of the individual concerned. However, in this Bill the Minister is taking untrammelled powers to determine that her view will prevail. There is no balance there, and the proper judicial process should be reinstated.

New clause 16(5) requires any processing purpose of personal data under the Bill to be defined by regulations made under it. It basically negates an organisation processing personal data for a secondary purpose, even

[Harry Cohen]

where that secondary purpose is authorised by other legislation. If the data are wanted for the secondary purpose, the Secretary of State's regulations should clearly say so. This is a major improvement. It limits processing purposes only to those identified under the Bill.

Subsection (6) amends the definition of personal data. That is necessary because the European Commission has sent the Government a 20-page infringement letter stating that the Data Protection Act 1998 is deficient and does not implement the data protection directive, 95/46/EC. Has the Minister seen that 20-page infringement letter? If so, has she taken it into account? If not, I cannot see how she can stand at the Dispatch Box talking about the protection of personal data when our UK Act is, according to the Commission, deficient in affording protection. As I said, powers are being enacted to override its already weak provisions anyway. My wide definition of personal data helps to resolve the matter and I ask hon. Members to support new clause 16 in that light.

3.30 pm

Mrs. Brooke: Many of the comments that the hon. Member for Leyton and Wanstead (Harry Cohen) made underline our feeling that we are being asked to sign a blank cheque. Many questions remain unanswered. Despite last week's publication of the consultation document, I still believe that we have more questions than answers. We are not trying to be obstructive but it is difficult to vote on such an important issue without more details.

There is a problem of being out of synch when we hear on Report that some matters will not be concluded until January. I share the concerns of the hon. Member for East Worthing and Shoreham (Tim Loughton) but I want to place it firmly on record that I do not agree with his general stance. We need local databases with objective data and I cannot believe that they should be restricted to those identified as vulnerable. I therefore distance Liberal Democrat Members from that viewpoint. If we are genuinely to move towards a preventive agenda, we must have basic, simple information on everybody.

I repeat the anxieties that I raised in Committee. Once one moves away from objective data into the subjective realm, my concerns increase. Let us consider the term, "cause for concern". I have just used the word "concern"; everyone else uses it. There is no definition and I am not sure that I want anyone to start defining it. If we ask different professionals from different backgrounds to flag up a cause for concern on a database that will become available for other people to see, we must worry about the use to which it might be put.

The consultation document suggested that the intention was for a flag to be attached if one professional wanted to talk to another. I do not want to belittle that because I should like the Minister to respond to the point. I do not understand how the proposal will make it any more likely that people will communicate with each other. For example, one either looks at one's e-mails or one does not. Someone either opens the database and knows which children they need to look up to find the flag or they do not. I do not understand how it will work. It sounds simple: an indication that someone wants to talk to someone else. However, I cannot understand how it will work when there are so many children and when other systems of communication are far more direct. We all say that our professionals need to communicate directly with one another if we are genuinely to protect our children and intervene at the earliest possible stage.

I found the consultation document easier to follow on sensitive services. The Minister had picked up the points that many organisations raised but it is important to note that the NSPCC remained concerned about the Bill. It might be fairly content about subjects for consultation but the measure permits the disclosure that someone has accessed sensitive services. I fear that that will put off young people and parents from using the services. I am not assured about that matter.

I have tried to make it clear that I agree with some provisions and take a different approach from Conservative Front-Bench Members to others. Overall, we have more questions than answers and we must vote to express that opinion. It must be rare to have so many unanswered questions about a major Bill at this stage in the proceedings. I hope that I am making clear our support for the some provisions but despite that, we must vote to express our anxiety, which centres especially around the subjective nature of any data on the database.

Although we support the local databases, I should have liked some suggestion of the options for passing on data when the child moves. I do not perceive the necessity for a national database per se, but mechanisms must exist. There must be different methods and we need to be able to assess them and have an opinion. The proposal will not work if it is viewed as a massive intrusion into one's life by a national database that has masses of information about everybody. However, some of the most vulnerable children are those who are moved around for various reasons and I would be distraught if I believed that we had a system that allowed the children who need protecting the most to fall through the gap.

I am sorry that we do not have a range of options. I do not have a full grasp of how the system could work. I simply have an image of the principles that I want the Bill to retain. We cannot be confident that those principles are retained because of the lack of detail in the measure.

Mr. John Gummer (Suffolk, Coastal) (Con): It is obviously necessary to take every measure that we can to protect vulnerable children. Our ability to collect data more effectively and efficiently than in the past does not necessarily mean that it would be sensible to act on it. We should therefore consider the proposals carefully. I support my hon. Friends in their quest for a great deal more information from the Minister.

The hon. Member for Leyton and Wanstead (Harry Cohen) made a powerful case. His description of the way in which the Bill runs counter to the proper protection of the individual was impressive. The trouble is that the Minister does not have a good reputation for willingness to listen or for use of data. I am therefore not prepared to leave in her hands the decision about the information that goes on to the lists, especially when the provisions are remarkably imprecise. In many years in the House of Commons, I have never known an occasion on which the relevant professional bodies have criticised a Government Bill in such detail for lack of precision. I cannot recall circumstances in which a Minister's hon. Friend made such a devastating attack about data protection.

I was interested that the Brook Advisory Centre, an organisation of which I largely disapprove, singled out a fascinating matter. Information that cannot be given to parents could be given to the state under the Bill. That is a new system. The centres will be asked to put on a database information that they have spent all their time—in my view, wrongly—trying to remove from parents. That is amazing.

Margaret Hodge *indicated dissent.*

Mr. Gummer: If the Minister claims that that is not correct, why does the Brook Advisory Centre, which is close to her, appear to believe that it may be asked to do things of which it disapproves and that, in its view, would undermine its activities?

Apart from that, I want to discuss the phrase "cause for concern". I am amazed by the causes for concern that people manage to produce. If the phrase is not defined more effectively, I fear that many people in all sorts of areas will have causes for concern that involve their own views and attitudes rather than children. The Minister must free us from our cause for concern, which is lack of precision in the keeping of data about young people, who have the right to be protected in the same way as adults—we live in a world in which far too many people think it satisfactory to keep information about adults.

Lastly, I want to underline something that my hon. Friend the Member for East Worthing and Shoreham (Tim Loughton) said on holding data about those who are vulnerable. The idea that every child should be recorded in that way is immensely illiberal. Indeed, I was very surprised to hear the Liberal spokesman, the hon. Member for Mid-Dorset and North Poole (Mrs. Brooke), once again underline the illiberality of the new Liberal party.

It is not acceptable to keep data on people for no reason and I cannot see why children should be put on a database unless there is a reason for it. I am perfectly prepared to protect people, even for the smallest of reasons, but the idea that data must be kept on every child in order to protect the vulnerable is the reverse of the truth, because the more data kept, the more likely it is that the data that one needs will be obscured.

The Minister has not proved her case either here or in Committee, and the House of Commons needs a better explanation than the one that she has given. The professional bodies are all as confused as the House.

Margaret Hodge *indicated dissent.*

Mr. Gummer: It is no good the Minister shaking her head, because the professional bodies have said that they are confused. The Minister may think that those bodies are all stupid, which is an attitude that she often takes towards people outside this House, but the fact of the matter is that they are confused. Unless she can remove the confusion of this House and the professional organisations, she will go down as a Minister who wants the power to do things as she thinks fit, and this House does not have confidence in her to do things as she thinks fit, because we have had too much experience of her.

Margaret Hodge: I regret that final contribution. When the right hon. Member for Suffolk, Coastal (Mr. Gummer) comes to the House to discuss a serious matter such as this, he should read himself into it so that he can make a more informed contribution. He would do better to return to the Herbert Laming inquiry into the death of Victoria Climbié and the many other inquiries into the deaths of children.

Time and time again, such inquiries find that the same features went wrong. One thing that every inquiry into an unnecessary child death finds is that people failed to share information effectively. Our attempt to establish a system—a tool—that professionals can use better to protect and safeguard children and better to promote children's well-being should command respect and support from both sides of the House and should not be pushed around like a political football, as in the case of the remarks made by the right hon. Gentleman.

Mr. Dawson: Is it not also the case that many deaths of children at the hands of parents and care givers come out of the blue as far as public agencies are concerned? Causes for concern would not be detected under the sort of system lamely proposed by Conservative Members.

Margaret Hodge: I agree entirely. I am conscious that hon. Members want to discuss other issues and hope that the hon. Member for East Worthing and Shoreham (Tim Loughton) will accept that we had a full debate on that issue in Committee. I shall simply say this: the information databases that we propose are no more than tools to support professionals in working together better. If professionals work together better, they may be able to prevent some other child's death. The databases are tools to shift the emphasis in how we work from simply intervening to protect children when things go wrong to, as my hon. Friend the Member for Lancaster and Wyre (Mr. Dawson) said, trying to intervene earlier to prevent children from going wrong. They are no substitute for the many systems that we have in place.

I want briefly to deal with some of the new issues that were raised in the debate. The first concerns the integrated children's system, which was mentioned by the hon. Member for East Worthing and Shoreham. That is not the same as the information database, nor is it a national register—it is a framework for social services, working with children in need and their families. It will be supported by the computerisation of social services records that are currently kept on paper.

3.45 pm

As the hon. Gentleman well knows from the debate in Committee, those records would not appear on the databases where we are keeping the simple, basic information that can identify children and those who

[Margaret Hodge]

work with them. The integrated children's system will not contain information about all children, only the records generated by those working with children in need and it will not be accessed by all practitioners, only those working with the children who are specified. The hon. Gentleman's point was a red herring.

In new clause 4, the hon. Gentleman raises an issue that we did not have time to debate in Committee. I remind him, and my hon. Friend the Member for Leyton and Wanstead (Harry Cohen), that the databases will comply with the subject access provisions of the Data Protection Act 1998. That means that parents and children can exercise existing rights to see what information is held about them through a simple request to the database operator. They will be able to ask for inaccuracies to be corrected, and that must then happen.

Moreover, there are measures in criminal law that impose penalties for the misuse of data in computer records and under the DPA. It would be a breach of the fourth data protection principle, which deals with accuracy, knowingly to supply untrue data or to fail to delete inaccurate data. That can lead to enforcement procedures by the Information Commissioner; and failure to comply with an enforcement notice issued by the commissioner is a serious offence.

I do not want to return to the argument about a national database because the Committee in general—apart from the hon. Member for East Worthing and Shoreham—supported the need for it. He knows, however, that our thinking is along the same lines as his: that we should have local databases, some on a regional level, whether it be London or Greater Manchester. They need to be inoperable—

Tim Loughton: Interoperable.

Margaret Hodge: I am sorry—the hon. Gentleman is right to correct me on that.

The Bill needs to provide for what we call the 151st system, which would ensure that all professionals know where to locate a child and that, if that child leaves one local authority area and moves to another, there is a system that holds a record of them until they re-emerge in another area.

I come to a concern that was expressed by several Members. The Bill contains a provision to enable a practitioner to inform another practitioner who subsequently accesses a child's record that they have a current concern about the child. That means that the second practitioner can see who else they should contact as a priority to determine whether their observations are related, so that together they can build a better all-round picture of the child's needs. That represents an added dimension to the information that the databases provide by simply holding the contact details of all the practitioners involved with a child. It will prompt contact and facilitate appropriate discussion to address the problem at an earlier stage. It is not a substitute for action—I said that in Committee and reiterate it today.

One would hope that in most cases placing a cause for concern on a database, as we suggested in the consultation document, would mean that the consent of the child and the family had been sought, and that only in the most exceptional circumstances where the child is at risk of harm and abuse would that happen without such consent.

I shall deal briefly with the important contribution made by my hon. Friend the Member for Leyton and Wanstead. I provided him with a written answer before the summer recess, in which I said that the databases would comply with the Data Protection Act 1998. I should also like to reassure him and all other hon. Members today. We are establishing a complex system and we need to work our way through a lot of difficult issues. Because we know that Members are concerned about these issues, we have said that we shall come back to both Houses of Parliament to seek affirmative resolutions as we go forward with the regulations and guidance. There is no hidden agenda here. There is no way in which any future Minister could misuse or abuse the powers in this part of the Bill. What we wish to do is move forward to try to establish better systems for sharing information. I hope that hon. Members will be satisfied by those added assurances.

Hon. Members have said that many children's organisations have concerns on this issue. Yes, but even during the first consultation on the first set of regulations, I have already had letters from organisations such as Barnardo's, the National Children's Bureau, the National Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Children, and the Children's Society, all welcoming the consultation in which we are engaged and recognising that it is starting to deal with some of the concerns that they had expressed earlier. Yes, it is only a consultation document, but we will come back to both Houses and use the affirmative resolution procedure to ensure that we have the support of everyone as we move towards regulations. Not to take advantage of this opportunity to provide a tool for professionals to share information, so that they can prevent the unnecessary deaths that we have witnessed, such as that of little Victoria Climbié, would be to miss the opportunity of a lifetime. I am not prepared to do that, and I hope that all hon. Members will share my wish to move forward with this part of the Bill.

Question put, That the clause be read a Second time:—

The House divided: Ayes 174, Noes 293.

Division No. 303] **[3:52 pm**

AYES

Ainsworth, Peter *(E Surrey)*
Atkinson, Peter *(Hexham)*
Baker, Norman
Baldry, Tony
Barker, Gregory
Baron, John *(Billericay)*
Barrett, John
Beggs, Roy *(E Antrim)*
Bercow, John
Beresford, Sir Paul
Blunt, Crispin
Boswell, Tim
Brady, Graham
Brake, Tom *(Carshalton)*
Brazier, Julian
Breed, Colin
Brooke, Mrs Annette L.
Browning, Mrs Angela
Bruce, Malcolm
Burns, Simon
Burnside, David
Burstow, Paul
Burt, Alistair
Butterfill, Sir John
Cable, Dr. Vincent
Calton, Mrs Patsy
Campbell, Gregory *(E Lond'y)*
Campbell, rh Sir Menzies *(NE Fife)*
Carmichael, Alistair
Cash, William
Chapman, Sir Sydney *(Chipping Barnet)*
Chope, Christopher
Clappison, James
Conway, Derek

Cotter, Brian
Cran, James *(Beverley)*
Davey, Edward *(Kingston)*
Davis, rh David *(Haltemprice & Howden)*
Djanogly, Jonathan
Dodds, Nigel
Duncan Smith, rh Iain
Evans, Nigel
Fabricant, Michael
Fallon, Michael
Field, Mark *(Cities of London & Westminster)*
Flight, Howard
Forth, rh Eric
Foster, Don *(Bath)*
Fox, Dr. Liam
Garnier, Edward
George, Andrew *(St. Ives)*
Gibb, Nick *(Bognor Regis)*
Gidley, Sandra
Gillan, Mrs Cheryl
Goodman, Paul
Gray, James *(N Wilts)*
Green, Damian *(Ashford)*
Green, Matthew *(Ludlow)*
Greenway, John
Grieve, Dominic
Gummer, rh John
Hague, rh William
Hammond, Philip
Hancock, Mike
Harris, Dr. Evan *(Oxford W & Abingdon)*
Harvey, Nick
Hawkins, Nick
Hayes, John *(S Holland)*
Heald, Oliver
Heath, David
Heathcoat-Amory, rh David
Hoban, Mark *(Fareham)*
Holmes, Paul
Horam, John *(Orpington)*
Hughes, Simon *(Southwark N)*
Jack, rh Michael
Jenkin, Bernard
Keetch, Paul
Kennedy, rh Charles *(Ross Skye & Inverness)*
Key, Robert *(Salisbury)*
Kirkbride, Miss Julie
Kirkwood, Sir Archy
Knight, rh Greg *(E Yorkshire)*
Laing, Mrs Eleanor
Lait, Mrs Jacqui
Lamb, Norman
Lansley, Andrew
Laws, David *(Yeovil)*
Letwin, rh Oliver
Lewis, Dr. Julian *(New Forest E)*
Lidington, David
Lilley, rh Peter
Llwyd, Elfyn
Loughton, Tim
Luff, Peter *(M-Worcs)*
Mackay, rh Andrew
Maclean, rh David
Malins, Humfrey
Maples, John
Maude, rh Francis
Mawhinney, rh Sir Brian
May, rh Mrs Theresa
Mercer, Patrick
Moore, Michael
Moss, Malcolm
Murrison, Dr. Andrew

Norman, Archie
Oaten, Mark *(Winchester)*
O'Brien, Stephen *(Eddisbury)*
Öpik, Lembit
Ottaway, Richard
Page, Richard
Paterson, Owen
Pickles, Eric
Portillo, rh Michael
Pugh, Dr. John
Randall, John
Redwood, rh John
Rendel, David
Robathan, Andrew
Robertson, Hugh *(Faversham & M-Kent)*
Robertson, Laurence *(Tewk'b'ry)*
Robinson, Peter *(Belfast E)*
Rosindell, Andrew
Ruffley, David
Russell, Bob *(Colchester)*
Sanders, Adrian
Sayeed, Jonathan
Shephard, rh Mrs Gillian
Shepherd, Richard
Smith, Sir Robert *(W Ab'd'ns & Kincardine)*
Smyth, Rev. Martin *(Belfast S)*
Spelman, Mrs Caroline
Spicer, Sir Michael
Spink, Bob *(Castle Point)*
Spring, Richard
Stanley, rh Sir John
Steen, Anthony
Streeter, Gary
Stunell, Andrew
Swayne, Desmond
Swire, Hugo *(E Devon)*
Syms, Robert
Tapsell, Sir Peter
Taylor, Ian *(Esher)*
Taylor, John *(Solihull)*
Taylor, Matthew *(Truro)*
Taylor, Sir Teddy
Teather, Sarah
Thomas, Simon *(Ceredigion)*
Thurso, John
Tonge, Dr. Jenny
Tredinnick, David
Turner, Andrew *(Isle of Wight)*
Tyler, Paul *(N Cornwall)*
Tyrie, Andrew
Viggers, Peter
Walter, Robert
Waterson, Nigel
Watkinson, Angela
Webb, Steve *(Northavon)*
Whittingdale, John
Widdecombe, rh Miss Ann
Wiggin, Bill
Wilkinson, John
Willetts, David
Williams, Hywel *(Caernarfon)*
Williams, Roger *(Brecon)*
Willis, Phil
Wilshire, David
Winterton, Ann *(Congleton)*
Winterton, Sir Nicholas *(Macclesfield)*
Yeo, Tim *(S Suffolk)*
Young, rh Sir George

Tellers for the Ayes:
Andrew Selous and
Mr. Geoffrey Clifton-Brown

NOES

Abbott, Ms Diane
Adams, Irene *(Paisley N)*
Ainsworth, Bob *(Cov'try NE)*
Allen, Graham
Anderson, rh Donald *(Swansea E)*
Anderson, Janet *(Rossendale & Darwen)*
Armstrong, rh Ms Hilary
Atherton, Ms Candy
Atkins, Charlotte
Austin, John
Bailey, Adrian
Baird, Vera
Barnes, Harry
Barron, rh Kevin
Battle, rh John
Bayley, Hugh
Beard, Nigel
Beckett, rh Margaret
Begg, Miss Anne
Berry, Roger
Best, Harold
Blackman, Liz
Blears, Ms Hazel
Blizzard, Bob
Bradley, rh Keith *(Withington)*
Bradley, Peter *(The Wrekin)*
Bradshaw, Ben
Brennan, Kevin
Browne, Desmond
Buck, Ms Karen
Burden, Richard
Burgon, Colin
Burnham, Andy
Byers, rh Stephen
Byrne, Liam *(B'ham Hodge H)*
Cairns, David
Campbell, Alan *(Tynemouth)*
Campbell, Mrs Anne *(C'bridge)*
Campbell, Ronnie *(Blyth V)*
Casale, Roger
Caton, Martin
Challen, Colin
Chapman, Ben *(Wirral S)*
Chaytor, David
Clapham, Michael
Clark, Mrs Helen *(Peterborough)*
Clark, Dr. Lynda *(Edinburgh Pentlands)*
Clark, Paul *(Gillingham)*
Clarke, rh Tom *(Coatbridge & Chryston)*
Clelland, David
Clwyd, Ann *(Cynon V)*
Coaker, Vernon
Coffey, Ms Ann
Colman, Tony
Corbyn, Jeremy
Corston, rh Jean
Cousins, Jim
Cranston, Ross
Crausby, David
Cruddas, Jon
Cryer, John *(Hornchurch)*
Cummings, John
Cunningham, Jim *(Coventry S)*
Cunningham, Tony *(Workington)*
Curtis-Thomas, Mrs Claire
Davey, Valerie *(Bristol W)*
David, Wayne
Davidson, Ian
Davies, rh Denzil *(Llanelli)*
Dawson, Hilton
Dean, Mrs Janet

Denham, rh John
Dhanda, Parmjit
Dismore, Andrew
Dobbin, Jim *(Heywood)*
Donohoe, Brian H.
Doran, Frank
Doughty, Sue
Dowd, Jim *(Lewisham W)*
Drew, David *(Stroud)*
Eagle, Angela *(Wallasey)*
Eagle, Maria *(L'pool Garston)*
Edwards, Huw
Efford, Clive
Ennis, Jeff *(Barnsley E)*
Etherington, Bill
Farrelly, Paul
Field, rh Frank *(Birkenhead)*
Fisher, Mark
Fitzpatrick, Jim
Flint, Caroline
Flynn, Paul *(Newport W)*
Follett, Barbara
Foster, rh Derek
Foster, Michael *(Worcester)*
Foster, Michael Jabez *(Hastings & Rye)*
Gapes, Mike *(Ilford S)*
George, rh Bruce *(Walsall S)*
Gilroy, Linda
Godsiff, Roger
Goggins, Paul
Griffiths, Jane *(Reading E)*
Griffiths, Nigel *(Edinburgh S)*
Griffiths, Win *(Bridgend)*
Grogan, John
Hain, rh Peter
Hall, Mike *(Weaver Vale)*
Hall, Patrick *(Bedford)*
Hamilton, David *(Midlothian)*
Hamilton, Fabian *(Leeds NE)*
Hanson, David
Harman, rh Ms Harriet
Harris, Tom *(Glasgow Cathcart)*
Havard, Dai *(Merthyr Tydfil & Rhymney)*
Henderson, Doug *(Newcastle N)*
Henderson, Ivan *(Harwich)*
Hendrick, Mark
Heppell, John
Hesford, Stephen
Hewitt, rh Ms Patricia
Heyes, David
Hinchliffe, David
Hodge, Margaret
Hoey, Kate *(Vauxhall)*
Hood, Jimmy *(Clydesdale)*
Hoon, rh Geoffrey
Hopkins, Kelvin
Howarth, rh Alan *(Newport E)*
Howarth, George *(Knowsley N & Sefton E)*
Hoyle, Lindsay
Hughes, Beverley *(Stretford & Urmston)*
Hughes, Kevin *(Doncaster N)*
Humble, Mrs Joan
Hurst, Alan *(Braintree)*
Hutton, rh John
Iddon, Dr. Brian
Ingram, rh Adam
Jackson, Glenda *(Hampstead & Highgate)*
Jackson, Helen *(Hillsborough)*
Johnson, rh Alan *(Hull W)*

Johnson, Miss Melanie *(Welwyn Hatfield)*
Jones, Helen *(Warrington N)*
Jones, Jon Owen *(Cardiff C)*
Jones, Kevan *(N Durham)*
Jones, Lynne *(Selly Oak)*
Jones, Martyn *(Clwyd S)*
Joyce, Eric *(Falkirk W)*
Kaufman, rh Sir Gerald
Kelly, Ruth *(Bolton W)*
Kemp, Fraser
Kennedy, Jane *(Wavertree)*
Khabra, Piara S.
Kilfoyle, Peter
King, Andy *(Rugby)*
Knight, Jim *(S Dorset)*
Lammy, David
Lawrence, Mrs Jackie
Laxton, Bob *(Derby N)*
Lazarowicz, Mark
Leslie, Christopher
Levitt, Tom *(High Peak)*
Lewis, Ivan *(Bury S)*
Lewis, Terry *(Worsley)*
Liddell, rh Mrs Helen
Linton, Martin
Lloyd, Tony *(Manchester C)*
Love, Andrew
Lucas, Ian *(Wrexham)*
McAvoy, Thomas
McCabe, Stephen
McCafferty, Chris
McDonnell, John
MacDougall, John
McFall, rh John
McGuire, Mrs Anne
McKechin, Ann
Mackinlay, Andrew
McNulty, Tony
Mactaggart, Fiona
McWalter, Tony
McWilliam, John
Mahon, Mrs Alice
Mallaber, Judy
Mann, John *(Bassetlaw)*
Marris, Rob *(Wolverh'ton SW)*
Marsden, Gordon *(Blackpool S)*
Marshall, David *(Glasgow Shettleston)*
Martlew, Eric
Meacher, rh Michael
Meale, Alan *(Mansfield)*
Michael, rh Alun
Miliband, David
Miller, Andrew
Mitchell, Austin *(Gt Grimsby)*
Mole, Chris
Moonie, Dr. Lewis
Moran, Margaret
Morgan, Julie
Mudie, George
Munn, Ms Meg
Murphy, Denis *(Wansbeck)*
Murphy, Jim *(Eastwood)*
Naysmith, Dr. Doug
O'Brien, Mike *(N Warks)*
O'Hara, Edward
Olner, Bill
O'Neill, Martin
Organ, Diana
Osborne, Sandra *(Ayr)*
Owen, Albert
Perham, Linda
Picking, Anne
Pickthall, Colin
Pike, Peter *(Burnley)*
Plaskitt, James
Pollard, Kerry
Pond, Chris *(Gravesham)*
Pope, Greg *(Hyndburn)*
Pound, Stephen
Prentice, Ms Bridget *(Lewisham E)*
Prentice, Gordon *(Pendle)*
Primarolo, rh Dawn
Prosser, Gwyn
Purchase, Ken
Quin, rh Joyce
Quinn, Lawrie
Rapson, Syd *(Portsmouth N)*
Raynsford, rh Nick
Reed, Andy *(Loughborough)*
Reid, rh Dr. John *(Hamilton N & Bellshill)*
Robertson, John *(Glasgow Anniesland)*
Roche, Mrs Barbara
Rooney, Terry
Ross, Ernie *(Dundee W)*
Roy, Frank *(Motherwell)*
Ruane, Chris
Ruddock, Joan
Russell, Ms Christine *(City of Chester)*
Ryan, Joan *(Enfield N)*
Sawford, Phil
Sedgemore, Brian
Shaw, Jonathan
Sheerman, Barry
Sheridan, Jim
Shipley, Ms Debra
Simpson, Alan *(Nottingham S)*
Singh, Marsha
Skinner, Dennis
Smith, rh Andrew *(Oxford E)*
Smith, John *(Glamorgan)*
Smith, Llew *(Blaenau Gwent)*
Southworth, Helen
Starkey, Dr. Phyllis
Stewart, Ian *(Eccles)*
Stinchcombe, Paul
Strang, rh Dr. Gavin
Stringer, Graham
Stuart, Ms Gisela
Sutcliffe, Gerry
Tami, Mark *(Alyn)*
Taylor, Dari *(Stockton S)*
Taylor, David *(NW Leics)*
Thomas, Gareth *(Clwyd W)*
Timms, Stephen
Tipping, Paddy
Touhig, Don *(Islwyn)*
Trickett, Jon
Truswell, Paul
Turner, Dennis *(Wolverh'ton SE)*
Turner, Dr. Desmond *(Brighton Kemptown)*
Turner, Neil *(Wigan)*
Twigg, Derek *(Halton)*
Tynan, Bill *(Hamilton S)*
Vaz, Keith *(Leicester E)*
Vis, Dr. Rudi
Walley, Ms Joan
Ward, Claire
Wareing, Robert N.
Watson, Tom
Watts, David
White, Brian
Wicks, Malcolm
Williams, rh Alan *(Swansea W)*
Williams, Betty *(Conwy)*
Wills, Michael
Winnick, David
Winterton, Ms Rosie *(Doncaster C)*
Woodward, Shaun
Woolas, Phil
Worthington, Tony
Wright, Anthony D. *(Gt Yarmouth)*
Wright, David *(Telford)*
Wright, Tony *(Cannock)*

Tellers for the Noes:
Gillian Merron and
Mr. Nick Ainger

Question accordingly negatived.

New Clause 5

PRESUMPTION OF EQUAL PARENTING

'(1) The Children Act 1989 (c.41) is amended as follows.

(2) After section 1(1) (paramount consideration is welfare of the child) insert—

> "(1A) In respect of subsection (1)(a) above the court shall, unless a contrary reason be shown, act on the presumption that a child's welfare is best served through residence with its parents and, if its parents are not living together, through residence with one of them and through both of them being as fully and equally involved in his parenting as possible.".'—*[Mr. Grieve.]*

Brought up, and read the First time.

Mr. Grieve: I beg to move, That the clause be read a Second time.

The purpose of the new clause is to amend the Children Act 1989 to provide a subsidiary measure to that in section 1 of the Act dealing with the child's welfare being of paramount consideration, so as to make it absolutely clear that the intention—*[Interruption.]*

Mr. Deputy Speaker (Sir Michael Lord): Order. The conversations that are breaking out throughout the House are making it difficult to hear the hon. Member who is addressing us.

Mr. Grieve: Thank you, Mr. Deputy Speaker.

The intention behind the new clause is to make it clear that, subject to the welfare of the child being the paramount consideration, it should also be the case that a presumption exists that a child should live with their parents and that, in the event of the breakdown of a family relationship, both parents should have as equal and full a possibility to provide input into their child's life. The proposal was the subject of what I regret to say was a rather ill-tempered debate in Committee. I am slightly surprised that that should be the case because I would have expected the Minister for Children, Young People and Families to support the sentiments underlying the new clause.

The position is extraordinary. Part I of the Children Act states that, when a court makes a determination,

> "the child's welfare shall be the court's paramount consideration",

a matter on which I have absolutely no dispute. Sections 2 and 3 of the Act restate our common law principles, slightly amended, that it is the parents who have parental responsibility for their children. I am sure that the Minister would not disagree with that, otherwise we would have a situation akin to "1984" in which children can be arbitrarily removed from their parents at birth. Yet when we come to part II, dealing with the important issue of how a court approaches divorce, or indeed when we come to the parts of the Act that deal with care proceedings, the principles set out earlier in the Act are, surprisingly, not provided for at all. The issue—that the child's welfare is the paramount consideration—is simply left in the air.

That is why we have proposed the new clause. I make it clear to the Minister, for the avoidance of doubt, that it does not seek in any way to undermine the principle that the court should have paramount regard to a child's welfare, but it does seek to provide a framework within which the child's welfare interests are defined.

Mr. David Heath (Somerton and Frome) (LD): It is a great shame that we do not have sufficient time to explore the issue properly but in stating clearly that the child's welfare is paramount—the hon. Gentleman has done so without equivocation, for which I am grateful—and in putting forward a proposal that one doubts will take us further than case law in terms of its effect, rather than its intention, does he agree that the most fruitful area for looking at more effective arrangements might have been the early interventions programme, which the Government have failed to implement as part of their family resolutions and which would have provided a pre-court arrangement?

Mr. Grieve: I agree entirely with the hon. Gentleman and I share his regret at the fact that the Government have not implemented the early interventions programme. We need such a programme; indeed, it is essential. However, I also believe that until we alter the principles in the statute, we cannot start driving home the message that people must co-operate to ensure that on the break-up of a marriage, both parents have the real possibility of a full and fruitful relationship with their children, so that they can have an input into their lives.

Mr. Simon Burns (West Chelmsford) (Con): Does my hon. Friend accept that however welcome his comments are, the reality is that, regardless of the law's intention, the courts are biased in favour of the mother?

Mr. Grieve: I appreciate that that may have been a problem, but there has been considerable movement on that front. What is undoubtedly true is that the resident parent currently has a stranglehold over the ability to enable contact with the non-resident parent to work, be it the mother or the father. In many cases that might not be a problem, and the parties involved might be able to co-operate. But for the 10 per cent. of cases in which the parties involved are not willing to co-operate, there is no framework, despite the judiciary's best endeavours, through which to put relentless pressure on the resident parent to co-operate properly with court orders. So although one might get a contact order, it becomes meaningless, or contact is reduced to such a tiny level that is soon fizzles out, as inevitably it must. We have to address that.

Mr. Dawson: Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

Mr. Grieve: I am sorry but I cannot; I want to give the Minister time to respond.

New clause 5 goes some way towards redressing the balance, and establishes a framework that in no way undermines the other parts of the 1989 Act. Indeed, on considering how to amend that Act, I initially contemplated tackling part II, but I concluded that it did not require reform; rather, what needed amending were the general principles. I hope that the Minister will accept the new clause in that spirit, and I look forward to hearing a positive response from her.

Margaret Hodge: I have only three minutes to deal with new clause 5, but I should point out that I am absolutely delighted that we have flushed out the position that the Opposition are attempting to take. This is an extremely difficult, high profile, contentious and controversial issue, and the Opposition have tried to jump on a bandwagon. At best, they are being disingenuous; at worst, they are being opportunistic. In my view, they have tried to exploit many fathers' quite proper frustration and misery at not seeing their children by raising false hopes—that is particularly true of the right hon. Member for Maidenhead (Mrs. May)—and have led people to believe that they would legislate for equal parenting and 50:50 residence. We have exposed that opportunism—

Mr. Grieve: Will the right hon. Lady give way?

Margaret Hodge: No, I will not. This is another of the ill-thought out, hastily constructed and opportunistic policies that are designed to gain support from any quarter on any issue, in order to save a dying party. What an appalling way to exploit genuine human distress and misery.

We recognise that although the current system has the paramountcy of the interests of the child at its heart, it is not working as well as it should. That is why we have published a Green Paper, and why we are pursuing the "family resolutions" pilots that are up and running in three places. We know, as the hon. Member for Beaconsfield (Mr. Grieve) himself knows, that under existing case law, in 99.2 per cent. of cases that go to court, contact between children and both their parents is maintained. We agree with the Opposition that the child's best interests are served by both parents maintaining responsibility for that child where it is safe for them to do so. We want to speed up the system and to introduce more mediation and conciliation. We also want to give the courts a wider array of appropriate enforcement measures to ensure that parents comply with court orders. What we will not do is to be populist in the short term against the interests of children in these very difficult situations, and we will not exploit emotions—

It being quarter past Four o'clock, MR. DEPUTY SPEAKER *proceeded to put the Question already proposed from the Chair, pursuant to Order [this day].*

Question put, That the clause be read a Second time:—

The House divided: Ayes 176, Noes 304.

Division No. 304] **[4:15 pm**

AYES

Ainsworth, Peter *(E Surrey)*
Atkinson, Peter *(Hexham)*
Baker, Norman
Baldry, Tony
Barker, Gregory
Baron, John *(Billericay)*
Barrett, John
Beggs, Roy *(E Antrim)*
Bercow, John
Beresford, Sir Paul
Blunt, Crispin
Boswell, Tim
Brady, Graham
Brake, Tom *(Carshalton)*

Brazier, Julian
Breed, Colin
Brooke, Mrs Annette L.
Browning, Mrs Angela
Bruce, Malcolm
Burns, Simon
Burnside, David
Burstow, Paul
Burt, Alistair
Butterfill, Sir John
Cable, Dr. Vincent
Calton, Mrs Patsy
Campbell, Gregory *(E Lond'y)*
Campbell, rh Sir Menzies *(NE Fife)*
Carmichael, Alistair
Cash, William
Chapman, Sir Sydney *(Chipping Barnet)*
Chope, Christopher
Clappison, James
Conway, Derek
Cormack, Sir Patrick
Cotter, Brian
Cran, James *(Beverley)*
Davey, Edward *(Kingston)*
Davies, Quentin *(Grantham & Stamford)*
Davis, rh David *(Haltemprice & Howden)*
Djanogly, Jonathan
Dodds, Nigel
Doughty, Sue
Duncan, Alan *(Rutland)*
Duncan Smith, rh Iain
Evans, Nigel
Fabricant, Michael
Fallon, Michael
Field, Mark *(Cities of London & Westminster)*
Flight, Howard
Forth, rh Eric
Foster, Don *(Bath)*
Garnier, Edward
George, Andrew *(St. Ives)*
Gibb, Nick *(Bognor Regis)*
Gidley, Sandra
Gillan, Mrs Cheryl
Goodman, Paul
Gray, James *(N Wilts)*
Green, Damian *(Ashford)*
Green, Matthew *(Ludlow)*
Greenway, John
Grieve, Dominic
Gummer, rh John
Hague, rh William
Hammond, Philip
Hancock, Mike
Harris, Dr. Evan *(Oxford W & Abingdon)*
Hawkins, Nick
Hayes, John *(S Holland)*
Heald, Oliver
Heath, David
Heathcoat-Amory, rh David
Hendry, Charles
Hoban, Mark *(Fareham)*
Hogg, rh Douglas
Holmes, Paul
Horam, John *(Orpington)*
Howarth, Gerald *(Aldershot)*
Hughes, Simon *(Southwark N)*
Jack, rh Michael
Jenkin, Bernard
Keetch, Paul
Kennedy, rh Charles *(Ross Skye & Inverness)*
Key, Robert *(Salisbury)*
Kirkbride, Miss Julie
Kirkwood, Sir Archy
Knight, rh Greg *(E Yorkshire)*
Laing, Mrs Eleanor
Lait, Mrs Jacqui
Lamb, Norman
Lansley, Andrew
Laws, David *(Yeovil)*
Letwin, rh Oliver
Lewis, Dr. Julian *(New Forest E)*
Lidington, David
Lilley, rh Peter
Loughton, Tim
Luff, Peter *(M-Worcs)*
Mackay, rh Andrew
McLoughlin, Patrick
Malins, Humfrey
Maples, John
Maude, rh Francis
Mawhinney, rh Sir Brian
May, rh Mrs Theresa
Mercer, Patrick
Moore, Michael
Moss, Malcolm
Murrison, Dr. Andrew
Norman, Archie
Oaten, Mark *(Winchester)*
O'Brien, Stephen *(Eddisbury)*
Öpik, Lembit
Ottaway, Richard
Page, Richard
Paterson, Owen
Pickles, Eric
Portillo, rh Michael
Pugh, Dr. John
Randall, John
Redwood, rh John
Rendel, David
Robathan, Andrew
Robertson, Hugh *(Faversham & M-Kent)*
Robertson, Laurence *(Tewk'b'ry)*
Robinson, Peter *(Belfast E)*
Rosindell, Andrew
Ruffley, David
Russell, Bob *(Colchester)*
Sanders, Adrian
Sayeed, Jonathan
Shephard, rh Mrs Gillian
Shepherd, Richard
Smith, Sir Robert *(W Ab'd'ns & Kincardine)*
Smyth, Rev. Martin *(Belfast S)*
Soames, Nicholas
Spelman, Mrs Caroline
Spicer, Sir Michael
Spink, Bob *(Castle Point)*
Spring, Richard
Stanley, rh Sir John
Steen, Anthony
Streeter, Gary
Stunell, Andrew
Swayne, Desmond
Swire, Hugo *(E Devon)*
Syms, Robert
Tapsell, Sir Peter
Taylor, Ian *(Esher)*
Taylor, John *(Solihull)*
Taylor, Matthew *(Truro)*
Taylor, Sir Teddy
Teather, Sarah
Thurso, John
Tredinnick, David
Turner, Andrew *(Isle of Wight)*
Tyler, Paul *(N Cornwall)*
Tyrie, Andrew
Viggers, Peter
Walter, Robert
Waterson, Nigel
Watkinson, Angela
Webb, Steve *(Northavon)*
Whittingdale, John
Widdecombe, rh Miss Ann
Wiggin, Bill
Wilkinson, John
Willetts, David
Williams, Roger *(Brecon)*
Willis, Phil
Wilshire, David
Winterton, Ann *(Congleton)*
Winterton, Sir Nicholas *(Macclesfield)*
Yeo, Tim *(S Suffolk)*
Young, rh Sir George

Tellers for the Ayes:
Andrew Selous and
Mr. Geoffrey Clifton-Brown

NOES

Abbott, Ms Diane
Adams, Irene *(Paisley N)*
Ainsworth, Bob *(Cov'try NE)*
Allen, Graham
Anderson, rh Donald *(Swansea E)*
Anderson, Janet *(Rossendale & Darwen)*
Armstrong, rh Ms Hilary
Atherton, Ms Candy
Atkins, Charlotte
Austin, John
Bailey, Adrian
Baird, Vera
Barnes, Harry
Barron, rh Kevin
Battle, rh John
Bayley, Hugh
Beard, Nigel
Beckett, rh Margaret
Begg, Miss Anne
Bell, Sir Stuart
Berry, Roger
Best, Harold
Blackman, Liz
Blears, Ms Hazel
Blizzard, Bob
Boateng, rh Paul
Bradley, rh Keith *(Withington)*
Bradley, Peter *(The Wrekin)*
Bradshaw, Ben
Brennan, Kevin
Browne, Desmond
Bryant, Chris
Buck, Ms Karen
Burden, Richard
Burgon, Colin
Burnham, Andy
Byers, rh Stephen
Byrne, Liam *(B'ham Hodge H)*
Cairns, David
Campbell, Alan *(Tynemouth)*
Campbell, Mrs Anne *(C'bridge)*
Campbell, Ronnie *(Blyth V)*
Caplin, Ivor
Casale, Roger
Caton, Martin
Cawsey, Ian *(Brigg)*
Chapman, Ben *(Wirral S)*
Chaytor, David
Clapham, Michael
Clark, Mrs Helen *(Peterborough)*
Clark, Dr. Lynda *(Edinburgh Pentlands)*
Clark, Paul *(Gillingham)*
Clarke, rh Tom *(Coatbridge & Chryston)*
Clelland, David
Clwyd, Ann *(Cynon V)*
Coaker, Vernon
Coffey, Ms Ann
Cohen, Harry
Colman, Tony
Corbyn, Jeremy
Corston, rh Jean
Cousins, Jim
Cranston, Ross
Crausby, David
Cruddas, Jon
Cryer, John *(Hornchurch)*
Cummings, John
Cunningham, rh Dr. Jack *(Copeland)*
Cunningham, Jim *(Coventry S)*
Cunningham, Tony *(Workington)*
Curtis-Thomas, Mrs Claire
Davey, Valerie *(Bristol W)*
David, Wayne
Davidson, Ian
Davies, rh Denzil *(Llanelli)*
Dawson, Hilton
Dean, Mrs Janet
Denham, rh John
Dhanda, Parmjit
Dismore, Andrew
Dobbin, Jim *(Heywood)*
Dobson, rh Frank
Donohoe, Brian H.
Doran, Frank
Dowd, Jim *(Lewisham W)*
Drew, David *(Stroud)*
Eagle, Angela *(Wallasey)*
Eagle, Maria *(L'pool Garston)*
Edwards, Huw
Efford, Clive
Ennis, Jeff *(Barnsley E)*
Etherington, Bill
Farrelly, Paul
Field, rh Frank *(Birkenhead)*
Fisher, Mark
Fitzpatrick, Jim
Flint, Caroline
Flynn, Paul *(Newport W)*
Follett, Barbara
Foster, rh Derek
Foster, Michael *(Worcester)*
Foster, Michael Jabez *(Hastings & Rye)*
Gapes, Mike *(Ilford S)*
George, rh Bruce *(Walsall S)*
Gibson, Dr. Ian
Gilroy, Linda
Godsiff, Roger
Goggins, Paul
Griffiths, Jane *(Reading E)*
Griffiths, Nigel *(Edinburgh S)*
Griffiths, Win *(Bridgend)*
Grogan, John
Hain, rh Peter
Hall, Mike *(Weaver Vale)*
Hall, Patrick *(Bedford)*
Hamilton, David *(Midlothian)*
Hamilton, Fabian *(Leeds NE)*

Hanson, David
Harman, rh Ms Harriet
Harris, Tom *(Glasgow Cathcart)*
Havard, Dai *(Merthyr Tydfil & Rhymney)*
Henderson, Doug *(Newcastle N)*
Henderson, Ivan *(Harwich)*
Hendrick, Mark
Heppell, John
Hesford, Stephen
Heyes, David
Hinchliffe, David
Hodge, Margaret
Hoey, Kate *(Vauxhall)*
Hood, Jimmy *(Clydesdale)*
Hoon, rh Geoffrey
Hopkins, Kelvin
Howarth, rh Alan *(Newport E)*
Howarth, George *(Knowsley N & Sefton E)*
Hoyle, Lindsay
Hughes, Beverley *(Stretford & Urmston)*
Hughes, Kevin *(Doncaster N)*
Humble, Mrs Joan
Hurst, Alan *(Braintree)*
Hutton, rh John
Iddon, Dr. Brian
Illsley, Eric
Ingram, rh Adam
Irranca-Davies, Huw
Jackson, Glenda *(Hampstead & Highgate)*
Jackson, Helen *(Hillsborough)*
Johnson, rh Alan *(Hull W)*
Johnson, Miss Melanie *(Welwyn Hatfield)*
Jones, Helen *(Warrington N)*
Jones, Jon Owen *(Cardiff C)*
Jones, Kevan *(N Durham)*
Jones, Lynne *(Selly Oak)*
Jones, Martyn *(Clwyd S)*
Joyce, Eric *(Falkirk W)*
Kaufman, rh Sir Gerald
Kelly, Ruth *(Bolton W)*
Kemp, Fraser
Kennedy, Jane *(Wavertree)*
Khabra, Piara S.
Kilfoyle, Peter
King, Andy *(Rugby)*
Knight, Jim *(S Dorset)*
Lammy, David
Lawrence, Mrs Jackie
Laxton, Bob *(Derby N)*
Lazarowicz, Mark
Leslie, Christopher
Levitt, Tom *(High Peak)*
Lewis, Ivan *(Bury S)*
Lewis, Terry *(Worsley)*
Liddell, rh Mrs Helen
Linton, Martin
Lloyd, Tony *(Manchester C)*
Llwyd, Elfyn
Love, Andrew
Lucas, Ian *(Wrexham)*
McAvoy, Thomas
McCabe, Stephen
McCafferty, Chris
McDonnell, John
MacDougall, John
McFall, rh John
McGuire, Mrs Anne
McKechin, Ann
McKenna, Rosemary
McNulty, Tony
Mactaggart, Fiona
McWalter, Tony
McWilliam, John
Mahon, Mrs Alice
Mallaber, Judy
Mann, John *(Bassetlaw)*
Marris, Rob *(Wolverh'ton SW)*
Marsden, Gordon *(Blackpool S)*
Marshall, David *(Glasgow Shettleston)*
Martlew, Eric
Meacher, rh Michael
Meale, Alan *(Mansfield)*
Michael, rh Alun
Miliband, David
Miller, Andrew
Mitchell, Austin *(Gt Grimsby)*
Mole, Chris
Moonie, Dr. Lewis
Moran, Margaret
Morgan, Julie
Morris, rh Estelle
Mudie, George
Munn, Ms Meg
Murphy, Denis *(Wansbeck)*
Murphy, Jim *(Eastwood)*
Naysmith, Dr. Doug
O'Brien, Bill *(Normanton)*
O'Brien, Mike *(N Warks)*
O'Hara, Edward
Olner, Bill
O'Neill, Martin
Organ, Diana
Osborne, Sandra *(Ayr)*
Owen, Albert
Perham, Linda
Picking, Anne
Pickthall, Colin
Pike, Peter *(Burnley)*
Plaskitt, James
Pond, Chris *(Gravesham)*
Pope, Greg *(Hyndburn)*
Pound, Stephen
Prentice, Ms Bridget *(Lewisham E)*
Prentice, Gordon *(Pendle)*
Primarolo, rh Dawn
Prosser, Gwyn
Purchase, Ken
Quin, rh Joyce
Quinn, Lawrie
Rapson, Syd *(Portsmouth N)*
Raynsford, rh Nick
Reed, Andy *(Loughborough)*
Reid, rh Dr. John *(Hamilton N & Bellshill)*
Robertson, John *(Glasgow Anniesland)*
Roche, Mrs Barbara
Rooney, Terry
Ross, Ernie *(Dundee W)*
Roy, Frank *(Motherwell)*
Ruane, Chris
Ruddock, Joan
Russell, Ms Christine *(City of Chester)*
Ryan, Joan *(Enfield N)*
Sawford, Phil
Sedgemore, Brian
Shaw, Jonathan
Sheridan, Jim
Shipley, Ms Debra
Simpson, Alan *(Nottingham S)*
Singh, Marsha
Skinner, Dennis
Smith, rh Andrew *(Oxford E)*
Smith, John *(Glamorgan)*
Smith, Llew *(Blaenau Gwent)*
Southworth, Helen
Spellar, rh John
Starkey, Dr. Phyllis
Stewart, Ian *(Eccles)*
Stinchcombe, Paul
Strang, rh Dr. Gavin
Stringer, Graham
Stuart, Ms Gisela
Sutcliffe, Gerry
Tami, Mark *(Alyn)*
Taylor, rh Ann *(Dewsbury)*
Taylor, Dari *(Stockton S)*
Taylor, David *(NW Leics)*
Thomas, Gareth *(Clwyd W)*
Thomas, Simon *(Ceredigion)*
Timms, Stephen
Tipping, Paddy
Touhig, Don *(Islwyn)*
Trickett, Jon
Truswell, Paul
Turner, Dennis *(Wolverh'ton SE)*
Turner, Dr. Desmond *(Brighton Kemptown)*
Turner, Neil *(Wigan)*
Twigg, Derek *(Halton)*
Tynan, Bill *(Hamilton S)*
Vaz, Keith *(Leicester E)*
Vis, Dr. Rudi
Walley, Ms Joan
Ward, Claire
Wareing, Robert N.
Watson, Tom
White, Brian
Wicks, Malcolm
Williams, Betty *(Conwy)*
Williams, Hywel *(Caernarfon)*
Wills, Michael
Winnick, David
Winterton, Ms Rosie *(Doncaster C)*
Woodward, Shaun
Woolas, Phil
Worthington, Tony
Wright, Anthony D. *(Gt Yarmouth)*
Wright, David *(Telford)*
Wright, Tony *(Cannock)*

Tellers for the Noes:
Gillian Merron and
Mr. Nick Ainger

Question accordingly negatived.

Mrs. Theresa May (Maidenhead) (Con): On a point of order, Mr. Deputy Speaker. Is it in order for a Minister to use the wholly unreasonable guillotine on this debate to launch a personal attack on another hon. Member, confident in the knowledge that that hon. Member cannot respond? The guillotine means that serious issues affecting children, parents and grandparents in this country have not been addressed. Surely it is the Minister's job to deal with the issues under debate, rather than to launch a tirade of invective against the Opposition. The serious issues involved in this Bill have not been considered, and the Minister has not put the interests of children first.

Mr. Deputy Speaker (Sir Michael Lord): The timing of the debate is not the responsibility of the Chair and was decided by the House earlier. Had the Minister been out of order in any of the things that she said, I would not have allowed her to say them.

New Clause 12

REASONABLE PUNISHMENT

'(1) Battery of a child cannot be justified in any proceedings on the grounds that it constituted reasonable punishment.

(2) Battery of a child is not unlawful if the act amounts to the use of reasonable force in order to—

(a) avert an immediate danger to the child or any other person;

(b) avert an immediate danger to property; or

(c) prevent the commission of a crime, or an act which would be a crime if the child had reached the age of criminal responsibility.

(3) For the purpose of subsections (1) and (2), "child" means a person under the age of 18.

(4) Section 1 of the Children and Young Persons Act 1933 (c.12) (cruelty to persons under sixteen) is amended as follows.

(5) At the end of subsection (7) insert "subject to subsection (8)".

[Mr. Deputy Speaker]

(6) After subsection (7) insert—

"(8) Corporal punishment administered to a child cannot be justified in any proceedings on the grounds that it was administered in pursuance of a right exercisable by virtue of subsection (7).

(9) For the purpose of subsection (8), administering corporal punishment to a child means doing anything for the purpose of punishing that child which would constitute unlawful battery.".'.—*[Mr. Hinchliffe.]*

Brought up, and read the First time.

Mr. David Hinchliffe (Wakefield) (Lab): I beg to move, That the clause be read a Second time.

Mr. Deputy Speaker: With this it will be convenient to discuss the following amendments: No. 23, in page 37, line 18, leave out clause 56.

No. 39, in page 37, line 33, at end insert—

'(6) Two years after the commencement of this section, the Secretary of State shall undertake a review of the effect of the provisions of subsections (1) to (5) on the number of convictions for the offences specified in subsection (2).

(7) As soon as practicable after the completion of the review under subsection (6) the Secretary of State shall lay before each House of Parliament a report on the outcome of the review.'.

Mr. Hinchliffe: I want to begin by repeating the warm welcome that I gave on Second Reading for the broad thrust of the Bill. In general, it is a very positive measure. With some minor amendments, it could represent a genuinely historic step forward in children's welfare.

New clause 12 deals with the physical chastisement of children. I accept that this is a highly contentious matter for some, and that it generates strong feelings among a significant number of people. I also accept that it is not any easy matter for any Government to address, as some people will accuse them of establishing a so-called nanny state and of interfering in the private domain of the family. I am therefore very grateful to the ministerial team responsible for the Bill for their willingness to listen, over a long period of time, to the concerns and arguments of those of us who believe that children should have equal protection in law from assault.

I am grateful to my right hon. Friends the Minister for Children and the Secretary of State for Education and Skills for the time that they have devoted to this issue. I am also grateful to those who are—shall we say—at even higher levels of the Government for a dialogue that has ensured that serious thought has been given to how we can make progress in respect of protecting children.

I shall not dwell on the outcome of our dialogue, save to say that it is unfortunate that Labour members have been whipped to vote against a new clause that has the overwhelming support of every child protection agency in the country. For some, this is an abstract academic issue, but for many hon. Members, and myself, it is about the basic human rights of a significant proportion of our population. Our arguments are based not on policy briefings from worthy organisations but on the experience that some of us have gained from working in child protection with vulnerable and abused youngsters. Our strength of feeling comes from the certain knowledge that our laws and society could do a great deal more to ensure their well-being.

4.30 pm

Jonathan Shaw: My hon. Friend told the House that a range of child protection agencies supported his amendment. Is he aware that Lord Laming, the author of the Victoria Climbié report that led to the introduction of the Bill, does not support his amendment and, indeed, supports the Government's position?

Mr. Hinchliffe: Lord Laming appeared before the Health Committee, and we discussed the matter. I do not know why he does not support the amendment, bearing in mind the fact that the escalation of injuries to this girl stemmed from what might be termed "gentle smacking". His personal perspective differs significantly from that of his predecessor, Sir William Utting, who was a strong supporter of the arguments that I shall make.

I am the first to agree that the vast majority of children, even most of those whose parents use physical chastisement, are probably better treated now than at any other time in history. For a minority whom the current law does not protect properly, however, the reality is very different. It is a scandal and a disgrace that in 21st century Britain, at least one child every week—more than 80 children every year—dies at the hands of their parents or carers. Compared with many similar countries, our record on child deaths is appalling.

Like my colleagues who have worked in child protection, I do not just think that there is a connection between our shocking levels of child deaths and laws permitting so-called reasonable chastisement; I know that there is. I have witnessed in individual cases the progression from what is now called "gentle smacking" to serious injury and, in a couple of instances, death from shaking, hitting, punching and beating. I have direct experience of the inability of a child protection agency to stop a child suffering serious beating because of a court's acceptance of the reasonable chastisement defence.

Mr. Andrew Robathan (Blaby) (Con): Will the hon. Gentleman confirm that those serious injuries and deaths are already illegal, and that the problem is the behaviour of parents who commit illegal acts, not the behaviour of the vast majority of parents who are trying to keep their children within reasonable bounds of discipline?

Mr. Hinchliffe: If the hon. Gentleman will allow me to expand my argument, I will address that point.

New clause 12 seeks to right a long-standing wrong for children. It has the modest aim of giving children equal protection from assault, but has substantial potential to reduce all forms of violence. Equal protection means what it says; hitting a child will be unlawful to exactly the same extent as hitting an adult. Some adults and, sadly, even some Government Ministers are fond of using the term "smacking" to make them feel more comfortable with what they are condoning or defending. Children, however, tell it as it is; smacking is hitting, and smacking hurts. It does not just cause physical pain, but hurts inside too.

The new clause would criminalise hitting to exactly the same extent as hitting adults. That is equality, and children, who are far more fragile and vulnerable than us, deserve nothing less. Some members of the Government have said that they do not want parents to be criminalised for hitting their children. If they mean that they will not apply the criminal law on assault equally to assault by parents on children, we are on opposite sides of the fence. If they mean that they do not want parents to be drawn into the criminal justice system, charged and prosecuted for minor assaults on children, we are on the same side. No one in their right mind would think it constructive, apart from in very exceptional circumstances, to pursue parents into court for trivial assaults. Prosecution of parents is seldom in the interests of their dependent children, but that cannot be used as an excuse for leaving the law unclear, and sending the message that hitting children, unlike hitting adults, is acceptable.

Mr. Simon Thomas (Ceredigion) (PC): The hon. Gentleman will know that since the law was changed in Germany in 2000, not one parent has been criminalised. Does he agree that the issue at the heart of the Bill is summed up in the film of Roald Dahl's "Matilda", in which Danny DeVito says to his daughter, "I'm big and you're small. I'm right and you're wrong"? It is not only about quality, but about defending the most vulnerable in society. It is plainly wrong that a 13-stone, 40-year-old man can hit a four-stone seven-year-old child. We just have to change the law.

Mr. Hinchliffe: I did not see the film, but I agree with its message. The only way to clarify the law and send a clear message that hitting children is at least as wrong and unlawful as hitting anyone else is to give children equal protection by removing the existing defence of reasonable chastisement altogether.

Peter Bradley (The Wrekin) (Lab): Through an honest sleight of hand, my hon. Friend has elided smacking and hitting. Most responsible parents are well able to distinguish between smacking that does not cause lasting harm and hitting, which certainly would. When he listed the ways in which those 80 children met their tragic deaths, he identified shaking and other forms of assault, but did not refer to smacking. It is clear to most reasonable people that assault is a different kettle of fish from disciplining a child in a loving family environment.

Mr. Hinchliffe: My hon. Friend gets us into the heart of the debate. I have been in court when the same point has been raised in individual cases. Is a smack in the mouth a hit? What is the difference between a smack and a hit? What is a gentle smack and what is a more serious, heavier smack? There are different smacks from different people. I weigh 16 stone. If I smacked my hon. Friend, it would be different from someone who was 10 stone smacking him. We need to consider how difficult it is for the courts to come to terms with the doubts that he raises.

To pursue the point further, I have argued that we need to get rid of the reasonable chastisement defence. Those who cannot accept what I believe to be a common-sense approach have been scaremongering that it is unworkable or that the child protection police and prosecution services will pursue prosecutions for so-called gentle smacks.

The evidence of the Director of Public Prosecutions has been grossly misrepresented. In his evidence to the Joint Committee on Human Rights, he said, reasonably enough, that he could not guarantee that parents would never be prosecuted for minor assaults on their children. He stated:

> "The reality is that we would have to have some sort of policy about this but I think it would be inconceivable for us to draft a policy that would be so wide as to say that minor assaults on children would never be prosecuted because there clearly could be circumstances where they would be. One might posit an example of a child who was mentally handicapped or a child who was subjected to sexual abuse or other forms of assault. So we would not and could not draft guidance which would absolve all minor acts of battery against children from criminal prosecution. That said, the reality is that, just as most minor assaults against adults are not prosecuted, I suspect most minor assaults against children would not be either, although it is not an entirely accurate analogy because children are much more vulnerable than adults."

Mr. Elfyn Llwyd (Meirionnydd Nant Conwy) (PC): How does the hon. Gentleman square the DPP's view with the Crown Prosecution Service allegedly telling the Government that the new clause would criminalise a huge number of people?

Mr. Hinchliffe: The view of the CPS appears to be contradicted by what the DPP told the Joint Committee and also what the Association of Chief Police Officers said to me last week.

The DPP did not say that equal protection was unworkable. He said that Parliament should decide. Two tests have to be satisfied before any prosecution goes ahead: the evidential test and the public interest test. The public interest test invariably includes consideration of the best interests of the affected child. It is hard to understand how charging and prosecuting a parent for a minor assault that causes no injury is going to pass the tests and go ahead except in extreme circumstances. That does not render the law meaningless. On the contrary, it shows it to be sensitive.

Mr. Barry Sheerman (Huddersfield) (Lab/Co-op): My hon. Friend's arguments are very persuasive; we pursued many of them in both my Select Committee and his. However, the proposals would bring a big change in our law. Does not he think that trying the new system for two years, monitoring it and then making a judgment would give us a means of transition for people we represent who are unpersuaded? Would not that be a more positive way forward?

Mr. Hinchliffe: If by "the new system" my hon. Friend means the one included in the Bill by the House of Lords, I shall be going through exactly what all the agencies concerned with child protection are saying about clause 56.

Mr. David Chaytor (Bury, North) (Lab): Will my hon. Friend give way?

Mr. Hinchliffe: No, I am sorry, but I have to make some progress. Other Members want to speak in this brief debate.

All the associations representing those who will need to work on equal protection are agreed that it is workable and safe; all of them. I have met and talked

[Mr. Hinchliffe]

with representatives of the Association of Directors of Social Services, the Association of Chief Police Officers, social workers, the NSPCC, health visitors and paediatricians. They all believe emphatically—to respond to my hon. Friend the Member for Huddersfield (Mr. Sheerman)—that clause 56 is unworkable and unsafe.

The position of the police is especially worthy of note. The House will recall that in the Lords debate on equal protection Lord Condon—who, as Paul Condon, was a distinguished Metropolitan Police Commissioner—said that he was absolutely certain that the status quo should not prevail and that parliamentarians

> "have an historic opportunity to establish a pragmatic, symbolic and new legal approach to protecting children".

He said that peers

> "should not be deterred by a fear of unleashing hundreds of thousands of police inquiries into trivial allegations and pitting child against parent in frivolous circumstances".—[*Official Report, House of Lords*, 5 July 2004; Vol. 663, c. 549.]

Only last week, I met Chief Constable Terence Grange, who speaks for ACPO on child protection matters. Subsequently, he wrote to me, setting out the association's views on the serious problems that would arise for the police should clause 56 become law. I have a copy of his letter if anybody wants to look at it. He stated:

> "The proposed Clause would introduce randomness in terms of the child's physiology and the background of the parent, working class families tend to have much rougher hands than lawyers, bankers, etc. Some children redden or bruise much more easily than others. Such randomness and the use of age to differentiate between common assault and actual bodily harm is, in my view, likely to lead to much more complexity."

In addressing specifically the removal of the reasonable chastisement defence, Chief Constable Grange stated that

> "since 2002, the police service in England and Wales has adopted an approach of recording crime whereby if a child or a witness or a member of the public had called to allege that a parent had smacked a child, that matter would be recorded as a crime. That does not mean that prosecution would follow, there is a well established procedure under 'Working Together' that enables the police and social services to decide on the best course of action and that would be followed. Therefore, if Parliament removes the defence I would anticipate no lasting issues which would make the situation unmanageable for the Police. The matter would be recorded as a crime and investigated by police or social services, dependent on the evidence, injury and a view on what is best for the family, as happens now . . . There may be an increase in allegations, however, given the increase in police resources over the last four years I am confident that we could cope with that. It is my view that were the change to be made over a reasonable period of time the number of allegations would fall, as given a good education programme by Government, rather like drink driving, smacking a child would become socially unacceptable".

Chief Constable Grange concludes his letter on behalf of ACPO by saying that

> "removing the defence of reasonable chastisement would not create an unmanageable situation for the police force. The proposed clause 56 would introduce far more complexity than it would solve, as one example, the police would be seeking statements from Doctors and Paediatricians at such a level that I think they would find that unmanageable. We take no view on whether or not the defence should be removed. If Parliament removes the defence the police service in England and Wales will be able to manage the consequences".

As Chief Constable Grange indicates, the police must work closely with members of the medical profession on such matters. It is important to note that the Royal College of Paediatrics and Child Health, which represents paediatricians involved in child protection, is a signatory to a multi-agency statement that claims that clause 56 is unsafe and unworkable and that supports equal protection. Other signatories to the statement include the Community Practitioners and Health Visitors Association, the NSPCC, the British Association of Social Workers and the Association of Directors of Social Services.

4.45 pm

Mr. Steve Love of the children and families committee of the ADSS wrote to me on behalf of the association to state its clear views. He said:

> "We would welcome the greater clarity that will result that children be given the same protection as adults. I believe this would assist frontline practitioners in reinforcing the message that physical punishment is not an appropriate method of providing care and control for children."

He continued:

> "I think the proposed introduction of Cl. 56 would create an additional complication to what are already complex matters. The current threshold of 'significant harm' for formal child protection investigations would now have another standard if Cl. 56 was introduced. It's difficult to see how the standard could be applied consistently, as what may bruise one child may not bruise another. Social Services Departments are working hard to ensure a careful, measured and consistent approach for those involved in protecting children. I do not believe the introduction of Cl. 56 will do anything to assist".

In the light of such clear statements from all those in the front line of child protection, the scaremongering about the reform is frankly unacceptable. If there are still people in 2004 who want to defend hitting children, they should do so honestly, rather than hiding behind the misrepresented effects of reform that have been peddled over the past few weeks.

Miss Julie Kirkbride (Bromsgrove) (Con): Part of the hon. Gentleman's argument is the idea that children should be equally protected from being hit or smacked, whichever word one chooses to use. However, there is a difference between a child and a parent. A parent has a duty of care to a child and carries that out by putting it to bed, giving it food, looking after it and giving it moral guidance and help with discipline so that it may become a proper civilised adult. Smacking might be appropriate in that context. Why does he want to influence the relationship between a responsible parent and a child who may well need proper guidance?

Mr. Hinchliffe: We could argue on that basis that perhaps people with learning difficulties lack a sense of reason. Should we thus suggest smacking them, because that is exactly the same argument?

Mr. Kerry Pollard (St. Albans) (Lab): May I offer my hon. Friend some support? As a father of seven children, I believe that I have more parenting skills than most in the House, and I say, "Don't smack children."

Mr. Hinchliffe: I am grateful to my hon. Friend.

I want to conclude in a moment so that other hon. Members have the opportunity to speak. People who oppose new clause 12 because of the risk that a parent might, in exceptional circumstances, be prosecuted for what is perceived as a minor assault should not fool themselves that they have the backing of those charged with a responsibility for child protection; clearly, they do not. The Joint Committee on Human Rights has heard evidence on the matter from the Director of Public Prosecutions and others. In its 19th report in September, it emphasised the fact that equal protection would provide more legal certainty than clause 56. No one has challenged the law of assault against adults as not providing legal certainty. No one would suggest that we should decriminalise the minor slapping of women, confused elderly people or those with learning difficulties, who, like young children, might have limited powers of reasoning. I am merely proposing to extend the existing law to cover children equally. We have already extended equal protection to children in schools, nurseries and so on. This is the last logical step in establishing equality.

Colleagues who have looked at debates on the Bill in the House of Lords will have seen that some particularly absurd examples were cited. One Member asked whether we really wanted to criminalise the exasperated parent who smacks her child to stop him running into the road for the fourth time. Well, do we really want to decriminalise the exasperated but loving daughter who smacks her confused father who is suffering from dementia and who is also straying into the road for the fourth time? Again, we must not confuse the law, which must be clear and take sensible common-sense approaches to prosecution. All assault and battery should be unlawful. In either of the examples, can anyone seriously envisage the perpetrators being dragged off to court?

If there are not to be wholesale prosecutions, some will ask what is the point of changing the law if we are not going to enforce it. Let us be clear that removal of the defence will make prosecution easier in cases where it is necessary to protect children from significant harm and doing so is in the child's best interests. At the moment, the law inhibits the child protection system at every stage. Most importantly, it inhibits those working with families in intervening early with clear and supportive messages, rather than waiting for significant injury.

The concept of prosecution and punishment is just one purpose of the law. Prosecution in this area is a demonstration of the law and the system failing to protect the child. The higher purpose of the law and its particular purpose when dealing with the private sphere of the family is to set a standard, send a clear signal, educate, change the culture, change individual attitudes and satisfy human rights.

Through its policies on the physical punishment of children, Britain is in breach of its obligations under both the United Nations convention on the rights of the child—signed up to by a Conservative Government some years ago—and the United Nations convention on human rights. Twelve countries have already introduced equal protection. If they can do it, so can we. The new clause has the support outside Parliament of the largest and broadest alliance ever assembled to pursue an issue on behalf of children. We should listen to its argument, and in particular to the unanimous voice of our child protection agencies, and vote to ensure that the welfare of our children is properly safeguarded in law.

Mrs. Brooke: We have just heard a comprehensive run-through of most of the main arguments, and as time is limited and many hon. Members want to speak, I shall not repeat them. I want to reflect on the fact that the defence of reasonable chastisement has been challenged in the European Court of Human Rights and a judgment has been made. The Joint Committee on Human Rights in this place believes that something must change as a result of that judgment.

In accepting that something must change, let us consider the amendment agreed in the House of Lords, which now forms clause 56. I regard it effectively as a sticking plaster. I am sure that legalistically it addresses the fundamental issue that we are in breach of various conventions, but as the Joint Committee on Human Rights says, it is likely that there will be further incompatibilities in future. So, if anything, clause 56 would be only a temporary fix and does not tackle the main issue. If we think about it, putting a sticking plaster on something makes one feel better and more comfortable. I worry that clause 56 makes people feel a little better because they think that they are tackling the worst of abuses and that therefore things will be all right. That concerns me greatly. For that reason, I support new clause 12, but I do not do so lightly. It has taken me quite a long time to come round to that and to have the courage to speak up on it.

Mr. John Redwood (Wokingham) (Con): What would happen where a parent had smacked a child in the privacy of the home, just the two of them? How would the child have protection? Is the idea that the child would know about this law, go to the police, and then the police would have to adjudicate between parent and child, one saying yes and the other no? How far will the intrusion go and could it be successful for the child?

Mrs. Brooke: I shall continue with my points and address that question at an appropriate point rather than diverting from my main issue at this stage.

I was saying that I do not support the new clause lightly. I have given it a great deal of thought and I am aware that many people will disagree with this approach, but it is an opportunity to show leadership. So much of the legislation in which I have been involved has been reactive. We constantly try to do something in our criminal justice system about bad behaviour, violence and physical assault, but this is an opportunity to start at the root causes.

What does physical punishment achieve? Research shows that it does not change behaviour but suppresses it, and suppressing behaviour almost certainly means that it comes out in another form, particularly when the person who administers or might administer the punishment is not around. That creates the potential for children to hit out at one another in the playground. After all, what have they seen in the home? What are their role models? Any form of physical punishment sets that lead.

Until I became a Member of Parliament, I had not realised that some children, particularly in certain home settings, see types of behaviour that I could not even

[Mrs. Brooke]

comprehend—I am referring to cases of sexual abuse—yet they become a norm. We are talking about norm referencing here. Any form of violence within the home has a spin-off effect outside the home and in future family relationships.

Mr. Humfrey Malins (Woking) (Con) *rose—*

Miss Kirkbride *rose—*

Mrs. Brooke: I shall continue my argument, if hon. Members do not mind. I am sure that they will have plenty of opportunity to speak later.

Physical punishment is ineffective and has other consequences. There is also the important point about equality for children and adults, which I see in terms of the respect that we have for one another as individuals, and that respect is broken down.

Mr. Malins: Will the hon. Lady give way?

Mrs. Brooke: I shall continue the points that I am making.

If we stop and think carefully, we are not making a positive contribution. It is often said, "It never did me any harm," but the research shows overwhelmingly that physical punishment certainly does no one any good. We have a positive opportunity to show real leadership and set a change in culture for the 21st century. People will not change their behaviour overnight. It will be gradual and any move along these lines needs an enormous amount of support and parental education.

Let us consider a familiar scenario. In a busy shopping centre one inevitably comes across a parent who is having an extremely frustrating time with a youngster. They are pushed to the limit of their endurance and perhaps hit their child round the head or hit hard, and I flinch when I see that. I imagine that that applies to most people. I understand the situation because, as a parent, I have been pushed to the limit of endurance, too. We can all acknowledge that. We are not considering criminalising normal behaviour.

5 pm

Other countries take a sensible approach. It is accepted that it takes time to moderate behaviour and that one cannot simply go from one control system to another without supporting education. However, we could be proud of our leadership if we accepted the new clause. I do not view it as an example of being a nanny state because we would set the foundations for improving behaviour in society and for some of the values that we all support. We see violence on the streets, and perhaps we have set the bad example.

In answer to the point that the right hon. Member for Wokingham (Mr. Redwood) made, senseless criminalisation has not occurred in other countries. It is worth attending briefings by representatives of Germany and Sweden. Europe has a long history of making improvements in this respect. Deaths from abuse have more or less disappeared in Sweden, where the problem is managed so much better. I ask all hon. Members to examine their consciences and consider supporting new clause 12.

Mrs. Claire Curtis-Thomas (Crosby) (Lab): I want to speak about amendment No. 39, which I framed after discussions with my hon. Friend the Member for St. Helens, South (Mr. Woodward), who, as a trustee of ChildLine, has done much to help vulnerable children. I want to put on record my thanks to him for his work on behalf of vulnerable children throughout the United Kingdom.

The law, which allows reasonable chastisement of a child, fails to protect children who are physically abused. It allows their abusers a loophole at trial and prevents other cases from coming to trial. The alterations that were made in another place present an unsatisfactory compromise, allowing children to be hit but placing a physical marker on how hard they can be hit and in what way. That is dangerous because children mark in many different ways for different lengths of time, and shaking and blows to the head often do not offer the physical proof that would have to be brought as evidence to ensure a conviction. The proposal is impractical because it will place doctors and paediatricians in a difficult position in determining what constitutes minor bruising and thus whether a child is covered by the new law. That is unsatisfactory.

However, although my hon. Friend and I believe that the current law fails to protect a child, we acknowledge the need to bring the public with us. That is why we propose, as a practical way forward, a Government review two years after the introduction of clause 56. It should be followed by a report to the House for our consideration. I stress that, if the review shows that the child abuse statistics have not dramatically improved, legislation will need to be reconsidered. That should happen only after we have had a proper time to consider the effectiveness of the proposals.

Mr. Andrew Turner (Isle of Wight) (Con): I want clause 56 to be removed from the Bill because, like the hon. Member for Wakefield (Mr. Hinchliffe), I believe that it worsens the position. The hon. Gentleman spoke of the need for a careful, measured and consistent approach to assist those who care for children and he mentioned several agencies that supported his careful, measured and consistent approach. The group that he did not mention in that connection was those who have the greatest responsibility for bringing up children: parents. I am not fortunate enough to be a parent, but I have no doubt that the best way to bring up children is with their two natural parents. Not all of us achieve that aspiration—we do not, of course, condemn those who do not achieve it—but parents have a unique relationship with their children and a unique responsibility to bring them up as citizens of tomorrow, as my hon. Friend the Member for Bromsgrove (Miss Kirkbride) suggested. We know that the overwhelming majority of parents not only do their best, but do an excellent job of bringing up children. Just as we make mistakes from time to time in our personal and political lives, so, under much greater pressure than us, do parents.

Mr. Malins: Does my hon. Friend agree that if the defence of reasonable chastisement is abolished, it will criminalise millions of decent, loving parents who use a smack from time to time, whereas those few parents who assault their children horribly and are guilty of a criminal act will simply take no notice?

Mr. Turner: My hon. Friend is absolutely right. The police and other agencies currently face the difficulty of tracking down and securing convictions against those who horribly abuse their children.

Mr. Llwyd: Is the hon. Gentleman aware of the recent "Children are Unbeatable!" alliance poll, in which 74 per cent. of parents—the figure for parents under 24 is 76 per cent.—said that they are against beating and smacking?

Mr. Turner: I am aware of that poll. It did not mention "beating"; it talked about "hitting". It was taken in 2004.

Mr. Llwyd: This year.

Mr. Turner: Yes; the poll is up to date. The definition of "hitting" adopted in the preamble to the poll included a slap or smack, but when the actual question was asked, the poll did not use the words "slapping" or "smacking"—it used the word "hitting", in the sense of hitting not a child but family members. That is the perverted way in which the questions were asked on behalf of the "Children are Unbeatable!" alliance.

Many other surveys have been undertaken. MORI conducted a survey for the National Family and Parenting Institute, which claimed after that survey that only one in five parents think that smacking is an effective way to teach children the difference between right and wrong. However, parents were not asked whether smacking is an effective way to teach children the difference between right and wrong, but whether it is the most effective way, and one in five parents think it the most effective method.

A British Market Research Bureau survey in July 2004 found that 85 per cent. of respondents think that parents should have the right sometimes to smack their children. In a survey undertaken on behalf of the Department of Health in 1998, 88 per cent. of respondents agreed that it is sometimes necessary for parents to smack their children. Let us examine all the surveys, rather than just one.

Peter Bradley (The Wrekin) (Lab): I thank the hon. Gentleman for giving me the opportunity to confirm the findings that he has just set out. I conducted a survey on the issue in my constituency, where 89 per cent. of respondents said that they do not want to see smacking banned. However, 71 per cent. wanted the law clarified to distinguish between smacking and hitting—the distinction is between disciplining a child in a loving relationship and assaulting and abusing a child. My constituents want to see the law make that distinction, and I am slightly disappointed that the hon. Gentleman does not.

Mr. Turner: I am grateful to the hon. Gentleman for his intervention, which brings me neatly on to what is wrong with clause 56. The amendment that Lord Lester moved in the other place throws the law on smacking into confusion. It removes the reasonable chastisement defence in three cases—wounding, grievous bodily harm and cruelty. That is entirely justifiable, but it will make no difference because a court is unlikely to accept that chastisement with such effects is reasonable. Indeed, the reasonable chastisement defence has been attempted in only 11 cases since 2001, and in only five of those was a conviction not secured. Lord Lester's amendment would retain the reasonable chastisement defence for assault and for battery, but abolish it for assault causing actual bodily harm. That is the nub of the problem, because the definition of assault causing actual bodily harm includes tenderness and bruising; and, as the hon. Member for Wakefield said, some children bruise more easily than others.

It follows that a parent who administers a quick slap in a supermarket, perhaps to foreshorten the sort of childish tantrums to which the hon. Member for Mid-Dorset and North Poole (Mrs. Brooke) referred, will be guilty of a criminal offence if it causes actual bodily harm such as tenderness. That is not to say that they will be prosecuted, but they will be criminalised. The hon. Member for Wakefield agrees with me about that.

Mr. Douglas Hogg (Sleaford and North Hykeham) (Con): The question also arises as to whether this will result in a misuse of police resources. Does my hon. Friend agree that if a member of the public saw a child being struck in a public place, and then reported that matter to the police, the police would have to make detailed inquiries to discover whether there was an underlying case of abuse in that particular case?

Mr. Turner: I agree with my right hon. and learned Friend. The hon. Member for Wakefield says that the police are recording such reports now, so we can imagine how many more there would be if there were even more confusion about what the law means, which would be the result of Lord Lester's amendment.

Mr. Simon Thomas: The hon. Gentleman has made the case that clause 56 is rubbish and does not hold water, so we can at least agree on that. He now wants to rely on the ancient common law defence of reasonable chastisement. Is he aware that that defence once applied to wives and servants as well? In what sense does he think that we should, in the 21st century, extend a protection that allows children to be, in his own words, bruised or harmed?

Mr. Turner: I should have thought that there is an obvious difference between a child who is not yet, or is in the process of becoming, a moral being and a wife or a servant, who, one would hope, already is. The loving relationship that parents have with their child is part of what informs the way in which they bring them up. It may be argued—indeed, it was put to me by members of the Isle of Wight youth council, who lobbied me vigorously and eloquently last Wednesday—that no one will be charged with this offence. There are prosecuting guidelines, and the police and social services have discretion. The problem with the guidelines, however, is that the authority has discretion whether to apply the

[Mr. Turner]

law, and different authorities, even those operating on the same guidelines, can reach different and perfectly reasonable conclusions about how to apply the law.

Mr. Robathan: Does my hon. Friend agree that even if no one is charged, the police or some social worker— [HON. MEMBERS: "Some social worker?"] I am glad that Labour Members find it so amusing, but aiming to criminalise millions of people is a serious matter. The police or a social worker, who know neither the parents nor the child, will come to interview them and drive a wedge between them.

Mr. Turner: I would be surprised if they did not; and better authorities than I have said that such interviews cause trauma within families.

The Attorney-General has stated that the Director of Public Prosecutions intends to revise his guidelines to make it more likely that people will be prosecuted for actual bodily harm than for assault, although that means that they will not have the defence of reasonable chastisement. He said:

> "The effect of that pending change is that even minor assaults by a parent on a child, where—

among other things—"minor bruising" or

> "swelling . . . are caused, will normally be charged as assault occasioning actual bodily harm."—[*Official Report, House of Lords*, 5 July 2004; Vol. 663, c. 563.]

As if that were not bad enough, the guidelines apply only to the police and the Crown Prosecution Service, not to other prosecuting authorities or private individuals. That will lead to greater confusion among parents about how they are permitted to discipline their children. The CPS and the police might say one thing, but a private prosecution, perhaps backed by a militant anti-smacking lobby, might say something different.

I echo the view of the hon. Member for Wakefield that clause 56 is a muddle and makes the law more, rather than less, complicated. The division of opinion in the House is very clear: it is between abolishing smacking altogether and retaining the current reasonable chastisement defence.

5.15 pm

Huw Irranca-Davies (Ogmore) (Lab): I speak in support of amendment No. 39, tabled in my name and those of my hon. Friend the Member for Crosby (Mrs. Curtis-Thomas) and other hon. Members.

My journey on this issue reflects that of any other parent, I suspect, and of many members of the public. I have no great expertise in the matter, as some hon. Members do. The only expertise that I bring to the debate comes from my becoming the father of three children within three years—I have expertise in running myself ragged trying to keep up with their high levels of energy.

My journey on this issue has changed substantially. At one stage, I was completely opposed to the idea of any further controls or of a ban on smacking. Now, I feel that the mood of public opinion is moving firmly in the direction not only of greater controls but, eventually, a total ban. I also feel that that is probably the right thing to do. However, I have a degree of uncertainty about this because, as a parent, I am not yet wholly convinced, although I am nearly there.

Clause 56 is not ideal by any stretch of the imagination, but I recognise that it is a step in the right direction. It lacks simplicity and it is open to legal interpretation. It also lacks elegance, but so does much of our current law. If a ban is the right way forward— I am inclined to that way of thinking, but it is a big "if" in the public's mind at the moment—but the Government do not feel ready to introduce a ban today, let them at least commit themselves to a full, fundamental review two years after the commencement of the Bill, which has so many good things in it. Let them bring this issue back to the House so that we can debate it in full and consider the implications.

Mr. Dawson: Does my hon. Friend accept that all of us who propose a complete ban—now—on the physical punishment of children would very much want it to be developed in the context of parental support, parental education and parental information? There would be no question of simply imposing something without a great deal of work being done with parents.

Huw Irranca-Davies: I entirely agree with my hon. Friend. His point is well made and he will see that I shall cover that issue later. He will be aware of the well-known saying in politics that we cannot lead unless, when we look over our shoulder, people are still following. One of the problems that the Government face is that there is not a great big crowd in favour of a ban. People are following that route in increasing numbers, but they are not all there yet. I include myself among those who are not yet there, because I still have some doubts.

Mr. Win Griffiths (Bridgend) (Lab): On that issue, may I point out to my hon. Friend that when the Swedish Government took the decision that parents should not smack their children, most people there were against it? However, a survey was carried out a couple of years ago, after the ban had been in place for quite a few years, and only 6 per cent. of people wanted the right to smack their children. So let us take this step now, educate now, and get on with the process of improving the lives of our children.

Huw Irranca-Davies: One Labour Member has already remarked on the fact that this is an historic occasion. I agree, but it is not the only occasion. I know that my hon. Friend holds strong fundamental and principled views on this matter, which might well be right—that is what I am saying—but this should not be the only occasion on which we can revisit the issue. That is why I strongly support the amendment under which we would review the matter in full once we have seen whether clause 56 works. If it has not worked, we will have to go forward from that point.

Such a review would not be based only on international comparators—we have those already. It is a question not of what works in Sweden or other European countries, but of what will work in this country, with our historical attitudes, our parenting culture and our legal system. I for one would urge the Government to move ahead with the Bill because it contains so many good things for children. However, they should come back to the House, not lock the door on us, and give us the opportunity to debate this issue once again. While this might be a historic moment, it is not the one and only and we deserve another opportunity to review public opinion, parental opinion and Back-Bench opinion in two years' time.

Mr. Robathan: I wish to speak to the new clause and amendment No. 23. I hope that the House will divide on amendment No. 23 when it gets the opportunity.

I introduced a private Member's Bill four years ago, which I recall the hon. Member for Lancaster and Wyre (Mr. Dawson) opposed. I therefore re-examined my notes. I recall that in 1993, a judge had before him a mother of two appealing against a conviction for assault. She had spanked her child with a slipper having caught the child stealing. One may or may not agree with that, but she was convicted of assault—for those who say that people do not get charged and convicted, that is one case. The judge quashed the conviction, saying:

> "If a parent cannot slipper a child, the world is going potty".

I do not know whether the judge is still alive, but I suspect that he will think that many in the House are indeed going barking mad—*[Interruption.]* If there are Members who would like to leave the Chamber, they should do that instead of nattering.

A parent who harms a child should of course be charged and prosecuted. Many are not. Does anyone really believe that passing this law will mean that more parents who harm children will be prosecuted? I suspect that that will not be the case.

Mr. Dawson: Does not the hon. Gentleman understand that the proponents of a complete ban are trying to argue for a cultural change whereby the physical punishment or over-chastisement of children simply becomes unacceptable?

Mr. Robathan: The hon. Gentleman will know that I like and respect him, but that does not mean that I agree with him.

I am delighted that the hon. Member for St. Albans (Mr. Pollard) and others can bring up their children without smacking them. I think that that is marvellous. I have two small children to whom I am devoted—I love them more than anything else in the world. Very occasionally, I smack them; much more often, I threaten them with it. Funnily enough, it works rather well.

I will talk briefly about violence in society. The hon. Member for Mid-Dorset and North Poole (Mrs. Brooke) said that violence begets violence. Apparently, we now have 1 million violent crimes a year on our streets, children are carrying knives in schools and using them, teachers are being attacked in schools more and more often, and teachers tell me that when they try to remonstrate with children, they say, "You can't touch me." When we debated getting rid of corporal punishment in schools, we were told that it would mean less violence in schools. In fact, there is more. Members should therefore ask their constituents whether they think that the drive towards removing violence—smacking children and corporal punishment—has achieved much.

David Taylor (North-West Leicestershire) (Lab/Co-op): In the instance that the hon. Gentleman, who is my near parliamentary neighbour, has given, is it not just as likely that increased violence between young people and by young people arises from the violence of the background that they may experience in their home, rather than from a lack of chastisement in school?

Mr. Robathan: I do not think that the evidence bears that out. I would say that the rise in violence is much more related to the drivel coming out of our television and video screens, but that is another matter for another debate at a later time.

Who cares more? Is it parents, is it social workers, is it the police or is it legislators? As a parent, I know who cares more: I care more. I suspect that if other Members ask their constituents who are parents the same question, they will hear the same answer.

Chris Bryant (Rhondda) (Lab): Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

Mr. Robathan: I will give way to the hon. Gentleman, who will never have children so he will approach the matter differently. *[Interruption.]*

Chris Bryant: I would have said that I was grateful to the hon. Gentleman for giving way.

Is not the truth of the matter that some parents—the vast majority—do care deeply about their children, but some do not? That is the problem that we must address.

Mr. Robathan: On that I entirely agree with the hon. Gentleman. He is quite right that some parents do not care. The question is whether abolishing all smacking will make them care more. I rather doubt it.

Who knows best? Is it the police, social workers or parents? Of course there are parents who harm their children, but they are, I suggest, a very small minority, and they should be prosecuted now.

Mr. Hogg: May I say to my hon. Friend—on behalf, I think, of his own party—that his remark to the hon. Member for Rhondda (Chris Bryant) was uncalled for and deserves an apology?

Mr. Robathan: I will indeed apologise to the hon. Gentleman, although I do not like people preaching to others. I hope that the hon. Gentleman will forgive me, and I might even buy him a drink afterwards. Perhaps it is to do with the excitement of the occasion.

Most loving parents are trying their best in very difficult circumstances and many do raise children with no smacking at all. I remember my brother telling me that he had no problem in this regard; perhaps it is only others who do—but how dare anyone tell loving parents, "We know best"?

Mr. Paul Goodman (Wycombe) (Con): My hon. Friend will know from his constituency experience—as will all Members—of the belief among our constituents that public authorities and the ruling elites, who are well

[Mr. Paul Goodman]

represented on the Labour Benches, are not on their side. Is this not the key question? If the law is changed tonight, are our constituents more or less likely to believe that the ruling elites and the public authorities are on their side?

Mr. Robathan: That is an excellent point. We are talking about introducing the police and social services into the relationship between a child and his or her parents. At the very least, an interview with a police officer will cause some friction and tension between parents and children. At worst, it will lead—as it often has—to a child being taken into care.

There was a man called Frank Beck who ran care homes in Leicestershire. We should all know about the horror stories that emerged from those homes. Most social workers are trying their best in difficult circumstances and some are outstanding, but we know that not all of them are.

Mr. Shaun Woodward (St. Helens, South) (Lab): At the heart of these proposals is the fact that every week more than one child in this country dies as a result of parental physical abuse. We are not asking whether people in this country love their children more or less than those elsewhere in the world. The fact is that in Sweden, where smacking has been banned, no child has died as a result of parental physical abuse. What we are arguing about, surely, is how to prevent unnecessary and tragic deaths.

Mr. Robathan: I am not sure that banning smacking will lead to any more convictions of parents who abuse their children in this country. I understand that in Sweden smacking was abolished in 1979. Between 1981 and 1994 there was a fivefold increase in the number of child abuse cases and child-on-child assaults, which is interesting; but, more to the point, UNICEF states that the average number of deaths per 100,000 children over the past five years in Sweden is much greater than the United Kingdom average. We should go back to the statistics.

5.30 pm

I want to see a society where children are well disciplined. Part of self-discipline is being taught discipline by one's parents. I hope that that does not need smacking, but sometimes it does. Those who will vote to ban smacking are showing an extraordinary arrogance in saying, "I know best. I know better than loving parents." As my hon. Friend the Member for Wycombe (Mr. Goodman) said, that shows a detachment from people in this country. We do not know better than most parents. We should not pretend that we do. Most parents can look after their children much better without the interference of legislators, the police or social services.

Julie Morgan: I support new clause 12. My hon. Friend the Member for Wakefield (Mr. Hinchliffe) has gone into many of the detailed arguments for the new clause. It is important that the law sends a clear message that hitting, smacking or any form of physical punishment by an adult to a child, who is smaller, weaker and vulnerable, is not acceptable. Hitting a child is humiliating for the child and for the adult involved.

I have looked into research that has been conducted in Wales by Save the Children about how children feel about being smacked. That research clearly shows that children do not view smacks as trivial and that the effects of a smack are deeply felt. They associate smacking with angry parents. Some of the older children said that they felt that the adults felt regret after they smacked a child. Children said that smacking usually takes place in the house and in other areas where no one can see. They felt that adults were ashamed of smacking their children.

Peter Clarke, the Children's Commissioner for Wales, says that young people have complained to him that they do not have the respect of adults. That is one of his main findings in the reports that have been published and the discussions that he has had with children since he became the commissioner. They feel that the main reason that they do not have such respect is that adults are allowed to hit them. As Peter Clarke said in his letter to the Prime Minister yesterday, urging him to support new clause 12:

> "As long as the smallest and most vulnerable members of society have less protection from assault than adults, the Government's position is at odds with the title of the Green Paper 'Every Child Matters'."

He goes on to say:

> "Smacking children is not only a breach of their human rights, but is linked to an outdated and ineffective approach to raising children."

Children should be afforded the same protection under the law as adults. It is unjust for one human being to be treated differently under the law on the basis of age alone. Children in Wales, the national umbrella organisation for children and young people, does not accept that smacks are mostly loving. It seems a contradiction in terms to say, "You can have a loving smack."

Mr. Heath: I would like to see a ban on abusive violence but am yet to be persuaded by new clause 12. Can the hon. Lady explain why subsection (2) introduces a new defence, which is available to people for smacking their children under certain circumstances? That seems to be out of kilter with the argument advanced by the hon. Member for Wakefield (Mr. Hinchliffe) in introducing the new clause.

Julie Morgan: I have been consulting my hon. Friend the Member for Wakefield because I am uncertain about the point that the hon. Gentleman is making. I am afraid that I cannot answer that point.

Mr. Hinchliffe: Subsection (2) takes account of the concern that we should not take action where, as I mentioned in my speech, a parent may be faced with a child consistently running into the road. I have done this with one of my children and I accept that I did it because I was concerned about danger. There will be exemptions. The law would not take action in such circumstances. Surely that is a common-sense approach.

Julie Morgan: I thank my hon. Friend for helping me out.

Child protection agencies say that smacking is often a result of loss of control by the adult. Children in Wales has concrete evidence of injuries to very young children where parents have felt justified in their actions because the defence of reasonable chastisement exists. By not removing that defence completely, we will feed into that justification.

I am also very concerned about clause 56, which should be removed. It allows parents to justify common assault as reasonable punishment; the message is, as the "Children are Unbeatable!" briefing tells us, "Carry on smacking."Many people have expressed concern about parents being criminalised, but as has been pointed out, the new clause is not about that; rather, it is about giving parents support and help with positive parenting. If it were accepted, it would be accompanied by a great deal of help, education and support; it cannot be introduced by itself overnight. There would be a change in climate and we would do all that we could to help and support parents. The message would be clear and the Government would be giving a clear lead on what is acceptable.

At the heart of all this is the question, "What is in the child's best interest?" and taking a parent to court will almost always not be in their best interest. The hon. Member for Ceredigion (Mr. Thomas) said that in Germany, where smacking was outlawed in 2000, it appears that no parents have been prosecuted since then. Early research suggests that there has already been a major shift in public opinion away from physical punishment. My hon. Friend the Member for Bridgend (Mr. Griffiths) drew our attention to Sweden, where public opinion has changed. A Government have to lead, and the evidence from other countries shows that on this issue, public opinion has followed.

This issue is also important for all those present who campaigned against domestic violence. When we campaigned in the 1970s, we were told that such legislation would be unworkable and that in any case, "She must have done something to deserve it." In the early days of Women's Aid, domestic violence was considered a trivial issue and we had to campaign to get it up the political agenda. Of course, there was also the question of not interfering in family life.

Sandra Osborne (Ayr) (Lab): I agree with my hon. Friend. Does she agree that given that we have achieved zero tolerance of violence against women, children deserve the same?

Julie Morgan: I thank my hon. Friend for that intervention. Our long experience of domestic violence issues has led us to a position of zero tolerance, and I am proud of the fact that only last week our Government introduced legislation on domestic violence.

David Taylor: Linking this issue back to the point made by the hon. Member for Blaby (Mr. Robathan), is it not true that children who are smacked and subjected to violence at home are much more likely to be aggressive towards their siblings, to bully other children, to get involved in antisocial behaviour, to be violent to their future spouses and to commit violent crime?

Julie Morgan: I thank my hon. Friend for that intervention and I certainly agree with him.

Many of the arguments against the new clause that we have heard today we have been through before in other surroundings. Some people say that smacking does no harm, but there is evidence that it does. We are also told that such a provision would be unworkable.

Mrs. Betty Williams: Is my hon. Friend aware of the view of the Joint Committee on Human Rights on clause 56? It says that the clause "perpetuates the current uncertainty" about what constitutes reasonable chastisement, and that as such, rather than reducing unfair and unnecessary prosecutions, as the Government suggest, it will simply encourage them.

Julie Morgan: I thank my hon. Friend for that intervention; I agree.

We have an opportunity to increase protection for children. It is up to us to take a lead in this field, to think of the many children who have died at the hands of parents or carers, and to think of the step that we can take today to help to protect them in future.

Miss Kirkbride: I shall be very brief. Following on from the comments of the hon. Member for Cardiff, North (Julie Morgan), I should point out that those who support the new clause have not explained how banning the smacking of children and criminalising all parents will lead to a change in the number of tragic deaths of young children in the UK. There is simply no basis for the connection that has been made. People who are wicked enough to want to kill or sexually abuse a defenceless child are, in my opinion, beyond the realms of the law. No modest measure to say that all parents should not smack their children will influence their behaviour in any way. The case has not been made.

I would not want to smack my child, but I do not want to criminalise other parents who might believe that it is an appropriate way of dealing with their children. I ask Members to think about circumstances in a supermarket, for example, where a parent smacks a child who has just destroyed a display. What are the staff supposed to do—bring in the police, corral the parents or what? What will happen if a child is upset about being smacked in the home and calls the police? They often do not turn up for a burglary, so are they to turn up because a child has protested about being smacked by their parent? It makes a nonsense of the law and I implore hon. Members to vote against the proposals of the hon. Member for Wakefield (Mr. Hinchliffe).

Tim Loughton: We have had an interesting debate and it is good to see the Chamber so full. What a shame that it was less full earlier for other parts of the Bill with equally important provisions.

As the hon. Member for Wakefield (Mr. Hinchliffe) said, this is a highly contentious issue. The fact is that we are all here because we care about children and none of us—whichever side of the argument we stand on smacking—wants to bring about more harm to children than already exists. All those who have supported the Children Bill want tougher measures against the perpetrators of violence, such as that against Victoria Climbié, and let us not forget the other 80 children a

[Tim Loughton]

year on average who are harmed by it. More importantly, we want to prevent violence from happening in the first place and give protection and better life chances to looked-after children. We want to do all of that with as little intrusion as possible into the private lives of decent, hard-working, loving families.

This part of the Bill is a mess. I remind hon. Members that provisions on smacking were not in the original Bill and it is a shame that the issue has overshadowed coverage of the many important parts of this important Bill. In the Lords, the Liberal Democrat peer, Lord Lester, cobbled together this amendment to criminalise smacking, despite his own party's policy, which is to criminalise it altogether. In the Commons, the Liberal Democrats supported a motion and will be whipped to defeat the amendment of their fellow Liberal Democrat peer. Labour peers were allowed a free vote in the House of Lords as long as it was to vote against the outright ban amendment.

History is repeating itself in the Commons tonight. Here we have three choices. The first is to retain the Lester fudge or "middle way" amendment—

Mr. Heath *rose—*

Tim Loughton: I will not give way because I do not have time.

The second option is to vote for the amendment proposed by the hon. Member for Wakefield in favour of an outright ban. The third is to vote for the Isle of Wight amendment to return to the status quo. Only Conservative Members will decide the issue on the basis of a genuinely free vote this evening.

We already have a good child protection record in this country, despite some high-profile cases. According to the UNICEF figures provided by my hon. Friend the Member for Blaby (Mr. Robathan), we compare favourably in respect of the number of child deaths to other European countries, particularly Sweden. I am appalled at some of the speeches made in the debate and at some of the comments made outside the House, which suggest that a parent who in extremis smacks his or her child is only one step away from becoming a child abuser or killer—another Victoria Climbié case. That argument does not strengthen the case.

The Children Bill is designed to improve the protection of children yet further. There is no research to prove the causal link between moderate smacking administered by loving parents and violent effects on children. Suggesting otherwise is insulting to decent families trying to bring up their children in difficult circumstances.

As the right hon. Member for Brent, South (Mr. Boateng) said when he was a Health Minister,

> "The overwhelming majority of parents know the difference between smacking and beating. They know how to ensure good social behaviour in a loving and caring way."

Are we seriously suggesting that some parents get up each morning and pledge systematically to smack their child at least six times that day? It just does not happen like that.

Mr. Dawson *rose—*

Tim Loughton: I will not give way.

Smacking is a last resort if a child has failed to respond to anything else, especially if the child is causing harm to siblings or putting himself or others in danger.

How are we to judge the amendments before us today? I believe that there are four criteria: whether there is a significant body of support for change; whether the law is working well as it stands; whether the proposals are workable and proportionate and whether there will be knock-on effects; and, finally, whether the relationship between the state and families will be undermined. There is support for change. We have heard about all sorts of opinion polls, the latest of which, from MORI, suggested that 85 per cent. of parents say that we should allow smacking to continue. Interestingly, 40 per cent. of people said enforcing a ban on smacking would be a waste of police time, and only 12 per cent. said it should be illegal in all circumstances.

5.45 pm

When the Government carried out their own consultation back in 2001, the Minister for Industry and the Regions—then a Health Minister—found that 70 per cent. of the public opposed a change in the law. She said:

> "We do not believe that any further change to the law at this time would be appropriate. It would neither command widespread public support nor be capable of consistent enforcement."

The Prime Minister said:

> "Our position is that it is a matter of individual choice for parents and the Government believe that most parents accept and understand there is a difference between discipline and abuse."

I do not see that there is overwhelming pressure for change.

Is the law bust and do we need to fix it? Again, we have heard the figures: in the past three years, only 11 cases of reasonable chastisement have been pleaded in the courts, of which five brought acquittals. The Government themselves found that there was no improper use of the defence of reasonable chastisement. That is an important point. It is not as though there is a problem in the judicial system.

Mr. Hinchliffe: Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

Tim Loughton: May I go on to my third point about the workability and proportionality tests? Clause 56 and Lord Lester's amendment seem to have created an unholy alliance against them on the ground that they are unworkable; that includes children's charities, anti-smacking Members of Parliament and the police. The hon. Member for Wakefield cited the Association of Chief Police Officers. The "reddening of the skin" test is surely unworkable. What about children with sensitive skin, dermographia or medical conditions, and what about ethnic minority children? It would be a lawyers' paradise. The NSPCC says that clause 56 is likely to result in unfair and unnecessary prosecutions.

Let us remember another deficiency in the Lester amendment, which is the idea that a battery can be committed without the victim suffering any kind of injury. Thus, any touching can constitute battery. It need not necessarily involve a harming of the body, and that can be shown by the fact that a battery can take place even if the victim did not feel the touching. Is that not disproportionate? Are we really saying that parents who smack their children could be prosecuted with up to a five-year jail term, as is proposed under the new clause?

Surely any attempt to define smacking as a criminal offence or narrowly to define reasonable chastisement is fraught with difficulties. Scotland tried to do it, wanting to ban blows to the head, shaking, use of implements, and smacking for the under-twos. The Scots are now having to back-track. I have a good deal of sympathy with what they were trying to achieve, but are we not just creating an instruction manual for how to beat a child? Parents will be able to rush off to get the rule book to see what they are actually allowed to do.

Trying to define severity by codifying the law on, for example, the duration and frequency of a smack or the child's personal characteristics is fraught with problems. What about the psychological punishment being meted out? How do we gauge that? Surely we should rely on the existing law, which has at least five tests—the prosecution of cruelty, wounding, grievous bodily harm, actual bodily harm and common assault—that can be applied to parents who really do go over the top.

There will be a knock-on effect on professionals. The already stretched resources of police and social workers will be stretched yet further. Fear and confusion among parents will be exacerbated by the fact that the margin for error has greatly decreased and the custodial penalty massively increased—tenfold. A mother who makes a mistake about the precise interpretation of the law could face very serious consequences. If she commits actual bodily harm, the maximum penalty is five years in prison, but what is currently common assault has a maximum of six months in jail, and that is, in some cases, now to become actual bodily harm.

It will be extremely easy to make false allegations about parents under the Government's proposals. It will be easy to make a serious criminal allegation against the parent whose child slips and bruises himself by accident. Many loving parents already fear being unjustly accused by neighbours or social workers, and the new proposals will add to their concerns. Parents may even be afraid to present their children at a doctor's surgery if they have marks in case they are accused of child abuse.

The fourth and final test is whether the change would undermine family and children relationships. Will it promote undue intrusion by the state? Surely it will. It will mean undue intrusion by the state into the lives of decent, caring families who are trying to bring up their children as best they can, often in difficult circumstances. It is a legitimate concern that the changes proposed in the law would give rise to an unprecedented level of unnecessary and potentially damaging state intrusion where children are looked after well and are at no risk of abuse.

One wonders where it will all end. There are many things that parents do to and for their children that it would be quite inappropriate, if not illegal, to do to another adult. Why pick just on smacking? Perhaps soon it will become illegal for parents to send a child to his room—imposing incarceration on another human individual.

If the proposals fail to pass those four tests—I believe that they have so failed—the burden of proof that falls on the prosecution should be removed. The law should remain as it stands and we should return to the status quo. Those are the options before the House this evening. I know that Opposition Members will exercise their free vote in an intelligent manner and in the best interests of the welfare of children.

Margaret Hodge: I recognise the passionate feelings and views held by Members on both sides of the House and I appreciate that new clause 12 is an attempt to be constructive. However, the Government cannot support what amounts to an absolute ban on smacking.

The Government's position remains unchanged: it is vital that we protect children from violence and abuse. The House will know that one of the driving forces behind the creation of my post and the development of this Bill is our determination to strengthen the way that society safeguards and protects its children. That is why we took seriously the representations from the children's charities and others to the effect that the defence of reasonable chastisement was being misused by parents who were harming their children. It is also why we supported a free vote in the House of Lords on Lord Lester's amendment, which would have removed the defence of reasonable chastisement for acts of actual bodily harm, grievous bodily harm or cruelty. It is for that reason that Labour Members will be offered a free vote on the matter tonight.

I recognise that that does not go far enough for some hon. Members, who believe that the level of harm required by the offence is too great a threshold. However, actual bodily harm has been defined by the courts as any hurt or injury calculated to interfere with health or comfort. That seems to me to offer quite broad protection. Clause 56 provides additional protection for children and tightens the existing law. Some of the cases in which there was a misuse of the reasonable chastisement defence would no longer be able to use that as a legal defence.

It is nonsense and wrong to suggest that clause 56 would create a new loophole, or that it would legitimise acts of harm and abuse. It tightens the law but it does not change the standard of evidence needed to prove actual bodily harm or anything else, as my hon. Friend the Member for Wakefield (Mr. Hinchliffe) suggested.

Clause 56 provides additional protection for children but it does not criminalise parents for administering a light smack to their children. The Government are tightening up on a defence that was misused, but we are not creating a new offence, as to do so would be wrong. Actual bodily harm, grievous bodily harm and cruelty do not require that serious injury must be suffered. As the Attorney-General told the House of Lords, actual bodily harm is not confined to physical harm but can include psychological harm, for example.

The Director of Public Prosecutions is reviewing charging standards and the Government are toughening the law. At present, when a decision is being made about whether to pursue charges, no regard is given to children's physical strength and vulnerability. That is what the DPP is considering, and changes that have regard to those matters should be welcomed.

Mr. Hinchliffe: Will my right hon. Friend give way?

Margaret Hodge: No, because I do not have time.

[Margaret Hodge]

The Joint Committee on Human Rights has been critical of Government on this matter, but it recognised the positive impact of clause 56 when it said in its report that

> "the combination of the new clause and the new charging standard may well be considered sufficient to satisfy the UK's obligation to comply with the judgment of the European Court of Human Rights in A *v.* UK, because it makes the defence unavailable in relation to treatment or punishment which is contrary to article 3."

It would be very odd, to say the least, if anyone who wanted to encourage parents to seek alternative forms of discipline voted to remove this clause.

I turn now to new clause 12, which the Government cannot support. All hon. Members believe that it is vital to strengthen the safeguarding and protection of children, but it would be wrong to create a new offence by imposing a ban on smacking. That would leave parents wondering whether a trivial smack could land them in prison. We cannot deal with the misuse of a defence by creating a new, inappropriate and ill-conceived offence. There is a world of difference between a light smack and violence or abuse. We should recognise that the vast majority of parents understand that difference and would never harm their children deliberately. Some people argue that minor smacks will not be prosecuted, but the new clause would make smacking a crime, so there is no guarantee that that will be the case. It is for Parliament to be clear and to make the law. We cannot expect the Crown Prosecution Service to pick and choose which crimes it does, or does not, prosecute in the light of a clear statement by Parliament that all smacking should be a criminal offence. The confusing gap between the effect of the new clause and the claims made by its proponents, as well as the fact that the Government simply do not believe that every single instance of parental smacking should be treated as a criminal offence, have led to our decision not to offer a free vote. No one decides lightly to smack a child, and most people feel bad and guilt-ridden about doing so. They believe that they have failed if they resort to smacking, but do hon. Members really believe that we can support good parenting by adding to those bad feelings by threatening the strong arm of the law? Is not a better way of changing the culture positively to encourage and support good parenting in the home? That is what our Sure Start programme aims to do, as do the children's fund, through many projects that it supports, and the parenting fund. We want to offer more support to good parents.

I turn to the amendment tabled by my hon. Friend the Member for Crosby (Mrs. Curtis-Thomas), which was supported by my hon. Friend the Member for Ogmore (Huw Irranca-Davies). I recognise the reasoning of my hon. Friend the Member for Crosby in calling for a review of the effects of clause 56 once it has been in operation for two years. I agree wholeheartedly that when significant extra legal protection is introduced by the clause we should look closely at its practical effects. I am afraid, however, that her amendment does not meet its intended objective. None the less, I can give a clear commitment that two years after clause 56 comes into effect we will review the practical consequences of those changes to the law, and will also seek parents' views about smacking. We will lay a copy of the results before Parliament.

This important debate has rightly engendered much passion in all parts of the House. I understand and respect the sincerity and strength of the views of all hon. Members, but I urge them to consider that while we want to stop the misuse of a defence that could lead to children being harmed or abused—I believe that clause 56 achieves that aim—we do not want to be responsible for introducing a new offence that could criminalise thousands of parents throughout the country who are trying their hardest to do their best for their children. They love and cherish their children, and want to establish a framework of discipline while protecting them from harm and endeavouring to support their well-being. They try their hardest to get it right.

A total ban on smacking could criminalise most parents. That is surely not what we are about. Let us focus on the important job of safeguarding and protecting children who are in real danger of harm and abuse. Let us support parents in that most difficult and important job of bringing up their children. Let us legislate in a clear and practical way, which will properly benefit children and young people. I urge hon. Members to accept clause 56 and reject new clause 12.

Question put, That the clause be read a Second time:—

The House divided: Ayes 75, Noes 424.

Division No. 305] **[5:50 pm**

AYES

Allan, Richard
Austin, John
Barrett, John
Barron, rh Kevin
Berry, Roger
Best, Harold
Brake, Tom *(Carshalton)*
Brooke, Mrs Annette L.
Burstow, Paul
Calton, Mrs Patsy
Carmichael, Alistair
Caton, Martin
Chaytor, David
Clapham, Michael
Cohen, Harry
Colman, Tony
Corbyn, Jeremy
Cousins, Jim
Davey, Valerie *(Bristol W)*
Dobbin, Jim *(Heywood)*
Doughty, Sue
Etherington, Bill
Flynn, Paul *(Newport W)*
Foster, Don *(Bath)*
George, Andrew *(St. Ives)*
Green, Matthew *(Ludlow)*
Hancock, Mike
Harris, Dr. Evan *(Oxford W & Abingdon)*
Hinchliffe, David
Holmes, Paul
Hopkins, Kelvin
Illsley, Eric
Jones, Lynne *(Selly Oak)*
Kennedy, rh Charles *(Ross Skye & Inverness)*
Kirkwood, Sir Archy
Lewis, Terry *(Worsley)*
Llwyd, Elfyn
McCafferty, Chris
McDonnell, John
Mahon, Mrs Alice
Mallaber, Judy
Marshall-Andrews, Robert
Morgan, Julie
Mudie, George
Naysmith, Dr. Doug
O'Hara, Edward
O'Neill, Martin
Osborne, Sandra *(Ayr)*
Owen, Albert
Pollard, Kerry
Pope, Greg *(Hyndburn)*
Purchase, Ken
Reed, Andy *(Loughborough)*
Rendel, David
Russell, Bob *(Colchester)*
Sanders, Adrian
Sawford, Phil
Sedgemore, Brian
Shipley, Ms Debra
Skinner, Dennis
Smith, Llew *(Blaenau Gwent)*
Stinchcombe, Paul
Taylor, David *(NW Leics)*
Taylor, Matthew *(Truro)*
Teather, Sarah
Thomas, Simon *(Ceredigion)*
Tonge, Dr. Jenny
Turner, Dr. Desmond *(Brighton Kemptown)*
Tyler, Paul *(N Cornwall)*
Vis, Dr. Rudi
Wareing, Robert N.
Williams, Betty *(Conwy)*

Williams, Hywel *(Caernarfon)*
Williams, Roger *(Brecon)*
Willis, Phil

Tellers for the Ayes:
Mr. Win Griffiths and
Mr. Hilton Dawson

NOES

Abbott, Ms Diane
Adams, Irene *(Paisley N)*
Ainger, Nick
Ainsworth, Bob *(Cov'try NE)*
Ainsworth, Peter *(E Surrey)*
Allen, Graham
Amess, David
Anderson, rh Donald *(Swansea E)*
Anderson, Janet *(Rossendale & Darwen)*
Arbuthnot, rh James
Armstrong, rh Ms Hilary
Atherton, Ms Candy
Atkins, Charlotte
Atkinson, Peter *(Hexham)*
Bacon, Richard
Bailey, Adrian
Baird, Vera
Baker, Norman
Baldry, Tony
Barker, Gregory
Barnes, Harry
Baron, John *(Billericay)*
Battle, John
Bayley, Hugh
Beard, Nigel
Beggs, Roy *(E Antrim)*
Bell, Sir Stuart
Benn, rh Hilary
Bercow, John
Beresford, Sir Paul
Blackman, Liz
Blears, Ms Hazel
Blizzard, Bob
Blunkett, rh David
Blunt, Crispin
Boateng, rh Paul
Boswell, Tim
Bradley, rh Keith *(Withington)*
Bradley, Peter *(The Wrekin)*
Bradshaw, Ben
Brady, Graham
Brazier, Julian
Breed, Colin
Brennan, Kevin
Brown, rh Nicholas *(Newcastle E Wallsend)*
Browne, Desmond
Browning, Mrs Angela
Bruce, Malcolm
Bryant, Chris
Buck, Ms Karen
Burden, Richard
Burgon, Colin
Burnham, Andy
Burns, Simon
Burnside, David
Burt, Alistair
Butterfill, Sir John
Byers, rh Stephen
Byrne, Liam *(B'ham Hodge H)*
Cable, Dr. Vincent
Cairns, David
Cameron, David
Campbell, Alan *(Tynemouth)*
Campbell, Mrs Anne *(C'bridge)*
Campbell, Gregory *(E Lond'y)*
Campbell, rh Sir Menzies *(NE Fife)*
Campbell, Ronnie *(Blyth V)*

Caplin, Ivor
Casale, Roger
Cawsey, Ian *(Brigg)*
Chapman, Ben *(Wirral S)*
Chapman, Sir Sydney *(Chipping Barnet)*
Chope, Christopher
Clark, Mrs Helen *(Peterborough)*
Clark, Dr. Lynda *(Edinburgh Pentlands)*
Clarke, rh Charles *(Norwich S)*
Clarke, rh Tom *(Coatbridge & Chryston)*
Clelland, David
Clifton-Brown, Geoffrey
Clwyd, Ann *(Cynon V)*
Coaker, Vernon
Coffey, Ms Ann
Connarty, Michael
Conway, Derek
Cook, rh Robin *(Livingston)*
Cormack, Sir Patrick
Cotter, Brian
Cran, James *(Beverley)*
Cranston, Ross
Crausby, David
Cruddas, Jon
Cryer, John *(Hornchurch)*
Cummings, John
Cunningham, rh Dr. Jack *(Copeland)*
Cunningham, Jim *(Coventry S)*
Cunningham, Tony *(Workington)*
Curry, rh David
Curtis-Thomas, Mrs Claire
Davey, Edward *(Kingston)*
David, Wayne
Davidson, Ian
Davies, rh Denzil *(Llanelli)*
Davies, Quentin *(Grantham & Stamford)*
Davis, rh David *(Haltemprice & Howden)*
Dean, Mrs Janet
Denham, rh John
Dhanda, Parmjit
Dismore, Andrew
Djanogly, Jonathan
Dobson, rh Frank
Dodds, Nigel
Donaldson, Jeffrey M.
Donohoe, Brian H.
Doran, Frank
Dowd, Jim *(Lewisham W)*
Drew, David *(Stroud)*
Duncan, Alan *(Rutland)*
Duncan Smith, rh Iain
Eagle, Angela *(Wallasey)*
Eagle, Maria *(L'pool Garston)*
Efford, Clive
Ennis, Jeff *(Barnsley E)*
Evans, Nigel
Fabricant, Michael
Fallon, Michael
Farrelly, Paul
Field, rh Frank *(Birkenhead)*
Field, Mark *(Cities of London & Westminster)*
Fisher, Mark
Fitzpatrick, Jim

Fitzsimons, Mrs Lorna
Flight, Howard
Flint, Caroline
Follett, Barbara
Forth, rh Eric
Foster, rh Derek
Foster, Michael *(Worcester)*
Foster, Michael Jabez *(Hastings & Rye)*
Fox, Dr. Liam
Gapes, Mike *(Ilford S)*
Garnier, Edward
George, rh Bruce *(Walsall S)*
Gibb, Nick *(Bognor Regis)*
Gibson, Dr. Ian
Gillan, Mrs Cheryl
Gilroy, Linda
Godsiff, Roger
Goggins, Paul
Goodman, Paul
Gray, James *(N Wilts)*
Green, Damian *(Ashford)*
Greenway, John
Grieve, Dominic
Griffiths, Jane *(Reading E)*
Grogan, John
Gummer, rh John
Hague, rh William
Hain, rh Peter
Hall, Mike *(Weaver Vale)*
Hall, Patrick *(Bedford)*
Hamilton, David *(Midlothian)*
Hamilton, Fabian *(Leeds NE)*
Hammond, Philip
Hanson, David
Harman, rh Ms Harriet
Harris, Tom *(Glasgow Cathcart)*
Harvey, Nick
Havard, Dai *(Merthyr Tydfil & Rhymney)*
Hawkins, Nick
Hayes, John *(S Holland)*
Heald, Oliver
Healey, John
Heath, David
Heathcoat-Amory, rh David
Henderson, Doug *(Newcastle N)*
Henderson, Ivan *(Harwich)*
Hendrick, Mark
Hendry, Charles
Hepburn, Stephen
Heppell, John
Hesford, Stephen
Hewitt, rh Ms Patricia
Hill, Keith *(Streatham)*
Hoban, Mark *(Fareham)*
Hodge, Margaret
Hoey, Kate *(Vauxhall)*
Hogg, rh Douglas
Hood, Jimmy *(Clydesdale)*
Hoon, rh Geoffrey
Horam, John *(Orpington)*
Howard, rh Michael
Howarth, George *(Knowsley N & Sefton E)*
Howarth, Gerald *(Aldershot)*
Hoyle, Lindsay
Hughes, Beverley *(Stretford & Urmston)*
Hughes, Kevin *(Doncaster N)*
Humble, Mrs Joan
Hurst, Alan *(Braintree)*
Hutton, rh John
Iddon, Dr. Brian
Ingram, rh Adam
Irranca-Davies, Huw

Jack, rh Michael
Jackson, Glenda *(Hampstead & Highgate)*
Jackson, Helen *(Hillsborough)*
Jenkin, Bernard
Jenkins, Brian
Johnson, Alan *(Hull W)*
Johnson, Miss Melanie *(Welwyn Hatfield)*
Jones, Helen *(Warrington N)*
Jones, Jon Owen *(Cardiff C)*
Jones, Kevan *(N Durham)*
Jones, Martyn *(Clwyd S)*
Joyce, Eric *(Falkirk W)*
Keetch, Paul
Kemp, Fraser
Kennedy, Jane *(Wavertree)*
Key, Robert *(Salisbury)*
Khabra, Piara S.
Kilfoyle, Peter
Kirkbride, Miss Julie
Knight, rh Greg *(E Yorkshire)*
Knight, Jim *(S Dorset)*
Ladyman, Dr. Stephen
Laing, Mrs Eleanor
Lait, Mrs Jacqui
Lamb, Norman
Lammy, David
Lansley, Andrew
Lawrence, Mrs Jackie
Laws, David *(Yeovil)*
Laxton, Bob *(Derby N)*
Lazarowicz, Mark
Leslie, Christopher
Letwin, rh Oliver
Levitt, Tom *(High Peak)*
Lewis, Ivan *(Bury S)*
Lewis, Dr. Julian *(New Forest E)*
Liddell, rh Mrs Helen
Lidington, David
Lilley, rh Peter
Linton, Martin
Lloyd, Tony *(Manchester C)*
Loughton, Tim
Love, Andrew
Lucas, Ian *(Wrexham)*
Luff, Peter *(M-Worcs)*
McAvoy, Thomas
McCabe, Stephen
McDonagh, Siobhain
MacDougall, John
McFall, rh John
McGuire, Mrs Anne
McIntosh, Miss Anne
Mackay, rh Andrew
McKechin, Ann
McKenna, Rosemary
Mackinlay, Andrew
Maclean, rh David
McLoughlin, Patrick
McNulty, Tony
Mactaggart, Fiona
McWalter, Tony
McWilliam, John
Mahmood, Khalid
Malins, Humfrey
Mann, John *(Bassetlaw)*
Maples, John
Marris, Rob *(Wolverh'ton SW)*
Marsden, Gordon *(Blackpool S)*
Marshall, David *(Glasgow Shettleston)*
Martlew, Eric
Maude, rh Francis
Mawhinney, rh Sir Brian
May, rh Mrs Theresa

Meacher, rh Michael
Meale, Alan *(Mansfield)*
Mercer, Patrick
Merron, Gillian
Michael, rh Alun
Milburn, rh Alan
Miliband, David
Miller, Andrew
Mitchell, Andrew *(Sutton Coldfield)*
Mitchell, Austin *(Gt Grimsby)*
Mole, Chris
Moonie, Dr. Lewis
Moore, Michael
Moran, Margaret
Morris, rh Estelle
Moss, Malcolm
Munn, Ms Meg
Murphy, Denis *(Wansbeck)*
Murphy, Jim *(Eastwood)*
Murrison, Dr. Andrew
Norman, Archie
Oaten, Mark *(Winchester)*
O'Brien, Bill *(Normanton)*
O'Brien, Mike *(N Warks)*
O'Brien, Stephen *(Eddisbury)*
Olner, Bill
Öpik, Lembit
Organ, Diana
Ottaway, Richard
Page, Richard
Paterson, Owen
Perham, Linda
Picking, Anne
Pickles, Eric
Pickthall, Colin
Pike, Peter *(Burnley)*
Plaskitt, James
Pond, Chris *(Gravesham)*
Portillo, rh Michael
Pound, Stephen
Prentice, Ms Bridget *(Lewisham E)*
Prentice, Gordon *(Pendle)*
Primarolo, rh Dawn
Prosser, Gwyn
Pugh, Dr. John
Quin, rh Joyce
Quinn, Lawrie
Rapson, Syd *(Portsmouth N)*
Raynsford, rh Nick
Redwood, rh John
Reid, rh Dr. John *(Hamilton N & Bellshill)*
Robathan, Andrew
Robertson, Hugh *(Faversham & M-Kent)*
Robertson, John *(Glasgow Anniesland)*
Robertson, Laurence *(Tewk'b'ry)*
Robinson, Peter *(Belfast E)*
Roche, Mrs Barbara
Rooney, Terry
Rosindell, Andrew
Ross, Ernie *(Dundee W)*
Roy, Frank *(Motherwell)*
Ruane, Chris
Ruddock, Joan
Ruffley, David
Russell, Ms Christine *(City of Chester)*
Sarwar, Mohammad
Sayeed, Jonathan
Selous, Andrew
Shaw, Jonathan
Shephard, rh Mrs Gillian
Shepherd, Richard
Sheridan, Jim
Short, rh Clare
Simpson, Alan *(Nottingham S)*
Singh, Marsha
Smith, rh Andrew *(Oxford E)*
Smith, John *(Glamorgan)*
Smith, Sir Robert *(W Ab'd'ns & Kincardine)*
Smyth, Rev. Martin *(Belfast S)*
Southworth, Helen
Spellar, rh John
Spelman, Mrs Caroline
Spicer, Sir Michael
Spink, Bob *(Castle Point)*
Spring, Richard
Stanley, rh Sir John
Starkey, Dr. Phyllis
Stewart, Ian *(Eccles)*
Strang, rh Dr. Gavin
Streeter, Gary
Stringer, Graham
Stuart, Ms Gisela
Sutcliffe, Gerry
Swayne, Desmond
Swire, Hugo *(E Devon)*
Syms, Robert
Tami, Mark *(Alyn)*
Tapsell, Sir Peter
Taylor, rh Ann *(Dewsbury)*
Taylor, Dari *(Stockton S)*
Taylor, Ian *(Esher)*
Taylor, John *(Solihull)*
Taylor, Sir Teddy
Thomas, Gareth *(Clwyd W)*
Thurso, John
Timms, Stephen
Tipping, Paddy
Touhig, Don *(Islwyn)*
Tredinnick, David
Trickett, Jon
Trimble, rh David
Turner, Andrew *(Isle of Wight)*
Turner, Dennis *(Wolverh'ton SE)*
Turner, Neil *(Wigan)*
Twigg, Derek *(Halton)*
Twigg, Stephen *(Enfield)*
Tynan, Bill *(Hamilton S)*
Tyrie, Andrew
Vaz, Keith *(Leicester E)*
Viggers, Peter
Walley, Ms Joan
Walter, Robert
Ward, Claire
Waterson, Nigel
Watkinson, Angela
Watson, Tom
White, Brian
Whittingdale, John
Wicks, Malcolm
Widdecombe, rh Miss Ann
Wiggin, Bill
Wilkinson, John
Willetts, David
Williams, rh Alan *(Swansea W)*
Wills, Michael
Wilshire, David
Winnick, David
Winterton, Ann *(Congleton)*
Winterton, Sir Nicholas *(Macclesfield)*
Winterton, Ms Rosie *(Doncaster C)*
Woodward, Shaun
Woolas, Phil
Worthington, Tony
Wright, Anthony D. *(Gt Yarmouth)*
Wright, David *(Telford)*
Wright, Tony *(Cannock)*
Yeo, Tim *(S Suffolk)*
Young, rh Sir George

Tellers for the Noes:
Joan Ryan and
Paul Clark

Question accordingly negatived.

MADAM DEPUTY SPEAKER *then proceeded to put forthwith the Questions necessary for the disposal of the business to be concluded at that hour.*

Amendment proposed: No. 23, in page 37, line 18, leave out clause 56.—*[Mr. Andrew Turner.]*

Question put, That the amendment be made:—

The House divided: Ayes 208, Noes 284.

Division No. 306] **[6:14 pm**

AYES

Ainsworth, Peter *(E Surrey)*
Allan, Richard
Amess, David
Arbuthnot, rh James
Atkinson, Peter *(Hexham)*
Austin, John
Bacon, Richard
Baldry, Tony
Barker, Gregory
Baron, John *(Billericay)*
Barrett, John
Beggs, Roy *(E Antrim)*
Bercow, John
Beresford, Sir Paul
Berry, Roger
Best, Harold
Blunkett, rh David
Blunt, Crispin
Boateng, rh Paul
Boswell, Tim
Brady, Graham
Brake, Tom *(Carshalton)*
Brazier, Julian
Breed, Colin
Brooke, Mrs Annette L.
Browning, Mrs Angela
Bruce, Malcolm
Burns, Simon
Burnside, David
Burstow, Paul
Burt, Alistair
Butterfill, Sir John
Calton, Mrs Patsy
Cameron, David
Campbell, Gregory *(E Lond'y)*
Carmichael, Alistair
Cash, William
Caton, Martin
Chapman, Sir Sydney *(Chipping Barnet)*
Chope, Christopher
Clapham, Michael
Clappison, James
Clifton-Brown, Geoffrey
Colman, Tony
Conway, Derek
Corbyn, Jeremy
Cormack, Sir Patrick
Cotter, Brian
Cousins, Jim
Cran, James *(Beverley)*
Curry, rh David
Davies, rh Denzil *(Llanelli)*
Davies, Quentin *(Grantham & Stamford)*
Davis, rh David *(Haltemprice & Howden)*
Dawson, Hilton
Denham, rh John
Djanogly, Jonathan
Dobbin, Jim *(Heywood)*
Dodds, Nigel
Donaldson, Jeffrey M.
Doughty, Sue
Duncan, Alan *(Rutland)*
Duncan Smith, rh Iain
Edwards, Huw
Etherington, Bill
Evans, Nigel
Fabricant, Michael
Fallon, Michael
Field, Mark *(Cities of London & Westminster)*
Flight, Howard
Forth, rh Eric
Foster, Don *(Bath)*
Fox, Dr. Liam
Garnier, Edward
Gibb, Nick *(Bognor Regis)*
Gillan, Mrs Cheryl
Goodman, Paul
Gray, James *(N Wilts)*
Green, Damian *(Ashford)*
Greenway, John
Grieve, Dominic
Griffiths, Win *(Bridgend)*
Grogan, John
Gummer, rh John
Hague, rh William
Hamilton, Fabian *(Leeds NE)*
Hammond, Philip
Hawkins, Nick
Hayes, John *(S Holland)*
Heald, Oliver
Heathcoat-Amory, rh David
Hendrick, Mark
Hendry, Charles
Hinchliffe, David
Hoban, Mark *(Fareham)*
Hogg, rh Douglas
Holmes, Paul
Horam, John *(Orpington)*
Howard, rh Michael
Howarth, Gerald *(Aldershot)*
Hutton, rh John
Illsley, Eric
Jack, rh Michael
Jenkin, Bernard
Jones, Lynne *(Selly Oak)*
Jones, Martyn *(Clwyd S)*

Kennedy, rh Charles *(Ross Skye & Inverness)*
Key, Robert *(Salisbury)*
Kirkbride, Miss Julie
Kirkwood, Sir Archy
Knight, rh Greg *(E Yorkshire)*
Laing, Mrs Eleanor
Lait, Mrs Jacqui
Lansley, Andrew
Letwin, rh Oliver
Lewis, Dr. Julian *(New Forest E)*
Lewis, Terry *(Worsley)*
Lidington, David
Lilley, rh Peter
Llwyd, Elfyn
Loughton, Tim
Lucas, Ian *(Wrexham)*
Luff, Peter *(M-Worcs)*
McCafferty, Chris
McDonnell, John
McIntosh, Miss Anne
Mackay, rh Andrew
Maclean, rh David
McLoughlin, Patrick
Mahon, Mrs Alice
Malins, Humfrey
Maples, John
Marshall-Andrews, Robert
Maude, rh Francis
Mawhinney, rh Sir Brian
May, rh Mrs Theresa
Mercer, Patrick
Mitchell, Andrew *(Sutton Coldfield)*
Morgan, Julie
Moss, Malcolm
Murrison, Dr. Andrew
O'Brien, Stephen *(Eddisbury)*
Öpik, Lembit
Ottaway, Richard
Owen, Albert
Page, Richard
Paterson, Owen
Pickles, Eric
Plaskitt, James
Pollard, Kerry
Portillo, rh Michael
Pound, Stephen
Redwood, rh John
Rendel, David
Robertson, Hugh *(Faversham & M-Kent)*
Robertson, Laurence *(Tewk'b'ry)*
Robinson, Peter *(Belfast E)*
Rosindell, Andrew

Ruffley, David
Sanders, Adrian
Sayeed, Jonathan
Selous, Andrew
Shephard, rh Mrs Gillian
Shepherd, Richard
Sheridan, Jim
Singh, Marsha
Smith, Llew *(Blaenau Gwent)*
Smyth, Rev. Martin *(Belfast S)*
Spelman, Mrs Caroline
Spicer, Sir Michael
Spink, Bob *(Castle Point)*
Spring, Richard
Stanley, rh Sir John
Stinchcombe, Paul
Swayne, Desmond
Swire, Hugo *(E Devon)*
Syms, Robert
Tapsell, Sir Peter
Taylor, David *(NW Leics)*
Taylor, Ian *(Esher)*
Taylor, John *(Solihull)*
Taylor, Sir Teddy
Teather, Sarah
Thomas, Simon *(Ceredigion)*
Tonge, Dr. Jenny
Tredinnick, David
Turner, Andrew *(Isle of Wight)*
Tynan, Bill *(Hamilton S)*
Tyrie, Andrew
Viggers, Peter
Walter, Robert
Ward, Claire
Waterson, Nigel
Watkinson, Angela
Whittingdale, John
Widdecombe, rh Miss Ann
Wiggin, Bill
Wilkinson, John
Willetts, David
Williams, Betty *(Conwy)*
Williams, Hywel *(Caernarfon)*
Williams, Roger *(Brecon)*
Willis, Phil
Wilshire, David
Winterton, Ann *(Congleton)*
Winterton, Sir Nicholas *(Macclesfield)*
Yeo, Tim *(S Suffolk)*
Young, rh Sir George

Tellers for the Ayes:
Mr. Andrew Robathan and
Mr. Gary Streeter

NOES

Adams, Irene *(Paisley N)*
Ainger, Nick
Ainsworth, Bob *(Cov'try NE)*
Allen, Graham
Anderson, rh Donald *(Swansea E)*
Anderson, Janet *(Rossendale & Darwen)*
Armstrong, rh Ms Hilary
Atherton, Ms Candy
Atkins, Charlotte
Bailey, Adrian
Baird, Vera
Baker, Norman
Barnes, Harry
Battle, rh John
Bayley, Hugh
Beard, Nigel
Begg, Miss Anne
Bell, Sir Stuart

Benn, rh Hilary
Blackman, Liz
Blears, Ms Hazel
Blizzard, Bob
Bradley, rh Keith *(Withington)*
Bradley, Peter *(The Wrekin)*
Bradshaw, Ben
Brennan, Kevin
Brown, rh Nicholas *(Newcastle E Wallsend)*
Browne, Desmond
Bryant, Chris
Buck, Ms Karen
Burden, Richard
Burgon, Colin
Burnham, Andy
Byers, rh Stephen
Byrne, Liam *(B'ham Hodge H)*
Cable, Dr. Vincent

Cairns, David
Campbell, Alan *(Tynemouth)*
Campbell, Mrs Anne *(C'bridge)*
Campbell, rh Sir Menzies *(NE Fife)*
Campbell, Ronnie *(Blyth V)*
Caplin, Ivor
Casale, Roger
Cawsey, Ian *(Brigg)*
Chapman, Ben *(Wirral S)*
Chaytor, David
Clark, Mrs Helen *(Peterborough)*
Clark, Dr. Lynda *(Edinburgh Pentlands)*
Clarke, rh Charles *(Norwich S)*
Clarke, rh Tom *(Coatbridge & Chryston)*
Clelland, David
Clwyd, Ann *(Cynon V)*
Coaker, Vernon
Coffey, Ms Ann
Connarty, Michael
Cook, rh Robin *(Livingston)*
Cranston, Ross
Crausby, David
Cruddas, Jon
Cryer, John *(Hornchurch)*
Cummings, John
Cunningham, rh Dr. Jack *(Copeland)*
Cunningham, Jim *(Coventry S)*
Cunningham, Tony *(Workington)*
Curtis-Thomas, Mrs Claire
Davey, Edward *(Kingston)*
Davey, Valerie *(Bristol W)*
David, Wayne
Davidson, Ian
Dean, Mrs Janet
Dhanda, Parmjit
Dismore, Andrew
Dobson, rh Frank
Donohoe, Brian H.
Doran, Frank
Dowd, Jim *(Lewisham W)*
Drew, David *(Stroud)*
Eagle, Angela *(Wallasey)*
Eagle, Maria *(L'pool Garston)*
Efford, Clive
Ennis, Jeff *(Barnsley E)*
Farrelly, Paul
Field, rh Frank *(Birkenhead)*
Fisher, Mark
Fitzpatrick, Jim
Fitzsimons, Mrs Lorna
Flint, Caroline
Flynn, Paul *(Newport W)*
Follett, Barbara
Foster, rh Derek
Foster, Michael *(Worcester)*
Foster, Michael Jabez *(Hastings & Rye)*
Gapes, Mike *(Ilford S)*
George, Andrew *(St. Ives)*
George, rh Bruce *(Walsall S)*
Gibson, Dr. Ian
Gilroy, Linda
Godsiff, Roger
Green, Matthew *(Ludlow)*
Griffiths, Jane *(Reading E)*
Hain, rh Peter
Hall, Mike *(Weaver Vale)*
Hall, Patrick *(Bedford)*
Hamilton, David *(Midlothian)*
Hancock, Mike
Hanson, David
Harman, rh Ms Harriet

Harris, Dr. Evan *(Oxford W & Abingdon)*
Harris, Tom *(Glasgow Cathcart)*
Harvey, Nick
Havard, Dai *(Merthyr Tydfil & Rhymney)*
Healey, John
Heath, David
Henderson, Doug *(Newcastle N)*
Henderson, Ivan *(Harwich)*
Hepburn, Stephen
Heppell, John
Hesford, Stephen
Hewitt, rh Ms Patricia
Hill, Keith *(Streatham)*
Hodge, Margaret
Hoey, Kate *(Vauxhall)*
Hood, Jimmy *(Clydesdale)*
Hoon, rh Geoffrey
Hopkins, Kelvin
Howarth, George *(Knowsley N & Sefton E)*
Hoyle, Lindsay
Hughes, Beverley *(Stretford & Urmston)*
Hughes, Kevin *(Doncaster N)*
Hughes, Simon *(Southwark N)*
Humble, Mrs Joan
Hurst, Alan *(Braintree)*
Iddon, Dr. Brian
Ingram, rh Adam
Irranca-Davies, Huw
Jackson, Glenda *(Hampstead & Highgate)*
Jackson, Helen *(Hillsborough)*
Jenkins, Brian
Johnson, rh Alan *(Hull W)*
Johnson, Miss Melanie *(Welwyn Hatfield)*
Jones, Helen *(Warrington N)*
Jones, Jon Owen *(Cardiff C)*
Jones, Kevan *(N Durham)*
Joyce, Eric *(Falkirk W)*
Keetch, Paul
Kemp, Fraser
Kennedy, Jane *(Wavertree)*
Khabra, Piara S.
Kilfoyle, Peter
King, Andy *(Rugby)*
Knight, Jim *(S Dorset)*
Ladyman, Dr. Stephen
Lamb, Norman
Lammy, David
Laws, David *(Yeovil)*
Laxton, Bob *(Derby N)*
Lazarowicz, Mark
Leslie, Christopher
Levitt, Tom *(High Peak)*
Lewis, Ivan *(Bury S)*
Liddell, rh Mrs Helen
Linton, Martin
Lloyd, Tony *(Manchester C)*
Love, Andrew
McAvoy, Thomas
McCabe, Stephen
McDonagh, Siobhain
MacDougall, John
McFall, rh John
McGuire, Mrs Anne
McKechin, Ann
McKenna, Rosemary
Mackinlay, Andrew
McNulty, Tony
Mactaggart, Fiona
McWalter, Tony
McWilliam, John

Mahmood, Khalid
Mallaber, Judy
Mann, John *(Bassetlaw)*
Marris, Rob *(Wolverh'ton SW)*
Marsden, Gordon *(Blackpool S)*
Marshall, David *(Glasgow Shettleston)*
Martlew, Eric
Meacher, rh Michael
Meale, Alan *(Mansfield)*
Merron, Gillian
Michael, rh Alun
Milburn, rh Alan
Miliband, David
Miller, Andrew
Mitchell, Austin *(Gt Grimsby)*
Mole, Chris
Moonie, Dr. Lewis
Moore, Michael
Moran, Margaret
Mudie, George
Munn, Ms Meg
Murphy, Denis *(Wansbeck)*
Murphy, Jim *(Eastwood)*
Oaten, Mark *(Winchester)*
O'Brien, Bill *(Normanton)*
O'Brien, Mike *(N Warks)*
O'Hara, Edward
Olner, Bill
O'Neill, Martin
Organ, Diana
Osborne, Sandra *(Ayr)*
Perham, Linda
Picking, Anne
Pickthall, Colin
Pike, Peter *(Burnley)*
Pond, Chris *(Gravesham)*
Prentice, Ms Bridget *(Lewisham E)*
Prentice, Gordon *(Pendle)*
Primarolo, rh Dawn
Prosser, Gwyn
Pugh, Dr. John
Purchase, Ken
Quin, rh Joyce
Quinn, Lawrie
Rapson, Syd *(Portsmouth N)*
Raynsford, rh Nick
Reed, Andy *(Loughborough)*
Reid, rh Dr. John *(Hamilton N & Bellshill)*
Robertson, John *(Glasgow Anniesland)*
Roche, Mrs Barbara
Rooney, Terry
Ross, Ernie *(Dundee W)*
Roy, Frank *(Motherwell)*
Ruane, Chris
Ruddock, Joan
Russell, Bob *(Colchester)*
Russell, Ms Christine *(City of Chester)*
Sarwar, Mohammad
Shaw, Jonathan
Sheerman, Barry
Short, rh Clare
Simpson, Alan *(Nottingham S)*
Skinner, Dennis
Smith, rh Andrew *(Oxford E)*
Smith, John *(Glamorgan)*
Smith, Sir Robert *(W Ab'd'ns & Kincardine)*
Southworth, Helen
Spellar, rh John
Starkey, Dr. Phyllis
Stewart, Ian *(Eccles)*
Strang, rh Dr. Gavin
Stuart, Ms Gisela
Stunell, Andrew
Sutcliffe, Gerry
Tami, Mark *(Alyn)*
Taylor, rh Ann *(Dewsbury)*
Taylor, Dari *(Stockton S)*
Taylor, Matthew *(Truro)*
Thomas, Gareth *(Clwyd W)*
Timms, Stephen
Tipping, Paddy
Touhig, Don *(Islwyn)*
Trickett, Jon
Turner, Dennis *(Wolverh'ton SE)*
Turner, Dr. Desmond *(Brighton Kemptown)*
Turner, Neil *(Wigan)*
Twigg, Derek *(Halton)*
Twigg, Stephen *(Enfield)*
Tyler, Paul *(N Cornwall)*
Vaz, Keith *(Leicester E)*
Vis, Dr. Rudi
Walley, Ms Joan
Wareing, Robert N.
Watson, Tom
Webb, Steve *(Northavon)*
White, Brian
Wicks, Malcolm
Williams, rh Alan *(Swansea W)*
Wills, Michael
Winnick, David
Winterton, Ms Rosie *(Doncaster C)*
Woodward, Shaun
Woolas, Phil
Worthington, Tony
Wright, Anthony D. *(Gt Yarmouth)*
Wright, David *(Telford)*
Wright, Tony *(Cannock)*

Tellers for the Noes:
Joan Ryan and
Paul Clark

Question accordingly negatived.

Clause 7

FUNCTIONS OF COMMISSIONER IN NORTHERN IRELAND

Amendment made: No. 28, in page 5, line 36 after 'promoting', insert 'awareness of'.—*[Margaret Hodge.]*

Clause 27

RESPONSIBILITY FOR FUNCTIONS UNDER SECTIONS 25 AND 26

Amendment made: No. 40, in page 21, line 17, leave out 'sections 25 and 26' and insert 'section 25'.—*[Margaret Hodge.]*

Clause 51

ASCERTAINING CHILDREN'S WISHES

Amendments made: No. 21, in page 36, line 18, after 'wishes', insert 'and feelings'.

No. 22, in page 36, line 21, after 'wishes', insert 'and feelings'.

No. 29, in page 36, line 22, at end insert—

'(2) In section 20 of that Act (provision of accommodation for children: general), in subsection (6)(a) and (b), after "wishes" insert "and feelings".

(3) In section 47 of that Act (local authority's duty to investigate), after subsection (5) insert—

"(5A) For the purposes of making a determination under this section as to the action to be taken with respect to a child, a local authority shall, so far as is reasonably practicable and consistent with the child's welfare—

(a) ascertain the child's wishes and feelings regarding the action to be taken with respect to him; and

(b) give due consideration (having regard to his age and understanding) to such wishes and feelings of the child as they have been able to ascertain."'.—*[Margaret Hodge.]*

Clause 64

REGULATIONS AND ORDERS

Amendments made: No. 41, in page 42, line 11, at end insert—

'(3A) The Secretary of State may not make a statutory instrument containing the first order under section [payments to foster parents] unless a draft of the instrument has been laid before, and approved by resolution of, each House of Parliament.'.

No. 42, in page 42, line 14, after 'apply,', insert—

'(aa) an order made by the Secretary of State under section [payments to foster parents] to which subsection (3A) does not apply,'.—*[Margaret Hodge.]*

Clause 65

COMMENCEMENT

Amendment made: No. 43, in page 43, line 3, leave out paragraph (c) and insert—

'( ) section 47 and Schedule 4 so far as relating to England come into force in accordance with provision made by order by the Secretary of State, and so far as relating to Wales in accordance with provision made by order by the Assembly;

( ) section [payments to foster parents] comes into force at the end of the period of two months beginning with the day on which this Act is passed;

( ) sections 48 to 55 so far as relating to England come into force in accordance with provision made by order by the Secretary of State, and so far as relating to Wales in accordance with provision made by order by the Assembly;'.—*[Margaret Hodge.]*

Schedule 1

CHILDREN'S COMMISSIONER

Amendment made: No. 30, in page 44, line 19, at end insert—

'(1A) The Secretary of State must, to such extent and in such manner as he thinks fit, involve children in the appointment of the Children's Commissioner.'.—*[Margaret Hodge.]*

Order for Third Reading read.

6.28 pm

Margaret Hodge: I beg to move, That the Bill be now read the Third time.

We are approaching the end of the Bill's passage through the House. It is a significant moment. I am pleased to reflect on a process in which there has been a great deal of constructive engagement from hon. Members of all parties who have brought their wide experience, intellect and attention to detail to our deliberations and the Bill has benefited greatly from that.

When the measure was introduced in the House of Lords in March, it was widely and warmly welcomed in and outside Parliament. Many people have waited a long time for the measure. The Bill has acted as a vehicle for important discussion of an exceptionally wide range of issues that are important to children's lives and the outcomes that they achieve. Throughout, there has been a wide consensus about the value and importance of the reforms that we are making. Baroness Howarth of Breckland came up with the catch phrase:

> "It is a small Bill with a large heart".—[*Official Report, House of Lords*, 30 March 2004; Vol. 659, c. 1287.]

It is slightly larger now and, thanks to this House and the other place, its heart beats even more strongly.

The Government's plans for the commissioner have been well tested during the parliamentary process, and I pay tribute to the parliamentarians and lobbyists who have campaigned for the creation of a commissioner for such a long time. The Government are confident that the Bill, enhanced by the amendments that the House has agreed today, is the best way forward. We will have a strong champion for children with a powerful, independent and manageable role, which will allow them to be an important voice on children's behalf. We intend the commissioner to be appointed early next year, and I am pleased to say that we are involving children and young people in the appointment process. My ministerial colleagues and I look forward to working with the commissioner.

Part 2 of the Bill contains a range of duties and powers for local agencies, which will establish clear lines of accountability for children's services and lead to better arrangements for safeguarding children and planning, commissioning and delivering services. I was pleased that the Standing Committee agreed a Government amendment to introduce the children and young people's planning requirement, which is an important rationalisation of the planning burdens on local authorities and which will be another lever to encourage more effective outcomes in planning, commissioning and delivering services.

The Bill allows us to set up universal information databases, which have attracted considerable attention. I repeat that those databases will in no way be a substitute for action, and I hope that they will provide a valuable tool to help practitioners work together better so that they can more easily identify children and meet their needs.

In response to parliamentary scrutiny, we have made some helpful amendments. The Bill now contains clear descriptions of the information that will be on the database and the agencies that may access it. Crucially, it includes the reassurance that the databases will not include details of case information.

Last week, we published our first consultation document on the difficult issues around the cause for concern and sensitive services. In developing the regulations and guidance, it will be important to respond to the issues raised by the consultation, to continue to learn from the work of the trailblazers and to take into account the issues and concerns that have been raised legitimately during the passage of the Bill. I am grateful to all hon. Members who have taken pains to ensure that we are aware of the importance of getting the Bill right and of the many things that we must avoid getting wrong.

We have spent a lot of time today debating aspects of the latter parts of the Bill, and hon. Members know that some significant improvements have been made. Today, we have introduced a power to establish a minimum fostering allowance, which is an important step that has been welcomed on both sides of the House. We have amended the Children Act 1989 to ensure that children's feelings, as well as their wishes, are taken into account when assessing their needs in a range of circumstances.

We have responded to hon. Members' concerns by enabling changes to be made to the rules of court, which will help us to represent our constituents without getting into contempt of court, and I am grateful for the work that has been done by my right hon. and learned Friend the Solicitor-General.

The passage of the Bill marks the beginning of the important programme of change for children to which the Government are committed. As I have said many times, the Bill provides a legislative framework, rather than all the answers, to improve outcomes for children.

Our purpose is to maximise opportunity and minimise risk; to enhance opportunity for every child; to work to close the gap between those who succeed and those who achieve less well; to make sure that every child matters; and to support our resolve to do all we can to prevent children such as Victoria Climbié from falling through the net and dying at the hands of adults in whose care they have been entrusted.

But it is what happens at the local level, on the ground, that will make a real difference to the lives of children, young people and their families. What will count is our work over the coming months and years with all those who provide services for children at the front line, from strategic agencies to individual practitioners. Our task is to build on the framework created by the Bill to reconfigure our services so that we shift our efforts to prevention while strengthening the safeguarding and protection of children; change services and organise them around the needs of the child, not of the professionals; and ensure that the voice of children and young people lies at the heart of all that we do.

This is a great Bill that will help us to create a step change for children. I commend it to the House.

6.36 pm

Tim Loughton: We are pleased to support the Bill that we are about to pass on Third Reading. That has been the case throughout, although we have had vigorous debates and remain concerned about some of the details.

[Tim Loughton]

We support the Bill in order to support vulnerable children and to promote the life chances of looked-after children, too many of whom are left behind. I hope that we can do that in a way that does not intrude too much into the private family lives of those many children who are fortunate enough not to be described as vulnerable. I also hope that we have added safeguards to the Bill in relation to the independence from Government of certain of the new systems that are being set up and ensuring a more joined-up approach by the professionals that is at the heart of what we need to achieve.

The Minister said that this is a great Bill. That may be slightly over-egging it, but it is a very important Bill. As Lord Laming said, it was wholly unacceptable that there had been some 40 predecessors to his report on Victoria Climbié in as many years. We were failing too many children, and the message from Lord Laming was that things must be different. All hon. Members who have participated in the passage of the Bill would subscribe to that.

The Committee could be described as the testimonial of the hon. Member for Lancaster and Wyre (Mr. Dawson). He contributed to it with his usual well-informed demeanour and, when responding to me, cantankerousness. We respect and admire that, and we will miss him greatly when children's legislation comes before the House in future. I thank hon. Members on both sides of the Committee, particularly my hon. Friends, for their well-informed contributions.

Debate in Committee was sometimes fiery, particularly when the Minister talked about parental access. We saw that again today—fireworks from the Minister three days before Guy Fawkes night. However, the subject will not lie down. It is not a bandwagon on to which the Opposition have opportunistically climbed, but a very serious issue that is blighting the lives of too many decent parents around the country, and it deserves to be treated with rather more respect and seriousness than the Minister has shown in Committee and in this Chamber. Her comments may well come back to haunt her and will not be appreciated by many thousands of fathers and mothers who feel that they are being shut out of their children's lives.

I congratulate the Government on some of the later additions on foster allowances and look forward to the emergence of details on how that can become a practical reality. We sensed that the door was opening a tiny bit further in regard to a private fostering registration scheme, but we shall have to wait patiently for that. We particularly welcome the amendments that the Government accepted today on the wishes and feelings of children.

The Standing Committee was the first on which I had ever served in which I had my amendments hijacked. Quite a few that were accepted by the Government started off as Conservative amendments; mysteriously, the name of the Minister—or, today, the Secretary of State—then appeared on them. We are delighted that the Government have seen fit to support Conservative amendments, but it is slightly odd that they had to try to hijack them in that way.

There are certain outstanding problems in the Bill; we make no issue about that. The independence of the children's commissioner still needs to be proven, and the "big ears, no teeth" tag will still concern their lordships when the Bill returns to the upper House. The relationships between the English children's commissioner and those in Wales, Scotland and Northern Ireland will also present various problems that we shall have to review. One of my biggest concerns relates to the operation of the database. That provision still needs an awful lot more work and thinking out, because it represents a radical change to the way in which we account for our citizens, and many people will be concerned about its implications.

The structures that we have put in place in the Bill, the new people with titles, the tsars and the committees all sound very fine, but they will be as nothing unless there are well-trained professionals on the ground—social workers, teachers, school nurses, police officers and everyone else—who are properly informed, know what to look out for and work practically with each other to share that information safely in the interests of vulnerable children. The real test will not be what the Bill says but whether the people out there on the ground, whose job is to put it into action every day of the week, every week of the year, are able to do that; if, indeed, they are there to do it at all, because we still suffer from an enormous shortage of those dedicated people.

I was very pleased with our debate on promoting the educational achievement of looked-after children, which has been a scandal for far too long. We all agreed that it was a scandal, and that urgent action was required to address it. I hope that some of the practical measures in the Bill will begin to do so.

It is absolutely right that the Government should involve children as much as possible in making the provisions work. That is what the Bill is all about, and why we have all signed up to it. If it works, I hope that it will serve to re-engender some faith in the system among those children who have been left behind or left vulnerable for too long.

It is now four and a half years since the tragic, horrendous and unimaginable death of Victoria Climbié, but we should not forget that an average of 80 children suffer similarly at the hands of parents or carers each year without hitting the headlines. We need to reduce that figure, and we hope that the Bill will go some way towards achieving that. Lord Laming's report said that we needed to take urgent action now, and that his recommendations could not be

> "deferred to some bright tomorrow."

That was absolutely right, and I hope that the Bill will represent an important step towards ensuring that this problem is addressed now. If it works, it will be a fitting tribute not only to Victoria Climbié but to all the other victims of horrendous abuse, whose abusers should never have been allowed to get away with what they did. We hope that they will not be allowed to do so in the future.

6.43 pm

Mr. Dawson: I am extremely grateful to the hon. Member for East Worthing and Shoreham (Tim Loughton) for pointing out to the Whips that, although I have lost count of the number of times I have voted against the Government on the Bill, I have still been really nasty to the Opposition. I trust that that will ease my passage through the last few months of my dotage in the House of Commons, although I must point out that the Constitutional Affairs Committee inquiry into the family court system starts next week.

Despite my recent voting record, this is a good Bill, which presages a tremendous future for children in this country. I hope that it leads to a future of child-centred services, integrated services, co-operative services and, as the hon. Gentleman said, a future in which many more workers on the ground come together, are respected and valued for the work that they do, and are enthused and inspired by the Bill to produce even better work for children in the future.

In all of our discussions, we have all been guilty of tending to think of children as a great object of concern, while ignoring their dynamic and creative potential. We have had a great deal of discussion about the rights and wrongs of the children's commissioner. The Bill has been amended one way or the other, but I believe that it provides a huge opportunity for children and young people to take the commissioner and children's services wherever they will. We now have one person and, I presume, an office, who will be responsive to the agenda not of the Government or Parliament, but of children and young people. That will take children and young people—and eventually this whole country—in directions that perhaps we do not fully understand, as I believe that children and young people know things that we do not know, that they can engage with their peers in ways that we cannot, that they are the future of this country and that the experience of having a children's commissioner will allow them to lead and eventually take over the running of this country in directions at which we can only hint.

We have let the genie out of the bottle with this Bill, which is a good thing and a real achievement. In time, that may lead us all to say that this was a great Children Act.

6.47 pm

Mrs. Brooke: We have been really pleased to be able to work on this legislation and, I hope, to contribute positively to the debate. It is always a matter of great pride to participate in making legislation that one believes can make a real difference—in this case, to children's lives.

Throughout consideration on this Bill, we have made much of the fact that we all need to listen to children. We cannot remind ourselves of that too often. Listening to children imposes on us the responsibility of not letting them down. Undoubtedly, we, collectively, have let many children down over the years. A core part of the Bill involving adults relates to the quality and quantity of staff and the training that is needed. Most importantly, if we are to learn the lessons of the past, we must achieve real multi-agency working and common practices, so that people are not compartmentalising and going home because they have done their bit, resulting in somebody being left out of the equation.

I welcome the amendment on wishes and feelings. The all-party children group, with the hon. Member for Lancaster and Wyre (Mr. Dawson), arranged an excellent presentation not long ago in which we witnessed children's feelings. It was important to realise that children who might not be able to articulate their wishes could express anger, sorrow and so on. I congratulate the Minister yet again on introducing the minimum fostering allowance, which has been very important.

I want to express a few regrets. Are we really saying that every child matters if we still have asylum seekers' children in detention centres? We have children in prison. This very day, people are calling for a special inquiry into Joseph Scholes's death. We still have a lot to do, and it would have been good to reflect concern for those most vulnerable children in the Bill.

On a slightly different tack, I thank the Minister very much for writing to me about the proposed guardianship arrangements. I was extremely pleased to learn that the Government were in the early stages of reviewing existing arrangements for unaccompanied asylum-seeking children, to establish whether they needed to be changed. That was heartening, because we had said a lot about asylum seekers' children and it gave us a ray of hope.

We have had a great deal to say about the children's commissioner, and I am sure we will return to the subject when the Bill returns to this House. Obviously, we have concerns about new clause 12, but overall I agree with other Members that so much in the Bill is good that we want to express our support clearly and loudly.

I also want to thank everyone who served on the Committee, because it was a pleasant Committee on which to serve.

6.50 pm

Jonathan Shaw: What I hope we will gain from the Bill is a service that will look forward in assessing the difficulties and challenges involved in children's and parents' services. "Parents" is a word that is not mentioned often enough, and I would have preferred this to be called the Children and Parents Bill or the Children and Carers Bill.

The Bill looks forward to the shaping of children's and family services, rather than looking back. As the hon. Member for East Worthing and Shoreham (Tim Loughton) pointed out, all too often in the past inquiries have looked back on tragic events. Under the Bill there will be an annual report to Parliament, and those of us who are members of the Education and Skills Committee look forward to receiving it. There will be a robust exchange, and it will happen every year. In the past we have had to wait for inquiries on the cases of, for instance, Victoria Climbié, Maria Colwell and Jasmine Beckford.

Sterling work was clearly done in Committee. I congratulate members of the Standing Committee, and regret that I was not able to serve on it.

I am proud of the work that the Government have done on this and a range of other Bills. Since I entered the House in 1997, successive Bills relating to children have improved existing legislation and increased protection. Nevertheless, we need to focus our energies on helping parents with vulnerable children. It is the

[Jonathan Shaw]

hard-to-reach parents whom we need to draw into the services that we want to provide. Often we start to engage such parents only in tragic circumstances, and sometimes they are forced to become involved through parenting orders. Research relating to such orders is positive, but we want parents to become engaged voluntarily rather than in a punitive context. Let us hope that the children's commissioner will concern himself not just with children but with the people with whom they spend most of their time—the people who shape their lives. Those people are, of course, their parents.

6.53 pm

Hywel Williams: I pay tribute to all who have contributed to our debates on the Bill. We have had an interesting, enjoyable, occasionally funny and very challenging experience, and I am sure that I am a better man for it.

Let me make a serious point. It is our highest duty to ensure that children are better protected, and to enhance their lives. I think that the Bill will achieve that, although not to the extent that I had hoped. I know that other members of the Welsh Affairs Committee will share my disappointment about the Children's Commissioner for Wales, and that my hon. Friends who concerned themselves with clause 56 will agree that we shall have to return to issues that are important and will not go away.

There is, however, much to welcome in the Bill. I particularly welcome the measures relating to CAFCASS—the Children and Family Court Advisory and Support Service—in Wales, which are long overdue and have been demanded in the past by many Members, including me. I also welcome the changes to fostering allowances. I became involved in child care many years ago, when it was very difficult to recruit foster parents. I hope that this change will lead to better recruitment and better foster services.

Therefore, I welcome what is positive in the Bill. I want to make it clear that I am committed to revisiting those issues that I, my hon. Friends and other hon. Members think are important. The Bill is an opportunity to make a real change to children's lives. That is something that we can all be proud of.

6.55 pm

Julie Morgan: I want briefly to say how pleased I was to serve on the Committee that considered the Bill and how pleased I am to support the Bill on Third Reading. I had my differences with the Minister, particularly over the issues of physical chastisement and the relationship between the Welsh and English children's commissioners, but those subjects have had a good airing and, overall, I support the Bill strongly.

I want in particular to say how pleased I am that CAFCASS is transferring to Wales. My hon. Friend the Under-Secretary of State for Wales and the Minister for Children, Young People and Families have put a lot of work into bringing that about. That will be a great step forward and it is welcomed by the work force in Wales. We did not have much debate about that because it is universally accepted.

Therefore, I am pleased to say that I support the Bill. I think that it will take the protection of children forward and I look forward to seeing its implementation in the years ahead.

6.56 pm

Mr. Roger Williams: I, too, congratulate the Minister on introducing a Bill that is accepted as a real improvement in terms of how children are looked after and welfare is promoted. Hon. Members from Wales have mentioned the devolution of CAFCASS to Wales. That issue has not had much coverage because the move has been universally welcomed. Although CAFCASS has had its difficulties in recent times, we all hope that, under the new leadership, it will be able to achieve the aspirations that many had when it was set up. The people who work for CAFCASS in Wales welcome the challenge of adapting it and ensuring that it is appropriate to the needs of children and families in Wales. Hugh Patrick, a constituent of mine with a long history of involvement in children's welfare issues, who is now a union representative for people working for CAFCASS, has assured me that staff are ready, willing and wanting to take up that challenge.

There have been disappointments. The Minister and I and other hon. Members have had our arguments over the role of the English and Welsh commissioners. The Select Committee on Welsh Affairs undertook considerable, lengthy pre-legislative scrutiny in good faith. It is disappointing that the Government could not accept the representations that we made, but I commend the Under-Secretary of State for Wales on the way in which he has made the present arrangements work. He has been instrumental in many cases, working with the commissioner in Wales, looking at his recommendations and taking them to other Ministers and Government Departments here. I assure him that we will want to make the arrangements, which we regard as inadequate, work well for children in Wales, too.

It is in that spirit that all hon. Members have taken part in the Standing Committee and in the debates on Report. We all commend the Bill and sincerely hope that there will be the great improvement in children's welfare that we all desire.

6.59 pm

Margaret Hodge: I want to thank everyone, if I may. I thank our Committee Chairmen for the estimable way in which they chaired our proceedings, and all the members on both sides of the Committee for the positive contribution that they made. Even where we disagreed and had some debate, it was all in good spirit. I particularly thank my fellow Ministers, who are incredibly busy people, for the time they gave to supporting me during the proceedings on the Bill, and the Whip, my hon. Friend the Member for Gedling (Vernon Coaker), who played an estimable role in ensuring that we all kept to order. I also want to thank the many Back Benchers who served with us, some of whom spoke today. Others who were not called had, I know, prepared contributions to this important debate. I want to thank the parliamentary officials—

It being 7 o'clock, MADAM DEPUTY SPEAKER *proceeded to put forthwith the Question necessary for the disposal of the business to be concluded at that hour, pursuant to Order [this day].*

Question put and agreed to.

Bill accordingly read the Third time, and passed, with amendments.

BUSINESS OF THE HOUSE

Ordered,

That, at the sitting on Wednesday 3rd November—

(1) the Speaker shall put the Questions necessary to dispose of proceedings on the Motions relating to Members' Allowances, Parliamentary Pensions (Contributions Rate) and Parliamentary Pensions (Survivor Benefits and Early Retirement) not later than three hours after the commencement of proceedings on the first Motion, and such Questions shall include the Questions on any Amendments selected by the Speaker which may then be moved; and

(2) the Speaker shall put the Questions necessary to dispose of proceedings on the Motion in the name of Mr Peter Hain relating to Sessional Orders and Resolutions not later than Seven o'clock, or three hours after their commencement, whichever is the later; such Questions shall include the Questions on any Amendments selected by the Speaker which may then be moved; proceedings may continue after the moment of interruption; and the Orders of the House of 28th June 2001 and 6th November 2003 relating to Deferred Divisions shall not apply.—*[Margaret Moran.]*

Health Services (Gosport)

Motion made, and Question proposed, That this House do now adjourn.—*[Margaret Moran.]*

7 pm

Mr. Peter Viggers (Gosport): May I thank Mr. Speaker, through you, Madam Deputy Speaker, for allowing me the opportunity to raise this evening on the Floor of the House the issue of health care on the Gosport peninsula? The subject has been forced to the centre of our concerns in Gosport because of the Ministry of Defence's decision in December 1998 to close the Royal hospital Haslar, which is the only military hospital left in the United Kingdom. The local population greeted this decision with dismay and I proposed a rally and a march to the hospital—it involved 22,000 people—to express their view that the hospital should be retained.

The cause of the problem is that the MOD is seeking to disengage from hospital management, which is in stark contrast with the approach of Governments in other countries, who are building up—or at least maintaining—their defence medical services. Faced with a tremendous shortfall in key faculties in general surgery, anaesthetics, orthopaedic surgery and general medicine, the Government have taken the most peculiar decision to close the one remaining military hospital, at Haslar, and to develop a centre of military excellence elsewhere.

I maintain that in this area, more than any other, what we need is joined-up Government and the maintenance of links between the MOD and the national health service, but I am afraid that this Government have resolutely refused to provide that. In fact, although the Under-Secretary of State for Defence kindly invited me to his office, the purpose of the invitation was to tell me in clear terms that the MOD is absolutely determined to withdraw from Haslar not later than 31 March 2007. So, it is clear that the Government are determined to press ahead.

However, there is no doubt that Haslar hospital will be needed after March 2007, because the proposed development of Queen Alexandra hospital, Cosham, which is the subject of a private finance initiative bid, will not be completed by that date. Secondly, military medicine is still strong at Haslar and has much to offer in the context of the new hospital arrangements in south Hampshire, even after the development of Queen Alexandra hospital. Haslar still has 33 Field hospital. It has advanced telemedicine, a clinical measurement department, echocardiograms, cardiac systems and neurophysiological systems; such provision is not available at the proposed new location in Birmingham. If satisfactory arrangements can be made for the conjunction and joint use of Haslar with Queen Alexandra hospital, defence medicine would have a lot to gain and a lot to offer.

Military medicine is currently in a very sad state and there is a shortage in every specialty. The proposal was to move from Haslar to a new centre of defence medicine. At one point, the idea was jointly to involve Guy's and St. Thomas' hospitals in London. Then, the John Radcliffe hospital in Oxford was considered; indeed, Newcastle was also considered. Eventually, Birmingham was chosen and the decision was taken

[Mr. Peter Viggers]

to spend £200 million on a new centre of defence medicine at Selly Oak hospital. Doing so would also allow military personnel to use the very good facilities at Birmingham university. Unfortunately, the Government ran out of money. The £200 million development was cancelled and, among other things, the admiral in charge of the project resigned from the Navy, rather than put through a project that he thought unworkable. Currently, armed forces personnel are left billeted out in twos and threes in small groups all around Birmingham. Some live in a YWCA hospital, some in a former hostel for the homeless. There is no real centre for defence medicine. The plans have collapsed, and so has the ethos of defence medical services.

The Ministry of Defence defiantly says that recruitment is satisfactory, but retention of trained doctors is at an abysmal level to the extent that the shortage of trained medical staff is a factor in troop deployment. We have to rely on other nations, particularly the Americans who, unlike us, give medical back-up a priority. If hospital and secondary care can be sorted out in Portsmouth and the Gosport peninsula, defence medicine could have a future in the south Hampshire area even now.

The civilian aspects, which are the main subject of my Adjournment debate this evening, are dominated by the construction of the new Queen Alexandra hospital at Corsham and the MOD's intention to close the Haslar hospital. The local population has consistently showed over the past six years complete determination in wanting Haslar to continue as a hospital providing local services. As a result of that determination, a consultation was undertaken by the Portsmouth and South East Hampshire health authority, which resulted in changes being announced in January 2000.

The announcement was as follows:

> "The new Haslar Accident Treatment Centre will replace the RH Haslar accident and emergency department. This will treat . . . an estimated 17,500 per year . . . It will open 24 hours a day, seven days a week, and will be staffed by emergency nurse practitioners."

It continued:

> "Day surgery will be provided on the Haslar site for many patients in good general health—an estimated 1,100 cases a year. The day surgery will include general surgery, orthopaedics, gynaecology and urology. Diagnostic services, including x-ray facilities, and investigations will be provided at Haslar. Outpatient clinics on the Gosport peninsula will be increased so that around 5,000 more patients a year than at present will be seen at either Haslar or Gosport War Memorial Hospital. It is expected that there will be more than 100 clinics a week in over 20 specialties."

That is an outline of the proposals advanced by the health authority in 2000. The Haslar taskforce, which I formed and have chaired from the beginning, reluctantly went along with those proposals, believing that it was the best that could reasonably be expected. We were somewhat reluctant to lose in-patients but felt that Haslar could at least survive as a major hospital and perhaps even expand in due course.

We formerly had a primary care trust both for Gosport and for Fareham, then a Fareham and Gosport PCT, and now a Fareham and Gosport PCT that shares its executive with an another PCT—not a happy scene. That PCT has now put forward two revised proposals, both of which involve having a community hospital at Fareham. The main difference between the two is that the first proposal has one key idea—the retention of the Haslar cross-link to provide various facilities, including an accident treatment centre, out-patients, physiotherapy and occupational therapy. The alternative proposal would have similar facilities, but provided at the Gosport War Memorial hospital. It would expand the Gosport health centre to provide an accident treatment centre, out-patients, minor surgery and more diagnostics. Both alternatives include the Fareham community hospital, but only one would retain Haslar with the other developing the Gosport War Memorial hospital.

Haslar is a major hospital. It is a former district general hospital equivalent and it deals with out-patients, has an accident treatment centre, a breast unit, 5,000 gastroenterology cases a year, a first-class X-ray department, including an magnetic resonance imaging scanner and ultra-sound. Its diagnostic and treatment centre is very successful, having succeeded in reducing waiting lists for operations in the area. It is a busy and successful hospital. Support for Haslar in the community has not wavered. People respect its superb facilities and its staff and they admire the way that nurses march at Haslar. It is a military hospital and it retains the ethos and spirit of the area, which has very much a military flavour in south Hampshire. Haslar is an outstandingly good hospital and people want it to be retained.

Gosport War Memorial hospital, on the other hand, is a former cottage hospital. When it was a cottage hospital, it was proposed that it should close, and we all campaigned to keep it open. While we did that—this shows how fashions change in medicine—it suddenly became fashionable to have a community hospital, so it was expanded to become one, and it is also much loved. However, it is a small hospital on a site that is already quite congested. Car parking is really quite difficult and it would not take further expansion.

The one thing that is not mentioned in the latest consultation document by the primary care trust—in the shorter version, certainly—is money. What I most fear is that the comparison between the two proposals will not be dealt with like for like, but handled entirely on the matter of money. The primary care trust, on advice, has concluded that for the Haslar alternative, economic assessment capital over 30 years would cost £93.038 million, risk adjusted, net present value—that is the way these things are assessed. The War Memorial hospital option would cost £75.318 million on the same basis. In capital terms, it is maintained that Haslar would cost £13 million, which would need to be paid to the Ministry of Defence, and £14.9 million in capital cost. The War Memorial hospital would cost £3.594 million, plus £2.6 million for replacing the health centre, where there might be some capital offset through a lift project. There would also be some £23.6 million for the community hospital at Fareham under both plans.

Where do we go from here? Hampshire county council's scrutiny committee, which is charged by statute to look at local plans, will meet on 26 November, and I look forward to being there to discuss the issue. The Fareham and Gosport primary care trust plans to make its final decision on 15 December.

I do not believe that those making the judgments are comparing like with like. Gosport War Memorial was a cottage hospital; it has been expanded and is a busy site, and it will not take further expansion. Car parking is a problem. Haslar is a large, airy, superb location. It is a former district general hospital. There is room for change and expansion. Excellent equipment is in place and it has the suites of operating facilities that will be needed. Portsmouth and South East Hampshire hospitals trust concluded in 2000, and again in 2002, that Haslar would be needed. We simply cannot believe that it will be possible to manage in future with fewer operating theatres and fewer beds. There is an absolute and widespread conviction that Haslar is needed, and my plea from Gosport is that consultation should be genuine. Our wish is to retain Haslar hospital, and I ask the Minister to support that proposal.

7.13 pm

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Health (Miss Melanie Johnson): I congratulate the hon. Member for Gosport (Mr. Viggers) on securing this debate on health services in the Gosport peninsula. Before I turn to the specific issues that he raised, I pay tribute to the work of all the staff in the Fareham and Gosport area and the role that they play in delivering quality services. All Members rightly attach the highest importance to national health service developments in their own constituencies. It is important that local people can have local access to high-quality health services. The hon. Gentleman is obviously demonstrating his interest in the subject by raising this debate.

I begin by looking at the context of this matter. Our NHS improvement plan set out a challenging 10-year programme for reform. As part of that, we want services to be accessible, flexible and designed around the needs of local patients. The policy of devolution gives local communities an opportunity to plan and develop health services according to their needs and demands and we have backed that up with significant funding.

Overall, there will be an average year-on-year increase in England of 7 per cent., over and above inflation. There will be an increase of £34 million in total budgets between 2003–04 and 2007–08, and more than 75 per cent. of that will go directly to PCTs. That means that we are putting resources in the hands of people in the front line of the NHS, alongside their responsibilities for developing and running services.

Fareham and Gosport PCT, in the constituency of the hon. Member for Gosport, will receive an increase in revenue allocation of £41 million between 2003–04 and 2005–06. That represents a cash increase of 30 per cent. However, to achieve our goal of modernising the NHS, many NHS economies and organisations are considering, with their local stakeholders, changes to the way in which they organise their services. I am sure that the hon. Gentleman will agree that hospital services need to change if we are to continue to fulfil patients' needs and improve access. Services cannot remain static forever, but must be responsive to local needs.

In Fareham and Gosport, work is already under way to plan health services fit for the future. Central to these plans is the major private finance initiative to which the hon. Gentleman referred. That scheme will mean a redevelopment of hospital services in Portsmouth, focusing on the current Queen Alexandra hospital site in Cosham. Once the new hospital is completed, all acute in-patient services will move there. It will be the main acute site for the whole of south-east Hampshire.

The rebuilding of the Queen Alexandra hospital and the reorganisation of its services mean that the local NHS has a unique opportunity to look afresh at what it does, and from where. As the hon. Gentleman noted, in October last year, the local PCT commenced a project to review the health needs of the local population and develop a strategy to provide services to meet those needs over the next five years and beyond. That work included a needs assessment, site feasibility studies, analysis of patient activity data and a bed census.

In March, as a result of that work, three broad options were offered for further consideration. They were discussed at various informal meetings, eight of which were held in the hon. Gentleman's constituency. In addition, five staff briefings were held.

The PCT is now undertaking a comprehensive and thorough consultation process that gives local people an opportunity to make their views known and to shape local health services. All that is in line with the Government's policy and principles, outlined in the document, "Keeping the NHS Local".

As the hon. Gentleman knows, two main proposals are being consulted on. He has gone through them already, so I shall not outline them again. However, the dispersed model provides new buildings for services when and where they need replacing, while the community hospitals model develops community hospitals as the hub of health services, in both Fareham and Gosport. Common to both models is the building of a new Fareham community hospital, and of new premises for an existing GP practice.

The hon. Gentleman raised concerns about the future of the Royal Hospital Haslar. I am aware that it has been a subject of discussion locally for many years. As he knows, the Ministry of Defence will vacate the hospital in 2007. The former Portsmouth and South East health authority gave a commitment in 2000, following public consultation, to develop a substantial facility at Haslar, subject to MOD agreement to the use of the site. The new hospital will offer day surgery, diagnostic and out-patient facilities, operative clinics and accident treatment.

That commitment was subsequently reiterated in a letter sent to the hon. Gentleman in January last year by my hon. Friend the Member for Salford (Hazel Blears), who is now Minister for Crime Reduction, Policing and Community Safety but who at the time was a Minister in the Department of Health. The local NHS has therefore been in discussions with the MOD about the potential use of part of the site for the provision of those services. The MOD identified two potential locations on the site of the Royal Hospital Haslar on which to develop a range of services—the crosslink block and the undeveloped area on the periphery of the site. As the hon. Gentleman will be aware, the latter option was excluded after public feedback this summer. The use of the crosslink block remains under public consultation, but the proposal brings with it, as he outlined, a substantial capital cost accruing from the purchase of

[Miss Melanie Johnson]

the site and the necessary adaptations. The NHS has a duty to use public money wisely, and must therefore consider other options. The future of the Royal Hospital Haslar cannot be looked at in isolation, and the NHS has a responsibility to look at a range of options to ensure that primary and secondary services meet the needs of local patients and fit with wider plans for modernisation.

The precise configuration of services is under consultation, and we are in discussions on the matter. All the services currently provided by the Royal Hospital Haslar, including therapies, diagnostics and out-patient services, will still be provided locally, but the location of those services has yet to be decided. The NHS in Hampshire and the Isle of Wight remains committed to the pattern of services for the population of Gosport and Fareham agreed after the 2000 consultation, but their precise nature is under debate. It would be inappropriate to speculate about the outcome of the present consultation, which does not end formally until 8 November next week. Locally, the NHS has been in discussions with the MOD about the use of the site and I have already outlined the two options and their consequences. The arrangements for those discussions, as well as discussions with other partners, are the responsibility of a local partnership board, which will make sure that the quality and continuity of health services for the people of Gosport, Fareham and the south-east Hampshire area are not affected in the event of a delay, as the hon. Gentleman mentioned, in completing the redevelopment of the Queen Alexandra hospital in Cosham. The MOD has given assurances that sufficient time will be allowed for the Hampshire and Isle of Wight strategic health authority, the Portsmouth Hospitals NHS Trust and the Fareham and Gosport primary care trust to decide future requirements for the Haslar site and ensure that patients continue to receive the highest possible standard of health care over that period.

The hon. Gentleman spoke extensively about the role of the MOD, but he will understand that I can only comment from the perspective of the Department of Health. I was pleased to hear that he has had discussions with my colleagues in the MOD, even though I detected a note of frustration—the future of health services on the Gosport peninsula is obviously an issue of great concern to him. As I have mentioned, it is our policy that the local NHS should decide the priorities for the NHS locally, including decisions on the location of services. That is where specific local knowledge and expertise lies, and it is not appropriate for Ministers to decide on the direction of travel and how services should be configured, as we have made clear.

There is a discussion to be had about the relative merits of the different options with regard to the cost to the local economy. Money deployed on a more expensive option would mean less for other services. Local people need to have that discussion with the local health service. That process is going on, and the meeting on 15 December, to which the hon. Gentleman referred, is part of that. We have made it clear that it is best for that local knowledge and those local decisions to come into play through local decision making.

The health community in Fareham and Gosport has set out its proposals for change to a number of the key health services to improve the quality and the range of services for local people. That is an opportunity for local people to influence the debate by responding to the consultation. I hope that the hon. Gentleman continues to work with the local NHS to build a better future for residents in his area and that he urges local people to respond to the consultation so that they have a say in the provision of local health services.

Question put and agreed to.

Adjourned accordingly at twenty-five minutes past Seven o'clock.

House of Commons

Wednesday 3 November 2004

The House met at half-past Eleven o'clock

PRAYERS

[MR. SPEAKER *in the Chair*]

Oral Answers to Questions

WALES

The Secretary of State was asked—

Health Trusts

1. **Mr. Jon Owen Jones** (Cardiff, Central) (Lab/Co-op): What discussions he has had with National Assembly for Wales Ministers concerning the effects of the Freedom of Information Act 2000 on the publication of data on individual health trusts in Wales. [194551]

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Wales (Mr. Don Touhig): My right hon. Friend the Secretary of State and I have had no discussions with Assembly Ministers on the Freedom of Information Act in relation to the publication of data on individual health trusts, but I rather suspect that my hon. Friend has.

Mr. Jones: My constituent, Kelly Harris, contracted MRSA in the Heath hospital two months ago. Unfortunately, she has since had a toe amputated. For the past couple of months she has been trying to obtain information about her medical records, which the hospital has been reluctant to disclose. She is also trying to obtain information about the number of MRSA cases in the hospital, which she would have the right to do were it an English hospital. Does the Minister agree that not disclosing such information risks people believing either that Welsh people are too ignorant to interpret the data or that someone has something to hide?

Mr. Touhig: I express my sympathy for the ill health of my hon. Friend's constituent. The national public health service gathers and publishes data on health care-associated infections, including MRSA, in Wales. The information is not published in the same way as it is in England—it is anonymised—and it is for each individual trust to decide whether it wants to publish it. Given my hon. Friend's views, which other hon. Members will share, I will ensure that his comments are brought to the attention of my Assembly colleague, the Minister for Health and Social Services.

Mr. Bill Wiggin (Leominster) (Con): I am glad that the Minister takes this matter seriously. Last year, NHS trust code D had 119 cases of MRSA. This year, it is estimated that 600 people will die from hospital-acquired infections in Wales. Even the Prime Minister has recognised that this is a problem. Keith Callaway of Bettws has twice suffered MRSA infections in hospital, and has lost his leg and suffered kidney failure and a cardiac arrest as a result. He said in *The Western Mail* that he is

> "very bitter that this information is withheld"

and that he

> "wholeheartedly believes that it should be made public."

I hope that the Minister will do a bit more than he outlined to make that happen.

Mr. Touhig: I fully understand the hon. Gentleman's point. As I said in answer to my hon. Friend the Member for Cardiff, Central (Mr. Jones), his view is shared by Members on both sides of the House and I will ensure that it is brought to the attention of the health Minister in the Assembly.

Mr. Wiggin: I am glad that the Minister will bring the issue to his colleague's attention. However, the Assembly could do a great deal more. In 1996, there were 152 cases of MRSA; by 2001, there were 342. Last year, the figure reached 481. We need more than just pretty words from the Minister.

Mr. Touhig: I am sorry that the hon. Gentleman thinks that I am just uttering pretty words, because I do take the matter seriously. I remind him that when his party was in power no figures on MRSA were published whatsoever.

Mr. Roger Williams (Brecon and Radnorshire) (LD): My colleague Kirsty Williams, the Assembly Member for Brecon and Radnorshire, has been instrumental in bringing this situation to light in the Assembly. Does the Minister agree that unless we have accurate figures about the prevalence of MRSA in Welsh hospitals we are unable properly to scrutinise the policies that are put forward by the Assembly to address the problem?

Mr. Touhig: I acknowledge the hon. Gentleman's point. I am sure that he would agree that the Welsh Assembly is very transparent on a whole range of matters as regards giving information to the public. I share the concerns that hon. Members have expressed. I repeat that I will ensure that they are brought to the attention of the Assembly Minister.

Barnett Formula

2. **David Taylor** (North-West Leicestershire) (Lab/Co-op): What recent discussions he has had with the First Minister of the National Assembly for Wales on the impact of the Barnett formula on regeneration. [194552]

6. **Kevin Brennan** (Cardiff, West) (Lab): What consultations he has had with the First Minister of the National Assembly for Wales on the effect of the Barnett formula on public expenditure in Wales in the next financial year. [194556]

The Secretary of State for Wales (Mr. Peter Hain): I regularly meet the Assembly First Minister, and regeneration in Wales is one of the topics that we frequently discuss.

David Taylor: When I recently drove to Holyhead via the A55 along the north Wales coast, I was hugely impressed by the scale of regeneration since my last visit a decade ago. The Labour Government and the Labour Assembly have much of which to be proud. However, will the Secretary of State acknowledge the role of the generous Barnett formula in all this? Should not national grant distribution be more needs-based so that my own region does not lose out; or does the English midlands need to be categorised as Powys, East before we get a fairer deal?

Mr. Hain: That is an interesting proposition—I look forward to adding Red Leicester to the list of fine Welsh cheeses. If my hon. Friend wants to apply to the Gorsedd of the Bards, I shall put in a good word for him.

The Barnett formula is a population-based share that changes according to comparable spending in England, including in Leicestershire. It is therefore triggered by what goes on in England. Wales has a lot of catching up to do. We are making great progress, but gross domestic product per head remains 78.8 per cent. of the United Kingdom average. That is why the additional funding that the Labour Government are investing, compared with the miserable Tory record, is so important.

Kevin Brennan: I am sure that the soon-to-be defunct Wales Tourist Board will be glad to make a film about North-West Leicestershire called "Last Quango in Powys". Is not the fact that we shall have Barnett-plus in Wales for the next few years a warning to those who appear to believe that the answer to every problem in Wales is to throw the baby out with the Barnett formula?

Mr. Hain: Yes—I assume that my hon. Friend is talking about the nationalists, who have consistently attacked the Barnett formula. That is not surprising as they want Wales to be cut off from the rest of the United Kingdom. They ignore the fact that, uniquely, we have £555 million over the next three years over and above the Barnett formula for objective 1 funding. Yesterday, Sue Essex, the Minister for Finance, Local Government and Public Services in the Assembly, announced that some £13 million from the business rates incentive scheme would go towards reducing the impact of council tax rises, as part of an increase of £60 million-odd in the coming years. That is proof that the Labour Government are genuinely delivering for Wales all the way.

Lembit Öpik (Montgomeryshire) (LD): As the representative for Powys, Central, may I tell the would-be Member for Powys, East that yesterday the Assembly Finance Minister announced a Welsh local government settlement? On all independent projections, that will mean a big increase in council tax as a result of the poor settlement for local government in the Budget, due to the inadequate formulation of the Barnett formula. Has the Secretary of State any plans to address that? If so, when can we expect a reformulation so that local government in Wales is not squeezed, although it has been so far?

Mr. Hain: I should have thought that the hon. Gentleman would welcome the additional money that the Labour Government in the Welsh Assembly announced yesterday to ensure that council tax rises are kept to a minimum, as they were this year. What would happen if the Liberal Democrat policy of massive hikes in income tax to replace the council tax were introduced? That would mean hard-working people, from police officers to nurses and teachers, paying a huge additional burden of income tax. That is the mad Lib Dem policy.

Mr. Nigel Evans (Ribble Valley) (Con): Not only the additional money but how it is spent is important to Wales. Will the Secretary of State hold discussions with the First Minister to ensure that more Barnett formula money is spent on attracting manufacturing investment into Wales, because thousands of jobs have been lost since the Government came to power? Is he not ashamed that there are fewer manufacturing jobs in Wales now than in 1997?

Mr. Hain: It is true that manufacturing has contracted in Wales as it has throughout the industrialised, modern world. It has happened elsewhere in Europe, in the United States and other places. The hon. Gentleman does not point out that employment in Wales is at record levels compared with a massive loss of manufacturing—around 100,000—and huge unemployment under Tory policies. Compared with that, we have a good record. We are doing more and more and the Welsh economy is strengthening week by week.

Mrs. Betty Williams (Conwy) (Lab): My right hon. Friend will recognise the scene that my hon. Friend the Member for North-West Leicestershire (David Taylor) described of travelling along the A55, and especially of the regeneration that has occurred in my constituency of Conwy since 1997. However, will my right hon. Friend take every opportunity to discuss with the First Minister and other agencies in Wales the effectiveness of flood defences, given the serious flooding in the past two weeks? Businesses and householders were badly affected, especially in the Bangor area.

Mr. Hain: I am aware of the problems of flooding in the Bangor area and throughout Wales, including in my constituency. I shall ensure that my hon. Friend's concerns are brought to the attention of the First Minister and therefore the Welsh Assembly Government. However, as she acknowledged, there has been record investment and more and more jobs in her constituency and along the north Wales corridor, to which my hon. Friend the Member for North-West Leicestershire (David Taylor) also referred. That is because Wales is working under Labour, compared with a Tory record of mass unemployment, mass bankruptcies and business collapse.

New Deal

3. **Mrs. Jackie Lawrence** (Preseli Pembrokeshire) (Lab): What recent discussions he has had with his Cabinet colleagues on the number of people who have benefited from the new deal in Wales. [194553]

The Secretary of State for Wales (Mr. Peter Hain): I have regular discussions with Cabinet colleagues. The Government's new deal has helped to reduce unemployment in Wales, with more than 70,000 people finding work through the programme.

Mrs. Lawrence: I thank my right hon. Friend for that reply. Does he agree that there is no better example of the successful way in which Wales is working than the take-up of the new deal for lone parents? Will he tell the House what he feels the impact would be of the Tories' plans to scrap the new deal, particularly on lone parents in areas such as mine whose lives have been dramatically—

Mr. Speaker: Order. The Secretary of State may answer questions only on matters for which he is responsible.

Mr. Hain: I agree with my hon. Friend that the new deal has been a fantastic success right across Wales, with 35,000 young people, 19,900 lone parents and 7,400 disabled people securing new jobs through it. That is why it would be absolutely catastrophic if a policy were adopted to abolish the new deal, as has been advocated by the Tories and the Liberal Democrats.

Alan Howarth (Newport, East) (Lab): Is my right hon. Friend aware that thanks to the new deal, to successful education and training policies, to a business-friendly strategy by Newport city council and to the Government's good management of the economy, unemployment in Newport has halved since 1997—*[Interruption.]*

Mr. Hain: Yes is the answer to that question! May I take this opportunity to pay tribute to my right hon. Friend's work as the Member representing Newport, East? I want to acknowledge that it will be a loss for the House when he stands down at the end of this Parliament.

We have had a fantastic record of job creation under Labour, with both the Assembly and our Westminster Government working in partnership. Unemployment in Wales is now at its lowest for nearly 30 years, and at half the level that we inherited from the last Conservative Government.

Antisocial Behaviour

4. **Ian Lucas** (Wrexham) (Lab): What discussions he has had with Cabinet colleagues on tackling antisocial behaviour in Wales. [194554]

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Wales (Mr. Don Touhig): My right hon. Friend and I have regular discussions with ministerial colleagues on matters affecting Wales. Over the past year, the police, community safety partnerships and others in Wales have increasingly used the wide range of powers put in place to tackle antisocial behaviour. Last week, Cardiff, Newport and Swansea were included among 50 new antisocial behaviour action areas.

Ian Lucas: One of the most successful innovations associated with antisocial behaviour is the introduction of alley gating, which has been introduced in Caia Park in my constituency and is very popular with my constituents. Unfortunately, however, the provisions introduced by the Countryside and Rights of Way Act 2000 have not yet been implemented by the Assembly, which is preventing a more rapid introduction of alley gating in Caia Park. Will my hon. Friend have discussions with the National Assembly for Wales to establish what steps it intends to take to introduce this legislation in Wales as soon as possible?

Mr. Touhig: I am aware of the success of the alley gating project in Caia Park in my hon. Friend's constituency—*[Interruption.]* I can say that with a straight face. Indeed, £250,000 has been set aside by my colleagues in the Assembly for such projects. I am also aware of my hon. Friend's concerns about the Countryside and Rights of Way Act 2000. It is a matter for the Assembly to decide on the commencement of the relevant orders under that Act, but I will take up the points that he has raised with my colleague Minister there.

Mr. Simon Thomas (Ceredigion) (PC): In the week in which a 12-year-old girl in my constituency admitted in court that she had provided the drugs that killed a schoolboy, may I ask the Minister what steps are being taken under the antisocial behaviour initiatives to deal with illegal drug dealing on our streets? In particular, will he tell me what is going to come out of the Prime Minister's announcement last week about empowering local communities to take more steps in regard to the people whom they can identify as problematic in their area? What detailed discussions are going on with National Assembly Ministers about implementing these proposals?

Mr. Touhig: I very much regret the incident to which the hon. Gentleman referred. My colleagues in the Assembly have a proactive policy of funding and supporting drug agencies. Indeed, I spent a day with one agency, as a fly on the wall, observing the good work that it was doing. It is also important that investment is going into education, so that young people can be made aware of the dangers of using drugs. They are an awful blight on our society, both in the hon. Gentleman's rural constituency and in my urban constituency.

We must work together as community partnerships because this problem will not be solved by the police alone. The community has to be proactive. There was an incident in my constituency in which a drug pusher was trying to sell drugs to children in primary schools and the local community rose up, turned up outside the school and phoned the police to give them the person's car number. We must be vigilant in all that we do. We are working closely with our colleagues in this regard, and they have a good record to date.

Huw Irranca-Davies (Ogmore) (Lab): The antisocial behaviour measures that have been implemented throughout Wales have been welcomed by my constituents, although they would like more of them to be used in my area. Does my hon. Friend agree that equally important is having eyes and ears on the ground to implement these measures? In addition to the extra policing and the community support officers, will he join me in actively encouraging local authorities, including my own in Bridgend, to consider the use of community or neighbourhood wardens?

Mr. Touhig: My hon. Friend is right to refer to the effects of the antisocial behaviour orders. Indeed, 114 have been issued in Wales. I take his point about the community wardens, and in my own borough the new Labour-controlled council is introducing a scheme. What is important is that that supplements and supports the work being done by the police. It encourages the community to participate in combating antisocial behaviour problems. Often, wardens act as professional witnesses when the community or the public are afraid to come forward, perhaps as a result of witnessing antisocial behaviour. I commend the schemes and I hope that authorities across Wales look seriously at the work being done in Newport and the work we are now doing in Caerphilly.

Mr. Bill Wiggin (Leominster) (Con): For ASBOs to work, people with them must not breach them. When I asked how many of the 114 issued in Wales had been breached, the Minister did not give me the figures for 2003. Bearing it in mind that it is now November 2004, why was that?

Mr. Touhig: I knew that I should have signed off that question yesterday. This is the latest information I have that I can give the hon. Gentleman. When there are further figures available and if he asks the question again, I will give him the most up-to-date figures I have.

Mr. Stephen Pound (Ealing, North) (Lab): I am sure that my hon. Friend will have been as delighted as I was to witness the Damascene conversion of the Liberal Democrats, who now support that legislation. What can be done to encourage those who put political prejudice over the interests of the nation to see the error of their ways? How can he reach out to the recalcitrant and the opportunistic?

Mr. Touhig: There are many potential St. Pauls on the other side of the House. Indeed, the Liberal Democrat record is not a good one. Frankly, they have opposed at every level in the House legislation that we have put through to combat antisocial behaviour, yet—*[Interruption.]* Oh yes they have—yet in local constituencies they campaign on issues of antisocial behaviour. They want to deprive the police and local authorities of powers—

Mr. Speaker: Order. I think my mistake was to call the hon. Member for Ealing, North (Mr. Pound).

Julie Morgan (Cardiff, North) (Lab): I very much welcome the fact that Cardiff has been chosen as one of the pilot areas to tackle antisocial behaviour. What does that means for the people in my constituency of Cardiff, North and, in particular, for the residents of Fishguard road in Llanishen, who are suffering due to rowdiness, graffiti and drunkenness from a very small group of young people?

Mr. Touhig: I would hope that the resources that will now go into the antisocial behaviour action areas in Cardiff, Newport and Swansea will improve the situation to which my hon. Friend refers. Resources and manpower will now be committed to tackling serious problems of antisocial behaviour in those communities. A minority of people are involved in such activity in our communities across Wales and it is important that the community work together with the police, the local authorities and other agencies to tackle it. It will not disappear overnight, but if we work together in partnership we will start to see the tide turn.

Police Numbers

5. **Mr. Dai Havard** (Merthyr Tydfil and Rhymney) (Lab): What discussions he has had with his Cabinet colleagues on the latest figures for police numbers in Wales. [194555]

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Wales (Mr. Don Touhig): My right hon. Friend and I have regular discussions with ministerial colleagues on matters affecting Wales. In Wales, police strength at 31 August 2004 was at 7,414, which is an increase of more than 12 per cent. since 1997.

Mr. Havard: There has been significant improvement in police numbers, community support officers, the extension of community wardens in my constituency, the reopening of local police stations and so on, as well as a significant improvement in drug interdiction—all of which has all been possible because of extra funding. However, I do not want that episodic investment to remain exactly that and not be sustained. What will my hon. Friend do to ensure sustainability of that funding so that those improvements continue?

Mr. Touhig: Funding the police service remains a top priority of this Government. In 2004–05, total provision for policing in England and Wales was more than £10 billion: an increase of 4.2 per cent. Funding for the police service in England and Wales has increased by more than 30 per cent., or £2.3 billion, over the past four years. The Government will continue to put in the resources, unlike the Conservative party, with its Mickey Mouse fantasy figures, which wants to cut £1.6 billion from the Home Office budget and spend £1.3 billion more on police. Its figures do not add up.

Mr. Elfyn Llwyd (Meirionnydd Nant Conwy) (PC): Yesterday, the Minister for Finance, Local Government and Public Services in Wales announced a 5 per cent. increase in funding for local authorities in Wales. On closer inspection, that turned out to be 4.8 per cent. Interestingly, however, the average for north Wales authorities is 3.8 per cent. Given that the North Wales police authority requires 7.4 per cent. to meet its commitments, will the Minister ensure that there will be a generous and substantial police grant to avoid substantial policing cuts and/or huge hikes in council tax?

Mr. Touhig: I am aware of the statement made by my Assembly colleague the Minister for Finance, Local Government and Public Services yesterday. The settlement is very good and should be welcomed across Wales. It confirms the commitment of this Government and our partners in the Assembly to invest in public services. Clearly, the funding of the police service is important, and we can be proud of our record. Certainly, as we move towards the next settlement, the voice of Wales will be made clear by my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Wales in Cabinet and in bilateral discussions with ministerial colleagues. We are determined that the police service in Wales will have all the adequate resources that it needs.

Minimum Wage

7. **Mr. Huw Edwards** (Monmouth) (Lab): What discussions he has had with Cabinet colleagues on the impact in Wales of the recent changes in the minimum wage. [194557]

The Secretary of State for Wales (Mr. Peter Hain): Tens of thousands of low-paid workers stand to benefit from the increases to the national minimum wage in Wales in October, including for the first time young workers aged 16 and 17 who will receive £3 an hour.

Mr. Edwards: Will my right hon. Friend tell his Cabinet colleagues that as a result of the national minimum wage, the recent increase and the extension of the minimum wage to 16 and 17-year-olds, Wales is no longer known as the land of low pay? Does he agree that shop assistants, catering staff and those who work in care homes will always remember that the minimum wage was introduced by this Government and opposed by the Conservative party at every stage?

Mr. Hain: Certainly, that will be one of the points on which we campaign in Wales over the coming months. Labour introduced the minimum wage, Labour will increase—*[Interruption.]*

Mr. Speaker: Order. The House must come to order. It is far too noisy, and too many conversations are going on.

Mr. Hain: Labour introduced the minimum wage, and we will continue to increase it in line with recommendations from the Low Pay Commission. At the same time, contrary to all the scare stories of the Tories, employment has increased in Wales to record levels, business activity is up and the economy is stronger, all with the minimum wage underpinning wages so that decent social standards apply.

Michael Fabricant (Lichfield) (Con): Is the Secretary of State aware that the John Lewis Partnership, which is about to open a department store in Cardiff, has announced that the new national minimum wage rates will reduce the number of staff that it can employ? What does that mean for employment in Wales?

Mr. Hain: The hon. Gentleman's leader, the right hon. and learned Member for Folkestone and Hythe (Mr. Howard), said that 1 million jobs would be lost if we introduced the minimum wage: exactly the same scare stories that the hon. Gentleman is now repeating in respect of John Lewis in Cardiff.

Albert Owen (Ynys Môn) (Lab): The introduction of the national minimum wage directly benefited more than 2,000 families in my constituency and, importantly, indirectly the business community in Ynys Môn. Will my right hon. Friend join me, and the Plaid Cymru strategist Eurfyl ap Gwilym in his comments in a leaked draft of the Plaid Cymru manifesto, in welcoming the beneficial effects of the minimum wage in Wales? Does he agree that the additional resources that are put into the minimum wage, and its extension to 16 and 17-year-olds, will further benefit economies across Wales?

Mr. Hain: First, I acknowledge my hon. Friend's excellent work in his constituency in promoting the minimum wage and helping people to get off benefits. That is the point—since the Labour Government came to power, we have seen 101,000 more people in jobs in Wales. The minimum wage alongside that encourages people to go into work, as it makes work pay and rewards people to a decent extent.

Welsh Language

8. **Hywel Williams** (Caernarfon) (PC): What discussions he has had regarding a new Welsh Language Act. [194558]

The Secretary of State for Wales (Mr. Peter Hain): The Government continue to be supportive of the Welsh language. The Home Office recently announced that Welsh will be included on the first page of new passports issued to people in Wales from around the end of next year

Hywel Williams: Irrespective of the many complaints that I, among other Members, receive about Welsh language provision, when does the Secretary of State think it would be proper for the Government to review the workings of the Welsh Language Act 1993—this Government, that is, rather than the Cardiff Government?

Mr. Hain: I am proud of our record in promoting the Welsh language. More people are learning and speaking Welsh than has been the case for generations. I see that the hon. Gentleman acknowledges that.

Rhodri Williams, the former chairman of the Welsh Language Board, has rejected calls for a new Welsh Language Act. He said:

> "We have not supported calls for the new Welsh Language Act. We believe it is through persuasion that we can get companies to use the language. We can work together. The Welsh language is now healthier and in a better state than it has been for a very long time."

I am sure that the hon. Gentleman will acknowledge that as well.

PRIME MINISTER

The Prime Minister was asked—

Engagements

Q1. [195552] **David Wright** (Telford) (Lab): If he will list his official engagements for Wednesday 3 November.

The Prime Minister (Mr. Tony Blair): This morning I had meetings with ministerial colleagues and others. In addition to my duties in the House, I will have further such meetings later today.

I am sure that the whole House will join me in sending our warmest congratulations to President Karzai of Afghanistan. It was the first ever election for the Afghan people and a remarkable tribute to them and to the power of democracy. Like everyone else, I await the outcome of the other presidential election with interest.

David Wright: I can say with some confidence that I am sure the people of Telford, Pennsylvania will have voted for John Kerry last night. Unfortunately, most of their countrymen did not do the same. When my right hon. Friend calls President Bush in the next few hours to congratulate him, will he push him very hard on the middle east peace process?

The Prime Minister: I meant what I said a moment ago. We must await the outcome of the presidential election in the United States. I can tell my hon. Friend, however, that I believe that progress in the middle east, the democracy that now exists in Afghanistan and the democracy that is to come, I hope, in Iraq—those three things together—would be the single most significant contribution we could make to the reduction of terrorism and of the power of terrorists to recruit to their cause in the world. I assure my hon. Friend that I will do everything I possibly can to work with the President of the United States to secure that progress in the middle east.

Mr. Michael Howard (Folkestone and Hythe) (Con): Has the Department for Culture, Media and Sport had discussions with foreign casino operators about relaxing the money-laundering rules?

The Prime Minister: I am sure that the Department has had discussions with everyone to do with the Gambling Bill, and I am sure that that is absolutely normal. It is what the Department would expect to do. As far as I am aware, there has been no discussion about how it will reduce taxes for casino owners or others. I also think that we should be able to discuss the rights and wrongs of the Bill without hearing utterly absurd allegations of interference with the public interest.

Mr. Howard: We should indeed, but we should also know whether such discussions have taken place. I am surprised that the Prime Minister did not answer that question. It is something that he should have known, given the widespread concern expressed by the police and others about the effects of the Gambling Bill on money laundering and organised crime.

I have here an email from a senior official at the Department for Culture, Media and Sport to the operators of the biggest casino in Las Vegas. It begins, helpfully,

> "Hello all. I am about to head out of the office until Sep 9th now so could I encourage you all not to send in letters for a bit".

It goes on:

> "For our work on Money Laundering directive No. 3, still interested in seeing estimates as to what the transactional limit would be. Also interested in any other material you feel we should see about this".

Does the Prime Minister accept that the Department has held discussions with the casino operators about relaxing the rules on money laundering?

The Prime Minister: I have not seen that particular email—of course I have not—but if the right hon. and learned Gentleman is trying to suggest that the DCMS has had corrupt conversations with people—[HON. MEMBERS: "Yes."] It is utterly absurd. We have been conducting this consultation process on the Gambling Bill for several years. We had an independent report from Sir Alan Budd, and then two bouts of legislative scrutiny. We have taken the utmost care to try to get this regime right. Having initially supported all this, the Conservatives—with their usual lame opportunism—came along a few weeks ago when they realised that a media campaign was on, and tried to create scare stories. Even now, I suppose that the right hon. and learned Gentleman is trying to make accusations of corruption. I really think that that is pretty shoddy.

Mr. Howard: As usual, the Prime Minister has answered a question that I did not ask and failed to answer the question that I did ask. I ask him now to accept that the Government, and the DCMS in particular, have had discussions with foreign casino operators on relaxing the rules on money laundering. On Monday, these allegations were put to the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport. She said that they were "untrue". She went on to say:

> "Discussions on the money laundering directive are a matter for the Treasury".—[*Official Report*, 1 November 2004; Vol. 426, c. 51.]

Is it not clear that what she told this House on Monday was completely wrong?

The Prime Minister: I do not think that that is clear at all; actually, it is not clear from what the right hon. and learned Gentleman read out from the email a moment or two ago. Of course there will be discussions with casino operators—and, indeed, with everybody—about the Bill's impact, but money laundering issues are, as my right hon. Friend said, a matter for the Treasury; that is absolutely clear. But what is the right hon. and learned Gentleman actually suggesting? Is he suggesting—if so, he might as well say it openly—that there have been corrupt discussions involving casino operators in order that we relax the rules on money laundering to let them launder money? It really is a completely absurd allegation.

The fact is that, as the right hon. and learned Gentleman well knows, 90 per cent. of this Bill is about regulating gambling better. It is true that we are allowing regional casinos to operate and removing the restriction on them, but there are also a whole series of new restrictions on gambling in this country. My right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport said very fairly the other day that she would listen to concerns raised from all parts of the House about this Bill, and we will. But for the right hon. and learned Gentleman, after a four-year process, to suddenly stand at the Dispatch Box and make such an allegation simply reflects on him.

Mr. Howard: Let me make crystal clear what I am suggesting. I am suggesting—indeed, I have demonstrated—that discussions have taken place on money laundering between the DCMS and the biggest casino operators in Las Vegas, and that the Secretary of State denied that in this House on Monday. We know that the Government have been offering concessions on money laundering to the operators of those casinos, and that the Secretary of State tried to cover it up. What is the Prime Minister going to do about it?

The Prime Minister: I am sorry, but I do not accept at all that the right hon. and learned Gentleman has somehow shown that concessions have been offered on money laundering to casino operators. It really is ridiculous of him to suggest such a thing. I could at least understand it if he were putting forward his opposition to the Bill on the basis of what it actually says, although he probably feels somewhat discomfited by the fact that, as I said, the Conservative party supported these measures until a few weeks ago. But to mount an allegation of such a serious nature on the basis of some email that he has picked up is utterly absurd.

Mr. Seamus Mallon (Newry and Armagh) (SDLP): The Prime Minister will know that Annetta Flanagan, one of the three young people taken hostage in Afghanistan, is a constituent of mine, and will be aware of the intense grief that her family and the community feel. As he continues to strive for her safe release, will he make it clear that no dogma, no creed and no political objective can justify her kidnapping, that of Margaret Hassan or that of anyone else? Will he agree that that humanitarian message would be much more powerful, effective and listened to were it not diminished by the number of innocent Iraqi women and children who have been killed to date, which cannot be justified by many people there—

Mr. Speaker: Order. I call the Prime Minister.

The Prime Minister: In respect of the first part of my hon. Friend's question, I agree entirely with him. In respect of the second part, we do not accept the figures released by *The Lancet* last week at all. The Iraqi Ministry of Health has put out figures for the six months up to October, which suggest just over 3,000 deaths, but that includes people who are either terrorists or insurgents and those who have been the victims of terrorist attack. We do everything we possibly can to limit civilian casualties, but when our troops and Iraqi forces come under fire, they have to return fire. The way to stop all civilian casualties in Iraq is for insurgents and terrorists to lay down their weapons, allow the elections to go ahead in January and allow Iraq to become a stable democracy.

Mr. Charles Kennedy (Ross, Skye and Inverness, West) (LD): May I ask the Prime Minister about the other democratic decision that is bound to have preoccupied him this week, the north-east regional assembly referendum? Will he take the opportunity to urge voters there not to repeat the mistake that the Scots made back in 1979 by voting no to devolution, only to have to wait 20 years to see it established? Does he agree that, with only 24 hours to go, it is most important that north-east voters take the opportunity to go out and vote yes?

The Prime Minister: Yes, I agree entirely. Devolution has been shown to work in Scotland and in Wales and London-wide government has also been shown to work. The fact that the north-east assembly will be handling hundreds of millions of pounds of money will mean an actual reduction in the overall number of councils in the north-east. It is right to have devolution and decentralisation of power and I support that.

Mr. Kennedy: Staying on the subject of referendums, we would all agree that one of the lessons of the north-east campaign is that the more positive campaigning is done in advance, the better it is when the decision is reached. As all parties in the House are committed to a referendum at some point on the European Union proposed constitution, when is the Prime Minister himself going to get out, with cross-party support, and begin positively to make the case for that constitution?

The Prime Minister: I always do, not only when I am asked, but on any occasion when I can talk about it. It is entirely sensible that Europe changes its rules when there is a Europe of 25 members, which will become 30 over time. It is right to have a modern framework of rules for Europe, provided, as the new constitution makes clear, that we protect our own right to determine our tax rates, our foreign policy and our defence and retain our opt-in in relation to asylum and immigration. Provided all of that is correct, the people of this country will believe that it is right for us to be at the centre of Europe, not on its margins.

Q2. [195553] **Andy King** (Rugby and Kenilworth) (Lab): Many workers at Jaguar in Coventry who live in Rugby and Kenilworth are very angry at the way in which Ford has handled the future of the Browns Lane plant. The car industry plays a very important role in the growing strength of the west midlands economy. Can I ask my right hon. Friends the Prime Minister and the Chancellor to continue to do everything possible to secure the long-term future of Jaguar in the west midlands?

The Prime Minister: First, in respect of the Browns Lane plant, my hon. Friend, who has been active on the issue, knows that we have spoken to the company and the unions, urging them to sit down and to try to work out a proper way forward. I understand the strength of feeling, especially as the work force feel that they were given assurances on the future of the plant. I know that my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry has recently spoken again to the parties concerned. I am sure myself, however, that it is also important to press for assurances about the long-term future of Jaguar in the west midlands, and we will continue to do so.

Mr. Howard Flight (Arundel and South Downs) (Con): Will the Prime Minister please confirm that, so long as he remains Prime Minister, he will not abolish the earnings limit on employees' national insurance contributions?

The Prime Minister: We have absolutely no plans to do so.

Q3. [195554] **Mr. Wayne David** (Caerphilly) (Lab): The Prime Minister will agree that antisocial behaviour needs to be tackled firmly. I believe that the measures announced this week for an extension of spot-fines will certainly help in that respect. Does he also agree that measures to tackle graffiti and to break up teen gangs, which have not been supported by all Members in the House, have been particularly successful? Can we look forward to more measures of that kind in future?

The Prime Minister: First, I entirely agree with my hon. Friend that it has been important to add further offences to the fixed-penalty notice regime. Also, the antisocial behaviour legislation is working, and working well, as was obvious from last week's report. We need to make sure that that is used right across our communities. I am delighted to say that the Liberal Democrat spokesman on these issues recently said about ASBOs:

> "Having gone round the country I can't, hand on my heart, say these aren't a useful thing."

Unfortunately, the Liberal Democrats voted against all the measures in the Bill that introduced these provisions; we look for their conversion, one by one, on these matters.

Mr. Michael Howard (Folkestone and Hythe): Why does the Prime Minister think that shoplifters should not get a criminal record?

The Prime Minister: There is no reason why shoplifters should not get a criminal record. If the right hon. and learned Gentleman is referring to fixed-penalty notices, it is important that we are able to levy such notices, but the full criminal law still applies.

Mr. Howard: Let us be clear about what is happening. As a result of a law passed by this Government that came into force on Monday, shoplifters will be punished by means of a fixed-penalty notice, such as applies to people parking on a double yellow line. Right? Shoplifters will no longer get a criminal record. Right? Shoplifters are being told that they can steal up to £200 worth of goods, and in exchange get a fixed-penalty notice of £80. Right? That means that they can take £200 and get fined £80. This week, the Government produced a charter for shoplifters. Is that what the Prime Minister meant when he talked about being tough on crime?

The Prime Minister: The right hon. and learned Gentleman gets worse. First, the fixed-penalty notice is not a substitute for the ordinary criminal offence. [[HON. MEMBERS: "It is."] No, it is not, as police officers are perfectly entitled to arrest the person involved and charge him under the law. However, if they decide—

Mr. Howard: Who?

The Prime Minister: The police officers. If they decide that they want to serve a fixed-penalty notice, they can do so. I remind the Leader of the Opposition that fixed-penalty notices have been welcomed by police right across the country. Fixed-penalty notices are not a substitute for the existing criminal law; they are in addition to it. Right?

Q4. [195555] **Mr. Michael Jabez Foster** (Hastings and Rye) (Lab): Whatever their views on Iraq, many of my constituents are anxious that British troops who are there at Christmas should have the best possible contact with their families. Does my right hon. Friend agree that something should be done about restoring the free post to troops in Iraq?

The Prime Minister: My right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Defence has been considering the strong representations on this matter that have come from all sides of this House. I am pleased to announce that, in the run-up to Christmas, the Ministry of Defence will help friends and relatives send postal packets free of charge from anywhere in the UK to all service personnel serving overseas. We will see what happens after that period, but Christmas is a special time, when our thoughts are with those who are deployed overseas. We wish to recognise the exceptional commitment made by our servicemen and women world wide.

Q5. [195556] **Charles Hendry** (Wealden) (Con): Is the Prime Minister aware that in much of east Sussex and Kent women with breast cancer are having to wait three months for radiotherapy, and that that wait is expected to rise to five months as a result of a shortage of radiotherapy equipment and operators? Is he aware that breast cancer is the second biggest killer among women who die of cancer, and that if it is not treated within five months there is a much higher risk that the cancer will return? Is it not completely unacceptable that people living with the physical, mental and emotional problems associated with cancer must wait so long for treatment that genuinely could determine whether they live or die?

The Prime Minister: It is, of course, absolutely unacceptable, which is why we have been taking action on it. Breast cancer services in the UK are certainly improving faster than anywhere in Europe, and are now a match for the very best in the world. I do not know about the situation in the hon. Gentleman's constituency or area, and I shall look into it. However, we have made a huge investment into cancer services and hired extra cancer consultants. In addition, my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Health has brought in an extra 600,000 MRI scans. That shows that we are trying to deal with the radiology bottleneck in the treatment of all cancers, and we shall look to do more. Finally, I shall look into the specific circumstances in the hon. Gentleman's constituency, and write to him.

Mr. John Battle (Leeds, West) (Lab): We all welcome the successful outcome and process of the elections in Afghanistan, but will my right hon. Friend ensure that promised international development funds actually reach the newly elected President and his government, so that there is proper, local sustainable economic development both to tackle poverty in Afghanistan and to undermine the pernicious poppy cultivation that washes up as drug abuse in our communities?

The Prime Minister: I totally agree with my right hon. Friend. We are making efforts to ensure that the money gets through and, in forthcoming weeks, we shall announce a new programme on the eradication of the drugs trade in Afghanistan. After the fall of the Taliban, we have seen what will, I believe, be a temporary increase in the amount of poppy cultivation. We have to bring that back down again, but we must also make sure that the economic development of Afghanistan—there is growth of about 25 or 30 per cent. a year—is not distorted by people feeling that their only livelihood is in cultivation of the poppy. My right hon. Friend is absolutely right; we have to deal with the matter at an international level, and we will do so.

Q6. [195557] **Mr. Simon Burns** (West Chelmsford) (Con): Is the Prime Minister aware of the concerns of local authorities such as mine about the growing problem of Travellers who buy or occupy land in rural areas and then flout the planning laws to build on it, resulting in a considerable amount of money and time being spent to rectify the problem through the courts? Will the Prime Minister intervene to ensure that local authorities are given the greatest powers possible to combat the problem and to protect local residents whose lives are made such a misery by that antisocial practice?

The Prime Minister: I agree entirely with the hon. Gentleman, and I have held discussions with hon. Members about it. My understanding is that we are actually giving local authorities greater powers to ensure that they can take immediate action in the courts, rather than having a drawn-out process that often means that buildings or dwellings are erected by Travellers before there has been a chance to take action. However, we are looking at the matter again to ensure that the powers are sufficiently tough. I know from my own constituency that the issue can be serious and I think that the combination of measures that we are taking will make a genuine difference. But I am looking at the issue myself and, on that, too, perhaps I can get back to the hon. Gentleman.

Mrs. Alice Mahon (Halifax) (Lab): Will the Prime Minister give the House an assurance that when the United States launches its bomb-into-submission policy on Falluja, our Army will not become involved in any way in what are collective punishments that indiscriminately kill innocent civilians?

The Prime Minister: I have to say to my hon. Friend that the situation is simple. There is a Government in Iraq who have been appointed by the UN; not, as some people say, by the US, but by the UN. There will be elections supervised by the UN in January. What we are saying to people in Falluja—this is from the Iraqi Government, never mind the multinational force—is, "Lay down your weapons, submit to the authority of that UN-appointed Government, participate in the election, and see from the election how much support you have". But what we and the Iraqi Government cannot allow is a situation where outside terrorists and others use Falluja as a base to mount operations and kill innocent civilians and our soldiers, who are doing a job blessed by the United Nations Security Council resolution. To describe that as collective punishment of Falluja is gross, if I may say so to my hon. Friend. The collective punishment that is being visited on people in Iraq is collective punishment by suicide bombers and people detonating vehicles and trying to stop the democratic process taking place; our job is to make sure that it does.

Q7. [195558] **Mr. Alan Reid** (Argyll and Bute) (LD): May I draw the Prime Minister's attention to the case of a pensioner who lives on one of the islands in my constituency? She has poor eyesight, but is able to go to the post office every week to collect her pension. However, she and many other pensioners with poor eyesight will find it difficult, if not impossible, to work with Post Office card accounts, and to recognise the cheques that the Department for Work and Pensions plans to send through the post instead of pension books. Will the Prime Minister agree to keep pension books for pensioners who, owing to poor eyesight, are unable to work with the Post Office card account and for whom cheques are unsuitable?

The Prime Minister: My understanding is that the Post Office is working with the Royal National Institute of the Blind to make sure that the problem is overcome. It is obviously a problem for people who have impaired sight but, as I say, it is my understanding that discussions are now taking place between the Department for Work and Pensions and the RNIB to resolve it.

Mr. Iain Luke (Dundee, East) (Lab): I am sure that the Prime Minister welcomes the real impact that community wardens have had both north and south of the border, but will he do all he can to expand the system so that all communities benefit from this very positive scheme?

The Prime Minister: Clearly, if we keep the investment going in, we have the possibility over the next few years of having not just record numbers of police but supporting that with community support officers and neighbourhood wardens. I would like to see a situation in which every community that needs one has a community patrol, so that we are back with a visible, uniformed presence on our streets in our local communities. Where this is happening throughout the United Kingdom, it is having a major impact not just on crime itself but on the fear of crime.

Q8. [195559] **Hugh Robertson** (Faversham and Mid-Kent) (Con): The Volcker inquiry into corruption at the United Nations during the oil-for-food scandal will not report for a number of years, by which time many of those implicated will have retired. Given the implications of that scandal for the urgently needed reform of the United Nations and the fact that money from the programme is subsidising the insurgency in Iraq that is threatening the lives of British servicemen and women and British civilians, why did the Prime

Minister not raise the issue in any way with the Secretary-General during his visit to London a week ago?

The Prime Minister: We have, of course, raised this issue with the Secretary-General and the United Nations on previous occasions. It is a serious question. It will take some time to get to the bottom of what has happened but we, in particular, have a very firm belief, for very obvious reasons, that if the oil-for-food programme has been abused in any way, the people who have abused it should be held to account. I simply point out to the hon. Gentleman that these issues are also being raised by the UN high-level panel that the Secretary-General established a short time ago. That will report over the next few weeks, and there is a British representative on it. That will give us the additional protection to make sure that such things cannot happen in future.

Q9. [195560] **Richard Burden** (Birmingham, Northfield) (Lab): May I welcome the Prime Minister's assurance that, in conjunction with the President of the United States, he will be giving priority over the coming months to the middle east peace process? What can he do in practice to ensure that reality on the ground in the middle east reflects the theory of the road map? Part of that involves pressing for an end to suicide bombings—a point that he makes frequently—but will he also address the comments of Mr. Dov Weisglass, a senior adviser to Ariel Sharon, who said that disengagement from Gaza is not a furthering of the peace process but a freezing of it and that the agenda for a Palestinian state has been taken off Israel's agenda with the blessing of the President of the United States?

The Prime Minister: I have not seen those remarks and I would like to see the context before I commented on them specifically. My very clear view—I believe it is shared by President Bush and certainly by the international community—is that the disengagement plan from the Gaza is important. I welcome it; I applaud the fact that Prime Minister Sharon is proceeding with it. However, it is a first step and if it is used properly, it can help us to get back into a proper process of peace negotiations that lead to a final settlement based on the two-state solution; an Israel that is confident of its security and a viable Palestinian state. I do not know of any statements that contradict that, but that is the vision—the only vision in my view—that will bring a lasting peace to the middle east.

Richard Ottaway (Croydon, South) (Con): Despite the fact that weapons of mass destruction have not been found in Iraq, the Prime Minister has always argued that a change of regime there was legitimate. The Foreign Secretary's secret and personal memo to the Prime Minister dated 25 March 2002 advised him:

> "Legally there are two potential elephant traps:
>
> (i) regime change per se is no justification for military action".

What exactly did the Prime Minister understand that to mean?

The Prime Minister: Let me repeat this again, as I have done many times in the House; I understood that to mean that the legal grounds had to be a breach of United Nations resolutions. That was precisely what the legal grounds were. I should point out that the Iraq survey group, which is prayed in aid by many people on the existence of readily deployable weapons, makes it absolutely clear that there were multiple breaches of United Nations resolutions. That is why the legal basis was not merely clear at the time; it is clear now and was actually adhered to.

Q10. [195561] **Miss Anne Begg** (Aberdeen, South) (Lab): Will the Prime Minister say that in any future pension strategy, a Labour Government will ensure that pensioners on the lowest incomes will see their incomes rise by more than 55p a week for a single pensioner and 5p a week for a pensioner couple, which is what the Scottish nationalists proposed yesterday?

The Prime Minister: I think I can safely say that I would absolutely deplore such a policy. I had not come across the proposal myself, but now that I have, I am shocked and outraged by it. It only goes to show what a bad idea it would be to vote for them.

Point of Order

12.31 pm

Mr. Barry Sheerman (Huddersfield) (Lab/Co-op): On a point of order, Mr. Speaker—*[Interruption.]*

Mr. Speaker: Order. Could hon. Members leave the Chamber quietly?

Mr. Sheerman: I do not usually raise points of order on matters of House of Commons security, but one of my constituents received an invitation to a reception in the House on 9 November that looked like a written personal invitation from the Prime Minister. After doing a little research, I found that the reception was for Animal Defenders International. The invitation was sent to a large number of people with an advertisement saying:

> "WHIP ME BEAT ME KICK ME 9th November 2004. House of Commons."

Given the heightened security in the House, it seems to be quite irresponsible for a Member to book a room to host such an event, especially given that the invitation does not indicate the purpose of the meeting or who that Member is. The invitation has gone out to a large number of people throughout the country. Many have been taken in by it and thought that they had received an invitation from the Prime Minister himself.

Mr. Speaker: If the hon. Gentleman gives me the documents, I will ensure that the Serjeant at Arms investigates the matter and reports to me.

Sex Equality (Duties of Public Authorities)

12.32 pm

Angela Eagle (Wallasey) (Lab): I beg to move,

> That leave be given to bring in a Bill to make provision in relation to public authorities for the further prevention of sex discrimination and for the promotion of equality of opportunity for men and women.

Such a duty to promote equality was introduced for race discrimination in the Race Relations (Amendment) Act 2000. The Audit Commission has since described that as the key driver for change to combat the discrimination that still exists against our black and ethnic minority communities. Likewise, the draft Disability Discrimination Bill also contains a positive duty on the public sector to promote equality—and rightly so. It is now time for the same advance to be made for women and men, and my Bill would accomplish that.

The Sex Discrimination Act 1975 outlaws discrimination between women and men in the workplace and in the provision of goods and services. It was pioneering legislation 28 years ago when the incomparable Barbara Castle put it on the statute book. Her vision and determination put Britain at the forefront of the battle for equal opportunities and key advances were made. However, the Act does not prevent discrimination from happening in the first place, but it provides redress and compensation to those who experience it after the event, so only those who are determined enough to endure the stresses and strains of a legal process, the threat of losing their job or the likelihood of incurring high legal costs get the chance of receiving recompense. Cases can take many years to resolve with the result that women are still sacked for being pregnant and men are penalised at work for taking on caring responsibilities. In Britain today, much illegal discrimination is left unchallenged and unchecked.

A positive duty to promote equality would address that problem by shifting the onus to end discrimination from the individuals who suffer it to the public bodies that provide vital services to all of us and employ many millions to deliver them. The duty to promote will close many of those practical loopholes in the law, and make the fight against unfairness and blighted life chances much more effective. Make no mistake, there is still much to do, as recent figures have confirmed that the pay gap between women and men is stubbornly persistent at 18 per cent. Pay in the public sector is generally better than in the private sector. For example, the gap stands at 13 per cent. in health care, but in banking and public relations it is a staggering 56 per cent., and is widening. The causes are well documented, and women's lack of access to bonuses, overtime and opportunities for promotion are significant factors. Child care and other caring responsibilities often leave women with little choice but to work part-time for pay and conditions that are inferior to those in the full-time labour market, which often leads to men having to work even longer hours to make up the family income. British men work the longest hours in Europe, which is clearly not good for family life.

At work, women are still concentrated overwhelmingly in low-paid occupations and can expect to retire after a lifetime of hard work on a pension

[Angela Eagle]

income that is just over half that of their male counterparts. Once again, the situation is not improving. The Equal Opportunities Commission, which supports the Bill, recently conducted an inquiry into job segregation by gender, and looked at five sectors—construction, engineering, plumbing, information technology and child care. Four of those sectors have a mainly male work force and major skills shortages, and one has a largely female work force and low pay. The commission discovered that the Government's modern apprenticeship scheme has reinforced rather than challenged that gender segregation. There has been no increase in the number of women coming into the four male-dominated sectors in the past ten years. For example, women make up only 1 per cent. of people working in construction, yet only 1 per cent. of modern apprentices in construction are women. Eight per cent. of people working in engineering are women, yet only 6 per cent. of modern apprenticeships in engineering are held by women. In child care, despite the prospective creation of 150,000 new jobs, men are almost completely absent from the sector and pay remains very low. A man who wishes to pursue a career in child care is still considered mildly eccentric or much worse. Overall, 95 per cent. of apprenticeships in engineering and construction are held by men, who earn £115 a week. In social care, by contrast, 89 per cent. of apprenticeships are taken by women, who earn just £60 a week.

Once the positive duty to promote equality is enshrined in law it is inconceivable that the lack of progress in tacking job segregation would be allowed to continue, and the role of the modern apprenticeship scheme in reinforcing that segregation would end. Banishing gender job segregation would offer women more choices and higher earnings opportunities and would also address skill shortages and boost our economic efficiency. It would offer men more civilised choices about their work-life balance. The duty to promote can also be a lever to ensure that public services are redesigned to reflect the life experiences of women and men more effectively. For example, men are much less likely than women to visit their GPs in a timely fashion, and only go to the doctor when their illness is advanced. Primary health services need to be redesigned to encourage men to seek help earlier. Women, on the other hand, rely on public transport much more than men as they have less access to private cars. They also have different patterns of usage, and combine trips to the shops with journeys to take children to school or the childminder, as well as their own travel to work. That is a complex set of journeys, yet bus routes and ticketing are often designed for simple commuting from one place to another. I could provide many similar examples of the scope for improving the design and delivery of public services to meet the needs of women and men more effectively. That can only improve efficiency and value for money.

There are those who will argue that the positive duty to promote will just be a bureaucratic nightmare that will have no effect on improving fairness and efficiency. These criticisms are usually made by people who do not wish our equality laws to be effective or modernised. In reality, the introduction of a new requirement to promote equality in the public sector can be delivered as part of the core planning inside an organisation. It should lead to greater equity and a more effective use of existing resources. It need not introduce extra complexity or expense, or endless paper trails, but it should encourage strategic analysis that results in more user-focused provision. That will create public services that fit the shape of more people's lives and that offer people equal opportunities to benefit.

I believe that, in due course, it is only right to extend these positive duties to prevent discrimination and promote equality to the private sector too. There is no reason why the efficiency and equity gains that they deliver should not benefit the whole economy and all our population. The Bill could be a small part of a third term Labour agenda to simplify, harmonise and extend equality protection to all. That would make our law simpler to understand and use for employers, employees and service providers alike. It would make protection from illegal discrimination a reality for all, and it would finish the work so ably begun by Barbara Castle by extending and opportunity further than ever before.

12.41 pm

Mr. Eric Forth (Bromley and Chislehurst) (Con): There is, of course, always a temptation when these worthy measures are brought before the House on these occasions for us to allow them to pass. Procedurally, you know as I do, Mr. Speaker, that measures brought to the House at this stage in the Session have no chance of reaching the statute book, for which I for one am grateful. There are occasions, however, on which I believe hon. Members should express a view when they think that the measure is ill-founded and ill-directed, as, sadly, I think this one is.

Although we always respect the motivation of hon. Members when they introduce such measures—I certainly respect the motivation of the hon. Member for Wallasey (Angela Eagle)—I believe that going too far in an area such as that with which the Bill deals can be just as damaging as not going far enough. For example, I was struck by her comment early in her speech that much illegal discrimination goes unchallenged. I think that she was referring to the existing law and suggesting that it was perhaps not being used to the full. I immediately wondered whose fault it was that such discrimination went unchallenged. In my view, one of the main duties of a trade union, for example, should surely be to use every opportunity under existing law to represent its members, be they male, female or whatever, in the context of the very law that she praised so highly.

If the hon. Lady is saying that much illegal discrimination is unchallenged, I ask her—and this applies to so much new legislation that is brought before the House—why we should not concentrate on using existing legislation more effectively before seeking to introduce yet more. That is a matter of important general principle, and I doubt very much from what she said whether she has spent quite enough time considering whether existing legislation is being explored to the full, not least by the trade unions, before seeking to introduce yet further measures of the sort that she is talking about.

The worrying thing is that the hon. Lady and her Government would be the first to say that, in the context of historically low unemployment in this country, which

I applaud, and the fact that this country has one of the highest proportions of women in work in the western world, any measure that even risks diminishing those conditions could be highly counterproductive. There is always a risk that, if well-intentioned measures such as the Bill are carried too far and reach too far into the workplace, they could start to have a counterproductive effect. That danger cannot be over-stated.

We are familiar with the phenomenon by which a quango set up under previous well-meaning legislation uses the resources given to it further to justify its existence and to extend its remit, which is a natural thing for people in quangos to do and we see it all the time. However, simply because a well-funded quango says, "We have discovered more things to do," or, even worse, "Another new quango should be set up," does not mean that we should say, "That's all right then." That is one of the weakest parts of the hon. Lady's argument.

The hon. Lady went on to make an interesting case about apprenticeships. She said that far too few women avail themselves of apprenticeships in engineering and that too few men work in child care—I do not know how one arrives at "too few" in that context. I do not know whether the hon. Lady expects an equal number of men and women to enter engineering apprenticeships and child care, or whether the number of women on engineering apprenticeships is not quite enough to satisfy her.

Leaving that matter to one side, how can one intervene in the structure and running of apprenticeships in order to change that balance? Such arguments always miss that point. It is easy to say, "There are too few women in engineering apprenticeships." I am intrigued to know the mechanism by which the number of women in engineering apprenticeships, or indeed the number of men in child care, would be increased. It is not good enough to state the problem and then assume that the solution will be made available.

Even more intriguingly, the hon. Lady went on to discuss lifestyle changes, which sound very trendy. Were the legislation to reach the statute book, it would allow some sort of quango to intervene in transport and many other arrangements in order to fulfil the requirements set out in hon. Lady's motion. Again, we must be careful before we go too far in that direction. It is difficult enough to improve our public transport arrangements, whether tubes, buses or railways, without the nightmarish thought that some well-meaning quango will say, "We have identified some necessary lifestyle changes in the population. We think that our railways should run differently and that our buses should run on different routes in order to try to improve people's lifestyles."

The resolution is far reaching and ambitious. It has the potential to reach into all aspects of employment, the public sector, transport and many other areas. As for the duty to promote—I pick out that phrase because the hon. Lady stressed it—she did not give any details, perhaps because of lack of time, on how it would bear on employers and the workplace. The phrase is easy to deploy and sounds attractive, if it is said fairly quickly, but when one starts to examine the implications and ramifications of a duty to promote, which would no doubt be policed by a quango, reaching out into the workplace and interfering yet further in relationships between managers and the managed, one sees scope for severe disruption of the employment process, of which the Government are rightly so proud.

I urge the hon. Lady to think again about the implications of what she is suggesting. Such measures are always well motivated, but the implications and the adverse effect on the workplace are extremely worrying. If the hon. Lady is not prepared to do the decent thing and withdraw her proposal, I hope that the House, having given the matter careful consideration, will say, perhaps with regret, that it is not persuaded that the measure, radical and far reaching as it is, is remotely justified and should therefore not proceed.

Question put, pursuant to Standing Order No. 23 (Motions for leave to bring in Bills and nomination of Select Committees at commencement of public business), and agreed to.

Bill ordered to be brought in by Angela Eagle, Vera Baird, Mr. Roger Berry, Mr. John Grogan, Helen Jackson, Ann McKechin, Mrs. Barbara Roche, Joan Ruddock, Mr. Shaun Woodward and Mr. Parmjit Dhanda.

SEX EQUALITY (DUTIES OF PUBLIC AUTHORITIES) BILL

Angela Eagle accordingly presented a Bill to make provision in relation to public authorities for the further prevention of sex discrimination and for the promotion of equality of opportunity for men and women: And the same was read the First time; and ordered to be read a Second time on Friday 19 November, and to be printed [Bill 172].

Members' Allowances

Mr. Speaker: We now have three hours for the motion on Members' allowances and the two motions on parliamentary pensions. At the conclusion of the three-hour debate, I shall call the amendments to the Members' allowances motion that I have selected to be moved formally; the House will vote on each in turn and then on the main motion on Members' allowances, amended or not, as the case may be. We shall then vote on the two motions on pensions.

My selection of amendments has been posted in the No Lobby in the usual way.

12.51 pm

The Leader of the House of Commons (Mr. Peter Hain): I beg to move,

(1) That this House notes the recommendations made in Chapter 4 of the report of the Review Body on Senior Salaries on parliamentary pay and allowances (Cm 6354-I) a copy of which was laid before this House on 21st October; and is of the opinion that the provisions set out in paragraphs (2) to (5) below should be implemented, subject to any decisions of the Members Estimate Committee with regard to their application.

Staffing Allowance

(2) With effect from 1st April 2005, the Staffing Allowance should be increased to a base level of £72,000, rising to a maximum of £80,460, according to the number of full-time equivalent employees funded from the Staffing Allowance and based in London; and these sums should be adjusted on 1st April each year (beginning on 1st April 2005) in line with the Average Earnings Index for public and private sectors combined.

IT Provision

(3) With effect from the beginning of the next Parliament, the level of provision of IT equipment and support should be increased in line with recommendations 11 and 12 of the Review Body's report (Cm 6354-I).

London Supplement

(4) With effect from 1st April 2005, the London Supplement should be increased to £2,500, and this sum should be adjusted on 1st April each year (beginning on 1st April 2005) in line with the Average Earnings Index for public and private sectors combined; and it should not be payable to any Member who receives the Additional Costs Allowance.

Car Mileage Allowance and Parking

(5) With effect from 1st April 2005, the Car Mileage Allowance should be payable at the same rate as the car mileage rates approved by the Inland Revenue, with the higher rate payable up to a total of 10,000 miles and the lower rate thereafter or as determined in future by the Inland Revenue; and the cost of parking a car, motorcycle or bicycle, if wholly, exclusively and necessarily incurred in the performance of parliamentary duties, should be reimbursed.

Incidental Expenses Provision

(6) That recommendation 8 of the Review Body's report (Cm 6354-I) be referred to the House of Commons Members Estimate Committee for further consideration.

We have three motions before us this afternoon, the first of which is on Members' allowances, the second and third on parliamentary pensions. Explanatory memorandums on each have been placed in the Vote Office. All three are tabled in response to the report of the Review Body on Senior Salaries—the SSRB's triennial review of pay and allowances, a copy of which was laid before the House on 21 October. The Government are grateful to the SSRB for undertaking the review with its customary thoroughness and expertise. I am sure that hon. Members on both sides of the House join me in thanking John Baker and his team for their hard work.

Let me say a word or two about the status of the SSRB. It is an independent organisation. That the Government, as a matter of principle, put its recommendations to the House is established practice. We ask the SSRB to study specific matters and it makes a recommendation, and it is to our advantage that we take outside and independent advice. I know that the whole House shares that view.

I emphasise that we are not debating Members' pay this afternoon. The SSRB recommended no increase in Members' or Ministers' salaries beyond the normal annual uprating in line with inflation. Personally, I think that that is right. Members' allowances have been the subject of some attention recently. It is understandable that some of the media and our constituents question whether the considerable sum spent on Members' allowances is well spent, but contrary to the lurid headlines, the allowances do not go to line our own pockets: they are essential if we are to function as effective Members of Parliament both at Westminster and in our constituencies, and all claims are within agreed rules.

The position today is very different from the one 20 or 30 years ago, when many Members lived in London, went to their constituency perhaps once a month for the odd surgery, and did not have a constituency office. Our constituents demand a different level of service and it is proper that the House has put in place the resources necessary to support that.

There are five effective parts to the motion. I shall deal with the amendments that you have selected, Mr. Speaker—(g), (h), (c) and (i)—during my opening remarks, if that is convenient. Paragraph (2) is applicable to the staffing allowance. It would implement recommendation 5 of the SSRB's report so that, with effect from 1 April 2005, the staffing allowance will be increased to a base of £72,000, rising to a maximum of £80,460 according to the number of full-time equivalent employees funded from the staffing allowance and based in London. Those sums will be adjusted annually in line with the average earnings index. The purpose is to enable Members to employ three full-time equivalent staff at proper rates of pay and to take account of the increased cost of employing staff in London.

I hope that the House will support the change. The SSRB based its recommendations on extensive analysis of pay rates in comparable jobs in London and outside. Although we must be careful with public money, we must pay our staff a decent rate for the job.

Sir Michael Spicer (West Worcestershire) (Con): In reference to paragraphs (2) and (6), what does the right hon. Gentleman think is the reasonable minimum number of secretaries that a Member of Parliament should be able to employ in the Palace of Westminster without penalties?

Mr. Hain: That is a very complicated question and difficult to answer with a simple yes or no. The reason I hesitate to respond is that each Member allocates staff and determines the precise arrangements according to his or her own needs and choices, and I think that that is an important right shared by all of us.

Miss Ann Widdecombe (Maidstone and The Weald) (Con): I am grateful to the Leader of the House for giving way again so quickly. He did not answer the question asked by my hon. Friend the Member for West Worcestershire (Sir Michael Spicer), but will he answer mine? Does he agree that whether we base our staff in our constituency or at Westminster is a matter for each Member to determine and that the system should be neutral between the two decisions?

Mr. Hain: I am not sure that I accept the right hon. Lady's point about neutrality, because Members who base all their staff at Westminster do not pay rents and get free heat, lighting, use of the telephone and photocopying, and so on, whereas those of us who have constituency offices—the vast majority, including the right hon. Lady—incur costs there. However, one of the reasons why the motion refers the SSRB recommendation to the Members Estimate Committee, as the SSRB anticipated it might be, is that we would get into a difficult position if there were, in effect, a massive disincentive to having staff employed within the Palace or on the parliamentary estate. We are parliamentarians as well as constituency MPs, and that is an important principle to maintain.

Mr. Patrick McLoughlin (West Derbyshire) (Con): Does the right hon. Gentleman agree, however, that in the light of the fact that the expenses and allowances paid to Members are now published, they should be equally and easily understood and able to be judged? Giving different allowances—taking £7,000 off a Member and making extra provision if a Member employs all his or her staff in London—adds to the complexity of already complex rules. Should we not be creating a simpler, more straightforward system that is easy to understand and easily accounted for?

Mr. Hain: I understand the hon. Gentleman's point. He has gone into the matter in considerable detail. There are enormous benefits in simplicity; on the other hand, the decision that the House took to establish two separate sources of allowance—the staffing allowance and the incidental expenses allowance, which overwhelmingly is directed toward constituency offices, although it can be used for other purposes—had the advantage of ensuring that our employees would not have to compete constantly against demands to buy a computer, or to pay a constituency office bill. We have an obligation to our employees to ensure that they have decent conditions.

Mr. Oliver Heald (North-East Hertfordshire) (Con): Does the Leader of the House share my concern that the proposal on the incidental expenses provision, which the SSRB no doubt made in good faith, is extremely complicated? If the Members Estimate Committee accepts the recommendation, there will, in effect, be four levels of IEP for new Members starting after the general election, and a transitional arrangement with four different levels of IEP applicable to existing Members. Is there not at least the possibility of coming up with a simpler method of dealing with the problem of providing a little extra help to Members who have their offices outside London?

Mr. Hain: Yes, there is a simpler way—it is described on the Order Paper. On the other hand—the hon. Gentleman and I share common concerns on this, and I shall come on to it in some detail later—the enormous pressure on the parliamentary estate means that we have many different interests to reconcile. The SSRB tried to do that, but recognised that it would involve practical implications beyond its remit. We referred the proposal on the IEP to the Members Estimate Committee so that it could address precisely these issues. It is not the SSRB's fault, but the proposal that came to us had certain rigidities that could have had all sorts of anomalous effects. It is very important that proper consideration be given to that.

Mr. Frank Dobson (Holborn and St. Pancras) (Lab): The question of pressure on the parliamentary state is certainly outside the SSRB's terms of reference. According to paragraph 4.43 of its report,

> "The House authorities wish to encourage MPs to locate their office staff in the constituency."

Who are these House authorities—the men in wigs and tights? They take their authority from Members, and Members have never said that they want that.

Mr. Hain: I appreciate my right hon. Friend's passion, but the House authorities provide an extremely valuable service for us all in the variety of different functions that they undertake. They have a responsibility to inform the SSRB about a variety of issues affecting the parliamentary estate, including the enormous pressure on it.

Mike Gapes (Ilford, South) (Lab/Co-op): Does my right hon. Friend recognise that the proposals in the report would seriously affect those of us who are outer-London MPs with a constituency office and staff in the House of Commons, as well as a huge amount of immigration and asylum casework? I would have either to sack one of my members of staff or to close down my constituency office.

Mr. Hain: That is why the motion refers the matter to the Members Estimate Committee, where several such issues will be discussed.

The purpose of my bringing before the House a series of proposals on how allowances should be structured is to allow the House to decide on them. It is for the SSRB to recommend, but for the House to make the decisions.

Mr. Barry Sheerman (Huddersfield) (Lab/Co-op): What surprises many of us is not that the recommendations came about but that none of us were consulted. I should have thought that consultation of Members of Parliament on their office costs and where they want to locate their staff would have been undertaken before proposals were brought to the House. That would be done in even the most primitive organisation.

Mr. Hain: My hon. Friend clearly has strong feelings, as have many Members on both sides of the House. I understand that. However, it is not true to say that Members were not consulted. Everybody knew that the SSRB inquiry was going on and anybody could have submitted evidence. At the back of the report there is a list of those who did so. The Speaker's Advisory Panel,

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which consists of Members of this House, was consulted. The proposal did not come out of thin air. It would not be right to criticise the SSRB, which has done a very professional job in the circumstances.

David Winnick (Walsall, North) (Lab): I employ one member of staff in the House of Commons. Does my right hon. Friend accept that it is disturbing that we are being told how we should go about our business in serving our constituents? It is not up to the body that has made this recommendation, the House authorities, or anyone but ourselves to decide whether we best serve our constituents by having staff here or in the constituency. I happen to have a constituency office. The proposals are simply unacceptable, and it is just as well that the Leader of the House should know that.

Mr. Hain: As I said, that is precisely why the motion refers the matter to the Members Estimate Committee. I agree that it is for Members to decide how they allocate their different allowances and serve their constituencies. Equally, however, there are constraints. One of those is the amount of accommodation that is available on the parliamentary estate; another is that those of us with constituency offices incur considerable additional costs, which are not incurred by Members who have all their staff located here. We have all sorts of different interests to balance.

Mr. Alex Salmond (Banff and Buchan) (SNP): The IEP should not be used to put pressure on staff salaries, which is why they have been kept separate; nor should it be used to pay for overnight stays for Members of Parliament on parliamentary business, which properly come under the additional costs allowance. When the Committee considers these issues, will the Leader of the House bear in mind that the rules for the additional cost allowance were drawn up in 1971 before there was a Parliament in Scotland, a National Assembly in Wales or any other assemblies that might come into being? Costs incurred on overnight stays on parliamentary business involving those places should come under the additional costs allowance.

Mr. Hain: I noted the hon. Gentleman's amendment, which was not selected. The difficulty is that the additional costs allowance is intended for a very specific purpose: to allow Members of Parliament to have both a constituency home and a London home in order that we can do our jobs effectively. If the ACA were to be redirected to other areas, that would raise issues about the basis on which it is established. The hon. Gentleman may claim under the incidental expenses provision.

The hon. Gentleman refers to the Scottish Parliament. That does not affect me, for example, because I have no constituency interest in going there, although I visit the Welsh Assembly, which, as it happens to be between my constituency and London, does not cause a problem. The hon. Gentleman can continue to press his case, and we will no doubt continue to take account of it.

If I may make a little progress, I shall deal with some of the points that hon. Members have made. Amendment (g), which was tabled by the hon. Member for South-West Hertfordshire (Mr. Page) and others, would increase the staffing allowance to £80,460—the amount that the SSRB recommended—for all Members, ending the system of differential allowances for London-based Members and those with their staff based in the constituency, while allowing Members to use up to 10 per cent. of the staffing allowance to fund their constituency office. Linked to that is amendment (h), which would remove from the motion the proposed reference of the SSRB's recommendation on the IEP to the Members Estimate Committee.

I sympathise with the underlying point of amendment (g), which suggests that although Members with staff in London pay out more in salaries for their staff, Members with staff in their constituency may pay out more on office rental and other costs. That needs to be recognised in the funds that are provided.

However, the amendment would not encourage any location of staff to constituency offices. Furthermore, the staffing allowance and incidental expenses provision are each available for specific purposes, as I explained, and there is a logic to ring-fencing them for those purposes. Allowing the staffing allowance to be put towards office costs would be a new departure and would undermine the principle that the staffing allowance should be ring-fenced and available only for the purpose of paying for work done.

Mr. Paul Tyler (North Cornwall) (LD): The Leader of the House has made much reference to ring-fencing to protect the salaries of staff. We are all sympathetic to that, but does he recognise that since the House introduced standard conditions of employment, with standard salary ranges, that argument has largely disappeared?

Mr. Hain: I am not entirely sure that it has disappeared. It concerns the principle mentioned by my hon. Friend the Member for Walsall, North (David Winnick): that it is for each Member to determine, within the acceptable custom and practice that the SSRB and the House rules provide, how to pay staff, whether they are based in the constituency or in London.

Most significantly, amendment (g) would go well beyond the increase in staffing allowance recommended by the SSRB; I am advised that it would cost an extra £2 million to £3 million. I must therefore urge the House to reject it.

Mr. McLoughlin: The Leader of the House says that the proposal will cost an extra £2 million to £3 million. From the SSRB's report, how much will the increase in the incidental expenses provision cost?

Mr. Hain: I do not have the figures, but the House authorities advise me that it would be an additional cost on top of the proposal that the SSRB recommended. I obviously need to rely on that advice.

Mr. Heald: Does the Leader of the House accept that the figures are not based on any research? If one examines the proposal for more money for IEP, amendment (g), which proposes instead more flexibility in the staff budget, appears neutral. Has the right hon. Gentleman gleaned some behavioural effect or research from the House authorities that supports the estimate of £2 million?

Mr. Hain: We all rely on the Department of Finance and Administration, which has great expertise, and it has advised about the figures that I have presented to the House.

I understand the unrest and anxiety, which is why I did not put the straight SSRB recommendation in the form of a motion. Indeed, the SSRB said that its practical phasing and implementation might need further consideration. Had I tabled such a motion, it would have been defeated for all sorts of reasons, some of which have been raised with me. I have therefore given hon. Members an opportunity to reflect, through the Members Estimate Committee, on how we should move forward. I believe that a much better approach would be for that Committee, which you chair, Mr. Speaker, to consider the SSRB's proposal for abating the IEP to encourage the location of staff away from the parliamentary estate.

The Committee will consider the picture in the round, including the interaction between the staffing allowance and the IEP. That is a proper course of action, which will avoid hasty compromises with uncertain effects.

Miss Widdecombe: I am grateful to the Leader of the House for giving way to me a second time. If his recommendation is accepted and the matter is referred back to the Members Estimate Committee, would not it be appropriate for the House to express a view to that Committee about what it considers to be reasonable basic employment provision, which should not attract penalties? I am sad that my amendment (d) was not selected, but will the right hon. Gentleman at least undertake to ensure that the view of the House is taken before the Members Estimate Committee considers the matter?

Mr. Hain: The Members Estimate Committee reflects the wishes of the House and can receive representations through the Speaker's advisory panel and ordinary representations. The fact that everything is being conducted so openly allows hon. Members to make their points. I understand the point that the right hon. Lady made in amendment (d), which was backed by many hon. Members from all parties. It relates to my earlier point that I understand the accommodation pressures and the desire on the part of the House authorities for location away from the parliamentary estate to constituency offices. There is enormous pressure, especially through interns, on the parliamentary estate. However, we are parliamentarians—I believe that that lies behind the right hon. Lady's amendment—not glorified social workers. We are parliamentarians in addition to providing a first-class constituency advice and assistance service. I believe that most of us try to provide such a service. Although the numbers have to be determined and have to be proportionate to the availability of accommodation and resources, it is important to sustain the case for locating staff here.

Sir Nicholas Winterton (Macclesfield) (Con): I have been a Member of Parliament for 33 years and the SSRB report is the first example of a report that seeks to tell Members of Parliament how to organise their offices. That is extremely dangerous. An outside body, with little experience of our work, is advising us on how to do our job. I am grateful that the Leader of the House said that the matter will be referred to the Members Estimate Committee—I shall support that motion. I hope that the Committee will take into consideration the views of the House as expressed in the debate. Will the right hon. Gentleman express some anxiety about the fact that, for the first time, an outside body has sought to tell hon. Members how to organise their offices and the job that they do in the House and in their constituencies?

Mr. Hain: As I have signalled in the clearest possible terms, I understand the hon. Gentleman's point. However, I must disagree emphatically with any suggestion that the SSRB has operated in an improper fashion. The SSRB is not telling him, me or any other Member what to do. It has provided a set of incentives—whether the House and the Members Estimate Committee accept them or not—to fulfil a set of criteria that it was invited to investigate. They include pressure on the parliamentary estate and the anomaly that hon. Members with staff who are based only on the estate get the whole IEP and do not bear the costs of a constituency office, as, for example, I do. It proposed a recommendation in good faith. We should respect that and I do not accept that it was ordering any of us to do anything. In the end, the House will make the decision.

Mrs. Anne Campbell (Cambridge) (Lab): If the SSRB had not made the recommendations, an entirely different set of people would be in the Chamber, complaining bitterly that it was not advantageous for them to have offices in their constituencies. Many hon. Members do not have staff in the House. The proposal is not as draconian as it appears at first sight. The SSRB also recommended that hon. Members should have computers as well as a laptop for themselves. [*Interruption.*] If the work station is based here and shared by a member of staff, I presume that it would not count against the £7,500 reduction in the IEP, which would allow hon. Members to have two members of staff here with only one work station. [*Interruption.*]

Mr. Hain: I stress to hon. Members that my hon. Friend has done a lot of work on our behalf and her point is about the number of work stations that one can have in order to be allocated the specific provisions under the IEP that the SSRB recommends. Hon. Members can vary the number of staff according to the availability of work stations. That sort of detail makes it important for the Members Estimate Committee to consider the matter in greater depth.

Mr. Dobson: For many years, Members of Parliament decided that we needed to improve the office accommodation for our staff and ourselves. Given that there is now more office accommodation than ever, why has someone decided on our behalf that we should discourage people from letting their staff use the accommodation? Three people work in my outer office. If I get rid of two, someone will continue to use the outer office and there will be no gain. My right hon. Friend

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says that we should submit the proposal to the Members Estimate Committee, but it will consider a transition towards something to which we have never agreed.

Mr. Hain: The recommendation has been made precisely because I was aware of the concerns that my right hon. Friend and others have expressed. The Members Estimate Committee will therefore have a chance to examine the proposal in more detail.

Mr. Mark Field (Cities of London and Westminster) (Con): Will the Leader of the House give way?

Mr. Hain: I am afraid that I need to make progress.

Mr. Field: Will the right hon. Gentleman give way on the point that we are considering?

Mr. Hain: No. I need to answer my right hon. Friend's other points and then I shall give way.

The truth is that this place is bursting. There are already far too many people working here, and it is not the case that we could just fill up our offices with existing paid and unpaid members of staff. Even unpaid members of staff have an effect, through the greater use of catering and other facilities here, resulting in a drain on the House's resources. If we expect other people to be careful about public spending, we cannot simply expand our allowances and accommodation willy-nilly.

Sir Michael Spicer: The theme running through this debate is that Members feel that they are not being properly consulted, as my right hon. Friend the Member for Maidstone and The Weald (Miss Widdecombe) pointed out. Will the Leader of the House give us an assurance that, when the Members Estimate Committee has done its work, the House will have a chance to take a view on its recommendations?

Mr. Hain: On that specific point, I can say yes. If the Members Estimate Committee comes back with major changes to the way in which the allowance is structured—whether of the exact nature that the SSRB has recommended, or a variation or equivalent of it—of course the House will have to make a decision on them. That is absolutely right.

Mr. Clive Betts (Sheffield, Attercliffe) (Lab): Will my right hon. Friend give way?

Mr. Hain: I shall take one last intervention, then I must make some progress, because I know that other Members want to move their amendments and contribute to the debate.

Mr. Betts: My right hon. Friend the Member for Holborn and St. Pancras (Mr. Dobson) talked about the office accommodation that has been provided here. Does the Leader of the House agree that it would be strange, having built Portcullis House a few years ago with specifically dedicated accommodation for staff to work alongside Members, if we were to pass a resolution now to discourage Members from employing any staff to work in that accommodation? There is something slightly not joined up about that thinking.

Mr. Hain: That is another reason why it is right for the House, through the Members Estimate Committee, to consider further these conflicting points.

Mr. Mark Field *rose—*

Mr. Hain: I will give way to the hon. Gentleman in a moment, because he has been trying to intervene on me. I did something very unusual in the case of this SSRB report, in that I did not just put down the recommendations from the board, because I knew that they would provoke precisely the concerns that have been raised here this afternoon.

Mr. Field: There is a universal dislike of the whole notion of abatement, the reasons for which a number of hon. Members have set out. For inner London Members and those who do not claim the additional costs allowance, who are assumed to have a single base, this whole idea is an absolute nightmare. I saw in this idiotic report—I am not a great fan of the SSRB report—the suggestion that we could somehow get office space at between £8 and £23 a square foot. I should be very interested to see whether the Serjeant at Arms Department could find me or the right hon. Member for Holborn and St. Pancras (Mr. Dobson) anything at that price in our constituencies. Is it seriously being suggested that those of us with constituencies in central London should open satellite offices in Luton, Slough or Reading in order to make ends meet? That really is absolute nonsense.

Mr. Hain: I am not suggesting that, and nothing that I have said suggests that. This is an independent report, and I hope that, on consideration, the hon. Gentleman will withdraw what he said about it being idiotic. It has been very carefully considered, although whether it has come to the right conclusion on this particular issue is a matter for the House. We asked the SSRB to look independently into the provision that we make for ourselves; otherwise we could just vote whatever we liked for ourselves, without any independent advice, and it is important that we bear this in mind.

Anne Picking (East Lothian) (Lab): This obscure debate is certainly one-sided. I would like to ask my right hon. Friend and other hon. Members whether they realise the impact of the lack of accommodation in the parliamentary estate. Some Members of Parliament are still working in offices that do not even have windows, never mind accommodation for staff.

Mr. Hain: That is part of the complexity that we are having to wrestle with. I would like to make some progress now, because I think that I can help the House in the debate that is to follow.

Even if the House were to accept amendment (g), I hope that it will reject amendment (h). I believe that it would still be helpful for the Members Estimate Committee to consider this matter thoroughly; the questions that have just been put to me underline that point.

On the question of information technology provision, paragraph 3 provides that, with effect from the beginning of the next Parliament, the level of provision of IT equipment and support be increased in line with recommendations 11 and 12 of the SSRB's report. In other words, the level of provision of IT equipment should be increased by one, so that each Member has one fixed workstation and one laptop for his or her own use, plus three further workstations, so that each full-time equivalent member of staff paid for through the staffing allowance has his or her own PC, and that each Member should also have two heavy-duty printers. The level and range of IT support offered to constituency offices should also be improved to a level comparable with that offered on the parliamentary estate.

David Taylor (North-West Leicestershire) (Lab/Co-op): I warmly welcome the two recommendations that the Leader of the House is describing. Does he accept, however, that if we are to have more remote facilities and more support from staff here and elsewhere, the network needs urgent attention to ensure that remote users of the parliamentary data and video network—the PDVN—have an adequate service?. It really is not adequate at the moment. The service in the House is not at all bad—I speak as someone with 30 years' experience in the world of information and communications technology—but the remote service is not adequate.

Mr. Hain: My hon. Friend has raised this matter before. It is precisely for those reasons that the SSRB has recommended extra provision for a local constituency IT service comparable with that offered on the parliamentary estate, provided at local level. The House and I fully accept this recommendation, and I know that the House authorities will resource it.

I believe that Members on both sides of the House will welcome these recommendations on IT, which reflect proposals by the Information Committee. It is important that Members, and Members' staff, should be adequately, although not lavishly, equipped to function effectively in the information age, and particularly to interact better with our constituents. The increased IT support for constituency offices should help those Members who choose to locate their staff away from the parliamentary estate.

Paragraph 4 relates to the London supplement. It would implement the SSRB's recommendation that the London supplement should be increased from next April to £2,500, the same level as the proposed enhancement to the staffing allowance in respect of London-based staff, and that this sum should be adjusted annually in line with the average earnings index. It would also implement the SSRB's recommendation that, in future, Ministers and officeholders should be able to claim the London supplement only if they did not claim the additional costs allowance.

Mr. Mark Field: Does the Leader of the House accept that the conclusion in paragraph 4.35 that there were

"no major concerns about the London Supplement"

is odd, given that I have spoken and written to him and his predecessors about the very low level of the supplement? I was particularly disturbed to read that the report stated that

"we did not interview any MPs with inner London constituencies."

On what basis, therefore, can it possibly conclude that the recommendation that the allowance should go up to a paltry £2,500 is credible, given that central London Members have to have a main, rather than a second, London home, when Members who claim the additional costs allowance are claiming at the rate of £20,902 a year? The methodology behind the London supplement is entirely wrong. A figure seems to have been plucked from the sky, which is one of the reasons why I tabled an amendment to the motion, although it has unfortunately not been selected.

Mr. Hain: I know that the hon. Gentleman wanted to put an alternative point of view before the House. The SSRB did not just pluck the figure out of thin air, as he has implied. It is based on equivalent civil service rates. The additional costs allowance is to enable Members with constituencies outside the London area to provide a proper service and to live in their constituency, which is a central part of modern parliamentary life.

May I make a further point in relation to what the hon. Gentleman has just said? Eight individual MPs gave evidence to the SSRB, including the Opposition deputy Chief Whip, the chair of the Labour party, the Liberal shadow Leader of the House, and many other Members of Parliament—*[Interruption.]* The shadow Leader of the House did, too—we would not want to forget him. Of course, I gave evidence on behalf of the Government, so it is not the case that no evidence was given. More evidence could have been given, including from the hon. Member for Cities of London and Westminster (Mr. Field), because everybody knew the inquiry was going on.

Paragraph (5) is to implement the SSRB's recommendations on the car mileage allowance. It provides that car mileage allowance should be payable at the same rates as the maximum car mileage rates which the Inland Revenue recognises as excluding a profit element. Car mileage will be payable at a rate of 40p per mile up to 10,000 miles and 25p per mile thereafter, instead of 57.7p per mile up to 20,000 miles and 26.6p per mile thereafter, as at present. Those rates will be adjusted automatically in line with the future changes in the Inland Revenue rates.

In part compensation for the reduction in the mileage allowance, and also for the loss of free parking at airports, paragraph (5) makes new provision for the cost of parking a car, motor cycle or bicycle to be reimbursed

"if wholly, exclusively and necessarily incurred in the performance of parliamentary duties".

The Members Estimate Committee and the advisory panel on Members' allowances will be asked to approve the rules for claims. I believe that this change will be widely welcomed.

Mrs. Anne Campbell: Will my right hon. Friend confirm that the Inland Revenue recommended rate for mileage allowance has not increased for several years? It has remained stationary.

Mr. Hain: Yes, I understand that that is the case.

I recognise that the proposed change represents a significant reduction in car mileage allowance and that this will have a significant impact on those Members

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who are heavily dependent on car transport, particularly those with large rural constituencies. I also recognise that the immediacy of the changes—by 1 April—could put some Members in real difficulties if they have entered into leasing or purchase agreements that go beyond that date.

The hon. Member for Macclesfield (Sir Nicholas Winterton) and others have quite properly tabled an amendment that would freeze the current rate until the Inland Revenue rates catch up with the House rates. That could be many years, however. The effect of the amendment is therefore firmly to reject the SSRB recommendation, which I have put before the House.

Sir Nicholas Winterton: I am putting this marker down now while a number of Members are present. The Inland Revenue rate seems to fail entirely to take into account, as the right hon. Gentleman has said, the size of a constituency and the need for a Member to use his car in that large area to undertake constituency duties. There is no difference between an inner-city seat and a large urban seat, which surely is grotesquely unfair. It could be a disincentive to Members properly and fully undertaking constituency duties and, in some cases, travelling to London when there is not adequate public transport to enable them to do so.

Mr. Hain: I know the points that the hon. Gentleman is making. I dare say his constituents and mine would want to make the same points if they travelled a lot on business, but may I make this point? Some Members feel that the Inland Revenue rates are too low to reflect the true costs of motoring. The Government do not accept that. The 40p rate, which was set in the Income Tax (Earnings and Pensions) Act 2003, covers the full costs of using a car for business travel for a wide range of types and size of car, including cars that are safe and comfortable for long business journeys. It is advantageous to drivers of small, environmentally friendly cars. It has been set at a level that will not subsidise all the standing costs of owning a larger, more fuel-hungry car, so that it does not encourage drivers of larger cars to drive unnecessary business miles. It is, however, still generous enough fully to cover the marginal running costs of such cars.

In any case, if the House feels that the Inland Revenue rates are inadequate, that is an argument for reviewing those rates, not for diverging from them. I hope that the House will reject the amendment.

Nick Harvey (North Devon) (LD): The Leader of the House has just referred to what the Inland Revenue reckons that 40p covers, which is the marginal cost of using the vehicle, whereas our current motor mileage allowance purports to cover the capital cost of the vehicle as well, so we are considering two fundamentally different things. What is being proposed is a change of policy dressed up as a recalibration of some comparative figures. If we are to debate what is being proposed, we should do so with our eyes open, rather than confuse two completely different things.

Mr. Hain: The hon. Gentleman makes a valid point, but the SSRB has considered this in the round and considered what applies to our constituents, saying that we should be treated in the same way as they are. That is what it is arguing.

The hon. Member for Lewes (Norman Baker), by contrast, has tabled an amendment that would strike out the proposal to allow hon. Members to claim for parking charges. While I sympathise with his wish to encourage the use of other forms of transport, the fact is that many hon. Members rely on cars in their constituencies and for at least part of their journey to and from this place. That point was made by the hon. Member for Macclesfield.

A problem has arisen in respect of the withdrawal of free car parking provision by BAA, as a result of shareholder action. That has placed a lot of Members of the House who rely on air transport in Scotland, north-west and north-east England and elsewhere in real difficulty, because if they have to leave their cars for the best part of a week a huge additional cost is incurred. I would point out that the provision that we recommend applies to motor cycles and bicycles as well as to cars.

Norman Baker (Lewes) (LD): I have looked through the SSRB report and I can find no recommendation relating to parking. Have I missed it or is it a subsequent invention as part of the motion?

Mr. Hain: I think the hon. Gentleman has missed it. If he looks more carefully, he will see it.

Mr. McLoughlin: On the parking issue, previously there was deemed to be an element of profit in the motor mileage allowance. That was one reason for deciding that no allowance should be made when congestion charging was introduced. If we accept this proposal for parking, should not we also accept it for congestion charging if the profit element has gone from the motor mileage allowance?

Mr. Hain: The Inland Revenue does not provide for congestion charging to be met in such a way. I should say to the hon. Member for Lewes that if the amendment tabled by the hon. Member for Macclesfield is carried, I will recommend that we support it, because built into the costs of the mileage rate of the House of Commons is provision to meet such costs. For example, if I travel across the Severn bridge I pay a toll. I do not think that that should be provided for by the House authorities, because the mileage rate is fairly generous. The same applies to parking.

Sir John Butterfill (Bournemouth, West) (Con): The Inland Revenue figure is for the calculation of tax liability; it is not said that a higher allowance should not be paid by an employer. Simply, if an allowance is given above that figure, it is taxable. That is already the case with Members' existing allowance—it is taxable above 40p. That is a matter for the Inland Revenue to decide, but the fact that this does not accurately reflect modern costs of running a motor car is well known throughout the nation. The AA says that, as do all the motor car magazines that publish the costs of running a motor car. The Inland Revenue point has nothing to do with the real cost of running a car, but it relates to a threshold for taxation.

Mr. Hain: There is a lot of substance to the hon. Gentleman's argument, but the public in our constituencies are treated by the Inland Revenue in a certain way. [HON. MEMBERS: "So are we!"] Well, we are not, because we get a higher rate than is generally given. Anyway, this is ultimately—*[Interruption.]* Look, I understand the concerns. For goodness' sake, I acknowledged the concerns earlier by saying that I understand the points that are being made, particularly the sharp change— *[Interruption.]* Hon. Members ask why I am proposing what I am proposing. It would be a serious departure if the Leader of the House did not put before the House recommendations from the SSRB.

It is for the House to decide what it wishes to decide—that is our sovereign right—but asking an independent body such as the SSRB to look at this dispassionately and then not putting its proposals before the House would be a serious breach with tradition and practice in respect of independent advice from such a body.

Mr. John Greenway (Ryedale): The fact that there is a tension between the amendment tabled by the hon. Member for Lewes and that tabled by my hon. Friend the Member for Macclesfield, which I have supported, shows that the review body's recommendation does not suit all hon. Members. Despite the fact that we could have been consulted on the matter, this recommendation has come to many of us as a complete surprise, out of the blue. It is grossly unfair to those of us with large rural constituencies some distance from London. I agree that the provision can be unfair to people who have to use airports, but surely the matter should be referred back to the Members Estimate Committee if the amendment is not carried.

Mr. Hain: I understand that point, but I have an obligation to put before the House recommendations from the SSRB. It would be a serious breach of practice adopted by previous Leaders of the House were that not done.

I will now take what must be the final intervention.

Mr. Mark Lazarowicz (Edinburgh, North and Leith) (Lab/Co-op): Does my right hon. Friend agree that when Members vote on the matter they should bear it in mind that it is difficult to explain to the public why we are prepared to accept SSRB recommendations when they increase our pay and allowances, but not so keen to accept them when they lead to a reduction? Without wishing to be pious, does he agree that at a time when every party talks about the need to combat climate change, we should at least set some example in relation to the mileage for which we claim and the vehicles that we operate?

Mr. Hain: Yes, I do. I speak as someone with a large constituency, with large rural areas, who must necessarily incur large constituency mileage in going about my parliamentary duties.

The proposed provision for the reimbursement of parking—for parliamentary duties only—will be fully justified if the House agrees to reduce the mileage allowance as the SSRB has recommended. If the House rejects amendment (c), I hope that it will also reject amendment (i). If the House agrees to amendment (c), however, I shall support amendment (i), and I hope that the House will also do so. That is because the existing car mileage rates include an element to cover parking charges. Amendment (c) on its own would allow double reimbursement for parking costs.

Mr. Ian Davidson (Glasgow, Pollok) (Lab/Co-op): Will my right hon. Friend give way?

Mr. Hain: I am sorry but I must stick to what I said earlier; otherwise, like a parent with a—I will not continue with that line of thought. *[Laughter.]*

Paragraph (6) deals with the incidental expenses provision. The SSRB's report recommends that the provision be increased to a maximum of £27,500, and that the amount that may be claimed by Members should be abated by £7,500 for each permanent workstation occupied by their staff on the parliamentary estate. As the SSRB acknowledges, this recommendation could involve a significant reorganisation of current office arrangements for many Members, or else a significant loss of income. The SSRB states that it would understand were the House to conclude that the recommendation should apply only to new Members and that certain transitional arrangements should operate for currently serving Members. The Government believe that it would be appropriate for the Members Estimate Committee to give further consideration to this matter, particularly in the light of the points raised during this debate and the strong views expressed.

I fully support the principle behind the SSRB's recommendation—we must take steps to relieve pressure on the parliamentary estate, and we must address the current disincentives discouraging Members from basing their staff in constituency offices—but there are a number of other factors to take into account, which the SSRB was not able to address: security, for example, and the administration of House services. The Members Estimate Committee will be able to consider the various factors in the round.

On parliamentary pensions, the SSRB has made two recommendations. I am grateful to the trustees and their chairman for their work on this matter. Before I examine the matter, I want to say on behalf of the House how indebted we are to those Members who serve as our trustees. They have important and wide-ranging duties and responsibilities, and I would like to record my particular thanks to the hon. Member for Bournemouth, West (Sir John Butterfill) and his fellow trustees for their continued excellent service in running our pension scheme.

The second motion before the House is to implement the SSRB recommendation that the contribution rate for those scheme members who have opted for their pension to build up at a rate of one fortieth of final salary for each year of service should increase from 9 per cent. to 10 per cent. It may be recalled that in 2002, the SSRB recommended that, in the first instance, the contribution rate of members who opted for the one-fortieth accrual rate should increase to 9 per cent. It recommended that the remaining cost of the benefit improvement should be taken into account in subsequent reviews of pay and allowances. That would mean that eventually the full cost of implementation would be borne by Members on an ongoing basis. The Government accepted that recommendation.

[Mr. Hain]

The SSRB has now considered the options for recovering the remaining cost. It has concluded that it would be unfair to restrict future pay increases for all Members irrespective of whether they had opted for the one-fortieth accrual rate. It has instead recommended that the contribution rate for those who opted for the improved accrual rate should increase by 1 per cent. from 1 April 2004. It considers that an appropriate step towards recovering the full cost. The SSRB remains of the view that the full cost of the benefit improvement should in due course be borne by Members on an ongoing basis. It intends to take the outstanding amount into account in its next review of parliamentary pay and allowances.

The Government are content with the SSRB's recommendation to phase the recovery of the additional cost and believe that it should be implemented. If the House agrees, I understand that the trustees would propose that the collection of arrears back to 1 April this year should be spread over the balance of the current tax year, so that Members are not saddled suddenly with a huge bill. The Government are happy with that approach.

The SSRB has recommended that the trustees should decide what action to take on the recommendations outstanding from its 2001 report. The main outstanding recommendations relate to the extension of survivor benefits to unmarried partners and the introduction of pensions for life for surviving widows and widowers. The Government's policy is that such benefit improvements could be introduced only if Members are prepared to meet the additional costs. That is consistent with our line on other public service schemes. In 2001, the House expressed its view rightly that survivor benefits should apply to unmarried partners as well as spouses. I have therefore been in discussion with the trustees about how those important provisions can be introduced in a way that is fair to Members and to the taxpayer. The issue of civil partners is slightly different. It is expected that the scheme will be amended to provide benefits for surviving civil partners, and that any additional costs arising from that will be met by the Exchequer.

The Government have noted the observation made by the SSRB in its report that phasing out the favourable early retirement terms in the scheme would be consistent with the Government's policy on public service pension age and might make possible benefit improvements as part of a package. The Government therefore feel that this represents a sensible way forward. The additional cost of providing pensions to partners and not just spouses can therefore be offset and remain cost-neutral by implementing the new retirement provisions.

Mr. Davidson: Given that the Leader of the House and several of his Government colleagues have said on a number of occasions that they wish that a variety of hon. Members would go away, is not this change inconsistent, as it makes it less likely that they will do so?

Mr. Hain: I do not remember any such recommendation from me unless it was in respect of Conservative Members of Parliament. It would be good to see more Labour Members of Parliament in the House. *[Laughter.]* I am not going down that road, either.

The Government's policy on pension age, first announced in the 2002 pensions Green Paper, is that the rules of public service schemes should be changed to make an unreduced pension payable from age 65 rather than 60.

Mr. Andrew Miller (Ellesmere Port and Neston) (Lab): A uniquely separate set of circumstances applies to Members of Parliament compared with other public sector workers: the trigger dates for our choices are not in our hands but in the hands of the Prime Minister. I note that the motion says that the scheme will be

"phased out for existing members from 1st April 2009".

I see nothing in the Command Paper that defines the methodology in that regard. Will that be subject to a separate resolution, and will there be consultation with the trustees?

Mr. Hain: There will certainly be consultation with the trustees. I have already discussed the matter with their chairman. There will not be a separate motion; this motion will decide the matter.

All Members are to be allowed to draw pension before the age of 65 on an actuarially neutral basis, not just those with at least 15 years' service. Those who have at least 15 years' service on 31 March 2009 will continue to be eligible for early retirement terms which are more favourable than actuarially neutral. Those who serve beyond 1 April 2009 will not have access to an unreduced pension before the pension age of 65.

Mr. Miller: So it will not be phased out, as the motion says; it will be ended. Perhaps the motion should be amended accordingly.

Mr. Hain: The end date is 2009 or the general election after next, whichever is the later.

Mr. Miller: That is not phasing.

Mr. Hain: It is. I am sure my hon. Friend will understand this. Each individual Member is in a different position owing to differences in age and length of service, so this provision affects them in different ways. I could give various examples, including that of my own position, if that is of any interest.

Mike Gapes: Is there not an important difference between introducing changes that affect new Members and introducing changes that affect many Members, including me, in a way that does not involve a right to vote on it as a separate item, and puts us in an invidious position? We will have to vote something down in order to defend our own position, because we can see the difficulties that it will cause us by forcing us either to go very early or to stay until we are about 67. This has not been thought through clearly. Can my right hon. Friend please look at it again?

Mr. Hain: I am sorry to have to tell my hon. Friend, with whom I have a long-standing friendship, that he should study the detail. His position will not be prejudiced, except in one respect.

We are seeking to bring the House of Commons in line with civil servants and other public sector workers, including my hon. Friend's constituents. We are here by permission of the electorate. There is a real problem if we are saying that because of the ageing society and the cost of providing pensions at the taxpayer's expense—which applies in our case as well—we should have fantastically more advantageous pension conditions than our constituents who work in the public sector. We are trying to bring the Government's changes in line with demographic factors affecting the country.

Sir John Butterfill: May I explain why "phasing out" is, in my view, an appropriate term? The changes will come into force gradually. As from this November, new Members will no longer be entitled to the early retirement provision. Existing Members will continue to be entitled to the provision until 2009 and possibly beyond, depending on the date of the general election. Some Members who are re-elected after the next general election will continue to be entitled to the existing arrangements, even possibly until the following general election, so it is a phasing process. The motion will enable the trustees to change the rules of the scheme to allow all this to be put in place.

Mr. Hain: The lucidity of the hon. Gentleman's intervention explains why he is chairman of the trustees and, perhaps, why I am not.

The point is—I think the whole House will understand this, and back it—that the Government are phasing out generous early retirement provisions in the public sector. It would be inconsistent, and would not be understood by our constituents, if we exempted ourselves from these provisions. We must be careful not to cause our own voters to think we are putting ourselves in an extremely privileged position.

The pension age in the parliamentary scheme is already 65, but Members with at least 15 years' service can retire early before that age on favourable terms. Those terms include the ability, often referred to as the "rule of 80", to draw unreduced benefits if they retire early—between the ages of 60 and 65—provided that age plus service totals at least 80.

The third motion proposes a package addressing the issues relating to survivor benefits and early retirement. It would be at least cost-neutral to the Exchequer, which is an important requirement. It proposes the introduction of pensions for surviving unmarried partners of existing active Members, calculated on the same basis as pensions for widows and widowers. I am sure that that will be widely welcomed, as it is in line with the decision already made by the House in principle.

The trustees and the Government Actuary would be involved in working out the detailed implementation of the package, as was mentioned by the chairman of the trustees. In the case of survivor pensions that would include, for example, consideration of what constitutes an eligible partner, and measures to ensure that the provisions remain affordable.

The motion proposes that pensions for widows, widowers and surviving partners of existing active Members should be payable for life, and not cease on remarriage or cohabitation as widow and widower pensions do at present. That is an anomaly, which we are correcting. It also proposes that the favourable early retirement terms should be removed for new Members immediately, and phased out—I insist that that is the correct term—for existing Members from 1 April 2009 or the day after the general election after next, whichever is the later.

That means that anyone retiring at the next general election will not be affected. Nor will anyone retiring at the general election after that. Indeed, by 2009 nearly half of us—48 per cent—will be able to retire immediately and draw our pensions without any reduction. We will either be over 65 or will have served for more than 20 years, and will qualify for unreduced benefits under the rule of 80. A further 17 per cent of us—including me, as it happens—will either be able to retire then and draw our pensions on better than actuarially neutral terms, or have the potential to do so when we are older.

Mr. Betts: First, will my right hon. Friend spell out more clearly the nature of the residual benefit that will remain after 2009? I do not entirely understand—perhaps other Members do not either—what will happen to those who retain some potential benefit under the existing scheme. Will it go completely after 2009, or will it continue in some form?

Secondly, does my right hon. Friend accept what was said by my hon. Friend the Member for Ellesmere Port and Neston (Mr. Miller)? There is a difference between Members of Parliament and those in other schemes. We cannot go on our 65th birthdays; we have to go on the date of the general election. If people cannot go with reduced pensions before they are 65, my right hon. Friend is effectively saying that the average retirement age of MPs is 67 or 68.

Mr. Hain: These are complex matters. We already have generous pensions by most people's standards: the whole House will agree with that. It would be very dangerous if we did not put ourselves in line with the retirement provisions that now apply to other public sector workers, let alone those with much less favourable terms.

Let me give some examples of how the arrangements would work. On 31 March 2009, a Member aged 54 who has served for 13.6 years will have given over 15 years' service but will not meet the rule of 80. That Member will be able to draw pension before 65 on favourable terms, but not on an unreduced basis. Let us consider the position of a 1987 entrant who, as of 3 November 2004—today—is aged 55 and has 17.4 years' service. As of March 2009, they will meet the rule of 80 and will be able to draw pension immediately on an unreduced basis, so the scheme will continue. As of March 2009, an older, 1992 entrant—aged 59, for example—with 12.6 years' service will meet the rule of 80 and will be able to draw pension immediately on an unreduced basis. As of March 2009, a younger 1992 entrant, aged 43, with 12.5 years' service, will have more than 15 years' service but will not meet the rule of 80. They will, however, be able to draw pension before 65 on favourable terms, but not on an unreduced basis. So it is not the case that Members will suddenly fall over the edge and get no benefit at all; rather, it is a question of providing for these changes in a proper fashion.

[Mr. Hain]

Finally, I note the SSRB's observation that it will be for the Government, in conjunction with the trustees, to consider the implications of the new pension tax regime. The Finance Act 2004 sets out a much-simplified tax treatment of pensions, and I can confirm that that will apply to the parliamentary pension scheme. The Government look forward to working with the trustees on its detailed implementation. I urge the House to vote for these motions, especially those relating to pensions. It is very important that we bring our own practice in line with outside practice, and that we preserve our own conditions in the way that I described. I reiterate the Government's thanks to the SSRB for conducting this triennial review. A respected independent body has recommended certain changes to our allowances and pension arrangements, and I hope that the House will agree to their implementation in the way that I described.

2.1 pm

Mr. Oliver Heald (North-East Hertfordshire) (Con): The Senior Salaries Review Body's triennial review is an important piece of work, and I, too, would like to thank John Baker, the chairman of the SSRB, and its other members, who have clearly worked hard to produce that report. The SSRB has done its work conscientiously for many years, and it is vital that information such as this be placed in the public arena.

In all parts of the House and in the country, it is recognised that Members need services such as staff, postage, transport, and personal and office accommodation, in order to do the job effectively on behalf of their constituents, many of whom come to them for help when they have been turned away elsewhere, or when they have been unsuccessful in their struggle against a particular bureaucracy. We speak often about connecting Parliament with the public, and it is imperative that parliamentarians maintain, and be seen to maintain, the highest standards of probity and adherence to the principles of public life. But it also should not be forgotten that we do a vital job, and that when our constituents most need help, they come to us.

The work and independence of the SSRB has been important in providing the public with an element of reassurance about our accountability. Members of Parliament were first paid in 1911, and our pay levels have always been controversial, primarily because we are one of the few groups with the power to set our own salaries. The mechanism for mitigating this is, and has been since 1970, the objective assessment of a body that is independent and outside Parliament: the SSRB.

Since that time, the SSRB's terms of reference have been revised on several occasions. The development of its role is welcome, but I still feel that there is scope for making the setting of parliamentary salaries more independent, and in particular for finding firm employment comparators for Members—and sticking to them.

On allowances, I welcome the fact that more of the services necessary to Members are being provided centrally by the House authorities. That has already happened with computers, and such an approach is being tested with the travelcard. The move towards pay scales for staff is a further important step in the right direction. However, I have a concern that seems to be shared in all parts of the House, and I wonder whether you also share it, Mr. Deputy Speaker. The SSRB compares us to chief executives of councils and businesses. Such people employ private secretaries, and their costs are treated as something that a council or company would necessarily provide. Nobody ever talks about them receiving "expenses" or allowances in that regard; such things are treated as the tools of the job, not a perk. So I hope that on another day, we can discuss how these matters might be better presented in future.

The Deputy Leader of the House of Commons (Mr. Phil Woolas): The hon. Gentleman is making a very powerful point, and it might help his case if I remind him that the comparators that the SSRB uses for Members are in fact head teachers of middle-ranking secondary schools and police superintendents. I perhaps wish that it did use the comparator of chief executives of local authorities.

Mr. Heald: I am grateful to the hon. Gentleman. If he looks a little further into the report, he will see that the managing director of a business is treated as one of our comparators in the private sector, as is a particular local authority grade.

Mr. McLoughlin: My hon. Friend mentioned earlier the supplying of computers. The current situation is wholly inadequate, so will he draw attention to recommendation 12 in the report? It states:

> "We recommend that the level and range of IT support offered to constituency offices should be improved to a level compatible with that offered on the Parliamentary Estate."

If Members are to find any way of locating in their constituencies, acting on that recommendation is one of the most important things to do. At the moment, there is a very long way to go, so will he emphasise that that recommendation needs to be implemented?

Mr. Heald: My hon. Friend makes the point about IT very well. He and I both gave evidence to the review, which focused on the position of Members with outside offices and the need for more help. When we considered the incidental expenses provision, we were looking for an element of help for those with offices outside Westminster, and the complexities and difficulties associated with the SSRB's recommendations are something that we will have to contend with.

On this year's recommendations, I want to thank the Leader of the House for discussing with me the form of his main motion. Of course, these are free-vote matters, but I feel able to offer him a strong measure of support. The pensions changes reflect the SSRB's views and the increased cost of providing parliamentary pensions, and they ensure that the main burden is not placed on the taxpayer. That seems non-controversial, and I want to pay tribute to the trustees of the parliamentary scheme, and particularly to its chairman, my hon. Friend the Member for Bournemouth, West (Sir John Butterfill). They have taken the trouble to do so much in terms of training and talking to Members about these issues; indeed, he offered an admirable explanation of the various changes a few minutes ago. The examples that the Leader of the House gave show that such changes are being phased in, and they certainly reflect what is happening in the civil service. I also accept that the salary rate should not increase above inflation.

I accept the motion on Members' allowances, which reflects the SSRB's thinking. However, the recommendations on incidental expenses provision seem over-complex, creating as they do four levels of payment and a six-and-a-half-year transitional period. I am sure that further reflection would be worth while.

I agree with the right hon. Member for Holborn and St. Pancras (Mr. Dobson) that the report seems to contain a large number of references to Officers of the House giving evidence and guidance to the SSRB. It is important that we recognise that, much as we admire their work, they have never run a constituency or party office. Their guidance should be taken into account, but it should not be regarded as the final word on the subject. The principle that those who have an office outside Westminster incur extra costs in providing the services available to Members here seems correct, but establishing non-eligibility to the new payment by reference to how many workstations a Member has seems problematic. A simpler system that retains equality of treatment of Members, but which allows a Member to use part of his salaries budget towards office costs outside London, might well be the way forward. That would also avoid an increase in the incidental expenses provision, while giving an extra element of flexibility within the same envelope. The costs involved should be relatively neutral.

Although there has been some talk of a cost to the House authorities if the change goes through, I do not believe that it is based on any research—I understand that it is not—and it seems to me that unless it has some behavioural effect that has not been described, it should be a relatively neutral proposal. I would like to hear what hon. Members have to say, but I am inclined to support the proposal.

The Leader of the House was right to say that amendment (h) may, on reflection, be unnecessary and it may be worth my hon. Friend the Member for South-West Hertfordshire (Mr. Page) thinking more about whether it is necessary. It may be right for the Members Estimate Committee to look further into it.

Sir Nicholas Winterton: Does my hon. Friend not accept that the ability of a Member of Parliament to employ two people within the Palace of Westminster should be entirely acceptable? I have one and a half members of staff here and have done for many years; the half member of staff is shared with my wife. We have one suite of offices and two members of staff in the office between our two individual offices. There should be no disincentive to having—quite legitimately—one secretary and one assistant or researcher. Surely there should be no disincentive to having that level of staffing for a Member of Parliament?

Mr. Heald: I agree with my hon. Friend and I also feel that it is right for an MP to be able to decide how to run his office within a reasonable band of options.

Mr. Mark Field: Given that my hon. Friend is on the Members Estimate Committee, will he pay some attention to the points that I made earlier to the Leader of the House about the particular strains that inner London Members would face if there were to be an abatement of provision? Will he do his best to ensure that inner London Members and those who do not claim the additional costs allowance and are assumed to have single base will be exempt from any abatement provision?

Mr. Heald: That point is probably best considered in the context of a more detailed report that my hon. Friend could present not only to me as shadow Leader of the House but to the Speaker's Panel, which plays an important role in advising on matters connected with pay and allowances. That would be the best way forward for my hon. Friend and his important points.

Miss Widdecombe: My hon. Friend will be aware that my amendment (d) has not been selected, despite gaining 51 Members in support within a couple of hours of being tabled. I am sad about that. My amendment simply said that in referring the matter back to the Members Estimate Committee, we should express the opinion as a House that it is reasonable to employ two members of staff at Westminster. My hon. Friend has just said that he agrees with that, so does he also agree not only that it is reasonable, but that it is the House's view that the Members Estimate Committee should take it into account?

Mr. Heald: Yes, as I said, but I also believe in a neater approach rather than having so many different rates of IEP, which is the product of the system of abatements. I think that a proposal such as amendment (g) offers a simpler way of proceeding. My preference is to leave the decision with MPs and to have as simple a system as we can. I certainly believe that having four different rates of IEP and a transitional arrangement that creates another four rates of IEP for the next Parliament is not a satisfactory way forward. Having said that, the simple point that the SSRB was trying to reflect in its suggestions—that there should be some extra help for people who have offices outside London—is a good one. Indeed I, my hon. Friend the Member for West Derbyshire (Mr. McLoughlin) and the Leader of the House himself made that point in evidence to the SSRB. In translating SSRB support for the concept into a practical solution, there might have been room for a simpler proposal.

Mr. Jonathan Sayeed (Mid-Bedfordshire) (Con) *rose—*

Mrs. Anne Campbell *rose—*

Mr. Heald: Gosh, an "embarras de richesses". I shall give way to my hon. Friend first.

Mr. Sayeed: At some stage during his speech, will my hon. Friend explain to the House why, when we have built a very large and very expensive new office building, we are running out of space and need these proposals? Can he offer the House any figures about how many staff, Officers of the House and so forth are on the parliamentary estate and do not necessarily need to be based here?

Mr. Heald: As far as Members are concerned, I think I am right in saying that there about 2,500 passes issued

[Mr. Heald]

for them and their teams. The report refers to about 900, who I assume are paid staff, so there is quite a difference between the number of paid staff on the estate and the number of pass holders. As regards the establishment of the House authorities, I do not have the figures to hand, but we should pay tribute to the staff of the House for the work that they do to support us. Personally, I would not want to criticise them in any way, which I hope meets the point.

Mrs. Campbell: I would like to refer to the hon. Gentleman's implied support for amendment (g). He will recall that, a few years ago, staff salary allowances and incidental expenses were not separate. We had an office cost allowance out of which everything was paid. There were reasons for changing from that system to a separate system of staff salaries. It was thought that many members of staff were not being properly paid and did not have proper terms and conditions. I believe that the changes introduced—the Members advisory panel was instrumental in making the recommendations—have had a major beneficial effect on staff pay and conditions in the House. Does the hon. Gentleman agree that amendment (g) takes us back to where we were before those changes were made?

Mr. Heald: I hope to persuade the hon. Lady. I agree totally that we should have an IEP that provides for the physical costs of an office outside the House and certain other expenses, and that the salaries budget should be separate from it. She will recall that it is possible to use part of the IEP to subsidise staff salaries. That might apply to Members who have an operation in London where staff costs are more expensive.

I believe that amendment (g) provides similar flexibility, applying to Members who might have lower staff costs outside London—the salary scales reflect that—but want to use part of it to subsidise the higher costs of providing an office outside London. It provides an element of equality between the two allowances and means that Members can have the same allowances, which is very important in the context of publishing the allowances. We should not have different rates of allowances if the public are going to see them published: they must be on an even basis. I hope that the hon. Lady will accept that making the change will not weaken the principle at all.

Sir Michael Spicer: Further to what my hon. Friend is saying, is it not also the case that up to 25 per cent. of the staff budget can already be used for consultancy purposes and for buying services? The flexibility already exists.

Mr. Heald: Yes, that is a strong point that supports my position.

On amendment (c), which deals with car mileage allowance, it is hard to avoid the logic of the SSRB recommendation that we should receive equality with our constituents. Although I accept the SSRB proposals, I look forward to hearing the arguments of my hon. Friend the Member for Macclesfield (Sir Nicholas Winterton) and others and to seeing how they advance their case. Different circumstances may apply in different constituencies and in different parts of the UK. I will listen carefully to what my hon. Friend has to say, as I always do, and see how much support his arguments gain in the House today.

A crucial element of greater openness has been the detail provided about how Members' allowances are spent and the new publication of those details, which was handled very efficiently by the staff of the House. The old system lacked the necessary transparency and did not provide full information to the public. The publication of allowances has shown that MPs are generally providing a good service and that they need help to do so. I am sure that both sides of the House will join me in that view. Subject to the qualifying points that I have made, I shall support the motions before us today. We should back the recommendations of the review body.

I would have supported the amendment on pooled research facilities, and I hope that it is possible for that issue to be dealt with in some way in the future. It seems wrong that a shared researcher should be treated differently from a person who works directly to an hon. Member. I hope that some consideration can be given to that.

Of course, I shall monitor the strength of support for the various amendments to see whether a compelling case can be made for changes to the Government's plans. I am sure that we will have an interesting and reasoned debate, and I have kept my remarks reasonably brief as I know that many hon. Members want to contribute.

2.20 pm

Mr. Chris Smith (Islington, South and Finsbury) (Lab): I want to concentrate on the SSRB's recommendation on incidental expenses, and especially on the question of abatement for those who have staff here in the House. I have no personal interest in this matter: I am standing down at the next election, so I will not benefit from or be disadvantaged by the proposals. However, I have a very strong interest in ensuring that my successor—whoever he or she is—and those of my colleagues who also represent London seats will not be severely disadvantaged by those proposals.

I shall make five very brief points. First, the proposals in the SSRB report will severely affect those hon. Members with existing staff who have always been based in the parliamentary estate. That is despite, but in some ways because of, the recommendation for a transitional period. The staff to whom I refer have been employed on the basis that this is their place of work. If, even after a period of one Parliament, this place ceases to be their place of work, the SSRB recommendation would amount to a serious change in their terms and conditions of work and could well mean that they have to terminate their employment.

Although having a transitional period is better than imposing such a change immediately, I am not sure that it is sensible for us to create what, in effect, is two tiers of membership of this House. Under the recommendations, some hon. Members would be able to have more staff here, and some would not. That does not strike me as terribly sensible.

Secondly, the provisions in the SSRB report will be very difficult for those hon. Members who represent constituencies in London, but especially so for those with inner-London constituencies. As the hon. Member for Cities of London and Westminster (Mr. Field) noted, establishing a constituency office in the City, Islington or Holborn costs much more than it does in many other parts of the country outside London. To assume that the same constituency office allowance will apply both in London and outside it takes no account of the differences in costs, prices, rent and so forth.

Many hon. Members with inner-London constituencies face an especially heavy constituency case load. I have been in this House for twenty-one and a half years. In all that time I have not used any of the allowances available to me to employ any researchers because I have had to devote all my resources to employing people to work on my constituency case load. At present, the number of cases in connection with immigration and asylum is very large for hon. Members with inner-city constituencies—and especially so for those in inner London—but the allowance system does not recognise the additional costs that those hon. Members incur.

Nothing in either the present or the proposed systems recognises the particular difficulties that face London Members. That is why I have always had my staff here in the parliamentary estate, and why I want to ensure that my successor has the same option, if he or she decides that that is in the best interests of constituents.

Thirdly, the SSRB proposal hits permanent staff but not people such as interns or volunteers, who share workstations and do not have their own. If my right hon. Friend the Leader of the House and the review body are worried about pressure on the parliamentary estate because of the number of people using the facilities here, I would gently suggest that the report is aiming at the wrong target. The report hits permanent staff as I have described, but ignores the pressure that arises from non-permanent staff. That seems a rather partial approach to the problem.

Ian Stewart (Eccles) (Lab): My right hon. Friend mentioned the use of interns and volunteers, but does he accept that the use of such people has implications for the resources of the House? They all need to be trained to use the PDVN system, and they have other training needs that take up the House's resources.

Mr. Smith: My hon. Friend is right, but I hasten to make it clear that I am not suggesting that it should not be possible to employ interns or volunteers. However, if we are taking a serious look at the pressure on the House's resources, we must accept that the problem is very complex. To assume that the SSRB recommendation is the only answer would be to ignore that complexity.

My fourth point is simple and blunt. Although it does not apply to me, I suspect that it will apply to some of my colleagues, especially those representing seats in London. If implemented, the proposals will involve redundancies among existing staff. That is not something that should be considered lightly, and I am not sure that the SSRB has taken account of the costs involved.

Miss Widdecombe: The right hon. Gentleman is taking us through this minefield in an exemplary fashion, but does he agree that the recommendation means that some of the most experienced members of staff would lose their jobs? They are the ones who have permanent workstations, and they have been kept here because of their knowledge.

Mr. Smith: The right hon. Lady is right. I confess that I can imagine saying that only in very rare circumstances, but she is absolutely correct on this point.

Norman Baker: And on hunting.

Mr. Smith: And on hunting, as the hon. Gentleman says.

My fifth point is perhaps the most important. In seeking to remove one perceived discrimination between hon. Members, the SSRB is in danger of inserting another. Its report seeks to help those hon. Members with constituency offices outside the parliamentary estate, but in doing so it would cause serious harm and difficulty to those hon. Members—and especially to those London Members—with offices and staff on the parliamentary estate. I suggest that, instead of removing one discrimination and creating another, the solution is to help the one category of hon. Member without harming the other.

That is why I shall support amendment (g). I believe that it offers an effective way of ensuring that we provide further support and assistance to those hon. Members with constituency-based offices so that they can run them properly and effectively.

The amendment makes sense, however, only if the incidental expenses provisions are left as they are—not enhanced and not abated. If the amendment is passed, I hope that will be the spirit in which the matter is approached. If it goes to the Members Estimate Committee, I hope that the Committee will take into account the concerns that I and many Members on both sides of the House have expressed.

Mr. Hain: With the shadow Leader of the House and some other Members, I am a member of the Committee, so perhaps I can offer my right hon. Friend some comfort by assuring him that we will certainly take close heed of the points that he and other Members have forcefully made.

Mr. Smith: I am grateful to my right hon. Friend for saying that. I would have expected no less from such an exemplary Leader of the House, but I hope that these serious issues will be considered carefully and that the rather simplistic approach that the review body proposes—albeit to achieve a sensible and fair purpose—will not be seen as the right way forward.

Mr. Heald: The Members Estimate Committee will take very seriously the points that the right hon. Gentleman is making and will ensure that they are adequately reflected in our discussions.

May I also say that I did not know that the right hon. Gentleman was retiring? We shall all miss him.

Mr. Smith: That event will occur only when the Prime Minister decides that the time is right for an election, but I am grateful to the hon. Gentleman for his remarks.

Mr. Mark Field: I am aware that many Members want to speak, so rather than make a speech myself I endorse all that the right hon. Gentleman said about the concerns of London Members. All too often, Members with country seats, perhaps especially in my party, do not understand the burdens to which he referred. In my constituency, which is very like his, there are not only 70,000 electors but 40,000 non-UK nationals. I have 600 live asylum and immigration cases, which puts an intolerable burden not so much on me but on the large number of staff I am required to employ. I endorse the right hon. Gentleman's remarks, as well as those of the hon. Member for Ilford, South (Mike Gapes), who spoke forcefully on the matter earlier.

Mr. Smith: The hon. Gentleman is right. The issues are common to all of us who represent London seats. The pressure is great and it has increased during the whole 21-year period I have been a Member.

Mr. Stephen Pound (Ealing, North) (Lab): My right hon. Friend may be choosing to leave the House at the next election but no one could ever describe him as retiring.

On this occasion, my right hon. Friend speaks, as ever, for London, but is he as bemused as I am at a circumstance in which a review body on senior salaries appears to be concerning itself with staff deployment? If there is a problem with staff in the House, should not that be considered in isolation, rather than being spatchcocked into the SSRB report, which will have the most disastrous consequences for people such as my right hon. Friend and me who do not have a constituency office but try to give constituents the best possible service from an office in the Palace?

Mr. Smith: I very much agree with my hon. Friend. I am sorry that amendment (d) was not selected, as that would have enabled the House as a whole to give a clear indication of what we regard as a reasonable level for staff based in Westminster. That would not have taken account of the particular problems for London Members, but it would have enabled us to give a general view. As I am sure my hon. Friend will agree, Members, rather than the SSRB, must ultimately decide these matters.

I hope that my right hon. Friend the Leader of the House, the shadow Leader of the House and the Members Estimate Committee will take those points on board if and when they consider these matters. They are serious matters; they affect the standard and quality of the service that we give our constituents.

Sir Nicholas Winterton: On a point of order, Mr. Deputy Speaker. May I seek your help? The debate has just over an hour to run, but Members whose amendments were selected have not yet made a contribution. Will you make a plea to Members to be brief, Mr. Deputy Speaker? Otherwise, there will be no formal presentation of the amendments that Mr. Speaker selected?

Mr. Deputy Speaker (Sir Alan Haselhurst): I am not sure that it is exactly correct to say that hon. Members who tabled amendments have so far made no contribution to the debate—that is perhaps why the opening speech from the Leader of the House was so long. However, the hon. Gentleman correctly observes that there is a limited amount of time available, so the Chair will do its best to accommodate as many Members as possible—but their comments must be brief.

2.35 pm

Mr. Paul Tyler (North Cornwall) (LD): I am delighted to follow the right hon. Member for Islington, South and Finsbury (Mr. Smith). I listened to him with great care and agree with every word he said. I am not a member of the Members Estimate Committee but I hope that it has taken seriously the issues he raised. I have a particular point of agreement with him, as I, too, can declare a non-interest in most of the matters before us, because I am due to retire at the next general election, which looks as though it will be sooner rather than later.

I want to refer to the principles behind the SSRB report. I accept that it is vital to preserve the principle that our package of remuneration and reimbursement of costs is assessed by an external, independent, authoritative body, just as monitoring and authenticating it is in the hands of rigorous auditing arrangements in the House. However, an equally important principle is that the body must have access to the fullest possible information about the work of parliamentarians. It has become increasingly apparent this afternoon that the SSRB has not been operating on the basis of intelligent analysis of the real work of parliamentarians. Indeed, it has, to a considerable extent, misunderstood the work we do in this place.

The emphasis of the report, especially the elaborate and convoluted section on office costs and the salaries of our staff, seems to suggest that MPs must be encouraged to concentrate our work in our constituencies. We are already under attack for neglecting our core role as parliamentarians—as scrutineers of the Government's legislative programme and of Executive action. If anything were to encourage the media and the public to think of us as overpaid and under-trained social workers, it would be the recommendations of the report, which would push things in that direction. That is a basic misunderstanding of our role in this place.

Within obvious limits, I insist that every Member of the House has the right and responsibility to serve the country and their constituents in whatever way he or she thinks most effective and appropriate. That is critical to the way in which Parliament operates. I fear, as is already apparent from the comments of several Members, that the SSRB does not understand that that is our role.

Nick Harvey: The Leader of the House fairly made the point that Members had the opportunity to give evidence to the SSRB, but, if we were broadly content with things as they were, there was no incentive to do so; only now that we have seen what the SSRB proposes is there any reason for us to comment. Bodies such as the boundary commissions consult after they make their initial proposals. There is more concern about the current SSRB report than ever before, so we must consider the future and ensure that there is a second round of consultation on its proposals before they are signed off; otherwise, we shall be put in the embarrassing position of having to repudiate the recommendations, which we do not want to do.

Mr. Tyler: I am grateful to my hon. Friend for making that point, to which I want to return. As someone who gave evidence to the SSRB, I can speak with authority; there was no evidence from any Member of the House on the vital issue of our role. Nor, as far as I can establish, was there any evidence on mileage. As far as I am aware, no Member of the House gave evidence on those issues.

Mr. Tony McWalter (Hemel Hempstead) (Lab/Co-op): I commend the hon. Gentleman's remarks, but I wish to point out that it is extraordinarily difficult to acquire knowledge about the role of an MP. All our constituencies have hugely different problems and we use our personality and judgment to interact with our constituencies in very different ways. The current rules give us a lot of scope to exercise our judgment, but this report gives us—in my view and, I hope, that of the hon. Gentleman—far less scope to take decisions that will benefit our constituents.

Mr. Tyler: The hon. Gentleman makes an extremely important point. The diversity in the way in which we operate is the result of our very diverse constituencies.

Ian Stewart: Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

Mr. Tyler: No, because I want to make progress. I know that other Members wish to contribute to the debate.

I wish to refer to a point that the right hon. Member for Islington, South and Finsbury made. It is not an answer to deal with one distortion by introducing another. Two wrongs do not make a right. However, I am afraid that is the whole basis on which the SSRB has approached the issue of staffing.

We should all examine carefully the way in which the SSRB has considered staffing allowances. The report refers to

> "modern, high quality, fully serviced accommodation for MPs and their staff . . . available free of charge on the Parliamentary Estate in Westminster, particularly in Portcullis House".

The SSRB then makes a leap to a value judgment. It adds:

> "The present system as a whole acts as an incentive to locate staff on the Parliamentary Estate."

That is why we built Portcullis House.

When I first entered the House in 1974 for a very brief interlude, I had the end of a table and no phone. I had to meet my secretary somewhere down in the bowels of the earth. Therefore, to give us a proper opportunity to do our job, we in the House decided—I think with the nation's support—to improve the conditions in which our staff, and perhaps Members, operate. To refer to that as though it is a retrograde step is extraordinary and seems to go right beyond the way in which the SSRB should look at the issue. It may be that the SSRB's extended its remit itself.

Mr. Dobson: The SSRB's report goes on to say:

> "However none of the MPS who we met said they had actually chosen to establish office facilities or employ staff on the Parliamentary Estate for financial reasons."

It reached conclusions that are plainly contradictory to the evidence that it took.

Mr. Tyler: It is a fair point, but my basic point is that if we decide that we can provide a good service to the country as a whole—we are not just constituency Members; we are members of the UK Parliament as well—surely we should be given some flexibility. It is extraordinary that it appears as though we will be bribed to spend less time in the facilities in which we have recently invested in this place.

There is another more critical issue. What is the prime function of a Member of the House of Commons? What would Edmund Burke say about the suggestion that we should scatter ourselves throughout the country by spending more time with our constituents and that our staff should, too? That would mean that we would not fulfil our role in the House and such an assumption is way beyond the remit of the SSRB. As I understand it, no Member gave evidence on this issue simply because it did not arise at the time of the original review.

Ministers might be only too happy to see some Government Back Benchers and more Opposition Members spending more time in their constituencies. I understand that the Government did not give evidence to that effect; it was given by those mysterious people—the authorities of the House. It is extremely important that we deal with the issues carefully and consider them in the round.

My Liberal Democrat colleagues will have a completely unwhipped vote on the issue, but I must say that I am attracted by cross-party amendment (g). It is also probably helpful to retain what I think is paragraph 6 rather than to push amendment (h) to a conclusion. However—and it is an incredibly important point—if the Opposition parties are to be denied the resources to do our job in the House properly, I hope that the Government recognise that we shall have to review the Short money; otherwise we will simply be prevented from doing our job properly in holding them to account. In the long run, there will not be a reduction in the taxpayers' provision.

I shall deal speedily with paragraphs 2 and 3 on information technology and the London supplement. They are tidying-up and sensible provisions. They may not be as generous as everyone thinks or would like to accept, but they make good progress.

On car mileage, I recognise that some Members, especially those with large and scattered constituencies such as mine and those who have seen the value of their cars depreciate very quickly as they travel thousands and thousands of miles and way beyond what most people in our comparator occupations travel, have a valid point. Most MPs are now faced with a system that fails to assist with the capital cost of an essential working tool for our job. That is not necessarily the case with some of the comparators.

The hon. Member for Bournemouth, West (Sir John Butterfill) and my hon. Friend the Member for North Devon (Nick Harvey) made a very important point about the tax significance of that additional sum over and above the Inland Revenue rate.

Sir John Butterfill: Is the hon. Gentleman also aware that it is by no means clear who asked the SSRB to consider this item? In fact, I understand that the recommendation came as a shock to Ministers and the Cabinet Office. They had no idea that it was going to

[Sir John Butterfill]

arise, which is why nobody gave evidence. There is just a sneaking suspicion that the provenance of this suggestion may rest with the Treasury at the instigation of the Inland Revenue.

Mr. Tyler: Well, what a surprise! I am grateful for that revelation, because it encourages me in my view that the SSRB has been asked to go well outside its original terms of reference on this issue.

Mr. David Heath (Somerton and Frome) (LD): Will my hon. Friend give way?

Mr. Tyler: I hope that my hon. Friend will forgive me, but I wish to make progress.

As I understand it, the Inland Revenue rate was decided three or four years ago, even though it was implemented only recently. It completely fails to take into account the considerable increases in fuel costs in recent years. There is a difficulty with that.

It may be that for quite different reasons—for environmental policy reasons or to lead opinion on the issue—the Government recommended that there should be a change. However, I see no logic to the SSRB coming forward with the recommendation. I want a firm commitment that the Inland Revenue rate will be uprated by the time of the next Budget to take into account the additional costs before I am persuaded that the proposal is logical.

Mr. John Burnett (Torridge and West Devon) (LD): Will my hon. Friend give way?

Mr. Tyler: I shall give way once more.

Mr. Burnett: I sincerely hope that my hon. Friend means that if the Inland Revenue rate is uprated, that will benefit not just Members of the House but the country generally.

Mr. Tyler: Of course, that is axiomatic. Someone said earlier that we were in a privileged position, but we are not. Everyone is in the same position and we all pay tax on everything over and above the minimal level.

I understand the argument that the incidental expenses provision should be referred to the Members Estimate Committee. That view has some merit. I see from the many issues that have already arisen in the debate that an input from Members, based on their practical experience, would be helpful. However, Members are entitled to know what the remit, limitations and constraints of that investigation would be. Will the SSRB's basic objectives be accepted, and what is the time scale for producing the conclusions and implementing them? What will happen in the interim?

I turn now to parliamentary pensions, and I suppose I should now declare an interest. However, given the convoluted discussion that took place earlier, I am not sure how I am affected. Nevertheless, we are all affected to some extent. I accept that it was unfortunate that the long process to persuade or encourage us to engage in adequate saving arrangements in the late 1990s or the early part of this century meant that, when we eventually got round to improving the terms, the world had moved on. It looked as though we were totally out of synch with comparators in other occupations. That creates a difficulty, and I understand the problem and the suggestion from the Leader of the House and the SSRB that there should be some "phased recovery". I have the greatest confidence in our trustees, but some issues have not been properly addressed.

I hope that the Leader of the House will give us a specific assurance that the situation will not set a precedent for going back on explicit promises made to Members only a short time ago about the way in which the rate of contributions will be handled. The fact that the provision is retrospective and will apply from April 2004 also sets an unfortunate precedent. We usually say that we do not want the House to implement retrospective legislation, and I hope that that situation will usually apply to us. Members will face an effective increase of 2 per cent. because the 1 per cent. provision will apply to only six months in the current year.

I entirely agree with the reasonable and equitable improvements suggested for beneficiaries. However, pensionable age remains a fraught question, and there is no way that we are dispelling worries about that today—*[Interruption.]* The hon. Member for Ellesmere Port and Neston (Mr. Miller) has obviously indicated that that is the case. We should bring ourselves into line with people in comparable occupations, but, as has been pointed out, hon. Members, especially those in marginal seats, are not encouraged by the leaders of their parties—not even the leader of my party—let alone the Whips, to say on their 65th birthday, "I'm off, friends."

I hope that the Leader of the House will carefully examine the way in which the SSRB was asked to conduct this review. I take up a point made by my hon. Friend the Member for North Devon. The SSRB made a set of proposals that were unrelated to the matters that hon. Members thought were on the table, so there was no consultation on major changes that will affect the way in which we try to serve the country and our constituencies. That has weakened the package—perhaps disastrously. Although I would hope that an SSRB package would normally receive overwhelming cross-party support when debated on the Floor, on this occasion the SSRB has either been let down, or has let us down—I am not prepared to judge which. Yes, it has an important role to play, but it is not right that it should advance principles about the way in which Parliament operates that are outwith its terms of reference.

2.52 pm

Ian Stewart (Eccles) (Lab): I am pleased to be called to speak in the debate. There are 659 Members of Parliament, so the Members' service has 659 different shapes. I speak for myself on the basis of my experience. I can tell you at the outset, Mr. Deputy Speaker, that if I retain the confidence of the people of Eccles at the next general election and they return me to this place, I shall make an even bigger effort to assist the authorities with their future deliberations on the question of what I call the "MPs' parliamentary service" by submitting oral evidence to the Senior Salaries Review Body. That service ranges from a Member's role in the core aims of the service to the way in which the service is delivered across locations. To be frank, I do not think that we do enough to raise public awareness about such matters and although I accept that each individual Member must decide the most appropriate shape of service for his or her constituency, there are overarching issues which the House can, and must, address. Nevertheless, I support the system through which the independent SSRB reviews such issues as Members' pay and allowances.

I thank the SSRB for its comprehensive report. I understand that some members of the body may be in the Public Gallery today, so I hope that the debate will further their understanding of the many varied factors behind the 659 different approaches employed by Members to deliver such a complex and important service. I also thank the body for agreeing to hear my oral evidence in support of the written evidence that I submitted. Although I am pleased that my request to the SSRB bore fruit, I am sad to report that on two occasions, the former Speaker's Panel on Members' Allowances refused my request for a meeting and did not offer any solution to the problem with the staffing budget that I had highlighted. I thus have great hopes that the new Members Estimate Committee will be much more transparent, accessible and responsive to Members.

I had a lively and stimulating session with the SSRB, which I thoroughly enjoyed. As I have given written and oral evidence to the 2001 and the 2004 review boards, I have come to realise that while my motive for attending the sessions was to ensure that the body understood my views, I also gained clarification on, and a better understanding of, the issues that arose from our joint exchanges.

Like many hon. Members, I have an office in Westminster and one in my constituency. I employ 2.5 members of staff, who are individual members of the Transport and General Workers Union parliamentary branch, which is based in the House. I would like to increase that complement to three full-time equivalent workers. As you are aware, Mr. Deputy Speaker, I have deep roots in the trade union movement as a lifelong TGWU member. I take the view that if there is an identified formal job to be done, someone should be employed to do it and paid at the right rate for it. I should point out that although I am a proud trade union member, I have consistently put forward my views on the basis that I want to be a Member of Parliament who is also a good employer. That is imperative if I am to deliver the service that my constituents deserve.

To deliver that service, we need not only good equipment, but caseworkers, researchers and, of course, the much maligned administrators. I welcome the increase in the staffing budget because I hope that it will go a significant way towards enabling us to employ the three full-time equivalent members of staff that the SSRB recommends at decent and appropriate salary levels. I welcome the SSRB recommendation that the extra pay intended for staff based in London be recognised in their pay ranges.

I am sorry to say, however, that the problem with the staffing budget remains. In my submission to the SSRB, I argued for the abolition of the anomalous cap on staff salaries. I said that the numbers of staff allowed, after account was taken of the criteria outlined by the House and proper staff evaluation, would create a natural cap in the existing system, and I remain concerned. When the previous report was produced, the House's Department of Finance and Administration circulated to us, as employers, the recommended salary scales for each grade of staff. However, the increase in the staffing allowance that we have received each year since then has met only the cost of inflation. Although I have been able to give my staff a pay increase to cover rising costs, I have not been able to allow them to progress up the salary scales. If I were to do that as the SSRB and the Department of Finance and Administration intended, I would have to pay staff at less than the appropriate grade for their qualifications, experience and duties, or employ fewer than three members of staff, which I believe provides a lesser service than my constituents deserve.

I doubt that many members of staff are on the top level for posts such as senior parliamentary assistant. The SSRB and the Department of Finance and Administration recommend a rate of £34,300 for such staff based in London. I am certainly unable to pay that amount. I am sure that many of us have experienced and long serving staff, but we just cannot pay them the highest salaries, even when that is appropriate. We do not have the money to do so because the staffing budget has an artificial cap, which means that if an experienced member of staff meets the criteria laid down in the 2001 SSRB report for the highest grade and if the MP, after proper evaluation, agrees to pay that level of salary, he or she must depress the salary levels of the other two full-time equivalent members of staff or alternatively be forced, like me, to consider employing fewer than three members of staff. The system is perverse.

I hope that the SSRB recommendation to increase our staff budget from £66,450 to £72,000 for Members outside London will help us to make progress on the issue. However, the matter requires further investigation and is still to be resolved. I note that the SSRB recommends a review of job descriptions and pay ranges for caseworkers, which I would support. That should give us a firm basis on which to resolve the matter, and I am happy to assist the Members Estimate Committee or any other appropriate body in order to do so.

It is well known that I take an interest in the provision of information technology equipment. The implementation of the SSRB recommendations in 2001 was undoubtedly a significant step forward. I am glad that the board is unequivocal in advocating that every MP should be provided with three work stations in addition to their own, which is an acknowledgement that we need three full-time equivalent members of staff. However, we must address the increasing use of pervasive technology such as modern mobile phones that can be used as mini-computers. As I have told Mr. Speaker, I am happy to carry out a pilot, and I shall contact him separately on the matter. We need a designated MP IT service unit. Every Government and parliamentary department has its own designated IT unit, and it is not acceptable in this day and age that MPs should have no such support or back-up.

Turning to SSRB recommendations with which I do not agree, I appreciate that pressure on the parliamentary estate has led to proposals for hot-desking. As I have already said, there is great pressure on MPs to take on interns and other temporary staff, but hot-desking is not the answer. Caseworkers generally need access to hard-copy information, particularly in

[Ian Stewart]

immigration and asylum cases. They cannot work just anywhere, if for no other reason than to preserve confidentiality. I am on record as predicting that electronically received constituency casework will increase over the next five to 10 years, which means that MPs will have to employ more staff. However, although e-mail casework is increasing, my constituents are far from emailing me as a matter of routine. Constituents with problems still tend to use a small size of ruled writing paper—so much so, in fact, that I think the pad is passed round the constituency. Our constituents expect confidentiality, which must not be compromised. Hot-desking will not solve the ever-increasing need for space for MPs' services on the parliamentary estate. However, the House must be frank with the public and explain why we need certain resources to deliver a modern and effective service. The more accessible and effective Members' services are, the greater the need for adequate and appropriate resources. We should not shirk that responsibility, and we should be frank with the public.

As the initiator of the "ADAPT" learning project, which has subsequently developed into the parliamentary learning project, I was pleased that the SSRB highlighted the key role of training for staff and, indeed, Members. However, constituency staff are the Cinderellas of the field, so more must be done to allow them access to high-quality training and support. We need to develop the parliamentary learning project to deliver core training for Members' services, including the use of the internet-based distance learning system originally envisaged in 1998.

I shall conclude with a provision that affects our constituencies. I am concerned about the recommendation on the one hand to increase the incidental expenses provision to £27,500 while on the other hand clawing back or slicing off some of that money from Members who employ one or more staff members in London. That detrimental change could lead to a massive deficit that might destabilise our services. My local authority has argued with the Government that a reduction in the overall population does not necessarily lead to a reduction in the cost of providing services. I believe that the same principle applies to Members' services. Once a Member has an office in their constituency, fixed costs for rental and heating apply whether they have one or more members of staff. I also oppose any reduction in the facilities available in the House, as it is self-evident that that is not in my constituents' interests. I hope that my recommendation will be remitted to the Members Estimate Committee so that it can find a more acceptable way forward. I shall therefore support the proposals on the provision of incidental expenses tabled by my right hon. Friend the Leader of the House.

I have not yet addressed the recommendations on Members' pay. The SSRB reports that it received no submissions from MPs proposing that their pay be increased. I gave oral evidence to the SSRB and, on both occasions, I declined when I was asked if I wished to comment on Members' pay. To date, I have been happy with an inflation-proof increase on an annual basis. The next SSRB report is scheduled for 2006, but I thank the board for its present report. While I do not agree with all of it, it is lucid and easy to read. I hope that some of its key recommendations will command the support of the House, and I welcome the fact that it will be referred back to deal with the concerns that I have highlighted, namely hot-desking and the proposals on the incidental expenses provision.

3.6 pm

Mr. Richard Page (South-West Hertfordshire) (Con): I wish to speak in support of amendment (g). The Leader of the House and my hon. Friend the Member for North-East Hertfordshire (Mr. Heald) can relax, as I do not propose to speak to amendment (h) or press it to a vote.

I am exceedingly grateful to right hon. and hon. Members who have supported amendment (g). Like the right hon. Member for Islington, South and Finsbury (Mr. Smith), I belong to the select band of Members who, after 28 years of service, will not stand at the next election, so I can press amendments without fear or favour. I tabled the amendment because I am concerned that the House is getting into a bit of a muddle. When I leave, I want to be sure that everything is sweetness and light and runs properly. At the outset, however, I should make it clear that I am not critical of the way in which the SSRB has determined its figures. Whatever mysterious method it uses, I have no quarrel with the total sum. However, the money should be divided equally between all Members of Parliament and, as elected representatives, we should take responsibility for the way in which the allowance is spent, subject to approval from Finance and Administration that it has been correctly spent.

I said that the House is getting into a bit of a muddle—after all the years that I have spent here, I recognise a slippery slope when I see one. I am not sure whether the figure of £7,000 is a bonus or penalty, but it is the start of a slippery slope. I am not sure where it will lead, but I fear that it will further diminish the standing of Parliament. I am afeard that that £7,000 will force MPs to do not what they want to do, but what the allowances direct them to do.

Miss Widdecombe: Will my hon. Friend comment on the farcical situation that would ensue? Members of Parliament would be so penalised by the rule of £7,500 per work station that they would end up—as I would—with insufficient money to pay the rent for their constituency office, which is the exact opposite of the intended effect of the proposals.

Mr. Page: My right hon. Friend, who had the wit and wisdom to support my amendment, makes a valid point. We must return to a clearer and simpler system, so that we avoid those difficulties. One or two hon. Members have said that the SSRB should stop trying to engineer accommodation in the House and stick to its overall task.

Mr. McLoughlin: Does my hon. Friend accept that another problem with the recommendations in the SSRB report is that, now that allowances are to be published each year, the very fact that certain Members will be able to claim £27,000 in incidental expenses provision while other Members will perhaps be able to claim only £5,000 may give the public a very distorted view of what is being claimed or the benefit that a Member of Parliament is getting?

Mr. Page: One of the advantages of speaking so late in a debate about one's own amendment is that it will have been trawled and trampled over, and generally explained to everybody to the nth degree. In fact, I wonder why I am speaking to amendment (g) at all. Apart from the Leader of the House, who got himself into such a muddle trying to answer questions about these matters, everybody agrees that the amendment is a good thing. Perhaps I should sit down and leave it at that, but I have never known a Member of Parliament not use some words when the opportunity to do so is available. As my time is running out in this place and this is such an opportunity, I should like to say just a little bit more, but I promise that it will be only a little bit.

The main purpose of amendment (g) is to restore to Members the right to restructure their offices however they think best in order for them to carry out their parliamentary and constituency duties. That is the raison d'être of the amendment. As has been mentioned, prior to 2001 all Members were treated equally with regard to allowances. Many aspects of those reforms were welcome, but in my view they started this very unhelpful trend towards ending the uniformity of allowances for Members and introducing an element of persuading Members, by the allowances that were available, to restructure their offices in a particular way that was not their way, but the allowances' way. The £7,000 would accelerate that trend.

I welcome the greater transparency in laying down and publicising Members' allowances, but I think that, in order to be believable—this relates to the point that my hon. Friend the Member for West Derbyshire (Mr. McLoughlin) has just made—those allowances must be made irrespective of where Members' constituencies are and of whether and where they have decided to have a principal office. First, we had extra allowances for Members with London constituencies, and now Members who choose to base their staff in Westminster rather than in their constituency will, if the proposals are agreed to, have their allowances reduced. It is not a fair comparison. We have all had media interest in our various allowances, and we have had it to a greater degree over the past few weeks.

More importantly, I strongly believe that Members should not be subject to financial pressures in deciding how best to structure their offices in order to do the best job for their constituents. They have to stand up in front of their constituents at the election, and I believe that they should not be subject to outside pressures telling them how they should have been running their affairs. As the House will know, the unique nature of each constituency means that there cannot be such a one-size-fits-all arrangement for Members' offices. The Leader of the House accepted that view when he delicately accepted—I was about to say dodged, but perhaps I shall withdraw that—the points made by hon. Members on this matter.

I shall not expand on that point, except to give just one example. On the day when the list of MPs' expenses was published, the hon. Member for Caithness, Sutherland and Easter Ross (John Thurso)—I did not tell him that I would mention him in the debate, but I do not believe that he will be upset, because what I have to say is in no way critical—said that he had chosen not to have a fixed office in his constituency on account of the huge geographical area that it covers and the distances between its various towns and villages. Instead, he chooses to travel to his constituents and receive logistical support from his Westminster-based staff. If that is the arrangement that he wants, it is the arrangement that he should have. There should be flexibility in the allowance system to enable him to do exactly that. I believe that the review body's proposals would unfairly penalise those with such arrangements.

Ian Stewart: Does the hon. Gentleman remember that in the 2001 report and the subsequent debate, a special circumstances allowance was referred to? To date, we know of no hon. Member who has applied—I am aware that some have done so—who has achieved any success from that allowance.

Mr. Page: I am not responsible for who gets or does not get any of these so-called special allowances. I believe that there should be an overall, even amount for Members of Parliament, and that it is for them alone to decide how that money is spent.

In short, Members have widely different responsibilities and constituents' needs, and the allowance should give maximum flexibility in office arrangements. Amendment (g) would be easy to administer and control, and would ensure that responsibility is where it should be—with the Member.

Several hon. Members *rose*—

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Order. Although the length of time for debate is not fixed from the Chair, I am anxious that there are a number of what might be called stakeholders who will expect to contribute to the debate. May I please appeal now for extreme brevity, as we need a winding-up speech at the end of the debate, and there is not a lot of time left?

3.16 pm

Mrs. Anne Campbell (Cambridge) (Lab): I should like to speak in favour of the main motion, which largely reflects the recommendations of the SSRB.

I want also to take this opportunity to pay tribute to the work done by my hon. Friend the Member for Eccles (Ian Stewart) in initiating the Adapt project, which has led to some extremely valuable training provision for our staff. My staff have found that training extremely useful and valuable, and it has also been valuable to me as a Member. The work that he did was pioneering stuff, and I congratulate him on it. I assure him that the Members' advisory panel carefully considered his submission to us; although we did not call him to give evidence, that submission was extensively considered, and I am sorry that we were unable to follow through the recommendation.

The amendments raise some issues that I would like to address. I oppose amendment (g), which was tabled by the hon. Member for South-West Hertfordshire (Mr. Page), because I think that it breaks an important principle that was introduced after the 2001 election.

[Mrs. Anne Campbell]

The principle was introduced because it was feared that many members of staff were not being employed under proper terms and conditions. The work done by the Speaker's advisory panel and now the Members' advisory panel, which I chair, led to the introduction of a standard contract for all employed staff, standard pay scales and a staff salaries budget, which was ring-fenced, so that it is in no one's interest to pay their staff poverty wages.

Mr. McWalter: My hon. Friend makes a good point. I agree with her in principle, but as she heard my hon. Friend the Member for Eccles say, there is now no scope for giving proper increments to experienced staff year on year. As I read it, amendment (g) would allow us to do that very thing.

Mrs. Campbell: We are always going to get to a point at which the maximum is reached. It is inherent in the capping procedure that once staff salaries total the maximum, it is not possible to pay increments in addition to inflationary allowances. That is one of the difficulties that we have to accept. Staff turnover is rapid, so one can start new staff at the bottom of the scale and pay increments to other staff, but we all face that difficulty.

Mr. Tyler: Will the hon. Lady accept that if the motion is passed hon. Members will be encouraged to employ interns, partially qualified staff, untrained staff or part-time staff, which she apparently wants to do, rather than maintaining professional staff in the House?

Mrs. Campbell: We must all make a judgment on that, but we all understand the importance of employing permanent staff. I would find it difficult to staff my office entirely, or even mainly, with interns and voluntary staff.

Mr. Dobson: A substantial number of hon. Members supplement the existing money for salaries by taking money from the incidental expenses provision. They do so because they like to give increments to staff, some of whom have worked for them for more than 20 years, and because they like to reward their staff, if their staff undergo training. If they continue that practice and exercise their judgment that their staff should be in their parliamentary estate office, they will not be able to do the other things for which IEP provides, because they will have only £5,000.

Mrs. Campbell: I understand my right hon. Friend's point and do not pretend that the SSRB's recommendations are entirely satisfactory. I use the example to speak against amendment (g), which erodes the important principle that staff salaries should be ring-fenced. Together with the changes to staff pension arrangements, we have put staff employment on a proper and fair footing, and I do not want to see the erosion of that principle.

It is, of course, possible to transfer money into salaries from IEP, but not the reverse, which amendment (g) would allow, and we should hold fast to that principle. I realise that amendment (g) was tabled for good reasons and that it is simpler than the proposal advanced by the SSRB. However, it is better to increase IEP and allow hon. Members to transfer some of it to staff salaries, which they may do now, than to transfer money from staff salaries to IEP, so I cannot support the amendment afternoon.

On the main proposal, I welcome the modest increase in the staff budget. Paragraph 4.9, table 4.3 in the SSRB report makes it clear that most hon. Members spend all of their staff salaries allowance. I personally welcome the extra, which will enable me to reward my staff a little more generously for what they do. I need to employ my full complement of three staff, all of whom work on constituency casework. I do not employ staff to conduct research here because the casework load is so heavy that I need three staff to do it—I can also find plenty of work for the various interns and volunteers who pass through my office. My staff serve me well—they perform an essential service and are much appreciated by my constituents. However, a new rule to increase IEP for those hon. Members with constituency offices and to reduce it for members of staff based at Westminster would present many of us with a conundrum.

Earlier, I referred to the important question of how workstations would count under amendment (g) towards reducing the allowance. I would certainly base my workstation here in the House, which is where I do most of my work, but I do not use it when I sit in this Chamber, for example, and therefore consider it to be available to a member of staff. That addresses the point raised by the right hon. Member for Maidstone and The Weald (Miss Widdecombe) about two members of staff being the norm. One could have a staff workstation and a Member's workstation, in which case two members of staff could be employed for about the same IEP as they are currently.

Miss Widdecombe: This is Monty Python stuff. The hon. Lady's answer is that we should get round the problem not by decreasing the burden on the parliamentary estate but by fiddling how we define "workstation"—forget it.

Mrs. Campbell: I object to the use of the word "fiddling". Examining the allocation of workstations is not fiddling.

Amendment (c) concerns mileage allowances, which I have always considered absurdly generous, possibly because I do not own a car and therefore have rarely had the opportunity to claim them. We should encourage hon. Members to use environmentally friendly means of travel, and the private car does not fall into that category. I appreciate that my constituency is small, that I can get around it by bicycle, on foot and by bus, and that many hon. Members cannot do that, but the current mileage allowance is far too high.

I use a taxi when it is raining, blowing or snowing, which makes a bicycle impractical. Ironically, the current mileage allowance pays about one third of the cost of a taxi. We have recently introduced the possibility of claiming the full amount from IEP, provided that receipts are produced, but because I always spend my IEP—in most years, I exceed it by a quite a large amount—I cannot use that solution. If IEP were to increase, it would allow me to use some of my allowance to pay for taxis, when they are necessary.

I appreciate that many hon. Members will be caused difficulty by a rapid reduction in the mileage allowance from 57.7p a mile to 40p a mile, and we must examine how to introduce that reduction gradually rather than very quickly. I do not support amendment (c), because the Inland Revenue rate has not been increased for many years, and I presume that it would take a long time for its rate—40p per mile—to catch up with the 57.7p that we pay Members now.

Sir John Butterfill: On a point of order, Mr. Deputy Speaker. It is clear that it will not be possible for my hon. Friend the Member for Macclesfield (Sir Nicholas Winterton) to speak to his amendment. Will he be able to move it formally, when time is up?

Furthermore, I shall be unable to say anything about the pension fund, which hon. Members wanted to be explained to them. Can the Leader of the House arrange another occasion for me to do that?

Mr. Deputy Speaker: It is now apparent that not all those whom I identified as wanting to speak are likely to be able to contribute. However, that has no negative effect on the ability to put Questions at the end of the debate.

Mr. Salmond: On a point of order, Mr. Deputy Speaker. Is it not in order for the Leader of the House to move that the debate be deferred or extended, so that these matters can be decided after having been debated?

Mr. Deputy Speaker: That is not a matter that I can determine. The House determined the timing of the debates yesterday on a motion tabled by the Leader of the House, and I do not think that we shall see any change now.

Mrs. Campbell: I was about to wind up, as I have nothing else to say. I shall listen carefully to what others say.

3.30 pm

Sir Nicholas Winterton (Macclesfield) (Con): I am grateful to be called to speak briefly to my amendment (c). I am not frightened of putting my head above the parapet when I believe that it is necessary to gain justice and fairness for Members of Parliament.

I remind the House that Members of Parliament have entered into leasing or hire purchase agreements on cars, or have found other ways to have the use of a car, and they cannot change such arrangements, which might last for up to five years. I believe that it is unreasonable to reduce dramatically the rate of mileage allowance available to Members from the present rate of 57.7p per mile, which is low compared with what we used to have. The purpose of my amendment is to freeze the allowance at the present rate until the Inland Revenue rate—40p per mile at present—has caught up.

We have already heard that the Inland Revenue rate is based on no understood criteria and has not been increased for a number of years, despite the fact that motoring costs, particularly fuel costs, have increased dramatically in the past four or five years. The Leader of the House knows that in the last two or three months alone the cost of petrol and diesel has increased by 7p or 8p per litre. It would be an injustice not to reflect that in the mileage allowance that Members are able to claim.

Mr. Heath: Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

Sir Nicholas Winterton: I shall in a moment.

We have agreed to have no increase in salary this year, other than the inflation increase. At April 2003, the median salary of the typical private sector comparator was £68,000, and that of the typical public sector comparator was £65,000. Our salary is £57,500, so our earnings are well below those of the comparators with which we are supposed to be matched. It is therefore unfair that from 1 April next year Members of Parliament face a dramatically reduced mileage allowance, which bears no resemblance to the true cost of motoring. I understand that Members who travel 20,000 miles a year will lose £3,600 from their income. Is that fair? I do not believe that it is.

Mr. Heath: Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

Sir Nicholas Winterton: I am sorry, but I have been advised to keep going because of the time. I apologise profusely to the hon. Gentleman.

I wish to draw the House's attention to the threshold. My constituency is about 180 miles from London. My wife and I generally, but not always, travel to London by car rather than by train, because doing so enables us to do our job in our constituencies better—we are able to attend more meetings and meet more constituents. Every time we do that journey, we save the taxpayer £380. I get only a modest allowance for travelling by car, so I already subsidise every mile that I travel on constituency or parliamentary duties. I hope that the Leader of the House will say that my amendment will be decided on a genuinely free vote. It is wrong that Members of Parliament should so heavily subsidise their parliamentary activities. I feel very deeply about this. I am delighted that my amendment has received support from the Labour party—the Government party—the Liberal Democrat party, the Democratic Unionist party, and Her Majesty's Opposition: the Conservative and Unionist party.

I ask only for fairness. There has been a huge rise in the cost of motoring. In my constituency, it is 26 miles from north to south and 16 miles from east to west. I attend numerous events. We do not have the public transport that the hon. Member for Cambridge (Mrs. Campbell) appears to have. I cannot get from the north to the south of my constituency by public transport or, for that matter, by bicycle, unless I spend a huge amount of time that reduces the time available to serve my constituents.

I say this to the Leader of the House: please let us have justice for people who seek to do a good job and to use their car only when it is necessary to do so in support of their parliamentary activities. The Senior Salaries Review Body is abusing its position by interfering in this matter, which has nothing whatever to do with it. Why it did it I do not know. I see the damp hand of the Inland Revenue; that is deeply regrettable.

[Sir Nicholas Winterton]

Members of Parliament have faced the situation that all their allowances were published in the tabloid press and elsewhere—let us give them a fair crack of the whip. I have been in this place for 33 years. I worship this House and believe that it is the best Parliament in the world. Let us not undermine the role of Members of Parliament by undermining their ability to do the job that they are here to do.

3.36 pm

Norman Baker (Lewes) (LD): I thank you, Mr. Deputy Speaker, for being so kind in trying to call Members who have moved amendments.

I am afraid that I must disagree with the hon. Member for Macclesfield (Sir Nicholas Winterton), although I do so with respect for his position. He says that motoring costs have risen substantially, but Department for Transport figures show that they have decreased by 4.8 per cent. since 1997. I do not agree that 57p is the appropriate rate for mileage. The recommendation in the report is right on environmental grounds. Paragraph 4.51 explains why the rate was chosen and says that it includes depreciation, which was mentioned by my hon. Friend the Member for North Devon (Nick Harvey). It states:

> "We received no evidence to justify why MPs should be entitled to a more advantageous rate",

and that it

> "sets a bad environmental example by encouraging and rewarding car use."

If Members feel disadvantaged, they have, as the Leader of the House said, the option of switching to a cleaner, greener car. I endorse his view. I hope that he will have had some sway with his colleagues, and that if amendment (c) is carried, he will support my amendment (i).

The proposal on parking charges was not in the report but was subsequently inserted into the motion. There would have to be strict controls on how that is applied. For example, it costs £40 a day to park in short-term parking at Heathrow airport. No doubt Members could make the case that that was necessary in the performance of their duties, but it would not be good value for the taxpayer.

I will not take up any more of the House's time, although there is a lot more that I could say. If amendment (c) is accepted, I will move amendment (i).

3.39 pm

Sir John Butterfill (Bournemouth, West) (Con): The trustees and I support the amendments that relate to the pension fund. We agreed to the increase in Members' contribution when we changed the accrual rate. The increase of 1 per cent. goes one further step—almost all the way—to paying for that. Perhaps when the next actuarial valuation is made, a further increase will not be necessary. However, we shall not know that until the Government Actuary's Department conducts its valuation.

The package of measures that relate to pensions for widows, widowers and surviving unmarried partners and the payment for life of pensions to widows, widowers and unmarried partners is generally available throughout the country in pension schemes in the public and private sectors, and I fully support it. The need to make that cost neutral influences the idea that we should forgo our early retirement rights. I suggested that in a debate when we discussed forces pensions. It is right and proper that we should fall into line with what is happening elsewhere in society and in the public sector.

The change needs to be phased in, however. The Government's proposal would lead to a process of phasing in which I shall try to explain briefly. For new Members of Parliament, there will be no right to retire before the age of 65 without a diminution calculated by the Government Actuary. All existing Members will have some benefit. Those who retire in 2009 or the day after the general election after next will not be affected. After that, there will be a sliding scale whereby the actuarial factor is diminished to take account of Members' length of service so that they will not pay the full actuarial reduction but some actuarial reduction, tempered by a table that my fellow trustees and I, together with the Leader of the House and the Government Actuary, will construct. We will send full details of that to all hon. Members as soon as they are available. However, no existing Members will have a full actuarial reduction if they retire before they are 65.

3.42 pm

Mr. Alex Salmond (Banff and Buchan) (SNP): I understand that time is pressing. With the exception of the contribution of the hon. Member for Bournemouth, West (Sir John Butterfill), whose expertise I respect, much of the rest of the SSRB's report is a dog's breakfast. I believe that that is due to a lack of familiarity with some of the detail of the allowances. The Leader of the House would have been better advised to refer the SSRB report in its entirety, rather than only one aspect of it, to the Members Estimate Committee. That would have been better for the treatment of the recommendations and, I suspect, for the outcome.

I want to speak for one minute on a small matter. It is frustrating that I have failed to get it progressed. Perhaps it is a symptom of our treatment of such issues that something so minor has not been progressed. The SSRB defines the additional costs allowance as it is described on the House of Commons website. It states that the purpose of the allowance is

> "To reimburse Members for costs incurred when staying overnight away from their main home whilst performing Parliamentary duties."

However, the additional costs allowance was brought into being by a motion in December 1971 and defined specifically as being for parliamentary duties in London or the constituency. At that time, there was no National Assembly for Wales or Scottish Parliament. For a small number in the north of Scotland and perhaps in rural Wales, it is often physically impossible to carry out parliamentary duties with Scottish or Welsh Ministers or, indeed, Westminster Ministers when they are visiting the relevant Parliament, without staying overnight, away from home.

The Fees Office solution, which is bound by a previous resolution, is to tell Members to claim out of their IEP. However, it is clear from the SSRB report that IEP is not designed to pay for Members' overnight expenses. The additional costs allowance should do that. I am not asking for an increase in the allowance, merely for the ability to claim from the correct allowance for meeting a Minister in the Scottish Parliament or the National Assembly for Wales instead of being told to claim from an allowance that was not designed for that purpose.

This affects a very small number of Members, but I would have thought that it was a very simple matter to resolve. I had a meeting with the Leader of the House last year to attempt to progress it, and I find it highly frustrating that something so simple, so clear and so obvious cannot be done to bring the House up to date in regard to its expenses provision. I strongly suspect that, if the SSRB were more familiar with the nature of our allowances, it would have had no objection whatever to my proposal. I therefore hope that the Members Estimate Committee will, if the House decides to charge it with considering these matters, introduce this minor amendment. It would make life for a few Members much easier by bringing the allowances into line with what they were originally intended to do, and by bringing them into terms with reality.

3.45 pm

The Deputy Leader of the House of Commons (Mr. Phil Woolas): I thank all the right hon. and hon. Members who have contributed to the debate, not only this afternoon but in the extensive work that they have done before. Members such as the hon. Member for Bournemouth, West (Sir John Butterfill) and my hon. Friend the Member for Cambridge (Mrs. Campbell) have put in a huge amount of time and effort on behalf of us all—often without thanks, as we have seen this afternoon. I thank them and all the other Members who have taken part.

I emphasise that, as this is a House matter, this will be a free vote for Back Benchers on this side and, I know, on the Opposition side—*[Interruption.]* If hon. Members will be patient, I shall explain. My right hon. Friend the Leader of the House has a duty to put forward the recommendations of the independent report from the SSRB, which the House commissioned. He cannot cherry-pick, should not cherry-pick, and has not cherry-picked the recommendations. This is an independent report and it is presented to us to ensure that the integrity of the House is maintained.

I want to go through some of the arguments in favour of the motion and against the amendments—*[Interruption.]* If the hon. Member for Buckingham (Mr. Bercow) would stop chuntering, he might find that he has some sympathy with what I have to say—*[Interruption.]* He is chuntering and chattering, as is normally the case. As I was saying, it is incumbent on us to put these recommendations before the House. As the Leader of the House acknowledged, there is some difficulty in regard to the recommendations on incidental expenses provisions. The SSRB report recognises that some of the matters that it has been asked to deal with—it is the House that asked it to do so—go beyond the remit of considering Members' pay and allowances. Of course, there is an interaction between office accommodation, incidental expenses and staff allowances. It is also a fact—a harsh one—that the parliamentary estate is very crowded, and that has to be taken into account.

The hon. Member for North Cornwall (Mr. Tyler) made the point that there was discrimination under the current system. His worry was that the proposed new system would introduce another kind of discrimination, and that two wrongs would not make a right. That is exactly why my right hon. Friend the Leader of the House has asked for a deviation from the SSRB recommendation in this one regard, by asking the Members Estimate Committee to consider this matter. He has done so because the matter is not exclusively about salaries and allowances.

Amendment (g), which has the advantage of simplicity, has been supported by hon. Members on both sides. It contains a carrot, in that it would redress the discrimination against those Members who lose out by not having staff on the parliamentary estate, but it does not provide the stick, in terms of an incentive to bear down on the staff. I am not arguing that it should do that, or that it should not. I am pointing out that the choice has been put before the House. Hon. Members should bear in mind the fact—as the House authorities, the Leader of the House and I have to—that none of these things come without a cost. We do not know the exact cost of amendment (g), but we estimate it at between £2 million and £3 million. However, we must acknowledge in our deliberations the fact that we are in a unique situation in deciding our own pay and allowances. I am grateful for the indication that amendment (h) will not be pushed to the vote.

On mileage, the hon. Member for Macclesfield (Sir Nicholas Winterton) has pointed out the shock impact of the proposal, in that Members who use cars will lose money. On the other hand, the House has to balance whether it wishes to accept the independence of the SSRB report and the fact that our mileage allowances are better than those for members of the public. If there are problems with the Inland Revenue rates, I suggest that hon. Members take that up with the Government and the Inland Revenue, not make special pleading for their own case.

On pensions, which are perhaps the most important point, it is clear that the increase in the fund is provided by Members' contributions. This is not feather-bedding by the Exchequer; Members' salaries pay those contributions, which sets a good example. However, I believe that we have a moral, as well as a political and financial, obligation to accept these recommendations that the trustees all supported.

It being three hours after the commencement of proceedings on the motion, MADAM DEPUTY SPEAKER *put the Questions necessary to dispose of proceedings, pursuant to Order [2 November].*

Amendment proposed: (g), in line 9, leave out from first 'to' to 'and' in line 11 and insert—

"£80,460 for all Members with up to 10 per cent. of the Staffing Allowance being available to fund a Member's office in his or her constituency.".—*[Mr. Page.]*

[Mr. Phil Woolas]

Question put, That the amendment be made:—

The House divided: Ayes 239, Noes 109.

Division No. 307] **[3:51 pm**

AYES

Adams, Irene *(Paisley N)*
Ainsworth, Peter *(E Surrey)*
Allen, Graham
Anderson, Janet *(Rossendale & Darwen)*
Arbuthnot, rh James
Atkinson, Peter *(Hexham)*
Austin, John
Bacon, Richard
Baker, Norman
Baldry, Tony
Barker, Gregory
Barron, rh Kevin
Beggs, Roy *(E Antrim)*
Bellingham, Henry
Bercow, John
Beresford, Sir Paul
Best, Harold
Betts, Clive
Blunt, Crispin
Boswell, Tim
Brady, Graham
Brake, Tom *(Carshalton)*
Brazier, Julian
Breed, Colin
Browning, Mrs Angela
Bruce, Malcolm
Burnett, John
Burns, Simon
Burnside, David
Burstow, Paul
Burt, Alistair
Butterfill, Sir John
Byrne, Liam *(B'ham Hodge H)*
Cable, Dr. Vincent
Campbell, Gregory *(E Lond'y)*
Campbell, rh Sir Menzies *(NE Fife)*
Campbell, Ronnie *(Blyth V)*
Carmichael, Alistair
Cash, William
Chapman, Sir Sydney *(Chipping Barnet)*
Chope, Christopher
Clapham, Michael
Clappison, James
Clifton-Brown, Geoffrey
Clwyd, Ann *(Cynon V)*
Connarty, Michael
Corbyn, Jeremy
Cormack, Sir Patrick
Cotter, Brian
Cox, Tom *(Tooting)*
Cranston, Ross
Cunningham, Jim *(Coventry S)*
Curry, rh David
Davey, Edward *(Kingston)*
David, Wayne
Davidson, Ian
Djanogly, Jonathan
Dobbin, Jim *(Heywood)*
Dobson, rh Frank
Dodds, Nigel
Donaldson, Jeffrey M.
Donohoe, Brian H.
Doughty, Sue
Dowd, Jim *(Lewisham W)*
Duncan, Alan *(Rutland)*
Duncan, Peter *(Galloway)*
Duncan Smith, rh Iain
Dunwoody, Mrs Gwyneth
Eagle, Angela *(Wallasey)*
Evans, Nigel
Ewing, Annabelle
Fabricant, Michael
Field, rh Frank *(Birkenhead)*
Field, Mark *(Cities of London & Westminster)*
Flight, Howard
Flook, Adrian
Flynn, Paul *(Newport W)*
Forth, rh Eric
Foster, Don *(Bath)*
Gapes, Mike *(Ilford S)*
Garnier, Edward
George, Andrew *(St. Ives)*
George, rh Bruce *(Walsall S)*
Gillan, Mrs Cheryl
Goodman, Paul
Gray, James *(N Wilts)*
Green, Damian *(Ashford)*
Green, Matthew *(Ludlow)*
Greenway, John
Grieve, Dominic
Gummer, rh John
Hall, Mike *(Weaver Vale)*
Hamilton, David *(Midlothian)*
Hancock, Mike
Harvey, Nick
Havard, Dai *(Merthyr Tydfil & Rhymney)*
Hawkins, Nick
Heald, Oliver
Hendrick, Mark
Hendry, Charles
Hermon, Lady
Hoban, Mark *(Fareham)*
Hood, Jimmy *(Clydesdale)*
Hopkins, Kelvin
Horam, John *(Orpington)*
Howarth, rh Alan *(Newport E)*
Howarth, Gerald *(Aldershot)*
Hughes, Kevin *(Doncaster N)*
Hughes, Simon *(Southwark N)*
Iddon, Dr. Brian
Illsley, Eric
Jack, rh Michael
Jenkins, Brian
Jones, Kevan *(N Durham)*
Jones, Lynne *(Selly Oak)*
Jones, Martyn *(Clwyd S)*
Kennedy, rh Charles *(Ross Skye & Inverness)*
Key, Robert *(Salisbury)*
Kirkbride, Miss Julie
Knight, rh Greg *(E Yorkshire)*
Laing, Mrs Eleanor
Lait, Mrs Jacqui
Lamb, Norman
Laws, David *(Yeovil)*
Leigh, Edward
Lepper, David
Lewis, Dr. Julian *(New Forest E)*
Liddell-Grainger, Ian
Lidington, David
Lilley, rh Peter
Loughton, Tim
Love, Andrew
Lucas, Ian *(Wrexham)*
Luff, Peter *(M-Worcs)*
Luke, Iain *(Dundee E)*
McCabe, Stephen
McDonagh, Siobhain
McFall, rh John
McIntosh, Miss Anne
Mackay, rh Andrew
McKenna, Rosemary
Mackinlay, Andrew
Maclean, rh David
McLoughlin, Patrick
McWalter, Tony
McWilliam, John
Mahon, Mrs Alice
Marshall, David *(Glasgow Shettleston)*
Mates, Michael
Mawhinney, rh Sir Brian
May, rh Mrs Theresa
Meale, Alan *(Mansfield)*
Mitchell, Andrew *(Sutton Coldfield)*
Mitchell, Austin *(Gt Grimsby)*
Moffatt, Laura
Moonie, Dr. Lewis
Morgan, Julie
Murrison, Dr. Andrew
Oaten, Mark *(Winchester)*
O'Brien, Stephen *(Eddisbury)*
O'Hara, Edward
Öpik, Lembit
Organ, Diana
Osborne, Sandra *(Ayr)*
Ottaway, Richard
Paice, James
Paterson, Owen
Pickles, Eric
Plaskitt, James
Pollard, Kerry
Portillo, rh Michael
Pound, Stephen
Prentice, Gordon *(Pendle)*
Purchase, Ken
Quinn, Lawrie
Randall, John
Redwood, rh John
Reid, Alan *(Argyll & Bute)*
Rendel, David
Robathan, Andrew
Robertson, Laurence *(Tewk'b'ry)*
Rosindell, Andrew
Ross, Ernie *(Dundee W)*
Roy, Frank *(Motherwell)*
Ruane, Chris
Ruffley, David
Russell, Bob *(Colchester)*
Salmond, Alex
Sayeed, Jonathan
Selous, Andrew
Shaw, Jonathan
Sheerman, Barry
Simpson, Keith *(M-Norfolk)*
Singh, Marsha
Smith, rh Chris *(Islington S & Finsbury)*
Smith, Sir Robert *(W Ab'd'ns & Kincardine)*
Smyth, Rev. Martin *(Belfast S)*
Soames, Nicholas
Spelman, Mrs Caroline
Spicer, Sir Michael
Spink, Bob *(Castle Point)*
Steen, Anthony
Streeter, Gary
Stunell, Andrew
Swayne, Desmond
Swire, Hugo *(E Devon)*
Syms, Robert
Tapsell, Sir Peter
Taylor, Dari *(Stockton S)*
Taylor, Ian *(Esher)*
Taylor, John *(Solihull)*
Taylor, Matthew *(Truro)*
Teather, Sarah
Thurso, John
Tredinnick, David
Turner, Dennis *(Wolverh'ton SE)*
Turner, Dr. Desmond *(Brighton Kemptown)*
Tyler, Paul *(N Cornwall)*
Tynan, Bill *(Hamilton S)*
Tyrie, Andrew
Viggers, Peter
Vis, Dr. Rudi
Walter, Robert
Wareing, Robert N.
Watkinson, Angela
Weir, Michael
Whittingdale, John
Wiggin, Bill
Wilkinson, John
Williams, Betty *(Conwy)*
Williams, Hywel *(Caernarfon)*
Williams, Roger *(Brecon)*
Wilshire, David
Winnick, David
Winterton, Ann *(Congleton)*
Winterton, Sir Nicholas *(Macclesfield)*
Wishart, Pete
Worthington, Tony
Young, rh Sir George

Tellers for the Ayes:
Miss Ann Widdecombe and
Mr. Richard Page

NOES

Ainger, Nick
Ainsworth, Bob *(Cov'try NE)*
Allen, Richard
Armstrong, rh Ms Hilary
Bailey, Adrian
Baird, Vera
Barnes, Harry
Bayley, Hugh
Beard, Nigel
Bell, Sir Stuart
Blears, Ms Hazel
Brennan, Kevin
Bryant, Chris
Buck, Ms Karen
Burden, Richard
Burnham, Andy
Calton, Mrs Patsy
Campbell, Alan *(Tynemouth)*
Campbell, Mrs Anne *(C'bridge)*
Caplin, Ivor
Clark, Dr. Lynda *(Edinburgh Pentlands)*
Clark, Paul *(Gillingham)*
Coaker, Vernon
Colman, Tony
Conway, Derek

Cook, rh Robin *(Livingston)*
Cousins, Jim
Cunningham, rh Dr. Jack *(Copeland)*
Davey, Valerie *(Bristol W)*
Davies, Geraint *(Croydon C)*
Dean, Mrs Janet
Doran, Frank
Drew, David *(Stroud)*
Eagle, Maria *(L'pool Garston)*
Edwards, Huw
Efford, Clive
Fallon, Michael
Fitzpatrick, Jim
Fitzsimons, Mrs Lorna
Flint, Caroline
Gerrard, Neil
Gibson, Dr. Ian
Gidley, Sandra
Goggins, Paul
Griffiths, Jane *(Reading E)*
Griffiths, Win *(Bridgend)*
Hain, rh Peter
Hanson, David
Healey, John
Heath, David
Heppell, John
Hewitt, rh Ms Patricia
Holmes, Paul
Humble, Mrs Joan
Irranca-Davies, Huw
Johnson, Alan *(Hull W)*
Keetch, Paul
Kidney, David
King, Ms Oona *(Bethnal Green & Bow)*
Laxton, Bob *(Derby N)*
Lazarowicz, Mark
Levitt, Tom *(High Peak)*
Linton, Martin
Lloyd, Tony *(Manchester C)*
McAvoy, Thomas
McGuire, Mrs Anne
Mann, John *(Bassetlaw)*
Marlew, Eric
Merron, Gillian
Miller, Andrew

Moore, Michael
Moran, Margaret
Mullin, Chris
Munn, Ms Meg
Murphy, Jim *(Eastwood)*
Olner, Bill
O'Neill, Martin
Picking, Anne
Pickthall, Colin
Pike, Peter *(Burnley)*
Pond, Chris *(Gravesham)*
Pope, Greg *(Hyndburn)*
Prentice, Ms Bridget *(Lewisham E)*
Rapson, Syd *(Portsmouth N)*
Reid, rh Dr. John *(Hamilton N & Bellshill)*
Robertson, Hugh *(Faversham & M-Kent)*
Robertson, John *(Glasgow Anniesland)*
Rooney, Terry
Ruddock, Joan
Sanders, Adrian
Sheridan, Jim
Simpson, Alan *(Nottingham S)*
Skinner, Dennis
Smith, Jacqui *(Redditch)*
Spellar, rh John
Starkey, Dr. Phyllis
Stewart, Ian *(Eccles)*
Taylor, David *(NW Leics)*
Taylor, Dr. Richard *(Wyre F)*
Timms, Stephen
Tipping, Paddy
Trickett, Jon
Twigg, Stephen *(Enfield)*
Ward, Claire
Webb, Steve *(Northavon)*
White, Brian
Woolas, Phil
Wright, David *(Telford)*
Wyatt, Derek

Tellers for the Noes:
Joan Ryan and
Mr. Tom Watson

Question accordingly agreed to.

Amendment proposed: (c) in line 25, leave out from 'With' to 'and' in line 28 and insert—

'immediate effect, the annual uprating of the higher and lower car mileage rates shall cease; with effect from the date on which the Inland Revenue higher car mileage rate first exceeds the higher car mileage rate payable to Members, the higher rate car mileage allowance payable up to a total of 20,000 miles to Members should be payable at the same rate as the higher car mileage rate approved by the Inland Revenue, and with effect from the date on which the Inland Revenue lower car mileage rate first exceeds the lower car mileage rate payable to Members, the lower car mileage allowance payable to Members should be payable at the same rate as the lower car mileage rate approved by the Inland Revenue.'.—*[Sir Nicholas Winterton.]*

Question put, That the amendment be made:—

The House divided: Ayes 118, Noes 193.

Division No. 308] **[4:05 pm**

AYES

Adams, Irene *(Paisley N)*
Allen, Graham
Atkinson, Peter *(Hexham)*
Bacon, Richard
Baldry, Tony
Barron, rh Kevin

Beggs, Roy *(E Antrim)*
Bercow, John
Beresford, Sir Paul
Betts, Clive
Browning, Mrs Angela
Burnside, David

Burt, Alistair
Butterfill, Sir John
Campbell, Gregory *(E Lond'y)*
Campbell, Ronnie *(Blyth V)*
Cash, William
Chope, Christopher
Clapham, Michael
Clappison, James
Clifton-Brown, Geoffrey
Clwyd, Ann *(Cynon V)*
Connarty, Michael
Cox, Tom *(Tooting)*
Cunningham, Jim *(Coventry S)*
Curry, rh David
Davidson, Ian
Dobbin, Jim *(Heywood)*
Dobson, rh Frank
Dodds, Nigel
Donaldson, Jeffrey M.
Donohoe, Brian H.
Dowd, Jim *(Lewisham W)*
Duncan, Alan *(Rutland)*
Duncan Smith, rh Iain
Dunwoody, Mrs Gwyneth
Fabricant, Michael
Flook, Adrian
Garnier, Edward
Gillan, Mrs Cheryl
Gray, James *(N Wilts)*
Green, Matthew *(Ludlow)*
Greenway, John
Gummer, rh John
Hall, Mike *(Weaver Vale)*
Hamilton, David *(Midlothian)*
Harvey, Nick
Havard, Dai *(Merthyr Tydfil & Rhymney)*
Hawkins, Nick
Hendrick, Mark
Hendry, Charles
Hermon, Lady
Hoban, Mark *(Fareham)*
Hood, Jimmy *(Clydesdale)*
Howarth, Gerald *(Aldershot)*
Hughes, Kevin *(Doncaster N)*
Iddon, Dr. Brian
Illsley, Eric
Jack, rh Michael
Jenkins, Brian
Jones, Kevan *(N Durham)*
Jones, Martyn *(Clwyd S)*
Kirkbride, Miss Julie
Knight, rh Greg *(E Yorkshire)*
Laing, Mrs Eleanor
Lait, Mrs Jacqui
Leigh, Edward

Liddell-Grainger, Ian
Lilley, rh Peter
Loughton, Tim
Luff, Peter *(M-Worcs)*
Luke, Iain *(Dundee E)*
McIntosh, Miss Anne
Mackay, rh Andrew
McKenna, Rosemary
McWalter, Tony
Mahon, Mrs Alice
Marshall, David *(Glasgow Shettleston)*
Mates, Michael
Mawhinney, rh Sir Brian
Mitchell, Austin *(Gt Grimsby)*
Moonie, Dr. Lewis
Moss, Malcolm
O'Brien, Stephen *(Eddisbury)*
O'Neill, Martin
Page, Richard
Paice, James
Paterson, Owen
Pound, Stephen
Redwood, rh John
Robertson, John *(Glasgow Anniesland)*
Robertson, Laurence *(Tewk'b'ry)*
Rosindell, Andrew
Roy, Frank *(Motherwell)*
Sayeed, Jonathan
Sheerman, Barry
Simpson, Alan *(Nottingham S)*
Smyth, Rev. Martin *(Belfast S)*
Spicer, Sir Michael
Steen, Anthony
Stewart, Ian *(Eccles)*
Streeter, Gary
Swire, Hugo *(E Devon)*
Syms, Robert
Taylor, Matthew *(Truro)*
Taylor, Dr. Richard *(Wyre F)*
Thurso, John
Tynan, Bill *(Hamilton S)*
Viggers, Peter
Walter, Robert
Wareing, Robert N.
Watkinson, Angela
Whittingdale, John
Widdecombe, rh Miss Ann
Wiggin, Bill
Wilshire, David
Winterton, Ann *(Congleton)*
Younger-Ross, Richard

Tellers for the Ayes:
Sir Nicholas Winterton and
Mr. Ken Purchase

NOES

Ainger, Nick
Ainsworth, Bob *(Cov'try NE)*
Allan, Richard
Anderson, Janet *(Rossendale & Darwen)*
Arbuthnot, rh James
Armstrong, rh Ms Hilary
Austin, John
Bailey, Adrian
Baker, Norman
Barnes, Harry
Bayley, Hugh
Beard, Nigel
Bell, Sir Stuart
Bellingham, Henry
Blears, Ms Hazel
Bradley, Peter *(The Wrekin)*

Brake, Tom *(Carshalton)*
Breed, Colin
Brennan, Kevin
Brooke, Mrs Annette L.
Bryant, Chris
Buck, Ms Karen
Burden, Richard
Burnett, John
Burnham, Andy
Burstow, Paul
Byrne, Liam *(B'ham Hodge H)*
Cable, Dr. Vincent
Calton, Mrs Patsy
Campbell, Alan *(Tynemouth)*
Campbell, Mrs Anne *(C'bridge)*
Campbell, rh Sir Menzies *(NE Fife)*

Caplin, Ivor
Carmichael, Alistair
Chapman, Sir Sydney *(Chipping Barnet)*
Clark, Dr. Lynda *(Edinburgh Pentlands)*
Clark, Paul *(Gillingham)*
Coaker, Vernon
Colman, Tony
Conway, Derek
Cook, rh Robin *(Livingston)*
Corbyn, Jeremy
Corston, rh Jean
Cotter, Brian
Cousins, Jim
Cranston, Ross
Cruddas, Jon
Davey, Edward *(Kingston)*
David, Wayne
Davies, Geraint *(Croydon C)*
Dean, Mrs Janet
Doran, Frank
Doughty, Sue
Drew, David *(Stroud)*
Duncan, Peter *(Galloway)*
Edwards, Huw
Efford, Clive
Fallon, Michael
Field, rh Frank *(Birkenhead)*
Field, Mark *(Cities of London & Westminster)*
Fitzpatrick, Jim
Fitzsimons, Mrs Lorna
Flint, Caroline
Foster, Don *(Bath)*
Gapes, Mike *(Ilford S)*
George, rh Bruce *(Walsall S)*
Gerrard, Neil
Gibson, Dr. Ian
Gidley, Sandra
Goggins, Paul
Goodman, Paul
Grieve, Dominic
Griffiths, Jane *(Reading E)*
Griffiths, Win *(Bridgend)*
Hain, rh Peter
Hancock, Mike
Hanson, David
Harris, Dr. Evan *(Oxford W & Abingdon)*
Healey, John
Heath, David
Heathcoat-Amory, rh David
Heppell, John
Hewitt, rh Ms Patricia
Holmes, Paul
Hopkins, Kelvin
Horam, John *(Orpington)*
Howarth, rh Alan *(Newport E)*
Humble, Mrs Joan
Irranca-Davies, Huw
Johnson, Alan *(Hull W)*
Jones, Lynne *(Selly Oak)*
Keetch, Paul
Kennedy, rh Charles *(Ross Skye & Inverness)*
Key, Robert *(Salisbury)*
Kidney, David
King, Ms Oona *(Bethnal Green & Bow)*
Kirkwood, Sir Archy
Knight, Jim *(S Dorset)*
Lamb, Norman
Lansley, Andrew
Laws, David *(Yeovil)*
Lazarowicz, Mark
Levitt, Tom *(High Peak)*
Lewis, Dr. Julian *(New Forest E)*
Lidington, David
Linton, Martin
Lloyd, Tony *(Manchester C)*
Love, Andrew
Lucas, Ian *(Wrexham)*
McAvoy, Thomas
McFall, rh John
McGuire, Mrs Anne
Mackinlay, Andrew
MacShane, Denis
Mallaber, Judy
Mann, John *(Bassetlaw)*
Marlew, Eric
May, rh Mrs Theresa
Meale, Alan *(Mansfield)*
Merron, Gillian
Miller, Andrew
Mitchell, Andrew *(Sutton Coldfield)*
Moffatt, Laura
Moore, Michael
Moran, Margaret
Morgan, Julie
Mullin, Chris
Munn, Ms Meg
Murphy, Jim *(Eastwood)*
Murrison, Dr. Andrew
Naysmith, Dr. Doug
Oaten, Mark *(Winchester)*
O'Hara, Edward
Olner, Bill
Öpik, Lembit
Organ, Diana
Osborne, Sandra *(Ayr)*
Picking, Anne
Pickles, Eric
Pickthall, Colin
Pike, Peter *(Burnley)*
Plaskitt, James
Pollard, Kerry
Pond, Chris *(Gravesham)*
Pope, Greg *(Hyndburn)*
Portillo, rh Michael
Prentice, Ms Bridget *(Lewisham E)*
Prentice, Gordon *(Pendle)*
Quinn, Lawrie
Randall, John
Rapson, Syd *(Portsmouth N)*
Reid, Alan *(Argyll & Bute)*
Reid, rh Dr. John *(Hamilton N & Bellshill)*
Rendel, David
Robathan, Andrew
Robertson, Hugh *(Faversham & M-Kent)*
Rooney, Terry
Ross, Ernie *(Dundee W)*
Ruane, Chris
Ruddock, Joan
Russell, Bob *(Colchester)*
Salter, Martin
Sanders, Adrian
Selous, Andrew
Shaw, Jonathan
Sheridan, Jim
Skinner, Dennis
Smith, rh Chris *(Islington S & Finsbury)*
Smith, Jacqui *(Redditch)*
Smith, Sir Robert *(W Ab'd'ns & Kincardine)*
Spink, Bob *(Castle Point)*
Starkey, Dr. Phyllis
Stunell, Andrew
Swayne, Desmond
Taylor, Dari *(Stockton S)*
Taylor, David *(NW Leics)*
Taylor, John *(Solihull)*
Teather, Sarah
Timms, Stephen
Tipping, Paddy
Trickett, Jon
Turner, Dennis *(Wolverh'ton SE)*
Twigg, Stephen *(Enfield)*
Vaz, Keith *(Leicester E)*
Vis, Dr. Rudi
Ward, Claire
White, Brian
Williams, Betty *(Conwy)*
Williams, Roger *(Brecon)*
Woolas, Phil
Wright, David *(Telford)*
Wyatt, Derek
Young, rh Sir George

Tellers for the Noes:
Joan Ryan and
Mr. Tom Watson

Question accordingly negatived.

Main Question, as amended, put and agreed to.

Resolved,

That this House notes the recommendations made in Chapter 4 of the report of the Review Body on Senior Salaries on parliamentary pay and allowances (Cm 6354-I) a copy of which was laid before this House on 21st October; and is of the opinion that the provisions set out in paragraphs (2) to (5) below should be implemented, subject to any decisions of the Members Estimate Committee with regard to their application.

Staffing Allowance

(2) With effect from 1st April 2005, the Staffing Allowance should be increased to £80,460 for all Members with up to 10 per cent. of the Staffing Allowance being available to fund a Member's office in his or her constituency; and these sums should be adjusted on 1st April each year (beginning on 1st April 2005) in line with the Average Earnings Index for public and private sectors combined.

IT Provision

(3) With effect from the beginning of the next Parliament, the level of provision of IT equipment and support should be increased in line with recommendations 11 and 12 of the Review Body's report (Cm 6354-I).

London Supplement

(4) With effect from 1st April 2005, the London Supplement should be increased to £2,500, and this sum should be adjusted on 1st April each year (beginning on 1st April 2005) in line with the Average Earnings Index for public and private sectors combined; and it should not be payable to any Member who receives the Additional Costs Allowance.

Car Mileage Allowance and Parking

(5) With effect from 1st April 2005, the Car Mileage Allowance should be payable at the same rate as the car mileage rates approved by the Inland Revenue, with the higher rate payable up to a total of 10,000 miles and the lower rate thereafter or as determined in future by the Inland Revenue; and the cost of parking a car, motorcycle or bicycle, if wholly, exclusively and necessarily incurred in the performance of parliamentary duties, should be reimbursed.

Incidental Expenses Provision

(6) That recommendation 8 of the Review Body's report (Cm 6354-I) be referred to the House of Commons Members Estimate Committee for further consideration.

PARLIAMENTARY PENSIONS (CONTRIBUTION RATE)

Resolved,

That this House notes recommendation 4 contained in the report of the Review Body on Senior Salaries on parliamentary pay and allowances (Cm 6354-I), a copy of which was laid before this House on 21st October, that the contribution rate to the parliamentary pension scheme for those scheme members who have opted for the 1/40th accrual rate should be increased by 1 per cent. to 10 per cent. with effect from 1st April 2004, and is of the opinion that it should be implemented.—*[Mr. Woolas.]*

PARLIAMENTARY PENSIONS (SURVIVOR BENEFITS AND EARLY RETIREMENT)

Resolved,

That this House notes recommendation 3 contained in the report of the Review Body on Senior Salaries on parliamentary pay and allowances (Cm 6354-I), a copy of which was laid before this House on 21st October, and is of the opinion that, subject to consultation with the Trustees of the PCPF and the Government Actuary as to the detailed implementation, the proposals set out in paragraphs (1) to (3) below should be adopted as a package which is, overall, at least cost neutral to the Exchequer:

(1) Pensions calculated on the same basis as pensions for widows and widowers should be introduced for surviving unmarried partners of members in service on or after 3rd November 2004.

(2) Pensions for the widows, widowers and unmarried partners of members in service on or after 3rd November 2004 should be payable for life.

(3) The early retirement provisions which permit a member who has accrued at least 15 years service to retire before the age of 65 on favourable terms should be removed for those who become members of the scheme after 3rd November 2004 and phased out for existing members from 1st April 2009, or the day after the general election after next, whichever is the later.—*[Mr. Woolas.]*

Sessional Orders and Resolutions

4.17 pm

The Leader of the House of Commons (Mr. Peter Hain): I beg to move,

That this House takes note of the Third Report of the Procedure Committee, Session 2002–03, on Sessional Orders and Resolutions, HC 855, and the Government's Response thereto (published as the Committee's Third Special Report of the current Session, HC 613); approves the proposals set out in paragraphs 9, 10 and 25 of the Report for changes in the practice of the House at the beginning of each Session; and, as recommended in paragraph 9(b), makes the following provision:

That all Members of this House who are returned for two or more places in any part of the United Kingdom should choose for which of the places they will serve, within one week after it appears that there is no question about their election for that place.

I had looked forward to seeing headlines in tomorrow's newspapers stating that we had agreed to cut our mileage rates, but somehow I think that that might not happen.

The motion takes note of the Procedure Committee's report on Sessional Orders and resolutions, published last November, and the Government's reply to it. It approves the proposals set out in paragraphs 9, 10 and 25 of the report for changes in the practice of the House at the beginning of the Session. I am grateful to the Procedure Committee, and to its Chairman, for the advice we have been given.

As the Committee's report explains, for nearly 200 years—and longer in some cases—the House has agreed to three orders and three resolutions at the beginning of each Session. They relate to elections, witnesses, the Metropolitan police, and votes and proceedings. The text appears on page 3 of the Committee's report.

Since 1852, these matters have been taken just before the debate on the reply to the Queen's Speech. They are proposed from the Chair without notice, and have occasionally given rise to debate.

At the suggestion of Mr. Speaker, the Procedure Committee conducted a thorough inquiry to consider whether the Sessional Orders and resolutions should be abolished and updated, and came to the very clear conclusion that our traditional practice should change.

First, the Committee considered the First Reading of the Outlawries Bill—a

> "Bill for the more effectual preventing of clandestine outlawries"—

that traditionally is taken before the debate on the Queen's Speech as a symbolic assertion of the House's freedom to consider matters of its own choosing. The Committee notes that the practice takes only a few seconds and recommends that it should continue. The Government agree.

Secondly, the Committee considered the Sessional Orders and resolutions on elections, witnesses and the Votes and Proceedings. It found that the resolution about bribery and the provision for Members to withdraw during any debate on any dispute on their return are obsolete and misleading, as responsibility for election offences and disputes now belongs to the courts, not to the House; that the provision about double returns—two Members being returned for the same seat—relates to an event that cannot now take place; that the order for the printing of the Votes and

Proceedings—the formal daily minutes of the House—is unnecessary and that the provision that the Speaker should peruse them before they are printed is not normally carried out; and that the resolutions against tampering with witnesses and giving false evidence have some value as statements of intent, but add nothing to the House's powers to deal with contempts or, in the case of tampering with witnesses or the giving of false evidence on oath, the statutory powers. The Committee, therefore, recommends that the passing of the Sessional Orders and resolutions relating to elections, witnesses and the Votes and Proceedings be discontinued. The Government agree. The motion seeks the House's agreement to that change.

Mr. Eric Forth (Bromley and Chislehurst) (Con): I hope that at some stage the Leader of the House will tell us why he thinks that those splendid, if slightly archaic, traditions are in any way harmful. This is beginning to look like yet another of the ghastly modernisations that seem to be becoming commonplace, so rather than simply reading out the traditions as if to say that they are self-evidently a bad thing, will he tell us why he thinks it necessary to do away with them?

Mr. Hain: The right hon. Gentleman has no doubt looked carefully at the Procedure Committee's report, so he will know that the Committee recommended the changes—and I agree.

The Committee found that the provision, in the elections order, about Members returned for more than one place is unlikely ever to be needed. It last happened in 1910, but the Committee recommended that the possibility be dealt with once and for all by the House deciding, when agreeing to its report, that all Members who are returned for two or more places in any part of the United Kingdom should choose for which of the places they will serve, within one week after it appears that there is no question about their election for that place. The motion contains that provision.

Mr. Alex Salmond (Banff and Buchan) (SNP) *rose*—

Mr. Hain: I can assure the House that the provision applies to Members returned to this House for two or more places and would not prevent a Member of this House from belonging to another elected body in the United Kingdom.

Mr. Salmond: The Leader of the House has answered the point I wanted to make. I merely wanted to check that there was no insidious, nefarious scheme to prevent any Member from exercising that right if the electorate so wished. The Leader of the House has reassured me and I rest satisfied.

Mr. Hain: The urgency with which the hon. Gentleman leapt to his feet made me wonder what his future intentions are and where he sees himself sitting in future.

Sir Nicholas Winterton (Macclesfield) (Con): May I—uniquely—come to the aid of the Leader of the House to respond, through him, to my right hon. Friend the Member for Bromley and Chislehurst (Mr. Forth)? Mr. Speaker encouraged the Procedure Committee to consider whether the Sessional Orders and resolutions should be retained or abolished. In our informal discussions we came to the view set out in our report that they should be abolished as they are no longer relevant to the modern age in which we live.

Mr. Forth: Ah, the modern age.

Mr. Hain: I shall not rise to the bait held out by the right hon. Gentleman. The Chairman of the Procedure Committee has explained the situation adequately.

Mr. Oliver Heald (North-East Hertfordshire) (Con): Will the Leader of the House explain the logic of keeping the much-loved Outlawries Bill while abolishing other things? What is the logic behind that?

Mr. Hain: It was a radical-traditionalist coalition, following the Procedure Committee's expert advice.

The Committee felt that although those Sessional Orders and resolutions should go, we should still begin the Session with a reminder of matters that the House considers to be of importance. The Committee recommended that there should be a statement by the Speaker of the duties and responsibilities of Members—possibly, the Committee suggested, the seven principles of public life as set out in the code of conduct—together with historic claims to privilege, including those of freedom of speech and freedom from legal challenge embodied in the Bill of Rights 1689. The motion endorses that proposal.

Mr. John Redwood (Wokingham) (Con): Given that the Government have had more than a year to consider these matters, does the Leader of the House have a preferred form of words to present to the House? It might be difficult to make a judgment without knowing what is imagined.

Mr. Hain: As will be evident from the terms in which the debate is being put to the House, we are asking the Committee to look into the matter for us.

Andrew Mackinlay (Thurrock) (Lab): That question needs to be answered, and I hope to return to it later if I catch your eye, Madam Deputy Speaker. I listened carefully to the remarks of the Leader of the House about the use of these words at the beginning of a Session, in which he referred to Members. However, the Sessional Orders relate not to Members but to witnesses and people from outside Parliament who should come here to say the truth, the whole truth and nothing but the truth instead of hiding behind the Osmotherly rules and being economical with the truth. That is the real problem, and he has not addressed it.

Mr. Hain: With all due respect to my hon. Friend, who is a diligent and fine parliamentarian, I think that he has raised a separate issue.

Simon Hughes (Southwark, North and Bermondsey) (LD): I am sure that the Leader of the House understands that this is an important issue, because we could be signing up to a document that is a statement of the way in which we should conduct ourselves. Will he assure us that it will be proceeded with on the basis of a proposal to the House and a full opportunity to debate and consult on it? In effect, it will be our constitution and it should not come to us other than after careful consideration so that the Bill of Rights, the freedoms of the House and all the other things are guaranteed.

Mr. Hain: Obviously, Mr. Speaker and the Procedure Committee will need to be consulted on the detailed wording before we move further.

Sir Patrick Cormack (South Staffordshire) (Con): Does the Leader of the House accept that taking the Oath is enough for most of us? We do not want anything else.

Mr. Hain: I understand the hon. Gentleman's point, which was well made.

The larger, and more controversial, part of the Procedure Committee's report relates to the Sessional Order on the Metropolitan police and the linked issues of access to Parliament and demonstrations in Parliament square. The Committee finds that the Sessional Order is misleading, since it does not confer any additional legal powers on the police. The Committee recommends that the Government should introduce appropriate legislation to prohibit long-term demonstrations and to ensure that the laws about access are adequate and enforceable.

The Government are well aware of how strongly Members of the House, including Mr. Speaker, feel about this matter. We therefore agree that there needs to be specific legislation that recognises the unique position of Parliament and its surroundings. We will introduce such legislation as soon as parliamentary time allows.

Jeremy Corbyn (Islington, North) (Lab): Will the Leader of the House explain exactly what his proposal means today? Is it a welcome for the suggestion of legislation at an indeterminate point in the future, or does it fundamentally encourage the police to behave and act differently from the way in which they have acted hitherto?

Mr. Hain: I think that my hon. Friend will find the answer to his question in what I am about to say. What is envisaged is a sensible proposal that particularly protects access and the orderly operations of the House.

Several hon. Members *rose—*

Mr. Hain: I will give way to the right hon. Member for North-West Hampshire (Sir George Young), but then I had better make progress so that I can explain what we intend and take questions on it.

Sir George Young (North-West Hampshire) (Con): The Leader of the House said that legislation would be introduced as soon as he could find parliamentary time. Will he assure us that it will be introduced within, say, the next six months?

Mr. Hain: The right hon. Gentleman knows from the previous positions that he occupied that I cannot anticipate what will be in the Queen's Speech. He knows that there are protocols and restrictions on me, but I have been pretty clear that we will introduce such legislation as soon as parliamentary time allows. We will do that, and it will be sooner rather than later.

There is legislation to deal with disruptive demonstrations in Parliament square. Under section 14 of the Public Order Act 1986, the police can put conditions on assemblies that they believe may cause serious public disorder, serious damage to property or serious damage to the life of the community. We amended the definition of "assembly" in the Anti-social Behaviour Act 2003 to cover two or more persons.

The Government recognise that existing legislation has not provided the police with all the powers they need to control all protests and demonstrations around Parliament. My right hon. Friend the Home Secretary has carefully considered what more can be done and we propose a new power for the police to give direction to and impose conditions on any protest, demonstration or assembly within the vicinity of Parliament. It will be an offence to fail to comply with a direction. The precise area will be defined in secondary legislation.

There is a difficult balance to be struck. It is a long-standing tradition in this country that people are free to gather together and to demonstrate provided that that they do so within the law. I have exercised those rights to protest, and would defend to the last the rights of others to do so, including in Parliament square. Equally, however, access to Parliament must be maintained and those who work in Parliament should be able to do so free from harassment. We are working on the detail of the new power and will of course ensure that it is compatible with the European convention on human rights.

Mr. Heald *rose—*

John McDonnell (Hayes and Harlington) (Lab) *rose—*

Mr. Hain: I give way to the hon. Member for North-East Hertfordshire (Mr. Heald).

Mr. Heald: Will the Leader of the House confirm that it will be an arrestable offence?

Mr. Hain: That will depend on the exact nature of the legislation that we introduce, but we intend to ensure that it will protect the House in the way that I described.

May I say, perhaps in anticipation of the question that my hon. Friend the Member for Hayes and Harlington (John McDonnell) wishes to ask, that when I organised demonstrations it was impossible to bring them alongside the House of Commons because Sessional Orders and the state of the law did not allow that? That has subsequently become possible and hon. Members have not easily been able to get into the House for votes or to make their way through crowds. Additionally, the problem outside on the square itself is continuously with us, so we need an updated response.

John McDonnell: It is best not to anticipate questions. Will the Leader of the House clarify the motion before us? It says that the House

> "approves the proposals set out in paragraphs 9, 10 and 25 of the Report for changes in the practice of the House at the beginning of each Session".

Paragraph 25 of the Procedure Committee report proposes a new Sessional Order including the wording:

> "that no obstruction be permitted to hinder the passage of Members . . . or to hinder Members by any means in the pursuit of their Parliamentary duties".

When the House reaches a decision on the motion, will we be approving the wording in paragraph 25 as a Sessional Order, or will we still be awaiting the legislation that he proposes to impact on the demonstration?

Mr. Hain: We will be doing both, in a way. We will have to wait for legislation because the Sessional Order does not cover the circumstances that currently affect the House.

Simon Hughes: On the same important issue, can I assume that if we agree to the motion we are not approving paragraph 22 of the Procedure Committee report, which proposes that legislation should be introduced to prohibit long-term demonstrations? Is it the case that nothing that we agree today would prevent the man in the middle of Parliament square from remaining there until legislation that we can properly consider is introduced to determine whether one person, or some or many people, should be allowed to stay in Parliament square?

Mr. Hain: I can confirm that. If the hon. Gentleman reads paragraph 25 on page 11 of the Procedure Committee report, he will note that the situation is clearly explained.

Several hon. Members *rose*—

Mr. Hain: It might better assist the House if I make a bit of progress.

Sir Patrick Cormack: Just for clarity.

Mr. Hain: Well, okay.

Sir Patrick Cormack: The Leader of the House is most kind. I think that I speak for most hon. Members on both sides of the House by saying that the thing that we are most worried about is the defacing of Parliament square that has occurred over the past three years. Will he assure me that any legislation that the Government introduce will apply to what is going on in Parliament square so that the gentleman concerned—after proper notice and following the due process of law—can be removed?

Mr. Hain: The answer to that question is yes, as I shall explain when I manage to reach that point of my speech.

Jeremy Corbyn: I was interested to hear the Leader of the House's response to the hon. Member for Southwark, North and Bermondsey (Simon Hughes) about the current peace protest in Parliament square. Paragraph 25 sets out the suggested Sessional Order under the wording:

> "the Order should take the following form".

Would that be an invitation to the Metropolitan police to clear the central area of Parliament square at all times, or would the status quo be maintained so that demonstrations in that area would be agreeable with the co-operation of the police? The system of co-operation with the police on demonstrations on the grass part of the square works well.

Mr. Hain: There are all sorts of anomalies. For example, the square is, I believe, owned and controlled by the Greater London authority. My hon. Friend should accept that if those powers existed, then, following pressure from Members of Parliament and requests from the Speaker, the noise would have been dealt with. A change in the law is needed, particularly to deal with the noise.

The Government fully accept that maintaining access to Parliament is essential to its working and to our democracy. We must maintain access; otherwise we cannot do our job as representatives in the cockpit of democracy. The police already use their existing powers, including powers under the Public Order Act 1986, to ensure that access to the House is maintained, and our new power will provide them with an additional tool to do so.

Mr. Salmond: The right hon. Gentleman said, almost regretfully, that when he was organising demonstrations he could not get into Parliament square. Many of us are reluctant to back the proposal, because we have attended business questions and listened to a number of Members who think it hugely important to moan about people demonstrating. There should be powers to prevent Members of Parliament from being obstructed when voting and carrying out their parliamentary duties, but some people, including many members of the Procedure Committee, if we read the evidence, conflate that with a dislike of people exercising their right to free speech and to demonstrate. I hope that hon. Members, whatever their party, believe that sacrificing that right is too a high a price to pay, even though some people think that it is a nuisance.

Mr. Hain: There is a balance to be struck. People must be able to exercise the right to demonstrate and protest, which, as I have stated, is an absolute, traditional and fundamental right in our democratic society. However, as an experienced Member of Parliament, the hon. Gentleman will agree that we must have access to the House. We simply cannot operate on any other basis.

The Committee's report addresses the use of loudhailers by demonstrators in Parliament square. The Government recognise that the use of loudhailers is of particular concern to Members, who have raised it regularly with me, as has Mr. Speaker. My right hon. Friend the Home Secretary will therefore consider using the order-making power in section 62 of the Control of Pollution Act 1974, which governs the use of loudhailers in the streets, to ban the use of loudhailers in the area around Parliament square, subject to exemptions in the case, for example, of emergencies. It is intended to lay the necessary secondary legislation before the House as soon as possible in the new Session. Currently, the use of loudhailers in the streets is prohibited only between 9 pm and 8 am.

Jeremy Corbyn: I thank the Leader of the House for giving way again—he has been very generous with his time. Would the order prevent the use of loudhailers in a permanent demonstration such as the one that is currently taking place, or would it apply to approved rallies, such as those that took place during the Iraq war, in the central part of Parliament square, which is controlled by Westminster council with the co-operation of the police?

Mr. Hain: Speaking from experience, loudhailers and means of making announcements, as my hon. Friend will know, are necessary during demonstrations to marshal people and shepherd them.

Jeremy Corbyn: And for safety reasons.

Mr. Hain: Indeed, they can be used for the orderly progress of a protest. Of course, that will continue to be permitted. However, we are dealing with a persistent "bang, bang, bang", which is deafening for Members in the House who, quite understandably, have complained about it, as have members of press and others who work in the Palace.

Dr. Julian Lewis (New Forest, East) (Con): I thank the Leader of the House for giving way yet again. I welcome his announcement while endorsing the comments of the hon. Member for Islington, North (Jeremy Corbyn) that properly policed demonstrations should not suffer as a result. Is the Leader of the House aware that existing legislation such as the Environmental Protection Act 1990, which can usually be used to stop incessant noise, includes an exemption for the purposes of political protest? Would he look at that legislation to see whether we could address the issue by ending the exemption?

Mr. Hain: I am certainly happy to do so, and I am sure that the Home Secretary will do so as we proceed. However, we are trying to address the situation sensitively and ensure that we do not deal with the problem in a heavy-handed way. I believe that the House would expect us to achieve that balance.

Simon Hughes: May I seek two clarifications? In relation to loudspeakers, is the Leader of the House saying that the primary legislation exists, but no secondary legislation has so far been introduced? If legislation is passed, will it be a civil or criminal matter if somebody acts in breach of it?

Mr. Hain: All these matters will be debated in the House when the measure is introduced. As I said, the existing regulations apply between 9 pm and 8 am, and it is the problem that arises outside those times that we need to make progress on.

Mr. Heald: Obviously, there are questions about the area in which the regulations will apply. Many approved demonstrations begin outside Barclays bank and wend their way around Parliament square and up Whitehall. I imagine that that would be perfectly acceptable, but it might help all Members if a draft of the proposed regulations were made available to allow a quick element of consultation before the matter is taken forward.

Mr. Hain: That is an interesting point, and I shall certainly bear it in mind, as will the Home Secretary. We are trying to move by consensus. This is a House matter, and we have been criticised, understandably, for being a bit slow on it. We do not want to rush into things. A lot of care has been taken. *[Interruption.]* We have not been dragging our heels, as I hear impudently suggested, but taking some care, for precisely the reasons that have been raised in voicing concern that we should strike a balance between the rights of our citizens and voters to express their view to us and maintaining the proper access that we require and our ability to go about our business without the kind of harassment that we have had.

Once new legislation to control demonstrations in Parliament square comes into force, the Procedure Committee considers that the Sessional Order relating to the Metropolitan police will be unnecessary. Meanwhile, the Committee recommends that we continue with the Sessional Order, albeit in an amended form, so as to clarify that it covers the whole parliamentary estate. The motion endorses that proposal. If the House agrees to the motion, at the beginning of the next Session, only that one Sessional Order will be moved—the amended motion on the Metropolitan police.

In conclusion, I believe that the House as a whole will, as I said at the beginning of my speech, be very grateful to the Procedure Committee for its report and its clear exposition of the issues involved. I believe that the changes proposed to our procedures at the beginning of each Session are a sensible reform, and I commend the motion to the House.

4.42 pm

Mr. Oliver Heald (North-East Hertfordshire) (Con): I welcome the Procedure Committee's report.

Mr. Forth: Do you? Why?

Mr. Heald: Yes, I do, and I offer my congratulations to my hon. Friend the Member for Macclesfield (Sir Nicholas Winterton) on his work and that of his Committee. I also pay tribute to the Committee for its output, which has been impressive over the past year.

The motion approves paragraphs 9, 10 and 25 of the report, the effect of which is to change the Sessional Orders by discontinuing some of the old and much-loved usages, such as the passing of orders about elections, witnesses and Votes and Proceedings, although the Outlawries Bill will be kept. The report also suggests that a statement of our rights, duties and responsibilities be recorded, and goes on to suggest a new form of the Sessional Order. Although those may seem modest ideas, I ask why some of these charming old traditions need to be abolished. Only last week, we were abolishing the use of the term "strangers", which never did anyone any harm. I imagine that the new

[Mr. Heald]

Labour battalions are lurking somewhere in the building and that, although they are not debating this matter, they are ready to vote solidly with the Leader of the House if that is required.

Andrew Mackinlay: I am genuinely bewildered about why the hon. Gentleman utters the mantra of the Leader of the House when he refers to the Sessional Orders relating to witnesses as outdated. How is that measure outdated? It is essential. I would love to hear from the hon. Gentleman about that.

Mr. Heald: There is legislation that deals with the issue of witnesses, so I would have thought that the measure was not necessary. I agree with the hon. Gentleman, however, on his earlier comments about the Osmotherly rules. The fact that Lord Hutton can come into an inquiry and have all the witnesses and documents that he wants—*[Interruption.]* A point about witnesses has been raised, and as the Osmotherly rules are about the conditions under which the Government allow witnesses to attend Select Committees, there is an overlap.

It is wrong that all the documents and witnesses in the world were available and put on the internet when we brought in a judge or a retired civil servant, whereas when the Foreign Affairs Committee asked for the same witnesses and documents, it was told that the matter was top secret and that it could not have the information. I remember the Foreign Affairs Committee report, which was stingingly critical of the Government, on that matter. One criticism of the Leader of the House that I make from time to time is why: on earth has he done nothing about it?

Mr. Hain: I gave evidence to the Liaison Committee on the Osmotherly rules and made proposals, which were widely welcomed, on how we can move forward. I was surprised when the hon. Gentleman referred to the new Labour battalions, because I have never thought that the Chairman of the Procedure Committee, the hon. Member for Macclesfield (Sir Nicholas Winterton), fits that description.

Mr. Heald: That was a cunning wheeze. The Leader of the House appeared before the Liaison Committee—I am sure that it was grateful—but he has yet to find a mechanism by which a Select Committee that asks for a witness or document can speak to the Leader of the House and the Government to explain the importance of the matter and obtain satisfaction.

At business questions the week before last, I suggested that one way in which to tackle the matter would be to form a sub-committee of the Liaison Committee, which could call in the Leader of the House if a dispute occurred. The Leader of the House dismissed the idea out of hand, but I do not know why, because it seems modest enough. If he will not accept my idea, surely as Leader of the House, who is supposed to uphold the rights of Select Committees, strengthen our procedures and support scrutiny, he must introduce a proposal that will work.

Mr. Tony McWalter (Hemel Hempstead) (Lab/Co-op): I am a member of the Procedure Committee, but as the Leader of the House well knows, I am not a member of the new Labour battalions. Many Sessional Orders were useless because they referred to proceedings in the St. Stephen's area and stopping people impeding MPs as they struggle through Westminster Hall. People were under the illusion that our contributions were protected, when actually they were not, which is why such matters needed adjustment. The adjustment had nothing to do with modernisation.

Mr. Heald: The access provisions were not underpinned by legislation to enable a police officer to enforce the Sessional Orders, and I am glad that the Leader of the House is introducing proposals on that matter. The main focus of today's debate is the effect of demonstrations in or near Parliament square on the work of the House, particularly the long-standing, visually unattractive demonstration that is accompanied by the extensive use of loudhailers, which disrupt the environment for not only hon. Members, but everyone who works here.

The Procedure Committee put it this way:

> "The Government should introduce appropriate legislation to prohibit long-term demonstrations and to ensure that the laws about access are adequate and enforceable. We also expect the appropriate authorities to explore fully the possibility of using existing legislation to control the use of loud-hailers and other amplification equipment; failing that, the Government should consider legislation on this subject".

The Committee suggested that the mechanism of Sessional Orders is fundamentally insufficient to deal with the current problem, although it recommended that we introduce an interim Sessional Order in the terms set out in paragraph 25, which I support.

I seek assurances on exactly what the Leader of the House intends to do. The Government response stated that a consultation on developing the right police powers for effective and proportionate action would take place, and he has told us today that an offence of not following Sessional Orders will be created. It is important that the police have enough power to change the situation.

Is the right hon. Gentleman able to state whether the offence will be arrestable and whether it will be summary only or either way?

Mr. David Heath (Somerton and Frome) (LD): Should there not be some distinction between an immediate problem of someone preventing an MP from entering the House, which clearly should be an arrestable offence in which the police would be expected to be involved, and a long-term nuisance, which is a civil matter and should be subject to civil remedy, not criminal remedy?

Mr. Heald: I do not agree and I shall explain why.

Mr. Salmond: What did the hon. Gentleman think of Mr. Justice Gray's judgment on 4 October 2002, in which he declined to grant Westminster city council an injunction to prevent the long-term demonstration, citing article 10 of the European convention on human rights? Does the hon. Gentleman think Mr. Justice Gray was wise or unwise to refuse to grant the injunction?

Mr. Heald: As one who served as a barrister for many years, I never criticise the judiciary and I shall not do so on this occasion. The point is that we have a say in article 10 and the operation of the convention, whereas we have not had a say in respect of Parliament square, and I believe that we should. I believe in freedom of expression and of speech—for some years, I spoke at Speakers' Corner as a Hyde Park Tory and I have been on demonstrations. It is important that we are able to conduct our politics, but there are parameters within which one should do so.

Dr. Julian Lewis: May I remind the House that the court case mentioned by the hon. Member for Banff and Buchan (Mr. Salmond) had nothing to do with the noise nuisance? Noise did not feature in the judgment and was an entirely separate matter. The judgment was based entirely on whether the protester was obstructing members of the public or Members of Parliament.

Mr. Heald: My hon. Friend is correct.

The long-term protester in question is about to embark on a fourth winter as a permanent resident of Parliament green. Although we can admire its durability, his form of protest causes real problems for Parliament and for others. The problem is not aesthetic—it is not just that the posters do not look nice or anything like that. The fact is that he has created something akin to a fence-like structure. That mars the appearance of the square, but the main problem is one of security: to allow a barrier of that sort directly opposite the gates of Parliament is unwise. The Speaker has raised that as a point of concern. Police are forced to check around the barrier on the square several times a day to see what is happening behind the posters and placards, and the fence obscures security sightlines. Today's reality is that we cannot ignore such security concerns, and I think that Mr. Speaker is right to have raised the issue.

Lembit Öpik (Montgomeryshire) (LD): Does the hon. Gentleman not accept that those who are concerned about the barrier in Parliament square could also be concerned about someone sneaking around the statue of Churchill and jumping an unsuspecting Member of Parliament on the way home? The police are present in part to defend our right of free expression under duress, and to say that the gentleman in question presents a security risk is a preposterous argument against his right of expression.

Mr. Heald: Nobody minds someone attending to make a protest carrying a banner—that is part of our democratic process. The point is that that man has set up something like a fence with placards all the way around and the police have to go over there many times a day to check round, because we live in world in which security is tight.

Mr. Desmond Swayne (New Forest, West) (Con): Will my hon. Friend reflect on the fact that there are enough police in and around the Chamber to match the protesters one for one, and if they have to go out and check behind the fence every now and again, they are probably more usefully employed than they are in here?

Mr. Heald: My hon. Friend has his fun, as he is entitled to. Nevertheless, security around here is important, and it is not right for there to be a permanent barrier that creates cover directly opposite the gates of the Palace and takes up a huge amount of police time and effort. We should not be too amusing about the police presence here, because they do a good job. We need their help, and it is right that we should have it.

Mr. Salmond: I do not know Mr. Justice Gray, but having read his judgment I would strongly advise the hon. Gentleman not to appear before him citing the arguments that he has used in the past few minutes. In effect, the judge said to Westminster city council, "Don't come before me with such rubbish."

Mr. Heald: The hon. Gentleman has clearly not looked into this, because the arguments that were deployed were not based on security considerations.

This is the predominant institution of our democracy and an important symbol of democracy world wide, and it is a terrorist target. Hon. Members may want to have a bit of fun, but these are important matters and we must not ignore them.

Dr. Julian Lewis: In support of my hon. Friend, I remind the House that we have armed police on duty who put their lives on the line every minute of the day—

Mr. Swayne: What, in the Chamber?

Dr. Lewis: I am talking about those on the street. If necessary, they would have to deal with a potentially lethal terrorist attack. How are they expected to make split-second decisions, and to do so wisely, when there is a constant barrage of yammering noise distracting them and putting their safety at risk at a time when it is sufficiently at risk already?

Mr. Heald: My hon. Friend rightly raises the issue of noise. Blaring away into a megaphone is a completely pointless exercise, because nobody can understand a word that is being said, yet it disturbs people all over the Palace and the parliamentary estate. I do not mind somebody wanting to protest in a reasonable way—as I say, I have often spoken at speaker's corner in Hyde park—but the level of noise here is unacceptable, and I welcome the fact that something is going to be done about it.

Mr. Paul Tyler (North Cornwall) (LD): Before the hon. Gentleman leaves the matter of security entirely, will he clarify whether he opposes, on security grounds, long-term demonstrations by an individual, but is prepared to accept short-term demonstrations involving thousands of people in Parliament square, which, as we know from recent experience, are far more dangerous?

Mr. Heald: The hon. Gentleman is wrong. The point about a major, policed demonstration is that it is exactly that—a large demonstration that the police know about in advance and for which they are able to prepare. In the past year, I have been on two such demonstrations—one against the Stansted proposals, and the other in favour of people who have been disadvantaged through the Government's policy on pensions. Proper notice was given, we marched up Whitehall, and the policing was more than adequate.

[Mr. Heald]

The permanent demonstration is different because it is there all the time, it is a fence-like barrier directly opposite the gates of the Palace, it is taking up a lot of police time and effort, and it is a security risk.

John McDonnell: I wish to be clear about the judgment that the hon. Gentleman is making. If the placards were small enough to ensure that a terrorist could not hide behind them and sufficiently aesthetically pleasing to him, would they be acceptable?

Mr. Heald: I have no objection to someone—or a greater number of people— standing outside the House of Commons with a banner and making a point. I simply stress that such activities should be carried out in a proportionate way that does not create a security hazard, and that the noise should not be unreasonable. I fully accept that a loudhailer is needed on a demo but constant, loud wailing is not reasonable.

Mr. Hain: I am sure that the hon. Gentleman agrees that, despite all the discussion about the loudhailer, the sole individual and so on, we are also considering some of the problems that we have experienced recently when access to the House has been blocked. The individual whom we have discussed does not pose such a threat but all sorts of demonstrations, including those on hunting and Iraq, have, for the first time in my experience, blocked access to the House. That is the problem and the measures are primarily designed to deal with that.

Mr. Heald: I am grateful to the Leader of the House for making that point; I was sidetracked when I was about to make it. It has always been established that hon. Members should have access to the House to do their job, especially when we are voting, so that democracy can do its work. The measures will underpin that well established principle with the sort of powers that are needed to make it work.

5.1 pm

John McDonnell (Hayes and Harlington) (Lab): I remain unclear about the process that we are going through today. I would welcome any intervention from the Chairman of the Committee to clarify exactly what we are doing. My right hon. Friend the Leader of the House told us that consultation will take place to seek a remedy in law to some of the problems that the Committee identified. He said that consultation would take place about the development of a new measure and that an order would be introduced under existing environmental legislation to tackle the supposed nuisance or problem.

Yet we are also being asked to support a motion with a form of words for a new Sessional Order, which tries to provide a remedy for several problems that the Committee identified. The Sessional Order is incredibly wide-ranging. It states:

> "That the Commissioner of the Police of the Metropolis do take care that the passages through the streets leading to this House be kept free and open".

We all agree that enabling Members of Parliament to get into the House of Commons to do their duty in voting and participating in debate is critical—no one wants to underestimate the problems that have occurred—but the order goes far beyond that.

The Sessional Order suggests that it is needed to oppose any activities

> "to hinder Members by any means in the pursuit of their Parliamentary duties in the Parliamentary Estate".

The breadth of that is remarkable. It covers any activity that we undertake to hinder hon. Members. I want to hinder some of my hon. Friends in reaching some decisions on specific Bills. I want to do that through argument, lobbying and debate. *[Interruption.]* The breadth of the order means that an individual—whether or not the placard is small or a terrorist threat exists—cannot stand outside the House.

Mr. Salmond: The hon. Gentleman may have missed the sedentary intervention from the Front Bench that I heard, implying that what he described did not constitute hindering. However, in the absence of a definition of hindering, what else are we to think? Some hon. Members appear to believe that noise pollution hinders; I do not. I should like to know exactly what hindering means.

John McDonnell: That is the very point that I am making. If hindering is about noise that causes some obstruction to clear thought or work in an office—there are other obstructions to clear thought in the building, but we do not need to go into them now—perhaps we could have a definition of an acceptable decibel level or the problems that some hon. Members experience.

Mr. Heald: It is my understanding that the question of noise is being dealt with separately from the Sessional Order in paragraph 25. Paragraph 25 is about access to the building.

John McDonnell: I have to say that that is not what the Sessional Order says. This order will have to be interpreted by the Metropolitan Police Commissioner, and I think that we are putting him in an impossible position because of the breadth and loose wording of the order, which states that

> "no obstruction be permitted . . . to hinder Members by any means in pursuit of their Parliamentary duties in the Parliamentary Estate".

That is a breathtaking range of provision to insist that the commissioner should interpret. Individual constituents, Members or members of staff could insist that the commissioner take action, but against what? Perhaps against a megaphone being used in Parliament square, but at what level? On what frequency? On what days? At what time of day? According to the Sessional Order, the provision would apply when Parliament was in session, but that could be late at night when there was not much going on in the building. This measure would require a subjective judgment on the part of the Metropolitan Police Commissioner, which I think would be inoperable.

Mr. Heald: The particular wording that the hon. Gentleman is criticising has been in the Sessional Orders since time immemorial. The provision used to be enforced by the police, but a change in the law means that that no longer happens. However, this is nothing new; it is very old.

John McDonnell: But now we are trying to use the order against a practice that has been acceptable for a long time. It has certainly been acceptable for the past few years, because Brian Haw has been out there for that long. It has been acceptable behaviour to a large number of us.

I am trying to clarify this question. If the Minister is arguing that we need to consult on new legislation, and that, in regard to some of this supposed nuisance behaviour, we have to introduce a new order that we shall eventually debate, why is that taking place when we are introducing a Sessional Order? Are we pre-empting that consultation? Are we pre-empting the debate on the new order? Why is this necessary? I am completely unclear on this, and I would welcome any intervention that will clarify the matter.

Dr. Julian Lewis: Perhaps I can help the hon. Gentleman. As my hon. Friend the Member for North-East Hertfordshire (Mr. Heald) has explained, the provision has been there all along. It has also been ineffective—I see the Minister nodding—which is why the Government have, rightly, to introduce new legislation. The hon. Gentleman is arguing that we should weaken the Sessional Order more than it has been weakened in the past. This proposal is carrying forward something which, though ineffective, has been there all along, with a promise that something effective will be brought in further down the line—and about time, too.

John McDonnell: So we are being asked to approve something that we all agree is totally ineffective, totally useless and therefore unnecessary. What are we doing here? What is the point? Well, we know what the point is. It is that one person out there is exercising his democratic right to free speech. When Ministers introduce legislation, they have to assure us in writing, as part of the process, that it complies with the European convention on human rights. What is remarkable about this order is that we have had no such assurance today in relation to it.

Mr. John Bercow (Buckingham) (Con): The hon. Gentleman is lamenting the need to interpret the legislation, while at the same time effectively conceding how easy it will be to do so in this particular, rather extreme case. I know the vantage point from which he is perfectly legitimately approaching the subject. We all believe in the right to free speech—I am periodically inclined to exercise it myself—but there is a difference between free speech and a licensed, permanent cacophony of a destructive character.

John McDonnell: That is interesting. In none of the submissions to the Committee that I have seen has there been any mention of "permanent cacophony". It is true that there has been intermittent use of a loudhailer, and I am sure that that has caused some offence to some people, but I think that that is one of the tolerances that we should have in a democracy. With the greatest respect, I find some of the statements that are made in this Chamber offensive, but I accept the democratic right of hon. Members to make them. I also accept the right of Brian Haw to make his statement out there. As soon as we start to undermine that process of free speech, it becomes a slippery slope to intolerance.

Lembit Öpik: Is it not perhaps in order for us to remember as well that we are in a position of relative power in this Chamber? We have the capacity to express our views and occasionally get them reported in the media. A man such as Brian Haw does not have that luxury. It is to his credit that he has caused a debate to take place on account of the fact that he has found an effective means of demonstrating.

John McDonnell: It is a means of demonstration that also shadows what has happened across the world. The Aborigines in Australia and the campaigners in America have all used this tactic to bring something that they feel strongly about to the attention of democratic Parliaments. I welcome Brian Haw. I think he has been a hero for the past few years, suffering throughout those winters to bring to our attention a fundamental issue, which is about peace and opposing war.

On some objections that have been made to Brian Haw, I accept the integrity of a large number of Members who have intervened today to raise their concerns about nuisance and so on, but some interventions and some opposition to what he is doing out there have arisen because some Members do not like to be reminded of what they have done in this Chamber in terms of voting for war and the deaths.

Madam Deputy Speaker (Sylvia Heal): Order. Perhaps the hon. Gentleman will restrict his remarks to the motion on the Order Paper.

John McDonnell: I will not contradict your ruling, Madam Deputy Speaker, but the point of Brian Haw's protest is to ensure that we listen to him. If we silence him, we will be unable to listen to that message, which is one of peace that opposes some decisions of the House. One of the roles of an MP is to defend the democratic rights of the citizens of this country. That is what we are threatening. This is not to do with noise or nuisance; it is to do with removing the little man's voice from outside the Chamber.

Mr. Hain: I am sure that my hon. Friend would not defend this example—in fact, I know he would criticise it. My hon. Friend the Member for East Lothian (Anne Picking) tried to enter the House during the hunting demonstration and was virtually beaten up. We have to move forward in dealing with such problems. The issue of the loudhailer is one small part of a much wider picture and we really must deal with it. I am sure he agrees with that. I think he should be more proportionate about the points that he is understandably making.

John McDonnell: Is that an allegation that Brian Haw has at any time tried to prevent Members from coming to the House, because he has not, and no one has ever alleged it? We are introducing a Sessional Order and then legislation to obviate one evil—preventing Members from having access to the House—while at the same time wiping out the democratic rights of an individual. The breadth of potential interpretation is

[John McDonnell]

what is abhorrent about the Sessional Order. We are also going through a lengthy process of introducing new legislation—a new order to quell the voice of one man who speaks for the majority of the population of this country, against war and for peace.

5.13 pm

Mr. Paul Tyler (North Cornwall) (LD): I am always rather uncomfortable when we have a discussion that appears to be ad hominem, so I shall not follow precisely the line pursued by the hon. Member for Hayes and Harlington (John McDonnell), but I want to remind the House that, long before the particular individual whom we have been discussing was permanently installed, a pig named Winston was present. I do not recall any Opposition Member objecting to the presence of that pig, although it was just as untidy as the gentleman to whom we are referring.

Dr. Julian Lewis: Did it have a loudhailer?

Mr. Tyler: It did not, but those who were with it had very loud voices, and rightly so, because they were making an important point on behalf of my constituents, as it happens—those involved in agriculture.

I want to return to the report and the motion. Recommendations 1, 2 and 3, which the Government accept, are very sensible. They should be endorsed by the House. Recommendation 4 relates to the new statement that is to be made giving details of the

> "historic claims to privilege including those of freedom of speech and freedom from legal challenge".

That obviously is important, but as my hon. Friend the Member for Southwark, North and Bermondsey (Simon Hughes) said, there surely must be a proposal as to what will be said in that statement. I do not know why we have waited so long, because the report was made to the House in November last year, and we could by now have seen a draft. I hope that we will see one before the general election.

Clearly, however, the main matter for consideration this evening is recommendation 5. I want to read that again to the House:

> "The Government should introduce appropriate legislation to prohibit long-term demonstrations".

That gives rise to all sorts of problems of definition. What is a long-term demonstration? If an individual comes and goes regularly but intermittently, is that a long-term demonstration? If we have a very large demonstration that raises the security issues referred to earlier, and it takes more than 24 hours, is that a long-term demonstration? What is the difference? I am suspicious of that recommendation, and to be fair, so are the Government, whose response states:

> "The Government's first principle is that the right of free expression under Article 10 of the European Convention on Human Rights should be protected."

Furthermore, they do not ask us to endorse paragraph 22 and recommendation 5. There were concerns in the Committee about the recommendation, as was obvious from the evidence given to it, and as I know from Members present this evening. I therefore hope that we will make progress very slowly on that recommendation. It could be, as hon. Members have said, a slippery slope.

There is something to be welcomed and celebrated about the fact that the main focus of demonstration has in recent months moved from opposite Downing street into Parliament square. I hope that that is recognition that Parliament still has a role in our political society, and that the body politic is not exclusively in Whitehall. It is extremely helpful that people now recognise that speaking to Members of Parliament, albeit occasionally through loudhailers, might have some practical impact. It is much better than simply shouting at No. 10 and assuming that that is the only place in which power lies.

I understand the concerns of members of the public about trying to ensure that their voice is heard. These days, it is difficult. The hon. Member for North-East Hertfordshire (Mr. Heald) referred to himself as a member of the Hyde Park Tories—I am not quite sure what that described—but there is a case for a designated area in an appropriate part of London where people can speak their mind and have an audience that is attentive and perhaps even influential. Perhaps he would join me in suggesting that we move speakers' corner from Hyde park to St. James's park—[HON. MEMBERS: "Connaught square."] Hon. Members are suggesting other parts of London, but I am not quite sure why. Perhaps it is opposite the residence of a particular individual.

Mr. Heald: What I heard was Connaught square, which I believe is where the Prime Minister has bought his new house.

Mr. Tyler: I see. I thought it was the hon. Gentleman's house. I thought that he had moved up in the world, too.

There is an extremely important issue at stake. To some extent, the Government are attempting to push it sideways, with references to the Mayor of London's "World Squares for All" proposals for Parliament square. I cannot quite see the Mayor of London addressing the issue in the way that I would prefer, but he may have a different view from the Government's. What is extremely important is that the Government go on to say that there will be a "consultation exercise", but they seek to limit the remit of that consultation exercise to "developing police powers". That must be in the context of the rights of the individual in this country to represent his or her views. The Leader of the House has already said that there is existing legislation to deal with disruptive, dangerous or threatening activities that may concern us in our duties in the House.

Mr. Bercow: I very much admire the hon. Gentleman, but may I put it to him that although the House should have self-respect it should not practise self-delusion? I put it to him that the reason why Mr. Haw continues to indulge in his rancid rants opposite the House of Commons is not that he wishes to pay tribute to Parliament but that he knows that he is able to get off scot-free. That is partly because of the rank naivety of the hon. Gentleman and others.

Mr. Tyler: I hear what the hon. Gentleman says. I will defend the right of people who disagree with me to express their views. The hon. Gentleman may well disagree with members of my farming community in Cornwall who express their views in a similar way on a similar site in Parliament square, but I do not recall his objecting.

The House must consider this carefully. If, in the interests of tidiness, we are in any way to undermine the legitimate concerns of our constituents and the public at large—if we are to extinguish long-standing rights—let us do it with our eyes open, and not because we have suddenly joined the Keep Britain Tidy campaign. There is existing legislation to deal with the threats that we all understand are there. I found the flight of fantasy from the hon. Member for North-East Hertfordshire extraordinary. There are security issues, but they are not there now, and they are not involved in the proposed change to our Sessional Orders.

It is certainly important for us to look carefully at the issue of access, for a number of reasons—access for Members, staff and constituents wishing to come here on legitimate business. The order, however, does not deal with that. I accept that the existing order has been there for some time, but as the hon. Member for Hayes and Harlington pointed out, if it has not proved satisfactory in the past why should we repeat it now? The current wording of the revised order is surely redundant. It says:

> "to hinder Members by any means in the pursuit of their Parliamentary duties in the Parliamentary Estate".

That section does not deal with those who are trying to get into the parliamentary estate. The revised order seems to ignore the whole question of access.

Sir Nicholas Winterton: I have listened to the hon. Gentleman with some impatience. It seems to me that he has not read the report in full, and has not taken note of the fact that we received representations and evidence from the Metropolitan Police Commissioner himself, the Serjeant at Arms, the Clerk of the House and others associated with the security and administration of the parliamentary estate. Does he give no weight to the evidence and views of those who have looked after this place for hundreds of years?

Mr. Tyler: I am a great fan of the hon. Gentleman and of the traditions of the House, but I have read the evidence in the report, and it is far from clear that there is unanimity. I wish there were, because that would make it much easier for us. I also have great respect for the Metropolitan Police Commissioner, but let us face it: the police made some absurd mistakes on the day of the hunting demonstration. It was their fault that people came into this place disguised as building workers; it was no fault of officers of the House. I take with a pinch of salt the suggestion in the evidence that the commissioner is seeking new powers. Whenever the police seek new powers, I think it the right and responsibility of Members to establish why the existing powers are not sufficient.

Mr. Heald: Much has been made of the permanent demonstration. The commissioner spoke of what happened four years ago when there was a demonstration, Parliament square was cut up and statues were damaged. He said that there should be stronger powers to tackle such dangerous incidents. I do not think we should spend the entire debate speaking about Mr. Haw.

Mr. Tyler: I entirely agree, which is why I want to return to recommendation 7. It is clear from the recommendation—I understand that the Government accept this—that the legislation they are now considering, in a wider sense, will require extensive consultation, for reasons that I think all hon. Members would appreciate. The new Sessional Order is essentially an interim measure, and a very insubstantial and probably rather ineffective one.

What happens next? I am always slightly suspicious of secondary legislation, and the suggestion that everything will be straightforward—that it is just a matter of detail, and that the wish of the House is being implemented. It is easy for us to agree to that. The Leader of the House said earlier that this would be a matter for secondary legislation. I hope that there will be the fullest possible consultation, and that we will have a full opportunity to examine the implications of that secondary legislation. All too often, such legislation goes through with insufficient scrutiny. That is a major criticism of our parliamentary procedure, and this particular issue surely requires very careful scrutiny indeed.

Yes, we need to strike a balance. In considering access to this place, we have to ensure that Members, their staff and constituents, and the staff of the House are protected. That is critical, and we cannot afford to allow undue pressure to be applied that prevents us from doing our duty, but equally, in terms of freedom speech, one of our duties is to ensure that members of the public are not impeded if they want to exercise their right and duty to express their views in a democratic society. The balance between those two conflicting pressures is a very difficult one to strike, and it requires that all Members of the House—not just somebody Upstairs in Committee—consider them very carefully.

I hope that in responding to this debate the Minister will make it clear that this matter will be given careful consideration, so that we do not end up with a very unbalanced situation.

5.25 pm

Mr. Tony McWalter (Hemel Hempstead) (Lab/Co-op): I will not detain the House for long, but there are just a couple of observations that I would like to make. First, we should dissociate the question of access to the House from what is currently going on in Parliament square, inasmuch as we can. Unlike the hon. Member for North Cornwall (Mr. Tyler), I consider the Procedure Committee's proposal—I am a member of that Committee—to be effective. It orders that

> "no obstruction be permitted to hinder the passage of Members to and from this House",

and subsequently refers to the duties that we carry on in the House. Such duties are the very reason why we are trying to ensure that Members are not so obstructed, so the proposal makes eminent sense.

In my view, the police need this reminder. On both of the two occasions on which I was prevented from entering the House, the police were responsible. When George W. Bush was in the area—I understand that he

[Mr. Tony McWalter]

has been re-elected President of the United States—I and other MPs were prevented from getting anywhere near the House of Commons for some considerable time. *[Interruption.]* I note that other Members did indeed experience such a problem. Whatever the commissioner understood about his responsibility to ensure that Members of Parliament could actually get here to perform their duties, that message somehow failed to percolate down to officers controlling the area. They treated Members of Parliament as if they were members of the public, who could be directed as and when they wished.

Mr. Salmond: The hon. Gentleman is making a very interesting point. If the Government proceed with criminal legislation, who might be prosecuted if such circumstances are repeated? Would he like to venture an answer?

Mr. McWalter: I am tempted to say that if members of the police force do not carry out their duties, they would be subject to the normal process of police discipline for failing to understand and act on their responsibilities. I rather doubt whether the laws that we get will push things any further than that, but Members will also know that historically, this Chamber has been ringed with policemen to prevent Members from entering. I know that we are talking about the 17th century, but that is how Cromwell succeeded in getting complete control of the parliamentary process.

So there is an historical precedent to show that, if one wants to turn democracy into tyranny, the first thing to do is to ensure that Members of Parliament cannot sit on these Benches and discuss matters in the way that we are currently doing. The House needs to be very mindful of that pivotal right. It is a pivotal right not only for Members of Parliament, but for the 56 million people whom we represent when we come here. We are the custodians of their freedoms, and our freedom is a condition of that. So this is not a trivial matter, and we need to ensure that that right is properly protected.

The second issue that I wish to raise relates to the suggestion that all MPs should wear an identity card for security purposes. I would like to make a couple of points about that. On the other occasion when I was stopped from entering the House, the officer on the door did not just ask whether I was an MP—I said yes—but also whether I had my identity card. I scrambled around in my pockets but was unable to find it. I was detained nearly beyond the end of a vote, but just about managed to get in at the very last minute.

If it became a condition for entry to the Palace that one had to have a pass, it would pose many interesting issues. First, Members could forget their pass; it could be lost or stolen. In many ways, the requirement to use a pass could prove a significant obstacle to Members carrying out their duties. I heard one Member say last week, "MPs want to be privileged, being the only people who do not have to wear a pass", but the answer to that is that as few obstacles as possible should be put in the way of MPs who come here to participate in debates. Any requirement to wear a pass could certainly compromise that freedom.

Demonstrations in Parliament square are a separate issue. I have already provided my own example to show that Members are sometimes prevented from entering the Palace. Not having a clear understanding of the rights of people in Parliament square is another important component of the problem. We need to sort out whether people can have a permanent encampment and whether hundreds of thousands of people can be allowed there. We need to make clear exactly what rights people have. I insist that that be factored in, of course, with the rights of Members of Parliament to unhindered passage to this place in order to perform their duties in the House. That is the most important matter. It is vital to have facilities for demonstrations and perhaps we should look into their longevity, intermittence and similar issues. Crucially, the right of MPs to get into the House is a fundamental part of our democracy, so I hope that Members will accept the recommendations of the Procedure Committee.

5.33 pm

Sir Nicholas Winterton (Macclesfield) (Con): I am very pleased to follow the hon. Member for Hemel Hempstead (Mr. McWalter), who is a hardworking member of the Procedure Committee, bringing independence and objectivity to the views that he expresses in considering the matters on which we take evidence and produce reports.

I am grateful for the opportunity to support the Government motion and to speak about the Procedure Committee's report. Perhaps you will allow me, Madam Deputy Speaker, to say that the structure of these debates puts the Committee's Chairman in some difficulty. Many Front Benchers and a number of Back Benchers have spoken, and it is wrong that the Chairman is not allowed to express the views of the Procedure Committee to the House before others get up to criticise it.

Let me respond immediately to the hon. Member for Hayes and Harlington (John McDonnell). In no way are we seeking to end demonstrations in Parliament square. In no way are we seeking to deny people the right of free speech or the right to make their views clear and well known to Members of Parliament. What we are seeking to do is to use Parliament square in a far better fashion. I believe that Mr. Haw has been there for some considerable time—at least three years. We believe that that is rather long for one demonstrator to do what he is doing there. In being there, he may well be deterring other groups or other individuals from exercising their right of free speech, and they might do it in a rather better way than Mr. Haw.

John McDonnell: Did the Committee receive any evidence from other groups to the effect that Mr. Haw had prevented them from demonstrating in Parliament square?

Sir Nicholas Winterton: We received evidence from Members of Parliament, including the hon. Member for Islington, North (Jeremy Corbyn)—he is sitting next to the hon. Gentleman this afternoon—because we wanted to take evidence from everyone who had a view on this matter. That included people who were strongly opposed to the demonstrations in Parliament square, people who were rather equivocal about demonstrations, and people like the hon. Member for Islington, North, who were positively in favour of people being able to demonstrate.

John McDonnell: My question is, did anyone suggest in evidence that Mr. Haw was preventing others from demonstrating in the square? That is not recorded in any of the minutes.

Sir Nicholas Winterton: That view was expressed, although it may not have been minuted in the report. The view was put forward that Mr. Haw could be preventing other individuals or groups from demonstrating who wished to do so. I believe that the hon. Gentleman would not be unsympathetic to other groups using the square for that purpose, or to Mr. Haw returning at some stage in the future.

Lembit Öpik: Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

Sir Nicholas Winterton: No, as I want to be logical and constructive about this matter. I say to the hon. Member for Hayes and Harlington that, if a man cannot make his point and get his view across in three years, he will not do it in 30 years. Parliament square should be the place where other people can register their views. The Procedure Committee heeded the advice of those from whom we took evidence. They included the Metropolitan Police Commissioner, the Clerk of the House and the Serjeant at Arms. We also received the encouragement of Mr. Speaker, who is deeply concerned about the situation in Parliament square. Our aim is not to deny free speech or people's right to demonstrate, but to ensure that those activities are conducted in a more regulated and appropriate way.

Jeremy Corbyn: I am grateful to the hon. Gentleman for giving way and for allowing me to present evidence to his Committee when it investigated this matter. Numerous other demonstrations have taken place while Brian Haw has been in the square. On one slightly bizarre occasion, I was talking to him when he decided he wanted a photograph of him in conversation with some peace protesters visiting from Canada. He went off and got one of the hunt supporters to take the photograph. The two sides seemed to have worked out a modus operandi, even though I suspect that they probably did not agree on anything.

Mr. Bercow: That is a case of exceptional charity.

Sir Nicholas Winterton: I do not know about that. On most occasions, I very strongly disagree with the views expressed by the hon. Gentleman. However, I have the highest regard for him, as he is brave in his advocacy of free speech and of the issues that he feels are of paramount importance to this country and deserving of being raised in Parliament. In no way am I hostile to the hon. Gentleman: I want the situation in Parliament square to be regulated.

Mr. Salmond: Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

Sir Nicholas Winterton: Of course I shall give way to my very good friend from north of Hadrian's wall.

Mr. Salmond: That will not help. I yield to no one in my admiration of the Chairman of the Procedure Committee, as he knows. That is why so many of us are so disappointed that he should suggest Mr. Haw's failure to put across his point in three years as the reason for introducing measures that, at least at first sight, appear somewhat draconian. It is our disappointment that the hon. Gentleman's usual strong defence of free speech is not represented in the report that is causing us to make these interventions.

Sir Nicholas Winterton: I think that the hon. Gentleman has misunderstood the report. In no way are we trying to deny free speech: quite the opposite. In many ways, we are trying to give more people the opportunity of free speech in Parliament square.

Lembit Öpik *rose—*

Sir Nicholas Winterton: I shall give way later on, but I should like to develop my argument as Chairman of the Committee.

I am grateful that the motion implements nearly all the Committee's recommendations, although I shall have something briefly to say about Parliament square a little later on. Let us go back into the history of these matters. As hon. Members will be aware, at the beginning of each Session we hear the Queen's Speech in the morning and we return in the afternoon to debate it, but before the debate begins the House is asked to agree six questions. Because it is the first day of the Session no notice can be given of the questions, so Mr. Speaker reads them in full to the House. They are the Sessional Orders and resolutions; the current ones are set out on page 3 of the Procedure Committee's report. They relate to elections, witnesses, the Metropolitan police and the Votes and Proceedings.

As we note in our report, it was Mr. Speaker—I highlight that point—who encouraged us to look at those orders and resolutions to consider whether they should be abolished or updated. As Members will see, we recommended, with only one exception, that they should be abolished. That was not an easy decision for me to take—I say that especially to my right hon. Friend the Member for Bromley and Chislehurst (Mr. Forth)—because I am a great traditionalist and I like some of the older features of the way the House operates, but we cannot stand against change when change is inevitable.

The one exception was the order instructing the Metropolitan Police Commissioner to prevent access to the House from being impeded. That order took up most of the Committee's time and I shall return to it after dealing with the other five—

Mr. Forth *rose—*

Sir Nicholas Winterton: But first I give way without hesitation to my right hon. Friend.

Mr. Forth: I am grateful to my modernising Friend. To help the House, will he elaborate on the phrase he has just used, "when change is inevitable"? I would have thought that the whole point of our deliberations was to decide whether change was desirable and not for us to proceed on the basis of some odd inevitability.

Sir Nicholas Winterton: I have great regard and respect for Mr. Speaker, so perhaps when I said that change was inevitable I should have added that it should also be justified.

[Sir Nicholas Winterton]

I repeat that Mr. Speaker was concerned, and if, on behalf of the House, Mr. Speaker requests us to investigate a matter, we are obliged to do so. We took wide evidence, as my right hon. Friend the Member for Bromley and Chislehurst will see, and came to the conclusion that most of the orders were no longer relevant.

Mr. Heald: The hon. Member for Thurrock (Andrew Mackinlay) made a point about tampering with witnesses. Does my hon. Friend agree that the House has the power to deal with that, but it was rather inappropriate to put that matter alongside one that we had no power to deal with? Does he agree that the powers to deal with witnesses still exist and that there is no question of their going?

Sir Nicholas Winterton: If my hon. Friend will be patient, I intend to come on to that matter.

Mr. Bercow: Will my hon. Friend give way?

Sir Nicholas Winterton: I cannot refuse my hon. Friend.

Mr. Bercow: On the Conservative Benches, following the dictum of Edmund Burke, we have always accepted that the state which lacks the means of change lacks the means of its own conservation. May I further encourage my senior hon. Friend not to be subjected to parliamentary bullying by our right hon. Friend the Member for Bromley and Chislehurst (Mr. Forth)? In the earlier debate, when I chided my right hon. Friend for being opposed to all change since the 11th century, he corrected me by saying that he had in fact been opposed to all change since the fourth.

Sir Nicholas Winterton: I am a very good friend of the hon. Member for Buckingham, so I am delighted that he has, on this occasion, come so robustly to my defence.

All the current Sessional Orders and resolutions date back to at least 1713, and many of them are even older than that. However, I say to my right hon. Friend the Member for Bromley and Chislehurst that they have not been considered unalterable. Several were converted into Standing Orders in 1852 and others, such as those about peers not voting in parliamentary elections and the printing of the *Journal*, were discontinued quite recently, in 2000. Various other minor changes have been made to them over the years.

The Procedure Committee—again, I highlight this—took detailed evidence from the Clerk of the House, a learned gentleman who serves the House well, and from the Serjeant at Arms. We discovered that the orders about elections, witnesses and the votes and proceedings could all be dispensed with. That was their advice to the Committee. Some were unnecessary, some were obsolete and at least one was misleading. I refer to the order that says that

"this House will proceed with the utmost severity"

against those engaging in corrupt practices at elections. I am not for a moment suggesting that corrupt practices do not matter, but simply that the House has not been able to proceed against them since 1868, when jurisdiction on such matters was transferred to the courts.

Why do we proceed with reading out long Sessional Orders that are obsolete? The provisions for double returns are no longer necessary. They applied when there was a tie and the returning officer returned two names for a constituency instead of one. Now, in the event of a tie, the choice is made by lot. Why is that Sessional Order required? It is no longer needed; it is obsolete.

One other provision is probably obsolete, but it could theoretically still be needed. This is the one about a Member being returned for more than constituency. I am not sure whether the House knows when this last occurred, but it last happened in 1910. In case it happens again, the relevant part of the Sessional Order about elections is reproduced at the end of the day's motion to make it permanent.

Among the unnecessary motions are those about witnesses. In recommending the abolition of those motions, we are not ascribing any less importance to the principles that witnesses should not give false evidence or be tampered with. I see the Committee's chairman, my right hon. Friend the Member for North-West Hampshire (Sir George Young), behind me, and hon. Members will surely recall that a case was referred to the Standards and Privileges Committee this Session

Mr. Heald: The case of the Lord Chancellor.

Sir Nicholas Winterton: Indeed. However, we do not need to say something about such cases every year. That is now part of the longstanding practice of the House.

Andrew Mackinlay *rose*—

Sir Nicholas Winterton: I give way to another Government Member for whom I have enormous admiration.

Andrew Mackinlay: Likewise, but the hon. Gentleman's admiration may be against his better judgment. However, does he realise that the Sessional Orders are the only thing that we have to caution witnesses and those people who would lean on witnesses? The orders afford some protection to those who might be leant on. The fact that they have not been drawn to anyone's attention is the real problem.

Sir Nicholas Winterton: The hon. Gentleman has made his point to the House and I am sure that it will be noted by the Deputy Leader of the House and the Under-Secretary of State for the Home Department, the hon. Member for Don Valley (Caroline Flint). As we say at paragraph 10 of our report, the survival of the Sessional Orders for so long may reflect a desire by the House to begin the Session with a reminder of matters that it considers important. Certainly the issue to which the hon. Gentleman has just drawn attention is important.

As I hope I have made clear, we believe that the Sessional Orders are no longer appropriate for that purpose, but we have suggested that, instead, Mr. Speaker might make a statement about the duties and responsibilities of Members. I believe that that will be very useful to the House, and the House, my Committee and Mr. Speaker will clearly turn their attention to it.

We also recommend the continuation of the First Reading of the Outlawries Bill. That takes only a few seconds and serves to remind the House of an important principle. Once Parliament has been opened, it does not have to begin a Session by considering the Queen's Speech. It can, if it wishes, consider other business.

I return to the Sessional Order that has dominated the debate: that on access to the House. I tell the hon. Members for Hayes and Harlington and for Islington, North that the order, like the others, is nearly 300 years old, so it is much older than the Metropolitan police to whom it is now addressed. As hon. Members will note, it includes a provision to prevent disorder in Westminster Hall, but we think that that has become unnecessary because Westminster Hall is now within the parliamentary estate and the precincts of the House.

At the beginning of the 19th century, the order also provided that there should be no annoyance by chairmen. Quite by chance, I have an interesting extract from the *Journal* of the House from the year of 1801, and I hope that hon. Members will not mind if I read it out. It says:

> "*Ordered*, That the Constables in Waiting do take Care that there be no Gaming, or other Disorders, in *Westminster Hall*, or the Passages leading to the House, during the Sitting of Parliament; and that there be no Annoyance by Chairmen, Footmen, or otherwise, therein or thereabouts."

Of course, those chairmen were not Chairmen of Committees, but those who would be at either end of a sedan chair. I thus do not take the matter, which was drawn to my attention by the Clerk of the Procedure Committee, too personally, although having recently injured my Achilles' tendon, I could do with the use of a number of chairmen and a sedan chair to get around the Palace of Westminster.

Mr. Salmond: This is all rollicking good stuff, as we expect from the hon. Gentleman. Will he tell us where the specific phrase in paragraph 25 of the report that says

> "or to hinder Members by any means in the pursuit of their Parliamentary duties"

is currently contained in the existing Sessional Order, printed on page 3 of the report?

Sir Nicholas Winterton: May I come back to that, even if I perhaps do so after I have finished my speech, because I cannot give the hon. Gentleman a direct answer off the cuff? I know that he would not want me to give him false information, because he and I have an understanding that we are always direct with each other.

Although the existing Order has a quaint aspect, it has a serious side, too. I am sure that most hon. Members agree that access to the House should be preserved at all times so that its work may go on uninterrupted. I suspect that hon. Members believe that the Order gives the Metropolitan police extra powers to ensure that that occurs, but unfortunately that is not the case. No Order of the House—neither the current one nor any revised one—can give the police extra powers, which to an extent addresses a concern raised earlier by the hon. Member for Hayes and Harlington. Powers relating to London exist in the Metropolitan Police Act 1839, but they are largely unenforceable.

Measures to prevent large numbers of people from approaching the House for specific purposes were repealed in 1986. I know that because on at least two occasions I took part in demonstrations in support of textile workers and those in this country's textile and clothing industries—they still have my support. We were allowed to march from Hyde park, but the closest we could come to the Palace of Westminster was the Tate gallery, because we were governed by the legislation that existed prior to 1986. The law on demonstrations that block access to Parliament is in practice exactly the same as the one applying to demonstrations elsewhere in the country.

I repeat and emphasise the point that we are not calling for a ban on demonstrations. As we say in paragraph 11 of the report:

> "the right to demonstrate peacefully is highly prized and is a fundamental right, and we have no desire to prevent the public expressing their concerns to Members of Parliament in this way."

John McDonnell: Further to the intervention by the hon. Member for Banff and Buchan (Mr. Salmond), the words to be inserted in the new Sessional Order do not exist in the old one, and greatly expand the advice that we are giving the Metropolitan Police Commissioner. The hon. Member for Macclesfield (Sir Nicholas Winterton) is arguing that he simply wants to regulate demonstrations, but he has not given us any information about how that is to be done. Will they be licensed, and will the licence have to be paid for? Is he going to set up a regulator called Ofdemo?

Sir Nicholas Winterton: I fear that those questions should be put not to me but to the Under-Secretary of State for the Home Department, the hon. Member for Don Valley, and the Government. We have highlighted a problem that requires attention. However, I am grateful for much of what the Leader of the House said.

Lembit Öpik: Does the hon. Gentleman not accept that with the best will in the world his proposals will almost certainly have the unintended consequence of restricting demonstrations? For example, he thought that Mr. Haw could be prevented from demonstrating in Parliament square, but there could be a continuous demonstration on a rotating basis. He cannot have it both ways—he must accept either that there is a continuous demonstration by different people or that demonstration is limited.

Sir Nicholas Winterton: Personally, I believe that there could be many demonstrations, but longstanding demonstrations by individuals should be regulated and come to an end. If other people want to come and demonstrate in their place, they can do so. However, more stringent regulations are needed because of the environmental and heritage importance of Parliament square.

Mr. Heald: The original text includes the words

> "that there be no annoyance therein or thereabouts".

John McDonnell: That applies to Westminster Hall.

Mr. Heald: No, it applies to a much a wider area and covers all the environs of Parliament. The new wording is as follows:

"to hinder Members by any means in the pursuit of their Parliamentary duties".

If anything, that is a narrower definition.

Sir Nicholas Winterton: Following the quote that I read out a moment ago, I should highlight the fact that that is not the same as preventing access to Parliament. Demonstrations should not prevent hon. Members from reaching the House, as the hon. Member for Hemel Hempstead (Mr. McWalter), a member of the Procedure Committee, said. The police tell us that they need powers to ensure uninterrupted access. Although the order deals with access, we also considered the related matter of the nuisance caused by demonstrations in Parliament square—both the unsightly nature of long-term demonstrations in a world heritage site and, perhaps more importantly, the noise from megaphones and amplifiers, which prevent people in nearby offices from doing their work properly. I have seen evidence that members of the public are grossly inconvenienced by the raucous noise emanating from those megaphones.

Dr. Julian Lewis: My hon. Friend neatly anticipates my concern about noise. Can he confirm that, whatever demonstrations are allowed, whether they are individual, long-term, short-term or, indeed, rotating, it is important that they should not cause annoyance by bombarding people doing legitimate work with incessant sound? Does he also accept that while loudhailers are, as the hon. Member for Islington, North (Jeremy Corbyn) rightly pointed out, essential to communicate with people participating in a set-piece demonstration, it is an abuse to use them continually to interfere with people who are not part of the demonstration?

Sir Nicholas Winterton: My hon. Friend anticipates what I am about to say. The Committee simply could not understand why the noise is allowed to go on, day after day, given all the recent legislation on noisy neighbours. Attempting to prevent long-term demonstrations may be controversial—and hon. Members have expressed such a concern—but we think that that should be done while allowing short-term demonstrations, provided that they do not impede access or produce unreasonable amounts of noise.

Mr. Salmond: We are now coming to the nub of the issue. What I would like to know is where the phrase

"or hinder Members by any means"

comes from. Did it come from the Committee Clerk, or was it a joint production of the Committee? Was the Committee influenced by the hon. Member for New Forest, East (Dr. Lewis), who is so worried and concerned about noise pollution? Where did the phrase come from and what does it mean?

Sir Nicholas Winterton: I can only say that it was the wording chosen by the Committee as a whole, with the advice of our Clerk, and as Chairman, I therefore take full responsibility for it. I say those words with Ministers present on the Treasury Bench.

The Government undertook at paragraph 7 of their reply to the report to consult on ensuring that the police have power to act—again, I address my remarks to the hon. Members for Hayes and Harlington and for Islington, North—"effectively and proportionately" in relation to activities near Parliament. That consultation took place as part of a wider Home Office consultation on modernising police powers. We know that, and I accept that process, which closed recently, on 8 October.

Mr. McWalter: I hope that the hon. Gentleman is about to emphasise that many of the orders relate to Parliament proceeding with severity, although he is now making the completely accurate point that these duties have to be reposited in the police. In the 1840s, Parliament imprisoned an Irish Member for failing to sign up to a Committee on the basis that his not doing so destroyed the work of the Committee. He was imprisoned here for a week by Members of Parliament, but those days are gone, and we have to have a new agency dealing with these matters.

Sir Nicholas Winterton: I am not sure whether the hon. Gentleman is suggesting that Parliament should once again assume those powers and authorities. I fear that, on both sides of the House, there would be a number of people whom we would like to see locked away.

David Taylor (North-West Leicestershire) (Lab/Co-op): Would not imposing in the 21st century the punishment of being confined to the Chamber with some speakers whom we could name be categorised in Europe and elsewhere as a cruel and unnatural punishment?

Sir Nicholas Winterton: I assume that the hon. Gentleman is not referring to the person who currently has Mr. Deputy Speaker's permission to speak. I know the hon. Gentleman well and I know that he is not doing that, but I would be inclined to agree with him.

I am grateful to the Government for what they have said today in respect of taking action both about demonstrations, and perhaps the unsightly nature of some of them, and about the raucous noise, which disturbs not only tourists and other members of the public in and around Parliament square, but Members of the House, staff of the House and those who work in the proximity of the square.

I make my next point just as the Leader of the House is leaving—he has returned; I did not know I had that influence. To follow up the remarks of my right hon. Friend the Member for North-West Hampshire, I ask the Government to look at this matter urgently, seek to introduce orders or legislation taking account of the views that have been expressed by those who are concerned that we are not trying to limit demonstrations, and to ensure that action is taken as urgently as possible, not only to enhance Parliament square and to ensure that demonstrations are more regulated in future, but also to act in a modest way in respect of security. This House is spending very large sums on security, and we should not ignore that.

In the meantime, although I accept that what has been said so far could perhaps be implemented sooner—some people might say that it is second best—the Committee recommended that the Sessional Order on access should continue in a modified and updated form until new legislation comes into force, which is a point the hon. Member for Banff and Buchan and others have raised in the course of this debate. The Committee left out references to Westminster Hall, but we included not only the Palace itself, but the whole parliamentary estate.

I hope that I have answered most of the concerns. If the point raised by the hon. Member for Banff and Buchan has not been fully dealt with, on hearing from him, I will seek to provide him with further information. I commend the report to the House and hope that the legislation, which we called for and which the Government have promised, will be introduced at an early date for Parliament's consideration.

Mr. Andrew Miller (Ellesmere Port and Neston) (Lab): On a point of order—I apologise to hon. Members who want to continue the debate, which is on an important subject—earlier today, an important exchange occurred between my hon. Friend the Member for North-West Leicestershire (David Taylor) and the Leader of the House on resources for Members of Parliament in connection with IT provision for remote users. That problem is being made worse by the amount of spam that we receive. I seek your assistance, Mr. Deputy Speaker, because one particular company, Argos, is bombarding us with commercial material in a perfectly legitimate attempt to sell things, but it has not responded to requests to remove Parliament from its database, which causes the problem raised by my hon. Friend. Will you bring that matter to the attention of the relevant authorities and see what can be done not only to stop that nonsense, but to release resources that would help us to serve our constituents?

Mr. Deputy Speaker (Sir Michael Lord): I cannot make a ruling on that matter from the Chair, but the hon. Gentleman's points are on the record and will be noted by the appropriate department of the House.

6.7 pm

Andrew Mackinlay (Thurrock) (Lab): I regret the fact that the Order Paper invites us to deal with all the changes to the Sessional Orders in one vote rather than deal with them separately. I have listened to the important points about Parliament square with considerable interest, and my view has moved backwards and forwards as the debate has gone on.

I urge hon. Members to join me in the Lobby tonight to resist the changes, because the overriding point is the removal of the Sessional Orders relating to witnesses, which have been around since the 1700s and have their genesis in the Bill of Rights. What fools we would be if, late one Wednesday evening, we swept away something that is essential to our parliamentary democracy. We are being invited to do that tonight, and it is foolhardy in the extreme.

The Deputy Leader of the House of Commons (Mr. Phil Woolas): I respect the strength with which my hon. Friend speaks, but I refer him to evidence 4 in the Procedure Committee report, which gives the reason why those Sessional Orders are obsolete—namely, the definition of parliamentary contempt in "Erskine May". I suggest to my hon. Friend that the protection that he seeks exists elsewhere.

Andrew Mackinlay: Even if I am wrong—I do not think so—it is incumbent on those seeking a change to advance an alternative, which they have failed to do, to ensure that evidence given to Parliament is the truth, the whole truth and nothing but the truth and that people do not interfere with witnesses. We should not support any change until we know the alternative.

Mr. Redwood: I am grateful to the hon. Gentleman and admire his stance. The Deputy Leader of the House's response that the protection exists elsewhere is not sufficient, and surely that protection should be strengthened rather than weakened. There would be no harm in reasserting that protection at the beginning of every Session, because a civil servant coming before this House needs reassurance that their career will not be wrecked if they speak the truth.

Andrew Mackinlay: The right hon. Gentleman is absolutely right. The great problem is not that the Sessional Orders are irrelevant and out of date, but that there has been a lack of vigour and will on the part of Parliament to ensure that people coming before a Committee are clearly cautioned beforehand that they are expected to be candid with Parliament.

Mr. McWalter: My hon. Friend's integrity, determination and courage are on the record, but surely he understands that to pretend that the House has the capacity to proceed with severity against those who infringe our Sessional Orders is a major mistake. We need to do what he wants us to do properly, not to pretend that some 1839 law has sorted everything out for us.

Andrew Mackinlay: I disagree. The fact is that we have the power; what is needed is enforcement. Most legislatures have such powers and enforce them. On this occasion, I commend the Congress of the United States, which requires those giving evidence to take the oath. Parliament would be sensible to follow suit. We all know that taking the oath before entering the witness box cautions us about the gravity of the evidence that we are about to give. It would help if we did the same in Parliament—it is provided for in Standing Orders.

My point is that we do not caution anyone and it has become the custom or culture for someone appearing before a Select Committee to regard it as legitimate sport to give as little away as possible. Doing so is not seen as being irregular, nor does it attract any criticism of any substance when one is found out. Severe penalties ought to be enforced if a person perjures himself before a parliamentary Committee.

Jeremy Corbyn: I understand my hon. Friend's comments about the gravity of giving evidence to Select Committees, but I was a member of a Select Committee that attempted to interview the Maxwell brothers about missing pension funds: they said that they were not

[Jeremy Corbyn]

prepared to answer any questions and prayed in aid the right of silence, which is inherent in law in this country. What would he do about such a case?

Andrew Mackinlay: In my view, there should have been sanctions for declining to respond to Parliament. About a year ago, I was criticised for saying,

> "This is the high court of Parliament",

but that is precisely what it is, and we should not forget that.

It has been suggested that the Sessional Orders that the Speaker reads out at every state opening of Parliament are long. They are not. I am particularly interested in the one that states:

> "if it shall appear that any person has been tampering with any witness, in respect of his evidence to be given to this House, or any Committee thereof, or directly or indirectly has endeavoured to deter or hinder any person from appearing or giving evidence, the same is declared to be a high crime and misdemeanour; and this House will proceed with the utmost severity against such offender."

We have to do that if we are to be taken seriously as a Parliament.

Let me draw on personal experience of what I regard as attempts to interfere with Select Committees. When I was a member of a Select Committee in a past Parliament, the permanent secretary of a Government Department intimated to the Committee that the witness we wanted—a junior civil servant, or junior to him at least—was sick. I found it somewhat surprising to hear that on the Monday because I had seen the man in question on Saturday partying. After I had let that be known, that civil servant, to his eternal credit, stormed up to the permanent secretary and said, "What is this you're saying about me? I insist that I appear." He did so and acquitted himself well, and two weeks later got substantial promotion.

That is an example of deliberate interference by a senior civil servant to frustrate the attempts of a Select Committee to get a witness to appear. To complete the picture, let me tell the House that a senior Minister phoned me at midnight one Sunday to ask, "What the hell were you doing?"—he used those words, or perhaps stronger ones. He concluded by saying, "This conversation never took place." Well, it did, and the whole affair is recorded in my diary. The fact is that attempts have been made to interfere with Select Committees and we need to stamp on them to ensure that they are never repeated.

These Sessional Orders are very important because they protect those people in the public or the private sector who recognise their public responsibilities and want to be candid to Parliament but are being leaned on by employers, managers or some other vested group. I should have liked the Committee to say that before a witness appears before a Select Committee, its Chairman should draw his or her attention, probably when they receive the invitation to appear, to the fact that they are obliged to be completely candid and to give full disclosure, and help him or her by saying that if anybody should interfere with that it will be taken very seriously by Parliament. We do not do that—why not?

Sir Nicholas Winterton: I can tell the hon. Gentleman and my right hon. Friend the Member for North-West Hampshire (Sir George Young) that the Liaison Committee is considering that matter. If the hon. Gentleman would like the Procedure Committee to be involved, he might care to write to me, and I will ensure that we, too, consider it.

Andrew Mackinlay: I am grateful to the hon. Gentleman. I do not want to delay the House for much longer because I should like to hear from the right hon. Member for North-West Hampshire, whom I hold in the highest regard. However, if what the hon. Gentleman says is correct, why are we making this change? It is foolish and should be rejected. The Leader of the House mentioned his submission on the Osmotherly rules. We know that no Government—not only Labour Governments, but Tory Governments hitherto—like civil servants to appear before Select Committees, so they pray in aid the Osmotherly rules, which, to his credit, the Clerk of the House of Commons, in his memorandum to the Hutton inquiry, said are not agreed or subscribed to by Parliament. That is on the public record, and rightly so.

The Osmotherly rules are conjured up by the Executive of the day to protect and promote their selfish interests. It is time that we asserted ourselves to say that we will have nothing to do with that, and that we will introduce a discipline whereby people who appear before Select Committees are protected, but expected to give full disclosure and candour. That is why right hon. and hon. Members, including those who are in the Tea Room, should join me in the Lobby later this evening to sink this stupid proposal.

6.17 pm

Sir George Young (North-West Hampshire) (Con): I am grateful for the trailer given by the hon. Member for Thurrock (Andrew Mackinlay). Whether he spoke loudly enough for his voice to carry to the Tea Room remains to be seen. I want to make three points, the first of which is a direct response to the hon. Member for Thurrock.

The hon. Gentleman may know that relatively recently the Select Committee on Constitutional Affairs reported to the Committee on Standards and Privileges a potential case of breach of privilege in which a witness who had given evidence felt that she had been disadvantaged by having been threatened with removal. When we investigated the matter, we found that there had indeed been contempt. The Government are reviewing the rules following our discovery that the civil service is not well informed about Select Committees, privilege and the risk of contempt. My hon. Friend the Member for Macclesfield (Sir Nicholas Winterton) and I, together with other members of the Liaison Committee, are providing input to clarify the rights and privileges of Select Committees and the risks that are run if there is any contempt or tampering with witnesses.

My second point relates to the Sessional Orders. The Procedure Committee recommended the replacement of obsolete Sessional Orders and resolutions with a statement of the duties and responsibilities of Members, with the details being left to the discretion of the Speaker. In their response, the Government accepted that recommendation and suggested that the Committee on Standards and Privileges might wish to express a view on a form of words. My Committee was sympathetic to the idea of making a contribution, so with Mr. Speaker's approval we offered him some thoughts reflecting the substance of the Procedure Committee's vision, which, when he draws up the statement that he will make to the House at the start of the Session—if the motion is agreed—he may wish to bear in mind.

My third point concerns Parliament square, which is an issue that I have pursued in business questions and in Westminster Hall. I was pleased to hear what the Leader of the House said when he introduced the debate. However, we have waited two days short of a year for the Government to come up with that response, and we still do not know when the legislation that he mentioned will be introduced or enacted.

In the meantime, the problem will continue. I was slightly dispirited by the remarks of the hon. Member for North Cornwall (Mr. Tyler), who appeared to advocate a slow process. I have no objection to draft legislation and consulting the House, but I hope that there will be no further delay. The problem has existed for three years. The Procedure Committee has made inquiries and reported and the Government have consulted extensively within government for a year. I hope that there will be no undue delay in making progress.

I have always advocated a balanced solution that respects the rights of the individual to protest, those of visitors to the centre of our great capital to appreciate and enjoy one of the most historic sites in the world and those of people who work nearby, not least the policemen on duty at the gates, to work without constant high volume noise. The solution should also respect the rights of those who work in or visit the Palace not to have our security compromised by providing cover at the entrance to New Palace Yard. My strong view is that we have not got the balance right.

Mr. Gerald Howarth (Aldershot) (Con): I agree with my right hon. Friend. Does he agree that, if workers in any other place in the country were subjected to the same noise and interference as those whose job it is to protect us suffer from the cacophony on the other side of road, all the health and safety legislation in the land would be brought to bear on them? The police officers have to put up with an intolerable burden.

Sir George Young: My hon. Friend makes a valid point, which leads to my next comment. We are not considering deprivation of a long established right or a threat to freedom of expression. We are trying to close a loophole in the law to get back to where we believed we were three or four years ago. Brian Haw has discovered the loophole and, well advised by Messrs Bindmans, exploited it. If we were starting from scratch, would we introduce a law to ban such activity from every pavement in London but specifically allow it outside the entrance to the House of Commons? We would not, but the law currently provides for that and the House would be well advised to move to a more defensible position that removed the loophole.

John McDonnell: Health and safety has been mentioned. Has the Health and Safety Executive made a health and safety assessment? It has not been reported to any Committee. No offence has been alleged under health and safety legislation.

Sir George Young: I am sure that the Health and Safety Executive will note the hon. Gentleman's remarks, but if he talks informally to the policemen he will find that it is doing no good to the health of those who are confronted by that noise some 20 ft away at high volume, hour after hour. I hope that he does not try to defend what the policemen at the gates have to tolerate.

Liberty said:

> "If this legislation is passed, it could potentially endanger the rights of every single person in this country".

That is absurd. I hope that hon. Members will put the matter in some sort of perspective. We have well preserved, well used rights of protest in this country, but the activity in Parliament square goes beyond what is appropriate or reasonable in a mature democracy. One of the rights of a mature democracy is setting some acceptable parameters for freedom of expression. In my judgment, they are being exceeded.

Lembit Öpik: Will the right hon. Gentleman give way?

Sir George Young: I shall give way to the hon. Gentleman, with whom I have debated the matter exhaustively in the media for most of the past 24 hours.

Lembit Öpik: I thank the right hon. Gentleman. Does he recall that we did one of those interviews in exactly the spot that he describes, across the road from Mr. Haw's demonstration? We could do that and be heard. He says that he is looking for a balance, but the status quo is the balance because we are considering non-violent, legal direct action that does not obstruct us in our activities. To go further would take away rights.

Sir George Young: I do not accept that the volume of noise is reasonable. I do not accept that we were interviewed in good conditions. The reporter was happy to conduct the interview there because the loudhailer noise made the point and gave the listener to the programme some idea of what was happening, but the conditions were not ideal.

We can all distinguish between a one-off, well-targeted demonstration for a day and a permanent encampment with constant high volume slogans and abuse.

Mr. Haw is entitled to protest in the same way as anyone else, and in a free country there are many opportunities to do so, but as I understand it there is nothing to stop others doing exactly what Mr. Haw is doing all the way round Parliament square. That is not something that I would welcome.

Finally, I should like to make an environmental point. We are discussing one of the most important historic sites in the world. We have here the Houses of Parliament, Westminster abbey, Whitehall, the Churchill statue and the Guildhall, but the eye and ear are drawn towards the unsightly cacophony in the middle. We simply have not got the balance right. No other democracy in the world would tolerate what is happening in Parliament square, with a shanty town

[Sir George Young]

right opposite Parliament. There is no history of protest at this location; it is not like Hyde Park corner. There is a loophole in the law, and an abuse that has been going on for far too long. I support the Government in their attempts to put that right.

6.25 pm

Jeremy Corbyn (Islington, North) (Lab): The right hon. Member for North-West Hampshire (Sir George Young) wants to create an antiseptic tourist attraction round here that has nothing to do with democracy or participation, and the suggestion that Brian Haw's presence outside is somehow damaging to the buildings is pushing it a bit. Brian Haw is there because he believes in something. Surely, in a democracy, we should welcome people who believe in something and who are prepared to make that statement.

This debate on Sessional Orders is very interesting and important. I gave evidence to the Committee on this matter, and I hope that the Ministers will think very carefully about what they are proposing here. We seem to be inviting the police to take certain actions concerning the presence of people in Parliament square, without being specific about the powers under which they would do so, on the basis that legislation on the issue will be proposed at some point in the future. That sets a dangerous precedent. If we accept it, the police will act in a certain way, having been given a kind of nod from Parliament as to how we now believe that Sessional Orders should operate, and, at some point in the indeterminate future, legislation that we shall have a chance to debate will appear. Unless something dramatic happens during the Minister's wind-up speech—which would surprise me—I shall vote against these proposals because I think that that is the right thing to do.

We have a duty to protect the right of free speech around Parliament just as much as have a duty to protect the right of Members to get to Parliament—that was the basis of some of the Sessional Orders—and we must ensure that that remains the case. During the Select Committee hearing, there seemed to be quite a lot of confusion about the rights of access to Parliament. It is perfectly clear that MPs must have the right to get to Parliament, otherwise a tyrannical situation could arise in which they were prevented from getting here and would therefore be unable to vote, resulting in legislation being carried or not, as the case may be. It is essential that they have that democratic right, because they are here to represent the people. However, the suggestion that a demonstration in the centre of Parliament square somehow impedes Members getting to the House is unbelievably absurd. Nobody would walk down Whitehall, cross two roads to get to the centre of the square, then cross two more to get into the building. That is absurd; they simply would not do it.

Mr. McWalter: Was it not the case that, during the hunting demonstration, those of us coming to Parliament by car were prevented from getting here?

Jeremy Corbyn: That is so. That demonstration was organised with the co-operation and consent of the Metropolitan police, and had nothing whatever to do with Brian Haw and his demonstration in the middle of Parliament square. Indeed, I received a copy of a letter sent to Brian Haw by the Metropolitan police suggesting that he might like to be somewhere else that day, because they thought that his presence might not be compatible with the aims of the hunting lobby. I do not know what Brian did, but I suspect that he probably stayed there.

Mr. Bercow: There is, of course, a distinction between liberty and licence. The hon. Gentleman champions Mr. Haw's right to articulate his views, but does he not accept that the right to free speech has to be exercised within a context? There must be some limitation and control because it is not a self-regarding act. This is an act that has an effect—many of us would argue that it is an unacceptable and damaging effect—on the rights of others. If the hon. Gentleman accepts that there has to be some limit, in terms of time and/or intensity of expression, where would he place that limit?

Jeremy Corbyn: I am deeply disappointed with that intervention. I was hoping that the statements in the weekend press about the hon. Gentleman's rapid move to the left—passing new Labour on the way—had real substance. Indeed, I was in his constituency on Sunday evening discussing just that matter with some of his constituents, and they were very interested.

Mr. Bercow: I am grateful to the hon. Gentleman, because he has given me a welcome opportunity to exercise, in order, my right to free speech. I have always been a Tory, I am a Tory and I have to tell him and his relatives who live in my constituency that I will die a Tory.

Jeremy Corbyn: If I had not given way so soon, I could have explained to the hon. Gentleman that the conclusion of our lengthy conversation was that he was a Tory, is a Tory and will remain a Tory. In those circumstances, grateful as they are for his work as their Member, they will never be able to vote for him. I am sure he understands the democratic context in which those remarks were made.

To return to the issue of the right of free speech outside the House, Brian Haw's presence has never prevented anybody else from demonstrating or expressing a point of view. He has resided there because he believes passionately that this country's policy towards Iraq is wrong and that we should not be associated with the war. He has established a presence there and become a focal point. I think that what upsets Members who supported the war, who walk, drive or cycle to Westminster, is being reminded of that by his presence. They do not like it and feel slightly irritated by it.

I was irritated at times by the presence of the hunting lobby in the centre of Parliament square, but, as those Members who have read the Select Committee report will know, evidence was given to that Committee by the hon. Members for Mid-Sussex (Mr. Soames) and for Richmond Park (Dr. Tonge) and by me. It was a rare afternoon out when the hon. Gentleman, the hon. Lady and I all agreed on the need to protect the right to demonstrate. We made that point very clearly.

I want to make two quick points. First, there is no universal right of assembly, march or demonstration, although perhaps there should be. That was removed by the Public Order Act 1986, which was passed by Parliament and which requires police permission to have a demonstration, unless the police allow an unusual demonstration to take place. The fact that someone says that Brian Haw has outlived his usefulness proves just how useful and important he is. He should be congratulated on that.

I was thinking about long-term demonstrations that I have visited at different times and at various places in this country and around the world. The presence of one person making a point, taking sanctuary or making a public protest is very powerful. Sun Yat-sen occupied a place in London and became a figure of Chinese nationalism at the start of the 20th century, while the presence of Aboriginal land rights demonstrators outside the Australian Parliament has continued for years. There is a peace camp outside the White House, which has gone on for years. There was a demonstration for a long time—1,000 days, indeed—outside the United States embassy to bring US troops out of Vietnam. Those who organised it said, "We will stay here until the troops go."

I took part in a vigil that lasted many years outside South Africa house. I was there at the beginning. Indeed, along with my hon. Friend the Member for West Ham (Mr. Banks), I was arrested and told that I was obstructing the pavement. Then the charge was changed to acting in a way that was deliberately offensive to a foreign embassy based in London. As it was the apartheid regime's foreign embassy, I could do nothing but plead guilty with honour to that charge. The charge was thrown out, and the demonstration therefore won the right to be outside South Africa house and it stayed there until the apartheid regime was ended. So, there are plenty of examples.

Did not the women who stayed on Greenham Common for all those years play a major part in promoting the cause of nuclear disarmament, in exactly the same way as those demonstrating currently at Menwith Hill? We owe our rights to those who have been prepared to stand up and express them.

Lembit Öpik: On exactly that point, is it not interesting that those who are in defence of Brian Haw consider his motivations for the demonstration, while those who oppose the likes of him simply consider the inconvenience caused to themselves by the demonstration? Does not that prove that the essence of such a demonstration is to try to get people who consider it an inconvenience to listen to the fundamental reason why such a person has inconvenienced himself by virtually living outside the Palace of Westminster?

Jeremy Corbyn: I could not agree more with the hon. Gentleman. I happen to agree with what Brian Haw says, but if others were there, such as the pig farmers, I would not have to agree with them. I would respect their right to be there and to express their point of view—

Mr. Salmond: Or, for that matter, the demonstration for five years outside the Scottish Office, which Conservative Secretaries of State for Scotland wished to have removed, as we now know, but could find nothing in the law of Scotland to support the removal. That makes it all the more disappointing that Labour Members apparently want to go ahead with this mumbo-jumbo.

Jeremy Corbyn: I did not get involved in the demonstration outside the Scottish Office, but it had an important effect, as demonstrations do. Members who are prepared to pass this motion should think for a moment about where our democratic rights came from. Were they handed down, or were they gained because people were prepared to demonstrate and demand a freely elected Parliament? Did not the Chartists make a great contribution to the history of this country from which we draw many of our rights? We should be very careful about taking away the rights of others on fairly spurious grounds, as we are doing at present. It becomes the start of a slippery slope.

Demonstrations are inconvenient and a nuisance, and different points of view are sometimes not believed to be acceptable. But if we want to live in a free and democratic society, we must protect the right of those who are prepared to stand up and speak for a cause, outside this place, and remind us day in, day out that the decisions that we take have effects elsewhere, all the way over in Iraq or wherever. I ask Members tonight to think of our democratic values and not to support the proposals.

6.37 pm

Mr. John Redwood (Wokingham) (Con): The hon. Member for Thurrock (Andrew Mackinlay) made an extremely powerful case for the protection of witnesses. Witnesses are not well enough protected, and it would send the wrong signal to strike that out of the opening remarks of the Session. Instead the Government should consider ways of strengthening the position of witnesses, especially vulnerable witnesses such as civil servants, whose testimony is often crucial. Until that strengthening has occurred, I hope that we will keep in place the stern warning from Mr. Speaker at the beginning of the Session that witnesses will get, and deserve, the protection of the House. We then need to think about how we can do that.

The hon. Member for Hemel Hempstead (Mr. McWalter) was right to say that there are occasions when right hon. and hon. Members have their passage to the House delayed. It would be good if the whole House, through the Speaker, said to the police at the beginning of each Session that we expect them—our friends on our side—to make sure that all Members in possession of their passes are given quick and free passage, whatever may be going on outside. There have been occasions of state visits that have led to delays and impediments to Members getting through, and policed demonstrations when Members have been delayed or detained and not able to get through. I am sure that the police would want to help us, and it would be good if the whole House united to say that Members in possession of their passes, or well-known Members whom the police can identify, should be let through as a matter of urgency and courtesy. Members have sometimes been delayed in getting into the House to debate and vote on the very issues about which the demonstrators are complaining. Surely all demonstrators in a free and

[Mr. John Redwood]

democratic society would wish to see elected Members having the opportunity to be in the House when such important matters are being discussed

My third point relates to the proposed change of words with the suggestion that a form of words connected with the duties and responsibilities of Members should be used instead at the beginning of the Session. It is difficult for us to make a judgment tonight, as we are not in possession of whatever that form of words might be. I suspect that if we asked all Members to jot down on a piece of paper how they would define "duties and responsibilities" we would see variations and nuances on a large scale, although we trust that there would be some family resemblance. It would, I think, prove contentious and difficult. It would be odd of us to sweep away existing words before knowing that we had a much better form of words in the spirit of modernisation that the Government and the Committee suggest. The devil could well be in the detail, and I am reluctant to sign up until I have seen a difficult task carried out successfully.

Having observed the passions and disagreements that have arisen today over demonstrations, let me suggest that it is a question of balance. Some of us are on the side of free demonstrations, while others are more interested in having a beautiful square with law and order. Everyone is somewhere on the spectrum. I think that the issue will be resolved by Government proposals on legislation, and I do not think Members should be swayed by proposals on Sessional Orders tonight. There should be plenty of time for debate when legislation is before us. As the Government have made clear, this issue cannot be resolved without primary legislation. That, surely, is the time for a strong and passionate debate—again, about wording, so that we can decide whether the balance has been struck in the right way.

I hope that Members will bear that in mind when deciding whether to accept this rather rushed change, in the absence of all the improvements and modernisations that we have been promised.

6.41 pm

Mr. Alex Salmond (Banff and Buchan) (SNP): I can count on the fingers of one hand the number of occasions on which I have agreed with the right hon. Member for Wokingham (Mr. Redwood), but this just might be one of them. How on earth are Members to judge whether this new form of words, this mission statement from the code of conduct, this splendid encapsulation of the duties and responsibilities of a Member of Parliament, is better than the Sessional Orders, without seeing the form of words with which we are being invited to replace them? Given the complaint from various Committee Chairmen that this has taken too long, we might have expected to see the alternative formulation by now.

I have no doubt that others involved in this will come up with some splendid formulae, but I must say I have always thought that the Good News Bible does not quite capture the majesty of the King James version.

Mr. Swayne: Perhaps we might give each other a sign of peace.

Mr. Salmond: I join the Conservative ranks, in a constitutional sense, just in the context of this particular aspect, and to sound some warnings.

With due deference to the distinguished Chairman of the Procedure Committee, let me say that the fact that something has not been used for a while does not always mean that it is not necessary. We have not seen a motion for impeachment in the House since 1848, but in the current circumstances—against the current Prime Minister—it is very important that it remains available to Members of Parliament. The fact that some of the protections conferred by the Sessional Orders have not been used for a while does not mean that they are not important.

Sir Nicholas Winterton: Does the hon. Gentleman not take seriously the advice of the Clerk of the House, who is a servant not of Government, not of Opposition, but of the House? His recommendation was very much along the lines of the recommendations in the report.

Mr. Salmond: I am not concerned about whether the Chairman of the Procedure Committee took seriously the recommendations of the Clerk of the House; I am concerned about the fact that—not showing his usual robust independence—he did not perceive the flaws and difficulties with which such advice presents us this evening. Under the guise of convenience, modernisation and "wrapping things up", we see the mishmash of nonsense that we are being invited to support when no one can even explain the reasons for the change in the wording of the sessional order.

I believe, and I think other Members agree, that the new phrase

"to hinder Members by any means"

might refer to noise pollution. We are assured that that preoccupied the Committee and preoccupies certain Members, but I do not think it is worth the candle if it means restricting the right and freedom to demonstrate that some Members have mentioned. They are not thinking of themselves, of course; they are thinking of the poor policemen and members of staff.

The reality, as anybody who has attended business questions knows, is that those Members do not like the message coming through the loudhailers. It is not the loudhailers that they object to, but the occasional pricks to their bloated consciences. We should see through this cant and humbug and question why on earth we are being asked to buy a pig in a poke, to support formulations that nobody can explain, and to reject the Sessional Orders when we do not even have their replacement before us this evening.

I became concerned when I read the Procedure Committee's report. Despite my enormous admiration for the Committee Chairman, I was aghast to read the exchange between him and the Serjeant at Arms concerning the difficulties that the police experienced during a children's demonstration in forcibly removing them when they lay down in front of the House of Commons. Rather than understanding that there might be some difficulties and sensitivities in terms of how the police carry out such duties—just as might occur in dealing with a disabled demonstration—the Chairman said in response the Serjeant at Arms that there was "Almost anarchy!" I suppose that we should be surprised that he thought it "almost" anarchy. Usually, in his ebullience, he would have thought it true anarchy. Many of us, regardless of the proclivity of these children to take an unauthorised day off school, were actually rather glad to discover that so many members of the younger generation were thinking about something more than what was going to happen in that evening's soap, and that they wanted to come to this place to demonstrate about an issue that they thought particularly important.

Some people address these issues as if there is something absolutely special about Members of Parliament. Well, there are two things that are special, the first of which is the right of privilege: the fundamental right of Members to say what they like without the encumbrance of any threat of action against them. Secondly, there is a fundamental right of access, as all who have spoken in this debate agree. Over and above that, there is no need for special rights, or for protection for Members against noise pollution entering their place of work. On the contrary, there should be additional rights to demonstrate around Parliament, not less. We should want people to demonstrate around here; the time to worry is when nobody can be bothered to do so.

Mr. Haw, who has spent three years outside this place, seems to preoccupy many Members. Indeed, the preoccupation is such that the Committee said:

> "The Government should introduce appropriate legislation to prohibit long-term demonstrations".

Unusually, a Member with the sanity and perception of the Committee Chairman is telling us that it is only "long-term demonstrations" that the Committee objects to, and that the occasional short-term demonstration will be okay. He is worried about the crowding out by Mr. Haw of other demonstrations. He is worried about the intimidation of thousands of huntsmen and women by this one man's demonstration, which apparently occupies too much space in Parliament square. That such a distinguished and insightful Member can come before us with such nonsense suggests that he has been over-influenced by some of our more sensitive souls. They cannot see beyond their own minor inconvenience to detecting something in the Sessional Orders—about the right to demonstrate—that might be important in terms of protecting our rights and the people's rights.

So I shall join the rebellious Labour Back Benchers and others who are concerned about the suborning of witnesses, although I suspect that the hon. Member for Thurrock (Andrew Mackinlay) could have given us more recent examples of Committees being influenced. We look forward to his memoirs and to accounts of more recent Committees in which he has participated, to see whether such things do in fact happen. I shall join that rebellion and share the concern of those who want to maintain freedom of speech, and I shall insist—if I can—that we see what we are meant to be voting for before we fling out the Sessional Orders. They may be archaic and arcane. They may not be noticed by many hon. Members at the start of each Session, but I suspect that they contain some things of greater importance than the grumblings of a few Conservative MPs and the inability of Government Front Benchers to detect anything of historic significance in them.

In particular, I note that the Leader of the House is a man who specialised in demonstrations in the early stages of his career and I think that he was absolutely right to campaign on those issues. Yet he now comes before us to support proposals whose purpose is, inter alia, to obstruct and restrict a gentleman who has done nobody any harm and is demonstrating for a cause that is fundamentally good.

6.50 pm

Lembit Öpik (Montgomeryshire) (LD): I rise to support the views expressed by the hon. Member for Islington, North (Jeremy Corbyn) and others because I believe that we really have a personal responsibility to defend the rights of those who have a quieter voice than ourselves.

As I have said before, we are greatly privileged to be able to express our views directly in the House to decision makers and those who run the country, and at the same time to have them expressed occasionally through the media, whether it be on television, radio or in newspapers. By comparison, our man outside, Brian Haw, has proved that people have to work pretty damn hard to get heard and have a voice by proxy in this place. To his great credit, we have had what amounts to a three-hour debate prompted in large part by his three-and-a-half year sacrifice and his willingness to inconvenience himself by virtually living outside the Palace of Westminster in the daytime.

Other hon. Members have spoken about balancing the right to demonstrate with other concerns. I would suggest that we have the balance about right in this country. I do not need to repeat what others have said—that Brian Haw presents no danger to us; that he has not restricted our ability to come in and out of the premises. He is clearly a non-violent demonstrator, and as we know, he does not even break the law. As far as I am concerned, introducing legislation to outlaw such behaviour is in itself a crime.

I also cannot help wondering whether, if the message were different, we would be having this debate. If Brian Haw stood with his megaphone on Wednesdays as the Prime Minister left Downing street and shouted, "Up with the Prime Minister; we want four more years!" or shouted out to the Ministers before us today, "Long live the hon. Member for Don Valley!" or "Good luck to the hon. Member for Oldham, East and Saddleworth. We love you!", would we be debating this gentleman as a dangerous scourge on society?

Sir Nicholas Winterton: Yes.

Lembit Öpik: The hon. Gentleman merely expresses his own vain envy because I mentioned Ministers rather than himself, but I am sure that with a couple of words across the road, Brian Haw would give the thumbs up to him as well. I suggest that it is, at least in part, the message that causes us to have the current debate.

Prohibiting long-term demonstrations itself brings about all sorts of difficulties. How might such legislation be implemented? The hon. Member for Macclesfield (Sir Nicholas Winterton) suggested that the problem with having Brian Haw there all the time is that there could be a long list of other people who would like to demonstrate there, too. I assume therefore that he

[Lembit Öpik]

would have no problem if Brian Haw decided to do a hot megaphone—in other words, operated a rota with two or three other people. There would always be demonstration going on, but not on the same matter.

Perhaps we could have a demonstration against the war in Iraq on Mondays, Wednesdays and Fridays; we could have another gentleman opposing the war in Afghanistan on Tuesdays, Thursdays and Saturdays; and on Sundays we could have someone who generally objected to the Government's foreign policies such as the sale of arms to the very people we are now having to attack. There would be three demonstrations in a week rather than one long-term demonstration. That is the sort of preposterous position we get into once we accept that people are allowed to demonstrate without restriction, but not in one continuous blast.

I accept that people are uncomfortable or inconvenienced by what Mr. Haw and other people like him do, but that is not a good enough reason to prevent them from having the opportunity to demonstrate if they want to. It strikes me as very telling that people who support such demonstrations tend to consider the motivations of those who demonstrate, while those who would curtail the demonstrations tend to consider the inconvenience to themselves. The irony is that demonstrations become effective only when some inconvenience is caused.

That is the heart of the matter, and I support those who have argued so eloquently about the importance of giving a voice to people who are willing to inconvenience themselves to raise a concern. In this case, we are talking about Brian Haw, but the principle applies to the nation.

Mr. Mega—*[Interruption.]* I was going to say Mr. Megaphone, because it seems that I am fixated with that word. Mr. Deputy Speaker, I was going to conclude by saying that megaphone diplomacy is alive and well in Parliament square. Its guardian is a man called Brian Haw. We are guardians of democracy and have the right and responsibility to look after his interests. It is an old truism to say, for reasons that we have heard many times before, that although some of us may abhor what Brian Haw says, if we are serious about democracy we are duty bound to defend to the end his right to say it.

6.56 pm

Mr. Eric Forth (Bromley and Chislehurst) (Con): I want to mention a couple of things that have not been talked about much so far. First, I draw the House's attention to paragraph 6 of the report, which gives the lie to a lot of what has been said about what this is about. It states that

> "in the absence of an Order of Business for the first day of a Session, the Orders and Resolutions are proposed to the House without notice and have to be read out in full: they have on occasion given rise to debate and even (in 1984) a division."

That shows that the report is about cleaning up, controlling and disciplining what happens in this House, in case it should inconvenience the Government or hon. Members at large. It seems that we must never have surprises in this House any more, or anything that is unpredictable or that might upset the Government. I am afraid that we are seeing that sort of thing repeatedly these days.

I should have thought that hon. Members would welcome the spontaneity that could arise from some of our rather quaint traditions. We should not want everything to be so ordered, arranged and controlled that we know exactly what is going to happen, but we are moving in that direction. I am sad to say that the report takes that process a step further.

Paragraph 10 of the report contains what I consider to be the following impertinence. It states that

> "the Sessional Orders and Resolutions . . . should be replaced by a statement of the duties and responsibilities of Members, possibly the seven principles of public life as set out in the Code of Conduct".

That is nonsense: Members of Parliament define their responsibilities and account to their voters for them. We do not want to start getting involved in job descriptions and procedure manuals that tell us how to do our job, but it appears that that is what underlies that supposedly innocent proposal involving a

> "statement of the duties and responsibilities of Members".

I know that a lot of hon. Members regard themselves effectively as social workers, and not even very glorified ones, but a few of us still cling to the view that it is the variation in the attitude that they take to their responsibilities—and their definition of those responsibilities—that is the essence of what it means to be a Member of Parliament. If we start to move away from that, we shall diminish even further the already diminished role that we have created for ourselves.

We are making rather heavy weather of this very important issue involving demonstrations and the balance between freedom and discipline. Some time ago, I suggested to the Leader of the House that we institute a very simple rule stipulating that Parliament square be cleared between sunset and sunrise every day. That would be one way of dealing with the problem of whether a demonstration is continuous, for example.

My other suggestion would be to ban voice amplification. People would be perfectly free to forgather and use their voices in an acceptable way, but they would not be allowed to set up the permanent encampments that have arisen. That would be a reasonable balance between maintaining people's freedom to be in Parliament square opposite the House of Commons and express a point of view, either individually or collectively, and the need to maintain some sort of discipline.

Mr. Salmond: The right hon. Gentleman clings to a view, which I support, of his rights as a Member of Parliament, so why cannot he cling to the idea that there are rights for people who want to demonstrate to Members of Parliament?

Mr. Forth: I have no desire to stop people demonstrating. They could gather freely in Parliament square, as long as they did not permanently camp there, because if a large enough number of them did so, it might prevent others from demonstrating. There should be some equity. The noise thing is relevant, too. There are probably some fairly simple and elegant solutions to the problem, and I hope that we can find them, rather than being too heavy-handed.

7 pm

Dr. Julian Lewis (New Forest, East) (Con): I have waited seven long years to find something in common with the hon. Member for Islington, North (Jeremy Corbyn). My wait has been fulfilled today, because like him, I have been arrested for demonstrating in public. I have even been locked up in a cell for demonstrating in public, and one of the reasons for that was that I made too much amplified noise in public.

Mr. Bercow: Will my hon. Friend tell the House whether he informed the selection committee of the New Forest, East Conservative association of that important fact before he was selected?

Dr. Lewis: I am sure that had I done so, the good burghers of New Forest, East would have made a far wiser selection than, in the event, they did.

In May 1982, there was a huge demonstration going up Whitehall, led by Arthur Scargill and Tony Benn, against the taskforce that was deploying to fight in the Falklands war, so I and a number of friends and colleagues ambushed—as it were—the demonstration from the rooftops, playing at excessively loud volume Her Majesty's national anthem. That led the police to arrest me and others on the ground that by playing the national anthem we might so upset the serried ranks of Trotskyites, communists and other agitators marching in the main demonstration as to cause a breach of the peace.

Jeremy Corbyn: I have to inform the hon. Gentleman that he did not upset us at all. We quite enjoyed it and thought it was a bit of fun. Not one person on the demonstration requested that he or anybody else be arrested for mounting any form of counter-demonstration. There was a spirit of democracy about the event.

Dr. Lewis: I am delighted that the hon. Gentleman made that intervention, as I should now like to tell him what happened next.

People felt that the police had been a tad heavy-handed, so on future demonstrations, in October 1983 and June 1984, we mounted similar counter-demonstrations, by arrangement with the police. The council—I think it was Westminster—sent along an officer with a decibel meter, and whatever may or may not have happened in 1982, there were plenty of protests from the demonstrators to that environmental officer. He kept telling us, "If you don't turn it down, we'll confiscate your equipment." In those days, it was possible to hold a major demonstration with a minor counter-demonstration and to have a certain balance of forces so that both sides could put their point across.

Mr. Salmond: To boil it down to its essence, the hon. Gentleman is saying that 20 years ago he was arrested for noise disturbance and now he wants to arrest everybody else who—

Mr. Deputy Speaker (Sir Michael Lord): Order. Unusually, I think I need say no more.

Dr. Lewis: Would that life were as simple as the hon. Gentleman suggests. What I am actually saying is that somewhere between then and now there has been a change in the law. There has been a change in the rules and it looks as though it must have been brought in under the last Conservative Government in the Environmental Protection Act 1990, because according to a letter sent to me by Westminster council,

> "section 79(1)(ga) defines noise that is prejudicial to health or a nuisance and is emitted or caused by a vehicle, machinery or equipment in a street, as a statutory nuisance. However, section 79(6A) provides that section 79(1)(ga) does not apply to noise made by a political demonstration or a demonstration supporting or opposing a cause or a campaign."

The fact is, we have heard a lot of humbug talked about freedom of speech. We have freedom of speech in this Chamber; we each put forward our differing views. When we have had our say, we let the other person have his. We sit down, we shut up and we listen. We do not go on shouting in the face of the other person whether he wants to listen or not. We obey the rules. That is not happening in Parliament square.

I have taken the trouble to go across and have extensive conversations with Brian Haw and I take much very much to heart the comments of the hon. Member for Banff and Buchan (Mr. Salmond), who tried to suggest that those of us who oppose the racket that Brian is making do so because we hate his message. I ask the hon. Gentleman and others to accept my sincerity when I say that I would take the same approach to anyone who demonstrated in the same way for a cause in which I passionately believed and who went on making a racket that was designed not to address the people who had come to hear the message but to penetrate the building of people who were trying to get on with their work, looking after the interests of their constituents.

Perhaps some of those who speak so glibly about the noise have offices that are somewhat better insulated than mine, but I assure them that it is very difficult to do one's work when there is a constant racket and a barrage of noise the words of which cannot even be heard clearly. It is a row, and it is made not to get a message across or in the interests of free speech but to harass and annoy parliamentarians. That is the beginning and end of it. Nothing other than a change in the law will prevent this abuse from continuing.

I am relatively agnostic on whether or Brian or anybody else ought to be able to demonstrate in Parliament square. I have spoken to him and I admire his commitment to his cause. I will make a point that no one else has made. I know that one of his motivations results from the fact that his father went into and liberated one of the Nazi concentration camps. With my family background, I have every reason to hold anyone motivated in that way in the highest regard.

I do not think that Brian used to make all this noise in the earlier part of his campaign, and when he did not make the noise and just put his message across, I had very little, if anything, to say about what he was doing. However, I now think that he has taken freedom of speech into areas that become an abuse of free speech. There is no freedom to impinge on the freedom of other people. That is what he is doing.

7.17 pm

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for the Home Department (Caroline Flint): We have had a very interesting debate, with 13 speeches from the Back Benches in addition to those from the Front-Bench Opposition spokespersons.

As a Home Office Minister, I will concentrate on the demonstrations in Parliament square, and while there has been a great deal of discussion about one individual, the legislation that we will introduce is not just about that individual: it is about dealing with a number of issues relating to both long-term and short-term demonstrations in the area around Parliament. It is important to address such issues.

The Mayor of London took part in the consultation and a summary of his response shows that he believes

> "in an individual's right to protest but must be balanced with the security of protection from harassment and that protests outside Parliament are addressed. Londoners' safety could be seriously jeopardised by violent demonstrations around Parliament and Parliament Square. Current legislation provides a degree of safety for the Houses of Parliament, however recent demonstrations suggests they are insufficient."

My hon. Friend the Member for Hayes and Harlington (John McDonnell) and I worked for the Mayor when the Greater London council existed, and the Mayor makes an interesting point.

I too have demonstrated, and perhaps like other Members, I remember the time when I could not cross Westminster bridge to demonstrate. There has been much discussion about the right to free speech and to demonstrate, but some of the contributions to the debate suggested that that right does not exist in this country. The right does exist in this country, and it does so to a much greater extent than in many other countries throughout the world, including Iraq under Saddam Hussein, whom Mr. Haw advocated that we should do nothing about. The matter is important, and as the right hon. Member for Wokingham (Mr. Redwood) said, we must examine the detail of the legislation when we introduce it.

Let me touch on several points raised by hon. Members.

Mr. Salmond *rose—*

Caroline Flint: We have heard a lot of contributions and I will not have time to deal with the points made by hon. Members if I give way.

My hon. Friend the Member for Hayes and Harlington asked about consultation. Consultation has occurred on new police powers and we have seen the publication of the consultation paper, "Modernising Police Powers to Meet Community Needs". The public consultation process lasted for 12 weeks and closed only recently.

Like several hon. Members, the hon. Member for North Cornwall (Mr. Tyler) suggested that the powers were being designed to deal with only one individual. I do not know whether this will reassure him, but I re-emphasise the fact that the plans that we intend to introduce will allow the police to place conditions on all short and long-term demonstrations in the vicinity of Parliament.

I congratulate my hon. Friend the Member for Hemel Hempstead (Mr. McWalter) on his work on the Procedure Committee and thank him for his support. He raised a point about the important question of passes. Police officers and staff of the House who ask to see people's passes do so because they are trying to protect us and our security. I am sometimes guilty of not wearing my pass, but I am glad to do so today. We must appreciate the situation and act responsibly.

The Chairman of the Procedure Committee, the hon. Member for Macclesfield (Sir Nicholas Winterton), made an excellent speech. He has been accused of many things during the debate, such as preventing Parliament from scrutinising the Executive and doing away with traditions that should be part and parcel of Parliament in the future. He is the last person who could be accused of doing such things. He and his colleagues on the Procedure Committee have tried to make sensible suggestions about the way forward and have rightly taken heed of hon. Members' concerns. In preparation for our debate, I read the report of the Westminster Hall debate—I did not attend it—in which many hon. Members participated, including the right hon. Member for North-West Hampshire (Sir George Young), to express people's worries about the way in which free speech can sometimes be abused. There must be a sense of order behind the way in which free speech may be expressed.

My hon. Friend the Member for Thurrock (Andrew Mackinlay) raised several points about witnesses. I am assured by my right hon. Friend the Leader of the House and my hon. Friend the Deputy Leader of the House that his worries about witnesses are covered by other statutes. As the right hon. Member for North-West Hampshire said, a debate is currently being held within the Liaison Committee on whether there is a clear way in which witnesses who are brought before Committees could be advised of their rights and responsibilities when giving evidence, which is a good idea.

Mr. McWalter: Will my hon. Friend give way?

Caroline Flint: I have only a few minutes in which to speak, so I shall not give way to my hon. Friend on this occasion.

The right hon. Member for North-West Hampshire made a balanced contribution. The Government do not intend to ban demonstrations, so we are in accord with him on that point. We are saying that, given the times in which we live, we must consider hon. Members' access to Parliament and the protection of not only Members of Parliament and those who work here but other people who meet and gather in the square. When we introduce the legislation, we will have a full chance to debate how we may achieve that and deal with the obvious problems that exist while maintaining people's right to protest. It is absurd to suggest that the actions that we intend to take will deny people the right to express their views.

Mr. Tyler *rose—*

Caroline Flint: I am sorry, but I will not give way.

My hon. Friend the Member for Islington, North (Jeremy Corbyn) asked about police permission. Police permission must be given for marches under section 2 of the Public Order Act 1986. However, it is not necessary to obtain advance police permission for assemblies.

The right hon. Member for Wokingham made a point about witness protection, but as I said, I am advised that that matter is covered elsewhere. He mentioned the important question of MPs' access to the House. My right hon. Friend the Leader of the House mentioned the fact that one of our colleagues in the House was assaulted during a recent demonstration. She was simply making her way from her office in No. 1 Parliament Street to the House.

The hon. Member for Bournemouth, West (Sir John Butterfill) raised the statement of principles, which I am advised will be looked at by the right hon. Member for North-West Hampshire, who chairs the Select Committee on Standards and Privileges. Mr. Speaker will make a statement to the House, and it will be for the House to endorse it. I agree that we need to strike a balance when dealing with the many problems in Parliament square raised by hon. Members.

The hon. Member for Banff and Buchan (Mr. Salmond) repeated a number of points made by my hon. Friends the Members for Hayes and Harlington and for Islington, North. He said that the message would be stopped, but as was rightly pointed out, one cannot hear or understand a message blared out by a loudhailer. People have the right to protest, and we could have a long debate about whether the protest outside has been particularly effective in changing policy—I suggest that it has not. The right hon. Member for Bromley and Chislehurst (Mr. Forth), I am afraid, accused the hon. Member for Macclesfield of helping the Executive to storm their way through the House without due process or scrutiny. I have already said that that is not the case. He also raised the issue of the statement, and I believe that I have already explained how the process will operate. He agreed with other hon. Members that we must do something about certain types of demonstration that have come to the fore in recent times.

The hon. Member for New Forest, East (Dr. Lewis) suggested that there was a split in the New forest.

Dr. Julian Lewis: For the first time ever.

Caroline Flint: Surely not the last. The hon. Gentleman shared his interesting experiences of demonstrating—

It being three hours after the commencement of proceedings on the motion, MADAM DEPUTY SPEAKER *put forthwith the Question, pursuant to Order [2 November].*

Question put:—

The House divided: Ayes 130, Noes 75.

Division No. 309] **[7:17 pm**

AYES

Ainger, Nick
Ainsworth, Bob *(Cov'try NE)*
Allen, Graham
Amess, David
Anderson, Janet *(Rossendale & Darwen)*
Arbuthnot, rh James
Armstrong, rh Ms Hilary
Atkins, Charlotte
Bailey, Adrian
Baldry, Tony
Barnes, Harry
Barron, rh Kevin
Battle, John
Bayley, Hugh
Beard, Nigel
Begg, Miss Anne
Benn, rh Hilary
Bercow, John
Betts, Clive
Blears, Ms Hazel
Bradley, Peter *(The Wrekin)*
Brady, Graham
Brennan, Kevin
Browne, Desmond
Burden, Richard
Burnett, John
Burnham, Andy
Byrne, Liam *(B'ham Hodge H)*
Clark, Paul *(Gillingham)*
Clwyd, Ann *(Cynon V)*
Coffey, Ms Ann
Connarty, Michael
Corston, rh Jean
Crausby, David
David, Wayne
Davidson, Ian
Davis, rh David *(Haltemprice & Howden)*
Dean, Mrs Janet
Dowd, Jim *(Lewisham W)*
Eagle, Angela *(Wallasey)*
Eagle, Maria *(L'pool Garston)*
Evans, Nigel
Fitzpatrick, Jim
Fitzsimons, Mrs Lorna
Flight, Howard
Flint, Caroline
Gapes, Mike *(Ilford S)*
George, rh Bruce *(Walsall S)*
Green, Damian *(Ashford)*
Grieve, Dominic
Griffiths, Jane *(Reading E)*
Hain, rh Peter
Hall, Mike *(Weaver Vale)*
Hamilton, Fabian *(Leeds NE)*
Heald, Oliver
Hendrick, Mark
Hoban, Mark *(Fareham)*
Hoyle, Lindsay
Hughes, Kevin *(Doncaster N)*
Humble, Mrs Joan
Hutton, rh John
Iddon, Dr. Brian
Jack, rh Michael
Jones, Kevan *(N Durham)*
Jones, Lynne *(Selly Oak)*
Jones, Martyn *(Clwyd S)*
Keeble, Ms Sally
Key, Robert *(Salisbury)*
Kidney, David
Knight, rh Greg *(E Yorkshire)*
Lait, Mrs Jacqui
Levitt, Tom *(High Peak)*
Lewis, Dr. Julian *(New Forest E)*
Liddell-Grainger, Ian
Linton, Martin
Lloyd, Tony *(Manchester C)*
McAvoy, Thomas
McFall, rh John
Mactaggart, Fiona
McWalter, Tony
McWilliam, John
Mann, John *(Bassetlaw)*
Mawhinney, rh Sir Brian
May, rh Mrs Theresa
Merron, Gillian
Michael, rh Alun
Miller, Andrew
Moffatt, Laura
Moss, Malcolm
Murphy, Jim *(Eastwood)*
Murrison, Dr. Andrew
Naysmith, Dr. Doug
O'Brien, Stephen *(Eddisbury)*
Olner, Bill
Pike, Peter *(Burnley)*
Plaskitt, James
Pope, Greg *(Hyndburn)*
Pound, Stephen
Prentice, Ms Bridget *(Lewisham E)*
Prentice, Gordon *(Pendle)*
Quinn, Lawrie
Rapson, Syd *(Portsmouth N)*
Robathan, Andrew
Rosindell, Andrew
Roy, Frank *(Motherwell)*
Ruane, Chris
Salter, Martin
Simpson, Keith *(M-Norfolk)*
Smith, Jacqui *(Redditch)*
Smith, John *(Glamorgan)*
Smith, Sir Robert *(W Ab'd'ns & Kincardine)*
Spellar, rh John
Stewart, Ian *(Eccles)*
Taylor, Dari *(Stockton S)*
Taylor, David *(NW Leics)*
Tipping, Paddy
Tyrie, Andrew
Vaz, Keith *(Leicester E)*
Walter, Robert
Watson, Tom
White, Brian
Wiggin, Bill
Williams, Betty *(Conwy)*
Winterton, Ann *(Congleton)*
Winterton, Sir Nicholas *(Macclesfield)*
Woolas, Phil
Wright, David *(Telford)*
Wyatt, Derek
Yeo, Tim *(S Suffolk)*
Young, rh Sir George

Tellers for the Ayes:
Margaret Moran and
Vernon Coaker

NOES

Allan, Richard
Amess, David
Brooke, Mrs Annette L.
Bruce, Malcolm
Burnside, David
Calton, Mrs Patsy
Campbell, Gregory *(E Lond'y)*
Campbell, rh Sir Menzies *(NE Fife)*
Chidgey, David
Clapham, Michael
Corbyn, Jeremy
Cotter, Brian
Cruddas, Jon
Cunningham, Jim *(Coventry S)*
Davey, Edward *(Kingston)*
Dodds, Nigel
Donaldson, Jeffrey M.
Drew, David *(Stroud)*
Duncan, Peter *(Galloway)*
Dunwoody, Mrs Gwyneth
Ewing, Annabelle
Foster, Don *(Bath)*
George, Andrew *(St. Ives)*
Gidley, Sandra
Gray, James *(N Wilts)*
Green, Matthew *(Ludlow)*
Harvey, Nick

Heath, David
Hermon, Lady
Hoey, Kate *(Vauxhall)*
Holmes, Paul
Howarth, Gerald *(Aldershot)*
Jenkins, Brian
Keetch, Paul
Kirkwood, Sir Archy
Laing, Mrs Eleanor
Lamb, Norman
Lepper, David
Lilley, rh Peter
Loughton, Tim
Luke, Iain *(Dundee E)*
McDonnell, John
McIntosh, Miss Anne
Mackinlay, Andrew
Mahon, Mrs Alice
Mitchell, Austin *(Gt Grimsby)*
Moore, Michael
Pugh, Dr. John
Redwood, rh John
Reid, Alan *(Argyll & Bute)*
Rendel, David
Robathan, Andrew
Robertson, Angus *(Moray)*
Robertson, Laurence *(Tewk'b'ry)*
Russell, Bob *(Colchester)*
Salmond, Alex
Sanders, Adrian
Simpson, Alan *(Nottingham S)*
Skinner, Dennis
Smyth, Rev. Martin *(Belfast S)*
Spink, Bob *(Castle Point)*
Stunell, Andrew
Swayne, Desmond
Syms, Robert
Taylor, John *(Solihull)*
Taylor, Dr. Richard *(Wyre F)*
Teather, Sarah
Thurso, John
Tonge, Dr. Jenny
Tyler, Paul *(N Cornwall)*
Weir, Michael
Williams, Hywel *(Caernarfon)*
Williams, Roger *(Brecon)*
Wishart, Pete
Younger-Ross, Richard

Tellers for the Noes:
Mr. Eric Forth and
Lembit Öpik

Question accordingly agreed to.

Resolved,

That this House takes note of the Third Report of the Procedure Committee, Session 2002–03, on Sessional Orders and Resolutions, HC 855, and the Government's Response thereto (published as the Committee's Third Special Report of the current Session, HC 613); approves the proposals set out in paragraphs 9, 10 and 25 of the Report for changes in the practice of the House at the beginning of each Session; and, as recommended in paragraph 9(b), makes the following provision:

That all Members of this House who are returned for two or more places in any part of the United Kingdom should choose for which of the places they will serve, within one week after it appears that there is no question about their election for that place.

Sharpness Docks

Motion made, and Question proposed, That this House do now adjourn.—*[Mr. Woolas.]*

7.28 pm

Mr. David Drew (Stroud) (Lab/Co-op): I am delighted to have this opportunity to discuss Sharpness docks, and I am also delighted to see the Under-Secretary of State for Transport, my hon. Friend the Member for Staffordshire, Moorlands (Charlotte Atkins), on the Front Bench. I was slightly surprised when I learned that she was responding to this debate, but in the spirit of comradeship that we have in our party, and given that the subject is docks, I am sure that the Department for Transport is as relevant as the Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs, which is the managing Department.

I apologise for the state of my voice—I have not been to voice training recently, but I have got the lurgy, so if I suddenly splutter, it is because of that and not for some other reason. Sharpness docks are close to my heart because I used to visit them when I was a child. Some of us can remember the days when people used to go out on Sunday afternoon car trips, and I used to go and watch the ships in Sharpness docks, which might show what a sad life I led as a child. There used to be a lovely ship, the Vindicatrix, in Sharpness docks. It was a training ship, and people who trained on it—the Vindi boys—always have an annual reunion. It still sticks in the memory.

It might surprise people to hear that my constituency contains docks, because most think that Stroud is somewhere inland near the Cotswolds, but we have long-established docks that are quite important. Sharpness docks is one of three inland waterway terminals still owned by British Waterways, and I contend that it is an important facility that is in need of some investment. The docks stand on the tidal upper reaches of the Severn estuary: the tidal range of up to 10 m is slightly less than at Avonmouth, 17 miles downstream. Ships carrying up to about 3,500 tonnes of cargo regularly pass through the port—I am pleased that their number has increased over the past three years—and it is possible to take some further up the Gloucester and Sharpness canal, which can take ships up to 900 deadweight tonnes, although the canal is mainly used by leisure craft now.

The river up to Sharpness is one of compulsory pilotage. I am bringing this matter to the attention of the House because of a report undertaken by the pilots which voices concern about the state of the docks. The pilots bring in vessels over 100 deadweight tonnes; they are part of a consortium, the Gloucester Pilots Partnership, which is under contract to Gloucester Harbour Trustees, which is the competent harbour authority. The trustees also provide the navigation aids in the harbour, which extends from the Maisemore and Llanthony weirs at Gloucester to seaward of the Severn road bridges. They provide comprehensive navigation lights cover and an advanced pilot watch radar system to help to guide shipping through the bridges, especially the deep water channel—known as "the Shoots"—under the second Severn crossing.

It is estimated that the docks date back to 1827, but it was only towards the end of the 19th century, in 1874, when the new docks opened and the Severn-Wye railway bridge was completed, that the thoroughfare became important for both water and rail transport. The potential use of coal in the forest of Dean—one of the reasons for building the railway and opening up the port—was never really realised. None the less, the facility has been important: connected to the Gloucester and Sharpness canal, it has always served its purpose.

In 1997, the quayside operations of British Waterways were transferred on a 125-year lease to Sharpness Dock Ltd., or SDL, a wholly owned subsidiary of the Victoria group based in Plymouth. The dry dock facility is separately leased to Sharpness Shipyard and Dry Dock Ltd. I wish to express my respect for Mark Gatehouse of SDL, who has seen the docks through a difficult period to the pleasing point at which they appear to be on the up. That is proved by the recent trading position, which shows the tonnage passing through the docks rising from almost 470,000 in 1994–95 to 1, 235,722 in 2002–03. Although the tonnage fell slightly last year, we still think that the port is doing quite well.

The reason for my present concern is a report that I received from Gloucester Harbour Trustees. I pay tribute to those who helped me understand its relevance and prepare this speech, including my old friend Bob Hall, who has been a harbour trustee for many years, Mike Johnson, who helped to edit his notes, and Gary Strickland of SDL. The report highlights the fact that parts of the docks are in a poor state of repair. I am sure that my hon. Friend the Minister will be able to obtain her own copy of the report, but if she cannot, I shall leave one with her. The report shows that the dry dock, and particularly the dolphins and the area where material is loaded and unloaded, is in need of repair.

I have always believed that the dock has a good future as long as it is invested in. The problem is that there are nearly £6 million of arrears in relation to investment, and I should like progress to be made on how British Waterways can be encouraged to take forward a strategy to bring the docks up to a decent state of repair.

We must recognise that the report is worthy of action. By chance, before it was published—although I had been given notice that it was in its incubation stage—I had my own meeting with BW back in September, where I met several people, including Roy Parker, the freight marketing manager, Stewart Sim, the operations director, and Ian Jarvis, the general manager for the south-west. We had an interesting couple of hours' discussion in which, having agreed that the docks have a future and that we are committed to assuring it, we explored some of the arguments. Bob Hall came along to that meeting. Although we left with a degree of optimism because of the commitment shown by the officials whom we met, that was not the same as being told where the money would come from.

There are two sides to this. We need to consider not only putting together a funding package to deal with some of the problems in relation to the docks' state of repair, but how to invest in freight use. No one pretends that it is possible to move dramatically from road to water, or from road to water and rail. However, it would be nice to think that the freight grants that are available to other forms of transport could be made available to inland waterways. That is germane not only to Sharpness but to all forms of inland waterway. Because they do not get access to the same level of grant, it is impossible to think about how to change things if and when the opportunity arises. I hope that that can happen at a more general level. It is no less than Sharpness deserves, and it would provide many opportunities to consider what could be achieved with the right level of capital investment and to how to use the revenue stream to move freight about in better and more sustainable ways.

In concluding my remarks to give my hon. Friend plenty of time to respond, I shall deal briefly with other issues relating to the Sharpness area. We cannot isolate the docks from their hinterland. The people who live there would not think of doing that, and I have no intention of arguing for it. I believe that the docks have a strong future. They are a good facility which, with the right level of capital investment, and with more revenue support, can be turned around to deal with the sort of tonnages of which we believe that they are capable. However, that depends on other factors.

The B4066 is the road to the docks. It is partly completed but it needs to be fully completed because of heavy vehicles driving through unsuitable areas. My constituents complain to me regularly about that. Again, we could do with a commitment to complete the road. I appreciate that that is subject to extant planning arrangements, but it would be useful to get a Government view about how progress can be made.

I shall not go into the details about the rail head because they are long and complicated, but we have been talking about trying to get a rail head for the past 10 years. It would act as a catalyst, because there would be a quick way of moving freight to the midlands, with intra-country shipping travelling from the east coast to the west coast, or directly from Spain. Ships bringing phosphates for our agriculture are some of the major users of the port. I want the rail head to be properly evaluated to ascertain how much it will cost. We have not got anywhere yet because the rail freight grant was lost, but I believe that there are still ways of providing a rail head.

On the negative side, there was the threat of an incinerator, which I strongly oppose. If hon. Members will excuse the pun, I believe that it is on the back burner now. However, the docks could be a potential source of an exciting development in waste. We have a firm, which used to be called Plasmega and has recently been taken over by Tarmac, that undertakes recycling. We want to encourage such industry on to the docks. It is an ideal centre for a waste recycling facility but it needs proper investment. We need to use the docks area appropriately.

At a time when Sharpness docks has the potential for expansion, we are in the process of examining what we need to do with Berkeley technology centre a few miles around the corner. It has a genuine impact on my constituency, with the potential loss of 1,100 jobs. We are considering an exciting taskforce investigation into how we can use the facility to develop a high-tech park. I should like some link between the docks, where some of the blue-collar work could take place, and the work that could go on in the Berkeley technology centre.

Other threats could derail matters. As I have said in this place on previous occasions, I have never been in favour of the Severn barrage. It could have a big impact on the docks. We do not seem to be making progress on

[Mr. David Drew]

that. Again, if such issues are being discussed in other places, they should be brought to the forefront of our deliberations about what we want to with the docks in future.

The docks have a future. They are capable of sustaining a good tonnage. Their facilities need to be repaired and brought up to standard so that they can be used not only now but in future. We need to get the infrastructure issues right and ensure that employment measures on the docks are suitable for the 21st century. I hope that my hon. Friend the Under-Secretary, in liaison with the Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs, will give me some good news that we are serious about using inland waterways. That is not a pious dream but a way of securing a sustainable future.

7.43 pm

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Transport (Charlotte Atkins): I congratulate my hon. Friend the Member for Stroud (Mr. Drew) on securing the debate on the future of Sharpness docks. I am delighted that his debate is the first to which I have had an opportunity to respond.

The speech has highlighted the important role that smaller ports such as Sharpness can play in meeting the needs of business customers and in generating wealth locally and regionally. Although the heaviest traffic flows are concentrated in our biggest ports, providing vital facilities for container and bulk traffic such as oil and coal, there are more than 1,000 ports and terminals throughout the United Kingdom.

The Government do not run the ports industry. Some ports are run by local authorities, and others operate as independent trusts or are wholly in the private sector; all are run as commercial propositions.

Let me set out three key tenets of the Government's policy towards ports. We recognise that all ports have the potential to bring significant economic benefit to their hinterland, be it local or regional. We have ensured that the framework is in place to allow ports, large and small, to make the most of the opportunities that the market presents. The Government are firmly committed to encouraging more freight to be carried by water, where that offers the best value for money for our economy, environment and society.

Sharpness is an excellent example of what makes our ports industry successful. Under the new operator's entrepreneurial approach, traffic has climbed 50 per cent. since 1996, and it has already established itself as the eighth largest port in the south-west region, whose coastline stretches from Gloucester to Poole. Sharpness Docks Ltd has successfully developed its niche business in dry cargo in and out of the west midlands on short sea shipping services.

I fully understand my hon. Friend's keen interest in supporting the company's efforts to build on this success—it would clearly benefit his constituents, the region, and the Government's policy aims. Sharpness is unusual, in that the owner of the site, and the statutory port authority, is British Waterways, a public corporation. As the port authority, British Waterways is required to ensure that the port is fit for purpose and can safely be used by ships and other vessels. However, the maintenance requirements laid down by the Transport Act 1968 apply only to commercial and cruising waterways, and British Waterways is not obliged to maintain Sharpness docks to specified standards, except for the length of the Gloucester and Sharpness canal where it passes through the docks.

There are many demands on British Waterways' budget, but the Government have been increasing the funding for the corporation. Between 1999 and 2002, British Waterways was allocated an additional £24 million to eliminate its safety backlog over a seven-year period. A further £18 million was provided between 2002 and 2004 to enable it to reduce the backlog even more quickly. In addition, DEFRA has in the past few years given British Waterways a further ring-fenced payment of £30 million for infrastructure improvements to bring the network up to a sufficiently reliable standard to attract new business and opportunities to the waterways.

The Government and British Waterways clearly recognise the need to invest in Sharpness to repair and upgrade the existing port infrastructure. Indeed, British Waterways has identified a requirement for £4.1 million of remedial work that it would like to undertake over the next four to five years if available funds and priorities permit. This includes work on the tidal basin jetties and entrance locks. In fact, British Waterways is now considering the phasing of this work into its overall maintenance programme. If further proof were needed of British Waterways' commitment to the future development of Sharpness, I would point to the £500,000 already spent in refurbishing the middle lock gates in 2003–04, and the further £595,000 earmarked for the sea gates in 2006–07.

I assure my hon. Friend that British Waterways is committed to keeping the docks open, and, under its ongoing investment programme, it hopes to encourage a continuing increase in freight traffic through the port over the coming years. I am pleased to hear that BW is currently in discussion with Sharpness Docks Ltd to explore how the docks might be used for the movement of waste and recyclable material, and how the port might, once more, become the gateway for traffic on the Gloucester and Sharpness canal. In this context, it is good to see the return of significant quantities of aggregate traffic to the Severn further upstream, between Ripple, Ryan and Gloucester, supported by a £1 million freight facility grant from my Department. This is the first major freight traffic to flow on the Severn for more than 10 years. It will remove 340,000 lorry journeys from Gloucestershire's roads over the next 10 years, and bodes well for the revitalisation of this major UK waterway.

I also understand that Gloucestershire county council has taken a considerable interest in the future prosperity of Sharpness docks. The county is part of a European Union Atlantic Arc partnership studying the potential for increasing short-sea shipping. We look forward to the outcome of that study later this year.

The county has also been leading on the re-establishment of the docks railway system through the freight quality partnership and is offering to match-fund this work. That will establish a connection to the metal recycling plant at Sharpness, which has rail-connected sites in the west midlands. Discussions are also in hand with the port operator regarding the potential for rail and with a distribution firm regarding the potential for a rail-connected warehouse. The dockside could include a general purpose rail/road facility.

Mr. Drew: I congratulate my hon. Friend and hope that that will be followed up, because the company is Howard Tenens. I ask that the Department actively pursue it, as there has been some disagreement on the ground for all sorts of obvious reasons. This could be a real key to turning the docks into an even more successful employment, and dare I say development, opportunity.

Charlotte Atkins: I am sure that the Department will look favourably at that, because it is very much in line with our objectives.

The county council feels that the role of Sharpness as a port was overlooked in the past, as does my hon. Friend, but it clearly believes that Sharpness now offers an exciting opportunity for the county, with tremendous development potential. There is a good supply of employment land and relatively few planning constraints. The local plan has identified 19 hectares of development land, which could probably be easily increased.

The potential of Sharpness was recognised in the county council's local transport plan with an explicit policy aimed at encouraging the development of water freight at Sharpness dock. Another county policy promotes the creation of rail freight terminals, with Sharpness as one of the possible sites.

It is clear that Sharpness is in an excellent position to become a tri-modal freight facility for the region. There is a rail connection—mothballed but largely in good order, having been well maintained for nuclear traffic to Berkeley power station—and the Gloucester and Sharpness canal, connecting with the River Severn at Gloucester. It is only a few miles from the M5. I am pleased to report that the county council is making provision in its second local transport plan for funding to improve the road link from the M5 to Sharpness.

I understand that the county council, through the freight quality partnership, is establishing a project team to drive forward the creation of a tri-modal freight facility at Sharpness. Starting with the dock railway network, the county council will work with Stroud district council, British Waterways, the rail industry, the port operator and other private sector and stakeholder interests at Sharpness to develop and implement the project. The county council sees this as an excellent opportunity to reduce the amount of freight moved by road and to promote the use of rail and water—inland and short-sea—for the transport of goods.

The Department for Transport also recognises the role that Sharpness can play in meeting transport needs in the south-west region and further afield. Sharpness is already well positioned to develop further. It can be reached from the midlands by road without having to negotiate the congestion of the M4 and M5 in the Bristol area. It also has the potential to exploit good-quality rail and even canal access.

The Government are keen to take freight traffic off congested roads and we support short-sea shipping as a safe, environmentally friendly and sustainable mode of transport. Freight should be carried by water wherever it offers the best value-for-money solution in terms of the economy, society and the environment. The Government will do what they can to help a port such as Sharpness make the most of that potential.

However, I should make it clear that we believe that port operations and port developments should not rely on public subsidy. Port infrastructure can and should be commercially financed. Port subsidies not only have the potential to distort competition between ports but risk spreading the problems caused by excess capacity. Nevertheless, we undertake to judge each case on its merits, balancing the potential for adverse economic impact against the real social, economic and environmental benefits to be derived.

Although we have no plans to give British Waterways increased grant aid to enable it to expand its freight activities, infrastructure investment might be supported by freight facility grants to help divert traffic from our roads on to water. Start-up and catalyst funding might also be available from the European Commission's Marco Polo programme, which is the grant regime supporting modal shift away from roads.

British Waterways remains committed to keeping the port of Sharpness open and the prospects for further traffic growth are good, whether it be more traffic from the west midlands or more locally sourced waste and recyclables using the Gloucester and Sharpness canal. The Government as a whole are committed to taking traffic off the roads and to boosting short-sea shipping, all as part of a sustainable freight policy. That entails ensuring that the Government's ports policy continues to provide the right framework for the sustainable development of our ports, large and small.

I am sure that my hon. Friend will be delighted to hear that the Department for Transport will work with the Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs and British Waterways to ensure that Sharpness has every opportunity to succeed within the ports policy framework. But, most importantly, we look to port operators such as Sharpness Dock Ltd to make the most of the potential, for the benefit of the port's customers, of the local area and the wider region that it serves.

Question put and agreed to.

Adjourned accordingly at four minutes to Eight o'clock.

House of Commons

Thursday 4 November 2004

The House met at half-past Eleven o'clock

PRAYERS

[MR. SPEAKER *in the Chair*]

Oral Answers to Questions

TRADE AND INDUSTRY

The Secretary of State was asked—

Post Office Closures

1. **Mr. David Heyes** (Ashton-under-Lyne) (Lab): If she will make a statement on post office closures. [195860]

The Secretary of State for Trade and Industry (Ms Patricia Hewitt): Post Office Ltd. embarked on a restructuring of its urban network in late 2002 because there was simply no longer enough business to sustain the existing network. The urban reinvention programme will help to ensure a sustainable urban network for the future. The programme is now approaching its final stages, and 95 per cent. of people living in urban areas will still be within a mile of their nearest post office.

Mr. Heyes: I thank my right hon. Friend for that answer, but I wish I could share her optimism about the way in which the post office closure programme is being handled, especially given the predicted threat to Crown offices. I do not believe that franchising is the answer. In the Failsworth area of my constituency, there is a former Crown office that was franchised to the Co-op some years ago. It is now threatened with closure, despite being described by the Post Office as

> "a busy branch which attracts customers from a wide area".

This is happening simply because the Co-op has decided to get out of the post office business. Does my right hon. Friend agree that the time has come for a decisive ministerial intervention to bring some sanity to the Post Office's incompetent closure programme and to remind the Post Office of its public service obligation?

Ms Hewitt: I am grateful to my hon. Friend for that question, because it gives me the opportunity to stress to every hon. Member that the press coverage earlier this week was completely wrong. There is no proposal or programme to cut a swathe through the directly managed post offices. The only requirement that I have placed on Allan Leighton and his team at the Post Office is that they stop the losses in the directly managed post offices, which are currently amounting to some £71 million a year. That is simply unacceptable. There are 550 directly managed post offices. Fewer than five of them are likely to close next year, and that will be because they are simply not viable. Whether the others remain directly managed or whether some become managed through a retail franchise, as others have done in the past, the important issue is that they continue to give the best possible service to customers, and that they bring new customers in to all our post offices by introducing new products and services, as the Post Office is doing.

Mr. Michael Weir (Angus) (SNP): I hear what the Secretary of State says, but, having gone through the post office reinvention programme, which closed many sub-post offices in towns and rural areas, we now hear that the Post Office is even considering closing Crown post offices, whose existence has often been given as the excuse for closing down sub-post offices. Does she not accept that there is a real need for the Government to intervene and get a handle on what is happening to the whole post office network?

Ms Hewitt: The hon. Gentleman should understand that, because of what we have done on rural post offices, we have stopped all rural post office closures, except those that are completely unavoidable because nobody can be found to run the sub-post office in question. I understand very well why people are concerned about urban network closures, because we all value the part that sub-post offices play in our communities. However, we face a choice. Do we simply allow unplanned closures to take place as sub-postmasters retire or give up because they cannot make a living, or do we back our Post Office in a planned reorganisation of the network that will give better service to customers? I believe that we are taking the right approach. This is a planned reorganisation, there is more investment in the post offices and, contrary to the hon. Gentleman's assertion, there are no proposals to close all the directly managed post offices.

Mr. Martin O'Neill (Ochil) (Lab): My right hon. Friend might not yet have had time to read the document that my colleagues and I on the Select Committee on Trade and Industry have issued in response to her comments on our report on the urban reinvention programme. It is not without precedent, but it is not common for Select Committees to comment on a Minister's comments. We did so because we were so concerned by the inadequacy of the response that we received. In respect of implementation, transparency and consultation, the handling of the urban reinvention programme was a bit of a shambles. Frankly, we do not agree that it was effectively and efficiently handled, and we think that there is an unwarranted degree of complacency on the part of the Department.

What is more, we feel that the assessment of the effectiveness of urban reinvention is far too narrow, and the idea that it can be effectively and efficiently carried out only on the basis of the number of closures is not the best criterion to apply. This was the unanimous view of a cross-party Committee that, as I have said, took the rare step of questioning the effectiveness of the Government's response to our report. We would like to think that when the Secretary of State has had time to consider the document, a better response will be forthcoming.

Mr. Speaker: Order. May I appeal to the House for brief questions and brief replies?

Ms Hewitt: I am grateful to my hon. Friend for the work that he and his fellow Committee members have undertaken. I will read his report very carefully. I have not had time to do so yet, because it was published only half an hour ago; but I have had an opportunity to read the last line of its conclusions, which states

> "Its true effectiveness"

—the effectiveness of urban reinvention, that is—

> "can only be assessed in terms of the future viability of the urban network."

I entirely endorse that. That is the goal of urban reinvention, and that is the basis on which we are judging the progress that has been made.

As for administration and consultation, following a number of expressions of concern from Members nearly a year ago, on 5 February my hon. Friend the Member for East Ham (Mr. Timms), then the Minister for postal services, announced significant improvements in the consultation process. Moreover, by means of that process Postwatch has ensured that nearly 400 closure proposals have been withdrawn or changed.

Mr. Patrick McLoughlin (West Derbyshire) (Con): How many more post offices are going to close?

Ms Hewitt: That will depend on the outcome of the consultation that is currently taking place in the constituencies that have not yet been part of the process, but I can say that the number is likely to be considerably smaller than the 3,500 figure that was bandied around by the press and Conservative Members some months ago.

Mr. Lindsay Hoyle (Chorley) (Lab): As my right hon. Friend will know, I am a member of the Select Committee chaired by my hon. Friend the Member for Ochil (Mr. O'Neill). We see this as the urban destruction of the post office network. What worries me is the fact that we now have empty shops in Chorley. The appropriate criterion was not used, the figures were massaged, and the whole thing was an absolute disgrace. We were depending on the Crown post office in the town centre becoming a replacement for the benefit of those wishing to travel into town. Can we have a categorical assurance that the Crown post office will remain open, like others elsewhere?

Ms Hewitt: The directly managed Crown post offices are regarded as part of the urban network. They are therefore subject to exactly the same criterion as we set for the Post Office—that 95 per cent. of people living in urban areas must be within a mile of a post office. As for the specific issue of Chorley Crown post office, I will check with David Mills of Post Office Ltd. and write to my hon. Friend.

I cannot accept my hon. Friend's assertion about urban reinvention. I stress that whereas post offices were closing in an unplanned way because sub-postmasters and postmistresses simply could not make a living, there is now a new network. Nine out of 10 customers of post offices that have closed have moved their custom to the nearest branches, and thanks to the new products we are providing—particularly the new banking services—we are increasing the potential customer base. There are now 21 million people who can do their banking at the post office. That is the way in which to strengthen our post office network.

Mrs. Patsy Calton (Cheadle) (LD): What advice can the Secretary of State offer my elderly and disabled constituents, and those with mobility problems, who, as a result of the flawed network reinvention process, have either no access to a post office because they cannot reach the top of the hill where the only remaining post office is, or rather worse access?

Ms Hewitt: One of the main factors taken into account by Postwatch as well as the Post Office when they are considering the closure of a branch is access for elderly people, people with disabilities and people without the use of a car. As I have said, nine out of 10 customers of post offices that have closed have moved their custom to the nearest branches that Postwatch and Post Office Ltd. were considering. I sympathise with the hon. Lady's constituents who may be experiencing difficulties, but I am afraid I must advise them that the Liberal Democrats' policy—as announced by their Front-Bench spokesman—is to privatise the Post Office along the lines of the Dutch model. That would hardly improve matters.

Jonathan Shaw (Chatham and Aylesford) (Lab): On access, will my right hon. Friend look at Greenacres post office in Aylesford, which is subject to closure, and the receiving post office that is about a mile away? Access to it will not be possible for people in wheelchairs, and the Post Office is suggesting that such people ring a bell outside, so that counter staff can deal with their requests on the pavement.

Ms Hewitt: I certainly understand my hon. Friend's concern about the position of his wheelchair-bound constituents. The Under-Secretary with responsibility postal services, my hon. Friend the Member for Bradford, South (Mr. Sutcliffe), and I will ensure that we check exactly what the situation is, and whether it is possible, given the investment that we are putting into the post office network, to deal with the problem. I will write to my hon. Friend on this subject.

Michael Fabricant (Lichfield) (Con): But is the Secretary of State not slightly concerned that she has received no support from any Member in any part of the House? Does she not also accept the view of the National Federation of Sub-Postmasters, which represents 16,000 sub-post offices? It believes that the Government have caused much of the problem by reducing post offices' viability as a result of reducing their footfall. Has she bothered to read its manifesto, and if so, what is she going to adopt from it?

Ms Hewitt: Since becoming Secretary of State, I have stayed in very close touch with the federation, and indeed, my hon. Friend the Under-Secretary met its representatives only last week. The federation itself has been calling for an urban reinvention programme—with compensation for sub-postmasters who have to give up their offices—precisely because so many of its members simply cannot make a living. The fact is that the traditional business of cashing of benefit books at post offices has been falling for years, as more and more people shift to banking, using the internet and so on. What we are doing, and which the hon. Gentleman's Government never did, is modernising and investing in our post offices, and ensuring—as the federation and others want—that there are new products, new services and new customers, and therefore a much healthier post office network in future.

Gas Prices

2. **Huw Irranca-Davies** (Ogmore) (Lab): What recent discussions she has had with Ofgem on fair competition in gas prices. [195861]

The Minister for Energy and E-Commerce (Mr. Mike O'Brien): I have discussed gas market prices with Ofgem. It recently published a report that identified the cause of such rises as the impact on the UK wholesale market of the cost of gas in continental Europe—gas prices there are linked to oil prices, which have obviously risen—and of declining gas production in the North sea.

Huw Irranca-Davies: My hon. Friend will be aware of the considerable disquiet that exists among residential gas consumers at what seem to be runaway prices in the gas market. I attended a CBI dinner two weeks ago, at which the main topic of conversation was the impact of gas prices on the manufacturing base in south Wales. The manufacturing base in my constituency is very healthy and there are many jobs, but can my hon. Friend give me and employers in my constituency an assurance that gas prices will be brought under control, and that there will be genuine and fair competition in respect of them?

Mr. O'Brien: A recent report by Oxford Economic Research Associates, published in October, showed that the UK has the most competitive energy market in Europe. Prices are indeed increasing, but from a historically very low base in real terms. Domestic consumers can of course substantially reduce their gas bills by switching suppliers; indeed, a £30 reduction for gas and £20 for electricity is achievable. Customers who can switch their method of payment to direct debit can save up to £13 on their electricity bills and £14 to £26 on their gas bills, and some companies are offering low-cost—or, indeed, free—insulation to pensioners and those on benefit. The owner of a typical 1970s semi that is heated by gas could save up to £130 per annum by using proper insulation. On industrial prices, Ofgem is looking at the way in which the market is operating to ensure that it continues to do so efficiently.

Malcolm Bruce (Gordon) (LD): Does the Minister acknowledge Ofgem's estimate that wholesale energy prices in the UK will rise this winter by £5 billion as a result of these increases, and that that will dramatically increase fuel poverty, hit households hard and undermine the competitiveness of British industry? The fact is that competitiveness within the UK market does not help if we are being undermined by a lack of competitiveness in the European market. Is it not time that the European Commission de-linked the coupling of gas and oil prices and introduced a genuinely competitive market? As things stand, we are exporting gas to the continent when prices are low, and importing it back again when prices are at a record high.

Mr. O'Brien: On the hon. Gentleman's final point, I certainly agree that we need to get the European Commission to ensure that there is a liberalisation of the energy market in Europe. The increase in oil prices is affecting gas prices, and there is a link to Europe, but if we can ensure a greater degree of liberalisation in the European energy market, we may be able to get some of those prices under more effective control.

We view the energy sector here as market-based and it has functioned remarkably well in recent years. As I said, domestic customers can reduce their gas bills through energy insulation methods, by switching suppliers and, if they can, by direct debit payment. Those are means by which domestic consumers can make substantial savings on their bills. Ofgem has looked at the way in which the market is operating for industrial customers. It is conducting further investigations into particular issues such as the excessive spike in some prices and will get back to us on that. We are monitoring the issue carefully. It is important and the hon. Gentleman can be sure that the Government take the matter seriously.

Mr. Mike Hall (Weaver Vale) (Lab): May I draw my hon. Friend's attention to the impact of gas prices on INEOS Chlor in Runcorn? The gas price per therm has gone up from 17p to 34p—double the price paid last year, which is costing the firm £170,000 a day extra, £50 million a year more. It has to pay 25 per cent. more for its gas, yet it comes from the same fields that supply continental Europe. What are the Government going to do about it?

Mr. O'Brien: Ofgem has studied with a great deal of care the way in which the gas market operates and it concluded that wholesale price increases have caused the increases in domestic prices. A number of gas companies have taken the view that they will hold their prices; others that they will increase their prices to their customers. In those circumstances, customers will want to look for companies that will cost them less and consider switching to them to receive lower bills. What we want to do is encourage customers to examine their bills, check with Energywatch to find out who is charging the lowest prices and, where they can, switch. They should also take the other measures that I mentioned, which will also ensure that their bills come down.

Richard Ottaway (Croydon, South) (Con): Will the Minister accept that consumers will take with a pinch of salt the idea that savings can be made by switching accounts? When the price of gas fell by nearly half, consumer prices fell by only 10 per cent. The truth of the matter is that when gas prices go up, the consumers take the burden, but when gas prices go down, they do not gain the benefit.

Mr. O'Brien: I am not sure whether the hon. Gentleman is suggesting that we should dispense with the market and somehow introduce regulation. That would be a volte-face for the Conservatives. As far as we are concerned, the consumer has a number of options available. Different consumers will have different available options. It is certainly the case that, on average, switching supplier can save £30 on a gas bill per year, and by switching payment to direct debit a further £26 could be saved on gas bills. Furthermore, if consumers properly insulate, they could save £130 per annum. Some of the companies increasing their prices are making it clear that they will offer some of the insulation free of charge. I might add that replacing an old boiler with a modern, energy-saving one—I accept that it is a capital cost—could bring about savings of up to £120 per annum. Those are quite significant savings that consumers could make, but none of that disputes the fact that the issue is serious and that we are watching the market with a great deal of care.

Inward Investment

3. **Mr. Colin Challen** (Morley and Rothwell) (Lab): What action is being taken by UK Trade and Investment to promote inward investment in the UK. [195862]

The Minister for Trade and Investment (Mr. Douglas Alexander): UK Trade and Investment has 39 inward investment teams in 19 countries striving to bring investment here to the United Kingdom. UKTI, the regional development agencies and the devolved Administrations work hard to turn those proposals into reality. The priority is to bring in knowledge-driven investments. Under the terms of the 2004 spending review, UKTI will expand its operation over the next three years in order to maintain the UK's position as the No. 1 location in Europe for attracting inward investment and to increase the quantity and quality of investment into the UK.

Mr. Challen: I thank my hon. Friend for that answer which, combined with the recent improvements in the manufacturing sector, demonstrates that Britain is working. However, I want to add the caveat that I am very concerned about regional disparities. The overheating in the south-eastern economy means that areas such as Yorkshire and the Humber could miss out on inward investments and improvements in manufacturing. In his evidence last week to the Environmental Audit Committee, Sir John Egan gave the impression that success should be encouraged to breed success in successful areas, and that we should almost forget the rest. What are the Government doing to counterbalance that sort of approach?

Mr. Alexander: I am grateful to my hon. Friend for raising that matter. The Government are determined to ensure regionally balanced economic growth right across the UK. That is why, in my hon. Friend's area, Yorkshire Forward is progressing the agenda of bringing inward investment directly into Yorkshire and Humberside. The Government have put in place a platform of stability, and we want that to be the basis for regional devolution. In turn, that can be a real driver for the economic generation of every part of this country.

Mr. Roy Beggs (East Antrim) (UUP): Thousands of jobs have been lost in Belfast, in heavy engineering, shipbuilding and the manufacture of textile machinery, and they have not been replaced. There is great disappointment in Protestant areas, and people feel that more has been lost than gained since the Belfast agreement was signed. Will the Secretary of State and the Minister use their influence to persuade potential investors in the UK that Belfast is a good place to locate? There has always been a good work ethic there, and education and training services are excellent. Will the Government encourage investors to work with the development agencies in Northern Ireland?

Mr. Alexander: The hon. Gentleman raises an important point. One of the elements of the Government's approach to Northern Ireland is that we are determined to secure the economic regeneration of areas that have suffered the de-industrialisation that he describes. I have great sympathy with that, not least because the area that I represent suffered similar de-industrialisation when jobs in the traditional manufacturing and shipbuilding sectors were lost in recent years. The latest figures available to me show that, in 2003–04, 26 inward investment successes were enjoyed by the Northern Ireland Office. I shall be happy to communicate that information to the hon. Gentleman directly. At the same time, I shall make colleagues in Government aware of the matters that he has raised in respect of the ongoing challenge in Northern Ireland.

Chris Ruane (Vale of Clwyd) (Lab): May I take this opportunity to inform my hon. Friend of the great successes achieved in my constituency in attracting foreign inward investments? Before 1997, there were no foreign inward investors there, but now we have Merloni, an Italian company, TRB, a Japanese company, and Pachem, an Austrian company. What steps can be taken to increase the co-operation between the Department, the Welsh Development Agency and the National Assembly for Wales to ensure that further foreign inward investment takes place, in my constituency and in Wales as a whole?

Mr. Alexander: I join my hon. Friend in paying tribute to the work undertaken by the WDA, which has combined with the work done by the Government to advance the sort of inward investment that he describes. One of the challenges for UKTI is to balance the strategic overview available at the centre with the regional reach of agencies such as the WDA. We need to strike a balance between ensuring that we speak with a common voice to the inward investment community around the world—and we should emphasise Britain's competitiveness without shame or embarrassment—and ensuring that we speak up for those parts of the economy that may not, traditionally, have received as much inward investment as other areas. That is why I believe that the regional focus of directly involving the RDAs strikes exactly the right balance between strength at the centre and real regional reach.

Mr. James Arbuthnot (North-East Hampshire) (Con): In June, the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development issued a report stating that the foreign direct investment flows into the UK fell by almost half in 2003, from a level that was unimpressive by historical standards. Was the OECD wrong? Will the Minister give a slightly better reply than the Secretary of State did when she said, in the previous DTI question session, that the OECD was using the wrong statistics?

Mr. Alexander: I am grateful to the right hon. Gentleman for that characteristically gracious question. There is of course a technical distinction to be drawn between stock and flows of inward investment, and I would be happy to write to him on the technical point that underpinned the answer given by my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State. However, it ill behoves the Opposition to lecture this Government on the success of inward investment, when Ernst and Young, in a recent report, declared that the UK remains the No. 1 location in Europe for inward investment. The anti-European policies of the Conservatives would imperil that leadership position.

Mr. Brian Jenkins (Tamworth) (Lab): Will my hon. Friend explain who has a watching brief on the effect of inward investment? I know that we have a good success story, but I put to him the case of a marvellous investment in the purchase of a company, with promises of expansion and technological development, followed—a couple of years later—by the shift of most production overseas, with the consequent suffering by suppliers. Has that investment had a negative or positive impact?

Mr. Alexander: My hon. Friend raises an important point, which has exercised the Government for several years. We need to ensure that we get best value for money for any public support that is provided for inward investment. Our response is not to turn away inward investment, but to ensure that support is provided to our own indigenous manufacturing base and British companies. That is why we have advanced the research and development tax credit and put in place regional economic development strategies from a foundation of economic strength. We need to ensure that, as well as attracting inward investment, we ensure that we get value for money for it and that we support indigenous British companies.

EU Constitution

5. **Alistair Burt** (North-East Bedfordshire) (Con): What assessment she has made of the impact that an EU constitution will have on the number of EU directives affecting UK industry. [195864]

The Secretary of State for Trade and Industry (Ms Patricia Hewitt): The constitution will have no impact on existing directives. As far as future directives are concerned, the constitution will strengthen the position of national Governments and Parliaments.

Alistair Burt: Is it not the case that because of the uncertain relationship between the decisions of the European courts and the constitution there is no credibility in what the Secretary of State says? Because of that lack of credibility and the Government's track record of an increase in regulation of more than 50 per cent., it is no wonder that in a recent poll of 1,000 chief executives about the impact of the European constitution, 59 per cent. said that it will be bad for business. Some 64 per cent. of members of the CBI also say that it will be bad for business. Is it not that track record and the failure to address regulation that make businesses in my constituency and elsewhere think that the Government are all talk on deregulation?

Ms Hewitt: Let me give the hon. Gentleman just one example of the many actions we have taken to improve the climate for business people in Britain—leaving aside the enormous achievement of economic stability. Twelve years ago, the then Prime Minister told the Conservative party conference that

"you may need 28 separate licences, certificates and registrations just to start a business".

Now, thanks to our Government, people can set up a business with one form in less than a day for £25. Every global benchmarking survey shows that we are one of the best countries in the world in which to set up and grow a business. We are determined to go on improving that by continuing to simplify and improve regulation. The new constitution will strengthen our hand, just as the new Commission will, in achieving better regulation and economic reform in Europe.

Mr. Barry Sheerman (Huddersfield) (Lab/Co-op): Will my right hon. Friend attack even more vigorously the mealy-mouthed nonsense from the Opposition? Our future prosperity lies with Europe, but the Opposition constantly deride Europe and directives that have improved our environment and the lives of people in this country. Let us go on the attack and tell people the truth about our EU membership.

Ms Hewitt: I am grateful to my hon. Friend for giving me the opportunity and I am delighted to take it. The consequence of the Conservative position on the constitution—and the intention of many Conservative Members—would be to sideline the UK within Europe, to put us at the margins or even on the road to withdrawal. That would put us in the same position as Norway and Norwegian businesses, which have to comply with European directives but have no say in what they contain. I remind Conservative Members of how the new constitution—on which we secured all our goals—is viewed in the rest of Europe. As *Le Monde* correctly said in June:

"Whatever people say"—

it must have had the Conservatives in mind—

"this text remains a British victory."

It will be good for Europe and good for Britain.

Mr. Speaker: May I remind the Secretary of State that I must get through the business on the Order Paper, and I need some help?

Mr. Stephen O'Brien (Eddisbury) (Con): According to the Treasury, about 50 per cent. of all regulations with a significant impact on business derive from the EU. Does the Secretary of State agree with the Chancellor, her colleague, who now believes that the level of regulation coming from the EU is "unacceptable"? Does she think that EU regulation will increase or decrease in the light of the Labour Government signing up to the European constitution?

Ms Hewitt: I always agree with my right hon. Friend the Chancellor, and it is because we are so determined to get better regulations in Europe that we support the constitution and economic reform. We have won the argument across all European member states that we need simpler, better regulation, and we have got a programme of work to deliver that.

Mr. O'Brien: The Prime Minister's former chief economic adviser—a man whose advice the Prime Minister told us last week he always took seriously—recently lamented the fact that the EU constitution

"entrenches and expands the . . . European social model."

Under Labour, the UK has plummeted from 13th in 1997 to 30th place this year in global rankings of the burden of Government regulation. Will the Secretary of State now look those in British business in the eye and tell them when her addiction to signing up to more EU regulations made British business more competitive?

Ms Hewitt: I remind the hon. Gentleman that the right hon. Member for Wokingham (Mr. Redwood) recently said that the UK is one of the best places in the world to do business. That is indeed true, and we will go on simplifying and improving regulation, both domestically and in Europe, but unlike the Conservative party we recognise the enormous benefits to the British people that come from our membership of the EU, including—to name just a few—cleaner beaches, cheaper telephones and cheaper holidays.

Mr. Michael Clapham (Barnsley, West and Penistone) (Lab): Is it not correct to say that the UK has less labour market and product regulation than any other country in the OECD and that it has greater labour utilisation than most other countries in the EU and is only behind Japan and America? What discussions has my right hon. Friend had with the TUC regarding security in a flexible market?

Ms Hewitt: My hon. Friend makes an extremely important point. The UK has the best economic record of all the G7 countries for growth, economic stability and, crucially, employment. I draw the House's attention to the recent World Bank study of 145 countries that placed the UK top in the EU, with the best business conditions, because the UK regulates in less costly and burdensome ways than other countries.

Economic Partnership Agreements

6. **Mr. Alistair Carmichael** (Orkney and Shetland) (LD): If she will make a statement on the development of economic partnership agreements between the European Union and poor countries. [195865]

The Minister for Trade and Investment (Mr. Douglas Alexander): Negotiations of economic partnership agreements between the EU and the African, Caribbean and Pacific countries were launched earlier this year. Substantive negotiations are due to start early in the new year and to be concluded by the end of 2007. While the negotiations are at a very early stage, we will continue to work with the European Commission, other member states and ACP countries to ensure that those agreements deliver their development potential.

Mr. Carmichael: I thank the Minister for that answer. He will be aware of the fears expressed by Christian Aid, among others, that economic partnership agreements will force ACP countries to open their markets to unequal competition with the EU. Indeed, the Commission's own impact assessment of EPAs concludes that they could threaten the development of a modern industrial sector and result in social instability in some of the world's poorest countries. What will the Government do to ensure that the needs of poor people in developing countries are put first and not overridden by a trade liberalisation agenda?

Mr. Alexander: I share the hon. Gentleman's concern and commitment on these issues, and I look forward to discussing them at Christian Aid's national Scottish conference this Saturday.

On the specific issue that the hon. Gentleman raises, I emphasise that we are at a very early stage in the negotiations, but I wish to make two brief points. First, under the current system of trade preferences, such agreements are not compatible with World Trade Organisation rules, so change must occur. Secondly, I emphasise that the reciprocity that we are obliged to consider as part of those agreements is not the same as a symmetric opening, and in that sense developing countries have far more time to open markets than is suggested by the expectation about when the EU would open them—but, as I say, the negotiations continue.

Hugh Bayley (City of York) (Lab): Does my hon. Friend agree that in the interests of policy coherence it is important to couple the EU's economic partnership agreements with reform of the common agricultural policy, because unless we reduce subsidies on our domestic agriculture and, most importantly, remove export subsidies, the products that the poorest countries are most able to export will still be unable to enter our markets?

Mr. Alexander: I am in full agreement with my hon. Friend. He can look back to the success that we enjoyed at Geneva in July when we achieved a framework for the Doha development agreement, contrary to the pessimism expressed after Cancun. One of the keys that unlocked that agreement was the EU's movement on export subsidies. The challenge now is to achieve the parallelism that was contingent on the agreement—we need a similar response from the United States, and clearly the new trade commissioner will take that forward. If there is scope for further progress, we are determined to be at the forefront.

Post Office Closures

7. **Clive Efford** (Eltham) (Lab): What discussions she has had with the Deputy Prime Minister on the impact of the closure of sub-post offices on neighbourhood renewal areas; and if she will make a statement. [195866]

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Trade and Industry (Mr. Gerry Sutcliffe): There have been no specific discussions on this matter, but the Department has worked closely with the Office of the Deputy Prime Minister in developing the £15 million deprived urban post office fund, which is aimed at providing support for sub-post offices in the most deprived urban areas. Post office closures are a commercial matter for Post Office Ltd. It is the company's responsibility when developing its closure proposals to consider carefully, among a range of factors, any impact that they may have on neighbourhood renewal areas.

Clive Efford: I appreciate that the closures are a matter for Post Office Ltd. The criterion it has set to identify deprivation uses ward-based statistics, which, the Government realise, are a blunt instrument. They have introduced neighbourhood renewal projects in some areas because they understand that the figures do not identify areas of deprivation in sufficient detail, but Post Office Ltd. has ignored that fact in its reinvention programme. Will my hon. Friend take that up with Post Office Ltd. and revisit some of its proposals? It should ensure that there is a good case for the closure of post offices in neighbourhood renewal areas. The sub-postmaster of the Mound post office in my constituency has changed his mind. He no longer wants to close it because he thinks that he can put a business together, but still the closure is going ahead.

Mr. Sutcliffe: I am grateful to my hon. Friend for raising the issue and pay tribute to his work on the matter in his constituency. He has written to me on the subject and I shall respond in due course. He can take a crumb of comfort from the fact that Postwatch will launch a survey on the impact of post office closures to determine whether the company got things right, so there is an immediate proposal to examine his constituency issue. In the longer term, we will see how effective the closures have been and act accordingly.

Sir Nicholas Winterton (Macclesfield) (Con): I support the views expressed by the hon. Member for Eltham (Clive Efford) and I would like to go further. Does the Minister not accept that the Post Office has forgotten the service responsibilities that it owes to people in communities throughout the country? Will he have a firm word to encourage it to understand that the location of post offices in areas such as those that the hon. Gentleman described is vital to their success? The Post Office has become too damn commercial and has forgotten its duty of service and provision of service to the people of this country.

Mr. Sutcliffe: I understand the point that the hon. Gentleman raises, but he must remember the bigger picture affecting the Post Office, which has been missed in today's questions. Closures happened regularly under the Conservative Government without any control or consideration of the reaction to them. This Government have invested £2 billion in the Royal Mail and post office network, but I agree that we need to get the balance right, which is why my hon. Friend the Member for East Ham (Mr. Timms) talked to Postwatch about the consultation process when he was a Minister in the Department. I accept that we need to learn lessons, but we must also remember that post office business was losing millions of pounds every day. The Government have put in the investment and we will continue to ensure that people get the service that they require.

Andy Burnham (Leigh) (Lab): We accept the need for some change, but my constituents feel that the seven planned closures in the Leigh area go way too far. Leigh is a former mining area and has a legacy of ill health, including people with mobility problems. It is a collection of former mining villages and some of our post offices are classed as rural. May I urge my hon. Friend to impress on the Post Office the need to proceed with great caution in a constituency such as Leigh when implementing a closure programme?

Mr. Sutcliffe: I recognise those points and am pleased that my hon. Friend accepts that change was necessary. If no change had taken place, there would be no post offices and we would be in a dire situation. The Government recognise the value of post offices. We also recognise the value of having a controlled position, which is why investment has been made. We set up the consultation process through Postwatch, and I know that my hon. Friend will have contacted it about the closures. If he feels that the process has not worked properly, I shall certainly take representations from him.

Operating and Financial Review Regulations

8. **Tom Brake** (Carshalton and Wallington) (LD): What key performance indicators will be included in the operating and financial review regulations. [195867]

The Minister for Industry and the Regions (Jacqui Smith): Our proposals for a statutory operating and financial review will require quoted companies to provide a narrative report setting out the company's business objectives, its strategy for achieving them, and the risk and uncertainties that might affect their achievement. It will require companies to report on other matters where these are necessary for an understanding of the business, and these include their employees, the environment, and social and community issues.

Tom Brake: I thank the Minister for her response. Will there be a mandatory set of performance indicators for quoted companies, covering their environmental and social performance and impact? If so, will the performance indicators allow comparisons between different companies? Will they also allow a year-on-year assessment of the companies?

Jacqui Smith: There will not be a mandatory set of common key performance indicators. What is important about the process is that directors have to think carefully about the prospects of their business and how different factors—the environment, their employees or other risks—will impact on their business. They then have to consider the most appropriate ways to measure that and to report it to shareholders and investors who, because of that process, will be better able to engage with the ongoing governance and running of the company. I am not convinced that setting out a list that directors may be tempted to run down and tick is the most appropriate way to encourage the engagement that this development is all about.

Mr. Julian Brazier (Canterbury) (Con): Given that the operating and financial review regulations are designed to make directors more accountable and that the Government have spent a small fortune on introducing, through resource accounting, often ill-fitting copies of private sector accounting practice into the public sector, do they intend to produce something similar for the public sector so that we have greater insight into its increasingly opaque accounts?

Jacqui Smith: I disagree with the hon. Gentleman's conclusion, but I agree that we must consider applying the same principles on transparency as we propose for the private sector to the public sector. In many ways, we lead on that in terms of the information we provide. It is key that we improve that information and enable accountability wherever possible.

Young Workers

9. **Tony Lloyd** (Manchester Central) (Lab): If she will make a statement on her policy on protection against exploitation of young workers. [195868]

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Trade and Industry (Mr. Gerry Sutcliffe): I understand that my hon. Friend is particularly interested in the position of young apprentices.

The Low Pay Commission looked at the position of apprentices aged 16 and 17 in its 2004 report and recommended that they should be exempt from the minimum wage because of concerns that employers might otherwise be deterred from providing valuable training opportunities for young people. Bearing in mind the Government's ambition to ensure that young people reach 19 with the skills they need to succeed, the Government accepted the commission's recommendation.

Tony Lloyd: My hon. Friend needs no lessons from me as he has a strong record on protecting all workers, and in particular young workers, and the Government have done much in that area. However, unscrupulous employers can make life difficult for people on modern apprenticeships. The £79 recommendation, accepted by many, is designed to ensure that employers take on apprentices. Some employers, alas, are driving the figure below the recommendation. Not only are they exploiting young workers, but they are giving them a strong incentive to get out of training and to work for Tesco or wherever the minimum wage applies. That is not the right way to go.

Mr. Sutcliffe: Again, I acknowledge the work that my hon. Friend has done to pursue employment rights for workers in the UK. He makes a valid point. The Learning and Skills Council, which is under the auspices of the Department for Education and Skills, deals with issues relating to apprentices. We are considering the matter of the £79 and the protections that should be included in the contracts between apprentices and companies. My hon. Friend will be pleased about the number of modern apprenticeships taken forward under the Government's policies, and he will recognise that we always try to strike a balance between making sure that people are employable and making sure they get a just reward from their work.

MINISTER FOR WOMEN

The Minister was asked—

Women Scientists

19. **Michael Fabricant** (Lichfield) (Con): If she will meet the chairman and chief executive of the Engineering and Technology Board to discuss career opportunities for women in science, engineering and technology; and if she will make a statement. [195879]

The Deputy Minister for Women and Equality (Jacqui Smith): I welcome the support that the Engineering and Technology Board has put behind our strategy to increase the number of girls and women taking up careers in science, engineering and technology, and I am pleased that my noble Friend the Minister for Science and Innovation frequently meets Sir Peter Williams and Alan Clark, the chair and the chief executive of the ETB respectively, to discuss all matters concerning the board, including career opportunities for women in science, engineering and technology. Their next meeting is in November and would be a perfect opportunity to discuss the matter further.

Michael Fabricant: I thank the right hon. Lady for that constructive answer. She recognises the problem of skills in IT, particularly with young recruits. Gartner Consulting and e-skills UK reckon that 179,000 graduates are needed each year, but only 18,000 students have gone in this year—only a small proportion. Worse than that, only 20 per cent. of those in the IT industry are women. What can the Government do to encourage more women to go into IT?

Jacqui Smith: The hon. Gentleman makes an important point by identifying the link between areas in which we need to encourage more women and areas where there are skills shortages. The first step is to make the argument clearly that where talented people are needed, they must be recruited from the whole population, not from only part of it. Through the work that we are supporting with the UK Resource Centre on science, engineering and technology, which is working with employers, kitemarking good employers and providing good practice advice among many other things, we will be able to make progress. My colleagues in the Department for Education and Skills and in the education system more widely are looking at careers advice and how we can encourage more girls and young women to do technology subjects, particularly information technology, and to carry on to get the benefits of working in those areas.

Mr. Bill Olner (Nuneaton) (Lab): During her discussions, will my right hon. Friend meet an organisation called WISE—Women Into Science and Engineering? Women play a significant role in all types of engineering and should play a greater role on the craft side of engineering and science. Will she do her utmost to encourage women to take up positions in new modern apprenticeships that deal with craft issues?

Jacqui Smith: My hon. Friend is right. I join him in commending the work of WISE, which is supported by the Department. It does an excellent job. He is also right that there are already some excellent women working in engineering. We as employers and Government need to do more to make sure that we encourage that. This week I was pleased to visit the British Gas Engineering Academy in Leeds, where I met young women who are undertaking apprenticeships and training in gas engineering. They certainly thought it was a good job, and I was pleased that British Gas was making such an effort to recruit those young women, to their benefit and to the benefit of the business.

Sandra Gidley (Romsey) (LD): I am delighted to hear that the Minister needs no encouragement to encourage women in that direction, but she will be aware of her Department's research that found that women with science, engineering and technology degrees were economically less active than their male counterparts or female non-SET graduates. There is a particular problem when women have had a career break, which makes it difficult for them to return. What is the Minister doing to address these problems?

Jacqui Smith: The hon. Lady is right. That is why one of the programmes of work of the UK Resource Centre, backed up by investment of £1.5 million from the Department for Education and Skills, aims to examine the issues relating to women returners—for example, helping them to keep up to date with scientific research during their career break, helping to train them when they come back into employment, and giving good practice advice to employers about how to bring women back into the workplace and keep them engaged. There is both money and action through the UK Resource Centre aimed at the issue that the hon. Lady identified.

Women Non-executive Directors

20. **Dr. Vincent Cable** (Twickenham) (LD): What progress has been made in increasing the proportion of women non-executive directors. [195880]

The Minister for Women and Equality (Ms Patricia Hewitt): In 2000, only 57 FTSE 100 non-executive directorships were held by women. That increased in 2003 to 84, but it is still not good enough, which is why we are working with business leaders, recruitment firms and others to widen board recruitment.

Dr. Cable: How does the Minister explain the fact that whereas women make up 30 per cent. of all company managers, her own figures suggest that they account for only 6 per cent. of the magic circle of non-executive directors, and only 1 per cent. of chairmanships? What is the Laura Tyson initiative, which I think the right hon. Lady launched, helping concretely to deliver in this respect?

Ms Hewitt: A real problem that was clearly identified in Derek Higgs's report is that of non-executive directorships being recruited from far too narrow a pool of people who are already known to the existing board members, and particularly the chair. Since the Higgs and Tyson reports, we have held round tables with a series of leading businesses, remuneration committees, headhunters, search firms and so on; we are now working on a document entitled "Better Boards" that will be launched later this month, drawing on the business case for widening and diversifying board appointments; and, crucially, we have established a mentoring scheme with 20 chairs and chief executives of the FTSE 100 already signed up to act as mentors to women who are one or two steps below a board-level appointment, but who with the right support will form part of the next generation.

Mrs. Eleanor Laing (Epping Forest) (Con): Does the Minister agree that it is somewhat ironic that only 6 per cent. of non-executive directors are women when a non-executive directorship is the perfect job for a woman? We are always talking about flexibility and part-time employment, and that is exactly what a non-executive directorship is. I am pleased to hear what the Minister has said about the "Better Boards" report, and I look forward to seeing it. I find myself strangely in agreement with most of what she has just said, but please will she assure me that she will not go down the road of introducing quotas or coercing companies into employing women? It should not be necessary. The business case itself should convince all companies that the best companies are already employing best practice with regard to women, and I hope that she will continue encouraging and not coercing.

Ms Hewitt: I entirely agree with the point made by the hon. Lady, and I can happily give her that assurance. We have no intention whatever of imposing Norwegian-style quotas on boards, but I cannot help reflecting that it is rather a pity that the Conservative party proposes to slash through my Department's budget, and the Liberal Democrats propose to abolish it completely, so no one would be left to pursue the excellent work that she has just welcomed.

Women Chartered Engineers

21. **Mr. Tony McWalter** (Hemel Hempstead) (Lab/Co-op): What assessment she has made of the effectiveness of programmes designed to enable a greater number of women to become chartered engineers. [195881]

The Deputy Minister for Women and Equality (Jacqui Smith): As I said earlier, a large number of programmes are designed to encourage more women and girls to take up education and employment opportunities in engineering, stay in those careers and progress to the top of them. However, it remains the case that the percentage of female applicants and acceptances through the Universities and Colleges Admissions Service for engineering courses has remained stable at only 14 per cent. during the past 10 years. My officials are discussing with the new UK Resource Centre for women in science, engineering and technology the possibility of conducting a piece of research designed to map and evaluate these programmes, and will ensure that any best practice is subsequently shared.

Mr. McWalter: I am grateful to my right hon. Friend for that answer, but earlier she mentioned Alan Clark of the Engineering and Technology Board, and at a recent meeting with him I suggested that possibly the greatest single measure that could be taken would be for there to be zero fees for engineering students with proper Government funding for engineering places, so that the subject would be regarded as of national strategic importance, and so that women would be able to get the skills that would get them to the top of the boards of industry. I hope that my right hon. Friend will make representations to her colleagues at the Department for Education and Skills with a view to seeing whether really effective action in this matter might some day be taken.

Jacqui Smith: I agree with my hon. Friend's objectives, but I am not sure whether I agree with his proposals. It is important to encourage girls and young women to be interested in science and engineering at an earlier stage, which will increase applications, and to find ways post-higher education to keep people in the science, engineering and technology professions. It is, of course, viable for those companies that depend on engineers to consider ways to help student engineers with their fees, which employers in other industries sometimes do. We have a comprehensive range of activity to get young people, and particularly young women, interested in science, engineering and technology, to get them into university and to keep them in those professions afterwards. We are spending a significant amount of money and are focusing it in the right place.

Business of the House

12.30 pm

Mr. Oliver Heald (North-East Hertfordshire) (Con): Will the Leader of the House please give us the business for next week?

The Leader of the House of Commons (Mr. Peter Hain): The business for next week will be as follows:

MONDAY 8 NOVEMBER—Consideration of Lords amendments to the Housing Bill.

TUESDAY 9 NOVEMBER—Remaining stages of the Civil Partnership Bill *[Lords]*, followed, if necessary, by consideration of Lords amendments.

WEDNESDAY 10 NOVEMBER—Consideration of Lords amendments to the Human Tissue Bill, followed, if necessary, by consideration of Lords amendments.

THURSDAY 11 NOVEMBER—Opposition half-day [unallotted]. There will be a half-day debate entitled "Government's Failure to Support Family Doctor Services" on an Opposition motion, followed, if necessary, by consideration of Lords amendments.

FRIDAY 12 NOVEMBER—The House will not be sitting.

The provisional business for the following week will include:

MONDAY 15 NOVEMBER—Consideration of Lords amendments.

TUESDAY 16 NOVEMBER—Consideration of Lords amendments.

WEDNESDAY 17 NOVEMBER—Consideration of Lords amendments.

THURSDAY 18 NOVEMBER—Consideration of Lords amendments.

I inform the House that business in Westminster Hall on Thursday 18 November will be:

THURSDAY 18 NOVEMBER—A debate on the report from the Work and Pensions Committee on the work of the Health and Safety Commission and Executive.

In respect of Prorogation, I hope that it will be possible to prorogue no later than Thursday 18 November. The House will understand that that is subject to the progress of business in both Houses.

Mr. Heald: I thank the Leader of the House for the business, although I must say that it seemed a tad repetitive.

When can we expect the pre-Budget statement? We normally have news of it by now. Will it even occur in November? Where is the draft Civil Service Bill, which has been promised for almost a year?

Turning to the situation in Northern Ireland, the Prime Minister said before the Leeds castle meeting in September that the moment of decision could not drag on indefinitely. Today's third report by the Independent Monitoring Commission makes bleak reading: paramilitaries have not wound down their activities, violence is at disturbingly high levels and a policy stalemate has been reached. Can we expect a statement before Prorogation setting out the Government's intentions for the future of government in Northern Ireland and do the Government have a plan B?

May we have a debate on the mid-term review of the common agricultural policy and the details of the single farm payment, which is causing farmers confusion? Farmers are planting their crops, to which those rules will apply, but the Government have not yet introduced the necessary rules, which would be extremely helpful to clarify the situation.

Yesterday, the Prime Minister said that he would give local authorities greater powers to ensure that they can take immediate action in the courts to deal with Travellers who flout planning laws. He also said that he is re-examining the matter to ensure that the powers are adequate. Can we have a debate about the planning process and Traveller sites? Planning permission is being obtained under the Human Rights Act 1998 for greenfield sites that no one else would be allowed to develop. Although the Government's proposals seem to allow stop notices to force any building work to stop, is it not the case that so far nothing has been done to address those difficult planning issues?

Yesterday, I raised again with the Leader of the House the question of Government co-operation with requests from Select Committees for witnesses and papers. Is he able to say that the Government are taking a new, more positive approach to this issue?

Finally, the Leader of the House will be aware of the concerns that have recently been expressed in the House about the protection of those who work for businesses that are subject to animal rights campaigns. Those campaigns now target shareholders and workers in associated businesses, including building companies and suppliers. There are still difficulties in relation to the approach of the Department of Trade and Industry to the privacy of shareholders registers and concerns that police powers may not be adequate. Would it be possible to have a joint Home Office-DTI debate in Government time on that subject?

Mr. Hain: That latter point is very important, and I am grateful to the hon. Gentleman for raising it. Unfortunately, an official from the Driver and Vehicle Licensing Agency—who has since been prosecuted—divulged the names of individuals working on research to animal rights activists, allowing them to target and terrorise those individuals. That must be clamped down on.

On the pre-Budget statement, we will be able to give notice of that as soon as we are ready to do so.

I assure the hon. Gentleman that the draft Civil Service Bill will be published by the end of the Session.

I understand the points that the hon. Gentleman makes about the Northern Ireland report's findings, including the reduction in some paramilitary activity. That underlines our view that there must be a complete stop to all such activity, including organised crime. As for a plan B, we do not want to get into plan As or plan Bs—we want to get the Assembly back up and running and a proper peace agreement. The Secretary of State for Northern Ireland, working closely with the Prime Minister, is trying to ensure that that happens. As soon as there is any news, the House will be informed.

On the mid-term review, the hon. Gentleman knows that we have led the way across the rest of Europe for reform of the common agricultural policy. It is

[Mr. Hain]

absorbing far too much of the European budget and is a waste of money. We have already achieved major reforms and will continue to drive that process forward.

I understand the hon. Gentleman's point about Travellers flouting planning laws. We are all concerned about that and it has been persistently raised on the Floor of the House. We are taking forward action on that front.

On information and documents for Select Committees, I gave evidence to the Liaison Committee in which I said that there should be a presumption that such documents should be made available on request and that officials, including special advisers, should appear before Select Committees. That does not mean, however, that such requests will be agreed to. There is a presumption in favour of openness, but in the end the decision rests with the Minister because of ministerial accountability—we are accountable to this House. That is a much more positive approach to the whole matter than has been evident until now.

Mr. Kevin Hughes (Doncaster, North) (Lab): At yesterday's Prime Minister's Question Time, the Leader of the Opposition made a disgraceful accusation against a Department for Culture, Media and Sport civil servant, whom he virtually accused of engaging in what could amount to corrupt activities. May we have a debate about how we handle such matters in this Chamber, because although we can stand up and defend ourselves in here and in the media, civil servants cannot?

Mr. Hain: Mr. Speaker, I am sure that you agree that it is important always to maintain high standards across the Floor in debate and in questions. I can only agree with my hon. Friend that there has been a severe deterioration of standards in the questions that are being asked, particularly by the Leader of the Opposition. We have seen a deliberate attempt to smear a civil servant that has frankly become all too typical, and was repeated by the hon. Member for Maldon and East Chelmsford (Mr. Whittingdale). Last night, my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport wrote to the Leader of the Opposition, flatly denying both reports and his claim, and making the point that casinos are subject to money-laundering regulations. Tough questions are fine but the sooner we get back to questions of high integrity the better.

Mr. Paul Tyler (North Cornwall) (LD): In the aftermath of the United States presidential election, the Prime Minister has given new impetus to the middle east peace process. Yet there are mixed messages from Washington. Those from Vice-President Cheney are much more aggressive than those from President Bush. May we have a full debate as soon as possible specifically on the middle east peace process, and not simply discuss it as part of a general foreign affairs debate? The matter is clearly urgent, as the Prime Minister said.

Will the Deputy Prime Minister make a statement on fire and rescue control centres? Dubious financial savings are said to be involved. Fire chiefs throughout the country doubt the merits of the proposal. Although they are prepared to answer parliamentary questions, the Deputy Prime Minister and his Ministers refuse to discuss the implications of the proposals with Members of Parliament from all over England, despite the requirement for consultation under part 1 section 2(5) of the Fire and Rescue Services Act 2004. I presume that Members of Parliament are considered appropriate consultees.

Does the right hon. Gentleman recall that the former leader of Neath-Port Talbot council, Councillor Noel Crowley said:

> "A single Fire Control Centre covering the whole of Wales is not the best way to deliver an effective service. In an emergency, when a member of the public rings the Fire Service it would be much more appropriate if the person responding had the benefit of local knowledge. This would avoid confusion and lead to a speedier response. It could mean lives being saved."?

Why should lives be saved in Wales but not in England? Surely we can accept that what is good for Wales should be good for England.

The Leader of the House has previously said that he is sympathetic to a debate in Westminster Hall on the important House of Commons Commission report. When can that be timetabled?

Mr. Hain: I shall consider the latter point as soon as I can. I agreed with the hon. Gentleman when he asked me about it recently. It is a great opportunity to examine the excellent report from the House of Commons Commission. It should prove an interesting debate and we shall arrange it as soon as possible.

I am glad that the hon. Gentleman asked about the middle east peace process because the Prime Minister confirmed only yesterday that he is giving progress on it absolute priority. It is important in its own right to reverse the historic injustice done to the Palestinians and ensure that they have an independent state and, at the same time, ensure a secure Israeli state, living in partnership alongside the new independent Palestinian state. The Prime Minister is confident that we can make progress on that now that the American elections are out of the way.

I cannot believe that the Deputy Prime Minister, who is extremely accountable to the House and, almost more than any other Cabinet Minister, makes himself available around the House, flatly refuses to discuss fire and rescue control centres with hon. Members. However, the Office of the Deputy Prime Minister will have noted the hon. Gentleman's comments.

The hon. Gentleman referred to Noel Crowley, the former leader of my local council, who made some points and whose views are greatly respected. It does not automatically follow that what is done in Wales should be done in England. The purpose of devolution is to effect policies and models that are relevant to the different conditions in each part of the United Kingdom. We can learn from best practice. Indeed, perhaps in the case that the hon. Gentleman raised, there is some learning to do. However, in Wales there is learning to do about, for example, much shorter waiting lists in the health service in England.

Tony Wright (Cannock Chase) (Lab): The hon. Member for North-East Hertfordshire (Mr. Heald) said that we had waited a year or so for the Civil Service Bill. In fact, we have been waiting for approximately 150 years. When we get one in the next week or so, will the Government draw attention to its constitutional significance through an oral statement? In introducing the measure, will they state the procedure whereby they intend Parliament to take it forward?

Mr. Hain: There are no plans for an oral statement. A consultation document will be published in which the draft Bill will appear. I know that my hon. Friend's Committee has taken an active interest in this matter and will no doubt continue to do so.

Sir George Young (North-West Hampshire) (Con): When will the Secretary of State for Health present his public health White Paper to Parliament, and can we thereafter have a full day's debate in Government time so that Members on both sides of the House can urge the Government to take a robust approach to smoking in public places?

Mr. Hain: I think that the right hon. Gentleman will be encouraged on that matter by the forthcoming public health White Paper. On the timing, it will be quite soon.

Kate Hoey (Vauxhall) (Lab): Can the Leader of the House arrange for another debate on Zimbabwe before the England cricket team leave, particularly in relation to early-day motion 1855, which draws attention to the expulsion from Zimbabwe of COSATU, the Congress of South African Trade Unions, and particularly the treatment of a fellow parliamentarian, Roy Bennett—who has visited this place quite recently—who has now been sentenced to 15 months' hard labour and is out breaking stones in Harare prison at this very time?

[That this House deplores as an insult to the international trade union movement and an affront to the principle of free association the recent deportation from Zimbabwe of a COSATU delegation; condemns the sentencing by the Zimbabwean Parliament of Roy Bennett, Member of Parliament for Chimanimani to 15 months' imprisonment with hard labour; regards the penalty as grossly disproportionate and the culmination of a sustained campaign of hate and personal abuse waged by Zanu PF ministers and the state-controlled propaganda machine against a culturally-sensitive and progressive elected representative of the people; and calls upon the governments and parliamentarians of member states to uphold Southern African Development Community Treaty principles of human rights, democracy and the rule of law in Zimbabwe.]

I know the views of the Leader of the House on this matter, but can he say whether there is any chance of another debate on Zimbabwe soon?

Mr. Hain: I know, and the Foreign Secretary is well aware, not least because of the regular points made rightly by my hon. Friend, of the deteriorating situation in Zimbabwe. The treatment of Roy Bennett and the trade unions in Zimbabwe is outrageous, and there are now reports that the very farms that were commandeered by the Mugabe clique in the so-called land reform process are just lying waste, with not only the white farmers having been driven off them but, in my view, even more importantly, the black workers by the hundred having been left destitute. The way in which Mugabe has allowed such a fantastic country virtually to collapse is outrageous. I repeat that had I ever been eligible to tour with the England team, which is pretty unlikely, I would have refused to tour, as I do not think that any encouragement or succour should be given by English cricketers going out there to play.

Mr. John Bercow (Buckingham) (Con): May we please have an urgent debate in Government time on Burma, given that the so-called State Peace and Development Council, the ruling military junta in Burma, is guilty of the most savage violations of human rights every day, in the form of rape as a weapon of war, compulsory relocation, forced labour, the use of human mine sweepers, child soldiers, religious persecution and the bestial destruction of villages on a daily basis, with more than 1,400 political prisoners languishing behind bars? Does the right hon. Gentleman, as a humanitarian, agree that it is important that we have the chance of a debate in this Chamber, so that the argument for a robust European Union sanctions policy on oil, gas and the telecommunications sector can rapidly be developed?

Mr. Hain: I applaud the hon. Gentleman's sentiments. He is increasingly respected across the House for the way in which he focuses on international injustice. Certainly, the injustice in Burma is at least on a par with that in Zimbabwe, and it is one of the really troubled spots across the world. His points are valid, and I am sure that the Foreign Secretary will want to take note of them.

Ms Dari Taylor (Stockton, South) (Lab): Will my right hon. Friend organise a debate on the adoption and fostering of children? Last year, the House supported an excellent but challenging piece of legislation, with targets that referenced the number of adoptions that should take place year on year. We need reassurance that those targets are being met, and if they are not being met, we need the opportunity to discuss the reasons why. I ask this during national adoption week and remind the House, with great warmth, that the legislation was about one thing: providing a loving and stable family home for vulnerable children, 25 per cent. of whom never achieve that goal.

Mr. Hain: I am grateful to my hon. Friend for drawing this important matter to the House's attention. If she has the opportunity to get a debate on it, I am sure that it will be welcomed by the House. I know that the Minister for Children, Young People and Families will be with her in spirit on the important point that she has made.

Clive Efford (Eltham) (Lab): May I ask my right hon. Friend for an urgent debate on Post Office Ltd.'s urban reinvention programme and its impact on our communities? In my constituency, Post Office Ltd. has proposed the closure of a post office in an urban neighbourhood renewal area. It makes no sense for one Department to oversee Post Office Ltd. and provide it with public money, while another, which is trying to

[Clive Efford]

reinvent local economies and save local shopping precincts, is being undermined by Post Office Ltd.'s closure programme. We need to assess the impact of that programme and have a debate on the matter here on the Floor of the House.

While I have my right hon. Friend's ear, may I draw his attention to South Eastern Trains, which is the only publicly owned and run rail franchise in the country? It is outperforming its private sector predecessor, so is it not about time we had legislation to bring the railways back under public control?

Mr. Hain: I understand that my hon. Friend, who is an excellent Member of Parliament, has just been lucky enough to be selected to serve on the Gambling Bill Standing Committee. The nature of his question illustrates that the story going around that that Committee has been packed with cronies is not true. I understand his point about the Post Office's plans to either close or sell off directly managed Crown post offices, because they form an important hub on our local high streets and are an important part of our towns and cities. Whatever the Post Office does, it is important that it should bear local feelings in mind.

On South Eastern Trains, I note the point that my hon. Friend makes.

Mr. Nigel Evans (Ribble Valley) (Con): May we have a debate in Government time on the national health service and its priorities? Two people came to see me at my surgery recently. One has no feeling in his arm and has been told that there will be a wait of more than two years for a scan. Another gentleman, who has had back pain for more than three years, has been told that he faces a 40-week wait for his scan. They need scans before they can be treated, and in the meantime they are condemned to live on drugs. It is very stressful for them to have to wait so long for their scans. Can we prioritise that problem in a debate in this House?

Mr. Hain: The hon. Gentleman is right to raise any anomalies or difficulties in the system, but he will also understand that waiting lists are plummeting under the Labour Government, as a result of the enormous reform and investment that has gone into the health service. Not everything is perfect, but it will not be until we have reversed the long decades of collapse and decline that took place under the Tories.

Dr. Brian Iddon (Bolton, South-East) (Lab): My right hon. Friend will know that the first major reform of the civil registration service since it was set up in the mid-19th century is now passing through the House, by way of two regulation reform orders, the first of which is before the Committee chaired by my hon. Friend the Member for Burnley (Mr. Pike). When I attended the Committee on Tuesday this week, both the Financial Secretary to the Treasury and the Chairman of the Regulatory Reform Committee felt that there should be a debate on this subject, if only to raise awareness among hon. Members that this reform is taking place. When the Committee publishes its report at the end of this month, will my right hon. Friend consider finding time for a debate in Government time on this subject?

Mr. Hain: I shall certainly bear that in mind, because that is an important issue. My hon. Friend has been one of the champions of the reform programme, and the whole House is indebted to him for that. I cannot promise a debate in Government time, but he might wish to apply for a debate in his own name. If he is lucky in that regard, I am sure that the House would welcome such a debate.

Sir Nicholas Winterton (Macclesfield) (Con): Following the excellent question from the hon. Member for Vauxhall (Kate Hoey), may I thank the Leader of the House for his full and very sympathetic response? However, the House wants to know whether there will be another debate on the disastrous situation in Zimbabwe, and on the denial of human rights there and the imprisonment of the Member of Parliament, Roy Bennett? The House wants to know what new initiatives the Government are going to take to bring about the end of Mr. Mugabe's tyrannical regime. Can the right hon. Gentleman give us any hope of a further debate and a Government statement on new initiatives?

Mr. Hain: The Foreign Secretary will take questions next week—on Tuesday, I think—and the matter could be raised then. The deterioration in Zimbabwe is very serious, as the hon. Gentleman says. I cannot promise a debate before the end of this Session, for the reasons that I explained a few minutes ago in the business statement, but I shall certainly bear in mind the force of his argument and that of my hon. Friend the Member for Vauxhall.

Tom Levitt (High Peak) (Lab): Two weeks ago at business questions, I asked my right hon. Friend to comment on the lack of progress in recent times of the draft Disability Discrimination Bill, which has now passed all its scrutiny stages. Members on both sides of the House are waiting to hear how it can rapidly be progressed. The explanation that he gave was that Conservative members of the usual channels had been blocking the timetable for discussions on the Bill. Will he update us and tell us whether this logjam still exists? When can we expect the Disability Discrimination Bill, as it will become, to be introduced? Does he share my concern that we have no way of bringing an Opposition spokesman to the Front Bench to make a statement to the House and to be taxed on why their party is saying one thing and doing another on this Bill?

Mr. Hain: The opportunity to haul Opposition spokesmen before the House to apologise for their actions would be a novel but attractive procedure. As I announced some weeks ago, the Government intended to introduce the Bill in the House of Lords, but that has not been possible for the reasons that my hon. Friend gave. I hope, however, that we can make early progress on this legislation, if not before Prorogation then very soon afterwards.

Angus Robertson (Moray) (SNP): The Leader of the House will be aware that the Government intend to run down or close a whole series of military facilities as part of their defence cuts, although it is unlikely that the Ministry of Defence will confirm the details of the closures before the next election. May we have a debate in Government time on the plans that are being developed to ameliorate the economic and social consequences of base closures and run-downs?

Mr. Hain: First, there are no defence cuts. Defence investment and spending are rising to record levels and have been doing so throughout the entire period of our Government. There has also been the most consistent growth in defence spending. There will be a debate this afternoon in which the hon. Gentleman could raise these matters. As the Secretary of State for Defence and his Ministers have persistently made clear to the House, what is involved is the reorienting of our armed forces to cope with the logistics of modern warfare. That has involved reprioritising expenditure, support and logistics to the front line, and introducing greater efficiency measures across the country. Some tough decisions have had to be taken, but I think that the hon. Gentleman's constituents would want our armed forces to remain the best fighting force in the world and to have the back-up that they need to achieve that, and that they would be prepared to face tough decisions, even in their own localities, to ensure that that happens.

Mr. Wayne David (Caerphilly) (Lab): Yesterday, the Prime Minister informed us that certain Members of the House had developed their views on the Government's plans for antisocial behaviour. Would it be possible to find time for the Liberal Democrats to explain to the House how their policy on antisocial behaviour is evolving?

Mr. Hain: My hon. Friend can apply for a debate on this matter. The change in attitudes in the House towards antisocial behaviour is fascinating, especially on the Liberal Democrat Benches, and I would be fascinated to hear their contribution to such a debate. They have been on a steep learning curve in this regard. As local people have rebelled against their unwillingness to clamp down on antisocial behaviour, they have been driven to accept the good sense and effectiveness of the Government's laws. People across the country have been rebelling in great numbers against their previous dreadful policy.

Sir Michael Spicer (West Worcestershire) (Con): Will the Leader of the House confirm that, after the vote on amendment (g) last night, the issue of MPs paying for their workstations in the Palace of Westminster is now dead? Will he also confirm that, after last night's votes, MPs are now to be paid a salary that is some 15 per cent. behind that of the comparators that the House set for itself?

Mr. Hain: The Senior Salaries Review Body looked into Members' salaries and came up with the recommendation that the House endorsed last night. However, I think that there is merit in what the hon. Gentleman has said.

On the questions of workstations and the SSRB's recommendations concerning the impact on the incidental expenses allowance, those will come before the Members Estimate Committee, as we agreed yesterday. I am well aware—as I know you are, Mr. Speaker—of concern throughout the House about what would have happened if the SSRB's recommendation had been delivered unchanged. That would have been seriously disruptive for Members in all parts of the House, based in London and elsewhere. We need to consider the matter carefully, and I can give the hon. Gentleman an absolute assurance that we will.

Mr. Clive Betts (Sheffield, Attercliffe) (Lab): May I urge my right hon. Friend to allow the introduction, at an early date, of a Bill to transfer strategic responsibility for the railways to the Secretary of State for Transport? The situation is in urgent need of a review. While the east and west coast main lines have benefited from major investment, the midland main line is the forgotten line. It has old trains, even older signals and a 19th-century track. None of that provides a service for people and businesses in such cities as Sheffield or meets the requirements of the modern age. May we have a Bill, and also a debate about how we can put more investment into the midland main line? Both are urgently needed.

Mr. Hain: I understand my hon. Friend's point, but he should appreciate that there has been a 25 per cent. increase in the number of rail passenger journeys since we came to power, and more than 1,500 more rail services are timetabled every weekday. Nineteen new stations have been built, nine have been reopened and more than 2,000 have been improved. There are still problems owing to the dreadful legacy of underinvestment that we inherited, but things are improving and services in my hon. Friend's area will continue to improve as well.

Richard Younger-Ross (Teignbridge) (LD): I am sure that Members will be grateful for the concern about the post office closure programme that the Leader of the House expressed earlier, but they will also be aware that there is probably little chance of a debate before Prorogation. Will the Leader of the House ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry to make a statement to the House, following the questions she was asked about post office closures at Question Time?

Post offices are currently being closed. Two sub-post offices are being closed in Newton Abbot, and the Crown post office is being relocated. A single bidder is involved: there is no open competition. Will the Leader of the House arrange for that statement to be made, and also urge the Post Office not to proceed with any more closures until the Trade and Industry Committee has reported and negotiations with the unions on the closure programme have been completed?

Mr. Hain: The hon. Gentleman's points are well understood by the Secretary of State and she will have noted what he has said. I am a great fan of local post offices, including high street Crown post offices. The problem is that local post offices are not used as much as they were because customers are behaving differently. That is why we have supported the rural post office network with hundreds of millions of pounds—I dare say that includes post offices in the hon. Gentleman's constituency—and why we will work with the Post Office to preserve a national network that offers the best possible quality.

Mr. David Drew (Stroud) (Lab/Co-op): My right hon. Friend will have noted the dreadful news from Darfur

[Mr. David Drew]

this week. On the eve of the American presidential election we witnessed the antics of the Sudan Government, who used their own army and the police to organise clearances of the most deprived people in the region, the internally displaced persons. The hon. Member for Buckingham (Mr. Bercow) and I observed the same antics in Omdurman, where again people were forced out and made to re-buy pieces of land on which they had previously kept their squalid possessions. Will my right hon. Friend convey to the Foreign and Commonwealth Office that there is a limit to how long we will sit back and hope that the north-south dialogue continues in Sudan, while seeing these dreadful incidents occurring time and again?

Mr. Hain: I think that everyone will be sympathetic to the points that my hon. Friend has made so eloquently. The Prime Minister visited Sudan and, following his tough representations, the Sudan Government changed their approach. The Foreign Secretary has also been there, as has the Secretary of State for International Development. We will continue to put pressure on the Sudan Government to ensure that the current desperate situation is alleviated and the conditions that are plaguing people there are eliminated.

Mr. Andrew Mitchell (Sutton Coldfield) (Con): Will the Leader of the House try to find time as soon as possible for a debate on the report of the Joint Committee on the draft Charities Bill? I am sure that it would be beneficial if, before the Government produce a Bill, they could hear the views of Members in all parts of the House and also the huge constituency outside that is extremely interested in the draft terms that will eventually come before us.

Mr. Hain: The Bill is very important. It is one of our flagship Bills and we hope to make early progress with it. The pre-legislative scrutiny was very positive and I do not see a case for a debate on the outcome of that scrutiny before the Bill is introduced. I think that when it is introduced, the hon. Gentleman will be encouraged to note that many of the excellent points made during the scrutiny have been taken on board. I hope that he will be supportive and that the Bill will be given a fair wind by the Opposition.

Mr. Kelvin Hopkins (Luton, North) (Lab): I strongly agree with what was said by my hon. Friend the Member for Sheffield, Attercliffe (Mr. Betts).

May I draw my right hon. Friend's attention to what I consider to be a growing crisis in the freight industry? There is road and port congestion and poorer links to the continent of Europe, which is so vital to our economy. The Government have rejected the Central Railways scheme and feeble quantities of freight are being transported by rail. We need a serious debate about the future of freight, especially rail freight. Will my right hon. Friend make time for that and also find out what the Government can do to rebuild our freight sector?

Mr. Hain: I understand my hon. Friend's points, although increasing amounts of freight are being transported by rail as our railways benefit from the Government's extra investment. My right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Transport will pay close attention to what my hon. Friend has said, and my hon. Friend can of course try to secure a debate in his own time. However, I think that he should acknowledge the fantastic improvement that is feeding through the railway network as a result of our huge investment.

Mr. Patrick McLoughlin (West Derbyshire) (Con): Since the abolition of the Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food, it has been much more difficult to table questions relating solely to agriculture and to have them answered in the Chamber, because the Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs has wider responsibilities. Will the Leader of the House arrange a debate on agriculture as soon as possible, given the serious position in which most dairy farmers now find themselves?

Mr. Hain: The dairy farmers' position is certainly of concern. My right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs is very alive to that and is working with the dairy market and the dairy farm industry to try to help them in whatever way she can. I am not sure that there will be an opportunity for an early debate before Prorogation, but my right hon. Friend will bear in mind what the hon. Gentleman has said.

Huw Irranca-Davies (Ogmore) (Lab): Will my right hon. Friend find time for a debate on the effectiveness of the Bill on fireworks control which was introduced last year by my hon. Friend the Member for Hamilton, South (Mr. Tynan) and supported by the Government? According to the feedback I have received, the Fireworks Act 2003 has proved very effective. A debate would enable us not just to discuss its effectiveness but to clarify the Liberal Democrats' position. One of their senior spokesmen, quoted this week in *The Western Mail*, seemed to imply that the Bill was an attack on civil liberties.

Mr. Hain: I, too, was astonished by that statement. There was cross-party support—although it seems not to have included the Liberal Democrats—for an important measure, widely welcomed in our communities, to control the abuse of fireworks. With all this flip-flopping by the Liberal Democrats, we do not know where they stand on anything. In fact, they usually stand on more than one thing at the same time, depending on which part of the country is involved.

David Burnside (South Antrim) (UUP): The Leader of the House will be aware of the urgent debate taking place in the Home Office and the Metropolitan police on whether serving police officers carrying firearms should have greater personal protection under the law. Can we debate that subject in the House, because there is much concern at the fact that, for the past 30 years, the thousands [illegible] soldiers who served in Northern Ireland and the thousands of officers who served in the Royal Ulster Constabulary were never given any special protection under the law in carrying out their duty?

It is somewhat ironic that Sir John Stevens is promoting a change for the Metropolitan police, because if there is to be legislative change it should apply to all police forces and all soldiers serving in the whole of the United Kingdom in the fight against terrorism, rather than being the preserve of the Metropolitan police.

Mr. Hain: I understand the strength of the point that the hon. Gentleman makes. We are all indebted to the bravery of police officers throughout the United Kingdom who have to intervene in the most dangerous and difficult situations involving firearms in order to deal with them. Lessons are being learned, and they should be applied across the country.

Mr. Gordon Prentice (Pendle) (Lab): Voting ends today in the referendum for the North East assembly. Win or lose, can we expect a statement from the Deputy Prime Minister next week on the implications?

Mr. Hain: Well, let us await the outcome of the referendum—*[Laughter.]* We have heard before this negative sniggering and name-calling from the Conservatives, who do not want to devolve power to the people. This proposal is about giving the people of the north-east a voice, just as Wales has a voice through its own Assembly and Scotland through its own Parliament. We will see what the outcome of the referendum will be, but the Deputy Prime Minister has never been afraid to make statements to the House or to make himself accountable to it. I pay tribute to the way in which he has led the campaign, as opposed to a lot of Tory attacks and lies from the "No" campaign. They are seeking to deny the people of the north-east the voice that other constituent parts of the United Kingdom enjoy.

Mr. David Heath (Somerton and Frome) (LD): May I bring the Leader of the House back to his comments, and those of the Prime Minister yesterday, about illegal Travellers sites? It is recognised—certainly in my part of the world—that those who promulgate such sites are moving with a great deal more urgency than the Government. May we have a debate on this issue, so that those of us who represent such areas can draw attention to the fears, concerns, distress and, sometimes, anger of our constituents at the inadequacies of the planning law and, for example, the utilities' apparent belief that they have a duty to supply, and to maintain supply to, settlements that are wholly outside the law?

Mr. Hain: As the Prime Minister said yesterday, he very much sympathises with the points that the hon. Gentleman makes. I cannot say that there will be time for such a debate before Prorogation, but the hon. Gentleman can obviously apply for one. Given the feeling throughout the House on this matter, such a debate would be welcome.

Jonathan Shaw (Chatham and Aylesford) (Lab): In the light of the new role for Ofsted following the Children Bill—it will inspect children's services across different agencies—do the Government intend to give it any other roles in future, particularly in respect of the frequency with which good schools are inspected? It is vital that parents have information, but it is also important that we focus on the need for Ofsted to inspect schools that are performing well, and in which the parents have confidence. This week, a school in my constituency—St. Katherine's, in Snodland—is being inspected.

Mr. Hain: I have a great deal of sympathy with what my hon. Friend says. We will continue, in the coming years, to put resources into such areas—resources that would be put at risk if we were defeated at the next general election. We are looking not only at making that extra investment but at freeing up the delivery of front-line services in schools and across the public services. My hon. Friend will doubtless be encouraged by the measures that we intend to introduce to take forward the schools inspection agenda. It is true that the proper delivery of higher standards in our classrooms can sometimes be impeded.

Mr. Julian Brazier (Canterbury) (Con): I echo the call of the hon. Member for Stockton, South (Ms Taylor) for a debate in Government time on the workings of the Adoption Act 1976. National adoption week provides an opportunity to congratulate those local authorities, including Kent, that have achieved a considerable increase in the number of children in care being found loving homes, but there remain huge problems in the courts. There are delays, the advisory service is in a muddle, and judges are sometimes unwilling to realise that if we want people to provide loving homes for these desperately damaged children, they must ease the process along as quickly as possible.

Mr. Hain: The objective of finding loving homes for such children is shared throughout the House, regardless of party, and the Minister with responsibility for such matters will have heard the points that the hon. Gentleman makes.

Kevin Brennan (Cardiff, West) (Lab): As my right hon. Friend will know, there has always been a market for parliamentary memorabilia. In fact, this morning on eBay one could buy a House of Commons ashtray for £4.95, a bottle of whisky signed by John Major for £45 or a House of Commons carrier bag for 99p, but not—despite press reports—any of the new visitors' passes. Can my right hon. Friend shed any light on whether such reports are true?

Mr. Hain: I have been alarmed to discover that, apparently, visitors' passes do not have to be returned when visitors depart the House. I know that the House authorities will pay close attention to this issue and that it will be looked into very carefully—and you, Mr. Speaker, will also be concerned about it. It came to my notice only this morning that visitors' passes can sometimes be kept—indeed, they constitute a fashion accessory in some areas. That is very alarming indeed.

Rev. Martin Smyth (Belfast, South) (UUP): The Leader of the House expressed great sympathy with the hon. Member for Stroud (Mr. Drew) regarding the situation in Darfur. Could we have an early statement on the pressure that our United Nations representatives are bringing to bear on the Security Council members present there? Those members may well be trying to

[Rev. Martin Smyth]

keep the peace between nations, but they are doing very little to protect citizens' rights within nations, as they foster their own interests in Sudan and other places.

Mr. Hain: The Government of Sudan have apparently accepted the terms of the United Nations Security Council resolution that we were very instrumental in achieving, but a lot of progress still needs to be made. The situation remains desperate and a lot of stalling is going on in terms of the resolution, so the hon. Gentleman's question is very pertinent.

Mr. Andrew Miller (Ellesmere Port and Neston) (Lab): My right hon. Friend will have seen speculation in the press that the proposals on identity cards are getting increasingly narrow. Will he use his good offices to ensure that if such a Bill is included in the Queen's Speech, it is designed so that it can be built on as different needs develop? In particular, will he ensure that it is designed to help deal with the terrible new crime of identity theft, which is causing huge problems throughout the country?

Mr. Hain: My hon. Friend makes a very good point. The Home Secretary is in the process of finalising his proposals and he is bearing in mind in particular the pre-legislative scrutiny of such a Bill. He will want to take into account the point that my hon. Friend makes.

Mr. Harry Barnes (North-East Derbyshire) (Lab): Has my right hon. Friend seen the fine early-day motion 1799, on trade unions in Iraq, which is in the name of my hon. Friend the Member for Bassetlaw (John Mann)?

[That this House notes that free trade unionism is a key ingredient of a move from totalitarianism to democracy; welcomes the renewal of free trade unionism in Iraq; and calls on the Government to give assistance and priority to the strengthening of this movement.]

An admirable amendment has been included from my hon. Friend the Member for Islington, North (Jeremy Corbyn), with whom I do not always see eye to eye on Iraq. The early-day motion asks the Government to help strengthen the trade union movement in Iraq, while the amendment encourages the applying of pressure on the Iraqi Government to ensure that changes in trade union law are made, in order to allow trade unions to be properly organised within the public sector—a move supported by the International Labour Organisation and the Iraqi Federation of Trade Unions. May we have a debate on this issue?

Mr. Hain: It would be good to air this issue on the Floor of the House. We are determined to support the creation of a democratic Iraq, not just through elections early next year, but through the other instruments of civil society—especially trade unions—that make a democracy vibrant and possible. The Iraqi people and the Government certainly welcome my hon. Friend's championing of that cause.

Jim Sheridan (West Renfrewshire) (Lab): It is anticipated that the Prime Minister will be held personally responsible by many in the press and media, and in the House, for any British deaths in Iraq—I sincerely hope that there will be no more. If it is right and proper for the Prime Minister to be held responsible for those deaths, why is it not right and proper for British employers to be held responsible for the deaths of their employees? After all, as the statistics stand today, there is far more chance of being killed on a British building site than there is in Iraq, although that does not carry the same priority headline in the press.

Mr. Hain: The issue of corporate manslaughter has concerned the Government for some time. We are trying to get our proposals right. I think that my hon. Friend will be encouraged by the progress that we are making and by our intention to take the matter forward with a view to legislation.

Mr. Tony McWalter (Hemel Hempstead) (Lab/Co-op): Thank you, Mr. Speaker, for not hanging me out to dry. My right hon. Friend will have seen early-day motion 1845, standing in the name of my hon. Friend the Member for Nottingham, North (Mr. Allen).

[That this House welcomes the judgement in favour of the Meadows family in their case versus London North Securities; and urges the Government to bring forward legislation to prevent similar activities by loan sharks.]

My right hon. Friend will know about the Meadows family, whose £5,000 debt was multiplied by a factor of 30. Can he arrange for a debate on the subject of loan sharks in the relatively near future—or, instead, will he submit those among his Treasury colleagues who believe that there should be no limit to interest rates and charges to a rugby tackle?

Mr. Hain: I would never dream of hanging my hon. Friend out to dry—I might get very wet in the process if I tried.

By modernising consumer credit markets, we are driving out the rogues and giving consumers many more rights. My hon. Friend is right to identify the scandalous role of loan sharks, which was exposed in a recent court case. Extensive consumer credit reform is in progress. When time permits, we plan to introduce legislation that will make it much easier for people to challenge unfair loan agreements so that they do not have to face the added burden of a lengthy and expensive court battle to rid themselves of the dreadful burden inflicted on them.

Point of Order

1.22 pm

Mr. Oliver Heald (North-East Hertfordshire) (Con): On a point of order, Mr. Speaker. Page 799 of "Erskine May", which deals with the membership of Standing Committees, says that

> "in the case of bills which divide the House on cross-party lines . . . the strength of opinion as expressed in any division at second reading"

should be "properly reflected" in the Standing Committee. And of course we know that the Committee of Selection never makes mistakes.

The Leader of the House admitted a few moments ago that there has been criticism of the Standing Committee considering the Gambling Bill, which, it has been suggested, is packed with cronies. None of the 70 Labour rebels—more than the parliamentary membership of the Liberal Democrat party—appears to have been appointed as a member of the Committee. In that light, Mr. Speaker, I ask your guidance as to whether "Erskine May" needs to be reviewed on that point. What is particularly surprising is that I am quoting a brand new edition from 2004 and there it is in black and white. Can you help us on this matter, Mr. Speaker?

The Leader of the House of Commons (Mr. Peter Hain) *rose—*

Mr. Speaker: Order. Perhaps I can answer that point of order. My understanding is that the vote on Second Reading took place largely along party lines, so I assume that the Committee of Selection took that matter into consideration.

Mr. Hain: Further to that point of order, Mr. Speaker. For the information of the House, I have been advised that none of the 29 Government Back-Bench Members who voted against the Bill applied to sit on the Committee. Similar accusations were made in respect of the Higher Education Bill, but they proved to be groundless as there was vigorous debate during the Committee stage.

Mr. Speaker: In my days as a Back Bencher, a Committee of Selection sometimes invited Back Benchers to sit on a Committee, but I shall not be drawn further on that one.

Defence Procurement

[Relevant documents: The Sixth Report from the Defence Committee, Session 2003–04, HC 572, Defence Procurement; and the Government's response thereto, Cm 6388]

Motion made, and Question proposed, That this House do now adjourn.—*[Mr. Watson.]*

1.24 pm

The Minister of State, Ministry of Defence (Mr. Adam Ingram): The professionalism and bravery of the men and women who serve in our armed forces are beyond question. We are rightly proud of the job that they do. The Government are committed to providing them with the capabilities and the support that they need in today's increasingly dangerous world. That is why we are investing in defence.

This July's spending review saw the defence budget increase by £3.7 billion over the next three years. That is the longest period of sustained real growth in planned defence spending for more than 20 years. It is our job to make sure that that extra money is spent in the best way possible. We must ensure that it makes a difference at the place where, every day, our armed forces make a difference: the front line.

We will spend more than £6 billion this year on new equipment and more than £8 billion supporting it. The management of those resources is a huge task. In giving our armed forces the best equipment that we can, we are also committed to delivering value for money to the taxpayer. In doing so, we support the British economy, helping to maintain key parts of our manufacturing and technology base.

Our procurement performance and the armed forces' equipment are rightly subject to a huge amount of scrutiny. However, sometimes there is unfair and unbalanced criticism. Yes, there have been disappointing delays and cost growth on some of our major legacy projects, but there have also been significant achievements.

Angus Robertson (Moray) (SNP) *rose—*

Mr. Ingram: No, let me get on with the statement. It is nice to see the hon. Gentleman in his place, as he did not participate in the last debate and did not attend Defence questions. I know that he is the SNP's defence spokesperson, so he has obviously realised that he has a job to do. I will allow him to intervene later.

Let me provide some recent examples from Operation Telic in Iraq. First, we have seen the successful employment of the devastatingly accurate Storm Shadow missiles for the first time. Then there has been the delivery of the Mamba artillery locating radar system six months early, allowing troops to identify enemy positions, which saves soldiers' lives. Also, the world-leading Bowman personal role radio provided a significant boost to our infantry's capability. The US Marines were so impressed that they bought some of that equipment.

Angus Robertson: I want to pick up on a point of scrutiny. Is it the case that the UK Government, unlike the US Government, still do not publish a comparative

[Angus Robertson]

report on defence offset and its impact on the economy and defence manufacturing base? Are not foreign contractors obliged to submit regular reports to the Ministry of Defence every six months, updating their progress on UK offset obligations? If it is possible for the US to publish those details and scrutinise offset there, why is it not the case here?

Mr. Ingram: I think that the best thing would be for me to write to the hon. Gentleman about that. There are reasons why we adopt our particular position. It is not because of the lack of intensity of pressure on companies to deliver, or an unwillingness to see the achievement of all the objectives of a procurement stream being implemented within the UK. My experience tells me that there are good reasons why we do not necessarily put these matters under public scrutiny. The hon. Gentleman shrugs his shoulders as if this were a great mystery. My experience in Government tells me that we do not do things lightly, but after long and careful consideration. Sometimes there are good established practices, but it does not mean that we do not consider whether there might be a better way of doing things. I note what the hon. Gentleman says, but as ever, there is more depth to the issue than the headline that he is obviously chasing.

The National Audit Office report on Operation Telic concluded that our equipment performed well and was effectively supported, and that the numerous items of new equipment that we deployed proved their effectiveness. But we are not complacent. We believe that we can do even better and that industry can do better, too. We have set ourselves demanding standards and today's debate will help to explain how we will deliver against those standards. Equipment procurement is not just about today's operations. We have to plan over decades, predicting the challenges that our servicemen and women will face in the future and then equip them to meet those challenges. That is no easy task and there is no simple formula for success.

Ms Julia Drown (South Swindon) (Lab): I congratulate the Ministry of Defence on selecting MAN ERF UK as the preferred bidder for the biggest defence contract in Europe for 25 years. However, does he agree that some commentators have misunderstood what is happening? They have referred to the German parent company, even though MAN ERF UK is a UK company. It will get the best vehicles for our armed forces, and safeguard thousands of manufacturing jobs in this country. The company will also expand those jobs through the 15 major UK suppliers that it uses, and also at its headquarters, which is in my constituency.

Mr. Ingram: My hon. Friend makes a very good point. As ever, we are subject to bad press. In any procurement decision involving competition there will always be some disappointed companies. As a result, counter-arguments are often stoked up. My hon. Friend played a considerable role in encouraging the final decision, and will know the quality of assessment devoted to this procurement stream. However, although parliamentary pressure is always welcome, we do not always bend to it—nor should we, as we have to take account of a range of factors when we make a judgment. She has alighted on some of the key factors that made this decision appropriate. They include the role that the MOD plays in the UK manufacturing sector, and the vitality and size of this particular procurement stream.

This was a very big decision. It was right to take time with it and to consider all the available options. As a consequence, some companies were disappointed, but I pay tribute again to the contribution made by my hon. Friend to that debate.

Mr. Gerald Howarth (Aldershot) (Con): In respect of the support vehicle contract, will the Minister say whether the decision took account of the need to provide offset to the Austrians for the potential contract for the Eurofighter Typhoon?

Mr. Ingram: I have no knowledge of that, but if what the hon. Gentleman says is the case, I shall make sure that my noble Friend Lord Bach, the Minister for Defence Procurement, communicates all the available information. However, the hon. Gentleman should be aware that there are many sensitivities in commercial projects. Some of them can be revealed if the companies so agree, but often they do not want that to happen.

I do not want to say that the issue raised by the hon. Gentleman was a factor in this matter, but revealing all the parameters of a successful bidder means that all the parameters of the unsuccessful bidders must also be revealed. Is that what companies want? I think not. My experience tells me that we should give competitors as much information as we can. That information then goes into the public domain. However, it is always better to treat commercially sensitive information with care, for fear of affecting share prices. A lot of factors have to be balanced in these matters.

I was saying that the procurement process was not easy, and that there was no simple formula for success. I explained some of the aspects of the problem, but it is worth looking at what we are doing in all three services.

We aim to give the Royal Navy an enhanced expeditionary capability. That involves providing two new large aircraft carriers, with the joint combat aircraft providing a more powerful air group than we have ever had before. We will also provide new amphibious shipping for the Royal Marines and, for the Royal Navy, type 45 destroyers—the most powerful air defence destroyers ever built. We will also provide a new submarine fleet based around the Astute class of submarines.

Mr. Peter Viggers (Gosport) (Con): How many ships are under construction today?

Mr. Ingram: I do not have an answer to that, as I am not a walking abacus or computer. It would be nice if that figure were immediately to hand.

Mr. Keith Simpson (Mid-Norfolk) (Con): My hon. Friend knows the answer.

Mr. Ingram: He may know the answer, but it is easy to ask a question when one knows the answer in advance. No doubt an answer will be winging its way here as we speak—or it may sail here—but I am tempted to analyse what is meant by the term "under construction". The hon. Member for Gosport (Mr. Viggers) is probably not familiar with the MOD's new approach to these matters, in terms of smart acquisition and de-risking. A broad interpretation means that we could say that those factors form part of the construction process. That is why I hesitate about being too precise, but we shall try and get him an answer before the end of the debate, or in the wind-up to be delivered by my hon. Friend the Under-Secretary. However, I should be grateful if he defined precisely what he means.

Mr. Viggers: I am happy to clarify my question. By using the term "under construction" I wanted to know how much steel was being cut.

Mr. Ingram: The question could apply to the Astute submarines or the Type 45 destroyers, or to the LSD(A)s—the auxiliary landing ship docks. If the hon. Gentleman wants to talk about the number of hulls involved, I do not think that I could tell him off the top of my head, but we will try and get the information.

Jim Sheridan (West Renfrewshire) (Lab): Could my right hon. Friend give an estimate of how many ships would be under construction if we still had a Conservative Government?

Mr. Ingram: There would fewer than under this Government. That is not an unreasonable question, given the cuts that the Conservative party recently announced that it would impose on some critical and key areas of defence spending. All of that needs to be examined. It is not my job to speak for the Opposition on such matters, but I think that it is fair to say that a Conservative Government would be less successful in its approach to defence procurement. As a result, this country would not be making the progress that it is making, or building the largest warship since world war two. That is a very important element, necessitated by the fact that we have to catch up with many of the non-decisions and cuts made by previous Conservative Governments.

Richard Ottaway (Croydon, South) (Con): I want to bring the Minister back to his announcement a few minutes ago in respect of the new carriers and air defence destroyers. In the old days, airborne early warning was used to give advanced radar coverage for the fleet. It seems that that principle is being abandoned. Will that result in a decline in our operational capacity, and mean that there is less time for defence of the fleet to be implemented? If so, why?

Mr. Ingram: A range of factors was involved in the judgment on these matters, not least among them the decision not to upgrade the Sea Harrier. It was accepted that our approach to the defence of the fleet involved an element of risk, but that is always the case with our armed forces. As we move towards new procurement, we cannot always maintain the old approach. Legacy systems mean that maintaining the old procurement approach has some very large cost elements. We must strike a balance as we move forward.

In addition, it is worth listening to what the First Sea Lord had to say on these matters. He rightly identified some of the risks involved, but he also highlighted what the new Navy will look like. That new Navy will be better and more agile, and more able to deliver what is required of it as part of an expeditionary force.

Moreover, we believe that we would always work in alliance with other countries in any major conflict. That belief has informed our approach to uplifting the capabilities of NATO and the EU. We want to ensure compatibility and interoperability between naval fleets, and to ensure maximum protection for fleets required to enter dangerous environments

It is true that risks are associated with our approach; when he winds up the debate, my hon. Friend the Under-Secretary may be able to give more specifics. I have given the Government's general view of this matter, and hope that the hon. Gentleman will accept the general thrust of my remarks—that we have set in train the biggest programme of warship building since world war two.

Richard Ottaway: That is all right.

Mr. Ingram: As far as the Government are concerned, it is more than all right. We have made a major commitment, and it is one for which previous Governments should have argued in preceding years.

We are giving the Army a highly deployable, flexible and effective mix of capabilities. These include the future rapid effects system. The FRES will be the central pillar, providing a potent medium-weight system able to project power rapidly worldwide. The capabilities also include the introduction into service of the Apache attack helicopter, which will provide a step change in our ability to engage land targets with agility and precision and at range.

We are enabling the RAF to strike with accuracy and devastating effect, as well as to deliver our forces rapidly and in strength. We are now taking delivery of Typhoon aircraft. The RAF is delighted with its performance and reliability so far, which have greatly exceeded expectations. Additional C-17 and A400M capability will further enhance our strategic lift. Those are just some of the big-ticket items, and I will touch on many more in my contribution.

Mr. Nigel Evans (Ribble Valley) (Con): The Minister has mentioned some of the high-tech procurement, and I am grateful for that because I have BAE Systems in my constituency and I am proud of what that company achieves. On the low-tech side, I have some firms that have suffered because a clothing contract has been given to a Northern Ireland firm that has outsourced provision to China. A constituent came to see me last weekend and pointed out that the French are able to ensure that the clothing provided to their servicemen and women is manufactured in France. Could we do that, and if so, why do we not take that opportunity to back British business?

Mr. Ingram: The hon. Gentleman asked how we can back British business, but—as he said—the contract went to a UK company. The detailed background to the cut and sew contract is not in the public domain, but several firms made bids. Examination of the competing bids also entailed significant sourcing outside the UK. The conclusion showed that significant savings could be achieved for the MOD and, therefore, the taxpayer. The contract provides value for money and uses a supply route in which we have every confidence. I repeat that the contract did not go to a parent company outside the UK. We are sourcing from the UK, but the supply chain is a matter for the prime companies.

I hope that the hon. Gentleman does not suggest that we should do what other nations do, which is to impose conditions on contracts. That leads to overpriced contracts, which means that we cannot make savings that can be invested in defence spending elsewhere. That balance has to be struck in any procurement decision. We do not have such a protective system and nor did the Conservative Governments of long and distant memory. We have to ensure that we have a robust contract that will deliver on time, on value and on quality. That is what we believe we have achieved in that case.

Mr. Paul Keetch (Hereford) (LD): The Minister was right to go through the broad aspects of the Army, Navy and Air Force main procurements. Will he say anything about procurement for the Royal Fleet Auxiliary, especially the Military Afloat Reach and Sustainability—or MARS—programme? As he knows, while the two new carriers and the new assault ships are welcome, they will not be sufficiently deployable unless they have support ships to refuel and rearm them in combat. The MARS programme is a substantial programme that will place huge demands on our design and shipbuilding but is vital to the future of the Royal Navy.

Mr. Ingram: I agree that the MARS programme is important. I am increasingly intrigued by Opposition spokesmen who make demands but never put a ticket price on them. They give lists of everything they want, but deny that they amount to spending commitments. They say that they want us to do this and that, but they never reveal their total commitment in each area. Nor do they ever say what they would take out of the existing programme to make way for their demands. If we are to have an honest and open debate on procurement—

Mr. Keetch: Answer the question, and then we might do so.

Mr. Ingram: Well, I have said that the MARS programme is important. Our whole approach to expeditionary warfare requires support shipping. How we pay for that and the timing of its provision are issues for the procurement stream. As I said, we are spending £6 billion this year on procurement and £8 billion to sustain it. I do not know whether the hon. Gentleman would want to spend more.

Mr. Gordon Prentice (Pendle) (Lab): I wish to take my right hon. Friend back to the issue of the desert field jacket, the contract for which was awarded to Cooneen in Northern Ireland. He has written to me on the issue and I am grateful for that. I do not know whether he has yet had sight of the letter from the chairman of Carrington, a company in the north-west, but it reveals that it has been 19 weeks since the contract was award to Cooneen. In that time, the Chinese subcontractor—People's Liberation Army factory No. 3533 in Chongqing—has not been able to produce fabrics that meet the specifications for tensile strength, tear strength, shrinkage and infra-red reflectance. How long does Cooneen have to meet the specifications in the contract before it is awarded elsewhere? *[Interruption.]*

Mr. Ingram: I hear the snide comments from the Opposition. Is it suggested that we should have a trade embargo with China? *[Interruption.]* Well, it is nice to know that that is not what is suggested. Outsourcing in China is an acceptable part of a process put in place by any prime contractor. All contracts have to be subject to evaluation as they proceed. That happens in all procurement streams, and if contractors do not supply on quality, on time and on the required numbers, the penalty will fall on them. They will then have to find other sourcing methods. If contractors do not deliver, it is their failure and we hold them to account for it. That is exactly what would happen on the contract my hon. Friend mentions. He said that he had a letter about the contract, but several allegations have already been made about it. All of them have been investigated, and the allegations he makes will also be investigated. We owe that to the people who depend on the equipment procured, be it uniforms or the big-ticket items I have already mentioned. We will give consideration to the points that he makes, but making an allegation does not make it a fact or accurate. We will have to examine the allegations.

Mr. Ian Davidson (Glasgow, Pollok) (Lab/Co-op): Will my right hon. Friend give way?

Mr. Ingram: I wish to make some progress. I have always been generous to my hon. Friend, although I am not so sure that he is always generous to me. I will come back to him in a moment, but I wanted to comment further on the big-ticket items and how we are trying to deliver in some very demanding procurement areas. There is no easy or simple formula.

We have received criticism from the Defence Committee, as well as from some ill-informed sections of the media. We are not letting down the armed forces. Not only is the criticism in the recent report misleading, it is unfair and demoralising to all those people in the Defence Procurement Agency, both service and civilian, who work so hard for our men and women on the front line. I am conscious of the fact that my right hon. Friend the Chairman of the Defence Committee is present. I do not know whether he will seek to catch your eye, Mr. Deputy Speaker.

Mr. Bruce George (Walsall, South) (Lab): Yes, I will.

Mr. Ingram: No doubt my right hon. Friend will make his points. I am sure that he recognises that we normally have robust exchanges between the Defence Committee and the Ministry of Defence, and where criticisms are levelled, a reasoned response is always given, but he should perhaps also recognise that the strong response on this occasion was caused by some of the wildly wrong comments and criticisms in the report.

The DPA comprises about 3,500 civilian and military personnel, all of whom work extremely hard, but we are told that they are working in a climate of fear—a statement that was never made by any member of the MOD, although it somehow appears in the report. I will not go into all the detail in the report; we have more useful things to discuss. No doubt the Chairman will tell us his point of view in great detail, but let us have a balanced debate. As I say, I believe that some of those comments are very misleading, unfair and unquestionably demoralising for those who are trying to do what is undoubtedly a very difficult job.

I shall say more about the improvements that we continue to make in our procurement processes, but first I want to say something about what we are trying to achieve with our procurement plans—our vision, to use the jargon. Before I do so, I will give way to my hon. Friend the Member for Glasgow, Pollok (Mr. Davidson). I hope that he still remembers his question.

Mr. Davidson: I do indeed. I take very much to heart the point that the Minister made when he said that I am insufficiently generous to him. He has perhaps not been listening to what I have been saying about some of his colleagues.

I very much welcome the enormous shipbuilding orders that are in the pipeline, but will the Minister expand a little on the management of the relationship between the MOD and the industry? Will he speak about how he is trying to avoid boom and bust and how dialogue is emerging to ensure that peaks and troughs are evened out? Will he tell us when the maritime coherence study might be published? In particular, what can he do to avoid the redundancy of design staff, who are rapidly running out of work on Clydeside and for whom no work is available in the short term?

Mr. Ingram: I take that as a very generous and helpful comment. I will consider what my hon. Friend says about my colleagues, and I may sleep better at night knowing that he is less of an enemy of mine than of theirs.

Mr. Davidson: A critical friend.

Mr. Ingram: Okay, if my hon. Friend wants to put it that way; my colleagues may see things differently. I shall say something later about the important issue that he raises, and he may want to intervene then.

People often focus on specific pieces of equipment—that is understandable, and it has happened already in the debate—but it is important that those pieces of equipment combine to generate the capabilities needed to meet the threats of the future. Last July, my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Defence outlined in his statement on future capabilities how the coming years will involve continued movement away from the traditional emphasis on numbers of platforms and people to an emphasis on effects and outcomes.

We no longer face the threat of the cold war, but myriad threats and opportunities. The type of technology and the options for the associated equipment that we can procure for our armed forces in the future are equally varied and numerous. The capabilities of our armed forces and the military effect that they can deliver are growing year by year. Increasingly, we can combine intelligence with target acquisition, modern communications and precision weaponry. The result is changing the nature of modern warfare. For example, in Iraq, the RAF was able to hit more of its targets with less ordnance and therefore fewer aircraft than ever before: 85 per cent. of our air-dropped munitions were precision-guided bombs. That represents a step change in capabilities over the relatively short period of a decade.

In the future, military operations will involve the rapid, accurate and decisive delivery of critical military effect at the right moment. Again, to use the jargon, that is known as effects-based warfare, the key to achieving which will be the agility and flexibility of our forces and the platforms that they operate from. Procurement is crucial to delivering that transformation. Too often in the past, procurement decisions were made through replacement thinking—automatically replacing ageing platforms with new ones designed to do much the same job. These days, our procurement decisions are increasingly made on the basis of capability, flexibility and inter-operability. We need adaptable and flexible capabilities that we can use alongside our allies.

I want to outline three elements of our vision for delivering those capabilities: network-enabled capability; defence industrial policy; and equipment acquisition reform. Let me deal with network-enabled capability first because it is central to effects-based warfare. It is not a weapon, but a concept of war, and it cannot just be bought off the shelf. Put simply, it is a linked network of systems, platforms and headquarters that can all communicate with one another in real time. It allows up-to-date intelligence and information to be delivered exactly where it is needed most, so our commanders achieve the rapid, pinpoint response that we require. That is not just a future aspiration.

In Iraq, we have seen the difference that networked capability can make. The Mamba artillery detection radar, which is a procurement success story, was recently used in concert with our communications network to pinpoint enemy firing positions. Fire was then brought to bear from coalition aircraft at the precise time and location that it was needed. That is a graphic demonstration that our NEC approach is already paying dividends.

At the strategic level, our investment in the Skynet 5 satellite system—the largest private finance initiative contract ever awarded by the MOD—will provide secure communications between strategic decision makers and front-line forces. That secure network will extend to the operational and tactical levels, using systems such as Cormorant and Bowman, both of which are at an advanced stage. Bowman entered service in March this year, with Cormorant due in service in 2005.

Of course, the network will be only as good as what is connected to it. That is why we are investing in state-of-the-art technologies from surveillance assets, such as the Watchkeeper unmanned aerial vehicle, to other world-

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beating air, land and maritime capabilities for the delivery of effect in theatre, such as Typhoon, Apache and the aircraft carriers.

Mr. Michael Jack (Fylde) (Con): The Minister has alluded to the fact that BAE Systems is one of the key suppliers of the type of weapons system to which he has referred. Will he confirm that the MOD has no doubts about the integrity and probity of the company in the way that it has conducted its business for his Department and for contracts abroad?

Mr. Ingram: We have very good relations with BAE Systems and all our major suppliers throughout the supply chain. I know about the criticisms that have been made. I have heard people say that there could be corruption at the highest level between the industry and the MOD. If they say that, they must make it stack up. This goes back to the importance and vitality of what we do in procurement and the way in which it delivers not just for individual companies and their employees but for the good of the British economy. Crucially, what the suppliers deliver is vital to our war-fighting and peacekeeping capabilities. I endorse the point of view expressed by the right hon. Gentleman.

Mr. Gerald Howarth: Will the Minister give way?

Mr. Ingram: No, I want to make progress now.

I have already mentioned the new aircraft carriers and Type 45 destroyers. Our amphibious capability has been enhanced most recently by the introduction of the assault ship, HMS Albion, in July last year. HMS Albion will be joined by her sister ship, HMS Bulwark, this December. Our future maritime expeditionary force will therefore be better placed to support the land component—a vital element of any military intervention, which is known in the jargon as the boots on the ground. Our future procurement plans will also ensure that the Army is ready for whatever it will face.

I have mentioned FRES, but better-balanced land forces also need flexible, highly capable support. Helicopters provide a flexible attack and lift capability. Over the next decade, a significant part of our helicopter fleet will be retired from service. We therefore intend to invest about £3 billion over the next 10 years to replace and enhance that capability. The Apache attack helicopter is the most recent addition to our fleet. Apache gained initial operating capability on 28 September, and any hon. Member who has seen it will know that it is an awesome aircraft. It will provide the Army with an unprecedented long-range precision attack capability.

Our commitment to more flexible and deployable forces is also borne out elsewhere in the air environment. Our planned purchase of an extra C-17 and 25 A400M military airlifters will boost the tactical and strategic airlift for all three services in times of peace, crisis and war.

Delivering all that capability is done through a partnership between the Ministry of Defence and industry, so safeguarding our forward equipment programme and equipping and sustaining our front-line forces are central to safeguarding that partnership. That brings me on to the defence industrial policy, which is the second element of our vision that I want to touch on.

The Government are committed to a strong and healthy UK defence industry. The defence industry brings significant economic benefits to the UK. It creates employment, technology and intellectual property.

Mr. John Smith (Vale of Glamorgan) (Lab): Will my right hon. Friend give way?

Mr. Ingram: If I am going to give way to my hon. Friend, I trust that he will not be asking about the Defence Aviation Repair Agency—I live in hope.

Mr. Smith: Not on this occasion. My right hon. Friend mentioned the defence industrial policy and the need to retain capability. He rightly said that the Apache will come into operation, but there is a large capability requirement for new helicopters and our helicopter industry depends on that. Does he anticipate that there will be an early announcement on that? Does he think that it will benefit the British-based helicopter industry?

Mr. Ingram: I do not know what my hon. Friend means by "early". I was grateful that he did not raise DARA, although he often raises the important matter of DARA St. Athan on behalf of his constituents.

I said that some £3 billion would go into the rotary fleet, and that vital investment will have a major impact on British industry. The work on, and consideration of, that process are currently going on and major suppliers will form part of those discussions. The general answer to my hon. Friend is yes, but I cannot give him a time line. I know how assiduous he is, so I have no doubt that he will be on the case and pursue the matter vigorously in the months ahead.

We have made great advances in our relationships with our suppliers. It is now more than two years since we published our defence industrial policy, which was a watershed. For the first time, we brought together all the issues that affect our relationship with industry into a single, coherent policy. It was developed against a backdrop of huge industrial consolidation.

In the area of market access, we are addressing the barriers to UK industry in our allies' markets. The defence exports and market access forum has been set up jointly with industry to address issues that affect our ability to participate in overseas markets. While we are on the subject of participation, it is worth noting that we have just appointed John Wall, the national officer for the Amicus trade union, to the National Defence Industries Council. Partnership with industry means just that: there is partnership with not only the companies but those who deliver the product—the work force.

We have taken a leading role in Europe on shaping the new defence agency. The agency's principal purpose is to improve member states' military capabilities. It will do that by easing access to member states' markets, improving the flow of information and technology across borders and creating an environment that allows companies to co-operate more closely. Our closer relationship with European partners does not jeopardise our relationship with the US in any way. We have always been clear that maintaining both relationships is crucial. Nearly 18 months ago, the Prime Minister signed an agreement with President Bush to increase co-operation on military and defence matters even further. Progress has been much slower than we would like, and has not been helped by some in Congress who continue to stand in the way of an international traffic in arms regulations waiver for the UK.

Although we are encouraged by the positive language in the recent US Defence Authorisations Bill about the processing of export licences, it does not address the root cause of barriers to co-operation. We need a US system that recognises not only that the UK is wholly trustworthy but that it has the necessary legislation to safeguard sensitive information and control arms exports. It is high time for the intent of our agreements to be translated into concrete actions that meet the needs of both our Governments. We will continue to press the new Administration on that point.

Our defence industrial policy also sets out the factors that we take into account when assessing acquisition options. In addition to factors such as security of supply, we also take account of impact on the industrial base, such as the level of investment in intellectual property, facilities and employment in the UK. The globalisation of the defence business means that the UK defence industry embraces suppliers that bring benefit to, and create value in, the UK, regardless of the nationality of their shareholders.

We are now working on the next step: developing the policy into an industrial strategy. That will explain more clearly which technologies and industrial skills are most important for maintaining existing capabilities and which we expect to require in the long term. That is a major undertaking, but the output will inform better the investment decisions of industry and the Government alike.

We have also been working hard to develop our industrial strategy in the shipbuilding sector, which my hon. Friend the Member for Glasgow, Pollok mentioned. The current programme has the potential to create or secure several thousand jobs in UK shipyards and their suppliers. However, I appreciate that without a reasonable amount of programme stability, core skills might be lost and we may thus be unable to build on experience or achieve longer-term investment in modern facilities. Ministry of Defence and Department of Trade and Industry officials and representatives from the shipbuilding industry have been meeting on a regular basis.

We have been examining the industry for some time. In summer 2003, the supplier relations group began a study on the UK naval shipbuilding industry. That study was complementary to the RAND study on UK shipbuilding capacity. The output from the studies has underscored the need to develop an industrial strategy for UK shipbuilding that supports the delivery of the forward programme and promotes a healthy and economically viable industry in the long term.

We do not wish to impose change on shipbuilding or any other part of industry. We aim to work together to establish changes to the way in which we conduct our business that both sides need. For example, we are involved in close dialogue with the aerospace industry about how we both need to change so that we can deliver our future programme.

Both aerospace and shipbuilding are key industries. We are working in greater partnership with industry and we need a more open-book examination of the situation. We must deal with the peaks and troughs and ensure that we have capacity when we need it. We must ensure that we have core capability when we need it. The important thing is to establish a way in which we can smooth the process while achieving that. There will be difficulties, because individual companies that are at different phases of their future plans have competing demands, but there is determination to find a solution.

Mr. John Burnett (Torridge and West Devon) (LD): Will not budgetary pressures smooth out the capacity problems?

Mr. Ingram: I am not sure of the precise meaning of the hon. Gentleman's question.

Mr. Burnett: I can try to explain.

Mr. Ingram: Let me try to understand what the hon. Gentleman means, because I want to make progress. The amount invested in the procurement stream must have an impact on it—that is a given. The industry knows that, but it is beginning to realise that the cash register is no longer in place. We will not feed a future overspend in the present, so we must deal with the situation. Is the hon. Gentleman asking for the budget to be increased, and if so, by what amount? *[Interruption.]* I am only posing the question.

Mr. Burnett: I am asking an entirely sensible question. The shipbuilding consortium talks about a bunching of contracts because of the process of re-fleeting. I am asking whether normal budgetary constraints will smooth out the process.

Mr. Ingram: That would depend on the nature of the proposition when set against the budgets, which is what is being discussed. I accept the premise on which I thought that the hon. Gentleman's earlier question was based, but budgets must have an impact on the procurement stream. We must get the balance right because we need future capability. We need to be able to ensure that it will exist when we need it, so we need to talk with industry sensibly and openly, but equally it has to talk to us realistically. We are not involved in a one-way process. We are the main purchaser and we keep the shipyards open. As I have said before, if there were no MOD spending in British shipyards, there would be no shipbuilding industry. I am sure that that message has struck home.

We also work closely with industry on research and development in the UK. The MOD spends £2.6 billion per year on research and development, which is comparable with the largest private investor in any sector.

On our acquisitions strategy, I have highlighted the successes of our procurement system and the wide-ranging work to develop our industrial policy, but we cannot let it rest there. In May 2003, we commissioned

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a review of the Defence Procurement Agency's progress in implementing smart acquisition. The review confirmed that the principles of smart acquisition were the right ones, but it also recommended a programme to enhance its application, including new and improved processes. Those focus on project review; financial management; supplier management; and greater joint working with the Defence Logistics Organisation. The changes will be supported by other initiatives, such as the establishment of senior responsible owners for major projects, to strengthen the governance process. We are also increasing the funding provided in early years to de-risk projects where we are working with complex leading-edge technology.

One example of de-risking is FRES, which recently made considerable progress. The assessment phase is gaining momentum and Atkins has been selected as the systems house preferred bidder. The systems house will be independent of any product range or manufacturing capability. Its project management, systems engineering and risk management expertise will provide objectivity and reduce risk early in the programme. In the case of the carriers, we have extended the assessment phase of the programme as part of the process of de-risking it.

Successive National Audit Office reports have endorsed the importance of up-front technology risk reduction. We have taken that message on board. I have set out how we are driving that forward. That is, perhaps, long overdue, and perhaps lessons should have been learned earlier, but we have now taken those messages on board and are driving forward those fundamental changes.

Leadership of the acquisition process, within both the Defence Procurement Agency and the Defence Logistics Organisation, is being driven by the very top of the Department, and all the issues—military, scientific, financial and industrial—involved in acquisition are being addressed. The changes are being managed through a new acquisition policy board chaired by the Minister for Defence Procurement, Lord Bach. The process is part of our overarching structure, which is driving forward major transformation in the way in which we go about our business, from procurement, through logistic support, to a better structured, more flexible and capable front line.

The Government are investing in defence. It is worth repeating that for the third successive spending review we have announced real growth in the defence budget. That is without precedent since the mid-1980s. We are committed to ensuring that that extra funding is spent in the best way and delivers where it can make a difference—at the front line.

I have outlined the three elements of the transformation of procurement that is necessary to deliver the capabilities vital to future military operations. To do that, we must continue to take the right decisions for defence. Those decisions might be hard for some, but are none the less essential. Change and transformation is not an easy process, but the gains it will deliver are what our front-line needs.

In conclusion, do we have a perfect track record on procurement? No, but no Government ever have. Are we getting better? Yes, unquestionably. Are we determined to provide the best equipment for our armed forces that we can? Absolutely. The men and women of our armed forces deserve nothing less.

2.13 pm

Mr. Gerald Howarth (Aldershot) (Con): As is my custom, I start on a note of agreement. My hon. Friends and I join the Minister in paying tribute to the courage and professionalism of our armed forces. I am sure that I speak for the whole House when I say that.

I also endorse what the Minister said about some of our equipment. Storm Shadow has performed superbly in Iraq. It was brought into operation early, which speaks volumes for Britain's defence industry and the quality of our scientists and engineers who ensure that such equipment is delivered. We endorse the C-17 as important heavy-lift equipment. We have consistently supported the principle of the two new aircraft carriers. I have said before that I issued a press release welcoming the Government's decision to go for the short take-off and vertical landing variant of the joint strike fighter and to incorporate in the design of the carriers the possibility of retrofitting the catapult. There is common ground, but inevitably there are disagreements.

A recent report stated:

> "Our Armed Forces have been let down by the organisation tasked with equipping them".

Those are not my words, but the conclusion of the Defence Committee. Its recent report on defence procurement exposed how the Government's procurement process is in almost complete disarray. It is hard to recall when I last read a report by a Committee dominated by Members of Parliament of the governing party that was so overtly critical of the Government, so much so that it led to the extraordinary situation of the Government virtually rejecting the report out of hand. Worse still for the Government, however, is that it was one of a succession of critical reports exposing their inability to get a grip on their procurement process.

The reports follow on from another series of reports on the Government's approach to the equipping of our armed forces for the recent Iraq war. All concluded that there was deficiency in the provision of some kit. I remind the Minister that one of our accusations was sustained by the National Audit Office, which said that there was insufficient kit in theatre. It gave three reasons for that. First, there were insufficient stocks on the shelves. It did not entirely criticise the Government for that because it accepted that it was not possible to keep a vast array of kit on the shelves that may not be required. Secondly, there was difficulty in getting some of the kit into theatre. Again, that involves logistics issues, which we all understand. However, the NAO's third point was that the Government had allowed insufficient time to make up the shortfall of the kit that was not on the shelves. The Government have not been able to defend that serious accusation, which we lay at their door, and we pray in aid the NAO in support of our position.

I must tell the Minister, who speaks on behalf of the Minister for Defence Procurement, that the argument has again surfaced in connection with the court martial that concluded yesterday. It was told that

> "training for soldiers who were to be deployed to Iraq was delayed because of the attempts to negotiate a peaceful settlement."

That is simply unacceptable. It illustrates the fault at the heart of the Government, not only in equipping our armed forces, but in training them. They did not allow sufficient time for either equipping or training because they were concerned that that would send the message to their Back Benchers that they were preparing for war at the same time as they were negotiating at the United Nations. I am afraid to say that as a result our armed forces were betrayed. Yesterday's verdict in a court martial further confirms the extent of that betrayal.

Mr. John Smith: Does the hon. Gentleman agree that the overall judgment of the NAO report was that the operation was a logistical success and that we deployed into theatre in half the time that it took 10 years ago in the first Iraq war?

Mr. Howarth: Of course I accept that, but I cannot ignore—the House and the country would not want me to—the criticisms that have been made. Those specific and detailed criticisms go to the heart of the Government's thinking about the planning for the operations. In the world of realpolitik, we understand that it is necessary for a party to carry its Back Benchers with it, but the armed forces must not be sacrificed, and their safety not imperilled, by the political imperative of the Government of the day who are unwilling to face up to their Back Benchers, who might be hostile to military action. The result is that the troops do not get the kit that they want or do not get it in time.

Mr. Keetch: Is not another example of the point that the hon. Gentleman is making the large number of urgent operational requirement orders that were placed in the run-up to the Iraq war? That clearly shows that forces were being sent without being properly equipped. It is worth remembering that this was not a war that occurred suddenly, like the first Gulf war or the Falklands war. This was a war of our timing, which should not have been started until our forces were ready to begin the conflict properly.

Mr. Howarth: The hon. Gentleman reinforces my point and I am grateful to him for doing so, particularly as he comes from a slightly different position on these matters. What he says about urgent operational requirements, which amounted to about £500 million, also illustrates the point. However, the National Audit Office was right to say that it would not be reasonable to expect any Government to have on the shelves, ready to use, equipment for 50,000 troops in the Arctic, the desert, temperate climates and so on. We must be reasonable; taxpayers' money is at stake.

Only last month the Public Accounts Committee published a highly critical report on the Government's management of their 20 largest projects. That report, based on the equally damning NAO 2003 major projects report, cited cost overruns of £3.1 billion and an average delay of 18 months across the 20 largest projects. The Defence Committee described the performance of the Defence Procurement Agency as "woeful". On the cost increases, the Committee concluded:

> "Such substantial cost increases are also likely to have an impact beyond defence procurement and result in cuts elsewhere. Given the recent pressures on our Armed Forces, we believe such impacts would be unacceptable."

I am sure the House would agree. How are those cost overruns to be funded? From cuts elsewhere? If so, it is incumbent on the Minister to tell us where.

Since the Government came to power, spending on defence has fallen both in real terms and as a share of gross domestic product.

Mr. Davidson: Would it not be helpful to point out to the House that the largest cost overruns were on projects inherited from the previous Conservative Government?

Mr. Howarth: The hon. Gentleman will have to wait for what I am about to say on that topic.

Mr. Davidson: That is a yes, then.

Mr. Howarth: The hon. Gentleman will hear the answer.

Despite the claims made by the Minister in his opening speech about how much more is being spent on defence by the Labour Government—I leave aside the extensive extra commitments to which they have subjected our armed forces—defence spending in 2004–05 will be almost £1 billion less in real terms than it was in 1995–96. Defence expenditure was then 3 per cent. of GDP. By 2005–06 it is set to fall to 2.3 per cent. of GDP, resulting in reductions in equipment, platforms, manpower and overall funding to the front line.

Demands on our frontline forces are far greater than envisaged by the strategic defence review, and the message from the White Paper is that those demands are likely to increase. The White Paper is littered with modern MOD-speak such as "capabilities-based approach" and "effects-based warfare", terms deployed in today's debate by the Minister. Those are a cloak to mask the cuts resulting from decisions made in No. 11 Downing street. We have been warning that such cuts would lead to dangerous capability gaps and place our front-line forces at risk. We cited the withdrawal of the Sea Harrier as an obvious example.

The First Sea Lord said:

> "You will need a lot of type 45 destroyers to give the same coverage as a naval air defence fighter."

That accords with the point made by my hon. Friend the Member for Croydon, South (Richard Ottaway). We have also raised serious concerns about the repeated claims by the Secretary of State that numbers no longer count and that it is capabilities that are important; again, a point made by the Minister. But no one unit of capability can ever be in two places at once. The First Sea Lord has been honest about the risks that the Government are running. As he told the latest issue of *Warship World* in respect of the Government's proposed 20 per cent. cut in the number of destroyers and frigates:

> "My gut feeling is that we need a DD/FF force"—

that is, destroyer/frigate force—

> "of about 30 ships . . . I would still much rather not be losing those Type 23s. It is a painful cut, and I believe we are taking a risk. We shouldn't delude ourselves."

That is precisely what the Minister was doing in his opening address.

[Mr. Howarth]

The Defence Committee endorsed the concerns expressed by the First Sea Lord and from the Conservative Benches. The Committee stated on page 9 of its report:

> "We also consider that a policy of reducing the existing number of platforms in advance of acquiring the new capabilities is potentially dangerous."

We agree. That is why our commitment to spend £2.7 billion more on the front line than the Government are spending will allow us to ensure that our armed forces are fully funded.

It is appalling that the Minister left his Prime Minister so exposed to my right hon. and learned Friend the Leader of the Opposition the other day, when the Prime Minister was clearly unaware of the announcement made by my right hon. Friend the shadow Chancellor and my hon. Friend the shadow Secretary of State for Defence. It was extremely neglectful of Ministers in the Ministry of Defence to leave the Prime Minister so obviously ignorant and in danger of misleading the House, but perhaps that is no surprise coming from the current Secretary of State, who is fairly cavalier about such things.

Mr. Ingram: I recognise the headline figures that the hon. Gentleman is bandying around. If £1.1 billion is to be funded from cuts elsewhere in Government programmes, will he tell us where? If £1.6 billion is to be taken out of defence expenditure, on top of the £2.8 billion efficiency changes that we are making, that means a £4.4 billion cut in defence activity. Will he give an indication of where that extra £1.6 billion-worth reduction in activities is to come from?

Mr. Howarth: The debate is about procurement issues, but let me address the Minister's comments. The James committee, led by an experienced businessman with a fantastic track record of turning round ailing businesses—he would be hugely advantageous to the Government—identified substantial savings across other Departments, of which £1.1 billion, I assure the right hon. Gentleman, is a drop in the ocean. The Government cannot stomach the fact that they are making so-called efficiency savings, but nobody else can make efficiency savings beyond those that they have identified. I can tell the right hon. Gentleman that we have done our sums. The figures are in the public domain and we stand by them. I assure him that we will be able to fund all that we intend to do for our armed forces, which will be significantly more than the Government are prepared to do.

Perhaps the Minister could answer a point on the annual report and accounts of the Defence Procurement Agency. In 2003–04 capital commitments amount to £14 billion in round figures, contracted but not provided for; £14 billion of commitments for which the Government have no money. So we are taking no lessons from them. The Conservative party is determined to ensure that our armed forces are properly funded for the tasks that we give them.

It is six years since the Government introduced their policy of smart acquisition and the results of the policy have been, at best, mixed. The Chief of Defence Procurement, Sir Peter Spencer, told the Defence Committee earlier this year that of the seven aims of smart acquisition, only one had been met. The Committee accordingly concluded:

> "We find it immensely disappointing that the Smart Acquisition initiative, launched some six years ago, has yet to deliver its aim of procuring equipment faster, cheaper, better."

That is pretty damning stuff, and it is easy to see why the Minister felt stung by the vehemence of the charges and felt constrained to respond so vehemently just now to the Committee.

However, the MOD has itself admitted that smart acquisition has not been applied in the way that was envisaged on some of the newer projects, and that it has failed to bring the anticipated improvements to legacy projects, to which the hon. Member for Glasgow, Pollok (Mr. Davidson) just referred. It is not the Committee with which Ministers should be taking issue; rather it is their own chief of defence procurement. It was Sir Peter who predicted that this year's accounts were likely to present another problem year.

The problem with smart acquisition is not so much the policy itself but its implementation. The Government's failure properly to implement their own policy has meant that some of the potential savings, which could have been achieved through improved management of risk, through life management and a partnership with industry, have not been achieved, and it is to those key areas that I wish to turn.

On risk management, the Public Accounts Committee concluded:

> "The Department admitted that the figures showed that some projects had not been properly de-risked in the Assessment Phase and this was an indication that Smart Acquisition was not being applied thoroughly or consistently."

Much more needs to be done to manage risk. The SDR sets out that 15 per cent. of a project's budget should be spent prior to the key decision-making point, known in the trade as main gate, to try to reduce that risk. However, smart acquisition projects have seen only 4.4 per cent. of their total budget being spent prior to main gate, well short of that target of 15 per cent. that the Government have set themselves.

The Minister has just told us that the Government have taken that message on board, and we welcome that, but they are a long way short of achieving the objective that they themselves have set. It is no good their bleating on that the problems are exclusively with projects started by the last Conservative Government, because Sir Peter admitted last week that one of the reasons smart acquisition projects had not encountered difficulties similar to those of the so-called legacy projects was that they were in the relatively early stages, and could well run into problems later in the procurement cycle when such difficulties traditionally arose. So the answer to the hon. Member for Glasgow, Pollok is that the jury is out on his Government's own projects. We wait to see whether the Government fulfil their own commitments.

Part of the solution is to ensure that there is adequate research funding. However, the amount spent on research has been falling since the Government came to power. At £450 million, the current research budget is less than half the total research budget in 1990. We acknowledge that the culture around the DPA is increasingly one of risk-aversion—not fear—to which the Defence Committee drew attention, as officials seek to limit the risk of a kick in the backside by the NAO, the PAC and the Select Committee. It must be given some leeway to explore the possibilities of science, without feeling at every point that it may be kicked. I hope that we can share that aim with the Government. This is not a criticism of the Government, but a criticism of the system, and together we must find ways to address that, so that the DPA scientists can do their job without feeling that if they fail at the cutting edge of technology, they will be kicked in the backside, because that is not the answer.

There are serious issues here. Rolls-Royce tells me that unless it has some support for the hot-end development of its aero-engines, it could shift the company out of the United Kingdom. That is a serious issue to which I urge Ministers to pay attention. If Rolls-Royce were to move out of the UK, I suspect that there would be an uproar; not an attack on the company, which is answerable to its shareholders, but an attack on the Government who allowed that to happen.

There continue to be great concerns about the future of Qinetiq, in which, as the Minister knows, I have a vested interest, as its headquarters are in my constituency. My hon. Friend the shadow Secretary of State for Defence fully shares my concerns on that front. The Minister must face the fact that being starved of resources for the development of new technology is driving business to the United States, where Qinetiq's minority shareholder, Carlyle, is based. Once the business is in the United States, we then face the difficulties of repatriating the benefit of that development work to the United Kingdom, thanks to the operation of the international traffic in arms regulations in the United States, to which the Minister referred.

Another issue of concern was raised at the weekend in *The Observer*, although for that reason I naturally take it with a pinch of salt. Ministers should come to the House and tell us their policy on the whole issue of defence research. If it is true that there are people who now believe that it is not worth working in the defence sector and that they should hawk around the world their experience and the knowledge that they have gained from working in UK secret defence establishments, that is a serious issue that we need to address.

The MOD defines through life management as

> "an integrated approach to all Smart Acquisition process, planning and costing activities across the whole system and whole life of a project".

In May last year the NAO released its report on through life management at the MOD. It found that the MOD and DPA had been slow to recognise its potential benefits and were not doing enough to achieve effective through life management. In particular, the NAO had criticisms of the interface between the DPA and the Defence Logistics Organisation, such as incompatible information technology systems and different financial reporting systems.

The inability to transfer a project seamlessly between those two organisations was preventing the MOD from achieving a genuine through life approach. The next Conservative Government will take steps to ensure that the DPA becomes a much leaner organisation, and that the relationship between it and the DLO is such that major capital projects in particular are managed through their life without an artificial interruption as they pass from one organisation to the other.

The NAO described progress as "patchy", and said that the almost complete absence of a role for the second customer and for the supplier following a project's entry into service demonstrated that the MOD had not taken it on board that it required an attitudinal change in project management. Failure to integrate into the process the services that will be using the equipment, and the industry that builds and supplies that equipment, means that the process of delivering military capability will be incomplete.

Another key to achieving the aims of smart acquisition is developing a mature partnership with industry, with both sides working together from a project's inception through to the completion of its service life. Government and industry need to be honest with each other on costs, capability and time issues. I agree with the Minister. This is not simply a matter for the Government; industry has a role to play here. It involves setting achievable budgets and in-service dates. If the Government set a budget that is too low simply to gain Treasury approval, or industry gave a low estimate in order to win a contract, the result would be escalating costs later in the process. Equally, if for political reasons the Government set an unrealistic in-service date and industry accepted such an estimate, the result would be time slippages.

However, recent experience tells us that such a relationship is not yet developing. Despite what the Minister said, there have been repeated reports of difficulties between BAE Systems and the MOD. In their extraordinary rejection of the Defence Committee report, the Government said:

> "It was remarkable that no mention of any kind is made of industries performance—the Committee suggests that all the faults appear to lie with the DPA."

I partly agree with that. On the other hand, the Committee was right to point out that it is incumbent on the customer to work with industry. Again, I agree with what the Minister said earlier in reply to the hon. Member for Torridge and West Devon (Mr. Burnett) about providing a clear programme of stability for industry in so far as that is compatible with the requirements of the Treasury. But that has now become an imperative. We can no longer continue with peaks and troughs in the British defence industry.

The Minister knows that there is a fantastic warship building programme. The question is whether we have the skills to undertake that programme. We have feast or famine, and we cannot go on like that. If we are to maintain a defence industrial base in this country, we must find a way to even out that stream of income for business, something to which the Conservative party is absolutely committed.

Mr. Burnett: I hope that the hon. Gentleman agrees that if the ordering process were more orderly, it would retain competition, because having one supplier and one customer is unlikely to be in the best interests of the taxpayer.

Mr. Howarth: Yes, of course. We were the architects of the introduction of extensive competition into defence procurement, which resulted in a considerable saving for the British taxpayer and a sharpening-up of British industry. We must also face the fact that the defence industrial base is contracting not only in this country but around Europe and in the United States. We must also address security of supply.

Ms Dari Taylor (Stockton, South) (Lab): The hon. Gentleman discussed how the Conservative Government increased competition, but does he remember that he closed Swans, an excellent naval yard, which reduced competition?

Mr. Howarth: My hon. Friend the Member for Mid-Sussex (Mr. Soames) has confirmed that the hon. Lady is a magnificent woman and we all welcome her contribution. Of course, we closed various things when we were in government, and this Government have closed things. The point is that we must have an adult debate. The world has moved on.

The Minister told the Select Committee that he seeks the answer to the question: which essential capabilities does this country require? We understand that point and are doing our own work to see whether common ground exists or whether we disagree on the capabilities that it is necessary to retain in the United Kingdom. Given the contracting defence industrial base, we must address the essential issues. I hope that I have made our policy clear: we believe that it is essential to work with industry and to even out the peaks and troughs so that we can retain the skills base in the United Kingdom to ensure that essential capability is maintained.

I do not want to take too long on individual projects, but the Minister inevitably raised Typhoon. He mentioned that the Royal Air Force is pleased with the product, and I endorse that view. The last Conservative Government started the Typhoon project, and it is a fantastic bit of kit. I look forward to seeing it at close quarters, when I introduce its delights to my hon. Friend the Member for Mid-Sussex. I hope that we shall manage a flight in it—my hon. Friend did not know that.

This time last year, we were told that a decision was expected on tranche 2 of Typhoon by Christmas. We still expect a decision on tranche 2 by Christmas—unfortunately it will be Christmas 2004 rather than Christmas 2003. Will the Minister give the House an assurance that the Government expect to sign off tranche 2 by the end of the year? If the contract is not signed by the end of the year, what plans does he have to introduce some form of bridge funding to ensure the maintenance of the skills base, particularly among the sub-contractors, an issue to which I have just referred?

We have consistently called for the second tranche of Typhoon to be adapted to a ground attack role and hope that that project will now proceed. I understand that design work is at an advanced stage, but we must know when it will be finalised and how confident the Minister is that the new systems integration work has been satisfactorily concluded and de-risked.

When will the new variant enter service? The Defence Committee concluded:

> "We are concerned that there appears to be a wide disagreement between the MoD and industry on how much the necessary enhancements will cost. We find it surprising that MoD considers that there will be little impact on the total cost of the programme, unless there are plans to reduce the size of the third Tranche."

I am not inviting the Minister to comment on the third tranche, but I ask him to comment on that particular point. The Government response to the report suggested that the Committee was confused. Will he tell us what the planned enhancement programme is all about and how it differs from the ground attack variant?

Hon. Members will remember that the MOD originally expected to award FRES—the unfortunately named future rapid effects system, which is medium-weight battlefield equipment—to Alvis Vickers, Britain's major land system manufacturer. Ministers later backtracked from their initial position and dismissed out of hand a joint proposal last year by BAE, Alvis and Thales to work with the MOD to develop that project. So much for the partnership with industry. Months passed while the MOD was reviewing its procurement strategy.

Later, the Government announced their intention to establish a systems house to reassess the entire project, adding at least another year to the process. The Minister appointed W S Atkins to undertake the assessment phase. When does he expect it to be completed? In a recent interview in *Jane's Defence Weekly*, the chief of defence procurement, when discussing the FRES project, stated:

> "we are not going to sign up to any in-service-date, any capability or cost until we understand what the customer wants".

I agree with the de-risking, but the assessment has gone on for such a long time that the gestation period is approaching A400M proportions.

The CDP's statement would be fair, were it not for the fact that Ministers had already set an in-service date of 2009, which subsequently slipped to 2010. The Minister cast doubt on the achievability of that in-service date in a written answer last month to my hon. Friend the Member for Congleton (Ann Winterton), who inquired about the introduction of an assessment phase:

> "Part of this Assessment Phase work will be to identify and reduce risk in the programme to enable us to define an appropriate In-Service-Date."—[*Official Report*, 4 October 2004; Vol. 424, c. 1874W.]

Will the Minister stick by 2010?

Can the Minister tell us how much he has set aside for the FRES project, which the Chief of the General Staff, General Sir Mike Jackson, regards as absolutely essential? There has been some speculation that the programme's lifetime cost could be as much as £50 billion on top of the initial £6 billion figure. Again, we would welcome clarification from the Minister on that point. It is little wonder that a senior infantry officer was quoted in *The Daily Telegraph* on 2 October as saying that the FRES programme had turned into "a debacle".

On the question whether the programme will be collaborative, the Minister confirmed in a written answer to me on 19 October that a collaborative solution is a possibility. What work is going on? Will we collaborate with our European partners or the United

States, which has a similar programme under way? We must be told the parameters within which the Government are operating.

The record is not happy on collaboration with our European partners. The Minister abandoned Tracer and the multi-role armoured vehicle, both of which were collaborative programmes. Having abandoned those programmes, is there any sense in going down another collaborative route? The answer is in the Minister's hands, and I would be grateful if he explained it.

Serious questions remain over the future of the project to design and build the carriers. First, the Government announced that they wanted the MOD to take a risk-sharing part in the programme, leading BAE's former chairman, Sir Richard Evans, to express the concern that the three-way alliance was developing into:

> "some sort of a procurement committee, chaired by a procurement officer from the Ministry of Defence who will have a balancing vote on the committee".

He was rightly concerned about where and with whom the responsibility for risks resides and whether a committee is the right decision-making body. Have those concerns, which were raised by one of the prime contractors in the carrier project, yet been attended to?

The decision to introduce a physical integrator for the carrier project represents little more than an added layer of bureaucracy on an already cumbersome project. As I said at Defence questions last Monday, the contract is not, as has been reported, for the management of the project, but rather it is the contract for the management of the contract for the management of the carrier project, which is extremely convoluted.

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Defence (Mr. Ivor Caplin): Say that again.

Mr. Howarth: No, the Minister must do that.

On the joint combat aircraft, which was formerly known as the joint strike fighter, reports persist about continuing problems with the short take-off and vertical landing variant. Can the Minister confirm that the weight problems with the STOVL variant have been resolved? I understand that those problems have not been resolved, giving rise to concerns that the aircraft will carry only two 1,000 lb bombs instead of the planned 2,000 lb bombs. As *Jane's Defence Weekly* put it:

> "the requirement has now been made to fit the aircraft, instead of the other way around".

Are the Government prepared to accept that reduced payload?

Doubts have also been cast on the viability of the STOVL variant. Tom Fillingham of BAE told *Jane's Defence Weekly*:

> "STOVL is not set in stone. Right now our current planning is for STOVL but we don't have a contract."

A decision to abandon the STOVL variant would mean the new carriers being fitted with catapults to launch conventional aircraft. When does the Minister expect to make that decision, and what effect would the need to change the JCA requirement have on the cost of the carrier programme and on that aircraft project itself?

I do not want to speak for too much longer, because I know that many hon. Members want to contribute to the debate. The Minister mentioned the international traffic in arms regulations waiver. I agree with him that progress has been slow, although I attach no blame to Ministers, because Lord Bach has batted as hard as anybody. We are all indebted to Senator John Warner of the Senate armed services committee for his work on behalf of Anglo-American relations in trying to drive through a solution in Congress, where the real problem lies, to benefit the United Kingdom and the United States.

We are indebted to the Senator for at least having got into the Appropriations Bill a specific undertaking that the United States Government will ensure that the United Kingdom's applications for the export of technology are expedited—whatever that means. I fear, though, that it is not enough. The Secretary of State said in a letter to the US Defence Secretary on 16 June:

> "The mutual operational, technological and industrial benefits we have enjoyed over the years of co-operation could quickly evaporate, with both of us being losers and with obvious political ramifications."

I think that he is right.

My own view is that progress will remain slow unless the Prime Minister seeks to extract some dividend for the phenomenal support that he has given President Bush over the past few years. It is the very least that the United States can do. This is not an intemperate criticism of the US Administration. However, the fact is that we are partners, and the Prime Minister deserves some dividend for his support. The Minister is more aware than I of the damage that the Prime Minister has incurred from his own side. One dividend should be to get the ITAR waiver—which, I remind the House, concerns unclassified information. We are not asking for classified stuff—well, we are, but we are not getting it—yet we cannot even get an agreement enforced on unclassified material. The Prime Minister deserves that.

I turn to Galileo, the EU's proposed competitor to the US's free-to-users global positioning system, which provides aeronautical and motor car navigation systems—although more advanced Members no doubt have SatNav in their BMWs.

Mr. Nicholas Soames (Mid-Sussex) (Con): Correct.

Mr. Howarth: My hon. Friend is nothing if not fully conversant with the most up-to-date and modern technical gizmos. With an hour's briefing, I am sure that he will be able to fly the Typhoon.

The Galileo project represents a potential source of growing transatlantic discord. It has serious military potential. Ministers insist that they will resist any attempt by France to give Galileo a military application. On 7 June, the Under-Secretary of State for Transport, the hon. Member for Plymouth, Devonport (Mr. Jamieson), told European Standing Committee A that it

> "would not be used for operational military matters."—[*Official Report, European Standing Committee A*, 7 June 2004; c. 6.]

Is that also the intention of the MOD?

Furthermore, the Minister will have seen last weekend's article by Christopher Booker in *The Sunday Telegraph*, which referred to a discussion at the Royal United Services Institute on 11 October when the

[Mr. Howarth]

question was posed whether, in the event of a conflict involving the US, the EU would agree to deny Galileo facilities to America's enemies. I understand that that is the case, as I have been told in a letter from Astrium. At that meeting, when EU officials replied that they would not be prepared to turn it off, US officials unsurprisingly responded that in such circumstances the US would be forced either to jam the Galileo signal or destroy Galileo's satellites.

There is a further cause of concern in that China has been admitted to the project as an equity partner. It will therefore have access not only to Galileo's facilities but to the technology, and is reported to have said that it will resist any US attempt to deny access to Galileo—whatever that means. These are extremely serious issues on which the country is entitled to know the views of the MOD, as well as the Department for Transport.

There are, of course, aspects of defence policy with which we agree, and we recognise that there are real difficulties with which the Government and their Ministers have to wrestle. However, they have chosen to deploy Britain's armed forces more frequently and in greater numbers than for decades. It is their duty to ensure that the men and women of our armed forces have the right equipment and that they sustain Britain's defence industrial base to ensure that we have security of supply. We believe that the overwhelming evidence is that they are failing to deliver. Their failure to invest in research will have deeply damaging consequences for Britain's defence industrial base in years to come, their reliance on new technology gizmos at the expense of numbers of tanks, ships and aircraft will expose our armed forces to real risk, and their inability to manage the procurement process has proved costly to an already stretched defence budget.

It is time for a new Government—a Conservative Government—who are committed to ensuring that our armed forces go into combat properly trained and equipped. That is what our superbly courageous and professional armed forces need, and that is what I hope that the people of Britain will ensure next year that they get.

Mr. Deputy Speaker (Sir Michael Lord): Order. Before I call the next speaker, I remind the House that Mr. Speaker has placed a 15-minute limit on all Back-Bench speeches, and that applies from now on.

2.55 pm

Mr. Bruce George (Walsall, South) (Lab): I came to the Chamber with three speeches. Plan A, if the Conservatives were forgetful of their failures over the years, was to repeat my classic A to Z of Tory procurement foul-ups. The hon. Member for Aldershot (Mr. Howarth) almost forced me to do so. Plan B was a run-of-the-mill speech on defence procurement. I am well able to give run-of-the-mill speeches, but I resisted that temptation. Plan C was what I would say if the Minister attacked the Defence Committee. So it is going to be plan C.

The Defence Committee's report on defence procurement was published at the end of July. It received considerable press coverage, although not as much as the Ministry of Defence's riposte, which was a little over the top. Having read it, I was reminded of the famous quotation of Robert E. Lee, who once said:

> "I was too weak to defend, so I attacked."

I shall therefore try to explain our motives and purposes.

In fairness, the extent of the current defence procurement programme and budget is formidable in terms of ensuring that our armed forces are among the best in the world. The cost of the top 20 projects for 2002–03 was in excess of £50 billion. I am very pleased about that. We have already heard about the joint strike fighter and Typhoon. In our much maligned report, we listed the top 20 projects; it is an impressive list. We welcomed the fact that the Government are spending more on defence. I do not believe the figures cited by the hon. Member for Aldershot. The Government are giving procurement a great deal of attention. Much of what they have done is to be supported, and we did so in our report.

The procurement of high-tech, cutting-edge equipment is not easy, but lessons from the past need to be learned and acted on. Some of our previous reports pointed to the risks if equipment programmes are not managed properly. Those reports go back years. I have been on the Defence Committee since 1980, and we have produced endless critiques of the defence procurement process. In our report on the strategic defence review, we discussed the major inquiries—the Gibb-Zuckerman in 1961, Downey in the mid-60s, and Levene in the mid-80s—and looked into smart procurement. Those were all serious attempts to do something that we have never done as a country—to produce defence equipment effectively, on time, and to cost.

We are still striving for that, and progress has been made. In our highly-criticised report, we said that the system is not yet succeeding—indeed, there have been several failures. The report was based on our own methodology. We have a full-time member of staff seconded from the National Audit Office, we undertake an annual review of the defence procurement process, and we read the NAO material and all sorts of documentation. Many of our criticisms came from the chief of defence procurement. How can we be criticised for citing the senior guy in the procurement process apart from the Minister? That is indefensible.

We pointed out that the top 20 defence procurement projects for 2002–03 had experienced in-year cost increases totalling £3.1 billion and that those projects had slipped a further 18 months beyond their expected delivery date, with nine months' slippage occurring in 2002–03. However, the report highlighted several good things, including the successful de-risking of the 2087 sonar radar project—2087 is not the projected in-service date. We complimented the decision to extend the assessment phase of the future carrier programme and the second tranche of the Eurofighter Typhoon aircraft to multi-role.

Despite claims to the contrary by the MOD, this was a fair report. We welcomed the fact that the MOD had recognised the importance of establishing an industrial strategy to sit alongside a defence industrial policy. We said that the decision to procure a Hawk trainer aircraft was sensible. However, we have a key role in examining expenditure, administration and policy, and we do that on behalf of the taxpayer. It is not our job to be a cheerleader for the MOD and to ignore poor performance where it occurs.

The Government's response, published in October, called our endeavours "misguided, disappointing and flawed". It accused the Defence Committee of being selective in its use of evidence and said that it had missed an opportunity to be constructive. What did we say? First, the performance of the Defence Procurement Agency in 2002–03 was "woeful". That was a slight mistake. The Clerk could not read my handwriting. I wrote, "The performance of the Defence Procurement Agency was wonderful." He is on his first written notice, and he had better learn how to read my writing. Secondly, we said that

> "our armed forces have been let down by the organisation tasked with equipping them."

We also said that the MOD had only recently taken action to improve performance on major projects and that a fear culture existed in the DPA. The Government's response, it is fair to say, did not accept those specific conclusions.

I intend to respond to some of the more extreme claims made in the Government's response in due course, but first I want to highlight the fact that in a number of areas the response agreed with what we were doing. The hon. Member for Aldershot, a good personal friend, despite his politics—he claims that he is to the left of me, but I deny it—commented on the ITAR waiver. He will remember that we lobbied very hard against the "buy American" Act, and for the ITAR waiver and the helicopter sale for the President, so we have been helping the MOD as far as we can.

The Government's response welcomed a number of the Committee's other conclusions, some of which were highly critical. When the Government introduced smart acquisition, their objective was to procure equipment faster, cheaper and better. The Committee welcomed that initiative and looked forward to the expected improvements. Some of those improvements have been obvious; others have not.

In addition to the poor headline performance figures for 2002–03, the most disappointing findings from our inquiry were the evidence provided by the chief of defence procurement, Sir Peter Spencer, head of the DPA. Sir Peter had commissioned an independent review of the DPA, referred to by the Minister, and specifically of the implementation of the smart procurement initiative. He told us in an evidence session that the findings from the review included the following: the underlying causes of poor performance were endemic; only one of the seven key principles underlying smart procurement had been implemented in full; there was a misunderstanding throughout the MOD as to what project leaders were expected to deliver; and some of the projects that had commenced following the introduction of the smart acquisition process were showing signs of problems.

If those were the findings of Conservative Central Office, we would quite rightly dismiss them, but they were the result of a report commissioned by the MOD. We are castigated for echoing some of those points. If we were selective in our evidence, as the MOD claimed, it is because we drew on the evidence provided by the head of the DPA, part of the MOD, and the findings of an inquiry commissioned by the MOD. Why are we considered to be the aberration? Why are others trying to be difficult with the MOD?

I shall give a few quotes. The first states:

> "Cost overruns of £3 billion and delays of nine months on average on major defence projects during a single year is a poor performance. Our servicemen and women will be without the equipment promised, and will have to continue to use older kit planned to be withdrawn . . . The Department must properly apply the sound principles of smart acquisition".

Where did that come from? It came from the Public Accounts Committee's comments on the major projects report. It gets all its information from the National Audit Office. The second quote states:

> "The Agency . . . failed to achieve its targets on programme slippage and cost growth . . . overall performance was seriously damaged by major cost and time delays".

Was that the Defence Committee? Was it *The Daily Telegraph*? No, it is the foreword to the DPA's annual report and accounts 2002–03.

One more quote:

> "People were so excited about smart acquisition delivering more for their money that they got over-optimistic . . . People want to believe their own publicity and think they can get it for the cost they first thought of before they had done any of the reconnaissance and then you get a slightly unholy alliance of optimism".

Who said that? Was it the hon. Member for Aldershot? No, it was the chief of defence procurement in an interview published last week in *Jane's Defence Weekly*.

Ms Dari Taylor: I am sure that my right hon. Friend remembers that I was a member of the Select Committee, under his chairmanship, when defence procurement was something that we were all discussing and becoming involved in. May I ask him whether he made any criticisms of it at the time? Frankly, I cannot remember him ever doing so. In fact, I remember that it was the hon. Member for Canterbury (Mr. Brazier) and I who made such criticisms, not my right hon. Friend.

Mr. George: I cannot go back as far as the idyllic days when my hon. Friend was a member of the Committee, but I will talk to her afterwards.

The Government's response suggested that the Committee should have highlighted the success of the procurement of items. We did, and in our "Lessons of Iraq" report we were in many ways very complimentary. The MOD attacked us as uninformed and disliked our conclusions, but those were based on solid evidence given to us.

The Committee concluded that a fear culture existed in the DPA. The Government disliked that intensely. Several pieces of evidence led us to our conclusion. Perhaps the most compelling was from the chief of defence procurement, who told us:

> "You have to ask yourself with some of these very big failures which occurred, why did they suddenly appear to come out of a clear blue sky? Somebody must have known".

He also told us:

> "We need to make sure that people give us honest forecasts. The worst way of getting out of this is simply to hoard up bad news until after you have gone and then somebody else comes along and uncovers it inside a project . . . We effectively had an amnesty to say 'If you have something you need to get off your chest, this is the year to do it.'"

[Mr. George]

Why would officials need an amnesty? What would prevent them from admitting that their programmes were experiencing problems? Fear? However, our conclusion was rejected by the MOD.

One of our industry witnesses also used the term "fear culture", and Vice-Admiral Sir Jeremy Blackham, former director of equipment capability—a dangerous outsider—spoke at a recent RUSI procurement conference, which I chaired, about procurement problems being prompted by

> "the fear of failure outweighing the glare of glory".

Our report focused on the latest available data at the time on the performance of major defence projects. What about the procurement performance since then? In the DPA's annual report and accounts for 2003–04, published in October, the chief of defence procurement says that the agency failed to achieve its targets on programme slippage, cost growth and customer satisfaction. He added:

> "Failure to meet three key targets is incontrovertible evidence that the agency has yet to deliver the full benefits of the smart acquisition reforms introduced five years ago".

I could go on and on, but it is too painful.

My point is that things have gone right in many instances. The budget is going up and the programme set out by the Government to acquire weapons to equip our armed forces for the future is formidable and commendable. I admire what they have done. They are trying to achieve almost the impossible. Many previous Governments have failed in the task. The Government have begun the process and made progress but, unfortunately, failures have occurred. It is incumbent on the Defence Committee to point out those failures. If the Minister does not like the message, he should not shoot the messengers, because most of them are in the pay of the Ministry of Defence. I ask him to tell the person who wrote the document that slags us off that he should perhaps have approached us privately so that we could exchange views. We are trying to be constructive, not destructive.

The budget constraints are obvious, and we need to get the best equipment that we can afford. The Minister, his colleagues and I remain good friends. I have had my famous discussion with a nameless person and I emerged in one piece. We are on the same side. Even the Opposition are part of the process of considering how best to serve our armed forces with the money available. I hope that our comments, those of Ministry of Defence employees, and of internal mechanisms, can be acted on. I hope that lessons will be learned, without rancour or excessive anger. We can then collectively deliver to our armed forces the right amount of high-quality equipment that is good enough for them. They deserve the best and perhaps we can collectively help them to get the best equipment so that they can do what we ask of them.

3.11 pm

Mr. Colin Breed (South-East Cornwall) (LD): It is a privilege to follow the Chairman of the Select Committee and to agree with everything that he said, especially his last comments. The purpose of such debates is to try to ensure that we get to the bottom of all the matters that need discussion, not only for our armed forces, but for taxpayers, constituents and the country. We should be able to do that in a helpful and constructive, rather than a destructive, spirit.

A fortnight ago, we debated defence in the world, which clearly demonstrated our enormous current defence commitments, not least in Afghanistan and Iraq. In the context of Iraq, I want to comment on some "breaking news"—the phrase that appears on television screens. The Black Watch is apparently deploying to a larger geographical area. Although I do not have the exact details, I hope that the Minister will make a statement at the end of the debate. On 21 October, the Secretary of State said:

> "The deployment is limited in scope, time and space".—[*Official Report*, 21 October 2004; Vol. 425, c. 1037.]

I hope that the breaking news does not contravene that, and that later we will understand what constitutes the enlargement of the geographical area.

I place on record again our admiration of and support for the bravery and professionalism of all our troops, especially in the difficult times that they are experiencing, leading up to what we all hope will be successful elections in Iraq in the new year. I am pleased that presidential elections, although they may not have been perfect, were held in Afghanistan. We wish President Karzai the very best in trying to take his country forward.

The annual opportunity to consider defence procurement policy provides us with the chance of considering individual high-profile projects. The two previous speakers have spent approximately an hour going through two aspects of those high-profile and costly projects. However, I hope that the debate also provides us with an opportunity to explore the changing strategic environment in which long-term decisions have to be made. The United Kingdom is—I suspect, not for the first time—at a crossroads in several matters, which will have a significant bearing on those decisions. I should like to consider them briefly.

The hon. Member for Aldershot (Mr. Howarth) alluded to the first aspect, which is the relationship on foreign affairs and defence with the United States of America and the European Union. Without unnecessarily repeating the catalogue of events that led up to the conflict in Iraq, we must surely recognise that if we move ever closer to the USA in foreign policy, it will inevitably affect relationships with our European partners. It is also likely to determine the shape of our defence assets.

The necessity for compatibility with US equipment when fighting alongside each other is clear and obvious and such a policy has significant cost implications. Unless compatibility is also possible with our European partners, we face either expensive duplication or possible value for money integration. It would be ideal, as the Minister said in his opening speech, if we could harmonise in Europe and be compatible with the USA. I am not clear about whether that will be possible on a medium and long-term basis.

Secondly, procurement spending appears increasingly polarised between expensive technology and what might be considered low-tech personnel numbers. As greater technological advances are made in our weapons and communications equipment, it is tempting and seductive to believe that fewer fighting troops are necessary. Yet is clear that, although impressive technology was able to win the brief war in Iraq, the lack of troops on the ground to patrol the borders and secure arms dumps, vital oil installations and other infrastructure dramatically changed military planning. We need both, and expenditure and focus on one should not compromise the provision of the other.

Thirdly, I want to consider the importance of the UK defence industry. Again, much has been said about that with which I agree. Its importance in security of supply and economic value to the UK cannot be overestimated, yet we must ensure that our armed forces get the best possible equipment and that the taxpayer gets value for money. As the Chairman of the Select Committee pointed out, those decisions are sometimes incredibly complex and difficult. We do not criticise to make a point—we acknowledge that decisions are difficult—but we want to try to understand all the parameters.

Mr. Davidson: The hon. Gentleman says that there are difficult decisions. Will he disown the comments of the Liberal Democrat Lord Garden, who recently said that he wanted the order for aircraft carriers to be placed in the United States and the aircraft carriers to be built in Norfolk, Virginia?

Mr. Breed: I was not aware of that and I hope that the aircraft carriers will be built here. There is every hope that that will happen. However, it would be interesting to examine the cost comparisons so that we understood the issues. Sometimes the definitions of value for money—and the definitions in general—are not sufficiently broad. When I read the report, it took me a while to understand the term "de-risking". I believed that it meant to get rid of risk, but it means risk assessment. Why use "de-risk" to mean risk assessment? I worked in an industry that considered risk and reward all the time. It is not possible to remove all risk but we can try to assess some risk and make cost comparisons.

Mr. Ingram: If the cost comparator said that it was cheaper to build abroad, would that become Liberal policy?

Mr. Breed: Decisions would not be made purely on cost comparisons. We must acknowledge that value for money contains far more elements than the actual cost of building a vessel. If, as I understand it, the life span is 50 years, that will have all sorts of implications for the economy, and so on. There is no reason why we cannot be honest and mature enough to examine how much production might cost in different places, and to consider the benefits.

Such objectives sometimes seem incompatible. I do not believe that they are, but our instinct must be to buy British where possible. Because of globalisation, however, the necessity of joint ventures and the scale of some defence programmes, the international defence industry is shrinking in terms of the number of companies involved, particularly with the capacity to undertake such programmes. With the huge US defence budget and the nationalistic calls from American politicians to buy only American, it will be more difficult to maintain an independent UK defence industry. The Government have indicated that they do not consider ownership of a company important provided that it remains based in the UK, with all the employment opportunities and with some safeguards for intellectual property rights. I do not take that view, as I believe that joint ventures as well as mergers and acquisitions provide Trojan horses, which could by stealth appropriate the component parts of our defence industry.

This brings me to the last of my crossroads concerns—research and development, which has been touched on in previous contributions. The Government have rightly indicated that the UK's future economic fortune lies in knowledge-based industries at the heart of which is research and development. There are three vital elements to successful research and development in any field, but they are perhaps most important in defence: a supply of highly intelligent and motivated people; considerable financial resources; and an appropriate Government policy. It is interesting to note from today's newspaper that seven of the top 10 universities in the world are American, and perhaps we ought to congratulate Oxford and Cambridge on being the only two UK universities in the top 10. As regards funding, the vast majority of venture capital funds now available for R and D are located in the USA. And the enormous programme of public expenditure by the US Government provides an attractive background to R and D projects, allied to a most attractive corporate taxation policy to encourage R and D in companies at all levels.

We are rightly concerned about the admissions policy of our universities, and hon. Members have engaged in all kinds of debates recently on that. While we are debating, however, American universities are scouring the world and Europe in particular to offer attractive packages to the very best students, with the prospect of US citizenship at the end. In no way do I present this scenario as an anti-American rant, but as a recognition of the USA's clear, co-ordinated policies to assemble a defence industry that has the capability for significant domination in the foreseeable future. It is therefore vital for us to recognise that our procurement policies will have to take into account those realities. I hope that that gives my view in terms of work that may go out of this country to the USA in particular.

I want to turn to a few current concerns. Mention has already been made of the Astute submarine programme, and especially the delays that have been experienced. I have recently been made aware of the operational vulnerability of our existing Trafalgar class submarines. I understand that HMS Torbay and HMS Tireless have been withdrawn from service and are undergoing further expert assessment at Devonport. I readily pay tribute to the highest safety standards that are adopted at Devonport when dealing with our nuclear-powered submarine fleet. Clearly, safety is of the utmost importance not only to those who sail on those ships but to those who do the work at Devonport. It places inevitable strains on the existing submarine fleet if replacements are delayed, however, and we are likely to experience technological difficulties in ships that are probably among the most complex pieces of machinery in the world today. Increasingly, lengthy delays will be experienced, exposing some of the problems with replacements. If the Minister cannot provide

[Mr. Breed]

clarification of the current situation of those two submarines in Devonport in his wind-up, I would be grateful if he could write to me.

As we have indicated previously, we wholeheartedly support the carrier programme and would welcome the Minister's confirmation of the current situation. Reference has already been made to that. In an intervention, my hon. Friend the Member for Hereford (Mr. Keetch) mentioned the Military Afloat Reach and Sustainability project in an attempt to understand the thinking of the MOD in respect of the MARS and carrier programmes, as it appears that they are inextricably linked. If our warship yards cannot cope with the construction of eight to 10 ships for the MARS programme at the same time as the construction of aircraft carriers, we would like some understanding of the thinking on how to tackle that programme. If they can be constructed at the same time as carriers, in this country, I would be only too pleased to hear it.

Finally, I want to refer to the results of the MOD internal survey, which was published only a few months ago. I hope that the Minister agrees that it provides some alarming figures. Two thirds of those questioned are spending their own money on extra equipment because they do not have confidence in the MOD issue, and nearly half our soldiers in Iraq have no confidence in their fighting kit. Furthermore, a constituent of one of my hon. Friends who is the mother of a Royal Marine serving in Iraq at the moment has advised me that the Marines cannot operate effectively at night because there are only eight pairs of night-sight goggles for a total of 800 men. That seems extraordinary and I would therefore welcome the Minister's comments.

The same survey revealed that 39 per cent. of soldiers do not feel valued by the Army and that 35 per cent. felt that morale was very low. When asked, "Does the MOD look after its personnel?", only 3 per cent. of respondents strongly agreed, and 32 per cent. somewhat agreed, leaving 62 per cent. who either did not know or did not believe that the MOD looked after its staff. Furthermore, 35 per cent. of soldiers were critical of the frequency of the operation of tours, while 87 per cent. of the RAF said that they were overstretched, with 20 per cent. working more than 50 hours a week. I hope that the Minister at least finds those figures as worrying as I do, and will seek to address some of the underlying problems. Again, I would be appreciative of his views in his wind-up.

I think that it is agreed across the House—at least I hope so—that we need to ensure that our forces have the best and most effective equipment, and yet it is clear from the survey that that does not seem to be the case. I readily accept that no one can provide everything without reference to cost, but in the total sum game, the amount spent as a proportion of total expenditure on basic kit and basic equipment cannot be large. I would hope that some reprioritising of expenditure, bearing in mind the huge costs of some of the big-ticket items mentioned this afternoon, can be made so that we can at least ensure that no member of the armed forces would feel compelled to purchase additional kit with their own hard-earned cash in order to feel more confident in the dangerous situations to which we send them.

3.28 pm

Mr. David Crausby (Bolton, North-East) (Lab): I shall begin by making the obvious statement that it is undeniable that our armed forces deserve—indeed, must have—the very best equipment and support services available. They are, after all, men and women who risk life and limb in our defence on an increasingly regular basis. Whenever there is a conflict between the safety of our troops and buying British, we must have no hesitation in coming down on the side of protecting our brave servicemen and women. Cost is obviously an important issue, but we would be wise to take a sensibly balanced view in the procurement process, so as to deliver a secure supply of defence-related products and services in the long and medium term.

The safety of our forces notwithstanding, the most secure and dependable supply is, of course, a local supply, manufactured and delivered by the UK in the UK. The end of the cold war has completely changed western defence priorities, and the globalisation of the industry has put enormous strain on both defence manufacturers and the trade unions. The trade unions have dealt with and accepted enormous numbers of job losses over recent years, and defence manufacturers, for their part, have continued to invest, in spite of difficult trading conditions.

Despite this revolution in the industry, the UK has been able to maintain its position as the world's second largest defence supplier; and so we ought to be, as we are, after all, the world's second largest defence importer as well. This is not just a one-way process, with UK manufacturers demanding more of the defence budget. The size of the budget is in many ways dictated by the size of our industry and its ability to produce. As the British defence supply chain declines, the temptation to cut the budget will increase.

The UK's defence industry is one of which we should be enormously proud. While I accept the Minister's comment that without the MOD there would not be a British shipbuilding industry, I must point out that without the British shipbuilding industry there would not be an MOD—or, indeed, a British nation, other than one that might well be French or Spanish-speaking. This is very much a two-way process. The UK defence industry is world-class, and it should be valued in the same way as we value our armed forces themselves. It contains irreplaceable talents and skills, and it is vital to our independent ability to protect ourselves and our nation.

The UK has the most open defence market in the world, but our openness to others is not always reciprocated. Does anyone really believe, for example, that the French would allow us to build their aircraft carriers, or the Chinese would dress their soldiers in Lancashire cotton? I doubt very much that either of those things could happen.

The defence industrial policy launched in October 2002 was an important step in the right direction, but it was long overdue. The order for Hawk trainer jets was secured only at a very late stage, after some very serious arm-twisting. Sir Richard Evans, the then chairman of BAE Systems, told the Defence Committee that the recommendation from the Defence Procurement Agency was to acquire the Italian Aermacchi aircraft rather than the British Hawk, and that in coming to that recommendation no account had been taken of the additional value to the UK of purchasing the Hawk. He went on to say that the Indian Government had placed an order for 66 Hawks only after the British Government's eventual decision to buy British, and that he could genuinely see us being able to sell 400 to 500 such aircraft worldwide. Well, we shall see, but one thing is absolutely certain: none of that would be possible without the MOD order. After all, who would expect the Indian Government to buy the Hawk if the British Government had not been prepared to?

The eventual decision by the Secretary of State to secure the Hawk trainer was a brave and sensible one that was obviously made in Britain's interests, and I suppose that this example demonstrates the success of the defence industrial policy in the end. Why, though, did he have to make the decision at such a late stage? One of the six overarching themes of defence industrial policy is maximising economic benefit to the UK from defence expenditure. The Americans do not appear to be so reticent in protecting their manufacturing base. They are not quite as enthusiastic as we are about being fair and open to foreign competition. That is clearly demonstrated by their reluctance to grant even an unclassified waiver of the international traffic in arms regulations to the UK, which is disgraceful. I greatly appreciated the Minister's robust comments on the waiver in his opening speech, and we strongly support his efforts to overturn the decision.

America's argument in favour of the regulations is that it should not export its technology to the industries of untrustworthy countries. That is understandable, but Canada has done so and enjoys free trade with the United States. The question is, who will George Bush turn to first when he needs a reliable military ally—Canada or the UK? There is an urgent need for the President to deliver on the ITAR waiver. The White House has no excuses now that the Republicans are clearly in control. Failure to deliver will inevitably damage our special relationship. Without full access, we are entitled to ask why we should stick our neck out in support of the United States if it does not trust us with its technology. The denial of the waiver delivers a huge and unfair advantage to American companies.

Mr. Andrew Robathan (Blaby) (Con): I agree with what the hon. Gentleman is saying about ITAR, but the question that must be asked—perhaps he knows the answer—is whether the Prime Minister has asked that favour of the US Government, and if so, what the response from his friend George Bush was.

Mr. Crausby: The Prime Minister has not confided in me personally, but my understanding is that the White House is very much in favour of the waiver, and support from the President is there. The problem lies with Congress, and people such as Congressman Hunter. My point is that as we move into a second and strong presidential term, the President should redouble his efforts to ensure that Congress delivers. As I have said, the lack of a waiver gives American companies an unfair advantage. Not only are there obvious commercial difficulties in having to license thousands of individual components, but delays could make effective competition virtually impossible.

Increasingly, UK companies are trying to get around American protectionism by buying up US companies. Therein lies another problem. Many of our major enterprises are forced to employ nearly as many workers in the US as in the UK. If we do not halt that drift, Britain will rapidly become the low-tech end of the business, completely reliant on other countries and their Governments. If that is coupled with the purchase by overseas companies of UK defence manufacturers, we could end up with just the unskilled and outdated end of the business.

The globalisation of high-tech manufacturing is of course inevitable. With a level playing field, the British defence industry can compete with anyone in the world; but defence industrial policy must ensure that the UK has maximum exposure to new technologies. British taxpayers and British politicians will be best persuaded to invest in defence when they can see that the wealth of our nation benefits as a result.

3.39 pm

Mr. Peter Viggers (Gosport) (Con): Thank you, Madam Deputy Speaker, for giving me the opportunity to follow my Defence Committee colleague, the hon. Member for Bolton, North-East (Mr. Crausby). Of course, our thoughts today are with our armed forces, many of whom are being put at risk on our behalf. Our objective is to contribute to the discussion in order to ensure that they have the best possible equipment available to them.

The facts have been rehearsed by several hon. Members. The 20 largest projects in defence procurement cost £51.9 billion—a massive sum—excluding the two most sensitive, which are not recorded. In 2002–03, some £3.7 billion-worth of defence equipment was delivered, but there was a slippage—an increase in cost—of £3.1 billion. Looked at in one way, that means that we are scarcely making any progress at all. There was a 6 per cent. increase in costs and an 18-month slippage in programmes. Nine months of that slippage occurred in the last year, so in that time only three months of real progress was being made. Moreover, although the Defence Procurement Agency said that it expected to spend 15 per cent. of programme costs on investment in de-risking, only 5 per cent. was actually spent. So the smart procurement initiative—now known as smart acquisition—aim of "faster, cheaper, better" is not being met.

With the possible exception of Ministers, we all enjoyed very much the speech of the right hon. Member for Walsall, South (Mr. George), Chairman of the Defence Committee, in which he robustly defended the Committee's report. It was accurate in every case, and every allegation and statement can be fully justified. The Government's description of it as "disappointing and flawed" is completely incorrect. I take part in this debate with relish, and I am happy to associate myself with some of the more critical sections of the report. It is not a habit in this House for a Member to be identified with a particular phrase in a report, but I am proud to be associated with some of this report's more robust language.

We have to ask ourselves what has gone wrong. How can it be that a respected Committee's report can describe the programme as "woeful", which indeed it

[Mr. Peter Viggers]

was? Smart procurement was introduced some six years ago, and it is highly charged with management consultant-speak. My background is in business, and I used to have ministerial responsibility for economic development in Northern Ireland—I was responsible for the privatisations of Harland and Wolff and of Short Brothers—so I do not regard myself as completely ingenuous when it comes to business matters. However, even though I listened carefully for about an hour when I attended my first smart procurement presentation many years ago, I did not really understand what those present were talking about. The presentation was completely suffused with management consultant-speak. Ordinary, normal people find it difficult to tune into such language, which was full of "main-gates" and special technical phrases. One needed a dictionary to understand what was being said.

We have reached the stage where the director of defence procurement is offering an amnesty for honest forecasts, and there is a gap in targets. For example, the Ministry of Defence says that there is a 50 per cent. likelihood of a target being met in five years, whereas the DPA is talking about a 90 per cent. certainty of meeting a target in six years—so they are not even talking about the same targets. Every project has to jump through the same hoops, and as so often with this Government, they have created a set of artificial targets and are spending an inordinate amount of money and time trying to meet them. Exactly the same thing is happening in the national health service. The Defence Committee Chairman, whose speech I am trying to develop, said that things have gone wrong; I am trying to work out why.

In the NHS, micro-management has resulted in the Government setting targets in order to decide whether a hospital should get stars. They set targets for waiting times in accident and emergency units, for example. I know that my own local hospital had to work for weeks in advance to build up to its target week when it would be checked for its accident and emergency times. Having reached the target, it wound down from there. Doctors' leave was cancelled in order to meet the target in the particular week, but it was subsequently restored. Having to meet the target distorted the work of the hospital for months.

Exactly the same is happening in defence procurement. The Defence Procurement Agency sets artificial targets and people have to meet them rather than the interests of efficiency. The way ahead must be to develop a team of trained service personnel who have experience within the armed forces. They can move over to the procurement field when they have built up service experience.

The Defence Committee provides a similar sort of analysis in paragraph 14 on page 47 of its report:

> "MoD estimates that Smart Acquisition has resulted in savings of £2 billion. However, given that the Chief of Defence Procurement has acknowledged that only one of the seven principles of Smart Acquisition has been implemented, we have no confidence in the reliability of this estimate."

These are the key words:

> "Indeed, the programme of Smart Acquisition was created and named by government, but does not necessarily define the ultimate standards in defence procurement. Success in defence procurement should be measured by objective standards and not just by reference to the seven principles that the MoD has itself adopted."

Smart acquisition has at its kernel the point that a task is de-risked at the beginning, but how can we de-risk a project? Let us take the example of the two huge new aircraft carriers, which we all fervently hope will eventually materialise. How do we decide whether the joint strike fighter, with its short take-off and vertical landing role, will be able to meet its requirements? We all know that there is a significant weight risk with the VSTOL joint strike fighter, but how can we possibly work out whether the technical problems will be overcome, and how can any commercial manufacturing company be prepared to take the risk of the project not working properly? It simply does not work. The Public Accounts Committee made the point that it is unreasonable to expect commercial companies to bear the risk, however much study is put into the project at the beginning.

The only way ahead is to have a trained team of people. Having spoken to a wide range of people in the armed forces over a long period, I would submit that people involved in defence procurement need to have military, hands-on, armed services experience. We need to work in the long term to build up a team of trained and suitably qualified people from the outset and give them hands-on military experience for, shall we say, 10 or 12 years. At the age of, shall we say, 32 to 35 at the rank of, shall we say, major, these people would move over and take over long-term procurement projects. The long term is important: we cannot expect people to pick up a full understanding of major projects in a short period.

The concept of drafting in Army, Navy and Air Force personnel for the standard billet of two and a half to three years and expecting them to be able to pick up and run with the ball is just not realistic. We need a cadre of people, perhaps comparable to the old Royal Corps of Naval Constructors. They usually had services experience before they moved in to become professional experts in their particular fields. I urge the Government to go down that road, to develop a cadre of trained people and then to trust them. We cannot second-guess them all the time; we must put them in position and let them manage. I would maintain that the besetting fault of this Government in particular, and of socialism generally, is that they love micro-management and believe that everything can be controlled from the centre.

I want to make three more brief points. First, we should enhance co-operation with other nations. If the chairman of British Airways said that he wanted aircraft to be designed to his specifications, we would all think that he had gone barking mad and that the company would go out of business. However, the Army, the Royal Navy and the Royal Air Force all have equipment specially designed for them, and the same is true in France, Germany and most other countries.

Governments are protectionist when it comes to defence procurement, and hon. Members, who have the interests of their constituents at heart, are also naturally protectionist in that respect. However, we must steel ourselves to recognise that procurement is not a job creation scheme. Adopting more long-term thinking about defence procurement means that we will work more closely with other nations. In that way, the cost to taxpayers will be reduced, and defence forces will receive equipment that is the most cost-effective possible.

Mr. Gerald Howarth: I understand my hon. Friend's rationale, but is not one of the difficulties with collaborative programmes the fact that, on average, they are some 40 per cent. more expensive? That is a result of the collaborative element. The difficulty lies in trying to harmonise common requirements without compromising on the capability that is aimed for, and in banging together heads in Europe in an attempt to keep the costs down.

Mr. Viggers: My hon. Friend is right to say that collaborative projects are more expensive. That is why we must be much more strategic in our thinking, so that one country takes the lead in developing a tank, for example, while another takes the lead in developing a ship, and another in developing an aircraft. However, that would require a level of statesmanship that is not evident anywhere in Europe, or even in the UK.

Secondly, I want to say a word about the carrier programme, about which I am less sanguine than my colleagues on the Defence Committee or in the House. There is a yawning gap between the £2.9 billion that the Government say the ships can be built for, and the £4 billion that the manufacturers say is the absolute minimum. The Government started by setting up a competition between BAE Systems and Thales, and then announced that there would not be a competition after all. Input was forthcoming from VT, which has a great deal to offer, and from Swan Hunter, which has very little. Now we have an alliance—effectively, a committee made up of representatives from BAE Systems and Thales, with a Defence Procurement Agency chairman. We are told that it is not a committee, but if it is not that, what is it?

Ms Dari Taylor: Did the hon. Gentleman really say that Swan Hunter had little to offer when it came to building the aircraft carrier? If so, will he explain exactly what he meant?

Mr. Viggers: The hon. Lady will know that Swan Hunter almost went out of business before it was pulled back from the grave. I may be putting myself in a position that resembles the one encountered by my hon. Friend the Member for Henley (Mr. Johnson), and I may have to make a journey to the north-east, but I stand by what I said. There is widespread apprehension in the shipbuilding industry as a whole that Swan Hunter is being included because of jobs and not because of skills. I do not resile from that statement.

My third and final point concerns the need for open markets in defence products. The UK is the nearest thing to an open market in Europe in that respect, but we must work more with colleagues to encourage the US to give us the international traffic on arms regulations waiver that we need so much. The VT group has suggested a new industry-Government approach to secure greater access to global defence markets, which would also be very welcome, but the ITAR waiver is crucial.

To be fair to the Prime Minister, I understand that No. 10 and the White House issued a joint statement after a meeting between him and President Bush. The statement said that they had agreed

> "radically to improve the sharing of defence information and technology between our two countries."

The US Administration have therefore supported a waiver for the UK, but the problem lies with Congress. We must hope that the new profile of the membership of Congress will help, as we urgently need to ensure that we can maintain a good defence dialogue, in technological terms, with our American allies.

3.54 pm

Mr. John Smith (Vale of Glamorgan) (Lab): It is always a privilege to follow the hon. Member for Gosport (Mr. Viggers). I do not always agree with what he says, but his speeches are always a good listen, with occasional thought-provoking ideas. This is an important debate, especially after the announcement on the White Paper and yet another transformation in our armed forces.

I often think that defence procurement and logistics are the poor relations, but they are in fact some of the most important aspects of defence policy. If we advocate serious change but do not get right procurement of equipment and the logistical support for that equipment, we will be in serious trouble. People can wish for effects-based defence or for capability, but they will not get it if procurement and logistical support are not got right. As I have said before, although it is often forgotten, almost half the defence budget is spent, not on equipment or front-line capability, but on supporting that equipment and front-line capability. The House does not get the chance to debate that aspect of defence policy enough.

My comments today are made as a loyal supporter of the Government's defence policy, which has been a huge success since we were first elected in 1997. Like the hon. Gentleman and indeed you, Madam Deputy Speaker, I have had the honour to represent Parliament on the NATO Parliamentary Assembly for some years. I have also been a member of the sub-committee of that assembly on future military capability, and I have been proud to observe the role that British defence policy—especially the strategic defence review—has played in transforming defence, not only in this country, but in other NATO countries. I do not know whether hon. Members are aware that all the countries that have undertaken a strategic defence review, including Norway, Germany, Spain and many former Warsaw pact countries—the latter through their military action plans—have referred to the British strategic defence review as a basis for considering transformation.

I was present when the former Supreme Allied Commander Europe, General Wesley Clark, held up a copy of the British strategic defence review and told other NATO countries that that was how it should be done. The SDR has been a great success story. Indeed, I have a spare copy, for anyone who is interested, of the Spanish defence review, which pays particular tribute to the British review. In fact the only country in Europe to undertake a defence review recently without paying tribute to the British role is France. Hon. Members may not be surprised to learn that.

[Mr. John Smith]

I welcome the speech by my right hon. Friend the Member for Walsall, South (Mr. George). All hon. Members should read the Defence Committee's report carefully, and it would be a mistake for the Government to ignore what it says. We have done well in formulating our vision and in the reconfiguration of our forces to meet future challenges, but I sense a drift in the Ministry of Defence on issues of procurement and logistical support. The Defence Committee report should be welcomed by Front Benchers as a warning shot across the bows. There are problems developing in the Department and now is the time to do something about them, while we still can. In that way, we can build on the excellent start that we have made with our smart procurement and smart acquisition policies.

Mr. Caplin: The Ministry has no intention of suggesting that we do not understand the points made by the Defence Committee—I will say more about that later—or that we are not willing to learn lessons. We have proved over the years that we are willing to do so. However, some of the language used in the report was not properly evidenced. That is where the disagreement has occurred between the Defence Committee and the Ministry.

Mr. Smith: I am delighted with the assurance that my hon. Friend gives us in that intervention, but I still have deep concerns about trends in the Department.

Mr. Lindsay Hoyle (Chorley) (Lab): Does my hon. Friend agree that procurement—whether for Typhoon, Hawk or the A400M—has been very good under the Government, but the big problem, especially in respect of British textiles, is that uniforms are being made in China by a red army company? I am sure that he would agree that that is absolutely absurd and should not be allowed to happen.

Mr. Smith: I am not familiar enough with the issues to be able to comment on them—I am sure that my hon. Friend the Minister is and will take every opportunity to do so—but I take the point that was made earlier; what we want for our servicemen and women, who do such a wonderful job for us throughout the world, is the best equipment at the best price. That occasionally involves making tough decisions.

I want to spend the time left to me throwing up a case that reflects my concerns about developments in the DPA and the Defence Logistics Organisation that have been flagged up already in the Defence Committee report. I refer to the announcement on 16 September of the Minister of State's preferred option to hand back the entire deep repair and maintenance of the RAF's premium front-line fleet of Tornado GR4s to the RAF. I am talking not about servicing in theatre, first-line servicing or minor repairs to keep those aircraft in the air, but factory maintenance. Major repair and overhaul is being taken away from the Defence Aviation Repair Agency.

I commend the report produced by the Defence Committee in March 2001 that heralded the creation of that agency as a great innovation, as part of the strategic defence review as it relates to smart procurement. DARA was created by Her Majesty's Government in April 2001, as an alternative competitive source of aircraft repair to that offered by the commercial, private sector. It has a major strategic role in ensuring that our front-line fleet is kept in the air at the right price, so that we get value for money.

The RAF used to carry out deep repair and maintenance—in fact, it did so in my constituency for 40-odd years—but not because it could deliver front-line capability better, more cost-effectively or more efficiently than business, but because there was a very good military case for doing so during the cold war. Since the end of the cold war, no one—none of the NATO countries, nor any of those who produced strategic defence reviews—believes that there is any military or economic case for the RAF to carry out deep support for our fast jets on the front line.

Only the declaration of a preferred option has been announced, but I am deeply concerned that, if pursued, it will result in capability failures and a dependence on a monopoly source of support for the RAF, and that a well-known defence contractor—I shall not name it, but I am sure that those on the Front Bench are aware of it—will be relied on to bail out the RAF in the future, as it has had to do in the past. If the fully commercialised civilian capability that exists is taken out of DARA, the RAF will have no one else to turn to. I draw the House's attention to the recent comments of the Public Accounts Committee when it interviewed Sir Kevin Tebbit about the Ministry of Defence's constant failure to avoid being dependent on a monopoly supplier; that is exactly what is happening.

The decision is bizarre, but it reflects the drift that is occurring in the DPA and the DLO. I am absolutely delighted that the Defence Committee has decided to investigate the preferred option before the decision is taken, rather than after the recommendation is implemented and the capability is lost for ever.

Mr. Viggers: The hon. Gentleman knows that I am with him in spirit because St. Athan in his constituency carries out parallel work to Fleetlands in my constituency, which undertakes the overhaul of rotary wing aircraft. Does he agree that the Government's proposal flies in the face of most logic? If one can take manufacturing and overhaul facilities away from the uniformed armed forces, one can reduce costs and increase efficiency.

Mr. Smith: I agree with the hon. Gentleman. If one does that, one can enhance front-line capability at the same time.

It was right to carry out a review of logistics. An end-to-end review of logistics in land and air was carried out in 2002–03, which was precisely when the Defence Committee suggested that serious problems were occurring. I recommend that hon. Members read the review. Its recommendations were completely flawed because they ignored the strategic role that was created for DARA as little as three years ago by the Government. Secondly, and crucially, a proper distinction was not drawn between the productivity, output and potential of servicemen and women operating in a factory environment under a military code and Queen's regulations, and those of civilians working in a factory in a commercial environment. They were treated as the same, but that beggars belief because it goes completely against common sense.

I am mindful of what the hon. Member for Gosport said about the dangers of management speak because earlier this year, the Minister of State rolled forward the maintenance of the Harrier GR9 to Marham. We were told that that happened because service personnel had developed a lean technology and a pulse line and that they could thus compete with the private sector; what utter nonsense. They are not there to compete with the private sector, but to prepare for and fight wars. They are the best in the world at doing that, so for goodness' sake, let them get on with that and stop pretending that they are businesses and that they should be running factories, precisely the nonsense that is proposed.

The move to Marham was not a success. The so-called lean machine has been fraught with problems. The Minister has asked me on several occasions to list some of the problems and provide him with the information, but I do not wish to do that in the House today. I have a long list of aircraft that have experienced difficulties in recent months, but I shall put only one example on record: Zulu Delta 402. Will the Minister seek an independent assessment of what went wrong with the aircraft and why it took 219 days to turn it around, rather than the 60 that it should have taken? The reason for that is obvious. Those people are loyal servicemen and women who joined the Royal Air Force, as I did many years ago, to serve their country, not to work in a factory or to behave as commercial civilian factory workers.

The decision is a disaster for the military in terms of its capability and for the British taxpayer, because we will pay through the nose for it. When we are dependent on that monopoly supplier, there will be no way out. The supplier will be able to ask for blank cheques. It was little wonder that the supplier was pleased when I recently spoke to it about the prospects of the new partnership and new relationship. There is still time to do something about that, however.

If the decision were right for our military and the taxpayer, I would go to my constituents, who are very experienced—in the Minister's words, uttered within the past 12 months, they are world-beaters—in defence aviation repair, and say that in the interests of the defence of this country we have to bite the bullet, take the tough decision and find ways to minimise the impact, but that is not the case. The decision is bad for the military, the taxpayer and the aviation industry in south Wales. It is wrong in principle and wrong in practice.

I ask my right hon. Friend to reconsider the decision. The end-to-end review was flawed. It took place within months of the creation of the Defence Aviation Repair Agency. The RAF was not happy about the agency in the first place and, surprise, surprise, the review's recommendation is to give the work back to the RAF. If he cannot see that, it is a matter for concern, which is why I am delighted that the Defence Committee will investigate the issue shortly.

Please do not get this decision wrong. It is not a question of jobs in my constituency. It is not even a question of the damaging effect that it will have on the south Wales economy. It is a question of the future capability of the British Royal Air Force. We cannot place that at risk.

4.12 pm

Mr. Michael Jack (Fylde) (Con): In following the hon. Member for Vale of Glamorgan (Mr. Smith), may I say that I am glad that he implicitly acknowledged the excellent work in the private sector by the many thousands of my constituents at BAE Systems Warton, who produced the Tornado mid-life update and the GR4 model as a result of that? I have noted his comments, which will not be lost on those aerospace workers.

I want to pick up a theme of the hon. Member for Bolton, North-East (Mr. Crausby), who made a perceptive and interesting speech, touching on many of the challenges that lie ahead in securing the future for Britain's high-technology defence industries, particularly in the aerospace sector. The House knows that the home of BAE Systems is in my constituency, and it is to that that I want specifically to address my remarks.

Although I found much in the Minister of State's speech that was interesting, I was disappointed with the number of omissions relating to specific projects. I appreciate that he cannot cover everything, but we are embarking on taking our place in the construction of the joint strike fighter project. It is the world's biggest military aerospace project. Some 230 of our personnel are in Dallas Fort Worth. I think that I can claim to be the first British politician to visit that plant, to have a presentation on the JSF, to see the future for myself and to talk to some of our excellent people who are contributing to that project. However, the Minister made no specific detailed mention of the future of that project and the implications of that for Britain's aerospace industry.

On the future offensive air system—the cradle of the development of the new technologies that will equip our industry for the future—the Minister told me in a written answer that since 1999 we have spent £84 million on that project, subsumed as it is into the European technology acquisition programme. But there was no mention in his speech of what the project is currently about, what technologies are involved and when we can expect some public exposure of the projects that will arise from it. In the parliamentary question I asked for a statement on the future offensive air systems project, including the project's objectives. We got two lines on arguably the most important programme that will determine our future aerospace industry technologies.

The debate has touched briefly on the Eurofighter Typhoon. I take the opportunity to put on record my personal appreciation for the courtesy and kindness that the Minister for Defence Procurement, the noble Lord Bach has shown in personal discussion and correspondence in response to the many letters of representation that I have sent on the subject of tranche 2. The discussions between the company and the Ministry of Defence about the difficulties of the cost of the second tranche and the implications for the cost structure of tranche 1 appear to have been successfully concluded. May we please have a straight answer to the question as to when an announcement will be made? This has been run out for far too long. It is nearly a year since those of us with an interest started asking when the matter would be sorted.

[Mr. Michael Jack]

I say this not for any kind of political gain. I recently had a constituency advice bureau in BAE Systems and, one after another, members of the work force came to me and said, "Mr. Jack, when is this going to be settled? When will we know that we have some future for our work at Warton and Samlesbury?" I acknowledge that the Minister must have a meeting with the other three partner countries before the matter can be finally decided, but he owes it to those workers to give them an early Christmas present and put the future of tranche 2 once and for all beyond doubt.

The language on Eurofighter Typhoon has become noticeably more positive from the Secretary of State and all Ministers and from the Chief of the Air Staff. I welcome that endorsement. It will certainly help prospects for export orders in the discussions that are going on with the Greeks and the Malays, for example, and perhaps even future orders for Saudi. More confidence among export customers would be welcome, but the biggest vote of confidence would be the signing of tranche 2. Perhaps in his winding-up speech the Minister will put us all out of our—I will not say misery, but anticipation.

Mr. Ingram *indicated dissent.*

Mr. Jack: The Minister says no, and that will be noted. Many thousands of workers would have liked an answer, which they will not receive tonight.

Mr. Gerald Howarth: My understanding is that our European partners are awaiting a decision from the United Kingdom. They are all ready to go. I understand from BAE Systems that the price has been agreed with the Government. What is the hold-up? My right hon. Friend is right to say that the Minister must give us an answer today.

Mr. Jack: I agree. My hon. Friend underscores my point.

I should be grateful if the Minister explained why pen has not yet been put to paper on the subject of the Hawk order for the RAF. The hon. Member for Bolton, North-East rightly emphasised the importance of the United Kingdom's decision to purchase that aircraft, yet I understand that the plane has not yet been ordered. A decision in principle has been made, but it would helpful to know when the order will be placed.

Another notable omission from the Minister's speech was the Nimrod MRA4. That may be, from the Minister's point of view, in the "All too difficult" column, but let us spend a moment reviewing MRA4 and its importance to the UK aerospace industry. It is currently the largest British aircraft project. In fact, it is the only large British aircraft project in construction. I would be the first to acknowledge that the birth of MRA4, representing as it does nearly 95 per cent. of a brand-new aircraft, has not been painless. There are huge lessons to be learned from the way the procurement exercise was undertaken, but with the successful flight of the first prototype from Woodford to Warton in my constituency, we know the aircraft will fly. We know also that two other prototypes studying the mission system are under construction at Woodford.

This aircraft is a world-beater. Its mission system, which Boeing has helped us to develop, is the envy of the world. A fair chunk of what Boeing has done is going into the American P3 replacement aircraft. It has, for example, a 14-hour loiter capability, one of the largest bomb bays of any military aircraft in the world, and the latest acoustic suite and electronic surveillance systems. It is one of the best aircraft of its type and yet it was not mentioned specifically in the Minister's speech. It is of crucial importance to the aerospace industry, with 1,500 workers at BAE Systems at Woodford, Warton and Brough combined involved in it. There are 2,000 more in the supply base, and many small and medium-sized enterprises depend on it. So far, the most that the Government have said is that they need, or think they need, approximately 12 of these aircraft to carry out the capabilities of the existing fleet of Nimrod patrol aircraft.

Given the investment that the Government and the company have put into the project, it merited at least a mention in the Minister's speech to give us some indication of how the Government will take forward the future assessment of the project and when, if ever, they will decide to buy more than one, two or three. I do not know, but in terms of the future of our maritime patrol capability, and possibly, as it is a world-beater, even selling the aircraft to others, we should at least have had a mention of it in his speech.

I had the rather surreal experience in the middle of September of standing in the middle of the joint strike fighter factory in Lockheed Martin at Dallas Fort Worth. That aircraft plant is over a mile long. It is the home of the F-16 and the F-22, as well as now of the F-35. The reason why it was odd to be standing there was that I was having a discussion with representatives of 230 of our own aerospace workers who were there. They were admired for their skills and they told me how impressed the Americans were by our engineering capability. They said that the Americans were in awe of the fact that when British-made components came together, they fitted. There were no shims, no adjustments, no nothing. They did what it said on the outside of the can. They talked about their contribution, but then they said that they had already put their technological jewels on the table and that that was what had got them into the joint strike fighter project. They asked what was the future of the British aerospace industry, where were the new technologies coming from, and what would keep the skilled teams of engineers and systems designers together. The most that we have heard on that score in the Minister's speech today is that he welcomed the desire to secure a long-term future for the aerospace industry, or words to that effect, and he muttered something about the defence industrial strategy.

I welcome the fact that there is a much better dialogue between BAE Systems and the Government. In fairness, there is both listening and discussion. But unless that exercise, combined with the work of the future offensive air system project is to mean anything, we must have a clear statement first, that the Government regard the aerospace industry in the same way that they do shipbuilding. Shipbuilding is on their list of strategic capabilities that they feel that the UK should have. That lines up, as I understand it, with nuclear weapons, nuclear propulsion and encryption. But aerospace does not currently figure on the list of strategic defence capabilities that we should maintain in this country.

I can see, from having seen the size of Lockheed Martin's plant at Dallas Fort Worth, that we will never be able to rival the might of the American defence industry. But, to pick up on the points made by the hon. Member for Bolton, North-East, we have world-beating capabilities that should in future put us at any table, anywhere in the world where there is a project of partnership that would be to the advantage of the United Kingdom.

The Government must now state with greater clarity what they are doing to develop new technologies. What are the new technologies? What work are the Government doing in the materials development field? Which new electronic systems and manufacturing systems will they support? After Eurofighter-Typhoon and other current projects, we will not have an industry.

In conclusion, I turn to the JSF. I wholly endorse all that has been said in this debate about technology transfer and welcome the efforts on the ITAR waiver, but now is the time for the Prime Minister to call in the cards. I know from my discussions with the Foreign Secretary and a question that I put to the Prime Minister in the House that they take seriously the discussion about that matter with President Bush. As America's most loyal ally, it is time for America to come to our aid and make certain that meaningful discussions to evaluate the RAND Europe report on the JSF in Europe are pursued.

I say that because the report offers the prospect of a final assembly and check-out line for the up-to-150 aircraft in which the Government have an interest. There is certainly the prospect of a maintenance and repair unit for those aircraft in this country, which is a necessity. In addition to servicing, such a unit could also undertake lucrative upgrades over the aircraft's potential 20-year lifespan.

The production run in the United States could exceed 2,800 planes, and when I visited Dallas Fort Worth, Lockheed Martin indicated that it might be subject to supply constraints. If that is the case, it is incumbent on the Government carefully to evaluate—perhaps on behalf of or in concert with other European countries which are interested in the aircraft—the possibility of locating the final assembly and check-out facility in the United Kingdom, hopefully at Warton. A facility to deal with maintenance and repair makes eminent sense in the long term. If technology transfer does not occur, however, all the possibilities for British industry and the JSF identified in the Government-funded RAND Europe report will not happen, because we will not get the required technologies.

The JSF is a vital project and we have embedded our best technology to date in it. Given that we may want to develop the aircraft in the future, I back the attempts to achieve technology transfer. However, I hope that the Government will indicate whether they will engage in meaningful discussions with the United States about the long-term planning for that aircraft.

I have briefly covered the major procurement projects that matter to BAE workers, not only in my constituency but across the north-west and throughout the country. Unless long-term decisions are taken in the context of the future offensive air system about where Britain's military aerospace industry is going when the JSF has been built, the Eurofighter has been delivered and decisions have been taken about the Nimrod MRA4, we will not have a meaningful aerospace industry in this country, which is totally unacceptable in military and, indeed, economic terms.

4.28 pm

Ms Dari Taylor (Stockton, South) (Lab): I take great pleasure in having an opportunity to contribute to today's debate, which I have enjoyed.

Appropriately, I shall start with the 2004 spending review. Although all hon. Members are concerned about how much we are spending and how effectively we are spending it, it is also important to remember that we are spending. The defence budget will increase by some £3.7 billion over the next three years, which is something to be satisfied with. I say to the Minister that I will always want more, but I am pleased that the Government have put the money up front.

We should acknowledge that the average real terms increase in spending of 1.4 per cent. a year, building on the additional investment in defence in the 2000 and 2002 spending reviews, gives us a sense of satisfaction and security. We are putting our money where it is required to achieve the best equipment and kit for our armed forces. That represents seven consecutive years of planned, real-terms growth—the longest period of sustained growth in planned defence spending for more than 20 years. That is a record of which to be proud.

My knowledge of defence and the defence industry started with my membership of the Select Committee on Defence, which represented a tremendously valuable opportunity for me. During that period, I met many of our troops serving in the Balkans, in Kosovo and in parts of Europe where they were playing high-quality, creative and professional roles. I was never more proud than when I met them in Banja Luka and they explained how they were helping to maintain peace. To be honest, I often felt that I would love to be a member of the armed forces. My back went straight and I was always wanting to stand to attention, because although what they were delivering was not known about or acknowledged by many people in Great Britain, it was superb in terms of what it achieved.

I felt the same when I met our armed forces as members of NATO involved in partnership for peace. They were committed to involving others in working together in partnership better to deliver change and to understand one another, and working together better to achieve a peaceful Europe. That was very pleasing.

As we are talking about procurement, I shall lean on the fact that I was Parliamentary Private Secretary to my hon. Friend the Member for Kirkcaldy (Dr. Moonie) when he was Minister with responsibility for veterans—that was a tremendous experience—and to Lord Bach, Minister for Defence Procurement. That gave me a keen insight into the Royal Navy. That was not because they wear the smartest uniforms, although they do—many hon. Members have teased me about that—but because of the way in which they deliver a service. Through the Defence Committee, I gained

[Ms Dari Taylor]

knowledge of Portsmouth, Plymouth and Barrow, as well as keeping a sure and clear eye on my own River Tees and River Tyne.

I was staggered when the hon. Member for Gosport (Mr. Viggers) told the House that Swan Hunter had won the contract to build part of the aircraft carrier merely to provide it with work. That was a straightforward insult, and I hope that he will have the decency to come to the House to withdraw it. I had to ask him to repeat it because I could not believe it the first time. Swan's has 100 years of experience and a reputation as an excellent builder of naval ships. I got to know the men—the boilermakers and engineers—there when I worked in trade unions in the northern region. Whenever I went to Portsmouth or Plymouth or to parts of the world where commercial contracts were being put together, I was proud that men from the north-east regularly made themselves known to me. They were often in the majority among the construction force. Let nobody in this House say that we won the contract in order to provide jobs. I am not trying to fool anybody—of course I want jobs so that my community can work—but I would not want a contract for the Royal Navy to be built by sub-standard people, as was implied by the hon. Member for Gosport.

Mr. Davidson: Does my hon. Friend agree that the hon. Gentleman made it even worse by suggesting that he might have to follow the hon. Member for Henley (Mr. Johnson) up north, not realising that the hon. Member for Henley went to Liverpool, which is in the north-west, while Swan Hunter is in the north-east. Does not that explain why the Tories have only a small band of support on the south coast?

Ms Taylor: My hon. Friend knows that I could not agree more.

When Swan Hunter won the contract for the two auxiliary landing ships logistics, I was delighted. I was thrilled to watch the construction process, with its expert shipbuilding and engineering competence. When the first ship was launched, everyone, including the Royal Navy, said, "Look, Dari,"—they did not call me "the hon. Member"—"this is not high-tech kit," but to my eyes it was an excellent piece of engineering. It was expertly made and totally dependable; it was launched on time, and it was made to price. To my way of thinking, all those are qualities.

I want now to bring a problem to the attention of my Front-Bench colleagues. I hope that they will be sympathetic to what I am saying. Swan Hunter is now building the second logistics ship. Construction should have started three months before it did. I believe that production is catching up and that the ship will be launched in 2005, but I want my Front-Bench colleagues to acknowledge the following problem. During the building of the first logistics ship, the Royal Navy decided that it wanted greater electronic competence and better technology, so the design had to be rethought for the second ship. The designers had to go back to the drawing board, and that took time. Inevitably, time is money. If the Royal Navy wants better, more and different, that is exactly what we should be producing and delivering, but the straight fact is that it will cost. I do not know which one of the hon. Members present is prepared to stand up and say, "We should have the lesser design because it was cheaper and it was done on time." I most certainly will not be making that statement.

The new landing ship dock logistics, or LSD—an unfortunate acronym—will be launched in spring 2005. I have no illusions about my competence to understand the changes that the Royal Navy required, but I do know that I support its determination to achieve the best. We in this House should determine likewise and spend accordingly. I do not want anyone to be under the illusion that I expect there to be an open chequebook, but when the Royal Navy can explain why and how the costs have increased, we are honour bound to accept that.

My next point has to do with the maintenance of a competent manufacturing industry, which is a difficult and expensive achievement. We must understand that investment in equipment is astoundingly expensive. I want to put a problem to my Front-Bench colleagues. The second logistics ship is, as I said, to be launched next spring. We know that, justly, Swan Hunter has won the contract to build 25 per cent. of the aircraft carrier, but all the suggestions are that the date for that project has slipped. It could be 2006; it might be later. That is seriously problematic for a shipbuilding industry that is costly in terms of its skilled work force and the equipment that it uses.

I cannot complain about that: the design of the carriers has to be right, and if the project takes longer, we have to cope with that. However, we also have to be sympathetic to the manufacturer, who cannot have kit lying idle or watch the people whom he has trained disappear into the ether. How would he get that trained work force back again quickly and effectively—a work force whom we trust to build the carrier? I have a suggestion for Ministers. It is not that I want the Department always to build on time—that is not always possible—but I want it to acknowledge that there are alternatives when that is not possible. I want to suggest such an alternative.

The Royal Fleet Auxiliary Service needs new oil tankers. I do not believe that that is a secret—the whole House probably knows that. New oil tankers are necessary because the single-hull tanker is being decommissioned for appropriate reasons. We can rebuild or put in a second, additional hull lining. Both options mean good work. I want to persuade my Front-Bench colleagues that the contract should go to a British yard. Of course, I want it. The hon. Member for West Chelmsford (Mr. Burns) is smiling because he knows jolly well what I am about to say: I want the contract to come to the north-east and I shall lobby and exert pressure for it. However, I especially want Ministers to understand that we have a responsibility to support a competent defence manufacturing base. It also has a responsibility to look for new products, diversify and ensure that it is looking for commercial opportunities.

I hope that Ministers would not consider giving the tankers to Holland or the Ukraine to build. Again, I make it clear that I understand that those places could build cheaper—the industry's estimate is £2 million cheaper—but the cost to us would be clear in many other ways.

Mr. Jack: Does the hon. Lady agree that the north-east has the potential to offer another service to the Ministry of Defence? If any existing Royal Navy vessels need to be scrapped, a proper and environmentally friendly facility for dismantling them could be built, possibly in Hartlepool or other north-east sites, using the expertise to which she adverts.

Ms Taylor: I agree with the right hon. Gentleman. The northern defence industry is keen to press its competence to decommission in an environmentally friendly way. Not only Hartlepool but the Tyne faces much opposition. Both rivers have the competence and I hope that Ministers are listening because it is crucial to keep that manufacturing base.

I have spoken about the right of the Royal Navy to change the specifications if it believes that to be appropriate. We should support that. I have asked the Department to consider the way in which we can bring product forward to support the defence manufacturing industry when that is feasible. I know that hon. Members want building to be done to cost and on time, but I want us to build the best so that our armed forces have the best.

The debate has been good and robust. We have challenged each other and we are clearly thinking about a complex part of defence. I started by complimenting my Front Benchers and I shall end by doing that because it is valuable and important. They made it clear that they believed that they could cut waste. They believed that they could make savings. We all watched and wondered how and if. I am delighted to read a report that states that the pledge to make £2 billion of savings over 10 years has already been met. The Department is hitting its targets. It is spending good money and minimising waste. I simply ask my hon. Friends for one more thing—to ensure that any slippage is acknowledged and stopped and, when possible, to support our defence manufacturing industry. It is precious to us all and the last thing we want to see damaged.

4.44 pm

Mr. Simon Burns (West Chelmsford) (Con): It is a great pleasure to follow the hon. Member for Stockton, South (Ms Taylor), who made a passionate and interesting speech. She conveyed to the House her love of men in uniform—the armed forces—and her stalwart support for constituency interests. Although I will not follow her comments, except in one respect, I was impressed by her interest in and love of the armed forces and defence. I mused, as I listened to and watched her, on how interesting it would have been to hear a speech on defence from her 20 years ago. It might have been a case of then and now with regard to her views, but given her background before she came to the House, perhaps she had not had the same experience that she has had since of meeting our armed forces in the field, which may have influenced her.

The part of the hon. Lady's speech that I would like to follow is that which she devoted correctly to her constituency interest. That is what I would like to do briefly today. My constituency has for many years been associated with defence procurement. In 1987, there were five Marconi companies in the constituency. It still has a Marconi company—Marconi Selenia—but because of changes in defence procurement, a global economy and rising costs, there have been changes in the ownership and composition of some other companies that remain in my constituency such as e2v and BAE Systems, which, having taken over some of the Marconi empire, has a manufacturing presence there. Chelmsford has expertise and experience dating back many years because it is the home of Marconi. We have a close interest in defence procurement, and rely on it for jobs and the sustainability of the local economy. We are proud of the town's contribution over many years to supplying our armed forces with highly skilled, highly technical equipment, and to supplying armed forces and commercial, non-military companies and establishments around the world with first-class equipment.

I want to ask the Minister four questions, to which I hope he will respond, if not in his wind-up, because of pressure of time, then in writing as soon as conveniently possible. The nature of defence companies has changed rapidly because of the massive costs of research and development for new equipment. Much more international co-operation has developed between companies seeking to produce the finest equipment that armed forces need. As a result, there is concern in my constituency, which my hon. Friend the Member for Aldershot (Mr. Howarth) shares, about the need for clarification of the Government's view on giving defence contracts to companies that may be part of an amalgamation or conglomeration that is not exclusively British-based. As the Minister will know, the Government's defence industrial policy states:

> "The UK defence industry should be defined in terms of where the technology is created, where the skills and the intellectual property reside, where jobs are created and sustained, and where the investment is made."

First, on that basis, are the Government more concerned about investment in and growth of UK defence industries than the ultimate ownership of a defence supplier?

Secondly, inward investment is clearly extremely important for the future of the UK's defence industry. We need to move away from the issue of company ownership and focus instead on where jobs are created and how best the UK can attract more foreign investment. For instance, Finmeccanica is an Italian business, but its subsidiary, Marconi Selenia in my constituency, is a UK company that sustains high-quality jobs both at its sites in Chelmsford and Liverpool and through third-party relationships in the UK that support delivery of its contracts. So my second question to the Minister is: do the Government agree that creating and sustaining such jobs is essential in order to avoid a technology drain, in which such expertise is forced to leave the UK in search of jobs overseas?

Thirdly, the UK defence industry does not exist in isolation. Rather, it collaborates with European partners to identify procurement and third-party opportunities. Such an approach is naturally two-way, and by encouraging inward investment UK workers and

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businesses can continue to identify new opportunities for growth. So my third question to the Minister is: does the Government's policy on defence procurement take into account the need for ever greater collaboration so as to ensure the continued successful growth of the defence industry?

Fourthly, the UK's industrial capability and export ability are key to this debate. Companies such as Finmeccanica are well placed to exploit networks on behalf of the UK industry. For example, the global defence communications market sector is estimated to be worth about £500 million over the next 10 years, and it is essential that UK companies compete vigorously and successfully in this market. So my fourth and last question to the Minister is: what is the Government's stance on the need to increase the UK's export capability? It is crucial that British companies, either working alone or in collaboration with overseas companies, should have the ability to be at the sharp end of research and development, developing new technologies and products that will ensure that our armed forces have the finest, best and most appropriate equipment to enable them to continue to defend this country and protect our interests overseas.

These companies have gone through an extremely difficult time economically as world markets and the industry contracted very painfully, with far too many job losses and all the misery that that entails. It is important that they should now be given the opportunity to put the difficult times behind them and to move forward, so that they can thrive and look forward to a bright, successful future in which they have the ability to be innovative and entrepreneurial, both in our own national interest and for the purposes of inward investment, job creation and exports.

4.52 pm

Jane Griffiths (Reading, East) (Lab): Thank you, Madam Deputy Speaker, for the opportunity to take part in this important and interesting debate. I come to the debate having taken note of the Defence Committee's report, and as a member of the defence committee of the Western European Union. In September, the Committee met in Hengelo, in the Netherlands, to discuss defence procurement, and we looked at the issue from a pan-European and international perspective. The issues addressed at the meeting were extremely similar to those addressed by the Select Committee in its report and by the Public Accounts Committee in its recent report on major projects.

One of the main issues that the Committee sought to address was international collaboration in the defence industry. The view was that this has tended not to work very well. In shipbuilding, for example, good ships have been built in collaboration projects between European countries, but have cost about 25 per cent. more than they would if any country had built them alone. So it would seem that, even in collaboration between European countries, there is the same problem of cost overrun.

To address this problem, a European defence agency is in the process of being established, but it is important that there is a will for it to succeed. The point of the European defence agency is to ensure that there is sufficient capacity in Europe for national Governments to meet their own needs for defence and security, and for European needs to be met. But it is important to remember that decisions on defence have an impact on the economies of the individual countries involved. A nasty, cynical mind might think it would be all too easy for policies to be tilted to ensure a beneficial outcome for one country's defence industry. We must ensure, in all our wider interests, that that does not happen.

In the last few years, we have seen consolidation in the defence industries of both Europe and the United States. Key European players in defence say that we must not have "fortress Europe"; but it must be borne in mind that the defence industry is unique, in that it is a market whose customers are just about always Governments. Improving defence procurement will have an impact on the defence industry. In fact, it could be argued that improvements in the defence industry will bring about improvements in defence procurement. But the US accounts for nearly 40 per cent. of the world's defence spending, more than double that of the European Union—and it is worth remembering that great big China's proportion is only 6 per cent. The needs of the US will dominate the world's defence market, whether any of us like it or not.

As a result of action taken by the then US Defence Secretary, William Perry, we have seen a massive rationalisation of the US defence industry which has resulted in just five major airframe companies, three missile companies—down from nine or 10—two armoured vehicle land systems, and only three shipyards. Progress in Europe has been even slower. According to the head of marketing at BAE Systems, Sir Charles Masefield,

> "Firstly, the defence budget shown there of the combined European companies is only 115 billion, less than half the total annual US defence budget, in fact just 41 per cent. Instead of 5 airframe manufacturers chasing that greatly reduced budget, you can see we have 7, we have double the number of missile companies in Europe, we have three times the number of armoured vehicle companies in Europe, and we have nearly four times the number of shipyards."

In the US there has been a move to deliver the industry that delivers the economies of scale, to deliver an improved performance on procurement. We in Europe are much slower in achieving that.

There is, however, a danger that European defence industrial consolidation will result not in a better European industry able to compete and collaborate with large US companies, but in the "fortress Europe" that I mentioned earlier, in which preference will be given to European solutions for European requirements. Similar problems in the US could also damage defence procurement. The Defence Committee has expressed concern about that, saying:

> "A careful balance is needed, with the UK government using its influence in Europe to avoid any undue European-preference policy emerging while also playing a full part in rationalising the defence equipment market in Europe."

Ideally, in market terms, the US and Europe need an integrated marketplace. In a lecture in Rome 17 May 2001, Sir Charles Masefield of BAE Systems said:

> "But what about the transatlantic consolidation? I believe if you look at the US and European situation, we have of course as I've shown, the four mega companies in the United States, Boeing,

> Lockheed, Raytheon and Northrop Grumman. We have in Europe, Finmeccanica, BAe, EADS and Thales. How are those going to play in the 10 years ahead? Well no-one knows but my guess is that this sort of thing will gradually happen and if we were to meet in this room in ten years' time, I wouldn't like to predict what would be the marriage in those global companies, but instead of 8 major defence companies in the world, I believe it is much more likely there will be 3 or maybe 4 . . . I believe each of those 3 or 4 will be transatlantic global companies, rather than either the United States or European companies."

One important piece of work for the European defence agency will be to look forward to how the different countries in Europe will be able to carry out their defence procurement in this kind of world. How will we meet the different requirements of the different countries in such a marketplace? In particular, how can we be sure that in a global marketplace UK defence procurement is driven by the requirements of the UK military, rather than just by what the large companies are willing to offer? I don't pretend to have any answers to those dilemmas now, but they are being discussed.

Mr. Kevan Jones (North Durham) (Lab): Does my hon. Friend agree that the defence White Paper allows the market to help drive the efficiencies to which she alludes, rather than creating a rigid policy under which national Governments would decide what the future of the defence industry in their countries should be?

Jane Griffiths: My hon. Friend makes a very sound intervention and he is absolutely right. That very point is being made, and it is contributing to the discussions that are taking place in what I hope is a positive way. It is well understood within the Western European Union, for example, that the UK invites competition in its defence procurement industry, while other states do not. That is an obvious difficulty, and hopefully, a body such as the European defence agency will play a part in opening things up.

I end with a very short story that shows the difficulties associated with truly opening up transatlantic defence procurement. The new helicopter for the newly re-elected US President is being built by AgustaWestland, mainly at its factory in Italy, which the WEU's defence committee visited last year. Because it will carry around the President of the United States, it has had to be called US101 to make it sound American.

5 pm

Mr. John Burnett (Torridge and West Devon) (LD): It is a pleasure to follow the hon. Member for Reading, East (Jane Griffiths), who made a very thoughtful contribution. Unlike the hon. Member for Stockton, South (Ms Taylor), she did not assert an ambition to join the armed forces. I have had a pleasant few minutes to dwell on what would have happened had the hon. Member for Stockton, South been able to join my troop in 42 Commando. I do not know what line she would have followed, or what specialisation she was keen on.

I am concerned that there are some unanswered questions about defence procurement, and I want to begin by asking a few of them. Today is indeed the time to ask them, and I hope that the Minister will answer them when he winds up. I have an outstanding shipyard in my constituency, called Appledore, which still exists despite going into receivership last autumn. Earlier this year, the assets were bought by DML, and I am delighted that that happened. Before going into receivership, Appledore had some 600 employees plus 300 to 400 self-employed personnel working in the shipyard. Given that it provided jobs for more than 1,000 people, it was an extremely important employer—in my constituency, regionally, and indeed nationally. Its work force was outstanding, and it had a great reputation for its high skills. It competed in the commercial world for commercial orders, but it was not successful when it came to Ministry of Defence orders.

I was pleased that DML Plymouth bought Appledore's assets. DML is not solely reliant on the MOD for orders and work; it actively seeks and tenders for commercial orders worldwide. It now has a proven track record in the construction of super-yachts. Some are being built as we speak, and I hope that further yachts will be ordered in the near future. DML took on Appledore's superb design team of some 50 people straight away, and a further 50 are now employed on a super-yacht construction contract. So about 100 of the original 1,000-strong work force—only about one tenth—are re-engaged.

DML Appledore is currently competing in the MOD tender for the 1 Castle class offshore patrol vessel. Appledore has built a number of these vessels in the recent past for the Royal Navy—but only as sub-contractors—and also for the Irish navy. Its record is excellent. Vessels were constructed on time to a fixed cost, and to top quality. It also built the arctic survey ship HMS Scot on a sub-contract from BAE Systems. She has been at sea nearly every day since her construction, and every report that I hear is of her excellence.

DML itself has a turnover of some £500 million sterling a year, so we now have the financial muscle to compete for MOD orders. I point out to the Minister that neither DML nor Appledore has ever had a prime MOD contract for the construction of a Royal Navy ship.

If we win the OPV contract, a further 200 employees will be re-engaged for at least 18 months. Importantly, it will give the MOD a further shipyard to engage in the competitive tendering process—a shipyard that is used to competing in the commercial world where the competition is extremely tough, and a shipyard that understands that the future for British shipbuilding is to be in the forefront of technology, building sophisticated niche vessels.

On the role of competition in winning MOD orders, I have reason to be dubious, if not cynical, about the process. Three or four years ago, Appledore tendered for two alternate landing ships logistic. The order was won by the north-east—Swan Hunter, I believe—as the hon. Member for Stockton, South said. We took that on the chin, on the grounds of fair competition. A few months later, out of the blue and without any further tendering process, orders for two further vessels were placed at Govan, despite our numerous attempts. The only satisfactory explanation I can find for this order is that it was just in time for the Scottish elections.

My question to the Under-Secretary is this: how can a senior Cabinet Minister direct an MOD order, whether it be for construction or refitting, to be placed at a shipyard other than the one making the

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most competitive bid? Why cannot commercial confidentiality be lifted and full scrutiny allowed after the exchange of contracts and completion? Bidding itself is an increasingly expensive process and the inherent costs of the favoured lease-maintenance deals are extremely high.

Research and development, construction and maintenance are not the only costs that shipyards have to bear. On lease-maintenance deals, banks are always involved and they usually buy and lease. The banks will want to extract watertight indemnities as well as pick up capital allowances. Bank charges will be substantial; legal costs will be high. Documents such as leases, performance guarantees, collateral warranties and so forth have to be drafted and agreed. There is the risk to the shipbuilder of having to take the vessel back when the lease expires, often with very little residual value left. It is a complex process, very costly in management time, bank charges and professional fees. Do Ministers really believe that that is the best way to manage procurement and provide value for taxpayers' money? It is a question that I should like to hear answered when the Under-Secretary winds up the debate.

Along with other hon. Members, I recently attended a presentation given by BAE Systems at which that company suggested that shipbuilding companies should form what I would loosely call a consortium and bid as one for a future construction programme for the re-fleeting of the Royal Navy. The discussions are mainly taking place between Vosper Thorneycroft and BAE Systems, but I know that DML Appledore is also involved.

What are the main reasons behind the precipitation of the discussions? First, there is the over-reliance of many yards on MOD orders and, secondly, the abundance of new naval orders in the pipeline. I welcome that, but the Under-Secretary will have heard my intervention on the Minister of State earlier when he spoke about the programme, and the budgetary constraints are being evened out more than is apparent as we speak. What it would mean is that the MOD would effectively be the sole customer and the new consortium company the sole supplier. That is not a satisfactory state of affairs for the taxpayer or for the shipbuilding industry in the medium or long term when, as they surely will, the MOD orders dry up. I hope to hear what the Under-Secretary believes the medium and long-term solutions will be in respect of these matters.

Some of us are seriously concerned that important contracts are subject to undue influence by senior Ministers, and that the contracting process is unnecessarily complex and costly. When the Minister sums up, I hope that he will endeavour to allay our fears on these matters.

5.10 pm

Mr. Ian Davidson (Glasgow, Pollok) (Lab/Co-op): I shall begin with a quotation:

> "The problem with building big carriers is that we haven't done it for 50 years and we want to do it here. If we really wanted big carriers they have a production line for them in Norfolk, Virginia. We could be buying American, rather than giving work to the shipyards in Britain."

That was said on "Sky News" on 28 July by Lord Garden, the Liberal Democrat spokesman on these matters in the House of Lords. I am glad that there is a clear division between the Liberal Democrat party and the Government as to where the carriers should be built. Among Labour Members, there is no doubt or equivocation that these carriers should be built in Britain.

The carriers form part of the biggest ordering pattern for some time. I very much welcome that, and the partnership developing between industry and Government in respect of ordering. It is important that we work towards avoiding boom and bust in the shipbuilding industry. I want to raise several matters with the Minister this evening. If he cannot answer them tonight, I hope that he will respond to me at a later stage, in my capacity as chairman of the parliamentary shipbuilding group.

How far has the MOD's maritime coherence study progressed? If it is complete, will it be made available to hon. Members? Also helpful would be an update on the discussions that have taken place between the MOD and the industry about bringing the industry together. What patterns and structures have been discussed? One of those hon. Members who represent Devon constituencies raised these matters earlier, but details of the MOD's view would be useful.

I have touched already on warship procurement in this country. It would be immensely helpful if we could have a clear and unequivocal statement from the Government that the MARS ships will be built in this country as well. Will the entire construction of those vessels take place in this country? Will the Minister assure the House that the MOD—or some forces within it—will not seek to have the hulls built abroad as part of a cost-saving exercise?

Most of us who have been involved in the industry for some time recognise that the distinction between hull construction and outfitting is now artificial. Vessels are designed to be built in modules, segments and sections, and that is much more efficient and cost-effective. It means that the hull is completed, followed by the other steelwork and then the rest of the outfitting. I hope that that point will be taken into account.

Will the Minister give an indication of when work will begin on the second batch of Type 45 destroyers? As I asked earlier, what efforts are being made to ensure that the design work on the new carrier is moved forward? I am aware that the supply of design work on Clydeside is rapidly running out and that a gap between the available work force and the work required is likely to become apparent in December. To avoid redundancies, the MOD needs to give the okay for some of the second batch design work to begin now. If highly skilled people in ship design are allowed to leave the industry, it will be very difficult to reassemble that work force later on.

Finally, I very much welcome the fact that work on the first of the Type 45 destroyers—HMS Daring and HMS Dauntless—is well under way. If that pattern is to be maintained, surely it would be logical to name the third ship, or a subsequent one, HMS Davidson?

5.14 pm

John Mann (Bassetlaw) (Lab): I shall be brief and refrain from discussing general manufacturing industry, except to make one point about the skills of welders and others at Swan Hunter. I propose that the House should consider inviting a welder from Swan Hunter to demonstrate the most creative way of welding the hon. Members for Gosport (Mr. Viggers) and for Henley (Mr. Johnson) together.

Our defence industrial policy recognises the vital importance of procurement to our industrial base in the UK and ensures that jobs, skills and exports are all fully considered in making procurement decisions. Does my hon. Friend the Minister agree or disagree with that statement? If he agrees with it, why has that policy not been applied to the clothing manufacturing sector? On what basis are decisions made on price rather than best value? On what basis do we not classify clothing as warlike? Are there any other EU countries that do not classify clothing as warlike? For example, do the French classify clothing as warlike—despite the fact that their army never appears to participate in many wars, unlike ours?

The large contracts that are being given out are, it could be suggested, ruinous to small and medium-sized enterprises. What cognisance has the MOD taken, in its procurement policy for clothing, of the Department of Trade and Industry policy on contracting with SMEs? What cognisance has been taken by the MOD of the ability of our domestic clothing manufacturing industry to compete in the future? How does our present policy sustain an environment that enhances competitiveness? That is one of the categories of defence industry policy. My hon. Friend the Minister may be unclear about the point that I am making, so I shall put it another way. Some British clothing companies will no longer produce clothing because they have lost contracts that they previously had. The new contracts are for five or 10 years, so how will British companies be able to tender for such work in the future? The industry will no longer exist. In other words, will the inadvertent result of present policy be that we will have to give all the work to overseas competitors?

The example of Cooneen has already been cited. I understand that that company is world famous for the manufacturing of wedding dresses and babywear. Has due diligence been exercised to ensure its capacity and capability to carry out a contract for the MOD? Is it the case that the company failed to register accounts in the last year, and if so, why? Was the red army factory No. 3533 in China part of the tender bid that the company put in or did it change its outsourcing, after it won the contract, from, say, Belgium to China? I presume that such issues as capacity and capability were considered in advance of the contract being awarded. We would not want to be in a situation in which actual fabric samples had not been provided. Were fabric samples provided from China or any other proposed outsourcing for that contract?

Finally, has there been any quantification of the loss of British jobs throughout the supply chain caused by such decision making? I ask that because the supply chain includes some of my constituents. Bassetlaw provides a disproportionately high number of new entrants to the armed forces. Next week, young people in my constituency will apply to join the armed forces, and I do not want the people who volunteer to join our armed services when there is conflict around the world to be equipped with second-rate, shoddy Chinese clothing, instead of British clothing, to do the job that they are paid to do.

5.20 pm

Jim Sheridan (West Renfrewshire) (Lab): In the short time left to me, I want to concentrate on two main issues that are relevant to today's debate. I have worked almost all my working life in the defence industry, so I hope that I reflect it accurately.

The first issue is smart procurement, which the DPA has promoted and implemented as a way to improve defence procurement. That has involved a change to the procurement cycle, the idea being that the industry is involved at an earlier stage. That may be true, but the overriding desire to get value for money still dominates competitions. MOD staff continually talk about wanting offers from industry that provide 80 per cent. of the capability at 50 per cent. of the cost. Various permutations of percentages are used, depending on who is talking. It is a great principle, but we rarely see it happening, because the DPA evaluation teams are not empowered or organised to assess non-compliant proposals.

Currently, a proposal may arrive from industry that is around 12 inches thick and is broken up into lots of small packages that are distributed to many disparate MOD teams who score it against a set of requirements. At no time do those teams have access to sensitive price data. All they can do is mark each response paragraph as compliant or non-compliant. Each proposal is assessed for its compliance, and in effect only those proposals that are deemed to have cleared the bar are considered for price and other commercial issues. At the end of the day, each company feels compelled to submit a fully compliant and therefore intrinsically expensive bid, and it would take a very brave company indeed to aim under the bar.

The basic point is that the DPA and its customer, the MOD's equipment branch, are not equipped or organised to assess a non-compliant bid that may offer better value for money by proposing a reduced capability and price. If the MOD and the DPA truly want to implement smart procurement they need to change their way of assessing bids and increase the calibre of staff involved in the process.

My second point is about overseas competition, which many hon. Members have mentioned today. The MOD, in its pursuit of competition, encourages overseas companies to compete for work in the UK. All UK defence companies are used to competition—it is a way of life for many of them, and it can be a positive pressure on businesses to ensure that waste is eliminated, overheads are reduced and product development cycles are shortened. It keeps companies fit and lean in the defence industry. However, the marketplaces where we can compete openly in the world are not that big. In fact, we find that we compete with the same companies in the far east and middle east as on our home turf. Okay, all is fair in love and war, but we do not have the opportunity to compete in those competitors' home markets, and the biggest culprit is the USA.

American companies are growing strong on rich pickings at home, and that gives them an added advantage over this country overseas. The UK Government should either get the US and other European domestic markets opened up to fair competition, or they should impose the same domestic

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restrictions on the US and other countries to protect our defence industrial base. That is the sort of language used in the pubs and clubs in my neck of the woods by people who work in the defence industry.

As I said, I spent most of my working life in the defence industry. I was a worker at Barr and Stroud, which is now called Thales. I also worked in Yarrow shipyard on the Clyde, which is now operated by BAE Systems. I congratulate the people whom I worked beside on the education that I received during that period—I am not blaming them for it—for which I am eternally grateful. Without being too critical, I have to say that the Ministry of Defence is one of the most difficult organisations to deal with. Extreme frustration is caused by procrastination when placing orders. Companies have to wait for orders that keep getting pushed further back down the pipeline. Companies and management sometimes have difficulty retaining their work force while waiting for such orders to come through and holding on to spare parts and components required to fulfil a contract. The Ministry of Defence is not an organisation with which someone would choose to work.

Many jobs in the defence industry have been lost over the years. More jobs have been lost in it than in any other industry of which I am aware. I am proud of the fact that that was done by companies and trade unions getting together to recognise the problems and taking appropriate action. I pay tribute to them, because if they had not acted at the time, we would not have the defence industry that we do, especially on the Clyde.

If we are to have a strong, robust and efficient defence industry, we must give the management and the work force the tools to realise that. That is why we need a long-term strategy that allows employers to plan, where possible, some years ahead in placing contracts and getting the tools to do the job. We must also consider the suppliers to the major contractors, because they have a right to know about the strategy. More importantly, employees in the defence industry must know the direction in which the Government's strategy for defence is going and how that will impact on them.

I am proud of the Government's record on placing MOD contracts with British companies, and I hope that it continues. However, may I also send a message to British companies that depend wholly on defence contracts? The MOD requires only a finite amount of equipment and has only a finite amount of taxpayers' money to spend. Every company involved in the defence industry should develop tangible diversification plans so that when there is a downturn in the defence industry, they will be able to compete in the commercial market.

5.28 pm

Mr. Andrew Robathan (Blaby) (Con): As many hon. Members have reminded us, while we sit talking in this comfortable Chamber it is important to bear it in mind that our soldiers, sailors and airmen are putting their lives on the line and themselves in danger on our behalf.

The Minister of State told us how well defence procurement was going. To use his words, he highlighted our successes on defence procurement and said that all issues on smart acquisition had been addressed. Sadly, few people who have spoken in the debate have agreed with him. I do not pretend that defence procurement is easy or that it was easy for Conservative Governments; anyone who does so is foolish. However, we must always remember the end result of failings in defence procurement; a frightened soldier, sailor or airman who is protecting our country's interest and defending us, yet who, because of deficient equipment—a failed radio, a rifle that does not work properly or an engine that does not start—might die. That explains why the debate is important.

The Select Committee Chairman, the right hon. Member for Walsall, South (Mr. George) properly highlighted, with great wit, his Committee's report. He also highlighted the Minister's astonishing sensitivities when confronted with criticism. We all know that the truth hurts and that we only get really angry with criticism when it is justified. As many hon. Members said, the report needs a proper reasoned answer, not the Minister's petulant response, and the important points need to be addressed.

If the Minister of State has moved to the right of my hon. Friend the Member for Aldershot (Mr. Howarth), he should start to be called Genghis by Labour MPs. [HON. MEMBERS: "He already is."] I was not aware of that.

Ms Dari Taylor: Attila.

Mr. Robathan: I thank the hon. Lady for that.

I do not often agree with the Liberal Democrats, but the hon. Member for South-East Cornwall (Mr. Breed) rightly talked of the looming crisis in research and development, echoing my hon. Friend the Member for Aldershot. He also spoke of the importance of the ownership of defence companies. Not all defence companies or products have to be British; that would be ridiculous. However, we are right to remember that ownership matters. In the Gulf war in 1991, our Belgian allies had a request from the Ministry of Defence for 5.56 small arms ammunition, which was running short. They refused it.

The hon. Member for Bolton, North-East (Mr. Crausby) spoke—I hope he does not take this the wrong way—a great deal of sense about defence industrial policy. He said that it is not necessarily benefiting the UK and has a bad effect on our industry while other countries benefit to our detriment. That was an excellent point.

My hon. Friend the Member for Gosport (Mr. Viggers) described the indecipherable gobbledegook and management-speak of smart acquisition. He made an excellent critique of the failings of smart acquisition and a sensible point about the need for proper service experience in long-term procurement management.

Mr. Nicholas Brown (Newcastle upon Tyne, East and Wallsend) (Lab): On the contribution by the hon. Member for Gosport (Mr. Viggers), will the hon. Gentleman take this opportunity to dissociate the Conservative party from the disgraceful and gratuitous attack on the work force at Swan Hunter shipbuilders?

Mr. Robathan: The right hon. Gentleman should attend the debate if he wishes to criticise hon. Members who spoke in it.

Mr. Brown *rose—*

Mr. Robathan: I know that the right hon. Gentleman was here at the beginning, but he was not here when my hon. Friend the Member for Gosport spoke. My hon. Friend's point was reasonable. I have to confess that I have never visited Swan Hunter. I do not know what the situation is there. My hon. Friend has been there, so he spoke with some authority, but I cannot support or deny what he said.

Mr. Brown: It is possible to follow the debate on the closed circuit television that we all have in our offices, which I have been doing. The remarks by the hon. Member for Gosport were gratuitous and offensive. If the Conservative party is to have any standing in such debates, it should take the opportunity to dissociate itself from them.

Mr. Robathan: I am sorry, but I do not intend to associate myself with those remarks. However, my hon. Friend the Member for Gosport took a judgment that Swan Hunter did not have the ability to do the work. Surely anyone is entitled to make such a judgment.

Mr. Kevan Jones: Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

Mr. Robathan: I am not going to go on about this unimportant point. All this nonsense about an apology is unworthy of the right hon. Member for Newcastle upon Tyne, East and Wallsend (Mr. Brown). He should attend the debate instead of sitting with his feet up in his office drinking tea. If he had attended, he could have intervened on my hon. Friend the Member for Gosport. I was disappointed with my hon. Friend in one respect; he did not mention Haslar, which I think he has mentioned in every other debate.

We also heard from the hon. Member for Vale of Glamorgan (Mr. Smith), who described himself as a loyal supporter. The hon. Members for Bassetlaw (John Mann), for Glasgow, Pollok (Mr. Davidson) and for West Renfrewshire (Jim Sheridan) all made points that were not supportive of the Government. It was not that they were anti-Government, but their criticisms were good. Even in her loyal speech, the hon. Member for Stockton, South (Ms Taylor) reported that she had identified problems and demanded that the UK support UK defence manufacturing industry; a fair point.

My right hon. Friend the Member for Fylde (Mr. Jack) made an excellent speech and asked some pertinent questions about the aerospace industry and where skills would come from. Those questions need answers from the Minister. The dialogue that he mentioned earlier is not enough.

I joined the armed forces in 1970, which makes me distressingly old. I shall tell a short story that illustrates defence procurement. With a very short haircut I was shown around the Royal Marines commando training centre—perhaps "shown around" is not the right way to describe it—and I remember a signals captain showing me something called an A40. Some hon. Members may have carried an A40. It was a big one, and very heavy. I carried it across Dartmoor, the Brecon Beacons and all sorts of places. It was almost impossible to tune and very inefficient. The person who had the job of carrying it was the unlucky one. In 1970 the marine captain said, "Don't worry, Clansman is coming in soon. It's a brilliant new set and we're all going to have Clansman." This is not a party political point, I hasten to tell the Minister. I rejoined my battalion in 1987 in Hong Kong and we still had Larkspur A40s. It was only in 1988, 18 years after I had been told that it was coming soon, that Clansman came in.

I mention that because Bowman's original in-service date was 1995; under a Conservative Government, I know. The Labour Government said in 1999 that the in-service date was 2002 and it eventually came into service in March this year. Procurement is dogged by such delays. It needs to be sorted out, but I do not have any pat answers.

Smart acquisition, of which we have heard a great deal, was introduced six years ago, but we have yet to see evidence that it is working. It was intended to result in faster, cheaper, better procurement, delivering

"best value for money for the taxpayer",

but the Government cannot continue to claim that the strategy is working if, as we heard earlier, the 20 biggest projects are already delayed by, on average, a year and a half and the taxpayer is footing the bill for the Government's £3 billion overspend. Typhoon was four and a half years behind its target in-service date and will cost at least £1 billion more than promised.

Let me emphasise the consequences of delays and overspend. Not only are service personnel jeopardised when they find themselves on the front line without the equipment that they need, but there is the prospect of having to cancel or scale down the size of projects, as in the case of Type 45 destroyers.

My hon. Friend the Member for Aldershot mentioned the Defence Procurement Agency's "woeful" track record, which the Chairman of the Select Committee also described. The cancellation of the human centrifuge project, which has not been mentioned, is an example of how the MOD has lost its grip on the procurement process. In 1997 a contract worth £14 million to design and build a human centrifuge to allow trainee pilots to experience G-force was let to the US firm Environmental Tectonics Corporation, ETC. In July 2001 the MOD took the decision to cancel the project, citing

"the failure of that company to deliver a centrifuge to the Royal Air Force".

Before the project's cancellation, the MOD had already made progress payments of almost £6 million, which were of course written off.

The costs to the taxpayer of the centrifuge that never was do not end there. Earlier this year the MOD had to pay cancellation costs. According to the 2003–04 annual report and accounts of the MOD, under the rather euphemistic heading "Constructive Losses", the final cost of the project to the British taxpayer was reported to be £14.4 million. The MOD paid more to cancel the project than it would have cost to acquire the centrifuge. The project was not cancelled on grounds of insurmountable risk or because of an inability to achieve the desired capability, as ETC was able to design and build the centrifuge. It was cancelled as a result of the Government's inability to manage the procurement process. I can report to the House that the centrifuge,

[Mr. Robathan]

designed and built with British taxpayers' money, is in full operational service with a far eastern air force. That is what we call smart acquisition; by them.

We hear much about future effects and capability, but what happens first is cuts. The promised future capability is often still at drawing-board level, while our forces have to cope with what they have been left with. Is that sensible at a time when our forces are experiencing overstretch as never before?

Admiral Sir Alan West has acknowledged that the reductions in the fleet leave the Royal Navy exposed to "enhanced risk". He has said:

> "People should be under no illusions that with only 25 destroyers and frigates we will be very close to the cusp . . . my concern overall is that we are taking risk on risk".

I come now to logistics in the Gulf war last year. British troops were dubbed "the borrowers" by their American counterparts because they were short of equipment. That is not new, because troops always like having other people's equipment, but nevertheless it is true. The hon. Member for South-East Cornwall mentioned equipment survey findings in Iraq. The 2003 survey for the Army last year found that 55 per cent. of troops and 42 per cent. of officers had bought items of kit with their own money.

Mr. Caplin: There is nothing unusual in that.

Mr. Robathan: Indeed, there is nothing unusual in that, but it is rather worrying that they feel compelled so to do.

In addition, 1 Armoured Division had to come back to find the kit that they needed in the UK. That should not have happened. The 1991 Gulf war had an enormous logistical build-up. As people said, there was no warning; it began from a standing start and took a long time, but the logistics were fantastic. Very good kit was delivered when we needed it.

Just-in-time equipment is fine, but we are not talking about cans of beans. We are talking about issues that may affect soldiers' lives, and—as the Commandant General of the Royal Marines said earlier this week and as my hon. Friend the Member for Aldershot mentioned—more equipment should be stockpiled.

I very much hope that we will see two carriers, but the in-service date for the first CVF is 2012, and 2005 is less than two months away. When will the contracts be signed? When will the keels be laid? What will be the long-term running costs? I heard an extraordinary suggestion, which I am sure should be dismissed, of £3 billion per year per ship. What will be the complement of each carrier and, given that the Minister is cutting manpower now, is he confident that trained crew will be available to man them? Will he say something about point defence and close-in weapons systems? Like our existing carriers, the US carriers have a close-in weapons system, but unlike ours they also have Sea Sparrow surface-to-air missiles. We will have to rely on the Carrier Air Group, but the Type 45 air defence ships will be reduced from the projected 12 to eight. That does not leave many spare for two carrier forces.

Other hon. Members have spoken about shipbuilding, and I do not want to dwell on that, except to say that we need to overcome the cycle of feast and famine that characterises the shipbuilding industry. The Select Committee's report in July 2004 referred to the Astute programme and particularly mentioned that delays were exacerbated by shortfalls in skills. The MOD needs to concentrate on creating a stable procurement programme; a smoother pattern of demand in order to retain workers and protect the UK's valuable shipbuilding expertise, which I believe is referred to as gap filling.

I return now to the issue of through-life management, which was particularly mentioned by my hon. Friend the Member for Gosport. Civil servants are sent for two, three or four years to deal with a project, and service personnel are posted for two, three or four years to deal with a procurement project. They realise that they will not see it into service, so they try to put off making decisions. They do not want to see it in service because they will end up with the problems. My hon. Friend was right. We need a new approach. We need people to see a project through from beginning to end. We need people with experience and an understanding of service life, and we need long-term continuity in project management. Conservatives intend that that should happen.

All hon. Members want our troops well equipped, which is why we have been debating the matter. I hope that the Minister will now respond in a reasoned manner to the criticism that he has heard from the Defence Committee and everybody else because our servicemen deserve nothing less.

5.44 pm

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Defence (Mr. Ivor Caplin): I begin by welcoming the hon. Member for Blaby (Mr. Robathan) to his new shadow Defence responsibilities and look forward to further exchanges in the months and years to come.

Twelve Back Benchers contributed to this afternoon's interesting debate: my right hon. Friend the Member for Walsall, South (Mr. George); my hon. Friends the Members for Bolton, North-East (Mr. Crausby), for Vale of Glamorgan (Mr. Smith), for Stockton, South (Ms Taylor), for Reading, East (Jane Griffiths), for Glasgow, Pollok (Mr. Davidson), for Bassetlaw (John Mann) and for West Renfrewshire (Jim Sheridan); the right hon. Member for Fylde (Mr. Jack), who is a regular contributor; and the hon. Members for Gosport (Mr. Viggers), for West Chelmsford (Mr. Burns) and for Torridge and West Devon (Mr. Burnett). I shall try to respond to as many points as possible in the time available, but, given other matters, that may be not possible, in which case I shall ensure that hon. Members receive written responses to their inquiries.

As the hon. Member for Blaby said, equipping our service personnel with battle-winning capabilities is a matter close to this House's heart. We owe a considerable debt to our people, and I pay tribute to those men and women in the armed forces who are currently engaged in serious and dangerous undertakings throughout the world. The Government are committed to ensuring that our armed forces remain highly capable and effective. Through our procurement plans and by making sure that our armed forces are properly equipped, they can respond effectively to the challenges that they confront, day in, day out.

In his opening remarks this afternoon, my right hon. Friend the Minister of State outlined the continued improvements to the way in which we procure equipment. Procurement is a vital part of the MOD's role and has often been subject to criticism. In his final words this afternoon, my right hon. Friend said, "Do we have a perfect track record on procurement? No, but no Government ever have." That point should form the basis for this debate.

We have taken many of the valid criticisms on board, but there is much to be proud about. The urgent operational requirement process rapidly equips and supports our armed forces at the front line in Iraq, and has been a success. The process proved to be flexible and adaptable, and I reject any suggestion that our forces have been let down by the MOD and the Government. Indeed, the hon. Member for Hereford (Mr. Keetch) raised urgent operational requirements in an intervention. Urgent operational requirements are an accepted means of supporting operations and are an effective and efficient way to target activity against emerging operational priorities. The National Audit Office has complimented the urgent operational requirement process.

I shall respond to the comments made by the hon. Member for Aldershot (Mr. Howarth) about yesterday's court martial. I am sure that the House will join me in extending our deepest sympathies to the family of Sergeant Nightingale, who was killed in that tragic incident. We are aware of the finding of the court martial arising from the death of Sergeant Nightingale. Lance Corporal Braymire was found guilty of a military offence concerning his failure to conduct normal safety procedures, which do not involve advanced technical procedures. He had successfully completed his weapons handling test, which included passing the safety modules, during his mobilisation training.

Mr. Soames: On Lance Corporal Braymire, will the Minister accept that 2,300 young men went to the Gulf as reservists without properly certified weapons training? Will he assure the House that the board of inquiry, which we understand has been set up, will report, that its findings will be made public and that the people responsible for that gross failing will be held to account, whatever rank, military or civilian, they may be?

Mr. Caplin: The hon. Gentleman is right. In accordance with our normal procedures, an Army board of inquiry has been set up. It was rightly stayed, pending the outcome of the court martial. We have seen the findings of the court martial only in the past 24 hours and will of course consider very seriously the comments of the judge advocate. However, we are yet to receive a full copy of the transcript, and I think that the hon. Gentleman would accept that we should wait to see that before going any further.

We heard about the ITAR waiver and the importance that the House attaches to it. There has been progress on that front. My right hon. Friend the Prime Minister last raised the issue with President Bush in June in the margins of the NATO summit meeting. We will continue to press the point, and contributions from both sides of the House are welcome.

Much has been said about the Defence Committee's report on procurement, about which I intervened on my hon. Friend the Member for Vale of Glamorgan. I was rather taken with the Committee Chairman's suggestion that we should have preliminary discussions before the Government responses are published. That is okay provided that he is prepared to offer us the same facility before his Committee publishes a report. Perhaps the MOD and the Committee can discuss that in the weeks to come.

I want to highlight one or two aspects of the Committee's report. It claimed that the performance of the Defence Procurement Agency could only be described as woeful; my right hon. Friend the Member for Walsall, South tried to suggest that the word was meant to be "wonderful", which might have given a different tone to the whole report. We cannot accept that the agency's performance was woeful in that particular year, when it delivered £3.6 billion of new equipment.

The report said that there are still problems in relation to four legacy projects. We accept that, although I should say that the Committee particularly welcomed the progress that we have made on Nimrod and Astute to try to deal with the situation. Around 40 per cent. of the cost increases comprise internal interest on capital charges.

The other significant aspect of the report relates to paragraph 53, which refers to a "fear culture" at the Defence Procurement Agency. Several hon. Members tried to explain what they think that means, but it clearly relates directly to staff. The Ministry of Defence wholeheartedly rejects the assertion that such a culture exists. The Committee did not substantiate it, and although it had many opportunities to consult MOD officials and my noble Friend Lord Bach, it failed to do so. The House will understand that such an accusation could have a serious effect on morale at the agency. I am afraid that the Committee did not properly think that through.

I hope that we can move on from here, but it is right and proper to place on record our feelings about the report and its failings, notwithstanding the fact that that there are of course lessons to be learned from the Committee's comments.

I want to move on to comments made by Members. Various Opposition Members suggested that CVF—the future aircraft carrier—is now being run by a committee. In fact, it is an alliance. That works well in other industries and there is no reason why it should not work well in defence procurement. As the House knows, BAE Systems is an important member of that alliance.

I was very disappointed by what the hon. Member for Gosport said about Swan Hunter. I utterly reject his comments and strongly support those of my right hon. Friend the Member for Newcastle upon Tyne, East and Wallsend (Mr. Brown) and my hon. Friends the Members for Stockton, South and for Glasgow, Pollok. Conservative Front-Bench Members could, in winding up the debate, have dissociated themselves from the hon. Gentleman's comments; they should have done.

[Mr. Caplin]

I will just say this: those who work at Swan Hunter and the people of the north-east will have heard what the hon. Gentleman said today.

The hon. Member for South-East Cornwall (Mr. Breed) asked me about Devonport, and I undertake to write to him about those issues. The hon. Member for Aldershot asked about Galileo. It is a civil system under civil control, as has been confirmed by successive EU Transport Councils. The requirement for navigation and timing information to support UK armed forces will continue to be met by GPS, which remains the de facto NATO standard.

I return to the hon. Member for Gosport—on a slightly happier note, I hope—to answer his point about shipbuilding. There are three Astutes, two Type 45 destroyers and two handling ship docks that he might regard as being in some phase of construction.

There was a suggestion that the Defence Procurement Agency accounts may affect our ability to complete some of our planned projects. The figures presented show the value of actual contracts placed with suppliers, less any expenditure recorded elsewhere in the accounts. They do not in any way mean that funding to meet commitments for our procurement programme is not available. I hope that I have clarified that point.

In the short time remaining, I want to make a couple of final points about industrial policy and future capabilities. My right hon. Friend the Minister of State set out in his opening remarks the key principles of the defence industrial policy and the importance of defence manufacturing industrial support. That was welcomed by many Labour Members, including my hon. Friend the Member for Stockton, South. I take this opportunity to emphasise a further aspect of that important policy. Our partnership with industry is crucial in equipping and sustaining our front-line forces. In achieving those objectives, it is vital that the Ministry of Defence and industry continue to work together. We must seek fully to understand the pressures on industry but, in return, industry must respond effectively to the challenge of delivering equipment to time and to cost in fulfilling the contracts that it wins from the MOD.

On future capabilities, I want to emphasise that the challenges faced by our armed forces are complex and ever changing, as I hope the House understands. We have to make difficult procurement decisions today and tomorrow to equip our forces for that unpredictable future. We are often looking decades in advance, so it is not a simple business. Just as our armed forces will have to be increasingly flexible and adaptable in future, so will our procurement plans. The proposals outlined in the future capabilities announcement by my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State in July will be implemented over the coming years. We plan to increase our capacity to undertake expeditionary operations alongside an equipment programme that is delivering, and will continue to deliver, an advanced range of capabilities.

This Government are investing in defence. For the third successive spending review, we have been able to announce real growth in the defence budget. That is without precedent. We owe a considerable debt of gratitude and thanks to our people, wherever they are serving, at home and abroad. Their courage, determination and ability are making the difference across the world, but that in itself would not be enough without sustained investment in defence and the continued modernisation of our armed forces which will help to guarantee our battle-winning capability long into the future.

It is only right that our armed forces, the best in the world, are provided with the equipment and support that they need to do the job. Procurement plays its part in that process; it has delivered, and will continue to deliver, in that important task. Our investment in network-enabled capability will deliver increasingly agile and precise military capability. Our future procurement programme will support more flexible and deployable forces with world-beating kit tailored to achieve that effect. I can assure the House that this Government will spare no effort in making that happen.

Jim Fitzpatrick (Poplar and Canning Town) (Lab): I beg to ask leave to withdraw the motion.

Motion, by leave, withdrawn.

BUSINESS OF THE HOUSE

Ordered,

That, at the sitting on Thursday 11th November, paragraph (2) of Standing Order No. 31 (Questions on Amendments) shall apply to the Motion in the name of Mr Michael Howard as if the day were an Opposition Day; proceedings on the Motion may continue, though opposed, for three hours and shall then lapse if not previously disposed of; and the Orders of the House of 28th June 2001 and 6th November 2003 relating to deferred Divisions shall not apply.—*[Jim Fitzpatrick.]*

Norman Baker (Lewes) (LD): On a point of order, Mr. Deputy Speaker. Yesterday, the hon. Member for Huddersfield (Mr. Sheerman) made a point of order. He was rightly concerned about an invitation that was sent yesterday to hon. Members and journalists to a meeting that was planned to take place in the House next Tuesday. I regret that the meeting was booked in my name and I wanted to take the first opportunity to assure hon. Members that, contrary to normal requirements, I was not shown the invitation for clearance prior to dispatch. I would not have authorised it if I had done so. As soon as I became aware of the incident, I cancelled the room booking and told the group in question that the meeting was firmly off. I asked the group to notify those who were invited. I greatly regret any inconvenience to Officers of the House or concern to Members.

Mr. Deputy Speaker (Sir Alan Haselhurst): The House will be grateful to the hon. Gentleman for making that clear on the record, so that the least inconvenience is caused to anyone.

Incident in Iraq

6 pm

The Minister of State, Ministry of Defence (Mr. Adam Ingram): We have received reports of a serious incident in Iraq. I know that hon. Members will appreciate that it is often difficult immediately to establish a clear picture of events and precise details of what has happened. However, I greatly regret that I can confirm to the House that, in an attack on British forces in the Black Watch area of operations, we have suffered a number of casualties, including three fatalities. The process of informing their next of kin is under way, and I hope that hon. Members will accept that that should take place before we release fuller details. However, I can say that United States forces helped to provide urgent medical support at the scene of the incident, for which I know that our forces were grateful.

I know that I speak for the whole House when I say that our thoughts are with those soldiers and their loved ones.

Mr. Nicholas Soames (Mid-Sussex) (Con): I thank the Minister for coming to the House with the grave news. Her Majesty's loyal Opposition extend their deepest condolences to the families of the three soldiers of the Black Watch who have this day given their lives in action, and to the families of those who have been involved in the incident.

The country will want to wish the Black Watch well as they continue to carry out their duties.

Mr. Paul Keetch (Hereford) (LD): This is indeed tragic news. On behalf of the Liberal Democrats, I send our condolences to the families of those killed and injured, to the members of the Black Watch and all the members of Her Majesty's armed forces serving in Iraq.Whatever our views on the war, our armed forces are performing a difficult job under difficult circumstances. Our thoughts are with them tonight.

Angus Robertson (Moray) (SNP): On behalf of the Scottish National party, I should like to express shock and sadness at the death and injury of Black Watch soldiers in Iraq. Everyone's thoughts go to their families and friends. I am certain that the Minister appreciates that the tragic news will have profound implications for public opinion in Scotland.

Diego Garcians (Surrey)

Motion made, and Question proposed, That this House do now adjourn.—*[Margaret Moran.]*

6.3 pm

Mr. Peter Ainsworth (East Surrey) (Con): I echo the expressions of concern that hon. Members throughout the Chamber have uttered about the incident in Iraq.

I am grateful for the opportunity to raise an issue that causes considerable and immediate concern in my constituency, but clearly has far wider implications and has its origins in a distant place and at a distant time. As well as my hon. Friend the Member for Reigate (Mr. Blunt), my hon. Friends the Members for Mole Valley (Sir Paul Beresford), for Epsom and Ewell (Chris Grayling), for Woking (Mr. Malins) and for Chichester (Mr. Tyrie) have taken a keen interest in the matter—it is good to see my hon. Friends in their places—and wish to be associated with my remarks.

I must admit that until I received a telephone call on the evening of 19 October, I was only sketchily aware of the long and wretched story of the Chagos islands and their people. It is a shabby story of international power politics and betrayal. It is a stain on the integrity of British foreign policy. I know that the Office of the Deputy Prime Minister is not responsible for foreign policy, but I will argue that it now has a key responsibility for the consequences of what happened.

I do not wish to replicate the excellent speech of my hon. Friend the Member for Reigate (Mr. Blunt) in Westminster Hall yesterday. The focus of this debate is on the practical problems that we face now and in the future. It is clear, however, that past Government actions led directly to the call that I received on 19 October, and to the problem that we are discussing today. It is therefore worth rehearsing those briefly.

In 1966, Harold Wilson's Government acquiesced to an American request to purchase and depopulate the British Indian Ocean Territory in order to build an airbase on the principal island of Diego Garcia. It has been suggested that, in return, Britain got a special offer on Polaris submarines. Be that as it may, the plantations were closed, and with them the island's economy. The supply ships were diverted and the majority of the islanders were exiled to a slum area of Port Louis, the capital of Mauritius. Some went to the Seychelles. Eventually, in November 2000, following an action brought by the chairman of the Chagos refugees group, the High Court ruled that the islanders had the legal right to return. Attempts to return, however, were obstructed and proved unsuccessful.

Under the British Overseas Territories Act 2002, a majority of the exiles became British citizens, allowing them to enter and reside in the United Kingdom. In 2003, about 100 destitute islanders arrived at Gatwick airport and settled in Crawley, West Sussex. It is good to see the hon. Member for Crawley (Laura Moffatt) in her place, as I know that she has wrestled with this issue for some considerable time. It is reported that the support that they have so far received from West Sussex county council has cost local taxpayers £500,000.

I have said that this is a shabby story. The latest and, perhaps, shabbiest twist of all came in June this year. On the day of the local government and European elections,

[Mr. Peter Ainsworth]

when eyes were elsewhere, without notification to the House, let alone debate, the Government signed two Orders in Council, the effect of which was to overturn the High Court judgment and reimpose the legal ban on the islanders' ability to return to Diego Garcia.

This is the position: the Government have finally cut off the remaining hope of returning to the islands, and legislated to enable the islanders to come to Britain. Given that the only other choice available is to remain in Port Louis, where they claim to live in conditions of poverty, drug abuse, unemployment and prostitution, it is hardly surprising that many would prefer to make a new life in Britain. Certainly, I have no argument with their decision to do so.

Now we come to the telephone call of 19 October. It was from Councillor Mrs. Spiers, leader of Reigate and Banstead borough council. She told me that 45 islanders had arrived at Gatwick and, following a court decision that discharged West Sussex county council from an obligation to house all but the most vulnerable of them, 33 had effectively thrown themselves on the mercy of her council. They were being housed in temporary accommodation in Horley in my constituency, at a cost of some £20 per person per night. Her question was straightforward: she understood the plight of the islanders, but why should the council tax payers of Reigate and Banstead be solely responsible for footing the bill for their maintenance? That is a question that I hope the hon. Member for Gillingham (Paul Clark) will answer directly.

My expectations of a helpful response are not high. When my conversation with Councillor Mrs. Spiers had ended, and having established via the Home Office that this was not an immigration issue—on the ground that the individuals concerned were British—but a matter for the Office of the Deputy Prime Minister, I sent an urgent fax to the Minister for Local and Regional Government, setting out the issue and concluding:

> "I would be most grateful if you might let me know what provisions exist for your Department to provide financial support to the Council to cover these exceptional circumstances: and it would also be greatly appreciated if you could arrange for an appropriate official to contact the Council as a matter of urgency in order to discuss the situation".

I then provided the direct contact details of the leader and chief executive of the council.

That was on 19 October. It is now 4 November, and nobody from the Office of the Deputy Prime Minister has bothered to make any contact with the council. It would be helpful if the hon. Gentleman could explain why there has been no communication at all, despite that urgent request.

My hon. Friend the Member for Reigate and I visited the islanders last Friday. They have been moved into a block of sheltered flats, somewhat to the alarm of a number of elderly residents, and although their accommodation is cramped, they are being well cared for. The council deserves to be congratulated on the way that it has handled the issue. It immediately reacted with humanitarian assistance, while at the same time seeking to protect local residents from a potentially open-ended financial liability. It thus sought to discharge its moral duty to the islanders and fiduciary duty to local people.

As the Minister will know, solicitors acting for the Chagossians successfully sought a judicial review of the council's decision to refuse temporary accommodation in respect of one of the applicants, on the ground that he was not habitually resident. Pending the outcome of the judicial review, the council decided to accommodate all the islanders, in order, as it said, to save the public purse from any further judicial review requests. The court determined on 1 November that the council should continue to house them until the outcome of the review of the original decision. Meanwhile, the council is assessing the islanders' entitlements under separate homelessness legislation. I am sorry if this all sounds a bit complicated, Mr. Deputy Speaker, but I am afraid that it is.

The House might take the view that it was strange for the court to come to a decision that the islanders could arguably be considered to be habitual residents of the United Kingdom when they had only been here for a couple of weeks. But this decision only serves to underline the need for the Government to intervene to resolve the matter. Having looked at the full circumstances of the case and its history, Mr. Justice Moses acknowledged—and this is significant—that the real issue was the Government's need to address the problems of the islanders. He said that there were very unusual circumstances in the case, and that, in his view, a substantive case could be made that the habitual residence occurred as soon as the Chagossians arrived in the United Kingdom.

Mr. Justice Moses stated that he had great sympathy with the local authority, saying that it was certainly arguable that this was a matter not for the authority but for central Government. However, he was quite clear that, in a humane and civilised society, it was unacceptable not to provide any temporary accommodation for the islanders, as that would merely mean that they would return to Gatwick, where there were no facilities whatever. He is quoted in today's edition of the *Surrey Mirror* under the rather unhelpful but none the less true headline, "You foot bill for homeless Diego Garcians", saying:

> "The prospect of their wandering around and gravitating back to Gatwick is not something that any civilised human being can contemplate."

Given the unique circumstances of the case, this judgment seems understandable. However, it does nothing to resolve the difficulties faced by the council, or the basic injustice of requiring my constituents, and those of my hon. Friends the Members for Reigate and for Epsom and Ewell, to foot the entire bill for housing the islanders for an undetermined period of time.

And it does not end there. While the immediate issue surrounds the 33 islanders in Horley, the hon. Gentleman will be aware that, in response to my written question, the Foreign Office stated on 1 November that

> "it is estimated that there are about 5,000 Chagossians who enjoy British citizenship with the right of abode in the UK following the coming into force of the British Overseas Territories Act in May 2002. Since then, the British High Commissions in Mauritius and Seychelles have issued more than 900 British passports to Chagossians".—[*Official Report*, 1 November 2004; Vol. 426, c. 73W.]

My hon. Friend the Member for Reigate asked in the debate yesterday why more than 900 passports had been applied for when these people had perfectly good Mauritian travel documents of their own. It would be responsible to conclude that at least 900 people are actively considering following their compatriots to Gatwick; a further 4,100 are in a position to do so. It would be logical to expect them to want to settle close to other former islanders in the Horley and Gatwick areas. It would therefore be sensible for the Government to make plans now for this event.

I am aware that solicitors acting for the islanders are seeking an exemption from the relevant regulations so that, on arrival, they may be deemed eligible for housing and other benefits. If they are successful in this, it would certainly help the council's legal bills, but it would compound the problems that it faces in meeting the needs of the islanders from its very limited means. I am sure that I do not have to warn the hon. Gentleman of the consequences were thousands of islanders to arrive and were the cost of their maintenance to remain a local responsibility.

I am proud to say that local people have to date shown sympathy and good will towards the islanders, although I have already been asked by one homeless man why he is sleeping rough in a playing field when the islanders are not. I remind the hon. Gentleman that there are at present about 2,000 people already on the waiting list for housing in the Reigate and Banstead area. Good will can be stretched only so far. It is therefore essential that, in replying to this debate, he understands the potentially very serious nature of the issue.

As I said in yesterday's debate, the long-term solution lies with the Foreign Office, and I was pleased to hear that the Foreign Office Minister has indicated that he would consider raising the question of aid measures with the Department for International Development. However, the short-term solution lies with the Office of the Deputy Prime Minister. We are seeking a solution that is fair both to the islanders and to local residents. The problem has arisen as a result of action by central Government, and it is time for central Government to shoulder their responsibilities.

The Minister may recall that a few years ago, when Surrey unexpectedly played host to General Pinochet, the county police were awarded a special one-off payment from the Home Office to help offset the exceptional security costs associated with their new temporary resident, on the ground that he was in Surrey for reasons to do with Government decisions entirely beyond Surrey's control. There is an obvious parallel in the present case.

Let me end with another quotation from the *Surrey Mirror*'s report of the recent court hearing:

> "Told that, until the legal issues were resolved, there was nothing that Central Government could do, the judge suggested: 'Well, write a cheque'".

I look forward to the Minister's response to that simple request.

6.15 pm

Mr. Crispin Blunt (Reigate) (Con): I am grateful to my hon. Friend the Member for East Surrey (Mr. Ainsworth) for allowing me to make a brief contribution, and for his kind words about my debate with the Under-Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs, the hon. Member for Harlow (Mr. Rammell) yesterday.

Yesterday's reply was extremely disappointing. It did not suggest that the Government were treating the issue with the seriousness and immediacy that it requires. It is a consequence of the Government's Orders in Council, presented in June, that we now face what is potentially an increasingly difficult challenge for local authorities. It is very important for the services required for these people to be established in Mauritius and the Seychelles before they come to the United Kingdom—but if the Government are not going to do that, they really must offer assistance to the local authorities that have to host the people.

There is a clear need for joined-up government. If the hon. Member for Gillingham has nothing to offer local authorities this evening, as the Under-Secretary had nothing to offer the people of Diego Garcia and the rest of the Chagos islands yesterday, I must tell him that this will certainly not be the last he has heard of the matter.

6.16 pm

Paul Clark (Gillingham) (Lab): I congratulate the hon. Member for East Surrey (Mr. Ainsworth) on securing the debate.

The Government are well aware of the importance of the issues facing local authorities as a result of the arrival of a number of Chagossians in Britain. I hope that following my response the hon. Gentleman, and the hon. Member for Reigate (Mr. Blunt), will appreciate the importance that we attach to this, and will also take account of the resources that have been and are available and of other issues arising from the case.

Because there was clearly a very good debate in Westminster Hall yesterday, and because my hon. Friend the Under-Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs responded to it, I do not want to go into details of the history at great length; but following what the hon. Member for East Surrey has said, I want to put one or two things on record.

The Chagos islands were part of the dependency of Mauritius, and continue to be administered under that scheme. On achieving independence in 1968, with the agreement of the Mauritius Council of Ministers they were detached to form part of the British Indian Ocean Territory, which was rightly created to meet the defence needs of the United States and Britain. I am sure the hon. Gentleman will know that the plantations to which he referred were ceasing to be economically viable at the time. For that reason as well as for defence reasons, it was decided that the islanders should be removed. That happened in the late 1960s and early 1970s.

The vast majority of the islanders, some 1,200, were relocated to Mauritius, although some went to the Seychelles. They automatically acquired either Mauritian or Seychelles citizenship when those countries achieved independence, and they retained their status as citizens of the United Kingdom and the colonies. Entirely correctly, under the British Overseas Territories Act 2002 they were given the additional status of full British citizenship. That carries the right of abode in the United Kingdom, and as we know and the hon. Gentleman mentioned, some have taken up that

[Paul Clark]

opportunity. Of course, that also gives them freedom of access to other European countries, but the suggestion that the Orders in Council may have been used in an underhand way is incorrect. The hon. Gentleman will be well aware that it is common practice to deal with such decisions through the use of Orders in Council when amending the constitution of an overseas territory, so nothing different was done in that regard. In addition, some of the islanders were in fact seeking British citizenship before the Orders in Council were put in place. They continue to apply for such citizenship, as we know.

Any Chagossian applying for a British passport at our high commission in Mauritius receives clear guidance on what to expect if they travel to the UK. This guidance—in the form of a leaflet in English and Creole that is placed in each passport—stresses that it is their responsibility to ensure before travelling that they have the necessary resources, or that they can rely on friends or family who are already here.

In addition, our high commissioner in Mauritius wrote to the leading member of the Chagossian community on 27 September. It is worth quoting that letter, which states:

> "Those Chagossians who are British citizens are of course free to go the United Kingdom if they wish. However, as you know, those that do exercise this right cannot expect more favourable treatment than any other British citizen going to the United Kingdom from abroad and, just like any other British citizen, they have to fulfil the normal conditions of entitlement and habitual residence before qualifying for social security benefits etc. These entitlements are clearly set out in the leaflet which accompanies each new passport issued to members of your community by the British High Commission passport section."

Mr. Ainsworth: I would be grateful if the hon. Gentleman explained whether that letter is legally binding in any way, and if so, whether anyone had told Mr. Justice Moses.

Paul Clark: We have a duty and a responsibility to ensure that we communicate clearly to such people their position and rights, to the extent that they prevail. We are making it clear through the issuing of that letter that those who seek to come here as British citizens have no automatic right to accommodation or benefits. As I understand it, that letter was given wide coverage in the Mauritian press. Such information is also given to every new applicant for a British passport, including the 900 people who recently applied, to whom the hon. Gentleman referred.

Mr. Ainsworth: The point is that such people are currently receiving accommodation at the expense of the public purse, so something seems to have gone wrong with the hon. Gentleman's logic.

Paul Clark: Nothing has gone wrong with the logic. What we have to understand is the legal responsibilities and the legalities of the process of becoming a British citizen, and the rights to which that entitles individuals. I will deal in due course with homelessness, local authorities and the resources available.

I turn to the Reigate and Banstead case. I listened very carefully to what was said about the number of such people who could come to this country. That is an issue, but we have to deal with the facts. It was suggested that thousands could come, but the fact that 900 people have applied for passports does not mean that all will come here to seek accommodation and resources; it is not necessary to follow that logic. Small groups of Chagossians have made their way to the UK. The most recent group, of some 43, arrived at Gatwick airport at the beginning of October. I have said very clearly that they are welcome to be here in the UK, but we have also made it clear that they are expected to support and accommodate themselves when they arrive. Income-related benefits and local authority housing are generally not available to persons from abroad, including British citizens, who are not habitually resident in the UK.

In the case of the most recent arrivals, I understand that they were all accommodated by West Sussex county council for a temporary period while care assessments were made under the National Assistance Act 1948. I believe that the county council is continuing to accommodate a small number of them. Most of the Chagossians were subsequently required to leave the hotel accommodation provided by West Sussex council, and it seems that the next port of call for them was the housing authority. Accommodation was provided by West Sussex in Horley, in the hon. Gentleman's constituency in the district of Reigate and Banstead borough council. About 31 applications have now been made under the homelessness legislation.

We must recognise that homelessness legislation is there to protect all people who are genuinely homeless or claim to be genuinely homeless. That is why I laid out clearly what our High Commission says to British citizens about what they can expect. When they are here, they then fall under the provisions of the homelessness legislation, which provides an important safety net for vulnerable people who find themselves facing a housing crisis.

Where specified criteria are met—that is, that applicants are eligible for assistance, have become homeless through no fault of their own and fall within a priority need group—the local housing authority must ensure that suitable accommodation is available until a settled home can be found. Lesser duties apply in cases where homelessness is intentional or where the applicant does not have a priority need for accommodation. Those categories are defined in the legislation.

I understand that the decision by Reigate and Banstead, in all the cases concerning the Chagossian arrivals, was that the applicants were ineligible for housing assistance because they were persons from abroad who were not habitually resident in the UK, or the wider area including the Channel Islands or the Isle of Man. I am sure that all hon. Members would agree that it is important for proper decisions to be made concerning homeless applications, and would understand why safeguards are built into the legislation.

Applicants have the right to ask the local authority internally to review a decision that they are ineligible for assistance, and I understand that the Chagos islanders have exercised that right with the Reigate and Banstead borough council. As a further safeguard, the legislation also gives local housing authorities a discretionary power to accommodate applicants while they carry out a review. Reigate and Banstead council originally decided not to exercise its power to provide applicants with accommodation, pending an internal review. There has also been a review of the High Court proceedings, to which the hon. Gentleman referred.

Mr. Ainsworth: We are running short of time, so I would be grateful if, before the hon. Gentleman concludes, he could say very simply whether he believes that it is fair that our constituents should foot the bill, solely and by themselves, for these people who are here as a direct consequence of the Government's actions. Does he not think that it would be a fairer system if the Government shouldered their own responsibility in this case?

Paul Clark: Of course, the hon. Gentleman will be well aware of the substantial moneys that local government receives for a whole host of activities that councils have to carry out and have to meet in the numerous operations in which they are involved. That was very much the point that I was making. Members cannot ignore the substantial increases in moneys that have gone to local authorities. There has been a 30 per cent. real-terms increase over the last seven years. That is a fact and there is no question about it. Additionally, substantially more moneys have been announced in the spending review earlier this year as going into local government finance generally. Authorities in Surrey have benefited from the extra money that we have made available. Surrey county council received a grant increase 7.7 per cent. increase in this year's settlement, well above the average for county councils. District councils also received good grant increases, with Reigate and Banstead receiving a grant increase of 3.6 per cent.

Mr. Blunt: Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

Paul Clark: I will give way if there is time, but I want to answer the hon. Member for East Surrey properly. The House will be aware that the homelessness provision given by the Government to local authorities is made by means of the formula block known as the environmental, protective and cultural services. Local authorities have substantial flexibility when it comes to its use.

We have also given local authorities substantial direct resources through the rate support grant, but the issue at the heart of this debate is of a piece with the difficulty in respect of homelessness and housing that all authorities face, but especially those in London and the south-east. The pressures are substantial.

The Government are putting substantial moneys into meeting the requirements of making affordable housing available and making provision for homeless families. That is true in Reigate and Banstead, and everywhere else in the country. We are well aware of the pressures that local authorities face, but we have made substantial additional resources available.

I know that the events under discussion were unexpected, but we expect local authorities to plan for any such contingency that might arise. Substantial increases in resources have been made available to Reigate and Banstead, and substantial reserves are available to enable local authorities meet any contingency.

Legislation is in place to protect people who are genuinely homeless, and the necessary procedures are in hand. We expect local authorities to be able to deal with any contingencies that arise. We recognise the important pressures faced by local authorities, and the Under-Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs said yesterday—

The motion having been made after Six o'clock, and the debate having continued for half an hour, MR. DEPUTY SPEAKER *adjourned the House without Question put, pursuant to the Standing Order.*

Adjourned at twenty-seven minutes to Seven o'clock.

House of Commons

Monday 8 November 2004

The House met at half-past Two o'clock

PRAYERS

[MR. SPEAKER *in the Chair*]

Oral Answers to Questions

WORK AND PENSIONS

The Secretary of State was asked—

New Deal

1. **Laura Moffatt** (Crawley) (Lab): How many disabled people the new deal for disabled people has helped back to work. [196316]

The Secretary of State for Work and Pensions (Alan Johnson): Since the national launch of the programme in 2001, more than 45,000 people have gained a job through new deal for disabled people.

Laura Moffatt: I am sure that everyone is delighted to hear that news, but it is important to say that when disabled people need access to the workplace they require extra help and support. This fantastic programme has provided that. Will my right hon. Friend tell the House exactly what extra training goes on with advisers to assist people with disabilities into the workplace?

Alan Johnson: The important contribution is made by the disability employment advisers: their expertise, as well as the involvement of the employer through various groups, has given us those extraordinary access figures. It might be as well to point out that the 45,000 figure is the number of disabled people who have obtained work through the new deal for disabled people. As a result of all the new deal programmes taken together, however, 180,000 disabled people have found work, so we are talking about the expertise not only of the disability employment advisers in the new deal for disabled people, but of those who work in other programmes under the new deal.

Paul Holmes (Chesterfield) (LD): What reassurance can the Secretary of State offer to those organisations such as the Shaw Trust and the Groundwork Trust, which are being told this year that they must cut back on the number of disabled people whom they are successfully placing in work?

Alan Johnson: The reassurance we would give them is the reassurance that we have already given them; the Under-Secretary of State for Work and Pensions, my hon. Friend the Member for Liverpool, Garston (Maria Eagle), has made that clear on several occasions. We are looking very carefully at the needs of providers. This is a problem of success in the sense that the Shaw Trust, which does a marvellous job, as do the other providers, has been more successful than we thought in getting disabled people into work. We are constantly evaluating the programme, and we are having regular discussions. We think that as this is, uniquely, an outcome-funded arrangement, we can find a solution to the problem that the Shaw Trust has identified.

Pensioner Poverty

2. **Mr. Alistair Carmichael** (Orkney and Shetland) (LD): What steps he is taking to tackle pensioner poverty. [196317]

The Secretary of State for Work and Pensions (Alan Johnson): We have taken many steps to tackle pensioner poverty, including the introduction of pension credit and winter fuel payments. As a result of those and other measures, during 2004–05 we will be spending nearly £10 billion more on pensioners, including £5 billion more on the poorest third. That means that the poorest pensioners are, on average, £1,820 per annum, or £35 a week, better off in real terms than they would have been under the 1997 system.

I am today publishing in the Library the pension credit take-up figures to September 2004. They show that pension credit is playing a vital role in helping to give more money to the people who need it most: 2.62 million pensioner households are benefiting, with 3.18 million individuals receiving an average award of about £41 a week.

Mr. Carmichael: I thank the Secretary of State for that very full answer. He will be aware that his Department's own figures showed that in 2002–03 some 2.2 million pensioners were still living below the poverty line. Given his welcome recent statements in which he accepts there were problems with pension credit take-up and that it provides a disincentive to save and his acknowledgement that he is veering towards the idea of a citizen's pension based on residency, how much longer will he be veering and when might we eventually see flesh put on those interesting and laudable ideas?

Alan Johnson: I can veer exhaustively; I shall be veering for a while longer. On the particular point about pension credit, in the hon. Gentleman's constituency 1,858 households and 2,153 individuals are benefiting. While the issue of take-up should be at the forefront of our minds, we are two thirds of the way towards our target in a third of the time available. Pension credit has just passed its first anniversary, and in Orkney and Shetland and elsewhere it is making a remarkable contribution.

Mr. Stephen Hepburn (Jarrow) (Lab): Why are we, on the one hand, quite laudably giving out those benefits to pensioners to reduce pensioner poverty yet, on the other, making it harder and harder for them to collect those benefits by allowing the closure of post offices? I know it will be said that that is a matter for the Post Office, but will he use his good offices through the Department of Trade and Industry, his own Department and, indeed, the head of the Post Office service to ensure that pensioners' considerations are taken into account before any future closures?

Alan Johnson: That takes me back to Department of Trade and Industry questions when I started off as a Minister. I understand the importance of my hon. Friend's point. We are the first Government to provide £2 billion a year to protect the rural network and post offices in urban deprived areas. As for the rest of the network, sub-postmasters told us that they needed to ensure that they had the capability to make a proper living; otherwise they would go out of business. That is what the urban regeneration programme is about.

Sir Peter Tapsell (Louth and Horncastle) (Con): Will the Secretary of State publicly castigate a solvent foreign company that is threatening 400 of its former British employees with pension poverty? Has he seen the documents that I sent to his helpful Minister for Pensions from those pensioners, showing that Nikko Europe plc put its British pension scheme into wind-up in deficit on Christmas day 2001? Despite Nikko declaring profits last year of more than $400 million, it has so far declined to make good the deficit, as it could well afford to do, and is forcing those 400 deferred pensioners through a period of prolonged and acute anxiety.

Alan Johnson: I understand that the employer, as the hon. Gentleman said, is solvent. The hon. Gentleman has been in correspondence with my hon. Friend the Minister for Pensions and now that he has raised the matter at Question Time, I will take a personal interest in it.

Mr. Frank Field (Birkenhead) (Lab): Does the Secretary of State realise that in his enthusiasm to counter pensioner poverty, the Liberal Democrats may have misread the answer that he gave at our last Question Time? Does he accept that while a citizenship pension might be a useful, additional tool to help the very oldest of our pensioners, it is not an avenue down which the Government are going, and that while our national insurance scheme has disadvantages, which need reform, reform will come in that direction and not via a citizenship pension?

Alan Johnson: That answer was not given at the last Department for Work and Pensions questions but during the Opposition day debate on pensions two days later. Let me make this point: the problem that I am interested in tackling, which Members on both sides of the House should be interested in tackling, is pensioner poverty. Two thirds of those in abject poverty are women, for the very good reason that they have not built up enough national insurance contributions. Fifty per cent. of women do not have a full state pension, compared with only 10 per cent. of men, and some women retiring now are in the same position. I reassure my right hon. Friend that we are determined to resolve that problem. The citizen's pension is one way of doing so—I have no wish, as I said recently to the Select Committee, to abrogate the contributory principle or to create more problems than we solve. I am concerned to overcome pensioner poverty, however, as we all should be, as it is a very real problem for millions of women in our society.

Mr. David Willetts (Havant) (Con): May I ask the Secretary of State about another aspect of pensioner poverty? Tackling pensioner poverty in the future means insuring company pensions with an effective pension protection fund. We agree with the Government on that, but it would be perverse if a flat-rate levy penalised well-funded schemes. Will he tell the House today what position he will take on the defeats that the Government suffered in the other place last week? Will the Government seek to reverse their decision to introduce rapidly a risk-related levy that is significantly bigger than the flat-rate levy?

Alan Johnson: I have committed the Government, as has my hon. Friend the Minister for Pensions on many occasions, to introduce a risk-based levy as soon as possible. We had opted for a different route towards that levy because of the practical problems that we had identified. I have not yet taken full cognizance of the decisions reached in the other place, but there is no disagreement between us on the need to move to a risk-based levy as soon as possible. I will examine the practical difficulties and seek to resolve those in accordance with the decisions made in the other place.

Vera Baird (Redcar) (Lab): Irrespective of longer-term measures, perhaps such as a citizen's pension, will my right hon. Friend consider some quick changes now to help those women who will soon retire to have better basic state pensions: for instance, scrapping the 25 per cent. rule, under which any national insurance contributions of less than 10 years do not count towards a pension at all? Does he agree that that is unfair, that all contributions should count equally, and that that change could be brought about without primary legislation and without adding complexities to the pension system? That could help women who are about to retire to have a larger basic state pension of their own.

Alan Johnson: I recognise the contribution that my hon. and learned Friend has made in this regard. I shall consider her suggestion, and other constructive suggestions made by Members. The report on women's pensions that we are pledged to publish next year will allow us to do that. The Turner commission included a separate chapter on women's pensions, which was a very good move on the part of the Pensions Commission.

Child Support Agency

3. **Mr. James Plaskitt** (Warwick and Leamington) (Lab): When he expects to migrate existing Child Support Agency cases to the new maintenance assessment formula. [196322]

8. **Mr. David Kidney** (Stafford) (Lab): How many child support cases the Child Support Agency is dealing with under (a) the old rules and (b) the new system. [196323]

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Work and Pensions (Mr. Chris Pond): The agency is working with EDS, the IT supplier, to resolve the problems with the computer system. We will make a decision on the transfer of old scheme cases once we are satisfied that the new scheme is working well. Currently around 326,000 cases are being dealt with under the new arrangements, with just over 1 million still subject to the old scheme.

Despite difficulties of which the House is well aware, the agency is still collecting £280 million more in child maintenance than it did in 1997–98.

Mr. Plaskitt: I thank my hon. Friend for his answer, but, as I am sure he is aware, it is broadly the same as the one that his Department has been giving since July 2003, when migration was supposed to start. It was supposed to be completed by April 2005.

As more new cases come on stream and are assessed under the new formula, we are fast approaching a point at which we shall be running two CSAs in parallel. That is not sustainable. Whose fault is it, and when will it be put right?

Mr. Pond: I acknowledge what my hon. Friend has said about the disappointment shared by all of us about the fact that we have not been able to make as much progress with the computer system as we wanted. That inevitably means that we cannot implement what all Members agree to be a much more effective system.

I do not think that this is the place in which to allocate blame. My hon. Friend will know that we have had robust discussions with EDS. We are disappointed that the scheme is not in a fit state for us to be sure that it can work properly for parents with care and non-resident carers, but I assure my hon. Friend that we are doing all we can to make the system work effectively as soon as possible.

Mr. Kidney: Will my hon. Friend take this opportunity to state publicly that the CSA's job would be easier if all parents, rather than just some, accepted their responsibility to maintain their children? Will he also acknowledge that running two systems side by side makes the agency's job difficult? Making one system out of the two would benefit not only parents and children, but CSA staff.

Mr. Pond: My hon. Friend is right on both counts, but the most important point is that parents must take responsibility for the maintenance of their children. The CSA is there to ensure that that happens. If more non-resident parents took real responsibility, perhaps we would have less need for a CSA in any form. That could be described as a sad indictment.

My hon. Friend is also right on the second count. Inevitably, running two systems at the same time makes the whole arrangement more complex. That is why we—like my hon. Friend, who has made an important contribution—are keen to ensure that the new system is working properly and effectively as soon as possible.

Mr. Steve Webb (Northavon) (LD): The Minister will know that in the case of a lone parent on income support under the old child support system, any maintenance that is collected is deducted pound for pound. Under the new system, a lone parent can keep a tenner a week. That means that every week in which the Minister fails to get a grip on the issue, some of the poorest children in the land lose £10. As the new system was introduced 18 months ago, some of those poor families have lost more than £700 because of his failure to get a grip.

Earlier this year, the former Secretary of State said that a recovery programme would be completed by the autumn. Did he mean this autumn, and has it been completed?

Mr. Pond: The hon. Gentleman will know that 33,000 families already receive the child maintenance premium. We want to ensure that all who are entitled—and 600,000 children would benefit—receive that help as quickly as possible. My right hon. Friend the Secretary of State is looking afresh at this and a number of other issues to ensure that we can make that happen. There is a difficulty at the moment but the child maintenance premium is a feature of the new system. It cannot operate under the old system, the old system rules or the old system legislation. We are looking at the matter afresh to see whether there are any other mechanisms that we can use to ensure that the children who need the help get it.

Gregory Barker (Bexhill and Battle) (Con): I am glad that the Minister is not seeking to stand there and blame others for this Government shambles, but will he do what my constituents want him to do and accept ministerial responsibility for that shambles and give a definite deadline, which he will personally stand by, for when it will be cleared up?

Mr. Pond: No, I will not be giving any deadlines because I, my colleagues and my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State have made it clear that we will make the transfer to the new system only when we believe that it can really deliver effectively for non-resident parents, for parents with care and, most important, for children. I have said openly to the House that we share the disappointment of other hon. Members that we have not been able to make those moves as quickly as we expected. The Secretary of State said clearly to the Select Committee that he would like us to be moving ahead more quickly, but we have to be honest that we have not made the progress that we wanted to make. It would be highly irresponsible to try to transfer the old cases across until we are sure that the system is working properly.

Jon Trickett (Hemsworth) (Lab): I accept that it is a complex computer problem and that having two systems is unsatisfactory but the human effects are disturbing. I have been writing to the Minister since April about Mrs. Voros from Crofton, who has lost all the money for her and for her child. That is surely an unsatisfactory situation. When can we anticipate justice for such people?

Mr. Pond: My hon. Friend will understand that it is difficult to respond to individual cases on the Floor of the House. I can tell him, however, that we will certainly follow up cases in which constituents feel that the CSA is not providing an effective service. The CSA is committed to ensure that, as far as possible, the income from non-resident parents reaches the children who need that help as quickly and as effectively as possible. I will happily discuss with my hon. Friend the particular case that he has raised.

Mr. Paul Goodman (Wycombe) (Con): A key witness to a recent Select Committee on Work and Pensions inquiry claimed that poor planning by the Department was responsible for over 2,000 change requests being made to the new computer system. The Select Committee has said that it is "profoundly dissatisfied" with the Government's response to its report, which cited that claim and others.

Will the Minister publish a full response to the Select Committee? If he does not, surely parents will conclude that the Department may have something to hide.

Mr. Pond: If the Department were trying to hide something, I would not be standing at the Dispatch Box now—*[Interruption.]* Well, I could stand here, but I would not be saying that we accept and understand the frustration felt not only in the House but by parents because the system is not working as effectively as it should. We will certainly respond to the comments made by the Select Committee, which we believe is making a real contribution to the debate. I can promise hon. Members that the Committee will get a constructive response from the Department in which it will seek to deal with the issues that the Committee has raised.

Mr. Derek Wyatt (Sittingbourne and Sheppey) (Lab): I have five constituents who moved from the old system to the new system, but now that the new system has failed they are on paper and pen systems. What they all want to know—all hon. Members are aware of similar problems—is when they will get their payment.

Mr. Pond: I can only reiterate what I said earlier. Where the technological difficulties can be worked around on a clerical basis, the agency is committed to doing that. Like all of us, it wants to ensure that the payments get to the children. If my hon. Friend has particular cases that he would like to discuss directly with me, I will happily pursue those on his behalf.

Unclaimed Assets

5. **Mr. Andrew Robathan** (Blaby) (Con): What recent assessment he has made of the possible use of unused orphan funds in bank and building society accounts to assist members of collapsed occupational pension schemes. [196319]

11. **Mr. Peter Lilley** (Hitchin and Harpenden) (Con): If he will use unclaimed assets to boost the funding of the financial assistance scheme. [196326]

The Secretary of State for Work and Pensions (Alan Johnson): I refer hon. and right hon. Members to the reply by my hon. Friend the Minister for Pensions on 4 July 2004. As my right hon. Friend the Chancellor made clear in the March Budget, we want as much as possible to reunite unclaimed assets with their rightful owners. Where the assets cannot be so reunited, they should be reinvested to benefit the whole of society. There are no plans to use such assets to provide assistance for people who have lost pensions.

Mr. Robathan: Apparently, there are some £15 billion-worth of unclaimed assets in dormant bank and building society accounts. As the Chancellor thinks that he can take the interest from such funds and give it to charities—which is sensible, assuming that the owners do not exist—will the Secretary of State not reconsider? Does he not realise that we all have constituents who have saved for all or part of their working lives yet, through no fault of their own, lost everything when their companies went bankrupt and their occupational pension schemes were lost? Is this not a good deserving case that the Minister should consider with some charity, for people in that desperate position?

Alan Johnson: We do not disagree about the problem faced by people who find their occupational pensions jeopardised, diluted or destroyed overnight. That is why we are introducing the pension protection fund and the financial assistance scheme. The hon. Gentleman is asking whether we should put the assets to which he referred into that scheme, and he mentioned a sum of £15 billion. That is disputed, particularly by the Building Societies Association, which summarised the problem when it described the policy of Her Majesty's official Opposition as follows:

> "This is an uncosted policy, as no thorough work has ever been undertaken as to the full amount held in lost accounts."

To quote Adrian Coles, the director general of the BSA:

> "At no point have we been consulted by the Conservative Party about this policy. We dispute the figures involved. We also strongly question the right of any organisation, government or otherwise"—

I think that the Conservative party falls under the description "otherwise"—

> "to take money from building society members. In addition, it is not clear under existing law whether this is even possible. But, most importantly, to promise pensioners compensation on the basis of an uncosted policy proposal is misleading and unfair."

I completely agree with that statement.

Mr. Lilley: I welcome the Secretary of State's decision to set up the financial assistance scheme, but does he not realise that it is untenable to do so on a basis that is not fully funded and does not cover all the potential victims of collapsed pension funds? Is it not therefore essential that he make use of the funds, rather than ridiculing the Chancellor's policy of making use of orphan funds for other purposes? If they are available for charity, they are available to the Secretary of State.

Alan Johnson: That is the last thing I was doing; I was quoting the Building Societies Association ridiculing the policy of the Opposition—

Mr. Lilley: That is the same thing.

Alan Johnson: No, it is not. Government Members believe that, as my right hon. Friend the Chancellor said in this year's Budget speech, we should invest those moneys for the good of society as a whole. As for the money that we have available for the financial assistance scheme, for the reasons set out by my hon. Friend the

Minister for Pensions in late June, we believe that we do have the opportunity to provide assistance. This is not compensation, and we do not accept any liability as a Government, but we are giving some assistance—not to the level that we are providing for the future, with the pension protection fund, but for the first time some help will be provided for those who have suffered in the past. The question is: should it come from the source that has been mentioned? We say no, it should not—and an awful lot of people who are politically neutral say the same thing.

Mr. Barry Sheerman (Huddersfield) (Lab/Co-op): Does my right hon. Friend agree that we have been talking about orphan funds for a very long time? I thought that our Government—the new Labour Government—were supposed to be a radical Government. If they are, why do we not get on and do the research, knock some heads together, talk to the Treasury and get this sorted, whatever we use the funds for? Personally, I would like it to go to the pensioners who have lost their pensions, and I do not consider that to be a party political matter. But whatever we use the money for, let us get on with it, rather than sitting and talking about it.

Alan Johnson: I accept that my hon. Friend, who asks us to be radical, holds very strong views, and work is continuing. However, this is not a matter for my Department, and I suggest that he turn up at Treasury questions; indeed, as I understand it various opportunities are coming up to question Treasury Ministers on how far they have got. As Adrian Coles of the Building Societies Association pointed out, we are talking about other people's money, and for us to blunder in without giving the matter the most adroit and careful consideration would be a huge mistake. We are moving as quickly as we can in such a complex area.

Sandra Osborne (Ayr) (Lab): Surely the important point is that the Government have promised substantial help for those who have lost their pensions. However, my constituents are getting understandably impatient to find out exactly what assistance they will receive. What is the time scale for hearing more details about the pension assistance fund, and will my right hon. Friend meet my constituents to discuss this issue?

Alan Johnson: I certainly will. We are exactly on course with the statement made by my right hon. Friend my predecessor to Parliament in May, and we are on track in terms of the comprehensive statement made to Parliament on 30 June. Looking back year by year at the liabilities and assets of pension funds and schemes is another really complex issue. We said that by the end of November, we will be able to start consulting on the detail, and we are still on course to do so. We are also on course to have a scheme up and running by next spring, so when I meet my hon. Friend and her constituents I will be able to reassure them that that timetable is still on track.

Mr. Nigel Waterson (Eastbourne) (Con): I will not be joining the Secretary of State in his unprovoked attack on the Chancellor, but what possible distinction can there be in principle or practice between using—with proper safeguards—unclaimed assets to assist charities, and using them to help people who have lost their pensions through no fault of their own? Can he see any reason at all in principle why people falling within his financial assistance scheme should not receive the same level of benefits as those covered by the PPF?

Alan Johnson: I find it amazing that the Conservatives are now saying how important this issue is, given that they voted against the Pensions Bill on Second Reading.

Mr. Waterson *indicated dissent.*

Alan Johnson: The hon. Gentleman shakes his head, but it is a matter of record. *[Interruption.]* I am told from a sedentary position that they declined to give the Pensions Bill a Second Reading; I am sorry if that is hugely different from their saying that they refused to back it. The simple fact is that we believe that the orphan funds should be used for the good of society as a whole, and we will proceed very carefully in that direction. We believe that people who have lost money in pension schemes in the past should be given some level of assistance; however, we do not think it viable or sensible for us to promise the same level of assistance in future, through a pension protection fund that is set up to generate funds to ensure that it meets its liabilities. In looking at the past and offering assistance rather than compensation, we should be absolutely clear that the pension protection fund will not be able to offer 100 per cent. and 90 per cent. coverage in the same way.

Mr. Peter Pike (Burnley) (Lab): I have had several occupational pension schemes go wrong in my constituency, including Bellings' scheme, which was swindled by fraud in 1992. Will my right hon. Friend recognise that one of the biggest concerns of all those involved in such schemes is that when something goes wrong, the administrators, lawyers and legal people make so much money that the funds diminish and they do not get the pensions that they want? In fact, in some instances a bad position gradually gets worse.

Alan Johnson: I accept that that is a problem, and similar difficulties have arisen with schemes in my own constituency. Of course, some changes have already been made and importantly, schemes that start to wind up after 10 May 2004 will benefit from a change in the priority order. The sector as a whole needs to look at this issue, and the pension protection fund needs to examine the issue of how much money is being spent and is being taken away from pensioners, rather than being dedicated to them.

Pension Credit

6. **Miss Anne McIntosh** (Vale of York) (Con): What recent representations he has received on erroneous payments of pension credit. [196320]

The Minister for Pensions (Malcolm Wicks): From time to time, there are individual errors in the payment of pension credit, but overall accuracy is good. Pension credit payment accuracy levels were running to target at around 94 per cent. during August and September, for example. The Pension Service aspires to provide the best possible level of service and accuracy at all times.

Miss McIntosh: To what extent does the Minister attribute the erroneous contributions made to constituents in the Vale of York to the closure, after opening only two years ago, of the pensions office in York and its relocation to Dundee? What else can be attributed to the fact that he has unnecessarily chosen the most complicated formula, ensuring that he rewards only those who have failed to save throughout their working lives?

Malcolm Wicks: On the hon. Lady's final point, I am proud of the fact that, at long last, we have a system of assistance that rewards rather than penalises modest savings. Under the old system presided over by the Conservative Government, people were penalised pound for pound for any money they saved, so we are making progress on the savings incentive.

On the question of erroneous payments, I do not think that we have been in correspondence about any particular problems in the Vale of York. If there has been correspondence, I apologise and undertake to look further into it. I am proud of the fact, however, that 3,000 pensioner households in the Vale of York are now receiving pension credit. I hope that the hon. Lady will also be pleased about that and will congratulate our excellent Pension Service on that result.

Mr. Iain Luke (Dundee, East) (Lab): The Minister will be aware of the unhappiness felt by many pensioners who lose their pension credit if they spend more than four weeks out of the country. They may have scrimped and saved to go abroad to meet other family members, for example, but on their return they are faced with bills to pay back their credit. Will the Minister take steps to extend the amount of time that pensioners are able to spend outside the country before they lose their pension credit? The period should be extended to help them.

Malcolm Wicks: Yes, we need to look further into that and, indeed, we are reviewing it. I am sympathetic to the point that my hon. Friend raises. Obviously, I will have to consider any resource implications. We also need to make it absolutely clear that this is not an exportable benefit, but one that exists for people who are resident in this country. As I say, we are looking very vigorously into that matter.

Sir Archy Kirkwood (Roxburgh and Berwickshire) (LD): Does the Minister agree that one of the best ways of ensuring that pension credit payments are accurate is having a properly staffed and resourced local pension service? When the right hon. Member for Makerfield (Mr. McCartney) sold the idea of pension credit to the House, he strongly supported the idea of developing pension services locally. Can the Minister provide an assurance that despite the incidence of staff cuts, which the Government are working through, staffing levels for local pension services will be protected; otherwise, the erroneous payments will continue and get even worse?

Malcolm Wicks: We need to safeguard local pension services. It is a tough decision, but we are right to expect that, in future, we can run an efficient Pension Service with fewer staff. That is an important efficiency saving. However, at the local level, 638,000 home visits have been made and advice surgeries have seen 448,000 customers, so the local service is important and we will safeguard it.

Mr. Brian Jenkins (Tamworth) (Lab): Has my hon. Friend conducted any satisfaction surveys of pensioners in receipt of pension credit, which would help us to understand what pensioners believe is the most appropriate way of assisting them?

Malcolm Wicks: Customer satisfaction surveys are running, if I remember correctly, at about 80 per cent.— a high level of satisfaction. We listen to all shades of opinion on the success of pension credit and the Pension Service, but I am sure the House would agree that we should listen most to our customers, who are satisfied. We are also satisfied, but not complacent. When we can improve matters, we will do so.

Mr. David Willetts (Havant) (Con): Those, of course, are the customers who have managed to get through the incredibly complicated procedure and managed finally to secure the pension credit. The figures do not include the 1.7 million pensioners who are not receiving the pension to which they are entitled.

What would the Minister say to the pensioner who contacted the citizens advice bureau after applying for pension credit and receiving a letter from the Pension Service, which stated:

> "From 22 January 1811 you will get £163,168.66 a week"?

Is not that absurd? Does it not show that a system as complicated as the one introduced by the Minister is prone to error, leads to high administration costs and fails to get help to the pensioners who really need it?

Malcolm Wicks: The pension credit is a great social advance, although in that individual case it was an advance too far. If the hon. Gentleman's accusation is that, in a system that deals with millions of people and pieces of information, we occasionally make mistakes, well yes, we do. However, I am proud of the fact that the customer satisfaction level is high. Indeed, it is much higher than the satisfaction level with the British Conservative party.

Mr. Willetts: We are getting confused messages from the Government. The Secretary of State thinks out loud about the future of means-tested benefits. Indeed, I have not heard him defend means-testing and the pension credit in his new role at the Dispatch Box. Every time he appears, he offers some new criticism of the system that he is supposed to be defending. Now the Minister of State tries to maintain that the pension credit is a success. Does he really believe that the pension credit is the right long-term solution to Britain's pension crisis?

Malcolm Wicks: The right long-term solution is to ensure that more of our citizens in the future, including young workers today, retire on pension incomes above means-tested levels, through a combination of state pensions and private or occupational pensions. However, while there is a major problem of pensioner hardship and poverty, pension credit will have a significant role to play. As for the charge of complexity, under a previous Tory Government people had to fill in a very long form: the form is now shorter. Under a Tory Government, people could not apply over the telephone: under a Labour Government, they can. Finally, under a Tory Government, the Pension Service did not exist and there were no home visits: our system makes it easy for the customer. I am proud of our record. I hope that he is ashamed of his.

Pension Service

9. **Andrew Selous** (South-West Bedfordshire) (Con): If he will make a statement on the administration of the Pension Service. [196324]

The Minister for Pensions (Malcolm Wicks): The Pension Service is making good progress—as we have just heard—against its target of improving delivery to customers. I always appreciate a planted question at this stage. We made an announcement on 29 June about plans for business transformation to secure high levels of service with increased efficiency in the Pension Service as part of wider efficiency gains in the Department.

Andrew Selous: If the Pension Service is indeed making such good progress, perhaps the Minister can explain why one of my constituents had to receive seven letters from the Pension Service before it could organise direct payment into her bank account, the last letter being in Welsh. I am aware that the European Union managed to lose Wales from the map of the United Kingdom, but does the Department for Work and Pensions think that it has arrived in south Bedfordshire?

Malcolm Wicks: We are a joined-up Government and we always seek to improve language skills wherever possible. If one of the hon. Gentleman's constituents has received too many letters from us, I apologise. I would be grateful if he would let me have the details. However, this Government do not expect a single pensioner to live on £69 a week, as the Tories did. We have a guaranteed income of £105 for a single person. The vast majority of those entitled to the pension guarantee receive it. We are attacking pensioner poverty and I am proud of that: I hope that the hon. Gentleman is, too.

Rob Marris (Wolverhampton, South-West) (Lab): I know that my hon. Friend is a keen follower of Wolverhampton Wanderers football club and will be aware that it seeks a new manager. Is he also aware that Jane Whitaker, the excellent and much more successful manager of the Pension Service in Wolverhampton, is also looking for a job because the DWP proposes to close the pension centre in the town? It has met and beaten its targets and has even taken in work from elsewhere in the UK, but the Department still proposes to close it. Will my hon. Friend reconsider that decision?

Malcolm Wicks: We do have in common the support of a certain football club and I am pleased to answer as an old-fashioned inside left. We need to make efficiency savings. If we are to convince the British public—as we will—that we can have a modern welfare state for the 21st century, it needs to be efficiently run. We needed to build up our staff to launch the pension credit successfully and we now need an efficient service. Wherever possible, we will redeploy people within the Department or elsewhere in government. We have had some success in that already and we will find other uses for pension centres that will not be required for the Pension Service in the future.

Mr. Patrick McLoughlin (West Derbyshire) (Con): If the civil servants operating the Pension Service have done such a marvellous job, should not the Minister move them to the Child Support Agency?

Malcolm Wicks: It is always useful to have some light relief. We are determined that all our public agencies should be run efficiently. That is true for the Pension Service and it must also be true for the Child Support Agency. We realise that a challenge faces the agency, and we must meet that challenge for the sake of lone mothers—and, indeed, some lone fathers—who are being let down by the other parent and who need that support for the sake of their children.

Incapacity Benefit

10. **Paul Farrelly** (Newcastle-under-Lyme) (Lab): How many people are claiming incapacity benefit in Newcastle-under-Lyme. [196325]

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Work and Pensions (Maria Eagle): There are 4,500 people in Newcastle-under-Lyme claiming incapacity benefit. We are the first Government to try to help people on incapacity benefit who want to work to do so. We have already made progress, particularly through Jobcentre Plus, the new deals, and our flagship reform programme, pathways to work.

Paul Farrelly: I thank my hon. Friend for that reply. Is she aware that in constituencies such as mine a great number of people are on incapacity benefit due to the ravages of industries such as mining, pottery and steel? Clearly, in north Staffordshire we welcome the Government's support for programmes such as the job guarantee programme in Stoke, which is helping people off benefit and back into work, in line with pathways to work, but does she recognise that long-term claimants are deeply worried about the prospect of compulsory interviews? If those interviews are brought in, will she ensure that the Government show their sensitive side so that people are not dealt with in the same way as the many disability living allowance claimants who approach MPs for help week in, week out?

Maria Eagle: I will take up the DLA point with my hon. Friend on another occasion. I accept fully his opening point that there are higher levels of sickness and incapacity for occupational reasons in some areas, including his own. The pathways initiative is voluntary for long-term claimants. There is no compulsory element for those who have been on incapacity benefit for many years, many of whom, we find, volunteer to receive the help that the programme offers. We also find that compulsion is not an issue in practice. Most people who are concerned about the compulsory nature of the work-focused interview are reassured once they attend the first interview. Similarly, our condition management programme providers are not concerned about the impact that the compulsory element of attendance may have, especially in respect of mental health; nor are individuals who come to us, once they understand the nature of the process. I hope that I can reassure my hon. Friend that the compulsion element, which is supported by disability organisations countrywide, is not proving to be the concern that he fears.

Unemployment (Bulwell)

12. **Mr. Graham Allen** (Nottingham, North) (Lab): If he will visit the Bulwell jobcentre to discuss trends in unemployment rates in the area. [196328]

The Minister for Work (Jane Kennedy): Regrettably, I am not planning on visiting Bulwell jobcentre in the near future, unlike my hon. Friend who visited it last week and took that opportunity to compliment the staff and congratulate them on achieving a regional performance award for their very hard and excellent work. However, I am pleased to say that as a result of our well-proven labour market policies, long-term unemployment in my hon. Friend's constituency has fallen by 69 per cent.

Mr. Allen: I am not surprised that my right hon. Friend does not want to visit the Bulwell jobcentre in my constituency, because I have not wanted to visit it for nearly 18 months—even as an assiduous constituency Member of Parliament—whereas in 1997 I visited the office so often that I was invited to the leaving party for its then manager. Does not that prove to my hon. Friend what a brilliant success the new deal has been throughout the land? Will she make it clear that we intend not only to sustain the new deal, but to extend it wherever possible, to ensure that unemployment becomes an issue for all the right reasons, as it never was in the early days of the Government?

Jane Kennedy: I am grateful to my hon. Friend for those comments. He is right: the new deal programmes have been a well-proven success. More than 3,000 people have been helped into work through the new deal in Nottingham, North and more than 65,000 in the east midlands. Their lives have been changed through their experience of the new deal.

Progress2work Scheme

13. **John Mann** (Bassetlaw) (Lab): How many progress2work clients have maintained full-time work for over 12 months since joining the scheme. [196329]

The Minister for Work (Jane Kennedy): Jobcentre Plus delivers progress2work, which helps those people who have misused illegal drugs to overcome difficult barriers to enter employment. I can tell my hon. Friend that more than 3,000 people with a history of drug misuse have been helped into work through the progress2work programme, and more than 1,000 of them are still in work after three months or more.

John Mann: That was not quite an answer to the question that I tabled today, and I look forward to receiving the actual answer. Does the Minister recognise that constituencies such as mine, which have a significant and successful drugs treatment programme, need the help of her Department to get people back to work? Is she prepared to meet a delegation of experts from my constituency who have prepared alternative plans on how to get people back to work because of the failures of progress2work?

Jane Kennedy: I am disappointed to hear my hon. Friend describe progress2work as a failure. In north Nottinghamshire, 85 per cent. of those people helped into work through progress2work are still in work more than three months later. His question relates to 12 months, and he knows from informal discussions that although we do not yet have evaluations for the one-year point, it is still a mark of success when individuals with the difficulties faced by those people who take part in the progress2work scheme are continuing to work after three months. Indeed, a 23-year-old man who had used heroin for six years and had been in prison for three month has now been off heroin for six months. He is on methadone, but he is working. He has achieved his driving licence and forklift licence to maintain work, and he is still in work after six months. That is one of the individual success stories that tell me that progress2work is having the expected results. However, I would be very pleased to meet my hon. Friend and his delegation to talk about this crucial issue.

Pathways to Work Pilots

14. **Lynne Jones** (Birmingham, Selly Oak) (Lab): What assessment he has made of the effectiveness of the pathways to work pilots; and if he will make a statement. [196330]

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Work and Pensions (Maria Eagle): Pathways to work pilots are subject to ongoing evaluation. The early indications are extremely encouraging. As my right hon. friend the Secretary of State announced recently, pathways areas are getting double the level of improvement in the number of recorded job entries compared with other areas, and about six times as many people as in other places are taking up further help to get back to work.

Lynne Jones: I commend all those involved in the development of the programme, which I saw for myself on a visit to Derbyshire in the summer. The sooner that it operates in my constituency, the better. Does my hon. Friend agree that the holistic approach that the programme represents is far more likely to achieve long-term success than the punitive approach of threatening people with the loss of benefits? It is far more likely to be successful in getting people on incapacity benefit back into the world of work, particularly those who have mental health problems.

Maria Eagle: I understand my hon. Friend's point. I am glad that she was able to see pathways to work working in Derby, and I, too, hope that we can extend it to her constituency and other places as soon as possible. I know that she is chair of the all-party parliamentary group on mental health and understand her concern about the impact of compulsion, but I am a great supporter of compulsion in respect of the work-focused interview. There are safeguards to ensure that vulnerable people are not sanctioned if they do not turn up. It is absolutely crucial that people who have often been away from the jobs market and Jobcentre Plus for very many years get to see what kind of help can be offered. Many of them are surprised at the supportive way in which our staff can take them forward. Unless we get them in, we cannot help them get into work. So, the approach balances the rights of those individuals to be helped to get work with the responsibilities of having to turn up for the interviews.

Miss Anne Begg (Aberdeen, South) (Lab): Although my local Jobcentre Plus has done a great deal to help disabled people into work, the extra help and the holistic approach mentioned by my hon. Friend the Member for Birmingham, Selly Oak (Lynne Jones) is not available, particularly in respect of the help that exists elsewhere through access to the rehabilitation service. Will my hon. Friend the Minister go further and say when pathways to work will be rolled out across the country, so that my constituents can benefit from the extra help that it provides?

Maria Eagle: Pathways to work is a pilot programme. Until very recently, no one knew how to assist that group of people to get back into the labour market. We need to ensure that we spend the money in the right way to get results. Therefore, despite the fact that the early indications are very encouraging—we are very excited about them—we do not yet know what the impact of the pilot schemes will be in respect of sustained job entries, for example. We need to ensure that we go forward on the basis of evidence. Only when we have that evidence—it is appearing all the time—will we be able to judge when and, indeed, if we can extend that approach elsewhere.

Faversham Jobcentre

15. **Hugh Robertson** (Faversham and Mid-Kent) (Con): If he will make a statement on the future of Faversham jobcentre. [196331]

The Minister for Work (Jane Kennedy): The hon. Gentleman and I have discussed the future of Faversham jobcentre before. He knows that by 2006 we will have completed the roll-out of the Jobcentre Plus network and will be delivering radically improved services to all our customers. However, he knows, because I wrote to him on 3 November, that the existing jobcentre in Faversham is unfortunately not suitable for conversion to one of the new style offices, so we intend to provide our enhanced services from our Sittingbourne office, where many of our Faversham customers already go.

Hugh Robertson: I thank the Minister for her letter, if not the news that it contained. She will understand that the loss of the five days a week service and its replacement with one half day is causing a great deal of local anguish. Is there any way in which she can increase the number of days on which a face-to-face service is available? Will she assure me that no steps will be taken to close Faversham jobcentre before the new service at Sittingbourne is up and running?

Jane Kennedy: I will look at the detail again. However, the hon. Gentleman knows that there are only 620 claimants in his constituency, which is down 60 per cent. on the figure in 1997. Jobcentre Plus is not about only new offices. He rightly asks whether we can ensure that the new way in which services will be delivered will be sufficient to address the requirements placed upon them. I will look into the matter that he raised today. We will offer services outside jobcentres in such places as local surgeries and shared sites with local authorities to meet the needs of our local customers. I will look again at the number of days on which services will be available in Faversham.

Child Support Agency

17. **Mr Adrian Bailey** (West Bromwich West) (Lab/Co-op): What assessment he has made of the new Child Support Agency calculation scheme for maintenance payments; and if he will make a statement. [196333]

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Work and Pensions (Mr. Chris Pond): I was anxious that I might not get a further opportunity this afternoon to get to the Dispatch Box to talk about the Child Support Agency.

My right hon. Friend the Secretary of State has made regular progress reports to the House, the latest being on 28 October. More than 230,000 cases have been cleared under the new arrangements and more than 33,000 of the poorest families are benefiting from the new child maintenance premium. Customers and staff confirm that when it works well, they like the simplicity of the new scheme.

Mr. Bailey: I thank my hon. Friend for his reply. One of the results of the welcome simplification and transparency of the new scheme is that parents who are paying under the old scheme can access the website to calculate what their payments would be under the new scheme. However, they then of course find that they will not graduate on to the new scheme until some date in the future that is yet to be determined. Will he reassure my constituents and me that they will graduate at the earliest possible opportunity?

Mr. Pond: Of course we understand that the new scheme's transparency is attractive, which is why the whole House wants us to move towards it as quickly as possible. I understand that parents who want to move on to the new scheme quickly are frustrated because they do not know the date on which that will happen. If one parent is anxious to move on to the new scheme, it probably means that the other parent will lose significantly. However, I must make it clear that even after we have made the decision to move across to the new scheme, phasing arrangements will apply, which will mean that people will not move immediately on to new assessments. I reassure my hon. Friend that we will move on to the new scheme as soon as possible after we are sure that the new system is working properly.

Sir Robert Smith (West Aberdeenshire and Kincardine) (LD): That answer will not help people who are trying to work out what will happen to them. Our constituents need to plan their lives and finances. Can the Minister give them any idea of what "as soon as practically possible" means? What sort of phasing time scale does he expect to apply? Has he worked out at least the phasing part so that our constituents can understand how long the phasing will last?

Mr. Pond: Yes—the phasing arrangements are already well publicised. We reckon that 80 per cent. of cases, even with phasing, will move on to the new assessment within three years, although the change will take up to five years for others. That process is designed to ensure that people will not face large changes to their liabilities or assessments, but, again, I am afraid that I cannot give the hon. Gentleman or the House a clear date on which we will be able to begin the process. I wish that I could.

Mr. Russell Brown (Dumfries) (Lab): It is a tremendous achievement when the CSA secures the information to carry out the assessment. It is an even greater achievement when the non-resident parent makes the payments. The ex-partner of one of my constituents has been making payments to the CSA since June, yet she has not received a single penny. If I pass information on that case on to my hon. Friend, will he endeavour to secure the release of those funds at the earliest opportunity?

Mr. Pond: The agency is committed to passing on those payments as quickly as possible so that the children for whom they are intended get that help as soon as possible. There may be circumstances in which it cannot pass them on, sometimes because it does not have sufficient information on the intended recipient of the payment or it is waiting for clearance from bank accounts. However, I assure my hon. Friend that if he brings that case to me, I shall look at it carefully.

EU Summit

3.30 pm

The Prime Minister (Mr. Tony Blair): With permission, Mr. Speaker, I shall make a statement on the European Council that took place in Brussels on 4 and 5 November.

I should like to thank Prime Minister Balkenende and the Dutch Government for their arrangements for the summit, and for the way in which they have conducted their presidency to date. The Council was inevitably dominated by Iraq, given the presence of Dr. Allawi, the Iraqi Prime Minister.

First, let me express what I know will be the sentiments of the entire House in sending our profound condolences to the families of the Black Watch soldiers killed by a terrorist bomb in Iraq last week and our sympathy to those soldiers injured yesterday in another terrorist attack. We salute their dedication, professionalism and, above all, sheer and undaunted courage. They are an example to us all and we can and should be very proud of them.

Let us also be very clear about the fundamental importance to Britain's security of what the Black Watch and, indeed, the British armed forces in the south of Iraq are doing. Defeat of terrorism in Iraq is defeat for this new and virulent form of global terrorism everywhere. A democratic Iraq is the last thing the terrorists want to see. It is precisely for that reason—because victory for the terrorists would damage security around the world, including here in Britain—that we have to hold firm, be resolute and see this through, including in Falluja.

The action by allied and Iraqi forces under way in Falluja would cease now, immediately, if the terrorists and insurgents who are using Falluja as a base for terrorism laid down their weapons and agreed to participate in the elections. Over the past few months, as he explained today, Prime Minister Allawi has tried to persuade them to do so. They have refused, not because they are fighting a foreign occupation—if the terrorism stopped, American, British and other troops would leave Iraq—but because they are fighting democracy. They are fighting to stop democratic elections, supervised by the UN and due to take place in January. They know that while Falluja remains outside the control of the UN-endorsed Government, they can use it to wreck elections. Why do the terrorists fear elections? Because they know that given the chance to vote for their own Government, Iraqis would reject the extremism and fanaticism these terrorists represent.

The powerful speech made by Dr. Allawi to the European Council made precisely those points. He appealed for Europe's help. Some promised support of a military nature; others promised only financial support. But all of the Council agreed that it was in the interests of global security for Iraqi elections to take place. The Council also agreed a comprehensive package of EU assistance for Iraq, including a further programme of financial and logistical support for the elections, and financing for the UN protection force. This is on top of €300 million of humanitarian and reconstruction support from the EU over the past two years.

Following the re-election of President Bush, the Council also agreed that a close transatlantic partnership was fundamental to building international peace, security and prosperity, and that we now need to strengthen that alliance so that we can intensify our work together in addressing the main international threats and challenges of the moment, including regional conflicts, terrorism and the proliferation of weapons of mass destruction.

The Council also heard a presentation from the former Prime Minister of the Netherlands, Wim Kok, on his mid-term review of the Lisbon strategy on European economic competitiveness. He rightly concluded that Europe has to do far more to improve its underlying economic performance if it is to respond to the challenges of Asia and the United States, and he sensibly highlighted the importance of completing the single market, developing flexible labour markets, and promoting sustainable growth. The Council adopted a new five-year work programme of measures in the area of justice and home affairs. There are great benefits for the UK in co-operation with our European partners on these issues. Illegal immigration affects all member states. However, the opt-in protocol for Britain—*[Interruption.]*

Mr. Speaker: Order. Mr. Bellingham, you had better be quiet, otherwise I will put you out of the Chamber.

The Prime Minister: The opt-in protocol for Britain, negotiated in Amsterdam in 1997, remains. It is also enshrined in the new constitutional treaty. We have used it successfully over the past five years to opt in to new measures on asylum and combating illegal immigration, and to opt out of measures on legal migration, frontiers and visas. The protocol gives us the right to decide whether to participate in each item of the EU work programme and makes nonsense of claims that Britain has given up the right to control its own borders. If, of course, we opt in because we want a particular measure, it is in our interests that in a Europe of 25 and soon 27 or 28 countries the use of a veto by another country cannot block the measure.

Finally, the President-designate of the Commission, José Manuel Barroso, briefed us on his proposals for restructuring the new Commission. He has reacted decisively to resolve the dispute with the European Parliament, and I am confident that as a result the new Commission will be able to take office soon. In summary, the meeting once again underlined the importance to Britain of maintaining both a strong relationship with the United States of America and a strong place in the Councils of the European Union. Both partnerships are vital to the British national interest and it will remain the policy of this Government at least to nurture both.

Mr. Michael Howard (Folkestone and Hythe) (Con): I join the Prime Minister in expressing our deepest sympathy to the families of the soldiers of the Black Watch who have lost their lives and our good wishes for a speedy recovery to those who have been injured. I join, too, in the tribute that the Prime Minister paid to the outstanding dedication, professionalism and courage of the Black Watch.

I welcome both the European Council's discussions with Prime Minister Allawi and the financial contribution towards elections in Iraq. I support everything that the Prime Minister said about the

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importance of defeating terrorism in Iraq and elsewhere. Events in Samarra have shown that bringing an area under ostensible control does not, sadly, always mean an end to insurgency. Can the Prime Minister tell the House as much as he can about the coalition's plans to deal with the situation that is likely to arise in Iraq after the battle for Falluja?

I welcome the Council's agreement on the importance of a close transatlantic partnership and on the need to strengthen the alliance. What specific proposals does the Prime Minister have to bring that about? The communiqué emphasises the middle east peace process, although his statement was silent on the subject. Is it not time to turn again to the road map? Should we not now seize the moment to make real progress on the ground towards a secure Israel within internationally recognised borders and a viable Palestinian state?

The European Council also discussed Iran's nuclear programme. Has preliminary agreement been reached on that issue with Iran? In the past, Iran has not complied with the undertakings that it has given, so what measures are proposed to make sure that it does so this time? The communiqué also expresses grave concern about Darfur. Has not the time come for immediate United Nations action, including automatic sanctions, to ensure that the Sudanese Government reign in the militias? Should not the African Union forces be given the mission to keep the peace, rather than just monitor the situation, to put an end to the dreadful attacks on civilians that still continue in that area?

The Prime Minister has boasted endlessly about progress on economic reform in Europe. In 1998, he said

"We have to reform Europe and we are winning that battle".

In 2000, he said that there had been

"a sea change in European economic thinking . . . away from heavy-handed intervention and regulation, towards a new approach based on enterprise, innovation and competition."—[*Official Report*, 27 March 2000; Vol. 347, c. 21.]

But is not that all talk? Has not Romano Prodi admitted that economic reform in Europe has been a "big failure"? Has not the director general of the CBI said that Europe has got to change? Has not Wim Kok said that

"too many targets will be seriously missed"?

The aim of the Lisbon agenda was to make Europe the most dynamic economy in the world by 2010. Is not that just a pipe dream? Will not we all pay the price in terms of lower productivity, lower living standards and fewer jobs?

Promises on economic reform are not the only areas where the Prime Minister has been all talk. Four years ago, he said that he did not want a

"single, legally binding document called a Constitution"

yet that is exactly what he signed a week ago. The director general of the CBI has said that the constitution will not help business. The Prime Minister's own former chief economic adviser has said that it will

"entrench Europe's economic failings and drag Britain down too".

[Interruption.] Well, this was someone to whom the Prime Minister listened for six and a half years, so I think that his views might be entitled to a modicum of respect. Is not it the case that the constitution will make Europe's economy even less flexible, even less competitive and even more sluggish than it is today?

Earlier this year, the Prime Minister promised that

"we will retain completely our control over our asylum policy".

But was not that promise all talk? At the summit, a "common European asylum system" was agreed. The communiqué that the Prime Minister signed says:

"the Constitutional Treaty greatly increases the powers of the European Court of Justice in that area".

Does not that mean in plain English that more and more decisions on asylum and immigration will no longer be taken in this elected Parliament, but will in future be taken by the unelected judges of the European Court? It is no good the Prime Minister's talking about opt-outs when he has chosen to opt into all the major measures on asylum.

Is not all this a huge lost opportunity? Are not there practical policies that would turn some of the Prime Minister's rhetoric into action? If the Prime Minister means what he says about listening to people on Europe, why will not he match our pledge to set a date next year for the referendum on the constitution so that the people can have their say? If he means what he says about a modern Europe, why does not he put the case for greater flexibility, including the return of powers from Brussels to Britain so that we are no longer forced to accept so many new regulations that we do not support?

In 1997, the Prime Minister promised to

"lead a campaign for reform in Europe".

Seven and a half years later, in a diverse Union of 25, and in a fiercely competitive world, is not the need for a modern, flexible, reformed European Union more urgent than ever and under this Prime Minister, despite all his talk, are not we further away from it than we have ever been before?

The Prime Minister: First, let me deal with the questions on Iraq. In respect of Samarra, Najaf, Tal Afar and other places that have been taken back into the control of the Iraqi Government and Iraqi forces, it is of course true that terrorists will carry on actions in those places, as they did in Samarra just a few days ago.

There are a couple of interesting points, however. When those terrorists have been cleared out of these cities, it has become very obvious, contrary to what we were told beforehand, that they did not enjoy the support of local people; on the contrary, local people were all too glad to get rid of them so that they could get back to the lives that they wanted to lead.

Let us be clear that the purpose of the action in Falluja is to stop it being used as a base for terrorists and insurgents who are killing innocent people in Iraq and anybody who tries to make the country better. If and when we take back control of Falluja so that it is in the control of the Iraqi Government, a process of reconstruction will follow, as happened in Samarra and Najaf, where literally hundreds of millions of dollars are being spent on reconstruction projects. The people can then participate fully in the elections. I do not minimise the difficulties but it is essential for the holding of democratic, free and fair elections that the power and grip of the terrorists and insurgents in some parts of Iraq be broken. That is why Prime Minister Allawi has authorised the operations.

It is extremely important that we make progress on the middle east now. Progress must be towards a two-state solution; an Israel confident about its security and a viable, independent Palestinian state. It is essential to take measures to make progress on that. I hope that we shall do that as soon as possible. As I said when I congratulated President Bush on his re-election, it is the single most pressing political challenge of the moment.

We are still at the point of negotiation on Iran. A series of issues has been agreed at political director level, but not yet at intergovernmental level between the European three—France, Germany and the United Kingdom—and the Iranian Government but we are hopeful that we will be able to make some progress in the next few days.

On Sudan, it is important to make it clear that not only the Sudanese Government should exercise restraint; some of the Sudanese rebel groups must do so. A series of measures has been laid down for the Sudanese Government and they must follow them. If they do not, there has to be reference to the Security Council and necessary measures must be taken.

I agree with the right hon. and learned Member for Folkestone and Hythe (Mr. Howard) that the African Union should not only increase the number of troops available there but make it clear that, if possible, it can keep the peace as well as monitor what is happening there. However, it is a difficult and delicate situation for the troops that are going into it. We are watching the situation carefully. My right hon. Friends the Foreign Secretary and the Secretary of State for International Development are in constant touch with their opposite numbers in other capitals and with the Sudanese Government. However, the situation remains serious. If anything, it has got worse rather than better in the past few weeks. If we do not get obedience and compliance with the measures that the international community laid down, we will have to revert to the matter at Security Council level and take action.

It is worth pointing out that, since 1999, some 6 million jobs have been created in Europe and liberalisation has taken place in many sectors under the Lisbon strategy process. I agree that it is important that we do more but the right hon. and learned Gentleman's policy of being a semi-marginalised player in Europe will not help to get economic reform. As for the woeful things that he claims will happen if the EU constitution is passed, I merely point out that he used to make the same predictions when he was Secretary of State for Employment in the previous Government about the social chapter. I think I remember his saying that 500,000 jobs would desert Britain if we signed the social chapter. We signed it and 2 million extra jobs have been created since. His powers of prediction are not good.

I am surprised that the right hon. and learned Gentleman opposes our opt-in on asylum. A few months ago, he made a speech in which he said that a process whereby countries decided whether to opt in to specific measures was precisely the direction in which Europe wanted to go. We have delivered that, but the moment that we do so, he switches around 180°, in his usual opportunistic fashion, and says that it is a disaster for the country.

The right hon. and learned Gentleman mentioned the charter of rights. Let me read part of our protocol to him. It states:

> "No decision of the Court of Justice interpreting any such provision"—

to do with asylum and immigration—

> "shall be binding upon or applicable in the United Kingdom."

That destroys the effect of the right hon. and learned Gentleman's point. As for his view that we should have a bold strategy of renegotiating the existing membership of the European Union, it is, as some his hon. Friends have pointed out, simply not on the table. He would have to get the agreement of every one of the other members to renegotiate that. How many members have agreed? [HON. MEMBERS: "Norway."] I think we are back to the Norway issue.

Following the right hon. and learned Gentleman's comments at the weekend, it is extraordinary that, in his first year as Conservative leader, he has managed to achieve a foreign policy position that would make us a marginalised member of the European Union and not welcome in the White House either. Only his leadership could have brought the Conservative conception of foreign policy to such a pass.

Mr. Charles Kennedy (Ross, Skye and Inverness, West) (LD): I thank the Prime Minister for his statement. May I join him, on behalf of my right hon. and hon. Friends, in extending our condolences to the families of the Black Watch personnel who have been killed or injured, as well as to those of the very brave civilians who are giving their support and assistance to the Black Watch in their extremely dangerous job? The families not only of serving Black Watch personnel but of the Scots Guards, who have reportedly been placed on replacement standby, would welcome some clarification of the Government's position on possible replacement forces, given that they are clearly adhering to their view that the Black Watch will be home by Christmas. The House and the families concerned would welcome any clarification that the Prime Minister can give them on that issue, not least because there were contradictory reports in the media this weekend on whether replacement forces would be deployed at the end of this period.

Whatever the original principled disagreements over the basis for the war, and, indeed, the more recent divergences of view over what many of us regarded as a strategic political and military shift over the Black Watch deployment, there is obviously consensus on wanting to see the democratic timetable and an independent Iraq achieved, and on our having no truck with terrorism. I am sure that the Prime Minister will acknowledge, however, that the real concerns over this American-led assault on Falluja—not least in terms of the civilian casualties involved—give rise to fair and legitimate questions. These questions have been raised on the international stage by Kofi Annan, the Secretary-General of the United Nations, and they are also arising within the Iraqi interim Government, not least in the different viewpoints now being expressed by the Prime Minister and the President there.

Does the Prime Minister agree that, whatever the events of the next few days and weeks in Falluja, it is essential that the Americans' conduct does not squander

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any moral capital or undermine the legitimacy of the democratic process, especially if that were to result in a Sunni boycott of any elections taking place in January? On a practical as well as moral level, will the Prime Minister address the question of what contingency plans have been put in place to deal with those insurgents who have already fled Falluja, or who will in due course be flushed out of the city and move to other parts of the country, perhaps to carry on their notorious activities there? Formal hostilities in Falluja are commencing as we speak, so I am sure that the Prime Minister will acknowledge that these are responsible questions to which the House will genuinely want to return in due course.

On the allied issue of Iran, the Prime Minister has already responded to some of the discussions that have taken place. He has an important summit meeting coming up later this week with President Bush, which is surely welcome, given the agenda that will be in front of them. If, as he suggested a moment ago, further discussions among the three European powers—the United Kingdom, France and Germany—will be taking place over the next few days, is he hopeful that he will be in a position to ask the President to endorse the strategy of these three countries in regard to Iran later this week in Washington? On completion of that summit meeting, does he intend to return to the House with a further statement of this kind, perhaps this time next week, to enable further discussions to take place?

On the issue of the eventual composition of the European Commission, does the Prime Minister agree that the way in which the European Parliament, as the directly elected representative body of all the member states, was able to have an impact on the President of the Commission should encourage one and all of a Eurosceptic disposition or otherwise that it is the proper forum in which proper European parliamentary pressure can be exerted to achieve a healthier, more desirable outcome? Does he also agree that this recent crisis, so-called, in fact redoubles the argument for a smaller Commission—ultimately—of precisely the type that the constitution puts forward?

Finally, on the issue of the constitution and the referendum pertaining to it, the Prime Minister has said that it is the Government's position that there should be a referendum in due course. Will he confirm that the Government, irrespective of what might happen in referendums that may precede one here, will proceed with a referendum, come what may, in this country? If the type of economic liberalism and greater economic flexibility, to which he alluded in his statement and which were discussed at the summit, are achieved, will he perhaps, on a future occasion, see scope for doubling up a referendum on the constitution with one on the single currency?

The Prime Minister: First, in respect of Iraq, let me say that although we had a disagreement about the war, I accept entirely that the questions the right hon. Gentleman is asking are perfectly legitimate ones to ask in this connection. I have made it clear that the Black Watch deployment will be finished so that the Black Watch is back in time for Christmas. It is not anticipated that the Scots Guards will replace the Black Watch in the job that it is doing at the present time.

I also entirely agree that the important thing is to ensure that the democratic elections in Iraq go ahead. As I think we saw with Afghanistan, what happens in the course of the movement towards democracy is that some of those people who were anti-democratic forces end up on the defensive because people can see that there is a democratic process they can take part in. The power of some warlords in Afghanistan was broken not in the two years after the invasion, but in the few months running up to the democratic elections.

The decision in respect of Falluja was taken by the Iraqi Government. It is really important that people understand this. Prime Minister Allawi made it very clear when he was appointed by the United Nations—endorsed by the United Nations—back in June that decisions of this nature were for him. Anyone who heard his press conference today, including his description of exactly how those terrorists and insurgents are using hospitals, schools, mosques and other places to store explosives and to try to ensure that in removing them there is the maximum damage done, could hear from his statement how passionately he believes that this is important. I understand that the decision has also been endorsed by the National Assembly. The very fear that he and others have is that if these terrorists and insurgents are allowed to carry on effectively making no-go areas in Iraq for the Iraqi Government, the issue of elections will be made more difficult.

That brings me to the UN and the Secretary-General's letter. He said in that letter that the Iraqi elections are what he called, I think, the keystone of progress in Iraq. That is true. It is true also that he went on to express reservations about the action in Falluja, but as Prime Minister Allawi says, without the action in Falluja the keystone of the democratic process may be at risk. That is the important reason for doing it.

I think the Secretary-General is right also in saying it is important that we retain the moral high ground in fighting for elections in Iraq, but I say this to him and to others: part of us doing that is to keep emphasising the whole time to people that if the terrorists and insurgents would stop, elections would go forward. There would be full participation by Sunnis and others in those elections. Everyone wants that to happen. If the terrorism and insurgency stopped, there would be no need for American and British and other countries' troops to help the Iraqi forces before they are able to look after Iraq on their own.

The truth of the matter is that it is the terrorism that keeps troops from America, Britain and elsewhere there. If it stopped, of course, the Iraqi Government would be able to assume control of those areas, the UN-sponsored elections would take place and we would have a democratically elected Government. That is why I say to people that the absolutely critical argument to understand is that these terrorists are not fighting foreign troops because of their presence—they are fighting them because they are an obstacle to preventing democratic elections. They know that if democratic elections happen, people will never give up democracy.

In Afghanistan, turnout was highest among women, and highest in the areas where the Taliban used to hold sway. It is obvious from the past few weeks, I am afraid, that the terrorists have an increasingly sophisticated strategy, in relation to how they operate, what they say and how they play the modern media. They are trying to ensure that they focus attention not on their attempt to prevent democracy but on the presence of foreign forces in Iraq, when they know perfectly well that those forces would leave if only the terrorism stopped.

In respect of Iran, the Americans, France, Germany and the UK take the same line: we have all made it clear that it is not acceptable for Iran to acquire nuclear weapons capability. It should come into compliance with the International Atomic Energy Agency. We are trying to put maximum pressure on it to do that. I am sure that the right hon. Gentleman would endorse that strategy, which we all endorse.

In respect of the European Parliament, I sort of agree with what the right hon. Gentleman says. In respect of a smaller Commission, I entirely agree with what he says—in time, I think that that is important. We have made it clear that we will have a referendum on the EU constitution. As for combining that with one on the euro, we have always made it clear that membership of the single currency must be decided on the basis of the economic tests, and that remains the case.

Sir Gerald Kaufman (Manchester, Gorton) (Lab): Was it not churlish of the Prime Minister not to congratulate the Leader of the Opposition on his first anniversary as leader, since the right hon. and learned Gentleman will not be around to celebrate a second anniversary?

Mr. Speaker: Order. The right hon. Gentleman is out of order. I call Sir Stuart Bell.

Sir Stuart Bell (Middlesbrough) (Lab): I am grateful, Mr. Speaker, for the opportunity of answering a question on behalf of the Prime Minister.

However, the Prime Minister, in his statement, referred to our strong relationship with the United States and our strong place in the European Union's Councils. He said that that was Government policy and that it was in our national interest, but were there not siren voices in the Council indicating that competition between the European Union and the United States was a better policy than competition and collaboration? Will he not reiterate that that transatlantic co-operation and closeness to which he referred should also be the policy of the entire European Union?

The Prime Minister: Obviously, I agree with my hon. Friend. In so far as there are any voices saying that Europe should try to set up a rival pole of power to the United States, I think that it is far better that we co-operate strongly together. Of course, that is another reason why it is important for Britain to stay part of the European Union and a key player in Europe. It cannot be stressed too often that many countries around the table in Europe—let us remember that 12 out of the 25 have troops in Iraq—are strong supporters of the transatlantic alliance and need Britain arguing that case with them.

Sir Peter Tapsell (Louth and Horncastle) (Con): Will the Prime Minister now answer the core argument in the letter of the Secretary-General of the United Nations, which is that an attack on Sunni-held Falluja by mainly Shi'a militia, under cover of American firepower, far from making it more likely that there will be peaceful elections there in January, will prove dangerously divisive for the future social and political unity of Iraq?

The Prime Minister: That is simply not the case. It is not the Sunni-held town of Falluja: the town is held hostage by terrorists and insurgents. If they stopped and laid down their weapons, that town would have its own municipal democratic elections, and the town as a whole could participate in the Iraqi elections. Surely what the hon. Gentleman and every democrat should say is, "There is no need to fight; if you believe in what you are doing, stand in the elections." What Prime Minister Allawi would say to him is that the very purpose of the terrorists, many of whom are not Iraqi, never mind from Falluja, is to stop the democratic process. Surely all of us who are democrats, whatever we think about the war, should agree with the Iraqi Government.

Helen Jackson (Sheffield, Hillsborough) (Lab): Many of us feel that since the American elections there is an even greater need for very close integration with Europeans on our foreign policy. Was my right hon. Friend able to secure the full backing of European Union partners for our aid and development programme, and particularly our concentration on Africa, for when we hold the presidency—we hope—of both the European Union and the G8 next year?

The Prime Minister: My hon. Friend is right to say that aid and development are an important element of our partnership in the European Union. I believe that there is wholehearted support for that, and I also believe that there is support for it in the United States of America. It is important, therefore, for us to use not just the EU presidency but the G8 presidency to further that agenda. As my hon. Friend will know, we have selected climate change and Africa as the two key subjects for our G8 presidency.

Sir Teddy Taylor (Rochford and Southend, East) (Con): Given widespread concern about the appalling situation in Iraq extending and not being contained, will the Prime Minister and the European Council make it abundantly clear that we are wholly opposed to the bombing or invasion of Iran by America, Israel or anyone else? Will he seek to remind his friend President Bush that it is only a few years since the Americans were supporting, and providing weapons of mass destruction for, their then friend Saddam Hussein so that he could invade Iran?

The Prime Minister: No one is talking about an invasion of Iran. No one has ever talked about it, to my knowledge. I think it is completely absurd of us to talk in this way. However, it is obviously important for Iran to face up to its obligations under the International Atomic Energy Agency. It should also be recognised that our reasons for taking action against Saddam Hussein—going back over 12 or 13 years—were his invasion of Kuwait, his defiance of United Nations resolutions, and the plain intent that he had to develop weapons that cause immense damage not just to the middle east but to the wider world.

Mr. Dennis Skinner (Bolsover) (Lab): Is the Prime Minister aware that, now that we have these statements

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on European summits, no one—with the exception of the leader of the Liberal Democrats—seems to care about the euro or the single currency any more? Are there any long faces when he meets these people? There has been all this talk about our having to join. Seven and a half years have elapsed, and we have kept our promise. I hope everyone understands that. Will the Prime Minister tell them that, at least until the next election, we will not have anything to do with it, and will leave the Liberal Democrats to play with their own little toys?

The Prime Minister: I will not put it exactly like that, but my hon. Friend makes an important point. For years we have been told, particularly by the Conservatives, that our ability to decide whether we want to join the single currency will somehow be taken away by Europe. The fact is that we have that right—we have it absolutely—and we have made it clear that in the end it is a decision for the British people.

Mr. William Cash (Stone) (Con): The Prime Minister referred to Wim Kok and his indictment of the way in which Europe has been going. He has also referred to the CBI. He will know that today the president of the CBI issued a similar indictment. He also knows that David Arculus, the head of his own Better Regulation Task Force, has said that this is costing £100 billion a year in over-regulation, much of which emanates from the EU. Does he accept that in the past seven years he and his Government have agreed to a large number of those regulations? Does he also accept that he can therefore do something about it? He can use the powers of this legislative Chamber—this House of Commons—in the interests of British business, which is becoming increasingly angry, to repeal or amend any of the legislation that is having such an impact on British business.

The Prime Minister: Let me make two points. First, I do not think the director-general of the CBI would agree with the hon. Gentleman's views on Europe, whatever he says about European regulation.

Mr. Cash: It was the president.

The Prime Minister: Or indeed the president, for that matter.

Secondly, of course, regulation has been agreed by this Government in the European Union and indeed by the previous Government in the European Union, which I know was not much to the hon. Gentleman's liking either, but it is important to recognise that the only way that we can get Europe to take a better and more sensible view of regulation is to be in there and to be part of it. The alternative is to get out of Europe altogether. I think that he probably would favour that in the end, but it would not be in the interests of British business and British jobs. I do not think that the CBI would opt for that either.

Keith Vaz (Leicester, East) (Lab): Does not my right hon. Friend agree that the importance of the Lisbon agenda is that, for the first time, it set out benchmarks for economic reform in the EU? The purpose of the Kok report was, rightly, to praise countries such as Britain that have risen to the challenge of economic reform and to criticise others that have failed to do so. It is an opportunity to ensure that those who have not moved forward will do so by the time of the mid-term review next spring and indeed during our presidency.

The Prime Minister: That is absolutely right. It is worth pointing out that it is not simply Britain that has undertaken economic reform but Spain, Denmark, Holland and other countries. A huge reform programme is under way in Germany, tackling really difficult issues. The purpose of the Wim Kok report was to say not that everything in Europe is hopeless but that, on the contrary, there was a certain amount of progress but there needed to be much more.

Mr. Simon Thomas (Ceredigion) (PC): As the Prime Minister set out tackling climate change as one of his key international objectives for next year in the G8 and in the EU presidency, can he say what progress was made at the summit on that subject? In particular, can he take the opportunity to defend the reputation of his chief scientific adviser, Sir David King, against the attacks on him last week by the adviser to President Bush on climate change?

The Prime Minister: I am not sure that the person who made the attacks is an adviser to President Bush, still less a member of the US Administration, but obviously I entirely agree with David King's position on climate change. He is absolutely right. We did not discuss it at the European Council, but the European Union would be broadly supportive of that position. It is important that we try to begin a dialogue with the US, very much based on science and technology, as to how to deal with greenhouse gas emissions in the years to come. I hope that we can take forward that agenda.

Mrs. Alice Mahon (Halifax) (Lab): If, after another brutal bombardment of Falluja, the Sunni Muslims refuse to participate in the elections, what strategy will the ever decreasing coalition employ to bring democracy and security to Iraq? Will it be bomb a city a month until all that is left in Iraq is rubble and hatred?

The Prime Minister: No, the strategy is very clear: it is to say that, instead of the government of Iraq and Iraqi towns being decided by terrorists who plant car bombs, kill innocent people and kill contractors who are trying to make the country better, there should be a democratic process in which people stand for election both locally and nationally and get elected on the basis of the ballot box. I cannot understand why people cannot agree with that.

In respect of the figure of 100,000 that has been bandied about as the number of people who have died in Iraq over the past period, I saw today, looking at the figures in greater detail, that the figure is extrapolated from the recorded deaths of 61 people. When one sees that, one can understand how much propaganda is coming through on the issue.

Mr. Peter Lilley (Hitchin and Harpenden) (Con): Does the Prime Minister accept that what he has signed up to on immigration is a ratchet mechanism for the one-way transfer of power on making immigration policy away from this country to the supranational authorities in Europe? Can he confirm that, whenever the Government opt in, as he puts it, to immigration measures taken under that procedure, if circumstances subsequently change, or the European Court interprets those measures in ways that we do not anticipate, we will be unable to amend them, or to withdraw from them?

The Prime Minister: The simple position is that we are entitled to decide whether we opt in to any of these measures. That is the pick and choose Europe, if you like, that I thought the right hon. Gentleman and others supported. It is precisely what we are able to do. Indeed, it is more than that: if at the end of the process we decide not to opt in when the measure is first discussed, after that discussion, we can also decide to opt in.

Of course, once we opt in, we are part of that process. [HON. MEMBERS: "Ah!"] But it is our complete choice as to whether to opt in; we might as well say that about any measure in Europe. I thought that the whole point was that the Conservative party wanted a situation in which, when measures were discussed, we had the decision whether to opt in or not. This gives us that decision. Obviously, once we opt in, that is presumably because we have decided that it is in our interests to do so. Only the Conservative party could say that a decision whether to opt in is somehow a negation of our sovereignty; surely it is the expression of it.

Mr. Eric Joyce (Falkirk, West) (Lab): Does my right hon. Friend agree that the best way for people in Scotland, and across the United Kingdom, to show their support for the Black Watch Regiment is by recognising its ability to carry out the task in hand, and the historical importance of that task?

The Prime Minister: My hon. Friend, who I believe was actually a member of the Black Watch Regiment—

Mr. Joyce *indicated assent.*

The Prime Minister: My hon. Friend speaks with a particular authority, and I hope that people will listen to what he said. I am sure that, as someone who used to serve with the Black Watch, his words will command the attention and support of everyone.

Mr. David Heathcoat-Amory (Wells) (Con): On immigration and asylum, can the Prime Minister confirm the figure extracted from the Home Office in July showing that the United Kingdom has recently agreed to participate in 26 separate measures in that field, including measures defining unauthorised entry, transit and residence, visas, asylum, and the qualification and status of non-EU nationals in seeking entry to this country? Will he confirm that that figure is correct? If it is, does that not show a clear transfer of decision making and authority from this House to the EU, to be decided by majority voting, even if the Government disagree with the eventual decision by that procedure?

The Prime Minister: We decide our own asylum policy here. The Opposition can make many criticisms of the asylum and immigration policy, but the one sure thing is that it has been decided here. However, with some measures we will want to opt in—for example, those to do with illegal immigration, for which it is important that we get European co-operation. Surely the best thing is for it to be the decision of the Government whether to take part. If we decide to take part, we do take part—presumably because we think that that is in our interest. If we decide not to take part, we do not have to take part. It is beyond me why that does not command the support of the Conservative party.

Harry Cohen (Leyton and Wanstead) (Lab): In the discussions with Dr. Allawi—who, according to the last poll that I saw, represented about 3 per cent. of Iraqi public opinion—was it maintained that the assault on Falluja was being done for the United Nations, as the Prime Minister maintained to my hon. Friend the Member for Halifax (Mrs. Mahon) last week? How can that be so, when the Secretary-General of the United Nations has urged that it should not be undertaken, and said that it would make legitimate elections in Iraq in January less possible?

The Prime Minister: Surely, in the end, as for the decision whether Dr. Allawi commands support in Iraq—all the polling evidence that I have seen shows that he enjoys considerable support there—my hon. Friend may be right, or I may be right. Put it to the test. Let there be elections in Iraq in January, and let the terrorists and insurgents lay down their weapons so that those elections can take place. I would have thought that the best message—even from people such as my hon. Friend, who, for reasons that I entirely respect, was against the war in Iraq—would be to say, "Whatever we thought about the conflict in Iraq, lay down your weapons, let the United Nations-sponsored elections take place, and then let's see who has the support in Iraq."

Mr. John Bercow (Buckingham) (Con): It seems that there was no summit discussion of the worsening crisis in Burma. Given that the military junta there is guilty of savage violations of human rights every day, including using rape as a weapon of war, forced labour, compulsory relocation, use of child soldiers, use of human minesweepers, bestial destruction of villages and the incarceration of 1,400 political prisoners, does the right hon. Gentleman agree that it is essential that the European Union should adopt not token measures in the form of action against the pineapple juice sector in that country but a robust programme of targeted sanctions against the oil, gas and telecommunications sector, so that we can bring the regime to heel and offer the people of Burma the prospect of the freedom and justice that we have long enjoyed, and they have too long been denied?

The Prime Minister: The hon. Gentleman makes a very powerful case. It is important that the European Union adopt stronger action, but to be frank, at the moment it is not possible to get that agreement in Europe. I understand that the matter was discussed at the General Affairs Council, but there is another and bigger issue: how the United Nations changes its charter and its rules, so that the way in which a country treats its own people can be a proper and fitting subject of

[The Prime Minister]

international discussion. It is not only a question of Burma; there are many other countries in which people live in a state of deep repression, and it is only because of the absence of television cameras that no one notices or protests about it.

Mr. George Foulkes (Carrick, Cumnock and Doon Valley) (Lab/Co-op): On the middle east, the Palestinian Cabinet Minister Saeb Erekat said to me that the most useful help being given to the Palestinian Authority by any European Government is the British Government's training of the security forces, and he asked me to pass on his thanks. He also said that the Prime Minister, who has the trust of the Palestinian Authority and of the Israeli Government, is in a unique position to take an initiative to revive the middle east peace process. Will he take up that challenge?

The Prime Minister: I thank my right hon. Friend for his comments about those who are engaged in the training of the Palestinian Authority's security forces. Britain has undertaken this work over a significant period, as well as work on political reform and governance. Actually, a lot has been happening underneath the surface that is very important, although not much noticed. As I have said before, I will obviously do everything that I can to ensure that this peace process becomes reinvigorated; plainly, that will be a significant part of the discussions that I have later in the week.

Michael Fabricant (Lichfield) (Con): But further to that question, given the grave ill health of Yasser Arafat, was any consideration given to the possible succession in Palestine? Does the Prime Minister accept that in a way the whole peace process is on a cusp? If the Palestinian organisation falls into the wrong hands, there could be impasse between Israel and Palestine, whereas if the right people succeed Yasser Arafat, the peace process could have a very real future.

The Prime Minister: I agree, which is why it is important to proceed with measures that would allow elections in the Palestinian Authority to take place and the drafting of a new constitution. What is important is that we have empowered Ministers who can take decisions on security issues, but I agree with the hon. Gentleman that the situation is very much in the balance. It is important that we ensure that there is a Palestinian leadership that wants to make progress in the middle east. It is then for the international community to give that moderate Palestinian leadership support.

Mr. Harry Barnes (North-East Derbyshire) (Lab): Is the Prime Minister aware that I utterly condemn, and wish to see countered, terrorism in Iraq not only against the Black Watch but against Iraqi citizens? Four railway workers, all of whom were members of the Iraqi Federation of Trade Unions, were murdered on 27 October between Mosul and Baghdad. What measures have been put in place in Falluja to ensure that such people—innocent people who are held hostage, as the Prime Minister himself put it—are not attacked?

The Prime Minister: My hon. Friend—he was an opponent of the war, but he has taken a very honourable position on these issues all the way through—is right in saying what the dilemma is. The terrorists are trying to cause maximum difficulty, which is why they are taking over places such as hospitals, schools and mosques. That is the reason why the situation in Falluja has not happened before now. I know from my discussions with Prime Minister Allawi and his Government that over the past few months, they have been making every effort to get a peaceful settlement in Falluja. That included making it clear that, provided that Iraqi Government forces came in and took control in Falluja, there would be no need for multinational forces to be in there, and it included ensuring that it was realised that there would be municipal elections in Falluja. The problem that we now have, however, is that unless we take back control of Falluja, ultimately it will be very difficult for ordinary people there to make progress, but we are doing everything that we can to limit civilian casualties in the course of the action that we take, which is why this is being proceeded with in a very careful way. I entirely agree that the important thing is to ensure that the Iraqi people understand that in the end this is not directed at them, but at the people who are preventing them from getting a democratic outcome.

Mr. Desmond Swayne (New Forest, West) (Con): I found myself in profound agreement with what the Prime Minister had to say about Iraq and the transatlantic alliance, but the gloss on the summit coming from the Elysée palace is very different, prompting the question whether the Prime Minister and the President of France attended the same European summit.

The Prime Minister: It is probably not the first time that that has been said. Of course there are people in Europe who take a different view of what our attitude should be to the transatlantic alliance, but my answer is that we should remain in there, fighting for the right view of how Europe should co-operate with America, not get out and leave the field to those we disagree with.

Hugh Bayley (City of York) (Lab): Does the Prime Minister agree that there would be security benefits as well as environmental advantages if the west, the European Union, the United States and other Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development countries reduced their dependence on, and consumption of, oil? What will the EU do over the coming months to try to persuade the second-term US Government to take the problem of global warming more seriously and to reduce US consumption of oil?

The Prime Minister: The emissions trading agreement is obviously an important part of what Europe is trying to do to deal with the problem. Europe as a whole has signed up to the Kyoto protocol. I think that issues connected to security of supply are making people think again, even in the United States of America, albeit from a different perspective. I have made Africa and climate change the key priorities for the G8, so there will be an opportunity to take this agenda forward. It is possible to see how we can do that—probably, when it comes to discussion with the Americans, through the route of science and technology. Long-term issues to do with energy supply, as well as climate change, make that imperative.

Sir Robert Smith (West Aberdeenshire and Kincardine) (LD): Further to that answer, one of the explanations for why our constituents, especially the fuel-poor and large energy-using industries, are threatened with extremely high energy bills this winter is that we have managed to liberalise our energy market quite successfully in the UK, while mainland Europe has dragged its heels. Did the Prime Minister find anything in the summit to encourage any optimism that mainland Europe will eventually address that agenda, open up its own energy markets and decouple the price of gas from oil?

The Prime Minister: The hon. Gentleman is absolutely right. The Council did discuss the issue of energy liberalisation and why it is important to pursue it. A process of change is now under way, and it will reduce energy prices for our consumers. One of the problems is that we have a liberalised energy market, while other countries in Europe do not, but the movement is definitely towards liberalisation.

Hugh Robertson (Faversham and Mid-Kent) (Con): Did the Prime Minister have any discussions with other European Heads of State about the attitudes of countries bordering Iraq? Is there any evidence that any of those countries are providing men and equipment to the rebels in Falluja?

The Prime Minister: A conference taking place in Egypt in the next couple of weeks will discuss that very issue. It is true to say that there are varying reports, but when Dr. Allawi visited Syria recently, he found a willingness to co-operate. I think that it is immensely important for both Syria and Iran in particular to ensure that their borders are not being used as a route for people to cross over and engage in terrorist activity. We are certainly making it very clear to those countries that any such support of terrorism in Iraq is unacceptable. I believe that the conference will play some part in flushing out people's positions and will send out a strong signal that those who support terrorists and insurgents are in breach of their moral obligations to the international community.

Mr. Jonathan Djanogly (Huntingdon) (Con): The surrender of Britain's veto on asylum and immigration policy in favour of qualified majority voting forms part of the European constitution. That being the case, why is the Prime Minister taking the decision to give up the veto now? Can he not wait for the referendum, when the British people will be able to vote on the constitution?

The Prime Minister: The hon. Gentleman said, "That being the case", but it is not the case. We are not giving up the absolute right to decide whether to opt in to any asylum or immigration measure, and that is very sensible. There are certain issues—for example, as I said a moment ago, people trafficking and illegal immigration—on which we want to be part of European action. However, we can decide those issues one by one. As my right hon. Friend the Home Secretary rightly said, it is the best of both worlds.

The hon. Gentleman probably represents the mainstream view in the Conservative party today. It is not really about opting in or opting out, or this veto or that veto. What he and his colleagues want is a fundamental restructuring of Britain's existing relationship with the European Union—*[Interruption.]* Well, one or two Opposition Members shake their heads and many of them nod. Why do they not sort it out between themselves and come back with a proper position?

Regional Referendums

4.30 pm

The Deputy Prime Minister (Mr. John Prescott) *rose*—[HON. MEMBERS: "Hooray!"] Here today, gone tomorrow.

With permission, Mr. Speaker, I should like to report to the House on the regional referendum in the north-east, held last Thursday. May I first congratulate Ged Fitzgerald, the chief counting officer, and his staff across the north-east, who ran such a well-organised poll and count? I also want to thank the police, the Post Office and the Electoral Commission for their co-operation during the referendum.

Turnout, at nearly 48 per cent., was a great deal more than many people expected and has shown that all-postal voting can be extremely successful when the ground is well prepared. This ballot was conducted successfully, without witness statements, and the turnout has increased considerably. It was higher than the 42 per cent. turnout in the European elections in the north-east, higher than the 34 per cent. in the London referendum and similar to the 50 per cent. in the Welsh referendum. I am sure that the Electoral Commission will want to reflect on that.

Throughout the referendum, the Government have made it absolutely clear that the decision whether to have elected regional government rests with the people. It is their choice and their say. Our policy of devolution, set out in our manifesto, means giving power to people in our nations and regions so that they can set their own priorities and make more decisions that affect their lives. As a result, London now has city-wide government and a Mayor powerful enough to run a global city. The Scottish Parliament enables the people of Scotland to make key decisions without recourse to Westminster for the first time in hundreds of years. The Welsh Assembly has given the Welsh people a powerful new voice to create jobs, prosperity, and social justice. Each of these new bodies was voted for by the people and has since proved to be very popular.

It is worth remembering that proposals for Scottish and Welsh devolution failed to win public support in the first referendum in 1979, only for the situation to be reversed 20 years later in a new referendum. On 4 November, we offered the people of the north-east the chance to benefit from an elected regional assembly. Last Thursday, voters in the north-east decided by a margin of 78 per cent. to 22 per cent. that they did not want that, and of course we abide by their decision.

I confirm to the House that the result of the referendum means that the Regional Assemblies Bill will not be introduced in the coming Session of Parliament; under existing legislation, there can be no further referendum on regional assemblies in the north-east for at least seven years; and—let me make it clear—despite press speculation, there will be no reorganisation of local government in County Durham or Northumberland arising out of this referendum result. Indeed, I hope that the two councils can now get on with delivering effective services for their people.

The decision now raises the question as to whether to proceed, as we previously intended, with referendums in the north-west and in Yorkshire and the Humber. We have reflected on the outcome of the referendum in the north-east, as promised. We have also made it clear that referendums in the north-west and in Yorkshire and the Humber would have to wait until the Electoral Commission had completed its work on the "new foundation model for voting." That is not due to be published until the end of March 2005.

The Electoral Commission has also said that there should be no electoral pilots using the new model until at least September 2005, but in the meantime, under the legislation, our ability to hold referendums based on the current soundings exercise runs out in June 2005. We would, therefore, need to conduct a new soundings exercise and bring orders to call the referendums before both Houses of Parliament under the Regional Assemblies (Preparations) Act 2003. All that would result in a long period of uncertainty for local government in the two regions, and we do not think that is acceptable. I will not, therefore, be bringing forward orders for referendums in either the north-west or Yorkshire and the Humber. If and when, in the future, a region wants to move ahead with a referendum, the House will have plenty of notice of that event.

I do not want to underplay the importance of last week's decision, but the House should remember that elected regional assemblies are just one part of the wider programme of devolution and decentralisation in England. For a decade or more, it has been recognised that there are issues that must be dealt with at regional, rather than national, level, but which need to be co-ordinated over an area larger than any single local authority—[HON. MEMBERS: "Why?"] Members should look at a map if they are in any doubt.

That is why the Conservatives established the Government offices for the regions in 1994, and rightly so. We have since strengthened the Government offices to include more departments. We also created, in 1998, the regional development agencies as economic powerhouses for their regions; the Conservatives opposed them, but I believe that they have now changed their minds.

In the last two years alone, the English RDAs have created or safeguarded more than 160,000 jobs and have played a major part in reshaping our regional economies. The House will be aware that in 1998 every English region was given the choice of having a voluntary regional assembly composed of representatives from local government, business, trade unions and the wider community. All eight regions—all of them—chose to have one of those voluntary regional assemblies. All parties are represented on them, and some are even chaired by Conservative councillors.

Those voluntary assemblies have an important influence on housing, planning, transport, economic development and skills and training in their region. Those regional bodies play a co-ordinating, strategic role with the full involvement of local authorities and other representatives in the regions. The successful northern way initiative, launched in February this year, is a good example of the benefits of that co-operative approach.

The RDAs and their partners in the three northern regions are working together to create more jobs, more prosperity and greater justice. The northern way has been warmly received, and has energised people in the three northern regions—that includes representatives of all political parties. It is one example of how, across the country, regional structures and initiatives will continue to work for the benefit of the regions with the full support of the Government.

Our continuing agenda of reform and devolution to local authorities is equally important. That was evident in July, when we launched our document, "Local Vision", beginning an extensive consultation about the future of local government. It means allowing more decisions to be made in local communities. Along with the modernisation and reform of local government, we have taken several steps to devolve decision making to local authorities. We have removed the restrictive controls on local authority borrowing. We have given local authorities greater power to promote the well-being of their communities and the freedoms and flexibilities to deliver better services, and we are piloting local area agreements that will streamline funding from Whitehall so that spending can better reflect local priorities, determined locally. All those measures—every one of them—have been warmly welcomed by all local authorities.

Our agenda for reform, change and modernisation means that we will continue to decentralise and devolve power wherever we can. We have already done a lot, and there is a lot more to do. We have already brought economic stability, lower unemployment and lower inflation; and our commitment to delivering the best possible future for all the regions remains as strong as ever.

Mrs. Caroline Spelman (Meriden) (Con): I commend the right hon. Gentleman for coming to the House and making a statement at the first opportunity, and I associate the official Opposition with his thanks to the returning officer and his staff.

Will the Electoral Commission carry out a full evaluation of the referendum? The right hon. Gentleman is on record as having expressed surprise at the scale of the defeat, but how can the result have come as such a surprise? Was he not listening when the Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster, the right hon. Member for Darlington (Mr. Milburn), said:

> "We will lose because we have failed to get across a coherent message."?

He should know; after all, 90 per cent. of Darlington's voters said no to a regional assembly, the highest proportion in the north-east. People understood, loud and clear, that the assembly would not put one more doctor, teacher, nurse or policeman into service.

As for the Liberal Democrats, they were not surprised by the defeat. No sooner was it clear that they were on the losing side than they withdrew their support for the Bill. They might as well have the slogan, "Never knowingly missing a bandwagon".

It is quite clear that the decisive "No" vote in the north-east has serious consequences for the Government's entire regional agenda. Will the right hon. Gentleman stick to the promise that he made to the people of the north-east on 19 October, when he said:

> "If you don't want it, we drop it"?

What exactly did his long statement mean? Will he now say, loud and clear, that the regional agenda is dead? In broader terms, what does this humiliating defeat mean for the Government's whole regional agenda?

What of the powers that have been stripped from local authorities and handed over to expensive, unelected regional chambers? The right hon. Gentleman criticised our participation in regional chambers, but our participation simply reflects the fact that core powers have been stolen from local government. He talks of a choice for the regions to have unelected regional assemblies. That is Hobson's choice. Given that the regional chambers now have no prospect of any democratic mandate, will the right hon. Gentleman abolish them? Will he return the crucial powers of housing, planning fire and rescue services to democratically elected local councils? Why not fill the vacancy in the Queen's Speech where a regional assemblies Bill would otherwise have appeared with a Bill to return the powers that have been stripped from local authorities? Or does he share the view of the Secretary of State for Education and Skills in seeing

> "councils as agents of central Government"?

This is an urgent question; it cannot be fudged or kicked into touch. People up and down the land are living under the threat of huge house-building targets proposed by unelected regional housing boards. Is the right hon. Gentleman not duty bound to get rid of those housing boards as well? *[Interruption.]*

Mr. Deputy Speaker (Sir Michael Lord): Order. The House listened to the Deputy Prime Minister with politeness; those on the Government Front Bench should do the same for the hon. Member who is speaking for the Opposition.

Mrs. Spelman: Thank you, Mr. Deputy Speaker.

What about the cost of this whole sorry saga? The Government have ploughed tens of millions of pounds into the campaign for a regional assembly that only 20 per cent. of voters wanted. The whole exercise has been humiliating for the Government and expensive for the taxpayer. Is the right hon. Gentleman really serious about more soundings, throwing more money after bad? I am not going to ask him to resign because he will not, but the nation is owed an apology for the tens of millions of pounds wasted in pursuit of a pipedream that is very definitely history now—and, if the House is honest, so is he.

The Deputy Prime Minister: They must be joking.

I thank the hon. Lady for her kind remarks at the beginning of her contribution, which I appreciated, and I can answer some of her questions. It is proper to ask about the Electoral Commission. I think that it has made a statement and there should be an analysis of the postal ballot. The all-postal ballot was very successful, without any talk of witnesses' statements or any problems whatsoever—that should make the Electoral Commission think about things. The commission will analyse the result and publish a report in—I think—the summer.

On people's choice, I shall never apologise for giving people the opportunity to say whether they agree with something on occasions other than the general

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election—I thought that the Conservative party was demanding referendums on the European constitution and the euro to give people choice. But referendums cost money. People need to be provided with information and leaflets so that they may make proper decisions, but that costs money, albeit not the tens of millions that the hon. Lady was talking about. The actual cost of running the referendum was £2.9 million—*[Interruption.]* I am just saying that if hon. Members look at the cost per capita of the referendums in London, Scotland and Wales, they will see that the recent referendum was cheaper. I must admit that the cost is a reality, but the alternative would be to do what the Conservative Government did. They abolished 18 councils and the Greater London council without any consideration whatsoever. They held no referendums, and the people eventually had to demand the right for a local authority. I will take no lectures from the Tories about abolishing local authorities.

The hon. Lady put forward the argument that the assembly would have created not one teacher, nurse or doctor more, but that was never the intention—that was never in the White Paper. This Government have produced thousands upon thousands of doctors, teachers and nurses, but that was not the intended role of the assembly, although it does relate to one of the arguments that was put forward during the campaign.

At the end of the day, we must consider the effect on the regional agenda. I said in my statement that I believe there is still a strong argument for a regional dimension, otherwise things will be left to unelected quangos and civil servants.

Mr. Eric Pickles (Brentwood and Ongar) (Con): Scrap them.

The Deputy Prime Minister: The hon. Gentleman shouts, "Scrap them", but he was a member of the Government who set them up. The regional government civil servants were set up in 1994 for one good reason: decisions had to be taken on a regional basis, so the Conservatives set up the regional Government offices. We came along and established the regional development agencies, but the hon. Lady did not say whether the Conservatives are for or against them. Although the hon. Member for North Essex (Mr. Jenkin) says that they have not said that they are against the RDAs, their manifesto made it clear that they would abolish them. They say that they have had a change of heart, so perhaps she will tell us whether they will get rid of the RDAs.

We will keep regional Government offices and regional development agencies, and as for the regional assemblies, we will keep them also. They are not as good as assemblies with directly elected members, but people are directly appointed to them. Elected councillors serve on them, so they can make decisions about regional priorities instead of the unelected members of quangos. I think that that is right. That dimension will continue and we will support it, working with local government.

If the Tories are against regional assemblies, it would be useful to hear why they do not tell all their councillors to resign from them—they joined them voluntarily. If the Tories do not want them, they can get off them. If they want to be honest, that is what they should do. We will keep the regional assemblies, the regional development agencies and regional government. The regional dimension will form an essential part of this Government's policy to correct the economic differential between the north and south of this country. Let us be clear that that is our intention.

I was a bit surprised that the hon. Member for Meriden (Mrs. Spelman) was asking the questions, because we were all waiting for the big man to come in—the hon. Member for North Essex. He was the guy who said that if turnout in the vote got anywhere near 50 per cent., he would eat his hat. I believe that he has eaten it already, so on that he was wrong—just like everything else that the hon. Lady said.

Mr. Edward Davey (Kingston and Surbiton) (LD): I thank the Deputy Prime Minister for his statement and agree about the professionalism of the officials and police during the process. He knows that Liberal Democrats share his disappointment at the outcome of the referendum, but equally believe that all democrats need to respect the voice of the people, especially when it is spoken so clearly.

Is the Deputy Prime Minister worried that with elected regional assemblies off the immediate political agenda, a growing democratic deficit remains in our regions which needs to be tackled in another way? There are quangos that he inherited from the Conservatives, as he told the House, and quangos that Labour Governments have created and they need to feel the heat of greater accountability. Will he therefore revisit his decision to force through the House and the other place, against Liberal Democrat and Conservative opposition, the taking of strategic planning powers away from county councils? Is not planning one example of powers that can quickly be handed down and given back to local government? Will he set up a cross-departmental review of all elements of Britain's regional bureaucracy to consider how democratic accountability and efficiency can be improved in the absence of directly elected assemblies, especially through stronger local democratic input?

The Deputy Prime Minister knows that from the White Paper on, the Liberal Democrats felt that the regional devolution he was offering was too weak and the package of local government reorganisation too confusing to ensure that the "Yes" vote was maximised. Given that he has come to the House so quickly to discuss the defeat and to tell the House his position, will he at least admit that the Government were wrong on powers and wrong on the linkage with local government reorganisation?

The Deputy Prime Minister: I am grateful for the hon. Gentleman's comments in support of the people who were involved in running the ballot. I am also grateful that he took part in the debate and for the statement and visit by the leader of the Liberal Democrats, the right hon. Member for Ross, Skye and Inverness, West (Mr. Kennedy), in support of the regional assembly. I am bound to say, however, that I did not find many more Liberals beyond them who were in favour of it. The others on the ground melted away, so there was no great Liberal support. *[Interruption.]* Well, in the last week of the election you made the statement that you would kill the Bill—

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Order. The Deputy Prime Minister must be careful to use the correct parliamentary language.

The Deputy Prime Minister: I am sorry, Mr. Deputy Speaker. I must get my procedure right.

In the last week of the election, the hon. Member for Kingston and Surbiton (Mr. Davey) made the front-page statement:

"We will kill the Bill".

Quite frankly, that is the kind of support I could do without. I had the feeling that the Liberals were with us one moment and against us the next. It is the Liberal flip-flop in British politics, and I should have got used to it by now.

The hon. Gentleman talked about quangos established by us. That is true: the regional development agency is a quango. When I introduced the idea of regional development to the House, I said that we had not yet introduced democratic accountability. That was the purpose of the assembly: to have an elected assembly that subjected those quangos to that accountability.

As for whether there are sufficient powers, those arguments will go on. There has to be an agreement in government about the distribution of powers from Whitehall to the regions. That is inevitable. I gave the best negotiated position that I thought was sufficient. I note that Mayor Livingstone of London came to the area and said that he wished that he had the same powers that we were proposing for the north-east. I just comment on that, him being the mayor of Livingston—I mean Mayor of London.

We will analyse what caused the emphatic defeat, and it was an emphatic defeat, of the idea of a directly elected assembly. Not many Conservatives campaigned against it, however. They were all kept down here, their mouths quiet, and were never involved in the election. I must make it clear that the defeat was not the result of one thing. If one issue did run through the campaign, however, it was that the people felt that it would mean more politicians. I was constantly challenged about that. In fact, there would have been 500 fewer because of the abolition of the councils.

Mr. Pickles: They did not believe you.

The Deputy Prime Minister: I am just giving the facts. The people decided that they did not like the idea of more politicians. Perhaps the council tax played its part in that, even though it would have meant a £12 million saving, with 10 more councils abolished. *[Interruption.]* I accept their decision, but I can have a different view. That is why I introduced the Bill. However, the people have spoken and I am now reacting to that. I accept their decision and I am reporting it to Parliament.

Sir Stuart Bell (Middlesbrough) (Lab): The House will welcome the statement by the Deputy Prime Minister that there will be a continuing agenda of reform and devolution for local government. He referred to powers that we have given back to local authorities to promote the well-being of their communities. Does he recall his visit to Middlesbrough with the Prime Minister, when he saw a community in action at a community council, where the people told him that those powers had given power back to the people, and that their community had been enormously improved as a result? Will he reiterate that there will be a continuing decentralisation and devolution of those powers to local communities so that they can all benefit from the actions of a Labour Government?

The Deputy Prime Minister: I certainly can. I well remember my visit and the meeting that I chaired with my hon. Friend, where there was great support for the proposal. The reality is that the decision was still 8:2 against us and, whether I like it or not, I must face up to that. However, I can assure him that decentralisation and reform of local government will continue. The democratic point, albeit important, was only one part of modernisation and reform. I do not know—eventually, people may come round to accepting that unelected individuals should not make decisions for them, and decide that they want elected individuals. However, the people have spoken in the north-east, and at this stage they do not want a regional assembly. If politicians are to be worth anything they must take that into account.

Mr. William Hague (Richmond, Yorks) (Con): Will the Deputy Prime Minister give the people of the north-east the hearty congratulations of their neighbours in North Yorkshire, who would have voted no in equal or even greater proportions if the referendum there had gone ahead? Does he accept that one reason for the public rejection of those ideas is that, except where whole tiers of government have been abolished without replacement, people's experience of local government reorganisation under successive Governments is one of vast expenditure with very few benefits to show afterwards? Could he not do a great deal for long-term respect for local democracy and civic pride in local institutions, as well as enable councils to get on with the job in the way that he described earlier, by declaring the whole era of local government reorganisation to be well and truly over?

The Deputy Prime Minister: No, I do not accept that for one moment. It was under the previous Administration, who abolished 18 councils, that costs became really extraordinary. Most people who speak about the evidence of reorganisation of local government refer to the way in which it was done under a past Administration, when 18 councils were abolished without any consideration. I therefore do not accept that we have reached an ideal stage in local government. We stand for unitary authorities, as the right hon. Gentleman knows. *[Interruption.]* Well, it is our policy and we believe in unitary authorities. Curiously, the Tories in England say that they do not like unitary authorities—they want to keep the counties—so why did they force them on Scotland without any consultation whatsoever or even leaving the issue to be decided by the Scottish Parliament or an assembly? As for the right hon. Gentleman's point that the vote would be bigger in Yorkshire, I do not know whether that would be the case. However, in the Welsh referendum in 1979, there was an even bigger defeat for people who

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wanted devolution. Twenty years later, however, they came back and voted for it when they realised its full benefit.

Lawrie Quinn (Scarborough and Whitby) (Lab): May I thank the Deputy Prime Minister for his statement? Returning to the issue of scrutiny that should be afforded Parliament, the Regional Affairs Committee meets very infrequently. Does he foresee the possibility of looking at arrangements for that Committee, and perhaps extending them to allow Select Committee-type powers for areas such as Yorkshire and the Humber, the north-east, the north-west and other English regions to make sure that Parliament scrutinises those regional bodies?

The Deputy Prime Minister: I understand the point that my hon. Friend is making. I have been a Member of Parliament for over 30 years, although some people want me to go now, and have witnessed demands in the House and the Chamber to set up various regional committees. I have always supported those demands, but the House does not have a very good record of providing much influence or power to Members, and we are told that there is no time for debate. The last regional debate was on the northern way, when one Tory turned up. Despite demands for Parliament to deal with regional affairs, the evidence, I am afraid, is against such a role. I am supportive of my hon. Friend, but the pressure of time on this legislature is one reason why people in the regions should make their own decisions. We have neither the time nor frankly the inclination to debate regional matters in the Chamber.

Mr. David Curry (Skipton and Ripon) (Con): Does the right hon. Gentleman accept that one of the unbridgeable problems in the referendum was the colossal gap between the rhetoric that was used to describe the proposed devolution and the powers that would have accompanied it? Was not that because the Government—least of all the Deputy Prime Minister and the Prime Minister—never made up their mind on what powers they wanted to devolve, so the Deputy Prime Minister spent the last few days of the campaign scratching around for any powers that he could beg, borrow or steal to make the proposals look substantial? Is not the lesson that, with future policies, the Government as a whole need to make up their mind on what they want and to concede to people substance, not shadows?

The Deputy Prime Minister: The House recognises that the right hon. Gentleman is a fair man in his appraisal of these matters and knows a great deal about local authority and regional issues. In fact, he was one of the few Conservatives to say that, if the assembly had more powers, he would vote for it. That was certainly his position, if not that of his Front Benchers. The powers were clearly set out in the White Paper and the question whether they were enough was constantly debated in the House. We went further than the White Paper on fire, planning arrangements and transport. Some might argue that the assembly should be a parliament with the powers that we have. That is fair enough. We tried to strike a balance between local authorities, Whitehall and Westminster, and that is what we tried to explain to people. However, the question of powers was not the main issue. To be honest, people were mostly concerned about whether they wanted another layer of the decision-making process. The question that constantly came up was, "Does this mean that there will be another tier, that we are going to pay for it and that there will be more politicians?" It did not matter that I could show that that was not so, because they had reached their conclusion and that was it—they thought that it would be a white elephant.

Mr. David Clelland (Tyne Bridge) (Lab): I congratulate the Deputy Prime Minister on his work on this over the years. His quest to extend democracy is an honourable one, and he should be congratulated on it.

Is my right hon. Friend aware that, as recently as this morning, constituents have contacted me to ask for more democratic control of local services privatised by the Conservatives? Is not there still a case for extending democracy to the regions and localities, and can we look for other ways of doing that?

The Deputy Prime Minister: I thank my hon. Friend for his kind personal remarks. I noted that, immediately after the result was announced, even the no campaign was saying, "We still need to find ways to deal with this issue", and that has continued. I have even heard voices calling for national conventions, which is precisely what happened in Scotland and Wales. I do not support that, but I would sooner hear what people have to say about it. The no campaigners have started to wonder whether they have missed an opportunity. They voted against it, but now they are saying, "Can we have something, albeit different, after all?" I have to ask whether they are whistling in the wind.

We will continue to reform the local government structure. We will devolve more powers downwards by strengthening regional development agencies, regional government and assemblies. For the moment, that will have to be the way forward for the north-east.

Mr. John Greenway (Ryedale) (Con): I am grateful to the Deputy Prime Minister for his statement. Does not he realise that his refusal to rule out completely a referendum in Yorkshire and Humber and his response to my right hon. Friend the Member for Richmond, Yorks (Mr. Hague) on unitary authorities will only prolong the uncertainty as regards local government in North Yorkshire? Most people in North Yorkshire—a county that is almost 100 miles wide—think that they already have regional government through North Yorkshire county council. Will the Deputy Prime Minister get on with the job of devolving powers back to it so that, as my right hon. Friend said, we can get good people elected into the council chamber and get some decisions made locally?

The Deputy Prime Minister: I thought that I had made it clear to the House that changes to the local government structure of, in this case, Northumberland and Durham would fall if the people said no, which is what they clearly did. I made it clear that no changes to the local government structure would arise out of the assembly. Our manifesto stated our belief in establishing unitary local government, but that would require primary legislation.

Mr. Philip Hammond (Runnymede and Weybridge) (Con): Wrong—ask the Minister for Local and Regional Government.

The Deputy Prime Minister: I am only passing on the advice that I receive. I do not necessarily agree with the hon. Member for Ryedale (Mr. Greenway). Basically, local government reorganisation would need to go through a proper process. As that is not being proposed, the local government structure that we have at the moment is not affected whatsoever by this decision. Local government as it is, in its county, district and unitary form, will continue.

Mr. Ronnie Campbell (Blyth Valley) (Lab): I thank my right hon. Friend on behalf of the north-east of England for at least giving us a vote. If the Tories had been in power, we would not have got one. People are basically saying that they want more democracy in their areas and their councillors to be more professional but, unfortunately, we lost the vote. We should have some sort of organisation, even if it has to be in Parliament, to tie the north-east together, join the threads and get moving because we are being left behind by the Welsh, the Scots and Londoners.

The Deputy Prime Minister: I am grateful for my hon. Friend's words. I read some of the reports on Friday and Saturday after the results and I have heard the comments that we should do something. I presented one proposal, which the people in the north-east emphatically turned down. I can therefore only say that we shall continue to see what we can do to strengthen the assembly, RDAs and local government generally. Giving people more power to make decisions means devolving some of the decisions from local government to communities. We are doing that; it is embodied in the local vision and we shall continue with the reforms because we want to decentralise decision making.

I am sorry about the decision that the people in the north-east made, but it is their decision and it is our job to recognise that. However, I reassure myself by remembering that a successful conclusion was ultimately reached in Wales and Scotland.

Mr. Douglas Hogg (Sleaford and North Hykeham) (Con): The right hon. Gentleman will acknowledge that his proposal for directly elected regional assemblies was at least a partial answer to the West Lothian question. Given that it has failed, will he consider preventing Members who represent Scottish constituencies from voting on exclusively English business?

The Deputy Prime Minister: No.

Mr. Gordon Prentice (Pendle) (Lab): I congratulate my right hon. Friend on his decision not to press ahead with a referendum in the north-west of England, which would certainly have been lost. Was the referendum in the north-east lost during or before the campaign?

The Deputy Prime Minister: I am used to clever questions from my hon. Friend. It is time to worry when we get support from him. I do not know why the referendum was lost—there is a range of reasons. I have probably spent more time than anyone else defending the proposal and listening to people's views in markets, streets and in debates. I gave some of the reasons, which included worries about too many politicians and cost. Europe was mentioned from time to time, as if the proposal were a Euro-plot. All those factors played a part. I do not think that there was one major reason. I cannot therefore really give an answer to the question "Why?". All I need to know now is that I did not convince people and that I was emphatically defeated. I have had to take the consequences today. As to the north-west, we must wait and see.

Mr. Andrew Stunell (Hazel Grove) (LD): I thank the Deputy Prime Minister for his statement and share his disappointment. He may know that the Northwest Development Agency held a meeting last Friday as a briefing for Members of Parliament. Several Labour Members attended, as I did. The development agency was clear that some untidy ends remain in the north-west. The links between the agency, the Government office for the north-west and the Learning and Skills Council are not as strong as they should be and accountability remains poor and divided. Will the right hon. Gentleman assure us that he will take those issues forward and improve the accountability of those big budget quangos?

The Deputy Prime Minister: That is an important question, which I had to address during the debate. We produced a White Paper that reflected the judgment between Whitehall and us about the powers that could be redistributed. Some were already undergoing a form of reorganisation. The Learning and Skills Council was a classic example of something that was established both nationally and locally. As I said earlier, people found in the regions that regional directors had to be appointed to make regional decisions about training. I argued after the White Paper that people in the regions should make the decisions. Local bodies alone cannot do that; there needs to be regional decision making. That has been recognised by the Learning and Skills Council, and the fact that we approved the number of people to be appointed by the assembly to sit on the board responsible for training is an improvement. This is also a recognition that regional dimension decision making is going to be there all the time, whether it involves elected people or unelected people.

Mr. Peter Pike (Burnley) (Lab): I understand why we cannot go ahead with the referendum in the north-west, but it is very disappointing. I urge my right hon. Friend not to lose sight of the fact that, while there has been a reversal in the north-east, the case for regional devolution and accountability has not been lost. There is still a very strong case for it, because too many strategic decisions are still being taken by unelected and unaccountable people. I hope that he will address that issue. In the case of local government in Lancashire, does he recognise that the changes brought in under the Banham review by the Conservative Government were

[Mr. Peter Pike]

a poor, hybrid solution that introduced two unitary authorities and left the rest of the county with two-tier local government? That also needs to be addressed.

The Deputy Prime Minister: I certainly agree with my hon. Friend's last comment. In regard to regional devolution, the thing that has always convinced me of the need to do more than simply leave things to central Government is the increasing differential between the north and the south. It has now been measured that if the three northern regions were to secure the same level of growth in gross domestic product that there is in the south, they would be £30 billion better off and there would be 250,000 more jobs. That is the reality. While all the regions have now increased their prosperity under the Labour Government and reduced their unemployment by half, the differential still exists. That is why I feel strongly that *we need to do something more.*

The institutional changes in London, Wales and Scotland have made a difference and I tried to argue the case for such changes in the north-east. I certainly recognise that that argument is also true for the north-west, but it will be up to the people of the north-west to make their views clear. We have kept the legislation relating to these measures, and if it is their declared opinion that they want one, the legislation remains for another exercise, but not within the next year or so.

Mr. Graham Brady (Altrincham and Sale, West) (Con): Many Members on both sides of the House have been telling the Deputy Prime Minister for months that the soundings exercise was incompetently handled. Does he now accept that he completely mishandled that process and completely misread public opinion through the soundings exercise?

The Deputy Prime Minister: No.

Mr. Clive Betts (Sheffield, Attercliffe) (Lab): I am sure that my right hon. Friend will agree that, while this particular proposal might be dead, the principle of devolution most certainly is not. We on this side of the Chamber need take no lectures from the Conservatives on devolution, because when they last occupied the Government Benches, they were the most centralising Government this country had ever seen. When the dust has settled, will my right hon. Friend consider introducing either a White or Green Paper to examine a new constitutional settlement for this country, based on the principle of devolution, to address the regional democratic deficit and to examine the transfer of significantly more powers to local government, including the right to regulate local public transport?

The Deputy Prime Minister: Of course, those were some of the powers that we were considering that the assemblies should have, particularly on a regional basis. I know that my hon. Friend was a little critical of our proposals, but he now wants to renegotiate and discuss them. Fine. I hope that the debate will continue, but I think that the opportunity has been lost. That argument has taken place in the north-east, to a certain extent, although in my view this will still come, in the north-east as well as in Yorkshire and Humberside. In the meantime, however, my hon. Friend is right to say that we should now ensure that our local government structure delivers in the best way. The councillors who sit on local authorities already sit in the regional assemblies so, although they are not directly elected to them, they are indirectly elected. That will give them some authority, as opposed to the quangos and civil servants in regional government who make the decisions at the moment.

Mr. George Osborne (Tatton) (Con): The decision not to proceed with the referendum in the north-west is very welcome and is, in part, a tribute to the North West Says No campaign, which was enthusiastically supported by many Labour MPs. The Deputy Prime Minister has ruled out a referendum in the north-east for seven years. Is he also ruling out a referendum in the north-west for seven years?

The Deputy Prime Minister: The ruling out comes from the statutory obligation that the House imposed on us, but that does not apply to the north-west or to Yorkshire and Humberside, because they have not had referendums. Had they done so, and said no, it could apply. It is therefore possible that if a particular view was developed and assessments were made in the north-west and Yorkshire and Humberside, they could still have a referendum. The legislation is there for them to do so if they so wish.

Mrs. Angela Browning (Tiverton and Honiton) (Con): May I say to the right hon. Gentleman, in the most friendly way, that he will wait a darn sight longer than 20 years to get a yes vote out of Devon and Cornwall? He is into hell freezing over territory there. If he is not going to abolish those unelected bodies that are spending money on our behalf, will he please have a referendum in the south-west? I promise him that he will have good news at that Dispatch Box about the turnout—it will be really high.

The Deputy Prime Minister: I fear that the hon. Lady might be eating her hat as well. She puts Cornwall and Devon together, but if the vote on the decision were held solely in Cornwall, I wonder whether she would be so confident about the result.

Mr. John Redwood (Wokingham) (Con): In Wokingham we have a unitary council, thanks to the previous Government, and we would like that council to make the crucial housing and planning decisions that affect our lives. Now that the Deputy Prime Minister has shown that even he cannot push the vote out for elected regional government, will he get rid of the unelected junta in Guildford and give the powers over planning and housing to my local elected councillors, who would do a good job with them?

The Deputy Prime Minister: The right hon. Gentleman makes a point about the unelected junta, but it is staffed by many Tories, I understand. Out of 100, 44 Conservatives sit on it. I just make the point that they seem to be actively participating—*[Interruption.]* There are 44 Tories sitting on it, right? All I am saying is that if the right hon. Member for Wokingham (Mr. Redwood) looks at the decisions on these regional matters of housing and planning—all of them have a regional dimension—he will see that the local authorities, whether unitary or county, are not sufficiently wide to take the regional dimension into account. That is why the Government set up the regional offices to deal with these matters and to find a regional decision. They were right on that and we are right to add democratic accountability to it. I look forward with interest to see how many Tories are going to resign from these assemblies.

Sir Teddy Taylor (Rochford and Southend, East) (Con): Will the Deputy Prime Minister promise to take seriously the implications of what may be unexpected, but is a substantial and clear expression of opinion by the people? Is he in particular willing to give the people of Scotland and Wales the opportunity to have another referendum to ask whether they wish to retain their devolved Administrations, bearing it in mind that I gained a clear impression from my visits there that people are fed up to the teeth with the cost and bureaucracy of those organisations? Is he willing to give the people of Scotland and Wales a chance to say whether they wish to keep their devolved government?

The Deputy Prime Minister: That matter is something that the people of Scotland and Wales have the choice to develop themselves, if they wish. I note that when devolution was opposed by the Tories, that effectively destroyed the Tory party in Scotland.

Mr. Eric Forth (Bromley and Chislehurst) (Con): Following this excellent expression of common sense by the people of the north-east, and indeed the question of my hon. Friend the Member for Rochford and Southend, East (Sir Teddy Taylor), will the Deputy Prime Minister consider giving the people of London a further referendum so that they can express their view on whether they think that this outrageously expensive assembly and Mayor are worth the money spent on them or whether it is time to lay them quietly to rest?

The Deputy Prime Minister: What an absolute cheek from somebody who supported the abolition of the Greater London council with no consideration whatever for the people and now advocates a referendum. Is not the cost a consideration? Is not the democratic mandate? It is hypocrisy we expect from those on the Tory Benches and we get it.

Sir Sydney Chapman (Chipping Barnet) (Con): The Deputy Prime Minister will know that many provisions in a number of recent Government Bills have transferred powers of one sort or another upwards to the regional authorities. There was the expectation or hope—the word can be chosen—that directly elected regional assemblies would be a reality, but now that it is apparent that they will not be a reality for some time, will he, where possible, consider those recently enacted measures and not activate those provisions, which would take power from directly elected local authorities of one sort or another and give it to unelected regional authorities?

The Deputy Prime Minister: First, I am not readily accepting, because there has been one decision in the north-east, that we will not move towards a regional dimension, and eventually an elected one.

Mr. Bernard Jenkin (North Essex) (Con): The right hon. Gentleman can.

The Deputy Prime Minister: I have accepted the decision and I am giving my judgment. I am entitled to do that; I am still a person with a political view. I am not giving up what I have believed for 30 years, which will eventually come about, as it did in Wales and Scotland.

With regard to the point about powers being taken away from local authorities and some going to the regions, whether they are on planning and the regional dimension, housing, transport or the fire and emergency services, where it is felt that the local authority boundaries are not sufficient to deal with the region-wide considerations, there are regional decisions for which the local authority boundaries are inadequate. I have to say, because the hon. Member for Chipping Barnet (Sir Sydney Chapman) was a member of the Government who did it, that the regional government civil servants and the Government offices were set up to deal with that problem because of the inadequacy of the boundaries and powers of local authorities.

Mr. Peter Lilley (Hitchin and Harpenden) (Con): Does the Deputy Prime Minister realise that, if a referendum were held in the east of England in general, and Hertfordshire in particular, it would be defeated not by 4:1 but by 40:1? Does he realise that that is because people resent the transfer of power that has already taken place from local authorities to a more remote and distant regional authority and the efforts by that authority to impose housing targets on Hertfordshire that are wholly unwelcome to its residents? Previously, when Hertfordshire had the opportunity to take such decisions, and a Lib-Lab county council tried to impose building on the green belt, we were able to defeat it at the ballot box and change the policy. We want those powers back at county level, so that we can determine our own future.

The Deputy Prime Minister: I do not know whether the proposal would be defeated by 40:1 in the east of England—*[Interruption.]* Even if it were 50:1, the right hon. Gentleman is showing his arrogance by feeling that he knows what the outcome would be. What we have done is to put the question to the people and let them make the decision. There is an important difference between those two positions. I may give my judgment to the region, but it may reject it, as it has done on this occasion. I am not therefore acting on my judgment, as, to its mind, my judgment was wrong. I will not assume that I know what the outcome will be in the eastern region, but the assembly there has 36 Tories on it, is chaired by a Tory, and is considering the housing situation and recommendations on it. We are in discussion with it, but I notice that it and the Government differ by only a few thousand on what housing is needed in the area. We will continue the discussion.

Mr. Roger Gale (North Thanet) (Con): A few moments ago, the Deputy Prime Minister said that he did not understand why he lost the referendum in the north-east. The reason is blindingly obvious. He lost the referendum in the north-east, as he would everywhere else in the country, because the people of this country do

[Mr. Roger Gale]

not want regional assemblies. That being so, he went on to say that he has learned the lesson and that he accepts the result. But he does not, because he said that regional assemblies will continue. The South East England regional assembly is not only unelected but unloved and unwanted. Why should the people of Kent pay for a quango for which they have not voted and that they do not want?

The Deputy Prime Minister: Again, I do not know how the hon. Gentleman can assume what will happen in other areas. We must wait and see. As for my accepting the judgment of the north-east, I have done so. I asked it not about the regional assembly but about an elected regional assembly. It chose to vote against it, and I have announced to Parliament today that I have no intention of bringing forward the Bill that would make such an assembly a reality, because the people have spoken. In those circumstances, the unelected regional assemblies, rather than unelected quangos, need to make decisions about matters that affect their regions, as at least they are indirectly elected—again, I suspect that in the south-east, the assembly will have more Tories than Labour members. I think that that is right. We will fully support the assemblies, we will get on with it and I wait to see how many Tories will resign from them.

Richard Ottaway (Croydon, South) (Con): Referring to the deferred referendums, the Deputy Prime Minister said that, if in future a region does not want to move ahead with a referendum, the House will have plenty of notice of that. How will he ascertain whether a region wants to move ahead with a referendum and what criteria will he use?

The Deputy Prime Minister: The Regional Assemblies (Preparations) Act 2003 lays down how to consult and report back. I did that for the north-east, Yorkshire and Humber, the north-west and all the regions. Those were the only three regions in the north, on consultation, in which more than 50 per cent. wanted to have a referendum as to whether to have an elected assembly. That is laid out in the Act, and if the consultation process is to happen again, that remains what will take place and be reported to Parliament.

Andrew George (St. Ives) (LD): Will the Government genuinely learn the lessons rather than give up? Will they let the people genuinely decide in which regions to hold referendums, on which powers from the menu, when to hold them and on whose terms? I agree with the Deputy Prime Minister that the Government would have won a referendum in Cornwall, but when will we get that referendum?

The Deputy Prime Minister: First, I am not giving up, and I hope that I do not give that impression. I am being attacked for not giving up on all regional policy simply because the democratic mandate—which I would have thought that the House would regard as an important principle—should apply to decisions in the regions. People have rejected the proposal, and I have accepted that. The House should make no mistake: I am not giving up on the regional dimension and democratic accountability. I have always believed in it. I think that there is a reason for the fact that, in terms of growth, the north suffers more than the south, but in view of the decision made in the north-east, I will not proceed with a Bill.

As for Cornwall, the hon. Gentleman will be well aware of one of the first lessons that I learned about regions, and I learned it again in the north-east. People in Devon do not like Cornwall, and Cornwallites do not like Devon. People in both counties dislike Bristol and all of them hate London. In my own area, Hull and Grimsby cannot get on. When I went to the north-east, I thought that there might be a bit more of a regional identity there, but as soon as people started saying in Newcastle that Newcastle footballers were telling them to vote yes, there was not the same feeling in other parts of the region.

There are strong rivalries within regions that must be taken into account, but in general people know what constitutes a northern region and are proud to belong to it. We are doing our best to reduce the differential in prosperity between the north and the south—and, I might add, the south-west.

Alistair Burt (North-East Bedfordshire) (Con): The Deputy Prime Minister spoke of the growth differential between north and south. His building plans for the south will accentuate the difference, because of the resources that they will draw in to boost the south-east further. Does he not understand that the anger felt in counties such as Bedfordshire, which faces the construction of 80,000 more houses over the next 20 years as a result of his decision, is just as great as the anger that he experienced last week? Given increasing evidence of the danger of such a rate of growth, will he abandon those plans, listen to local people and show that he knows the difference between regional co-operation and regional coercion?

The Deputy Prime Minister: I was trying to recall the hon. Gentleman's constituency—[HON. MEMBERS: "It was Bury."] It is not Bury now, though. *[Interruption.]* Is it still Bury? If so, I apologise. But I remember the hon. Gentleman losing his seat in the north, and as he well knows the housing situation in the north is very different from that in the south. We have to meet housing demand in the south—

Mr. Redwood: Why?

The Deputy Prime Minister: If the right hon. Gentleman has a son or a daughter, I assume that, given his circumstances, they would be able to get a house. But many people cannot afford houses or mortgages and do not want to get on a train and go north to improve their quality of life. They want to live in the south. We have shown that it is possible to build more housing by increasing density and using brownfield sites, as we have, without increasing the amount of land it takes. We must make that kind of intelligent decision rather than telling young people, "You can't live near your mum and dad and you can't have a job in the south. Go north, young man." In fact, it is possible to do both.

Mr. Edward Garnier (Harborough) (Con): Will the Deputy Prime Minister let me into a secret? Was all this one of those eye-catching initiatives with which the Prime Minister wished to be personally associated?

The Deputy Prime Minister: Daft question.

Mr. Damian Green (Ashford) (Con): I think that that means that the answer is no.

The Deputy Prime Minister has made it clear this afternoon that elected regional assemblies are now dead, but that he is as wedded as ever to unelected regional assemblies. Can I tell him how much that will disappoint my constituents, in a week when the South East England regional assembly has come up with a maniacal proposal to build even more houses in my constituency and the rest of east Kent than he himself proposes to build?

Is that not a prime example of the way in which the South East England regional assembly is out of touch and does not reflect the views of local people in parts of Kent? It is not just a waste of money but is actively doing more harm than good to the quality of life of my constituents and many other people in the south-east. Why does the Deputy Prime Minister not admit that there is no desire for a regional dimension in the south-east and scrap the regional assembly now?

The Deputy Prime Minister: I am confused by the hon. Gentleman's remarks. It was his area that wanted growth and houses, and it was his area that wanted the channel tunnel rail link to stop there. It was bound to be one of our growth areas. We think it important to do what we are doing, and the pressures that he is talking about are certainly not as great in his area as those in other southern areas that Members have mentioned. The housing will improve quality of life, and it will be connected to a damn good transport system, as we know from the announcement of the domestic services that will feature on the rail link. The hon. Gentleman should stop whining and enjoy his advantages.

Mr. Mark Prisk (Hertford and Stortford) (Con): How much has this failed experiment under the Deputy Prime Minister's stewardship cost to date? Why does he not understand that what people want, whether they are in the north-east or in my region—he likes to call it East Anglia but we still like to think of ourselves as Hertfordshire, and we will fight for that all the way—[HON. MEMBERS: "Oh!"] We will, I can assure him of that. Why does he not understand that people want local services from democratic local authorities? They do not want his herd of white elephants.

The Deputy Prime Minister: The hon. Gentleman's contribution was a little short on history. Did not the Tories abolish Berkshire? The right hon. Member for Wokingham (Mr. Redwood) nods. Where was the hon. Gentleman fighting then? Presumably, he was a candidate objecting to what his Government were doing.

The cost of the election in the north-east—*[Interruption.]* May I give the answer as best I can? The cost was £2.9 million. Elections were not held in Yorkshire and the Humber or in the north-west, but there was an information campaign, which cost approximately £10 million. Per capita, it was no more expensive—in fact, it was cheaper—than the referendums in Scotland and Wales, but if we consult people there is a price to pay. I do not know whether the hon. Gentleman will object to the costs of the referendum on the European constitution. Would he say that we should not hold that because it will cost more? I suspect that the right hon. Member for Wokingham would say that it is money well spent. The hon. Gentleman's question was just a bit of argy-bargy in the Chamber, and there was no sense behind it.

Mr. Mark Francois (Rayleigh) (Con): I sincerely hope that last shall not be least.

The Deputy Prime Minister has advanced a strong argument for the continuing devolution of powers to local authorities, as he put it. May I ask him to follow the logic of his argument? Will he devolve back to local authorities the power to decide how many houses should be built in their areas? Surely it is better that directly elected local councillors, of whatever party, decide how many houses their area can bear, rather than having numbers imposed on them by unelected regional bodies whose moral authority has been destroyed by what happened in the north-east.

The Deputy Prime Minister: The hon. Gentleman must be aware that, under the previous Administration, housing numbers were decided not by local authorities but by Government and the boards that were set up.

Mr. Francois: In negotiation.

The Deputy Prime Minister: Fine—and that is what we are doing. The south-east and eastern regions are matters for negotiation, but the previous Administration imposed housing figures on local authorities—*[Interruption.]* I am bound to say that they did. They imposed figures against the will of local authorities. However, the main argument is not whether the Government impose the figure but whether, if it is left to local authorities to decide the housing for a whole region, most local authorities will just vote against. Even among elected members, there is a predominance of nimbyism—we do not want it here. We are entitled to say that, if there is housing demand in an area from people who need it, we must meet that. It is a matter of negotiation between central and local government. We decided that housing boards in the region were better placed to decide from where the land was to be found to provide the houses. We think that that was right. It is a regional dimension—it is a far greater regional basis than would otherwise be the case, considering what local authorities can do with the powers in their boundary areas.

Point of Order

5.32 pm

Hywel Williams (Caernarfon) (PC): On a point of order, Mr. Deputy Speaker. Mr. Luis Austin is an Argentinian from the Welsh settlement in Patagonia. He is a Welsh speaker who is visiting my constituency. Some two weeks ago, he was stopped at Gatwick airport and told that he would have to leave the country after what I can view only as a naïve breach of regulations. He was then told that he should leave the following Thursday. Some time later, he was told that he could stay until the matter was settled. Later, he was told by letter, which was sent to the wrong address, that he should leave the United Kingdom. Last Thursday, he was told that he could stay until 2 December; last Friday, he was told that he must leave tomorrow, 9 November. Unsurprisingly, he is confused. That sorry catalogue of events can only diminish the reputation of the immigration service and, importantly, damage the relationship between Patagonia, the Welsh people there and the UK, which this Government and the Administration in Cardiff have fostered. Despite all that, the Minister of State at the Home Office has refused to meet me. Can Mr. Speaker use his good offices to prevail on the Minister of State to meet me before tomorrow afternoon—before it is too late?

Mr. Deputy Speaker (Sir Michael Lord): I have listened carefully to the hon. Gentleman, but this is not a matter for the Chair. There are channels laid down for such matters—ministerial channels and others, and he must pursue those in the normal way.

Housing Bill (Programme) (No. 3)

Motion made, and Question put forthwith, pursuant to Orders [28 June 2001 and 6 November 2003].

That the following provisions shall apply to the Housing Bill for the purpose of supplementing the Order of 12th January 2004.

Consideration of Lords Amendments

1. Proceedings on consideration of Lords Amendments shall be completed at this day's sitting.

2. Those proceedings shall be taken in the order shown in the first column of the following Table, and each part of those proceedings shall (so far as not previously concluded) be brought to a conclusion at the time shown in the second column.

TABLE

Lords Amendments	*Time for conclusion of proceedings*
Amendments Nos. 191, 128	Two hours after the commencement of proceedings on consideration of Lords Amendments.
Amendment No. 140	Two hours and 45 minutes after the commencement of those proceedings.
Amendment No. 190	Three hours and 45 minutes after the commencement of those proceedings.
Amendments Nos. 1 to 127, 129 to 139, 141 to 189 and 192 to 284	Four hours after the commencement of those proceedings or 10 pm (whichever is the later).

Subsequent stages

3. Any further Message from the Lords may be considered forthwith without any Question being put.

4. The proceedings on any further Message from the Lords shall (so far as not previously concluded) be brought to a conclusion one hour after their commencement—[*Keith Hill.*]

The House divided: Ayes 291, Noes 165.

Division No. 310] **[5:35 pm**

AYES

Ainsworth, Bob *(Cov'try NE)*
Allen, Graham
Anderson, Janet *(Rossendale & Darwen)*
Armstrong, rh Ms Hilary
Atherton, Ms Candy
Atkins, Charlotte
Austin, John
Bailey, Adrian
Baird, Vera
Banks, Tony
Barnes, Harry
Barron, rh Kevin
Bayley, Hugh
Beard, Nigel
Beckett, rh Margaret
Begg, Miss Anne
Bell, Sir Stuart
Benton, Joe *(Bootle)*
Berry, Roger
Blackman, Liz
Blizzard, Bob
Boateng, rh Paul
Borrow, David
Bradley, rh Keith *(Withington)*
Brennan, Kevin
Brown, Russell *(Dumfries)*
Browne, Desmond
Bryant, Chris
Buck, Ms Karen
Burden, Richard
Burgon, Colin
Burnham, Andy
Cairns, David
Campbell, Alan *(Tynemouth)*
Campbell, Mrs Anne *(C'bridge)*
Campbell, Ronnie *(Blyth V)*
Caplin, Ivor
Casale, Roger
Caton, Martin
Cawsey, Ian *(Brigg)*
Challen, Colin
Chapman, Ben *(Wirral S)*
Chaytor, David
Clark, Mrs Helen *(Peterborough)*
Clark, Paul *(Gillingham)*
Clarke, rh Tom *(Coatbridge & Chryston)*
Clarke, Tony *(Northampton S)*
Clelland, David
Clwyd, Ann *(Cynon V)*
Coaker, Vernon
Coffey, Ms Ann
Cohen, Harry
Connarty, Michael
Cook, rh Robin *(Livingston)*
Corbyn, Jeremy
Corston, Jean
Crausby, David
Cruddas, Jon
Cummings, John
Cunningham, Jim *(Coventry S)*
Cunningham, Tony *(Workington)*
Darling, rh Alistair
Davey, Valerie *(Bristol W)*
David, Wayne

Davidson, Ian
Davies, rh Denzil *(Llanelli)*
Davies, Geraint *(Croydon C)*
Dawson, Hilton
Dean, Mrs Janet
Dhanda, Parmjit
Dismore, Andrew
Dobbin, Jim *(Heywood)*
Donohoe, Brian H.
Doran, Frank
Dowd, Jim *(Lewisham W)*
Eagle, Angela *(Wallasey)*
Eagle, Maria *(L'pool Garston)*
Edwards, Huw
Efford, Clive
Ellman, Mrs Louise
Ennis, Jeff *(Barnsley E)*
Etherington, Bill
Farrelly, Paul
Field, rh Frank *(Birkenhead)*
Fisher, Mark
Fitzpatrick, Jim
Fitzsimons, Mrs Lorna
Flynn, Paul *(Newport W)*
Follett, Barbara
Foster, rh Derek
Foster, Michael *(Worcester)*
Foster, Michael Jabez *(Hastings & Rye)*
Foulkes, rh George
Francis, Dr. Hywel
Gardiner, Barry
Gerrard, Neil
Gibson, Dr. Ian
Gilroy, Linda
Godsiff, Roger
Griffiths, Jane *(Reading E)*
Griffiths, Nigel *(Edinburgh S)*
Griffiths, Win *(Bridgend)*
Grogan, John
Hall, Mike *(Weaver Vale)*
Hall, Patrick *(Bedford)*
Hamilton, David *(Midlothian)*
Hanson, David
Harris, Tom *(Glasgow Cathcart)*
Havard, Dai *(Merthyr Tydfil & Rhymney)*
Healey, John
Henderson, Ivan *(Harwich)*
Hendrick, Mark
Hepburn, Stephen
Heppell, John
Hesford, Stephen
Heyes, David
Hill, Keith *(Streatham)*
Hinchliffe, David
Hodge, Margaret
Hope, Phil *(Corby)*
Hopkins, Kelvin
Howarth, rh Alan *(Newport E)*
Howarth, George *(Knowsley N & Sefton E)*
Howells, Dr. Kim
Hoyle, Lindsay
Hughes, Beverley *(Stretford & Urmston)*
Hughes, Kevin *(Doncaster N)*
Humble, Mrs Joan
Hurst, Alan *(Braintree)*
Hutton, rh John
Iddon, Dr. Brian
Illsley, Eric
Irranca-Davies, Huw
Jackson, Glenda *(Hampstead & Highgate)*
Jackson, Helen *(Hillsborough)*
Jenkins, Brian
Johnson, Miss Melanie *(Welwyn Hatfield)*
Jones, Helen *(Warrington N)*
Jones, Kevan *(N Durham)*
Jones, Lynne *(Selly Oak)*
Jones, Martyn *(Clwyd S)*
Joyce, Eric *(Falkirk W)*
Kaufman, rh Sir Gerald
Keeble, Ms Sally
Kennedy, Jane *(Wavertree)*
Khabra, Piara S.
Kidney, David
King, Andy *(Rugby)*
King, Ms Oona *(Bethnal Green & Bow)*
Knight, Jim *(S Dorset)*
Kumar, Dr. Ashok
Ladyman, Dr. Stephen
Laxton, Bob *(Derby N)*
Lazarowicz, Mark
Lepper, David
Leslie, Christopher
Levitt, Tom *(High Peak)*
Lewis, Ivan *(Bury S)*
Lewis, Terry *(Worsley)*
Linton, Martin
Love, Andrew
Lucas, Ian *(Wrexham)*
Luke, Iain *(Dundee E)*
Lyons, John *(Strathkelvin)*
McAvoy, Thomas
McCabe, Stephen
McCartney, rh Ian
McDonagh, Siobhain
MacDonald, Calum
MacDougall, John
McFall, rh John
McGuire, Mrs Anne
McIsaac, Shona
McKechin, Ann
McKenna, Rosemary
McNulty, Tony
MacShane, Denis
Mactaggart, Fiona
McWalter, Tony
McWilliam, John
Mahmood, Khalid
Mahon, Mrs Alice
Mallaber, Judy
Mann, John *(Bassetlaw)*
Marris, Rob *(Wolverh'ton SW)*
Marsden, Gordon *(Blackpool S)*
Marshall, David *(Glasgow Shettleston)*
Marshall-Andrews, Robert
Martlew, Eric
Meacher, rh Michael
Merron, Gillian
Michael, rh Alun
Milburn, rh Alan
Miliband, David
Miller, Andrew
Mitchell, Austin *(Gt Grimsby)*
Moffatt, Laura
Moonie, Dr. Lewis
Morris, rh Estelle
Mountford, Kali
Mudie, George
Mullin, Chris
Munn, Ms Meg
Murphy, Denis *(Wansbeck)*
Murphy, Jim *(Eastwood)*
Naysmith, Dr. Doug
O'Brien, Bill *(Normanton)*
O'Neill, Martin
Organ, Diana
Osborne, Sandra *(Ayr)*
Perham, Linda
Picking, Anne
Pickthall, Colin
Plaskitt, James
Pollard, Kerry
Pound, Stephen
Prentice, Ms Bridget *(Lewisham E)*
Prentice, Gordon *(Pendle)*
Prescott, rh John
Prosser, Gwyn
Purchase, Ken
Purnell, James
Quin, rh Joyce
Quinn, Lawrie
Rapson, Syd *(Portsmouth N)*
Raynsford, rh Nick
Reid, rh Dr. John *(Hamilton N & Bellshill)*
Robertson, John *(Glasgow Anniesland)*
Robinson, Geoffrey *(Coventry NW)*
Rooney, Terry
Roy, Frank *(Motherwell)*
Ruane, Chris
Ruddock, Joan
Ryan, Joan *(Enfield N)*
Salter, Martin
Savidge, Malcolm
Sawford, Phil
Sedgemore, Brian
Shaw, Jonathan
Sheerman, Barry
Sheridan, Jim
Short, rh Clare
Simon, Siôn *(B'ham Erdington)*
Simpson, Alan *(Nottingham S)*
Singh, Marsha
Skinner, Dennis
Smith, rh Andrew *(Oxford E)*
Smith, rh Chris *(Islington S & Finsbury)*
Smith, Jacqui *(Redditch)*
Smith, Llew *(Blaenau Gwent)*
Soley, Clive
Starkey, Dr. Phyllis
Steinberg, Gerry
Stewart, Ian *(Eccles)*
Stinchcombe, Paul
Stoate, Dr. Howard
Strang, rh Dr. Gavin
Straw, rh Jack
Sutcliffe, Gerry
Tami, Mark *(Alyn)*
Taylor, Dari *(Stockton S)*
Taylor, David *(NW Leics)*
Timms, Stephen
Tipping, Paddy
Todd, Mark *(S Derbyshire)*
Touhig, Don *(Islwyn)*
Trickett, Jon
Turner, Dennis *(Wolverh'ton SE)*
Turner, Dr. Desmond *(Brighton Kemptown)*
Turner, Neil *(Wigan)*
Twigg, Stephen *(Enfield)*
Tynan, Bill *(Hamilton S)*
Walley, Ms Joan
Ward, Claire
Wareing, Robert N.
Watson, Tom
Watts, David
White, Brian
Whitehead, Dr. Alan
Wicks, Malcolm
Williams, rh Alan *(Swansea W)*
Williams, Betty *(Conwy)*
Wills, Michael
Winnick, David
Wood, Mike *(Batley)*
Woolas, Phil
Worthington, Tony
Wright, Anthony D. *(Gt Yarmouth)*
Wright, David *(Telford)*
Wright, Iain *(Hartlepool)*
Wyatt, Derek

Tellers for the Ayes:
Margaret Moran and
Mr. Nick Ainger

NOES

Ainsworth, Peter *(E Surrey)*
Allan, Richard
Amess, David
Ancram, rh Michael
Arbuthnot, rh James
Atkinson, David *(Bour'mth E)*
Atkinson, Peter *(Hexham)*
Bacon, Richard
Barker, Gregory
Baron, John *(Billericay)*
Barrett, John
Bellingham, Henry
Bercow, John
Beresford, Sir Paul
Boswell, Tim
Bottomley, Peter *(Worthing W)*
Brady, Graham
Brazier, Julian
Breed, Colin
Browning, Mrs Angela
Burns, Simon
Burnside, David
Burstow, Paul
Burt, Alistair
Butterfill, Sir John
Cable, Dr. Vincent
Calton, Mrs Patsy
Cameron, David
Carmichael, Alistair
Cash, William
Chapman, Sir Sydney *(Chipping Barnet)*
Clappison, James
Clarke, rh Kenneth *(Rushcliffe)*
Clifton-Brown, Geoffrey
Collins, Tim
Conway, Derek
Cran, James *(Beverley)*
Curry, rh David
Davey, Edward *(Kingston)*
Davis, rh David *(Haltemprice & Howden)*
Djanogly, Jonathan
Doughty, Sue
Duncan, Alan *(Rutland)*
Duncan Smith, rh Iain
Fabricant, Michael
Fallon, Michael
Field, Mark *(Cities of London & Westminster)*
Flight, Howard
Flook, Adrian
Forth, rh Eric
Foster, Don *(Bath)*

Fox, Dr. Liam
Francois, Mark
Gale, Roger *(N Thanet)*
Garnier, Edward
George, Andrew *(St. Ives)*
Gill, Parmjit Singh
Gillan, Mrs Cheryl
Goodman, Paul
Gray, James *(N Wilts)*
Grayling, Chris
Green, Damian *(Ashford)*
Green, Matthew *(Ludlow)*
Greenway, John
Grieve, Dominic
Gummer, rh John
Hague, rh William
Hammond, Philip
Harris, Dr. Evan *(Oxford W & Abingdon)*
Harvey, Nick
Hawkins, Nick
Hayes, John *(S Holland)*
Heath, David
Heathcoat-Amory, rh David
Hendry, Charles
Hoban, Mark *(Fareham)*
Hogg, rh Douglas
Holmes, Paul
Horam, John *(Orpington)*
Howard, rh Michael
Jack, rh Michael
Jackson, Robert *(Wantage)*
Jenkin, Bernard
Kennedy, rh Charles *(Ross Skye & Inverness)*
Key, Robert *(Salisbury)*
Kirkwood, Sir Archy
Knight, rh Greg *(E Yorkshire)*
Laing, Mrs Eleanor
Lait, Mrs Jacqui
Lansley, Andrew
Leigh, Edward
Letwin, rh Oliver
Lewis, Dr. Julian *(New Forest E)*
Liddell-Grainger, Ian
Lilley, rh Peter
Loughton, Tim
Luff, Peter *(M-Worcs)*
McIntosh, Miss Anne
McLoughlin, Patrick
Malins, Humfrey
Maude, rh Francis
Mawhinney, rh Sir Brian
May, Mrs Theresa
Mercer, Patrick
Mitchell, Andrew *(Sutton Coldfield)*
Moore, Michael
Moss, Malcolm
Murrison, Dr. Andrew
Oaten, Mark *(Winchester)*
O'Brien, Stephen *(Eddisbury)*
Öpik, Lembit
Osborne, George *(Tatton)*
Ottaway, Richard
Page, Richard
Pickles, Eric
Price, Adam *(E Carmarthen & Dinefwr)*
Prisk, Mark *(Hertford)*
Pugh, Dr. John
Redwood, rh John
Rendel, David
Robathan, Andrew
Robertson, Hugh *(Faversham & M-Kent)*
Robertson, Laurence *(Tewk'b'ry)*
Robinson, Mrs Iris *(Strangford)*
Robinson, Peter *(Belfast E)*
Roe, Dame Marion
Rosindell, Andrew
Russell, Bob *(Colchester)*
Sanders, Adrian
Selous, Andrew
Shepherd, Richard
Simmonds, Mark
Simpson, Keith *(M-Norfolk)*
Smith, Sir Robert *(W Ab'd'ns & Kincardine)*
Smyth, Rev. Martin *(Belfast S)*
Soames, Nicholas
Spelman, Mrs Caroline
Spicer, Sir Michael
Spink, Bob *(Castle Point)*
Streeter, Gary
Stunell, Andrew
Swayne, Desmond
Syms, Robert
Tapsell, Sir Peter
Taylor, Matthew *(Truro)*
Taylor, Sir Teddy
Teather, Sarah
Thomas, Simon *(Ceredigion)*
Turner, Andrew *(Isle of Wight)*
Tyler, Paul *(N Cornwall)*
Tyrie, Andrew
Waterson, Nigel
Watkinson, Angela
Webb, Steve *(Northavon)*
Whittingdale, John
Wiggin, Bill
Willetts, David
Williams, Hywel *(Caernarfon)*
Williams, Roger *(Brecon)*
Willis, Phil
Wilshire, David
Winterton, Ann *(Congleton)*
Winterton, Sir Nicholas *(Macclesfield)*
Yeo, Tim *(S Suffolk)*
Young, rh Sir George

Tellers for the Noes:
Mr. Crispin Blunt and
Mr. David Ruffley

Question accordingly agreed to.

Orders of the Day

Housing Bill

Lords amendments considered.

Mr. Deputy Speaker (Sir Michael Lord): I inform the House that privilege is involved in Lords amendments Nos. 35, 36, 51, 52, 88, 101, 103, 105, 107, 186, 190, 191, 192 and 202. If the House agrees to any of these Lords amendments, I shall arrange for the necessary entries to be made in the Journal.

New Clause

IMPROVEMENTS IN ENERGY EFFICIENCY

Lords amendment: No. 191.

5.51 pm

The Minister for Housing and Planning (Keith Hill): I beg to move, That this House disagrees with the Lords in the said amendment.

This amendment would place an obligation on the Secretary of State to take reasonable steps to ensure an increase of at least 20 per cent. in residential energy efficiency by 2010. I assure the House that the Government have absolutely no difficulty with the idea that residential energy efficiency should be increased. In debates on this issue in the other place, the Government were accused of weakening their position on that commitment, but I hope to be able to demonstrate the fallacy of that argument. I will also show that the amendment is unnecessary because existing legislation already provides the basis for setting and—just as important—reviewing energy efficiency aims.

The 2003 White Paper referred to savings of around 5 megatonnes of carbon as an indication of what we thought we could achieve at that time. With the benefit of further analysis, we have been honest enough to publicise a slightly lower figure. The energy efficiency plan of action, published last April by my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs, details measures that will deliver savings of 4.2, rather than 5, megatonnes of carbon in the residential sector.

Brian White (Milton Keynes, North-East) (Lab): Will my right hon. Friend give way?

Keith Hill: My hon. Friend knows that I am a big fan, but I would like to be allowed to develop my argument a little before I yield to him.

That figure is based on detailed analysis carried out following publication of the White Paper and reflects changes in economic and technical assumptions that came to light as a result of further work undertaken by DEFRA. So the Government have not sought to pull the wool over people's eyes on this issue. Indeed, the beauty of the figure of 4.2 megatonnes is that, at about 19 per cent., it is very close to the 20 per cent. improvement that this amendment seeks. Achieving 4.2 million tonnes of savings is in fact roughly equivalent to doubling the historic 1990s rate of energy efficiency improvement.

My right hon. Friend the Secretary of State has declared an energy efficiency aim of 3.5 megatonnes of savings in England, under the Sustainable Energy

Act 2003, as a contribution to the UK target of 4.2 megatonnes. The Act enables us to keep our aims under review, and improve on them where we can. DEFRA will consult shortly on the climate change programme review and we will also review our energy efficiency aim in 2007, as well as setting the target for the next phase of the energy efficiency commitment beginning in 2008. In other words, this is a constantly developing scene.

Savings of 4.2 megatonnes of carbon are not to be sniffed at, and they are not the whole story. The difference of 0.8 megatonnes between the White Paper and action plan figures will be more than compensated for by an increase in projected savings from the business and public sector. We estimate that the measures set out in the action plan will achieve carbon savings of around 12 million tonnes per annum by 2010 across all sectors. That is 20 per cent. greater than the original White Paper figure of 10 million tonnes and by 2010 is expected to save households and businesses more than £3 billion a year on their energy bills.

Mr. Tony McWalter (Hemel Hempstead) (Lab/Co-op): There is much in what my right hon. Friend says, but is he aware that any saving in energy not only saves carbon emissions, but potentially depresses the need for nuclear energy as part of our energy sources? I would be grateful if my right hon. Friend addressed that issue and not simply that of carbon emissions, important though it is.

Keith Hill: I take my hon. Friend's thoughtful point, but I am the Minister for Housing and Planning and I am addressing the issue in the context of housing. Wider issues of energy policy are not for me. I guarantee, however, that his observation will be reported to the Department for Trade and Industry, which has responsibilities in that area.

Mr. Simon Thomas (Ceredigion) (PC): The Minister has tried to claim that savings on carbon emissions from the industrial sector will offset the 16 per cent. cut—it is not a small cut—in the Government's initial target. However, that does not address the issue of fuel poverty and the warm homes initiative. If a 5 megatonnes saving had been the target, it would have provided the opportunity to deliver energy efficiency in the domestic sector with corresponding savings for some of the most deprived in our communities. I would not like the Government to lose sight of that aim.

Keith Hill: I am grateful to the hon. Gentleman for his observation. I assure him that there is no danger of the relationship between energy efficiency and fuel poverty being ignored in the course of our deliberations. In fact, it is my expectation that we will be able to discuss those issues at some length and in detail in consideration of the third group of amendments, which includes proposals on the decent homes programme. He will be aware that we have to make a distinction between issues of energy use and energy loss and issues of income. There is not necessarily a direct and obvious relationship between the two, as I will seek to argue later.

Brian White: In Committee, it was pointed out that there was a discrepancy in the way in which the figure of 4.2 megatonnes was calculated and the Minister who replied agreed to look at it again. What action has been taken to review the figure?

Keith Hill: I am certain that when Ministers make such undertakings they are followed up. I know that my hon. Friend has a deep interest in this issue—as is demonstrated by his legislative attempts—but the picture is shifting and evolving. As the technology changes, the opportunity for delivery occurs. I take his point, however, and I shall seek to ensure that those undertakings were properly pursued. I am sure that they were.

Mr. John Hayes (South Holland and The Deepings) (Con): The picture is indeed shifting, but it is important for the House to be clear about it. In the other place, Lord Bassam said that the decent homes programme would reduce carbon emissions by at least 2 megatonnes. The Government's energy efficiency plan for action, however, claims that the decent homes programme will be responsible for 0.05 megatonnes. The position has shifted, but has it really shifted that much?

6 pm

Keith Hill: Perhaps the hon. Gentleman will permit me two things: to develop the argument in my speech, which is primarily about energy efficiency; and to revert to the decent homes programme in our later exchanges. I am, however, grateful to him for putting the issue on the record. At an appropriate point, I might be better placed to answer it.

Ms Joan Walley (Stoke-on-Trent, North) (Lab): A number of Members are obviously concerned about the amendment. I welcome my right hon. Friend's commitment to further review, but in the light both of debates on the Energy Bill and of the Environmental Audit Committee's recommendations to the Government, will he give the House an assurance that he will find some mechanism in the review to consider what his Department, DEFRA and the DTI are doing so that we can be certain that we have the best possible standards for dealing with energy efficiency as the cheapest, cleanest and safest way to reduce CO_2 emissions?

Keith Hill: I am happy to give my hon. Friend that assurance, and I do not do so in a facile fashion. This is an aspect of genuine joined-up government—to use that familiar and slightly cod phrase. Indeed, I recently met DEFRA Ministers precisely to discuss such issues. Other Ministers were present, as well as representatives from other Departments, so the issues are genuinely being addressed across the board, and I hope that my hon. Friend finds that, at least, reassuring.

I was setting out certain points about the progress that we have already made on the action plan and the objectives for energy and carbon savings, which go beyond those originally identified in the 2003 White Paper. It is important that those points are put on the record. They have certainly been raised in previous debates, but it does no harm to reiterate them. That is not all. More energy efficiency measures are being

[Keith Hill]

backed by firm policy commitments than ever before. I highlight two key measures: we expect condensing boilers to be installed faster under the 2005 building regulations than anticipated in the energy White Paper, and we expect installations of cavity wall insulation to more than double under the next phase of the energy efficiency commitment, which puts obligations on energy suppliers to achieve energy efficiency gains.

I regard the amendment as well intentioned but unnecessary and inflexible. We are already working towards its objective. Setting a numerical target in primary legislation will not help us to pursue an open, technically sound, evolving approach to the setting of objectives and targets.

Although I recognise the genuine interest in the issue shown by hon. Members on both sides of the House and have listened to debates in this place and read those that took place elsewhere, I have been struck by the approach of some Opposition Members. Their zeal for the amendment has not been matched by their approach to other provisions in the Bill that would in fact help their case. I am thinking particularly of the home condition reports that will form part of the home information packs under part 5. The EU directive on energy performance of buildings will make it compulsory for home sellers to provide energy efficiency information on their home to potential buyers. That is entirely reasonable. We know that most improvements to homes take place when keen new owners take over.

Mr. Edward Davey (Kingston and Surbiton) (LD): I am grateful to the Minister for giving way and I apologise for not being in the Chamber for the beginning of his remarks.

Does not the EU directive require certification of energy efficiency to be given only when the house is sold and not when the property is marketed? Is not that key to the Minister's proposals for home condition reports?

Keith Hill: We will have an opportunity to discuss those matters and, in due course, I want to go into a little more detail about the inter-relationship of the energy and home condition reports. The EU directive will require an energy report at every point of sale and that will be part and parcel of the home information pack.

Although the Opposition favour compulsory energy efficiency reports—at least, the Liberal Democrats favour them—they do not support the very means whereby they will be delivered cost-effectively: compulsory home condition reports as part of a compulsory home information pack. Those reports will contain information about the energy efficiency of homes when they are marketed. Compulsory home information packs, with data about the energy efficiency of a property and what a new owner can do to improve it, will capture that moment. Voluntary packs risk frittering that opportunity. We will return to the issue when we debate the next group of amendments.

Lynne Jones (Birmingham, Selly Oak) (Lab): I entirely agree with my right hon. Friend about the mechanisms to improve energy efficiency, but what I cannot quite understand is why he thinks that the 20 per cent. target would be inflexible. If we overshot it and did better, that would be fine, but is not it good to have the target, to fix the Government's mind and to ensure that we reach the minimum necessary to achieve our overall goals? After all, let us not forget that our overall goal is a 60 per cent. reduction in CO_2 emissions by 2050.

Keith Hill: But we are already almost at that 20 per cent. point—achieved by mechanisms that may not have been anticipated even two years ago. When we are moving towards the target, with which my hon. Friend is properly concerned, it seems unnecessary to add this provision to the Bill and set a numerical target, which may be overshot or outdated but none the less adds a degree of inflexibility. Indeed, it might even encourage a degree of complacency. Let us have neither suspicion of the Government's intentions nor encouragement to complacency. Let us not make an unnecessary amendment to the Bill.

Mr. Robert Syms (Poole) (Con): It has been a fair time since we debated these issues in Committee, and one could have predicted that they would come back at this point. The upper House has done us a favour by bringing the matter back to our attention.

The amendment is not unreasonable. It is not unreasonable that

> "the Secretary of State shall take reasonable steps to ensure an increase in residential energy efficiency of at least 20% by 2010 based upon 2000 levels."

The Government included that commitment in their manifesto, so it could not have seemed too inflexible then. They said that they would decrease CO_2 emissions by 20 per cent. by 2010 based on 1990 levels. From 1990 to 1997, carbon emissions decreased by 13.1 million tonnes. Since the Government were elected in 1997, such emissions remained almost static, but in three of the past four years they have increased.

In August, the Environmental Audit Committee reported that the Government's latest forecasts indicated that by 2010 carbon emissions would be 8 million cubic tonnes more than the target—a 25 per cent. shortfall. That target is the Government's target; they have assured the public no fewer than 15 times that it would be the energy efficiency aim set under the Sustainable Energy Act 2003. Some members of the Government have promoted that target. On 17 August, the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry wrote to Mr. J. Card of Hereford:

> "I hope the above helps to convince you that the Government has put in place measures to deliver the expected 5 million tonnes of carbon from household energy efficiency savings."

The Government's sustainable energy policy network website lists as an objective delivery by 2010 of

> "additional emissions reductions in households of around 3.5 million cubic tonnes . . . beyond those envisaged"—

that is, 1.5 million cubic tonnes—

> "in the UK Climate Change Programme".

That equals 5 million cubic tonnes, or the 20 per cent. specified in the amendment. The site also states that it is a Government "commitment" to deliver

> "improvements in household energy efficiency of 5 million cubic tonnes by 2010",

which is exactly what the amendment says.

The DEFRA website lists the target under the Home Energy Conservation Act 1995 as a 30 per cent. improvement in 10 to 15 years, using the baseline of 1 April 1996. Taking that as its lowest—30 per cent. over 15 years, based on 1996 levels—it is virtually the same as 20 per cent. over 10 years, as in the Lords amendment. Indeed, the Energy Saving Trust—the Government's own adviser—does not know why the target has been changed to 16 per cent. It has been completely surprised by the sudden decrease and has said so publicly, as it has worked on the policies to achieve the higher figure of 20 per cent. In evidence to the Environmental Audit Committee on 19 May, it said:

> "We were involved in developing the Plan"

but

> "we have to say that we did not have the final decision"

in respect of the reduction

> "and we do not agree with it."

As support for the 20 per cent. target will come from Opposition and Government Members, the real issue is why the Government have decided to change the target. After all, the Lords amendment uses the phrase "reasonable steps". I have served on enough Committees to know that "reasonable" is not an unreasonable word to use in legislation. The target does not necessarily have to be achieved, but the Government must take reasonable steps to achieve it. The Lords amendment is not unreasonable. It would set this country's policies in the context of international relations at a responsible level, and it should be supported.

I note that early-day motion 96, on the residential energy efficiency aim pursuant to the Sustainable Energy Act 2003, has accumulated more than 340 signatures. Given that Ministers would not sign an early-day motion, two thirds of all the Back Benchers in Parliament must have signed it. I would not suggest that Members of Parliament would sign any early-day motion lightly on such an important matter that has an impact on the future and sensible energy policies. That shows the breadth of support for the 20 per cent. target. The Lords have given us an opportunity to think again, and I hope that the House will adopt a sensible approach and vote for the 20 per cent. target.

Brian White: The Lords amendment is very important, and I agree with the hon. Member for Poole (Mr. Syms) that their lordships have done us a good service by introducing it. Reference has been made already to the Sustainable Energy Act 2003, which I piloted through the House a couple of years ago, and early-day motion 96, so I want to concentrate on what the Government said in opposing the amendment in the Lords last week, which the Minister has just repeated.

Last week, Lord Rooker said that 4.2 megatonnes is double the historic 1990s level. That is welcome, and we should not lose sight of the fact that there has been a major change. In the energy White Paper, the Government said why the target was important, and they set the aspiration at a 20 per cent. reduction. The problem is that officials began to realise that an historic step change would be required and that a number of issues need to be addressed.

Lord Rooker argued for flexibility and said that the 2003 Act provides a mechanism to increase the level—it certainly does—but that is not a reason why the Lords amendment, which would set a floor, should not be carried. The Lords amendment would set in statute a floor beneath which Government aspirations should not fall. If the Government want to exceed that baseline, they can use the mechanism in the Act to go way above it.

The Minister rightly referred to the action plan, which contains many good points; but, again, that does not negate the need for the Lords amendment. The Government have also argued that we are doing well in the industrial and business sector, so we should be allowed to slip in another sector, but this is not a zero-sum game. Our aspiration should be to exceed the level in every sector.

Lord Rooker also said that the Government have a good tale to tell. The Government are not reneging on their commitments, despite what the Opposition have said, but they are scoring a classic own goal. We have a good tale to tell, but because we are not living up to what we said in the White Paper and we are arguing about 4.2 megatonnes as against 5 megatonnes, we are scoring an own goal for no good reason.

6.15 pm

David Taylor (North-West Leicestershire) (Lab/Co-op): Does my hon. Friend not agree that set as we may undershoot our CO_2 emission reduction targets by about 25 per cent., as reported by the Environmental Audit Committee, to pass up what the White Paper called the cheapest, cleanest and safest way to reduce carbon emissions—energy efficiency—seems perverse, to put it mildly?

Brian White: My hon. Friend makes the key point. Energy efficiency is the best and most effective way to achieve our goals. Whether we are talking about tackling climate change, reducing carbon emissions or taking people out of fuel poverty, energy efficiency is a key policy instrument that the Government must use. By embracing the Lords amendment, the Government would be going with the flow, rather than trying to find a justification for resisting it, when everyone interested in the issue knows that the White Paper provided the right aspiration and the right policy.

In May, during the debates on the Energy Bill in Committee, the Minister said that the energy commitment would be reviewed in 2007—he has repeated that today—but he also thought that the non-statutory commitment would lead to a substantial stepping up of activity. Unfortunately, that has not been the case. If I am right and the increase has not been sufficient, not holding the review until 2007, with implementation in 2008, leaves very little time to achieve our goals.

The Minister also said that dialogue with the industry was needed to ensure that the serious disappointment that has been expressed until now does not recur, but that disappointment has been reinforced by the resistance to this very sensible Lords amendment. We have been down this route before with combined heat and power, when we made similar statements with consequences for the CHP industry. We are in danger of doing the same with energy efficiency.

[Brian White]

I have often quoted Bryan Carsberg saying that regulators think that if something is not in the statute, it does not exist. What is true for regulators is also true for officials. Such a proposal has been around for a long time. Indeed, it was part of my original Sustainable Energy Bill. When a ministerial reshuffle took place during the consideration of that Bill, officials said that they would oppose it, although it had been agreed before, and their words are etched on my brain:

> "That may have been ministerial policy, but it is not departmental policy."

That is the nub of the problem, and those words struck home. If officials do not see something in statute and do not agree with it, it will not happen. There must be a statutory requirement to allow officials to act. That is why the performance and innovation unit's report was so important and why the energy White Paper was so insistent on the 20 per cent. target.

Everyone agrees that the era of low energy prices, which helped to lift millions out of fuel poverty, is over. We are in a different global environment, so we must consider how to take more people out of fuel poverty. At a recent energy company's annual general meeting, someone said:

> "The consequences for companies that do not act responsibly and take steps to assess and mitigate risks posed by climate change will be just as devastating as the recent corporate scandals."

What is true for companies is also true for Governments.

Next summer, the UK will hold the presidencies of the G8 and the EU, and the Prime Minister has rightly made tackling climate change a key objective. Never has the old adage "Think global, act local" been so true. If we do not take on board the Lords amendment, we will negate all the words we use and cause problems at home and abroad. It will give our opponents—whether political opponents at home or countries that oppose the Kyoto protocol—the excuse not to take the action that is desperately needed if we are to take climate change seriously.

The Prime Minister is right to focus on the international context next year, but we do not need to erect unnecessary barriers, which we will do if we do not accept the Lords amendment. We can hardly criticise the United State if we seem to run away from a sensible amendment. This ought to be a no-brainer, given the list of people who support the target, which includes the energy industry, energy efficiency companies, campaigners from various non-governmental organisation, Friends of the Earth, Greenpeace, the Women's Institute, Shelter and tenants' organisations.

All the political parties signed up to the proposal—all their green wings have endorsed it—and some 340 MPs from all parties signed up to the aspiration. The wording of the early-day motion was carefully discussed with Ministers and officials, and the figures were checked with officials several times. All of them suggested a figure of 20 per cent, not 16 per cent. The 20 per cent. figure was reaffirmed on 24 occasions, 15 of which were ministerial statements. It was confirmed only a few days before the actual target was announced.

The Minister says that there is only a small difference between targets of 16 and 20 per cent., so why is it a problem to accept the Lords amendment as a basis on which we can move forward? There is a mechanism by which we can go above the target, but we need a statutory floor. Whatever words the Government use, they will send a clear message by disagreeing with the Lords amendment: the matter is not a priority, and the market need not deliver because slippage is okay. That message would be totally wrong. It would go against everything that the Government are trying to do and all the good things that Departments have done.

Dr. Brian Iddon (Bolton, South-East) (Lab): Does my hon. Friend accept that the all-party warm homes group has taken evidence showing that industry wants to invest in products that would lead to greater energy efficiency? That would create jobs, so there would be a win-win situation all round: we would not only reduce CO_2 emissions and the utility bills of people in fuel poverty, but increase jobs in industry.

Brian White: As I say, this should be a no-brainer. I ask the Minister to rethink his position and accept the Lords amendment. I do not understand why he wants to turn the win-win situation that my hon. Friend described into a no win situation in which we would be accused of reneging on commitments. The story that we have to tell is good, and we have made excellent achievements, so we need to seize the opportunity of achieving a long-held Labour aspiration. We should not give our political opponents a stick with which to beat us, or erect unnecessary barriers that would hinder next year's G8 negotiations.

Matthew Green (Ludlow) (LD): The Minister described the figures as a shifting, moving picture. The shifting and moving has been on the Government's part, because they have moved from their stated target of 5 megatonnes of carbon down to 4.2 megatonnes. He says that that would result in a 19 per cent. target on carbon rather than a 20 per cent. one, and asks what everyone is getting so worked up about. I suspect that the figure is closer to 18 per cent. than 19 per cent.—

Alan Simpson (Nottingham, South) (Lab): It is 16 per cent.

Matthew Green: Well, the reduction would be 16 per cent., but the Minister said that the overall effect would be equivalent to a 19 per cent. target. However, if the difference between the targets is so small, why will the Government not agree to the 20 per cent. target? Why is a target of 19 per cent. more achievable than one of 20 per cent.? The Government must know something that the rest of us do not. There must be a reason why a 19 per cent. target can be achieved easily, but 20 per cent. is out of reach. I am struggling to understand what that is, so when the Minister winds up the debate, I hope that he will set out why the Government are confident that they will meet the 19 per cent. target, yet fail to meet 20 per cent. The projections that his officials are making must be really tight to enable him to reach that conclusion.

By my count, at least 150 Labour Members signed the early-day motion—[HON. MEMBERS: "Over 200."] I am being told that the figure is more than 200. *[Interruption.]* Well, the bigger the number gets, the more uncomfortable the Minister looks. I hope that the Labour Members who signed the early-day motion will back that up with their votes.

There is a lot of good in the Bill—*[Interruption.]* There are some bad things as well. However, as there is a lot of good in it, we do not want to descend into a process of ping-pong between the Lords and the Commons. The easiest way for us to avoid that would be to accept the Lords amendment. If Labour Members were to stick to their guns, we would not have to send the Bill back to the Lords because we could pass it now. That would get the Minister out of a bind, because it would make the Whips happy if we did not get into ping-pong. The Minister used to be a Whip, so he knows all about that.

Hon. Members have posed good questions already, yet the Minister made great play of the fact that the target in the amendment is only just above the Government's proposal, but if there is such a small difference, the higher target must be achievable, unless he knows something that the rest of us do not. It is very strange for the Government to say that we should resist the amendment because we will get awfully close to the target in it anyway, but that is essentially the position that they have adopted.

I hope that the Minister will make the difference between the targets clear and explain why there is so much at stake that he will resist the amendment. Energy efficiency has been described as one of the Government's key objectives, and proposals have been made by the Cabinet Office performance and innovation unit, so there is clearly support for it high up in Government. The Government's Sustainable Development Commission has used the 20 per cent. figure, and we have heard that it has been cited in letters even recently. I do not understand why the Minister is resisting the amendment. The hon. Member for Milton Keynes, North-East (Brian White) described the decision as a no-brainer, so the Minister must come clean and tell us what is at stake if we change the target from 19 to 20 per cent.

Alan Simpson: We need to put the debate in the context of the best aspects of the Government's record. For the first time in history, the Labour Government gave a statutory undertaking to eradicate fuel poverty in this country by 2016. The Government and the Labour party should rightly be proud of that awesome commitment. Equally, the Prime Minister made it clear to the House that meeting Britain's Kyoto targets was a statutory and binding obligation. He has also said that addressing the challenge of climate change will be the centrepiece of the next Labour Government, so the amendment should be at the heart of what Labour has tried to stand for: taking people out of fuel poverty while meeting our broader global obligations to tackle climate change. It is thus bizarre and somewhat absurd that the Government refuse to endorse the targets in the amendment that successive Labour Ministers have affirmed as Government policy. We are having an "Alice Through the Looking Glass" debate that has been constructed by officials in the Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs, rather than Labour Ministers or the Labour party.

The reduction of the carbon target from 5 megatonnes to 4.2 megatonnes has been justified on the ground that it was done on the basis of the best available evidence at the time. People have asked the nature of that evidence and where it came from, but it has not been adequately justified. Our advisers, the Fuel Poverty Advisory Group, said that it was at a loss to understand why the Government wanted to introduce a lower target. I think that in this Bill, as in those that have preceded it, civil servants have been faced with the prospect of targets, but rather than asking how they can meet them, they have asked how they can lower the hurdle. They want to know how they can appear to be meeting Government targets without breaking a sweat. There is a conflict not between different parties in the House, but between the House—it knows the policies that came from the Government—and the civil servants who have the job of writing measures to deliver and implement Government policy. They should not rewrite such policies to give themselves an easier life while leaving everyone else with bigger problems.

6.30 pm

The Minister understandably rebuffed the question of whether that would contribute to our ability to choose not to go down the nuclear path by saying that it was not in his remit to address energy industry issues because we are merely discussing a Bill on housing. That is perfectly fair. By the same token, however, he cannot try to shelter from reducing carbon savings as a result of improving household energy efficiency by saying that other savings would be met and exceeded in other parts of industry. We made specific commitments in relation to the housing sector and it is against those commitments that we are being asked to define a position in the Bill.

Hon. Members have counted the number of Labour MPs who signed the early-day motion, with different results.

David Taylor: It is 229.

Alan Simpson: It seems that the figure is now 229.

Someone said that it is hard to find a loser, but there are 230 potential losers—the 229 Labour MPs who signed the early-day motion in good faith and the country. Those commitments are not abstract figures. They will affect the quality of life of the most fuel-poor people in the country. The Government need to accept that the challenge that faces us is to stand by the commitments that we have made.

In a letter on behalf of the Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs dated 28 October, Alan Clifford of the sustainable energy policy division wrote to Mr. Robson, chair of the Association for the Conservation of Energy and a member of the Government's Fuel Poverty Advisory Group, in an attempt to rationalise why the lower figure of 4.2 million tonnes of carbon emissions was being set. He said:

> "the White Paper figure was based on the best information available at the time, and was not a target."

Unfortunately, we are getting into the realms of pantomime. Civil servants may consistently say that the figure was not a target, but other voices in the background say that it was. The Labour manifesto said:

> "We will lead the fight against global warming, through our target of a 20 per cent. reduction in carbon dioxide emissions by 2010."

[Alan Simpson]

So that target was defined in the manifesto.

The letter went on to say that the energy efficiency action plan, published in 2004, reduced the target to 4.2 million tonnes because that was deemed to be the appropriate figure. So the 5 million tonnes was not a fixed figure. However, when the hon. Member for Truro and St. Austell (Matthew Taylor) asked the Prime Minister:

> "Will he make it clear that there is no truth in the interpretation that has been put on the comments of some Ministers that Britain will stick to the new Government's 20 per cent. target for cuts to CO_2 emissions only if other countries co-operate in cutting their emissions? Will he confirm that our target is not conditional on the action of others?",

his response could not have been clearer. He said:

> "It is not a conditional target".—[*Official Report*, 24 June 1997; Vol. 296, c. 687–88.]

We have targets that are defined as unconditional; targets that are defined as a quantum; targets that are defined by a succession of Labour Ministers; and targets that are endorsed, approved and supported by 229 Labour Members. I suspect that the overwhelming majority of local authorities, non-governmental organisations and everyone who works in the environment and fuel poverty sector all envisaged us setting and standing by our targets. The question that will baffle the public is why on earth we would want to renege on them now.

The Minister said that there was a danger that setting the target would create a mood of complacency and we would be held back, but the final paragraph of Alan Clifford's letter nails the lie of that when he says:

> "it has always been recognised that additional measures might be needed to achieve the domestic goal of a 20 per cent. reduction in carbon dioxide emissions below 1990 levels by 2010."

By setting the lower figure of 4.2 million tonnes, there is a calculated level of under-achievement in which officials recognise that the Government will be forced to identify other measures. Why do we build in a guarantee of failure to meet the targets that we have set for ourselves when it is within in our reach to do so and to stand by the commitments that we made?

Hon. Members are right to say that the energy efficiency industry waits for us—pleads with us—to set those targets, which it will meet. It is incomprehensible that the Minister asks the House to set lower standards when our original targets are within our reach and we should stand by them. I am not asking him to do a Dolly Parton and stand by our man, but I am asking him to stand by our manifesto, which would be welcomed by the public and the party.

Sir Sydney Chapman (Chipping Barnet) (Con): I shall be brief because I agree with every word my hon. Friend the Member for Poole (Mr. Syms) and the hon. Members for Milton Keynes, North-East (Brian White), for Ludlow (Matthew Green) and for Nottingham, South (Alan Simpson) said. I declare a possible non-financial interest. For many years, I was a qualified architect, but for much of that time I was off the drawing board and now receive no income from my erstwhile profession. Indeed, I said in Committee and before that I have a reverse interest to declare because for years I paid professional subscriptions to the Royal Institute of British Architects to no avail.

I feel a sense of sadness about the proposal. I honestly do not think that there was any need for the Government to resile from their commitment to improve energy efficiency by 20 per cent. by 2010 on 2000 AD levels. They have made a tactical mistake, and I shall set out why. As hon. Members have said, they repeatedly assured us that that target would be set. My hon. Friend the Member for Poole said that they repeated that 15 times. The target has got into the public psyche, which is good and heart-warming. It has also been fully supported by the Energy Saving Trust, the Sustainable Development Commission, the Government's official advisers and at least two other Departments—the Department of Trade and Industry and DEFRA. I cannot understand why the Office of the Deputy Prime Minister has suddenly decided to revise it.

The plan is to save 4.2 megatonnes of carbon rather than 5 megatonnes. That is a reduction of 16 per cent., which is significant. However, as other hon. Members said, the revised target means that we will hit only a 19 per cent. overall improvement in energy efficiency instead of 20 per cent. by 2010. Overall, the House supports the Government in the early-day motion that has been tabled. I hope that the number of Labour Members who support the proposal does not increase, as that detracts from the all-party nature of the issue, for which there is general support. I shall not be here in 2010, but if I am correct, my colleagues, whether they belong to the Government or the Opposition, will not feel a sense of triumph if the Government fail. There will be a sense of sadness, combined with respect for the fact that the Government kept to their original target. Even at the 59th minute of the 11th hour, I beseech the Minister, for whom I have a very strong regard, to change his mind or seek to persuade the Government to do so.

In conclusion, the Government have set myriad targets—some people may say too many—throughout the field of government. I am a member of the Public Administration Committee, which produced a report on Government targets. We may have complained that there are too many targets, some of which contradict others, but we have never suggested that pinpointed targets are anything other than a good thing for the Government to try to achieve. If the Government do not accept the Lords amendment, which was tabled by Baroness Hanham on 3 November, they will detract from the efficacy of their target-setting policies. I beseech the Minister, who represents Streatham—I must remember not to say "St. Reatham"—to reconsider his position, as he will win tremendous all-party support not only from hon. Members but from the public at large, persuading them that we take the issue of energy savings and energy efficiency very seriously indeed.

Ms Walley: I shall make a brief speech, as I hope that in his reply the Minister will take on board the many points made by Members on both sides of the House.

I religiously signed the early-day motions because I believed in them and in the original target. We must be careful not to devalue targets by suggesting that a target that cannot be met provides a perverse incentive and undermines the system. Many hon. Members passionately want the original target to be met and to be applied to energy efficiency. My hon. Friend the Member for Milton Keynes, North-East (Brian White) set out our aims clearly, and I urge the Minister to persuade the Government to address the reports and debate on the issue. If the target cannot be included in the Bill, will he give us an assurance that we can meet what we set out to achieve—the basic floor target of 20 per cent. savings?

Mr. McWalter: I am sure that, like us, the Minister is strongly in favour of abolishing fuel poverty and meeting achievable targets on insulation with a hard-working programme. I do not believe that that is at issue. However, I would like to know why he believes that it is inappropriate and wrong to include the 20 per cent. target in primary legislation. Does he fear, for instance, that the Government could be taken to court gratuitously if the Lords amendment is accepted? Would a lot of legal time be taken up defending slow-burning Government programmes? Why does he agree with everything that has been said in favour of the target, but object to its inclusion in primary legislation?

6.45 pm

Mr. Bill Tynan (Hamilton, South) (Lab): I will not delay the House long, as I merely seek clarification.

It is obviously difficult for the Government to change their mind. Had the Bill received pre-legislative scrutiny, they might have been able to do so. However, once a Government have decided to push through a measure, it is usually impossible for them to change their mind.

I have just one question for the Minister. The Lords amendment says that

> "the Secretary of State shall take reasonable steps to ensure an increase in residential energy efficiency of at least 20 per cent. by 2010 based upon 2000 levels."

Will the Minister clarify the Government's position? Is it that he supports the target but does not want to include it in the Bill? His reply will help hon. Members who signed early-day motion 96 to consider their position before voting against the Government.

Keith Hill: Let me provide immediate assurance to my hon. Friend the Member for Hamilton, South (Mr. Tynan) that the Government support the 20 per cent. target and, indeed, as I have argued, we are in the process of meeting it.

I am alarmed by the tone taken by some of my hon. Friends. There is no hidden agenda or conspiracy. May I tell my hon. Friend the Member for Nottingham, South (Alan Simpson) that the Government have not reneged on their commitments—we are delivering on them, as I have previously said, and as I shall go on to demonstrate. I respect the expertise of my hon. Friend the Member for Milton Keynes, North-East (Brian White), who protested that we have not accepted the terms of the amendment, even though, somehow, we have already agreed to its substance in legislative form. We have not done so, but we are not withdrawing or resiling from our commitments. To be entirely accurate, the figure of 5 million tonnes of carbon savings in the residential sector was never the Government's stated aim, but an initial indication in the energy White Paper of what could be achieved. However, our record stands in its own right. The 4.2 million tonnes of carbon savings that have been mentioned in our debate represent a significant increase in activity on current levels, and will require a major increase in delivery by the industry. Our latest calculations indicate that that total corresponds to an increase in efficiency of about 19 per cent. compared with 2000 levels.

Mrs. Anne Campbell (Cambridge) (Lab): Will my right hon. Friend give way?

Keith Hill: No, I am afraid that I do not have time.

We expect a significant increase in overall carbon savings from energy efficiency. The energy efficiency action plan details measures to make estimated carbon savings of 12 million tonnes of carbon—a 20 per cent. increase compared with the rough figures in the energy White Paper, which predicted savings of 10 million tonnes of carbon to 2010. I repeat, therefore, that we are genuinely succeeding in meeting our energy efficiency targets, so the Lords amendment is simply unnecessary. There are no grounds for doubting the Government's commitment and we are getting there by making carbon savings across the board.

My hon. Friend the Member for Hemel Hempstead (Mr. McWalter) raised the relationship between energy efficiency targets and fuel poverty. He will know that that relationship, about which colleagues and I share serious concern, is not unilateral. We will have an opportunity to debate it later this evening, but I remind him that measures in the energy efficiency action plan play an important part in combating fuel poverty. As he and the House will know, there has been a steady reduction in the number of households in fuel poverty, which we can discuss in more detail later. However, I remind the House that the fuel poverty action plan for England, which will be published later this year, will set out how the Government expect to meet the target of eradicating fuel poverty in vulnerable households by 2010. I therefore invite the House to disagree with the Lords amendment.

Question put, That this House disagrees with the Lords in the said amendment:—

The House divided: Ayes 259, Noes 186.

Division No. 311] **[6:49 pm**

AYES

Ainsworth, Bob *(Cov'try NE)*
Allen, Graham
Anderson, Janet *(Rossendale & Darwen)*
Armstrong, rh Ms Hilary
Atherton, Ms Candy
Atkins, Charlotte
Bailey, Adrian
Baird, Vera
Banks, Tony
Barron, rh Kevin
Bayley, Hugh
Beard, Nigel
Beckett, rh Margaret
Begg, Miss Anne
Bell, Sir Stuart
Benn, rh Hilary
Benton, Joe *(Bootle)*
Berry, Roger
Blackman, Liz
Blizzard, Bob
Borrow, David
Bradley, rh Keith *(Withington)*
Brennan, Kevin
Brown, Russell *(Dumfries)*
Browne, Desmond
Bryant, Chris
Burden, Richard
Burgon, Colin
Burnham, Andy
Caborn, rh Richard
Cairns, David
Campbell, Alan *(Tynemouth)*
Casale, Roger
Cawsey, Ian *(Brigg)*
Challen, Colin
Chapman, Ben *(Wirral S)*
Chaytor, David

Clark, Mrs Helen *(Peterborough)*
Clark, Paul *(Gillingham)*
Clarke, rh Tom *(Coatbridge & Chryston)*
Clelland, David
Clwyd, Ann *(Cynon V)*
Coaker, Vernon
Coffey, Ms Ann
Connarty, Michael
Cook, rh Robin *(Livingston)*
Corston, Jean
Crausby, David
Cruddas, Jon
Cummings, John
Cunningham, rh Dr. Jack *(Copeland)*
Cunningham, Jim *(Coventry S)*
Cunningham, Tony *(Workington)*
David, Wayne
Davidson, Ian
Davies, rh Denzil *(Llanelli)*
Davies, Geraint *(Croydon C)*
Dean, Mrs Janet
Denham, rh John
Dhanda, Parmjit
Dismore, Andrew
Donohoe, Brian H.
Doran, Frank
Dowd, Jim *(Lewisham W)*
Eagle, Angela *(Wallasey)*
Eagle, Maria *(L'pool Garston)*
Edwards, Huw
Efford, Clive
Ellman, Mrs Louise
Ennis, Jeff *(Barnsley E)*
Etherington, Bill
Farrelly, Paul
Field, rh Frank *(Birkenhead)*
Fisher, Mark
Fitzpatrick, Jim
Fitzsimons, Mrs Lorna
Flynn, Paul *(Newport W)*
Foster, rh Derek
Foster, Michael *(Worcester)*
Foster, Michael Jabez *(Hastings & Rye)*
Foulkes, rh George
Francis, Dr. Hywel
Gardiner, Barry
George, Andrew *(St. Ives)*
Gilroy, Linda
Godsiff, Roger
Griffiths, Jane *(Reading E)*
Griffiths, Win *(Bridgend)*
Hall, Mike *(Weaver Vale)*
Hall, Patrick *(Bedford)*
Hamilton, David *(Midlothian)*
Hanson, David
Harris, Tom *(Glasgow Cathcart)*
Havard, Dai *(Merthyr Tydfil & Rhymney)*
Healey, John
Henderson, Ivan *(Harwich)*
Hendrick, Mark
Hepburn, Stephen
Heppell, John
Hesford, Stephen
Heyes, David
Hill, Keith *(Streatham)*
Hinchliffe, David
Hodge, Margaret
Hood, Jimmy *(Clydesdale)*
Hope, Phil *(Corby)*
Hopkins, Kelvin
Howarth, rh Alan *(Newport E)*
Howarth, George *(Knowsley N & Sefton E)*
Hoyle, Lindsay
Hughes, Beverley *(Stretford & Urmston)*
Hughes, Kevin *(Doncaster N)*
Humble, Mrs Joan
Hurst, Alan *(Braintree)*
Hutton, rh John
Illsley, Eric
Irranca-Davies, Huw
Jackson, Glenda *(Hampstead & Highgate)*
Jackson, Helen *(Hillsborough)*
Jamieson, David
Jenkins, Brian
Jones, Helen *(Warrington N)*
Jones, Kevan *(N Durham)*
Jones, Martyn *(Clwyd S)*
Jowell, rh Tessa
Joyce, Eric *(Falkirk W)*
Kaufman, rh Sir Gerald
Keeble, Ms Sally
Kennedy, Jane *(Wavertree)*
Khabra, Piara S.
Kidney, David
King, Andy *(Rugby)*
King, Ms Oona *(Bethnal Green & Bow)*
Knight, Jim *(S Dorset)*
Kumar, Dr. Ashok
Ladyman, Dr. Stephen
Lammy, David
Laxton, Bob *(Derby N)*
Lazarowicz, Mark
Lepper, David
Leslie, Christopher
Levitt, Tom *(High Peak)*
Lewis, Ivan *(Bury S)*
Linton, Martin
Love, Andrew
Lucas, Ian *(Wrexham)*
Luke, Iain *(Dundee E)*
Lyons, John *(Strathkelvin)*
McAvoy, Thomas
McCabe, Stephen
McCartney, rh Ian
McDonagh, Siobhain
MacDonald, Calum
MacDougall, John
McGuire, Mrs Anne
McIsaac, Shona
McKechin, Ann
McKenna, Rosemary
McNulty, Tony
MacShane, Denis
Mactaggart, Fiona
McWalter, Tony
McWilliam, John
Mahmood, Khalid
Mahon, Mrs Alice
Mann, John *(Bassetlaw)*
Marsden, Gordon *(Blackpool S)*
Marshall, David *(Glasgow Shettleston)*
Marshall-Andrews, Robert
Martlew, Eric
Merron, Gillian
Michael, rh Alun
Miller, Andrew
Moffatt, Laura
Moonie, Dr. Lewis
Morris, rh Estelle
Mountford, Kali
Mudie, George
Mullin, Chris
Munn, Ms Meg
Murphy, Denis *(Wansbeck)*
Murphy, Jim *(Eastwood)*
Naysmith, Dr. Doug
O'Brien, Bill *(Normanton)*
Organ, Diana
Osborne, Sandra *(Ayr)*
Owen, Albert
Perham, Linda
Picking, Anne
Pickthall, Colin
Plaskitt, James
Pollard, Kerry
Prentice, Ms Bridget *(Lewisham E)*
Prosser, Gwyn
Purchase, Ken
Purnell, James
Quin, rh Joyce
Quinn, Lawrie
Rapson, Syd *(Portsmouth N)*
Raynsford, rh Nick
Reid, rh Dr. John *(Hamilton N & Bellshill)*
Robertson, John *(Glasgow Anniesland)*
Rooney, Terry
Roy, Frank *(Motherwell)*
Ruane, Chris
Ryan, Joan *(Enfield N)*
Salter, Martin
Sarwar, Mohammad
Savidge, Malcolm
Sawford, Phil
Shaw, Jonathan
Sheerman, Barry
Sheridan, Jim
Short, rh Clare
Simon, Siôn *(B'ham Erdington)*
Singh, Marsha
Smith, rh Andrew *(Oxford E)*
Smith, rh Chris *(Islington S & Finsbury)*
Smith, Geraldine *(Morecambe & Lunesdale)*
Smith, Jacqui *(Redditch)*
Starkey, Dr. Phyllis
Steinberg, Gerry
Stewart, Ian *(Eccles)*
Stinchcombe, Paul
Stoate, Dr. Howard
Strang, rh Dr. Gavin
Straw, rh Jack
Stringer, Graham
Sutcliffe, Gerry
Tami, Mark *(Alyn)*
Taylor, Dari *(Stockton S)*
Timms, Stephen
Tipping, Paddy
Todd, Mark *(S Derbyshire)*
Touhig, Don *(Islwyn)*
Trickett, Jon
Turner, Dennis *(Wolverh'ton SE)*
Turner, Dr. Desmond *(Brighton Kemptown)*
Turner, Neil *(Wigan)*
Twigg, Stephen *(Enfield)*
Tynan, Bill *(Hamilton S)*
Vaz, Keith *(Leicester E)*
Walley, Ms Joan
Ward, Claire
Watson, Tom
Watts, David
Whitehead, Dr. Alan
Wicks, Malcolm
Williams, rh Alan *(Swansea W)*
Williams, Betty *(Conwy)*
Wills, Michael
Winnick, David
Winterton, Ms Rosie *(Doncaster C)*
Woolas, Phil
Worthington, Tony
Wright, Anthony D. *(Gt Yarmouth)*
Wright, David *(Telford)*
Wright, Iain *(Hartlepool)*
Wyatt, Derek

Tellers for the Ayes:
Margaret Moran and
Mr. Nick Ainger

NOES

Ainsworth, Peter *(E Surrey)*
Allan, Richard
Amess, David
Ancram, rh Michael
Arbuthnot, rh James
Atkinson, David *(Bour'mth E)*
Atkinson, Peter *(Hexham)*
Bacon, Richard
Barker, Gregory
Barnes, Harry
Baron, John *(Billericay)*
Bellingham, Henry
Bercow, John
Beresford, Sir Paul
Boswell, Tim
Bottomley, Peter *(Worthing W)*
Brady, Graham
Brazier, Julian
Breed, Colin
Browning, Mrs Angela
Burns, Simon
Burnside, David
Burstow, Paul
Butterfill, Sir John
Cameron, David
Campbell, Mrs Anne *(C'bridge)*
Campbell, rh Sir Menzies *(NE Fife)*
Carmichael, Alistair
Caton, Martin
Chapman, Sir Sydney *(Chipping Barnet)*
Chope, Christopher
Clappison, James
Clarke, rh Kenneth *(Rushcliffe)*
Clarke, Tony *(Northampton S)*
Clifton-Brown, Geoffrey
Collins, Tim
Corbyn, Jeremy
Cran, James *(Beverley)*
Curry, rh David
Davey, Edward *(Kingston)*
Davey, Valerie *(Bristol W)*
Davis, rh David *(Haltemprice & Howden)*
Djanogly, Jonathan
Doughty, Sue
Duncan, Alan *(Rutland)*
Duncan Smith, rh Iain
Dunwoody, Mrs Gwyneth
Evans, Nigel
Ewing, Annabelle
Fabricant, Michael
Fallon, Michael
Field, Mark *(Cities of London & Westminster)*

Flight, Howard
Flook, Adrian
Follett, Barbara
Foster, Don *(Bath)*
Fox, Dr. Liam
Francois, Mark
Gale, Roger *(N Thanet)*
Garnier, Edward
Gerrard, Neil
Gibson, Dr. Ian
Gill, Parmjit Singh
Gillan, Mrs Cheryl
Goodman, Paul
Gray, James *(N Wilts)*
Grayling, Chris
Green, Damian *(Ashford)*
Green, Matthew *(Ludlow)*
Greenway, John
Grieve, Dominic
Grogan, John
Gummer, rh John
Hammond, Philip
Harris, Dr. Evan *(Oxford W & Abingdon)*
Harvey, Nick
Hawkins, Nick
Hayes, John *(S Holland)*
Heath, David
Heathcoat-Amory, rh David
Hendry, Charles
Hoban, Mark *(Fareham)*
Hogg, rh Douglas
Holmes, Paul
Horam, John *(Orpington)*
Howarth, Gerald *(Aldershot)*
Hunter, Andrew
Iddon, Dr. Brian
Jack, rh Michael
Jackson, Robert *(Wantage)*
Jenkin, Bernard
Johnson, Boris *(Henley)*
Jones, Lynne *(Selly Oak)*
Keetch, Paul
Kennedy, rh Charles *(Ross Skye & Inverness)*
Key, Robert *(Salisbury)*
Knight, rh Greg *(E Yorkshire)*
Laing, Mrs Eleanor
Lait, Mrs Jacqui
Lansley, Andrew
Leigh, Edward
Letwin, rh Oliver
Lewis, Dr. Julian *(New Forest E)*
Lewis, Terry *(Worsley)*
Liddell-Grainger, Ian
Lilley, rh Peter
Loughton, Tim
Luff, Peter *(M-Worcs)*
McIntosh, Miss Anne
Maclean, rh David
McLoughlin, Patrick
Malins, Humfrey
Maude, rh Francis
Mawhinney, rh Sir Brian
May, Mrs Theresa
Meale, Alan *(Mansfield)*
Mercer, Patrick
Mitchell, Andrew *(Sutton Coldfield)*
Moore, Michael
Moss, Malcolm
Murrison, Dr. Andrew
Norman, Archie
Oaten, Mark *(Winchester)*
O'Neill, Martin
Öpik, Lembit
Osborne, George *(Tatton)*
Ottaway, Richard
Page, Richard
Paterson, Owen
Pickles, Eric
Prentice, Gordon *(Pendle)*
Price, Adam *(E Carmarthen & Dinefwr)*
Prisk, Mark *(Hertford)*
Pugh, Dr. John
Rendel, David
Robathan, Andrew
Robertson, Hugh *(Faversham & M-Kent)*
Robertson, Laurence *(Tewk'b'ry)*
Robinson, Mrs Iris *(Strangford)*
Robinson, Peter *(Belfast E)*
Roe, Dame Marion
Rosindell, Andrew
Ruddock, Joan
Russell, Bob *(Colchester)*
Sanders, Adrian
Sayeed, Jonathan
Sedgemore, Brian
Selous, Andrew
Shephard, rh Mrs Gillian
Simmonds, Mark
Simpson, Alan *(Nottingham S)*
Simpson, Keith *(M-Norfolk)*
Skinner, Dennis
Smith, Llew *(Blaenau Gwent)*
Smith, Sir Robert *(W Ab'd'ns & Kincardine)*
Smyth, Rev. Martin *(Belfast S)*
Soames, Nicholas
Soley, Clive
Spelman, Mrs Caroline
Spicer, Sir Michael
Spink, Bob *(Castle Point)*
Spring, Richard
Streeter, Gary
Stunell, Andrew
Syms, Robert
Taylor, David *(NW Leics)*
Taylor, John *(Solihull)*
Taylor, Sir Teddy
Teather, Sarah
Thomas, Simon *(Ceredigion)*
Turner, Andrew *(Isle of Wight)*
Tyrie, Andrew
Wareing, Robert N.
Waterson, Nigel
Watkinson, Angela
Webb, Steve *(Northavon)*
White, Brian
Whittingdale, John
Wiggin, Bill
Willetts, David
Williams, Hywel *(Caernarfon)*
Williams, Roger *(Brecon)*
Wilshire, David
Winterton, Ann *(Congleton)*
Yeo, Tim *(S Suffolk)*
Young, rh Sir George

Tellers for the Noes:
Mr. David Ruffley and
Mr. Crispin Blunt

Question accordingly agreed to.

Lords amendment disagreed to.

Clause 137

DUTY TO HAVE A HOME INFORMATION PACK

Lords amendment: No. 128.

Keith Hill: I beg to move, That this House disagrees with the Lords in the said amendment.

Madam Deputy Speaker (Sylvia Heal): With this we may discuss Lords amendments Nos. 130, 135, 137, 143 and 144 and the Government motions to disagree thereto.

Keith Hill: It is a matter of great regret to me that the issue of home information packs has remained so contentious between the parties, especially when there has been such broad consensus about the Bill and we have been able to work so well together. That applies not least to work between the Government and the Liberal Democrats in improving the Bill, especially the provisions on empty homes and tenancy deposits.

The amendments would replace a compulsory home information pack scheme with a voluntary one. The notion of voluntarism is seductive and there was much talk in the other place of the reforms being an unjustified restriction on people's right to buy and sell homes as they please in a market that functions perfectly well as it is. However, those of us who inhabit the real world know that that is not the case. The home buying and selling process does not function properly. Hundreds of thousands of people every year are put through the wringer because of the inadequacies of the current system. Hundreds of millions of pounds are wasted on transactions that get nowhere. That is money that ordinary, hard-working families can ill afford to lose.

Three out of 10 sales fall through between offer acceptance and exchange of contracts and more than half of all sales experience some sort of problem during that period. It is no wonder that, whenever they are asked, people say that they are hugely dissatisfied with the current system. Nine out of 10 people said that in one independent survey last year. That is hardly a ringing endorsement for a system that is supposed to work well.

I do not doubt that some people are doing very nicely out of the system. Every cloud has a silver lining and the abortive costs to consumers from all those failed transactions represent a nice little earner for others. Needless to say, they are not the people for whom the reforms are designed, although many in the industry welcome what we are doing and are keen to get on with it. For them, the reforms are overdue and liberating, enabling them to offer the sort of service that their customers want.

Mr. David Kidney (Stafford) (Lab): Will my right hon. Friend give way?

Keith Hill: Of course I shall give way to my guru on home information packs and so much else.

Mr. Kidney: Surely my right hon. Friend does not suggest that the lawyers and estate agents who object to the home information packs are the ones who benefit from an inefficient system.

Keith Hill: As I was wont to say in my previous incarnation as deputy Chief Whip, my hon. Friend may say that but I could not possibly comment.

[Keith Hill]

Opponents of compulsion should recognise that relying on voluntarism would mean things staying much as they are. That is because a voluntary HIP system will not achieve the universal acceptance needed to make it work properly. The amendments are really about removing part 5 from the Bill, thus leaving the housing market unreformed and damaging not only to individual buyers and sellers, but to the national economy. Too many people are disadvantaged for us to ignore the problems and settle for the status quo. We are determined to offer consumers a genuine prospect of change. That cannot be done through relying on voluntarism and good will alone.

Peter Bottomley (Worthing, West) (Con): Will the Minister give way?

Keith Hill: I shall, but I have much to say and relatively little time in which to say it. I also want to allow other hon. Members to speak.

Peter Bottomley: The Minister is trying to reverse a Lords amendment and get the House's approval for that and I am grateful to him for allowing me to ask a question. If I approach someone who is not planning to sell a home and ask them whether they will sell it to me, is it lawful for them to do that without providing a home information pack?

Keith Hill: The answer to that is an unqualified yes.

Of course, there are a few agents who have sought to progress on the basis that I have described. They report none of the dire consequences predicted by the Opposition, although they are frustrated that others can reap the benefit of their efforts without having to do very much. In a buoyant housing market, that is not surprising. In a downturn, they might need to work harder, but unless they pull in the same direction, more effort can be ineffective.

All markets work most efficiently when all the parties are well informed, and the housing market is no exception. Nobody disputes that. The home information pack will deliver that for home buyers and sellers. We do not need a Bill just to have a voluntary system of home information packs. Sellers and estate agents are free to provide them now if that is what they want. However, despite the evidence that they can greatly reduce the chances of transaction failure, they have not gained a sizeable foothold in the home buying and selling process. There are very good reasons for that.

The main problem with a voluntary scheme is chains. If any link in the chain is without a pack, the whole chain would suffer if that were to be the cause of problems. If packs are not made compulsory, one individual who decides to opt out can wreck the process for everyone else. We also know that estate agents in the high street are fiercely competitive, and without compulsion, most of them will be tempted to offer the easy option. Without the level-playing field that a compulsory scheme will bring about, most estate agents, even those sympathetic to HIPs would look at what their competitors were doing and would not act for the greater good of consumers if they felt that it would put them at a commercial disadvantage.

There have been accusations that the introduction of compulsory HIPs will mean a huge reduction in the number of properties going to the market and that that will result in massive house price inflation. That would be scary if it were true, but it is just the usual scaremongering. The introduction of similar changes in Denmark and New South Wales had no effect on the market. That view is also supported by research commissioned by the UK's largest estate agency group—the Countrywide group—which suggested that there would be little impact on the number of homes sold. The Countrywide study found that, even if sellers had to pay up front for the pack, 87 per cent. would still offer their home for sale. It concluded that the pack would take out of the market only the people who were not serious about selling anyway.

Mr. Simon Thomas: According to my understanding of the proposals, the Minister will decide at what stage to commence this part of the Bill. Will he tell us how he would do that, because that decision would have an impact on the market? Will he introduce the provision throughout the United Kingdom overnight, or will it be piloted in certain areas—perhaps in Wales; why not?—and what ideas does he have about ensuring that it will actually work?

Keith Hill: The hon. Gentleman has been a good supporter of this proposal, and he is articulating a reasonable concern about its implementation. After all, there are few things in life more important than a person's home and their acquisition of it. I can give him an absolute assurance that we shall not bring this system in until we are absolutely clear that it is going to work. We envisage various kinds of dry run to ensure that it is working properly and I hope to talk about that in due course, in a way that I hope he will find helpful.

I was saying that there had been accusations that the introduction of compulsory HIPs would mean a huge reduction in the number of properties going to the market, and that the evidence was that there would be no such reduction. Indeed, I pray in aid on this matter no less a figure than Kate Barker of the Bank of England's Monetary Policy Committee, who has spoken about the problems of the current home buying and selling system and about how HIPs will help. In her recent report on housing, she said:

> "An efficient housing market depends on buyers and sellers having available to them accurate and comprehensive information about individual properties as early as possible. This is often not the case at present, and as a result many transactions fail or take longer than necessary."

She went on to say that HIPs would address that market failure and should reduce the risk of transaction failure and speed up the buying and selling process, provided that they were properly researched with the industry and consumers. We certainly intend to do that. She finished by saying of HIPs:

> "I welcome the greater transparency that they are expected to bring, and would not anticipate that there will be an impact on house prices as a result of their introduction."

7.15 pm

Sir John Butterfill (Bournemouth, West) (Con): Will the Minister tell me what particular expertise Kate Barker has in the home buying and selling markets?

Mr. Edward Davey: She is a macro-economist.

Sir John Butterfill: She is, but I do not know whether she has any great expertise in this area.

Keith Hill: If the hon. Gentleman had read Kate Barker's report on housing—he might well have done so—which was commissioned jointly by my Department and the Treasury, he could not have helped being impressed by her deep understanding, the great extent of her expertise and the enormous trouble that she took to analyse the housing market and to get these things right. I do not know which authority the hon. Gentleman wants to promote in opposition to Kate Barker but, frankly, I am content to rest on her judgment that this system would not impact on house prices in any negative sense, and that it would make the housing market more efficient.

The provision of more and better information cannot help but improve the functioning of the housing market, although I do not pretend that it will solve every problem. We accept that our proposals are not a panacea. However, every examination of these problems by Governments over the past 30 years—and there have been a number, in case anyone is labouring under the delusion that these are new problems—has concluded that this would be the most helpful change. My noble Friend Lord Rooker listed some of those conclusions recently in another place. There was the Law Commission report on subject-to-contract agreements, which was laid before Parliament as long ago as January 1975. Then there was the first report of the Conveyancing committee in 1984, better known as the Farrand report. The previous Conservative Government's report, "Survey of options for simplifying the house purchase process", published in 1993—I presume under the auspices of the right hon. Member for Suffolk, Coastal (Mr. Gummer), who is in his place—responded to concerns about inefficiencies in the market and concluded that sellers should provide property details at the outset and that conveyancers could reduce the uncertainties of chains by encouraging a greater disclosure of information.

None of this is new. The problems are not new and the solutions are not new. What is new is that we now have a Government who have the courage to do something about it, even if that means upsetting a few interests along the way. While I am on the subject of interests, let me draw to the attention of the House a couple of interests that have recently come out in support of the Government's proposals. As a Labour man, I have been reading *The Guardian* devotedly for more than 40 years, although nowadays, opening my copy often feels like a somewhat masochistic exercise. To my delight, however, I saw that the editorial in the edition of Saturday 6 November contained a most enthusiastic expression of opinion in support of the Government's proposals on home information packs. And, lo and behold, in *The Times* of Friday 5 November, the excellent Susan Emmett, its deputy property editor also wrote enthusiastically about the ending of what she described as "this tortuous process" of home sale and purchase. If I had more time, I should certainly draw these serious observations to the attention of the House. I shall spare hon. Members that experience now, although I might get the opportunity to do it later. I will simply say that when the muesli and sandals brigade lines up with "The Thunderer" in joint support of the Government's proposals, those proposals must be taken very seriously.

Unlike the Opposition, we have a coherent view of what is needed to create a sustainable housing market. Apart from making an effort to balance the supply and demand for housing responsibly, we want to ensure that the existing stock is maintained and kept in good repair for future generations. We want to see people taking responsibility for their stewardship of the housing stock, including its upkeep and energy efficiency. They can do that only if they have the necessary information at the right time and in the right place.

Mr. John Gummer (Suffolk, Coastal) (Con): The Minister mentions energy efficiency. I wonder why. My concern is that the Secretary of State is taking powers whereby he "may" do this, that or the other. Why did he not state categorically from the outset that he would institute a mechanism whereby the proper energy efficiency rating of every house could be presented, enabling people to make a comparison?

Keith Hill: The right hon. Gentleman entices me on to the next phase of my exposition of the virtues of our proposals, but I am surprised that he, as a good European, is unaware of European Union directive 2002/91/EC, which makes such an energy efficiency report mandatory.

Mr. Gummer: I was inviting the Minister to explain why the Secretary of State did not take credit for this, as is his wont, by getting it in the original documentation.

Keith Hill: The right hon. Gentleman will have to put that down to my innate modesty. After all, he will acknowledge that I have not attempted to replace the concept of the Gummer exception with the Hill exception. This is a rather arcane exchange, albeit one that we have both enjoyed.

The Opposition have failed to make any link between their laudable demands for more and better use of the existing stock in creating sustainable communities, including higher energy and other standards, and the crucial role that HIPs will play in achieving those ends.

As I was saying to the right hon. Member for Suffolk, Coastal, we shall have compulsory energy surveys when properties are sold; the EU directive to which I alluded requires that. It is entirely consistent with the primary need to use energy supplies more efficiently and is something that the Opposition fully support, but they clearly have difficulties with the means.

Let me take the House on a tour of some questions that need to be addressed to meet the energy certification requirement and the information that the inspector carrying out the survey will need to gather as he or she goes around a property to complete the energy report. The questions include: is it a flat or a semi-detached, a mid-terrace or detached house? When was

[Keith Hill]

the property built? Are there any extensions or modifications, and when were they made? What are the walls in the main property or any extension constructed from? Is there any evidence that the walls have been modified, possibly with cavity fill insulation or external insulating render? What is the floor construction? What types of window and glazing are installed? What is the roof construction? Is there a porch or a conservatory or a basement; if so, how big is it, and can it be closed off from the main part of the house and does it have a separate heating system?

For each storey of the property, the inspector needs to measure the floor area, the room height and the length of wall through which heat can escape either to the outside world or into unheated spaces such as a garage, and the area of windows, doors and rooflights.

I put it to the House that this is already starting to sound like a fairly sophisticated assessment, but the requirement goes much further because the following questions must also be addressed: what type and thickness of insulation is there in any loft space? Is there gas or electricity available in the property or in the street? What ventilation rate can be expected in normal circumstances? What space and water heating systems are installed? What controls are there on those systems?

This is not just a question of, "Is it a gas central heating boiler or not?" Instead, the requirement is to determine whether it is a standard boiler or a combination boiler, and whether it is a condensing boiler; how efficient it is; and whether there is a timer, a room thermostat or thermostatic radiator valves. That assumes that the system in question is a straightforward gas system, but it can get a lot more complicated if it is not and the means of heating is from other fuels or local heaters rather than central heating.

Undertaking an energy efficiency assessment is a skilled task, requiring a qualified individual to look at all the key elements of the property such as walls, floor, roof, glazing, space and water heating, and services—in fact, pretty much every element that we are proposing should be considered in the home condition report.

The time required on site to perform an energy efficiency assessment using the reduced data standard assessment procedure methodology would be an hour to an hour and a half, with a relatively short period for subsequent preparation of the report. That compares with an anticipated two hours on site to undertake a full home condition report, plus up to an additional hour to write up the report.

Sir John Butterfill: The Minister is being very generous in giving way, but I am not sure that he fully understands what is likely to be involved in such a report. I speak as a chartered surveyor. To cite an example that occurs frequently, if a building has tile hanging on the exterior, there should be some insulation between it and the plaster walls on the inside—an older property may have lath and plaster—but it is not possible to tell without removing either some tiles from the exterior or some plaster work from the interior whether there is any suitable insulation material between them. That would require considerable work and a labourer on site, and the damage would have to be made good. Even that one element of the report could not be completed in an hour and a half.

Keith Hill: It is perfectly clear that the work that has to be carried out for the energy report and inspection is very much akin to that which needs to be carried out for a home condition report. It is, effectively, a medium-level survey. Quite frankly, it is a sight better than the drive-by survey that is so often done by those who carry out surveys and valuations. I accept, of course, that more detailed work is required in some circumstances, but I make the point that we already have a compulsory system of energy assessment, which will require little by way of add-on—in terms of what needs to be looked at or time—to produce a home condition report.

How long would it take to finalise a stand-alone energy report? We think it would take three to five days—the same time as we expect it to take to get a home condition report and, indeed, assemble the whole pack. So, frankly, the Opposition are offering no time savings. This would also scupper the possibility of first day marketing—another Opposition shibboleth—given that the energy survey has to be made available to enable potential buyers to make comparisons with similar properties.

Mr. Edward Davey: The Minister has spoken in some detail about what would be in such an energy audit, but will he go to the key point? The directive requires that to be done by the time the property is sold, not at the point of marketing. That is the difference between the parties, I believe. We have no objection to energy audit being compulsory and having to be done before sale—that is what the directive requires—but producing a system under which all has to be done before the house is marketed is the genuine big problem here. It will cause so many difficulties in the housing market.

Keith Hill: It seems to me that the hon. Gentleman really is splitting hairs. The fact of the matter is that the work on the energy report has to be done in any circumstances. It has to be done by the point of sale. Why not? What reason is there not to conduct that exercise at the beginning of the process? After all, presumably nobody knows exactly when the point of sale will be. There is absolutely no reason for that work not to be done.

One corollary of the home condition report system is that the period of sale will be considerably reduced because all the information that is required and which takes time to acquire in a normal house sale will be provided up front. So, it seems to me that the hon. Gentleman is not raising a significant reservation.

I am aware that I have spoken for some time, so I want to deal with some issues that have been raised and perhaps come back to offer assurances of the sort that the hon. Member for Ceredigion (Mr. Thomas) is looking for. The question is often raised that this is an unreasonable imposition on the house seller and those involved in the process. An energy report is essential, but how much will that cost? The industry estimates that a free-standing energy survey will cost at least £150, yet for another £150 sellers and buyers could have a full home condition report and thereby help to solve the problem of the 43 per cent. of failed transactions that result from an unfavourable survey. I would say that that is a good deal, and I firmly believe that buyers and sellers would agree if they were told the facts as distinct from the fiction.

7.30 pm

I keep reading, and the Opposition keep stating, that these provisions will force every house seller to pay £1,000 for a pack. Never mind that the cost is nearer £650, of which £300 will buy the seller the full condition report, including the energy assessment—and never mind that many of the costs are incurred now. What about the benefits? There will be savings to the buyer from fewer mortgage lenders' valuation inspections—exactly how many fewer we do not yet know, but those are commercial decisions that lenders will take in the light of their confidence in the packs and their own plans.

We should not forget that the market is likely to drive down costs. The price of HIPs will be driven down by competition. Last week, Rightmove, members of whose property portal site make up half the entire estate agency market, announced that it is gearing up to provide at least 500,000 packs a year from 2007. That is not far off a third of the total requirement for packs—and that is from just one company, albeit one backed by the Halifax, Countrywide Assured, Connells and Royal Sun Alliance. We know that other players have similar plans.

A number of independent agents have expressed interest in the Rightmove initiative. Critics of our proposals suggest that small estate agents stand to lose out under HIPs, yet here is an example of an initiative that will provide packs for the whole industry, including small agents.

The House will be aware that I have announced that our aim is to introduce these reforms in January 2007. However, I have also made it plain that the reforms will not be implemented until everything is in place and ready to go. We will, of course, take our lead from the industry on that. In that respect, our proposals for a dry run of the home information pack will help everyone to judge the readiness of the market.

To help to ensure a smooth and successful introduction, the Government intend to facilitate a dry run of the full HIPs scheme on a voluntary basis throughout England and Wales from mid-2006. During the dry run, all the components of the statutory scheme will be available for the industry to test and make ready their systems ahead of the introduction of the compulsory scheme. We regard that as a crucial part of our implementation strategy. With the industry, we will closely monitor the dry run and identify any problem areas. If necessary, any problems will be addressed through regulations before the national scheme commences. The flexibility built into the Bill ensures that that can be done quickly.

It was suggested in the other place that the dry run should include a compulsory element in a designated area. Again, the provisions of the Bill are sufficiently flexible to allow that approach. I am happy to consider that further with the industry.

We have no intention of rushing headlong into this with our blinkers on and without any regard for whether the market is ready and the new system works. There is no basis for that sort of accusation, which has been made on other occasions. We are flexible on the issues that several Members have raised, such as the implications of the new compulsory system for low-value homes and for people who are moving out of home ownership, such as the elderly, who will not gain directly from a HIP prepared on another property. There will be open and frank discussion about such matters before the final shape of the scheme is settled.

The housing market is not functioning properly. Consumers—buyers and sellers—want change. We have said that we will deliver that, and have confirmed it in two general election manifestos. The changes cannot be delivered on the scale that is needed under a voluntary system. Compulsion may be regrettable, but in this case it is necessary.

Mr. Hayes: I have seldom heard a Minister expend so much energy so inefficiently. For half an hour, the Minister for Housing and Planning regaled us with his accounts of the glories of home information packs, without addressing a single argument that had been made persuasively by Liberal Democrat peers—I do not often say that—Cross Benchers and, most notably, Conservatives in the other place. The truth is that home information packs, or sellers packs, as they have become known, are not needed and not wanted.

Let me reciprocate the generosity that the Minister displayed at the beginning of his remarks. It is true that the Bill includes many good proposals, and we discussed some of those at length in Committee, but this proposal is not one of them. Extraordinarily, it is against all advice, and the Opposition parties are united on this, although I demur from including the Welsh nationalists, who, I understand, at least from what the hon. Member for Ceredigion (Mr. Thomas) just signalled, are on the fence.

The other place debated the proposal at great length, and peers of all parties both voted for the amendment and made the case against the Government's position. Despite what the Minister says, there is no widespread demand for sellers packs from buyers and sellers. The only people whom he could cite in support of his contentious—I say that advisedly—proposals were people in New South Wales, people in Denmark and Kate Barker, who was doing the Government's bidding anyway. She was hardly likely to come out and say that they were wrong, when she was commissioned by them to say that they were right. The evidence that the Minister has brought before us is not in any way convincing.

Mr. Kidney: Perhaps my right hon. Friend the Minister was therefore remiss in not repeating, as he did in Committee, that the Consumers Association is a strong supporter of the proposal on the grounds of consumer protection. Is not this proposal necessary to ensure that everybody who buys a home gets the speediest possible service and all the information that they need before signing a cheque for a whacking great price for their house?

Mr. Hayes: I will address both those points, on speed and the quality of information that people receive, in my brief remarks. The hon. Gentleman's point on the Consumers Association is a fair one, and as ever, he

[Mr. Hayes]

makes a good argument. It is a great pity that the Minister, in the full half an hour for which he spoke, was not able to cite it himself, as it was considerably more persuasive than any that he made.

The Minister said that the sellers packs are in response to popular demand, and that the market is not working. I am not convinced. The amendment goes to the heart of the contention over sellers packs. What is the position of the other place, and what is the Government's position? The Government say that everyone will be obliged, by law, despite the run-in period to which the Minister refers, to spend up to £1,000 when selling a house, regardless of the value of that house. In return, they will gain a sellers pack. Let us imagine someone who puts a modest house worth, say, £60,000 or £70,000 on the market, and who must then withdraw it from the market and re-market it some time later. We have no assurance from the Minister that the sellers packs will last any great time. We are told, as the other place debated at some length, that they may be valid for as little as three months. In the scenario that I just described, the person would have to purchase two sellers packs costing up to £2,000 for the sale of a £60,000 house that they might not sell anyway.

Mr. Gummer: Has not my hon. Friend noticed that the Minister prayed in aid the perfectly reasonable statement that an energy audit of a house is needed? He did not mention, of course, that that would last significantly longer than the pack, and that it had a rigour that meant that it was of use to the purchaser, whereas the sellers packs are so lacking in rigour that they will more often lead purchasers astray than be likely to give the kind of information that they would want?

Mr. Hayes: As ever, my right hon. Friend makes an apposite point, with his usual skill and charm. The picture, however, is even worse than he paints it.

I suspect—and the Minister has yet to convince us otherwise—that people will commission additional surveys to supplement these inadequate reports. I invite hon. Members to imagine that they are buying a property and are presented with a sellers pack containing basic information, and to imagine their suspicion about the paucity of that information—and their desire, in the case of an older property or one featuring particular difficulties, to obtain information that is as detailed as possible. I suspect that they would arrange their own survey. Not only will there be a sellers pack floating about; for the reasons my right hon. Friend has given, additional surveys may well be commissioned. Indeed, I suspect that the sellers packs will prompt additional surveys rather than replacing surveys.

Mr. Edward Davey: Many lenders have not said that they will rely on home-commissioned reports. Many will have their own valuations carried out. Moreover, it should be noted that house sales fall through mainly because of valuations done by lenders, as opposed to surveys undertaken by buyers.

Mr. Hayes: The hon. Gentleman is right, and I shall return to his point if I have time.

Sir John Butterfill: Is there not a great danger that some large firms of estate agents that claim they will co-operate will do so because many poorer vendors cannot afford packs up front? The estate agents will say, "We will supply you with a pack, and when we have sold your property, we will knock the cost off the proceeds of sale." The poor vendors will then be locked into the clutches of estate agents who, in some instances, are quite unscrupulous. They will not be able to change from an estate agent who does not perform properly, because they will have a debt to the agent who supplies the pack.

Mr. Hayes: That is a good point. As was mentioned in Committee, in other countries there are strict regulations—indeed, laws—preventing such a possible conflict of interests. In this country, that does not apply, and the Minister has given no guarantee that it is likely to. I think that there may well be real issues of probity. Such issues were raised in the other place, and they were raised by Conservative and Liberal Democrat spokesmen in Committee. Once again, however, we hear nothing from the Minister, despite the length of his speech.

The Government say that the proposal will speed up the process, and the hon. Member for Stafford (Mr. Kidney) repeated that claim. But the Lords, including Lord Donaldson, say that it may have the opposite effect—that it is likely to slow down the process.

Let us imagine another scenario. Someone may want to put his house on the market quickly. He has in mind a potential buyer, perhaps a person he knows in his locality. He will not even be able to begin the transaction until he has commissioned and put into effect a sellers pack. If neither party has demanded that, it is nonsensical to suggest that it is likely to speed up the market and make it more efficient.

The Government say that sellers packs may cost only £600, but we know that they will not be introduced until 2007. We know that by the time they have become compulsory, things will have moved on. We know that there is no cap on the total price of the packs. The Minister's blithe statement that competition will drive the price down flies in the face of all our experience of buying and selling houses, and of commissioning reports of one sort or another concerning the condition of those houses.

7.45 pm

The Government say that sellers packs will remove the need for other surveys, but as the hon. Member for Kingston and Surbiton (Mr. Davey) said, mortgage lenders have given no assurances of their willingness to accept them as an alternative to their own surveys. Indeed, the Council of Mortgage Lenders has made clear that it is not prepared to give any such guarantee on behalf of its members. The Minister could not name a single lender that had given an equivalent guarantee. He said that they were all geared up to writing them and were starting businesses in order to roll them out, but that is no surprise, is it? No doubt sellers pack millionaires will emerge from this. That will be the Minister's legacy.

The Government say that sellers packs should be compulsory. In the other place, Lord Hunt described the compulsion issue as the key question. If the packs are such a good idea, why do not the Government trust the people and allow them to say whether they want them or not? If the packs are to replace any other surveys, including those required by the companies offering mortgages, why do the Government not allow them to be voluntary?

The case made by peers throughout the other place was convincing. They said, much as we did, that the Government had failed to persuade anyone of their argument, and we heard the reason for that at the very end of the Minister's long speech. He said that they were obliged to do it because it was in two manifestos. For once, the Government are sticking to a manifesto commitment. That is an unusual and welcome change from common practice.

The Government said that they would do this, and despite all the evidence they intend to do it. In effect, they are saying, "We don't know for how long the sellers packs will be valid, we don't know who will accept them and we don't know what they will cost, but we will impose them on you anyway." They are wrong, the Lords are right, and we will support our noble Friends and other Members of the other place who have championed the cause of sellers and buyers in opposing these silly packs.

Mr. Edward Davey: In the three minutes that remain, may I try to be helpful to the Government?

Lord Rooker said in the other place:

> "I realise that ours is a high-risk strategy . . . The fact that 40,000 dwellings are marketed every week means that if we get our provisions wrong, the Government are in deep trouble."—[*Official Report, House of Lords*, 3 November 2004; Vol. 666, c. 355.]

I believe that the Government should be a little more cautious. They should think about the risks not just to them but to the millions of home buyers up and down the country. This really is a gamble. The Government have more or less admitted that they will arrange pilot schemes and a voluntary period, but they need to go much further.

The real danger is that the housing market could grind to a halt in some areas, and purchase costs could rise significantly. That could damage not just the economy but many individuals.

Lord Hunt of Wirral quoted comments by the late Earl Russell in one of his last speeches in the other place:

> "There is necessarily a place for compulsion, but it is an unpleasant, expensive and labour-intensive process that will not become easier while the Chancellor is engaged in reducing the number of civil servants. So where something can be done voluntarily and compulsion rendered unnecessary, it is a good thing". —[*Official Report, House of Lords*, 21 July 2004; Vol. 664, c. 270.]

Earl Russell was right. There is no need for compulsion. There is no demand for it. It will be a costly mistake if the Government push ahead.

I hope that the Government can, through the discussions in this and the other place, put into the Bill the notion that it will keep the home information packs voluntary until another order comes before Parliament. The Minister made great play of the promises in the manifesto. If he reads it again, he will find that the Labour Government promised only to introduce home information packs. Nowhere in the manifesto does it say that they should be compulsory. With the support of the Opposition, the Government could meet the manifesto pledge by keeping the proposal voluntary. Then they will get the support of all parties and of both Houses.

Question put, That this House disagrees with the Lords in the said amendment:—

The House divided: Ayes 292, Noes 148.

Division No. 312] **[7:50 pm**

AYES

Ainger, Nick
Ainsworth, Bob *(Cov'try NE)*
Allen, Graham
Anderson, Janet *(Rossendale & Darwen)*
Armstrong, rh Ms Hilary
Atherton, Ms Candy
Atkins, Charlotte
Austin, John
Bailey, Adrian
Baird, Vera
Banks, Tony
Barnes, Harry
Barron, rh Kevin
Battle, rh John
Bayley, Hugh
Beard, Nigel
Begg, Miss Anne
Bell, Sir Stuart
Benn, rh Hilary
Benton, Joe *(Bootle)*
Berry, Roger
Blackman, Liz
Blears, Ms Hazel
Blizzard, Bob
Borrow, David
Bradley, rh Keith *(Withington)*
Brennan, Kevin
Brown, Russell *(Dumfries)*
Browne, Desmond
Bryant, Chris
Burden, Richard
Burgon, Colin
Burnham, Andy
Caborn, rh Richard
Cairns, David
Campbell, Alan *(Tynemouth)*
Campbell, Mrs Anne *(C'bridge)*
Campbell, Ronnie *(Blyth V)*
Caplin, Ivor
Casale, Roger
Caton, Martin
Cawsey, Ian *(Brigg)*
Challen, Colin
Chapman, Ben *(Wirral S)*
Chaytor, David
Clark, Paul *(Gillingham)*
Clarke, rh Tom *(Coatbridge & Chryston)*
Clarke, Tony *(Northampton S)*
Clelland, David
Clwyd, Ann *(Cynon V)*
Coffey, Ms Ann
Connarty, Michael
Cook, rh Robin *(Livingston)*
Corbyn, Jeremy
Corston, Jean
Crausby, David
Cruddas, Jon
Cummings, John
Cunningham, Jim *(Coventry S)*
Cunningham, Tony *(Workington)*
Davey, Valerie *(Bristol W)*
David, Wayne
Davidson, Ian
Davies, rh Denzil *(Llanelli)*
Davies, Geraint *(Croydon C)*
Dawson, Hilton
Dean, Mrs Janet
Denham, rh John
Dhanda, Parmjit
Dismore, Andrew
Dobson, rh Frank
Donohoe, Brian H.
Doran, Frank
Dunwoody, Mrs Gwyneth
Eagle, Angela *(Wallasey)*
Eagle, Maria *(L'pool Garston)*
Edwards, Huw
Efford, Clive
Ellman, Mrs Louise
Ennis, Jeff *(Barnsley E)*
Etherington, Bill
Farrelly, Paul
Field, rh Frank *(Birkenhead)*
Fisher, Mark
Fitzpatrick, Jim
Flint, Caroline
Flynn, Paul *(Newport W)*
Follett, Barbara
Foster, rh Derek
Foster, Michael *(Worcester)*
Foster, Michael Jabez *(Hastings & Rye)*
Foulkes, rh George
Gardiner, Barry
George, rh Bruce *(Walsall S)*
Gerrard, Neil
Gibson, Dr. Ian
Gilroy, Linda
Godsiff, Roger
Goggins, Paul
Griffiths, Jane *(Reading E)*
Griffiths, Nigel *(Edinburgh S)*
Griffiths, Win *(Bridgend)*
Grogan, John
Hall, Mike *(Weaver Vale)*
Hall, Patrick *(Bedford)*
Hamilton, David *(Midlothian)*
Hanson, David
Harris, Tom *(Glasgow Cathcart)*

Havard, Dai *(Merthyr Tydfil & Rhymney)*
Healey, John
Henderson, Ivan *(Harwich)*
Hendrick, Mark
Hepburn, Stephen
Heppell, John
Hesford, Stephen
Heyes, David
Hill, Keith *(Streatham)*
Hinchliffe, David
Hodge, Margaret
Hood, Jimmy *(Clydesdale)*
Hope, Phil *(Corby)*
Hopkins, Kelvin
Howarth, rh Alan *(Newport E)*
Howarth, George *(Knowsley N & Sefton E)*
Hoyle, Lindsay
Hughes, Beverley *(Stretford & Urmston)*
Hughes, Kevin *(Doncaster N)*
Humble, Mrs Joan
Hurst, Alan *(Braintree)*
Hutton, rh John
Iddon, Dr. Brian
Illsley, Eric
Irranca-Davies, Huw
Jackson, Glenda *(Hampstead & Highgate)*
Jackson, Helen *(Hillsborough)*
Jamieson, David
Jenkins, Brian
Johnson, Miss Melanie *(Welwyn Hatfield)*
Jones, Helen *(Warrington N)*
Jones, Kevan *(N Durham)*
Jones, Lynne *(Selly Oak)*
Jones, Martyn *(Clwyd S)*
Jowell, rh Tessa
Joyce, Eric *(Falkirk W)*
Kaufman, rh Sir Gerald
Keeble, Ms Sally
Kemp, Fraser
Kennedy, Jane *(Wavertree)*
Khabra, Piara S.
Kidney, David
King, Andy *(Rugby)*
Knight, Jim *(S Dorset)*
Kumar, Dr. Ashok
Ladyman, Dr. Stephen
Lammy, David
Laxton, Bob *(Derby N)*
Lazarowicz, Mark
Lepper, David
Leslie, Christopher
Levitt, Tom *(High Peak)*
Lewis, Ivan *(Bury S)*
Lewis, Terry *(Worsley)*
Love, Andrew
Lucas, Ian *(Wrexham)*
Luke, Iain *(Dundee E)*
Lyons, John *(Strathkelvin)*
McAvoy, Thomas
McCabe, Stephen
McDonagh, Siobhain
MacDonald, Calum
MacDougall, John
McGuire, Mrs Anne
McIsaac, Shona
McKechin, Ann
McKenna, Rosemary
McNulty, Tony
MacShane, Denis
Mactaggart, Fiona
McWalter, Tony
McWilliam, John
Mahmood, Khalid
Mahon, Mrs Alice
Mallaber, Judy
Mann, John *(Bassetlaw)*
Marris, Rob *(Wolverh'ton SW)*
Marsden, Gordon *(Blackpool S)*
Marshall, David *(Glasgow Shettleston)*
Martlew, Eric
Meale, Alan *(Mansfield)*
Michael, rh Alun
Miller, Andrew
Mitchell, Austin *(Gt Grimsby)*
Moffatt, Laura
Moran, Margaret
Mountford, Kali
Mudie, George
Mullin, Chris
Munn, Ms Meg
Murphy, Denis *(Wansbeck)*
Murphy, Jim *(Eastwood)*
Naysmith, Dr. Doug
O'Brien, Bill *(Normanton)*
Osborne, Sandra *(Ayr)*
Owen, Albert
Perham, Linda
Picking, Anne
Pickthall, Colin
Plaskitt, James
Pollard, Kerry
Prentice, Ms Bridget *(Lewisham E)*
Prentice, Gordon *(Pendle)*
Prescott, rh John
Price, Adam *(E Carmarthen & Dinefwr)*
Prosser, Gwyn
Purchase, Ken
Purnell, James
Quin, rh Joyce
Quinn, Lawrie
Rapson, Syd *(Portsmouth N)*
Raynsford, rh Nick
Reid, rh Dr. John *(Hamilton N & Bellshill)*
Robertson, John *(Glasgow Anniesland)*
Rooney, Terry
Roy, Frank *(Motherwell)*
Ruane, Chris
Ruddock, Joan
Ryan, Joan *(Enfield N)*
Salter, Martin
Sarwar, Mohammad
Savidge, Malcolm
Sawford, Phil
Sedgemore, Brian
Shaw, Jonathan
Sheerman, Barry
Sheridan, Jim
Short, rh Clare
Simon, Siôn *(B'ham Erdington)*
Simpson, Alan *(Nottingham S)*
Singh, Marsha
Skinner, Dennis
Smith, rh Andrew *(Oxford E)*
Smith, rh Chris *(Islington S & Finsbury)*
Smith, Geraldine *(Morecambe & Lunesdale)*
Smith, Jacqui *(Redditch)*
Smith, Llew *(Blaenau Gwent)*
Soley, Clive
Starkey, Dr. Phyllis
Steinberg, Gerry
Stewart, Ian *(Eccles)*
Stinchcombe, Paul
Stoate, Dr. Howard
Strang, rh Dr. Gavin
Straw, rh Jack
Stringer, Graham
Sutcliffe, Gerry
Tami, Mark *(Alyn)*
Taylor, Dari *(Stockton S)*
Taylor, David *(NW Leics)*
Taylor, Dr. Richard *(Wyre F)*
Thomas, Gareth *(Harrow W)*
Thomas, Simon *(Ceredigion)*
Timms, Stephen
Tipping, Paddy
Todd, Mark *(S Derbyshire)*
Touhig, Don *(Islwyn)*
Trickett, Jon
Turner, Dennis *(Wolverh'ton SE)*
Turner, Dr. Desmond *(Brighton Kemptown)*
Turner, Neil *(Wigan)*
Twigg, Stephen *(Enfield)*
Tynan, Bill *(Hamilton S)*
Walley, Ms Joan
Ward, Claire
Wareing, Robert N.
Watson, Tom
Watts, David
White, Brian
Whitehead, Dr. Alan
Wicks, Malcolm
Williams, rh Alan *(Swansea W)*
Williams, Betty *(Conwy)*
Williams, Hywel *(Caernarfon)*
Wills, Michael
Winnick, David
Winterton, Ms Rosie *(Doncaster C)*
Wood, Mike *(Batley)*
Woolas, Phil
Worthington, Tony
Wright, Anthony D. *(Gt Yarmouth)*
Wright, David *(Telford)*
Wright, Iain *(Hartlepool)*
Wyatt, Derek

Tellers for the Ayes:
Vernon Coaker and
Gillian Merron

NOES

Ainsworth, Peter *(E Surrey)*
Allan, Richard
Amess, David
Ancram, rh Michael
Atkinson, David *(Bour'mth E)*
Atkinson, Peter *(Hexham)*
Bacon, Richard
Barker, Gregory
Baron, John *(Billericay)*
Barrett, John
Bercow, John
Beresford, Sir Paul
Boswell, Tim
Bottomley, Peter *(Worthing W)*
Bottomley, rh Virginia *(SW Surrey)*
Brady, Graham
Brake, Tom *(Carshalton)*
Brazier, Julian
Breed, Colin
Browning, Mrs Angela
Bruce, Malcolm
Burns, Simon
Burnside, David
Burstow, Paul
Burt, Alistair
Butterfill, Sir John
Cable, Dr. Vincent
Calton, Mrs Patsy
Cameron, David
Campbell, rh Sir Menzies *(NE Fife)*
Cash, William
Chapman, Sir Sydney *(Chipping Barnet)*
Chope, Christopher
Clappison, James
Clarke, rh Kenneth *(Rushcliffe)*
Clifton-Brown, Geoffrey
Collins, Tim
Cran, James *(Beverley)*
Curry, rh David
Davey, Edward *(Kingston)*
Donaldson, Jeffrey M.
Doughty, Sue
Duncan, Alan *(Rutland)*
Duncan Smith, rh Iain
Evans, Nigel
Field, Mark *(Cities of London & Westminster)*
Flook, Adrian
Forth, rh Eric
Foster, Don *(Bath)*
Fox, Dr. Liam
Francois, Mark
Gale, Roger *(N Thanet)*
Garnier, Edward
Gill, Parmjit Singh
Goodman, Paul
Gray, James *(N Wilts)*
Grayling, Chris
Green, Damian *(Ashford)*
Green, Matthew *(Ludlow)*
Greenway, John
Gummer, rh John
Hammond, Philip
Harris, Dr. Evan *(Oxford W & Abingdon)*
Harvey, Nick
Hawkins, Nick
Hayes, John *(S Holland)*
Heath, David
Heathcoat-Amory, rh David
Hendry, Charles
Hoban, Mark *(Fareham)*
Horam, John *(Orpington)*
Howarth, Gerald *(Aldershot)*
Hughes, Simon *(Southwark N)*
Hunter, Andrew
Jack, rh Michael
Jackson, Robert *(Wantage)*
Jenkin, Bernard
Johnson, Boris *(Henley)*
Keetch, Paul
Key, Robert *(Salisbury)*
Kirkwood, Sir Archy
Knight, rh Greg *(E Yorkshire)*
Laing, Mrs Eleanor
Lait, Mrs Jacqui
Lansley, Andrew
Leigh, Edward
Lewis, Dr. Julian *(New Forest E)*
Lilley, rh Peter
Loughton, Tim
Luff, Peter *(M-Worcs)*
McIntosh, Miss Anne

Maclean, rh David
McLoughlin, Patrick
Mawhinney, rh Sir Brian
May, Mrs Theresa
Mercer, Patrick
Moore, Michael
Moss, Malcolm
Murrison, Dr. Andrew
Norman, Archie
Oaten, Mark *(Winchester)*
Osborne, George *(Tatton)*
Page, Richard
Paterson, Owen
Pickles, Eric
Prisk, Mark *(Hertford)*
Pugh, Dr. John
Rendel, David
Robathan, Andrew
Robertson, Hugh *(Faversham & M-Kent)*
Robinson, Mrs Iris *(Strangford)*
Robinson, Peter *(Belfast E)*
Roe, Dame Marion
Rosindell, Andrew
Russell, Bob *(Colchester)*
Sanders, Adrian
Sayeed, Jonathan
Selous, Andrew
Shephard, rh Mrs Gillian
Shepherd, Richard
Simmonds, Mark
Smith, Sir Robert *(W Ab'd'ns & Kincardine)*
Smyth, Rev. Martin *(Belfast S)*
Spicer, Sir Michael
Spink, Bob *(Castle Point)*
Spring, Richard
Streeter, Gary
Stunell, Andrew
Swayne, Desmond
Syms, Robert
Taylor, John *(Solihull)*
Taylor, Sir Teddy
Teather, Sarah
Turner, Andrew *(Isle of Wight)*
Tyler, Paul *(N Cornwall)*
Tyrie, Andrew
Watkinson, Angela
Webb, Steve *(Northavon)*
Whittingdale, John
Widdecombe, rh Miss Ann
Wiggin, Bill
Willetts, David
Williams, Roger *(Brecon)*
Wilshire, David
Winterton, Ann *(Congleton)*
Winterton, Sir Nicholas *(Macclesfield)*
Yeo, Tim *(S Suffolk)*
Young, rh Sir George

Tellers for the Noes:
Mr. Crispin Blunt and
Mr. David Ruffley

Question accordingly agreed to.

Lords amendment disagreed to.

Sir John Butterfill: On a point of order, Mr. Deputy Speaker. It may have come to your attention that the timetabling of the debate on that group of amendments was such that not only did no Back Bencher on either side of the House have the opportunity to speak, but even the Opposition Front-Bench spokesmen were obliged to curtail their speeches on probably the most contentious clause—indeed, possibly the only contentious clause—in the Bill. Perhaps you, Mr. Deputy Speaker, could rule on that, and those in another place may wish to take it into account when the Bill goes back to them.

Mr. Deputy Speaker (Sir Michael Lord): The hon. Gentleman knows that I cannot rule on that matter now; those arrangements were agreed by the House earlier. However, he has got his point on the record and no doubt it will be read by those who are interested in such matters.

Clause 145

HOME CONDITION REPORTS

Lords amendment: No. 140.

Keith Hill: I beg to move, That this House disagrees with the Lords in the said amendment.

Mr. Deputy Speaker: With this we may take the following: Government amendments (a) to (d) in lieu of the Lords amendment.

Lords amendments Nos. 123 to 127, 129, 131 to 134, 136, 138, 139, 141, 142, 145 to 150 and 260.

Keith Hill: It may be for the benefit of the House if I explain that amendments Nos. 123 to 127, 129, 131 to 134, 136, 138, 139, 141, 146, 150 and 260 are technical amendments that clarify or remove ambiguities or repetition in the Bill, and improve the definition of the word "marketing". Amendments Nos. 142, 145, 147, 148 and 149 would make provision for an estate agents redress scheme. I do not propose to dwell on those amendments at great length, as there seems to be a high level of agreement about the proposals in them—although I shall, of course, be happy to return to them if they are raised by other speakers.

Amendments (a) to (d) in lieu of Lords amendment No. 140 would ensure that adequate safeguards are placed on the register of home condition reports. If the House will forgive me, I shall say a few words about those, because this is new matter for this Chamber.

It will be vital for the public to have confidence in the new home condition reports, and a register for home condition reports will help to ensure that. The register will prevent unscrupulous people from tampering with home condition reports once written, because paper copies can be compared with the register. The register will also ensure that the home condition report can be prepared only by a member of the certification scheme. Someone fraudulently passing himself off as a home inspector —or, indeed, a former home inspector who has been expelled from the scheme—will be unable to register a home condition report.

To guard against the possibility of a seller "shopping around" and obtaining a number of home condition reports from different home inspectors, we propose that the home information pack include copies of all home condition reports obtained on the property within the previous 12 months. The register would ensure that that requirement could be enforced. It would be an important resource to help the certification schemes ensure the competence and probity of home inspectors, and that the inspectors were properly insured. Taken together with the checks and balances already in the Bill, this should enable buyers and sellers to rely with confidence on home condition reports.

Mr. Geoffrey Clifton-Brown (Cotswold) (Con): Will the right hon. Gentleman give way?

Keith Hill: If the hon. Gentleman will forgive me, I feel that I need to say a few more words in amplification of the proposals for the scheme first, but I will happily give way to him in due course.

Provision is already made for such a register in clause 145(5)(d). The purpose of the amendments is to ensure that that register is kept in a proper way. Amendments (a) and (b) to Lords amendment No. 140 strengthen the provisions for approved certification schemes for home inspectors producing home condition reports. The scheme is required to make provision for the registration of all home condition reports. That will greatly enhance the ability of consumers and others to use the home condition report and to trust it, for the reasons that I shall explain.

Certification schemes would be approved by the Secretary of State. They are likely to be run on a not-for-profit basis by private companies owned by stakeholders. We had initially intended the control of access to information on the register to be left to the terms of approval. However, that might not be legally effective, and might not be sufficient to ensure that appropriate and adequate safeguards are placed on the creation and use of the register.

[Keith Hill]

Amendment (c) inserts after clause 145 a new clause that will ensure that the Secretary of State can make regulations allowing any private keeper of the register to restrict access to it to certain limited and prescribed circumstances and purposes. It requires that the onward use of information obtained from the register should respect privacy considerations, and that as far as possible, any conditions imposed by the seller on the use of information in a home information pack, in accordance with clause 139, be respected. It also makes the unauthorised disclosure of information a criminal offence in order to deal with someone who, for example, sells details to a double glazing salesman, or the selling of information on the home of a public figure to a newspaper. Finally, the amendment allows the Secretary of State to maintain the register if the private operator proves unsatisfactory.

Mr. Clifton-Brown: Can the Minister say in what form the register be kept? Will it be kept electronically and who will have access to those records? Will the Government have access to them? There is the suspicion that they could use home condition reports to do the next council tax revaluation for nothing. How will the Data Protection Act 1998 protect people's privacy, given that there will be a lot of very private information in the packs?

Keith Hill: It is precisely because I anticipated that the hon. Gentleman—whom I know well, and with whom I have jousted on many previous occasions—would take an interest in these matters that my speech includes what I hope will prove persuasive answers to those issues.

Dealing with these important issues administratively when approving a certification scheme involves doing so behind closed doors, but we feel that it is in everyone's interest that they be dealt with openly and on the record through regulations. The amendment should ensure that the register is kept in a proper way, while respecting privacy considerations. An electronic register of home inspectors and of home condition report data is essential to ensure authenticity and trust. I should emphasise that access to the register will not be a free-for-all and will be strictly controlled.

We envisage that access will be available to the seller and potential buyers, and to their professional advisers and agents, so that they can, for example, check the integrity of copies of home condition reports supplied to them. We also intend to enable access to certification schemes in order to assist with their operation, and to ensure that proper standards are maintained. We envisage that certification schemes will use the register of home condition reports to monitor, or to undertake, spot checks on the work of home inspectors to ensure that they maintain the required standards.

Allowing mortgage lenders online access to the register of home condition reports will assist with valuation assessments and help to avoid unnecessary valuation inspections. It will enhance the efficient operation of the home buying and selling process, and reduce costs for home buyers. We continue to work with the Council of Mortgage Lenders and other stakeholders to ensure that lenders can use the home condition report as a source of information from which a valuation can be derived, without the need for a separate valuation inspection.

Matthew Green: Much of what the Minister is saying is welcome, but I am concerned about what happens when someone chooses to market their property without going through an estate agent, as they have the right to do. When they produce their pack, how will they check who has access to such information? Will a prospective buyer gain access to the register? If so, will they access such information only in respect of the property in question, or will they be able to peruse information on all properties online, simply because they have said that they are interested in buying a particular property? I am slightly confused as to how the process will work.

Keith Hill: It will be for the seller or their agent to make the home condition report available to the potential purchaser. Provision will be made to ensure that access to the report is restricted to those potential buyers to whom the would-be seller wishes such information to be made available. If the hon. Gentleman will allow me, I shall spell the situation out in a little more detail in due course.

8.15 pm

The expected content of the home condition report has already been discussed in detail with lenders to ensure that it incorporates the data that they will need to create valuations, using automatic valuation models or other innovative valuation methods. We therefore envisage that access to the register will be allowed to lenders and others involved in carrying out valuation assessments on behalf of lenders.

I should point out that no final decision has been taken as to whether one of the proscribed uses of information from the register will be as a source of statistics on the condition of the nation's housing stock and its energy efficiency. If such a use were permitted, it would be subject to data protection and privacy considerations. Amendment (c) provides for regulations that restrict access to prescribed circumstances or purposes, and to prescribed descriptions of persons. We intend that access will not be indiscriminately available. For example, a potential buyer would need to have the HCR reference number in order to access a home condition report on the register. That reference number would be available only from the seller or their agent, which will ensure that data on the register is not available to any person who cannot satisfy the seller or their agent that he is a bona fide potential buyer.

Mr. Clifton-Brown: The Minister has virtually admitted that what I said to him a few minutes ago is true. He says that the Government will use this information for statistical purposes. Is it not true that that will enable them to use it to obtain a revaluation of the entire nation's housing stock at very little cost, and without involving valuers?

Keith Hill: The hon. Gentleman is getting over-excited about a possibility that the Government are not contemplating. We have made no final decisions on this matter, but we do take into account the possibility that the register could be of value in making broad assessments of the condition of the nation's housing stock. The hon. Gentleman takes a close interest in this issue, and he surely will not regard such an approach as disadvantageous, should we decide to pursue it. However, this is a matter for consultation and open discussion in due course.

Mr. Kidney: I hope that my right hon. Friend finds my intervention helpful. Is it the Government's intention to make it a criminal offence for people to disclose information from the register that should not be disclosed, and is that the purport of subsection (7) of amendment (c)? Moreover, is there a typographical error in that subsection? It states:

> "A person who contravenes subsection (3) is guilty of an offence",

yet subsection (3) deals with the paying of a fee in order to include a report on the register. In fact, it is the contravening of subsection (4) that would constitute a criminal offence.

Keith Hill: Can the House be surprised that I describe my hon. Friend as my guru in these matters? Not only has he anticipated exactly the point that I was about to make on disclosure, but he has also made a typically shrewd point about a typographical error in the amendment. I can confirm that there is indeed such an error, and it will of course be put right. I am most grateful to him for drawing the House's attention to it, and I am sure that he is grateful for my immediate and positive response. That certainly demonstrates the listening character of this Government and this Minister.

I was about to say that any disclosure, except as provided for in regulations, would be taken very seriously and would amount to a criminal offence. My hon. Friend the Member for Stafford (Mr. Kidney) is absolutely right about that. Anyone committing such an offence, for instance, by passing on data from home condition reports to a building firm or to the proverbial double glazing salesman, would be liable on summary conviction to a fine of up to level 5 on the standard scale—currently a maximum of £5,000. That is equivalent to the penalty for offences relating to infringing the Data Protection Act 1998. The Home Office has confirmed that criminal offences for the unlawful disclosure of information are the norm in legislation and has approved this particular offence.

Clause 153 provides that the Secretary of State may make grants towards expenditure incurred in connection with the development of proposals for the contents of home information packs or of potential home inspector certification schemes. Amendment (d) is consequential on the introduction of the new clause and provides that the Secretary of State may also make grants towards expenditure incurred in the development of a register of home condition reports.

There are legitimate sensitivities surrounding disclosure of information—I fully concede that to the hon. Member for Cotswold (Mr. Clifton-Brown)—we will not know for some time which certification scheme will get approval. We will need to begin work on developing the technology for a secure register of home condition reports as soon as possible in order to address those issues, and that work will require a grant. We also need to ensure that the register is not specific to a particular certification scheme so that it is possible for the keeper of the register to be changed, if necessary, without resulting in practical difficulties.

It is important that consumers and lenders can trust the home condition report and be able to rely on it with confidence. Together with the provisions for home inspectors' certification schemes already in the Bill, these amendments should provide that confidence. In moving these Government amendments, I draw the House's attention to my support for amendments Nos. 142, 145, 147, 148 and 149.

Mr. Syms: This is an important part of the Bill; it is just a pity that we are here at five minutes to midnight debating such important detail. I wish to put a number of questions to the Minister.

The proposal to have a register of approved surveyors or inspectors is sensible because people can check the register to see whether the person is qualified. One of the major concerns in Committee was whether the supply of surveyors or inspectors would be sufficient, so having a register also seems reasonable on those grounds. My question is whether the register will be broken down into regions or counties. There could be a surplus of surveyors in the north-west, with other areas having a deficiency, which could affect the ability to produce home condition reports within a reasonable time frame. It would be helpful to have a breakdown of surveyors and inspectors, including where they live.

The Minister made several points about the home condition report—for example, whether it should have a reference number or be put on the internet and what the controls should be. My hon. Friends have raised a number of concerns about those issues. If the information is too restricted, there is a danger of missing some opportunities. Will the register of home condition reports be made available to those who are registered inspectors or surveyors? If a home has been sold four times and had four home condition reports, the logical starting point for a surveyor would be to look at the last four reports on the home to see whether there had been any problems in the past. It seems silly to start from a blank sheet of paper when, first, there is a shortage of surveyors and, secondly, the home to be inspected has already been inspected many times.

Mr. Clifton-Brown: May I suggest a simple way around that problem? My hon. Friend might want to press the Minister on what I am saying. If the home condition report and home seller's pack become the property of the purchaser on completion of the purchase, the purchaser will then have full property rights and would be well advised if he wanted to sell the house subsequently to make the information available to his surveyor because it would reduce the cost of producing a new home condition report.

Mr. Syms: I thank my hon. Friend for making that reasonable suggestion. I am sure that what he says will be heard. When a house is modern and has been sold a number of times, it would be illogical to deny information about it to registered surveyors or inspectors.

[Mr. Syms]

The Minister also referred to lenders having the information. The standards of building on estates in certain parts of the country are not particularly good, so is it not a matter of concern that, if lenders have access to the register, they might blight certain estates? Accusations are already sometimes made about lenders, particularly when certain areas have a bad reputation. How free will access to lenders be? Will they be able to look at individual reports or at the register in its entirety? I suspect that many lenders will build up a picture, which could lead to decisions being taken on the basis of the postcode. That could be a problem for some people. How will the proposals operate in practice? It is important to get the balance right between having reasonable access so that we do not always have to reinvent the wheel and protecting the privacy of the homeowner or home seller. As the Minister said, we do not want the double glazing salesman or building company to have full access to the information.

If the Minister has enough time, will he say more about whether the insurance scheme for home condition reports is in place? I know that concerns have been raised about that. Insurers are also worried about problems of flooding, underground drainage and so forth. Has a final decision been taken about what type of report will be used for the register? We have only a few more minutes left, so I will end there to allow other hon. Members to ask a few questions.

Matthew Green: I will be brief. We broadly welcome the amendments in the group, including the Government amendments, which go a long way towards dealing with the concerns of the House of Lords, but I want to ask the Minister a couple of questions about the administration and security of the system.

From what the Minister described, it would appear that, under the system, people producing the reports could post them on to a register via a remote server somewhere. The difficulty arises in controlling access to it. The Minister says that buyers will be given a unique number for a particular property, allowing them to look into that single property alone. Even with a good random generator of numbers, given the sheer number of properties available on the market at any one time, it would be possible for someone to guess the numbers and be able to look at other properties. That will be a problem if the register is accessed through a single number, however large. In reality, there are likely to be patterns in the numbers; they are not purely random. From what the Minister described, it would be possible for people to view other properties.

8.30 pm

The question of security raises another potential concern. As we saw last week, online banks can have problems with unauthorised access to some of their systems. Can the Minister be confident that no one could hack into the system holding the details on, say, the house that the Prime Minister has just purchased and sell the information or publish it on the internet? Can the system be secure at the same time as being flexible enough to allow access to all the users who need it? The Minister seems to have much more confidence in the ability to set up a foolproof system than I have.

The amendments have gone a long way towards addressing the issues raised in the other place. We do not support home information packs, but if they do go ahead the amendments will be necessary. On that ground, we will not oppose the Government on this issue tonight.

Mr. Clifton-Brown: I shall take one minute to make a few key points and to enable the Minister to reply to the important points that have been made.

First, access to information is critical. One of the key aspects is that, if it is possible for unauthorised people to access the information, the home information packs could become a burglars' charter. I hope that the Minister will reassure us that hackers will not be able to access the information if it is stored electronically. Given the record of such systems, I do not know how he can do that.

Secondly and most importantly, many inspectors will be needed. Inevitably, some of those inspectors will be trained at very short notice and mistakes will therefore be made. It is important that an adequate insurance scheme is in place. People must also have the ability to sue on the reports if they prove to be incorrect. I hope that the Minister can tell us whether that will be the case, because otherwise the reports will have zero value.

Keith Hill: I shall take the issues raised in reverse order. The hon. Member for Cotswold (Mr. Clifton-Brown) asked about insurance against error in the reports. I may say that an indemnity scheme has always been part and parcel of the proposition. The indemnity scheme will apply to home inspectors as it already does to conveyancers, and we think that it is a good idea to extend it to estate agents, through the estate agents redress scheme, which has been approved by the other place and has received a general welcome for both particular and general reasons. The monitoring of home condition reports will also allow judgments to be made about the performance of individual inspectors.

The hon. Gentleman raised the hoary old issue of access to information and the burglars' charter. We have gone over that matter on many occasions, but I shall reiterate—given that the allegation always seems to creep into adverse media coverage—that the home condition reports will contain no plans of the property, no information about security devices or alarms and no information about safes. We do not believe that the reports will remotely begin to add up to what he described as a burglars' charter.

The hon. Member for Ludlow (Matthew Green) raised several points and I am grateful for his qualified support. He asked about the operation of the electronic system and whether someone could hack into its numeration arrangements. That is a valid issue. We need to get the details right, and that is why we would do a great deal of work with all the relevant partners to ensure that that could not happen.

The hon. Member for Poole (Mr. Syms) raised several issues. He asked whether lenders will be able to look at individual reports, and the answer is yes. They will have the advantage of looking at the entirety of the property, which is not always the case in the present system. He asked whether the register would be open to other inspectors and would they have access to all home condition reports on the register. Again the answer is yes. He also asked whether there will be regional or local registers, and the answer is yes. I hope that I have been able to reassure him on the points that he raised.

Lords amendment disagreed to.

Government amendments (a) to (d) in lieu of Lords amendment No. 140 agreed to.

New Clause

DECENT HOMES STANDARD FOR SOCIAL HOUSING

Lords amendment: No. 190.

Keith Hill: I beg to move, That this House disagrees with the Lords in the said amendment.

Yes, it is me again. The new clause proposed by the amendment would require the Secretary of State to ensure that, by 2016, all existing social housing stock should, as far as is reasonably practicable, achieve a SAP rating—an energy rating under the standard assessment procedure—of no lower than 65, which would amount to a change in the decent homes standard. I refer to that point because material circulated among Members recognises that the decent homes standard is the Government's vehicle for the delivery of heating and thermal comfort.

I remind Members that the decent homes standard aims to tackle the worst problems. It triggers action; it is not a standard to which work is done. I also remind Members, as I have on earlier occasions, that when the Govt took office in 1997 no fewer than 2.2 million social homes were non-decent and there was a £19 billion backlog of work. The work we have done, and are continuing to do, tackles a range of problems that affect housing—leaking roofs and mould and damp in kitchens and bathrooms that have not been touched since the homes were built, which in some cases was the 1930s. Our work is having a huge impact on the lives of some of the most vulnerable members of society who have lived, or who currently live, in non-decent homes. I said "have lived" because, since 1997, we have reduced by 1 million the number of homes below the decent homes standard—a fact that we celebrate and rejoice in on the Labour Benches.

The decent homes programme is helping to rejuvenate some of our most deprived communities and is contributing towards improving public health and the well-being of tenants. By tackling poor housing, we are facing head-on a problem that is rife in the most disadvantaged communities and that affects the most disadvantaged groups. By making homes decent, in many cases alongside wider regeneration work, we are making whole areas more attractive places in which to live.

I should like to quote some of the tenants whose lives have been changed as a result of the decent homes programme, such as a tenant on a Walsall estate—not in the constituency of my hon. Friend the Member for Walsall, North (David Winnick), who is in the Chamber, but in the constituency of my right hon. Friend the Member for Walsall, South (Mr. George)—who said:

> "For many years the residents of Delves West felt like they were forgotten. We never seemed to get any investment in our homes. Thanks to the Decent Homes programme we are now making a real difference. Residents are getting the decent homes they've waited for, for so long."

In Redcar, some tenants were "over the moon", and a resident in Kensington and Chelsea, visited by my right hon. Friend the Deputy Prime Minister in May, said:

> "It was absolute murder before and now it's a godsend".

Amendment No. 190 picks up on one aspect of the decent homes programme—improving the thermal efficiency of homes and, in doing so, contributing to reducing fuel poverty and thereby increasing energy efficiency. We take seriously our responsibilities for alleviating fuel poverty. However, I remind the House that the decent homes programme has four elements: meeting the current statutory minimum standard for housing; achieving a reasonable state of repair; ensuring reasonably modern facilities and services; and providing a reasonable degree of thermal comfort. The programme therefore aims to tackle a wide range of problems and to prioritise the worst homes, of which there remain 1.4 million; including a SAP rating of 65 would add a further 1.7 million households, of which, as I shall demonstrate, only 120,000 would be fuel-poor.

We cannot seek a policy of perfection in regard to one of the four elements of the decent homes standard—thermal comfort—and disregard our obligations to tenants to make more basic improvements. For those people who live in non-decent homes, works such as mending a leaking roof, replacing rotten windows and tackling unsafe electrics matter more than focusing purely on energy efficiency.

Before I continue, it would be useful to explain to the House what fuel poverty is and how many people it affects. Fuel poverty occurs where those in a household spend more than 10 per cent. of their income on heating their home to an adequate standard of warmth. That is generally defined as 21° C in the living room and 18° C in the other occupied rooms. Fuel poverty affects 350,000 social sector households in England. Of course, the Lords amendment applies to the social sector. About 120,000 of those households meet the decent homes standard and about 230,000 households are currently non-decent homes.

We expect that the work done to those 230,000 social homes under the decent homes programme will bring most of those households out of fuel poverty. The work done by authorities is expected to raise the thermal efficiency of those homes well above the minimum that triggers action. The guidance that we have issued recommends that, when loft insulation is fitted, authorities should take the opportunity to improve energy efficiency and install it to a much greater depth than the 50 mm that triggers action and that, when new heating is installed or systems replaced, landlords should install energy efficient boilers where possible. Energy efficient boilers have a SEDBUK—seasonal efficiency of domestic boilers in the UK—A to C rating. We also recommend that landlords take advantage of DEFRA and DTI sponsored programmes that require suppliers of gas and electricity to achieve energy efficiency targets by helping landlords to take up energy efficiency measures.

Matthew Green *rose*—

Keith Hill: I see that the hon. Gentleman is bestirring himself; and, of course, I give way to him.

Matthew Green: I thank the Minister for giving way, but does he accept that not all the 230,000 households

[Matthew Green]

that he says will be raised to the decent homes standard will necessarily reach the SAP 65 rating? Many of those homes may well have to be revisited in future to get them up to that level. In fact, we are talking about guidelines, so some councils—perhaps those facing financial pressures—will not go the whole hog; they will do just enough to meet the decent homes standard without hitting the higher rating.

Keith Hill: Unusually for the hon. Gentleman, he is labouring under a misapprehension. He is usually very precise. In fact, very few of those 230,000 homes are likely to reach the SAP 65 level. That is exactly why I explained that the requirement for SAP 65 would not only embrace the 1.5 million so-called non-decent homes that we propose to tackle using the decent homes programme up to 2010, but entail a return to a further 1.7 million social sector homes that do not attain the SAP 65 level. The important thing to remember is that fuel poverty relates to the percentage of income that is necessarily expended to achieve a decent level of thermal comfort.

8.45 pm

Many householders who live in homes that do not have a SAP rating of 65 are not in fuel poverty because they do not spend a sufficiently high proportion of their incomes on the issue. It is terribly important for all hon. Members to bear it in mind that fuel poverty is a factor of not the physical fabric of a property, but the relationship between thermal comfort, or the need to compensate for heating loss, and income. The truth is that only a small proportion of those in fuel poverty live in social homes that are below the decent homes standard—about 120,000. Many people who live in fuel poverty might live in homes with a SAP 65 rating, which is why our fundamental argument is that it would be an immense over-reaction to insist on the SAP 65 standard across the board to lift households out of fuel poverty. It would be like using a JCB to smash a nut.

Brian White: Tackling fuel poverty is a key objective for the Government. However, they have several other objectives, such as reducing CO_2 emissions, which SAP 65 would help us to achieve. The Minister is missing the interaction between the objectives.

Keith Hill: I disagree with my hon. Friend, although I do not often do that because we have a good relationship both inside and outside the Chamber. We have dealt with such matters already. I have demonstrated that the Government are clearly committed to, and on route towards, achieving their carbon saving and energy efficiency targets. We mislead ourselves if we confuse energy efficiency and fuel poverty because they are different issues that we must separate in our minds.

The Government's argument is that the small numbers of households in fuel poverty should be dealt with individually. Interestingly, such households are characteristically not made up of senior citizens. They tend to be made up of people on low incomes living in three-bedroom houses. It is clearly possible to devise strategies to deal with such individuals. Indeed, the fuel poverty action plan has been designed to ensure that fuel poverty will be eliminated in such vulnerable households by the year 2010, and a report is due later this year. For all those reasons, although I take my hon. Friend's point about energy efficiency on board, we need to focus carefully on the precise sources of fuel poverty.

David Taylor: My right hon. Friend is one of the more lucid, rational, thoughtful and, especially, numerate Ministers—he is no doubt set for further promotion. Does he agree that if the only available options to address local authority tenants facing fuel poverty are stock transfer, the private finance initiative and arm's-length management organisations, all of which are more expensive than conventional local authority methods of raising houses to a decent standard, fewer houses will be tackled with the available pot of money than would have been the case if he had delivered option four, as he told the fringe meetings at the party conference that he would?

Keith Hill: I am grateful to my hon. Friend, who teases me. Although I know that there is an undercurrent of great seriousness in his observations, I sometimes feel that the fourth option is to him what King Charles's head was to Mr. Dick in "David Copperfield". I decline to be sucked down that vortex.

We have issued guidance that is designed to improve energy efficiency. The effectiveness of what is being done to improve heating and insulation under the decent homes programme is demonstrated by what our tenants say about it. A tenant in my hon. Friend's and mine beloved east midlands said:

> "At last I have decent heating and a radiator in every room, meaning my home is not only warm and cosy but actually cheaper to heat than before."

Another tenant in Chelmsford—I like to demonstrate a regional reach in my examples—described how her heating bills dropped from £35 a week in winter to £8 a week all year round.

We are working very hard to ensure that the Government meet their target on alleviating fuel poverty and improving energy efficiency, but I recognise that about 120,000 householders who live in homes that are above the decent homes threshold are in fuel poverty. However, it is not necessarily the very poor energy efficiency of the homes that is the main problem. As I have said, most of the households are single non-pensioner households on extremely low incomes living in three-bedroom homes. There are other issues to tackle beyond work to the physical fabric of the home.

Matthew Green: Will the Minister give way?

Keith Hill: If the hon. Gentleman will forgive me, I will make progress because other colleagues want to contribute. I am conscious that I have spoken at some length on this amendment and others. I dare say that he will have his opportunity later.

Amendment No. 190 wants us to tackle the problem of having around 120,000 households in fuel poverty in the social sector by increasing by 1.7 million the number of homes that would need work in accordance with the decent homes standard. Those homes are currently decent but below SAP 65, and they would more than double the number that we still have to tackle under the programme. The amendment would require the minimum standard that triggers action to be SAP 65. That would cost—I say this in all earnestness—£28.5 billion to solve a problem in 120,000 homes. That is roughly equivalent to 8p on the basic rate of tax. This is more than a sledgehammer to crack a nut. The amendment is a JCB. Indeed, a JCB might be the only solution for many homes if all social housing is to achieve a SAP 65 rating. An estimated 400,000 homes could not be brought up to that level of energy efficiency. For those, demolition and rebuilding would be the only solution at a cost of more than £20 billion, excluding any costs of re-acquiring property.

For the homes that could achieve SAP 65, some would require additional work over and above basic measures to improve their energy efficiency. For example, we would have to carry out insulation to the solid walls. That would cost £6 billion. Then there are those homes that would not be in the decent homes programme since they already meet the current levels of thermal comfort required. Work in those homes would include replacing boilers that are still functioning, modifying electric immersion heaters and installing double-glazing, which would cost £2.5 billion.

The grand total comes to an astonishing £28.5 billion. Demolition and rebuilding would cost more than £20 billion. Tackling hard-to-heat homes would cost £6 billion. To cover homes that do not currently come under the decent homes programme would cost £2.5 billion. That extra expenditure would cripple the budgets of local authorities and many housing associations. It would mean that work on wider regeneration work, including security measures and environmental improvements, would go undone. Those things matter to tenants, and how would we explain to them that those priorities would no longer be addressed? The new target would amount to moving the goalposts for social landlords who have been working hard to achieve the decent homes standard. Planned programmes of works would need to be rescheduled, which would disrupt not only landlords but tenants.

Even if it were possible to achieve SAP 65 for the social sector at a reasonable cost, it would still be unwise to fix that in statute. The standard assessment procedure measures energy efficiency on an index calculated by considering the annual space and water-heating costs for a standard heating regime. It is a constantly evolving mechanism that will change in response to new energy efficiency technology and changes in fuel prices. We have a huge range of social housing stock in this country, and a SAP target of 65 would be expensive, unachievable and inflexible. We prefer action on achievable targets to aspirations that, frankly, have not been properly thought through. We want to deliver on our decent homes programme by 2010, not see it jeopardised and perhaps put back to 2016. Above all, we cannot choose one part of our decent homes programme and promote it above everything else. We have a duty to tenants, and must provide them with the improvements in their living conditions that really matter to them. While energy efficiency may be the primary concern for some people, it is certainly not the primary concern for all social sector tenants. Our efforts in this area should remain focused on delivering the essential work needed to make all homes decent, and in doing so we must always maximise energy efficiency and promote the alleviation of fuel poverty. However, to put those two concerns above all else would be unrealistic.

In conclusion, a target of SAP 65 for all social sector homes would cost the taxpayer about £28.5 billion. The Government are committed to dealing with fuel poverty and to improving energy efficiency. However, we are not committed to doing that in an impractical and ludicrously expensive manner, as the amendment suggests. It is for those reasons that I invite the House to disagree with the amendment.

Mr. Hayes: The Minister said that the amendment, which was supported in the Lords by Liberal Democrats, Conservatives and Cross Benchers, but not by members of the governing party, was a sledgehammer to crack a nut. He said that it was like using a JCB or a juggernaut to deal with a problem that could be dealt with much more lightly. However, it has managed to attract the support of no less a group of people than the National Pensioners Convention, Shelter, Age Concern, Help the Aged, the National Right to Fuel Campaign, WWF, the Campaign to Protect Rural England, the all-party groups on warm homes and on intelligent energy, the Association for the Conservation of Energy and National Energy Action. Most people who are concerned about the welfare of some of our most vulnerable citizens, as well as most people who are concerned about energy conservation, disagree fundamentally with the Minister's analysis.

Dr. Iddon *rose—*

Mr. Hayes: If the amendment is a sledgehammer to crack a nut, it is supported by a considerable number of people worth listening to, perhaps including the hon. Gentleman.

Dr. Iddon: I was chairman of housing when the Conservatives were in power, and I suffered a 75 per cent. cut in funding for both the private and public sectors. Having listened to the hon. Gentleman, may I ask whether, if they regain power, the Conservatives would commit themselves to a SAP rating of 65?

Mr. Hayes: The hon. Gentleman is a wise and shrewd enough parliamentarian to know that you would not permit me, Mr. Deputy Speaker, to detach myself from the proper consideration of the amendment and meander into a debate about the history, interesting as it may be, of his service in local government, or indeed into a fanciful discussion about what may happen at a distant time in the future—although in fact I do not expect it to be very distant, as I should be replacing the Minister in a few months' time if what we read in the press is true.

I will be absolutely straight with the hon. Gentleman, who speaks with great passion about these subjects: the Conservatives, if I have anything to do with it, will take the issue of fuel poverty seriously. I believe very strongly in the warm homes agenda, and I will certainly, as Minister, review what he has said and done with a view to making significant progress in the campaign against fuel poverty. That is said genuinely; I am not trying to

[Mr. Hayes]

evade his point. He would not expect a bigger commitment than that, given that I am the Opposition spokesman, not the Minister, but I assure him that I will address the issue of fuel poverty when I become Minister and get the red boxes, the car and all the rest of it in a few months' time, and when the Minister begins to enjoy his long retirement and is relieved of the appropriate pressure that is being brought to bear on him.

9 pm

The amendment demands that all social housing should meet the standard assessment procedure rating of 65. That is the measure of energy efficiency in homes that is agreed by the Government and recognised elsewhere. There are two aspects to this debate: one concerns carbon emission targets, and the other fuel poverty. Both were well aired in the other place. Perhaps I may beg your indulgence for a second, Mr. Deputy Speaker, to pay tribute to Baroness Hanham and Lord Hanningfield, who did much good work there, together with noble colleagues from other parties. I single them out for particular praise because they did their very best to improve the worst aspects of the Bill. Lord Hanningfield pointed out that the Government had a manifesto commitment to decrease CO_2 emissions by 20 per cent. by 2010 based on 1990 levels; that from 1990 to 1997 carbon emissions decreased by 13.1 megatonnes of carbon; and that since this Government were elected in 1997 they have remained virtually static, while in three of the past four years they have increased. In August this year, the Environmental Audit Committee reported that the Government's latest forecasts indicate that carbon emissions by 2010 will be 8 megatonnes more than the target—a 25 per cent. shortfall.

The amendment calls for a 20 per cent. improvement in domestic energy efficiency by 2010, based on 2000 levels. That is equivalent to the saving of 5 megatonnes of carbon emissions from the domestic sector by 2010 that the Government originally stated as their intention and is the target that they assured the public no fewer than 15 times would be set as the energy efficiency aim under the Sustainable Energy Act 2003. A range of Ministers assured both Houses that that would be the case, until April this year when they reduced it to 16 per cent.—a saving of 4.2 megatonnes.

The original target is supported by the Energy Saving Trust, the Government's official adviser on energy efficiency; the Cabinet Office performance and innovation unit, the Government's advisers on energy policy; and the Sustainable Development Commission, the Government's advisers on sustainable development. It is also supported by a large number of Members on both sides of the House, particularly on the Labour Benches, who have taken fuel poverty, carbon emissions, the relationship between the two and the need for better energy conservation very seriously, campaigned on it, spoken on it and made their position patently clear, whereas the Government's position on this is not at all clear. There are fundamental contradictions between what they have said in the past and what they are saying now; but even more than that, there are—heaven forbid—contradictions between what different Ministers say about it.

The Minister for the Environment and Agri-environment said that

> "research has shown that bringing homes to a SAP rating of 65 is a level at which there is a minimal risk of a household being in fuel poverty."—[*Official Report*, 19 April 2004; Vol. 420, c. 138W.]

Lord Whitty expressed sympathy with the amendment. On 19 October, at a meeting of the all-party warm homes group in Committee Room 17 in the House of Commons, the same point was made to him. He replied:

> "I have sympathy with this . . . I am not defending ODPM."

It is clear that the ODPM and the Minister stand alone in the matter. Even his ministerial colleagues are not prepared to line up alongside him and defend the change of policy. Apart from concerns about emissions and the Government's failure to meet their targets, there are even more profound anxieties about the impact on many vulnerable people.

The Government have a legal duty to end fuel poverty under the Warm Homes and Energy Conservation Act 2000. The Minister has spoken about the meaning of fuel poverty and made it clear that he shares the commitment to combat it. However, the Government have agreed that a SAP rating of 65 is needed to achieve that objective. Other Ministers have made it clear that the only way in which the Government will achieve their aim is by adopting a different policy—that which is outlined in the amendment. The Government's figures demonstrate that. In 2001, the Department of Transport, Local Government and the Regions consultation on the decent homes standard stated:

> "Twenty-five per cent. of social sector tenants living in homes with these stock measures"—

insulation and heating measures that comply with the current decent homes standards—

> "are still fuel poor."

Twenty-five per cent. is approximately 650,000 or 1.4 million people, based on the national average of 2.2 people per household.

The latest figures suggest that more than 1.141 million homes fall below standards on the ground of thermal insulation. The current policy is to bring those homes up to a decent homes standard, which will not necessarily mean that they escape fuel poverty. It is not good enough for the Minister to say that the Government are committed to decent homes. Of course it is right to improve the stock of social housing in all sorts of ways but it is unacceptable not to tackle the fundamental issue of insulation and fuel poverty as part of that, in order to deliver the Government's stated aims.

The House of Lords debated the matter in a measured and reasoned way. The debate showed the passions of Members from across the political spectrum. It was not simply a matter of knockabout, Opposition versus Government, politics. Any reading of the debate reveals a genuine commitment on behalf of hard-pressed people.

The gist of the Government's case is straightforward. They have effectively reneged on their original commitment. They have lowered the bar because they know that it will be difficult to reach the standard that the amendment demands of them. The excuse that the Minister gave initially in his contribution was that doing so would mean taking their eye off the ball for other aspects of the decent homes standard. However, he gave the game away at the end of his speech by saying that it was all about cost. He thus confirmed what was said in the Lords. In answering the proponents of the amendment, Lord Bassam said that it would focus on one aspect of decent homes to the detriment of others. He said:

> "That is what the amendment would do, but at a potentially huge cost . . . bringing all social housing up to a standard of SAP 65 could add £3 billion to £5 billion to the cost of the decent homes programme."—[*Official Report, House of Lords*, 3 November 2004; Vol. 666, c. 379.]

It is not as simple as that, however, because failing to support this amendment will waste vast sums of public money. The Government will ensure that works are undertaken on all social homes to bring them up to the decent homes standard, but they will still leave a large number of people in fuel poverty. The law will require them to address that issue at some stage in the future and to spend additional sums to take those people out of fuel poverty. The truth of the matter is that this is a false economy. If the Government were to get this right now, they could fulfil their legal responsibilities in one coherent and consistent programme. Instead, however, what Lord Hanningfield has described as the "double visit" to the project will cost more and be extremely wasteful. The Government's argument about money does not stack up, given that they have acknowledged their overriding legal duty in this regard.

More than that, I disagree fundamentally with the Minister on this. This is a very important issue indeed, and not to address fuel poverty would be a dreadful shame that the Minister and the Government would have to carry.

Ms Sally Keeble (Northampton, North) (Lab): Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

Mr. Hayes: I apologise to the hon. Lady, but I am about to finish. I am usually very generous with interventions, as she well knows, but I want to give other hon. Members time to speak. Perhaps she will be one of them.

The freedom from fear and the freedom from want are fundamental objectives of any decent Government, and this Government should live up to those principles—*[Interruption.]* Well, the hon. Member for Eltham (Clive Efford) may chafe, but there are people on this side of the Chamber—and, I am sure, on his side—who believe that the mitigation of disadvantage is the greatest purpose of politics. I believe that to be the case, and I make no bones about stating it. I have always believed it, and I have said so many times. This is not a recent conversion for me.

Clive Efford (Eltham) (Lab) *rose—*

Mr. Hayes: I am not going to give way, so I am not sure why the hon. Gentleman is standing.

We have been told that the Minister is a literate, numerate and rational man. I think that he is also a good man, and that he will want to be remembered as a good Minister. On that basis, and in the spirit of agreement that he called for at the beginning of tonight's proceedings, I ask him to support the amendment and to adopt this standard, thus gaining the support of the broad consensus of opinion. His doing so would cast the Government in an entirely different light.

Matthew Green: I shall be brief, because I know that at least one other hon. Member would like to speak.

I have a little bit of sympathy for the Minister's position on this amendment; I am perhaps not as dogmatic as others on the issue. However, in attempting to fight it, he has done himself no credit whatever. Uncharacteristically, he has read things into the amendment that are not there, and cited figures that I do not think he could defend on closer examination. For instance, he talked about demolishing large numbers of homes in order to meet the standard, when the amendment says only that it should be met

> "as far as is reasonably practicable".

I do not think that anyone would find it reasonably practicable to demolish lots of houses and build new ones. That takes £20 billion out of the £28 billion that he cited. I will not start delving into the rest—perhaps other hon. Members will want to tackle the question of the remaining £8 billion—but the figure certainly drops dramatically with a more accurate reading of the amendment.

The Minister is on difficult ground with this issue. As he himself explained, the definition of fuel poverty involves the amount a household spends on fuel in relation to its income. However, fuel prices are rising, and they are likely to continue to do so. Many people in the House, myself included, do not think that that is necessarily a bad thing, from an environmental viewpoint. However, by definition, it causes a problem, because if things stand still more people will be put into the fuel-poor categories. The figures that the Minister accounted for—the 120,000, the 240,000 and the 1.1 million people—could all increase.

9.15 pm

There is a great danger that the advantage that the Government have had for the past few years, largely as a result of low fuel prices rather than Government intervention, will disappear. The Minister will be Minister for Housing and Planning when more people enter fuel poverty. Rather than taking an aggressive attitude against the amendment, which is well-meaning and has good practical thoughts behind it, and setting himself dogmatically against it, he should perhaps have moved some way towards meeting it, as it is clear that increasing the SAP rating of properties where it is relatively practical to do so does, as the Minister for the Environment and Agri-environment has made clear, bring people out of fuel poverty.

I am saddened that the ministerial response has been so dogmatically against the amendment. I shall go against the Government tonight, because I want them to make some move to suggest that they are aware of the gap between where they are and where they will be—it will be a problem—in a couple of years with the continuing rise of fuel prices. I hope that we hear from the Minister that he at least acknowledges that there is such a problem and that he has some action plan to deal with it.

Alan Simpson: I have no doubt that both Opposition

[Alan Simpson]

parties will vote in support of the Lords amendment and I have no reason to doubt the sincerity of the comments made by both Front-Bench spokesmen, but I must point out in terms of questioning the depth of this commitment that not a single Opposition Back-Bencher has been present throughout the debate on this clause. That is not the case in respect of Labour Members, and I want to address Labour's commitments in my remarks.

The Minister rightly said that a number of different objectives are built into the decent homes standard. I do not think anyone in the House would dispute the value of that, but it is not true to say that the Government can then use that as a pretext for getting out of what we have set for ourselves as the non-negotiable obligation to eradicate, in its entirety, fuel poverty by 2016.

The Minister will know from a number of delegations that I have been involved with, particularly from the parliamentary warm homes group—I brought them to see him to discuss this matter—that we have also tried to explore other choices that the Government have. By and large, we have taken a twin-pronged approach to the eradication of fuel poverty: one through the warm front programme and the other through income support measures, involving the Chancellor and the Treasury. However, it is absolutely right to say, as the hon. Member for Ludlow (Matthew Green) did, that the viability of that intervention in income support will be put seriously to the test.

We have seen the end of the era of low energy prices; we are knee-deep in an era of dramatically increasing energy prices. None of us should kid ourselves that it will come cheap to the Government to intervene to pay people to throw money out of poorly insulated properties for no gain at all. There will certainly be a negative consequence of massively undermining our commitments to carbon reduction targets. The best way to tackle this is to address the structural condition of Britain's housing. As other Members have mentioned, on 19 April this year my hon. Friend the Minister for the Environment and Agri-environment pointed out that the best way to do that would be to set a minimum SAP rating of 65 for all social housing.

I suspect that if we were to do that, some other points that have been made to the Minister would come in on the shirt tails of it. He could, for example, also meet the fuel poverty reduction targets by making those standards apply to the private rented sector. We have tried to make the same representations. But we see in subsequent clauses that we will not go down that path either. We could, as my hon. Friend the Member for North-West Leicestershire (David Taylor) pointed out, give a fresh remit to local authorities for a new era of council house building, which is by far the cheapest and most effective way of intervening in the social sector. As yet, however, none of the promises of a level playing field in respect of local authority housing are in the framework for delivery by either the Minister for Housing and Planning or other Ministers.

What should we do to meet our existing legal obligations to eradicate fuel poverty? The Government's Fuel Poverty Advisory Group is now saying, in consistent terms, that we are not on track to meet our legal targets. We have choices about how we can meet those targets, but one choice that we do not have is to do nothing. Unfortunately, one of the ways in which we have built up cost consequences is by structuring the warm front programme so badly in the first instance that we are duplicating costs. We began by quoting numbers of households in fuel poverty that we have helped—we never said that we were not helping them out of fuel poverty, but we said that we were helping them in it.

The reality of the fuel poverty benchmark will not go away. The amendment gives the House the chance to address a structural issue with a structural solution. I beg the Minister to take that on board, not as a threat or challenge from the other place, but as a way of helping us out of a hole into which we have been digging ourselves.

Ms Keeble: I had not intended to contribute to the debate today, and only the challenge from the hon. Member for South Holland and The Deepings (Mr. Hayes) made me feel that it was worth saying something in support of the Government's position and opposing that of the other place.

It seems to me that the Conservative party has completely misrepresented some of the basis of tackling fuel poverty and of the intent of the decent homes strategy, for two reasons in particular. First, we needed a decent homes strategy because of the legacy of disrepair that we inherited when the Conservative party left government. I was a council leader in one of the areas with some of the worst social housing in the country, and I recall how those homes were starved of funds, the price paid in terms of the discomfort of people living there and the real hardship of thousands of families in social housing that was on the skids. We needed a decent homes strategy so that social housing could approach a reasonable level after all that disrepair.

Like so many things that the Government have done, that strategy might not seem the most wonderfully heroic new socialist dawn. Given what we took over, however, it was a supremely ambitious programme, and extremely difficult to deliver. Once it is achieved, which I am sure it will be, the Government will have every right to be extremely proud of it. The only way to achieve our decent homes target is to balance the key measures that make homes unpleasant and unfit for people to live in. That is a question not just of technical standards but of what happens to the people who live in those properties and what they need.

Secondly, when we came into power we were confronted by massive fuel poverty, particularly among the old. A key factor in fuel poverty, which the Minister addressed and the hon. Member for South Holland and The Deepings did not, was income. That is why we introduced the winter fuel allowance, which the Conservative party opposed bitterly. It ill behoves a party that so opposed the winter fuel allowance to preach to anyone about fuel poverty. The reason why it is residual groups such as single people on low incomes, households with families or people with disabilities who are in fuel poverty is that we dealt with fuel poverty among pensioners with the winter fuel allowance, which has been increased year on year.

If we are talking seriously about tackling fuel poverty, I can certainly describe my wish list—as the Minister well knows, for I have berated him about housing improvements on several occasions. We should think not just about social housing but about private housing. Social housing sometimes has to be knocked down and replaced, but we must also deal with fuel poverty in the private sector—*[Interruption.]*—I see that I am now being asked to finish my speech.

There is a huge agenda to be tackled. I agree that we should keep to the programme that we have set and observe the priorities involved in it, but we should not lose sight of bigger goals. I do not think that the amendment would help us to achieve those goals, on which I am sure we all agree.

Dr. Iddon: I want to make three brief points.

I am concerned about fuel poverty. My right hon. Friend the Minister said that 120,000 people were in that position, but I believe that a 10 per cent. fuel price increase would return 500,000 people to fuel poverty. We are on a treadmill, and I remind my right hon. Friend that fuel companies are making obscene profits: I think they amount to £8 billion. I hope that he will discuss with his friends on the Treasury team the possibility of a windfall tax so that we can really help those who are being subjected to fuel poverty by price increases. I have signed an early-day motion on the subject.

I raised the second point in Committee. We are setting different decent home standards for the public and private sectors. I am grateful for what the Government are doing in the private sector. Improved building control procedures are beginning to deliver better decent home standards, along with better architectural design and other features, but we are not catching up with that in the public sector.

The third point is this: we have wasted an awful lot of money trying to bring homes up to a decent standard in terms of fuel efficiency. We began with draught stripping, then dealt with cavity walls and UPVC double glazing. We improved central-heating systems in a thousand and one different ways. My plea to any Government, including this one, is that they take a holistic approach rather than persistently going back—three or four times, in fact—to trying to bring houses up to decent home standards.

Keith Hill: I shall try in the short time available to me to respond to all the points that have been raised.

The hon. Member for South Holland and The Deepings (Mr. Hayes) expressed his personal passion for the warmer homes programme, but as my hon. Friend the Member for Nottingham, South (Alan Simpson), observed, that passion was clearly not shared by his Tory colleagues, for the Tory Benches were empty throughout his speech. In fact, his colleagues missed the wrong speech on the wrong subject. However, since despite his weasel words and disavowals he spoke in favour of the amendment and is likely to divide the House, I think we can assume that he has committed the official Opposition to expenditure of at least £28.5 billion to achieve SAP 65 rating. No doubt the shadow Chancellor of the Exchequer, the right hon. Member for West Dorset (Mr. Letwin), will be most interested to learn of that not insubstantial spending commitment. The hon. Gentleman may find himself out of a job rather sooner than he has a chance to succeed me in mine.

I was grateful for the "little sympathy" expressed by the hon. Member for Ludlow (Matthew Green). He drew attention to the qualification

"as far as is reasonably practicable"

in the amendment, and argued that it would mean lower costs than I had identified. But where does that observation get us? It is as long as a piece of string. The amendment either indicates a serious attempt to attain a SAP rating of 65 or it does not. I have described the financial implications of taking it seriously, which are immensely costly. I have argued that it is a misplaced policy because, in the social sector—the amendment refers to the social sector—fuel poverty is a limited phenomenon that can be tackled by individual households.

That brings me on to the observations of my hon. Friend the Member for Nottingham, South. He is right. We have spoken about the matter on many occasions. I respect his commitment and his long-term campaign on these issues.

9.30 pm

The hon. Member for South Holland and The Deepings drew attention to observations by ministerial colleagues in the Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs. However, DEFRA has not said that a SAP rating of 65 is necessary in all stock. What it has said is that removing fuel poverty depends on the characteristics of the individual household, but that SAP 65 is the level at which there is a minimal risk of a household being in fuel poverty. The precise answer given by the Minister for the Environment and Agri-environment to the hon. Member for Guildford (Sue Doughty) was that removing fuel poverty depends on the characteristics of the individual household. I recognise that we may be in an era of rising energy prices, but we cannot base an expenditure commitment of that scale on a relatively unquantifiable guess.

My hon. Friend the Member for Nottingham, South rightly talked about the warm front programme, but I remind him that that programme deals exclusively with the private sector and that that is where the problem of fuel poverty is immensely more extensive. My hon. Friend the Member for Northampton, North (Ms Keeble) was right when she identified that the kernel of the fuel poverty issue is in the private sector, but the amendment is about the social sector, not the private sector. My contention is that, because the standard is much higher in the social sector, the issue is much more manageable through interventions other than this blunderbus approach to SAP 65. I was grateful to my hon. Friend, a distinguished former housing Minister, for her support and for exposing the hypocrisy of the Conservative party.

I say to my hon. Friend the Member for Bolton, South-East (Dr. Iddon) that I will certainly draw to the attention of colleagues in the Treasury his observations about fuel prices and a windfall tax. I thought that he was wrong when he said that we were not catching up with the private sector. For all the reasons that I have mentioned, I believe that we are doing and will do better in the social sector. However, as he demonstrated to me when I visited him in the Haulgh in Bolton, it is best to do it together. I accept his observations about a holistic approach.

[Keith Hill]

I know that, in some respects, my response will be a disappointment to colleagues on the Labour Benches, but I have attempted to be precise and accurate and to demonstrate the Government's commitment to dealing with fuel poverty. It will be dealt with in the social sector by techniques that are different from those proposed in the amendment. For all those solid reasons, I invite the House to disagree with the Lords in the said amendment.

Question put, That this House disagrees with the Lords in the said amendment:—

The House divided: Ayes 265, Noes 156.

Division No. 313] **[9:34 am**

AYES

Ainger, Nick
Ainsworth, Bob *(Cov'try NE)*
Allen, Graham
Anderson, Janet *(Rossendale & Darwen)*
Armstrong, rh Ms Hilary
Atherton, Ms Candy
Atkins, Charlotte
Bailey, Adrian
Baird, Vera
Banks, Tony
Barron, rh Kevin
Battle, rh John
Bayley, Hugh
Beard, Nigel
Beckett, rh Margaret
Begg, Miss Anne
Bell, Sir Stuart
Benn, rh Hilary
Benton, Joe *(Bootle)*
Berry, Roger
Blackman, Liz
Blears, Ms Hazel
Borrow, David
Bradley, rh Keith *(Withington)*
Brennan, Kevin
Brown, Russell *(Dumfries)*
Browne, Desmond
Bryant, Chris
Burgon, Colin
Burnham, Andy
Cairns, David
Campbell, Alan *(Tynemouth)*
Campbell, Mrs Anne *(C'bridge)*
Campbell, Ronnie *(Blyth V)*
Caplin, Ivor
Casale, Roger
Cawsey, Ian *(Brigg)*
Challen, Colin
Chapman, Ben *(Wirral S)*
Chaytor, David
Clark, Paul *(Gillingham)*
Clarke, Tony *(Northampton S)*
Clelland, David
Coffey, Ms Ann
Cohen, Harry
Corston, Jean
Crausby, David
Cruddas, Jon
Cummings, John
Cunningham, Jim *(Coventry S)*
Cunningham, Tony *(Workington)*
Darling, rh Alistair
Davey, Valerie *(Bristol W)*
David, Wayne
Davidson, Ian
Davies, rh Denzil *(Llanelli)*
Davies, Geraint *(Croydon C)*
Dawson, Hilton
Dean, Mrs Janet
Denham, rh John
Dhanda, Parmjit
Dismore, Andrew
Dobson, rh Frank
Donohoe, Brian H.
Doran, Frank
Dowd, Jim *(Lewisham W)*
Eagle, Angela *(Wallasey)*
Eagle, Maria *(L'pool Garston)*
Edwards, Huw
Ellman, Mrs Louise
Ennis, Jeff *(Barnsley E)*
Etherington, Bill
Farrelly, Paul
Field, rh Frank *(Birkenhead)*
Fisher, Mark
Fitzpatrick, Jim
Flint, Caroline
Flynn, Paul *(Newport W)*
Foster, rh Derek
Foster, Michael *(Worcester)*
Foster, Michael Jabez *(Hastings & Rye)*
Foulkes, rh George
Gardiner, Barry
George, rh Bruce *(Walsall S)*
Gerrard, Neil
Gibson, Dr. Ian
Gilroy, Linda
Godsiff, Roger
Goggins, Paul
Griffiths, Jane *(Reading E)*
Griffiths, Win *(Bridgend)*
Hall, Mike *(Weaver Vale)*
Hall, Patrick *(Bedford)*
Hamilton, David *(Midlothian)*
Hanson, David
Harris, Tom *(Glasgow Cathcart)*
Havard, Dai *(Merthyr Tydfil & Rhymney)*
Healey, John
Henderson, Ivan *(Harwich)*
Hendrick, Mark
Hepburn, Stephen
Heppell, John
Hesford, Stephen
Heyes, David
Hill, Keith *(Streatham)*
Hinchliffe, David
Hodge, Margaret
Hood, Jimmy *(Clydesdale)*
Hope, Phil *(Corby)*
Hopkins, Kelvin
Howarth, rh Alan *(Newport E)*
Howarth, George *(Knowsley N & Sefton E)*
Hoyle, Lindsay
Hughes, Beverley *(Stretford & Urmston)*
Hughes, Kevin *(Doncaster N)*
Humble, Mrs Joan
Hurst, Alan *(Braintree)*
Hutton, rh John
Iddon, Dr. Brian
Illsley, Eric
Irranca-Davies, Huw
Jackson, Glenda *(Hampstead & Highgate)*
Jackson, Helen *(Hillsborough)*
Jamieson, David
Jenkins, Brian
Johnson, Miss Melanie *(Welwyn Hatfield)*
Jones, Helen *(Warrington N)*
Jones, Kevan *(N Durham)*
Jones, Martyn *(Clwyd S)*
Jowell, rh Tessa
Joyce, Eric *(Falkirk W)*
Kaufman, rh Sir Gerald
Keeble, Ms Sally
Kemp, Fraser
Kennedy, Jane *(Wavertree)*
Khabra, Piara S.
Kidney, David
King, Andy *(Rugby)*
King, Ms Oona *(Bethnal Green & Bow)*
Knight, Jim *(S Dorset)*
Kumar, Dr. Ashok
Ladyman, Dr. Stephen
Lammy, David
Laxton, Bob *(Derby N)*
Lazarowicz, Mark
Lepper, David
Leslie, Christopher
Levitt, Tom *(High Peak)*
Lewis, Ivan *(Bury S)*
Linton, Martin
Love, Andrew
Lucas, Ian *(Wrexham)*
Luke, Iain *(Dundee E)*
Lyons, John *(Strathkelvin)*
McAvoy, Thomas
McCabe, Stephen
McCartney, rh Ian
McDonagh, Siobhain
MacDonald, Calum
MacDougall, John
McGuire, Mrs Anne
McIsaac, Shona
McKechin, Ann
McKenna, Rosemary
McNulty, Tony
Mactaggart, Fiona
McWalter, Tony
McWilliam, John
Mahmood, Khalid
Mallaber, Judy
Mann, John *(Bassetlaw)*
Marris, Rob *(Wolverh'ton SW)*
Marsden, Gordon *(Blackpool S)*
Marshall, David *(Glasgow Shettleston)*
Martlew, Eric
Michael, rh Alun
Milburn, rh Alan
Miliband, David
Miller, Andrew
Mitchell, Austin *(Gt Grimsby)*
Moffatt, Laura
Moran, Margaret
Mountford, Kali
Mudie, George
Mullin, Chris
Murphy, Denis *(Wansbeck)*
Murphy, Jim *(Eastwood)*
Osborne, Sandra *(Ayr)*
Owen, Albert
Perham, Linda
Picking, Anne
Pickthall, Colin
Plaskitt, James
Pollard, Kerry
Prentice, Ms Bridget *(Lewisham E)*
Prescott, rh John
Prosser, Gwyn
Purchase, Ken
Purnell, James
Quin, rh Joyce
Quinn, Lawrie
Rapson, Syd *(Portsmouth N)*
Raynsford, rh Nick
Reid, rh Dr. John *(Hamilton N & Bellshill)*
Robertson, John *(Glasgow Anniesland)*
Robinson, Geoffrey *(Coventry NW)*
Rooney, Terry
Ross, Ernie *(Dundee W)*
Roy, Frank *(Motherwell)*
Ruane, Chris
Ryan, Joan *(Enfield N)*
Salter, Martin
Sarwar, Mohammad
Savidge, Malcolm
Sawford, Phil
Sedgemore, Brian
Shaw, Jonathan
Sheridan, Jim
Short, rh Clare
Simon, Siôn *(B'ham Erdington)*
Singh, Marsha
Skinner, Dennis
Smith, rh Andrew *(Oxford E)*
Smith, rh Chris *(Islington S & Finsbury)*
Smith, Geraldine *(Morecambe & Lunesdale)*
Smith, Jacqui *(Redditch)*
Soley, Clive
Starkey, Dr. Phyllis
Steinberg, Gerry
Stewart, Ian *(Eccles)*
Stinchcombe, Paul
Stoate, Dr. Howard
Strang, rh Dr. Gavin
Stringer, Graham
Sutcliffe, Gerry
Tami, Mark *(Alyn)*
Taylor, Dari *(Stockton S)*
Thomas, Gareth *(Harrow W)*
Timms, Stephen
Todd, Mark *(S Derbyshire)*
Trickett, Jon
Turner, Dennis *(Wolverh'ton SE)*
Turner, Dr. Desmond *(Brighton Kemptown)*
Turner, Neil *(Wigan)*
Tynan, Bill *(Hamilton S)*
Vis, Dr. Rudi

Walley, Ms Joan
Ward, Claire
Watson, Tom
Watts, David
White, Brian
Whitehead, Dr. Alan
Wicks, Malcolm
Williams, rh Alan *(Swansea W)*
Williams, Betty *(Conwy)*
Wills, Michael
Winnick, David
Winterton, Ms Rosie *(Doncaster C)*
Wood, Mike *(Batley)*
Woolas, Phil
Worthington, Tony
Wright, Anthony D. *(Gt Yarmouth)*
Wright, David *(Telford)*
Wright, Iain *(Hartlepool)*
Wyatt, Derek

Tellers for the Ayes:
Gillian Merron and
Vernon Coaker

NOES

Ainsworth, Peter *(E Surrey)*
Allan, Richard
Amess, David
Arbuthnot, rh James
Atkinson, David *(Bour'mth E)*
Atkinson, Peter *(Hexham)*
Bacon, Richard
Barker, Gregory
Barnes, Harry
Baron, John *(Billericay)*
Bellingham, Henry
Bercow, John
Boswell, Tim
Bottomley, Peter *(Worthing W)*
Bottomley, rh Virginia *(SW Surrey)*
Brady, Graham
Brake, Tom *(Carshalton)*
Brazier, Julian
Browning, Mrs Angela
Bruce, Malcolm
Burns, Simon
Burnside, David
Burt, Alistair
Butterfill, Sir John
Cameron, David
Campbell, rh Sir Menzies *(NE Fife)*
Cash, William
Caton, Martin
Chapman, Sir Sydney *(Chipping Barnet)*
Chope, Christopher
Clappison, James
Clarke, rh Kenneth *(Rushcliffe)*
Clifton-Brown, Geoffrey
Collins, Tim
Corbyn, Jeremy
Curry, rh David
Davey, Edward *(Kingston)*
Djanogly, Jonathan
Donaldson, Jeffrey M.
Duncan, Alan *(Rutland)*
Efford, Clive
Evans, Nigel
Fabricant, Michael
Fallon, Michael
Field, Mark *(Cities of London & Westminster)*
Flight, Howard
Flook, Adrian
Follett, Barbara
Foster, Don *(Bath)*
Fox, Dr. Liam
Francois, Mark
Gale, Roger *(N Thanet)*
Garnier, Edward
Gill, Parmjit Singh
Gillan, Mrs Cheryl
Gray, James *(N Wilts)*
Grayling, Chris
Green, Damian *(Ashford)*
Green, Matthew *(Ludlow)*
Greenway, John
Grogan, John
Gummer, rh John
Hammond, Philip
Harvey, Nick
Hawkins, Nick
Hayes, John *(S Holland)*
Heath, David
Heathcoat-Amory, rh David
Hendry, Charles
Hoban, Mark *(Fareham)*
Hogg, rh Douglas
Horam, John *(Orpington)*
Howarth, Gerald *(Aldershot)*
Jack, rh Michael
Jackson, Robert *(Wantage)*
Jenkin, Bernard
Jones, Lynne *(Selly Oak)*
Key, Robert *(Salisbury)*
Kirkbride, Miss Julie
Kirkwood, Sir Archy
Knight, rh Greg *(E Yorkshire)*
Lait, Mrs Jacqui
Lansley, Andrew
Leigh, Edward
Lewis, Dr. Julian *(New Forest E)*
Lewis, Terry *(Worsley)*
Liddell-Grainger, Ian
Lilley, rh Peter
Loughton, Tim
Luff, Peter *(M-Worcs)*
McIntosh, Miss Anne
McLoughlin, Patrick
Mahon, Mrs Alice
Mawhinney, rh Sir Brian
May, Mrs Theresa
Meale, Alan *(Mansfield)*
Mercer, Patrick
Moss, Malcolm
Murrison, Dr. Andrew
Norman, Archie
Osborne, George *(Tatton)*
Ottaway, Richard
Page, Richard
Paterson, Owen
Pickles, Eric
Prentice, Gordon *(Pendle)*
Price, Adam *(E Carmarthen & Dinefwr)*
Prisk, Mark *(Hertford)*
Pugh, Dr. John
Redwood, rh John
Robathan, Andrew
Robertson, Hugh *(Faversham & M-Kent)*
Robertson, Laurence *(Tewk'b'ry)*
Robinson, Mrs Iris *(Strangford)*
Robinson, Peter *(Belfast E)*
Roe, Dame Marion
Rosindell, Andrew
Ruddock, Joan
Ruffley, David
Russell, Bob *(Colchester)*
Selous, Andrew
Shephard, rh Mrs Gillian
Simmonds, Mark
Simpson, Alan *(Nottingham S)*
Smith, Llew *(Blaenau Gwent)*
Smith, Sir Robert *(W Ab'd'ns & Kincardine)*
Smyth, Rev. Martin *(Belfast S)*
Spelman, Mrs Caroline
Spicer, Sir Michael
Spink, Bob *(Castle Point)*
Spring, Richard
Streeter, Gary
Swayne, Desmond
Syms, Robert
Taylor, David *(NW Leics)*
Taylor, John *(Solihull)*
Taylor, Dr. Richard *(Wyre F)*
Taylor, Sir Teddy
Thurso, John
Turner, Andrew *(Isle of Wight)*
Tyler, Paul *(N Cornwall)*
Tyrie, Andrew
Viggers, Peter
Wareing, Robert N.
Waterson, Nigel
Webb, Steve *(Northavon)*
Whittingdale, John
Widdecombe, rh Miss Ann
Wiggin, Bill
Willetts, David
Williams, Hywel *(Caernarfon)*
Williams, Roger *(Brecon)*
Winterton, Ann *(Congleton)*
Winterton, Sir Nicholas *(Macclesfield)*
Yeo, Tim *(S Suffolk)*
Young, rh Sir George

Tellers for the Noes:
Mr. David Wilshire and
Mr. Crispin Blunt

Question accordingly agreed to.

Lords amendment disagreed to.

Clause 3

LOCAL HOUSING AUTHORITIES TO REVIEW HOUSING CONDITIONS IN THEIR DISTRICTS

Lords amendment: No. 1.

Keith Hill: I beg to move, That this House agrees with Lords in the said amendment.

Mr. Speaker: With this we may discuss Lords amendments Nos. 2 to 25, 212 to 214, 216, 218, 219, 221, 248, 250 to 252, 271, 273, 275 to 278 and 281 to 283.

Keith Hill: The great majority of these amendments are, as you can see, Mr. Speaker, minor and technical. They are either consequential on amendments made to later provisions in the Bill, intended to rectify small errors or clarificatory, but there are a few that I should briefly like to draw to the House's attention.

Lords amendment No. 2 responds to concerns raised by the Joint Committee on Human Rights. Under clause 5, which deals with the health and safety rating system, where a category 1 hazard exists, the local housing authority is under a duty to take the most appropriate course of enforcement action available to it. Under clause 7, where a category 2 hazard exists, it may take one of the available courses of action.

Ms Keeble: I am pleased that overcrowding will be dealt with separately, and I congratulate the Government on the consultation on that. What is the Government's thinking on overcrowding in relation to the special needs of children with behavioural and other difficulties, and will those special needs be taken into account in considering the revision of the overcrowding rules?

Keith Hill: As ever, I am grateful to my hon. Friend, who is a former housing Minister. I share her pleasure that we have been able to introduce some important provisions to the Bill on the issue of overcrowding, which she has worked to achieve for a long time. Of

[Keith Hill]

course, as we seek to implement those provisions, we will take into account the issues of special needs that she has raised with me tonight and on previous occasions.

In its eighth and 10th reports, the Joint Committee on Human Rights expressed concerns that the absence of a duty on local authorities to give reasons for deciding which form of enforcement action to pursue under clauses 5 or 7 failed to comply with article 6 of the human rights convention on the right to a fair hearing; could lead to breaches of article 8 on respect for private and family life; and could lead to breaches of article 1 of the first protocol on the protection of property. The amendment responds to those concerns by placing a duty on local authorities to prepare a statement of reasons for their decision to take the course of action on which they have settled. We believe that this new clause responds positively to the Joint Committee's concerns without placing local authorities under a significant additional burden.

Lords amendments Nos. 212 to 214, 216, 218, 219 and 221 amend clauses 199, 203 and 204. In part, they respond to concerns of the Joint Committee on Human Rights and in part they are clarificatory. Clause 199 allows a local housing authority to require the production of documentation that the authority might need to carry out its functions under parts 1 to 4 of the Bill and to investigate offences committed in relation to any residential premises. In its 10th report, the Committee expressed concern that the lack of procedural safeguards, and the lack of requirement for authorisation, could lead to a risk of unjustified or disproportionate use of the powers in clause 199. Lords amendments Nos. 212 and 213 require that a person exercising the power to require the production of documents has been authorised in writing.

Clause 203 gives a local housing authority power of entry to properties in pursuance of its duties under parts 1 to 4 and part 7 of the Bill when certain conditions are met. Representatives of the authority must have written authorisation that sets out the purpose for which the entry is authorised and must give at least 24 hours notice to the owner or occupier of the premises they intend to enter. Permission under this clause does not include a power to use force to obtain entry. This power of entry includes entry for the purpose of taking samples. In its 10th report, the Committee expressed the view that the authorisation to express the power should be given at an appropriate level of seniority.

Clause 204 enables a justice of the peace to issue a warrant for admission to premises. This includes power to enter by force if necessary. This power is applicable, however, only when either entry under clause 203 has been refused, or the property is empty and immediate access is necessary, or prior warning of entry is likely to negate the purpose of access. Lords amendments Nos. 214, 216, 218 and 219 extend the power of entry in clauses 203 and 204 to include an express power for the purposes of inspections under clause 4. These amendments are clarificatory.

The concern of the Joint Committee that authorisations should be given at an appropriate level of seniority is addressed by Lords amendment No. 221, which introduces a new clause after clause 206. The new clause provides that authorisations under a number of powers in the Bill, including clauses 199 and 203, must be given by a relevant deputy chief officer of the local housing authority or by the officer to whom he reports or is directly accountable.

Ms Keeble: Can my right hon. Friend let me know what kind of documents he was referring to when he referred to the production of documents?

Keith Hill: I am again grateful to my hon. Friend for that question. Of course, I will send her examples of such documentation. I hope that that reassures her of my positive, honourable and transparent intentions and I ask the House to support the amendment.

Lords amendment agreed to.

Lords amendments Nos. 2 to 54 agreed to [some with Special Entry].

Lords amendment No. 55 and Government amendment (a) thereto agreed to.

Lords amendments Nos. 56 to 100 agreed to [some with Special Entry].

Lords amendment No. 101 [Special Entry] and Government amendment (a) thereto agreed to.

Lords amendment No. 102 and Government amendment (a) thereto agreed to.

Lords amendments Nos. 103 [Special Entry] and 104 agreed to.

Lords amendment No. 105 [Special Entry] and Government amendment (a) thereto agreed to.

Lords amendments Nos. 106 to 127 and 129 agreed to [some with Special Entry].

Lords amendment No. 130 disagreed to.

It being Ten o'clock, MR. SPEAKER, *put forthwith the Questions necessary for the disposal of business at that hour, pursuant to Orders [28 June 2001, 6 November 2003 and this day].*

Lords amendments Nos. 135, 137, 143 and 144 disagreed to.

Remaining Lords amendments agreed to [some with Special Entry].

Committee appointed to draw up Reasons to be assigned to the Lords for disagreeing to certain of their amendments to the Bill: Paul Clark, Matthew Green, Mr. John Hayes, Keith Hill and Mr. Terry Rooney; Three to be the quorum of the Committee.—*[Paul Clark.]*

To withdraw immediately.

Reasons for disagreeing to certain Lords amendments reported, and agreed to; to be communicated to the Lords.

DELEGATED LEGISLATION

Motion made, and Question put forthwith, pursuant to Standing Order No. 118(6) (Standing Committees on Delegated Legislation),

SEA FISHERIES

That the Fishing Boats (Satellite-Tracking Devices) (England) Scheme 2004 (S.I., 2004, No. 2467), dated 14th September 2004, a copy of which was laid before this House on 21st September, be approved.—*[Margaret Moran.]*

Question agreed to.

Motion made, and Question put forthwith, pursuant to Standing Order No. 118(6) (Standing Committees on Delegated Legislation),

CONSTITUTIONAL LAW

That the draft Scotland Act 1998 (Functions Exercisable in or as Regards Scotland) Order 2004, which was laid before this House on 9th September, be approved.

That the draft Scotland Act 1998 (Modifications of Schedule 5) Order 2004, which was laid before this House on 9th September, be approved.

That the draft Freedom of Information (Scotland) Act 2002 (Consequential Modifications) Order 2004, which was laid before this House on 12th October, be approved.

That the draft National Assembly for Wales (Transfer of Functions) Order 2004, which was laid before this House on 11th October, be approved.—*[Margaret Moran.]*

Question agreed to.

SITTINGS OF THE HOUSE

Ordered,

That—

(1) at the sittings on Monday 15th, Tuesday 16th, Wednesday 17th and Thursday 18th November, the Speaker shall not adjourn the House until any Message from the Lords has been received and any Committee to draw up Reasons which has been appointed at that sitting has reported; and

(2) at the sitting on Thursday 18th November, the Speaker shall not adjourn the House until a Message has been received from the Lords Commissioners.—*[Margaret Moran.]*

INTERNATIONAL DEVELOPMENT

Ordered,

That Mr Andrew Robathan be discharged from the International Development Committee and Mr John Bercow be added.—*[Mr. John McWilliam, on behalf of the Committee of Selection.]*

PROCEDURE

Ordered,

That Mr Peter Atkinson be discharged from the Procedure Committee and Mr John Bercow be added.—*[Mr. John McWilliam, on behalf of the Committee of Selection.]*

Homelessness (London)

Motion made, and Question proposed, That this House do now adjourn.—*[Margaret Moran.]*

10.6 pm

Simon Hughes (Southwark, North and Bermondsey) (LD): I appreciate the opportunity to raise the issue of homeless people in London. I am grateful that the Under-Secretary of State, Office of the Deputy Prime Minister, the hon. Member for Corby (Phil Hope), is in the Chamber, and I wish the Under-Secretary of State, Office of the Deputy Prime Minister, the hon. Member for Pontefract and Castleford (Yvette Cooper), who would normally have been holding the fort, best wishes during her maternity leave.

I do not intend to raise the matter in a confrontational way because it is hugely important not only to my constituency but to all London boroughs and constituencies. I hope that I can make constructive suggestions that might inform Government policy. I am conscious of the fact that the Select Committee on the Office of the Deputy Prime Minister is conducting a review on homelessness, and I hope that my speech will be regarded as a contribution to that debate. I would be grateful for a later opportunity to pursue matters that I raise with Ministers bilaterally. I shall state what I believe to be the gravity of the situation before putting on record some telling and worrying statistics—they are not mine, but generally agreed statistics from Government sources—and making my proposals.

Like most hon. Members, each year I review the balance of the work that comes my way as a constituency MP. I have just done that again as we approach the end of the Session. The largest single issue that arises, as it probably has been for each of my 21 years in this place, is housing and homelessness. People come to me because they have inadequate housing or cannot get decent housing. That problem consistently occurs in inner London and urban areas. My honest view is that homelessness is a ticking time bomb for more and more of London and for more Londoners. The statistics are serious. Homelessness is the most serious crisis facing many Londoners and London families. The Government and councils of all persuasions—I am not making a party-political point—are losing the battle against homelessness rather than winning it, despite the strenuous efforts made by previous Administrations, especially this one and the previous one.

If we do not house people properly, their health becomes worse, their ability to learn or work is reduced and their personal and social problems escalate—we all pay the price of that. In a capital city of increasing wealth, as London is, and in a country of increasing wealth, one in 100 households do not have a permanent home. Such a record has not existed for a considerable time. Although many people are doing well, more and more are being left behind. Irrespective of what may have been tried and tested, my fear is that unless there is a more urgent response, the Government will stoke up a set of huge social problems.

There have been many debates on housing and homelessness—indeed, we spent the past few hours discussing those very issues—but this is the first specific debate on homeless people in London since the first year of this Parliament, and I am glad to return to it.

[Simon Hughes]

I want to give some figures, which I understand are fully agreed. The number of households accepted as homeless by the 33 local authorities in London increased from 24,570 in the first year of the Labour Government in 1997–98 to 31,530 in 2002–03, the last year for which figures are available. There was an increase of 10 per cent. in that last year. In the same period in my borough, the figure went up from 893 to 1,671. Those are the people for whom the councils accept they have a duty to provide housing. The figures mean that 1 per cent. of households in London are not permanently housed.

One of the most worrying trends is the number of young people, and the increase in the number of young people, who have been accepted as homeless. For that purpose, young people are 16 and 17-year-olds, who are all regarded as in priority need, and 18 to 20-year-olds who have been care. In 1997–98, the number of homeless young people was 305, 66 of whom were in my borough. In the past full year, the figure was 2,038, 106 of whom were in my borough—a phenomenal increase of more than 500 per cent. in young people who were accepted as vulnerable.

There has been a relentless increase in young homeless people in almost every borough. In Lambeth, the figure was 36 in 2000 and 194 in 2003; in Tower Hamlets, it was six in 1999 and 99 in 2003; and in Camden it was nine in 2000 and 118 in 2003. As I said, the number also increased in my borough. The problem is not sectoral but Londonwide.

Paul Flynn (Newport, West) (Lab): Does the hon. Gentleman agree that the reason for the increase in the figures is not an increase in the number of people who suffer housing distress? The Government have a marvellous record, having reduced the number of rough sleepers to a third of what it was when we took office. The figures look so alarming because the definition of homelessness has been stretched. Had that definition applied when I was a young man, half the population would have been defined as homeless. The figures look so alarming because the definition of homelessness now includes people who are under-housed. The problem is not an increase in the number of homeless people, but a widening of the definition.

Simon Hughes: I do not accept that. There have been redefinitions since 1997, but they were not significant. There is plenty of evidence to support my case, including my constituency experience. Shelter's evidence to the Select Committee inquiry sets out the factors that cause homelessness. Some 17 per cent. of parents and 12 per cent. of friends are no longer able to offer accommodation, and 1[illegible] per cent. of homelessness cases—the biggest group—are due to violent relationship breakdown. I hope that the hon. Gentleman accepts that those people are justifiably looking for new housing. Some 7 per cent. of cases are due to non-violent relationship breakdown; 7 per cent. to mortgage arrears; 2 per cent. to rent arrears; 12 per cent. have come to the end of their tenancies; 17 per cent. are caused by other reasons; and 9 per cent. are caused by the loss of other rented or tied accommodation.

My constituency experience, and that of most of our colleagues, is that more people are becoming homeless. Why? It is because we are not building anything like enough property. If Members talk to the Mayor of London, the Greater London authority or any borough they will see that we are building less than half the property that we need. The most recent figures for London show that 5,209 additional homes were completed with Housing Corporation funding. In the same year, however, 7,823 homes were lost to the rented sector as a result of the right to buy. We are therefore losing homes rather than gaining them.

Paul Flynn: They are not lost.

Simon Hughes: They are lost to the rented sector as a result of the right to buy. If the hon. Gentleman looks at all the trends across London, he will see that the position is the same in my borough, where 185 homes were completed with Housing Corporation funding, but 974 were lost to the rented sector. The number of people who are deemed intentionally homeless has gone up, because the definition is interpreted more tightly, not in a more relaxed way. People coming to my surgeries are priority cases under any definition—they are vulnerable, they cannot work, they are mentally ill or emotionally distressed, and they may be suicidal—but they have been turned down, so we have to appeal. It is not always easy, however, to have them accepted as homeless. The reality is that those people are initially taken out of the figures.

We are short of new housing and other accommodation in London, partly because people no longer live in extended households of grandparents, parents and children, and they need their own home. When relationships break down, for example, they want their own place. Work by the Mayor and studies of London show that that we have been building about 15,000 new homes a year, but we need at least 30,000, and have done so ever since the Government took office.

I began by saying that I initiated this debate more in sorrow than in anger, but it is not the case that the position is getting better, as the problem is becoming significantly worse. I accept that there are fewer rough sleepers, but if the hon. Member for Newport, West (Paul Flynn) and other Members talk to people who know about homelessness in London they will discover that some rough sleepers are now staying with friends and family. They are sleeping on the floor and living in other people's accommodation, and are known as the hidden homeless. If the hon. Gentleman looks at the figures or the evidence given to the Office of the Deputy Prime Minister, he will see that the numbers have gone up. I shall give a final set of figures. The number of households in temporary accommodation—people housed in bed-and- breakfast hostels and hotels—has gone up in London from 24,060 in 1997–98 to 59,170 in 2002–03. In London, the average time spent in temporary accommodation before someone who is accepted as homeless is given a permanent home has gone up from 91 days in 1997 to 391 days in 2003. A couple with a child, a couple who have been accepted as vulnerable or a family are now likely to spend more than a year in temporary accommodation, whereas six or seven years ago they would have spent a few months there. People from the street and others are among the figures, so there is a true crisis. If the hon. Gentleman does not accept that, I invite him to look at the cases that I deal with in my surgery. He can sit with me, and see the people who come through the door—they are from all walks of life and backgrounds, and are of all classes, creeds, colours and ages. The problem, however, is getting substantially worse.

I wish to make a final point about statistics before putting my proposals to the Minister. From a previous debate in which Ministers were generous to my colleagues I know that we still have a huge number of empty properties. The most recent figures show that there were 89,000 empty homes across the capital, and we must be more vigorous in getting those empty homes back into use. We could all come up with our own answers, but I want to put five proposals to the Minister.

First, we need a new and more urgent drive to identify and fill empty properties. That is always a difficult challenge, but we must do much better. It is a scandal that such properties should be empty, and we could appropriate them for use without appropriating ownership.

Secondly, I propose the use of quick-build homes, such as those pioneered by Urban Settings, to deal with the immediate crisis. A Polish company constructs buildings—they are like Portakabins stacked on top of each other—off-site and puts them on-site. It can provide warm, dry, safe, secure and respectable accommodation, and for many people that is far better than nothing. It is not a long-term solution for many, but it is a solution for some.

Thirdly, there should be additional funding for councils. We could talk to any of the 33 local authorities in London and to the Housing Corporation about a massive programme of new build in London, particularly of three and four-bedroom homes. If those are built, all the overcrowded people in homes with one and two bedrooms could move to homes with the three and four bedrooms that they need, releasing one and two-bedroom properties for single people, couples, couples with one or two children, or smaller families.

Fourthly, I commend to Ministers the example of New York, which I visited last December. I suggest the urgent acquisition and conversion of hotels, as in New York, or other buildings in the middle of London to house the homeless and the low-paid. Common Ground is a brilliant project that has been going for 10 years—it was founded in New York and has spread across part of the eastern United States. It does not have the stigma of a homeless hostel, because although half the people there are homeless, the other half are low-paid workers. It has done a brilliant job. Crisis, Shelter and other organisations have been talking to Ministers about a similar project in London. That would make a huge difference.

Lastly, in my constituency, in Blackfriars road, there is a place called Wedge house, which is the Department for Work and Pensions benefit office where homeless people in London go for their benefits. It cannot cope, and within a year or two the DWP wants to get rid of the site. I hope that Ministers will seriously consider the idea of two one-stop shops—one south of the river, one north, and both quite near the centre—where homeless people can go to have all their benefits, housing and health needs sorted out. That would offer a first point of reference instead of their being shuttled from one place to another, which is hardly satisfactory if one has nowhere to lay one's head.

I conclude with a factual point. The other night I saw someone at my surgery—a single person who was pretty inadequate. I spent two and a half hours—this is not a criticism—waiting for an answer from the Shelter hotline. At 9.30 at night, it said that there was absolutely nowhere in London available. That is the circumstance that many people now face.

I believe that solutions to the growing crisis are possible, but they require the political will to implement them. London local councils cannot cope on their own. The fact that the number of rough sleepers has gone down does not mean that homelessness is not a growing issue in London for more and more people every day. I hope that there can be new, positive and truly effective initiatives.

10.22 pm

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State, Office of the Deputy Prime Minister (Phil Hope): I congratulate the hon. Member for Southwark, North and Bermondsey (Simon Hughes) on securing this important debate. I shall endeavour to respond to the issues that he raised.

We can agree that, as the hon. Gentleman said, more and more people are receiving assistance from local authorities under the homelessness legislation, and that homelessness is not a problem in his borough of Southwark alone. Indeed, it is a problem not only across London but nationally, because increases have been recorded in all regions in recent years. I am sure that despite his remarks to my hon. Friend the Member for Newport, West (Paul Flynn), he recognises that some of those increases are the result of strengthened legislation. More people are being helped who might not have been given priority in the past. However, I accept that that does not entirely account for the growth in numbers.

We are clear about the extent of the problem—it is growing and we are taking positive steps to tackle it. Ishall not repeat the hon. Gentleman's litany of statistics—human misery expressed in numbers—but I must correct him on one figure. He cited a 10 per cent. increase between 2001–02 and 2002–03, but that is wrong—the real increase was 3.5 per cent. Rather than dealing with the detail now, I will write to him to explain that error, which has entered the public domain.

I want to pick up on the second half of the hon. Gentleman's contribution. The important thing is what we do about the problem. The Government are not shying away from it—we want to tackle it head on. I believe that we have a good track record to date. First, we have successfully reduced the number of people who sleep rough—those who are literally roofless—by no less than two thirds. In 1997, we inherited housing legislation—the Housing Act 1996—which reduced the rights of homeless people. We have strengthened the safety net for homeless people so that more people are eligible for local authority help, and widened the help that local authorities provide.

In the short term, that has meant local authorities accepting more people as homeless and has therefore added to the numbers in temporary accommodation.

[Phil Hope]

Many of those people would have been left to fend for themselves under the previous legislation. More vulnerable people than ever are being helped and that includes those who are mentally or physically disabled. The consequence of the increase in the number of people who are helped is a growth in households in temporary accommodation. Of course we are greatly concerned about that, and we have acted quickly to end the scandal of households having to raise children in bed and breakfast hotels.

It is interesting to note that, on 31 December 2002, some 2,230 families were living in bed and breakfast. That means approximately 3,600 children living in bed and breakfast accommodation. By 31 March 2004, the figure was zero. We had eliminated the problem of children and families having to live in bed and breakfast hostels. As the hon. Gentleman said, those are statistics. However, they are important: the statistics express human misery and I am delighted that we are considering a figure of zero.

We acknowledge that some local authorities' services have been bogged down in the process of deciding whether a household asking for help is homeless under the legislation rather than concentrating on the help that could be offered to avoid homelessness. That means that households are being accepted as homeless and moved into temporary accommodation in circumstances where homelessness might have been prevented. The protection that the legislation offers, although greatly welcome, has become the only option, rather than the safety net that it should be.

I am glad that proactive local authorities have changed their culture to develop a range of appropriate options for everyone who asks for advice. By helping someone to rebuild relationships with their family or friends, stay in education or work or deal with a drug or alcohol problem, homelessness can be prevented. We support those approaches and services that provide the right help at the right time, backed up by a robust safety net for vulnerable people. The hon. Gentleman described that as losing the battle, but I am pleased that every local authority now has a strategy in place for preventing homelessness, and that we are beginning to achieve reductions in homelessness acceptances, with London leading the way. Here, reductions in the past two quarters—that is how recently the change began to bite—were 9 per cent. compared with last year and 5 per cent. elsewhere. I believe that we are turning the corner. That is making a huge difference.

Bob Russell (Colchester) (LD): It has taken seven years.

Phil Hope: As I said earlier, we have been widening the net in the past seven years to allow more people to be helped. More vulnerable people are being helped. It is crucial to deal with prevention to prevent people from becoming homeless in the first place as well as rightly tackling the provision of more accommodation to meet needs.

Bob Russell: Will the Minister give way?

Phil Hope: No, because I have only three minutes left to respond to the hon. Member for Southwark, North and Bermondsey.

We have provided significant additional funding for local authorities and voluntary sector agencies to support delivery of their homelessness strategies, doubling previous spending plans. London has received more than half of the resources available nationally, because we recognise the unique problems that it faces. We have doubled the investment in affordable housing, and London is receiving more than 40 per cent. of the national allocation; that is some £2 billion in the current spending review period. We have also increased the investment in new provision of housing, and these prevention initiatives will together turn around the problem of homelessness.

The hon. Gentleman raised several points on this issue, and I should like to say a little more about funding. This year, the homelessness and housing support directorate allocated £45 million to local authorities in support of their homelessness strategies. A further £14 million has been allocated to voluntary organisations, and London received the lion's share. Indeed, Southwark's allocation was one of the highest in London, receiving more than £1 million from the directorate in each of the past three years. Of course, money is not the only answer. This is about people working together, and the partnership work that has been done on rough sleeping has been hugely successful. Rough sleeping levels are now less than half their 1998 levels, and there have been notable successes.

The hon. Gentleman mentioned empty homes. In London, the London Housing Board's discretionary funding pot for private sector renewal is funding an empty property website in the West London sub-region, and other sub-regional schemes to help to bring empty properties back into use. We have introduced a range of fiscal incentives, and in particular a VAT reduction, to encourage the renovation of long-term empty homes. We have also provided funding for the Empty Homes Agency, an independent housing charity, to work with local authorities to implement effective empty property strategies. We have published comprehensive guidance for local authorities and property owners on unlocking the potential of empty property. We will follow that up later this year with more specific guidance for Departments and the public sector. I hope that, through those measures, we have demonstrated our commitment to tackling the pernicious effects of empty homes.

The hon. Gentleman also mentioned the question of benefits in relation to the homeless sector in London. He will know that the London homeless services team was set up specifically to address the needs of homeless people across London with regard to welfare benefits. I shall not take him through all the details, but the team works with 80 outreach organisations across London, often using a van, and it sees about 700 customers a month. The Southwark homelessness unit offers a direct access benefit-related service to a case load of more than 400 street homeless people and in excess of 100 hostel dwellers. These are good examples of joint working between the Department for Work and Pensions and local boroughs to tackle the relationship between homelessness and the benefit system.

The hon. Gentleman mentioned the New York project. The Government are well aware of the excellent work of the Times Square project there, and have been very supportive of it. We have also encouraged innovative projects such as that in England. In particular, we are closely involved with the Crisis urban village project, and we await with interest the next stage of its development. I take his remarks on this issue very much to heart, and we are grateful for his involvement in some of these developments.

The hon. Gentleman made a particular point about temporary accommodation. While there are more people in such accommodation now, it is important to remember that the people who have been helped have been rehoused as a result of the stronger homelessness legislation. The vast majority—more than 80 per cent.—are housed in self-contained homes in the private or social sector. We accept, however, that that number reflects a shortage of suitable housing, and we are determined to tackle that issue, too. That is why our priority for action over the next three years is to increase the number of new social rented homes.

I have mentioned prevention, so I shall say no more about that at the moment. I want to talk about the importance of building more homes. The hon. Gentleman mentioned using a particular method of construction as a way of delivering new homes. He will remember that, at our conference in Brighton this year, the Deputy Prime Minister put out a challenge to the housing sector to try to build homes for £60,000. We then heard about some imaginative schemes involving the use of surplus public land. That is the kind of innovative thinking that is going on right now on modern methods of construction, but of course we need more money to supply quality affordable housing. We are already investing £1.4 billion in more affordable housing for London over the periods 2004–05 and 2005–06. Let me tell the House what that means: this year and next, 10,000 more homes for rent for homeless and poorly housed families; 4,000 homes for low-cost home ownership; and 8,000 homes for key workers. That is a total of 22,000, and we are not going to stop there.

The recent spending review has announced significant additional funding, which will provide nationally an additional 75,000 social rented homes and 40,000 homes for essential public sector workers and low-cost home ownership over the three years to 2007–08. We have also provided resources to reduce nationally the number of non-decent homes—we had a debate about that earlier—by 1 million. We are determined to continue that good progress.

We have had a short but important debate, and I hope I have shown that investment is being made in additional homes. I hope I have also shown through the statistics not only how people's lives are being affected but that the Government are taking this action seriously and that we have had a lot of good success in tackling rough sleeping and children living in bed-and-breakfast accommodation. We have a prevention agenda that is beginning to show results. With our investment in new affordable housing, we are setting the right agenda for reducing homelessness in London and across the country.

Question put and agreed to.

Adjourned accordingly at twenty-five minutes to Eleven o'clock.

House of Commons

Tuesday 9 November 2004

The House met at half-past Eleven o'clock

PRAYERS

[MR. SPEAKER *in the Chair*]

Oral Answers to Questions

FOREIGN AND COMMONWEALTH AFFAIRS

The Secretary of State was asked—

Zimbabwe

1. **Mr. Michael Jack** (Fylde) (Con): If he will make a statement on human rights abuses in Zimbabwe. [196780]

6. **Sir Nicholas Winterton** (Macclesfield) (Con): If he will make a statement on the human rights situation in Zimbabwe. [196785]

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs (Mr. Chris Mullin): Serious violations of human rights take place in Zimbabwe on a daily basis. We, together with our international partners, will continue to press the Government of Zimbabwe to end those and to restore democracy and the rule of law.

Mr. Jack: In thanking the Minister for his answer, may I say that many fine words have been expended, but such an answer indicates that their effect has been limited? As a democrat, may I ask him what steps he, his fellow Ministers and other members of the international community will take to ensure that the intimidation and fear that has been so typical of electioneering in Zimbabwe in the past will not affect the election scheduled for March next year? The best antidote to human rights abuses in that country is a proper, freely elected Parliament. What steps will he take to ensure that that happens next year?

Mr. Mullin: Ultimately, of course, whether there is a free election in Zimbabwe will be a matter for the authorities there. We have been doing all that we can to put pressure on all interested parties to enable free elections to take place. We have been talking to the Southern African Development Community, and, as the right hon. Gentleman knows, there are EU sanctions. We have also done what the Opposition have been pressing us to do for a long time: an EU resolution is to be proposed at the United Nations, which will be debated later this month.

Sir Nicholas Winterton: While we are grateful to the Minister for that reply, will he not admit to the House that the human rights situation is deteriorating? We have seen the 15-month imprisonment with hard labour of Roy Bennett, the expulsion of the Congress of South African Trade Unions from Zimbabwe, and the law that prevents people from getting aid and food to those who are starving—and if they are found to do it without going through an official Government source, they can be heavily punished. Cannot the Government come forward with some new initiatives to bring about an end to the most tyrannical of regimes in Africa?

Mr. Mullin: Certainly, I am prepared to admit that the situation in Zimbabwe is getting worse. What I am not prepared to do is pretend that there is some magic solution that no one else has thought of, which will somehow make everything right. What is going on in Zimbabwe is primarily the responsibility of the Government of Zimbabwe. Over a long period, we have been at the forefront, with our allies in Europe and elsewhere and at the United Nations, of putting what pressure we can on the Government of Zimbabwe to behave decently, but I regret to say that I see no sign so far that their behaviour is about to change.

Kate Hoey (Vauxhall) (Lab): The Minister may say that there is no magic solution, which of course is true, but will he give us his views on the expulsion of the COSATU delegation and particularly the reaction of President Mbeki, who seemed to be angry with the COSATU delegation for even visiting? Now that COSATU and the Communist party, which are allies of the South African Government, have said that Mbeki's quiet diplomacy is not working, is not this the time for this Government to put pressure on President Mbeki and say that he is not carrying out his side of the bargain on the New Partnership for Africa's Development agreement?

Mr. Mullin: We have been discussing the situation in Zimbabwe with the South Africans for a long time, and President Mbeki is as aware as any of the rest of us about what is going on there. No doubt the expulsion of the trade union delegation will have been a timely reminder to him. What I will not do is engage in megaphone discussion with the South Africans or anyone else on the subject.

Ann Clwyd (Cynon Valley) (Lab): May I bring to my hon. Friend's attention the fact that the Inter-Parliamentary Union human rights commission has just published its report after a visit to Zimbabwe? It stated that it was

> "appalled at the high number of beatings, other ill treatment and torture reportedly being inflicted on MPs".

That involved at least 28 Members of Parliament. I agree with the hon. Member for Macclesfield (Sir Nicholas Winterton) that the case of Roy Bennett in particular needs strong representations from our Government.

Mr. Mullin: My hon. Friend is right to draw attention to the way in which members of opposition parties have been treated over a long period. The statistics, which we have discussed in the House previously, are shocking:

97 per cent. of opposition MPs have been subject to intimidation and violence; 24 per cent. of opposition MPs have survived assassination attempts; 16 per cent. say that they have been tortured; and three have died following assaults. That says it all about the state of life and the state of democracy in Mr. Mugabe's Zimbabwe. As far as Roy Bennett is concerned, we do not condone what he did, but the sentence is wholly disproportionate to the offence, and he was severely provoked.

Sir Patrick Cormack (South Staffordshire) (Con): Does the Minister accept that it is all very well for him to stand at the Dispatch Box wringing his hands, but—while no one doubts his sincerity—we expect this matter to be higher on the Prime Minister's and the Foreign Secretary's agenda? Can he not take an initiative, and can the Foreign Secretary not go to South Africa specifically to see President Mbeki and try to persuade him to take a proper statesmanlike line?

Mr. Mullin: My right hon. Friend the Foreign Secretary has discussed the issue regularly with President Mbeki and indeed with many other leaders, most recently in New York at the end of September.

No one is standing here wringing their hands. We all agree that the situation in Zimbabwe is totally unacceptable. What we are interested in is constructive discussion. We have had one or two such discussions, and have tended to follow them up. As I have said, what we are not prepared to do is stand around pretending that there is some solution that no one else has thought of. If there were such a solution, I am sure that the hon. Gentleman would have put it to me just now.

Mr. Peter Pike (Burnley) (Lab): My hon. Friend the Minister rightly said that the problem of Zimbabwe was in Zimbabwe's own hands, and that it needed to elect a new Government to end the Mugabe regime. Does he accept, however, that intimidation was worse before the last election than during it? South Africa is the other country with influence in Zimbabwe, and through its relationships with other African countries in the region. There is an urgent need for us to talk to the South African Government in order to ensure that the election in March next year is as free and fair as possible.

Mr. Mullin: My hon. Friend is right. What will matter is not whether there is relative freedom during the two or three weeks of the election period—which will probably not be the case—but what goes on in the run-up to the election.

Yes, we will pursue the matter with the South Africans, and with our other African friends and allies.

International Atomic Energy Agency

2. **Mr. David Heath** (Somerton and Frome) (LD): What recent discussions he has had with the International Atomic Energy Agency. [196781]

The Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs (Mr. Jack Straw): The United Kingdom is actively involved in the work of the International Atomic Energy Agency. I meet its director, Dr. el-Baradei, from time to time. Currently, the agency's main focus is Iran. Over the weekend, senior officials from the United Kingdom, France, Germany and the European Union met Iranian officials in Paris. They negotiated a draft text designed to give us confidence that Iran is not developing its most sensitive nuclear technologies while we seek to agree long-term arrangements for Iran's nuclear power programmes.

I very much hope that the Government of Iran accept the draft, including the need for a full suspension of uranium enrichment and reprocessing and all related activities.

Mr. Heath: I welcome the terms of the Paris agreement. What is the status of the agreement, and does the Foreign Secretary expect all parties to accept it at Head of Government level before the 25 November meeting of the IAEA? Will the message that the Prime Minister will take to President Bush be that of Li Zhaoxing, the Chinese Foreign Minister—namely that reference of Iran to the United Nations at this stage would only complicate matters? Most important, will the Foreign Secretary confirm his statement that he could foresee no circumstances in which the United Kingdom could support military action against Iran by the United States?

Mr. Straw: I am happy to confirm what I said. I preceded it with the statement that I knew of no suggestions emanating from the United States of any idea of military action, but I then made it absolutely clear that I could envisage no circumstances in which military action would be justified, and that it formed no part of the policy of Her Majesty's Government.

The text of the agreement is a draft text ad referendum to capitals. The three Governments—France, Germany and the United Kingdom—have agreed the text, and we now look to the Government of Iran to agree it as well. It provides a way through for all sides.

On the issue of reference to the UN Security Council, in October 2003 an agreement was reached in Tehran whereby we provided a process for Iran to rectify its previous failure to comply with its obligations under the non-proliferation treaty. In return, we agreed not to refer the matter to the Security Council—provided that Iran suspended all uranium enrichment, reprocessing and related activities. We have repeatedly made it clear to the Iranian Government that the E3—the three European Governments—and the European Union reserve the right to refer the matter to the Security Council if that requirement is not met.

Mr. Michael Clapham (Barnsley, West and Penistone) (Lab): In the context of the discussions with the IAEA, will my right hon. Friend say a little more about press reports suggesting that the UK is to support the construction of a light water reactor in Iran in return for their abandoning their weapons programme? Is that part of a programme to create a nuclear-free zone in the middle east? If that is to be the way forward, how will he go about giving the Israelis an incentive to come on board?

Mr. Straw: All non-nuclear weapons states that are signatories to the non-proliferation treaty have a right under article IV of the NPT to develop, research and produce nuclear power. A light water reactor is obviously one important way of doing that, and there have indeed been informal discussions with the Iranians about the provision of technology in that regard. One reason why we believe it very important that this agreement be reached is so that there can be complete confidence that the Iranians' nuclear research and technology programme is directed only to the peaceful production of nuclear energy, and that any possibility that they are using it to develop a nuclear weapons programme is eliminated.

On Israel, yes, it is our policy for there to be a nuclear weapons-free middle east, and we look to Israel—as we look to India and Pakistan—to sign up to the non-proliferation treaty.

Mr. Geoffrey Clifton-Brown (Cotswold) (Con): The Ayatollah Khamenei in particular made great play of the fact that Iran is an emerging democracy with presumably peaceful intent, but those assurances are not worth much until the Iranians give full account of their nuclear invoices to the IAEA. Surely they cannot have it both ways.

Mr. Straw: We made it clear to Iran that the whole international community, who have agreed successive resolutions by consensus through the IAEA board of governors, expects it to enable them to have full confidence about the nature of its intentions. The Iranians say that they have no intentions or programme leading to the development and use of nuclear weapons; what we have to have is proof.

Llew Smith (Blaenau Gwent) (Lab): While I accept that Israel is not a signatory to the non-proliferation treaty, and taking into account what the Secretary of State has just said, does he believe that it would be good if IAEA inspectors visited Israel to examine, and report back on, the full extent and truth of its nuclear programme?

Mr. Straw: Israel, like India and Pakistan, is not a signatory to the non-proliferation treaty, but as I have already made clear to the House, we believe that it should be, and that it should then be subject to the normal safeguards and agreements laid down by the NPT itself.

Iraq

3. **Mr. James Gray** (North Wiltshire) (Con): What assessment he has made of the impact that the result of the US presidential election will have on UK foreign policy in Iraq. [196782]

The Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs (Mr. Jack Straw): We will continue our pattern of close co-operation and consultation with the United States Administration on all matters of common concern, including Iraq.

The crucial challenge now for the whole international community—and above all for the people of Iraq—is fully to implement Security Council resolution 1546, which lays down the timetable for elections to be held by the end of January. Work on these elections is well in hand; however, a hard core of terrorists and insurgents is currently seeking to prevent the Iraqi people from exercising their democratic right to free elections. Tragically, those terrorists refused to negotiate a peaceful solution, which is why the Iraqi Interim Government found it necessary to order the current military action in Falluja.

Mr. Gray: Leaving aside Falluja, it has been an astonishing week in Iraqi politics. There were the tragic events surrounding Camp Dogwood, and in Palestine an apparent power vacuum may well influence the outcome of events in Iraq. On top of all that comes Sir Stephen Wall's devastating announcement this week that in his view the war had no basis in international law in the first place. Is it not time that we had an urgent and fundamental review of our entire position on Iraq?

Mr. Straw: If it is the hon. Gentleman's view that, regardless of the position individuals took at the time of the military action, we should walk away from Iraq and hand it over to the terrorists and insurgents, let me tell him that that is certainly not the view of the Iraqi people or of the whole international community. What fine British forces, including the Black Watch, are doing, alongside contributors from 30 other members of the international community, is seeking to implement a Security Council resolution passed unanimously, which laid down that those multinational forces had the duty

> "to take all necessary measures to contribute to the maintenance of security and stability in Iraq . . . including by preventing and deterring terrorism, so that . . . the Iraqi people can implement freely and without intimidation the timetable and program for the political process and benefit from reconstruction and rehabilitation activities".

I very much hope that the view expressed by the hon. Gentleman is not the view of Conservative Front Benchers.

Denzil Davies (Llanelli) (Lab): My right hon. Friend referred to the Iraqi elections. Is it the case that any party or grouping in Iraq is free to put forward representatives to stand in that election, or are there some restrictions? If there are restrictions, who is entitled to draw them up and lay them down?

Mr. Straw: There are, I believe, some limited restrictions in respect of former senior members of the Ba'ath party. That aside, the decisions are in the hands of the Independent Electoral Commission of Iraq under the supervision of the United Nations, particularly Carlos Valenzuela and Mrs. Perelli. I am absolutely clear that the process for elections is satisfactory and that the atmosphere for them will also be satisfactory, provided—a big and important proviso—that the terrorists and insurgents can be persuaded by one means or another to allow the Iraqi people to have their say in those elections.

Mr. Michael Ancram (Devizes) (Con): In referring to Iraq, may I start by paying tribute to our courageous forces who have been in action there this week and by offering our sympathy to those who have been wounded and to the families of those who have died? Can the Foreign Secretary assure the House that the Prime Minister will use his forthcoming visit to the President of the United States to press certain elements of policy in relation to Iraq? In particular, will he press for a substantial plan for reconstruction and job creation to provide hope for the many unemployed and resentful Iraqis who are currently ready recruits to insurgency?

Secondly, alongside our military representation, will the Foreign Secretary press for the appointment of a senior British political figure to provide high-level political advice within the joint councils of the Interim Government and the multilateral forces? Can the Foreign Secretary urge the Prime Minister to make sure that, on this occasion, Britain's voice is not only heard, but heeded?

Mr. Straw: I am grateful to the right hon. and learned Gentleman for his expression of sympathy and condolences to those members of the Black Watch who have been killed in action south of Baghdad. Our hearts, prayers and thoughts go out to the families and we salute the extraordinary courage and fortitude shown by the Black Watch and all other units of the British forces in that theatre.

The Prime Minister will indeed be discussing Iraq when he meets President Bush on Thursday and Friday. I have to say that there are already well-developed plans for reconstruction and job creation, and many of them are working. There has been a large increase in employment and in GDP in Iraq. What is holding back Iraq's development is the terrorism and insurgency. That is why it has to be dealt with.

On senior political advice, the Iraqis know that their Government are independent and sovereign, albeit appointed and approved by the United Nations. It is important for Iraq to have elections. I have the highest confidence—I hope the right hon. and learned Gentleman does, too—in our senior ambassador in Baghdad, Edward Chaplin, and all his colleagues.

Mr. Ancram: Will the Foreign Secretary now concede that the precipitate disbandment after the war of the Iraqi armed forces, the Iraqi police and much of the Iraqi civil service created a security and employment vacuum, which has, in the event, been filled by violence? Will he accept that that was an error, for which the price is now being paid on the ground? Will he therefore also urge the Prime Minister to press on the President the need for a more accelerated and better rewarded process of recruitment, training and deployment of Iraqi police and internal security forces to fill that vacuum and thus allow for an earlier phased reduction of multilateral forces, including our own?

Mr. Straw: It is really important that the right hon. and learned Gentleman does not seek to make the victims of the violence appear to be its perpetrators. Ever since the end of the major conflict in April 2003, there has been violence in Iraq because of the activity of the terrorists and insurgents. We must be absolutely clear that they are the cause of the casualties. There are no incidents or casualties in those provinces of Iraq where there is no insurgency. Everybody needs to recognise that central fact.

David Winnick (Walsall, North) (Lab): I recognise that those who kidnap, torture and behead their prisoners certainly do not want democratic elections in any circumstances. However, would it not be useful for my right hon. Friend the Prime Minister to explain to President Bush at their meeting this week that winning hearts and minds in Iraq will not depend only on military campaigns, however successful they are? Does my right hon. Friend agree that the international community is watching events in Iraq very closely indeed?

Mr. Straw: I entirely agree with my hon. Friend. Winning hearts and minds is fundamental, and that is well understood by Prime Minister Allawi and his colleagues in the Iraqi Interim Government. That is why, to my certain knowledge, they went to very extensive lengths to try to secure peaceful solutions to the problems faced in Falluja. I was with Prime Minister Allawi when he was engaged in similar activities in respect of the insurgency in Sadr city. Thanks to his flexibility and forbearance, a settlement there was reached while I was in Baghdad four weeks ago, and it has stuck. That is what he wanted for Falluja, as did we, but the world has to know that the military action tragically taking place there now does not stem from a lack of effort by the Iraqi Interim Government. It is a direct result of the intransigence of the terrorists and insurgents, who literally are holding Falluja hostage in an attempt to prevent the elections from taking place.

Sir Menzies Campbell (North-East Fife) (LD): May I associate myself and my party with the Foreign Secretary's sentiments in respect of the Black Watch? Not the least of my reasons for doing so is the fact that the regiment recruits in my constituency.

Will the Foreign Secretary say what influence UK foreign policy has on the US Government, especially in relation to American forces' actions in Falluja? The Black Watch regiment is inevitably associated with those forces now. Does he agree that we must ensure that those actions are proportionate and consistent with international law, and that they do not alienate the people of Iraq or cause unnecessary civilian casualties?

Mr. Straw: First, I thank the right hon. and learned Gentleman for what he said about the Black Watch, and for his expression of condolences. I appreciate that the deaths and injuries suffered by soldiers in such difficult circumstances is a trauma for the whole of the community in those areas where there is recruitment to the Black Watch. In saluting the soldiers, we also salute the courage, forbearance and support provided by their families.

In respect of the action in Falluja, the Iraqi Interim Government have been in charge of military strategy since the passage of UN resolution 1546. It was Prime Minister Allawi who ordered the Falluja action, and Iraqi national forces are working alongside US forces. The right hon. and learned Member will know that the US Government have gone on record repeatedly as saying that they subscribe to their obligations under international law, as do other state parties to the UN charter.

Mr. Harry Barnes (North-East Derbyshire) (Lab): When Iraqis and others oppose the presence of foreign troops in Iraq, is not it entirely legitimate for them to demonstrate, publish their ideas, and run relevant candidates in the coming elections? However, does my right hon. Friend agree that it is entirely illegitimate to use terrorist techniques, the purpose of which is to keep those foreign troops in the country so that the conflict can continue?

Mr. Straw: My hon. Friend is entirely right. As the Prime Minister said yesterday, everybody should take note of the opinions being expressed by him. He opposed the military action, but I commend him for the approach that he has taken since, which recognises that we have to join together to secure a peaceful outcome for the people of Iraq. It is ironic, to say the least, that the terrorists say they are fighting the so-called occupation—it is not that—by the multinational forces when the only reason why those forces have to be there is to support the Iraqi people because of the insurgency.

Palestinian Authority

4. **Mr. Simon Thomas** (Ceredigion) (PC): What assistance he is offering the Palestinian Authority during President Arafat's absence. [196783]

The Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs (Mr. Jack Straw): In President Arafat's absence during his treatment in Paris, we have been in close touch with members of the Palestinian Authority in the occupied territories and in Paris. We will continue to support them and the Palestinian people through humanitarian aid, support to the World Bank trust fund and bilateral assistance projects on security.

Mr. Thomas: I thank the Foreign Secretary for what he has just said. While we all wish President Arafat and his family a peaceful end to his illness, we need to turn to the future. A time will come when there will be a need for new leadership in Palestine. What steps are being taken to ensure that Palestinians have robust democratic institutions that will ensure they are in control of their leadership and elect their own leader? Will the Foreign Secretary confirm that it is the Government's position that the Palestinian people should decide their leadership?

Mr. Straw: If I may correct what I think was a slip of the tongue, I think that the hon. Gentleman was expressing a hope for an immediate recovery for President Arafat rather than what he said. That is the fervent wish of all concerned.

Mr. Thomas *indicated assent.*

Mr. Straw: So far as the hon. Gentleman's substantial point is concerned, the answer is yes. The organisation of Palestinians and the Palestinian Authority is a matter for them. Their Basic Law lays down a satisfactory process for elections, and it is for them to decide whether to follow that or to change it in an equally satisfactory way.

Mr. Mark Lazarowicz (Edinburgh, North and Leith) (Lab/Co-op): What assurance is my right hon. Friend seeking from the Israeli Government that withdrawal from Gaza will be co-ordinated with the Palestinian Authority and that it will be the first step, not the last, to withdrawal from the occupied territories?

Mr. Straw: The Israeli Government have described their withdrawal from Gaza, which we welcome as a necessary but not a sufficient step on the implementation of the road map, as a unilateral act. It is not being done in negotiation with the Palestinians. We have, however, urged the Israelis better to co-ordinate the withdrawal, and we have made clear our readiness to give active support to the Palestinian Authority to ensure that a vacuum is not created by the withdrawal of the Israeli Defence Force and that opportunities for the Palestinians to run their own affairs and their own security are properly taken up.

Mr. Francis Maude (Horsham) (Con): Will the Foreign Secretary ensure that assistance to the Palestinian Authority is focused especially on security measures to remove from the authority the excuse that has allowed it tacitly to tolerate the murderous attacks that have continued on Israeli citizens? If the authority wants the Israeli Government's unilateral action in withdrawing from Gaza and some west bank settlements to be extended, an abrupt end to such murderous attacks is absolutely essential.

Mr. Straw: The burden of what the right hon. Gentleman says is absolutely right. The Palestinian Authority has clear responsibilities better to control security and terrorism from within its own borders. A high proportion of our direct assistance from the UK to the Palestinian Authority is designed to strengthen its security and security apparatus.

Mrs. Louise Ellman (Liverpool, Riverside) (Lab/Co-op): Last week, I had discussions with senior Palestinian Ministers in Ramallah on a visit organised through Labour Friends of Israel. I saw for myself the value that Palestinians attach to British support. Is the Foreign Secretary concerned that the recent admission by Mr. Peter Hansen, head of the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East, that the UN employs members of Hamas, a terrorist organisation dedicated to the destruction of Israel, will jeopardise the neutrality of the United Nations at this critical time?

Mr. Straw: As my hon. Friend knows, Hamas is a broad organisation whose military wing is banned under the Terrorism Act 2000, although its humanitarian wing is not. I know that that is the subject of great argument, especially in Israel. Constant allegations have been made against UNRWA because of its employment of individuals who claim some association with Hamas, but I have not yet seen any evidence that it has employed people who are involved in the military activities of Hamas. If there were such evidence, we would of course be gravely concerned.

Dr. Jenny Tonge (Richmond Park) (LD): Despite the Foreign Secretary's response to the hon. Member for Ceredigion (Mr. Thomas), he must surely admit that the present situation is a wonderful opportunity for Israel to pursue the peace process in the middle east. Does he agree that Marwan Barghouti, who at present languishes in an Israeli jail, is much respected by Palestinians and, indeed, by many Israelis? Would the Foreign Secretary be prepared to put pressure on the Israeli authorities to release Mr. Barghouti from prison and encourage a free presidential election in Palestine?

Mr. Straw: With respect, the present president of the Palestinian Authority is President Arafat. As far as the Government are concerned, we wish him a speedy recovery from his illness. Any succession is overwhelmingly a matter for the Palestinians.

Middle East

5. **Mr. Wayne David** (Caerphilly) (Lab): What initiatives are being taken to give new impetus to the middle east road map. [196784]

The Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs (Mr. Jack Straw): With the US elections over, and with Prime Minister Sharon's plan for disengagement from Gaza, there is a powerful opportunity to give fresh and much needed impetus to the peace plan laid out in the road map. Mr. Sharon's proposals represent a necessary, though not sufficient, step towards the goal endorsed by the whole international community in Security Council resolution 1397: two states, a secure Israel and a viable state of Palestine.My right hon. Friend the Prime Minister will discuss reviving the peace process with President Bush in Washington later this week. I hope to visit the region shortly.

Mr. David: I very much welcome my right hon. Friend's comments, especially his endorsement of the Sharon plan for disengagement. Does he agree that, alongside that agenda, it is important to consider the economic situation faced by many Palestinian people?

Mr. Straw: Yes, I do. Security and economic recovery and development must go side by side. My hon. Friend will know that the European Union has already put some millions of euros into development in the Palestinian areas, and we are ready to do much more once there is a more secure environment.

Mr. Henry Bellingham (North-West Norfolk) (Con): For the middle east road map to work, the Palestinian Authority will require substantial amounts of bilateral and other aid. Does he agree that it is vital that all the aid that has gone missing under Arafat's tenure is recovered?

Mr. Straw: There have been repeated allegations of mismanagement of funds by the Palestinian Authority, but Commissioner Chris Patten, who has been responsible for the disbursement of EU funds to the Palestinians in the occupied territories for the past five years, has said repeatedly that he is satisfied about the destination of funds.

Tony Lloyd (Manchester, Central) (Lab): Will my right hon. Friend be part of the process of reminding the re-elected US Administration that this President is the first to declare formally that the US is in favour of a Palestinian state? We did not see any real progress on this agenda in the last term, but now there is a real opportunity for progress. If the President can be reminded of his obligations, he could make a real difference in his second term.

Mr. Straw: My hon. Friend makes an important point. President Bush is the first US president to go to the United Nations to commit himself to a two-state solution and to sponsor a Security Council resolution laying that solution down as the policy of the UN. There is a great opportunity, and that is underlined by the courageous decision taken by Prime Minister Sharon, and followed through in the teeth of substantial opposition in his own party, to disengage from Gaza. We should commend Prime Minister Sharon for that. It is an important step on the road to full statehood for the Palestinians. We have to ensure that that works successfully and that there then is an equivalent process in respect of the west bank.

Mr. Ernie Ross (Dundee, West) (Lab): If my right hon. Friend does not mind, I will stop short of supporting him in his view of Prime Minister Sharon. I know Prime Minister Sharon slightly better than my right hon. Friend does, and I know of his activities in the past. However, it is very important that the road map gets back on track and that the Prime Minister takes with him the best wishes of the House. The whole of the middle east is looking to that meeting; the Prime Minister has staked a lot on it, and we hope that he comes back with something more than just promises: we need action on the road map. If the road map does not start, the whole middle east situation will become much more difficult.

Mr. Straw: My right hon. Friend the Prime Minister fully understands the expectations on both sides of the House. I do not ask my hon. Friend for a general reference in respect of Prime Minister Sharon—he might be reluctant to provide one—but we should judge people by their actions. Whatever reservations there may be about other aspects of Prime Minister Sharon's very long career, I believe that he has shown considerable courage and statesmanship, and he should be commended for it. The only way to get a full state of Palestine is by withdrawal, and that can happen only on a phased basis, but to have the Israeli defence forces withdraw from 40 per cent. by population of the occupied territories is a very important start.

Mr. Gary Streeter (South-West Devon) (Con): When the Prime Minister goes to Washington, will he make it clear that another conference on the middle east, although welcome, is not enough and that it is time, once the Palestinian leadership issues are resolved, to seek constructive action on the ground to bring the parties back to the road map, just as the hon. Member for Dundee, West (Mr. Ross) has said? Should that not include the appointment by the Quartet of a very senior international figure to stay in place in Jerusalem to oversee negotiations, backed by the presence of international monitoring and observer forces, and to help to foster a climate of trust? Is there not a unique opportunity for action now, and should we not seize it?

Mr. Straw: I commend what the hon. Gentleman says. There is a case for the appointment of a high-level representative, but that representative must have something to do and all sides—the Palestinians, the Israelis and the neighbours who have a direct interest in the peace process and the road map—must have a clear willingness to engage.

Uganda

7. **Mr. Bob Blizzard** (Waveney) (Lab): What assessment he has made of the prospects for peace in northern Uganda. [196786]

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs (Mr. Chris Mullin): We welcome the statement made on 2 November by a senior member of the Lord's Resistance Army that it is prepared to end hostilities and enter into dialogue. We hope that that development will represent a start towards achieving a peaceful and sustainable end to the tragic conflict, but dialogue will not be easy in a conflict that has lasted 18 years.

Mr. Blizzard: I am sure that all Members welcome that statement, but is my hon. Friend aware that the United Nations emergency relief co-ordinator, Jan Egeland, has said that there are more internally displaced people in northern Uganda than in the neighbouring Darfur region of Sudan, and that our own UN ambassador has acknowledged that northern Uganda is

"one of the great crises out there which is not recognised enough".

I appreciate all that my hon. Friend has done on this matter, but is there not the opportunity now more than ever before for the Government to raise their game even further and take their natural lead in a new international initiative to take advantage of the statement made by the Lord's Resistance Army?

Mr. Mullin: I am well aware of the scale of the catastrophe in northern Uganda because, like many hon. Members, I have been there and seen it for myself. As I said to my hon. Friend when we discussed this issue last month, there is now scope for mild optimism: large numbers of followers of the Lord's Resistance Army are now coming out of the bush and being rehabilitated; some senior members of the LRA have been taking advantage of the amnesty that President Museveni has agreed; and the Sudanese, who have backed that dreadful, evil force in the past, withdrew their support for it some time ago. So, yes, there is an opportunity for a breakthrough and, yes, we are keeping very closely in touch with all the main parties. We will certainly do everything in our power to bring the conflict to an end. In the longer term, there will have to be reconciliation between the Government of President Museveni and the Acholi and Langi peoples in the north, who have been alienated by the events of the past 18 years.

Sudan

8. **Mr. Andrew Robathan** (Blaby) (Con): If he will investigate whether members of the Sudanese Government are involved in ethnic cleansing and atrocities in Darfur. [196788]

9. **Helen Jones** (Warrington, North) (Lab): What recent discussions he has had on respect for human rights in Darfur. [196789]

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs (Mr. Chris Mullin): We remain gravely concerned by the human rights violations taking place in Darfur. We continue to make it clear to the Government of Sudan that they must respect the human rights of all their citizens and that there can be no impunity for such crimes. We are conveying the same message to the rebels. It will be for the United Nations international commission of inquiry, which began its work on 25 October, to investigate the situation in Darfur and determine who should be held accountable.

Mr. Robathan: I do not think that the Minister and I disagree much about this. There is the most terrible situation in Darfur; whether or not it is genocide, which the United Nations is investigating, is one thing, but certainly some 70,000 people have been killed and 1.5 million ethnically cleansed. The most terrible atrocities are taking place. It is important that there is no impunity, as the Minister said, and that responsibility is laid at the doors of those responsible. It was all very well for the Prime Minister to take tea with Bashir and his cronies last month, but the truth is that the Sudanese Government have armed and supported the Janjaweed. Will the Minister ensure that it is Government policy to hold the people who are responsible to account—and that starts with President Bashir and all his cronies?

Mr. Mullin: As I said, it is our view that those responsible should be held to account. I am afraid that, in diplomacy, it is sometimes necessary to meet Governments with whom we do not see eye to eye on all matters. One of the main reasons the situation in Darfur has changed for the better—inasmuch as it has—is that the Sudanese Government have been left in no doubt about the international community's attitude to what has been going on. They have thus been willing to co-operate with the international community to bring the situation to an end.

I would like to draw the House's attention to an aspect of the tragic situation that does not get the attention that it deserves. A growing feature of the problem is that the rebels are making more attacks on civilians, aid convoys and Government installations. *[Interruption.]* I think that the hon. Member for Buckingham (Mr. Bercow) is saying that that is a small matter, but it is not. Mr. Pronk, the UN Secretary-General's representative, said the other day that in the past month the bigger problem had been attacks by rebels, not forces of the Sudanese Government. The rebels attacked Arab tribes that had not been drawn into the conflict. I assume that they did so with a view to drawing the tribes into the conflict, which is beginning to happen. There is a danger that the conflict will spread even wider, so the problem is serious.

Helen Jones: When does my hon. Friend expect the UN commission of inquiry to report on what has been happening in Darfur? Does he agree that, as reports have never yet saved a life, it will be the duty of the Government following the inquiry to press for immediate UN action, so that instead of debating the matter we can ensure proper protection for the people of Darfur and that those responsible for the atrocities are called to account?

Mr. Mullin: The UN commission is due to report at the end of January, but no one is sitting and waiting for that. An enormous amount is being done both by the UN on the ground in Darfur and through the effort to get the African Union monitoring force in place. We will make a difference when we can provide security for the people on the ground, which is most likely to happen with the help of the African Union. We are doing all that we can to help it to get its troops in place.

Mr. John Bercow (Buckingham) (Con): Given that the African Union-sponsored peace talks in Abuja have stalled, principally because of the calculated obstructionism of the Government of Sudan in resisting the proposal for the establishment of a no-fly zone, does the hon. Gentleman agree that it is essential both that a no-fly zone be erected in the interests of the people of Darfur and that that proposal must necessarily include a ban on military flights, for we all know that it is Government bombing that has been killing, slaughtering and maiming innocent black Africans in Darfur?

Mr. Mullin: A number of issues are being discussed at the talks in Abuja, the main one being a ceasefire by both sides; the second is to agree a humanitarian protocol. A flight ban is under consideration, but, in a country the size of France, it would be relatively unenforceable. So far as I am aware, there have been no recent air attacks by Sudanese Government forces, so that is not the main problem. The main problem remains getting both sides to agree a ceasefire and then to sign up to the humanitarian protocol. I regret to say that, so far, that has not happened.

Mr. George Foulkes (Carrick, Cumnock and Doon Valley) (Lab/Co-op): But is it not true that British Ministers—both this Minister and the Secretary of State for International Development—have taken the lead in humanitarian and diplomatic initiatives in Darfur? What are the French, Germans, Italians, Canadians, Japanese and all the other OECD countries doing? Is it not about time that we said to some people, including Opposition Members, that it is not the responsibility of the British Government to deal with every crisis and problem in the world?

Mr. Mullin: I am grateful to my right hon. Friend. However, there has been a huge international effort in Darfur and it would be invidious of me to pick out individual countries, but we can hold our heads high because we have been in the lead and have arguably done more than anyone else. Many senior members of the Government, from the Prime Minister down, have taken a close personal interest in the situation and will continue to do so.

Mr. Mark Simmonds (Boston and Skegness) (Con): Conservative Members are horrified by the atrocities, human rights crisis and human rights violations that are continuing in Darfur. We are also deeply concerned about the peace process in southern Sudan and urge the Government to play their part in reinvigorating the Intergovernmental Authority on Development talks.

We recognise that the Government made a contribution by co-sponsoring UN resolution 1564, but further direct action is required, such as transforming the role of the African Union from monitoring to peacekeeping. What specific discussions have taken place with the Chinese to ensure a strong, multilateral resolution at the UN Security Council, leading to firm, immediate action? When will the Government agree with the US Administration and Conservative Members that events in Sudan are genocidal, thereby ensuring immediate international action?

Mr. Mullin: The hon. Gentleman raises a number of points. My right hon. Friend the Foreign Secretary discussed the matter fairly recently with the Chinese Foreign Minister, and there are constant discussions on the way forward in the United Nations between the representatives of all the countries on the Security Council. The hon. Gentleman mentioned progress in the Naivasha talks between the north and south. I understand that they are due to resume on 26 November. We are reasonably hopeful that there will be a successful outcome.

United States of America

10. **Hugh Bayley** (City of York) (Lab): If he will make a statement on the UK's bilateral relations with the United States of America. [196790]

The Minister for Europe (Mr. Denis MacShane): It has been a key foreign policy objective of this Government to maintain close co-operation and consultation with the United States Government and Congress, alongside a close and deepening relationship with our EU partners. That co-operation will continue. There is a huge range of issues on which progress in the world would be faster if Europe and the United States could agree.

Hugh Bayley: Britain's bilateral relations with the United States are important because hardly an issue of global policy—world trade talks, the global fight against AIDS or the fight against terrorism—can be resolved without America playing a leading role. Does my hon. Friend agree that we should encourage the United States to use to the full its soft powers of diplomacy and development aid to tackle the problems, as well using as hard military force where necessary?

Mr. MacShane: I very much agree. We should use our parliamentary soft power to build stronger links with the elected representatives of the American people on the Hill and in the state governments. In many states, quite progressive policies on environmental change and stem cell research have been adopted, and there is much more that is progressive and closer to our way of thinking in America than is sometimes reported. I therefore hope that hon. Members on both sides of the House will take part in deepening that interparliamentary dialogue.

Mr. Graham Brady (Altrincham and Sale, West) (Con): The French Foreign Minister has said that the European Union should become a power to rival the United States, and the Spanish Prime Minister has confirmed that the EU constitution would be an important step towards making the EU the world's strongest military power. Is it not increasingly obvious that moves towards a common EU foreign policy risk weakening the western alliance just when we should be strengthening it? Will the Minister take the opportunity to reassure the United States that this country wants no part in any attempts to undermine NATO and that we still regard our close relationship with America as the best guarantee of freedom in Europe?

Mr. MacShane: I think that the hon. Gentleman was misquoting an article in German in *Der Spiegel* that included an interview with the Spanish Prime Minister—I will send him a translation. A new approach would be most helpful, because the Leader of the Opposition is unwelcome in Washington, unwanted in Europe and unelectable in Britain. The Conservative party needs to rebuild its fences with the United States, rebuild its connections with Europe and start talking sense on foreign policy for the first time in seven years.

Mr. Tony McWalter (Hemel Hempstead) (Lab/Co-op): Notwithstanding my hon. Friend's positive remarks, would he raise in any talks about that relationship the issue of United States protectionism, particularly the fact that we cannot export anything that is to be used by the US Department of Defence without the US manufacturing the goods. There is therefore a strong protectionist factor, and I hope that that can be reviewed in the light of the new relationship that he spoke about.

Mr. MacShane: I entirely agree with my hon. Friend, as I represent Rotherham, where Europe's finest engineered steel products were threatened with tariffs imposed by the last Administration. I hope that the next Administration will not listen to some of their American trade union friends and go down the protectionist road. Isolationism, whether on the part of the Conservative party or whether in the form of protectionism by American unions, is unacceptable.

Iraq

11. **Bob Spink** (Castle Point) (Con): What recent representations he has received on the impending Iraq elections. [196791]

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs (Mr. Bill Rammell): We have received numerous representations on the elections in Iraq, all of which support the holding of free and democratic elections in January. We fully support the Iraqi Interim Government in their commitment to that timing, as set out in UN Security Council resolution 1546. The Independent Electoral Commission of Iraq, advised by the UN, is doing excellent work to ensure that technical preparations are on course for January.

Bob Spink: I am grateful to the hon. Gentleman for his answer. Of course, we all want the elections in Iraq to be successful, and we acknowledge the extraordinary bravery and professionalism of the Black Watch in helping to create a stable and secure backdrop against which elections can be held. What further support is being considered for the Black Watch, and what plans are there to replace it in December so that Security Council resolution 1546 is delivered?

Mr. Speaker: Order. The question should have been about the elections.

Middle East

12. **Richard Burden** (Birmingham, Northfield) (Lab): What assessment he has made of the implications for the road map of the statement by Mr. Dov Weisglass, an adviser to Prime Minister Sharon, that the Gaza disengagement plan involves the removal of the creation of a Palestinian state from the peace process. [196792]

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs (Mr. Bill Rammell): We believe the road map is the way forward and that disengagement is a first step towards a comprehensive peace settlement. Whatever rhetoric we may hear from either side, that is our goal and we shall stick to it. Prime Minister Sharon has reaffirmed Israel's commitment to the road map.

Richard Burden: I agree with my hon. Friend. Does he accept that many people believe that Mr. Weisglass only put into words what is happening on the ground, including the news just this week of a threat to wells in Wadi Fukin in the west bank? Echoing what my hon. Friend the Member for Dundee, West (Mr. Ross) said, I urge the Minister to ensure that when the Prime Minister meets President Bush he emphasises that the important thing is not words any more but action to make sure that peace is achieved for the benefit of both Israelis and Palestinians?

Mr. Rammell: There is consensus across the House that we have the right way forward in the road map. What we need is renewed impetus and momentum, which is very much what the Prime Minister will be talking about when he goes to Washington later this week. In the context of what Mr. Weisglass said, it is important to note that his reported remarks are out of step with the policy of the Israeli Government. We strongly welcome the fact that Prime Minister Sharon has indicated that, and indicated his continuing commitment to the road map.

West Indies

13. **Joan Ruddock** (Lewisham, Deptford) (Lab): If he will make a statement on the progress of reconstruction in the West Indian islands damaged by recent hurricanes. [196793]

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs (Mr. Bill Rammell): The recent hurricanes in the Caribbean caused extensive damage and destruction. The statement that my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for International Development made to the House on 12 October gave details of what this Government have done to help. Since then, we have announced a further £5.5 million in assistance to Grenada, the island most severely affected. Baroness Howells visited Grenada as the personal envoy of my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs, and our assistance to the region now amounts to almost £10 million.

Joan Ruddock: I am sure that the whole House will be extremely grateful to my hon. Friend for that reply. Will he congratulate the Marsha Phoenix Memorial Trust in my constituency, which, like many Caribbean communities across London, is raising funds for the Grenada hurricane appeal? Will he also tell us what plans the Government have to assist the islands of the West Indies in preparing better to avoid such tragedies in future, when there may, unfortunately, be further hurricanes?

Mr. Rammell: I should certainly like to congratulate the trust in my hon. Friend's constituency on the work that it is doing. Bearing in mind that this hurricane season has been the worst for some 90 years, it is critical that we do everything we can to find out what factors created that situation and what we can do to help. That is at the forefront of our thinking at the moment.

Speaker's Statement

12.31 pm

Mr. Speaker: As the House will know, this Thursday is 11 November, Remembrance day. Although the House will not be sitting at 11 o'clock, right hon. and hon. Members, their staff and officials in the House will be attending to their duties at that time. I regard it as appropriate that we should join the nation in observing the two-minute silence at that time, so that we might remember those who gave their lives for their country to help to preserve our democratic freedom. I should be grateful if those responsible for chairing Committees would make appropriate arrangements. Instructions will also be issued to heads of Department so that those members of staff who wish to observe the two-minute silence should be enabled to do so.

Police Reform

12.32 pm

The Secretary of State for the Home Department (Mr. David Blunkett): With permission, Mr. Speaker, I wish to make a statement on the future of the police service in England and Wales.

I am publishing today the second phase of our police reform agenda. This is an agenda designed to restore community policing for the modern age. Our proposals embody reform for a purpose: to reduce crime and antisocial behaviour; to build safer and more secure communities; to reinforce respect for the law; to protect law-abiding citizens; and to provide a customer-focused service using modern technology to underpin neighbourhood policing.

I wish to place on record the debt of gratitude that we owe to the men and women of the police service—their job is always challenging and sometimes dangerous. Police officers, support staff, volunteers and now the new police community support officers have our full support.

I believe that we are all committed to a more responsive, visible and reassuring presence on our streets, but rapid economic and social change bring their own challenges. The nature of crime has changed. Success in one area highlights new forms of criminality, unacceptable behaviour and the breakdown of respect. The service itself is prepared and willing to embrace change while maintaining the enduring values of the British police service—values that must be sustained, and which include integrity, a commitment to public service and a professionalism free of party political interference. Those who denigrate the achievements of the police in reducing crime downplay the commitment and professionalism of those officers who have helped to achieve the 30 per cent. reduction in overall crime since 1997; the use of enforcement powers that have led to 100,000 cases of antisocial behaviour being tackled in the past year alone; burglary and vehicle crime reduced by two fifths; and robbery down by a quarter in the past two years alone.

Police numbers are at an all-time high, with 140,000 officers, 68,000 police staff and more than 4,000 police community support officers, which is the result of an uplift in the overall police work force of more than 31,000 over the past seven years. For the new neighbourhood teams to work, however, we must free up police time. We need to cut bureaucracy, reinforce civilianisation and use forensic science to underpin the application of additional resources, which is why we have revised the codes under the Police and Criminal Evidence Act 1984, cut performance indicators and reduced the number of forms used by the service by more than 7,000. Video identity parades now make up more than 98 per cent. of all identity parades. We have reformed the criminal justice system, introduced easy-to-use fixed penalty notices and reduced unnecessary time in the station and the courts.

The public rightly demand more police, more support officers, more investment and more visible and available policing in the neighbourhood. From prevention through investigation and detection, the public require both action and results. The approach that I am setting out today seeks to address those challenges in partnership with the police.

[Mr. David Blunkett]

The new neighbourhood policing fund will invest in dedicated teams across the country, in addition to the forthcoming uplift in the police grant. Fully trained officers with updated powers and police community support officers, who have core powers to tackle antisocial behaviour, will help to meet our goals. Those neighbourhood teams will clearly require a tailored approach to the particular needs of urban and rural areas.

The investment of £50 million of new money this autumn will deliver 2,000 police community support officers this financial year, as a first step to achieving the 25,000 uplift to which we are committed. The fund will ensure that, unlike in the past, we do not see a reduction in the 140,000 officers—instead, reductions in bureaucracy will free up the equivalent of 12,000 front-line constables. However, first contact with the police—whether on the street or on the phone—is crucial, and the response and follow-up to reported crime and the treatment of victims and witnesses must improve dramatically.

In the next two years, we will guarantee standards of public service by introducing, together with an appropriate assessment of public satisfaction, a new contract. The new contract will include national minimum standards for call handling, a new three-digit non-emergency number and new guarantees on information for victims, which will reinforce the customer contract. That is part of the 10 commitments to improved public service that are set out in the White Paper.

Where inaction over a period of time has led to disillusionment and frustration, we will work with chief officers and others to set in place credible mechanisms for triggering action. Local people, through their local councillor, will have new powers to require information, appropriate consultation and, where appropriate action. Councillors or community safety officers employed by the community safety partnerships will be encouraged to focus on acting as a liaison or advocate, providing a better link between the police and the community. That will be supplemented by new channels for local people to influence policing priorities in their neighbourhood. There will be a lighter touch and longer breaks between inspections for the best performing services and the co-ordination of visits by different agencies will be improved. Improved performance will lead to greater freedom from monitoring through earned autonomy.

However, the police are not solely responsible for cutting crime, which is why we are reviewing the partnership provisions of the Crime and Disorder Act 1998 and will publish a community safety strategy early in the new year. Investment in tackling drug abuse must be co-ordinated by local partnerships and the improvements we seek in accountability will assist by inculcating collaboration into mainstream practice.

Police authorities, which will now have enhanced local democratic representation, must increase their community links. Clearer responsibilities must lead to greater visibility and greater accountability. These enhanced powers will include: holding chief constables to account; setting clear performance objectives; conducting appraisals; overseeing engagement with the public at neighbourhood and command unit level; for the first time, a duty to promote diversity within the force; and greater consistency of response and performance in its area. Moreover, I am clear that central Government have to clarify their role in relation to what is described as the tripartite decision-making process.

Nationally, it is the duty of Government to set the strategic framework and to be prepared to stand back and let chief officers and police authorities deliver the service. That will be achieved through a slimmed down national policing plan and a rationalisation of centrally accountable agencies. The Government are responsible for providing resources and powers: they must also provide a focus on improved quality of service, consistency and coherence through a better focused inspection system; clarity about powers of intervention where police authorities, as well as forces, are functioning badly; and support where necessary.

The role of the Home Secretary must be more than simply distributing taxpayers' money. Where local communities are failed, action must be forthcoming. This Home Secretary will not duck the duty to act where necessary. Ministers carry responsibility, but with responsibility must come the power to act—responsibility without power is as corrupting of democracy as power without responsibility.

In addition to reform at local, force and national level, we are, as the House knows, establishing the Serious Organised Crime Agency. The rationalisation of organisations working to tackle criminality at this level has been widely welcomed. Similarly, it is now necessary to subsume the functions of the different policing agencies at national level into a new national policing improvement agency, which will embed a culture of self-improvement and customer service.

Work is now being led by Her Majesty's inspectorate of constabulary to determine how best the service can work across boundaries in handling more serious and sophisticated crime. The chief inspector will report in the early new year on how force structures can best be configured to improve effectiveness.

However, it is not structures but the men and women of the police service who will deliver the more visible, accessible and accountable service we seek. They will have our full support, through improved training, enhanced powers and the right technology, in taking on the new role that they play in the rapidly changing world of today. Through the 10 commitments to the service, we are setting out how we can offer a unified work force, recognising the contribution of all.

The constable will remain central to policing. Constable numbers are at a record level. We will develop their lead role in the new neighbourhood teams. Probationer training will be family friendly, and every officer will now obtain a transferable qualification. Promotion will depend less on examinations and more on performance on the job. Career pathways will be more clearly defined and the role of police staff will be enhanced. People with the right skills will be able to enter the service above the rank of constable.

Good leadership and management, together with the spread of best practice, will be complemented by the work of the police standards unit, which has already had a dramatic impact on the performance of forces with which it has been working.

This is a broad and ambitious agenda. We are committed to working with and alongside the police service to build a better service for the future—a service appropriate to the 21st century. I commend the statement to the House.

David Davis (Haltemprice and Howden) (Con): I thank the Home Secretary for early sight of the statement and the White Paper and join him in commending the men and women of our police forces who work so hard, often against the odds.

We agree with elements of the White Paper. I welcome the introduction of a national IT system for sharing national police intelligence; it is long overdue. I welcome the fact that police authorities will be given power to request an intervention from the inspectorate, and the Home Secretary's acceptance of Conservative party policies on the need for greater accountability of police authorities—although the proposals do not go far enough.

We are considering the latest in a long line of initiatives on police reform from the Home Secretary. In March 2001, he established a police reform steering group. In December 2001, we had a police reform White Paper, which was followed the next month by the Police Reform Bill. At the end of last year, there was another Green Paper and now we have a White Paper with green edges. The Home Office has just finished consulting about modernising police powers to meet community needs and Her Majesty's inspectorate of constabulary is reviewing the structure of our police forces. We shall end up with a reform of a reform of a reform.

Our police forces are already buried in Home Office initiatives. So what is proposed? It is another set of initiatives. The Home Secretary undertakes to cut bureaucracy. Like most of the contents of the White Paper, we have heard it all before. Back in 1997, the Labour party manifesto stated:

> "We will relieve the police of unnecessary bureaucratic burdens to get more officers back on the beat."

We must ask why, seven years and four or five police reform initiatives later, there are still unnecessary burdens and forms to remove or scrap.

The main reason for the mountain of red tape is the Government's obsession with control. The police are fed up with the Government's constant central control—the targets, initiatives, priorities, inspections, checks, audits and ring-fenced funding. One force reported 37 inspections, audits or checks in 12 months. The Government believe that measurement is a substitute for action. We learn from the head of the police standards unit that one of the bureaucracy-busting initiatives that the Government require is for each force to have a bureaucracy officer. What does he do? He measures bureaucracy. The Home Secretary says that cutting police paperwork will free up 12,000 police officers. Again, I am glad that he agrees with Tory policy—the question is whether he can deliver it.

As usual, the Home Secretary has tried to claim that crime is down, based on a survey that misses out murder, drug crime, shoplifting, crimes against children—millions of crimes. It does not matter how the Government try to spin the figures: overall, crimes have increased by more than 750,000 since 1997; violent crime has spiralled out of control—there are more than 1 million incidents a year; gun crime has doubled, and sex offences and drug crime have increased.

When the Home Secretary launched the original police reform White Paper, he said that detection rates were far too low—yet now they are worse. Overall detection rates have decreased by a fifth since 1997. In 1997, almost eight out of 10 cases of violence against the person were detected. That figure is now down to half—a mere 50 per cent. Even more disgraceful, detection of sexual offences has dropped from 77 per cent. to 39 per cent. The figure has been halved since the Government came to power.

The detection rate is the single most important issue that faces the police today. The White Paper mentions it but offers no new solution. The Home Secretary is keen on targets. His target for detection rates in 2008 is to get them back to 30 per cent. In other words, he is planning for a performance that lets seven out of 10 criminals go free. Even his inspector of constabulary accepts that that is not good enough.

Let us take just one example. The Home Secretary has announced today that, ahead of any proper independent evaluation, he will empower all forces to give community support officers the power of detention. Has the Home Secretary seen the research by Leeds university, which not only called for the Government to slow their rapid expansion of CSOs but warned that their proliferation was

> "undermining the traditional bonds between officers and their communities"?

Surely, instead of spending £50 million on recruiting 2,000 CSOs, it would be better to have 1,000 fully trained police officers.

I share the disappointment of the police, including many chief constables, in this White Paper. The police service today is by no means perfect, but when it has its hands tied behind its back—from funding decisions to form filling—it is hardly surprising that reform has been slow. There is nothing new or radical in this paper. All is open to consultation, and the reforms will take years to happen. I fear that the Home Secretary has come to the House today for little more than a taxpayer-funded public relations exercise in the run-up to the general election. If the Government were intent on dealing with crime, they would give the police the numbers, the time and the ability to deter and detect criminal activity. There is precious little in this White Paper to reassure our concerned and committed police forces or to inspire the confidence of the worried citizens of our country.

Mr. Blunkett: The first question that the right hon. Gentleman asked was whether we agreed with Tory party policy. The answer is no, we do not, because it was about cutting police numbers and involved a 50 per cent. increase in crime in the 18 years that the Tory Government were in office. It also involved using the British crime survey, but setting it on one side when it did not suit them, as they are now doing once again.

The right hon. Gentleman's second question was whether we agreed that it would be a good idea to reduce bureaucracy and get more police on to the streets. The answer to that is yes, we do agree. That is why we have increased the police force by 13,000 since 1997—by

[Mr. Blunkett]

10,000 over the past two years alone—and why there have been 4,000 extra police community support officers and 31,000-plus staff overall during those years. It is also why we are now reducing bureaucracy.

The right hon. Gentleman then asked why we should have a bureaucracy-busting officer in each force. The answer to that question is, to bust bureaucracy. There should be someone whose focus and objective is to examine the pluralicity of forms that exist at local level, and to determine what can be done about that. At last, that is beginning to work, hence the 7,700 forms that have been set aside nationally and locally over the past two years.

The right hon. Gentleman next asked whether we agreed with ourselves that crime was actually falling. Yes, we do. Burglary and vehicle crime are down by more than 40 per cent. Those are year-on-year comparable figures, comparing like with like. Do we agree with some survey at Leeds university that says that police community support officers are a bad thing? No, we do not. I went to Bexley this morning with the Prime Minister and saw community support officers working alongside the new neighbourhood policing team, led by the award-winning police constable, Michael Wearing. What a tremendous example that was of those officers working alongside the community. There has been a massive decrease in crime and a tremendous uplift in reassurance, and these are just the kind of neighbourhood policing teams that we want to see right across the country over the next three years, putting in place neighbourhood reassurance, detecting and dealing with crime, catching criminals, reducing the fear of crime and ensuring that we can get more resources into the police force.

The right hon. Gentleman also asked about resources. He asked about time and about fixed penalty notices. The 20,000 that have been issued in the first experimental period have reduced the time needed to take people down to the station to go through the arrest procedures and all the various case and custody processes by one and a half hours on average, and by substantially more in many cases. Yes, additional resources will be necessary, both from the new neighbourhood policing fund and from the uplift that we shall give to the police authorities in the forthcoming police grant.

Of course it will also be necessary to ensure that those resources are used wisely. We have had an uplift in funding of 30 per cent. over the past four years. We will ensure that no police force in the country will be required to cut its services over the year ahead, and that, instead, forces will maintain those police numbers and draw down on the national policing fund for additional community support officers so that they can do their job in the community. Above all, they will do that job alongside local people, with that customer focus and fulfilling that contract, so that when people phone or contact the service they are dealt with professionally, politely and properly and know what is taking place after they have reported the crime. Victims will be followed up with information and we will mobilise the community on behalf of the police.

If the White Paper did not include proposals on all those issues, we would have failed. But it does, and when people have read it they will realise that we have unified an agenda for the future with the police force. The first police reform White Paper and Bill involved a past agenda that the Conservative Government had failed to fulfil on the back of the Sheehy report. Ten years later, it was my job to put that in place. Now, however, we are moving forward into a different era in the 21st century, with the chief constables, the superintendents, the Police Federation—I believe—and, above all, the public behind us. It is simply untrue to say that chief constables are not signed up to this White Paper, because they are. They are signed up to it because they want a radical, delivering police force that has the support of the public and is sufficiently reformed to deal with the new challenges. They want that because they are committed to reducing crime and ensuring that we have a safer Britain. We should all be proud of that.

Mr. Mark Oaten (Winchester) (LD): I thank the Home Secretary for giving me advance sight of his statement and also of the White Paper. We welcome many parts of the proposals in that document. He is right to want to find ways of building much closer links between the public and the police, and I am glad that he has rejected the more simplistic approach of having either directly elected sheriffs or directly elected police authorities.

Does the Home Secretary acknowledge, however, that a barrier to more local policing is the amount of time that the police still have to spend on administrative tasks? I acknowledge that he has made some progress in that regard, but is that not just the tip of the iceberg when it comes to tackling paperwork? Does he have any specific plans to tackle the amount of police time wasted in court appearances, when officers are often not called or have to wait ages to give evidence?

The Home Secretary says that he can free up the equivalent of 12,000 constables by cutting bureaucracy. Is that not an admission that under Labour—with its obsession with targets—the Government have actually tied up those 12,000 police officers in the first place? I welcome his plans to allow people to join the police at higher ranks, without always having to serve in the junior ranks first. Does he envisage this opportunity being available to people who have had business careers, or just to those who have had related careers?

The Home Secretary will also know that many people in rural communities feel that their police are being drawn into the city centres. What guarantee can he give under these proposals about local police levels in communities that feel that they are missing out in this way? In the White Paper, he says that he will seek a financial contribution from the drinks industry towards the cost of the harm caused by excessive drinking. Would he extend that to imposing a levy on late-night venues, to help with the cost of policing our city centres?

There are many good ideas in the White Paper, but will the Home Secretary explain exactly how they are going to be funded, particularly given the recent concern that police authorities have expressed over their settlement? Will these changes result in higher council tax bills, or will they be fully resourced from the Home Office?

Mr. Blunkett: I am very grateful for what I take to be the hon. Gentleman's welcome for the White Paper and for his sensible questions. Yes, our work on overturning bureaucracy does represent only the tip of the iceberg, which is why we are investing in technology such as Livescan, and why simple technology such as pagers and mobile phones should be used to avoid officers having to sit in court day after day without being called, when they are needed elsewhere. A lot of this is simple common sense. A new case and custody programme has now been introduced in 11 force areas, and we can now streamline the reporting of crime on the spot using the Airwave system, rather than requiring officers to return to the station. All these things, plus the effort being made nationally and locally to reduce paperwork, will make a difference. I do not accept that the 12,000 officers who will be freed up is a consequence of engaging 12,000 officers in the stations.

An interesting statistic is that we had 37,000 fewer constables 30 years ago than today, but more people saw them and believed them to be visible and available on the street. We must return to that era. In conjunction with police services, we must be able to ensure that people are released from sitting around in the station, which is why, three years ago, we started the process relating to the diary of a police officer.

I said that community policing in rural areas needed to be tailored to particular needs. Experiments are currently taking place using community support officers in rural areas, where there is less crime and fewer dangers, to substitute for police, thereby releasing police officers to engage in community policing in new ways. The local police service itself must tailor that approach to its area, as we cannot do it from the centre. By ensuring that we use the two aspects of policing—constables and support officers—we can do a better job.

On spending and the police grant, police authorities believed that they were to get a 3 per cent. uplift. On that basis, they have been lobbying that that is insufficient for them to meet the future demands of the service and they have been demanding 5.7 per cent. Let me make it clear: there is no way that I can deliver a 5.7 per cent. uplift across the board, and I do not believe that the police authorities truly believe that that is feasible. However, I will make sure, along with my right hon. Friends the Chancellor and the Deputy Prime Minister, that the uplift that we deliver in a few weeks will ensure that the programme that we have set out, and its supplementing in the years ahead, will deliver the neighbourhood beat police officers and the 25,000 support officers to which we have committed. On that basis, we will have the trust of the British people.

Several hon. Members *rose—*

Mr. Speaker: Order. Now that I am calling Back Benchers, I limit them to one supplementary question each.

Jeff Ennis (Barnsley, East and Mexborough) (Lab): I welcome today's announcement of the White Paper, and I thank my right hon. Friend for his recent visit to Grimethorpe, not Grimesthorpe, in my constituency, where we met representatives of the local police team and representatives of the local community, and where neighbourhood policing is now making a difference in terms of reducing crime. While we were there, we met a number of community support officers, who felt that their role could be beefed up to include, for example, use of the power of detention and so on. Will he reassure the House that the Government are looking to beef up the role of CSOs under the White Paper?

Mr. Blunkett: I thank my hon. Friend for the warm welcome that I received in Grimethorpe. It was an interesting afternoon, with the community being part of the solution—

Mr. Dennis Skinner (Bolsover) (Lab): Grimesthorpe is in "Brassed Off".

Mr. Blunkett: Yes, I know. I have wanted to heckle my hon. Friend ever since he started to mumble away when I was making my statement, for which I will get him afterwards.

Mr. Skinner: I was supporting my right hon. Friend.

Mr. Blunkett: Well, I refrain from using a more robust term in reply—I will save that for interviews on radio.

I reassure my hon. Friends that chief constables will have the power to designate detention powers to community support officers, but we will leave that to individual chief officers rather than impose it from above. They will of course automatically have powers for levying fixed penalty notices and requiring information such as names and addresses.

Bob Spink (Castle Point) (Con): How do we empower decent local residents? What information on local policing will be provided to each household, and how will it be distributed?

Mr. Blunkett: That will be part of the joint role envisaged for community safety partnerships. If we are to reduce bureaucracy, it is important that we do not duplicate and ask police to issue paperwork to the communities that they serve. Local authorities and community safety partnerships will work together to provide regular updates to local people. They will provide, in writing, information on where the local police service can be located; the numbers on which officers can obtained and, when we have a three-digit reserve number, a record of that number. They will ensure that local people know where local community panels and forums are being held and know how they can contribute to them. Where there is considerable disquiet, we need to inform people how they can take action under the new trigger powers to require consultation. In extremis, where things have gone very badly wrong, we need to tell local people how they might trigger snap inspections. The obligation to provide such information will be overseen by police authorities, which, regrettably, are little known by the public at the moment—on recent polling, about 80 per cent. of people

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had never heard of their police authority. That must be a thing of the past if decentralisation is to work in the way that I have spelled out in my statement.

James Purnell (Stalybridge and Hyde) (Lab): Does my right hon. Friend agree that wardens should play a key part in the police family? Will he thank the Minister for Crime Reduction, Policing and Community Safety for visiting Tameside to see our model of neighbourhood policing? Does he agree that we need to speed up the process of accrediting wardens where they are working hand in hand with the police? Should not that be the job of the local division commander rather than the chief constable?

Mr. Blunkett: In those circumstances, it can be, and where forces and man and woman power can be combined so that the job can be done better, that is welcome. The local commander, with the chief constable, will therefore be in a position to agree those designations. In some areas, wardens have decided to upgrade to community support officers, which is welcome. Some local authorities, regeneration partnerships and new deal for communities areas have been co-funding the appointment of officers, police community support officers and wardens. That is very welcome, and we will examine in future how local co-funding can play a more important role in expanding the service.

Derek Conway (Old Bexley and Sidcup) (Con): Did the Home Secretary discover this morning, when he and the Prime Minister were in Falconwood in my constituency pulling their little public relations stunt, that one of the reasons the public do not believe his figures is that they see what is happening on the ground? One of the problems in the Metropolitan police area is that those officers notionally allocated to the Bexley division, which he and his chum visited this morning, are consistently taken away for central force duties. Whatever he says at the Dispatch Box today about the figures, my constituents know that it is not happening on the ground, with or without the presence of the Prime Minister and the Home Secretary.

Mr. Blunkett: What a terrible denigration of the police officers and community support officers whom I met this morning. What a denigration of the work of the community. Do not take my word for what I and the Prime Minister saw this morning—I ask any journalist or broadcaster listening or viewing this afternoon to go to where we were this morning, and to talk to local people, the head of the community arts college, local police constables and community support officers—then call them a liar, not me.

Mr. Graham Allen (Nottingham, North) (Lab): I congratulate my right hon. Friend on continuing to be tough on crime, but may I also remind him that he needs to be equally tough on the causes of crime? We could have a uniformed officer on every street corner, but unless we tackle effective parenting so that young people have the proper values, it would still have little impact on crime. In his previous job as Secretary of State for Education and Employment, I know that that matter concerned him. Will he also take cognizance of the fact that arresting officers are spending hours in the police station progress-chasing case papers through to charge? If he is able to solve that problem, he could increase the number of hours spent by the average police officer on other duties by 25 per cent? Will he take that seriously?

Mr. Blunkett: That is a critical point, and the civilianisation of the force, and better use of technology alongside it, will help. Reconfiguring what takes place in the station, and how custody and management work at that level, is a major issue, and our investment of more than £1 billion in information technology is part of that. As I discovered when I was in Nottingham at the end of last week with the ministerial team, parenting is absolutely crucial, not merely in terms of building discipline but in terms of re-inventing and reinforcing respect within the family and in the community that we serve.

Rev. Martin Smyth (Belfast, South) (UUP): The right hon. Gentleman referred to diversity. I wonder how far that principle has been extended throughout all police authorities in dealing with folk with disabilities, both in relation to recruiting people who could do good police duties but who have certain impairments, and retaining and caring for those in the police service who are disabled. For example, I still think of that picture of the Royal Ulster Constabulary collator receiving the George cross who had no nether limbs because they had been blown off. It seems to me that, at times, we lose folk who could do excellent police work because of our standards in relation to disability.

Mr. Blunkett: I am pleased to say that I agree. A review is taking place, with the police service, of requirements that should no longer apply owing to improvements in medical technology and people's ability to cope. The new fitness test recognises the crucial role of women police officers. While maintaining reasonable standards, we must be able to welcome people who would otherwise have been excluded.

Chris Ruane (Vale of Clwyd) (Lab): I am pleased about the review of the partnership provision of the Crime and Disorder Act 1998. I believe that a lack of co-operation is the main reason for the underperformance of crime and disorder partnerships. Will my right hon. Friend consult Members in all parts of the House who have a worm's eye view—*[Laughter.]* I mean a view from the ground, of course. Will my right hon. Friend ensure that when we conduct the review there is input on this important issue from all sides of the Chamber?

Mr. Blunkett: I will take on board what my hon. Friend has said, but I think it would be unparliamentary for me to describe any hon. Member as a worm.

Mr. Eric Forth (Bromley and Chislehurst) (Con): Following the question from the hon. Member for Nottingham, North (Mr. Allen), will the Home Secretary tell us exactly what he proposes to do to reduce the current complexity? Police officers trying to do their job on the ground are faced with an enormous bureaucratic nightmare when they take someone to the station. What precisely will the Home Secretary do to free up police officers?

Mr. Blunkett: I withdraw my earlier reassurance that I would not call any hon. Member the name mentioned by my hon. Friend the Member for Vale of Clwyd (Chris Ruane).

First, we are introducing a hotline so that officers themselves can telephone anonymously—or, if they wish, give their names—to get something done about that bureaucracy. Secondly, we introduced someone with responsibility at force level—a move condemned earlier by the right hon. Gentleman's Front-Bench colleague, the right hon. Member for Haltemprice and Howden (David Davis)—precisely to secure action at that level. Thirdly, the whole point of civilianisation is to enable officers to leave the station and return to the community. That is working extremely well: there has been an immediate release of police time and, above all, a new morale in the service. We are beginning to see that everywhere we go.

Mr. Tony Clarke (Northampton, South) (Lab): Notwithstanding the antisocial behaviour displayed by some Conservative Members, may I warmly congratulate the Home Secretary on his statement? I especially welcomed the emphasis that he placed on the roles and responsibilities of individual police officers.

When talking of the extended police family, my right hon. Friend mentioned community support officers and neighbourhood wardens. Will he now comment on the role of the special constabulary? We are experiencing record levels of recruitment in Northamptonshire: more than 300 special constables are doing valuable work in the community. Will my right hon. Friend consider the role that they can play in the neighbourhood teams that he is setting up? Many special constables would welcome the opportunity to act as parish or neighbourhood constables, and to play a full part in those teams.

Mr. Blunkett: That is an excellent idea. I congratulate my hon. Friend on being a special constable—the only person among us who can go out on Saturdays and Sundays and do that imaginative job for his constituents. *[Interruption.]* I should say that he is the only Labour Member present today who is able to do that, although I appreciate that there are people doing other things in other ways.

It is crucial for us to build on the 21 force areas that have increased their numbers of special constables over the past year. In the east midlands last week, I noted that not only Northamptonshire but Derbyshire and Nottinghamshire had dramatically increased their numbers. That is one way in which the creation of a citizenship community—the development of a civil society—can be used to establish greater safety in the community while helping those at work. It demonstrates how those two processes can be combined.

Simon Hughes (Southwark, North and Bermondsey) (LD): Will the Home Secretary take the opportunity provided by his reforms to simplify the structure between the Home Office and local people, so that there can be one pot of money for each local area and local authorities and police can decide on priorities in consultation with the people, rather than there being numerous different strands and funding streams as there are now?

Mr. Blunkett: I welcome the hon. Gentleman back to the policing and crime reduction agenda. I experienced déjà vu for a moment.

Again, I am pleased to say that I agree. The Home Office has now reached 21 local area agreements involving unified funding streams, and is experimenting with the idea of having just one person in the Department to contact and work with. That makes much more sense than the multiplicity of individual sections and divisions with which people have been having to deal.

Mr. Eric Illsley (Barnsley, Central) (Lab): I welcome the proposal for neighbourhood policing teams. As my right hon. Friend knows, they have been successful in the Barnsley area. He may also know that in South Yorkshire we have a problem with the communication centre, which I understand is based in his constituency. Will he do what he can to improve the situation? Will he ensure that it is not repeated elsewhere when he introduces minimum standards for call handling?

Mr. Blunkett: I entirely take the point. Thankfully the centre is in the constituency of my right hon. Friend the Member for Sheffield, Central (Mr. Caborn), but I think we have all suffered as a result of the tremendous hiccup that occurred when the new facility was brought into play. Despite the best intentions, there has been a major problem. We must avoid a repetition of that as new technology is introduced throughout the country.

The point raises a wider issue—the need for expertise to be shared locally and regionally in regard to activity that has not been seen as a core police function in the past, and in which senior officers have no historic expertise. We must do that to ensure that people receive the service that they need, but above all to ensure that the police themselves are not frustrated by what lies between the public and their own role as enforcement agencies. They have been as angry and upset about what that means to them as the public have been about the service they have been receiving.

Mr. Henry Bellingham (North-West Norfolk) (Con): Is the Home Secretary aware that, as a result of his policies, the Norfolk constabulary is spending roughly half a million pounds on the diversity agenda? Does that make sense? Is it money well spent, especially in a county where ethnic minorities represent 1 per cent. of the population and where there have been no instances of police discrimination?

Mr. Blunkett: Yes, it does. Diversity takes many forms, and is intended to reflect the wider community, not just ethnicity. A vital synergy is involved in getting the reflection of the community right in the forces. We need diversity in terms of race, ethnicity, religion and gender; we also need to deliver services better to the local community. Of course that must be tailored to the community's specific needs, but to suggest that spending resources on improving diversity is a waste of money is

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to demonstrate that, regrettably, Conservative Members live way back in the past—and will remain there if they do not understand the difference between 21st-century Britain and the 18th-century Britain in which the Tory party was born.

Mrs. Anne Campbell (Cambridge) (Lab): I welcome the transformation that has taken place in community policing over the past few years, particularly in my constituency, where the police now use e-mail lists to keep residents informed of what is happening. But given his plan to increase local authorities' powers in regard to community safety, will my right hon. Friend advise those of us who must deal with Liberal-Democrat controlled authorities, Liberal Democrats who do not support the antisocial behaviour legislation and Liberal Democrat councillors who have stated publicly that they have no confidence in the police?

Mr. Blunkett: The new trigger powers mean power for local people. As in the case of ombudsman services, it will be necessary to use elected representatives as a filter. If people found that their local councillors were unable to co-operate with them in the improvement of service, they could of course turn to the ballot box to ensure that their future representatives did just that.

Mr. Patrick McLoughlin (West Derbyshire) (Con): Will the Home Secretary tell us what will be the budget of a national policing improvement agency?

Mr. Blunkett: The agency will drive best practice. It will bring together the National Centre for Policing Excellence and Centrex, the centre for training excellence. *[Interruption.]* It will bring together the relevant functions of the Police Information Technology Organisation, and will allow collaboration in slimming down the administration required to perform those functions while also focusing attention on improved service on the ground. Far from mumbling about it, the main Opposition should surely welcome that rationalisation, given that they are always going on about rationalising and cutting bureaucracy. Once we have taken that step, we might actually get some credit for it.

Chris Bryant (Rhondda) (Lab): The people of the Rhondda are delighted to have five community safety officers, and they will be even more delighted when they get the additional 33 whom, according to my calculations, the spreading of 25,000 such officers across 659 constituencies will provide. But they are particularly concerned that when they telephone the police, their call often seems to disappear into the wide blue yonder and they never hear from anybody again. Is it not important to allow local people to choose for themselves whether their call is an urgent, 999 call, or one that could be dealt with through a visit the next day or even later in the week? Should we not have another telephone number for the police?

Mr. Blunkett: We should have a three-digit back-up number, and, as my hon. Friend the Member for Cambridge (Mrs. Campbell) outlined, in future we should use e-mail to report incidents and to report back on the action to be taken. In Lancashire, once a clear system of reporting back was established and people were then confident that the promise made would be fulfilled, there was a 10 per cent. improvement in confidence in the police. I would like to see that replicated across the country.

Mr. Roger Williams (Brecon and Radnorshire) (LD): In the next couple of weeks, chief constables and police authorities will have to deal with settlements that some would call challenging but most would call inadequate. The Home Secretary has a reputation for driving through national initiatives that do not carry with them sufficient central funding, which leads to an increased burden on council tax payers. Will he confirm today that his proposals will be fully funded, and that the poorest in society will not carry the biggest burden for police services?

Mr. Blunkett: I do not think that the poorest in society do carry the burden for funding police services. I obviously cannot announce what the lift will be, but it certainly will not be at the level predicted by the police authorities themselves. What is absolutely clear is that the resources that we are making available will enable the continuing development of the service. Yes, we will fully fund those areas in which we are responsible directly, just as we are providing 100 per cent. funding over the next 12 months for 2,000 additional community support officers, and for the additional CSOs who will be part of the new national policing fund, which I will announce later.

Martin Linton (Battersea) (Lab): Does my right hon. Friend agree that it is vital for community support officers and street patrols to have the power to require information from—and, where necessary, to detain—members of the public while the police are called? For example, how can Clapham Junction's street patrol—sadly, Wandsworth council is going to disband it in March, when Government funding runs out—deal with offences such as those committed by graffiti artists and fly-tippers if it does not have the power to require information?

Mr. Blunkett: Those who are designated police community support officers will obviously have fixed penalty notice powers available to them as of now, and as I have said, the power to detain will be a matter for chief police officers to decide. But I deplore the fact that Wandsworth council is pulling the plug on the resources that are available to continue a scheme that I know, having been in the locality, remains a great success. I appeal to local authorities to work in partnership with the police to maintain those resources, and to continue the excellent work of pursuing community safety as a common goal for everyone at local level.

Mr. Desmond Swayne (New Forest, West) (Con): The Secretary of State did not even attempt to address the question raised by my hon. Friend the Member for West Derbyshire (Mr. McLoughlin), so may I try a different tack? How many officers will it take to run the national policing improvement agency?

Mr. Blunkett: Substantially fewer than currently operate the National Centre for Policing Excellence, Centrex and the Police Information Technology Organisation; indeed, that is the purpose of putting the agencies together. The reason we do not have a figure is that we are reconfiguring the service—*[Interruption.]* The boys in short trousers, as of recent months, always want to predict that amalgamation, collaboration and rationalisation will somehow be a disaster, but most people in business and in the community know that putting these organisations together will slim down overheads and remove unnecessary administration, thereby enabling the spending of additional resources on front-line policing.

Mr. Huw Edwards (Monmouth) (Lab): I welcome my right hon. Friend's statement and I can assure him that the four chief constables who recently gave evidence to the Welsh Affairs Select Committee offered full support for the Government's strategic approach to policing; I can also assure him that South Wales police expressed considerable support for the 24 community support officers whom we met. In a rural area such as mine, CSOs have to serve an enormous patch covering some 18 or 20 miles, and the additional CSOs will be greatly welcomed, especially in areas such Abergavenny and Monmouth, in which there has been a particular problem with alcohol-induced antisocial behaviour.

Mr. Blunkett: Yes, they will make a substantial contribution, as will the other antisocial behaviour measures that have been widely welcomed, including the combining of powers in the Anti-social Behaviour Act 2003 and in fireworks regulations. This has once and for all given the lie to the idea that such measures are a gimmick that will never work. In the past month, communities throughout England and Wales have benefited from them, and any Member of this House who tries to demonstrate otherwise is not in touch with their local neighbourhood.

Points of Order

1.26 pm

Derek Conway (Old Bexley and Sidcup) (Con): On a point of order, Mr. Speaker. Will you confirm that there is a long-standing courtesy and convention in the House whereby a Member of Parliament who intends to visit the constituency of another MP lets them know of their intention? May I draw to your attention the fact that both the Prime Minister and the Home Secretary were in my constituency this morning, but they did not exercise a courtesy that I understood applied to the most exalted Members of this Chamber, as well as to we lowly Back Benchers?

Mr. Speaker: We are all equal in this matter, and regardless of whether it is the Prime Minister, the Home Secretary or any other Cabinet Minister, the usual conventions must apply when they visit a constituency. I expect that convention to be abided by.

Mr. Tony McWalter (Hemel Hempstead) (Lab/Co-op): On a point of order, Mr. Speaker. I have given notice of a point of order concerning the relationship between this House and the press lobby. I would like to clarify whether it is possible to withdraw a press pass from a member of that lobby, particularly if they have shown contempt for all Members of this House. In this Sunday's edition of *The Sunday Times*, a journalist said:

> "Britain is being overrun by politicians. It has more of the vermin per acre than just about any major democracy."

Does someone who treats Members of this House in that way and who thinks of us in that manner have any right to a pass to attend our proceedings?

Mr. Speaker: I think that the standards of the journalist concerned certainly did leave a lot to be desired. As the hon. Gentleman said, he gave me notice of this point of order and I have made inquiries. That individual, fortunately, is not a Press Gallery passholder. He should follow the good example of such passholders, who work night and day to enhance our good reputation and always write about hon. Members—including me—in the kindest possible terms.

Mr. Patrick McLoughlin (West Derbyshire) (Con): Further to that point of order, Mr. Speaker. Can you tell us what newspapers you read?

Mr. Speaker: I will not be drawn into that one.

Corporate Nuisance Telephone Calls

1.29 pm

Kevin Brennan (Cardiff, West) (Lab): I beg to move,

That leave be given to bring in a Bill to create an offence in respect of corporate nuisance telephone calls.

Mr. Speaker, you, in common with many hon. Members and their constituents—and, indeed, you, Mr. Deputy Speaker—may occasionally have answered the telephone only to be confronted with a silent call. If it has happened to you, Mr. Deputy Speaker, or to other hon. Members in their places today, that would hardly be surprising, because evidence suggests that businesses in the UK are generating hundreds of thousands, probably millions, of direct marketing calls every year that result in the consumer receiving a silent call. That may seem a rather bold assertion and the House may want to know what evidence there is to confirm it.

A consultancy company called CM Insight Ltd recently produced a report that concluded that BT receives more than 100,000 queries every month from individuals who are concerned about silent calls. Companies will not generate all those calls, but evidence suggests that a large majority of the silent calls received by consumers do indeed originate from commercial interests. My Bill would create a specific offence if a telemarketing telephone call resulted in a consumer receiving a silent phone call or, as I call them in the title of my Bill, a corporate nuisance call.

Why do those calls happen? The problem arises mainly out of the use of something called predictive or power-dialling equipment, which is designed to maximise the efficiency of call centre operations; in other words, attempting to maximise the use of call centre operations when companies are trying to sell their products and services over the telephone. That equipment routinely and deliberately generates more calls than there are live operators available, on the assumption that many of the calls will be unanswered. However, when more people answer the calls than predicted by the predictive dialling equipment, there are not enough live operators at the other end of the line to handle the calls, so many people receive a silent telephone call. The problem is compounded in many cases when consumers try to find out who is calling them at the other end of the line by dialling 1471 and are met with the message, "The caller withheld their number".

It is not too difficult to imagine the impact that such calls can have on individuals, particularly on the vulnerable and the elderly, who may imagine that there is some malicious intent involved. Indeed, when I first raised the issue in the House in an Adjournment debate on 26 April 2002, I had been contacted by several of my constituents who had been pestered by silent corporate nuisance calls. In their case, they had gone to the trouble of going through the BT nuisance call bureau to discover where those calls had been generated and they found out that they had come from irresponsible companies rather than, as they feared, from psychopathic stalkers.

I referred to vulnerable people a few moments ago, but the people who originally contacted me about the problem were far from vulnerable. They were people who could well look after themselves, but they were also deeply disturbed by the problem. It remains a problem. Yesterday I spoke to a journalist who said that she had previously been the victim of genuinely abusive stalking-type phone calls and then more recently received many corporate nuisance calls. It was a frightening experience for her as it was a reminder of her previous difficulties.

My hon. Friend the Member for South Dorset (Jim Knight), who is sponsoring the Bill with me here today and who has campaigned on the issue in South Dorset, told me that when Radio Solent ran a feature on the problem, it received a bigger response from the public than for any other news item broadcast over the past 15 years. That shows that it is definitely an issue of genuine concern to our constituents.

One commonly cited solution is to register with the telephone preference service, which enables consumers to have their number removed from the lists of telemarketing companies, including those registered with the Direct Marketing Association, the industry body. It is a mark of the scale of the problem referred to in my Bill that 5.25 million numbers have already been registered with the telephone preference service since its inception in 1999. That amounts to 24 per cent. of British households; 37 per cent. of those households say that they registered with the TPS in order to escape silent nuisance calls. About 12,000 people register with the TPS every year, yet many complain that they still receive unwanted calls.

Although a £5,000 fine is already in place for companies breaching the TPS, to date not one fine has been levied against any of them and not one licence has been revoked during the legislation's six-year history. Let us compare that with the position in the US, where a similar scheme exists. The scheme now has more than 30 million numbers registered with it and it continues to grow at the rate of 4 million per month. It is interesting to note that in November 2001, the company AT&T was fined $780,000 for transgressing the "do not call this" scheme, the equivalent of our TPS. Clearly, our legislation needs to be toughened up.

In addition, some consumers may not necessarily wish to block all telemarketing calls, whatever the faults in the system. Some may be willing to receive such calls, particularly when they are an existing customer of a company, but no one wants to receive a silent call.

The industry has taken some steps since I raised the matter in the House in 2002. There is a Direct Marketing Association code of practice, which contains sensible provisions such as the basic requirement that caller ID is always available where a call fails, so that the customer can know the identity of the thoughtless company that believes it is appropriate to treat customers with such contempt as to give them a silent corporate nuisance call.

However, the same code of conduct contains the pathetically weak provision that predictive dialling equipment should be adjusted so that no more than 5 per cent. of live calls are silent calls in any 24-hour period. Even if someone is lucky enough to get a call from a company that is signed up to the DMA's code of conduct—not all are—it is deemed perfectly acceptable that one in 20 of the calls answered should generate a silent corporate nuisance call.

Let me just examine what that means in practice. Earlier this year, Ofcom took welcome action under the Communications Act 2003 against MKD Holdings in connection with the promotion of Kitchens Direct products. It is to the credit of the Direct Marketing Association that it originated the complaint. Ofcom's investigation showed that MKD made 24 million calls from its call centres between November 2003 and February 2004. Of those, 11 million were answered and 1.5 million resulted in silent calls. That was rightly deemed by Ofcom to be a misuse of the telecommunications system. But what if Kitchens Direct had been operating at the 5 per cent. level acceptable under the DMA code of conduct? Out of the 11 million calls, the company could have made 549,999 without falling foul of the industry's code of conduct, and that is just one company! We should welcome the fact that Ofcom has taken such action, but clearly it is not enough.

I am not a Luddite—telemarketing is legitimate if responsibly regulated—but if it takes 1.5 million silent calls in three months to trigger action, the current system is too weak. The UK has gone for the consumer "opt-out" model whereas Germany and Italy have an "opt-in" model. Unless action is taken, pressure will grow for the UK to follow that route.

My Bill would take the side of the consumer and put financial pressure on the industry to clean up its act. It would help those who currently follow best practice and penalise those who show little concern for the misery caused by their silent calls. It would end the scourge of the corporate nuisance call and help millions of people who currently suffer, literally, in silence.

I commend my Bill to the House.

Question put and agreed to.

Bill ordered to be brought in by Kevin Brennan, Jim Knight, Mrs. Anne Campbell, Mr. Tom Harris, Mr. Martin Salter, Mr. Khalid Mahmood, John Robertson, Mr. John Bercow, Ann Clwyd, Mr. Peter Kilfoyle, Lady Hermon and Sir Sydney Chapman.

CORPORATE NUISANCE TELEPHONE CALLS

Kevin Brennan accordingly presented a Bill to create an offence in respect of corporate nuisance telephone calls: And the same was read the First time; and ordered to be read a Second time on Friday 19 November, and to be printed [Bill 176].

Orders of the Day

Civil Partnerships Bill *[Lords]*

As amended in the Standing Committee, considered.

New Clause 1

CATEGORIES OF CIVIL PARTNERS OTHER THAN SAME SEX COUPLES

'(1) Two siblings, both of whom are aged over thirty years, shall be eligible to register as civil partners provided that they have lived together for a continuous period of twelve years immediately prior to the date of registration.

(2) In this section "sibling" means a brother, sister, half-brother or half-sister.

(3) Chapter 2 of Part 2, Chapter 5 of Part 3 and Chapter 2 of Part 4 shall not apply to civil partnerships formed by virtue of this section.

(4) Section [Termination of civil partnerships other than same sex couples] shall apply to civil partnerships formed by virtue of this section.'.—*[Mr. Leigh.]*

Brought up, and read the First time.

1.41 pm

Mr. Edward Leigh (Gainsborough) (Con): I beg to move, That the clause be read a Second time.

Mr. Deputy Speaker (Sir Michael Lord): With this it will be convenient to discuss the following:

New clause 2—*Termination of civil partnerships other than same sex couples*—

'(1) An application for a dissolution order may be made to the court by either civil partner.

(2) On an application for a dissolution order, if the court is satisfied that—

(a) the application is made in the correct form, and

(b) the other civil partner has been served with notice of the application,

it shall make a dissolution order.

(3) Provision may be made by order specifying the requirements as to form and service of the application for a dissolution order.

(4) No order may be made under subsection (3) unless a draft of the statutory instrument containing the order has been laid before, and approved by a resolution of, each House of Parliament.'.

New clause 3—*Categories of civil partners other than same sex couples (No.2)*—

'(1) Two persons both of whom are aged over eighteen years shall be eligible to register as civil partners provided that they are in a relationship which meets the condition set out in subsection (2).

(2) The condition is that the relationship is one which is specified for the purposes of this section by Schedule [Meaning of specified relationship for the purposes of section [Categories of civil partners other than same sex couples (No. 2)]].

(3) The Secretary of State may by order amend Schedule [Meaning of specified relationship for the purposes of section [Categories of civil partners other than same sex couples (No. 2)]] by—

(a) adding a relationship,

(b) amending the description of a relationship, or

(c) omitting a relationship.

[Mr. Deputy Speaker]

(4) No order may be made under this section without the consent of the Scottish Ministers and the Department of Finance and Personnel.

(5) The power to make an order under this section is exercisable by statutory instrument.

(6) An order which contains any provision (whether alone or with other provisions) amending Schedule [Meaning of specified relationship for the purposes of section [Categories of civil partners other than same sex couples (No. 2)]] by—

(a) amending the description of a relationship, or

(b) omitting a relationship,

may not be made unless a draft of the statutory instrument containing the order is laid before, and approved by a resolution of, each House of Parliament.

(7) A statutory instrument containing any other order under this section is subject to annulment in pursuance of a resolution of either House of Parliament.

(8) Chapter 2 of Part 2, Chapter 5 of Part 3 and Chapter 2 of Part 4 shall not apply to civil partnerships formed by virtue of this section.

(9) Section [Termination of civil partnerships other than same sex couples] shall apply to civil partnerships formed by virtue of this section.'.

Amendment No. 1, in clause 1, page 1, line 4, after 'relationship', insert

'between two siblings who fall within the scope of section [Categories of civil partners other than same sex couples] or'.

Amendment No. 12, in page 1, line 4, after 'relationship', insert

'between two people who fall within the scope of section [Categories of civil partners other than same sex couples (No. 2)] or'.

Amendment No. 13, in page 1, line 4, leave out 'of the same sex'.

Amendment No. 17, in page 1, line 18, after 'death,', insert 'marriage,'.

Amendment No. 2, in clause 3, page 2, line 33, at beginning insert 'Subject to subsection (1A),'.

Amendment No. 14, in page 2, line 34, leave out paragraph (a).

Amendment No. 15, in page 2, line 35, at end insert 'or'.

Amendment No. 16, in page 2, line 36, leave out from '16' to end of line 37.

Amendment No. 3, in page 2, line 37, at end insert—

'(1A) Subsection 1(a) and (d) shall not apply in the case of two people who wish to register as civil partners under section [Categories of civil partners other than same sex couples].'.

Amendment No. 4, in clause 36, page 16, line 20, at end insert—

'( ) with respect to determining whether two people have lived together for the period of twelve years specified in section [Categories of civil partners other than same sex couples];'.

Amendment No. 5, in clause 86, page 39, line 33, at beginning insert 'Subject to subsection (1A)'.

Amendment No. 6, in page 39, line 41, at end insert—

'(1A) Subsection 1(a) and (b) shall not apply in the case of two people who wish to register as civil partners under section [Categories of civil partners other than same sex couples];'.

Amendment No. 7, in clause 126, page 65, line 10, at end insert—

'( ) Regulations may in particular make provision with respect to determining whether two people have lived together for the period of twelve years specified in section [Categories of civil partners other than same sex couples]'.

Amendment No. 8, in clause 138, page 69, line 25, at beginning insert 'Subject to subsection (1A),'.

Amendment No. 9, in page 69, line 31, at end insert—

'(1A) Subsection 1(a) and (d) shall not apply in the case of two people who wish to register as civil partners under section [Categories of civil partners other than same sex couples]'.

Amendment No. 10, in clause 159, page 77, line 19, at end insert—

'( ) Regulations may in particular make provision with respect to determining whether two people have lived together for the period of twelve years specified in section [Categories of civil partners other than same sex couples]'.

Amendment No. 19, in clause 212, page 103, line 1, leave out sub-paragraph (i).

Amendment No. 20, in page 104, line 6, leave out Clause 216.

New schedule 1.—*Meaning of specified relationship for the purpose of section [Categories of civil partners other than same sex couples (No. 2)]*

Amendment No. 18, in schedule 27, page 373, line 29, leave out paragraphs 40 and 41.

Mr. Leigh: Broadly speaking, this Bill would give homosexual couples the same rights as those enjoyed by married couples. That is the principle of the Bill; although some of us oppose it, that is not what we are debating today. Whatever happens today, that principle will remain in place. Therefore, the new clause and associated amendments have not been tabled to wreck the Bill.

The new clause, if accepted, would leave the substance of the Bill intact. I, and those hon. Members who support me, am trying to ensure that the Bill does not create more injustices. We accept that many people believe that homosexual couples who live together for years often suffer great hardship, and we heard many stories to that effect on Second Reading. People in that situation cannot leave their houses or tenancies to each other, and they encounter all sorts of other problems.

An amendment tabled in the other place would have extended the same rights to others, such as siblings and other family members. Various objections were made to that proposal by the Minister and others. The Minister and her officials expended a huge amount of time convincing the House that the amendments were technically deficient. I believe, as do those hon. Members who share my views, that she could have made workable the amendments from the House of Lords if she had put the same amount of effort into doing so, but the Government's main objection to those amendments was that these amendments could be used to avoid inheritance tax, as they would allow people to pass property down through the generations.

Therefore, we have decided to adopt a moderate and sensible approach today. New clause 1 is very narrowly drawn, and the aim of this group of amendments is very simple. It would merely give to siblings the same rights granted by the Bill to homosexual couples. By "siblings" I mean a brother and sister, or two brothers or two sisters.

We have made the amendments very narrow indeed. It is not my job to foretell what will happen in another place, but I suspect that the issues raised today will be central to subsequent debates on this Bill.

Miss Ann Widdecombe (Maidstone and The Weald) (Con): On Second Reading, a principal objection to the relevant amendment that came to us from another place was that it would have required siblings to form a civil partnership. If one of the siblings later wanted to marry in what I still call the normal way—I am sure that that expression is politically incorrect these days—that partnership would have to be dissolved. It was therefore suggested that the Lords amendment was a nonsense for that reason. Will my hon. Friend assure me that the new clause and the associated amendments will not fall into the same trap?

Mr. Leigh: We took that argument on board after Second Reading. If my right hon. Friend looks at new clause 2, she will see that it does not adopt the same approach as the Bill. The Government may not admit it, but homosexual couples undertake what amounts to a marriage. The Bill is very long because it replicates a great deal of ordinary marriage law.

The objection raised to the Lords amendment was that it would be absurd for family members to have to go through some sort of divorce. New clause 2 would create a far simpler procedure for dissolving civil partnerships between siblings. That would not be a divorce; it would be equivalent to the procedure adopted in the French civil solidarity pact, or PACS, system. The process would be a simple, paper-based way to dissolve a civil partnership.

Mr. Douglas Hogg (Sleaford and North Hykeham) (Con): The basis of my hon. Friend's argument is the essential unfairness of inheritance tax. I agree with him about that. Does he not think that we should all concentrate our efforts on abolishing inheritance tax, rather than on trying to create these artificial partnerships?

1.45 pm

Mr. Leigh: Yes, I do. This debate provides an opportunity for that. The Government have said already that the Bill will require various consequential amendments to the Finance Bill. If the Minister were to intervene and say that she had spoken to the Chancellor of the Exchequer and that he had told her that the forthcoming Finance Bill contained measures recognising that siblings who had lived together for a number of years suffered a gross injustice, we could all go home now.

Unfortunately, that has not happened. The Government have made no such commitment. I give credit to my right hon. and learned Friend the Leader of the Opposition, who has made it clear in a letter to constituents that the first Finance Bill under a new Conservative Government would take action on this matter.

Chris Bryant (Rhondda) (Lab): If this injustice is as important and significant as the hon. Gentleman claims, am I right in presuming that he has had many letters from constituents on this subject?

Mr. Leigh *indicated dissent.*

Chris Bryant: From the look on his face, it seems that the hon. Gentleman has not received any letters on this subject. However, if the issue is so enormously important, why has the Conservative party never proposed an amendment similar to the one under discussion today in any Finance Bill Standing Committee over the years?

Mr. Leigh: We must deal with the situation as we find it now. In our law, it has always been accepted that marriage is unique. Certain privileges are conferred by marriage, and that is recognised in all societies in all parts of the world. The very good reason for that is that marriage is the building block of society. That is what we believe, and the Government apparently believe it too.

With this Bill, the Government are saying something that has never been said before. They are creating a particular class of people—same-sex couples who live together—who will enjoy the same unique advantages conferred by marriage in respect of tenancy, inheritance tax and so on. We are therefore in a new situation.

The hon. Member for Rhondda (Chris Bryant) asked about letters. I have one here. The original was sent by a lady whose name and address I shall not reveal to the House, as she is an elderly spinster who wants to remain anonymous. The letter states:

> "I live with my single brother and have done so since my mother died in . . . 1983. He had lived with her all his life. I retired from (work) to look after her as she was 85 and had cancer. She died within . . . months of my leaving. Stephen—"

that is her brother, although Stephen is not his real name—

> "really needed me to run the home . . . when my mother died I felt I should continue to live with him. I am now 79 and (Stephen) is 75."

That is a real case involving real people suffering real injustice.

Chris Bryant: Such people always have suffered an injustice.

Mr. Leigh: The hon. Gentleman says that such people have always suffered an injustice, so we should give credit to the Government. We have heard many stories about men who may have lived together for 20, 30 or 40 years. Why cannot we give the same justice to the elderly spinster—this real person—whose letter I have just read out?

Angela Eagle (Wallasey) (Lab): It is interesting that the hon. Gentleman has narrowed the new clause, and I suppose we have to be grateful for that, but has he worked out how much it would cost the Exchequer to give siblings the pension provisions in the Bill? He has just made a spending commitment for the Tory Front-

[Angela Eagle]

Bench team by saying that they will abolish inheritance tax, and I assume that there would also be pretty large pension costs in spreading to siblings the Bill's provisions for civil partners.

Mr. Leigh: Unfortunately, I am only a Back Bencher. I would love to give a commitment on behalf of the Conservative party to abolish all inheritance tax, but sadly I am not able to do that, and my right hon. and hon. Friends have not done so. The point of my amendments is to avoid the charge that we are trying to let people avoid paying inheritance tax. "Stephen" and the elderly spinster will not be able to pass their advantage down the generations, so inheritance tax will be paid pretty soon for that 75-year-old man and 79-year-old woman. I freely admit that I have not got the exact figures on what my proposals would cost the Treasury, but the Bill itself puts a cost on the Treasury and we have not had many figures from the Minister on that. It is an affordable cost because it is a matter of justice.

The hon. Lady seemed to imply that we are obsessed with inheritance tax, but we are not necessarily talking about inheritance tax. What will happen, for instance, if two sisters live together in a tenancy? They do not own the property, and if one of them dies the remaining sister, as well as suffering bereavement, will have what is called an assured tenancy. Under an assured tenancy, it is possible that her rent could rise or, in certain circumstances, that she could be evicted. She would not have a statutory tenancy, which is a far more secure thing. Under the Bill, a same-sex couple will have a statutory tenancy, and that is an obvious, glaring injustice to impose on siblings.

Mr. Alistair Carmichael (Orkney and Shetland) (LD): Will the hon. Gentleman tell me why he seems always to assume that only two siblings will be cohabiting? If it is so important to protect the rights of siblings who cohabit, why do his amendments not afford the same protection in situations where three, four or any number of siblings do so?

Mr. Leigh: Usually, there are only two. Secondly, the Bill is about partnerships, and if we had tried to extend it further, we would be accused of trying to go way beyond what it is intended to do. Thirdly, if there are more than two siblings, the financial consequences when one dies are far less than they are when there are two siblings. It is more affordable and a less devastating circumstance. If there are a brother and a sister and one dies, the remaining brother or sister is faced with buying out half the property, and that may often not be affordable. I shall refer in a few moments to an opinion poll that shows that a very large percentage of the population—8 per cent., which is 3.7 million people—know someone who has lost their home as a result of paying inheritance tax.

Mr. Alan Duncan (Rutland and Melton) (Con): If two people are sharing a house and one dies, the other would like to keep the house. If they have to register a civil partnership, though, they will pool all their assets, perhaps to the disadvantage of a third sibling, who effectively would be disinherited. My hon. Friend's measure would introduce into the traditional family some misery and stress, which would be rather undesirable in my view.

Mr. Leigh: We had this argument on Second Reading. If my hon. Friend will forgive me for saying so, he should allow people to make that decision for themselves. There will be circumstances in which it is not advantageous for siblings to enter into a civil partnership. There may be circumstances in which it is not advantageous—perhaps for tax reasons; I do not know—for a same-sex couple to enter into a civil partnership. None of those arguments has been used against the substance of the Bill; they are used only against our amendments. If my hon. Friend will forgive me for saying so, such nit-picking objections are constantly raised against what is an attempt to correct a fundamental injustice. Given that the Bill will become law and that homosexual couples will have these rights, I cannot for the life of me understand why people are so violently and strongly opposed to extending the same rights to siblings.

Mr. Eric Forth (Bromley and Chislehurst) (Con): Perhaps it is simply this; what we face here is a well-organised, vocal minority in society who are constantly pushing for more and more recognition of the kind that the Bill is supposed to give them. Siblings are not such a minority and are not so vocal. In a parliamentary context, we feel under constant pressure from a vocal minority but, perhaps sadly, under little or no pressure from the very group that my hon. Friend is trying to represent.

Mr. Leigh: Perhaps 80,000 same-sex couples will benefit from this Bill, but there are many other ways of living together—not necessarily in a sexual relationship—and those people do not have a voice. They do not come to lobby the House. We have a right, surely, to think of those other minorities, because they, too, have a right to justice. That is all that we are trying to give them. We are not trying to wreck the Bill or take anything away from homosexual couples. We are simply trying to extend a sense of justice to other people.

Chris Bryant: The hon. Gentleman seems to think that there is a very clever Venn diagram in the world that excludes all homosexuals from being siblings. They are not two separate communities; there may be many siblings who are homosexual and who may, indeed, want to enter into civil partnerships with the partner whom they love. The hon. Gentleman said that many of us wholeheartedly oppose the idea of doing anything for siblings where they suffer injustice. He may want to withdraw that remark, because many hon. Members have members of their families who are siblings who have lived together and who may have suffered injustices. We want to put those injustices right, but to do so in proper order, and this is not proper order. The hon. Gentleman said it is normal for there to be only two siblings, but the two cases in my own family involved three siblings living together—

Mr. Deputy Speaker (Sir Michael Lord): Order. The hon. Gentleman may wish to save his remarks in case he wants to catch my eye later.

Mr. Leigh: The hon. Gentleman makes an obvious point. People can make their own arrangements, and there may well be all sorts of arrangements we do not know about. Homosexual siblings may live together with other people, but that does not affect what I am saying. We did not ask for the Bill; in fact, we oppose the principle of the Bill. [HON. MEMBERS: "Oh!"] So what? We have never made any secret of that, and we will vote against the Bill. We have a perfect right to do that in a free House of Commons. All we are saying is that although we did not ask for the Bill, the completely novel idea has been introduced that a particular group of people should be helped outside of marriage. If we are establishing the principle that one group of people should be helped outside marriage, we say that others should be helped as well.

There is a fundamental dishonesty about this debate. The Bill introduces homosexual marriage by any other name. The Government are determined, for political reasons, not to call it a homosexual marriage Bill because they do not want to alienate public opinion, but they are creating a homosexual marriage Bill.

That peg allows me to move on to the proposals of my hon. Friend the Member for Christchurch (Mr. Chope). He, too, has seen a logical flaw in the Bill. He wants to extend civil partnerships to heterosexual couples. He asks why a couple who are heterosexual should not have the same rights. I do not accept or support my hon. Friend's amendments because I believe that marriage is unique and holy and should be left alone. None the less, there is at least some logic in what he is saying. He is at least being completely open with the House. No doubt the Minister will ensure that his amendments are thrown out, but I cannot see the logic in that. However, it is possible that the Government will introduce at some later stage, if they remain in power, some variation of the French PACS system for all sorts of couples. At least there is some logic in my hon. Friend's amendment. There is no logic in the Bill at the moment.

Mr. Hogg: This is a serious argument, but I suggest that my hon. Friend is wrong to say that the creation of civil partnerships is designed simply to provide financial relief for two homosexuals. The fundamental purpose is to assist two homosexuals who want some form of legal, continuing expression of their relationship. My hon. Friend may not agree with that, but it is a perfectly respectable objective.

Mr. Leigh: Why are we not being honest about that? Why do we not say to the British people that the Bill will create homosexual marriage? The Government do not dare do so, because it would be too politically controversial. Instead, they are creating this ridiculous beast and, when we try to extend it to address injustice to other groups, we are told that it is special and nothing can be added to it. Why not? If one group of people are to enjoy those advantages outside of marriage, why cannot another group, such as those supported by my hon. Friend the Member for Christchurch?

Mr. John Bercow (Buckingham) (Con): I shall tell my hon. Friend why many of us resist his amendments. The Bill in its original form is not about tax relief: it is about the recognition of relationships—

Miss Widdecombe: Homosexual marriage.

Mr. Bercow: My right hon. Friend chunters from a sedentary position to no obvious benefit or purpose. If the injustice is as fundamental as my hon. Friend claims, why did he not argue for remedying it a long time ago? Alternatively, why does he not argue that it be remedied in a Finance Bill? Instead, he dresses up his arguments in what many of us regard as a contortionist's logic.

2 pm

Mr. Leigh: It is not contortionist. We did not ask for this debate. We had a simple system in this country, as in most other countries historically, in which society believed that marriage is such a useful bedrock that it should have unique rights. The argument is not only about inheritance tax: it is about many other things. We fully accept that. The Government, heavily influenced by the homosexual lobby, want to introduce the same rights for homosexual couples. That is fair enough, but why not be honest about it? They are not being honest, so they have created something that gives us an opportunity to talk about other people in similar situations.

What does public opinion say? Communicate Research has asked some questions on the matter. It asked:

> "The Government wants to extend the financial benefits of marriage to gay and lesbian couples in its Civil Partnership Bill. Some argue that it would be unfair and unjust not at the same time to make these benefits available to others who have lived together for a long period and become financially interdependent. Would you agree or disagree that were these benefits to be made available to gay and lesbian couples, they should be made available to two sisters who share a house for 12 years?"

Some 84 per cent. responded yes to that question. Interestingly, 79 per cent. of Conservative voters were in favour of my amendment, as were 86 per cent. of Labour voters and 91 per cent. of Liberal Democrat voters. The public are overwhelmingly in favour of what I am trying to do.

Other questions were asked, one of which will please my right hon. Friend the Member for Maidstone and The Weald (Miss Widdecombe). People were asked about the case of a daughter who lives with her elderly mother for 12 years, and 91 per cent. agreed that she should have the rights that I suggest—90 per cent. of Conservative voters, 91 per cent. of Labour voters and 95 per cent. of Lib Dem voters. If we had stuck with the original House of Lords amendments, we would be even more popular. But of course we could not do that, because they had no hope of getting through this House. That is why we have had to draw these amendments very tightly.

[Mr. Leigh]

There is no debate in the country. Some 90 per cent. of people agree with what I am trying to do. Why is it that the House of Commons alone believes that it has the moral right to stand against rectifying a fundamental injustice?

Charles Hendry (Wealden) (Con): My hon. Friend places great store on opinion polls and public opinion. Did he also see the poll in *The Times* that showed that 75 per cent. of people backed the principle of gay couples having exactly the same rights as married couples? Should not that influence his judgment on how to vote today?

Mr. Leigh: If my hon. Friend accepts my amendment, I shall think about accepting the Bill. I accept, for the sake of argument, that the majority of people accept the substance of the Bill. But an even larger majority—91 per cent.—accept my amendments. Is my hon. Friend going to vote against them? He shrugs his shoulders.

Mr. Alan Duncan: I shall rise to that challenge. If those who were polled had been asked a secondary question to the effect that the amendments are impractical because many of the daughters caring for aged mothers may also want to get married, they would think again about supporting the amendments.

Mr. Leigh: That is a very patrician point of view. My hon. Friend is very patrician in many of his attitudes. The truth is that we should respect people's fundamental good sense. As we are limiting the amendment to siblings in any event, there is no reason why it would be unworkable. Nobody has yet convinced me that there is any technical problem with inheritance tax that would make it unworkable.

Mr. Bercow: My hon. Friend is an articulate advocate of his position. I have heard my hon. Friend the Member for Rutland and Melton (Mr. Duncan) described as many things over the years, but patrician is not one of them.

Mr. Alan Duncan: Magician.

Mr. Bercow: Possibly. I put it to my hon. Friend the Member for Gainsborough (Mr. Leigh) that if the majority of those questioned were told that under the terms of the Bill the dissolution of a civil partnership between daughter and mother would require demonstration of an irretrievable breakdown between the two, the overwhelming likelihood is that they would reconsider their view.

Mr. Leigh: My hon. Friend is a very articulate parliamentarian, but if he wants to make progress in this place he should read the amendments that have been tabled. It would help. If he read new clause 2, he would see that we do not propose anything of the sort.

Mr. Bercow: I said daughter and mother.

Mr. Leigh: We are not debating that case. I have already conceded that point. We are dealing only with siblings, and the amendments would not require them to argue that they have suffered an irretrievable breakdown in their relationship. We have tried to listen to the objections to our amendments and we have narrowed them down and down, but we still meet this immovable objection in principle to remedying the injustice for siblings. For the life of me, I cannot understand why.

Mr. David Borrow (South Ribble) (Lab): I have listened with great interest to the hon. Gentleman's contribution so far. The Bill deals with many injustices suffered by same-sex couples. Could the hon. Gentleman identify the specific injustices suffered by same-sex couples that are also suffered by siblings and which the Bill should also address?

Mr. Leigh: I do not understand the point that the hon. Gentleman is trying to make. He made a similar intervention on Second Reading and I have already tried to answer that point. I gave the specific example of assured and statutory tenancies, and inheritance tax is another obvious example. Another example might be if two sisters were living together and one was killed in a car crash because of the obvious negligence of another driver. The surviving sister would not be able to sue the driver for negligence. However, under the terms of the Bill, if a gay couple who had entered into a civil partnership were in the same situation, the bereaved partner could sue. We could go through the entire Bill and find similar examples. The hon. Gentleman is honest about believing in gay marriage and he knows that the Bill replicates the provisions of marriage and gives exactly the same rights to gay couples. That is why it is fundamentally dishonest.

Angela Watkinson (Upminster) (Con): For clarification, my hon. Friend is not suggesting that registered civil partnership between siblings should be compulsory. That would be a choice for those who may wish to take it. The Bill purports to put right injustices in a range of things such as benefits, pensions, inheritance and tenancy arrangements for same-sex couples or same-sex cohabitees, but the schedules show that these provisions will not do that; they are available only to selected types of couple. That is where the Bill fails.

Mr. Leigh: I am grateful to my hon. Friend for that intervention.

Before I sit down, I shall say one last thing: I will withdraw the motion if the Minister says that the new clause is totally inappropriate because the Bill will create gay marriages and it would be quite wrong to add such provisions to a marriage Bill. I would fully accept that. If she intervened now, we could all go home—we would have had an honest debate and the public could make up their minds—but she will not make that sort of intervention, will she? She will repeat, time and again, that this is not gay marriage. If it is not marriage and we are simply outside marriage, why are we giving certain benefits to only one group? Why do we not give them to other groups? That is the inescapable logic of what we are trying to do today, and it is why we believe that our cause is fully rooted in justice and that it will not go away.

Angela Eagle: It has been enjoyable watching those on the right wing of the Conservative party expressing concern about injustice, because it does not happen very often. I welcome their sudden attention to such details after 18 years in power, when they did not really spend much time considering these important issues. Perhaps even they, in their last redoubts, are beginning to recognise how our society has changed over the past 50 years.

David Winnick (Walsall, North) (Lab): I am just off to a meeting of the Home Affairs Committee, but listening to the hon. Member for Gainsborough (Mr. Leigh) reminded me very much of the arguments used in 1967, when I was a Member and those who were very much opposed to legalising homosexuality put forward all kinds of arguments, including that it was a minority point of view. It was a minority point of view in 1967; the House of Commons gave a lead, as it did on divorce and abortion, and we were right to do so. We have heard just the same arguments as those used nearly 40 years ago.

Angela Eagle: My hon. Friend makes an extremely valuable point. Even though I was only six years old when those debates were raging and could not know how relevant that move to tolerance would be to my own life, I am nevertheless extremely grateful to those who were Members in 1967 for having the foresight and humanity to make progress in those important areas, ensuring that we moved into an era when there is more tolerance of people with a different sexual orientation. However, in the week when we heard about an horrific homophobic murder in London, we can be a bit too complacent about the progress that we have made to date.

The increase in homophobic attacks in London in the past year is a cause of worry, and it ought be a cause of concern for all hon. Members, including those Opposition Members who are in the last redoubt, fighting this change. They should be worried about that, and they should join those of us who wish for freedom from fear or violence on the streets of London for all people, regardless of their sexuality. I hope that they will join me in making that plea, but I do see them joining in very much at the moment.

There are real issues with siblings and people who share a home for a long time but who are not in a marriage, a sexual relationship or a soon-to-be civil partnership. It is right that some of those issues have been raised. When they are raised seriously, very many hon. Members are sympathetic to them, and that is also true of the Government.

If the hon. Member for Gainsborough (Mr. Leigh) had read the report of the debates in the House of Lords when these issues were first raised, he should have noticed and at least had the grace to acknowledge in his speech the fact that Ministers expressed sympathy. They said that the Government were considering how to deal with some of the more obvious injustices for those who live together outside marriage and not in a sexual relationship. In fact, they announced that a review of such issues is going on. It is important that we await the outcome of that review so that we can find out how we can do justice for those who find themselves in those circumstances and can be disadvantaged if a sudden death has ruinous financial implications for those siblings who have shared their lives together.

It is invidious and divisive but totally predictable that the hon. Member for Gainsborough is trying to use this inappropriate legislative vehicle, first, to prove his so-called point about gay marriage and, secondly, to wreck the Bill.

2.15 pm

Mr. William Cash (Stone) (Con): Is the hon. Lady suggesting that, somehow, with all the thought that has gone into this 420-page Bill, it would have been impossible to sort out that central question and get it completely clear? It is absolutely ridiculous to say that the matter should go off to review. We know what is in the Bill.

Angela Eagle: I am not saying that the matters in the Bill should go off to review. I am saying that the hon. Member for Gainsborough might have at least had the grace to mention in his opening remarks on the new clause that the Government are looking in general at the issue and have said that they will come back with some suggestions to improve the disadvantages that have been pointed out as occurring to those people who live in the same household but are not married, or are in what is soon to be called a civil partnership.

Mr. Gerald Howarth (Aldershot) (Con): Will the hon. Lady give way?

Angela Eagle: Let me finish answering the previous point.

It is entirely appropriate for the Government to consider such things, but it is not appropriate that that should be somehow imported as an afterthought into a Bill that is designed to recognise the partnerships of same-sex couples.

Mr. Howarth: The hon. Lady said a moment ago that my hon. Friend's new clause would wreck the Bill. She owes a duty to the House and the country to explain why a very narrowly defined, simple new clause would wreck the Bill.

Angela Eagle: I was referring to the earlier Lords amendments, which undoubtedly wrecked the Bill. *[Interruption.]* If hon. Members will give me a chance to expand the argument, I was about to explain why even such a narrow new clause—I do not deny that it is—is still massively disruptive to the Bill's intended approach to same-sex couples. The new clause is hasty, and it would be better to deal with the necessary consultation on some of the issues that Opposition Members have raised in the fullness of time, using different legislation.

The hon. Member for Gainsborough had no idea how much the pension provisions in the Bill for same-sex couples that match those for spouses would cost if extended to siblings. One of the first requirements of any legislation or a new clause that deals with costs of that potential magnitude is that it should be costed. The

[Angela Eagle]

Government's analysis of the pensions provisions in the original clauses, which go wider, demonstrated that they would cost £2.5 billion if private and public pension costs were considered. Narrowing down those provisions to siblings would still leave a sizeable hole in the public finances, which, again, the hon. Member for Gainsborough and his followers have not costed. Given such circumstances, it is important to assess the costs properly before taking a fully informed decision on the principles that we are debating, rather than voting for a hastily assembled provision.

Mr. Hogg: Surely the most conclusive argument that could be made against my hon. Friend the Member for Gainsborough (Mr. Leigh) would be to accept his challenge. He says that if the Bill is essentially about marriage for same-sex couples, his amendments are inappropriate. Why do the Government not simply recognise the fact that the Bill is indeed about marriage for same-sex couples, because on that basis, by his own concession, the amendments would fall?

Angela Eagle: The Bill is about civil partnerships for same-sex couples, which will recognise and respect a choice that people of a different sexuality from Conservative Members who have spoken have been denied. Thankfully, after many years, that choice will be granted to them. I do not think that it is reasonable to play politics with that.

Miss Widdecombe: My right hon. and learned Friend the Member for Sleaford and North Hykeham (Mr. Hogg) asked the hon. Lady to confirm that the Bill was about homosexual marriage because if it is, we all agree that the amendments are inappropriate. Her response to that was that the Bill was about civil partnerships. Will she tell me the difference between the arrangements for civil partnerships for same-sex couples and a civil marriage in this country?

Angela Eagle: It is no secret that the Bill is an attempt to put in place arrangements that are as close as reasonable to civil marriage, but not holy matrimony. All Front-Bench spokesmen and hon. Members who support the Bill have been quite open about that.

Mr. Hogg: I favour the proposition that same-sex couples should be able to enter into a legal relationship if they wish. I do not want to do that, but I support the rights of others to do so. However, I do not understand why the hon. Lady and I cannot agree that that represents marriage—in substance, if not in name.

Angela Eagle: I have shared my views with the House, but it is important for us to talk about civil partnership and civil marriage because we should not offend or worry people who get married in a church, or appear that we, as a legislature, are stepping into areas on which the Churches have traditionally had their own rules. At the same time, I welcome the right hon. and learned Gentleman's support for civil partnerships for same-sex couples, because it is about time that the House legislated for such an important development.

The hon. Member for Gainsborough said that he thought that the Government would come forward at some point with a French-style approach on other arrangements for people sharing homesteads. However, it is interesting that he wants to insert such a provision in the Bill. He accepted that the Government are examining the issue, so instead of being a bit more patient, why does he want to use the matter to try to wreck the Bill? Why is he setting the needs of one set of people against the needs of another? Perhaps that is the right-wing Conservative way, but I do not think that it is attractive.

Angela Watkinson: How does the hon. Lady think that the Bill will affect same-sex cohabiting platonic couples? For example, after the war, many women who lost their fiancées—they went to war, but did not come back—spent decades sharing homes. They may wish to avail themselves of all the legal benefits that the Bill will provide, but might not want to register civil partnerships because of the connotations that the debate is putting on them.

Angela Eagle: I suspect that people who wish to avoid such connotations will have to wait for the Government's review on people who are neither in an openly sexual relation nor eligible to get married, but who live together in shared houses. The House must work to recognise the way in which families and people live together, because that has changed over the years. It is time for us to examine the needs of people in various circumstances.

Mr. Borrow: May I return to the argument about civil partnerships and marriage? Does my hon. Friend agree that many of our constituents see marriage in its religious context and think that marriage occurs between a man and a woman and that it should take place in a church? Although they would be sympathetic to a legal framework for same-sex couples, they would probably be deeply offended if the word "marriage" were used in that context. We must understand that many people of good will who have a serious opinion of the religious connotations of their marriage also accept that a legal framework is needed for same-sex couples.

Angela Eagle: My hon. Friend makes a good point in his usual delicate and clear manner. It is far better to make decisions about aspects of social change in a way that unites and brings together people in this country, rather than one that divides them. That is why I congratulate the Government on their approach.

Mr. Leigh: The hon. Lady mentioned the French PACS system. I take a great deal of interest in French society and law. A PACS does not need to mention family members because under the Code Napoléon, one cannot disinherit one's close family.

Angela Eagle: I thank the hon. Gentleman for that lesson in French legal history and I am sure that the House has noted his point. I mentioned his off-the-cuff remark because he said that he thought that the Government would recognise other relationships in due course, yet also argued that such a measure must be introduced immediately, although that would be to the detriment of the Bill. I do not know why he did that, but if he was arguing along the same lines as Lord Tebbit in the other place, we can all fathom his real reasons.

Even if Labour Members had a sudden conversion on the road to Damascus and accepted the amendments, I suspect that the hon. Member for Gainsborough would vote against the entire Bill on Third Reading. That puts the debate in its proper context—*[Laughter.]* The hon. Gentleman's laughter confirms my suspicion.

We should oppose the amendments for now, but we should not give the impression that we are not considering the situation of people who share houses, but do not want to be in a sexual relationship, to be civil partners or to get married. Everyone knows that we must do that, so I look forward to reading the results of the Government's review. I hope that there will be further reform so that the Government will deal in a future Bill with any injustices suffered by siblings who live together.

Mr. Carmichael: We are considering new amendments, but we have, regrettably, heard the same old arguments. The motivation behind the amendments is the same as that behind those moved by Baroness O'Cathain in the other place. The hon. Member for Gainsborough (Mr. Leigh) gave the game away when he issued a final challenge to the Minister that if she would accept that the Bill was about gay marriage, he would withdraw his amendments. That betrayed the attitude that underpins both his arguments and amendments. He does not accept the fundamental premise of the Bill, which is that we should offer equal opportunities to people regardless of their sexual orientation, and that is why I shall not join him in the Lobby.

2.30 pm

The hon. Gentleman is right. The amendments narrow the scope of those tabled by his noble Friends in the other place. He has gone to some pains to answer the more obvious objections to the ludicrous proposals on divorce. As a result, he has had to create a different regime of civil partnership, which reinforces the point that this is not the place to deal with cohabiting siblings or people in platonic relationships.

Mr. Hogg: The hon. Gentleman is mistaken. The Bill does deal with same-sex couples in platonic relationships.

Mr. Carmichael: The right hon. and learned Gentleman is right. I apologise for that slip of the tongue.

The question of inheritance tax among siblings should be dealt with in a Finance Bill. There will be other opportunities to deal with assured tenancies. The hon. Member for Gainsborough has not satisfactorily addressed my objection that, if more than two siblings cohabit, his amendments would lead to obvious conflict and injustice. If the principles of equality of provision for siblings who cohabit is so important, it is also important for those who cohabit in family groups of three, four or however many, and not just those who cohabit in couples.

Mr. Leigh: Had I framed my amendments in a different way to cover three, four or five siblings, would the hon. Gentleman have supported me?

Mr. Carmichael: No. I have made it clear that this is not the place to deal with such issues. The Bill deals with the formalisation of relationships between same-sex couples.

Mr. Gerald Howarth: But we are talking about same-sex couples. Why does the hon. Gentleman not admit that this is a gay marriage Bill and, as such, there is no place in it for any provision for siblings?

Mr. Carmichael: It is frankly obnoxious, and as a Christian I find it deeply repugnant, for the hon. Gentleman to suggest that the love of one sibling for another is the same as the love between couples in a same-sex sexual relationship. That is nonsensical.

Let me tell the hon. Gentleman why the Bill is not about gay marriage. As a Christian, I believe that marriage is something that is entered into by a man and a woman. That does not mean that I cannot accept that the rights and opportunities of those of a different sexual orientation should be protected in the same way. That is a fundamental premise. Frankly, I do not care if we call it marriage or not. The important thing is the outcome in terms of equality. That is why it is not about marriage and why the Government are right to call it civil partnership.

Mr. Hogg: Is not the hon. Gentleman cavilling at a word? Marriage is the legal recognition of a continuing partnership. He and I would hope that it would be blessed by the Church, but that is not the necessary element. In reality, whether it is a same-sex legal relationship or inter-sex legal relationship, it is the same thing. The Bill provides for the legal recognition of that long-lasting partnership.

Mr. Carmichael: I agree, but it is not me who is cavilling at the word. The right hon. and learned Gentleman's hon. Friends are insisting that the Government say that this is a gay marriage Bill. Their objection seems to be to the title rather than the substance. I am saying that the substance is important, not what we call it.

I read with regret the advert placed by the Christian Institute in *The Times* this morning. It says:

> "I lived with my sister for 15 years. When she died I had to sell our home to pay the inheritance tax. Why should I have less"—

I presume it means fewer—

> "house-sharing rights than a gay couple?"

Obviously good grammar is not considered a particular Christian virtue by the Christian Institute. It has acted well outwith its remit in terms of charitable purposes. The Government should consider that, through the appropriate body.

Mr. Bercow: Given that the approximate £20,000 cost of that full-page advertisement on page 31 of *The Times* by the Christian Institute would have sufficed to feed approximately 5,000 people in Sudan for up to a month, does the hon. Gentleman share my astonishment that a supposedly charitable institution should choose to deploy its resources in that way?

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Order. I would not want us to go too far down that road. Perhaps we could stick to the new clause.

Mr. Carmichael: In that case, I simply say that I agree with the hon. Member for Buckingham (Mr. Bercow) in the broadest terms.

Mr. Jeffrey M. Donaldson (Lagan Valley) (DUP): The issue is about freedom of speech.

Mr. Carmichael: It is about tax benefits for charities. That is what concerns me, which is why the Government should look at the conduct of the Christian Institute.

Chris Bryant: It is clear that, broadly speaking, there are two points of view. On the one hand, there is a wholly legitimate view, which I disagree with, that homosexuality is abnormal and wrong, that marriage should only be constituted as holy matrimony, that it is unique and holy, and that anything that looks like support for homosexuality in any shape or form is anathema and abomination.

Miss Widdecombe: I ask the hon. Gentleman to rephrase what he just said. No one has said that homosexuality or homosexual leanings are, to use his picturesque term, an anathema and abomination. What we would say is that homosexual acts are wrongful.

Chris Bryant: The hon. Member for Gainsborough (Mr. Leigh) accused some of us of nit-picking. The right hon. Lady has a great deal of nits to pick yet. Perhaps we should get the nit nurse in.

One view of homosexuality is that it is wrong and that the state should not do anything, in any shape or form, to support or encourage it or, as someone said on Second Reading, to proliferate it. There is another view, which is that homosexuality is simply a fact of life and that everyone, regardless of their sexuality—heterosexual or homosexual—should have the right to formalise their commitment and love for another person, one to another.

The Bill is not primarily about giving to another set of people a tax inheritance right that is currently available only to those who are married, as the amalgamation of the amendments tabled by the hon. Member for Gainsborough suggests, thereby giving a special privilege to that set of people that is not available to anyone else. It is primarily about saying that it is not right that the state should never support those who want to make a legally binding and committed relationship secure through a legal commitment, one to another.

I accept that some people believe that that is a wrong route. I note that many people believe that holy matrimony is completely different from civil marriage. Indeed, when the Spanish state in 1870 tried to introduce civil marriage for the first time in that country—previously, all marriage had been holy matrimony—the Catholic bishops said that it was certain that the project of civil marriage was wrong because civil marriage would never for Catholics be anything other than an "immoral harlotry" or a "scandalous form of incest".

I know that there are those who still hold to the view that civil marriage is nothing to do with holy matrimony. In this country, of course, the relationship between holy matrimony and civil marriage has been rather confused because of the establishment of the Church and the fact that we have allowed clergy belonging to many different Churches to become registrars, and effectively to register civil marriage.

Angela Eagle: Does my hon. Friend agree that the logic of the argument made by the hon. Member for Christchurch (Mr. Chope) in Committee was that we should abolish civil marriage?

Chris Bryant: That is precisely the point that I wanted to make. Some people want to undermine the role of commitment in civil marriage, because they believe that only holy matrimony should apply in this country. Others, such as the hon. Member for Christchurch (Mr. Chope), who has tabled amendments today, suggest that civil partnerships should be extended to all heterosexuals. I passionately believe that that is wrong, because it would undermine civil marriage and holy matrimony.

Mr. Hogg: Does the hon. Gentleman agree that it is difficult to see why the Church should not bless relationships between same-sex couples, if that is what they all want?

Chris Bryant: I wholeheartedly agree. Earlier, the right hon. Member for Maidstone and The Weald (Miss Widdecombe) suggested that I used colourful phrases in "abomination" and "anathema". "Anathema" comes from her own Church, and "abomination" comes from the Bible, which she reads assiduously, so it is hardly my colourful phraseology. Many people who belong to Churches, as well as Christians, including people polled by the Christian Institute—incidentally, its website address is the rather arrogant "www.christian.org.uk", as if there is only one way of being a Christian and one set of views on these issues—are either homosexuals themselves or accept that homosexuality has been a fact of life since the beginning of time. They believe that people should be able to celebrate that in the eyes of God and receive a church blessing. It is not for the state to legislate—it is for the Churches to decide whether they want to go down that route, and I suspect that, in the fullness of time, many of them may wish to do so.

The hon. Member for Gainsborough made three basic arguments. First, he argued that marriage is singular, unique and holy, which breaks apart the concept of civil marriage, let alone anything that is included in the Bill. His second argument was entirely fallacious, as the hon. Member for Orkney and Shetland (Mr. Carmichael) pointed out, because he contended that it is usually two siblings who live together. I have not received a single letter about the sibling issue on behalf of siblings in my constituency but, as I pointed out in an over-lengthy intervention, I have known two sets of siblings who have lived together for more than 12 years or for a large part of their lives. Three spinster second cousins of mine lived together in Aviemore for 70 years, and they made perfectly adequate provision for one another. One problem of the new clause tabled by the hon. Member for Gainsborough—it is the only proposal that we are considering, and he cannot submit amendments that suggest that three, four and five siblings should be able to live together—is that three or four siblings would have to decide which two were going to form a civil partnership, which would be profoundly more disturbing for the family relationship than the present arrangements.

Mr. Leigh *rose—*

Chris Bryant: I have enticed the hon. Member for Gainsborough.

Mr. Leigh: The hon. Gentleman is making a meal of the proposals. The provision was drafted in a certain way, and I am quite happy to extend it, either here or in the other place, to cover more than two siblings. We will do anything that he wants. It does not matter what we propose, the hon. Gentleman would still oppose it, as he knows perfectly well.

2.45 pm

Chris Bryant: And the hon. Gentleman knows perfectly well that, whatever the Government's proposals, he would not accept them. He is disingenuous in the extreme but, more importantly, he is a far more experienced Member than I am, and knows that on Report we can only debate amendments that have been tabled, and must choose whether to accept or reject them. I am just trying to point out that his amendments do not even meet his own arguments, let alone any other arguments that might be made to support them.

The hon. Gentleman's amendments create one final problem. I do not know whether he read the verbiage tabled in Standing Committee, some of which we debated and some of which did not pass muster, but he has decided to change tack slightly today. Instead of a system in which civil partnerships between same-sex couples are extended to siblings—they would have to dismantle their relationships, which would take time, and legal procedures could ruin family links between two sisters or two brothers—he has invented a wholly new concept of a relationship that is easily formed and dismantled. His argument therefore falls at the first hurdle.

Mr. Leigh: I am at fault, because I should have said at the outset that the new clause applies only to siblings who have been living together for 12 years. The provision would not apply to a casual relationship between two people who pass like ships in the night.

Chris Bryant: The casualness is in the forming of the relationship and the determination that it should be registered as a civil partnership. In the Bill, we are trying to allow homosexual couples, both male and female, to declare their commitment to one another and enter into something which, I accept, is remarkably similar to marriage in many regards. To use a phrase deployed by the hon. Member for Rutland and Melton (Mr. Duncan) on Second Reading, we are proceeding along parallel lines. It is right and proper that they are close together but, equally, it is a property of parallel lines that they do not cross.

Angela Watkinson: The hon. Gentleman seems to be arguing that the main purpose of the Bill is to recognise partnerships through civil registration. How does that affect same-sex cohabiting couples in a platonic relationship, such as two women who have shared a life together? They obviously do not have the sort of relationship that he is talking about, but they fall within the scope of the Bill. They cannot, however, avail themselves of civil registration.

Chris Bryant: I am glad to say that the secrets of our hearts are not known to everyone in the land. Many marriages in the land consecrated in church result in a remarkably platonic relationship. The couple, however, have decided that they want to declare their love for one another in public. The state should not try to ensure that those relationships are not platonic, as it is for individuals to make their own decision.

Mr. Alan Duncan: Is not the intervention by my hon. Friend the Member for Upminster (Angela Watkinson) the strongest possible argument for inheritance tax deferral for such people, over and above any argument for their inclusion in the Bill?

Chris Bryant: That is not a matter for the Bill. We could discuss at length what constitutes a platonic relationship.

David Cairns (Greenock and Inverclyde) (Lab): Do not go there.

Chris Bryant: My hon. Friend rightly warns me not to do so.

In conclusion, the hon. Member for Gainsborough, in an effort to avert the arguments against his previous amendments by trying to make a relationship that is easily dissoluble in law, has established a new set of parallel lines that have nothing to do with the Bill, and should therefore be rejected by the House.

Mr. Christopher Chope (Christchurch) (Con): Before I speak to my amendments, I congratulate my hon. Friend the Member for Gainsborough (Mr. Leigh) on the wording of new clause 1, which addresses concerns expressed on Second Reading and in Committee about the unintended consequences of the Bill, as amended in the other place. I challenge everyone who has used the anomalies in the original wording of the Bill as a smokescreen to confront the discrimination that, without my amendments or new clause 1, the Bill would embrace, as it would privilege same-sex partnerships over and above all other partnerships outside marriage. My hon. Friend's new clause extends the ability to access the privilege of legal partnership to siblings over 30 who have lived together for a continuous period of 12 years.

[Mr. Christopher Chope]

New clause 2 would replace the complicated legal structure of dissolution, nullity and separation with a much simpler system of termination similar to the approach that I argued for in Committee, which is reflected in new clause 3, which I tabled.

Miss Widdecombe: Will my hon. Friend confirm that his new clause would bring into the scope of the Bill couples of the opposite sex who are not married? Those of us who are extremely worried about the Bill because it undermines the uniqueness of marriage in favour of homosexual relationships must surely be vastly more worried by a proposal to extend its provisions to all and sundry.

Mr. Chope: I can understand that my right hon. Friend is worried about extending the Bill to all and sundry, as she puts it, but I hope that when she has listened to my argument in favour of new clause 3, she will accept its logic. In particular, she should bear in mind that the French civil solidarity pact is a registered relationship that is far inferior to marriage, and different from and looser than marriage. Nevertheless, whether partners are of the same sex or opposite sexes, they can enter into such a pact and thereby gain access to various state legal privileges. That arrangement has nothing to do with the law of God; it is purely a civil relationship. I commend it to the House in preference to the extraordinary arrangements set out in the Bill. I am grateful to my right hon. Friend for looking satisfied with my explanation.

I commend to the House the argument for extending the provisions in the Bill much further. My amendments would not limit the legal privilege of being able to apply for civil partnership as new clause 1 seeks to do. That privilege would be open to any two people over 18 in a specified relationship as set out in new schedule 1. It would be open to two unmarried and unrelated people sharing a home in an asexual relationship; an unmarried parent sharing a home with an unmarried son or daughter; two unmarried siblings sharing a home; and two unmarried and unrelated people in a sexual relationship sharing a home.

Mr. Hogg: New schedule 1 would have the bizarre effect of ensuring that inheritance tax is not chargeable in transfers between a parent and an unmarried child who registers, although it would be chargeable between a parent and a married child. That seems to turn values on their head.

Mr. Chope: My right hon. and learned Friend talks about turning values on their head, but in doing my research for this afternoon's debate, I happened to notice that he supported the Bill on civil partnerships introduced by the hon. Member for Reading, East (Jane Griffiths) in 2001. That Bill sought to give legality to civil partnerships covering both same-sex and opposite-sex relationships. I am disappointed that my right hon. and learned Friend seeks by implication to support the whole structure of inheritance tax. I would have hoped that he would, like me, be against inheritance tax and want to abolish it as soon as possible. I hope that we can agree about that.

Mr. Hogg: My hon. Friend must not do me an injustice. I am against inheritance tax and always will be. I want to see it abolished.

Mr. Chope: As soon as it is abolished, new clause 3 will no longer be the subject of any valid objection by my right hon. and learned Friend.

Charles Hendry: My hon. Friend mentioned the research that he had done in preparing for the debate. In doing that research, he will clearly have worked out how many millions of couples will benefit from the proposed package and identified its cost. Will he tell us what that cost is?

Mr. Chope: The arrangement would be open to about 4 million people. I am very disappointed by the implication of what my hon. Friend is suggesting. He seems to be saying that, if there is discrimination, there should be a limit on the price of eliminating it. I would have thought that, as a Conservative, he would be in favour of eliminating discrimination irrespective of the costs of so doing.

Miss Widdecombe: Will my hon. Friend help me through this maze with one very simple explanation? Under his new clause, what unique factors are still preserved by marriage?

Mr. Chope: The unique factors preserved by marriage are holy matrimony, permanence and all that goes with the fact that the relationship will be marriage.

Chris Bryant: Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

Mr. Chope: I shall not do so at the moment, as I want to respond to the points made by my right hon. Friend the Member for Maidstone and The Weald (Miss Widdecombe).

In France, marriage is a very strong institution. It has not been undermined one iota by the introduction into French law of the civil solidarity pact, to which I referred earlier. If one looks at new clause 2, which would effectively simplify the way in which one could enter into or break such a relationship, it becomes apparent that, far from being like marriage, this is a completely different and distinct legal relationship that is more like a contract and therefore totally unrelated to marriage. As it is distinct from marriage, it is much preferable to the complication in the Bill, which seeks to promote same-sex marriage in all but name.

Several hon. Members *rose—*

Mr. Chope: I know that lots of hon. Members want to participate in the debate, but I think that it would be better to make a bit of progress before taking any more interventions.

New clause 3 and new schedule 1 would give millions of people access to the legal privilege provided by the Bill, which the Government intend to be available only to same-sex partners. By far the largest category of people who could benefit from the new clause is unmarried and unrelated people sharing a home in a sexual relationship—in other words, cohabitees. The 2001 census found that slightly more than 4 million people lived in cohabiting relationships in England and Wales, in contrast with 78,500 living in same-sex cohabiting relationships.

About five years ago, the Law Society published recommendations for reform of the law relating to cohabitants. Those proposals gave rise to the Bill introduced by the hon. Member for Reading, East. I shall not repeat to the House the full list of the Law Society's recommendations, but I point out that a primary recommendation was:

> "Any reform of the law should provide both heterosexual and homosexual cohabitants with increased protection, while not equating the remedies available with those available for married couples".

The Law Society also said:

> "Cohabitants should have the right to apply for capital provision on separation. Applications should be determined having regard to the principle that fair account should be taken of any economic advantage derived by either party from contributions by the other, and of any economic disadvantages suffered by either party in the interests of the other party or of the family."

It went on to say:

> "Cohabitation contracts should be explicitly recognised as being enforceable subject to safeguards designed to ensure that the contract is fair when it is entered into and any major changes of circumstances can be catered for during the lifetime of the contract . . . Cohabitants should be able to opt to take advantage of pension earmarking and, in future, sharing on separation . . . Changes should be made to the law on life assurance to provide that cohabitants have an insurable interest in the life of their partners and that a cohabitant should be able to take out a life insurance policy on his or her own life for the benefit of a partner."

It was against that background that the hon. Member for Reading, East introduced her Relationships (Civil Registration) Bill in October 2001. That Bill was supported by the hon. Member for Orkney and Shetland (Mr. Carmichael), who has spoken today in terms that would make it difficult for an objective observer to see how it was consistent to support that Bill and oppose the amendments before us. As I said, my right hon. and learned Friend the Member for Sleaford and North Hykeham (Mr. Hogg) also supported that Bill.

Why did people support the Relationships (Civil Registration) Bill? They did so largely because of some of the cases identified by the hon. Member for Reading, East in her speech. I shall not repeat the whole of that speech, but I want to refer to a particular case that is pertinent to what we are discussing. She told the House about her constituent, Rose Green:

> "She had lived with John . . . for more than 12 years; they were engaged but they had never married—they never got around to it. They loved each other and saw no reason to change their situation. They expected to spend the rest of their lives together, but . . . last year John . . . died tragically and suddenly from a brain haemorrhage. That is when Rose found out that people who live together have no rights or responsibilities towards each other. She was not allowed to register John's death."

Hon. Members who are concerned about same-sex partnerships have made that point.

> "She was not allowed to sign for his funeral. She even had to get his family's permission to make an entry in the book of remembrance."—[*Official Report*, 24 October 2001; Vol. 373, c. 321.]

The hon. Member for Reading, East introduced her Bill against that background, so that people such as Rose and John, who lived together, can have the same rights and responsibilities as others.

3 pm

Mr. Borrow: The case that my hon. Friend the Member for Reading, East (Jane Griffiths) raised in the House a few years ago was tragic, but does the hon. Gentleman think it likely that that couple would have registered their civil partnership, given that they never got round to marriage?

Mr. Chope: Such couples should be given the choice. New clause 3 would introduce a much simpler system of registration, akin to that that prevails in France. People would be able to enter that system of registration, knowing that it would commit them not to a lifetime, permanent relationship, but to a relationship for the time being, which would be completely different from marriage, but which would bring certain legal privileges provided by the state. That is the essence of the argument. I know that the hon. Member for South Ribble (Mr. Borrow) believes only in marriage—on Second Reading, he courageously said that he wants to enter into a firm, lifetime, permanent partnership following the enactment of the legislation—but many other people in both same-sex and other-sex couples do not want to embrace long-term commitment.

Mr. Hogg: Is there not a public interest point? If my hon. Friend's new clause carried the day, people who did not intend to make a lifetime relationship could register a partnership, from which huge legal consequences concerning, for example, pensions would flow. Is it right that such an entitlement should be attached to a relationship that is not intended to be long lasting?

Mr. Chope: It is right, and the Solicitors Family Law Association thinks so too, which is why it proposed a new cohabitation law, separate and distinct from matrimonial law. That proposal was not introduced by casual people writing on the backs of envelopes; it was introduced by a body of some 5,000 solicitors, who are specialists in dealing with the breakdown of families, both married and unmarried.

The Solicitors Family Law Association sought to get Parliament to address how things have changed so radically over the years. In the late 1950s, which, like me, you may remember, Mr. Deputy Speaker, just 2 per cent. of women reported that they had lived with their first husband prior to marriage. By the 1960s, 25 per cent. of women had cohabited prior to marriage. By the mid-1990s, the figure had risen to 77 per cent., and it is probably even higher now. Social mores have changed, and Parliament must catch up. The proposal introduced by the Law Society and the hon. Member for Reading, East was designed to change the law to reflect the changing world.

Charles Hendry: Choice is the essence of new clause 3. My hon. Friend is discussing a man and a woman, who can choose whether or not to get married in either a holy ceremony or a civil ceremony, and who know that benefits will accrue from that choice. However, the Bill is about people who do not have that choice because they are in a same-sex relationship, which is why new clause 3 is fundamentally inappropriate.

Mr. Chope: My hon. Friend has deployed those arguments before, but he fails to recognise that we should widen choice. People could opt into civil partnerships, but they would not have to do so and it would not be compulsory. New clause 3 would give people who want to register a cohabiting relationship short of marriage fresh and wider choice. Some 4 million people are already involved in such relationships.

I understand that my hon. Friend the Member for Wealden (Charles Hendry) is active in campaigning for the Conservative case among young people. He will know that more than half of people in cohabiting relationships are aged between 20 and 35. If Parliament and, in particular, the Conservative party are to be relevant to people in that age group, there is a strong case for enabling—not forcing—those people to register their partnership, and thereby obtain access to legal privilege in same way as their counterparts in France. Why should we not do so? It would widen choice, freedom and responsibility.

Mr. Kevin McNamara (Hull, North) (Lab): I am grateful to the hon. Gentleman for giving way, because he is being generous with his time. May I postulate another case? What would happen if one of the parties wanted to get married or enter into a cohabitation arrangement and the other party did not? In that case, the "innocent" party would be unable to take advantage of either marriage or a cohabitation agreement. What rights would they have, and what rights would their children have?

Mr. Chope: Neither the hon. Gentleman nor anyone else involved in the debate has come up with a solution on unilateral marriage or unilateral partnerships, which the hon. Gentleman seems to be discussing. Perhaps he can come up with a formula that will find favour with the Administration. I am not discussing unilateral relationships or partnerships.

Mr. McNamara: I am not discussing unilateral relationships; I am discussing bilateral relationships in which one of the parties is not prepared to go the whole way, but the relationship has existed for 15 or 20 years—I know people in such circumstances. If the Bill grants people the right merely to register their interest, is it not unfair that a person who is unable to register such an interest because the other party is unwilling to do so should therefore suffer detriment?

Mr. Chope: I understand the hon. Gentleman's point, but the essence of the matter is agreement. Agreement is the basis for marriage, partnership or the French alternative, a civil solidarity pact.

If we are bringing ourselves up to date as a modernising Parliament, let us reflect the changing approach to children born outside marriage. Before my mother produced me, neighbours living close to our home in Kent counted out the months between when my parents got married and when I was born—the gap was 11 months, which was legitimate. In the past 20 years, however, the proportion of births registered outside marriage has risen from 10 per cent. to more than 40 per cent., and more than half of those births are registered by unmarried parents with the same address. For the sake of their children and themselves, such people may want to take advantage of the new registration system in my new clause.

Chris Bryant: The incomprehensible part of the hon. Gentleman's argument is why people who are so committed to each other that they are prepared to have children, but who have decided not to get married, should suddenly decide to form a civil partnership.

Mr. Chope: Such people may regard marriage as a permanent, lifetime commitment that they do not have the self-confidence to make. However, they may want to make a commitment which may last a lifetime, but which can be broken much more easily than marriage.

Chris Bryant: Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

Mr. Chope: I will not give way again, because I am in danger of using far too much time in this time-limited debate. It is appropriate to remind hon. Members that the tight guillotine imposed by the Government prevented us from debating 118 clauses in Committee.

We were unable to debate a host of Government amendments and debated only six of the 29 schedules. In view of the limited amount of time that the Government have given us today, it would be over-indulgent for one hon. Member to take more than a fair share of it. [HON. MEMBERS: "Hear, hear."] I am glad that that wins support from other hon. Members.

Let us remind ourselves of one particular group of people—those who are living together with a view to getting married. They may, for example, be waiting to get married at Christchurch priory, which is such a wonderful venue that it is sometimes necessary to book more than a year in advance in order to be able to do so. Why should those people be unable to register their relationship in a civil way so as to protect themselves in the event of one of them suffering an untimely death prior to the marriage? Hosts of people nowadays are separated or divorced and do not wish to enter into another marriage but would like to have the opportunity to register a relationship that is short of marriage.

Extraordinarily, in 2001–02, 57 per cent. of the population believed that there was something called common law marriage that gives cohabiting couples the same rights as married couples. That implies that those people would like to have such rights although they do not have them at the moment. The Government's response is to say, "Well, let's have a big education and propaganda campaign." My response, as a free marketeer, is to say, "Let's widen the choice—let's introduce a new partnership that people can opt into if they want to." That is exactly what has happened in the past. If we look in the history books, we see that the Marriage Act 1753 was introduced to deal with changing arrangements that Parliament thought should be reflected in changes to the law.

I want to refer to some of the other amendments that stand in my name. Amendments Nos. 12 and 13 would remove the restriction on civil partners having to be of the same sex. Amendments Nos. 17 and 18 would enable a partnership to be automatically terminated or dissolved by the subsequent marriage of one of the partners. That is a very important point that we debated briefly in Committee. One of the parties to a same-sex partnership may wish to enter into holy matrimony and should have the right to break the partnership in order to marry. That is not a new idea—it already happens in the jurisdiction of Portugal—and it is unconscionable that this House should legislate to prevent it from happening.

Amendments Nos. 14 and 16 would alter the rules on eligibility to reflect new clause 3 and new schedule 1. I want to say a few words about amendments Nos. 19 and 20, which would put recognition of all overseas civil partnerships on an equal footing. I hope that my right hon. and learned Friend the Member for Sleaford and North Hykeham will agree with me about this. In France, cohabitees of the opposite sex or the same sex can enter into a civil solidarity pact, yet clauses 212 and 215 provide that partners in a French civil solidarity pact who are registered as such will have their partnership recognised in English law only if they are of the same sex. That would necessitate investigations into whether the partnership was between same-sex or opposite-sex couples. That is highly discriminatory. Why should we not be prepared to recognise foreign civil partnerships, whether of the same sex or the opposite sex? I beg to suggest that that is in fundamental breach of human rights and freedoms and should be addressed, if not by the Government's acceptance of my amendments, then by the other place.

At the moment, the Bill creates a legal minefield. It is discriminatory in nature. It is effectively a same-sex partnership Bill, but the Government do not have the guts to call it such. It therefore offers scope for the acceptance of the amendments, which would ensure that it is no longer a same-sex partnership Bill but a much wider partnership Bill.

3.15 pm

Mr. Bercow: I have never previously viewed my hon. Friend the Member for Christchurch (Mr. Chope) as a moderniser, born-again or otherwise. He has presented himself in a new guise this afternoon, and I sought attentively to listen to and to take account of his arguments. I confess that, just as on Second Reading and in Standing Committee, I found those arguments unpersuasive.

Let me begin with my hon. Friend's amendment on extending the right of civil partnership to heterosexual couples. It is fair to observe, though I accept that it does not of itself undermine his argument, that there appears to be something of a split on this matter between different strands of the traditionalist view among Conservative Members. As I understand it, my right hon. Friend the Member for Maidstone and The Weald (Miss Widdecombe) and my hon. Friend the Member for Gainsborough (Mr. Leigh) are against the extension of that right to heterosexual couples. I think that my hon. Friend the Member for Christchurch, who is against the Bill, would admit that that would not have been his original preference.

What I tried unavailingly to elicit from my hon. Friend in Committee, and would try to extract from him now, is an explanation of what so far has not been explained—at any rate, not to me. How is it that, as my hon. Friend contends, civil partnership rights for gay couples undermine marriage, but civil partnership rights for heterosexual couples, for whom the option of marriage is available, do not? That strikes me as such an extraordinary argument that it requires explanation.

Mr. Chope: Will my hon. Friend give way?

Mr. Bercow: I was about to be helpful to my hon. Friend, but if he wants to help himself, I am obliged to him.

Mr. Chope: If my hon. Friend has listened to my speech he will know that I have not once deployed the argument about undermining marriage; I should like to establish a different system other than marriage that people can opt into if they want to.

Mr. Bercow: This seems to be a moveable feast. I had thought that I was listening closely to my hon. Friend's remarks. I am not able to regurgitate the full contents of his speech on Second Reading or to remember verbatim what he said in Standing Committee, but I do recall, because the argument was advanced so forcefully and frequently, his view that the Bill, in conferring these rights on gay couples, would undermine marriage. It therefore seems reasonable to ask him how it is that conferring similar rights on heterosexual couples who, unlike gay couples, can marry, would not undermine marriage.

I have observed before that the late Enoch Powell, a man with whom I agreed on some things and disagreed on a great many others, often used to say that such and such a point was so blindingly obvious that only an extraordinarily clever person could fail to grasp it. This point is so blindingly obvious that I cannot understand why my hon. Friend cannot grasp it. I have put it to my hon. Friend the Member for Aldershot (Mr. Howarth) before.

Mr. McNamara: Will the hon. Gentleman rephrase his comments and refer to heterosexual couples who "may be" able to marry?

Mr. Bercow: Yes, I am prepared to amend my position. I am grateful to the hon. Gentleman for that clarification. In most cases that the amendment would affect, the heterosexual couples could marry but I accept that there are some circumstances in which they could not. I am therefore grateful to the hon. Gentleman for clarifying and improving my argument.

I said that I was prepared to go a stage further than simply objecting to the illogicality of the argument of my hon. Friend the Member for Christchurch. I am prepared to nail my colours to the mast. After reflection and on balance—I do not feel passionately strongly about the matter—I believe that extending civil partnership rights to heterosexual couples would probably undermine marriage. I say "probably" but I am not sure whether it would have that effect. I am simply sensitive to the possibility. That would be undesirable.

[Mr. Bercow]

As my hon. Friend said, several people who introduced Bills on civil partnership rights in the past suggested that they should apply to both categories of person. However, it is equally true that in many examples from around the world, the entitlement exists only for same-sex couples. I believe that it is better to stick with the Bill rather than take a risk that is probably greater than any benefit that it might confer.

I want to deal briefly with tax, which featured prominently in the exchanges between my hon. Friend the Member for Gainsborough and my right hon. and learned Friend the Member for Sleaford and North Hykeham (Mr. Hogg), and in exchanges between my hon. Friend the Member for Christchurch and several hon. Members. The Bill is not principally about tax. It potentially includes tax implications for future Finance Bills but it is not mainly about that. It is about recognising relationships. It was a weakness in the passionately and sincerely argued case of my hon. Friend the Member for Gainsborough that he was unable to explain why, if the injustice against siblings was as fundamental as he claimed, he had not previously argued for it to be remedied through legislation.

My hon. Friend and others who share his view are perfectly free to argue for inheritance tax relief or, indeed, abolition, if they wish. For the avoidance of doubt and because I do not want to be outdone by my right hon. and learned Friend the Member for Sleaford and North Hykeham, I make it clear that, philosophically, I am sympathetic to the abolition of inheritance tax, but with two caveats. First, it should not be a top priority for Conservative Members given the limited public resources that might be available for tax relief.

Secondly, not only should it not be a top priority for Conservatives against other and better competing claims, but we must be realistic. My hon. Friend the Member for Gainsborough talked about living in the real world and dealing with circumstances as they exist. We must acknowledge that, however much we dislike the fact, at the moment—hopefully not for much longer—there is a Labour Government, who have rather a large majority. If inheritance tax relief is not a high priority for some Conservatives, it is no priority for the Labour Government. We cannot realistically cavil at that. We are therefore left with dealing with the Bill as it is.

It seems wrong to superimpose on the architecture of civil partnership, which is aimed at and will benefit people who cannot marry, an arrangement exclusively for the benefit of siblings or heterosexual partners who could get married. The Bill is not about tax. If we want to propose a tax measure, let us do that in a tax Bill. It is a deeply regulatory approach—the adoption of a sledgehammer to crack a nut—for a Conservative Member to try to create an architecture of civil partnership for people who could marry and enjoy all the benefits of marriage when the Bill is a narrower measure, aimed at an identifiable group of people who suffer exclusively from one disadvantage: that because of their orientation, they cannot marry.

Mr. McNamara: Will the hon. Gentleman change "could" to "may be able" to get married?

Mr. Bercow: I thought that I had explained that I accepted the hon. Gentleman's central point that, although in most cases the people to whom I refer could get married, a proportion are not in a position to do so. Those who are keenly interested in the debate would not thank us for being excessively pedantic when we know the broad issues, underlying principles and legal, financial and other consequences of the Bill.

Mr. Desmond Swayne (New Forest, West) (Con): Given that many of us have received forceful representations from heterosexual couples who want to avail themselves of the benefits of the new relationship, the Bill is a perfectly logical vehicle for trying to secure such an amendment. Telling people that they can get married is an argument that a clergyman might put to them, but not a politician. They do not want to get married. It is their choice not to get married. We are told that the measure is not a marriage Bill and we are therefore perfectly entitled to try to secure the sort of amendment that we propose.

Mr. Bercow: That does not work, because my hon. Friend believes that the Bill will damage marriage as an institution through creating civil partnership entitlements. *[Interruption.]* If he believes that marriage will be damaged by conferring civil partnership rights on gay couples, it is thoroughly illogical of him to suggest that marriage would not be undermined by giving the new rights to people who could avail themselves of the opportunity to get married in a way that gay couples could not. *[Interruption.]* My hon. Friend is champing at the bit.

Mr. Swayne: I have taken Ministers at their word. They say that it is not a marriage Bill and I accept that. I do not believe that the Bill damages marriage any more than I believe that extending the relationship to those who are not married will damage it. A growing proportion of our constituents are choosing to live in that way. If we ignore that reality, we shall undermine the stability of the social fabric. The arrangements should be extended to the growing proportion of our constituents who want and demand them.

Mr. Bercow: I am interested in my hon. Friend's comments. He referred to the growing proportion of our constituents who want and demand the arrangements. Let us be clear. I do not know how many representations, written or otherwise, hon. Members have received about the Bill. I have received a substantial number from gay couples who feel that they are not only invisible, as the Government often say, but almost non-existent in the eyes of the law. In the past 12 months since the Bill was mentioned in the Queen's Speech, I have not received a single letter from a constituent in a heterosexual relationship demanding that the Bill be extended for his or her benefit. I have not received one such representation.

My hon. Friend the Member for New Forest, West (Mr. Swayne) is entirely correct to say that cohabitation is growing, and that more and more people voluntarily choose that arrangement for their life. It is not, however, correct to say that there is a great clamour to extend the Bill in this way. It is a combination of that fact and my genuine concern that these measures could undermine the institution of marriage—which my hon. Friend and I, in our different ways, both cherish—that causes me to oppose the amendment tabled by my hon. Friend the Member for Christchurch.

The argument against extending these rights to siblings has been eloquently developed by a number of my colleagues. I have sought, in my humble fashion—or as near to humble as I am able to muster—to develop the arguments against the amendments, both on Second Reading and in Committee. I do not feel it necessary to dilate now. I should simply like to make two other points.

First, there is a cost issue involved, and I do not think that it is good enough for my hon. Friends the Members for Gainsborough and for Christchurch simply to brush aside the cost considerations. Many of us genuinely disagree with my hon. Friends on the issue of principle, but, given that there are all sorts of arguments that colleagues have rightly used in pressing their case, it is reasonable for us, whether we agree with the principle or not—I do not—to say, "What about the cost implications?" I have always regarded my hon. Friend the Member for Christchurch as a very model of fiscal probity. If, in fact, I were now to discover that he was the spendthrift of Christchurch, it would be perfectly reasonable for me to factor that into the equation and to use it as a criticism of his argument.

Mr. Gerald Howarth: I am sorry, but I cannot quite remember exactly how much the Bill will cost, in terms of public money, if it goes through without these amendments. I am sure that my hon. Friend, with his fantastic, encyclopaedic knowledge, will be able to remind us of the figure.

Mr. Bercow: Off the top of my head, I cannot. I heard my hon. Friend the Member for Aldershot (Mr. Howarth) chuntering to some other hon. Friends about this a few minutes ago. I know that he was, perfectly reasonably, considering saving that rather juicy intervention for the hon. Member for Wallasey (Angela Eagle). The hon. Lady managed to escape my hon. Friend's intervention, however, so I have been subjected to it instead. My honest answer is that, on this occasion, my hon. Friend has checkmated me. I do not know exactly, but, if I remember rightly, the figure is in the tens of millions. The Government have very fairly explained in the regulatory impact assessment what the cost of the Bill will be, and it is a relatively small cost. I happen to believe that it is a justifiable cost, and I do not think it right that we should substantially extend that cost, at a time of limited resources, by seeking to inject these provisions into a Bill to which they are not suited.

Finally, I want to deal with the question of whether this is about marriage. My hon. Friend the Member for Rutland and Melton (Mr. Duncan) made the point extremely effectively on Second Reading about civil partnership developing along parallel lines to marriage. The Deputy Minister for Women and Equality, the right hon. Member for Redditch (Jacqui Smith) stressed very openly—on Second Reading, I think, and certainly in Committee—that the Government's objective was to try to ensure that the provisions in the Bill corresponded as closely as possible to the procedures and entitlements of civil marriage, although not of holy matrimony. The question of whether a civil partnership is a marriage or not is therefore largely irrelevant.

We are seeking to provide to people who cannot marry arrangements that do not disadvantage them. That is why I am inclined to say that the arrangements in the Bill for civil registration for gay couples are analogous to, but not the same as or indistinguishable from, civil marriage. That seems to be a perfectly respectable position.

The Bill, in its original form, was a good Bill. It will command widespread support, and I do not think that it should be interfered with in the way that some Members want. In rejecting the amendments that my hon. Friends the Members for Aldershot and for Christchurch have perfectly honourably tabled, and to which they are speaking, I want to leave them with this simple thought; we cannot have it both ways when addressing the issue of civil partnership and the rights of gay people—*[Interruption.]* Let me try to develop a point that is important to me. Members cannot complain that gay partnerships are inherently transitory and unstable, and yet, when the opportunity for civil registration comes along—giving people the chance to declare their commitment, with the welter of rights and responsibilities that flow from that commitment—say that those people should not have that right to declare their commitment.

This is an opportunity to give substance, body and rigour to a new arrangement. I would like to suggest to my right hon. and hon. Friends that that arrangement is philosophically defensible from several different perspectives. I am perfectly prepared to accept that an argument can be made for the arrangement that is fully conversant with socialist principles. Similarly, I accept that the hon. Member for Orkney and Shetland (Mr. Carmichael) can make an argument for civil partnership and ground it in Liberal philosophy. I know that some of my right hon. and hon. Friends disagree with me, but I passionately believe that the principles of civil partnership for gay couples are eminently defensible in and can be expressed as part of Conservative philosophy. If we took a sensible and forward-looking approach, there would be nothing to stop a commitment to civil partnership rights in a Conservative manifesto.

3.30 pm

My right hon. and learned Friend the Leader of the Opposition sensibly allowed us a free vote on the Bill instead of stopping Conservatives voting for it. I was inspired when in February this year, in a speech to Policy Exchange, my right hon. and learned Friend said that he himself would vote for this Bill. I was even more encouraged when he made it clear that although he recognised some of the grievances that siblings and others might have, he judged that the amendments in the other place, which are favoured by some of my hon. Friends in this place, were not appropriate to the

[Mr. Bercow]

architecture of this Bill. As usual—although, I admit, not as always—I am strongly in agreement with my right hon. and learned Friend.

Mr. Alan Duncan: I know that some of my right hon. and hon. Friends may still wish to speak, and I do not want to stand in their way, but it might be helpful, at this stage of our interesting exchange, for me to comment on this group of amendments.

I find myself addressing the amendments with a sort of haunting inevitability—those of us who have followed the Bill through all its legislative stages so far will know what I mean, and may share my profound sense of déjà vu—because we have debated amendments of a similar or identical nature at every stage of the Bill. At every stage, in my opinion, the arguments against them have been overwhelming. None the less, for the benefit of Members who have not heard all our proceedings, it may be useful for me to rehearse the arguments once again, and to assist those who have to some extent been misled by assertions made in newspaper stories and advertisements that appeared in our press today. Perhaps I can say, "Here we go again," and some Members may be able to join in at the chorus. *[Laughter.]*

We are told that the motivation for tabling the amendments, as we were told in another place when amendments were tabled there, is to address the grievances of elderly siblings or carers who share a house and are stung by inheritance tax when the person with whom they live dies. It is indeed profoundly unfair that people who cohabit in this way are disadvantaged on the death of the other, by being forced out of their home or subjected to crippling inheritance tax so late in life. It is absolutely right to raise those issues, and in doing so the plight of those who are disadvantaged in this way was drawn to the attention of a wider audience. We have made an issue out of a concern that was not widely known about previously, but which genuinely exists. That has resulted in the Government's promising to take further action to address those issues, and we intend to hold them to that.

Let me remind the House that the Minister of State in the Home Office, Baroness Scotland, said in Grand Committee in another place:

> "I shall certainly undertake . . . to give the House the more mature reflection of the Government in relation to how to respond to that issue . . . these issues have percolated to the top of the discussions on a number of occasions. They are issues with which the Government have grappled and they will . . . continue to do so."—*[Official Report, House of Lords,* 10 May 2004; Vol. 661, c. GC 31.]

But we continued to press for the result of that grappling to be made clear, and we will continue to do so. In Committee, the Deputy Minister for Women and Equality herself said:

> "We are aware of the concerns, particularly of carers, but we do not believe that close family members need legal recognition as civil partners to make sense of their family arrangements. They are already related."—*[Official Report, Standing Committee D,* 19 October 2004; c. 12.]

That is quite so. And as my right hon. and learned Friend the Leader of the Opposition has said in a letter to colleagues, and to others who have written to him, to which reference has been made this afternoon:

> "If two sisters were to register their partnership, they would have to pool all their assets. If, later on, one of them wanted to get married, the only way they would be able to terminate this partnership would be through complicated legal proceedings"

—that is, through dissolution.

I admit that in the new clause my hon. Friend the Member for Gainsborough (Mr. Leigh) makes the dissolution easier, but that does two things. It dilutes the quality and extent of the commitment that civil partnerships are designed to entail, and it introduces a separate regime for, in some respects, similar sets of people. It therefore introduces a new scale of discrimination that did not previously exist. Rather than addressing a problem of discrimination, the new clause compounds it.

As others have said today, the complications do not end there. What if three of more siblings shared a house? What if two did and one did not? How would they decide which two would form a civil partnership, and what the effects would be? What if someone in a civil partnership with an elderly relative wanted to marry, and wanted to move in the prospective spouse to share the burden of caring? In such circumstances, they would be barred from marrying until the civil partnership had been dissolved in court. If, as would apply under another amendment, dissolution were automatic, that too would dilute the nature of the commitment intended in a civil partnership.

The partners would face the prospect of embarking on a complex legal process to prove irretrievable breakdown. That might be more difficult in the case of a mother than in that of a mother-in-law, but in any event it would be required. Alternatively, they would be accused of living in sin under the roof of the family home—or they would have to live in sin under the roof of the family home, and what would the Christian Institute say about that?

Peter Bottomley (Worthing, West) (Con): I think that most Members with no prejudices in either direction will have understood some of the arguments, including those of my hon. Friend. The fact is, however, that a significant proportion of marriages involve such problems, and they are not an argument against a Marriage Act. What we are doing is extending some rights to some people outside marriage—those who cannot marry.

The question that occurs to some of us is, "Why must we exclude people who might properly receive the benefits that follow from civil partnership?" Nothing that has been said on either side of the House strikes me as conclusive. I feel that it is taking the argument too far to cite the difficulties of dissolution when the same difficulties do not prevent us from getting married.

Mr. Duncan: The answer to that is that there are concerns to be addressed, but this is not the place in which to address them.

The new clauses and amendments wreck the Bill by creating partnerships within an existing family which, in their confused and contradictory interrelationship, are utterly unworkable. My right hon. and learned Friend the Member for Sleaford and North Hykeham (Mr. Hogg) gave a very good example when he cited the complications to the inheritance tax regime. The new clauses and amendments are an ingenious disruption masquerading as a genuine attempt to help people whom they would not, in fact, help. The associations that my hon. Friend the Member for Gainsborough wishes to protect—as do I—could, as he admitted, be included in a Finance Bill. They are not addressed by this Bill, for a very simple reason that no one has mentioned today.

The Bill cannot come into practical effect until there is an accompanying Finance Bill to implement all the measures. That is the place for all the arguments that have been deployed by my hon. Friends today. They do not fit in this particular piece of primary legislation.

Mr. McNamara: Is the hon. Gentleman not aware that the last Finance Act contained paving measures for this Bill?

Mr. Duncan: No. I argued for that on Second Reading. I would have liked the financial measures to coincide with Royal Assent for the Bill, but because this Bill did not exist, I was told that it was not possible to include such measures in the Finance Bill. If my interpretation is wrong, I am sure that the Minister will clarify the matter.

Mr. McNamara: Will the hon. Gentleman give way again?

Mr. Duncan: I hope the hon. Gentleman will forgive me if I do not.

3.45 pm

Other groups have also recognised that this is not the right way to address these issues, and they have said so on many occasions. As we have been told three or four times in this Chamber and in Committee, the Carers National Association, which purportedly would benefit from the new clauses and amendments being moved by my right hon. and hon. Friends, has stated its opposition to such provisions. It says:

> "We foresee many potential negative impacts on the cared for person and the carer with the amendments to the Bill . . . The changes could have a devastating impact on the income of the carer and the person for whom they care".

So all the apparently good motives supposedly contained in the Bill stand to have a "devastating" effect on the people whom they pretend to assist. That is not the kind of purpose that we in this House properly serve.

But there are many other anomalies—

Mr. Leigh: But such an arrangement would be voluntary.

Mr. Duncan: But if it can almost never work and it would not introduce a system that has parity of effect across the sector that my hon. Friend is trying to help, even more anomalies would be introduced than the ones I have listed, thereby making matters even more complicated. As a result, there would be carers who need help but who cannot benefit from the status of the law, and those who can. A myriad complications and discriminations would render many a carer far worse off than equivalent carers who would be equally deserving.

Mr. Bercow: My hon. Friend must not be too generous with my hon. Friend the Member for Gainsborough (Mr. Leigh), because although, as he just said, the arrangement would be voluntary, it would be chronic if we in this House deliberately—or even inadvertently—misled people into thinking that they were going to get a benefit that in fact would prove not at all workable.

Mr. Duncan: My hon. Friend is absolutely right. Although the new clauses and amendments have the potential to help some people, in my view they would wreck the Bill and introduce no end of problems; moreover, they would be only symbolic in their effect and cause many more problems than they address.

Mr. Gerald Howarth: Will my hon. Friend give way?

Mr. Duncan: Once again, my generosity overtakes me.

Mr. Howarth: I am most grateful to my hon. Friend for his typical generosity. He has repeated the assertion, made by the hon. Member for Wallasey (Angela Eagle), that the new clause would wreck the Bill. However, it is very narrowly defined and if passed, in its simplicity and clarity—even given the problems that he foresees—it nevertheless would not wreck the Bill's central purpose, which he appears to support.

Mr. Duncan: I remember a little homily that Lord Lawson offered when he was Chancellor of the Exchequer. When once urged to simplify the taxation system, he said that the problem is that as soon as one tries to do so, one invariably makes it more complicated. Those responsible for this supposedly simple group of new clauses and amendments could benefit from listening to that homily. These measures would not make things simpler; they are straightforward, but with potentially devastating and complicated implications.

Many other anomalies and absurd unintended consequences arising from trying to shoehorn these measures into the Bill would also make it utterly unworkable. What is needed are measures to offer inheritance tax deferral to anyone who finds themselves in the situation described emotively in this morning's Christian Institute advertisement. The place for securing inheritance tax deferral is—we say it again—in a Finance Bill, not a Civil Partnership Bill, as my hon. Friend the Member for Gainsborough essentially admitted earlier. We do indeed have the opportunity to include such an amendment to the Finance Bill that will be required to accompany the Bill before us. Indeed, that is the approach endorsed by my right hon. and learned Friend the Leader of the Opposition, who supported the action that we took in Committee to reverse amendments made in another place. I make no apology for repeating what he said in a letter to colleagues and to those who wrote to him:

> "I therefore think it better to return the Bill to its original form and fight vigorously for provisions to be included in a Finance Bill which would remedy the unfair disadvantages which affect them. This is what we shall do our best to achieve in the House of Commons during the passage of the next Finance Bill."

[Mr. Duncan]

That will be a glorious moment, because there is nothing that I would enjoy more than to be able to work in harmony, unity and unison with all my right hon. and hon. Friends in the manner best suited to dealing with the problem.

Mr. Chope *rose—*

Mr. Duncan: I still live in hope.

Mr. Chope: Will my hon. Friend let us know whether the commitment given by our right hon. and learned Friend extends to people who are cohabiting? Surely it is important for them to be included in it.

Mr. Duncan: In my personal opinion, rather than an official party position, I hope not, and for the very reason that my hon. Friend the Member for Christchurch (Mr. Chope) of all people should most understand—that it would undermine the institution of marriage. I believe that provisions should not be placed in a finance Bill to deal with that category of people.

David Cairns: When the hon. Gentleman forms his broad coalition to fight for inheritance tax reform, does he expect the Christian Institute to argue that cohabiting couples should receive the relief and not just married couples?

Mr. Duncan: The hon. Gentleman hits on the absurd contradiction contained in any argument for that position. It is certainly my view—we have been consistent in it throughout the Bill's passage—that we should not do anything to undermine the institution of marriage, and setting up a system of competing civil partnerships alongside heterosexual marriage would do exactly that. When it comes to setting up such arrangements for same-sex couples, I have argued that we are not exactly fishing in the same pool.

Both my party leader and I believe that amending a Finance Bill to allow inheritance tax deferral on certain terms is a sensible approach, and I hope that my hon. Friends will support it. I am sure that they will, when the moment comes. During the passage of the Bill, this important issue has been brought to wider attention; the Government have made some commitments to dealing with it, though not as firmly as we would like; and the leader of the Conservative party has committed us to fight for such a measure as a matter of policy. As far as I am concerned, that is not a bad result all round, though I would like to see it brought to a conclusion.

Charles Hendry: This afternoon's debate has focused heavily on the financial aspects such as inheritance tax, the transfer of housing rights and pension rights, but does my hon. Friend accept that a large part of the Bill deals with very different issues that uniquely affect same-sex couples and do not apply to siblings? I am thinking, for example, of the rights of next of kin, visiting rights in hospitals, the right to take decisions about a deceased partner and what subsequently happens to the estate and so forth. We should be focusing on those issues, but some of the other amendments have highlighted the fact that the Bill is not the most appropriate vehicle to deal with all of them.

Mr. Duncan: I totally agree with my hon. Friend, and I am happy openly to reassert that the fundamental assumption of the Bill is that a partnership is based on a permanent and loving relationship. As such, it is different in respect of the affection between a sister and brother or two sisters and two brothers, and it is also different because the arrangements apply to a different group of people from those in the established traditional institution of marriage.

Mr. Swayne: Before my hon. Friend moves on, will he deal with the point that was forcefully made earlier—that cohabiting couples deserve the same protection as those who are married? My hon. Friend's answer is that they can get married, but they may not want to get married. It seems to me that telling those people that they should get married is to preach at them and to fly in the face of reality.

Mr. Duncan: My hon. Friend is going through logical contortions here. It is not preaching at people. It is perhaps others who preach by saying that, because they are cohabiting, they should get married. I am not saying that and neither are most hon. Members. What we are saying is that, given that those people have the option of marriage and can quite readily secure all the rights that are currently given to same-sex couples in the Bill, they should not also be afforded the right to civil partnership. After all, they may be less inclined to enter into a civil partnership just to secure those rights than they would be to enter into marriage. As has been noted time and again, if there existed a parallel and equivalent institution—civil partnership—that was an alternative to heterosexual marriage, that would be in competition with marriage and would undermine it. It is strange that my hon. Friend the Member for New Forest, West (Mr. Swayne) and I appear to be on opposite sides of this argument, when one might expect him to agree with me that we should do everything possible to protect the traditional institution of marriage.

Peter Bottomley: It has been established that the amendment would not undermine the purpose of the Bill, but I want to propose to my hon. Friend the example of people who may live together between the ages of, say, 60 to 100. Such people might be an elderly surviving orphan and a housekeeper, for example. If they are of the same sex, they may enter into a civil partnership, but they cannot do so if they are not of the same sex. Why is the partnership available to people of the same sex who want to live together in a loving but non-sexual relationship, but not to people of different sexes?

Mr. Duncan: I am not sure that I quite understand what my hon. Friend means. Two people living together have the option of marriage, and it is possible that the Finance Bill will contain a provision to defer inheritance tax, thus overcoming the main problem that we are trying to address.

I shall explain why I was rather disappointed when I saw these amendments appear again, and when I saw this morning's media coverage and advertisements.

After all the debates that we have had on this issue, no one with any interest in it can be left in any doubt about the effect that the amendments would have. The Bill would be undermined, and I argue that the amendments would wreck it.

Mr. Leigh: Why?

Mr. Duncan: I have explained that about a million times. In wrecking the Bill, the amendments would do no one any good—least of all those whom the amendments are claimed to help.

Let us examine the Christian Institute advertisement. It states that 84 per cent. of people say yes to the assertion that if gay couples—and there is an insinuation in that that I do not particularly like, but I shall take it at face value—are to get new house-sharing rights, then so should two sisters who have lived together for 12 years or more. I agree that such people should be assisted, as the advertisement asks. In fact, I do not understand why only 84 per cent. of people were reported to agree with that proposition: why is it not 100 per cent?

As I have just said, we support the provision of inheritance tax measures to ensure that such couples are treated more fairly. However, this Bill is not the appropriate vehicle for that. That is a separate issue and it deserves separate attention in the Finance Bill.

We cannot choose to deal with one set of injustices in preference to another. Respect is not a zero-sum game, and neither is love. We do not weaken one loving relationship by affording recognition to another. *[Interruption.]* What is wrong and defensive in the argument advanced by the Christian Institute and others is the apparent suggestion that advancing the rights of what it calls ordinary families requires the condemnation of gay couples and the denial of rights to them. We are getting into a rather undesirable and potentially unpleasant situation when our debates as legislators begin to be swayed by moral lobbying and advertisements from religious pressure groups. Of course, they may choose to condemn homosexuality on the basis of their religious beliefs. We can either agree or disagree with that, but they do not have the right to insist that those beliefs be written into the laws of this country.

The potential effects of that approach are obvious. Once we translate our prejudices from the realm of private belief —

Mr. Gerald Howarth: Will my hon. Friend give way?

Mr. Duncan: I may address this matter on Third Reading, if I am allowed, but we shall wait and see.

Mr. Howarth: My hon. Friend is at risk of going down a really dangerous avenue if he is suggesting that the Christian Institute is not entitled to express what is a mainstream Christian point of view. It may not be universally held, but it is certainly in the mainstream. His approach is all the more dangerous because our laws are intended to be based on a Christian moral code.

Mr. Leigh: They used to be so intended.

Mr. Deputy Speaker (Sir Alan Haselhurst): Order. Before the hon. Member for Rutland and Melton (Mr. Duncan) replies, may I say that we are in danger of straying outside the terms of the amendment and going into a Second Reading debate? I do not want to narrow the focus too much, but the debate is becoming a little too general.

4 pm

Mr. Duncan: I heed your words, Mr. Deputy Speaker. I do not want to take up too much time for fear of stopping other hon. Members speaking.

The amendments would damage the Bill. They would introduce contradictions and complications that would broadly make it unworkable. They would not, in fact, help the people they purport to help. There are other routes by which improvements in someone's plight can properly be remedied. The route for remedying those difficulties is a Finance Bill, not this Bill. It is up to hon. Members to choose how they will vote, but on that basis I urge them to reject the new clauses and amendments.

Mr. McNamara: I apologise to the House. Because of business of the House, I was unfortunately unable to be present on Second Reading. Because of business of the House, I also came to this debate only when my hon. Friend the Member for Rhondda (Chris Bryant) was speaking.

I want to take up a point made by the hon. Member for Rutland and Melton (Mr. Duncan). He said that people were wrong to try to put into legislation what they felt were their correct beliefs. Yet that is what this Bill does. I am neither for nor against that in this particular matter, but it is what is happening now. He considerably weakened his case by saying that people should not be able, in whatever way, to put into legislation what they believe in. Whether they are old clause IV socialists like me or more like the hon. Member for Gainsborough (Mr. Leigh), who would privatise everything in sight, people are entitled—so long as their constituents know where they stand—to put forward their opinions and seek to change legislation.

I am sorry that my hon. Friend the Member for Rhondda is no longer in his place. He said that there were two extremes in this debate—those who regard homosexuality as an abomination, and those who think it is part and parcel of life and we should get on with that. I suggest that there is a third group—people who may or not find homosexual relationships acceptable but who believe that the law has no part to play in the matter. I well remember—I think I am the only hon. Member present who did so—voting in favour of Leo Abse's Bill. When I had a more elevated status than I do now, as Opposition defence spokesman, I moved amendments to military discipline legislation that would have resulted in homosexual conduct by members of the armed forces ceasing to be a criminal offence. I remember the serried ranks of the Conservative party voting against them, but when my own party came to power and was reminded of the undertaking that we had given, the Government ran away from it until the European Court of Human Rights in Strasbourg forced them to act.

On this matter, then, I think that I am in a position to say that I have a record of seeking not to criminalise people, but I can also say that I do not believe that the

[Mr. McNamara]

creation of a new type of civil relationship for one group alone—a group distinguished from others only by sexual relationship—should discriminate against other people. That, I think, is of the utmost importance.

We are saying that two people who have a sexual relationship, a commitment and a loving relationship, but who are of the same sex, should have advantages, through registering, over other people who have non-sexual loving relationships and who cannot register or gain any sort of advantage under the Bill. This Bill may not be about marriage—and I regard marriage as the union between a man and a woman—but it will create special relationships with special privileges that are not available to others in our society. Therefore, we must question it.

I raised with the hon. Member for Rutland and Melton the issue of the Finance Act 2004. I apologise to him because the Joint Committee on Human Rights in fact drew attention to the fact that confining the benefit of exemption from paragraph 10 of schedule 5 to the parties to a lawful marriage excludes from the scope of the exemption homosexual couples who live together as de facto spouses but are legally unable to marry; heterosexual unmarried couples who live together as de facto spouses; and people sharing a home on the basis of a long-term family relationship that is not a sexual relationship. We drew that to the attention of the House under articles 1 and 8 of protocol 1 of the European convention on human rights. Therefore, the House and the Government were aware of the particular problem that had been created in relation to this matter. Many hon. Members have said that this issue should be dealt with by a Finance Bill. If that is the case, the whole Bill should be dealt with by a Finance Bill. We could then deal with the relationships that I have just mentioned and achieve a degree of equity between them. The Bill will create an unequal situation.

I intervened in the speech by the hon. Member for Buckingham (Mr. Bercow) on several occasions to ask him to change "could" to "may" to draw attention to the fact that there are heterosexual relationships in which the parties may not wish to marry for a variety of philosophical reasons that mean that they do not personally feel able to enter into the institution of marriage. I also cited the case of a couple with children, one of whom would dearly love to get married, but the other sees no need to do so. The innocent party—the one who wants to get married or even to enter into a legal relationship—will not benefit because of the attitude of the other. That is wrong. We seek to legislate for equity, and a person in a heterosexual relationship should be able to have the rights in the Bill.

David Cairns: I acknowledge and respect my hon. Friend's long track record on this matter, which he outlined earlier. However, in the example that he has just cited, the couple would be in the position of a same-sex couple who choose not to register their partnership. The implication of what he says is that every same-sex couple should have those rights, but they should have those rights only if they choose to register their partnerships. Not every gay couple will choose to do so, but the fundamental point is that at present same-sex couples have no choice under the law. The couple that my hon. Friend gave as an example have made a philosophical decision and they could change their minds, but the gay couple cannot change their minds because the law discriminates against them as it stands.

Mr. McNamara: I take that point, but we seek to legislate equitably for all the sorts of relationships that may exist. One can imagine a situation in which one member of a gay couple would like to register the partnership but the other refuses to do so, for whatever philosophical reason. The innocent party—the one who wishes to register—would suffer.

We are taking a piecemeal approach and dealing with one example of an inequitable and unjust situation. By just picking one example, we are not looking at the gamut of relationships that can exist. We are not talking about the registration of a loving relationship. If that were to happen, that would be fine—no problem. What we are really talking about are fiscal, inheritance and property rights and how with deal with those matters in certain relationships.

The hardship that is often cited relates to the difficulties associated with the relationship between the principal actor in "Yes Minister" and his partner. The same relationship also exists between siblings—brothers and sisters or two daughters—and the only difference is one of sexuality, not of love or companionship. It is not a question of sharing or owning property, which is what the Bill really deals with. If it were merely a question of people registering a relationship, there would be no problem. The other things that follow from the Bill will create inequity in respect of other people's relationships.

Mr. Borrow: Does my hon. Friend accept that the most crucial aspect of the Bill for most same-sex couples is not tax, nor even inheritance, but the invisibility issue? If the relationship is recognised, the partners are recognised as next of kin. That is the crucial thing for most same-sex couples, and that is what the Bill will give to most of them if they decide to register. Tax, pensions and inheritance mean nothing to many same-sex couples without wealth or high incomes. The key thing is being recognised as a couple and as next of kin, with all the implications—

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Order. That is a very long intervention.

Mr. McNamara: I have no objection to the next-of-kin relationship. People are entitled to choose whom they want to represent them one way or the other. That is not the problem. The problem relates to the other things that will follow from the Bill. For that reason, I shall vote for the new clause.

Mr. Gerald Howarth: It has become a characteristic of these debates that, despite the fact that there are passionately held views on both sides of the argument, we have nevertheless endeavoured to discuss matters in as relatively amicable a fashion as we can possibly command, given the depth of our feelings.

I support new clause 1, moved by my hon. Friend the Member for Gainsborough (Mr. Leigh) and to which my hon. Friend the Member for Rochford and

Southend, East (Sir Teddy Taylor) and I are party. I make no bones about that. I have made it absolutely clear that I wholly oppose the Bill. It is a profound mistake. Its consequences have been as yet unfathomed by many of those who support it, but fathomed only too clearly by some of those who support it very enthusiastically, and great damage will be done to our country in consequence.

I have set out my reasons in earlier debates, so I will not rehearse them tonight, but I wish that those who support the Bill and oppose new clause 1 would understand that we are not in the business of wrecking the Bill with the new clause. Would that we could by the new clause wreck the Bill. Sadly, we will not be able to do so. To impute to us the motive that we are using the new clause to wreck the Bill is unfair. *[Interruption.]* I oppose the Bill, but the new clause is not a mechanism for wrecking it.

Sir Patrick Cormack (South Staffordshire) (Con): Is not anyone who suggests that the new clause would wreck the Bill indirectly criticising the Chair for selecting it?

Mr. Howarth: My hon. Friend is much better versed in such matters than I am. I know that you, with your wisdom, Mr. Deputy Speaker, will have heard the submission that my hon. Friend made. I am sure that he was right.

4.15 pm

Our motivation is the fact that the Bill is transparently unfair. The hon. Member for Wallasey (Angela Eagle) rejected Conservative Members' concerns for justice. *[Interruption.]* Yes, she did. She used the word "injustice" and said that we were not interested in justice during our 18 years in government. Let me remind her that we got rid of the closed shop, we gave people trapped in council houses the right to own their own homes and we relieved people of the tax burden. Those are examples of our concern for justice, which is manifested today in our support for new clause 1. We thus feel that we have every moral right to claim that the motivation behind new clause 1 is a sense of justice because we believe that the Bill is unfair. My hon. Friend the Member for Rutland and Melton (Mr. Duncan) said that it was profoundly unfair—I have not even used the word "profoundly"—that siblings were suffering to such an extent.

Let me remind the House of the situation about which we are talking. According to the 2001 census, more than 4.6 million people who live in the same house as another person do not consider themselves to be part of a couple. A number, although not all, of those will be close family members. Many will be siblings of the type set out in the excellent and admirable Christian Institute advertisement in *The Times* today. I submit that the situation contrasts unfavourably with the Bill's purpose.

The census estimates that some 80,000 people in this country live in same-sex couples. Baroness Scotland said in the other place that it was likely that 5 to 10 per cent. of eligible people would take up the benefits and privileges set out in the Bill.

Chris Bryant: And responsibilities.

Mr. Howarth: That means that perhaps only 8,000 people in this country will take up the great panoply of the several hundred pages of new law that will be enacted. I entirely accept that the Bill sets out responsibilities, as the hon. Member for Rhondda (Chris Bryant) says, but it will also create privileges that will be denied to siblings. New clause 1 would confer such privileges. It is grossly unfair that siblings will not be included under the Bill.

I listened to all the arguments made by my hon. Friend the Member for Rutland and Melton. He spoke from the Front Bench, but not, I hasten to remind the House, on behalf of the official Opposition—compelling though he was, we have a free vote on the issue. I do not understand why hon. Members proclaim the fact that the Bill will right an injustice and make fair a situation that is currently unfair when they are aware that other examples of unfairness exist. Their only answer to that is, "Wait until the Finance Bill." That is not an adequate response. It sits ill with a Government who profess that they are concerned about human rights and righting an injustice when they deny a pension to the widows of those who married servicemen after they had left military service and who have resisted time and again amendments made in the other place to correct that. It sits ill in their mouths to claim that they are motivated by righting an injustice when there are other manifest unfairnesses. Post-retirement marriages are one example of that, but clearly so too are siblings, as addressed in new clause 1.

Chris Bryant *rose—*

Mr. Bercow *rose—*

Mr. Howarth: I face an embarrassment des riches. I give way to the hon. Member for Rhondda first.

Chris Bryant: I thank the hon. Gentleman for giving way. He is generous as only a churchwarden can be.

Just because there are different injustices does not mean that they all have to be dealt with in one Bill. Injustices in British society affect coal miners, but they should not be inserted in the Bill. There are injustices suffered by disabled people, but they should not be inserted either. The problem is that the amendments do not fit in the Bill.

Mr. Howarth: I thank the hon. Gentleman for reminding the House of my other responsibilities at the Royal Garrison church in Aldershot. We shall continue to sing, "I Vow to Thee My Country" despite the observations of some bishops.

Chris Bryant: Put that in the Bill.

Mr. Howarth: The hon. Gentleman makes a good point. Perhaps I should table an amendment to that effect.

I reject the argument that the Bill is not the place to deal with the problem. The hon. Gentleman rests on the argument that, because there is an injustice about which he feels strongly, all other injustices should be set on one side until that is sorted out. We believe that our limited new clause sits fairly in the Bill and would not wreck it, and my hon. Friend the Member for Gainsborough made a powerful case to support that. I am afraid to say that I have not heard an argument to suggest that the new clause would wreck it. I accept that there are complexities, but it would not wreck it.

I do not have the same view of the amendment tabled by my hon. Friend the Member for Christchurch (Mr. Chope) and cannot support him on that. It is more far-reaching. However, the House should think carefully about how it will be perceived outside if we reject new clause 1, which is a modest measure to assist a particular group of people who may well exceed the number whom it is estimated will take advantage of the panoply of new law that the Bill creates. People will fail to understand why the Government rejected the opportunity to correct deficiencies in the amendments made in the other place by narrowing the definition and why they insisted that one group should benefit from the new rights without encompassing that other group. We should bear it in mind that 84 per cent. of the public who responded to the opinion poll took the view that those people also deserve consideration.

Mr. Bercow: Whatever my hon. Friend may think about the fundamental injustice that his new clause would correct, given that the siblings amendment would by common consent require a radical rewriting of social security legislation, how is it, if he feels so strongly about that, that he and others who think like him did not think it right or prudent to consult the Law Society or the Solicitors Family Law Association about the amendment?

Mr. Howarth: The submissions that I receive from the Law Society are so politically correct that they are not worth reading. They are not written by normal lawyers, but seem to be written by a particular group, probably from the Matrix chambers.

Mr. Bercow: Some of them may even be gay.

Mr. Howarth: That is quite possible. I have long since given up studying submissions from the Law Society. My hon. Friend, however, points out that some people believe that the proposal is not the appropriate way to deal with the problem, which is fair enough. Others, however, believe that it is appropriate, and we are entitled to assert that view and to try to persuade the public that they should not listen to the Law Society but to the Christian Institute and us.

Many points that I wanted to make have already been covered by my hon. Friend the Member for Gainsborough and other hon. Members. The House must think carefully before passing legislation and deliberately forswearing the opportunity to deal with another group of people, possibly a larger one than the group to whom the Bill applies, by excluding them altogether. Finally, whatever the Minister says, the public believe that the Bill is about gay marriage in everything but name. I received a letter from the Minister for Citizenship and Immigration about a constituent who wishes to have someone of the same sex admitted to this country so that he can live with him. He told me that the application is being considered and that documentary evidence has been requested to show

> "that he and his partner have been living together in a relationship akin to marriage for two years."

That is what the Home Office said.

The Deputy Minister for Women and Equality (Jacqui Smith): The important words are "akin to".

Mr. Howarth: That is the point. The relationship is presented as a parallel to marriage.

Angela Eagle *rose—*

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Order. Before the hon. Member for Aldershot (Mr. Howarth) thinks of accepting an intervention from the hon. Member for Wallasey (Angela Eagle), I should point out that he is clearly straying into Second Reading and away from the new clause before the House.

Mr. Howarth: Thank you for your guidance, Mr. Deputy Speaker, for which, as ever, I am truly grateful. It is only fair, however, to point out that Members who oppose new clause 1 do so because it mucks up their plan for a straightforward gay marriage Bill. That is why they do not want it, and the country will judge them accordingly.

Mr. Hogg: I wish to make only two brief points, as most matters have already been covered in other speeches, including those by my hon. Friend the Member for Buckingham (Mr. Bercow) and for Rutland and Melton (Mr. Duncan), both of whom I agree with.

In the course of our debate, many injustices have been highlighted, including arrangements that affect siblings and others such as inheritance tax, the right to statutory tenancies and perhaps the right to pensions. The hon. Member for South Ribble (Mr. Borrow) mentioned the position of next of kin and so on. Clearly, there are a number of injustices, which my hon. Friend the Member for Gainsborough (Mr. Leigh) highlighted, and the House is grateful to him for doing so. I agree, however, with the view powerfully expressed by my hon. Friend the Member for Rutland and Melton, who said that those injustices are essentially distinct from the Bill's underlying theme, and should be addressed in other appropriate legislation. Speaking for myself, I would like to abolish or substantially ameliorate inheritance tax, which is wrong in principle for a number of reasons. I do not, however, want to create special exemptions from the burdens of that tax, as that, too, would be wrong in principle. The injustices identified by the House need to be addressed in another measure or measures.

I now want to pursue my second theme in answer to a challenge made by my hon. Friend the Member for Gainsborough.I hope that you will forgive me for doing so, Mr. Deputy Speaker, because I do not want to make a Second Reading speech. When you were not in the Chair, my hon. Friend said in terms that, if it was conceded that this was a "gay marriage Bill", he would not press his amendments. He went on to say that he would concede that his amendments were inappropriate in the context of such a Bill. I know that you, Mr. Deputy Speaker, do not want me to go into a lot of depth about this matter.

4.30 pm

Mr. Bercow: Oh go on.

Mr. Hogg: No; I do not want to be called to order. I have had my exchanges before with you, Mr. Deputy Speaker, and I want to pursue my argument within the rules of order.

The question is whether what we are doing in this Bill is in substance to create a gay marriage Bill. I believe that that is probably the case, and let me hasten to say that I do not disapprove of that.

Sir Patrick Cormack: Your father would.

Mr. Hogg: I do not think that my father would have done, as a matter of fact. He became more compassionate in his old age—something that I would commend to other hon. Members as well.

If one asks oneself what marriage is, one sees that it is the recognition by law of a relationship of a continuing kind. Historically, such relationships have been held between men and women, and marriage has been attended by divine service. Of course, that was changed, and we now have civil marriage. I must ask myself what the sensible distinction is in fact and substance between a civil marriage between a man and a women and a legal partnership of the kind contemplated in the Bill. I do not think that there is any significant difference between a civil marriage between a man and a woman and a legal partnership as created by the Bill.

The purpose of the Bill is not to attach to the relationship the financial and other benefits to which my hon. Friend the Member for Gainsborough referred; it is rather to accord to a couple of homosexuals the right to denote their relationship with legal status. They want to do that, and I do not want to withhold from them that ability. As a matter of fact, I also think that the Church would be right to bless such relationships. *[Interruption.]* I can hear my right hon. Friend the Member for Maidstone and The Weald (Miss Widdecombe) expressing her disagreement. She and I have often disagreed on this point, but I think that in a liberal, compassionate world, the Church should be willing to act in that way.

Mr. Cash: I am following what my right hon. and learned Friend is saying, but I think that he is taking us into extremely dangerous territory. Does he not agree that there is something fundamentally insidious about introducing a Bill for a purpose that is not achieved under that Bill, but which, one realises on reflection, is an artifice? Basically, that is what this whole process is about.

Mr. Hogg: With respect to my hon. Friend, I think that he is wrong about this matter. The primary purpose is to accord a relationship within the law and before the law to a long-lasting partnership between people of the same sex. If people of the same sex want to designate their relationship as having that status, they should be able to do so, and the Bill achieves that. It may be—I can understand this view—that he does not want that to be permitted, but that is a difference of principle. I do want it to be permitted, and I ask myself whether the Bill is effective in achieving that, and I feel that it is.

Incidentally, I feel that I owe an apology to my hon. Friend the Member for South Staffordshire (Sir Patrick Cormack). I was a bit churlish with him in respect of his sedentary intervention about my father, and I hope that he will forgive me. If my hon. Friend the Member for Gainsborough is right when he says that his amendments are inappropriate in the context of a Bill that he described as being about "gay marriage"—I say that it is about partnerships recognised by law—new clause 1 should not stand. In substance, this is a gay marriage Bill, and, in substance, I am in favour of it and am prepared so to designate it.

Sir Patrick Cormack: I am grateful for my right hon. and learned Friend's gracious apology, which I accept. My right hon. and learned Friend is being totally honest. He supports gay marriage, which is a perfectly defensible point of view, but the Bill purports not to enact gay marriage.

Mr. Hogg: My hon. Friend is right. I criticise Government Front Benchers, because those of us who have examined the Bill and the consequences that it attaches to such relationships find it impossible to make a serious distinction between civil marriage—I emphasise "civil"—and civil partnership. It would be more honest if the Government were to say that the Bill concerns civil marriage between same-sex couples. However—this is the one remark that I shall make that will be wholly popular with Conservative Members—the Government are not honest.

Mr. Borrow: I want to speak for only a few minutes. I am pleased to follow the right hon. and learned Member for Sleaford and North Hykeham (Mr. Hogg) and agree with most of his contribution.

We must remember why the Bill was introduced in the first place: it recognises same-sex relationships and implements an infrastructure of rights and responsibilities for same-sex couples. It is not about property and taxation, which have formed the primary subjects for debate this afternoon. We are discussing the recognition of same-sex relationships, and the heart of the Bill concerns a lifelong commitment made by two individuals.

I recognise that the amendments in this group are in order because Mr. Speaker accepted them, but they seek to broaden the number of people affected by the Bill by including, with the exception of heterosexual couples who are not married, people in other sorts of partnerships who do not necessarily make a lifelong commitment to each other, whether they are members of the same family or people in platonic relationships.

New clause 3 seeks to extend the provisions of the Bill to heterosexual couples who cohabit. Such couples may or may not want to make a lifelong commitment, but I assume that the fact that they have not got married means that they are not yet ready to make such a commitment. Although the arguments about tax and inheritance may have some merit, the amendments to widen the scope of the Bill do not fit neatly and

[Mr. Borrow]

appropriately with the rest of the legislation. Such matters should be examined and dealt with separately because they do not fit the Bill's core, which concerns two people of the same sex making a lifelong public commitment to each other. That is the heart of the Bill; the various clauses simply deal with rights and responsibilities.

Charles Hendry: Much of this afternoon's debate has understandably focused on whether the registration of a civil partnership is the same as marriage, which is a point raised by my hon. Friend the Member for Christchurch (Mr. Chope).

To my mind, we have missed one of the key points. Although the Bill gives rights and confers responsibilities on those who are prepared to enter into civil partnerships, those benefits and rights are not workable without some form of legal registration. We are discussing the transference of property rights and pensions to obtain inheritance tax benefits, and, in the last few days of their life, someone could say, "This is my partner. I would be grateful if the whole of my estate is handed over to them." The only way in which legal changes of such magnitude can be made to work properly is if there is a legal framework that involves people making a legal commitment by saying that the relationship is long-term and having a structure whereby the framework can be broken up if the relationship goes wrong.

The Bill addresses a very clear injustice—the fact that people are invisible in the eyes of the law if they are living in a same-sex relationship. It is time to correct that injustice. That does not mean, however, that it is appropriate to use the Bill as a vehicle for correcting equally valid but disconnected injustices. That can be done on other occasions, and I hope that it will.

Much of the debate has focused purely on financial matters, yet, as the hon. Member for South Ribble (Mr. Borrow) said, the Bill deals with many other injustices. I have mentioned the rights of the next of kin and the inability of people in a relationship to visit their partners in hospital or to make decisions about what happens to their belongings and joint home in the event of the death of one of them. Those issues do not relate to siblings or to people in relationships of other kinds; that is why the Bill should focus primarily on such matters.

My hon. Friend the Member for Aldershot (Mr. Howarth) suggested that only small numbers of people may benefit from the Bill. That in itself is no reason for saying that it is not right to act. He and I would campaign together on the rights of Gurkhas or the pension rights of surviving partners of members of the armed forces. The fact that those issues affect only very small numbers of people does not in any way negate the importance of dealing with them, and the Bill must be seen in the same light. I happen to believe that the figure cited for the number of partners who will benefit significantly underestimates the total. In any event, there is a clear injustice and we are right to address it.

I want to say a few words about new clause 3. The more I listened to my hon. Friend the Member for Christchurch the more concerned I became. His reply to my right hon. Friend the Member for Maidstone and The Weald (Miss Widdecombe) left us in no doubt that he believes that this will fundamentally undermine marriage. I was also concerned when he started to use the term "holy matrimony". Many of us got married in register offices instead of churches. I, for one, feel every bit as married as anybody who got married in a church. I have a wife, whom I call my wife, we have shared domestic arrangements, and I have a very wonderful mother-in-law.

Mr. Bercow: Send her the speech.

Charles Hendry: I certainly will.

Those are all benefits that marriage brings; they cannot be linked solely to holy matrimony.

I was particularly concerned when my hon. Friend the Member for Christchurch said that people will opt for this sort of relationship when they are looking for a shorter-term, rather than a longer-term, commitment. That is bizarre. I tried to imagine the scene—two people are in a restaurant, and the man is about to make a proposal. In the candlelight, he gets down on one knee and says, "Darling, we've been together for a very long time now, we've got children and it's working very well—I want to ask you to become my short-term civil partner." In other words: "I love you very much—not enough to say that I want to be with you for ever, but I would like to be with you for several years. We don't have to go to all the expense of getting married, but there is an alternative arrangement—we can have a civil partnership with all the same benefits. You can have the pension and inherit the house in the event of my death." I am not sure whether she would be deeply flattered by that proposal. Had I said that to my wife when I proposed to her, I suspect that she might have walked out of the restaurant. My hon. Friend has not drawn an apt distinction.

Mr. Chope: Does my hon. Friend accept that the most romantic people on earth are the French? Yet they have a civil partnership arrangement that is similar to the one that I described. They can either enter into that or get married.

Charles Hendry: I believe that my wife, given the choice between a short-term civil partnership with a romantic Frenchman and a long-term loving marriage with me, would have made the same decision. My proposal was made in a French restaurant, so perhaps one can get the best of both worlds.

4.45 pm

Earlier, I asked about the cost of the amendment. My hon. Friend has tabled a completely uncosted amendment. He talks about the number of people who may benefit from it but asks us to vote for something when we have no idea how many billions it would cost. Although he makes the valid point that one either believes in equality—and accepts that there is an accompanying cost that must be taken into account—or one does not, tabling an amendment, which is described as serious, without being able to tell us how much it would cost, is unfortunate. However, my fundamental objection remains that the amendment undermines the principle of marriage.

Mr. Leigh: So my hon. Friend does not share the view of many of us that we should abolish inheritance tax outright?

Charles Hendry: As other hon. Members have said, there are other ways of dealing with that. I would dearly love inheritance tax to be abolished. *[Interruption.]* As my right hon. Friend the Member for Maidstone and The Weald rightly says, that would also benefit homosexual couples. However, it is a separate issue, which can be resolved by a Finance Bill. It does not need to be addressed in the Bill.

Jacqui Smith: We have had a good debate. My hon. Friends have made excellent contributions but, as my hon. Friend the Under-Secretary of State for Scotland has commented, it has been our pleasure to sit and watch a tableau of—

Angela Eagle: Tory party infighting.

Jacqui Smith: That would be a rather cruel way to characterise it. Perhaps it would be fairer to say that a range of views was expressed.

Mr. Gerald Howarth: Will the Minister give way?

Jacqui Smith: I have barely started, but if the hon. Gentleman insists.

Mr. Howarth: At least Conservative Members have freedom of expression and can disagree. We are not under Stalinist control like Labour Members.

Jacqui Smith: I should not have bothered.

I want to focus attention on the practical effects of the amendments, which would make changes that, as several hon. Members pointed out, would alter the Bill's nature and character. They would introduce a series of discrepancies in the provisions, which would make it unworkable.

The amendments that the hon. Member for Gainsborough (Mr. Leigh) tabled would allow siblings to form civil partnerships. The amendments that the hon. Member for Christchurch (Mr. Chope) tabled would allow unmarried parents and children and unmarried siblings to form such partnerships, as long as they shared a home. He would also extend such provision to cohabiting couples.

On Second Reading, the Bill received a majority of 377 votes on the basis that earlier amendments, which had the effect of including close family relatives, would be removed. In Committee, we voted 13 to one to remove the amendments. The argument for limiting civil partnership to unrelated same sex couples is clear and compelling and has been rehearsed on many occasions on the Floor of the House and in Committee. Furthermore, the hon. Member for Gainsborough said on Second Reading that the amendments that the House of Lords had passed might be unworkable as they stood. I am happy to agree with him about that. Given that, I find it difficult to accept his reasoning for tabling amendments to reinstate new categories of civil partnerships for siblings. They are no more workable. Indeed, they give rise to new anomalies.

I do not want to spend an inordinate amount of time reiterating all the detailed arguments about the issue but I want to re-emphasise the clear aim of the Bill. We introduced it with a specific purpose, which is to provide legal recognition for unrelated same-sex couples who do not currently have the option, which is available to opposite-sex couples, to marry. We seek to create a parallel but different legal relationship that mirrors as fully as possible the rights and responsibilities enjoyed by those who can marry, and that uses civil marriage as a template for the processes, rights and responsibilities that go with civil partnership. We are doing this for reasons of equality and social justice.

Mr. Hogg: Would the Minister be good enough to address the question of where the essential difference lies between a civil partnership involving a different-sex couple and a civil partnership involving a same-sex couple? In substance and reality, they are the same, are they not?

Jacqui Smith: As I have just pointed out, we have used civil marriage as the template for creating a completely new legal relationship, that of the civil partnership. We had some discussion about this in Committee, and our view was that, unless there was an objective justification for a difference in the approaches taken to civil marriage and civil partnership, no difference should exist. There are very few areas in which any difference does exist. The whole point, however, is that civil partnership is not civil marriage, for a variety of reasons, such as the traditions and history—religious and otherwise—that accompany marriage. It is not marriage, but it is, in many ways—dare I say it?—akin to marriage. We make no apology for that.

Angela Eagle: Does my right hon. Friend agree that, when social reform is needed that might be difficult for some people, the best way forward is not to set one group's rights against those of another so that those groups have a fight, but to proceed in a way that both groups can support? Does she agree also that having civil partnerships rather than challenging people's deeply held views, particularly about religious marriage, is the right way forward in these circumstances?

Jacqui Smith: My hon. Friend is absolutely right. In fact, the hon. Member for Aldershot (Mr. Howarth) let the cat out of the bag when he said that his reason for wanting to call this new relationship a gay marriage was precisely to provoke protest out in the country. We have identified a particular issue, and we want a 21st century legal process to resolve the difficulties involved. That is what we are delivering in the Bill.

Mr. Gerald Howarth: Will the Minister tell us to what other same-sex couples the Bill is intended to apply, other than those who are homosexual?

Jacqui Smith: While that is not a criterion in the Bill, I have said clearly on Second Reading—and I intend to say again later—that the particular difficulty identified

[Jacqui Smith]

here involves the thousands of gay and lesbian couples who live together and share their lives, yet have no way of gaining legal recognition for their relationship. I am quite happy to say that, and I am sorry that the hon. Gentleman thinks that that is somehow a difficult motive to have.

Civil partnership has not been designed as a legal relationship for people who are related to each other.

Sir Patrick Cormack: I really would welcome it if the right hon. Lady were honest with the House—*[Interruption.]* The fact is that she is indulging in sophistry. Will she please tell the House what the difference is between a civil partnership, as she defines it, and a gay marriage, as defined by my hon. Friend the Member for Aldershot (Mr. Howarth)?

Jacqui Smith: I resent the hon. Gentleman's comments. I have been absolutely open about what the Government intend to do with this new legal relationship. I have been open about the extent to which it replicates the provisions of civil marriage, where there is no objective justification for it not to do so. But it is not marriage. It is a new legal relationship for same-sex couples so that they can have the legal recognition that they cannot currently get.

David Winnick: When this Bill becomes law, does my right hon. Friend believe that any Member, whether Labour or Conservative, will argue in four, five or eight years' time that it should be changed again? As in the case of previous reforms, however controversial, once such a measure becomes law or is widely accepted, there seems to be no wish to change it again.

Jacqui Smith: My hon. Friend is right. Clearly, that is because we have identified an injustice for thousands of couples who are sharing their lives and who cannot at the moment find a legal way to have that relationship recognised, and, with that, have the range of rights and responsibilities that go with civil partnerships. That is the justification for this legislation. It is not designed, however, to address the problems for those people who are related to each other. That has been accepted not only by large numbers of Members of the House but by organisations that lobby on behalf of the interests of those people, the Law Society, the National Association of Citizens Advice Bureaux, the Solicitors Family Law Association, the trade union movement, equality groups, carers groups and the leaders of all three main parties in the House.

These and similar amendments have come in various different guises throughout proceedings on the Bill. At one point, in another place, they were ostensibly concerned with protecting carers. Once Carers UK indicated clearly that not only would they not support carers but positively damage caring relationships in many places, people backed off from that justification. Today, we have heard a new justification; the argument about inheritance tax. That is a reasonable debate, but at a cost of £2.8 billion a year to abolish inheritance tax, hon. Members are right that that would not be one of my top priorities. Nevertheless, they can raise that during consideration of the Finance Bill.

Neither is it the case that the Government have not recognised that there are particular issues not only for opposite-sex cohabiting couples but for others. The argument remains, however, that this is not the right Bill to address those problems. It is not only the Government who believe that. The Law Commission concluded in its report on home sharers in 2002 that one solution was not possible for all the different permutations of home sharers. It stated:

> "It is not possible . . . to devise a statutory scheme for the ascertainment and quantification of beneficial interests in the shared home which can operate fairly and evenly across the diversity of domestic circumstances which are now to be encountered."

The Law Commission recognised that there was not one simple way to approach the matter, as do the Government, and the Bill addresses a particular issue.

I will move on to the detail of the amendments and take the House on a short tour of the new absurdities that hon. Members have created in relation to their amendments. First, with respect to the arguments about siblings and other family members, to which the amendment of the hon. Member for Christchurch (Mr. Chope) extends, of course, siblings and other family members already have legal recognition of their relationships by virtue of the fact that they are related. They do not need legal recognition in the same way that same-sex couples do. Siblings, for example, are already recognised in law, whereas the law often treats the relationships between same-sex couples as invisible. That is the basis of many of the issues that they face, as was rightly identified by the hon. Member for Wealden (Charles Hendry).

Secondly, as several hon. Members have mentioned, there is what we could call the Chekhov problem; the three sisters problem. There may be three sisters who live together—

Chris Bryant: With uncle Vanya.

Jacqui Smith: With uncle Vanya—*[Laughter.]* They may wish to benefit from some of these rights and responsibilities. How are they to decide who forms a civil partnership? What impact would that decision have on internal family decisions and relationships? I do not believe that it could be positive.

Thirdly—perhaps we should call this the uncle Vanya question—is it only siblings, parents and children who live together in caring relationships? What about a niece who cares for an aunt or a grandson who cares for a grandfather? Why should only siblings, parents and children be singled out for the dubious honour of forming a legal relationship that does not in any case meet the needs of their joint lives?

5 pm

Fourthly, as several Members have pointed out, the financial repercussions of the new clauses and amendments render the Bill nonsensical. I am thinking of the effect on both the pension and the benefit provisions.

The fifth point relates to the introduction of new dissolution procedures for the new categories of civil partnership favoured by the hon. Members for Christchurch and for Gainsborough (Mr. Leigh). Under the procedure favoured by the hon. Member for Gainsborough, a dissolution order would be granted without discussion following an application to the court by one of the civil partners. The hon. Gentleman has been quite honest. He has created that new procedure to overcome a problem that we identified on Second Reading; the ridiculousness of expecting two sisters, or a mother and son, to go through a divorce-like process. Nevertheless, a process whereby dissolution is almost immediate involves its own myriad absurdities.

Were family members to form civil partnerships under the hon. Gentleman's provisions, a decision to end such a partnership could be made by one of them in the space of a few moments. There would be little time in which to think the decision through. There would be cursory notice to be given to the other party, and minimal support for the partner left behind. Leaving a family member—a civil partner—with few protections is as daft as forcing a daughter to undergo a divorce-style procedure with her mother.

Regardless of how the hon. Gentlemen may seek to include family members, their proposals create legal nonsense after legal nonsense. Let me make this as clear as I can. Family members should not be dealt with in this Bill, and torturing the Bill to make provision for them will not change the fundamental absurdity of including them.

The hon. Member for Christchurch believes that we should extend the Bill to opposite-sex cohabiting couples. We had some discussion about that on Second Reading and in Committee. The hon. Gentleman's proposals would allow both opposite-sex and same-sex couples to form civil partnerships whether or not they were related in the prohibited degrees, and would also apply to overseas relationships.

It has been made clear at several stages, both here and in the other place, that the Bill is designed to deal with disadvantages experienced by same-sex couples who cannot marry. Opposite-sex couples have no need of civil partnership, because they can marry. Some Members asked, "What if they do not want or feel able to take on the responsibilities of marriage?" The point has rightly been made that many of the provisions relating to civil partnership are very similar to those relating to civil marriage. I fail to see why someone who was unwilling to take on the responsibilities of civil marriage would want to take on the equivalent responsibilities of civil partnership.

Either we have the rights and responsibilities, the legal registration process and the dissolution—which people may well reject—or we set up what can only be described as my hon. Friend the Member for Wallasey (Angela Eagle) described it, "marriage-lite". If anything were likely to undermine the brand of marriage more—if I may employ the free-marketeer language used by the hon. Member for Christchurch—it would be his proposal for the lightweight, easy-in, easy-out relationship that he appears to favour.

There are serious issues for cohabiting couples. That is why the Government are undertaking not just to advise and educate people about their legal status if they are not married, but to consider how we can ensure that the legal rights currently applying to, for instance, the protection of children in the Children Bill can be better utilised for cohabiting couples than they are now. Also, we will ask the Law Commission to review the law in this area. There is a whole range of ways in which we can and will address these issues.

The new clauses and amendments seek to change yet again the Bill's fundamental principles. We reject them, because we have a clear view as to what a civil partnership is and whom it is for. Its purpose is to enable legal recognition, respect and dignity for thousands of gay and lesbian couples in this country. A charitable interpretation of the amendments is that they are misguided. They would not improve the position for carers and other family members; arguably, they would damage those relationships, and they cannot address issues of concern to cohabiting opposite sex couples. A less charitable but perhaps more realistic assessment is that, in all their permutations, these are wrecking amendments, supported by those who cannot and will not accept the value of stable gay and lesbian relationships. Whether misguided or mischievous, they are wrong and I hope that the House will reject them.

Mr. Leigh: To sum up briefly, I am afraid that the Minister has failed the test that I set her. I gave her a fair offer. I said to her early on in this debate that if she accepted that this was a gay marriage Bill, I would withdraw my amendments. She has told us in her summing up that the Government are using civil marriage as a template for civil partnership. What on earth does that mean? It is pure sophistry, and there is one reason—and one reason only—why the Government are not being honest with this House and with the people. They do not want to affront religious sentiment by creating something called a gay marriage Bill.

The Bill will become law—we know that—but the fact is that the new clause is not a wrecking amendment, because it would not affect the Bill's substance. I shall tell the Minister what the new clause and this debate have achieved. We now know, because Baroness Scotland told us in another place, that perhaps as few as 5,000 couples—perhaps even just 5,000 people—will benefit from the Bill. Yet we also know that there are 4.5 million people living in relationships who will not be affected by it. The fact is that the Government are creating for homosexual couples a unique state of affairs. Historically, this House has said that the rights of marriage should exist only for marriage because it is a fundamental building block of society. This Government, in a dishonest way, are picking out only one section of the community and giving them unique rights outside marriage.

We have raised a banner in this debate for those 4.5 million people. Both Labour and Conservative Front Benchers attacked our new clauses and amendments on technical and other grounds; both alluded to the difficulties that would arise in respect of dissolution, even though such principles work perfectly well in France, as my hon. Friend the Member for Christchurch (Mr. Chope) made clear, through the PACS system. But there is one difference between the positions of the two Front Benches. A Conservative Government, through a Finance Bill, would right this injustice, which is something that we should be proud of. So although this banner will go down to defeat today, in the long term we are going to win the debate.

Question put, That the clause be read a Second time:—

The House divided: Ayes 74, Noes 381.

Division No. 314] **[5:08 pm**

AYES

Amess, David
Arbuthnot, rh James
Beggs, Roy *(E Antrim)*
Beith, rh A. J.
Bottomley, Peter *(Worthing W)*
Brady, Graham
Brazier, Julian
Breed, Colin
Browning, Mrs Angela
Burns, Simon
Burnside, David
Butterfill, Sir John
Cash, William
Chapman, Sir Sydney *(Chipping Barnet)*
Chope, Christopher
Clappison, James
Clifton-Brown, Geoffrey
Conway, Derek
Cormack, Sir Patrick
Djanogly, Jonathan
Dodds, Nigel
Donaldson, Jeffrey M.
Duncan Smith, rh Iain
Fallon, Michael
Flight, Howard
Flook, Adrian
Forth, rh Eric
Gillan, Mrs Cheryl
Gray, James *(N Wilts)*
Grayling, Chris
Grieve, Dominic
Gummer, rh John
Hague, rh William
Hawkins, Nick
Hayes, John *(S Holland)*
Hunter, Andrew
Kirkbride, Miss Julie
Knight, rh Greg *(E Yorkshire)*
Leigh, Edward
Liddell-Grainger, Ian
Lidington, David
Lilley, rh Peter
MacDonald, Calum
McIntosh, Miss Anne
McNamara, Kevin
Mates, Michael
Mawhinney, rh Sir Brian
Moss, Malcolm
Murrison, Dr. Andrew
O'Brien, Stephen *(Eddisbury)*
Paisley, Rev. Ian
Paterson, Owen
Robathan, Andrew
Robertson, Laurence *(Tewk'b'ry)*
Robinson, Mrs Iris *(Strangford)*
Robinson, Peter *(Belfast E)*
Selous, Andrew
Shepherd, Richard
Spink, Bob *(Castle Point)*
Streeter, Gary
Syms, Robert
Taylor, Dr. Richard *(Wyre F)*
Taylor, Sir Teddy
Turner, Andrew *(Isle of Wight)*
Viggers, Peter
Walter, Robert
Waterson, Nigel
Watkinson, Angela
Whittingdale, John
Wiggin, Bill
Wilkinson, John
Wilshire, David
Winterton, Ann *(Congleton)*
Winterton, Sir Nicholas *(Macclesfield)*

Tellers for the Ayes:
Mr. Gerald Howarth and Miss Ann Widdecombe

NOES

Ainger, Nick
Ainsworth, Bob *(Cov'try NE)*
Ainsworth, Peter *(E Surrey)*
Allen, Graham
Anderson, Janet *(Rossendale & Darwen)*
Armstrong, rh Ms Hilary
Atherton, Ms Candy
Atkins, Charlotte
Atkinson, David *(Bour'mth E)*
Atkinson, Peter *(Hexham)*
Austin, John
Bailey, Adrian
Baird, Vera
Baker, Norman
Banks, Tony
Barker, Gregory
Barnes, Harry
Barrett, John
Barron, rh Kevin
Battle, rh John
Bayley, Hugh
Beard, Nigel
Beckett, rh Margaret
Begg, Miss Anne
Bell, Sir Stuart
Bercow, John
Berry, Roger
Best, Harold
Blackman, Liz
Blizzard, Bob
Blunkett, rh David
Boateng, rh Paul
Borrow, David
Boswell, Tim
Bradley, rh Keith *(Withington)*
Brake, Tom *(Carshalton)*
Brown, rh Nicholas *(Newcastle E Wallsend)*
Brown, Russell *(Dumfries)*
Browne, Desmond
Bruce, Malcolm
Bryant, Chris
Buck, Ms Karen
Burgon, Colin
Byrne, Liam *(B'ham Hodge H)*
Caborn, rh Richard
Cairns, David
Calton, Mrs Patsy
Campbell, Alan *(Tynemouth)*
Campbell, Mrs Anne *(C'bridge)*
Campbell, rh Sir Menzies *(NE Fife)*
Campbell, Ronnie *(Blyth V)*
Carmichael, Alistair
Casale, Roger
Caton, Martin
Challen, Colin
Chapman, Ben *(Wirral S)*
Chaytor, David
Clapham, Michael
Clark, Mrs Helen *(Peterborough)*
Clark, Dr. Lynda *(Edinburgh Pentlands)*
Clarke, rh Kenneth *(Rushcliffe)*
Clarke, rh Tom *(Coatbridge & Chryston)*
Clarke, Tony *(Northampton S)*
Clelland, David
Clwyd, Ann *(Cynon V)*
Coaker, Vernon
Cohen, Harry
Connarty, Michael
Cook, rh Robin *(Livingston)*
Corbyn, Jeremy
Corston, Jean
Cotter, Brian
Cranston, Ross
Crausby, David
Cruddas, Jon
Cummings, John
Cunningham, rh Dr. Jack *(Copeland)*
Cunningham, Jim *(Coventry S)*
Cunningham, Tony *(Workington)*
Curtis-Thomas, Mrs Claire
Davey, Edward *(Kingston)*
Davey, Valerie *(Bristol W)*
David, Wayne
Davidson, Ian
Davies, Geraint *(Croydon C)*
Dawson, Hilton
Dean, Mrs Janet
Denham, rh John
Dismore, Andrew
Dobson, rh Frank
Donohoe, Brian H.
Doran, Frank
Doughty, Sue
Dowd, Jim *(Lewisham W)*
Drew, David *(Stroud)*
Drown, Ms Julia
Duncan, Alan *(Rutland)*
Dunwoody, Mrs Gwyneth
Eagle, Angela *(Wallasey)*
Edwards, Huw
Efford, Clive
Ellman, Mrs Louise
Ennis, Jeff *(Barnsley E)*
Evans, Nigel
Ewing, Annabelle
Fabricant, Michael
Field, rh Frank *(Birkenhead)*
Field, Mark *(Cities of London & Westminster)*
Fisher, Mark
Fitzpatrick, Jim
Flynn, Paul *(Newport W)*
Follett, Barbara
Foster, rh Derek
Foster, Don *(Bath)*
Foster, Michael *(Worcester)*
Foster, Michael Jabez *(Hastings & Rye)*
Foulkes, rh George
Francis, Dr. Hywel
Gerrard, Neil
Gibb, Nick *(Bognor Regis)*
Gibson, Dr. Ian
Gidley, Sandra
Gilroy, Linda
Godsiff, Roger
Goggins, Paul
Green, Matthew *(Ludlow)*
Griffiths, Jane *(Reading E)*
Griffiths, Nigel *(Edinburgh S)*
Griffiths, Win *(Bridgend)*
Grogan, John
Hall, Mike *(Weaver Vale)*
Hall, Patrick *(Bedford)*
Hamilton, David *(Midlothian)*
Hanson, David
Harris, Dr. Evan *(Oxford W & Abingdon)*
Harvey, Nick
Healey, John
Heath, David
Heathcoat-Amory, rh David
Henderson, Doug *(Newcastle N)*
Henderson, Ivan *(Harwich)*
Hendrick, Mark
Hendry, Charles
Hepburn, Stephen
Heppell, John
Hesford, Stephen
Hewitt, rh Ms Patricia
Heyes, David
Hinchliffe, David
Hoban, Mark *(Fareham)*
Hodge, Margaret
Hoey, Kate *(Vauxhall)*
Hogg, rh Douglas
Holmes, Paul
Hood, Jimmy *(Clydesdale)*
Hope, Phil *(Corby)*
Hopkins, Kelvin
Howarth, rh Alan *(Newport E)*
Howarth, George *(Knowsley N & Sefton E)*
Hoyle, Lindsay
Hughes, Beverley *(Stretford & Urmston)*
Hughes, Kevin *(Doncaster N)*
Hughes, Simon *(Southwark N)*
Humble, Mrs Joan
Hurst, Alan *(Braintree)*
Iddon, Dr. Brian
Illsley, Eric
Jack, rh Michael
Jackson, Glenda *(Hampstead & Highgate)*
Jackson, Helen *(Hillsborough)*
Jackson, Robert *(Wantage)*
Jamieson, David
Jenkins, Brian
Jones, Helen *(Warrington N)*
Jones, Jon Owen *(Cardiff C)*
Jones, Kevan *(N Durham)*
Jones, Lynne *(Selly Oak)*
Jones, Martyn *(Clwyd S)*
Jowell, rh Tessa
Joyce, Eric *(Falkirk W)*
Kaufman, rh Sir Gerald
Keeble, Ms Sally
Keen, Alan *(Feltham)*
Keetch, Paul
Kemp, Fraser
Kennedy, rh Charles *(Ross Skye & Inverness)*
Kennedy, Jane *(Wavertree)*
Key, Robert *(Salisbury)*
Kidney, David
King, Andy *(Rugby)*
Kirkwood, Sir Archy
Knight, Jim *(S Dorset)*
Kumar, Dr. Ashok
Laing, Mrs Eleanor
Lait, Mrs Jacqui

Lamb, Norman
Lammy, David
Laws, David *(Yeovil)*
Laxton, Bob *(Derby N)*
Lepper, David
Levitt, Tom *(High Peak)*
Lewis, Terry *(Worsley)*
Liddell, rh Mrs Helen
Linton, Martin
Lloyd, Tony *(Manchester C)*
Loughton, Tim
Love, Andrew
Lucas, Ian *(Wrexham)*
Luke, Iain *(Dundee E)*
Lyons, John *(Strathkelvin)*
McAvoy, Thomas
McCabe, Stephen
McCafferty, Chris
McDonagh, Siobhain
McDonnell, John
MacDougall, John
McFall, rh John
McGuire, Mrs Anne
McIsaac, Shona
McKechin, Ann
McKenna, Rosemary
Mactaggart, Fiona
McWalter, Tony
Mahmood, Khalid
Mahon, Mrs Alice
Mallaber, Judy
Mann, John *(Bassetlaw)*
Marris, Rob *(Wolverh'ton SW)*
Marsden, Gordon *(Blackpool S)*
Marshall, David *(Glasgow Shettleston)*
Martlew, Eric
Meacher, rh Michael
Meale, Alan *(Mansfield)*
Merron, Gillian
Michael, rh Alun
Miliband, David
Miller, Andrew
Mitchell, Andrew *(Sutton Coldfield)*
Mitchell, Austin *(Gt Grimsby)*
Moffatt, Laura
Mole, Chris
Moonie, Dr. Lewis
Moore, Michael
Moran, Margaret
Morgan, Julie
Morley, Elliot
Morris, rh Estelle
Mountford, Kali
Mudie, George
Mullin, Chris
Murphy, Denis *(Wansbeck)*
Naysmith, Dr. Doug
Oaten, Mark *(Winchester)*
O'Brien, Bill *(Normanton)*
O'Brien, Mike *(N Warks)*
Öpik, Lembit
Organ, Diana
Osborne, George *(Tatton)*
Osborne, Sandra *(Ayr)*
Ottaway, Richard
Page, Richard
Paice, James
Perham, Linda
Picking, Anne
Pickthall, Colin
Pike, Peter *(Burnley)*
Plaskitt, James
Pond, Chris *(Gravesham)*
Pound, Stephen
Prentice, Ms Bridget *(Lewisham E)*
Prentice, Gordon *(Pendle)*
Price, Adam *(E Carmarthen & Dinefwr)*
Primarolo, rh Dawn
Prisk, Mark *(Hertford)*
Prosser, Gwyn
Purchase, Ken
Purnell, James
Quinn, Lawrie
Rammell, Bill
Rapson, Syd *(Portsmouth N)*
Reed, Andy *(Loughborough)*
Reid, Alan *(Argyll & Bute)*
Reid, rh Dr. John *(Hamilton N & Bellshill)*
Rendel, David
Robertson, Angus *(Moray)*
Robertson, Hugh *(Faversham & M-Kent)*
Robertson, John *(Glasgow Anniesland)*
Robinson, Geoffrey *(Coventry NW)*
Roche, Mrs Barbara
Rooney, Terry
Ross, Ernie *(Dundee W)*
Roy, Frank *(Motherwell)*
Ruane, Chris
Ruddock, Joan
Russell, Bob *(Colchester)*
Salmond, Alex
Salter, Martin
Sanders, Adrian
Sarwar, Mohammad
Savidge, Malcolm
Sawford, Phil
Sedgemore, Brian
Shaw, Jonathan
Sheerman, Barry
Shephard, rh Mrs Gillian
Sheridan, Jim
Shipley, Ms Debra
Simpson, Alan *(Nottingham S)*
Singh, Marsha
Skinner, Dennis
Smith, rh Andrew *(Oxford E)*
Smith, rh Chris *(Islington S & Finsbury)*
Smith, Jacqui *(Redditch)*
Smith, John *(Glamorgan)*
Smith, Llew *(Blaenau Gwent)*
Smith, Sir Robert *(W Ab'd'ns & Kincardine)*
Soley, Clive
Southworth, Helen
Starkey, Dr. Phyllis
Steen, Anthony
Steinberg, Gerry
Stewart, David *(Inverness E & Lochaber)*
Stewart, Ian *(Eccles)*
Stinchcombe, Paul
Stoate, Dr. Howard
Strang, rh Dr. Gavin
Stringer, Graham
Stunell, Andrew
Tami, Mark *(Alyn)*
Taylor, rh Ann *(Dewsbury)*
Taylor, Dari *(Stockton S)*
Taylor, David *(NW Leics)*
Taylor, John *(Solihull)*
Taylor, Matthew *(Truro)*
Teather, Sarah
Thomas, Gareth *(Clwyd W)*
Thurso, John
Timms, Stephen
Tipping, Paddy
Todd, Mark *(S Derbyshire)*
Tonge, Dr. Jenny
Touhig, Don *(Islwyn)*
Trickett, Jon
Truswell, Paul
Turner, Dennis *(Wolverh'ton SE)*
Turner, Dr. Desmond *(Brighton Kemptown)*
Turner, Neil *(Wigan)*
Twigg, Stephen *(Enfield)*
Tyler, Paul *(N Cornwall)*
Tynan, Bill *(Hamilton S)*
Tyrie, Andrew
Vaz, Keith *(Leicester E)*
Vis, Dr. Rudi
Walley, Ms Joan
Ward, Claire
Wareing, Robert N.
Watson, Tom
Watts, David
Weir, Michael
White, Brian
Whitehead, Dr. Alan
Wicks, Malcolm
Williams, rh Alan *(Swansea W)*
Williams, Betty *(Conwy)*
Williams, Hywel *(Caernarfon)*
Williams, Roger *(Brecon)*
Willis, Phil
Wills, Michael
Winnick, David
Winterton, Ms Rosie *(Doncaster C)*
Wishart, Pete
Wood, Mike *(Batley)*
Woodward, Shaun
Woolas, Phil
Worthington, Tony
Wright, David *(Telford)*
Wright, Iain *(Hartlepool)*
Wright, Tony *(Cannock)*
Wyatt, Derek
Young, rh Sir George
Younger-Ross, Richard

Tellers for the Noes:
Joan Ryan and
Mr. Jim Murphy

Question accordingly negatived.

New Clause 4

APPEAL AGAINST REFUSAL OF REGISTRATION AUTHORITY TO FIND LAWFUL IMPEDIMENT

'(1) If the registration authority has refused to uphold an objection to a proposed civil partnership the person who made the objection may within 7 days appeal to the Registrar General.

(2) On an appeal under this section the Registrar General must either uphold the appeal or direct that a civil partnership schedule be issued.'.—*[Mr. Chope.]*

Brought up, and read the First time.

Mr. Chope: I beg to move, That the clause be read a Second time.

The new clause would have been dealt with more appropriately in Committee, but the Government so truncated affairs there that 118 clauses, more than 20 schedules and a host of Government amendments were not debated. We have the opportunity to debate it briefly now, however.

The essence of the new clause is equity, a principle that the Government find hard to understand or accept. Clause 13 provides for a person to object to a proposed civil partnership during the 15-day waiting period following the giving of notice. Clause 14 provides that the relevant registration authority must investigate the objection and cannot issue a civil partnership schedule until it has so investigated. Clause 15 allows proposed civil partners to appeal to the Registrar General, but there is no equivalent right for an objector to appeal against refusal to uphold an objection. My proposal would not build in a significant delay. The new clause says that an appeal would have to be made within seven days, and I hope that it will commend itself to the Government as a reasonable way of introducing a level playing field and a balance that does not exist at present.

In Committee, the Government said that some of the differences that the Bill will introduce in the civil partnership registration process, by comparison with the registration process for births, marriages and deaths, will anticipate changes to be brought about in the

[Mr. Chope]

overall registration process. One issue discussed in Committee, however, was the concern that the registration authority will not have to publish the address of proposed civil partners, and proposed civil partners would not even have to register in the area in which they were residing. With those weaknesses in the proposed system, it is all the more important to agree to new clause 4.

Jacqui Smith: First, let me make it clear that the provisions as drafted for the registration process, including any objection, mirror those in place for marriage, which already work well and the Government cannot see any reason to differ from those arrangements. I shall go through the process when an objection is made. In most cases, under the standard procedure, two people would give separate notices of their intention to form a civil partnership to any registration authority. Once those notices have been recorded in the register, the relevant information must be publicised by a variety of appropriate registration authorities. The hon. Member for Christchurch (Mr. Chope) implied that that information would not be in the public arena, but it would be publicised by the registration authorities where either of the partners gave notice, and by the registration authorities where either of the partners lived. The information would be widely publicly available.

Any person who wishes to object to the issuing of a civil partnership schedule in respect of one or both of the proposed civil partners may object to any registration authority during the 15-day waiting period. The objection must be related to a problem with eligibility and must be recorded in the register as soon as possible by the registration authority that receives it. The registration authority to which the first notice of proposed civil partnership was given has the duty to investigate the objection and would notify the proposed civil partners of it. Depending on the nature of the objection, the registration authority would request information relating to the objection from either the proposed civil partners or the objector, giving an appropriate length of time to reply. Should the objection be dismissed, the waiting period would be concluded in the normal way and a civil partnership schedule issued. Should the objection be upheld, the civil partnership schedule would not be issued.

The basis of the hon. Gentleman's new clause 4 appears to be that somehow there is an equivalence of effect between the objector and the civil partners. I do not accept that equivalence. In particular, we see no reason for providing for the objector to have an appeal against the refusal of the Registrar General to uphold the objection. Civil partnership is a legal relationship between the proposed civil partners, and between that couple and the state. The objector is not a party to that process but essentially acts as an informant to the registration authority. For the purpose of the formation of a civil partnership, he or she is not in dispute with either one of the proposed civil partners and does not require the same right of appeal.

Mr. Tim Boswell (Daventry) (Con): Does the Minister agree that if the Registrar General has considered the objection and refused it, that judgment would be justiciable if it was thought that he or she had not acted properly or professionally in the matter?

Jacqui Smith: I am sorry, but I missed the word in the middle of that question.

Mr. Boswell: If the Registrar General made or was thought to have made a mistake, would it be possible to mount a legal challenge to that decision?

Jacqui Smith: In the final conclusion, it would be possible to submit the Registrar General's decision to judicial review. Therefore, if a legal problem arose regarding an objection, there would be a route to redress.

The proposed civil partners are in a different position from the objector's. If an objection were upheld, they would be prevented from forming a civil partnership—a fundamental right of theirs should they be eligible. The objector is not being prevented from forming a legal relationship but having their objection accepted or rejected. In that respect, the objector is acting in a similar way to an informant in a benefit fraud case, for example. While they may raise a concern with the relevant Jobcentre Plus agency, they are not in dispute with the person on whom they are informing and it is up to the agency to decide whether to investigate further.

As I suggested in outlining the process, it is important that the civil partners and the objector be kept informed of the investigation's progress—we would certainly want to ensure, through guidance, that that is the case—but that is far from giving a right of appeal to that objection. I hope that I have convinced the hon. Member for Christchurch that that is neither appropriate nor desirable in such cases.

5.30 pm

Mr. Chope: I am grateful to the Minister for her response, but I am not wholly convinced by what she says. By drawing an analogy with an objector to benefit fraud, she immediately opens the argument that, under the Bill, an objector whose objection is deemed frivolous will be liable to a claim for damages. That is certainly not the situation in relation to frivolous objections to benefit fraud. Having heard what the Minister says, however, and being mindful of the fact that we have only 29 minutes to discuss the rest of the Bill on Report, I beg to ask leave to withdraw the motion.

Motion and clause, by leave, withdrawn.

Clause 6

PLACE OF REGISTRATION

Jacqui Smith: I beg to move amendment No. 21, in page 3, line 38, leave out from 'means' to end of line 40 and insert 'premises which—

(a) are used solely or mainly for religious purposes, or

(b) have been so used and have not subsequently been used solely or mainly for other purposes.'.

Mr. Deputy Speaker: With this it will be convenient to discuss the following: Government amendments Nos. 22 to 24.

Amendment No. 33, in clause 131, page 66, line 30, at end insert—

'(4A) In section 10(2) of the Succession (Scotland) Act 1964, for "legitim" substitute "legitim and rights under section 131 of the Civil Partnership Act 2004".'.

Government amendments Nos. 25 to 27.

Amendment No. 32, in schedule 20, page 326, line 26, at end insert—

'United States of America: Massachusetts:	same sex marriage or civil union.'.

Government amendment No. 34.

Jacqui Smith: Amendments Nos. 21, 23 and 24 are a response to the commitment that the Government made in Committee to look again at the definition of religious premises in clause 6, and the commitment made by my hon. Friend the Under-Secretary of State for Scotland to look at the drafting of clause 93. Those clauses deal with the place where a couple may register as each other's civil partner. The other amendments in this group are largely technical, and I shall turn to them in due course.

On Second Reading and in Committee, the hon. Member for Rutland and Melton (Mr. Duncan) expressed concerns about the definition of religious premises in clause 6, and the Government gave an assurance in Committee that we would look again at the issue, and I am pleased to tell the House that we have tabled the amendment to meet his concerns.

Before I explain the amendment in more detail, it is worth while reiterating to the House that the Government have not changed our policy that civil partnership registration, like the registration of civil marriages, should be wholly secular. We believe that allowing the formation of civil partnerships to take place in religious premises would undermine the public perception of civil partnership as a secular registration procedure and should be avoided. However, as I have said, we are keen to ensure that the statutory definition of religious premises is not unnecessarily restrictive.

We have listened to the hon. Gentleman's concern that, where a building has ceased to be used for religious purposes—for example, where a former chapel has become a private home or where an old church is now an hotel—there is no good reason why those premises should be caught by the statutory definition of religious premises. However, as I spelt out in Committee, we are also mindful that some buildings that were used as churches or chapels might not be currently in use as places of regular worship. While such buildings are not in use, their character does not change in any material way. They are not solely or mainly used for other, non-religious purposes. For example, it would not be right for a dormant church or chapel—sometimes known as a chapel at ease—to be used as a place for the registration of civil partnerships. Our amendment would ensure that that remains the case and that such buildings would be caught by the definition of religious premises.

The definition of religious premises in the Bill refers to premises

"designed for use solely or mainly for religious purposes"

as well as premises

"in use solely or mainly for religious purposes."

We have accepted that the first part of the definition is not appropriate because the design of a building should not be relevant when evaluating its purpose and character. The amendment will thus remove that part of the definition.

The new definition will refer to premises that

"are used solely or mainly for religious purposes",

or those that

"have been so used and have not subsequently been used solely or mainly for other purposes."

That will ensure that decisions made by registration authorities will be taken by reference to the purposes for which a building is solely or mainly used, or, if it is not in use, by reference to the purposes for which it was last solely or mainly used. Former religious premises with a verifiably different character, by reference to their sole or main use, will not be caught by the new definition, so it will be possible for proposed civil partners to put forward such premises to a local registration authority for its agreement as the place of registration. For example, a former church or chapel that is in use as a private home, hotel, or indeed—in honour of the hon. Member for Rutland and Melton—gay club on the Charing Cross road will fall outside the new definition. A church or chapel that is disused or closed, but has not, since closing, acquired a sole or main use for purposes other than religious ones will remain within the definition.

Government amendments Nos. 23 and 24 arise as a direct result of the consideration of the Bill by the Scottish Parliament as part of the Sewel process. On 12 May, the Justice 1 Committee of the Scottish Parliament questioned whether the provision that is now clause 93(2) was drafted too narrowly. As drafted, the provision precludes from consideration by a local registration authority for civil partnership registration a place where one or more

"persons are known to meet for public worship or one known to be regarded by persons of a religious faith as a place of reverence."

The Scottish Parliament was worried that that might preclude from consideration such buildings as a village hall that was used for many purposes, of which only one was religious worship.

It was made clear in reply to the Scottish Parliament that the policy intention behind clause 93 was to focus the attention of the local registration authority on the primary purpose of a place. My hon. Friend the Under-Secretary of State for Scotland undertook to re-examine the provision in the light of the Scottish Parliament's views, and we have thus tabled the amendments to ensure that the clause follows our policy intention. We believe that the amendments address the justifiable worries of hon. Members while ensuring that there are appropriate safeguards against the use of disused religious premises that have not acquired a new sole or main use for civil partnership registration. As such, they strike a careful yet fair balance, and I hope that hon. Members will support them.

[Jacqui Smith]

Government amendment No. 22 will alter clause 93 slightly to bring it in line with procedures in Scotland on civil marriage. If the Registrar General for Scotland gives his approval, section 18(2) of the Marriage (Scotland) Act 1977 allows a registrar who is authorised to solemnise civil marriages to do so in the registration office of another authorised registrar, or in a place in the district of another authorised registrar in which civil marriages may be carried out. The provision can be used when a local registration authority does not have a registrar available on a specific occasion to conduct a civil marriage, but a neighbouring authority can supply a registrar. It can also be used when a couple want a friend who is a registrar to conduct their marriage, but when that is to take place somewhere other than the registration district in which the friend works. The provisions offer flexibility to the conduct of civil marriages in Scotland, so it is entirely appropriate that similar flexibility should be available for civil partnership registration.

Government amendments Nos. 25 to 27 are technical amendments that deal with transitional issues that could arise if two people who had registered an overseas relationship in a country or territory outside the UK had dissolved or annulled that relationship, or obtained a legal separation outside the UK, before the Bill came into force. The amendments will ensure that, if a couple dissolved or annulled their overseas relationship before commencement, and if that dissolution or annulment met the requirements for recognition in the UK that would apply if it had taken place after commencement, they would not be civil partners under clause 215, and they thus would not generally be treated as having been civil partners either.

Clause 215 provides that an overseas relationship that is registered before commencement is to be treated as a civil partnership that has been formed at commencement. Amendment No. 25 will ensure that, if the overseas relationship was dissolved or annulled before commencement, a civil partnership would not be recognised as existing after commencement. However, proposed new subsection (3B) inserted into clause 215 will allow for limited cases in which there are good policy reasons to make an exception to that principle and treat the parties after commencement as having been civil partners who have dissolved or annulled an overseas relationship. In particular, schedules 7, 11 and 17 allow the parties to an overseas dissolution, annulment or legal separation to apply to the courts in the UK for financial relief in certain circumstances.

Proposed new subsection (3B) also provides for flexibility by enabling an order to be made under clause 259 to specify additional provisions for the purpose of which the parties are to be treated as having been civil partners, subject to any modifications prescribed in the order. There may be other provisions that it would be right to apply to parties who have been in a past overseas relationship.

Amendments Nos. 26 and 27 make it clear that the provisions in chapter 3 of part 5 allow an overseas dissolution, annulment or legal separation to be recognised under that chapter even if it took place before commencement. They ensure that the provisions relating to the recognition of overseas relationships and overseas dissolutions deal adequately with pre-commencement events, and that only those provisions which it is appropriate to apply to relationships that were dissolved prior to commencement do apply.

Those technical amendments put the Bill into better order. They also recognise concerns of hon. Members about the definition of religious premises and strike a fair balance. I hope that the House will accept them.

Mr. Boswell: The House will appreciate that, as a result of other duties, I was unable to have the privilege of serving on the Standing Committee, although I have read its proceedings.

On behalf of my hon. Friend the Member for Rutland and Melton (Mr. Duncan), may I express our gratitude for the change set out in amendment No. 21? It will tie the prohibition on the use of church premises not to their design, but to their main use or immediate past use. That is realistic. We also have no objection to the other Government amendments. I was interested to hear about the greater flexibility in Scotland. One concern about the Gender Recognition Act 2004 was that some registrars might have objections of conscience—a concern that was expressed strongly by the right hon. Member for Swansea, East (Donald Anderson). We were assured that alternative arrangements could be made if registrars were concerned about people's status.

As I flagged up on Second Reading, it is important that the Minister has proper regard to private international law and the harmonisation of jurisdictions abroad. Although I did not participate in the debate on the main group of amendments, it is clear that a large number of western countries have introduced similar provisions for civil partnerships.

Chris Bryant: The hon. Gentleman makes an important point about what would happen if a registrar did not want to perform a civil partnership registration. I am sure that he is not resiling from the belief that every local authority in the land should none the less be required to make provision so that partners who want to have a civil partnership can do so.

5.45 pm

Mr. Boswell: I am happy to give the hon. Gentleman that assurance. Of course, there is no point in supporting the Bill unless we are prepared to put it into effect. My reservations specifically concerned the remarriage of transgendered individuals, who constitute a small but significant subset.

It is important to harmonise private international law and make those arrangements functional so that they meet a need here and in other countries. The hon. Member for Orkney and Shetland (Mr. Carmichael) will make his own case for the amendments that he tabled. Some of them are probing, but from private soundings I believe that they offer sensible proposals, so I hope that the Minister will consider them.

Mr. Carmichael: I shall speak to amendment No. 32, which I tabled with my hon. Friend the Member for Gordon (Malcolm Bruce). Amendment No. 33, which we also tabled, achieves exactly the same aim as Government amendment No. 34, so I shall not press it further.

Amendment No. 32 would add the commonwealth of Massachusetts to schedule 20, so that same-sex marriages registered there are recognised in this country. There was concern about whether the legislation introducing those relationships would fall foul of a constitutional amendment to ban same-sex marriages in the United States, but the position been settled with the Goodridge case, which was heard in the supreme judicial court of Massachusetts. It is unfair and unnecessary to leave gay and lesbian partners who have registered lawfully under Massachusetts legislation in doubt about what will happen when the Bill comes into force in the UK. There is no good reason for excluding the commonwealth of Massachusetts from schedule 20, so I look forward to the Minister's response.

Two letters have been circulated among hon. Members, including one dated 3 June 2004 from members of the Massachusetts state legislature and the general court. I will not read it out in its entirety, but the last sentence of a letter signed by senators and state representatives says:

> "If the United Kingdom does not recognize these relationships, families will be hurt if they decide to relocate from Massachusetts to the United Kingdom."

Similarly, a letter dated 29 September 2004 from Members of the US Congress concludes:

> "When couples decide to move to the United Kingdom from Massachusetts, they should have the security of knowing that they will enjoy even the most basic benefits, like hospital visitation. We hope you will agree that the exclusion of couples, whose respective state governments have recognized their right to enjoy the same benefits outlined in the civil partnership bill, leaves them in doubt about how their relationship will be viewed when this bill becomes law sometime next year."

Mr. Forth: Does the hon. Gentleman agree that caution is advisable in pursuing that line of argument, given that a number of American states have recently held referendums in which, by an overwhelming vote, people have urged constitutional changes at state level so that marriage can be recognised only between men and women? The country has not yet resolved the dilemma thrown up by people who have an arrangement in one state but then move to another. His argument that we should make special provision for Massachusetts when even other states of the union have not done so is thin.

Mr. Carmichael: I would not wish to second-guess the right hon. Gentleman, as I do not know how familiar he is with the terms of schedule 20. However, it already lists the state of Vermont, so it would be inconsistent to recognise civil partnerships or same-sex marriages from Vermont but not from the commonwealth of Massachusetts.

We never know what is going to happen in another country and we have little control over such matters, but it would be remiss of us to fail to act simply in anticipation of something that might or might not happen at a future date.

Jacqui Smith: As the hon. Member for Orkney and Shetland (Mr. Carmichael) made clear, amendment No. 32 seeks to add same-sex marriage or civil union in Massachusetts to schedule 20.

Perhaps it would be worth reminding hon. Members that we have taken a belt-and-braces approach to the international recognition provisions in the Bill. As the hon. Gentleman pointed out, we have listed in schedule 20 those foreign civil partnership-type arrangements that would be recognised in the UK, but we have also made clear in clause 214 a set of general conditions that, if fulfilled, would also lead to recognition of a relationship. He is proposing that we should include Massachusetts in schedule 20 at this point.

It was made clear by my noble Friends in another place that we do not consider it appropriate to add Massachusetts to schedule 20 at this stage, and we remain of that view. Same-sex marriage in Massachusetts was not originally included in the schedule because, when it was drafted, it remained uncertain whether the Massachusetts legislature would allow such marriages to go ahead. Hon. Members may be aware that the first same-sex marriages were conducted on 17 May this year, and those marriages continue to be legally valid in that state.

Hon. Members will also be aware, however, that the long-term future of same-sex marriages in Massachusetts remains unclear because of the controversy that surrounds the issue. The Massachusetts legislature has proposed a constitutional amendment that would limit marriage in Massachusetts to opposite-sex couples and instead establish civil unions. The amendment would need to be passed again by the state legislature in 2005 and then approved by the voters in a 2006 state-wide referendum before it could be passed. It is clear that the intention of law makers to prevent same-sex marriages in Massachusetts from continuing to be legally valid means that the situation there is still not stable and could change relatively soon. With the law being subject to such uncertainty, the inclusion now of Massachusetts in schedule 20 would be premature.

None the less, I have considerable sympathy with the point made by the hon. Member for Orkney and Shetland about the individual position of people who have entered into same-sex marriages in Massachusetts up to this point, and I hope that I can give him some reassurance. I should like to make it clear to hon. Members that not adding Massachusetts to the schedule now does not mean that same-sex couples who have a legally valid marriage there will not be treated as civil partners in the UK. The general conditions in clause 214 already ensure that such couples will be treated as civil partners. The general conditions are, however, also sufficiently flexible to deal with the prospect of subsequent legislation altering the situation in Massachusetts. We therefore see no need to add those marriages to the schedule.

Mr. Carmichael: It might assist if the Minister could give me an assurance that, as it will be some time before the Bill comes into force, presuming that it will eventually be passed, the Government will keep this matter under review and see by the time it takes effect whether it might be possible to add Massachusetts at a later date by statutory instrument.

Jacqui Smith: I can give the hon. Gentleman that assurance. Of course, it will not only be the situation in Massachusetts that we keep under review. As hon. Members have made clear, there are many other legislatures, whether in the United States, Europe or more widely, that are also considering such a move. It is

[Jacqui Smith]

in order to ensure certainty for couples who have entered a relationship that would fulfil the general conditions in clause 214 while also having clarity about the legislative arrangements in schedule 20 that we have the twin-track approach, which I hope gives him and the people of Massachusetts the assurance that our Bill is flexible enough to recognise both the individual situation of couples and the ongoing legislative position, which is rather more in a state of flux.

The hon. Gentleman is right about Government amendment No. 34, which fulfils the same function as his amendment No. 33. I congratulate him on his understanding of Scots succession law, although I will not test him on it.

Amendment agreed to.

Clause 49

GROUNDS ON WHICH CIVIL PARTNERSHIP IS VOID

Mr. Chope: I beg to move amendment No. 11, in page 24, *line* 22, *at end insert*

', or

(d) the necessary declaration under section 8 includes a false statement relating to the qualifying condition under Schedule 23.'.

Mr. Deputy Speaker: With this it will be convenient to discuss amendment No. 31, in clause 210, page 101, line 39 at end insert—

'(6) Where the conditions in subsection (2) are met but one of the proposed civil partners is not a United Kingdom national the two proposed civil partners may choose—

(a) to register in prescribed countries or territories outside the United Kingdom, or

(b) to register as civil partners within the United Kingdom, for which purpose, when required, an appropriate visa will be issued to the proposed partner who is not a United Kingdom national.'.

Mr. Chope: Amendment No. 11 would bring the Bill into line with where the Minister thought that it was in Committee. It would mean that a false statement made to enter into a civil partnership in order to avoid immigration control would render that partnership void. Surely a false statement to avoid immigration control should be a ground on which a civil partnership is rendered void, along with the other grounds set out in clause 49. One of those grounds is that the partners were not eligible to register as civil partners under chapter 1, and surely that is analogous to a situation in which one of the parties makes a false statement to avoid immigration control.

The Government obviously thought that that provision was included in the Bill. The Minister was gracious enough to write to members of the Committee explaining that her understanding had been wrong. I tabled the amendment so that the Bill can now reflect what she thought was the proper position. She said that she thought that she had made an unintentional error, and this is an opportunity for the Government to put that right.

Mr. Carmichael: I rise to speak to amendment No. 31, which stands in my name and that of my hon. Friend the Member for Gordon (Malcolm Bruce). The amendment's purpose is to allow the Minister to place on the record whether the Government will allow something akin to what is known informally as a fiancée visa, so that people who come to the United Kingdom and who anticipate entering a civil partnership agreement will be allowed a visa to enable them to do so.

Jacqui Smith: As the hon. Member for Christchurch said, amendment No. 11 is a probing amendment. It provides that a civil partnership would be void if a declaration made under clause 8 contained a false statement relating to the qualifying condition in schedule 23. I reiterate that I was wrong and that a civil partnership would not be void in that situation. Clause 8 requires a declaration to be made, but no legal impediment exists to the formation of a civil partnership. Each of the proposed civil partners must have a usual place of residence in England or Wales for at least seven days before giving notice.

Schedule 23 provides that where one of the proposed civil partners is subject to immigration control, the declaration under clause 8 must also include a statement that the qualifying condition is satisfied. The qualifying condition would be satisfied where a person subject to immigration control has an entry clearance granted expressly for the purpose of enabling him or her to form a civil partnership in the United Kingdom.

I shall quickly skip to amendment No. 31. The provision is equivalent to what the hon. Member for Orkney and Shetland described as a fiancée visa, so I can give him that assurance.

Mr. Chope: In the short time that remains, can the Minister explain why a false statement would not render a partnership void?

Jacqui Smith: Our approach is appropriate. If one makes a false statement about the declaration, one should be subject to the offences in clause 80. If one uses false documents in order to prove a particular point, one should be subject to forgery and counterfeiting legislation. If a civil partnership does not appear to be genuine—for example, the partners may not intend to live together permanently as civil partners—any existing leave to remain in the United Kingdom granted on the basis of that civil partnership might be curtailed, and any future application for leave to remain on that basis might be refused under the immigration rules. Those seem to me to be the appropriate penalties, as opposed to the uncertainty that could arise from saying that this is grounds for voiding a civil partnership that might, of course, have been in existence for a considerable period at the point at which—

It being Six o'clock, MR. DEPUTY SPEAKER, *put the Question already proposed from the Chair, pursuant to Order [12 October].*

Amendment negatived.

MR. DEPUTY SPEAKER *then proceeded to put the Questions necessary to dispose of the business to be concluded at that hour, pursuant to Order [12 October].*

Clause 93

PLACE OF REGISTRATION

Amendments made: No. 22, in page 44, line 7, at end insert—

'( ) The place of registration may, if the approval of the Registrar General is obtained, be outwith the district of the authorised registrar carrying out the registration.'.

No. 23, in page 44, line 8, leave out from 'be' to end of line 10 and insert

'in religious premises, that is to say in premises which—

(a) are used solely or mainly for religious purposes, or

(b) have been so used and have not subsequently been used solely or mainly for other purposes.'.

No. 24, in page 44, line 12, leave out

'; and "known" means known to the local registration authority'.—*[Jacqui Smith.]*

Clause 215

OVERSEAS RELATIONSHIPS TREATED AS CIVIL PARTNERSHIPS: THE GENERAL RULE

Amendment made: No. 25, in page 104, line 4, at end insert—

'(3A) But if—

(a) before this section comes into force, a dissolution or annulment of the overseas relationship was obtained outside the United Kingdom, and

(b) the dissolution or annulment would be recognised under Chapter 3 if the overseas relationship had been treated as a civil partnership at the time of the dissolution or annulment,

subsection (3) does not apply and subsections (1) and (2) have effect subject to subsection (3B).

(3B) The overseas relationship is not to be treated as having been a civil partnership for the purposes of any provisions except—

(a) Schedules 7, 11 and 17 (financial relief in United Kingdom after dissolution or annulment obtained outside the United Kingdom);

(b) such provisions as are specified (with or without modifications) in an order under section 259;

(c) Chapter 3 (so far as necessary for the purposes of paragraphs (a) and (b)).'.—*[Jacqui Smith]*

Clause 219

POWER TO MAKE PROVISION CORRESPONDING TO EC REGULATION 2201/2003

Amendment made: No. 26, in page 106, line 9, at end insert—

'( ) The regulations may make provision under subsections (1)(b) and (2)(b) which applies even if the date of the dissolution, annulment or legal separation is earlier than the date on which this section comes into force.'.—*[Jacqui Smith.]*

Clause 234

RECOGNITION IN THE UK OF OVERSEAS DISSOLUTION, ANNULMENT OR SEPARATION

Amendment made: No. 27, in page 112, line 27, at end insert

'(whether before or after this section comes into force)'.—*[Jacqui Smith.]*

Clause 255

POWER TO AMEND ENACTMENTS RELATING TO PENSIONS

Amendment made: No. 28, in page 125, line 29, at end insert

', and

(b) may be made with a view to ensuring that pensions, allowances or gratuities take account of rights which accrued, service which occurred or any other circumstances which existed before the passing of this Act.'.—*[Jacqui Smith.]*

Schedule 28

CONSEQUENTIAL AMENDMENTS: SCOTLAND

Amendment made: No. 34, in page 396, line 21, at end insert—

'In section 10(2) (calculation of legal rights), for "jus relicti, jus relictae or legitim" substitute "legal rights".'.—*[Jacqui Smith.]*

Order for Third Reading read.—[Queen's Consent, on behalf of the Crown, signified.]

6.1 pm

Jacqui Smith: I beg to move, That the Bill be now read the Third time.

The Civil Partnerships Bill marks an important stage in the ongoing progress towards equality for lesbian and gay people. Over recent years we have seen legislative and cultural changes that mark the growing confidence and maturity of our civil society. We have removed laws that stigmatised and excluded lesbian, gay and bisexual people from full involvement in the life of the nation. However, as my hon. Friend the Member for Wallasey (Angela Eagle) rightly observed, just when we may feel that progress is being made, we are confronted with events that remind us, in the most appalling ways, of how much more is to be done. Incidents such as the senseless murder of David Morley, a survivor of the bomb attack on the Admiral Duncan pub, and another recent attack in which a man was stabbed on his way home from a night out, apparently simply because he was gay, demonstrate that we must continue to combat prejudice and hatred wherever and whenever it rears its ugly head.

The way in which we legislate and conduct our discussions in this House sends an important signal about the respect and recognition that is due to lesbian, gay and bisexual people.

Mr. Gerald Howarth: I hope that the Minister will accept unreservedly that those of us who oppose the Bill, however passionately, in no way condone any of the actions to which she referred. We find it as outrageous and unacceptable as she does, and I hope that she would not try to persuade the House that we were complicit in the horrendous actions that have taken place.

Jacqui Smith: I certainly would not, and I commend the hon. Gentleman for his remarks.

The fact that we have introduced the Bill and will, I hope, pass it into legislation, sends a very important message about the respect in which we, as a country and as individuals, hold the many people in this country who are in long-term same-sex relationships. I have always

[Jacqui Smith]

argued that the Bill is not only about dealing with the considerable day-to-day practical and legal difficulties involved in those relationships, but is a manifestation of the respect and dignity that we give to them.

This new legal relationship comes with both rights and responsibilities, and the Bill sends out a clear message about the importance of stable and committed relationships. It will enshrine in law a comprehensive structure through which same-sex couples can form a civil partnership and make provision for organising their joint lives together.

Most of the time, our debates on the Bill have shown the House at its best. I thank all hon. Members who have spoken with intelligence, thoughtfulness and temperance. I believe that we have listened to hon. Members' concerns and, when appropriate, sought to amend the Bill to tackle them. On the whole, the process has been constructive, due to various hon. Members' contributions. I express my gratitude to my hon. Friend the Under-Secretary of State for Scotland for her contribution and the important issues that she has tackled, including those that relate to Scotland. I assure hon. Members that she has a close and intimate knowledge of Scottish succession legislation. I put on record my appreciation of the work in another place of Baroness Scotland, Baroness Hollis, Baroness Amos, Baroness Crawley, Lord Filkin and Lord Evans of Temple Guiting.

I thank hon. Members of all parties who have made an important contribution to the scrutiny of the Bill. The mature and constructive approach of the hon. Member for Rutland and Melton (Mr. Duncan)—perhaps I should call him Mr. December—is a credit to him and, I hope, to his party. The hon. Gentleman was unfortunately not in his place when the Government amendment on religious premises was agreed earlier. It is therefore worth while to put on record again that it arose from discussions that he in particular prompted.

I pay tribute to the hon. Member for Buckingham (Mr. Bercow), who has on every occasion actively supported the Government's commitment to reject amendments that would have rendered the Bill unworkable. He has been diligent in his attendance and his contributions.

The hon. Member for Orkney and Shetland (Mr. Carmichael) made thoughtful contributions and has played an important role in consideration of the Bill.

I want to place on record my appreciation of all my hon. Friends who served on the Committee and perhaps especially of my hon. Friends the Members for Rhondda (Chris Bryant) and for Wallasey, who have ensured an informed and passionate debate inside and outside the Chamber. They brought all the force of their argument to bear in the discussions, which led to a Government amendment that was agreed today and will ensure fair and equitable pensions treatment for civil partners.

I thank our Committee Chairmen for the excellent way in which they chaired our proceedings, the parliamentary officials who served during the Bill's passage and the Whip, my hon. Friend the Member for West Bromwich, East (Mr. Watson), who played an important role in ensuring that we kept to order.

Mr. Gerald Howarth: And the returning officer.

Jacqui Smith: That was a churlish intervention.

The Bill has taken some time to develop and, throughout, it has had the benefit of the work of an extraordinarily dedicated and proficient group of officials. They deserve congratulations.

Sir Patrick Cormack: In a spirit of conciliation, will the Minister also pay tribute to those who have honourably opposed the Bill and are not in any way at odds with her comments about the community who will benefit but simply believe that the measure is the wrong way to proceed? Some of us have not been able to take a great part in the proceedings but my hon. Friends the Members for Aldershot (Mr. Howarth) and for Gainsborough (Mr. Leigh) deserve the thanks of the House for the dignity and force with which they have advanced arguments that many people support. Will the right hon. Lady acknowledge that?

Jacqui Smith: I acknowledge that they have put their case strongly.

As the Bill leaves the House, it is complete and comprehensive, wide-ranging and detailed. It is carefully drafted and its clauses are tightly interwoven.

It is indeed ground-breaking, in that it is the first Bill of its kind to include comprehensive international recognition provisions that could be used as a template by other countries in the years to come. The Bill also provides equality in pension rights.

This is a Bill to be proud of and this House has done an excellent job in salvaging it from the unfortunate state in which it arrived here. It is perhaps no surprise that it has received massive support from the lesbian, gay and bisexual communities. What is truly heartening, however, is the level of support that has come from the population at large—from trade unions, religious groups, legal experts, groups such as Age Concern and Carers UK, and the hundreds of individuals who have written to express their delight that, at last, an important injustice is being addressed.

Many same-sex couples will be very keen to avail themselves of the Bill's provisions, once they come into effect. It is expected that the Act will take effect roughly a year after Royal Assent, to enable the necessary secondary legislation to be introduced and other operational changes to be made. I have no doubt that many people will want to take advantage of its provisions at that point. Many of us who are married know well how our lives have been enriched beyond measure by the support of our husbands and wives. Indeed, our achievements are all the greater and all the more enjoyable because we have someone to share them with. Our lesbian and gay family members, colleagues and friends deserve an equivalent chance, and they deserve the current legal injustices to be put right. The Civil Partnership Bill remedies those injustices and provides that opportunity, and I commend it to the House.

6.11 pm

Mr. Alan Duncan: May I echo the Minister's comments and thank her and her fellow Minister, the Under-Secretary of State for Scotland, the hon. Member for Stirling (Mrs. McGuire) for the courtesy with which they have conducted all our proceedings throughout the passage of the Bill? I also echo her thanks to the civil servants and to the Chairmen of the Committee, singling out in particular the hon. Member for Stockton, North (Mr. Cook), who returned from having a hospital operation and, despite being in considerable pain, continued to chair our Committee.

I should like to turn my attention, as my hon. Friend the Member for South Staffordshire (Sir Patrick Cormack) urged the Minister to do, to those who disagree with the Bill. Democracy involves the settling of difference by decent means, and I should like to express my respect for the manner in which those who have opposed the Bill, or elements of it—most, if not all, of whom are sitting behind me—have expressed that difference. Out of that respect, I should like to address the overarching religious objections that have been voiced throughout the passage of the Bill.

Over the centuries, political difference has been defined by various distinct positions: Church and state; Crown and people; rich and poor; left and right; pro and anti-Europe; wets and drys. However, rising nearer to the top of our political deliberations once again is the distinction between libertarian and authoritarian strands of thought. One strand of that debate involves the question of whether it is right for the state to use its supposed power to shape a moral template and to impose it on a country through the force of law.

The recent presidential election in the United States has sparked a debate about whether moral values are an electoral force that can be harnessed for the national and political good, and whether they mean the same thing in the United Kingdom as they do in the United States. We might set ourselves the task of comparing and contrasting the effects of moral opinion on the democratic process in the US and the UK. We have already seen some fairly manic articles on the subject, in which writers on each side of the argument have wilfully misconstrued the position of those on the other side. Each side deserves more respect from the other.

The Bill, with its merits and demerits, lies at the very heart of that debate. Is the change that it offers a threat to the traditional decencies of our way of life, and something that puts the moral fabric of our society at risk? Or is it an overdue recognition of how any society, as it inevitably changes, needs to embrace adjusted patterns of life and behaviour to suit the wishes of people whose qualities and conduct are no less and no more decent than those who readily fit into established mores? At the very least, the entire House, male and—if my right hon. Friend the Member for Maidstone and The Weald (Miss Widdecombe) will take it the right way—even female behind me, would agree that we have moved on from the view of the Emperor Justinian, who thought that homosexuality was a cause of earthquakes.

This debate, to which the hon. Member for Walsall, North (David Winnick) alluded earlier, was raging 40 years ago in the House. "Law, Liberty and Morality", by H. L. A. Hart, was a seminal lecture given in the early 1960s. It influenced my views on the subject that we are debating today. It provoked a blistering riposte from a Law Lord, Paddy Devlin, entitled "The Enforcement of Morals", which, in turn, in an attempt to mediate through a more churchly eye, led to Basil Mitchell's "Law, Morality and Religion in a Secular Society".

Miss Widdecombe: Will my hon. Friend give way?

Mr. Duncan: I will give way once, of course.

Miss Widdecombe: I therefore promise not to trespass on my hon. Friend's time twice. He is talking about the state enforcing morality. Nothing will change if the Bill is not passed, inasmuch as two people of the same sex will still be free to enter into a relationship, to set up a household and all the rest of it. Nothing will alter that. The only alteration will be that what is now unique—marriage and the rights and responsibilities that the law accords to marriage—will for the first time be given to one specific group in our community other than the married. That is the essence of this Bill, not anything to do with whether people should be free to practise homosexuality.

Mr. Duncan: But the fundamental premise of my right hon. Friend's comments is that there is a moral distinction to be made, which means that there should not be recognition of same-sex partnerships. If I may, let me trace my argument through, as I am trying to dignify her views with what I hope is seen as a thoughtful response; at the very least, I am making an effort to do so.

H. L. A. Hart, taking a more liberal stand, put the question of whether the state should adopt what he termed "physical paternalism", and asked

"is the fact that certain conduct"—

perhaps this answers the question of my right hon. Friend the Member for Maidstone and The Weald—

"is by common standards immoral sufficient to justify making that conduct punishable by law?"

Or, in this case, is it sufficient simply to make it not permitted or recognised? Indeed, he asked,

"is it morally permissible to enforce morality as such?"

Patrick Devlin, on the other hand, believed that one could justify the use of the criminal law—in this case, any law—to punish deviations from a society's shared morality.

Recognition of homosexual relationships in the 40 years since that classic exchange has become part of this and many other countries' shared morality. Indeed, John Stuart Mill had already set the calculus for our judgments. He said that society could use its powers to protect morality, but by that he meant stopping people doing harm to others. There is no greater harm than the brutal killing, to which the Minister referred, of David Morley, in a homophobic attack, just two weeks ago, a few hundred yards from the House.

This Bill does not do anybody harm. Those who believe in God, and yet believe too in opposing the Bill, risk being seen by others as people who are using the name of God to promote their own earthly dislikes. Faith in God, and one's ensuing conduct, are undeniably matters of personal choice and individual

[Mr. Duncan]

conviction. Being forced to do something does not make one moral. It might make one conform to certain moral norms, but only a decision that is taken entirely freely can be totally moral. Conversely, being gay is not a matter of choice. A natural disposition, which does no harm to others, cannot be immoral, however much it might be intensely despised by some.

In "Law, Morality and Religion", Basil Mitchell observed:

> "The new liberalism"—

which perhaps many here do not like—

> "is based on a fundamental distinction between a social morality which is thought of as a necessary condition of any viable society, and a morality of personal ideals which are for individuals to choose."

The Bill allows the latter.

In the same exchange, Devlin said

> "If Christianity is true, it should illuminate precisely those human needs which men are found in experience to have, and this is not by accident but because the God of revelation is also the God of nature."

Condemnation of gay relationships therefore risks being thoroughly unchristian, and barely hidden disdain combined with professed indifference is the most contemptible attitude of all. The role of the state is to intervene when two people are doing harm to each other, not when they just happen to love each other.

In my view, the Bill is a landmark in the clash between those who want to enforce their own moral code and choose to judge their fellow man and those who say that a couple's mutual love should be permitted and celebrated without the intrusion and interference of the state. We are supposed to be here to build a happier country. If we are to build a monument to decency, fairness, love, equality and all the rich happiness that two people can provide for each other, the Bill should be passed as a cornerstone of the very monument that we want to build.

6.21 pm

Angela Eagle: It gives me great pleasure to follow the hon. Member for Rutland and Melton (Mr. Duncan), and to compliment him on his quick philosophical round-up of important social and political issues. I agree with his interpretation of the effects of the Bill.

I welcome this sensible piece of social reform. It recognises that we have moved on socially, and if it is passed it will grant an acknowledgement of the dignity and respect that should be conferred on same-sex couples as well as legal recognition of their relationships should they choose to enter into civil partnerships. It means that the United Kingdom is moving into the mainstream of social reform across the world, as many of us pointed out on Second Reading.

I was privileged to serve on the Standing Committee, along with Members on both sides of the House. I believe that scrutiny and consideration hugely improved the Bill, which was a mess when it arrived from the House of Lords. The removal of the Lords' wrecking amendments, which effectively would have allowed grandmothers to have a relationship akin to marriage with their grandsons or granddaughters, was essential to prevent this House from becoming a laughing stock.

A significant advance made in Committee, albeit one less commented on than others, was the Government's decision to grant full pension equality to same-sex couples and allow them to benefit from the contributions that many had made on the same basis as that applying to widows and widowers in the case of both state and private occupational pension schemes.

I asked my hon. Friend the Minister about that on Second Reading, and the hon. Member for Orkney and Shetland (Mr. Carmichael) said rather cynically that she was just trying to get through the debate. He did not know about some of the meetings that had been taking place behind the scenes to deal with what my hon. Friend the Member for Rhondda (Chris Bryant) and I considered a very just cause. I for one was extremely pleased when, at the end of Second Reading, the Under-Secretary of State for Scotland was able to grant the first part of our wish—full pension equality in state occupational schemes—thus, I hope, banishing the cynicism of the hon. Member for Orkney and Shetland for ever. In Committee, we were able finally to iron out this issue by eliminating an existing anomaly in private sector pension schemes as well. So the Bill is now ready for the statute book, and I hope that when it returns to the other place shortly, the Lords will respect the large majorities by which it has proceeded through the various Commons stages.

The other very interesting and enjoyable aspect of the process was the spectacle of the Conservatives dealing with the Bill in Committee on a free vote. That prompted some extremely good speeches and passionate argument, but it also demonstrated the Janus face of the Conservative party, which I mentioned on Second Reading. Little did I realise quite how many facets that face has. The four Conservative Members in Committee proceeded in very different ways; in fact, they were all over the place, which is perhaps what free votes do.

After decades of reinforcing every prejudice, playing on every fear and creating legislation such as the odious section 28, there are welcome signs of movement among the Conservatives. Thankfully, a much more enlightened and humane element is emerging, and their support for the Bill is welcome. Particular mention should be made of the hon. Member for Salisbury (Mr. Key), who made an extremely good speech. The hon. Members for Buckingham (Mr. Bercow) and for Wealden (Charles Hendry) made superb speeches on Second Reading, demonstrating this strand of conservatism and, hopefully, its emerging strength.

But for each enlightened, tolerant and respectful speech, the narrow-minded right-wing element of the Conservative party voiced its backward view of the world. In Committee, we had a quite extraordinary spectacle. In general, the hon. Member for Rutland and

Melton supported the Bill with a great deal of erudition and passion. However, he refused to vote to include its first 80 clauses in Committee—

Miss Widdecombe: On a point of order, Madam Deputy Speaker. What on earth has this got to do with the merits of the Bill?

Madam Deputy Speaker (Sylvia Heal): That is a point for debate rather than a point of order for the Chair.

Angela Eagle: I am simply attempting, Madam Deputy Speaker, to report to the House some of our proceedings in Committee; that is a perfectly usual way of dealing with Third Reading debates.

Mr. Alan Duncan: I should it put on the record that I did not vote for some 80 clauses in Committee because they were being forced through on the guillotine with no debate. I thought it better to abstain, in order to make it quite clear that I do not approve of such timetable motions.

Angela Eagle: The hon. Gentleman can of course do what he likes with his vote, especially when his party has a free vote. But he knows that the practical effect of that vote in Committee could have been to destroy the Bill, and I hope and pray that that was not his intention. The Whip in Committee, the hon. Member for South-West Bedfordshire (Andrew Selous), mostly abstained but sometimes voted against the Bill. The altogether more predictable hon. Member for Christchurch (Mr. Chope) ploughed his lonely furrow of total opposition, never losing a chance to belittle, denigrate and trivialise same-sex partners and civil partnerships. When he was not attempting to change the Bill to require same-sex couples to register—

Mr. John Hayes (South Holland and The Deepings) (Con): On a point of order, Madam Deputy Speaker. I seek your ruling in this regard, but it seems to me that this is a speech analysing Conservative thinking on a range of subjects, including this one, rather than a Third Reading speech.

Madam Deputy Speaker: I repeat what I said earlier. The hon. Lady is recalling incidents throughout the Bill's passage in the Chamber and in Committee.

Angela Eagle: Thank you, Madam Deputy Speaker. I thought that it was part of the nature of debates on Third Reading that we look back on our proceedings. I am merely pointing out that the four Conservative Members serving on the Bill in Committee all did different things.

Of those four, I move on to the best, the hon. Member for Buckingham. Unlike some of his colleagues, he was steadfast, brave and principled throughout the Committee stage; he argued constantly and passionately in favour of the Bill from start to finish. I congratulate him on his open-minded humanity, but he faces a long and uphill battle with his crusade to make the Conservative party begin to remake itself as compassionate and humane. I wish him and his other colleagues in the fight all the best for the future.

Meanwhile, we have a Bill that is as near perfect as possible, following its Committee and Report stage. I welcome the huge endorsement that the Bill gained on Second Reading, when it was passed by 423 votes to 49 and I caution the other place against further interference in the Bill. I look forward to its commencement next year. Many people are already planning what I know will be joyous celebrations of their civil partnerships in due course when the Bill comes into force and civil partnerships become a reality for same-sex couples who have longed for many years to have that opportunity.

6.31 pm

Mr. Carmichael: First, I associate myself with the expressions of gratitude made earlier by the Minister and the hon. Member for Rutland and Melton (Mr. Duncan) in respect of House and Committee officials who have assisted the Bill's passage to its current stage. The Minister said that the process has been constructive, and I would certainly want to use the same word. I pay tribute to the Minister, particularly for the manner in which she has handled changes to the pension provisions. As a Liberal Democrat, I am delighted to welcome them.

I am pleased that my cynicism, or perhaps my scepticism, has made such an impression on the hon. Member for Wallasey (Angela Eagle). She asked whether it has been banished for ever, which sounds like the sort of optimism usually expressed by Liberal Democrats, but let us say that it is banished for tonight.

The right hon. Member for Maidstone and The Weald (Miss Widdecombe) said in an earlier intervention that if we do not pass the Bill, nothing will change. From my perspective, I have to say that that is exactly why we should pass the Bill, because if we do not pass it, nothing will change. Mixed-sex couples will still, to borrow the Minister's phrase, remain "largely invisible" within the eyes of the law and people will continue to suffer discrimination and disadvantage simply because of their sexual orientation. To my mind, that is simply wrong.

The hon. Member for Wallasey spoke about the House leading the world and being at the forefront of these issues, but I believe that we are engaged in a catching-up process. It is all about recognition of our society, as currently constituted and as it has been for some time.

Several hon. Members have urged us to admit that we are talking about gay marriage, but I cannot admit that because, as I explained earlier, marriage is something uniquely given to mixed-sex couples. What flows from that is recognition of the marriage relationship, which, in turn, brings certain financial and property rights. Having said that same-sex couples cannot be party to a marriage, I believe that they are obviously entitled to the same recognition and the same rights of property as married people are granted.

I often wonder why some Conservative Back Benchers are so obsessed with the use of the "M" word, if I may put it that way. The only conclusion that I can draw is that they argue that way deliberately, knowing that the issue becomes emotive and that, by talking that way, they stand a better chance of stirring up opposition and antipathy towards the giving of these basic rights to

[Mr. Carmichael]

certain groups of people. I therefore believe that the Government are correct to refer to "civil partnerships" and to leave it at that.

I also have to say that this morning's intervention by the Christian Institute was profoundly regrettable. I shall choose my words with care, but I have been a Christian since I was 14. Christianity has been a formative influence for me and has changed my life, but there are few less edifying spectacles than politicians who preach, so I shall keep this simple.

To my mind, the fundamental factor in Christianity is love. The tremendous thing about Christian love is that it knows no discrimination. That is why, when Jesus told us in the New Testament to love our neighbour, he did not qualify that by saying that we need not love those of our neighbours who are black, gay, fat, thin, tall or short. There are no equivocations about the love that Jesus offers us. That is why I feel passionately that it would be wrong for us to prolong, in the name of Christianity, the discrimination and disadvantage that some people suffer.

Mr. Donaldson: I hear what the hon. Gentleman is saying, but it can be an act of love to point out when someone is going wrong. With all due respect, I point out to him that there is discrimination against siblings in this country. In my opinion, the Christian Institute was right to make that clear. I regret that the hon. Gentleman considers that the brothers and sisters who live together and who suffer disadvantage in the way that was described in the previous debate need not benefit from this legislation in the way that homosexual couples—uniquely—will.

Mr. Carmichael: The hon. Gentleman began his intervention on a false premise by saying that it was an act of love to point out to people when they were "going wrong". That suggests that a person's sexual orientation is a matter of choice. It is not: it is something with which one is born. Homosexuals, lesbians and bisexuals are no more "going wrong" than any other people who choose to follow their particular sexual orientation.

Mr. Donaldson: What about paedophiles?

Mr. Carmichael: The hon. Gentleman also asked about my position in respect of siblings. We have rehearsed those arguments at considerable length today. If he was in the Chamber to hear my earlier remarks, he will have heard my opinions already; if he was not here at that time, he can read them tomorrow morning in *Hansard*.

It is rare to be able to say at the end of a Third Reading debate that the legislation will leave us in a better condition than when it arrived in this House, but that is very much the case today. I hope that our noble Friends in the other place will realise that the Bill enjoys the overwhelming support of this House. Although some minor tinkering may remain to be done—and we will always be open to that—we do not expect to see any significant amendment.

6.38 pm

Chris Bryant: I bear in mind the fact that the hon. Member for Orkney and Shetland (Mr. Carmichael) has just said that he hated politicians who preach, so I shall be very careful about the words that I choose this evening. However, I know that those hon. Members who are church wardens and Church Commissioners adopt a very different stance to the Bill, and also that there are many other religious hues in this House. I do not believe that there is one Christian, or even one religious position, on this matter. There are many different ways to view this legislation, and we should honour the personal position that each hon. Member adopts.

I welcome the Bill, primarily because it represents another nail in the coffin of prejudice towards homosexual people in this country. This is therefore an important moment. It is more than 100 years since Edward Carpenter, one of the great founders of the Labour party, set up his household with George Merrill. He was reviled at the time for that and had to be very courageous. Some years have passed since my right hon. Friend the Member for Islington, South and Finsbury (Mr. Smith) was open in this Chamber about his sexuality. Many people would consider that part of the steady progress that has been made towards openness and away from prejudice.

As I said, I welcome this Bill wholeheartedly, and I know that many lesbians and gay men in this country will do the same. For the sake of argument, I am sure that many will call what the Bill offers gay marriage—and I do not care at all. I am happy that the people who will benefit from the Bill will feel that they are able to enjoy the same rights, and bear the same responsibilities, as heterosexual people have been able to enjoy throughout the centuries. I think that they will accept both rights and responsibilities with open arms.

I also welcome the Bill because it is extremely comprehensive. The Minister paid tribute to the people in her office who have made sure that it is in good order. I merely note that we are amending the Explosive Substances Act 1883, the Pharmacy Act 1954, the Offices, Shops and Railway Premises Act 1963 and, perhaps most significantly, the Slaughterhouses Act 1974. Rights that they never even knew they did not have gay men and lesbians will now be able to enjoy.

That is in part because of the process that we went through in Committee. I wholeheartedly welcome the fact that we have improved the Bill immeasurably. The most important improvements, to my mind, have been those on pension provision, and I pay tribute to the two Ministers and to the Paymaster General, who played an important part in making sure we were able to produce a Bill that is yet more equal and is advancing more equality than was originally intended.

One of the most important and moving speeches made in the whole process was by my hon. Friend the Member for South Ribble (Mr. Borrow). Many Members will look forward to going to the celebration of his civil partnership, and we look forward to finding out where the wedding list will be, whether it is at John Lewis or somewhere else.

I also pay tribute to the hon. Member for Christchurch (Mr. Chope). I passionately disagree with nearly everything he said in Committee and in the

Chamber. He let himself down on a couple of occasions when he used phrases that he may wish he had not used in the light of better judgment. He said at the beginning of the Committee stage that he did not want to become its pariah. I do not know whether he then knew that that is a religious term, a Tamil word that refers to a drummer who is not allowed to take part in a religious procession. The hon. Gentleman banged his drum gracefully, and although he may not progress through the Lobby with us later, he has done a fine thing in standing up for what he believes, even if I just wish he believed in something different.

I pay tribute, too, to the hon. Member for Rutland and Melton (Mr. Duncan). He gave us a fine speech today and has given many of them. I was intrigued to hear him give a philosophical tour d'horizon today, not least because I remember much of it appearing in his book "Saturn's Children" a few years ago, which rabidly condemned Christian socialism—and me—at length. It is a delight to see him as consistent as ever.

I only hope that the Lords do not mess the Bill up. They messed it up when they sent it to us, giving us an unworkable Bill. They often proclaim that they are much better at drafting and improving legislation than we are, but this time we have done a far better job than they did.

6.43 pm

Mr. Chope: It is a pleasure to follow the hon. Member for Rhondda (Chris Bryant), and I am grateful for his gracious remarks, which stand in contrast to what I am sorry to record were the ungracious remarks of the Minister.

I will vote against the Bill. It discriminates in favour of one particular type of relationship outside marriage. It creates a type of partnership that is so akin to marriage as to be almost indistinguishable from it. My best efforts, and those of so many others, to try to reduce the worst discriminatory elements of the Bill have failed.

I hope that the other place will insist on extending the legal privileges of the Bill beyond the homosexual community.

6.44 pm

Mr. Robert Key (Salisbury) (Con): I said on Second Reading that the Bill was about justice rather than religion, prejudice or, indeed, sex. Our deliberations in the House and in Committee have proved that, and I am grateful that we have seen the Bill improved in Committee through the pension provisions. That will undoubtedly make a big difference.

It is important, however, to recognise that the House is at its best when it takes an extremely controversial subject that divides the nation, let alone the House itself, and deals with it in a civilised manner, coming to a sensible conclusion. That, I think, is what we have done, and it does us no good at all to start sniping at each other for holding deeply opposed views. That has been as true on my side of the House as on the other, although it is fair to say to all those right hon. and hon. Members who are not present that the voting record will show that most Members on both sides have stayed away throughout proceedings on the Bill, as no doubt will be the case tonight. It is also true that a minority of my colleagues have voted against the Bill. I happen to share the view of the leadership of my party that this is a matter of justice, righting wrongs and removing injustice, and I will therefore support it on Third Reading.

It is important that we do not give the impression that there is a single Christian view on the matter. I happen to support the majority view of the General Synod of the Church of England and the Archbishops Council that this is a matter of righting wrongs. I also believe passionately that the Bill should not be seen as introducing gay marriage. I disagree with the hon. Member for Rhondda (Chris Bryant). I said on Second Reading, and I still contend, that marriage is something unique between a man and a woman. I respect same-sex partners and recognise that they need legal recognition. The Bill does not create a group of people and discriminate in their favour. Instead, it removes an injustice because some people have been discriminated against. That is why the High Court said that the Government had to introduce the Bill and it is another good reason to vote for it tonight.

It is important to recognise that some of our constituents will be directly affected by the Bill. There are Conservative voters in my constituency in same-sex partnerships who have helped me through the process, which I have at times found difficult to comprehend, as I said on Second Reading. The House has done a good job on the Bill and I hope that when dawn breaks tomorrow we will have many happy people as a result. I also hope that the differences expressed during the passage of the Bill will be quickly forgotten.

6.46 pm

Miss Widdecombe: I was disappointed by the Minister's speech. There used to be a tradition, observed until recently, that when free vote issues were discussed and conscientious rather than party political divisions were expressed, tribute was paid to both sides of the argument and courtesies were extended. I am delighted that my hon. Friend the Member for Rutland and Melton (Mr. Duncan) followed that tradition—

Jacqui Smith: Perhaps I may put on record now—I thought that I had done so in my speech, but I would not like it to appear that I had not—that I recognise the contribution made to the debate throughout the whole process by people with very different views. As I suggested in my speech, that has helped to contribute to a better Bill. I am sorry if Opposition Members feel that I did not pay due attention to their contributions.

Miss Widdecombe: I am grateful to the Minister for that statement.

I turn to the merits of the Bill, on which I asked myself the following questions. If the Bill were not to be passed tonight, would it still be the case that two people could choose, of their own free will, to form a homosexual relationship? Of course it would. Would they be able to choose to set up a household and enter into a long-term partnership? They would. However, if the Bill is passed tonight, will marriage still be unique? The answer is no, because the Bill will give rights and privileges that at the moment are unique to marriage and not enjoyed by any other sector of the population to one particular group other than the married. That is what the Bill will do. It will destroy the uniqueness that marriage holds at present.

[Miss Widdecombe]

As I said on Second Reading, I am the first to recognise that the present system results in unkindnesses—never mind injustices—that have adverse impacts on homosexual relationships. However, I also said that that is not unique to homosexual relationships. That was what the amendments tabled by my hon. Friends today sought to address. They sought to point out that some things are wrong, but they are not uniquely wrong for homosexual relationships. I would have preferred for us to address those injustices for all groups affected—or as many as possible—through the necessary and relevant legislation, such as the Finance Bill, rather than set up a situation in which no discernible difference exists between a civil marriage and a civil partnership. It was recognised by both sides of the argument tonight that that is what this Bill will do and that is why it is so wrong.

Charles Hendry: Does my right hon. Friend accept that those people are looking for recognition of their relationships? At the moment, they do not feel that they are recognised—they feel invisible under the law—and only by such a Bill do they feel that they can have that recognition.

Miss Widdecombe: The recognition that is being offered has been uniquely reserved for marriage because there is no distinction in the Bill between the rights and responsibilities contracted by a civil marriage and those contracted by a civil partnership. My fundamental objection to the Bill is that that is homosexual marriage by another name.

Mr. Hayes: Is not the real point that some of the people referred to by my hon. Friend the Member for Wealden (Charles Hendry) are seeking equivalence with a married relationship? Indeed, the hon. Member for Rhondda (Chris Bryant) was honest about that and described it as gay marriage, and we have heard talk of wedding lists and all sorts of other things.

Miss Widdecombe: That is indeed the point. We do not oppose the Bill to prevent people from operating their own free choice. As I said on Second Reading, God gives free will and there is no reason why we should seek to put obstacles in the way of people exercising their own free choices, but the Bill goes beyond that: it would give the uniqueness of marriage to civil partnerships.

Mr. Borrow: The right hon. Lady accepts that there are injustices in the system, so I should be grateful to her if she would say which parts of the Bill, which we are likely to vote in favour of tonight, she thinks inappropriate and should be removed to produce a Bill that would be acceptable to her?

Miss Widdecombe: The basic premise of the Bill is that people sign a register and undertake a divorce process in all but name on the basis of irretrievable breakdown. In other words, there is nothing to distinguish civil marriage from civil partnerships. That is the basis of my opposition. The injustices, such as those in respect of inheritance tax, next of kin and all the rest, can be put right for homosexuals and others using different legislation.

I shall finish now because I know that other hon. Members are waiting to speak, but I stress that, although the hon. Member for Rhondda suggested that the basic opposition to the Bill arose because we are making moral judgments about homosexuality, my opposition to the Bill is based on keeping marriage unique and addressing any injustices that may exist through other means.

6.53 pm

Sir Patrick Cormack: It is a great privilege to follow two of my hon. Friends, and as I listened to them both, I could not help but think, "Would that my right hon. Friend the Member for Maidstone and The Weald (Miss Widdecombe) were as sound on hunting as my hon. Friend the Member for Salisbury (Mr. Key)." That, in a sense, illustrates how moral issues and issues of conscience divide hon. Members on both sides of the House. Those of us who are clearly in a minority must not be churlish, but that does not mean that we abandon what we believe to be right.

I received this morning a petition from many hundreds of constituents who are deeply troubled about the Bill. They are not nasty, homophobic people; they hold to traditional views and values—*[Interruption.]* That comment does a great disservice to many of the constituents of the hon. Member for St. Helens, North (Mr. Watts) because many people in his constituency, as in mine, are decent honourable people who hold to traditional values. Yes, we may be wrong—of course, we all have to concede that we may be wrong—but the fact is that people hold to those views for good reasons.

I do not impugn the integrity of those who advocate the Bill. I do not impugn for a moment the integrity of those who advocate gay marriage, as they call it. The hon. Member for Rhondda (Chris Bryant) was being honest when he said that that was in effect what the Bill was moving towards.

Chris Bryant: The hon. Gentleman is mistaken if he believes that I think that the Bill will create gay marriage. Many people will use "gay marriage" as shorthand for the Bill's provisions, but I believe that marriage should be only between a man and a woman.

Sir Patrick Cormack: If the hon. Gentleman consults *Hansard*, he will find that he said that he would not mind at all if people regarded this as gay marriage.

I do not want to get bogged down in semantic arguments with the hon. Gentleman or anyone else. I only want to say in the brief time that remains that the House will tonight pass a Bill—we know that it will be given its Third Reading with an enormous majority—that marks a real change in our society. In making that change, the House must realise that a society that changes without recognising whence it comes is rather intolerant. It is important to realise the background of many of our constituents who will be troubled by the Bill. I wish those who will benefit from it nothing but personal happiness—I hope that that will be their lot—but many people in my constituency and elsewhere are troubled because they can equate the partnerships granted by the Bill with marriage, and because of the fact that it is only from the union of a man and woman, whether they are married or not, that a future generation can come.

Such matters trouble ordinary people throughout the land, so I was glad that my hon. Friend the Member for Rutland and Melton (Mr. Duncan) recognised that in his thoughtful and dignified speech. I ask those who will cheer when the result of the Division is announced to have some regard for those who need to be convinced that they are wrong and that the majority in the House is worthy of a majority in the country. I remain profoundly disturbed about the consequences of what we are about to enact.

6.57 pm

Mr. Donaldson: As I said in Committee on 26 October, I was surprised when the Minister asserted that the Government's consultation on the proposals had received

> "at every single point ... approbation and support from the majority of those who have responded".—[*Official Report, Standing Committee D,* 19 October 2004; c. 8.]

That was not the case in Northern Ireland, where 86 per cent. of respondents opposed the Government's proposals. However, the Government will impose the Bill on the people of Northern Ireland despite the opposition of the overwhelming majority of those people and their political representatives. We in Northern Ireland do not accept that. I hope that the Northern Ireland Assembly will have the opportunity to revisit the legislation because we will try to amend it to reflect the wishes of the majority of people in Northern Ireland who oppose the Government's actions.

Mr. David Watts (St. Helens, North) (Lab): Does the hon. Gentleman believe that the people of Northern Ireland would do well to be more tolerant in the future?

Mr. Donaldson: The people of Northern Ireland are very tolerant. This is nothing to do with tolerance, but with what people want, how they want to order their lives and the kind of society in which they wish to live. The House should be more tolerant of the people of Northern Ireland and their views on these issues.

The Government are ignoring the views of the people of Northern Ireland. They could have accepted the amendment that I moved in Committee and thus left the matter for the Northern Ireland Assembly to decide, but unfortunately they rejected the amendment, and thus the views of the majority of people in Northern Ireland.

If the Bill is passed, it will not change my view, that of my hon. Friends or that of the majority of people in Northern Ireland. The Bill is still wrong. I agree with the right hon. Member for Maidstone and The Weald (Miss Widdecombe) that civil partnerships can be equated with marriages, which will be to the detriment of our society.

Mr. Bercow: This is a first-class Bill and I am delighted to support it. It has got better as it has gone along. I have been absolutely inspired by the leadership on the matter of my hon. Friend the Member for Rutland and Melton (Mr. Duncan). I respect the dissenting opinion of some of my hon. Friends, and I know that my hon. Friend the Member for Aldershot (Mr. Howarth) would like to express that in the 10 seconds that remain.

6.59 pm

Mr. Gerald Howarth: The last word falls to me. I profoundly oppose the Bill. It will have serious consequences for our country which are as yet unfathomed. It will damage the moral fabric of our society—

It being Seven o'clock, MADAM DEPUTY SPEAKER, *put the Question already proposed from the Chair, pursuant to Order* [12 October].

The House divided: Ayes 389, Noes 47.

Division No. 315] **[7:00 pm**

AYES

Ainsworth, Bob *(Cov'try NE)*
Ainsworth, Peter *(E Surrey)*
Allen, Graham
Anderson, Janet *(Rossendale & Darwen)*
Armstrong, rh Ms Hilary
Atherton, Ms Candy
Atkins, Charlotte
Atkinson, David *(Bour'mth E)*
Austin, John
Bacon, Richard
Bailey, Adrian
Baird, Vera
Baker, Norman
Banks, Tony
Barnes, Harry
Barrett, John
Barron, rh Kevin
Battle, rh John
Bayley, Hugh
Beard, Nigel
Beckett, rh Margaret
Beith, rh A. J.
Bell, Sir Stuart
Benn, rh Hilary
Bercow, John
Berry, Roger
Betts, Clive
Blackman, Liz
Blizzard, Bob
Blunt, Crispin
Boateng, rh Paul
Borrow, David
Boswell, Tim
Bradley, rh Keith *(Withington)*
Bradley, Peter *(The Wrekin)*
Brady, Graham
Brown, rh Nicholas *(Newcastle E Wallsend)*
Brown, Russell *(Dumfries)*
Browne, Desmond
Bruce, Malcolm
Bryant, Chris
Buck, Ms Karen
Burgon, Colin
Burstow, Paul
Byrne, Liam *(B'ham Hodge H)*
Cairns, David
Calton, Mrs Patsy
Cameron, David
Campbell, Alan *(Tynemouth)*
Campbell, rh Sir Menzies *(NE Fife)*
Campbell, Ronnie *(Blyth V)*
Carmichael, Alistair
Casale, Roger
Caton, Martin
Challen, Colin
Chaytor, David
Clapham, Michael
Clark, Mrs Helen *(Peterborough)*
Clark, Dr. Lynda *(Edinburgh Pentlands)*
Clarke, rh Kenneth *(Rushcliffe)*
Clarke, rh Tom *(Coatbridge & Chryston)*
Clarke, Tony *(Northampton S)*
Clelland, David
Clwyd, Ann *(Cynon V)*
Coaker, Vernon
Coffey, Ms Ann
Cohen, Harry
Connarty, Michael
Conway, Derek
Cook, rh Robin *(Livingston)*
Corbyn, Jeremy
Corston, Jean
Cotter, Brian
Cranston, Ross
Crausby, David
Cruddas, Jon
Cummings, John
Cunningham, Jim *(Coventry S)*
Cunningham, Tony *(Workington)*
Curtis-Thomas, Mrs Claire
Darling, rh Alistair
Davey, Edward *(Kingston)*
Davey, Valerie *(Bristol W)*
David, Wayne
Davidson, Ian
Davies, Geraint *(Croydon C)*
Dawson, Hilton
Dean, Mrs Janet
Denham, rh John
Dismore, Andrew
Dobson, rh Frank
Donohoe, Brian H.
Doughty, Sue
Dowd, Jim *(Lewisham W)*
Drew, David *(Stroud)*
Drown, Ms Julia
Duncan, Alan *(Rutland)*
Eagle, Angela *(Wallasey)*
Edwards, Huw
Efford, Clive
Ellman, Mrs Louise
Ennis, Jeff *(Barnsley E)*
Evans, Nigel

Ewing, Annabelle
Fabricant, Michael
Field, rh Frank *(Birkenhead)*
Fisher, Mark
Fitzpatrick, Jim
Fitzsimons, Mrs Lorna
Flynn, Paul *(Newport W)*
Foster, rh Derek
Foster, Don *(Bath)*
Foster, Michael *(Worcester)*
Foster, Michael Jabez *(Hastings & Rye)*
Foulkes, rh George
Francis, Dr. Hywel
George, Andrew *(St. Ives)*
George, rh Bruce *(Walsall S)*
Gerrard, Neil
Gibb, Nick *(Bognor Regis)*
Gibson, Dr. Ian
Gidley, Sandra
Gillan, Mrs Cheryl
Gilroy, Linda
Godsiff, Roger
Grayling, Chris
Green, Matthew *(Ludlow)*
Grieve, Dominic
Griffiths, Jane *(Reading E)*
Griffiths, Win *(Bridgend)*
Grogan, John
Hague, rh William
Hall, Mike *(Weaver Vale)*
Hall, Patrick *(Bedford)*
Hamilton, David *(Midlothian)*
Hanson, David
Harvey, Nick
Havard, Dai *(Merthyr Tydfil & Rhymney)*
Healey, John
Heath, David
Henderson, Doug *(Newcastle N)*
Henderson, Ivan *(Harwich)*
Hendrick, Mark
Hendry, Charles
Hepburn, Stephen
Heppell, John
Hesford, Stephen
Hewitt, rh Ms Patricia
Heyes, David
Hinchliffe, David
Hoey, Kate *(Vauxhall)*
Hogg, rh Douglas
Holmes, Paul
Hood, Jimmy *(Clydesdale)*
Hope, Phil *(Corby)*
Hopkins, Kelvin
Howard, rh Michael
Howarth, rh Alan *(Newport E)*
Howarth, George *(Knowsley N & Sefton E)*
Hoyle, Lindsay
Hughes, Beverley *(Stretford & Urmston)*
Hughes, Kevin *(Doncaster N)*
Humble, Mrs Joan
Hurst, Alan *(Braintree)*
Iddon, Dr. Brian
Illsley, Eric
Jackson, Glenda *(Hampstead & Highgate)*
Jackson, Helen *(Hillsborough)*
Jamieson, David
Jenkins, Brian
Johnson, Boris *(Henley)*
Jones, Helen *(Warrington N)*
Jones, Kevan *(N Durham)*
Jones, Lynne *(Selly Oak)*

Jones, Martyn *(Clwyd S)*
Joyce, Eric *(Falkirk W)*
Kaufman, rh Sir Gerald
Keeble, Ms Sally
Keen, Alan *(Feltham)*
Keetch, Paul
Kemp, Fraser
Kennedy, rh Charles *(Ross Skye & Inverness)*
Kennedy, Jane *(Wavertree)*
Key, Robert *(Salisbury)*
Khabra, Piara S.
Kidney, David
Kilfoyle, Peter
King, Andy *(Rugby)*
King, Ms Oona *(Bethnal Green & Bow)*
Kirkbride, Miss Julie
Kirkwood, Sir Archy
Knight, Jim *(S Dorset)*
Kumar, Dr. Ashok
Laing, Mrs Eleanor
Lamb, Norman
Laws, David *(Yeovil)*
Laxton, Bob *(Derby N)*
Lepper, David
Levitt, Tom *(High Peak)*
Lewis, Dr. Julian *(New Forest E)*
Lewis, Terry *(Worsley)*
Liddell, rh Mrs Helen
Linton, Martin
Lloyd, Tony *(Manchester C)*
Love, Andrew
Lucas, Ian *(Wrexham)*
Luff, Peter *(M-Worcs)*
Luke, Iain *(Dundee E)*
Lyons, John *(Strathkelvin)*
McAvoy, Thomas
McCabe, Stephen
McCafferty, Chris
McCartney, rh Ian
McDonagh, Siobhain
McDonnell, John
MacDougall, John
McFall, rh John
McGuire, Mrs Anne
McIsaac, Shona
McKechin, Ann
McKenna, Rosemary
Maclean, rh David
MacShane, Denis
Mactaggart, Fiona
McWalter, Tony
Mahmood, Khalid
Mahon, Mrs Alice
Mallaber, Judy
Mann, John *(Bassetlaw)*
Marris, Rob *(Wolverh'ton SW)*
Marsden, Gordon *(Blackpool S)*
Marshall, David *(Glasgow Shettleston)*
Martlew, Eric
Maude, rh Francis
Meacher, rh Michael
Meale, Alan *(Mansfield)*
Merron, Gillian
Michael, rh Alun
Milburn, rh Alan
Miliband, David
Miller, Andrew
Mitchell, Andrew *(Sutton Coldfield)*
Mitchell, Austin *(Gt Grimsby)*
Moffatt, Laura
Mole, Chris
Moonie, Dr. Lewis

Moore, Michael
Moran, Margaret
Morgan, Julie
Morley, Elliot
Moss, Malcolm
Mountford, Kali
Mullin, Chris
Munn, Ms Meg
Murphy, Denis *(Wansbeck)*
Naysmith, Dr. Doug
Oaten, Mark *(Winchester)*
O'Brien, Bill *(Normanton)*
O'Brien, Mike *(N Warks)*
Öpik, Lembit
Organ, Diana
Osborne, George *(Tatton)*
Osborne, Sandra *(Ayr)*
Ottaway, Richard
Owen, Albert
Page, Richard
Paice, James
Perham, Linda
Picking, Anne
Pickthall, Colin
Pike, Peter *(Burnley)*
Plaskitt, James
Pound, Stephen
Prentice, Ms Bridget *(Lewisham E)*
Prentice, Gordon *(Pendle)*
Price, Adam *(E Carmarthen & Dinefwr)*
Prosser, Gwyn
Purchase, Ken
Purnell, James
Quinn, Lawrie
Rammell, Bill
Rapson, Syd *(Portsmouth N)*
Reed, Andy *(Loughborough)*
Reid, Alan *(Argyll & Bute)*
Reid, rh Dr. John *(Hamilton N & Bellshill)*
Rendel, David
Robertson, Angus *(Moray)*
Robertson, Hugh *(Faversham & M-Kent)*
Robertson, John *(Glasgow Anniesland)*
Robinson, Geoffrey *(Coventry NW)*
Roche, Mrs Barbara
Rooney, Terry
Ross, Ernie *(Dundee W)*
Roy, Frank *(Motherwell)*
Ruane, Chris
Ruddock, Joan
Russell, Bob *(Colchester)*
Ryan, Joan *(Enfield N)*
Salmond, Alex
Salter, Martin
Sanders, Adrian
Sarwar, Mohammad
Savidge, Malcolm
Sawford, Phil
Sedgemore, Brian
Shaw, Jonathan
Sheerman, Barry
Sheridan, Jim
Shipley, Ms Debra
Simpson, Alan *(Nottingham S)*
Singh, Marsha
Skinner, Dennis
Smith, rh Andrew *(Oxford E)*
Smith, rh Chris *(Islington S & Finsbury)*
Smith, Jacqui *(Redditch)*

Smith, John *(Glamorgan)*
Smith, Llew *(Blaenau Gwent)*
Smith, Sir Robert *(W Ab'd'ns & Kincardine)*
Soley, Clive
Southworth, Helen
Starkey, Dr. Phyllis
Steen, Anthony
Steinberg, Gerry
Stewart, David *(Inverness E & Lochaber)*
Stewart, Ian *(Eccles)*
Stinchcombe, Paul
Stoate, Dr. Howard
Strang, rh Dr. Gavin
Straw, rh Jack
Stringer, Graham
Stunell, Andrew
Syms, Robert
Tami, Mark *(Alyn)*
Taylor, rh Ann *(Dewsbury)*
Taylor, Dari *(Stockton S)*
Taylor, David *(NW Leics)*
Taylor, Ian *(Esher)*
Taylor, John *(Solihull)*
Taylor, Matthew *(Truro)*
Taylor, Dr. Richard *(Wyre F)*
Teather, Sarah
Thomas, Gareth *(Clwyd W)*
Thomas, Gareth *(Harrow W)*
Thurso, John
Timms, Stephen
Tipping, Paddy
Todd, Mark *(S Derbyshire)*
Tonge, Dr. Jenny
Touhig, Don *(Islwyn)*
Trickett, Jon
Truswell, Paul
Turner, Dennis *(Wolverh'ton SE)*
Turner, Dr. Desmond *(Brighton Kemptown)*
Twigg, Stephen *(Enfield)*
Tyler, Paul *(N Cornwall)*
Tynan, Bill *(Hamilton S)*
Tyrie, Andrew
Vaz, Keith *(Leicester E)*
Vis, Dr. Rudi
Walley, Ms Joan
Walter, Robert
Wareing, Robert N.
Watson, Tom
Watts, David
Webb, Steve *(Northavon)*
Weir, Michael
White, Brian
Whitehead, Dr. Alan
Wicks, Malcolm
Williams, rh Alan *(Swansea W)*
Williams, Betty *(Conwy)*
Williams, Hywel *(Caernarfon)*
Williams, Roger *(Brecon)*
Willis, Phil
Wills, Michael
Winnick, David
Winterton, Ms Rosie *(Doncaster C)*
Wishart, Pete
Wood, Mike *(Batley)*
Woodward, Shaun
Woolas, Phil
Worthington, Tony
Wright, Anthony D. *(Gt Yarmouth)*
Wright, David *(Telford)*
Wright, Iain *(Hartlepool)*
Wright, Tony *(Cannock)*

Wyatt, Derek
Young, rh Sir George
Younger-Ross, Richard

Tellers for the Ayes:
Mr. Nick Ainger and
Mr. Jim Murphy

NOES

Amess, David
Arbuthnot, rh James
Beggs, Roy *(E Antrim)*
Brazier, Julian
Burnside, David
Burt, Alistair
Cash, William
Cormack, Sir Patrick
Cran, James *(Beverley)*
Davies, rh Denzil *(Llanelli)*
Dobbin, Jim *(Heywood)*
Dodds, Nigel
Donaldson, Jeffrey M.
Duncan Smith, rh Iain
Fallon, Michael
Flook, Adrian
Goodman, Paul
Gummer, rh John
Hawkins, Nick
Hayes, John *(S Holland)*
Howarth, Gerald *(Aldershot)*
Hunter, Andrew
Knight, rh Greg *(E Yorkshire)*
Leigh, Edward
Liddell-Grainger, Ian

Lidington, David
Lilley, rh Peter
McIntosh, Miss Anne
McLoughlin, Patrick
Paisley, Rev. Ian
Paterson, Owen
Robathan, Andrew
Robertson, Laurence *(Tewk'b'ry)*
Robinson, Mrs Iris *(Strangford)*
Robinson, Peter *(Belfast E)*
Rosindell, Andrew
Selous, Andrew
Spink, Bob *(Castle Point)*
Streeter, Gary
Swayne, Desmond
Taylor, Sir Teddy
Turner, Andrew *(Isle of Wight)*
Viggers, Peter
Watkinson, Angela
Widdecombe, rh Miss Ann
Wilkinson, John
Wilshire, David

Tellers for the Noes:
Mr. Eric Forth and
Mr. Christopher Chope

Question accordingly agreed to.

7.13 pm

Rev. Ian Paisley (North Antrim) (DUP): On a point of order, Madam Deputy Speaker. In this House tonight, there was a vote, but the voice of the people whom I and the majority of Unionists represent could not be heard because of the way in which the business was ordered. Surely, it is a sad commentary on this House when the voice of one section of this United Kingdom cannot be heard in the debate. I appeal to you to think of the minority from Northern Ireland in this House in future and to see to it that their voices will be heard and that at least one of their amendments will be selected and voted on.

Madam Deputy Speaker (Sylvia Heal): That is not really a point of order for the Chair, but I say to the hon. Gentleman that Mr. Speaker's selection of amendments was published and that the House had agreed to the programme motion and the time set aside to debate the Bill.

DELEGATED LEGISLATION

Madam Deputy Speaker: With permission, I shall put together motions 3, 4, 5 and 6.

Motion made, and Question put forthwith, pursuant to Standing Order No. 118(6) (Standing Committees on Delegated Legislation),

COMPANIES

That the draft Companies Act 1985 (International Accounting Standards and Other Accounting Amendments) Regulations 2004, which were laid before this House on 11th October, be approved.

That the Companies (Fees) Regulations 2004 (S.I., 2004, No. 2621), dated 6th October 2004, a copy of which was laid before this House on 11th October, be approved.

PARTNERSHIP

That the Limited Liability Partnerships (Fees) Regulations 2004 (S.I., 2004, No. 2620), dated 6th October 2004, a copy of which was laid before this House on 11th October, be approved.

CHILDREN AND YOUNG PERSONS

That the draft Health and Social Care (Community Health and Standards) Act 2003 (Commission for Healthcare Audit and Inspection and Commission for Social Care Inspection) (Consequential Provisions) Order 2004, which was laid before this House on 28th October, be approved.—*[Margaret Moran.]*

Question agreed to.

EUROPEAN COMMUNITY DOCUMENTS

Motion made, and Question put forthwith, pursuant to Standing Order No. 119(9) (European Standing Committees).

MARKETING OF OILSEED RAPE GENETICALLY MODIFIED FOR GLYPHOSATE TOLERANCE

That this House takes note of European Union Document No. 12343/04, draft Council Decision concerning the placing on the market, in accordance with Directive 2001/18/EC, of an oilseed rape product (Brassica napus L., GT73 line) genetically modified for glyphosate tolerance; and supports the Government's view that, although expert advice indicates that there probably are no safety concerns, it can adopt a position on authorisation under Directive 2001/18/EC only on receipt of satisfactory data from a further rat feeding study using 15% oilseed rape meal.—*[Margaret Moran.]*

Question agreed to.

Motion made, and Question put forthwith, pursuant to Standing Order No. 119(9) (European Standing Committees).

CREDIT INSTITUTIONS AND INVESTMENT FIRMS

That this House takes note of European Union Document No. 11545/04, and adds 1-3 draft Directive re-casting Directive 2000/12/EC relating to the taking up and pursuit of the business of credit institutions and Council Directive 93/6/EEC on the capital adequacy of investment firms and credit institutions; and notes that the Government, whilst supportive of the aims of the proposals, is seeking to amend them to ensure they fit with realities of the EU market and, in particular, the circumstances of smaller banks, building societies and investment firms.—*[Margaret Moran.]*

Question agreed to.

NOTICES OF QUESTIONS

Ordered,

That, in respect of Questions to the Advocate General and the Secretary of State for Scotland for oral answer on Tuesday 30th November in the next Session of Parliament, paragraph (5)(a) of Standing Order No. 22 (Notices of Questions, Motions and Amendments) shall apply with the substitution of 'three days' for 'four days'.—*[Margaret Moran.]*

PETITION

Epping Forest

7.15 pm

Mrs. Eleanor Laing (Epping Forest) (Con): I wish to present to the House a petition signed by more than 13,000 people who live in the vicinity of Epping Forest. Epping forest is an ancient forest, substantially located within the green belt. The biosphere of the forest is in danger of being damaged by the Government's plan to build large numbers of new houses in the green belt. The petitioners therefore request that the House of Commons urges the Government to review the research on which plans for new housing in the Epping Forest district are based and to confirm that the principle of protecting the green belt will be upheld.

The petition states:

> The Petition of the residents of Epping Forest District and surrounding areas and interested parties,
>
> Declares that Epping Forest is an ancient forest which is protected by an Act of Parliament that it lies substantially within the Metropolitan Green Belt which is also protected by an Act of Parliament and that plans for development of land in the Epping Forest District must take into account not only the land on which the Forest stands but also the "biosphere" of the Forest.
>
> The Petitioners further declare that the plans of the Government and its agents to build very large numbers of new houses in the Green Belt are of great concern to the Petitioners.
>
> The Petitioners therefore request that the House of Commons urge the Government to review the research on which plans for new houses in the Epping Forest District are based, and to confirm that the principle of protecting the Green Belt will be upheld.
>
> And the Petitioners remain, etc.

To lie upon the Table.

Bus Services (Wallasey)

Motion made, and Question proposed, That this House do now adjourn.—*[Margaret Moran.]*

7.16 pm

Angela Eagle (Wallasey) (Lab): In 1985, the Conservative Government completely deregulated all bus services outside London. That policy failed to achieve all its stated objectives, which were to reverse the decline in passenger numbers, to reduce fares and to reduce public subsidy. In fact, the opposite has happened in the past 18 years.

Bus deregulation in Wallasey has caused poorer quality and less reliability, higher fares and a worse service. Three years ago, just as the Labour Government were calling for a more integrated transport system and providing generous amounts of public money to pay for it, Arriva Merseyside, the main bus operator in my constituency, decided that it would not integrate bus services, but that it would disintegrate them instead. It prevented all the buses taking my constituents, who are often elderly, through the Mersey tunnels to Lime Street station or the inter-city bus station from actually running to the stations themselves. Arriva stopped the buses before they got to Queens square in Liverpool, which meant that those wishing to make major transport connections had to get off and struggle up a hill with their luggage to get to the inter-city connections.

Three hundred people turned up to an evening meeting that I called to protest against that. Arriva managers explained that they had taken the decision in order to prevent the traffic commissioners from fining them for late running. Buses were getting delayed in traffic around Queens square, so they decided to minimise their liability to fines by stopping the tunnel buses short of all mainline stations. Those attending the meeting said that twice as many people would have attended if they had been confident that they could get a bus home afterwards. I will never forget one man at the meeting, who was a wheelchair user. He had travelled in his electric wheelchair across the docks from Birkenhead to attend and had been refused access to several buses on the way because the drivers would not get out in order to operate the lift mechanism—he had no idea how he would get home again that night.

More recently, Arriva has been at it again. It has just ceased running the 405, the 406, and 407 and the 408, which ran between Birkenhead and New Brighton via Leasowe and Moreton. That completely cut the direct bus links between two parts of my constituency and caused an outcry that was taken up by the *Wallasey News* on its front page. Both the newspaper and I were inundated with complaints about the decision, as were local councillors, especially Ron Abbey, who is Wirral council's representative on the passenger transport authority.

On 9 October, we held a meeting at the town hall, attended by close to 100 angry passengers, at which Arriva once more emphasised that it was a commercial operator whose main motive was to make a profit. It was not considering the viability of the network or people's need to be able to shop or to go to work on public transport—it was concerned only about its own profitability. The outcry was so great, however, that it reinstated a small single-decker bus on a trial basis to replace the four services. However, that runs only once an hour and does not operate in the evenings or on Sundays, and given such a restricted timetable there is very little chance that it will be used enough to survive.

In making these arbitrary changes, Arriva has ensured that there is now no direct bus service from Moreton and Leasowe to the Asda store in Liscard, which is the only major supermarket in the constituency. As a result, those wishing to shop at the store face a 20-minute walk from the centre of Liscard with a much harder return journey carrying the shopping. Those of my constituents who live on the Millhouse estate in Moreton now have to walk a mile even to get to the nearest bus stop.

Arriva's disgraceful decision to break the established link between Moreton, Leasowe and New Brighton has also meant that Merseytravel has had to find an extra £135,000 every year to enable some of my younger constituents to get to school. At the other end of the age spectrum, we have an above-average number of pensioners in Wallasey and access to private cars is below average, yet the bus service is costing us all more and getting worse.

I receive an increasing number of complaints about the reliability of the bus services that are still running. All too regularly, timetabled services simply do not show up, leaving people stranded and late for work. The 423, which runs from Seacombe, Liscard, Leasowe and Moreton to Arrowe Park—the acute hospital that serves Wallasey—is notoriously unreliable. Its unpredictability leaves patients late for their appointments and staff late for their shifts. Scheduled services that are not full often sail past a queue of passengers without even bothering to stop. The 433 is a particular culprit in that respect. That is presumably because they are running late and need to avoid those fines from the traffic commissioners. What on earth is the point of a bus service that fails to pick up its passengers simply to minimise the operator's liability to fines?

Little wonder that the latest figures show that bus passenger usage in Merseyside is falling. However, the cost to the public purse of paying for this worsening service is rising. Unsurprisingly, Arriva's profits, which seem to be all that it really cares about, are rising too. Last year, on a turnover of £58.5 million Arriva Merseyside made a tidy operating profit of 8.4 per cent. As well as significant capital inputs through the local transport plan, Merseytravel contributed £66.3 million from its revenue budget to the bus operators last year. In the past few years, supported network costs have increased from 15 to 20 per cent. of the total cost. While last year saw a fall in commercial patronage of 1.6 per cent., there was a rise of 7.3 per cent. in supported usage. There is no clearer indication that providing a public service does not feature in the calculations of the bus operators, but making big profits does.

Merseytravel now spends £19.2 million a year on maintaining an inadequate bus network rather than on improving it because it has to keep reintroducing socially vital routes, which Arriva has abandoned as unprofitable. Fares have been going up, too. Rises three times the level of inflation have led to the unacceptable result that bus passengers living on modest incomes in Merseyside pay between 8 and 9 per cent. of their disposable income towards travel each month, compared with a United Kingdom average of 5.6 per cent. There is increasing evidence that those unacceptably high costs prevent people from taking up education and training opportunities and even jobs.

That cuts across the Government's central and increasingly successful efforts to increase job opportunities for all. Merseytravel has tried to help by introducing its Job Link services from pathways areas to key employment sites at unsocial hours for a low fare. However, the Tory Transport Act 1985 means that no strategic planning of bus networks to ensure social objectives and to meet people's needs is possible.

High fares impact most on those who are least able to afford them and have no choice but to try to use buses because they do not have access to a private car. Outside peak hours or at weekends, their options are now severely limited. The behaviour of the bus operators in Merseyside has constantly undermined all Merseytravel's attempts to put its bus strategy into operation.

In the public consultation on its bus strategy for Merseyside, Merseytravel asked passengers what they wished to see. Three quarters wanted reliability to be improved. Half the respondents felt that cheaper fares, through-ticketing and longer hours of operation were vital. Ninety per cent. believed that deregulation of services must be reversed and that Merseytravel should have a much greater role in planning and controlling the network and the timetable.

What should be done? In the short term, I recognise that the disastrous Tory deregulation of bus services cannot be reversed without primary legislation, though I believe that it should be a Labour priority in a third term. I also recognise that Labour's Transport Act 2000 created the possibility of quality partnerships between passenger transport executives and bus operators in an effort to improve the quality of services. Unfortunately, those have largely failed. While the public sector has fulfilled its side of the bargain, often investing a great deal of money in improving local road infrastructure, the Audit Commission has pointed out that bus operators have given little back in return. According to the Audit Commission, passenger transport executives and local authorities have typically contributed four times the investment that bus operators have put in. Only half those involved in quality partnerships thought that they had worked well.

I believe that the time is right to pilot quality contracts, for which section 124 of the Transport Act 2000 allows. That can be done only if passenger transport executives are satisfied that it is the only practical way to implement their bus strategies. The recent behaviour of local bus operators has convinced Merseytravel that a quality contract is the only way forward.

I ask my hon. Friend the Under-Secretary to consider piloting a quality contract in Merseyside. It would allow Merseytravel to decide what bus services should be provided and to what standards, including fare levels, frequencies and timetables. It would grant operators exclusive rights to provide services to Merseytravel's specification and standards and it would secure that by tender with operators.

[Angela Eagle]

Merseytravel is a well-organised and well-run passenger transport executive. I might even say that it is the best in the country. It is strategic, forward thinking and proactive. I believe that Merseytravel could demonstrate that, even under current legislation, there is a way of achieving much better value for money and a much better bus service for my constituents, who desperately need it.

I am pleased to see my hon. Friend the Under-Secretary on the Front Bench—I know that she is doing a great job. I urge her to make it even greater by granting Merseytravel's wish to pilot quality bus contracts. Labour's national policy forum recently endorsed the introduction of quality contracts as the way forward. Such a contract would give Merseytravel a chance to show the way and allow it to create a high-quality, reliable bus network fit for the 21st century. My long-suffering constituents deserve nothing less.

7.30 pm

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Transport (Charlotte Atkins): I congratulate my hon. Friend the Member for Wallasey (Angela Eagle) on securing this important debate. I was most concerned to hear of the problems that her constituents are experiencing with the local Arriva bus services. As she has pointed out, buses are central to an integrated transport strategy. They provide two thirds of all public transport journeys and play a vital role in tackling congestion and promoting access and inclusion. I welcome this opportunity to set out what the Government are doing to try to improve the quality of bus services in Merseyside.

Funding is an important part of the mix of factors that has to be brought to bear in improving public transport. In December, we announced a £1.9 billion capital settlement for local transport, an increase of £200 million compared with the previous year. Much of that is for bus-related projects, and £65 million of that settlement is for Merseytravel. Of that, £22.7 million was for small-scale integrated transport schemes to ease congestion, increase safety and create a better environment. Wirral's share was about £5.5 million.

Gorsey lane, in my hon. Friend's constituency, provides a good example of how those funds have been used to improve bus reliability. Buses on this corridor were suffering significant peak-hour delays. To address this problem, together with parking, access and safety issues, the lane has been transformed into a three-lane highway with two lanes for general traffic and a 920 m bus lane that allows northbound buses to bypass evening peak-hour congestion. Speed cameras, improved facilities for pedestrians, a new bus priority junction and segregated cycleways have also been provided.

Good progress has also been made on a range of key cross-boundary transport initiatives designed to enhance accessibility within the Greater Merseyside travel-to-work area. These include improved cross-boundary bus links between Wirral and Deeside, a Department for Transport-funded cross-boundary real-time passenger information system on a key bus corridor linking Runcorn, Widnes and Liverpool and preparation work on the extension of Merseytravel's pre-paid ticketing scheme to cover Halton.

Since 2002, Merseyside has spent £1.3 million on bus priority schemes and £12.4 million on bus infrastructure schemes, implementing improvements such as seven quality bus corridor showcase route schemes, three bus way or bus lane schemes, and seven other bus priority schemes, among others.

I am concerned to hear, however, that the unacceptably high costs of travel are preventing people from taking up education and training opportunities and even jobs. My hon. Friend referred to the successful Job Link initiative, which I had the pleasure of hearing about when I was last in Merseyside. The Job Link network seeks to maximise access to the wide range of employment, training and work-based learning opportunities being created through the regeneration of Merseyside. The services have been developed in three phases to encompass the whole of Merseyside, and have received nearly £3.2 million.

The Job Link network has involved both fixed-route, timetabled bus services linking deprived residential areas of high unemployment to key employment sites, and new demand-responsive door-to-door services providing transport to employment and training opportunities for clients referred to the scheme from partner organisations such as Jobcentre Plus, Action Team for Jobs and JET—jobs, enterprise and training—centres.

In addition, Merseyside was selected as one of 10 pilot locations for the Kickstart initiative, with an award of £504,000 for Airlink. This scheme, developed in a constructive partnership between Merseytravel and Arriva, will significantly enhance public transport links to the Speke/Halewood strategic investment area and Liverpool John Lennon airport from the St. Helens, Prescot and Huyton areas.

However, as my hon. Friend points out, there are significant challenges facing Merseyside. While there has been steady progress to improve the reliability and punctuality of bus services, there have been significant problems. As she has said, bus patronage has dropped in Merseyside.

My hon. Friend mentioned the traffic commissioners. They have been reviewing their enforcement of registered bus services in conjunction with the Bus Partnership Forum. I shall be chairing a meeting of the forum on 29 November, when we shall consider a whole new approach to improving and enforcing bus punctuality. The Traffic Management Act 2004 will also help to make buses more punctual, as local authorities manage their road network more effectively.

My hon. Friend has argued the case for some form of re-regulation, and I listened to her arguments carefully. I agree of course that it is essential that areas outside London have high-quality bus services as part of a modern, integrated transport system. We are keen to help create the conditions to make that happen. But we need to consider carefully how best to go about that. We must think carefully before assuming that replicating the London arrangements is a necessary or sufficient condition for delivering better bus services elsewhere. The Commission for Integrated Transport has pointed out that the regulated bus market in Belfast has not delivered patronage growth.

In the deregulated system, some bus operators have risen to the challenge and won bus industry awards for innovations in ticketing, marketing, environmental protection and customer service. Our experience is that the effectiveness of bus services depends on the level of partnership between local authorities and bus operators.

Angela Eagle: Does my hon. Friend share my worries that local bus operators do not currently have incentives to do anything other than maximise their profits? They can often do that by minimising, or at least not having growth, in bus mileage or routes. All the figures demonstrate that. While I am not arguing for an exact replica of the London situation, does she agree that we could get better value for money if we had some form of route franchising?

Charlotte Atkins: We certainly want better value for money, because while I appreciate that some bus operators are doing a good job, others are not. Sometimes, the performance of bus operators varies significantly around the country, with good performance in some areas and bad performance in others. We must therefore do much more to try to raise the bus operators' game. I appreciate that it is sometimes not clear that those issues are being addressed by bus operators, who, after all, are concerned about boosting profits.

We want to build partnerships. I appreciate that there has not been much of a partnership in Wallasey, not least between my hon. Friend and Arriva. I hope that we can explore ways of creating a proper partnership. I know that my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State opened a new £5 million Arriva depot in Birkenhead last May. I hope that that can be a basis on which to build rapid improvements in bus services through constructive dialogue.

The Transport Act 2000 enables local authorities to set up quality contracts where that is the only practicable way of implementing their bus strategy. The Government cannot approve a pilot quality contract outside of the procedures that Parliament laid down in the Act. It is up to the individual local transport authority to make its case. As part of its preparations for the next local transport round, however, I am aware that Merseytravel is in the process of revising its bus strategy, which is currently out for consultation. That strategy contains a detailed assessment of progress in the development of Merseyside's bus network. I am aware that Merseytravel is considering the introduction of a quality contract. Quality contracts suspend the deregulated bus market and allow authorities to plan and control bus services as in London, where bus services are run by private operators under contract to Transport for London. A local authority can specify fares, routes, timetables and driver training.

The legislative framework is already in place; it is a question of making it work. We are keen to remove barriers that might prevent local authorities from considering introducing quality contracts when it is clear that the criteria in the 2000 Act can be met. A particular issue has been the 21-month statutory minimum wait before implementation of a scheme. We have announced our intention of reducing that to six months. We will also shortly publish guidance on applying for a quality contract.

Looking to the future, I can reassure my right hon. Friend that the Department for Transport is working closely with local authorities and passenger transport authorities to develop new ways of involving local and regional stakeholders in the making of decisions on transport investment and service delivery. As part of that process, we held meetings last year with Liverpool city council and Merseytravel, and more meetings are planned with Wirral metropolitan borough council. I shall visit Merseytravel later this month, and I shall be pleased to discuss its proposals for the future with its representatives in more detail.

The Government's vision is of an integrated system that offers users choice, and encourages the use of public transport. We need to work at a local level to ensure that we have the appropriate balance of regulation, partnership, traffic management and funding to make the delivery of public transport a success. I hope that we can achieve that in Wallasey.

Question put and agreed to.

Adjourned accordingly at eighteen minutes to Eight o'clock.

House of Commons

Wednesday 10 November 2004

The House met at half-past Eleven o'clock

PRAYERS

[MR. SPEAKER *in the Chair*]

Oral Answers to Questions

INTERNATIONAL DEVELOPMENT

The Secretary of State was asked—

Sierra Leone

1. **Mr. Win Griffiths** (Bridgend) (Lab): What plans he has to visit Sierra Leone in the next three months to discuss progress on the agreement made with its Government on the development of Sierra Leone after the civil war. [197140]

The Secretary of State for International Development (Hilary Benn): I was in Sierra Leone in March this year. During my visit I had wide-ranging discussions about progress on our 10-year agreement. We are about to carry out a joint review of it with the Government of Sierra Leone.

Mr. Griffiths: I am sure my right hon. Friend is aware of the strong feeling in Sierra Leone about our Government's great contribution there, both in ending the civil war and in helping to redevelop the country after it. It is good to see the successful reintroduction of democracy with presidential and parliamentary elections and the first local government elections for 30 years. But will my right hon. Friend provide the extra support that will allow the Sierra Leone Government to clamp down on corruption with their anti-corruption measures, so that private industry can go in with confidence and start the economic development that is so necessary to building on that democratic success?

Hilary Benn: My hon. Friend is absolutely right. A great deal of progress has been made in Sierra Leone, partly because of our efforts; but the challenge for the country now is to build on that success, including the recent local elections. Corruption is, I think, the single biggest obstacle to further progress. That is why we are the main supporter of the Anti-Corruption Commission and, with the Commonwealth Secretariat, have provided four judges to focus partly on corruption cases, as well as a special prosecutor for corruption.

The people of Sierra Leone, however, want to see the Government demonstrate by their actions that they will not tolerate corruption, above all because if they do not tackle the problem it will affect the economic future of a country that has suffered so much.

Angus Robertson (Moray) (SNP): I welcome the progress made in Sierra Leone, but is the Secretary of State concerned about regional instability and the latest worrying reports of violence in Ivory Coast? Apparently more than 5,000 people have had to flee to neighbouring Liberia. What efforts can the United Kingdom Government make to ensure that progress in countries such as Sierra Leone can also be enjoyed in countries such as Ivory Coast that are currently going through such a difficult time?

Hilary Benn: The hon. Gentleman is right. The whole region has been greatly affected; not just Sierra Leone and Côte d'Ivoire but Liberia as well.

What can we do? First, we must give all possible support to the efforts being made in Côte d'Ivoire to ensure that the peace process that was on track starts up again. I am pleased that President Mbeki is playing a leading role in trying to ensure that the Linas-Marcoussis agreement, which provided the framework for the progress that has been made in Côte d'Ivoire, is upheld and the fighting brought to an end. We do not need any more instability in that part of west Africa. We know from experience that instability can spill into neighbouring states, and they have had quite enough of it already.

Mr. Kevin McNamara (Hull, North) (Lab): My right hon. Friend will know of the close relationship between Hull and Freetown. He will know that ours was the first city to be twinned with the capital of a developing country in Africa. One of Sierra Leone's problems is inadequate training of local government staff. Hull has pioneered a scheme to deal with that problem. What steps will the Government take to arrange more training for local government agency staff in Sierra Leone, to ensure that there is proper administration not just centrally but, more important, locally?

Hilary Benn: I welcome the links of which my hon. Friend has reminded us. The whole focus of our programme in Sierra Leone is indeed on governance reform. That includes public administration, public financial management, decentralisation, reform of the justice system and parliamentary committees.

Following the achievement of stability through United Kingdom intervention and the work of UNAMSIL—the United Nations Mission in Sierra Leone—the task now is to build the institutions of the state, including local government. The Sierra Leone Government can then begin to do what people look to government to do: meet their needs, educate their children and provide opportunities for economic development.

Remitted Funds

2. **Mr. David Heath** (Somerton and Frome) (LD): What assessment he has made of the role in international development terms of remittance of funds from individuals living and working in the United Kingdom to families in developing countries. [197141]

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for International Development (Mr. Gareth Thomas): Remittances from the UK are estimated at between £3 billion and £4 billion, with the Indian sub-continent, the Caribbean and sub-Saharan Africa the leading recipients. Remittances are a significant source of income for millions of poor people, making up as much as half the income of those who receive them. In partnership with the private sector and developing-country Governments, we are working to remove barriers to getting remittances to poor people by, for example, promoting competition to bring down costs and better use of technology.

Mr. Heath: I think that the richer countries may be missing a trick. As the Under-Secretary says, remittances from expatriates to their home countries and families can exceed official aid budgets. They also have the advantages of being earned income and money that goes directly to families rather than via governmental routes, which gives remittances greater value. Is there more that the Under-Secretary can do? Can he ask his right hon. Friend the Chancellor of the Exchequer to facilitate remittance transfers, as they are such a significant part of this country's aid effort?

Mr. Thomas: The hon. Gentleman is right that remittances make a huge difference to those who receive them. They mean, on occasion, that children can go to school, and that people can purchase food and access health care. We have established an international taskforce with 15 donors sitting on it, including the Americans, the World Bank and International Monetary Fund, to look at what else we can do to bring down costs and to promote competition worldwide in terms of remittance products.

David Taylor (North-West Leicestershire) (Lab/Co-op): Migrant workers have become a necessary feature of industrialised countries throughout the world and the Under-Secretary has paid tribute to the importance of their remittances to their home countries. Does not he agree that migration is an important aspect of sustainable development? What is the Government's attitude to the 1990 UN international convention on the protection of the rights of all migrant workers and members of their families, which would help to secure those hugely important remittances to home countries?

Mr. Thomas: My hon. Friend makes an important point about the contribution that migrant workers make in our society. I think, for example, of the Fillipino nurses who work at the key hospital that serves my constituency, and the Sri Lankan Tamils who work in businesses in my constituency. On his specific point about the UN convention, I do not have the answer to hand and will write to him with it.

Medical Training (Africa)

3. **Tim Loughton** (East Worthing and Shoreham) (Con): What support his Department has provided for the training of *(a)* doctors and *(b)* nurses in Africa in each of the last five years. [197142]

The Secretary of State for International Development (Hilary Benn): DFID has provided £560 million over the past five years to support health services development in Africa, including the training of nurses and doctors. Of that, an estimated 5 to 20 per cent., depending on the country, is spent on developing the capacity of the work force.

Tim Loughton: I warmly welcome those figures. One of the things that struck me most when I visited Ethiopia two years ago was being told that there are more Ethiopian doctors in Chicago than in the whole of Ethiopia. That pattern is replicated throughout Africa. In places such as Ghana and Zimbabwe, 70 per cent. of doctors leave within five years of graduation. It is right that we should contribute towards the training of health professionals but crazy that we should then poach them; that is still happening in this country through private agencies. Can the Secretary of State apply his mind to thinking more imaginatively about improving terms and conditions, perhaps as part of the aid budget, to ensure that doctors and nurses stay in their home countries, where they are needed most?

Hilary Benn: The hon. Gentleman is right. We have the code of practice in place and my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Health is looking at how we can strengthen it. Individuals make decisions to leave countries to seek employment in other parts of the world, but the hon. Gentleman has put his finger on the real issue. How can we do something, working with developing-country Governments, to make it less likely that people will take their skills and expertise away from the country of their birth and travel to other parts of the world? It is about pay, opportunities for continuing professional development, working conditions, the extent to which they will have access to the drugs that they have been trained to use but which may not be available in the communities in which they are placed, accommodation, and whether their children can be educated if they work in rural areas. When I was in Ghana earlier this year, I had exactly that discussion with the head of the Ghanaian health service. His mind was almost exclusively focused on what could be done in Ghana to reduce the factors that push health workers out of that country.

Tony Worthington (Clydebank and Milngavie) (Lab): The Secretary of State knows that this is an immense problem. As more money goes in to HIV/AIDS and reproductive health, it simply will not be possible to improve health services unless we improve the supply of nurses and doctors. There is no sign of any international effort to tackle that issue. Staff are emigrating; staff are themselves dying from HIV/AIDS and there is a totally unsatisfactory secondary and tertiary health system. Perhaps there should be a World Health Organisation-led effort to deal with the problem of the capacity of health services through human resources in Africa.

Hilary Benn: At its last gathering, the World Health Assembly passed a resolution asking the WHO to look at that very question and will report back next time. It included the proposal for an international code. Quite what that might say and how it would be enforced I cannot say.

AIDS is having a devastating impact not only on the countries themselves but on the capacity of their health services. That is why we are working with the Government of Malawi, for example, to try to double their health capacity over the next six years. The vacancy rates in Malawi are running at 64 per cent. for nurses, 91 per cent. for obstetricians and gynaecologists and 85 per cent. for surgeons. There are 10 districts in

Malawi with no Ministry of Health doctor whatever. That is the scale of the challenge, and we are considering a programme that will include external recruitment, to try to sustain the capacity of the Malawian health service.

Mr. Julian Brazier (Canterbury) (Con): Everything that the Secretary of State has said on this issue is welcome, but the fact remains that we are still pillaging doctors and nurses from countries that are desperately short of them; a figure even worse than those that he cited is the 97 per cent. shortfall of nurses in Uganda. Will he ask the Secretary of State for Health to take action, not just to tighten the code of practice, but to ban the NHS from taking staff, through private sector agencies, from the countries with the greatest shortfall of medical and nursing staff?

Hilary Benn: The code of practice says very clearly that there will not be active recruitment. The really difficult question, if we are honest, is this; if an individual from a developing country who is a nurse or a doctor chooses to seek employment in the United Kingdom or the United States of America, is it right to have a law that says that they cannot be employed in any capacity in the health service in our country? The individual would say, "What about my right?" Linking back to the earlier question about remittances, one thing that encourages people to seek employment in another country is that they can earn a higher salary so that they can send back money to help sustain their families. One must be aware of the two sides of the argument. The purpose of the code of practice is to prevent active recruitment, and my right hon. Friend the Health Secretary is investigating what more we can do to deal with the problem.

Commission for Africa

4. **Helen Jackson** (Sheffield, Hillsborough) (Lab): If he will make a statement on the work of the Commission for Africa. [197143]

The Secretary of State for International Development (Hilary Benn): Following the second successful meeting of the Commission for Africa in Addis Ababa, the commission will produce a consultation document shortly, on which it will seek views within and beyond Africa in the run-up to Christmas. I hope that hon. Members will continue to contribute to its work over the coming months. I expect the final report to be published in March 2005.

Helen Jackson: My right hon. Friend will agree that everyone favours giving more support and resources to the development of Africa, but not just on our terms; on African terms. The New Partnership for Africa's Development is an African-owned agenda. How will he ensure that there is some African ownership of the work of the Commission for Africa as it prepares for the G8 summit, not only at Government level, but through all parliamentarians and the men and women of Africa?

Hilary Benn: This is the big challenge for the commission. One of the steps that we have taken is to ensure that the majority of its members are African, so that is a good starting point. I pay tribute to the work that my hon. Friend and others have done through their links with parliamentarians. I know that she is particularly active in AWEPA, the Association of West European Parliamentarians for Africa. The purpose of producing the consultation document is precisely to allow people to see how the commission's thinking is evolving and to contribute to the process. In the end, it is a matter of what recommendations emerge, and I expect that a very strong theme will be what the rest of the world can do to support Africa in helping itself. One practical example is the support that we are giving to the African Union-led initiative in Darfur to increase the size of the ceasefire monitoring team. That is backing an African initiative to tackle conflict in the region.

Mr. Quentin Davies (Grantham and Stamford) (Con): Will this commission actually decide or do anything? If all it does is regurgitate conclusions and policy recommendations already determined by other individuals and bodies, with which we are all familiar, however worthy they are, is there not a most unfortunate danger that the whole exercise could look as if it was more a matter of public relations and the promotion of the Prime Minister on the world stage than a genuine attempt to do something about the problems of poverty in Africa?

Hilary Benn: If I may say so, I am loth to take a lecture of that sort from the hon. Gentleman, and perhaps I might give one practical example of what we are doing. On Africa, the Government are not interested in public relations; in fact, we are in the process of trebling the United Kingdom's development assistance to Africa. Why? The answer is, because we have a rising aid budget. The test of the commission will be the extent to which it supports the process in 2005 in order to get the world to take the steps that need to be taken to help Africa to have a different experience in the next generation from that of the previous one. As the hon. Gentleman well knows, we are taking such steps on volume of aid—as I said, we are in the process of trebling aid, in marked contrast with what went before—on debt relief, for which we have a new initiative, and in respect of the world trading system. What is different is that a serving G8 leader has decided to establish the commission, and has said that Africa will be one of the two priorities for the G8 presidency. That sounds to me like pretty practical politics.

Barbara Follett (Stevenage) (Lab): Recognising the pivotal role that conflict resolution played in Africa and in the work of the Commission for Africa, will my right hon. Friend say what progress is being made in Sudan?

Hilary Benn: The situation in Sudan, and in Darfur in particular, remains extremely difficult, although I very much welcome the signing of the humanitarian and security protocols at the peace talks in Abuja. This represents a considerable step forward, provided that the parties to those two agreements honour the commitments that they have entered into, and fulfils one pledge that the Government of Sudan gave to the Prime Minister when he visited Khartoum just over a month ago. The humanitarian situation remains difficult, although more aid is getting in. The political process in Abuja will, in the end, provide the solution to the conflict in Darfur.

Mr. Alan Duncan (Rutland and Melton) (Con): The Commission for Africa offers a unique opportunity for us all to work out from first principles how best to help people escape from, and then stay out of, poverty. Notwithstanding the ravages of AIDS, the problem of corrupt Governments, the misery of displaced people and, indeed, the problem of professionals leaving to work elsewhere—about which we have just heard—does the Secretary of State agree that establishing private ownership and property rights is absolutely essential to building economic progress and, more crucially still, to sustaining such improvements in the long term?

Hilary Benn: Indeed it is important, because economic development will be the real engine of poverty reduction in Africa, as it is in countries such as China and India. At the same time, however, effective states need to be built. That is why increasing aid, our action on debt relief, opening up the world trading system—so that trade is fair for developing countries, as opposed to unfair—and, indeed, private sector development, will have a part to play in enabling Africa to proceed much more successfully than it has until now.

Mr. Duncan: I welcome the Secretary of State's words. Some might see them as a slight break with family tradition, and they are all the better for that. But returning to first principles, what study will the commission make of the effectiveness of his own Department's policy in Africa in terms of where it concentrates effort? Would not it be better for the United Kingdom to concentrate its resources on countries with which we have an historical affinity, rather than trying to cover the entire continent, thereby spreading ourselves so thinly that our efforts are rather less effective?

Hilary Benn: We do not try to cover the whole continent; indeed, those African countries in which we have development programmes largely reflect our historical relationship with such countries. But there are other countries with which we have no historical relationship, of which the Democratic Republic of the Congo is a very good example. Now there is an opportunity for peace in the DRC, with an albeit fragile peace agreement and a transitional Government in operation. It would be a mistake if we and other donors did not provide support in such countries, because unless the DRC can consolidate the peace that the political process has delivered, the prospects for development in that part of Africa will not be as good as they would otherwise be.

Mr. Iain Luke (Dundee, East) (Lab): I agree with my right hon. Friend entirely. We should be taking steps now to ensure that the mistakes of the past are not visited on the next generation of Africans. Will he take the opportunity at the next meeting of the commission to implore our European partners to scrap the common agricultural policy, a subsidy that protects European farmers at the cost of African producers?

Hilary Benn: We are not going to make progress in the world trade talks without making further progress on reform of the common agricultural policy, particularly on reducing export subsidies. Progress has been made over the last 10 years, during which export subsidies have reduced by more than half in Europe, but they still represent an obstacle to developing countries earning and trading their way out of poverty. I am confident that the commission's recommendations will include some direct comments on the need to conclude the world trade talks in a way that benefits developing countries.

Tom Brake (Carshalton and Wallington) (LD): One of the commission's key recommendations next year is likely to be to boost funds for international development through the international finance facility. The official view on the IFF, as set out in a parliamentary answer, is:

> "Among the G7, France has been a firm supporter of the IFF . . . We are continuing to work with other potential donors",

but the unofficial view, set out in a background note that was helpfully sent to me at the same time, is:

> "With the exception of France and possibly Canada, the G7 remain sceptical of the IFF . . . Japan, Germany and Italy remain unconvinced."

Does the Secretary of State agree that it would be risky for developing countries to believe that the IFF was going to provide all their solutions? What are the contingency plans if the IFF does not fly?

Hilary Benn: The first thing that we can do is to demonstrate that the IFF model works. That is why we are currently working with the Global Alliance for Vaccines and Immunisation on an immunisation pilot IFF, which will allow many more children to get immunised than is currently the case. It will also show other countries that remain to be convinced that the model works and that it is the one practical proposal on the table that will raise additional development finance now, which is what we need if we are to make progress towards the millennium development goals. The question that the sceptics have to answer is, if not the IFF, what other proposals are there for raising the additional finance now? The finance is needed now to invest in the long-term development of Africa and other developing countries. *[Interruption.]*

Mr. Speaker: Order. The House must come to order.

Uganda

5. **Valerie Davey** (Bristol, West) (Lab): What assessment his Department has made of the humanitarian situation in northern Uganda; and if he will make a statement. [197144]

The Secretary of State for International Development (Hilary Benn): The humanitarian situation in northern Uganda is an emergency, but overall rates of mortality and malnutrition suggest that it is currently under control across the north as a whole. However, we have just received a report from Médecins sans Frontières (Holland) of alarmingly high mortality rates amongst displaced people in one part of the north. We are urgently investigating. Since December 2002, the UK, which is the second largest donor, has provided

£15 million of humanitarian assistance, channelled mainly through the World Food Programme, UNICEF and the Uganda Red Cross.

Valerie Davey: I thank my right hon. Friend for his reply and for his interest in this largely unreported disaster. Can he be confident that the aid is reaching the north, as the latest BBC news talks of the staggering death rate in northern Uganda, especially among the under-fives? Is he sure that the Ugandan Government's funding is prioritising northern Uganda?

Hilary Benn: Based on my visit to Gulu earlier this year, I can tell my hon. Friend that I have seen the benefits of the aid that we are giving, not least the support given to the children who are so blighted by the conflict. Work is also being done to reintegrate into society the children who have been abducted, traumatised and brutalised by the Lord's Resistance Army. The excellent Gulu Support the Children Organisation is in operation, with support from ourselves and others to help those children.

Clearly the potential for development in northern Uganda is being blighted by the conflict and I very much welcome reports that the Lord's Resistance Army now wishes to bring the conflict to an end and to open dialogue with the Government. We support efforts to make that happen but, based on past experience, the question remains whether it really means it. We must work with might and main to ensure that, if that opportunity now exists, it comes to fruition.

World Trade

6. **Mr. Jonathan Sayeed** (Mid-Bedfordshire) (Con): What action he has taken to ensure the success of the interim accord in furthering negotiations in the Doha round; and if he will make a statement. [197145]

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for International Development (Mr. Gareth Thomas): My right hon. Friend the Secretary of State and I will continue to talk to the European Commission, other EU member states and developing country Ministers to encourage progress towards a successful development outcome on the Doha development agenda. We continue to provide substantial ongoing assistance to developing countries to support them in these negotiations.

Mr. Sayeed: I am sure that the Under-Secretary means what he says, but we have had the talks at the general agreement on tariffs and trade, Uruguay and Cancun, and now we have Doha. Yet all the time agricultural protectionism and dumping are making the poorer nations poorer. When will the EU and the US understand that the richer the world is, the more people can afford the goods and services that we produce? Is not it common sense, and in our common interest, to end policies that make the poorest poorer?

Mr. Thomas: The hon. Gentleman is absolutely right to point out the need for us to make progress and to get a good outcome from the Hong Kong ministerial meeting in December next year. Although there has been rapid growth in world trade over the past 10 years, Africa's share has halved in that time. My right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs successfully negotiated a deal on reform of the common agricultural policy in 2003, and that was a significant step in the right direction. We continue to press the Commission and our friends in the US to go further.

PRIME MINISTER

The Prime Minister was asked—

Arctic Star Campaign Medal

Q1. [197155] **Dr. Julian Lewis** (New Forest, East) (Con): If he will make it his policy to recognise the service of personnel on the Russian convoys by the award of an Arctic Star campaign medal.

The Prime Minister (Mr. Tony Blair): Perhaps I can answer this question in a little detail, if I might. First, we owe the heroes of the Arctic convoys an immense debt of gratitude. They risked, and in many cases gave, their lives under some of the harshest conditions imaginable in order to keep this nation free and democratic in the second world war.

The Government at the time honoured those who took part in wartime convoys to the Soviet Union with the award of the Atlantic Star, and that explicitly included service on the convoys to north Russia. The difficulty that arises is that the eligibility criteria for the range of medals instituted to recognise second world war service was drawn up by the Committee on the Grant of Honours, Decorations and Medals. The King approved the proposals in the late 1940s, and subsequently ruled that no further medals should be instituted for second world war service. However, questions have been raised about the relative difficulty of qualifying for the Atlantic Star through service on the convoys. We continue to look at this matter, but it is extremely difficult, at the moment, to see a way through.

Dr. Lewis: I thank the Prime Minister for that thoughtful reply, but that is not the answer that these courageous men were hoping to hear the day before Remembrance day. He is right about the problem with the Atlantic Star, and that story really will not do. A man had to serve for six months to qualify for the Atlantic Star, but most of those on the Russian convoys who received that medal did so despite the fact that they were on the convoys. Hundreds of men who were on those convoys did not get the Atlantic Star, because they were not on them for six months. Finally, may I remind the Prime Minister that hundreds of hon. Members—including the Home Secretary, the leader of my party and many members of all the other parties in this House—have said that they want this medal to be awarded? He has it in his power to overrule the bureaucrats: will he now do so?

The Prime Minister: First, I assure the hon. Gentleman that I am as anxious as anyone else to resolve the issue, and of course I should like to resolve it in the way that he and many other hon. Members have suggested. However, he will know that the six-month qualifying service required at the time has been reviewed independently on many occasions, and the recommendation has always been to retain it. I repeat that we are trying to find a way through this difficulty. *[Interruption.]* It is not simply for me to decide. We have to act in a way that satisfies the armed forces. That continues to be the subject of discussion.

Mr. Calum MacDonald (Western Isles) (Lab): My right hon. Friend will be aware that next year is the 60th anniversary of the end of the second world war. Does he agree with me that, with each decade that passes, it becomes ever more important to remember and commemorate the sacrifice of that great generation of the 1940s? They fought in the Arctic, Europe and Asia to defend our liberties and democracy, and to create democracies in countries that previously did not know democracy.

The Prime Minister: I entirely share—as I am sure does the whole House—in my hon. Friend's tribute to the bravery and dedication of all those who served our country during two world wars. The Minister of State with responsibility for the armed forces will today announce plans to commemorate the 60th anniversary of the ending of the second world war. With British troops serving in Iraq and in many other places, Remembrance day will take on a special significance for this country at this time.

Engagements

Q2. [197156] **Sarah Teather** (Brent East) (LD): If he will list his official engagements for Wednesday 10th November.

The Prime Minister: Before listing my engagements, I know that the whole House will join with me in sending our deep condolences to the family of the Black Watch soldier killed by a terrorist bomb in Iraq on Monday and our sympathy to those soldiers injured in the same attack. Once again, we praise the courage and heroism of our armed forces and, once again, we say that this country can be very proud of them.

This morning I had meetings with ministerial colleagues and others. In addition to my duties in the House, I shall have further such meetings later today.

Sarah Teather: I associate myself with the comments made by the Prime Minister.

The College of North West London has a reputation for excellence in construction, is one of the largest providers of skills for life courses in the country and has been called the Cambridge of plumbing. The Government want the further education sector to provide courses in those priority areas on a demand-led basis, but have not provided the money to meet demand in my area. What advice can the Prime Minister give to the principal of my local college? Should she turn away the students that he has asked her to recruit, or risk the financial viability of the institution?

The Prime Minister: I cannot comment in detail on the funding of the college in the hon. Lady's constituency. However, I can say that we have massively increased the investment in further education. There are now 250,000 modern apprenticeships, and that will rise to 300,000 during or by the end of 2006. There are always difficulties with exactly how funds are allocated, but in addition to all the money that we are putting in, we are making a new offer to people of free level 2 skills funding for all who need it. I am aware that that will not cover everyone in her college, but we are increasing investment massively and I will have to get back to her on the precise details of her college.

Q3. [197157] **Mr. Mohammad Sarwar** (Glasgow, Govan) (Lab): My right hon. Friend is aware of the depth of feeling across Scotland about the future of Scottish regiments. Can he assure me that the Government will listen to public opinion and respond positively to the desire to retain their historic identities and traditions?

The Prime Minister: I fully understand the concern expressed about the uncertainty affecting the future of the regiments in Scotland. The Chief of the General Staff, General Sir Mike Jackson, is considering at present how best to implement changes designed to modernise the way in which infantry regiments are deployed, and he will continue to do that. No final decision on the future structure of Scottish regiments has yet been made and I ask people to wait a little longer until the final decision is made.

Mr. Michael Howard (Folkestone and Hythe) (Con): I join the Prime Minister in expressing my sympathy and respect to the family of the latest member of the Black Watch to lose his life on active service in Iraq, and I wish those who have been injured a full and speedy recovery.

The whole House will have been disappointed to hear the Prime Minister's answer to the hon. Member for Glasgow, Govan (Mr. Sarwar). The Black Watch is doing a heroic job in Iraq. Why cannot the Prime Minister confirm now that he will reverse his policy on the regiment's future? Why cannot he tell the House now that the courage and dedication of the Black Watch will not be rewarded by the abolition of the regiment?

The Prime Minister: It is not a question of reversing the policy. The decision has to be made by the Army, because it wants to configure itself in the best and most effective way possible. No decision has yet been made. We are well aware of the concerns that have been expressed and we have expressed our own admiration—it is not a matter of difference on either side of the House—of the Black Watch's heroism and the work that it is doing. However, it is important that the Army be allowed to make its decision in the right way. It will do so and announce it shortly.

Mr. Howard: But cannot the Prime Minister see that the way in which this whole issue has been handled is a complete shambles? The Secretary of State for Defence has said repeatedly that the Scottish regiments will be abolished, but the Prime Minister has briefed newspapers in Scotland that they will be saved. I have the headline here: "Saved!"—*[Interruption.]*

Mr. Speaker: Order. Let the Leader of the Opposition speak.

Mr. Howard: The headline reads: "Saved. Blair orders about turn on the Black Watch and 3 other Scots regiments". Does the Prime Minister not understand how shameful it is to treat the Black Watch and their families in that way at a time when they face such great danger in Iraq?

The Prime Minister: I am surprised at the right hon. and learned Gentleman's behaving in this way. He knows perfectly well that the Army has to make that decision and is considering it now. The Army will make that decision in due course. No one has announced that the regiments are to be abolished; a decision has to be taken by the Army on the most effective way to do it. We are well aware of the concern, but it has to be done in the right and proper way, and I simply regard what the right hon. and learned Gentleman is saying today, in particular his attempt to say that somehow we are undermining the Black Watch in Iraq, as completely wrong and just another example of his shabby opportunism.

Mr. Kevin Hughes (Doncaster, North) (Lab): While I appreciate that the big drug companies spend an awful lot of money on research and development, it is also a well-known fact that they make hundreds of millions of pounds from the national health service, so is it not about time the Government got a better deal for the NHS and the British taxpayer?

The Prime Minister: It is precisely for that reason that I am delighted to be able to tell my hon. Friend that, as a result of the deal secured by the Secretary of State for Health, there will be savings in the region of £300 million or more on the drugs bill. That is extremely important and it shows how we are getting good value for money in a health service that is improving and expanding capacity, treating more people and treating them better. We are well on the way to the renewal of the national health service in this country.

Mr. Charles Kennedy (Ross, Skye and Inverness, West) (LD): I associate myself entirely with the Prime Minister's initial comments about the further loss of life of a member of the Black Watch and the injuries sustained by others in their support. May I ask the Prime Minister about the current duties of the Black Watch in Iraq? It is reported that the Prime Minister has been assuring his colleagues that further British troops will not be required to replace the Black Watch when its 30-day redeployment is complete. Is it the case that he has been briefing his colleagues to that effect and can he tell Parliament whether British troops, generally, will continue to operate outside their southern sector after Christmas?

The Prime Minister: I have not been giving any particular briefings to colleagues about that, so all I can do is repeat what I said to the right hon. Gentleman on Monday, or perhaps last week: there are no plans to redeploy further British troops once the Black Watch has ceased those operations in the particular area the regiment is in at present. That was the case then and it remains the case now. It is obviously important that the Black Watch is there for the moment, as it is an integral part of the operation in Falluja.

Mr. Kennedy: In addition, given that we know that leading Iraqi insurgents have, in many cases, already left Falluja and that violence is flaring across the country, would the Prime Minister be prepared again to authorise the redeployment of British troops elsewhere in Iraq in support of other American-led military operations?

The Prime Minister: I do not think that it would be sensible for me to speculate about what might happen in the future in relation to British troops. Perhaps we should say this. First, we should pay tribute not just to the British forces but to American and Iraqi forces for what they are doing in Falluja. Let me make three things very clear. First, many of those in Falluja are foreign jihadis from outside Iraq; they are people who have no right to be in Iraq at all. Secondly, the operations—*[Interruption.]* I am sorry, but al-Zarqawi was in Iraq before the end of Saddam Hussein's regime. So, first, many of the people in Falluja are foreign, outside terrorists. Secondly, let me say again that we would cease operations now in Falluja—immediately—if they would lay down their weapons and agree to participate in elections; and, thirdly, the real desire of those terrorists is to stop the elections, because they know that if there are elections in Iraq, as there have been in Afghanistan, that will be a huge blow to them, as terrorists.

I have to say to the right hon. Gentleman that I cannot start making predictions or talking about what future operations there may be, but he knows that this was a special operation for particular reasons of immense importance to making the elections secure in Iraq. There are no plans to redeploy British troops in replacement of those.

Helen Southworth (Warrington, South) (Lab): My constituents want police officers who know the local area and are known by local people. Will my right hon. Friend back extra resources for community policing in Warrington?

The Prime Minister: We want to increase support for community policing, not just in my hon. Friend's constituency, but elsewhere in the country. We have now got record numbers of police. We are supplementing them now with community support officers and neighbourhood wardens, and what we are trying to do is bring back proper community policing for today's world. As I saw myself when I visited some of the community support officers yesterday, they are doing a magnificent job, and for the future they, along with fully warranted officers, will be a major part of a modern police service.

Mr. Howard: Last week, the Prime Minister and the leader of the Liberal Democrats urged voters in the north-east to vote yes in the referendum on the regional assembly. The next day, 78 per cent. of them voted no. Why does the Prime Minister think that more than seven out of 10 people in Sedgefield rejected his advice?

The Prime Minister: It had not escaped my attention that they voted no, because they obviously decided that a regional assembly in the north-east was not the way that they wanted to go. Fair enough. We said that we would give them the vote. They voted. We abide by the result, and we will now continue to strengthen local democracy in other ways.

Mr. Howard: Is it not clear that the lesson of last week is that people want local government and less government, not more government? There are now eight regional assemblies in England. They cost millions of pounds. We now know that they have no popular support at all. When will the Prime Minister abolish them?

The Prime Minister: We will not abolish them, because they perform a perfectly good task of co-ordinating action in the regions. Of course, what they build on are the Government offices for the regions, established by the previous Government, which actually cost five to six times the amount of the regional assemblies.

Mr. Howard: We did create the Government offices for the regions. We moved civil servants from Whitehall to the regions. The Prime Minister should do rather more than that, but I am not asking him about the regional offices; I am asking him about the regional assemblies. Has he not learned any lesson at all from last week's vote? People do not want important matters, such as planning and housing, taken away from local councils, which people identify with, and given instead to regional assemblies, which they do not identify with. The people have spoken: regional assemblies are dead. Why does not the Prime Minister bury them?

The Prime Minister: The vote was not on the regional chambers, and if the right hon. and learned Gentleman is so against them, can he please explain to me why so many Conservatives serve on them?

Mr. Howard: Because as long as they are there, Conservative councillors have to minimise the damage that they do, but Conservative councillors, like me, want them abolished. Why will the Prime Minister not abolish them?

The Prime Minister: If the Conservatives want them abolished and they think that they serve no purpose, I am surprised that they sit on them. The fact of the matter is that they most certainly do serve a purpose, but the reason why the previous Government established the Government offices for the regions is that they recognised that there had to be a regional dimension. That is precisely what we have recognised with the regional chambers. There will not be a regional assembly in the north-east, because they did not vote for one. What will remain are the Government offices for the regions and the regional chambers.

Ann Clwyd (Cynon Valley) (Lab): May I ask my right hon. Friend to look urgently at reports that some civilians caught up in the fighting in Falluja cannot access urgent medical treatment? May I ask him again to say that surely the main objective now must be to ensure that as much of Iraq as possible is made safe so that free and fair elections can take place next year and the people of Iraq can choose their own elected representatives?

The Prime Minister: The points that my hon. Friend makes are absolutely right. We are doing our best to get supplies, especially medical supplies, through to people in Falluja, but the current problem is that some of the terrorists and insurgents are trying to kill those who are bringing the supplies through. As Prime Minister Allawi made it clear, the Iraqi Government are going to redouble their efforts to achieve that. My hon. Friend's point is absolutely correct, because if the terrorism stopped, many things could happen in Iraq. The reconstruction could proceed more easily and investment in Iraq could be there. The elections—locally and nationally—could take place properly. That is why it is important that whatever the difficulties and people's views on the conflict in Iraq, we stand firm and see this through, because that is in the interests not only of the Iraqi people, but of the wider world.

Lewes

Q4. [197158] **Norman Baker** (Lewes) (LD): When he last visited the Lewes constituency.

The Prime Minister: Regrettably, I have been unable to do so. It says here in brackets that, if necessary, I hope to visit the hon. Gentleman's constituency at some point in the future.

Norman Baker: I very much hope that the Prime Minister will do so because my constituents have many things to say to him—some even complimentary.

Will the Prime Minister raise the issue of climate change when he reports for duty in Washington tomorrow? Given the importance that he attaches to the issue and the fact that President Bush has been the main obstacle to international progress on climate change, are we to conclude that he has not been raising the matter with President Bush, or have his concerns been contemptuously swept away in this one-way street of a special relationship?

The Prime Minister: The difference between us and the American Administration on climate change is well known, although it is not only a difference with this particular Administration—I think I am right in saying that the Senate vote against the Kyoto protocol was something like 100 to nothing. The difference is clear and well documented. However, I must tell the hon. Gentleman and other Liberal Democrat Members who cavil at our relationship with the United States that none of the issues—not climate change, not the Palestinian peace process, not the changes we want to see in the world—will be addressed without the engagement of the United States of America. We should be proud of our relationship with it.

Mr. Liam Byrne (Birmingham, Hodge Hill) (Lab): The Prime Minister will be aware that the Palestinian nation today faces hours of maximum uncertainty. What will he do in Washington to help to focus the American President on delivering a prosperous, stable, two-state solution in the middle east?

The Prime Minister: As I set out last week, I will obviously stress again the importance of the middle east peace process. As I think that I said in the statement straight after President Bush's re-election, that, together with democracy in Afghanistan and Iraq, is the single most important thing that we can do.

Engagements

Q5. [197159] **Simon Hughes** (Southwark, North and Bermondsey) (LD): The Prime Minister often, and rightly, stresses the importance of giving choice to people in their use of public services. Why then does he not accept Labour party policy and the views of thousands of people among the 2.5 million council tenants in England, including nearly 50,000 in my borough, who want to remain as council tenants yet still have the same right to investment in decent homes as people whose homes are transferred to other management, private finance, or alternative management systems?

The Prime Minister: Surely the whole point is giving people the ability to transfer if they want to. When they transfer, as many have done, many find that there is an improvement, but in the end the decision to do so is their choice.

Mr. John MacDougall (Central Fife) (Lab): I join my right hon. Friend in his comments regarding all the troops out in Iraq and thank him for them. May I pay a personal tribute to a local lad who was a brave young Scot serving in the Black Watch? He paid the ultimate price; he lost his life for being a brave young solider. I hope that the Prime Minister will join me in paying respects to Private McArdle's family today. Does he believe that there is a wider agenda? Although all the concentration is understandably on Iraq at the moment, the road map is vital to stabilise the middle east.

The Prime Minister: I agree with my hon. Friend, but first I want to express my condolences publicly to the family of Private McArdle and to the families of others who have lost their lives in recent days and during the time of our action in Iraq.

My hon. Friend is right. The road map and the middle east peace process are an important part of the battle in which we are engaged. It is increasingly obvious that we face a global movement of a new type of terrorism. Many of those people fighting in Afghanistan and Iraq are part of the same network that has caused atrocities all over the world. The important way to fight it is, of course, by security means, as we have done in Afghanistan and Iraq, but also by removing the cause of so much discontent and the sense of injustice by ensuring that we make progress on the middle east peace process and on resolving the Palestinian issue. If we can combine the measures on security with those measures that let us understand some of the sense of injustice that there is in the world, we have a better chance of defeating this terrorism and defeating it finally.

Q6. [197160] **Mr. Simon Burns** (West Chelmsford) (Con): Will the Prime Minister reflect on the genuine anger in Chelmsford at the 14,000 extra houses that are being imposed on us? Will he tell me and my constituents why democratically elected borough councillors cannot take that decision, given that they know the area and its needs better than central Government?

The Prime Minister: Surely the issue is that we have to expand housing provision in the south. We know that. We are trying, as other Governments before us have done, to find a way to do that that preserves the green belt, by building primarily on brownfield sites, to provide the homes that people in the south need to live in. If we do not provide those homes, we face rising house prices and many people find it difficult to get a home in the south. Of course people do not like particular developments in their own area, but if we are not able to do this on a proper and planned basis, we will not be able to provide the homes that people need in the hon. Gentleman's constituency and elsewhere.

Chris McCafferty (Calder Valley) (Lab): My right hon. Friend will be aware that the Duke of Wellington's Regiment was recently deployed to Iraq for a second tour of duty in 14 months. Is he also aware that the regiment faces the indiscriminate chop by the Army review board while fighting in a conflict? Will he take a personal interest in the future of the Dukes, which is one of the Army's oldest and best recruited regiments?

The Prime Minister: I certainly will. My hon. Friend's question underlines the importance of ensuring that decisions are taken together and can be justified in all parts of the country. We are well aware of the huge attachment that people have to particular regiments. We have to ensure that that is married with the necessary efficiency of the Army in today's world. That is what the Army chiefs of staff want to do.

Q7. [197161] **Tom Brake** (Carshalton and Wallington) (LD): The Prime Minister will have heard reports earlier today that refugees in camps in Darfur have been attacked by the Sudanese police. I am meeting the Sudanese ambassador in half an hour. Is there a message that I can convey to the ambassador from the Prime Minister?

The Prime Minister: Sudan does have to honour its commitments. If it does not, it needs to be well aware that there will be a serious response from the international community. Time is running out, frankly, for it to honour those commitments. The commitments were given to me, the United Nations and others. They are vital. If they are not honoured, Sudan has to understand that there will be a serious response from the international community. I very much hope that in the weeks to come it will recognise that both the advent of the African Union peacekeepers and the fact that the issue will be very much in the minds of the international community—even with everything else going on—mean that it has to come into line with the obligations it has entered into.

Q8. [197162] **Mr. Brian H. Donohoe** (Cunninghame, South) (Lab): My right hon. Friend will know about the

Lyons review as part of his role as Minister for the Civil Service. Does he understand that it excludes my constituency and, indeed, the whole of Ayrshire? Will he correct that anomaly?

The Prime Minister: I have just been informed that that is not correct, so I am not sure that I have to correct the anomaly, but I will certainly look into the matter for my hon. Friend. The important point to make to him is that the relocation programme, presented in the Lyons review and taken forward in the 2004 spending review, will provide real opportunities for sustained job relocation inside the United Kingdom, and I am sure that that will be applied to his constituency as well.

Train Derailment (Ufton)

12.30 pm

The Secretary of State for Transport (Mr. Alistair Darling): With permission, Mr Speaker, I would like to make a short statement on the train derailment that occurred at the Ufton level crossing in Berkshire on Saturday evening.

As the House will be aware, at approximately 18.11 hours, the 17.35 First Great Western service from Paddington to Plymouth hit a car, which had stopped on the railway line at the level crossing at Ufton lane. There were approximately 180 passengers and four train crew travelling on the train. The train driver, the car driver and five passengers died and 37 people were admitted to hospital. Hon. Members on both sides of the House will wish to join me in expressing our deepest sympathy to the families and friends of all those who lost their lives and to those who were injured.

I would like especially to praise the work of the Thames Valley emergency services and the agencies who worked closely together to respond to the accident with well-prepared contingency plans. I am told that the first of the emergency services arrived at the scene of the accident within four minutes. We must also thank the staff at the Royal Berkshire hospital and North Hampshire hospital for their care and dedication.

The British Transport police immediately began an investigation into why the car stopped on the level crossing and the actions of the driver. Alongside the police investigation, Her Majesty's railways inspectorate carried out its investigation to determine whether the rail safety equipment at the crossing functioned correctly, and as a result of that, the Health and Safety Executive has produced an interim report, published this morning, setting out its findings. Copies of that report have been placed in the Library and are publicly available.

It may be helpful to the House if I quote from the summary of the HSE report, which sets out what it has found. It says:

> "HSE investigators have not found any evidence at this stage to suggest that there were any errors by railway staff or faults with the level crossing, the signalling system or the train involved in the incident.
>
> Early indications are that a car driver stopped his vehicle on the crossing before the barrier sequence commenced and made no attempt to leave the vehicle once the crossing traffic signals began to flash and the barriers descended.
>
> The train struck the car. Damage to the crossing surface and sleepers between the crossing and 979 points"—

that is the points at the entry to a goods line, about 100 yd from the crossing—

> "indicates that the leading wheelset of the train derailed at the crossing and the train travelled in that condition until reaching the points. The derailment was then exacerbated as the train passed over the points".

The report sets out the HSE's findings in some detail and concludes:

> "The HSE investigation has not found any evidence in any of the level crossing or train data downloads to suggest any fault in the signalling, level crossing or on train equipment, or with the actions of those personnel on duty."

The HSE has now completed its on-site investigation and withdrawn from the site, but it will if required support the British Transport police investigation as it continues.

The next stage is for the Rail Safety and Standards Board, which has started a formal rail industry inquiry into the incident. A panel of independent experts will consider all aspects of the derailment. They will report within the next six to 12 months, but if any matters of importance on safety arise from their investigations, they will make them known immediately so that the appropriate action can be taken. It is for the coroner to determine the precise cause and circumstances of the deaths of those involved and I understand that the coroner's inquest will open today.

I should like to consider what is being done in the meantime to help those who were in the accident and to resume services on the line. In the past, there has been concern about a lack of clarity on what is done in the aftermath of such an accident to help those who were involved.

Network Rail and the train operating company, First Great Western, are working closely together to help those who were in the accident and their families. First Great Western has already taken the lead on handling claims from passengers. It is trying to contact all those who were on the train. There is a number to call for those passengers who have not already been contacted by the company.

Network Rail has estimated that, because of the damage to the track, it will take at least a week to replace the track and signalling equipment. In the meantime, First Great Western has provided replacement bus services. Network Rail is doing all that it can to restore the service as quickly as possible.

It is clear that this was a tragic accident. We owe it to those who were involved to find out the circumstances surrounding it. The inquiries that have been put in place will try to achieve that. It is ultimately a matter for the coroner to determine the cause of the tragic deaths.

It is clear from the HSE interim report that there was no failure of equipment. However, if there are wider safety lessons to be learned, that is for the RSSB inquiry to establish and for the industry and the Government as necessary to pursue.

Mr. Tim Yeo (South Suffolk) (Con): I thank the Secretary of State for sending me a copy of his statement an hour or so ago. Our first thoughts are for the families of those who lost their lives in the serious and tragic accident. I extend our deepest sympathy to the family of driver Stanley Martin, who died doing his job, the families of the others who died and the passengers who travelled last Saturday, expecting their journey to be safely completed. We also sympathise with all those who were injured and suffered the horrifying and inevitably frightening experience of being involved in a serious accident.

I join the Secretary of State in paying tribute to the emergency services, which responded quickly and superbly in the difficult conditions that prevailed at the scene, and the staff of the Royal Berkshire and North Hampshire hospitals. I welcome the publication of the Health and Safety Executive interim report this morning. I look forward to the results in due course of the formal inquiry that the RSSB is conducting.

The HSE report states that both the staff and the equipment that the railways used functioned properly. Knee-jerk reactions or hasty conclusions are the last

[Mr. Tim Yeo]

thing that the railways and the travelling public need. However, several questions arise. I appreciate that the Secretary of State may not be able to answer them immediately but I would be grateful for his assurance that they will be considered at the right time.

First, we must determine whether there are any lessons to be learned about the design of level crossings, especially whether the half barrier design, which appears to have operated safely at many crossings for a considerable time, can be improved in any way. Will the Secretary of State confirm that the last comparable accident that involved a level crossing with barriers happened as long ago as 1986?

Secondly, given that modern technology is better and cheaper than what was available in the past, we must consider whether more use can be made of closed circuit television to provide train drivers and signalmen with more advance information about when lines may be blocked. Can the Secretary of State say whether we know yet how long the vehicle was on the tracks before the train struck it?

Thirdly, are there any lessons to be learned about the design of trains, including the protection for drivers, who are now positioned at the front of high-speed and heavy trains, and the interior of carriages—the positioning and angle of seats and other internal fittings? Is there any evidence in this country or abroad that the use of safety belts in trains would be a practical or effective way of reducing the risk of injuries? Does the Secretary of State share the widely held view that it is not practical or cost-effective to replace all level crossings on high-speed lines with tunnels or bridges, as one trade union leader suggested the morning after the accident?

Does the Secretary of State agree that, if any steps can be taken to make trains, which despite the tragedy are one of the safest ways to travel, even safer, they should be carefully considered but that any action or expenditure should always be proportionate to the risks and analysed for their cost effectiveness?

Mr. Darling: I am sure that the relatives of those who were killed or injured and the injured themselves will be grateful for the hon. Gentleman's remarks. I very much appreciate the measured response of the hon. Gentleman and many others in the aftermath of the accident. He asks number of questions. All these matters will be considered by the inquiry, as the House would expect, but it might be helpful if I make one or two observations.

Most level crossings on high-speed lines—that is, the east coast line, the west coast line, the midland main line and the great western line—have full barrier crossings. There are about 16 crossings on those lines which have the half-barriers, but that is where there are line speeds of 100 mph or less. The line speed on the line in question was 100 mph. I must tell the House—I think the hon. Gentleman appreciates this—that the evidence so far is that the car was already on the track before the barrier sequence started. He asks how long it was on the track. The British Transport police are still investigating that and I do not want to say anything further. It is pretty clear that the car was already on the track, so it was not the case that the barrier was there and somehow the driver got round it. That is obviously one of the aspects that will have to be examined.

There are about 8,000 level crossings across the whole network. About 1,700 are barriers and lights, the sort that we are discussing. Network Rail, which owns the track, reviews all the crossings regularly. The last time there was a safety assessment on this crossing was 8 July this year, when it was examined and assessed. People should be aware that these things are kept constantly under review.

The hon. Gentleman asks about design and seat belts. That has been and will be considered. The new trains that are coming into service now are much better constructed than, for example, the old slam door trains that are being taken out of service. Of course attention is paid to interior design and so on. The question of seat belts has been considered both in Britain and in countries throughout the world, but so far there has been a general reluctance to pursue the idea. The issue undoubtedly needs to be looked at again. It is not straightforward, not least because of the fact that people tend to move around trains. Anyone who has been on a train knows that they are not the same as an aeroplane, where people tend to stay seated.

The final point that the hon. Gentleman makes about safety and costs is an important one. When we approach these matters, we should ask ourselves what is best in relation to safety. It was a terrible accident, but we should bear it in mind that rail safety in this country has been improving year by year. It is worth noting that in the past year, when the railways carried a record number of people—the highest number since the 1940s—there had not been an accident involving railway passengers. Sadly, there are accidents around the tracks, but those are other issues that we may explore today and which we need to examine. Nevertheless, the hon. Gentleman has my assurance that the matters that he raised will be looked at.

John Thurso (Caithness, Sutherland and Easter Ross) (LD): Our first thoughts today must be with all the victims of the tragic accident—those who lost their lives and those who were injured. May I, therefore, associate myself with the remarks of the Secretary of State and those of the hon. Member for South Suffolk (Mr. Yeo), and pass on our expression of deepest sympathy and condolence to all the relatives of the bereaved? May I add our tribute to the work of the emergency services and staff of the hospitals involved, who acted with commendable dispatch and in the finest traditions of our emergency services? I thank the Secretary of State for his courtesy in sending me an advance copy of his statement.

The key paragraph in the interim report, from which the Secretary of State quoted, is paragraph 17 on page 5, which makes it clear that there was no failure of systems, management or staff that was responsible for this tragic accident. There are clearly issues to be resolved by the police investigation in respect of the car and how it came to be there and, as the right hon. Gentleman mentioned, in respect of any wider safety issues that may have to be considered in due course, particularly with regard to level crossing design. However, today is not the day to debate these issues, and

I would merely ask the Secretary of State to undertake to return to the House when the appropriate moment arises, so that we may have a debate at that time.

Finally, will the Secretary of State reiterate that, notwithstanding the tragic events that took place last Saturday, the railways remain an extremely safe mode of travel, and one in which the travelling public can have confidence?

Mr. Darling: Again, I appreciate what the hon. Gentleman has said, and the way in which he said it. On his final point, it is worth reminding ourselves that, notwithstanding this accident, the railways are safe. We should all reflect on the fact that, over this last weekend, for example, 10 people were killed in road accidents. While we are doing everything that we possibly can to improve rail safety, we should also bear it in mind that a lot remains to be done in relation to road safety as well. As I said a few moments ago, we shall certainly look at these matters, and when we get the final report, I have not the slightest doubt that we shall return to it.

Mr. Martin Salter (Reading, West) (Lab): The Secretary of State will be aware that the crash took place at a site very close to three parliamentary constituencies that I know extremely well. While it is important to await the outcome of the full investigations by the RSSB, and not to jump to any premature conclusions, will he ensure that consideration is given to any devices that could be installed to give train drivers advance warning of any obstruction of railway lines at unstaffed level crossings? These could include CCTV, or pressure switch devices that could be triggered by a heavy blockage on the line.

Mr. Darling: This is clearly something that the RSSB will look at. However, as I have been saying over the past few days, we do not yet know how long the car had been on the line, and I would not want people to think that there were devices that could prevent all eventualities. This train was travelling at about 100 mph and, even with emergency braking, it would take between half a mile and a mile to stop. Obviously, the industry will look at the technology that is around and, importantly, at the technology that is being developed. What we want to do all the time is make things as safe as we possibly can. Our great difficulty, however, is that in an open network—as a railway system inevitably is—if somebody really wants to get on to the track, we cannot exclude every possibility of that happening, even if we do everything that we can.

Mr. John Redwood (Wokingham) (Con): The local community is very shocked by this dreadful accident, and I would like to send my deepest sympathy to the families of all those who have lost loved ones, and to the injured. I would also like to add my thanks to the emergency services and the members of the local community who responded magnificently when the crash occurred. Will the Secretary of State give me his personal assurance that the safety concerns that I sent to the HSE again this morning will be properly considered, including the question of whether more safety features can be built into the future design of railway carriages? Many of the injuries in this crash occurred under rapid deceleration as people and luggage were detached from where they should have been.

Mr. Darling: I am sure that everyone involved in the accident will appreciate what the right hon. Gentleman has said. He is particularly right to draw our attention to the help that was so promptly and readily given by people living and working near to the accident site on Saturday evening. And, yes, I can assure him that the suggestions that he has made to the HSE this morning will be taken into account. As I said a few moments ago, a lot of attention is given to safety features on each new generation of trains, in regard not only to the structure of the carriages but to the internal fittings. For example, the refurbishment of the east coast main line fleet that is taking place at the moment has taken into account some of the things that have happened in previous accidents, in terms of the internal design of the carriages.

Clive Efford (Eltham) (Lab): This accident happened in the most extraordinary circumstances, and I am sure that we all join together in sending our sympathy to all those who have been affected. In answer to my hon. Friend the Member for Reading, West (Mr. Salter), the Secretary of State said that we did not know how long the vehicle had been on the tracks. We all understand that, but each occurrence such as this could bring to light loopholes in the safety systems that we need to close. Will my right hon. Friend give us an assurance that the HSE will investigate all the available forms of technology that could be used to identify blockages at unmanned level crossings, so that we can establish as early a warning system as possible? We must bear it in mind that such a system might not have prevented this accident, but we might be able to identify a problem that can be resolved for the future.

Mr. Darling: The RSSB will examine such matters, and the Health and Safety Executive will help it. My hon. Friend is right that we must consider what technology might be available now and in the future, not just for new but existing trains. As I said, each year, further improvements come along. For example, the vast majority of trains are now fitted with the train protection warning system, which was not the case a few years ago. This train was fitted with that, but it did not help in a situation in which the signals were all at green and the car was on the railway line at some point. His general point, however, will be considered by the inquiry.

Mr. David Rendel (Newbury) (LD): Two of those who died were my constituents, one of whom I knew personally, and a number of other constituents were on that train or helped in the aftermath of the incident. I am grateful to the Secretary of State and other Members for offering their condolences, as I am sure that my constituents will be. Does he agree that it would be sensible in future for the emergency procedures to include some method of making sure that we get hold of the names and addresses of all those involved, since it appears that that did not happen on this occasion. At least we could then offer them help afterwards, if there are opportunities to do so, or ask them any further questions.

Is the Secretary of State also aware that in coach E, when an attempt was made to break the windows, the hammers broke, not the windows? That is thought to be because they were being improperly used, or not

[Mr. David Rendel]

used in accordance with safety instructions. Of course, safety instructions are often ignored by people until they are in an accident, but when it happened, the lights went out, and there was no emergency lighting to enable the safety instructions to be reviewed. Would it be possible to try to make sure that train companies introduce emergency lighting, at least where the emergency equipment is kept?

Mr. Darling: I am sure that the inquiry will consider that. The hon. Gentleman will be aware that in this case, because of the way in which the train eventually stopped, many of the power lines would have been fractured. He will have seen the photographs that show what happened to the train when it stopped I am sure that the inquiry will want to examine the use of hammers in particular.

I understand that the decision on names and addresses is essentially one for the coroner, and that certain formalities must be observed, such as formal identification. I am sure that the hon. Gentleman will agree that the last possible thing that we want is the wrong names and addresses. If anything can be done to speed up that process, I am sure that it can be examined. I know that there was a slight delay on this occasion, and I will have to make further inquiries about the reason for that, but those are essentially matters for the coroner and police.

Mrs. Gwyneth Dunwoody (Crewe and Nantwich) (Lab): In a horrific incident of this kind, the shattering effect not only on the family of those involved but on those working on and around the railway lasts for a very long time. I know that the Secretary of State will consider carefully the physical means of slowing down a train, but the reality is that that would have been almost impossible for a train at that speed. The unfortunate juxtaposition of the points was among the factors that contributed to the accident. Will he assure me that the families concerned, the people involved and some members of the emergency services will continue to receive not only information but help in the coming months, when they will desperately need it?

Mr. Darling: I attach some importance to that as, having met those who were affected by some of the major rail accidents that happened before I was Secretary of State, it is clear to me that what is important, among many other things, is that people are kept in touch and that they understand what is going on. That is why I was keen to ensure that both Network Rail and First Great Western, which will take the lead in this since it was its train, should get in touch with people and deal with their immediate concerns, as well as concerns that will probably arise over the next few weeks and months.

My hon. Friend is also right that we should not forget what a traumatic experience this is, not just for the railway staff but for everybody who has any involvement. Sadly, every year, a large number of incidents take place, which obviously can be tragic for the people involved, but which can also have a traumatic effect on railway staff. People sometimes forget how much trauma that causes for such staff. It must be remembered, primarily by their employers but, by others too.

Mr. William Cash (Stone) (Con): Will the Secretary of State accept that in my constituency, which has probably the highest number of level crossings in the country, there is deep concern about the safety issues, to which I referred in an Adjournment debate some time ago? In Barlaston, the level crossing failed seriously a few days ago, which is of grave concern to local residents. It should not be assumed that the funding is adequate to deal not only with the new technologies to which he has referred but with the necessity in certain cases for tunnels or bridges. That is not a knee-jerk reaction, as in certain cases it may be essential: for example, in Hixon in my constituency, where there was a fatality recently, and where, fortunately, a bridge has now been built.

Mr. Darling: In relation to the hon. Gentleman's first point, I am not aware of the problem that arose on the level crossing to which he refers, but if he would care to identify it in a little more detail, I will find out and write to him, and the letter will be placed in the Library so that people can appreciate the position. Inevitably, level crossings present a risk—anyone being on the track presents a risk. The object must be to try to manage that risk as much as possible. It is worth bearing it in mind that only twice in the past 35 years has there been an incident at a level crossing on a main line that has resulted in the deaths of railway passengers. Undoubtedly, every year, there are cases involving pedestrians and motorists, which are sometimes accidents and, unfortunately, sometimes suicides. In each case, we must try to manage the risk as much as possible. In the past couple of years or so, Network Rail has taken nearly 200 level crossings out of service where it was appropriate and where there was a realistic alternative, which is not always the case.

Finally, I am aware of cases where we would like to spend money and do something, but where other objections must be dealt with, such as environmental objections—I can think of one crossing in particular in that regard. None of these issues is straightforward, but of course we must keep them under review. As I said in reply to the hon. Member for South Suffolk (Mr. Yeo), each crossing is reviewed regularly.

Lawrie Quinn (Scarborough and Whitby) (Lab): May I associate myself with the Secretary of State's remarks about the emergency services and the wider railway community? As someone who previously had responsibility for many level crossings in the east of England, it is only too clear to me what may have happened in this case, although it is right to wait for the inquiry. Having said that, can he say whether any messages are coming back from the industry, particularly Network Rail, with regard to track-side and driving cab radio-controlled systems, to see whether we can improve the mechanism for getting such information to drivers?

Mr. Darling: I know that my hon. Friend knows a great deal about this, as before coming to the House his job was very much involved with railway engineering.

Network Rail has a project that will allow mobile phone communication between the cab and signallers. Again, that is not without difficulty, and some Members, for understandable reasons, are concerned about the placing of the radio masts that must go with such projects. We must deal with that.

I ought to say—I know that my hon. Friend knows this—that from what we know about this case so far, it seems clear that although an off-duty police officer phoned the signal box, no matter what means of communication he had, it was so late that it would almost certainly not have stopped this train, simply because of the speed at which it was travelling. From the time that the barriers come down, there is about 30 seconds, and such trains, by their very nature, take some time to stop. In relation to his general point about increased communication, however, that is in hand. In this case, however, from what I can see, it would not have made much difference.

Mr. Adrian Sanders (Torbay) (LD): The 17:35 Paddington to Plymouth train could not have had a more experienced driver than my constituent, Mr. Stan Martin from Torquay. Will the Secretary of State do all in his power to ensure that those who work on our railways, and their families, realise that safety will remain the primary concern of the railway industry?

Will the Secretary of State join me in paying tribute to the 14-year-old Torquay schoolgirl who used her Red Cross skills to nurse and comfort Louella Main, the nine-year-old victim of the crash? The teenager and her mother, who tried to help the child as she lay in a field next to the crash scene, have asked for their names not to be used out of respect for those who did not survive the tragedy.

Mr. Darling: The hon. Gentleman draws attention to one of a number of extremely courageous and thoughtful actions on the part of not just passengers but others in attendance. Many people performed heroic deeds, but for perfectly understandable reasons that will go unremarked, in that their identities will not be known. That is a tribute to their humanitarian feelings, and the hon. Gentleman was right to draw attention to it. He was also right to draw attention to the skill of the driver who died. The HSE report makes it clear that he did everything he was supposed to do in the event of an emergency. Sadly, however, he lost his life.

As I said a few moments ago, we should always bear in mind the skill of many people working on the railways who ensure that the system is safe and that rail is a safe means of travel.

Chris Bryant (Rhondda) (Lab): It would clearly be wrong to jump to any conclusions about precisely what happened on Saturday evening, but every Member who has spoken so far has described it as an accident. It is perfectly possible that it was no accident, but a deliberate act of violence and self-violence. Unfortunately, as the Secretary of State has said, suicides on the railway are relatively common, bringing not only tragedy to the families involved but a great deal of pain and personal anguish to drivers and many other people. Will the inquiry consider what we can do, as far as is humanly possible, to try to prevent further such suicides?

Mr. Darling: My hon. Friend raises two separate issues. As he says, we should not reach conclusions before they are warranted by an examination of the facts, which will be undertaken by the Rail Safety and Standards Board. As for the precise cause of the accident, that is something that the coroner will determine.

My hon. Friend made a more general point about suicides on the railway, of which there are between 180 and 200 a year. The Department, along with the industry, is already giving attention to that, but as I said earlier, it is impossible to stop people getting on to the track if they really want to. We must see what we can do to reduce the risk and improve the situation. No one could claim that such actions will be impossible in future—that is simply not the way the world works—but I hope the work done by the Department and the industry will help.

Bob Spink (Castle Point) (Con): Will the Secretary of State confirm that, sadly, up to four people a year die on unmanned pedestrian level crossings, and that it is Government policy to close such crossings where it is reasonable to do so? A few hundred yards up the road from the Benfleet pedestrian crossing is a perfectly safe alternative in the form of an underpass. Closing crossings of that kind would be very much in the interests of public safety, and would solve the problem of noisy train whistles.

Mr. Darling: The hon. Gentleman has raised that issue in the House before. I believe he initiated an Adjournment debate on the subject fairly recently.

Network Rail's policy is to remove level crossings when that is practical and the right thing to do, but the process is not without difficulty. Throughout the earlier months of this year, in a different part of the world from that represented by the hon. Gentleman—the highlands of Scotland—there was a sustained campaign against Network Rail's attempt to remove a number of unmanned crossings, led by walkers who, for entirely understandable reasons, wanted to be able to cross on foot. A sensible balance is needed. Those who remove crossings should make certain that people will not take matters into their own hands and cross the track by, for instance, climbing over a fence. It is fine if there is a sensible alternative.

A remarkable number of people try to zig-zag through barriers or jump the lights. They must understand that they are putting not just their own lives but those of others at risk. In my opinion, such behaviour should never be tolerated.

Mr. Paul Tyler (North Cornwall) (LD): My constituents who use the line regularly—as I do myself—will appreciate the Secretary of State's measured report, and the measured response of other Members. May I, however, encourage the right hon. Gentleman to emphasise that this was a maverick tragedy? Is it not important to convey to the travelling public the figures that he cited earlier, relating to road

[Mr. Paul Tyler]

and rail safety respectively? He pointed out that last weekend—tragically—there were 10 fatalities on our roads. May I suggest that the approach he has taken today must be the approach taken by the further inquiry, and that cost-benefit must be part of the balancing act? If we lose our sense of proportion, the travelling public will gain a completely false impression.

Mr. Darling: I agree with much of what the hon. Gentleman has said. We need to draw our conclusions in a measured way, and decide what is right and appropriate. We should indeed remember that, sadly, every day—not just last weekend—10 people are killed on the roads. Our road safety record is much better than those of many other European countries, but 10 people are still 10 too many. We need to reduce the risk by doing whatever is appropriate. We also need to bear it in mind that the cause of many accidents is not something that the Government of the day did or did not do, but the judgment of some individual. We can all make the wrong judgment when travelling, I suppose. As I have said, however, we must do all that we can to improve the safety of all travellers—those who travel by road, rail or, for that matter, air.

The hon. Gentleman was right to remind us that rail is a safe means of travel, and it is becoming safer each year. Tragically, there are accidents from time to time; but it is still a safe way to travel. I have no doubt that when the line reopens, hopefully in the next week or so, many will continue to use it to travel to the south-west.

Mr. Adrian Flook (Taunton) (Con): Many of my constituents use the service, and a friend of mine was trapped and injured on Saturday evening. Mercifully, she is now back at home. I echo the thanks that have been expressed to the emergency services, and especially thank the off-duty firefighter and the off-duty Royal Marine who helped my friend at her moment of need.

We have already heard how safe rail is in comparison with roads. May I have an assurance that any response to this tragic crash will not lead to a lessening of the frequency or speed of the service from the west country to London?

Mr. Darling: I do not want to pre-empt the inquiry, but the tenor of what has been said this afternoon suggests that whatever we do must be proportionate. We want to make the system as safe as we can, but travelling at speed inevitably involves a degree of risk. I think people recognise that. From the moment we set out from our front door we incur an element of risk, and arguably that is the case when we are in our homes.

The hon. Gentleman was right to draw attention, as others have, to the heroism and humanity of a very large number of people on Saturday evening.

Bob Russell (Colchester) (LD): I thank the Secretary of State for emphasising that rail is a safe way in which to travel. May I urge him, and his ministerial colleagues, to repeat that message as often as possible? I fear that media coverage has given the impression that rail travel is not safe, but will he confirm that the number of people who die in rail-related incidents each year represents about two days of road fatalities? Will he also confirm that in the last year for which figures are available, on 280 days the number of people killed on the roads was seven or more?

Mr. Darling: The hon. Gentleman is right to draw attention to the fact that far too many people are killed and seriously injured on our roads. He is also right to say that the number of people killed on the railways has been declining over the past 30 years. Thankfully, the number is comparatively small, although it is a tragedy for everyone who is involved.

There has been a measured response from everyone today. The hon. Gentleman mentioned the media. I do not suppose that it will do me any good, but I believe that their response after the accident has, for the most part, been measured. They are saying, "You must learn the lessons of what happened. You must do things, and you should react proportionately." Most commentators, from the moment the accident happened, have taken a sensible and mature line in the face of what is, after all, an extremely tragic accident.

Miss Anne McIntosh (Vale of York) (Con): May I associate myself with the comments of the Secretary of State and of my hon. Friend the shadow Secretary of State? What is particularly poignant about the timing of the accident is the fact that we had almost had a record period in which there was no rail accident or incident. I have had the honour of spending some time with Network Rail on the Industry and Parliament Trust scheme. I hope that the Secretary of State will take the opportunity to confirm that, with the dent in morale that anyone working in the railway industry will feel at this time, the thoughts of the House are with them.

There is another alarming feature in respect of those who were trapped in the train. The doors on these sophisticated modern trains open only when the train arrives at the scheduled station—they are computer-driven. It was particularly distressing in that many of the injured could not exit through the normal door. Will the inquiry look at that?

Mr. Darling: I am sure that the RSSB will look at the latter point. I am not qualified, and nor is anyone else sitting in the Chamber, to pass judgment on that. It needs to be looked at. The hon. Lady is right. We had a long period without accidents, and everyone in the industry can be extremely proud of that. A lot of attention has been paid to safety.

The hon. Lady has been on the Industry and Parliament Trust scheme. Morale in the industry is slowly but surely improving. For various reasons, it has been through a difficult time—there have been some accidents in the past few years, but there are other reasons, too. People can be proud to work in the industry. I encourage people to do so. Above all, I encourage people to use it because it is pretty good most of the time. Of course, there are problems, which we need to sort out, but it is improving in a way that perhaps people would not have thought possible a few years ago.

Dr. Julian Lewis (New Forest, East) (Con): The hon. Member for Rhondda (Chris Bryant) was surely right in drawing attention to the fact that this may not have been an accident—it may have been deliberate. In a week when the director general of the security services has warned us against complacency, and bearing in mind the train bombings in Spain during the election campaign, does the Secretary of State think that, in considering what level of investment is proportionate, we must take into account the fact that there is at least a possibility that this event will encourage some people who wish to engage in serious terrorist acts to do this sort of thing deliberately?

Mr. Darling: Nothing will be served by such speculation. I repeat what I said earlier: it is for the coroner to determine the cause of death, not just of the car driver but of the other people who died in the accident.

Alcohol-Related Anti-Social Behaviour and Domestic Violence

1.14 pm

Mr. Andrew Turner (Isle of Wight) (Con): I beg to move,

> That leave be given to bring in a Bill to amend the law relating to Anti-Social Behaviour Orders to extend their application to cases of domestic violence and alcohol-related disorder

The Bill is designed to prevent violence, especially domestic violence. Alcohol is a key contributor to domestic violence. It increases both the risk of violence and its severity. If we stop excess drinking among men—it is usually men—who, when drunk, are likely to be violent, we can reduce violence. This Bill enables the police to act against such drinkers before they resort to violence.

The relationship between alcohol and domestic violence is stark. The Home Office document, "Alcohol and intimate partner violence: key findings from the research" finds strong links between domestic violence and "problem" drinking. The British crime survey told us in 1999 that 32 per cent. of domestic violence was perpetrated under the influence of alcohol. It estimates that there were around 1.2 million incidents of alcohol-related violence in 1999. Those include all assaults, robberies and snatch thefts in which the victim thought the perpetrator to be under the influence of alcohol. A quarter of those—300,000—were domestic assaults.

The likelihood and severity of violence is linked to the amount drunk. Alcohol is especially important in inflaming existing conflict. Repeat victimhood is common. Forty-five per cent. of victims of domestic violence have suffered before. According to the Home Office's women and equality unit, 35 per cent. of incidents of domestic violence take place within five weeks of an earlier attack. No other type of crime has such a high rate of repeat victimisation.

An article in 2001 in the *Journal of Interpersonal Violence* tells us:

> "Studies suggest that between 25% and 80% of domestic violence perpetrators abuse alcohol and these rates of alcohol abuse and dependence are two to seven times higher than rates in the general male population."

In a study of 100 "battered women", as they used to be called, published in the *British Medical Journal* in January 1975, 52 per cent. of offending males were described by their victims as "frequently drunk", and a further 22 per cent. as having

> "episodes of heavy drinking with drunkenness".

Let me give the House an example. Gabbi Millar, the manager of a women's refuge, was beaten by her alcoholic former husband for four years before she finally plucked up the courage to leave him. She told the BBC in June 2003:

> "When he was drinking, I wasn't allowed to go to sleep; I had to stay awake with him. It was sleep deprivation, something which happens a lot to victims of domestic violence . . . I really did think he would end up killing me. The level of violence only ever gets worse."

During a period of 18 months, the police were called to the family home 36 times, either by Gabbi, or by worried neighbours who heard her cries for help. During their four years together, her husband was jailed three times

[Mr. Andrew Turner]

for the escalating offences of assault, actual bodily harm and grievous bodily harm. Gabbi was in hospital three times after particularly severe beatings and I regret to say that I have observed a similar relationship between alcohol and domestic violence reported in the pages of my own *Isle of Wight County Press*.

Recently, the law has been tightened significantly to deal with the perpetrators of domestic violence. The Domestic Violence, Crime and Victims Bill makes it a criminal offence, punishable by up to five years in jail, to breach a non-molestation order. It requires courts to consider making a non-molestation order when they hear an application for an occupation order. Such orders exclude someone from the home and surrounding area, but breach of an occupation order is not a criminal offence. The Bill enables courts to impose restraining orders when sentencing for any offence—at present, they can be imposed only when sentencing for harassment—and common assault will be made an arrestable offence.

Those changes are welcome, but that Bill does not adequately deal with the role of alcohol. It appears to be hoped that its penalty provisions will deter domestic violence, but the deterrent may not work where alcohol is a factor, since deterrence requires an individual to be rational. Not only is alcohol a disinhibitor, but an individual's capacity for reason is greatly reduced when under the influence of alcohol, so any deterrent would also be reduced.

We need to prevent men who might hit their womenfolk from becoming drunk enough to do so. Antisocial behaviour orders could help us. The courts can impose one if persuaded, on a balance of probability, that a person has acted in an antisocial way and that an ASBO is necessary to prevent further antisocial behaviour. Breach of an ASBO is itself a criminal act.

At present, ASBOs cannot be applied to domestic violence because antisocial behaviour is legally defined to affect only

"persons not of the same household".

The Metropolitan police, in their December 2001 domestic violence strategy paper, "Enough is Enough", discuss one suggestion for using ASBOs against domestic violence. They say:

> "It is suggested by the CPS that Anti-Social Behaviour Orders (ASBOs) may be used against domestic violence. ASBOs relate to behaviour that 'is likely to cause harassment alarm or distress to one or more persons not of the same household'. In the context of domestic violence this could relate to harassment caused to neighbours. By considering the use of ASBOs in this way it could send a message to the perpetrator that domestic violence is considered unacceptable to the local community and provide alternative options for the victim."

In my view, that is too roundabout a route. Of course domestic violence is unwelcome in the community, but it would be absurd to limit what could be an effective preventive measure to households whose neighbours are affected.

ASBOs could certainly help to prevent alcohol-related domestic violence if they could reduce the volatile circumstances in which it flourishes. The trigger of alcohol needs to be effectively removed, so my Bill offers a simpler solution than that proposed by the Metropolitan police. It would widen the definition of antisocial behaviour to include the domestic, thus enabling the courts to issue ASBOs in cases of domestic violence. It would allow an ASBO, where appropriate, to require the subject to remain under a set alcohol limit. The court could have discretion to limit an order to certain times, places and circumstances, for instance if previous problem drinking and violence had taken place only at night. Neighbours, if not the victim of violence herself, might call the police when they feared an alcohol-related ASBO was being breached—hopefully, in time to prevent violence.

This alcohol-related ASBO would not only be available in cases of domestic violence but could extend to other alcohol-reduced disorder, such as that which too often takes place after closing time in our urban areas.

The Bill would permit the police to administer a breath test, as in cases of suspected drunken driving, if they believed that the alcohol-related ASBO had been breached in circumstances where the subject was likely to commit another offence.

Too many of those who hit their wives or girlfriends do so under the influence of drink. Too many of those who commit other offences, and disfigure our towns and cities as they do so, are in drink. The forces of law and order have at their disposal many ways of dealing with the guilty, but as a society we have too few means of preventing these crimes. We have successfully reduced drunken driving by use of the breathalyser. Let us do the same with alcohol-related disorder, which probably causes as much, albeit sometimes lower-level, misery.

Prevention is better than cure. Prevention is the objective of the Bill, and it is with pleasure therefore that I commend it to the House.

Question put and agreed to.

Bill ordered to be brought in by Mr. Andrew Turner, Mr. Frank Cook, Jane Griffiths, Mr. David Wilshire, Mr. David Drew, Mr. Robert Key, Mr. Robert Walter, Mr. Paul Burstow, Sir Sydney Chapman, Mr. Andrew Robathan, Jim Knight and Angela Watkinson.

Alcohol-Related Anti-Social Behaviour And Domestic Violence

Mr. Andrew Turner accordingly presented a Bill to amend the law relating to antisocial behaviour orders to extend their application to cases of domestic violence and alcohol-related disorder: And the same was read the First time; and ordered to be read a Second time on Friday 19 November, and to be printed [Bill 177].

HUMAN TISSUE BILL (PROGRAMME) (NO. 2)

Motion made, and Question put forthwith, pursuant to Orders [28 June 2001 and 6 November 2003],

That the Programme Order of 15th January 2004 be supplemented as follows—

Consideration of Lords Amendments

1. Proceedings on consideration of Lords Amendments shall (so far as not previously concluded) be brought to a conclusion at 7 p.m. at this day's sitting.

Subsequent stages

2. Any further Message from the Lords may be considered forthwith without any further Question being put.

3. The proceedings on any further Message from the Lords shall (so far as not previously concluded) be brought to a conclusion one hour after their commencement.—*[Joan Ryan.]*

The House divided: Ayes 304, Noes 110.

Division No. 316] **[1:25 am**

AYES

Abbott, Ms Diane
Ainger, Nick
Ainsworth, Bob *(Cov'try NE)*
Armstrong, rh Ms Hilary
Atherton, Ms Candy
Bailey, Adrian
Baker, Norman
Barrett, John
Battle, rh John
Bayley, Hugh
Beard, Nigel
Beckett, rh Margaret
Begg, Miss Anne
Beith, rh A. J.
Benton, Joe *(Bootle)*
Berry, Roger
Best, Harold
Betts, Clive
Blackman, Liz
Blears, Ms Hazel
Blizzard, Bob
Borrow, David
Bradley, rh Keith *(Withington)*
Bradshaw, Ben
Brown, Russell *(Dumfries)*
Bruce, Malcolm
Bryant, Chris
Buck, Ms Karen
Burgon, Colin
Burnham, Andy
Burstow, Paul
Byrne, Liam *(B'ham Hodge H)*
Cable, Dr. Vincent
Cairns, David
Calton, Mrs Patsy
Campbell, Alan *(Tynemouth)*
Campbell, Mrs Anne *(C'bridge)*
Campbell, Ronnie *(Blyth V)*
Carmichael, Alistair
Casale, Roger
Caton, Martin
Challen, Colin
Chaytor, David
Clapham, Michael
Clark, Mrs Helen *(Peterborough)*
Clark, Dr. Lynda *(Edinburgh Pentlands)*
Clarke, rh Tom *(Coatbridge & Chryston)*
Clarke, Tony *(Northampton S)*
Clwyd, Ann *(Cynon V)*
Coaker, Vernon
Coffey, Ms Ann
Colman, Tony
Cook, rh Robin *(Livingston)*
Corston, Jean
Cotter, Brian
Cox, Tom *(Tooting)*
Cranston, Ross
Cruddas, Jon
Cryer, John *(Hornchurch)*
Cummings, John
Cunningham, Jim *(Coventry S)*
Cunningham, Tony *(Workington)*
Darling, rh Alistair
Davey, Valerie *(Bristol W)*
Davidson, Ian
Davies, rh Denzil *(Llanelli)*
Davies, Geraint *(Croydon C)*
Dawson, Hilton
Dean, Mrs Janet
Denham, rh John
Dhanda, Parmjit
Dismore, Andrew
Dobbin, Jim *(Heywood)*
Donohoe, Brian H.
Doran, Frank
Doughty, Sue
Drew, David *(Stroud)*
Drown, Ms Julia
Eagle, Angela *(Wallasey)*
Edwards, Huw
Efford, Clive
Ellman, Mrs Louise
Ennis, Jeff *(Barnsley E)*
Etherington, Bill
Field, rh Frank *(Birkenhead)*
Fisher, Mark
Fitzpatrick, Jim
Fitzsimons, Mrs Lorna
Flynn, Paul *(Newport W)*
Follett, Barbara
Foster, Don *(Bath)*
Foster, Michael *(Worcester)*
Foster, Michael Jabez *(Hastings & Rye)*
Foulkes, rh George
Gapes, Mike *(Ilford S)*
George, Andrew *(St. Ives)*
George, rh Bruce *(Walsall S)*
Gibson, Dr. Ian
Gill, Parmjit Singh
Gilroy, Linda
Green, Matthew *(Ludlow)*
Griffiths, Win *(Bridgend)*
Grogan, John
Hall, Mike *(Weaver Vale)*
Hall, Patrick *(Bedford)*
Hamilton, David *(Midlothian)*
Hanson, David
Harris, Dr. Evan *(Oxford W & Abingdon)*
Harvey, Nick
Havard, Dai *(Merthyr Tydfil & Rhymney)*
Heath, David
Henderson, Doug *(Newcastle N)*
Henderson, Ivan *(Harwich)*
Heyes, David
Hinchliffe, David
Holmes, Paul
Hood, Jimmy *(Clydesdale)*
Hope, Phil *(Corby)*
Hopkins, Kelvin
Howarth, rh Alan *(Newport E)*
Howarth, George *(Knowsley N & Sefton E)*
Hoyle, Lindsay
Hughes, Beverley *(Stretford & Urmston)*
Hughes, Kevin *(Doncaster N)*
Hughes, Simon *(Southwark N)*
Humble, Mrs Joan
Iddon, Dr. Brian
Illsley, Eric
Irranca-Davies, Huw
Jackson, Glenda *(Hampstead & Highgate)*
Jackson, Helen *(Hillsborough)*
Jamieson, David
Jenkins, Brian
Johnson, Miss Melanie *(Welwyn Hatfield)*
Jones, Helen *(Warrington N)*
Jones, Jon Owen *(Cardiff C)*
Jones, Kevan *(N Durham)*
Jones, Lynne *(Selly Oak)*
Jones, Martyn *(Clwyd S)*
Joyce, Eric *(Falkirk W)*
Kaufman, rh Sir Gerald
Kelly, Ruth *(Bolton W)*
Kemp, Fraser
Kennedy, rh Charles *(Ross Skye & Inverness)*
Khabra, Piara S.
Kidney, David
Kilfoyle, Peter
King, Ms Oona *(Bethnal Green & Bow)*
Kirkwood, Sir Archy
Knight, Jim *(S Dorset)*
Kumar, Dr. Ashok
Lamb, Norman
Lammy, David
Laws, David *(Yeovil)*
Lepper, David
Leslie, Christopher
Levitt, Tom *(High Peak)*
Lewis, Terry *(Worsley)*
Liddell, rh Mrs Helen
Linton, Martin
Love, Andrew
Lucas, Ian *(Wrexham)*
Luke, Iain *(Dundee E)*
Lyons, John *(Strathkelvin)*
McAvoy, Thomas
McCabe, Stephen
McCafferty, Chris
McDonagh, Siobhain
MacDonald, Calum
McDonnell, John
MacDougall, John
McFall, rh John
McGrady, Eddie
McGuire, Mrs Anne
McIsaac, Shona
McKechin, Ann
McKenna, Rosemary
McNamara, Kevin
McNulty, Tony
Mactaggart, Fiona
Mahmood, Khalid
Mahon, Mrs Alice
Mallaber, Judy
Mann, John *(Bassetlaw)*
Marsden, Gordon *(Blackpool S)*
Marshall, David *(Glasgow Shettleston)*
Martlew, Eric
Merron, Gillian
Michael, rh Alun
Miller, Andrew
Moffatt, Laura
Mole, Chris
Moore, Michael
Morgan, Julie
Morley, Elliot
Mountford, Kali
Mudie, George
Mullin, Chris
Munn, Ms Meg
Murphy, Denis *(Wansbeck)*
Murphy, Jim *(Eastwood)*
Naysmith, Dr. Doug
Norris, Dan *(Wansdyke)*
Oaten, Mark *(Winchester)*
O'Brien, Bill *(Normanton)*
O'Neill, Martin
Öpik, Lembit
Organ, Diana
Osborne, Sandra *(Ayr)*
Owen, Albert
Perham, Linda
Picking, Anne
Pickthall, Colin
Pike, Peter *(Burnley)*
Plaskitt, James
Pollard, Kerry
Pound, Stephen
Prentice, Ms Bridget *(Lewisham E)*
Prentice, Gordon *(Pendle)*
Prosser, Gwyn
Pugh, Dr. John
Purchase, Ken
Purnell, James
Quin, rh Joyce
Quinn, Lawrie
Rapson, Syd *(Portsmouth N)*
Reed, Andy *(Loughborough)*
Reid, Alan *(Argyll & Bute)*
Rendel, David
Robinson, Geoffrey *(Coventry NW)*
Rooney, Terry
Ross, Ernie *(Dundee W)*
Roy, Frank *(Motherwell)*
Ruane, Chris
Ruddock, Joan
Russell, Bob *(Colchester)*
Russell, Ms Christine *(City of Chester)*
Ryan, Joan *(Enfield N)*
Sanders, Adrian
Sarwar, Mohammad
Savidge, Malcolm
Sawford, Phil
Sheerman, Barry
Sheridan, Jim
Shipley, Ms Debra
Simon, Siôn *(B'ham Erdington)*
Simpson, Alan *(Nottingham S)*
Singh, Marsha
Skinner, Dennis
Smith, rh Andrew *(Oxford E)*
Smith, Geraldine *(Morecambe & Lunesdale)*
Smith, John *(Glamorgan)*
Smith, Sir Robert *(W Ab'd'ns & Kincardine)*
Soley, Clive
Southworth, Helen
Starkey, Dr. Phyllis
Steinberg, Gerry
Stevenson, George
Stewart, David *(Inverness E & Lochaber)*
Stewart, Ian *(Eccles)*
Stoate, Dr. Howard
Strang, rh Dr. Gavin
Stringer, Graham
Stunell, Andrew
Tami, Mark *(Alyn)*
Taylor, Dari *(Stockton S)*
Taylor, David *(NW Leics)*
Taylor, Matthew *(Truro)*

Taylor, Dr. Richard *(Wyre F)*
Teather, Sarah
Thomas, Gareth *(Clwyd W)*
Thomas, Gareth *(Harrow W)*
Thurso, John
Timms, Stephen
Tipping, Paddy
Todd, Mark *(S Derbyshire)*
Trickett, Jon
Truswell, Paul
Turner, Dennis *(Wolverh'ton SE)*
Turner, Dr. Desmond *(Brighton Kemptown)*
Twigg, Stephen *(Enfield)*
Tynan, Bill *(Hamilton S)*
Walley, Ms Joan
Ward, Claire
Wareing, Robert N.
Watson, Tom
Watts, David
White, Brian
Whitehead, Dr. Alan
Wicks, Malcolm
Williams, rh Alan *(Swansea W)*
Williams, Betty *(Conwy)*
Williams, Roger *(Brecon)*
Wills, Michael
Winnick, David
Winterton, Ms Rosie *(Doncaster C)*
Wood, Mike *(Batley)*
Woodward, Shaun
Woolas, Phil
Worthington, Tony
Wright, Anthony D. *(Gt Yarmouth)*
Wright, David *(Telford)*
Wright, Iain *(Hartlepool)*
Wright, Tony *(Cannock)*

Tellers for the Ayes:
Mr. John Heppell and
Margaret Moran

NOES

Ainsworth, Peter *(E Surrey)*
Amess, David
Arbuthnot, rh James
Atkinson, David *(Bour'mth E)*
Atkinson, Peter *(Hexham)*
Bacon, Richard
Baron, John *(Billericay)*
Bellingham, Henry
Bercow, John
Beresford, Sir Paul
Boswell, Tim
Bottomley, rh Virginia *(SW Surrey)*
Brady, Graham
Brazier, Julian
Browning, Mrs Angela
Burnside, David
Burt, Alistair
Cameron, David
Campbell, Gregory *(E Lond'y)*
Cash, William
Clifton-Brown, Geoffrey
Conway, Derek
Cran, James *(Beverley)*
Curry, rh David
Davies, Quentin *(Grantham & Stamford)*
Djanogly, Jonathan
Dodds, Nigel
Donaldson, Jeffrey M.
Duncan Smith, rh Iain
Evans, Nigel
Ewing, Annabelle
Fabricant, Michael
Flight, Howard
Flook, Adrian
Forth, rh Eric
Francois, Mark
Gale, Roger *(N Thanet)*
Garnier, Edward
Gibb, Nick *(Bognor Regis)*
Gillan, Mrs Cheryl
Goodman, Paul
Gray, James *(N Wilts)*
Hague, rh William
Hancock, Mike
Hawkins, Nick
Heald, Oliver
Heathcoat-Amory, rh David
Hendry, Charles
Hermon, Lady
Hoban, Mark *(Fareham)*
Hogg, rh Douglas
Horam, John *(Orpington)*
Howarth, Gerald *(Aldershot)*
Jack, rh Michael
Johnson, Boris *(Henley)*
Key, Robert *(Salisbury)*
Knight, rh Greg *(E Yorkshire)*
Lait, Mrs Jacqui
Lansley, Andrew
Lewis, Dr. Julian *(New Forest E)*
Liddell-Grainger, Ian
Lilley, rh Peter
Loughton, Tim
Luff, Peter *(M-Worcs)*
McIntosh, Miss Anne
Maclean, rh David
McLoughlin, Patrick
Malins, Humfrey
May, Mrs Theresa
Moss, Malcolm
Murrison, Dr. Andrew
O'Brien, Stephen *(Eddisbury)*
Osborne, George *(Tatton)*
Page, Richard
Paisley, Rev. Ian
Paterson, Owen
Price, Adam *(E Carmarthen & Dinefwr)*
Prisk, Mark *(Hertford)*
Robathan, Andrew
Robertson, Angus *(Moray)*
Robertson, Hugh *(Faversham & M-Kent)*
Robertson, Laurence *(Tewk'b'ry)*
Robinson, Peter *(Belfast E)*
Roe, Dame Marion
Sayeed, Jonathan
Shephard, rh Mrs Gillian
Shepherd, Richard
Simmonds, Mark
Smyth, Rev. Martin *(Belfast S)*
Spicer, Sir Michael
Spink, Bob *(Castle Point)*
Steen, Anthony
Streeter, Gary
Swayne, Desmond
Swire, Hugo *(E Devon)*
Taylor, John *(Solihull)*
Taylor, Sir Teddy
Trend, Michael
Trimble, rh David
Turner, Andrew *(Isle of Wight)*
Tyrie, Andrew
Walter, Robert
Waterson, Nigel
Watkinson, Angela
Weir, Michael
Williams, Hywel *(Caernarfon)*
Wilshire, David
Winterton, Ann *(Congleton)*
Winterton, Sir Nicholas *(Macclesfield)*
Yeo, Tim *(S Suffolk)*

Tellers for the Noes:
Andrew Selous and
Mr. Crispin Blunt

Question accordingly agreed to.

Orders of the Day

Human Tissue Bill

Lords amendments considered.

Clause 5

PROHIBITION OF ACTIVITIES WITHOUT CONSENT ETC.

Lords amendment: No. 1

1.37 pm

The Minister of State, Department of Health (Ms Rosie Winterton): I beg to move, That this House agrees with the Lords in the said amendment.

Mr. Deputy Speaker (Sir Alan Haselhurst): With this we may discuss Lords amendments Nos. 2, 10 to 17, 34, 35, 37 to 39, 50, 51 and 53.

Ms Winterton: These Government amendments were introduced to meet the concern expressed in the other place that giving magistrates the power to send researchers to prison conflicted with the Government's having stated that only the most serious offences would warrant a custodial sentence. The penalties available to magistrates relating to offences under the Bill were considered excessive, since the most serious cases would be referred to the Crown court anyway, so there was wide support for the view that fines should be a sufficient penalty for magistrates to impose in dealing with these offences.

The new offences created by the Bill are, in the jargon of the criminal justice system, triable either way; in other words, they can be dealt with by magistrates or by the Crown court. The amendments remove the scope that clauses 5 and 8 provide for magistrates to order a custodial sentence following summary conviction for offences relating to consent and to misuse of human tissue; the scope that clauses 25, 30 and 31 provide for such a sentence in respect of licensing offences; and the scope that clause 50 so provides in respect of the DNA offence.

We have not removed magistrates' power to order custodial sentences for all offences under the Bill because they can already order such sentences for most offences under the Human Organ Transplants Act 1989, which is concerned with trafficking in human organs and live transplants. They will continue to be able to do so for all offences transferred to the Bill from that Act.

The consequential amendments to clause 63 relate to the position pending the coming into force of the Criminal Justice Act 2003, and the consequential amendments to clauses 56 and 64 relate to the position in Scotland and Northern Ireland.

I have made it clear in this House, as did my noble Friend in the other place, that the penalties are there to act as a deterrent to future offences relating to consent and misuse of human tissue. We do not expect cases to come to court. The effect of the amendments will be, for example, that where a person stores or uses tissue taken from a deceased person for quality assurance without consent, if they are prosecuted and magistrates hear the case, the maximum penalty will be a fine. If the offence is so serious that the magistrates refer it to the Crown court, or if the defendant chooses to have a trial by jury, he or she can be sent to prison.

In introducing these amendments, we have responded to some of the concerns raised in the other place on behalf of researchers and pathologists. I therefore urge the House to accept the amendment.

Mr. Andrew Lansley (South Cambridgeshire) (Con): I am grateful to the Minister for explaining the purpose of the amendments tabled in the other place, though she will be aware that concerns were raised in Committee on 29 January. I made it clear then that we were surprised at the severity of the penalties and I argued that the provision for 12 months' imprisonment on summary conviction or three years on indictment seemed excessive. Happily, the Minister's colleague undertook to take the issue away for further consideration. It was not subsequently resolved in this House, but I am glad that it has been resolved in the other place.

Given our experience of the Human Organ Transplants Act 1989 and the availability of penalties to act as a deterrent there, the Lords amendment poses some questions. I was not aware of any concerns arising from consultation on the Bill about the lack of available penalties under earlier legislation or any abuse resulting from it. It seems that increasing the severity of penalties is not really needed in the Bill. None the less, I entirely take the point that the purpose of the penalties is to act as a deterrent. They will clearly do so because they are relatively severe.

My hon. Friend the Member for Westbury (Dr. Murrison) reminded me that, for those who are medically qualified, even the penalties relating to summary conviction and a fine before a magistrate are likely to have professional consequences, so it is important to recognise that the penalties will act as a deterrent to contravening the legislation. As the Minister argued in Committee, we all hope that it will never be necessary to bring any cases to trial.

My noble Friend Earl Howe raised some concerns and made it clear that we were unhappy about the prospect of prosecutions being brought before a magistrate and leading, on summary conviction, to imprisonment. Even though cases are triable either way and the defendant may elect for trial by jury, it seems inappropriate to implement such a procedure. I am happy that the Minister in the other place accepted that argument and that the Government tabled amendments to meet our concerns. We are content—indeed, pleased—that, in this respect at least, our concerns about penalties have been met.

Lords amendment agreed to.

Lords amendment No. 2 agreed to.

1.45 pm

Clause 6

ACTIVITIES INVOLVING MATERIAL FROM ADULTS WHO LACK CAPACITY TO CONSENT

Lords amendment: No. 3

Ms Winterton: I beg to move, That this House agrees with the Lords in the said amendment.

Mr. Deputy Speaker: With this we may consider Lords amendment No. 44.

Ms Winterton: Lords Amendment No. 3 supplies a word in the Secretary of State's title in clause 6. I hesitate

[Ms Winterton]

to say it, but it was spotted by eagle-eyed Opposition peers, though I am sure, of course, that it was also spotted by Opposition members of the Committee.

Lords amendment No. 44 corrects a drafting omission, which should have been included in the Bill when amendments were made by the House on Report, allowing the use of material or DNA analysis in certain circumstances in court orders. Clause 57 deals with the secondary legislation to be made under the Bill, including parliamentary procedure and consultation processes that apply to it. Subsections (1) and (2) refer to

> "Any power to make orders . . . under this Act".

That is clearly intended to refer only to secondary legislation but, as drafted, it could also apply to the powers of the court to make orders under clause 7 and schedule 5. It would clearly be inappropriate for a clause dealing with secondary legislation to apply to court orders, so the amendment ensures that that would not be the case.

Lords amendment agreed to.

Clause 7

POWERS OF COURT TO DISPENSE WITH NEED FOR CONSENT

Lords amendment: No. 4

Ms Winterton: I beg to move, That this House agrees with the Lords in the said amendment.

Mr. Deputy Speaker: With this we may consider the following: Lords amendments Nos. 4 and 5, Lords amendment No. 6 and Government amendment (a) thereto, Lords amendments Nos. 7 to 9, 52, 54 and 62 to 69.

Ms Winterton: The Government introduced this group of amendments to clause 7 and schedule 5 in response to points raised in the other place about two issues. First, the amendments provide scope for orders to be granted to waive consent where people do not respond to requests for consent to use their tissue to inform the health care of someone else. Secondly, they take the power to make these types of order away from the High Court and give it to the Human Tissue Authority.

The amendments were made in response to debate on a related amendment in Grand Committee in the other place. The Opposition tabled an amendment to introduce a court order to allow a refusal of consent to use tissue for the benefit of a relative to be overridden in prescribed circumstances—for example, in DNA analysis. The Government did not and could not accept that, since overriding someone's refusal of consent would cut directly across the basic principle of the Bill, which is that people should be able to decide what happens to their bodily material.

The Government believe that overriding a refusal of consent in that way would be a step too far. We must establish systems, particularly in the sensitive area of genetics so that individuals are asked, when their tissue is taken, whether they are content for it to be used for purposes such as research or informing their families' care. We know that 99 per cent. of people will agree and we provided, when the Bill came to this House on Report, for a waiver of the need for consent in the case of "missing relatives", where the person whose tissue might be used simply cannot be found. However, the Government listened hard to the debate in the other place and discussed the matter further with key stakeholders in genetics, who are most interested in this issue. They suggested that, in reality, the need to override refusal was a very infrequent occurrence and, indeed, some agreed that such an order would not be justifiable.

Geneticists say, however, that sometimes individuals just do not respond to requests for consent, so that they neither give nor refuse consent to the use of their tissue for the benefit of a relative. This situation arises in connection with requests to test tissue for genetic markers for various forms of familial cancer, such as breast and bowel cancer. I shall give a practical illustration of that.

Let us say that a person's uncle has bowel cancer. If the nephew wishes to know whether he is at risk of getting the same disease, it may be possible to test an existing stored sample of the uncle's tissue to find out whether both people share a known specific genetic mutation. If the uncle agrees, then it is clear that tests can proceed. That will be what happens in almost all circumstances, as we know that people are generally happy to assist in that way, especially with diseases that may affect family members. However, the question arises about what we can or should do if such agreement is not given, either because the uncle cannot be traced—and we dealt with that on Report—or because he simply fails to respond to requests.

At present, the common law on these issues is unclear, but in practice there is no clear legal obstacle to using material in this way without the uncle's consent. Clinicians usually try to get consent from relatives but, where that is not successful, they may seek to obtain tissue samples through the medical network without consent. We do not believe that that is satisfactory from any point of view, and part of the purpose of this Bill is to give certainty to these situations. However, the Bill means that the use of tissue for the purpose that I have described will clearly require consent. Geneticists say that, if individuals do not respond to requests to use their tissue for genetic comparison, their relatives may be refused prospective tests for genetic diseases by the NHS. Obviously, that could well cause distress and get in the way of treatment or prevention measures in individual cases. Without the right information, patients may not know whether to embark on a regime of regular tests, some of which—colonoscopies, for example—may be invasive.

The Government decided to address this situation by extending the "missing relative" provision, in clause 7(1) and schedule 5(9), to these cases of "non-responding" relatives. These amendments therefore provide that, in such cases, as long as certain conditions set out in the amendments are met, the Human Tissue Authority can deem consent to be in place for the purpose of obtaining information to benefit a relative.

In the example that I gave, the amendments would be able to deal with the situation where the uncle failed to respond to requests to use his stored tissue. If the uncle said no, that would be the end of the matter, but if he simply did not respond, the nephew could make an application under clause 7.

The conditions for waiving the need for consent include the requirement that reasonable efforts are made to get the person to consent, and that the person involved is given notice of the application. The aim is to make it clear that the waivers will be exceptional, so that the power does not become a mechanism for avoiding the need to ask for consent.

The second effect of this group of amendments is to provide that, instead of orders to dispense with the need for consent in the case of "missing persons" and "non-responders" being made by the High Court, directions will be issued instead by the HTA. The intention is that, in due course, the functions of the HTA, including this one, will be taken over by the regulatory authority for fertility and tissue, which will be responsible for both fertility and tissue matters.

Dr. Evan Harris (Oxford, West and Abingdon) (LD): I want to ask the Minister about something in the first part of her remarks. Is she confident that Lords amendment No. 6 is narrow enough in scope to refer only to a person's specific treatment needs? Some people will argue that it is wide enough, especially given its reference to "scientific or medical information", to include purposes that might be considered research. Although that might benefit someone later, there does not have to be a specific individual whose needs must be considered immediately. Is the amendment narrow, or could it be applied more widely?

Ms Winterton: The aim of the amendments and the clauses that have been referred to is simple. We want to be able to determine whether something is likely to affect the person involved directly—whether, as I said, a person might be liable to contract a disease. The provision may therefore be called a mixture of research and treatment: research in the sense that it is about what might happen in the future, and treatment in the sense that it deals with what a person might receive in the meantime to prevent a possible illness in the future.

Asking whether the provision covers research or something that would lead to treatment is therefore rather like asking how many angels can dance on the head of a pin, but I shall be happy to help further if the hon. Gentleman wants to pursue the matter.

Dr. Harris: I will have another stab at this, and I may try and raise it later if I catch your eye, Mr. Deputy Speaker. Lords amendment No.6 talks about

"another person (including a future person)",

but says nothing about the need to identify that person at the time. As a result, some people may try to use the provision to get the HTA, as opposed to the High Court, to waive the requirement for consent in the case of a non-responder. I make no judgment about that one way or the other, but the requirement would not be waived when there was a person—or a future embryo, or a family— in a clinic who needed the treatment. The Government have rejected previous amendments that would have given the HTA power to use the information for research purposes.

Ms Winterton: That is dealt with separately. This amendment concerns a specific individual making an application because it would directly benefit him or her. If a person is worried that a particular condition may develop, that person must be able to get information about a relative. That is different from a researcher trying to do research, which is dealt with elsewhere.

The Government recognise that extending the "missing persons" order under clause 7(1) and schedule 5(9) to "non-responders" may result in an increase in the number of applications to waive consent to use tissue in these situations. It is clear, however, that the numbers will still be small. There are 18 genetics centres in England, for example, and we might anticipate that each might have a couple of cases a year. We consider that it should remain an exceptional circumstance, but to save any potential burden on, and cost to, the NHS and to make it easier for both professionals and patients, we consider it appropriate for such applications to be made to the Human Tissue Authority rather than to the High Court.

2 pm

The Government consider that, taken together, this group of amendments provides a pragmatic solution to a situation that, while not common, could damage the interests of certain patients. We cannot countenance overriding a clear refusal of consent, but we have now provided for two sets of circumstances in which it may not be possible to get consent to use tissue to benefit another person. That will allow, in particular, genetic information from one person to be used to benefit the health care of a relative.

Dr. Andrew Murrison (Westbury) (Con): The amendments relate to clause 7, which was introduced late in our consideration of the Bill and in response to representations made by researchers, principally geneticists. The group is titled,

"Powers to dispense with the need for consent".

In a sense, that strikes at the heart of the Bill, because it is all about consent. Therefore, we need to tread a little warily. That said, the Opposition believe that the change is a pragmatic move that will strike the difficult balance between putting consent at the heart of everything we do medically and ensuring that researchers, especially in genetics, are not disadvantaged in the work that they do on behalf of us all.

I am sure that the Human Tissue Authority will be careful in drawing up codes of practice and guidance on the need to be assiduous in obtaining consent. We agree that the default position introduced by clause 7—that the authority may dispense with the need for consent if no response is received—implies that some effort has been made to ensure that the person concerned does not object to the use of their tissue. I suspect that some cases will emerge every year, given the sensitive nature of the issues surrounding genetics and DNA, in which people do object for a variety of reasons, some that we can imagine but others that we cannot. After all, genetics is a rapidly evolving science and will no doubt in future provide information about people that we are not presently aware of. For example, some religious groups may take exception to the use of tissue for this purpose and wish to object. In the case of objection, it would be

[Dr. Andrew Murrison]

inappropriate for the authority to have any powers to override. We must be sure that we give people every opportunity to object to the use of tissue and it is clear that we need, as a matter of some urgency, codes of practice from the authority that will clarify those points.

I have expressed the only concern that we have about the amendments. Broadly speaking, we welcome them, although it is a shame that they have been introduced at this late stage. We are concerned that some of the wording may be confusing, especially with regard to what is relevant directly to a person's condition and what might be relevant later. However, with that in mind, we will give the amendments a fair wind.

Dr. Richard Taylor (Wyre Forest) (Ind): I tabled amendment (a) as a probing amendment. Like the hon. Members for Westbury (Dr. Murrison) and for Oxford, West and Abingdon (Dr. Harris), I was concerned particularly about two phrases in Lords amendment No. 6. The first is

"obtaining scientific or medical information about the person".

That phrase exactly fits definition of research in the "Oxford English Dictionary" as well as the wider definition of research. The Minister has already clarified that, in this amendment, "research" is meant in the narrow sense of looking specifically at features of the donor that could affect people in the future.

My other query was about the definition of "another person". Could it mean other persons? Unless that is clarified, the wording could open the door to research on a wider circle of people. I would be grateful for absolute clarification of those two slight ambiguities.

While I have the chance, may I say how delighted I am that almost all the changes that we struggled to obtain in Committee have now reached the Bill at this stage?

Dr. Evan Harris: I wish to raise three points with the Minister on this group of amendments and, in particular, Lords amendment No. 6. I have already made the first point in an intervention on the Minister. I asked whether the amendment might be used to obtain permission for research without consent from the authority and not from the High Court, as provided for in clause 7(3). As the hon. Member for Wyre Forest (Dr. Taylor) said, it might be argued that to obtain scientific or medical information to help another person or future person is, by definition, a particular type of research project. The Minister kindly confirmed that we should be reassured—or, in the case of those who might have wished to use the provision to make such applications for permission, disappointed—because it is necessary for a person who would benefit from the information to make the application for permission to obtain it. Where in the amendments is the requirement for an application, or does some other provision in the Bill make it impossible for the application to be initiated unless by a person with specific diagnostic or treatment needs?

Will the authority have to decide applications for the purpose of research? Does the Minister think that it is appropriate that applications for research purposes should be decided by the High Court, as provided for in clause 7(3), rather than the authority? Will that make it difficult for any applications to be made, whatever their merits, because of the cost? If the Minister believes—as indicated by the amendments accepted in the other place—that the authority is expert enough to make decisions about dispensing with consent in some cases, why should it be the High Court that makes the decision about dispensing with explicit consent for other applications, such as those for research? I hope that I have made my concerns on that point clear. If not, I would be happy to accept an intervention to clarify them further.

Secondly, I would be grateful if the Minister would clarify the steps she expects will be taken to ensure that the donor from whom the authority is being asked to gain consent for the use of their tissue or genes has not died. The amendment refers to there being "no reason to believe" that the donor has died, which mirrors an amendment we discussed on Report—I think that that is worth returning to—but it talks elsewhere about "reasonable efforts" having been made to get the donor to decide whether to consent. If the donor had died, my understanding is that it would not be possible for that to be done, so one might argue that reasonable efforts ought to be made to establish whether a non-responding donor has died.

I presume that the clause is constructed around the knowledge that the person is not dead, but if it is the case that they are alive and not responding, it is curious that one would even need to mention the condition that there be no reason to believe that the donor had died. I am a little unsure of the circumstances in which that provision might apply and of the steps the Minister believes should be taken. Clearly, those who have died will not respond. I would be interested to know how she envisages certainty being obtained as to which applies.

The third issue relates to lack of capacity, and the Minister will be aware that I have raised that before. I understand that both Houses will debate the matter in the context of the Mental Capacity Bill. However, subsection (d) of amendment No. 6 states that

"there is no reason to believe. . .that the donor lacks capacity to consent to the use of material for that purpose".

It is thus clearly the Government's understanding that the Mental Capacity Bill will be used in that case to decide whether consent can be obtained. It is important that we debate that now, because this is the best place to get an idea from the Government now that Bill has been published—it was not when we previously debated this matter—on whether the best interests test is the best way forward.

It is hard to argue on an understanding of best interests that it is ever, narrowly, in someone's best interests to allow their material to be used for someone else's benefit. The Minister can say that best interests include what they would have wanted to do for a member of their family, but it seems to me that it would be better—I make this case again—to avoid the term "best interests" and use the expression "not against the best interests of the person concerned". That is a good example, and shows how using such terminology will not change the actual outcome, but it is a more honest way of saying how we are going to deal with issues of lack of capacity. Otherwise, people might feel that such cases are stretching the term "best interests" further than it need go.

I would be grateful if the Minister would comment on whether she envisages that it would almost always be the case—even though it is not always the case for a donor with capacity—that the advocate or their substituted decision maker would allow such a decision to be made. I hope that that is clear. Like the hon. Member for Westbury (Dr. Murrison), I welcome the fact that we are debating a series of amendments that have improved the Bill and I am pleased that the Government accepted—albeit in another place—some of the amendments that were pressed, which had their echo during debates that took place in this House.

Mrs. Patsy Calton (Cheadle) (LD): I want to bring to the attention of the House a number of points that have surfaced recently from the cancer research world, on which I seek clarification from the Minister. The concerns relate to material that has been stored previously, such as material stored several years ago. As someone whose material was stored several years ago, I can speak with some authority on the matter. I understand that ethics committees are already refusing permission because of the lack of consent in cases such as that of my own stored material. A number of people in my position would be horrified to think that material that had been lying in a tissue bank for some years could not be used now because of misunderstandings about the intentions of the Bill.

2.15 pm

I understand that Herceptin was discovered because of work that was done with material that had been stored—exactly like my own material—during the last few years. First, I would like the Minister to clarify whether material such as that stored six to eight years ago requires additional consent. Secondly, if consent is required, what form will it take? Will it require more than simply a letter to the last known address? Thirdly, are repeated consents necessary for new research as it arises? I apologise if that does not fit completely with Lords amendment No. 6, but like my hon. Friend the Member for Oxford, West and Abingdon (Dr. Harris), I was not clear whether "another person" referred to a specific person. I thought that the point was broader and would thus be acceptable.

I would be grateful if the Minister would clarify the three points I made about stored material from persons such as myself, who would be horrified to think that such material could not be used because ethics committees were erroneously of the opinion that fresh, modern, up-to-date consents of the type required by the Bill had to be obtained for every item stored in the past.

Ms Rosie Winterton: First, I shall deal with the amendment tabled by the hon. Member for Wyre Forest (Dr. Taylor). I hope that during the course of my opening remarks, I can clarify some points for him. I am sure that he is aware that the effect of his amendment would be to extend the waiving of consent applications for research purposes, which is why we could not accept it. We have said quite clearly that it is not about getting consent for research purposes, but about a link with an individual. To clarify his point, we have used the term "person" because it refers to an individual who wishes to find out information about the effect on themselves, or possibly their children. If someone was making a decision about whether to have a baby, for example, and felt that they might pass on a condition that a relative suffered from, it would be possible for consent to be waived in those circumstances. For those reasons, we cannot accept the amendment, but I hope that what I have said clarifies the points raised by his probing amendment.

I shall move on to points made by the hon. Members for Westbury (Dr. Murrison) and for Oxford, West and Abingdon (Dr. Harris). It is absolutely vital that proper efforts are made to locate a person and ensure that although they have received information, they have not in fact responded to it. The question of ascertaining whether someone had died would be covered by the attempt to find out whether they would respond to the information. The provision obviously concerns tissue from the living. If we were talking about someone who had died, the process would revert to getting consent from a relative.

Under the clause, the applicant should show that there is no reason to believe that the person has died. If it was necessary to prove that there was reason to believe that the person had died, those involved would have to revert to obtaining permission from a relative to use the stored material, so reasonable efforts would have to be made. The clause is nothing to do with trying to carry out research without gaining consent, as was suggested by the hon. Member for Oxford, West and Abingdon.

The reason why those issues can be dealt with by the Human Tissue Authority, rather than by the High Court, is that it will be possible to show that efforts have been made to contact the person or there will be clear evidence that the person is missing, so taking such cases to the High Court would be excessive.

Dr. Evan Harris: The Minister may have missed this, but my specific question was how she could be certain in her view, which she gave in answer to my earlier intervention, that an application under Lords amendment No. 6 must come from a person in a clinic who seeks a diagnostic or therapeutic intervention and could not be initiated by a clinician who seeks to use the tissue of someone who cannot be traced or who does not respond for the generic purpose of helping people in the future, even in circumstances that can be defined but are not specified. The Minister said that the application must originate from a person in the clinic. I should be grateful to her if she would say where that is made clear in the Bill.

Ms Winterton: Such things must relate to the interests of another person—an individual—and the application to the Human Tissue Authority must state that that person has asked that an attempt be made to obtain the material from their relative because they believe that they may have a certain condition. It must state that the proof that they have that condition is X and the reason why they want to find that out is Y, because the person may need treatment in between, perhaps to stop the condition developing.

The hon. Member for Cheadle (Mrs. Calton) asked about existing holdings. Existing holdings are exempt from consent provisions, but we will say in the code of practice—we expect research ethics committees to consider this at the moment, as we have said

[Ms Winterton]

previously—that those involved should try to obtain consent from an individual if it is clear from using existing material that they were likely to identify, because they knew from whom the material had come, something that might affect the individual in the future or that might link to another condition.

If research ethics committees anonymise the material, it can be used anyway. Anonymising the material does not necessarily mean that they would not have access to a person's medical records, so they could look at the treatment that the person had received, but they would not know who the person was. However, it is for individual research ethics committees to consider the proposed research and decide whether it would be necessary, if at all possible, to get the person's consent because the research may have a direct effect on them. I hope that that answers the hon. Lady's questions.

Finally, the most appropriate method of getting permission from people who lack capacity is to obtain a relative's consent. The Mental Capacity Bill makes clear the steps that must be undertaken to obtain consent where, for example, research is to be carried out. However, if research is not involved, those involved must ensure that the necessary consultation takes place, while also considering the person's best interests. It could be in a person's best interest to have their tissue used to benefit a relative. As hon. Members may know, there have been some recent examples where a person who is looking after someone without mental capacity has wished to obtain treatment because they can then find out what is affecting them. So there may be a wider best interests test.

With those reassurances, I hope that the House will accept these Lords amendments.

Lords amendment agreed to.

Lords amendments Nos. 5 to 17 agreed to.

Clause 33

RESTRICTION ON TRANSPLANTS INVOLVING A LIVE DONOR

Lords amendment: No. 18

Ms Rosie Winterton: I beg to move, That this House agrees with the Lords in the said amendment.

Mr. Deputy Speaker: With this we may discuss Lords amendments Nos. 40, 43 and 47.

Ms Winterton: Lords amendments Nos. 18, 40, 43 and 47, which were moved by the Government, implement a recommendation made by the Delegated Powers and Regulatory Reform Committee in its 25th report, published on 16 July. The Government are grateful, as always, to the Committee for its detailed consideration of the Bill. These Lords amendments put right an anomaly in the Bill that was noted by the Committee.

Clause 33 deals with transplants from living patients. It is brought forward from, and updates, the Human Organ Transplants Act 1989. In effect, it states that live transplants carried out using transplantable material are unlawful unless carried out in circumstances, and in accordance with procedures, set out in regulations. Through that approach, we can specify the type of material to which the offence applies, as well as the circumstances in which live transplants may be allowed—for example, where no coercion or payment is involved—and specify how case-by-case approval must be sought from the Human Tissue Authority.

We use the term "transplantable material" because transplants no longer only involve organs—the term can relate to part-organs or different tissue samples—and because it can be updated by regulation, as new procedures are developed.

Under the Bill, the Human Tissue Authority must make the regulations that define the term "transplantable material", while the Secretary of State has the power to make regulations setting out how and when cases would be subject to an approval procedure. The Secretary of State's power is subject to affirmative resolution in both Houses and the HTA's power is subject to no parliamentary scrutiny at all. The Committee pointed out that inconsistency, and the Government have accepted its recommendation.

We accept that both regulation-making powers should be subject to the same level of scrutiny, and the amendments will thus make the definition of transplantable material a matter for regulations subject to the affirmative procedure made by the Secretary of State. As with the other affirmative powers in the Bill, the Secretary of State will have to consult the National Assembly for Wales and the relevant Northern Ireland Department before acting under the powers.

2.30 pm

Dr. Murrison: Although we can agree that the Lords amendments appear to increase the transparency of the way in which transplantable material will be defined, will the Minister confirm that that is the purpose of Lords amendment No. 18? Lords amendments Nos. 40, 43 and 47 appear to say that the Secretary of State may define transplantable material, but that that could not be annulled by a resolution of the House. I am somewhat confused about that, so I would be grateful for her clarification.

Dr. Evan Harris: I welcome the amendments because it is always important to ensure that the House has the opportunity to comment on such regulations.

Does the Minister think that altruistic donation will fall within the procedures on which she expects the Secretary of State to make regulations? In Committee in the House of Lords, there was a debate on altruistic donation and on whether current arrangements allow for stranger donation or indeed domino donation. I have tabled parliamentary questions about the matter because it is unclear whether regulations that the Secretary of State has already promulgated under equivalent provisions in existing Acts allow such donations to take place. If the Minister does not think that that is the case, will she give me an undertaking that under the power that the amendments will rightly give the Secretary of State through clause 33(7), rapid progress will be made to provide a structure under which the relevant authority may determine whether such donations may go ahead? I have received many representations from people who believe that it should be possible to make such donations.

If the Secretary of State is to make regulations instead of the authority—it will have rather less on its plate than him, albeit still a lot—it would be helpful if the Minister could assure me that she and her colleagues are considering the issue urgently. People have been telling me for several years that the existing regulations do not allow the relevant authority to permit such donations. The Minister might think that this is a small point, but people's lives depend on ensuring that the pool of donors is as wide as possible, so I hope that she will be able to address my point.

Ms Rosie Winterton: The hon. Member for Westbury (Dr. Murrison) is right that the purpose of Lords amendment No. 18 is to give the power to the Secretary of State. The other amendments are consequential and relate to the procedure for making regulations.

To respond to the point made by the hon. Member for Oxford, West and Abingdon (Dr. Harris), altruistic donations are not prohibited at present, but the Unrelated Live Transplant Regulatory Authority does not currently allow them. The Human Tissue Authority will be in a position to consider altruistic donation further, and I know from our debates on Report and in Committee that the hon. Gentleman is concerned about the supply of transplantable material. However, although such donation is not prevented at the moment, ULTRA has the power to decide whether a procedure can go ahead. The matter is being considered, but as I am sure that he knows, many issues must be resolved before we can proceed. The HTA will be able to consider altruistic donation and will do so.

Dr. Harris: Is the Minister saying that if such donations are to be considered and carried out, new regulations under clause 33(7) need not be promulgated and the Secretary of State need not give approval?

Ms Winterton: Nothing prevents the donations at the moment except for the fact that ULTRA makes decisions about which donations can happen. If ULTRA said that altruistic donations could go ahead, I am not sure whether the Secretary of State would have to approve that. I suspect that ULTRA currently has the power to make the decision without referring back to the Secretary of State, but if that is not the case, I shall certainly write to the hon. Gentleman.

Lords amendment agreed to.

Clause 35

INSPECTORATE OF ANATOMY AND PATHOLOGY

Lords amendment: No. 19

Ms Winterton: I beg to move, That this House agrees with the Lords in the said amendment.

Mr. Deputy Speaker: With this is it will be convenient to consider Lords amendments Nos. 20 to 28, 31 to 33, 41, 42, 45, 46, 48, 58, 59, 70 and 71.

Ms Winterton: The structure of the Human Tissue Authority originally envisaged under the Bill was a single authority incorporating two inspectorates that would license and inspect regulated activities. The inspectorate for anatomy and pathology would have dealt principally with consent and ethical issues in relation to such matters as teaching anatomy and tissue banking for research. The inspectorate of organs and tissue for human use would have regulated banks holding tissue for transplantation and implemented the safety and quality protocols of the EU directive on tissues and cells.

As a result of the review of the arm's-length body, the Government announced in July that the Human Tissue Authority will merge its activities with those of the Human Fertilisation and Embryology Authority when the current review of the Human Fertilisation and Embryology Act 1990 is complete, which is likely to be in about 2008. At that time, both the HTA and the HFEA will be subsumed into a new organisation called the regulatory authority for fertility and tissue, or RAFT.

The Government listened to the debate on the structure of the inspectorates of the Human Tissue Authority in the other place and reconsidered their position. We believe that it will be helpful for the HTA to have maximum flexibility as it organises its activities alongside those of the HFEA and prepares for the eventual merger. We thus tabled the large group of amendments to remove the inspectorates of anatomy and pathology and of organs and tissue for human use from the structure of the HTA. The amendments will also allow the HTA to delegate its inspection and licensing functions to any members and staff of the HTA, or a committee composed of members and staff, or both.

The amendments will not in practice affect the way in which the authority will inspect and regulate licensed activities. It will still be able to call on the advice of experts in the various fields that it regulates, but it will operate in as streamlined a way as possible. It will still be possible for the HTA to hear appeals against decisions taken by those to whom it delegates certain functions, for example committees that deal with licensing decisions.

Opposition Members asked us in Committee to ensure that the system was not overly bureaucratic. I hope that the amendments address some of the points raised.

Mr. Lansley: Cla[illegible]s come and clauses go, and quite a number are going in this respect.

The amendments address some of the questions raised about excessive bureaucracy, but we need further assurances. It was generally understood that one of the originating reasons for the design of the legislation, with the two parallel inspectorates under the authority, was not least because of the existing body of expertise and the confidence that was placed in the inspectorate of anatomy in particular. We were only too aware that the tragic events that gave rise to the mischief that the Bill is intended to remedy did not arise in respect of functions inspected by the inspectorate of anatomy. The measures partly originated to assure people that things done well, not least by the inspectorate of anatomy, would not be messed about. So the first assurance that we need is that the existing body of relevant expertise built up in the inspectorate of anatomy will be properly protected in the HTA.

[Mr. Lansley]

That said, we are happy that what might have become a bureaucratic structure of parallel boards all within one authority is being dispensed with and that the HTA is being given the flexibility to structure its functions. Although the Minister did not refer to this, I am sure that she would recognise that clause 40 extends to the authority the ability to manage itself by giving agency functions to other public bodies and authorities. Given the intention to combine the HTA and HFEA into the regulatory authority for fertility and tissues from 2008, there are immediate questions for the HTA to consider about the extent to which it establishes parallel functions or agrees with the HFEA that they carry out functions on a jointly administered basis from the outset. I hope that the Minister can confirm that clause 40 does not bar any of that happening.

The amendments would probably have been desirable regardless of the arrangements proposed between the HFEA and HTA. They are not contingent on those two bodies being pushed together. However, the Minister has put them in that context, which raises one or two important issues.

The Minister will not be surprised if I remind her that on Third Reading on 28 June at column 118, I asked whether it was the intention of the Government, who had initiated the review of arm's-length bodies at that stage, to combine the work of the HFEA and HTA. Those of us who served on the Standing Committee were only too well aware that the two authorities were designed to function in a similar manner, and we raised that issue in February. Happily, our advice was that if that was the Government's intention, they should at least tell the other place before the Bill completed its passage. That was overtaken in September by further announcements on the review.

2.45 pm

It does, however, mean that we are proposing to introduce the HTA for it to disappear at a future point into a new and different authority. That will only reinforce the public's occasional cynicism about the nature of the legislative process and how we conduct things. I say "we" advisedly. Governments of perhaps all descriptions tend to set things up with greater frequency than they get rid of them. At least on this occasion two turn into one rather than the other way around.

Many people who were surprised at the Retained Organs Commission disappearing before the HTA arrived will also be surprised to find that the HTA will be around for just three years. That raises a serious question, which the Minister should answer. The Government are looking for members of the HTA, comprising a chair and up to 14 members, with the understanding that they will be in office for three years. That is a normal term, but there is also the expectation that the authority will disappear after three years because it will be wrapped up in early 2008 and replaced by the new authority. There will be competing interests from members of the HFEA and HTA. Does that make sense? Is there a case for joint appointments to the two authorities and for anticipating some of the changes?

It is not for any of us to anticipate what Parliament may dispose of in relation to statutory bodies in future legislation, but we made it clear in Committee and on Third Reading that the two authorities could be run together and operate as one. There are compelling reasons to look critically at the range of inspectorates, going beyond the two authorities. I talked to hospitals about the number of inspectorates to which they were subjected in the course of their daily business. One drew up a list with 42 inspectorates.

I raised the problem at a meeting and discussed it with the chief executive of the Healthcare Commission. She did not think that 42 was correct. I thought that she would say that there are far fewer, but on the contrary I was astonished to find that she reckons there are 102 inspectorates. I have not seen that list, but these two inspectorates are part of the burgeoning inspection process overall.

It is essential to find ways to rationalise inspection. The Healthcare Commission wants to do that, and I hope that the Government support it to the utmost extent. Although authorities have responsibilities, which clearly have to be discharged, those institutions that are inspected find that if inspectors talk to one another, the duplication is removed and the processes of providing data and information are rationalised, including the processes of providing access and giving people the opportunity to visit premises and to put specific activities in context. The role of inspectors could be rationalised in a way that minimises the burden of inspection. Happily, clause 43, which requires the authority to

"carry out its functions effectively, efficiently and economically"

and to have regard to best regulatory practice, should help us to ensure that it has no choice but to participate. However, it depends on the Healthcare Commission exercising its function, and doing so aggressively.

My next point relates to the authority's membership. Before these clauses were removed, there were different mechanisms by which different areas of expertise would be included in the authority's decision-making processes, either through membership of the HTA itself or through the two boards or the two inspectorates. In the absence of those boards, it is even more important that the authority and its members can bring the relevant expertise and perspectives—I am distinguishing between the two—to their work.

The advertisement for the authority's chair and membership posts—which I note, for anybody listening to our debate, requires completed applications by tomorrow—gives examples of the areas of knowledge and experience from which people may be drawn, dividing them between lay and professional members. Examples of those who may want to apply to be professional members include pathologists, coroners, anatomists, surgeons, researchers and pharmacologists, which seems to imply that professional and academic expertise is being sought.

A range of examples are given for lay members, including the areas of media and finance, but no specific reference is made to industrial experience. I am thinking of the pharmaceutical industry, biotech industry or bio-industry experience. I do not understand how we are to try to ensure that some of the issues concerned, such as tissue banking and the conduct of research in a commercial context, which we have discussed in our proceedings on the Bill, will be covered by the relevant expertise.

Dividing the advertisement into lay and professional members and not including any reference to private sector and industrial expertise begs the question whether such expertise is likely to be included. It may depend on whether biochemists and pharmacologists who have worked in pharmaceutical or bio-industries are appointed. Let us face it: 13 categories of members are instanced in the advertisement, and only 12 appointments—up to 12—other than the chairman, will be made through the NHS Appointments Commission. It may therefore be difficult to ensure that members have the relevant expertise.

In Committee, my hon. Friend the Member for Westbury (Dr. Murrison) referred to the experience of pathologists. Although we know that there is no place for a representative, as it were, of the Royal College of Pathologists, it is difficult to see how the authority could conduct its business without being sure that it could draw on the expertise of a pathologist and, perhaps, an anatomist and someone with not only a pharmacological background but an understanding of the use of tissues in research. There are specific areas of expertise that clearly have to be represented.

I hope that we can have some assurance from the Minister that although the appointments are being conducted on Nolan principles, excluding conflicts of interest and ensuring that any appointment is entirely on merit, the NHS Appointments Commission will make it absolutely clear that specific areas of expertise and knowledge need to be represented on the authority if it is to be able to perform its functions effectively.

Subject to all those points, we, like the Government, are happy to remove the clauses from the Bill by way of these amendments.

Dr. Evan Harris: I certainly agree with the hon. Member for South Cambridgeshire (Mr. Lansley) that neither the review of arm's-length bodies nor the particular conclusion of he review was required to argue that there should be flexibility for a new authority to maximise its efficiency by not simply seeking to transplant into it inspectorates from existing provision. That, arguably, seemed an easier thing to do at the outset than implementing what is now the very short provision in Lords amendment No. 58, which enables the authority to organise these matters as it wants.

I have a further point to make about the implications of the review of arm's-length bodies. To ensure that I remain in order, I do so only in the same terms as the debate in the Grand Committee in the House of Lords. These amendments presume that the merger of the HTA with the HFEA is sensible and rational. We have not had an opportunity for parliamentary debate on that, and that will not happen until Parliament, through primary legislation, approves that measure. That is not intended to happen for several years, and anything may happen in that time, including a general election.

Both bodies have inspectorates and an inspection function. Nevertheless, it has been argued, not least by Lord Jenkin of Roding, for whom I have a great deal of respect on these matters, that the merger is not rational policy making. I would argue that the HFEA and the Human Genetics Commission might have more in common. I hope that the Government still have an open mind on the matter and that it is still open for debate, particularly given the fact that the Science and Technology Committee is due to report on the HFEA and its future, which will hopefully inform the Department of Health's review. I understand the Government's wish to reduce the burden of regulation and the number of bodies, but that has to be done in a rational way. The fact that both the bodies that the Minister has indicated should be merged have inspectorates is not sufficient argument for the measure.

Further to the points that have just been made about the advertisement for jobs that has just gone out, I say to the House that part of the problem with the way in which policies and decisions are made is that the Government are advertising for people to apply for jobs in an organisation that will effectively be abolished, or at least merged, a few years down the line. The timing is unfortunate, to say the least; we are setting up new authorities only to have advertised in advance the fact that people will need to reapply for the jobs within a short time.

We accept the amendments on the understanding that while the Select Committee is looking at the issue and her Department is looking at the HFEA's future, the Minister realises that acceptance does not commit us to the view that the merger between the HTA and the HFEA is right. Although a merger may be a good thing in and of itself, we hope that there is room to explore whether the precise mergers proposed by the Minister are appropriate, given that there are issues other than inspection that various arm's-length bodies need to deal with.

Ms Rosie Winterton: I shall tackle one of the last points first. The people who apply for a job with the HTA will be aware of the position. It would have been more difficult for them if they had been appointed and then told, perhaps a year later, that the body was to be merged. When we talk about merging the two bodies to become the regulatory authority for fertility and tissue, it will be clear in which direction the body to which people are being appointed is going.

The hon. Member for Oxford, West and Abingdon asked whether the merger was appropriate. The HFEA currently licenses in vitro fertilisation, fertility clinics and the storage of sperm, eggs and embryos. We believe that its approach and structure and those of the HTA are similar and that merging will not significantly disrupt their activities.

3 pm

I want to reassure the hon. Member for South Cambridgeshire (Mr. Lansley) that we do not want to lose any expertise that has been built up. Anatomy organisations will provide input through membership of the HTA. We will look to Her Majesty's inspector of anatomy for advice in drawing up codes. Various clauses set out the authority's remit and inspections will continue to be carried out. However, we have made it clear that we want the authority to have maximum flexibility in undertaking its duties.

Let us consider the current relationship between the HFEA and the HTA. Clause 40 assists by providing for a close working relationship between the two bodies. We

[Ms Rosie Winterton]

are already considering ways in which the HFEA can work with us, for example, in providing back-office facilities and so on. That process can start almost immediately.

The hon. Member for South Cambridgeshire also mentioned the advert that has been distributed. It has been brought to the attention of the BioIndustry Association and the Association of the British Pharmaceutical Industry. We are open to applications from all sectors. Nothing is ruled out. The advert gave examples but others can apply. Furthermore, the HTA will regularly consult some of the experts that the hon. Gentleman mentioned. The NHS Appointments Commission must make decisions about the best candidates and consider, for example, his point about possible conflict of interest. It must take such matters into account.

We will ensure that we keep and build on the expertise that has accumulated over the years. We believe that our approach will ensure that no unnecessary duplication takes place and that we can move quickly to build in the sort of stability to which I referred so that people who come into post are well aware of the organisation's future direction and can participate in it.

Mr. Lansley: I assume that the Bill does not exclude the possibility of appointment to both the HFEA and the HTA.

Ms Winterton: That possibility is not excluded. Indeed, in some cases, it might be helpful in emphasising joint working. Again, it is for the NHS Appointments Commission to consider all the applications on their merits.

I hope that, with those assurances, hon. Members will accept the amendments.

Lords amendment agreed to.

Lords amendments Nos. 20 to 28 agreed to.

Lords amendment: No. 29

Ms Winterton: I beg to move, That this House agrees with the Lords in the said amendment.

Madam Deputy Speaker (Sylvia Heal): With this we may discuss Lords amendment No. 30.

Ms Winterton: Clause 44 ensures that activities that are carried out for criminal justice purposes are excluded from regulation by the HTA. By criminal justice purposes, we mean the prevention, detection, investigation and prosecution of crimes, including appeals. However, the exclusion does not extend to coroners' post mortems.

One aspect deals with what happens when a body, or part of a body, is found at what is clearly a crime scene. We want to ensure that the police and investigating authorities are not hindered in carrying out their responsibilities. Although mortuaries that carry out post-mortems will have to have an HTA licence and be subject to periodic inspection, we would not require licensing of a crime scene, which might, for example, be in a forest, simply because a forensic pathologist needed to remove tissue samples at the scene.

Removing tissue from the deceased for a post-mortem examination is licensable, even when it is done for criminal justice purposes. Although in most cases the removal of samples could wait and be carried out in the licensed mortuary, there will be cases in which, as part of the criminal investigation, it is necessary to leave the body where it lies and take samples away for analysis.

Clause 44 therefore has two effects. Subsections (1) and (2) exclude from the regulatory regime of part 2 anything done for criminal justice purposes, other than the coroner's post-mortem examination. Subsection (3) excludes from the licensing requirement the removal of tissue for the purpose of investigating a suspicious death from a body at the scene where it is found. For example, when a person dies of a heart attack, the coroner might ask for a post mortem. That examination would be conducted in a place licensed and inspected by the HTA.

However, when a body has been found and it seems that a crime was involved, it might be important for the criminal investigation for samples, for example of blood, to be taken before the body is moved. As that would be part of the coroner's post-mortem, clause 44(2) provides that the location where the body was found must be licensed before the sample can be taken. That is clearly not sensible. We have, therefore, through clause 44(3), provided for the removal of tissue in those circumstances, once the police have attended, to be outside the regulatory scheme.

None of this has been contentious, but the difficulty that emerged during consideration in another place was the lack of clarity in the meaning of subsection (3), which is designed to ensure that coroners' post-mortem activities that take place "at the scene" do not require a licence from the HTA. The mention of the constable was possibly ambiguous as it could have referred to the police first removing tissue from the body, or to bodies being found only by the police, as opposed to passers-by. We recognised the possible ambiguity, so we tabled amendments Nos. 29 and 30 to clarify the purpose of subsection (3).

The usual expression "at the scene" was previously expressed as

"at the place where the body or part is first found by a constable."

Clearly, people other than the police will often find bodies, which may also be moved after having been found but before the police are involved. To avoid ambiguity, the amendments change the description of these "at the scene" post-mortem activities from

"at the place where the body or part is first found by a constable"

to

"at the first place, where the body or part is situated, to be attended by a constable."

I hope that that is clear. I recognise that these formulations are not elegant or easy, but I assure the House that the revised wording at least removes any possibility of ambiguity. Put simply, the exemption from licensing should apply only to the place where the police first arrive on the scene. I urge the House to accept the amendments.

Dr. Murrison: I congratulate the Minister on dealing with an extremely clumsy amendment in her usual elegant fashion.

I shall describe to the hon. Lady one eventuality, which fortunately happens rarely—the situation that faces advanced trauma life support personnel. I should be grateful if she would say how the clause would classify and deal with the situation that I am about to describe. It concerns the scene of an accident or a crime at which, in order to get to a survivor to uncover them or to treat them, it is necessary to deal with someone who is deceased. That might mean moving the person or, in rare cases, removing parts of that person. How would such an eventuality be dealt with under the clause?

Ms Winterton: The clause deals with a coroner's post-mortem. What the hon. Gentleman described is the moving of a body from one place to another to try and reach another person to give them treatment. That is not necessarily relevant to the clause, which states that a coroner's post mortem must be licensed, but there will be circumstances where it may be necessary to take tissue from a body in order to assist the coroner's post mortem. That is where the clause applies. I hope I have correctly understood the situation that the hon. Gentleman describes.

Dr. Murrison: Perhaps I can expand a little further. If a doctor was required, for example, to remove a part of a body—disarticulate a part of it—in order to get to or to treat someone who was living, how would he or she stand in relation to the clause?

3.15 pm

Ms Winterton: The doctor would not be affected by the provision because, as I said, it applies to the situation where a coroner's post mortem was being carried out. One would look elsewhere for the actions that would be taken in respect of the situation that the hon. Gentleman describes. I do not know the relevant legislation that would cover it, but it sounds as though someone was taking action to help someone else. I do not believe the clause would apply.

Lords amendment agreed to.

Lords amendments Nos. 30 to 35 agreed to.

Lords amendment: No. 36

Ms Rosie Winterton: I beg to move, That this House agrees with the Lords in the said amendment.

Clause 52 enables the de-accessioning—that is, moving out of their collection—of human remains by specified museums that are currently prevented from doing so by their governing statutes. The clause fulfils the terms of the July 2000 joint declaration between the UK and Australian Prime Ministers, in which the UK Government undertook to increase efforts to repatriate human remains to Australian indigenous communities.

Lords amendment No. 36 is a response to representations made to the Government on behalf of the museum sector, which, while recognising the need to provide for de-accessioning of the remains of indigenous peoples, was nevertheless concerned to ensure that the power did not make the collections held by the museums listed in clause 52 vulnerable to gratuitous or vexatious claims for de-accessioning. There was particular concern about the ancient collections of human remains in the British Museum, such as mummies. The amendment that we tabled responds to this concern by ensuring that the remains of people believed to have died more than 1,000 years before the clause comes into force are outside the scope of this power. The amendment was prepared following discussion between the Department for Culture, Media and Sport and the relevant museums, particularly the British Museum, the museum of London, and the natural history museum.

There are a number of reasons why the Government adopted the present formulation. First, specifying a cut-off point of 1,000 years will allow the museum of London to make use of this power in de-accessioning the substantial number of mediaeval remains in its collection, such as remains that originate from mediaeval burial grounds. The original proposal by peers on behalf of the museums had suggested a 500-year cut-off, but that would have prevented the use of the power for the de-accessioning of this category of material.

Secondly, I am told that dating such ancient remains can be rather difficult. There are a number of ways in which human remains can be dated. These include radiocarbon dating, and the examination of the circumstances in which the remains were found and of the artefacts with which they may have been buried. However, none of those methods will necessarily pinpoint the date of death to a precise year. We have therefore formulated this amendment so that it will be sufficient that the remains are "reasonably believed" to be those of people who died less than 1,000 years before the clause comes into force, in order for them to fall within the scope of the de-accessioning power. The Government's formulation therefore allows for professional judgment to be exercised on the part of museum curators, archaeologists and other experts regarding the dating of the human remains. I therefore hope that hon. Members will agree to accept the amendment.

Dr. Murrison: I welcome the amendment. Like many others, my family and I enjoyed the mummy exhibition at the British Museum during the summer, and it would be a tragedy if those exhibits were to be dispersed. My understanding is that that would be prevented by the amendment and, to that extent, we welcome it. I am fascinated by the repatriation of indigenous remains, and the Minister clarified that that had taken place chiefly in response to requests by the Australian Government for the return of Aboriginal remains. I am not an expert in this field—the Minister is indicating that she is not an expert either, although I am sure that she is—but I suspect that there are other indigenous communities who would also be interested in this legislation, and I am concerned that there might be some remains that they would like to be repatriated.

As I understand it, this provision has to do with important artefacts. Clearly, mummies are important and the collection at the British Museum is of international importance. I suspect, however, that there are remains lurking in the depths of some museums that are of less significance historically and archaeologically, and it would be nice to think that, if they were significant to the communities from which they originally derived, they might be repatriated, even if they were more than 1,000 years old. I would be grateful to hear whether the Minister knows of any requests regarding such remains that might be made in the future and, if so, whether it might be appropriate to amend the proposal in some way so as to allow the professional judgment, as she put it, of the curators of the remains to prevail.

[Dr. Murrison]

I am concerned about the term "reasonably believe", because the dating of these artefacts can, as the Minister hinted, be rather an inexact science. Carbon dating is probably the most exact, but other means, such as examining the artefacts buried with the person, might be slightly less specific. My concern is that curators could be tempted to cherry-pick the method by which they determine the age of an artefact if there were any doubt about whether the remains fell within the strictures of the Bill. What safeguards does the Minister envisage in that regard? Does she envisage any guidance being issued to museums on best practice in determining the age of artefacts?

Mr. Robert Key (Salisbury) (Con): Just as my predecessors at Old Sarum—all two of them—represented five electors, I have the privilege of representing no electors at Stonehenge. However, I do represent a large archaeological community in south Wiltshire, which contains many hundreds of scheduled ancient monuments. I am also a member of the all-party group on archaeology.

I warmly welcome the amendment. It was first proposed in the other place by Lord Redesdale and Baroness Kennedy that there should be an amendment to do what has now been achieved in finding the right balance between real and effective claims, particularly from first nation communities—all of which now fall within this time bracket—and the need properly to preserve archaeological collections for future research. There is, however, a little matter on which I would be very grateful to receive some advice.

The Trust for Wessex Archaeology, which is based in my constituency, is now the second biggest contract archaeologist. It moves in whenever excavations for road building, housing or industrial development have to be undertaken to satisfy the grant of planning permission for such developments, and it regularly comes across bodies. They might or might not be 1,000 years old. There is already, therefore, a Home Office licensing regime for excavating in certain circumstances, and there is no problem with that. However, I have been asked to seek clarification on one aspect of licensing.

I have read the Bill, obviously, and I have read clause 52. I have also read clause 16, in particular, which deals with licence requirements, but I cannot find anything to satisfy my query. An archaeologist excavating a site might comes across a body—probably only a skeleton—that will eventually end up in a museum somewhere. One hopes that it would be the Salisbury and South Wiltshire museum, which is by far the finest museum in the south of England. When the body is betwixt and between the original site from which it was excavated and its final resting place in a museum, is a licence required under the Bill? That is not quite clear. How would the interface work between the Home Office licensing regime and a licence required under the Bill? That is a practical consideration. I would frankly be amazed if even this excellent Minister could answer that question off the top of her head, or even with a little inspiration from on high. Therefore, if she cannot produce an answer this afternoon, I would be grateful if she could drop me a line on the matter, and put a copy in the Library of the House, so that we can clear up this practical point for the many hundreds of archaeologists who find bodies in these circumstances every day.

Ms Winterton: With regard to the issue raised by the hon. Member for Salisbury (Mr. Key), I hope that I will be able to give him some reassurance. If he is not fully reassured by my sudden attempt to become an expert in this area, I can assure him that, if he wished to write to Ministers at the Department for Culture, Media and Sport, they would be more than happy to go into detail on this matter. However, clause 16(4) provides that no licence is necessary in relation to the bodies of people who died more than 100 years before the Bill comes into force. Licences are necessary only in relation to certain activities, all of which are limited to scheduled purposes. Archaeologists may remove material from bodies for the purpose of determining the cause of death, in which case a licence would be required, but only if the body were less than 100 years old. Clause 16(4) was introduced precisely to meet the concerns of archaeologists in this regard. I hope that that is helpful, and I would like to thank the hon. Gentleman for giving my officials notice that he would raise this matter.

The hon. Member for Westbury (Dr. Murrison) sought clarification of whether we know of any further applications that have been made with regard to ancestral remains. The answer is no. I do not know of any other applications. I am sure that he will appreciate that the idea behind de-accessioning and the request for return of remains is that an ancestral link should be established, hence the Aboriginal connection and the attempt to meet the request from the Australian Government.

With regard to the issue of reasonably believing, and how that would be interpreted, the Department for Culture, Media and Sport will issue guidance following its current consultation on human remains in museums. With those clarifications, I hope that the House will accept the amendments.

Lords amendment agreed to.

Lords amendments Nos. 37 to 48 agreed to.

Clause 57

ORDERS AND REGULATIONS

Lords amendment: No. 49

3.30 pm

Ms Rosie Winterton: I beg to move, That this House agrees with the Lords in the said amendment.

This one should be easy—*[Laughter.]* The amendment requires that the Secretary of State should exercise his powers to make orders and regulations on a number of issues under the Bill only after having consulted

> "such other persons as he considers appropriate".

That is in addition to the existing requirement to consult the devolved bodies, where appropriate. The amendment responds to requests made by various people wanting to be reassured that consultation with relevant stakeholders would take place. While we had indicated that such consultation would invariably take place in any event, but we nevertheless agreed to set that down in the Bill.

The provision applies to the more important secondary powers in the Bill—the orders and regulations listed at clause 57(4), which will be subject to the affirmative resolution procedure. The amendment makes it a statutory requirement that, in each of those cases, the Secretary of State should consult. I urge the House to agree to the amendment.

Dr. Murrison: The—*[Interruption.]* The Minister invites me to say yes. She suggested that the amendment might be straightforward, but nothing is ever straightforward.

Of course, we welcome the amendment. It was a long time coming, however, because one thing that has not characterised the Bill, and its passage through both Houses, is consultation. We might have to return to the subject of pre-legislative scrutiny, but I thought that I would take this opportunity to moan about the lack of it and the fact that the Bill might have been improved earlier had we consulted more widely.

Clearly, the amendment, as far as it goes, is welcome. My noble Friend Earl Howe was instrumental in including this measure in the Bill, and he is to be congratulated on that, as on much of the Bill to which he has contributed. The amendment, however, is a little thin, as all it does is put a duty on the Secretary of State to consult those whom he feels it appropriate to consult. It would be helpful if the Minister, without committing herself too much, could give us an indication of who those consultees might be.

Dr. Evan Harris: I had not realised that this amendment would be an issue, and perhaps I have overlooked something, but I would be grateful if the Minister would provide clarification.

Although the Minister's briefing refers to a list of provisions under clause 57(7)—to which we added section 33(7) in an earlier group of amendments—that list does not correspond entirely with the list given in the amendment, even though her briefing note implies that it should. Obviously, some clauses have been removed, so I do not expect her to defend consulting on clauses that do not exist. For example, section 4(10)(b), section 8(4)(d), section 16(3) and a couple of others are listed as provisions under which the Secretary of State

> "shall consult the National Assembly for Wales and the relevant Northern Ireland department"

before acting, but some in that list are not included in the list in Lords amendment No. 49. If that is the case, can she clarify the reason why?

Ms Rosie Winterton: Those who would be consulted would include professional bodies, family-patient organisations, religious groups and individuals who had been involved in our consultation on the Bill, and in the earlier review and consultation exercises. Anyone else who expressed a view or an interest in issues covered by the consultation could also be included. I do not want to prescribe an exclusive list, and I assure the hon. Member for Westbury (Dr. Murrison) that we want consultation to be as open as possible.

The hon. Member for Oxford, West and Abingdon (Dr. Harris) said that the list did not correspond with that in clause 57(7). The orders or regulations to which we refer are subject to affirmative resolution under clause 57(4).

Lords amendment agreed to.

Lords amendments Nos. 50 to 54 agreed to.

Clause 65

COMMENCEMENT

Lords amendment: No. 55

Ms Winterton: I beg to move, That this House agrees with the Lords in the said amendment.

The amendment would allow a three-month gap between publication of the codes of practice relating to consent and implementation of the penalties relating to consent in clauses 5 and 8. That would enable practitioners to prepare to meet the necessary standards in order to eliminate any risk—which would in any event be very small in the case of anyone already working to proper standards—that they might inadvertently commit offences during the transition period.

An amendment of this sort was proposed in the other place, reflecting a certain anxiety about the possibility that some practitioners might need to adapt to some aspects of the new legislative framework, especially as they will look to guidance to help them to understand their specific responsibilities. Having agreed to examine the issue further, my noble Friend Lord Warner returned with this amendment.

We recognise the importance of allowing people an opportunity to become familiar with the implications of the legislation, including the codes of practice that will help to support the required standards. That is particularly so when criminal sanctions may be at issue.

Consultation during the drafting of codes of practice will keep stakeholders in the picture, and it seems most unlikely that the codes will diverge significantly from what is currently considered to be good practice. For example, the taking and recording of consent for use in research of tissue following a post-mortem examination is already the norm, and health professionals have no reason to be nervous of a legislative framework that will support that approach.

Nevertheless, we recognise that there are anxieties. The three-month delay introduced by the amendment will allow everyone to be confident that they are complying with any new standards before the penalties take effect.

Dr. Murrison: We heard on Second Reading and in Committee of the anxieties of many who work in the research community about their liabilities and potential penalties under the Bill. In particular, I recall corresponding with Cancer Research UK, which was of the opinion that such measures might put off people who wanted to enter research. I hope that they will not be put off—I am sure that they will not be, particularly as the Bill has been revised as it has passed through both Houses and now appears to be sensible. However, we must be mindful of the fact that many of those who have been observing what has been going on have been filled with a certain amount of trepidation, are a little uncertain and are concerned about how they stand personally in terms of their legal liabilities.

[Dr. Murrison]

I welcome the measure, which will mean that people will be able to get to grips with the codes of practice well in advance of them beginning to bite, which is right and proper. However, the measure should not be used to delay the rolling-out of the codes of practice. It is important that we crack on with that.

Lords amendment agreed to.

Schedule 1

SCHEDULED PURPOSES

Lords amendment: No. 56

Ms Rosie Winterton: I beg to move, That this House agrees with the Lords in the said amendment.

Madam Deputy Speaker: With this we may discuss Lords amendments Nos. 57, 60 and 61.

Ms Winterton: On several occasions, arguments have been advanced to the Government, from both within and outside the House, suggesting that the Bill as drafted would have an adverse impact on the training of doctors and researchers. The difficulty related to the question of whether consent should be needed for the storage and use in training related to research of residual tissue samples following diagnostic or clinical procedures. We have listened long and hard to all the points that were made and recognised that there is some force behind the arguments.

Following debate in the other place, several Opposition amendments were passed to clause 1, schedule 1 and schedule 5. Those all had the intention of allowing use of residual tissue for research education and training without any consent, or with certain safeguards. Taken together, however, those amendments would have been unworkable. Therefore, we tabled Lords amendments Nos. 57, 60 and 61, which, when taken with Lords amendment No. 56, achieve a similar but more consistent and clear effect.

The amendments remove education and training in research techniques from part 1 of schedule 1, allowing that purpose to be subsumed within education and training in human health, so that it will be lawful to store and to use tissue from the living for both those purposes without consent under part 2 of schedule 1. Amendments to schedule 5 will similarly allow DNA analysis for education and training in research techniques without consent.

We chose that route to allow education and training in research techniques without consent, rather than the alternative option proposed in Opposition amendments of tissue anonymisation, for reasons of simplicity and clarity. We initially took the view that the use of residual samples for that purpose was too far removed from the original reason for taking the sample—for diagnosis or treatment—for the material to be used without consent. Unlike training in clinical and diagnostic procedures, training in research techniques is not part of what patients would ordinarily regard as part of the package of receiving treatment. That is why we felt that consent would be needed or, as a minimum, some other protection, such as anonymisation.

3.45 pm

We heard many arguments relating to the potential difficulty of distinguishing between education and training in research and that required for clinical practice, because the processes themselves are often the same. Moreover, we recognise that the training of doctors must include research training, and training activities will often include both clinical and research trainees. We therefore considered it best to save further confusion by aligning the two—clinical and research training—under the general heading of "Education or training relating to human health" in paragraph 9 of schedule 1.

Dr. Evan Harris: Can the Minister confirm that even though the Bill no longer specifies that education or training relating to research should be considered as education or training relating to human health, rather than research, it is her expectation that it should be understood to be so considered by those operating within the Act, and indeed by the courts in the event of any challenge?

Ms Winterton: Yes, I can certainly confirm that.

I must emphasise one point: this will not provide a back door to the use in research of tissue without consent. For example, this will not permit people to undertake such research without consent simply by involving a research trainee. That is not the idea at all.

Training and education in research techniques are clearly distinct from carrying out research. Research is concerned with creating new knowledge by addressing clearly defined questions with systematic and rigorous methods. Training, on the other hand, is more about showing medical students or technical trainees how to use equipment or about showing them research methods. So research, and training and education in relation to research, are distinct activities.

Dr. Murrison: Can the Minister confirm that a research ethics committee would clearly be bound by the Act, so no confusion is possible between research and treatment activities?

Ms Winterton: Yes, I can certainly confirm that.

While storing and using tissue for training purposes will now fall under part 2 of schedule 1, and may be done without consent, storing and using tissue for research itself will remain under part 1 of the schedule, requiring consent or, alternatively, anonymisation and, as the hon. Gentleman said, ethical approval for the project concerned, whether or not a research trainee is taking part. Of course, a trainee will often observe properly approved research, but that does not make it a training activity.

We can imagine a situation in which a research project is being carried out and a research trainee is also being taught. The researcher is examining tissue for the project and then demonstrating the technique to the trainee. Clearly, both activities—each for a different purpose—are taking place: one is research, the other is training. The training purpose does not require consent, but the research purpose still requires consent or REC approval with anonymisation. Satisfying the requirements for one activity does not obviate the need to satisfy the requirements for the other.

We have listened very carefully to the debate on this issue and I believe that we have come up with a solution that is pragmatic, in that it enables appropriate training to take place without undue restrictions, while ensuring that the door is not opened to research being conducted without proper approval. I hope that Members will welcome these amendments, which fully meet the concerns expressed in previous debates in this House and in the other place. I urge Members to accept them.

Dr. Murrison: Along with the amendments relating to clause 7, Lords amendment No. 56 is probably the most crucial that we have considered today. It is fairly straightforward, in that it removes from schedule 1 the reference to

"education or training relating to . . . research".

In so doing, it addresses many of the concerns expressed to us by the research community. I know that it must have been very difficult for the Minister to allow this amendment. The Bill is about consent, and the amendment rows back slightly from that; however, in our view it is a pragmatic solution that should allow the research community to proceed relatively unhindered with the important work that it does on our behalf, while retaining the Bill's original purpose. So to that extent, we of course welcome the amendment.

Residual tissue was a hotly contested issue in Committee and the general public have a clear view on the difference between the handling of organs from a corpse for such purposes and residual tissue taken from operations—in other words, tissue taken from somebody who is alive. Emotionally, the two are profoundly different, and we have finally managed to get a Bill that adequately reflects that difference. Of course, several months ago that was not the case. The two were closely allied, even though the popular perception and feeling was that they were quite different. The original Bill was out of line with popular sentiment in that regard, and given that it stemmed from the Kennedy, Redfern and Isaacs inquiry, I found that rather surprising. But we got there eventually, although it has been a hard slog. Given that the Bill is not partisan but very technical, it is a great pity that it was not subjected to pre-legislative scrutiny. The issues that this amendment and others have dealt with could have been sorted out by discussing them with the relevant expert organisations, but we will simply have to live with that in the months and years ahead.

We can all think of problematic situations—they have been described to us at great length—in which this amendment will help. We can perhaps envisage the law being broken every day in every medical school throughout the country, with one side of a lecture theatre learning how to treat patients and the other learning about research techniques, fundamentally the same instruction being given and the poor lecturer in the middle, trying to wade his way through the legislation to make sure that he is steering a proper course and not transgressing the law in any way. This problem is particularly relevant to cytology. Noble Lords discussed cytology in another place in defence of their amendments, the substance of which was eventually accepted by Ministers. We clearly need to train people in histopathology and cytology, which involve staining. Many stains are used in the course of therapeutics, but many others are research tools. Both can now be dealt with at the same time during the instruction of those who are learning how to treat patients and those who are learning research techniques.

It would make no sense at all to retain the Bill as originally drafted, as it would cause major disruption to medical schools. I believe that the amendments help to get around most of the problems. To that extent, they are extremely welcome and I am very pleased to see them. I am just sorry that we could not have reached this point sooner.

The downside, of course, has been an element of confusion in the minds of many who work in this field—pathologists, researchers, people in the NHS and in research generally—and they may be left wondering what is going on. I very much hope that any such confusion will be short-lived and that they will be able to get on with their work in the certain knowledge that they will not be transgressing when they carry out activities that most of us would regard, in a common sense way, as perfectly reasonable.

I share the Minister's hope that the amendment will not prove to be a back door to research without consent. I come back to the original tenet of the Bill, stemming from the tragedies at Alder Hey and the Bristol royal infirmary, that consent must be at the heart of everything that we do. I hope that neither this amendment nor any others will degrade or detract from that original intention. Indeed, I am sure that they will not.

Dr. Evan Harris: I shall comment on the specific amendment and then associate myself with some of the more general remarks made by the hon. Member for Westbury (Dr. Murrison). We are now at the last group of amendments, so it will be our last debate on the Bill.

The amendment deals with an important issue. Previously, the Government were in a bizarre position, as I pointed out on Report on 28 June this year when I said:

"If the education and training in research techniques were done on anonymised tissue, subject to the approval of a research ethics committee,"

it would not

"be exempt from the requirement for consent, as the research is"

because the Government had specified that such education and training in research techniques required explicit consent. A weird situation would have arisen, whereby parts of the research materials would have required explicit consent while other parts were anonymised. The Minister said:

"Yes, that is the case."—[*Official Report*, 28 June 2004; Vol. 423, c. 98.]

The Minister understood the problem that there were at least three categories of consent in that regard. There was education and training, which did not need consent; research that did not need consent as long as the samples were anonymised and gained research ethics approval; and training in research techniques that would always require explicit consent.

It would have been good if the Government had reflected further on the problem and tabled their own amendments, such as we now have, earlier in the other place. That would have shown their recognition, after consultation, of the problem. However, I understand

[Dr. Evan Harris]

that on Report in the other place, the Government resisted the proposals and pressed for a Division. Only following the Government's defeat at that stage did they table the necessary correcting amendments to ensure consistency. As the hon. Member for Westbury said, those amendments were important and the Minister has accepted that. We have to say that, on this occasion, unlike the others where the Government clearly listened and volunteered the amendments themselves, we had to wait for the Government to fail to secure a majority in the House of Lords. Thank goodness for the fact that it is a more proportional Chamber, if I may put it that way—*[Interruption.]* I will put it that way, at least once on every Bill.

Having said that, I wholly concur with what the Minister said about it being necessary to ensure that this is not seen as providing a back-door way to avoid the need for consent in research. The temptations may well be there, because much of the actual stuff of research is done by people who are being trained in some way or another. Indeed, researchers are always in training, up to the highest level. The Minister was right to put the point on the record and I am delighted that the hon. Member for Westbury agreed. We need to be clear and the research community needs to be very clear.

It will reassure the research community and health professionals working in this field that a sensible option has prevailed in the final stages of the Bill's consideration. I shall not repeat the general points made by the hon. Member for Westbury, although I associate myself with them. With amendments such as this and the others in the group, we can ensure that the Bill is satisfactory for patients and the public, but we must also make sure that people still want to practise pathology and pursue clinical research in this country. They should not have to fight against the interests of the public, as their work is valuable and benefits the public.

It is true that we need regulation, but we must ensure that we do not have too much bureaucracy. We need a climate that welcomes people into this area of research. We must make sure that they do not feel that they have to disguise the fact of what they do. There is a crisis in recruitment in some of these disciplines and I hope that the Bill will go some way towards dealing with that problem rather than making it worse.

Dr. Richard Taylor: I also welcome the amendment and I associate myself with the remarks made by other hon. Members. In its final form, the Bill will be acceptable to the professions, but I have one final question for the Minister. Will she repeat what I think she said earlier about the anonymisation of material collected for research without consent but with the agreement of the ethical committee? Will she confirm that the linkage of material to a patient's disease and the treatment that has been received will remain, despite that anonymisation, as it will be essential?

Ms Rosie Winterton: I can certainly give the hon. Gentleman that assurance.

As the hon. Member for Westbury (Dr. Murrison) said, this amendment is very important. I am pleased that it enjoys his support and that of the hon. Member for Oxford, West and Abingdon (Dr. Harris). It epitomises the principles on which the Bill is based.

We wanted the Bill to be based on consent, not least because of the very tragic events at the Alder Hey and Bristol hospitals. At the same time, we wanted to ensure that the regulation that all society wanted us to introduce was accompanied by reassurance that the Bill would be based on the principles of consent. We also wanted to convince the research and medical community that we were not trying to stifle some of the excellent work being done.

I believe that the Bill achieves all that now, and that, as a result, people will be very willing to give tissue or organs for research and other purposes. At the same time, it will give the medical and research community confidence that it is operating in an environment that they understand, and one that they know that others understand as well.

Our task has been to get the balance right between those two very important principles. I think that the Bill achieves that and I want to take this opportunity to thank everyone who has made possible amendments such as the one that we are discussing. In that respect, I want to make particular mention of my officials, but hon. Members of all parties in this House, and in the other place, have all contributed to making this a very good Bill. I am sure that it will satisfy some deeply held principles and the requirement that we provide the right atmosphere for the medical and research community to carry out its work. At the same time, it will provide some important safeguards for families, as desired by those who suffered from earlier events. The Bill will also encourage people to engage in the sort of activities that we have talked about. I am grateful to all involved and I urge the House to agree to the remaining amendments.

Lords amendment agreed to.

Lords amendments Nos. 57 to 71 agreed to.

Emergency Obstetrics (Northern Ireland)

Motion made, and Question proposed, That this House do now adjourn.—*[Mr. Ainger.]*

4.5 pm

Rev. Martin Smyth (Belfast, South) (UUP): I am glad to have the attention of the House for this Adjournment debate. Despite its long title, I shall not address the issue of people from overseas who are working in Northern Ireland or in Great Britain. Nor shall I address the issue of those who have arranged beforehand to be in the United Kingdom and are paying for obstetric care. Instead, I shall address a particular problem that has been drawn to my attention.

The problem came to my attention as the result of an outbreak of racist attacks in a part of my constituency. I investigated the cause of the attacks, because I could not understand why they were happening. In that part of the constituency, people from Africa had lived for years in harmony with their fellow citizens and were involved in various community activities. Then I discovered that a particular house in the area had a regular turnover of women from Africa, who arrived, had their babies, returned to the house and then moved on. They did not help in keeping the place clean and tidy. As a result, others in the community—I do not support them in any way—who had tried to obtain housing themselves, felt that this was a misuse of the property and of the system. The attacks started, and innocent people were affected.

I subsequently discovered that the activity has moved from that area, but I have been made aware of at least three other houses in the constituency that are bases for similar activity. I have concluded that an active gang or gangs is using the system and milking money from people who have an ulterior aim.

One of the reasons behind the activity is that under the constitution of the Republic of Ireland, every person born in the island of Ireland, its islands and its seas has an entitlement to be part of the Irish nation. Since then, of course, we have had the Anglo-Irish agreement, which changed everything—or so we were told—and there was no longer a territorial claim to Northern Ireland. However, under the agreement, any person born in Northern Ireland can identify themselves as Irish or British or both. It is against that background that people are trying to circumvent UK legislation. They have organised trips for people to get a foothold in Europe, above all. Having been involved in health care for many years, I am aware that one should not travel by air during the last few weeks of a confinement, so people must be finding another way into the country.

The most recent case I came across was of someone from Sierra Leone, who came into Northern Ireland from Dublin. In my research into the situation, I sought some guidance and information. I wrote to the Minister on 1 October and received a reply on 15 October informing me that I would shortly receive a reply. I tabled a question and was told something that I have heard regularly from the Department of Health, Social Services and Public Safety in Northern Ireland: as it deals with about 1,690,000 people, it does not keep that many central records, even though we can receive answers to questions about similar things in England. I was told:

"This information is not collected centrally."—[*Official Report*, 19 October 2004; Vol. 425, c. 678W.]

It appears that some sort of scam is going on, someone is making money out of it and our health service is paying the price. As I understand the situation, the women in question have husbands who are well off financially and are in professional positions. I can understand the desire to get a foothold in Europe, but I wonder what impact it is having on our community in Northern Ireland and especially on our health service.

I am aware, as I am sure others are, that there is currently a case in Great Britain where a person from China is seeking the right of habitation and citizenship on the ground that their child was born in Northern Ireland.

David Burnside (South Antrim) (UUP): I was not aware of the problem until my hon. Friend raised it during today's debate. Does he agree that our ministerial representatives should raise the issue with their counterparts in the Irish Republic? It is disgraceful that those seeking Irish citizenship should be using the British health service and its facilities in Northern Ireland, rather than using the health service available in the territory of the Irish Republic, which by my definition, constitutionally, is the 26 counties.

Rev. Martin Smyth: I thank my hon. Friend for his question. I am sure that our representatives will be asking the question, but they get no answer other than, "We have that problem in the Republic at the moment, too." There was a referendum recently to try to change the constitution of the Republic of Ireland to debar such things, but that will not come into effect until at least the beginning of 2005, and even then I would not hold my breath. I know that people in the Irish Republic are fighting against that legislation, and with elections coming sooner or later, there may be political issues involved in trying to gather votes one way or the other.

According to the law, emergency obstetric care must be provided free of charge to anyone, and it would appear that our health budget is carrying that burden. I phoned the chief executive of the Royal Jubilee hospital group who, interestingly, acknowledged that there were such cases, but said that there were not very many. I asked my personal assistant to do some checking on the hospitals where I understood such children would be born, and the results are rather interesting. I am not thinking of emergency obstetric care for people who reside in the area—that can happen at any hospital. We specifically asked about those from overseas who have no background of living in the area.

Daisy Hill hospital tells us that there was a nil return, fascinatingly enough, on the last survey for the Irish referendum, but we do not know whether such cases have happened before or since then, because that is a localised issue. The Erne hospital says that very few people are taken into maternity without prior knowledge, but that leaves the question of whether any are taken in. Lagan Valley hospital tells us that it has no evidence of foreign nationals. I am prepared to accept that, but I cannot understand, as I know a little about north Belfast, why the Mater hospital said that there is no evidence of foreign nationals—whether in general or in particular, I do not know.

[Rev. Martin Smyth]

Significantly, Craigavon hospital said that it has several foreign nationals a week. Two women recently presented for delivery who did not know each other, but they gave the same address. That confirms the pattern that I have traced. Altnagelvin hospital in Londonderry says that there is little evidence of such cases, but that they have been known to happen in the past. At the Ulster hospital in Strangford, such cases happen often. Let us remember that the chief executive said that they did not happen too often at the Royal Jubilee hospital group. Of course, he was very compassionate—I understand his compassion; the hospitals have to take anyone who comes—but according to my research, six people are presenting themselves each week.

About 300 to 400 people have presented between 2002 and the past week or so, and the tragedy is that most of them are presenting off the street. That requires medicals and blood tests because a large number of them come from Africa. With the problems of the AIDS epidemic there, extra medical attention is involved, even though the women may not remain in hospital for very long. However, we are all aware that it is the care and attention at the time of delivery that is most expensive. It is not the nursing attention later or the hospital care—the so-called hotel provision—that adds to the expense, but the procedures involved.

I wonder whether the Minister can tell us whether any of those hospitals are being given extra funds for such treatment or whether they must take the money from their budgets. She will be aware that most of the hospitals in Northern Ireland are crying out for more—even though it might be a little bit like Oliver when they cry for more because we sometimes wonder what some of them are doing with their money.

The number of people involved provides us with a challenge. I understand their aspirations; I understand that people want to improve their quality of life. I understand that Irish and British citizenship means much to people throughout the world, but I am not convinced that we should be subsidising people to make a fortune out of the aspirations of some and the miseries of others. We are aware of that when we talk about the trail of asylum seekers who manage to find their way right across the European continent, landing up in different parts our nation when someone else is raking in the money. Those people have gathered what money they have to pay off gangmasters and others. I wonder whether the Minister can tell us whether attempts have been made to investigate the issue. I can help her with one case because I know that the Police Service of Northern Ireland has been out to meet the folk in one home in my constituency—I am waiting to hear what happened.

Is anything being done beyond Northern Ireland, and in relation to the Irish Republic, to prevent this activity from happening? We must bear it in mind that the problem will multiply because, according to Irish law, people may claim citizenship through three generations. We are not considering only the circumstances tomorrow, but those for the next three decades at least.

4.20 pm

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Northern Ireland (Angela Smith): I congratulate the hon. Member for Belfast, South (Rev. Martin Smyth) on securing the debate. He has demonstrated his interest in the matter through his letters to me and his parliamentary questions. The situation regarding emergency obstetric care for patients from overseas worries several hon. Members, so I hope that I can reassure them on questions of care and that problems are being addressed. The hon. Gentleman rightly stated that it is set out in law that emergency obstetric care must be provided free of charge at the point at which it is needed.

It might be helpful if I give some background to the situation. When the Jubilee maternity hospital was situated at Belfast City hospital, only a small number of women—about four a month—travelled from overseas to give birth there. In the past four years, since the Jubilee joined the Royal maternity hospital to form the Royal Jubilee maternity service, the numbers have steadily increased. As the hon. Gentleman said, the situation affects other maternity units, albeit to a lesser extent. Those units are in the Mater, Ulster, Causeway, Antrim, Craigavon and Erne hospitals.

Women arriving at hospitals in Northern Ireland are generally at an advanced stage of their pregnancy, and most will present to the hospital at around 38 weeks gestation. As the hon. Gentleman said, they have generally travelled to Northern Ireland via England. In Belfast, the women appear to stay at a small number of addresses in the south and east of the city. The women mainly originate from China, but they are also known to have travelled from Algeria, Nigeria, Syria, Sudan, Uganda and Libya.

My next point relates to the hon. Gentleman's question about the difficulties with the statistics that we have. The majority of the women who arrive will have visited a general practitioner and will have an address in Northern Ireland, so they will have secured temporary resident status and a health service number. It is then routine for them to be referred to a maternity unit to book a confinement. Others will have no GP, and they will arrive directly at the maternity unit to be booked into what are called emergency booking slots. A very small number of women arrive at the maternity unit already in labour.

The RJMS, where most women attend, is managing the situation by using an emergency booking clinic, which is led by one of the consultants. Four slots are set aside each week for overseas women, although generally at least another two are also seen. The use of the clinic ensures that proper medical histories can be taken and that clinical tests can be carried out prior to labour. Additionally, a Chinese interpreter is provided as required. The RJMS has stressed that the women receive exactly the same care as local residents.

Through the establishment of the emergency booking clinic, the RJMS is better able to manage its maternity service and provide the best possible care both to local women who have already booked maternity care and to overseas patients who arrive at a late stage of pregnancy. When there has been a capacity issue at the RJMS, some women from overseas have been transferred to receive maternity care at the nearby Mater hospital.

As the hon. Gentleman said, figures on the exact number of women who are treated are not collected centrally. There are several reasons why the hospitals have had difficulty collecting data, but the main one is that many women from overseas have a health service number and appear as health and social services board residents. The data available on non-EU residents therefore mask the true picture because those who use Northern Ireland addresses are registered as temporary residents.

Nevertheless, the trusts have produced some statistical evidence, and I can report that the RJMS, which treats the vast majority of the women, reports that about 24 overseas women a month give birth at the unit. Other units vary from fewer than one a month to about three a month.

The hon. Gentleman raised a number of issues that I shall try to address in turn. It is estimated that the average cost of a birth at a hospital in Northern Ireland is around £2,000. Health and social services boards fund on the basis of the number of births in their area. The boards provided some £12.5 million to fund maternity care at the Royal Jubilee in 2004–05. The women who stay at Northern Ireland addresses are classed by the health service as temporary residents and are counted in the number of births to residents in a board area, thereby receiving funding. No separate allocation has been made for designated non-EU citizens. That represents a significant spend on services to a client group whose right to be in the UK may be subject to review by other parts of the Government. Nevertheless, under current legislation and guidance to GPs, emergency obstetric care must be administered free of charge.

The hon. Gentleman also spoke about why the women come to Northern Ireland to give birth. There may be some confusion on that. The primary reason, as he said, appears to be to secure Irish citizenship for the child. As hon. Members are aware, current Irish legislation means that a baby born in Ireland or Northern Ireland—anywhere on the island of Ireland—is entitled to Irish citizenship. Women who travel to Dublin from overseas to give birth have been a major problem and a significant issue in the Republic of Ireland for some time. A referendum was held last year to make residency and nationality changes to the relevant sections of the Irish constitution, thereby stopping wide-scale abuse of the system. In the referendum, 79 per cent. favoured change.

The Bill has not been passed and is at its first stage. Although it will have an impact, it is difficult to anticipate that the number of women coming to Northern Ireland to give birth for that reason will reduce until it comes into effect. We think that the legislation will be passed by the end of this year or the beginning of next year. From then on, there will be no gain for women giving birth in Northern Ireland to gain Irish citizenship and it is likely that the number of women coming to Northern Ireland for that reason will decline. I take the point that it will not decline immediately because the information has to get through to those women.

Rev. Martin Smyth: One of the ideas is that the system is used to get a foothold in Europe. Does the Minister agree that the legislation does not necessarily mean that the children will not get Irish citizenship? Instead, they will have to apply for it when they are 18 or thereabouts. There is no guarantee that they will get it, but it is difficult for us to say that ultimately they will not get it because they will have been born in the land. The change will not necessarily stop them coming.

Angela Smith: The hon. Gentleman perhaps underestimates the complexity of the legislation. It is not simply the case that people can get citizenship. They have to be born, whether in the north or south, to parents, one of whom is an Irish citizen, to be entitled to be an Irish citizen. It is more complex than just the issue of birth. I do not think that there will be the difficulty that he anticipates because of the provisions that are being considered by the Irish Government. I accept that current legislation has led to the increase in the past few years.

Another group of women who come to Northern Ireland are from Nigeria, but they almost always pay for their treatment before leaving. Since April this year, 42 Nigerian women have paid for treatment at the Royal Jubilee. They are usually booked in in advance and the maternity service has planned for their deliveries.

I understand the concerns that women arriving from overseas may displace local mothers. I reassure the hon. Gentleman that that is not the case. The trusts have taken steps to address the additional demand, and I mentioned some of those. That demand will be relatively short lived with the arrival of the new legislation.

Mr. Nigel Dodds (Belfast, North) (DUP): The Minister said that some non-EU residents have Northern Ireland health numbers, but, for those who do not, what are the costs of providing services to non-EU residents who give birth in Northern Ireland?

Angela Smith: I cannot give the hon. Gentleman an overall figure, but we are talking about a figure of around £2,000 per birth. I will obtain the figures for non-EU citizens and come back to him on that point.

I acknowledge the professionalism of the staff who deal with these issues in our health service, and particularly acknowledge the pressures on the medical, midwifery, nursing and management staff who deal with these issues in our trusts. They continue to provide a first-class service for local mothers-to-be, while also treating late-booking women from overseas with the same care and respect that they show every mother-to-be. It speaks volumes about their dedication and their concern for their patients. Their hard work, dedication and professionalism should be recognised and thought of as a beacon to us all. I am grateful to them for their efforts.

Rev. Martin Smyth: I am grateful to the Minister for giving way again, but we have until half-past 7 anyway, so we are all right.

I have no problem whatever with joining the Minister in paying tribute to our staff. I would like to put on record the fact that elsewhere in the Palace the radiographer of the year award is being given to one of our citizens, Margaret Grayson, from Northern Ireland.

[Rev. Martin Smyth]

Is anybody looking at the routes by which mothers-to-be come to Northern Ireland, so that those who profit from the trafficking of such persons are brought to justice and the burden is not placed on the taxpayer?

Angela Smith: I am grateful to the hon. Gentleman for his intervention not only because it allows me to pay tribute to Margaret Grayson but because it enables me to make a point that I had almost forgotten. I can assure him that we give information fully to the Police Service of Northern Ireland, and the foreign nationals division of the PSNI works closely with the Immigration Advisory Service and there is a free exchange of information. I can give him the utmost assurance that my Department will co-operate fully with the PSNI, the Home Office and the Immigration Advisory Service, which are all investigating the matter. There will be full co-operation, and I hope that that addresses the points that he has raised.

Question put and agreed to.

Adjourned accordingly at twenty-eight minutes to Five o'clock.

House of Commons

Thursday 11 November 2004

The House met at half-past Eleven o'clock

PRAYERS

[MR. SPEAKER *in the Chair*]

Oral Answers to Questions

TREASURY

The Chancellor of the Exchequer was asked—

Working Tax Credit

1. **Mr. Mark Lazarowicz** (Edinburgh, North and Leith) (Lab/Co-op): What steps he is taking to promote take-up of the child care element of the working tax credit. [197384]

The Paymaster General (Dawn Primarolo): The child care element has been a success, and more than 340,000 UK families are now benefiting from child care help within the working tax credit. That is 89 per cent. higher than the peak of 180,000 under the working families tax credit and the disabled person's tax credit, and more than seven times more than the number of families benefiting from the child care disregard in family credit. We continue to promote tax credits in a variety of ways, including TV advertising, press campaigns and direct mailing. We also work in partnership with child care providers, including representatives of the Daycare Trust and the National Childminding Association, to ensure that parents using formal child care are aware of the support that they can receive with costs.

Mr. Lazarowicz: The child care element is certainly good news for many of my constituents, not just because of the benefit that it provides to families, but because it enables the provision of excellent child care in centres such as the North Edinburgh child care centre, which is in my constituency. But as my right hon. Friend has pointed out, there are still people who need this benefit who are not getting it. Can she look at ways of encouraging employers in particular to work closely with the Inland Revenue to ensure maximum take-up of this important credit?

Dawn Primarolo: I would like to congratulate my hon. Friend, who is working very hard on this issue in his constituency. He should not undervalue the work that Members of Parliament can do with their local employers and trade unions to publicise the availability not only of the child care tax credit, but, from next April, of the £50 a week payment to families, which will be tax and national insurance free. Some 40 per cent. of employees have dependent children. One in four women return to full-time work within the first year, and the average cost to employers in recruitment and re-training is £4,300. The Inland Revenue is working with the Daycare Trust and with employers to supply detailed information, and to ensure that such information is available to help not only employees and their families, but the firms themselves, which will then be able to retain their staff and develop their business.

Mr. Paul Goodman (Wycombe) (Con): The Select Committee on Work and Pensions, which is of course dominated by members of the Paymaster General's own party, said that the child care tax credit is

> "not consistent with a childcare vision based on choices made by parents and families themselves, since it is only available to some of them"—

the "some" being those who work in the labour market. Is it not time that we had a simpler system of funding child care, so that choices can be shaped by parents themselves and not by the Chancellor?

Dawn Primarolo: That question simply demonstrates that the hon. Gentleman does not understand—perhaps because his party has never had a national child care strategy—exactly what is on offer to parents. The child care tax credit is available to working parents on low and middle incomes for 70 per cent. of costs. That can be as much as £94 a week for those with a maximum of one child, and £140 a week for those with more than two children. In addition, this Government have increased child benefit—the previous Government froze it—and invested in nursery education, children's centres and Sure Start. Furthermore, next April we are making available to every family who wish to claim it £50, tax and national insurance free, to help toward their child care costs. That defends quality, provides good outcomes for children and gives parents choice.

Angela Eagle (Wallasey) (Lab): My right hon. Friend has rightly set out Labour's very impressive record in putting child care at the centre of our economic life and ensuring its importance. Has she noticed that another party is talking about how important it is? Were she to match it—

Mr. Speaker: Order. So far, so good, but perhaps the Paymaster General will answer the question now.

Dawn Primarolo: I have noticed that a certain party did nothing when in power to invest in child care; for example, unlike this Government, it did not invest in nurseries. Now, it promises to spend £4 billion that it cannot find, having already committed itself to cutting child care as part of its proposed £20 billion-worth of public expenditure cuts.

Dentistry

2. **Mr. Gordon Prentice** (Pendle) (Lab): If he will allow money spent by a person on private dental insurance to be tax deductible where that person's dentist has opted out of NHS dentistry. [197385]

The Chief Secretary to the Treasury (Mr. Paul Boateng): The Government have no intention of introducing tax relief for expenditure on private dental insurance, as doing so would be wasteful, poorly targeted and inequitable.

Mr. Prentice: That is a very disappointing reply. I know that the Government are trying to turn things round and that six new NHS dental suites will open in my Pendle constituency next year—*[Interruption.]* They did not expect to hear that from me. The point is that in parts of my constituency there is an NHS dental desert and people are being forced to follow their dentist into the private sector. The nearest dentist with an open NHS list is 30 or 40 miles away, so it is totally impractical for elderly people and others to travel that distance. It seems fair and equitable that, in circumstances where people are forced to take out private dental insurance, they should have the money reimbursed.

Mr. Boateng: It is neither fair nor equitable. Indeed, it would be a waste of the taxpayers' money currently going into NHS dentistry support teams, which are benefiting my hon. Friend's and other primary care trusts to the extent of some £9 million. That is on top of the additional resources that my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Health announced only recently. I would hope that my hon. Friend would welcome that.

Mr. Damian Green (Ashford) (Con): The Minister should be aware that the NHS dentistry crisis will eventually land in the Treasury. The constituents of the hon. Member for Pendle (Mr. Prentice) are relatively well off. In the town of Ashford, the bulk of my constituency, there are 12 NHS dental practices, not one of which is accepting new NHS patients. Last week, one of them wrote to all its patients saying that they had to take up private insurance because it was no longer practising NHS dentistry. For the bulk of my constituents, NHS dentistry no longer exists. If the Chief Secretary carries on with the complacent tone that he adopts in his answers, I am afraid that constituents will recognise that the Government do not care about the future of NHS dentistry.

Mr. Boateng: I am not complacent at all. I recognise that there is a problem, albeit a localised one. I also expect right hon. and hon. Members on both sides of the House to recognise where the origin of the problem lies. It lies in the disastrous contract of 1990 and in the cuts in training places and expenditure that characterised the Conservative party's stewardship of the NHS. It is the same old policy of cuts and charges—that is the Tory way. Our way is additional investment in training places and in provisions that are leading to increased and improved dental facilities up and down the country.

Roger Casale (Wimbledon) (Lab): May I draw my right hon. Friend's attention to an article in this week's *Wimbledon News*, which focuses on the work of the local primary care trust in raising standards in four NHS dental services locally? Will he continue to invest in increasing capacity and raising standards, and will he reject the call of my hon. Friend the Member for Pendle (Mr. Prentice) and Conservative Members, who talk down the health service, to subsidise private medicine?

Mr. Boateng: I have no difficulty at all in rejecting that call and I am glad that my hon. Friend recognises the extra £368 million investment placed by the Government in NHS dentistry, which is leading to increases in the work force with 1,000 additional dentists by October 2005 and an extra 170 undergraduate training places. We are also giving more powers to primary care trusts to decide how to spend their money. We should compare and contrast that with the closure of two dental schools and the cut of £200 million in real spending on NHS dentistry under the Conservative Administration in the mid-1990s. It is the same old story: cuts and charges as against investment and training. That is the difference between them and us.

Mortgage Interest Rates

3. **Angela Watkinson** (Upminster) (Con): What recent discussions he has had with the Governor of the Bank of England regarding mortgage interest rates. [197386]

The Chancellor of the Exchequer (Mr. Gordon Brown): I met the Governor on 26 October. Mortgage interest rates have averaged 6 per cent. since 1997, in contrast to 11 per cent. in the period from 1979 to 1997.

I can also tell the House that I shall deliver the statement on the pre-Budget report on Thursday, 2 December.

Angela Watkinson: The Chancellor's 66 stealth taxes and his borrowing and spending programme have caused personal debt in this country to reach £1 trillion. The UK has nosedived from fourth to 15th place in the international competitiveness league. How will he stabilise mortgage interest rates, which have been increased five times this year?

Mr. Brown: The hon. Lady does not seem to understand that we have the lowest inflation for 40 years, the lowest average interest rates for 30 years and the lowest unemployment for 25 years. Moreover, we have more people in work than ever before. We have done what the Conservative party always failed to do, and we have low inflation, rising growth and employment, and more investment in the public services. She should be apologising for the Conservative record of the previous years.

Mr. Bill O'Brien (Normanton) (Lab): Does my right hon. Friend agree that it is important that we have low mortgage rates, as low interest rates are essential to ensuring that we continue the stability that we have enjoyed over the past seven years under his stewardship? Will he assure the House that he will keep up the pressure to maintain low mortgage and interest rates?

Mr. Brown: There are more than 1 million extra home owners since 1997 as a result of the low inflation and low interest rates that have been achieved in this country. I am grateful to my hon. Friend for pointing out that it is important that these policies for economic stability continue. That is why we will not return to the mistaken policies of the Government to whom the shadow Chancellor was an adviser.

Mr. George Osborne (Tatton) (Con): In order to help the Chancellor heed the advice of his good friend Peter Mandelson and avoid exaggerated gloating about the British economy, may I ask him to confirm that household disposable income is set to fall for the first time this year in six years, as a result of mortgage rate increases and his big tax increases? Does he think that that feel-bad factor is something that the Prime Minister's new council of economic advisers should look at?

Mr. Brown: What the hon. Gentleman is confirming is that real disposable income has risen every year under this Labour Government. It rose faster than under the previous Conservative Government, to whom he was an adviser. Disposable income has risen by 3 per cent. in real terms every year. That is the mark of a successful policy. If the hon. Gentleman is not prepared to acknowledge our success, I remind the House that the leader of the Conservative party has said that

> "the British economy appears to be doing pretty well. Unemployment is low. Inflation is low. We're growing faster than many other European countries."

That was the Leader of the Opposition's comment.

Ian Lucas (Wrexham) (Lab): Low and stable mortgage rates have contributed to a very healthy housing market in Wrexham and across Wales. However, my constituents tell me that they would prefer to have a fixed mortgage rate system. What progress has been made in discussions with the Bank of England on that?

Mr. Brown: There are more people on fixed and long-term mortgages than previously, and that was the subject of the Miles report at the time of the previous Budget. We continue to look at these matters to secure a more successful housing market in the UK. Although house prices are moderating and an adjustment is taking place, it should be noted that low interest rates and low mortgage rates have meant that the level of repossessions last year was at its lowest for 20 years. We continue to give people advice on personal debt problems and other issues, and we will continue to improve our services to deal with companies that unfairly charge extortionate interest rates. However, the secret for the long term is economic stability based on low inflation and low interest rates. I hope that all parties in this House now understand that that is the way forward for Britain.

Dr. Vincent Cable (Twickenham) (LD): Further to the answer that the Chancellor has just given, does he agree with the judgment of the Governor of the Bank of England that house prices are not "moderating", as he put it, but are falling and will continue to do so? What does the Treasury's analysis suggest will be the economic consequence for the UK of the expected sharp fall in house prices?

Mr. Brown: It is quite amazing. For months, Liberal Democrat Members have told us at Treasury Questions that house prices are rising too fast. Now the hon. Gentleman complains that they are moderating. I shall repeat to the House what he told the Confederation of British Industry. He said:

> "The Government—and Gordon Brown in particular—have established a reputation for maintaining economic stability. The independence of the Bank of England has helped deliver steady growth, low unemployment and inflation."

Why does the hon. Gentleman not say in this House what he tells the CBI?

Single Currency

4. **Mr. Graham Allen** (Nottingham, North) (Lab): If he will make a statement on progress made with meeting the criteria for joining the euro. [197387]

The Chancellor of the Exchequer (Mr. Gordon Brown): The assessment of the five economic tests was published on 9 June 2003. My statement to the House set out a reform agenda of concrete and practical steps to address the policy requirements identified by the assessment.

Mr. Allen: I congratulate my right hon. Friend the Chancellor on sticking to his guns on the five tests and continuing the policy that has served us so well. Is it legal in the United Kingdom for consenting adults—among whom I include businesses, companies and customers—to buy and sell goods and services in euros?

Mr. Brown: Some companies, including some major retailers, have installed euro systems already and are able to trade in euros. So the answer is yes, it is possible to do so.

Sir Peter Tapsell (Louth and Horncastle) (Con): Has the Chancellor noted that Mr. Derek Scott, former chief economic adviser to the Prime Minister, recently described the Chancellor's famous five economic tests for joining the euro as "absurd" and "economically illiterate"? So the Chancellor is to be congratulated for devising them, presumably to frustrate the Prime Minister's ardent wish that Britain join the single European currency.

Mr. Brown: This is the Member of Parliament who told us that if we made the Bank of England independent, it would be an absolute disaster. It has proved to be one of the greatest success stories, so I am not sure that I should listen to his analysis of the five tests. I gave a report to Parliament last year about the importance of flexibility, convergence, investment, the role of financial services and employment to a decision on the euro, and I have no reason to change my judgment that those are the important factors that have to be taken into account. I should have thought that the hon. Gentleman, who considers such matters very carefully, would see that employment, the role of financial services, what happens to investment, whether we have flexibility, and convergence—which are the five tests—are the important issues.

Mr. Dennis Skinner (Bolsover) (Lab): Will my right hon. Friend take no notice whatever of Mr. Derek Scott, who stood for the SDP in Swindon many years ago? He was wrong then and he is wrong now. Seven and a half years ago, we said that we would not join the euro, based on those tests, and now we are doing exceptionally well, with low inflation, low unemployment and more people in work. You can't beat it: keep taking the tablets.

Mr. Brown: I have to say to my hon. Friend that there are reasons why it is important to consider the euro: the first is a cut in transaction costs, which could be in the order of £1 billion; the second is the increased amount of trade that would take place within Europe and between Britain and other member states as a result; and the third is an increase in growth. But we have to get it right, which is why the five tests are important. In particular, we would need more flexible European and British economies and we would need sustainable convergence, which—with the large differential in interest rates—we clearly do not have at present.

Mr. John Wilkinson (Ruislip-Northwood) (Con): How can the Chancellor posit the idea of greater growth if the UK were to join the euro, given that growth in the eurozone is just over half the rate of growth in this country? Is it not a fact that the growth and stability pact has produced very little growth, and stability only in stagnation in the eurozone? How can that be the model to follow? We at least have a much better employment record, which is what counts to the British people.

Mr. Brown: I am glad that the hon. Gentleman acknowledges the great successes in employment under this Government. I hope that he will be able to tell his constituents about that when he fights a Labour candidate at the next general election—

Mr. John Bercow (Buckingham) (Con): He is retiring.

Mr. Brown: Ah, he is taking the wise option. In that case, he may be interested in our new deal. Some other hon. Members may also have to take advantage of it. The hon. Member for Ruislip-Northwood (Mr. Wilkinson) wants to leave the European Union: I ask him to look at the benefits we get from membership of the European Union. More than 50 per cent. of our trade is with Europe, and the single market opens up opportunities for British firms. If we were in the euro there would be a cut in transaction costs, and he must acknowledge that. If we could achieve the increased trade that I have mentioned, economic growth would increase, but the circumstances must be right for the UK. That is why the five tests that are disparaged by the Opposition are so important, and we must get them all right for Britain.

Keith Vaz (Leicester, East) (Lab): While I accept the importance of the five economic tests, does not the Chancellor believe it important that we should go out to the country campaigning on the benefits not only of the euro, which is Government policy, but also of the European Union? If we did that, we could dismiss many of the myths perpetrated by the Eurosceptics on the Opposition Benches.

Mr. Brown: I agree with my hon. Friend. The Conservative proposition is simply not to join the euro and not to accept the existing European constitution, but to renegotiate our membership of the European Union. As for the roadshows, there have been 150 events that the Treasury—*[Interruption.]* Well, I started it off with the first meeting, the Chief Secretary has done three, the Financial Secretary has done seven, the head of the European business unit—*[Interruption.]* We have a practice of devolution at the Treasury, so that people get on with the job. I should have thought that the Conservatives might now reconsider their position; theirs is the only party in the House of Commons that is not a member of the all-party committee looking at these issues. The Conservative party has chosen to isolate itself from that, just as it has isolated itself from the rest of Europe.

Mr. Mark Francois (Rayleigh) (Con): May I congratulate the Chancellor on his participation in the euro roadshow? I hope it has the same success as his participation in the north-east the other week.

In addition to meeting the five tests, if the UK were to join the euro we would, theoretically, have to comply with the marvellously named stability and growth pact, which as we have already heard from my hon. Friend the Member for Ruislip-Northwood (Mr. Wilkinson) neither ensures stability nor encourages growth. How could we do that when the Chancellor is running an excessive budget deficit, which last year, according to our own Office for National Statistics, reached as much as 3.2 per cent. of gross domestic product?

Mr. Brown: I welcome the hon. Gentleman to the Front Bench, but he really must make up his mind which position he is taking. He seems to be saying, on the one hand, that Britain is doing very well as an economy but on the other hand that we are not doing well. He really must make up his mind. As for the growth and stability pact, he knows that it is the UK that is making the recommendations for change in the pact and that this country's record on fiscal deficits and debt is better than that of America, better than Japan, better than Germany, better than France and better than the euro area. He should be congratulating us on the sustainable way in which we run our public finances.

David Taylor (North-West Leicestershire) (Lab/Co-op): Does the Chancellor think that the five economic tests are sufficiently flexible for the next leader of our party, and perhaps the next Prime Minister, to assess them at that point, to reject them as inappropriate for the conditions in which that succession might take place and then to consign them to the dustbin of political history in order to secure our economy and our political future?

Mr. Brown: My hon. Friend has a very specific view about the euro in principle. I have set out the advantages of being part of the euro and the difficulties that we found when we made the assessment. We shall come to the issue in the Budget next year when I report to the House. If we thought it right to pursue another assessment, we would make another assessment; if we think it is not right to do so, we will not. That is the position that has been agreed by the Government and I believe it commands wider support in the country than the position of the Conservatives, who would never join, and the position of the Liberals, who seem to want to join irrespective of what is happening.

Taxation

5. **Mr. Jonathan Djanogly** (Huntingdon) (Con): What assessment he has made of the influence of levels of taxation on the state of the economy. [197388]

The Financial Secretary to the Treasury (Mr. Stephen Timms): The level of taxation is one of a number of factors influencing the economy. The Government's approach balances finance to improve public services with fairness and sustainable growth, and our tax policies have been successful in delivering stability with strong growth and low inflation.

Mr. Djanogly: After 66 tax rises, equivalent to a 16.5p increase in the basic rate of income tax, together with a huge increase in public borrowing, when will the Government come clean and advise the British people by how much they will have to increase tax to bridge the growing black hole between their income and their spending plans?

Mr. Timms: The hon. Gentleman's figures are quite wrong. On the basis that he uses, there have been 200 tax cuts since 1997, as well. The fact is that there has been a remarkable transformation in the British economy since 1997. Between 1979 and 1997, the UK was the least stable of all the G7 countries except for Canada. Since 1997, we have been the most stable of all—bar none. That is a remarkable transformation and the best foundation for national prosperity and improving public services, and our tax policy has helped to deliver that remarkable improvement.

Mr. Stephen McCabe (Birmingham, Hall Green) (Lab): What kind of special alchemy does my hon. Friend think might be needed to maintain the economy if one were to deliver tax allowance increases for specific groups at a cost of about £7 billion, as I saw in one recent tax option paper, and simultaneously deflate the public economy by imposing £20 billion-worth of cuts?

Mr. Timms: My hon. Friend makes a telling point. The fact is, of course, that the Conservative party's sums simply do not add up. What is important for everybody in the UK is that we maintain the remarkable record of stability and growth that we have achieved since 1997.

Gregory Barker (Bexhill and Battle) (Con): The Governor of the Bank of England and his committee are now forecasting significantly lower growth next year than the Chancellor. What assessment has the Treasury made of those revised-downwards growth forecasts and what impact will that have on tax take? Will we have to raise taxes or are the Government proposing to cut spending?

Mr. Timms: I quote to the hon. Gentleman exactly what the Governor said. He said that over the past year:

> "The growth of domestic demand has moderated, and consumption growth has slowed from its earlier rapid pace. In contrast, investment spending has accelerated, and the committee judges that the recent softer patch will probably prove temporary".

On the latest figures, business investment is up by 5.9 per cent. in the second quarter of this year, the fifth consecutive quarter of expanding investment. The record is very, very good.

Dr. Brian Iddon (Bolton, South-East) (Lab): Is not taxation partly about investing in Britain's future, and nowhere more so than in the discovery of new products via investment in science, engineering and technology? Is that not what the Government are doing, and is that not good for the economy?

Mr. Timms: It is extremely good for the economy. We have a 10-year framework for science and innovation, and there have been improvements through the research and development tax credit, for which there has been a very large take-up already. But the key thing is that the stability that has been achieved since 1997 provides a sound basis for investments in innovation, in technology and right across the economy, and that is what puts us in such a good position.

Mr. Oliver Letwin (West Dorset) (Con): My hon. Friend the Member for Huntingdon (Mr. Djanogly) asked the Financial Secretary a question, which was, by how much will taxes have to rise if Labour is re-elected? Could he now answer that question?

Mr. Timms: Tax as a proportion of GDP today, of course, is significantly less than it was throughout the 1980s. Perhaps I can remind the right hon. Gentleman what he said in his speech to the Conservative party conference:

> "The sad truth is when we were in office, we made promises on tax we couldn't keep."

That is a mistake that we are not going to make.

Mr. Letwin: The Financial Secretary has given us a marvellous exposition of how to say nothing in a number of words. He must face the fact that all the respected international and national independent economic commentators—the International Monetary Fund, the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development, the Institute for Fiscal Studies, the Item Club, the National Institute of Economic and Social Research and the Centre for Economic and Business Research—are all saying that, given the black hole in the Chancellor's public finances and his spending plans, if Labour is re-elected, taxes will have to rise. Can the Financial Secretary tell us by how much?

Mr. Timms: I can tell the right hon. Gentleman that we remain on track to meet our strict fiscal rules. That is the basis on which the economy is being managed, and our forecasts will be updated at the time of the pre-Budget report, on the date that my right hon. Friend the Chancellor announced earlier.

International Finance Facility

6. **James Purnell** (Stalybridge and Hyde) (Lab): What recent discussions he has had with his G8 colleagues on using the international finance facility to meet the millennium development goals. [197389]

The Chancellor of the Exchequer (Mr. Gordon Brown): In recent days I have talked to Finance Ministers in Europe and America about our proposed international finance facility. I shall raise the matter at European and G20 meetings next week. Our aim is to secure progress on both debt relief and finance for development during our presidency of the G7 in 2005.

James Purnell: The non-governmental organisations are generally complimentary about the Government's record on aid, debt and trade, but there is an emerging worry about the European Union's attitude to the economic partnership agreements that it is negotiating. The NGOs worry that some of the issues that we have taken out of the Doha round, such as the Singapore issues, are being reintroduced by the back door. Does my right hon. Friend share that worry, and does he believe that we should address it in our presidency of the EU next year?

Mr. Brown: I think it is important, as our presidency of the EU will focus, as will Britain's G7 presidency, on getting an agreement with the World Trade Organisation, and we hope that will happen during the course of next year. That agreement would open up huge trading opportunities for many parts of the world, including Africa. We are also concerned—I think this is the gist of my hon. Friend's question as well—that African countries should have the capacity to benefit from an opening up of trade, and we will deal with the problems of the most vulnerable if trade is more open in the future. It is these two issues that our proposed international finance facility is able to address; in other words, if we are to make an impact on these problems, we will need substantially more resources.

Mr. Andy Reed (Loughborough) (Lab/Co-op): I know that my right hon. Friend the Chancellor has made great progress on the international finance facility, when one thinks that only 18 months ago no other country had signed up to the principle. On the basis of the 40 countries that have already said that they will support it, how much does he feel that he now has in the bag of the £100 billion that he expects? Will he set a timetable for reaching a final decision so that the international finance facility can be up and running and we will start to see some benefit from it?

Mr. Brown: I applaud my hon. Friend for the work that he has done in promoting these issues throughout the country. It is important to recognise not only that support is growing for the international finance facility as a proposal but that five countries in the past year have committed themselves to reaching 0.7 per cent. for development aid over the next few years. Substantial progress is now being made in discussions about multilateral debt relief as a result of pressure from people in this country such as the Churches, the non-governmental organisations and others. I believe that 2005 can be an important year when we will make a breakthrough. Many countries support the proposal. We also propose a pilot of the international finance facility with the vaccination and immunisation fund so that it can front-load its effort to save lives by making vaccination possible. I believe that progress is being made, but next year when so many people will be active—there will be a United Nations summit as well as G7 meetings—will be an important year for all of us.

Work Force Skills

7. **Lawrie Quinn** (Scarborough and Whitby) (Lab): If he will make a statement on the relationship between the level of skills in the work force and economic growth. [197390]

The Chancellor of the Exchequer (Mr. Gordon Brown): As investment in high standards and skills is central to the achievement of our aim of high and stable levels of growth, we have raised investment in schools from £2,500 per pupil to £5,500 by 2008. Apprenticeships have increased from 70,000 to 250,000, and the number of students in colleges and universities has increased by almost 1 million. Overall, investment in education has doubled since 1997.

Lawrie Quinn: Is my right hon. Friend aware of the Confederation of British Industry survey that was published at the conference earlier this week that showed that 98 per cent. of companies' human resources directors are calling for an increase in the provision of vocational education? However, only a quarter of business leaders say that their company is involved in the design and delivery of such training. If companies played a greater role in the creation of such courses, would not there be a beneficial return not only to the companies but to the wider economy? Is there not a gap that the Government want to bridge between the long-termism and optimism of HR directors and the short-termism of some financial directors?

Mr. Brown: My hon. Friend has taken a long-term interest in these matters, and he is right that we need to invest more. We also need a partnership involving employers, employees and Government so that, instead of being a nation in which 7 million people are without basic skills and instead of falling behind in some vital skills compared with other nations, we invest properly in the quantity and quality of education.

Apprenticeships, which were once almost dying, are now in the order of 200,000 and growing. We are prepared to invest more money in them. Equally, the employer training pilots, in which large numbers of employers are now involved, are working well and ripe for expansion. That can be done only if the nation has a wholehearted commitment to investing in training and education. I wish that there was an all-party commitment to it and that the Conservatives would not go about trying to cut the education and training budget as they propose.

Mr. Howard Flight (Arundel and South Downs) (Con): Does the Chancellor agree that this country has much to learn from Germany and Switzerland in getting the balance right between skills training relating to employment and pure academic higher education? In recent years, as he is already saying, surely we have not had enough skills training.

Mr. Brown: The hon. Gentleman is right that we have to learn from successful examples of where training works better. Germany is indeed one of the countries where, historically, industrial training and now training involving the workplace and universities and colleges works well.

I have to tell the hon. Gentleman—perhaps with the freedom that he now has on the Back Benches, he can pursue this—that we cannot increase skills training without spending a higher share of our national resources on education. That is what Germany and Switzerland do. That is what even some developing countries are now doing. Unfortunately, the ex-shadow Chief Secretary believes that we should cut education and training expenditure. That is not the right way forward for Britain.

Mr. Barry Sheerman (Huddersfield) (Lab/Co-op): Does my right hon. Friend share my frustration that there is still a great productivity gap between us and some of our leading competitors and that, surprisingly, it is more apparent in service industries, rather than manufacturing industries? Is it not about time that he spoke to the leaders of the CBI and other industrial leaders to get them to support some real innovation in skills training and 14 to 19 reform, which is represented by the new Tomlinson report?

Mr. Brown: My hon. Friend, who takes a big interest in these matters, is absolutely right. The productivity gap between ourselves and, for example, the United States is greater in retail than in some sectors of manufacturing. In the long term, we must invest more in the training of workers in the service industries, as he suggests. It is interesting that a number of very large companies that have not been involved in training, either through apprenticeships or other means, are now involving themselves, which is indeed the way forward. I believe that a partnership involving management, work forces and the Government, each accepting the responsibility for the future, is the only way forward for a country that will compete not just against the rest of Europe and America, but increasingly against China, India and Asia. We need to be the highest skilled nation, which is what such investment and resources can achieve.

Miss Anne McIntosh (Vale of York) (Con): Why are so many graduates unable to find employment when they leave university, while the country is short of joiners, plumbers and electricians?

Mr. Brown: First, graduate unemployment is very much lower now than it was several years ago, as the hon. Lady would be the first to acknowledge. Secondly, there has been a long-term problem in the industrial training that is available for the very trades that she is talking about. We are trying to rectify that using the sector skills councils and by involving employers, but people must be prepared to spend and invest in training and education. Her cause cannot be served by a Conservative policy of cutting education and training expenditure.

David Cairns (Greenock and Inverclyde) (Lab): In Inverclyde, there are individuals who began their working lives in the shipyards and heavy industry, moved on to work in the electronic manufacturing sector and now provide high-level IT support throughout northern Europe. Does that not demonstrate, first, that Inverclyde is an excellent place for inward investment and, secondly, the importance of investing in people's skills, not just at the beginning but throughout the entirety of their working lives?

Mr. Brown: My hon. Friend is right, and the growth in employment in Inverclyde—an area that, historically, had been entirely dependent on shipbuilding and other heavy industries—in recent years is not only something that he has played a part in contributing to, but something that is bringing jobs and opportunities to people who thought 10 or 20 years ago that there would be no work for them. But we must have recurrent and lifelong training available, so that adults can choose a second career and, in some cases, a third and fourth career if it becomes absolutely necessary. That is why the employer training pilots, which unfortunately were not supported by the Opposition, are making such a big impact, which is why employers are now saying that the policy should apply nationally. Again, that demands resources, and we must make a choice: the nation's long-term priorities require us to invest in education and training.

International Development

9. **Sir Nicholas Winterton** (Macclesfield) (Con): What recent discussions he has had with Cabinet colleagues regarding levels of public spending on international development in 2004–05. [197392]

The Chancellor of the Exchequer (Mr. Gordon Brown): Following discussions with Cabinet colleagues, I announced in the spending review that total UK official development assistance will increase from £4 billion this year to almost £6.5 billion by 2007–08, and ODA as a proportion of national income will increase from 0.34 to 0.47 per cent. in 2007–08

Sir Nicholas Winterton: Members on both sides of the House recognise the Chancellor of the Exchequer's commitment to international development, international aid and, ultimately, to achieving the United Nations target of spending 0.7 per cent. of national wealth on development aid, but does he accept that the Department for International Development spends aid very much more effectively in the poorest and most needy countries than does the European Union, which often concentrates on political objectives in neighbouring countries? Will he therefore ensure that a greater percentage of our aid is bilateral and decided by this country and given to the poorest and most needy nations?

Mr. Brown: We have of course increased bilateral aid and will continue to do so. However, multilateral aid has an important role, whether that is when nations come together through the World Bank, the International Monetary Fund, the African Development Bank or the European Union's aid programmes. We should not reject the idea that the European Union should do work in this area, but ensure that the European aid programme is reformed. I hope that the hon. Gentleman and I share a common objective on that. We have made proposals for the reform of the budget and we have a new Commission, so I hope that we can achieve such reform. I would hope that that would especially benefit the countries about which he is most interested: the countries of the British Commonwealth in which 70 million children still do not have schooling. We could make a huge impact on that situation in the next few years.

Mr. Win Griffiths (Bridgend) (Lab): When my right hon. Friend is at meetings with the G8 or other Chancellors in the European Union, will he ensure that a lot of the spending will be focused on dealing with the problem of HIV/AIDS? Unless we can stop that scourge, teachers and other professionals will not be available to ensure that our millennium goal of making sure that primary education is accessible to all children can be achieved.

Mr. Brown: My hon. Friend takes a huge interest in such matters. There are 40 million people who live with HIV/AIDS and 20 million people have died of AIDS. In sub-Saharan Africa, as he knows, 25 million people are living with AIDS and 3 million children have AIDS. That tragedy can be dealt with. Of the £1.5 billion that the UK will spend on tackling HIV/AIDS over the next three years, at least £50 million will be dedicated to helping children who have been made vulnerable by what has happened to their parents, and that will be spent especially in Africa. I met the head of the Global Fund to Fight AIDS, Tuberculosis and Malaria only a few days ago. He has a programme that would enable him to spend substantially more to deal with the problem, but the issue is the resources that are available to him for what is acknowledged as an effective programme. That is why we need measures such as the international finance facility.

Sir Patrick Cormack (South Staffordshire) (Con): Is the Chancellor confident that sufficient contingency plans are in place so that when the odious, tyrannical Mugabe regime comes to an end, there will be proper aid to put that country back on its feet?

Mr. Brown: It is a common cause among the parties that, if aid goes directly to organisations in civil society that deal with problems, and thus sometimes bypasses Governments, it is to the benefit of people who were previously denied bilateral aid given between Governments. Civil organisations in Africa are increasingly receiving help directly from the World Bank or Governments, and I think that that will continue. We provide help to Zimbabwe where there is famine and disease, but the unfortunate thing is that its Government are not doing what they should, which is why change is needed in that country.

Chris McCafferty (Calder Valley) (Lab): My right hon. Friend will be aware of the importance of access to sexual and reproductive health education and services to achieving the millennium development goals and helping people out of poverty. Will he assure the House that, when he discusses financial considerations for overseas development, and especially the millennium development goals, he will examine carefully the proportion of money that he is giving to fund sexual and reproductive health services abroad?

Mr. Brown: I am grateful to my hon. Friend, who has taken an interest in these matters. The International Development Secretary has been doing a great deal of work on the matter and I talked to him about it only a few days ago. Much more of our increased aid budget is being spent on health generally and the specific services about which she talks.

Venture Capital

10. **Mr. David Kidney** (Stafford) (Lab): What steps the Treasury takes to ensure that there is adequate access to venture capital in all regions. [197393]

The Economic Secretary to the Treasury (John Healey): The UK has one of the largest venture capital markets in Europe, but that national strength does not always mean that enterprises in all regions can access the finance that they need, especially in small amounts. We have therefore introduced a number of programmes, including nine regional venture capital funds, to ensure that firms in every region can get the investment capital that they need to start up and grow.

Mr. Kidney: My worries are graduate retention in my Stafford constituency and the availability of venture capital for new business start-ups and the moving up of successful businesses. Does my right hon. Friend agree that the Treasury's support for regional venture capital has stimulated the development of sub-regional venture capital funds, such as North Staffordshire Risk Capital Fund plc, which is ably chaired by David Gage? Does the Treasury welcome that development, and will it support that in the future?

John Healey: It certainly is. I congratulate my hon. Friend on the interest that he takes in such matters and in the operation of the north Staffordshire fund.

My hon. Friend is right. The introduction of the nine regional venture capital funds has also spawned, with some public money, significant sums of private investment. That is partly why 300,000 new businesses have come into existence in our economy since 1997. I hope that, as we prepare for next week's national enterprise week—the first to encourage entrepreneurial activity—we will have support from hon. Members on both sides of the House for the progress that Britain's small businesses are making under a Labour Government.

Adam Price (East Carmarthen and Dinefwr) (PC): Notwithstanding the success of the regional venture capital funds in England, does the Economic Secretary accept that there is still an imbalance between the supply of venture capital and other private sector investment capital vis-à-vis the south-east of England and the rest of the country? Will the Treasury consider other measures, such as tax incentives for venture capital companies in other parts of the United Kingdom?

John Healey: On the contrary, there is a good balance in respect of the public money that is used to prime the investment of private sector money. A couple of weeks ago, I was with the chairman of the Welsh Development

Agency, who told me about the progress that is being made in Wales, not just in setting up regional venture capital funds, but in using the tax reliefs available under the enterprise investment scheme and the venture capital funds. Public money is leveraging in billions of pounds of private sector investment to support Britain's small businesses so that they start up and grow.

Mr. George Mudie (Leeds, East) (Lab): The Treasury Committee heard as recently as Tuesday this week that, although the regional fund is working, 47 per cent. of the investment still goes into London and the south-east. Only something like 8 per cent. goes to Yorkshire. Will the Minister consider meeting the banks and investment houses to persuade them, by one method or another, to become more proactive in the regions, where there are great projects but insufficient interest from the finance houses?

John Healey: My hon. Friend gives distinguished service on the Treasury Committee and puts his finger on one of the long-standing problems. Investment capital has generally been available to firms typically in the south-east and to those that want to make larger investments. Those are the equity gaps that we have tried to fill with our regional venture capital funds. He will know, because he takes a close interest in Yorkshire, that the fund there has been in existence for nearly two years with a total value of £25 million. Although it is still getting up and running, it is already making investments in Yorkshire-based small businesses.

My hon. Friend invites me to meet a delegation. I shall meet any group, whether it invests nationally in the south-east or concentrates on stronger investment in the Yorkshire region.

Tax Credits

11. **Norman Lamb** (North Norfolk) (LD): If he will make a statement on the recovery of overpayment of tax credits. [197394]

The Paymaster General (Dawn Primarolo): Overpayments of tax credits are collected from continuing payments of tax credits wherever possible. There are limits on the amounts by which current payments can be reduced, depending on the claimant's circumstances. If there are no continuing payments, the money is collected direct and payments can be made over a 12-month period.

Norman Lamb: I am sure that the Paymaster-General accepts that the recovery of overpayments can seriously affect the finances of low-income families, yet all attempts to discover the scale of the chaos have been stonewalled. It affects 455,000 families. The Auditor-General concluded that the scale of the errors is unacceptably high, which led him to qualify his audit opinion. Will she accept his demand to provide full information far earlier than July next year, which is her current plan, and preferably before the next general election.

Dawn Primarolo: The hon. Gentleman raises three points. First, the final figures for overpayments in the system will be produced when we have completed the process. They are still based on the estimated income of those who will not submit their figures until January. Those figures will be available from National Statistics in spring 2005, when there has been a complete cycle of the tax credits.

The hon. Gentleman's second point was about the National Audit Office's comments on a system failure. As he knows, they appear in the NAO report at paragraphs 2.10 and 2.11, which refer specifically to system error that occurred in the early period of the tax credits. The Chairman of the Public Accounts Committee was notified and sums paid to some 373,000 households were written off.

The hon. Gentleman's third point—

Mr. Speaker: Order. There should not be a third point.

Mr. Bill Tynan (Hamilton, South) (Lab): Tax credits have been an unqualified success for the Government and for the people in my constituency who have benefited. However, I ask the Paymaster General to examine the manner in which deductions to recover overpayments of tax credits are made from people's income, which—in a few cases—is causing considerable problems in my constituency. If that is done compassionately and considerately, the system will be very good indeed.

Dawn Primarolo: Mr. Speaker, whenever an hon. Member puts more than one question to me, I shall reply to only one. For all this time, I had not appreciated that I was allowed to choose which one.

My hon. Friend's point is important. He acknowledged that few families are affected by overpayment, but for those few we need to ensure that the Inland Revenue deals with their inquiries and settles their cases as quickly as possible to minimise disruption to the family. I have raised the matter with the Inland Revenue and I assure him that I shall deal with it as quickly as I can.

Inheritance Tax

12. **Mr. Michael Jack** (Fylde) (Con): If he will make a statement on legitimate ways available to avoid paying inheritance tax. [197395]

The Financial Secretary to the Treasury (Mr. Stephen Timms): No inheritance tax is paid on the first £263,000 of any estate. There is a range of additional exemptions—for example, to help people to make gifts to charity or leave assets to their spouse. We have taken steps to prevent avoidance of inheritance tax through artificial schemes that are designed to get around the rules.

Mr. Jack: Is the Financial Secretary entirely comfortable with the structure and configuration of a tax if those with wealth can buy advice to avoid it, but those with houses affected by house price inflation worry about the amount that they can leave to their loved ones? Has not the time come to re-examine the structure of inheritance tax—to raise the starting point and thereafter to have a low marginal rate but with no exceptions made on amounts that are subject to the tax?

Mr. Timms: I am satisfied with our approach. We had to take steps to close several avoidance schemes and I believe that that was the right thing to do. A big change in the threshold or reduction in the rate would lead to cuts in public services. I was struck by the comment made by the hon. Member for Buckingham (Mr. Bercow), who is reported in an interview published last week as saying:

> "I certainly do not meet many people who tell me that their main priority is a cut in inheritance tax."

I think that he is right—it is not a high priority for most people. Most people want continuing investment in public services and, as it stands, inheritance tax is making an important contribution to that.

Rob Marris (Wolverhampton, South-West) (Lab): I urge my hon. Friend to hold fast to that answer. The right hon. Member for Fylde (Mr. Jack) talked about house price inflation affecting people's liability for inheritance tax, but for the vast majority of those people that is wholly unearned income—merely the result of inflation. I urge the Government to hold fast on inheritance tax.

Mr. Timms: I agree with my hon. Friend. Only about 32,000 estates—5 per cent. of the total and thus a very small proportion—are likely to pay inheritance tax this year. I think that the balance on inheritance tax is about right.

Interest Rates

13. **Mr. Kelvin Hopkins** (Luton, North) (Lab): Whether the UK will retain independent control of domestic interest rates in the event of the European constitutional treaty being adopted. [197396]

The Chief Secretary to the Treasury (Mr. Paul Boateng): The adoption of the European constitutional treaty would not affect the UK's capacity to retain independent control of domestic interest rates.

Mr. Hopkins: The enormous rise in the parity of the euro relative to the dollar has put the eurozone economies in serious danger of grave recession. I congratulate my right hon. Friend on keeping us out of the euro at least for the time being, so we do not face that danger. Does he agree that keeping economic and monetary union provisions separate from the constitutional treaty would have been more sensible and made it clear that signing up to the treaty does not mean signing up to the euro?

Mr. Boateng: My hon. Friend has a particular position, both on the euro and on the constitutional treaty. He knows a great deal about the treaty, and he will appreciate that, by our amendments to articles I.11 and I.14, we secured significant changes in the Convention, which made it clear that it is the responsibility of member states to co-ordinate economic policy. We retained our control in these areas while maintaining our position at the heart of Europe. That position would be sacrificed if Opposition Members were ever to have their way in relation to the treaty.

Business of the House

12.30 pm

Mr. Oliver Heald (North-East Hertfordshire) (Con): Will the Deputy Leader of the House please give us the business for next week?

The Deputy Leader of the House of Commons (Mr. Phil Woolas): As you are aware, Mr. Speaker, my right hon. Friend the Leader of the House is on Government business in New Zealand. He has asked me to pass on his apologies to the House for his absence today.

The business for next week will be as follows:

MONDAY 15 NOVEMBER—Consideration of Lords amendments to the Armed Forces (Pensions and Compensation) Bill, followed by a motion to approve a ways and means resolution on the Pensions Bill, followed by a debate on Thames Gateway on a motion for the Adjournment of the House.

TUESDAY 16 NOVEMBER—Consideration of Lords amendments to the Pensions Bill, followed by procedure and associated motions relating to the Hunting Bill, followed by consideration of Lords amendments on the Hunting Bill, followed by, if necessary, consideration of Lords amendments.

WEDNESDAY 17 NOVEMBER—Consideration of Lords amendments to the Civil Contingencies Bill, followed by consideration of Lords amendments.

THURSDAY 18 NOVEMBER—Consideration of Lords amendments.

The House will be prorogued when Royal Assent to all Acts has been signified.

The House may like to be reminded that my right hon. Friend the Chancellor of the Exchequer announced this morning that the pre-Budget report will be on Thursday 2 December.

Mr. Heald: I thank the Deputy Leader of the House for the business. Will he join me in welcoming the Sikh community to Westminster today? Has he seen early-day motion 1890, which commemorates the thousands of victims of the anti-Sikh pogroms of November 1984, acknowledges progress made since then—the current Prime Minister of India is a Sikh—and calls for an inquiry into what happened at that time?

[That this House remembers with sadness the 20th anniversary of the November 1984 anti-Sikh pogroms when thousands of innocent Sikhs were killed or injured across India; notes with pleasure the many positive changes that have since taken place in India where the current Prime Minister is a Sikh; and expresses the hope that the Government of India will continue to pursue the path of reconciliation in relation to those events by instituting an inquiry into them that can bring closure to the victims and relatives of those who suffered at that time.]

Would it be possible to have a debate about that in the short amount of time remaining before prorogation?

Is the hon. Gentleman able to give any further news about how the full list of Bills and draft Bills which the Government expect to introduce in the next Session will be published at the time of the Queen's Speech?

Although we welcomed the enlargement of the European Union on 1 May, the number of workers coming to the United Kingdom from the new EU countries is far higher than expected. The Home Secretary promised to review the Government's open-door policy if that happened. When can we expect a statement from the Home Secretary with his response?

Where is the draft Civil Service Bill?

Can we have a statement from the Deputy Prime Minister accepting the verdict of the north-east referendum and committing the Government to abolition of the unelected regional assemblies?Were not the Prime Minister's remarks yesterday, when he immediately backed those unpopular bodies, saying that they were "perfectly good", a complete denial of democracy? Was that not in sharp contrast with his attitude to the future of the Scottish regiments, when he refused to give an answer and left them dangling in the wind? Is that not a disgraceful way to treat the Black Watch when they are fighting for their country? Is it right that their homecoming is to be "Thank you and goodbye to the regiment"? Can we have an urgent statement on their future?

Finally, as we remember those who gave their lives for us, can we have an urgent statement about one group of veterans in particular—those who sailed in the Russian convoys and deserve a separate Arctic campaign medal? Three hundred and sixty hon. Members in all parts of the House—a majority—support the campaign. Can we have a positive response from the Government today?

Mr. Woolas: I confirm that I have read early-day motion 1890 and support the hon. Gentleman's remarks about the Sikh community. The hon. Gentleman will understand that we cannot debate the matter before the end of the Session, because the business has been allocated for the three or four remaining days.

On the publication of the list of Bills and draft Bills, I confirm that, as in the past, we will place the list in the Library to ensure that as much information as possible is available to the House. On draft Bills, as much information as possible is being made available to the Liaison Committee to allow discussions to take place.

On the Civil Service Bill, my right hon. Friend the Leader of the House has announced that the consultation document, which includes a draft Bill, will be published by the end of the Session. I cannot confirm the exact publication date, so the shadow Leader of the House must wait for a few more days.

Turning to the political points made by the shadow Leader of the House, it is simply scaremongering to say that people from the EU accession countries will flood this country. My right hon. Friend the Home Secretary has made statements on the matter, and I shall give the House some facts. Some 45 per cent. of the 90,000 people who have registered under the scheme were already in the country—the scheme has brought out into the open and made legal what was perhaps illegal.

Our economy requires those people, some of whom, as the head of the British Hospitality Association said yesterday, work in hospitality. Only 16 of those 90,000 people have successfully applied for income-related benefits, and only 14 of them have been given a council house. As my right hon. Friend the Home Secretary pointed out, the people on the registered

[Mr. Woolas]

scheme have already contributed £20 million to this country in income tax and national insurance and £120 million of output to the economy. My right hon. Friend the Home Secretary has a good record on that matter.

It is not true, as some newspapers stated this morning, that the Government claimed that only 13,000 people would come into the country under the scheme. That estimate came from University College London, and it was a net figure including both immigration and emigration. The scaremongers who claimed that more than 1 million people would flood into the country were absolutely wrong, and the intent behind their scaremongering has been exposed.

On the north-east regional assembly, I recall the Deputy Prime Minister coming to this House and making a statement. *[Interruption.]* I think that Conservative Members want to hear more from the Deputy Prime Minister, which would be good. The Deputy Prime Minister could then repeat the figures on the enormous investment that is taking place through the regional development agencies, which were set up by a Conservative Government and which Conservative Members are happy to criticise.

It was interesting to see the shadow Leader of the House make up another policy on the hoof. The Conservative party has revealed that it would abolish the regional assemblies. Conservative Members criticise us for holding a referendum to enhance democracy, but they want to take away the only vestige of democracy that holds the quangos to account in the regions.

The Prime Minister has answered the question on Scottish regiments and the Black Watch. The decision must be made in the proper way. The Army and the armed forces will consider the various options to ensure that the extra money that is being provided for the defence of our country is spent in the most appropriate way. A decision will be taken shortly.

On the Arctic convoys, I think that the hon. Gentleman made a point on behalf of the whole House. The Prime Minister responded to that in yesterday's Prime Minister's Question Time in as positive a way as was possible, given the procedures that he has to follow.

To finish on a non-partisan point, today is of course Remembrance day, and I join the hon. Gentleman in his remarks on the tributes that have rightly been paid all over the country.

Mr. Michael Connarty (Falkirk, East) (Lab): Will the Government find time to have a serious debate on who regulates the regulators? Ofcom is about to draw up plans to create unfair conditions for a publicly owned industry which will cause the universal service obligation to be threatened by cherry-picking from other people. Ofgem has created a situation whereby gas prices have risen by 70 per cent., with industries in this country paying 34p a therm and the same suppliers selling gas to the continent at 25p a therm. We face the prospect of the Health and Safety Executive interpreting EU regulations on Soveso 2 in terms of land use planning in such a way as to destroy the development potential of much of the UK and to impinge on many industries in the manufacturing sector. When will we look at who regulates the regulator in order to get regulation to work for the UK, not against it?

Mr. Woolas: My hon. Friend makes an important and valid point. The answer is that we regulate the regulators, which are set up by statute and are obliged to report not only to the Government but to the House. I am sure that my hon. Friend will accept that there is no time for a debate on the matter before the end of the Session, which is only three or four days away.

Mr. Paul Tyler (North Cornwall) (LD): The Deputy Leader of the House will be aware that my right hon. Friend the Member for Ross, Skye and Inverness, West (Mr. Kennedy) has asked the Prime Minister to make a statement on his return from Washington about the outcome of his talks with President Bush. That is extremely important, especially in view of the renewed momentum that we all hope that there must be in terms of the middle east peace process, to which the Leader of House made explicit reference in answer to me last week.

In the light of the death of President Arafat this morning, in the aftermath of which there could be great instability in the middle east until a new leadership is in place, I hope that the Deputy Leader of the House can confirm whether the Prime Minister is prepared to make a statement and to answer questions on these issues early next week.

The Minister in the other place with responsibility for the Gambling Bill said today that, in order to understand the changes that the Government intend to make in response to the concerns of Members of this House, it is important to take account of the tax regime for gambling. That implies a change to that regime. Will the Chancellor of the Exchequer make an urgent statement next week on any such changes that might be relevant to the Bill? Members of the Standing Committee will need to know about that before they can further consider it.

As the business statement indicates, for the next few weeks we will be in the period of parliamentary ping-pong between the Commons and the Lords. I am sure that the Leader of the House and the Deputy Leader of the House have read with care the report by the House of Lords Select Committee on the Constitution, which is chaired by the noble Lord Norton of Louth, entitled "Parliament and the Legislative Process". Can the Deputy Leader of the House tell us when the Government will make a statement on the extremely important proposals in that report, which shows that there are mechanisms for dealing with precisely the problems that we now face in managing the relationship between the two Houses and in dealing with the legislative process sensibly and intelligently?

Mr. Woolas: I shall deal with the last point first, if I may. The report that has come from the other place is very important, as the membership of that Committee has perhaps the greatest expertise that is available to us. I would not want to cross Baroness Gould of Potternewton on procedures in either House—

Chris Bryant (Rhondda) (Lab): Or on anything.

Mr. Woolas: My hon. Friend has pinched my line. Lord Holme, despite his political affiliations—some would say because of them—is very knowledgeable on these processes and procedures, and I acknowledge his expertise. The report is important, and the Government response to it will be taken seriously. It is in line with a growing consensus in this House and the other place that the provision of draft Bills, carry-over and pre-legislative scrutiny is slowly and surely working to the benefit of us all. This report takes that forward, so the response will be serious, and I look forward to further debates on it.

On the gambling tax, I understand the point that the hon. Gentleman is making—as the House will know, the Standing Committee is currently considering the Bill, and Members have requested information. I shall ensure that my right hon. Friend the Chancellor is aware of the point that has just been made.

On the question of the Prime Minister's trip to Washington, obviously, it comes at an important time. I was pleased at the hon. Gentleman's support for the Prime Minister's efforts to ensure that the middle east peace process, and the situation in Palestine and Israel, is at the top of the world affairs agenda, and I acknowledge his welcome of the Prime Minister's efforts to push the President in that direction.

The hon. Gentleman asked particularly about the situation [illegible] Palestine. It is only right that I should add to the comments made by the Prime Minister to express deep sympathy and condolences to the Palestinian people on the death of Yasser Arafat. As the Prime Minister has made clear, the United Kingdom Government will continue to strive to achieve the commitment to a viable Palestinian state alongside a secure state of Israel. The hon. Gentleman asked specifically whether the Prime Minister would be making a statement—I am not able to answer that. Next week is very crowded in terms of business, as he is aware. It is fair to say that the Prime Minister has a strong record of coming to the House after international summits, and I am sure that he will take the earliest opportunity to inform the House of progress.

Mrs. Lorna Fitzsimons (Rochdale) (Lab): I wonder whether my hon. Friend will find time in the packed agenda between now and prorogation to deal with the sub-post office closures happening in his constituency and mine, with specific reference to the £300 million that the Government allocated, in the urban sub-post offices revitalisation programme, for post offices that would otherwise be shut because they were economically unviable in very deprived urban areas such as Rochdale and Oldham. Will he share my concern at the way the Post Office is dealing in a very cavalier manner with sub-post office closures, when the clear intent of the Government and the whole House, in voting for that legislation, was that the viability of sub-post offices in the most deprived urban areas should be safeguarded? Will he share my concern that the Post Office seems to be cavalier about the intent of the House?

Mr. Woolas: Certainly, I thank my hon. Friend for raising that point, which is extremely helpful in the circumstances. I have seen the early-day motion that she and other Members have signed relating to post offices in north Manchester and in her constituency. It is the fourth early-day motion tabled about post offices in the past two weeks in which Members have raised specific concerns. The other side of the coin, as has been acknowledged, is that the Government have provided huge amounts of money to ensure that the Post Office can get through the transitional phase that it is undergoing at the moment. In those consultations, the difficulty, as has been acknowledged in debates in the House, is that post offices are often private small businesses and must enter into arrangements with the Post Office, particularly if they are loss-making, which creates a difficult set of circumstances. I will pass on her comments to the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry.

Mr. John Taylor (Solihull) (Con): With Land Rover negotiating quality control, troubles at Jaguar and worries at Rover, can we have a debate in Government time, replied to by the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry, on the subject of the motor industry in the west midlands? And might I tell the hon. Gentleman that this is the second time of asking?

Mr. Woolas: As I hope the hon. Gentleman knows, I am a big fan of his. Having read his book, in which he campaigns for the motor industry, I can say that in raising these issues he is at least consistent.

The future of the motor industry is, of course, important to us all. Although there will be no time for a debate during this Session, manufacturing is a priority for the Government. It is important to note from last year's figures that although manufacturing employment has fallen—there have been worrying job losses in that sector—output continues to rise, as do productivity, exports and research and development. Despite the problems, the overall picture is very good.

Mr. John Lyons (Strathkelvin and Bearsden) (Lab): May I draw attention to early-day motion 1898?

[That this House notes that the new formula for Child Support Agency (CSA) maintenance calculations has now been in place since April 2003, which is more than enough time to stabilise the system; considers that existing cases have experienced a long and avoidable delay under the old rules; and calls upon the Minister to instruct the CSA to take the necessary steps to bring in the new, simplified and fairer method of assessment for all cases with immediate effect.]

The motion is entitled "Fair and equal treatment for all CSA non-resident parents".

I know that I speak for many Members when I point out that, a year and a half after the introduction of a simplified system for child support payments, we are still struggling. Many of our constituents still tell us of serious problems, all of which affect children and parents and, I am sure, cause considerable distress. Will my hon. Friend be able to find time for a debate?

Mr. Woolas: I should mention that my hon. Friend has been campaigning on this issue. The motion is certainly important. The Child Support Agency continues to work with EDS, the computer supplier, to resolve the problems with the new IT system. As our casework demonstrates, we encounter such problems almost daily. Although, as my hon. Friend has acknowledged, there have been improvements, the system is still far from perfect.

[Mr. Woolas]

The Government are keen for those who are still on the old scheme to benefit from the reforms as soon as possible. We want our constituents to move to the new system because it is better, simpler and fairer—and, as my hon. Friend says, at the end of the day it is the children whom we are trying to help.

Mr. Nigel Dodds (Belfast, North) (DUP): There has rightly been much discussion in the House and elsewhere about the future of the Scottish regiments, but the Government must be aware of the great concern in Northern Ireland about the future of the home battalions of The Royal Irish Regiment, which has given valiant and courageous service for many years in difficult and challenging circumstances. Will the Deputy Leader of the House commit himself to an early debate on this important issue in Government time?

Mr. Woolas: My right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Defence takes the issue extremely seriously. We shall have a number of opportunities for defence debates during the coming Session, and I am sure that the hon. Gentleman will want to contribute.

Julie Morgan (Cardiff, North) (Lab): When will the long-awaited public health White Paper eventually be published, and when can we debate it? I am sure my hon. Friend is aware of yesterday's decision by the Scottish Executive to ban smoking in all enclosed public places, which I warmly welcome. The all-party group on smoking and health has visited Ireland and seen the success of the policy there, and Wales voted for a ban two years ago. Will my hon. Friend ask our right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Health to be bold and safeguard the health of all employees, wherever they may work—in offices, in restaurants or in bars?

Mr. Woolas: They did warn me that controversy might arise. The answer to my hon. Friend's question is no, but the Government are committed to publishing a White Paper as soon as possible—any day now.

My hon. Friend has raised this issue persistently. I have spoken to my right hon. Friend the Leader of the House about her views on smoking in public places, and he is of course aware of the Scottish decision. The House will want to hear the views of the Welsh Assembly, and will await the White Paper's publication with interest.

Sir Patrick Cormack (South Staffordshire) (Con): Is the Leader of the House in New Zealand in his capacity as Leader of the House or in his capacity as Secretary of State for Wales? If it is the former, will he report to the House on whatever he has discovered? If it is the latter, will he try to plan his diary better in future so as not to miss Thursdays?

Mr. Woolas: In fact, we get very good value for money from my right hon. Friend. He has visited Australia in his capacity as Secretary of State for Wales, where he championed the Welsh economy and inward investment. That followed a successful trip to China, as a direct result of which jobs have been brought to Wales. He is currently in New Zealand at the invitation of its Prime Minister, and is visiting the Parliament there. As a member of the Commonwealth Parliamentary Association, the hon. Gentleman will surely acknowledge the desirability to the House of those links.

As for the timing, my right hon. Friend—as I said—asked me to pass on his apologies. This window of opportunity before the final week of the Session was convenient. As I am sure the hon. Gentleman will acknowledge, my right hon. Friend has not missed business questions in two years.

Mr. Gordon Prentice (Pendle) (Lab): If we vote down the Lords amendments to the Hunting Bill on Tuesday, what exactly will be the procedure for invoking the Parliament Act?

Mr. Woolas: The procedure for invoking the Parliament Act is a matter for the House. I have announced the time that is available, and I am confident that there will be enough—although it takes only 30 seconds for my hon. Friend to say no, which I suspect will be his response. I can confirm that there will be a free vote for all members of the parliamentary Labour party, in line with our manifesto commitment.

The point about the Parliament Act—this is of course something of which you are fully aware, Mr. Speaker—is that its invocation is a process rather than a decision. We should see Tuesday's debate in that light.

Pete Wishart (North Tayside) (SNP): We have just learned from a No. 10 briefing that the Prime Minister has no intention of raising the redeployment of The Black Watch when he meets President Bush later today. Does the Deputy Leader of the House not find that extraordinary, given that the Black Watch have provided the president with international cover and credibility during the past few weeks? Perhaps the hon. Gentleman could gently suggest that it might be in the Prime Minister's interests to raise the issue—and, most important, seek a reassurance that no further such deployments will take place.

Mr. Woolas: I understand the hon. Gentleman's point, but the Prime Minister cannot involve the detail of military decisions in conversations of this nature. It would be wholly wrong of him to play politics with our armed forces, which is effectively what he would be doing.

I prefer to listen to members of the Black Watch who are currently in Iraq. They have made clear in media interviews that they would prefer politicians of all political colours not to hamper them in their work by commenting on their involvement. They would rather we gave them our backing, and did all that we can to support them. To play political football with the Black Watch, as I think the hon. Gentleman is—

Pete Wishart: No.

Mr. Woolas: There is an honest disagreement here. I think that that is what the hon. Gentleman is doing.

Mr. Tony McWalter (Hemel Hempstead) (Lab/Co-op): At the risk of putting my hon. Friend off, may I congratulate him on the lucidity and well informed character of what he has been saying today?

My hon. Friend will know that the Chancellor of the Exchequer has recently mentioned several times outside the House the importance of the money that he has designated for science, and how vital science is to the Government's strategy. He will also know that the Chancellor has not actually made a statement in the House to that effect. I am particularly concerned, because the Science and Technology Committee has said that it is vital that effective investment be made in engineering and science in terms of the capacity of developing countries, and many of us want to query the Chancellor's intentions in this regard. Will my hon. Friend direct the Chancellor to come to the House to deal with this very important issue?

Mr. Woolas: I feared that my hon. Friend was going to ask me about political philosophy but he has shifted to engineering and science, a very wise move. I expect the pre-Budget report and the spring Budget to continue what is a very strong track record on science investment. There is all-party agreement on science's importance to this country, but not on the provision of money for it. For example, as I discovered in preparation for today, one consequence of following the advice of the leader of the Liberal Democrats—his policy is to abolish the Department of Trade and Industry—would be the abolition of £2.4 billion-worth of investment in science; not a popular policy, I would have thought, in his constituency.

Alistair Burt (North-East Bedfordshire) (Con): Before the excellent Minister for Work, the right hon. Member for Liverpool, Wavertree (Jane Kennedy), makes her decision on the implementation of the temporary working at height directive, will the Deputy Leader of the House arrange for an urgent debate so the House can influence her to exempt those who are already qualified to make judgments about safety in the outdoor adventure industry, thus avoiding the embarrassment of UK mountaineering safety standards being accepted by climbers throughout the world as the gold standard while, seemingly, the only people not sharing that view being the Health and Safety Executive and, potentially, the British Government?

Mr. Woolas: The hon. Gentleman has raised this issue before in an Adjournment debate, and I wrote to the Minister responsible for such matters outlining his views. I shall not comment on the details of the temporary working at height directive because I do not know what they are.

Mike Gapes (Ilford, South) (Lab/Co-op): My hon. Friend will recall that on 3 November, he responded to the debate on Members' allowances, and that I and other Members expressed concern—as column 332 of the *Official Report* shows—about the impact of changes to Members' pension provision. Has he had an opportunity, in the light of our comments, to give further consideration to that matter, and can he now give a more adequate response than we got last week?

Mr. Woolas: I thank my hon. Friend for his question, because it enables me to put on record in *Hansard* the answer that I would have given in the debate, had time been available. He and others have very properly raised this issue with my right hon. Friend the Leader of the House and with the chairman of the trustees, the hon. Member for Bournemouth, West (Sir John Butterfill), and I, too, have discussed the matter with the chairman. The trustees and my right hon. Friend are consulting the Government Actuary on a formula that will of course include the preservation of early retirement benefits for those who have not reached 65 by 2009, but who are already 60 and meet current early retirement criteria. On the other side of the coin, my hon. Friend will also be pleased to know that there will be no detrimental loss if a Member goes beyond the age of 65 in those circumstances. I hope that that is the answer he is looking for, and the chairman of the trustees assures me that we can deal with this issue.

Mr. Roy Beggs (East Antrim) (UUP): Will the Deputy Leader of the House make time as soon as possible for a debate on the Paris declaration that was issued after an international conference of jurists on 10 November? We need to consider the legal opinion, expressed by the right hon. Lord Slynn of Hadley and others, concerning the need to recognise the status of the People's Mojahedin Organisation of Iran as a legitimate resistance movement on the basis of international law. Will he also provide the House with an opportunity to distance Her Majesty's Government from the sordid and shameful deal that the European Union proposes to do with the Iranian regime? The Paris declaration states that the following be taken into consideration:

> "The deal proposed by the European Union to the Iranian regime that if Iran agreed to suspend uranium enrichment activities, 'we would cooperate in the prevention and suppression of terrorist acts in accordance with respective legislation and regulations. We would continue to regard"

the Iranian resistance group

> "as a terrorist organisation'."

That is shoddy, and the Deputy Leader of the House should arrange for such a debate, so that we can consider removing from the PMOI the terror tag that legitimises the persecution of innocent members of that country's Opposition by the Iranian regime.

Mr. Woolas: I am of course aware of the strength of feeling on this issue, which has been raised by other Members, and of the petition and campaign to secure the recognition that the hon. Gentleman seeks. He will understand that there is currently no time for such a debate, but I will ensure that my right hon. Friend the Foreign Secretary is aware of the point that he makes. He will doubtless join the Foreign Secretary in agreeing with the objective of British Government policy, which is to ensure nuclear non-proliferation in Iran.

Kevin Brennan (Cardiff, West) (Lab): May we have a debate on child care so that we can consider the costed policies necessary to help hard-working families, and perhaps pick apart some of the uncosted con tricks that we read about in this morning's papers?

Mr. Woolas: I was amazed to read this morning that the right hon. and learned Gentleman the Leader of the Opposition is now contemplating more than £5 billion-worth of extra public expenditure. That follows Tuesday's off-the-top-of-his-head press statement, in

[Mr. Woolas]

which we discovered that he is contemplating more than £6 billion-worth of tax cuts. He cannot have his cake and eat it.

Mr. Douglas Hogg (Sleaford and North Hykeham) (Con): The hon. Gentleman will know that when the Prime Minister was pressed on the Black Watch during yesterday's Prime Minister's questions, he tried to distance himself and Ministers from the decision taken by saying that these were matters for the Army. Perhaps we could have an early debate on ministerial responsibility, so that we can point out that ultimately, such decisions are made not by soldiers but by Ministers, just as it was Ministers and not soldiers who took us to war in Iraq.

Mr. Woolas: I acknowledge the point that the hon. and learned Gentleman makes. I heard what the Prime Minister said, and I realised that such questions would then arise. If the hon. and learned Gentleman had listened carefully to the Prime Minister, he would know that he said that this is a matter for the Secretary of State for Defence at the end of the process. *[Interruption.]* He has said that. The point that the Prime Minister rightly made was that decisions on the future of regiments are not taken in isolation from advice from the Army. I hope that that reassures the hon. and learned Gentleman.

John Mann (Bassetlaw) (Lab): Considering that we may have some long and complex debates and votes in the House next week, will the Deputy Leader of the House seize the moment and minimise the possibility of any Member succumbing to the temptation to use performance-enhancing substances by introducing a system of random but compulsory drug testing of Members following the vote?

Mr. Woolas: I am pretty certain that the public health White Paper will not cover that issue, which is a matter for the House, not the Deputy Leader of the House.

Andrew George (St. Ives) (LD): In light of the Deputy Prime Minister's statement on Monday, is the Deputy Leader aware that, after the publication of the draft Regional Assemblies Bill in July, I sought through the usual channels the reconvening of the Standing Committee on Regional Affairs; so far, without success. In view of the momentous issues still to be resolved, will the Deputy Leader reassure me that that Standing Committee will reconvene and that we will have adequate opportunity to explore the significant issues that now arise as a result of the referendum and the Deputy Prime Minister's statement?

Mr. Woolas: The hon. Gentleman makes a reasonable point, which he and other hon. Members have made before. I am sure that my right hon. Friend the Leader of the House will want seriously to consider that matter on his return, so I thank the hon. Gentleman for the question.

Jim Sheridan (West Renfrewshire) (Lab): My hon. Friend will be aware of the decision made by the Chancellor of the Exchequer to return the value added tax on the new Live Aid single and forthcoming DVD. Will he use his good offices to promote the good work of this charity, particularly in the run-up to Christmas, when people can both buy good music and make a tangible contribution to enhancing the quality of life of people living in developing countries?

Mr. Woolas: I am very happy to do so and I thank my hon. Friend for his question. All people welcomed the Chancellor's announcement, which it is estimated will add £4 million to the Live Aid effort. That is only an estimate; if the record sells more, even more money will be made for the cause. I hope that all hon. Members will join the Chancellor and my hon. Friend in promoting this very worthwhile campaign.

Dr. Julian Lewis (New Forest, East) (Con): May I gently contradict the view of my hon. Friend the Member for South Staffordshire (Sir Patrick Cormack) and say that it is a genuine pleasure to see the Deputy Leader at the Government Dispatch Box? I trust that it will not be too much longer before we see him much more often at the Opposition Dispatch Box.

May I ask the hon. Gentleman for a statement or debate on the issue of the answers given to parliamentary questions? That would enable me to raise the case of the invisible Chancellor; not the one performing in the Chamber a little while ago, whom the Prime Minister wishes were invisible, but the Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster, who has so far resisted all attempts to establish how he spends his time on Government duties and how much it costs the country to have him separated, as he has been, from the Minister responsible for the Cabinet Office. He is not, of course, completely invisible, because there are plenty of news stories about what he is doing to win the election for Labour, as he hopes. A statement on that matter would be very useful indeed.

Mr. Woolas: My right hon. Friend the Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster will be answering questions in this Chamber on Tuesday. The accusation that the hon. Gentleman has made, and continues to make, rather flies in the face of the fact that the chairman of the Conservative party was a full member of the Cabinet throughout those 18 horrible years. I do not recall the hon. Gentleman standing up and complaining about that.

Mr. David Drew (Stroud) (Lab/Co-op): I am sure that my hon. Friend will be delighted to hear that Co-operative Financial Services, which includes the Co-operative Bank and the Co-operative Insurance Society, has been ranked No. 1 on sustainable reporting criteria for delivering UN environment programmes. I am sure that many hon. Members in their places today are very proud of that achievement. Bearing that in mind, will my hon. Friend consider the possibility of having an urgent and early debate—if the next Session, if not this one—on the Government's attitude towards corporate social responsibility, in order properly to highlight the importance of this successful sector? We could then show that the Government do encourage good endeavours such as the Co-op and want more of them.

Mr. Woolas: I am more than happy to congratulate Co-operative Financial Services on being ranked No. 1 in the world for its sustainability reporting relating to the UN environment programme. Some 2,000 sustainability reports are now produced worldwide and it is increasingly becoming a mainstream practice. I acknowledge my hon. Friend's work as chairman of the all-party group in promoting corporate responsibility and sustainability, and I congratulate him and the CFS again, especially in view of the part of the country that I represent.

Chris Grayling (Epsom and Ewell) (Con): May I remind the Deputy Leader that he has cited the pressure of business as a reason for not debating important subjects, yet the Government have left a half-day today completely empty and unused? That time could have been used to debate some of those subjects. Will he consider having a debate on the entirely unacceptable and illegal practice by many international criminal gangs of using automated dialling equipment to run up substantial premium-rate phone calls on behalf of innocent people in the United Kingdom? That activity is utterly unacceptable: it must be stopped, and the House needs to deal with it quickly.

Mr. Woolas: The hon. Gentleman made two points. On the allocation of time, I am sorry that he thinks that this afternoon's business is a waste of time. It is, of course, an Opposition motion and the debate was granted in response to requests made by Opposition Front Benchers. Once again, when my right hon. Friend the Leader of the House is magnanimous and acts on behalf of the whole House, Conservative Members rather churlishly have a pop at him, rather than thank him.

On the second issue, the hon. Gentleman makes a valid point. The problem is significant and is perhaps not acknowledged enough by commentators in the public debate. On Monday there is the opportunity to put questions to the Home Office, but I will ensure that my right hon. Friend the Home Secretary is made aware of the hon. Gentleman's point, which has also been made by other hon. Members.

Mr. David Chaytor (Bury, North) (Lab): My hon. Friend will appreciate the significance of the Prime Minister's visit to President Bush in clarifying a number of different aspects of the special relationship, not least the question of the American attitude to climate change in the next four years. Given the Prime Minister's stated priority of dealing with climate change as part of the G8 and EU presidencies, I endorse the need for the Prime Minister to make a statement when he returns from Washington next week. Is it not time that the Government, who are reviewing their climate change strategy, found time for a debate on climate change itself? If I recall correctly, our only opportunity to debate the subject in the last few months was an Opposition day debate on a Tory motion, which was subsequently withdrawn. Will my hon. Friend find time for a debate on climate change in the very near future?

Mr. Woolas: My hon. Friend makes a valid point. There have been calls for a debate on this subject and my right hon. Friend the Leader of the House is well aware of them. On the matter of the Prime Minister making a statement, I can do no more than refer my hon. Friend to the answer that I gave to the hon. Member for North Cornwall (Mr. Tyler). Climate change is one of the issues being raised with the American presidency and we need to campaign at all levels within the US about it. Our problem on this issue is not only the President, but the Senate.

David Burnside (South Antrim) (UUP): On this Remembrance day, will the Deputy Leader ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland to come to the House to deal with a charity legislation problem that is affecting our ability to raise funds for the Royal British Legion in Northern Ireland? I declare a past interest, having been an adviser to the British Legion on VE-day and VJ-day remembrance. We created an instant poppy card that brings in revenue of millions of pounds, in addition to the traditional form of fund-raising for the British Legion. It is very difficult nowadays. We saw in the press recently that in some of our major British cities there are no people fundraising on the days before Remembrance Sunday.

Northern Ireland is the only part of the United Kingdom where the charities law does not allow the £1 instant poppy card to be sold, yet Northern Ireland is an excellent source of fundraising for the British Legion and the fine cause it represents. Will the hon. Gentleman ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland to deal with that anomaly and ensure that charities legislation allows modern forms of marketing and fundraising, such as the use of the instant poppy card, to be used in Northern Ireland? That would help raise the income going to the Royal British Legion.

Mr. Woolas: The hon. Gentleman makes a sensible point. I shall be more than happy to ensure that my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland is made aware of it. The problem that he identifies seems wrong, and it should be put right. I am sure that the whole House supports the British Legion. May I take this opportunity, Mr. Speaker, to remind the House that there will be a fantastic display for Remembrance day at 6 pm this afternoon? It has been organised by the British Legion, and involves a fly-past of this House by Lancaster bombers.

David Taylor (North-West Leicestershire) (Lab/Co-op): Eighty-six years and two hours or so ago, the guns at last fell silent on the battlefields of Europe, after an intense and bloody conflict without precedent or parallel. Has my hon. Friend the Deputy Leader of the House seen early-day motion 1887, tabled by my hon. Friend the Member for Leicester, East (Keith Vaz), and signed by me and other hon. Members? It states:

> That this House notes with horror that the historic site where part of the Battle of Loos was fought in 1915 is being turned into a rubbish tip; further notes that the village of Auchy les Mines, in northern France, was the site of one of the most intense, bloody battles of the war and that up to 60,000 British soldiers died, including more than 500 from the Royal Leicestershire Regiment; and calls on the Foreign Secretary to meet the French Foreign Minister with a view to saving the battlefield from destruction and helping to preserve it as a place of historic interest.

It draws attention to the 1915 battle of Loos, and in particular to the intense fighting that took place around the village of Auchy les Mines in northern France. Many hundreds of soldiers from Leicestershire died in that

[David Taylor]

conflict, including a large number from my constituency. That battlefield is now threatened with being turned into a rubbish tip. Will my hon. Friend ask the Foreign Secretary to approach his French counterparts to see what can be done to protect the area? More generally, will he ask the Secretary of State for Defence to find time to summarise the threats that may exist to similar areas in northern France and the rest of Europe, so that we can give appropriate protection and honour to the areas where a million of our countrymen died?

Mr. Woolas: I am aware of that early-day motion, and it is right and proper for a Leicestershire Member to raise this matter. I think that I am right in saying that 500 members of the Royal Leicestershire Regiment were killed in that battle. I have seen the press reports about the problem with battlefield sites. I can confirm that the Government are very aware of this matter. The Foreign and Commonwealth Office and the Ministry of Defence maintain a close interest in the question of war graves and of battlefield sites. Although the UK cannot decide what another sovereign state may do with its own land, the Commonwealth War Graves Commission is in contact with the French authorities on this matter.

Chris Bryant (Rhondda) (Lab): This is the final question today, so may I congratulate my hon. Friend the Deputy Leader of the House on his fabulous performance? We hope to see him at the Dispatch Box on many more occasions in the future.

The specific point that I want to raise is that 13 per cent. of drivers in this country drive without any form of insurance. Unfortunately, many of them cause accidents, and the innocent drivers of the other cars involved in those accidents face two problems. They have to deal with the accident itself, and are then left significantly out of pocket by the increased premiums that they have to pay. Is not it time that the tax disc system was reformed to make sure that more cars are insured? Will the Govt allow a debate on this matter, or, more importantly, make provision in the Queen's Speech for changes in the law?

Mr. Woolas: I thank my hon. Friend for what he said early in his remarks. I thought that there would be a "but", and was very pleased that there was not.

I know that my hon. Friend takes a close interest in these matters and has raised this question before. He is right to say that incidents involving uninsured drivers cause great injustice to other drivers. Press reports about last week's tragic rail crash suggest that people with motor insurance policies may have to pick up the compensation bill. My hon. Friend's point is therefore very important and timely. I remind the House that Transport questions take place on Tuesday next week, and I shall ensure that the relevant Minister is aware of my hon. Friend's comments.

Mr. Heald: On a point of order Mr. Speaker. Perhaps inadvertently, the Deputy Leader of the House suggested that Conservative party chairmen in the 1980s were paid by the taxpayer. I should like to put on record that that was never the case. On the few occasions when the party chairman was also Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster, he drew a much-reduced salary to reflect the small number of duties involved in the Duchy. For example, Norman Tebbit drew only £2,000 a year. Is it in order for the Deputy Leader of the House to make such remarks? Is it in order for the present Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster to refuse to say what he is doing with taxpayers' money?

Mr. Speaker: As a former trade union officer, I would never advise anyone to take a reduced salary.

Opposition Day

Family Doctor Services

Mr. Speaker: I inform the House that I have selected the amendment in the name of the Prime Minister.

1.25 pm

Mr. Andrew Lansley (South Cambridgeshire) (Con): I beg to move,

> That this House places the highest importance on the role of general medical practitioners, working with allied healthcare professionals, constituting a family doctor service; regards this service as the lynch-pin of NHS primary care services and central to public health promotion; appreciates that general practitioners are best placed to provide care for patients, to facilitate their access to NHS services and to manage care of those suffering from chronic diseases and co-morbidities; is concerned by the continuing level of general practitioner vacancies and workload pressures; regrets the Government's devaluation of the family doctor's role in favour of an emphasis on diverse means of access to the NHS; deplores the failure to maintain the out-of-hours service as a general practitioner-led service and the loss of Saturday morning surgeries; calls on the Government to ensure that the NHS Programme for information technology delivers the choice of suppliers and functionality which general practitioners need; further regards the Government's abandonment of general practitioner fundholding and commissioning as a severe misjudgement and urges the reintroduction of the benefits of fundholding through the adoption of practice-led commissioning; and believes that the development of family doctor-led commissioning, alongside increasing patient choice, offers the best means of delivering an effective NHS which is responsive to patients' needs and wishes.

The origins of this debate lie in the many conversations that I and my colleagues have had in recent months with general practitioners and those who work in family doctor services. In the years since the 1999 legislation, when fundholding and GP commissioning were lost, GPs have become progressively divorced from the control of primary care as locality commissioning turned into primary care groups and then primary care trusts. The PCTs are no longer the local representative bodies for GPs and health professionals that they should be. Instead, they have become the local representatives of the Department of Health.

In my experience, one of the most depressing aspects of constituency health casework has been the decline in the influence that GPs can exert over the NHS services available to their patients.

Dr. Phyllis Starkey (Milton Keynes, South-West) (Lab): I rise to give the hon. Gentleman an opportunity to reflect on his remarks so far. Would not it be sensible for him to make it clear also that the role of the PCTs is to represent the needs of local people who rely on NHS services? The PCTs are not there to represent the needs of GPs, however worthy they may be.

Mr. Lansley: The hon. Lady is completely wrong. As those of us who have visited GPs recently have been told time and time again, GPs represent the needs of those patients whose needs they are best equipped to represent. They find that PCTs respond not to the needs of patients, but to the diktat of the Department of Health.

The previous Conservative Government started GP fundholding in 1997, and we were developing locality commissioning. Immediately after the 1997 election, the Government said that they were going to develop locality commissioning. However, that did not result in the establishment of local commissioning groups responsive to local health professionals, and to GPs in particular. Instead, the outcome is that PCTs are dictated to by the Department of Health.

Many people working in PCTs want exactly what the hon. Member for Milton Keynes, South-West (Dr. Starkey) suggests—PCTs that are accountable to their local NHS, through local health professionals, for the needs and interests of their patients. However, that is not what is happening.

Chris Grayling (Epsom and Ewell) (Con): I should like to give a very practical example of that. I was visited by a constituent who wanted to talk about the problems faced by women with endometriosis. That is a major problem for sufferers, and it can cause significant disruption to their lives. My constituent asked me to find out from the local PCT what effort was being made to tackle the problem, and what support was available for people like her. The PCT told me that as the disease was not part of the Government's national service frameworks, no particular support could be provided. Does my hon. Friend agree that that is a perfect example of why he is right and the hon. Member for Milton Keynes, South-West (Dr. Starkey) is wrong?

Mr. Lansley: I met my hon. Friend's constituents when I visited his constituency, and I know that he understands what is going on very well. He offers an excellent example. What I said in my opening remarks is born of experience. Recently, a constituent of mine was trying to access mental health services. She and I talked about her efforts for a considerable time, and in the course of our conversation I asked her what her GP had said. She told me that her doctor was fantastic and sympathetic, but that he had no say in the matter, nor any control over what services were available. That is dictated by the primary care trust. My hon. Friend is right and the hon. Lady needs to understand better what is happening in primary care.

This year, in the context of a new GP contract, GPs were looking for a more assured future and for a sense of support for and direction of family services, but unfortunately they have not found that. For example, the contract implies that GPs will take responsibility for the delivery of improved management of chronic disease. However, GPs then hear the Secretary of State say that regional chronic disease centres are to be established and that 3,000 community matrons are to be recruited to look after the elderly with chronic diseases. There was no mention of the role of GPs. They believe that they provide a service to patients as self-employed practitioners, contracted with the NHS. However, they are increasingly dictated to by PCTs and the Department of Health.

Mr. David Chaytor (Bury, North) (Lab): On the specific point about matrons being appointed, does the hon. Gentleman agree that one of the problems for the NHS for many years has been that GPs have been required to carry out some basic functions that would be

[Mr. David Chaytor]

far more efficiently carried out by nurses? Is it not wholly positive that we are devolving responsibility in the NHS to different occupations in that way?

Mr. Lansley: I shall come to that point in a moment. However, my point is not that we should not have additional community nurses. It is clear that they are necessary in order to provide improved chronic disease management, not least because in the years after 1997—up until the figures published by the Department of Health earlier this year—the number of community nurses fell. I shall come to the issue of the distribution of work in a moment.

The NHS programme for IT, to which I shall refer later in more detail, means that GPs are no longer the customers with control over the supply of their IT hardware, or the right to use the software that they have developed. They are told how to manage their patient booking systems. Out-of-hours services are now controlled by the PCT and, in some cases, they no longer deliver a GP service, nor even necessarily one where calls are handled locally.

Mr. David Drew (Stroud) (Lab/Co-op): I have some concerns about how the out-of-hours service operates, but I am not sure that GPs would want to turn the clock back. Part of the reality of the new contract was that GPs wanted a new environment to work in. I would prefer it if GPs volunteered to join the out-of-hours services. Some will, but some have chosen not to do so. What would the hon. Gentleman do in the circumstances to try to encourage them to do so?

Mr. Lansley: I shall deal with the issue of out-of-hours services in some detail later in my speech, but the short answer is that where the PCT continues to have a contract with a GP-led co-op that continues to have the support of local practitioners—as is happily the case in my area—much better results are seen than in other areas. That distinction points us in the right direction.

Despite the fact that a million patients visit their local family doctor practice each day—a far greater number than access NHS services by any other means—GPs see their service being diminished in importance. For example, I was on a bus in London recently—such is the nature of opposition that we cannot just get into the back of a car and hope that it moves. I saw an advert placed by a strategic health authority advertising options for care. The list included self-care, visiting a pharmacist, going to an NHS walk-in centre,calling NHS Direct, attending a minor injuries unit, going to accident and emergency or dialling 999 in an emergency. At the end of the list it said:

> "For advice or a jab, go to your GP."

Is it any wonder that GPs feel devalued?

Increasing numbers of GPs are becoming salaried and controlled by their PCTs, and all GPs are being inspected, validated, performance-managed and target-driven to the point where they are concerned about their continuing clinical freedom. As Dr. Mayur Lakhani, the new chairman of the Royal College of General Practitioners, said in the most recent edition of the *BMA News*:

> "I feel general practice is under threat—it is not valued . . . I want doctors to look forward to going to work in the morning. At the moment, people seem browbeaten."

Dr. Lakhani also suggested that the greatest threat to the profession—and this point is relevant to the intervention by the hon. Member for Bury, North (Mr. Chaytor)—is the

> "inappropriate redistribution of medical work and role substitution."

He said:

> "I do not buy this idea that others can do the work of GPs. GPs cannot be replaced. We cannot take the role of the GP and break it up into bits and say let provider X do that, provider Y do this and provider Z something else. You lose the essence."

Chris Bryant (Rhondda) (Lab): The hon. Gentleman may think it odd that a Welsh Member of Parliament should intervene on this point, although much of what he has been talking about applies equally to Wales as it does to England, even though some of what he says applies only in England. He said that many more GPs are now salaried and he suggested that that was a problem. I represent a valleys constituency that has found it very difficult to recruit traditional-style GPs, so the advent of the salaried GP has led to a dramatic improvement in provision locally.

Mr. Lansley: Far be it from me ever to think that what the hon. Gentleman says is odd. However, to introduce salaried GPs in circumstances in which it is difficult to recruit self-employed practitioners is very different from trying deliberately to introduce salaried GPs in place of self-employed practitioners, as PCTs are attempting to do in many areas.

Dr. Lakhani is right in what he says and right to say it. The Government cannot have it both ways. If, as I suspect, they know that they will achieve their aims only through recreating the innovation, energy and responsiveness of GP fundholding, they cannot at the same time put GPs on to a treadmill of providing services as dictated by the Department of Health. The Government cannot seek to recreate the benefits of fundholding and, at the same time, devalue the leading role of family doctor services in primary care.

Mr. Chaytor: Does the hon. Gentleman accept that one of the by-products of the introduction of GP fundholding by the previous Government was that it encouraged many GPs to devolve responsibilities to nursing staff for the first time ever? With no disrespect to Dr. Lakhani, there are many GPs who have actively argued for that to happen for many years. Does the hon. Gentleman seriously object to initiatives such as NHS Direct, which gives ordinary patients faster access to the health service?

Mr. Lansley: The point is not that NHS Direct is undesirable as a means of accessing NHS services, nor that walk-in centres are undesirable as a means of improving diversity of provision. We are in favour of diversity of provision. I have spoken about the importance of extending the role of nurses, for example. However, it is important for GPs to be focused on the things that they do best, such as diagnosis and the management of chronic disease. My objection was—and the hon. Gentleman will recall that this was the subject of his first intervention—that the Secretary of State announces that, for example, the NHS will recruit community matrons who will be responsible for the provision of services to the most elderly, who have a range of co-morbidities and who suffer from chronic diseases. Those are precisely the patients whose care GPs, as family doctors, are best equipped to manage. The relationship between community nursing and GPs is at the heart of the issue, but that is not what the Secretary of State said. It is not that diversity of provision is wrong—far from it—but we need to understand the central role of the GP and family doctor service.

We saw another example last week when the Minister of State, the right hon. Member for Barrow and Furness (Mr. Hutton) announced the establishment of seven walk-in centres for commuters. Fine. Okay. By all means, let us offer access to health care services. But that is the same Government who eroded the very access to family doctors that people who commute to city centres need. Commuters and office workers want to be able to visit their own GP practice in the evening or on Saturday morning, but those opportunities have gone. The consequence of the contract and the unwillingness of PCTs to commission those services from GPs has meant the abandonment of Saturday morning surgeries across the country.

The Minister of State, Department of Health (Mr. John Hutton): The hon. Gentleman is being generous in giving way and I am extremely grateful to him. May I take him back to the question put by my hon. Friend the Member for Stroud (Mr. Drew)? The hon. Gentleman has again raised concerns about the new GP contract and criticised those aspects that relate to the definition of out-of-hours services. Would he go back on the contract?

Mr. Lansley: What GPs want—*[Interruption.]* Do Labour Members want an answer? I am not sure. Let me give the Minister an example. As the Under-Secretary of State for Health, the hon. Member for Welwyn Hatfield (Miss Johnson), knows, I recently met GPs in Welwyn Garden City. They want their PCT to commission them to provide Saturday morning surgeries, but they are not being given the commission, so they have been forced to cancel Saturday morning surgeries. They regard that service as valuable and explained to me at considerable length the benefits it provides and the difficulties that will ensue in accessing services in its absence— the number of patients fetching up at surgeries on Monday mornings or going to accident and emergency departments or elsewhere. No doubt the hon. Lady knows about that.

It is not me who is saying that we want Saturday morning surgeries; it is general practitioners. They are not saying, "Scrap the contract", but, "Enable us to continue to provide the Saturday morning surgery that our patients want and that we are prepared to offer".

Mr. Hutton: I will be well behaved, Mr. Deputy Speaker. This is the last time that I shall intervene on the hon. Gentleman.

It is fundamentally untrue to say that GPs have been forced to do any of those things. The GPs were offered a contract and negotiated it. They wanted to be relieved of those responsibilities and chose to be relieved of them.

Mr. Lansley: The Minister knows perfectly well that, under the terms of the contract, out of hours was defined such that if a continuing level of access to service was required it would have to be commissioned as a locally enhanced service. That is all we seek—a locally enhanced service. We discussed the GP contract on 8 July 2003 for the sum total of one and a half hours—such is the nature of parliamentary proceedings. On that occasion, the Minister said:

> "I know from my work as a constituency MP that our constituents place a high premium on around-the-clock access to a GP, 24 hours a day, seven days a week. It is a defining characteristic of our primary care services. I can give the hon. Member for South Staffordshire the assurances he seeks: we will implement the agreement to ensure that there is no loss of access to out-of-hours services."—[*Official Report*, 8 July 2003; Vol. 408, c. 1050.]

He said that there would be no loss of access to out-of-hours services, but the agreement was not implemented on that basis, as I shall explain later.

For the reasons I have given, we need to be clear about the future of the family doctor service. My colleagues and I are clear. We believe that the relationship between patient and doctor is vital. That does not mean that a patient should necessarily see their own GP every time they visit a practice; nor does it mean that they have to see a doctor if that is not necessary, as the hon. Member for Bury, North pointed out in his intervention. The role of nurses and other health professionals is expanding and it makes good sense to focus scarce medical time on the tasks for which medics are actually needed. However, what that relationship means is that patients want to know that their health needs are understood, seen in context and that one illness is not treated without an understanding of the range of further illnesses and complications that they may experience. That is what patients are concerned about. It is clear that patients value knowing, and being known by, their GP.

Andrew Selous (South-West Bedfordshire) (Con): My hon. Friend mentioned practice nurses. Is it not rather extraordinary that the Government's definition of those eligible for key worker housing does not include practice nurses in GP surgeries? They may have been in the NHS pension scheme for 35 years, yet because some of their salary is paid directly by the GP they are not included.

Mr. Lansley: I do find that strange. Our constituencies are almost neighbouring, so my hon. Friend and I are both aware of the pressures on health workers and of their need to access affordable housing. I was not previously aware of that exclusion, but the Minister will know of it and I hope that he will take note of my hon. Friend's point and perhaps discuss it with the Office of the Deputy Prime Minister. In the past, I have had occasion to press for the extension of the definition of key workers, and my hon. Friend makes a good case in that regard.

Andy Burnham (Leigh) (Lab): I am listening to the argument that the hon. Gentleman is developing. He has mounted a critique in opposition to the concept of salaried GPs. He seems to want to uphold the principle that GPs are independent contractors. What would he say to deprived communities, such as the one I represent, where for many years GPs have not wanted to invest their capital and commit themselves? Consequently, GP vacancies are higher in such areas. If he is denying us the right to salaried GPs, what will the Conservative party do for communities such as Leigh?

Mr. Lansley: It will come as a surprise to some of my colleagues—for example, in Hertfordshire—to hear that significant numbers of GP vacancies are experienced only in urban areas. In fact, they occur in many areas.

The hon. Gentleman asked what we would do. Of course, we need measures to try to support GPs. I have held discussions with GPs, so I know of the difficulties for a young GP, especially in some urban areas, of taking on the necessary mortgage not only to live in the area, but to buy practice premises. That is not easy as it once was, so of course support is needed. There could be a range of options, such as the PCT purchasing the premises and, in some cases, as I acknowledged to the hon. Member for Rhondda (Chris Bryant), it will be right to employ salaried GPs. I do not dispute that. My point is about the desirability of creating opportunities for GPs actually to be independent contractors. That is the best basis on which to establish the service.

The relationship between GPs and patients is one of the benefits that small practices offer patients, but which well-run practices of all sizes can achieve. It is more than simply a matter of service standards; it has a positive impact on the treatment of patients. We should not underestimate the need for effective management of co-morbidities or the benefits that flow from giving patients a framework of information and advice in the management of chronic disease. In both respects, the patient-GP relationship may be instrumental.

We should also be aware that every GP is an advocate for public health promotion and has the opportunity to make early interventions to combat disease. That will be maximised if GPs know their patients, take responsibility for their patients, assist them in exercising choice and influencing the management of their care, and are progressively able to commission services on their behalf.

The value of GPs and the family doctor service in terms of health benefits is clear. As Dr. John Chisholm, a former chairman of the BMA's GP committee, said in his speech to local medical committees in June:

> "Health systems based on effective primary care with highly trained generalist physicians practising in the community provide more cost-effective and clinically effective care than other health systems that are less oriented to primary care. Furthermore, the higher is the ratio of family physicians to the population, the lower the hospitalisation rates."

Central to the role of family doctors should be the opportunity for practices to commission services on behalf of patients. Fundholding was taken up by many GPs and we should look to all practices progressively to take responsibility for commissioning decisions on behalf of their patients. Whenever possible, patients should exercise choice. All patients should have influence and a voice in the management of their care, but we should never underestimate the value of GPs as advisers and commissioners on behalf of patients.

Mr. Drew: Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

Mr. Lansley: No.

If we can be clear about the central role of GPs, why cannot the Government also be clear? In part, of course, it is because their focus is elsewhere. They have talked of hospitals and waiting list targets to the exclusion of all else. It is a condemnation of the Government that it is only now that they are acknowledging the need for the NHS to focus on improved chronic disease management.

Another reason is that the Government cannot let go of central control. Let us take that example of out-of-hours services, which we have discussed briefly. Eighteen months ago, I and my Opposition colleagues sought certain assurances. The Minister, as I quoted earlier, said that there would be no loss of access to out-of-hours services. What did we get? In seven areas, with a population totalling 1.2 million, including South Lincolnshire, we got a service with no GPs at all, and the Minister had to be brought to the House by my hon. Friend the Member for Grantham and Stamford (Mr. Davies) to answer that point. Saturday morning surgeries have gone. *MedEconomics* reported recently that the bill for new out-of-hours services is likely to reveal a frightening level of underfunding, which will have a detrimental effect on the quality of out-of-hours services. We were promised that more would be spent and access would be maintained.

Mr. David Hinchliffe (Wakefield) (Lab): I am grateful to the hon. Gentleman for giving way and I apologise for not being present for the first few minutes of his speech. I am particularly interested in the points that he is making about out-of-hours services and I have noted that the Conservative motion talks about deploring

> "the failure to maintain the out-of-hours service as a general practitioner-led service".

I do not know whether he has had the opportunity to study the Health Committee's report on out-of-hours provision, published as recently as July, in which we actually said:

> "We are impressed with the potential of some models of GP out-of-hours service provision, including integration with ambulance services and creative use of skill mix"

which we thought was a very important development. That report was signed up to by the entire Committee, which of course includes colleagues on his own Front Bench who agree with that particular point.

The hon. Gentleman seems to be harking back to a golden age of out-of-hours cover, which, in my experience, never existed. I worked alongside GPs in an out-of-hours service on mental health care; frankly, many of them were knackered—if that is not an unparliamentary term—and should not have been practising because they were exhausted. The hon. Gentleman really needs to address that point.

Mr. Deputy Speaker (Sir Alan Haselhurst): Order. The distinguished Member, the Chairman of the Select Committee, has a lot of knowledge on these matters, but we do not want it all at once.

Mr. Lansley: You are absolutely right, Mr. Deputy Speaker, but as a former member of the Select Committee under the hon. Gentleman's chairmanship, I would not diminish the value that we can get from hearing from him. I would sign up to what he says and I am not surprised that my hon. Friend the Member for West Chelmsford (Mr. Burns) did as a Member of the Committee, because there are some models from which we can learn.

In my region, the ambulance trust has taken responsibility for the provision of out-of-hours services in Norfolk. However I know—because it has been recruiting doctors from Germany to meet its requirements—that it is having difficulty in getting GPs involved. Among the things that we need to be clear about is the fact that GPs in particular will subscribe to an out-of-hours service if they feel that it is structured around their needs, that it will manage risk and take clinical judgments on a basis with which they are happy, and that it will provide a service that is complementary to them. Of course, it must be seen as part of a more integrated service of unscheduled, unplanned care, but that does not mean that it becomes part of a bureaucracy that is no longer accountable to GPs. It is the out-of-hours GP service and it must be seen as such.

NHS Direct was mentioned. It is important to understand how this will work because NHS Direct is gearing up to take over call handling nationally, and that could undermine GP out-of-hours providers locally. It could substitute clinical assessment software for GPs' management and judgment and it could mean handling calls at centres where staff simply do not know local services.

Mr. Christopher Chope (Christchurch) (Con): Will my hon. Friend comment about the situation relating to Egton Medical Information Services? The Government are centralising and imposing upon GPs a system of medical information that they do not want. Fifty-five per cent. of GPs are using Egton but the Government are going to prevent them from doing so in future. Is that not ludicrous?

Mr. Lansley: I shall deal with that point directly; I am grateful to my hon. Friend. As he says, out of hours is not the only area where GPs feel let down. For many GPs, the implementation of the NHS programme for IT is indeed a matter of deep concern. The Government originally said that it was going to be a national strategy for local implementation. In June 2002, however, they said that they would centralise the IT programme. When we discussed this in July 2003, in the short debate to which I previously referred, I expressed concern—I shall quote myself if my hon. Friend will forgive me—

"about the extent to which information technology systems in the NHS are being centralised"

and

"that the responsiveness of the IT system to individual customers was being removed".

I wondered, in the context of the negotiation of the contract,

"whether the BMA is entirely confident that GP practices will be able to exercise the same control over their service providers that they do at present".—[*Official Report*, 8 July 2003; Vol. 408, c. 1048.]

Since that warning back in July of last year, we have become aware of serious disquiet among general practitioners about the system that the Government are putting in place. As my hon. Friend the Member for Christchurch (Mr. Chope) said, they have put a lot of investment into the EMIS system and 50 per cent. of GPs have adopted it, but this system is not the one that has secured a contract with a local service provider to provide GPs with their IT systems under the new arrangements. The GP contract says:

"Each practice will have guaranteed choice from a number of accredited systems that deliver the required functionality"—

yet GPs are not getting the choice that they want, nor the required functionality.

It is also my understanding that the Department of Health has assured GPs that they will not be forced to change systems, but—with this Government there is always a but—GPs are being told that if they wish to keep their existing system and it is not one of those offered by their local service provider, they may have to pay for it from their own budget. Not only do GPs have cost concerns about the new system, but they are rightly concerned about moving from a system in which they have invested, that they and their staff are trained to use, and that they trust, to a system that is unfamiliar and untested.

Will the Minister today take the opportunity to tell us what consultation he has had with GPs about the IT programme? If a GP wishes to remain with an existing IT system that is compatible with the NHS system but which is not offered by their local service provider, will they be able to do so at no extra cost? Can the Minister assure the House that all new accredited systems can deliver the same functionality as existing systems? What assurance can he give the House that safeguards have been put in place that ensure that GPs who transfer to a new accredited system will not lose any confidential patient data in the process?

It is clear that the Government have a long way to go to convince doctors and the public—and, indeed, many of us—that they were right to take central control of the NHS IT programme, to explain why they have not secured the buy-in from GPs and users that is vital to any IT project, and especially to show that the IT programme will in fact deliver the service and the functionality that GPs require.

The NHS needs to be a primary care-led service, and the family doctor service is the lynchpin to primary care. In GPs we have 35,000 advocates of better public health who are best placed to intervene early and effectively—but it is a service under stress. GP numbers in the five years after 1997 rose by less than in the preceding five years. The number of applicants for GP training places is way down on five years ago. Vacancies reported in the last recruitment and retention survey were over 40 per cent. higher than during the previous year.

The Government's amendment to our motion demonstrates their failure. They are forced to recognise the value of a return to GP fundholding, although they will not admit it. They admit the lack of clinical engagement, as they term it, which actually means that they are admitting the lack of ability for GPs to control clinical services provided to their patients. They still fail in their amendment to express their appreciation of the central role of the family doctor service. The

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Government are clearly in denial over the problems experienced with out-of-hours services and the NHS IT programme. The Government's priority in their amendment seems to be to promote walk-in centres and NHS Direct. Our priority is to promote the family doctor service and GPs as the lynchpin of successful primary care.

I commend our motion to the House.

2 pm

The Minister of State, Department of Health (Mr. John Hutton): I beg to move, To leave out from "House" to the end of the Question, and to add instead thereof:

"welcomes the increase in general practitioner numbers; supports the expansion of primary care provision through walk-in centres and NHS Direct to meet the needs of patients; welcomes the new arrangements for the National Health Service out-of-hours services that provide an opportunity to integrate primary, secondary and social care, whilst guaranteeing high quality urgent care across the country including Saturday mornings and improving the quality of life for general practitioners; acknowledges the progress made on the NHS Programme for information technology; supports the introduction of practice-based commissioning which fosters clinical engagement whilst mitigating the worst excesses of general practitioner fundholding; and believes that the general development of practice-based commissioning will deliver improved patient care."

I agree with the hon. Member for South Cambridgeshire (Mr. Lansley) about one thing at least—it is important that where we agree, we make that clear. I agree with him about the importance of primary care and delivering high-quality health care services to NHS patients. Primary care has always been the cornerstone of the national health service, and our family doctors have always been at the forefront of change and innovation. Primary care is the cornerstone of the NHS because it is where the vast majority of patients are seen and receive their treatment. Ninety per cent. of all patient journeys in the NHS begin and end in a primary care setting. Some 300 million appointments are made in general practice every year. Every fortnight, one in four people in Britain will see their GP or practice nurse.

It is for those reasons and others that primary care has played a critical role in advancing the health of every single person and every community in Britain, so it is not a surprise that GPs are the most respected and trusted professionals in our country or that primary care always gets and continues to get—despite the impression given by the hon. Gentleman—the highest levels of patient satisfaction of any part of the NHS. It is a proud record, deservedly so, and despite all of its detractors, I believe that our primary care model is admired across the world.

GPs have played an important role in bringing about some significant improvements in the health of our population in recent years, none of them documented by the hon. Member for South Cambridgeshire. For example, death rates from cancer are down by more than 12 per cent.; death rates from cardiovascular disease have fallen by more than 23 per cent. That is real and solid progress. I disagree strongly with the hon. Gentleman on both his analysis of the present state of primary care and on the best way to secure its future.

Mr. Drew: I wonder whether my right hon. Friend will respond to something that the Opposition spokesman said. One of the arguments for freeing up the time of GPs is that it allows them to develop sub-specialisms. By chance, yesterday the all-party health group held a session on primary approaches to pain control. It was abundantly clear that GPs had to develop specialisms in order to make early diagnoses and pass their patients on for treatment. Unless we can free up time for GPs, which the Opposition do not seem to have any idea how they would do, it will not be practicable for them to develop such specialisms. Does my right hon. Friend care to say something about that in terms of the logic of what the Government are doing?

Mr. Hutton: I want to come back to that issue in a moment. It is important to recognise that much of the skill mix and much of the change that has taken place in primary care and the increasing role of other health care workers in supporting primary care and family doctors has been welcomed by GPs. They see it as an important part of making sure that their expertise is concentrated on those parts of their work that they need to do.

In relation to specialisation in general practice, we have seen some welcome and significant progress—progress that was not seen in the 18 years to which the hon. Member for South Cambridgeshire conveniently forgot to refer. His vision of primary care is very much the "Dr. Finlay's Casebook" version, and with great respect, I do not think that anyone in the Chamber today can recall those times. Times have changed and things have moved on. One of my problems with the hon. Gentleman's argument today is that, sadly, he does not appear to be in that process of change.

The essence of the hon. Gentleman's argument today has been that the Government have failed to support primary care services in our national health service. That is simply untrue. It is a claim that cannot be justified by reference to the facts. He has chosen to ignore every indicator that points in the direction of the progress that is being made. He has ignored the views of Britain's GPs, having appointed himself today as their national champion. They have signalled in opinion poll after opinion poll conducted by the British Medical Association that their view of the quality of patient care that they are providing is that it is improving, not decreasing. He showed a blissful and wonderful disregard for his party's record on primary care when it was in government.

I am not surprised that the hon. Gentleman chose to say nothing about the previous 18 years, but let me remind him and his hon. Friends of one or two of the facts, because they reveal a different story from the one that the hon. Gentleman tried to tell. For example, between 1991 and 1996 there was a fall of 20 per cent. in the number of GPs in training, with a reduction in every single year. So much for his claim to value the role of primary care. Average list sizes are lower today than they were both in 1997 and in 1992. That undermines his claim that we have failed to address work load issues.

In relation to the new contract, about which the hon. Gentleman spoke at length, let me remind him of one rather interesting fact. The previous Administration imposed a new contract on GPs in 1990, having failed to negotiate an agreement with them. That rather puts paid to his argument that we are the ones who are not listening to the views of general practitioners. He has yet again completely failed to establish a clear alternative, which I think is a pretty important yardstick by which people reading and listening to his contribution today are likely to form a view. He does not plan to spend any additional resources on primary care. We know that he has no plans to change the new primary care contracts.

What the hon. Gentleman has said would make matters worse, not better. He intends to scrap our plans to improve GP premises, because he is against all those national targets. He would take away the right of the patient to be seen by a GP or practice nurse within 24 or 48 hours, because he is against that target as well and would not take any measures to implement it. There would be no targets for recruiting more doctors or nurses in the NHS. He would return the NHS—we know this from the Opposition motion and from what he said today—to the bureaucracy and unfairness of GP fundholding. All that would be a huge step backwards for our national health service. That is why his contribution will be seen as shallow and superficial and devoid of serious proposals.

I want to set out what I believe are the important facts, but I want to make one thing clear at the beginning. It is not my argument today that every problem facing our family doctor services has been solved. We all know that that is not the case. Neither is it my contention that we cannot improve the quality and range of services on offer to patients. We all know that we can. My argument today is that we are making real progress in expanding primary care services and in the process giving patients a wider range of services to choose from; in short that primary care is heading in the right direction.

David Taylor (North-West Leicestershire) (Lab/Co-op): The House will agree that an NHS without targets could not possibly work efficiently or effectively. Does my right hon. Friend agree that those who supervise the delivery of general practice should apply their role in a sensitive and intelligent fashion to avoid the extra stress that is placed on GPs? Will he see me immediately the inquiry report is published into the suicide of Dr. Stephen Farley, a doctor in my practice in North-West Leicestershire? The report is due on 2 December, and the issue of stress may feature in its recommendations.

Mr. Hutton: I give my hon. Friend that assurance. The death of Dr. Farley was a terrible tragedy for his family and his patients, and we want to study carefully what the report says. The best way to deal with some of the work load pressures is to continue with the reforms and expansions that we are making in primary care, so that we can recruit more GPs and practice staff and the undoubted pressures that affect GP surgeries up and down the country can be managed more seriously.

We have been able to make progress, first, because of the additional investment that we have been able to put into the NHS—something that, of course, the Conservative party opposed at the time and described as reckless and irresponsible—and, secondly, because we have been prepared to challenge, which the hon. Member for South Cambridgeshire clearly has not today, some of the traditional assumptions about what primary care services should look like in the modern day and age.

The hon. Gentleman continues to define primary care largely in organisational terms—that is very much what I took from his comments today—and in terms of the services provided by doctors. That is a mistake on his part because primary care is much more than that. Primary care represents instead a concept of care that can be provided perfectly well by different professionals and organisations. What matters is the quality of care that is provided, not the organisational structure of the care provider who delivers it.

Primary care has benefited from new services led by nurses, such as walk-in centres and NHS Direct. Clearly, the hon. Gentleman takes a very different view. For example, both those services are viewed in the motion as undermining primary care because they are not led by GPs. He is completely wrong on that point, and I want to return to that in a moment.

Dr. Starkey: May I draw my right hon. Friend's attention to a scheme that is being implemented by the Co-op Pharmacy in my constituency that involves going to working men's clubs, measuring people's blood pressure and cholesterol levels and giving appropriate dietary advice? That is not GP led, but it is reaching men, in large part, who would never go near their GP and causing them to modify their behaviour and improve their health, so they are likely to be less of a burden on the NHS and their local GP. Should not those services be encouraged, not denigrated, as the hon. Member for South Cambridgeshire did? Most GPs would support exactly that sort of service.

Mr. Hutton: My hon. Friend is absolutely right. From my experience of working men's clubs, it is probably a pretty good idea to go into them fairly regularly to test blood pressure there. I am member of the Cemetery Cottages working men's club in my constituency, and blood pressure testing there is probably a quite a good idea. Of course, she speaks an awful lot of common sense, and she has made much more eloquently than I could the argument that I am trying to make.

Mr. Lansley: The Minister is proceeding on a misrepresentation of not only what I said, but what he ought to know we have made clear in our policies. I do not define primary care in organisational terms. In fact, we wish to define care increasingly in terms of its being patient centred, with patents having individual care plans. I do not denigrate walk-in centres. I visited one in Loughborough recently, which was run not by GPs, but by emergency care practitioners and nurses, and it was run very well. The point, however, is to understand that patients need the relationship with their GPs to be able to structure the manner in which they gain access to services, to recognise the co-morbidities and to understand how such care is best put together.

Mr. Hutton: Of course, they do. That is why we are investing additional resources in primary care to ensure that that can happen. Walk-in centres are not a substitute for the relationship that registered patients will have with their own GP; they provide an additional

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service. If the hon. Gentleman had wanted to make that point, he should have chosen his words more carefully in his speech.

On investment, NHS primary care services are benefiting from the significant additional resources that we have made available. Funding for primary care services will increase from £5 billion to £6.8 billion next year—an increase of more than 30 per cent. over that period. That progress would be immediately undermined by the policies that the Conservative party now advocates.

The hon. Gentleman's patient's passport would take more than £1 billion away from the NHS to help well-off people jump the queue for NHS treatment by going private—a typical Tory policy of looking after the interests of the few at the expense of the many. If that money were taken away from the NHS, as he intends, it would be quite impossible for primary care trusts to maintain the investment that is going into the NHS front line. Primary care would suffer in the same way as hospitals from those reductions in resources. So there is no accuracy behind his claim that we are not properly investing in NHS primary care services—we are—and his proposals would make matters worse. *[Interruption.]* It is clear from his comments from a sedentary position that he thinks we are investing the right level of resources in primary care. If he is not clear about that, let him come to the Dispatch Box.

Mr. Lansley: Clearly, the Minister wrote his speech before he heard my speech. He is referring to what he supposed I would say. He thought that I would criticise the Government's investment in primary care, but I did not do so. If I were to do so, I would say, for example, that between 2001 and 2002-03—let us look at the book, rather than into the crystal ball—investment in general medical services and personal medical service increased by just 9 per cent. As we would expect, the Minister is talking about what he will do in the future, but not holding himself accountable for what he has done in the past.

Mr. Hutton: I am happy to hold myself accountable for the actions of Ministers and my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Health. It is true that I wrote the speech in advance—I confess to doing so—and I can tell him why I did so: the hon. Gentleman makes exactly the same speech every time that he comes to the Dispatch Box. He makes exactly the same arguments, and we can see him coming from a very long way. It is ludicrous for him to say that he was not implying that we were not sufficiently investing in primary care because the motion is about our failure to support family doctor services. He is probably the only Member in the Chamber who thinks that the level of investment is not important to the support that we provide to our family doctors.

We are using those additional resources to invest more than ever before in our family health services. Our priorities are clear. We need more GPs and practice nurses. We need to improve as many surgeries as possible, so that patients can be treated in the best possible environment. We need to reward GPs and practice staff who are working hard to improve the quality of the care they provide. We need to improve access to primary care, so that patients can be seen wherever possible at a time of their own choosing and in a way that fits around their own needs and requirements. We need a wider range of services for patients to choose from, and we need to involve GPs and practice staff fully in the process of fashioning services around the needs of patients and shaping the key decisions that affect the design of local health services. In all those areas, we are making solid progress.

There are more GPs working in the NHS than ever before—over 3,000 more since 1997. We are increasing the number of GPs in the NHS at twice the rate achieved by the previous Administration. Vacancy rates for GPs, which were not even collected by the Conservative Government, are now falling, not rising, as the hon. Gentleman suggested. The number of doctors training to become GPs has increased by 80 per cent. compared with a 20 per cent. fall under the last Conservative Administration.

Mr. David Rendel (Newbury) (LD): I should declare an interest: my wife is a GP. Does the Minister agree that one of the troubles with the NHS is that there have been times of famine and times of good supply? What tends to happen is that a large number of doctors go into the GP service at one time, all of whom are roughly the same age, and then there is a period when many fewer go in because all the places are filled, followed by another period when a lot go in. Somehow, we need to smooth that out.

Mr. Hutton: I agree with the hon. Gentleman. The problem that he describes is the consequence of the boom and bust in NHS finances that we saw under that lot opposite. We are trying to ensure that the NHS has a steady path of increased resources, so that it can plan accordingly. It makes my blood boil—on the subject of blood pressure—to hear stories like that because that was the old NHS. That is precisely what used to happen: stop and go, start all over again. We can do better than that, which is what we are trying to do.

The hon. Member for South Cambridgeshire quoted a number of voices on primary care. Let me add a further one to the pot. I mentioned earlier that we are successfully recruiting GPs from other European countries. One such recent recruit was Dr. Lefeuvre from France who now works for the NHS in south-east London, and he said recently:

> "When you have experience of the NHS, it is difficult to go back to France. We wanted to work in a different way, but unfortunately we didn't have the opportunity to do that in France. We decided to move over here because the NHS is more flexible than the system we had in France. Also my wife can work as a part time GP here. In France, that is impossible."

I very much welcome Dr. Lefeuvre's positive endorsement of NHS primary care, and I hope that the hon. Gentleman will be able to do the same.

As all my hon. Friends know, primary care is not just about doctors. There are also over 3,000 more practice nurses working in GP surgeries than in 1997—an 18 per cent. increase. The hon. Gentleman referred to a small fall in the number of community district nurses. It is true that there has been a fall of 800 or so, but the number of nurses who work in the community has risen by 25 per cent. in the same period.

Mr. Mark Todd (South Derbyshire) (Lab): When my right hon. Friend discusses that interface between nurses and GPs, will he reflect on the example of the nurse-led practice at Chellaston in my constituency, where the doctor is employed by a nurse who leads the practice, which is highly successful, fast growing and popular with patients?

Mr. Hutton: That is a good example. I suspect that my hon. Friend is talking about a personal medical services practice in which all sorts of opportunities have opened up. That model points distinctly to the future of primary care. The situation will not be the same as that in "Dr. Finlay's Casebook"—most of the speech made by the hon. Member for South Cambridgeshire described Dr. Finlay in detail.

The hon. Member for South Cambridgeshire does not have a leg to stand on when he criticises our record investment and work force expansion. We have embarked on a major programme of investment in new GP surgeries and clinics. In the past four years, almost 2,500 GP surgeries have been replaced or substantially refurbished. Over the same period, more than 300 new one-stop primary care centres have been developed. There are 42 new NHS local improvement finance trusts—LIFT schemes—to help to boost investment in NHS primary care premises.

Mr. Liam Byrne (Birmingham, Hodge Hill) (Lab): Does my right hon. Friend recognise that in my inner-city area—I know that many Opposition Members visited it during the recent by-election—it is critical for Eastern Birmingham primary care trust to work in conjunction with NHS LIFT if things are to operate at the necessary scale to transform services? Such work is offering us the prospect of transforming one of the worst eyesores in Birmingham, which is the Leyland club on Alum Rock road. Such plans would be impossible under the Conservative party.

Mr. Hutton: I appreciate my hon. Friend's point. I was one of those who made the journey to his constituency; I thoroughly enjoyed my visit. He makes a good point. The NHS LIFT scheme gives us an important new opportunity to expand primary care imaginatively. We must ensure that while we also plan acute sector re-provision and build up new hospitals—there are 100-plus schemes in the NHS—we look critically at how many of the services traditionally provided in a hospital can be relocated to a primary care environment. I agree with the president of the Royal College of General Practitioners and John Chisholm that it would be good to locate many traditional hospital-based services in primary care, and I would be pleased, as I am sure that my hon. Friend would be, if we could make such progress in his constituency.

The NHS LIFT scheme offers a significant opportunity for primary care, with a total capital value in excess of £700 million. The Conservative party cannot point to similar investment in primary care premises throughout its entire period in office between 1979 and 1997.

The new primary care contracts will provide a better way to reward health care professionals for their commitment to improving patient care. They represent an important movement away from payments based largely on capitation to rewards that direct reflect the quality of care provided and primary care professionals' hard work. All the clinical indicators in the new contracts have been chosen by an independent expert group and are based on the best available evidence. GPs agreed to them when they voted overwhelmingly in favour of the new contracts last year. That situation is in stark contrast to that under the previous Administration, who imposed a new contract on GPs after failing to reach agreement with them.

I do not believe that the new contracts devalue the role of doctors working in primary care. Quite the opposite is the case because they properly reflect the hugely important role that doctors play. We inherited a situation in which only half of NHS patients could get a prompt appointment to see their GP—many had to wait for a long time. Some 97 per cent. of patients are now able to see a GP within two days, which is a huge improvement on the situation that we inherited. The improvement has been led by the pioneering work of GP practices throughout the country, including in South Cambridgeshire, where 100 per cent. of the constituents of the hon. Member for South Cambridgeshire are now able to get an appointment within 48 hours. It was disappointing, although not altogether surprising, that he failed to mention that improvement.

People can now choose from a wider range of primary care services, such as the new NHS walk-in centres, 57 of which are now open with a further 25 in development. More than 5 million people have attended NHS walk-in centres since they first opened in 2000. That confirms the value of the new services to the public, as does the support expressed for them by the Patients Association. They operate on a drop-in basis and can help to ease pressure in other parts of the NHS. They filled a gap in primary care that needed to be plugged.

As I said earlier, and as my hon. Friends have rightly noticed, the hon. Gentleman made a big mistake when he claimed that because such services are nurse-led, they somehow devalue the role of doctors. Of course they do not do that, in the same way in which the work of paramedics in accident and emergency departments does not undermine the role of hospital consultants. Such work can complement and support the contribution of other health care professionals who work as part of a wider team. Such work is being performed within properly agreed protocols. The service is safe and effective—it is nonsense to imply otherwise.

We have always been clear about the need to involve fully GPs and practice staff in local decision making in the NHS. In our first White Paper on the NHS in 1998, which was presented to the House by my right hon. Friend the Member for Holborn and St. Pancras (Mr. Dobson), we made it clear that we wanted to

> "extend to all patients the benefits, but not the disadvantages of GP fundholding."

That is the aim of practice-based commissioning. It is not a return to the fundholding arrangements of the past. We have consistently made our intentions on the matter clear since 1998, so it is a pity that the hon. Gentleman and his colleagues have not been listening. Unlike under fundholding, no extra resources will go to practices that take up practice-based commissioning.

[Mr. Hutton]

There will be a level playing field for all practices irrespective of whether they take advantage of practice-based commissioning. Patients will not be unfairly disadvantaged if their practices decide not to take up the new opportunities, but that was not the case under GP fundholding.

Unlike fundholding, practice-based commissioning will not usher in a huge expansion of bureaucracy because primary care trusts will retain legal responsibility for the contracting process. We will not return to the situation under fundholding when decisions often came down to which hospital could provide a service at the lowest price because the single national tariff will prevent that from arising. Practice-based commissioning will instead focus on quality and efficiency, which will put patients' interests first, as it should be.

My hon. Friends and I believed that it was right to end fundholding because it unfairly discriminated against the patients of practices that chose not to take it up and because it spawned a giant bureaucracy. We will not repeat those mistakes as we take practice-based commissioning forward.

Dr. Andrew Murrison (Westbury) (Con): Is the Minister aware of a report of a study published in the *British Medical Journal* today showing that fundholders reduced admission rates for elective procedures considerably? That must be a major consideration when comparing different forms of primary care delivery. Was he aware of that study?

Mr. Hutton: Yes, the study emphasises the important role that GPs can play.

Mr. Lansley: What about fundholding?

Mr. Hutton: We made it clear that there were benefits of fundholding—that is not revolutionary or rocket science. We rejected the fundholding scheme because of its associated bureaucracy and because it was unfair. We did not reject it because it empowered GPs to make local decisions, and we made that absolutely clear in the 1998 White Paper. I shall send a copy of it to the hon. Member for Westbury (Dr. Murrison) and perhaps we can have a discussion in the House about it another time.

Labour Members can safely disregard the comments made by the hon. Member for South Cambridgeshire because they bear no resemblance to the realities of the present or the past.

The final thrust of the motion relates to the changes being made to out-of-hours services. We have previously debated those proposals, but let me make our position clear to Conservative Members again. The new contracts will not lead to the end of GP-led out-of-hours services. They simply move responsibility for organising such services from individual GPs to the primary care trust. Let me remind the hon. Member for South Cambridgeshire of the important facts. The changes have been agreed with GPs, although he failed to mention that in his speech. Would he go back on the new contracts? Would he restore the legal obligation for GPs to organise and deliver out-of-hours care? It is transparent to everyone that he would not, which confirms the hollow nature of his criticisms of the new arrangements.

The hon. Gentleman complains about GP work loads, but the new contracts are an attempt to address that for the first time. He cannot have his cake and eat it. GPs have cited the heavy burden of responsibility for organising out-of-hours care as a barrier to recruitment to general practice. We agree with GPs, which is why we agreed to the changes in responsibility. Does he agree with the GPs or not? It is not true to say that out-of-hours service will not be GP-led—they will be. However, over time, there will be a wider role for other health care professionals in the delivery of out-of-hours services. Is he suggesting that that should not happen?

If the hon. Gentleman thinks that the changes should not happen, he needs to explain the difference between, for example, a trained emergency care practitioner working an out-of-hours rota one night and in an accident and emergency department another night. He will need to explain the difference between a trained district nurse working in the community and a trained first-contact nurse visiting a sick patient at home out of hours. The truth is that there is no difference in those scenarios. Other health care professionals can help in the delivery of out-of-hours services, and it would be absurd to argue that they should not.

It makes sense to—*[Interruption.]* The hon. Members for South Cambridgeshire and for Westbury (Dr. Murrison) chunter away. I have tried to make it clear, but the hon. Member for South Cambridgeshire does not listen, that the services will be GP led. I hope that that deals with his uncertainty.

It makes sense to draw on the widest range of skills available to provide out-of-hours care efficiently, to ease the work-load burden faced by busy GPs and to meet the needs of patients. That is what we are trying to do with the profession. The hon. Gentleman has proposed no alternative whatsoever. That says it all.

The hon. Gentleman's approach can be described as totally predictable. He is a shroud-waver, and that is what he did today. He wants to claim that the out-of-hours services are disappearing and people will not be able to see a GP out of hours any more. His position is ridiculous. We are investing heavily in maintaining those vital services. GPs will still make home visits out of hours. His central argument is without foundation. We all know why he makes those allegations: it is pure opportunism and nothing more.

The hon. Gentleman referred to investment in new IT systems in the NHS. Let me remind him of one or two of the things that have happened over the past 20 years. The NHS has spent a significant amount on information technology over that period, but it has made that investment in a piecemeal fashion, with no strategic vision and oversight. As a result, we have ended up with thousands of different operating systems but no central data network. Compatibility and interoperability have often played second fiddle to local preferences. As a consequence, it is not uncommon for one hospital to be unable to transfer data to another or for one GP practice to be unable to send patient records electronically to another. There are no systematic patient records. So a doctor in Cornwall who has to look after a patient from my constituency who is admitted to A and E while on holiday will not have access to that person's medical history. It does not add up to a positive endorsement of the idea that small is beautiful.

Although historically there may have been good local IT initiatives, sponsored by enthusiastic visionaries, those were often inhibited by the overall lack of funding and development priority given to IT at all levels of the service. Typically, good experiences were not highlighted and successful implementations were not scaled from their local beginnings to NHS-wide applications. Even after procurement and implementation was over, there was no guarantee that different local systems would be compatible or scaleable to support patient care across different organisational boundaries. That is the reality, and it is that reality that we are trying to address in the national programme for IT.

The experience of allowing individual trusts to specify and procure their own systems was slow and hugely costly. Having a national programme, which the hon. Gentleman criticised—if I understood him correctly, he doubted the value in having a national programme—makes it possible to harness the massive buying power of the NHS to achieve huge financial as well as clinical benefits. Implementation of the national programme does not, however, mean that all the systems that are currently providing value will be scrapped. The national programme strategy makes it clear that best use must be made of the existing IT asset base. Nor will GPs be expected to change clinical systems while their current system is compliant with the NHS care records service and continues to serve them well.

The national programme has adopted an incremental approach to building up any new applications or systems. That approach is intended to ensure that implementation is achievable and minimises disruption to the day-to-day business of the NHS. Similarly, it does not imply a wholesale replacement of one primary care system by another. EMIS supply a significant number of systems to primary care practitioners and we would prefer it to be part of the ongoing national programme. The national programme has sought to ensure that EMIS engages with local service providers, and I am aware that the company is continuing to work with the national programme to make its systems compliant. For example, it co-operated with the recent upgrade to GP IT systems to support the quality and outcomes framework, which from next April will drive the GP reimbursement arrangements.

The Department's policy on local choice on IT provision, to which the hon. Gentleman referred, remains as stated in the guidance that we agreed with the British Medical Association last year, which is that each GP practice should have a choice of more than one system. Those systems will need to be accredited against national standards and deliver the required functionality. Guidance published on the national programme website makes it clear that existing suppliers play an important role in current and future NHS IT service provision.

I am aware that in some areas, following consultation with local clinicians and representative bodies, a consensus has emerged that it is sometimes in the best interests of the whole local health community if choice were exercised on a community rather than an individual practice basis. However, LSPs have been informed of the national programme position that GPs must not be forced to change systems, and I understand that individual practices will continue to be supported if they have expressed a wish not to begin migrating in the short term to the preferred local system.

We are acting to preserve choice for GPs on which IT system they use, but it is absolutely right and proper—this is where I take issue with the Opposition—to ensure that those choices support the important objectives of the national programme itself. Those objectives are that in future the NHS IT network is effectively integrated and capable of providing a smooth flow of information around the system as a whole. That is important because patient lives can depend on it. So we will not be departing from that basic requirement in relation to local IT solutions.

I have set out the steps that we are taking to support the development of primary care services in the NHS. It is a substantial record of investment, growth and improvement. It is a record we intend to build on in future years so that primary care retains the very special role it plays in our nation's health care system. The motion proposed by the hon. Gentleman is an empty and vacuous collection of opportunistic, inaccurate and simplistic assertions. He has jumped on to every conceivable bandwagon he could find. He has presented no meaningful alternative. That is why I invite my hon. Friends to reject it in the Lobby.

2.37 pm

Mr. Paul Burstow (Sutton and Cheam) (LD): As I listened to the exchanges across the Dispatch Box, it occurred to me that the proposition is either GP family services on the Finlay model or primary care services on the "Peak Practice" model, as favoured by the Government. The Minister was a little hard on Dr. Finlay, but perhaps he needed to make those points because the hon. Member for South Cambridgeshire (Mr. Lansley) sounded like an advocate not so much of the consumer of health care, but of producer interests in the health care system. It is essential that the patient be kept at the forefront of our minds and at the heart of our thinking. It was not clear from some of the points about the GP contract whether that was the key consideration.

There can be no doubt that GPs are the backbone of the primary care system. It is right that we are debating the state of family doctor services and their pivotal role. It is also right to acknowledge that there have been improvements. The extra investment is beginning to give us additional capacity. I hasten to add that Liberal Democrats were happy to go through the Lobby in support of that extra investment. Changes such as the new GP contract and the development of practitioners with specialist interests are rightly placing even greater emphasis on the role of primary care in general and GPs in particular. As the Conservative motion and the unselected amendment standing in my name and those of my right hon. and hon. Friends rightly document, areas of concern remain. It is not my job—or any Opposition Member's—to act as cheerleaders for the Government's record. Our role is to analyse, criticise

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and point out areas of concern, which there are in relation to the development of primary care services in this country.

Mr. Lansley: The hon. Gentleman talked about investment in national health services, but can he clear up a point about which I am slightly confused? The Liberal Democrats appear to be proposing hypothecation to the NHS of the proceeds of national insurance, but the relationship between the two in the coming financial year would result in NHS expenditure having to be reduced by £4 billion if one simply did that hypothecation. I do not understand from where that £4 billion would come if not from national insurance, and it is not hypothecation if money is brought in from elsewhere.

Mr. Burstow: The hon. Gentleman was right to say, "if one simply" hypothecated. I shall happily send him the working paper on which the policy is based, so that he can read it in detail. The paper makes it clear that the hypothecation is spread over an economic cycle, not done one year to the next. That is how the policy would work. It seems an appropriate way to ensure that people see far more clearly how much they pay in taxes for the NHS. I would be surprised if the hon. Gentleman did not want to sign up to that, given that people would understand better how much they were paying into the health service and therefore would be more likely to engage at local level and question whether priorities were correct and whether resources were going to the right areas.

The most recent staffing figures available—I understand that new ones are due to be published fairly soon—suggest that there were 3,435 GP vacancies, a 31 per cent. increase on the previous year. The Minister said that that was no longer the case but did not quote any figure, so I hope that he can tell us today what the most up-to-date survey reveals the number of GP vacancies to be. More telling than the vacancy rate is the fall in each of the last three years for which figures are available in the number of applicants for GP posts. In 2001, there were 6.9 applicants for every vacancy, but that number had more than halved, to 3.3 applicants, by 2003.

Furthermore, the position will worsen before it improves. There is a demographic time bomb ticking away under the NHS work force; the number of GPs who will reach the mandatory retirement age—70—in the next five years will increase rapidly, especially in London and the west midlands. It is clear that there are recruitment and retention issues to be addressed. A change in working patterns has also been noted. Many more GPs are choosing to work part time. As a result, although the headcount of GPs has increased by 4,237 since 1997—a welcome increase—the full-time equivalent has increased by only 2,913.

One of the pressures on the system is the number of people who do not get a choice in which GP they sign up to. Patients in many areas struggle to get easy access to a local GP. Many GPs have lists much larger than the national average, which is about 1,850 per GP; for example, the average Westminster GP is coping with 2,500 patients, and areas such as Barking, Newham and Birmingham also have among the busiest GPs in terms of the number of people on their lists. No wonder many GPs are having to close their lists to new patients and patients are finding it ever harder to register with or change their GP.

Earlier this year, in its "Transforming Primary Care" report, the Audit Commission found that 0.5 per cent. of people every year are assigned to a GP. That might not sound like a large number when described as a percentage, but a significant number of people are affected; about 250,000 people each year are unable to find a GP because of list closures and other difficulties and are assigned to a GP by their primary care trust. The Audit Commission rightly said that this

"can be a significant issue for patients."

Of course it can. People should be able to choose their GP and get care closer to their home; they should not be allocated a GP, which might entail longer journeys away from where they live. Where is the choice for those 250,000 people every year?

Such shortages give cause for concern about how patient choice will work in practice, especially in the "choose and book" programme. I have no problem with patients having more choice and more control over their health care, but I am concerned about the Government's choice agenda being too narrow and its basis being on rather over-optimistic assessments of the capacity available to introduce choice. We believe that patients need to have more control over their health care; they should not just be faced with an array of choices—a choice of five hospitals, say, or—

Mr. Hutton *rose—*

Mr. Burstow: I give way to the Minister, who seems to have perked up.

Mr. Hutton: I am confused by what the hon. Gentleman just said. He said that our choice agenda is too narrow, but then described it as over-optimistic. Will he explain?

Mr. Burstow: I described as over-optimistic the assessment of the capacity available to make the policy a reality in practice.

Mr. Siôn Simon (Birmingham, Erdington) (Lab): Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

Mr. Burstow: I ask the hon. Gentleman to allow me to develop my point before intervening. In my view, patients should be regarded as partners in their care and involved in decision making about their treatment. If that is to become a reality, it must be not be something that is available only to the articulate few. When the NHS improvement plan was published earlier this year, the way in which PCTs and primary care professionals provided support to everyone in their community in exercising choice was left as a matter of local detail, so although the Government have targets for the implementation of the choice programme, there will be variations throughout the country in the support available to make choice a reality for everyone, not just for the articulate few.

The argument about choice between the Government and the Opposition is advanced in terms of, "My choice is bigger than your choice," but Ministers must give serious consideration to the extra time that GPs will have to take to make choice a reality for all patients. I wonder whether Ministers have undertaken any assessment or evaluation of how much additional time GPs will require to support patients in making choices at the point of referral.

Mr. Simon: As one of the inarticulate many on this side of the Chamber, and bowing as we do to the articulate few on the other, I have to say that I am not following the hon. Gentleman's argument. It sounds articulate, but I am not getting the details. For the benefit of those of us who are finding his speech baffling, will he speak more slowly and even more articulately?

Mr. Burstow: I am grateful to the hon. Gentleman for his constructive criticism of my remarks so far. He has clearly been struggling, but I shall endeavour to improve my performance, so that he can follow the rest of the argument.

I was exploring whether the patient choice programme will have an impact on GP consultation times and what assessment the Government have made of how much extra time GPs will need to provide the advice and support necessary to make that choice a reality. It is essential that the best use is made of GPs' time, so the roles of other members of the primary care team will have to be expanded. I do not buy the argument advanced by the hon. Member for South Cambridgeshire, that it is not possible to examine critically the range of tasks for which GPs have historically been responsible and determine whether some might more appropriately be discharged by others in the primary care team. I do not know whether that is his view or whether he was quoting the view of others, but my impression was that it is his own view.

It is estimated that one fifth of GP appointments are made in relation to minor ailments that could be handled by pharmacists. The development of minor ailment services in high street-based community pharmacists could help to ease the pressure on GP surgeries. That is a sensible proposal and one that I think will emerge from the new pharmacy contract. The Liberal Democrats would support such a move.

Mr. Rendel: Is not it the case that not only would the Liberal Democrats support it, but so would most of the best GPs?

Mr. Burstow: I am sure that is so. We need to re-examine the role of the GP and how some of the tasks hitherto undertaken by a GP can be taken on by others who have a great deal to contribute. For many years community pharmacists have felt undermined and undervalued within the system and as though they were not seen as part of the primary care team. There are now opportunities to overcome that.

It is not just the role of pharmacists that can be expanded. There is also scope, for example, to develop the role of therapists, particularly physiotherapists. I was struck by a pilot scheme undertaken in the Forth Valley primary care trust over a 30-month period, which looked at opportunities for self-referral to NHS physiotherapy services in a primary care-led setting. The study found that that had significantly reduced GP workloads. People were choosing to go not to the GP but to the physio, possibly to deal with problems of back pain. That had a marked impact on individuals' quality of life and reduced GPs' work load so that they could concentrate on other tasks, not least issues relating to the management of chronic disease.

Other possibilities such as nurse prescribing, nurse-led practices and therapist-led clinics are providing new career paths for professions that we need to attract into primary care, and are freeing up GP time. These changes in the roles of nurses and therapists are crucial to ensuring that we start to tackle the shortages in these professions.

What is being done with the time that GPs have? The Government's obsession with targets is of real concern to GPs. For example, follow-up appointments are delayed and deferred to ensure that first appointment waiting time targets are hit. Diseases with a target attached take priority over those without a target. GPs end up playing piggy in the middle as frustrated patients turn up at the surgery asking for their appointment with consultants and others to be expedited. It is not just targets in secondary care that need to be scrapped. The 48-hour access target is leading to all sorts of wheezes to game the system.

Sarah Teather (Brent, East) (LD): Despite repeated assurances from my local primary care trust that the 48-hour access target should have no impact on forward-planned appointments, I have had a continuous run of complaints from two groups of patients in particular. The first is those who are chronically ill and find it impossible to book repeat appointments with the same doctor, and the second is those who work and want to book an appointment for, say, next Wednesday, so that they can take a little time off work. They find that the only way they can get an appointment is by starting to jam the phones at 8.30 am, book the whole day off and hope that they can get to see the doctor by the end of the day. That has huge implications for going to see a doctor when the situation is not urgent and people simply want to talk something through.

Mr. Burstow: I thank my hon. Friend for her intervention. Those experiences are reflected in MPs' mailbags. Perhaps the good intentions behind the target are not being translated into reality. My hon. Friend's example of patients not being able to see the same GP at their next appointment raises concerns about the continuity of care, and there are increasing concerns about access to the GP by those who work away from the area where their GP surgery is located and not being able to get an appointment when they want one.

Other wheezes that are being used to game the system have been drawn to my attention by GPs, such as restricting patients to one problem per consultation. I do not know how that works in practice, but it is being tried. Another wheeze involves setting limits on times when patients can call for an appointment and, as my hon. Friend the Member for Brent, East (Sarah Teather) mentioned, rationing access because the telephone is engaged all the time. So many people are phoning in that

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they cannot get through to book an appointment. The selective release of appointment slots is a further wheeze. Appointments should be booked to meet the patient's need, not to hit an arbitrary target. All too often it seems that the target is shaping the way the system is working.

The motion refers to out-of-hours services. There is still much confusion about how such services will work after 1 January. The Select Committee on Health, whose Chairman intervened earlier, rightly raised concerns about the costs, planning and implementation of a huge change to the provision of family doctor services out of hours. I support the change. *[Interruption.]* If the Minister would not chunter from a sedentary position, I would be happy to outline my concerns. Hopefully, there will be a response to some of those.

It is evident from my mailbag and that of many other hon. Members that people are worried about the loss of Saturday morning surgeries and the difficulties that that will cause. How did the Government arrive at their estimate of £6,000 per GP to provide out-of-hours and Saturday morning services? According to the results of a survey by the NHS Alliance, PCTs are struggling with the logistics, staffing and finances necessary to deliver out-of-hours services. One in five PCTs say that they will restrict services on the basis of quantity or quality or both. On what basis does the Minister reject the findings of the NHS Alliance's survey? I wonder whether he has looked at it and why he does not consider it an acceptable basis on which to criticise the Government's approach to the provision of out-of-hours services in the new form under the new contract.

Where will all the extra doctors come from to staff the out-of-hours services? How much reliance will PCTs have to place on locum and overseas doctors to fill the gap? Many PCTs plan to use NHS Direct services as the front end of their out-of-hours services. However, that will need to be monitored closely in the light of recent research in the *British Medical Journal*. A study published on 17 September looked at the effects on consultation workload and costs of off-site triage by NHS Direct compared to on-site nurse triage in general practice. Patients in the NHS Direct group were less likely to have their call resolved by a nurse and were more likely to have an appointment with a general practitioner. In other words, it was costing more to use NHS Direct. Perhaps that explains one of the cost pressures that PCTs are grappling with. Half of PCTs have said that they will contain the extra costs by delaying investment in new services. How long will they delay investment in much-needed new services?

Ministers have said that the recent increases in accident and emergency attendances have nothing to do with the change to out-of-hours services. Certainly some of the figures suggest that the increase predates the changes. I accept that, yet reports from the front line tell another story. The *Nursing Times* recently quoted an accident and emergency sister at Norfolk and Norwich university hospital as saying that her department had seen a 13 per cent. rise in attendances since January. She is quoted as saying:

> "People tell me they are here because it is convenient and because they cannot get an appointment at the GP's."

Perhaps that is another unintended consequence of the 48-hour access target. To what do the Government attribute the increase in accident and emergency attendance?

Mr. Hutton: I have tried to resist intervening on the hon. Gentleman, but it has got too much for me. He has repeatedly attacked the 48-hour target, as did the hon. Member for Brent, East (Sarah Teather). I understand the criticism, but under the hon. Gentleman's proposals, how quickly would one of his constituents be able to get an appointment to see a GP if he scrapped the target?

Mr. Burstow: I am not proposing a target. I am proposing to scrap a target, because it gets in the way of people being treated quickly. The problem is that with the target, people are not getting treatment as quickly as they need because they are unable to get an appointment when they want it. An arbitrary target misses the point. That is my criticism of the Government's target culture.

Mr. Hutton *rose*—

Mr. Burstow: I will not give way again, if the right hon. Gentleman does not mind. I wish to make some progress and move on to NHS IT procurement, which is mentioned in the motion. Well designed business processes delivered by well implemented systems can save GPs and other primary care professionals time previously spent on administration, but there are real concerns about how the procurement is proceeding and how the end users are being engaged in the process. What control do GPs have over the process?

Mr. Simon: Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

Mr. Burstow: No, I shall make progress, if the hon. Gentleman will forgive me. Without GPs' engagement and without their enthusiastic support, delivering a system that is fit for purpose will be a challenge. It is far from clear who in the national team is responsible for leading on this aspect of the programme's work. How will the full costs of the procurement be met? It has been reported that the total cost of IT procurement could be anything from £18 billion to £30 billion. Most of the extra costs will have to come out of existing budgets, increasing the average spend on IT; yet another cost pressure for PCTs to grapple with.

A further issue not mentioned in the motion but relevant to the working conditions of family doctors and the quality of care that patients receive is the standard of practice premises. According to a written answer that I received there are 700 GP practices operating in sub-standard accommodation; that is, accommodation below the Department's minimum standard, such as surgeries that lack sufficient consultation space, have access difficulties or pose questions about patient confidentiality. What is the timetable for tackling such sub-standard premises?

Many GPs face the serious problem of the affordability of premises, a particular concern in areas with extremely high property prices such as London. In some areas, GPs are retiring and selling their premises at residential rates to recover their investments, and those doctors are not being replaced because prospective GPs cannot afford to set up premises in such areas.

The hon. Member for Leigh (Andy Burnham) mentioned the difficulty of getting doctors to set up in other areas, and I sign up to his view that salaried GPs have a role to play in ensuring good primary care across the whole country.

Sarah Teather: That is a particular problem in Brent, East, where underdeveloped land is scarce and property prices are high. The only way in which doctors can solve the problem is to buy a Victorian property and convert it. However, if one adds the cost of the property to the investment required to convert it, the cost is greater than its overall value, and the PCT will only reimburse GPs up to market value.

Mr. Burstow: My hon. Friend is right to raise that concern, which I know that she has raised with her PCT. GPs often wind up in negative equity as part of acquiring a property, which cannot be sensible. Although NHS LIFT is certainly part of improving existing accommodation and providing new accommodation, PCTs should surely have the freedom and flexibility to find solutions that fit local circumstances.

The motion refers in misty-eyed terms to GP fundholding. Many GPs whom I talk to do not have fond memories of how Conservative proposals on fundholding worked in practice. Fundholding caused a huge equity deficit in the way in which NHS care was accessed; whether one's GP was a fundholder determined how fast one was treated, which was not an acceptable basis on which to provide health care. Serious questions also remain over the cost-effectiveness of the fundholding experiment. Practice-led commissioning must avoid that pitfall, and some of the Minister's comments this afternoon have reassured me on that point. No patient should be left behind in the new system.

A balance must be struck between freeing the frontline to innovate—the reason why I would scrap targets and support practice-led commissioning—and the need to develop and maintain coherent community health services from one part of the country to another. To date, little research has been conducted into the impact of practice-led commissioning, and as that policy is rolled out, I hope that how it works in practice will be carefully evaluated.

I have already said that the Government are obsessed with targets and handing out tick boxes. When it comes to family doctor services and primary care, "Shifting the Balance of Power" has not resulted in a bonfire of targets and red tape.

Mr. Simon: Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

Mr. Burstow: I have already said that I will not give way to the hon. Gentleman.

A PCT executive board member recently told me that after all the spending commitments tied to Government targets, the trust had already allocated 105 per cent. of its budget. That leaves no room for local innovation and no scope to ensure that services are aligned to the health needs of the local population, in which case unmet need remains just that. The NHS needs good local performance management; it does not need poor national political targets.

We carefully examined the Conservative motion, but we cannot support it because it does not offer the right vision of primary care service, while the Government amendment pats the Government on the back, and we will therefore vote against both of them tonight.

GPs are the backbone of the system in this country and are vital to delivering closer-to-home health care, and this debate is an important contribution to that vision. I urge my hon. Friends to vote against both the Government amendment and the Conservative motion, neither of which offers a coherent vision for the future.

3.4 pm

Andy Burnham (Leigh) (Lab): To be fair to the Conservative party—I am not often inclined to do so—I congratulate it on securing today's debate and focusing our attention on primary care services, because the debate about health and the NHS in this country too often focuses on secondary care and hospitals, rather than primary care.

The motion describes family doctor services as the lynchpin—perhaps it is the bedrock or backbone—but whatever word we use, they are crucial to all our constituents. Given that the Conservative party has focused on the issue today, why on earth did it not prioritise family doctor services and primary care during its 18 years in power?

The Conservative Government left primary care in a sorry state, particularly in our more deprived communities and inner cities. Between 1991 and 1996, GP registrars fell by 20 per cent., which is why we now have a problem with GP vacancies. Let us make no bones about it: the motion discusses problems with GP vacancies and we can lay the blame at the Conservative party's door—GP numbers were slashed between 1991 and 1996. This Government have barely been in power long enough to see a GP through his training, which takes six or seven years, so we must make that point plain from the start.

The Conservative Government left GP practices in many communities in a terrible state—for example, located in old terraced houses without consulting rooms. The primary care estate, if we can call it that, was in a terrible mess. What are the answers in the motion? The motion discusses the reintroduction of fundholding, but is that really the answer to the problems facing primary care today? Fundholding placed an arbitrary label on patients, which dictated how they went through the system. Treatment was provided not on the basis of how urgently it was required, but according to funding status. Fundholding is incoherent. The motion mentions providing more Saturday surgeries, but it bemoans GPs being told what to do and being subject to targets. How can one want Saturday morning surgeries and also defend GPs' independence as contractors who can dictate their own work load?

The motion says nothing—not a word—about the state of primary care premises, on which I shall concentrate for a moment. In some of the more deprived communities, the state of the facilities led to general

[Andy Burnham]

practice becoming moribund and lacking a clear vision for the future. The Government's vision for primary care is beginning to emerge in my constituency. That vision includes high class, modern facilities where GPs want to come and work, in all the towns in my constituency. GPs can obtain professional satisfaction from working in such facilities because space is available to deliver new services and because they can locally develop services previously provided by secondary care. The future of primary care involves GPs developing their skills and their role, which is linked to the quality of premises.

My constituency contains one of the 42 LIFT pilot areas, and it is probably true to say that our scheme is one of the most developed. A couple of weeks ago, I visited the Atherton site, where a brand new facility for GPs has already been built. The facility is huge and looks like a cottage hospital: it has ample space and includes consulting rooms, while the facility is first class and looks lovely, too. LIFT will take services out of secondary care sites such as Wigan infirmary and Leigh infirmary and put them on the doorsteps of mining communities, where transport is not good and people must travel to access services. That can only be good.

The Atherton scheme was one of the first, but a scheme is also in progress in Golborne. The first phase of the Golborne scheme, Leigh health park, has already opened. A new GPs clinic is planned for Hindley in my constituency—it will be located next to the Sure Start building and the swimming baths. Those developments will transform the quality of primary care at a local level.

The Minister of State, my hon. Friend the Member for Doncaster, Central (Ms Winterton), knows that primary care is particularly important in communities that have a legacy of ill health from mining, because she kindly visited my constituency earlier this year. We have much higher levels of chronic long-term illness than other parts of the country and people find it harder to travel because they have mobility problems. That is why it is crucial that these services are developed and improved locally and people are saved from making needless trips to hospital.

General practitioners will be enthused if they are given modern facilities in which to work. That will tell them that they can begin to develop their careers and interests and to deliver far more than they are able to deliver in the cramped and poor conditions that they often have at the moment. The quality of the estate is crucially linked to tackling GP vacancies. Moreover, the improvements that have taken place in secondary care are linked to general practice. As GPs can begin to navigate their patients around the system as capacity is opened up and waiting lists fall, they can once again become the true advocates, or champions, of their patients, because they will be able to assert themselves on their behalf to secure the best of the care that they think they need. The role of the GP is about to flourish again, and it could become a very rewarding job.

In my constituency we face problems with GP vacancies and, as I have told the Minister before, with dentist vacancies. Contrary to Conservative Members, I would make a plea for salaried GPs and dentists in our communities, because they can provide services when patients want them at a time that they find convenient. That is the answer. My hon. Friend should reject the calls about "Dr. Finlay's Casebook" and give us salaried employees who can deliver services to my constituents.

I wholeheartedly endorse the Government's vision and direction, but funding is also required. As I say, health in my constituency is poorer than in many other parts of the country. The Minister talked about the increases in funding that have gone into primary care. That is indisputable, and they are welcome, but from the viewpoint of a PCT such as mine the imminent three-year spending round must go further in taking all PCTs as close to their target funding as possible. Otherwise, it will not be possible to deliver the desired improvements in general practice and family doctor services in areas such as mine. My PCT is some £12 million below its target funding in this financial year. I am led to believe that in PCTs in other areas where health is even poorer—such as Easington, central Manchester and parts of Liverpool—funding is even further below target. Yet many other PCTs in leafier parts of the country are significantly over the target that the Department of Health says that they need in order to tackle the health needs of their communities.

The Healthcare Commission recently recommended that the Government should move much more quickly towards bringing all PCTs up to balanced funding. That is because a couple of years ago the chief medical officer said that death rates in some communities in the north-west and the north-east have not improved since the 1950s. That shames every person involved in public policy, because it has not delivered the health gains to the communities that it should have done—health gains that other parts of the country are enjoying.

This spending round, in which a significant amount of extra money is going into primary care, gives us the chance to take a great leap forward in lifting the baseline of PCT funding in areas where the need is greatest. *[Interruption.]* The hon. Member for South Cambridgeshire (Mr. Lansley) may laugh, but that is morally the right thing to do. Extra health care revenue—new money—should be spent in the areas where need is greatest. There is no point in continuing to overfund areas that are already well provided for when we have serious health care problems in areas that are below their target funding allocation.

Dr. Murrison: Would the hon. Gentleman like to comment on whether health inequalities have widened or narrowed since 1997?

Andy Burnham: I would confidently assert that serious inroads have been made into some of the problems that scarred my constituency. For instance, deaths from coronary heart disease have been reduced by the prescription of statins under the national service framework. If the hon. Gentleman wants to argue that the Conservatives are in favour of tackling health care in the poorest communities, why on earth do not they say so, and why have they never shown any willingness to tackle the issue head on? I am proud to stand behind a Minister and a Government who are doing something about it. I urge them to take one more leap forward in this spending round, because many PCTs are some way below their target funding.

Mr. Simon: Is my hon. Friend aware that my own PCT is in eastern Birmingham, which is another traditional working-class community that is not projected to be funded as it had expected and as we would like?

Andy Burnham: I do recognise that. In many cases, inner cities and communities such as mine are suffering the most.

Mrs. Patsy Calton (Cheadle) (LD): Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

Andy Burnham: I want to draw my remarks to a close, because other hon. Members want to speak.

We should not take money away from places that are well provided for—they should at least keep in line with NHS inflation so that there are no cuts to services—but we should put the new money into areas where health care needs are greatest. The Government are doing great things in health and I can see their vision emerging. All power to the Minister in what she is doing, but I ask her to give us that extra bit more money so that we can improve the health of those who are most in need.

Several hon. Members *rose—*

Madam Deputy Speaker (Sylvia Heal): Order. Several Members are hoping to catch my eye. If hon. Members can be concise in their remarks, more may be successful.

3.16 pm

Mr. Desmond Swayne (New Forest, West) (Con): In July this year, my primary care trust took on the out-of-hours care for the New Forest, and together with other local PCTs contracted Primecare to carry out the service. Let me give those Members who do not have that new system a taste of what they are in for.

I discovered that something was radically wrong right at the outset when a retired doctor contacted me to say that he was being telephoned by his former patients, asking him if he could do anything for them because they could not get anything out of the out-of-hours service. I have here the minutes of a meeting at a doctors' surgery—I shall not give its name, but it is in God's own town of Lymington. Dr. X introduced the meeting as follows:

> "This meeting is to make clear our serious concern for our patients' welfare — and to highlight some of the causes so that they may be addressed without delay, thereby avoiding serious trouble."

He goes on to list some of the problems:

> "Triage delay . . . Lack of feedback from doctor to doctor . . . Inadequate feedback, slow and poor quality . . . Hopeless record-keeping and doctor contact . . . Poor car-organisation . . . To this I would add . . . Low standard of triage, which is unsafe . . . Poor quality of outcome . . . Poor communication . . . Cavalier attitude regarding handing-on of work . . . Dire cost-effectiveness".

Mr. Simon: Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

Mr. Swayne: No, I will not.

He concludes:

> "The Forest GPs have an enviable and hard-won reputation for looking after their patients' properly, and are deeply unhappy to find that this is already being undermined. We will not tolerate this, finding ourselves in the situation of being blamed by patients for inexcusably bad service from the new"—

out-of-hours—"system." So that is what the doctors think.

Let me give a vignette from my postbag as to what the patients think about this service. I received a letter from a lady in Milford-on-Sea who turned out to be suffering from a severe bladder infection. She did not know that at the time—she was simply in pain when she rang up at 8.30 in the morning only to get a robot voice telling her that no operators were available. After 10 minutes, she gave up and rang the other number, on which she reached an operative who could not understand what she was telling him and handed her to another operator who also could not understand. The call took 15 minutes, and as it was an 0845 number she was paying a premium rate. Eventually a nurse called back and the problem was sorted out with a visit to the local hospital, after she had been in pain for 10 hours.

Another wonderful example came from the other end of my constituency, in Ringwood. A lady's father had his toe amputated and came to stay with her to be looked after, but the dressing fell off, so she telephoned for some assistance. She wrote that at

> "approximately 10.30 pm his dressing came off his foot—I phoned Prime Care and after the telephonist spoke to someone I was told he needed to see a nurse and they would phone me back and give this 'top' priority. Three quarters of an hour later I phoned again and I was told it was 'top' priority and someone would be phoning shortly. I am still waiting!!!"

Mr. Kelvin Hopkins (Luton, North) (Lab): Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

Mr. Swayne: No, I will not.

Another example came to me from Diabetes UK, which is making representations on behalf of one of my constituents. The woman in question had shingles—she did not know that at the time, but she suspected it—and diabetic complications. She rang up at 10 am, and eventually, 12 hours later, she got to see a doctor—12 hours later for an out-of-hours service.

Another example came from Fordingbridge. It was a case of suspected stroke, in which the district nurse was contacted and handled the contact with Primecare. That contact began at 7 o'clock in the evening, with repeated calls at 9 pm and 10 pm, and the person was told that a doctor was coming. At a quarter past midnight, a doctor rang to say that he would not call after all.

Then there was a lady in Milford-on-Sea who rang up with her problem, got a foreign-sounding man on the phone, and could not get any sense out of the conversation. Eventually, a nurse rang back, who, having offered the woman the option of being treated at Bournemouth or Southampton, and having been told that that would involve either a 50 mile or a 30 mile

[Mr. Swayne]

round trip, said that she did not know where either of those towns were, because she was phoning from Sheffield. After further considerable delay—

Mr. Hopkins: Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

Mr. Swayne: The hon. Gentleman is so persistent that I cannot resist.

Mr. Hopkins: Could the hon. Gentleman inform me whether Primecare is a private company? Is this what private health care is like?

Mr. Swayne: I will come to why it is like this in a moment. Let me finish with this particular lady's difficulties.

After four hours' delay, and having got to a centre—having been offered in the interlude Brighton, Winchester and Andover, moving in an elliptical orbit of increasing distances away from the caller—she finally got to a doctor. After telling the story of what was wrong and giving her name, address and medical history so many times, she then found that the doctor had the wrong name and no other information about her.

Finally, I shall give the example of a lady in Ringwood, who wrote:

> "The nurse asked my father a lot of questions which were unsuitable as he could not get his breath, let alone talk."

Eventually, they got to a treatment centre, where her father

> "was seen by a German doctor, he was good but my father needed oxygen and the cylinder was empty."

I sympathise with the point on which she finished her letter:

> "My father has worked hard all his life. It is only now he needs medical help and this is what he has to put up with."

That is just a small selection of the complaints that I have been receiving from the New Forest. Ministers may live in planet Richmond house, but the reality of people's experience of primary care, and particularly of the out-of-hours service, is as I have described.

The hon. Member for Luton, North (Mr. Hopkins) asked whether a private company was involved. As I understand it, the problem is—I will meet the primary care trust again tomorrow, so see whether this is the case—that the service is costing vastly more than it is being reimbursed by the NHS for providing it. With respect to it being a private company, the reality is that most of the provision is by the people who have always provided it—the doctors in the New Forest. The chaos is engendered by the fact that this has been taken over by the primary care trust and then subcontracted to someone else. Were it still being run and led by the doctors of the New Forest, we would not be exposed to this problem.

I want to abide by your strictures about being brief, Madam Deputy Speaker, but I want to address one other problem about which doctors in the New Forest have been complaining to me. That is their fear that the system used by about 60 per cent. of them—EMIS—is going to be discontinued, and that they will have to abandon their tried and tested system and adopt something that will be expensive, unfamiliar and unhelpful. I have made a number of representations on their behalf. The story that we have got is that it will not work like that at all, and that EMIS might survive. During my research, I have found that that is not the case.

The Minister referred to the guidance. I have examined the document on the internet—"NPfITsuppliersguide.pdf"—which says:

> "Following the final selection of LSPs"—

local service providers—

> "and the two 'core' clinical applications for the NHS, it has been implicit that these systems will ultimately replace existing NHS clinical systems over time".

The reality is that the systems that our GPs are using now will be discontinued. During my research, I came across a very interesting document—the minutes of a board meeting of the Surrey and Sussex strategic health authority, which stated:

> "Professor Lawrenson raised the issue of the pressure being placed on surgeries to conform with NPfIT, when funds and culture were perhaps adverse."

Mr. Simon: Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

Mr. Swayne: No, I will not.

The minutes continued:

> "The chief executive replied that the nature of the new . . . contract would effectively see the demise of all other systems and their current suppliers. Professor Lawrenson also observed that the traditional benefits associated with suppliers going to great lengths . . . to meet NHS requirements was in danger of disappearing . . . GPs . . . were currently able to exercise some choice in terms of the systems they used".

That choice would not be available, "once IDX . . . was introduced". The minutes continued:

> "The Chairman acknowledged these concerns but remarked that the NHS was undergoing a process of 'ruthless standardisation' as far as IT was concerned and that there were clear advantages to that strategy."

Well, we have not seen any advantages.

3.27 pm

Mr. Doug Henderson (Newcastle upon Tyne, North) (Lab): I promise the House that my speech will be short. I want to raise a constituency issue, which also raises a point of general principle about the way in which the primary care trust operates, certainly in Newcastle and perhaps elsewhere.

To the south-west of my constituency is a community called Lemington, which has a population of about 9,000. At the bottom end of Lemington, right on the banks of the Tyne, is a relatively underprivileged area where a lot of elderly people live. Because of the private housing that is let, a lot of young single mothers live there too.

Until a couple of years ago, there was one doctor working in Lemington. He then left the practice. Having been approached by local people, I asked the health authority how people in Lemington were to gain access to primary care. The health authority told me that there was a perfectly adequate, indeed very good, practice about two miles west of Lemington, in a community called Newburn. In fact, the nearest practice is at the top of the hill. Anyone who has ever walked up the banks of the Tyne will know how steep they are. The hill leading from Lemington to the nearest community, about three quarters of a mile away, rises 300 or 400 ft. That is not the kind of gradient that an elderly person should be expected to negotiate.

At the top of the hill, on a plateau, is a relatively more affluent area called Chapel House and Chapel Park. There are two doctors' practices within 50 m of one another, each with about six partners. I asked the health authority "Do you think this is the right distribution of resources? Would it not be better if at least one or two of the partners in the two practices at the top of the hill moved a little of their operation to the bottom, where the poorest people live?" The health authority said "We will do what we can, but we cannot compel doctors' practices to locate themselves in any specific place." In that case, I asked, could the authority employ a doctor directly? The authority said that there was a limit to the number of doctors that it could employ directly, and that Lemington did not warrant the appointment of an employed doctor because there were enough doctors in the overall outer-west area. I could not disagree with that in statistical terms.

The question is, why does the authority not have power to require the two practices at the top of the hill at least to provide some facility at the bottom, where the need is greatest? The irony is that far more people own cars at the top of the hill than at the bottom, where there are elderly people and young mothers, many of them single.

The Government should look at the regulations governing the primary care trust. I do not think it right that we cannot require people who are publicly funded to locate themselves in areas of greatest need. The people of Lemington did not expect six doctors to go down to the bottom of the hill, but it would be an improvement if just one or two of the partners were prepared to work from a centre for at least some of the day, or some of the week.

There is, in fact, a new centre at the bottom of the hill in Lemington. It is one of those projects funded partly by regeneration money. There will be some nurses there. That great new facility could be financed because of the increase in health resources, but there is still no doctor for it. That is ridiculous, but the PCT tells me that it can do nothing.

I think that this is a real problem. I hope that the Minister will address it, if necessary taking advice from the health authority in Newcastle. If it turns out that the authority has interpreted its own regulations accurately, I hope that the Minister will consider the possibility of change to provide more flexibility, so that the authority can reallocate resources as circumstances and priorities change.

3.32 pm

Mr. David Amess (Southend, West) (Con): I congratulate my hon. Friend the Member for South Cambridgeshire (Mr. Lansley) on his speech. I agreed with everything that he said. My only criticism would be of his moderate language. There is no doubt that this is a centralising Government: there is not one aspect of our daily lives in which they are not prepared to interfere.

The first thing I ask the Minister to do is stop bashing doctors. The Government bash teachers, they bash the police, they bash our defence forces, they bash doctors, and the professionals find it absolutely repugnant. Labour Members recently started bashing each other. That I am not too bothered about—in fact I rather enjoy it—but I do think that bashing the professionals is deeply repugnant.

The Minister of State, the right hon. Member for Barrow and Furness (Mr. Hutton), who is no longer present, spoke about the marvellous atmosphere among GPs. He comes from the area that I represent. Were he to meet GPs in Southend, West, he would find that morale is currently pretty low. Let me give an example. I have received a letter from a local GP. On the "target culture", he said that

> "everything we are being asked to do is dominated by collecting numbers and reaching targets. This means that clinical priority is often put behind reaching targets. This is difficult for both primary care physicians as well as hospital doctors.
>
> This government is obsessed by the need for patients to be seen in 24 hours by a nurse and within 48 hours by a GP. To reach these targets the Modernisation Agency has introduced 'advanced access'. This means that in many surgeries patients who need urgent help in fact end up phoning or contacting the surgery for several days before getting an appointment. This means that they are waiting much longer than they used to. It is particularly difficult for elderly people. Doctors should decide when patients are seen and in what priority and should be left to run their own businesses."

On information technology, I do not want to be too unfair to the Minister, given that the Health Select Committee has been graciously invited to Richmond house on Tuesday. I am informed that we will be given

> "a demonstration of the Choose and Book software which will enable GPs to make direct referrals to Secondary Care and a demonstration of the NHS Care Records Service which will allow the sharing of consenting patients' records across the NHS".

We look forward to that.

However, another GP wrote to me saying:

> "Primary care doctors now feel more like data input clerks than general practitioners, spending much more time than ever inputting information into computer systems in order to reach targets that achieve points that have no proven clinical basis. Doctors striving to reach these unrealistic targets solely to reap the financial rewards that this brings, are compromising good standards of clinical care and 'Points mean prizes' are now the watchwords .... The data input requirements that are part of the Quality Outcome Framework mean doctors spend much time staring at their computer screens during what should be 'face-to-face' consultations. There is a general feeling of frustration that the data collection is detrimental to patient care. The public, who are ultimately funding the massive increase in health spending, frequently complain to primary care providers that they are seeing little in the way of improvement and know full well that there are lies, damn lies and statistics and do not believe the figures put out by the Department of Health."

As the Health Committee Chairman said, the Committee produced a report on this issue in July; indeed, the Minister of State, the right hon. Member for Barrow and Furness, gave evidence to us on it. This issue is obviously important. Approximately 9 million patients receive urgent primary care out of hours, and as the report states,

> "the 'out-of-hours' period, as it is now defined, accounts for two-thirds of every week."

We took evidence from a number of organisations, and again to be fair to the Minister, as the report states,

> "West Hull and East Anglia ... both ... appeared to be well advanced in developing innovate solutions to providing GP out-of-hours services for their local populations."

[Mr. David Amess]

However, it appeared to us that the preparedness of primary care trusts was not uniform across the country. In giving evidence, the NHS Confederation expressed the view that

> "PCT readiness is not consistent across England".

Having listened to the contribution of my hon. Friend the Member for New Forest, West (Mr. Swayne), one can see the extent of that inconsistency. The NHS Confederation felt that PCTs displayed a lack of understanding of out-of-hours issues and in general were not ready for the responsibility that they are being given. That is very worrying. It also said that PCTs are seen as being reactive rather than proactive. Few primary care trusts were working positively with GP co-operatives, which were mentioned earlier. Indeed, often, instead of being adversarial, they were actually in conflict. Dr. Mark Reynolds gave evidence, saying that people in PCTs were taking on the job "with no real experience". If we consider how important the service is, that is very worrying. The Health Committee felt strongly that PCTs across the country were not universally prepared. The Government certainly need to do something about that.

A local GP wrote to me recently to advise me that there was "considerable concern" about the out-of-hours services being taken over by primary care trusts. He said:

> "Many are starting a new service with no previous experience. They have not really consulted the GPs in the locality about how the service will run. They have not asked for advice in setting up the service. The whole thing is being rushed and is a recipe for disaster".

I end with those thoughts: as we all know, everything is driven by primary care trusts now.

Unlike any other hon. Member present, I attended the Committee stage of the Bill that introduced primary care trusts. If anyone took the time to read the Committee proceedings, they would see that every single point raised by Opposition Members has, sadly, come to pass. A GP who wrote to me said:

> "General practitioners were conned with the set up of PCTs. Some five years down the line, the ability of local practitioners to have any influence whatsoever on how services are commissioned or run in their area is minimal. They have no power on any PCT board and are often totally ignored."

That was not how the idea was sold to the country five years ago. I hope that the Minister, the hon. Member for Doncaster, Central (Ms Winterton), will take the opportunity when replying to the debate to praise the work of our GPs, stop bashing them and reassure the public that they will be given good quality out-of-hours services. Let us hope that the information technology on which the Health Committee is to be educated on Tuesday will not prove as deficient as it appears to be at the moment.

3.42 pm

Mr. Kelvin Hopkins (Luton, North) (Lab): First, I advise the hon. Member for South Cambridgeshire (Mr. Lansley) to visit his own GP. If he did, he might find that he has an injured foot where he shot himself. Whenever Conservative Members speak about health, I am reminded of the level of health spending when we came to office in 1997. I have the approximate figures: Britain spent 3 per cent. less of its gross domestic product on health than France, and 3 per cent. of GDP is equivalent to about £50 million per constituency every single year.

It is no surprise that we still have problems now, because we are still dealing with the legacy of the Conservative years. The Government are certainly making real progress now—it is evident in my constituency—because they have increased spending on health. We cannot have a good health service unless we spend the money on it. I accept that it must be spent efficiently, and we can argue about different systems, but we will never have a good health service without providing the resources. When the Minister said that the Conservatives do not have a leg to stand on, perhaps it is because they keep shooting themselves in the foot, though I shall not pursue that any further.

My Luton constituency has seen significant progress, although there are still undoubted problems. We still have "single-handed" GPs who are quite elderly and have long lists and they over-refer to hospitals perhaps because they cannot cope with the number of patients or perhaps because they are worried about diagnosis. My own GP practice is a group one and it is extremely good. It is now embarking on screening for blood pressure and other risk factors for the over-50s. That is new and did not happen a few years ago. It is also easier to get an appointment at short notice these days.

However, there is still a serious shortage of GPs in Luton. When PCTs were set up, I was a little dubious, but the PCT in Luton is truly excellent and making substantial progress in introducing new systems. Only a few weeks ago, my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State opened a new walk-in centre, and I was also present when my hon. Friend the Minister for Public Health opened another superb health centre just this week. The new centre was initiated by our PCT, which shows that it is working well with local GPs and doing really good things.

We also have an excellent hospital in the area, which is making a great contribution. It is working together with the PCT, and I am very pleased about that.

At one time, I was seriously worried that there might be an extension of contracting to private companies. That has not happened, at least not yet. I hope that Ministers will resist that temptation, otherwise we might fall into the problems described by the hon. Member for New Forest, West (Mr. Swayne). I want an integrated health service whose component parts work coherently together. I do not want a health service that is disparate, subcontracted, and the province of competing private companies.

As I said, there has been tremendous progress in Luton. From the day it opened, the walk-in centre in town has attracted many patients. It is always full and does a great job. It attracts people—for example, the classic male—who are normally reluctant to see their GP and who feel uncomfortable about seeing a doctor. It is much easier for such people to drop into the walk-in centre and talk, for example, about the pain that they may have in their leg. Making it easier for people to see doctors is part of the way forward.

It is obvious that we need to train more doctors. As the hon. Member for North-East Bedfordshire (Alistair Burt) said in Health questions last week, Bedfordshire faces a serious problem with its GPs. That problem is especially severe in Luton, but we are moving gradually to a world in which there is greater direct employment.

Mention has been made of salaried doctors. The doctors in Luton's walk-in centre are employed directly, and that is the direction that we should follow. Indeed, I believe that Nye Bevan would have preferred to create a service based on directly employed doctors in 1948, but he had to make some unavoidable compromises. I think that he would have been very pleased to see the move towards direct employment and the establishment of a coherent health service in the public sector. I hope to push my Government in that direction if I possibly can.

Group practices and centres such as I have described can afford to have specialisms and to employ a range of doctors. In my constituency, there are a number of minority ethnic communities, whose members might prefer to see a doctor who comes from their community and speaks their language. Moreover, women might prefer to be examined by a woman doctor rather than by a man. Group practices in a modern health service can provide such things.

I do not criticise GPs, as they do a tremendous job, but the old, single-handed practices run by a Dr. Finlay-type figure are a bit of a dying breed now. They did a wonderful job in their day, but we are moving to a new era. We should aim to provide what people need, and not try to match the folksy image that appears on television.

Dr. Murrison: Does the hon. Gentleman think that his constituents would prefer to see Dr. Finlay, or go to a walk-in centre?

Mr. Hopkins: We all want to have a personal relationship with a doctor, but I think that there will be a gradual convergence and that walk-in centres and medical centres such as I have described will offer services very similar to those available in the past. Patients will have a permanent relationship with one doctor, or with a group of doctors. For instance, I am not concerned about which doctor at my group practice I see. The practice has all my records and the doctors know me well, so there is no problem.

Mr. Doug Henderson: Does my hon. Friend accept that the practice run by Dr. Finlay and Dr. Cameron was virtually a walk-in centre?

Mr. Hopkins: Yes, but I suspect that in those days only those who could pay were able to walk in. We are talking about a free health service, and there is a big difference.

My next point has to do with funding. As is the case in the constituency of my hon. Friend the Member for Leigh (Andy Burnham), Luton is millions of pounds below its fair funding target. We have serious health problems with diabetes and heart disease, because of the nature of the population. We have a growing problem of HIV in Luton, partly because of people coming in from elsewhere. Those factors cause enormous pressure on our local health service and we need considerably greater funding.

Mental health services are also substantially underfunded across the country. Indeed, mental health provision is a Cinderella service, certainly in Luton. We have superb facilities and great doctors, but there are not enough of them. As a result, serious mental health problems in Luton are going undetected and untreated for lack of resources. That lack of resources stems from what the Conservatives did in their time in government, not from what our Government are doing now.

3.50pm

Mr. Richard Bacon (South Norfolk) (Con): I am pleased to have the chance to speak in this debate. The motion calls on the Government

> "to ensure that the NHS Programme for information technology delivers the choice of suppliers and functionality which general practitioners need".

I wish to focus specifically on that issue. The IT programme in the NHS is undoubtedly of huge importance, but GPs have serious concerns about it, not least because they are, at the moment, the controllers of information about patients. Eventually, under the proposals, it is likely that most information will be held centrally and a wider range of people will have access to it.

Worryingly, many of the characteristics of the most famous IT fiascos in the public sector—there are examples almost everywhere one looks—are exhibited by the national programme. The first is what the elder George Bush called "the vision thing". While for most undertakings some sense of where one is going is necessary, a grand vision for IT projects can be the most dangerous thing to have. Tony Collins, the specialist computer journalist, writes in his book "Crash: Ten Easy Ways to Avoid a Computer Disaster":

> "In computer disaster terms a vision is an essential first step".

Mr. Simon: Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

Mr. Bacon: No, time is limited and I know that others wish to speak.

All the evidence and reports that the Public Accounts Committee sees suggest that failed IT projects have in common the failure to take things step by step, the failure to build on what is already known, the failure to be incremental and infection by the vision thing. The national programme exhibits the vision thing in huge measure. It will cost £6.2 billion with an unknown amount on top for implementation.

The second problem is lack of consultation. In the Criminal Records Bureau fiasco, there was a huge lack of consultation. An August issue of *Computer Weekly* contained a survey by Medix that found that

> "Doctors feel left out of NHS IT plans".

In answer to a question about how much information they had had about the IT project, 3 per cent. said that they had had a lot of information, 26 per cent. had had some information, but 31 per cent. had had not much information, 29 per cent. had had no information but had heard of it, and a further 11 per cent. said that it was the first they had heard of it. In other words, 71 per cent. of those responding had had little or no information. In answer to a question about what consultation they had experienced personally about the IT project, 10 per cent.

said that it had been barely adequate, 15 per cent. said it had been inadequate and 70 per cent. said that they had experienced none—a total of 95 per cent. of the respondents.

The third characteristic of IT disasters, which will be worryingly familiar to students of such matters, is a high turnover of staff involved. Sir John Pattison, one of the original architects and the first senior responsible owner of the programme, has gone. Lord Hunt, who was the Minister in charge, has gone. Richard Granger, the director general of IT in the health service, slums along on a salary of £200,000 and is the highest paid civil servant in the UK, but he earns a lot less than he would in the private sector. I attended a conference recently that had promotion stands for local service providers and I mentioned to one of them that I had heard that Richard Granger would be moving on soon and they said that they had heard that too. We shall watch eagerly to see how long Mr. Granger remains in his job now that the LSP contracts have been let. Of course, he was never responsible for clinical buy-in to the programme; it was explicit that he had no responsibility for getting clinicians involved. The Department of Health suddenly noticed that that was a bit of a problem, so rather late in the day—in March 2004, two years after the announcement of the programme—it appointed Dr. Aidan Halligan, the deputy chief medical officer, as the joint senior responsible owner of the programme. Yet six months later, in September, we found that Dr. Halligan was to return to his native country to take up a post as the head of the health service in Ireland, having achieved more or less nothing in terms of clinical buy-in during his six months in the job.

The fourth characteristic is indeed buy-in and most projects that do not work fail in that respect. That is where the alarm bells really start to ring. What must be, even for students of IT disasters, the locus classicus of such disasters was the Wessex regional health authority, where there was a Department of Health project for a central system that had to be imposed regionally, and a key issue was the failure to achieve clinical buy-in. It simply did not happen, so the district health authorities refused to fund the project and the Department had no choice but to cancel it. The fear is that primary care trusts will be put in a similar position and will not have sufficient funding to make the programme work, especially when their clinicians do not want it, do not like it and do not trust it anyway.

Clinical buy-in is incredibly important, because clinicians need to understand who has put the data into the system. They are unlikely to trust data unless they know how it was acquired and whether it is reliable. There is also a huge question about who will have access to such data. Are the proposed controls on access and the security protocols adequate to the task? Do they meet the concerns of GPs and patients about maintaining the privacy of what is often sensitive information? There is implied consent in data going up to the national spine in the programme; even if patients do not give consent, the data will be wrapped so that it is not easily readable. I was told today that consultants can look at any data, including that of patients who are not their own, and change the consent tag without obtaining the patient's permission. There are serious concerns about access to data, as well as about clinical buy-in generally.

The fifth characteristic often found in failed IT projects relates to funding. The Minister of State, who, sadly, is not in the Chamber at the moment, did what can only be described as a magnificent job in adding to the confusion in an interview on Radio 4 a couple of weeks ago, which was lovingly and forensically reproduced in *Computer Weekly* under the headline, "Health Minister adds to uncertainty over implementation costs of the NHS IT plan". It included a photograph of the Minister in which he is gesturing. I think that he is trying to explain something but unfortunately his expression makes him look like a white rabbit caught in a headlight, so whether he is on the receiving end of something or trying to give an explanation is not clear. What is certain, however, is that he did not make things easier to understand when he said:

> "We think it is going to cost the same".

In other words, the £1 billion currently being spent on IT in the health service will cover all the changes required, taking no account of the fact that there is a series of IT issues in the health service, such as finance, payroll, manpower, staff rostering and the procurement of food and clinical and other services, as well as specialist equipment for immunisation programmes, none of which has anything to do with the national programme for IT.

The hon. Member for Sutton and Cheam (Mr. Burstow) received a little more clarity when pursuing a question put by my hon. Friend the Member for Westbury (Dr. Murrison). The Minister said:

> "Future funding to the NHS determined by the SR2004 expenditure settlement will enable trusts to achieve the target of 4 per cent. for total NHS spending on IT, set by the 2002 Wanless Report."—[*Official Report*, 4 November 2004; Vol. 426, c. 393W.]

Four per cent. is much higher than the current figure so that is not consistent with the statement, "We think it is going to cost the same". Any light that the Minister of State can shed in the wind-up will be most welcome.

To summarise, we have a massive vision, even though we know that in IT the vision thing is one of the most dangerous elements; indeed, it is a key ingredient of any computer disaster. We have lack of consultation on a spectacular scale. We have a high rate of staff turnover, although it has not yet reached the rate achieved during the implementation of the national probation service information systems strategy, which had seven programme managers in seven years, five of whom knew nothing about project management. One fears that we may be reaching that point. We also have a lack of buy-in—always a key worry, and in this case buy-in by clinicians, the people who matter the most—and we have huge questions about funding. This is a hardly a recipe for certainty or confidence and it is hardly surprising that *GP* magazine has said of the national programme for IT in the health service that it is likely to be more of a fiasco than the dome.

All of this is before one takes into account the effects of the new GP contract, and the way that it interlocks and dovetails, or, rather, does not interlock and dovetail, with the local service provider contracts that Mr. Granger has been so busy letting at such a high speed. As my hon. Friend the Member for South Cambridgeshire (Mr. Lansley) mentioned, the GMS contract says in paragraph 4.34:

> "Each practice will have guaranteed choice from a number of accredited systems",

but the local service provider contracts, which are roughly £1 billion apiece across the country, say more or less the opposite; that LSPs can impose a main system on local commissions with one alternative.

This brings us back to a point that was made earlier about the EMIS system, which is currently used by 55 per cent. of general practitioners, which is not involved in any of the local service provider contracts, unfortunately; mainly because the company could not get professional indemnity insurance because of the risks that insurers thought that it, as a relatively small company compared with the very large contractors who are LSP contractors, would have to take on. So we have the ludicrous situation in which GPs are in some cases having to turn away from a system that works, the EMIS system, and turn towards a system that in some cases has not even been written yet.

Until recently I was not familiar with the phrase "vapourware", but I am told that it means a system that exists, so far, only in someone's head; it has not even reached the back-of-the-envelope stage. No one who knows anything about EMIS or Vision or any of the other systems would say that they are perfect, but at least they were incrementally developed. They were not infected by the vision thing, they responded to what local clinicians wanted, they have continued to change in response to the needs of GPs in helping their patients, and GPs like the systems and want to carry on using them.

The Department reckons that, given the choice between getting something for free and having to pay for a system like EMIS, GPs will choose to go for something that is free. The Department is probably right that some of them will, but I think that it will be surprised, and I predict that many GPs will choose a system that they know, trust and understand, even if they have to pay for it. The point is that they should not have to pay for it; there should be no discrimination in funding between systems that GPs can rely on and ones that are still in the ether.

The areas that I would like to see the Minister focus on in the wind-up are as follows. First, specifically in relation to EMIS, will the Minister give a guarantee that there will not be an imbalance in the funding between systems such as EMIS and systems provided by the national programme for IT? Will Ministers listen to GPs' ongoing concerns about the potentially huge problems of data transfer? The other day I received a letter about that from a GP in Suffolk; the problems are potentially enormous. Can the Minister say whether the national programme understands better the benefits of the project rather than the risks, because where things go wrong it is nearly always the case that people have underestimated the risks?

Should £6 billion of contracts have been signed before it was known what the overall costs would be, including the costs of local implementation, before it was known what changes in business processes would be necessary, before it was known whether clinicians would use systems that were sought to be imposed centrally, before it was known how the benefits would be measured, before it was known whether GPs would oppose any handover of control of the confidentiality of their patient records and before it was known whether there were enough in-house skills to translate national plans into local action?

Finally, the National Audit Office, interestingly, has already announced an investigation into the national programme, which may shed light on some of these questions. But in the meantime I look to the Minister for an assurance that GPs will not be forced to replace trusted, well developed, well understood systems that provide what they want and enable them to help patients, with distrusted, less well developed, less well understood systems that may end up costing taxpayers a fortune without delivering what is required.

4.4 pm

Dr. Andrew Murrison (Westbury) (Con): We have had a good debate this afternoon. We have had a total of six Back-Bench speeches and some very good contributions indeed. It is regrettable that the speech made by my hon. Friend the Member for South Cambridgeshire (Mr. Lansley) was not listened to more closely by the Minister who replied to him. The Minister gave us a rendition that he had clearly written some time ago. My hon. Friend was trying to be helpful, as always, and it is a pity that his remarks were not reflected on more closely when the Minister came to make his speech. I am sure that his colleague will not fall into that trap when she comes to make her comments.

It is a time of enormous change for general practice. It is arguably the time of greatest change since the inception of the national health service—in many respects, perhaps even greater than that. Many practitioners and certainly the general public are perhaps not aware of the enormity of what is going on. The bedrock of primary care is shifting. Doctors will no longer have a 24/7 commitment to patients; patients arguably will no longer have a doctor whom they can truly call their own. Functions previously carried out by physicians are now being carried out by others.

General practice was once the lynchpin of British health care and one of its most attractive features; it was unique in the world and renowned throughout the world. It may be that the changes that are under way will improve health outcomes. We must always be on the lookout for how we might improve services, but change brings risk and the risk is that a unique and cherished part of health care delivery in this country is beginning to decline. That is certainly the impression that one gains from talking to many medical colleagues. They have the feeling that perhaps they have seen the best. We have heard some humorous references in the debate to "Peak Practice" and "Dr. Finlay's Casebook". We can joke and laugh about it, but in truth I suppose most people's ideal vision of a general practitioner is someone who has time to listen, to manage chronic conditions and to have a long-term relationship sometimes over many generations with a family.

With so much change, there is little wonder that many in the medical profession are struggling to determine where they will fit into the new scheme of things. Many have accepted the new contract, but privately they fear for their future and that of their calling.

[Dr. Andrew Murrison]

The hon. Member for Leigh (Andy Burnham) gave us his impression of how things were, especially in urban areas. The Labour party does not have a monopoly on concern for those who live in urban areas or for the underprivileged. We shall have a White Paper next week on public health. I hope that the Minister will tell us how Ministers feel that they might improve the health of those who are worst off. I am happy to send the hon. Member for Leigh some figures that may be of interest to him on improvements in health that have happened among the less well-off since 1997. We briefly exchanged some comments across the Floor of the House on that, and I think that he will be interested in the figures that the Department of Health has produced in that respect.

The hon. Member for Leigh may also be interested in the figures for recruitment in deprived urban areas, which have fallen in recent years. The number of applicants for positions in general practices has declined in deprived urban areas. I am more than happy to send him those figures.

Linda Gilroy (Plymouth, Sutton) (Lab/Co-op): The hon. Member for South Norfolk (Mr. Bacon) took 14 minutes, which denied me the opportunity to contribute. It is the legacy of my Tory predecessor that I represent the poorest ward in England. We do not have a recruitment problem. Will the hon. Gentleman look at how the primary care trust in Plymouth is performing? The chair of the professional executive committee, Dr. Pete Williams, said to me only this morning—he has been doing a surgery this afternoon as we speak—

"I've been a GP for 17 years and never enjoyed the job more."

Dr. Murrison: I am grateful for that intervention. Plymouth is a city that I know well, and I fully acknowledge that it has its own particular problems. I am delighted that the gentleman enjoys his job. Until recently, I enjoyed being a general practitioner. It is a unique calling, and I am pleased to hear that good news.

My hon. Friend the Member for New Forest, West (Mr. Swayne) talked about Primecare and EMIS, which is used by 60 per cent. of GPs in the New Forest—slightly above the national average. I will say a little about IT if I have a few moments presently.

The hon. Member for Newcastle upon Tyne, North (Mr. Henderson) wants his PCT to be a little more assertive in determining where general practices are located. Given that many PCTs appear to be an arm of central Government, perhaps he might want to have a word with his right hon. Friend the Minister about that.

My hon. Friend the Member for Southend, West (Mr. Amess)—a member of the Health Committee whose remarks were, as ever, robust and knowledgeable—was worried about the collection of data and referred to the fact that points mean prizes in connection with the quality and outcomes framework.

The hon. Member for Luton, North (Mr. Hopkins) focused on spending, rather than outcomes. Of course, spending is relatively straightforward—we can all do that—but getting results is more difficult.

My hon. Friend the Member for South Norfolk (Mr. Bacon) is, by now, an expert on the national programme for IT in the NHS, given his membership of the Public Accounts Committee. Again, I should like to make a few comments about NPFIT.

The new GP contract has thrown up a number of what are, I think, unintended consequences. We have heard about the demise of the Saturday morning surgery. It is perhaps ironic that, when we are seeing a reduction in out-of-hours services and Saturday morning services, we see the creation of walk-in, quick and easy clinics at railway stations. Most of our constituents want to see their own doctor if they possibly can, and I wonder about the Government's priority in that respect.

I should like to talk briefly about community hospitals. Again, an unintended consequence and perhaps something that the Government have not thought through properly is the threat to community hospitals. I have four such hospitals in my constituency, two of which have been badly affected by the new GP contract and threatened. Previously, GPs have given their services more or less for free to community hospitals because they have been on call out of hours and can bolt on their services to community hospitals relatively easily. Now that they no longer work out of hours, they are looking again at that commitment to community hospitals. Community care cannot be provided without out-of-hours cover. GPs would like to cover community hospitals in most cases; but, frankly, they are more or less doing so for free, and I very much hope that the Minister will consider that and reflect on the fact that the framework document for the new GP contract referred to the need to negotiate terms for GPs who work in community hospitals, but that was the last that we heard of it.

I should like to mention health MOTs because I suspect that they will become a large part of general practice in the future. Certainly, that is the hint that we get in the media. I have no doubt that the Minister will probably want to discuss that at some length next Tuesday, but I should like to sound a cautionary note. All hon. Members would like to see a wellness service—that is for sure—but those health MOTs and health checks should be based on evidence. We do not want gimmicks, because they are likely to divert resources from where they can be arguably better used.

This week, *Doctor* magazine felt that, under Government plans,

"Sick people will be treated by NHS Direct, walk-in centres and pharmacists"

while

"Proper doctors—

by which I think that it means traditional GPs—

"will spend all of their time devising health plans for well people."

Unless health plans are grounded in evidence and targeted properly, there is a real risk that they will be gimmicks and do very little to improve the health of the population. Health inequalities are growing under the Government. Such non-targeted schemes risk diverting resources from where they might have maximum impact.

NPFIT continues to be rolled out. We all agree that better IT is needed in the NHS, but we are perhaps at risk of indulging in some "group think". We are committed to a greater or lesser extent to that approach, so we are not prepared to think of alternatives. The predecessor programme—information for health—was bottom up, rather than top down, and we have perhaps lost some of the good points of that earlier proposal. I very much hope that Ministers will listen to GPs, who feel very badly let down, especially in relation to EMIS.

4.15 pm

The Minister of State, Department of Health (Ms Rosie Winterton): Opposition Members have asserted that the Government have failed to support family doctors. However, as the Minister of State, my right hon. Friend the Member for Barrow and Furness (Mr. Hutton), ably demonstrated in response to the hon. Member for South Cambridgeshire (Mr. Lansley), the exact opposite is true. Support for NHS general practice has never been greater.

There has been an unprecedented increase in investment in primary care under this Government. Expenditure will have risen by £6.8 billion in England by next year and by £8 billion in the UK as a whole. We have fostered innovation, with a greater range of services being offered to patients. We have increased the importance of primary care in the NHS and we have improved the rewards for NHS workers in primary care, both financially and in terms of professional responsibility.

The hon. Member for Southend, West (Mr. Amess) said that we were bashing doctors, but since July 2000, almost 2,500 general practice surgeries have been replaced or refurbished as we modernise the NHS infrastructure after years of under-investment. There are already some 1,300 GPs with special interests who are delivering a range of extended services in local settings that are convenient to patients. There are 1,169 more general practitioners than in 1997, and 3,280 more practice nurses. Record numbers of doctors are training to be GPs—almost 80 per cent. more than in 1997. We have introduced the new contract for GPs—unlike the previous Administration who imposed one—, which will considerably improve their quality of life and increase recruitment and retention. That is hardly bashing doctors.

The proof that our policies are working is the fact that more doctors are joining the NHS and staying within the NHS. They recognise that Labour is offering them a professional career in which they can concentrate on providing the best patient care. We are seeing an NHS that is becoming more local, not less. It is an NHS in which general practitioners and nurses have a greater say on how their patients are treated, and an NHS that is tailored to the needs of individual patients.

Let me briefly deal with several points made by hon. Members. I welcome the fact that the hon. Member for Sutton and Cheam (Mr. Burstow) acknowledged that there was extra investment in the NHS and that the new pharmacy contract presented an exciting opportunity to extend the role of pharmacists. He asked about GP vacancy rates. The vacancy rate in 2003 was 3.4 per cent., but that had reduced to 3 per cent. in 2004. The rest of his speech, however, was frankly a typical Lib-Dem whinge.

My hon. Friend the Member for Leigh (Andy Burnham) presented the vision of high-quality services that his constituency wants. He pointed out the importance of linking high-quality premises so that some of the GP vacancy problems that he was experiencing could be overcome. He talked about the way in which the LIFT scheme in his constituency was giving easier access to services. It was a great pleasure to visit his constituency and see how local people are working to improve services. He asked about funding, which we know that we need to address in some areas. He knows that we are considering allocations at the moment.

The hon. Member for New Forest, West (Mr. Swayne) gave a graphic description of his complaints about Primecare. We launched new guidelines on 14 October, which set out quality requirements for out-of-hours services, and I hope that those are useful in the meeting with his primary care trust.

My hon. Friend the Member for Newcastle upon Tyne, North (Mr. Henderson) referred to the difficulty in his constituency with the location of GPs in a particular area. The PCT can establish services under PMS where there is the greatest patient need. That may be a solution. However, I shall raise his specific point with the strategic health authority. My hon. Friend the Member for Luton, North (Mr. Hopkins) talked about the new health centres and walk-in centres in his constituency. He rightly drew attention to the importance of training and the provision of mental health services.

The hon. Member for South Norfolk (Mr. Bacon) raised the issue of IT. Of course we will listen to GPs' concerns. I also understand that my right hon. Friend the Minister of State has written to him about his specific points. If those are not dealt with in his correspondence, we will follow that up.

The hon. Member for Westbury (Dr. Murrison) mentioned Saturday morning services. PCTs can commission them as a matter of local discretion. Saturday morning surgeries are covered by out-of-hours services, as agreed in the new contract.

The Opposition motion says that we are failing to support family doctor services. The debate has demonstrated that nothing could be further from the truth or the reality of what is happening on the ground. The Conservatives had their chance to run the NHS. We know what happened when they were in control. Nurse training places were cut by 25 per cent. and GP training places were cut by 20 per cent. The fact is that under the Labour Government the NHS is getting better. We have record investment, 100,000 more doctors and nurses, the largest ever hospital building and equipment programme, better working conditions for all NHS staff and better treatment for NHS patients. Labour will keep the NHS free at the point of need. The increased investment that we are providing benefits the many, not the few. In our NHS, access is based on clinical need, not on how much people can afford.

The Conservatives have consistently voted against increased investment in the NHS. They voted against the increase in national insurance contributions to fund the health service. This Government will never remove £1.2 billion from the NHS to subsidise the well-off few who pay to go private. That is exactly what the Tories' patient's passport would do. The vast majority of Britain's hard-working families cannot afford £9,000 for a heart

[Ms Rosie Winterton]

bypass operation or £5,000 for a hip replacement, and they would face the prospect of unlimited waits under the Conservatives.

The Government believe that primary care is the cornerstone of the NHS and we are committed to supporting it. NHS primary care consistently scores 90 per cent. in patient satisfaction surveys. That is not the achievement of an unsupported service. It is a fantastic tribute to the hard work and dedication of GPs and NHS primary care staff. It shows that the public support the NHS, and so do the Government. I urge the House to reject the Opposition motion and support the Government's amendment.

Question put, That the original words stand part of the Question:—

The House divided: Ayes 118, Noes 286.

Division No. 317] **[4:25 pm**

AYES

Ainsworth, Peter *(E Surrey)*
Amess, David
Arbuthnot, rh James
Atkinson, David *(Bour'mth E)*
Atkinson, Peter *(Hexham)*
Bacon, Richard
Barker, Gregory
Baron, John *(Billericay)*
Beggs, Roy *(E Antrim)*
Bellingham, Henry
Bercow, John
Beresford, Sir Paul
Boswell, Tim
Bottomley, rh Virginia *(SW Surrey)*
Brazier, Julian
Browning, Mrs Angela
Burnside, David
Burt, Alistair
Butterfill, Sir John
Cameron, David
Cash, William
Chapman, Sir Sydney *(Chipping Barnet)*
Chope, Christopher
Clarke, rh Kenneth *(Rushcliffe)*
Clifton-Brown, Geoffrey
Collins, Tim
Conway, Derek
Cormack, Sir Patrick
Cran, James *(Beverley)*
Davies, Quentin *(Grantham & Stamford)*
Djanogly, Jonathan
Fallon, Michael
Field, Mark *(Cities of London & Westminster)*
Forth, rh Eric
Francois, Mark
Gale, Roger *(N Thanet)*
Garnier, Edward
Gibb, Nick *(Bognor Regis)*
Goodman, Paul
Gray, James *(N Wilts)*
Grayling, Chris
Green, Damian *(Ashford)*
Greenway, John
Grieve, Dominic
Gummer, rh John
Hammond, Philip
Hawkins, Nick
Hayes, John *(S Holland)*
Heald, Oliver
Heathcoat-Amory, rh David
Hendry, Charles
Hoban, Mark *(Fareham)*
Hogg, rh Douglas
Horam, John *(Orpington)*
Howarth, Gerald *(Aldershot)*
Jack, rh Michael
Jackson, Robert *(Wantage)*
Key, Robert *(Salisbury)*
Kirkbride, Miss Julie
Laing, Mrs Eleanor
Lait, Mrs Jacqui
Lansley, Andrew
Leigh, Edward
Letwin, rh Oliver
Lewis, Dr. Julian *(New Forest E)*
Liddell-Grainger, Ian
Lidington, David
Lilley, rh Peter
Loughton, Tim
Luff, Peter *(M-Worcs)*
McIntosh, Miss Anne
Maclean, rh David
McLoughlin, Patrick
Malins, Humfrey
Mates, Michael
Mawhinney, rh Sir Brian
Mercer, Patrick
Moss, Malcolm
Murrison, Dr. Andrew
Osborne, George *(Tatton)*
Ottaway, Richard
Page, Richard
Paisley, Rev. Ian
Paterson, Owen
Prisk, Mark *(Hertford)*
Randall, John
Robathan, Andrew
Robertson, Hugh *(Faversham & M-Kent)*
Roe, Dame Marion
Rosindell, Andrew
Ruffley, David
Sayeed, Jonathan
Shepherd, Richard
Simpson, Keith *(M-Norfolk)*
Smyth, Rev. Martin *(Belfast S)*
Soames, Nicholas
Spelman, Mrs Caroline
Spicer, Sir Michael
Spink, Bob *(Castle Point)*
Steen, Anthony
Swayne, Desmond
Syms, Robert
Tapsell, Sir Peter
Taylor, Ian *(Esher)*
Taylor, John *(Solihull)*
Taylor, Sir Teddy
Turner, Andrew *(Isle of Wight)*
Tyrie, Andrew
Walter, Robert
Waterson, Nigel
Watkinson, Angela
Whittingdale, John
Wilkinson, John
Willetts, David
Wilshire, David
Winterton, Ann *(Congleton)*
Winterton, Sir Nicholas *(Macclesfield)*
Young, rh Sir George

Tellers for the Ayes:
Mr. Hugo Swire and Andrew Selous

NOES

Abbott, Ms Diane
Ainger, Nick
Ainsworth, Bob *(Cov'try NE)*
Alexander, Douglas
Allan, Richard
Allen, Graham
Armstrong, rh Ms Hilary
Atkins, Charlotte
Austin, John
Baird, Vera
Banks, Tony
Barnes, Harry
Barron, rh Kevin
Battle, rh John
Bayley, Hugh
Beard, Nigel
Beckett, rh Margaret
Benton, Joe *(Bootle)*
Berry, Roger
Best, Harold
Blears, Ms Hazel
Blizzard, Bob
Boateng, rh Paul
Bradley, Peter *(The Wrekin)*
Bradshaw, Ben
Brake, Tom *(Carshalton)*
Brennan, Kevin
Brooke, Mrs Annette L.
Brown, rh Nicholas *(Newcastle E Wallsend)*
Bryant, Chris
Buck, Ms Karen
Burgon, Colin
Burnham, Andy
Burstow, Paul
Byrne, Liam *(B'ham Hodge H)*
Cable, Dr. Vincent
Caborn, rh Richard
Cairns, David
Calton, Mrs Patsy
Campbell, Alan *(Tynemouth)*
Campbell, Ronnie *(Blyth V)*
Caplin, Ivor
Casale, Roger
Caton, Martin
Cawsey, Ian *(Brigg)*
Challen, Colin
Chapman, Ben *(Wirral S)*
Chaytor, David
Clapham, Michael
Clark, Dr. Lynda *(Edinburgh Pentlands)*
Clarke, rh Tom *(Coatbridge & Chryston)*
Clarke, Tony *(Northampton S)*
Coaker, Vernon
Coffey, Ms Ann
Cohen, Harry
Colman, Tony
Connarty, Michael
Corbyn, Jeremy
Cotter, Brian
Cranston, Ross
Crausby, David
Cruddas, Jon
Cryer, John *(Hornchurch)*
Cummings, John
Cunningham, Jim *(Coventry S)*
Darling, rh Alistair
Davey, Valerie *(Bristol W)*
David, Wayne
Davies, Geraint *(Croydon C)*
Dawson, Hilton
Dean, Mrs Janet
Denham, rh John
Dhanda, Parmjit
Dismore, Andrew
Dobson, rh Frank
Donohoe, Brian H.
Doran, Frank
Dowd, Jim *(Lewisham W)*
Drew, David *(Stroud)*
Drown, Ms Julia
Dunwoody, Mrs Gwyneth
Eagle, Angela *(Wallasey)*
Eagle, Maria *(L'pool Garston)*
Edwards, Huw
Efford, Clive
Ennis, Jeff *(Barnsley E)*
Etherington, Bill
Farrelly, Paul
Field, rh Frank *(Birkenhead)*
Fisher, Mark
Flynn, Paul *(Newport W)*
Follett, Barbara
Foster, Don *(Bath)*
Foster, Michael *(Worcester)*
Foster, Michael Jabez *(Hastings & Rye)*
Gapes, Mike *(Ilford S)*
George, Andrew *(St. Ives)*
George, rh Bruce *(Walsall S)*
Gerrard, Neil
Gibson, Dr. Ian
Gidley, Sandra
Gill, Parmjit Singh
Gilroy, Linda
Godsiff, Roger
Green, Matthew *(Ludlow)*
Griffiths, Win *(Bridgend)*
Hall, Mike *(Weaver Vale)*
Hall, Patrick *(Bedford)*
Hamilton, David *(Midlothian)*
Hancock, Mike
Hanson, David
Harris, Dr. Evan *(Oxford W & Abingdon)*
Havard, Dai *(Merthyr Tydfil & Rhymney)*
Healey, John

Henderson, Doug *(Newcastle N)*
Henderson, Ivan *(Harwich)*
Hendrick, Mark
Hepburn, Stephen
Heppell, John
Hewitt, rh Ms Patricia
Heyes, David
Hinchliffe, David
Hoey, Kate *(Vauxhall)*
Hood, Jimmy *(Clydesdale)*
Hopkins, Kelvin
Howarth, rh Alan *(Newport E)*
Howarth, George *(Knowsley N & Sefton E)*
Hughes, Beverley *(Stretford & Urmston)*
Hughes, Kevin *(Doncaster N)*
Humble, Mrs Joan
Hurst, Alan *(Braintree)*
Hutton, rh John
Iddon, Dr. Brian
Irranca-Davies, Huw
Jackson, Helen *(Hillsborough)*
Jamieson, David
Jenkins, Brian
Johnson, rh Alan *(Hull W)*
Johnson, Miss Melanie *(Welwyn Hatfield)*
Jones, Helen *(Warrington N)*
Jones, Jon Owen *(Cardiff C)*
Jones, Kevan *(N Durham)*
Jones, Lynne *(Selly Oak)*
Jones, Martyn *(Clwyd S)*
Joyce, Eric *(Falkirk W)*
Keeble, Ms Sally
Keetch, Paul
Kelly, Ruth *(Bolton W)*
Kemp, Fraser
Kennedy, rh Charles *(Ross Skye & Inverness)*
Khabra, Piara S.
Kidney, David
Kilfoyle, Peter
King, Andy *(Rugby)*
King, Ms Oona *(Bethnal Green & Bow)*
Ladyman, Dr. Stephen
Lamb, Norman
Lammy, David
Laws, David *(Yeovil)*
Lazarowicz, Mark
Lepper, David
Leslie, Christopher
Levitt, Tom *(High Peak)*
Lewis, Terry *(Worsley)*
Linton, Martin
Love, Andrew
Lyons, John *(Strathkelvin)*
McAvoy, Thomas
McCabe, Stephen
McCafferty, Chris
McDonagh, Siobhain
MacDonald, Calum
MacDougall, John
McIsaac, Shona
McKenna, Rosemary
McNamara, Kevin
McNulty, Tony
MacShane, Denis
Mactaggart, Fiona
McWalter, Tony
Mallaber, Judy
Mann, John *(Bassetlaw)*
Marris, Rob *(Wolverh'ton SW)*
Marsden, Gordon *(Blackpool S)*
Marshall, David *(Glasgow Shettleston)*
Marshall-Andrews, Robert
Martlew, Eric
Meale, Alan *(Mansfield)*
Michael, rh Alun
Miliband, David
Moffatt, Laura
Moran, Margaret
Morgan, Julie
Morley, Elliot
Mountford, Kali
Mudie, George
Mullin, Chris
Munn, Ms Meg
Murphy, Denis *(Wansbeck)*
Murphy, Jim *(Eastwood)*
Naysmith, Dr. Doug
Norris, Dan *(Wansdyke)*
O'Brien, Bill *(Normanton)*
Osborne, Sandra *(Ayr)*
Perham, Linda
Picking, Anne
Pike, Peter *(Burnley)*
Pollard, Kerry
Pond, Chris *(Gravesham)*
Pope, Greg *(Hyndburn)*
Pound, Stephen
Prentice, Ms Bridget *(Lewisham E)*
Prentice, Gordon *(Pendle)*
Pugh, Dr. John
Purchase, Ken
Quin, rh Joyce
Quinn, Lawrie
Rammell, Bill
Rapson, Syd *(Portsmouth N)*
Reed, Andy *(Loughborough)*
Rendel, David
Robinson, Geoffrey *(Coventry NW)*
Roy, Frank *(Motherwell)*
Ruddock, Joan
Russell, Bob *(Colchester)*
Ryan, Joan *(Enfield N)*
Sanders, Adrian
Savidge, Malcolm
Sawford, Phil
Sedgemore, Brian
Sheerman, Barry
Sheridan, Jim
Simon, Siôn *(B'ham Erdington)*
Simpson, Alan *(Nottingham S)*
Singh, Marsha
Skinner, Dennis
Smith, rh Andrew *(Oxford E)*
Smith, Geraldine *(Morecambe & Lunesdale)*
Smith, Jacqui *(Redditch)*
Smith, John *(Glamorgan)*
Smith, Llew *(Blaenau Gwent)*
Smith, Sir Robert *(W Ab'd'ns & Kincardine)*
Soley, Clive
Southworth, Helen
Spellar, rh John
Starkey, Dr. Phyllis
Stewart, Ian *(Eccles)*
Strang, rh Dr. Gavin
Stunell, Andrew
Tami, Mark *(Alyn)*
Taylor, rh Ann *(Dewsbury)*
Taylor, David *(NW Leics)*
Taylor, Matthew *(Truro)*
Teather, Sarah
Thomas, Gareth *(Harrow W)*
Thurso, John
Timms, Stephen
Tipping, Paddy
Todd, Mark *(S Derbyshire)*
Tonge, Dr. Jenny
Trickett, Jon
Truswell, Paul
Turner, Dr. Desmond *(Brighton Kemptown)*
Turner, Neil *(Wigan)*
Twigg, Stephen *(Enfield)*
Vis, Dr. Rudi
Walley, Ms Joan
Ward, Claire
Wareing, Robert N.
Watson, Tom
White, Brian
Whitehead, Dr. Alan
Wicks, Malcolm
Williams, rh Alan *(Swansea W)*
Williams, Betty *(Conwy)*
Willis, Phil
Wills, Michael
Wilson, Brian
Winnick, David
Winterton, Ms Rosie *(Doncaster C)*
Wood, Mike *(Batley)*
Woolas, Phil
Wright, David *(Telford)*
Wright, Iain *(Hartlepool)*
Wright, Tony *(Cannock)*
Wyatt, Derek

Tellers for the Noes:
Jim Fitzpatrick and
Gillian Merron

Question accordingly negatived.

Question, That the proposed words be there added, *put forthwith, pursuant to Standing Order No. 31 (Questions on amendments):—*

The House divided: Ayes 257, Noes 149.

Division No. 318] **[4:40 pm**

AYES

Abbott, Ms Diane
Ainger, Nick
Ainsworth, Bob *(Cov'try NE)*
Alexander, Douglas
Allen, Graham
Armstrong, rh Ms Hilary
Atkins, Charlotte
Austin, John
Baird, Vera
Banks, Tony
Barnes, Harry
Barron, rh Kevin
Battle, rh John
Bayley, Hugh
Beard, Nigel
Beckett, rh Margaret
Benton, Joe *(Bootle)*
Berry, Roger
Best, Harold
Blears, Ms Hazel
Blizzard, Bob
Boateng, rh Paul
Bradley, Peter *(The Wrekin)*
Bradshaw, Ben
Brennan, Kevin
Brown, rh Nicholas *(Newcastle E Wallsend)*
Bryant, Chris
Buck, Ms Karen
Burgon, Colin
Burnham, Andy
Byrne, Liam *(B'ham Hodge H)*
Caborn, rh Richard
Cairns, David
Campbell, Alan *(Tynemouth)*
Campbell, Ronnie *(Blyth V)*
Caplin, Ivor
Casale, Roger
Caton, Martin
Cawsey, Ian *(Brigg)*
Challen, Colin
Chapman, Ben *(Wirral S)*
Chaytor, David
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Clarke, Tony *(Northampton S)*
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Coffey, Ms Ann
Cohen, Harry
Colman, Tony
Connarty, Michael
Corbyn, Jeremy
Cox, Tom *(Tooting)*
Cranston, Ross
Crausby, David
Cruddas, Jon
Cryer, John *(Hornchurch)*
Cummings, John
Cunningham, Jim *(Coventry S)*
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David, Wayne
Davies, Geraint *(Croydon C)*
Dawson, Hilton
Dean, Mrs Janet
Denham, rh John
Dhanda, Parmjit
Dismore, Andrew
Dobson, rh Frank
Donohoe, Brian H.
Doran, Frank
Dowd, Jim *(Lewisham W)*
Drew, David *(Stroud)*
Drown, Ms Julia
Dunwoody, Mrs Gwyneth
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Eagle, Maria *(L'pool Garston)*
Edwards, Huw
Efford, Clive
Ennis, Jeff *(Barnsley E)*
Etherington, Bill
Farrelly, Paul
Field, rh Frank *(Birkenhead)*
Fisher, Mark
Flynn, Paul *(Newport W)*
Follett, Barbara
Foster, Michael *(Worcester)*
Foster, Michael Jabez *(Hastings & Rye)*
Gapes, Mike *(Ilford S)*

Gardiner, Barry
George, rh Bruce *(Walsall S)*
Gerrard, Neil
Gibson, Dr. Ian
Gilroy, Linda
Godsiff, Roger
Griffiths, Win *(Bridgend)*
Hall, Mike *(Weaver Vale)*
Hall, Patrick *(Bedford)*
Hamilton, David *(Midlothian)*
Hanson, David
Havard, Dai *(Merthyr Tydfil & Rhymney)*
Healey, John
Henderson, Doug *(Newcastle N)*
Henderson, Ivan *(Harwich)*
Hendrick, Mark
Hepburn, Stephen
Heppell, John
Hewitt, rh Ms Patricia
Heyes, David
Hinchliffe, David
Hoey, Kate *(Vauxhall)*
Hood, Jimmy *(Clydesdale)*
Hopkins, Kelvin
Howarth, rh Alan *(Newport E)*
Howarth, George *(Knowsley N & Sefton E)*
Hughes, Beverley *(Stretford & Urmston)*
Hughes, Kevin *(Doncaster N)*
Humble, Mrs Joan
Hurst, Alan *(Braintree)*
Hutton, rh John
Iddon, Dr. Brian
Irranca-Davies, Huw
Jackson, Helen *(Hillsborough)*
Jamieson, David
Jenkins, Brian
Johnson, rh Alan *(Hull W)*
Johnson, Miss Melanie *(Welwyn Hatfield)*
Jones, Helen *(Warrington N)*
Jones, Jon Owen *(Cardiff C)*
Jones, Kevan *(N Durham)*
Jones, Lynne *(Selly Oak)*
Jones, Martyn *(Clwyd S)*
Joyce, Eric *(Falkirk W)*
Keeble, Ms Sally
Kelly, Ruth *(Bolton W)*
Kemp, Fraser
Khabra, Piara S.
Kidney, David
King, Andy *(Rugby)*
King, Ms Oona *(Bethnal Green & Bow)*
Ladyman, Dr. Stephen
Lammy, David
Lazarowicz, Mark
Lepper, David
Leslie, Christopher
Levitt, Tom *(High Peak)*
Lewis, Terry *(Worsley)*
Linton, Martin
Love, Andrew
Lyons, John *(Strathkelvin)*
McAvoy, Thomas
McCabe, Stephen
McCafferty, Chris
McDonagh, Siobhain
MacDonald, Calum
MacDougall, John
McIsaac, Shona
McKenna, Rosemary
McNamara, Kevin
McNulty, Tony
MacShane, Denis
McWalter, Tony
Mallaber, Judy
Mann, John *(Bassetlaw)*
Marris, Rob *(Wolverh'ton SW)*
Marsden, Gordon *(Blackpool S)*
Marshall, David *(Glasgow Shettleston)*
Marshall-Andrews, Robert
Martlew, Eric
Meale, Alan *(Mansfield)*
Michael, rh Alun
Miliband, David
Moffatt, Laura
Moran, Margaret
Morgan, Julie
Morley, Elliot
Mountford, Kali
Mudie, George
Mullin, Chris
Munn, Ms Meg
Murphy, Denis *(Wansbeck)*
Murphy, Jim *(Eastwood)*
Naysmith, Dr. Doug
Norris, Dan *(Wansdyke)*
O'Brien, Bill *(Normanton)*
Osborne, Sandra *(Ayr)*
Perham, Linda
Picking, Anne
Pike, Peter *(Burnley)*
Pollard, Kerry
Pond, Chris *(Gravesham)*
Pound, Stephen
Prentice, Ms Bridget *(Lewisham E)*
Prentice, Gordon *(Pendle)*
Prosser, Gwyn
Purchase, Ken
Quin, rh Joyce
Quinn, Lawrie
Rammell, Bill
Rapson, Syd *(Portsmouth N)*
Reed, Andy *(Loughborough)*
Robinson, Geoffrey *(Coventry NW)*
Rooney, Terry
Roy, Frank *(Motherwell)*
Ruddock, Joan
Ryan, Joan *(Enfield N)*
Savidge, Malcolm
Sawford, Phil
Sedgemore, Brian
Sheerman, Barry
Sheridan, Jim
Simon, Siôn *(B'ham Erdington)*
Simpson, Alan *(Nottingham S)*
Singh, Marsha
Skinner, Dennis
Smith, rh Andrew *(Oxford E)*
Smith, Geraldine *(Morecambe & Lunesdale)*
Smith, Jacqui *(Redditch)*
Smith, Llew *(Blaenau Gwent)*
Soley, Clive
Southworth, Helen
Spellar, rh John
Starkey, Dr. Phyllis
Stewart, Ian *(Eccles)*
Strang, rh Dr. Gavin
Tami, Mark *(Alyn)*
Taylor, rh Ann *(Dewsbury)*
Taylor, David *(NW Leics)*
Thomas, Gareth *(Harrow W)*
Timms, Stephen
Tipping, Paddy
Todd, Mark *(S Derbyshire)*
Trickett, Jon
Truswell, Paul
Turner, Dr. Desmond *(Brighton Kemptown)*
Turner, Neil *(Wigan)*
Twigg, Stephen *(Enfield)*
Vis, Dr. Rudi
Walley, Ms Joan
Ward, Claire
Wareing, Robert N.
Watson, Tom
White, Brian
Whitehead, Dr. Alan
Wicks, Malcolm
Williams, rh Alan *(Swansea W)*
Williams, Betty *(Conwy)*
Wills, Michael
Wilson, Brian
Winnick, David
Winterton, Ms Rosie *(Doncaster C)*
Wood, Mike *(Batley)*
Woolas, Phil
Wright, David *(Telford)*
Wright, Iain *(Hartlepool)*
Wright, Tony *(Cannock)*
Wyatt, Derek

Tellers for the Ayes:
Gillian Merron and Jim Fitzpatrick

NOES

Ainsworth, Peter *(E Surrey)*
Allan, Richard
Amess, David
Arbuthnot, rh James
Atkinson, David *(Bour'mth E)*
Atkinson, Peter *(Hexham)*
Bacon, Richard
Barker, Gregory
Baron, John *(Billericay)*
Beggs, Roy *(E Antrim)*
Bellingham, Henry
Bercow, John
Beresford, Sir Paul
Blunt, Crispin
Boswell, Tim
Bottomley, rh Virginia *(SW Surrey)*
Brake, Tom *(Carshalton)*
Brazier, Julian
Brooke, Mrs Annette L.
Browning, Mrs Angela
Burnside, David
Burstow, Paul
Burt, Alistair
Butterfill, Sir John
Cable, Dr. Vincent
Calton, Mrs Patsy
Cameron, David
Cash, William
Chapman, Sir Sydney *(Chipping Barnet)*
Chope, Christopher
Clarke, rh Kenneth *(Rushcliffe)*
Clifton-Brown, Geoffrey
Collins, Tim
Conway, Derek
Cormack, Sir Patrick
Cotter, Brian
Cran, James *(Beverley)*
Davies, Quentin *(Grantham & Stamford)*
Djanogly, Jonathan
Duncan, Alan *(Rutland)*
Fallon, Michael
Field, Mark *(Cities of London & Westminster)*
Forth, rh Eric
Foster, Don *(Bath)*
Francois, Mark
Gale, Roger *(N Thanet)*
Galloway, George
Garnier, Edward
George, Andrew *(St. Ives)*
Gibb, Nick *(Bognor Regis)*
Gidley, Sandra
Gill, Parmjit Singh
Gillan, Mrs Cheryl
Goodman, Paul
Gray, James *(N Wilts)*
Grayling, Chris
Green, Damian *(Ashford)*
Green, Matthew *(Ludlow)*
Greenway, John
Grieve, Dominic
Gummer, rh John
Hammond, Philip
Hancock, Mike
Harris, Dr. Evan *(Oxford W & Abingdon)*
Hawkins, Nick
Hayes, John *(S Holland)*
Heald, Oliver
Heath, David
Heathcoat-Amory, rh David
Hendry, Charles
Hoban, Mark *(Fareham)*
Horam, John *(Orpington)*
Howarth, Gerald *(Aldershot)*
Jack, rh Michael
Jackson, Robert *(Wantage)*
Keetch, Paul
Kennedy, rh Charles *(Ross Skye & Inverness)*
Key, Robert *(Salisbury)*
Kirkbride, Miss Julie
Laing, Mrs Eleanor
Lait, Mrs Jacqui
Lamb, Norman
Lansley, Andrew
Laws, David *(Yeovil)*
Leigh, Edward
Letwin, rh Oliver
Lewis, Dr. Julian *(New Forest E)*
Liddell-Grainger, Ian
Lidington, David
Lilley, rh Peter
Luff, Peter *(M-Worcs)*
McIntosh, Miss Anne
Maclean, rh David
McLoughlin, Patrick
Malins, Humfrey
Mates, Michael
Mawhinney, rh Sir Brian
Mercer, Patrick
Moss, Malcolm
Murrison, Dr. Andrew
Osborne, George *(Tatton)*
Ottaway, Richard
Page, Richard
Paisley, Rev. Ian
Paterson, Owen
Prisk, Mark *(Hertford)*
Pugh, Dr. John
Robathan, Andrew
Robertson, Hugh *(Faversham & M-Kent)*

Roe, Dame Marion
Rosindell, Andrew
Ruffley, David
Russell, Bob *(Colchester)*
Sanders, Adrian
Sayeed, Jonathan
Selous, Andrew
Shepherd, Richard
Simpson, Keith *(M-Norfolk)*
Smith, Sir Robert *(W Ab'd'ns & Kincardine)*
Smyth, Rev. Martin *(Belfast S)*
Soames, Nicholas
Spelman, Mrs Caroline
Spicer, Sir Michael
Spink, Bob *(Castle Point)*
Steen, Anthony
Stunell, Andrew
Swayne, Desmond
Syms, Robert
Tapsell, Sir Peter
Taylor, Ian *(Esher)*
Taylor, John *(Solihull)*
Taylor, Matthew *(Truro)*
Taylor, Sir Teddy
Teather, Sarah
Thurso, John
Tonge, Dr. Jenny
Turner, Andrew *(Isle of Wight)*
Tyrie, Andrew
Walter, Robert
Waterson, Nigel
Watkinson, Angela
Whittingdale, John
Wilkinson, John
Willetts, David
Willis, Phil
Wilshire, David
Winterton, Ann *(Congleton)*
Winterton, Sir Nicholas *(Macclesfield)*
Young, rh Sir George

Tellers for the Noes:
Mr. John Randall and
Mr. Hugo Swire

Question accordingly agreed to.

MADAM DEPUTY SPEAKER *forthwith declared the main Question, as amended, to be agreed to.*

Resolved,

That this House welcomes the increase in general practitioner numbers; supports the expansion of primary care provision through walk-in centres and NHS Direct to meet the needs of patients; welcomes the new arrrangements for the National Health Service out-of-hours services that provide an opportunity to integrate primary, secondary and social care, whilst guaranteeing high quality urgent care across the country including Saturday mornings and improving the quality of life for general practitioners; acknowledges the progress made on the NHS Programme for information technology; supports the introduction of practice-based commissioning which fosters clinical engagement whilst mitigating the worst excesses of general practitioner fundholding; and believes that the general development of practice-based commissioning will deliver improved patient care.

PETITIONS

Mental Health Unit (Romford)

4.52 pm

Mr. Andrew Rosindell (Romford) (Con): I wish to present a petition with no fewer than 1,200 signatures, from residents of the western part of my constituency, in the Oldchurch, Rush Green, London road and Waterloo estate areas. The petition was collected by members of the Oldchurch residents action group. It

> Declares that the proposed Mental Health Unit and residential development . . . on the current Oldchurch hospital site, Romford, Essex should not be granted planning permission.

The petitioners believe that

> The site is unsuitable for the proposed purpose. It is too small and consequently likely to prove detrimental to the collective well-being of patients with mental health difficulties . . . The site is bounded by a railway line to the north, busy roads to the south and east; and gasworks/cemetery to the west. In addition, there is also the possibility of a Crossrail depot complex—with 24 hour activity . . . being constructed within the immediate vicinity of the proposed Mental Health Unit.

The petitioners

> respectfully wish to make it clear that we are not against persons with mental health difficulties. Indeed, we are concerned that the proposed site would ultimately prove to be detrimental to the patients' collective well-being should this proposal be granted outline planning permission.
>
> The petitioners therefore request that the House of Commons urge the Government to commission an independent review of the North East London Mental Health Trust's proposals for a Mental Health Unit and residential development on the Oldchurch hospital site in advance of formal consideration of the proposals by the London borough of Havering.

The main signatory is Alan Pettet, chairman of the Oldchurch residents action group.

> And the petitioners remain, etc.

To lie upon the Table.

Andrei Bazanov

4.54 pm

Mrs. Annette L. Brooke (Mid-Dorset and North Poole) (LD): I wish to present a petition signed by nearly 1,200 students, teachers and parents from Bournemouth school for boys, attended by my constituent Andrei Bazanov from 2001 until 2003, in protest against his possible deportation following the failure of his recent appeal against a Home Office decision not to grant him further leave to remain in Britain. I have received glowing letters of support for Andrei from his former teachers, from his current lecturers at Bournemouth university, and from his manager at Comet, where he works part-time. Each letter highlights Andrei's many positive characteristics. He is bright, hard-working, honest, enthusiastic, a pleasure to teach or to work with, and overall an exceptional young man.

On behalf of Bournemouth school, I present a petition that states:

> The Petition of friends of Andrei Bazanov declares
>
> That at the age of 15, Andrei arrived in the United Kingdom, having travelled alone from his home country of Moldova. He was supported by a generous foster family and by Bournemouth school, where he attained four A-levels and made a great many friends, who regard him as a Bournemouthian.
>
> The Petitioners further declare their strong opposition to his deportation.
>
> The Petitioners therefore request that the House of Commons urge the Home Secretary to take urgent steps to reverse the decision to deport Andrei Bazanov.
>
> And the Petitioners remain.

To lie upon the Table.

Off-road Motor Cycling

Motion made, and Question proposed, That this House do now adjourn.—*[Mr. Ainger.]*

4.56 pm

Huw Irranca-Davies (Ogmore): I begin this important debate by welcoming the fact that my right hon. Friend the Member for Cardiff, South and Penarth (Alun Michael) is going to respond to it. I am well aware that over the past year or more, he has had many discussions with members of the off-road biking fraternity and sorority, and that he has always been frank and straightforward in discussing with them what are often contentious issues. He has sometimes faced undue criticism, particularly in the off-road biking press and newsletters, but I commend him for taking a reasonable and reasoned approach at all times.

Motor cycling of any type should carry some form of Government health warning. Mothers and fathers throughout the land warn their sons and daughters off all forms of motor cycling because it is dangerous. Well, those whose sons and daughters are MPs should warn them against dabbling in the politics of off-road biking, because doing so can certainly prove very dangerous for one's political health. This is the crux of the matter. For any politician—be they an MP, a parish-pump community councillor or a county councillor—getting involved in tackling off-road biking requires either great courage or absolute stupidity; I leave the House to decide which I am guilty of. Generally, it is better to ignore this issue and bury one's head in the sand. Why? Because an errant politician who enters this sometimes battlefield of off-road biking risks being mown down in the crossfire between those who want to take part in this activity—those who love it, but who are hunted up and down the country until they find the sanctuary of a place where they can legally ride their bikes—and those who want such people to be hanged, drawn and quartered.

So why on earth have I entered this battle zone and tempted the Minister in with me? Frankly, I am weary of receiving a postbag full of endless complaints about nuisance behaviour arising from off-road biking. People who should know better are riding very powerful machines up and down cycle paths and pavements. Weekends are frankly too short for my constituents to have to put up with the incessant buzz-saw noise of such machines riding up and down their back terraces and in neighbouring fields. Linked to off-road biking is a massive trade in stolen bikes and various drug-related activities. Moreover, I get annoyed when, on walks on the Sarn Helen Roman path across the Brecon Beacons, three bikes hurtle out of the mist towards me; or when, on walking along the cycle path in Blackmill with my children on push-scooters in front of me, bikers come down it—at speed—towards them, because it is the easiest way to get to the petrol station without risking the police stopping them on the highways, on which they are not allowed.

But there are other reasons why I have tempted the Minister to join in this debate. First, there are youngsters, parents and grandparents who want to pursue this activity legitimately without being chased by the police or being derided by their neighbours. I am talking about the ones who have a responsible attitude to this sporting activity, but feel marginalised because they have nowhere to go.

Another reason for the debate tonight is that the police, local authorities, community safety partnerships and many other agencies are now waking up to the fact that this is a growing issue. Also, the motor cycle industry has suddenly realised that there are commercial dangers if it does not tackle its own responsibilities. Finally, riders themselves and their organisations have come to realise that their existence is under threat unless they take responsibility for their own actions and the actions of others who are giving their sport a bad name.

In common with many other people, I have come to realise that it is all right to bury one's head in the sand like an ostrich, but when the feathers get ruffled and the backside gets kicked, it is time to recognise that there is a problem. It is then time to pull one's head out of the sand and tackle the problem head on. I am not directing all of this specifically at the Minister; it is for every Member, every councillor and community officer throughout the land.

I would like to commend to the Minister the approach promoted by the Auto-Cycle Union, which is the governing body for motor cycle provision in the UK. As part of a Government-funded national strategy for off-road motor cycling, a report was published in August this year, which identified 10 key issues that need to be addressed. Of those, most Members will probably be most familiar with the sixth, which is about noise pollution. That is what fills hon. Members' postbags and what is often put to us at our surgeries. We know that many people are annoyed at the excessive noise outside the House. We realise that many people, after mowing the lawn, want to put their feet up and are annoyed when all they can hear is noise from bikes.

Equally valid, however, is the second point—the lack of understanding about the activity and a lack of awareness and education about provision and, indeed, about the law that currently applies to off-road biking. That applies to parents, landowners and communities. More importantly, the 10 issues highlighted in the report reveal conflicting demands. As well as being a keen hill walker, I also enjoy the activity of off-road biking. It is very difficult to mix the two, which brings me to the need to have off-road provision in the right places at the right times.

There is a long-standing tradition in this country of unconstrained use of this activity, but unlike in America and other countries, we do not have a tradition of control. I can remember when, as a youngster, I used to go out with my brother and take my scrambling bike across the road to a piece of waste ground in Gowerton known as "the Slag" and we used to ride for hours. But that was in the days when it was a fairly minority activity. Nowadays there are bigger and noisier machines, and many parents and grandparents buy expensive bikes for their children to use. The problem has grown, so we need to look further into the need for controls.

Many other issues are highlighted in the report. The most fundamental issue, on which everything else hangs—unless we want simply to ban the activity out of existence—is No. 1 on the top 10 issues. I refer to the lack of legal off-road facilities and the real problem throughout the country of identifying sites for off-road provision to which there will not be objections.

I realise that some of the issues do not fall under the Minister's remit, but the need for a cross-cutting approach at local and national level remains the key to the solution. Providing a holistic solution to the problem is the biggest challenge. I have already raised some of the issues with other Ministers, including Cabinet Ministers. I note, in passing, that the Labour Government should be commended for trying to produce some joined-up thinking on the matter. Only a few years ago, the Government established the Government Motorsport unit in Northampton. It was funded by the Department of Trade and Industry, but pulls together the whole range of motor sport interests from the DTI, the Department for Culture, Media and Sport and the regional development agencies—for the east of England, the south-east and the east and west midlands. My right hon. Friend will notice that there is no mention there of any Welsh interest, but perhaps he and I can look further into that after the debate. We may be able to work together to rectify the problem.

There are some people—I am probably known as one myself—who adopt a very tough stance on nuisance behaviour. I know that some people want us to throw the book at those who cause a nuisance through off-road biking.

In that connection, I commend the south Wales off-road police bike team. It remains desperately in need of a minimal amount of sustainable funding from local authorities in south Wales, but it mounts aggressive operations to clamp down on the illegitimate and dangerous use of off-road bikes. The last time that the team went out, it combed the Garw, Llynfi and Ogmore valleys and all the way down to the M4. Around 30 riders were caught and cautioned, and four bikes were confiscated.

Police in Durham and elsewhere in the country do not merely confiscate bikes. They also crush them so that they are taken out of the system and cannot be stolen. However, my preferred approach would be to provide opportunities for people to pursue off-road biking, and then come down hard on people who abuse that right. Also, instead of confiscating and crushing bikes, I believe that we should reuse them as part of a scheme to train young people in riding skills or mechanics. For the network of youth offending teams, an asset of such value as a motor cycle could be put to good and constructive use.

However, that means that facilities need to be provided so that we can take advantage of such an approach. Adequate provision for off-road biking would mean that the police could be involved, as they are in existing schemes in some parts of the country. Officers could then work with youngsters and give them skills and safety awareness, and they would no longer be seen merely as the long and tough arm of the law.

The fundamental question remains: how can we clamp down on the miscreants—those uninformed and, frankly, idiotic people—if we do not provide the facilities as well? We have to adopt the stick-and-carrot approach, and recognise that off-road biking is as legitimate as any other activity.

Last year, I wrote to every local authority in Wales on this subject. I also wrote to the national park authorities, the Countryside Council for Wales and other agencies in an attempt to determine the level of concern that exists in respect of off-road biking. I hope that it will help the House if I refer to some of those responses.

For example, Torfaen local authority wrote:

> "Off road motorcycling is a pernicious problem which is multifarious in nature and resistant to intervention . . . On the one hand we must recognise off road biking is a legitimate leisure pursuit enjoyed by many whilst on the other hand we have a responsibility to lessen the nuisance it causes and prevent inappropriate . . . use".

The response from Torfaen continued with what is a common theme. It stated:

> "We have tried to provide amenities in the area but, understandably, although the facility is wanted by all, no person wants it near to them".

Denbighshire county council replied that, in common with many other parts of Wales, off-road biking was a problem in many parts of the county.

> "Apart from the physical damage done to what are often sensitive rural areas through erosion, there is the added problem of loss of peace and tranquillity which is expected in our countryside . . . One of the problems we face is not having a suitable site to direct motorcyclists to."

My discussions with the all-party parliamentary group on motor cycling, and other people, suggest that the problem is national in extent, so let us jet across Wales to Caerphilly, where the borough council replied:

> "Off-road motorcycling has been a major problem in the county borough for some years, unfortunately, the last five years has seen a considerable increase in this activity."

The council listed some of the problems, which include severe noise nuisance, damage to boundaries caused by riders gaining illegal access to land, damage to the land itself, and to the farm livestock that it supports and to wildlife habitats. The council also reported the dangers posed to legitimate users of the land. It stated that there was evidence that adult riders travel into the county from Cardiff, Cwmbran, Newport and even Bristol and the west midlands.

The Pembrokeshire Coast national park authority wrote:

> "Even though this problem is more frequent in urban fringe areas, we have observed a gradual increase in unlawful motorcycling in the Pembrokeshire Coast National Park, despite it being relatively remote from major centres of population. We feel that concerted action is required in order to prevent the order increasing . . . There is a need, working in conjunction with the Police, for the National Park Authority and local authorities to manage the problem not only through banning the activity and penalising offenders, but also by constructively trying to identify areas of land that could sustainably accommodate the activity."

Time and again, it comes down to that.

The final illustration I have is from Cardiff, which I know will ring a bell with my right hon. Friend the Minister. The local authority states:

> "Off-road motorcycling is indeed a serious nuisance for a number of residents within Cardiff and in particular for the users of many parks and open spaces. Indeed such has been the escalation of the problem that within a number of areas in Cardiff the public are changing their use of public areas due to fears for their own safety and through intimidation."

[Huw Irranca-Davies]

The local authority gives an example:

> "An elderly female remonstrated with a motorcyclist who was consistently riding his machine on public open space at the rear of the property. Her husband was terminally ill and all she wanted was some peace and quiet during her husband's terminal phase of illness. The motorcyclist (and a number of his associates) kept returning to the lady's house and deliberately made excessive noise by revving their machines and riding up and down the open space at the rear of her property."

That is the scale of the problem, but it is not good enough—as several of those correspondents pointed out—to look only at banning, penalties and other methods of clamping down on such behaviour. We have to find the space for people to take part in a legitimate activity.

We need a stick and carrot approach, but what is the way forward? The Auto-Cycle Union has advocated a coherent national strategy, through the work of its local authority support unit. The first requirement is the political acceptance that something must be done. The first step towards the development of a solution is taking the decision to tackle the problem. In parts of the UK, including some in Wales and Scotland, local authorities and countryside agencies have taken that step, but other areas have not. They must make a commitment to address the problem, in conjunction with the police. The commitment must embrace the two principles of meaningful provision and meaningful enforcement. One without the other is hopeless.

We do not need to reinvent the wheel, but we do need to take the issue seriously. We need to consider tailor-made solutions for local contexts—

Mr. David Drew (Stroud) (Lab/Co-op): My hon. Friend will know that, to be fair to the Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs, it has conducted its own survey of the issue, linked to the introduction of the Countryside and Rights of Way Act 2000. I have been involved in correspondence with a constituent who has worked for one of the off-road associations to see how they can prove, by mapping historical routes, that they have traditionally been used by off-road motor cyclists. That is the right approach, but the associations do not have the resources or the time to pursue it.

Huw Irranca-Davies: That is a valid point. Another difficulty is that the problem is not considered one of the top three issues, but for some constituents off-road motor cycling is a major problem because it is focused intensively in certain areas. I commend the work that DEFRA has done on the issue, but one of the advantages of the ACU approach—it is sponsored by the Department for Trade and Industry, but also has cross-departmental involvement—is the local government support unit. The unit helps local authorities, the police and other agencies to target effectively their use of resources, to ascertain the level of demand and to work on the training of instructors and riders. It is amazing that, at a time when we have an increasing level of conflict in the countryside between different uses for land, it is possible for people with no training in using a vehicle to ride across the hills. That needs to be tackled and the ACU approach, through the local government unit, makes that clear.

The ACU approach also stresses the full involvement of local stakeholders, because the burden should not fall wholly on the shoulders of local authorities or countryside agencies. It needs to be taken up by everybody with an interest in the matter.

At the risk of offending St. Francis of Assisi, whose prayer has already suffered ignominiously at the hands of other politicians, more famous or infamous than me, may I propose the following words to my right hon. Friend the Minister, who has great sympathy with the approach the ACU suggests? Where there is noise, let us bring noise control. Where there is no training for riders, let us, as the ACU suggests, bring standards for the training of riders and instructors. Where there is anarchy on our hills and in our back streets, let us bring order and structure.

The Metropolitan police and others have asked me to raise this final point: where there is anonymity of riders, let them be known through clubs and organised structures. One of the major problems in trying to control off-road biking is how to find out who the riders are and how to find out when—if they are not in open competition—their bikes do not have to be registered or licensed. I especially commend the work of one motor cycle manufacturer, KTM, which has already agreed to data tag electronically every new bike it sells in the UK. The cost adds about £50 to customers' bills, but the company thinks it is worth doing—as do the Metropolitan police and the ACU, which is the governing body—given the difficulty of enforcing controls on the off-road biking fraternity. Responsible riders will always work with us, but what about those who do not? The advantage of the tagging system, which I strongly commend, is that we can identify the riders and if they cannot prove that they own the bike, we can confiscate it and take appropriate action.

In conclusion, I urge my right hon. Friend, who approaches everything that lands on his plate with a fair dose of rationality and political courage, to work with his colleagues and encourage the efforts of the local authority support unit. In all his work with agencies and local authorities throughout the UK, will he try to disseminate best practice in providing off-road facilities, in the right place, at the right time? In short, we already know what works; there are very good examples. The Government have recognised what works, so let us try to get the message across to every part of the country: this is win-win for local communities and off-road riders.

I look forward to hearing my right hon. Friend's response.

5.17 pm

The Minister for Rural Affairs and Local Environmental Quality (Alun Michael): When I heard the closing litany of my hon. Friend the Member for Ogmore (Huw Irranca-Davies), I was tempted to suggest that he had missed out a line: where there is a debate on off-road motor cycles, let there be poetry. I hardly thought that an element of poetry would be injected in the debate when I saw the topic, but my hon. Friend's natural Welsh oratory held even my hon. Friend the Member for The Wrekin (Peter Bradley) spellbound in admiration.

I pay tribute to my hon. Friend the Member for Ogmore for constantly seeking to promote the interests of motor cyclists in a constructive way that recognises the difficulties that are sometimes created, especially by inconsiderate motor cycle users, but that challenges both motor cyclists and authorities to consider how to develop a better environment. Indeed, I shall refer later to his active intervention in the consultation that DEFRA has been leading recently.

The Government recognise that the issues surrounding motor cycling are complex; they involve wide-ranging issues. In terms of on-road riding, representatives of the Department for Transport have been meeting representatives of motor cycling interests in an advisory group on motor cycling, which has recently reported to Ministers. Its final report was submitted in August, and Transport Ministers are reflecting on its conclusions in developing an on-road motor cycling strategy.

DEFRA has responsibilities for issues relating to the impact of off-road motor cycling on the environment, while the Department for Transport is responsible for safety issues. The Department for Culture, Media and Sport covers the competitive element and the Department of Trade and Industry covers the associated business opportunities, so it is just as well that we are a joined-up Government.

My initial comments referred to the situation in England, and as my hon. Friend made several references to Wales, I should point out that different regimes deal with the same issues. He is quite right to point out that the experience in a variety of constituencies, including my own and particularly in Cardiff, has demonstrated the amount of nuisance that can be caused, for instance in parkland and open areas that should be available for the safe enjoyment of the wider community.

However, these issues are being addressed in a variety of ways. In particular, the ACU strategy to which my hon. Friend referred is first an outcome of work with the Department of Trade and Industry. In terms of my responsibilities, we have recently consulted on proposals that would have an impact on the recreational activities of users of motor vehicles to the extent that they would prevent further expansion of the rights of way network to motorised traffic in inappropriate circumstances.

My hon. Friend and the hon. Member for Montgomeryshire (Lembit Öpik) came to see me some time ago on behalf of the all-party group on motor cycling, and that resulted in a meeting with representatives of motor vehicle users and the industry generally. As a result I asked them to take ownership of the problem and to work with us to tackle some of the key issues. The achievement of my hon. Friend and other Members of the House was to persuade representatives and the industry not to be negative about the consultation we were undertaking but to engage with it, and I am grateful to him for that because it has indeed proved constructive.

We set up a time-limited group consisting of the main motorised interest groups and organisations, to look at how the Government's proposals to deal with motor vehicle use on rights of way might be better delivered. One of the issues that the group is considering is the provision of alternative sites that might assist in accommodating motor vehicles that might otherwise be used on rights of way. The group is reporting to me in the next few weeks and I give an assurance that I will consider very carefully the recommendations that emerge to address the provision of alternative off-road sites. Indeed, I will undertake to extend the work of the time-limited group if it is clear that it can make a valuable contribution in working with the Government in determining the way forward.

Mr. Drew: Is it possible that the mapping exercise undertaken by those who engage in off-road riding could be fed into that work, so that we could see whether a compromise might be reached between the walkers and the riders? As my right hon. Friend knows, that is the worst dilemma; it is not just about who he upsets but whether they upset one another.

Alun Michael: I will come to some of these issues. One of the great characteristics of access to the countryside is that people want to use that countryside in a variety of different ways. Sometimes it is a question of organisation so that people have the opportunities to enjoy their pursuit without interfering with the quiet enjoyment of the countryside by others. Sometimes it is a question of changing behaviour, and on some occasions a question of getting people simply to obey the law. But these issues are better dealt with by people recognising that the commonality of interest in access does give rise to difficulties, that they need to be talked through and that people need to be considerate of others.

I am very happy when I see representatives of particular groups of users coming forward with constructive suggestions and being willing to engage with Government and with one another in looking for ways forward. It is worth pointing out that in every part of the country, rights of way groups have now been established. They give an opportunity not just for landowners and walkers to relate to one another, but for other types of use also to be reconciled.

Access to water is a big issue. The Under-Secretary of State for International Development, my hon. Friend the Member for Harrow, West (Mr. Thomas), recently came to me with representatives of the British Canoe Union to raise some issues. There is no magic wand that suddenly creates the possibility of access, but the more people recognise that we live in an island where access to the countryside in a variety of different ways is important, and that that countryside must be used responsibly and considerately, the more we are likely to find the answers to the issues that we are debating, like those that we are debating tonight.

These are not just responsibilities for Government, but there is a role for Government in ensuring that there is an overarching framework to enable the provision of alternative sites where there is local agreement. A meeting is being set up at official level between my Department, Transport colleagues, the Department for Culture, Media and Sport, the Office of the Deputy Prime Minister and the Department for Transport to discuss the wider on and off-road policy issues and how they fit together.

My hon. Friend the Member for Ogmore has today offered some joined-up thinking from the point of view

[Alun Michael]

of users, and I can assure him that his words have not fallen on deaf ears. Once our officials have looked at these common issues, I will meet with ministerial colleagues to consider the way forward. From my Department's perspective, off-road sites also offer opportunities for farmers and landowners to take part in diversification, possibly utilising grants through the rural enterprise scheme, provided that the use is appropriate to the surrounding conditions and environmental considerations.

I have to point out that purpose-built sites provide only one part of the solution. Many motor vehicle users of rights of way do not see such sites as an alternative to using byways. Users who fall into the category of the irresponsible and illegal will not necessarily change from their current practices and go to use organised sites. There will still be those recalcitrant users who continue to drive or ride wherever they please, irrespective of the impact on others. This is why better education and better enforcement of existing offences are vital. The proposals in our consultation paper to that effect were universally welcomed.

Huw Irranca-Davies: I thank my right hon. Friend for giving way. He has been generous. Does he agree that one way round the problem is the organisation of club structures? Clubs are not only a small clique of people with expensive machines; clubs organise outreach events with trailers in parts of the community where youngsters cannot afford to get to such sites. Clubs organise not just within a small group of people but within a whole area to bring people on board wherever possible.

Alun Michael: Yes. I believe that social and club structures that bring people together to encourage responsibility go right to the heart of what I was saying a moment or two ago about both enforcement and education being part of the solution.

In addition, the Government are already committed to updating the guidance document "Making the Best of Byways" which was originally published in 1997 by the former Department for Environment, Transport and the Regions. This guidance, which provides advice to local authorities on managing vehicular traffic on byways, also covers the need to consider alternative sites to accommodate certain types of motor vehicle user.

Highway authorities are encouraged to take positive steps to identify suitable sites such as disused quarries for inclusion in local plans. We will be looking again at how to strengthen this advice. The planning issue is the key factor when considering the viability of establishing purpose-built alternative sites—principally because of general concerns and perceptions about the impact on the land and issues of noise and safety.

There are already examples of local good practice in operation. Cornwall county council is working with local partners on a joint venture plan addressing off-road use, promoting better publicity and education, and scoping possible alternative provision for off-road motorcycles.

My hon. Friend raised concerns about irresponsible behaviour—making noise, speeding and other nuisance. It is a complex area, but it is important to underline the ways in which we regulate motor cycling. When off-road motor cycles, such as scramble or trial bikes, are used on the highway, they must comply with highway regulations, have vehicle excise duty paid and be safely constructed in terms of lighting, braking, tyres and so on. Traffic law applies—for example, in respect of dangerous driving—and riders must hold a driving licence.

My hon. Friend the Member for Ogmore referred to the fact that riding or driving any vehicle on the pavement is also an offence. I know that the fact that something is an offence is not necessarily the same as being able easily to enforce the behaviour that we expect and is required by law. However, such offences became subject to fixed penalty notices on 1 August 1999, which has made enforcement by the police easier.

On another issue that my hon. Friend raised, the police were given new powers in January 2003 to seize motor vehicles being driven in a careless and inconsiderate manner on-road or off-road without authority and in a way that causes or is likely to cause alarm, distress or annoyance. Furthermore, a general power exists for the courts to enable them to confiscate vehicles used in the commission of crime.

Other powers allow prosecution against dangerous driving and the careless and inconsiderate driving of a mechanically propelled vehicle in a public place, and a rider of any such vehicle causing death or bodily harm to any person whatsoever by wanton or furious driving could be prosecuted by the police. To complete the picture, other powers may be relevant. For instance, charges may be brought for breach of the peace and causing a nuisance. Local authorities have the powers to prevent or abate noise nuisance. Those powers could apply to the use of off-road motor cycles, and it would be for the local authority to judge whether a problem could be deemed a statutory nuisance.

As scramble or trial bikes are classed as off-road vehicles when they are used off-road, however, other statutory requirements that relate to on-road motor cycles do not apply. So there is no minimum age restriction, nor any requirement to hold a driving licence or insurance or to wear a safety helmet. We currently have no plans to extend those provisions to the off-road use of bikes. Given the nature of off-road use, which tends to be infrequent, often on private land and usually over difficult terrain, effective enforcement would require a considerable commitment of scarce police resources.

I would underline the point that there is a complex range of means by which nuisance and illegal activity can be dealt with, but it is far better if we can create an environment in which the responsible use of motor cycles takes place primarily in areas where they do not cause a nuisance and if there is a separation, as my hon. Friends the Members for Ogmore and for Stroud (Mr. Drew) suggested in their contributions this evening. That will allow people to enjoy the responsible use of motor cycles and other users of the countryside will not have their peace disturbed, thus enabling everyone to benefit from the appropriate enjoyment of the countryside.

Question put and agreed to.

Adjourned accordingly at twenty-nine minutes to Six o'clock.

House of Commons

Monday 15 November 2004

The House met at half-past Two o'clock

PRAYERS

[MR. SPEAKER *in the Chair*]

ROYAL ASSENT

Mr. Speaker: I have to notify the House, in accordance with the Royal Assent Act 1967, that Her Majesty has signified her Royal Assent to the following Acts:

Domestic Violence, Crime and Victims Act 2004
Highways (Obstruction by Body Corporate) Act 2004
Human Tissue Act 2004
Children Act 2004

Oral Answers to Questions

HOME OFFICE

The Secretary of State was asked—

Community Support

1. **Simon Hughes** (Southwark, North and Bermondsey) (LD): What assessment he has made of the effectiveness of (a) community support officers and (b) neighbourhood wardens. [197729]

The Secretary of State for the Home Department (Mr. David Blunkett): Community support officers and wardens have been widely welcomed across the country, wherever they have been deployed. Twenty-seven forces have undertaken evaluations, which are now being collated and will be published in December. The Nuffield Foundation funded a report by Leeds university, which was published on 28 October, and an independent review of wardens was published in May this year.

Simon Hughes: The Home Secretary will know that my borough joins in the view that community support officers and wardens are welcome. Indeed, we already have 72 neighbourhood wardens and we are looking forward to a further 30.

I would be grateful if the Home Secretary would look further into a London-wide issue. The neighbourhood policing fund, as I understand it, will contribute £24,500 per community support officer, whereas the average cost of recruiting and training CSOs in London is £28,500. Will the Home Secretary ensure that the Metropolitan police and the 33 London local authorities will not be disadvantaged when they put in bids in the future, as other authorities around the country are doing?

Mr. Blunkett: For understandable reasons connected with recruitment, the Metropolitan force took the view that salaries should be generally higher than in the rest of the country. It now has 1,800 community support officers and, as far as I am aware, faces no difficulties with recruitment. We will ensure that London is not disadvantaged, but it is a fact that the Met's own evaluation reveals a 70 per cent. improvement in reassurance and confidence in policing in areas where CSOs have been heavily deployed.

John Cryer (Hornchurch) (Lab): My right hon. Friend will know that community support officers have played a crucial and effective part in the creation of ward-based neighbourhood teams, which have started to spread across the London boroughs. There are two in my own constituency, led by Sergeants John Fish and Paul George. The schemes have proved very effective and are highly thought of, certainly in my area. Will the Home Secretary ensure that the funding of the Met is sustained at an appropriate level to ensure that the future creation of neighbourhood teams continues at the present rate? All wards in Greater London should have neighbourhood teams as soon as possible.

Mr. Blunkett: I am grateful to my hon. Friend. We saw the scheme working well when I was in Bexley with the Prime Minister last week. The £50 million allocated by the Chancellor this autumn will fund additional community support officers across the country. The Metropolitan force will receive, of course, a generous share of the fully funded posts for the forthcoming 12 months. In addition, there is the neighbourhood policing fund allocation and the police grant. As I said last week, we are doing our utmost to ensure that the police grant provides encouragement for forces to sustain and continue the investment that they are already making.

Mr. Elfyn Llwyd (Meirionnydd Nant Conwy) (PC): Bearing in mind that the local government settlement in Wales will be 4.8 per cent. and the North Wales police force requires 7.4 per cent. just to stand still, does the Home Secretary realise that there will have to be a substantial real increase in the police grant for Welsh police forces? That applies if community support officers are to be retained, let alone further recruited.

Mr. Blunkett: I have a great deal of sympathy with forces trying to ensure that they can manage competing demands. However, given the funding that Welsh police forces have generally received over recent years and the substantial specific funding they have received not just for community support officers but for the introduction of Airwave, DNA forensics, reinforcement of training and other programmes, I do not accept for a minute the hon. Gentleman's figures on what is needed to stand still. I hope that Members will weigh with a degree of common sense the claims made by police authorities at the moment, because we are trying to ensure that their original fears can be allayed.

Jim Knight (South Dorset) (Lab): I thank the Home Secretary for visiting my constituency last month, where he saw at first hand the excellent work and effectiveness of community support officers in the Weston community in Weymouth. I ask him to ensure that Dorset gets its fair share of the £50 million that he has announced so that we can extend community support officers to other communities such as Portland in my constituency.

Mr. Blunkett: I will certainly do my best to do that. I may tell my hon. Friend that that was the first visit I have ever made during which I met the entire majority in one day—*[Interruption.]* It was a great pleasure to do so.

Angela Watkinson (Upminster) (Con): The similarity in uniforms of police community support officers and police constables is such that many of my constituents have been fooled into thinking that there are more police on the streets of Upminster. Is not that what the Home Secretary really means by effectiveness?

Mr. Blunkett: I think that the hon. Lady will find that there are more uniformed police on the streets of her constituency, thanks to the enormous investment we have made and as part of the 13,000 uplift in police over the past seven and a half years. It is very important, however, not to confuse things. What we are seeing on our streets is a uniformed presence with the authority to be able to work with local people to find solutions. The Nuffield report found that where those officers were deployed correctly alongside and working to uniformed police officers, they had a dramatic impact on reduction in crime.

There is a simple message here. Not a single Member of this House has to have community support officers or has to press for additional resources for those officers for their area. If the hon. Lady is so strongly against them, I suggest that she starts to petition in her community against deploying community support officers. I am sure that the new Metropolitan Police Commissioner will take what she says very seriously when it comes to the allocation of resources to her constituency.

Illegal Immigration

2. **Mr. Gwyn Prosser** (Dover) (Lab): What plans he has to visit Dover to discuss the impact of his measures to control illegal immigration. [197730]

The Minister for Citizenship and Immigration (Mr. Desmond Browne): Unfortunately, I have no immediate plans to visit Dover in the near future, but I welcome the opportunity to highlight the impact that the asylum and immigration measures that we have taken have had there. We have significantly strengthened our borders by the closure of Sangatte, by deploying new detection technology in France and by developing our juxtaposed controls in northern France, culminating in full United Kingdom immigration controls in Calais, Boulogne and Dunkirk since 3 October 2004. As a result, clandestine entry in Kent fell by 65 per cent. during 2003, compared with 2002. That fall has continued in 2004, with a 23 per cent. decrease in clandestines in Kent in the first six months of 2004, compared with the last six months of 2003.

Mr. Prosser: I thank my hon. Friend for that answer. I assure him that it reflects the situation in Dover, where illegal immigration and working have been reduced hugely. Does he accept that there is still far more to do? Although the number of asylum seekers coming through the port has reduced to just one or two a day, which compares well with figures we had in previous years, we can still take further action. Does he agree that the introduction of a secure identity card will go further towards cracking down on illegal immigrants and on traffickers and illegal working?

Mr. Browne: I thank my hon. Friend for his question, and I agree that the introduction of a secure biometrically based identity card will go a significant way further to secure our borders.

Mr. Eric Forth (Bromley and Chislehurst) (Con): How?

Mr. Browne: A sedentary voice asks "How", and the answer is comparatively simple: it will be done by ensuring that those who are in this country legally have to have a biometrically based identity card. We are confident in the knowledge that the absence of such an identity card—which has, of course, been part of the culture of this country—has been a pull factor to illegal immigrants for many years.

To my hon. Friend the Member for Dover (Mr. Prosser), I may say that there is further evidence on the impact of our measures. The number of detections in Calais increased by 36 per cent. in the first six months of 2004, compared with the first six months of 2003. In addition, my right hon. Friend the Home Secretary met the French Interior Minister Mr. de Villepin in Calais only this morning, and he was shown evidence that when Sangatte was open there were routinely about 2,000 asylum seekers in the Calais area. The police in France now know that there are only about 100 at any given time.

Mr. Julian Brazier (Canterbury) (Con): Will the Minister confirm that the number of work permits granted in-country has more than trebled? Will he say where all those people come from and whether or not they are all perfectly legal?

Will the Minister also tell the House why Amin Buratee, from Whitstable, was picked up at six in the morning one day last week, just six months before he is due to take his A-levels? His entire family in Afghanistan has been murdered, as is accepted by the Home Office. Could not he at least be allowed to get as far as his A-levels? Is it really necessary to pick soft targets to massage the figures?

Mr. Browne: I thank the hon. Gentleman for his question because it is important for the House to know that the number of work permits granted has increased significantly. As he knows, applications for work permits are made by employers. They are a reflection of the needs of employers and can be granted only if the criteria are met. Work permits do not necessarily mean that those who are granted them will receive entry clearance to remain in or enter the country.

I understand why the hon. Gentleman raises an individual case, but he will understand why I cannot, as an Executive Minister, go into the detail of that case. In general terms, all cases are robustly and fully examined by the immigration and nationality directorate and by the independent appellate authorities before any removal action is contemplated. I am sure that the hon. Gentleman would not want me to re-judge cases that have been judged by the independent appellate authorities or to substitute my decision for theirs as to the appropriate action in any individual case. I hope that he does not seek to persuade me to do so.

Andrew Mackinlay (Thurrock) (Lab): May I take my hon. Friend the Minister back to Dover, which is the subject of the question? No doubt the work of Dover harbour police has complemented that of the immigration authorities and Customs and Excise. That good practice should be extended to all the ports in the UK, because the absence of a national ports police service leaves us vulnerable. Will my hon. Friend consider the provision of such a service for ports that have no policing to tighten them up?

Mr. Browne: I am grateful to my hon. Friend for that suggestion. He will know that a review of border controls is under way, involving all the agencies that operate at the border. The issues that arise will be considered in the context of the Serious Organised Crime Agency, and I will ensure that those responsible take into account what he has had to say.

Mr. Humfrey Malins (Woking) (Con): Between May and September, 91,000 people from the new member states of the EU applied to register to work here. Last week, the Minister accepted that up to 40 per cent. of them—or 35,000—were here illegally before 1 May. May I ask the Minister two simple questions? First, if they were here illegally, how did they get here? Secondly, in May, was he or anyone else in his Department aware that they were here illegally?

Mr. Browne: I am grateful to the hon. Gentleman for that question because it gives me an opportunity to highlight what an astounding success—

Mr. Malins: Answer the question.

Mr. Browne: I will in a moment.

The hon. Gentleman's question gives me an opportunity to highlight what a success opening our labour markets to workers from the EU accession states has been, in terms of servicing the gaps that existed in certain sectors and skills.

Mr. Malins: Answer the question.

Mr. Browne: Well, the hon. Gentleman poses the question on the basis of a false fact. I did not accept that 43 per cent. or anything like that number were in the country illegally—

Mr. Malins: It is in *Hansard.*

Mr. Browne: I venture to suggest that that is not in *Hansard*, as the hon. Gentleman suggests from a sedentary position. What I did say was that about 43 per cent. of those who registered had either said that they were in the country before 1 May or did not answer that question—*[Laughter.]* Well, let me explain to those who cannot work it out that that means that some of those people were probably in the country before 1 May, but it does not mean that they were here illegally—*[Interruption.]* With respect, it does not say so, because—

Mr. Paul Goodman (Wycombe) (Con): You are in a mess.

Mr. Browne: The number of—*[Interruption.]*

Mr. Speaker: Order. Hon. Members must let the Minister answer.

Mr. Browne: Even if the hon. Member for Woking (Mr. Malins) were right in coming to the conclusion that those people were definitely here illegally, our position in relation to such people would be no different from that of his party when it was in government—or, indeed, that of any Government anywhere in the world. No Government anywhere in the world can know the number of people who are in their country illegally, and no Government in this country have ever been able to give that figure.

Immigration Cases

3. **Keith Vaz** (Leicester, East) (Lab): If he will make a statement on the backlog of immigration cases at the immigration and nationality directorate. [197731]

The Minister for Citizenship and Immigration (Mr. Desmond Browne): Asylum cases awaiting initial decision are now at the lowest level for a decade, continue to fall and are likely to reach frictional levels by the end of the current financial year. The number of asylum appeals awaiting processing in the IND is at a record low. At June 2004, 9,000 asylum appeals awaited processing—reduced from 30,000 in December 2002. Figures for non-asylum appeals are not published. There are minimal backlogs of charged cases in the general group. Although the non-charged work-in-progress cases have increased in certain specified areas, the aim is to get all that work to frictional levels by 31 March 2005. Over the past six months, work permit backlogs have increased owing to substantial additional pressures on resources as a result of new work streams, new processes, increased applications and difficulties in recruiting.

Keith Vaz: I appreciate the real efforts made by Ministers and senior officials at the IND to reduce the backlog of immigration cases. However, what shall we, as Members of Parliament, say to constituents who come to our surgeries—as many did to my most recent surgery—clutching letters from senior IND officials, with dates such as April 2003, telling them that they would get a reply to their cases within 16 weeks, yet 18 months later no decisions have been made? Is it not right that we should seriously consider trying to address the problems that we inherited in 1997 by giving the

IND additional resources so that we can complete the important work begun when this Government were formed?

Mr. Browne: I thank my hon. Friend for that question. Of course, if he wishes to bring individual constituents' cases to my attention I shall be happy to look at them, but I cannot deal with them at the Dispatch Box. He is right to suggest that there were significant delays—for example, when we came to power in 1997 it was routinely taking 22 months for an initial decision to be made on asylum applications. That is now down to two months. Charged general casework, to which he referred, is at frictional levels for this time of the year, and that accounts for about three quarters of the work in the IND. We continue to deliver good service levels and are improving them by the injection of resources and the training of caseworkers. Of course, the Conservatives wish to strip out all that cash, because without it they will not be able to get anywhere near to their promises about police officers.

Miss Julie Kirkbride (Bromsgrove) (Con): Does the Minister accept that one of the reasons why the Government find it hard to keep on top of asylum applications is that it is too easy to claim asylum in the United Kingdom? What plans do they have to renegotiate the UN conventions governing asylum, given that they were designed to deal with the problems of refugee Europe after world war two, not with the problems of economic migration that we face today?

Mr. Browne: The hon. Lady is correct to say that the convention on refugees was not designed for the problems of economic migration, but it is no easier to claim asylum under that convention in the United Kingdom than in any other country in the world—*[Interruption.]* The hon. Lady now wishes to ask me another question, but the point that she made was that it was easier to claim asylum under the convention here than elsewhere, and it is not.

The United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees has a process known as convention-plus, which we support, for the modernisation of the convention to enable it better to meet the circumstances of the 21st century. She is right to say that that convention was drafted in post-war western Europe, but what she does not say is that it has also been informed by the developments of the whole of the second part of the 20th century, and by the experience of the whole world. Derogations from the convention would be a denial of that history and would put the United Kingdom in a unique position, which I am sure that most people in this country would not wish to occupy.

Mr. Tony Clarke (Northampton, South) (Lab): The Home Department should be congratulated on what has been a dramatic turnaround for applications in asylum cases, but I have to tell the Minister that I share the concerns of my hon. Friend the Member for Leicester, East (Keith Vaz): at times, it seems that improvements to asylum claims are at the expense of other claims in the IND, especially for exceptional leave to remain. When will we be in a position to set targets across all the functions of the IND, so that all the people who come to our surgeries can expect to receive a time, which will be kept to, within which their applications will be answered?

Mr. Browne: I thank my hon. Friend for that question. He is right to suggest that leave to remain is experiencing delays, as I said in association with work permits. Currently, it takes about 12 weeks to process such applications. We have, as he suggested, increased decision-making staff in that sector by 30 per cent. since April 2004 and further staff are being recruited, but Members will appreciate that staff have to be recruited and then trained to do that complex work, so we shall not see the benefits of those recruitments until the training has taken place.

Mr. Mark Oaten (Winchester) (LD): The figures published last week on the number of new EU citizens who have applied to the worker registration scheme have shown that a sizeable backlog is developing. In August, 685 applications were outstanding, but in September the number was 2,670. Can the Minister tell us why the figure quadrupled during that period, especially as the number of applications has gone down? Is not that just another example of failed bureaucracy in the Home Office?

Mr. Browne: The hon. Gentleman is right to suggest that at one stage in the worker registration scheme there was an accumulating backlog, but that has now been significantly reduced. In fact, the majority of applications are dealt with in a week. However, the real concern about the backlog was the fact that the IND was holding on to people's passports while their applications were being processed. We have now changed the rules and passports are being turned around and returned to applicants within 48 hours, so significant improvement has taken place. I think that the hon. Gentleman will discover that we will be at frictional levels in terms of backlog within the comparatively near future.

Forensic Science Service

4. **Colin Burgon** (Elmet) (Lab): What representations he has received regarding the future organisation of the Forensic Science Service. [197732]

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for the Home Department (Caroline Flint): We have received a broad range of representations from hon. Members, trade unions and others, all of which are being carefully considered.

Colin Burgon: May I draw the attention of the Minister to the recent early-day motion 1522, in which nearly 100 Labour MPs expressed their opposition to privatising forensic science, and also to the submission to the Select Committee on Science and Technology by the Public and Commercial Services Union and Prospect—the trade unions representing people working in forensic science—in which they argued that forensic science should remain in the public sector? What impact have those two pieces of thinking had on Government thinking?

Caroline Flint: We are in consultation with the trade unions and others about those issues; in fact, we held a workshop in July and I am due to meet trade union representatives on 30 November. This is not about privatisation; it is about having a service that remains in the public sector but is privately delivered—a public-private partnership. The reason that we have to look at the situation is that six police forces account for about 47 per cent. of the revenue of the Forensic Science Service. In the past year, the Metropolitan Police Service has moved a share of its work to the private sector, and Thames Valley police force moved its final share of work to the private sector. We want a Forensic Science Service that can deliver for the future, but it has to work in a world where the competition is greater than it has ever been.

Bob Spink (Castle Point) (Con): Does the Minister accept that forensic science will have growing importance in the future in detecting crime and thus in deterring it, as detection is the best way to deter? Will she therefore withhold any restructuring decisions until the Science and Technology Committee has made its report on the Forensic Science Service?

Caroline Flint: Last year, my right hon. Friend the Home Secretary announced his intention radically to change the way in which we deliver forensic science services. We have given evidence to the Select Committee and will listen to what it has to say, but I have to say again to hon. Members that we are dealing with a world in which technology is advancing and other competitors can provide services.

If we consider the changes in the police forces, we see that the police spend 52 per cent. of their forensic budget on services they provide internally, compared with 48 per cent. on the external market, so we have to recognise those changes while also recognising the very good work of people in the Forensic Science Service, which I hope it will be able continue to deliver, even if in a different form, in the future.

Rob Marris (Wolverhampton, South-West) (Lab): What representations has my hon. Friend received, other than from the private sector, urging greater private sector involvement in the Forensic Science Service?

Caroline Flint: Well, representations have come from the Association of Chief Police Officers, the Police Superintendents Association and the Association of Police Authorities, for example.

Shoplifting

5. **Mr. Henry Bellingham** (North-West Norfolk) (Con): What plans he has for changing penalties for shoplifting. [197733]

The Minister for Crime Reduction, Policing and Community Safety (Ms Hazel Blears): None. We are satisfied that the range of penalties available for dealing with shoplifting—prosecution, caution, warning and fixed penalty—is sufficient.

Mr. Bellingham: Does the Minister agree that any form of stealing—whether from a shop, a large corporation or an individual—is very serious crime indeed? Does she feel that it is the Government's duty to ensure that all crimes that involve stealing and dishonesty are deal with equally harshly? Surely, any other approach would not only send quite the wrong signal to the criminal fraternity, but undermine the credibility of a criminal justice system.

Ms Blears: The hon. Gentleman is correct on one point—retail theft is an extremely important matter—but I am afraid that he is wrong in almost every other respect. We have given the police a range of options: prosecution, caution and fixed penalty notices. The introduction of fixed penalty notices has been universally welcomed by the police because it enables them to do their job quickly and get back out patrolling the streets, which is what the public want them to do.

Ross Cranston (Dudley, North) (Lab): Does my hon. Friend agree that deterring shoplifting also involves quickly and effectively dealing with offenders? In that light, will she welcome the street bail pilot scheme introduced in the west midlands in line with Government initiatives, whereby people are arrested and immediately bailed so that the police do not have to take them back to the police station or wait for responsible adults to arrive, but can get straight back on patrol to deal with other offenders?

Ms Blears: I am delighted to endorse my hon. and learned Friend's support for the street bail scheme, which is yet another example of the way in which we are changing the service to try to free up police officers to do the front-line work that the public want them to do. I am also delighted that in Lancashire the police have already started to use fixed penalty notices for shoplifting—they have issued 22 fixed penalty notices in the first week. Where police forces really feel that they have a "can do" attitude, they can make a big difference.

Mr. Nick Hawkins (Surrey Heath) (Con): Does the Minister recognise the fact that her astonishingly complacent answer to the question asked by my hon. Friend the Member for North-West Norfolk (Mr. Bellingham) will cause huge anger among the law-abiding public? Are the Government aware that former professional shoplifters have been interviewed and have said that if fixed penalty notices had existed in their time, all that they would have done is shoplift more to enable them to pay the fixed penalties? This is a nonsensical introduction of a new system that will do huge harm. The Government must take such serious dishonesty much more seriously.

Ms Blears: I am afraid that the hon. Gentleman is talking absolute nonsense. People who would have previously received perhaps no punishment at all, or perhaps just an informal ticking-off, will now get an £80 on-the-spot fine. With the fixed penalty notices for disorder, we have found that almost 50 per cent. more people have been punished than previously. Not only the police, but shopkeepers will welcome the introduction of fixed penalty notices because they will see people being punished on the spot for shoplifting in their premises.

Mr. Peter Pike (Burnley) (Lab): Does not the instant fixed penalty system cover a crime that all of us pay for at the end of the day because the cost of the stuff that is stolen from shops must be met by other consumers? In addition, the system involves a quick penalty, which must surely be a bigger deterrent to the petty shoplifter than having to go through the legal system, given that such cases are often not proceeded with and those involved just receive a warning. Is it not a better system than we have had before?

Ms Blears: My hon. Friend is absolutely right. We have made it clear in the guidance, which we are about to issue, that fixed penalty notices will not be used for persistent shoplifters. They are very much a warning to those people who might be tempted to shoplift that doing so will cost them a great deal of money, so perhaps they had better think twice about it.

David Davis (Haltemprice and Howden) (Con): To bring the Minister back to her responses to my hon. Friends the Members for North-West Norfolk (Mr. Bellingham) and for Surrey Heath (Mr. Hawkins), she gave it away when she intimated that half the fixed penalty notices issued in the pilot schemes replaced criminal action. [HON. MEMBERS: "No, she did not.] Yes, she did. Does she not see that it is intrinsically wrong for someone to be fined only £80 for stealing £100, let alone the £200 that she originally intended? The real terms of trade are even worse. The average shoplifter gets prosecuted once every 20 offences, so they can steal £2,000 for every £80 fixed penalty. Does she not realise that in the longer term this policy will lead to a large increase in shoplifting?

Ms Blears: Not at all. In fact, the position will be absolutely the opposite. People who were not prosecuted previously will find that there is a sanction on their behaviour, which is exactly what the Government want. We want to make sure that the police have the tools and the powers to do the job properly. That means not only that they can prosecute and caution, but that they can now issue fixed penalty notices. As I said in an earlier reply, the number of those punished for offences under the public order provisions has increased by 50 per cent. as a result of the introduction of fixed-penalty notices. That means that more offenders are being brought to justice; something that the Government are determined to see happen.

David Davis: Perhaps the Minister should read her own pilot studies. Is she aware, however, that more than half of shoplifting is done by drug addicts to pay for their addiction? Shoplifting provides a large part of the funds flow for the drug trade. Does she not realise that decriminalising the first and, as is discussed on her internet site, second and, perhaps, third shoplifting offence could lead to a significant increase in the problems of drug-dependent petty criminals? Does she really think that this is being tough on the causes of crime?

Ms Blears: The right hon. Gentleman really ought to know that fixed-penalty notices for shoplifting will not be used where people have problems with drugs or other substance misuse. They are not intended for use with persistent offenders. They are intended for first-time or perhaps second-time low-level offenders. The average fine in the courts is about £78. Now, people will get an on-the-spot fine of £80. That will be significant deterrent. Indeed, the Association of Convenience Stores, the British Retail Consortium and the Rural Shops Alliance have welcomed this additional disposal, which will now be available to our police services to deal with a very important crime.

Police Deployment

6. **Mr. Graham Allen** (Nottingham, North) (Lab): What estimate he has made of the percentage of a police officer's average working day spent (a) processing arrests to charging inside police stations and (b) out on the streets; and if he will make a statement. [197734]

The Minister for Crime Reduction, Policing and Community Safety (Ms Hazel Blears): The data requested by the hon. Gentleman are not centrally available. We know from the publication on 22 September of the police performance monitoring reports for 2003–04 that the average time spent by all police officers on front-line duties is 63.6 per cent., and we expect that the police service as a whole can improve on that to something nearer 73 per cent. by 2008.

Mr. Allen: The people of Nottinghamshire know that we have a record number of police officers in post in Nottinghamshire, but they also ask, "Where are those police officers?" Rather than give senior officers the temptation to backfill the absence of front-line officers who are in station by using police community support officers or neighbourhood wardens, would not it be more sensible to have specialist grades, retired officers or civilians to progress from arrest to charge? Will my hon. Friend look at that? If she does, will she give us some idea of how many extra police officers will be on the streets without a single extra officer needing to be employed?

Ms Blears: My hon. Friend makes a very important point, and I am aware of his personal interest in the matter; indeed, he had an Adjournment debate in Westminster Hall just last week. I am also aware of his hands-on experience, and I know that he has been out with his own force in Nottinghamshire to look at these issues. It is important to involve the police and the Crown Prosecution Service in looking jointly at charging, but we are increasingly seeing more and more civilian staff building cases, taking over roles that were previously carried out by police officers. For example, in Surrey, we now have civilian staff completing case preparation, releasing a whole number of detectives to do the jobs that only they can do.

Mr. Roger Gale (North Thanet) (Con): Perhaps I can assist the Minister from personal experience. From arrest to charge, it probably takes the average police officer about five hours to process a case. In towns such as Herne Bay or Margate in Kent, where police officers have, of course, to work in pairs on Friday and Saturday nights, there do not need to be many arrests before there is no cover whatever. How many forms does the police officer on the beat have to carry? How much time is spent filling those forms in on the beat, and why are the Government so intent on increasing it?

Ms Blears: We are absolutely intent on doing the reverse. I can tell the hon. Gentleman that nearly 8,000 forms have been made obsolete since we cracked down on the bureaucracy in the system. We are ensuring that more civilian staff are taking over the custody function so that officers are not tied up with unnecessary bureaucracy. I wonder whether he is aware that we have introduced video ID parades, which are freeing up officers. We have also introduced automatic number plate recognition and much better access to fingerprint data, and fixed penalty notices are being issued. I am sure that he will join me in welcoming the fact that a range of measures has been designed with the intention of freeing up our police officers so that they can fight crime on the front line. Once we push up the proportion of officers in front-line policing, we should be able to release an extra 12,000 officers over the next three years to do their jobs on behalf of the public.

Mr. Brian Jenkins (Tamworth) (Lab): I appreciate what my hon. Friend says, but does she not realise that outside the Chamber there is a perception of a police force that is good at paperwork but poor at catching criminals? Surely our assessment of police forces reinforces that, so what are the public to make of that situation?

Ms Blears: My hon. Friend is right; the public want not only a more visible and reassuring presence on their streets, but forces to catch and convict criminals. The best police forces are doing both. That is why my right hon. Friend the Home Secretary published our White Paper "Building Communities, Beating Crime" last week, which is exactly what we mean to do.

Mr. Eric Forth (Bromley and Chislehurst) (Con): Even if overall statistics are not available, as the Minister claims, surely she must know how much time a beat officer in a typical police station or police authority spends filling in forms. How much is that, and what is she doing to reduce it?

Ms Blears: The right hon. Gentleman will know that we introduced the "Diary of a Police Officer" scheme a couple of years ago to find out exactly how time was spent. We have also introduced activity-based costing to determine how police officers spend their time. For the very first time, we have started the process of compiling data about exactly what police officers do. The previous Government did not do that; they did not seem to care what police officers did. They took officers off the streets, put them into cars and got them away from the public. We are determined to get police officers out of their cars and police stations and on to the streets so that they can reassure the public who pay their wages.

Chris Bryant (Rhondda) (Lab): I do not know when my hon. Friend last had to provide a statement to the police as either a witness to or a victim of crime, but the process is often phenomenally laborious. It involves a police officer writing a statement in pencil, writing it in pen and then getting it typed up before it can finally be signed.

Michael Fabricant (Lichfield) (Con): Does the hon. Gentleman have personal experience?

Chris Bryant: I do, as a victim of crime. Will the Minister guarantee that in the near future she will examine ways of speeding up the process so that police officers may work faster? That would make things easier for victims and allow us to get police officers out on the beat again.

Ms Blears: My hon. Friend is right that freeing up our police officers must be a priority. Many police forces are introducing a system of mobile data so that officers can key data into portable computers straight away without necessarily going back to the police station. Civilian staff are taking statements in many cases; some are better at doing that than police officers themselves. We are absolutely determined to get the right people in the right place at the right time, doing the right job.

Suspected Terrorists

7. **Mr. Alistair Carmichael** (Orkney and Shetland) (LD): If he will make a statement on the detention of foreign nationals suspected of terrorism at Belmarsh prison. [197735]

The Secretary of State for the Home Department (Mr. David Blunkett): Under part 4 of the Anti-terrorism, Crime and Security Act 2001, 17 non-British nationals have been held under the certification system as posing a terrorist risk. One of those is being held under other powers and two have left the country. One individual has had an appeal upheld, one is being held under strict bail conditions and one has been released as no longer posing a serious threat, and thus 11 people are primarily held under the certification system.

Mr. Carmichael: The Home Secretary will no doubt have heard the comments made by Europe's Human Rights Commissioner last week when he said that he could see no justification at all for the detention of 10 inmates in Belmarsh. The right hon. Gentleman will also have seen a report last month by several psychiatrists saying that such detention was having a serious impact on the mental health of those inmates. Is it not time to find a way of implementing the recommendations of the Newton report, as endorsed by the Joint Committee on Human Rights, on alternatives to such detention?

Mr. Blunkett: The hon. Gentleman may have missed the fact that we published a consultation paper at the end of February and have been taking views on how to proceed when dealing with international terrorist threats in circumstances in which we have to secure the information and advice of the security services without putting their sources at risk. Having met the Human Rights Commissioner last week, I found that he was unaware of the independent assessment and review of the mental health services at Belmarsh and that the Prison Service had been awarded beacon status by the national health service.

We took up Lord Carlile's recommendations that those individuals should be moved to a specific and specially developed facility. We offered such a facility at Woodhill at considerable cost and, on the advice of solicitors, those who are held under part 4 refused to go. We cannot force them to move out of Belmarsh, but we can offer a choice. If solicitors choose, for all the reasons of which we may be aware, to advise their clients not to take that alternative, that choice lies with them, not us.

Jeremy Corbyn (Islington, North) (Lab): The Home Secretary will be well aware of the controversy surrounding the introduction of the legislation, which gives him unique powers to hold individuals without charge, trial or access to a normal court. How long does he expect the process to last before legislation is introduced to repeal that section of anti-terrorist legislation to ensure that all cases go through an open criminal court in the normal way, something to which any British national would be entitled?

Mr. Blunkett: There are circumstances in which any British national would not go through an open transparent court system in the usual way. They could be subject to particular restrictions on, for example, a public interest assessment basis. The Attorney-General, the Lord Chancellor and I have been examining that. We will introduce recommendations, subsequent to the current appeal to the House of Lords on derogation, on the way forward.

We have a choice. Either we hold individuals in the way that we do now, because we cannot remove them from the country on human rights grounds, or we release them, which means that we have to be sure that they will not take life and liberty and organise against us as part of the al-Qaeda network. As the court of superior record and the Appeal Court have affirmed that those concerned are linked with al-Qaeda and pose a threat, it would be irresponsible to release them.

Mr. Douglas Hogg (Sleaford and North Hykeham) (Con): Does the Home Secretary recognise that there is a matter of principle at stake? It is surely wrong in principle that a dozen or so people should be held in custody, in some cases for more than two years, without being charged or tried. When can those people expect to be either tried or released?

Mr. Blunkett: I am sorry, but the principle that I am following is the protection of the well-being of the British people. If that principle has to be reinforced by using powers that were introduced in exceptional circumstances and voted for by all major parties, we will continue to use them. There are three-monthly reviews of the cases and the appeals that I described have been undertaken. The court of superior record also involved special advocates assigned as legal representatives, and they had the right of appeal to the Appeal Court. We have taken every possible step to protect those people's interests. They are, of course, free to leave the country any time they feel that they can do so without being threatened with death and torture in other nations.

David Winnick (Walsall, North) (Lab): While recognising that my right hon. Friend faces a difficult problem when he is advised that certain individuals—foreign nationals—are an acute terrorist danger, is he nevertheless aware that there is bound to be unease, as expressed today, that people can be held indefinitely without charges? Will he continue to look for ways in which that can be overcome, perhaps along the lines of charging? That would be much better for the laws of our land and our consciences.

Mr. Blunkett: I am certainly aware of the disquiet. Three years ago, we all expressed disquiet at the necessity for introducing the powers. Those were voted for and have to be reaffirmed annually by the House, with a sunset clause in November 2006. What I am seeking are sensible contributions to how we can square the circle of protecting the sources of the advice that we receive and ensuring that those who are in front of the courts receive a fair hearing and fair representation, while protecting the well-being of the British nation. The proportionality and care that we adopted in passing the Anti-terrorism, Crime and Security Act 2001 is reflected in the limited use of the certification powers, which, when we passed the Act exactly three years ago, were described as a charter to hold hundreds of people without trial. That has not taken place and reviews of the use of the powers by Lord Carlile and the interception of communications commissioner have confirmed that we have used those powers sparingly.

Patrick Mercer (Newark) (Con): My right hon. and learned Friend the Member for Sleaford and North Hykeham (Mr. Hogg) has argued much more eloquently than I could that the holding of those individuals is not only wrong but unjust. Does the Secretary of State accept that every day that those men are detained, they act as a focus for further unrest? One way around that might be to adopt a more thoughtful approach towards evidence. Can he tell us when it will be possible to use intercept intelligence as evidence in court?

Mr. Blunkett: The hon. Gentleman has made an excellent case as to why he should never be the homeland security tsar for Britain, because discontent regarding the individuals who are held does not exist. If we released them and they continued to pose a risk and colluded on attacks in this country, the unrest at that moment in time would exceed anything that we have experienced here before. Of course, we are prepared to continue examining inceptors' evidence, and we are currently taking the advice of all the security and policing services. Once we have done so, we will make an announcement to the House, but we do not have a panacea for dealing with the problem, at the root of which is admissibility and the nature of the evidence, not the question of whether supporting intercept evidence has been provided.

Mr. Clive Soley (Ealing, Acton and Shepherd's Bush) (Lab): Will my right hon. Friend publish a comparison as to the way in which other countries, particularly in western Europe, deal with the problem? As I understand it—perhaps he will correct me if I am wrong—other countries deport such individuals against their will to countries that we regard as having an unacceptable record of human rights abuses. If that is so, are we not dealing with the problem by keeping them here as long as they wish to stay while also enabling them to go, whereas other countries are simply sending them back to possible torture and death?

Mr. Blunkett: My hon. Friend is right, and there are two aspects to consider. First, the magistrate investigation system in many European countries allows people to be held without being brought to court for very long periods of time. Secondly, some countries with judicial systems and human rights lawyers take a different view from human rights lawyers and the judiciary in our country. I respect their right to do so, which is why we have been careful not to remove people to countries where they might be threatened with death and torture. There is a paradox, however, and to be accused of taking away human rights when we are not removing people because we are concerned about their human rights really takes the biscuit.

Custody Suites

8. **Mr. David Heath** (Somerton and Frome) (LD): What his policy is in respect of maintaining custody suites in operational use. [197736]

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for the Home Department (Paul Goggins): The management of the police estate is a local operational matter for the chief constable or commissioner and the police authority. The Home Office has issued the police buildings design guidance and is in the process of producing a design quality guide for police buildings.

Mr. Heath: We do not hesitate to talk about operational matters in the House. We have heard the Minister for Crime Reduction, Policing and Community Safety say that a policeman spends one working hour in every three in the station rather than on the streets fighting crime, and is this not another false economy? Every time a cell is not available for use, police officers who have made an arrest must travel 20 or 30 miles to take a prisoner to a custody suite. Alternatively, they are deterred from making an arrest at all, because they know that they will not be available to fight crime in their own community. Should the Home Office not have a policy of ensuring that as many police cells as possible are available in local communities so that we can fight crime effectively?

Paul Goggins: It is a Home Office responsibility to make sure that there are adequate custody facilities in each area. Over this year and last, we made available £4.7 million in grant aid so that police authorities can provide such facilities, but it is for the police authority to decide where they are located, bearing in mind the need to balance the strategic use of resources and the accessibility of resources to the community. The hon. Gentleman may be encouraged, as I am, to hear of the pilot project in Northumbria, where civilians are staffing custody suites. That has released 91 police officers, who are out doing the job in the community that they joined the police to do.

David Taylor (North-West Leicestershire) (Lab/Co-op): In my constituency, a relatively recently built police station has a first-rate custody suite which spends most of its time in mothballs, as the hon. Member for Somerton and Frome (Mr. Heath) described. That means that those arrested have to be taken considerable distances to Loughborough and beyond. The argument is, as my hon. Friend knows, that the framework for the staffing of custody suites is so onerous that chief constables are reluctant to open them up too frequently. Will he look at the legal requirements in respect of the staff required to operate custody suites, so that those facilities can be brought into use much more frequently, saving all the travelling time to which the hon. Member for Somerton and Frome referred?

Paul Goggins: I should be happy, as would my hon. Friend the Minister for Crime Reduction, Policing and Community Safety, to consider that matter, but in the end every police authority must strike a balance between the strategic and the accessible. I draw my hon. Friend's attention to the example I gave of the pilot initiative in Northumbria, and I hope that in time he will benefit from such an approach in his area as well.

Mr. Edward Garnier (Harborough) (Con): May I take the Minister beyond Loughborough to Wigston, also in Leicestershire, in my constituency? The police station in Bullhead street in Wigston Magna is made of 1960s concrete and is quietly falling to bits. We desperately need a new police station in the borough of Oadby and Wigston. Will the hon. Gentleman please have urgent discussions with the police authority and the chief constable to ensure that a new site is found as quickly as possible, and ensure that, preferably, the new station is made of some sort of concrete that lasts more than 30 or 40 years?

Paul Goggins: The hon. and learned Gentleman calls for more investment and more spending. It will be interesting to see how his Front Bench team intend to fulfil his request.

Mr. Garnier: Answer the question.

Paul Goggins: Let me tell the hon. and learned Gentleman that we have 23 police private finance initiative schemes bringing first-rate modern facilities to local communities throughout the country. In addition, we invested £20 million over two years in the premises improvement fund. We recognise the importance of adequate facilities and we are providing them.

Race Relations

9. **Dr. Phyllis Starkey** (Milton Keynes, South-West) (Lab): What guidance his Department has issued to parish councils on implementing their duties under the Race Relations Acts. [197737]

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for the Home Department (Fiona Mactaggart): Under the Race Relations (Amendment) Act 2000, parish councils have a statutory duty to promote equality of opportunity and good race relations. The Commission for Racial Equality is responsible for enforcing the Race Relations Acts and issuing guidance to public authorities.

Dr. Starkey: May I remind the Minister that in my constituency in Milton Keynes there are a number of urban parish councils, which for the most part do an excellent job? However, it is my experience that many of them are unaware of their duty under the Race Relations Act positively to promote good race relations, and in some cases they appear to be unaware of their duty not to indirectly discriminate. May I urge my hon. Friend to look again at the way in which advice is given to parish councils and to make sure that they are all aware of their duty, like other local authorities, to positively promote good community relations?

Fiona Mactaggart: My hon. Friend is right that parish councils have that responsibility. At the same time as the CRE issued the statutory code of practice in 2002, it issued a guidance booklet to all parish councils. At that time there was a survey of parish councils' awareness of that duty. The replies suggested that a majority of parish councils were aware of their responsibilities, but I will raise the matter that my hon. Friend describes with the chairman of the CRE when I next meet him. I agree that it is important that parish councils throughout the country, in urban or rural areas, are aware of their legal responsibilities in that regard.

Kirkham Prison

10. **Mr. Michael Jack** (Fylde) (Con): What steps he is taking to utilise fully the intermittent custody facilities at Kirkham prison. [197738]

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for the Home Department (Paul Goggins): The intermittent custody pilot at Kirkham has steadily increased its numbers, and 30 of the 40 places are now filled at weekends. Some of the spare capacity is being used for ordinary prisoners, especially during the week.

Mr. Jack: Will the Minister confirm that intermittent custody is a tough and demanding sentence? Will he tell the House how he is dealing with the barriers to progress on midweek intermittent custody and whether his discussions with the Department for Work and Pensions have been successful?

Paul Goggins: I begin by welcoming the right hon. Gentleman's remarks, his support for the prison in his constituency and his support for intermittent custody. Some difficulties occurred in working out the benefit entitlement for jobseeker's allowance claimants who might be subject to intermittent custody, but we have resolved those issues. The message that intermittent custody is, as the right hon. Gentleman indicated, a tough punishment is going out loud and clear to the probation service and sentencers.

Mrs. Cheryl Gillan (Chesham and Amersham) (Con): After starting a small experiment in two prisons earlier this year, the Home Office had to admit after six months that it was having problems with the Department for Work and Pensions over the eligibility for benefits of prisoners committed to custody during the week. Why did it take so long to sort that problem out? Has that problem now been sorted out? How can we have confidence in the Home Office, which is reorganising the whole prison and probation system, when it cannot sort out the problems in a small, two-prison experiment?

Paul Goggins: The initiative is important, but it is a pilot; we are meant to learn from pilot initiatives, which is what we are doing. So far, as part of the intermittent custody pilots at Morton Hall and Kirkham, 128 orders have been made, and only three offenders have failed to turn up for their custody. The pilot is already a huge success.

Northern Ireland

3.32 pm

The Secretary of State for Northern Ireland (Mr. Paul Murphy): With permission, Mr. Speaker, I wish to make a statement.

I announced on Friday 12 November my intention to despecify the Ulster Defence Association, incorporating the Ulster Freedom Fighters. I signalled my intention to lay an order before this House to give effect to that decision, and today I have taken the earliest opportunity to do so. The House will also be aware of the statement made yesterday by the Ulster Political Research Group on behalf of the UDA. I welcome that development, which is positive, and will say more about the detail in a few moments.

First, I want to explain my actions in terms of despecifying the UDA. I have reviewed the status of all *specified and other paramilitary* organisations, as I am obliged to do under legislation, and concluded that there are sufficient grounds to despecify the UDA-UFF. For some time now, there has been contact between my officials and its political representatives, whom I, too, have recently met. I view that as part of an overall strategy to bring final closure to the problems that have hindered progress in Northern Ireland and to set in place an inclusive future for all, based on an enduring political settlement.

The UPRG announced a 12-month period of "military inactivity" by the UDA-UFF, known as the Gregg initiative, on 23 February 2003, and it announced an "indefinite extension" of that initiative on 24 February this year. I have taken advice from the Chief Constable and others and, as I am obliged to do under the terms of the Northern Ireland (Sentences) Act 1998, I have reviewed the status of all specified and other paramilitary organisations. It is my judgment, made in the round and having regard to the 1998 Act and other relevant issues, that the UDA ceasefire is now holding and is genuine.

I appreciate that some may question this decision in the light of negative comments in recent Independent Monitoring Commission reports. I have carefully studied both relevant IMC reports and support the strong language directed against a range of paramilitary organisations, but it is clear that UDA activity decreased between the first and second relevant reports, and other material provided to me endorses that view.

I am persuaded by the advice I have received that it is appropriate to despecify the organisation, but I have taken the decision cautiously and prudently, considering the full consequences of my actions and the effect on others, especially victims. I am only too conscious of the impact on victims of violence and the terrible consequences of both sectarianism and feuding within communities. I reassure victims that this Government have not forgotten their suffering and that we will continue to support and to work with them.

There is, however, now an opportunity to move forward. The statement made yesterday by the UDA contained a number of important undertakings. First, there is its commitment to work towards the day when, to use its own words, there will no longer be a need for the UDA or the UFF; its reaffirmation that the UDA will desist from all military activity and its declaration that the organisation's strategy will focus on community development, job creation, social inclusion and community politics. Secondly, there is its agreement to enter into a process with the Government that will see the eradication of all paramilitary activity. Thirdly, there is confirmation that it will re-engage with the Decommissioning Commission, and indeed I understand that that has already begun.

Those undertakings, which are commitments, not aspirations, are positive. The Government agree with the UPRG when it says that the loyalist community's enemies are issues such as poverty, social deprivation, drugs and crime, and we will work energetically with them and others to tackle those problems. The other issue is to end paramilitarism, and we will be discussing equally urgently with them how that is to be achieved.

The UDA says that it wants lasting peace and that it can prove to the people of Northern Ireland that it can change. I believe that it should be given the opportunity to do so.However, the Government have always made it clear that we would judge paramilitary organisations by their deeds, but also, of course, by their words, so I shall be watching the UDA's actions very carefully over the coming weeks to ensure that it lives up to the commitments that it has made. The UDA remains a proscribed organisation and the police will pursue relentlessly any criminal activity undertaken by its members or those of any other group.

In coming to a final judgment on this matter, I would wish to acknowledge the work that has been done in terms of political leadership by the UPRG. I also want to recognise the contribution that members of other political parties have made to creating the conditions in which loyalism can take these important steps. I take this opportunity to call on other groups engaged in violent activity to take similar steps.

I know that the House will agree that the time has long since passed for all paramilitary groups, loyalist and republican, to cease their activities once and for all and to decommission the weapons that have brought so much suffering to the people of Northern Ireland. As my right hon. Friend the Prime Minister said in Belfast in 2002, the Government want to see all paramilitary groups complete the transition from violence to exclusively peaceful means. I believe that yesterday's announcement by the UDA, together with the political dialogue that is currently taking place with other interested parties, constitutes a significant step towards achieving that goal—a goal that unites every Member of the House and every decent person in Northern Ireland.

Mr. David Lidington (Aylesbury) (Con): I thank the Secretary of State both for his statement and for his customary courtesy in giving me early knowledge of its contents.

Yesterday's words by the Ulster Political Research Group were welcome, but they need to be matched by action that is both swift and consistent with the pledges that were apparently given yesterday. Less than a fortnight ago, the Independent Monitoring Commission reported that, in the six months between March and August this year, the UDA was responsible for shootings, assaults and at least one vicious sectarian attack on Roman Catholics.

[Mr. David Lidington]

The IMC concluded in its most recent report that the UDA

> "remains heavily involved in many kinds of organised crime, and remains an active organisation capable of more widespread violence, with the will to commit it if judged appropriate."

All this at a time when UDA leaders were reiterating their commitment to the cessation of military activities, which they first announced 10 years ago. That discrepancy between words and conduct in the past is in itself good reason for caution, and so too was the wicked attack last night on an SDLP councillor in Larne—an attack which the victim's family have blamed specifically on the UDA.

I have a few questions for the Secretary of State. First, the UDA has now committed itself to the eradication of all paramilitary activity. Does he agree that that must include an end not only to shootings and assaults, but to the organised crime that has enabled the UDA to impose what can only be described as a mafia-style terror on loyalist communities? What assurances has he been given that the drug dealing, racketeering, exiling and intimidation will now stop?

Secondly, the Secretary of State said that the UDA had agreed to engage with General de Chastelain's commission. Do the Government believe that it has now accepted that it will have to decommission all the weapons and explosives that it currently holds? Will he also take the opportunity to deny the claims made in some of yesterday's media that the Government have secretly agreed that terrorists should be allowed to keep hold of small arms rather than decommissioning them? I hope that he will agree that such a concession would be an insult to the courage of democrats, whether nationalist or Unionist, who serve on the Policing Board and on local partnerships and have to put up daily with intimidation from the paramilitaries.

Thirdly, I welcome the indications that the Secretary of State reported that people who previously supported the UDA intend in future to commit themselves to democratic politics and to working to attract the new investment and jobs that are sorely needed in loyalist areas, but I hope that he can also assure the House that the Government will have no truck with any suggestion that a paramilitary or former paramilitary organisation could in some way become the intermediary between the agencies of Government and the people of those areas. People who have been members of the UDA need to put that past behind them. Will he confirm that if the UDA fails to deliver on its promises, he will have no hesitation in putting it back on the specified list?

The Secretary of State referred to there being no let-up in work by the police to track down and bring to justice people who are responsible for crimes, and I welcome that assurance, but can he also make it clear that there will be no soft-pedalling in the work of the police or the Assets Recovery Agency in pursuing the UDA or other godfathers who have amassed vast fortunes on the back of crime and terror?

Finally, there will be speculation in Northern Ireland that these announcements are part of a sequence designed to bring about the restoration of the political institutions at Stormont. That is an objective that I certainly share, but I hope that the Secretary of State will confirm that, in seeking that objective of restoring devolution, there can no longer be any room for fudge or ambiguity, and that nobody, and above all the paramilitary organisations, must be in any doubt about what they now have to do, and that their talk must now be matched with action.

Mr. Murphy: I entirely agree with the point about talk being matched by action. As I said in my statement, we have had the words and the deeds must now follow. I think that everyone in Northern Ireland is expressing exactly the same view.

Today's announcement, and the events of the past few days, have not been part of any choreography or sequence. I have held a parallel series of meetings over recent weeks. There is, however, no doubt that if the UDA is genuine, as I believe it is, that is bound to help the political process.

Obviously the Government condemn any attack on Mr O'Connor, the Larne SDLP councillor, or indeed on his mother, who I believe was involved; but I assure the House that there is no evidence to suggest that the attack was the work of any specific organisation. The police are currently investigating.

The hon. Gentleman is right to mention drugs and organised crime. The drugs trade in Northern Ireland—if it can be termed thus—is a scourge on society. It is a particular scourge on young Protestant women and young Protestant men who must live in that society. I made it absolutely clear in my discussions with the UPRG that dealing with the problem would have to form a major part of any development involving the UDA and despecification, and I must say that the response was very positive. The UPRG recognises that drugs are a scourge on the community.

I agree with the hon. Gentleman that there must be no let-up in the pursuit of criminality in any form, particularly—in this case—among loyalist communities. The Assets Recovery Agency must continue its good work, and the Northern Ireland Organised Crime Task Force will continue to examine the issues.

As I said, the UPRG held a meeting with the Independent International Commission on Decommissioning last week, and there will be further meetings. I myself will have further meetings with the UPRG to stress the importance of decommissioning, which it already recognises.

As for reports in the newspapers about some sort of deal involving small arms, I assure the hon. Gentleman and the House that that was a load of nonsense. Such a deal would not be tolerable.

The hon. Gentleman mentioned intermediaries. I accept that when dealing with the problems of loyalist areas we must deal with public representatives—in the House, in the Assembly or in local authorities—but also with those involved in community groups. I should like the widest possible consensus on our wish to do something about the problems of deprivation. As all Members know, deprived areas breed paramilitarism. The best remedies are education, training, jobs and housing.

I entirely agree with the general thrust of the hon. Gentleman's observations. We welcome this development, but we welcome it with caution: deeds must match words.

Lembit Öpik (Montgomeryshire) (LD): The words are fine, but we need to define what we are talking about.

Given the IMC's recent rather stern assessment, which the Secretary of State mentioned, what new evidence or information has emerged in favour of his despecifying the UDA? Presumably, specific information has come to light since the report.

What constitutes the Secretary of State's definition of a ceasefire has proved over the past 10 years that the concept is ill-defined and pretty ambiguous. We should really be talking about paramilitary organisations committing themselves to paragraph 13 of the joint declaration.

The Secretary of State mentioned small arms. Can he assure us that no understandings have been reached with the UDA that would allow it to believe that the Government would countenance a role for it involving the preservation of elements of its paramilitary infrastructure? Given the UDA's supposed change of stance, why were its members parading on the Rathcoole estate yesterday wearing masks?

What is the Government's view of the UDA's statement that it will retain the right to defend its own communities? May we have an assurance—putting aside the question of small arms—that the Government do not regard that as acceptable if it means some form of vigilantism? In that context, does the Secretary of State recognise the UDA as a legitimate representative of those communities when it comes to, for instance, community development? If so, in my judgment the UPRG is a very willing and sensible organisation that is committed to reforming that organisation. What support will the Government be giving the UPRG leadership to enable it to transit from a paramilitary infrastructure to an organisation with a primary focus on democratic and peaceful means of campaigning for the communities that it is rightly interested in defending and promoting?

Mr. Murphy: With regard to the IMC, there has been a change in the period between the two reports, as I mentioned in my statement. To give the details to the hon. Gentleman, the report shows that there has been a marked reduction in the level of violence from the group, that the leadership has reaffirmed its intention to hold to the terms of the ceasefire and that there is no desire within the group for a resumption of internecine feuding. In addition to that, I have other sources of information that indicate to me that there is a seriousness about the move that we have seen in the past few days.

Above all else, our view is that we are now looking to the future. The IMC will report at six-monthly intervals so we shall see what happens between now and the next time that that body reports. The point has been made so often this afternoon in the Chamber about deeds and words, and they are extremely relevant. I know that the hon. Gentleman is aware that when we look back over the past number of years and see the number of deaths from paramilitary terrorist activity compared with, say, 20 years ago, there is no comparison. There have been enormous developments in that area. However, the hon. Gentleman is right to point, as other hon. Members will undoubtedly do, to the continuance of criminality and other activities such as so-called punishment beatings. All those things have to be taken into account.

If we can persuade these organisations to go down the right road—to go down a political, non-violent road—all the better. The hon. Gentleman is right to refer to the UPRG and the work that it has done, remembering that the UDP, which was a party representing the UDA, played a part in the negotiations in the run-up to the Good Friday agreement. Clearly, there is a tremendous amount of opportunity there for people to go down that road as opposed to the one that we have seen. On the hon. Gentleman's point about vigilantism, he will be aware that the organisation remains proscribed as opposed to specified.

Jeremy Corbyn (Islington, North) (Lab): I thank my right hon. Friend for his statement. I hope that this means that there is a good step forward towards resurrection of the true political process in Northern Ireland. How soon does my right hon. Friend expect to be able to announce the restoration of the operation of the elected Assembly in Northern Ireland and the resumption of devolved government there as being a true sign that political progress has been made on top of all the other work that he has done?

Mr. Murphy: My hon. Friend is right in pointing to this as a measure by which we can look at some progress that has been made. As for the general political situation, talks are still continuing between the political parties and the Governments. As I have said on a number of occasions—my right hon. Friend the Prime Minister has, too—these talks cannot go on forever. We would hope to see a resolution as soon as possible, certainly in the next number of weeks. My hon. Friend is right to refer to the restoration of the Assembly as being the key to this, so that people in Northern Ireland can be governed by the people who represent them and who live there, and the sooner that happens the better.

Mr. David Trimble (Upper Bann) (UUP): Like the Secretary of State, I welcome these developments. I am sure that he will agree with me that it will be much easier to deal with the problems of loyalist areas and with organised crime if paramilitary organisations transform themselves in the way that has been indicated. I draw the right hon. Gentleman's attention to the statement made by the UDA that it needs to be assured that the current political efforts are for real. It would be ironic if those efforts were to stumble just as we are seeing some progress in this area. Is the right hon. Gentleman aware of the danger that there may be other paramilitary groups and other parties that will want to obstruct this process? It would be particularly helpful if the authorities were to keep a careful eye on interface areas to ensure that that does not happen.

Mr. Murphy: The right hon. Gentleman is right about the interface areas. These are the most difficult areas in Northern Ireland in terms of sectarianism. Clearly, we shall be looking carefully at that. I welcome the right hon. Gentleman's support for this move. I know that he

[Mr. Murphy]

and other members of his party, who represent with others some of the areas that we are dealing with, would want to see the development occur, and I thank him for that.

As to whether political efforts are for real, we all face the same situation and we all have to do our best to try to ensure that we make progress. There is a particular onus, of course, on the bigger Unionist and nationalist parties at the moment, but, as I said, we all have a role to play. The right hon. Gentleman is right to point the matter out to the House. At the end of the day, what will restore confidence and stability in Northern Ireland is the restoration of the Assembly and the Executive, as I just said.

Helen Jackson (Sheffield, Hillsborough) (Lab): My right hon. Friend's statement is to be welcomed wholeheartedly and I pay tribute to the perseverance with which he and his team have entered into political contact and dialogue over the past months. Is it not the case that any political grouping in Northern Ireland that declares itself to be in a ceasefire should be starting to work constructively with the Police Service of Northern Ireland so that they can work together with their communities to deliver a final end to paramilitary violence in those constituencies? What assurances and commitments has my right hon. Friend received from the UPRG or, indeed, the UDA to enter into constructive dialogue with the police service on these matters?

Mr. Murphy: My hon. Friend is right. On the drugs issue, for example, it is very important for the UPRG and others to work closely with the Police Service of Northern Ireland to deal with those particular matters, which I have already described as a scourge. It is then for the organisation and the Chief Constable to decide whether a meeting would be fruitful. I agree with the general thrust of my hon. Friend's remarks, that relationships with the police are indeed very important.

Mr. Nigel Dodds (Belfast, North) (DUP): The Secretary of State will know that all the paramilitary organisations in Northern Ireland are engaged in types of activity similar to those for which the UDA is responsible. Will he accept that for the people of Northern Ireland, in this case as in others, the real test is action, not words, and that it must be tested over a period of time? That applies to republican organisations as well as to loyalist ones. Will the Secretary of State also accept, as I and elected representatives in these areas have an overwhelming electoral mandate, that he and the Government must deal urgently with the serious social and economic issues in loyalist areas that we have highlighted, in a way that has the confidence and support of local people in those communities?

Finally, the Secretary of State will have the support of all right-thinking people for encouraging those who wish to turn away from violence and crime. However, those same people will look to him and the law enforcement agencies to ensure that the full force of the law is brought to bear against those who refuse to turn away from violence, criminality, racketeering and so forth.

Mr. Murphy: The hon. Gentleman is absolutely right. He represents an area where there have been many difficulties on the interface over the last months. Like others in the House, he will be aware of the particular problems that face Protestant working-class areas in Northern Ireland. Nationalist areas face them, too, of course, but we are dealing particularly with loyalism today. The hon. Gentleman is right that these organisations should be given a chance. He is also right to point out that paramilitary groups of all sides are still proscribed and that there should be no let-up in pursuing criminality. The economic and social problems that have bedevilled these areas must be dealt with. If we can do that, we will go a long way towards ensuring that there is no return to violence, which the hon. Gentleman and I both condemn.

Mr. Tony Clarke (Northampton, South) (Lab): The UDA and the UFF are late in coming to the peace table. We all welcome this small step forward, but as long as paramilitary activity continues—racketeering, drug running, the rise of race-hate crime on certain estates—our reservations and concerns will continue. Will my right hon. Friend ensure that the PSNI reports back to him regularly on whether those crimes on estates are decreasing? That will be the real measure of success. As politicians, we can welcome this move forward, but people living on estates who continue to have those crimes committed against them will be the real judge of whether the UFF and UDA are genuine and reasonable in their intent.

Mr. Murphy: My hon. Friend is right to point out that people will inevitably have reservations about the despecification of the UDA. I repeat that the matter was not taken lightly, and nor was the decision. He is also right to point out something that has not yet been mentioned, which is the appalling increase in race hate crime that has occurred in Northern Ireland in the last number of years, which must be addressed.

People in Northern Ireland will be aware of it if things do not change as they should. I was convinced that there was genuineness about the people whom I met who want to try to change things. There is a question, of course, about whether the whole organisation is able to follow on from the aspirations of those people and of those who lead the UDA. Here is its chance, however. It is the chance to show the world that things are going to change. No one is going to say that the world will change dramatically by a week next Tuesday on the estates and elsewhere in Northern Ireland—it does not work like that—but if we see an absolute and consistent trend towards improvement, that will be what we all want.

I shall, of course, be in touch with the police and the other security agencies to assess whether there has actually been progress. The people I met highlighted drugs, so-called punishment beatings and other issues of criminality that they admitted they had to address in order to get the confidence of people in Northern Ireland.

Mr. Andrew Mackay (Bracknell) (Con): Does the Secretary of State accept that many of us agree that he must move extremely cautiously, bearing in mind the history of the UDA and the UFF? Does he also agree that the definition of terrorism should be broad? That applies not only to loyalists, but to republican paramilitaries. There may be an end to traditional terrorist violence, but there has been no end to punishment beatings, to racketeering or to drug dealing. If that continues, through any paramilitary group, will he revise his initial decision?

Mr. Murphy: That is absolutely right. The hon. Gentleman is right to point to the history of the organisation and the appalling crimes that it committed against people in Northern Ireland, particularly in the Catholic community, although, obviously, what he said applies right across the board and to all paramilitary groups. He is right to emphasise what so many hon. Members have emphasised during the past half hour, which is that while we have indeed seen a welcome end to what could be termed political terrorism, the move over the last number of years to criminality, racketeering and all the rest of it is something that we have to address. If, as we hope it will, this organisation does turn its attention away from all that and genuinely towards community activity to try to help the people it lives with, we will all be pleased. We shall watch the moves very carefully.

As I tried to emphasise in my statement, because of the history of these groups, it is right to recognise the importance of their victims. It is important that all hon. Members are aware that the Government and other agencies and groups in Northern Ireland do their best to try to help the victims of appalling crimes. They are not forgotten, but we believe that if we can change the course of the UDA, there will be fewer victims in future.

Mr. Adrian Bailey (West Bromwich, West) (Lab/Co-op): May I welcome the comments of the Minister and the moves by the UPRG? A positive move by that group must be met with a positive response from the Government, but I am sure that the Secretary of State will be aware of apprehension given the long record of criminality among the paramilitaries. Will he assure us that the level of criminal activities and their association with the UDA and other paramilitaries will be measured? Will he assure us that, if necessary and appropriate, the issue will be reconsidered? Will he assure us, too, that criminality will be defined in terms of race hate, and not just those crimes traditionally associated with paramilitary activity in Northern Ireland?

Mr. Murphy: My right hon. Friend the Minister of State has already done a great deal of work with regard to race hate crime in Northern Ireland, including changing penalties to make them harsher. My hon. Friend the Member for West Bromwich, West (Mr. Bailey), like hon. Members from across the spectrum of the House, is right to say that if this does not work, we will obviously have to consider going back to where we were before last Friday. Our hope is that that will not have to happen. He will recall that one of the important ingredients of the Good Friday agreement was the presence of loyalism at the talks. Of course, that meant David Ervine's party, the Progressive Unionist party, but it also meant the party that represented the UDA—the UDP with Gary McMichael and others. They made a valuable contribution to those talks and I want to get back to the situation in which we can deal with people in loyalism from a political point of view and put the paramilitary and criminal side to one side.

Peter Bottomley (Worthing, West) (Con): The hon. Member for North-East Derbyshire (Mr. Barnes) cannot be here, but he would have raised, as I now do, the case of Davy Adams, who helped with some of the earlier loyalist ceasefires. Is the Secretary of State aware that on Thursday, five days ago, threats were made against the lives of both Mr. and Mrs. Adams? Will he make it plain to the UDA that that is unacceptable and must stop now?

Mr. Murphy: I have already done that. The hon. Gentleman may rest assured that I entirely share his views. I just mentioned the work that the UDP did in the talks that led up to the Good Friday agreement, and Davy Adams was an outstanding contributor to those talks. Any attempt to intimidate him is bad in itself, but also does great disservice to political loyalism.

Mr. Iain Luke (Dundee, East) (Lab): I welcome the statement made by my right hon. Friend today, and it may be a significant step in the peace process. However, it has been met with wide scepticism in the Province. Indeed, in the papers today a Mr. Alban Maginness, an SDLP Assembly Member for north Belfast, echoed the sentiments voiced in the Chamber today by the hon. Member for Belfast, North (Mr. Dodds). Only when actions are seen, not just words, will the many communities in Northern Ireland believe that this is a positive step. We took evidence last year from the Prison Officers Association, whose members have been specifically targeted by the UDA, and it would need reassurance—

Mr. Speaker: Order. The purpose of calling Back Benchers is to enable them to ask one supplementary question.

Mr. Luke: The POA seeks assurances that the UDA and UFF will desist from targeting prison officers to get their own way in prisons.

Mr. Murphy: Criminality includes the intimidation of prison officers, which we all condemn. My hon. Friend mentioned widespread scepticism, but I have read about the reaction of politicians and journalists in Northern Ireland in the past day or two and I would say that widespread caution was expressed. I did not detect anybody saying that we should not do what is proposed. Perhaps one or two people have said that, but generally speaking the political consensus in Northern Ireland—while rightly cautious and probably a little sceptical—is that we should give the UDA the chance to prove itself. If it does, everybody in Northern Ireland will benefit.

Mr. Edward Garnier (Harborough) (Con): My knowledge of the character of the Secretary of State and of the work that he has done since taking that office leaves no room for doubt about his intentions and

[Mr. Edward Garnier]

motives with regard to securing a better future for Northern Ireland. Can he assure me that absolution for past heinous crimes cannot simply be bought by a few words and the expression of an intention not to commit crimes in the future? There is a danger that members of the public—especially on this side of the Irish sea, but even in Northern Ireland—could gain the impression that too often absolution for terrible crimes is bought at a cheap price without any benefit accruing.

Mr. Murphy: I thank the hon. and learned Gentleman for his kind words. We have all expressed the same theme this afternoon. Words are very important in Northern Ireland, but they are not the only criteria that we have on which to judge developments. We have to judge developments on deeds—an end to paramilitary activity, to criminality and to drug dealing. We need to see a complete turnaround so that people in those organisations—and there are thousands of them—turn their energies to addressing those very issues that have provided the basis for paramilitarism in the past. They need to concentrate on education, training, schools, jobs, housing and health. We have to tackle all those issues, particularly in deprived Protestant working class communities in Northern Ireland. If we do that, there will be no need for paramilitary activity; indeed, there is never any need for that—the hon. and learned Gentleman knows what I mean—but we can take away any excuse for it. My meetings over the past couple of weeks have led me to believe that people are sincere in what they want to do. Time will tell.

Point of Order

4.11 pm

Mr. Graham Brady (Altrincham and Sale, West) (Con): On a point of order, Mr. Speaker. On 12 March 2003, in the Eighth Standing Committee on Delegated Legislation, I raised a concern with the Minister for School Standards—that the new procedures for co-ordinating admissions to secondary schools may, through the ranking of the schools to which parents are applying, allow schools to discriminate against those who did not rank a school as a first preference.

I was given a clear assurance by the Minister, who said:

> "As far as the schools are concerned, preferences will be equal. The ranking will come into play only if pupils are offered more than one place. If that happens, they will be given a place at the higher ranking school."

He went on to say that

> "because the preferences are equal, they will be sent to the school as if they are the same and . . . there will be no ranking in the notification sent to the school."—[*Official Report, Eighth Standing Committee on Delegated Legislation*, 12 March 2004; c. 14–15.]

From press reports yesterday, it appears that grammar schools in particular now have concerns that some of the non-selective schools in their areas are discriminating against applicants who do not put non-selective schools as first choices. The Minister for School Standards is quoted as having replied to one such school that

> "no government action is planned to prevent the school taking such measures."

May I seek your guidance, Mr. Speaker? What is the appropriate course of action when a Minister has given a very clear, unquestionable assurance during the passage of a statutory instrument that appears to be at variance with the code of practice subsequently issued by the Department, on which schools and parents rely?

Mr. Speaker: The hon. Gentleman is obviously concerned. Persistence is required from Back Benchers such as himself. He should put down parliamentary questions to the Minister and, perhaps, apply to me for an Adjournment debate—not that I agree or disagree with the hon. Gentleman; I am neutral in these matters.

Orders of the Day

Armed Forces (Pensions and Compensation) Bill

Lords amendment considered.

4.13 pm

Mr. Speaker: I inform the House that privilege is involved in Lords amendment No. 2C. If the House agrees to the amendment, I shall arrange for the necessary entry to be made in the Journal.

After Clause 6

Lords amendment: No 2C

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Defence (Mr. Ivor Caplin): I beg to move, That this House disagrees with the Lords in the said amendment.

It is ironic that the only remaining issue standing in the way of the Bill has nothing whatever to do with the new pensions and compensation arrangements. By my reckoning, this is the seventh time during the passage of the Bill that there has been a debate in either House on the issue of post-retirement benefits of widows and widowers. This House has twice voted resoundingly against adding a provision of the sort proposed to the Bill—on Report, on 6 May, by 252 to 132 votes, and on 20 October, the last time that this House discussed the issue, by 270 votes to 181.

Peter Bottomley (Worthing, West) (Con): No one would dispute the figures, but is the Minister saying that because the Government Whips can get their people to vote as the Government want, that carries the argument on merit?

Mr. Caplin: The hon. Gentleman will forgive me if I respond to that during the course of my opening remarks. To put the issue into perspective, I was about to say that the House of Lords had twice voted in favour of a provision, once by a single vote, and most recently on 2 November. Members will recall that

> "a charge on public funds"—

estimated by the Government Actuary at about £50 million for the Ministry of Defence alone and at between £300 million and £500 million across all public service schemes—was the clear reason for the House's refusal of the Lords' previous position. That remains the Government position and indeed, I hope and expect, the view of the House.

We do not think that the figures would be reduced in the major way indicated in the context of attempts by the Opposition, in this place and then in the Lords, to limit the impact of the amendment by inserting age thresholds for payment of 70 and then 75. Clearly, it was thought that, in each case, such a constraint would make the amendment a lot less expensive and, therefore, more palatable to the Government. I want to disabuse the House on that point.

4.15 pm

Mr. Julian Brazier (Canterbury) (Con): I am most grateful to the Minister for giving way. Incidentally, I was sorry to hear the recent announcement that he will be retiring from the House at the end of this Parliament.

Does the Minister really want to pursue the post-retirement pensions analogy for the Ministry of Defence and other elements of the public service? Surely, the point is that members of the armed forces tend to retire when they are much younger, so the problem bears on them disproportionately. There is no reason why there should be a read-across. Age limits could deal with the problem in a way that would not read across to other parts of the public service.

Mr. Caplin: I thank the hon. Gentleman for his comments. I shall deal with his remarks in the context of my contribution, as we have only a short time for this debate.

Most widows' and widowers' pensions come into payment only when the recipients are in their 70s, so little is likely to be saved by introducing what would, in any case, be an entirely arbitrary age point. The other point about the proposed amendment is that it is just not possible to ring-fence the armed forces on that issue, which brings me to the read-across point made by the hon. Gentleman. We have given that question careful consideration and I have revisited it in the light of the clear concerns expressed both in this place and in the Lords. Any concession to the widows and widowers of service personnel would inevitably read across to the other public service schemes, where individuals frequently leave service, for all kinds of reasons, before normal retirement age.

Against that background, it is disappointing to say the least that their lordships have not heeded the clearly expressed will of this House, so I invite the House today to send a strong signal to the Lords on the matter. The stakes could not be higher. I must make it clear that the Bill will not be able to proceed if the Lords insist on an amendment on post-retirement widows' and widowers' benefits. The Government have no provision within their programme for the £300 million to £500 million that might be involved, and could not justify making such provision.

This is but one of a number of equally deserving pension legacy issues, which affect not only the public services, but many people who were employed in the private sector. To address them all would cost many billions of pounds. Successive Governments of all persuasions have concluded that a remedy would be unaffordable.

If their lordships were to insist on their amendment, or something like it, on Wednesday, there would be no realistic chance of the Bill coming on to the statute book. In that case, the significant improvements to the pension scheme, which have long been sought by serving personnel and are strongly supported by the chiefs of staff, and also by many veterans organisations, including the Forces Pension Society and the Royal British Legion, would be lost; as would the benefits under the new compensation scheme, of lump sum payments and a new deal for the more seriously disabled. I cannot believe that the hon. Member for Aldershot (Mr. Howarth) would welcome that outcome, even though I know that some of his Opposition colleagues have shown no such reservations, as we saw the last time we debated the matter.

Given the number of times that we have debated the issue, I shall not take the House through all the arguments again. The Government's strong opposition

[Mr. Caplin]

to the proposal is clearly on the record: the cost implications of the amendment are too far-reaching to allow any Government to make such a change. Furthermore, despite what the hon. Gentleman said during our last debate, I doubt, in the very unlikely event he were standing in my place, that he would take a different view. Those who continue to support the amendment must face up to the very real and substantial cost implications of the change.

No one has grounds for saying that the Government have been insensitive to the needs of our older veterans or widows. Indeed, my noble Friend Lord Bach announced in the Lords on 8 September a tightly-defined concession for the pre-1973 war widows, reflecting the very special circumstances of that group of generally elderly and relatively poorly off war pensioners. That concession was targeted on that deserving group, which the War Widows Association has regularly highlighted for special treatment, and will cost the Government more than £20 million. However, that is as far as we can afford to go and further than any previous Government have gone.

Mr. William Cash (Stone) (Con): Does the Minister accept that most of his argument turns on cost? Would he not care to consider the fact that, for example, the Public Accounts Committee has made some pretty trenchant remarks about some failures in relation to Ministry of Defence costings and accountancy? Therefore, bearing in mind that the sum of £300 million to £500 million may seem a lot by comparison with the issues and principles at stake, it pales into insignificance when compared to the very considerable amount of inefficiency that has been occasionally highlighted by the PAC, although I should like to add one thing—

Mr. Deputy Speaker (Sir Michael Lord): Order. That is sufficient for one bite of the cherry.

Mr. Caplin: I thought that we were just getting to the interesting bit, Mr. Deputy Speaker.

I say to the hon. Member for Stone (Mr. Cash) that the MOD has a defined budget, and we rightly have to live within it. The measure would involve extra expenditure, and there is no provision for it in our current thinking. Of course, we take into account what the Public Accounts Committee has said, and we had a very lively debate on procurement just 10 days ago in this House, when all those issues were properly and fully examined.

I do not believe that the Lords amendment can achieve what its proposer is seeking. There were no pensions before 1975 for those with less than 22 years' service as another rank and 16 years' service as an officer. In other pension schemes, arrangements were even less generous, as no pensions were payable with less than 40 years' service. The measure would therefore benefit very few of those who may have decided to delay marriage out of deference to the constraints of service. We would expect the main beneficiaries to be those remarrying later in life after either the death of the spouse or divorce. There can be no compelling case for the special treatment of those in that group who are in the same position as many others across the public services.

Overall, I strongly believe that the Government have put together a very good package of pensions and compensation benefits for our armed forces. The improvements to the pension scheme have been made in response to concerns about the current arrangements that have been voiced over the years by serving personnel, including many former Chiefs of the Defence Staff and the ex-service community.

I hope that the Lords will not insist on their position, but let us just consider what is at risk if they do: a pension scheme based on final salary, against the general trend seen outside; a very significant improvement to widows' and dependants' benefits; the extension of benefits to unmarried partners, including same-sex relationships; the introduction of common terms for officers and other ranks; and a new deal for the more seriously disabled, significantly improving their benefits.

As I have said before in the House, I am in no doubt that the new pension and compensation schemes are a good deal for service personnel and that it would be quite wrong to tear up the new schemes now and start again, thus asking the armed forces to wait yet longer for proper, modern employment terms. I am therefore again asking the House to send a clear signal to the House of Lords about the wishes of the elected House on this matter. I hope that, in the light of the debate and in the knowledge that we could not allow the Bill to proceed if it contained the Lords amendment, the Lords will agree that it is now time to accept the will of this, the elected House, and allow the Bill to proceed to Royal Assent later this week. I therefore ask the House to reject Lords amendment No. 2C.

Mr. Gerald Howarth (Aldershot) (Con): First, may I point out that we have only a relatively short time to debate the amendment? That has nothing to do with the Opposition; the Government have set an arbitrary limit of an hour for the debate. I hope that that will not result in those who wish to participate being unable to do so.

After months of detailed deliberations on the Bill in the House, in Committee and in the other place, the Government now seem likely to get their Bill pretty much in the form that they originally intended. It is disappointing that they have proved unwilling to consider any form of compromise on a number of key issues, including the burden of proof, on which the Select Committee on Defence offered a very sensible compromise solution, the reduced early departure payments scheme and the refusal to allow our servicemen and women to earn a full career pension.

Sadly, only on the issue of independent oversight did the Government accede to Opposition demands by giving an oversight role to the Armed Forces Pay Review Body. Of course, we welcome that. As the Minister said, the only outstanding issue between the two Houses is the provision for the payment of a widow's pension to the oldest of those widows of post-retirement marriages whose spouses' service took place before 1978.

I was very interested to hear the Minister produce the figures that he used, because he produced them completely out of the air—there was no back-up or substance to them whatever. He does a disservice to the House in so doing. The Government Actuary's

Department and the Ministry of Defence refuse to release the assumptions on which those costings are based, so it is very difficult to make accurate projections of the financial cost of the amendment. However, as the Minister knows, the Forces Pension Society has done some work on the issue, and it estimates that the provision would cost in the order of £7 million. I will come in a moment to the read-across to other Departments. For the Minister to suggest, as we sit here in the week of the Armistice commemorations, that these people are somehow not particularly deserving and that there ought to be a read-across to every other Department will, frankly, not wash.

Mr. Caplin *rose—*

Mr. Howarth: I will give way to the Minister if he wishes to repent.

Mr. Caplin: I am not prepared to allow the hon. Gentleman to get away with such an outrageous and disgraceful comment. I have never said that the widows and widowers were not a deserving group. I was merely pointing out the specific issue in relation to widows, Government policy and wider pension policy.

Mr. Howarth: Well, I am afraid that that does not stack up, and I will explain to the Minister in words of one syllable in a moment why it does not.

As I say, £7 million is hardly a king's ransom. Furthermore, the Minister knows that those who have been seeking to put right this anomaly have made genuine efforts to give the Government the opportunity to put it right. They have made plenty of efforts both here and, in particular, in another place, where Lord Freyberg introduced the amendment and secured the support of their lordships in the vote. They reduced the entitlement and narrowed it down to those over the age of 75 in an endeavour to meet the Government part way. Indeed, as one of my hon. Friends pointed out to me a moment ago, when we calculate these figures, we also have to take into account the fact that there will be some saving in social security. Although these pensions will be payable out of the public purse, many of those who would be the beneficiaries if the amendment were accepted are currently in receipt of social security payments. Given that they would no longer apply, there would be a counter-balancing saving to the public purse.

Mr. Douglas Hogg (Sleaford and North Hykeham) (Con): I hope that my hon. Friend will forgive me for making a slightly ungracious intervention. He must bear it in mind that he is advocating something that has been rejected by all Governments for all time. Will he tell us why the argument on read-across does not apply? If we retrospectively change the law on pensions, why will we not be asked to reopen the matter in many other cases for younger age groups?

4.30 pm

Mr. Howarth: I shall come on to read-across in a moment. It is common ground among us that the matter is one of several legacy issues that Governments of both political complexions have found it difficult to address. We believe that it is now time to address the matter—we suggested others for consideration, but we have narrowed them down to one. I hope that the fact that the proposal has found favour in the other place will carry some weight with my right hon. and learned—and, if I may also say so, noble—Friend. Let me remind him that Lord Freyberg's amendment, which would limit the entitlement to those over 75, was carried by 149 votes to 126. Among those who supported the measure was the most recently retired Chief of the Defence Staff, Lord Boyce. Many of us would argue that he was one of the most distinguished people who have had the honour to serve in that post, and he has made no secret of his worries about several issues, of which this is one.

Mr. Caplin *rose—*

Mr. Howarth: I shall give way to the Minister in a moment.

If the Government give life peerages to all and sundry, but cannot find 150 people to turn up and support them on this measure, they clearly either have given peerages to the wrong people—perhaps they did not give the Labour party enough money—or could not persuade them of the argument. Frankly, I think that the latter is the case.

Mr. Caplin: That was a cheap shot—we are hearing plenty of those at the moment. The hon. Gentleman might like to reflect on the number of Labour peers who voted in that Division and the number of Conservative peers. I am sure that he has the figures to hand, but if not, I can certainly tell him.

Mr. Howarth: I have not done a detailed analysis on those who voted, although I note that at least one Labour peer voted with Lord Freyberg, who is, of course, a Cross Bencher. Cross Benchers, Conservatives and Liberal Democrats supported the amendment, and I think that most of those who voted against it were members of the Labour party. However, the Government have created many Labour peers, so if they do not turn up to vote, either they are not earning their corn, or they do not believe in the Government's policy.

I doubt that I am alone in finding it pretty grubby that the day after Remembrance Sunday, the Government's message to widows who married after their spouses had left the service of the Crown is, "We realise that your spouse risked his life for this country, but we are sorry that, as his widow, you are not entitled to anything from his service." Many such widows aged over 75 will have been married to men who served in the second world war, so hon. Members on both sides of the House and the British people will share our dismay at the Government's refusal to make such a small provision for some of the oldest and most vulnerable of our forces' widows.

I cited two cases the last time that we discussed the Bill, and I shall cite another today. A lady from Oxfordshire said:

> "We married in 1977 after my husband retired, but he unfortunately died in 1991. Consequently I get no pension. My husband served for 25 years in the RAF and was flying as a pilot throughout the last war. He was awarded the AFC and Bar and was mentioned in dispatches. He like many, many more was prepared to give his life if necessary."

That is the tenor of many letters that have been sent to organisations that champion the cause.

[Mr. Howarth]

The Minister sometimes adopts a hectoring manner and it has been suggested to me that he has said that if he fails to get his way on the matter, he will pull the Bill. Indeed, he made it abundantly clear to the House that that remained his position.

Mr. Brazier: Surely there is a second argument besides the strong one that my hon. Friend puts. The armed forces are in a unique position, with the possible exception of the diplomatic corps, in which people are moved about quickly and sent abroad for long periods. As a result, many personnel have less opportunity for marriage. Above all, unlike all other forms of public service, they typically retire in their 40s, so half their life's pension, which they acquired in the armed forces, cannot be read-across to a later marriage. The problem does not usually arise for someone who retires at a later age in any other part of public service.

Mr. Howarth: My hon. Friend is right and I am grateful to him for that. Hon. Members will know that it was almost frowned on to get married too early. The practice was that people married after they retired rather than when they moved around the world in service.

The Minister made it crystal clear again that if the House votes against the amendment and if it is carried in the other place, he will pull the Bill. That is as churlish as it is unlikely.

Mr. Caplin: Let me clarify something. I said that if the Lords insisted on the amendment, the Bill would be very different. Conservative Members criticised the Government in Committee because the Bill was enabling legislation, to be followed by secondary legislation. It would clearly be wrong for this matter, which does not need legislation, to be in the Bill.

Mr. Howarth: The Minister blows a hole in the Bill by making it crystal clear that it is essentially enabling legislation, as I made clear at the outset. There is some consistency in his argument that to include the measure would go against the Bill's general principle. In that case, we would be delighted for him to say that the Government will introduce proposals in a statutory instrument to achieve the same effect if the amendment is not insisted on in another place.

Mr. Caplin: I intend to respond to the debate in full and will give my thoughts about the future then.

Mr. Howarth: The Minister will need to catch your eye, Mr. Deputy Speaker, if he wishes to respond. We had his definitive statement. I find it astonishing that he is suggesting that something is up his sleeve that he wishes to impart to the House at the end of the debate. If he has good news for us, perhaps he will kindly tell us now so that I can properly respond.

Clearly, the Minister has nothing to say. You, Mr. Deputy Speaker, will have to consider whether there is any point in him winding up if the Government have nothing additional to offer. It will be unfortunate if he imparts new information that he was unwilling to give at the start of the debate, without enabling us to comment on it.

As I said, it is as churlish as it is unlikely that the Minister will pull the Bill. He would look pretty silly explaining how a small group of widows, their cause championed in this House and another place, had so overwhelmed the Ministry of Defence that it was forced to deprive tomorrow's armed forces of the myriad benefits he has claimed the Bill will provide.

The Government have cited a policy of no retrospection as grounds for resisting the amendment. In 1989, the then Secretary of State for Defence, Tom King, agreed a £40 a week tax-free payment to pre-1973 widows without any implication for retrospection in other areas. That provision was said to have been made for a "uniquely deserving category". Surely those widows of post-retirement marriages over the age of 75 today, like the lady from Oxfordshire whose case I quoted, should qualify as another uniquely deserving category. We were talking about read-across earlier, but it was not an issue when my noble Friend Lord King made that special gesture. The Ministry of Defence was clearly not telling him that if he made that concession, there would be a read-across to every other Government Department. It is unacceptable and outrageous that the Ministry and its officials should insist that if we look after a unique category of people, similar provisions should be made for every other Department so that an expenditure of £7 million on that small group would become £500 million across Government.

Mr. Hogg: Would my hon. Friend equip me with an argument that I can put to the widows of, for example, firemen, prison officers, policemen or teachers, and explain why they should not have the same benefit?

Mr. Howarth: Given the nature of my right hon. and learned Friend's constituency, which includes many Royal Air Force airfields and former RAF airfields, he will know that there is something unique about the people who fought in the second world war and whose widows would be the beneficiaries of the measure. I hope that I do not need to spell out the argument for him, because I am sure that it is apparent to him.

On the question of retrospection, there is plenty of precedent to show that the MOD has not needed to argue against retrospection in the past. More recently, the Civil Partnership Bill provides retrospective benefits dating back to 1988. If retrospective benefits are okay for homosexual couples, why is that not the case for the widows of men who fought for our freedom? I confess that I am surprised that the Minister has chosen to snub the widows as his parting shot. As he activates his ejector seat and parachutes back into the world of personal finance—my assumption may be unreasonable—which was comprehensively mucked up by the Government, he will surely want to be remembered with affection by that small but valiant group. The sum of £7 million, as well as being wholly justified, is an entirely affordable option. If the Government continue to be pigheaded and stubborn, next year's incoming Conservative Government will put the matter right and make provision for that deserving group.

I shall conclude by paying tribute to Lord Freyberg, who kindly mentioned me last week in the debate in the other place. We ought to leave the last word to him, because he concluded that debate and won the hearts of

Members of the upper House. I hope that by repeating his remarks I can win the hearts of Members of the House of Commons:

> "I should like to remind the House that those affected by this issue are mostly widows of Second World War servicemen who fought for a pensionable length of time—for around two decades—and endured great hardship without being able to provide for their wives in the event of their death, through no fault of their own and in contrast to contemporary colleagues in less arduous positions. I hope the House will grasp this late opportunity to help such a vulnerable group."—[*Official Report, House of Lords*, 2 November 2004; Vol. 666, c. 181.]

Amen to that—I hope that this House, too, will grasp it.

Mr. Colin Breed (South-East Cornwall) (LD): I shall make only a few comments, because I want to ensure that the Minister has time to enlighten us about how he will bring our proceedings to an end. We have discussed the Bill seven times, and I hope that he agrees that when primary legislation is introduced it is not just a time to look forward and lay out plans for the years and decades to come, but to address perceived injustices in systems that have been in place for some time. There is widespread acceptance of the fact that certain injustices ought to be put right by the Bill. The group that we are discussing falls into that category.

4.45 pm

I shall say a little about why the Government say they cannot accept the Lords amendment. The first reason is retrospection. The only way in which perceived injustices from the past can be put right is through retrospective legislation. There are examples of the Government doing that. The hon. Member for Aldershot (Mr. Howarth) gave one recent example and there are others. It would be churlish of the Government to rely on the argument that they cannot act retrospectively.

A more important consideration is cost. Bearing in mind all the resources at the Government's disposal, we should by this stage have some clear actuarial figures to show what the measure would cost. The Minister says the cost could be substantially more than £7 million, but we do not know how much more, how the cost was calculated or whether it includes social security benefits that will not become payable. Given the length of time that we have been considering the Bill, there should be something rather more solid for us to debate, rather than our bandying figures across the Chamber.

Mr. Hogg: The cost depends on the extent of the read-across. It is difficult to quantify the cost until we know the extent of the read-over to other public service pension schemes.

Mr. Breed: The right hon. and learned Gentleman makes my point exactly. That would have enabled us to define the extent of the read-across, and would have served the House in two respects. It would have given us a more solid estimate of the cost and provided boundaries to the read-across. As I understand it—I do not possess anything like the legal experience of the right hon. and learned Gentleman—there would have to be some comparability among the various schemes to which read-across applied. As has been pointed out, aspects of the armed forces pension scheme are fundamentally different from other public service pension schemes.

It would have helped us—perhaps that is why we do not have the figures—to know, rather than to guess, the extent of the read-across and the costs. It is almost impossible for us to debate these matters without more solid figures. It is a great shame that, after all this time, we do not have a clearer idea of the Government's views and the basis for their contentions.

I accept, however, that the Bill is valuable in other respects and I would not want to see it fall. Many aspects of it have received support across the House. The Government have missed the opportunity to address a widely perceived injustice, and it is a pity that that is being used as a hostage to fortune in the proceedings on the Bill. If the Minister indicates that the Government are willing to reconsider the matter and introduce a statutory instrument to address it, that will be welcome. Nevertheless, I am still minded to press this relatively small issue.

Mr. Hogg: I rise with some disquiet, as I dislike disagreeing with my hon. Friend the Member for Aldershot (Mr. Howarth) on a matter of considerable sensitivity. I recognise that the group of people under discussion deserve well of the country. At the same time, one must ask some questions of principle. I was a member of a Government who, for many years, declined to reopen the question. We were satisfied that the reasons for not doing so were sound; they are two in number.

One should be very cautious about reopening contractual arrangements retrospectively. Contractual arrangements are based on a contract—certain payments to obtain certain benefits—and one should be slow to give benefits for which contributions have not been paid. Once one starts to do that, one abandons the basic rule that one should not make retrospective changes and opens oneself to a range of demands with huge public spending implications.

Mr. Gerald Howarth: My right hon. and learned Friend is right that one must exercise a great deal of caution, but I put it to him that such issues have been reopened on a number of occasions. He will remember that Tony Barber, when he was Chancellor of the Exchequer, made an ex gratia payment to war widows, and I have cited the individual, special case that occurred when Lord King of Bridgwater was Secretary of State for Defence—my right hon. and learned Friend was a Minister at that time and, indeed, may have been a Cabinet Minister. Those at the top end of the age bracket—in that case, over-75s—have a long history of special consideration, which we are trying to introduce here.

Mr. Hogg: The fact that my hon. Friend has identified only two cases—I am not saying that other cases do not exist—after, I suspect, considerable research, indicates the caution with which Governments have approached that proposition over the years. If one reopens contractual arrangements for over-75s, one immediately faces the question of why an arbitrary age limit should be imposed—why not 70 or 65? Once one breaches the

[Mr. Hogg]

principle of not making retrospective changes, one opens oneself to considerable demands with huge public spending implications.

Mr. Cash: My right hon. and learned Friend referred to comparisons with people in other activities. Does he apply that principle to those in the fire service or other dangerous activities, irrespective of whether the widowing took place as a result of that activity's danger or merely because that occupation is dangerous in general terms? I am sure that he recognises that the war widows situation arises explicitly when a war widow, such as my mother, is widowed as a result of her husband being killed in action.

Mr. Hogg: However, that is not true of the amendment, although it is, of course, true in some cases. The amendment does not deal with such a tragic situation; it deals with a wholly different situation in which a person in the armed forces continues to serve for many years and does not die in service, which is different from my hon. Friend's example.

One must face this question: if one makes such a change in respect of a deserving group of people, what does one say to widows in comparable circumstances—for example, the widows of policemen or firemen who die in service? Indeed, leaving aside dangerous occupations, what does one say to the widows of those in public service? By making such a change, one accepts changes to one kind of pension provision, and I find it difficult to resist the argument that pensioners or prospective pensioners married to other public servants should be entitled to the same benefits. I ask myself whether one can ring fence the surviving spouses of servicemen and have great difficultly in defining that principle.

Mr. Gerald Howarth: We have done it, and I pointed out the case in which it was done.

Mr. Hogg: The case has been made, but it is not a justification in principle. My hon. Friend must give us a principled argument as to how one can properly make a distinction between the surviving spouses of servicemen and the surviving spouses of other individuals in thousands of other public sector occupations. it is very difficult to make that distinction as a matter of principle. As it happens, I would like to be able to benefit that group of surviving spouses but we have to understand the consequences of that. My hon. Friend the Member for Aldershot has not dealt satisfactorily either with the point about retrospection or with the point about read-across. Unless he can do so, I shall not support him.

Mr. Caplin: Perhaps I could begin where the right hon. and learned Member for Sleaford and North Hykeham (Mr. Hogg) ended. There seems to be some confusion in the House in relation to the suggestion by the hon. Member for Aldershot (Mr. Howarth) about the single change that Tom King made when he was Secretary of State for Defence. I want to try to clarify that. There was a change to the war pension scheme, which is not an occupational scheme. It does not raise the same issues that we have debated this afternoon. As the right hon. and learned Gentleman pointed out, the benefit is not in relation to the terms of service, which were set separately for service personnel at the time of their service, and there is no direct pay adjustment.

Furthermore, the war widows already had an entitlement to benefit in 1989 and all that happened was that the value of the benefit was increased for pre-1973 widows. That was an honourable thing for the Secretary of State at the time to do. It was also the right thing to do. The post-retirement marriages measure that we are debating today and that has been debated in the House of Lords would introduce a completely new entitlement. That is why I ask the House to disagree with their lordships. It is a completely different area. It is not right to make a comparison with the change that Tom King made at that time.

I wanted to start on a point of consensus in winding up this short debate. I welcome the comments of the hon. Member for Aldershot about our inclusion of the Armed Forces Pay Review Body and of the hon. Member for South-East Cornwall (Mr. Breed) in relation to the Bill in general. I want to say how much I have enjoyed the "trio debates" that we have had for the best part of eight months. When this Bill got into Committee in February, I did not expect us to be debating it in the last week of the Session, but there we are.

I want to try to make it absolutely clear where I stand in relation to post-retirement widows. The House will recall from our previous debate that I had a meeting with Lord Freyberg and the Forces Pension Society. I hope that I can build on the comments that I made then with some further comments. I make it clear that I remain open-minded on the possibility of a measure that may make further improvements for particularly vulnerable groups of armed forces widows, in particular some of those who are older and less well provided for. As I have already indicated to the society, I am prepared to meet it and Lord Freyberg once the Bill has received Royal Assent to consider the issues raised throughout our debates. I hope that the House will accept that commitment from me on behalf of the Government and, in consequence of it, will allow the House to disagree with the Lords and send a clear message back to their lordships on this issue.

Mr. Gerald Howarth: I am aware that the Minister had a meeting with Lord Freyberg and others. I find it surprising that the Minister, having said at the outset of the debate that, if the amendment were insisted upon, the Bill would have to be pulled and all these benefits to the armed forces would be lost, chooses at the end of the debate, when there is no real opportunity for us to reply, to say that he is open-minded about it and willing to reconsider.

If the Minister is saying that he is prepared to consider righting this injustice at some point in the near future, that is fine; but if he is saying that he is prepared to talk, but in fact there is nothing new to say, frankly, I do not see what purpose there is in his talking further. Can he give us some more definite commitment?

5 pm

Mr. Caplin: I have given a clear commitment both today and in what I have said previously. My words have been carefully chosen and reflect a further conversation that I had with the Forces Pension Society last week. I am saying that I am open-minded on the possibility of a measure that might make further improvements for especially vulnerable groups of armed forces widows, and in particular some of those who are older and less well provided for. It seems to me that that is clear and unambiguous, and it is a matter that we can discuss afterwards.

The hon. Gentleman knows, as we have already debated it today, that this is an enabling measure. It is right and proper to discuss these issues. He said to me in Committee when the matter was raised on, I think, 22 February, that it was a probing amendment. We did not divide on it then and he did not appear to wish to pursue it further. That is a normal consequence of House business, but in these circumstances I am trying to make it clear to the House and to the other place that there are opportunities for further discussions, and I am not ruling anything out and remain open-minded. He will simply have to accept that that is as far as I can go in making a commitment today.

Mr. Howarth: I am afraid that, from what I have heard so far, I do not feel sufficiently confident that there is a real intention to deal with this issue. I welcome the idea that the Minister is prepared for further negotiations, but I find what he has said so far unpersuasive, and unless he can give a certain commitment I am likely to seek to divide the House on this issue, because he has shown nothing but intransigence thus far, so I cannot place huge reliance on his delivering if he comes to further negotiations.

Mr. Caplin: I did not use the word "negotiations", and I reject the charge of intransigence. That was not a sensible point to make, and in fact the concession that we made to the pre-1973 widows, at a cost of more than £20 million, was welcomed by the hon. Member for South-East Cornwall and should perhaps have been welcomed by the hon. Gentleman, too.

I want to respond briefly to two points, the first of which concerns the Civil Partnerships Bill and retrospection—the two are not the same, and it is worth my placing on the record why that is the case. The regulations under that Bill will provide equality, as they will allow registered same-sex partners to accrue survivor pensions in public service schemes from 1988. That puts registered same-sex couples in the same position as married couples. This new legal status is akin to marriage and inevitably produces corresponding benefit rights. That is different from the issues relating to any retrospective improvements for pension benefits that have arisen in debates on our Bill both today and previously.

Secondly, it is simply not true that the Lords amendment would cost £7 million. The Government Actuary has confirmed that limiting the threshold for payments to age 75—I made this point in my opening remarks—does not reduce significantly the one-off cost, which I have stated clearly throughout this debate is in the region of £50 million to the Ministry of Defence, and the read-across of that is the other figures that we have heard: £300 million to £500 million.

Mr. Howarth: Are those costs net of social security payments that will be saved?

Mr. Caplin: It really was not worth my giving way. The Government Actuary works the figures out, and I have given the House a clear understanding of them. It is not £7 million; it is much, much more. Reading across to the public services and rectifying all the legacies, we would be talking about billions of pounds. I do not believe that the hon. Gentleman would expect any Government to present such a case.

We have now discussed this matter on seven occasions. I believe that the House should disagree with the Lords, and I urge it to do so by rejecting the amendment.

Question put, That this House disagrees with the Lords in the said amendment:-

The House divided: Ayes 260, Noes 160.

Division No. 319] **[5:05 pm**

AYES

Ainsworth, Bob *(Cov'try NE)*
Alexander, Douglas
Allen, Graham
Armstrong, rh Ms Hilary
Atherton, Ms Candy
Atkins, Charlotte
Bailey, Adrian
Banks, Tony
Barron, rh Kevin
Battle, rh John
Beard, Nigel
Berry, Roger
Blackman, Liz
Blears, Ms Hazel
Blizzard, Bob
Borrow, David
Bradley, rh Keith *(Withington)*
Bradley, Peter *(The Wrekin)*
Brennan, Kevin
Brown, Russell *(Dumfries)*
Browne, Desmond
Bryant, Chris
Buck, Ms Karen
Burgon, Colin
Burnham, Andy
Byrne, Liam *(B'ham Hodge H)*
Campbell, Mrs Anne *(C'bridge)*
Campbell, Ronnie *(Blyth V)*
Caplin, Ivor
Caton, Martin
Cawsey, Ian *(Brigg)*
Challen, Colin
Clark, Mrs Helen *(Peterborough)*
Clark, Paul *(Gillingham)*
Clarke, rh Charles *(Norwich S)*
Clarke, rh Tom *(Coatbridge & Chryston)*
Clarke, Tony *(Northampton S)*
Clelland, David
Clwyd, Ann *(Cynon V)*
Coaker, Vernon
Coffey, Ms Ann
Colman, Tony
Cook, rh Robin *(Livingston)*
Corbyn, Jeremy
Corston, Jean
Cranston, Ross
Cruddas, Jon
Cryer, John *(Hornchurch)*
Cummings, John
Cunningham, Jim *(Coventry S)*
Cunningham, Tony *(Workington)*
Davey, Valerie *(Bristol W)*
David, Wayne
Davidson, Ian
Davies, Geraint *(Croydon C)*
Dawson, Hilton
Dean, Mrs Janet
Dhanda, Parmjit
Dobbin, Jim *(Heywood)*
Dobson, rh Frank
Dowd, Jim *(Lewisham W)*
Drew, David *(Stroud)*
Eagle, Angela *(Wallasey)*
Eagle, Maria *(L'pool Garston)*
Efford, Clive
Ellman, Mrs Louise
Etherington, Bill
Field, rh Frank *(Birkenhead)*
Fisher, Mark
Fitzpatrick, Jim
Fitzsimons, Mrs Lorna
Flint, Caroline
Foster, Michael *(Worcester)*
Foster, Michael Jabez *(Hastings & Rye)*
Francis, Dr. Hywel
Gerrard, Neil
Gibson, Dr. Ian
Gilroy, Linda
Godsiff, Roger
Goggins, Paul
Griffiths, Jane *(Reading E)*
Griffiths, Nigel *(Edinburgh S)*
Grogan, John
Hain, rh Peter
Hall, Mike *(Weaver Vale)*
Hall, Patrick *(Bedford)*
Hamilton, Fabian *(Leeds NE)*
Hanson, David
Harman, rh Ms Harriet
Healey, John

Henderson, Doug *(Newcastle N)*
Henderson, Ivan *(Harwich)*
Hendrick, Mark
Hepburn, Stephen
Hewitt, rh Ms Patricia
Heyes, David
Hill, Keith *(Streatham)*
Hodge, Margaret
Hoey, Kate *(Vauxhall)*
Hope, Phil *(Corby)*
Hopkins, Kelvin
Howarth, rh Alan *(Newport E)*
Howarth, George *(Knowsley N & Sefton E)*
Hughes, Beverley *(Stretford & Urmston)*
Hughes, Kevin *(Doncaster N)*
Humble, Mrs Joan
Hurst, Alan *(Braintree)*
Hutton, rh John
Illsley, Eric
Irranca-Davies, Huw
Jackson, Glenda *(Hampstead & Highgate)*
Jackson, Helen *(Hillsborough)*
Jamieson, David
Jenkins, Brian
Johnson, Miss Melanie *(Welwyn Hatfield)*
Jones, Helen *(Warrington N)*
Joyce, Eric *(Falkirk W)*
Kaufman, rh Sir Gerald
Keeble, Ms Sally
Kelly, Ruth *(Bolton W)*
Kennedy, Jane *(Wavertree)*
Khabra, Piara S.
Kidney, David
Kilfoyle, Peter
Knight, Jim *(S Dorset)*
Kumar, Dr. Ashok
Ladyman, Dr. Stephen
Laxton, Bob *(Derby N)*
Lepper, David
Leslie, Christopher
Levitt, Tom *(High Peak)*
Linton, Martin
Lloyd, Tony *(Manchester C)*
Love, Andrew
Lucas, Ian *(Wrexham)*
Luke, Iain *(Dundee E)*
McAvoy, Thomas
McCabe, Stephen
McCafferty, Chris
McCartney, rh Ian
McDonagh, Siobhain
McGuire, Mrs Anne
McIsaac, Shona
Mackinlay, Andrew
McNulty, Tony
MacShane, Denis
Mactaggart, Fiona
McWilliam, John
Mahmood, Khalid
Mallaber, Judy
Mann, John *(Bassetlaw)*
Marris, Rob *(Wolverh'ton SW)*
Marsden, Gordon *(Blackpool S)*
Marshall, David *(Glasgow Shettleston)*
Marshall-Andrews, Robert
Merron, Gillian
Milburn, rh Alan
Miliband, David
Miller, Andrew
Mitchell, Austin *(Gt Grimsby)*
Moffatt, Laura
Moran, Margaret
Morley, Elliot
Morris, rh Estelle
Mountford, Kali
Mudie, George
Munn, Ms Meg
Murphy, Denis *(Wansbeck)*
Murphy, Jim *(Eastwood)*
Murphy, rh Paul *(Torfaen)*
Naysmith, Dr. Doug
O'Brien, Bill *(Normanton)*
O'Brien, Mike *(N Warks)*
O'Hara, Edward
Olner, Bill
O'Neill, Martin
Pearson, Ian
Perham, Linda
Picking, Anne
Pickthall, Colin
Pike, Peter *(Burnley)*
Plaskitt, James
Pollard, Kerry
Pope, Greg *(Hyndburn)*
Pound, Stephen
Prentice, Ms Bridget *(Lewisham E)*
Prentice, Gordon *(Pendle)*
Prosser, Gwyn
Purchase, Ken
Purnell, James
Quin, rh Joyce
Quinn, Lawrie
Rammell, Bill
Rapson, Syd *(Portsmouth N)*
Raynsford, rh Nick
Robinson, Geoffrey *(Coventry NW)*
Rooney, Terry
Roy, Frank *(Motherwell)*
Ruddock, Joan
Ryan, Joan *(Enfield N)*
Salter, Martin
Savidge, Malcolm
Sawford, Phil
Sedgemore, Brian
Shaw, Jonathan
Sheerman, Barry
Sheridan, Jim
Short, rh Clare
Simon, Siôn *(B'ham Erdington)*
Singh, Marsha
Skinner, Dennis
Smith, rh Andrew *(Oxford E)*
Smith, rh Chris *(Islington S & Finsbury)*
Smith, Geraldine *(Morecambe & Lunesdale)*
Smith, Jacqui *(Redditch)*
Smith, Llew *(Blaenau Gwent)*
Soley, Clive
Starkey, Dr. Phyllis
Steinberg, Gerry
Stewart, David *(Inverness E & Lochaber)*
Stewart, Ian *(Eccles)*
Stinchcombe, Paul
Straw, rh Jack
Stringer, Graham
Stuart, Ms Gisela
Sutcliffe, Gerry
Tami, Mark *(Ayr)*
Taylor, rh Ann *(Dewsbury)*
Taylor, Dari *(Stockton S)*
Taylor, David *(NW Leics)*
Thomas, Gareth *(Harrow W)*
Timms, Stephen
Todd, Mark *(S Derbyshire)*
Touhig, Don *(Islwyn)*
Trickett, Jon
Truswell, Paul
Turner, Dennis *(Wolverh'ton SE)*
Turner, Neil *(Wigan)*
Twigg, Stephen *(Enfield)*
Tynan, Bill *(Hamilton S)*
Walley, Ms Joan
Ward, Claire
Wareing, Robert N.
Watson, Tom
Watts, David
White, Brian
Whitehead, Dr. Alan
Wicks, Malcolm
Williams, rh Alan *(Swansea W)*
Wills, Michael
Winnick, David
Winterton, Ms Rosie *(Doncaster C)*
Wood, Mike *(Batley)*
Woolas, Phil
Worthington, Tony
Wright, Anthony D. *(Gt Yarmouth)*
Wright, David *(Telford)*
Wright, Iain *(Hartlepool)*
Wright, Tony *(Cannock)*
Wyatt, Derek

Tellers for the Ayes:
Mr. Nick Ainger and
Mr. John Heppell

NOES

Allan, Richard
Amess, David
Ancram, rh Michael
Arbuthnot, rh James
Atkinson, David *(Bour'mth E)*
Atkinson, Peter *(Hexham)*
Bacon, Richard
Baldry, Tony
Barker, Gregory
Barrett, John
Beith, rh A. J.
Bellingham, Henry
Bercow, John
Beresford, Sir Paul
Boswell, Tim
Bottomley, Peter *(Worthing W)*
Brady, Graham
Brazier, Julian
Breed, Colin
Brooke, Mrs Annette L.
Browning, Mrs Angela
Burnett, John
Burns, Simon
Burt, Alistair
Butterfill, Sir John
Calton, Mrs Patsy
Cameron, David
Carmichael, Alistair
Cash, William
Chapman, Sir Sydney *(Chipping Barnet)*
Clappison, James
Clifton-Brown, Geoffrey
Collins, Tim
Conway, Derek
Curry, rh David
Davey, Edward *(Kingston)*
Davies, Quentin *(Grantham & Stamford)*
Davis, rh David *(Haltemprice & Howden)*
Djanogly, Jonathan
Dodds, Nigel
Duncan, Alan *(Rutland)*
Duncan Smith, rh Iain
Fabricant, Michael
Fallon, Michael
Field, Mark *(Cities of London & Westminster)*
Flook, Adrian
Forth, rh Eric
Foster, Don *(Bath)*
Francois, Mark
Gale, Roger *(N Thanet)*
Garnier, Edward
Gibb, Nick *(Bognor Regis)*
Gidley, Sandra
Gillan, Mrs Cheryl
Goodman, Paul
Gray, James *(N Wilts)*
Grayling, Chris
Green, Damian *(Ashford)*
Greenway, John
Grieve, Dominic
Hague, rh William
Hammond, Philip
Hawkins, Nick
Hayes, John *(S Holland)*
Heath, David
Heathcoat-Amory, rh David
Hendry, Charles
Hermon, Lady
Hoban, Mark *(Fareham)*
Horam, John *(Orpington)*
Howard, rh Michael
Howarth, Gerald *(Aldershot)*
Hughes, Simon *(Southwark N)*
Jack, rh Michael
Jackson, Robert *(Wantage)*
Jenkin, Bernard
Johnson, Boris *(Henley)*
Kennedy, rh Charles *(Ross Skye & Inverness)*
Kirkbride, Miss Julie
Laing, Mrs Eleanor
Lait, Mrs Jacqui
Lamb, Norman
Lansley, Andrew
Leigh, Edward
Letwin, rh Oliver
Lewis, Dr. Julian *(New Forest E)*
Liddell-Grainger, Ian
Lidington, David
Lilley, rh Peter
Loughton, Tim
Luff, Peter *(M-Worcs)*
McIntosh, Miss Anne
Mackay, rh Andrew
Maclean, rh David
McLoughlin, Patrick
Malins, Humfrey
Maples, John
Mawhinney, rh Sir Brian
May, Mrs Theresa
Mercer, Patrick
Moore, Michael
Moss, Malcolm
Murrison, Dr. Andrew
Norman, Archie
O'Brien, Stephen *(Eddisbury)*
Öpik, Lembit
Osborne, George *(Tatton)*
Ottaway, Richard
Page, Richard

Paice, James
Pickles, Eric
Prisk, Mark *(Hertford)*
Pugh, Dr. John
Redwood, rh John
Rendel, David
Robathan, Andrew
Robertson, Hugh *(Faversham & M-Kent)*
Rosindell, Andrew
Russell, Bob *(Colchester)*
Sanders, Adrian
Sayeed, Jonathan
Selous, Andrew
Shephard, rh Mrs Gillian
Shepherd, Richard
Simpson, Keith *(M-Norfolk)*
Smith, Sir Robert *(W Ab'd'ns & Kincardine)*
Soames, Nicholas
Spelman, Mrs Caroline
Spicer, Sir Michael
Spring, Richard
Stanley, rh Sir John
Steen, Anthony
Streeter, Gary
Stunell, Andrew
Swayne, Desmond
Swire, Hugo *(E Devon)*
Syms, Robert
Tapsell, Sir Peter
Taylor, John *(Solihull)*
Taylor, Matthew *(Truro)*
Taylor, Sir Teddy
Teather, Sarah
Tredinnick, David
Turner, Andrew *(Isle of Wight)*
Tyler, Paul *(N Cornwall)*
Tyrie, Andrew
Waterson, Nigel
Watkinson, Angela
Webb, Steve *(Northavon)*
Widdecombe, rh Miss Ann
Wiggin, Bill
Wilkinson, John
Williams, Roger *(Brecon)*
Willis, Phil
Wilshire, David
Winterton, Ann *(Congleton)*
Winterton, Sir Nicholas *(Macclesfield)*
Wishart, Pete
Young, rh Sir George
Younger-Ross, Richard

Tellers for the Noes:
Mr. Crispin Blunt and
Mr. John Randall

Question accordingly agreed to.

Lords amendment disagreed to.

Committee appointed to draw up Reasons to be assigned to the Lords for disagreeing to certain of their amendments to the Bill: Liz Blackman, Mr. Colin Breed, Mr. Ivor Caplin, Vernon Coaker and Mr. Gerald Howarth; Mr. Ivor Caplin to be the Chairman of the Committee; three to be the quorum of the Committee.—*[Vernon Coaker.]*

To withdraw immediately.

Reasons for disagreeing to certain Lords amendments reported, and agreed to; to be communicated to the Lords.

Pensions Bill [*Ways and Means*]

5.21 pm

The Minister for Pensions (Malcolm Wicks): I beg to move,

That, for the purposes of any Act resulting from the Pensions Bill, it is expedient to authorise the levying of charges by virtue of the Act for the purpose of meeting expenditure of the Secretary of State to or in respect of the Ombudsman for the Board of the Pension Protection Fund.

The Bill provides for the Secretary of State to appoint an ombudsman for the pension protection fund. This is a new office which is being set up to provide an independent forum for dealing with PPF disputes.

Mr. Nigel Waterson (Eastbourne) (Con) *rose—*

Malcolm Wicks: I have not got to the very exciting bit yet, but will happily give way if the hon. Gentleman cannot contain himself.

Mr. Waterson: I am grateful to the Minister, and I do not want him to get too excited too early in his speech. Will he confirm that it is still the Government's thinking, as emerged in Committee, that at least to begin with the self-same person will be both the pensions ombudsman and the PPF ombudsman?

Malcolm Wicks: Yes, I am happy to confirm that. Clearly, in the early months of the pension protection fund—perhaps the first year or so—there should be little demand on the ombudsman. We therefore think it important that the same individual—the same man in this case—should undertake both roles. *[Interruption.]* I can deal with this matter relatively briefly, Mr. Deputy Speaker. Whether the House can is out of my hands.

When we debated the clauses on the pension protection fund ombudsman in this House on 20 April, the Bill made provision for the costs of the ombudsman and his office and staff to be provided by grant-in-aid by the Secretary of State. That would require the general taxpayer to foot the bill.

On reflection, we introduced an amendment in the other place allowing regulations to be made to allow the grant-in-aid to be recouped by a levy on pension schemes. That brings the funding of the PPF ombudsman into line with the approach already in place for organisations such as the pensions ombudsman, the PPF board and the pensions regulator. *[Interruption.]* I know that the hon. Member for West Derbyshire (Mr. McLoughlin) follows such things with great interest.

Mr. Michael Fallon (Sevenoaks) (Con): I am grateful to the Minister for giving way so early. Can we just be clear about what he is saying? When he refers to the levying of a charge, what he actually means is a stealth tax on business.

Malcolm Wicks: We think that as this measure is of benefit to people in, to use the jargon, final salary schemes or defined benefit schemes, and not to the general public or even to the general body of all people

[Malcolm Wicks]

in personal pensions, it is not unreasonable that that group rather than the general body of taxpayers should pay the cost.

Mr. John Bercow (Buckingham) (Con): Will the Minister give way?

Malcolm Wicks: Let me make a little more progress; the hon. Gentleman can polish his question even further if I give him a few more seconds. *[Laughter.]* Well, I have heard him before, and a little more polish always helps.

This measure brings the funding of the PPF ombudsman into line with the approach already in place for similar organisations. We do not envisage that the costs involved will be major. For example, the total costs of the existing pensions ombudsman in 2002–03 were under £1.5 million, which covered all the disputes and complaints referred to him. By contrast, the PPF ombudsman's remit covers just the pension protection fund, so we do not expect substantial costs.

Mr. Bercow: It is always a pleasure to listen to the Minister's mellifluous tones, but none of us would want him to proceed at an excessive pace. He referred a moment ago to regulations. Will those regulations be subject to the negative procedure or to its affirmative counterpart?

Malcolm Wicks: That is an extremely good question, and I thought that I might deal with that point very shortly. I am bound to say that it is always useful to give the one-nation tendency in the Conservative party—I think that the hon. Gentleman is still a member of that group—an opportunity. *[Interruption.]* I can now reply in the affirmative: the regulations will be subject to the affirmative procedure.

While the costs will be payable by all eligible—*[Interruption.]* There is a certain degree of end-of-term amusement on the Opposition Benches, which is slightly premature at this point. Opposition Members have obviously read the jokes that I took out of my speech. While the costs will be payable by all eligible pension schemes, the PPF ombudsman will be independent, because he will be appointed by the Secretary of State and not the PPF board. Although I have been urged by the left wing of the Tory party not to rush my remarks on this important matter, I shall do so on this occasion, and I therefore commend the motion to the House.

5.26 pm

Mr. Nigel Waterson (Eastbourne) (Con): The key words in this apparently harmless piece of verbiage are "the levying of charges". Of course, the Minister, in his habitual fashion, has tried, with honeyed words, to suggest that that is the right and sensible thing to be doing. However, it is nothing of the sort. As my hon. Friend the Member for Sevenoaks (Mr. Fallon) pointed out, this is yet another stealth tax on business.

The Minister was good enough to establish one point, which arose out of a proposal made by our side in Committee, which is that we should draw on the experience and wisdom of the existing ombudsman, so that—at least to begin with—Mr. Laverick will be both the pensions ombudsman and the PPF ombudsman. Sadly for Mr. Laverick, I do not think that that dual role will require two salaries, but I suspect that it will mean extra staff, so we should not allow the Minister to persuade the House that no extra cost is built into this part of the elaborate bureaucracy that the Bill has set up.

The real issue is the switching of the burden of this new office, and its back-up staff, to business and industry. Only a few days ago, the Department sneaked out a written statement, very quietly and without fanfare, that made it clear that the pension protection fund would, in some respects, be retrospective and might take into account companies such as Turner and Newell, if their pension schemes got into difficulties between now and when the Pensions Bill comes into effect. Of course, one can see the motivation for that. It is becoming apparent, almost day by day, that the Government's financial assistance scheme is woefully inadequate for its purpose of compensating people—I should say, of assisting people. The Secretary of State has made a distinction between compensation and assistance. The latter is a handout of only a tiny fraction of the benefits that would have been available to the people involved if they had been lucky enough to qualify under the PPF after April next year.

The boundaries have been blurred—we will no doubt debate the point at greater length tomorrow—between the pension protection fund and the financial assistance scheme. However, the point is that the PPF will be financed by a levy on business. Because of the slowness in introducing a risk-based levy, that levy will be a flat rate for a significant period, reflecting no risk and not distinguishing between good schemes and bad schemes, well run schemes and badly run schemes, or schemes with poor investments and schemes with better investments. The result, of course, will be that the good will subsidise the bad, and the measure that we are asked to approve today is an example of that. The Government's default position throughout the Bill has been, wherever possible, to heap more burdens on business, and the motion is another clear example of that.

Malcolm Wicks: Is the hon. Gentleman's position on behalf of the Conservative party that the taxpayer should pay? As I recall, in Committee the Conservative Opposition supported the idea of an ombudsman, for perfectly sensible reasons. That position has to be paid for. How does the hon. Gentleman think it should be paid for?

Mr. Waterson: The Conservatives resist attempts to heap more taxation on people. The reality is that we suggested—in fairness, I must add that the Minister took up the suggestion—that a new person was not needed to carry out the job of the new ombudsman. We hoped that there would be some saving, because the same person would be involved. We are trying to make the point that—*[Interruption.]* If the Minister stops chuntering, he may learn something. Well run companies with decently run pension schemes will already face a flat-rate levy from the start of the pension protection fund. That will be a significant burden on them, and yet another reason for the decline of defined benefit schemes.

Following the Minister's announcement the other day, we now know that, on top of that, the PPF may well open its doors with a substantial deficit caused by schemes swept up prior to April next year. Incidentally, that announcement was not adverted to at all either in the debate in the House of Lords, or during departmental questions on the same day.

Leaving that aside, there is already a significant burden on business. That may explain, in part, why the Minister's rather naïve hopes that industry would come forward voluntarily with money to boost the financial assistance scheme seems not to have borne any fruit. As I said, the motion will mean yet another burden on companies that support the PPF from April next year, because of the flat-rate levy that they will be paying. There will be no option for the better companies to pay less because they are better organised and run better pension schemes; the motion will simply add to the levy that they will already be paying.

As I have made clear, the Conservatives regret the fact that the Government continue to regard British business as merely a milch cow from which they can draw ever greater contributions to help pay for this flawed layer of bureaucracy that they are setting up, to try to deal with a pensions crisis that they have done so much to create.

5.33 pm

Mr. Steve Webb (Northavon) (LD): I am not sure whether that was a yes or a no. It is unclear to me whether Her Majesty's official Opposition are going to vote against the motion—*[Interruption.]* The tension is almost palpable.

The Ways and Means motion proposes that we work on the assumption that there will be an ombudsman for the pension protection fund. As a constituency Member who regularly finds that going to an ombudsman is the only way to resolve complex and difficult disputes independently, I think it entirely appropriate that there should be such an ombudsman.

I was rather surprised that the Minister did not tell us how much might be raised by the levy, and that was a rather regrettable omission. He said that the sum would be less than £1.5 million, but there is a big gap between £1.5 million and zero. I hope that, in responding to the debate, the Minister will at least give us some flavour of the amount of money that the House is giving the Secretary of State permission to levy. To ask how much might be raised seems a basic question to make of a Ways and Means resolution. The Minister did not tell us; he said, or implied, that it would not be more than £1.5 million, but will he give an idea of the order of magnitude that he is talking about?

The Liberal Democrats are of the view that there should be such an ombudsman, that that ombudsman has to be paid for, and that those who will benefit from the existence of the ombudsman are those with final salary or other defined benefit occupational schemes that are covered by the PPF. It is rather difficult to see why, if this body has to be paid for, it should be paid for by those who do not even have final salary or defined benefit pensions. In other words, in pensions, increasingly there are—to use an old phrase—two nations: those who have final salary, high-quality pensions and those at the mercy of the stock market. It seems odd to suggest that people whose pensions have no promise attached be asked to pay for a dispute resolution procedure for those who have better pensions, or indeed that the general taxpayer, who may have no pension at all beyond that provided by the state, be asked to pay for such a procedure.

It is hard to understand what the Conservative response actually meant. I think it was against a levy on PPF scheme members, so I take it that it supported a levy on the general taxpayer. That point will have been noted far and wide, as our debates are followed closely.

Mr. Fallon: Presumably, the hon. Gentleman has noticed that if the levy is to be charged on other final salary schemes, it will fall on us—on the parliamentary pension fund, as a successful final salary scheme. Has he consulted his colleagues about voting in favour of the motion?

Mr. Webb: On the assumption that our scheme is not covered by the pension protection fund, the levy would not fall on us, but I am open to amendment or correction on that point.

I have a question for the Minister. In his remarks, he referred to the fact that when we first discussed the issue in April—was it really all that time ago?—the original assumption was that the cost would be funded by the general taxpayer. Nothing changed, as far as I can see, between April and September, when his noble Friend Baroness Hollis said, on reflection, that it would be funded by a levy, so can the Minister explain why the Government changed their mind on that point? What changed? Or was it yet another of those last-minute changes to the Pensions Bill that we have grown all too fond of seeing?

The Bill will come back to us tomorrow and we shall debate the substantive issues then, but even on the eve of those final discussions, things are still changing. It is another hallmark of a Bill that has not been properly thought through or prepared that on the eve of its final return—perhaps not even its final return—to the House we are still debating last-minute changes of mind and Government second thoughts. It is worrying that a framework that affects the whole pensions system and which should be in place for a generation is being written on the back of an envelope and cobbled together by the Government as they go along.

On this specific last-minute change, however, the Government have got things right. If the ombudsman service has to be paid for, as clearly it does, it is appropriate that it be paid for by people who will benefit from its existence and not by those who may have no pension at all. I am not sure whether the Conservatives disagree with me, as it is a complete mystery to me what points—if any—the hon. Member for Eastbourne (Mr. Waterson) was trying to make. I assume that his colleagues will try to extend the debate to its full 45 minutes, so I shall stand in their way no longer.

5.37 pm

Mr. Michael Fallon (Sevenoaks) (Con): I shall try to answer the point made by the hon. Member for Northavon (Mr. Webb) when I conclude my remarks and offer my advice on which way we should vote.

The decision on how the ombudsman scheme should be funded is a harbinger of what is in store for us. We debated the whole matter about six months ago and it is

[Mr. Michael Fallon]

already becoming clear that under the legislation there will be more and more disputes to be sorted out—whether they involve the financial assistance scheme on the one hand, or the PPF on the other. As I shall point out in our debate tomorrow—if I am fortunate enough to catch your eye, Mr. Deputy Speaker—we are, in essence, setting up a new form of business regulator and, as the Minister has finally realised, that regulator has to be paid for.

The Minister's real fear is, of course, that the costs of the new regulation will be large and much more substantial than originally envisaged, because there will be disputes all over the place. There are already disputes about the scope of the financial assistance scheme—when it should apply and to whom, which schemes will be covered and so on—but they are as nothing to the disputes that will occur under the PPF once it is established. All that new regulation must be paid for.

Ombudsmen are almost becoming a new form of regulator. When they were first set up, they were to deal with individual cases of injustice—to rule on those cases and advise the House on them—but they have now become part of the regulatory system itself. The Minister clearly expects many cases to go to them.

Who should pay? What is clear from the motion is that the levy will fall on successful schemes. I hope the Minister has considered the fairness of that. If the levy is to be straightforward, and with no variation according to risk, as my hon. Friend the Member for Eastbourne (Mr. Waterson) pointed out, it will be even more unfair, as it will bear more heavily on schemes that happen to be well funded and well managed than on those that are not. That is not particularly fair.

Will the levy also bear on the smallest schemes? We read that those companies that have set up small-scale schemes to benefit small work forces are already fearful of the additional costs involved under the Bill in having to bail out those schemes that are on less secure ground. Of course, the House has a parallel: we were asked, under the Financial Services and Markets Act 2000, to set up the new, all-powerful Financial Services Authority. That, too, is an example of a regulator with its own power to tax; it can set its own scale of charges, thus imposing on the good the cost of policing the bad. We should not authorise this new stealth tax on business without being sure that the Minister is doing everything possible to reduce the scope of disputes that are likely to be referred to the ombudsman.

As we shall see tomorrow, we will end up at the end of the Pensions Bill with the worst of all worlds: fewer final salary schemes, but more and more disputes about them. That brings me, finally, to the way in which we on the Opposition Benches should decide to vote. In my view, as we can see with the last-minute haste with which the Ways and Means resolution has been introduced this evening, the Pensions Bill has been a mess. This has been a very sad story from beginning to end. A raft of clauses was added to the Bill in Committee. All those clauses have been revised in the other place, as we shall see tomorrow. Even last Friday, the Government were still making announcements about how the burden of the new legislation would be financed. The Pensions Bill is a mess created by the Government, and it will make the provision and safeguarding of pensions worse. For those reasons, we should oppose the motion.

5.42 pm

Mr. Eric Forth (Bromley and Chislehurst) (Con): It is always a great pity that these apparently innocuous Ways and Means resolutions attract such relatively little attention from colleagues in the House, because they are, of course, a very important part of what remains of the House's influence on the sort of measures that flow from legislation. I should like to think that in some ways Members would be more interested in Ways and Means resolutions than in many other aspects of the Bills themselves.

Some of the Minister's phrases—innocuous and soothing though they were intended to sound—rang a number of alarm bells, certainly in my mind. I made a note of the one that sticks out. He actually had to the gall to say, almost with a straight face, that all was okay, as the ombudsman would be independent because he will be appointed by the Secretary of State. That is a new doctrine altogether. We are now expected to believe that someone will be independent because he or she is appointed by the Secretary of State. I should have thought that that was a complete contradiction in terms, and it immediately set me worrying about what we are being asked to do.

I must confess that I am not the biggest fan of the institution of ombudsmen.

Mr. Bercow: Or of the Secretary of State.

Mr. Forth: Indeed, as my hon. Friend says, or of the Secretary of State, but let us leave the Secretary of State out of this for the moment; we might bring him back a bit later because he is mentioned in the motion, thus giving us ample scope.

What worries me about the institution of ombudsmen—taken some years ago from Scandinavia, as I recall—is that, generally speaking, they have few, if any, powers.

Malcolm Wicks: Europe.

Mr. Forth: The Minister says, "Europe". I shall get him into *Hansard*; I am generous in that way. Of course, some parts of Europe have been extraordinarily sensible: the Norwegians, who are a favourite of these occasions, are a shining example to us all in matters European. I often wish that we could emulate them.

Mr. Deputy Speaker (Sir Michael Lord): Order. The right hon. Gentleman is an experienced Member of the House and he knows that this is not the occasion for a general dissertation on the origins of ombudsmen.

Mr. Forth: Nor, indeed, Norway, when it comes to that. The Minister did provoke me, but I will try to resist his blandishments.

Leaving aside the origins of the institution of ombudsman for a moment, I was going to say that I am unhappy about the appearance of the ombudsman in this Ways and Means resolution because I am not convinced that ombudsmen are the great power for good that everybody seems to have come to accept that they are. I say that not only because they may have been appointed by the Secretary of State, which immediately puts a question mark over their usefulness, but because, generally speaking, they have no powers. We therefore get frustrated citizens coming to us time and time again because they expected miracles of this or that ombudsman, only to find subsequently that very little happened as a result of the ombudsman's ruling.

Mr. Webb: I am grateful to the right hon. Gentleman for giving way, and it is always a joy to watch a master at work. Which aspect of the powers that the Bill gives the PPF ombudsman does the right hon. Gentleman think are inadequate?

Mr. Forth: I would say—

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Order. The right hon. Gentleman is being tempted way beyond the scope of the motion. We are not discussing whether there should be an ombudsman; we are simply discussing how he should be funded.

Mr. Forth: Yes, indeed, Mr. Deputy Speaker. I am devastated that I am unable to give the hon. Gentleman a comprehensive reply. Perhaps we will leave that for another day; indeed, it might even be tomorrow if we follow the example of my neighbour and hon. Friend the Member for Sevenoaks (Mr. Fallon).

The proposition that the Minister has brought before us is that the operation of the ombudsman will be paid for by the levy, which has quite rightly become the main object of our attention in the debate because it is the reason why the Ways and Means resolution has had to be brought to the House. Quite rightly, therefore, we are involved in a proper debate about the nature of the levy. This debate takes place against the background of the fact that, as we all know, the whole pensions industry—the whole institution of pensions in this country—is under severe strain and likely, sadly, to continue to be so. As if to add insult to injury, the Government have come forward with additional bureaucracy, whose virtues I am unable to extol because of your ruling, Mr. Deputy Speaker, and I have no problem with that at all. However, this additional bureaucracy will involve additional cost and will therefore give rise to a levy on the very pension funds that are already under strain. That simply adds to the general accusation that we can make against the Government that the pensions industry is in dire straits largely because of actions taken by the Government over a period of time. Sadly, the resolution, which we are being asked to approve, will add to that phenomenon; it does not help the industry in any way. Personally, I would question whether it helps pension holders or beneficiaries, but we are not here to explore that on this occasion, are we Mr. Deputy Speaker?

So, we have the levy. The Minister tried to reassure us by saying that we were not to be too worried about it, because it would cost a mere £1.5 million—he threw that figure in as if it were a bagatelle. We are all too used now to Ministers coming to the House and bandying such figures around as if they were of no consequence whatever. Of course, to Ministers in this Government, a million here, a million there and a billion somewhere else are of little consequence. However, if they spend a billion here and a billion there, it adds up to real money in the end. Therefore, it is our duty as representatives of taxpayers or indeed, as on this occasion, of pension holders to worry about such things and to wonder whether this £1.5 million will be well spent and whether there will truly be beneficiaries. Lurking at the back of my mind is the suspicion that this may be yet another bureaucracy or yet another enhancement to an existing bureaucracy—it really makes very little difference—that has little or no benefit in the end.

Under the guise of this apparently innocuous Ways and Means resolution, there lurk all sorts of very worrying issues—the levy, the amount of the levy, the bureaucracy that will be created and, worst of all perhaps, the Minister's assertion that we need not worry, because the Secretary of State will see it all right in the end. I am sure that the Minister has the greatest respect for the Secretary of State, and would that he were with us today to give us some reassurance as to how the independence of this person whom he will appoint will be maintained. Again, however, that is not something that we should be pursuing on this occasion. However, the thought must linger.

So, all in all, this apparently innocuous little measure has a number of very unsatisfactory aspects.

Mr. Bercow: I am reluctant to have to chide publicly my right hon. Friend, but it really is about time, after his 21 years in the House, that he told us what he really thinks. His tendency to self-effacement is pretty unsatisfactory. I want the gravamen behind his argument to be clear in my mind. Is he saying to the House that the problem with the ombudsman will be that he or she will tend to be the craven lickspittle of the Government, that he or she will make no decisions, or that he or she will, in the end, be inclined simply to prevaricate?

Mr. Forth *rose*—

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Order. I can save the right hon. Gentleman the embarrassment of having to respond to that dangerous intervention. We are not discussing that matter today, but simply the cost of the ombudsman.

Mr. Forth: Yes, indeed, which prevents me from saying that I could not agree more with my hon. Friend the Member for Buckingham (Mr. Bercow)—you, Mr. Deputy Speaker, would not want to say that in these circumstances. I am grateful to my hon. Friend because given that the resolution refers explicitly to the ombudsman, we must give a passing thought to whether we will get value for money from the levy that is linked to the ombudsman. That gives rise to speculation about how effective the ombudsman might be, which was, I think, the point that my hon. Friend was trying to get at, although I would of course not dream of pursuing it because it is not for me to dwell on lickspittles, prevarication, or any other aspect of what the ombudsman might be able to do on behalf of pension holders.

The Minister will have to do much better than he did in his opening remarks to persuade me and, I suspect, one or two of my hon. Friends, that we should approve the Ways and Means resolution. Perhaps it should be

[Mr. Forth]

taken away and thought about for a longer time so that we can spare such a burden from the already overburdened holders of pensions.

5.51 pm

Malcolm Wicks: With the leave of the House, I shall respond to the debate.

I understand that the right hon. Member for Bromley and Chislehurst (Mr. Forth) regularly entertains the House on Fridays with such fearless scrutiny. It makes me sad that I cannot be here to see it more often, but my constituency engagements often make me busy on Fridays and I fully intend that to remain the case.

I shall not say that this debate is much ado about nothing, because it has something to do with public spending—I certainly do not wish to provoke the right hon. Member for Bromley and Chislehurst into another speech. However, we are talking about a relatively small amount of public money.

I was not quite sure what the hon. Member for Eastbourne (Mr. Waterson) was saying, which was a difficulty that I had with him in recent months in Committee. I think the Tories' position, despite the variety of views expressed by their renegade Back Benchers, is that they support the ombudsman, but I am unclear about how they would pay for it. The hon. Gentleman talks about stealth taxes on business, but if he is against funding the ombudsman through schemes, he is saying, by implication, that the taxpayer should fund it. Why? I can tell the hon. Member for Northavon (Mr. Webb) that having reflected on the matter, we thought that it would be fairer for schemes to pay for the ombudsman. The Tory position is, as usual, absolutely unclear. I shall not be tempted into talking about risk-based or flat-rate levies because they are not relevant to the modest, yet important, motion.

The levy will be relatively small. The £1.5 million figure that I cited is the current cost incurred through the pensions ombudsman. If that were replicated for the pension protection fund ombudsman, the cost would be 10p per member per year. However, we expect the cost to be much less—no more than perhaps 6p per member per year. Although I appreciate what the right hon. Member for Bromley and Chislehurst said, we are talking about only a few pence per year, which must be far less than the cost of several hon. Members' fearless scrutiny of legislation in the House of Commons—important and vital though some would no doubt say that that is.

Mr. Waterson: Will the Minister give way?

Malcolm Wicks: I am happy to give way because I am anxious for clarification of the Tories' position.

Mr. Waterson: I am anxious for clarification of the Government's position. As the hon. Member for Northavon (Mr. Webb) shows no sign of stirring, I thought that I would ask the Minister a question on his behalf. If we are talking about such a small amount—we have heard that one before in Committee—why did the Government change their mind about the funding of the personage?

Malcolm Wicks: Well, £1 million is £1 million, and we thought, on balance, that that should be paid by schemes whose members could in extremis—we hope that they will not have to call on the PPF—benefit from the fund. We do not think that it would be right for the general taxpayer to pay for the ombudsman. I remain uncertain about how the Tories would pay for a measure that I think they support. I shall give way if the hon. Member for Eastbourne wishes to clarify their position. Obviously he does not wish to do so.

I was not sure whether the hon. Member for Sevenoaks (Mr. Fallon) was opposing the pension protection fund and thus the ombudsman. Is he at odds with his Front Bench? I repeat that we are discussing an important safeguard and that the ombudsman will cost only a few pence per member per year.

We heard a lot from the hon. Member for Bromley and Chislehurst—

Mr. Bercow: Right hon. Member.

Malcolm Wicks: We heard a lot from the very right hon. Member for Bromley and Chislehurst, but I was not sure what he was saying. Does he support the pension protection fund? If he does support it, does he support the idea of an ombudsman? *[Interruption.]* I am trying to bring a little gravitas to what has been a fairly light-hearted debate. If the right hon. Gentleman is in favour of the ombudsman, how will he pay for it? That is not clear, but what is clear is that the Government support the PPF. We think that there should be a PPF ombudsman and we have clear views about how the modest cost should be paid.

Question put and agreed to.

Resolved,

That, for the purposes of any Act resulting from the Pensions Bill, it is expedient to authorise the levying of charges by virtue of the Act for the purpose of meeting expenditure of the Secretary of State to or in respect of the Ombudsman for the Board of the Pension Protection Fund.

DELEGATED LEGISLATION

Mr. Deputy Speaker (Sir Michael Lord): For the convenience of the House, we may take the motions together.

Hon. Members: No.

Motion made, and Question put forthwith, pursuant to Standing Order No. 118(6) (Standing Committees on Delegated Legislation),

LEGAL SERVICES COMMISSION

That the draft Criminal Defence Service (Choice in Very High Cost Cases) (Amendment No. 2) Regulations 2004, which were laid before this House on 21st October, be approved.—*[Joan Ryan.]*

The House divided: Ayes 300, Noes 128.

Division No. 320] **[5:57 pm**

AYES

Ainsworth, Bob *(Cov'try NE)*
Alexander, Douglas
Allan, Richard
Allen, Graham
Armstrong, rh Ms Hilary
Atherton, Ms Candy
Atkins, Charlotte
Bailey, Adrian

Baird, Vera
Banks, Tony
Barron, rh Kevin
Battle, rh John
Beard, Nigel
Beith, rh A. J.
Berry, Roger
Blackman, Liz
Blears, Ms Hazel
Blizzard, Bob
Blunkett, rh David
Boateng, rh Paul
Borrow, David
Bradley, rh Keith *(Withington)*
Bradley, Peter *(The Wrekin)*
Breed, Colin
Brennan, Kevin
Brooke, Mrs Annette L.
Brown, rh Gordon *(Dunfermline E)*
Brown, Russell *(Dumfries)*
Browne, Desmond
Bryant, Chris
Buck, Ms Karen
Burgon, Colin
Burnett, John
Burnham, Andy
Byrne, Liam *(B'ham Hodge H)*
Caborn, rh Richard
Calton, Mrs Patsy
Campbell, Mrs Anne *(C'bridge)*
Campbell, Ronnie *(Blyth V)*
Carmichael, Alistair
Caton, Martin
Cawsey, Ian *(Brigg)*
Challen, Colin
Clark, Mrs Helen *(Peterborough)*
Clark, Paul *(Gillingham)*
Clarke, rh Tom *(Coatbridge & Chryston)*
Clarke, Tony *(Northampton S)*
Clelland, David
Clwyd, Ann *(Cynon V)*
Coaker, Vernon
Coffey, Ms Ann
Colman, Tony
Cook, rh Robin *(Livingston)*
Cooper, Yvette
Corbyn, Jeremy
Corston, Jean
Cranston, Ross
Cruddas, Jon
Cryer, John *(Hornchurch)*
Cummings, John
Cunningham, Jim *(Coventry S)*
Cunningham, Tony *(Workington)*
Davey, Edward *(Kingston)*
Davey, Valerie *(Bristol W)*
David, Wayne
Davidson, Ian
Davies, rh Denzil *(Llanelli)*
Davies, Geraint *(Croydon C)*
Dawson, Hilton
Dean, Mrs Janet
Dhanda, Parmjit
Dobbin, Jim *(Heywood)*
Dobson, rh Frank
Dowd, Jim *(Lewisham W)*
Drew, David *(Stroud)*
Eagle, Angela *(Wallasey)*
Eagle, Maria *(L'pool Garston)*
Efford, Clive
Ellman, Mrs Louise
Etherington, Bill
Field, rh Frank *(Birkenhead)*
Fisher, Mark
Fitzpatrick, Jim
Fitzsimons, Mrs Lorna
Flint, Caroline
Foster, Don *(Bath)*
Foster, Michael *(Worcester)*
Foster, Michael Jabez *(Hastings & Rye)*
Francis, Dr. Hywel
Gerrard, Neil
Gibson, Dr. Ian
Gidley, Sandra
Gilroy, Linda
Godsiff, Roger
Goggins, Paul
Griffiths, Jane *(Reading E)*
Griffiths, Nigel *(Edinburgh S)*
Grogan, John
Hall, Mike *(Weaver Vale)*
Hall, Patrick *(Bedford)*
Hamilton, Fabian *(Leeds NE)*
Hanson, David
Harman, rh Ms Harriet
Heath, David
Henderson, Doug *(Newcastle N)*
Henderson, Ivan *(Harwich)*
Hendrick, Mark
Hepburn, Stephen
Hewitt, rh Ms Patricia
Heyes, David
Hill, Keith *(Streatham)*
Hinchliffe, David
Hodge, Margaret
Hoon, rh Geoffrey
Hope, Phil *(Corby)*
Hopkins, Kelvin
Howarth, rh Alan *(Newport E)*
Howarth, George *(Knowsley N & Sefton E)*
Hughes, Beverley *(Stretford & Urmston)*
Hughes, Simon *(Southwark N)*
Humble, Mrs Joan
Hurst, Alan *(Braintree)*
Hutton, rh John
Illsley, Eric
Ingram, rh Adam
Irranca-Davies, Huw
Jackson, Glenda *(Hampstead & Highgate)*
Jackson, Helen *(Hillsborough)*
Jamieson, David
Jenkins, Brian
Johnson, Miss Melanie *(Welwyn Hatfield)*
Jones, Helen *(Warrington N)*
Jones, Martyn *(Clwyd S)*
Jowell, rh Tessa
Joyce, Eric *(Falkirk W)*
Kaufman, rh Sir Gerald
Keeble, Ms Sally
Kennedy, Jane *(Wavertree)*
Khabra, Piara S.
Kidney, David
Kilfoyle, Peter
Knight, Jim *(S Dorset)*
Kumar, Dr. Ashok
Ladyman, Dr. Stephen
Lamb, Norman
Lammy, David
Laxton, Bob *(Derby N)*
Lepper, David
Leslie, Christopher
Levitt, Tom *(High Peak)*
Lewis, Ivan *(Bury S)*
Linton, Martin
Lloyd, Tony *(Manchester C)*
Love, Andrew
Lucas, Ian *(Wrexham)*
Luke, Iain *(Dundee E)*
McAvoy, Thomas
McCabe, Stephen
McCafferty, Chris
McCartney, rh Ian
McDonagh, Siobhain
McFall, rh John
McGuire, Mrs Anne
McIsaac, Shona
Mackinlay, Andrew
McNulty, Tony
MacShane, Denis
Mactaggart, Fiona
McWilliam, John
Mahmood, Khalid
Mallaber, Judy
Mann, John *(Bassetlaw)*
Marris, Rob *(Wolverh'ton SW)*
Marsden, Gordon *(Blackpool S)*
Marshall, David *(Glasgow Shettleston)*
Marshall-Andrews, Robert
Meale, Alan *(Mansfield)*
Merron, Gillian
Miliband, David
Miller, Andrew
Mitchell, Austin *(Gt Grimsby)*
Moffatt, Laura
Moran, Margaret
Morley, Elliot
Morris, rh Estelle
Mountford, Kali
Mudie, George
Munn, Ms Meg
Murphy, Denis *(Wansbeck)*
Murphy, Jim *(Eastwood)*
Murphy, rh Paul *(Torfaen)*
Naysmith, Dr. Doug
Oaten, Mark *(Winchester)*
O'Brien, Bill *(Normanton)*
O'Brien, Mike *(N Warks)*
O'Hara, Edward
Olner, Bill
O'Neill, Martin
Organ, Diana
Pearson, Ian
Perham, Linda
Picking, Anne
Pickthall, Colin
Pike, Peter *(Burnley)*
Plaskitt, James
Pollard, Kerry
Pope, Greg *(Hyndburn)*
Pound, Stephen
Prentice, Ms Bridg[illegible]ewisham E)
Prentice, Gordon *(Pendle)*
Prescott, rh John
Prosser, Gwyn
Pugh, Dr. John
Purchase, Ken
Purnell, James
Quin, rh Joyce
Quinn, Lawrie
Rapson, Syd *(Portsmouth N)*
Raynsford, rh Nick
Rendel, David
Robinson, Geoffrey *(Coventry NW)*
Rooney, Terry
Ross, Ernie *(Dundee W)*
Roy, Frank *(Motherwell)*
Ruddock, Joan
Russell, Bob *(Colchester)*
Ryan, Joan *(Enfield N)*
Salter, Martin
Sanders, Adrian
Savidge, Malcolm
Sawford, Phil
Sedgemore, Brian
Shaw, Jonathan
Sheerman, Barry
Sheridan, Jim
Short, rh Clare
Simon, Siôn *(B'ham Erdington)*
Singh, Marsha
Skinner, Dennis
Smith, rh Andrew *(Oxford E)*
Smith, Geraldine *(Morecambe & Lunesdale)*
Smith, Jacqui *(Redditch)*
Smith, Llew *(Blaenau Gwent)*
Soley, Clive
Squire, Rachel
Starkey, Dr. Phyllis
Steinberg, Gerry
Stewart, David *(Inverness E & Lochaber)*
Stewart, Ian *(Eccles)*
Stinchcombe, Paul
Stoate, Dr. Howard
Straw, rh Jack
Stringer, Graham
Stuart, Ms Gisela
Stunell, Andrew
Sutcliffe, Gerry
Tami, Mark *(Alyn)*
Taylor, rh Ann *(Dewsbury)*
Taylor, Dari *(Stockton S)*
Taylor, David *(NW Leics)*
Taylor, Matthew *(Truro)*
Taylor, Dr. Richard *(Wyre F)*
Teather, Sarah
Thomas, Gareth *(Harrow W)*
Timms, Stephen
Tipping, Paddy
Todd, Mark *(S Derbyshire)*
Tonge, Dr. Jenny
Touhig, Don *(Islwyn)*
Trickett, Jon
Truswell, Paul
Turner, Dennis *(Wolverh'ton SE)*
Turner, Neil *(Wigan)*
Tyler, Paul *(N Cornwall)*
Tynan, Bill *(Hamilton S)*
Vaz, Keith *(Leicester E)*
Walley, Ms Joan
Ward, Claire
Wareing, Robert N.
Watson, Tom
Watts, David
Webb, Steve *(Northavon)*
White, Brian
Whitehead, Dr. Alan
Wicks, Malcolm
Williams, rh Alan *(Swansea W)*
Williams, Roger *(Brecon)*
Willis, Phil
Wills, Michael
Winnick, David
Winterton, Ms Rosie *(Doncaster C)*
Wood, Mike *(Batley)*
Woolas, Phil
Worthington, Tony
Wright, Anthony D. *(Gt Yarmouth)*
Wright, David *(Telford)*
Wright, Iain *(Hartlepool)*

Wright, Tony *(Cannock)*
Wyatt, Derek
Younger-Ross, Richard

Tellers for the Ayes:
Mr. Nick Ainger and
Mr. John Heppell

NOES

Amess, David
Ancram, rh Michael
Arbuthnot, rh James
Atkinson, David *(Bour'mth E)*
Atkinson, Peter *(Hexham)*
Bacon, Richard
Baldry, Tony
Bellingham, Henry
Bercow, John
Beresford, Sir Paul
Boswell, Tim
Bottomley, Peter *(Worthing W)*
Brady, Graham
Brazier, Julian
Browning, Mrs Angela
Burns, Simon
Burt, Alistair
Butterfill, Sir John
Cameron, David
Cash, William
Chapman, Sir Sydney *(Chipping Barnet)*
Clappison, James
Clarke, rh Kenneth *(Rushcliffe)*
Clifton-Brown, Geoffrey
Collins, Tim
Conway, Derek
Curry, rh David
Davies, Quentin *(Grantham & Stamford)*
Davis, rh David *(Haltemprice & Howden)*
Djanogly, Jonathan
Dodds, Nigel
Duncan, Alan *(Rutland)*
Duncan Smith, rh Iain
Fabricant, Michael
Fallon, Michael
Flook, Adrian
Forth, rh Eric
Francois, Mark
Gale, Roger *(N Thanet)*
Garnier, Edward
Gibb, Nick *(Bognor Regis)*
Goodman, Paul
Gray, James *(N Wilts)*
Grayling, Chris
Green, Damian *(Ashford)*
Greenway, John
Grieve, Dominic
Hague, rh William
Hammond, Philip
Hawkins, Nick
Hayes, John *(S Holland)*
Heathcoat-Amory, rh David
Hendry, Charles
Hermon, Lady
Hogg, rh Douglas
Horam, John *(Orpington)*
Howarth, Gerald *(Aldershot)*
Jack, rh Michael
Jackson, Robert *(Wantage)*
Jenkin, Bernard
Kirkbride, Miss Julie
Laing, Mrs Eleanor
Lait, Mrs Jacqui
Lansley, Andrew
Leigh, Edward
Letwin, rh Oliver
Lewis, Dr. Julian *(New Forest E)*
Liddell-Grainger, Ian
Lidington, David
Lilley, rh Peter
Loughton, Tim
Luff, Peter *(M-Worcs)*
McIntosh, Miss Anne
Mackay, rh Andrew
Maclean, rh David
McLoughlin, Patrick
Malins, Humfrey
Maples, John
Mawhinney, rh Sir Brian
May, Mrs Theresa
Mercer, Patrick
Moss, Malcolm
Murrison, Dr. Andrew
Norman, Archie
O'Brien, Stephen *(Eddisbury)*
Osborne, George *(Tatton)*
Ottaway, Richard
Page, Richard
Paice, James
Paterson, Owen
Pickles, Eric
Prisk, Mark *(Hertford)*
Randall, John
Redwood, rh John
Robathan, Andrew
Robertson, Hugh *(Faversham & M-Kent)*
Rosindell, Andrew
Sayeed, Jonathan
Selous, Andrew
Shephard, rh Mrs Gillian
Shepherd, Richard
Smyth, Rev. Martin *(Belfast S)*
Soames, Nicholas
Spelman, Mrs Caroline
Spicer, Sir Michael
Spink, Bob *(Castle Point)*
Spring, Richard
Stanley, rh Sir John
Steen, Anthony
Streeter, Gary
Swayne, Desmond
Swire, Hugo *(E Devon)*
Syms, Robert
Tapsell, Sir Peter
Taylor, John *(Solihull)*
Taylor, Sir Teddy
Tredinnick, David
Turner, Andrew *(Isle of Wight)*
Tyrie, Andrew
Waterson, Nigel
Watkinson, Angela
Widdecombe, rh Miss Ann
Wiggin, Bill
Wilkinson, John
Wilshire, David
Winterton, Ann *(Congleton)*
Winterton, Sir Nicholas *(Macclesfield)*
Young, rh Sir George

Tellers for the Noes:
Gregory Barker and
Mr. Crispin Blunt

Question accordingly agreed to.

DELEGATED LEGISLATION

Motion made, and Question put forthwith, pursuant to Standing Order No. 118(6)(Standing Committees on Delegated Legislation),

ENVIRONMENTAL PROTECTION

That the draft Landfill Allowances and Trading Scheme (England) Regulations 2004, which were laid before this House on 13th October, be approved.—*[Joan Ryan.]*

Question agreed to.

Motion made, and Question put forthwith, pursuant to Standing Order No. 118(6)(Standing Committees on Delegated Legislation),

ENVIRONMENTAL PROTECTION (NORTHERN IRELAND)

That the draft Landfill (Maximum Landfill Amount) (Northern Ireland) Regulations 2004, which were laid before this House on 13th October, be approved.—*[Joan Ryan.]*

Question agreed to.

Thames Gateway

Motion made, and Question proposed, That this House do now adjourn.—*[Joan Ryan.]*

6.10 pm

The Minister for Housing and Planning (Keith Hill): I am delighted to introduce this Adjournment debate on the Thames gateway in the immediate aftermath of our announcement of a further £100 million of investment in infrastructure and community facilities in the gateway and at a time of intense media interest in the area.

A Thames gateway is not a new idea. Indeed, London owes its very existence to the Thames acting as a gateway to England. John Burns who, with Keir Hardie, was one of the first MPs to be elected on a socialist platform, termed the Thames "liquid history". As a Liberal Minister, John Burns was responsible for steering the first ever planning Act through Parliament in 1909. As the House will know, I have recently been responsible for steering the Planning and Compulsory Purchase Act 2004 through Parliament, so I feel an affinity with him, even though he crossed the Floor. I hasten to reassure the House, however, that I have no intention of following that precedent. John Burns said that his planning Act aimed to secure

> "the home healthy, the house beautiful, the town pleasant and the suburbs salubrious."

Those words, in the phrasing of the time, express a vision of the future. In some places, that vision was fulfilled, but in others we failed to deliver it. Today, we have a new opportunity to do so in the Thames gateway.

In the Thames gateway, there are nearly 4,000 hectares of brownfield land— 17 per cent. of the total in the region—located between London and mainland Europe. It is a massive area of market failure and relative deprivation, lying amid the buoyant economy and prosperity of the rest of the south-east. The regeneration of the gateway as a national, regional and local priority has been in plan since the early 1990s. Since then, a great deal of valuable and vital work has been done to set the stage for new development. Far-sighted decisions were taken, for example to route the channel tunnel rail link through the gateway, and create new stations at Stratford and Ebbsfleet to act as development hubs.

That has taken us a critical part of the way, but we need to do more. What was in the past desirable about the gateway is now essential. Housing growth will happen, and it is inevitable. For various reasons, including economic expansion, household growth in this country will continue at a high rate for the foreseeable future. The Government Actuary's Department estimates that household growth will average 189,000 homes a year between 2001 and 2021. Most of that growth will occur in London and the south-east, and most of it will be generated within the south-east. Indeed, the current draft of the Kent and Medway structure plan indicates that no less than 73 per cent. of household growth between 2001 and 2021 in the county arises from indigenous demographics and household growth and change. The serious question is not whether to have the growth, but how we manage it for the benefit of our communities and the environment.

We should seek to focus that growth within our existing urban areas, and that is exactly what we are doing. Within the wider south-east, London is the motor of growth, but it has the lowest housing density of any world-class city. The potential for housing growth in London is enormous, and it is already under way. In 2003, housing completions in London and south-east showed a year-on-year increase of 14 per cent.—9 per cent. in the south-east outside London and 24 per cent. in London itself. In the first six months of this year, there was a huge annual increase in completions in London of 30 per cent, and there is more to come. I am delighted that we have identified a considerable appetite for further housing development among the London boroughs. The Government office for London has recently created a London housing delivery unit, and we are already engaging with no fewer than 17 London boroughs to explore the opportunities for housing development. Much of the housing growth planned for the gateway itself will take place on the great brownfield sites of east London in the London Thames gateway. Stratford city has the potential to deliver about 20,000 homes; the Greenwich peninsula, about 10,000 homes; and Barking Reach has a maximum capacity of about 12,000 homes.

Richard Ottaway (Croydon, South) (Con): The Minister has set out the number of houses that will be built on brownfield sites, but could he say how many houses he expects to be built on greenfield sites?

Keith Hill: I shall come on to that and, indeed, I wish to dwell on the issue. The short answer, as I shall explain, is that all the planned development in the gateway is on brownfield sites, and we expect the vast majority of housing growth in the gateway to be on recycled land.

Jonathan Shaw (Chatham and Aylesford) (Lab): Following the question asked by the hon. Member for Croydon, South (Richard Ottaway), is not the point that we know where the brownfield sites are? Before 1997, there was no audit of brownfield sites and people did not know where they were. We have done the work, however, and have identified the sites.

Keith Hill: My hon. Friend is quite right. Before 1997, there was but a feeble commitment by Government to development on brownfield land. This Government's record, however, is extremely impressive, and I shall give the figures in due course.

Mr. Edward Davey (Kingston and Surbiton) (LD) *rose—*

Keith Hill: The hon. Gentleman is hovering, so I shall give way to him.

Mr. Davey: The debate about brownfield and greenfield sites also involves a debate about definitions. In a suburban constituency like mine, many local residents are surprised to learn that their gardens are deemed to be brownfield, and backland development can completely change the nature of a residential area. Will the Minister comment on that problem, which is causing great stress among some of my constituents?

Keith Hill: I accept that that is a concern in suburban areas—indeed, it is a concern in my own constituency. Of course, the hon. Gentleman's constituency is not in the gateway, and it is the long-standing policy of this Government and our predecessor that such development is permissible. A balance about the appropriateness of such backland development, however, must be struck.

Bob Spink (Castle Point) (Con) *rose*—

Keith Hill: I shall give way to the hon. Gentleman because I am especially fond of him, but then I wish to make progress.

Bob Spink: I am grateful to the Minister for his kind words. I am equally fond of him and look forward to meeting him shortly to discuss park homes. He will accept that my constituency is part of the Thames gateway and that we have an increased housing target of 4,000 new houses. Does he accept that there is no way in which we could find brownfield sites in Castle Point for all those homes? Will he confirm that to accommodate those 4,000 additional houses, it is Government policy to release greenfield sites in Castle Point?

Keith Hill: The hon. Gentleman would not expect me to go into the detail of specific site allocations. I do not deny for a second that there is an element of greenfield release in the housing programme in the Thames gateway. I am familiar with the hon. Gentleman's constituency, having campaigned fruitlessly for his predecessor in Castle Point, and know that there are brownfield opportunities there.

Elsewhere in the gateway, we will pursue our housing growth agenda through the redevelopment of neglected town centres, extensions to existing urban settlements, and the development of derelict industrial landscapes. Nobody who has viewed the vast swathes of worked-out quarries at Ebbsfleet and Eastern Quarry can be in any doubt about the huge benefits to the environment and to existing and future communities that will result from the development of the new urban villages planned for those sites.

No reasonable person can doubt the Government's commitment to securing the maximum development on recycled sites. The latest land use change statistics published three weeks ago show that 67 per cent. of all new dwellings in England were built on brownfield sites in both 2002 and 2003. That compares favourably with the 56 per cent. that we inherited in 1997. Those statistics also show that new dwellings in England were built at an average density of 33 dwellings per hectare in 2003. That compares with 27 dwellings per hectare in 2002, and only 25 in 1997. We have even more ambitious density figures for the Thames gateway. Indeed, as I said, all planned development in the gateway is on brownfield land.

The Thames gateway represents the largest collection of brownfield land next to a capital city in Europe. The vast majority of development in the gateway can be accommodated on existing derelict land. As I indicated, densities of development will be higher than those previously tolerated, and this will guard against profligate land use. At an average density of 40 dwellings per hectare, there is more than enough brownfield land in the gateway to accommodate the housing growth targets that the Government propose. So much for the doomsday scenarios of the "concreting over the countryside" brigade, the head-in-the-sand, die-in-the-ditch opponents of all, or any, change—the green Tories, as I prefer to call them.

In the context of the demands for growth in the south-east and the need for an affordable solution to its housing needs, the gateway offers the region's key opportunity for sustainable growth—growth that will not only deliver a housing solution, but will address the underlying weaknesses of the area by providing economic and employment opportunities, environmental improvement and community renewal that will bring benefits to new and existing residents. It is this that lends it national significance.

Of course, we are determined to reduce the economic differential between north and south, and we are pursuing policies such as the northern way to address that. But choking economic growth in the south does not mean more prosperity for the north. Someone going on the dole in Dartford does not mean a job for an unemployed worker in Sunderland. It simply means more jobs for our global competitors. That is why the gateway forms the cornerstone of the sustainable communities plan launched by my right hon. Friend the Deputy Prime Minister last year, and that is why we have put in place the arrangements necessary to take forward this sustainable programme.The gateway agenda is about accelerating delivery and expanding the scale of growth that can be achieved by 2016. At the same time, we will reinforce the quality and sustainability of the development that takes place, and ensure that the benefits reach the gateway community as a whole.

A further and major boost for the Thames gateway is the UK's bid to hold the 2012 Olympics in the lower Lea valley, near Stratford. As the House is aware, today is the day that we are submitting our candidature file to the International Olympic Committee. If our bid is successful, an Olympic park will be built close to the new Stratford international station to house the Olympic stadium, Olympic village, aquatics centre, velodrome and other facilities, including the administrative nerve centre for the games. A successful bid would accelerate the new homes and jobs planned for the lower Lea valley, transform the environment and provide a legacy of first-class sporting facilities. Together with the development of Stratford city, it will create a modern new quarter for London and a new metropolitan role for the area, which will help to drive regeneration for many years to come.

So what are the policies and principles in place to make the gateway happen? First, there is a gateway vision, to which all the key bodies can sign up. People say, "Where is the gateway vision?" We have a clear framework for growth that was introduced in regional planning guidance in 1995 and continues to underpin the development proposals that have evolved since then. There is the focus for growth at the western end of the gateway around Stratford and Canary Wharf, with new strategic transport links to the rest of the gateway and beyond.

Mr. Edward Davey: The Minister mentioned planning guidance from 1995. Is it not true that the Government want to review that guidance in the next year or two?

Keith Hill: As the hon. Gentleman surely knows, all regional planning guidance falls to be reviewed after a period of time. It is true that RPG9 is in the process of review by the regional assembly, and I dare say we shall hear more about that in due course.

The creation of a new development hub at Ebbsfleet, centred on the new channel tunnel rail link station, and the consolidation of other regional centres at Medway, Southend and Thurrock will provide the region with competitive locations for modern business services. The modernisation of the gateway's port and distribution economy—by tonnage, the ports in the gateway already collectively represent the largest in the UK—will help to ensure the future of this vital sector. The renewal of the gateway's existing town centres will provide improved local services, new housing and employment. The creation of new and improved green spaces on a strategic scale will transform the image of the area, and the creation of new sustainable settlements at locations such as Barking Reach, Greenwich peninsula and Ebbsfleet will provide new high quality housing.

The Mayor of London and the regional planning bodies for Kent and Essex endorsed this framework for growth in their recent inter-regional planning statement for the gateway, which was published in August. The statement supports the housing target of 120,000 that we put forward in the communities plan. In fact, it proposes to increase that figure by 8,000, which we heartily welcome. The statement also, for the first time, distributes this growth across the gateway to reflect the area's pattern of brownfield land.

The second principle of our approach is partnership. There is the commitment and strategic co-ordination of Government Departments, regional bodies and public agencies to deliver the policy, programmes and funding to support the gateway agenda.

Mr. Mark Francois (Rayleigh) (Con): I thank the Minister for his courtesy in giving way. He is well aware that Thames gateway recently provided a substantial grant to Rochford district council to allow the refurbishment of Rayleigh windmill and related developments in Rayleigh town centre. I place on record my thanks to the Minister for that decision. However, I have a question about infrastructure. All the house building that is envisaged, be it on greenfield or brownfield sites, will place severe pressure on our infrastructure in the gateway area, not least NHS infrastructure. Can the right hon. Gentleman tell us tonight where the new district general hospital in Essex is to be located?

Keith Hill: Of course, I cannot tell the hon. Gentleman that decision or detail, but I can tell him that the Department of Health, which is being extremely proactive in its support for the gateway, has committed £40 million over the next two years to primary care trusts in the area. We are very pleased with that, and further funding will flow through in the conventional way. Let me acknowledge my appreciation of the hon. Gentleman's thanks for the decision about the Rayleigh windmill—a decision that was taken on entirely objective but absolutely merited grounds.

Richard Ottaway: On infrastructure—

Keith Hill: On infrastructure, I am reluctant to detain the House for too long, but I will give way to the hon. Gentleman.

Richard Ottaway: I am grateful to the Minister for giving way a second time. In answer to my hon. Friend the Member for Rayleigh (Mr. Francois), he spoke about the NHS. The key to development of the gateway is transport. Will he set out the transport proposals to deal with plans with which, by and large, I agree?

Keith Hill: I am grateful to the hon. Gentleman for that expression of support. My feeling is that there is a broad consensus on the gateway programme. It is worth bearing in mind that the majority of the local authorities with which we are working closely on the gateway project are Conservative authorities, and we have an excellent working relationship with them. The answer to the hon. Gentleman's question about transport infrastructure is yes, I propose to say a few words about that in due course, and my hon. Friend the Minister of State, Department for Transport, will say more, if he ever gets the chance.

In the meantime let me draw the hon. Gentleman's attention to the £2.1 billion investment in the south-east that my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Transport announced as a result of the multimodal study earlier this year. Furthermore, the Government are committed to a gateway investment programme of almost £900 million, much of which will be devoted to transport infrastructure. In addition, I shall say a word in due course about the forthcoming community infrastructure fund, which will be jointly administered by my Department, the Office of the Deputy Prime Minister, and the Department for Transport.

On joint working, new working arrangements have been set up to allow Departments to work together to deliver the sustainable communities agenda in the gateway. The Cabinet Committee on growth areas, which is chaired by the Prime Minister, leads these arrangements, and it brings together all the key delivery Departments.

The ODPM has published a joint strategy with the Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs on "Greening the Gateway", which calls for the Thames gateway to become a world-class model of sustainable development with the living landscape at its heart.

We are working with the Department of Health and the Department for Education and Skills to ensure timely forward planning for health facilities and schools. On top of mainstream funding allocations the DOH is, as I have indicated, providing an additional £40 million over the next two years to PCTs in the growth areas. We have kick-started a major programme of unique new university campus developments at Southend, Medway and the Royal docks.

[Keith Hill]

I am particularly grateful to my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Transport and my hon. Friend the Minister of State, Department for Transport for their work to bring forward key transport infrastructure. The Thames gateway bridge, the concept for which dates back to before the middle of the last century, is now a real proposition. Hon. Members will have seen the pictures of the fantastic new channel tunnel domestic trains for which orders have now been placed. Those are massive boosts for the gateway, particularly when they are set against the competing budgetary pressures that those projects have faced. The newly established £200 million community infrastructure fund, which my Department and the DFT jointly administer, will provide additional grants to support transport infrastructure up to 2008 in the four growth areas, including the Thames gateway.

In addition, we are working closely with the Environment Agency to ensure that sustainable flood risk management is incorporated into gateway developments. My Department is represented on the Environment Agency's Thames estuary 2100 project to address flood protection into the next century. I should add that the gateway already has a higher standard of flood protection than most other parts of the country.

The Housing Corporation, English Partnerships, the regional development agencies and the learning and skills councils have all established internal structures that provide a policy focus on the gateway. The learning and skills councils have recently launched their Thames gateway skills audit to ensure that we get the right people with the right skills in the right places. I am also pleased to report that we will shortly re-establish, by popular demand, an expanded Thames gateway strategic partnership to co-ordinate progress at the strategic level.

The third ingredient in our gateway strategy is local delivery capacity. The gateway may be a strategic idea, but it will actually happen locally. The different locations in the gateway each have their own bespoke issues, opportunities, and agendas, and the quality of local planning and delivery will ultimately determine the success of the project and secure the quality and sustainability that we seek.

It is critical that we have organisations in place with the capacity to define local priorities, to develop the necessary local programmes and, fundamentally, to integrate both the growth strategy with other local programmes and new communities with the old. We have established new bodies in each of the major development areas of the gateway to take responsibility for those tasks.

In two cases, Thurrock and east London, where the task is particularly challenging, we have established urban development corporations with the support of the local authorities involved. The boards of both urban development corporations are now in place and senior executive staff are being recruited. Those bodies are identifying the key priorities for their areas and the critical actions necessary to resolve them, and they will draw together existing public and private plans to deliver an effective local investment programme.

At the same time, we have created a new gateway delivery office—not in Whitehall, but in the gateway itself—which will take charge of the ODPM gateway funding programme, and my right hon. Friend the Deputy Prime Minister formally launched the new office last week. The gateway delivery office will contain a proactive and accessible team, which will work closely with local partners to deliver an effective programme, sort out problems, monitor progress and achieve results.

The fourth strand of the Government's approach to the gateway lies in the planning and resourcing of investment to deliver the timely provision of infrastructure and to attract private investment to create the more liveable environment and more viable locations for business that we seek—that task is big, but manageable. Mainstream programmes are also in place, and I have already mentioned the transport programme and the new universities. Much of the expenditure required, particularly for social infrastructure such as health facilities, hospitals and schools, will be drawn down from national budgets in the conventional way.

Those costs are not unique to the gateway, but reflect the planned increase in population forecast in the gateway. The critical issue is not funding, but effective planning and management. However, additional Government investment will be required in certain critical areas. The ODPM has allocated a substantial new gateway budget to address those areas and other priorities, which represents an £850 million commitment to the area for the first five years of the programme.

In consultation with local partners, £475 million has been allocated to date to early opportunities and immediate priorities. Last week, £100 million of that funding was announced for new projects ranging from major site preparation in Kent Thameside to local community, business and training facilities in areas of relative deprivation in Sheerness, Poplar and Barking.

The private sector is the other critical area of resource. The private utility companies clearly have a direct role to play and private finance will additionally play an important part in funding new transport and other social infrastructure, using mechanisms that are now well established.

Bob Spink: Will the Minister give way?

Keith Hill: If the hon. Gentleman will forgive me, I am conscious that I may be straining the patience of the House. [HON. MEMBERS: "No!"] I am sure that hon. Members are eager for me to move on to the fifth and final principle that informs our approach, so I shall hurry along to it.

The private sector is already very active across some of the key development areas in the gateway. It is already investing massive resources in planning and site preparation: Stratford city, Isle of Dogs, Silvertown quays, Ebbsfleet, north-east Gravesend, Dartford Park and Barking Reach are all either on site or at an advanced planning stage, and those are just the big projects. We have established a developer forum to meet regularly with developers to identify and tackle key barriers to delivery.

The fifth principle of the gateway strategy lies in securing the key policy goals to achieve sustainable objectives, which involves quality and imagination of design and construction and the reuse of brownfield land. We have taken steps nationally to promote higher densities and better design. For example, English Partnerships has already used urban design codes at Greenwich Millennium village.

The Government have also made a commitment to developing a sustainable buildings code to establish higher standards for energy and water efficiency, waste and use of materials. The Thames gateway will be the focus for demonstration schemes to test sustainable construction methods, supply chains and economic viability. The gateway will rightly be in the vanguard of new design and construction standards.

It goes without saying that the gateway is a big project. It will require time, resources, imagination and a lot of effort to realise, but it offers enormous rewards. It is currently fashionable to say how complicated the scheme is. Yes, the project can look complicated from the outside, and we recognise that we must present the gateway in a way that existing businesses and residents and potential new investors can understand.

Most importantly, local people, both those who currently live in the gateway and those who will move into the area, will need to see the benefits. On Tuesday of last week, I went on a whistle-stop tour of the gateway to coincide with our announcement of a further £100 million tranche of investment in infrastructure, and I saw for myself the progress in creating sustainable communities.

My hon. Friend the Member for Poplar and Canning Town (Jim Fitzpatrick) and I visited Poplar to celebrate our investment of £4 million in the A12 junctions project, which will, for the first time, link hitherto isolated housing estates, such as the Teviot estate, to the new employment, retail and leisure opportunities of the Leaside regeneration.

I visited Basildon to celebrate, with the Basildon Renaissance Partnership, our investment of £100,000 in the feasibility study for the proposed Basildon centre for sporting excellence, which, if successful, will provide first-class opportunities for sports development, recreational sport and preventive health care, and will offer a key training location for the 2012 Olympics in London. That comes on top of nearly £30 million of investment by my Department in housing and regeneration projects in Basildon.

I also visited Swanscombe in the constituency of my hon. Friend the Member for Dartford (Dr. Stoate) for further celebrations, this time of our £1 million investment in road and environmental improvements, not least the refurbishment of community halls in a locality that sometimes feared that it would not benefit from planned housing developments in the Dartford area.

In Swanscombe, in Basildon and in Poplar, there was a recognition of the opportunities for a better quality of life arising out of the Thames gateway project, and an enthusiasm for the Government's determination that both existing and future communities will benefit from the gateway scheme. The Thames gateway is positive, exciting and it is definitely now on the move.

6.41 pm

Mr. Robert Syms (Poole) (Con): I welcome this debate on the Thames gateway. I am pleased to see so many hon. Members from that area both behind me and on the Government Benches. [Hon. Members: "Not behind you."] I do not think that the area is over-represented by Conservatives yet, but perhaps by the end of next year things will change. *[Interruption.]* I am a modest person.

There is an all-party consensus on this issue. If the commitment to communities is to mean anything, it must be a commitment that all of us sign up to. A long-term investment is necessary to turn many communities around, and one hopes that it will continue when Governments change.

Much of what the Government have done has built on the work of previous Governments, under both Baroness Thatcher and John Major, and Lord Heseltine provided much of the vision that started the process. If we look at what happened in docklands, we see that there are some useful lessons on how to approach extending development to the Thames gateway.

In most of the post-war years, very little was done in some of these communities. There is now a great deal more hope about what politicians with sensible policies can bring to many communities. London is a success story.

Richard Ottaway: My hon. Friend speaks of post-war success. If I had made a third intervention on the Minister, I would have reminded him that there was an urban development corporation for docklands. If the Thames gateway were made into an urban development corporation with powers, Ministers would be even more certain about the proposal. Does my hon. Friend have a view on that?

Mr. Syms: I understand that there is consultation about whether to create a corporation for some of the area, but the concern is that the corporation would take in three regions: the eastern region, the southern region and London. A good deal of co-ordination will be required if that is to be successful. I see no reason why that should not happen, as long as there is the clear vision that the Minister mentioned.

Planning policy guidance 9A needs to be updated. As the hon. Member for Kingston and Surbiton (Mr. Davey) said, it is nearly 10 years old. Some things have certainly changed over the past 10 years, so I suspect that an update is necessary. From what I can see from the information, there is already a commitment to update it after the south-east plan has been updated.

London is a successful city. It is a city of contrasts. As with other wealthy communities, in and around London there have always been areas of great deprivation. Any sensible politician will want to do what they can to improve the conditions of people in that area. People in parts of the east end and the Thames gateway suffer from poor health and education and higher unemployment than perhaps other areas of the capital. Generally speaking, that is why we welcome the approach that has been taken. As the Minister set out, it is no small undertaking. There may be substantial differences between Opposition Members and Labour

[Mr. Syms]

Members on the sustainable communities plan in its entirety, particularly on building on green fields in some of our shire counties, but the Thames gateway is one aspect of the plan where there is much common ground.

If we can make the Thames gateway a success, we can mitigate a lot of the urban migration that is putting pressure on some of our shires, where there is great opposition to development. If we make it a success, I do not think that we will necessarily need to build the number of houses to which the Government seem to be committed.

Mr. Andrew Love (Edmonton) (Lab/Co-op): May I characterise the hon. Gentleman's position as being that the Conservatives are happy to build houses in areas where they are not represented, but that they do not want to build houses in any of their own areas?

Mr. Syms: The Government and the Opposition agreed that it is best to build on brownfield sites. There are many opportunities in the Thames gateway. It would be a pity if we did not look at those opportunities before we took decisions that meant that we had to build on greenfield sites.

Dr. Howard Stoate (Dartford) (Lab): Would the hon. Gentleman comment on the plan of the right hon. Member for Wokingham (Mr. Redwood) to build a new city called Thames Reach south of Swanscombe and Greenhithe in the middle of the green belt in my constituency? He envisages a major city with many thousands of houses— more than the number currently agreed. I wonder whether that is now Tory party policy and whether the hon. Gentleman agrees with the right hon. Gentleman.

Mr. Syms: It is not policy. The key issue is that the sensible thing for any politician to do is to look first at urban areas where there are brownfield sites and opportunities. Otherwise, businesses and investment will be driven towards greenfield sites, which, as we all know, are cheaper to develop than many brownfield sites. With this development—120,000 new homes, 180,000 jobs, 80,000 hectares, 40 miles by 20 miles—we are talking about a major concern. If it is a success, it will be a major area of growth and building for the next 20 to 30 years.

What needs to be done to make it a success? We need to set more targets, so that we can measure how we are getting on. Up-front investment is the key. If there is confidence among the financial institutions, they will invest because they will see the long-term ability to make profit from those areas. The Government have talked about levering in £2 billion of investment. We all know that the area will develop and grow only if private sector funds, pension funds and other major financial institutions feel that it will be profitable and take an interest in those areas.

The key difficulty is transport and infrastructure. We all know that there is a shopping list of transport projects, some of which are coming to fruition, some of which are planned. We have heard about the channel tunnel rail link, which we think will be finished by 2007; the Greenwich waterfront and east London transit scheme; the east London line extension; the docklands light railway extension to City airport by 2005 and further extensions. The proposal for the Thames gateway bridge at the moment is for a private finance initiative scheme with a toll to link both sides of the estuary, which will open lots of opportunities. Substantial road improvements are also proposed. The Government have so far committed about £600 million for these schemes. It is important to get the transport right. In docklands, there was growth but the extension of the underground was delayed. Transport should come first if we are to lever in investment for housing and development.

There is concern that there has already been some backtracking on certain schemes. Transport for London's scheme for linking Barking Reach and Barking town centre is now proposed to be a bus route rather than a transit scheme. The rail passenger committee for southern England says that the poor rail network in the region could cripple development.

The Minister did not mention Crossrail. The City of London and many hon. Members have long felt that Crossrail, with its Stratford link, is essential to the development of the area, but we are also aware that it is a remarkably expensive scheme. Whenever Crossrail has briefed me, it has said that most of the track is there, but it just needs to link up this area and that area. As a Transport Minister is to wind up the debate, perhaps he can enlighten us a little more about progress on Crossrail and how it could affect investment in the area.

Infrastructure is key, but as the region covers not only London but parts of Essex and Kent, it needs to be fairly distributed between the urban and non-urban areas. Most of the schemes that I have seen so far tend to concentrate on the London bit rather than on Essex or Kent. My hon. Friend the Member for Castle Point (Bob Spink) has tabled several parliamentary questions about services in Essex. Those communities must get the investment if they are expected to take additional housing and development. If development is to be forced in, the investment must come first. The siting of hospitals, for example, is a key issue.

The Mayor and the regional planning bodies of both the south and the east believe that there is substantially more capacity to build in the area if sufficient investment is made. As many as 300,000 houses have been mentioned; again, investment is the key. The Campaign to Protect Rural England, which, along with some of the Labour Members present today, is not all that keen on development in rural areas, has also cottoned on to the fact that one could lift some of the levels and targets in the Thames gateway. The investment has to be up front.

When the housing is built, it is important that the communities are as self-contained as possible, with health, education, culture, media and open spaces all provided for. The Minister mentioned that in his speech. It is important that all the facilities be included in planning guidance. It is important also to be able to get in and out of the Thames gateway, as one suspects many people will need to do for employment purposes. It is also important to minimise the number of people who have to move around.

Andrew Mackinlay (Thurrock) (Lab): The hon. Gentleman mentioned media in passing. I trespass on his speech to say that if the BBC listens to the debate or reads his speech it should take cognisance of the fact that there is no Thames gateway television or radio. In Tilbury, on the north bank, I get Kent BBC television, and the area does not get London services. The media must take account of what is demonstrably a new area. The BBC in particular is way behind, but commercial television is not really meeting the challenge either.

Mr. Syms: That is a good point. Although we may disagree about regional identities, TV station identities certainly inform the way in which people think about their region. I am in the Meridian area, and Meridian claims to serve people not too far from the hon. Gentleman's region, so the service stretches all the way from Dorset to the Thames gateway. Media can certainly define an area very successfully.

The Minister said clearly that most of the identified sites for development were brownfield, but the majority of the area is greenfield, and there is green belt within it. It is important to tease out the priorities for development. I know that the CPRE is concerned about the temptation to go for some of the greenfield sites in Essex and Kent before investing in some of the more expensive redevelopment sites in London. Given that the Government have on occasions encroached on green belt, we need a clear statement on how they feel about the piece of green belt on this side of London.

The Minister spoke a great deal about density levels but gave no specific commitment. Figures of 90 to 100 per hectare have been mentioned, and perhaps the Minister who winds up can be more specific about what level the Government consider appropriate. In previous developments, shortcuts have sometimes been taken, so it is important to have high-quality as well as high-density development.

The Environment Agency and others have estimated that perhaps £4 billion will have to be spent on flood defences in the area. The Environment Agency issues maps, and PPG25 should inform planning authorities, but it is clearly a matter for concern. If there is a flood on the site in 20 years' time, when many houses have been built, people will ask how we could let the development go ahead without proper flood prevention measures. The time to consider the issue is now, not after the houses have been built.

Mr. Francois: My hon. Friend will be aware that flooding is an emotive issue in Essex, going all the way back to the great flood of 1953—the terrible events of that night are not lost on us in the county even today. That being the case, it is a great pity that the Government decided to abolish the Essex local flood defence committee, which had a tremendous track record. Does he agree that safety must be paramount and the Government must be more careful about the flooding implications of the proposed developments?

Mr. Syms: Of course. The Minister will have heard what my hon. Friend said, and indeed he mentioned flooding in his speech. Of course we must take sensible measures to ensure that any development is safe.

Keith Hill: I am sure that neither the hon. Gentleman nor the hon. Member for Rayleigh (Mr. Francois) is in the business of scaremongering. The Thames is protected to a level of one in 1,000 years, and that will remain the case up to 2030. In the meantime, much work is being done, led by the Environment Agency, to put in place appropriate defences for the future beyond that year. Furthermore, the hon. Gentleman is absolutely right: PPG25 informs every aspect from regional to local planning decisions in terms of flood risk and assessment. Every ODPM and local vehicle delivery project is also subject to rigorous flood risk assessment, and we are using the opportunity of the greening of the gateway to think creatively about sustainable flood defences. I want to establish it absolutely on the record that the Government are seized of the issue and every possible measure is being taken to increase the already high levels of flood defence in the Thames gateway.

Mr. Syms: I thank the Minister for his assurance that Conservative Members are not scaremongering. It is obviously sensible to think before building lots of houses.

Mr. Francois: I, too, am grateful for what the Minister has said. As my hon. Friend will know, there has been a lively debate on these issues between the Office of the Deputy Prime Minister and the Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs, but the Minister has given us some reassurance. I hope that he will continue to bear the issues in mind as development proceeds.

Mr. Syms: My hon. Friend has made his own point.

The Minister mentioned skills. There is concern about whether there are enough skills to deal with this level of development, especially in regard to the built environment. The way in which development is going means that there are already shortages of planning officers, which is why planning appeals sometimes take so long. I was pleased to learn that the Minister had announced a skills audit by the Learning and Skills Council. It would be a pity if people affected by unemployment above the national average could not take advantage of the growth and inward investment that will result from this project.

Other anxieties have been expressed. For instance, there is the possibility of people building up land banks on brownfield sites in order to sit on rising land values. There are also general environmental worries. There is, for example, a substantial water shortage; indeed, all the public utilities need to undertake major investment. Given the degree of development involved, we should ask whether we should try to improve environmental standards in some of the homes. In Australia, there are double flushes on lavatories to conserve water.

I will not detain the House further, because many Members with local interests want to speak. There is considerable common ground, and we have a great opportunity. Investment must be made at the outset to give confidence to the private sector; we need design of a decent quality; and we need to involve people in the area, because much of the development will change its geography considerably. If it is all done properly, however, I think we can offset some of the pressures affecting greenfield sites.

[Mr. Syms]

I welcome the debate, and look forward to hearing other speeches.

7.3 pm

Dr. Howard Stoate (Dartford) (Lab): I welcome the opportunity to speak in such an important debate.

The people of Dartford are extremely proud of their heritage, which they see as one of the engine rooms of the Kent economy. Dartford has been home to many great engineers and thinkers of bygone ages. Hiram Maxim, who made such a contribution to powered flight, lived there. Trevithick did much of his engineering work there. Burroughs, Wellcome, one of the first and most important drugs companies in the world, set up shop in Dartford and has done extremely well. Dartford is also reported to be the site of the first-ever commercially successful paper mill. It has a long and proud heritage. We recognise, however, that we have moved into a post-industrial age, and that businesses that have long outlived their usefulness need to be regenerated. Dartford needs new jobs, new investment, better and more modern housing and a cleaner environment if it is to be an exciting area of which we can be proud in future.

That is all very well and good and the people of Dartford are certainly onside, but development must take place in a measured way. We must ensure that the area can sustain so much investment, and we must pay careful attention to detail in terms of infrastructure. The area must be enhanced rather than being damaged further.

The right hon. Member for Wokingham (Mr. Redwood), the new shadow Secretary of State for deregulation, has called for the creation of a new city to be called Thames Reach, with its heart in the Swanscombe and Greenhithe areas. He wants to see thousands of extra houses built in Kent Thameside, in addition to the proposed brownfield developments at Eastern Quarry, Swanscombe peninsula and Ebbsfleet, to meet the housing needs of the rest of the south-east. He has said:

> "there is a large area suitable for development bounded by the settlements of Northfleet and Greenhithe along the river banks, with Swanscombe, Bean and Darenth to the south . . . The idea is to add to the development projects already identified and up and running for both Kent Thameside and the Swale and Medway Districts. We need a new city centre to the south of the planned Swanscombe and Greenhithe developments, with better community facilities alongside more housing to the south of the current planned developments."

The right hon. Gentleman's proposal amounts to nothing less than the concreting over of north Kent, with large swathes of green belt and farmland in Dartford bulldozed to make way for new housing. It will destroy the character and integrity of existing communities such as Swanscombe and Greenhithe, which every effort is being made to preserve. It will effectively swallow up the communities of Bean, Darenth, Betsham and Southfleet, pleasant Kent villages that currently enjoy the countryside and the rolling green fields that surround them. It undermines the claims of local Tories that their party is committed to the defence of the green belt and the countryside. Moreover, it demonstrates that the Tories want to use parts of north Kent to meet all the south-east's future house-building needs, thus ensuring that their own heartland areas are not affected.

Even if this madcap scheme could somehow be brought to fruition, I seriously doubt that the local infrastructure could begin to cope with so much strain on its limited resources. A recent report by the planning committee of the South East regional assembly questions whether even the projected housing growth in the Thames gateway is sustainable, given the limitations of our water supply and sewage treatment network and the fact that one of the lowest levels of annual rainfall in the country is found in the south-east, and north Kent in particular.

The Environment Agency has pointed out that per capita water consumption has risen by between 3 per cent. and 5 per cent. in the last 10 years, and that 80 per cent. of water in Kent comes from groundwater. The level of rainfall received by the south-east is the lowest among UK regions: it is only about 740 mm a year. All that will obviously put a huge strain on existing supply, and Kent county council estimates that an additional £70 million will be needed in Kent Thameside in the next few years to speed up utility connections, flood defences and land reclamation. We are already seeing signs that the infrastructure needs to be upgraded significantly even to deal with the planned development, let alone another entire city.

What about the effect on air quality? Dartford borough council has set up an air quality management area around the A282 tunnel approach road to mitigate the impact of traffic emissions. Traffic emissions in the area 72 per cent. above the Government's nitrogen dioxide objective, and 54 per cent. above the PM2—that refers to particulate matter—objective. Through traffic along the A282 accounts for at least 25 per cent. of emissions in the area.

As traffic levels in Kent Thameside increase over the next 20 years, air quality in Dartford could easily deteriorate further. Additional air quality management areas are already being planned at the Bean interchange, St. Clements way, East Hill and Park road, the Brent-Watling street junction and Lowfield street. Dartford council is at least doing its bit to monitor air quality, but we must ensure that an appropriate standard is maintained. Additional funds to promote more sustainable local transport solutions are urgently needed.

One obvious source of income is the Dartford river crossing. Each year it generates £55 million in income. Only about £1 million of that is earmarked for local transport uses in Kent Thameside. I believe that its share must be increased, as a matter of urgency.

Bob Spink: I believe that there is currently a £60 million surplus from the operation of the Dartford crossing. It lies in the coffers unspent. Legislation has stated that the money should be spent on local infrastructure improvements. Will the hon. Gentleman accept this offer from me? I will back his being given, say, 25 per cent. of that—£15 million—for his local road improvements if he will back my being given £15 million to help build Canvey's third road.

Dr. Stoate: That is an intriguing idea. I wonder whether the hon. Gentleman will be my agent and I will be his agent in this deal. Certainly, the hon. Gentleman is right that we need to ensure that a good chunk of the money is put into a local transport infrastructure that mitigates the effects of increased traffic and air pollution generated by the extra traffic that we see.

Even with improvements to public transport and with a rail freight network, additional capacity needs to be built into the road network in Kent Thameside. Urgent consideration needs to be given to upgrading the A2/B255 Bean interchange. The junction currently serves the Bluewater regional shopping centre, Greenhithe village and the A206, which runs to the Dartford river crossings. It is also due to serve the Eastern Quarry development, a 740-acre development that will contain about 7,250 new houses.

The route management study, which has been recently published by the Highways Agency, has acknowledged that the junction must be improved. Dartford borough council and Kent county council have also recognised the importance of this work. However, despite this there is little prospect of the necessary funding being forthcoming in the next few years.

Another factor is pressure on school places. There is a desperate need for the expansion of secondary school places in Dartford. Currently, there is no wide ability county boys' school for children living in most of the north, west and east of Dartford. Many 11-year-olds are now faced with a half-hour train journey just to get to school, which I believe is not acceptable. Kent LEA is proposing to increase the number of secondary places in the area over the next few years but it has no plans to build a new county boys' school in Dartford, where the need is greatest.

What about higher education? The Government's original planning guidance for Kent Thameside—RPG9a—which was published in 1994, highlighted the importance of creating a higher education facility in Kent Thameside as a means of raising the skills profile of the area and helping to encourage the growth of spin-off companies requiring higher levels of skill in north Kent. RPG9a envisaged the development of a 5,000-student campus and also a London science park, supported by GlaxoSmithKline, the borough council and the university of Greenwich. However, neither of these projects came to fruition. In fact, the university of Greenwich has now closed its remaining Dartford campus. North West Kent college is now the only post-18 education provider in Kent Thameside.

The Government's recent skills audit report found that the number of people with skills in the Thames gateway is 20 per cent. below the national average. It warned that unless the problem was addressed, businesses could be forced to move elsewhere. The report says that 112,000 of the 194,000 new jobs that will be created by 2016 in Thames gateway will need applicants with A-level and degree level qualifications. Compared with the rest of London and other parts of the UK, Thames gateway has a significant skills gap, particularly among local residents.

At present, most Kent Thameside residents with higher skills are forced to commute to London. Almost 100,000—that is, 12 per cent. of the Kent and Medway work force—commute to London. The percentage is as high as 38 for those who commute from Dartford. About 15,900 people commute from Dartford to London. We need to reverse this trend if Kent Thameside is to be genuinely sustainable.

We must give urgent consideration to the rebuilding of Greenhithe and Dartford stations to increase capacity. Furthermore, the damaging proposals of the Strategic Rail Authority to reduce service levels at the Greenhithe, Stone crossing and Swanscombe must be rejected and reversed. The existing Kent line is already running well over capacity and the plans that have been put forward, when the CTRL phase 2 is open, are significantly to cut back services on the north Kent line. That will have a damaging effect on my local area and it is something that must be examined carefully.

Greenhithe station is at the heart of Kent Thameside and passenger levels at this station are projected to rise considerably in the next five to 10 years, as the housing developments at Ingress Park—900 homes—Eastern Quarry—7,250 homes—Stone Castle—500 homes—and Greenhithe waterfront—950 homes—get underway and are completed.

Dartford station, despite being the busiest station in north Kent, is housed in a 40-year-old building and does not have the platform capacity to meet the level of services that use it at present, let alone in the future. Consideration must be given to increasing the capacity at London Bridge and renewing the north Kent network's antiquated signalling system. It is woefully inadequate to meet future needs. It currently takes between 45 and 55 minutes for trains to travel to London from Dartford owing to the inadequacies of the current network. This must be put right.

I asked the mayor of Swanscombe and Greenhithe town council, Councillor Brian Fitzpatrick, who is a senior traffic engineer, to give his thoughts on how he thought the new development would affect the areas of Swanscombe and Greenhithe. He certainly came up with some interesting ideas. He stated that a lack of attention to detail and to local knowledge pervades many of the applications submitted for planning at the moment. Knowledge of the existing situation and the needs and aspirations of the in situ community must be a firm component of all applications, but at the moment it is not given adequate consideration. He believes that true integration can be achieved only if we address fully the needs and wishes of the existing settled community with the needs of an incoming community.

The good news is that Brian Fitzpatrick accepts that there are good and sensible reasons why there should be new communities in Kent Thameside, but unless we get the planning issues right we will come unstuck. That will cause divisions in the local community rather than encouraging integration, which is what we so desperately need.

Richard Ottaway: I am following the hon. Gentleman's argument with interest. He is talking about many contemporary problems. He knows, however, that the gateway is for the future. Does he support the gateway proposals, and will they resolve some of the issues that he is raising?

Dr. Stoate: That is an extremely good question. The answer is that I entirely support the gateway proposals, but they will work only if we pay particular attention to the issues that I am raising, which I am sure that other hon. Members will raise. I see that the hon. Member for South Holland and The Deepings (Mr. Hayes) is nodding. I am sure that he agrees.

Kent Thameside and the Thames gateway development is a marvellous opportunity to regenerate the whole of the south-east, but it will work only if we get the infrastructure right before we go ahead with the development. The greatest mistake that we could make would be to press on with development with already overstretched existing capacity, which in many areas is already at breaking point. That would lead to more damage. There are huge opportunities that can be realised if only we get the development right. It is all a matter of attention to detail. The people of Dartford are behind the development, but whenever I talk to them on the doorstep they say that that is provided we can improve the road network, provided that we can improve the rail network, provided that we can get enough school places for our youngsters, and provided that we have enough health care facilities to meet the needs of the future. We are all in agreement, but the development must be done in the right way.

The people of Swanscombe and Greenhithe want careful co-ordination of what is proposed for the future with what we have now. Again, if we get that right, they will be totally on side with this type of development. The point made by Councillor Fitzpatrick is that no one from Swanscombe and Greenhithe is on the delivery board. No one from the town council in Swanscombe is able to participate in these planning issues. Councillor Fitzpatrick thinks that that is also a mistake. The people of Swanscombe and Greenhithe are asking that it is ensured that there is integration with existing and planned new communities and also that Swanscombe and Greenhithe residents are not disadvantaged by the scale and pace of developments surrounding them.

These people are asking for a few quite simple things. They want the inclusion of the local community in discussions about the size, location and required infrastructure of the planned development. They are asking that more resources be given to Dartford borough council to enable it better to represent its residents. They are asking also for another look at the Kent traffic model to ensure that it is run more often and kept up to date with existing traffic movements. Further, they are asking for targets for air quality that are enforceable to ensure that we do not damage our environment. In addition, they are asking for a close look at the numbers and situations of new developments to ensure that they are sustainable in terms of bus transport and air quality. I do not think that these requests are unreasonable.

If we get these things right, we will all be happy with what we see. If we get them wrong, we will live to regret that. I believe that by proper attention to detail, proper integration of what local people want and proper working with local councils and development boards, we can achieve the aim of us all, which is a bright future that includes the regeneration of old worked-out sites. That is a proud future for the whole of the Thames gateway area.

7.19 pm

Mr. Edward Davey (Kingston and Surbiton) (LD): The hon. Member for Dartford (Dr. Stoate) has done the House a service. He has made the "yes but" speech. When we listened to the hon. Member for Poole (Mr. Syms) and the Minister, there was a danger that we were getting consensus and hearing that everything was all right. That was particularly so when the Minister was sketching the Nirvana that was growing up in the east of London. I almost felt that the House was going to sing "Jerusalem", given the way in which the Minister was lauding the progress and the prospects.

That is not to say that the Minister was not right to say that there were some exciting opportunities. The hon. Member for Dartford was right to mention the excitement around the east of London and in the various communities in Kent and Essex. There are real prospects for solving some long-term problems, such as unemployment or the need for economic regeneration and affordable housing. Many potential prizes are there to be gained, but it is the House's job and duty to question Ministers to ensure that they are getting it right. Otherwise, the opportunity could be wasted and there are already a number of signs that the Government have not learned the lessons from the past and are not listening carefully enough to those who will be affected. When the Minister for Transport replies to the debate, I hope that he will answer some of the questions that will be posed.

Regeneration on this sort of scale can present real problems. We saw with the new towns of the past that much hope and excitement was generated by the prospect of new projects, but the optimistic scenario was frequently not fulfilled. Three-quarters of the English new towns are among the most deprived 50 per cent. of local authorities. All but two are more deprived than the counties in which they reside. Many of them never grew as planned. Skelmersdale was supposed to have a population of 80,000 but never made it beyond 40,000; Corby was planned for 100,000 but never made it beyond 50,000. Much of the hope in those new projects was never delivered, and I hope that the Minister will reassure the House that the Government have learned from problems of the past when expectations were raised but never met.

There are many and huge difficulties in building the Thames gateway. I shall deal with the problem of flood plains in more detail later. Contaminated land is another problem, which makes the project quite expensive. The lack of transport infrastructure for the initial stages is another difficulty. There will be real problems; it will not be easy, and the Government should recognise that. The vision and planning will have to be that much more effective. I want to ask several specific questions about the problems. Some may arise because we are at the initial stages of the process and others because Government Departments are making mistakes, but the House must have some of these points answered.

The first problem that emerges from reading some of the background documents is the number of organisations involved. The Minister responsible for the Thames gateway said that his second principle was to have a partnership approach, but can we have a response in tonight's reply or a written response at a later date, setting out the full list of organisations involved? We need to know the number of quangos, the number of Government Departments, the number of all other public sector bodies and public-private partnerships involved. I have to say that it gets pretty complicated when one tries to work out who is doing what, who is leading the project and who is accountable for what. We need accountability because huge amounts of money are being spent.

I do not know whether the Minister has seen September's "Regeneration and Renewal", which includes a wonderful map of all the organisations involved. The Minister puts his eye to the ceiling at the sight of it. Eighteen local authorities are listed in the web, followed by a wonderful list of bodies, including the Thames estuary partnership, English Partnerships, the Environment Agency, the sustainable communities taskforce, English Heritage, Transport for London, East of England Development Agency, South East of England Development Agency, the Greater London Authority, London Development Agency, Thames gateway London partnership, green giro network, architecture and urbanism unit, Thurrock UDC, London Thames gateway UDC, heart of Thames gateway, Thames gateway South Essex, Thames gateway Kent partnership, Kent county council, British Waterways, London First, Gateway to London, Invest Thames Gateway, Thames Gateway strategic executive—and no doubt many others. I have not finished, Mr. Deputy Speaker, but I think that I have made my point.

Richard Ottaway: To return to my earlier intervention on my hon. Friend the Member for Poole (Mr. Syms), the corporation will cover all of this within one overall body. The great success of Lord Heseltine's docklands was the establishment of the London Docklands development corporation. Does that not provide a sensible solution to the hon. Gentleman's problem, meeting the point that he is putting to us?

Mr. Davey: I am not sure that that corporation was the great achievement that the hon. Gentleman assumes. There were many problems with the experience, particularly when local communities were not consulted and their interests were overridden. Some of the development was not as sustainable as we want to see for the Thames gateway. I am not in favour of having one all-embracing body. It is important to ensure that accountability structures are in place.

As the Minister knows, we debated these issues in connection with statutory instruments for setting up the Thurrock urban development corporation. The Liberal Democrats were concerned with the lack of accountability in the structure. I should add—the hon. Member for Thurrock (Andrew Mackinlay) may want to join the debate on this point—that party control of Thurrock council changed recently. However, after the change, the Labour councillors appointed to the UDC did not change. The newly elected Conservative councillors did not assume the local authority places on the board. That is why we raised questions of accountability when we debated the statutory instrument, but that point did not come out. We were given assurances that the UDCs would be more accountable, but that does not appear to have happened when the recently elected councillors failed to take up their places.

Accountability issues are important, but from the map of the conglomeration of quangos and other bodies such as public-private partnerships that I read out, it is clear that accountability has not been created. On the contrary, it has created confusion and Ministers must explain how that confusion will be cleared up. We have heard about directorates on the Thames gateway within the Office of the Deputy Prime Minister; we have heard about a Cabinet Committee; we have heard about a new office—until hearing the Minister's speech, I knew nothing about it—being launched somewhere in the Thames gateway earlier last week. It is just not clear exactly who is in control and where the lines of accountability lie. I hope that the Minister will clarify that for the House—*[Interruption.]*

Ministers on the Treasury Bench may complain among themselves about what I am saying, but I am not the only one saying it. Many other people working in the Thames gateway area are also complaining. Let me provide some quotes to illustrate the point. Sandra Hunt, the director of the Thames gateway-based consultancy, Regenfirst, said:

> "There are basically too many players".

Glyn Roberts, the spokesperson for the Royal Town Planning Institute regeneration panel, said:

> "The Government's going out of its way to try to get everybody on board . . . and I think it's going too far."

Others make the very same point. To be fair, some believe that the Government are getting it right in some parts of the Thames gateway. The leader of Medway council in Kent—

Mr. Khalid Mahmood (Birmingham, Perry Barr) (Lab): Rodney.

Mr. Davey: Yes, Rodney Chambers—Rod to his mates, presumably—believed that in his area the Government were following a democratic model and he was pleasantly surprised that the local authority was given the powers to go ahead and deliver it, with accountability to the people. That is the sort of model that many in the House would prefer. I hope that Ministers can get through this alphabet soup that the Government have created in the Thames gateway and that there will be clearer lines of accountability and fewer organisations in respect of this important project.

Related to the number of organisations is the cost. A plethora of bodies means a plethora of chief executives and a whole range of people wanting jobs and coming in with their different lackeys. The Government talk positively about the Thurrock urban development corporation, but it has a chief executive, director of resources, director of planning and strategy, director of delivery and director of marketing and communications. How many similar sorts of positions will apply to the partnerships that I listed with concerns in the Thames gateway? When he replies to the debate, can the Minister for Transport tell us how many chief executives there will be in all the bodies dealing with the Thames gateway? If not, will he write to us with the answer and include information on the collective salary involved?

Andrew Mackinlay: The hon. Gentleman is in danger of ruining a good point about the plethora of organisations. It is important that we have posts for the Thurrock urban development corporation, which is the rocket motor for that area's regeneration. We want the positions appointed and under way. The hon. Gentleman should not knock that aspect, but otherwise, he makes a valid point about the plethora of quangos and other organisations and the bewilderment that comes from it.

Mr. Davey: The hon. Gentleman is right to pull me up on that. I am not saying that those posts are the wrong ones for that particular organisation. The point is that if they are mirrored in all the organisations I have listed, huge amounts of money will be spent paying the same people to do the same things in the same area. That is both bewildering and a total waste of money. I hope that the Minister can give us some assurances on the costs of those organisations. How many heads of marketing will there be for the Thames gateway? We need to know.

Transport is the other issue that has come up, and the Minister who will reply to the debate at least has some responsibility for that. It seems to most people that transport is the absolute key. If the state sector can do anything to unlock the potential in the east of London, it has to be in its provision of a public transport network. I am sure that the Government will say they are doing an awful lot, talking about everything from the extension of the Docklands light railway to the east London line extension to the plans for Crossrail and so on. At the moment, though, none of us is clear whether some of the bigger projects are actually going to happen. There is lots of talk about them, but when the Secretary of State for Transport made a statement on Crossrail, there was not a clear commitment on the cash that would enable us to know that it will happen.

I say that not as a party political point but to ask what the best use of public money is. Spending on public transport infrastructure is probably the most effective use of public money to unlock potential. If a lot of money was channelled that way, we could save a great deal on other aspects of the projects. Will the Minister say a little about the key role for transport?

One project on the drawing board and ready to go could improve some road links in the south of Essex and create jobs, and that is the Shell Haven port and distribution park development. The planning application has been on Ministers' desks for some time. Because of the sensitivity of the proposal, the Minister may not wish to comment directly, and nor do I expect him to, but a lot of people across the House support that application and look to the Government to give it the go-ahead. To those of us who have had even limited involvement, it seems to have dealt sensitively with the community environmental issues, and it promises a huge amount for early delivery on jobs, economic regeneration and transport links.

Bob Spink: The hon. Gentleman may not be aware that I contributed at the public inquiry on Shell Haven port, both at the start and the end, giving more than 25 pages of evidence. The port will bring real benefits to south Essex, but there are also a number of serious disadvantages, and it will certainly bring no benefit whatever to Castle Point, unless Canvey is put in so that we have access to those jobs.

Mr. Davey: I am sure that Ministers will have heard that, but my point is that there is huge support for the proposal. If Ministers can give an early and positive reply, it would be welcome.

Let me turn to the environmental challenges in the gateway and how the Government are responding to them. The Government are right to focus their attention on the gateway because brownfield developments there could ensure that land is successfully reused. They also have to ratchet up construction standards so that materials are used in a sustainable way and to make sure that the buildings are designed so that they are efficient in terms of energy use, water use and all the other things coming from advisory groups.

There is continuing concern about the flood plain and about how the Government are tackling that issue. I have asked questions about this, particularly in trying to get information about the maps. I was told in an answer on 20 May 2004 that maps are provided to local planning authorities every three months and updated as new information comes on board. The Minister said that there is a lot of certainty and stability, but in fact there are many changes in the analysis of the flood plain in the Thames gateway. This is not a minor point; some 11 of the 14 designated growth areas in the Thames gateway are in the flood plain. It is pretty essential that we get this right. I hope that the Minister is right, and I know that the Department and others are spending a lot of time on the matter. He has given assurances that none of the developments will go ahead unless and until there has been a flood risk assessment.

Keith Hill: May I dispel the possibility of scaremongering on flooding and the flood plain? The fact is that something in the order of 17 London boroughs lie within the flood plain. Some £85 billion of property assets are located within the flood plain, but it is protected. Provided the flood plain is protected, which is the Government's commitment, practice and intention, there is not a significant problem. The hon. Gentleman is simply wrong to conjure the expression "flood plain" out of the firmament and imagine that that is in itself a threat. It is not, and he is doing wrong in even ventilating the possibility of a threat arising from the existing flood plain in its own right.

Mr. Davey: That is an extraordinary statement from the Minister, containing the idea that Members of Parliament should not ask questions about some of the key risks. It is not just hon. Members who are doing so. Peter Dower, chair of the Association of British Insurers Thames gateway working group, said in a press release issued by the Office of the Deputy Prime Minister:

> "Insurers remain committed to offering as wide a range of insurance solutions as possible to home-owners and businesses. As the increasing demand for new homes will inevitably involve some developments in areas of higher flood risk, it is important that flood risk management is designed into these developments to maintain insurability."

His colleague, the policy officer Sebastian Catovsky, quoted recently in "Regeneration and Renewal" said:

> "Big development sites such as Barking Reach, Thamesmead, Greenwich peninsula are all very low-lying and, even if well protected, could have problems."

I am quoting insurance professionals who will have to provide policies for those homes. *[Interruption.]* Hon. Members may say that they have a vested interest, and that may well be so, but it is for this House to ask Ministers questions to make sure that the work is being done.

I am more than happy to accept the Government's and the Minister's assurances, but I must ask a further question. The Minister will know that the Thames barrage will need to be updated by 2030, and he may have the exact date in his brief. That updating may even require a completely new barrage to be built, according to some analysts. That would be an important investment. We are talking about £4 billion or £5 billion, and the project will be critical to many of the developments that we are talking about tonight. I am not making this point to scaremonger or to try to suggest that it will blow away all the potential. I hope that the problems, issues and risks can be managed properly so that we can develop brownfield land. It is in the interests of everybody, including my constituents, that we do that. We must be reassured by Ministers, however, that serious risks are being properly considered.

I want to raise a few more specific issues to ask whether the Government have thought about them in their overall strategy, particularly relating to the people who will live in the homes in the Thames gateway. One thing that concerned me about the Barker report was that it was very much a top-down analysis of housing demand. It did not analyse the types of people concerned—the age groups or the family distribution and organisation involved, such as one-parent families or families with two or three children—and therefore did not analyse the type of homes that will be needed. Can the Minister assure us that the demographic needs are being considered in the plans being developed? For example, will there be any developments for older, retired people in the Thames gateway?

We have heard about other aspects of the infrastructure such as health, education and transport. Are there any proposals for prisons, for example? From the Minister's reaction, he does not appear to think so, but all such aspects need to be considered.

Some transport issues, especially the river crossings, do not appear to be linked to the environmental and public transport needs of the communities. For example, a huge debate has arisen over the Thames gateway bridge. It clearly has to have a road link, but will the bridge also be able to take trams or pedestrians? What are the plans for guaranteed bus lanes? If we could have some assurances on those aspects of the bridge, many people would have their fears assuaged.

As other colleagues have mentioned, the developments are a real opportunity. We hope that the Government will get it right and we want to help them to do so. I hope that Ministers will take my remarks in that light.

7.41 pm

Linda Perham (Ilford, North) (Lab): In congratulating the Government on their vision for the Thames gateway, I wish first to focus on the meaning of Thames gateway regeneration for the London borough of Redbridge, which lies along on the border of London and Essex, and the importance of local authorities in providing leadership when building tomorrow's communities.

To many people outside Redbridge, the borough is a leafy suburb of London. To some in Essex, Suffolk and Norfolk, Redbridge is known only as "the place you park your car when you go to London". However, our borough contains a diversity of urban, suburban and rural communities, a diversity of faiths and races, and also some of the richest and poorest areas of the country.

Redbridge has seen enormous changes in the past decade. Some two and a half years ago, the local council launched an ambitious vision for the future of Ilford, "Progressive Ilford", to fulfil local demand for homes, jobs and services for a generation. I worked out that when it was completed I would be 85, so I hope to be still around when it all comes to fruition. I was pleased that my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Constitutional Affairs, in his previous capacity as a Minister in the Office of the Deputy Prime Minister, was able to attend that event with me. However, the launch of that regeneration plan coincided with a change of political control in Redbridge, which has led to a disturbing shift in the council's regeneration priorities.

The first apparent shift by the new Tory council was to deprioritise public consultation. Dialogue with the public did take place, but it rarely did so in a form that gave consultees the impression their concerns had been heeded. I should like to take the Gants Hill area as an example. Gants Hill is situated on the border between my constituency and Ilford, South at the heart of Redbridge. It has a Central line tube station; a crossing of the A12, the Woodford avenue, which links to the north circular road; and Cranbrook road, a major local route.

Gants Hill has been in need of regeneration since the late 1960s. However, for two years, the Tory council tried to force through a plan that would have flattened dozens of homes to make way for a supermarket, despite four other supermarkets being within a mile of the site, and in the face of massive public opposition. The council also proposed to close the much loved and architecturally significant Gants Hill library, regardless once again of public opposition and the desperate need in the area for better community facilities. The library and its car park have been designated by the council for commercial or leisure use.

In the last four years, Gants Hill residents association has complained to me about the neglect of the Woodford avenue area. Mustafa Redif, the manager of Serene's fish and chip shop on the Woodford avenue, told me recently that he felt that his corner of Gants Hill had been overlooked when it came to regeneration—a view shared by other residents in Gants Hill's "forgotten quarters". *[Interruption.]* I am sure that my hon. Friends are thinking of other forgotten quarters in their constituencies, especially if they have Conservative councils.

[Linda Perham]

Perhaps our most well known landmark was the Odeon cinema on the A12 at Gants Hill. It has now been demolished for the construction of over 200 high-rise flats, which has taken from our community part of its identity and fuelled the demonisation of young people who have little to do in the area. A similar story is told by residents of Barkingside, who are threatened with the loss of Fullwell Cross library, which serves as a cultural landmark in the community, to be replaced with blocks of flats.

Those travesties of regeneration stem from a difference in principle. When under Labour control, Redbridge's plans for the future were based on the needs of local people, but now, young people in my constituency are priced out of the local housing market, forcing them out of the communities in which they grew up. Everyone can see the slow erosion of community life in our area, but still the Tories fight tooth and nail to minimise any allocations for affordable housing on major developments,

As populations grow, there is increasing need for community centres, libraries, youth clubs and other facilities, but the Tories' regeneration plans have lost coherence. The attitude of the Tory council has led to a general and understandable public distrust of regeneration, which undermines the potential benefits.

The next decision the council has to make, a week today, is whether to allow a horse racing track, which is bitterly opposed by hundreds of local residents—including me—with a grandstand, bars and restaurants to be built on green belt land on Fairlop plain in my constituency. I am urging local Tory councillors to listen to the voices of the people whom we represent.

I also wish to raise the issue of Crossrail, because I have the honour of chairing the all-party parliamentary group on the issue, which counts 100 MPs and peers as members. In the spring we hope to see a hybrid Bill before Parliament to empower the financing and construction of Crossrail. I cannot overstate how important it is for us to take the opportunity to make the fullest success of Crossrail to contribute to regeneration in the Thames gateway.

The plans for the gateway could realise up to 30 per cent. of London's required new homes, including provision for affordable housing, which is very important to my constituents, and the creation of job opportunities. That will help London to accommodate the predicted increase in population of 700,000 people over the next 10 years, without encroaching on greenfield sites or the green belt. The Thames Gateway London Partnership has highlighted the insufficiency of rail networks and interchanges connecting key town centres and development sites. As with other areas of London, Crossrail will provide rapid, frequent and convenient access for business and leisure travellers from the Thames gateway areas to the City, central London and Heathrow.

Crossrail will provide a freedom of movement for people that will give businesses greater access to the labour force; it will give people the opportunity to look further afield for jobs that will recognise and develop their potential; and it will ensure hundreds of thousands of people will be able to get to and from work each day and enjoy the capital's leisure opportunities by night. In that latter group, I include my daughters, who are in their 20s. In fact, to me, Crossrail represents opportunity for my constituents, for Londoners and for much of the south-east. It will also play an essential role in securing London's future as a financial and international business centre vital to the UK economy and with benefits for the whole country. For residents in my constituency, it will mean a practical alternative to being crammed into overcrowded carriages on the Central line, which operates at capacity no longer just during rush hour but throughout the day and evening.

East London contains some of the poorest communities in Britain, yet a lack of infrastructure inhibits opportunity for the people living in those communities. I have lived in the east of London for almost all my life and I feel very strongly that the time has come for my birthplace, my living space and the people I represent to benefit from this Labour Government's commitment to this huge investment in the Thames gateway programme.

7.50 pm

Bob Spink (Castle Point) (Con): It is a pleasure to follow the hon. Member for Ilford, North (Linda Perham). She spoke eloquently, and made a number of important and good points about her constituency. I am deeply proud of my constituency, as she is of hers. Castle Point is a wonderful and beautiful town, which nestles seductively on the Thames estuary. It boasts the wonderful and historic Hadleigh castle, St. James's church in Hadleigh, St. Peter's church in Thundersley and Benfleet church, which was built on the site of the battle of Benfleet, in which we defeated the Vikings about 1,110 years ago. On Canvey Island we also have the Dutch cottages, and a wonderful, tight-knit and caring community.

The Thames gateway project can do much for my constituency; it offers much promise. However, like the hon. Member for Dartford (Dr. Stoate), I am concerned to get the detail right, particularly on infrastructure. If we do not get that right, the Thames gateway could be a burden on my constituents. The gateway will bring regeneration and jobs, although as I have said before and will continue to say until the House is sick of my saying it and delivers Canvey's third road, without that third road there will be no jobs in Castle Point from the Thames gateway. However, the gateway could deliver jobs.

I am delighted with the Olympic bid, which involves the gateway area. Winning that bid would be a great thing for this country. I cannot understand why the whole country is not backing that bid and Lord Coe, who is pushing it. It could deliver much for south Essex and my constituency. There are many new opportunities to come from the Thames gateway project: in leisure, in sport, through protecting and enhancing our heritage, through jobs and improved housing, and, as the hon. Member for Ilford, North said, through more social and cheaper housing so that our young people can get on the housing ladder and we can house teachers, nurses and people in low-paid occupations.

The Thames gateway could enhance my constituents' lifestyle and quality of life in many ways. The Minister for Housing and Planning, who has just left, is an excellent man, as is the Minister of State, Department for Transport, who has taken over. I am sure that he will pick up some of these points when he sums up. However, the Ministers have a very tough job in selling the gateway to my constituents. Local people and the local press do not simply accept without question the soft soap and the hard sell on the number of houses, which is the nub of the matter for us.

We need some additional housing, but the question is where it should go. Should it be on the green belt? My constituents feel that it should not. How many houses should we have? My constituents feel that 4,000 additional houses, which the Office of the Deputy Prime Minister is trying to foist on us, represent a totally unsustainable level, which could not possibly be built without consuming parts of the green belt in my constituency.

My constituents also feel—and this is one of the key differences between the Conservatives' and the Government's policy on planning—that the best people to make decisions on numbers of houses, where they go and on green belt protection are local people, who are democratically accountable to their community. They know best. My constituents are completely bewildered—that seems to be the word of the night—that the decisions are taken away from them and given to what I suppose is a quango. Certainly, my constituents do not know who the people in Go East and the regional planning authority are, and they cannot vote them out if they disagree with their decisions. Such people simply seem to be placemen—yes men—intended to deliver whatever number the Office of the Deputy Prime Minister comes up with and seeks to force on us.

We do not accept the claim made by the Minister for Housing and Planning in his opening remarks that housing growth at levels that the Office of the Deputy Prime Minister seeks to force on the south-east is "inevitable"—that was the word that he used. There is no inevitability about it at all. There is regeneration in the north of England, and some communities there want more housing. Our communities do not. We should trust those local communities.

Jonathan Shaw: Does the hon. Gentleman recall one important point that the Minister made? The vast majority of the new homes will be built for the indigenous population: the sons, the daughters, the grandmas and grandfathers of the indigenous people living in those communities already.

Bob Spink: If only that were so; it simply is not so. There is an assumption that there will be a major influx of population into the south-east, at a time when the north is starting to regenerate and great cities such as Manchester, Liverpool and Newcastle are striving forward. Why should we seek to take their people away from them?

Mr. John Hayes (South Holland and The Deepings) (Con): Will my hon. Friend recommend the Joseph Rowntree Foundation report to the hon. Member for Chatham and Aylesford (Jonathan Shaw)? That makes it clear that the principal pressure on housing demand does not come from within communities but from all kinds of other factors such as migration from the north of England and other demand-side factors.

Bob Spink: I am grateful to my hon. Friend for that clarification.

I move from housing to a headline that I doubt anyone here will have seen. It says "Not a single penny", and refers to the £23 million regeneration handout from the Thames gateway project in south Essex this week. Many people benefited from that; we have already heard that my hon. Friend the Member for Rayleigh (Mr. Francois) got some work done on his local windmill. Basildon benefited and Southend benefited. There are many projects that benefited. I am sure that Thurrock benefited, because the hon. Member for Thurrock (Andrew Mackinlay) is so assiduous that he would have made sure of that. Sadly, Castle Point did not get a penny of that money.

Indeed, Mary Spence, the chief executive, is quoted in the same local paper—the *Evening Echo* of 10 November—as saying:

> "This additional money has got to be spent by March 31 next year and there just aren't any projects in Castle Point which are suitable."

I think that I have already mentioned one or two.

I find the offer of the money a little offensive—analogous to someone throwing coloured beads at the natives while stealing their land, in the hope of making them compliant. We are given £23 million for a bit of a windmill improvement here and a little project there, and we are all supposed to say, "Thank you so much," tug our forelocks and go home happy that the Thames gateway is fantastic, and doing good things locally. That is what the £23 million is intended for.

Yet at the same time people are trying to force 123,000 houses on south Essex—on the south-east—which is totally unsustainable. Some of those houses will have to go on the green belt.

The Minister of State, Department for Transport (Mr. Tony McNulty) *rose—*

Bob Spink: As the Minister wants to intervene, will he confirm that to get 4,000 extra houses in Castle Point, some green belt will have to be released?

Mr. McNulty: I intervene only to point out that the hon. Gentleman cannot say that the figure will be 125,000 for south Essex and then in the next breath say that it will be the south-east. Which is it? Is he suggesting that there will be 125,000 houses for south Essex or for the south-east? We have to be careful about these figures. In fact, as I understand it, the figure for Castle Point is 2,500, not 4,000.

Bob Spink: I accept the Minister's correction. I meant to say the south-east, not south Essex, so I apologise to the House for that. I tried to correct myself immediately, as the record will show, but the Minister made two errors. First, he said 125,000, whereas I said 123,000; and secondly, he said that there would not be 4,000 additional houses for Castle Point. If not, will he confirm that the lower figure will be the one imposed on

[Bob Spink]

Castle Point, because we would love that? I am sorry to have to say that my understanding is that it will be the higher figure—4,000—for Castle Point.

On housing, the gateway is a Trojan horse. It brings a massive increase in building but offers no improvement in infrastructure. Canvey Island really needs new access, but there will be none. The East of England Development Agency will be spending a few million pounds on developing new industrial sites in a new industrial park on Canvey Island, yet there are empty sites all over the island. If only that money were spent on a road, we would not have to spend any more money on developing industrial sites on Canvey Island. The private sector would take over and do it for us; the development would be organic, driven by people. What we need on Canvey Island is an additional access road—nothing less. We need no further development at all until we have that infrastructure.

Our roads are already overburdened with congestion, yet there are plans to build in the green belt, which would feed on to the A13 in Hadleigh and Thundersley, yet there is no means of improving the road in those areas. It goes through a densely built-up area, so there is no solution for the already wholly unacceptable congestion, yet only two weeks ago a proposal was made to build 310 more houses in that green belt. My constituents are full up with housing and fed up with congestion. In fact, one of them, Eric Fenwick, rang me this morning to say, "Dr. Spink, when you're writing your election address, use the slogan, 'Full up and fed up' because that describes how the residents of Castle Point feel."

Our public services are tremendously overstretched. Our schools are full. Our hospitals still have massive waiting lists. Our doctors' surgeries are full. People cannot book into a dentist locally. We do not have sufficient leisure and sporting facilities locally. Our kids have nothing to do, so they hang about on the streets, sometimes—not always—making a nuisance of themselves, although I stress that Castle Point kids are basically fantastic and deserve more facilities from us. We should not be dragging in more kids, without such facilities. I hope the Government are taking note and that the Minister will receive a note from his officials about the 4,000 houses in Castle Point and give us the very good news that he has decided to reduce that number. Does he accept that a major new development of hundreds of houses feeding on to already congested roads is nonsense, and will he pull that development, because of the highways issues, pending improvements to the infrastructure?

The Thames estuary has internationally important wildlife sites, not least in and around Castle Point, which include a vast area of the Thames, going past Southend, West as far as Rochford and Southend, East. I do not get many votes in the wildlife areas of my constituency, but they are important and I treasure them and want to protect them. Such sites are especially important for birds and the Royal Society for the Protection of Birds has carefully and wisely lobbied for their protection.

We need to enhance our existing nature reserves, but we also need to ensure that the, sometimes conflicting, leisure uses of the Thames are also enhanced, developed and protected. People and their leisure activities are just as important as wildlife. We have to balance those two conflicting aims and I hope that the Minister will be able to do so.

We need to ensure that the new flood storage does not damage wildlife sites. The overreaction of the Minister for Housing and Planning whenever the flood plain was mentioned frightened me to death. What is in his mind? What caused him to overreact in that, shall I say, bewildering manner? Perhaps we will find out.

We need to minimise the production of waste in the area and to find better and more sustainable ways of dealing with it. Waste management is a major issue, especially at the Pitsea tip, and questions about incineration in Essex keep raising their heads.

If we get the infrastructure issues right, the Thames gateway could be of great benefit for the people of the south-east and, indeed, south Essex.

Mr. Geoffrey Clifton-Brown (Cotswold) (Con): I am sure that my hon. Friend is aware that the Environment Agency is about to publish flood plain maps which will give a much more accurate idea of the precise boundaries of flooding, according to certain risks. The Minister referred to one in 1,000, but it is no good if that one in a 1,000 years happens to be when one's house is being built—but that is another matter. Could it be that the Minister is sensitive about those maps because he will have much greater difficulty finding spaces for those houses than he originally thought?

Bob Spink: I think my hon. Friend may be on to something. The one in 1,000 design standard may have been consistent with conditions 10 or 20 years ago, but recently we have seen massive climate change and all the models have been rapidly adjusted. I am pretty sure that the one in 1,000 standard no longer applies for the Thames estuary. The Government were wrong to abolish the Essex flood defence committee and I am grateful to my colleagues on the Opposition Front Bench for confirming that they will reinstate the committee when we win the next election. I am delighted that my hon. Friend the Member for South Holland and The Deepings (Mr. Hayes) reminded me about making those points.

I do not want to be a dismal Jimmy, however. I do not want to suggest that the Thames gateway is all bad—it is not. It offers much promise, but to secure that promise we need to get the infrastructure in and reduce the number of houses being forced on us by the Government, which will destroy our green belt.

8.8 pm

Andrew Mackinlay (Thurrock) (Lab): This is both an interesting and rather unusual debate, because there has been less of the party politics and synthetic anger that are a feature of the Chamber and that diminish its effectiveness. Members on both sides of the House have made points of great validity, and it would be prudent for the Government to reflect on them.

The hon. Member for Kingston and Surbiton (Mr. Davey) mentioned the plethora of organisations involved in the Thames gateway. People in public life and potential developers are bewildered and cannot understand who is responsible for what, so it would be sensible for the Government to take that on board.

We must address some of the points made by the hon. Members for Poole (Mr. Syms) and for Croydon, South (Richard Ottaway). I hope I do them no injustice nor cause them embarrassment when I say that they broadly supported the thrust of the Government's strategy of regenerating the part of England that we are discussing.

There has been criticism of the bodies involved. Large parts of the Thames gateway strategy are not included in urban development corporations—I am fortunate in that one is dedicated to Thurrock. The Thames gateway is not in one English region, which is a mistake. Thurrock is in the eastern region, but we have no relationship with a region that is largely run from Cambridge and goes right up to Norfolk and Norwich. The maps of the English regions are wholly artificial. I remember that, when the London Government Act 1963 was passed, the boundaries of Greater London were fixed at 2 o'clock in the morning during a debate in Committee in the House of Lords, almost by accident, depending on who could be present at the time.

Things have moved on. I would liken the shape of the Thames gateway to an Osram light bulb laying on its side: it includes not only Greater London, as we know it, but goes down both sides of the Thames. That is the reality of the London region. People commute into London; Londoners have moved eastwards; and the region includes London's river and London's motorway, albeit largely outside the Greater London authority's area. Those issues need to be addressed if we are to manage the area—London, the Thames and its gateway—in the long term, and in my view it should come under just one English region, which would have some coherence.

We are now presented with an exciting opportunity not only to create new homes and environments, but to do away with some of the derelict, contaminated land throughout the area. My constituency contains a large amount of brown, derelict land that has been exploited during the past century without restoration. That land can now be restored and commerce and residences built, contributing not only to the economy but to the good quality of life of the people who live to the east of London. So I am excited by those possibilities and the new opportunities for innovative design in the building and urban planning there.

I very much welcome the moneys that the Office of the Deputy Prime Minister has made available to the Thurrock development corporation—some £330-odd million—and I hope that the Deputy Prime Minister will use his good offices to ensure that the other public sector partners, Ministries, Departments and agencies redirect their spending programmes to the Thurrock development corporation as well as the development corporation that covers the London boroughs and throughout the Thames corridor.

There is an anomaly, in respect of which the hon. Member for Castle Point (Bob Spink) raised legitimate concerns, because the absence of an urban development corporation will disadvantage his area. The beauty of the urban development corporation is that it allows true planning to take place. It not only deals with residential development, but ensures that the transport infrastructure, schools and national health service provision grow and are paid for, while new, good quality environments and residential properties are created. Hitherto, that has not happened in my constituency and that of the hon. Member for Castle Point.

The vehicle for true comprehensive planning must be an urban development corporation. That was the thrust of what the hon. Member for Croydon, South, who is no longer in his place, was saying, and he was talking common sense when he referred to the experience of the London docklands 20 years ago. My hon. Friend the Member for Bexleyheath and Crayford (Mr. Beard) and I agree that the responsibility for developing the docklands fell between a number of local authorities, all of which were well motivated, but there was no single body to drive through any plan. Only when such a single body was created did we see what we now know as the docklands. Of course, there might be some warts and deficiencies, but, overall, the docklands are a massive success commercially, environmentally and in terms of regeneration.

Mr. Edward Davey: The hon. Gentleman argues for the UDC in his area by linking it with the docklands experience in London, but surely that UDC is more or less, if not totally, coterminous with a local authority. Is he not worried at all about the UDC's accountability?

Andrew Mackinlay: We must be sensitive about that. The local authority discharges a multiplicity of functions very well, but the essence of the urban development corporation is that it is focused on creating a new environment, attracting funds and marshalling funds and land—it has one purpose—but all that fails to happen when such things are vested with a local authority.

The thrust of my speech is that all the areas that make up the Thames gateway should be covered by urban development corporations and that there needs to be some overall, strategic planning by one English region. I accepted the hon. Gentleman's valid point that an awful lot of other intermediate bodies could be either culled or rationalised, so I would not start from this point if I were the Minister, but the Government have made a very sensible start.

On the hon. Gentleman's point about Thurrock, of course I believe in local democracy, but, after all, the local authority will monitor the urban development corporation's work and it appoints some representatives. That is not a matter for me—I took the point that he made earlier—and I am fairly comfortable with the new arrangements. In any event, I also recognise that the urban development corporation can badger other departments in a way that local authorities cannot. For example, I regret to say that Thurrock has some of the lowest general practitioner provision in England, not just in the region. I told Health Ministers in the Chamber a few weeks ago—I do so again to my hon. Friend on the Front Bench now—that they and the urban development corporation must get those other agencies to ensure not only the necessary GP provision to meet people's existing demands, but the necessary growth as the urban development corporation is extended and developed. That cannot be done adequately by a traditional local authority.

I am pleased that the hon. Gentleman intervened because I want to take this opportunity to emphasise the deficiency in respect of GPs. I understand that, in

[Andrew Mackinlay]

England, the average is 52 GPs per 100,000 people. My borough, Thurrock, currently has 43 GPs per 100,000 people. Moreover, we have a large number of single practitioners, which is not the most efficient way to deliver health care. So there is much work to be done, and I hope that the Minister with responsibility for London will join me in taking an initiative to bring together the Department of Health, the primary care trust and other agencies to discover whether we can address those deficiencies, perhaps by channelling some funds to put us on the starting grid by creating GP provision that is appropriate to our area.

The Highways Agency must urgently address the lack of capacity at junction 30 of the M25 and on adjacent stretches of the A13. The problem must be dealt with in the interests not just of Thurrock but of the whole Thames gateway, because that junction and those stretches are increasingly becoming bottlenecks. In passing, may I therefore express my regret and frustration that, when there is a major hiatus on the M25, a statement is never made in the House of Commons? However, when there is a comparable hiatus on the rail network, a statement is made. That partly reflects the failure of Ministers to make a statement, but also the disinterest and wrong priorities of the press and media.

Although it took place some distance from the Thames gateway over the weekend, a major incident on the M25 frustrated an awful lot of people in the region. A similar incident occurred near junction 30 a few months ago, and given the cost, losses and frustration caused to commerce and people travelling on the M25, we should consider big hold-ups and closures on the M25 much more seriously than we do at present. That raises the question of whether we should have a dedicated traffic police for the M25 rather than relying on the different constabularies of Kent, Essex and the Met, who do not communicate adequately with each other about the quadrants for which they have responsibility. I hope that such a suggestion will be taken on board.

I know that colleagues might later refer to crossings over the Thames, but I must point out that I oppose the continued tolling of the Queen Elizabeth II bridge between Dartford and Thurrock. It was wrong to abrogate the statute of Parliament that said that tolling should cease once the bridge had been paid for. I resent that on behalf of my constituents in Thurrock and south Essex and of people in north Kent. The charges collected are not returned to our areas. The motorists who use the bridge to go from south Essex to work in Kent and vice versa have an additional £10 a week tax on them to pay for the wider highways network. That is simply not fair unless there is tolling around the whole M25 and elsewhere. This issue should be addressed with some urgency.

Reference might be made later to the desire for a Thames bridge to the west of Thurrock. That is a prudent proposition, but I am surprised that the Government have not addressed the need for a crossing to the east of Thurrock. The QEII bridge and one that might be created in the London boroughs to the west would merely act as bottlenecks or funnels that would not meet the needs of the north of England or help with access to the channel ports. We need to examine a proposal for a further crossing to the east that could be situated either in the vicinity of my borough of Thurrock or in the area represented by the hon. Member for Castle Point.

I remember attending a meeting with the hon. Gentleman soon after we were elected to the House at which it was made quite clear that if he wanted an additional access road to Canvey Island in his constituency, it would have to be part of a wider river crossing. I am not suggesting that the crossing should be sited there but, tantalisingly, he might consider the possibility that an additional road to Canvey Island should be incorporated in a highway across the Thames that gave access to the ports in Kent. Such a highway would be useful for the wider economy and our Thames gateway region.

The need for c2c's London to Tilbury and Southend line to be upgraded with some dispatch is also a matter of urgency in south Essex. It was a run-down line and, to be fair, it has received considerable investment. However, it does not have sufficient capacity to meet the existing needs of the Thames gateway.

The channel tunnel rail link goes under the Thames and, like a bootlace, comes out of the ground near the QEII bridge in my constituency. I think that we should revisit the prospect of having a station on that line in West Thurrock or Purfleet. I realise that there is the proposal for a station at Stratford, but it is common sense to examine the suggestion for a station in my constituency. A number of trains for Paris and Brussels could stop there each day, and that would also provide useful extra capacity for people in north Kent and my constituency who want to go to London.

John Cryer (Hornchurch) (Lab): Does my hon. Friend agree that an important transport infrastructure link would be the extension of the docklands light railway out as far as Rainham? That would help my constituents, those in other parts of Greater London and his in Thurrock.

Andrew Mackinlay: There is a lot to be said for my hon. Friend's suggestion. I draw attention to the fact that he implicitly referred to the fact that the Greater London authority and the Mayor are the driving force for such a proposal. However, this issue is extraterritorial to my constituency; we are not in Greater London and I am not advocating that we necessarily should be in the GLA area. However, I am saying that the boundary of Greater London makes no sense. We should be included in the considerations for the extension of the docklands light railway.

As well as capitalising on the new channel tunnel rail route that comes through my constituency and that of my hon. Friend, we need to upgrade the c2c line and address the problems of the level crossings in my constituency and that of my hon. Friend the Member for Basildon (Angela Smith), who shares my frustration at the number of crossings in our area. They cut off communities and create problems for emergency vehicles. That issue needs to be addressed urgently because if the decision goes in favour of the development of the port at Shell Haven, even greater burdens will be imposed on the limited resources of the c2c rail line.

That will impose greater frustration on the residents who have to wait many minutes to get across the level crossings when they travel to East Tilbury and other areas along the line.

My area also lacks an office market even though it has great potential. We have some of the lowest ratios of public sector jobs to employment in the entire country. If the Lyons review is to take civil servants out of London—my constituency is not in London—it is sensible and reasonable for me to invite Her Majesty's Government to consider moving some civil service jobs from the centre of London and into south Essex, which, at the Government's choice, is part of the eastern region. That would help to encourage the growth of skills training and would be useful in dealing with the shortages of skills, which is one of the great problems faced in our project for the Thames gateway.

It is intended that Thurrock's contribution towards meeting the housing needs of our part of England during the lifetime of the urban development corporation will be roughly 18,500 new houses. I remind my constituents who express concern about that that they must understand that we are talking about not only houses, but schools, hospital and general practitioner provision and transport links, as I have tried to describe in my speech. I also tell them that my right hon. Friend Minister for Housing and Planning has reassured me informally, as he did in the House today, that the whole strategy is especially geared towards bringing contaminated derelict land and brownfield land back into use, and that the Government stand by their commitment to the green belt.

A private enterprise company that goes under the name of Thamesgate has produced an ambitious and innovative proposal, which will presumably become a planning application in several months. It proposes to develop some 18,000 houses in the vicinity of East Tilbury in my constituency. It has tried to sound out local politicians, members of the local authority and other people in public life, such as clergymen. We have made it clear that the green belt is precious and that we do not think that there is a case to build on it unless and until brownfield sites have been exhausted and contaminated land has been restored. That must be our message to the company.

When the Minister makes his winding-up speech I hope that he will reaffirm the Government's commitment to safeguarding the green belt jealously, because that would give a great deal of reassurance to my constituents, especially those in East Tilbury. The proposal has caused them anxiety and they assume that it is a done deal to which politicians and the Government have agreed. There is in fact not even a planning application existing. A private enterprise company merely has a legitimate desire to find out whether it could float such a proposition.

Mr. Hayes: I share the hon. Gentleman's passionately articulated desire to protect green space, especially his area's green belt. I reassure him that there is no likelihood that brownfield land will be exhausted. Brownfield land is a stream, not a reservoir, and as land use changes more brownfield development opportunities emerge. I am confident that when a Conservative Government are soon elected, we will be able to support the bold case that he makes on behalf of local people.

Andrew Mackinlay: My constituents certainly need new homes before there is next a Conservative Government. I am worried about the nice people who visit my surgery to express concern rightly about the housing needs of their sons and daughters. I sometimes ask them whether they bought their council houses, and many did—good luck to them, because if I had been a council tenant, I am sure that I would have bought my house too. Such people, however, must realise that we need a way of supplying additional housing units, especially those that may be rented or bought at low cost. Such houses do not fall like manna from heaven each night to appear on the grass each morning. We need to use our energies to find out how we can build houses at low cost to meet such demand, yet still protect and enhance our environment. Politicians and the public must address that challenge and be reminded of it.

The impact on Thurrock of the reduction of housing stock due to council house sales is such that it is becoming more difficult to meet the housing needs of people on modest pay. Such housing provision must be available if we are to have the skills to achieve the wonderful project of regenerating the Thames gateway. I hope that the Minister will find a moment to reassure people throughout the region, and especially my constituents in East Tilbury who would be affected by the private company's proposal, that the Government stand by their commitment to protect and enhance the green belt.

8.34 pm

Mr. Geoffrey Clifton-Brown (Cotswold) (Con): I declare an interest as a member of the Royal Institution of Chartered Surveyors, and I shall make a few comments in that capacity.

I am delighted to follow the hon. Member for Thurrock (Andrew Mackinlay). I agree with him passionately on two points and disagree with him passionately on one. He said that he wanted to move Thurrock into one regional area. Coming from Gloucestershire, which is on the edge of four regional areas, I have a huge amount of sympathy with him in that quest. Bearing in mind the Government's horrendous defeat in the north-east referendum, I hope that Ministers will reconsider their decision not to have new boundaries for regional areas, so that we can address some of the anomalies. The hon. Gentleman is the Member for Thurrock and I am not, but it seems to me that Thurrock fits better in the London region than it does in the eastern region, which I know quite a lot about.

Thames gateway, which is the largest and most ambitious single regeneration project in this country, was launched with great fanfare by the Deputy Prime Minister on 5 February 2003. It is therefore appropriate to evaluate what progress has been made in the year and three quarters since then. The project is a huge opportunity, but it poses a huge danger as well if the Government do not think it through properly, because our great capital city could end up functioning less well

[Mr. Geoffrey Clifton-Brown]

than it does now. I want London to prosper as one of the world's great capitals. The Thames gateway project gives us an opportunity to achieve that, but it also poses considerable dangers.

The point was made that London will grow by more than 700,000 people in the next 10 years. The gateway project will last for 13 years. One can assume that in the time in which it is to take place, London will have grown by almost 1 million people. The project envisages the building of 120,000 houses. That presages the possibility of at least 250,000 newly housed people. However, Transport for London has estimated that only 35,000 to 55,000 jobs will be created. This is the most important thing that Ministers should listen to—*[Interruption.]* I wish the Minister would listen instead of talking to his colleague, because this is an important point.

If 250,000 people live in the new houses in the Thames gateway and there are jobs for only 55,000 of them, and as every piece of literature and study that I have seen on the project is predicated on the basis that the Thames gateway will have transport links within 45 minutes of central London, it is inevitable that a large number of those newly housed people will have to commute back into jobs in central London. Commuting into and from central London every morning and evening is pretty much hell for thousands, if not millions, of people. If we are not going to put in the transport infrastructure at least at the same time as, but preferably ahead of, some of the new houses, we will be in great trouble.

I also think that the Government are not taking a proper strategic approach, which is surprising given that the Prime Minister is taking a lead on the matter in his Cabinet committee Misc 22. We also know from the Minister that the Deputy Prime Minister is setting up a new quango. I regret that I was not in the Chamber to hear about that and apologise for being late, but I was at another meeting. If we are not careful, the project will have too many chiefs and not enough doers.

We need to take a strategic approach to see where new jobs will be created in the next 13 to 20 years. Which industries will be successful in that time? The Government have not done that strategic thinking properly, and they need to do it. We need to see what new industries we could create in the east of London and what new jobs would follow from that. It will be a quagmire if we create all those new houses and there are no jobs in that area. It is environmentally unsustainable—the great buzz words of our time—and we need people to have jobs near their houses. That is the biggest single thing that the Government need to think about.

The transport infrastructure to make the project work is enormous. The Minister of State, Department for Transport is on the Treasury Bench. I hope that he can give us some answers. What is the future of Crossrail? Who will pay for it? What is the time scale? What about the three estimated new Thames crossings, one of which is a bridge? What about the docklands light railway extension, which has already been mentioned? What about rail upgrades to areas such as Stansted and Tilbury? We need to know something about those developments to the transport infrastructure, as vast sums of money will be required to upgrade systems and fund new projects. Where is all the money coming from, and what is the time scale for construction?

Bob Spink: My hon. Friend has made some excellent points and has highlighted an issue of serious concern. The c2c line from Shoeburyness to Fenchurch Street station is already at over-capacity. People stand on trains on that line every day, as they cannot find a seat. How will we increase capacity on that line for people who already live in the area, let alone for those who will take up all the new jobs and houses that we are going to create?

Mr. Clifton-Brown: My hon. Friend has made an excellent intervention and anticipates what I am about to say. He makes a very good point about transport, but the same principle applies to schools, hospitals, health centres and every other public service. It is no good building all those houses if we do not consider how we will provide public services in the area. With a general election looming, the Government must clarify the development criteria that they expect in the next five to 10 years. Will they follow Kate Barker's proposal for a development land tax? How will section 106 and the social housing requirement work? Unless developers have a settled environment in which to work, the position will be very difficult.

The concept of urban development corporations was implemented successfully by the last Conservative Government in the Local Government, Planning and Land Act 1980. They made UDCs work by levering in money from the private sector and adopting a bidding approach. The present Government must be measured not by inputs but by outputs—it is not about how much money they spend but about how effectively they spend it for the country. They need to think carefully about how they will lever in all that money. How will they organise or assemble large enough packages of land, possibly through compulsory purchase, which has been successful in some UDC areas?

I do not wish to be too political, but the Minister for Housing and Planning must do a little better. Some of his answers to parliamentary questions, particularly those asked by my hon. Friend the Member for Castle Point (Bob Spink), lack the detail or strategic thinking that I have been talking about. On 21 October 2004, my hon. Friend asked at column 861W how many fire stations and how many firemen and women will be required in the Thames gateway between 2003 and 2016—a fairly simple question, one would have thought. *[Interruption.]* I am going to read out the answer, which I shall quote verbatim from *Hansard*:

> "The information . . . is not held centrally, and could be provided only at disproportionate cost."—[*Official Report*, 21 October 2004; Vol. 425, c. 861W.]

If that is the usual level of detail that characterises thinking on the Thames gateway, the Minister must do much better, or the project will not get off the ground. Exactly the same answer was given in relation to leisure centres on 18 October 2004 at column 465W. Such matters of detail need to be thought through a little better.

Before concluding, I should like to deal with some of the details that have been mentioned this evening. I have spoken about the transport infrastructure, but we need to consider carefully where all those houses will go. I agree with my hon. Friend the Member for Castle Point that the Minister was incredibly sensitive about flooding. We must all be completely open about the problem of the flood plain and where we should build houses, because it would be monstrous to build houses that have any chance of being flooded whatsoever. Recently, there was a controversial planning application in Fairford in my constituency. It was nonsense—the local council turned down the application because the houses were likely to flood, but the Minister's inspector came along and said, "No, you can build the houses there, as they are not likely to flood and we have a proper flood attenuation scheme in place." The Minister said tonight that there is only a one in a thousand chance of houses flooding in the Thames barrier area, but we all know that climate change is making matters much more unpredictable. We all know that in large areas of housing, with large areas of tarmac and concrete where rainwater can run off quickly, the risk of flooding is much greater. We will want to study the Environment Agency flood maps with great care and in great detail to see where the houses are to be built. The Government are working hard with the insurance industry. I am glad to hear that, because the insurance industry will not want to insure houses that have any chance of flooding. Perhaps that will be our safeguard.

I should like to speak about design and density. Density may not be the universal theme of the gateway. There may be different densities in different parts. I have seen the detailed gateway plan and the Olympic bid plan. What is envisaged in those plans is first class. I hope the Government are successful in their Olympic bid. There is no stronger champion of it than I. The plan is excellent. It regenerates the lower Lea area, it will provide 3,000 social houses that will be left in the Olympic village after the games, and the plan will provide new green areas and water features. I went down to the Thames gateway offices in East London university to see the model for the gateway plan, and that plan is excellent too.

We must, however, concentrate carefully on design and density. There is nothing wrong with dense housing per se. After all, look at Kensington, where there are some 80 houses to the hectare. Nobody would say that Kensington was excessively dense, but in other areas—for example, in my rural areas—80 houses to the hectare would be far too many. There needs to be a harmonious mixture of medium-rise dense housing and less dense housing.

We are becoming more and more knowledgeable about the design of housing—for example, how we insulate houses properly so that they are heat efficient, and how we make them last longer. It is a monstrosity that pre-cast reinforced concrete houses that were built in the 1960s are being pulled down. We should be designing houses with a longer life than 40 years. It is perfectly possible to do it, and to design decent houses so that people on any level of income can live in comfort and in warmth. That should be our aim in building new houses.

Many other hon. Members wish to speak in the debate, so to sum up, the Thames gateway project is the most exciting regeneration project that the country has ever faced. There are huge opportunities to ensure that London and hence the United Kingdom becomes one of the foremost places going forward in the 21st century. Let us for goodness' sake build well and make sure that jobs are near the places where people will live. I wish the Government every success.

8.48 pm

Jonathan Shaw (Chatham and Aylesford) (Lab): Harold Wilson once made a famous speech at a public meeting in my constituency. He asked, "Why do I say that the Royal Navy is vital to the future of Britain?", and someone heckled him from the back and said, "Because you're in Chatham."

The Chatham dockyard was our heart and it is our proud history. In 1984—20 years ago now—it closed and thousands of people lost their jobs. Unemployment rose to almost 20 per cent. That was in the "Garden of England". People sometimes take the view that the county is prosperous, but we have had our difficult times. It was painful, but unemployment is now at a record low—about 3 per cent. The dockyard is once again breathing healthily. Once again it is the centre of employment, and of businesses, homes, schools and, most recently, a university. More than £20 million of Government money has been invested in the area.

This evening, hon. Members have discussed what will happen in the Thames gateway, but if they came to Medway, they would see that experience and that investment happening today. The university of Greenwich and the university of Kent are working alongside our further education college, and we have recently received money for a construction training centre to provide vital skills to build the gateway. Hon. Members have discussed people moving into the area, but we want jobs and opportunities for the existing communities.

Some £23 million has been invested in the development of brownfield sites. There has been some doubt whether the Government will put in the cash to ensure that land is decontaminated, but that is happening in the Medway towns. The idea of the Rochester/Chatham riverside development has been around since a Labour council entered office in 1991. My namesake, Councillor John Shaw, pioneered the Rochester/Chatham riverside, for which we have obtained £23 million. At one time, we had that aspiration and the Government supported our ideas, but their pocket was empty and so was ours; but thanks to this Government, we have got £23 million.

We are in good shape to meet the challenges of the Thames gateway, but like so many communities, we have our shopping list, too—some things are in the trolley, but we want a few extras. As many hon. Members have said, the challenge of getting the Thames gateway right means that not everyone will get everything they want. However, transport is a common theme flowing throughout the debate, and a consensus exists among MPs who represent constituencies within the Thames gateway that we must get the transport right.

I want to point to things that are already happening, such as private sector investment. Arriva, the main bus operator in Medway, has delivered £10 million of new buses around the Medway towns, because it recognises that the Medway towns are a growth area and that it can get more people on to its buses if it provides a regular,

[Jonathan Shaw]

reliable and quality bus for passengers, which it is doing. The number of passengers on those fantastic new vehicles, which were commissioned a few months ago, is growing.

We welcome the news about the channel tunnel rail link, which is one of the greatest engineering projects. I remember being in this House in 1998, when the project was seemingly doomed as a consequence of poor financial planning by the Conservative party. People forget that situation, but my right hon. Friend the Deputy Prime Minister, who is a great man, saved the project.

In Kent, we have had the pain of the channel tunnel rail link, and now we want some of the gain, which means a domestic service. I welcome the fact that my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Transport has ordered new bullet trains that will speed through the county—importantly, those trains will also stop in the county and in the Medway towns. We welcome that £200 million investment, and the trains will come on stream in 2009.

The channel tunnel rail link will be finished by 2007. I wonder whether my hon. Friend the Member for Gillingham (Paul Clark), who is currently taking notes, will tell us—his interest is as great as mine—whether the operator that gets the new integrated Kent transport franchise can use Eurostars. Some Eurostars are currently mothballed—can we use them during that two-year period?

It is 40 years since the Kent railway timetable was last reorganised. We await the new timetable, which will include the channel tunnel rail link domestic service. We do not want reduced services in 2006 and a three-year wait for replacement services. As the Thames gateway evolves, we must continually review and revise our train infrastructure and the timetable, which we must adapt according to people's work patterns. It is important that we do not have to wait another 40 years or so. I would like some answers on that.

I will skip through the next part of my speech. Many of the things that I was going to say have already been said, so I shall I do not delay the House any longer than I need to. I am sure that that will be popular.

For a dynamic area like the Thames gateway, we need continually to review our transport policies. When we look back 15 or 20 years from now, the question will be: did we enhance the communities and the lives of the people who already live there? Economic regeneration is vital but so is social regeneration.

Many of my constituents read the grand plans. They can see some of the things happening, but those do not necessarily touch them in their everyday lives. There is still too much litter around. There are too many alleyways and Victorian terraces that are full of rubbish. It is seemingly difficult to remove the rubbish, because the houses are in the private sector.

Are we getting it right in terms of the regeneration grants? Stamp duty reduction, for example, is a regenerator for the poorest wards in our communities, but where the scheme is situated in Medway is not where the poorest housing is. Those communities are stable. The scheme is run on a ward basis. It should not be, because wards can sometimes be skewed—they can contain a very poor area and a wealthy area alongside it, so we do not necessarily get the targeting of the resources that we want.

The scheme should be run on a polling district basis or on a street basis. There are concerns that some streets of inner Chatham, the inner city of the Medway towns, which I represent, are at tipping point. Too many houses are in multiple occupation. That will not encourage people to remain living there—it will encourage flight. There needs to be greater joined-up thinking between Departments in providing incentives for people to remain in the area, to get good deals—cheaper deals perhaps—and to take advantage of the grants that are already available.

There have been references to many community projects from hon. Members. I want to mention one—the All Saints neighbourhood project. That has been led by some commendable people living and working in the community around central Chatham. They have been involved with the clean-ups and getting the local community involved in the things they see when they step outside their front door: community projects, after school clubs, and improving play areas. Those are not the grand things, but they are important aspects of regeneration which the existing communities should feel part of. The grand plans are all very well but let us fix things that concern people in their daily lives. That is my greatest fear.

My hon. Friend the Minister is aware that my constituency crosses the boundary of the Thames gateway. I make this point for the communities that neighbour the gateway. The northern part of Tonbridge and Malling borough council is in my constituency. It is engaged with the Thames gateway process and is pleased to be able to do that. It is principally a green belt borough. It has land deposits but it cannot be an overspill site for the Thames gateway. If there are difficulties in achieving the housing on brownfield sites in the Thames gateway, the borough cannot be an overspill site. Perhaps my hon. Friend the Minister would like to refer to that in his winding-up speech.

Things in the Medway towns are already happening, and I have great faith that we will continue to deliver. All of us have a shopping list. It is only right that we stand here, occasionally poke the Minister in the ribs and remind him that there are some concerns as well as excitement, which many of us feel. I wish him and all his colleagues well in delivering a promising and bright future for my constituents.

8.59 pm

Clive Efford (Eltham) (Lab): Let me say at the outset how much I welcome the regeneration of the Thames gateway area and the opportunities that it offers to my constituents. Those of us who value debate in the House as an opportunity to put our points across will inevitably focus on areas of concern or areas in which we seek change, and I appeal to Ministers to take our remarks in that context rather than thinking that we are being negative about the prospects that the development offers our communities.

For too long, the east of London has been the poor relation in terms of economic development and opportunity. In the latter part of the last century we had enormous decline in the region, with the docks running down and a loss of industry. In the north of my borough, around Woolwich, 250,000 jobs disappeared in a generation from the Royal Arsenal—an incredible number of jobs to lose in one area. People who do not know the area may not realise that around Woolwich there are some of the most deprived communities to be found anywhere in the country. The regeneration of the Thames gateway will bring enormous change to their lives and to the vitality of the economy in east London, and it is well overdue.

On the day on which we have formally submitted our bid to host the Olympics, let me mention in passing the enormous opportunities that that brings to the area. I wish it every success.

When the regeneration is completed, it is intended to create about 180,000 jobs, as well as about 120,000 homes. Much of the land to be regenerated is in public ownership, and that offers us an opportunity to achieve a great deal more social housing than is currently contemplated. Every week, my surgery is full of families who have three generations living in the same house. Young people, now with children of their own, have grown up in houses built by Labour Governments and Labour local authorities, and they look to Labour now to provide the opportunities for them and their families that their parents had before them.

The process that we currently go through to develop social housing is invariably that we sell the local authority property to the private developer and then seek to negotiate back a proportion for social housing under section 106. I know from my discussions with housing associations that they would like to take on the management role for the development of some sites, so that they manage the whole project from beginning to end. They will sell some of the housing, so that we get mixed tenure: we are not talking about building huge council estates as we did in the past. We want to create balanced communities, achieving more from the value of the land to allow us to build more social housing.

We need partnership with social landlords to maximise social housing. I am not advocating social housing exclusively for local people. That has been a disaster in the past and would not help the regeneration of the Thames gateway and bring in the diversity of people that we need to participate in the local economy and industry and to provide public services. We need much more affordable housing than I fear we will get if we are to accommodate existing residents who want to rent property that they can afford, and those who will make the gateway regeneration a success if they move into the area.

Several Members have mentioned the obvious public services, such as health services and schools. Even the fire service was mentioned. A number of other public services do not spring to mind in the context of planning gain, however. I am thinking of supported housing units for people with learning disabilities, and further-education colleges. FE colleges need a great deal of capital. There will be an enormous demand for training in the area, and I think the negotiations should take that into account. My hon. Friend the Minister will probably say that all those issues have been taken on board, but I fear that they are lost in talk of health centres, schools and the like. They slipped off the shopping list when we are telling private developers what we want.

Much has been said about transport, but I want to say more about it. There is a plan to bring the docklands light railway to Woolwich in the north of my borough. As I have told my hon. Friend the Minister on several occasions, a swathe of south-east London is not served by the underground. We rely heavily on trains, as buses are still not considered an option for long-distance travel to and from central London. Bringing the DLR to Woolwich will enhance a major hub in south-east London. It benefits from several bus services and from rail services, but—in the medium term, at least—it will have the DLR as well.

According to the current plans to take Crossrail south of the river, it will bypass Woolwich. That will deprive people south of Greenwich and beyond of an essential link. The ability to use other forms of transport to reach a hub in the north of the borough could transform the way in which people reach their jobs each day, and could play a major part in relieving pressure on roads that are already much too congested. The lack of a Crossrail station will make it virtually impossible for large chunks of the population of south-east London to benefit from easy access to services.

An enormous amount of money is being invested in the Thames gateway bridge. My hon. Friend the Minister will say that the problems cannot be solved simply by diverting funds from the bridge—a road link—to Crossrail, but it is important to emphasise the importance of public-transport links.

For more than two decades Greenwich council undertook some surveys into poverty in south-east London, particularly in Greenwich. The results of the surveys highlighted that those who were socially excluded did not have access to a car. The argument that the regeneration of the Thames gateway and the opportunities for people who do not have a car are predicated on the development of a road does not stack up given the evidence that we have found in the past.

The argument was turned on its head when the congestion charge was introduced. It was said that people who did not have access to a car could not be disfranchised by the congestion charge. It is not possible to have it both ways. Either these people are in need of public transport links or they are not. We are planning to put an enormous amount of investment into the road. We are talking of the largest bridge to span the Thames in the London area. It will have two lanes for traffic and one lane for buses. Those of us who are more cynical than others could point to the fact that with bus lanes it is necessary only to change the colour of the tarmac to produce a three-lane motorway in each direction.

We shall see an increase in the amount of traffic on already congested roads on the south side of the river. In my opinion, the community in this part of south-east London will be divided in the long term. The people concerned will experience what everyone else experiences when they live near a bridge. When the bridges in west London were closed for repair, people argued that they should remain closed. They and their communities cherished the relief that the closures brought to them as a result of reduced traffic congestion. That will result in people saying, "We want relief from the traffic", and I believe that that will lead to them saying that they want a relief road. That will lead to the

[Clive Efford]

resurrection of the east London river crossing route, which has been the subject of so much controversy in south-east London.

The issue should be taken before a public inquiry. There is no evidence to support the economic contribution that it is claimed that the Thames gateway bridge will bring about through the creation of jobs. In his submission on the bridge, Professor Whitelegg said that there was little evidence about the types of jobs that would be created by the bridge. The assertion that it would create 48,000 jobs has now been omitted from the Mayor of London's transport strategy. The figures of Halcrow, the consultants, show little evidence of the role that the Thames gateway bridge will play in the creation of jobs. The economic case is thin.

There are environmental issues that need to be addressed and that can only be done by means of a public inquiry. That is essential if the bridge project is to go ahead. In terms of transport infrastructure development, it is so important that we place an emphasis on public transport. That is what will bring about access to jobs and opportunities for local people.

9.13 pm

Mr. Nigel Beard (Bexleyheath and Crayford) (Lab): The House has heard a great deal this evening with which I agree. The potential of the area for housing, for business and for the development of new jobs is there to be seen. The conditions in the area at present are not right to attract these new developments.

There has been a sequence of four or five studies going back 25 years, all of which have shown that the economic and social development of east London is inhibited and limited by the division of the area by the Thames. That is illustrated by the very few opportunities that exist to cross the Thames along the 15 miles to the east of Tower bridge compared with the vast number of opportunities that there are to do so in the 15 miles to the west, with the huge difference in the economic opportunities that exist there.

That, Mr. Deputy Speaker, is the true significance of the Thames gateway bridge. It will bridge the problem and it will mean that my constituents in Bexleyheath and Crayford, for example, will be able to look right through London for job opportunities, whereas their ambit is curtailed at present to 180°. The same applies to businesses coming into the area. Presently, businesses are trapped in an area that is badly served by road transport, albeit alleviated to an extent by the Thames road improvement in my area. Generally, it is a difficult area to get out of, which inhibits the ability to exploit the full market of the whole of Greater London. That is the true significance of the Thames bridge.

It also has a local role for London and for east London, in particular. Public transport provision will help to alleviate some of the potential traffic. As my hon. Friend the Member for Eltham (Clive Efford) suggested, there is some local anxiety about the project being essentially the old east London river crossing in a new guise, but it is not really that at all. The old east London river crossing was meant as a strategic route right through London, taking traffic from the rest of Britain and bringing it down to the Channel ports. This bridge is already designed as a local means of crossing the river.

Some anxiety remains in my constituency, particularly in the Brampton road area, about the possibility that the extra traffic generated will mean more traffic on the roads jeopardising the environment. I plead with Ministers to ensure that no penny pinching will take place in respect of minimising any environmental consequences of the bridge, which will play such a vital role for the development of east London. The minority who may suffer from increased traffic should not be caused to suffer when the benefits to the vast majority of the population are so large. We can afford generosity and sensitivity in dealing with their problems.

The other major project that will open up the potential of the area is, as my hon. Friend the Member for Ilford, North (Linda Perham) mentioned several times, Crossrail. It is particularly important to my constituents that it goes along the present alignment into south-east London from Canary Wharf, through the royal group of docks, on to Abbey Wood and then to Ebbsfleet. That alignment will take it through some of the largest areas for potential development anywhere in London: on the south bank of the Thames in north Greenwich and north Bexley. It will provide a link from the presently fairly isolated area of south London to Heathrow on the one side and to Ebbsfleet and the channel tunnel rail link on the other. The result will not be enhanced employment alone; it will enhance the whole quality of employment available in that area of London and make a very major contribution to regeneration.

I believe that there is some anxiety in the City and Canary Wharf, which now draws many employees from west London, that that will not continue to happen, as the growth of the financial services industry in the area continues. They will increasingly need to pull people in from east London generally, south-east and north-east London. That need will be catered for by Crossrail on the planned two alignments. As well as underpinning development in south-east London, Crossrail could also underpin the potential growth of the biggest financial services centre in the whole of the European Union. As it grows, it could become the dominant force in the EU.

If we are to achieve the potential for housing and businesses, the Thames bridge project and Crossrail must have definite timetables with enough finance behind them to give the private investor confidence that things will happen. If we have that, the private investment can come either before or alongside those developments. If, however, as has happened too often in the past, these become "this year, next year, some time, never" projects, the private sector will not have the confidence to bring investment in soon enough for us to gain real advantage. My plea is that Ministers ensure to the maximum extent possible that we have timetables for both the Thames bridge and Crossrail that are believable and that mean that private and public development go hand in hand.

Finally, the provision for Crossrail will come before the House in a Bill to prepare the ground. Can we ensure that the branch to Ebbsfleet from Canary Wharf is included in that as an integral part of the Crossrail project?

9.20 pm

Jon Cruddas (Dagenham) (Lab): There has been a lot of cross-party agreement tonight, so I hope that I will not add a note of disagreement at the end of the debate. I want to raise a few issues about local buy-in to the whole regeneration process across the Thames gateway, and I hope that that will be taken in the spirit intended. Before that, I should say that I welcome the debate, which has allowed us to take stock of where the Thames gateway discussions have got to. It has been a good debate.

My points relate specifically to my constituency and the sheer rate of change in the debate over the past few years. I entered into this discussion before I was elected to Parliament, when I worked in Downing street, because of economic transformations in the UK car industry. After BMW pulled the plug out of Rover in the west midlands, the next one on the runway would have been the Ford Dagenham plant. We got involved to manage the process of economic transformation and change, and that quickly got me involved in a series of economic and social relationships above and beyond the Ford Dagenham estate, to do with the work of the Thames Gateway London partnership and what was happening in terms of the single regeneration budget project at the heart of the Thames gateway.

What we decided during those difficult transformations in 1999–2000 is beginning to come on stream now. For example, in collaboration with the Mayor's office, the London Development Agency and the Department of Trade and Industry, we agreed to set up the Centre for Engineering and Manufacturing Excellence, which was opened last year by the Prime Minister on the Ford estate in my constituency. That is altering the life chances of local people in enabling them to take qualifications up to the most advanced postgraduate level in engineering and manufacturing, and that is much to be welcomed.

At the same time, we agreed a package to build a new Ford engine plant on the Dagenham estate, which the Prime Minister also opened last year. We are in discussions to increase capacity at the plant over the coming period to ensure that we have an enduring legacy of diesel technology and engine manufacture in Dagenham.

What was the SRB project around the heart of the Thames gateway has been transferred or consolidated into the London Riverside regeneration company. I should declare an interest as an LDA nominee on the board of that company and as an LDA nominee as a director on the CEME project.

All that is to be welcomed, and those are secure building blocks, which were developed during 1999–2000. Since then, there has been a massive intensification of the debate and policy developments around it. We have to ask why that has occurred. Obviously, we have had the Mayor of London's spatial economic development plan as well as strategies by which he can manage economic change and population movements in London by pushing the centre of gravity of policy making eastwards. That has come alongside the strategies of local boroughs, which have been in development for a number of years, to try to confront local issues of poverty and deprivation. At the same time, we have had the Government's national prioritisation of the Thames gateway, arising partly because the housing crisis in the south-east acts as a brake on broader patterns of economic change across other regions of the British economy. We have to put the brakes on interest rates because of that, meaning that growth is constrained elsewhere in the economy, irrespective of economic context in different regions. Secondly, as we saw in the review of our prospective entry into the euro, the housing market in the south-east constrains entry because of the possible effect that a reduced pan-European interest level would have in reigniting growth in the south-east. That would in turn have an effect on other regions in the UK.

Therefore, we have come a long way since I first got involved in 1999–2000 and the Government should be commended for the rigour with which they have approached the issue, the thinking behind some of the policy prescriptions and for turning it into a national priority, with its own Cabinet sub-committee. However, the various objectives of different levels of government with regard to the Thames gateway throw up different priorities and create tensions in the debate. The first concern is the structures and institutions involved. The number of institutions working in parallel on aspects of regeneration has already been pointed out—for example, the LDA, the boroughs, local regeneration partnerships, English Partnerships and the new London Thames Gateway Development Corporation. That all shows the commitment to regeneration, but we need a clear delineation of responsibilities, otherwise, we could create confusion, hesitation and fragmentation.

We should not concentrate all developments and priorities within certain sectors of the Thames gateway. That concern is felt in the London riverside area, in terms of the Olympic bid and the possible reprioritisation of projects towards the eastern area, at the expense of developments to the west within the urban development corporation boundaries. Transport infrastructure is also critical. I flag up the issue of the Thames gateway bridge, but I welcome the commitments that the Government have made, which my hon. Friend the Member for Bexleyheath and Crayford (Mr. Beard) mentioned.

All these aspects of the issue are welcome, but there is a brittleness about some of the decision making. My real concern is local community buy-in to the overall gateway strategy. As I said earlier, Dagenham sits at the geographical centre of the Thames gateway. It covers much of the London riverside part of the gateway and has a massive amount of brownfield land. Across the London riverside area, excluding Barking town centre, we anticipate some 20,000 new homes over the next 10 to 15 years. It is also one of the smallest boroughs in London and has a great strategic location.

Notwithstanding the future developments, change is already occurring at an astonishing rate. It is estimated that the population has increased by some 20,000 since 2001. That is partly because we have the lowest-cost housing market in Greater London. As house prices have risen, aspiring members of the property-owning democracy have gravitated towards the area, so that we have increased demand for housing in the borough. At the same time, the effect of the right-to-buy policy has meant a greater supply of private housing stock than previously. People are also ahead of the curve in terms of the Government's strategy for east London and are

[Jon Cruddas]

gravitating towards the Thames gateway because they foresee the future economic developments in the area.

Cumulatively, those elements are transforming the local community day by day. However, that is occurring even before we trigger the changes anticipated under the gateway proposals. That transformation is colliding with the long-term legacy of poverty, deprivation and underinvestment in public services in the locality. That is the crux of the issue of regeneration in Dagenham. A fundamental tension exists between our historic economic and social legacy, current changes that are transforming our community and the radical changes that are envisaged in the future. On top of all that, we have the toxic politics of race, operating within the context of limited resources, great need and rapid change, both now and in the future.

Consider, for example, some of the basic characteristics of the community. It is the lowest-wage economy in Greater London. Adult numeracy is the lowest in the country and adult literacy the fourth lowest, and the number of people with higher education qualifications is the lowest in the country. Heart and lung disease, infant mortality and life expectancy are among the worst in the capital.

Yes, we are seeing incremental change: some of the schools are the fastest improving not only in the capital but in the country, and new integrated health centres are being built across the borough. The new hospital at Oldchurch will, I hope, open in the next 18 months. That is all incrementally positive change—but it operates in the context of population expansion that places even greater tension and pressure on local public services.

Take, for example, health funding. We have an acknowledged serious under-capitation. Despite a recent generous settlement, we will be 10.7 per cent. under capitation in three years' time—one of only four primary care trusts nationally to be in that situation. That amounts to a year-on-year shortfall of £24 million a year in PCT funding, with no defined commitment to sorting it out.

That is before we even begin to consider the additional pressures arising from our own current population growth, let alone future population growth. Even on the basis of out-of-date population statistics, the discretionary Thames gateway funding for health is small beer in the context of that structural health funding problem. For example, this year we received some £700,000 to deal with the population changes, which is not a lot, given the £24 million annual shortfall.

My point is simple: we do not have enough resources to deal with our historic problems, let alone current and future changes. How does that manifest itself? Change is always difficult for people, and it is more difficult when resources are severely limited. For people to feel comfortable, they have to have confidence in change, and feel that it will benefit them and their families. At the moment there are not enough secure footings on the ground in terms of public service delivery for people to feel confident in the broader patterns of economic transformation.

Housing is another example. There are about 6,000 people on our waiting list in the borough. Historically, here more than almost anywhere else in the country, the local community has relied on the principle of council housing to deliver socialised housing provision. Yet last year, because of changes in the make-up of local authority social housing grant, the authority lost about £12 million on a couple of key sites, and had to establish its own partnerships with a developer so that it could maintain control of nominations to the social housing dwellings.

That has engendered real concerns about the ability to provide local homes for local people in the context of both current changes in the community and future housing developments with limited nominations for local people. Again, the lack of a base camp of confidence to deal with current problems undermines the confidence in future changes. The local population therefore feel threatened and concerned, and that rich brew of legacy versus current changes within the community, let alone future changes, manifests itself today in far-right activity. Two months ago, the British National party secured its first council seat for 11 years in the capital, in the constituency next to mine, and in the same borough. That development did not fall out of the sky; it is a manifestation of the tensions over resources in the context of changing communities and long-term historic need.

I have raised those points to illustrate some of the possible tensions surrounding future regeneration in the Thames gateway. In our community, the stakes are high. The jury is out on local buy-in to the whole gateway agenda. We must do more to build confidence in the community, and that must be translated into resources. Regeneration must be built on fairness that takes local people with the process of change. If it is not, the phrase "sustainable communities" will seem as a complete and utter misnomer.

I am confident about the agenda for change, but I do not underestimate some of the difficulties attached to it. For my community, the whole question of the Thames gateway can go in one of two ways. It could continue the previously repeated process by which people feel threatened and hostile because something is being done to them rather than with them, with the corresponding angry resentment that can be articulated in extreme forms. Alternatively, it could be a rewarding and liberating process of material, economic and social change that takes people with it and genuinely builds new sustainable communities. I am extremely confident that the Thames gateway agenda will take the latter route rather than the former, but I do not underestimate the difficulties attached to the process of change.

9.34 pm

Mr. John Hayes (South Holland and The Deepings) (Con): I draw the attention of the House to my interests in the Register, although they are not terribly relevant to tonight's deliberations. I also apologise for not being in the Chamber at the beginning of the debate—a fact that I had anticipated and of which I informed both, you, Mr. Deputy Speaker, and Members on the Treasury Bench.

This has been a good debate, but it is a tragic irony that the sustainable communities plan is neither sustainable nor really about communities. Conservatives believe it inappropriate to target development on areas where development pressure is already greatest. What does it really say about regeneration to put extra resources, build extra houses and create extra jobs in a corner of Britain that is already the most prosperous? What does that say about job creation for people in areas where unemployment is still a blight?

The Thames gateway, though, is different, qualitatively and quantitatively, from the rest of the sustainable communities plan. It is different because the development is largely on brownfield land and thus implicitly regenerative; different, too, because of its location. Our fundamental doubts about the Government's strategy and our doubts about the sustainability of their communities plan are not all reflected in our views about the Thames gateway project.

I remind the House that we are not alone in doubting the suitability and viability of the Government's programme for housing development. My hon. Friend the Member for Castle Point (Bob Spink) highlighted the severe concerns of his constituents about housing numbers, but it is not only them—important though they are. The Office of the Deputy Prime Minister Select Committee described the impact of the Government's housing programme on the environment as potentially "unsustainable". The Committee said:

> "The impact of developing so many homes in the South East, one of the most densely populated regions in Europe, has not been fully assessed . . . The additional homes could place excessive demands on the environment, leading to the loss of green-field sites and excessive pressure on the water supply and other natural resources . . . The Government . . . has yet to estimate the costs of providing the transport links, health care, education and all the other facilities which new neighbourhoods require."

The Committee has delivered its verdict on the Government; it is not a happy one for the Minister who will reply to the debate.

In a series of speeches, we have heard real questions about several aspects of the development. We have heard questions about environmental issues, infrastructure issues and project management. I shall deal with them in turn, beginning with the environmental concerns.

There are issues about water resources that have yet to be properly answered. We know that water resources in the south of England—in the capital, in Kent and Essex—are already under pressure and the Minister must give us firm answers to the relevant questions. There are issues about developments on the flood plain. I take the view of the Minister for Housing and Planning that flood risk needs to be assessed in terms of flood record. As I represent the fens in Lincolnshire, I understand that one cannot say that simply because an area is at risk, irrespective of its record of flooding and its existing defences, one should not build there. If that were the case, my constituency would not exist and that would be a monstrous thing, as the whole House will agree. The Minister is right: record and risk need to be balanced but, nevertheless, the hon. Member for Kingston and Surbiton (Mr. Davey) put some important questions about that matter and we need more than the dismissive answer he was given.

There are also issues about the effect of the development on air quality. I should like to hear answers on that subject in the Minister's summing up, as well as on the issues raised by the hon. Member for Thurrock (Andrew Mackinlay) about biodiversity, wildlife and green spaces. My hon. Friend the Member for Castle Point also talked about the impact of the development on the quality of life. Those issues, too, deserve an answer and I know that the Minister is well equipped to deal with them all in considerable detail in the time available.

Perhaps even more fundamental than those environmental concerns are the concerns about infrastructure that have been debated at some length during our deliberations. The hon. Member for Ilford, North (Linda Perham), in a telling phrase, said that the lack of infrastructural investment inhibits opportunity. She said that was especially damaging to the interests of her poorer constituents. She is right.

The hon. Member for Dartford (Dr. Stoate) said—I use his words—that pressing on without dealing with the infrastructural challenges would be the greatest mistake. Other hon. Members have questioned the issues associated with a balance between jobs and transport. I particularly highlight the contribution made by my hon. Friend the Member for Cotswold (Mr. Clifton-Brown), who always speaks with great authority on these matters. He gave us the figures, and they were stark: 240,000 extra people and 55,000 extra jobs; that involves a large number of people travelling, and they need high quality transport infrastructure to do so efficiently, at their comfort and with appropriate ease. Yet there are still enormous gaps in the information that the Government have made available to us.

Mr. Clifton-Brown: My hon. Friend has touched on the most important thing in the debate: it is not just a question of all those people travelling, but where they travel to. The Government have not identified what are the industries and businesses of the future—the next 10 to 20 years—to which those people will travel, but we hope that we can create those businesses on their doorsteps and make them environmentally sustainable.

Mr. Hayes: We hope that we can do so, but until the Government come up with persuasive answers to the important questions that have been asked by hon. Members on both sides of the House tonight, we cannot be certain. It would not be appropriate to proceed, as the hon. Member for Dartford said, unless we are reasonably certain about these fundamental matters.

The Government have been repeatedly asked to articulate how the infrastructure provision for the communities plan projects, particularly the Thames gateway, will be funded. The ODPM has stated that the finances for the Thames gateway development corporation have not been fully determined and that part of the funding will come from the £446 million allocated for regeneration from the last Government spending review. Not only is that explanation inadequate, but so is the funding.

The Library pack prepared for the debate includes extracts from the Thames gateway regional spending plan, but I do not know whether any hon. Member noticed that there are no figures in that spending plan. The conclusion says:

> "The Thames gateway London partnership will be in a position to comment more fully on its proposed framework for area-based schemes once Transport for London issues further clarification on the timing and content of revised Guidance."

[Mr. Hayes]

The project faces massive funding problems, and there are massive doubts about the effectiveness of the infrastructure. We have heard from a variety of Members about the need for Crossrail, but the Government have yet to provide clear answers on that either.

There are conflicting views about the bridge. I heard what the hon. Member for Bexleyheath and Crayford (Mr. Beard) said about the paucity of provision on the east side of London. I was born in south-east London, at Woolwich, as generations of my family have been, so I can speak with some authority about the Thames, and I was pleased to grow up in Eltham. I was delighted that the hon. Member for Eltham (Clive Efford) contributed to the debate. He is right to say that such things are difficult and create limited opportunities for people travelling to work and leisure and for all kinds of other purposes, but I have doubts about the bridge because independent analysis, which he mentioned, has questioned whether the project is appropriate and whether it will deliver what it was once said that it might. Again, that requires Government clarification and comment. We cannot be left in the dark any longer about those matters.

The issue of project management has been raised. It is often said that too many cooks spoil the broth, and plenty of cooks are involved in this project, are they not? The number of organisations, the lack of accountability and the range of conflicting agendas have been mentioned by many hon. Members.

People are not mere units and homes are not just buildings. This project must be about building real communities, not soulless sprawling estates of houses that have little to offer beyond ubiquity. We must look beyond utility to grace and beauty; each home should be in keeping with its neighbour, and each settlement should be in tune with the prevailing landscape—ergonomically, ecologically and environmentally sustainable. Real communities are mixed communities: jobs and leisure, shops and open spaces, churches, schools, clubs and pubs—all the little platoons with their individual intricacies, courtesies and civilities that together make up civilised life.

A number of key questions remain. Will the Minister in summing up clarify the infrastructural shortfalls? Will he consider ways to address them by using public funds to trigger private investment? It has been estimated that we need 55 primary schools, 10 secondary schools, nine leisure centres and six playing fields, as has been mentioned by my hon. Friend the Member for Cotswold and by inference by the hon. Members for Chatham and Aylesford (Jonathan Shaw) and for Thurrock. Will the Minister also deal with the fundamental issue of transport?

Will the Minister commit to determining the extent of this development by using environmental, ecological and infrastructural criteria? That means air, water, biodiversity, flooding, but also "liveability" to use a term that the Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs has used. Will it be a good place to live?

Will the Minister look again at the shortfall in the skills necessary to deliver the project that was identified by the chairman of the Commission for Architecture and the Built Environment? He said that the project could not be sustained on the basis of inadequate skills and pointed out:

> "There are simply not enough people with the right skills to do the job. This is the biggest single barrier to the achievement of the Communities Plan."

Will the Minister rethink what sustainability really means? That means reviewing RPG9A and redesignating sufficient land that is currently earmarked for employment for residential purposes. It means understanding that living communities are mixed and diverse communities. They make demands on active citizens and pay them back in the currency of the joy of shared identity and pride.

Will the Minister raise the bar in respect of design? All that we build should add to what is there. Appropriate standards in design, density, access to amenities, layout and green spaces will engender a sense of place, distinctiveness and deliver an aesthetic feel-good factor.

We plant trees for those born later, and we build houses for them too. This is an opportunity to be grasped or an enormous mistake to be made. Beyond party, this Government have an opportunity and this House has a duty to make the right decisions. If we do not, those born later will not forgive us.

9.46 pm

The Minister of State, Department for Transport (Mr. Tony McNulty): This has been a thoughtful and reflective debate, for which I am grateful. Clearly, I cannot answer in 13 minutes all the questions that were asked, but I shall begin by saying a few words by way of introduction.

The contribution of the Opposition Front-Bench spokesman was interesting. He clearly swallowed the lexicography of the sustainable communities plan and regurgitated it at his leisure. I can cheerfully say that we are heading in precisely the direction that he outlined on all the major points that he mentioned. I shall come to some of them in detail later.

I welcome what I thought was an offer to treat the issue in a cross-party or non-party basis. In my year as a Minister responsible for housing regeneration in the Office of the Deputy Prime Minister and subsequently as a Transport Minister, I have taken the firm view that we have a once-in-a-lifetime opportunity to get this right. It is a massive undertaking and one of the problems in the debate is that we have confused two to three-year horizons with 15, 20 or 30-year horizons. If the task is undertaken properly, it will take a generation and more to see it through to completion.

I fully endorse the hon. Gentleman's comments about the durability and sustainability of the project. I am grateful, in the main—I know that there are local concerns, and I will come to them—that people have eschewed the notion that the gateway, which he referred to in the context of the wider sustainable communities plan, is all about concreting over every blade of grass between here and Southend and Manston airport in Kent and that, if we are not concreting it over, we will face serious difficulties with flooding. I shall come to the serious concerns about flooding later, but I am grateful to the House that the debate has not taken place in the stunted playground context in which serious debates about planning regeneration often take place.

The Government have taken on board real local concerns. We are serious about sustainability and infrastructure investment in the broadest context. I entirely accepted what hon. Members said about health, education and other forms of social infrastructure being equally as important as transport, which is my specific responsibility. I also accept that biodiversity, the green dimension, liveability and quality of life are equally important. The charge that such issues are being ignored is not well made.

I heartily supported what I thought was—in the end—the endorsement of my hon. Friend the Member for Dartford (Dr. Stoate) for the entire project. He said that it would be a mistake to press on without appropriate infrastructure, and I think that everyone in the Chamber is with my hon. Friend on that—perhaps the right hon. Member for Wokingham (Mr. Redwood) would not agree, but we will leave him to one side on his own planet.

It is not appropriate to cite Eastern Quarry as a problem. I have said publicly while sitting next to a leading representative of the company that it is inappropriate for a land security developer to spend more than a year faffing with its traffic assumptions without sharing them with other public bodies that have the right to know how a specific development would fit with the rest of the transport infrastructure. We are not making mistakes in that regard. The situation is still one of drip-feeding, so we need to go beyond that.

I tell the hon. Member for Kingston and Surbiton (Mr. Davey) and others who raised the matter that I am sad in that I still read "Regeneration and Renewal" and avidly wait for my copy each week. I thought that the specific article about myriad organisations was simplistic to the point of being fatuous and that it let down the publication. We are trying slowly in some cases, although faster in others, to get all assorted organisations and public bodies—elected and otherwise—in each and every area together so that we can start to sing with a united voice. That is difficult, but standing on the outside and talking at length about the complexity and difficulty of the task of bringing many bodies together is fatuous and adds nothing to the debate.

It is appropriate for the Highways Agency to deal with the major strategic roads in this country, but it is equally appropriate for it to sit down and talk to Dartford, Medway, and other delivery bodies. It is appropriate for Basildon to lead Basildon's renaissance and contribution to regeneration in the gateway, but it is also appropriate for Essex county council, English Partnerships, the train operators and others to have a voice. The trick is drawing all bodies together to focus on what is needed in a specific area and to determine how that fits with the wider strategic concerns of south Essex, north Kent or the whole gateway. It is easy to sit on the sidelines saying, "Oh look, there's 14 organisations." The hon. Member for Kingston and Surbiton read a good number of them out, but although that is a clever little fourth-form debating point, it adds nothing to the substance of the debate. If complexities and overlaying contributions still exist, they must be busted through. That is exactly what is happening in Thurrock and Basildon, and with Renaissance Southend and others. We have started from the premise that it is usually more appropriate, especially in south Essex and north Kent, for localities to choose their delivery mechanisms and to bring together all those involved.

The hon. Member for Croydon, South (Richard Ottaway), who is not in the Chamber, seemed to suggest that the easy answer was to apply a fully-blown London Docklands development corporation from Southend and the north Kent coast all the way back to the Isle of Dogs. He said that the LDDC was such a wonderful example of how to move forward on these issues that we should simply recreate it. As the hon. Member for Kingston and Surbiton suggested, the LDDC was a complete disaster in its early days. It did not recognise the concept of community buy-in to which my hon. Friend the Member for Dagenham (Jon Cruddas) referred or the notion that communities existed. We think that urban development corporations are appropriate for east London, despite some concerns that were raised, and for Thurrock, when they are contiguous with borough boundaries. Other delivery mechanisms are appropriate elsewhere, but there should not be a LDDC incarnate in any shape or form.

The concerns expressed about flood plains and flooding are genuine. New planning policy guidance note 25 goes far further than anything in the past. At each and every step, there will be, as we said, a flood risk assessment of the plans submitted by every delivery body and of the plans and applications from the Office of the Deputy Prime Minister. There has been engagement with the Environment Agency from day one on the series of issues relating to flooding. The problem is not new, but, as my right hon. Friend the Minister suggested, the area is well protected in terms of flood alleviation and much better protected than most of the country. However, that does not mean that we are complacent because we have to keep on the case.

My right hon. Friend spoke of the criteria and the drift—let me say that and no more—towards scaremongering. Some 17 London boroughs would be under water or in serious difficulty were it not for the Thames barrier and flood alleviation measures. I take the point that those should be kept under review, and they are.

Some of the general points about transport have merit if we are looking across a 20 to 30-year horizon. I firmly believe—I have always said this and have got into trouble with colleagues from Essex and Kent for doing so—that although there can be significant development in north Kent, Basildon and some of the other urban parts of Essex, the key success to the gateway on the initial five to seven-year horizon is at the London end.

Mr. Hayes *rose—*

Mr. McNulty: I apologise, but I do not have time to give way.

To suggest that the transport infrastructure planned for London is insufficient is abject nonsense. It is going in the right direction. Of course more should be done, but if we include the schedules suggested by the Transport for London business plan, the best part of £1 billion will be invested in transport infrastructure over the next three years throughout the gateway. That is not money for plans, working parties or fancy offices for the myriad organisations mentioned by the hon. Member for Kingston and Surbiton, but money for real projects.

[Mr. McNulty]

On the Thames gateway bridge and the DLR North Woolwich, the London end needs to be developed alongside developments elsewhere. The redevelopment of the London end will contribute nearly half the houses in the gateway, but we would commit a significant mistake in public policy terms if, because of an historical anomaly, south London were left out. So we need the DLR to go under the Thames to Woolwich Arsenal and the Thames gateway bridge for local traffic.

Much has been done in all matters raised. Hon. Members will forgive me if I do not go near the topic of Shell Haven. I am the planning Minister involved in that and cannot talk about the application in any way, shape or form because I will determine the decision in the near future. In terms of jobs, we do not want to recreate the mistakes of the past by having linear commuter dormitory towns, with people flooding back into London, as the hon. Member for Cotswold (Mr. Clifton-Brown) said. Of course we need jobs in the area in the right place for the right people.

The learning and skills councils are jointly considering the skills audit and the skills deficiencies. Colleagues in other Departments are working with us in the ODPM and the Department for Transport to ensure that all aspects of the infrastructure develop alongside the assorted communities so that we grasp the potential in the gateway. We should stop talking about it. The shift of London's economic focus to the east and away from the west has been talked about incessantly for probably hundreds of years—it certainly predates the 1930s. We have the infrastructure investment plans necessary for the next wave of gateway investment. Of course, more needs to be done in the 20 to 30-year vista. However, across the piece, we are going in the right direction regarding infrastructure. Mistakes will be made along the way, but if a cross-party consensus can be forged, we have an historic, national and, I venture to say, international opportunity to put the UK on the map—

It being Ten o'clock, the motion for the Adjournment of the House lapsed, without Question put.

PETITION

Iraq

10 pm

Bob Spink (Castle Point) (Con): The Magna Carta, the Act of 1406 and the William and Mary Bill of Rights of 1688 all gave rights to citizens to petition the Government. MPs have a duty to present petitions, even where the terms of the petition may be disagreeable to them personally. I disagree with the terms of the petition on the war on Iraq that I am about to present. The Iraqi people, the region and the world will benefit in the longer term from the war, even though its prosecution has been poorly directed. We can all agree, however, that our forces on the ground are acting with great courage and professionalism and, where necessary, with compassion.

The petition states:

To the Honourable Commons of the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland in Parliament Assembled.

The Humble Petition of Mr. Chris Keen, Mrs. Irene Willis, Ms Petchy and others of like disposition sheweth.

That there is deep concern over the conduct of the war in Iraq and for the humanitarian situation currently in Iraq.

Wherefore your Petitioners pray that your Honourable House shall urge the Government to withdraw the support of British Troops for Bush's massacres in Iraq's cities and the senseless slaughter of civilians which is making a desperate situation even worse.

And your Petitioners, as is duty bound, will ever pray.

To lie upon the Table.

Health Service Funding (Barnsley)

Motion made, and Question proposed, That this House do now adjourn.—*[Mr. Watson.]*

10.1 pm

Mr. Eric Illsley (Barnsley, Central) (Lab): I am grateful for the opportunity to raise the funding of health services in the Barnsley area. This is not the first occasion on which I have done so in an Adjournment debate, as you, Mr. Speaker, and the Under-Secretary of State for Health, my hon. Friend the Member for South Thanet (Dr. Ladyman), are probably aware.

Health funding in Barnsley has been a problem for several years, mainly because the area has one of the greatest needs for health services in the country, but it is among the lowest funded. Over the years, our area, which used to be part of the former Trent health authority, has been funded well below the 100 per cent. target. It is now said that we are funded below our fair share, which is a more descriptive and apt phrase. We have a high level of health need in Barnsley, but our funding simply does not reflect that.

I shall go into further details later, but first I shall give some background and highlight a few issues affecting Barnsley's health services. To some extent, they are good news stories. First, Barnsley district general hospital is currently being considered for the award of foundation status, and we are optimistic that a positive decision will be made. I wish to place on record my congratulations to all the hospital staff, who worked hard to achieve the three-star ratings over two years that enabled the application to proceed. We await the decision with interest. Secondly, Barnsley has opened the first three facilities under the LIFT—local improvement finance trust—programme nationwide. It has provided three needy communities within the Barnsley area with excellent new health facilities, and we are proud that we were the first area to open such facilities. That 10 million investment is probably the biggest investment in primary and community health facilities that Barnsley has ever had. At this point I should flag up a caveat. The primary care trust signed contracts for a number of LIFT facilities before funding under the LIFT programme was restricted because of high demand. That could lead to contractual problems and funding concerns in the near future.

Another success story is the e-booking system, or choose and book, as it is called in the Barnsley area. Barnsley is proud that a local general practitioner was the first to implement the service, under the pathfinder or early implementer pilot scheme. Despite an article on the subject that appeared in *The Sunday Times* yesterday, which reported that the programme had been frozen, I am reliably informed today that the programme is continuing in the Barnsley area and is working well. It provides patients with a choice of hospital date to see their consultant.

Intermediate treatment centres are another innovation for which the local PCT is signed up, but we need to encourage more take-up by the local populace. We are contracted for a five-year period and unless people attend the centres, there will be financial consequences. It is worth noting that our waiting lists are comparatively low and we do not have problems of bed blocking in our area. We are fully behind the Government's programmes and initiatives relating to health. We are delighted to have had those two firsts under the LIFT programme and the choose and book programme, but we have a continuing problem with regard to funding.

To provide some background to the situation in Barnsley, I refer my hon. Friend the Minister to the 2002–03 annual audit letter from the Audit Commission in respect of Barnsley PCT. Under the heading "Key messages" the Audit Commission commented:

> "We have found that the Trust has made good progress since its inception in April 2002. There is evidence of progressive initiatives that indicate an energy and desire to develop appropriate and quality healthcare services for the residents of Barnsley in partnership with other local agencies.
>
> This is praiseworthy, particularly as the funding locally falls well below that indicated by the funding formula developed by the Department of Health. The shortfall not only restricts the PCT's ability to develop services required to meet the NHS Plan targets, but also constrains management capacity to implement further change initiatives.
>
> This creates a very difficult climate in which to develop services as quickly as the PCT might wish."

Later in the same audit letter, under the heading "Financial standing", the Audit Commission made further comments in relation to Barnsley's funding situation:

> "The Trust met its financial targets in 2002/2003. In the current year, significant pressures exist. Although the Trust is projecting a break-even position, this is only achievable by using non-recurrent measures to meet a recurrent revenue deficit estimated at £5 million. This clearly is not sustainable. Ultimately, either services will have to be downgraded, or, under the present financial regime, financial balance may not be achieved."

I am speaking of 2002–03—I will come to the present situation in a moment—to highlight the background to the continuing shortfall in our finances. The Audit Commission went on to deal with our financial standing in 2003–04 and reported:

> "While the Trust is forecasting a break-even position for 2003/2004, there is a significant recurrent revenue deficit. This is being met by non-recurrent means. Overall therefore the financial position is unbalanced and requires fundamental adjustment, preferably by a significant uplift in funding."

The Audit Commission continued:

> "The Barnsley health community has, based on DoH target funding, been under-funded for several years. For example the difference between target funding and actual funding for 2003/2004 is a shortfall of £13.6 million. As a consequence, there has always been a need to exercise stringent control to maintain financial balance. However, this is aggravated in an environment where the same targets apply nationally, and local performance is judged against those targets, without recognition of the reduced funding available to meet them.
>
> Financial pressures this year are markedly higher than in 2002/2003. Although the PCT is projecting a break even position for the year end, there is a significant recurrent deficit estimated to be some £5m.
>
> The original plans were for this deficit to be met by means of:
>
> £2m brokerage from South Yorkshire Strategic HA
>
> £1m capital to revenue transfer
>
> £2m from future funding allocations that could be applied to the deficit."

Even with those savings, the PCT was still required to find a further £2 million of savings.

[Mr. Eric Illsley]

The Audit Commission summed up the position:

> "The general situation is unsatisfactory, and cannot be sustained indefinitely. Developments to meet NHS plan targets are at risk of failure because of inadequate funding. It is difficult to maintain incentives to find efficiency savings when all savings found must be used to meet the underlying deficit."

Having discussed 2002–03, the letter examined 2003–04, for which the story was exactly the same. The letter stated the position at the end of the financial year 2003–04 and pointed out the problems for 2004–05:

> "The PCT achieved financial balance in 2003/04, although overspending on prescribing was funded from slippage on new developments . . . The PCT has a good record for robust financial control but faces very significant challenges over the medium term."

This is the important passage:

> "For 2004/05 the PCT recognised a deficit of some £15.6m in the LDP process, which prompted a request for planned brokerage from the SHA of £9.7m. This combined with a non-recurrent recovery plan to be developed by the PCT would achieve financial balance in 2004/05. The PCT has developed a recovery plan to release £6.6m savings during 2004/05; however we understand that the SHA is not yet in a position to formally guarantee the delivery of the planned brokerage. As a consequence financial balance remains at risk.
>
> In subsequent years, the roll out of payment by results will start to impact on funding and payment issues."

For how long can Barnsley PCT be required to broker huge sums of money to meet those funding shortfalls? In the previous financial year, it provided £2 million of brokerage, and it is required to broker £9 million to achieve financial balance at the end of this financial year. Basically, it must make £6 million of cuts in the current financial year to meet that break-even position. How long can it continue to borrow such sums while making cuts at the same time?

In 2005–06, Barnsley will receive £15.5 million less than its fair share of resources, and the allocation of resources—it is known as "the pace of change"—means that we are unlikely to reach our 100 per cent. target before 2015. We are in danger of replacing what we used to call the postcode lottery on health care with a postcode funding lottery.

What are the effects of the shortfall in funding? The 18-week target for "see and treat" will provide a major improvement to patient care. However, the shortfall will have an impact on acute capacity. For Barnsley, that capacity is likely to cost £20 million from now until 2008. Barnsley PCT simply does not have the resources to deliver that 18-week target. I make a plea to the Minister. Future funding allocations must recognise that. We must either reduce the target in relation to our PCT or improve the resources available to it.

I have already mentioned the LIFT programme. Improving primary care is a national and local priority. We need to improve access, and the range and quality of services. To do that in Barnsley, we need between eight and 10 primary care centres. I have mentioned that we have three already. Those are funded from the general medical services contract and from the NHS bank, but the funding is now over-committed and, as a consequence, is being rationed. Therefore further developments have to be funded from baseline allocation. Barnsley PCT simply cannot allocate any more funds to the LIFT programme, so our development is likely to be curtailed, although we may achieve one more LIFT initiative.

There is a fear that the local private-public partnership LIFT company, which was established to deliver that programme, could face insolvency very soon. Obviously, because of the unavailability of further GMS revenue funding, any further GP-led primary care developments are likely to be curtailed. So having been led to believe that we were to get up to 10 new premises, we will be lucky to achieve four. That is simply unfair.

I have outlined clearly my concerns regarding the funding of Barnsley PCT. As I have mentioned, we have high levels of need, mortality and morbidity—some of the highest in the country. To give two quick examples, a boy born today in the most disadvantaged part of Barnsley can expect to live 12 years less than a boy born today in an affluent part of England, and Barnsley's death rate is 15 per cent. higher than the England and Wales average. As I have pointed out, ours is one of the lowest funded health authorities in the area and it constantly struggles to balance the books. It is high time that struggle was ended and our financial situation once and for all improved.

10.17 pm

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Health (Dr. Stephen Ladyman): I congratulate my hon. Friend the Member for Barnsley, Central (Mr. Illsley) on securing the debate and on his continuing interest in the health service in his constituency. He and my hon. Friend the Member for Barnsley, East and Mexborough (Jeff Ennis), who I see in his place, have raised before in the House their concerns about health service funding in Barnsley and have also discussed the matter with the Secretary of State for Health, so tonight is by no means an exceptional demonstration of their commitment to the NHS in Barnsley.

I am also aware that a meeting tomorrow evening has been organised by the coalfield communities campaign, which, I believe, is based in Barnsley, to discuss the specific issue of health service funding in coalfield areas. I do not know whether my hon. Friends will be at the meeting, but I hope that it goes well. As Thanet and Dover, the two councils that represent my own constituency, are members of the campaign, I have a personal interest in their success.

I do not disagree with what my hon. Friend the Member for Barnsley, Central said. He set out the case fairly and accurately but perhaps not quite in its full context. I start by putting it in context. The national health service in England is benefiting from record investment. Over the years 2003–04 to 2007–08, expenditure on the NHS in England is increasing on average by 7.2 per cent. a year over and above inflation, a total increase over the period of 42 per cent. in real terms. That will take the total spent on the NHS in England from £69 billion in 2004–05 to £92 billion in 2007–08.

Along with other areas, Barnsley is benefiting from this record level of investment and, I am pleased to say—my hon. Friend put this fairly in his contribution—has been making effective use of the resources it has received. Barnsley primary care trust is receiving £247.7 million in the current financial year, increasing to

£270.7 million in 2005–06. In total, over the period 2003–04 to 2005–06, the increase in funding available to Barnsley PCT is more than £64 million, or 31 per cent.

That is a real and significant level of investment in health services in Barnsley, and it has produced real benefits for local people. For example, all the residents of Barnsley are able to make an appointment to see a GP within two working days and no one in the Barnsley area now waits more than 13 weeks for a first out-patient appointment or more than nine months for in-patient treatment. Barnsley district general hospital provides excellent services for local people: 98 per cent. of people with suspected cancer see a specialist within 48 hours, and 97 per cent. of patients are in and out of accident and emergency within four hours.

New building and facilities are also coming on line. Later this month, three new primary care centres developed as part of the first wave of the local improvement finance trust will open in Goldthorpe, Thurnscoe and Worsborough, while at the district general hospital new imaging and breast cancer services are being developed. None of these major improvements would have happened if we had not elected a Labour Government in 1997, as my hon. Friend would be the first to acknowledge, and none of them would have been made without the dedication and hard work of people on the ground, and I join him in commending the staff working in the local NHS for their dedication in bringing about real improvements to health services in Barnsley.

A few moments ago, I mentioned the allocation of money to my hon. Friend's PCT, so let me explain how the Department of Health decides what funds primary care trusts should receive. Clearly, different parts of the country have different health needs. The national resource allocation formula, which is used to inform revenue allocations for PCTs, recognises that fact. The formula is based on the age distribution of the population, additional need over and above that accounted for by age, and the unavoidable geographical variations in the cost of providing services.

The formula was criticised in the past for failing to get health services to the areas of greatest health need. Getting resources to people with greatest need and ensuring equity of treatment are fundamental principles of faith for this Government, so we carried out a wide-ranging review of the formula, under the auspices of the Advisory Committee on Resource Allocations, aimed at producing a fairer means of allocating resources.

The review was completed in autumn 2002, in advance of the current allocations to PCTs. The allocations were announced in December 2002 and were based on the new formula. The allocations, of £148 billion—a cash increase of more than 30 per cent.—were then made directly to local PCTs. In 2001, we proudly proclaimed in the NHS plan:

> "by 2003, following the review of the existing weighted capitation formula used to distribute NHS funding, reducing inequalities will be a key criterion for allocating resources to different parts of the country."

I am equally proud to say we have delivered on that promise.

The pattern of use of health services, and the relationship with socio-demographic factors, have changed in the past 10 years, so the element of the formula that reflects need has been updated to include better measures of deprivation. For the first time, the formula takes account of "unmet need" in relation to certain groups within the population—for example ethnic minorities and socio-economically deprived groups.

The new formula also deals with the variation in labour market pressures across the country. We need to able to get funds into areas where recruitment and retention difficulties are greatest—and I am aware that there is a shortage of GPs in Barnsley.

The new formula provides a better measure of health need in all areas. In order to get resources in the right place, we need to get the balance right between areas of high health need and those with high labour costs. For all these reasons, I am confident that the allocations to PCTs announced in 2002 set us on the right path.

Jeff Ennis (Barnsley, East and Mexborough) (Lab): I congratulate my hon. Friend the Member for Barnsley, Central (Mr. Illsley) on his excellent speech, and associate myself with most, if not all, of what he said. I accept that the Minister sincerely wants to redress the current imbalance in Barnsley. However, in 2001—before South Yorkshire secured objective 1 funding—my constituency had a lower gross domestic product per capita than any other United Kingdom constituency. It still has one of the lowest levels of GDP per capita, and it also still has the highest level of disability: one in three households contains at least one disabled person. That is obviously a legacy of the former mining industry.

My constituency is divided between Barnsley and Doncaster health authorities. Two thirds of my constituents live in Barnsley; the other third live in Doncaster. Doncaster enjoys funding up to the national average, while Barnsley's funding is 3 per cent. less than the national average. I am finding it increasingly difficult to explain to my constituents in Barnsley that my constituents in Doncaster enjoy much more generous health funding under the present Government. My hon. Friend says that the gap will not be closed until 2015. Will the Minister try to give me a better explanation, which I can convey to my Barnsley constituents, of the current funding inadequacies?

Dr. Ladyman: Certainly. If my hon. Friend will bear with me, he will find that my later remarks explain the position.

The new formula provides a better measure of health need in all areas. It is right to move from the old formula and distribute health funding to a new one, which will benefit Barnsley considerably in the long term. I hope that my hon. Friend agrees, however, that it would not be sensible to swing violently from one formula to another overnight, with all the negative consequences that that would bring for some areas. This is very relevant to the point raised by my hon. Friend the Member for Barnsley, East and Mexborough. We clearly need to phase in the change to allow PCTs to manage the consequences sensibly.

That said, I assure my hon. Friends that we are committed to bringing PCTs to their target allocations as soon as is practicable. The pace-of-change policy is decided for each allocations round and the policy varies

[Dr. Ladyman]

from round to round to take account of a number of factors, including the overall level of resources available and the priorities for their use. By next year—2005–06—no PCT will be more than 6 per cent under target, and PCTs will be constrained to a maximum reduction in distance from target each year of 2 per cent for any one year.

The progress made to date in Barnsley is considerable, but has taken place in the context of a tight financial position. I do not dispute any of the points that my hon. Friends have made about the financial allocation to Barnsley PCT, but they should also be clear about the impact of our funding policy on Barnsley. The new formula's emphasis on directing funding towards areas with higher rates of deprivation, and our policy of moving all PCTs, mean that Barnsley PCT has received a greater increase in funding over the current three-year period than would otherwise have been the case. It amounts to a total increase of £64 million, equivalent to 31 per cent.

I know that both my hon. Friends would like me to make a commitment here and now to future levels of funding for Barnsley PCT, and to increasing the pace of progress towards target allocation; but, as I am sure they will appreciate, I am not able to do so at this stage. We have received advice and recommendations from the advisory committee for the forthcoming allocations round, but my hon. Friends will have to wait until the new year for the precise details of funding for Barnsley. What I can say is that we are committed to increasing funding for health services throughout England and to moving all PCTs towards target, and that includes Barnsley. I can also say that, despite the tight financial position, health services in Barnsley are on track to deliver all the key targets set by the Department.

The NHS improvement plan sets new key targets to build on the progress that has already been made in Barnsley and across England, not least the target that by 2008 patients will receive treatment within 18 weeks of referral by a GP. It is my job as a Minister to ensure that all PCTs are adequately funded to enable them to meet the next set of challenges. I hope that when PCT allocations for 2005–06 to 2007–08 are announced, they will bring welcome news for my hon. Friends and provide a platform for health services in Barnsley to build on their success.

If I cannot give my hon. Friends any guarantee of funding tonight, I can give them another guarantee. All the Department's targets—on accident and emergency waiting times, on overall treatment times, on choice and equity and on quality of service—will be delivered everywhere, and that includes Barnsley. The NHS in the constituency of my hon. Friend the Member for Barnsley, Central will receive the resources and support necessary for the achievement of these challenging goals.

Question put and agreed to.

Adjourned accordingly at half-past Ten o'clock.

House of Commons

Tuesday 16 November 2004

The House met at half-past Eleven o'clock

PRAYERS

[MR. SPEAKER *in the Chair*]

REPORT OF INQUIRY INTO DISTURBANCE AND FIRE AT YARL'S WOOD

Resolved,

That an humble Address be presented to Her Majesty, That she will be graciously pleased to give directions that there be laid before this House a Return of the Report of the inquiry into the disturbance and fire at Yarl's Wood Removal Centre.—*[Mr. Desmond Browne.]*

REPORT OF INVESTIGATION INTO DISTURBANCE AT HARMONDSWORTH IMMIGRATION REMOVAL CENTRE

Resolved,

Than an Humble Address be presented to Her Majesty, That she will be graciously pleased to give directions that there be laid before this House a Return of the Report of the investigation into the disturbances at Harmondsworth Immigration Removal Centre on 19th and 20th July 2004.—*[Mr. Desmond Browne.]*

Oral Answers to Questions

TRANSPORT

The Secretary of State was asked—

Light Rail Schemes

1. **Mrs. Patsy Calton** (Cheadle) (LD): What support his Department plans to give for light rail schemes; and if he will make a statement. [198100]

The Secretary of State for Transport (Mr. Alistair Darling): All bids for light rail schemes will be considered on the basis of their value for money, wider benefits, and affordability.

Mrs. Calton: I agree that value for money should be a key part of any decision that the Secretary of State makes, but I remind him that the Metrolink in south-east Manchester was a key part of the multi-modal study proposals for that area approved by his Department. Does he plan to backtrack on any other proposal in that study?

Mr. Darling: The hon. Lady will understand that the Government must be satisfied that a scheme represents value for money before it can be agreed on. As she knows, the problem with the Metrolink scheme was that the costs nearly doubled in two years. What was being offered was less than what was originally proposed; two and a half lines as opposed to three. No Government could have approved the scheme without asking why the costs had risen so much. As it happens, my Department and the Greater Manchester passenger transport executive have been working closely since July to try to get to the bottom of some of those cost increases. Another meeting is due tomorrow, and I hope that progress can be made.

Mr. David Clelland (Tyne Bridge) (Lab): My right hon. Friend will know that the Tyne and Wear Metro system continues to enjoy huge public support. It deserves to be improved and modernised to meet the transport needs of the 21st century. However, is he aware that, like other transport systems, it continues to be abused by the minority of people who are fare dodgers? When will he be in a position to announce his review of the maximum penalty fare, which I understand has been stuck at £10 since 1989?

Mr. Darling: I am well aware of the Tyne and Wear Metro—I visited it earlier this year—which has been very successful. I agree that, at today's prices, £10 for a penalty fare is a very small sum, especially as a person who dodges fares can save rather more than that very quickly. The Department has looked at this matter and I am strongly of the view that we need to increase the penalty fares. I hope to have something to say on this in the not too distant future.

Mr. Greg Knight (East Yorkshire) (Con): Does the Secretary of State agree that, although the Deputy Prime Minister does not get many things right, he was right to support the Greater Manchester Metrolink? Is not the obstacle to further progress the present team of Transport Ministers? Is he aware that one of the first decisions to be made next year by a Conservative Secretary of State for Transport will be to give the go-ahead to the Greater Manchester Metrolink extensions? When the right hon. Gentleman is sitting on the Opposition Benches, I hope that he will welcome that.

Mr. Darling: Never mind what might happen in the future; one of the issues facing the shadow transport team is how they can square what the right hon. Gentleman has just said with the fact that they are committed to cutting £1.8 billion from transport spending. There are problems of cost increases in the Manchester Metrolink and other light rail schemes and there are other transport problems in this country, but one thing is certain: arbitrarily to cut £1.8 billion from transport would lead to fewer transport schemes, not more.

Mr. Graham Stringer (Manchester, Blackley) (Lab): I am less interested in a fantasy about a Conservative Government than I am in discovering whether my right hon. Friend agrees with his permanent secretary's assessment to the Public Accounts Committee, which reported last Wednesday that there was a 65 or 70 per cent. chance of the Metrolink schemes going ahead. Does he agree that it is important that the working party takes a decision on this matter very quickly? Only two bidders have been in the race for the Greater Manchester Metrolink scheme. If they walk away, no decision will have to be made.

Mr. Darling: I agree that we need to take a decision as soon as we can, but that decision must be the right one. I told the House in July that the Government could not accept a situation in which costs had increased very dramatically, yet we were being offered fewer light-rail facilities than had been the case before. No Government could accept that in Manchester or in any other part of the country. We have to understand why costs went up, and a lot of progress has been made in that respect. We must then decide what is the best solution for Manchester, and for those other places with tram schemes.

I want to be very clear about this. Very constructive discussions have taken place between the Greater Manchester PTE and my Department over the past few weeks. As I said a moment ago, another meeting is due tomorrow, but our approach must be based on the need to get the right solution. If we do not achieve that, the costs will have to be met by council tax payers in the Greater Manchester area as well as by central Government. All of us owe it to those people to make sure that we get the right solution. We should not rush into something that could unravel very quickly.

Mrs. Lorna Fitzsimons (Rochdale) (Lab): Will my right hon. Friend accept the thanks of my constituents for the role that the Minister of State, Department for Transport has played in the working party? Does he also accept, though, that as far as my constituents and those of my hon. Friend the Deputy Leader of the House of Commons, the hon. Member for Oldham, East and Saddleworth (Mr. Woolas), are concerned, the only right decision is to go ahead, which is hardly rushing things after 13 years? Does he also accept that "value for money" has to take into consideration investment from other Departments, which will be appreciably less if the answer is not yes?

Mr. Darling: My hon. Friend the Minister of State will be very pleased to hear what my hon. Friend had to say about him. He has done a great deal to make sure that the talks are constructive.

At the risk of repeating myself, may I say that the Manchester metro has been very successful and the Government are well disposed towards it? However, we are also concerned about the rising cost of the scheme, as my hon. Friend should be; if it goes wrong, the people who will pay for it are, among others, council tax payers in the Greater Manchester area. That is why it is so important that we ensure that the costings and forecasts on which the scheme is being constructed are right, while making sure that the scheme is viable and affordable in future. That work continues, and there will be another meeting tomorrow, which I hope all sides will approach constructively, because there is a solution.

The one thing I am clear about, having delved into the figures, is that if we had nodded things through in July without asking questions, things might have been all right for a few months but the trouble would then have become apparent. No responsible Secretary of State could agree to that.

South Eastern Trains

2. **John McDonnell** (Hayes and Harlington) (Lab): What representations he has received requesting that South Eastern trains be kept in the public sector.
[198101]

The Secretary of State for Transport (Mr. Alistair Darling): I have received a number of representations from the RMT campaign and a number of letters from hon. Members and their constituents.

John McDonnell: I wonder whether I can refresh the Secretary of State's memory. I believe that he has received representations urging him not to re-privatise the service from the TUC, the railway unions, the overwhelming majority of the public, the Select Committee on Transport, and 100 colleagues from the Labour Benches who signed the early-day motion tabled by my hon. Friend the Member for Eltham (Clive Efford). People are perplexed as to why the Government—in opposition to Labour party conference policy—are seeking to re-privatise the service. Will he receive a delegation of colleagues to discuss that as a matter of urgency?

Mr. Darling: It does not sound to me as if my hon. Friend would change his mind even if he came to see me, or any of my colleagues. The Government set out our proposals on the railways in the White Paper, published in July. Our view was that we needed to take greater strategic control of the railways and to make Network Rail responsible for day to day operations, while train operating companies should continue, albeit on a slightly different basis, to be responsible for running train services. When I look at relative performance and the costs of South Eastern Trains, which has been run by the Strategic Rail Authority over the past 18 months or so, I am bound to say, as I have told my hon. Friend before, that it is not immediately obvious to me that things are materially better under the SRA than in comparable franchises in the south-east. My hon. Friend will not be surprised that I am not particularly attracted to what he advocates. It is more important to make sure that we get the best solution for people who travel on South Eastern Trains, as well as the best solution for the railways overall.

Clive Efford (Eltham) (Lab): I am grateful to my right hon. Friend for his answer, but disappointed that he did not say that he is willing to meet my hon. Friend the Member for Hayes and Harlington (John McDonnell) to discuss the future of South Eastern Trains. If we are to get value for money for taxpayers' investment in our railways, it surely follows that we must have a public sector comparator, and not just the dogma of privatisation of our railways. If South Eastern Trains has shown an improvement in certain areas in the short time in which it has run rail services in the south-east, particularly on main line services, we must surely consider the future of the railways under that management. May I urge my right hon. Friend to consider a meeting to discuss that further?

Mr. Darling: The Minister of State, my hon. Friend the Member for Harrow, East (Mr. McNulty), tells me that he has offered a meeting to my hon. Friend, if he would like to take that up. The performance of South Eastern Trains is not as good as the average for the south-east as a whole. My hon. Friend is right that there has been an improvement, but that is largely due to what Network Rail has done in reducing track delays. South Eastern Trains, and some others, have had problems with new rolling stock. We have had the experience of that franchise for some 18 months, which, obviously, is one of the things that we would compare with any bid that might come in from another company. I am not interested in dogma; I am interested in ensuring that we have a decent service for people using trains, which is something that they have been denied for rather too long. That is why I want to get it right, and I assure my hon. Friend that dogma has nothing to do with it.

Intercity Trains

3. **Julie Morgan** (Cardiff, North) (Lab): If he will take steps to encourage Intercity trains to provide services late into the evening. [198102]

The Minister of State, Department for Transport (Mr. Tony McNulty): Train operating companies must provide a minimum level of service, usually including late trains, as prescribed by their franchise agreements. Services beyond those minimum levels are provided at operators' discretion on a commercial basis.

Julie Morgan: What can my hon. Friend do to encourage First Great Western to put on more late night trains from Cardiff to London Paddington? Is he aware that the last direct train is at 9.28 pm in the week and 7.25 pm on a Saturday? Next week, the Wales millennium arts centre opens in Cardiff, which will mean that people from London will flock to Cardiff. They will need to be able to return late at night.

Mr. McNulty: I am aware that the last train to Cardiff is at ten past 10 and the last one from Cardiff is at about half past 9. My hon. Friend will know that the First Great Western franchise will be let in 2006. Part of the process of letting that franchise is extensive consultation with a range of stakeholders, taking into account factors such as the dynamic development that she refers to in Cardiff city centre. I am sure that all such elements will be fed into the consultation process.

Mr. Barry Sheerman (Huddersfield) (Lab/Co-op): Is my hon. Friend aware that after a successful campaign by parliamentarians on both sides, GNER has responded with a very good late night service on the east coast line? Will he be wary of anything with "First" in the title, such as FirstBus, which would be a great threat to that line? That company cannot run buses in west Yorkshire and many of us are very worried that GNER will lose the franchise to that bunch of cowboys.

Mr. McNulty: My hon. Friend will know that we are in the middle of letting the new tender for the east coast main line; therefore, it would not be useful if I commented on potential tenderers or on his comments on any bus company.

Mr. Bill O'Brien (Normanton) (Lab): Whoever receives the franchise for the east coast main line, will there be a guarantee that the services for my constituents and others in the Yorkshire and Humber region will not decline and that we will retain the efficient service that we have at present, as provided by GNER? When the franchise is let, will my hon. Friend ensure that the service to which we are entitled will continue or improve?

Mr. McNulty: I know that the service that has been provided thus far is cherished and loved by any number of Members of Parliament. We are not seeking, through the new franchise, any diminution of that service.

Rail Freight

4. **Mr Dave Watts** (St Helens North) (Lab): If he will make a statement on the future of rail freight. [198103]

The Minister of State, Department for Transport (Mr. Tony McNulty): Rail freight in the UK is a growing business. Tonne miles of freight moved have increased by 42 per cent. since privatisation, and rail freight has also increased its market share. In October, a fifth freight operating company entered the market. The Government will provide more than £20 million per year in grants to the rail freight industry over the next two years, and we published in the recent railways White Paper our clear proposals to provide greater certainty and stability for the industry.

Mr. Watts: Does my hon. Friend agree that more freight could be transferred to rail if there were a better rail infrastructure? Will he assure me that he will do all he can to help to develop such facilities in places such as the north-west, especially in St. Helens?

Mr. McNulty: My hon. Friend will know that any number of applications are pending for freight termini—I think that is the term—in the north-west, on which I certainly cannot comment. In the railways White Paper, the Government laid out clear support for rail freight in three ways: through infrastructure, as my hon. Friend suggests, and capacity; through freight grants, to which I have alluded; and, crucially, through securing certainty of affordable access for freight paths.

Sir Sydney Chapman (Chipping Barnet) (Con): The Minister will know that a central objective of the Government's transport plan, published in 2000, was to increase rail freight by 80 per cent. by 2010. The figures I have before me suggest that since 2000 progress has been erratic, with an increase one year, a decrease in the next and so on. Will he give an assurance that there will be an 80 per cent. increase by 2010 and, if so, would not it be wise to have stepping stones so that we can understand what progress is actually being made?

Mr. McNulty: As I said, we made it absolutely clear in the rail White Paper that we are committed to rail freight and that we will, in the ways I outlined, secure a greater future for rail. If progress on rail freight since 1997 could be described as erratic, which I dispute, prior to that it was positively sclerotic.

Mr. David Marshall (Glasgow, Shettleston) (Lab): Does my hon. Friend have any evidence to suggest that delays on the west coast main line are having an adverse effect on Anglo-Scottish rail freight movements and, if so, when does he expect such delays to come to an end?

Mr. McNulty: During some previous works on the west coast main line, there certainly was some delay and disruption to freight movements to and from Scotland. As with passenger services, the more we get away from the works needed to improve the west coast main line—again, something positively untouched by the previous Government—the more such disruption will be a thing of the past, and we shall ensure that that remains the case.

Mr. Christopher Chope (Christchurch) (Con): Why did not the Minister tell us that, in 1997, a total of 105 million tonnes of freight was lifted, but that last year the amount was only 89 million tonnes? In other words, there has been a decline of 15 per cent. over the lifetime of the Government. Why are the Government now intent on pursuing a policy of forcing up the price of rail freight to suppress demand? That is the Government's policy; why does not the Minister come clean about it?

Mr. McNulty: As ever, both the hon. Gentleman's data and his analysis are so wide of the mark as to be, again, positively sclerotic.

Mr. Kelvin Hopkins (Luton, North) (Lab): My hon. Friend will know that large-gauge dedicated rail freight routes that are capable of taking lorries and lorry trailers on trains are being developed across the continent of Europe, and that substantially greater volumes of rail freight are carried there than in Britain. Is not it time for the Government to take the lead in building a dedicated rail freight route in Britain, linking all the UK's major industrial areas from Scotland to the channel tunnel and the continental economies beyond?

Mr. McNulty: If such proposals are forthcoming, we shall of course look at them. I am grateful that my hon. Friend managed to catch your eye on this question, Mr. Speaker, because his recent characterisation of the rail freight industry as somehow in crisis is 100 per cent., absolutely, stone wrong.

Road Transport Emissions

5. **Norman Lamb** (North Norfolk) (LD): If he will make a statement on carbon dioxide emissions from road transport. [198104]

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Transport (Mr. David Jamieson): Road transport is responsible for about 20 per cent. of the UK's total carbon dioxide emissions. We have already introduced a comprehensive range of measures to reduce the impact of transport on the environment. We will consider the scope for further measures as part of the review of the climate change programme.

Norman Lamb: The Government have clearly stated their commitment to tackling climate change, yet total greenhouse gas emissions from all forms of road transport increased by about 13 per cent. between 1990 and 2002. The development of biofuels could make a significant impact on the Department's problem, so will the Minister and the Secretary of State press the Chancellor to take decisive action in the pre-Budget report this autumn to kick-start the industry? There is great frustration that nothing effective is happening to get things going.

Mr. Jamieson: It is true that, since 1990, emissions of carbon dioxide from transport have risen by 10 per cent., but traffic has increased by 24 per cent., which is a measure of our successful economy under this Government. The hon. Gentleman mentions biofuels, which do have the potential to reduce CO_2 from transport. But we must ensure that we get a benefit for UK agriculture and do not take action that sucks in imports, and we must ensure security of supply by getting biofuels provided from this country. The hon. Gentleman knows that we consulted on the way forward on this issue earlier this year and we are looking very closely at the results. Already, as he knows, we have reduced the tax on biodiesel to 20p per litre, and on 1 January the tax on bioethanol will also be reduced to 20p per litre. That is some of the progress that we are making and further announcements will be made shortly.

Mr. Brian Wilson (Cunninghame, North) (Lab): Does my hon. Friend agree that the issue of emissions and the number of freight journeys, particularly by road, is closely related to ports policy? Will he recognise that more than two thirds of the freight that enters through south of England ports ends up north of Birmingham? Does he accept that ports policy is far too important to be left to the market or to a series of random public planning inquiries, and that there is an essential need for a major port in the north, preferably at Hunterston, which would act as a container hub and would reduce substantially the number of road freight journeys within the crowded south of England?

Mr. Jamieson: I congratulate my right hon. Friend on getting the subject of ports in Scotland into a question on carbon dioxide emissions from road transport. He is quite right to say that, where possible, we should be moving particularly heavy loads by water rather than road; that is certainly an issue that we take into consideration in our ports policy. We await an application from the port in Scotland that he mentioned, and the issues that he has raised will be considered when we consider further developments.

John Thurso (Caithness, Sutherland and Easter Ross) (LD): Does the Minister agree that congestion is a major contributor to carbon emissions? The feasibility study that his Department published in July on national road price charging indicates that a 4 per cent. reduction in traffic could reduce congestion by as much as 45 per cent., and could address the blatant injustice of remote rural motorists paying considerably more for their motoring, where there is no congestion, than urban motorists do where there is congestion. What are the Government doing to promote national road price charging, which would give us fair tax instead of fuel tax?

Mr. Jamieson: I congratulate the hon. Gentleman on his latest cliché. As he knows, the Secretary of State launched a feasibility study earlier this year and we are looking very closely at the issue. We are looking for a debate and I hope that we can find some cross-party accord on an important issue. As the hon. Gentleman says, reducing congestion, whether on local or main trunk roads, could reduce substantially carbon dioxide and other noxious emissions from transport. But, as he knows, the technology to introduce road pricing is a long way from being in place. Over the next 10 to 15 years we need to develop that technology and develop the policies that could bring us those benefits. I had a glance at the document, "A Better Environment, A Better Life—Liberal Democrat Policies for the Environment". I did not see any mention of road pricing, but I am sure that he will put that right shortly.

Mr. Andy Reed (Loughborough) (Lab/Co-op): I am very grateful for my hon. Friend's acknowledgment of the role of things like biofuels. Does he also accept that fuel cell technology and biofuels will play a great role? Unfortunately, at the moment these are not available on a wide enough scale to enable us to reach the tipping point at which that role becomes a reality for many British motorists right across the UK. Rather than spending the next few months just looking at further reports on what can be done, will my hon. Friend apply pressure on the Chancellor before it is too late to ensure that we get to the point where we make biofuels, fuel cell technology and all the technological advances that would make an enormous difference to the entirety of this problem, particularly carbon dioxide emissions?

Mr. Jamieson: I know of the enormous amount of work that my hon. Friend has done on this issue and how important the growth of biofuels would be to his constituents and, possibly, to UK agriculture, but he must accept that we must make progress carefully; if we set very high targets for the use of biofuels, it could suck in imported biofuels, which, of course, may not be produced from sustainable sources. We have to balance it very carefully. However, the fuel duty rebates that we have already applied to biofuels have considerably increased the amount of biofuel available at the pumps, and it is now available at 100 filling stations. I am sure that my right hon. Friend the Chancellor will have heard what my hon. Friend says and will take the issue forwards in his next statement on this matter.

Mr. Tim Yeo (South Suffolk) (Con): Does the Minister agree that to cut carbon dioxide emissions from road transport, it is not necessary to force motorists off the road, as the Deputy Prime Minister tried to do and as the Liberal Democrats apparently now wish to do? The same aim can be achieved by a switch to environmentally friendly cars. Does the Minister accept that far more use could be made of the tax system—his last answer on the matter was very disappointing—to encourage the purchase and use of greener vehicles so that motorists can continue to enjoy the freedom to drive, which has enhanced the lives of millions of people?

Mr. Jamieson: I do not know where the hon. Gentleman has been in recent years, but we are doing a great deal with fiscal measures to encourage cleaner, greener vehicles. Under this Government, vehicle excise duty now relates to the carbon dioxide emissions from vehicles and the company tax car regime introduced by my right hon. Friend the Chancellor has encouraged the take-up of cleaner, greener vehicles. We have seen a growth in the use of diesel vehicles that produce less CO_2. The European voluntary agreement has brought about much cleaner engines in vehicles. We have our "Powering Future Vehicles" strategy, and we have brought the industry together to discuss these matters. We are doing a great deal, and we will continue to do so, and we look to the hon. Gentleman for his support.

Transport (Nottingham)

6. **Mr. Graham Allen** (Nottingham, North) (Lab): What recent discussions he has had with Nottingham city council on transport issues in the city. [198105]

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Transport (Charlotte Atkins): My right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Transport met Nottingham city council when he launched the Nottingham express transit system on 8 March 2004. My hon. Friend the Minister of State for Transport also met members of the council during a visit to the city on 6 September this year.

Mr. Allen: I hope that the Minister herself will come to Nottingham and take the brand new tram system from Nottingham station. I shall meet her in my constituency with a tandem to take her back to town along the new cycleway and walkway along the River Leen. I hope that we will be able to talk about the pedestrianisation and the workplace parking scheme that the city of Nottingham is discussing. But before that happy day, will she commend the intelligent and innovative work that is taking place throughout the city of Nottingham on transport matters?

Mr. Dennis Skinner (Bolsover) (Lab): Give me your answer do. *[Laughter.]*

Charlotte Atkins: I should be delighted to visit Nottingham, North and, indeed, to get on a tandem, so long as I am in the driving seat, and, of course, to use the tram. First-year patronage is likely to be just over 8 million passengers—a considerable success—so congratulations to all involved. Their dedication and hard work have secured the success of that ambitious project, and I am sure that it will make a real difference to the people of Nottingham.

Mr. Edward Garnier (Harborough) (Con): When the Minister takes up the invitation from the hon. Member for Nottingham, North (Mr. Allen) to go to Nottingham to discuss transport issues with the city council—*[Interruption.]* I am being anticipated. Will she ensure that she discusses with the city council the expansion of night flights from Nottingham East Midlands airport? One of the things that concerns me and will no doubt concern the hon. Member for Nottingham, North is that the maps that are being used to persuade the people of the Nottingham area about the good sense of the airport's proposals are inaccurate and do not properly display the flight path. A further matter that she should discuss with them is the expulsion of aviation fuel from the aircraft that use Nottingham airport, which may be causing dairy cattle to become sterile as a result of their ingesting the expelled fuel. [HON. MEMBERS: "Come on!"] This is a matter of huge environmental importance not just to the people of the city of Nottingham, but to those who live in the surrounding area. *[Interruption.]*

Mr. Speaker: The question was in good order.

Charlotte Atkins: The airport is clearly not in Nottingham, but this is an issue for the airports authority. I will certainly take the issue up with the authority, but it is not a matter for me or the Secretary of State. It is not a designated airport.

Noise Disturbance (Plas Derwen)

7. **Mr. Huw Edwards** (Monmouth) (Lab): If he will meet the chief executive of Network Rail to discuss noise disturbance to residents of Plas Derwen, Abergavenny, from the nearby railway maintenance plant. [198106]

The Minister of State, Department for Transport (Mr. Tony McNulty): Under the terms of its network licence enforced by the independent Office of Rail Regulation, Network Rail is obliged to secure the efficient and economical stewardship of the network in accordance with best practice. The operation and development of facilities at Abergavenny sidings is an operational matter for Network Rail, and I understand that it has offered to meet my hon. Friend to discuss the matter further. I wish him well with that meeting.

Mr. Edwards: I am grateful to my hon. Friend. When he meets Network Rail's chief executive, will he tell him that my constituents find the noise of the double tamper locomotives sited at Abergavenny unbearable through the night? They feel that the guidelines, which were agreed with Carillion and other contractors, are not being followed and that the plant could be better sited at Pontypool. Will my hon. Friend ask Network Rail to look into the issue and ask that its chief executive meet me, because I have repeatedly asked to meet him?

Mr. McNulty: As I understand it, Network Rail notifies local residents and the environmental health officer at Monmouthshire county council in advance whenever night work is planned at Abergavenny sidings. Network Rail endeavours to implement measures to mitigate the effect of its operations. In the first instance, I suggest that my hon. Friend meet the Network Rail regional manager, who has offered to meet him. I will be happy to receive a response from my hon. Friend about the success or otherwise of that meeting. Then we might take matters further.

Railways

8. **Norman Baker** (Lewes) (LD): What projection he has made of a change in passenger rail journeys between now and 2015. [198107]

The Secretary of State for Transport (Mr. Alistair Darling): The Strategic Rail Authority in its strategic plan that was published in 2003 forecast an increase in rail passenger mileage from 2001–02 to 2010–11 of between 25 and 35 per cent. Last year the railways carried more then 1 billion passengers—the highest total since 1961.

Norman Baker: It is welcome to see a projected increase in rail usage, but is the Secretary of State convinced that the present network can cope? The route utilisation strategies are welcome and will buy perhaps five years' extra usage on the railways for increased numbers, but is there a medium-term strategy to increase capacity on the network, or are we going to be driven back to the old British Rail policy of pricing people off the trains?

Mr. Darling: We are increasing capacity. For example, the upgrade of the west coast main line, which is about halfway through, is substantially increasing capacity and, every year, improvements are being made to the lines to allow more trains to run. The hon. Gentleman can be assured that we will do whatever we can. Obviously, in the longer term, there will be some quite big decisions for Governments to face up to, both in terms of what we need in the network and, equally important, how we are going to pay for it.

Dr. Alan Whitehead (Southampton, Test) (Lab): Does my right hon. Friend accept that a problem with increasing the passenger capacity is the number of freight slots that are allocated and that get in the way of increased passenger slots? Does he also accept that the new high-box containers mean that more slots are required for the same number of freight movements? Has his Department investigated this problem, particularly as it relates to passenger movements and the ease of freight traffic? Has he in mind any measures that might alleviate it?

Mr. Darling: We are both aware of the problem, and we have looked at how we might sort it out. I shall say a word about Southampton in a moment, but for example, a few weeks ago, the line between Felixstowe harbour and central England was upgraded to allow the carriage of bigger freight loads. That was quite a significant investment and it improves access to the rest of the freight network.

I am aware that there is a particular problem in relation to Southampton docks. I had recent discussions with one of the freight operating companies as to a possible way round that. We obviously want to make sure that rail access to our ports is as efficient and as effective as possible. Wherever possible, it is best to move goods over long distances by rail if we can. I know that there is a particular problem in Southampton, and I hope that we can find a way of sorting it out.

Mr. Tim Yeo (South Suffolk) (Con): It is good news that more people are travelling by train. That trend has clearly been encouraged by the increased investment in railways that followed privatisation. Does the Secretary of State, however, accept that further increases in passenger numbers will be helped if the privately owned train operators are free to respond to consumer demand, but would be hindered if bureaucrats from Network Rail and the Department for Transport or, even worse, the Mayor of London, were given more say over where and when rail services are run?

Mr. Darling: I see the hon. Gentleman has not lost his sense of humour. The increased investment over the past seven or eight years has happened largely because the Government have been prepared to spend more on the railways. I remind him that he has a commitment—no doubt foisted on him by the shadow Chancellor—to cut spending by £1.8 billion. He cannot say that he will increase investment and improve the railways, yet cut the amount available for that. That does not add up, and the Tories' transport policy will remain incredible until the hon. Gentleman sorts that out. I remind him that much of the long-term decline of the railways occurred during the terms of Conservative Governments.

Jonathan Shaw (Chatham and Aylesford) (Lab): The number of passengers in the Medway towns has grown and will continue to grow as the Thames gateway development comes forward. We welcome the £200 million investment in the new bullet trains that will come on stream in 2009. However, my right hon. Friend will know that there is concern that the new timetable running from 2006 that will be announced shortly will show that there will be a reduction in services before the new Eurostar bullet trains come on stream. Does he understand that concern? Can he indicate whether he has listened to our arguments and tell us that there will not be a reduction in services, but replacement train services, for which we have called for several years?

Mr. Darling: I am grateful for my hon. Friend's welcome to the new high-speed domestic services. People in Kent have wanted them for a long time, and although many people doubted that the development would happen, it will. The trains will provide high-speed services from parts of Kent to London St. Pancras. However, my hon. Friend will accept that if we are to provide such services, we must ensure that the existing service pattern is compatible with new services so that the lines do not become over-congested, which would lead to delays building up. The SRA has consulted on those matters and is trying to reconcile the many competing demands. It will publish its conclusions when the invitation to tender for the new franchise goes out. My hon. Friend will have to wait a little longer, although I am reasonably confident that we can probably put the invitation to tender out in the middle of December.

Mr. David Heath (Somerton and Frome) (LD): Is there anything that the Secretary of State can do to prevent the asset-stripping of land from railway stations? Frome is the largest town in the country to have a mainline station at which the trains do not stop, but the railway authorities are planning to sell and redevelop the land that was its old goods yard, which is critical to the future development of Frome's passenger rail services. Is that a sensible plan for proper integrated transport use in the future?

Mr. Darling: I am not aware of the specific proposal, but if the hon. Gentleman would like to write to me, I shall certainly look at it. The general principle is that Network Rail is encouraged to get rid of land that it does not need because that realises money that can be reinvested in the network. We can all think of countless stations with lines and goods yards that have lain unused for years. If such land could be sold off with the money put into the network, so much the better. I am not sure how imminent the development to which the hon. Gentleman refers is, but I shall certainly examine it, although he must bear in mind the fact that that does not mean that I am making a commitment to do something different from what is proposed.

9. **Mr. David Kidney** (Stafford) (Lab): What assessment he has made of the effects on passenger rail travel of the new autumn timetables. [198108]

The Secretary of State for Transport (Mr. Alistair Darling): Some changes to the timetables were made on 27 September, especially to those of the operators affected by the implementation of the west coast route project, to enable the first benefits of the upgrade to be realised.

Mr. Kidney: I thank my right hon. Friend for that answer. Is he aware that since the new timetable commenced, rail passengers at Stafford now have fewer inter-city London trains, fewer cross-country trains and inadequate services to Birmingham and Liverpool? Although there used to be three peak-time morning trains from Penkridge to Birmingham, there are now only two, so most passengers have to stand. Is that experience common throughout the country, or have those passengers been singled out for such harsh treatment? Will my right hon. Friend call on the rail companies to make urgent improvements for those passengers?

Mr. Darling: My hon. Friend and other hon. Members will be aware that over the past two or three years, with the imminent arrival of high-speed trains running on the west coast line, the SRA tried to reconcile that with what was required for local services. It is probably fair to say that although some people were happy with the outcome, others were not. Inevitably, when a service is reduced some people are unhappy about it. We are trying to ensure that we make the best possible use of the new upgraded line. Some trade-offs need to be made. If there is a particular problem, I shall certainly ask the train operating companies to look at it.

We do have a problem with the temporary bus service that runs between Stafford and Stoke-on-Trent. I am not sure whether that troubles my hon. Friend, but it should be resolved next year. It is due to a temporary shortage of drivers on Central Trains. I certainly undertake to consider any other issues.

Michael Fabricant (Lichfield) (Con): Is the Secretary of State aware that the autumn timetable is in disarray, because it seems that the tilting Pendolino trains are forbidden to run at 125 mph as anticipated because the braking systems do not work properly? They are being restricted to 110 mph, which means that the autumn timetable will not run on time. Will he investigate with Virgin Trains how long that will last and how the problem arose in the first place?

Mr. Darling: I have already done that. I am pleased to tell the hon. Gentleman that the trains have been able to run at 125 mph since this morning. [HON. MEMBERS: "Hurrah!"] However, let me get my retaliation in first for Question Time on 21 December. I know what happened. Modifications were carried out to the braking systems. That type of train has not hitherto run on Britain's railways and inevitably when new rolling stock is introduced problems need to be sorted out. Sadly, the Pendolino trains have had more teething problems than we would like. As of this morning, however, they are supposed to be running at up to 125 mph, though I am bound to say that the one I travelled in last week with the driver was not one of them.

Mr. Bob Blizzard (Waveney) (Lab): I welcome the new timetable for One West Anglia services which comes into effect in my constituency in December. It will mean that for the first time since the days of Dr. Beeching, Lowestoft and Beccles have a direct service to and from London. That has happened because the Government combined three franchises into one, so beginning the process of repairing the damaging fragmentation introduced by the Conservatives in the botched rail privatisation. May I invite my right hon. Friend to try out the new service?

Mr. Darling: My hon. Friend is quite right to highlight what happens when the railways are broken up and it is left to chance to see whether services run. We are rightly in the process of reducing the number of franchises. The service in East Anglia is much better than it was, although one or two difficulties still need to be sorted out. As a result of the amalgamation of the new service, we can run more trains and improve reliability. That is precisely what the Government intend to continue to do, all backed up by investment that would be cut if the Conservatives ever got back into office.

10. **Mr. Henry Bellingham** (North-West Norfolk) (Con): When he next expects to meet representatives of the Health and Safety Executive to discuss the Potters Bar rail accident. [198110]

The Minister of State, Department for Transport (Mr. Tony McNulty): The Secretary of State expects to meet representatives of the HSE shortly to hear the conclusions of its investigation into the Potters Bar rail crash.

Mr. Bellingham: I am grateful for that reply, but with all the emphasis on the recent tragic First Great Western train disaster near Newbury, will the hon. Gentleman ensure that the equally tragic Potters Bar disaster is not forgotten? Are the lessons from that disaster going to be learned? Why did he not set up a public inquiry into that disaster?

Mr. McNulty: The lessons certainly have been learned. The HSE expected to complete its investigation in early November. It has been trying to locate the last witness which, through no fault of its own, it has not been possible to do. So the whole timetable has been shunted on. However, the Secretary of State still anticipates meeting the HSE to discuss its report in early December. Any decision on a public inquiry is predicated on my right hon. Friend's discussions on the outcome of the HSE's investigation.

Mrs. Gwyneth Dunwoody (Crewe and Nantwich) (Lab): Will the Minister raise with the HSE the fact that, this year alone, eight track workers have been killed—an unwelcome and unnecessary increase? Will he direct the HSE to inquire into what responsibility the fragmentation among maintenance companies bears for the deaths?

Mr. McNulty: Each and every one of the tragic incidents has been raised with the HSE and all are the subject of separate inquiries. However, my hon. Friend is right: we need to learn lessons from each and every incident and to ensure that deaths of railway workers on track diminish as much as all other deaths on our railway network.

Mr. James Clappison (Hertsmere) (Con): I understand that the bereaved families appreciated their meeting with the Secretary of State, but is it not deeply unsatisfactory that they and the travelling public have had to wait more than two and half years for a decision on a public inquiry and that Network Rail has refused to pay anything more than a very small amount of compensation to five of the seven bereaved families, including the family of my late constituent, Agnes Quinlevan? Is it not time that Network Rail recognised the value of the lives lost?

Mr. McNulty: As I said, any decision on a public inquiry is predicated on my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State's receiving the HSE's report, then determining which direction to take. The hon. Gentleman knows that the HSE has written to the bereaved, the injured and their representatives to inform them of the revised timetable and of the fact that, through no fault of the HSE, it has been unable to stick to the original timetable of which they were notified.

CABINET OFFICE

The Minister for the Cabinet Office was asked—

E-government

19. **Mark Tami** (Alyn and Deeside) (Lab): To ask the Minister for the Cabinet Office what plans she has to improve access for disadvantaged groups to the electronic delivery of Government services. [198120]

The Minister for the Cabinet Office (Ruth Kelly): The new Directgov site is the main access point for the electronic delivery of government services. It draws together a comprehensive range of information and services from the whole of government, making it easier for all people to access. We have also recently implemented a new government service within Directgov that focuses on the needs of disadvantaged groups. It has been very well received and is being expanded for the future.

Mark Tami: Although we are taking some positive steps forward, does my hon. Friend accept that many people from disadvantaged groups and areas do not have direct access to the internet and are not aware of which services are available? What is she doing to tackle that problem and to promote the service?

Ruth Kelly: My hon. Friend is right to say that we need to educate people about the use of the internet and what services are available, so we have to start in the classroom. One of the things that the Government have done since 1997 is ensure that every school and every public library is connected to the internet. We have also opened 6,000 UK Online centres to make it as easy as possible for disadvantaged groups to access the internet. However, some people will never feel comfortable with the internet, so we are examining other channels, such as interactive television and mobile phones, for the delivery of e-government services.

Miss Anne McIntosh (Vale of York) (Con): Does the Minister accept that e-delivery for disadvantaged groups and others in North Yorkshire is in disarray because the very person who was to educate people in how to access the system is no longer in his position?

Ruth Kelly: I cannot comment on the situation in North Yorkshire, although I am happy to look into it, but I can tell the hon. Lady that 95 per cent. of the population is now within 5 km of a UK Online centre and that we are working with the centres to make them as accessible as possible to disadvantaged groups. That work includes the "get started" campaign, whereby UK Online centres are opened up to disadvantaged groups.

Rob Marris (Wolverhampton, South-West) (Lab): My friend Mark Campbell of Wolverhampton has been blind since birth. He is an educated man, but it will cost him £2,500 to get the software he needs to access the internet. Is there any help available for people such as him?

Ruth Kelly: My hon. Friend is right to draw attention to the importance of making services as accessible as possible to disadvantaged groups, especially the visually impaired. We have been working with the Directgov service to make it as accessible as we can, and as of last month all new .gov domain names have to be compatible with worldwide accessibility guidelines. About half of all public sector or government websites are now accessible and meet those guidelines—a much larger proportion than in the private sector, where about one in five websites are. None the less, we clearly have a long way to go.

DUCHY OF LANCASTER

The Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster was asked—

Policy Directorate

20. **Mr. Bill Wiggin** (Leominster) (Con): To ask the Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster how many hours on average he has spent per week on his responsibilities for the policy directorate. [198121]

The Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster (Mr. Alan Milburn): In my role as a Cabinet Minister, I divide my time between my various duties. I am responsible to Her Majesty the Queen on Duchy business. As a member of the Cabinet, I sit on 17 Cabinet Committees. [Hon. Members: "Oh!"] I will list them if hon. Members are interested.

As Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster, I have a cross-Government role in the co-ordination of Government policy. I therefore have a wide range of official meetings, including meetings with Cabinet colleagues. In addition to that, I am responsible for the work of the strategy unit and, of course, the policy directorate inside No. 10 Downing street.

Mr. Wiggin: The Minister will be aware that everybody believes that his role is to organise the Labour party's general election campaign. Perhaps he should have another chance at answering my question and tell me how many hours he actually does.

Mr. Milburn: As the hon. Gentleman is well aware, it has not been unusual either in this Government or in previous Conservative Governments for the holder of this office, the Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster, on some occasions to have other ministerial responsibilities. Some have had ministerial responsibilities other than Duchy business and some have not. In some cases they have combined Duchy business with political business. That is not unusual.

If the hon. Gentleman had listened to the answer that I gave earlier, he would understand what my range of governmental responsibilities are. I suspect that he did not listen to what I had to say because he was too busy reading the briefing that he has received from the hon. Member for New Forest, East (Dr. Lewis), who sits on the Opposition Front Bench. He has a copy of that briefing and so have I. It reads: "Dear colleagues", and it is signed "Yours ever, Julian". It says:

> "Thank you to the 30 colleagues who responded positively to my e-mail about putting down an OPQ to Milburn for answer on Tuesday, 16 November at 12:20."

I like a man who is punctual.

"There is a real"—

Mr. Speaker: Order. The Chancellor of the Duchy has made the point.

Mr. Hilton Dawson (Lancaster and Wyre) (Lab): The city of Lancaster is eagerly awaiting the visit of the new Chancellor of the Duchy on 9 December. Can my right hon. Friend assure me and all my constituents that he will take every opportunity to avail himself of the splendid new developments at Lancaster university, the regeneration of run-down derelict sites in Lancaster, the revitalisation of the rural community and the huge investment that has taken place in public services across the Lancaster and Wyre constituency during the short time of his visit?

Mr. Milburn: I am of course looking forward to joining my hon. Friend on my visit to the fine city of Lancaster. As he knows, I am a graduate of the university of Lancaster. I will be meeting people from Lancaster university. I will also be meeting representatives of the Duchy and tenants of the Duchy. I look forward to meeting my hon. Friend too.

Dr. Julian Lewis (New Forest, East) (Con): I am delighted that the Chancellor of the Duchy has concluded his sixth minute at the Dispatch Box since his appointment in September. With such a record, it is hardly surprising that the Deputy Prime Minister got him mixed up with the right hon. Member for Tyneside, North (Mr. Byers), and not in very complimentary terms either.

Is the Chancellor aware that ministerial guidelines state that answers to questions from parliamentarians should be as full as possible unless it is not in the public interest to reveal the details? Why has the right hon. Gentleman consistently pursued a policy of evasion when asked how he spends his time, how he is having his engagements organised and how much his office costs? Is it because the list is so lengthy or is it because it is so—

Mr. Speaker: Order. We have only a few minutes left.

Mr. Milburn: It has never been standard practice to release detailed information about Ministers' diaries, as the hon. Gentleman knows full well. It is true that he has asked me many questions since I came to office—I think that he has asked 35 since 11 October, 16 of which relate to my responsibilities. I noted the absence, however, of questions on the lips of his constituents about crime, jobs, health, education, child care and pensions. Frankly, the reason why he does not ask about those issues is that he, just like the Conservative party in general, has precisely nothing to say about them.

Matthew Taylor (Truro and St. Austell) (LD): While it is true that holders of the Minister's office have often combined their role with political duties, on many occasions they have not been paid by the taxpayer for that work, but by their political party, which makes more sense. Given that the Minister will undertake extensive duties for his party during the general election and that running the Labour campaign will undoubtedly be more than full-time work, can he assure the House that he will not take a ministerial salary during that period?

Mr. Milburn: Perhaps because of the naivety of the Liberal Democrats and the fact that they have not been in office for many years—and hopefully, for many years to come—it may have escaped the attention of the hon. Gentleman that Conservative Ministers, just like Labour Ministers, have combined two roles—a role in government, which I carry out, and a role for their party.

CABINET OFFICE

The Minister for the Cabinet Office was asked—

E-government

21. **Mr. Andrew Miller** (Ellesmere Port and Neston) (Lab): What steps are being taken to ensure that Government (a) websites and (b) electronic services are designed to meet the needs of the general public. [198122]

The Minister for the Cabinet Office (Ruth Kelly): Designing websites and services around customer needs has always been at the heart of the Government drive to put services online. The Cabinet Office has made extensive guidance available to public sector web managers through the publication of guidelines for UK Government websites.

Mr. Miller: I welcome my hon. Friend's answer and her response to my hon. Friend the Member for Wolverhampton, South-West (Rob Marris), but will she look at the available tools developed by companies such as Nomensa, which are aimed at people with visual impairments; and will she ensure that they become the norm as soon as possible on every Government-supported website?

Ruth Kelly: I pay tribute to the work that my hon. Friend has done in drawing attention to this matter, as well as other matters to do with information technology and the way in which citizens' experience can benefit from the use of internet technology. He is right to highlight the work of companies that promote tools to aid, for example, individuals with visual impairment. Through the web accessibility guidelines, the Government are committed to creating websites that are both visually appealing and user-centred. They should be accessible to people with various disabilities and individual needs, and we are committed to advancing that work.

Public Health White Paper

12.32 pm

The Secretary of State for Health (Dr. John Reid): Mr. Speaker, I wish to make a statement concerning the publication of the White Paper outlining the Government's policy on health improvement.

Over the past eight months of the consultation we have seen speculation after speculation about the contents of the White Paper and alleged leak after alleged leak. I regret the fact that some of that, unfortunately, has been relatively accurate. Much of it has been highly inaccurate and some of it has been sheer fantasy. Today, I want to tell the House the reality.

Last century saw undreamt of progress in the health of the people of England, gathering pace after 1948 as the establishment of the NHS permitted free universal provision of immunisation, screening and treatment to make inroads into ill health and premature death. It should be a matter of pride that a child born today is likely to live nine and a half years longer than one born on the eve of the formation of the national health service in 1948.

The role of Government, however, in the prevention of ill health during that period was often characterised by a top-down approach. This White Paper is different. It is about enabling people to exercise choice; it is about extending opportunity and offering security to those who want to choose a healthier life; it is about people improving themselves. In the White Paper, it is the public, not Whitehall, who, for the first time have set the agenda and identified what "for their own good" means. Over the past eight months, we have consulted, discussed, listened, canvassed and calculated public opinion on a wider scale than ever before to get in touch with people's real concerns, to ask what they wanted and how they could help to realise their aims.

People know that in recent years new opportunities have been opening up rapidly, but with them come growing inequalities. Paradoxically, affluence and comfort often bring their own health challenges—growing obesity, lack of exercise and more casual sexual relations. Faced with these, many people want more opportunities to live healthier lifestyles. They know that they will become healthier only through their own efforts. However, they look to Government to assist them with information about healthy and unhealthy choices—not to make the decisions for them, but to provide them with clear information to allow them to make the decisions.

Now that the NHS is improving waiting times, reducing waiting lists and improving emergency care departments, that frees up time and space in the NHS for effective action on prevention, to help people make those changes and decisions for themselves. That is why this White Paper commits us to ensuring that health services such as sexual health services, the NHS stop smoking services and obesity services all benefit fully from the drive for modernisation and improvement that is spreading across the rest of the NHS.

Our starting point is informed choice. That means an approach that respects the freedom of individual choice in a diverse, open and more questioning society. It also means addressing inequalities so that everyone can have real choice—addressing the differences that locality and social conditions make. *[Interruption.]* It may not interest those interrupting, but it is a sad fact that even today a male child born in Manchester lives at least seven years less than a child born in Kensington and Chelsea. Those inequalities cannot be tolerated any longer. To improve the nation's health, we need everybody to have the chance to make more healthy choices, not just the better-off.

We will not be successful in tackling these inequalities unless we work in different ways. We need to reach people where they live their lives, and provide services that are accessible to them and that derive from their local communities. That is why the Deputy Prime Minister and I were determined that this White Paper would set out action that maximises the positive impact that local authorities and others can have to help people make those healthier choices. For example, this coming spring the communities for health programme will bring all parts of the community and locality together—statutory and voluntary organisations, businesses and individuals—in campaigns to improve local health. Working with local government we will be targeting funding to give greater priority to areas of high health need. New investment in primary care facilities for some 50 per cent. of the population by 2008 will focus on the most deprived areas of our communities.

In our widespread consultation, people made it clear that they often want to change, but they lack accessible help and advice. So, to help the public make healthy choices, we will provide them with clear information on those choices. Building on the success of NHS Direct, which had 7 million advice and assistance calls last year, we will introduce a completely new service—Health Direct, a telephone, online and digital TV information service, making advice on health, nutrition, diet and a whole spectrum of public health issues available to everyone, not just to the better-off.

We will give specific help to specific groups. Thirty years ago, almost half the adult population of this country—46 per cent.—smoked. Today the figure is 26 per cent. We will take another 2 million people off that figure over the next five years. Ultimately, people need to make the decision to improve their own health themselves, and to give up smoking everywhere, not only at work and in the pub, but at home as well. The Government cannot make that decision; it is a personal decision. We can help, as we helped 125,000 quitters last year through NHS smoking cessation services. We are radically extending our campaign against smoking and will extend our smoking cessation services.

We will introduce action to put hard-hitting picture warnings on cigarette packets; further restrictions on tobacco advertising; tough action on shops that sell cigarettes to children; improvements in the way in which the NHS helps people to stop smoking and to stay stopped; and further reductions in tobacco smuggling. And, as I will outline later, we will see smoke-free environments becoming the norm both at work and at leisure.

Others have told us that they would like help too. Many people today, such as busy mums, have told us that they want their families to eat more healthily, but they need more easily accessible and simple information to guide them. Together with the Food Standards Agency, retailers and the food industry, we will develop

[Dr. John Reid]

a simple code for processed food to indicate fat, sugar and salt content for shoppers to help people choose what they require for a healthy and balanced diet.

Our general approach is, of course, to recognise the right of adults to make their own informed choices, but people, particularly parents, feel differently about children. Parents know that their children's health is primarily their responsibility, but in our discussions they told us that government, businesses and anyone who has an influence also shares that particular responsibility to protect children from premature exposure to a world of adult choices, and they want the security of knowing that that will be done. That is why my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport and I will ask Ofcom to consult on advertising to children on television and will work with the industry to limit other forms of advertising to children outside television itself.

Led by my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Education and Skills, we will develop our approach to health in schools to ensure that everything that a school does—lessons, sport, food, school nurses, personal, social and health education—is brought together in an co-ordinated whole school approach to health to start children on the right path to a healthy life.

We will increase activity for children in schools. The Government are investing an unprecedented amount—more than £1 billion up to 2006—in physical education and school sport. We are developing more sports specialist academies, strengthening the protection for school playing fields and helping more children to walk or cycle safely to school. In an age in which obesity has trebled in a generation, and in which, if the number of obese children continues to rise, we face the prospect of children having a shorter life expectancy than their parents. To be effective, the support that we provide to combat that must be personally tailored to the realities of individual lives, with services and support personalised sensitively and flexibly and provided conveniently.

Through new technology and investment, we intend to offer everyone in England the opportunity to develop their personal health guide and, starting with the areas of greatest disadvantage, we will provide people with NHS health trainers to support their motivation in making the difficult decisions to choose healthy lifestyles. That which the better-off regard as of assistance in a healthy lifestyle should be available to the rest of the people of England too.

Healthy living starts at a young age, which is why we have decided to provide funding so that by 2010 every PCT in England will be resourced to have at least one full-time school nurse working with each cluster of primary schools and secondary schools in their area.

One of our greatest challenges is in respect of sexual health. It is a staggering fact that no fewer than one in 10 sexually active young women is today infected with chlamydia. We have to bring this problem out of the shadows and into the forefront of our attention. We therefore intend to launch a new national campaign targeted particularly at those at risk of catching sexually transmitted infections or of unplanned pregnancies; to accelerate the implementation of our chlamydia screening programme to cover the whole of England by 2007; and to offer the same fast access to high quality genito-urinary medicine services that patients expect of other NHS treatment—in other words, by 2008 everyone referred to a genito-urinary medicine clinic should be able to have an appointment not within weeks but within 48 hours, and we will make that a priority.

We recognise, too, the damage that excessive alcohol can have on individuals, families and society at large. That is why we will work with the Portman Group to cut down on binge drinking and with industry to develop a voluntary social responsibility scheme for alcohol producers and retailers in order to protect young people; support Ofcom in strengthening the rules on broadcast advertising of alcohol, particularly to protect the under-18s; and invest to improve services to help the NHS to tackle alcohol problems at an early stage.

But there is another area where people want a greater degree of security and protection in maintaining a healthy lifestyle for themselves and their families. I have stressed throughout that our approach has been guided by informed choice on the part of individuals, with Government playing our role in providing information, encouragement and support to assist individuals in making the healthy choices. We do that because we believe that in a free society men and women ultimately have the right within the law to choose their own lifestyle, even when it may damage their own health.

People do not, however, have the right to damage the health of others or to impose on them an intolerable degree of inconvenience or nuisance. We therefore intend to shift the balance significantly in favour of smoke-free environments. From 2006, we propose to introduce changes to ensure that all Government Departments will be smoke-free; that all enclosed public places and workplaces—other than licensed premises, which are dealt with separately—will be smoke-free; that all restaurants will be smoke-free; and that all pubs and bars preparing and serving food will be smoke-free. Other pubs and bars—about 20 per cent. of those in England—and membership clubs will be free to choose whether to allow smoking or to be smoke-free, but smoking in the bar area will be prohibited everywhere.

We will therefore ensure that people are able to go to their workplace or to choose to go out for a meal or a drink without damage, inconvenience or pollution from second-hand smoke, but do so in a way which, while protecting that right of the majority, still allows a degree of choice—albeit more limited than before—to the minority. I believe that that is a sensible solution that balances the protection of the majority with personal freedom for the minority in England.

This White Paper promotes the opportunity for healthy living in a manner and scale unseen before. It envisages investing at least £1 billion in public health over the next three years. It treats our fellow citizens as adults capable of making their own decisions, while providing advice, information, encouragement, resources and personal support for those who want to make the healthy choices and protection from the effects of those who do not want to make those choices. It begins the transition of our health care away from just a national treatment system for illness and towards a true national health service. It offers the opportunity for healthy living to everyone who wants to take it, and the security of knowing that for those who do so a degree of protection will be afforded to them and their families. In doing so, it begins to fulfil at last the founding vision of a true national health service. I commend it to the House.

Mr. Andrew Lansley (South Cambridgeshire) (Con): I am grateful to the Secretary of State for the customary hour's advance sight of his statement. The House will have seen copious leaks of the White Paper and will be able to judge how many of them were informed speculation and how many were just spin. In any case, after all that, what have we got? Labour's big conversation has turned out to be all talk. After seven years of a lack of priority for public health, all the Government can offer is gimmicks and a nanny state. *[Interruption.]* As one would expect, the Secretary of State—*[Interruption.]*

Mr. Speaker: Order. Hon. Members must allow the hon. Gentleman to speak.

Mr. Lansley: At least they are awake while I am speaking, Mr. Speaker.

The Secretary of State did not admit to the extent of the Government's failures on public health, so let me tell the House about them. Levels of obesity in this country have risen by more than a third in the last decade, and at a rate far greater than in the rest of Europe. Obesity may soon be this country's greatest preventable cause of disease and premature death. The proportion of people who smoke, which fell by a third in the 1970s and 1980s has been virtually unchanged since 1997. British teenagers are now among the healthiest drinkers—*[Laughter]*—I mean the heaviest drinkers in Europe. We are seeing serious levels of liver disease—*[Interruption.]* I am sorry that Government Members find this funny, because liver clinics in hospitals are treating increasingly younger people with serious liver disease. Several thousand young people are dying from the consequences of liver disease and liver failure.

The number of new HIV diagnoses has doubled since 1997. Sexually transmitted infections are increasing. Chlamydia incidence has more than doubled and that of gonorrhoea has increased several times more than previous recorded levels. We have seen serious syphilis outbreaks where previously there were none. MMR vaccination rates are down to 82 per cent. because the Government lost control and public confidence in vaccination went down. The number of hepatitis C reports has doubled and up to 200,000 people may have the disease but be undiagnosed. TB is up by 15 per cent. and respiratory disease is this country is twice the EU average. According to the Joseph Rowntree Charitable Trust,

> "there is no sign of any progress since 1997 in reducing inequalities in health."

Listening to the Secretary of State, one would imagine this was year zero in public health. But five years ago, the Government published a White Paper on public health. At that time, the current Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport was the Minister of State in the Department of Health. That document said nothing about tackling obesity at the very time when it was rising in this country much faster than in other European countries. In contrast, the 1992 "Health of the Nation" White Paper published by the Conservative Government set out plans for tackling obesity and was regarded by the World Health Organisation as a ground-breaking document.

Five years ago, the Government said that they would introduce a sports strategy. Since then, young people have been doing less exercise. There has been a reduction in time spent on physical activity and fewer children participate in sport out of school. The lack of sport and exercise in recent years is at least as significant a cause of rising obesity in children as their diet. Of the £700 million promised four years ago from the lottery for sport in schools and communities, barely 1 per cent. has been spent.

In the document published five years ago, the Government said that health action zones would tackle inequalities. Now they have been abandoned. Five years ago, the Government said that the Health Development Agency was going to tackle public health problems, but now they say that it is to be abolished. It was all talk, just as the present White Paper is all talk. Again, five years ago, the Government said in their White Paper:

> "We do not believe in the old 'Nanny State approach'",

yet now they believe in the new nanny state approach, but not in doing things that really work.

For years, public health needs have lacked priority, the public health service has fragmented and the messages given out by Government have been inconsistent and incoherent. Yet the Government have not understood that the solution lies in reversing those failings. *[Interruption.]* The Government should give public health a priority and create a unified and influential service. They should provide coherent and consistent messages based on evidence. Instead, the Secretary of State reaches for more gimmicks and for bans.

Four months ago, the Secretary of State said smoking was one of life's small pleasures, but today he wants to ban it in public places. *[Interruption.]* Does he not realise that, in the time that it takes to implement legislation, the industry could and would deliver a voluntary code? That would remove smoking from up to 80 per cent. of the space available in public houses. It would ban it from the bar area, and people behind the bar would not be able to smoke.

I am also confident that we could expect the industry to achieve a smoke-free environment wherever children have access. Typically, the Secretary of State did not even mention the central importance of achieving smoke-free environments in those public places to which children have access. The Government's approach simply risks delaying progress. It could send smokers home and thus expose families and children to more second-hand smoke.

On the advertising of foods for children, Ofcom said this year—*[Interruption.]*

Mr. Speaker: Order. The House will settle down. Some of the hon. Members who are shouting have put their names down to be called to make a contribution from the Back Benches, but I shall refuse to call them if they do not settle down. If the shouting continues, what could happen is that the House might hear only the Front-Bench spokesmen, and perhaps the Chairman of the Health Committee, and no one else.

Mr. Lansley: On the advertising of foods for children, Ofcom this year said that a total ban on such advertising would be "ineffective and disproportionate". The FSA and the industry are working towards a new advertising code, so is not the Secretary of State offering a mere gimmick?

Traffic-light labelling of food is another half-baked idea that the Department communicated to the press.

Mr. David Hinchliffe (Wakefield) (Lab): It is not.

Mr. Speaker: Order.

Mr. Lansley: The traffic-light labelling is based on the concept of good or bad food, but what matters is whether a diet is good or bad. How would the system work? If a wholemeal bread roll is low in sugar, moderate in fats and high in salt, would it merit a green, amber or red light? If fruit juices, cheese or fish have red traffic lights, how will people understand that they can form part of a healthy diet? How does a crude traffic-light system deal with the major differences between the diets of adults and of children?

Different people need different diets. If I had high cholesterol, I would eat less in the way of fats. If I had high blood pressure, I would reduce my salt intake and I would reduce my sugar intake if I had diabetes. Traffic-light systems do not enable people to get the information that they need, but the Secretary of State should say whether he has such a system in mind. If he does, will it be acceptable to industry, and to the European Commission?

Does the Secretary of State agree that food labelling should be based on information about foods' nutritional value and their contribution to a good diet? That means people should be given information about the recommended daily amount of calories, fats, sugar and salt. Such a system would be well understood by the public, it is essential when it comes to putting together a good diet, and it is not likely to fall foul of EU restrictions. Adopting such a system would mean that Britain would lead the European debate on these matters. Will the Secretary of State accept that the Opposition are right to argue for a scheme like that in preference to a crude traffic-light system?

The inadequacies of the statement that the House has just heard are too many to list, but some are really striking. Where is the commitment to mental health, and especially to the provision of access to services for the 75 per cent. of young people who have mental health problems yet have no access to those services? Where is the commitment to a national campaign aimed at all young people to encourage and empower them to resist peer pressure to engage in early or unprotected sex, or in the misuse of drugs or the abuse of alcohol?

Where is the commitment to an immediate national roll-out of chlamydia testing? What attempt is being made to ensure that people who attend genito-urinary clinics are not turned away? One third of clinics now report that they frequently have to do that. Where is the commitment to evidence-based screening by family doctor services, as opposed to the gimmicks of asking GPs to turn into lifestyle gurus or sending people to fitness trainers? The Secretary of State may want a Carole Caplin approach to health policy, but we have an NHS short of physiotherapists, community nurses, midwives, district nurses, chiropody services, occupational therapists, dentists and radiographers. The Government need to sort out their priorities.

The White Paper is a missed opportunity. The public health service needs a Cabinet champion. It needs the restoration of a high status role for public health professionals, which they had when they were medical officers of health. It needs independent, evidence-based reports and recommendations from an independent public health commission. It needs a service with focus, with resources and with the ability to lever change. We need behavioural change, not a nanny state. We need public health teams with staffing and resources to do the job, able to engage GPs, health visitors and school nurses—in each school—in delivering the service.

We need Government-wide action. We need sport. We need exercise for young people. We need other Departments that have not been delivering on their part of the public health obligation to do so. We need a Government—they will be the next Conservative Government—who will take the action to give us organisation, resources and leverage across the public and private sectors to deliver public health objectives. In doing so, we will support an NHS that is genuinely focused on promoting good health and reducing disease—we will not leave the NHS simply to treat the consequences of public health failures.

Dr. Reid: I do not quite know how to respond to that. There was not much there in the way of constructive suggestions. As a matter of fact, I do not know whether the hon. Gentleman had time to read anything that was supplied, but there is a whole section on mental health, which he does not appear to have seen.

If I pin together everything that the hon. Gentleman said, it was that just because we cannot do everything, we should not do anything. That is the philosophy that ran through it. For instance, it is true that we are prepared to take the legislative and regulatory path to ensure that people are protected from second-hand smoke, but the idea that that somehow prevents the industry from moving ahead with smoke-free areas is utter fantasy. Leaving aside the fact that the industry has had several decades to do that, let me make it plain that I would welcome the industry moving ahead. If the industry wants to move, before we have legislation in place, to exactly the point at which we want to legislate, we will all enjoy that. Now, though, that is just an excuse from the Conservatives for doing nothing.

Similarly, on Ofcom, it is true that it opposed a total ban on television advertising of foods for children, but we are not proposing a total ban and Ofcom was not opposed to restrictions. Once again, because the Conservatives say we cannot do everything, they claim we cannot do anything at all.

Similarly, we are asking the Food Standards Agency, together with the industry, to work out a simplified form of indicating the nutritional value of food, but that does not stop us conducting a campaign at the European level as well. On the Government Benches, we are capable of walking and chewing gum at the same time. We can do several things at once. Just because we are not doing everything does not mean we cannot do several things.

I am rather disappointed by the hon. Gentleman's response. The world has moved on in the past quarter of a century, but it is obvious to me that the Conservative party has not moved with it. What we heard today, again, were the same tired clichés and the same old vapid slogans—an accumulation of several centuries of Tory philosophy and thought dedicated to doing nothing and changing nothing. They are always on the side of the status quo, and always on the side of the producer and against the consumer. We are not going to act that way. Having consulted the people of this country, we are going to give them the information and resources that they need and the back-up and support they need. We are going to give that to everybody, not just the better off, so that they can make choices for themselves and their families that will give them a longer, healthier life.

Mr. David Hinchliffe (Wakefield) (Lab): In contrast to the Opposition, I warmly welcome today's statement, which is both comprehensive and brave in many respects. The Government have listened to a range of recommendations, including from the Health Committee, picked them up and run with them, and I genuinely appreciate the steps that have been taken.

I wish to press my right hon. Friend on two points. One concern of mine is to put public health in the engine room of government. What steps have been taken structurally to ensure that public health concerns are addressed collectively across Departments when policies are being developed? Secondly, I accept that the Government are taking brave steps on the smoking issue, but I am slightly disappointed by the exemption, which will cause concerns. From my limited experience of standing at public bars, I am at a loss to understand how it will be possible to prevent smoke from elsewhere in a public bar getting to the bar area. I am particularly interested in the legal advice that the Government have received under health and safety legislation about protecting the interests of those staff working in bars where smoking will continue to be permitted.

Dr. Reid: I thank my hon. Friend for all the work that he and the Health Committee have done on this issue. They have been a catalyst and, in some ways, a cattle prod for Ministers to make progress. He makes two very good points. The first is the nature of our approach across government. It is essential to recognise that people can make healthy choices, but they cannot always make them in circumstances of their own choosing. Therefore, people's social circumstances, and in some cases their geographical locality, can help or hinder them in making healthy choices.

We have tried across government to work together and, indeed, we have established a Cabinet Committee—Misc. 27 for the "afactionados" who like to know such names—on which I can get together with my right hon. Friends the Deputy Prime Minister and the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport to try to ensure that in schools, on sports fields and across the health service we are working towards a common end.

I realise that the smoking exemption will be controversial. My hon. Friend said that he had limited experience of standing at bars. As someone who has perhaps a little more experience of doing that, I have thought about the issue carefully and discussed, argued and debated it. I have tried to balance the protection of people going about their daily business at work and at leisure who want to do so in a smoke-free atmosphere and who want to avoid the damage, pollution and inconvenience of second-hand smoke—people talk to me about their clothes smelling of smoke—with remembering that this is England and we take people's freedoms seriously. We should not try to prevent people from doing what is legal by other means. I have tried to provide an exemption that will not require a huge bureaucratic invention, because pubs are already classified into those that serve food and those that do not. It will also mean that people will not be forced into alleyways or out of the bar room and into their own living rooms to smoke even more there, because most of the evidence about the damage of passive smoking is based on those who live with a smoker. We have to be careful that in trying to solve one problem, we do not create another.

I have tried to strike a balance between the protection of the majority and the freedom of the minority. Let us see how that works. I think that it will be a compromise that will commend itself to the vast majority of people in England.

Mr. Paul Burstow (Sutton and Cheam) (LD): I thank the Secretary of State for the opportunity to see the statement in advance. I agree that doing nothing to tackle the causes of ill health is not an option. A report by the Treasury estimated that the cost of doing nothing would add £30 billion a year to the cost of health care by 2020. By how much does the Secretary of State believe his package will reduce that estimate?

The scientific evidence on second-hand smoking damaging health is overwhelming. Does the Secretary of State accept that passive smoking kills? What is a safe level of smoke? Does he accept the World Health Organisation research that shows that ventilation systems cannot guarantee a safe working environment? His proposals will consign those staff who work in pubs that do not serve food to an unsafe environment.

The Secretary of State's proposals on clear labelling are welcome, although we would prefer a mandatory scheme. How will he monitor the codes of practice to ensure that they are being complied with? He referred to schools, which play a vital part in reinforcing healthy habits of diet and exercise. Given that nutrition was but an afterthought in the current school meals standards, why does the White Paper say that it will be another three years before new standards for nutrition will be brought in?

The White Paper says next to nothing about poverty, poor housing and poor environment and the Department's role in developing health-promoting policies across government. Why are there no plans in the document for auditing the impact of Government policies on people's health—not just Department of Health policies but all Government policies? Clearly, there is a growing gap between the richest and the poorest in this country, and in terms of health it has grown over the past seven years.

We heard today that the Secretary of State spent eight months consulting, yet he has just announced that he plans to conduct more consultations—he wants more consideration and debate, and more voluntary codes. The White Paper demonstrates that the Government,

[Mr. Paul Burstow]

far from having courage, in fact lack the courage to take the necessary action to deal with the wide range of public health threats posed in this country. Through his statement today, the Secretary of State is saying that he is willing to allow us all to continue eating, drinking and breathing smoke at the last chance saloon.

Dr. Reid: I shall start with the hon. Gentleman's last point. We think that what we are doing is proportionate to the challenges we face. It involves a combination of Government action, voluntary action and partnership, with legislation and regulation where necessary. There are a number of reasons why we are staging in action on smoking from 2006, 2007 and 2008. For instance, there may be a requirement for legislation for the latter stages. However, I can assure the hon. Gentleman that by 2006, Departments and the health service will be smoke free; by 2007, we intend that to apply right across all workplaces; and by 2008, all the regulations and legislation will, we hope, be in place for licensed premises. It is a matter of staging in and it will require legislation, not just reliance on voluntary measures.

The costs of what I announced in the White Paper are in the order of £1 billion, but many times that amount will be saved. The hon. Gentleman is correct—the Conservatives take a very short-sighted view when they fail to recognise that this is on the grounds not only of good health for the nation, but of efficiency for the NHS. It is impossible to say exactly how much will be saved as that will depend on the effectiveness of how we proceed, but it will be many times £1 billion. The process will be overseen by the National Institute for Clinical Excellence, which will be tasked to look at the effectiveness of the White Paper. That is not a full audit across government, but it goes some way towards it.

The hon. Gentleman asked me a straight question: do I accept that passive smoking damages health? Yes, I accept that. All the evidence shows that passive smoking increases the risk of cancer by about 23 or 24 per cent. and of coronary heart disease by about 25 per cent. I accept that. That is why I have done what I did today to try to protect people, including workers, because the vast majority will be working in an industry where 90-odd per cent. of restaurants and pubs—taking the two together—will be smoke free, and we will be prepared to legislate to ensure that in the remainder the bar area will be smoke free, too.

I think that I have covered most of the points that the hon. Gentleman made. Reviews are under way at present on nutrition in primary and secondary schools. We have looked at one and are in the course of considering the other, and I have been in close contact with my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Education and Skills on the matter.

Kali Mountford (Colne Valley) (Lab): I very much welcome my right hon. Friend's statement, especially his announcement about screening for chlamydia. Will he go further and look into how sexually transmitted diseases can be prevented through education and an understanding of appropriate sexual behaviour, so that the lives of many are not ruined by irreversible damage that could be prevented?

Dr. Reid: Yes, I agree with my hon. Friend, and we intend to try to highlight the issue in a major campaign because of the reservoir of anguish that is building up, particularly, although not exclusively, through chlamydia. Although chlamydia has no symptoms, it can lead to infertility and other serious complications further down the line, which is a source of possible anguish and cost for the future. So we will not only lead that campaign, but we fully intend to make much more information much more widely available, including through all the online internet services that young people use so often.

Sir Paul Beresford (Mole Valley) (Con): As a very part-time health professional, I am keen on any move that helps to reduce tobacco smoking and damage. I have talked to a number of publicans and restaurateurs in my constituency, and off the record, particularly away from the public bar, they are basically keen on a ban, but a total ban, perhaps for commercial reasons. I wonder whether the Secretary of State has left that door open.

Dr. Reid: In some ways, the hon. Gentleman may be right. I can understand why such a ban could make things easier, for commercial reasons, for the providers, but our job is to look at the interests of the public—not the producers or providers, but the consumers. I therefore think that the balance that we have reached is appropriate, from the point of view of balancing the protection of the majority of people who want smoke-free areas with the protection of the rights of the minority in England who want to smoke a cigarette without damaging the health of others. That is what we have tried to do, while allowing diversity.

The options would be, first, to say, "You shall not smoke anywhere at your leisure", and then to say, as is now happening in Sydney, with the Health Minister there, or in California, given the campaigns there, "You shall not smoke in the open air or on the beaches", the effect of which could be to increase the amount of smoking that goes on in the home, by pushing people to accept that that is the only place that they can smoke. All the damage in respect of passive smoking that hon. Friends and colleagues have mentioned is based on passive smoking damage to those who live with a smoker at home. I am trying to get the balance right. None of us is infallible and time will tell, but I think that our approach is proportional and balanced.

Mr. Kevin Barron (Rother Valley) (Lab): My right hon. Friend is right to say that the critical issues are those of lifestyle and personal choice. Although he has outlined the education initiatives, with the emphasis in the statement on sport and physical activity, will the Government take initiatives with the national curriculum to ensure that people make informed choices, so that we can really begin to improve health in this country? We are getting messages from different parts of society, but a comprehensive message should start at basic school level.

Dr. Reid: Absolutely. My right hon. Friend has hit on critical point. I can give him some satisfaction by telling him that we will do exactly that, and I have been talking to my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Education and Skills about it. Indeed, this afternoon

I will go a school where the education incorporates practical and theoretical advice at primary level on nutrition and food and the history and narrative of balanced diets and healthy living. I have now extended the healthy school project—the free fruit—from the pilot areas to the whole of England for every four, five and six-year-old going to school, and we also have the five-a-day programme. All that is essential because it is not Jesuitical to say that if we have a child by the age of seven who has learned healthy living, it will stand them in good stead for the rest of their life. That is exactly what will happen.

Mrs. Iris Robinson (Strangford) (DUP): We are all very concerned about the rise in the number of sexually transmitted illnesses. Has any research been carried out to ascertain whether there is a link between the rise in sexually transmitted illnesses and the availability of the morning-after pill?

Dr. Reid: I do not think, off the top of my head, that I am aware of research on that specific item. However, if the hon. Lady will allow me, I will write to her.

Ms Debra Shipley (Stourbridge) (Lab): Why did my right hon. Friend choose Ofcom, which does not support a ban on advertising to children of food high in fat, sugar and salt, to liaise with the food and drink and television industries, which are also against a ban? May I suggest that he should choose another organisation that is perhaps a little less biased, such as the Food Standards Agency or one of the 120 organisations, including the Royal College of Physicians, the Royal College of Surgeons, the Royal College of General Practitioners—the list goes on—that have backed my call for a ban on the advertising of high fat and sugar food and drink to children? If he did that, I reassure him that more than 240 Members of Parliament from both sides of the House would support him, as would between 76 and 81 per cent. of the public, who have been extensively polled.

Dr. Reid: My hon. Friend was too courteous to point out that many of those who signed the motion and supported that very call were Conservative Members. They regarded it as worth while and not nannyish, to use an expression that they tend to use. I used Ofcom to make the decision in the first instance because it is the independent body that has been set up to study such issues, and it has already started its consideration. It is true that it said that a ban, in itself, would not find favour with Ofcom, but it was not opposed to restrictions. I have also made it clear that if, after a reasonable time, the Government find it impossible to achieve their required end or cannot go in the direction in which they wish to go, I will then consider introducing legislation.

A number of possibilities are available. One is the total ban before a certain time that my hon. Friend outlined; another is a tapered approach by which foods of a particular nature could not be advertised before a certain deadline, and would then be regulated after that and restricted. After another deadline, the provisions would be wider. One thing is certain: we cannot confine our approach just to television advertising—it must extend beyond that. However, this is our starting point.

Mr. Kenneth Clarke (Rushcliffe) (Con): I remind the House of a well-known interest that I have declared in the Register of Members' Interests.

Does the Secretary of State accept that as his statement was riddled with constant references to the role of individual responsibility and personal choice in our society, he rather betrayed his guilt that his original instincts had been overruled? He has been rolled over by well-intentioned but very powerful lobbies, many of whom sit behind him. He has embarked on an extension of the criminal law, bans on advertising and regulation into areas of choice as to what people drink and eat—their choice of diet—and whether they smoke. That is an extraordinary extension of the role of the state into individual liberty and choice of lifestyle in this country.

Does the Secretary of State further accept that the major pressures upon the health service, for which he is responsible, come from the fact that we have the longest-living, fittest and healthiest specimens of the human race who ever walked these islands? Fortunately, he has to contend with advances in medical care and ever-increasing age expectation, but he has difficulty in doing so. Will he therefore not believe, among the statistical nonsense, all this stuff about the billions of pounds that the proposals will save? Will he make sure that he concentrates on worthwhile things, such as improving the services to deal with sexual ill health, and not start employing yet more campaigners, counsellors, lifestyle advisers and health gurus? They make up an industry in themselves and they will consume his resources and introduce an interventionism into the lives of individual citizens in which Governments should not engage.

Dr. Reid: The right hon. and learned Gentleman, whom I know well, is an archetypal lifestyle guru in his own way. It is just not true that we are dictating to people what they should eat or drink. At their request, we are giving them advice and information in an easily accessible and understandable fashion about what they might or might not want to eat. They can ultimately make their choice. I do not see why he should complain about dealing with the complicated things on the back of processed food that one has to be a biochemist or have hours at hand to understand. I do not understand why it is objectionable to put such messages in a simple fashion.

Ultimately, people will make their own choices. I have made it plain today that they will make their own choices about smoking and drinking; I know that as well as anybody. People make their own choices and they pull themselves out of their own ill health or their own disadvantage. The question is whether we should help them in doing so.

All we are trying to do is to say, "If you wish to live a healthier life, here is the information that will allow you to do it." The one area where we are saying, "You shouldn't be able to do that" is when people are damaging the health of others. We are saying, "In a civilised society, your rights have to be constrained in case they impinge upon the rights and damage the health and lives of others." That is all we are doing with passive

[Dr. Reid]

smoking. I would have hoped that the right hon. and learned Gentleman would think that the solution I came up with was a balanced one that might attract the support of such a balanced person as himself.

Stephen Hesford (Wirral, West) (Lab): May I direct my right hon. Friend to the passive smoking issue? This welcome White Paper builds on the very good work that the Government have been doing since 1997 in this area—in stark contrast to what happened under the previous Government. In a very extensive survey that I carried out in Wirral, West, more than 90 per cent. of those surveyed—including societies, clubs, members of the public, workplace operatives and companies—said that they wanted a ban on passive smoking in the workplace and other public places. On that basis, why will my constituents be left asking why there should be inequality between localities. In my right hon. Friend's locality in Scotland there will be a ban; in my locality in Wirral, West there will not.

Dr. Reid: My hon. Friend is right that people in England will have a freedom that apparently will not be available to people in Scotland, but I have to do what I think is right. It may be some consolation to him to know that what I am doing is actually what the men and women of England want us to do. There is no question about the statistics on this. The Office for National Statistics figures and the various other scientifically balanced opinion polls that have been carried out are quite clear that when people are asked whether they want a general ban in the workplace and in restaurants, more than 90 per cent. answer yes, but when it comes to pubs, 80 per cent. are opposed to a total ban. About 20 per cent. support a total ban but more than 80 per cent. support restrictions. I place no emphasis on that one way or the other, but that is where men and women in England are. That is not the only reason I reached the decision that I did, but having reached it at least there is some consolation for the House in knowing that that is what people outside the House and the Chamber actually believe should be done.

Sir George Young (North-West Hampshire) (Con): The Secretary of State has just announced wide-ranging restrictions on smoking in public places, and speaking purely personally I wholeheartedly welcome what he has just done, in the name of public health. May I press him on the issue raised by his hon. Friend the Member for Wirral, West (Stephen Hesford) and by my hon. Friend the Member for Mole Valley (Sir Paul Beresford)? From the point of view of public health, and from the point of view of the customer or the employee, why has he chosen to exclude pubs and bars that do not prepare food?

Dr. Reid: First, I wanted to get a balance between protecting the majority's health and preserving the minority's rights.Secondly, a distinction is already made between restaurants and pubs that sell food and other pubs that do not. There is already a classification, which is to hand, which means that no additional bureaucracy or definition will be necessary, because that classification is already carried out through the local authorities.

Thirdly, I made that choice because it is the nearest position to that which the public, in our consultation and in all opinion polls, said that they wanted. It is slightly ahead of public opinion because what public opinion would have us do is to have restrictions within a pub itself, rather than restrictions among pubs. So, it is not exactly replicating public opinion, and it is not, as some people say, behind public opinion—it is slightly in front of it. For those three reasons, this seemed the most balanced way of doing things.

Ms Sally Keeble (Northampton, North) (Lab): I welcome the White Paper and the important measures contained in it. Will my right hon. Friend say more about how he envisages that the campaigns mentioned in the White Paper will be designed and delivered to reach young people, especially young women who have problems with not only sexual health, but drinking and smoking, and who, by and large, have the responsibility of feeding young children? We all know that it is exceptionally hard to reach those people with such a message.

Dr. Reid: Yes, indeed. The first thing that we want is a public information campaign at a level such that sexual health matters break out of the shadows in which they have traditionally been dealt with. That traditional situation will come as no surprise to hon. Members, because few people come to our surgeries to complain about a lack of information or the inadequate service of a GUM clinic for the obvious reason that they are embarrassed about such matters. Getting rid of such embarrassment is the first necessary step towards tackling the problem.

We need a public information campaign to alert people to dangers and we must draw on every single facility used by young people to achieve that. We must use not only people in the community such as health trainers, assistants, advisers and GPs, but cinemas, online websites and magazines that are especially popular with young people. Those are the vehicles through which we should try to deliver the message.

Hywel Williams (Caernarfon) (PC): On 22 January 2003, the Welsh Assembly Government asked for legislation to ban smoking in public places in Wales. Will the Secretary of State tell the House his Government's intentions for Wales regarding that issue?

Dr. Reid: Public health is devolved to Wales, so it was out of respect for Wales, not disrespect, that I referred to England today. Matters such as advertising, however, apply consistently throughout the United Kingdom, so the House will legislate on them for Wales. I hope that discussions will continue between my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Wales and the Welsh Assembly on a range of such matters. I hope that many of the measures in the White Paper, including perhaps those on smoking, will commend themselves to Wales. If the Assembly wants us to assist it, as we pass legislation, to carry forward its public health programme—I know that the First Minister is deeply committed to that—I shall be happy to try to oblige.

Peter Bradley (The Wrekin) (Lab): I welcome the statement and the White Paper, and do not believe that difficult and debateable issues of balance should distract from the positive package of measures. I have also conducted a survey among my constituents and, of the 600 people who responded, 75 per cent. wanted a ban on smoking in public places.

In cracking down on binge drinking, which it is obviously right to do, is my right hon. Friend worried that we might be creating conditions for binge smoking? How will striking the balance that he set out help smokers to quit, and how can he guarantee that people will have the choice of a smoke-free environment if the only pub in their neighbourhood is a smokers' pub? Will he listen to representations on the issue and be prepared to concede that the balance that he has struck might need to be readdressed?

Dr. Reid: I assure my hon. Friend that I do not want to set other hares running by saying that I shall think about that and come back with another idea next week. We are where we are, and a great deal of thought has gone into our proposals. It is true that the measure will not stop people smoking by itself, although it might discourage them. However, it is only one of a range of measures. We helped 125,000 people to give up smoking last year and I want to double—and more—that number over the next few years by using smoking cessation services, hotlines, information, high taxation, the fear created by the warnings displayed on packets, restrictions on advertising and the availability of nicotine patches on the NHS. A whole host of measures is required.

I have said all along that a ban is the sexy item on the agenda, but on its own it will not significantly reduce the number of people who smoke. We must be careful not to ghettoise people smoking in their front rooms. If a group of people comes together to smoke, at least we may assume that it is largely composed of smokers who are damaging their health anyway through smoking, rather than passive smoking. At least we are minimising the danger of passive smoking, but the measure on its own will not reduce smoking, which is why we have a battery and array of assistance, resources, advice and information. At the end of the day, we just say to people, "If you keep smoking, you're going to kill yourself." That is the biggest and most persuasive factor.

Sandra Gidley (Romsey) (LD): The Secretary of State treated us to his little list of people who would be helped by the measures, but let me remind him of the people he missed out—the old and the vulnerable. Does he agree that damp conditions and cold housing are for many the biggest contributors to poor health and that the White Paper misses the opportunity to deal with that problem?

Dr. Reid: Yes, I agree with the first statement, but not the second. Addressing the problems and inequalities faced by the most vulnerable is a large feature of the White Paper. I have in particular dealt with the Deputy Prime Minister on that. The hon. Lady is right about cold, damp, flu and so on. Vaccines, insulation, better housing and transport have a direct effect on health. We have known that since the Black report many decades ago. I say in all modesty that the Government are doing a great deal across many areas and we will continue to work across Government, as my hon. Friend the Member for Wakefield (Mr. Hinchliffe), the Chair of the Select Committee, asked us to.

Dr. Howard Stoate (Dartford) (Lab): As chair of the all-party groups on primary care and public health and on obesity, I add my congratulations to the Secretary of State, who has done a marvellous job on setting out how public health can be improved. As he knows, I am working with a group of internationally acclaimed experts on obesity to set up a national institute of obesity. How does he envisage that institute working closely with the Government to achieve the necessary aim of tackling obesity?

Dr. Reid: My hon. Friend makes the pertinent point that such things cannot be done by the Government alone. It requires a combination of Government, local government, partnerships, charities and, ultimately, individuals. He mentioned one of the important institutes that we want to work closely with over the coming years. The fact that we have prioritised the issue in the way that we have means that smoking has taken the headlines in much of the press, but out in the real world there is a huge concern and thirst for information on healthy diets and how to combat obesity. We will certainly work with the institute on that.

Julie Morgan (Cardiff, North) (Lab): I welcome my right hon. Friend's statement and congratulate him on what he has achieved and will achieve. I am also pleased that Wales may have the opportunity to introduce its own measures on the back of other legislation. I am sure that he knows that a working party in Wales is consulting on public health issues.

May I also express my disappointment that the measures to provide smoke-free work places dos not extend to bars? What legal advice has my right hon. Friend received on the position of bar staff who may be affected by passive smoking and who will be the only employees left exposed to it?

Dr. Reid: No, I have not received legal advice on that. Ultimately, it would be up to individuals to take a civil action, as anyone is free to do in any circumstances. I merely point out that, after we accomplish the proposals that I have set out, every bar that serves food and every restaurant in England will be smoke-free, which is a huge step forward in the protection of everyone, including those who work in those environments, from passive smoking. I have also said that I want to ensure, in legislation if necessary, that the bar area is smoke-free, even in those areas where smoking is permitted.

In addition, one might reflect on the fact that if 90 to 95 per cent. of the aggregate number of restaurants, bars and so on are smoke-free, workers will have a huge choice, which does not exist now, on where they work, as will customers on where they go. By any standard, although this is a public health measure and not an employment or health and safety measure, workers will know that it is a huge advance on where we are now.

Mr. Andrew Mackay (Bracknell) (Con): Constituents of mine employed in casinos would like a workplace ban on smoking. Can the Secretary of State guarantee that

[Mr. Andrew Mackay]

the eight new super-casinos that have just been announced by the Government will have such a ban and that different regulations will not apply to them?

Dr. Reid: If the right hon. Gentleman lets us build the things, we might then decide who will be allowed into them. I have said that the exclusions will be pubs that do not sell food and certified membership clubs—it is as simple as that. The latter are classified as clubs that one cannot walk into off the street; one has to apply for membership, then wait for a certain period. Presumably—I am not a member of such a club—they include some of the London clubs, along with the Royal British Legion and golf and rugby clubs that have memberships. Such bodies may or may not be smoke-free. I think that many will go smoke-free, but it will be for their members to decide.

Dr. Richard Taylor (Wyre Forest) (Ind): I too welcome the White Paper wholeheartedly, especially the plan to help more people to walk or cycle safely to school. Will the Secretary of State enlarge on how he plans to do that?

Dr. Reid: I am grateful to the hon. Gentleman for his welcome. In the past 10 years or so we have made some, but not vast, headway in that respect. I have been speaking to my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Transport and considerable extra money is being put in. There are two dimensions worth highlighting: first, cycle lanes and, secondly, the journey to and from school. The issue is complex, because we have to take into account the fact that parents' fears and the desire to walk or cycle to school rise and fall according to the horror stories that appear on television and the dangers of traffic. We are trying as much as we can to encourage a reduction in the school run and an increase in walking or cycling to and from school. I hope that we will be able to develop that in the coming years.

Several hon. Members *rose*—

Madam Deputy Speaker (Sylvia Heal): Order.

Points of Order

1.42 pm

Glenda Jackson (Hampstead and Highgate) (Lab): On a point of order, Madam Deputy Speaker. You will recall that the Government argued that the redeployment of Black Watch troops was to enable American forces to launch an attack on Falluja. My constituents are remarkably concerned about the destruction of that city, culminating in today's reports of the murder of an injured, unarmed Iraqi civilian by US marines. Has no Minister asked to come to the House to make a statement in response to the genuine concern arising in my constituency and, I have no doubt, throughout the rest of the country about what appears to be a rapidly deteriorating situation in Iraq? I know that you cannot demand that a Minister come to the House to answer questions, but I shall be grateful if you can assist me in obtaining for my constituents some direct response from a Minister on a matter for which Ministers are in no small measure responsible.

Madam Deputy Speaker (Sylvia Heal): I appreciate the concerns that the hon. Lady expressed, but I have no knowledge of any Minister wishing to come to the House to make a statement.

Mr. Oliver Heald (North-East Hertfordshire) (Con): On a point of order, Madam Deputy Speaker, of which I gave Mr. Speaker prior notice. Yesterday evening, the BBC carried an extensive report on the public health White Paper, including quotations from the document—lines such as, "In the foreword the Government will say," and quotations from the Department of Health spokesman. This morning, all the main newspapers carried detailed reports about the White Paper and bullet-points, which we now know were accurate, setting out the main provisions, and *The Sun* had a question-and-answer briefing on how the ban will hit at work and play. Is it not discourteous to the House that Ministers did not make the statement here first, but gave all that information to the media 12 hours earlier? Is that not particularly serious, given that Mr. Speaker and his predecessor have made the point on a number of occasions that the House should be told first?

With this particular Secretary of State, there have been two other occasions in recent years when that guidance has been specifically brought to his attention, in respect of the strategic defence review and the MRSA clean-up announcement, yet, again, here we are, on his watch, with an announcement made to the media ahead of the House.

Mr. Peter Lilley (Hitchin and Harpenden) (Con): Further to that point of order, Madam Deputy Speaker. You may recall that on 8 December last year, Mr. Speaker heard a point of order from me about a similar offence by the same Secretary of State, who had announced on a non-sitting Friday new policies on MRSA and failed to make any statement in the House. Mr. Speaker told him in no uncertain terms that Ministers were expected to make announcements in the House. You may also recall that Mr. Speaker promised that I would be called at Question Time the next day to allow the Secretary of State to make such a statement. He then defended himself on the ground that the statement that he had made outside the House contained nothing new, as was the case during the first 10 minutes of his statement today.

Madam Deputy Speaker: The House is well aware of Mr. Speaker's views on this matter. He has certainly made them plain on more than one occasion, as has his predecessor. I can only say that the Secretary of State concerned was in his place when those points were made.

Alistair Burt (North-East Bedfordshire) (Con): On a point of order, Madam Deputy Speaker. At 12 noon today, the Home Secretary published by way of a written statement his response to the report by the Prison Service ombudsman, Stephen Shaw, into the fire and incident at Yarl's Wood in my constituency two and a half years ago. The report implicates the Government in a negligent handling of the asylum system, building a detention centre unfit for purpose, refusing to fit sprinklers and placing in it people who should not have been there, at risk both to themselves and to others, including the brave people who dealt with the incident on the day. Have you received any indication from the Home Secretary or any member of his team that he should come to the House to answer questions about his response to a very serious report that implicates the Government in considerable mishandling and negligence?

Madam Deputy Speaker: I am not aware of any request from the Home Secretary to come to the House. The right hon. Gentleman made a written statement but I am not aware of any other request. No doubt the matter is now on the record and will be noted.

Braille Identity Cards

1.48 pm

Jon Trickett (Hemsworth) (Lab): I beg to move,

> That leave be given to bring in a Bill to require all public authorities and certain regulated companies and organisations providing written means of identification to persons seeking to enter private residences to include braille information about those persons on the written means of identification; and for connected purposes.

This is a modest proposal to afford a degree of protection to a particularly vulnerable group of consumers from rogue doorstep callers. I am thinking of those individuals who are visually impaired in some way.

There is widespread support across the political spectrum for including protection against rogue doorstep callers. There is a political will in the House and elsewhere to improve such protection. Many right hon. and hon. Members have constituents who have fallen victim to the activities of unscrupulous doorstep callers. Concern has been expressed in the House in a number of debates in recent times. Private Members' Bills have been introduced during the Session. My hon. Friend the Member for Pudsey (Mr. Truswell) tabled an early-day motion on this matter that attracted the support of more than 100 Members on both sides of the House.

The Bill that I seek leave to introduce has gained the support of more than 60 Members from all parties represented in the House, as well as from 20 organisations with a particular interest in the matters raised in the Bill. Organisations that support the principles underlying my Bill include the Jill Dando Institute of Crime Science, which seeks ways to design out crime, the Royal National Institute of the Blind, the Confederation for the Registration of Gas Installers—the national gas safety watchdog, to which I shall refer later—and the National Federation for the Blind of the United Kingdom, which is active in many constituencies.

The problem of rogue doorstep traders is significant. As recently as May, the Office of Fair Trading concluded that bogus trading was characterised by consumers being

> "cold-called and tricked or pressurised into paying large sums often for shoddy goods and services . . . its distinguishing feature is the high degree of deception and intimidation involved."

I firmly believe that the informed consumer is a safer consumer, and programmes such as "Rogue Traders" and "Watchdog" help to increase consumer awareness. Last year, I supported a campaign by journalist Vivienne Parry in *Woman's Own* that sought to expose gas installers who were operating illegally. Such campaigns can play a huge role in helping to inform consumers about how they can protect themselves, and I pay tribute to everyone involved in exposing bogus activities. More, however, needs to be done because, despite the best efforts of campaigners, the OFT estimates that about 15,000 bogus trading cases are reported each year.

I discovered the full extent of the threat that rogue doorstep callers pose in my capacity as chairman of the all-party group on gas safety. At the very least, rogue callers rip off consumers, but those who undertake gas safety work can endanger lives. CORGI keeps figures on

[Jon Trickett]

the problem that show that work undertaken by illegal installers has a high chance of incorporating a significant gas safety defect. Consumer protection for gas installation and other kinds of activity is literally a matter of life and death. It is vital that consumers be provided with the necessary information to help them protect themselves. The threat of exploitation is particularly acute for the most vulnerable groups in society, and I am pleased to report that many organisations are already working on innovative projects to increase protection for them. Mencap, for example, has worked with Energywatch to develop accessible communications for people with learning disabilities.

My Bill focuses on increasing information protection for visually impaired people, who are particularly vulnerable in their own home. It would introduce a requirement for all local authorities and certain regulated companies and organisations to include Braille on the identification that they provide for their employees or the people whom they register to go to consumers' homes. I am grateful to my hon. Friend the Member for Batley and Spen (Mr. Wood) for pointing out that only a small proportion of visually impaired people can read Braille, so my Bill will not solve completely the problems posed by doorstep callers. As well as Braille, organisations should consider other means of assisting visually impaired people such as the password scheme operated by some energy companies that gives consumers prior notification of doorstep calls and issues a password that callers use to identify themselves. The RNIB has clear print guidelines on the use of appropriate font type and size and good colour contrast. I urge other organisations to adhere to those guidelines, but Braille identifiers are an innovative, simple and relatively cheap way of making a difference, and should be pursued. Including Braille on identity cards allows doorstep callers to post their card through the door, enabling a visually impaired consumer to assess whether to open the door to them. The Braille identifier would provide much-needed assurance in what could otherwise feel like a threatening situation.

My Bill does not refer to the national identity card that my right hon. Friend the Home Secretary is considering, but particularly given his background, I hope that the Home Office will consider Braille identifiers as part of the national identity card scheme, if it is introduced. The model for it already exists, and Ministers should consider it carefully. CORGI, the national gas safety watchdog, has led the way in introducing Braille on its ID cards for all registered gas installers. There are about 98,000 of them, so that was not a small exercise, yet it was carried out successfully.

British Gas is considering the use of Braille on the ID cards of all its gas engineers who need to go into people's homes. That would be an excellent step forward and I urge British Gas to take it. CORGI, which is still the only organisation in the country using Braille on ID cards, has demonstrated that it can be done successfully, quickly and cheaply. All organisations should be encouraged to follow such a procedure. Given that most organisations periodically renew the ID cards used by their employees, often annually, the phased introduction of Braille seems entirely possible. The technology exists and I am told that it is quite cheap.

There is a rumour that, as the House rises on Thursday, my Bill may not become law. There may be some substance to that rumour, but I am introducing the Bill to raise awareness and stimulate debate in the House and elsewhere about simple and inexpensive measures, such as the use of Braille, that can be taken to protect the most vulnerable in our society from the most unscrupulous. The use of Braille has the potential to improve the information given to a particularly vulnerable group of consumers. I therefore urge the House to give me leave to introduce the Bill.

Question put and agreed to.

Bill ordered to be brought in by Jon Trickett, Mr. Bill O'Brien, Colin Burgon, Mr. Martin O'Neill, Mr. Tom Clarke, Mr. David Lepper, Peter Bottomley, Mr. Phil Willis, Mrs. Iris Robinson, Mr. Andrew Hunter, Mr. Fabian Hamilton and Rob Marris.

BRAILLE IDENTITY CARDS

Jon Trickett accordingly presented a Bill to require all public authorities and certain regulated companies and organisations providing written means of identification to persons seeking to enter private residences to include braille information about those persons on the written means of identification; and for connected purposes: And the same was read the First time; and ordered to be read a Second time on Friday 19 November, and to be printed [Bill 180].

Pensions Bill (Programme) (No. 4)

Motion made, and Question put forthwith, pursuant to Orders [28 June 2001 and 6 November 2003],

That the following provisions shall apply to the Pensions Bill for the purpose of supplementing the Orders of 2nd March 2004, 19th April 2004 and 18th May 2004:

Consideration of Lords Amendments

1. Proceedings on Consideration of Lords Amendments shall (so far as not previously concluded) be brought to a conclusion four hours after their commencement at this day's sitting.

2. Those proceedings shall be taken in the order shown in the first column of the following Table, and each part of those proceedings shall (so far as not previously concluded) be brought to a conclusion at the time shown in the second column.

Lords amendments	*Time for conclusion of proceedings*
Amendments to Part 1 (other than Amendments to Schedules 1 to 4)	Thirty minutes after the commencement of proceedings on consideration of Lords Amendments.
Amendments to Clause 168; remaining Amendments to Part 2 (other than Amendments to Schedules 5 to 9); Amendments to Parts 3 and 4 (other than Amendments to Schedule 10)	Two hours after the commencement of those proceedings.
Amendments to Part 5	Three hours after the commencement of those proceedings.
Amendments to Parts 6 to 9 (other than Amendments to Schedules 11 to 13); Amendments to Schedules 1 to 13	Four hours after the commencement of those proceedings.

Subsequent stages

3. Any further Message from the Lords may be considered forthwith without any Question being put.

4. The proceedings on any further Message from the Lords shall (so far as not previously concluded) be brought to a conclusion one hour after their commencement.—[*Paul Clark.*]

The House divided: Ayes 267, Noes 170.

Division No. 321] [1:58 pm

AYES

Abbott, Ms Diane
Ainger, Nick
Ainsworth, Bob *(Cov'try NE)*
Alexander, Douglas
Allen, Graham
Anderson, Janet *(Rossendale & Darwen)*
Armstrong, rh Ms Hilary
Atherton, Ms Candy
Atkins, Charlotte
Bailey, Adrian
Baird, Vera
Barron, rh Kevin
Battle, rh John
Begg, Miss Anne
Bell, Sir Stuart
Berry, Roger
Blackman, Liz
Blizzard, Bob
Borrow, David
Bradley, rh Keith *(Withington)*
Bradley, Peter *(The Wrekin)*
Brennan, Kevin
Brown, rh Nicholas *(Newcastle E Wallsend)*
Brown, Russell *(Dumfries)*
Browne, Desmond
Bryant, Chris
Buck, Ms Karen
Burgon, Colin
Byrne, Liam *(B'ham Hodge H)*
Cairns, David
Campbell, Alan *(Tynemouth)*
Campbell, Mrs Anne *(C'bridge)*
Campbell, Ronnie *(Blyth V)*
Caplin, Ivor
Caton, Martin
Cawsey, Ian *(Brigg)*
Challen, Colin
Clark, Dr. Lynda *(Edinburgh Pentlands)*
Clarke, rh Tom *(Coatbridge & Chryston)*
Clelland, David
Coaker, Vernon
Coffey, Ms Ann
Colman, Tony
Cook, rh Robin *(Livingston)*
Corbyn, Jeremy
Cox, Tom *(Tooting)*
Cranston, Ross
Cruddas, Jon
Cryer, Ann *(Keighley)*
Cryer, John *(Hornchurch)*
Cunningham, Jim *(Coventry S)*
Cunningham, Tony *(Workington)*
Davey, Valerie *(Bristol W)*
David, Wayne
Davidson, Ian
Davies, rh Denzil *(Llanelli)*
Davies, Geraint *(Croydon C)*
Dawson, Hilton
Dean, Mrs Janet
Denham, rh John
Dhanda, Parmjit
Dobbin, Jim *(Heywood)*
Donohoe, Brian H.
Dowd, Jim *(Lewisham W)*
Drew, David *(Stroud)*
Eagle, Angela *(Wallasey)*
Eagle, Maria *(L'pool Garston)*
Edwards, Huw
Efford, Clive
Ellman, Mrs Louise
Ennis, Jeff *(Barnsley E)*
Etherington, Bill
Field, rh Frank *(Birkenhead)*
Fisher, Mark
Fitzpatrick, Jim
Fitzsimons, Mrs Lorna
Flint, Caroline
Foster, rh Derek
Foster, Michael *(Worcester)*
Foster, Michael Jabez *(Hastings & Rye)*
Francis, Dr. Hywel
Gerrard, Neil
Gilroy, Linda
Goggins, Paul
Griffiths, Jane *(Reading E)*
Griffiths, Win *(Bridgend)*
Grogan, John
Hain, rh Peter
Hall, Mike *(Weaver Vale)*
Hall, Patrick *(Bedford)*
Hamilton, Fabian *(Leeds NE)*
Harman, rh Ms Harriet
Healey, John
Henderson, Ivan *(Harwich)*
Hendrick, Mark
Hepburn, Stephen
Heppell, John
Hesford, Stephen
Heyes, David
Hill, Keith *(Streatham)*
Hinchliffe, David
Hoey, Kate *(Vauxhall)*
Hopkins, Kelvin
Howarth, George *(Knowsley N & Sefton E)*
Howells, Dr. Kim
Hughes, Beverley *(Stretford & Urmston)*
Hughes, Kevin *(Doncaster N)*
Humble, Mrs Joan
Hurst, Alan *(Braintree)*
Hutton, rh John
Illsley, Eric
Irranca-Davies, Huw
Jackson, Glenda *(Hampstead & Highgate)*
Jackson, Helen *(Hillsborough)*
Jamieson, David
Jenkins, Brian
Jones, Helen *(Warrington N)*
Jones, Jon Owen *(Cardiff C)*
Jones, Martyn *(Clwyd S)*
Jowell, rh Tessa
Joyce, Eric *(Falkirk W)*
Keeble, Ms Sally
Keen, Alan *(Feltham)*
Kelly, Ruth *(Bolton W)*
Kemp, Fraser
Kennedy, Jane *(Wavertree)*
Khabra, Piara S.
Kidney, David
Kilfoyle, Peter
King, Andy *(Rugby)*
Knight, Jim *(S Dorset)*
Kumar, Dr. Ashok
Laxton, Bob *(Derby N)*
Lazarowicz, Mark
Lepper, David
Leslie, Christopher
Levitt, Tom *(High Peak)*
Lewis, Ivan *(Bury S)*
Lewis, Terry *(Worsley)*
Linton, Martin
Lloyd, Tony *(Manchester C)*
Love, Andrew
Lucas, Ian *(Wrexham)*
Luke, Iain *(Dundee E)*
McAvoy, Thomas
McCafferty, Chris
McDonagh, Siobhain
MacDonald, Calum
McDonnell, John
McGuire, Mrs Anne
McIsaac, Shona
Mackinlay, Andrew
McNamara, Kevin
McNulty, Tony
Mactaggart, Fiona
McWilliam, John
Mahmood, Khalid
Mallaber, Judy
Marris, Rob *(Wolverh'ton SW)*
Marsden, Gordon *(Blackpool S)*
Marshall, David *(Glasgow Shettleston)*
Marshall-Andrews, Robert
Martlew, Eric
Meale, Alan *(Mansfield)*
Merron, Gillian
Michael, rh Alun
Milburn, rh Alan
Miller, Andrew
Moffatt, Laura
Moran, Margaret
Morgan, Julie
Mountford, Kali
Mudie, George
Munn, Ms Meg
Murphy, Denis *(Wansbeck)*
Murphy, Jim *(Eastwood)*
O'Brien, Bill *(Normanton)*
O'Hara, Edward
Olner, Bill
O'Neill, Martin
Organ, Diana
Owen, Albert
Perham, Linda
Picking, Anne
Pickthall, Colin
Pike, Peter *(Burnley)*
Plaskitt, James
Pollard, Kerry
Pond, Chris *(Gravesham)*
Pope, Greg *(Hyndburn)*
Pound, Stephen
Prentice, Ms Bridget *(Lewisham E)*
Prentice, Gordon *(Pendle)*
Prosser, Gwyn

Purchase, Ken
Purnell, James
Quin, rh Joyce
Quinn, Lawrie
Rapson, Syd *(Portsmouth N)*
Reed, Andy *(Loughborough)*
Robinson, Geoffrey *(Coventry NW)*
Roche, Mrs Barbara
Rooney, Terry
Ross, Ernie *(Dundee W)*
Roy, Frank *(Motherwell)*
Ruane, Chris
Ruddock, Joan
Ryan, Joan *(Enfield N)*
Sarwar, Mohammad
Savidge, Malcolm
Sawford, Phil
Sedgemore, Brian
Shaw, Jonathan
Sheerman, Barry
Sheridan, Jim
Shipley, Ms Debra
Short, rh Clare
Singh, Marsha
Skinner, Dennis
Smith, rh Andrew *(Oxford E)*
Smith, Geraldine *(Morecambe & Lunesdale)*
Smith, Jacqui *(Redditch)*
Smith, Llew *(Blaenau Gwent)*
Squire, Rachel
Starkey, Dr. Phyllis
Steinberg, Gerry
Stewart, David *(Inverness E & Lochaber)*
Stinchcombe, Paul
Stoate, Dr. Howard
Strang, rh Dr. Gavin
Straw, rh Jack
Stringer, Graham
Stuart, Ms Gisela
Sutcliffe, Gerry
Tami, Mark *(Alyn)*
Taylor, rh Ann *(Dewsbury)*
Taylor, Dari *(Stockton S)*
Taylor, David *(NW Leics)*
Thomas, Gareth *(Harrow W)*
Timms, Stephen
Tipping, Paddy
Touhig, Don *(Islwyn)*
Trickett, Jon
Truswell, Paul
Turner, Dennis *(Wolverh'ton SE)*
Turner, Neil *(Wigan)*
Twigg, Stephen *(Enfield)*
Tynan, Bill *(Hamilton S)*
Vis, Dr. Rudi
Walley, Ms Joan
Ward, Claire
Wareing, Robert N.
Watson, Tom
Watts, David
White, Brian
Whitehead, Dr. Alan
Wicks, Malcolm
Williams, rh Alan *(Swansea W)*
Winnick, David
Wood, Mike *(Batley)*
Woolas, Phil
Worthington, Tony
Wright, Anthony D. *(Gt Yarmouth)*
Wright, David *(Telford)*
Wright, Iain *(Hartlepool)*
Wright, Tony *(Cannock)*
Wyatt, Derek

Tellers for the Ayes:
Derek Twigg and
Paul Clark

NOES

Ainsworth, Peter *(E Surrey)*
Allan, Richard
Amess, David
Ancram, rh Michael
Arbuthnot, rh James
Atkinson, Peter *(Hexham)*
Bacon, Richard
Baldry, Tony
Barker, Gregory
Barrett, John
Beggs, Roy *(E Antrim)*
Beith, rh A. J.
Bercow, John
Blunt, Crispin
Boswell, Tim
Bottomley, Peter *(Worthing W)*
Brady, Graham
Brake, Tom *(Carshalton)*
Brazier, Julian
Breed, Colin
Brooke, Mrs Annette L.
Browning, Mrs Angela
Bruce, Malcolm
Burns, Simon
Burnside, David
Butterfill, Sir John
Calton, Mrs Patsy
Cameron, David
Campbell, Gregory *(E Lond'y)*
Carmichael, Alistair
Cash, William
Chapman, Sir Sydney *(Chipping Barnet)*
Chope, Christopher
Clappison, James
Clarke, rh Kenneth *(Rushcliffe)*
Collins, Tim
Conway, Derek
Cotter, Brian
Curry, rh David
Davies, Quentin *(Grantham & Stamford)*
Djanogly, Jonathan
Dodds, Nigel
Doughty, Sue
Duncan, Alan *(Rutland)*
Fabricant, Michael
Fallon, Michael
Field, Mark *(Cities of London & Westminster)*
Flight, Howard
Flook, Adrian
Forth, rh Eric
Foster, Don *(Bath)*
Francois, Mark
Gale, Roger *(N Thanet)*
Garnier, Edward
George, Andrew *(St. Ives)*
Gibb, Nick *(Bognor Regis)*
Gidley, Sandra
Gillan, Mrs Cheryl
Goodman, Paul
Gray, James *(N Wilts)*
Green, Damian *(Ashford)*
Greenway, John
Grieve, Dominic
Gummer, rh John
Hammond, Philip
Hancock, Mike
Harvey, Nick
Hawkins, Nick
Hayes, John *(S Holland)*
Heald, Oliver
Heath, David
Heathcoat-Amory, rh David
Hendry, Charles
Hermon, Lady
Hoban, Mark *(Fareham)*
Hogg, rh Douglas
Holmes, Paul
Horam, John *(Orpington)*
Hughes, Simon *(Southwark N)*
Hunter, Andrew
Johnson, Boris *(Henley)*
Kennedy, rh Charles *(Ross Skye & Inverness)*
Kirkbride, Miss Julie
Knight, rh Greg *(E Yorkshire)*
Laing, Mrs Eleanor
Lait, Mrs Jacqui
Lamb, Norman
Lansley, Andrew
Laws, David *(Yeovil)*
Leigh, Edward
Letwin, rh Oliver
Lewis, Dr. Julian *(New Forest E)*
Liddell-Grainger, Ian
Lidington, David
Lilley, rh Peter
Llwyd, Elfyn
Luff, Peter *(M-Worcs)*
McIntosh, Miss Anne
Mackay, rh Andrew
Maclean, rh David
McLoughlin, Patrick
Mawhinney, rh Sir Brian
May, Mrs Theresa
Mercer, Patrick
Mitchell, Andrew *(Sutton Coldfield)*
Moore, Michael
Moss, Malcolm
Murrison, Dr. Andrew
Oaten, Mark *(Winchester)*
Öpik, Lembit
Osborne, George *(Tatton)*
Ottaway, Richard
Page, Richard
Paice, James
Paterson, Owen
Pickles, Eric
Price, Adam *(E Carmarthen & Dinefwr)*
Prisk, Mark *(Hertford)*
Reid, Alan *(Argyll & Bute)*
Rendel, David
Robertson, Angus *(Moray)*
Robertson, Hugh *(Faversham & M-Kent)*
Robinson, Mrs Iris *(Strangford)*
Rosindell, Andrew
Ruffley, David
Russell, Bob *(Colchester)*
Salmond, Alex
Sanders, Adrian
Sayeed, Jonathan
Shepherd, Richard
Simmonds, Mark
Simpson, Keith *(M-Norfolk)*
Smith, Sir Robert *(W Ab'd'ns & Kincardine)*
Smyth, Rev. Martin *(Belfast S)*
Spelman, Mrs Caroline
Spicer, Sir Michael
Spink, Bob *(Castle Point)*
Stanley, rh Sir John
Steen, Anthony
Streeter, Gary
Stunell, Andrew
Swayne, Desmond
Swire, Hugo *(E Devon)*
Syms, Robert
Tapsell, Sir Peter
Taylor, Ian *(Esher)*
Taylor, John *(Solihull)*
Taylor, Matthew *(Truro)*
Taylor, Dr. Richard *(Wyre F)*
Taylor, Sir Teddy
Teather, Sarah
Thomas, Simon *(Ceredigion)*
Thurso, John
Tredinnick, David
Tyler, Paul *(N Cornwall)*
Tyrie, Andrew
Waterson, Nigel
Watkinson, Angela
Webb, Steve *(Northavon)*
Widdecombe, rh Miss Ann
Wiggin, Bill
Wilkinson, John
Willetts, David
Williams, Hywel *(Caernarfon)*
Williams, Roger *(Brecon)*
Wilshire, David
Winterton, Ann *(Congleton)*
Winterton, Sir Nicholas *(Macclesfield)*
Young, rh Sir George
Younger-Ross, Richard

Tellers for the Noes:
Andrew Selous and
Mr. Geoffrey Clifton-Brown

Question accordingly agreed to.

Orders of the Day

Pensions Bill

Lords amendments considered.

Madam Deputy Speaker (Sylvia Heal): I inform the House that privilege is involved in a large number of Lords amendments to the Pensions Bill. A full list is available in the No Lobby. If the House agrees to the amendments, I shall arrange for the necessary entry to be made in the Journal.

Clause 4

REGULATOR'S FUNCTIONS

Lords amendment: No. 1.

2.12 pm

The Minister for Pensions (Malcolm Wicks): I beg to move, That this House agrees with the Lords in the said amendment.

Madam Deputy Speaker: With this we may discuss Lords amendments Nos. 2 to 19, 24, 25, 27 to 29, 33 to 94, 324 to 329, 358, 481 to 498 and 577.

Malcolm Wicks: Before I launch into the first of these very large groups of amendments, it might be helpful if I take this opportunity to remind the House about some of the key points of the Pensions Bill. It is nearly six months since we last saw the Bill at the end of May. Since then, there has been the best part of 70 hours of debate in the other place, which has dealt with more than 1,200 amendments, just over half of which are before us today. The other place likes to describe itself as the revising chamber, but, as will be seen later, we do not always agree with its revisions. In this case, however, its contributions have improved the Bill since we last saw it here.

Most of the amendments were tabled by the Government. I make no apology for that, but I want to make it absolutely clear that it is because we have listened not only to Opposition spokesmen—on occasion—but to Back Benchers on both sides of both Houses. We are also indebted to outside organisations that have continued to take an interest by providing briefings, suggesting amendments and participating in continued consultation over the provisions in the Bill.

As I have explained on several occasions, all other things being equal it might have been useful to present the Bill as a draft Bill to allow us to consider some of the technical details. However, all other things are not equal. We are being urged to protect people's pensions—indeed, urged by some to make the pension protection fund retrospective—and we could not afford to delay because of the issues that are at stake.

The Bill is a good and rounded piece of legislation. It introduces a regulator with teeth who, among other things, will now be able to deal with those who have developed so-called pension liberation scams; provides protection for those who might otherwise lose their defined benefit pensions through no fault of their own if their employer becomes insolvent; and provides an important measure of help for those where that situation has already occurred.

Over the summer, we worked with organisations involved in helping ailing companies, led by the British Venture Capital Association, to enable us to improve and clarify the provisions relating to moral hazard. Some of the amendments reflect and respond to their concerns. Furthermore, the Bill now reflects other commitments that were taken forward from this House, including representation for pensioner organisations in the nomination of trustees and the removal of statutory limited price indexation for defined contribution schemes.

2.15 pm

I am conscious of the limited time that we have available today for further debate, Madam Deputy Speaker, and I know that Members will be disappointed if they are unable to catch your eye during the rest of the afternoon. I therefore commit in advance to keeping my remarks as short as I can when agreeing to amendments in order to allow more time for others to speak.

Let me turn without further comment to the first group of amendments, which deals with part 1 of the Bill and the provisions relating to the regulator.

Mr. Steve Webb (Northavon) (LD): The Minister mentioned the ending of limited price indexation for defined contribution schemes. If I am correct, that will be discussed in the hour or so that we have to talk about annuities under a separate group of amendments. Almost certainly, therefore, there will be no debate whatever about these changes. Does the Minister think that that is acceptable?

Malcolm Wicks: It would always be nice to have plenty of time to discuss pensions. I hope that there will be an opportunity to discuss those matters, but we have made our position clear and a vote has been taken on the programme motion.

Several amendments were made to part 1 to enhance the powers of the regulator. We have given the regulator specific powers to tackle the illegal practice of what some call pension liberation but what should, in my judgment, more appropriately be called pension robbery. As hon. Members are aware, pension liberation schemes purport to offer to convert the accrued rights of members of legitimate schemes into an immediate tax-free lump sum. The organisers of these schemes—I should perhaps say scams—target people who urgently need cash and usually charge high commission, ranging from 20 to 30 per cent. of the individual's total fund. An individual could also end up paying as much as 40 per cent. tax on the total amount. Moreover, their provision for retirement is severely reduced, sometimes to nothing.

Clauses 19 to 22 give the regulator the power to apply to the court for an order that the so-called "liberated" moneys, or property representing those moneys, are transferred back to a pension scheme, put into an annuity or insurance policy or given back to the member concerned. Prior to going to court, the regulator will also have the power to make a restraining order over liberators' bank accounts that contain liberated funds. These are important new powers that will enable the regulator to deal with this nefarious practice.

[Malcolm Wicks]

There has been particular interest in the moral hazard clauses, which were first introduced in Standing Committee. Clauses 44 to 58 are intended to deal with the moral hazard that employers may deliberately manipulate their affairs so as to leave the pension protection fund to pick up the tab for their underfunded pension scheme. Such practice would both put members' benefits at risk and increase the levy costs of well-run schemes.

Several concerns were expressed about the scope and effect of the moral hazard clauses. During the debates in the other place, my right hon. Friend Baroness Hollis offered further to consult the industry over the summer to review their impact and to try to find practical ways of allaying concerns about the measures. As a result, several amendments were made. A key message was the requirement for the regulator to provide a clearance procedure. That has been agreed and is reflected in clauses 43 and 47.

Other headline amendments to the moral hazard clauses include: a time limit of six years for which the regulator can consider acts or failures to act before issuing a contribution notice; the exclusion of insolvency practitioners, if acting in good faith, from the scope of contribution notices and financial support directions; and the exclusion of the majority of individuals from the scope of financial support directions. Also, new clause 58 has been added to the Bill to define partnerships and limited liability partnerships for the purposes of the moral hazard clauses.

There is one further significant change to the moral hazard provisions. Much concern was expressed in the House and in the other place about the regulator's power to issue contribution notices or restoration orders in relation to acts occurring after 11 June 2003, corresponding with the date of the announcement in the House by my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State. The Government continue to believe that the limited retrospection proposed is proportionate as a matter of law.

Sir John Butterfill (Bournemouth, West) (Con): Can the Minister explain precisely what he means by insolvency practitioners "when acting in good faith"? Insolvency practitioners have only one duty, which is to get the maximum amount of money for the creditors. What does the expression "when acting in good faith" mean in that context?

Malcolm Wicks: We assume that insolvency practitioners do act in good faith, given their task. When they do so, they will be excluded from any moral hazard procedures. There is the concern that it might be possible for some practitioners not to act in good faith, perhaps in connivance with others, but if I can provide any further advice on the question later, I will.

I was saying that the Government believe that the proposed limited retrospection is proportionate as a matter of law, but we accept that there may be some who would seek to challenge it, resulting in the regulator being tied up in court for a number of years, unable to act to protect members or the pension protection fund and benefiting only lawyers. For that reason, amendments Nos. 38 and 71 limit the retrospective effect of both contribution notices and restoration orders to acts or deliberate failures to act, and to transactions at an undervalue that took place on or after 27 April 2004, the date on which the moral hazard clauses were introduced in Committee.

The amendments to the moral hazard clauses will ensure that the regulator will retain effective anti-avoidance powers, while removing many of the concerns raised about the potential scope and effect of the original clauses. It has also been necessary to make a number of minor, consequential and technical amendments to part 1 of the Bill to reflect its evolvement, ensure consistency and tighten the drafting.

Mr. Nigel Waterson (Eastbourne) (Con): I thank the Minister for dealing briefly, as he put it, with some of the Lords amendments. I entirely accept what he said about so-called pension liberation schemes and we welcome the fact they have effectively been shut off as an option.

There is a sort of Alice Through the Looking Glass quality to the Bill. I remember saying, to the point of almost bleating, in Committee and earlier that if ever there were a piece of legislation that cried out to start its life as a draft Bill and be subject to the pre-legislative scrutiny procedures of both Houses, this is it. For the Minister to say rather ruefully, at this half-past 11th hour, that that might have been the best way forward is absolutely amazing.

Malcolm Wicks: I must correct the hon. Gentleman. What I said was that there was a great demand out there for pension protection now and that is why we needed to introduce the legislation, even if it meant some inconvenience to various colleagues in having to amend the Bill as it proceeded through its stages. The demand was to protect people now and we responded to it.

Mr. Waterson: A broader issue that arises—it is more appropriate to debate it in detail in a later group of amendments—is whether the Government have looked into the issue from the wrong end of the telescope. They should have focused their immediate attention and energies on tackling the problem of people in the here and now who have lost their pension rights, while taking a more measured approach, in respect of time for debate and for implementation, to ensure that they got the Bill right. That was certainly the attitude of the then Government towards the Pensions Act 1995.

I am afraid that matters are even worse than I described. Not only did we not have a draft Bill—*[Interruption.]* It is not just a matter of inconvenience. We are all here to do our best and to take however long it takes. We could certainly spend a great deal more than four hours today on these important matters without unduly straining ourselves, but we are not being allowed to because of the timetable motion that the Government have forced through. The guillotine has been used in one way or another at every stage of the Bill's passage.

I want to discuss the moral hazard provisions, the really crucial part of the group, in more detail. It is not just that there was no draft Bill encompassing those provisions—I am talking about the original provisions—as they were produced at the very end of consideration in the House. As far as I have been able to discover, there was no consultation and no discussion with anybody about whether the provisions were appropriate, workable, and tackled the issues that they were intended to tackle.

What happened in due course—I shall deal with the issue in greater detail when I move on to specific provisions—is that, having failed consistently to listen to Opposition voices in the House or to consult any relevant outside bodies, professional or otherwise, the Government got themselves in a tremendous mess. They then had completely to abandon their first attempt at moral hazard provisions, go through a consultation process—putting the cart before the horse—and then return with a series of further different provisions to deal with the same problem.

The Minister was right to pay tribute to the work of the revising Chamber, though in respect of this particular legislation, the task was more than just revision. The Lords laboured long and hard—we could not in the House, as our consideration was finished— to try to get the Bill right. The fact that, as the Minister himself said, the Lords tabled 1,200 amendments, surely illustrates the Government's problems. The Government tabled 450 amendments during the Commons stages, adding 62 new clauses and 81 pages to the Bill. It arrived in the Lords with 310 clauses and 13 schedules and has now developed into a two-volume Bill. We rarely encounter that nowadays, except in the case of a Finance Bill.

The Bill grew even longer in the House of Lords. Prior to Third Reading, the Government had made 442 further amendments and added a further 16 clauses and 50 pages to its length. On any view, that amounts to an awful lot of afterthought on the part of the Government and their draftsmen.

Following the Minister, I, too, pay tribute to the work of the Opposition, particularly the official Opposition, in the House of Lords. I am particularly grateful to my noble Friend Lord Higgins. The Bill is still far from perfect, but it has been enormously improved.

I shall now deal with the moral hazard provisions in greater detail. Personally, I have always taken the view that a more accurate description would be "anti-avoidance". I made the point in Committee, though much good it did me, about the importance of those provisions for the likely shape of the Bill. I went to Washington to discuss the approach with people who had more than 30 years experience of this matter. I also spoke to experts here, particularly people in the City of London, actuaries, lawyers and others. One theme that always came across vividly was that the Government would be well advised to get the anti-avoidance or moral hazard provisions right from the start, because if they were not dealt with properly, they could make a total nonsense of the other, doubtless laudable, provisions in the Bill. It is a tribute to the Government's incompetence that, far from those provisions being the first to be considered and dealt with, they were among the last, at least during the passage through this House.

The Minister took us through the moral hazard provisions, and he described their effects fairly. We welcome the fact that the time limit involves going back no more than six years, and we are pleased at what was said about insolvency practitioners acting in good faith. In that connection, my hon. Friend the Member for Bournemouth, West (Sir John Butterfill) made a good, practical point. I shall be interested to hear how the Minister deals with that specific question.

2.30 pm

There is a new power to ensure that a contribution notice may not be issued to prescribed people, and a new and reasonable test about the issue of a financial support direction. As I understand it, the regulator will need to be satisfied that it is reasonable to issue an FSD—aficionados of the Bill know that it is truly acronym country—to a person. A number of factors will have to be considered when that decision is made, and in respect of decisions about non-compliance contribution notices. The regulator must consider whether any benefit has been obtained, directly or indirectly, by the person named in the FSD from the employer.

I turn now to the clearance procedure. Concern has been expressed about what that could turn into, but the regulator must now provide a clearance procedure, and make decisions about clearance as soon as is reasonably practical. That makes considerable sense in what is a fast-moving business environment.

The regulator will not be bound by any clearance statement if there is a material change in circumstances, or if the circumstances described in the application are not real. Another change of heart by the Government is that most people have been excluded from the scope of the FSDs. We welcome that.

In sum, we welcome what has been put in the Bill about so-called pension liberation schemes. We think that the moral hazard provisions, as they are called, achieve a balance between different needs and aspirations. The process involved has been unnecessarily long and painful, and we must be grateful for the fact that we have an active and vibrant second chamber. Left to themselves, the Government would never have reached this destination.

There is nothing in this group of amendments on which we would wish to divide the House. Again, I am grateful for the hard work done in the other place on this part of the Bill.

Mr. Webb: We have 672 Lords amendments to discuss this afternoon, and almost all of them are Government amendments. My arithmetic tells me that we have 21 seconds to discuss each amendment. However, in this section of the debate, we have to discuss 183 amendments in 30 minutes, which comes out at under 10 seconds per amendment. That shows the lack of serious scrutiny that will be given to some important matters.

The amendments propose ways to close what the Minister rightly called scams. It is a source of concern that people can be ripped off in this way, and we welcome this attempt to close the loophole. However, I am worried that legislation passed with the best of intentions but in haste is often repented of at leisure. The short amount of time available for consideration of these amendments means that proper scrutiny is impossible and that there may be unintended consequences. As a result, people who are supposed to benefit from the Bill might suffer from other loopholes

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created by the attempt to close the particular loophole under discussion.

When pensions legislation is made in haste, it is often poor and in need of subsequent amendment. I often wonder what the Government would have done to close this loophole if they had not had this Bill going through the House. The Bill has been around for a long time, so the Government have thought that they could just amend it and add to it whenever anything on pensions has popped up. They thought that they could use the Bill to do those things on pensions that they quite fancy doing. Often, changes have been made long after this House had a chance to consider the Bill, so it is difficult to do justice to the 112 amendments in this group and to spot the bear pits that the Government may have created.

There is no reason why we could not have been allowed time to scrutinise these amendments properly but, for some reason, the Government decided to prevent that proper scrutiny. On behalf of the people whom we are trying to protect by means of amendment No. 1 and associated amendments, I hope that we do not live to rue that lack of scrutiny.

The people who will lose out are those who find that a large part of their pension investment is taken up by charges and fees when they are sold the products that we are discussing this afternoon. That is what will happen if we do not get the legislation right. Given the cursory run-through from the Minister at the start of this debate, it is difficult to tell whether the amendments will have the desired effect.

The financial services industry is notorious for inventing new products, scams and wheezes to get around regulations. The Government have produced these amendments like rabbits out of a hat this afternoon. It is very late in the day, so it is hard to have confidence that thought has been given to all the ways in which the provisions might be evaded.

On the face of it, the amendments look broadly sensible. They attempt to close down undesirable practices and respond to some of the concerns expressed about the Bill. Like the Conservatives, we shall not divide the House on the amendments, although we do want to register our concern that insufficient time has been given for the scrutiny that such important changes deserve.

Mr. Michael Fallon (Sevenoaks) (Con): I want to raise again some of the issues that I raised on Report some six months ago about the scope of the pensions regulator. I remind the House of the business interests that I declared then.

On Report, I said that the scope of the regulator was too wide and that his power to hit individuals was too extensive. I also said that the contributions notices and the FSDs were too wide in scope. The Minister will remember that he brushed those concerns aside. He wrote me a four-page letter on 11 June in an attempt to reassure me, but—to his credit—he began a process of consultation almost from that date. That process has led to the very substantial amendments to the Bill that we are discussing this afternoon.

It would be churlish not to acknowledge the great deal of work that has been done, but much concern remains. There is a great deal of worry about the position of insolvency practitioners, to which my hon. Friend the Member for Bournemouth, West (Sir John Butterfill) has referred already, and about the position of individual investors, as they can still be caught by the regulator. However, a much more general concern remains that the Bill establishes what amounts to a new business regulator. It will be something like the Office of Fair Trading, but by no means all business transactions are referred to the OFT. I hope that the Minister will reassure me that the new regulator will have the resources and skills to deal with what I expect to be a flood of clearance applications.

Given that anything that could be construed as removing assets from a pension fund could be caught for six years, almost every business transaction is likely to be submitted to the regulator for clearance. The secondary effect on business could be that deals do not proceed unless the full pension fund deficit has been made up. As a result, struggling companies may be denied the opportunity to be taken over by others.

Therefore, I still need reassurance about three matters, and I hope that the Minister will supply that reassurance when he responds to the debate. First, will he confirm that the regulator will have the resources to deal with the flood of clearance applications that I expect to be put in? Secondly, is not the six-year period too long? I know that it derives from Inland Revenue statute, but I still think that it is too long and that it may have a deterrent effect.

Finally, will the Minister confirm that the new business regulator that he is creating will not deter the formation, or reformation, of businesses that is characteristic of a healthy economy?

Malcolm Wicks: We have had a useful airing of some of the issues. Those that I cannot cover in the few minutes I have, I will deal with in correspondence.

The hon. Member for Bournemouth, West (Sir John Butterfill) queried what I meant about insolvency practitioners. We just wanted to make it clear that insolvency practitioners acting in accordance with their functions under the Act cannot receive contribution notices and cannot receive financial support directions, as they are individuals. We meant nothing more than to clarify that.

We have had a welcome for the amendments, if at times—we are used to this—a slightly grudging one. There was no early consultation on the moral hazard clauses. To have consulted before introducing them would have given advance notice to those who wanted to avoid pension liabilities. The changes made in the Lords are not radical, but they make clear on the face of the Bill the Government's policy as expressed in Parliament. We are confident that the moral hazard clauses strike the right balance on protecting members, the PPF, levy payers and business interests.

On the final point from the hon. Member for Sevenoaks (Mr. Fallon), it is not our intention to interfere with legitimate and proper business reorganisation. We have to be concerned, however, to prevent people from dumping pension liabilities on the new pension protection fund. What we are doing has been widely welcomed by outside organisations, and I hope that the House will agree to the amendments that we are suggesting.

Lords amendment agreed to.

Lords amendments Nos. 2 to 94 agreed to.

Clause 168

AMOUNTS TO BE RAISED BY THE PENSION PROTECTION LEVIES

Lords amendment: No. 298.

Mr. Webb: I beg to move amendment (a) to the Lords amendment.

Madam Deputy Speaker: With this it will be convenient to discuss the Government motion to disagree, amendments (b) and (c), Government amendments (a) to (k) in lieu thereof, amendment No. 283 and Government amendment (a).

Mr. Webb: This is an area in which their lordships substantively disagreed with the Government. The amendments deal with the nature of the levy for the pension protection fund. Their lordships made two substantive amendments in the face of Government opposition when a combination of Conservative, Liberal Democrat and other peers prevailed, as reflected in Lords amendments Nos. 298 and 283.

Amendment No. 298 proposes that 80 per cent. of the levy should be a risk-based levy as opposed to one based simply on the number of members of a scheme. Amendment No. 283 proposes that part of the definition of risk will include the risk that the firm become insolvent, and not merely that the scheme itself is underfunded. It seems entirely proper that there should be a substantial risk-based levy and that the definition of risk should have some regard not merely to whether the fund is underfunded but whether the firm is likely to become insolvent, thereby triggering a claim on the fund.

My reading of the Government's amendments to those amendments is that the Government have largely accepted that argument. I am sure that the Minister will clarify the position, but I understand that the Government broadly accept the principle of an 80 per cent. risk-based levy and of allowing the insolvency risk of the firm to be a determining factor, among others, of the risk-based premium. My understanding of Government amendment (a) to Lords amendment No. 283 is that the Government are giving themselves, or the PPF, the power to exempt certain firms from consideration of insolvency in assessing the level of the risk-based premium. Provided the Minister can assure us that that power will be used sparingly and can give some flavour of the circumstances in which it would be used, I have no objection in principle to the idea that using the solvency risk to the firm might not always be appropriate. We welcome the fact that the Government seem to have accepted the general principle.

That said, I have a number of concerns about how things will operate. I hope that the Minister can clarify a point that remains not entirely clear even after their lordships' discussions. As I understand it, after the transition to a risk-based levy, firms will have the opportunity to move to the risk-based levy more or less straight away. However, firms will still have the option, even if we accept the Lords amendments or the Government's versions of them, to put off for several years the evil day when a risk-based premium arrives. That is my understanding of where we will leave the Bill today; if I am wrong, I hope that the Minister will correct me. I think that firms will still be able to say that they do not fancy a risk-based premium and that they will still go for the flat-rate premium for as long as they can.

2.45 pm

Clearly, that creates some bizarre features. If my understanding is right, and if one draws an analogy with car insurance, we are effectively saying that people who drive middle-of-the-road family cars—a Ford Escort, or something like it—can say they would like a risk-based premium because they are not much of a risk and realise they will pay a low premium. On the other hand, Ferrari drivers—and the Ferraris of the pensions world—will be able to say, "Heck, we may face a very high risk-based premium, so we will put off the evil day for as long as we can and will stay with a flat-rate premium."

That seems perverse. If the Ferrari drivers are, in effect, creating a bigger potential call on the fund, and if we do not introduce a levy reflecting that risk, there will be some cross-subsidisation. Essentially, the safe drivers—the low-risk pension schemes—will subsidise the high-risk ones. Will the Minister make it clear whether that is indeed how things will work? Can high-risk schemes put off the move to a risk-based levy? Can he justify that? Now that the Government have accepted the principle of an 80 per cent. risk-based levy, as they have in their amendments, it seems odd to say that high-risk schemes will not have to pay it for several years.

Amendments (a) to (c) are intended to respond to the concerns expressed by Baroness Hollis when she responded in the other place to the Opposition's first attempts to amend the Bill. One of her first responses was to say that there is a problem in applying a risk-based levy to small schemes. As we know, the vast majority of occupational pension schemes are small, with small numbers of members and relatively small assets. There would therefore be a disproportionate cost on the schemes if we required small ones to provide information for the calculation of a risk-based levy and on the PPF from working out the insolvency risk for tiny firms—perhaps even one-man or one-woman firms—especially if the risk simply reflected the fund's being underfunded, which is information it would probably have anyway, but there was also a risk of the small firm going to the wall. Trying to do that for hundreds of thousands of small schemes would be disproportionate.

Baroness Hollis registered that as an objection to the whole principle of an early move to a risk-based levy, advancing that as an argument for why it should not be done at all. The Government have now accepted the principle of a risk-based levy, however, and, aided by the National Association of Pension Funds in drawing up our amendments, we say that small schemes might be exempted. Amendments (a) to (c) set out a definition of

[Mr. Webb]

a small scheme, and we have referred to a scheme with fewer than 100 members. I must admit that when I first saw our amendments—the Minister knows what I mean by that—I was surprised that 100 was chosen as the threshold, but, as the National Association of Pension Funds points out, at 31 March 2003 schemes with fewer than 100 members accounted for around 60 per cent. of the defined benefits and hybrid schemes that will be eligible for the PPF. By setting the threshold at 100, we are freeing the PPF of the obligation to work out risk-based premiums for 60 per cent. of all schemes, which is a substantial concession in the spirit of Baroness Hollis's objections.

Mr. Fallon: Has the hon. Gentleman calculated what the loss of revenue in levy not raised would be from that 60 per cent. of schemes?

Mr. Webb: There would be no loss, because those 60 per cent. of schemes would make the same total contribution to the levy—on a pro-rata basis, not on a risk-based basis. Our amendments would not change the balance of the burden between big and small schemes, but they would reduce the disproportionate bureaucracy—for both the schemes and the PPF—involved in calculating a risk-based levy for small schemes. The levy could be per head or some other pro rata arrangement.

Although the amendments mention 60 per cent. of schemes, they would affect only 1 per cent. of members of schemes. The amendments would save huge amounts of bureaucracy, but 99 per cent. of members would still be covered by a risk-based levy. That is the neat combination that would be achieved by amendments (a), (b) and (c).

In the other place, Baroness Hollis said, in objecting in principle to a risk-based levy, that

> "there will be a number of extremely small eligible schemes that are required to pay the levy—applying an extremely complex risk-based calculation to schemes, which might have 10, 20 or perhaps 40 members, would be a case of using a sledgehammer to crack a nut—and providing the required information may be overly burdensome and costly for the scheme."—[*Official Report, House of Lords*, 4 November 2004; Vol. 666, c. 490.]

The House will accept that we have gone further even than the noble Lady suggested by relieving the PPF of the burden of that work for schemes of up to 100 members. I hope that the Minister will accept the amendment, given that generosity of spirit and the attempt to address the concerns of the noble Lady.

I believe that the noble Lady last night expressed concern that the amendment had been tabled late in the day, but one of the reasons for that was that the concerns about small firms had been used as an argument to resist risk-based levies. The Government only last night accepted the principle of risk-based levies—it was not until we saw today's amendment paper that we learned of the Government's amendments to Lords amendment No. 298—and our amendment is a tidying-up amendment.

Mr. Waterson: Is the hon. Gentleman telling the House that he had seen the Government's amendment before tabling his amendment?

Mr. Webb: No, I am saying the opposite. Once we knew that the other place had defeated the Government on the risk-based levy, we received representations from the National Association of Pension Funds, which, while it agreed with the principle, was concerned about its application to small schemes. The association helped us to draft amendment (a), which we tabled last night. Since then, it has become apparent that the Government have accepted a risk-based levy in principle, which we welcome.

I hope that the Minister will accept the amendments. It would be a shame to divide the House on them, although we will do so if necessary. The changes the amendments would make are in the spirit of something that the Government argued not so long ago only a few yards away. My understanding is that although the Government disagree with Lords amendment No. 298, the long list of Government amendments (a) to (k) are designed to replicate the spirit of the Lords amendments, albeit slightly more efficiently. I do not have a problem with that and, in principle, we do not have a problem with Government amendment (a) to Lords amendment No. 283, on the assumption that the Minister can tell us what it means when it refers to

> "any prescribed scheme or scheme of a prescribed description".

That is one of those phrases that could mean anything and before we give it the nod we need to know whether the Government envisage widespread exemptions or very limited ones. In principle, however, we are minded to be sympathetic to that amendment and we hope that the Minister will accept our amendments in the spirit that they were intended, as he has accepted the spirit of the Lords amendments.

Malcolm Wicks: In essence, there is now little between us on this issue, but it is such an important part of the Bill that I need to approach my explanation with care. An Opposition amendment was made on Report in the other place to replace clause 168 with a new clause. We disagree with the amendment made in the other place, but have tabled an amendment in lieu.

The amendment made in the other place had four main objectives—to require the board to collect at least 80 per cent. of the levies estimated to be raised via the risk-based pension protection levy; to require the board to ensure that the amount collected via the scheme-based levy has a value that is no greater than the administration costs; to require the Secretary of State to lay regulations before Parliament before any changes are made over the proposed levies that the PPF board could collect in any given year; and to impose restrictions on the levy ceiling and the increase in pension protection levies from year to year, so that they apply from the end of the initial period, rather than from the end of the transitional period. That would mean that during the transitional period the board would not be able to increase the amount of the levy collected by more than 25 per cent. from year to year. I understand that that was the intended effect of the amendment. However, clause 171(1)(a) would still allow the levy ceiling to be modified during the transitional period. However, let us not worry about that technical defect.

We disagree with the amendment made in the other place for the following reasons. We do not believe it right that Parliament should have to approve changes to the amount collected through the levies. We have made it clear throughout our discussions that it is critical that the PPF can operate independently at arm's length from Government. That was an important lesson that we learned from US experience of the Pension Benefit Guarantee Corporation, where changes must be approved by Congress and where, as a result, no changes have been made since 1991. It is a fundamental principle in our approach that the PPF should operate without undue political interference, and that is why we created different controls through the imposition of a levy ceiling and the 25 per cent. rule.

From the outset it was our intention that, during the transitional period, the amount raised by the board through the pension protection levies should be controlled by the levy ceiling only and not by the 25 per cent. rule, which applies from the second financial year after the end of the transitional period. If the board was constrained by application of the 25 per cent. rule during the transitional period, its only option might be to collect the £300 million that we anticipate will be needed from the end of the transitional period in the first financial year after the initial period, even if that turned out not to be necessary. That might be the only way that the board could ensure that the PPF could meet its liabilities in the subsequent year.

On administration costs, the intention of the amendment seemed to be that the scheme-based levy should be used to collect administration costs for the PPF. We do not think that that is a sensible approach. It is crucial that a clear distinction be drawn between the PPF income that is used to pay compensation and the income that is used to pay administration costs. That is also important so that Parliament can scrutinise the PPF accounts, and is in line with the way in which most other non-departmental public bodies are funded. I should also be clear that the amendment does not achieve the intent I have described. Instead, the effect would be simply to restrict the amount that could be collected through the scheme-based pension protection levy to the same level as the PPF's administration costs.

However, we do recognise the importance of risk in setting the levies, and that is perhaps the crucial point. We have always made it clear that the levies should be predominantly risk based and that we might expect the PPF to collect 80 per cent. from the risk-based levy. We recognise the concerns that have been raised, however, and the importance of the issue for well-funded schemes with a strong employer covenant. We therefore propose an amendment in lieu, with a provision to increase the amount collected through the risk-based levy to 80 per cent. of the estimated total to be collected, through a concession.

3 pm

If we disagree with the amendment introduced in the other place, some consequential technical amendments would have to be made to the original clause. Those amendments would result from amendments made to clause 166 on Report in the other place, requiring the board to set both a risk-based pension protection levy and a scheme-based pension protection levy in relation to eligible schemes from the end of the transitional period.

In this group we are also considering the amendment tabled by the hon. Member for Northavon (Mr. Webb). Amendments introduced in the other place require the board to set a risk-based levy for all schemes. The hon. Gentleman's amendment would enable the board to make exceptions to that rule and set only a scheme-based levy for small schemes, defined as those with under 100 members. The intention would be to ensure that it would not be necessary for the PPF to undertake a complex and costly assessment of risk to collect a relatively small amount of money. We fully agree that there are possible problems surrounding small schemes and the calculation of the risk-based pension protection levy; the Government raised the same concerns throughout the progress of the Bill, and when the Opposition introduced the amendments in question.

There are, however, a couple of problems with the amendment. It provides that the board may set only a scheme-based levy in relation to small schemes, provided that the amount the board estimates will be raised from those schemes in aggregate is the same as the amount that would have been raised from them if a risk-based pension protection levy had also been imposed. It seems that in order to estimate the amount that would have been raised from schemes via a risk-based pension protection levy, it would be necessary to undertake a risk calculation in relation to those schemes—the very process that we are trying to avoid due to its cost implications.

Mr. Webb: I understand why the Minister makes that point, but the burden comes from working out the figure for individual schemes; all the proposal requires is that the aggregate be the same. It is possible to estimate the aggregate without working out the figure for each scheme.

Malcolm Wicks: I am genuinely puzzled about how one could work out the aggregate without the sum of the parts.

For the reasons I outlined, we tabled an amendment to the amendments introduced in the other place, which would reduce the burden on the PPF and small schemes to provide an accurate calculation of risk. Our amendment provides a regulation-making power to enable the PPF to disapply the requirement that insolvency risk be taken into account when setting the risk-based levy. We intend to use that regulation-making power to exempt small schemes from the consideration of insolvency risk. We consider that that approach is in keeping with the spirit of the amendment tabled in the other place, which required the board to impose both levies, so that the risk-based levy is imposed in respect of all eligible schemes. In that sense, our approach may go further than the hon. Gentleman's amendment by still requiring a risk-based levy to be in place for all schemes, but it will allow the board to calculate risk much more simply for small schemes. The board would thus have to consider underfunding only to determine the risk-based element, information on which will be provided anyway by all such schemes through PPF valuations. The amendment not only allows burdens on schemes and the PPF to be kept to a minimum, but also ensures that the levy paid by all schemes will reflect at least some assessment of risk. Our

[Malcolm Wicks]

approach should go a long way towards meeting the concerns expressed by the Opposition and the NAPF, without undermining the principle of the amendment in the other place—to apply a risk-based element for all schemes.

Mr. Fallon: I think the Minister's comments will be welcome. Will his definition of a small scheme be the same as that proposed by the Liberal Democrats? Can he clarify that point for the House?

Malcolm Wicks: I can clarify that it is also our definition of a small scheme.

In summary, I urge the House to disagree with the amendment introduced in the other place, and to accept the Government amendments to clause 168 that we propose in lieu. The amendments will restore clause 168 to the Bill, but with a change to require that 80 per cent. of the estimated total collected by the levies should be collected via the risk-based pension protection levy. They also make some changes consequential on the amendments made in the other place.

I urge the hon. Member for Northavon to withdraw his amendment relating to small schemes and to support instead the Government amendment that we propose to the Lords amendments to clause 166. To recap, that will have the effect that, in relation to prescribed schemes, the PPF may disapply the requirement that insolvency risk be taken into account when setting the risk-based levy.

In response to some specific questions put by the hon. Gentleman, yes, it is the case that firms will be able to opt for a risk-based levy as soon as they want, but—this may disappoint him—they do not have to move to risk-based levies until the triennial valuation falls due. The hon. Gentleman shakes his head, but there is a question of judgment about how we phase in such things and whether it would be appropriate—we think it would not—to require a scheme to bring forward, no doubt at some expense, its triennial valuation. That is a matter of judgment, not of great principle, and that is our judgment. If the valuation falls within the transitional period, the firm would not have the choice of deferring until a later date.

When well-run funded schemes opt into the risk-based levy, the PPF will need to decide how to charge schemes that have been left outside. It is extremely likely—although it will be a matter for the board—that schemes that do not opt in will have to pay higher amounts as a result, especially as the PPF will want to incentivise schemes to enter the risk-based levy as soon as possible. I hope that goes some way towards satisfying the hon. Gentleman.

The hon. Gentleman referred to the advice he received from the NAPF. It is my understanding that the association recognises the concerns we have raised about the amendments it suggested initially and that it welcomes the Government's approach in response to those amendments, which combines the principles of fairness and administrative simplicity. The NAPF—a great friend of the Government—will of course want to work with the PPF board to put the regulatory framework into practice in a proportionate way.

I hope that after those explanations the hon. Gentleman might consider withdrawing his amendment and supporting our amendments.

Sir John Butterfill: First, I remind Members of my entry in the Register of Members' Interests; I chair not only the parliamentary contributory pension fund trustees, but also the trustees of the People's Dispensary for Sick Animals pension fund.

I have one or two queries arising from the comments of the hon. Member for Northavon (Mr. Webb) and the Minister. I am concerned about the way in which the risk element will be assessed. Will the Minister further clarify that? A triennial valuation would make obvious any deficiency in the fund and the extent to which it would need to be remedied, and I see no particular problem with that. However, if I heard the Minister correctly, it is the intention that, in assessing the risk-based levy, the employer's financial viability will also need to be taken into account. What will be the criteria for that?

The hon. Member for Northavon implied that large schemes might be safer than small ones. However, when we recall Enron we might consider that large schemes were not safe at all. In many cases, the greatest risks may arise from very large companies. How do we assess that? Do we say that the asset base of the company is sufficiently large to give us reassurance? On the other hand, we all know that a couple of years of disastrous trading can quickly erode an asset base. We only have to look at what has happened to the market rating of large companies such as Marks and Spencer recently to see how quickly things can turn around. Therefore, will the levy itself be constantly reassessed according to the assessment of the financial viability of the employer, or will that be assessed only on a periodic basis, and what will the assessment be?

What will the situation be for charities? The Minister will appreciate my concern about this in respect of the People's Dispensary for Sick Animals. We have a relatively well-funded scheme, which substantially exceeds the MFR valuation. It does not meet the 100 per cent. solvency test, but very few schemes do. However, there is no trading record in respect of charities. They certainly will have some assets, but the amount of assets tends to be regulated by the charity commissioners. We have to satisfy the charity commissioners that, for example, we are not holding back too much by way of assets to the detriment of using that cash and those assets for our charitable purposes. We hold back, by way of reserve, about one year's operating expenditure, so that if all our charitable donations dried up we could still keep going without anything coming in for a year; that has been accepted by the charity commissioners. If, however, the regulator did not regard that as satisfactory, the Government would have to talk to the charity commissioners to see whether they would allow charities to hold greater reserves in the light of their pension liabilities. The Minister may wish to consider that further and come back to me at a later date, but it is certainly a very relevant point as far as charities are concerned.

The other problem with assessing the viability of charities is that one never knows how much income there will be in any one year. We at the PDSA have become rather good at forecasting what it will be; a lot of our income derives from legacies that we know will be coming to us, so we can make fairly accurate predictions of our legacy income over the next few years. Other charitable income, however, from charity shops or appeals or all the other available funding methods, are subject to much greater fluctuation. To what extent might charities be penalised because they cannot show a trading record in precisely the same way as a firm can? That will be a concern to the whole charity sector.

Malcolm Wicks: I am happy to talk to the hon. Gentleman about the PDSA and the point that he raises about charities, given his involvement with the PDSA; we hope that later there will be fewer animals at risk, but that is another debate. In terms of the risk of firms, the board must consider underfunding and it must consider insolvency risk, but other criteria will be up to the PPF board.

Sir John Butterfill: I am grateful to the Minister for that. It does seem to me, however, that given the range of risk that will have to be assessed—not just the viability of the fund but the viability of the employer—the process may take quite a long time to complete. Is the Minister satisfied that the present timetable that he has set out will be adequate for that purpose?

Mr. Fallon: It would be churlish not to recognise that the Minister has moved on the question of the percentage of the risk-based levy, and I think we would all welcome that. My hon. Friend the Member for Bournemouth, West (Sir John Butterfill) has raised a very valid point about charities, because it perfectly illustrates what I think will be the problem under this legislation—regulatory overload. I suspect that in essence, what will happen is that the regulator will have to confirm the trading position of a charity and will be drawn into dialogue, presumably in this case with the charity commissioners, but in other cases probably with the Financial Services Authority and who knows what else, and we shall have one regulator chasing another regulator round and round the block.

3.15 pm

It will not quite do for the Minister to say that every conceivable transaction has to be registered, and will not be officially cleared, in case of any change of circumstance, for the whole of a six-year period, and then to say—presumably in reply to my hon. Friend the Member for Bournemouth, West—that this particular issue will not take too long to resolve. The Minister cannot have it both ways.

Finally, on small schemes, I would certainly support the hon. Member for Northavon (Mr. Webb) on exempting small schemes if there is no element of cross-subsidy involved. That was the purpose of my question to him, and he has given me an assurance on that. I suspect that we would support what he has put forward and I hope that he may be comforted by what the Minister has said in reply.

There is one element of the Minister's reply that I would like him to reflect on, perhaps at a later stage of the Bill. He did say that it was his intention to invite the regulator to disapply. I think that that will be in the guidance or, eventually, in the regulations. An awful lot is being left to the guidance and there are a lot of people outside the House who will have no comfort from these debates until they see that guidance and see the form of regulations that will flow from the Bill. I wonder whether, if not now, at some stage in our proceedings, the Minister will be able to clarify what he means when he says, "it is our intention that"; does that mean that he will be publishing guidance in draft, between the passing of this legislation as an Act and the setting up of the regulator and his powers coming into force, or are we simply going to be confronted, as usual, with a great pile of regulations?

Mr. Waterson: I have a mental image, which I have shared privately with the Minister recently, of the Minister haring up the road to Buckingham palace at the last minute, dashing the pen from Her Majesty's hand before she signs the Royal Assent and saying, "Your Majesty, we have had a final thought on this and we would like to change things just a teeny little bit—tweak things just a fraction to get the Bill right." I cannot get rid of that image. I used to think that it was a joke, but I am beginning to wonder.

We have just heard something extraordinarily revealing from the Minister, which confirms my impression that, from start to finish of the Bill, he has been making it up as he goes along. He has revealed a new bit of policy that has suddenly emerged—unless I just failed to spot it on a previous occasion, although I noted that the hon. Member for Northavon (Mr. Webb) was equally taken aback.

We did manage to extract rather painfully from the Minister in Committee that in fact it could be 2009—although he did hotly contest the idea that it could be 2010—before we had an all-singing, all-dancing risk-based levy system applying across the board. He referred to the question of triennial reviews and he did confirm, as I understood it, in response to a point raised by the hon. Member for Northavon, that it was possible for schemes to opt in early, as it were, to the risk-based levy. Presumably, the other side of that coin is that they can put it off as long as it suits them within the 2009 ceiling.

Then suddenly there emerged the brand new idea that the PPF would somehow produce a yet further basis for charging some schemes, completely outwith anything that has been debated in the House or the other House, to incentivise some of these schemes to opt in sooner than they might otherwise. We have to ask, in all seriousness, is the Minister simply making it up, or is there some developed policy thinking on this, and if so, why does it not feature in the hundreds, if not thousands, of amendments and new clauses that have been pouring out of the Department ever since the Bill saw the light of day?

Mr. Webb: The hon. Gentleman refers to schemes choosing whether to go for the risk-based levy or the flat-rate levy, but is there not a further paradox? Presumably, the scheme must guess what its risk-based levy would be, which is related to that specific scheme's features. So the scheme may not even know what its risk-based levy might be, and it will therefore inject greater uncertainty into the Government's proposed voluntary approach.

Mr. Waterson: The hon. Gentleman makes a fair point. I seem to remember that, in Committee, we as the official Opposition made a kind of rough and ready interim proposal, not unrelated to the MFR, to try to get a risk-based levy up and running sooner rather than later. That was airily dismissed by Ministers, but it at least had the attraction of being more immediate in its application. There is a real problem, but we can be sure that those schemes that face perhaps the greatest risk in reality will be those that are most careful about calculating whether they will be better off staying outside for as long as possible. There is a real worry, and not for the first, the second or the hundredth time, I find myself having to respond to something that is brand new and has just come barrelling out of the blue this afternoon without warning and with no paperwork attached.

Before I move on to the central questions involved in the risk-based levy, I wish to touch on the smaller schemes issue. I take on board some of what the Minister says and some of the things said in the other place about the practicalities; but, on balance, we understand the force of what is proposed by the hon. Member for Northavon, and subject to anything further that I hear from the Minister or any other hon. Member, we would be minded to support the hon. Gentleman if he presses his amendment to a vote this afternoon.

I cannot help reflecting on the fact that, just for once, the exasperation expressed by Baroness Hollis in the other place only yesterday was justified when she made the point that Lord Oakeshott had indeed argued against such a proposition in Grand Committee and on Report. She said:

> "When I tried to make that key point on behalf of the Government, it was not acceptable. However, when, beyond the appropriate time, the NAPF takes exactly the same line as the Government, we hear that amendments may be moved in the Commons."—[*Official Report, House of Lords*, 15 November 2004; Vol. 666, c. 1221.]

I dare say that it is not unusual for the Liberal Democrats to change their minds on any number of issues, but it is worth reflecting on the fact that they seem to have done a bit of gymnastics on this issue.

I shall come now to the key matter. I never know whether this is appropriate, but to be on the safe side, I suppose that I should declare a possible interest in that I have private pension provision, as I have indicated in, I think, all our previous debates on the Bill. We in the House and our colleagues in the official Opposition in the Lords have always had three basic concerns about the risk-based levy. First, the initial levy period should be limited to one year. In other words, as soon as is humanly possible, we should have a risk-based levy, and I shall return to some of the major reasons why in a moment.

Secondly, we want to ensure that, after the initial period, the pension protection levy should comprise both risk-based and scheme factor components. As has been said already, we have consistently, certainly in Committee, looked for the greatest possible definition of risk, so that we consider not just the risks to the scheme of underfunding as well as the nature and quality of a fund's investments, but the likelihood of the sponsoring company's insolvency in respect of any scheme, as the hon. Member for Northavon said.

The third major issue, which the Government are clearly now accepting—although in a sense the Minister did so in Committee, and I shall return to that in a moment, as I would not want to seem to misrepresent his position—is that the highest possible proportion of the levy should indeed be risk-based. We argued successfully in the Lords for an 80 per cent. figure.

Those have always been our major concerns about the Bill, and I shall explain in a little detail why we think that they are important issues. Before the Bill ever saw the light of day, when it was in what passes for its gestation period, I took the trouble of going to Washington to met Mr. Steve Kandarian, the then executive director of the Pension Benefit Guarantee Corporation, the body on which the Government claim that they are modelling the pension protection fund, although that is not the case in a variety of respects. The Government have diluted the model—if one can dilute a model—in a number of important respects, not least of which is that the so-called guarantee offered by the PPF is nothing like as secure as that offered by the PBGC.

Leaving that aside for a moment, Mr. Kandarian, who has since visited London, having ceased to be the executive director, and lectured on these issues at Imperial college, was adamant about a variety of things, one of which the Minister touched on: the importance of not necessarily leaving it to the legislature, particularly in election periods, to decide to increase the levy. Mr. Kandarian was adamant in his discussions with me and, I suspect, with anyone who was prepared to listen to him—I am sure that that included the Minister and his officials, as they prepared the Bill—about the need to have a risk-based levy from the very outset. Indeed, it was a number of years before the PBGC started to pay out benefits, as it gradually built up its funding since its founding in 1974. Mr. Kandarian was very clear that a proper risk-based levy was needed from the start, and he also spoke with some regret that, when the original model was set up in 1974, it was not fully risk based because it did not include all the components of risk that I spoke about earlier. We have always taken the view that that must be an important part of the Bill because it seemed sensible to take some note of 30 years' experience on the other side of the Atlantic, and it became even more important the more we considered the Bill.

I shall briefly refer to the evidence on these issues that Mr. Kandarian gave to the United States Senate when he was still the PBGC's executive director. He said:

> "When PBGC takes over underfunded pension plans, financially healthy companies with better-funded pension plans end up making transfers to financially weak companies with chronically underfunded pension plans. If these transfers from strong to weak plans become too large, then over time strong companies with well-funded plans may elect to leave the system."

That is what we are talking about. We can dress it up and call it moral hazard or any number of fancy terms, but the reality is that if the Bill, despite having changed shape in so many important respects, is supposed to protect the members of existing defined-benefit schemes in this country, while encouraging not only those schemes to continue to be open to new members, but perhaps new schemes even to start, the last thing that we want is to deter employers who might be considering opening a new scheme or keeping one open to new members. That is clearly a problem.

If we tell well-run schemes and well-run companies that, for a significant period, they will end up paying a flat-rate levy that is not fully risk-based—in effect, the good will subsidise the bad—perhaps some of the less well-run, more risk-based schemes will be able to continue to opt out for as long as possible from the whole scheme, despite the new bit of policy that we heard about just a few minutes ago,

In America, as Mr. Kandarian went on to say in his evidence, there is

"a flat-rate charge of $19 per participant, and a variable rate premium of 0.9 per cent. of the dollar amount of a plan's underfunding, measured on a 'current liability' basis."

His great regret, which he explained to me and others, was that the system was not got right from the start and that regret is encapsulated in the example of Bethlehem Steel. It resulted in the largest single claim in the history of the PBGC. However, Bethlehem Steel paid no variable rate premium for five years prior to termination despite being drastically underfunded on a termination basis. That flags up the enormous importance of ensuring, as we have consistently said, that the risk-based levies are in place early on.

3.30 pm

In fairness to the Minister, what he said earlier—apart from the new bit of policy—only reflects what he said in Committee. It emerged that he conceded that, because of the practicalities involved in bringing in a fully risk-based element, it would not come in for three or four years. That obviously took me by surprise, because he refers to me grimacing from a sedentary position. He added that

"if a scheme chose to bring forward the three-yearly valuation, presumably to benefit from a lower risk base, it could do so."

However, the hon. Member for Northavon pointed out that this could end up without a proper insurance scheme covering all funds until 2010. The Minister responded—somewhat in annoyance, as I recall it—by saying that that was certainly not the case, but added

"The three-yearly valuation cycle takes us to 2008, so the full risk-based levy could be introduced for all schemes at the end of the process by 2009"—[*Official Report, Standing Committee B*, 1 April 2004; c. 560, 568.]

The *Hansard* report shows that that remark was followed by an "Interruption", I am not at all surprised.

There will be a significantly longer period for all schemes to pay a fully risk-based levy, but the position gets worse. We heard only recently that the burdens on the PPF at its inception are increasing rather than decreasing. We will spend more time on that when we come to a later group of amendments, but I think of the statement the other day about schemes such as that run by Turner and Newell. They still might be dealt with retrospectively under the PPF even if there were a significant event before April 2005.

There have been strenuous arguments on all these issues. I think that the Government have accepted most of them and, in particular, the argument about the figure of 80 per cent. It is important to point out that the National Association of Pension Funds has been clear throughout that it wants the highest possible proportion of risk element in the way that the levy is calculated. It says:

"NAPF would like the PPF's risk-based levy to be at least 80 per cent. of the total funds raised, in order to minimise moral hazard. The initial transitional period when there is only a flat rate levy should not extend beyond a year."

The fact that we need to debate this issue in the Lords or this House is slightly curious. In Committee, the Minister said that

"we consider that an appropriate split in due course could be—although it is up to the board—about an 80 per cent., 20 per cent. split in favour of risk factors."—[*Official Report, Standing Committee B*, 1 April 2004; c. 588.]

There has never really been a lack of common ground between the two sides on the 80 per cent. issue. This is all about whether the Government have been prepared to include that figure in the Bill. Baroness Hollis put it rather well when she said:

"I, too, support the amendment: I just cannot accept it."

That struck us as slightly bizarre. She also coined the memorable phrase when she said that, in the early stages, there would be a

"mixed economy in which all schemes will have some scheme-based levy and others will carry, by choice, a risk-based element. It is clear that insofar as the good companies seek the risk-based element in the hope of reducing their premium, this will have"—

this is an important admission—

"an adverse selection effect on the scheme-based levy for the rest."—[*Official Report, House of Lords*, 4 November 2004; Vol. 666, c. 485, 497.]

That is the point that the hon. Member for Northavon made. Some good companies will clearly be disadvantaged by the long run-in to a fully risk-based levy right across the board. We think that that is wrong.

The good news is that the Government appear to accept the 80 per cent. figure and that we should be moving as rapidly as possible to a fully risk-based levy. We still think that they could do more to tighten up the time scale, but we do not propose to divide the House on the main issue. We think, however, that there is sufficient merit in the amendment tabled by the Liberal Democrats, and we do not think that it should be dealt with in the way that the Minister suggested. The amendment makes a clear point that should be included in the Bill, so we urge the hon. Member for Northavon to pursue it. We are prepared to support him in the Lobby.

Mr. Webb: I am grateful for the support of the hon. Members for Eastbourne (Mr. Waterson) and for Sevenoaks (Mr. Fallon), and it is only right that I respond briefly to some of the questions that have been raised about the amendment and clarify what it will and will not achieve.

The hon. Member for Eastbourne asked about my noble Friend Lord Oakeshott, who pointed out in another place that the effect of the risk-based levy on small schemes was not a reason for rejecting an 80 per cent. risk-based levy. That point has been missed. Baroness Hollis has used the effect on small schemes as a reason for not having such a levy at all. That reason has now gone, because the Government have now said that they will accept the 80 per cent. rule. We can therefore modify it to deal with the legitimate concerns

[Mr. Webb]

that she raised. It was not a fatal objection, but it needs addressing.

I listened to the Minister's response, and I am now puzzled. He said that the Government propose that every tiny scheme will have a risk-based levy based only on the underfunding and not the insolvency risk. That means, however, that every small scheme might have a unique level of risk-based premium. Such a proposal is vastly more complex than it needs to be. Every scheme will have to have an individually assessed risk that is based, admittedly, on information that will presumably be gathered anyway. However, if we are to do the job properly and assess the level of risk in a particular scheme based on the position of the fund—I shall be interested in the thoughts of the hon. Member for Bournemouth, West (Sir John Butterfill) on this—we do not necessarily need precisely the same information to assess the level of underfunding as we do to assess the risk arising from that underfunding. For example, there may be a given level of underfunding on a particular definition at a particular point in time, but the likelihood of two schemes with identical levels of funding at a snapshot making a claim on the scheme may vary greatly depending on the asset mix or something like that.

Assuming that we fail with this amendment, the PPF board will have to make an individual calculation for every single—even one-member—occupational scheme and the PPF will not just need the information that it collects anyway. I am happy to take an intervention from the Minister on that point, because it is important. As I understand it, for the PPF board to work out the risk-based levy on small schemes even just based on the funding in the fund will require more than the information that it collects anyway. To do the job properly, there is the realistic prospect that it will require further information, such as information about the asset mix. That could create serious administrative burdens on small schemes.

Sir John Butterfill: The hon. Gentleman makes a valuable point; he is entirely correct. The question that I raised earlier was how far we go in pursuit of the information. How do we assess the viability of small firms without the benefit of international credit ratings to assist us? A detailed examination of the accounts and the current state of play of individual employers may be required. The amount of work involved in that is huge.

Mr. Webb: I greatly respect the hon. Gentleman's knowledge of such matters. As he says, it would be difficult to assess the insolvency risk of such small firms. To be fair to the Government, as I often am, the thrust of Government amendment (a) to Lords amendment No. 283 is the exemption of small schemes from the need for a calculation of insolvency risk. However, even a risk-based element that is based on the funding of the PPF will put an unnecessary burden on small schemes.

The Minister pointed out what appeared to be a paradox in the amendment's wording, although I hope that I have reassured him about that. To go back to the point that the hon. Member for Sevenoaks made, we would exempt small schemes from a risk-based element, so we would not change the balance between the overall burdens on smaller and larger schemes.

The Minister asked how we would work out what small schemes would have paid as a risk-based premium if we did not make individual calculations for each scheme and suggested that that would create the problem that we were trying to avoid. However, if I may draw an analogy with car insurance, it is perfectly possible for Direct Line to work out the average risk of Ford Escort drivers without calculating the risk of each individual Ford Escort driver, which will vary. The company knows the average risk for the group, so it does not have to work out each person's risk. It would not be a problem to work out the aggregate risk-based premium for small schemes, and thus ensure that the overall burden would not change. The calculation would be simpler than that envisaged, so it would put less burden on the PPF and small schemes. As the bureaucracy would be less, there would be a smaller overall burden—a smaller levy—which is what we all want, so I am somewhat puzzled about why the Government want to go down their route.

I was astonished by the Minister's response to my question about the ability to make a choice about whether to be insured according to risk. The idea that people who are a bad risk may choose to pay a different and lower premium for an insurance scheme is bizarre and implies that cross-subsidisation would occur.

The Minister came up with an extraordinary ad hoc suggestion—although I think that he was reading it—that firms that did not adopt the risk-based element as soon as possible would be incentivised to do that. Which aspect of the Bill gives the PPF the power to do that? It can set a scheme-based levy based on the number of members in a scheme, but can it change the levy to penalise the bad guys who do not adopt the risk-based option? The Government seem to be making things up as they go along. The Minister told us at the start of his speech that the PPF will be independent of the Government, so the Government could not make the fund do that. Has he drawn up any guidance for the PPF? Will he ask it to encourage people to adopt the risk-based levy?

If the Government think that it would be good to get people on the risk-based levy, why do they not make them do so? If that measure would result in a proper insurance scheme more quickly, the Government should implement it. They say that they want to incentivise people, but where will the money for that come from? It would be bizarre to give people an incentive to adopt the risk-based scheme, and thus presumably pay a higher premium. Perhaps we will pursue the matter through a written question, because although I would be happy to give way to the Minister, he does not have the opportunity to make a speech in which he may explain himself.

We welcome the fact that the Government amendments in lieu of Lords amendment No. 298 accept its spirit. However, Liberal Democrat amendment (a) to the Lords amendment deals with a point about small firms that Baroness Hollis raised. The amendment would achieve something that the Government should try to do, so I would like to test the opinion of the House.

Amendment proposed to the Lords amendment: (a), in line 13, leave out from first "The" and insert "Subject to subsection (4A), the"—*[Mr. Webb.]*

Question put, That the amendment be made:—

The House divided: Ayes 196, Noes 293.

Division No. 322] **[3:44 pm**

AYES

Ainsworth, Peter *(E Surrey)*
Allan, Richard
Amess, David
Ancram, rh Michael
Arbuthnot, rh James
Atkinson, Peter *(Hexham)*
Bacon, Richard
Baker, Norman
Baldry, Tony
Barker, Gregory
Barrett, John
Beggs, Roy *(E Antrim)*
Beith, rh A. J.
Bellingham, Henry
Bercow, John
Beresford, Sir Paul
Blunt, Crispin
Boswell, Tim
Bottomley, Peter *(Worthing W)*
Brady, Graham
Brake, Tom *(Carshalton)*
Brazier, Julian
Breed, Colin
Brooke, Mrs Annette L.
Browning, Mrs Angela
Bruce, Malcolm
Burns, Simon
Burnside, David
Burstow, Paul
Burt, Alistair
Butterfill, Sir John
Cable, Dr. Vincent
Calton, Mrs Patsy
Cameron, David
Campbell, Gregory *(E Lond'y)*
Carmichael, Alistair
Cash, William
Chapman, Sir Sydney *(Chipping Barnet)*
Chope, Christopher
Clappison, James
Clifton-Brown, Geoffrey
Collins, Tim
Conway, Derek
Cormack, Sir Patrick
Cotter, Brian
Curry, rh David
Davies, Quentin *(Grantham & Stamford)*
Davis, rh David *(Haltemprice & Howden)*
Djanogly, Jonathan
Dodds, Nigel
Doughty, Sue
Duncan, Alan *(Rutland)*
Duncan, Peter *(Galloway)*
Fabricant, Michael
Fallon, Michael
Field, Mark *(Cities of London & Westminster)*
Flight, Howard
Flook, Adrian
Forth, rh Eric
Foster, Don *(Bath)*
Fox, Dr. Liam
Francois, Mark
Gale, Roger *(N Thanet)*
Garnier, Edward
George, Andrew *(St. Ives)*
Gibb, Nick *(Bognor Regis)*
Gidley, Sandra
Gillan, Mrs Cheryl
Goodman, Paul
Gray, James *(N Wilts)*
Green, Damian *(Ashford)*
Green, Matthew *(Ludlow)*
Greenway, John
Grieve, Dominic
Gummer, rh John
Hague, rh William
Hammond, Philip
Hancock, Mike
Harvey, Nick
Hawkins, Nick
Hayes, John *(S Holland)*
Heald, Oliver
Heath, David
Heathcoat-Amory, rh David
Hendry, Charles
Hermon, Lady
Hoban, Mark *(Fareham)*
Hogg, rh Douglas
Holmes, Paul
Horam, John *(Orpington)*
Howard, rh Michael
Howarth, Gerald *(Aldershot)*
Hughes, Simon *(Southwark N)*
Hunter, Andrew
Jackson, Robert *(Wantage)*
Johnson, Boris *(Henley)*
Jones, Nigel *(Cheltenham)*
Kennedy, rh Charles *(Ross Skye & Inverness)*
Kirkbride, Miss Julie
Kirkwood, Sir Archy
Knight, rh Greg *(E Yorkshire)*
Laing, Mrs Eleanor
Lait, Mrs Jacqui
Lamb, Norman
Lansley, Andrew
Laws, David *(Yeovil)*
Leigh, Edward
Lewis, Dr. Julian *(New Forest E)*
Liddell-Grainger, Ian
Lidington, David
Lilley, rh Peter
Llwyd, Elfyn
Loughton, Tim
Luff, Peter *(M-Worcs)*
McIntosh, Miss Anne
Mackay, rh Andrew
McLoughlin, Patrick
Malins, Humfrey
Maples, John
Maude, rh Francis
Mawhinney, rh Sir Brian
May, Mrs Theresa
Mercer, Patrick
Mitchell, Andrew *(Sutton Coldfield)*
Moore, Michael
Moss, Malcolm
Murrison, Dr. Andrew
Norman, Archie
Oaten, Mark *(Winchester)*
O'Brien, Stephen *(Eddisbury)*
Öpik, Lembit
Osborne, George *(Tatton)*
Ottaway, Richard
Paice, James
Paterson, Owen
Pickles, Eric
Price, Adam *(E Carmarthen & Dinefwr)*
Prisk, Mark *(Hertford)*
Pugh, Dr. John
Redwood, rh John
Rendel, David
Robathan, Andrew
Robertson, Angus *(Moray)*
Robertson, Hugh *(Faversham & M-Kent)*
Robinson, Mrs Iris *(Strangford)*
Robinson, Peter *(Belfast E)*
Roe, Dame Marion
Rosindell, Andrew
Ruffley, David
Russell, Bob *(Colchester)*
Salmond, Alex
Sanders, Adrian
Sayeed, Jonathan
Selous, Andrew
Shephard, rh Mrs Gillian
Shepherd, Richard
Simpson, Keith *(M-Norfolk)*
Smith, Sir Robert *(W Ab'd'ns & Kincardine)*
Smyth, Rev. Martin *(Belfast S)*
Spelman, Mrs Caroline
Spicer, Sir Michael
Spink, Bob *(Castle Point)*
Stanley, rh Sir John
Steen, Anthony
Streeter, Gary
Stunell, Andrew
Swayne, Desmond
Swire, Hugo *(E Devon)*
Syms, Robert
Tapsell, Sir Peter
Taylor, Ian *(Esher)*
Taylor, John *(Solihull)*
Taylor, Matthew *(Truro)*
Taylor, Sir Teddy
Teather, Sarah
Thomas, Simon *(Ceredigion)*
Thurso, John
Tredinnick, David
Turner, Andrew *(Isle of Wight)*
Tyler, Paul *(N Cornwall)*
Waterson, Nigel
Watkinson, Angela
Webb, Steve *(Northavon)*
Whittingdale, John
Widdecombe, rh Miss Ann
Wiggin, Bill
Wilkinson, John
Willetts, David
Williams, Hywel *(Caernarfon)*
Williams, Roger *(Brecon)*
Wilshire, David
Winterton, Ann *(Congleton)*
Winterton, Sir Nicholas *(Macclesfield)*
Wishart, Pete
Yeo, Tim *(S Suffolk)*
Young, rh Sir George

Tellers for the Ayes:
Mr. Alan Reid and
Richard Younger-Ross

NOES

Abbott, Ms Diane
Ainger, Nick
Ainsworth, Bob *(Cov'try NE)*
Alexander, Douglas
Allen, Graham
Anderson, rh Donald *(Swansea E)*
Anderson, Janet *(Rossendale & Darwen)*
Armstrong, rh Ms Hilary
Atherton, Ms Candy
Atkins, Charlotte
Bailey, Adrian
Baird, Vera
Banks, Tony
Barron, rh Kevin
Battle, rh John
Beard, Nigel
Begg, Miss Anne
Bell, Sir Stuart
Berry, Roger
Blackman, Liz
Blizzard, Bob
Blunkett, rh David
Boateng, rh Paul
Borrow, David
Bradley, rh Keith *(Withington)*
Bradley, Peter *(The Wrekin)*
Brennan, Kevin
Brown, rh Nicholas *(Newcastle E Wallsend)*
Brown, Russell *(Dumfries)*
Browne, Desmond
Buck, Ms Karen
Burgon, Colin
Burnham, Andy
Byrne, Liam *(B'ham Hodge H)*
Caborn, rh Richard
Cairns, David
Campbell, Alan *(Tynemouth)*
Campbell, Mrs Anne *(C'bridge)*
Campbell, Ronnie *(Blyth V)*
Caplin, Ivor
Caton, Martin
Cawsey, Ian *(Brigg)*
Challen, Colin
Clark, Mrs Helen *(Peterborough)*
Clark, Dr. Lynda *(Edinburgh Pentlands)*
Clarke, rh Tom *(Coatbridge & Chryston)*
Clelland, David
Coffey, Ms Ann
Colman, Tony
Cook, rh Robin *(Livingston)*
Corbyn, Jeremy
Corston, Jean
Cox, Tom *(Tooting)*
Cranston, Ross
Cruddas, Jon
Cryer, Ann *(Keighley)*
Cryer, John *(Hornchurch)*
Cunningham, Jim *(Coventry S)*
Cunningham, Tony *(Workington)*
Curtis-Thomas, Mrs Claire
Davey, Valerie *(Bristol W)*
David, Wayne
Davidson, Ian
Davies, rh Denzil *(Llanelli)*
Davies, Geraint *(Croydon C)*
Dawson, Hilton
Dean, Mrs Janet
Denham, rh John
Dhanda, Parmjit
Dismore, Andrew

Dobbin, Jim *(Heywood)*
Dobson, rh Frank
Donohoe, Brian H.
Dowd, Jim *(Lewisham W)*
Drew, David *(Stroud)*
Dunwoody, Mrs Gwyneth
Eagle, Angela *(Wallasey)*
Eagle, Maria *(L'pool Garston)*
Edwards, Huw
Efford, Clive
Ellman, Mrs Louise
Ennis, Jeff *(Barnsley E)*
Etherington, Bill
Field, rh Frank *(Birkenhead)*
Fisher, Mark
Fitzpatrick, Jim
Fitzsimons, Mrs Lorna
Foster, rh Derek
Foster, Michael *(Worcester)*
Foster, Michael Jabez *(Hastings & Rye)*
Francis, Dr. Hywel
Gerrard, Neil
Gilroy, Linda
Godsiff, Roger
Goggins, Paul
Griffiths, Jane *(Reading E)*
Grogan, John
Hain, rh Peter
Hall, Mike *(Weaver Vale)*
Hall, Patrick *(Bedford)*
Hamilton, David *(Midlothian)*
Hamilton, Fabian *(Leeds NE)*
Hanson, David
Harman, rh Ms Harriet
Healey, John
Henderson, Doug *(Newcastle N)*
Henderson, Ivan *(Harwich)*
Hendrick, Mark
Hepburn, Stephen
Heppell, John
Hesford, Stephen
Heyes, David
Hill, Keith *(Streatham)*
Hinchliffe, David
Hoey, Kate *(Vauxhall)*
Hood, Jimmy *(Clydesdale)*
Hoon, rh Geoffrey
Hope, Phil *(Corby)*
Hopkins, Kelvin
Howarth, rh Alan *(Newport E)*
Howarth, George *(Knowsley N & Sefton E)*
Howells, Dr. Kim
Hughes, Beverley *(Stretford & Urmston)*
Hughes, Kevin *(Doncaster N)*
Humble, Mrs Joan
Hume, John *(Foyle)*
Hurst, Alan *(Braintree)*
Hutton, rh John
Illsley, Eric
Irranca-Davies, Huw
Jackson, Glenda *(Hampstead & Highgate)*
Jackson, Helen *(Hillsborough)*
Jamieson, David
Jenkins, Brian
Johnson, rh Alan *(Hull W)*
Johnson, Miss Melanie *(Welwyn Hatfield)*
Jones, Helen *(Warrington N)*
Jones, Jon Owen *(Cardiff C)*
Jones, Martyn *(Clwyd S)*
Joyce, Eric *(Falkirk W)*
Kaufman, rh Sir Gerald
Keeble, Ms Sally
Keen, Alan *(Feltham)*
Kelly, Ruth *(Bolton W)*
Kemp, Fraser
Kennedy, Jane *(Wavertree)*
Khabra, Piara S.
Kidney, David
King, Andy *(Rugby)*
Knight, Jim *(S Dorset)*
Kumar, Dr. Ashok
Ladyman, Dr. Stephen
Laxton, Bob *(Derby N)*
Lazarowicz, Mark
Lepper, David
Leslie, Christopher
Levitt, Tom *(High Peak)*
Lewis, Terry *(Worsley)*
Linton, Martin
Lloyd, Tony *(Manchester C)*
Love, Andrew
Lucas, Ian *(Wrexham)*
Luke, Iain *(Dundee E)*
McAvoy, Thomas
McCabe, Stephen
McCafferty, Chris
McCartney, rh Ian
McDonagh, Siobhain
MacDonald, Calum
McDonnell, John
McFall, rh John
McIsaac, Shona
McKenna, Rosemary
Mackinlay, Andrew
McNamara, Kevin
McNulty, Tony
MacShane, Denis
Mactaggart, Fiona
McWilliam, John
Mahmood, Khalid
Mallaber, Judy
Mann, John *(Bassetlaw)*
Marris, Rob *(Wolverh'ton SW)*
Marsden, Gordon *(Blackpool S)*
Marshall, David *(Glasgow Shettleston)*
Marshall-Andrews, Robert
Martlew, Eric
Meacher, rh Michael
Meale, Alan *(Mansfield)*
Merron, Gillian
Michael, rh Alun
Miller, Andrew
Mitchell, Austin *(Gt Grimsby)*
Moffatt, Laura
Moran, Margaret
Morgan, Julie
Mountford, Kali
Mudie, George
Munn, Ms Meg
Murphy, Denis *(Wansbeck)*
Murphy, Jim *(Eastwood)*
Murphy, rh Paul *(Torfaen)*
O'Brien, Bill *(Normanton)*
O'Hara, Edward
Olner, Bill
O'Neill, Martin
Organ, Diana
Owen, Albert
Perham, Linda
Picking, Anne
Pickthall, Colin
Pike, Peter *(Burnley)*
Plaskitt, James
Pollard, Kerry
Pond, Chris *(Gravesham)*
Pope, Greg *(Hyndburn)*
Pound, Stephen
Prentice, Ms Bridget *(Lewisham E)*
Prentice, Gordon *(Pendle)*
Prosser, Gwyn
Purchase, Ken
Purnell, James
Quin, rh Joyce
Quinn, Lawrie
Rapson, Syd *(Portsmouth N)*
Reed, Andy *(Loughborough)*
Robertson, John *(Glasgow Anniesland)*
Robinson, Geoffrey *(Coventry NW)*
Roche, Mrs Barbara
Rooney, Terry
Ross, Ernie *(Dundee W)*
Roy, Frank *(Motherwell)*
Ruane, Chris
Ruddock, Joan
Ryan, Joan *(Enfield N)*
Sarwar, Mohammad
Savidge, Malcolm
Sawford, Phil
Sedgemore, Brian
Shaw, Jonathan
Sheerman, Barry
Sheridan, Jim
Shipley, Ms Debra
Short, rh Clare
Singh, Marsha
Skinner, Dennis
Smith, rh Andrew *(Oxford E)*
Smith, Geraldine *(Morecambe & Lunesdale)*
Smith, Jacqui *(Redditch)*
Smith, Llew *(Blaenau Gwent)*
Soley, Clive
Squire, Rachel
Starkey, Dr. Phyllis
Steinberg, Gerry
Stinchcombe, Paul
Stoate, Dr. Howard
Strang, rh Dr. Gavin
Stringer, Graham
Stuart, Ms Gisela
Sutcliffe, Gerry
Tami, Mark *(Alyn)*
Taylor, rh Ann *(Dewsbury)*
Taylor, David *(NW Leics)*
Timms, Stephen
Tipping, Paddy
Touhig, Don *(Islwyn)*
Trickett, Jon
Truswell, Paul
Turner, Dennis *(Wolverh'ton SE)*
Turner, Neil *(Wigan)*
Twigg, Derek *(Halton)*
Twigg, Stephen *(Enfield)*
Tynan, Bill *(Hamilton S)*
Vaz, Keith *(Leicester E)*
Vis, Dr. Rudi
Walley, Ms Joan
Ward, Claire
Wareing, Robert N.
Watson, Tom
White, Brian
Whitehead, Dr. Alan
Wicks, Malcolm
Williams, rh Alan *(Swansea W)*
Wilson, Brian
Winnick, David
Wood, Mike *(Batley)*
Woolas, Phil
Worthington, Tony
Wright, Anthony D. *(Gt Yarmouth)*
Wright, David *(Telford)*
Wright, Iain *(Hartlepool)*
Wright, Tony *(Cannock)*
Wyatt, Derek

Tellers for the Noes:
Paul Clark and
Vernon Coaker

Question accordingly negatived.

Lords amendment No. 298 disagreed to.

Government amendments (a) to (k) in lieu of Lords amendment No. 298 agreed to.

Clause 106

THE NON-EXECUTIVE COMMITTEE

Lords amendment: No. 95.

Malcolm Wicks: I beg to move, That this House agrees with the Lords in the said amendment.

Mr. Deputy Speaker (Sir Alan Haselhurst): With this it will be convenient to take Lords amendments Nos. 96 to 120, 122, 123, 125 to 130, 132, 133, 135, 137 to 144, 146 to 150, 152, 153, 156, 160, 162 to 165, 167, 169, 171 to 179, 181, 184 to 196, 198 to 208, 211 to 218, 221 to 223, 227 to 230, 232 to 246, 248 to 256, 258 to 260, 262 to 270, 272 to 277, 279 to 281, 284 to 292, 294 to 297, 299 to 303, 306 to 323, 330 to 345, 384, 388 to 397, 399 to 401, 499 to 523, 525 to 538, 540 to 542, 544 to 551, 554, 555, 558, 563, 565 to 567 and 569 to 576.

Malcolm Wicks: I want to offer a brief explanation of the Government amendments on the pension protection fund, which were tabled in the other place. On compensation, we have introduced a set of amendments to cover court orders made against a pension scheme following divorce or nullity proceedings. The amendments enable the PPF to honour attachment, earmarking and pension-sharing orders made before the end of the assessment period, and in particular to implement pension-sharing orders made before the end of the assessment period but not implemented before the board assumes responsibility for the scheme.

Following representations made in Standing Committee, provisions have been extended to provide compensation to surviving unmarried and civil partners. We have also included regulation-making powers to enable us to ensure that survivors' payments will be made only where there was provision to pay survivors' benefits under the scheme.

4 pm

Other provisions allow for compensation to be paid to members whose scheme characteristics differ from traditional defined benefit models, for example, cash balance schemes. That is a response to changes in scheme design as employers seek to share risk with their employees but still offer attractive pension benefits. Further changes have been made to ensure that members who have been in their pension schemes a short time are treated fairly. Amendments will replace the current statutory priority order on wind-up with a new one when the PPF commences business. The priority order will be aligned with PPF benefits to ensure that if a scheme has been through a PPF assessment period but has not transferred into the PPF, scheme members receive broadly what they would have done had the scheme gone into the PPF. The Government's view is that it would be unfair for people to be entitled to significantly less on winding up than they would have received had the scheme gone into the PPF. The same priority order will apply whether a scheme starts to wind up owing to the insolvency of the employer, or does so while the employer is solvent. The objective remains to ensure that the limited assets available are distributed fairly between all scheme members during a scheme wind-up.

Moving on to the PPF's entry rules, changes have ensured that insolvency practitioner notices have no effect until they have been verified by the board. Because of the importance of those notices, we have made that verification a reviewable matter. The board will also be able to modify certain insurance contracts to ensure that no one receives more than the PPF level of compensation. Further amendments have ensured that schemes that become ineligible during an assessment period are still able to enter the PPF if necessary—for example, to cover the situation when there is a two-member scheme in an assessment period and one of the members dies. We have also protected the PPF against certain compromise agreements and, in the light of industry concerns, have ensured that the board's powers in insolvency proceedings do not exceed those of trustees. We have also taken a regulation-making power to ensure that, in the valuation of a scheme, the PPF will take account of any contribution notices and financial support provisions put in place by the regulator using its moral hazard powers. Without those amendments, the PPF could be called upon to assume responsibility for schemes which, had they been taken into account, could have been wound up outside the PPF to the benefit of members.

On levies, the Opposition have introduced amendments limiting the initial period to 12 months and requiring the board to set both the scheme-based and risk-based pension protection levies. We have revised the non-executive functions for the PPF board in response to Opposition's concerns, so that they include only remuneration and the review of financial affairs. Other functions that were previously listed as non-executive functions become subjects for inclusion in the board's annual report. Rules governing the investment strategy of the PPF board have been amended to ensure that the interests of levy payers and scheme members are taken into consideration.

Mr. Webb: I am aware that the Minister has only a few minutes—nine, I think—to deal with this huge group of amendments. He is working through them systematically, but the group deals with an important matter that I fear he will not reach. Does the group contain amendments relevant to his written statement of last Monday and his press release of last Thursday about schemes in the gap year and the scope of the financial assistance scheme and the PPF in relation to schemes that become insolvent now? Will he clarify the position of schemes in the 12-month period—the gap year? Do they go into the FAS or the PPF, or can they go into either?

Malcolm Wicks: The relevant amendments are in this admittedly rather large group. Our concern was to ensure that we took a comprehensive view across the piece so that people could be protected as Parliament intended. We hope and assume that the PPF will come into force in April, subject to the will of Parliament. Let us suppose that an insolvency event affecting a scheme occurs before April—the company goes into administration, for example. We are now stating clearly in the legislation that scheme members should not be prevented from benefiting from the PPF as long as there is a second insolvency event—for example, the company goes into liquidation—after April. If there is a second insolvency event, a scheme can be covered by the PPF, subject to other criteria. A scheme that is totally wound up before April, however, will not be subject to the PPF.

The other announcement that we were able to make last week is that the financial assistance scheme will cover what some call the gap year—the period to April next year—as we intended. We were concerned about moral hazard issues, but we are now satisfied that they cannot arise. I hope that that answers the hon. Gentleman.

Mr. Webb: Will the Minister make it clear that if a first insolvency event occurs in the gap year, the company will have some incentive to delay the second insolvency event until the PPF comes into force, because it is more generous than the FAS—that, in principle, a scheme that enters administration now might hold on for the PPF because it gives scheme members more? Is that how it will work?

Malcolm Wicks: I am happy to write to the Opposition spokesmen about this important matter. Despite our initial doubts, having consulted a number of people we are now reassured that such manipulation—delaying until after April—cannot take place. That is why we felt able to make the announcement we did.

Mr. Waterson: I agree that this is an important issue. Yesterday in the Lords, Baroness Hollis was at pains to say that the Minister's statement a few days ago made no real difference; it was merely a clarification. However, when the information was leaked or announced to the press, it was presented—or spun, if one prefers—as good news for, for example, the Turner and Newell pension scheme. Either it makes a difference or it does not, but the noble Lady's suggestion that it makes no difference to the potential liability of the PPF must surely be wrong.

Malcolm Wicks: I do not wish to refer to any particular scheme, although I have to say that some of the news on one scheme might be looking better than it was. However, surely even the cynics accept that, together, the two announcements are good news, because it means that, subject to the criteria being satisfied, scheme members in defined benefit schemes will now be covered, one way or another, either because we have extended the FAS to the start of the PPF or because we have now covered cases in which a second insolvency event occurs after April. Fair-minded people should welcome that news.

Mr. Andrew Miller (Ellesmere Port and Neston) (Lab): Following on from the same point but looking back in time, when does my hon. Friend expect to be able to announce the date on which the Government propose to commence the financial assistance scheme?

Malcolm Wicks: I have said that the scheme will be up and running in the spring.

Mr. Miller: I apologise to my hon. Friend—I was not clear enough. I was asking about the earliest date from which pension schemes can be eligible to claim from the scheme.

Malcolm Wicks: We are engaged in a secondary exercise to collect precise data from schemes. Although hon. Members have particular interests in certain schemes, I know that my hon. Friend will appreciate that we are dealing with perhaps 250 schemes and that the data-gathering exercise is complex. He will therefore understand that I am not yet in a position to answer his question.

Given the interest in this matter, we felt it important to make the announcements last week because it had come to our attention, from a number of people within the pensions industry, that some pension scheme trustees were unaware of how the Bill's provisions would operate. We felt it essential to confirm the position to enable trustees to make more informed decisions about the future of their pension schemes. It is very much that concern that enabled us to rethink the advantages and disadvantages. We thought that there were advantages in the announcements, which is why we were able to proceed in that direction.

I appreciate that there is a good number of amendments before us and that we have relatively little time to deal with them. I am happy to have been sidetracked—I do not mean that pejoratively—into these important issues. With those remarks and with the interventions that have been made, I shall draw my remarks to a conclusion.

Mr. Webb: We are dealing with a large number of amendments and I want to refer only to those that we have been talking about that relate to the FAS and the scope of the PPF.

One of my concerns is that the Government are not getting best value for money out of the wind-up of the schemes. Schemes are winding up now and the assets are being used to buy deferred annuities. People will then be left with a substantial shortfall, some of which will be made up by the FSA scheme. I plead with the Minister, in the seconds that we have available, to look again at the issue of allowing schemes to close through poor value deferred annuities, thereby leaving the FSA scheme having to make up a big gap.

Would it not be better to take those assets as a going concern not into the PPF, but into some form in which they could be carried on? That would mean that there would be less of a burden on the FSA scheme, which is already overburdened. There is a danger that it will be even more overburdened by the announcement that the Minister has just made.

It being two hours after the commencement of proceedings, MR. DEPUTY SPEAKER *put the Question already proposed from the Chair, pursuant to Order [this day].*

Lords amendment agreed to.

MR. DEPUTY SPEAKER *then proceeded to put the remaining Questions required to be put at that hour.*

Lords amendment No. 283, as amended, agreed to.

Lords amendments Nos. 96 to 282, 284 to 297 and 299 to 358 agreed to.

Before Clause 229

REMOVAL OF COMPULSION TO TAKE ANNUITIES

Lords amendment: No. 359

Malcolm Wicks: I beg to move, That this House disagrees with the Lords in the said amendment.

I obviously know all the amendments off by heart, but I had briefly forgotten the significance of Lords amendment No. 359, although it is of considerable interest to the House. Mr. Speaker has brought it to the attention of the House that the amendment involves the question of Commons privilege. It relates to financial matters where it is the role of the Lords to agree not to initiate or to amend.

The effect of the amendment is to alter the taxation arrangements made by the Commons: it allows annuities not to be paid where they might otherwise be paid; it extends tax relief by allowing more people in some circumstances to pass their tax privileged pension pot on to their survivors tax-free; it allows in some circumstances for contributions to be made to pension schemes beyond the age of 75; it reduces the instances when part of the tax relief given to contributions is recouped when an annuity is paid, and so on. The House can waive its privilege but I think that it is inappropriate to do so.

I shall explain the proposed amendment and its background further. It is similar in intent to one that we in this House have previously rejected in Committee. It is also a topic that has been endlessly debated in this House as a result of a number of private Members' Bills and during the progress of this year's Finance Bill.

The present rules on annuities mean that members of personal pensions schemes and small defined contribution occupational schemes must purchase an annuity with their pension fund by the time that they reach the age of 75. Members of occupational pension schemes are required to receive a pension, rather than purchase an annuity at the age of 75.

4.15 pm

The intention behind these rules is to ensure that pension pots are used to provide a stream of income in retirement. Personal pension schemes will purchase an annuity and occupational pension schemes usually, but not always, provide a pension from the scheme rather than for the purchase of an annuity. Members of pension schemes benefit from more favourable tax treatment than other savers. Tax relief is provided at the pension scheme member's marginal income tax rate so that, in effect, he saves the gross amount and not the net amount of income into his pension pot.

Sir John Butterfill: Will the Minister give way?

Malcolm Wicks: Yes, but I want to make some progress. The House needs to hear the whole story.

Sir John Butterfill: I am sure that the Minister did not wish in any way to mislead the House. That is why I am grateful that he has taken my intervention. There are other savings schemes that are equally tax privileged. I am thinking about enterprise investment schemes and venture capital trusts. There are a number of other schemes that involve quite significant levels of tax relief in terms of savings schemes that do not have the lock-up that pensions do. I do not think that the Minister would be completely accurate in saying that these reliefs were not available to other savings schemes that are open to the public.

Malcolm Wicks: Let me make some progress. I think that I will be able to cover some of those issues.

The contributions grow in a tax-favoured environment when invested. There is also the tax-free lump sum on vesting a pension, which adds to the favourable treatment. That can be up to 25 per cent. of the value of the fund and is recognition by the Government that people need encouragement to lock away their money for a considerable period until they are ready to draw retirement benefits.

Those tax reliefs are then only recovered when the pension fund is converted into an income stream either by taking a pension or purchasing the annuity. That can happen as early as age 50 under present rules but must happen once the member reaches the age of 75. I recognise that there will be a debate about the cost-benefit tax analysis of that against other savings vehicles but our argument would be that this is a tax-privileged area for savings for retirement.

Mr. Frank Field (Birkenhead) (Lab): Will my hon. Friend give way now that he has interrupted himself?

Malcolm Wicks: I welcome my right hon. Friend to our proceedings and I am happy to give way.

Mr. Field: There is probably no one in the House who is arguing that people should be able to unlock their funds before they are retired, and having done so then make a claim on welfare. That is surely the issue that we are addressing in the Lords amendment.

Malcolm Wicks: Indeed. If I come to the end of my script and give a better balance, I think that my right hon. Friend will be able to stay until the end.

The amendment from another place would remove the requirement on members of personal pension schemes and some occupational schemes to purchase an annuity—and thereby secure an income stream—by the age of 75. However, there is a proviso. That is that only those who can "demonstrate" that their existing resources mean that they can avoid any reliance on means-tested benefits are allowed the privilege of not having to purchase an annuity. At any one time, and for any one individual, it is quite difficult to say what level of resources might be required to avoid entitlement to the income-related benefits. However, I can assure the House that the amounts involved are far in excess of the amounts that most people saving into personal pension schemes have in their pension funds. Furthermore, to ensure that the individual continues to avoid entitlement to the income-related benefits the annuity would have to be index-linked. There are therefore several ironies. First, for the vast majority of annuity purchasers, the Lords amendment would create a far more restrictive environment than currently exists and, secondly, it would undo the liberalisation that we are seeking to achieve on index-linking elsewhere in the Bill. It will benefit the top 3 or 4 per cent. of annuity savers and in particular the 1 per cent. with pension funds in excess of £250,000, should they attain the age of 75 without purchasing an annuity.

Independent research shows that most people buy their annuities when they retire and even those who do not do so still purchase their annuity well before the age of 75. The paper by the Association of British Insurers entitled, "Annuities—The Consumer Experience" shows that, of people who retired in the past two to three years and purchased an annuity, 95 per cent. did so before the age of 70. The ceiling of 75 for annuity purchase is clearly not a major problem for the vast majority of annuitants. It certainly is not for my constituents nor, I suspect, those of my right hon. Friend the Member for Birkenhead (Mr. Field). The Lords amendment would certainly not benefit the vast majority of pension savers, because 80 per cent of pension pots are worth less than £30,000—a sum significantly and substantially less than the funding needed to be above income-related benefit.

The Government recognise the underlying issues of greater longevity and demographic shifts in this country and, indeed, across the developed world, both of which

[Malcolm Wicks]

have profound implications for the way in which our pensions policies are put into effect. The Government are taking action through the Bill and in other ways to meet those and other challenges. We set up the Pensions Commission under Adair Turner to review the regime for UK private pensions and long-term savings. Its first report, published last month, provides a mine of detailed and valuable information on the demographic challenges that we face. It is a singular fact that we are debating whether to preserve one of the few elements of compulsion in our pensions structure, but the Pensions Commission was set up specifically to look at the effectiveness of the voluntary approach to pensions and whether there is a case to move to greater compulsion. The commission is considering whether the level of compulsion within the UK pension system is appropriate. For people investing in a pension, the requirement to purchase an annuity at 75 with tax-privileged saving is a compulsory element in the existing system. Once the commission has reported on the wider issues relating to compulsory saving, the Government will wish to consider key issues, including annuitisation at the age of 75, with particular care and urgency, and decide whether they remain fit for the purpose.

It should be clear by now that the Lords amendment is not appropriate, although we acknowledge the evident interest shown by the other place. The amendment would specifically benefit people who do not need to buy an annuity while requiring the less well-off to subsidise them through income taxation.

Mr. Webb: The Minister has ruled out scrapping the age limit of 75, but does he accept that, since it was introduced, male life expectancy has risen from 65 by more than five years, contrary to what Baroness Hollis said in another place. Is there therefore not a case for raising the limit to at least 80?

Malcolm Wicks: I can only repeat what I said earlier. The Government will wish to consider key issues, including annuitisation at the age of 75, with particular care and urgency, and decide whether they remain fit for the purpose. That is as far as I can go.

The Lords amendment is not appropriate, but we acknowledge the high level of interest in the issue. We are, as I have just shown, prepared to respond constructively and promptly, including on the specific issue of annuitisation, as a priority once the Pensions Commission has reported.

Mr. Edward Garnier (Harborough) (Con): The Minister should not allow himself to think that interest in this matter was confined to the other place. He acknowledged that it had been discussed on previous occasions in the Commons, but he seems to have found it inconvenient to remind himself that, on 7 March 2003, the Retirement Income Reform Bill, which I had the honour to introduce in the House, completed its Second Reading with a majority of 101. It is therefore the settled will of the Commons that Lord Higgins's proposal in Lords amendment No. 359 should come into law. The Minister is a great supporter of the supremacy of the House of Commons, so perhaps he could be consistent and argue for it in this case as well.

Malcolm Wicks: I had better not comment on the hon. and learned Gentleman's judgment that that was the settled will of the House. That may have been the case on a rather quiet day, but there are more than 100 Members in the House, as we will demonstrate later. However, I have said that we will look at the specific issue of annuitisation as a priority once the Pensions Commission has reported. I acknowledge the interest shown by the House, both in this issue and in pension matters that affect the other 99 per cent. of the population.

Mr. David Willetts (Havant) (Con): The Minister has just made a tiny concession, although it required a trained eye to spot it. Indeed, that is why he had to repeat it for the Liberal Democrats. However, it will not quite do the job. It would be helpful if he explained what the Government will look at after Adair Turner reports. Can he give a firmer commitment, particularly on the age limit for buying an annuity? I am afraid that I do not regard what he has said as a significant concession, given the weight of opinion in both Houses. There was a substantial vote in the other place last night, because their lordships feel strongly about the issue. I do not have any expertise on matters of privilege, but there is a strong belief in the other place that privilege does not apply in the way that the Minister suggested.

This is not just a matter for the other place. As my hon. and learned Friend the Member for Harborough (Mr. Garnier) said, Members of the Commons feel strongly about it as well. I am grateful to him for reminding the House of the heroic moment when the Government suffered a defeat on Second Reading. We fondly remember that great moment, which was a reminder to the Government of how strongly people feel about annuities. The fact that the vote took place on a Friday shows how much the Opposition care about the subject, because we were all willing to turn up to support our hon. and learned Friend who, like my hon. Friends the Members for Taunton (Mr. Flook) and for Bournemouth, West (Sir John Butterfill), introduced a private Member's Bill on retirement income.

I shall not rehearse all the arguments in favour of the Lords amendment, because a tight programme motion is in operation. I shall therefore comment briefly on some of the things that the Minister said. First, a simple point of principle is at stake. Why should we pass regulations in the House telling adults what they should do with their savings provided that the taxpayer does not have a direct interest in the result? Once we have covered that angle—the Lords do so successfully in their amendment—it is not legitimate for us to tell people what to do. With the greatest respect to my hon. Friends, the proposal inserted in the Bill in the other place achieves that neatly and simply by specifying that there should be no requirement to buy an annuity by the age of 75

"provided that the pensioner can demonstrate that he has resources to ensure that he will not become dependent on means-tested benefits."

Beyond that simple proviso, what right do we have to tell people what to do with their money?

Sir John Butterfill: I have been listening carefully to my hon. Friend, and I thoroughly agree that, provided that we can demonstrate that there is no call on the state, people should be free to do as they wish? Can he imagine an independent financial adviser telling someone that they should put all the money for their retirement into an annuity? Does he think that the IFA would be performing his duty as a financial adviser if he did so?

4.30 pm

Mr. Willetts: That is a very good question. I sometimes fear that, as we get into these pension debates, I may occasionally find myself straying into giving financial advice without being regulated to do so. Given my hon. Friend's expertise on the subject, he makes a powerful point that I hope the Minister will take into account.

The Minister argued that the people who convert into an annuity do so significantly before they reach the age of 75, so the requirement to convert at the age of 75 cannot be a serious obstacle. That is my summary of his argument, but the evidence from a survey by Watson Wyatt rather undermines that argument. The evidence was that there was a group of people who wished to convert into an annuity and they did, it is true, by and large do so before reaching the age of 75. However, there was a large group of people who had no desire to convert into an annuity—59 per cent. of pensioners had no desire to move into an annuity at all, and 12 per cent. said they would do so later. It is not that people are up against a deadline. There is a significant group of people who do not want to convert into an annuity. Another group may wish to do so earlier. It is not for us to tell them.

We have already had one concession from the Government, aimed particularly, as we understand it, at Plymouth Brethren to tackle their ethical objections to annuities as they are currently constructed. If the Government can be flexible for that group, why can they not be flexible for the rest of the population? The Minister needs to address that argument.

Mr. Frank Field: Should the Government not be doubly flexible on the matter? Plymouth Brethren lobbied me, as they no doubt lobbied other Members of Parliament. In representing their views, we knew that they would not be voting for any of us. There are large numbers of other people who are affected and who would vote.

Mr. Willetts: It is perhaps a reflection on the Chancellor of the Exchequer's view of the world that one does not have to be a Plymouth Brother to take advantage of the concession that we are told is for Plymouth Brethren. The concession is potentially rather wider than we were told it was intended to be. Even when the Chancellor makes a concession, he does not want to admit how big it could be. The right hon. Member for Birkenhead (Mr. Field) is right. It could extend way beyond the Plymouth Brethren. As far as I know, the Government have not imposed a religious test before people take advantage of it—yet. Who knows? There are still another 24 hours and the Government may well amend the Bill further. They are only up to 950 amendments so far.

I shall touch briefly on the argument that the amendment would affect only a small number of rich people. The point was made in the other place by the Minister there, as the Minister for Pensions has just reported to the House. The Minister in the other place said:

> "We estimate that about 1 per cent. of all annuitants . . . would have an annuity worth more than about £250,000 that would therefore float them into being able to take advantage of this amendment".—[*Official Report, House of Lords*, 15 November 2004; Vol. 666, c. 1233.]

I wonder whether the Minister remembers our exchanges in oral questions just over a year ago. I invited Deborah Cooper of Mercer's to do a calculation on how much money someone needed to build up a sum of capital to pay them an income that would be sufficient to keep them off means-tested benefits throughout their retirement. The figure that she calculated was £180,000. I put that to the Minister, who said:

> "The example presented by the shadow Secretary of State was specific, very long-term and assumed that the couple were not owner-occupiers, which would not be typical of elderly households, so I dispute its usefulness."

He went on to say:

> "What the figure might be depends on a wide range of assumptions, but bringing forward a figure that is in denial of owner-occupation, which is the common experience of pensioners, is not at all helpful."—[*Official Report*, 20 October 2003; Vol. 411, c. 358–9.]

We had an estimate of £180,000, which I thought was pretty high and a reminder of how shockingly extensive means-tested benefits have become. The Minister did not accept the figure of £180,000. The Government are now using an even higher figure of £250,000 to stop any movement on annuities by saying that anybody with a saving of less than £250,000 would not benefit from the amendment.

The Minister cannot have it both ways. He cannot reject £180,000, a figure suggested to him in the Chamber only a year ago, and suddenly say for the purposes of annuity reform that the figure is even higher. I paid great attention to what he just said. He seemed to be willing to endorse a figure of £250,000, which I think is a very high figure. Let us assume for a moment that it is right. After the exchanges on annuities over the past few days in another place, I am tempted to say that, from now on, we know from Ministers that means-testing is so extensive that people need not £180,000, but £250,000 as a sum of capital to keep them off means-testing in their retirement.

Let us assume that the £250,000 that the Minister has just endorsed is the correct figure. He thinks that that tells us we should not reform annuities. I think that it tells us that we need to reform the benefits system. It is not an argument against annuity reform. It is an argument in favour of tackling mass means-testing of pensioners. That is why the policies to which we are committed, and which, in a different form, the Liberal Democrats also believe in, are aimed at reversing the number of pensioners who are on means-tested benefits and ensuring that that very large figure starts to fall. That is the best way of tackling the problem.

Malcolm Wicks: I had better not let the hon. Gentleman get away with that. He is obviously limbering up for the debate on hunting. What he says is

[Malcolm Wicks]

misleading. I was not implying that £250,000 is what people need to avoid a means test. He knows that I did not suggest that. Perhaps he could pay more attention to the 80 per cent. of British people with pension pots worth less than £30,000. Whatever the merits of his argument, does he concede that he is speaking—as can happen on certain Benches—about a very small privileged group of well-off people?

Mr. Willetts: I am happy to accept another intervention from the Minister if he has further and better information. We know the size of the individual pot, but we do not know how many pots an individual has. The Minister does not know how much, on average, an individual has. All he is measuring is the size of specific pots. It is perfectly possible for someone to have two or three personal pensions in specific arrangements. Sadly, one of the problems of personal pensions is that they are fragmented. It would therefore be wrong to regard that figure as the total amount of money held, on average, by an individual.

Mr. Adrian Flook (Taunton) (Con): I may be able to help my hon. Friend. The Minister may not be speaking of the figure of £250,000, but the noble Baroness in another place said precisely that £250,000

"would therefore float them into being able to take advantage of this amendment"—[*Official Report, House of Lords*, 15 November 2004; Vol. 666, c. 1233.],

so the Government have collective responsibility for the figure of £250,000.

Mr. Willetts: My hon. Friend is right. The Minister was trying, in his previous intervention, to escape from the figure of £250,000 but it is clear how the figure has been used in both Houses to justify the Government's position.

Mr. Garnier: Does my hon. Friend accept that the Government's arguments about large pots being required to bring people into a reasonable income have been put to us time after time? I am sure that we heard them in the context of the Bill introduced by my hon. Friend the Member for Bournemouth, West (Sir John Butterfill), and perhaps later in connection with the Bill introduced by my hon. Friend the Member for Taunton (Mr. Flook). One would have thought that, by now, the Government would have provided us with the information from the Treasury or the Department for Work and Pensions, having done the research to find out how many separate pots people had in order to accumulate a sufficiently large pot. Moreover, just because we cannot help everybody, is it the Government's case that we should not help anybody at all?

Mr. Willetts: My hon. and learned Friend is right. I would have wanted the flexibility that we offer in the amendment that the Government are trying to remove to extend to as many people as possible. That is why, as I was arguing, we believe in reforming the benefits system so that there is less means-testing. As we do that and reverse the spread of means-testing, and as the value of the basic pension increases, fewer and fewer people will be excluded from that flexibility by the requirement. Accepting the amendment introduced in the other place, and even accepting at face value the Minister's argument that people need £250,000 to avoid means-testing, confirms to me that we should be energetic in trying to reverse means-testing.

We shall divide the House if the Minister attempts to reverse the amendments made in another place. I do not regard the concession, if concession it be, that he made about the terms of Adair Turner's report as rising to the strength of feeling that has been shown in both Houses on this very important subject.

Mr. Frank Field: May I briefly add three points to the debate, Mr. Deputy Speaker? Although we are debating annuities, we are also debating the nature of government and our belief in it.

First, although my hon. Friend the Minister is right to say that in his view few people in Birkenhead would benefit from the proposal, both he and I might be surprised by the number of people in Birkenhead who would benefit. The Minister and I learn from our constituents, but that is not the only way in which we gain policy ideas. Sometimes we must make policy decisions that do not arise directly from our constituencies, and this is one such case.

Secondly, one of the Labour party's goals is to spread wealth as far as possible, and not to see wealth confiscated. The arguments about the privileges by which people built up their pension pots are difficult, but as the hon. Member for Bournemouth, West (Sir John Butterfill) quickly told us, people who build up other pots of savings are not required to cash them in at the end of the day. Although the proposals may affect only a few people, the Government have deployed the weak argument that the proposals will affect annuity rates, because there will be a rush out of the annuities market, but that there is no need to worry because almost nobody will be affected.

It is a matter of principle: as far as I am concerned, the principle is that we should, at all times, allow people to keep their wealth rather than deciding what is best for that wealth. Way back at the beginning of my political career, I believed that we should have been the party that introduced the sale of council houses, and that was in favour of spreading wealth. Because we did not drive the policy, the funds were not used to replenish the housing stock—we all know what happened because we did not lead that reform. We must learn that lesson and apply it to this particular reform, which is about giving people freedom over their savings.

Thirdly, the Government and the Opposition parties are feeling their way to a new consensus on pensions. Even 10 years ago—certainly 20 years ago—we had extraordinarily high hopes for what the Government could achieve for everybody on pensions, but now our objectives are much more limited. All the Government's energy should be spent on ensuring that everybody is brought up to a minimum pension provision. What people do above that is not our concern, and we should not try to put our sticky fingers into people's private affairs.

In conclusion, first, although some people in Birkenhead would benefit, that is not the only reason why one should vote on the proposals; secondly, the

Labour party should be about spreading wealth, not confiscating it; and thirdly, we must think about what the Government can do well and concentrate on that, rather than meddling in affairs that we continually get wrong.

Mr. Webb: I normally pride myself on speaking for the poor, marginalised and dispossessed, but occasionally I keep in with the well-off, and this is one such occasion.

I accept that we are discussing relatively small numbers of people and relatively large pension pots, but as the hon. and learned Member for Harborough (Mr. Garnier) said a moment ago, that is no reason why the regime should not be rational and sensible.

The Minister's arguments are woefully thin. The freedom not to annuitise has always been subject to two caveats: first, that one does not then make a claim on means-tested benefits, which is dealt with explicitly in the amendment; and secondly, that the tax take is eventually obtained. The Minister is worried that people will pick up tax relief when they pay in, tax relief on the fund and a tax-free lump sum. However, one does not get a tax-free lump sum until the money is taken out. It is not the case that when someone picks up a tax-free lump sum the taxpayer does not get their share, because people do not get a tax-free lump sum if they do not annuitise. I cannot see the relevance of the tax-free lump sum. On death, a 35 per cent. tax rate applies to uncashed pension pots, so the taxpayer potentially takes a beneficial stake compared with a tax-free lump sum being taken and the rest of the pot being taxed as income. The taxpayer may make a gain, and it is hard to see the potential loss.

4.45 pm

If the Minister will not abandon that principle, in the spirit of new Labour, he surely wants to modernise it. In 1976, the age limit at which that provision bites was raised to 75 for particular sorts of pensions. Yesterday, some discussion occurred in the other place about the relationship between that threshold and life expectancies. Undoubtedly unintentionally, Baroness Hollis gave the other place the misleading impression that the life expectancy in years for a man of 65

"is now about 16, so far as we can tell."—[*Official Report, House of Lords*, 15 November 2004; Vol. 666, c. 1231.]

However, the Turner report states that the figure is 19 years, which is the most up-to-date estimate. That point is significant because, since the age threshold was raised to 75, male life expectancy has risen not by three and a half years, which is the impression that Baroness Hollis gave to the other place last night, but by six and a half years, which makes the case for raising the age threshold from 75 to 80 compelling.

Today, my noble Friend Lord Oakeshott has written to Baroness Hollis asking her to correct the record, and I hope that she will do so. The substantive point is that freezing the threshold at 75, which the Government want to do, will make the provision bite more and more. When the threshold was first introduced, a good number of men would not have made it to 75. With substantially enhanced life expectancies, more and more people are being covered by the annuity rule.

A moment ago, the Government hinted that next summer, after the election, they might think about the threshold. Surely the electorate deserve better than that—they deserve to know the Government's plans. The amendment does not change any of the arguments of principle. I agree that the restriction is not necessary in principle, and if the framers of the legislation and its amenders in 1976 intended the provision to apply to a particular proportion of the retired population, keeping that threshold up to date with changes in life expectancy would not even undermine the Government's principle.

I know that several other hon. Members have, like me, pursued the issue over a number of years, and I am sure that the House would like to hear from them. However, I share the view taken by my noble Friends that the annuity rule is altogether unnecessary. At the very least, I ask the Government to reflect on whether raising the threshold might go a good way to addressing some of the concerns that have been expressed.

Sir John Butterfill: I agree with everything that the hon. Member for Northavon (Mr. Webb) just said—he made some extremely valuable points.

In some cases, it would be in the Exchequer's interest to agree to the relaxation. When I introduced my private Member's Bill, I received many letters from all over the country. One chap wrote to me a few months before his 75th birthday. He did not have a wife—he had no dependants at all. He had built up a substantial pension pot over the years and was required to buy an annuity with it. Had he died before his 75th birthday, the Exchequer would have received a significant chunk of his pension pot, but because he had to convert it into an annuity, the Exchequer got a bit of the 25 per cent. that was left, and all the rest of it went to the insurance company that sold him the annuity. As far as the Exchequer is concerned, requiring people with a short life expectancy to convert at 75 is absolute madness, and the Chancellor would be far better off letting such people carry on with their arrangements.

Such an approach would also benefit some people with small pension pots. For example, somebody with a small pension pot who has a wife and family and who knows that he is suffering from a terminal illness may find that annuitising works to his disadvantage, particularly if he has a policy with a guaranteed annuity rate, which he will lose unless he converts. However, if he converts, just over half of his pot will go to his wife—if they bought a joint policy at a reduced rate. Somebody in that position may be able to leave more to a spouse by not annuitising and hoping that he will live long enough to reach the relevant age.

The figure of £30,000 or £40,000 that the Government give is a complete myth, because most people have other savings beyond that. Probably the largest element will be their house, from which they may already derive an income through a home income plan. They may have all sorts of other savings that they have accumulated through personal equity plans, tax-exempt special savings accounts and other vehicles. Yet the Government clearly have no idea, because if one asks them what the average level of total savings for any individual is, they have no statistics on which to give a reply.

It is completely wrong to say that this will apply only to very rich people and not to those with only modest pension funds. In the course of modern life today, many

[Sir John Butterfill]

people have been through several careers. At some point, they may have been self-employed and paid into a pension fund, while at other times they may have been employed and the beneficiary of a company pension scheme. They may have had small businesses that they have sold and invested the funds in other ways. People have retirement income from all kinds of sources. It is demonstrably wrong to say that this will affect only the very rich, not those with modest pension pots, and completely unreasonable for the state to tell somebody that, when they reach a certain age, 75 per cent. of their savings must be invested in an annuity at a time when annuity rates are at an all-time low and almost any other form of saving will give them a higher return.

Another person who wrote to me was, like me, a chartered surveyor. Being a shrewd chartered surveyor, he had invested cautiously but successfully in commercial property through a self-administered scheme. As a result of his expertise, his fund had built to a very substantial sum and was showing a return of 20 per cent. on the money that he had put in. He told me: "At age 75 I'm going to have to sell this property on which I'm getting a 20 per cent. yield and put that same lump of money into something yielding me about 5 or 6 per cent." Is not that potty? I rest my case.

Mr. Garnier: The example of the chartered surveyor cited by my hon. Friend the Member for Bournemouth, West (Sir John Butterfill) exemplifies the silliness of the Government's antipathy towards the amendment tabled by my noble Friend in the other place, which has two advantages: first, it is written in simple English that anybody could understand; and secondly, it would work. The Government's argument that it would benefit only a very small number of very well-off people is designed to terrorise Labour Back Benchers—other than the right hon. Member for Birkenhead (Mr. Field) and the hon. Member for Crewe and Nantwich (Mrs. Dunwoody), who are completely impervious to terror—to dissuade them from supporting it. The Government think that if they can persuade their supporters that this is rich man's racket, they will agree that it must be a jolly good thing to knock it down. I suspect that neither the former Financial Secretary to the Treasury, the hon. Member for Bolton, West (Ruth Kelly), nor the Economic Secretary to the Treasury, the hon. Member for Wentworth (John Healey), who argued against my private Member's Bill from the Front Bench, nor anyone else who has thought about this for more than a moment, could possibly argue against the common sense and good sense of my noble Friend's amendment.

The right hon. Member for Birkenhead is entirely right to identify the main principle and the growing consensus across the Floor of this House with regard to the pensions question. The amendment would provide grown-ups with choice and, as along as they maintained a level of income that did not allow them to resort to means-tested benefits, nobody would lose. The problem is that the Chancellor of the Exchequer does not like any idea that is not his own. The reason why the Department for Work and Pensions, which he no doubt thinks is subordinate to his Department, is having to advance a particular argument is that the dead hand of the Treasury is forcing it to take that line.

Mr. Frank Field: I have noticed that my hon. Friend the Minister, who knows his brief as well as anyone, agrees with an argument, hardly ever looks at his notes, but when he knows that he has to deliver a script he reads them closely.

Mr. Garnier: Interestingly, when the right hon. Gentleman intervened on the Minister earlier, the Minister asked to be allowed to finish his script. I do not know who writes the Minister's script, but he certainly read it extremely well.

Malcolm Wicks: My analyst will of course write to my right hon. Friend the Member for Birkenhead about that perverse observation.

Mr. Garnier: I hope that when he has done so the Minister will keep taking the pills.

I want the public to be given a choice that enables them to make provision for their own old age. If they want to choose an annuity, let them do it. If they want to buy equities, let them do it. If, like the chartered surveyor who contacted my hon. Friend the Member for Bournemouth, West, they want to buy a portfolio of properties, let them do it. The amendment, like my Retirement Income Reform Bill, has the advantage of being gender-neutral and would provide an answer—if not a complete one—to the growing deficiency in the savings ratio that we have experienced over the past few years.

The Government have a perverse order of priorities. When my Bill achieved its Second Reading by 101 votes, the Government put up a Back-Bench Member, the hon. Member for Hendon (Mr. Dismore), who spoke for about an hour and a half—it seemed longer—to try to talk it out. He failed. Yet when a Conservative Front Bencher in the other place tables a short, understandable and sensible amendment, and we are permitted to discuss it here, the debate is truncated by Government diktat. The Government must sort out their intellectual approach to such issues, quite apart from the way in which they manage the business of this House.

Mr. Flook: The private Members' Bills promoted by my hon. and learned Friend the Member for Harborough (Mr. Garnier) and my hon. Friend the Member for Bournemouth, West (Sir John Butterfill) were very much along the lines of a Bill that I promoted, and another similar Bill was promoted by my right hon. Friend the Member for Skipton and Ripon (Mr. Curry). All four Bills were perfectly formed around the idea of removing the annuity age barrier of 75 and introducing a minimum income guarantee. The Government dismissed that suggestion out of hand in the course of several debates. I was therefore pleased to see how neatly my noble Friend Lord Higgins incorporated our private Members' Bills into his amendment in a specific, one-sentence clause.

The removal of the age barrier of 75 receives cross-party support from everywhere bar the Government. For that we have to thank the Retirement Income Reform

Campaign under the leadership of Dr. Oonagh McDonald, a former Labour Member of Parliament. Whenever we debate this principle, we are inundated by letters from pensioners and those looking towards their retirement who are extremely worried about being compelled to take an annuity. The Minister suggested that only a small number of people are concerned, but there is great demand for such legislation. It is therefore extremely comforting that the Lords voted by a considerable margin for an amendment that would give effect to the private Members' Bills that have been introduced three or four times in this House.

The Minister said that there is not much demand for these provisions, but Lord Higgins pointed out in the other place that 58.8 per cent. of people asked in a survey never wanted to annuitise their pension pots, with 12.1 per cent. wanting to do so later than required at present. That amounts to quite a substantial 70 per cent. who do not agree with the way in which the Bill is formulated. As several of my hon. Friends have pointed out, the Bill does not address the problem, which will only worsen. A number of large blue-chip companies in this country have defined-benefit schemes that can only be described as dying. More are looking to move out of a defined-benefit scheme and into a defined-contribution scheme. If we do not deal with the problem of annuities, their unfairness and the age barrier, the position will get worse.

5 pm

As a Conservative, I do not believe in compulsion. I believe that the current position does not work at all. As we have heard, it forces pensioners to annuitise three-quarters of their pension at the age of 75, which is old-fashioned and anachronistic. It is not followed anywhere else in the world and I cannot see that the singular benefits of the British system provide any reason to continue it.

The other problem with the current system is that it sets up an unbreakable contract for the remainder of the life of the annuitant. As we heard so eloquently from my hon. Friend the Member for Bournemouth, West, there is usually only a single provider. The Minister, who I am sure wants to spread the risk, must acknowledge that relying on one insurer, such as Equitable Life—we have seen what has happened there over the past few years—promotes and imposes a moral hazard on pensioners. The Bill thus appears entirely arbitrary, given that the same size pension fund can buy widely varying incomes, depending—this is the key point—only on the date of purchase.

The current position also introduces sex discrimination into retirement income. As the Minister knows, annuitants are forced to take the price that is offered to them, which unfairly varies from male to female. It does not happen with the state pension or with defined-benefit pensions such as those that MPs and civil servants enjoy. It is particularly unfair that women are being discriminated against as a result of the Government's refusal to act.

There is a further problem with the current system, which the Lords amendment is designed to address. Occupationally defined contribution schemes are limited by their index linking—sometimes at about only 3 per cent.—which poses the risk of inflation. When it comes to inflation, even the Chancellor cannot determine that he has completely rid us of boom and bust.

The virtue of the scheme proposed by the Lords is, as my hon. Friend the Member for Bournemouth, West explained, that it protects the interest of the state while providing much greater freedom. It provides the state with more revenue, as the pension funds remain invested in a range of financial instruments, allowing them to grow. They can then be taxed, as and when. In other countries such as Canada, there is no obligation and retirees can choose to put their pension funds into a retirement income fund managed on their behalf, over which they have control. If it is good enough for Canada, it should be good enough for pensioners in Britain. This is a principled and practical amendment that the House should support.

Malcolm Wicks: We have had an interesting debate and a rehearsal of the issues, many of which are familiar to the House. I am feeling quite nervous because my right hon. Friend the Member for Birkenhead (Mr. Field) implied that it is only when I look up that I agree, and that when I am reading I do not. May I say for the record that I agree with every inch of Government policy? That is what it says here in my brief anyway.

I cannot add a great deal to what has been said already. For the record, I note that the hon. Member for Northavon (Mr. Webb) made a demographic point about different estimates of longevity. Perhaps he will receive a written reply, but I understand that the difference relates to different measures of life expectancy. My noble Friend in the other place used one measure and Lord Oakeshott used another. I am advised that, on a standardised basis, the difference is about one year, so there is not that much to get excited about, even though the hon. Gentleman did appear to get excited about it.

Mr. Willetts: The wider point is whether there could be a better compromise than the tiny concession made on the Turner commission. It would mean the Minister accepting that, if he wants to retain an age rule, it need not be 75. It could, for example, be 80. Is there no flexibility whatsoever? The inflexibility is what causes frustration among Opposition Members.

Malcolm Wicks: Let me come back to that point, but I want to deal with another issue mentioned by my right hon. Friend the Member for Birkenhead. He said as a matter of philosophy—I rather agree with him—that where the state has no direct interest, it should not interfere, but we are not talking about savings that have been built up with no impact from the state. I am sure that we would all agree that we are dealing with a tax-privileged situation for those who are building up pension funds. The purpose is that people have a guaranteed income in old age. That is the state's interest

[Malcolm Wicks]

in putting tax resources into pensions generally. In that sense, we are not talking about free decisions in a free society.

Mr. Frank Field: Provided people do not go back on to welfare, that part of the bargain has been fulfilled.

Malcolm Wicks: Yes, but it was not a bargain to use the money in any old way: it was a bargain to produce an annuity for old age. That is the matter for debate.

I want to sum up now because we have covered all the issues; my opening statement anticipated most of them. I repeat that once the Pensions Commission has reported on a range of issues, the Government will want to engage with it again, including annuitisation at the age of 75, about which the hon. Member for Havant (Mr. Willetts) asked. I have already said that we will look further into that with particular care and particular urgency. We will then decide whether the proposals remain fit for purpose. That is as far as we can go on this matter today. This financial matter is one of privilege for the House of Commons and it would be altogether wrong, off the back of a Pensions Bill, to deal with other matters that are not directly concerned with annuitisation with a view to launching a major reform. In our judgment, that would not be appropriate.

Mr. Garnier: This whole issue has been discussed for some years. It is not new, but the Government always come back to the House, claiming that they are considering the matter and will do this, that and the other. It is rather like pulling teeth. Is there no energy in the Government, whether in the Department for Work and Pensions or the Treasury, to encourage Ministers, special advisers and civil servants to get to grips with the impoverishment of elderly people through the forced annuity? Why do the Government not do something about it? They should do it before the election; if they did, they might even just win it.

Malcolm Wicks: There is just a chance that we might win it anyway, but we will have to wait to see. I cannot add any more. The hon. and learned Gentleman has made his points forcefully and I have made mine.

Mr. Webb: I know that the Minister would like to clarify a point that he made about the figure of 250,000 people. He implied that he was being misrepresented and that that was not the right number of people who would be clear of means-tested benefits. In that context, will he tell us what is the question to which 250,000 is the answer?

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Work and Pensions (Mr. Chris Pond): The question might be, is 250,000 another way of saying a quarter of a million?

Malcolm Wicks: Yes. The point is that we are talking about a quarter of a million people who are way above means-tested levels. I recognise that there is a gap in evidence about the accumulation of different pension funds but, as I said, 80 per cent. of people have very tiny pension pots. It would require some very clever arithmetic to show that large numbers of people could be placed in the relatively rich category that we have been discussing.

I accept that we need to consider this matter, and we will do so in due course. With that, I hope that the House will decline to accept the view of the House of Lords on this matter.

Question put, That this House disagrees with the Lords in the said amendment:—

The House divided: Ayes 292, Noes 203.

Division No. 323] **[5:10 pm**

AYES

Abbott, Ms Diane
Ainger, Nick
Ainsworth, Bob *(Cov'try NE)*
Alexander, Douglas
Allen, Graham
Anderson, rh Donald *(Swansea E)*
Anderson, Janet *(Rossendale & Darwen)*
Armstrong, rh Ms Hilary
Atherton, Ms Candy
Atkins, Charlotte
Bailey, Adrian
Baird, Vera
Banks, Tony
Barron, rh Kevin
Battle, rh John
Beard, Nigel
Begg, Miss Anne
Bell, Sir Stuart
Berry, Roger
Blackman, Liz
Blizzard, Bob
Borrow, David
Bradley, rh Keith *(Withington)*
Bradley, Peter *(The Wrekin)*
Brennan, Kevin
Brown, rh Nicholas *(Newcastle E Wallsend)*
Brown, Russell *(Dumfries)*
Bryant, Chris
Buck, Ms Karen
Burgon, Colin
Burnham, Andy
Byrne, Liam *(B'ham Hodge H)*
Caborn, rh Richard
Cairns, David
Campbell, Alan *(Tynemouth)*
Campbell, Mrs Anne *(C'bridge)*
Campbell, Ronnie *(Blyth V)*
Caplin, Ivor
Caton, Martin
Cawsey, Ian *(Brigg)*
Challen, Colin
Clark, Mrs Helen *(Peterborough)*
Clark, Dr. Lynda *(Edinburgh Pentlands)*
Clark, Paul *(Gillingham)*
Clarke, rh Tom *(Coatbridge & Chryston)*
Clelland, David
Coaker, Vernon
Coffey, Ms Ann
Colman, Tony
Cook, rh Robin *(Livingston)*
Corbyn, Jeremy
Corston, Jean
Cox, Tom *(Tooting)*
Cranston, Ross
Crausby, David
Cruddas, Jon
Cryer, John *(Hornchurch)*
Cunningham, Jim *(Coventry S)*
Cunningham, Tony *(Workington)*
Darling, rh Alistair
Davey, Valerie *(Bristol W)*
David, Wayne
Davidson, Ian
Davies, rh Denzil *(Llanelli)*
Davies, Geraint *(Croydon C)*
Dawson, Hilton
Dean, Mrs Janet
Denham, rh John
Dhanda, Parmjit
Dismore, Andrew
Dobbin, Jim *(Heywood)*
Dobson, rh Frank
Donohoe, Brian H.
Dowd, Jim *(Lewisham W)*
Eagle, Angela *(Wallasey)*
Eagle, Maria *(L'pool Garston)*
Edwards, Huw
Efford, Clive
Ellman, Mrs Louise
Ennis, Jeff *(Barnsley E)*
Fitzpatrick, Jim
Fitzsimons, Mrs Lorna
Flint, Caroline
Foster, rh Derek
Foster, Michael *(Worcester)*
Foster, Michael Jabez *(Hastings & Rye)*
Francis, Dr. Hywel
Gerrard, Neil
Gilroy, Linda
Godsiff, Roger
Goggins, Paul
Griffiths, Jane *(Reading E)*
Grogan, John
Hain, rh Peter
Hall, Mike *(Weaver Vale)*
Hall, Patrick *(Bedford)*
Hamilton, David *(Midlothian)*
Hanson, David
Harman, rh Ms Harriet
Havard, Dai *(Merthyr Tydfil & Rhymney)*
Healey, John
Henderson, Doug *(Newcastle N)*
Henderson, Ivan *(Harwich)*
Hendrick, Mark
Hepburn, Stephen
Heppell, John
Hesford, Stephen
Heyes, David
Hill, Keith *(Streatham)*
Hinchliffe, David
Hood, Jimmy *(Clydesdale)*
Hoon, rh Geoffrey

Hope, Phil *(Corby)*
Hopkins, Kelvin
Howarth, rh Alan *(Newport E)*
Howarth, George *(Knowsley N & Sefton E)*
Howells, Dr. Kim
Hughes, Beverley *(Stretford & Urmston)*
Hughes, Kevin *(Doncaster N)*
Humble, Mrs Joan
Hume, John *(Foyle)*
Hurst, Alan *(Braintree)*
Hutton, rh John
Illsley, Eric
Irranca-Davies, Huw
Jackson, Glenda *(Hampstead & Highgate)*
Jackson, Helen *(Hillsborough)*
Jamieson, David
Jenkins, Brian
Johnson, rh Alan *(Hull W)*
Johnson, Miss Melanie *(Welwyn Hatfield)*
Jones, Helen *(Warrington N)*
Jones, Jon Owen *(Cardiff C)*
Jones, Martyn *(Clwyd S)*
Joyce, Eric *(Falkirk W)*
Kaufman, rh Sir Gerald
Keeble, Ms Sally
Keen, Alan *(Feltham)*
Kelly, Ruth *(Bolton W)*
Kennedy, Jane *(Wavertree)*
Khabra, Piara S.
Kidney, David
King, Andy *(Rugby)*
Knight, Jim *(S Dorset)*
Ladyman, Dr. Stephen
Laxton, Bob *(Derby N)*
Lazarowicz, Mark
Lepper, David
Leslie, Christopher
Levitt, Tom *(High Peak)*
Lewis, Ivan *(Bury S)*
Lewis, Terry *(Worsley)*
Linton, Martin
Lloyd, Tony *(Manchester C)*
Love, Andrew
Lucas, Ian *(Wrexham)*
Luke, Iain *(Dundee E)*
McAvoy, Thomas
McCabe, Stephen
McCafferty, Chris
McDonagh, Siobhain
MacDonald, Calum
McDonnell, John
McFall, rh John
McGuire, Mrs Anne
McIsaac, Shona
McKenna, Rosemary
Mackinlay, Andrew
McNamara, Kevin
McNulty, Tony
MacShane, Denis
McWilliam, John
Mahmood, Khalid
Mann, John *(Bassetlaw)*
Marris, Rob *(Wolverh'ton SW)*
Marsden, Gordon *(Blackpool S)*
Marshall, David *(Glasgow Shettleston)*
Marshall-Andrews, Robert
Martlew, Eric
Meacher, rh Michael
Meale, Alan *(Mansfield)*
Merron, Gillian
Michael, rh Alun
Miller, Andrew
Mitchell, Austin *(Gt Grimsby)*
Moffatt, Laura
Morgan, Julie
Morley, Elliot
Morris, rh Estelle
Mountford, Kali
Mudie, George
Munn, Ms Meg
Murphy, Denis *(Wansbeck)*
Murphy, Jim *(Eastwood)*
Murphy, rh Paul *(Torfaen)*
O'Brien, Bill *(Normanton)*
O'Brien, Mike *(N Warks)*
O'Hara, Edward
Olner, Bill
Organ, Diana
Owen, Albert
Pearson, Ian
Perham, Linda
Picking, Anne
Pickthall, Colin
Pike, Peter *(Burnley)*
Plaskitt, James
Pollard, Kerry
Pond, Chris *(Gravesham)*
Pope, Greg *(Hyndburn)*
Pound, Stephen
Prentice, Ms Bridget *(Lewisham E)*
Prentice, Gordon *(Pendle)*
Prescott, rh John
Prosser, Gwyn
Purchase, Ken
Purnell, James
Quin, rh Joyce
Quinn, Lawrie
Rammell, Bill
Rapson, Syd *(Portsmouth N)*
Raynsford, rh Nick
Reed, Andy *(Loughborough)*
Robertson, John *(Glasgow Anniesland)*
Robinson, Geoffrey *(Coventry NW)*
Roche, Mrs Barbara
Rooney, Terry
Ross, Ernie *(Dundee W)*
Roy, Frank *(Motherwell)*
Ruane, Chris
Ruddock, Joan
Sarwar, Mohammad
Savidge, Malcolm
Sawford, Phil
Sedgemore, Brian
Shaw, Jonathan
Sheerman, Barry
Sheridan, Jim
Shipley, Ms Debra
Singh, Marsha
Skinner, Dennis
Smith, rh Andrew *(Oxford E)*
Smith, Angela *(Basildon)*
Smith, rh Chris *(Islington S & Finsbury)*
Smith, Geraldine *(Morecambe & Lunesdale)*
Smith, Jacqui *(Redditch)*
Smith, Llew *(Blaenau Gwent)*
Soley, Clive
Squire, Rachel
Starkey, Dr. Phyllis
Steinberg, Gerry
Stewart, David *(Inverness E & Lochaber)*
Stinchcombe, Paul
Stoate, Dr. Howard
Strang, rh Dr. Gavin
Stringer, Graham
Stuart, Ms Gisela
Sutcliffe, Gerry
Tami, Mark *(Alyn)*
Taylor, rh Ann *(Dewsbury)*
Taylor, Dari *(Stockton S)*
Taylor, David *(NW Leics)*
Tipping, Paddy
Touhig, Don *(Islwyn)*
Trickett, Jon
Truswell, Paul
Turner, Dennis *(Wolverh'ton SE)*
Turner, Neil *(Wigan)*
Twigg, Derek *(Halton)*
Twigg, Stephen *(Enfield)*
Tynan, Bill *(Hamilton S)*
Vaz, Keith *(Leicester E)*
Vis, Dr. Rudi
Walley, Ms Joan
Ward, Claire
Wareing, Robert N.
Watson, Tom
Watts, David
White, Brian
Whitehead, Dr. Alan
Wicks, Malcolm
Williams, rh Alan *(Swansea W)*
Wilson, Brian
Winnick, David
Wood, Mike *(Batley)*
Woolas, Phil
Worthington, Tony
Wright, Anthony D. *(Gt Yarmouth)*
Wright, David *(Telford)*
Wright, Iain *(Hartlepool)*
Wright, Tony *(Cannock)*
Wyatt, Derek

Tellers for the Ayes:
Margaret Moran and
Joan Ryan

NOES

Ainsworth, Peter *(E Surrey)*
Allan, Richard
Amess, David
Ancram, rh Michael
Arbuthnot, rh James
Atkinson, Peter *(Hexham)*
Bacon, Richard
Baker, Norman
Baldry, Tony
Barker, Gregory
Barrett, John
Beggs, Roy *(E Antrim)*
Beith, rh A. J.
Bellingham, Henry
Bercow, John
Beresford, Sir Paul
Blunt, Crispin
Boswell, Tim
Bottomley, Peter *(Worthing W)*
Brady, Graham
Brake, Tom *(Carshalton)*
Brazier, Julian
Breed, Colin
Brooke, Mrs Annette L.
Browning, Mrs Angela
Bruce, Malcolm
Burns, Simon
Burnside, David
Burstow, Paul
Burt, Alistair
Butterfill, Sir John
Cable, Dr. Vincent
Calton, Mrs Patsy
Cameron, David
Campbell, Gregory *(E Lond'y)*
Carmichael, Alistair
Cash, William
Chapman, Sir Sydney *(Chipping Barnet)*
Chope, Christopher
Clappison, James
Clifton-Brown, Geoffrey
Collins, Tim
Conway, Derek
Cormack, Sir Patrick
Cotter, Brian
Curry, rh David
Davey, Edward *(Kingston)*
Davies, Quentin *(Grantham & Stamford)*
Davis, rh David *(Haltemprice & Howden)*
Djanogly, Jonathan
Dodds, Nigel
Donaldson, Jeffrey M.
Dorrell, rh Stephen
Doughty, Sue
Duncan, Alan *(Rutland)*
Duncan, Peter *(Galloway)*
Etherington, Bill
Ewing, Annabelle
Fabricant, Michael
Fallon, Michael
Field, rh Frank *(Birkenhead)*
Field, Mark *(Cities of London & Westminster)*
Fisher, Mark
Flight, Howard
Flook, Adrian
Forth, rh Eric
Foster, Don *(Bath)*
Fox, Dr. Liam
Francois, Mark
Gale, Roger *(N Thanet)*
Garnier, Edward
George, Andrew *(St. Ives)*
Gibb, Nick *(Bognor Regis)*
Gidley, Sandra
Gillan, Mrs Cheryl
Goodman, Paul
Gray, James *(N Wilts)*
Green, Damian *(Ashford)*
Greenway, John
Grieve, Dominic
Hague, rh William
Hammond, Philip
Hancock, Mike
Harvey, Nick
Hawkins, Nick
Heald, Oliver
Heath, David
Heathcoat-Amory, rh David
Hermon, Lady
Hoban, Mark *(Fareham)*
Hoey, Kate *(Vauxhall)*
Hogg, rh Douglas
Holmes, Paul
Horam, John *(Orpington)*
Howard, rh Michael
Howarth, Gerald *(Aldershot)*
Hughes, Simon *(Southwark N)*
Hunter, Andrew
Jack, rh Michael
Jackson, Robert *(Wantage)*

Jones, Nigel *(Cheltenham)*
Kennedy, rh Charles *(Ross Skye & Inverness)*
Kirkbride, Miss Julie
Kirkwood, Sir Archy
Knight, rh Greg *(E Yorkshire)*
Laing, Mrs Eleanor
Lait, Mrs Jacqui
Lamb, Norman
Lansley, Andrew
Laws, David *(Yeovil)*
Letwin, rh Oliver
Lewis, Dr. Julian *(New Forest E)*
Liddell-Grainger, Ian
Lidington, David
Lilley, rh Peter
Llwyd, Elfyn
Loughton, Tim
Luff, Peter *(M-Worcs)*
McIntosh, Miss Anne
Mackay, rh Andrew
Maclean, rh David
McLoughlin, Patrick
Malins, Humfrey
Maples, John
Maude, rh Francis
Mawhinney, rh Sir Brian
May, Mrs Theresa
Mercer, Patrick
Mitchell, Andrew *(Sutton Coldfield)*
Moore, Michael
Moss, Malcolm
Murrison, Dr. Andrew
Oaten, Mark *(Winchester)*
O'Brien, Stephen *(Eddisbury)*
Öpik, Lembit
Osborne, George *(Tatton)*
Ottaway, Richard
Paice, James
Paterson, Owen
Pickles, Eric
Price, Adam *(E Carmarthen & Dinefwr)*
Prisk, Mark *(Hertford)*
Pugh, Dr. John
Redwood, rh John
Reid, Alan *(Argyll & Bute)*
Rendel, David
Robathan, Andrew
Robertson, Angus *(Moray)*
Robertson, Hugh *(Faversham & M-Kent)*
Robinson, Mrs Iris *(Strangford)*
Robinson, Peter *(Belfast E)*
Roe, Dame Marion
Rosindell, Andrew
Russell, Bob *(Colchester)*
Salmond, Alex
Sanders, Adrian
Sayeed, Jonathan
Shephard, rh Mrs Gillian
Shepherd, Richard
Simmonds, Mark
Simpson, Keith *(M-Norfolk)*
Smith, Sir Robert *(W Ab'd'ns & Kincardine)*
Smyth, Rev. Martin *(Belfast S)*
Soames, Nicholas
Spelman, Mrs Caroline
Spicer, Sir Michael
Spink, Bob *(Castle Point)*
Spring, Richard
Stanley, rh Sir John
Steen, Anthony
Streeter, Gary
Stunell, Andrew
Swayne, Desmond
Swire, Hugo *(E Devon)*
Syms, Robert
Tapsell, Sir Peter
Taylor, Ian *(Esher)*
Taylor, John *(Solihull)*
Taylor, Matthew *(Truro)*
Taylor, Sir Teddy
Teather, Sarah
Thomas, Simon *(Ceredigion)*
Thurso, John
Turner, Andrew *(Isle of Wight)*
Tyler, Paul *(N Cornwall)*
Tyrie, Andrew
Waterson, Nigel
Watkinson, Angela
Webb, Steve *(Northavon)*
Whittingdale, John
Widdecombe, rh Miss Ann
Wiggin, Bill
Wilkinson, John
Willetts, David
Williams, Hywel *(Caernarfon)*
Williams, Roger *(Brecon)*
Wilshire, David
Winterton, Ann *(Congleton)*
Winterton, Sir Nicholas *(Macclesfield)*
Wishart, Pete
Yeo, Tim *(S Suffolk)*
Young, rh Sir George
Younger-Ross, Richard

Tellers for the Noes:
Mr. David Ruffley and
Andrew Selous

Question accordingly agreed to.

Lords amendment disagreed to.

It being more than three hours after the commencement of proceedings, MR DEPUTY SPEAKER *put the remaining Questions required to be put at that hour, pursuant to Order [this day].*

Motion made, and Question put, That this House agrees with the Lords in amendments Nos. 360 to 415.

The House divided: Ayes 348, Noes 148.

Division No. 324] [5:24 pm

AYES

Abbott, Ms Diane
Ainger, Nick
Ainsworth, Bob *(Cov'try NE)*
Alexander, Douglas
Allen, Graham
Anderson, rh Donald *(Swansea E)*
Anderson, Janet *(Rossendale & Darwen)*
Armstrong, rh Ms Hilary
Atherton, Ms Candy
Atkins, Charlotte
Bailey, Adrian
Baird, Vera
Baker, Norman
Banks, Tony
Barrett, John
Barron, rh Kevin
Battle, rh John
Beard, Nigel
Begg, Miss Anne
Beith, rh A. J.
Bell, Sir Stuart
Berry, Roger
Blackman, Liz
Blears, Ms Hazel
Blizzard, Bob
Boateng, rh Paul
Borrow, David
Bradley, rh Keith *(Withington)*
Bradley, Peter *(The Wrekin)*
Brake, Tom *(Carshalton)*
Breed, Colin
Brennan, Kevin
Brooke, Mrs Annette L.
Brown, rh Nicholas *(Newcastle E Wallsend)*
Brown, Russell *(Dumfries)*
Bruce, Malcolm
Bryant, Chris
Buck, Ms Karen
Burgon, Colin
Burnham, Andy
Burstow, Paul
Byrne, Liam *(B'ham Hodge H)*
Cable, Dr. Vincent
Caborn, rh Richard
Cairns, David
Calton, Mrs Patsy
Campbell, Alan *(Tynemouth)*
Campbell, Mrs Anne *(C'bridge)*
Campbell, Ronnie *(Blyth V)*
Caplin, Ivor
Carmichael, Alistair
Caton, Martin
Cawsey, Ian *(Brigg)*
Challen, Colin
Clark, Mrs Helen *(Peterborough)*
Clark, Dr. Lynda *(Edinburgh Pentlands)*
Clark, Paul *(Gillingham)*
Clarke, rh Tom *(Coatbridge & Chryston)*
Clelland, David
Coaker, Vernon
Coffey, Ms Ann
Colman, Tony
Cook, rh Robin *(Livingston)*
Corbyn, Jeremy
Corston, Jean
Cotter, Brian
Cox, Tom *(Tooting)*
Cranston, Ross
Crausby, David
Cruddas, Jon
Cryer, John *(Hornchurch)*
Cunningham, Jim *(Coventry S)*
Cunningham, Tony *(Workington)*
Darling, rh Alistair
Davey, Edward *(Kingston)*
Davey, Valerie *(Bristol W)*
David, Wayne
Davidson, Ian
Davies, rh Denzil *(Llanelli)*
Davies, Geraint *(Croydon C)*
Dawson, Hilton
Dean, Mrs Janet
Denham, rh John
Dhanda, Parmjit
Dismore, Andrew
Dobbin, Jim *(Heywood)*
Dobson, rh Frank
Donohoe, Brian H.
Doughty, Sue
Dowd, Jim *(Lewisham W)*
Eagle, Angela *(Wallasey)*
Eagle, Maria *(L'pool Garston)*
Edwards, Huw
Efford, Clive
Ellman, Mrs Louise
Ennis, Jeff *(Barnsley E)*
Etherington, Bill
Ewing, Annabelle
Field, rh Frank *(Birkenhead)*
Fisher, Mark
Fitzpatrick, Jim
Fitzsimons, Mrs Lorna
Flint, Caroline
Foster, rh Derek
Foster, Don *(Bath)*
Foster, Michael *(Worcester)*
Foster, Michael Jabez *(Hastings & Rye)*
Francis, Dr. Hywel
George, Andrew *(St. Ives)*
Gerrard, Neil
Gidley, Sandra
Gilroy, Linda
Godsiff, Roger
Goggins, Paul
Green, Matthew *(Ludlow)*
Griffiths, Jane *(Reading E)*
Grogan, John
Hall, Mike *(Weaver Vale)*
Hall, Patrick *(Bedford)*
Hamilton, David *(Midlothian)*
Hamilton, Fabian *(Leeds NE)*
Hancock, Mike
Hanson, David
Harman, rh Ms Harriet
Harvey, Nick
Havard, Dai *(Merthyr Tydfil & Rhymney)*
Healey, John
Heath, David
Henderson, Doug *(Newcastle N)*
Henderson, Ivan *(Harwich)*
Hendrick, Mark
Hepburn, Stephen
Heppell, John
Hesford, Stephen
Heyes, David
Hill, Keith *(Streatham)*
Hinchliffe, David
Hoey, Kate *(Vauxhall)*
Holmes, Paul
Hood, Jimmy *(Clydesdale)*
Hoon, rh Geoffrey
Hope, Phil *(Corby)*
Hopkins, Kelvin
Howarth, rh Alan *(Newport E)*
Howarth, George *(Knowsley N & Sefton E)*
Howells, Dr. Kim
Hughes, Beverley *(Stretford & Urmston)*
Hughes, Kevin *(Doncaster N)*
Hughes, Simon *(Southwark N)*
Humble, Mrs Joan
Hume, John *(Foyle)*
Hurst, Alan *(Braintree)*

Hutton, rh John
Illsley, Eric
Irranca-Davies, Huw
Jackson, Glenda *(Hampstead & Highgate)*
Jackson, Helen *(Hillsborough)*
Jamieson, David
Jenkins, Brian
Johnson, rh Alan *(Hull W)*
Johnson, Miss Melanie *(Welwyn Hatfield)*
Jones, Helen *(Warrington N)*
Jones, Jon Owen *(Cardiff C)*
Jones, Martyn *(Clwyd S)*
Joyce, Eric *(Falkirk W)*
Kaufman, rh Sir Gerald
Keeble, Ms Sally
Keen, Alan *(Feltham)*
Kelly, Ruth *(Bolton W)*
Kennedy, rh Charles *(Ross Skye & Inverness)*
Kennedy, Jane *(Wavertree)*
Khabra, Piara S.
Kidney, David
King, Andy *(Rugby)*
Kirkwood, Sir Archy
Knight, Jim *(S Dorset)*
Kumar, Dr. Ashok
Ladyman, Dr. Stephen
Lamb, Norman
Laws, David *(Yeovil)*
Laxton, Bob *(Derby N)*
Lazarowicz, Mark
Lepper, David
Leslie, Christopher
Levitt, Tom *(High Peak)*
Lewis, Ivan *(Bury S)*
Lewis, Terry *(Worsley)*
Linton, Martin
Lloyd, Tony *(Manchester C)*
Llwyd, Elfyn
Love, Andrew
Lucas, Ian *(Wrexham)*
Luke, Iain *(Dundee E)*
McAvoy, Thomas
McCabe, Stephen
McCafferty, Chris
McDonagh, Siobhain
MacDonald, Calum
McDonnell, John
McFall, rh John
McGuire, Mrs Anne
McIsaac, Shona
McKenna, Rosemary
Mackinlay, Andrew
McNamara, Kevin
McNulty, Tony
MacShane, Denis
McWilliam, John
Mahmood, Khalid
Mann, John *(Bassetlaw)*
Marris, Rob *(Wolverh'ton SW)*
Marsden, Gordon *(Blackpool S)*
Marshall, David *(Glasgow Shettleston)*
Marshall-Andrews, Robert
Martlew, Eric
Meacher, rh Michael
Meale, Alan *(Mansfield)*
Merron, Gillian
Michael, rh Alun
Miller, Andrew
Mitchell, Austin *(Gt Grimsby)*
Moffatt, Laura
Moore, Michael
Morgan, Julie
Morley, Elliot
Morris, rh Estelle
Mountford, Kali
Mudie, George
Munn, Ms Meg
Murphy, Denis *(Wansbeck)*
Murphy, Jim *(Eastwood)*
Murphy, rh Paul *(Torfaen)*
Oaten, Mark *(Winchester)*
O'Brien, Bill *(Normanton)*
O'Brien, Mike *(N Warks)*
O'Hara, Edward
Olner, Bill
O'Neill, Martin
Öpik, Lembit
Organ, Diana
Owen, Albert
Pearson, Ian
Perham, Linda
Picking, Anne
Pickthall, Colin
Pike, Peter *(Burnley)*
Plaskitt, James
Pollard, Kerry
Pond, Chris *(Gravesham)*
Pope, Greg *(Hyndburn)*
Pound, Stephen
Prentice, Ms Bridget *(Lewisham E)*
Prentice, Gordon *(Pendle)*
Prescott, rh John
Price, Adam *(E Carmarthen & Dinefwr)*
Prosser, Gwyn
Pugh, Dr. John
Purchase, Ken
Purnell, James
Quin, rh Joyce
Quinn, Lawrie
Rapson, Syd *(Portsmouth N)*
Raynsford, rh Nick
Reed, Andy *(Loughborough)*
Reid, Alan *(Argyll & Bute)*
Rendel, David
Robertson, Angus *(Moray)*
Robertson, John *(Glasgow Anniesland)*
Robinson, Geoffrey *(Coventry NW)*
Roche, Mrs Barbara
Rooney, Terry
Ross, Ernie *(Dundee W)*
Roy, Frank *(Motherwell)*
Ruane, Chris
Ruddock, Joan
Russell, Bob *(Colchester)*
Salmond, Alex
Sanders, Adrian
Sarwar, Mohammad
Savidge, Malcolm
Sawford, Phil
Sedgemore, Brian
Shaw, Jonathan
Sheridan, Jim
Shipley, Ms Debra
Singh, Marsha
Skinner, Dennis
Smith, rh Andrew *(Oxford E)*
Smith, Angela *(Basildon)*
Smith, rh Chris *(Islington S & Finsbury)*
Smith, Geraldine *(Morecambe & Lunesdale)*
Smith, Jacqui *(Redditch)*
Smith, Llew *(Blaenau Gwent)*
Soley, Clive
Squire, Rachel
Starkey, Dr. Phyllis
Steinberg, Gerry
Stewart, David *(Inverness E & Lochaber)*
Stinchcombe, Paul
Stoate, Dr. Howard
Strang, rh Dr. Gavin
Stringer, Graham
Stuart, Ms Gisela
Stunell, Andrew
Sutcliffe, Gerry
Tami, Mark *(Alyn)*
Taylor, rh Ann *(Dewsbury)*
Taylor, David *(NW Leics)*
Taylor, Matthew *(Truro)*
Teather, Sarah
Thomas, Simon *(Ceredigion)*
Tipping, Paddy
Touhig, Don *(Islwyn)*
Trickett, Jon
Truswell, Paul
Turner, Dennis *(Wolverh'ton SE)*
Turner, Neil *(Wigan)*
Twigg, Derek *(Halton)*
Twigg, Stephen *(Enfield)*
Tyler, Paul *(N Cornwall)*
Tynan, Bill *(Hamilton S)*
Vaz, Keith *(Leicester E)*
Vis, Dr. Rudi
Walley, Ms Joan
Ward, Claire
Wareing, Robert N.
Watson, Tom
Watts, David
Webb, Steve *(Northavon)*
White, Brian
Whitehead, Dr. Alan
Wicks, Malcolm
Williams, rh Alan *(Swansea W)*
Williams, Hywel *(Caernarfon)*
Williams, Roger *(Brecon)*
Wills, Michael
Wilson, Brian
Winnick, David
Wishart, Pete
Wood, Mike *(Batley)*
Woolas, Phil
Worthington, Tony
Wright, Anthony D. *(Gt Yarmouth)*
Wright, David *(Telford)*
Wright, Iain *(Hartlepool)*
Wright, Tony *(Cannock)*
Wyatt, Derek
Younger-Ross, Richard

Tellers for the Ayes:
Joan Ryan and
Margaret Moran

NOES

Ainsworth, Peter *(E Surrey)*
Amess, David
Ancram, rh Michael
Arbuthnot, rh James
Atkinson, Peter *(Hexham)*
Bacon, Richard
Baldry, Tony
Barker, Gregory
Beggs, Roy *(E Antrim)*
Bellingham, Henry
Bercow, John
Beresford, Sir Paul
Blunt, Crispin
Boswell, Tim
Bottomley, Peter *(Worthing W)*
Brady, Graham
Brazier, Julian
Browning, Mrs Angela
Burns, Simon
Burnside, David
Burt, Alistair
Butterfill, Sir John
Cameron, David
Campbell, Gregory *(E Lond'y)*
Cash, William
Chapman, Sir Sydney *(Chipping Barnet)*
Chope, Christopher
Clappison, James
Collins, Tim
Conway, Derek
Cormack, Sir Patrick
Curry, rh David
Davies, Quentin *(Grantham & Stamford)*
Davis, rh David *(Haltemprice & Howden)*
Djanogly, Jonathan
Dodds, Nigel
Donaldson, Jeffrey M.
Dorrell, rh Stephen
Duncan, Alan *(Rutland)*
Duncan, Peter *(Galloway)*
Fabricant, Michael
Fallon, Michael
Field, Mark *(Cities of London & Westminster)*
Flight, Howard
Flook, Adrian
Forth, rh Eric
Fox, Dr. Liam
Francois, Mark
Gale, Roger *(N Thanet)*
Garnier, Edward
Gibb, Nick *(Bognor Regis)*
Gillan, Mrs Cheryl
Goodman, Paul
Gray, James *(N Wilts)*
Green, Damian *(Ashford)*
Greenway, John
Grieve, Dominic
Gummer, rh John
Hague, rh William
Hammond, Philip
Hawkins, Nick
Heald, Oliver
Heathcoat-Amory, rh David
Hermon, Lady
Hoban, Mark *(Fareham)*
Hogg, rh Douglas
Horam, John *(Orpington)*
Howard, rh Michael
Howarth, Gerald *(Aldershot)*
Hunter, Andrew
Jack, rh Michael
Jackson, Robert *(Wantage)*
Kirkbride, Miss Julie
Knight, rh Greg *(E Yorkshire)*
Laing, Mrs Eleanor
Lait, Mrs Jacqui
Lansley, Andrew
Letwin, rh Oliver
Lewis, Dr. Julian *(New Forest E)*
Liddell-Grainger, Ian
Lidington, David
Lilley, rh Peter
Loughton, Tim
Luff, Peter *(M-Worcs)*

McIntosh, Miss Anne
Mackay, rh Andrew
Maclean, rh David
McLoughlin, Patrick
Malins, Humfrey
Maples, John
Maude, rh Francis
Mawhinney, rh Sir Brian
Mercer, Patrick
Mitchell, Andrew *(Sutton Coldfield)*
Moss, Malcolm
Murrison, Dr. Andrew
Norman, Archie
O'Brien, Stephen *(Eddisbury)*
Osborne, George *(Tatton)*
Ottaway, Richard
Paice, James
Paterson, Owen
Pickles, Eric
Prisk, Mark *(Hertford)*
Redwood, rh John
Robathan, Andrew
Robertson, Hugh *(Faversham & M-Kent)*
Robinson, Mrs Iris *(Strangford)*
Robinson, Peter *(Belfast E)*
Roe, Dame Marion
Rosindell, Andrew
Ruffley, David
Sayeed, Jonathan
Shephard, rh Mrs Gillian
Shepherd, Richard
Simmonds, Mark
Simpson, Keith *(M-Norfolk)*
Smyth, Rev. Martin *(Belfast S)*
Soames, Nicholas
Spelman, Mrs Caroline
Spicer, Sir Michael
Spink, Bob *(Castle Point)*
Spring, Richard
Stanley, rh Sir John
Steen, Anthony
Streeter, Gary
Swayne, Desmond
Swire, Hugo *(E Devon)*
Syms, Robert
Tapsell, Sir Peter
Taylor, Ian *(Esher)*
Taylor, John *(Solihull)*
Taylor, Dr. Richard *(Wyre F)*
Taylor, Sir Teddy
Turner, Andrew *(Isle of Wight)*
Tyrie, Andrew
Waterson, Nigel
Watkinson, Angela
Whittingdale, John
Widdecombe, rh Miss Ann
Wiggin, Bill
Wilkinson, John
Willetts, David
Wilshire, David
Winterton, Ann *(Congleton)*
Winterton, Sir Nicholas *(Macclesfield)*
Yeo, Tim *(S Suffolk)*
Young, rh Sir George

Tellers for the Noes:
Andrew Selous and
Mr. Geoffrey Clifton-Brown

Question accordingly agreed to.

Lords amendments agreed to.

Sir John Butterfill: On a point of order, Mr. Deputy Speaker. It will not have escaped your attention that we have been dealing this afternoon with 97 pages of Lords amendments, which occupied their Lordships for more than 90 hours of debate. This House has been given four hours to debate what the Lords took 90 hours to debate. This subject is of vital importance to citizens all over this country, but debate will be curtailed simply so that the Government can get in their wretched Hunting Bill, which more than 56 per cent. of the population do not want anyway. Is not that an abuse of this House?

Mr. Deputy Speaker (Sir Michael Lord): Order. The hon. Gentleman is an experienced Member of Parliament and he knows that that is not a matter for the Chair. We are also now taking away from what time we have for the next debate.

Clause 274

FINANCIAL ASSISTANCE SCHEME FOR MEMBERS OF CERTAIN PENSION SCHEMES

Lords amendment: No. 416.

Mr. Pond: I beg to move, That this House disagrees with the Lords in the said amendment.

Mr. Deputy Speaker: With this we may discuss Government amendment (a) in lieu, thereof

Mr. Pond: I am sure that if the hon. Member for Bournemouth, West (Sir John Butterfill) had had the opportunity to hear my arguments on the last group of amendments, he would not have felt it necessary to vote against them and use up still more time.

In the other place, clause 287 was amended on the subject of the funding of the financial assistance scheme. Lords amendment No. 416 requires that the FAS is paid for entirely from public funds and not in part or in full by way of a charge, levy or contribution from the private sector. I accept the spirit of the amendment, to the extent that imposing any sort of compulsory charge, levy or contribution on the private sector does not figure in our plans for the FAS. Indeed, my noble Friend offered repeated assurances in the other place that we will not impose such charges. That is just as well, because we do not have powers to do so under clause 287.

The amendment made in the other place has, however, a second and much more unwelcome effect. By prescribing that the FAS should be a scheme for making payments entirely from public funds, the amendment disables the FAS from receiving voluntary donations from the private sector. Because the FAS will increase confidence in pensions and will benefit the industry as a whole, we feel that it is right to keep open the option of obtaining voluntary financial contributions from the private sector. We are most grateful for the valuable assistance in kind offered by the pensions industry to date, both in sharing its expertise through the FAS industry working group and in supporting the data collection exercises that enhance our understanding of the problems that the FAS must address. We maintain a firm hope that the industry will further support the Government's leadership in assisting the individuals and we believe that it has a strong interest in doing so.

Mr. Waterson: So far, has any company, industrial organisation or other body or individual indicated in any shape or form that they are remotely intent on making any voluntary contributions to the fund?

Mr. Pond: The hon. Gentleman knew the answer to that question before he decided to put it on the record. My point is that we should leave open the possibility that we might receive contributions from the private sector, because it will have a strong interest in providing them. As it stands, the Bill would shut the door in the face of anyone outside the Government who is willing to support our commitment to help the victims of pension wind-ups. That will ultimately reduce the potential level of financial assistance made available to those individuals, which none of us wants—although, sadly, we have seen attempts to vote out many aspects of the Bill, which could put that at risk.

I urge Members to disagree with the Lords in their amendment and to support our substitute amendment, which makes it explicit that regulations under clause 287 may not impose a levy or charge on anybody for the funding of the FAS. It does not, however, rule out voluntary contributions to the fund. I hope that Members will support that approach.

Mr. Waterson: Although I am not sure that the word "concession" passed the Minister's lips, this is in fact another concession from the Government, for which we are grateful. I do not anticipate a Division, because we accept the Minister's comments on the drafting and technical points, and that his version may be an improvement on that proposed by the Lords.

The background to the concession is important, however. We all know that a situation had developed in which it became clear that more than 60,000 people had lost all, or a large proportion, of their pension rights and there was a mounting cross-party campaign on the issue. The Government were faced with a dilemma. They had set their face against doing anything more, but it looked increasingly as though they would be defeated in the House by a combination of the Opposition parties and Government Back-Bench rebels. So they probably panicked, but then, at the last minute, they cobbled together the so-called financial assistance scheme and produced the magic figure of £400 million.

Many people have tried to find some justification for that figure and the basis on which it was arrived at. We have yet to find the envelope on the back of which it was sketched out, but it is perfectly clear that it was the amount that the Treasury was prepared to make available. As the then Secretary of State said:

> "The Government will therefore make available £400 million of public money . . . with the possibility of further contributions from industry."—[*Official Report*, 14 May 2004; Vol. 421, c. 32WS.]

A few days later, the Minister for Pensions said:

> "It is open to industry to offer further support. We hope that that support will be forthcoming."—[*Official Report*, 19 May 2004; Vol. 421, c. 983.]

The Minister who has just opened this debate was not entirely clear in his answer to my intervention, but I think we can take it that from that day to this no one—but no one—in industry has come forward to say that they might even consider making any kind of offer to top up the £400 million, exactly as we predicted at the time. That particular fig leaf has, sadly, been torn away from the Minister—*[Interruption.]* I do not want to go too far down that road; it is nearly dinnertime.

Following that announcement in the middle of May, the whole credibility of the FAS has been systematically crumbling, partly due, it must be said, to friendly fire from the Government. There has been a series of leaked announcements about the people and situations that will not be covered by the FAS. We have seen a consistent retreat from the package. I can understand why Ministers might want to do that; it was clear from the start that the sum was woefully inadequate to meet the needs, especially in the cases put forward genuinely and often with passion by Back-Bench Labour Members representing their constituents.

5.45 pm

It has been indicated that solvent wind-ups will not be included in the package, even though it is impossible to make out the moral distinction between workers who have lost everything due to a solvent wind-up and those who have lost due to an insolvent wind-up. There is also the so-called gap year. Ministers or officials let it be known that, because they had changed the priority order, there was to be a period between May 2004 and April 2005—when the PPF is supposed to come into force and open its doors; at the present rate, the queue will stretch round the building—during which people would not be covered by the FAS.

That position was clearly unsustainable so the Department found another wheeze: to throw some of the liabilities forward into the PPF itself. The crucial thing we have to remember about the amendment is that, basically, it is recognising the inevitable: there is no way that industry will make contributions. Although we must let Ministers retain a certain amount of dignity, no one ever seriously expected them to impose a further levy, on top of all the other imposts they are intending to make on good, well-run companies and pension schemes, but they had that forlorn hope that people would be queuing up to give them the money. It is clear that that will not happen.

All sorts of things have happened to the Bill, bits have fallen off and new bits have been added, but one of the few wholly consistent themes running run through it from start to finish—like the word Blackpool through a stick of rock—has been that the PPF will not be retrospective. In fairness, the official Opposition and, I think, the Liberal Democrats, too, have always accepted that principle. The analogy, much overworked in various debates, is that one cannot insure one's house against fire after it has already burned down. Members on both sides of the House have accepted that the PPF, funded by the levy—going forward, in a phrase that the Minister has used more than once—cannot consider settling claims that have arisen by the date that it opens its doors; yet the other day, very quietly, under the cover of departmental questions, in which the matter received no mention at all, under the cover of a debate in the Lords on these very issues, in which it received no mention at all, not even as a footnote, the Minister put out a short statement, indicating that—surprise, surprise—some schemes that got into difficulties during the so-called gap year could fall within the PPF's responsibilities.

Since then, attempts to explain that statement have taken two separate directions. The Minister in the Lords, Baroness Hollis, made the point that there had been considerable media interest in the Minister's statement and said that she wanted to reassure the House. She continued:

> "The Statement made on Monday simply confirmed how existing provisions in the Bill would apply . . . The position has not changed . . . the PPF has not, and cannot, become 'retrospective'."—[*Official Report, House of Lords*, 15 November 2004; Vol. 666, c. 1212.]

That seems fairly clear. However, on the day that the announcement was made, it became clear that, as is their wont, the Government had spun it to the newspapers. The spin put on it by a Government spokesman was that this was good news—the Minister used that very phrase in an earlier debate this afternoon. Indeed, it was good news, especially in the context of the Turner and Newell pension scheme.

I know about the Minister's reluctance to talk about that scheme; that is perfectly understandable and we wish it well. We all hope that its difficulties will be resolved in due course. The way things were put, however, meant that people in that position—perhaps I can stop referring to that particular scheme, and instead refer to "those in that position"—*[Interruption.]* The Turner and Newell scheme is a useful reference point, not least because it involves some 40,000 people and a shortfall of nearly £900 million on paper, so it is not exactly insignificant, but my point is that there must be a series of much smaller schemes that are in the same kind of no man's land, or what was no man's land until the Minister's statement clarifying the

[Mr. Waterson]

position. The indication is that the position has changed for people in that unfortunate situation. So which is right—the version in the Lords, that the statement changes nothing, or the version from the Minister of State to the effect that it does make a change, and it is good news because it is helping people in such a position?

I hope that when the Minister responds he will take the trouble to explain—I have tabled a parliamentary question on this subject because I think that it is sufficiently important—what estimate the Department made, before it issued that statement, of any extra liabilities that were likely to fall on the PPF as a result of that statement, or clarification if they prefer to describe it as such. That is an important question, to which the House deserves an answer.

What is at issue actually goes further than that, because it is suggested that we have had a tacit acceptance by Ministers that the £400 million fund is inadequate for the purpose, and hence this attempt, as I have said, to throw forward liabilities on to the PPF, completely contrary to the entire philosophy underpinning the Bill.

Many Members of the House will be familiar with the work of Dr. Ros Altmann, who has done sterling work over a long period in trying to help the now 65,000 or more people who have lost their pension rights through no fault of their own. She has done some number crunching, which actually does not tell us anything very new because I do not think that anyone, except possibly Ministers, actually believes that £400 million is remotely enough to compensate those people. Indeed, the Secretary of State admitted as much the other day in questions when he made a very clear distinction between assistance and compensation. One thing is very clear: there will be a large gulf between the benefits that people will receive under the PPF and the assistance that they might receive under the FAS. Let no one be in any doubt about that.

Vera Baird (Redcar) (Lab): I am waiting with bated breath to hear what sum of money the Conservatives will put into the FAS to rectify the faults that he is now picking on.

Mr. Waterson: I have never known what bated means, but I hope it is not painful. If the hon. and learned Lady will bate her breath just a little bit longer, I will come back to the point that she very reasonably raised.

I return to the point that I was discussing. Dr. Ros Altmann has done some figures, and on her calculations, the £20 million a year that the Government are proposing to put into the FAS would buy a pension of £6,000 a year for 130 people. Compare that to 65,000 people who we know for sure have lost a large proportion or all of their pension rights. And for many people, £6,000 does not begin to compensate for what they have already lost. Let me repeat: on Dr. Altmann's calculations, 130 people might be assisted.

I think, in fairness—I am not trying to pre-empt something that the Minister may want to say—one must add to that any remaining assets of those funds that would be carried into the FAS, in the same way as I assume they would be carried through into the PPF when that is up and running, but by definition those assets are inadequate for the purpose of paying pensions and buying annuities under the current system.

Is it not strange that before the announcement of 14 May, the mantra we consistently heard, over and over again from Ministers, whether in Opposition day debates or departmental questions, was that they did not want to raise false hopes? I am afraid that the charge now is that on 14 May they did precisely that; they raised false hopes by cruelly making a lot of people think that they were going to be compensated for the pension they had lost.

I think it is somewhere in Sherlock Holmes that there is talk about the dog that did not bark, but I think this is more a question of the dog that stopped barking, by which I mean those Labour Back Benchers who have been so persistent and vociferous in pursuing the interests of their constituents who have lost their pension rights. They have largely, if not entirely, fallen silent. These are intelligent Members of Parliament, who, I hope, display a cynical disbelief in what most Governments have to say, so it cannot be, I trust, that they believe that the £400 million will be enough.

Sir John Butterfill: While my hon. Friend is talking about cynical disbelief, may I point out to him that the effect of the Government amendment to the Lords amendment is that it does not rule out private contributions as long as they are voluntary, but of course there are various ways of ensuring that one might get voluntary contributions, such as a great deal of arm twisting? Has it occurred to my hon. Friend, for example, that it might be rumoured that the Government were thinking about new tax changes that would affect the industry, but of course if members of the industry were to make voluntary contributions, that might become unnecessary? Should we not therefore reconsider whether we support the Government amendment?

Mr. Waterson: My hon. Friend makes a very good point. There are sectors where the Government might have more leverage, such as the defence sector or any sector where the Government are the customer. Computer procurement and IT might be another area.

Mr. Fallon: There is another example in this very sector, and that is of course the banks. They were asked whether they would contribute to the costs of the universal bank that the Government were setting up through the Post Office and the Department of Trade and Industry. When the Minister uses the phrase "obtain a voluntary donation", that is exactly what happened; the banks were strong-armed into making that donation. I would not be at all as sanguine as my hon. Friend is about the effect of Government amendment (a). I hope that he will start opposing it soon.

Mr. Waterson: My hon. Friend makes another very good point. All I can say is that, so far, the arm twisting has clearly failed to produce any results.

I was just touching on the fact that all the noise and fury we heard from Labour Back Benchers stopped, in effect, on 14 May and we have heard very little from any of them since. It cannot be because they believe that the £400 million is adequate, but could it be that, with an election looming, they realise that it is not in their interests to rock the boat? Is that the real purpose of the £400 million and the announcement of the FAS on 14 May?

I return to the point raised by the hon. and learned Member for Redcar (Vera Baird). She knows what I am going to say, but let me say it anyway. We do not believe in using yet more taxpayers' money to make the FAS workable. We have long borrowed the proposal, originally made by the right hon. Member for Birkenhead (Mr. Field), to use unclaimed assets. Despite the Secretary of State's round abuse of that idea—put forward by his own Chancellor—until relatively recently the mantra of the Treasury was that just because assets are unclaimed does not mean that they do not belong to somebody. Then suddenly, in the small print of the last Budget, we saw that unclaimed assets were suddenly available but for a different purpose. My understanding, having met the British Bankers Association among others, is that those proposals are continuing and are going forward, and we expect, because I was told so in a reply to a question the other day, that we shall have an update on that policy in the pre-Budget report.

A respected body—the Unclaimed Assets Register—stands by its estimate that there are £15 billion of unclaimed assets in this country, and it is estimated that some £3 billion of pensions remain unpaid every year. The Government trouser vast sums in unclaimed gilts and national savings; they simply put that money in their own pocket because no one has claimed it. So a variety of different pots of unclaimed assets are available. In Ireland, such assets are disposed of for charitable purposes.

6 pm

There must be proper safeguards—I shall not discuss them in detail today, although I hope that we will hear more about them when the Chancellor reports on his own pet project for unclaimed assets—but when the next Conservative Government take office, possibly in May next year, I hope that we will find a new, finely honed, glossy fund, produced under this Government, for claiming unclaimed assets and putting them to good use, and one of the good uses to which we intend to put them is providing compensation over and above the existing £400 million to the people who have lost their pension rights.

Mr. Bill Tynan (Hamilton, South) (Lab): In the unlikely event that you are in government come next May, what payment would you take from—

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Order. The hon. Gentleman must use the correct parliamentary terms. I think it most unlikely that I will be in government next May, whatever happens.

Mr. Waterson: We would have to look at that at the time. Let me finish the paragraph if not the sentence. We still have not got from the Government the details of how their scheme will work. What is the level of benefit? How will it be paid? Who will be excluded and who will be included? The one thing that will certainly not happen this side of next April, at the earliest, is that anyone will see any money. Again, that seems extraordinarily convenient.

Vera Baird: Is the hon. Gentleman saying that the Tories would not put a penny of the Government's money—the taxpayer's money—or anyone's money, apart from the unclaimed assets about which there is strong argument, into trying to save all the 65,000 people who have lost their pensions? Is he making it clear that the Tories would not give them a penny piece?

Mr. Waterson: Let us be clear on two issues. First, the £400 million is already part of the public expenditure figures. We would take that over, and I am talking about topping it up to a realistic figure by the use of unclaimed assets. Secondly, the only argument about unclaimed assets is going on within the Government between the Chancellor and the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions, who has expressed tremendous independence and freedom of thought since he took over, but I am sure that people in the Department will eventually beat that out of him. They are the ones who are arguing, not us—we have said all along that those assets are available. The only argument is between the Treasury and the Department for Work and Pensions.

We accept—I do not want to seem entirely churlish—that the Government have made a concession. They have had to recognise the wisdom of the Opposition's arguments. We also accept, as I said at the start, what the Minister says about the drafting and technical issues on these amendments.

Mr. Webb: The purpose of Lords amendment No. 416 was to ensure that private funds were not required to top up the inadequate sums in the financial assistance scheme, and I am perfectly happy to accept the principle that Government amendment (a) will do so rather more effectively than the Lords amendment. In the unlikely event that such a contribution was freely given—I understand the comments made by the hon. Member for Bournemouth, West (Sir John Butterfill)—it would be slightly absurd if statute prevented that money from being accepted into the financial assistance scheme, so the change is sensible.

The very fact that the Government said that private contributions might be part of the package proves that £400 million was not enough. If £400 million were enough, extra money would not be needed from the private sector to make it up to a decent level. Indeed, that money would be turned away as excessive and unnecessary—so the £400 million is inadequate.

There has been an important development this afternoon with regard to the prospects of the people who will come under the financial assistance scheme getting justice. The parliamentary ombudsman announced this afternoon that she will investigate the alleged maladministration of several Departments, including the Department for Work and Pensions, leading to the loss of those workers getting a fair deal. I wrote to the ombudsman last May to ask whether, in principle, she would investigate. I met her, together with Dr. Ros Altmann, who was mentioned by the hon. Member for Eastbourne (Mr. Waterson), and members

[Mr. Webb]

of a pensioners action group in July. I and other Members, including the hon. Gentleman, have made submissions to the ombudsman. I am delighted that she has confirmed that she will investigate, because that seems increasingly likely to be the only way that the workers covered by the financial assistance scheme will get justice.

The Minister for Pensions, speaking at the weekend, appeared to be rather surprised that the private sector had not come up with some cash to top up that inadequate fund. We need to understand just how inadequate that £400 million is. It inevitably sounds like a lot when added up over 20 years. If my overdraft was added up over 20 years, it would look even more terrifying. We are talking about £20 million each year. In the context of a departmental budget of £100 billion a year, the Government are putting in 0.02 per cent. of the Department's budget. That is clearly not enough. When the scheme was proposed, the figure of £400 million was presumably based on the assumption that schemes that went to the wall in the infamous gap year would not be covered. Assuming that the scheme was not adequate on that basis, it is clearly even more inadequate now.

The key point with regard to Government amendment (a) is that, even if the sums were to come from the private sector, they are likely to be extraordinarily limited in scope. Even if the private sector were to become extraordinarily generous, it will not begin to touch the millions of pounds of underfunding. The best estimates are that £20 million a year over 20 years should have been perhaps £75 million a year over 40 years. The idea that the private sector might come up with £50 million every year for 40 years to bail out an underfunded scheme seems wholly implausible.

Although we shall reach the end of our consideration of these amendments to the Bill in a few moments, we shall still end up in a wholly unsatisfactory situation, with a huge hole in the financial assistance scheme. Government amendment (a) will allow the possibility of the private sector bailing the Government out, but no one seriously expects contributions of anything like the necessary level and the people who will lose out are those workers who trusted Governments of successive parties, who believed that their company pensions were safe and who have been cruelly let down. I am afraid that the financial assistance scheme is wholly inadequate to deal with that problem.

Mr. Fallon: I agree with the hon. Member for Northavon (Mr. Webb) on one point: £400 million will certainly not be adequate. It was always a fairly suspicious figure—suspiciously divisible by 20. That is the real explanation. The figure will not be enough, but I caution my hon. Friend the Member for Eastbourne (Mr. Waterson) on thinking that it can be simply topped up from unclaimed assets. If he has talked to the banks and the British Bankers Association, he will know that the pot of gold of unclaimed assets may not be quite so large as he thinks. Those assets are certainly very difficult to define in statute. I am not at all sure that the Conservative party should be in the business of expropriation, but that is for my hon. Friend to justify in the necessary legislation.

I was broadly in favour of Government amendment (a) until the Minister was honest enough to explain it. Until he made it absolutely clear that not making provision for any levy or charge left open the opportunity of obtaining voluntary donations, I was on his side, but it is now clear what will happen. Those in the pensions industry will be told that extra taxes and regulations will laid on them, unless they feel obliged to make those voluntary donations. The phrase "obtain voluntary donations" is sufficiently chilling for us to encourage my hon. Friend the Member for Eastbourne, who speaks from the Opposition Front Bench, to oppose that amendment.

Sir John Butterfill: When the programme of assistance was first announced, the Government said that they would get voluntary funding from the industry and, at that time, I asked what was meant by "the industry". If it means other insurance companies that may handle the pensions of individuals, such funding can be obtained only to the detriment of those who save with the people providing their personal pensions. If it means the companies that are paying for final salary schemes for their employees, such funding could be obtained only to the detriment of those companies and their employees. If the Minister means the trustees of existing pensions funds, they would be in breach of their fiduciary duty if they made contributions.

The only reason why the Government have changed the wording inserted by the Lords is so that they can engage in the arm-twisting that my hon. Friend the Member for Sevenoaks (Mr. Fallon) has just described. It is entirely likely that that will happen. That has happened on many occasions in different instances, and we will be deluding ourselves if we do not believe that it will happen now. I urge my hon. Friend the Member for Eastbourne (Mr. Waterson) to reconsider his opinion. I, for one, will be voting against amendment (a).

Mr. Pond: The House and the thousands of people looking to the financial assistance scheme and the PPF to assist them in what is a real tragedy for many of them will see through the position taken by the hon. Member for Eastbourne (Mr. Waterson). The House will remember that he voted to decline to give a Second Reading to a Bill that establishes the PPF. He now tells us that the financial assistance scheme is, in his words, "woefully inadequate", but he would not he tell us how much he would put into the scheme and he would not allow us to obtain contributions from the private sector. It is clear that the position that he has taken throughout is to talk down the PPF and to talk down the extra protection in the Bill. Now, he is talking down the financial assistance scheme, to which thousands of people are looking to help them out of the tragedy that they face.

Lords amendment disagreed to.

Motion made, and Question put, That amendment (a) in lieu of Lords amendment No. 416 be made.—*[Mr. Pond.]*

Mr. Speaker: I think the Ayes have it.

Sir John Butterfill: No.

Mr. Speaker: What does the hon. Gentleman wish to do?

Sir John Butterfill: I want to vote against Government amendment (a).

Mr. Speaker: I shall put the Question again.

Government amendment (a) in lieu of Lords amendment No. 416 agreed to.

Lords amendment No. 417 disagreed to.

Government amendment (a) in lieu of Lords amendment No. 417 agreed to.

Remaining Lords amendments agreed to [some with Special Entry].

Motion made, and Question put,

That a Committee be appointed to draw up Reasons to be assigned to the Lords for disagreeing to their amendment No. 359; David Cairns, Margaret Moran, Mr Nigel Waterson, Mr. Steve Webb and Malcolm Wicks to be members of the Committee; Malcolm Wicks to be the Chairman of the Committee; Three to be the quorum of the Committee; Committee to withdraw immediately.—*[Margaret Moran.]*

The House divided: Ayes 354, Noes 148.

Division No. 325] **[6.15 pm**

AYES

Abbott, Ms Diane
Ainger, Nick
Ainsworth, Bob *(Cov'try NE)*
Alexander, Douglas
Allan, Richard
Allen, Graham
Anderson, rh Donald *(Swansea E)*
Anderson, Janet *(Rossendale & Darwen)*
Armstrong, rh Ms Hilary
Atherton, Ms Candy
Atkins, Charlotte
Bailey, Adrian
Baird, Vera
Baker, Norman
Banks, Tony
Barrett, John
Barron, rh Kevin
Battle, rh John
Beard, Nigel
Begg, Miss Anne
Beith, rh A. J.
Berry, Roger
Blackman, Liz
Blears, Ms Hazel
Blizzard, Bob
Borrow, David
Bradley, rh Keith *(Withington)*
Bradley, Peter *(The Wrekin)*
Brake, Tom *(Carshalton)*
Breed, Colin
Brennan, Kevin
Brooke, Mrs Annette L.
Brown, rh Nicholas *(Newcastle E Wallsend)*
Brown, Russell *(Dumfries)*
Browne, Desmond
Bruce, Malcolm
Bryant, Chris
Buck, Ms Karen
Burgon, Colin
Burnham, Andy
Burstow, Paul
Byrne, Liam *(B'ham Hodge H)*
Cable, Dr. Vincent
Caborn, rh Richard
Cairns, David
Calton, Mrs Patsy
Campbell, Alan *(Tynemouth)*
Campbell, Mrs Anne *(C'bridge)*
Campbell, Ronnie *(Blyth V)*
Caplin, Ivor
Casale, Roger
Caton, Martin
Cawsey, Ian *(Brigg)*
Challen, Colin
Clark, Mrs Helen *(Peterborough)*
Clark, Dr. Lynda *(Edinburgh Pentlands)*
Clark, Paul *(Gillingham)*
Clarke, rh Tom *(Coatbridge & Chryston)*
Clarke, Tony *(Northampton S)*
Clelland, David
Coaker, Vernon
Coffey, Ms Ann
Colman, Tony
Cook, rh Robin *(Livingston)*
Corbyn, Jeremy
Corston, Jean
Cotter, Brian
Cox, Tom *(Tooting)*
Cranston, Ross
Crausby, David
Cruddas, Jon
Cryer, John *(Hornchurch)*
Cunningham, Jim *(Coventry S)*
Cunningham, Tony *(Workington)*
Curtis-Thomas, Mrs Claire
Darling, rh Alistair
Davey, Edward *(Kingston)*
Davey, Valerie *(Bristol W)*
David, Wayne
Davidson, Ian
Davies, rh Denzil *(Llanelli)*
Davies, Geraint *(Croydon C)*
Dawson, Hilton
Dean, Mrs Janet
Denham, rh John
Dhanda, Parmjit
Dismore, Andrew
Dobbin, Jim *(Heywood)*
Dobson, rh Frank
Donohoe, Brian H.
Doughty, Sue
Dowd, Jim *(Lewisham W)*
Drew, David *(Stroud)*
Dunwoody, Mrs Gwyneth
Eagle, Angela *(Wallasey)*
Eagle, Maria *(L'pool Garston)*
Edwards, Huw
Efford, Clive
Ellman, Mrs Louise
Ennis, Jeff *(Barnsley E)*
Etherington, Bill
Ewing, Annabelle
Field, rh Frank *(Birkenhead)*
Fisher, Mark
Fitzpatrick, Jim
Fitzsimons, Mrs Lorna
Flint, Caroline
Foster, rh Derek
Foster, Don *(Bath)*
Foster, Michael *(Worcester)*
Foster, Michael Jabez *(Hastings & Rye)*
Francis, Dr. Hywel
Gardiner, Barry
George, Andrew *(St. Ives)*
Gerrard, Neil
Gidley, Sandra
Gilroy, Linda
Godsiff, Roger
Goggins, Paul
Green, Matthew *(Ludlow)*
Griffiths, Jane *(Reading E)*
Grogan, John
Hain, rh Peter
Hall, Mike *(Weaver Vale)*
Hall, Patrick *(Bedford)*
Hamilton, David *(Midlothian)*
Hamilton, Fabian *(Leeds NE)*
Hancock, Mike
Hanson, David
Harman, rh Ms Harriet
Harvey, Nick
Havard, Dai *(Merthyr Tydfil & Rhymney)*
Healey, John
Heath, David
Henderson, Doug *(Newcastle N)*
Henderson, Ivan *(Harwich)*
Hendrick, Mark
Hepburn, Stephen
Heppell, John
Hesford, Stephen
Heyes, David
Hill, Keith *(Streatham)*
Hinchliffe, David
Hodge, Margaret
Hoey, Kate *(Vauxhall)*
Holmes, Paul
Hood, Jimmy *(Clydesdale)*
Hoon, rh Geoffrey
Hope, Phil *(Corby)*
Hopkins, Kelvin
Howarth, rh Alan *(Newport E)*
Howarth, George *(Knowsley N & Sefton E)*
Howells, Dr. Kim
Hughes, Beverley *(Stretford & Urmston)*
Hughes, Kevin *(Doncaster N)*
Hughes, Simon *(Southwark N)*
Humble, Mrs Joan
Hurst, Alan *(Braintree)*
Hutton, rh John
Illsley, Eric
Irranca-Davies, Huw
Jackson, Glenda *(Hampstead & Highgate)*
Jackson, Helen *(Hillsborough)*
Jamieson, David
Jenkins, Brian
Johnson, rh Alan *(Hull W)*
Johnson, Miss Melanie *(Welwyn Hatfield)*
Jones, Helen *(Warrington N)*
Jones, Jon Owen *(Cardiff C)*
Jones, Martyn *(Clwyd S)*
Jones, Nigel *(Cheltenham)*
Joyce, Eric *(Falkirk W)*
Kaufman, rh Sir Gerald
Keeble, Ms Sally
Keen, Alan *(Feltham)*
Kelly, Ruth *(Bolton W)*
Kemp, Fraser
Kennedy, rh Charles *(Ross Skye & Inverness)*
Kennedy, Jane *(Wavertree)*
Khabra, Piara S.
Kidney, David
King, Andy *(Rugby)*
Kirkwood, Sir Archy
Knight, Jim *(S Dorset)*
Kumar, Dr. Ashok
Ladyman, Dr. Stephen
Lamb, Norman
Laws, David *(Yeovil)*
Laxton, Bob *(Derby N)*
Lazarowicz, Mark
Lepper, David
Leslie, Christopher
Levitt, Tom *(High Peak)*
Lewis, Ivan *(Bury S)*
Lewis, Terry *(Worsley)*
Linton, Martin
Lloyd, Tony *(Manchester C)*
Llwyd, Elfyn
Love, Andrew
Lucas, Ian *(Wrexham)*
Luke, Iain *(Dundee E)*
McAvoy, Thomas
McCabe, Stephen
McCafferty, Chris
McDonagh, Siobhain
MacDonald, Calum
McDonnell, John
McFall, rh John
McGuire, Mrs Anne
McIsaac, Shona
McKenna, Rosemary
Mackinlay, Andrew
McNamara, Kevin
MacShane, Denis
McWilliam, John
Mahmood, Khalid
Mann, John *(Bassetlaw)*
Marris, Rob *(Wolverh'ton SW)*
Marsden, Gordon *(Blackpool S)*
Marshall, David *(Glasgow Shettleston)*
Marshall-Andrews, Robert
Martlew, Eric
Meacher, rh Michael
Meale, Alan *(Mansfield)*
Merron, Gillian
Michael, rh Alun
Miliband, David
Miller, Andrew
Mitchell, Austin *(Gt Grimsby)*
Moffatt, Laura
Moore, Michael
Moran, Margaret
Morgan, Julie
Morris, rh Estelle
Mountford, Kali
Mudie, George
Munn, Ms Meg
Murphy, Denis *(Wansbeck)*
Murphy, Jim *(Eastwood)*
Murphy, rh Paul *(Torfaen)*
Naysmith, Dr. Doug
Oaten, Mark *(Winchester)*

O'Brien, Bill *(Normanton)*
O'Brien, Mike *(N Warks)*
O'Hara, Edward
Olner, Bill
Öpik, Lembit
Organ, Diana
Owen, Albert
Perham, Linda
Picking, Anne
Pickthall, Colin
Pike, Peter *(Burnley)*
Plaskitt, James
Pollard, Kerry
Pond, Chris *(Gravesham)*
Pope, Greg *(Hyndburn)*
Pound, Stephen
Prentice, Gordon *(Pendle)*
Price, Adam *(E Carmarthen & Dinefwr)*
Prosser, Gwyn
Pugh, Dr. John
Purchase, Ken
Purnell, James
Quin, rh Joyce
Quinn, Lawrie
Rammell, Bill
Rapson, Syd *(Portsmouth N)*
Raynsford, rh Nick
Reed, Andy *(Loughborough)*
Reid, Alan *(Argyll & Bute)*
Rendel, David
Robertson, Angus *(Moray)*
Robertson, John *(Glasgow Anniesland)*
Robinson, Geoffrey *(Coventry NW)*
Roche, Mrs Barbara
Rooney, Terry
Ross, Ernie *(Dundee W)*
Roy, Frank *(Motherwell)*
Ruane, Chris
Ruddock, Joan
Russell, Bob *(Colchester)*
Salmond, Alex
Sanders, Adrian
Savidge, Malcolm
Sawford, Phil
Sedgemore, Brian
Shaw, Jonathan
Sheridan, Jim
Shipley, Ms Debra
Singh, Marsha
Skinner, Dennis
Smith, rh Andrew *(Oxford E)*
Smith, Angela *(Basildon)*
Smith, rh Chris *(Islington S & Finsbury)*
Smith, Geraldine *(Morecambe & Lunesdale)*
Smith, Jacqui *(Redditch)*
Smith, Llew *(Blaenau Gwent)*
Smith, Sir Robert *(W Ab'd'ns & Kincardine)*
Soley, Clive
Starkey, Dr. Phyllis
Steinberg, Gerry
Stewart, David *(Inverness E & Lochaber)*
Stinchcombe, Paul
Stoate, Dr. Howard
Strang, rh Dr. Gavin
Stringer, Graham
Stuart, Ms Gisela
Stunell, Andrew
Sutcliffe, Gerry
Tami, Mark *(Alyn)*
Taylor, rh Ann *(Dewsbury)*
Taylor, David *(NW Leics)*
Taylor, Matthew *(Truro)*
Taylor, Dr. Richard *(Wyre F)*
Teather, Sarah
Thomas, Simon *(Ceredigion)*
Thurso, John
Tipping, Paddy
Touhig, Don *(Islwyn)*
Trickett, Jon
Truswell, Paul
Turner, Dennis *(Wolverh'ton SE)*
Turner, Neil *(Wigan)*
Twigg, Derek *(Halton)*
Twigg, Stephen *(Enfield)*
Tyler, Paul *(N Cornwall)*
Tynan, Bill *(Hamilton S)*
Vaz, Keith *(Leicester E)*
Vis, Dr. Rudi
Walley, Ms Joan
Ward, Claire
Wareing, Robert N.
Watson, Tom
Watts, David
Webb, Steve *(Northavon)*
White, Brian
Whitehead, Dr. Alan
Wicks, Malcolm
Williams, rh Alan *(Swansea W)*
Williams, Hywel *(Caernarfon)*
Williams, Roger *(Brecon)*
Wills, Michael
Winnick, David
Wishart, Pete
Wood, Mike *(Batley)*
Woolas, Phil
Worthington, Tony
Wright, Anthony D. *(Gt Yarmouth)*
Wright, David *(Telford)*
Wright, Iain *(Hartlepool)*
Wright, Tony *(Cannock)*
Wyatt, Derek
Younger-Ross, Richard

Tellers for the Ayes:
Ms Bridget Prentice and
Joan Ryan

NOES

Ainsworth, Peter *(E Surrey)*
Amess, David
Ancram, rh Michael
Arbuthnot, rh James
Atkinson, Peter *(Hexham)*
Bacon, Richard
Baldry, Tony
Barker, Gregory
Beggs, Roy *(E Antrim)*
Bellingham, Henry
Bercow, John
Beresford, Sir Paul
Blunt, Crispin
Boswell, Tim
Bottomley, Peter *(Worthing W)*
Brady, Graham
Brazier, Julian
Browning, Mrs Angela
Burns, Simon
Burnside, David
Burt, Alistair
Butterfill, Sir John
Cameron, David
Campbell, Gregory *(E Lond'y)*
Cash, William
Chapman, Sir Sydney *(Chipping Barnet)*
Chope, Christopher
Clappison, James
Clarke, rh Kenneth *(Rushcliffe)*
Collins, Tim
Conway, Derek
Cormack, Sir Patrick
Curry, rh David
Davis, rh David *(Haltemprice & Howden)*
Djanogly, Jonathan
Dodds, Nigel
Donaldson, Jeffrey M.
Dorrell, rh Stephen
Duncan, Alan *(Rutland)*
Duncan, Peter *(Galloway)*
Duncan Smith, rh Iain
Fabricant, Michael
Fallon, Michael
Field, Mark *(Cities of London & Westminster)*
Flight, Howard
Flook, Adrian
Forth, rh Eric
Fox, Dr. Liam
Francois, Mark
Gale, Roger *(N Thanet)*
Garnier, Edward
Gibb, Nick *(Bognor Regis)*
Gillan, Mrs Cheryl
Goodman, Paul
Gray, James *(N Wilts)*
Green, Damian *(Ashford)*
Greenway, John
Grieve, Dominic
Gummer, rh John
Hague, rh William
Hammond, Philip
Hawkins, Nick
Hayes, John *(S Holland)*
Heald, Oliver
Heathcoat-Amory, rh David
Hendry, Charles
Hermon, Lady
Hoban, Mark *(Fareham)*
Hogg, rh Douglas
Horam, John *(Orpington)*
Howard, rh Michael
Howarth, Gerald *(Aldershot)*
Hunter, Andrew
Jack, rh Michael
Jackson, Robert *(Wantage)*
Kirkbride, Miss Julie
Knight, rh Greg *(E Yorkshire)*
Lait, Mrs Jacqui
Lansley, Andrew
Letwin, rh Oliver
Lewis, Dr. Julian *(New Forest E)*
Liddell-Grainger, Ian
Lidington, David
Lilley, rh Peter
Loughton, Tim
Luff, Peter *(M-Worcs)*
McIntosh, Miss Anne
Mackay, rh Andrew
McLoughlin, Patrick
Malins, Humfrey
Maples, John
Maude, rh Francis
Mawhinney, rh Sir Brian
Mercer, Patrick
Mitchell, Andrew *(Sutton Coldfield)*
Moss, Malcolm
Murrison, Dr. Andrew
Norman, Archie
O'Brien, Stephen *(Eddisbury)*
Osborne, George *(Tatton)*
Ottaway, Richard
Paice, James
Paterson, Owen
Pickles, Eric
Prisk, Mark *(Hertford)*
Redwood, rh John
Robertson, Hugh *(Faversham & M-Kent)*
Robinson, Mrs Iris *(Strangford)*
Robinson, Peter *(Belfast E)*
Roe, Dame Marion
Rosindell, Andrew
Ruffley, David
Sayeed, Jonathan
Shephard, rh Mrs Gillian
Shepherd, Richard
Simmonds, Mark
Simpson, Keith *(M-Norfolk)*
Smyth, Rev. Martin *(Belfast S)*
Soames, Nicholas
Spelman, Mrs Caroline
Spicer, Sir Michael
Spink, Bob *(Castle Point)*
Spring, Richard
Stanley, rh Sir John
Steen, Anthony
Streeter, Gary
Swayne, Desmond
Swire, Hugo *(E Devon)*
Syms, Robert
Tapsell, Sir Peter
Taylor, Ian *(Esher)*
Taylor, John *(Solihull)*
Taylor, Sir Teddy
Tredinnick, David
Turner, Andrew *(Isle of Wight)*
Tyrie, Andrew
Waterson, Nigel
Watkinson, Angela
Whittingdale, John
Widdecombe, rh Miss Ann
Wiggin, Bill
Wilkinson, John
Willetts, David
Wilshire, David
Winterton, Ann *(Congleton)*
Winterton, Sir Nicholas *(Macclesfield)*
Yeo, Tim *(S Suffolk)*
Young, rh Sir George

Tellers for the Noes:
Andrew Selous and
Mr. Geoffrey Clifton-Brown

Question accordingly agreed to.

Reasons for disagreeing to Lords amendment No. 359 reported, and agreed to; to be communicated to the Lords.

HUNTING BILL (PROCEDURE) (NO.2)

Motion made, and Question put forthwith, pursuant to Order [15 September].

That the Order of 15th September shall be supplemented as follows—

1. At this day's sitting proceedings on consideration of Lords amendments shall be brought to a conclusion (unless already concluded) three hours after commencement of proceedings on the motion relating to Hunting Bill (Money).

2. For the purpose of bringing proceedings on consideration of Lords Amendments to a conclusion in accordance with paragraph 1 the Speaker shall put the following questions forthwith (and no others)—

(1) any question which has been proposed from the Chair and has not yet been decided,

(2) the question on any motion moved by a Minister of the Crown to disagree with Lords Amendments (which may, in particular, be a motion relating to a specified group of amendments),

(3) the question on any motion moved by a Minister of the Crown for an amendment in lieu, and

(4) the question on any other motion moved by a Minister of the Crown.

3. Sessional Orders F(7) and H (Programming of Bills: ancillary questions and Reasons Committee) of 28th June 2001 shall apply to proceedings in relation to the Hunting Bill.

4. Paragraph 6(1) to (7) of the Order of 15th September shall apply to proceedings on consideration of Lords Amendments.

5. No notice shall be required of a further motion to supplement the Order of 15th September.—*[Jim Fitzpatrick.]*

The House divided: Ayes 310, Noes 179.

Division No. 326] **[6:30 pm**

AYES

Abbott, Ms Diane
Ainger, Nick
Ainsworth, Bob *(Cov'try NE)*
Alexander, Douglas
Allen, Graham
Anderson, rh Donald *(Swansea E)*
Anderson, Janet *(Rossendale & Darwen)*
Armstrong, rh Ms Hilary
Atherton, Ms Candy
Atkins, Charlotte
Bailey, Adrian
Baird, Vera
Banks, Tony
Barron, rh Kevin
Battle, rh John
Beard, Nigel
Begg, Miss Anne
Berry, Roger
Blackman, Liz
Blears, Ms Hazel
Blizzard, Bob
Boateng, rh Paul
Borrow, David
Bradley, rh Keith *(Withington)*
Bradley, Peter *(The Wrekin)*
Brake, Tom *(Carshalton)*
Brennan, Kevin
Brown, rh Nicholas *(Newcastle E Wallsend)*
Brown, Russell *(Dumfries)*
Browne, Desmond
Bryant, Chris
Buck, Ms Karen
Burgon, Colin
Burnham, Andy
Burstow, Paul
Byrne, Liam *(B'ham Hodge H)*
Cable, Dr. Vincent
Caborn, rh Richard
Cairns, David
Campbell, Alan *(Tynemouth)*
Campbell, Mrs Anne *(C'bridge)*
Campbell, Ronnie *(Blyth V)*
Caplin, Ivor
Carmichael, Alistair
Casale, Roger
Caton, Martin
Cawsey, Ian *(Brigg)*
Challen, Colin
Clark, Mrs Helen *(Peterborough)*
Clark, Dr. Lynda *(Edinburgh Pentlands)*
Clark, Paul *(Gillingham)*
Clarke, rh Tom *(Coatbridge & Chryston)*
Clarke, Tony *(Northampton S)*
Clelland, David
Coaker, Vernon
Coffey, Ms Ann
Colman, Tony
Cook, rh Robin *(Livingston)*
Corbyn, Jeremy
Corston, Jean
Cox, Tom *(Tooting)*
Cranston, Ross
Crausby, David
Cruddas, Jon
Cryer, John *(Hornchurch)*
Cunningham, Jim *(Coventry S)*
Cunningham, Tony *(Workington)*
Curtis-Thomas, Mrs Claire
Darling, rh Alistair
Davey, Valerie *(Bristol W)*
David, Wayne
Davidson, Ian
Davies, rh Denzil *(Llanelli)*
Davies, Geraint *(Croydon C)*
Dawson, Hilton
Dean, Mrs Janet
Denham, rh John
Dhanda, Parmjit
Dismore, Andrew
Dobbin, Jim *(Heywood)*
Dobson, rh Frank
Donohoe, Brian H.
Dowd, Jim *(Lewisham W)*
Drew, David *(Stroud)*
Eagle, Angela *(Wallasey)*
Eagle, Maria *(L'pool Garston)*
Edwards, Huw
Efford, Clive
Ellman, Mrs Louise
Ennis, Jeff *(Barnsley E)*
Etherington, Bill
Field, rh Frank *(Birkenhead)*
Fitzpatrick, Jim
Fitzsimons, Mrs Lorna
Flint, Caroline
Foster, rh Derek
Foster, Michael *(Worcester)*
Foster, Michael Jabez *(Hastings & Rye)*
Francis, Dr. Hywel
Gardiner, Barry
Gerrard, Neil
Gilroy, Linda
Godsiff, Roger
Goggins, Paul
Griffiths, Jane *(Reading E)*
Griffiths, Win *(Bridgend)*
Grogan, John
Hain, rh Peter
Hall, Mike *(Weaver Vale)*
Hall, Patrick *(Bedford)*
Hamilton, David *(Midlothian)*
Hamilton, Fabian *(Leeds NE)*
Hancock, Mike
Hanson, David
Harman, rh Ms Harriet
Havard, Dai *(Merthyr Tydfil & Rhymney)*
Healey, John
Henderson, Doug *(Newcastle N)*
Henderson, Ivan *(Harwich)*
Hendrick, Mark
Hepburn, Stephen
Hesford, Stephen
Heyes, David
Hill, Keith *(Streatham)*
Hinchliffe, David
Hodge, Margaret
Holmes, Paul
Hood, Jimmy *(Clydesdale)*
Hoon, rh Geoffrey
Hope, Phil *(Corby)*
Hopkins, Kelvin
Howarth, rh Alan *(Newport E)*
Howarth, George *(Knowsley N & Sefton E)*
Howells, Dr. Kim
Hughes, Beverley *(Stretford & Urmston)*
Hughes, Kevin *(Doncaster N)*
Humble, Mrs Joan
Hurst, Alan *(Braintree)*
Hutton, rh John
Illsley, Eric
Irranca-Davies, Huw
Jackson, Glenda *(Hampstead & Highgate)*
Jackson, Helen *(Hillsborough)*
Jamieson, David
Jenkins, Brian
Johnson, rh Alan *(Hull W)*
Johnson, Miss Melanie *(Welwyn Hatfield)*
Jones, Helen *(Warrington N)*
Jones, Jon Owen *(Cardiff C)*
Jones, Martyn *(Clwyd S)*
Joyce, Eric *(Falkirk W)*
Kaufman, rh Sir Gerald
Keeble, Ms Sally
Keen, Alan *(Feltham)*
Kelly, Ruth *(Bolton W)*
Kemp, Fraser
Kennedy, rh Charles *(Ross Skye & Inverness)*
Kennedy, Jane *(Wavertree)*
Khabra, Piara S.
Kidney, David
King, Andy *(Rugby)*
Knight, Jim *(S Dorset)*
Ladyman, Dr. Stephen
Laxton, Bob *(Derby N)*
Lazarowicz, Mark
Lepper, David
Leslie, Christopher
Levitt, Tom *(High Peak)*
Lewis, Ivan *(Bury S)*
Lewis, Terry *(Worsley)*
Linton, Martin
Lloyd, Tony *(Manchester C)*
Love, Andrew
Lucas, Ian *(Wrexham)*
Luke, Iain *(Dundee E)*
McAvoy, Thomas
McCabe, Stephen
McCafferty, Chris
McDonagh, Siobhain
MacDonald, Calum
McDonnell, John
McFall, rh John
McGuire, Mrs Anne
McIsaac, Shona
McKenna, Rosemary
Mackinlay, Andrew
McNamara, Kevin
MacShane, Denis
McWilliam, John
Mahmood, Khalid
Mann, John *(Bassetlaw)*
Marris, Rob *(Wolverh'ton SW)*
Marsden, Gordon *(Blackpool S)*
Marshall, David *(Glasgow Shettleston)*
Marshall-Andrews, Robert
Martlew, Eric
Meacher, rh Michael
Meale, Alan *(Mansfield)*
Merron, Gillian
Michael, rh Alun
Miliband, David
Miller, Andrew
Mitchell, Austin *(Gt Grimsby)*
Moffatt, Laura
Moran, Margaret
Morgan, Julie
Morris, rh Estelle
Mountford, Kali
Mudie, George
Mullin, Chris
Munn, Ms Meg
Murphy, Denis *(Wansbeck)*
Murphy, Jim *(Eastwood)*

Murphy, rh Paul *(Torfaen)*
Naysmith, Dr. Doug
O'Brien, Bill *(Normanton)*
O'Brien, Mike *(N Warks)*
O'Hara, Edward
Olner, Bill
O'Neill, Martin
Organ, Diana
Owen, Albert
Perham, Linda
Picking, Anne
Pickthall, Colin
Pike, Peter *(Burnley)*
Plaskitt, James
Pollard, Kerry
Pond, Chris *(Gravesham)*
Pope, Greg *(Hyndburn)*
Pound, Stephen
Prentice, Gordon *(Pendle)*
Prosser, Gwyn
Pugh, Dr. John
Purchase, Ken
Purnell, James
Quin, rh Joyce
Quinn, Lawrie
Rammell, Bill
Rapson, Syd *(Portsmouth N)*
Raynsford, rh Nick
Reed, Andy *(Loughborough)*
Robertson, John *(Glasgow Anniesland)*
Robinson, Geoffrey *(Coventry NW)*
Roche, Mrs Barbara
Rooney, Terry
Ross, Ernie *(Dundee W)*
Roy, Frank *(Motherwell)*
Ruane, Chris
Ruddock, Joan
Ryan, Joan *(Enfield N)*
Savidge, Malcolm
Sawford, Phil
Sedgemore, Brian
Shaw, Jonathan
Sheridan, Jim
Shipley, Ms Debra
Singh, Marsha
Skinner, Dennis
Smith, rh Andrew *(Oxford E)*
Smith, Angela *(Basildon)*
Smith, rh Chris *(Islington S & Finsbury)*
Smith, Geraldine *(Morecambe & Lunesdale)*
Smith, Jacqui *(Redditch)*
Smith, John *(Glamorgan)*
Smith, Llew *(Blaenau Gwent)*
Soley, Clive
Starkey, Dr. Phyllis
Steinberg, Gerry
Stewart, David *(Inverness E & Lochaber)*
Stinchcombe, Paul
Stoate, Dr. Howard
Stringer, Graham
Stuart, Ms Gisela
Sutcliffe, Gerry
Tami, Mark *(Alyn)*
Taylor, rh Ann *(Dewsbury)*
Taylor, David *(NW Leics)*
Teather, Sarah
Tipping, Paddy
Touhig, Don *(Islwyn)*
Trickett, Jon
Truswell, Paul
Turner, Dennis *(Wolverh'ton SE)*
Turner, Neil *(Wigan)*
Twigg, Derek *(Halton)*
Tynan, Bill *(Hamilton S)*
Vaz, Keith *(Leicester E)*
Vis, Dr. Rudi
Walley, Ms Joan
Ward, Claire
Wareing, Robert N.
Watson, Tom
Watts, David
Webb, Steve *(Northavon)*
White, Brian
Whitehead, Dr. Alan
Wicks, Malcolm
Widdecombe, rh Miss Ann
Williams, rh Alan *(Swansea W)*
Wills, Michael
Winnick, David
Wood, Mike *(Batley)*
Woolas, Phil
Worthington, Tony
Wright, Anthony D. *(Gt Yarmouth)*
Wright, David *(Telford)*
Wright, Iain *(Hartlepool)*
Wright, Tony *(Cannock)*
Wyatt, Derek

Tellers for the Ayes:
Ms Bridget Prentice and
Mr. John Heppell

NOES

Ainsworth, Peter *(E Surrey)*
Allan, Richard
Amess, David
Ancram, rh Michael
Arbuthnot, rh James
Atkinson, Peter *(Hexham)*
Bacon, Richard
Baker, Norman
Baldry, Tony
Barker, Gregory
Barrett, John
Beggs, Roy *(E Antrim)*
Beith, rh A. J.
Bercow, John
Beresford, Sir Paul
Blunt, Crispin
Boswell, Tim
Bottomley, Peter *(Worthing W)*
Brady, Graham
Brazier, Julian
Breed, Colin
Brooke, Mrs Annette L.
Browning, Mrs Angela
Bruce, Malcolm
Burns, Simon
Burnside, David
Butterfill, Sir John
Calton, Mrs Patsy
Campbell, Gregory *(E Lond'y)*
Cash, William
Chapman, Sir Sydney *(Chipping Barnet)*
Chope, Christopher
Clappison, James
Clarke, rh Kenneth *(Rushcliffe)*
Conway, Derek
Cormack, Sir Patrick
Cotter, Brian
Cran, James *(Beverley)*
Curry, rh David
Davey, Edward *(Kingston)*
Davis, rh David *(Haltemprice & Howden)*
Djanogly, Jonathan
Dodds, Nigel
Donaldson, Jeffrey M.
Dorrell, rh Stephen
Doughty, Sue
Duncan, Alan *(Rutland)*
Duncan, Peter *(Galloway)*
Duncan Smith, rh Iain
Fabricant, Michael
Fallon, Michael
Field, Mark *(Cities of London & Westminster)*
Flight, Howard
Flook, Adrian
Forth, rh Eric
Foster, Don *(Bath)*
Fox, Dr. Liam
Francois, Mark
Garnier, Edward
George, Andrew *(St. Ives)*
Gibb, Nick *(Bognor Regis)*
Gidley, Sandra
Gillan, Mrs Cheryl
Goodman, Paul
Gray, James *(N Wilts)*
Green, Damian *(Ashford)*
Green, Matthew *(Ludlow)*
Greenway, John
Grieve, Dominic
Gummer, rh John
Hague, rh William
Harvey, Nick
Hawkins, Nick
Hayes, John *(S Holland)*
Heald, Oliver
Heath, David
Heathcoat-Amory, rh David
Hendry, Charles
Hermon, Lady
Hoban, Mark *(Fareham)*
Hogg, rh Douglas
Horam, John *(Orpington)*
Howarth, Gerald *(Aldershot)*
Hughes, Simon *(Southwark N)*
Hunter, Andrew
Jack, rh Michael
Jackson, Robert *(Wantage)*
Jones, Nigel *(Cheltenham)*
Kirkbride, Miss Julie
Kirkwood, Sir Archy
Knight, rh Greg *(E Yorkshire)*
Lait, Mrs Jacqui
Lamb, Norman
Lansley, Andrew
Laws, David *(Yeovil)*
Letwin, rh Oliver
Lewis, Dr. Julian *(New Forest E)*
Liddell-Grainger, Ian
Lidington, David
Lilley, rh Peter
Llwyd, Elfyn
Loughton, Tim
Luff, Peter *(M-Worcs)*
McIntosh, Miss Anne
Mackay, rh Andrew
Maclean, rh David
McLoughlin, Patrick
Malins, Humfrey
Maples, John
Maude, rh Francis
Mawhinney, rh Sir Brian
Mercer, Patrick
Mitchell, Andrew *(Sutton Coldfield)*
Moore, Michael
Moss, Malcolm
Murrison, Dr. Andrew
Norman, Archie
Oaten, Mark *(Winchester)*
O'Brien, Stephen *(Eddisbury)*
Öpik, Lembit
Ottaway, Richard
Paice, James
Paterson, Owen
Pickles, Eric
Prisk, M[illegible] *(Hertford)*
Redwood, rh John
Reid, Alan *(Argyll & Bute)*
Rendel, David
Robathan, Andrew
Robertson, Hugh *(Faversham & M-Kent)*
Robinson, Mrs Iris *(Strangford)*
Robinson, Peter *(Belfast E)*
Rosindell, Andrew
Ruffley, David
Russell, Bob *(Colchester)*
Sanders, Adrian
Sayeed, Jonathan
Shephard, rh Mrs Gillian
Shepherd, Richard
Simmonds, Mark
Simpson, Keith *(M-Norfolk)*
Smith, Sir Robert *(W Ab'd'ns & Kincardine)*
Smyth, Rev. Martin *(Belfast S)*
Soames, Nicholas
Spelman, Mrs Caroline
Spicer, Sir Michael
Spink, Bob *(Castle Point)*
Spring, Richard
Stanley, rh Sir John
Steen, Anthony
Streeter, Gary
Stunell, Andrew
Swire, Hugo *(E Devon)*
Syms, Robert
Tapsell, Sir Peter
Taylor, Ian *(Esher)*
Taylor, John *(Solihull)*
Taylor, Matthew *(Truro)*
Taylor, Dr. Richard *(Wyre F)*
Taylor, Sir Teddy
Thomas, Simon *(Ceredigion)*
Thurso, John
Tredinnick, David
Turner, Andrew *(Isle of Wight)*
Tyler, Paul *(N Cornwall)*
Waterson, Nigel
Watkinson, Angela
Whittingdale, John
Wiggin, Bill
Wilkinson, John
Willetts, David
Williams, Hywel *(Caernarfon)*
Williams, Roger *(Brecon)*
Wilshire, David
Winterton, Ann *(Congleton)*
Winterton, Sir Nicholas *(Macclesfield)*
Yeo, Tim *(S Suffolk)*
Young, rh Sir George
Younger-Ross, Richard

Tellers for the Noes:
Andrew Selous and
Mr. Geoffrey Clifton-Brown

Question accordingly agreed to.

Hunting Bill *[Money]*

Queen's recommendation having been signified—

6.45 pm

The Minister for Rural Affairs and Local Environmental Quality (Alun Michael): I beg to move,

That, for the purposes of any Act resulting from the Hunting Bill, it is expedient to authorise—

(1) the payment out of money provided by Parliament of expenditure of a Minister of the Crown in connection with the Act, and

(2) the payment of sums into the Consolidated Fund.

The money resolution is a necessary formality. The House has to pass a money resolution before it can debate proposed legislation that could require new public expenditure. The House of Lords has proposed a system that would require the establishment of an institutional framework, which would be a charge on the public purse, so we need to pass a money resolution as a prelude to our debate. I emphasise that passing the resolution is a formality. It does not pre-empt the decisions that the House might make.

Mr. Douglas Hogg (Sleaford and North Hykeham) (Con): Can the Minister tell the House his estimate of the costs of implementing the amendments made in the other place and of implementing his original proposal?

Alun Michael: No, I cannot give an exhaustive reply now, nor do I think it appropriate to do so. The resources necessary to implement the decision of this House would be agreed. It is clear that this is very much a House of Commons matter.

Mr. Hogg *rose—*

Alun Michael: What I am making clear is that it is necessary to pass the formality of a money resolution so that we can—

Mr. Hogg *rose—*

Mr. Speaker: Order. The Minister is not giving way.

Alun Michael: It is necessary that we pass the resolution so that we can proceed to the substance of the Lords amendments, on which I think that the House would want to spend its time this evening. Let me repeat that passing the resolution does not pre-empt the decisions that this House might make. Passing it will not commit the House to agreeing with the Lords amendments or, indeed, to making any amendments to the Bill.

The right hon. and learned Member for Sleaford and North Hykeham (Mr. Hogg) asked about finances. At this stage, if this House agrees with the House of Lords, other decisions may well be taken that affect the cost and the impact on the public purse. It would therefore not be appropriate to go into the financial details now. What we need to do is make sure that the House would agree to the provision of resources, which is why I have moved the resolution.

Mr. David Heath (Somerton and Frome) (LD): The Minister has made it clear that passing the money resolution does not pre-empt the decision of the House. What would affect the resolution, but appears to have been pre-empted by the House's previous decision, is the amendment tabled by my hon. Friend the Member for St. Ives (Andrew George) on compensation—an issue that is important to many hon. Members on both sides of the hunting argument. Does the Minister intend to allow the House to divide on that amendment later?

Alun Michael: What votes take place is very much a matter for the House's procedures to determine. It depends when the debate is concluded. I understand the motives of the hon. Member for St. Ives (Andrew George) in tabling his amendment. He has made his position clear both personally and in correspondence and I respect his view, although, as he knows, I do not share it. Compensation is not made necessary by the provisions of the Bill. When we debate the substantive matters before the House, including his amendment, we can discuss the principles that underlie his decision to table it.

Andrew George (St. Ives) (LD): Does the Minister accept that, under the procedure of the House, the House's ability to divide on the matter is, in fact, within his gift? Does he agree that if we are to scrutinise the issue properly, he should use his power to allow us to vote on it?

Alun Michael: It depends on how we move forward with these debates. If the debates end well before the time that is allowed for the procedure motion, the procedures of the House go in one direction. If not, motions moved formally by Ministers take precedence, as is the normal procedure of the House. I would not mislead the House by suggesting that we are willing to entertain the possibility of compensation being paid.

Sir Robert Smith (West Aberdeenshire and Kincardine) (LD): Will the Minister confirm that, if we reach the guillotine, it is in his power to move it formally so that the House can divide on it?

Alun Michael: I shall listen with interest to the debate. However, I am not inclined to do what the hon. Gentleman says.

The money resolution is needed for the House to proceed to what I am sure Members on both sides of the Chamber wish to do, which is to engage with the substance of the amendments that have been proposed by another place. I have kept my remarks as brief as is possible, with the interventions, to allow the maximum time for the House.

6.51 pm

Mr. Peter Luff (Mid-Worcestershire) (Con): I know that the House wants to come to the serious business that is before us. However, I am disappointed that the Minister has given no indication of the blank cheque that he is asking the House to write this evening.

As I understand it, there are three possible outcomes from our debate this evening. The first is the Bill as it left this place not so many weeks ago—that is an effective ban, and many of us believe that it is riddled with

[Mr. Peter Luff]

inconsistencies and difficulties. The second possibility is that we accept the Lords amendments. I think that we accept also that that is probably unlikely, but a cost will attach to that. Many of us think that that is the right way to proceed, and a sensible and balanced approach. The third outcome is that the amendments of the hon. Member for Ogmore (Huw Irranca-Davies) are accepted, which effectively returns the Bill to its original state when the Minister introduced it about two years ago. The Minister must be able to give us some indication of the cost of those three outcomes before we move to the major business that is before the House.

6.53 pm

Mr. Jonathan Sayeed (Mid-Bedfordshire) (Con): It is extraordinary that the Minister cannot give any estimate for any of the options that are before the House. It may be that an outright ban would cost the taxpayer a great deal more money than a licensing system.

Mr. Hogg: Does my hon. Friend agree that not only is it extraordinary that the Minister will not give us his best estimate but that that is improper? The House is being asked to authorise public expenditure by a Minister who is declining to give us any idea of what the cost is likely to be.

Mr. Sayeed: I have considerable sympathy for that point. The most important thing is that we have an idea of the costs. If an outright ban is much more expensive than a licensing system, it may be that certain Members would reject the concept of an outright ban in its entirety.

David Burnside (South Antrim) (UUP): I wonder whether the Minister is not giving guidance to the House on the costs of the various alternatives of the middle way or an outright ban because he is being assured by the First Lord of the Treasury, the Prime Minister, who will be voting for the middle way later this evening, that the Government are prepared to pay for the compromise.

6.53 pm

Alun Michael: I make it clear that, when we come to the debate, I shall refer to the amendments in the name of my hon. Friend the Member for Ogmore (Huw Irranca-Davies). The motion that is before us, the money resolution, refers to the offering from the House of Lords, which goes to one extreme in the nature of the regulation that it proposes. It is the House of Lords that makes those proposals, not the Government. It is for this House to debate these matters and I suggest that proceedings to deal with the money resolution would allow the House to use time to the maximum to debate the principles.

Question put and agreed to.

Hunting Bill

Clause 1

HUNTING WILD MAMMALS WITH DOGS

Lords amendment: No. 1.

6.55 pm

Huw Irranca-Davies (Ogmore) (Lab): I beg to move, That this House disagrees with the Lords in their said amendment.

Mr. Speaker: With this it will be convenient to take motions to disagree to Lords amendments Nos. 2 to 54, amendments (a) and (b) in lieu of certain amendments, and amendments (c) and (d) in lieu of amendment No. 46.

I inform the House that privilege is involved in Lords amendments Nos. 10, 12, 45 and 52. If the House agrees to the amendments, I shall arrange for the necessary entries to be made in the Journal.

Huw Irranca-Davies: I rise not to withdraw the amendments, as I have been encouraged to do by my right hon. and hon. Friends, but to urge support for them. Before turning to the amendments, I shall refer to some technical issues. I hope that the House will bear with me if I explain that the amendments were prepared speedily and that there are some technical clarifications that do not alter their meaning. In amendment (b), the reference in subsection 2(4) to paragraph 11 should be to paragraph 9 and the reference to paragraph 10 should be to paragraph 8. The reference in subsection 9(6)(b) should be to paragraph 23(5), and subsection 14(3)(b) should contain a reference to paragraph 12(4).

Mr. Eric Martlew (Carlisle) (Lab): On a point of order, Mr. Speaker. Is the amendment in order, in your view?

Mr. Speaker: The amendment is in order. I would not have called the hon. Gentleman if it had been otherwise.

Huw Irranca-Davies: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I am glad that we have clarification on that point.

As many right hon. and hon. Members will know, 150 years ago in the Crimea, a war began. Two weeks ago saw the anniversary of one of the battles in that war, which included a suicidal charge across open terrain by the light cavalry of the British forces. It was immortalised by Lord Tennyson, who wrote the now famous lines:

> "Cannon to the right of them,
> Cannon to the left of them,
> Cannon in front of them
> Volleyed and thunder'd".

As we already see, the parallels with today's debate are pretty clear. In case they are not clear, Tennyson continued:

> "Into the jaws of Death,
> Into the mouth of Hell
> Rode the six hundred."

At moments like these, those lines from "The Charge of the Light Brigade" seem particularly relevant as I risk fire from all sides. Suicidal or not, the option enabled by these amendments needs to be put to the House on one last occasion. Alas, there may be fewer than 600 Members in the Chamber, but they are no less bold or perhaps foolhardy.

Sir Gerald Kaufman (Manchester, Gorton) (Lab): I admire my hon. Friend's literary knowledge. For those who do not have the extent of his knowledge, will he tell us what happened to the 600?

Huw Irranca-Davies: Yes, indeed. Perhaps it is not the best analogy to use, but history does not always repeat itself.

Mr. Andrew Robathan (Blaby) (Con): Like the troops of the cavalry at Balaclava, the hon. Gentleman is showing great courage. Does he agree that Tennyson goes on to say the "noble six hundred"? Does he think that the likely outcome of today's debate will show that there are 600 noble Members of Parliament?

Huw Irranca-Davies: I would say, in diplomatic fashion, that I consider everyone in the Chamber on both sides of the debate to be both honourable and noble. I hope that what we will see at the outcome of the debate is 600 Members in the Lobby.

Mr. Crispin Blunt (Reigate) (Con): The answer to the right hon. Member for Manchester, Gorton (Sir Gerald Kaufman) is that the 600 carried their objective and the Russian cavalry was never able to face them again.

Mr. Tony Banks (West Ham) (Lab) *rose—*

Huw Irranca-Davies: I thank the hon. Gentleman for highlighting the way in which the poem ends. I shall, in fairness, give way to my hon. Friend the Member for West Ham (Mr. Banks).

Mr. Banks: My hon. Friend will remember that when history repeats itself, it does so in farce. Are the amendments all his own work? If so, I am rather surprised. If not, all I can say is

"put not your trust in princes".

7 pm

Huw Irranca-Davies: I suspect that my hon. Friend's intervention was not intended to be helpful, but was meant to cast aspersions on my motives. I remind him that I took this position before I entered Parliament, and I still maintain it. I expect him to treat my opinions with the same honour that I treat his principled position.

The easiest speeches to make in Parliament, as I have found out, are those in which one knows that the House is with one in passionate unanimity. Failing that, it is at least some comfort to know that one's party is behind one. In the direst times, it is good to know that one's minority vice is shared by at least a few other stalwart friends. Today, I am in a rather lonely position, although I suspect that I am not entirely alone. Even if mine were the only voice in favour of the amendments, it is a mark of our democracy that it should be heard with tolerance by those who oppose my views. In front of me and behind me are Members who in principle support a total ban on hunting. To my left and right are people who oppose any restrictions whatever. I have never belonged to either of those firmly opposed parties, but I respect the passion and principle that underpin their positions. People who oppose the suffering of animals recognise that they are sentient beings. Having campaigned on this and other animal welfare issues, they deserve the admiration of the House. I only ask them to extend the same courtesy and understanding to people who hold a different view. I urge them to recognise that I, like others, believe that a total ban would be less favourable towards animal welfare than they do, and I shall return to that point later.

Chris Bryant (Rhondda) (Lab): I pay tribute to my hon. Friend's courage today. When he was elected in a by-election not very long ago, many of us had campaigned on his behalf, and were rather bewildered suddenly to find that we had supported somebody who backed registered hunting. *[Interruption.]*

Mr. Speaker: Order. The House must be calm.

Chris Bryant: Turning to the amendments tabled by my hon. Friend, does he accept that the logic of his argument is that lamping might well be prohibited under his proposals? Most people, however, accept that it is the fairest and safest way of killing foxes.

Huw Irranca-Davies: My hon. Friend makes a fair point, and I shall deal with it when I address the technical aspects of my amendments. I know that he intended no discourtesy, and I reiterate that I have adopted a consistent view throughout.

I acknowledge that my position is somewhat unpopular—that may turn out to be the parliamentary understatement of the year—and I realise that my friends in the parliamentary Labour party will marvel at my audacity or my folly, depending on their assessment of my individual worth. I repeat: I held these views before I came to Westminster. I held them when I campaigned as an unsuccessful, then a successful, candidate. I have maintained them at Westminster. I have been consistent throughout and, as passionately as other hon. Members have held to their principles, I have held to mine.

Mr. Simon Thomas (Ceredigion) (PC): As someone who campaigned against the hon. Gentleman in Ogmore, I acknowledge that he held those views before he came to the House. However, his views are not very unpopular in Wales, because they reflect the views of upland farmers in Wales, where there is a need to maintain a proper relationship between farming and the fox population, which is healthy and viable. Is he going to address the fact that his amendments, in my opinion and the opinion of many people throughout Wales, are environmentally beneficial and will improve the upkeep of the Welsh highlands?

Huw Irranca-Davies: The hon. Gentleman makes an important point. I adopted my position because I recognised the impact of upland hunting on wildlife

[Huw Irranca-Davies]

and its habitat. People interpret the Burns report in different ways, but it clearly said that there was a distinct argument in favour of hunting with hounds in upland areas. I support that argument. It might have been helpful if, at an earlier stage, Lord Burns had clarified his position and spoken out more strongly, but he has done so now.

Mrs. Gwyneth Dunwoody (Crewe and Nantwich) (Lab): May I tell my hon. Friend that if, at any point, any member of the parliamentary Labour party is not free to express their views, irrespective of their content, without others shouting them down, we shall be in considerable trouble?

Huw Irranca-Davies: When I tabled the amendments, I realised that I would not be successful in any popularity contest among Back-Bench Labour Members.

Jim Dowd (Lewisham, West) (Lab): That was true before.

Huw Irranca-Davies: I am grateful to my hon. Friend the Member for Lewisham, West (Jim Dowd).

Miss Ann Widdecombe (Maidstone and The Weald) (Con): Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

Huw Irranca-Davies: If the right hon. Lady will allow me, I shall try to make progress. I think that I have been quite generous in accepting interventions.

On the last occasion that I voted for a licensing regime, my local daily newspaper, *The Western Mail,* ran a second-page headline: "Newest MP Backs Blood Sports". That is hardly an accurate reflection of my views, but when did a good headline or story stand in the way of accuracy or truth? Perhaps the paper, along with some hon. Members, would like to reflect on my intervention on a debate in March 2002 when I decried the bloody excesses of hunts which were clearly shown by video evidence to be guilty of barbaric practices such as hurling live foxes to hounds to be torn apart. I make no apology for repeating what I have said before: such hunts should, under the licensing regime, be sanctioned and, if necessary, licensed out of existence.

Miss Widdecombe *rose—*

Huw Irranca-Davies: To say all hunts are like that is to oversimplify and denigrate the hunts that would want to dissociate themselves from such practices.

Miss Widdecombe: Will the hon. Gentleman give way now?

Mr. Speaker: The hon. Gentleman is not willing to give way to the right hon. Member for Maidstone and The Weald (Miss Widdecombe)—*[Interruption.]* Order. She may wish to keep trying, but he is not giving way.

Huw Irranca-Davies: I agree that the pro-hunt lobby has been too slow to recognise the need for change. The Lords hesitated too long when given the opportunity to opt to reform of hunting with a licensing regime. However, the Commons has been equally guilty of wilfully misunderstanding the motives of people involved in hunts. We have ignored the benefits of lifelong animal welfare and countryside stewardship. In simplifying the debate as one between good and evil, friend and foe, we damage logical argument and diminish the debate. It is enhanced, however, if we respect each other's views, even if we are in total disagreement. We should leave this skirmish without animosity to fight other battles on pensioners and poverty, overseas aid and trade justice, crime and community. In my constituency, we have one hunt—the Llangeinor hunt. To categorise it as red-coated toffs riding to hounds would be to ignore the upland hill-farmer, whom I know well and who, in his eighties, still trots behind the hunt, enjoying the ride along the upland areas of the Garw and Ogmore valleys, as he did when he was a teenager and the valleys were full of collieries. To portray that hunt in terms of class war is to disregard—*[Interruption.]*

Mr. Speaker: Order. The hon. Member for West Ham (Mr. Banks) should know better. We must have tolerance in the Chamber. The hon. Member for Ogmore (Huw Irranca-Davies) must be heard and it is wrong to heckle him.

Huw Irranca-Davies: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

To portray that hunt in class-war terms is to disregard wholly the former miners who hunt with it, or the Labour party members whose families rely on the hunt for work as farriers. To represent the hunt as a vicious predation on foxes is to ignore the effect that that hunt and others have on maintaining the landscape and the healthy fox population, because the very existence of the hunt places a value on the fox and the habitat in which it exists. If we take away the value of the fox and the lifelong welfare and habitat implications, the effects are clear.

I do not hunt, but I recognise that others do. Those people are not demons and monsters, but they have been made demons and monsters as we have sought to simplify the terms of the debate. I would ask hon. Members in the debate to please recognise that my constituents who hunt hold very different views, have different backgrounds and arrive at very different conclusions about hunting, but they are exactly the same people who teach our children, police our streets and treat us when we are sick. They are not all saints—and not all hon. Members, despite their honourable status, are absolutely saintly—but neither are those people criminals. They soon will be, however, if a total ban is put in place.

The amendments in my name are straightforward in their aims and effect. The Lords amendments will be erased and in their place, if carried, will appear the clauses put forward in the Government Bill introduced by my right hon. Friend the Minister for Rural Affairs in December 2002.

The combined effect of the amendments would include the following: first, hunting would be banned, unless exempted under schedule 1 or registered for the protection of property or biodiversity—that is, for pest control. Secondly, deer hunting would be banned, and hare hunting would be subject to registration. Thirdly, the use of dogs below ground would be subject to registration. Hare coursing events would be banned. The registration of hunts would take place where no other reasonable available method would cause less suffering. Some animal welfare offences would preclude registration at the first point. Finally, if an application for registration were rejected, a further application would be barred for six months.

My right hon. Friend will understand if I say that my reinstatement of the original Bill does not imply that it is perfect, but I propose it again as a highly workable compromise that reflects the political reality of the moment. It has always been the basis of the least worst way forward.

Mr. Michael Foster (Worcester) (Lab): Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

Huw Irranca-Davies: I will give way, for the last time.

Mr. Foster: I am grateful to the hon. Gentleman and I recognise the difficult position in which he finds himself. He is willing to allow hare coursing to be banned, but hare hunting potentially to continue. Both activities use dogs to kill hares. How can he justify a principled position if he allows hare coursing, but not hare hunting, to be banned?

7.30 pm

Huw Irranca-Davies: It would be easy to be drawn into the same debates and the same questions as have been heard in the Chamber time and again. I will not be tempted down that road because the arguments are so well rehearsed. I have a different opinion from the hon. Gentleman, and I hope he will allow me to continue.

Why reject out of hand the Lords amendments that have come down to us? Because they are clearly unacceptable to the majority in the House. Not least, the Lords have been provocative by voting last night for regulated hunting of foxes, stags and hares, subject to approval by local tribunals. That approach was always going to be rejected by the House. I echo the disappointment of my right hon. Friend the Minister for Rural Affairs, who had urged those in another place to accept a compromise option banning stag hunting and hare coursing but permitting some licensed fox hunting with hounds, provided the hunts passed the test of utility and cruelty.

The original Government Bill, as tabled again tonight in my name, may still prove to be unacceptable, but it has the benefit that it was originally, and still is, well intentioned. It aims to find a balance between the competing principles on the basis of rational criteria and, more importantly, it reflects the relatively recent position of the Government.

There is a well-rehearsed joke, older even than the debates on hunting, and it seems particularly apt tonight. A drunk comes out of a pub, turns to his equally drunk mate and says, "How do I get home?" The mate replies, "I wouldn't start from here." That is what it seems like tonight: I would not start from here. We are not drunk, but we are certainly punch-drunk on hunting. All sides have been up against the ropes for far too long and have adopted defensive positions. They see their enemy through bloodied eyes and cannot hear the shouts of compromise—too much fighting, too many blows, too many bruising and bloody bouts between old enemies. That is what my right hon. Friend ran up against when he introduced the Government Bill in December 2002. He stepped into the ring to pull the sides apart, but it was never going to be a fight by the Queensberry rules. I am sure he started seeing stars pretty soon himself.

I do not wish to damn my right hon. Friend with faint praise, but let me say clearly for the record that under his stewardship the Government made a brave attempt to seek a conciliatory position based on evidence and set against the criteria of cruelty and utility. They tried to bring a structure of logical analysis to the debate and to bring light where previously there was only heat. It may have been doomed to heroic failure—as, despite my hopes, the amendments may also be doomed—but sometimes it is better to know that one has tried. I can sleep better at night if I have tried and failed. I can sleep even better if I have tried and won. I urge colleagues to vote for the amendments.

Why do I bother to introduce again the Government Bill of 2002 in my name? Because if the will of the House is to move to a total ban, I want the House to consciously and emphatically turn its back again on any compromise, and be clear in so doing that every opportunity has been given for an alternative way forward. Even at this eleventh hour, I want hon. Members to reflect for at least a moment before rejecting licensing out of hand: because Burns has declared his position and does not see a ban as helpful for animal welfare; because of the difficulties of policing a total ban; because of the inordinate focus on the chase and the kill, and the lack of focus on the lifelong welfare of the animal; because of the threat to the welfare of the animal when farmers resort to other, more cost-effective measures than lamping, including shotguns and poisons; and above all because I and several other hon. Members want the opportunity to put on record our continuing support for a licensing regime as a viable alternative to a total ban.

If the final outcome of this long-running debate is a ban on hunting, all democrats will recognise the undeniable will of the House. It has been demonstrated on previous occasions. But do not deny me the opportunity to register my principled opposition to a total ban, or my principled opposition to the status quo. Too often in the debate the sides have portrayed each other as bitter enemies, but no one in the House should be the enemy of democratic debate and democratic decision-making.

In conclusion, I thank the House for its tolerance in hearing me out, with words that I know will have been uncomfortable for many. I began my contribution by describing what may be called the loneliness of the long-distance licenser. My right hon. Friend the Minister will be familiar with the syndrome. At the end of my speech, as the demeanour of the House by and large suggests this evening, I do not feel quite as lonely, as we are, by and large, all receptive to well-tempered debate. I await the views of other hon. Members with great interest.

Mr. James Gray (North Wiltshire) (Con): I pay tribute to the hon. Member for Ogmore (Huw Irranca-Davies), whose speech was, by any standards, honest, passionate and, above all, brave. I do not welcome the solution he proposes, which I shall discuss in a moment, but he has done his reputation in the House no harm at all, and I congratulate him on his speech.

The hon. Gentleman made it plain that the Minister for Rural Affairs and Local Environmental Quality is disappointed that the other place has not returned with a better compromise. Those of us who watched the debates in the other place found one thing astonishing: Lord Whitty, the Minister responsible for the Bill in the Lords, took great steps not to speak in favour of an outright ban, which the Bill would have introduced before it went to the Lords. It was extraordinary to see a Minister at the Dispatch Box failing to speak even once for his own Bill.

Lord Whitty went to great lengths to tell noble Lords that they should come up with a compromise. Unsurprisingly, noble Lords cross-examined him time and again about the compromise that the Government would like, but answer came there none. No hint was given throughout the entire process in the other place about what kind of compromise the Government would like.

There have been plenty of noises off. The Prime Minister has made it plain in briefings and elsewhere that he favours a compromise, and the Secretary of State for Health—when he is not talking about smoking—has made it plain that he, too, would welcome a compromise. All the noises off have said that the Government want some kind of compromise, but try as we might, formally and informally, we have not been able to find out what kind of compromise.

That is why the other place came up with this compromise. It sought to recreate the Bill initially introduced by the Minister for Rural Affairs and Local Environmental Quality—admittedly, it has made a number of changes, which I shall discuss in a minute. It has received no guidance from the Government and it has sought to do what it believes the Government want, namely to recreate the Bill about which the Minister spoke so passionately at the Dispatch Box a year or two ago. We cannot hold it against the other place that it went no further than that and that it sought to improve the Bill in a number of ways.

I welcome the fact that the Government—in the form of No. 10, if not in the form of DEFRA—are now beginning to engage in discussions about a compromise, albeit by using the unconventional, if highly competent, mouthpiece of the hon. Member for Ogmore. Incidentally, the Government used the same tactic in the other place, where a brand new noble Lord tried to propose a compromise. Like the Minister tonight, the Minister in the other place sat on the Front Bench, not speaking at all. The Minister has left it to a Back Bencher to come up with a compromise. I am glad that No. 10 has taken a grip of the situation and sought to put together a compromise.

Before discussing the details of a compromise, perhaps it is worth touching for a second on the principle of licensing versus banning—we must not forget that if the House does not accept licensing this evening, the net result will be an outright ban. Believe it or not, we have just passed the fifth anniversary of the publication of the Burns report. Most outside observers might well be forgiven for thinking that never in the field of legislation has so much time been spent by so many on a matter of importance to very few.

Most sensible people view hunting as a matter for the individual's conscience. Lord Burns seems to take that view—he failed to find any evidence whatsoever that hunting with hounds is cruel. The Minister took us through the six-month consultation period, which culminated in the Portcullis House hearings, but that also failed to produce any such evidence. Lord Burns concluded that

> "the bulk of the concerns . . . raised about hunting might be addressed through licensing, a regulatory approach or by changing the rules of the hunt".

Lord Burns reiterated that view in an important speech in the other place:

> "If there is a desire on the part of the Government and of this House to reform hunting in a way that is gradual and avoids the divisiveness that would be created by a simple ban, there may still be a way forward, through a combination of licensed hunting and further reform of animal welfare legislation."—[*Official Report, House of Lords*, 12 October 2004; Vol. 665, c. 146.]

The Government's great guru, Lord Burns, wants to see licensing, and I hope that many hon. Members agree with him.

Miss Anne McIntosh (Vale of York) (Con): I congratulate the hon. Member for Ogmore (Huw Irranca-Davies) on his courageous and eloquent speech. Does my hon. Friend agree that the Burns inquiry found that hunting remains the most humane form of pest control in safekeeping our habitat for future generations? Will my hon. Friend raise that with the Minister?

Mr. Gray: My hon. Friend makes a good point, and she is of course right. I hope that this evening we can avoid doing what we have done in so many of these debates in the past in exchanging quotes from Lord Burns and seeking to make use of him on either side of the argument. His report produced a great deal of evidence, but I am not sure that it is as conclusive as his speech during the Bill's passage in the other place.

The amendments give Parliament the opportunity to find the way forward. After all, licensed hunting is precisely the principle that the Minister advanced in the first place. He will remember that he said in his press notice when he announced the first Bill:

> "Taking account of the evidence given at these hearings, and of the response to my two consultation papers, I plan to set out proposals for Parliament which can form good and robust law and can take us forward into the twenty-first century able to reflect evolving views on animal welfare and wildlife management."

When, at the Dispatch Box, he laid out the principles behind the Bill, he said that because the two Houses could not previously reach an agreement on the issue of hunting with dogs

> "the Prime Minister gave me the job . . . of designing legislation to command the support of Parliament and to make good law".

He said that he hoped that the Bill would enable Parliament to act on the

> "basis of principle and evidence"

that

> "provides a golden thread that runs through the whole process and provides authority for the proposals themselves. I believe that my proposals will stand the test of time and are right."—[*Official Report*, 3 December 2002; Vol. 395, c. 755–57.]

Those proposals are precisely those that the hon. Member for Ogmore set out. That is the golden thread that ran through everything that the Minister proposed two years ago, and those are the very principles that the Government now seem to want us to adhere to.

Mr. Henry Bellingham (North-West Norfolk) (Con): Does my hon. Friend agree that if the Government were not seeking compromise they would long ago have stopped hunting on Ministry of Defence and Forestry Commission land, as they easily could have done without any legislation?

Mr. Gray: My hon. Friend is not quite right, because the Government have taken a very honourable position with regard to hunting on MOD and Forestry Commission land. I must declare an interest, in that I hunt on Salisbury plain. The Government have always said that hunting on MOD and Forestry Commission land will continue under licence until such time as hunting elsewhere is banned. That is a perfectly sensible and correct position for them to have taken, and I am glad that they have done so. Year after year Ministers have signed the licences for those two areas.

By comparison with the golden thread—the principle that ran through the Minister's Bill—the banning Bill that left this House flew in the face of the evidence and principle on which the Minister constantly relies. As he himself said in a letter to the Deputy Prime Minister dated 14 May,

> "A complete ban amendment would destroy the architecture of my Bill, undermine the strong, simple framework of enforcement that is set out in the Bill and be perceived as pursuing prejudice rather than targeting cruelty."

During the doomed Bill's Report stage in this place, the Minister said:

> "We must not send a defective Bill to the other place, and we would face extreme difficulty if we sought to apply the Parliament Acts to a defective piece of legislation."—[*Official Report*, 30 June 2003; Vol. 408, c. 39.]

The Secretary of State reconfirmed that view in an article in *The Times* in which she said:

> "The Bill as it stands"—

namely, the licensing Bill so ably supported by the hon. Member for Ogmore—

> "is acknowledged by animal welfare organisations to be the strongest ever put forward . . . No bill on a simple ban has ever been thought to be workable. If cruelty is the main concern, I plead with colleagues neither to wreck the bill, nor delay its timing."

I am happy to confirm to the House that if a banning Bill is passed using the Parliament Acts—a Bill that is described by the Minister and his Secretary of State as wrecking and unworkable—an incoming Conservative Government will introduce a Government Bill in Government time to repeal it.

I readily accept that the licensing solution proposed in the other place and by the hon. Member for Ogmore will not be easy to accept for those Labour Back Benchers who have made it a lifetime project to achieve an outright ban.

David Winnick (Walsall, North) (Lab): Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

Mr. Gray: If the hon. Gentleman will forgive me, I am right in the middle of a rather delicate point, but I will come back to him in a few moments.

Those who favour an outright ban will find it difficult to accept the licensing proposal of the hon. Member for Ogmore. If it is any compensation to them, I, too, would find it quite extraordinarily difficult to accept that same proposal.

7.30 pm

David Winnick: If an incoming Conservative Government were to do what the hon. Gentleman has just said, would it not amount to a challenge to those who want to break the law? If the House agrees that these provisions should become law by end of this week, people who oppose what I hope will be a total ban on hunting will have an opportunity shortly in a general election. If they disagree with what Parliament has so decided, they can vote Conservative, so democracy will be decided in the usual way. What is wrong with that?

Mr. Gray: The hon. Gentleman takes quite a long time to make an obviously correct point. I have never for one second suggested that people should break the law. He is quite right. If people believe in hunting, they will vote Conservative. I suspect that quite a lot of people will vote Conservative whether they believe in hunting or not. Things could well be the other way round by 6 May next year.

Mr. Douglas Hogg (Sleaford and North Hykeham) (Con): Does my hon. Friend agree that it is essentially a matter for and of liberty? Those who vote Conservative will be voting for liberty on this matter.

Mr. Gray: My right hon. and learned Friend is absolutely right. It is not about hunting, but about liberty, freedom and tolerance. That is why people will vote for a Conservative Government in this area of policy, as in so many others.

I entirely accept that the licensing proposal before us this evening will be difficult—it will stick in the craw—for the outright abolitionists on the Government side. It sticks in my craw as well. I have spent the best part of the last three years arguing, on occasions quite passionately, against such proposals. Indeed, I have spent a large part—too large a part—of my parliamentary career attempting to leave hunting alone and allow it to remain unregulated. These proposals are certainly not something that I genuinely welcome. I also have to say that, from my standpoint, there is a risk—many people think it is a very substantial risk—that if the licensing regime were to be passed, it would be the end of normal,

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ordinary, traditional hunting as I know it. That is very likely to be the case, which makes me not at all keen to endorse the proposals.

Kate Hoey (Vauxhall) (Lab): Does the hon. Gentleman agree that the approach proposed by my hon. Friend the Member for Ogmore (Huw Irranca-Davies)—I share his views in many respects on this matter—would be improved further if we could get wildlife management brought into the whole equation? Then, we really would be considering the issue as the Government originally intended, which was subsequently changed. The Minister himself promised people that he would look into the wider issues, including wildlife management.

Mr. Gray: The hon. Lady is indeed right. In a few moments, I shall speak to the Lords amendments, some of which include wildlife management in the test for utility. The Minister said on many occasions that he would like to see wildlife management made part of those utility tests, so the hon. Lady is entirely right. I am merely explaining that, if the regime proposed by the hon. Member for Ogmore were accepted, it would still be accompanied by a great deal of concern on my part, but we might be prepared to consider it none the less.

Alun Michael: The hon. Gentleman repeated something that was said in the other place—that I had suggested that wildlife management should be viewed as an element of utility, but that is not the case. When I sought evidence and invited people from all quarters to submit it, I did so on the broadest possible range of issues that might help to define utility, but that is quite different from the conclusions that I reached, having heard the different submissions provided by different groups of people.

Mr. Gray: The Minister is, of course, entitled to change his mind. A couple of quotations show that he has done so. One is from a press release announcing the Bill, dated 11 September 2002, where he plainly says:

> "The future of hunting with dogs should not be decided on personal taste, but on evidence on the principles of whether or not it is serving an effective purpose in managing wildlife . . . Taking account of the evidence given at these hearings . . . I plan to set out proposals . . . to reflect evolving views on animal welfare and wildlife management."

Again, on 10 April 2003, the Minister said in a letter to the chairman of the Countryside Alliance that the term "utility"

> "addresses the need for particular activities, particularly in the work of land and wildlife managers. It might be described as the need or usefulness of an activity for vermin control, wildlife management, habitat protection or land management and conservation."

Like any lady, the Minister is of course entitled to change his mind. However, when he discussed these matters with the Countryside Alliance and others—in the run-up to the Portcullis House meeting and while the Bill was being prepared—the Minister made it clear that he believed that wildlife management was an important part of the utility of hunting. It was only when the Bill was finally published that, for mysterious reasons that may be not unconnected with political expediency, the wildlife management heading disappeared from the utility definitions.

Alun Michael: I must correct the hon. Gentleman again. That happened as a result of consideration of the evidence. The opportunity was given for evidence to be given, and I based the Bill on the evidence that I saw. The record of all the evidence that was considered is still available.

Mr. Gray: The Minister is trying his best, but that does not explain why, after all the evidence had been presented at the Portcullis House hearings, the Minister said that he believed that wildlife management was one of the matters that had to be considered.

Lembit Öpik (Montgomeryshire) (LD): Does the hon. Gentleman agree that all of us who opposed a ban at that time were fully convinced that the Minister had accepted the case for wildlife management? He now pretends that he changed his view on the basis of the evidence, but the fact is that he gave us documentary confirmation, after he had heard the evidence, that he believed that wildlife management was a key consideration.

Mr. Gray: That is right. The quotations that I gave the House show that, long after the Portcullis House discussions, the Minister said time and again that he believed that wildlife management was a legitimate part of the utility test. He has changed his mind about that—I suspect because he needed to buy off some of the opposition on his Back Benches. None the less, he must admit that at one time he believed in the legitimacy of wildlife management in the utility test, and that now he does not.

David Taylor (North-West Leicestershire) (Lab/Co-op): While it could turn out that wildlife management will lie at the heart of any rationalisation of hunting on the basis of utility, does the hon. Gentleman agree that the test of cruelty is likely to fail, for the reasons elucidated by Lord Burns—that is, because there is too little information about the comparative welfare implications of the different ways to kill foxes? Is not that the problem over which any scheme of registration will stumble at the first hurdle?

Mr. Gray: The hon. Gentleman makes an extremely good point. On several occasions, scientists have said that we need a great deal more scientific evidence about the welfare implications for different species. The Lords suggested that implementation be delayed for three years, so that research by the Royal College of Veterinary Surgeons could be commissioned to determine the relative cruelties inflicted by the different ways available for dealing with the different species. That emphasises why we should not proceed with a ban this evening. We should go ahead with a licensing system that would allow the registrar to consider the very difficult and complex scientific matters to which the hon. Gentleman referred. I hope very much that he will join us in the Lobby.

The hunting world is ready to consider some form of compromise involving a registration system, albeit with gritted teeth. We have come to accept that, ill informed though it is, there is public concern to make sure that hunting is the most humane and sensible way to dispatch foxes, mink, hare and deer. If licensing will assuage that public concern, then so be it: hunting has nothing to hide. We are not afraid of regulation, so long as it is fair minded and evidence based.

That leads me on to a discussion of the type of regulation being proposed this evening. After all, we on this side of the argument are convinced that hunting mammals with dogs produces the most animal-friendly, and the least cruel, solution to the killing of foxes, deer, hare and mink. We argue that shooting, snaring, gassing and poisoning are far more cruel and—importantly—far less selective. We argue that there is a real utility in many aspects of hunting with hounds, that the rules and conditions that govern it are clear, straightforward and above board, and that they would pass the scrutiny of any dispassionate registrar or arbiter.

Of course, I am well aware of the contrary arguments advanced by Labour Members. They say that they can prove that hunting mammals with dogs has little or no utility, and that it is more cruel than any other method of dispatch. That is their argument, and they express it passionately enough. If they are convinced of their case, however, and if they are convinced that they can prove it, I challenge them to allow the registrar to weigh up my views, my passion and my beliefs against theirs. They are not prepared to do that; they want this House, which does not have the scientific evidence called for by the hon. Member for North-West Leicestershire (David Taylor), to make up its mind whether stag hunting, for example, is more or less cruel than allowing people to shoot the stag, which would certainly happen if it were to be banned.

Mr. Edward Garnier (Harborough) (Con): The supporters of a ban on hunting should be all the more keen to allow the licensing system to come into force because the Government's Bill, as it used to be, provided for the expenditure of public money to allow so-called animal welfare groups to argue their case. It did not, of course, allow for public money to be used by those who were asking for the licence to hunt.

Mr. Gray: My hon. and learned Friend makes an extremely good point, although I have to tell him that once we have the registrar up and running one of my greater ambitions in life will be to have the Countryside Alliance registered as one of the animal welfare groups that does indeed benefit from public money. I very much hope that we shall succeed in achieving that.

There is an old truism in business that the hallmark of a good deal is when both parties leave the negotiating table rather dissatisfied. The proposal before us seems to bear the hallmark of that truism. Labour Members will not be happy with it, as we can see from their behaviour. We would most certainly not be even slightly happy with it, and I have spent three years of my life arguing against it. It just may be, however, that I am none the less ready to accept that the registrar would balance up the arguments that my hon. Friends are putting and that I could rest and rely on the conclusions to which he comes.

I would accept the Bill with a heavy heart, and I must enter certain caveats implicit in the small changes that the other place made to the Bill originally presented on Second Reading by the Minister for Rural Affairs. The other place made seven groups of amendments to that licensing Bill. Some are reasonably unimportant and may well be acceptable to many people who are looking at the big picture. For example, they exempt the hunting of stoats and weasels, which was inexplicably omitted from the original Bill.

They also allow the use of terriers underground for the dispatch of orphan cubs and the protection of wild birds and livestock. After all, there is really no reason why that Bill, which left this House and was voted for overwhelmingly by the House, should allow terriers to be used underground for one purpose, and one purpose only—the protection of birds. Why should the 340,000 lambs killed every year by foxes not have the benefit—

Mr. Gordon Prentice (Pendle) (Lab) *indicated dissent.*

Mr. Gray: The hon. Gentleman expresses amazement, but that figure comes from the National Farmers Union. Some 340,000 lambs a year are killed by foxes, yet farmers may not use terriers underground to protect them while game people may use terriers underground to protect game birds. Why should that be the case? Why cannot farmers use terriers as much as gamekeepers can? There is no reason why those relatively uncontroversial proposals from the other place should not be sensibly considered here.

Three sets of Lords amendments to the original Bill are worthy of further explanation, however, raising three areas of contention against the proposals of the hon. Member for Ogmore. First, the other place corrected what seems a logical anomaly in the structure of the Minister's Bill. He, of course, allowed the registration of the use of dogs—as he likes to call them—to hunt foxes, mink and hare. On the basis, however, of what he described as incontrovertible evidence of their absolute cruelty, the Minister banned deer hunting and organised hare coursing events outright. In Committee we challenged him repeatedly to tell us what that incontrovertible evidence of cruelty might be. He failed time and again to do so, so we inquired of Professor Patrick Bateson, the scientist on whose work the Minister seemed to base his claim, whether there was any such thing as incontrovertible evidence of the cruelty of deer hunting. In a reply dated 21 January 2003, Professor Bateson famously said:

> "Only someone who was scientifically illiterate could argue that evidence from a new area of research was 'incontrovertible'. I shall write to Alun Michael to distance myself from that view."

He went on to argue that much more research was needed on the physiological effects on deer of being hunted before it would be possible to conclude whether the practice should be banned. That research is specifically called for in the Lords proposals on implementation that we are discussing this evening. In the absence of any such incontrovertible evidence to support an outright ban on hunting, surely it would be only reasonable to allow the registrar and the tribunal system established by the Bill to consider the scientific arguments of its proponents and opponents. Why should we put ourselves in the position of the registrar? Why should we say that we know that deer hunting is more cruel than fox hunting and must be banned outright? What is the evidence to prove to us that that is the case? Why cannot we ask the registrar and the

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tribunal to consider the scientific evidence, from Professor Bates and others, and whether deer hunting should be banned? Surely all categories of hunting should be treated in the same way. There is no reason to single out two particular kinds of hunting for an immediate ban.

Mr. Flook: Will my hon. Friend give way?

Mr. Gray: I will happily give way to my hon. Friend, whose knowledge of deer hunting on Exmoor is second to none.

7.45 pm

Mr. Flook: One of the concerns about a ban on stag hunting is that it would decimate the red deer herd on Exmoor. Members who intend to vote to ban stag hunting do not appear to appreciate that.

Mr. Gray: My hon. Friend knows what he is talking about and I have seen him on Exmoor. There is no reason why farmers would allow herds of deer to roam across their farms were it not for their support for the hunt. The Minister has consistently refused to come up with any alternative red deer management programme to replace hunting.

The second series of amendments from the other place, about which we have spoken briefly already, addresses the issue of managing wildlife. It is important that the management of wildlife should be one of the utility tests in the Bill.

The third change that the other place made to the original Bill concerns commencement. The House will remember that the original Bill proposed commencement three months after its passage, but that on Second Reading a suggestion was made to the other place that—ostensibly for reasons of the welfare of the hounds and horses, although many of us suspect that it was more for political reasons and to try to avoid the general election—implementation should be delayed to 31 July 2006. The hon. Member for Ogmore suggests a slightly later date. Leaving aside the suspicion that political expediency lies behind the proposed dates, the other place has suggested a much more logical approach. Under its amendment, the Bill would come into force on a date determined by the Secretary of State, which would not be before 1 December 2007. It would also require the Secretary of State to commission research from the Royal College of Veterinary Surgeons into the relative pain, suffering or distress caused to wild mammals as a result of hunting with dogs. The amendment does not seek an unreasonable delay. It would be a modest delay to the implementation of the Bill and is probably accepted by Labour Members who disagree with me on other issues. The amendment seeks to complement the registration system giving the registrar the vital scientific help that he will need in assessing relative suffering. It would also give enough time for the registrar and tribunal to be set up, and for those seeking registration to prepare their applications.

I approach today's proceedings, and what the other place has proposed, with no enthusiasm. It is my view that hunting is the most humane and selective way of culling foxes, deer, hare and mink; that the self-regulation under which we have operated for some years works very well; and that governmental interference is entirely unnecessary. But I am ready to accept that, after years of discussion, the nation needs to be reassured that hunting is conducted properly and that its utility greatly exceeds any compromises to the hunted animals' welfare. So we on this side of the argument have concluded that we have nothing to hide, and that we are content to submit our activities to the scrutiny of an independent and dispassionate registrar. We therefore welcome the amendments proposed by the other place and we will vote in their support. If they are not passed, I should make it plain that we have grave reservations about the detail of the proposals from the hon. Member for Ogmore in three important respects—deer hunting and hare coursing, the date of implementation and, above all, the inclusion of wildlife management. But we welcome the fact that the Government appear, albeit by a roundabout route, at last to be engaging in some degree of negotiation about a fair and reasonable licensing regime. We are keen to allow the other place to consider further the Minister's proposals, so it is with a heavy heart and through gritted teeth that I shall ask my hon. Friends who care about the countryside to support the amendment proposed by the hon. Member for Ogmore, making it clear as we do so that we have grave reservations about it.

David Burnside (South Antrim) (UUP): The hon. Gentleman makes a reasonable argument for consensus and agreement. If there is no consensus and no agreement on a middle-way approach and if, after 5 May, the Conservative party does not have an overall majority in the election and needs some other support, would he welcome the fact that at least 11 of the 14 Ulster MPs who sit in the House will give cross-party backing to our English, Welsh and Scottish colleagues in reversing a ban on hunting?

Mr. Gray: I am extremely grateful to the hon. Gentleman for his support, which is especially important, as he has recently suffered from an ignorant and prejudiced ban on hare hunting in Northern Ireland, for all the wrong reasons and with no scientific evidence whatever. We entirely support him on that.

Mr. Stephen O'Brien (Eddisbury) (Con): I share my hon. Friend's analysis. I speak on behalf of the five hunts that use land in my constituency, and it is clear to me that, although the Minister and his party will vote for many measures to give definition to a permissive society, the compromise that my hon. Friend advocates—albeit through gritted teeth—is a test of whether they truly believe in a permissive, civilised, free society.

Mr. Gray: My hon. Friend is entirely right. I look forward to hearing the Minister's reaction to the amendments proposed by the other place and by the hon. Member for Ogmore. Indeed, I am rather surprised that the right hon. Gentleman has not been on his feet before now to promote his original Bill.

If the House does not accept the amendments that the other place has sent us, or the alternative proposals made by the hon. Member for Ogmore, the net result will be an outright ban on hunting. The truth of the matter is that the countryside will be a poorer place if that happens and the people of the countryside will neither forget it nor forgive it.

Alun Michael: We have started well. I congratulate in particular my hon. Friend the Member for Ogmore (Huw Irranca-Davies) on demonstrating something that is always respected in the House—a consistent personal view on a controversial issue.

The hon. Member for North Wiltshire (Mr. Gray) expressed his views in a forthright manner. I disagree with a great deal of what he said, but we can certainly agree on the dangers of selective quotation from the Burns report. That report, like the hearings in Portcullis House, is illuminating if one approaches it looking for enlightenment rather than simply searching for quotations that support one's original point of view.

I respect especially the important point that the hon. Gentleman made when he said that he would not breach the law in the event of the House legislating for a ban. He made clear his point of view that, should a ban be introduced, he would try to change the law, but that he would respect the law. I respect that point of view. In discussing these issues, some people on both sides of the argument, and sometimes Members of the House, have allowed their passion to take them beyond the bounds of reason. We have heard some of the language used in Parliament square. I respect the strength of view that people expressed in that demonstration, but I do not support the disrespect to the parliamentary process that was expressed there and in a variety of other places.

I know of the hon. Gentleman's personal strength of view, so I congratulate him on not going down that road when he speaks in this place and elsewhere. It is an approach similar to that taken by many of us in our opposition to a really unjust law—the poll tax. Although we opposed the law and sought change—we were eventually successful—we argued that people should neither break the law in their demonstrations at the time nor fail to pay the poll tax.

Tony Wright (Cannock Chase) (Lab): I am grateful to my right hon. Friend for giving way, but we should also know what we are doing, should we not, and is it not the case that if we do go for a total ban there will be three certain effects? One is that there will be lots of work for lawyers. The second is that there will be lots of work for policewomen. The third is that the forces of political extremism will be nourished. We should at least know that in doing what we do?

Alun Michael: The response to my hon. Friend is no, no and no. The way in which language has been used in some quarters in this debate to appear to justify or condone acting outside the bounds of legitimate protest is unacceptable. That has been wrong. But the options that are before the House, as I will spell out in a moment, are reasonable and clear, and the House of Commons will have to take a view on them.

Mr. David Cameron (Witney) (Con): Will the right hon. Gentleman give way?

Alun Michael: In a moment.

I referred to what the hon. Member for North Wiltshire said in his introduction, and I would say to him that it is a pity that the willingness he has expressed tonight to seek compromise has not been seen over the last three years. Whereas he suggested that the Government were coming belatedly to look for a way through this issue, I have to say that anybody who has watched the work that I have undertaken and the debates that we had exhaustively in Committee, has to say that it is on the Government Benches that there has been an attempt to find a way through the issues.

I also point out to the hon. Gentleman that the spontaneous action of the Lords Back Bencher last week to put forward the Bill as it came out of Committee in the House, was unceremoniously dismissed by some 189 votes to 39 in the House of Lords last week. If his view is shared on the Conservative Benches in the House of Lords, it is a pity that it was not reflected in that vote.

Lembit Õpik: On the matter of compromise, while I agree that the Minister has worked hard to try to find some alternative involving regulation, does he not accept that the middle way group and others have sought to do so as well? While perhaps not always having the resources to shout as loudly as the others, we have for a long time been trying to lead the thinking in the Chamber towards some sort of regulation. Does he agree with me, therefore, that when one starts looking at the evidence, as the Minister has done, one comes to the incontrovertible conclusion that only regulation has a chance of increasing animal welfare?

Alun Michael: I have to agree with the hon. Gentleman on one point and disagree with him on the other. First, yes, I pay tribute to him and others who have sought to find another way through, and it has been a cross-party effort; however, no, I do not agree with the conclusion that he reaches. I made it clear that I did not agree with the middle way Bill option as he drafted it, but that does not stop me respecting the efforts that he put in to try to find a way through this divisive issue.

Sir Patrick Cormack (South Staffordshire) (Con): The Minister knows that I deplore breaking the law as much as he does, but does he now accept the validity of the case made so eloquently and bravely by his hon. Friend the Member for Ogmore (Huw Irranca-Davies) this evening?

Alun Michael: Coming to my Bill, I still believe that that Bill was well drafted and would have provided the basis for good legislation, and I shall make that clear in a moment. However, I want to draw to the attention of the House the fact that there are three choices before the House. First, there are the amendments proposed by the House of Lords, which I would describe as a limp system of regulation; secondly, there is the Bill as introduced in the House and sent to the Lords earlier in this Session; and thirdly, there are the amendments moved by my hon. Friend the Member for Ogmore, which essentially would turn the Bill back into the Bill as I introduced it to the House in the previous Session.

May I deal with the questions of finance, as I promised that I would? As I said, the money resolution dealt with the propositions that have been sent to us by

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the House of Lords, and I have not exhaustively studied the matter to see what the cost of those would be. The current estimate of the costs of the registration system within the Bill as I originally introduced it was £10 million for the first year. Three quarters of that cost would be in respect of tribunals.

The money resolution, of course, would not be necessary if the Bill as sent to the House of Lords were approved, since policing costs have been authorised already. Indeed, the Association of Chief Police Officers expressed the view that the cost of policing a ban would be much the same as that of policing hunt protesters at present.On finances, perhaps I should also refer to the amendments proposed by the hon. Member for St. Ives (Andrew George). Of course, I shall listen to the contribution that I am sure he will make shortly, but such an amendment would provide an open-ended compensation clause—a blank cheque—and even a so-called banning Bill would not deprive anyone of their property. It would only place a restriction on the use to which the property is put, and there is no human rights requirement to pay compensation in such cases. Of course, when the House last debated the issue, we heard the views of the Joint Committee on Human Rights, which made a narrow point about contracts, which a ban must frustrate, but it did not call into question the human rights issues in general.

8 pm

Andrew George (St. Ives) (LD): I fully accept that the amendment that I tabled could have been drafted a little tighter in places, but the Minister has not dealt with the principle. If a ban could be introduced within three months, which is a prospect under the present proposals, surely the Minister must accept that there is a strong case for compensation. What about the principle?

Alun Michael: No, I do not accept that, which should not come as a surprise to anyone, given the long period during which the issue has been debated in the House. As I made clear when we discussed the issue at length on a previous occasion, my advice is that there are no human rights implications nor any implication for a requirement to compensate either in the Bill that I originally introduced, or in the Bill as amended when it left the House. In any event, I proposed a motion, which was supported in the House, to delay implementing the legislation because it is quite clear that some people will not accept that the current situation is likely to change until there is something to that effect on the statute book. That delay would allow those who have put their heads in the sand time to adjust, but that is a bonus, rather than a necessity in respect of human rights legislation.

Mr. David Drew (Stroud) (Lab/Co-op): We have the precedent of the Fur Farming (Prohibition) Act 2000, under which compensation was paid. However, when and if the draft animal welfare Bill is introduced, will my right hon. Friend consider whether it could include a mechanism by which some form of compensation could take place?

Alun Michael: I have to correct my hon. Friend: there is no precedent relevant to the Bill. In the case that he mentions, there was deprivation of property, and a timing was proposed that aimed to mitigate the affect of that deprivation of property.

Let me make a couple of points about the Lords amendments. Some Lords have said that the amendments that they approved would establish a registration and tribunal system that would be an improved version of the system proposed in the Bill that I introduced in December 2002. That is a gross misrepresentation. My Bill was not a compromise—there can be no compromise on cruelty—and it would have put an immediate end to all the cruelty associated with hunting with dogs. Cruelty is well defined in law as the cause of unnecessary suffering.

My Bill would have only allowed hunting in cases where it was proved beyond doubt that the use of dogs was essential for necessary pest control and would cause less suffering than other methods of pest control. That is a principled approach that addresses the reasons why so many people find hunting with dogs for sport so abhorrent.

Let me make another couple of points about the differences. My Bill sought to ban deer hunting because it is absolutely clear on the evidence that that form of hunting would never pass both the utility and the least-suffering tests, since it will always cause more suffering than the alternative of stalking and shooting. That stands to reason. It will always cause the deer more suffering to chase it for hours until it is exhausted and can run no more before shooting it than approaching it quietly and shooting it unawares.

Mr. Gray: That is not what Professor Bateson said. If the Minister is so certain that there is no chance that deer hunting will pass the test as defined in the Bill, why not leave it to the registrar to turn it down?

Alun Michael: Very simply, because that would be a waste of the tribunal's and registrar's time. I made that point very clearly when I introduced the Bill. There is a difference between deer hunting and the evidence that Lord Burns acknowledged in respect of some aspects of fox hunting—he referred only to some aspects—which is what the tribunal system is meant to deal with on the basis of an objective consideration of the evidence.

The hon. Gentleman was wrong to suggest that we have done nothing to promote deer management. Indeed, we have done a great deal. Part of the problem in relation to Exmoor is that some fear—I speak of those who support hunting—that the proper management of deer would be the thin end of the wedge for the regulation or banning of deer hunting. It is a pity that there has not been more engagement in deer management by those involved in hunting if they have such concern for the deer. We will continue our efforts to seek to engage all parties in effective management of the deer population.

In respect of the amendments suggested by the other place, I have to point out that my Bill was drafted to ban hare coursing. Hare coursing events have no pest control justification; their primary aim is to allow people to gamble on the relative performance of dogs when they are set after hares in a confined space. I took the view that setting a dog on a wild mammal just for fun is not just totally unacceptable, but certainly has no utility. It certainly does nothing to assist in pest control.

The Bill and the amendments that the Lords have sent us do not offer us the Bill as I originally introduced it to the House or as it emerged from Committee. It is a far more extreme measure and, as I indicated earlier, limp in terms of pretending to provide a form of regulation. It would be pretty weak and ineffective.

The Lords also widened the utility test to allow hunting for the purpose of wildlife management. Except in the narrow sense of pest control, the evidence did not justify such an approach. It did not suggest widespread benefit for wildlife management. However necessary it is in the modern world to manage wildlife, we do not do it by chasing wild mammals with dogs.

For all those reasons, I believe that the House should disagree with all the Lords amendments on registration. They would also prevent the new system from coming into force for at least three years from now and would give an effective veto to the Royal College of Veterinary Surgeons. In contrast, my registration system would have been up and running within three months and the alternative of the Bill that went from this House with a motion for a later commencement date would have given July 2006 for the date of commencement.

Mr. Simon Thomas: I take the Minister back a few sentences to what he said about wildlife management. Is he aware that the Countryside Council for Wales actively promotes hunting on Cors Fochno near Borth—it is one of the lowland bogs in Wales and a site of special scientific interest—precisely because hunting with hounds and flushing out foxes with hounds to be shot afterwards is the best way to protect the ground nesting birds on that essential site? He should surely consider the wider wildlife protection issue. If the Countryside Council for Wales can support it, surely he can.

Alun Michael: The circumstances that the hon. Gentleman describes may be correct in relation to flushing, but he generalises too far about the activities to which he refers.

I remind the House of how we reached this position. Strong and passionate views have been expressed on both sides of the hunting debate on many occasions. The House has voted nine times in 10 years and, on each occasion, it has voted to introduce a ban on hunting. On two occasions, those votes came about because a Back Bencher had introduced a Bill and, on seven occasions, there was a vote because the Government, who were seeking a less contentious way forward, had brought forward other options or proposals. I have to point out that the House has voted for a ban by a large majority on every occasion, so its views have been made clear.

Mr. Bellingham: The Minister talks about the past 10 years, but I seem to remember that in the vote in 1996, there was a majority of 11 in favour of keeping hunting.

Alun Michael: No, I do not think so. I have been through the records and found nine occasions on which there were votes, and on each occasion there was a large majority in favour of a ban on hunting.

David Winnick: In view of what my right hon. Friend said a moment ago, is it not a fact that the House of Lords has not shown the slightest desire to accommodate the House of Commons? It is responsible for the confrontation that is occurring between the two Houses, and the fault for it lies entirely with the majority of the Lords who have not the slightest wish for any kind of ban whatsoever?

Alun Michael: I cannot disagree with what my hon. Friend says.

Kate Hoey: Does the Minister agree that a majority of Labour peers in the House of Lords voted for a licensing regime?

Alun Michael: The decisions of Parliament are not taken by some sort of opinion poll in which the votes on either side in the House of Lords and the House of Commons are averaged out. I am trying to address this House—the elected House—on the issue.

I am often asked whether the House of Commons regards hunting as the most important issue before it—certainly not, as far as the Government are concerned. Hon. Members on both sides of the argument say that it is not the most important issue facing them, but we must look at their behaviour. Time after time when we debate hunting, both sides of the Chamber are full, but when we consider issues that are far more important to people in rural areas, such as jobs, the economy, housing, health or education, the Chamber empties. Hunting might not be at the top of anyone's agenda, just as it is not at the top of the Government's agenda, but it must be dealt with because of the consistent strength of view that has been expressed by hon. Members on both sides of the argument year after year.

Have the Government tried to find a less divisive way forward? They certainly have. The Government commissioned the Burns inquiry and introduced a Bill that offered three choices for consideration by the House and the other place. The Government, through me as the Minister, invited all sides to give evidence to try to find a way forward. I undertook proximity talks with the three main groups—they were necessary before we could get them into the same room—to discuss the possibility of them examining the evidence together.

We held hearings in Portcullis House during which the focus was on cruelty. All three groups, including the Countryside Alliance, agreed the issues that we debated and on which we heard expert evidence. It was at that point that the chairman of the Countryside Alliance, John Jackson, said:

> "If something is cruel, we shouldn't be doing it".

[Alun Michael]

This has nothing to do with liberty, freedom or respect for people's way of life, but, as the Countryside Alliance acknowledged at the time, it is about the question of cruelty. Of course I respect those who argue that hunting is not cruel. That is why we gave them the opportunity to agree on both the people who gave evidence to the inquiry and the questions that should be put to them. That is why we spent a day considering evidence on the principle of utility—cruelty is the causing of unnecessary suffering, so necessity must be considered. We also spent a day considering the principle of least suffering and a further day debating how best to apply those principles on the basis of a list of topics that was agreed by all three main groups. We listened to expert witnesses, the list of which was agreed by all three groups.

I was proud of securing that debate and of the quality of the discussion. I paid tribute at the time to the way in which all three groups engaged in the process. However, it was rather sad that after people left the meetings, they claimed that everything that they had heard justified the view with which they went into the room in the first place. That illustrates not just a perversity on the part of the people who expressed those views, but the extent to which views on all sides of the debate are deeply entrenched, passionately held and very difficult to move in any way.

8.15 pm

Mr. Geoffrey Clifton-Brown (Cotswold) (Con): A large number of my constituents participate in hunting. All of them, especially those who will lose their jobs if a banning Bill is passed, ask for fairness and for the Minister to be a man of principle. The Minister went through those Portcullis House hearings, commissioned the Burns inquiry and concluded that a licensing Bill would be the best way forward. In his press release of 11 September 2002, he said:

> "The future of hunting with dogs should not be decided on personal taste, but on evidence on the principles of whether or not it is serving an effective purpose in managing wildlife and whether it is more or less cruel".

Bearing all that in mind, will he demonstrate that he is a man of principle and vote for the amendments tabled by the hon. Member for Ogmore (Huw Irranca-Davies) and for the original Bill?

Alun Michael: Yes, I will vote for the amendments because they introduce legislation that I thought would be extremely effective and right for the long term.

Mr. Barry Sheerman (Huddersfield) (Lab/Co-op): That is good news. My right hon. Friend knows that a group of us on both sides of the House has consistently thought, with the bone-headed relationship between this House and the House of Lords, that there was a middle way. The opportunity to find a middle way has consistently been brought before the House. I deeply resent his suggestion that the fault lies only in the upper House. From the middle way position, it seems to me that both sides are equally to blame for the position that we are in.

Alun Michael: I find my hon. Friend's logic peculiar. First, I said that there were serious flaws with the middle way group's propositions, much as I respected what the people who proposed that option were attempting to do. Secondly, if he wants to judge who is and who is not being bone-headed, I should explain that the middle way option was put to the House of Lords before the last general election and was overwhelmingly voted down. Had that decision not been taken, perhaps debate would have gone on and we would not be in this position. I suggest that that was day one of being bone-headed.

Mr. Peter Luff (Mid-Worcestershire) (Con): I am grateful to the Minister for once again repeating something that was implied in the Lords, which was that it would have been much better had the Lords opted for the middle way before the last election. Does he accept, however, that the middle way group has never looked for a compromise? I am worried that the word "compromise" has featured extensively in the debate. We are looking for a radical and different way genuinely to improve animal welfare and protect human freedom. We may have failed in his judgment, but for the first time those of us who sought the middle way are having to find a compromise between an outright ban, which would be extremely bad for animal welfare, and the amendments tabled by the hon. Member for Ogmore (Huw Irranca-Davies), which are not as good for animal welfare as a full middle way solution would have been. For the first time we are compromising, and I think we will vote with the hon. Gentleman.

Alun Michael: I accept the description of the proposals that that the hon. Gentleman supported and his reasons for doing so. As he knows, I respect the great amount of effort and time that he put in to promote the middle way option. As I said—I have made this clear to him before—his proposals were flawed, but I respect entirely the efforts that were made to find a different solution.

Chris Bryant: I pay tribute to the way in which the Minister has tried to take the Bill through all its different stages, and I am glad that he is supporting the amendments tabled by my hon. Friend the Member for Ogmore (Huw Irranca-Davies), although I shall not support them. My problem is that the most common way of killing foxes in the Rhondda is by shooting them at night—

Mr. Simon Thomas: By running them over.

Chris Bryant: Not by running them over.

The most common way of killing foxes in my constituency is by lamping them, but I remember sitting through the three days of hearings in Portcullis House and being told by a large number of people who supported hunting that it would be far crueller to kill foxes by shooting or lamping. If that is the case, surely the registration system, as advocated by my hon. Friend the Member for Ogmore, would fall foul of the cruelty case.

Alun Michael: No, I do not believe that lamping is a crueller option—indeed, that is one of the points on which there is widespread agreement. Everyone asked me to accept the Burns report, and one of that report's clear findings was that lamping is generally preferable and less damaging in terms of animal welfare. Lamping would not be ruled out by the Bill as I introduced it, or as amended as my hon. Friend the Member for Ogmore proposes. I am grateful to my hon. Friend the Member for Rhondda (Chris Bryant) for giving me the opportunity to make that clear.

One of the problems is that the conclusions that we reached during our discussions at Portcullis House, which must surely have led anyone to say that not all hunting was entirely clear-cut, were set aside by those who have campaigned for hunting. They have retreated not into compromise, but into an attitude of "no surrender", exemplified by the phrase "an attack on one is an attack on all", rather than sought to achieve a just solution based on principle and evidence. In contrast to the comments made by the hon. Member for North Wiltshire (Mr. Gray), comments such as

"the countryside will erupt in fury"

are not only inaccurate—there are divisions of view within the countryside—but appear to justify, if not condone, an unreasonable approach to protest. I warned the chairman of the Countryside Alliance on a number of occasions that I feared that some of his members might be encouraged to think it okay to become involved in illegal activities if such language continued to be used. That is not the right way to approach public debate or decision making.

Mr. Garnier: I do not want to dwell on the countryside erupting and things like that. The Minister admitted to my hon. Friend the Member for Cotswold (Mr. Clifton-Brown) that he would support the amendment tabled by the hon. Member for Ogmore (Huw Irranca-Davies), which reflects the Bill that the right hon. Gentleman introduced in November 2002. Will he explain to me why it is the hon. Member for Ogmore who introduced the proposal, not the Government?

Alun Michael: Because my hon. Friend the Member for Ogmore, whose efforts I respect, sought to table the amendment. Having seen the way in which last week the House of Lords, by such a large majority, rejected the Bill as it came out of Committee, I had given up hope that, at this late stage, a majority might be found in favour of the Bill that I originally introduced, or the Bill as it came out of Committee. It would have been rather more constructive if there had been some support for my efforts to bring constructive options before the House, or if there had been more support for our proposals in the Commons in the last Session, or if the House of Lords in the last Session had sent back an amended Bill so that there could have been debate between the two Houses, or if last week the House of Lords had responded positively to the amendments before it.

Mr. Garnier: Perhaps the right hon. Gentleman did not understand my question. Why did the Government not table the amendment? After all, it precisely reflects the Government's own Bill of November 2002.

Alun Michael: My preferred option would have been the Bill as it came out of Committee and as it was put to the House of Lords last week and defeated there. However, my hon. Friend the Member for Ogmore has tabled a set of amendments and my treatment of those amendments is based on the reasons for my introducing the Bill in the first place. It is perfectly simple—perhaps the hon. and learned Gentleman did not understand my answer.

Sir Gerald Kaufman: My right hon. Friend says, accurately, that our hon. Friend the Member for Ogmore tabled the amendment. My right hon. Friend is accurate in saying that our hon. Friend proposed it and spoke to it. Can my right hon. Friend tell me whether our hon. Friend drafted the amendment?

Alun Michael: I think that my hon. Friend the Member for Ogmore sought advice on how to draft amendments, as any wise Back Bencher would. It is for him to respond, but I hope that my right hon. Friend the Member for Manchester, Gorton (Sir Gerald Kaufman) respects our hon. Friend's motivation and his reasons for proposing the amendments.

Sir Gerald Kaufman: Of course I respect my hon. Friend. He is an hon. Friend. I would respect my right hon. Friend if he would now answer directly the question that I put to him rather than saying that my hon. Friend sought advice. Who drafted the amendment that my hon. Friend moved?

Alun Michael: It is not my place to reply. I did not see the amendments tabled by my hon. Friend until I saw them printed in the amendment paper this morning.

Huw Irranca-Davies: It may be of assistance to the House to know that as a Back Bencher of two-and-a-half year's experience, it is beyond my ken to draft something like this on my own. I sought assistance. However, the principle behind it and the spirit of it, and the fact that I voted for the provisions originally, should not cause a disdainful light to be cast upon my reason for bringing the amendment forward. I hope that my right hon. Friend the Member for Kaufman (Manchester, Gorton) is not doing that.

Alun Michael: I am sure that my right hon. Friend would not be suggesting anything of the sort.

My motivation in bringing the Bill before the House in the first place was the same as that of my hon. Friend in bringing forward the amendment. It was to find a way for the House and for Parliament as a whole through this most divisive issue on which the division of opinion has been so sharp and in many ways destructive. I think that we have started well in this debate, despite the strength of views that we can hear in the contributions that are being made.

I want to make one point strongly. As I did in introducing the Bill and since, the Government and I personally have sought to reduce the temperature and to find a way through this issue. I had hoped that the House of Lords, as a revising chamber, would have helped, but we must look at the record of decisions there from the pro-hunting side. As I have said, it voted down the middle-way option when it was before us. It sent

[Alun Michael]

nothing back to us last year although it had plenty of time to consider the Bill fully and return it to this place. In Committee in the House of Lords recently the other place voted through a series of quite extreme amendments that emasculated the Bill and did not turn it back into anything like the Bill that I introduced. It rejected the possibility of compromise last week. The language last night was not only unkind to Lord Whitty, the Under-Secretary of State, but it ignored one simple fact: it is not this place that will insist on using the Parliament Act should that become necessary to resolve this issue, it will be the House of Lords that has provoked the application of that measure.

Even at this late stage I ask Members of this place and those in another place to consider whether there is an opportunity for a less divisive way forward. Our motion to delay implementation until July 2006 was agreed by the House. I thank my right hon. and hon. Friends who supported that proposition wholeheartedly when it was before the House. It is now on the table for the House of Lords to agree to if the House votes for the Bill as it was sent to the Lords.

My hon. Friend the Member for Ogmore has tabled amendments that recreate the Bill that I introduced in this place. I still believe that after the offer was made there was the basis for a constructive way forward. It would have ended cruelty but provided a constructive window of opportunity for those who could show that their method of hunting was not cruel. My Bill was at that time the strongest ever put forward, but the amendment put forward my by hon. Friend the Member for West Ham (Mr. Banks) provided that it was still a workable piece of legislation.

I make that point because there has been some criticism of the Bill as it went to the House of Lords, as if it was unworkable. Our decision after the House voted for my hon. Friend's amendment was to recommit the Bill to Committee to ensure that it was properly drafted, an effective piece of legislation and one that would work and would be simple in its application. The choice before the House tonight does not relate to a piece of legislation that is badly drafted. We put it into proper order.

Lembit Öpik: Will the Minister give way?

Rob Marris (Wolverhampton, South-West) (Lab): Will my right hon. Friend give way?

Kate Hoey: Will my right hon. Friend give way?

Alun Michael: This is getting exciting.. I give way to my hon. Friend the Member for Wolverhampton, South-West (Rob Marris) and then I will give way to the hon. Member for Montgomeryshire (Lembit Öpik).

Rob Marris: The Minister has tried very hard to seek compromise. May I suggest to him that it is almost impossible because people like me and many of my hon. Friends—I include the Minister in this, even though I shall vote against the amendment—consider that the primary issue is that of cruelty. For many Opposition Members, however—and this became clear in Committee—the primary issue is one of liberty. Their position is illogical, as they would allow cock fighting and bear baiting on the grounds of liberty. The primary issue is one of cruelty.

8.30 pm

Alun Michael: My hon. Friend is right, and that was acknowledged by the Countryside Alliance in discussions in which we tried to find a way forward. Obviously, there is a considerable difference of view about what constitutes cruelty, and what does not, but it is the starting point, as my hon. Friend rightly reiterates.

Lembit Öpik: I understand the point that the Minister made about the amended Bill proposed by the hon. Member for West Ham (Mr. Banks), even if I disagree with his conclusions, but I would be grateful for clarification. Given that he has chosen to exclude stag hunting from the tests but to include fox hunting, is it fair to conclude that there are likely to be cases in which hunting with dogs or foxes is not necessarily cruel?

Alun Michael: That was not completely answered in the evidence that I have seen. It was certainly not completely answered in the Burns report, as Lord Burns himself made clear. I therefore proposed a method that would allow cases to be dealt with according to the principles that we set out in the Bill and through the hearing of evidence. Clearly, some cases are expected to succeed. On the evidence that I have seen there will only be a small number that do so, but that possibility is one of the strengths of the Bill that I drafted.

Mr. Andrew Turner (Isle of Wight) (Con): The right hon. Gentleman described the Bill as amended by the hon. Member for West Ham (Mr. Banks) and the amendments tabled by the hon. Member for Ogmore (Huw Irranca-Davies) as workable. Does he accept, however, that they both have consequences for the warp and weft of the countryside, particularly in an isolated constituency such as mine? Until a fortnight ago, the National Fallen Stock Company could not find anyone to collect dead stock from my constituency. The Isle of Wight Foxhounds, however, made a successful bid to do so. In its absence, there would be no one to collect dead stock, as required under the Government's legislation. What is the right hon. Gentleman's response to farmers in my constituency who fear that situation arising?

Alun Michael: I never quite understood why the farming industry generally did not embrace with enthusiasm the fallen stock scheme when it was originally proposed. The Isle of Wight Foxhounds is contracted to Government to provide a service. It does not offer that service out of the goodness of its heart, but there is no reason why that contractual relationship should cease in the event of legislation being passed.

My contribution is longer than I would have wished as a result of the many interventions that I have accepted. However, at the end of the day, the will of the House must prevail, and everyone should respect its decision. Individual Members of Parliament, who are accountable to their constituents, should decide on a free vote what should be the law of the land. I am answerable to my conscience, as is my hon. Friend the Member for Ogmore and every other Member in making our decision tonight. I hope that my arguments about seeking a less divisive way forward will be heard by Members on both sides of the House. However, it is certainly time for the House of Commons to fulfil a Labour manifesto commitment to enable Parliament to reach a conclusion on the issue of hunting with dogs. The issue will not stop being divisive, but everyone, whatever their point of view, should respect the decision that is made at the end of our debate tonight.

Andrew George: I am aware that we have little more than an hour remaining for our debate, so I shall keep my remarks as brief as possible. First, it appears that all Front Benchers will go into the Aye Lobby to support the motion tabled by the hon. Member for Ogmore (Huw Irranca-Davies), whom I congratulate on his courage and the way in which he made his case. Although there has been an obsession about whose hand held the pen or pressed the computer buttons when the amendment was written, the fact is that it is on the amendment paper. It has certainly helped us to reflect on the initiative.

The hon. Member for Ogmore said that another place had been provocative in the way in which it had considered the Bill and in the amendments that it had tabled. I agree. Perhaps the House of Lords has taken the Mickey out of the Michael Bill, to coin a phrase. It signalled that it had misjudged the opportunity for a compromise or that it was not prepared to compromise. I hope the hon. Member for Ogmore is successful. He said that he hoped that all democrats would accept the democratic will of the House. I assume that that was a message to the other place, not just to this place, and I endorse that remark.

My preferred option is much the same as the Minister's—the Bill as it left Committee in February 2003. A great deal of helpful work was done on the Bill at that stage. I have tabled an amendment, which I do not claim to be the most wonderfully drafted amendment that ever appeared on the Order Paper, especially in relation to the Hunting Bill. The amendment links compensation and the commencement of the Bill, and I was a little disappointed that the Minister concentrated on the drafting of the amendment, rather than on the underlying principle.

The Minister said that the cost to the taxpayer of establishing a registrar is likely to be about £10 million. If Parliament ultimately agreed to a Bill that involved a total ban, I do not believe that the level of compensation would exceed that figure in the first year, so I doubt whether the cost to the taxpayer would be greater than the Minister already envisages.

We are discussing not an act of God, but an Act of Parliament. We can control the impact that it will have on those directly affected. We know from the Burns report, even though the figures in it are widely debated, that between 500 and 1,000 people would be directly affected by a total ban. I drafted the amendment in such a way as to give the Secretary of State powers that he or she may or may not choose to use to implement a compensation scheme and to allow for a delay in commencement until the closed season of 2006. It would give the Secretary of State the power to do either, both or neither. That is why I am disappointed that the Minister indicated that he would not use his gift to allow us to vote on it. I hope that he will listen to the debate on that point, that he will consider the fact that a large number of Members in this place and in another place are concerned about the potential impact, and that he will respond.

The primary question is what effect a total ban, if implemented within a three-month period, would have on jobs, livelihoods, incomes and homes. We know that the likely impact on a large number of people will in some cases be catastrophic, and in some cases be significant.

Mr. Drew: In the long and tortuous debate that we have had, that is a particularly important issue. As someone who is in favour of a ban, I believe that we must be responsible and consider the implications of a ban. On the hon. Gentleman's last point about housing, I asked a series of parliamentary questions to see whether it would be possible to get people who are employed by the hunt and in tied housing included in agricultural tenancies. At present that is not possible, and it ought to be looked at seriously. Would the hon. Gentleman care to comment on that?

Andrew George: I am grateful to the hon. Gentleman for that important intervention. It is important that the Government and those who support a ban understand that a ban will have a direct effect, not on toffs, but on ordinary working people, who depend on hunting for their income, their livelihood and their home.

Mr. David Heath (Somerton and Frome) (LD): My hon. Friend's point is incredibly important, whether one is for or against a ban. Some of my constituents are distressed at the thought of losing their livelihoods. I am not talking about people who sit on horses and engage in hunting as a sport; I am talking about people on low incomes in tied accommodation who will lose their jobs and their homes if the ban is implemented. The loss of property is not a narrow issue of human rights legislation; it is a matter of justice for those people, for whom this House should act in a proper way.

Andrew George: I am grateful to my hon. Friend for that intervention. The hon. Member for Stroud (Mr. Drew) intervened on the Minister on a point of principle and drew out the comparison between this Bill and the Fur Farming (Prohibition) Act 2000. Interestingly, the Minister repeated the point, which he made in a debate last year, that those two pieces of legislation are different, because the 2000 Act affected people's property. However, the people affected by the 2000 Act had property, whereas the people about whom we are concerned largely do not have property. The issue concerns those people's livelihoods. It is strange that the Government are prepared to compensate people with property, who are well healed in comparison with people on low rural incomes who have few prospects.

Mr. Kevin McNamara (Hull, North) (Lab): I have fought against tied cottages throughout my time in this House, and I share and appreciate the concern expressed by my hon. Friend the Member for Stroud (Mr. Drew). Is the hon. Member for St. Ives (Andrew George) saying that the followers of hunting will throw their employees

[Mr. Kevin McNamara]

out of tied cottages if the Bill is enacted? Will the hon. Gentlemen who follow the hounds do that to their loyal employees, about whom they have spoken so much, so tearfully and so directly, and whom they pay so lousily?

Andrew George: May I correct the hon. Gentleman in one respect? I have followed the hunt on many occasions in the past, and I voted for the Minister's compromise licensing approach. I cannot speak for hunts—I am sure that the many hunts that are disappointed with my position would not want me to speak on their behalf—and it is not for me to double guess or anticipate the likely outcome of the circumstances in which many people will find themselves.

Mr. Russell Brown (Dumfries) (Lab): The hon. Gentleman and other hon. Members assume that people will be thrown from their properties. If that is the case, what will the property owners do with their properties? Surely, it would be as well for them to sit on the properties and let people pay rent.

Andrew George: The case would have to be made, and appeals can be made if such cases are turned down. If the matter were in dispute, it would ultimately be considered at the tribunal.

Lembit Öpik: Does my hon. Friend agree that the lack of comprehension on the part of Labour Members concerning the loss of income and the natural requirement for people who own tied cottages to ensure that they maintain an income means that there is a case for compensation? Does he agree that if Members who set their faces so sternly against compensation were considering another industry, such as coalmining, they would hold a different view?

Andrew George: My hon. Friend is right. There are many imponderables and many cases could be made for compensation.

8.45 pm

Mr. Clifton-Brown: The accusation by the hon. Member for Hull, North (Mr. McNamara) shows that, as usual, Labour Members are ignorant of the facts of hunting. Often the dwellings that house hunt employees are not owned by wealthy landowners but by the hunt itself, which if it is not hunting will have no income and will have no option but to sell its assets.

Will the hon. Member for St. Ives (Andrew George) support my call to the Minister during the previous debate in the House for a compensation scheme for workers who lose their jobs?

Andrew George: On the hon. Gentleman's last point, the purpose of my amendment is to achieve just that. It is wide ranging in its proposals; as the Minister suggested, it may be too wide ranging.

Rob Marris: As the hon. Gentleman knows, because I discussed it with him in Standing Committee, many Labour Members have some sympathy with the position that he is putting forward and like to think that we have some understanding of what may befall people should a ban pass through the Houses of Parliament this week. Does he accept, however, that were his amendment to be passed, the Parliament Acts could not be used and those of us who wish for a ban would thereby be disappointed? Does he therefore agree that a better solution would be to try to get his amendment put forward in another arena, such as in the other place or in a Finance Bill or an animal welfare Bill, not in the House of Commons tonight?

Andrew George: I assure the hon. Gentleman that I do not have it in my gift to divide the House on this issue—that is in the power of the Minister.

I do not accuse those who take a different position on hunting from that which is expressed largely by Conservative Members of being unsympathetic to those people who are likely to be directly affected. Although the Minister will not use his power to allow us to divide on the amendment, it can be considered as a probing amendment. I hope that the other place is listening and will consider the possibility of reintroducing it at a later stage.

Mr. Tony Banks (West Ham) (Lab): May I echo the sentiments expressed by my hon. Friend the Member for Wolverhampton, South-West (Rob Marris)? I supported the principle of compensation when we discussed the Bill previously, but the moment has passed. My hon. Friend put his finger precisely on the point: we cannot accept the hon. Gentleman's amendment. If the House of Lords discussed compensation, it escaped me. The hon. Gentleman will undoubtedly have other opportunities to raise the issue again, perhaps as a result of the Bill that the Government may introduce in the new Session to move the date to July 2006.

Andrew George: I do not agree that the moment has passed. In fact, the moment has arrived if we are in a situation whereby there is to be a precipitate ban within three months and no compensation scheme is in place. I would hope that the other place will consider the issue and, having taken up a position that is implacably opposed to that of the Commons, introduce, as part of a compromise, a clause to allow for appropriate compensation. Or perhaps the hon. Gentleman is right and the Minister will be honourable and introduce new legislation to deal with that in the next Session. I am well aware that many other hon. Members want to comment on this and many other issues relating to the Bill and the amendment proposed by the hon. Member for Ogmore. I hope that the Minister is listening and that he will speak to those involved in the debate in the other place, so that the issue will not be left as it is tonight.

Sir Gerald Kaufman: I respect the sincerity of the hon. Member for St. Ives (Andrew George), but the basis of his argument gives rise to two questions. First, during the entire discussion of the ban on hunting, opponents of the ban have sought to jerk our tears by talking about the jobs that will be lost. The Countryside Alliance and similar groups all say that these jobs are at stake and will be lost if there is a ban. Are we saying that the people who are now exploiting the possibility of job losses are such ghastly employers that they would throw their employees out of work and home? That is the basis of the argument about tied cottages, as my hon. Friend the Member for Hull, North (Mr. McNamara) said.

Several hon. Members *rose*—

Sir Gerald Kaufman: I want to proceed for a moment. If I may say so, with total respect to the Chair, two thirds of the time has gone by and these few words that I am about to utter are the first from someone who supports the Bill as sent from the House of Commons to the House of Lords.

Secondly, not only is it the implication of what the hon. Member for St. Ives said that hunt employers are horrible people with no sense of loyalty to the people they employ, but he is asking to make them a special case. The estimate of Burns, much quoted by the hon. Member for North Wiltshire (Mr. Gray), is that up to 800 direct jobs will be lost—700 direct jobs employing 800 people. Well, 1,100 workers at Jaguar in Coventry will, if the employers have their way, certainly lose their jobs and not over a short period, but at a stroke. Why should hunt employees receive compensation other than redundancy payments if the Jaguar workers will receive only the redundancy payments due to them under the law?

Andrew George: The right hon. Gentleman's first point presupposes that those who are campaigning to continue hunting have control over the livelihoods of the people who are likely to be affected. On the second point, he fails to accept the point that I made—I thought very clearly—that we are talking this evening about an Act of Parliament, not the vagaries of commerce.

Sir Gerald Kaufman: So that is all right, then. The Jaguar workers can say that their jobs do not matter, because it is not an Act of Parliament throwing them out of work, just selfish, nasty capitalist employers. All right then, good for the Jaguar workers.

As I was saying, we are dealing with an issue that has been active ever since my hon. Friend the Member for Worcester (Mr. Foster) moved his Bill early in the last Parliament. It is now, of course, as it was then, an issue about the ethos of hunting and the cruelty of tearing wild creatures to pieces for pleasure. That is the essence of what we have been campaigning about. Although that is the heart of the Bill, there are now other issues, as the debate has moved on.

First, there is the supremacy of the rule of law. We now have people saying that they will disobey the law if the Bill sent to the House of Lords becomes an Act. Not only that, we have seen people behaving in the most loutish and illegal way right now. I am not talking only about the deplorable invasion of this Chamber. I am talking about the injuries inflicted on police officers in Parliament square when we debated the Bill two months ago. Louts and hooligans inflicted serious physical injury on a very considerable number of officers, according to information published by the Metropolitan Police Commissioner. If that is what they can do when a Bill is merely going through Parliament, what on earth will they do if the Bill becomes law in the form in which we sent it to the House of Lords? Whether or not it supports the legislation, the House of Commons therefore faces a very serious question about respect for the rule of law.

Towards the end of his speech, my right hon. Friend the Minister referred to another matter—the supremacy of the will of the House of Commons. When my right hon. Friend the Prime Minister asked me to serve on the royal commission on the reform of the House of Lords, he gave me terms of reference to the effect that any such reform should be based on the principle that the House of Commons is supreme in a bicameral legislative arrangement. However, the other place has rejected the will of the House of Commons as it has been expressed on this matter over the years, and twice in connection with this Bill.

We must be clear that the Parliament Acts are not about the supremacy of Government policy. When the Liberal Government introduced the original Act more than 90 years ago, they laid down that the important point was the supremacy of the House of Commons. When I served on the royal commission on the House of Lords, we discussed whether Bills originating in that House should be subject to the Parliament Acts. Our answer was that they should not, as the Parliament Acts were not about ensuring that the Government's will prevailed. They were about ensuring that the will of the House of Commons prevailed.

I shall set out the consequences that flow from that. If this House of Commons rejects both the Lords amendments and the amendment tabled by my hon. Friend the Member for Ogmore (Huw Irranca-Davies), the position will be that the Bill that was sent to the House of Lords two months ago will again be the one that that House must reconsider. We are dealing with more than hunting or the rule of law. We are dealing with one of the basic principles of our evolving form of government in this country. For that reason, if for no other—although, as I said, there are other reasons—it is essential that the will of the House of Commons prevail.

Another factor has emerged as the Bill has gone through the House, starting from the moment my right hon. Friend the Minister introduced the Second Reading debate. That is the issue of trust. In my view, that is something that we must resolve, and insist on.

Like many of my hon. Friends who have been active on this issue, I receive a very heavy postbag of letters on this matter. A very large number of people in the countryside support a ban on hunting, as well as people from urban areas. What people say—and they have done so even in the letters that I received this morning—is that the Prime Minister promised a ban seven and a half years ago. My correspondents say that they now look to me to bring that ban about.

I am a great fan of my right hon. Friend the Prime Minister, as everyone in this Chamber knows. When I reply to my correspondents—and I reply to them all—I say that the Prime Minister never promised a ban, although he has gone on record as saying that he favours a total ban. I tell people that what he promised was to give Parliament the chance to legislate for a ban. That is what we are about now.

9 pm

My right hon. Friend the Prime Minister authorised statements from 10 Downing street earlier this week saying that he was in favour of a compromise. It is very difficult to understand what compromise he is actually

[Sir Gerald Kaufman]

supporting. The Bill, if amended in the way that my hon. Friend the Member for Ogmore suggests, would be far from a compromise. As my right hon. Friend the Minister for Rural Affairs has pointed out with very great clarity, it is in essence the Bill that he introduced in the last Session, which we threw out and have thrown out twice.

The Bill is not, therefore, a compromise: a compromise involves the Government moving from their original position. Yet my right hon. Friend the Prime Minister is asking the House of Commons to maintain the Government's position. I am totally at a loss to understand how my right hon. Friend can vote for the amendment offered by my hon. Friend the Member for Ogmore on the basis that he wants a compromise. To anyone who has read my hon. Friend's amendment, it is clear that it is not a compromise, and my right hon. Friend the Minister for Rural Affairs, speaking a little while ago, talking about the Bill that he originally introduced, to which we would revert if my hon. Friend the Member for Ogmore had his amendment accepted, said—I took down his words—"My Bill was not a compromise Bill."

Of course, it was not a compromise Bill. It was an effort by the Government, which many of us deplored, to evade a total ban. I am not questioning the faith of my right hon. Friend the Minister: we know of the care he took and the hearings he held. When it came right down to it, however, the Government introduced that Bill not as a compromise but as a settled policy that they asked the House of Commons to endorse. There was a bit of finagling to try to manoeuvre the House of Commons into accepting it, but when it came to it, we threw it out. The Prime Minister may regard it as a compromise, but it is not one. It is the Government's original Bill, which we have thrown out twice.

Alun Michael: As always, I admire my right hon. Friend's clarity of expression, and I certainly do not want to cross philosophical swords with him. What I meant was that, in introducing the Bill as I originally did, there was no compromise in terms of cruelty. It sought to base the legislation on principle and on evidence. Of course, many people, myself included, have suggested that it would be a good thing if we were able to move away from the extremes of view that the Bill has provoked. There are, in other words, two senses of the word compromise, as I am sure my right hon. Friend would accept.

Sir Gerald Kaufman: I do not challenge a word that my right hon. Friend said. But we are not dealing with what he said; we are dealing with the authorised statements from 10 Downing street earlier this week, and they said that the Prime Minister wants a compromise. As I understand it, and it will be interesting to see what happens when the Division bell rings, the Prime Minister is going to vote for the amendment tabled by my hon. Friend the Member for Ogmore. This is, is it not, a syllogism? My right hon. Friend the Prime Minister wants a compromise; my right hon. Friend the Prime Minister is going to vote for the amendment put forward by my hon. Friend the Member for Ogmore; therefore, in the eyes of the Prime Minister, the amendment is a compromise; but my right hon. Friend the Minister for Rural Affairs says that it definitely is not a compromise. I very much hope that my right hon. Friend the Minister will account to himself for the way in which he has traduced the logic that the Prime Minister has put forward—something that I would never dare to do myself.

David Taylor: My right hon. Friend's contributions are always well considered and carry great weight in the House and the country. Will he at some stage consider the amendment tabled by the hon. Member for St. Ives (Andrew George)? Many of us are quite attracted by his idea. Can my right hon. Friend say whether intellectually, morally, legally and politically it differs very much from the Fur Farming (Prohibition) Act 2000, which provided for compensation of the sort suggested in the amendment?

Sir Gerald Kaufman: No, it does not differ, in any of the adverbs that my hon. Friend has just uttered. On the other hand, as my hon. Friend—I am sorry I have forgotten his constituency—[HON. MEMBERS: "Wolverhampton, South-West."] Wherever he represents it is brilliant. As my hon. Friend the Member for Wolverhampton, South-West (Rob Marris) pointed out, if that amendment were accepted, it would tarnish the Bill and we could not get it through under the Parliament Acts. Therefore, the hon. Member for St. Ives (Andrew George), as suggested by my hon. Friend the Member for West Ham (Mr. Banks), must find other choices even though it may well be the case that a number of us sympathise with him.

Lembit Öpik: The right hon. Gentleman and I obviously differ about the Bill, but does he agree that what the Prime Minister probably believes is that in some circumstances it is acceptable to kill a fox with dogs? That is the only way to interpret what the Prime Minister has said.

Sir Gerald Kaufman: I may be wrong, but I have a feeling that my right hon. Friend the Prime Minister would not choose the hon. Gentleman as his first interpreter and analyst. If the hon. Gentleman wishes to join the Labour party and try to get a job, it may be that my right hon. Friend will look favourably on him. The hon. Gentleman would be a good swap for the hon. Member for Shrewsbury and Atcham (Mr. Marsden).

What is the rationale for compromise? On 18 March last year, my right hon. Friend the Prime Minister asked the House of Commons to vote for war against Iraq. He was ready courageously—whether controversially is a different matter—to stand up with armed force against an evil dictator. If he did not ask us to compromise with Saddam Hussein, is he really asking us to compromise with the Countryside Alliance? Is that the Prime Minister's wish? We know that he believes in a big tent, but that one would have to be enormous. P. T. Barnum himself could not construct one big enough.

The animal welfare organisations took an opinion poll that showed that more than 90 per cent. of those who took part in the Countryside Alliance march vote Conservative. The hon. Member for North Wiltshire (Mr. Gray) said earlier that, if people believe in hunting, they will vote Conservative. It is one thing for the Prime

Minister and the Government to want a great national consensus on all kinds of issues, but a great national consensus in which they appease law-breaking Tories while rejecting the view of the parliamentary Labour party does not seem to me to be what we fought the last general election on.

I have always been in my right hon. Friend's big tent. Indeed, I have been at the centre of it, warming myself on the glow from the furnace in the middle of it. I hope that he is ready to listen both to his right hon. and hon. Friends who have voted overwhelmingly for a ban, and to some brave Opposition Members, rather than to the louts and hooligans who are the spearhead of the Countryside Alliance.

Tony Wright *rose—*

Sir Gerald Kaufman: I shall give way to my hon. Friend, but then I shall conclude as I want to give others the chance to speak.

Tony Wright: I certainly do not want to interpret the Prime Minister, but perhaps he is trying, in his own inimitable way, to rescue us from the irreconcilables on both sides and to find some genuinely common ground. In doing that, I suspect that he reflects the views of the majority of people.

Sir Gerald Kaufman: If so, it is not the famous Oscar Wilde quotation about the unspeakable in pursuit of the uneatable, but the ineffable in pursuit of the unachievable.

My right hon. Friend the Prime Minister, in his speech on the Queen's Speech last November, promised us that he wanted to resolve the issue in this Parliament. I say to the House and to my right hon. Friend that the only way to resolve it is to enact the Bill passed by the House of Commons in September. I have some hopes of being re-elected at the next general election, so I can tell the House that, if the issue is not resolved in that way, and only in that way, we shall carry on fighting and it will not be resolved. Tonight is the night; this is our chance. Let us chuck out everything on the Order Paper and vote for the Bill as we decided we wanted it two months ago, and by the end of the week we will have a Hunting Act that enacts a total ban.

Mr. Francis Maude (Horsham) (Con): It is usually a great pleasure to follow the right hon. Member for Manchester, Gorton (Sir Gerald Kaufman), but he has spoken for 21 minutes without at any stage addressing the merits of the case, which is disappointing. I normally have great respect for him.

I remain opposed to a ban on hunting. I have not spoken on the issue in the House before but was moved to do so after listening to the speech made by the hon. Member for Ogmore (Huw Irranca-Davies), who spoke movingly and persuasively. He said one thing that saddened me, however. At the end of his speech, he felt it necessary to thank the House for its tolerance of his dissent from the view of his colleagues in the parliamentary Labour party. He was closer to them than me, but I could feel waves of visceral hostility emanating from them. That seemed to be a microcosm of the degeneration of the debate on this issue over the years. The debate does not revolve around the rational assessment of evidence, but flows from blind and destructive dogma.

There are arguments from different sides about cruelty and liberty, but the argument is about both. The cruelty issue is central and we cannot do much better than turn to what Lord Burns said. After all, he and his colleagues on the committee spent a great deal of time looking at the issues and assessing the evidence. He said recently in another place that the evidence was inconclusive and that to use the Parliament Act to force through a ban in the face of evidence that was, at least, inconclusive was unacceptable. The case on cruelty has not been made.

I have only a short point to make on the issue of liberty. In a free country, there should be a huge gap between disapproval of an activity and wanting to ban it. A ban is the mark of an authoritarian society, not one based on freedom, tolerance and respect. If the House opts for a complete ban on hunting, and forces it through against the wishes of a majority of Members of Parliament—because that would be the case—we will have inflicted damage on the standing of Parliament and, let us face it, Parliament does not stand high in the respect of the nation. We should not do it.

9.15 pm

Mr. Banks: May I say to the right hon. Member for Horsham (Mr. Maude) that, given that there is clearly not going to be reconciliation and compromise, as my right hon. Friend the Member for Manchester, Gorton (Sir Gerald Kaufman) said, if it comes down to it, surely the views of the elected Chamber must prevail. We are the people who will have to go out into our constituencies and defend our voting record. Many Labour Members represent rural constituencies where there are hunts, and they will have to justify what they have done, defend their position and look for votes, and I suspect that they will get them.

A pro-hunting Labour peer told me, "Under no circumstances must you allow us to win on this, because if you do we will ride roughshod over your legislation at any time." *[Interruption.]* I am just saying what he said. In the end, it is a matter of the will of the elected House against the will of the unelected House, and I should have thought that anyone in this House would agree on that. I would have said precisely the same had I been on the other side of the argument, because in the end I am a House of Commons man, and as an elected Member I believe that the will of this House should prevail. We have to defend our actions in the constituencies; the Lords do not.

My hon. Friend the Member for Ogmore (Huw Irranca-Davies) might remember when I spoke in his area and supported him, and I have no reason to doubt my judgment in supporting him in the House. Tonight, he put forward a view that has received minority support, but we defend his right to do so. What we found objectionable was the way that he then characterised our position. That was the point where he began to lose us. By all means stand up and defend the position, but do not cast aspersions on the position of those who do not agree.

[Mr. Banks]

I am finding myself in a minority of one in the Gambling Committee—

David Winnick: Good job—you are in a minority of one.

Mr. Banks: Maybe so. We already have another disagreement going on here, but I do not seek to discredit or misrepresent the views of those who do not agree with me.

My hon. Friend the Member for Ogmore more or less suggested that this was a class issue. We have heard this time and again. I wrote down "red-coated hunters". I do not really care what they are dressed in—I have not the foggiest idea what they wear. I have made this point time and again; I do not even like the word "toffs". The fact is that if all of those who hunted were members of the Transport and General Workers Union, voted Labour and supported Chelsea, I would still vote against them because in the end, for me, it is a matter of morality. Killing animals for pleasure is wrong. It is immoral and must be stopped.

I know many people who hunt and whom I consider to be friends of mine. Some are Opposition Members, including a number of prominent Conservatives, but I still feel that they need help. I regard myself as a sort of friendly psychiatrist in this, and I think the first way that we help those who are doing something wrong is to stop them doing it and then we can put them into some sort of counselling. [HON. MEMBERS: "Rehab."] Rehab is a much better word. I do believe that we have to reassert our position tonight.

The last point I would like to make is that we cannot vote for a licensing system. We did not do so for the simple reason that a licensing system would still allow hunting to go on. Then, in the event of a Conservative Government being elected—one day, deplorable though that might sound to Labour Members, a Conservative Government will be elected—all they will need to do is touch the old fine tuning and we will get back hunting in its totality as it is today. Therefore we cannot vote for a licensing system, I say to my hon. Friend the Member for Ogmore and to my right hon. Friend the Minister, and to my right hon. Friend the Prime Minister, who I understand will make a rare appearance here tonight to vote—I would not do it if I were him, but of course I am not likely to be him and I certainly hope that he will not do it. I hope that he will remember that this is a free vote, and that he will not look curiously at those who do not support him in the Lobby tonight. I suspect that he will be in a minority on the Labour side, and he will be with colleagues from the Opposition. That is his choice, however, because it is a free vote.

We cannot support a licensing system, because it will eventually end with hunting being fully restored. Those who want to restore hunting have a simple choice now. If we go to July 2006, a general election will intervene. If you want to have hunting back, Mr. Deputy Speaker, vote Conservative at the next election. I suspect that that will be another reason why the Conservatives will not be elected.

Mr. Garnier: What we have learned from the hon. Member for West Ham (Mr. Banks) and the right hon. Member for Manchester, Gorton (Sir Gerald Kaufman) is that the argument tonight is not about the rural economy, the environment or the need to maintain social cohesion in the country—it is not even about animal welfare. It is about the exercise of naked political power and the dispute about how that power should be exercised. That is the argument taking place in the ranks of the Labour party.

The fact that the Minister has not advanced the amendment proposed by the hon. Member for Ogmore (Huw Irranca-Davies) himself as a Government amendment speaks volumes about the relationship between his Department and No. 10. It is interesting that it requires a Back Bencher of recent election, the hon. Member for Ogmore, to advance a so-called compromise—some people do not think that it is a compromise—and a case on behalf of the Prime Minister when one would have thought that a fellow Minister would be willing to do so.

It is interesting that the right hon. Member for Manchester, Gorton found time to amuse us with one of his classic little vitriolic speeches. They are wonderful to listen to; they do not tell us very much, other than that he likes to put on a display from time to time. Fair enough. May he enjoy his searchlight fame in the circus and the big tent that he so proudly claims to inhabit. However, it is important that the House realises, before we ban hunting tonight, if that is what the House decides to do, that it has nothing whatever to do with the merits of the issue that we ought to be discussing.

The discussion that we are having tonight has nothing whatever to do with any of the arguments that I have engaged in since 1992, when I was first elected. It has nothing whatever to do with the arguments that were deployed for and against a ban in all the debates in Committee on all the hunting Bills that we have had to deal with.

I have argued with the Minister both in his position on the Front Bench during the debates on the most recent Bill and when he was a Back Bencher in the uncomfortable hiatus that he had between being the Secretary of State for Wales and working his passage back into government, but it is down to the hon. Member for Ogmore to save the Prime Minister and allow him a way out, thus allowing him to demonstrate who is in charge.

I accept that not all my constituents—the people whom I represent—support hunting, but most of them do not want a ban on hunting. It is regrettable, however, that we are left in this rather dirty, filthy little arrangement that is being sorted out for the benefit of the parliamentary Labour party. It is a pity that this is where we have come to: an arrangement that allows the Labour party to feel comfortable with itself, allowing it to sit with itself and to enjoy its own company for a few short moments, whereas real people outside are trying to earn an honest living and live a lawful life without being interfered with or bossed about by those who do not want to know and who do not want to understand because they think that they know. It seems utterly regrettable that the House of Commons should allow itself to be addressed in that way by that sort of argument.

I am afraid that we are only talking about the exercise of power. We are only talking about the arrogance of power, and in the light of that there is very little more that we can say on behalf of those who wish to continue to hunt and to carry out the activities and the sport that they have enjoyed for many years.

I agree with my hon. Friend the Member for North Wiltshire (Mr. Gray): we are being presented with the least-worst option, and I hope that we can get it through the House. I shall do so with a heavy heart, but I will support the hon. Member for Ogmore. I am only sorry that the Minister did not feel able to introduce that amendment himself. This will be a black day for a great many people, and I do not think that any Member should feel proud of how we have reached this position.

Mr. McNamara: For the majority of people in this country, and for those of us who have campaigned over the years to see the end of hunting with dogs, this will be a great day. This issue goes across party, across class and across areas of the country—urban and rural. All the time that I have campaigned on the issue, I have been surprised by the overwhelming support that I have had from rural areas, including from farmers' wives who have said, "My husband daren't open his mouth, but he doesn't like the hunt going across the land. He knows that he can't do anything about it, because he is a tenant farmer." This is a great day.

The right hon. Member for Horsham (Mr. Maude) said that we had not discussed the merits of a licensing system, of unlicensed hunting and of abandoning hunting altogether. That is what this debate and the votes will be all about. They are important matters. As my right hon. Friend the Member for Manchester, Gorton (Sir Gerald Kaufman) said—I am glad that he saw Her Majesty before tonight, because I am not sure whether he will see her after tonight—the issue goes to the root of what we are all about.

We are told that a majority of Members in Parliament voted against the Bill, but a majority of the elected Members have overwhelmingly and repeatedly voted for it. I have often tabled amendments and not had them carried, so I know that I have to accept the will of the elected majority. That is what it is all about. My hon. Friend the Member for Ogmore (Huw Irranca-Davies) and my right hon. Friend the Minister know that that is the case.

I am sorry that my hon. Friend the Member for Ogmore felt it necessary to table the amendments, because we have gone through them twice. I understand that he might have had some help in drafting them. In nearly 40 years in the House, I have never had any help from the Government in drafting amendments. None the less, we are all entitled to get help where we can.

My hon. Friend echoed a point that had been made before. He spoke about the teachers, the doctors and the constables in his constituency who mount horses and follow the hunt in their serried ranks. Quite apart from what that might mean about empty surgeries, burglars on the streets and classrooms without teachers, he says that we are making criminals of those involved. *[Interruption.]*

Mr. Hugo Swire (East Devon) (Con): Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

Mr. McNamara: No, I have been in the Chamber a long time, unlike the hon. Gentleman and some of the other Conservative Members who have been interjecting.

Apart from the spuriousness of the points that my hon. Friend made in giving the impression that all teachers, policemen and doctors are in favour of blood sports, there is a more important issue. Nobody will be made a criminal by the Bill if it becomes an Act. In exactly the same way as the ownership of property, whereby nobody makes themselves a criminal unless they steal or break the law, nobody becomes a criminal unless they break the law passed by this House. It is for people to decide whether they want to obey the law. That point is of utmost importance. As my right hon. Friend the Member for Manchester, Gorton said, this issue is about two things: the supremacy of the elected House and the upholding of the rule of law.

We have been told that the issue is all about the Labour party, but I am sure that if it is about the passage of the Parliament Act, it is all about the Liberal party. Many people might think that it is about fair legislation, taxation and home rule for Ireland. That is a different matter, but the Tories have always advocated strange arguments.

If the Bill brings peace and harmony to the majority of my colleagues and comrades in the Labour party, that is a great collateral benefit. All Labour Members would support that. What is more important than the peace and harmony of the Labour party, important though I think that is, is the will of the elected representatives of this country and the rule of law. That is what we are voting for tonight.

9.30 pm

Mr. Cameron: I want to take issue with something that the right hon. Member for Manchester, Gorton (Sir Gerald Kaufman) said. He said that what we can call the Ogmore amendment is not a compromise, but it is a compromise between those who want to ban hunting completely and those who, like me, want to defend it. The compromise option is far more similar to banning hunting than defending it.

A lot has been said about the House of Lords—House of Lords bashing is an easy blood sport. If this House sends a Bill providing for regulated hunting to the House of Lords at this stage of a Session, the Lords can either engage with the Bill and work with the House of Commons on it, or reject the Bill, in which case a total ban will go through. Endlessly bashing the Lords makes for a sterile debate.

We heard a great speech from the hon. Member for Ogmore (Huw Irranca-Davies), who spoke bravely. The question for the House of Commons tonight is whether we can compromise. Let me make it absolutely clear that I support the freedom to hunt and I oppose the regulation scheme. The scheme would lead to massive unnecessary state interference and would ban almost all hunting. It would allow hunting in some places rather than others, often in an unfair and haphazard manner. However, I recognise the power of the convictions held by those—they are mainly Labour Members—who want to ban hunting, although I disagree with them. They have promised their constituents that they will ban hunting just as I have made promises to my constituents that I will defend it.. If we are to compromise, we must both change our positions in tonight's vote. I am willing to do that because I recognise the force of their convictions and think that we must try to compromise, but do they?

[Mr. Cameron]

Let me explain why those hon. Members should compromise tonight. My right hon. Friend the Member for Horsham (Mr. Maude) put it extremely well when he said that there was a huge difference between disapproving of something and wanting to make it a crime. The argument about cruelty has not been proved. Lord Burns, the person whom the Prime Minister and the Government asked to examine that matter, has made it clear that there is no cruelty case for an absolute ban on hunting.

The real reason why I plead with Labour Members to think about compromising is that the morality of our actions depends on their consequences—acts have consequences. The one thing that has come out of all our debates on fox hunting is that a total ban will not save the life of a single fox, because they will be shot or gassed in larger numbers than at present. The consequences of an effective total ban would be wounded foxes, dead hounds, unemployed hunt staff, empty livery stables and rural businesses hit by a decline in trade. Although I would never advise anyone to break the law, if the ban is not effective and people continue to hunt, we will face the consequences of law breaking, problems with policing and the other difficulties that the hon. Member for Cannock Chase (Tony Wright) cited in his effective intervention on the Minister.

Irrespective of whether a ban would work, there is a strong case for compromise. Labour Members should consider such a compromise because they should think about what will happen to people if the ban goes through. The hon. Member for Hull, North (Mr. McNamara) said that the Bill does not make a criminal of anyone, but it would criminalise thousands of people throughout the country who have carried out an activity that was not against the law for generations.

Even at this late hour, I ask Labour Members to think about the fact that a total ban would lead to a divided and angry countryside. We must ask why the Prime Minister has changed his mind, because he was always in favour of a ban. Although I cannot read his mind, I think that he is worried about having to lead a divided and angry country, which is what would happen under a total ban.

The hon. Member for Ogmore has given us the opportunity to compromise. The compromise is wholly unsatisfactory, but it would be better than the division and anger that a ban would cause. I hope that hon. Members will think about that even at this late stage and make one last try for compromise before embarking on a ban that would lead to an angry and bitter countryside.

Tony Wright: I speak as someone who dislikes blood sports intensely. I cannot understand why people engage in them and think that it demeans the human condition, so instinctively I am in favour of stopping them. It would also be politically convenient for me to sign up to the proposition that we should stop them.

When the argument started some years ago I set myself one test: to answer the question of whether there is something uniquely cruel about hunting with dogs that would justify banning it. If there was, I would have no hesitation in doing that and I would not be detained by the arguments that it would cause a loss of livelihood or encroach on liberties. I would have known the answer to those questions. However, as someone who instinctively wanted to be on that side, and who has sought to follow the arguments and to read the evidence, I have to say that that test has not been passed.

It is the deliberate lack of attention to the evidence that troubles me most. In addition, there is the suggestion that there is a superior moral sensibility on the part of those who want a complete ban. That cannot be right because people who have taken different views over the years have different moral sensibilities. Just down the road from Ogmore, Aneurin Bevan—a man who was neither deficient in class warriorship nor in moral sensibility—thought that a ban could not be justified.

The question is: if the test has not been passed—in a sense, the Minister acknowledged that—why should we persist in insisting on a ban rather than regulation? I can only think that it is either because we have got ourselves imprisoned in a position in which we think we have to do that or because we are implicitly saying that we have a greater sensibility on the cruelty issue than people who take a different view, and I simply reject that.

There is no question but that this House of Commons would be justified in applying the Parliament Act, in asserting its supremacy by doing what it wants to do and in eschewing any common ground by rejecting compromise. All that is possible. The question is whether it would be sensible. It would feel terribly exciting this week and people would march through the Lobby with a lighter step. However, one of the first laws of this place is that we should not do things that we know are undoable; we should not do things that we know are unenforceable; we should not do things that will not carry a substantial number of our population with us. If we do something knowing all that, with the evidential test not having been passed, I am afraid that in the long term there will be consequences that we shall all come to regret.

We can do that. I am sure that we shall do that. I have turned up here often to vote for the Bill. I am going to try to vote for it again tonight because it is sensible, but it will not be embraced. We will continue on the course that the House set some time ago. It can do it. It will do it. The question is whether it is sensible to do it.

Lembit Öpik: The Bill is not about animal welfare. The hon. Member for West Ham (Mr. Banks) said on 24 November 2003:

> "It is not a matter of great significance in . . . animal welfare, but it has become totemic."

A ban on hunting with dogs is not about public opinion. The majority of people are opposed to criminalising those who go hunting with dogs. Frankly, if we are going to ban things and the majority of people do not support us in that, the Labour party, which 58 per cent. of the electorate voted against at the last election, should be banned as well, but I support to the death its right to exist.

The debate is not about the evidence in favour of a ban. Five hundred and sixty members of the Royal College of Veterinary Surgeons have made clear their belief that a ban on hunting with dogs is contrary to the interests of animal welfare. The debate is not primarily based on evidence from those who support a ban.

I am not sure whether hon. Members recognise that the Bill advocated by the hon. Member for West Ham (Mr. Banks) will not prevent all hunting with dogs, as people think. It will not be illegal to use a terrier underground, as long as the purpose is to protect game birds, but it will be a criminal offence if the purpose is to protect farm livestock or rare birds. Under the Bill, it will be illegal for one's dog to catch a hare, but not for it to catch a rabbit; it will be illegal for one's dog to kill a mouse, but not for it to kill a rat. How on earth can any supporter of the Bill think that that is reasonable legislation?

Many of us have supported the middle way group and fought with small resources a great battle to introduce evidence into the discussion, but, to our great frustration, people are not willing to listen to that evidence even now. Is the hon. Member for West Ham even aware of the Kreeger report, which was done in the 1990s and which showed that a fox is under greater stress when it is hunting than when it is hunted? [HON. MEMBERS: "Oh!"] The hon. Members who jeer probably did not know until this minute that the Kreeger report even existed.

Are the hon. Members who want to ban hunting with dogs aware of the research that we sponsored that indicates surprisingly high wounding rates when foxes are shot compared with when they are hunted with dogs? Whether we like it or not, with dogs, it is all or nothing; with guns—*[Interruption.]*

Mr. Speaker: Order. The House must be fair and give the hon. Gentleman a hearing.

Lembit Öpik: With dogs, it is all or nothing—there is no wounding rate. With guns, foxes often die an agonisingly painful death. That fact has not even been considered by many of the right hon. and hon. Members who have just now come into the Chamber to vote, without having seen the evidence.

The middle way group has worked hard, not to achieve a victory, but to achieve a solution that is in the wider interests of the country and in the specific interest of animal welfare. Nothing has been more irritating than the almost visceral unwillingness of those who favour a ban to entertain even the slight possibility that there is evidence-based research to show that a ban on hunting with dogs will increase suffering in the countryside, not reduce it.

I have worked hard to convince the public and hon. Members that ours is the right way to go, as have my colleagues in other parties, whose efforts I salute. I stand here feeling extremely disappointed: once again, we stand on the brink of a vote based on prejudice and not on fact, on victory and not animal welfare—a vote that more than anything is based on the desire to win and pay back the Conservatives for their decisions on the miners and other things that their Government did in the 1980s. Tonight's vote is a test of whether we—

Miss Widdecombe: Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

Hon. Members: Give way!

Lembit Öpik: No, I will not give way, especially not to the right hon. Lady.

Tonight's vote will be a test of whether we are guided primarily by our emotions or by facts—whether we care more about winning battles from the past than about improving animal welfare in the countryside in future. I, for one, will with a heavy heart support the proposal made by the hon. Member for Ogmore (Huw Irranca-Davies), because it is the best that we are likely to get, but I assure the House that millions watching tonight will judge the House on its ability to make the right decisions rather than prejudiced decisions.

At the end of the day, we will see whether those who support the Royal Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals and the League Against Cruel Sports will be happy with the increase in animal suffering that results from the simple fact that Members of Parliament were not willing to listen to the arguments advanced by the middle way group and others. It is a matter of great regret that, after 700 hours of debate in two Houses, most of those who support a ban still do not have even the slightest idea of what the research has told us.

It being three hours after the commencement of proceedings, MR SPEAKER *proceeded to put the Question already proposed from the Chair, purusant to Order (this day).*

The House divided: Ayes 343, Noes 175.

Division No. 327] **[9:45 pm**

AYES

Abbott, Ms Diane
Adams, Irene *(Paisley N)*
Ainger, Nick
Ainsworth, Bob *(Cov'try NE)*
Alexander, Douglas
Allan, Richard
Allen, Graham
Amess, David
Anderson, rh Donald *(Swansea E)*
Anderson, Janet *(Rossendale & Darwen)*
Armstrong, rh Ms Hilary
Atherton, Ms Candy
Atkins, Charlotte
Bailey, Adrian
Baker, Norman
Banks, Tony
Barrett, John
Barron, rh Kevin
Battle, rh John
Beard, Nigel
Beckett, rh Margaret
Begg, Miss Anne
Bell, Sir Stuart
Berry, Roger
Blackman, Liz
Blair, rh Tony
Blizzard, Bob
Boateng, rh Paul
Borrow, David
Bradley, rh Keith *(Withington)*
Bradley, Peter *(The Wrekin)*
Brake, Tom *(Carshalton)*
Brennan, Kevin
Brooke, Mrs Annette L.
Brown, rh Nicholas *(Newcastle E Wallsend)*
Brown, Russell *(Dumfries)*
Browne, Desmond
Bryant, Chris
Buck, Ms Karen
Burgon, Colin
Burnham, Andy
Burstow, Paul
Byrne, Liam *(B'ham Hodge H)*
Cable, Dr. Vincent
Caborn, rh Richard
Cairns, David
Calton, Mrs Patsy
Campbell, Alan *(Tynemouth)*
Campbell, Mrs Anne *(C'bridge)*
Campbell, Ronnie *(Blyth V)*
Casale, Roger
Caton, Martin
Challen, Colin
Clark, Mrs Helen *(Peterborough)*
Clark, Dr. Lynda *(Edinburgh Pentlands)*
Clark, Paul *(Gillingham)*
Clarke, rh Charles *(Norwich S)*
Clarke, rh Tom *(Coatbridge & Chryston)*
Clarke, Tony *(Northampton S)*
Clelland, David
Coaker, Vernon
Coffey, Ms Ann
Colman, Tony
Cooper, Yvette
Corbyn, Jeremy
Corston, Jean
Cotter, Brian
Cox, Tom *(Tooting)*
Cranston, Ross
Crausby, David
Cruddas, Jon
Cryer, John *(Hornchurch)*
Cunningham, Jim *(Coventry S)*
Cunningham, Tony *(Workington)*
Curtis-Thomas, Mrs Claire
Davey, Edward *(Kingston)*
Davey, Valerie *(Bristol W)*
David, Wayne

Davidson, Ian
Davies, rh Denzil *(Llanelli)*
Davies, Geraint *(Croydon C)*
Dawson, Hilton
Dean, Mrs Janet
Denham, rh John
Dhanda, Parmjit
Dismore, Andrew
Dobbin, Jim *(Heywood)*
Dobson, rh Frank
Donohoe, Brian H.
Doran, Frank
Dowd, Jim *(Lewisham W)*
Drew, David *(Stroud)*
Dunwoody, Mrs Gwyneth
Eagle, Angela *(Wallasey)*
Eagle, Maria *(L'pool Garston)*
Edwards, Huw
Efford, Clive
Ellman, Mrs Louise
Ennis, Jeff *(Barnsley E)*
Etherington, Bill
Field, rh Frank *(Birkenhead)*
Fitzpatrick, Jim
Fitzsimons, Mrs Lorna
Flint, Caroline
Foster, rh Derek
Foster, Don *(Bath)*
Foster, Michael Jabez *(Hastings & Rye)*
Francis, Dr. Hywel
Gale, Roger *(N Thanet)*
Gardiner, Barry
George, Andrew *(St. Ives)*
George, rh Bruce *(Walsall S)*
Gerrard, Neil
Gidley, Sandra
Gilroy, Linda
Godsiff, Roger
Goggins, Paul
Griffiths, Jane *(Reading E)*
Griffiths, Win *(Bridgend)*
Grogan, John
Hain, rh Peter
Hall, Mike *(Weaver Vale)*
Hall, Patrick *(Bedford)*
Hamilton, David *(Midlothian)*
Hancock, Mike
Hanson, David
Harman, rh Ms Harriet
Havard, Dai *(Merthyr Tydfil & Rhymney)*
Healey, John
Henderson, Doug *(Newcastle N)*
Henderson, Ivan *(Harwich)*
Hendrick, Mark
Hepburn, Stephen
Heppell, John
Hesford, Stephen
Heyes, David
Hill, Keith *(Streatham)*
Hinchliffe, David
Hodge, Margaret
Holmes, Paul
Hood, Jimmy *(Clydesdale)*
Hope, Phil *(Corby)*
Hopkins, Kelvin
Howarth, rh Alan *(Newport E)*
Howarth, George *(Knowsley N & Sefton E)*
Hughes, Beverley *(Stretford & Urmston)*
Hughes, Kevin *(Doncaster N)*
Hughes, Simon *(Southwark N)*
Humble, Mrs Joan
Hurst, Alan *(Braintree)*
Hutton, rh John
Illsley, Eric
Ingram, rh Adam
Irranca-Davies, Huw
Jackson, Glenda *(Hampstead & Highgate)*
Jackson, Helen *(Hillsborough)*
Jamieson, David
Jenkins, Brian
Johnson, rh Alan *(Hull W)*
Johnson, Miss Melanie *(Welwyn Hatfield)*
Jones, Helen *(Warrington N)*
Jones, Jon Owen *(Cardiff C)*
Jones, Martyn *(Clwyd S)*
Jones, Nigel *(Cheltenham)*
Joyce, Eric *(Falkirk W)*
Kaufman, rh Sir Gerald
Keeble, Ms Sally
Keen, Alan *(Feltham)*
Keen, Ann *(Brentford)*
Kelly, Ruth *(Bolton W)*
Kemp, Fraser
Kennedy, Jane *(Wavertree)*
Khabra, Piara S.
Kidney, David
King, Andy *(Rugby)*
Knight, Jim *(S Dorset)*
Kumar, Dr. Ashok
Ladyman, Dr. Stephen
Laws, David *(Yeovil)*
Laxton, Bob *(Derby N)*
Lazarowicz, Mark
Lepper, David
Leslie, Christopher
Levitt, Tom *(High Peak)*
Lewis, Ivan *(Bury S)*
Lewis, Terry *(Worsley)*
Linton, Martin
Lloyd, Tony *(Manchester C)*
Love, Andrew
Lucas, Ian *(Wrexham)*
Luke, Iain *(Dundee E)*
Lyons, John *(Strathkelvin)*
McAvoy, Thomas
McCabe, Stephen
McCafferty, Chris
McCartney, rh Ian
McDonagh, Siobhain
MacDonald, Calum
McDonnell, John
McFall, rh John
McGuire, Mrs Anne
McIsaac, Shona
McKechin, Ann
McKenna, Rosemary
Mackinlay, Andrew
McNamara, Kevin
McNulty, Tony
MacShane, Denis
McWilliam, John
Mahmood, Khalid
Mallaber, Judy
Mann, John *(Bassetlaw)*
Marris, Rob *(Wolverh'ton SW)*
Marsden, Gordon *(Blackpool S)*
Marshall, David *(Glasgow Shettleston)*
Marshall-Andrews, Robert
Martlew, Eric
Meacher, rh Michael
Meale, Alan *(Mansfield)*
Merron, Gillian
Michael, rh Alun
Miliband, David
Miller, Andrew
Moffatt, Laura
Moran, Margaret
Morgan, Julie
Morley, Elliot
Mountford, Kali
Mudie, George
Mullin, Chris
Munn, Ms Meg
Murphy, Denis *(Wansbeck)*
Murphy, Jim *(Eastwood)*
Murphy, rh Paul *(Torfaen)*
Naysmith, Dr. Doug
O'Brien, Bill *(Normanton)*
O'Brien, Mike *(N Warks)*
O'Hara, Edward
Olner, Bill
O'Neill, Martin
Organ, Diana
Owen, Albert
Palmer, Dr. Nick
Pearson, Ian
Perham, Linda
Pickthall, Colin
Pike, Peter *(Burnley)*
Plaskitt, James
Pollard, Kerry
Pond, Chris *(Gravesham)*
Pope, Greg *(Hyndburn)*
Pound, Stephen
Prentice, Ms Bridget *(Lewisham E)*
Prentice, Gordon *(Pendle)*
Prescott, rh John
Prosser, Gwyn
Pugh, Dr. John
Purchase, Ken
Purnell, James
Quin, rh Joyce
Quinn, Lawrie
Rammell, Bill
Rapson, Syd *(Portsmouth N)*
Reed, Andy *(Loughborough)*
Reid, rh Dr. John *(Hamilton N & Bellshill)*
Rendel, David
Robertson, John *(Glasgow Anniesland)*
Robinson, Geoffrey *(Coventry NW)*
Roche, Mrs Barbara
Rooney, Terry
Ross, Ernie *(Dundee W)*
Roy, Frank *(Motherwell)*
Ruane, Chris
Ruddock, Joan
Russell, Bob *(Colchester)*
Ryan, Joan *(Enfield N)*
Sanders, Adrian
Sarwar, Mohammad
Savidge, Malcolm
Sawford, Phil
Sedgemore, Brian
Shaw, Jonathan
Sheridan, Jim
Shipley, Ms Debra
Short, rh Clare
Singh, Marsha
Skinner, Dennis
Smith, rh Andrew *(Oxford E)*
Smith, Angela *(Basildon)*
Smith, rh Chris *(Islington S & Finsbury)*
Smith, Geraldine *(Morecambe & Lunesdale)*
Smith, Jacqui *(Redditch)*
Smith, John *(Glamorgan)*
Smith, Llew *(Blaenau Gwent)*
Soley, Clive
Starkey, Dr. Phyllis
Steinberg, Gerry
Stewart, David *(Inverness E & Lochaber)*
Stewart, Ian *(Eccles)*
Stinchcombe, Paul
Stoate, Dr. Howard
Stringer, Graham
Stuart, Ms Gisela
Stunell, Andrew
Sutcliffe, Gerry
Tami, Mark *(Alyn)*
Taylor, rh Ann *(Dewsbury)*
Taylor, David *(NW Leics)*
Taylor, John *(Solihull)*
Taylor, Matthew *(Truro)*
Teather, Sarah
Timms, Stephen
Tipping, Paddy
Touhig, Don *(Islwyn)*
Trickett, Jon
Truswell, Paul
Turner, Dennis *(Wolverh'ton SE)*
Turner, Neil *(Wigan)*
Twigg, Derek *(Halton)*
Tynan, Bill *(Hamilton S)*
Vis, Dr. Rudi
Walley, Ms Joan
Ward, Claire
Wareing, Robert N.
Watson, Tom
Watts, David
Webb, Steve *(Northavon)*
White, Brian
Whitehead, Dr. Alan
Wicks, Malcolm
Widdecombe, rh Miss Ann
Williams, rh Alan *(Swansea W)*
Wills, Michael
Winnick, David
Winterton, Ms Rosie *(Doncaster C)*
Wood, Mike *(Batley)*
Woolas, Phil
Worthington, Tony
Wright, Anthony D. *(Gt Yarmouth)*
Wright, David *(Telford)*
Wright, Iain *(Hartlepool)*
Wright, Tony *(Cannock)*
Wyatt, Derek

Tellers for the Ayes:
Mr. Michael Foster and
Mr. Ian Cawsey

NOES

Ainsworth, Peter *(E Surrey)*
Ancram, rh Michael
Arbuthnot, rh James
Atkinson, Peter *(Hexham)*
Bacon, Richard
Baldry, Tony
Barker, Gregory
Beggs, Roy *(E Antrim)*
Beith, rh A. J.
Bellingham, Henry
Bercow, John
Beresford, Sir Paul
Blunt, Crispin
Boswell, Tim
Bottomley, Peter *(Worthing W)*

Bottomley, rh Virginia *(SW Surrey)*
Brady, Graham
Brazier, Julian
Breed, Colin
Browning, Mrs Angela
Bruce, Malcolm
Burns, Simon
Burnside, David
Burt, Alistair
Butterfill, Sir John
Cameron, David
Campbell, Gregory *(E Lond'y)*
Cash, William
Chapman, Sir Sydney *(Chipping Barnet)*
Chope, Christopher
Clarke, rh Kenneth *(Rushcliffe)*
Clifton-Brown, Geoffrey
Collins, Tim
Conway, Derek
Cormack, Sir Patrick
Curry, rh David
Davies, Quentin *(Grantham & Stamford)*
Davis, rh David *(Haltemprice & Howden)*
Djanogly, Jonathan
Dodds, Nigel
Donaldson, Jeffrey M.
Dorrell, rh Stephen
Doughty, Sue
Duncan, Alan *(Rutland)*
Duncan Smith, rh Iain
Fabricant, Michael
Fallon, Michael
Field, Mark *(Cities of London & Westminster)*
Fisher, Mark
Flook, Adrian
Forth, rh Eric
Fox, Dr. Liam
Garnier, Edward
Gibb, Nick *(Bognor Regis)*
Gillan, Mrs Cheryl
Goodman, Paul
Gray, James *(N Wilts)*
Grayling, Chris
Green, Damian *(Ashford)*
Green, Matthew *(Ludlow)*
Greenway, John
Gummer, rh John
Hague, rh William
Hammond, Philip
Harvey, Nick
Hawkins, Nick
Hayes, John *(S Holland)*
Heald, Oliver
Heath, David
Heathcoat-Amory, rh David
Hendry, Charles
Hermon, Lady
Hoban, Mark *(Fareham)*
Hoey, Kate *(Vauxhall)*
Hogg, rh Douglas
Horam, John *(Orpington)*
Howard, rh Michael
Howarth, Gerald *(Aldershot)*
Hunter, Andrew
Jack, rh Michael
Jackson, Robert *(Wantage)*
Jenkin, Bernard
Johnson, Boris *(Henley)*
Kirkbride, Miss Julie
Kirkwood, Sir Archy
Knight, rh Greg *(E Yorkshire)*

Laing, Mrs Eleanor
Lait, Mrs Jacqui
Lamb, Norman
Lansley, Andrew
Leigh, Edward
Letwin, rh Oliver
Lewis, Dr. Julian *(New Forest E)*
Liddell-Grainger, Ian
Lidington, David
Lilley, rh Peter
Llwyd, Elfyn
Loughton, Tim
Luff, Peter *(M-Worcs)*
McIntosh, Miss Anne
Mackay, rh Andrew
Maclean, rh David
McLoughlin, Patrick
Malins, Humfrey
Maples, John
Maude, rh Francis
Mawhinney, rh Sir Brian
May, Mrs Theresa
Mercer, Patrick
Mitchell, Andrew *(Sutton Coldfield)*
Mitchell, Austin *(Gt Grimsby)*
[illegible] Michael
Moss, Malcolm
Murrison, Dr. Andrew
Norman, Archie
Oaten, Mark *(Winchester)*
O'Brien, Stephen *(Eddisbury)*
Öpik, Lembit
Osborne, George *(Tatton)*
Ottaway, Richard
Paice, James
Paterson, Owen
Pickles, Eric
Price, Adam *(E Carmarthen & Dinefwr)*
Prisk, Mark *(Hertford)*
Redwood, rh John
Reid, Alan *(Argyll & Bute)*
Robathan, Andrew
Robertson, Hugh *(Faversham & M-Kent)*
Robinson, Mrs Iris *(Strangford)*
Robinson, Peter *(Belfast E)*
Rosindell, Andrew
Ruffley, David
Sayeed, Jonathan
Selous, Andrew
Sheerman, Barry
Shephard, rh Mrs Gillian
Shepherd, Richard
Simmonds, Mark
Simpson, Keith *(M-Norfolk)*
Smith, Sir Robert *(W Ab'd'ns & Kincardine)*
Smyth, Rev. Martin *(Belfast S)*
Soames, Nicholas
Spelman, Mrs Caroline
Spicer, Sir Michael
Spink, Bob *(Castle Point)*
Spring, Richard
Stanley, rh Sir John
Steen, Anthony
Streeter, Gary
Swayne, Desmond
Swire, Hugo *(E Devon)*
Syms, Robert
Tapsell, Sir Peter
Taylor, Ian *(Esher)*
Taylor, Dr. Richard *(Wyre F)*
Thomas, Simon *(Ceredigion)*
Tredinnick, David

Turner, Andrew *(Isle of Wight)*
Tyler, Paul *(N Cornwall)*
Tyrie, Andrew
Waterson, Nigel
Watkinson, Angela
Whittingdale, John
Wiggin, Bill
Wilkinson, John
Willetts, David
Williams, Hywel *(Caernarfon)*
Williams, Roger *(Brecon)*

Wilshire, David
Winterton, Ann *(Congleton)*
Winterton, Sir Nicholas *(Macclesfield)*
Yeo, Tim *(S Suffolk)*
Young, rh Sir George
Younger-Ross, Richard

Tellers for the Noes:
Mr. Dominic Grieve and
Mr. Mark Francois

Question accordingly agreed to.

Lords amendment disagreed to.

It being more than three hours after the commencment of proceedings, MR SPEAKER *out the remaining Questions required to be put at that hour.*

Mr. Speaker: I call the Minister to move a motion in relation to the remaining Lords amendments.

Alun Michael: I beg to move, That this House agrees en bloc to Lords amendments Nos. 2 to 43, 45, 46 and 52 to 54.

Mr. Speaker: Order. For clarity, is it "disagrees"?[HON. MEMBERS: "No—agrees".] Order. I wish that hon. Members would calm down. This is not the first time that I have tried to assist hon. Members on both sides of the House. I must make sure that I heard correctly. Perhaps we should do it again.

Alun Michael: I beg to move, That this House disagrees with the Lords in the said amendments.

Hon. Members: No. "Agrees".

Mr. Speaker: Order. We must be calm. Mr. Soames, we must be calm. It was a slip of the tongue. The Question is, That this House disagrees with the Lords in their amendments Nos. 2 to 43, 45, 46 and 52 to 54.

The House divided: Ayes 344, Noes 173.

Division No. 328] **[9:59 pm**

AYES

Abbott, Ms Diane
Adams, Irene *(Paisley N)*
Ainger, Nick
Ainsworth, Bob *(Cov'try NE)*
Alexander, Douglas
Allen, Richard
Allen, Graham
Amess, David
Anderson, rh Donald *(Swansea E)*
Anderson, Janet *(Rossendale & Darwen)*
Armstrong, rh Ms Hilary
Atherton, Ms Candy
Atkins, Charlotte
Bailey, Adrian
Baker, Norman
Banks, Tony
Barrett, John
Barron, rh Kevin
Battle, rh John
Beard, Nigel
Beckett, rh Margaret
Begg, Miss Anne
Bell, Sir Stuart
Berry, Roger

Blackman, Liz
Blizzard, Bob
Blunkett, rh David
Boateng, rh Paul
Borrow, David
Bradley, rh Keith *(Withington)*
Bradley, Peter *(The Wrekin)*
Brake, Tom *(Carshalton)*
Brennan, Kevin
Brooke, Mrs Annette L.
Brown, rh Nicholas *(Newcastle E Wallsend)*
Brown, Russell *(Dumfries)*
Browne, Desmond
Bryant, Chris
Buck, Ms Karen
Burgon, Colin
Burnham, Andy
Burstow, Paul
Byrne, Liam *(B'ham Hodge H)*
Cable, Dr. Vincent
Caborn, rh Richard
Cairns, David
Calton, Mrs Patsy
Campbell, Alan *(Tynemouth)*

Campbell, Mrs Anne *(C'bridge)*
Campbell, Ronnie *(Blyth V)*
Casale, Roger
Caton, Martin
Challen, Colin
Clark, Mrs Helen *(Peterborough)*
Clark, Dr. Lynda *(Edinburgh Pentlands)*
Clark, Paul *(Gillingham)*
Clarke, rh Charles *(Norwich S)*
Clarke, rh Tom *(Coatbridge & Chryston)*
Clarke, Tony *(Northampton S)*
Clelland, David
Coaker, Vernon
Coffey, Ms Ann
Colman, Tony
Cooper, Yvette
Corbyn, Jeremy
Corston, Jean
Cotter, Brian
Cox, Tom *(Tooting)*
Cranston, Ross
Crausby, David
Cruddas, Jon
Cryer, John *(Hornchurch)*
Cunningham, Jim *(Coventry S)*
Cunningham, Tony *(Workington)*
Curtis-Thomas, Mrs Claire
Davey, Edward *(Kingston)*
Davey, Valerie *(Bristol W)*
David, Wayne
Davidson, Ian
Davies, rh Denzil *(Llanelli)*
Davies, Geraint *(Croydon C)*
Dawson, Hilton
Dean, Mrs Janet
Denham, rh John
Dhanda, Parmjit
Dismore, Andrew
Dobbin, Jim *(Heywood)*
Dobson, rh Frank
Donohoe, Brian H.
Doran, Frank
Dowd, Jim *(Lewisham W)*
Drew, David *(Stroud)*
Eagle, Angela *(Wallasey)*
Eagle, Maria *(L'pool Garston)*
Edwards, Huw
Efford, Clive
Ellman, Mrs Louise
Ennis, Jeff *(Barnsley E)*
Etherington, Bill
Field, rh Frank *(Birkenhead)*
Fitzpatrick, Jim
Fitzsimons, Mrs Lorna
Flint, Caroline
Foster, rh Derek
Foster, Don *(Bath)*
Foster, Michael Jabez *(Hastings & Rye)*
Francis, Dr. Hywel
Gale, Roger *(N Thanet)*
Gardiner, Barry
George, Andrew *(St. Ives)*
George, rh Bruce *(Walsall S)*
Gerrard, Neil
Gidley, Sandra
Gilroy, Linda
Godsiff, Roger
Goggins, Paul
Griffiths, Jane *(Reading E)*
Griffiths, Win *(Bridgend)*
Grogan, John
Hain, rh Peter
Hall, Mike *(Weaver Vale)*
Hall, Patrick *(Bedford)*
Hamilton, David *(Midlothian)*
Hancock, Mike
Hanson, David
Harman, rh Ms Harriet
Havard, Dai *(Merthyr Tydfil & Rhymney)*
Healey, John
Henderson, Doug *(Newcastle N)*
Henderson, Ivan *(Harwich)*
Hendrick, Mark
Hepburn, Stephen
Heppell, John
Hesford, Stephen
Heyes, David
Hill, Keith *(Streatham)*
Hinchliffe, David
Holmes, Paul
Hood, Jimmy *(Clydesdale)*
Hope, Phil *(Corby)*
Hopkins, Kelvin
Howarth, rh Alan *(Newport E)*
Howarth, George *(Knowsley N & Sefton E)*
Hughes, Beverley *(Stretford & Urmston)*
Hughes, Kevin *(Doncaster N)*
Hughes, Simon *(Southwark N)*
Humble, Mrs Joan
Hurst, Alan *(Braintree)*
Hutton, rh John
Illsley, Eric
Ingram, rh Adam
Irranca-Davies, Huw
Jackson, Glenda *(Hampstead & Highgate)*
Jackson, Helen *(Hillsborough)*
Jamieson, David
Jenkins, Brian
Johnson, rh Alan *(Hull W)*
Johnson, Miss Melanie *(Welwyn Hatfield)*
Jones, Helen *(Warrington N)*
Jones, Jon Owen *(Cardiff C)*
Jones, Martyn *(Clwyd S)*
Jones, Nigel *(Cheltenham)*
Joyce, Eric *(Falkirk W)*
Kaufman, rh Sir Gerald
Keeble, Ms Sally
Keen, Alan *(Feltham)*
Keen, Ann *(Brentford)*
Kelly, Ruth *(Bolton W)*
Kemp, Fraser
Kennedy, rh Charles *(Ross Skye & Inverness)*
Kennedy, Jane *(Wavertree)*
Khabra, Piara S.
Kidney, David
King, Andy *(Rugby)*
Knight, Jim *(S Dorset)*
Kumar, Dr. Ashok
Ladyman, Dr. Stephen
Laws, David *(Yeovil)*
Laxton, Bob *(Derby N)*
Lazarowicz, Mark
Lepper, David
Leslie, Christopher
Levitt, Tom *(High Peak)*
Lewis, Ivan *(Bury S)*
Lewis, Terry *(Worsley)*
Linton, Martin
Lloyd, Tony *(Manchester C)*
Love, Andrew
Lucas, Ian *(Wrexham)*
Luke, Iain *(Dundee E)*
Lyons, John *(Strathkelvin)*
McAvoy, Thomas
McCabe, Stephen
McCafferty, Chris
McCartney, rh Ian
McDonagh, Siobhain
MacDonald, Calum
McDonnell, John
McFall, rh John
McGuire, Mrs Anne
McIsaac, Shona
McKechin, Ann
McKenna, Rosemary
Mackinlay, Andrew
McNamara, Kevin
McNulty, Tony
MacShane, Denis
McWilliam, John
Mahmood, Khalid
Mallaber, Judy
Mann, John *(Bassetlaw)*
Marris, Rob *(Wolverh'ton SW)*
Marsden, Gordon *(Blackpool S)*
Marshall, David *(Glasgow Shettleston)*
Marshall-Andrews, Robert
Martlew, Eric
Meacher, rh Michael
Meale, Alan *(Mansfield)*
Merron, Gillian
Michael, rh Alun
Miliband, David
Miller, Andrew
Moffatt, Laura
Moran, Margaret
Morgan, Julie
Morley, Elliot
Mountford, Kali
Mudie, George
Mullin, Chris
Munn, Ms Meg
Murphy, Denis *(Wansbeck)*
Murphy, Jim *(Eastwood)*
Murphy, rh Paul *(Torfaen)*
Naysmith, Dr. Doug
Norris, Dan *(Wansdyke)*
O'Brien, Bill *(Normanton)*
O'Brien, Mike *(N Warks)*
O'Hara, Edward
Olner, Bill
O'Neill, Martin
Organ, Diana
Owen, Albert
Palmer, Dr. Nick
Pearson, Ian
Perham, Linda
Picking, Anne
Pickthall, Colin
Pike, Peter *(Burnley)*
Plaskitt, James
Pollard, Kerry
Pond, Chris *(Gravesham)*
Pope, Greg *(Hyndburn)*
Pound, Stephen
Prentice, Ms Bridget *(Lewisham E)*
Prentice, Gordon *(Pendle)*
Prescott, rh John
Prosser, Gwyn
Pugh, Dr. John
Purchase, Ken
Purnell, James
Quin, rh Joyce
Quinn, Lawrie
Rammell, Bill
Rapson, Syd *(Portsmouth N)*
Reed, Andy *(Loughborough)*
Reid, rh Dr. John *(Hamilton N & Bellshill)*
Rendel, David
Robertson, John *(Glasgow Anniesland)*
Robinson, Geoffrey *(Coventry NW)*
Roche, Mrs Barbara
Rooney, Terry
Ross, Ernie *(Dundee W)*
Roy, Frank *(Motherwell)*
Ruane, Chris
Ruddock, Joan
Russell, Bob *(Colchester)*
Ryan, Joan *(Enfield N)*
Sanders, Adrian
Sarwar, Mohammad
Savidge, Malcolm
Sawford, Phil
Sedgemore, Brian
Shaw, Jonathan
Sheridan, Jim
Shipley, Ms Debra
Short, rh Clare
Singh, Marsha
Skinner, Dennis
Smith, rh Andrew *(Oxford E)*
Smith, Angela *(Basildon)*
Smith, rh Chris *(Islington S & Finsbury)*
Smith, Geraldine *(Morecambe & Lunesdale)*
Smith, Jacqui *(Redditch)*
Smith, John *(Glamorgan)*
Smith, Llew *(Blaenau Gwent)*
Soley, Clive
Starkey, Dr. Phyllis
Steinberg, Gerry
Stewart, David *(Inverness E & Lochaber)*
Stewart, Ian *(Eccles)*
Stinchcombe, Paul
Stoate, Dr. Howard
Stringer, Graham
Stuart, Ms Gisela
Stunell, Andrew
Sutcliffe, Gerry
Tami, Mark *(Alyn)*
Taylor, rh Ann *(Dewsbury)*
Taylor, David *(NW Leics)*
Taylor, John *(Solihull)*
Taylor, Matthew *(Truro)*
Teather, Sarah
Timms, Stephen
Tipping, Paddy
Touhig, Don *(Islwyn)*
Trickett, Jon
Truswell, Paul
Turner, Dennis *(Wolverh'ton SE)*
Turner, Neil *(Wigan)*
Twigg, Derek *(Halton)*
Tynan, Bill *(Hamilton S)*
Vis, Dr. Rudi
Walley, Ms Joan
Ward, Claire
Wareing, Robert N.
Watson, Tom
Watts, David
Webb, Steve *(Northavon)*
White, Brian
Whitehead, Dr. Alan
Wicks, Malcolm
Widdecombe, rh Miss Ann
Williams, rh Alan *(Swansea W)*
Wills, Michael
Winnick, David

Winterton, Ms Rosie *(Doncaster C)*
Wood, Mike *(Batley)*
Woolas, Phil
Worthington, Tony
Wright, Anthony D. *(Gt Yarmouth)*
Wright, David *(Telford)*
Wright, Iain *(Hartlepool)*
Wright, Tony *(Cannock)*
Wyatt, Derek

Tellers for the Ayes:
Mr. Ian Cawsey and
Mr. Michael Foster

NOES

Ancram, rh Michael
Arbuthnot, rh James
Atkinson, Peter *(Hexham)*
Bacon, Richard
Baldry, Tony
Barker, Gregory
Beggs, Roy *(E Antrim)*
Beith, rh A. J.
Bellingham, Henry
Bercow, John
Beresford, Sir Paul
Blunt, Crispin
Boswell, Tim
Bottomley, Peter *(Worthing W)*
Bottomley, rh Virginia *(SW Surrey)*
Brady, Graham
Brazier, Julian
Breed, Colin
Browning, Mrs Angela
Bruce, Malcolm
Burns, Simon
Burnside, David
Burt, Alistair
Butterfill, Sir John
Cameron, David
Campbell, Gregory *(E Lond'y)*
Cash, William
Chapman, Sir Sydney *(Chipping Barnet)*
Chope, Christopher
Clarke, rh Kenneth *(Rushcliffe)*
Clifton-Brown, Geoffrey
Collins, Tim
Conway, Derek
Cormack, Sir Patrick
Curry, rh David
Davies, Quentin *(Grantham & Stamford)*
Davis, rh David *(Haltemprice & Howden)*
Djanogly, Jonathan
Dodds, Nigel
Donaldson, Jeffrey M.
Dorrell, rh Stephen
Doughty, Sue
Duncan, Alan *(Rutland)*
Duncan Smith, rh Iain
Fallon, Michael
Field, Mark *(Cities of London & Westminster)*
Fisher, Mark
Flight, Howard
Flook, Adrian
Forth, rh Eric
Fox, Dr. Liam
Francois, Mark
Garnier, Edward
Gibb, Nick *(Bognor Regis)*
Gillan, Mrs Cheryl
Goodman, Paul
Gray, James *(N Wilts)*
Grayling, Chris
Green, Damian *(Ashford)*
Green, Matthew *(Ludlow)*
Greenway, John
Grieve, Dominic
Gummer, rh John
Hague, rh William
Hammond, Philip
Harvey, Nick
Hawkins, Nick
Hayes, John *(S Holland)*
Heald, Oliver
Heath, David
Heathcoat-Amory, rh David
Hendry, Charles
Hermon, Lady
Hoban, Mark *(Fareham)*
Hoey, Kate *(Vauxhall)*
Hogg, rh Douglas
Horam, John *(Orpington)*
Howard, rh Michael
Howarth, Gerald *(Aldershot)*
Hunter, Andrew
Jack, rh Michael
Jackson, Robert *(Wantage)*
Jenkin, Bernard
Johnson, Boris *(Henley)*
Kirkbride, Miss Julie
Kirkwood, Sir Archy
Knight, rh Greg *(E Yorkshire)*
Laing, Mrs Eleanor
Lait, Mrs Jacqui
Lamb, Norman
Lansley, Andrew
Leigh, Edward
Letwin, rh Oliver
Lewis, Dr. Julian *(New Forest E)*
Liddell-Grainger, Ian
Lidington, David
Lilley, rh Peter
Llwyd, Elfyn
Loughton, Tim
Luff, Peter *(M-Worcs)*
McIntosh, Miss Anne
Mackay, rh Andrew
Maclean, rh David
McLoughlin, Patrick
Malins, Humfrey
Maples, John
Maude, rh Francis
Mawhinney, rh Sir Brian
May, Mrs Theresa
Mercer, Patrick
Mitchell, Andrew *(Sutton Coldfield)*
Mitchell, Austin *(Gt Grimsby)*
Moore, Michael
Moss, Malcolm
Murrison, Dr. Andrew
Norman, Archie
Oaten, Mark *(Winchester)*
O'Brien, Stephen *(Eddisbury)*
Osborne, George *(Tatton)*
Ottaway, Richard
Paice, James
Paterson, Owen
Pickles, Eric
Price, Adam *(E Carmarthen & Dinefwr)*
Prisk, Mark *(Hartford)*
Redwood, rh John
Reid, Alan *(Argyll & Bute)*
Robathan, Andrew
Robertson, Hugh *(Faversham & M-Kent)*
Robinson, Mrs Iris *(Strangford)*
Robinson, Peter *(Belfast E)*
Ruffley, David
Sayeed, Jonathan
Selous, Andrew
Sheerman, Barry
Shephard, rh Mrs Gillian
Shepherd, Richard
Simmonds, Mark
Simpson, Keith *(M-Norfolk)*
Smith, Sir Robert *(W Ab'd'ns & Kincardine)*
Smyth, Rev. Martin *(Belfast S)*
Soames, Nicholas
Spelman, Mrs Caroline
Spicer, Sir Michael
Spink, Bob *(Castle Point)*
Spring, Richard
Stanley, rh Sir John
Steen, Anthony
Streeter, Gary
Swayne, Desmond
Swire, Hugo *(E Devon)*
Syms, Robert
Tapsell, Sir Peter
Taylor, Ian *(Esher)*
Taylor, Dr. Richard *(Wyre F)*
Thomas, Simon *(Ceredigion)*
Tredinnick, David
Turner, Andrew *(Isle of Wight)*
Tyler, Paul *(N Cornwall)*
Tyrie, Andrew
Watkinson, Angela
Whittingdale, John
Wiggin, Bill
Wilkinson, John
Willetts, David
Williams, Hywel *(Caernarfon)*
Williams, Roger *(Brecon)*
Wilshire, David
Winterton, Ann *(Congleton)*
Winterton, Sir Nicholas *(Macclesfield)*
Yeo, Tim *(S Suffolk)*
Young, rh Sir George
Younger-Ross, Richard

Tellers for the Noes:
Mr. Andrew Rosindell and
Lembit Öpik

Question accordingly agreed to.

Lords amendments disagreed to.

Amendments proposed: (a) and (b) in lieu of Lords Amendments Nos. 2 to 43, 45, 46 and 52 to 54—*[Alun Michael.]*

Question put, That the amendments be made:—

The House divided: Ayes 204, Noes 321.

Division No. 329] **[10:13 pm**

AYES

Ainsworth, Bob *(Cov'try NE)*
Ainsworth, Peter *(E Surrey)*
Ancram, rh Michael
Arbuthnot, rh James
Armstrong, rh Ms Hilary
Atkinson, Peter *(Hexham)*
Bacon, Richard
Baldry, Tony
Barker, Gregory
Beckett, rh Margaret
Beggs, Roy *(E Antrim)*
Beith, rh A. J.
Bellingham, Henry
Bercow, John
Beresford, Sir Paul
Blair, rh Tony
Blunkett, rh David
Blunt, Crispin
Boswell, Tim
Bottomley, Peter *(Worthing W)*
Bottomley, rh Virginia *(SW Surrey)*
Brady, Graham
Brazier, Julian
Breed, Colin
Browning, Mrs Angela
Bruce, Malcolm
Burns, Simon
Burnside, David
Burt, Alistair
Butterfill, Sir John
Cameron, David
Campbell, Gregory *(E Lond'y)*
Cash, William
Chapman, Sir Sydney *(Chipping Barnet)*
Chope, Christopher
Clark, Dr. Lynda *(Edinburgh Pentlands)*
Clarke, rh Kenneth *(Rushcliffe)*
Clifton-Brown, Geoffrey
Collins, Tim
Conway, Derek
Cook, rh Robin *(Livingston)*
Cormack, Sir Patrick
Curry, rh David
Davies, Quentin *(Grantham & Stamford)*
Davis, rh David *(Haltemprice & Howden)*
Djanogly, Jonathan
Dodds, Nigel
Donaldson, Jeffrey M.
Dorrell, rh Stephen
Doughty, Sue
Duncan, Alan *(Rutland)*
Duncan Smith, rh Iain
Dunwoody, Mrs Gwyneth
Fabricant, Michael
Fallon, Michael
Field, rh Frank *(Birkenhead)*
Field, Mark *(Cities of London & Westminster)*
Fisher, Mark
Flight, Howard
Flook, Adrian
Forth, rh Eric
Fox, Dr. Liam
Francois, Mark

Garnier, Edward
George, Andrew *(St. Ives)*
Gibb, Nick *(Bognor Regis)*
Gillan, Mrs Cheryl
Goodman, Paul
Gray, James *(N Wilts)*
Grayling, Chris
Green, Damian *(Ashford)*
Green, Matthew *(Ludlow)*
Greenway, John
Grieve, Dominic
Gummer, rh John
Hague, rh William
Hammond, Philip
Harvey, Nick
Hawkins, Nick
Hayes, John *(S Holland)*
Heald, Oliver
Heath, David
Heathcoat-Amory, rh David
Hendry, Charles
Hermon, Lady
Hoban, Mark *(Fareham)*
Hoey, Kate *(Vauxhall)*
Hogg, rh Douglas
Horam, John *(Orpington)*
Howard, rh Michael
Howarth, Gerald *(Aldershot)*
Howells, Dr. Kim
Hughes, Simon *(Southwark N)*
Hunter, Andrew
Ingram, rh Adam
Irranca-Davies, Huw
Jack, rh Michael
Jackson, Robert *(Wantage)*
Jenkin, Bernard
Johnson, Boris *(Henley)*
Kennedy, rh Charles *(Ross Skye & Inverness)*
Kirkbride, Miss Julie
Kirkwood, Sir Archy
Knight, rh Greg *(E Yorkshire)*
Laing, Mrs Eleanor
Lait, Mrs Jacqui
Lamb, Norman
Lansley, Andrew
Laws, David *(Yeovil)*
Leigh, Edward
Letwin, rh Oliver
Lewis, Dr. Julian *(New Forest E)*
Liddell-Grainger, Ian
Lidington, David
Lilley, rh Peter
Llwyd, Elfyn
Loughton, Tim
Luff, Peter *(M-Worcs)*
McAvoy, Thomas
McIntosh, Miss Anne
Mackay, rh Andrew
Maclean, rh David
McLoughlin, Patrick
Malins, Humfrey
Mann, John *(Bassetlaw)*
Maples, John
Maude, rh Francis
Mawhinney, rh Sir Brian
May, Mrs Theresa
Mercer, Patrick
Michael, rh Alun
Mitchell, Andrew *(Sutton Coldfield)*
Mitchell, Austin *(Gt Grimsby)*
Moore, Michael
Moss, Malcolm
Murrison, Dr. Andrew
Norman, Archie
Oaten, Mark *(Winchester)*
O'Brien, Stephen *(Eddisbury)*
Öpik, Lembit
Osborne, George *(Tatton)*
Ottaway, Richard
Paice, James
Paterson, Owen
Pickles, Eric
Price, Adam *(E Carmarthen & Dinefwr)*
Prisk, Mark *(Hertford)*
Redwood, rh John
Reid, Alan *(Argyll & Bute)*
Reid, rh Dr. John *(Hamilton N & Bellshill)*
Robathan, Andrew
Robertson, Hugh *(Faversham & M-Kent)*
Robinson, Mrs Iris *(Strangford)*
Robinson, Peter *(Belfast E)*
Rosindell, Andrew
Ruffley, David
Sayeed, Jonathan
Selous, Andrew
Sheerman, Barry
Shephard, rh Mrs Gillian
Shepherd, Richard
Simmonds, Mark
Simpson, Keith *(M-Norfolk)*
Smith, Sir Robert *(W Ab'd'ns & Kincardine)*
Smyth, Rev. Martin *(Belfast S)*
Soames, Nicholas
Spelman, Mrs Caroline
Spicer, Sir Michael
Spink, Bob *(Castle Point)*
Spring, Richard
Stanley, rh Sir John
Steen, Anthony
Straw, rh Jack
Streeter, Gary
Stuart, Ms Gisela
Swayne, Desmond
Swire, Hugo *(E Devon)*
Syms, Robert
Tapsell, Sir Peter
Taylor, David *(NW Leics)*
Taylor, Ian *(Esher)*
Taylor, John *(Solihull)*
Taylor, Matthew *(Truro)*
Taylor, Dr. Richard *(Wyre F)*
Thomas, Simon *(Ceredigion)*
Tredinnick, David
Turner, Andrew *(Isle of Wight)*
Tyler, Paul *(N Cornwall)*
Tyrie, Andrew
Waterson, Nigel
Watkinson, Angela
Whittingdale, John
Wiggin, Bill
Wilkinson, John
Willetts, David
Williams, Hywel *(Caernarfon)*
Williams, Roger *(Brecon)*
Wilshire, David
Winterton, Ann *(Congleton)*
Winterton, Sir Nicholas *(Macclesfield)*
Wright, Tony *(Cannock)*
Yeo, Tim *(S Suffolk)*
Young, rh Sir George
Younger-Ross, Richard

Tellers for the Ayes:
Mr. Fraser Kemp and
Mr. Tom Watson

NOES

Abbott, Ms Diane
Adams, Irene *(Paisley N)*
Ainger, Nick
Alexander, Douglas
Allan, Richard
Allen, Graham
Amess, David
Anderson, rh Donald *(Swansea E)*
Anderson, Janet *(Rossendale & Darwen)*
Atherton, Ms Candy
Atkins, Charlotte
Bailey, Adrian
Baker, Norman
Banks, Tony
Barrett, John
Barron, rh Kevin
Battle, rh John
Beard, Nigel
Begg, Miss Anne
Bell, Sir Stuart
Berry, Roger
Blackman, Liz
Blizzard, Bob
Boateng, rh Paul
Borrow, David
Bradley, rh Keith *(Withington)*
Bradley, Peter *(The Wrekin)*
Brake, Tom *(Carshalton)*
Brennan, Kevin
Brooke, Mrs Annette L.
Brown, rh Nicholas *(Newcastle E Wallsend)*
Brown, Russell *(Dumfries)*
Browne, Desmond
Bryant, Chris
Buck, Ms Karen
Burgon, Colin
Burnham, Andy
Burstow, Paul
Byrne, Liam *(B'ham Hodge H)*
Cable, Dr. Vincent
Caborn, rh Richard
Cairns, David
Calton, Mrs Patsy
Campbell, Alan *(Tynemouth)*
Campbell, Mrs Anne *(C'bridge)*
Campbell, Ronnie *(Blyth V)*
Casale, Roger
Caton, Martin
Challen, Colin
Clark, Mrs Helen *(Peterborough)*
Clark, Paul *(Gillingham)*
Clarke, rh Charles *(Norwich S)*
Clarke, rh Tom *(Coatbridge & Chryston)*
Clarke, Tony *(Northampton S)*
Clelland, David
Coaker, Vernon
Coffey, Ms Ann
Colman, Tony
Cooper, Yvette
Corbyn, Jeremy
Corston, Jean
Cotter, Brian
Cox, Tom *(Tooting)*
Cranston, Ross
Crausby, David
Cruddas, Jon
Cryer, John *(Hornchurch)*
Cunningham, Jim *(Coventry S)*
Cunningham, Tony *(Workington)*
Curtis-Thomas, Mrs Claire
Davey, Edward *(Kingston)*
Davey, Valerie *(Bristol W)*
David, Wayne
Davidson, Ian
Davies, rh Denzil *(Llanelli)*
Davies, Geraint *(Croydon C)*
Dawson, Hilton
Dean, Mrs Janet
Denham, rh John
Dhanda, Parmjit
Dismore, Andrew
Dobbin, Jim *(Heywood)*
Dobson, rh Frank
Donohoe, Brian H.
Doran, Frank
Dowd, Jim *(Lewisham W)*
Drew, David *(Stroud)*
Eagle, Angela *(Wallasey)*
Eagle, Maria *(L'pool Garston)*
Edwards, Huw
Efford, Clive
Ellman, Mrs Louise
Ennis, Jeff *(Barnsley E)*
Etherington, Bill
Fitzpatrick, Jim
Fitzsimons, Mrs Lorna
Flint, Caroline
Foster, rh Derek
Foster, Don *(Bath)*
Foster, Michael Jabez *(Hastings & Rye)*
Francis, Dr. Hywel
Gale, Roger *(N Thanet)*
Gardiner, Barry
Gerrard, Neil
Gidley, Sandra
Gilroy, Linda
Godsiff, Roger
Goggins, Paul
Griffiths, Jane *(Reading E)*
Griffiths, Win *(Bridgend)*
Grogan, John
Hain, rh Peter
Hall, Mike *(Weaver Vale)*
Hall, Patrick *(Bedford)*
Hamilton, David *(Midlothian)*
Hancock, Mike
Hanson, David
Harman, rh Ms Harriet
Havard, Dai *(Merthyr Tydfil & Rhymney)*
Healey, John
Henderson, Doug *(Newcastle N)*
Henderson, Ivan *(Harwich)*
Hendrick, Mark
Hepburn, Stephen
Heppell, John
Hesford, Stephen
Heyes, David
Hill, Keith *(Streatham)*
Hinchliffe, David
Holmes, Paul
Hood, Jimmy *(Clydesdale)*
Hope, Phil *(Corby)*
Hopkins, Kelvin
Howarth, rh Alan *(Newport E)*
Howarth, George *(Knowsley N & Sefton E)*
Hughes, Beverley *(Stretford & Urmston)*
Hughes, Kevin *(Doncaster N)*
Humble, Mrs Joan
Hurst, Alan *(Braintree)*
Hutton, rh John
Illsley, Eric
Jackson, Glenda *(Hampstead & Highgate)*

Jackson, Helen *(Hillsborough)*
Jamieson, David
Jenkins, Brian
Johnson, rh Alan *(Hull W)*
Johnson, Miss Melanie *(Welwyn Hatfield)*
Jones, Helen *(Warrington N)*
Jones, Jon Owen *(Cardiff C)*
Jones, Martyn *(Clwyd S)*
Jones, Nigel *(Cheltenham)*
Joyce, Eric *(Falkirk W)*
Kaufman, rh Sir Gerald
Keeble, Ms Sally
Keen, Alan *(Feltham)*
Keen, Ann *(Brentford)*
Kelly, Ruth *(Bolton W)*
Kennedy, Jane *(Wavertree)*
Khabra, Piara S.
Kidney, David
King, Andy *(Rugby)*
Knight, Jim *(S Dorset)*
Kumar, Dr. Ashok
Ladyman, Dr. Stephen
Laxton, Bob *(Derby N)*
Lazarowicz, Mark
Lepper, David
Leslie, Christopher
Levitt, Tom *(High Peak)*
Lewis, Ivan *(Bury S)*
Lewis, Terry *(Worsley)*
Linton, Martin
Lloyd, Tony *(Manchester C)*
Love, Andrew
Lucas, Ian *(Wrexham)*
Luke, Iain *(Dundee E)*
Lyons, John *(Strathkelvin)*
McCabe, Stephen
McCafferty, Chris
McCartney, rh Ian
McDonagh, Siobhain
MacDonald, Calum
McDonnell, John
McFall, rh John
McGuire, Mrs Anne
McIsaac, Shona
McKechin, Ann
McKenna, Rosemary
Mackinlay, Andrew
McNamara, Kevin
McNulty, Tony
MacShane, Denis
McWilliam, John
Mahmood, Khalid
Mallaber, Judy
Marris, Rob *(Wolverh'ton SW)*
Marsden, Gordon *(Blackpool S)*
Marshall, David *(Glasgow Shettleston)*
Marshall-Andrews, Robert
Martlew, Eric
Meacher, rh Michael
Meale, Alan *(Mansfield)*
Merron, Gillian
Miliband, David
Miller, Andrew
Moffatt, Laura
Moran, Margaret
Morgan, Julie
Morley, Elliot
Mountford, Kali
Mudie, George
Mullin, Chris
Munn, Ms Meg
Murphy, Denis *(Wansbeck)*
Murphy, Jim *(Eastwood)*
Murphy, rh Paul *(Torfaen)*
Naysmith, Dr. Doug
Norris, Dan *(Wansdyke)*
O'Brien, Bill *(Normanton)*
O'Brien, Mike *(N Warks)*
O'Hara, Edward
Olner, Bill
O'Neill, Martin
Organ, Diana
Owen, Albert
Palmer, Dr. Nick
Pearson, Ian
Perham, Linda
Picking, Anne
Pickthall, Colin
Pike, Peter *(Burnley)*
Plaskitt, James
Pollard, Kerry
Pond, Chris *(Gravesham)*
Pope, Greg *(Hyndburn)*
Pound, Stephen
Prentice, Ms Bridget *(Lewisham E)*
Prentice, Gordon *(Pendle)*
Prescott, rh John
Prosser, Gwyn
Pugh, Dr. John
Purchase, Ken
Purnell, James
Quin, rh Joyce
Quinn, Lawrie
Rammell, Bill
Rapson, Syd *(Portsmouth N)*
Reed, Andy *(Loughborough)*
Rendel, David
Robertson, John *(Glasgow Anniesland)*
Robinson, Geoffrey *(Coventry NW)*
Roche, Mrs Barbara
Rooney, Terry
Ross, Ernie *(Dundee W)*
Roy, Frank *(Motherwell)*
Ruane, Chris
Ruddock, Joan
Russell, Bob *(Colchester)*
Ryan, Joan *(Enfield N)*
Sanders, Adrian
Sarwar, Mohammad
Savidge, Malcolm
Sawford, Phil
Sedgemore, Brian
Shaw, Jonathan
Sheridan, Jim
Shipley, Ms Debra
Short, rh Clare
Singh, Marsha
Skinner, Dennis
Smith, rh Andrew *(Oxford E)*
Smith, Angela *(Basildon)*
Smith, rh Chris *(Islington S & Finsbury)*
Smith, Geraldine *(Morecambe & Lunesdale)*
Smith, Jacqui *(Redditch)*
Smith, John *(Glamorgan)*
Smith, Llew *(Blaenau Gwent)*
Soley, Clive
Starkey, Dr. Phyllis
Steinberg, Gerry
Stewart, David *(Inverness E & Lochaber)*
Stewart, Ian *(Eccles)*
Stinchcombe, Paul
Stoate, Dr. Howard
Stringer, Graham
Stunell, Andrew
Sutcliffe, Gerry
Tami, Mark *(Alyn)*
Taylor, rh Ann *(Dewsbury)*
Taylor, David *(NW Leics)*
Teather, Sarah
Timms, Stephen
Tipping, Paddy
Touhig, Don *(Islwyn)*
Trickett, Jon
Truswell, Paul
Turner, Dennis *(Wolverh'ton SE)*
Turner, Neil *(Wigan)*
Twigg, Derek *(Halton)*
Tynan, Bill *(Hamilton S)*
Vis, Dr. Rudi
Walley, Ms Joan
Ward, Claire
Wareing, Robert N.
Watts, David
Webb, Steve *(Northavon)*
White, Brian
Whitehead, Dr. Alan
Wicks, Malcolm
Widdecombe, rh Miss Ann
Williams, rh Alan *(Swansea W)*
Wills, Michael
Winnick, David
Winterton, Ms Rosie *(Doncaster C)*
Wood, Mike *(Batley)*
Woolas, Phil
Worthington, Tony
Wright, Anthony D. *(Gt Yarmouth)*
Wright, David *(Telford)*
Wright, Iain *(Hartlepool)*
Wyatt, Derek

Tellers for the Noes:
Mr. Michael Foster and
Mr. Ian Cawsey

Question accordingly negatived.

Motion made, and Question put, That this House disagrees with the Lords in their amendments No. 44 and Nos. 47 to 51—*[Alun Michael.]*

The House divided: Ayes 334, Noes 170.

Division No. 330] **[10:27 pm**

AYES

Abbott, Ms Diane
Adams, Irene *(Paisley N)*
Ainger, Nick
Ainsworth, Bob *(Cov'try NE)*
Alexander, Douglas
Allan, Richard
Allen, Graham
Amess, David
Anderson, rh Donald *(Swansea E)*
Anderson, Janet *(Rossendale & Darwen)*
Armstrong, rh Ms Hilary
Atherton, Ms Candy
Atkins, Charlotte
Bailey, Adrian
Baker, Norman
Banks, Tony
Barrett, John
Barron, rh Kevin
Battle, rh John
Beard, Nigel
Beckett, rh Margaret
Begg, Miss Anne
Bell, Sir Stuart
Berry, Roger
Blackman, Liz
Blizzard, Bob
Boateng, rh Paul
Borrow, David
Bradley, rh Keith *(Withington)*
Bradley, Peter *(The Wrekin)*
Brake, Tom *(Carshalton)*
Brennan, Kevin
Brooke, Mrs Annette L.
Brown, rh Nicholas *(Newcastle E Wallsend)*
Brown, Russell *(Dumfries)*
Browne, Desmond
Bryant, Chris
Buck, Ms Karen
Burgon, Colin
Burnham, Andy
Burstow, Paul
Byrne, Liam *(B'ham Hodge H)*
Cable, Dr. Vincent
Caborn, rh Richard
Cairns, David
Calton, Mrs Patsy
Campbell, Alan *(Tynemouth)*
Campbell, Mrs Anne *(C'bridge)*
Campbell, Ronnie *(Blyth V)*
Casale, Roger
Caton, Martin
Challen, Colin
Clark, Mrs Helen *(Peterborough)*
Clark, Dr. Lynda *(Edinburgh Pentlands)*
Clark, Paul *(Gillingham)*
Clarke, rh Charles *(Norwich S)*
Clarke, rh Tom *(Coatbridge & Chryston)*
Clarke, Tony *(Northampton S)*
Clelland, David
Coaker, Vernon
Coffey, Ms Ann
Colman, Tony
Cooper, Yvette
Corbyn, Jeremy
Corston, Jean
Cotter, Brian
Cox, Tom *(Tooting)*
Cranston, Ross
Crausby, David
Cruddas, Jon
Cryer, John *(Hornchurch)*
Cunningham, Jim *(Coventry S)*
Cunningham, Tony *(Workington)*
Curtis-Thomas, Mrs Claire
Davey, Edward *(Kingston)*
Davey, Valerie *(Bristol W)*
David, Wayne
Davidson, Ian
Davies, rh Denzil *(Llanelli)*
Davies, Geraint *(Croydon C)*
Dawson, Hilton
Dean, Mrs Janet
Denham, rh John
Dhanda, Parmjit
Dismore, Andrew
Dobbin, Jim *(Heywood)*

Dobson, rh Frank
Donohoe, Brian H.
Doran, Frank
Dowd, Jim *(Lewisham W)*
Drew, David *(Stroud)*
Eagle, Angela *(Wallasey)*
Eagle, Maria *(L'pool Garston)*
Edwards, Huw
Efford, Clive
Ellman, Mrs Louise
Ennis, Jeff *(Barnsley E)*
Etherington, Bill
Fitzpatrick, Jim
Fitzsimons, Mrs Lorna
Flint, Caroline
Foster, rh Derek
Foster, Don *(Bath)*
Foster, Michael Jabez *(Hastings & Rye)*
Francis, Dr. Hywel
Gale, Roger *(N Thanet)*
Gardiner, Barry
George, Andrew *(St. Ives)*
Gerrard, Neil
Gidley, Sandra
Gilroy, Linda
Godsiff, Roger
Goggins, Paul
Griffiths, Jane *(Reading E)*
Griffiths, Win *(Bridgend)*
Grogan, John
Hain, rh Peter
Hall, Mike *(Weaver Vale)*
Hall, Patrick *(Bedford)*
Hamilton, David *(Midlothian)*
Hancock, Mike
Hanson, David
Harman, rh Ms Harriet
Havard, Dai *(Merthyr Tydfil & Rhymney)*
Healey, John
Henderson, Doug *(Newcastle N)*
Henderson, Ivan *(Harwich)*
Hendrick, Mark
Hepburn, Stephen
Heppell, John
Hesford, Stephen
Heyes, David
Hill, Keith *(Streatham)*
Hinchliffe, David
Holmes, Paul
Hood, Jimmy *(Clydesdale)*
Hope, Phil *(Corby)*
Hopkins, Kelvin
Howarth, rh Alan *(Newport E)*
Howarth, George *(Knowsley N & Sefton E)*
Hughes, Beverley *(Stretford & Urmston)*
Hughes, Kevin *(Doncaster N)*
Humble, Mrs Joan
Hurst, Alan *(Braintree)*
Hutton, rh John
Illsley, Eric
Ingram, rh Adam
Jackson, Glenda *(Hampstead & Highgate)*
Jackson, Helen *(Hillsborough)*
Jamieson, David
Jenkins, Brian
Johnson, rh Alan *(Hull W)*
Johnson, Miss Melanie *(Welwyn Hatfield)*
Jones, Helen *(Warrington N)*
Jones, Jon Owen *(Cardiff C)*
Jones, Martyn *(Clwyd S)*
Jones, Nigel *(Cheltenham)*
Joyce, Eric *(Falkirk W)*
Kaufman, rh Sir Gerald
Keeble, Ms Sally
Keen, Alan *(Feltham)*
Keen, Ann *(Brentford)*
Kelly, Ruth *(Bolton W)*
Kemp, Fraser
Kennedy, rh Charles *(Ross Skye & Inverness)*
Kennedy, Jane *(Wavertree)*
Khabra, Piara S.
Kidney, David
King, Andy *(Rugby)*
Knight, Jim *(S Dorset)*
Kumar, Dr. Ashok
Ladyman, Dr. Stephen
Laxton, Bob *(Derby N)*
Lazarowicz, Mark
Lepper, David
Leslie, Christopher
Levitt, Tom *(High Peak)*
Lewis, Ivan *(Bury S)*
Lewis, Terry *(Worsley)*
Linton, Martin
Lloyd, Tony *(Manchester C)*
Love, Andrew
Lucas, Ian *(Wrexham)*
Luke, Iain *(Dundee E)*
Lyons, John *(Strathkelvin)*
McAvoy, Thomas
McCabe, Stephen
McCafferty, Chris
McCartney, rh Ian
McDonagh, Siobhain
MacDonald, Calum
McDonnell, John
McFall, rh John
McGuire, Mrs Anne
McIsaac, Shona
McKechin, Ann
McKenna, Rosemary
Mackinlay, Andrew
McNamara, Kevin
McNulty, Tony
MacShane, Denis
McWilliam, John
Mahmood, Khalid
Mahon, Mrs Alice
Mann, John *(Bassetlaw)*
Marris, Rob *(Wolverh'ton SW)*
Marsden, Gordon *(Blackpool S)*
Marshall, David *(Glasgow Shettleston)*
Marshall-Andrews, Robert
Martlew, Eric
Meacher, rh Michael
Meale, Alan *(Mansfield)*
Merron, Gillian
Michael, rh Alun
Miliband, David
Miller, Andrew
Moffatt, Laura
Moran, Margaret
Morgan, Julie
Morley, Elliot
Mountford, Kali
Mudie, George
Mullin, Chris
Munn, Ms Meg
Murphy, Denis *(Wansbeck)*
Murphy, Jim *(Eastwood)*
Murphy, rh Paul *(Torfaen)*
Naysmith, Dr. Doug
Norris, Dan *(Wansdyke)*
O'Brien, Bill *(Normanton)*
O'Brien, Mike *(N Warks)*
O'Hara, Edward
Olner, Bill
O'Neill, Martin
Organ, Diana
Owen, Albert
Palmer, Dr. Nick
Pearson, Ian
Perham, Linda
Picking, Anne
Pickthall, Colin
Pike, Peter *(Burnley)*
Plaskitt, James
Pollard, Kerry
Pond, Chris *(Gravesham)*
Pope, Greg *(Hyndburn)*
Pound, Stephen
Prentice, Ms Bridget *(Lewisham E)*
Prentice, Gordon *(Pendle)*
Prescott, rh John
Prosser, Gwyn
Pugh, Dr. John
Purchase, Ken
Purnell, James
Quin, rh Joyce
Quinn, Lawrie
Rammell, Bill
Rapson, Syd *(Portsmouth N)*
Reed, Andy *(Loughborough)*
Rendel, David
Robertson, John *(Glasgow Anniesland)*
Robinson, Geoffrey *(Coventry NW)*
Roche, Mrs Barbara
Rooney, Terry
Ross, Ernie *(Dundee W)*
Roy, Frank *(Motherwell)*
Ruane, Chris
Ruddock, Joan
Russell, Bob *(Colchester)*
Ryan, Joan *(Enfield N)*
Sanders, Adrian
Sarwar, Mohammad
Savidge, Malcolm
Sawford, Phil
Sedgemore, Brian
Shaw, Jonathan
Sheridan, Jim
Shipley, Ms Debra
Short, rh Clare
Singh, Marsha
Skinner, Dennis
Smith, rh Andrew *(Oxford E)*
Smith, Angela *(Basildon)*
Smith, rh Chris *(Islington S & Finsbury)*
Smith, Geraldine *(Morecambe & Lunesdale)*
Smith, Jacqui *(Redditch)*
Smith, John *(Glamorgan)*
Smith, Llew *(Blaenau Gwent)*
Soley, Clive
Starkey, Dr. Phyllis
Steinberg, Gerry
Stewart, David *(Inverness E & Lochaber)*
Stewart, Ian *(Eccles)*
Stinchcombe, Paul
Stringer, Graham
Stunell, Andrew
Sutcliffe, Gerry
Tami, Mark *(Alyn)*
Taylor, rh Ann *(Dewsbury)*
Taylor, David *(NW Leics)*
Taylor, John *(Solihull)*
Taylor, Matthew *(Truro)*
Teather, Sarah
Timms, Stephen
Tipping, Paddy
Touhig, Don *(Islwyn)*
Trickett, Jon
Truswell, Paul
Turner, Dennis *(Wolverh'ton SE)*
Turner, Neil *(Wigan)*
Twigg, Derek *(Halton)*
Tynan, Bill *(Hamilton S)*
Vis, Dr. Rudi
Walley, Ms Joan
Ward, Claire
Wareing, Robert N.
Watson, Tom
Watts, David
Webb, Steve *(Northavon)*
White, Brian
Whitehead, Dr. Alan
Wicks, Malcolm
Widdecombe, rh Miss Ann
Williams, rh Alan *(Swansea W)*
Wills, Michael
Winnick, David
Winterton, Ms Rosie *(Doncaster C)*
Wood, Mike *(Batley)*
Woolas, Phil
Worthington, Tony
Wright, Anthony D. *(Gt Yarmouth)*
Wright, David *(Telford)*
Wright, Iain *(Hartlepool)*
Wyatt, Derek

Tellers for the Ayes:
Mr. Michael Foster and
Mr. Ian Cawsey

NOES

Ainsworth, Peter *(E Surrey)*
Ancram, rh Michael
Arbuthnot, rh James
Atkinson, Peter *(Hexham)*
Bacon, Richard
Baldry, Tony
Barker, Gregory
Beggs, Roy *(E Antrim)*
Beith, rh A. J.
Bellingham, Henry
Bercow, John
Beresford, Sir Paul
Blunt, Crispin
Boswell, Tim
Bottomley, Peter *(Worthing W)*
Bottomley, rh Virginia *(SW Surrey)*
Brady, Graham
Brazier, Julian
Breed, Colin
Browning, Mrs Angela
Bruce, Malcolm
Burns, Simon
Burnside, David
Burt, Alistair
Butterfill, Sir John
Cameron, David
Campbell, Gregory *(E Lond'y)*
Cash, William
Chapman, Sir Sydney *(Chipping Barnet)*

Chope, Christopher
Clarke, rh Kenneth *(Rushcliffe)*
Clifton-Brown, Geoffrey
Collins, Tim
Conway, Derek
Cormack, Sir Patrick
Curry, rh David
Davies, Quentin *(Grantham & Stamford)*
Davis, rh David *(Haltemprice & Howden)*
Djanogly, Jonathan
Dodds, Nigel
Donaldson, Jeffrey M.
Dorrell, rh Stephen
Doughty, Sue
Duncan, Alan *(Rutland)*
Duncan Smith, rh Iain
Fallon, Michael
Field, Mark *(Cities of London & Westminster)*
Fisher, Mark
Flight, Howard
Flook, Adrian
Forth, rh Eric
Garnier, Edward
Gibb, Nick *(Bognor Regis)*
Gillan, Mrs Cheryl
Goodman, Paul
Gray, James *(N Wilts)*
Grayling, Chris
Green, Damian *(Ashford)*
Green, Matthew *(Ludlow)*
Greenway, John
Gummer, rh John
Hague, rh William
Hammond, Philip
Harvey, Nick
Hawkins, Nick
Hayes, John *(S Holland)*
Heald, Oliver
Heath, David
Heathcoat-Amory, rh David
Hendry, Charles
Hermon, Lady
Hoban, Mark *(Fareham)*
Hoey, Kate *(Vauxhall)*
Hogg, rh Douglas
Horam, John *(Orpington)*
Howard, rh Michael
Howarth, Gerald *(Aldershot)*
Hughes, Simon *(Southwark N)*
Hunter, Andrew
Jack, rh Michael
Jackson, Robert *(Wantage)*
Jenkin, Bernard
Kirkbride, Miss Julie
Kirkwood, Sir Archy
Knight, rh Greg *(E Yorkshire)*
Laing, Mrs Eleanor
Lait, Mrs Jacqui
Lamb, Norman
Lansley, Andrew
Leigh, Edward
Letwin, rh Oliver
Lewis, Dr. Julian *(New Forest E)*
Liddell-Grainger, Ian
Lidington, David
Lilley, rh Peter
Llwyd, Elfyn
Loughton, Tim
Luff, Peter *(M-Worcs)*
McIntosh, Miss Anne
Mackay, rh Andrew
Maclean, rh David
McLoughlin, Patrick
Malins, Humfrey
Maples, John
Maude, rh Francis
Mawhinney, rh Sir Brian
May, Mrs Theresa
Mercer, Patrick
Mitchell, Andrew *(Sutton Coldfield)*
Mitchell, Austin *(Gt Grimsby)*
Moore, Michael
Moss, Malcolm
Murrison, Dr. Andrew
Norman, Archie
Oaten, Mark *(Winchester)*
O'Brien, Stephen *(Eddisbury)*
Öpik, Lembit
Osborne, George *(Tatton)*
Ottaway, Richard
Paice, James
Paterson, Owen
Pickles, Eric
Price, Adam *(E Carmarthen & Dinefwr)*
Prisk, Mark *(Hertford)*
Redwood, rh John
Reid, Alan *(Argyll & Bute)*
Robathan, Andrew
Robertson, Hugh *(Faversham & M-Kent)*
Robinson, Mrs Iris *(Strangford)*
Robinson, Peter *(Belfast E)*
Rosindell, Andrew
Ruffley, David
Sayeed, Jonathan
Selous, Andrew
Sheerman, Barry
Shepherd, Richard
Simmonds, Mark
Simpson, Keith *(M-Norfolk)*
Smith, Sir Robert *(W Ab'd'ns & Kincardine)*
Smyth, Rev. Martin *(Belfast S)*
Soames, Nicholas
Spicer, Sir Michael
Spink, Bob *(Castle Point)*
Spring, Richard
Stanley, rh Sir John
Steen, Anthony
Streeter, Gary
Swayne, Desmond
Swire, Hugo *(E Devon)*
Syms, Robert
Tapsell, Sir Peter
Taylor, Ian *(Esher)*
Taylor, Dr. Richard *(Wyre F)*
Thomas, Simon *(Ceredigion)*
Turner, Andrew *(Isle of Wight)*
Tyler, Paul *(N Cornwall)*
Tyrie, Andrew
Waterson, Nigel
Watkinson, Angela
Whittingdale, John
Wiggin, Bill
Wilkinson, John
Williams, Hywel *(Caernarfon)*
Williams, Roger *(Brecon)*
Wilshire, David
Winterton, Ann *(Congleton)*
Winterton, Sir Nicholas *(Macclesfield)*
Yeo, Tim *(S Suffolk)*
Young, rh Sir George
Younger-Ross, Richard

Tellers for the Noes:
Mr. Dominic Grieve and
Mr. Mark Francois

Question accordingly agreed to.

Lords amendments disagreed to.

Committee appointed to draw up Reasons to be assigned to the Lords for disagreeing to their amendments Nos. 1 to 54: Mr Nick Ainger, Peter Bradley, Andrew George, Mr. James Gray and Alun Michael; Alun Michael to be the Chairman of the Committee; Three to be the quorum of the Committee.—*[Mr. Ainger.]*

To withdraw immediately.

Reasons for disagreeing to the Lords amendments reported, and agreed to; to be communicated to the Lords.

PETITIONS

Bridleway Bridge (Berkshire)

10.39 pm

Mr. David Rendel (Newbury) (LD): I should like to present a petition on behalf of 55 residents who live in and around the area concerned that reads:

> The Petition of Mr. Michael MacEwen and others.
>
> Declares that the Bridleway Bridge (Bridge number 9), spanning the A34 and the Oxford Road (south of Chieveley, Berkshire) urgently requires painting and/or cladding.
>
> The Petitioners therefore request that the House of Commons urge the Secretary of State for Transport to take steps to ensure that the Bridleway Bridge is painted and/or clad and thereafter properly maintained.
>
> And the Petitioners remain, etc.

To lie upon the Table.

Royal Gloucester, Berkshire and Wiltshire Regiment

10.40 pm

Mr. Parmjit Dhanda (Gloucester) (Lab): This petition is signed by 762 residents of Gloucestershire, all of whom have had their names printed in the local newspaper, *The Citizen*, today and is supported by my Gloucestershire colleagues, my hon. Friends the Members for Stroud (Mr. Drew) and for Forest of Dean (Diana Organ).

The petition states:

> The petition of the residents of Gloucestershire declares their support for the soldiers of the Royal Gloucester, Berkshire and Wiltshire Regiment; their recognition of the great history of the Glorious Glosters, spanning more than 300 years; their pride in the Glosters' unique "Back Badge", which was won when soldiers fought back to back against Napoleon's troops at the Battle of Alexandria in 1801; and their belief that the Back Badge is part of the military heritage of the Glorious Glosters, of which Gloucestershire people are proud.
>
> The Petitioners therefore request that the House of Commons urges the Government to support the campaign backed by local veterans, the Royal British Legion, residents and The Gloucester Citizen newspaper to retain the Back Badge.
>
> And the Petitioners remain etc.

To lie upon the Table.

Diabetes

Motion made, and Question proposed, That this House do now adjourn.—*[Mr. Heppell.]*

10.42 pm

Mr. David Amess (Southend, West) (Con): It is my very good fortune to have the opportunity to debate the subject of diabetes with the Minister on the very day when the Government have introduced the White Paper on public health. It could not be more relevant: Sunday was world diabetes day. This year's theme was obesity, and I am sure that the Minister would be the first to agree that the Health Committee has done some splendid work on our inquiry into obesity because, as all hon. Members know, obesity is very closely linked to the increase in diabetes. Indeed, Claire Francis of Diabetes UK said:

> "The scale of the problem was acknowledged by the EU Health Council of Ministers when they last met in June."

The Council stated that the situation in Europe is very serious.

Unfortunately, there is no cure for diabetes—yet more and more people are being diagnosed with it—and the first question on which I want the Minister to share some thoughts with the House is how far are we along the road of research into eventually finding a cure. Some good quality work must be going on among our major drug companies. According to Diabetes UK, since 1996, the number of people diagnosed with diabetes has increased from 1.4 million to 1.8 million, and it is estimated that almost 3 million people will be suffering from diabetes by the end of the decade. There has been a huge increase, and almost 1 million people are undiagnosed.

There are two types of diabetes. Type 1 is insulin-dependent diabetes, which has an early onset in childhood and patients are treated with insulin. It is not associated with obesity. Type 2 diabetes—non-insulin-dependent diabetes—has a later onset. Patients still produce some insulin, but that is inadequate. Blood sugar levels are controlled through diet, exercise, medication or different combinations of these. This is very much associated with obesity.

I draw to the House's attention a paragraph in our report on obesity. It said:

> "Around two-thirds of the population of England are overweight or obese. Obesity has grown by almost 400 per cent. in the last 25 years and on present trends will soon surpass smoking as the greatest cause of premature loss of life. It will entail levels of sickness that will put enormous strains on the health service. On some predictions, today's generation of children will be the first for more than a century for whom life-expectancy falls."

That is absolutely shocking testimony to the way things are. The report adds:

> "Obesity is associated with many health problems including coronary heart disease, diabetes, kidney failure, osteoarthritis, back pain and psychological damage. The strong association between obesity and cancer has only recently come to light.
>
> We estimate that the economic costs of obesity are between £3.3 billion and £3.7 billion a year".

Most of the 1.8 million diabetics in the United Kingdom are diagnosed with type 2 diabetes. This is attributed to an ageing population and an ever-increasing number of overweight and obese people. Many Members of the House will know of close relatives who have diabetes, and a number of their constituents will be diabetics. The issue is relevant to all 659 Members of the House. Serious health problems include heart disease, stroke, high blood pressure, circulation problems, nerve damage, kidney damage and eye damage. There is an even greater risk for the diabetics who are obese, who smoke and who are not physically active. Controlling diabetes is not that difficult. Complications can be reduced by controlling blood glucose and blood pressure levels through eating healthily and doing regular exercise.

The next point that I want to share with the Minister is that of food labelling. I understand that today's Government White Paper touched on the subject, but I feel strongly that there is not in supermarkets as big of range as there should be of products that can help people with diabetes. Has the Minister anything to say about that? The healthy food range on sale in supermarkets is not, sadly, necessarily as healthy as one would think. An excellent article in *The Observer* on October was entitled "Carb crash" and it said:

> "If you are diabetic, beware the recommended bread, potato and pasta diet, says, Dr. John Briffa. It could drive your blood-sugar levels over the limit."

Many of these products still contain high levels of fat, sugar and salt. I very much believe that a healthier lifestyle has to be adhered to by those who have diabetes, but a better supply of real food and drinks would go a long way to helping them with their ailment.

The third point that I want the Minister to address is the specific issue of insulin. I have asked his colleagues a number of questions about it. More than 350,000 people have type 1 diabetes, which is treated with insulin. They can be treated with natural animal insulin or synthetic insulin. The majority of diabetics are treated with human insulin and about 30,000 diabetics use animal insulin. All insulin, whether synthetic or animal, is equally pure, but the alternative forms have different time actions and peaks of actions to suit the differing needs of diabetics. Synthetic genetically modified insulin was introduced in 1982 on the grounds that it would be a cheaper option and that the body would not produce antibodies to it. The Insulin Dependent Diabetes Trust has advised me that in the years since its introduction, neither claim has been proved. However, the vast majority of diabetics have been transferred from animal insulin to synthetic insulin for no clinical reason, often without their knowledge or consent.

The Minister will be aware that I have tabled several parliamentary questions during this Session and that I have written to Lord Warner several times about insulin, and especially the possibility of the discontinuation of animal insulin. I do not criticise the charming and helpful letter of reply that I received, but when the Minister responds to the debate, I hope that he will reassure diabetics who use animal insulin that they will still be able to obtain it.

Animal insulin has been discontinued for commercial reasons in most European Union countries and many other countries throughout the world. Diabetics are effectively denied a choice of treatments and have no alternative but to use synthetic GM insulin and suffer the adverse effects.

Mr. Adrian Sanders (Torbay) (LD): I do not think that there is any evidence to show that people suffer adverse effects, except those who switched from animal to GM insulin and back again.

Mr. Amess: I thank the hon. Gentleman. He is entirely right to correct the impression that I gave the House—I left a few words out of my speech.

In a letter dated 10 November, Lord Warner assured me that the two companies that currently supply animal insulin in the UK—Novo Nordisk Pharmaceuticals Ltd and CP Pharmaceuticals Ltd—had not notified the Department of Health of any intention to discontinue its production. Novo Nordisk has delayed making any decision until 2005, and CP Pharmaceuticals apparently has no plans to withdraw from the market. I hope that the Minister will reassure the many diabetics who use animal insulin that he will do everything possible to ensure that they will still have the choice of using synthetic or animal insulin, I know that Diabetes UK's stance on animal insulin is clear.

I praise Pfizer for its "ChoLESSterol" campaign, which is building on the success of its 2003 programme. This year, the company is focusing on communicating with diabetics and is working closely with Diabetes UK. It is sponsoring the "ChoLESSterol" programme because the national service framework on coronary heart disease states that patients with diabetes should be assessed to determine their risk of CHD, and the management of cholesterol levels forms an important part of that assessment. With the introduction of general medical services contracts, which set targets for recording the processes and outcomes of cholesterol levels in patients with diabetes, general practitioner practices are given a huge incentive to address diabetes management and associated risk factors. I commend Pfizer for its initiative to help to reduce cholesterol and improve the lives of diabetics.

I end on a local note by talking about services in Southend, as the Minister would expect. I have close links with the diabetes group in Southend and enjoy attending its regular meetings. However, its members think that the service that they currently receive is somewhat inadequate. It does not criticise the two consultants who deal with diabetes, but given that my constituency is No. 1 for the number of people aged between 100 and 111, we have more than our fair share of people who suffer from diabetes. The diabetes helpline in Southend is only open on Tuesday between 10.30 and 12.30. That is inadequate. At all other times there is a telephone answering service for members of the general public to leave a message and the diabetes nurse will return the call.

There are very few trained diabetes nurses in Southend. Two or three practices have been lucky enough to secure the services of a trained diabetes nurse. Three are based at the hospital, but they are inundated with requests for help. I know that all the money goes through the primary care trust, but more funding is needed to enable Southend to have more specialist diabetes nurses. General practitioners want more of those nurses attached to their surgeries so that diabetes provision is available at practice level, which I am sure the Government would support, so taking the pressure off Southend hospital. The Minister should be aware that as a result of the target set by the Department of Health, general practitioners' patients are sent to the hospital, creating more pressure on hospital services. The primary care trust has advised me that it is doing its best to address the situation, but more help is urgently needed in Southend, in particular.

10.56 pm

Mr. Adrian Sanders (Torbay) (LD): I congratulate the hon. Member for Southend, West (Mr. Amess) on his excellent speech. He covered many of the points that the all-party group on diabetes, which I chair, is keen to hear addressed as often as possible in the presence of Ministers. Healthy eating and exercise are vital. We do not know the real cause of why people get the condition, whether at an early age or later in life, although clearly unhealthy lifestyles and obesity are contributing factors.

A key point is that food labelling is important, and I am glad that we have the White Paper. Animal insulin should be a matter of patient choice. When patients are diagnosed and insulin is introduced to a type 2 condition, they will be put on GM insulins. I am not worried about that. I am, however, concerned that those who have always been on animal insulin are able to continue to get a source of supply.

The all-party group will engage in an online consultation on 8 December—our launch date—and we hope that diabetics across the country will go on to the website to talk directly to medical professionals and politicians about how the NSF is being delivered in their area and wider diabetic issues. The Minister's Department knows about that.

10.58 pm

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Health (Dr. Stephen Ladyman): I congratulate the hon. Member for Southend, West (Mr. Amess) on his continued interest in the issue. This is not a flash in the pan. He has been asking questions and beavering away for some time. I am grateful to him for his interest in an important subject. Equally, I am grateful to the hon. Member for Torbay (Mr. Sanders) for his work through the all-party group.

I congratulate Pfizer. I am always pleased to congratulate my former employer, especially as it continues to employ 5,000 of my constituents. I am always pleased to hear nice things said about it. Its work is important. On behalf of the Government, I also congratulate Diabetes UK on its important work, and also the local diabetes networks, which have put a lot of effort into raising awareness of diabetes and supporting those who have the condition.

It is right that we take this opportunity, which was also taken on world diabetes day, to raise awareness of a serious condition that affects many people. Diabetes is a chronic and progressive disease that has an impact on almost every aspect of life and on all age groups. People who do not suffer with diabetes often do not realise the complications that it can cause. Those complications

[Dr. Stephen Ladyman]

include visual impairment and blindness; kidney damage leading to progressive renal failure; heart attack and stroke; and other conditions that can lead to further complications, including amputation of the lower limbs. Ultimately, diabetes can result in premature ill health, disability and even death and, as the hon. Member for Southend, West said, it cannot be cured. I am not aware of any research that is imminently likely to provide a cure. Research is ongoing into the best means of screening for type 2 diabetes, but I am sure that all the pharmaceutical companies are actively investigating the opportunities. The Medical Research Council is the body that would provide Government funding for general research.

As the hon. Gentleman said, there are two main types of diabetes. Type 1 generally shows itself in younger people, although it does affect older people too. With that type of diabetes, the body cannot make any insulin—the hormone that controls the amount of sugar in the blood—so people with type 1 diabetes need insulin injections for the rest of their lives. The hon. Gentleman asked about the availability of both types of insulin, and I can give him the assurance that he sought: to the best of our knowledge, there are no plans to discontinue the production of the two types of insulin. Were we to become aware of such plans, we would, of course, express a view, and our clear view is that which type of insulin a patient receives should be a clinical decision. That decision certainly should not be controlled by commercial considerations or issues of availability. I hope that that reassures him.

Type 2 diabetes usually appears in middle-aged or elderly people and can be developed as a result of lifestyle choices. That is why it is indeed appropriate that today, as we launch the public health White Paper, we are debating diabetes. People who are overweight are more likely to develop type 2 diabetes; it also tends to run in families and is more common in Asian and African-Caribbean communities.

Diabetes is becoming more common across the world, and that is also true in England. About 1.4 million people in England are currently diagnosed with diabetes and as many as 1 million may have type 2 diabetes without even knowing it. The number of people with diabetes in the UK is expected to rise to 3 million by 2010. It will have a significant impact on those people's lives and that of their families. When researching for this speech, the statistic that horrified me was that diabetes is estimated to account for 5 per cent. of total NHS spending—a huge amount of money spent on a single condition.

The challenges are mounting. Our population is made up of a complex cultural mix that is becoming more overweight, obese and inactive, so our population is also becoming more prone to diabetes. That is why we developed the national service framework for diabetes and published it in December 2001. It was developed with the help of users of the service, clinicians and managers. The NSF sets out to make best practice the norm, setting out a 10-year programme of change through 12 new national standards. The document is supported by the diabetes delivery strategy, which was published in January 2003 and which offers a framework that the NHS can use to build capacity and deliver the national targets.

Taken together, the NSF standards and the delivery strategy will lead to fewer people developing diabetes and better care for those who have it. They will also ensure that diabetes services are centred around the needs of people with diabetes and offer care that is structured and proactive, providing people with the support and skills they need to manage their own condition, which is particularly important. Those are the first ever set of national standards for diabetes services in the NHS. They will raise the quality of services everywhere and reduce unacceptable variations. In order to stay healthy and well, every person with diabetes needs good and regular health care. We can reduce the risk of serious complications and lengthen life. This means prompt diagnosis, regular checks to identify serious complications at an early stage and treatment to control blood glucose and blood pressure levels.

Support and education are crucial so that people can manage this complex disease effectively by themselves. Structured education and care planning are crucial tools that will enable people with diabetes to improve their knowledge and skills, supporting them to take control of their own condition and to integrate self-management into their daily lives.

In line with that, explicit objectives of the NSF include the provision of services that enable people to manage their own diabetes through education and support that recognises the importance of lifestyle, culture and religion. There is much work being accomplished in this area. For example, Action Diabetes is a Department of Health pilot project in Slough primary care trust. It is designed to improve the lives of patients who are known to have diabetes, and to identify sooner those patients who have yet to be diagnosed. The particular focus is to reduce late diagnosis of the disease and to improve the health of the most at risk, generally Asian communities. That initiative was launched by the Minister, my right hon. Friend the Member for Barrow and Furness (Mr. Hutton), on 18 October 2004 and has already successfully identified a number of previously undiagnosed cases of diabetes.

In Barnet, community-based education has been developed to meet the needs of the PCT's ethnic and multicultural population. Specific projects include a diabetes awareness day for the Chinese community, a bi-monthly education programme for an ethnically mixed group of patients at the multicultural centre, and a patient day organised by the PCT to promote greater awareness of diabetes, PCT services and the importance of personal responsibility for health.

While I am talking about local initiatives, the hon. Member for Southend, West mentioned his concerns about some services in Southend. He rightly said that money is now channelled through the PCT, so it is for it to make decisions about how that money is spent. Southend PCT is doing a considerable amount of work locally to try to improve services for people who suffer from diabetes. A strategic vision for chronic disease management, including diabetes, was presented to the joint board and executive committee on 27 May 2004. There has already been a number of valuable outcomes from the work, which I am confident will improve services for people in the hon. Gentleman's constituency. Initiatives such as those provide services that are patient centred, equitable and appropriate to individual's needs, and they will make a real difference to the lives of people from all backgrounds, including those from ethnic minorities with diabetes.

Good progress is already being made across a number of areas covered by the Diabetes NSF. The recent Dr. Foster report, "Your Local Care", published by Diabetes UK, found that systems for service delivery are well on their way to implement the NSF on a national basis. For example, 86 per cent. of PCTs are part of a whole system diabetes network, 79 per cent. have accountability arrangements to ensure that decisions are implemented and 93 per cent. have identified a clinical lead. The diabetes delivery strategy emphasises the importance of specialist care in certain circumstances—for example, for women during pregnancy and for those who are admitted to hospital.

The report found that in 97 per cent. of PCTs, people with diabetes who are admitted to hospital have access to the support of a diabetes specialist team. In 98 per cent. of PCTs, women with pre-existing diabetes, and those who develop diabetes during pregnancy, have access to joint diabetes and obstetrics management. That is an increase from 91 per cent. in the past year. We recognise, however, that there is a need to continue to continue to make further progress in other areas of diabetes care if we are to succeed in the implementation of the 12 standards. The Department of Health is committed to do just that. The very first of the NSF standards also makes it clear that prevention is better than cure.

In many cases, but not all, type 2 diabetes can be prevented or the onset delayed, especially if individuals at increased risk of developing type 2 reduce their risk by changing lifestyle, eating a balanced diet, losing weight and increasing their physical activity levels. In May this year, the Health Committee, on which the hon. Member for Southend, West serves—I congratulate it on its work and on its interest in the matter—reported the results of its thorough and comprehensive investigation of the issues surrounding the growing problem of obesity, which is a major risk factor in the development of type 2 diabetes. The timing of its report was fortunate, as it directly contributed to the "Choosing Health?" consultation, and made an important contribution to the development of the comprehensive range of proposals that we set out in today's White Paper. In July 2004, we announced a new joint public service agreement target for the Department of Health, the Department for Culture, Media and Sport and the Department for Education and Skills, aiming to halt

"the year on year rise in obesity among children under 11 by 2010, in the context of a broader strategy to tackle obesity in the population as a whole".

The public health White Paper published today pulls together a comprehensive strategy to deliver that target. One of the six priorities for action identified in the White Paper relates to reducing obesity. The White Paper recognises that obesity, both in children and adults, is increasing and poses a serious threat to our health, storing up trouble through an increase in diabetes, heart disease and cancer. It sets out practical measures to support people who want to live healthier lives. We have set out a comprehensive plan of action covering physical activity, diet, personalised support, information and curbs on marketing, thus providing a strong foundation for tackling obesity. For example, the Department of Health has commissioned the National Institute for Clinical Excellence to prepare definitive guidance on prevention, identification, management and treatment of obesity, which is due to be available in 2007. We will also commission the production of a weight loss guide, to set out what is known about regimes for losing weight and to help people select healthy approaches that are most likely to help them to lose weight and maintain a more healthy weight. For the first time in England and Wales, evidence-based guidance will be available for children and adults on both prevention and management, ensuring a consistent evidence-based approach.

The NHS will provide more effective services on obesity, whether in prevention, management or treatment, so that the public and patients have much better support, tailored to their individual needs, to help them achieve and maintain a healthy weight. These are concrete and practical measures that signal our commitment—

The motion having been made after Seven o'clock, and the debate having continued for half an hour, MR. DEPUTY SPEAKER *adjourned the House without Question put, pursuant to the Standing Order.*

Adjourned at twelve minutes past Eleven o'clock.

House of Commons

Wednesday 17 November 2004

The House met at half-past Eleven o'clock

PRAYERS

[MR. SPEAKER *in the Chair*]

Oral Answers to Questions

DEPUTY PRIME MINISTER

The Deputy Prime Minister was asked—

Thames Gateway

1. **Jonathan Shaw** (Chatham and Aylesford) (Lab): What steps he is taking to ensure that existing communities share the benefits of the Thames gateway development programme. [198432]

The Minister for Housing and Planning (Keith Hill): The Government are determined that existing communities will share fully in the benefits of the big new investment to support housing growth in the Thames gateway. I am pleased to say that only last week the Government announced £100 million of funding to new Thames gateway projects, aimed at improving educational, health, environmental and transport provision in the gateway. Since last year, the Government's investment in community improvements in the gateway has risen to £475 million.

Jonathan Shaw: I am grateful for that reply from my right hon. Friend. May I extol the virtues of the All Saints neighbourhood project? It is essential, if the gateway is to develop successfully, that the existing communities not only feel the benefits but are part of the development. That will include not just shiny new buildings away from some of the poorer areas in the Medway towns, but improvements in street lighting, the environment and safety—all the things that impact on people's daily lives when they open their front doors. When my right hon. Friend is giving out the money, will he ensure that councils and other delivery units engage with the communities, especially those in Chatham?

Keith Hill: My hon. Friend may extol to his heart's content, because he is right in everything that he says. He is right about the Chatham social regeneration project, which was one of the successful projects and will, following our announcement last week, receive £550,000 from my Department. That project covers streetscape and public realm improvements in the area around Luton Arches in his constituency and environmental enhancements to Fort Amherst. The project also builds on the £10 million ODPM allocation for the regeneration of Chatham town centre.

Mr. John Hayes (South Holland and The Deepings) (Con): Unlike the rest of the Government's community plans, the Thames gateway project has merit, but serious concerns about the infrastructure, the environment and community buy-in were raised in the recent debate by the hon. Members for Chatham and Aylesford (Jonathan Shaw), for Thurrock (Andrew Mackinlay) and for Dagenham (Jon Cruddas). What specific steps will the Minister take, beyond the usual consultation procedures and representative process, to ensure that the existing population's interests are taken fully into account? The people of the Medway towns, Bexleyheath and Ilford want action, not just more talk from this lacklustre ministerial team in a careless Government.

Keith Hill: The hon. Gentleman does his best, but it is a dismal effort. We did have a debate on the Thames gateway on Monday evening and the immense benefits that the scheme will confer on local communities were universally acknowledged by all the hon. Members who contributed. The fact is that absolutely every aspect of the investment programme in the Thames gateway is based on the involvement of local communities. Indeed, the entire mechanism for the delivery of the Thames gateway project is based on local delivery vehicles.

Mr. Derek Wyatt (Sittingbourne and Sheppey) (Lab): In my constituency, we have had a £100 million bridge and a £25 million new ring road. We are grateful for those and we are looking forward to the development of the Thames gateway. In conjunction with the housing projection for Sittingbourne and Sheppey, will my right hon. Friend produce an infrastructure audit, so that we will get the schools, the GPs' surgeries and so on at the same time as the housing?

Keith Hill: My hon. Friend is right, and to his list of transport investments in his constituency we can add the Sittingbourne learning hub, the Elmley Sheppey building crafts centre to train apprentices, and the Sheerness children and family centre. All of those are benefits conferred as a result of the Thames gateway projects. He is also right that we need to bring in the necessary health and education provision simultaneously with the housing developments. My Department is working closely with other Departments to ensure that such simultaneous delivery is secured.

Regional Chambers

2. **Mr. Mark Francois** (Rayleigh) (Con): What the cost was of regional chambers in England, in 2003–04; and how many staff they employed. [198433]

The Minister for Local and Regional Government (Mr. Nick Raynsford): The total Government grant allocated to the eight regional chambers in 2003–04 was £14 million. They employed some 302 staff at the end of the 2003–04 financial year.

Mr. Francois: I thank the Minister for that reply and I note that the Deputy Prime Minister has ducked the opportunity to respond to the question. Given that in the north-east the people voted overwhelmingly—by 78 per cent. to 22 per cent.—not to have a regional assembly, those bodies now lack any political or moral authority. Should not we now abolish those white elephants and hand planning powers back to locally elected authorities where they rightfully belong?

Mr. Raynsford: No, and let me quote someone on this subject:

> "Despite the north-east vote, there will still be a requirement for effective regional planning functions, provision of democratic mandate for the regions and effective scrutiny of other regional bodies—a role in which the assembly and other voluntary chambers have shown themselves to be extremely competent."

That was written two weeks ago, by Sue Sida-Lockett, the Conservative chair of the East of England regional assembly.

Mr. Peter Pike (Burnley) (Lab): Does my right hon. Friend agree that the North West regional assembly does a very good job, as does the Northwest Development Agency, in considering strategic issues in the north-west? Does he further agree that the result of the vote in the north-east the other week in no way diminishes the fact that, at the end of the day, there is still a very strong case for democratic accountability in the regions?

Mr. Raynsford: I agree very much with my hon. Friend. The Government expect the North West regional assembly, like other assemblies, to perform functions in relation to regional planning and the oversight of the regional development agency, but it also does a number of other jobs in the north-west and contributes to the wider debate on economic development and regeneration, which is absolutely critical to that region. Clearly, as I said in the response to the previous question, there is an ongoing and important role for regional assemblies, which include a majority of members from elected local authorities.

Mrs. Caroline Spelman (Meriden) (Con): Today is the day for quotes. Sir Jeremy Beecham, in a letter to *The Daily Telegraph*, says:

> "We have regional government conducted in piecemeal fashion by civil servants, quangos and next steps agencies, with minimal accountability to the regions they serve."

If the leader of the Labour group of the Local Government Association can see the problem, why cannot the Deputy Prime Minister?

Mr. Raynsford: The hon. Lady will know only too well that there is a strong case for the preparation of regional planning guidance and that that was put in place by the Conservative party when in government. The structures that the Conservative Government proposed called for consultation with elected representatives from local councils, plus others involved in regional development. The difference between the outcomes then and now is that, in those days, the Secretary of State decided what the outcome was—it was entirely a decision by central Government—but we have modernised the system and devolved power so that decisions are taken by bodies such as the one chaired by the Conservative whom I quoted a moment ago, who believes that regional chambers are the means to engage local authorities in the formulation of regional planning guidance.

Decent Home Standard

3. **Mr. Andrew Love** (Edmonton) (Lab/Co-op): What his strategy is for meeting the decent home standard. [198434]

The Deputy Prime Minister (Mr. John Prescott): In 1997, we inherited 2 million non-decent homes. Since then, more than £18 billion of public and private money has been invested to reduce that number by more than 1 million. That means 650,000 homes with new central heating, 240,000 new kitchens, 180,000 new bathrooms, making a real difference to people's lives—people who suffered from the massive disinvestment of the previous Administration. We remain on track to deliver our commitment to make every home in the public sector decent by 2010.

Mr. Love: I congratulate my right hon. Friend on attaining 1 million improved homes earlier this year, but there is considerable concern about the lack of affordable accommodation for key workers in Greater London. What steps is he taking to ensure that they can have decent, affordable accommodation, so that we do not continue to lose key workers from the capital?

The Deputy Prime Minister: That is indeed a very important problem. The first tranche of the starter home initiative delivered about 10,000 affordable homes under the key worker programme. We have also established a new programme—the key worker living programme, which began in March 2004—and 16,000 people will benefit from it. In the borough of Enfield and my hon. Friend's constituency, about 120 people have already been helped by that programme and 264 further applications are being dealt with at the moment.

Sir Nicholas Winterton (Macclesfield) (Con): The Deputy Prime Minister will be aware that Macclesfield borough council achieves a housing standard far in excess of the decent housing standard. It is known in his Department as the Macclesfield standard. Will he ensure that Macclesfield borough council continues to get sufficient resources to enable it to continue to manage its own housing stock and not force it into a large-scale voluntary transfer, against the wishes of tenants, who have my support?

The Deputy Prime Minister: I am glad to hear of the new Macclesfield standard. It is a pity that it did not apply throughout the previous Administration, which is why we inherited 2 million houses of a non-decent standard for which the programme has been developed. It is true that we gave a choice to tenants as to whether they would like to opt for the transfer programmes that the hon. Gentleman mentioned. Those transfers have brought in something like £18 billion-worth of money from the public and private sectors and allowed us to implement the programme more quickly. We leave it to the tenants to make a decision and three quarters of those asked have voted overwhelmingly to adopt these programmes.

Mr. Ivan Henderson (Harwich) (Lab): My right hon. Friend will be aware of a ward in my constituency called

Jaywick Sands because I have made the Department aware of the fact that some people in that area are living in 1930s holiday homes. The area has deteriorated for several years under the control of Tory Essex county council and Tory Tendring district council. My constituents are looking to the Government to make a difference. Will he assure them that he will look at the area specifically so that the local people have a right to a decent home to live in?

The Deputy Prime Minister: I do not know the full details of the point made by my hon. Friend, but I will certainly look into the matter and write to him. One of the difficulties that we inherited is the fact that, in the last five years of the Tory Administration, they slashed housing investment by half. We doubled it in the same period after. That is the real difference, and that is why people look to this Government to make a real difference on housing.

Mr. Mark Field (Cities of London and Westminster) (Con): To pick up the point made by the hon. Member for Edmonton (Mr. Love), does the Deputy Prime Minister agree that the programme for decent homes for key workers should not be restricted just to those who work in the public sector? It should cover those who work in catering, cleaning, retail and other low-paid jobs in the private sector.

The Deputy Prime Minister: To be honest, matters of state aid are involved, but the hon. Gentleman makes a decent point about a broader definition of key workers. We have established a certain key worker definition at the moment, and we are following that. We hope to make a statement about housing matters shortly.

County Councils (Planning)

4. **Mr. Henry Bellingham** (North-West Norfolk) (Con): What plans he has to strengthen the planning powers of county councils. [198435]

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State, Office of the Deputy Prime Minister (Phil Hope): The Planning and Compulsory Purchase Act, 2004 and supporting regulations provide for county councils to have an extensive role in the new planning system, which came into force on 28 September 2004. It would be premature now to be considering further changes to county councils' planning powers.

Mr. Bellingham: Is the Minister aware that Norfolk is having forced on it nearly 100,000 extra homes? Is he aware that this will put intolerable new pressure on already overstretched services and infrastructure? Is he aware that my constituents want more affordable housing, but they do not want thousands of more executive-style homes that are occupied by second home owners? Surely it would be far better if such key decisions were taken by a county council that is directly elected by local people.

Phil Hope: The importance of regional planning has been recognised by successive Governments—his Government in the past as well as by this Government. That is why we have to address major regional transport and housing issues across a region as well as within individual local areas. The fact is that one of the key benefits of this Government's regional planning policy has been the investment of £3.9 million for housing in King's Lynn and west Norfolk. That is providing homes for key workers and affordable housing for people in the hon. Gentleman's area.

Mrs. Ann Cryer (Keighley) (Lab): Can my hon. Friend comment on the fact that there has been a democratic deficit for my constituents and others in the metropolitan counties since Mrs. Thatcher removed those councils? We do not have planning or any other sort of powers, because we do not have a county council. Will he comment on that?

Phil Hope: I understand my hon. Friend's concerns. We are trying to ensure that local authorities have the ability to undertake the responsibilities that they are given. A key part of having the ability to deliver those functions is having the resources to do so. She will know that, since 1997, local authorities across the board have received an increase of 30 per cent. in funding from the Government. Local authorities suffered desperately to deliver services under the previous Administration who cut funding by 7 per cent. in the previous four years.

Sir Paul Beresford (Mole Valley) (Con): The Minister will be aware that the South East England regional assembly draft housing numbers plan is out—it is a pretty shoddy affair. It is lightly done and ignores a few basic factors, of which I shall cite two. First, the extrapolation of growth from the past ignores the fact that after land has been built on, it has gone, so the continuation of that process threatens the green belt. Secondly, economic growth in the south-east is based on productivity to a greater extent than actual given numbers. Will the Minister reflect on his first answer and recognise that county councils need a strengthened role, even if they must save the dignity of the Deputy Prime Minister and put things through the regional assemblies?

Phil Hope: The fact is that the South East England regional assembly has a Conservative majority and is chaired by a Conservative councillor, so the hon. Gentleman is criticising his own party. Perhaps he should hold a debate inside his party and decide how it should deliver the affordable homes in the south-east that are desperately needed by people with sons and daughters who cannot afford to find a place to live in their areas.

John Mann (Bassetlaw) (Lab): In Nottinghamshire, some planning matters go to the county council for decision and some go to district councils. Will the Minister make the situation much easier for my constituents by giving us a ballot on a unitary authority so that we can enjoy the benefits that most of the country does?

Phil Hope: My hon. Friend will know that we recently published our "Local Vision" documents, which describe the outline of our proposals for the future strengthening of local government and the role that local government can play in leading and empowering communities and working in partnership with other agencies. Included in the 10-year vision is a debate on the future structure of local government, and I look forward to the contribution of my hon. Friend and other hon. Members to that debate.

Mr. Edward Davey (Kingston and Surbiton) (LD): The Minister will recall that Liberal Democrats fought against taking planning powers away from county councils to the last when other parties had thrown in the towel. There is now no early prospect of any regional planning boards becoming properly accountable. Will he revisit that matter, recognise the strength of our arguments on democracy and local government, and give planning powers back to English county councils?

Phil Hope: Once again, we see the Liberal Democrats moving from one position to another. There is no mistaking the fact that their national position is different from their local and regional positions. The previous system was hopelessly bureaucratic, but the new system gives county councils clear powers on sub-regional policies and responsibilities for surveying in their areas. It allows them to produce new waste and mineral plans and to form joint committees with other authorities on key aspects in their areas. To go back to the older system would be to go back to delay and conflict, and that would fail to deliver the housing and infrastructure that the Government are delivering.

Mr. Eric Pickles (Brentwood and Ongar) (Con): The Minister talks as though the vote in the north-east was a hiccup on the road to regionalism rather than its death knell. Does he not understand that denial is no substitute for a policy? He and his hon. Friends made it clear on countless occasions that the transfer of planning powers from counties and other authorities to regional bodies was done in preparation for an elected regional assembly. Those unelected bodies have no legitimacy in doing the Government's bidding by bulldozing over our countryside. Their powers must be returned to the people. Does the Minister understand that while he and his colleagues might run from the decision of the people of the north-east, they cannot hide from the verdict of the people?

Phil Hope: That was an interesting contribution from a member of the Conservative Front Bench because the Conservative chair of the East of England regional assembly said that such Tory criticisms

> "demonstrates a crass misunderstanding of the role of voluntary regional chambers".

Such crass misunderstanding has been repeated today. The Conservative party published planning guidance in 1992 that said:

> "up to date regional planning guidance is necessary in every region".

Conservative Members now want to sweep that aside, but the consequences of that would be that housing, transport and infrastructure would be taken away from every single one of their constituencies. *[Interruption.]*

Mr. Speaker: Order. I ask the House to come to order. I know how difficult it is.

Housing (Eastern England)

5. **Mr. Mark Prisk** (Hertford and Stortford) (Con): If he will make a statement on housing provision along the Cambridge-Stansted-London corridor. [198436]

The Minister for Local and Regional Government (Mr. Nick Raynsford): London, Stansted, Cambridge and Peterborough form one of the four growth areas that will play a key role in delivering the sustainable communities plan. The East of England regional assembly recently made its proposals to the Government for housing provision in the east of England, including this growth area. Those will now be subject to public consultation and examination.

Mr. Prisk: I thank the Minister for that statement, although I have to say that EERA's proposals are, as many of my constituents think, both undemocratic and, frankly, unsustainable. Given that Hertfordshire is the most densely populated county in England, will the Government invest in and improve our infrastructure before approving more houses?

Mr. Raynsford: The hon. Gentleman makes a perfectly fair point about the importance of combining infrastructure investment with new housing provision. It is precisely because of the Government's recognition of that that we have defined the growth area strategies and are ensuring a more integrated approach rather than the one that his party pursued when in government, which led to the sprawl of uncontrolled low-density development that produces the problem about which he complains. If Hertfordshire has a problem of development, it is because when his party was in government it allowed large-scale urban sprawl in that area.

Mr. Simon Burns (West Chelmsford) (Con): Will the Minister accept that there is considerable anger as a result of the decision by the East of England regional assembly to impose 14,000 extra houses on the Chelmsford local authority area? Why is it right that an illegitimate, unelected organisation has the right to take those decisions rather than elected borough councillors on planning departments in Chelmsford?

Mr. Raynsford: The hon. Gentleman clearly has either not been listening to the debate or chosen deliberately to ignore it. The chair of the East of England regional assembly is of the same party as the hon. Gentleman. He decisively dismissed his carping comments as ill-informed and rightly made the point that it is doing a good job. The hon. Gentleman has to remember that the proposals will be subject to consultation and examination in public. The important thing that his party fails to recognise is the issue of how we provide the housing that people need and do so in a sustainable way. Unlike his party, the Government are addressing those issues seriously.

Local Government Reform

6. **Mr. George Mudie** (Leeds, East) (Lab): If he will make a statement on his plans for reforms in local government. [198437]

The Deputy Prime Minister (Mr. John Prescott): In July I published a discussion document "The future of local government: Developing a 10 year vision". This vision puts local government at the heart of our communities in the years ahead. It also makes clear that both local and central government will need to change to meet the challenges of building sustainable communities in which people want to live.

Mr. Mudie: I thank the Deputy Prime Minister for that answer. In his post-referendum review, will he assure the House that councils will be key deliverers of services and not just enablers, handing out contracts to the private sector? Will he also assure us that such ideas as taking all primary schools or high schools out of direct local government control will not be part of his future plans?

The Deputy Prime Minister: I can assure my hon. Friend that local authorities are key in developing local and national services. I can also tell him that the extra powers and resources that we have provided will enable them to do that.

Regarding whether the community assets of schools, whether secondary or primary, are directly controlled by the local authority, I assure him that in Leeds and other parts of the country, as he knows, there is an increasing amount of community involvement in the new deals, the new neighbourhood areas, Sure Start and the local strategic partnerships. More than 1 million people are now participating in decisions and sharing community assets. In that sense, the community is enriched by using those assets for the benefit of the community, working with local authorities in creating new services for the citizens in their area.

Matthew Green (Ludlow) (LD): When the Deputy Prime Minister publishes his White Paper on local government reform, will it include details of his planned revaluation of properties and their council tax bands? When will he come clean on that?

The Deputy Prime Minister: The hon. Gentleman is aware that we have said that we will keep to the timetable for the revaluation of properties that is set out in legislation. The White Paper will deal with future changes to local government.

Mr. Bill O'Brien (Normanton) (Lab): I congratulate my right hon. Friend on the work that he is doing to help local government to sustain services to its communities. Has he any plans to bring into being more town or parish councils with a view to bringing local government closer to the electorate?

The Deputy Prime Minister: My hon. Friend makes a powerful point; he has tremendous experience of working in local government. As he will know, our new document on local vision makes it clear that we want more active citizen engagement and participation, which will be brought about by greater local leadership and will certainly be to the improvement of the community.

PRIME MINISTER

The Prime Minister was asked—

Engagements

Q1. [198447] **Mr. David Heath (Somerton and Frome)** (LD): If he will list his official engagements for Wednesday 17 November.

The Prime Minister (Mr. Tony Blair): Before I list my engagements, I know that the whole House will wish to express our grief at what has happened to Margaret Hassan and to join in paying tribute to her for 30 years dedicated to working for the good of the people of Iraq.

This morning I had meetings with ministerial colleagues and others. In addition to my duties in the House I will have further such meetings later today.

Mr. Heath: The whole House will join in condemnation and dismay at the brutal murder of another innocent victim in Iraq.

The Home Secretary said that he does not want to create a climate of fear, and I am sure that he is right, but we also recognise the real and present threat of terrorism. Why, then, does he intend to spend billions of pounds on an identity card system which did not work in New York or Madrid, instead of spending that money on more police, better security services, the protection of our travelling public—as in America—and our emergency response? Why does he believe that we can fight terrorism with plastic?

The Prime Minister: A large part of the cost is to do with the introduction of biometric passports, which will be done in any event. I believe that identity cards do have a role to play, and I think that most people would recognise now that, if we want to secure our borders properly and ensure that people are not coming into or operating in this country illegally, it is not unreasonable to ask people to have some system of identity.

Mr. Robert Marshall-Andrews (Medway) (Lab): The Prime Minister will be aware that in July 2003 the intelligence services withdrew reports on Iraq's weapons as wholly discredited. Will he undertake to let the House know the information that he has consistently refused to give in writing, namely the exact date—not the period, but the date—on which he was aware of that withdrawal?

The Prime Minister: I think I am right in saying that we made it clear that the doubts about the information to which my hon. and learned Friend is referring were drawn to our attention during the Butler review. I can certainly look into the precise date on which that happened. It has to be said, however, and I hope that he understands this, that the information and intelligence that we received, we received in good faith and acted on in good faith.

Mr. Michael Howard (Folkestone and Hythe) (Con): I join the Prime Minister in the remarks that he made about the murder of Margaret Hassan. This murder of an innocent woman, a Muslim woman, who dedicated her entire life to the welfare of the people of Iraq, shows yet again that we are up against barbaric terrorists who want to destroy Iraq's future, and we must stand steadfast in the face of their terror.

The chief executive of the Child Support Agency has just resigned. The agency is in crisis. What is the Prime Minister going to do to get a grip on the problem and help some of the poorest families in our country who are not getting the money that they are entitled to?

The Prime Minister: The first thing to do, obviously, is to ensure that the information technology system that has caused so many problems is sorted out. The second, and perhaps most important, problem is that there are still a million cases being dealt with under the old system—the system that we inherited. Over time, there will be a migration to the new system that we introduced, which is far simpler. It is important that we manage to migrate as many cases as possible from the old system to the new.

Mr. Howard: The Prime Minister has been in office for seven and a half years. His Government are responsible for the new computer; his Government are responsible for the new assessment system; and it is his Government's chief executive who has just resigned. The Child Support Agency has failed to collect £750 million owed to some of the poorest families in Britain. Those people desperately needed that money to help bring up their children. They have been denied it by the failures of this Government. Do they not deserve better?

The Prime Minister: Of course what has happened is not acceptable. That is precisely why it is important to change. However, I have to point out to the right hon. and learned Gentleman that a million cases are being dealt with under the old scheme because those claims were made under the previous Administration and the scheme that we inherited. I am very happy to take lessons from people who have found that they have not got the service that they need under the new system, but I will not take lessons from a Conservative party that introduced a child support system that was a byword for chaos and unfairness.

Linda Perham (Ilford, North) (Lab): Following the Prime Minister's visit to President Bush last week, what hope can he offer my thousands of Jewish constituents on the prospects of peace in the middle east, security for Israel, freedom from terror and a viable two-state solution?

The Prime Minister: I hope that it will be possible to use the opportunity of an election for a new Palestinian leader, the disengagement from Gaza and parts of the west bank, which is the programme announced by the Israeli Government, and our determination to ensure that we work with the Palestinians and others in the international community to put together the political, economic and security institutions of a viable state. I hope that it will be possible by a combination of those means to reinvigorate the middle east peace process. As I have said on many occasions in the past few weeks, and I repeat again, I do not think that there is a more pressing political challenge facing the world today.

Mr. Charles Kennedy (Ross, Skye and Inverness, West) (LD): I associate my right hon. and hon. Friends completely with the expressions of outrage at the wicked murder of Margaret Hassan.

To return to the Child Support Agency resignation this morning, as well as the computerisation problems to which the Prime Minister rightly referred, there is of course the fact that the Government have been changing the specifications, which has added to the problems. As the CSA is as we speak leaderless, the staff are bound to be demoralised and the agency is failing in its functions, will the Prime Minister as a matter of urgency scrap the Child Support Agency and transfer its purpose directly to the Inland Revenue, so that it can get payments to those most in need?

The Prime Minister: I am not sure that transferring to the Inland Revenue is the answer to the problem. The reason for the difficulty is that people have to pay child support when they have an obligation to support children on divorce or the separation of partners. The CSA was established by the previous Government in order to try to ensure that the system worked in an effective and fair way without the need for long drawn-out court hearings. Unfortunately, that system did not work. I do not in any way minimise the difficulties under the new system that we are introducing. It is not acceptable, as I said a moment or two ago. However, there will be new leadership of the Child Support Agency, we will have to sort out the computer programme that has been the cause of the present problems, and we will then have to ensure that as many people as possible get on to the new scheme, which is a lot simpler and more effective.

Mr. Kennedy: I still hope that the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions and the Prime Minister might look at the idea that I have mentioned.

Talking of new leadership, there will have to be a new leader of the National Assessment Agency, too, as its chief executive has resigned this morning. He has resigned because of a three-month delay in publishing key stage 3 English results. Is not that also indicative of the central problem of this Government? They set unrealistic targets, the quangos and agencies cannot deliver, and the recipients on the front line, after seven years of Labour in power, are left languishing.

The Prime Minister: It is extraordinary of the right hon. Gentleman to say that we should not have testing and exams for pupils. An independent authority is needed to carry that out, and it has done so. I simply point out to him that it found that there was not any problem, either with the quality of marking or with the results. There has been a problem in the system, which is the reason for the resignation. We cannot have it both ways—either arm's-length agencies carry out these functions, or they are carried out direct from Government. I will certainly look at his suggestion that we transfer child support to the Inland Revenue, but it is highly unlikely that doing so would cause anything other than consternation among recipients and the Inland Revenue alike.

Ian Lucas (Wrexham) (Lab): Yesterday, the directors of Wrexham football club, the home of football in Wales, announced that they were putting the club into administration. This Saturday, thousands of football supporters across Britain are setting aside their tribal loyalties to wear red for Wrexham. What can the Prime Minister offer community football clubs that are again under huge pressure from predatory company developers, and what can he do to improve the situation?

The Prime Minister: As ever, I am helpfully briefed that it is not for the Government to determine how a football club is owned and that there are many different models of ownership. I do not suppose that that is a great help to my hon. Friend or to Wrexham football club, but I obviously wish them well. Many supporters want to ensure that their club is owned and based in the local community, but he will accept that this is not a matter for me to intervene in personally.

Q2. [198448] **Mr. Simon Thomas** (Ceredigion) (PC): With an average household income in Ceredigion of less than £19,000 a year and an average house price of £160,000, my constituency is now the least affordable place to buy and live in Wales, and is the fifth least affordable in the United Kingdom. As interest rates are not delivering affordability for young people, what other steps can the Prime Minister take to help young people access decent and affordable homes?

The Prime Minister: Housing in Wales is the responsibility of the Assembly, but we have put a substantial amount of additional money into housing, and affordable rural housing in particular. Of course, the situation is difficult, because there is a strong economy and the fact that more people are in work—unemployment figures are again down today, and are at their lowest level for 30 years—puts pressure on housing. However, interest rates—again, under this Government, they are at their lowest for several decades—are important in enabling people to afford their homes. How the money that we put into affordable housing is distributed is a matter for the Assembly.

Q3. [198449] **Mr. Ian Davidson** (Glasgow, Pollok) (Lab/Co-op): Is the Prime Minister aware that unemployment in my constituency fell by 13 per cent. last year; that the Clyde shipyards are well on the way to having the biggest order book in living memory; and that I am still not happy? Will he try to make me happier by ensuring that the naval orders come in a steady flow to avoid boom and bust in the yards? In particular, will he ensure that the MARS—Military Afloat Reach and Sustainability—ships order is placed in such a way that periods of decline are avoided, and will he place those ships in Britain?

The Prime Minister: I hope that my hon. Friend realises that Govan has good prospects for future work on aircraft carriers, and is involved in the building of the first T-54 destroyers, offering stability for the work force well into the next decade. I also hope that his constituency will benefit from other projects currently in the concept phase. He is right that unemployment is down in his constituency—it is down in every single constituency in the country and 2 million more people are in work. The new deal has helped more than 1 million people into work, which is why we should continue with the policies of stability and maintain the new deal, not scrap it as the Opposition want to do.

Mr. Michael Howard (Folkestone and Hythe) (Con): From today, the Metropolitan police will have to fill in a form every time that they stop someone in the street—not stop and search, just stop. Can the Prime Minister tell the House how much of a police officer's time will be wasted on this latest piece of political correctness?

The Prime Minister: The provision, as I understand it, was introduced after the Lawrence inquiry to ensure that police powers, which we have increased, are exercised in a way that keeps the confidence of the local community.

Mr. Howard: The Police Federation estimates that it will take seven minutes on average to fill in the new form. The police will be assessed on it under the police performance assessment framework, affectionately known by the police as PFAF. From today, if a police officer in London wants to stop a gang of half a dozen yobs in the street, it will take the best part of an hour to fill in the forms. Does the Prime Minister think that that will encourage the police to stop gangs in the street?

The Prime Minister: First, as a result of the Government introducing dispersal orders and other measures to deal with antisocial behaviour, we are able to take action against gangs of yobs in the street for the first time. Secondly, I point out to the right hon. and learned Gentleman that crime in London is down and police numbers up. We remember that when he was Home Secretary he cut the numbers of police, and crime under the last Conservative Government doubled.

Mr. Howard: The Prime Minister knows perfectly well that when I was Home Secretary, crime fell by 18 per cent., and either of his Home Secretaries would give their eye teeth for that record. The Prime Minister told the country in his manifesto that he would

"relieve the police of unnecessary bureaucratic burdens".

Is this what he meant? Should the police not be doing their job, not filling in forms? We have said that we will scrap this latest piece of politically correct nonsense. Why will he not?

The Prime Minister: For the reason that I have just given. The measure was introduced after the inquiry into the death of Stephen Lawrence. It was considered necessary in order to ensure that there was proper support in local communities for policing. I do not think that the right hon. and learned Gentleman's record on policing in London can be that good, since he was telling us a few weeks ago that he went out in Brixton for the night and could not see a single police officer. Let me say to him:

> "Burglary is down, robbery is down, graffiti wiped away, abandoned cars towed away. Central Brixton is a safer, happier place than it was a couple of years ago . . . Call it what you like, but it works."

Not my words—the words of the shadow Chancellor.

Mr. Howard: And how does the Prime Minister think that the police in Brixton will be able to continue to make the progress they have made, if they have to spend the best part of an hour filling in forms every time they stop a gang of half a dozen people in the street? I have now asked him four times the question about the forms that the police have to fill in. On each of those occasions he has failed to answer it. Why, for once, does he not face up to the nonsense of the requirements that his Government are imposing on the police?

The Prime Minister: I have not failed to answer the question. I have answered it. I have explained why we think it is necessary to do that, following the Lawrence inquiry. An important part of policing in London is to police with the support of the local community. In relation to policing in general, in London and elsewhere, there are record numbers of police, and they are now supported by community support officers who, incidentally, were opposed by the Opposition. We are reintroducing neighbourhood policing throughout London. Crime in London is down, not up, and as the commander in Brixton said:

> "I think Mr. Howard is out of touch . . . Maybe 10 or 20 years ago his comments would have been more accurate but there are now more police in Brixton. There are no more no-go areas and things have improved tremendously."

I prefer his words to those of the right hon. and learned Gentleman, or indeed my own.

Hon. Members: More.

Mr. Speaker: Order.

Q4. [198450] **Anne Picking** (East Lothian) (Lab): I thought that the Leader of the Opposition would be a hard act to follow, but plainly not.

My right hon. Friend was contacted this morning by a constituent of mine, Sandra Stalker, who wanted to thank me and the Government for her winter fuel allowance. Will he reassure her and millions of others that he has no plans to abolish or reduce that necessary measure to tackle fuel poverty?

The Prime Minister: I can assure my hon. Friend that we shall continue with the winter fuel payment and with the free television licence for the over-75s, which were dismissed at the time by the Conservatives as patronising gimmicks. For many of our constituents, the £200 winter fuel allowance is of help. It goes alongside the measures that have been taken to boost energy conservation, particularly in pensioners' homes, leading to a situation where far fewer pensioners fear the choice between heating and eating.

Alistair Burt (North-East Bedfordshire) (Con): The prisons ombudsman's report into the fire at Yarl's Wood removals centre in my constituency was published yesterday. It blames ill-thought-out policies and the setting of unachievable targets for leading to the design and construction of a building that was unfit for purpose and in which the many hundreds of detainees whom it housed might have lost their lives. Who does the Prime Minister think is accountable and responsible for the policy failures that led to the incident, which the ombudsman himself described as a hair's breadth from tragedy?

The Prime Minister: Of course we take responsibility for Yarl's Wood. It is necessary to ensure that we have more detention space. We are increasing detention space for the obvious reason that there is concern about asylum claims in particular—we have processed 80 per cent. of asylum claims in two months. Despite yesterday's rise, the number of asylum applications is now down to near the level that we inherited in 1997. We have taken on board the criticisms about Yarl's Wood and are ensuring that both the refurbished Yarl's Wood and other detention space complies with the recommendations in the report.

Q5. [198451] **Mr. Piara S. Khabra** (Ealing, Southall) (Lab): I welcome the Prime Minister on his return from the United States. He brought back some encouraging signals from his meeting with Mr. Bush on the middle east peace process. However, may I draw his attention to the dangers of global warming? In light of both a recent study showing a record rate of warming in the Arctic and Russia's decision to sign the Kyoto protocol, will he confirm that he was able to prompt Mr. Bush to take greater action on global warming to save the world from environmental disaster?

The Prime Minister: I agree with my hon. Friend about the importance of climate change and global warming. That is why we have made climate change one of the two priorities for our G8 chairmanship next year, along with Africa. I spoke at length to President Bush about that matter and hope that we can work with America and other G8 partners to draw up proposals for the G8 summit next year to allow us to make progress on that issue again. The Kyoto protocol will come into effect as a result of Russia's ratification, but my hon. Friend and others rightly point out that even if Kyoto were implemented fully, it would effectively stabilise emissions, whereas we need to reduce them considerably.

Mr. John Wilkinson (Ruislip-Northwood) (Con): What action will the Prime Minister take on the unsurprising but shocking news that, for the tenth year running, the European Court of Auditors has failed to sign off the accounts of the European Union? Are the Government happy to acquiesce in that sorry state of affairs? Is it not about time that the United Kingdom stopped throwing good taxpayers' money after bad and did something about the issue, rather than seeing whistleblowers being fired?

The Prime Minister: We will, of course, continue to insist that the European Commission and the European Union come into compliance with the auditors' requirements. It is worth pointing out that although shortcomings were identified, they do not affect all the funds that are paid into the European Union or that come back to us. On the other hand, we have been pressing the new Commission to take far tougher action.

Q6. [198452] **Mr. Wayne David** (Caerphilly) (Lab): I know that the Prime Minister is very pleased with the unemployment figures announced this morning, and so he should be, because they are at a record low—nothing shows more clearly that Labour is working for Britain. Does he realise that if we are to achieve long-term economic success in this country, we must build an enterprise culture, especially among our young people? Will he indicate his plans to build on the success of this week's enterprise week?

The Prime Minister: It is important to recognise the extra investment in education that is going into our schools. We have boosted investment in each pupil by a significant amount beyond what we inherited. We are also setting up business and enterprise specialist schools, which will help too. The child trust fund, which is just starting, will make a big difference by giving children a nest egg for the future. In addition, the proposals on child care will enable parents to balance work and family life to a far better extent.

Crown Post Office (Newton Abbot)

Q7. [198453] **Richard Younger-Ross (Teignbridge)** (LD): What plans he has to visit the Crown post office in Newton Abbot.

The Prime Minister: I have no current plans to do so.

Richard Younger-Ross: That is a shame, because the Post Office proposes to close the Newton Abbot Crown office and the sub-post offices in Queen street and at Keyberry and to replace them with one franchise given to Costcutter. Will the Prime Minister condemn the Post Office for refusing to allow any other local business to bid for that franchise, and will he support the commercial workers union in asking for the sell-off and franchising—*[Interruption.]*

Mr. Speaker: Order.

Richard Younger-Ross: Will he support the commercial workers union in asking for the suspension of the sell-off and franchising until the Trade and Industry Committee has completed its report—*[Interruption.]*

Mr. Speaker: Order. Let the hon. Gentleman speak.

Richard Younger-Ross: —and the Post Office has completed its negotiations with the union?

The Prime Minister: It is not correct to equate closures with franchises. More than 280 of the 550 directly managed post offices have been successfully franchised, and I understand that there are high customer satisfaction levels with that. The problem that we face is quite simple. The combined losses of those 550 directly managed post offices are more than £70 million a year, and we simply cannot afford to sustain those losses. We are putting hundreds of millions of pounds into supporting post offices, but there is a limit to that.

I understand, incidentally, that discussions are continuing between the Post Office and the Communication Workers Union to try to resolve this issue.

Engagements

Q8. [198454] **Mr. William Cash** (Stone) (Con): President Chirac has insisted that Europe should become a superpower to counter the United States. The Prime Minister himself has said that he wants Europe to be a superpower. When will he accept that this complete contradiction of his commitment to an undemocratic European constitution, with its defence and foreign policy, runs counter to our proven alliance with the United States? When will he discover that he cannot ride both horses at the same time?

The Prime Minister: It is extraordinary, given that the hon. Gentleman was down to ask a question, that I have briefings on education, crime, health and jobs, although it was perfectly obvious that there was only one subject he would ever ask about: Europe. I really must complain about those briefings.

Mr. Cash: Answer the question, then.

The Prime Minister: I will answer the question. I think that this country is lucky to have two major strong alliances—one with the United States of America and the other as a leading member of the European Union. It is important that we keep both alliances intact, because they are both important for the future of this country. I can think of many other countries around the world that would be delighted to have two such strong alliances. It is time, frankly, and with the greatest respect to the hon. Gentleman, that we started to celebrate, not denigrate, that fact.

Q9. [198455] **Chris Ruane** (Vale of Clwyd) (Lab): Will my right hon. Friend take time out of his busy schedule to visit the £15.5 million OpTIC optoelectronic incubation and research centre at the St. Asaph business park in my constituency? That technology centre will result in 24 new high-quality, high-tech companies being created every two years. What help can be given to spread that technology around the rest of Wales and the rest of the UK?

May I also ask my right hon. Friend whether he will be hanging around for the next few minutes for my ten-minute Bill at half past 12?

The Prime Minister: I cannot give an absolutely firm commitment on that, but I am sure that it is a great Bill, whatever its subject.

My hon. Friend is right. Investment in science and technology is a major part of the Government's programme to make this country the No. 1 capital in the world for the development of science and technology and businesses associated with it. We are in a strong position and we could be stronger still. The facility in my hon. Friend's constituency is not the only one in the country. They are important, and we need to grow and to build them because they have a direct impact on our future prosperity.

Mr. David Trimble (Upper Bann) (UUP): I welcome today's meetings on Northern Ireland but does the Prime Minister appreciate the puzzlement of people there, given that 12 months after the election and more than two months since he declared at Leeds castle that he had virtually got the issue sorted out, nothing has happened? Will he get a grip and end the drift that someone somewhere clearly wants to prolong?

The Prime Minister: I hope that people in Northern Ireland are not too puzzled. Frankly, by now, they should be used to the stops and starts of a difficult and arduous process. Again, I pay tribute to the right hon. Gentleman for his work in the peace process, which should always be stated. I hope that the talks today will be productive. Although it is taking slightly longer than I anticipated, we are trying to resolve the outstanding issues. I think he would acknowledge that, provided that it is absolutely clear—it must be—from anyone who wants to sit in the Government of Northern Ireland that paramilitary violence is ended once and for all in all its forms, there is no reason why the Unionist community should not sit in an Executive with other parties, including the republican party, to govern Northern Ireland in a devolved way. I greatly hope that, in the next few days—it may be a little longer—we will make progress to ensure that, on the republican side, there is a complete end to violence, and on the Unionist side an acceptance that if that is so there should be power sharing.

Points of Order

12.31 pm

Sir Patrick Cormack (South Staffordshire) (Con): On a point of order, Mr. Speaker. May I draw your attention to motion 18 on today's Order Paper, which is entitled, "Application of the Parliament Act to the Hunting Bill"? It has been signed by 20 hon. Members from all parties representing both sides of the argument. Would you prefer to give time for that to be debated today?

Several hon. Members *rose—*

Mr. Speaker: Perhaps I can answer Sir Patrick and then there will be no need for further points of order. Those matters are for the Government, not the Speaker. [*Interruption.*] Perhaps I can clarify matters. Debating time in the House is for the Government, not the Speaker, to determine.

Mr. James Gray (North Wiltshire) (Con): On a point of order, Mr. Speaker. Last night, the Prime Minister, the Foreign Secretary, the Home Secretary and 18 of their colleagues who were able to get into the Lobby with them voted against an outright ban on hunting. Is there any precedent in the long history of the Parliament Act for it to be used to force through a Bill, against which the holders of the great offices of state and the leader of the Government have voted?

Mr. Speaker: Hon. Members' voting records are a matter for them, not the Speaker.

Mr. Gray: What about precedent?

Mr. Speaker: The hon. Gentleman should not worry about the Parliament Act. That is for me to worry about and look after—[HON. MEMBERS: "And us."] Of course, and I look after the interests of all hon. Members, especially those of Back Benchers.

Claire Ward (Watford) (Lab) *rose—*

Mr. Speaker: I shall take the hon. Lady last because she has a different point of order.

Mr. Elfyn Llwyd (Meirionnydd Nant Conwy) (PC): On a point of order, Mr. Speaker. You may know that the board of inquiry into the deaths of the six brave policemen who were killed at Majar al-kabir last year reports today. The Secretary of State for Defence will conduct a press conference to discuss the report at four o'clock in the Ministry of Defence. With great respect, I have shown a deep interest in the matter, given that one of my constituents was murdered in the incident. Other hon. Members have also done so. At the very least, the Secretary of State should have the guts to come here, make a statement and be questioned properly in Parliament.

Mr. Speaker: I think that we should have temperate language in the Chamber. The hon. Gentleman can always ask me for an urgent question. He can also raise the matter in other ways, perhaps through an Adjournment debate. I will consider the matter, but it is not for me to decide whether the Secretary of State goes to a press conference; that is a judgment for the right hon. Gentleman.

Mr. Iain Duncan Smith (Chingford and Woodford Green) (Con): On a point of order, Mr. Speaker. I listened to what you rightly said about the Parliament Act but would you also accept that, when it is time for you to make the decision about its application, you will clearly take into consideration the position of the Prime Minister and leading members of his Cabinet in voting against that which the Act would impose on Parliament?

Mr. Speaker: The House makes these decisions, the House passed the Act and the Act, in a sense, gives me certain instructions. It would be wrong of me to listen to the Prime Minister or anyone else in this matter.

Mr. Dominic Grieve (Beaconsfield) (Con): On a point of order, Mr. Speaker. Has the Prime Minister notified you that he wishes to come to the House to correct what he said during Prime Minister's Question Time, when he engaged in a highly selective quotation of my right hon. Friend the Member for West Dorset (Mr. Letwin) about policing in Brixton? If he had correctly quoted him, he would have pointed out that both my right hon. Friend and I noted in Brixton that the action in Brixton town centre had pushed crime into the housing estates and into the immediate periphery, which were suffering as a result.

Mr. Speaker: The hon. Gentleman has done well to put the record straight through a point of order.

Claire Ward: On a point of order, Mr. Speaker. I would like to raise with you and the House an abuse of parliamentary privilege by the Liberal Democrat party in Watford, which has deceitfully used the portcullis of the House for cheap party political purposes. The matter has been raised with the Serjeant at Arms, who has reported it to the Liberal Democrats in the House and ordered that the abuse cease immediately. Will you condemn the Liberal Democrats for this abuse of the Crown privilege, bestowed on Members of the House and Officers of the House in fulfilling their duties, and will you remind them of the rules?

Mr. Speaker: Perhaps I can remind all hon. Members of the rules, but I will not go as far as condemning any political party. The Crown portcullis—and other emblems of the House—should be used only in direct connection with communications and publications originating from the House. It should not be shown on any publicity material associated with any individual political parties, and that includes the content of party websites. I am aware that the Crown portcullis emblem has been withdrawn from the website in question. The use of stationery has been dealt with by the Serjeant at Arms.

Vehicle Servicing Industry (Regulation)

12.37 pm

Chris Ruane (Vale of Clwyd): I beg to move,

That leave be given to bring in a Bill to make provision about the regulation of the vehicle servicing industry.

There are approximately 25 million cars on the road in the UK. The garage servicing industry is worth an estimated £9.8 billion a year—around £350 per car. The cost of shoddy repairs is estimated to cost UK car drivers £170 million per annum. The questions I pose today are, are we getting value for money, are our cars being serviced to the highest standards, and is safety being compromised?

In dealing with this issue I have worked very closely with *Which?* and the Consumers Association. Last week, *Which?* published the results of an undercover investigation. It took 48 cars to 48 garages across the country and asked them to fix relatively minor faults such as worn brake discs, and then it asked independent, trained experts to check the quality of the work. Seventy-three per cent. of the work undertaken was unsatisfactory and 67 per cent. of the garages that *Which?* took the cars to, failed to pick up the faults. *Which?* has conducted other research in the past into MOT servicing, and only eight of 36 garages performed the tests correctly.

The report's findings are nothing new and, although the figures are high, erratic quality in the servicing of vehicles is not a recent phenomenon. The public, consumer organisations and Government agencies have complained about it for decades. The latest investigations by the Office of Fair Trading and by trading standards authorities reveal some gross abuses of consumer confidence. Interestingly, the problem appears as endemic in the franchise dealer workshops as in the small independent garages. Despite the efforts of vehicle manufacturers to get their franchisees to observe quality standards, they have failed to do so.

Most car users think that, if they take their car to a recognised franchisee—they often pay over the odds to do so—they will get a good deal. That is not always the case. On the other hand, I do not want to condemn all garages or tar them all with the same brush. Personally, I have received excellent service in my constituency from a one-man operator, Jack Frodsham, who serviced my car for many years, and from a franchise operator, KA Ford, which gave me some expert and timely advice last week that saved me more than £600. I congratulate those garages.

The latest attempt to tackle poor standards was the good garage scheme, which is also known as the CarWise scheme and has been promoted by the Department of Trade and Industry. The proposal, which is based on codes of conduct, self-regulation and asking the consumer to distinguish between good and bad, was welcomed by consumer groups and hailed as a way of sorting out the mess of garage servicing without legislation. Unfortunately, the scheme received a mixed reception in industry circles, and the industry finally withdrew, refusing to fund it.

The scheme would have cost about £10 million to set up—only 35p for every car on the road in the UK. The industry claimed that the consumer would be up in arms about having to pay that 35p per year and per car for the service. *Which?* could not believe it, so it conducted further research with 1,100 people to find out what they were getting for their money and what they wanted from a mechanic. Some 93 per cent. of the people surveyed said that they would be concerned if they thought that their car was being serviced by a mechanic without suitable qualifications. People said that they wanted to be able to trust their mechanic. In order to get that trust, the industry has to listen to what people want: some kind of decent standard that is nationally recognised. Some 87 per cent. of those surveyed told *Which?* that they would pay extra for an approved technician to work on their car, and 67 per cent. said that they would travel further to get their car serviced by someone who was suitably qualified. With the consumer prepared to pay more and travel further for good customer service and a professional repair, it is unclear why the industry has not responded more positively.

Following the decision to scrap the good garage scheme, the Government did the only thing they could, and encouraged the industry to develop a code of practice and work with the OFT and its consumer code approval scheme. While some societies and organisations, such as the Society of Motor Manufacturers and Traders, have joined the scheme, *Which?* informs me that the Retail Motor Industry Federation, whose members are mainly independent repairers, withdrew its code, claiming that the OFT kept changing its criteria and the goalposts. The criteria are relatively low anyway, but, by signing up, a trade body can demonstrate its commitment to standards and good consumer service. I hope that the RMIF will reconsider its position following this debate.

There are many in the industry who support regulation and licensing. Philip Branley of the insurers Allianz Cornhill said:

> "In principle we would be in favour of a national licensing scheme. Anything that improves the standards and enhances consumer confidence has to be a good thing."

The automotive trade magazine representing body repairers and small independent garages conducted e-polling and found that 82 per cent. of its trade readership supported licensing under a mandatory scheme. Obviously, there is concern about who will pay to set up and monitor a scheme. As I have asserted, however, the public have stated that they are prepared to pay more, as long as they are guaranteed quality.

The Government are also helping out in other ways, such as improving competencies with the modern apprenticeship scheme. I believe that 7,000 apprentices are currently being trained to be mechanics. I point to the centre of automotive technology in my constituency—a £1.5 million project in Rhyl college aimed at giving young people, both male and female, the chance to gain these 21st century skills in the car servicing industry. Many in the industry welcome that help and realise that competency is the core of improving consumer confidence. Some, such as the Institute of the Motor Industry, Automotive Advantage and several dealer groups and manufacturers, already operate a code of practice and a raft of qualifications to help train mechanics. Their positive input should be recognised and encouraged by the Government.

Regulation has been introduced successfully in other industries and sectors. The gas installation industry, for instance, is now covered by CORGI registration, and in the aerospace industry mechanics are trained to the highest standards. Today's automated, computerised cars are a different beast from those of 30 years ago. The knowledge and skills required to service such cars are of a far higher standard, and deserve recognition and respect.

Failure to regulate could have tragic consequences. In the words of Alan Hodgkinson, chief executive of body repair network ABS, who supports regulation and licensing,

> "The failure of just one incorrectly fitted ball joint could lead to a multiple pile up on a motorway causing many deaths."

He added that

> "Government would have to step in overnight with compulsory licensing and the debate would be over."

I do not believe that we should have to wait for that accident to happen. I believe that the Bill should be adopted, and that the motor vehicle servicing industry should be regulated and licensed.

Question put and agreed to.

Bill ordered to be brought in by Chris Ruane, Mr. Elfyn Llwyd, Mr. Roy Beggs, Mark Tami, Linda Perham, Mrs. Betty Williams, Mr. Martyn Jones, Albert Owen, Ian Lucas, Gareth Thomas, Mr. Gordon Prentice and Jim Sheridan.

VEHICLE SERVICING INDUSTRY (REGULATION)

Chris Ruane accordingly presented a Bill to make provision about the regulation of the vehicle servicing industry: And the same was read the First time; and ordered to be read a Second time on Friday 19 November, and to be printed [Bill 183].

Civil Contingencies Bill (Programme) (No. 2)

Motion made, and Question put forthwith, pursuant to Orders [28 June 2001 and 6 November 2003],

That the following proceedings shall apply to the Civil Contingencies Bill for the purpose of supplementing the Order of 19th January 2004.

Consideration of Lords Amendments

1. Proceedings on consideration of Lords Amendments shall (so far as not previously concluded) be brought to a conclusion three hours after their commencement at this day's sitting.

2. Those proceedings shall be taken in the order shown in the first column of the following table, and each part of those proceedings shall (so far as not previously concluded) be brought to a conclusion at the time shown in the second column.

Lords amendments	*Time for conclusion of proceedings*
Amendments 49 to 51	One hour after the commencement of proceedings on consideration of Lords Amendments.
Amendments 41, 42 and 46	One hour and 45 minutes after the commencement of those proceedings.
Amendments 7 and 56	Two and a half hours after the commencement of those proceedings.
Remaining amendments	Three hours after the commencement of those proceedings.

Subsequent stages

3. Any further Message from the Lords may be considered forthwith without any further Question being put.

4. The proceedings on any further Message from the Lords shall (so far as not previously concluded) be brought to a conclusion one hour after their commencement—[*Paul Clark.*]

The House divided: Ayes 277, Noes 174.

Division No. 331] **[12:47 pm**

AYES

Ainger, Nick
Ainsworth, Bob *(Cov'try NE)*
Allen, Graham
Atherton, Ms Candy
Baird, Vera
Barron, rh Kevin
Battle, rh John
Bayley, Hugh
Beard, Nigel
Begg, Miss Anne
Bell, Sir Stuart
Berry, Roger
Blackman, Liz
Blizzard, Bob
Boateng, rh Paul
Borrow, David
Bradley, rh Keith *(Withington)*
Bradley, Peter *(The Wrekin)*
Bradshaw, Ben
Brennan, Kevin
Brown, rh Nicholas *(Newcastle E Wallsend)*
Brown, Russell *(Dumfries)*
Browne, Desmond
Bryant, Chris
Buck, Ms Karen
Burgon, Colin
Burnham, Andy
Byrne, Liam *(B'ham Hodge H)*
Cairns, David
Campbell, Alan *(Tynemouth)*
Campbell, Mrs Anne *(C'bridge)*
Campbell, Ronnie *(Blyth V)*
Caplin, Ivor
Casale, Roger
Caton, Martin
Challen, Colin
Chaytor, David
Clark, Mrs Helen *(Peterborough)*
Clark, Dr. Lynda *(Edinburgh Pentlands)*
Clark, Paul *(Gillingham)*
Clarke, rh Charles *(Norwich S)*
Clarke, rh Tom *(Coatbridge & Chryston)*
Clarke, Tony *(Northampton S)*
Coaker, Vernon
Coffey, Ms Ann
Colman, Tony
Corbyn, Jeremy
Corston, Jean
Cox, Tom *(Tooting)*

Cranston, Ross
Crausby, David
Cruddas, Jon
Cryer, Ann *(Keighley)*
Cunningham, Jim *(Coventry S)*
Cunningham, Tony *(Workington)*
Darling, rh Alistair
Davey, Valerie *(Bristol W)*
David, Wayne
Davidson, Ian
Davies, rh Denzil *(Llanelli)*
Denham, rh John
Dhanda, Parmjit
Dismore, Andrew
Dobbin, Jim *(Heywood)*
Donohoe, Brian H.
Doran, Frank
Drew, David *(Stroud)*
Drown, Ms Julia
Eagle, Angela *(Wallasey)*
Eagle, Maria *(L'pool Garston)*
Edwards, Huw
Efford, Clive
Ellman, Mrs Louise
Ennis, Jeff *(Barnsley E)*
Etherington, Bill
Field, rh Frank *(Birkenhead)*
Fitzsimons, Mrs Lorna
Foster, Michael *(Worcester)*
Foster, Michael Jabez *(Hastings & Rye)*
Francis, Dr. Hywel
Gardiner, Barry
Gerrard, Neil
Gilroy, Linda
Goggins, Paul
Griffiths, Jane *(Reading E)*
Griffiths, Win *(Bridgend)*
Grogan, John
Hain, rh Peter
Hall, Mike *(Weaver Vale)*
Hall, Patrick *(Bedford)*
Hamilton, David *(Midlothian)*
Hamilton, Fabian *(Leeds NE)*
Hanson, David
Harman, rh Ms Harriet
Havard, Dai *(Merthyr Tydfil & Rhymney)*
Healey, John
Henderson, Ivan *(Harwich)*
Heppell, John
Hesford, Stephen
Hewitt, rh Ms Patricia
Heyes, David
Hill, Keith *(Streatham)*
Hinchliffe, David
Hodge, Margaret
Hood, Jimmy *(Clydesdale)*
Hope, Phil *(Corby)*
Hopkins, Kelvin
Howarth, rh Alan *(Newport E)*
Howarth, George *(Knowsley N & Sefton E)*
Howells, Dr. Kim
Hughes, Beverley *(Stretford & Urmston)*
Hughes, Kevin *(Doncaster N)*
Humble, Mrs Joan
Hume, John *(Foyle)*
Hurst, Alan *(Braintree)*
Hutton, rh John
Irranca-Davies, Huw
Jackson, Glenda *(Hampstead & Highgate)*
Jackson, Helen *(Hillsborough)*
Jamieson, David
Jenkins, Brian
Johnson, rh Alan *(Hull W)*
Jones, Helen *(Warrington N)*
Jones, Jon Owen *(Cardiff C)*
Jones, Martyn *(Clwyd S)*
Joyce, Eric *(Falkirk W)*
Kaufman, rh Sir Gerald
Keeble, Ms Sally
Keen, Alan *(Feltham)*
Kelly, Ruth *(Bolton W)*
Khabra, Piara S.
Kidney, David
Kilfoyle, Peter
King, Andy *(Rugby)*
King, Ms Oona *(Bethnal Green & Bow)*
Knight, Jim *(S Dorset)*
Kumar, Dr. Ashok
Ladyman, Dr. Stephen
Lammy, David
Laxton, Bob *(Derby N)*
Lazarowicz, Mark
Lepper, David
Leslie, Christopher
Linton, Martin
Lloyd, Tony *(Manchester C)*
Love, Andrew
Lucas, Ian *(Wrexham)*
Luke, Iain *(Dundee E)*
McAvoy, Thomas
McCabe, Stephen
McCafferty, Chris
McDonagh, Siobhain
McDonnell, John
McFall, rh John
McGuire, Mrs Anne
McIsaac, Shona
McKechin, Ann
McKenna, Rosemary
Mackinlay, Andrew
McNamara, Kevin
McNulty, Tony
McWilliam, John
Mahmood, Khalid
Mallaber, Judy
Mann, John *(Bassetlaw)*
Marris, Rob *(Wolverh'ton SW)*
Marsden, Gordon *(Blackpool S)*
Marshall, David *(Glasgow Shettleston)*
Martlew, Eric
Meacher, rh Michael
Merron, Gillian
Michael, rh Alun
Miller, Andrew
Mitchell, Austin *(Gt Grimsby)*
Moffatt, Laura
Moran, Margaret
Morgan, Julie
Morley, Elliot
Morris, rh Estelle
Mudie, George
Munn, Ms Meg
Murphy, Denis *(Wansbeck)*
Murphy, Jim *(Eastwood)*
Naysmith, Dr. Doug
Norris, Dan *(Wansdyke)*
O'Brien, Bill *(Normanton)*
O'Hara, Edward
Olner, Bill
Organ, Diana
Osborne, Sandra *(Ayr)*
Owen, Albert
Palmer, Dr. Nick
Perham, Linda
Picking, Anne
Pickthall, Colin
Pike, Peter *(Burnley)*
Plaskitt, James
Pollard, Kerry
Pope, Greg *(Hyndburn)*
Pound, Stephen
Prentice, Ms Bridget *(Lewisham E)*
Prentice, Gordon *(Pendle)*
Prosser, Gwyn
Purnell, James
Quin, rh Joyce
Quinn, Lawrie
Rapson, Syd *(Portsmouth N)*
Raynsford, rh Nick
Reed, Andy *(Loughborough)*
Robertson, John *(Glasgow Anniesland)*
Roche, Mrs Barbara
Rooney, Terry
Ross, Ernie *(Dundee W)*
Roy, Frank *(Motherwell)*
Ruane, Chris
Ruddock, Joan
Sarwar, Mohammad
Savidge, Malcolm
Sawford, Phil
Sedgemore, Brian
Sheerman, Barry
Sheridan, Jim
Shipley, Ms Debra
Simon, Siôn *(B'ham Erdington)*
Skinner, Dennis
Smith, rh Andrew *(Oxford E)*
Smith, Angela *(Basildon)*
Smith, Geraldine *(Morecambe & Lunesdale)*
Smith, Jacqui *(Redditch)*
Smith, John *(Glamorgan)*
Smith, Llew *(Blaenau Gwent)*
Soley, Clive
Spellar, rh John
Starkey, Dr. Phyllis
Steinberg, Gerry
Stewart, David *(Inverness E & Lochaber)*
Stewart, Ian *(Eccles)*
Stinchcombe, Paul
Stoate, Dr. Howard
Strang, rh Dr. Gavin
Straw, rh Jack
Stringer, Graham
Stuart, Ms Gisela
Sutcliffe, Gerry
Tami, Mark *(Alyn)*
Taylor, rh Ann *(Dewsbury)*
Taylor, Dr. Richard *(Wyre F)*
Timms, Stephen
Tipping, Paddy
Todd, Mark *(S Derbyshire)*
Touhig, Don *(Islwyn)*
Trickett, Jon
Truswell, Paul
Turner, Dennis *(Wolverh'ton SE)*
Turner, Neil *(Wigan)*
Twigg, Derek *(Halton)*
Tynan, Bill *(Hamilton S)*
Vaz, Keith *(Leicester E)*
Vis, Dr. Rudi
Walley, Ms Joan
Ward, Claire
Wareing, Robert N.
Watson, Tom
White, Brian
Whitehead, Dr. Alan
Wicks, Malcolm
Williams, rh Alan *(Swansea W)*
Wills, Michael
Winnick, David
Winterton, Ms Rosie *(Doncaster C)*
Woolas, Phil
Worthington, Tony
Wright, Anthony D. *(Gt Yarmouth)*
Wright, David *(Telford)*
Wright, Iain *(Hartlepool)*
Wright, Tony *(Cannock)*
Wyatt, Derek

Tellers for the Ayes:
Joan Ryan and
Jim Fitzpatrick

NOES

Ainsworth, Peter *(E Surrey)*
Allan, Richard
Amess, David
Arbuthnot, rh James
Atkinson, Peter *(Hexham)*
Bacon, Richard
Baker, Norman
Barrett, John
Bellingham, Henry
Bercow, John
Beresford, Sir Paul
Blunt, Crispin
Boswell, Tim
Brady, Graham
Brake, Tom *(Carshalton)*
Brazier, Julian
Breed, Colin
Brooke, Mrs Annette L.
Browning, Mrs Angela
Bruce, Malcolm
Burns, Simon
Burnside, David
Burstow, Paul
Burt, Alistair
Calton, Mrs Patsy
Cameron, David
Campbell, Gregory *(E Lond'y)*
Carmichael, Alistair
Cash, William
Chapman, Sir Sydney *(Chipping Barnet)*
Chope, Christopher
Clappison, James
Clifton-Brown, Geoffrey
Collins, Tim
Conway, Derek
Cormack, Sir Patrick
Cotter, Brian
Curry, rh David
Davey, Edward *(Kingston)*
Davies, Quentin *(Grantham & Stamford)*
Davis, rh David *(Haltemprice & Howden)*
Djanogly, Jonathan
Dodds, Nigel

Donaldson, Jeffrey M.
Doughty, Sue
Duncan, Alan *(Rutland)*
Duncan, Peter *(Galloway)*
Duncan Smith, rh Iain
Ewing, Annabelle
Fabricant, Michael
Fallon, Michael
Field, Mark *(Cities of London & Westminster)*
Flook, Adrian
Forth, rh Eric
Foster, Don *(Bath)*
Fox, Dr. Liam
Francois, Mark
Gale, Roger *(N Thanet)*
George, Andrew *(St. Ives)*
Gibb, Nick *(Bognor Regis)*
Gidley, Sandra
Gill, Parmjit Singh
Gillan, Mrs Cheryl
Goodman, Paul
Gray, James *(N Wilts)*
Grayling, Chris
Green, Damian *(Ashford)*
Green, Matthew *(Ludlow)*
Greenway, John
Grieve, Dominic
Hague, rh William
Hammond, Philip
Hancock, Mike
Harvey, Nick
Hawkins, Nick
Hayes, John *(S Holland)*
Heald, Oliver
Heath, David
Heathcoat-Amory, rh David
Hendry, Charles
Hermon, Lady
Hogg, rh Douglas
Holmes, Paul
Horam, John *(Orpington)*
Hughes, Simon *(Southwark N)*
Jack, rh Michael
Jenkin, Bernard
Jones, Nigel *(Cheltenham)*
Kennedy, rh Charles *(Ross Skye & Inverness)*
Kirkbride, Miss Julie
Laing, Mrs Eleanor
Lait, Mrs Jacqui
Lamb, Norman
Laws, David *(Yeovil)*
Letwin, rh Oliver
Liddell-Grainger, Ian
Lidington, David
Lilley, rh Peter
Llwyd, Elfyn
Loughton, Tim
Luff, Peter *(M-Worcs)*
McIntosh, Miss Anne
Mackay, rh Andrew
Maclean, rh David
McLoughlin, Patrick
Malins, Humfrey
Maples, John
Maude, rh Francis
May, Mrs Theresa
Mercer, Patrick
Mitchell, Andrew *(Sutton Coldfield)*
Moore, Michael
Moss, Malcolm
Murrison, Dr. Andrew
Norman, Archie
Oaten, Mark *(Winchester)*
O'Brien, Stephen *(Eddisbury)*
Öpik, Lembit
Osborne, George *(Tatton)*
Ottaway, Richard
Pickles, Eric
Price, Adam *(E Carmarthen & Dinefwr)*
Prisk, Mark *(Hertford)*
Pugh, Dr. John
Reid, Alan *(Argyll & Bute)*
Rendel, David
Robathan, Andrew,
Robertson, Angus *(Moray)*
Robertson, Hugh *(Faversham & M-Kent)*
Robinson, Mrs Iris *(Strangford)*
Robinson, Peter *(Belfast E)*
Rosindell, Andrew
Russell, Bob *(Colchester)*
Sanders, Adrian
Sayeed, Jonathan
Selous, Andrew
Shepherd, Richard
Simmonds, Mark
Simpson, Keith *(M-Norfolk)*
Smith, Sir Robert *(W Ab'd'ns & Kincardine)*
Smyth, Rev. Martin *(Belfast S)*
Spicer, Sir Michael
Spink, Bob *(Castle Point)*
Streeter, Gary
Stunell, Andrew
Swayne, Desmond
Syms, Robert
Taylor, Ian *(Esher)*
Taylor, John *(Solihull)*
Taylor, Matthew *(Truro)*
Teather, Sarah
Thomas, Simon *(Ceredigion)*
Thurso, John
Tredinnick, David
Trend, Michael
Trimble, rh David
Turner, Andrew *(Isle of Wight)*
Tyler, Paul *(N Cornwall)*
Tyrie, Andrew
Waterson, Nigel
Watkinson, Angela
Weir, Michael
Whittingdale, John
Widdecombe, rh Miss Ann
Wiggin, Bill
Wilkinson, John
Willetts, David
Williams, Hywel *(Caernarfon)*
Wilshire, David
Winterton, Sir Nicholas *(Macclesfield)*
Wishart, Pete
Yeo, Tim *(S Suffolk)*
Young, rh Sir George
Younger-Ross, Richard

Tellers for the Noes:
Gregory Barker and
Mr. Hugo Swire

Question accordingly agreed to.

Orders of the Day

Civil Contingencies Bill

Lords amendments considered.

Clause 34

COMMENCEMENT

Lords amendment: No. 49.

1.1 pm

The Minister for the Cabinet Office (Ruth Kelly): I beg to move, That this House disagrees with the Lords in the said amendment.

Mr. Speaker: With this we may discuss Lords amendments Nos. 50 and 51 and the Government motions to disagree thereto.

Ruth Kelly: These amendments provide the vehicle for bringing part 2 of the Bill, on emergency powers, to an end three years after it has been brought into force. The Government are unable to agree with that approach. The idea of sunsetting part 2 of the Bill was originally raised by the Joint Committee that conducted pre-legislative scrutiny of the then draft Bill. The Government in their response made it clear that a sunset clause is relatively unusual and requires careful consideration. The issue was discussed at some length on Report and Third Reading in the other place.

The arguments against sunsetting are compelling. Sunsetting legislation is appropriate when the powers it contains are expected no longer to be needed after a certain period, or if their use should be reviewed by Parliament. This Bill does not meet either criterion. Time-limiting the Bill is clearly not appropriate. No one believes that emergencies will stop happening in three years' time. If part 2 of the Bill were to be repealed, something else would simply have to be put in its place. The purpose of review by Parliament on a triennial basis, it is suggested, is that—given the nature of the powers—Parliament should assess whether it is appropriate for them to continue to exist, in the light of the way in which they have been exercised. I understand that that was the main intent behind the amendment.

Provision for regular review by Parliament may be appropriate where the exercise of powers is of legitimate parliamentary interest but their exercise is not subject to parliamentary scrutiny, the intent being that some powers—given their nature—should not simply be handed over to a Government to exercise indefinitely in the manner of their choosing. That argument, however, does not apply to part 2 of the Bill. Any exercise of the powers it confers will undergo detailed parliamentary scrutiny.

I would also question the utility of review every three years, given that part 2 is a last resort option for dealing with only the most serious of emergencies, for which existing legislation proves insufficient. It is not intended for regular use. It is worth noting for example that there was a 29-year gap between the uses of the powers under the present legislation. It simply would not have been necessary or sensible to review the Emergency Powers Act 1920 every three years during that period.

Mr. Douglas Hogg (Sleaford and North Hykeham) (Con): The Minister says—and she is right, because

[Mr. Douglas Hogg]

clause 27 applies—that there will be parliamentary scrutiny of the regulations. Will Parliament be able to amend the regulations through the process of scrutiny?

Ruth Kelly: Yes. In a totally exceptional provision, it will be possible for Parliament to amend the regulations—for example, to impose additional limitations and constraints on their use by providing that the use of the powers should come to an end after a certain date.

Emergency regulations would be laid before Parliament as soon as was reasonably practical, once they had been made, and would require the assent of Parliament to continue in force. Any further set of regulations made after the lapse of the regulations would also have to go through the same process of parliamentary scrutiny.

Mr. Richard Shepherd (Aldridge-Brownhills) (Con): The Minister talks of detailed scrutiny, but the regulations would be in the form of an Order in Council and subject to the statutory instrument process. The detailed scrutiny would have to take place in 90 minutes. Or does the Minister know something that the House and the Standing Orders do not?

Ruth Kelly: The hon. Gentleman raises an important and interesting point. I said that I would expect detailed scrutiny by Parliament to take place, and I accept that 90 minutes is indeed unlikely to be sufficient to debate regulations of such importance. It is likely that in the time of such an emergency there would be a call for a major debate on the subject of the crisis and the Government would respond to that and provide the appropriate time. The hon. Gentleman may question why we have not chosen to amend the Standing Orders to reflect that expectation. I would argue that it would not be appropriate to complicate the Standing Orders with varying procedures for different kinds of regulations. However, I place it clearly on the record that we would expect detailed scrutiny of the regulations to take place.

Mr. Oliver Heald (North-East Hertfordshire) (Con): As the Minister will know, it has been thought right to have sunsetting for a small class of provisions, including the Anti-terrorism, Crime and Security Act 2001—an obvious example—and the Terrorism Act 2000, which repeated the provisions that used to be in the Northern Ireland (Emergency Provisions) Act 1973. Given that the Bill proposes to give, rightly, the most draconian powers to Ministers in an emergency, it surely also falls into that category and should be treated seriously.

Ruth Kelly: The hon. Gentleman is not alone in trying to draw parallels between the Bill and the Acts that he mentioned. Indeed, several of their Lordships also attempted to draw such parallels. They argued that because a review mechanism was appropriate in those contexts, it would be appropriate in this case. I beg to disagree. The powers in this Bill are not intended to be used on a regular basis. The powers in the Acts to which the hon. Gentleman referred are not subject to parliamentary scrutiny when exercised. We are dealing with a different type of Bill: it is an enabling Bill and the exercise of the powers it contains would be subject to detailed parliamentary scrutiny. The other Acts that have been mentioned grant ongoing powers that can be evaluated after a certain period of time has elapsed.

Mr. Richard Allan (Sheffield, Hallam) (LD): Following the point made by the hon. Member for Aldridge-Brownhills (Mr. Shepherd) about the nature of the scrutiny of the regulations once they are invoked by a Minister, we are concerned that those debates will be focused on the regulations before the House, rather than on the wider principle of whether the powers should have been used at all. We seek a review or a sunset provision because we want a review of the legislation as a whole, rather than the specific regulations that may have been invoked at a particular moment.

Ruth Kelly: It is worth bearing in mind the fact that we envisage the powers being used only for the most serious situations. It is unthinkable that any emergency that such powers would be connected with would not be debated in full while that emergency was taking place, including the Government's handling of the situation and the use of emergency powers.

Mr. Heald: Of course the particular circumstances that arise would probably be debated, and the particular measures taken would also be debated, albeit ex post facto and at not very great length. The point that is being made—I hope that the Minister will address it—is that the powers and their appropriateness to the situation would not be the subject of such a debate. That is what we would like to see scrutinised every three years. What is wrong with that?

Ruth Kelly: The true parallel to draw here is between the exercise of the regulations and the Anti-terrorism, Crime and Security Act 2001 and the Terrorism Act 2000, not between the Bill and those Acts. They do not all fall into the same category. The regulations would be subject to detailed parliamentary scrutiny and, as I was in the process of telling the House, I cannot conceive of their being used in practice without a full parliamentary debate or without scrutiny after the event of how they had been exercised in practice and of whether greater limitation should have been imposed on their use. There is no real parallel between the Bill and the Terrorism Act 2000 or the Anti-terrorism, Crime and Security Act, as this is a purely enabling Bill.

Mr. Shepherd: But of course, the underlying anxiety is the very definition of what constitutes an emergency, which lies in the Government's hands and in the hands of the parliamentary majority that the Government normally have. With such a very loose definition of what constitutes an emergency, with the powers being so enormous and with the rights of scrutiny dependent on the Government—not necessarily this Government, because of course the Minister is arguing for a permanent Act—we want the greatest possible clarity about why all that is appropriate.

Ruth Kelly: The hon. Gentleman should reflect on the fact that not only does Parliament have the power to amend the regulations, which is an exceptional provision and additional safeguard that strengthens the robustness of the scrutiny process, but the emergency regulations contain their own sunset clause: they lapse 30 days after they are made and fresh parliamentary approval must be required if further regulations are to be made. One could speculate about the composition of a Parliament that would somehow override the rule of law and the detailed safeguards in the Bill, but I would argue that that would be a function of the will of Parliament and the extremism of Members of Parliament, rather than anything to do with the functions of the Bill.

The Bill contains far more safeguards than its predecessors. It contains provision for detailed parliamentary scrutiny and amendment by Parliament of its provisions. It also contains in-built sunset clauses on the use of the regulations. In summary, the Government simply cannot agree to these Lords amendments. We are replacing a long-standing, generic framework that is entirely unsuitable for sunsetting, and effective arrangements for parliamentary scrutiny are already set out in the Bill in relation to the regulations made under it.

Mr. Heald: The Government have improved the Bill in the other place, and I pay tribute to the work of my noble Friend Baroness Buscombe, who led for the Opposition in the other place and was able to persuade the Government to do some things that I had found it very difficult to persuade them to do in the House. She has obviously got some silky skills that I have not yet acquired. It was good that the Government were prepared to tighten the definition of an emergency. Although I accept the point made by my hon. Friend the Member for Aldridge-Brownhills (Mr. Shepherd), the definition is now better.

The Government now recognise the role of the voluntary sector—something that we have pressed for throughout our debates in Committee. The test for urgent directions under clauses 7 and 8 is more objective. That is good. Clause 7 directions will be made in writing—something that we pressed for in Committee. Again, that was a good change. The removal of clause 19(5)(a), which would have allowed a Minister to treat certain situations as coming under the definition of an emergency irrespective of whether they came within the categories set out in the Bill, and the recognition of the role of parliamentary and judicial scrutiny of emergency regulations under clause 22 were all to the good.

On these Lords amendments, however, we wish the Government to go further. In the other place, my noble Friend argued that clause 34 should contain the three new subsections in Lords amendment No. 50, to provide sunset provisions for part 2. After three years, part 2 would fall unless both Houses agreed to renew it, but if they agreed to a renewal, it would last for another three years. We are used to that approach in the context of emergency powers.

1.15 pm

Despite the Minister's comments, it was agreed from the outset that the Anti-terrorism, Crime and Security Act 2001 should be subject to sunset provisions, as it contains some draconian powers in part 4 to allow the indefinite detention without charge of foreign nationals suspected of involvement with various terrorist bodies. Part 4 of that Act requires annual renewal by Parliament, and the provisions will expire altogether on 10 November 2006. Similarly, with the Northern Ireland situation, the Northern Ireland (Emergency Provisions) Act 1973 provided for annual approval by Parliament, and those provisions have been carried into the Terrorism Act 2000, so there are precedents.

Mr. Hogg: The Army Act 1992.

Mr. Heald: My right hon. and learned Friend mentions the Army Act 1992, and there are others. In fact, the Government are committed to such procedures. In a document that deals with the agenda for the future of regulation in this country, the then Minister for the Cabinet Office said:

> "as part of their better regulation agenda, the Government are committed to using sunset clauses where appropriate."

Not only are there precedents, but the Government claim to have a policy to promote such provisions. We first made the proposal for a sunset provision in Committee. We have suggested various lengths of time that might be appropriate. The Government have refused to agree.

The powers in part 2 are draconian and warrant a sunset provision. We are not saying, as the Minister suggested, that civil contingencies legislation may no longer be necessary in three years' time, but the Minister acknowledges that, over time, the powers needed to tackle such situations change. That is why the Bill has been introduced. Given the effects of such a Bill on liberty, it is only right that the latest circumstances should be considered. After all, the reason why the Government introduced the Bill is: events and new circumstances.

Given that the Government accept that events and new circumstances can prompt and require a new response, it seems wrong that they are not prepared to follow that principle by accepting a sunset provision of the kind that we suggest. We will continue to press for such a provision to be included in the Bill, and I hope that Ministers, even in the short time available, will reflect on that and consider the seriousness of the powers that they are taking and how necessary it is to review them in due course.

Mr. Allan: I would echo the comments made by the hon. Member for North-East Hertfordshire (Mr. Heald) about some of the improvements that have been made to the Bill, but we continue to have some concerns. The Liberal Democrats were open-minded in the debate that took place in the House of Lords. My colleague, Lord Avebury, made it clear that we were looking for some kind of review procedure, although not necessarily as proposed in the Lords amendment with which the Government now seek to disagree, but that we would not be happy if the provisions did not contain an ability independently to review the way in which the powers may be used. Unfortunately, the Minister in the House of Lords gave us nothing, so we made it clear that in lieu of there being no alternative, we would vote with the Conservatives to ensure that we kept the issue alive.

[Mr. Allan]

We suggested as an alternative the kind of procedure that is followed under the Terrorism Act 2000, whereby my noble Friend Lord Carlile has a statutory responsibility to review some of the provisions used under that Act. That is very useful. It has kept issues alive and on the political agenda that we fear would not otherwise have been kept alive so forcefully if the procedure had simply involved a Home Office Minister reporting on the powers under that Act. So we seek to support the principle of independent review in resisting the Government's attempts to remove the Lords amendments.

The Minister refers to the fact that part 2 should be used only in extremis, and we agree. We believe that it should be used in very few circumstances. Having gone to all the trouble to get the legislation on to the statute book, I for one would be delighted if it were 29 years before it is used. I would love to see the provisions not used at all, and to return on a triennial basis with a report simply making a nil return to say that the powers had not been used and that the legislation could therefore be allowed to continue.

Our fear, however, is that the powers in the Bill will not be used only in extremis. Ministers might be tempted to use them rather than go through the normal legislative procedures. Even in a case as serious as the attacks that took place in the United States on 11 September, we were able through the normal parliamentary procedures to introduce the Anti-terrorism, Crime and Security Act 2001. It was contentious, but it got through the House in reasonable time. Similarly, we responded to the foot and mouth crisis with legislation that is specifically about how we deal with animals in such a situation and that, I hope, will pre-empt the need for emergency regulations. Parliament has enacted legislation ahead of any potential crisis.

We want that approach to continue. The normal approach to an emergency should be either to foresee the emergency and have the legislation on the statute book so that the part 2 powers are not needed, or to come to the House to introduce legislation in the normal way, again so that the part 2 powers are not needed.

We believe that there might be a temptation—perhaps out of laziness or because Ministers do not want to use up their valuable slots for pre-emptive legislation—to fall back on the powers in the Bill. If such a mindset takes hold, the powers may be used inappropriately as an earlier port of call than they should be. We see them very much as a last resort that should be used in extremis. The triennial review proposed in the amendment would be a good way to address those genuine concerns.

If, as the Minister suggested, the powers were not used at all, the process involved in the amendment would be very speedy. The Government would say that they had not used the powers and the House would simply renew the legislation and provide the powers for the next three years. Off we would go. If the Government had used the powers, the amendments would allow us to hold an independent session in which all we would debate is whether the powers had been used appropriately. We would not be confronted by an emergency at the time of the debate.

Mr. Heald: Does the hon. Gentleman not agree that a great deal of thought has been given recently to how legislation should be dealt with? The report of the Constitution Committee in another place proposes much more post-legislative scrutiny. If we are dealing with draconian powers such as those in the Bill, they are the obvious candidates for such an approach. A sunset clause is the obvious way of forcing post-legislative scrutiny.

Mr. Allan: The hon. Gentleman has expressed my sentiments effectively. We are at one on this. We are seeking to find a way of monitoring the Bill, because it is potentially so powerful. Because we fear that it will be used more frequently than is strictly necessary, we want to be able to return to it. The Minister suggests that we can do that when we are confronted with an emergency or discussing the detail of regulations that are there to deal with that emergency. However, to suggest that we will be calmly stepping back and reviewing all the possible legislative options that the Government could have used instead of the emergency legislation is fantastical. We will not do that. When the House is confronted with an emergency and a Minister says that we need emergency regulations, the reality is that the regulations will go through using the Government's majority. There simply will not be the scope to take the constitutional or long view that we would need to challenge Ministers as to whether they strictly need to use the part 2 powers in the Bill.

We need the opportunity to return to the powers every three years. As the hon. Member for North-East Hertfordshire said, the advantage of the sunset clause is that it would force such a review in a way that no other provision could. That is a sensible way forward in that it establishes the point of principle that such powers must be scrutinised separately from the debates around specific regulations.

Mr. Hogg: I support my hon. Friend the Member for North-East Hertfordshire (Mr. Heald) and the hon. Member for Sheffield, Hallam (Mr. Allan).

The Minister conceded—indeed, she had to concede—that sunset clauses are unusual. They are unusual, but so are the powers in the Bill. It would be difficult to imagine a Bill that was more dramatic in the powers that it confers on the Executive. They powers are contained in clause 22(3) which, apart from anything else, states:

> "Emergency may make provision of any kind that could be made by Act of Parliament or by the exercise of the Royal Prerogative".

The powers extend to

> "the confiscation of property (with or without compensation)",

the prohibition of movements, the prohibition of assemblies, the deployment of the armed forces, the prohibition of travel, the prohibition of specified activities, disapplying or modifying any enactment, requiring a person or body to act in performance of a function, and so on and so on. In other words, the Bill gives to the Executive of the day powers of a wholly draconian—and I would say authoritarian—character.

The question is whether we should so conduct ourselves as to leave the Bill in perpetuity on the statute book or give ourselves the opportunity from time to time to review whether such a Bill should be on the statute book. I have no doubt that we should review it from time to time.

The hon. Member for Sheffield, Hallam made the point—he is entirely right—that Governments may well be moved to use the powers in circumstances that it is difficult to justify as falling strictly within the definition of clause 19. All of us know that Governments like to use powers that exist, and I ask myself whether the Government might not have been willing to use the powers for the confiscation of property without compensation if they had been able to do so when the foot and mouth crisis was at its height.

One has to ask oneself some uncomfortable questions. The first is, "Do you trust any Government?" or, if one wants to be more particular, "Do you trust this Government?" I remind myself of the circumstances in which we were taken to war in Iraq. We were told facts that turned out not to be accurate. I happen to believe that Ministers knew or ought to have known that they were not accurate, but that is a matter for historians or perhaps an impeachment motion in the House. My point is that to the question, "Do you trust the Government?", the only sensible answer has to be, "No, under no circumstances." If that is true, the House had better equip itself with a mechanism for reviewing the powers.

We have also asked why we should not have such a mechanism, but I did not hear the answer to that question. I heard lots of evidence of unwillingness, but that is a very different matter. That is not a justification; it is sheer unwillingness.

Are there any procedural difficulties? No, because Lords amendment No. 50 requires only a positive resolution in both Houses. That would take only an hour or two, but it would enable the political debate to focus on the Bill so that we can ask whether we need a different definition of an emergency, whether particular powers should remain on the statute book, and whether additional safeguards should be incorporated in statutory language. We are being denied that ability.

The Minister tells us that the regulations have their own inherent sunset clauses. That is true in part, but it will have not escaped her, no doubt sharp, eye that the regulations can be relaid time and time again. The sunset clause of which she spoke is not perhaps as robust a safeguard as she might have hoped that we would believe.

As you may have noticed, Mr. Speaker, I am becoming increasingly cantankerous with age. I find my distrust of Government is becoming more and more intense, especially since Iraq. I would not give any Government—least of all, this Government—the powers that are in this Bill and, in particular, in clause 22. I very much hope that we will have a sunset clause.

Mr. Shepherd: The Damascene conversion that my right hon. and learned Friend the Member for Sleaford and North Hykeham (Mr. Hogg) has undertaken during his travels through the House illuminates the sky and gives us hope.

My difficulty with the Minister's words was her response that the measure would be inappropriate in the context of such a Bill. I am especially mindful that the Government have already derogated from the Human Rights Act 1998, which they enacted, and that that derogation may occur if our country faces an emergency that threatens the life of the nation. We are already in a position in which the Government may say that life is threatened, but they have managed their business in the years since that Act came into existence without recourse to the new permanent structure without end that they now want.

1.30 pm

I accept the points made by the hon. Member for Sheffield, Hallam (Mr. Allan) because the Bill is detailed, comprehensive and iron-clad to such an extent that it is inappropriate for a democratic country and a democratic House. The route that he outlined matched my judgment on how emergencies should be dealt with. Legislation on such matters should be introduced on a case-by-case basis and considered in a day, as has often been the case during my time in the House. However, that process requires the danger or peril facing the life of the nation to be self-evident to such an extent that the House will accede to that legislation.

Mr. Hogg: My hon. Friend will remember the old Northern Ireland emergency legislation that had to be renewed annually. Will he remind himself and the House of the fact that the Labour party welcomed the opportunity to oppose that legislation year after year?

Mr. Shepherd: I am grateful to my right hon. and learned Friend because the propositions of the Government could be tested annually on such occasions and, indeed, the then Opposition made full use of that opportunity.

Mr. William Cash (Stone) (Con): May I amplify my hon. Friend's point because he is anticipating something that I was going to say? Does he agree that the Terrorism Act 2000 supersedes and subsumes the Northern Ireland legislation to which my right hon. and learned Friend the Member for Sleaford and North Hykeham (Mr. Hogg) referred? A feature of this Government is their tendency towards permanence.

Mr. Shepherd: My hon. Friend is right and his point forms a substantial part of my case. As the Minister well knows, the House unfortunately did not have the opportunity to discuss part 2 of the Bill, so all the powers that my right hon. and learned Friend the Member for Sleaford and North Hykeham cited are, in a sense, strange to a debate in which every hon. Member may speak. We are running at a gallop on the back of Lords amendments, which I shall support, although I think that they are inadequate. That explains why there is great reluctance to accept the Bill in such a permanent form.

Mr. Heald: My hon. Friend will recall that a great raft of amendments was not considered on Report because of the guillotine. The proposal before us was among the

[Mr. Heald]

amendments that were not considered at the time. Does he agree that it is a sad reflection of the present situation that the other place must do our job?

Mr. Shepherd: All that is true. In fact, the situation is worse than my hon. Friend described it, because the whole of part 2 was not considered.

Mr. Hogg: May I suggest to my hon. Friend that the inclusion of a sunset clause would allow the House to consider part 2 in detail for the first time? We were denied that opportunity under the guillotine to which my hon. Friend the Member for North-East Hertfordshire (Mr. Heald) referred.

Mr. Shepherd: That is true. We would be able to consider the provisions after three years, although we have not yet been able to consider them for five minutes. We are considering a piece of primary legislation that will create a framework that will affect the rights for which the House has fought for centuries. We had annual Army Acts so that we could control the supply of money to the Crown to ensure that the Crown could not do that which we did not want. The same important point is relevant to the Bill. The Government should not shrug off our anxieties and complaints. They could bring forward individual pieces of legislation. They could have addressed our point. Although I think that there should be an annual review, I shall gladly support their lordships' amendments.

Mr. Cash: I agree with many of the points that hon. Members have made. The Bill, with its power to deal with enactments with such a broad brush, is Orwellian in its range and depth. The permanence of the arrangements takes us way beyond "1984" into the indefinite future. There are profound reasons why we should object to such infringement of the liberty of the people of this country and Parliament.

I said that the Terrorism Act 2000 subsumed and superseded the temporary provisions imposed on Northern Ireland under the Acts passed between 1989 and 1996. However, when my hon. Friend the Member for Aldridge-Brownhills (Mr. Shepherd) talked about a standing army, he might not have known—although knowing him, I am sure that he did—that his point went straight to the heart of the Bill of Rights. The Bill of Rights is regarded as a permanent safeguard, but this Bill will not cover it. No doubt we shall later consider the interaction between the Bill and the Human Rights Act 1998, which is a temporary palliative because it may be amended or repealed, and the Bill of Rights, which any person in this country would regard as the bulwark of our liberty.

Article 6 of the Bill of Rights says:

> "the raising or keeping of a standing army within the kingdom in time of peace, unless it be with consent of Parliament, is against law".

That was why we required the Army Acts to which my hon. Friend the Member for Aldridge-Brownhills referred. The provision in article 9 is fundamental to the proceedings of the House. It says:

> "the freedom of speech and debates or proceedings in Parliament ought not to be impeached or questioned in any court or place out of Parliament".

The Bill will override the most fundamental aspects of liberty and freedom in this country. As there is not at least a sunset clause to guarantee that the powers be reviewed regularly, I condemn the Bill's provisions for their lack of liberty and permanence and I condemn the intolerant, totalitarian thinking behind them. The Labour party is supposed to be the descendant of Tom Paine and "The Rights of Man". The Bill is a disgrace.

Ruth Kelly: We have had a passionate and interesting debate, although I think that most of the arguments expressed by Conservative Members reflected their fundamental disagreement with the Bill itself, rather than their view that a sunset clause would be the most appropriate way to deal with the situation before us.

The Bill has been drafted to enable future emergencies to be covered flexibly under it. The provisions are sufficiently flexible to ensure that specific supply systems or facilities may be covered under the definition of an emergency when serious damage to human welfare is threatened. It also allows examples about which we are not yet aware to be addressed. However, specific powers will be contained in regulations issued under the Bill, so any debate on the Bill itself would be only a rerun of our debates throughout its consideration in the House and the other place.

Mr. Allan: Does the hon. Lady appreciate that a debate on the Bill some three, six or nine years after it has come into force—after which we might know about circumstances in which it was used—would be different from today's debate, because we are currently discussing our fears due to the fact that we do not know the way in which the Bill will be used? We are asking for the opportunity to debate the Bill after we know how it has been used in practice.

Ruth Kelly: The Bill itself does not restrict individual liberty. It is the provisions made by the regulations that may infringe or restrict civil liberties. I have outlined the safeguards, which are in the Bill and include detailed parliamentary scrutiny under the regulations.

Mr. Hogg: The hon. Lady is right when she says that individual prohibitions are contained in regulations, but she is bound to concede that the powers are created in clause 22(3). Whether Ministers should be able, through regulations, to do this and that does lie on the face of the Bill. It is that which we need to review.

Ruth Kelly: The Bill, which we have debated for a while, has far more safeguards built into it than the Emergency Powers Act 1920, which it replaces. The triple lock is the cornerstone of the safeguards set out in the Bill. Three stringent tests must be met if emergency powers are to be used. First, the emergency must be serious and require immediate action. Secondly, it must be necessary to take emergency powers, such as when it is not possible to introduce a Bill in the usual way; that deals with one of the points raised by the hon. Member for Sheffield, Hallam (Mr. Allan). Thirdly, emergency regulations must be proportionate to the aspect or effect of the emergency at which they are directed.

A range of additional safeguards is on top of that triple lock—we shall debate that in other groups of amendments—as well as the automatic safeguards of the public test of reasonableness and the provisions of the European convention on human rights, which apply to all legislation.

Mr. Cash: The hon. Lady refers to the test of reasonableness. Hopefully she will be aware of the case of Liversidge *v.* Anderson in the late 1940s, in which the question of reasonableness, which had been imported into regulation 18B of the defence regulations, came into question. Where is the test of reasonableness expressly stated in respect to the application of the powers? Furthermore, does she agree that Lord Diplock and a series of other judges said that the case of Liversidge *v.* Anderson was bad law? I asked in Committee for that to be examined, but I do not think that it was.

Ruth Kelly: I have had no indication from business managers that there was insufficient time to discuss that in Committee. The public law test of reasonableness applied to the 1920 Act and will continue to apply. We would agree that the case the hon. Gentleman cites is bad law, but it is not necessary to provide for a test of reasonableness on the face of the Bill.

I outlined the additional safeguards on top of those that applied to the 1920 Act. We will go on to debate the need for emergency regulations to be compatible with the Human Rights Act and whether that is a sufficient safeguard. I would argue that it is, but that will be discussed in the next group of amendments.

Mr. John Bercow (Buckingham) (Con): The Bill envisages a vast and unwarranted arrogation of powers from Parliament to the Executive. Why does clause 20(3)(c) include Government Whips as the persons entitled to make regulations?

Ruth Kelly: The hon. Gentleman will find that senior Ministers are able to carry that out in some circumstances.

Mr. Bercow: I do not want to encroach on private grief, and, equally, far be it from me to settle the hon. Lady's disputes with Government Whips, but I hope she realises that reference to Government Whips includes senior Ministers and the other way around. The Government Whips would have that power under the terms of the Bill. They are rejoicing in it. It is up to her either to apologise for it or to explain it satisfactorily.

1.45 pm

Ruth Kelly: I remind the hon. Gentleman that a reference to senior Ministers includes Lords Commissioners.

Mr. Bercow: I told the Minister that.

Ruth Kelly: So the hon. Gentleman accepts that, and Lords Commissioners are indeed senior Ministers.

Mr. Hogg: They are not.

Ruth Kelly: They certainly are. We are not talking about junior Ministers. There needs to be a fall-back position in case Her Majesty the Queen cannot act in a timely fashion. The process set out in the Bill has been followed in other cases.

Mr. Shepherd: This is an important point, although relatively small. We understood that the inclusion of Treasury Ministers or Lords Commissioners was to allow for a direct reference to the Chancellor of the Exchequer. No one would have difficulty with that. However, the Bill as drafted includes the first three Whips from the Whips Office. There is something ludicrous about Whips who never speak in the House being able to amend primary legislation.

Ruth Kelly: The Government are following conventional procedure when Her Majesty is unable to act in a timely fashion for whatever reason. I think the hon. Gentleman would agree that the inclusion of Lords Commissioners is not the core of the debate.

Mr. Heald: Will the Minister give way?

Ruth Kelly: Perhaps the hon. Gentleman will allow me to address the point.

The question is whether the Bill should be subject to a sunset clause after a period of time or whether it falls into the same category as the Anti-terrorism, Crime and Security Act 2001. Let me explain the difference. Under the Act, things are being done—perhaps as we speak—such as the detention of foreign nationals who are suspected of being terrorists and the sharing of relevant confidential information between Customs and Excise or the Inland Revenue and the intelligence services. In other words, there is something to review—the action that has taken place under that Act—after two years of its operation. We hope that part 2 of the Bill remains unused for many years to come. The legislation that it replaces remained unused for 29 years.

Patrick Mercer (Newark) (Con) *rose*—

Ruth Kelly: Perhaps the hon. Gentleman will let me finish my point. What would the review team review unless and until emergency regulations were made? The debate and the review would merely be a rerun of the debates in the course of the Bill's passage. If regulations are made, they will be scrutinised in depth by Parliament at that time.

The hon. Member for North-East Hertfordshire (Mr. Heald) suggested that the Cabinet Office and the Government are promoting the use of sunset clauses. I do not differ from him in that. In fact, I am the Minister with responsibility for better regulation and know about promoting the use of sunset clauses in government. Cabinet Office guidelines—I have taken the trouble to look them up—say that sunset clauses should be used where appropriate. They also set out a long list of when that might be appropriate. I shall read out just two items that might interest the hon. Gentleman were he making this point. Examples include—I say this to argue that they should not be used in future—measures extending the powers of the state or reducing civil liberties, reserve powers that may never be used or bodies that are set up

[Ruth Kelly]

but not immediately given any powers to do anything. One might argue that those are relevant to this debate; it could be argued that part 2 of the Bill extends the powers of the state or reduces civil liberties.

I would argue, however, that the need for any regulations made under the Bill to be approved by Parliament offsets any argument that the Bill itself should contain a sunset clause. I agree with the hon. Gentleman that sunset clauses are appropriate for the regulations, which is why I pointed out to the House that there is an in-built sunset clause; the regulations will lapse 30 days after they are made. The House can shorten that time if it wants to.

Another hon. Gentleman—I am afraid that I forget exactly who it was—argued that the existence of an in-built sunset clause does not prevent the Government from laying another set of emergency regulations. But if that were done, the whole process of parliamentary scrutiny would have to be gone through again; and the triple lock would apply; and the debate would have to take place; and in that debate there would undoubtedly be an evaluation of how the powers in the Act and the regulations had been used.

Mr. Heald: Does not the Minister understand the distinction, which I have been making throughout the debate, that if a Whip were, on a regular basis, stationing an armed person at the end of one's road to stop one's movement, one might want, after three years, to review the operation of the Act, as it may be that on one occasion that action was justified?

Ruth Kelly: The hon. Gentleman does not seem to have much faith in the concept of Parliament, which is here to scrutinise the exercise of the regulations and decide whether the triple lock applies and whether the powers exercised are appropriate and reasonable. That is why the triple lock is set out, and Parliament has the power not only to debate but to amend the regulations to ensure that they are being used in an appropriate fashion.

I believe that Parliament can be quite effective in scrutinising the Government from time to time. I believe that Parliament would not be shy of criticising or constraining the Government were it, for example, to consider that a situation was not an emergency, that the range of powers should be narrowed or that the powers were being exercised in an unreasonable way that was not consistent with the nature of the emergency. I would not expect Parliament to be any less effective in scrutinising emergency regulations than it is in other cases; in fact, I would hope and expect it to be more effective and assiduous in scrutinising those regulations.

Mr. Cash: I fear that in her response to my previous intervention the Minister completely failed to understand the point that I was making about the test of reasonableness, and she really must take it on board. Under article 18B of the defence regulations there was a test of reasonableness, but it was overridden in the view of Lords Diplock, Scarman and Reid as being bad law. That is the point; if we do not have an express test of reasonableness, the liberty of the subject is severely at risk. The Minister made the point that she wanted proper, effective scrutiny, but she walks away from it when it is offered.

Ruth Kelly: I beg to disagree. There is a public law test of reasonableness in the Bill. It does not have to be shown in the Bill; it will still apply to the Bill. The safeguards set out in the Bill are far, far stronger than those that applied under the 1920 Act, legislation that was not used by any Government for 29 years. It lay on the statute book untouched.

The safeguards that we have built into the Bill are far stronger. They include a triple lock on the use of the powers, making sure that the legislation could not simply be taken through Parliament and that the use of the powers must be reasonable and proportionate. Those are strong safeguards, and there are additional ones built into the Bill; for example, one that will protect compatibility with the Human Rights Act 1998, which we are about to debate in the next group of amendments.

The Bill will not somehow become unnecessary after a period. Sunset clauses are appropriate if a situation is to come to an end after a short period. That is why we have included express provision for sunsetting in the use of the regulations. It is why we have also provided, exceptionally, for enhanced parliamentary scrutiny in the exercise of the regulations. It is why I argue, too, on behalf of the Government, that sunsetting for the Bill itself is not appropriate.

Question put, That this House disagrees with the Lords in the said amendment:—

The House divided: Ayes 293, Noes 171.

Division No. 332] **[1:55 pm**

AYES

Adams, Irene *(Paisley N)*
Ainger, Nick
Ainsworth, Bob *(Cov'try NE)*
Alexander, Douglas
Allen, Graham
Anderson, rh Donald *(Swansea E)*
Anderson, Janet *(Rossendale & Darwen)*
Atherton, Ms Candy
Baird, Vera
Banks, Tony
Barron, rh Kevin
Battle, rh John
Bayley, Hugh
Beard, Nigel
Begg, Miss Anne
Bell, Sir Stuart
Berry, Roger
Blackman, Liz
Blears, Ms Hazel
Boateng, rh Paul
Borrow, David
Bradley, rh Keith *(Withington)*
Bradley, Peter *(The Wrekin)*
Bradshaw, Ben
Brennan, Kevin
Brown, rh Nicholas *(Newcastle E Wallsend)*
Browne, Desmond
Buck, Ms Karen
Burgon, Colin
Burnham, Andy
Byrne, Liam *(B'ham Hodge H)*
Cairns, David
Campbell, Alan *(Tynemouth)*
Campbell, Mrs Anne *(C'bridge)*
Campbell, Ronnie *(Blyth V)*
Casale, Roger
Caton, Martin
Cawsey, Ian *(Brigg)*
Challen, Colin
Chaytor, David
Clark, Mrs Helen *(Peterborough)*
Clark, Dr. Lynda *(Edinburgh Pentlands)*
Clark, Paul *(Gillingham)*
Clarke, rh Tom *(Coatbridge & Chryston)*
Clarke, Tony *(Northampton S)*
Coaker, Vernon
Coffey, Ms Ann
Colman, Tony
Corbyn, Jeremy
Corston, Jean
Cox, Tom *(Tooting)*
Cranston, Ross
Crausby, David
Cruddas, Jon
Cryer, John *(Hornchurch)*
Cunningham, Jim *(Coventry S)*
Cunningham, Tony *(Workington)*
Curtis-Thomas, Mrs Claire
Darling, rh Alistair
Davey, Valerie *(Bristol W)*
David, Wayne
Davidson, Ian

Davies, rh Denzil *(Llanelli)*
Dawson, Hilton
Denham, rh John
Dhanda, Parmjit
Dismore, Andrew
Dobbin, Jim *(Heywood)*
Dobson, rh Frank
Donohoe, Brian H.
Doran, Frank
Dowd, Jim *(Lewisham W)*
Drew, David *(Stroud)*
Drown, Ms Julia
Dunwoody, Mrs Gwyneth
Eagle, Angela *(Wallasey)*
Eagle, Maria *(L'pool Garston)*
Edwards, Huw
Efford, Clive
Ellman, Mrs Louise
Etherington, Bill
Field, rh Frank *(Birkenhead)*
Fitzpatrick, Jim
Fitzsimons, Mrs Lorna
Flint, Caroline
Foster, rh Derek
Foster, Michael *(Worcester)*
Foster, Michael Jabez *(Hastings & Rye)*
Francis, Dr. Hywel
Gardiner, Barry
George, rh Bruce *(Walsall S)*
Gerrard, Neil
Gilroy, Linda
Goggins, Paul
Griffiths, Jane *(Reading E)*
Griffiths, Win *(Bridgend)*
Grogan, John
Hain, rh Peter
Hall, Mike *(Weaver Vale)*
Hall, Patrick *(Bedford)*
Hamilton, David *(Midlothian)*
Hanson, David
Harman, rh Ms Harriet
Havard, Dai *(Merthyr Tydfil & Rhymney)*
Healey, John
Henderson, Ivan *(Harwich)*
Hendrick, Mark
Hepburn, Stephen
Hesford, Stephen
Hewitt, rh Ms Patricia
Heyes, David
Hill, Keith *(Streatham)*
Hinchliffe, David
Hodge, Margaret
Hood, Jimmy *(Clydesdale)*
Hope, Phil *(Corby)*
Hopkins, Kelvin
Howarth, rh Alan *(Newport E)*
Howarth, George *(Knowsley N & Sefton E)*
Howells, Dr. Kim
Hughes, Beverley *(Stretford & Urmston)*
Hughes, Kevin *(Doncaster N)*
Humble, Mrs Joan
Hurst, Alan *(Braintree)*
Hutton, rh John
Irranca-Davies, Huw
Jackson, Glenda *(Hampstead & Highgate)*
Jackson, Helen *(Hillsborough)*
Jamieson, David
Jenkins, Brian
Johnson, rh Alan *(Hull W)*
Jones, Helen *(Warrington N)*
Jones, Jon Owen *(Cardiff C)*
Jones, Martyn *(Clwyd S)*
Joyce, Eric *(Falkirk W)*
Kaufman, rh Sir Gerald
Keeble, Ms Sally
Kelly, Ruth *(Bolton W)*
Khabra, Piara S.
Kidney, David
Kilfoyle, Peter
King, Andy *(Rugby)*
King, Ms Oona *(Bethnal Green & Bow)*
Knight, Jim *(S Dorset)*
Kumar, Dr. Ashok
Lammy, David
Laxton, Bob *(Derby N)*
Lazarowicz, Mark
Lepper, David
Leslie, Christopher
Levitt, Tom *(High Peak)*
Linton, Martin
Lloyd, Tony *(Manchester C)*
Love, Andrew
Lucas, Ian *(Wrexham)*
Luke, Iain *(Dundee E)*
McAvoy, Thomas
McCabe, Stephen
McCafferty, Chris
McDonagh, Siobhain
MacDonald, Calum
McFall, rh John
McGrady, Eddie
McGuire, Mrs Anne
McIsaac, Shona
McKechin, Ann
McKenna, Rosemary
Mackinlay, Andrew
McNulty, Tony
Mactaggart, Fiona
McWilliam, John
Mahmood, Khalid
Mallaber, Judy
Mann, John *(Bassetlaw)*
Marris, Rob *(Wolverh'ton SW)*
Marsden, Gordon *(Blackpool S)*
Marshall, David *(Glasgow Shettleston)*
Martlew, Eric
Meacher, rh Michael
Merron, Gillian
Michael, rh Alun
Miliband, David
Miller, Andrew
Mitchell, Austin *(Gt Grimsby)*
Moffatt, Laura
Moran, Margaret
Morgan, Julie
Morley, Elliot
Munn, Ms Meg
Murphy, Denis *(Wansbeck)*
Murphy, Jim *(Eastwood)*
Naysmith, Dr. Doug
Norris, Dan *(Wansdyke)*
O'Brien, Bill *(Normanton)*
O'Hara, Edward
Olner, Bill
O'Neill, Martin
Organ, Diana
Osborne, Sandra *(Ayr)*
Owen, Albert
Palmer, Dr. Nick
Perham, Linda
Picking, Anne
Pickthall, Colin
Pike, Peter *(Burnley)*
Plaskitt, James
Pollard, Kerry
Pope, Greg *(Hyndburn)*
Pound, Stephen
Prentice, Ms Bridget *(Lewisham E)*
Prentice, Gordon *(Pendle)*
Prescott, rh John
Prosser, Gwyn
Purchase, Ken
Purnell, James
Quin, rh Joyce
Quinn, Lawrie
Rammell, Bill
Rapson, Syd *(Portsmouth N)*
Raynsford, rh Nick
Reed, Andy *(Loughborough)*
Robertson, John *(Glasgow Anniesland)*
Robinson, Geoffrey *(Coventry NW)*
Roche, Mrs Barbara
Rooney, Terry
Ross, Ernie *(Dundee W)*
Roy, Frank *(Motherwell)*
Ruane, Chris
Ruddock, Joan
Salter, Martin
Sarwar, Mohammad
Savidge, Malcolm
Sawford, Phil
Sedgemore, Brian
Shaw, Jonathan
Sheerman, Barry
Sheridan, Jim
Shipley, Ms Debra
Simon, Siôn *(B'ham Erdington)*
Singh, Marsha
Skinner, Dennis
Smith, rh Andrew *(Oxford E)*
Smith, Angela *(Basildon)*
Smith, Geraldine *(Morecambe & Lunesdale)*
Smith, Jacqui *(Redditch)*
Smith, John *(Glamorgan)*
Smith, Llew *(Blaenau Gwent)*
Soley, Clive
Spellar, rh John
Starkey, Dr. Phyllis
Steinberg, Gerry
Stewart, David *(Inverness E & Lochaber)*
Stewart, Ian *(Eccles)*
Stinchcombe, Paul
Stoate, Dr. Howard
Strang, rh Dr. Gavin
Stringer, Graham
Stuart, Ms Gisela
Sutcliffe, Gerry
Tami, Mark *(Alyn)*
Taylor, rh Ann *(Dewsbury)*
Timms, Stephen
Tipping, Paddy
Todd, Mark *(S Derbyshire)*
Touhig, Don *(Islwyn)*
Trickett, Jon
Truswell, Paul
Turner, Dennis *(Wolverh'ton SE)*
Turner, Neil *(Wigan)*
Twigg, Derek *(Halton)*
Tynan, Bill *(Hamilton S)*
Vaz, Keith *(Leicester E)*
Vis, Dr. Rudi
Walley, Ms Joan
Ward, Claire
Wareing, Robert N.
Watson, Tom
Watts, David
White, Brian
Whitehead, Dr. Alan
Wicks, Malcolm
Williams, rh Alan *(Swansea W)*
Wills, Michael
Winnick, David
Winterton, Ms Rosie *(Doncaster C)*
Wood, Mike *(Batley)*
Woolas, Phil
Worthington, Tony
Wright, Anthony D. *(Gt Yarmouth)*
Wright, David *(Telford)*
Wright, Iain *(Hartlepool)*
Wright, Tony *(Cannock)*
Wyatt, Derek

Tellers for the Ayes:
Joan Ryan and
Mr. John Heppell

NOES

Ainsworth, Peter *(E Surrey)*
Allan, Richard
Amess, David
Arbuthnot, rh James
Bacon, Richard
Baker, Norman
Barker, Gregory
Barrett, John
Beggs, Roy *(E Antrim)*
Beith, rh A. J.
Bellingham, Henry
Bercow, John
Beresford, Sir Paul
Blunt, Crispin
Boswell, Tim
Brady, Graham
Brake, Tom *(Carshalton)*
Brazier, Julian
Breed, Colin
Brooke, Mrs Annette L.
Browning, Mrs Angela
Bruce, Malcolm
Burnside, David
Burstow, Paul
Burt, Alistair
Butterfill, Sir John
Calton, Mrs Patsy
Cameron, David
Campbell, Gregory *(E Lond'y)*
Carmichael, Alistair
Cash, William
Chapman, Sir Sydney *(Chipping Barnet)*
Chope, Christopher
Clappison, James
Clifton-Brown, Geoffrey
Conway, Derek
Cormack, Sir Patrick
Cotter, Brian
Davey, Edward *(Kingston)*
Davies, Quentin *(Grantham & Stamford)*
Djanogly, Jonathan
Dodds, Nigel
Donaldson, Jeffrey M.
Doughty, Sue
Duncan, Alan *(Rutland)*
Duncan, Peter *(Galloway)*
Ewing, Annabelle
Fabricant, Michael

Fallon, Michael
Field, Mark *(Cities of London & Westminster)*
Flook, Adrian
Forth, rh Eric
Foster, Don *(Bath)*
Fox, Dr. Liam
Francois, Mark
Gale, Roger *(N Thanet)*
George, Andrew *(St. Ives)*
Gibb, Nick *(Bognor Regis)*
Gidley, Sandra
Gill, Parmjit Singh
Gillan, Mrs Cheryl
Goodman, Paul
Gray, James *(N Wilts)*
Grayling, Chris
Green, Damian *(Ashford)*
Green, Matthew *(Ludlow)*
Greenway, John
Grieve, Dominic
Hague, rh William
Hammond, Philip
Hancock, Mike
Harvey, Nick
Hawkins, Nick
Hayes, John *(S Holland)*
Heald, Oliver
Heath, David
Heathcoat-Amory, rh David
Hendry, Charles
Hermon, Lady
Hogg, rh Douglas
Holmes, Paul
Horam, John *(Orpington)*
Hughes, Simon *(Southwark N)*
Jack, rh Michael
Jenkin, Bernard
Jones, Nigel *(Cheltenham)*
Kirkbride, Miss Julie
Kirkwood, Sir Archy
Knight, rh Greg *(E Yorkshire)*
Laing, Mrs Eleanor
Lait, Mrs Jacqui
Lamb, Norman
Laws, David *(Yeovil)*
Letwin, rh Oliver
Lewis, Dr. Julian *(New Forest E)*
Liddell-Grainger, Ian
Lidington, David
Lilley, rh Peter
Llwyd, Elfyn
Loughton, Tim
Luff, Peter *(M-Worcs)*
McIntosh, Miss Anne
Mackay, rh Andrew
Maclean, rh David
Malins, Humfrey
Maples, John
Maude, rh Francis
Mawhinney, rh Sir Brian
May, Mrs Theresa
Mercer, Patrick
Moore, Michael
Moss, Malcolm
Murrison, Dr. Andrew
O'Brien, Stephen *(Eddisbury)*
Osborne, George *(Tatton)*
Ottaway, Richard
Paisley, Rev. Ian
Pickles, Eric
Price, Adam *(E Carmarthen & Dinefwr)*
Prisk, Mark *(Hertford)*
Pugh, Dr. John
Reid, Alan *(Argyll & Bute)*
Rendel, David
Robathan, Andrew
Robertson, Angus *(Moray)*
Robinson, Mrs Iris *(Strangford)*
Robinson, Peter *(Belfast E)*
Roe, Dame Marion
Rosindell, Andrew
Russell, Bob *(Colchester)*
Sanders, Adrian
Sayeed, Jonathan
Selous, Andrew
Shepherd, Richard
Simmonds, Mark
Simpson, Keith *(M-Norfolk)*
Smith, Sir Robert *(W Ab'd'ns & Kincardine)*
Smyth, Rev. Martin *(Belfast S)*
Spicer, Sir Michael
Spink, Bob *(Castle Point)*
Steen, Anthony
Streeter, Gary
Stunell, Andrew
Swayne, Desmond
Syms, Robert
Taylor, Ian *(Esher)*
Taylor, John *(Solihull)*
Taylor, Matthew *(Truro)*
Taylor, Dr. Richard *(Wyre F)*
Teather, Sarah
Thomas, Simon *(Ceredigion)*
Thurso, John
Trend, Michael
Trimble, rh David
Turner, Andrew *(Isle of Wight)*
Tyler, Paul *(N Cornwall)*
Tyrie, Andrew
Watkinson, Angela
Weir, Michael
Widdecombe, rh Miss Ann
Wiggin, Bill
Wilkinson, John
Willetts, David
Williams, Roger *(Brecon)*
Wilshire, David
Winterton, Ann *(Congleton)*
Winterton, Sir Nicholas *(Macclesfield)*
Wishart, Pete
Yeo, Tim *(S Suffolk)*
Young, rh Sir George
Younger-Ross, Richard

Tellers for the Noes:
Mr. Hugo Swire and
Mr. Peter Atkinson

Question accordingly agreed to.

Lords amendment disagreed to.

It being one hour after the commencement of proceedings, MR. DEPUTY SPEAKER *put the remaining questions required to be put at that hour, pursuant to Order [this day].*

Lords amendments Nos. 51 and 52 disagreed to.

Clause 22

SCOPE OF EMERGENCY REGULATIONS

Lords amendment: No. 41

Ruth Kelly: I beg to move, That this House agrees with the Lords in the said amendment.

Mr. Deputy Speaker (Sir Michael Lord): With this we may discuss Lords amendment No. 42 and Lords amendment No. 46, with amendment (a) thereto.

Ruth Kelly: The Government amended the Bill in the other place to reinforce three key areas of protection against the possible misuse of emergency powers: first, protection of fundamental rights; secondly, protection of the limitations and safeguards on the use of the powers; and thirdly, protection of parliamentary scrutiny and judicial review where those are affected by the emergency or by response efforts. I remind the House that that presents us with a particular challenge, balancing on one hand the rights of the individual and proper protections for our democratic institutions, and on the other the ability of Government to take action for the collective good in the most serious of emergencies. We now accept that the Bill has been improved by the other place, but because we believe that we have struck the right balance, we will not accept the Opposition's attempt to reintroduce proposals that were long debated in the other place and ultimately rejected.

It is important to be clear from the outset about the function of emergency powers and the safeguards in the Bill to prevent their misuse. Emergency powers exist to make temporary changes to the law, as we have just debated, where effective response is prohibited by insufficient powers or hindered by statutory requirements. Any regulations made will be temporary and can be made only for the purposes of preventing, controlling or mitigating an aspect or effect of the emergency in question. They must be necessary and proportionate, compatible with the Human Rights Act and will be scrutinised by Parliament.

The possibility of temporarily amending legislation of constitutional importance was examined in detail both by the Joint Committee that undertook pre-legislative scrutiny of the Bill and during debates in both Houses. Discussions have also taken place with civil liberties groups. The Government, too, are concerned that emergency powers should not be used to make substantive amendments that undermine the constitution of the United Kingdom. We are satisfied that the Bill cannot be used for that purpose, given the absence of any express power to do so. In the light of concerns expressed by civil liberties groups and by Members of both Houses, the Government looked again at the position of the Human Rights Act 1988. We remain convinced that nothing in the Bill would allow the Government to disapply or amend it. However, an express provision to the effect that emergency regulations cannot disapply or modify any provision in the Human Rights Act would offer the certainty and reassurance that is sought.

It has always been the Government's intention that emergency regulations should be entirely compatible with the Human Rights Act and should not be used to modify or suspend it. We believe that, unlike other pieces of constitutionally significant legislation, the Human Rights Act sets out the relationship between the individual and the state that is at the heart of the operation of emergency powers and fundamental to concerns about their possible use. Our acceptance of express protection in the case of the Human Rights Act must not be seen as casting doubt on the fact that emergency powers cannot be used to make substantive amendments to constitutionally important enactments, an issue discussed at length in Committee and in another place. We are convinced that the absence of specific protection for that Act would not allow its disapplication or modification.

Mr. Heald: The hon. Lady will know that, throughout our previous proceedings, we said that the provision that she has now made for the Human Rights Act was needed. It is hard to see why the same principle should not apply to habeas corpus or the Bill of Rights. Can she make a distinction between the Human Rights Act on the one hand and the Bill of Rights and habeas corpus on the other?

Ruth Kelly: The Bill of Rights was passed to declare the rights and liberties of the people and to ensure the succession to the throne. With the passing of the Human Rights Act and the Regency Acts, those intentions are effectively protected. Many of the protections set out in the Bill of Rights have been overtaken by the Human Rights Act, and others, such as the protection given to Protestants to prevent them from being disarmed when "papists" are both armed and employed, contrary to the law, are no longer relevant. Other protections in the Bill of Rights, such as the prohibition on raising tax or keeping a standing army in peacetime without the consent of Parliament are simply not things a Government could claim are reasonable, necessary and proportionate under the terms of the Civil Contingencies Bill, given that the purpose of emergency powers is to provide temporary new powers to prevent, control or mitigate emergencies because existing powers are insufficient.

Mr. Hogg: I welcome the fact that the Minister has told the House that the Human Rights Act will be protected, and cannot be amended under the Bill. That is good news. However, can powers and articles in the Human Rights Act be relied upon as a means of attacking the regulations made under the Bill? In other words, can the rights enshrined in the articles of the Human Rights Act be asserted against the regulations?

Ruth Kelly: I certainly can provide the right hon. and learned Gentleman with that assurance. While we did not think it necessary to accept express protection for the Human Rights Act, we thought that so doing would provide additional certainty and reassurance to people who were concerned about how the Bill might be used. That is the spirit in which we acted, and our acceptance of that protection does not in any way undermine or cast doubt on the fact that emergency powers cannot be used to make substantive amendments to other constitutionally important enactments.

Mr. Cash: I hope that the Minister does not disagree with the proposition that the Human Rights Act is not an entrenched constitutional provision. In fact, in the case of Simms and O'Brien, Lord Hoffmann, a great advocate of human rights, the former Lord Chancellor, Lord Irvine of Lairg, and the Home Secretary all said that the Human Rights Act could be amended or repealed. It is therefore not the entrenched provision that the Minister has sought to claim is a bulwark for liberty.

2.15 pm

Ruth Kelly: I do not agree with the hon. Gentleman's analysis. The reasons why the Government believe that express protection for constitutional enactments is unnecessary are set out in detail in our response to the report by the Joint Committee, and were outlined by the Under-Secretary of State for the Home Department, my hon. Friend the Member for Slough (Fiona Mactaggart) in Committee. They have also been set out in the other place.

In summary, legislation does not operate in isolation, and must be seen in the context of our wider constitutional law. There are two key presumptions—first, it is important to remember that a power to make secondary legislation would be interpreted in light of the purpose of the power. Secondly, in considering the scope of the power to modify enactments, it is important to acknowledge the status accorded to enactments of constitutional importance in recent judicial announcements. In that regard, Thoburn *v.* Sunderland city council, known as the metric martyrs case, is the clearest precedent. In the light of recent cases such as that one, the Government believe that the courts will expect Parliament to use clear language before delegating the power to make substantive amendments to the Human Rights Act or a provision of constitutional importance to the Executive. Applying those presumptions to the Bill, it does not expressly permit emergency regulations to modify enactments such as the Human Rights Act, and it makes it clear that the purpose of the power is to prevent, control or mitigate the emergency.

Mr. Bercow: I understand very clearly that the Human Rights Act will stay on the statute book, but I seek the same assurance as my right hon. and learned Friend the Member for Sleaford and North Hykeham (Mr. Hogg). After the passage of the emergency powers, will it remain a robust vehicle for protecting citizens' rights? Will the Minister confirm that, following the passage of such powers, citizens' rights to pursue cases under the Human Rights Act in respect of the application of those powers will remain unaltered and undiminished?

Ruth Kelly: I can certainly confirm that that will be the case.

Mr. Shepherd: The hon. Lady is making the case that the Human Rights Act is entrenched, so it is appropriate to name it in the Bill. However, it is not entrenched, because primary legislation passed by the House could do away with it. That route would be open to the Government if they were dissatisfied with the Habeas Corpus Act 1816, the Bill of Rights, the Act of Settlement 1700 or any of the measures listed in the amendment. We are seeking protection for what are

[Mr. Shepherd]

considered fundamental steps in our march to liberty. There is nothing distinctive about the Human Rights Act apart from the fact, the hon. Lady suggests, that primary legislation is required to amend, change or repeal it. However, her case is not a good one, because the same argument applies to the other measures.

Ruth Kelly: The hon. Gentleman, to give him his due, makes an extremely good point that the Human Rights Act is not entrenched, as it could be overturned by primary legislation. He also puts his finger on the fact that that could not be done with emergency powers. The House would have to debate the matter and use primary legislation to change the Act.

Mr. Hogg: I should know the answer, but will the hon. Lady confirm that the Government can derogate from the Human Rights Act without coming to the House? In other words, if an article in the Act is thought embarrassing in the context of the regulations, a Minister could derogate from it.

Ruth Kelly: Let me reiterate the point about the safeguards in the Bill. The Human Rights Act could not be altered, as I understand it, through emergency regulation. If it becomes appropriate to change it and the way in which it operates, that would be done through primary legislation. At that point, I would expect protection for the Act to be reconsidered. If there were to be a derogation from the Act, there would have to be an order approved by both Houses, so that, too, is an essential safeguard in the Bill.

Mr. Bercow: The Minister has made effective use of additional information timeously provided. She said that, in the circumstances envisaged, another Order in Council would be required, and she invoked that point as evidence that there would be parliamentary scrutiny. Can she confirm that that new Order in Council would be capable of debate?

Ruth Kelly: I can confirm that the order would be subject to the safeguard to which the hon. Gentleman refers. It would be debated by both Houses and would have to be approved by both Houses. If not, it would fall. That is a critical safeguard.

We have accepted the arguments that were made in the other place that protection in the case of the Human Rights Act should be made explicit. We do not think that that is a necessary protection, but it is desirable to create some degree of certainty on the matter.

Mr. Shepherd: I am grateful to the Minister, but we need greater clarity in respect of the point made by my right hon. and learned Friend the Member for Sleaford and North Hykeham (Mr. Hogg). We are in a state of derogation, as a result of a ministerial decision—not a decision of the House, though the consequences were—that the life of the nation is currently threatened. On that basis, the Government set aside a contention in the Human Rights Act. All of this is outwith the cognisance of the Bill. That is what puzzles some of us and needs reconciliation. Primary legislation is indeed needed to change the Human Rights Act, but derogation from it is a ministerial, Executive or Crown function predicated on existing anti-terrorism laws and habeas corpus.

Ruth Kelly: The hon. Gentleman is really making a point about the interaction between Parliament and the Executive in this and other cases and the application of the Human Rights Act, rather than about something that applies solely to the exercise of emergency powers. I have made it clear that, under the emergency powers, the Human Rights Act would have to be respected.

I said that derogation would have to be approved by both Houses. There would be a debate and Parliament would have to be content that it was appropriate. I set out earlier, and in the previous debate, the additional safeguards that are in the Bill, compared with the predecessor legislation. I would argue that the safeguards go much further than the previous legislation and are appropriate.

Lords amendments Nos. 41 and 46 provide protection for part 2. It is important that part 2 should similarly be incapable of being amended by emergency powers in order to ensure that the tests and protection that it contains cannot be amended. The Bill expressly provides that emergency regulations cannot be used to modify part 2. The Government have amended the Bill to move this prohibition from the clause on scope to the clause on limitations on emergency regulations, where it sits more naturally.

On amendment (a), the Government are convinced that no further pieces of legislation require express protection. Adding a list of constitutional enactments—we have already debated this point—to be protected from the amendment would only weaken the safeguards in the Bill. As a consequence of the way in which legislation is made, there is room for legitimate disagreement on which enactments contain provisions of constitutional importance, and we do not believe that it would be possible to prepare an accurate list of enactments that ought to be protected.

Take, for example, the devolution Acts. Some would argue that they are of great constitutional importance. Those less sympathetic to devolution may not agree. There are arguments both ways. The Acts alter the distribution of powers and the way that parts of the country are run. On the other hand, they do not affect the sovereignty of Parliament or the fundamental rights of individuals. There would be a danger that, if the list were not entirely comprehensive, a partial list in the Bill would undermine the protection of Acts that were not cited in it. Therefore we cannot accept the amendment on that point.

Mr. Heald: We welcome Lords amendment No. 42, which requires a person making emergency regulations to have regard to the importance of ensuring that Parliament, the High Court and the Scottish equivalent can conduct proceedings in connection with the regulations or actions taken under the regulations. The matter was raised in the other place by my noble Friend Baroness Buscombe and by other Conservative peers. It is good that the Government responded and Lords amendment No. 42 emerged. A little credit is due for that.

On Lords amendment No. 46, we have argued throughout the course of the Bill for the protection of a group of statutes to ensure that civil liberties are respected. On Report in this place, the debate was guillotined. In the other place, peers were able to find the time and minds were changed. The Government agreed to protect the Human Rights Act, saying that it was right to do that in the interests of certainty.

If it is right to do that for the Human Rights Act, we cannot understand the Government's approach when they say that it is not also right to do so in respect of the other important Acts of Parliament identified by the Joint Committee on Human Rights that we have suggested on previous occasions. The list has been narrowed by my hon. Friend the Member for Stone (Mr. Cash), who is proposing amendment (a). The Acts set out there are the bedrock of our constitution.

Ministers say that the provision is not required. They argue that, if there is no provision allowing amendment of constitutionally important legislation, it cannot take place. They said that about the Human Rights Act, and they changed their mind. If it is right to have that certainty and that declaratory effect for one important part of the bedrock of our constitution, why can we not do it for the others?

Mr. Shepherd: In the Government's responses to the Joint Committee on Human Rights, they cited a Law Lords judgment about constitutionally important Acts, such as the Human Rights Act. In other words, they identified one of those constitutionally important Acts. The other Acts listed in amendment (a) are undoubtedly constitutionally important and of equal standing to the Human Rights Act within the framework of law. There cannot in logic be an argument against the inclusion of the specified Acts.

Mr. Heald: My hon. Friend is right. How can the Government say that it is necessary in the interests of certainty to list a particular Act, and then say, "Oh, but we'd like to retain the uncertainty in respect of others."? I agree that that is an illogical position.

Mr. Allan: Amendment No. 46 seeks to make an important change to the Bill. My Liberal Democrat colleagues in another place would modestly lay some claim to having persuaded the Government to accept it. Throughout the course of the Bill we have argued for the importance of the Human Rights Act to be respected by it. During the Bill's passage through the House, we were able to secure another concession, so that in clause 20(5)(b)(iv) we now have a requirement for any regulations brought under part 2 to be certified as compliant with the Human Rights Act.

In a sense, amendment No. 46 is the other part of that—the braces to the belt. It states that any regulations introduced under part 2 must be compliant with the Human Rights Act, and that those regulations in turn cannot modify the Human Rights Act. That provides a certain amount of protection, such that any regulations under part 2 will have to be compliant with the Human Rights Act.

We believe that there is a particular status to the Human Rights Act. We as a party are constitutionalists: we argue in favour of a written constitution. We do not have one and we do not expect the country to develop one between now and the end of this parliamentary Session, so we seek to develop some notion of a constitution in the legislation that comes before us. Although I am not a lawyer, I paid close attention to the words in the other place of my noble Friend Lord Lester of Herne Hill, who is an eminent lawyer in that area. He advanced a cogent case for the particular position of the Human Rights Act 1998 in English legislation.

Mr. Cash *rose—*

Mr. Allan: I shall give way to someone who is a lawyer.

2.30 pm

Mr. Cash: Does the hon. Gentleman accept that some people do not believe that Lord Lester was right to assert that the 1998 Act is adequate to deal with all those contingencies? I hope that he will not fall into the same trap as Lord Lester, who asserted that that was why the Liberal Democrat Opposition would not support the official Opposition in the House of Lords yesterday.

Mr. Allan: I accept the hon. Gentleman's point that disagreements remain. However, I must disappoint him by saying that the divergence on that particular issue between the Whigs in the Conservative party and the modern Liberal Democrats remains. We will not support amendment (a) because the nearest that we can get to a constitutional position is to continue to support and assert the supremacy of the 1998 Act, which acts as a kind of modern constitutional framework guaranteeing the rights of citizens in relation to the actions of the Executive.

We recognise that all legislation must be certified as compliant with the 1998 Act, which is a difference between the 1998 Act and other legislation referred to in amendment (a). The clearest way in which the part 2 provisions can proceed is to collect different Acts of Parliament, such as those in the amendment, and insert them into the Bill, but that will not give the ordinary citizen the safeguards that they are looking for on freedom from oppressive or inappropriate regulations. I accept the divergence of opinion and am sure that the hon. Gentleman will ably advance the argument for the inclusion of other legislation.

It is important that all those who are concerned about relations between the citizen and the state should seek to bolster and reinforce the 1998 Act rather than undermine it. Sadly, some of those who seek to challenge this Bill also sought to challenge the 1998 Act as an alien or foreign import. The provisions of the 1998 Act are important and all regulations should comply with them. Now that the 1998 Act cannot be altered by regulations, we have the best possible framework to guarantee the citizen's constitutional rights in respect of regulations. It would be better still if the Government were to introduce proposals on a written constitution meaning that the provisions of the 1998 Act cannot be overturned, even by a simple majority in Parliament. We would prefer such a constitutional system, but we have not got it. Amendment No. 46 takes us as near as we can get to clarity. Sadly, amendment (a) would not enhance that clarity, but it would dilute the 1998 Act's particular and special position.

Mr. Cash: Let there be no doubt that what Lord Lester said in the other place yesterday and what the

[Mr. Cash]

hon. Member for Sheffield, Hallam (Mr. Allan) has just said demonstrate the differences between us. Although the Government were pulled kicking and screaming to include the 1998 Act, the words that they sent to the Joint Committee on Human Rights when the Committee sought to include the 1998 Act in the first place were fairly derogatory.

The 1998 Act is inadequate in itself to deal with the questions. That brings us to an interesting issue, which is also exemplified by the Government's agreement to the charter of fundamental rights in the European constitution—dialogue is currently occurring between Strasbourg and Luxembourg on how to resolve that matter. The plain fact is that the charter of fundamental rights might have appeared in the Bill instead of the 1998 Act, or both of them might have been included. In both instances, it is assumed that the arrangements set out in those international treaties should effectively take supremacy over laws made in this Parliament according to constitutional arrangements that have developed over many centuries.

For example, we have just heard mention of habeas corpus. I have referred to the great authorities on that subject, in particular the chapter in Bradley and Ewing's "Constitutional and Administrative Law", which points out that, with respect to the question of habeas corpus, in the context of article 5(4) of the European convention on human rights, a divergence of view has developed. That divergence of opinion could be dealt with by amending section 31 of the Supreme Court Act 1981 to add the forms of relief that may be granted in an application for judicial review.

We should have grave reservations about displacing the Habeas Corpus Act 1816 in favour of provisions emanating from the European convention on human rights. The Government hope that the European constitution will go through, in which case the charter of fundamental rights would be incorporated and exclusively adjudicated upon by the European Court. That would move us into completely different territory, because it would override the provisions contained in these enactments.

We are getting into deep waters, and, thanks to my hon. Friend the Member for Aldridge-Brownhills (Mr. Shepherd), I am glad that we have an opportunity to debate the matter at the last minute, because such debate has been excluded during the Bill's passage. I could enlarge on that matter, but we are running out of time, and I am extremely concerned that amendment (a) should make as much progress as possible.

Mr. Shepherd: The hon. Member for Sheffield, Hallam (Mr. Allan) is right about Lord Lester, who was one of the progenitors of the 1998 Act and who, along with the Government, was instrumental in creating its form. My problem is not with the inclusion of the 1998 Act: Conservative Front-Bench Members and the hon. Member for Sheffield, Hallam know that I submitted to the Committee, of which I was not a member, a list of Acts, of which the 1998 Act was one, and the Committee debated it. The purpose of amendment (a) is to provide the key instances in which the Government would require primary legislation to undermine some of the contentions of those Acts.

Mr. Hogg: The fact that the Bill entrenches and protects human rights legislation is important, because it will enable judges to interpret regulations against the background of the articles in the human rights legislation, which provides a degree of protection. I shall not go on, because the Minister must reply.

Ruth Kelly: I recognise the sincerity with which the points have been made in debate, but I argue that amendment (a) would weaken the protections inherent in the Bill, and, on behalf of the Government, I strongly feel that we should resist it.

The Government always intended the Bill to be compatible with the 1998 Act, and the hon. Member for Sheffield, Hallam (Mr. Allan) understands that point, but we welcome the additional certainty that has been created by its inclusion in the Bill. However hard one tries to agree a list of constitutionally important Acts that should be protected and put in the Bill, the list would quickly be superseded by other Acts and become redundant. Indeed, I believe that in some sense it could even subject the House to ridicule.

Perhaps more importantly, there is a real danger that any list of constitutional enactments, even were it agreed, will at some point be incomplete and partial. Such a list, which could not be amended, could lead a court to conclude that it was exhaustive and that Parliament envisaged that constitutional enactments not specified in the Bill could be amended by way of emergency regulation.

Mr. Elfyn Llwyd (Meirionnydd Nant Conwy) (PC): I was on the Committee, but have held back from saying anything until now. I would say this to the Minister: first, the list could be expressed as not being exclusive; and secondly, she has just given the best justification for a sunset clause.

Ruth Kelly: Not at all. At any point in time—during an annual, a three-year or a five-year process—the list would, by its nature, be partial and incomplete, thereby weakening the safeguards inherent in the Bill. Once Parliament begins to list enactments that cannot be amended there is a real risk that a court could conclude that, notwithstanding the other provisions of the Bill, any enactment that is not on the list could be amended.

The Government remain convinced that the absence of an express power to amend constitutionally important legislation, coupled with the clear expression of the purposes for which regulations can be made and the safeguards in the Bill that I outlined, ensure that substantive amendments to such legislation are not possible by way of emergency regulation. I accept that that approach lacks the transparency of an express provision for each constitutional enactment in the Bill, and if we thought that we could protect them from inappropriate amendments by including them in the Bill, we would do so. Given that it is not possible to craft an amendment to the Bill that protects the constitutional fabric of the UK, it is better to rely on the implied effect of the Bill as drafted, which achieves the effect that we all wish for by ensuring that substantive amendments cannot be made to constitutional enactments.

I hope that I have made it clear to the House that any attempt to do otherwise would not offer the protection that we all seek, but could merely undermine the protection that is already there. Because this is such a serious matter, I would argue that it is very important that we do not accept the amendment on constitutional enactments and that the House accept the Government's position, which will ensure that the safeguards are maximised and that the constitution is as fully protected as possible.

Lords amendment agreed to.

Lords amendment No. 42 agreed to.

Clause 23

LIMITATIONS OF EMERGENCY REGULATIONS

Lords amendment: No. 46.

Amendment proposed to the Lords amendment: (a)—*[Mr. Cash.]*

Question put, That the amendment to the Lords amendment be made:—

The House divided: Ayes 135, Noes 349.

Division No. 333] **[2:43 pm**

AYES

Ainsworth, Peter *(E Surrey)*
Amess, David
Arbuthnot, rh James
Bacon, Richard
Barker, Gregory
Beggs, Roy *(E Antrim)*
Bellingham, Henry
Bercow, John
Beresford, Sir Paul
Blunt, Crispin
Boswell, Tim
Bottomley, Peter *(Worthing W)*
Brady, Graham
Brazier, Julian
Browning, Mrs Angela
Burns, Simon
Burnside, David
Burt, Alistair
Butterfill, Sir John
Cameron, David
Campbell, Gregory *(E Lond'y)*
Cash, William
Chapman, Sir Sydney *(Chipping Barnet)*
Chope, Christopher
Clappison, James
Clifton-Brown, Geoffrey
Conway, Derek
Cormack, Sir Patrick
Curry, rh David
Davies, Quentin *(Grantham & Stamford)*
Djanogly, Jonathan
Dodds, Nigel
Donaldson, Jeffrey M.
Duncan, Alan *(Rutland)*
Duncan, Peter *(Galloway)*
Duncan Smith, rh Iain
Ewing, Annabelle
Fabricant, Michael
Fallon, Michael
Field, Mark *(Cities of London & Westminster)*
Flook, Adrian
Forth, rh Eric
Francois, Mark
Gale, Roger *(N Thanet)*
Gibb, Nick *(Bognor Regis)*
Gillan, Mrs Cheryl
Goodman, Paul
Gray, James *(N Wilts)*
Grayling, Chris
Green, Damian *(Ashford)*
Greenway, John
Grieve, Dominic
Gummer, rh John
Hague, rh William
Hammond, Philip
Hawkins, Nick
Hayes, John *(S Holland)*
Heald, Oliver
Heathcoat-Amory, rh David
Hendry, Charles
Hermon, Lady
Hoban, Mark *(Fareham)*
Hogg, rh Douglas
Horam, John *(Orpington)*
Hunter, Andrew
Jack, rh Michael
Jenkin, Bernard
Kirkbride, Miss Julie
Knight, rh Greg *(E Yorkshire)*
Laing, Mrs Eleanor
Lait, Mrs Jacqui
Leigh, Edward
Letwin, rh Oliver
Lewis, Dr. Julian *(New Forest E)*
Liddell-Grainger, Ian
Lidington, David
Llwyd, Elfyn
Loughton, Tim
Luff, Peter *(M-Worcs)*
McIntosh, Miss Anne
Mackay, rh Andrew
Maclean, rh David
Malins, Humfrey
Maples, John
Maude, rh Francis
Mawhinney, rh Sir Brian
May, Mrs Theresa
Mercer, Patrick
Mitchell, Andrew *(Sutton Coldfield)*
Moss, Malcolm
Murrison, Dr. Andrew
O'Brien, Stephen *(Eddisbury)*
Osborne, George *(Tatton)*
Ottaway, Richard
Paice, James
Paisley, Rev. Ian
Pickles, Eric
Prisk, Mark *(Hertford)*
Robathan, Andrew
Robinson, Mrs Iris *(Strangford)*
Robinson, Peter *(Belfast E)*
Roe, Dame Marion
Rosindell, Andrew
Sayeed, Jonathan
Shepherd, Richard
Simmonds, Mark
Simpson, Keith *(M-Norfolk)*
Smyth, Rev. Martin *(Belfast S)*
Spicer, Sir Michael
Spink, Bob *(Castle Point)*
Stanley, rh Sir John
Steen, Anthony
Streeter, Gary
Swayne, Desmond
Swire, Hugo *(E Devon)*
Syms, Robert
Tapsell, Sir Peter
Taylor, Ian *(Esher)*
Taylor, Dr. Richard *(Wyre F)*
Trimble, rh David
Turner, Andrew *(Isle of Wight)*
Tyrie, Andrew
Watkinson, Angela
Weir, Michael
Whittingdale, John
Widdecombe, rh Miss Ann
Wiggin, Bill
Wilkinson, John
Willetts, David
Wilshire, David
Winterton, Ann *(Congleton)*
Winterton, Sir Nicholas *(Macclesfield)*
Wishart, Pete
Yeo, Tim *(S Suffolk)*
Young, rh Sir George

Tellers for the Ayes:
Andrew Selous and
Mr. Peter Atkinson

NOES

Adams, Irene *(Paisley N)*
Ainger, Nick
Ainsworth, Bob *(Cov'try NE)*
Alexander, Douglas
Allan, Richard
Allen, Graham
Anderson, rh Donald *(Swansea E)*
Anderson, Janet *(Rossendale & Darwen)*
Armstrong, rh Ms Hilary
Atherton, Ms Candy
Baird, Vera
Baker, Norman
Banks, Tony
Barrett, John
Barron, rh Kevin
Battle, rh John
Bayley, Hugh
Beard, Nigel
Beckett, rh Margaret
Begg, Miss Anne
Beith, rh A. J.
Bell, Sir Stuart
Berry, Roger
Blackman, Liz
Blears, Ms Hazel
Blizzard, Bob
Borrow, David
Bradley, rh Keith *(Withington)*
Bradley, Peter *(The Wrekin)*
Bradshaw, Ben
Brake, Tom *(Carshalton)*
Breed, Colin
Brennan, Kevin
Brooke, Mrs Annette L.
Brown, rh Nicholas *(Newcastle E Wallsend)*
Brown, Russell *(Dumfries)*
Browne, Desmond
Bruce, Malcolm
Bryant, Chris
Buck, Ms Karen
Burgon, Colin
Burnham, Andy
Burstow, Paul
Byrne, Liam *(B'ham Hodge H)*
Cairns, David
Calton, Mrs Patsy
Campbell, Alan *(Tynemouth)*
Campbell, Mrs Anne *(C'bridge)*
Campbell, rh Sir Menzies *(NE Fife)*
Campbell, Ronnie *(Blyth V)*
Caplin, Ivor
Carmichael, Alistair
Casale, Roger
Caton, Martin
Cawsey, Ian *(Brigg)*
Challen, Colin
Chaytor, David
Clark, Mrs Helen *(Peterborough)*
Clark, Dr. Lynda *(Edinburgh Pentlands)*
Clark, Paul *(Gillingham)*
Clarke, rh Tom *(Coatbridge & Chryston)*
Clarke, Tony *(Northampton S)*
Coaker, Vernon
Coffey, Ms Ann
Colman, Tony
Corbyn, Jeremy
Corston, Jean
Cotter, Brian
Cox, Tom *(Tooting)*
Cranston, Ross
Cruddas, Jon
Cryer, John *(Hornchurch)*
Cunningham, Jim *(Coventry S)*
Cunningham, Tony *(Workington)*
Curtis-Thomas, Mrs Claire
Darling, rh Alistair
Davey, Edward *(Kingston)*
Davey, Valerie *(Bristol W)*
David, Wayne

Davidson, Ian
Davies, rh Denzil *(Llanelli)*
Dawson, Hilton
Denham, rh John
Dhanda, Parmjit
Dismore, Andrew
Dobbin, Jim *(Heywood)*
Dobson, rh Frank
Donohoe, Brian H.
Doran, Frank
Doughty, Sue
Dowd, Jim *(Lewisham W)*
Drew, David *(Stroud)*
Drown, Ms Julia
Dunwoody, Mrs Gwyneth
Eagle, Angela *(Wallasey)*
Eagle, Maria *(L'pool Garston)*
Edwards, Huw
Efford, Clive
Ellman, Mrs Louise
Ennis, Jeff *(Barnsley E)*
Etherington, Bill
Field, rh Frank *(Birkenhead)*
Fitzpatrick, Jim
Fitzsimons, Mrs Lorna
Flint, Caroline
Foster, rh Derek
Foster, Don *(Bath)*
Foster, Michael *(Worcester)*
Foster, Michael Jabez *(Hastings & Rye)*
Francis, Dr. Hywel
Gapes, Mike *(Ilford S)*
Gardiner, Barry
George, Andrew *(St. Ives)*
George, rh Bruce *(Walsall S)*
Gerrard, Neil
Gidley, Sandra
Gill, Parmjit Singh
Gilroy, Linda
Godsiff, Roger
Goggins, Paul
Green, Matthew *(Ludlow)*
Griffiths, Jane *(Reading E)*
Griffiths, Win *(Bridgend)*
Grogan, John
Hain, rh Peter
Hall, Mike *(Weaver Vale)*
Hall, Patrick *(Bedford)*
Hamilton, David *(Midlothian)*
Hancock, Mike
Hanson, David
Harman, rh Ms Harriet
Harvey, Nick
Havard, Dai *(Merthyr Tydfil & Rhymney)*
Healey, John
Heath, David
Henderson, Ivan *(Harwich)*
Hendrick, Mark
Hepburn, Stephen
Hesford, Stephen
Heyes, David
Hill, Keith *(Streatham)*
Hinchliffe, David
Holmes, Paul
Hood, Jimmy *(Clydesdale)*
Hope, Phil *(Corby)*
Hopkins, Kelvin
Howarth, rh Alan *(Newport E)*
Howarth, George *(Knowsley N & Sefton E)*
Howells, Dr. Kim
Hughes, Beverley *(Stretford & Urmston)*
Hughes, Kevin *(Doncaster N)*
Hughes, Simon *(Southwark N)*
Humble, Mrs Joan
Hurst, Alan *(Braintree)*
Hutton, rh John
Iddon, Dr. Brian
Irranca-Davies, Huw
Jackson, Glenda *(Hampstead & Highgate)*
Jackson, Helen *(Hillsborough)*
Jamieson, David
Jenkins, Brian
Johnson, rh Alan *(Hull W)*
Johnson, Miss Melanie *(Welwyn Hatfield)*
Jones, Helen *(Warrington N)*
Jones, Jon Owen *(Cardiff C)*
Jones, Martyn *(Clwyd S)*
Jones, Nigel *(Cheltenham)*
Joyce, Eric *(Falkirk W)*
Kaufman, rh Sir Gerald
Keeble, Ms Sally
Keen, Alan *(Feltham)*
Keen, Ann *(Brentford)*
Kelly, Ruth *(Bolton W)*
Kennedy, rh Charles *(Ross Skye & Inverness)*
Kennedy, Jane *(Wavertree)*
Khabra, Piara S.
Kidney, David
Kilfoyle, Peter
King, Andy *(Rugby)*
King, Ms Oona *(Bethnal Green & Bow)*
Knight, Jim *(S Dorset)*
Kumar, Dr. Ashok
Lamb, Norman
Lammy, David
Laws, David *(Yeovil)*
Laxton, Bob *(Derby N)*
Lazarowicz, Mark
Lepper, David
Leslie, Christopher
Levitt, Tom *(High Peak)*
Lewis, Terry *(Worsley)*
Linton, Martin
Lloyd, Tony *(Manchester C)*
Love, Andrew
Lucas, Ian *(Wrexham)*
Luke, Iain *(Dundee E)*
McAvoy, Thomas
McCabe, Stephen
McCafferty, Chris
MacDonald, Calum
McFall, rh John
McGrady, Eddie
McGuire, Mrs Anne
McIsaac, Shona
McKechin, Ann
McKenna, Rosemary
Mackinlay, Andrew
McNulty, Tony
Mactaggart, Fiona
McWilliam, John
Mahmood, Khalid
Mahon, Mrs Alice
Mallaber, Judy
Mann, John *(Bassetlaw)*
Marris, Rob *(Wolverh'ton SW)*
Marsden, Gordon *(Blackpool S)*
Marshall, David *(Glasgow Shettleston)*
Meacher, rh Michael
Meale, Alan *(Mansfield)*
Merron, Gillian
Michael, rh Alun
Miliband, David
Miller, Andrew
Mitchell, Austin *(Gt Grimsby)*
Moffatt, Laura
Moore, Michael
Moran, Margaret
Morgan, Julie
Morley, Elliot
Mullin, Chris
Munn, Ms Meg
Murphy, Denis *(Wansbeck)*
Murphy, Jim *(Eastwood)*
Naysmith, Dr. Doug
Norris, Dan *(Wansdyke)*
Oaten, Mark *(Winchester)*
O'Brien, Bill *(Normanton)*
O'Hara, Edward
Olner, Bill
O'Neill, Martin
Öpik, Lembit
Organ, Diana
Osborne, Sandra *(Ayr)*
Owen, Albert
Palmer, Dr. Nick
Perham, Linda
Picking, Anne
Pickthall, Colin
Pike, Peter *(Burnley)*
Plaskitt, James
Pollard, Kerry
Pond, Chris *(Gravesham)*
Pope, Greg *(Hyndburn)*
Pound, Stephen
Prentice, Ms Bridget *(Lewisham E)*
Prentice, Gordon *(Pendle)*
Prescott, rh John
Prosser, Gwyn
Pugh, Dr. John
Purchase, Ken
Purnell, James
Quin, rh Joyce
Quinn, Lawrie
Rammell, Bill
Rapson, Syd *(Portsmouth N)*
Raynsford, rh Nick
Reed, Andy *(Loughborough)*
Reid, Alan *(Argyll & Bute)*
Rendel, David
Robertson, John *(Glasgow Anniesland)*
Robinson, Geoffrey *(Coventry NW)*
Roche, Mrs Barbara
Rooney, Terry
Ross, Ernie *(Dundee W)*
Roy, Frank *(Motherwell)*
Ruane, Chris
Ruddock, Joan
Russell, Bob *(Colchester)*
Salter, Martin
Sanders, Adrian
Sarwar, Mohammad
Savidge, Malcolm
Sawford, Phil
Sedgemore, Brian
Shaw, Jonathan
Sheerman, Barry
Sheridan, Jim
Simon, Siôn *(B'ham Erdington)*
Singh, Marsha
Skinner, Dennis
Smith, rh Andrew *(Oxford E)*
Smith, Angela *(Basildon)*
Smith, Geraldine *(Morecambe & Lunesdale)*
Smith, Jacqui *(Redditch)*
Smith, John *(Glamorgan)*
Smith, Llew *(Blaenau Gwent)*
Smith, Sir Robert *(W Ab'd'ns & Kincardine)*
Soley, Clive
Spellar, rh John
Starkey, Dr. Phyllis
Steinberg, Gerry
Stewart, David *(Inverness E & Lochaber)*
Stewart, Ian *(Eccles)*
Stinchcombe, Paul
Stoate, Dr. Howard
Strang, rh Dr. Gavin
Stringer, Graham
Stuart, Ms Gisela
Stunell, Andrew
Sutcliffe, Gerry
Tami, Mark *(Alyn)*
Taylor, rh Ann *(Dewsbury)*
Taylor, Matthew *(Truro)*
Teather, Sarah
Thurso, John
Timms, Stephen
Tipping, Paddy
Todd, Mark *(S Derbyshire)*
Touhig, Don *(Islwyn)*
Trickett, Jon
Truswell, Paul
Turner, Dennis *(Wolverh'ton SE)*
Turner, Neil *(Wigan)*
Twigg, Derek *(Halton)*
Twigg, Stephen *(Enfield)*
Tyler, Paul *(N Cornwall)*
Tynan, Bill *(Hamilton S)*
Vis, Dr. Rudi
Walley, Ms Joan
Ward, Claire
Wareing, Robert N.
Watson, Tom
Watts, David
Webb, Steve *(Northavon)*
White, Brian
Whitehead, Dr. Alan
Wicks, Malcolm
Williams, rh Alan *(Swansea W)*
Williams, Roger *(Brecon)*
Wills, Michael
Winnick, David
Winterton, Ms Rosie *(Doncaster C)*
Wood, Mike *(Batley)*
Woolas, Phil
Worthington, Tony
Wright, Anthony D. *(Gt Yarmouth)*
Wright, David *(Telford)*
Wright, Iain *(Hartlepool)*
Wright, Tony *(Cannock)*
Wyatt, Derek
Younger-Ross, Richard

Tellers for the Noes:
Joan Ryan and
Mr. John Heppell

Question accordingly negatived.

Lords amendment No. 46 agreed to.

Clause 2

DUTY TO ASSESS, PLAN AND ADVISE

Lords amendment: No. 7.

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Transport (Mr. David Jamieson): I beg to move, That this House disagrees with the Lords in the said amendment.

Mr. Deputy Speaker: With this we may discuss Lords amendment No. 56. I inform the House that privilege is involved in Lords amendment No. 7. If the House agrees the amendment, I shall arrange for the necessary entry to be made in the *Journal*.

Mr. Jamieson: The United Kingdom's resilience to disruptive challenges is already high. We have not been complacent. Since 11 September 2001, the Government have substantially increased the country's counter-terrorism efforts and improved contingency planning for and resilience to a range of emergencies. The amendments relate to the Government's powers to take effective action to protect the public and United Kingdom interests against acts of terror.

Amendment No. 56 comprises a group of changes in one amendment. Its purpose is to provide a clearer legal basis for regulating traffic to prevent or reduce the impact of vehicle-borne terrorist attacks, especially no-warning vehicle suicide bombings, with which, around the world, we have sadly become all too familiar. We need to be able to protect critical national infrastructure sites, iconic buildings, places hosting events such as intergovernmental conferences and diplomatic premises from the threat of vehicle-borne terrorist attacks. For some sites, traffic restrictions may have an important role to play as part of a counter-terrorist strategy.

3 pm

We need traffic controls that put a distance between the detonation of a bomb and the target, to reduce the impacts of such an attack. Likewise, reducing speeds at which vehicles loaded with explosives can approach a target enhances defensive measures and can significantly lessen the impacts of an attack. Over the past three years a great deal of technical development has been undertaken to counter the threat of vehicle-borne suicide bombs.

The purpose of the Government's motion is to ensure that a clear legal framework is in place to control traffic and deploy the necessary measures. It amends the Road Traffic Regulation Act 1984 to enable anti-terrorist traffic regulation orders to be made by traffic authorities on the recommendation of the police; by providing for a Secretary of State override in order to direct a traffic authority to make such an order if it proves necessary; by enhancing existing police powers to control traffic in an emergency to cover terrorism or the prospect of terrorism; and by providing that traffic calming measures normally used to control vehicle speeds for road safety purposes, such as chicanes and pinch points, may also be used as anti-terrorist measures.

Our anti-terrorism efforts must not be hamstrung by doubts or hesitation about legal powers, the consequences of which could be devastating. It is therefore crucial that the measures be agreed today.

Lords amendment No. 7 relates to the Government's powers to require ports, airports and local authorities to purchase equipment designed to identify the presence of chemical, biological, radioactive or nuclear material—CBRN material—and to deploy it at ports and airports. As we demonstrated with the amendments relating to anti-terrorism traffic regulation orders, the Government are resolved to take the powers they need to combat terrorism.

I fully understand the points that were made in the other place. However, the Government already have the powers that their noble lordships have sought to confer on us with their amendment No. 7. Under the Airports Act 1986, the Secretary of State may give directions to the operators of airports in the interests of national security. The Aviation and Maritime Security Act 1990 gives the Government wide-ranging power to require port authorities to undertake screening and monitoring. Detailed requirements relating to maritime security have been adopted at an international level, particularly in the international ship and port facility security code, and at Community level, particularly in regulation 725/2004 on enhancing ship and port facility security. The requirements include provisions relating to security assessments for port facilities, provision of information and port facility plans. The provisions are enforced under the Ship and Port Facility (Security) Regulations 2004, under which ships and port facilities can be inspected to ensure that they comply with the Government's security requirements. Under clause 5 of the Bill an order could be made requiring local authorities—or any other category 1 responder—to perform their functions in a particular way. This could include the purchase and deployment of equipment that Lord Jopling suggested in the other place.

The powers that the amendment confers on the Government are therefore unnecessary and otiose. In addition, the new provisions could undermine the robust procedural safeguards set out in the existing powers. Existing legislation sets out in much greater detail the scope of the powers and the procedures to be followed when they are used. If left on the statute book, the provisions of their lordships' amendment would cause significant confusion.

I am sure that hon. Members will understand that, from the Government's point of view, the amendment simply would not make sense, and confusion over issues of implementing security arrangements are the last thing we would want.

Patrick Mercer: I am grateful for the opportunity to reply to the Minister, who has made a very clear case in terms of Lords amendments Nos. 56 and 7. If I deal with them in that order, I hope that that will be convenient.

I begin with Lords amendment No. 56. The Government continue to talk about a lack of complacency and a need for awareness of the new types of threat that we face today. It is reassuring, therefore, to hear that the threat of, in the colloquial phrase, suicide bombers is being looked at in more detail. It would be interesting to know exactly how far planning has gone within Government to counter the threat to, for example, the approach roads to critical national infrastructure sites, routes that are frequently used for chemical and radiological material, and other high profile targets and iconic targets around the country. Exactly what is being done to counter that threat?

[Patrick Mercer]

The Minister will be well aware of the pressure, particularly from the private sector, for security industries to help the wider police family in resisting such a threat and of the difficulty that the private security industry has encountered in training operatives to spot terrorist reconnaissance and the build-up to a suicide-type attack. I should be extremely interested to hear from the Minister not just the theory of this but the practice.

I entirely take the Minister's points about Lords amendment No. 7. I pay tribute to Lord Jopling and the points that he raised in another place, because they do, so to speak, hold the Government's feet to the fire on a series of different measures on which it would be quite incorrect to suggest that nothing has been done yet, but which have yet properly to be implemented in all our ports and all the different points of entry to this country.

Lord Jopling suggests that special equipment needs to be installed to monitor the contents of lorries, and that we need further special equipment designed to monitor persons, ships, other conveyances or other objects for radiological—I think that should be "radioactive"—material. The amendments also require local authorities and other public bodies to obtain specific static or mobile equipment that is designed to identify the presence of chemical material, biological organisms or radioactive substances that might be used in a terrorist attack.

Undoubtedly, the Government have done something about this. I do not want to go into the details of Project Cyclamen, because if I were to do so it might provide aid and succour to the enemies of this country. It is fair to say, however, that many of Lord Jopling's points have been at least partially addressed by Project Cyclamen and the installation of various bits of specialist equipment.

How thorough has the deployment of that equipment been? Can the Minister say for certain that all airports are covered? I take the point about the Airports Act 1986 and the Aviation and Maritime Security Act 1990. The fact remains, however, that with the exception of some areas we are wide open to equipment being brought into this country. I have no doubt that trials in the near future will provide a focus for the subject under discussion today.

I should be interested to hear from the Minister how far Project Cyclamen has got, how successful its implementation has been, exactly how far the Minister intends to extend it and whether, indeed, our airports are as thoroughly covered as Lord Bassam suggests in his reply to Lord Jopling.

Mr. John Gummer (Suffolk, Coastal) (Con): Those of us who represent major ports have concerns about my hon. Friend's point about not going into the details of Project Cyclamen. Does he agree that it is important that those who live in the vicinity of airports and seaports know enough about these matters to be secure in their minds that the work is being done properly? At the moment, they do not have such knowledge, which is a serious worry.

Patrick Mercer: I am grateful to my right hon. Friend for his intervention, which underlines exactly the point that I am trying to make. I do not want to expose what I regard as loopholes in our defences under the project, but the fact remains that there is much that would be reassuring and deterring if the Government were to deploy more knowledge.

In many ways, what Lord Jopling proposes would require the Government to bring that information to the surface. A provision

> "requiring local authorities and other public bodies to obtain specific static or mobile equipment which is designed to identify the presence of chemical material or biological organisms or radiological substances which might be used in a terrorist attack"

would be particularly telling. For example, how much of that mobile equipment is currently in the hands of non-uniformed organisations? How much of it is in the hands of uniformed organisations whose personnel are not yet trained properly in how to use it? On top of that, how much have the Government thought about using the expertise of the 60,000-odd soldiers, sailors and airmen who are all trained to a greater or lesser extent in this field? I suggest that the answer is not very much at all.

The comments that Lord Bassam made in reply to my noble Friend Lord Jopling therefore leave me slightly baffled. Lord Bassam said:

> "The resilience to disruptive challenges is already high. There is a strong tradition of effective planning and response at the local level and 30 years of Northern Ireland terrorism has established a capability within Government and an awareness among businesses and the public which puts the UK in a comparatively strong position. But we are not complacent. Since 11 September 2001, the Government have substantially increased the country's counter-terrorism efforts and have improved contingency planning and resilience to a range of emergencies.—[*Official Report, House of Lords*, 9 November 2004; Vol. 666, c. 782.]

I do not think so. Will the Minister tell us how many practical exercises the Government have carried out in resilience terms? I am not referring to table-top or command post exercises. How many practical exercises have there been of the sort that do not take place on a Sunday morning or in a barracks or another controlled area and in which there is a realistic level of civilian traffic, both pedestrian and vehicle, trains are running and there is a realistic amount of congestion to deal with? The answer is not one.

Will the Minister look closely at the amendments? I believe that they have great merit, and it appals me that Lord Bassam's reply concentrates on 30 years of terrorism in Northern Ireland and effective planning and response at a local level. All that is completely behind the curve.

Sir Nicholas Winterton (Macclesfield) (Con): Following up the question of my right hon. Friend the Member for Suffolk, Coastal (Mr. Gummer), is my hon. Friend not of the view that, if the Government were a bit more forthcoming with information and about the availability of technology and equipment that could trace and identify the sort of matter or products involved, including nuclear chemicals and other such materials, it would be not only a huge reassurance to those of us who represents constituencies with a major airport nearby—in my case, it is Manchester international airport—but a deterrent to those who might think of smuggling into this country the material that our noble Friend Lord Jopling sought to deal with in his amendments?

Patrick Mercer: I am most grateful to my hon. Friend for his intervention, which again underlines the point that I am trying to make. In Committee, we suggested to the Government that there should be an effective method of informing the public not only of the threat, but of what they should do in the event of the threat of an attack or an actual attack. The Government told us that that proposal was completely unnecessary, that it was scaremongering and that it would be doing the terrorist's job for him. Within weeks of making those comments, however, they issued a booklet—it did not go to every household in the country, although they tried to ensure that it did—trying to address precisely those points. As he says, they could go much further in terms of reassurance and in terms of the next leg of the argument—training the public in how to deal with the threat that is in front of them.

In conclusion, I would be extremely pleased to hear the Minister accept the points that my noble Friend Lord Jopling has made for the simple reason that the amendments would underline the inadequacy of the Government's response at the moment and require them to produce a wholly better and more cohesive policy in future.

3.15 pm

Mr. Allan: The Minister has set out a sensible case in respect of Lords amendment No. 56. We should spell out in legislation the way in which highways alterations will take place for the purposes of civil contingencies, and it is sensible to include such provision in the Bill.

Lords amendment No. 56 adds up to more than three pages of additional text in a 30-odd page Bill, so 10 per cent. of the Bill could be taken up in dealing with quite a minor issue. Having been in local government, I cannot help but reflect that, just as we love to spell out everything in traffic regulations in intimate and minute detail, down to the width of double yellow lines, when we come to try to define in law how we can make alterations for the purposes of anti-terrorism, we seem similarly to be required to spell everything out in minute detail to give appropriate legal authority. None the less, the provisions are unremarkable in what they are seeking to achieve.

On Lords amendment No. 7, the Liberal Democrats are running counter to the thrust of the debate so far today, in which we have been seeking to limit the Government's powers and tie their hands to a degree. Lords amendment No. 7 offers the Government an additional permissive power to make regulations. The Minister said they could already introduce such regulations, but the amendment, which was moved by Lord Jopling but had the support of my Liberal Democrats as well as the official Opposition, seeks to spell out the way in which the Government can make regulations in respect of the protective measures that need to be taken to prevent harmful materials from coming through ports and so on.

I thought that the Minister helped to strengthen the case for the amendment in his speech. He referred to all the existing measures that require ports and various other people to take the sort of measures that we are talking about. There is, however, quite a complex web of regulatory powers, and it might be helpful for a comprehensive Civil Contingencies Bill to spell out that the regulations affecting the ports authorities and everybody else should fall within the overall framework. They may have to meet other legal requirements anyway, but having one port of call would be helpful, and part 1 could effectively say to responders, "These are your duties and responsibilities." Including in those responsibilities protection, scanning and the purchase and provision of equipment for detecting the noxious substances might be helpful. It would not mean that those involved did not have other legal responsibilities; it would simply mean that the civil contingencies regulations were pulled together in one place.

The Minister may say that the Government will take such action anyway, but the purpose of the amendment is sensible; it seeks to highlight those issues and include them in the Bill. If we send back reasons why we disagree with the Lords—the Government will command the majority to ensure that that happens—I hope that the Government can give additional reassurances in discussions in another place that the issue is covered. The fact that it is covered in other disparate measures is not sufficient reason for it not to be mentioned in the big, comprehensive measure before us today, which seeks to cover all eventualities. Not including such reference will leave a gap that Lords amendment No. 7 tries sensibly to plug.

Mr. Gummer: When the Minister replies to my hon. Friend the Member for Newark (Patrick Mercer), I hope that he will also bear it in mind that, on the other side of the issue, there is considerable disquiet about actions that are unnecessary, otiose or intrusive. I say again that it is outrageous that, for example, it would be impossible to drive around Grosvenor square. It is unacceptable that such a restriction should be imposed. I think that it is illegal, although I have found it impossible to get an answer from the Government as to whether a proper case has been made under present legislation. The situation is similar with regard to the road behind the embassy. If an embassy cannot operate in a way that enables the rest of the world to go about its business, we should ask ourselves whether it is in the right place. I wish we would apply the same criterion abroad, to avoid an unacceptable impact on the public.

I hope the Minister will reassure us that the measures will be used for their intended purpose, and not for purposes of aggrandisement or interference. Will he also have a look at measures that have already been implemented, which I consider both unnecessary and intrusive? As I have said, I should like him to look into the measures that we take abroad as well as those taken in this country, especially in regard to embassies.

Sir Nicholas Winterton: I want to follow up the points made by my right hon. Friend the Member for Suffolk, Coastal (Mr. Gummer). I fear that the powers in the Bill could well be misused. Let me put a specific question to the Minister, for whom I have had a high regard not just in his current role but in previous incarnations. As an Opposition Back Bencher, I should like an assurance from him.

Like my right hon. Friend, I am concerned about the proposals relating to roads. I am thinking of chicanes, concrete blocks and the blocking of roads. My right hon. Friend gave the example of Grosvenor square and the American embassy. I want to be certain that the

[Sir Nicholas Winterton]

proposed mammoth, massive, overwhelming powers will not be abused by Government or police, and will be used and maintained only in the event of ongoing need. Roads often remain blocked almost ad infinitum.

Mr. Allan: Does the hon. Gentleman share my hope that the impact of the amendments will be such that a Secretary of State will have to make an order for works such as those in Grosvenor square, which will be challengeable in a court of law if people disagree with it? Surely that would be better than introducing these measures on an ad hoc basis.

Sir Nicholas Winterton: I can tell the hon. Gentleman that on this matter, at least, he and I are as one. I believe that such proposals should be made only in the context of an order. I seek a categorical assurance from the Minister that these mammoth powers will not be abused, and that the House will have an opportunity to comment on the Government's proposals. I do not suggest that the Government's powers to act in a proven emergency should be reduced, but the Minister should appreciate the view of Back Benchers in both Opposition parties that such huge powers should be used extremely sensitively and carefully.

Mr. Jamieson: I thank those who have contributed to this short debate for their generally consensual approach to these important matters.

The hon. Member for Newark (Patrick Mercer) spoke of the new suicide threat. Over many years we have, sadly, become used to bomb threats that have generally involved a warning and in which the bombers, because they did not wish to lose their lives, did not take quite as many chances as suicide bombers do. We are now living in a new world, and we should all accept that.

I do not think that the hon. Gentleman or anyone else would expect me to respond to his points in detail. I cannot, for instance, tell him exactly what is being done in the privacy of the House. However, I can reply to his question about the use of wider security forces. In many cases the police co-operate with security guards and forces in ports who are not part of the national police force. Many people join in a concerted effort to create a secure environment around a particular establishment.

There seems to be some confusion about the proposed powers. The debate seemed to centre on how they would be used, which I suppose is inevitable in a debate like this, but our proposals relate not to what we will do with the powers but to where they should lie. The hon. Member for Newark asked about specialised equipment. As I said in my opening remarks, powers allowing the use of such equipment, and allowing the Secretary of State to insist on its use in ports, airports or other places of entry, are already contained in existing legislation. The hon. Member for Sheffield, Hallam (Mr. Allan) suggested that we should have just one port of call. I suppose we could have brought all the provisions together in this Bill, but the Bill as it stands is not comprehensive and would not supplant what is in other legislation. That is our difficulty.

As was implied by the hon. Member for Macclesfield (Sir Nicholas Winterton) and the right hon. Member for Suffolk, Coastal (Mr. Gummer), the protocols for implementation are terribly important. They are laid out much more clearly in other legislation. I think that, if used as the primary legislation to drive future action, Lords amendment No. 7 would prove inadequate. There are 1,000 ports in this country, and a single piece of legislation applying to them. That is understandable to those operating in ports, but airports are a different matter.

Powers already exist through my Department and through the Transport Security Directorate—TRANSEC—for the inspection of airports. We carry out such inspections with great thoroughness and rigour to ensure that the correct measures are taken, especially where there is the greatest danger. We take proportionate action: obviously larger ports involving sensitive goods or a considerable number of passengers will need much more attention than smaller, less significant ports.

The hon. Member for Newark asked about Programme Cyclamen. I am sure he will understand why I cannot give him a full answer. I cannot put operational deployment on the public record, but I should be happy to have a private discussion with the hon. Gentleman. He also asked about the role of the military. We use the military quite widely. As the existing military aid arrangements are well established and work extremely well, there is no need to place legal duties on the armed forces. The armed forces are closely linked with the civil regional resilience arrangements, and provisions in the new chapter in the strategic defence review, including the creation of civil contingencies reaction forces, will enhance their ability to respond to emergencies.

The hon. Gentleman asked what practical measures we have taken. Unfortunately, there is not enough time left in the debate for me to go through the three-page list of things that we have done; suffice it to say that many sensible, practical measures have been taken at both national and local level to ensure that we tackle the issue of terrorism. It is not a fixed feast; such matters are constantly renewed in the light of our knowledge and understanding of how the threat to us is changing.

The hon. Gentleman asked about exercises. We have in place a co-ordinated, cross-governmental programme for exercises, which covers a comprehensive range of domestic, disruptive challenges, including accidents, natural disasters and acts of terrorism. I can confirm that one such exercise is happening in my constituency over the weekend and during next week—*[Interruption.]* It is happening over several days, not just on a Sunday. Sometimes those are table-top exercises, but at other times they are full and live.

The right hon. Member for Suffolk, Coastal made a very good point—the hon. Member for Macclesfield made a similar one—about what is in existing law. In existing law, but not, I am afraid, in the amendment, there are some checks and balances; for example, a permanent fixture on a road would require a local inquiry. The local authority would be required to post a direction to say what was happening and, if necessary, a public inquiry would be held in some cases.

I shall conclude my remarks. The Opposition may want to push the motion to a vote and if I continue talking they will be unable to do so, but if there are any further points I shall be happy to respond to them in writing.

Question put, That this House disagrees with the Lords in the said amendment:—

The House divided: Ayes 304, Noes 189.

Division No. 334] **[3:30 pm**

AYES

Abbott, Ms Diane
Adams, Irene *(Paisley N)*
Ainger, Nick
Ainsworth, Bob *(Cov'try NE)*
Alexander, Douglas
Allen, Graham
Anderson, rh Donald *(Swansea E)*
Anderson, Janet *(Rossendale & Darwen)*
Armstrong, rh Ms Hilary
Atherton, Ms Candy
Atkins, Charlotte
Bailey, Adrian
Baird, Vera
Banks, Tony
Barron, rh Kevin
Battle, rh John
Bayley, Hugh
Beard, Nigel
Beckett, rh Margaret
Begg, Miss Anne
Berry, Roger
Blackman, Liz
Blears, Ms Hazel
Blizzard, Bob
Borrow, David
Bradley, rh Keith *(Withington)*
Bradley, Peter *(The Wrekin)*
Bradshaw, Ben
Brennan, Kevin
Brown, rh Nicholas *(Newcastle E Wallsend)*
Brown, Russell *(Dumfries)*
Browne, Desmond
Bryant, Chris
Buck, Ms Karen
Burgon, Colin
Burnham, Andy
Byrne, Liam *(B'ham Hodge H)*
Caborn, rh Richard
Cairns, David
Campbell, Alan *(Tynemouth)*
Campbell, Mrs Anne *(C'bridge)*
Campbell, Ronnie *(Blyth V)*
Caplin, Ivor
Casale, Roger
Caton, Martin
Cawsey, Ian *(Brigg)*
Challen, Colin
Chaytor, David
Clark, Mrs Helen *(Peterborough)*
Clark, Dr. Lynda *(Edinburgh Pentlands)*
Clark, Paul *(Gillingham)*
Clarke, rh Tom *(Coatbridge & Chryston)*
Clarke, Tony *(Northampton S)*
Coaker, Vernon
Coffey, Ms Ann
Colman, Tony
Corbyn, Jeremy
Corston, Jean
Cox, Tom *(Tooting)*
Cranston, Ross
Cruddas, Jon
Cunningham, Jim *(Coventry S)*
Cunningham, Tony *(Workington)*
Curtis-Thomas, Mrs Claire
Darling, rh Alistair
Davey, Valerie *(Bristol W)*
David, Wayne
Davidson, Ian
Davies, rh Denzil *(Llanelli)*
Dawson, Hilton
Dean, Mrs Janet
Denham, rh John
Dhanda, Parmjit
Dismore, Andrew
Dobbin, Jim *(Heywood)*
Donohoe, Brian H.
Doran, Frank
Dowd, Jim *(Lewisham W)*
Drew, David *(Stroud)*
Drown, Ms Julia
Dunwoody, Mrs Gwyneth
Eagle, Angela *(Wallasey)*
Eagle, Maria *(L'pool Garston)*
Edwards, Huw
Efford, Clive
Ellman, Mrs Louise
Ennis, Jeff *(Barnsley E)*
Etherington, Bill
Field, rh Frank *(Birkenhead)*
Fisher, Mark
Fitzpatrick, Jim
Fitzsimons, Mrs Lorna
Flint, Caroline
Foster, rh Derek
Foster, Michael *(Worcester)*
Foster, Michael Jabez *(Hastings & Rye)*
Francis, Dr. Hywel
Gapes, Mike *(Ilford S)*
Gardiner, Barry
Gerrard, Neil
Gilroy, Linda
Godsiff, Roger
Goggins, Paul
Griffiths, Jane *(Reading E)*
Griffiths, Win *(Bridgend)*
Grogan, John
Hain, rh Peter
Hall, Mike *(Weaver Vale)*
Hall, Patrick *(Bedford)*
Hamilton, David *(Midlothian)*
Hanson, David
Harman, rh Ms Harriet
Havard, Dai *(Merthyr Tydfil & Rhymney)*
Healey, John
Henderson, Ivan *(Harwich)*
Hendrick, Mark
Hepburn, Stephen
Hesford, Stephen
Heyes, David
Hill, Keith *(Streatham)*
Hinchliffe, David
Hodge, Margaret
Hood, Jimmy *(Clydesdale)*
Hope, Phil *(Corby)*
Hopkins, Kelvin
Howarth, rh Alan *(Newport E)*
Howarth, George *(Knowsley N & Sefton E)*
Hughes, Beverley *(Stretford & Urmston)*
Hughes, Kevin *(Doncaster N)*
Humble, Mrs Joan
Hume, John *(Foyle)*
Hurst, Alan *(Braintree)*
Hutton, rh John
Irranca-Davies, Huw
Jackson, Glenda *(Hampstead & Highgate)*
Jackson, Helen *(Hillsborough)*
Jamieson, David
Jenkins, Brian
Johnson, Miss Melanie *(Welwyn Hatfield)*
Jones, Helen *(Warrington N)*
Jones, Jon Owen *(Cardiff C)*
Jones, Martyn *(Clwyd S)*
Joyce, Eric *(Falkirk W)*
Kaufman, rh Sir Gerald
Keen, Alan *(Feltham)*
Keen, Ann *(Brentford)*
Kelly, Ruth *(Bolton W)*
Kennedy, Jane *(Wavertree)*
Khabra, Piara S.
Kidney, David
Kilfoyle, Peter
King, Andy *(Rugby)*
King, Ms Oona *(Bethnal Green & Bow)*
Knight, Jim *(S Dorset)*
Kumar, Dr. Ashok
Ladyman, Dr. Stephen
Lammy, David
Laxton, Bob *(Derby N)*
Lazarowicz, Mark
Lepper, David
Leslie, Christopher
Levitt, Tom *(High Peak)*
Lewis, Terry *(Worsley)*
Linton, Martin
Lloyd, Tony *(Manchester C)*
Love, Andrew
Lucas, Ian *(Wrexham)*
Luke, Iain *(Dundee E)*
McAvoy, Thomas
McCabe, Stephen
McCafferty, Chris
McDonagh, Siobhain
MacDonald, Calum
McDonnell, John
McFall, rh John
McGrady, Eddie
McGuire, Mrs Anne
McIsaac, Shona
McKechin, Ann
McKenna, Rosemary
Mackinlay, Andrew
McNamara, Kevin
McNulty, Tony
Mactaggart, Fiona
McWilliam, John
Mahmood, Khalid
Mahon, Mrs Alice
Mallaber, Judy
Mann, John *(Bassetlaw)*
Marris, Rob *(Wolverh'ton SW)*
Marsden, Gordon *(Blackpool S)*
Marshall, David *(Glasgow Shettleston)*
Martlew, Eric
Meacher, rh Michael
Meale, Alan *(Mansfield)*
Merron, Gillian
Michael, rh Alun
Miller, Andrew
Mitchell, Austin *(Gt Grimsby)*
Moffatt, Laura
Morgan, Julie
Morley, Elliot
Morris, rh Estelle
Mullin, Chris
Munn, Ms Meg
Murphy, Jim *(Eastwood)*
Naysmith, Dr. Doug
Norris, Dan *(Wansdyke)*
O'Brien, Bill *(Normanton)*
O'Hara, Edward
Olner, Bill
O'Neill, Martin
Organ, Diana
Osborne, Sandra *(Ayr)*
Owen, Albert
Palmer, Dr. Nick
Perham, Linda
Picking, Anne
Pickthall, Colin
Pike, Peter *(Burnley)*
Plaskitt, James
Pollard, Kerry
Pond, Chris *(Gravesham)*
Pope, Greg *(Hyndburn)*
Pound, Stephen
Prentice, Ms Bridget *(Lewisham E)*
Prentice, Gordon *(Pendle)*
Prosser, Gwyn
Purchase, Ken
Purnell, James
Quin, rh Joyce
Quinn, Lawrie
Rapson, Syd *(Portsmouth N)*
Reed, Andy *(Loughborough)*
Robertson, John *(Glasgow Anniesland)*
Robinson, Geoffrey *(Coventry NW)*
Roche, Mrs Barbara
Rooney, Terry
Ross, Ernie *(Dundee W)*
Roy, Frank *(Motherwell)*
Ruane, Chris
Ruddock, Joan
Salter, Martin
Sarwar, Mohammad
Savidge, Malcolm
Sawford, Phil
Sedgemore, Brian
Shaw, Jonathan
Sheerman, Barry
Sheridan, Jim
Shipley, Ms Debra
Simon, Siôn *(B'ham Erdington)*
Singh, Marsha
Skinner, Dennis
Smith, rh Andrew *(Oxford E)*
Smith, Angela *(Basildon)*
Smith, rh Chris *(Islington S & Finsbury)*
Smith, Geraldine *(Morecambe & Lunesdale)*
Smith, Jacqui *(Redditch)*
Smith, John *(Glamorgan)*
Smith, Llew *(Blaenau Gwent)*
Soley, Clive
Spellar, rh John
Starkey, Dr. Phyllis
Steinberg, Gerry
Stewart, David *(Inverness E & Lochaber)*
Stewart, Ian *(Eccles)*
Stinchcombe, Paul
Stoate, Dr. Howard
Strang, rh Dr. Gavin

Stringer, Graham
Stuart, Ms Gisela
Sutcliffe, Gerry
Tami, Mark *(Alyn)*
Timms, Stephen
Tipping, Paddy
Todd, Mark *(S Derbyshire)*
Touhig, Don *(Islwyn)*
Trickett, Jon
Truswell, Paul
Turner, Dennis *(Wolverh'ton SE)*
Turner, Neil *(Wigan)*
Twigg, Derek *(Halton)*
Tynan, Bill *(Hamilton S)*
Vis, Dr. Rudi
Walley, Ms Joan
Ward, Claire
Wareing, Robert N.
Watson, Tom
Watts, David
White, Brian
Whitehead, Dr. Alan
Wicks, Malcolm
Wills, Michael
Winnick, David
Winterton, Ms Rosie *(Doncaster C)*
Wood, Mike *(Batley)*
Woolas, Phil
Worthington, Tony
Wright, Anthony D. *(Gt Yarmouth)*
Wright, David *(Telford)*
Wright, Iain *(Hartlepool)*
Wright, Tony *(Cannock)*
Wyatt, Derek

Tellers for the Ayes:
Joan Ryan and
Mr. John Heppell

NOES

Ainsworth, Peter *(E Surrey)*
Allan, Richard
Amess, David
Arbuthnot, rh James
Bacon, Richard
Baker, Norman
Baldry, Tony
Barrett, John
Beggs, Roy *(E Antrim)*
Beith, rh A. J.
Bellingham, Henry
Bercow, John
Beresford, Sir Paul
Blunt, Crispin
Boswell, Tim
Bottomley, Peter *(Worthing W)*
Brady, Graham
Brake, Tom *(Carshalton)*
Brazier, Julian
Breed, Colin
Brooke, Mrs Annette L.
Browning, Mrs Angela
Bruce, Malcolm
Burns, Simon
Burnside, David
Burstow, Paul
Burt, Alistair
Butterfill, Sir John
Cable, Dr. Vincent
Calton, Mrs Patsy
Cameron, David
Campbell, Gregory *(E Lond'y)*
Campbell, rh Sir Menzies *(NE Fife)*
Carmichael, Alistair
Cash, William
Chapman, Sir Sydney *(Chipping Barnet)*
Chope, Christopher
Clappison, James
Clifton-Brown, Geoffrey
Conway, Derek
Cotter, Brian
Curry, rh David
Davey, Edward *(Kingston)*
Davies, Quentin *(Grantham & Stamford)*
Davis, rh David *(Haltemprice & Howden)*
Djanogly, Jonathan
Dodds, Nigel
Donaldson, Jeffrey M.
Doughty, Sue
Duncan, Alan *(Rutland)*
Duncan, Peter *(Galloway)*
Duncan Smith, rh Iain
Ewing, Annabelle
Fabricant, Michael
Fallon, Michael
Field, Mark *(Cities of London & Westminster)*
Flight, Howard
Flook, Adrian
Forth, rh Eric
Foster, Don *(Bath)*
Francois, Mark
Gale, Roger *(N Thanet)*
George, Andrew *(St. Ives)*
Gibb, Nick *(Bognor Regis)*
Gidley, Sandra
Gill, Parmjit Singh
Goodman, Paul
Gray, James *(N Wilts)*
Grayling, Chris
Green, Damian *(Ashford)*
Green, Matthew *(Ludlow)*
Greenway, John
Grieve, Dominic
Gummer, rh John
Hague, rh William
Hammond, Philip
Hancock, Mike
Hawkins, Nick
Hayes, John *(S Holland)*
Heald, Oliver
Heath, David
Heathcoat-Amory, rh David
Hendry, Charles
Hermon, Lady
Hoban, Mark *(Fareham)*
Hogg, rh Douglas
Holmes, Paul
Horam, John *(Orpington)*
Howard, rh Michael
Hughes, Simon *(Southwark N)*
Hunter, Andrew
Jack, rh Michael
Jenkin, Bernard
Jones, Nigel *(Cheltenham)*
Kennedy, rh Charles *(Ross Skye & Inverness)*
Kirkbride, Miss Julie
Kirkwood, Sir Archy
Knight, rh Greg *(E Yorkshire)*
Laing, Mrs Eleanor
Lait, Mrs Jacqui
Lamb, Norman
Laws, David *(Yeovil)*
Leigh, Edward
Letwin, rh Oliver
Lewis, Dr. Julian *(New Forest E)*
Liddell-Grainger, Ian
Lidington, David
Lilley, rh Peter
Llwyd, Elfyn
Loughton, Tim
Luff, Peter *(M-Worcs)*
McIntosh, Miss Anne
Mackay, rh Andrew
Maclean, rh David
McLoughlin, Patrick
Malins, Humfrey
Maples, John
Maude, rh Francis
Mawhinney, rh Sir Brian
May, Mrs Theresa
Mercer, Patrick
Mitchell, Andrew *(Sutton Coldfield)*
Moore, Michael
Moss, Malcolm
Murrison, Dr. Andrew
O'Brien, Stephen *(Eddisbury)*
Öpik, Lembit
Osborne, George *(Tatton)*
Ottaway, Richard
Paice, James
Paisley, Rev. Ian
Pickles, Eric
Price, Adam *(E Carmarthen & Dinefwr)*
Prisk, Mark *(Hertford)*
Pugh, Dr. John
Redwood, rh John
Reid, Alan *(Argyll & Bute)*
Rendel, David
Robathan, Andrew
Robinson, Mrs Iris *(Strangford)*
Robinson, Peter *(Belfast E)*
Roe, Dame Marion
Rosindell, Andrew
Ruffley, David
Russell, Bob *(Colchester)*
Sanders, Adrian
Sayeed, Jonathan
Selous, Andrew
Shepherd, Richard
Simmonds, Mark
Smith, Sir Robert *(W Ab'd'ns & Kincardine)*
Smyth, Rev. Martin *(Belfast S)*
Spicer, Sir Michael
Spink, Bob *(Castle Point)*
Spring, Richard
Stanley, rh Sir John
Steen, Anthony
Streeter, Gary
Stunell, Andrew
Swayne, Desmond
Swire, Hugo *(E Devon)*
Syms, Robert
Taylor, Ian *(Esher)*
Taylor, Matthew *(Truro)*
Taylor, Dr. Richard *(Wyre F)*
Teather, Sarah
Thomas, Simon *(Ceredigion)*
Thurso, John
Tredinnick, David
Trimble, rh David
Turner, Andrew *(Isle of Wight)*
Tyler, Paul *(N Cornwall)*
Tyrie, Andrew
Waterson, Nigel
Watkinson, Angela
Weir, Michael
Whittingdale, John
Widdecombe, rh Miss Ann
Wiggin, Bill
Wilkinson, John
Willetts, David
Williams, Hywel *(Caernarfon)*
Williams, Roger *(Brecon)*
Wilshire, David
Winterton, Ann *(Congleton)*
Winterton, Sir Nicholas *(Macclesfield)*
Yeo, Tim *(S Suffolk)*
Young, rh Sir George
Younger-Ross, Richard

Tellers for the Noes:
Gregory Barker and
Mr. Peter Atkinson

Question accordingly agreed to.

Lords amendment disagreed to.

It being more than two and a half hours after the commencement of proceedings, MR. DEPUTY SPEAKER *put forthwith the remaining Question required to be put at that hour, pursuant to Order [this day].*

Lords amendment No. 56 agreed to.

Clause 1

MEANING OF "EMERGENCY"

Lords amendment: No. 1.

Ruth Kelly: I beg to move, That this House agrees with the Lords in the said amendment.

Mr. Deputy Speaker: With this it will be convenient to deal with Lords amendments Nos. 2 to 6, 29 to 36, 39, 40 and 48.

Ruth Kelly: All these Lords amendments streamline the definition of emergency, sharpening the drafting, rather than making substantive changes. They were warmly welcomed in the other place, and I hope that hon. Members will agree that the definition is clearer and more concise as a result.

Lords amendment agreed to.

Lords amendments Nos. 2 to 6 agreed to.

Clause 2

DUTY TO ASSESS, PLAN AND ADVISE

Lords amendment: No. 8.

Ruth Kelly: I beg to move, That this House agrees with the Lords in the said amendment.

Mr. Deputy Speaker: With this we may discuss Lords amendment No. 9.

3.45 pm

Ruth Kelly: The amendments relate to the role of the voluntary sector in contingency planning. The Government now accept that there is merit in capturing in statute the role of voluntary organisations. This, we believe, will create a climate of expectation that their skills, resources and expertise should be used to the full. The Government have worked closely with the voluntary sector to get the text of the amendments and the package of supporting regulations and guidance right. I therefore recommend the amendments to the House.

Patrick Mercer: I am grateful to the Minister for bringing forward the amendments. They represent a breakthrough. The voluntary sector was disgracefully neglected earlier and, in Committee, we could make no progress whatever with the Government on this point.

The work done by my noble Friend Lady Buscombe should be acknowledged. Her team has worked tirelessly and, at last, we have recognition for bodies such as the British Red Cross and others which have seen the example set by the Spanish Red Cross after the incident on 11 March. I am delighted that the Government have seen sense on this point.

Mr. Allan: I simply wish to reinforce the point made by the hon. Member for Newark (Patrick Mercer) that it is very welcome that the Government have recognised the position of the voluntary sector. I know that it was a contentious and difficult issue, with different views being expressed within the voluntary sector. Bodies such as the Red Cross have been effective in keeping the issue alive, and the amendments reach a sensible compromise in making sure that the Bill formally recognises issues with which the voluntary sector will be intimately involved.

Mr. Mike Hancock (Portsmouth, South) (LD): I am delighted that the Minister has reflected on what was said in Committee and on Report, but it is not good enough to accept that the voluntary sector is now part of the Bill unless the Government are also convinced that resources should be forthcoming to help the voluntary sector deliver on its side of any arrangements that it may come to. It is not good enough simply to write the sector into the Bill and then deny or refuse applications for the resources that will be needed by many organisations in the voluntary sector. I hope that the Government and the Minister will take that point on board.

Lords amendment agreed to.

Lords amendment No. 9 agreed to.

Clause 7

URGENCY

Lords amendment: No. 10.

Ruth Kelly: I beg to move, That this House agrees with the Lords in the said amendment.

Madam Deputy Speaker (Sylvia Heal): With this we will take Lords amendment No. 18, Lords amendments Nos. 37, 38, 43 to 45 and the Government motions to disagree thereto, Government amendments (a) to (e) in lieu thereof, Lords amendment No. 47 and the Government motion to disagree thereto, and Government amendments (a) and (b) in lieu thereof.

Ruth Kelly: The Bill originally required decision makers to think that provisions of emergency regulations were in due proportion to an emergency or that an urgent direction was needed. Concerns were raised about that approach in both this House and the other place, and their lordships have replaced those provisions with an objective test. In other words, their amendments provide that an urgent direction must be needed, and that urgent directions or emergency regulations must be in due proportion to the situations that they address.

We have re-examined the matter in the light of their noble lordships' concerns and worked hard to find a compromise position to which I hope that both sides of the House can sign up. Under parts 1 and 2 of the Bill, when determining whether there is an urgent need to dispense with the requirement to consult the Council on Tribunals, the maker of urgent directions will make judgments of fact or near fact, so he will be deciding whether there is an urgent need to issue a direction or whether there is insufficient time to consult the Council on Tribunals. We believe that that approach is appropriate, so we will accept the relevant Lords amendments.

We do not accept that it would be appropriate to apply such an approach to decisions made about the kinds of provision that should be included in emergency regulations made under part 2. Any decision made about the necessary scope of emergency powers, for example, will be more subjective. There will inevitably be a question of judgment. We think that it is appropriate for the Bill to recognise that fact and to indicate clearly who will be responsible for making such a judgment call. However, we think that we should raise the threshold of the test in such cases. We have thus tabled an alternative amendment that will raise the threshold from "thinks" to "is satisfied". That will require the maker of regulations not only to think that the provisions of regulations are appropriate, but to be satisfied, or pretty sure, of that fact. I urge the House to accept the compromise package.

Mr. Heald: Ministers in this House and the other place have gone a considerable way towards improving

[Mr. Heald]

the nature of the test in part 1, which we welcome. References to Ministers thinking appear throughout the Bill, so I am glad that the inclusion of an objective test in part 1 is acceptable.

Part 2 of the Bill provides for draconian actions, so although the nature of the test in that part is more important, the Minister has not been able to go as far as we had hoped. We have argued that the proper way to deal with the matter would be to require belief on reasonable grounds. That would have included an objective element, but it would have also required the relevant Minister to justify his actions. The Government's proposal that a Minister would to have to be satisfied that something were appropriate rather than only thinking that represents a slightly stronger requirement, but it is not strong enough. We shall continue to support Lords amendment No. 37 because we are dissatisfied with the Minister's approach on the matter, although some improvements to the Bill have been made.

Mr. Allan: Liberal Democrats in this House and the other place shared concerns similar to those expressed by the hon. Member for North-East Hertfordshire (Mr. Heald), and we made such arguments in Committee and on Report. However, on balance, we are inclined to accept the Government's proposal. The Minister has made the case that a Minister's judgment will ultimately apply, because we cannot avoid the fact that Ministers will make judgments for which they will be held to account about whether conditions prevail to such an extent that emergency regulations should be brought into play.

If we come to challenge a Minister through the legal process or in the House, it is important that the test is genuine so that he or she cannot say, "I thought the measures were appropriate, so you can't do anything to me. If I thought wrongly then tough luck." The threshold of the test is important, but we think that the new wording is satisfactory. The inclusion of the word "appropriate" in the Bill will mean that we will have something to get our teeth into when we come to testing a Minister. Although there are several ways in which the provisions could be phrased to give us more certainty, we must strike a balance somewhere. We think that the Government have conceded enough at this stage of the Bill's passage to satisfy us that the test will be sufficiently robust.

Mr. Hogg: It would be churlish not to acknowledge that the Minister and the Government in general have made a useful concession. In a sense, one could accept it. However, my hon. Friend the Member for North-East Hertfordshire (Mr. Heald) desires to go with Lords amendment No. 37 and I am content to follow him.

There is no doubt that clause 22 provides for substantive powers. I reminded the House of the extent of those in our debate on the first group of amendments. The question is: what should trigger the exercise of those powers? The test of "thinks" was too low a threshold. The Minister was right about that. The question is whether there is a significant difference between the concept of being satisfied and that contained in amendment No. 37. I think that there is relatively little difference between the two tests. The test formulated in the other place sets a slightly higher threshold. In ordinary circumstances, I would not fall out about that, but if my hon. Friend thinks that it is a matter of principle, I shall support him.

Ruth Kelly: Amendment No. 37 proposes an objective test, to be satisfied on reasonable grounds. I shall respond to the point about an objective test, unless the hon. Member for North-East Hertfordshire (Mr. Heald) has something to add.

Mr. Heald: If one requires a belief to be genuine, and also to have reasonable grounds to support it, the objectivity comes in the provision of the reasonable grounds. I accept that that is not what the amendment says, as I mentioned in my contribution, but it provides an objective test, something that we welcome.

Ruth Kelly: I am glad that the hon. Gentleman makes that clear. In that case, an objective test would achieve the wrong results in certain situations and should be rejected.

Let me give an example. Consider the outbreak of a strain of flu that is fatal. Faced with a cluster of flu-related fatalities in an area, the Minister may quite reasonably take the view that there is a threat of serious damage to human welfare in that area, and that it is proportionate and necessary to use emergency powers to impose limits on public gatherings to limit the spread of the disease. If, after a week of laboratory tests and developments on the ground, it becomes clear that the new strain is not highly contagious and it was unnecessary to restrict public gatherings, amendment No. 37 would make the emergency regulations unlawful. Anyone affected by them could successfully challenge them and seek compensation, even though the Minister acted reasonably and appropriately.

Mr. Heald: The decision that would be considered would be the one made on a particular day. The hon. Lady refers to a week later on.

Ruth Kelly: That is right, but the longer-term effect of the amendment would be that Ministers would delay taking reasonable and appropriate action to deal with an emergency until they were 100 per cent. sure that they knew what the emergency entailed. That cannot be right. The idea of an objective test, with the threshold set that high, is not appropriate. In addition, I do not accept that stipulating "on reasonable grounds" would solve the problem. As I said on different groups of amendments, it is not necessary for that to be specified. I do not expect the hon. Gentleman to want to re-run that particular argument now.

The "satisfied" test is a higher threshold than the "thinks" test and goes a long way towards meeting hon. Members' concerns. Let me give an example of when "satisfied" is a higher test than "thinks". If a Minister is informed of a credible threat of extensive life-threatening flooding in East Anglia, but there is a suggestion that the wind may change and the rain will fall elsewhere, he would have to balance and evaluate the evidence available. A Minister might meet the "thinks" test if he or she reasonably considered that the flood was likely to happen. The Minister might have some doubts, but if the flood were more likely to happen than not, and he or she had reached that conclusion reasonably on the basis of the available evidence, the "thinks" test would be met. However, to be satisfied that an emergency was about to happen, the Minister would have to be more certain. He or she would have to pretty sure that the flood was likely to occur and have no substantial doubts about the point.

The difference between the two tests is one of degree, but there is a difference, so I recommend the "satisfied" test to the House as meeting reasonable concerns.

It being three hours after commencement of proceedings, MADAM DEPUTY SPEAKER *put the Question already proposed from the Chair, pursuant to Order [this day].*

Lords amendment agreed to.

MADAM DEPUTY SPEAKER *then proceeded to put the remaining Questions required to be put at that hour.*

Lords amendment No. 18 agreed to.

Clause 22

SCOPE OF EMERGENCY REGULATIONS

Lords amendment: No. 37, in page 15, line 6, leave out from "provision" to "for" in line 7.

Motion made, and Question put, That this House disagrees with the Lords in the said amendment.—*[Mr. Jim Murphy.]*

The House divided: Ayes 318, Noes 135.

Division No. 335] **[4:02 pm**

AYES

Abbott, Ms Diane
Ainsworth, Bob *(Cov'try NE)*
Alexander, Douglas
Allan, Richard
Allen, Graham
Anderson, rh Donald *(Swansea E)*
Anderson, Janet *(Rossendale & Darwen)*
Armstrong, rh Ms Hilary
Atherton, Ms Candy
Atkins, Charlotte
Bailey, Adrian
Baker, Norman
Banks, Tony
Barrett, John
Barron, rh Kevin
Battle, rh John
Bayley, Hugh
Beard, Nigel
Beckett, rh Margaret
Begg, Miss Anne
Beith, rh A. J.
Berry, Roger
Blackman, Liz
Blizzard, Bob
Borrow, David
Bradley, rh Keith *(Withington)*
Bradshaw, Ben
Brake, Tom *(Carshalton)*
Breed, Colin
Brennan, Kevin
Brooke, Mrs Annette L.
Brown, rh Nicholas *(Newcastle E Wallsend)*
Bruce, Malcolm
Buck, Ms Karen
Burgon, Colin
Burnham, Andy
Burstow, Paul
Cable, Dr. Vincent
Caborn, rh Richard
Cairns, David
Calton, Mrs Patsy
Campbell, Alan *(Tynemouth)*
Campbell, Mrs Anne *(C'bridge)*
Campbell, rh Sir Menzies *(NE Fife)*
Campbell, Ronnie *(Blyth V)*
Caplin, Ivor
Carmichael, Alistair
Casale, Roger
Caton, Martin
Cawsey, Ian *(Brigg)*
Challen, Colin
Chaytor, David
Clark, Mrs Helen *(Peterborough)*
Clark, Dr. Lynda *(Edinburgh Pentlands)*
Clark, Paul *(Gillingham)*
Clarke, rh Tom *(Coatbridge & Chryston)*
Clarke, Tony *(Northampton S)*
Coaker, Vernon
Coffey, Ms Ann
Colman, Tony
Corston, Jean
Cotter, Brian
Cox, Tom *(Tooting)*
Cranston, Ross
Cruddas, Jon
Cunningham, Jim *(Coventry S)*
Cunningham, Tony *(Workington)*
Curtis-Thomas, Mrs Claire
Darling, rh Alistair
Davey, Edward *(Kingston)*
Davey, Valerie *(Bristol W)*
David, Wayne
Davidson, Ian
Davies, rh Denzil *(Llanelli)*
Dawson, Hilton
Dean, Mrs Janet
Denham, rh John
Dhanda, Parmjit
Dismore, Andrew
Dobbin, Jim *(Heywood)*
Donohoe, Brian H.
Doran, Frank
Doughty, Sue
Dowd, Jim *(Lewisham W)*
Drew, David *(Stroud)*
Drown, Ms Julia
Eagle, Angela *(Wallasey)*
Eagle, Maria *(L'pool Garston)*
Edwards, Huw
Efford, Clive
Ellman, Mrs Louise
Ennis, Jeff *(Barnsley E)*
Field, rh Frank *(Birkenhead)*
Fitzpatrick, Jim
Fitzsimons, Mrs Lorna
Flint, Caroline
Foster, rh Derek
Foster, Don *(Bath)*
Foster, Michael *(Worcester)*
Foster, Michael Jabez *(Hastings & Rye)*
Francis, Dr. Hywel
Gapes, Mike *(Ilford S)*
Gardiner, Barry
George, Andrew *(St. Ives)*
Gerrard, Neil
Gidley, Sandra
Godsiff, Roger
Green, Matthew *(Ludlow)*
Griffiths, Jane *(Reading E)*
Griffiths, Nigel *(Edinburgh S)*
Griffiths, Win *(Bridgend)*
Grogan, John
Hain, rh Peter
Hall, Mike *(Weaver Vale)*
Hall, Patrick *(Bedford)*
Hancock, Mike
Hanson, David
Harman, rh Ms Harriet
Havard, Dai *(Merthyr Tydfil & Rhymney)*
Healey, John
Heath, David
Henderson, Ivan *(Harwich)*
Hendrick, Mark
Hepburn, Stephen
Heppell, John
Hesford, Stephen
Hewitt, rh Ms Patricia
Heyes, David
Hill, Keith *(Streatham)*
Hinchliffe, David
Holmes, Paul
Hood, Jimmy *(Clydesdale)*
Hope, Phil *(Corby)*
Hopkins, Kelvin
Howarth, rh Alan *(Newport E)*
Howarth, George *(Knowsley N & Sefton E)*
Hughes, Beverley *(Stretford & Urmston)*
Hughes, Kevin *(Doncaster N)*
Hughes, Simon *(Southwark N)*
Humble, Mrs Joan
Hume, John *(Foyle)*
Hurst, Alan *(Braintree)*
Irranca-Davies, Huw
Jackson, Glenda *(Hampstead & Highgate)*
Jamieson, David
Jenkins, Brian
Johnson, rh Alan *(Hull W)*
Johnson, Miss Melanie *(Welwyn Hatfield)*
Jones, Helen *(Warrington N)*
Jones, Jon Owen *(Cardiff C)*
Jones, Martyn *(Clwyd S)*
Jones, Nigel *(Cheltenham)*
Joyce, Eric *(Falkirk W)*
Kaufman, rh Sir Gerald
Keen, Alan *(Feltham)*
Keen, Ann *(Brentford)*
Kelly, Ruth *(Bolton W)*
Kennedy, rh Charles *(Ross Skye & Inverness)*
Kennedy, Jane *(Wavertree)*
Khabra, Piara S.
Kidney, David
King, Andy *(Rugby)*
King, Ms Oona *(Bethnal Green & Bow)*
Knight, Jim *(S Dorset)*
Kumar, Dr. Ashok
Ladyman, Dr. Stephen
Lamb, Norman
Laws, David *(Yeovil)*
Laxton, Bob *(Derby N)*
Lazarowicz, Mark
Lepper, David
Leslie, Christopher
Levitt, Tom *(High Peak)*
Lewis, Terry *(Worsley)*
Linton, Martin
Lloyd, Tony *(Manchester C)*
Lucas, Ian *(Wrexham)*
Luke, Iain *(Dundee E)*
McAvoy, Thomas
McCabe, Stephen
McCafferty, Chris
McDonagh, Siobhain
MacDonald, Calum
McFall, rh John
McGrady, Eddie
McGuire, Mrs Anne
McIsaac, Shona
McKechin, Ann
McKenna, Rosemary
McNamara, Kevin
McNulty, Tony
Mactaggart, Fiona
McWilliam, John
Mahmood, Khalid
Mahon, Mrs Alice
Mallaber, Judy
Mann, John *(Bassetlaw)*
Marris, Rob *(Wolverh'ton SW)*
Marsden, Gordon *(Blackpool S)*
Marshall, David *(Glasgow Shettleston)*
Marshall-Andrews, Robert
Martlew, Eric
Meacher, rh Michael
Meale, Alan *(Mansfield)*
Michael, rh Alun
Miller, Andrew
Mitchell, Austin *(Gt Grimsby)*
Moffatt, Laura
Moore, Michael
Morgan, Julie

Morley, Elliot
Morris, rh Estelle
Mullin, Chris
Munn, Ms Meg
Murphy, Denis *(Wansbeck)*
Murphy, Jim *(Eastwood)*
Naysmith, Dr. Doug
O'Brien, Bill *(Normanton)*
O'Hara, Edward
Olner, Bill
O'Neill, Martin
Öpik, Lembit
Organ, Diana
Osborne, Sandra *(Ayr)*
Owen, Albert
Palmer, Dr. Nick
Perham, Linda
Picking, Anne
Pike, Peter *(Burnley)*
Plaskitt, James
Pollard, Kerry
Pond, Chris *(Gravesham)*
Pope, Greg *(Hyndburn)*
Pound, Stephen
Prentice, Ms Bridget *(Lewisham E)*
Prentice, Gordon *(Pendle)*
Prosser, Gwyn
Purchase, Ken
Purnell, James
Quin, rh Joyce
Quinn, Lawrie
Rapson, Syd *(Portsmouth N)*
Reed, Andy *(Loughborough)*
Reid, Alan *(Argyll & Bute)*
Rendel, David
Robertson, John *(Glasgow Anniesland)*
Robinson, Geoffrey *(Coventry NW)*
Roche, Mrs Barbara
Rooney, Terry
Ruane, Chris
Russell, Bob *(Colchester)*
Ryan, Joan *(Enfield N)*
Sanders, Adrian
Sarwar, Mohammad
Savidge, Malcolm
Sawford, Phil
Sedgemore, Brian
Shaw, Jonathan
Sheerman, Barry
Sheridan, Jim
Shipley, Ms Debra
Simon, Siôn *(B'ham Erdington)*
Singh, Marsha
Skinner, Dennis
Smith, rh Andrew *(Oxford E)*
Smith, Angela *(Basildon)*
Smith, rh Chris *(Islington S & Finsbury)*
Smith, Geraldine *(Morecambe & Lunesdale)*
Smith, Jacqui *(Redditch)*
Smith, John *(Glamorgan)*
Smith, Llew *(Blaenau Gwent)*
Smith, Sir Robert *(W Ab'd'ns & Kincardine)*
Soley, Clive
Spellar, rh John
Starkey, Dr. Phyllis
Steinberg, Gerry
Stewart, Ian *(Eccles)*
Stinchcombe, Paul
Stoate, Dr. Howard
Strang, rh Dr. Gavin
Stringer, Graham
Stuart, Ms Gisela
Stunell, Andrew
Sutcliffe, Gerry
Tami, Mark *(Alyn)*
Taylor, Matthew *(Truro)*
Teather, Sarah
Thurso, John
Timms, Stephen
Tipping, Paddy
Todd, Mark *(S Derbyshire)*
Touhig, Don *(Islwyn)*
Turner, Dennis *(Wolverh'ton SE)*
Turner, Neil *(Wigan)*
Twigg, Derek *(Halton)*
Tyler, Paul *(N Cornwall)*
Tynan, Bill *(Hamilton S)*
Vis, Dr. Rudi
Walley, Ms Joan
Ward, Claire
Wareing, Robert N.
Watson, Tom
Watts, David
Webb, Steve *(Northavon)*
White, Brian
Wicks, Malcolm
Williams, rh Alan *(Swansea W)*
Williams, Roger *(Brecon)*
Wills, Michael
Winnick, David
Wood, Mike *(Batley)*
Woolas, Phil
Wright, Anthony D. *(Gt Yarmouth)*
Wright, David *(Telford)*
Wright, Iain *(Hartlepool)*
Wright, Tony *(Cannock)*
Wyatt, Derek
Younger-Ross, Richard

Tellers for the Ayes:
Gillian Merron and
Mr. Nick Ainger

NOES

Ainsworth, Peter *(E Surrey)*
Arbuthnot, rh James
Bacon, Richard
Baldry, Tony
Beggs, Roy *(E Antrim)*
Bellingham, Henry
Bercow, John
Beresford, Sir Paul
Blunt, Crispin
Boswell, Tim
Bottomley, Peter *(Worthing W)*
Brady, Graham
Brazier, Julian
Burns, Simon
Burnside, David
Burt, Alistair
Cameron, David
Campbell, Gregory *(E Lond'y)*
Cash, William
Chapman, Sir Sydney *(Chipping Barnet)*
Chope, Christopher
Clappison, James
Clifton-Brown, Geoffrey
Collins, Tim
Conway, Derek
Cormack, Sir Patrick
Davies, Quentin *(Grantham & Stamford)*
Davis, rh David *(Haltemprice & Howden)*
Djanogly, Jonathan
Dodds, Nigel
Donaldson, Jeffrey M.
Duncan, Peter *(Galloway)*
Duncan Smith, rh Iain
Ewing, Annabelle
Fabricant, Michael
Fallon, Michael
Field, Mark *(Cities of London & Westminster)*
Flook, Adrian
Francois, Mark
Gale, Roger *(N Thanet)*
Gibb, Nick *(Bognor Regis)*
Goodman, Paul
Gray, James *(N Wilts)*
Grayling, Chris
Grieve, Dominic
Gummer, rh John
Hague, rh William
Hammond, Philip
Hawkins, Nick
Hayes, John *(S Holland)*
Heald, Oliver
Heathcoat-Amory, rh David
Hendry, Charles
Hermon, Lady
Hoban, Mark *(Fareham)*
Hogg, rh Douglas
Horam, John *(Orpington)*
Hunter, Andrew
Jack, rh Michael
Jenkin, Bernard
Johnson, Boris *(Henley)*
Kirkbride, Miss Julie
Knight, rh Greg *(E Yorkshire)*
Laing, Mrs Eleanor
Lait, Mrs Jacqui
Leigh, Edward
Letwin, rh Oliver
Lewis, Dr. Julian *(New Forest E)*
Liddell-Grainger, Ian
Lilley, rh Peter
Llwyd, Elfyn
Loughton, Tim
Luff, Peter *(M-Worcs)*
McIntosh, Miss Anne
Mackay, rh Andrew
Maclean, rh David
McLoughlin, Patrick
Malins, Humfrey
Maples, John
Maude, rh Francis
Mawhinney, rh Sir Brian
May, Mrs Theresa
Mercer, Patrick
Mitchell, Andrew *(Sutton Coldfield)*
Moss, Malcolm
Murrison, Dr. Andrew
O'Brien, Stephen *(Eddisbury)*
Osborne, George *(Tatton)*
Ottaway, Richard
Page, Richard
Paice, James
Paisley, Rev. Ian
Pickles, Eric
Price, Adam *(E Carmarthen & Dinefwr)*
Prisk, Mark *(Hertford)*
Redwood, rh John
Robathan, Andrew
Robinson, Mrs Iris *(Strangford)*
Robinson, Peter *(Belfast E)*
Roe, Dame Marion
Rosindell, Andrew
Ruffley, David
Sayeed, Jonathan
Selous, Andrew
Shepherd, Richard
Simmonds, Mark
Smyth, Rev. Martin *(Belfast S)*
Spicer, Sir Michael
Spink, Bob *(Castle Point)*
Spring, Richard
Stanley, rh Sir John
Steen, Anthony
Streeter, Gary
Swayne, Desmond
Swire, Hugo *(E Devon)*
Syms, Robert
Tapsell, Sir Peter
Taylor, Ian *(Esher)*
Taylor, Dr. Richard *(Wyre F)*
Tredinnick, David
Trimble, rh David
Turner, Andrew *(Isle of Wight)*
Waterson, Nigel
Watkinson, Angela
Weir, Michael
Whittingdale, John
Wiggin, Bill
Wilkinson, John
Willetts, David
Williams, Hywel *(Caernarfon)*
Wilshire, David
Winterton, Ann *(Congleton)*
Winterton, Sir Nicholas *(Macclesfield)*
Wishart, Pete
Yeo, Tim *(S Suffolk)*

Tellers for the Noes:
Gregory Barker and
Mr. Peter Atkinson

Question accordingly agreed to.

Lords amendment disagreed to.

Mr. Colin Pickthall (West Lancashire) (Lab): On a point of order, Madam Deputy Speaker. During the Division, there was a good deal of confusion between Portcullis house and the Chamber. A large number of us, hearing that the Division was off, turned back; that may have been our fault. But when we returned, at least two of us—my hon. Friend the Member for Sheffield, Hillsborough (Helen Jackson) and I—tried to get in the door downstairs behind the Chamber. The door was locked and our passes would not open it, despite the fact that the light was flashing green, so we could not get up to vote. Will you have that looked into?

Tony Worthington (Clydebank and Milngavie) (Lab): Further to that point of order, Madam Deputy Speaker. I was one of the first Members here for the last vote, and the monitors clearly showed that the Division was off. I then moved to Portcullis house and misled hon. Members by saying that the Division was off, which seemed a sensible thing to tell them, as it had been announced. That should be taken into account, in addition to the point made by my hon. Friend the Member for West Lancashire (Mr. Pickthall).

Madam Deputy Speaker (Sylvia Heal): Perhaps I can clarify the situation for hon. Members. The Division on Lords amendment No. 10 was called off. The Division on Lords amendment No. 37 followed in quick succession. That, perhaps, explains some of the difficulty. I remind hon. Members that in proceedings such as these, Divisions can be called at any time. On the matter of the door, I will draw that to the attention of the Serjeant at Arms.

Lords amendment No. 38 disagreed to.

Mr. Heald: On a point of order, Madam Deputy Speaker. For our part, if you wanted to put the Government motions to disagree together, we would be content with that.

Madam Deputy Speaker: I thank the hon. Gentleman for that suggestion, but I am required to put the motions separately. I shall go through them as quickly as I can.

Lords amendment Nos. 43 to 45 disagreed to.

Government amendments (a) to (e) in lieu of Lords amendments Nos. 37, 38, 43, 44 and 45 agreed to.

Lords amendment No. 47 disagreed to.

Government amendments (a) and (b) in lieu of Lords amendment No. 47 agreed to.

Remaining Lords amendments agreed to.

Committee appointed to draw up Reasons to be assigned to the Lords for disagreeing to certain of their amendments to the Bill: Mr. Richard Allan, Mr. Oliver Heald, Ruth Kelly, Ms Bridget Prentice and James Purnell; three to be the quorum of the Committee.—*[Ms Prentice.]*

To withdraw immediately.

Reasons for disagreeing to certain Lords amendments reported, and agreed to; to be communicated to the Lords.

Housing Bill

Lords message considered.

Madam Deputy Speaker (Sylvia Heal): I inform the House that privilege is involved in Lords amendment No. 191B. If the House agrees to the amendment, I will arrange for the necessary entry to be made in the *Journal*.

After Clause 143

Lords amendment: No. 128C.

The Minister for Housing and Planning (Keith Hill): I beg to move, That this House agrees with the Lords in the said amendment.

I have already made it clear that this Government will not introduce the duty to have a home information pack unless we are sure that the industry and the public are ready. We are already committed to undertaking a national voluntary dry run of home information packs ahead of compulsory introduction.

Yesterday, in another place, my noble Friend Lord Rooker offered a commitment that our Department will pursue positively with stakeholders the possibility of a compulsory element to the dry run in a local or sub-regional area further to test our proposals ahead of the introduction of national compulsory packs. That would be achieved by commencing the statutory scheme in the chosen area earlier than in the rest of England and Wales. Clause 231(8) provides the necessary powers. We will involve all the key consumer and industry stakeholders in the arrangements and in the monitoring and evaluation of the voluntary and compulsory elements of the dry run.

We are confident that we have the flexibility within this Bill quickly to respond through regulations to any problems that arise before or during the dry run period or with the compulsory element. Depending on the nature of a potential problem, we could tailor the contents of the pack, exclude certain types of property from the duties or allow certain elements of the pack to be included later than the day of marketing, and so on.

Mr. John Hayes (South Holland and The Deepings) (Con): I wonder whether the dry run will be in a low-value area.

Keith Hill: We have not decided where the dry run will occur. That is a matter for close consultation with the industry.

We recognise that even with those commitments to undertake rigorous research and testing ahead of introduction, there are concerns among Conservative Members and in some sections of the industry that problems might arise that, despite the extent of the flexibility provided in the Bill, might be best addressed by suspending the operation of all or part of part 5 while they are resolved.

In response to those concerns, my noble Friend moved amendment No. 128C. That amendment adds a new clause, giving the Secretary of State the power to suspend the home information pack duties. I do not expect that we will face problems that we cannot solve quickly through regulations, so I do not expect that we

[Keith Hill]

will need to exercise that power. Should I be wrong, however, this power will enable us to suspend duties while we put things right.

I hope that I have allayed the concerns of Opposition Members and put to rest once and for all the suggestion that we are hell-bent on persisting with compulsory home information packs regardless of their impact.

Mr. Hayes: According to St. Luke, there is

"more rejoicing in heaven over one sinner who repents than over ninety-nine righteous people who do not need to repent."

In this case, there is undoubtedly a degree of repentance on the part of the Minister, and we should be generous about that. He has listened to the concerns expressed by Opposition Members. In that respect, despite my intrinsic reservations about all Liberal Democrats, I have to say that they have been at one with us. He has listened to the concerns expressed in the House of Lords by peers of all parties, including Cross Benchers. He has listened to the concerns expressed by the Law Society. Incidentally, although he withdrew the remark, it was not terribly emollient of Lord Rooker to describe it as the "Lie Society" in the other place. That was not the right tone for the Government to use in making such a U-turn.

The Minister has listened to the concerns expressed by estate agents and by others who have pointed out that with the best will in the world—I think that the Minister does have good will over this—significant problems could arise during the trial period of these packs.

Let me lay my cards on the table. I make no secret of the fact that I believe that home information packs are unnecessary and will be unhelpful. They will slow down the market, might stimulate further surveys, are unlikely to satisfy mortgage lenders, and will be insufficient in many regards.

Andrew Selous (South-West Bedfordshire) (Con): Does my hon. Friend agree that it is not right that the state should compulsorily interfere with two freely contracting individuals, and that that is the heart of the argument that Conservative Members have advanced?

Mr. Hayes: For once, there is a nuance of difference between my hon. Friend and I, who agree about so much, so often. As hon. Members know, I am not an advocate of the unbridled free market, and I believe that there is a civilising role for Government and local government. In this instance, however, my hon. Friend is spot on, because the case that the Government made—that this would assist the marketplace—was not made persuasively. It did not persuade Opposition Members and clearly it has not persuaded the Lords.

For that reason, the trial, as we can now reasonably call it, becomes highly significant. If my hon. Friend the Member for South-West Bedfordshire (Andrew Selous) is right about this, as he probably is, and if our reservations are founded in common sense—as, in my judgment, they are—so that significant problems arise during the course of the trial, it is absolutely right that this House should have the power to suspend the implementation of the packs. That would mean that instead of a dry run leading to an inevitability, we would have a legitimate and genuine pilot scheme. Under a pilot scheme, one tests something, sees what has gone wrong, and alters it. The suspension suggested in the amendment will be essential following the failure that sellers packs will undoubtedly become; otherwise, we will experience the chaos predicted by many experts, colleagues in this place, and Members of the Lords.

I acknowledge that the Minister has recognised those arguments. He has had the courage to make a significant concession, for which we must be grateful. But I have to say, although I do not want to be churlish, that he could have done that a long time ago. We had this debate in Committee, on Second Reading and during several other debates in this place and in the other place. It is an 11th-hour conversion, but at least it is a conversion.

I make a prediction and a commitment. The prediction is that, in their trial, sellers packs will be a disaster. The commitment is that, when a Conservative Government are elected to office—as I confidently expect next year—we will use the provision to suspend sellers packs at the outset. We are not convinced about them for the reasons that have often been articulated. I shall not tire the House by repeating them.

4.30 pm

I am pleased that the Minister has made a concession, but a concession which would not have been granted without the consistent and energetic pressure that my colleagues in the Lords exerted. Baroness Hanham and Lord Hanningfield have been notable in that campaign, supported by Liberal Democrat Members. Without that pressure and the humble contribution of those in this place, who pale into insignificance beside the eloquence of our colleagues in the other place, we would not have wrung the concession from the Minister. He is a sinner that repenteth and I welcome his repentance. Sellers packs will not work. They will be suspended and the proposed new provision provides the chance to do that. We therefore welcome it.

Mr. David Kidney (Stafford) (Lab): The hon. Member for South Holland and The Deepings (Mr. Hayes) represents the amendments differently from my understanding of them. The principle of a compulsory scheme appears to have been accepted by both Houses. The system of buying and selling in this country through chains of transactions means that it is important for one comprehensive system to apply. That will happen and I congratulate my right hon. Friend the Minister on standing firm and ensuring that that forms part of the eventual legislation.

I thank the other place for adding a useful and pragmatic power, which may or may not be used in future. I assure the hon. Member for South Holland and The Deepings that it is not possible to suspend the scheme before it has started. I thank my right hon. Friend for all his work on the Bill and the subject.

Matthew Green (Ludlow) (LD): I welcome the Government amendment, which recognises that the Liberal Democrats were talking common sense about home information packs. We have our disagreements. We do not believe that the packs will be a success and the Government clearly believe that they will prove successful. We are glad that they have included a get-out-of-jail clause. We are pleased to have helped them to do that because we believe that the proposed new provision is necessary to ensure that the packs can be suspended if they do not work after a trial period or even at some later stage.

The major difference between Conservative Members and us is that we have always acknowledged the need to introduce energy efficiency into the home sale at some point. We do not believe that it should be at the point of marketing but at the point of sale. That would bring it into line with the European directive. If the problems envisaged with home information packs occur and the proposed new power is needed, we hope that the ability to meet the terms of the European directive can rapidly be established at the point of sale, not of marketing. The Government have not given themselves the power to do that but they would have to do it to fulfil the terms of the directive if they used the proposed new provision.

I welcome the Government's change of heart. We are pleased to have played our part in persuading them of the need for it. We are not convinced that the packs will work and we continue to have huge reservations about them. However, the Government have at least given themselves the ability to stop them when, as we believe is likely, they prove to be a millstone around home buyers' necks.

Keith Hill: I was sorry that the hon. Member for South Holland and The Deepings (Mr. Hayes) was a little taken aback by Lord Rooker's forcefulness. Perhaps my noble Friend feels that there is quite sufficient emollient on these ministerial Benches in normal circumstances.

I know that the energy performance certificate has been a matter of some concern to the hon. Member for Ludlow (Matthew Green). The EC directive requires the certificate to be made available when a property is sold. It also says that the certificate should be made available to prospective buyers to enable consumers to compare and assess the energy performance of the property being sold. The objectives of the directive would clearly not be met if the certificate were just handed over to the buyer on completion. It must be made available earlier in the process to provide the consumer with a genuine choice.

The hon. Member for Ludlow has raised the issue of what happens to the energy performance certificate in the event of a suspension or non-pursuit of the home information package. The power to suspend in amendment No. 128C is a power to suspend all or some of the duties in clauses 137 to 141. It is limited to those clauses and would not affect other powers or provisions in part 5, including the ones in clause 144. However, the power in clause 144(9)(a) to make regulations altering the time at which a pack document is provided will still exist. If a suspension order were to be made affecting the duties under clause 138, therefore, this would not prevent special arrangements from being made for the timing of the production of energy performance certificates, if that were deemed necessary.

Matthew Green: I thank the Minister. My understanding of what he has just said is that in fact the Government would have the power to ensure that the energy performance certificate could be in place at the end of the process rather than at the start, if they so chose and if they realised that what they were proposing was not working.

Keith Hill: I am delighted to say that the usual form of inspiration has winged its way to me and confirms my instinctive understanding that the answer to the hon. Gentleman's question is yes.

Mr. Hayes *rose—*

Lords amendment agreed to.

Clause 154

INTERPRETATION OF PART 5

Lords amendment: No. 140E.

Keith Hill: I beg to move, That this House agrees with the Lords in the said amendment.

Hon. Members may recall that in our debate on Monday, my guru, my hon. Friend the Member for Stafford (Mr. Kidney), pointed out that there was a typographical error in the amendments on the register of home condition reports moved in this place last week. Lords amendment No. 140E replaces the reference in subsection (7) of the new clause to subsection (3), which relates to the paying of a fee to register a report, with the correct reference to subsection (4).

Lords amendment agreed to.

After Clause 187

Lords amendment: No. 191B.

Keith Hill: I beg to move, That this House agrees with the Lords in the said amendment.

Madam Deputy Speaker (Sylvia Heal): With this it will be convenient to take Lords amendment No. 191C.

Keith Hill: I invite the House to note that the Lords do not insist on their amendment No. 191 and that they have accepted Government amendments Nos. 191B and 191C, which were offered in lieu.

The House will recall that on Commons consideration of Lords amendments it disagreed with amendment No. 191, which placed a duty on the Secretary of State to take reasonable steps to ensure an increase in residential energy efficiency by at least 20 per cent. by 2010, based on 2000 levels. The Government have given further consideration to amendment No. 191. We continue to take the view that its effect will be broadly in line with that of existing policies on residential energy efficiency, and that there has been no weakening of the Government's determination to make serious progress on energy efficiency. However, we recognise the strength of feeling on this issue. We still believe that duties based on specific numerical figures are inflexible and better avoided in primary legislation, but we have decided to accede to the principle of the amendment as providing some comfort that the Government stand by the energy efficiency aim that they have declared. I am pleased that the 20 per cent. energy efficiency target will be included in the Bill. I am grateful

[Keith Hill]

to noble Members of the other place, who agreed in their wisdom to the amendment that the Government tabled on this subject.

We listened carefully to the arguments made in this House and elsewhere and we accepted the strength of those arguments. What we emphatically did not take into account was the disgraceful full-page advertisement naming names that appeared in *The Guardian* newspaper after the vote here. It was paid for by Greenpeace and an organisation called ACT, of which I personally had never heard before and of which I wish to hear no more. The advertisement pandered to the vulgar tabloid theory convenient to at least some elements hostile to the Government that Members of Parliament will always in some knee-jerk fashion cave in to pressures from the Prime Minister. Frankly—I speak as a former deputy Chief Whip—anybody with the most primitive knowledge of recent events in this Parliament will recognise that that is a lie.

The advertisement went on to state that the consequences of the vote would be the deaths of 30,000 people. That statement is outrageous. It is in plain ignorance of the facts of the case. Not even the most passionate advocate of the energy and fuel poverty amendments that we were debating would make such a dishonest claim, and nobody did so. The advertisement also betrayed a total ignorance of the way in which Parliament works.

I shall remind the House and, more to the point, those outside, how Parliament does work. I acknowledge the position of those Members of Parliament who felt that they could not support the position of the Government during the debate, some of whom have a long history of advocacy of the energy efficiency target, but I have to say to the House in all candour—I hope that this message gets through to those outside elements—that the voices to which I listened were the private representations of the colleagues who rightly supported the Government in the Divisions. If a Government are to work, they must depend on the support of Government Members, who continued in this case to make the argument with me. It was precisely because I recognised their loyalty and concern that I worked in Government to accept their argument. They are the Members who succeeded and to whom credit should be paid. There will be no names and no pack drill this time, but they know who they are, and I hope that they will claim the credit.

After the votes in question, one of my Labour colleagues wrote to *The Guardian* to say that, if anything, the Greenpeace advertisement would be more likely to heighten the Government's resistance to the energy efficiency amendment. I cannot say that I was not tempted. There is something of an object lesson here about the perhaps too easy signing of early-day motions; something along the lines of chickens coming home to roost springs to mind. Personally, as a Back Bencher, I resolved after the 1997 general election never again to sign an early-day motion, and I cannot say that I have suffered much as a consequence.

Nevertheless, we have done the right thing in supporting the 20 per cent. energy efficiency target in residential accommodation. All the evidence suggests that the Government have been working towards the target effectively and that they will achieve if not exceed it. I repeat that agreeing to it was nothing to do with the pathetic stunt by Greenpeace et al. I know that such outfits have to justify their donations by various stunts, but this stunt could well have backfired, and I wonder whether those involved really care about that.

I hope that the House will recognise that amendment No. 191B is a significant concession to colleagues who feel strongly about the matter. We are satisfied that the amendment will not place an additional burden on the Government. We have tabled it to rectify some technical deficiencies in Lords amendment No. 191. The definition of residential accommodation in amendment No. 191B mirrors that in the Sustainable Energy Act 2003 to bring the provision into line with the designated aims, and proposed subsection (2) clarifies that that duty does not affect the duty to designate an aim under that Act. Finally, amendment No. 191C, which amends clause 231, the commencement clause, provides that the new clause introduced by amendment No. 191B will come into force two months from the date of Royal Assent.

I therefore invite the House to agree to amendments Nos. 191B and 191C.

4.45 pm

Mr. John Hayes (South Holland and The Deepings) (Con): This is the second U-turn. Even the hon. Member for Stafford (Mr. Kidney), with all his powers of spin, will not be able to dress it up as anything other than a substantial concession. We have Lord Bassam's own words. This, he says,

> "is a significant concession and . . . evidence that the Government listen."—[*Official Report, House of Lords*, 16 November 2004; Vol. 666, c. 1397.]

Yes, listen to their own critics on the Labour Benches; yes, listen to the powerful case made by peers in all parties; yes, listen—I think the hon. Gentleman will have to acknowledge—to the Opposition, who have been both consistent and united in their concern to ensure that the Government honour the commitment on which they reneged earlier this year. Let us be frank: they switched the target from 20 per cent. to 16 per cent. It does not do the Minister much credit to get too high-handed about that and about those outside who drew attention to it. At least the Government have returned to where they began and set a target in line with what was suggested by their own advisers, most experts outside and most of those who campaign both for energy efficiency and against fuel poverty.

I make no specific comment about the newspaper article to which the Minister referred, but I do say this. A range of organisations representing some of the most vulnerable of our countrymen have highlighted the fact that the Government were not playing straight when they resisted the Lords amendments initially—organisations representing the poorest of our countrymen, the elderly, vulnerable children and people with a long-standing commitment to the battle against fuel poverty. I understand why the Minister's parliamentary private secretary is embarrassed—

Mr. Terry Rooney (Bradford, North) (Lab): I am not in the least embarrassed.

Mr. Hayes: The hon. Gentleman is embarrassed, because he initially voted against the Lords. I understand that he has had to see the error of his ways. He is another convert—another sinner that repenteth.

Brian White (Milton Keynes, North-East) (Lab) *rose—*

Mr. Hayes: I wonder whether the hon. Gentleman has ever been a sinner in this regard. I rather doubt it, as he has a pretty proud history of standing up for those who fight fuel poverty.

Brian White: Does the hon. Gentleman recognise that most of the groups that he mentioned understood the workings of this place and worked within the system to secure the change that we see today?

Mr. Hayes: Yes, they did. I personally received many representations from them, and I am sure that the hon. Member for Ludlow (Matthew Green) did as well. I know that the Minister did. Of course they understood: they understood that they must put pressure on all of us who were involved in the debate on these matters, and hoped that they could bring about a resolution that was appropriate and deliverable.

Of course those bodies understood how the process worked, but it is a bit rich to pick out an advertisement without paying tribute to some of the organisations that were measured and consistent in their campaign and that did not go over the top in their representations. To counterbalance some of the criticism, let me pay tribute to all those, outside this place and in it, who fought for the cause of eliminating fuel poverty, including all-party groups and, indeed, to those who embarrassed the Government when it became clear that they had started to renege on a public commitment made more than 15 times.

When more than two dozen of a Government's own Members rebel on an amendment in support of the Lords, of course it is embarrassing. *[Interruption.]* Of course it is embarrassing to the hon. Member for Bradford, North (Mr. Rooney), who is now chuntering. I understand his embarrassment, and I feel a bit sorry for him, but he has been got off the hook by his Minister. Because the Minister has conceded, there will be a return to the original position of recognising the efficacy of a 20 per cent. decrease in carbon dioxide emissions by 2010, on the basis of the 1990 levels. That is what the Minister's commitment means and, in practice, many of the arguments articulated in the other place and in the House will find a form in the Bill in a clear restatement of policy to do something real and deliverable about emissions, fuel poverty and other issues related to energy efficiency.

Once again, I recognise that the Government have moved, even though it was not of their own volition. However, their move is welcome because it improves the Bill. The measure is by no means perfect—it contains some good things and some very bad things—but the work of both Houses of Parliament, assisted by those outside who have made representations to us, has improved it by forcing the Minister to take note. That does him some credit, but much more to those who forced him to do so.

I am pleased to support the amendment, alongside Members on the Treasury Bench.

Brian White: I thank my right hon. Friend the Minister and the Minister in the Lords for introducing the amendment, which will be welcome in the industry and which is a sign of the Government's good work on these matters. They are the first Government to try to tackle fuel poverty. They have a long history of doing so and the amendment is another in a long line of initiatives. That context is important, given the comments of the hon. Member for South Holland and The Deepings (Mr. Hayes), which suggest that the Government have done nothing, whereas they have a long record of tackling fuel poverty.

I am pleased that the Government introduced the amendment. It seems that every time I rebel, the Government table amendments in the Lords, so I hope that they will adopt a quicker method in future. I am grateful to my right hon. Friend for clarifying the relationship between the 20 per cent. target and the energy efficiency target in the Sustainable Energy Act 2003. That is useful.

I want to say something about the Greenpeace advert. Last Monday, many people asked me whether they should rebel and I replied, "No, don't. Go and speak to the Minister." Many of my colleagues who had signed the early-day motion chose to make their point to the Minister in the Aye Lobby and they deserve credit for doing so. It is important that the House recognise that a large number of people who could have rebelled did not do so, but none the less made their point to the Minister. I welcome the fact that the Minister listened to them. That was important, and it makes the Greenpeace advert all the more annoying.

I think that Stephen Tindale should resign as director of Greenpeace, because of the damage that he has done. He has attacked his friends—people who have campaigned on environmental issues in the House for a long time—and gave them no help. He did not attack those who have opposed such measures. I could have understood that if he had been a novice campaigner, although I would not have been very happy about it, but he has a long history of campaigning and understands it. As an insider, when he was a special adviser, he was part of the problem so he has a lot to answer for. If he does not resign, Greenpeace should sack him. He has done real damage to—

Madam Deputy Speaker: Order. I understand the hon. Gentleman's comments, but perhaps he could confine his remarks to the amendment.

Brian White: I apologise Madam Deputy Speaker.

Many Members have campaigned on this issue for a long time and they may not support future campaigns for fear of being stabbed in the back. The Minister has already told us that he chose not to sign early-day motions when he was a Back Bencher and several of my colleagues may make the same choice, which will be to the detriment of the House. It is important that we use

[Brian White]

early-day motions to put pressure on Ministers, so I am glad that 340 Members signed the early-day motion and that the Minister listened.

It is also important that we take forward the energy efficiency target. I welcome the fact that the Minister has taken that on board, and hope that his officials will talk with the industry about improving the situation.

Matthew Green (Ludlow) (LD): The Labour party doth protest too much. I had no idea that Labour Members would talk about the Greenpeace advertisement quite so much. They have just given Greenpeace huge publicity, so that may have been counterproductive, unless a real double game is being played.

We are pleased to have helped force the Government into recommitting to a target to which they have previously been committed and into putting it in the Bill. It is a small step forward. It is frustrating that the Government talk the language of energy efficiency but at times they need to be dragged, kicking and screaming, to do anything about it. They have a better record than the Conservatives ever did, but they have not always seemed enthusiastic about it. The Government talk the talk, but they do not always walk the walk. I am glad that, for once, the Liberal Democrats—in conjunction with others—have been able to encourage the Government into walking the walk.

This amendment, like others on the tenancy deposit scheme and empty property management orders, has helped to improve the Bill considerably. We still have problems with home information packs, but much of the Bill is very welcome. Substantial improvements have been made, such as this amendment, and the Minister will be able to look back and be pleased with the Bill. The Liberal Democrats are certainly pleased to have played our part in ensuring that some of the best parts of the Bill, including this amendment, were added to it.

Mr. Kidney: As one who suffered damage to his reputation by the Greenpeace advertisement that has been mentioned, I thank my right hon. Friend the Minister for making it clear that he listened to the representations of Labour Back Benchers who loyally supported him last Monday, as I did, but spoke to him privately about the matter. I am sure that even the hon. Member for South Holland and The Deepings (Mr. Hayes) would agree, without spin, that my right hon. Friend has a fine record, in proceedings on this Bill, of accepting good arguments from Labour Back Benchers on a series of issues, including empty homes, overcrowding, park homes and tenants' deposits. That is commendable.

Mr. Hayes: I just wished to put on the record that, as I have said previously, I think that the passage of the Bill has been a happy experience. It has shown Parliament working well. The pressure that the hon. Gentleman mentioned, and the Minister acknowledged, has come from both sides of the House. We have been helpful to the Government in making this a better Bill, because they will not reach their carbon dioxide emission targets unless they deal with energy efficiency. They will now deal with that and—

Madam Deputy Speaker: Order. That is rather lengthy for an intervention.

Mr. Kidney: On that happy note, I shall end.

Mr. Christopher Chope (Christchurch) (Con): I note the Government's concession, but we should not get carried away and start thinking that it is a concession of much substance. All that the concession does is require the Secretary of State to take reasonable steps to ensure that by 2010 the general level of energy efficiency of residential accommodation is increased by at least 20 per cent. compared with the general level in 2000. No sanction will apply if that target is not met. There are no stepping stones, interim or otherwise, on the way to that target. We know that the Government have cynically abandoned a range of targets when it has become apparent that they will not be met. Why should we be party to allowing the general public to be duped into thinking that this is a concession of real substance?

The fact that the Minister made such a play of the Greenpeace advertisement shows that the Government are frightened of the Greenpeace lobby and that pressure group. The advertisement obviously got to the Minister in a big way.

Most hon. Members are concerned about the substance of trying to ensure that there are improvements in energy efficiency and reductions in fuel poverty, and we find that the Government talk a good talk, but that they do not deliver the substance. That is why I am slightly disappointed that my hon. Friend the Member for South Holland and The Deepings (Mr. Hayes) seems to go along with the idea that a great concession has been made. I am sure that we rightly argued that we want to try to hold the Government to account to a greater extent, and we may have made some progress on that, but I hope that my hon. Friend agrees that we have not got the whole cake.

5 pm

Mr. Hayes: Let us make no mistake: I do not say for a moment that I would not be a better Minister than the right hon. Gentleman or that we would not manage these matters altogether better than him and his colleagues. Of course, the House and the whole country know that, but when improvements are made, even if they are modest, we have a responsibility to welcome them. The Government have moved in our direction. The Lords amendment is not ideal, but it is better than nothing.

Mr. Chope: My hon. Friend says that the Lords amendment is better than nothing, and the Bill certainly includes words that were not there before. He is one of the most robust critics of the Government's good-talk-but-no-action policies, and I am sure that he is not really taken in by them. If he thinks that it is better than nothing, I suppose that I will go along with his judgment, but we should not send the message from the House that the Government have made a major climbdown or U-turn. To a large extent, this is an exercise in semantics. There is no point in having targets or commands without sanctions, and there is no sanction against the Government if they do not comply or meet the target.

Mr. Hayes: That is true, but my hon. Friend must recognise that the measure of how far the Minister has moved in our direction is that, having consistently argued against our case and the Lords case, he has now written an amendment that is virtually identical to the one that the Lords proposed, which he opposed. There are minor differences, but at last the Bill contains a commitment to energy efficiency that is essential if we are to meet the carbon emissions targets, which we all agree are vital. The concession is somewhat toothless, but not entirely without teeth—

Madam Deputy Speaker: Order. Once again, the hon. Gentleman's intervention is quite lengthy.

Mr. Chope: I am grateful to my hon. Friend for making that point. I hope that he can assure me that he feels confident that we know what the general level of energy efficiency was in 2000, so that we have a benchmark against which we can measure. One of the problems is that the Government promote targets, but we find that the baselines for those targets have not been properly defined. For example, the Government certainly kept on saying that they would produce a definition of congestion on the roads, but they never did and they eventually abandoned the target altogether. I shall give way to my hon. Friend again if he can assure me that there is a definition of the general level of energy efficiency in 2000 that would be a proper benchmark.

Mr. Hayes: I am grateful to my hon. Friend for painting me as the moderate in such matters. The Government's advisers have been very clear about the benchmark, and we called in aid those advisers when they said that they could not understand why the Government had adjusted their target. So the Government's advice, based on a proper measurement of the current situation, is in line with our thinking, the Lords thinking and the Government's new thinking, and I am therefore confident that we have made progress.

Mr. Chope: I am grateful to my hon. Friend for that. If he thinks that that is enough for us, let us rest on our laurels, but I certainly predict that, when we reach 2010, the Government will have got nowhere near the target, unless we have a Conservative Government by then to deliver it for us.

Lords amendment No. 191B agreed to.

Lords amendment No. 191C agreed to.

CIVIL PARTNERSHIP BILL *[LORDS]* (PROGRAMME) (NO. 3)

Motion made, and Question put forthwith, pursuant to Orders [28 June 2001 and 6 November 2003],

That the following provisions shall apply to the Civil Partnership Bill [*Lords*] for the purpose of supplementing the Order of 12th October 2004 (Civil Partnership Bill [*Lords*] (Programme)):

Consideration of Lords Message

1. Any Message from the Lords may be considered forthwith without any Question put and proceedings on that Message shall (so far as not previously concluded) be brought to a conclusion one hour after their commencement.

Subsequent stages

2. Any further Messages from the Lords may be considered forthwith without any Question put.

3. The proceedings on any further Message from the Lords shall (so far as not previously concluded) be brought to a conclusion one hour after their commencement.—*[Vernon Coaker.]*

Question agreed to.

Madam Deputy Speaker (Sylvia Heal): Pursuant to the Order of the House of 8 November, the sitting is suspended. Shortly before the sitting resumes, I shall cause the Division bell to be sounded.

5.5 pm

Sitting suspended.

7 pm

On resuming—

BUSINESS OF THE HOUSE

Motion made, and Question put forthwith, pursuant to Standing Order No. 15 (Exempted business),

That, at this day's sitting, proceedings on the Housing Bill and any Lords Messages and Amendments that may be received may be proceeded with, though opposed, until any hour.—[Ms Bridget Prentice.]

Question agreed to.

Mr. Paul Tyler (North Cornwall) (LD): On a point of order, Mr. Deputy Speaker. I seek your guidance. Is it not unfortunate that hon. Members—if I may say so, this evening's gathering is distinguished—cannot use this time to discuss important issues? I shall give one example: this morning, the independent inquiry into Gulf war illnesses was published. That issue is extremely important and many hon. Members have views on it. The House is sitting, so surely we can debate such important and urgent issues. Will the Chair make representations to either the Procedure Committee or the Leader of the House to see whether we can make good use of the time available to us on occasions such as this?

Mr. Deputy Speaker (Sir Alan Haselhurst): The hon. Gentleman is experienced in the ways and procedures of the House. He knows that the Order Paper is determined by the Government of the day and that the Chair can do nothing in these circumstances to alter that situation.

Mr. Eric Forth (Bromley and Chislehurst) (Con): Further to that point of order, Mr. Deputy Speaker.

[Mr. Eric Forth]

Can you help the House by confirming that a Minister can request to make a statement on a matter such as that described by the hon. Member for North Cornwall (Mr. Tyler)? Will you confirm that nothing prevents Ministers from using the time available to come to the House and inform hon. Members about such matters, and allow themselves to be questioned?

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Many things are possible, but the Chair has received no request from any Minister to attend the House at the present time.

Mr. Dennis Skinner (Bolsover) (Lab): Further to that point of order, Mr. Deputy Speaker. I thought that you could have been a little fairer with the Liberal Democrat representative, the hon. Member for North Cornwall (Mr. Tyler). That earnest fellow always wants to talk about something or other, and I have a suggestion: the Liberal Democrats are keen on proportional representation and can bore people to tears by talking about it. They could explain why, some time ago, 26 Liberals voted for fox hunting and 26 Liberals voted against fox hunting, which is proportional representation—fair voting.

Mr. Deputy Speaker: I am grateful to the hon. Gentleman, who has considerable experience of the ways and procedures of this House. However, he knows that hon. Members could discuss that matter only if the Government had put a motion on the Order Paper.

Mr. Oliver Heald (North-East Hertfordshire) (Con): Further to that point of order, Mr. Deputy Speaker. When gaps such as this occur in our proceedings, is it possible to arrange for the Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster to attend and answer questions? Since he started his onerous duties, he has spoken at the Dispatch Box for only six minutes. My suggestion would give him the opportunity to answer questions such as, "What does he do with his time, for the taxpayers' £137,000 a year?"

Mr. Deputy Speaker: The hon. Gentleman must find another opportunity to discuss that matter—pursuing a point of procedure here will not do it.

Tom Levitt (High Peak) (Lab): Further to that point of order, Mr. Deputy Speaker. Is not the real issue that we shall shortly be waiting in this House not for the Members of the other place to deliberate, but for them to finish their dinner?

Mr. Deputy Speaker: The Chair has cognisance of many things, but that does not extend to knowing what is happening in the other place.

7.4 pm

Sitting suspended.

8.45 pm

On resuming—

Pensions Bill

Before Clause 229

Lords amendment in lieu of a Lords amendment disagreed to by this House, considered.

Lords amendment: No. 359B.

The Minister for Pensions (Malcolm Wicks): Mr. Speaker has brought to the attention of the House the fact that Lords amendment 359A—like its predecessor, which we debated yesterday evening—involves the question of Commons privilege; and, like its predecessor, it relates to financial matters in regard to which it is the role of the Lords to agree not to initiate or to amend.

Taxation arrangements made by this House would be altered if the amendment were to be brought into effect. The amendment allows annuities not to be paid where they might otherwise be paid; it extends tax relief by allowing more people in some circumstances to pass their tax-privileged pension funds on to their survivors tax-free; it allows, in some circumstances, for contributions to be made to pension schemes by people up to the age of 85; and it reduces the number of instances in which part of the tax relief given on contributions is recouped when the annuity is paid.

As I said yesterday—

Mr. Steve Webb (Northavon) (LD): On a point of order, Madam Deputy Speaker. I am sorry if I missed something in your earlier remarks, but I seek your guidance on Mr. Speaker's ruling on whether Lords amendment No. 359B involves privilege. Having consulted the document before us, I can see no judgment on the issue.

Madam Deputy Speaker (Sylvia Heal): The hon. Gentleman is correct. Lords amendment No. 359B does involve privilege.

Mr. Michael Fallon (Sevenoaks) (Con): Further to that point of order, Madam Deputy Speaker. Although I did not quite understand why, the Minister seemed to be speaking to Lords amendment No. 359A.

Madam Deputy Speaker: We are discussing Lords amendment No. 359B.

Malcolm Wicks: Indeed. If I mis-spoke—as I think certain American Presidents occasionally do—I apologise.

As I said yesterday, the Government recognise the underlying and serious issues relating to greater longevity and demographic shifts in this country, and indeed throughout the developed world. They have profound implications for the way in which our pensions policies should be implemented. We set up the Pensions Commission under Adair Turner to review the regime for UK private pensions and long-term savings. Its first report, published last month, provides a mine of detailed and valuable information on the demographic challenges that we face.

The Pensions Commission is considering whether the level of compulsion in the UK pensions system is appropriate. For those investing in a pension, the requirement to purchase an annuity at 75 with tax-privileged savings is one compulsory element of the existing system. As I have already said, once the commission has reported on the wider issues relating to compulsory saving, the Government will want to consider with care and urgency key issues, including annuitisation at the age of 75, and decide whether they remain fit for purpose.

We have recognised the high level of interest and are prepared to respond constructively and promptly, including on the specific issue of annuitisation as a priority action, once the Pensions Commission has reported.

Mr. Terry Rooney (Bradford, North) (Lab): Would my hon. Friend speculate on whether, this weekend, we can expect "Focus" leaflets to say how the Liberals conspired to try to scuttle the pension protection fund, the financial assistance scheme and all the other good things in the Bill?

Malcolm Wicks: My hon. Friend reminds us that the Bill is not about annuities and the privileges enjoyed by the better-off and the very rich in society; it is about pension security for large numbers of people in final salary schemes, many of whom have been urging the House to take action. As the Minister responsible for the Bill, I have to say that, given the so-called ping-pong that is taking place, I am worried about the measure. We want to see it become an Act of Parliament so that the pension protection fund will be in place to protect workers from April this year. I am sure that common sense will prevail, whatever honest disagreements there may be on this issue, and that the other place will want the legislation to come into force as soon as possible.

Mr. Geoffrey Clifton-Brown (Cotswold) (Con): Does the Minister accept that the annuity regime was enacted in wholly different circumstances? Life expectancy has increased considerably since the legislation was enacted, and interest rates are far lower than the average that prevailed at that time. In the current circumstances, people have no incentive whatever to take out a private pension, so does not he accept that the whole matter must be looked into urgently?

Malcolm Wicks: That intervention went rather far in an unhelpful direction, but when the hon. Gentleman began I was reminded of what I have just said: that the Government will want to consider key issues, including annuitisation at 75, with particular urgency, and decide whether they remain fit for purpose. I should have thought that any reasonable party and reasonable people in this or the other House would take that as a serious pledge to look into the issue—as it is.

Mr. Webb: Will the Minister give way?

Malcolm Wicks: I am anxious to read out the last sentence of my speech, but I always give way to the professor.

Mr. Webb: I am grateful to the Minister. Will he explain whether his objection to the amendment raising the annuitisation age from 75 is an objection in principle?

Malcolm Wicks: The issue is complex and important, and has been debated many times in the House. There are powerful arguments on both sides, which is why we will look at the matter with particular care and urgency. I repeat that reasonable people will realise that we are making a key pledge, and if the many people campaigning on the issue want to regard that as a victory, they may do so. But I want to see a victory for the Pensions Bill, to bring security to British workers and existing pensioners. I should have thought that anyone considering what I said yesterday and am saying today would conclude that the nonsense has to end and that the other place should agree to what we are saying so that we can start the work of setting up the PPF and the regulator, getting on with the financial assistance scheme and bringing security and confidence back into the British pensions system. No sensible party would stand in the way of that; the people would judge it badly if it delayed the legislation.

I ask the House to disagree with the Lords amendment.

Mr. Nigel Waterson (Eastbourne) (Con): The Opposition also hope that common sense will prevail. It is an exercise in machismo for the Government to talk about losing the entire Bill on the basis of this issue. Why are the Government so obsessed with what they perceive as unfairness towards other groups of pensioners, but are prepared to dismiss this substantial group as just rich people and only better-off pensioners? Is that old Labour rearing its ugly head again?

The more that the democratic process grinds on, the more tired and stale the Government's arguments become, in this House and in the other place, whereas our arguments are as fresh and relevant as when we first made them. Is not it instructive that yet again the Government seek to hide behind the doctrine of financial privilege to defeat this amendment? Is not it amazing how the Turner report has rapidly become a catch-all excuse for this Government not to do anything on pensions? It is not a case of "Waiting for Godot", but of waiting for Turner.

I think that the right hon. Member for Birkenhead (Mr. Field) was the first to suggest that the Government should get the Turner commission to bring forward its final report to, say, February, so that we would all know of the Government's proposals for pensions by the time of the general election campaign. The Government dismissed that suggestion out of hand. Turner has given the Government a wonderful excuse to put the whole issue in the box marked "Too difficult". That includes dealing with the ancient and obvious unfairness of compulsory annuitisation.

The arguments have been well rehearsed, but I shall make a few simple points. There has been a long and consistent campaign by the Opposition to try to right that wrong. We have had private Members' Bills from my right hon. Friend the Member for Skipton and Ripon (Mr. Curry), my hon. and learned Friend the Member for Harborough (Mr. Garnier), who memorably scored a significant victory on Second Reading so that it is the settled will of this House to address this issue, and my hon. Friends the Members for Taunton (Mr. Flook) and for Bournemouth, West (Sir John Butterfill).

The somewhat technical issues arising out of the earlier amendments in the Lords have been replaced by a much simpler, more straightforward amendment that

[Mr. Nigel Waterson]

would simply raise the age to 85. No one seems to know when the initial rule of compulsory annuitisation was first introduced, but it is clear that since then much has changed, including life expectancy. In fact, their lordships appear to have had a minor spat about exactly how long people will live, but that is separate from the central issue, which is that many more people now live beyond 75 than ever before. The whole rule is completely out of date.

The rule does not only affect rich, well-off people. I can testify from my knowledge of my constituents that many people have done the right thing—and what the Government claim to want them to do—and made provision during their working lives for their retirement so that they do not need to fall back on the benefit system. As my hon. Friend the Member for Havant (Mr. Willetts) argued only yesterday, what business is that of the Treasury, provided those people do not fall back on the benefit system?

Other advanced countries, such as Australia, Canada, the USA and the Republic of Ireland do not have compulsory annuitisation. Why should we still have that outmoded concept in this country?

The rule is wholly at odds with the Government's professed policy of trying to incentivise savings. We all know that the marketplace for annuities is difficult, to put it mildly, and that the return on annuities has fallen sharply over a long period. We know that the savings ratio has halved since 1997. We clearly need incentives to save, and even the interim report from the Turner commission makes that clear.

We just want flexibility in the system, and we have campaigned long to deliver it. The Government have slowly begun to move in that direction. There was a minor concession in the last Budget, but, typically of the Chancellor, it was grudging and complicated, and it seems people have to be Plymouth Brethren, or something like that, to benefit from it. When Lord Fowler said in the other place yesterday that the Government were simply being stubborn, he got it absolutely right. It is time to give in on this issue.

9 pm

Mr. Clifton-Brown: Is my hon. Friend aware that, when the Government took office seven years ago, we had one of the best funded pensions regimes in Europe, but that we now have one of the poorest?

Mr. Waterson: My hon. Friend is absolutely right, and I am sure that, like me, he can point to any number of his constituents who feel unfairly treated by the current system.

The Government must show us that they are serious about restoring the savings culture and encouraging defined benefit schemes—one of the central tenets of the Bill. This is a proposal whose time has definitely come. The logic of the Lords amendment is clear: to take the pressure off those who might be approaching the age of 75 and to allow a breathing space for the next Conservative Government to scrap the rule altogether.

Let me try to help the Minister in his negotiations with the Treasury. It might help if he at least pretended to listen to what I am saying—he might find that helpful over the next few hours. If we are unsuccessful this evening in supporting the Lords in their amendment, the Conservative party would expect to table an amendment tomorrow in the Lords along the same lines but substituting the age of 80, rather than 85, and it would be our intention to press that amendment to a Division in the Lords tomorrow.

So let us have none of this nonsense about the Bill not getting through. If the Bill were to fall, it would be entirely the Government's fault for two reasons: first, their stubbornness on this issue in the face of the evidence and the patent unfairness of compulsory annuitisation at the age of 75; and, secondly, their crass incompetence and ineptitude from start to finish on the Bill, which was poorly drafted, badly argued, changed, with whole chunks taken out and put back again, and hundreds and thousands of amendments in the House and the Lords.

The Government only have themselves to blame, but now is the time to cut out the machismo and bite the bullet, make a decision on annuities and free hundreds of thousands, if not millions, of people from the obligation, without putting at risk the Bill, flawed though it is in many respects. I urge my hon. Friends to support the Lords in their amendment.

Mr. Webb: I spent a happy hour earlier this evening listening to their lordships as they debated this amendment. Given that the Government have rejected an outright abolition of the annuity rule, the Liberal Democrats also warmly welcome the Lords' attempt substantially to relax it by raising the compulsory age for annuitisation from 75 to 85. It was intriguing to compare and contrast the approaches adopted by the two Ministers: Baroness Hollis gave detailed, careful and thorough arguments, none of which stood up, but they were at least comprehensive; the Minister for Pensions simply said that privilege applied.

Even if privilege applies, we do not necessarily need to refuse to accept the Lords amendment. We can say that, although privilege applies, we will none the less accept it. In other words, if we think that it is good, we can say, "Fine. Privilege may or may not apply, but we will take it anyway." So I am afraid that the Minister has let down the House by not responding to the substance of the Lords amendment this evening. Indeed, he did not even refer to its content at all, as far as I could tell, other than by referring to privilege.

Surely the key point is that we are dealing with a different way of approaching the issue from the one we took yesterday. Yesterday, we said that annuitisation would be allowed in all circumstances except when means-tested benefits were brought into play; today we have the different approach of raising the age from 75 to 85. A different approach warrants a different response from the Minister, but we did not get one.

Life expectancy at 65 has been discussed at both ends of the Palace, but Baroness Hollis was still unclear in her response. She seemed to say that life expectancy at the age of 65 had risen by 16.3 years, but she then said that the typical 65-year-old would live to 82. The two statements do not appear to be consistent, so I am not quite sure what was going on there.

The issue is significant. If a typical 65-year-old now lives to 82 or 84, as the Turner commission figures on a different definition suggest, the key point is that, since the annuity age was last raised from 70 to 75, life expectancy has risen by three or four years or by perhaps as many as six or seven. I was interested to hear what the hon. Member for Eastbourne (Mr. Waterson) said. If the age became 80 instead of 85, as we are considering now, the case would be overwhelming. That would simply return us to the status quo.

I am struggling to think who passed the 1974 legislation, but the key point is that the annuitisation age was raised from 70 to 75 over a 20-year period—it was first set at 70 about 20 years previously—to keep up with changing life expectancies. As life expectancies move on, unless we want the annuitisation rule to bite harder and harder year after year, we need to raise the age from 75 even if we accept the principle of compulsory annuitisation. It is self-evident that even to maintain the status quo of the original policy intention when the age of 75 was brought in, we must raise it at the very least to 80. The age of 85 goes further in the direction that we want, but the Government should seriously consider 80 as a gracious concession.

I intervened on the Minister and asked whether this was an issue of principle. He declined to say that it was. Indeed, it is extraordinary that Baroness Hollis is saying that we cannot possibly make the change for all sorts of reasons. For example, when people take out a pension, they know it has to be annuitised so she says that it would be wrong to change the rules at the end. That is an issue of principle. She then says that those people have had what she described as tremendously generous tax relief. Because they have all that tax relief, it would be wrong not to force them to annuitise. She gave several other examples that also appeared to be arguments of principle. However, she then said, "Ah, but next year when Adair Turner has reported, we might change our minds."

Is this an issue of principle, or is it not? Patently it is not an issue of principle. If it were, the fact that Adair Turner might come up with a recommendation next year would not change the principle. It is therefore a pragmatic issue and, given the importance that the Liberal Democrats attach to the Bill—unlike the Conservative Opposition we did not vote to decline to give it a Second Reading; we have supported it throughout—we think that the Government need to recognise that it is not an issue of principle. If it were, they would not be saying that they might change their minds next year. Given that is not an issue of principle, why risk the Bill? Why not make a substantive movement in the direction of recognising that, even on a pragmatic basis, the age threshold should be raised.

Important contributions were made in their lordships' House about why the argument about tax, which is obviously important, does not hold water. I fully accept that if people have had some tax relief on the fund, the Exchequer should at some point receive a fair share of tax. I accept that principle. We have already pointed out, however, that if people defer annuitisation but start to draw down and then die, 35 per cent. will go in tax. In fact, although Baroness Hollis implied that if the fund were not touched it would be passed on tax free, Lord MacGregor pointed out that if that added to the value of an estate, a tax rate of 40 per cent. could easily apply to the many people who have houses at or above the value of the inheritance tax threshold. That is the higher rate of income tax.

If we force people to annuitise, the best that we will get is 40 per cent., which is the higher rate of income tax, and we might get less than that. If people do not annuitise and they become liable to inheritance tax, the whole thing will be taxed at 40 per cent. The Exchequer could benefit from not requiring compulsory annuitisation. I accept that the Exchequer has the right to the tax, but it is far from obvious that, by relaxing the rule on compulsory annuitisation, it loses out at all. Therefore, why not give people a choice? What would be lost by giving people a choice? No one would lose because the Exchequer would get its share, and possibly eventually more. If people annuitised, they would get a 25 per cent. tax-free lump sum, but if they did not do so, the whole value of what was left could be liable to 40 per cent. inheritance tax, and thus the Exchequer might receive more tax.

The Government should give people freedom of choice. No one would suffer under the proposal and we are discussing only a minority of people, albeit a growing number, because more people hold direct contribution schemes and life expectancies will continue to improve. Although such people form a minority now, even minorities have the right to fair treatment, as one might say in a different context. If the proposal would mean that no one would lose and that people would get additional choices, I do not understand why the Government will not accept it.

It is regrettable that the Government are simply arguing about privilege and that they will use their force in numbers to win the vote. We are discussing a matter of substance, but the Minister has admitted that it is not an issue of principle, so the Government should be willing to offer concessions. The Minister should respond positively to a pragmatic matter relating to a Bill that I support. I shall consult my colleagues in the House of Lords on the attitude that they will take tomorrow, but I hope that the Minister will sleep on what has been said and realise that we are willing to be reasonable. If he were to offer us the serious prospect of revisiting the matter, I would be happy to talk to my noble Friends to decide how to take things forward.

Malcolm Wicks: I did not think it useful to detain the House with a long speech because these issues have been aired many times in the Chamber and we had a proper discussion on them only yesterday. There is a difference between being serious and being verbose.

The Government take such matters seriously, and that is evidenced by the fact that we set up the Pensions Commission. Its three distinguished members have already produced what I judge to be the best evidenced report on the pensions question this century—certainly for the past 60 years.

Mr. George Osborne (Tatton) (Con): That is four years.

Malcolm Wicks: It is sometimes a struggle to be serious when facing the sixth-form humour of someone who might not yet be old enough to be in the sixth form. I want to take the matter seriously.

The Turner report, which is a key evidence-based document, has given us a good basis on which to discuss such matters. I know that the comment made by the

[Malcolm Wicks]

hon. Member for Tatton (Mr. Osborne) was not meant entirely seriously and that he made it to serve a political purpose, but if he reads the report—I recommend that he does—he will note that Turner says that such problems have been building up since the 1980s.

Mr. Waterson: Will the Minister give way?

Malcolm Wicks: Not yet, because I am trying to be serious.

I have told the House seriously that we do not want to consider these key issues in such an environment, but that we want to examine all of them, including annuitisation at the age of 75, with care and urgency to determine whether the existing arrangements remain fit. I wish that hon. Members would take my pledge seriously.

Mr. Waterson: Surely the Minister must accept that one of the central conclusions of the Turner interim report—Turner is unlikely to retreat from this in his final report—is that there is a crying need to reincentivise savings in this country. Does he not accept the argument that by scrapping, or changing significantly, the compulsory annuitisation rule, he might well achieve that objective?

Malcolm Wicks: We have heard all that. I shall give way to a more serious person.

Mr. Clifton-Brown: To accuse any hon. Member of being serious or not is unworthy of the Minister.

Will the Minister make a serious commitment tonight? If the full Turner report recommends changes to how the Bill deals with annuities once it is enacted, will he accept those recommendations and introduce them in the House as soon as possible?

The Secretary of State for Work and Pensions (Alan Johnson): We are going to win the next election.

Malcolm Wicks: I am never complacent about such things, but I, too, suspect that there will be a Labour Government later next year.

We said that we will take the Turner commission seriously. Of course we will. The Prime Minister established the report and we will take all its recommendations seriously. We will judge them when we see them. We will also give serious consideration to the annuity issue.

When I said that the House faces the difficulty of whether the Bill will become law, I was making the point that although there are serious issues at stake, most of those who would gain—this cannot be questioned—would be at the wealthier end of our community. We shall take those issues seriously. However, 80 per cent. of the people—just to give one statistic—with defined contribution schemes end up with a pension fund of less than £30,000. I hope that that puts in context the number of people who have a particular interest in the Bill.

It is interesting that the amendment is not to the Bill per se, but is an attempt to bounce the Government at the end of its consideration. The key point is that the Bill is concerned not with just a few people—either the poorer few or the richer few—but with bringing security and confidence to more than 10 million scheme members in final salary schemes, who are looking to Parliament to pass it. Frankly, they will judge badly indeed any parliamentarian, whether serious or not, of any political party who stands in the way of this becoming the Pensions Act later this week.

Question put, That this House disagrees with the Lords in the said amendment:—

The House divided: Ayes 265, Noes 155.

Division No. 336] **[9:17 pm**

AYES

Abbott, Ms Diane
Adams, Irene *(Paisley N)*
Ainger, Nick
Ainsworth, Bob *(Cov'try NE)*
Alexander, Douglas
Anderson, rh Donald *(Swansea E)*
Anderson, Janet *(Rossendale & Darwen)*
Atkins, Charlotte
Bailey, Adrian
Banks, Tony
Barron, rh Kevin
Bayley, Hugh
Begg, Miss Anne
Bell, Sir Stuart
Blackman, Liz
Blizzard, Bob
Boateng, rh Paul
Borrow, David
Bradley, rh Keith *(Withington)*
Bradley, Peter *(The Wrekin)*
Bradshaw, Ben
Brennan, Kevin
Brown, Russell *(Dumfries)*
Browne, Desmond
Bryant, Chris
Buck, Ms Karen
Burgon, Colin
Burnham, Andy
Byrne, Liam *(B'ham Hodge H)*
Cairns, David
Campbell, Alan *(Tynemouth)*
Campbell, Mrs Anne *(C'bridge)*
Campbell, Ronnie *(Blyth V)*
Caton, Martin
Cawsey, Ian *(Brigg)*
Challen, Colin
Chaytor, David
Clapham, Michael
Clark, Mrs Helen *(Peterborough)*
Clark, Paul *(Gillingham)*
Clarke, rh Tom *(Coatbridge & Chryston)*
Clarke, Tony *(Northampton S)*
Coffey, Ms Ann
Colman, Tony
Cook, rh Robin *(Livingston)*
Corbyn, Jeremy
Corston, Jean
Cox, Tom *(Tooting)*
Cunningham, Jim *(Coventry S)*
Cunningham, Tony *(Workington)*
Darling, rh Alistair
Davey, Valerie *(Bristol W)*
David, Wayne
Davidson, Ian
Davies, rh Denzil *(Llanelli)*
Davies, Geraint *(Croydon C)*
Dawson, Hilton
Dean, Mrs Janet
Denham, rh John
Dhanda, Parmjit
Dismore, Andrew
Dobbin, Jim *(Heywood)*
Dobson, rh Frank
Donohoe, Brian H.
Doran, Frank
Dowd, Jim *(Lewisham W)*
Drew, David *(Stroud)*
Eagle, Angela *(Wallasey)*
Edwards, Huw
Efford, Clive
Ellman, Mrs Louise
Ennis, Jeff *(Barnsley E)*
Etherington, Bill
Fisher, Mark
Fitzsimons, Mrs Lorna
Flint, Caroline
Foster, rh Derek
Foster, Michael *(Worcester)*
Francis, Dr. Hywel
Gapes, Mike *(Ilford S)*
George, rh Bruce *(Walsall S)*
Gerrard, Neil
Goggins, Paul
Griffiths, Jane *(Reading E)*
Griffiths, Nigel *(Edinburgh S)*
Griffiths, Win *(Bridgend)*
Grogan, John
Hall, Patrick *(Bedford)*
Hamilton, David *(Midlothian)*
Hanson, David
Havard, Dai *(Merthyr Tydfil & Rhymney)*
Healey, John
Henderson, Ivan *(Harwich)*
Hendrick, Mark
Hepburn, Stephen
Heppell, John
Hesford, Stephen
Heyes, David
Hill, Keith *(Streatham)*
Hood, Jimmy *(Clydesdale)*
Hoon, rh Geoffrey
Hope, Phil *(Corby)*
Hopkins, Kelvin
Howarth, rh Alan *(Newport E)*
Howarth, George *(Knowsley N & Sefton E)*

Hughes, Beverley *(Stretford & Urmston)*
Hughes, Kevin *(Doncaster N)*
Humble, Mrs Joan
Hurst, Alan *(Braintree)*
Hutton, rh John
Irranca-Davies, Huw
Jackson, Glenda *(Hampstead & Highgate)*
Jackson, Helen *(Hillsborough)*
Jenkins, Brian
Johnson, rh Alan *(Hull W)*
Johnson, Miss Melanie *(Welwyn Hatfield)*
Jones, Martyn *(Clwyd S)*
Joyce, Eric *(Falkirk W)*
Kaufman, rh Sir Gerald
Keeble, Ms Sally
Khabra, Piara S.
Kidney, David
Kilfoyle, Peter
King, Andy *(Rugby)*
King, Ms Oona *(Bethnal Green & Bow)*
Knight, Jim *(S Dorset)*
Kumar, Dr. Ashok
Ladyman, Dr. Stephen
Laxton, Bob *(Derby N)*
Lazarowicz, Mark
Lepper, David
Levitt, Tom *(High Peak)*
Lewis, Terry *(Worsley)*
Linton, Martin
Love, Andrew
Lucas, Ian *(Wrexham)*
Luke, Iain *(Dundee E)*
McAvoy, Thomas
McCabe, Stephen
McCafferty, Chris
MacDonald, Calum
McDonnell, John
McGuire, Mrs Anne
McIsaac, Shona
McKechin, Ann
McKenna, Rosemary
Mackinlay, Andrew
McNulty, Tony
Mactaggart, Fiona
McWilliam, John
Mahmood, Khalid
Mahon, Mrs Alice
Mann, John *(Bassetlaw)*
Marris, Rob *(Wolverh'ton SW)*
Marsden, Gordon *(Blackpool S)*
Marshall, David *(Glasgow Shettleston)*
Martlew, Eric
Meale, Alan *(Mansfield)*
Merron, Gillian
Michael, rh Alun
Miliband, David
Miller, Andrew
Moffatt, Laura
Moran, Margaret
Morgan, Julie
Morley, Elliot
Mullin, Chris
Munn, Ms Meg
Murphy, Jim *(Eastwood)*
Naysmith, Dr. Doug
Norris, Dan *(Wansdyke)*
O'Hara, Edward
Olner, Bill
Organ, Diana
Osborne, Sandra *(Ayr)*
Owen, Albert
Palmer, Dr. Nick
Perham, Linda
Picking, Anne
Pickthall, Colin
Pike, Peter *(Burnley)*
Plaskitt, James
Pollard, Kerry
Pond, Chris *(Gravesham)*
Pope, Greg *(Hyndburn)*
Pound, Stephen
Prentice, Ms Bridget *(Lewisham E)*
Prentice, Gordon *(Pendle)*
Prosser, Gwyn
Purchase, Ken
Purnell, James
Quin, rh Joyce
Quinn, Lawrie
Rapson, Syd *(Portsmouth N)*
Reed, Andy *(Loughborough)*
Robertson, John *(Glasgow Anniesland)*
Roche, Mrs Barbara
Rooney, Terry
Ross, Ernie *(Dundee W)*
Roy, Frank *(Motherwell)*
Ruane, Chris
Ruddock, Joan
Ryan, Joan *(Enfield N)*
Salter, Martin
Sarwar, Mohammad
Savidge, Malcolm
Sawford, Phil
Sedgemore, Brian
Shaw, Jonathan
Sheerman, Barry
Sheridan, Jim
Shipley, Ms Debra
Short, rh Clare
Simon, Siôn *(B'ham Erdington)*
Singh, Marsha
Skinner, Dennis
Smith, rh Andrew *(Oxford E)*
Smith, Angela *(Basildon)*
Smith, rh Chris *(Islington S & Finsbury)*
Smith, Geraldine *(Morecambe & Lunesdale)*
Smith, Jacqui *(Redditch)*
Smith, John *(Glamorgan)*
Smith, Llew *(Blaenau Gwent)*
Spellar, rh John
Steinberg, Gerry
Stewart, Ian *(Eccles)*
Stinchcombe, Paul
Stoate, Dr. Howard
Strang, rh Dr. Gavin
Stringer, Graham
Stuart, Ms Gisela
Sutcliffe, Gerry
Tami, Mark *(Alyn)*
Taylor, David *(NW Leics)*
Timms, Stephen
Tipping, Paddy
Todd, Mark *(S Derbyshire)*
Touhig, Don *(Islwyn)*
Trickett, Jon
Truswell, Paul
Turner, Dennis *(Wolverh'ton SE)*
Turner, Neil *(Wigan)*
Twigg, Derek *(Halton)*
Vaz, Keith *(Leicester E)*
Vis, Dr. Rudi
Walley, Ms Joan
Ward, Claire
Wareing, Robert N.
Watson, Tom
Watts, David
White, Brian
Whitehead, Dr. Alan
Wicks, Malcolm
Williams, rh Alan *(Swansea W)*
Wills, Michael
Winnick, David
Winterton, Ms Rosie *(Doncaster C)*
Wood, Mike *(Batley)*
Woolas, Phil
Worthington, Tony
Wright, Anthony D. *(Gt Yarmouth)*
Wright, David *(Telford)*
Wright, Iain *(Hartlepool)*
Wright, Tony *(Cannock)*
Wyatt, Derek

Tellers for the Ayes:
Jim Fitzpatrick and
Vernon Coaker

NOES

Allan, Richard
Ancram, rh Michael
Arbuthnot, rh James
Atkinson, David *(Bour'mth E)*
Bacon, Richard
Baker, Norman
Baldry, Tony
Barrett, John
Beggs, Roy *(E Antrim)*
Beith, rh A. J.
Bellingham, Henry
Bercow, John
Beresford, Sir Paul
Blunt, Crispin
Boswell, Tim
Bottomley, Peter *(Worthing W)*
Brady, Graham
Brooke, Mrs Annette L.
Browning, Mrs Angela
Burns, Simon
Burnside, David
Burt, Alistair
Butterfill, Sir John
Calton, Mrs Patsy
Cameron, David
Campbell, Gregory *(E Lond'y)*
Campbell, rh Sir Menzies *(NE Fife)*
Carmichael, Alistair
Cash, William
Chapman, Sir Sydney *(Chipping Barnet)*
Chope, Christopher
Clappison, James
Clifton-Brown, Geoffrey
Cormack, Sir Patrick
Davey, Edward *(Kingston)*
Djanogly, Jonathan
Dodds, Nigel
Donaldson, Jeffrey M.
Duncan, Alan *(Rutland)*
Duncan, Peter *(Galloway)*
Ewing, Annabelle
Fallon, Michael
Field, Mark *(Cities of London & Westminster)*
Flook, Adrian
Foster, Don *(Bath)*
Francois, Mark
Gale, Roger *(N Thanet)*
George, Andrew *(St. Ives)*
Gibb, Nick *(Bognor Regis)*
Gidley, Sandra
Gill, Parmjit Singh
Gillan, Mrs Cheryl
Goodman, Paul
Gray, James *(N Wilts)*
Grayling, Chris
Green, Matthew *(Ludlow)*
Greenway, John
Grieve, Dominic
Gummer, rh John
Hammond, Philip
Hayes, John *(S Holland)*
Heald, Oliver
Heath, David
Hendry, Charles
Hermon, Lady
Hoban, Mark *(Fareham)*
Hogg, rh Douglas
Holmes, Paul
Howarth, Gerald *(Aldershot)*
Hughes, Simon *(Southwark N)*
Kennedy, rh Charles *(Ross Skye & Inverness)*
Kirkwood, Sir Archy
Knight, rh Greg *(E Yorkshire)*
Laing, Mrs Eleanor
Lait, Mrs Jacqui
Lamb, Norman
Laws, David *(Yeovil)*
Leigh, Edward
Lewis, Dr. Julian *(New Forest E)*
Liddell-Grainger, Ian
Lidington, David
Llwyd, Elfyn
Loughton, Tim
Luff, Peter *(M-Worcs)*
McIntosh, Miss Anne
McLoughlin, Patrick
Malins, Humfrey
Maples, John
May, Mrs Theresa
Mitchell, Andrew *(Sutton Coldfield)*
Moore, Michael
Moss, Malcolm
Murrison, Dr. Andrew
O'Brien, Stephen *(Eddisbury)*
Öpik, Lembit
Osborne, George *(Tatton)*
Ottaway, Richard
Page, Richard
Paice, James
Paisley, Rev. Ian
Paterson, Owen
Pickles, Eric
Price, Adam *(E Carmarthen & Dinefwr)*
Prisk, Mark *(Hertford)*
Pugh, Dr. John
Redwood, rh John
Rendel, David
Robathan, Andrew
Robertson, Hugh *(Faversham & M-Kent)*
Robinson, Mrs Iris *(Strangford)*
Robinson, Peter *(Belfast E)*
Roe, Dame Marion
Rosindell, Andrew
Russell, Bob *(Colchester)*
Sanders, Adrian
Sayeed, Jonathan
Selous, Andrew

Simmonds, Mark
Simpson, Keith *(M-Norfolk)*
Smith, Sir Robert *(W Ab'd'ns & Kincardine)*
Soames, Nicholas
Spicer, Sir Michael
Spink, Bob *(Castle Point)*
Stanley, rh Sir John
Streeter, Gary
Stunell, Andrew
Swayne, Desmond
Swire, Hugo *(E Devon)*
Syms, Robert
Taylor, Ian *(Esher)*
Taylor, Matthew *(Truro)*
Taylor, Dr. Richard *(Wyre F)*
Taylor, Sir Teddy
Teather, Sarah
Thomas, Simon *(Ceredigion)*
Tonge, Dr. Jenny
Turner, Andrew *(Isle of Wight)*
Tyler, Paul *(N Cornwall)*
Tyrie, Andrew
Waterson, Nigel
Watkinson, Angela
Webb, Steve *(Northavon)*
Weir, Michael
Whittingdale, John
Wiggin, Bill
Willetts, David
Williams, Hywel *(Caernarfon)*
Williams, Roger *(Brecon)*
Wilshire, David
Winterton, Ann *(Congleton)*
Winterton, Sir Nicholas *(Macclesfield)*
Wishart, Pete
Yeo, Tim *(S Suffolk)*
Young, rh Sir George
Younger-Ross, Richard

Tellers for the Noes:
Mr. Peter Atkinson and Gregory Barker

Question accordingly agreed to.

Lords amendment disagreed to.

Committee appointed to draw up Reasons to be assigned to the Lords for disagreeing to their amendment No. 359B; David Cairns, Margaret Moran, Mr. Waterson, Mr. Webb and Malcolm Wicks; Malcolm Wicks to be the Chairman of the Committee; Three to be the quorum of the Committee.—*[Margaret Moran.]*

To withdraw immediately.

Reasons for disagreeing to the Lords amendment reported, and agreed to; to be communicated to the Lords.

David Burnside (South Antrim) (UUP): On a point of order, Mr. Deputy Speaker. Because of your duties in the House today, you may not be aware that the Prime Minister earlier this evening briefed the leader of the Democratic Unionist party, the hon. Member for North Antrim (Rev. Ian Paisley), on proposals to restore a power-sharing Executive in Stormont, and at the same time in Dublin the Prime Minister of the Irish Republic briefed the leader of Sinn Fein/IRA, Gerry Adams, on plans to achieve the objective of total decommissioning. Will you find time for the Prime Minister to come to the House tomorrow on this important matter for the future governance of Northern Ireland, to inform the House of what is in these proposals so that we can question him on what was proposed to the leader of the Democratic Unionist party and to the leader of Sinn Fein/IRA in Dublin earlier this evening?

Mr. Deputy Speaker (Sir Michael Lord): The hon. Gentleman is right. I have no knowledge of the matters that he is raising before the House this evening, nor do I have any knowledge of statements that are being planned at this time. No doubt the whole House and those on the Government Front Bench will have heard the points that he made, and they are now on the record.

Sir Patrick Cormack (South Staffordshire) (Con): Further to that point of order, Mr. Deputy Speaker. Would you be prepared to tell Mr. Speaker that it would be for the convenience of the House if such a statement were made tomorrow?

Mr. Deputy Speaker: I have already said that Mr. Speaker reads the records of the House very carefully, and those matters are now on the record.

Post Office Closures (South Manchester)

Motion made, and Question proposed, That this House do now adjourn.—*[Gillian Merron.]*

9.36 pm

Mr. Keith Bradley (Manchester, Withington): I am pleased to be granted this debate on the closure of post offices in South Manchester, because it is a matter of extreme importance to my constituents in that part of the city, as well as to people throughout Manchester who are similarly suffering from post office closures.

May I make it clear at the outset that I am not challenging the urban reinvention programme? I supported it in the House and I recognise the need for a proper, effective strategic review of urban post offices to ensure a comprehensive spread of that service throughout the city of Manchester. What I am challenging is the consultation process undertaken by Post Office Ltd., and the decisions on the closures that have been taken as a result of that consultation process.

In south Manchester, in my constituency, Manchester Withington, three post offices were identified for closure in the latest round of such closures. I shall briefly discuss each of them. First, I want to make a general point. When the three post offices were announced, one of them was already temporarily closed, but I immediately visited the other two and found that, prior to any consultation process beginning, arrangements had been made for potential pay-offs to those sub-postmasters. They already knew that the intention was to close those post offices before any consultation process had begun. Already there was an intention by the Post Office to identify and make arrangements for those post offices to close.

The consultation process began with Beech road in Chorlton. Beech road is a lively local shopping area that has become more and more popular in recent years. The post office on Beech road is at the heart of that community. The plan to close the post office was greeted with great dismay by local residents and a campaign to keep it open was immediately launched. Petitions were compiled and a public meeting was arranged locally. I pay tribute to the two local ward councillors—Labour councillors—Sheila Newman and Val Stevens, who did so much work to properly gauge public opinion on the proposed closure.

Several key points came out of that consultation exercise. First, a significant number of elderly and disabled people who live in that immediate area need local access to post office services. Secondly, the closure of that post office would have a serious impact on other local traders—the area is vibrant and expanding and the post office is part of that local economy.

Thirdly, and perhaps most importantly, the Post Office's view that the majority of current users of the Beech road branch would transfer to Hardy lane post office has no credibility. Anyone who understands the local geography of that part of south Manchester knows that if local people lost their local post office in Beech road, they would look towards Chorlton main post office, because of the natural flow of the population towards the centre of the city. Even now, however, Chorlton post office is incapable of dealing with the number of people who use it. Queues are long and no parking facilities exist, particularly for disabled people. If Beech road post office closes, it is a long walk to Chorlton main post office.

When the decision was taken to continue with the post office closure, the Post Office provided this justification:

> "From our planning assumptions, we would expect the majority of customers to migrate to Hardy Lane branch and others to Chorlton-cum-Hardy branch. I know you are doubtful about Chorlton-cum-Hardy branch being able to cope with any additional business and I hope that when my colleague, Helen Jachim, wrote to you last month she allayed your concerns."

She certainly did not, because the planning assumption that only a minority of people would transfer to Chorlton main post office was wrong.

Even if a minority transferred, the capacity problems would remain, because there is also a proposal to close another post office, which is just outside my constituency in Upper Chorlton road, with those customers transferring to Chorlton main post office. The arguments that have been advanced have no validity and the consultation, which showed local people's genuine feelings, was totally ignored.

Mr. Graham Stringer (Manchester, Blackley) (Lab): My right hon. Friend will not be surprised to learn that the story that he is describing in south Manchester has also taken place in north Manchester. The consultation was a sham and a disgrace, and false and misleading information has been put out about alternative post offices and the facts and figures in north Manchester. Today, Collyhurst post office is closed, leaving the people of Collyhurst without any obvious alternative—one of the two alternatives identified is not on a bus route, while the other, the Crown post office, is in the city centre. The situation is unsatisfactory, and I look forward to the Minister's response.

Mr. Bradley: I entirely agree with my hon. Friend's view. The key phrase is "sham consultation", and my second example will underline that point.

The second proposal was to close Mauldeth road west post office and Burton road post office, both of which are in the Old Moat ward in my constituency. As I said earlier, Mauldeth road west post office was already temporarily closed, and there were issues surrounding the location of that particular post office. It was only acceptable to confirm that temporary closure as permanent if the Burton road post office was still available to the people of Old Moat, and particularly those in the south of that ward.

As a result of hard work by Labour councillors, again, we had an opportunity properly to gauge public opinion during the consultation exercise, and, again, key points emerged. First, and most importantly, a previous closure had occurred in that area on Barlow Moor road in west Didsbury. The justification for that closure was that the Burton road post office would be the receiving post office for those customers. When I did not oppose that particular closure because of circumstances in that area, I made it clear that it would not be acceptable for the Post Office to return at a future date and close the Burton road post office, which is the receiving post office for the one that closed. That is typical of what is happening around the country. And it has been completely ignored by Post Office Ltd.

Secondly, Old Moat is one of the most deprived wards not only in Manchester but throughout the country. The closure of Burton road and Mauldeth road west would mean that the whole ward would have no post office service available to it. That is completely unsustainable in terms of the deprivation factors that should apply when considering closures.

Mrs. Lorna Fitzsimons (Rochdale) (Lab): Does my right hon. Friend share my utter dismay that although Members on both sides of the House voted for specific money to be allocated to areas of deprivation where sub-post offices were under threat, the Post Office admitted to me that it is closing such sub-post offices, but has passed the buck to my hon. Friend the Minister and to other Departments instead of owning its responsibility to find solutions in areas of deprivation?

Mr. Bradley: My hon. Friend makes a sound point. That flows through all the consultations that we have experienced in Greater Manchester and the north-west.

A second key point about the Old Moat ward is that many elderly people live in that area, and if these two post offices closed, leaving the ward with none, they would have to travel to the centre of Withington, which for some elderly people is well over a mile away, to get post office services. That is unacceptable.

Thirdly, the justification for closing the Burton road and Mauldeth road post offices was that a significant number of customers would transfer to Hart road post office. That view beggars belief. If the Post Office understood the geography of this part of south Manchester, it would know that the people of Old Moat would not even have Hart road on their radar. When I challenged it about that, it informed me that it had a state-of-the-art modelling system that had helped it reach its conclusion. When it failed to send me the details of that, I suggested that it might be better to ask local people what they thought about transferring to Hart road. The people to whom I spoke would probably need an overnight stay before returning home if they used that post office. It is a completely unacceptable alternative.

James Purnell (Stalybridge and Hyde) (Lab): I thank councillors Bernard Walsh and Kevin Welsh for their hard work in Ridge Hill in my area, where we faced exactly the same problem as my right hon. Friend describes. We thought that we had luckily found a solution whereby the mini-market next door would be able to take over the franchise, but the Post Office refused even to meet its owner, on the basis that it wanted to be able to transfer all the business to another post office. Is not that completely unacceptable when someone else is prepared to take over the service for a deprived estate that is on top of a hill and a long way from the town centre?

Mr. Bradley: My hon. Friend is absolutely right. In the course of the consultation exercise, I asked Post Office Ltd. to look for an alternative outlet in the Old Moat ward, but silence was the stern reply.

The only conclusion that we can draw from these examples is that the consultation exercise is a complete sham, as my hon. Friend the Member for Manchester,

[Mr. Bradley]

Blackley (Mr. Stringer) said. The Post Office knew what it wanted when it embarked on the exercise, and public opinion and the sound arguments that were put by representatives would only be ignored at the end of the consultation process. I ask the Minister to intervene in order carefully to consider the way in which these closures are being undertaken and the process that Post Office Ltd. is employing to arrive at its conclusions.

Will the Minister consider the precise role of Postwatch in this exercise? At a local level, I have received extremely good co-operation from Postwatch. Dario Cottingham has been extremely helpful. He has attended meetings with me, and he attended the public meeting and tried to represent the views expressed back through Postwatch to Post Office Ltd.

However, I question whether Postwatch is meeting the objectives that it set itself. Judith Donovan, the regional chairman of Postwatch Northern England, said to me:

> "As the independent consumer watchdog Postwatch want to ensure that a sustainable network of post offices is achieved and that any closure should cause the minimum inconvenience to local consumers. Postwatch is also ensuring that remaining branches are making the necessary improvements to create the network of 'bigger, better and brighter post offices'"

for the local area. I question whether Postwatch can justify the closures and its views on them and also fulfil its commitment as the representative of the consumer in the process. Should not it challenge the decisions? Will the Under-Secretary therefore consider its role in the process?

I strongly believe that we must ensure public confidence in the urban reinvention programme, for which the Under-Secretary is ultimately responsible. I am sure that my hon. Friends from Manchester and Greater Manchester agree. It is not acceptable for Post Office Ltd. simply to ignore the views of local communities in constituencies such as mine. It should set about trying to protect the most vulnerable, the elderly and the disabled in our local communities to ensure that they have proper and efficient access to Post Office services and that south Manchester, Manchester and Greater Manchester have a proper network of post offices that meet the needs of local consumers.

9.51 pm

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Trade and Industry (Mr. Gerry Sutcliffe): I congratulate my right hon. Friend the Member for Manchester, Withington (Mr. Bradley) on securing the debate. As we heard from his contribution, he has been assiduous in voicing, on behalf of his constituents, all the local concerns about Post Office Ltd.'s urban reinvention programme in his constituency. I pay tribute to his work and that of others in the community in Manchester in trying to come to terms with an emotive and difficult issue.

My right hon. Friend has expressed his depth of feeling and that of other hon. Friends about closures in Manchester. He knows that I met my hon. Friend the Member for Manchester, Blackley (Mr. Stringer), Councillor Jim Battle and Mr. Eddie Smith from Manchester council yesterday, when similar concerns were expressed to me about the role of Post Office Ltd. and that of Postwatch.

My right hon. Friend knows that responsibility for postal services has come to me only recently and that there have been many Adjournment debates, other debates and questions in the House about the process. I was grateful for his opening remarks about his support for the principles behind the urban reinvention programme. He is aware of the state of Royal Mail and post offices that we inherited from the previous Government. He will acknowledge and welcome the £2 billion that the Government spent on developing Royal Mail and postal services. He also knows that the Government are committed to maintaining a viable nationwide network of post offices for the future. In a wider context, he knows about the massive challenge for everyone involved in achieving that viability.

Under the previous Government, there was no planned programme, and unplanned closures and many gaps appeared in the system. That clearly affects the whole country. My right hon. Friend knows that the Government's policy for the post office network was based on the performance and innovation unit's report, "Modernising the Post Office Network", which was published in 2000. The report was widely welcomed as squaring up honestly to the challenges that the network faced. It made 24 recommendations for the future, all of which the Government accepted. It showed starkly that our network of post offices had not kept pace with the changing needs of its customers.

Too often, post offices had become dingy and shabby through lack of investment and were losing business. The business had lost touch with its customers' needs, which are different now from those of a generation ago. Following years of underinvestment, the Post Office business was in a spiral of decline.

It is important to detail the circumstances that led to the company's rationalisation programme, which includes the closure of some offices, including those that we heard about from my right hon. Friend, and some in my own constituency. He knows that a number of post offices closed in my constituency of Bradford, South and that two days before I achieved this responsibility there were issues surrounding the Crown post office in my city of Bradford. I too have been heavily involved in the process that the Government set up to try to ensure that consultation was adequate and real.

My right hon. Friend will know that in February our hon. Friend the Member for East Ham (Mr. Timms), who had these ministerial responsibilities before me, actually changed and detailed more fully the guidelines for the consultations that he expected to be undertaken.

My right hon. Friend and hon. Members will know that the Government are Royal Mail's principal shareholder, and that this Government gave Royal Mail the commercial freedoms that have allowed it to turn the business round, as it is doing. We are expecting to hear in the interim results this week that the situation is far better than it has been in the past. That does not help my right hon. Friend in respect of the closures in his constituency, but it is important to put on the record the general position, which I know that most Members of Parliament support—the need for a viable post office network within a viable Royal Mail.

I shall pick up some of the points that were raised. I too, in that meeting with elected representatives from Manchester, was very concerned about the role of

Postwatch, because there is a clear procedure for Postwatch to use if it believes that closures are unnecessary, and I had concerns about the matters that were raised yesterday, and tonight by my right hon. Friend. So I will undertake to contact Postwatch to see what was done to find out why perhaps the next stage proposals were not achieved. I want to know from Postwatch its role in this matter, because as my right hon. Friend has said, it is the consumer watchdog in this case and it should be putting consumers' interests first.

I am also concerned to hear from my right hon. Friend's speech and from the meeting yesterday that the local authority, which has a wealth of information, was not included in the discussions and the final outcome. I will be speaking to Post Office Ltd. about that and I will ask the local authority to furnish me with information about the meetings that it had.

I hope that that helps my right hon. Friend in the detail of the constituency issues that he faces. He will understand why the Government, and I as the responsible Minister, cannot and should not intervene in every case, because obviously, as my right hon. Friend showed great foresight in acknowledging, one post office could close because it was no longer viable.

Postwatch has, up and down the country, made representations and resolved to the satisfaction of certain communities some of the closure proposals. I want to know the detail of what is going on as far as Postwatch is concerned and the relationship between the local authority and Post Office Ltd. That is the best that I can offer my right hon. Friend.

In addition, now that this programme has been going on for some time, Postwatch is undertaking a survey to look at what has happened to those post offices that have closed, to see whether any gaps have emerged. It may be possible, indeed desirable, for the situation in Manchester to be examined, and we can ask Postwatch to do that.

My right hon. Friend used very emotive language, which I know from our dealings on many issues in the past must be sincere, because he does not use such words without great care and cause, and he said that the consultation process was a sham. I would be very upset if that was the case. If the consultation process was a sham, we will need to investigate that, and we will do so.

My right hon. Friend will be aware that the post office closures came about because Post Office Ltd. tested the water with many of the sub-postmasters and sub-postmistresses about their individual positions with regard to the future of their businesses. Many of them felt that their businesses could not continue and were happy to seek part of the payment for closing them voluntarily. That was the basis on which Post Office Ltd. looked at those post offices and their viability.

With regard to the consultation process, however, there is supposed to be a post office within a mile of any post office that closes. In the most deprived wards, there should be one half a mile away. My right hon. Friend will be aware of the funding that came from the Office of the Deputy Prime Minister to look at post offices in deprived areas and the support that was given to them.

In general terms, I am quite confident that the principles that have been laid out to support the viable network being put in place are there. What worries me is if those principles have not been followed. Clearly, that is the basis on which we should look at the position outlined this evening. If my right hon. Friend wanted me to do so, I could go into even greater detail about a large number of other things, but I do not think that that would help at this stage.

James Purnell: I do not know whether my hon. Friend can comment on this point. Does he think that there is merit in the Post Office investigating someone else taking over a franchise if that is possible? Does he agree that there should at least be discussions on that issue if the consultation is to be real?

Mr. Sutcliffe: My hon. Friend makes a good point, but if I dealt with it, it would confuse this matter. His point about franchises relates to directly managed offices and Crown post offices, with regard to which there has been lots of press speculation about what might or might not happen. I am happy to enter correspondence with him about the detail of the case that he wants to raise.

It is important that we have a viable post office network for the reasons that my right hon. Friend has given. The Government are committed to that, and we believe that it should be done in a planned way. We have offered financial support of £2 billion since 1999, and it is crucial that we have a viable network. It is also crucial that the consumer interest is looked after. With the provisos that I have outlined to him, I look forward to ensuring that we get to the bottom of what went on in his constituency.

10.2 pm

Sitting suspended.

10.20 pm

On resuming—

Mr. Deputy Speaker (Sir Michael Lord): The Question is, That this House do now adjourn.

Mr. David Wilshire (Spelthorne) (Con): On a point of order, Mr. Deputy Speaker. Is the matter dividable?

Mr. Deputy Speaker: No.

ADJOURNMENT

Resolved,

That this House do now adjourn.—*[Mr. Ainger.]*

Adjourned accordingly at twenty-one minutes past Ten o'clock.

House of Commons

Thursday 18 November 2004

The House met at half-past Eleven o'clock

PRAYERS

[MR. SPEAKER *in the Chair*]

Oral Answers to Questions

ENVIRONMENT, FOOD AND RURAL AFFAIRS

The Secretary of State was asked—

Flood Defence

2. **Mr. Mark Francois** (Rayleigh) (Con): What the anticipated time scale is for changes to local flood defence committees; and if she will make a statement. [198954]

The Minister for the Environment and Agri-environment (Mr. Elliot Morley): As you know, Mr. Speaker, my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State is unable to attend questions this morning, because she is attending the Anglo-French summit.

Subject to the necessary parliamentary procedures, the local flood defence committees in England will be revoked from 1 April 2005.

Mr. Francois: I thank the Minister for his reply, but is he aware that in Essex we have a perfectly good local flood defence committee that is not broken and does not need fixing? Given that recent events in the north-east clearly demonstrate that amorphous regional bodies are unloved and have little popular support, will he review his decision to merge us with Norfolk and Suffolk, and instead allow the Essex local flood defence committee to continue in the foreseeable future?

Mr. Morley: I have thought carefully about the changes to the regional flood defence committees. Without doubt, there is general support for moving to a single-tier flood defence committee, and the argument concerns the most appropriate regional scale. Regional structures are, indeed, the most efficient. I know the Essex local flood defence committee very well. The hon. Gentleman brought a delegation to see me, and I have had many connections with its members over the years. I went to Essex and talked to them, so I am familiar with the interest that elected Members in Essex take in their work. I very much hope that that expertise will continue under the new structure. A powerful argument was made to have a single flood defence committee for the Anglian region as a whole. I accept in part the validity of the hon. Gentleman's argument. The region is the only area to be divided into three regional flood defence committees, thus reflecting the point that he made.

Hugh Bayley (City of York) (Lab): May I remind my hon. Friend that after the devastating floods in York in November 2000, the Government came up with substantial additional funding for flood defence? Because of the separate small committees around Yorkshire, however, counterpart funding from the local authorities did not materialise, as some areas did not think that they were at risk of flooding and did not want to contribute. I warmly welcome the steps that the Government have taken to ensure that all areas contribute equally to flood defences. Flood defences serve upland areas, because the water drains away from them through areas that are at risk of flooding.

Mr. Morley: I understand the point that my hon. Friend is making. Indeed, he made it powerfully in the debate about adequate resources for the Yorkshire regional flood defence committee. The changes that we have implemented, including the block grant to the Environment Agency, will address many of the concerns that he has so ably expressed.

Bob Spink (Castle Point) (Con): Will the Minister pay tribute to Councillor Ray Howard, who is a major player in the Essex flood defence committee? What is his assessment of the effect on flood defences in Castle Point of the additional 4,000 houses that the Government are forcing the town to build?

Mr. Morley: I am more than happy to pay tribute to Ray, whom I have met on a number of occasions. He has enormous experience in flood defence matters and I hope that he continues to make a contribution. As for proposed developments, as the hon. Gentleman will be aware, we have revised planning policy guidance 25, which requires careful assessment of new developments in relation to flood risk. The condition of flood walls, continued investment and potential risks to life and property will feature very strongly in any future planning proposals in the hon. Gentleman's area.

Mr. Michael Foster [illegible]orcester) (Lab): What assistance can my hon. Friend's Department give with the better co-ordination of activities of highways authorities and water companies in tackling the growing problem, particularly in urban areas, of flash flooding?

Mr. Morley: Yes, it is a major problem. In the floods of 2000, 40 per cent. of the flooding was from non-river sources and was caused, for example, by blocked drains on highways. The issue is being addressed by the Environment Agency, as well as by the regulator in the periodic review, PR 04. Matters such as sewer flooding are a major concern for many hon. Members on both sides of the House, but I hope that my hon. Friend will take that work into account.

Climate Change

3. **Richard Ottaway** (Croydon, South) (Con): What recent research she has commissioned on the impact that climate change is having on the environment. [198955]

The Minister for the Environment and Agri-environment (Mr. Elliot Morley): The annual report of the global atmosphere research programme for 2002–03 outlines research activities on the impacts of climate change. The report is available on the Department's website, but I will arrange for a copy to be placed in the Library for the benefit of hon. Members.

Richard Ottaway: The Government are rightly making climate change a priority of their G8 presidency next year, if they win the election. Given that we are missing our targets on renewables, combined heat and power output is down, the energy efficiency commitment has been downgraded and, worst of all, carbon emissions are rising, should the Minister not put his own house in order before he starts to lecture the rest of the world? Does he think that he will hit his 2010 target for CO_2 emissions and, if so, will he set out very clearly how he expects to achieve that?

Mr. Morley: We have set out precisely how we intend to meet the climate change programme. While I do not dispute that there are challenges, this country's record on climate change is the best of any of the G8 nations. The UK is rightly seen as a leader on this issue. We are expanding the percentage of energy from renewables, and we are making progress on the introduction of carbon trading, which we pioneered. I believe that the 2010 target is achievable.

Ms Julia Drown (South Swindon) (Lab): To do more on the renewable energy part of the agenda, can my hon. Friend give some help to one of the farmers whose land partly covers my constituency and who has been growing renewable crops for 10 years, but has not sold a single twig? He has been given almost £1 million of potential grant from the Government, which shows their commitment to the issue, but he is having serious problems getting his business off the ground. Will my hon. Friend talk with his colleagues in the DTI to get this farmer the help that he needs?

Mr. Morley: As my hon. Friend rightly recognises, considerable funds are available for bio-energy and biomass energy. That includes giving support to the installation of equipment—generators, combined heat and power systems and central heating systems—that can use bio-energy. One significant development that has considerable potential is the co-firing of biofuel by coal-burning power stations such as Drax. That could present a long-term opportunity for farmers and a way of reducing carbon dioxide from coal-burning power stations.

Mr. Tim Yeo (South Suffolk) (Con): As it is universally accepted that there can be no effective solution to the problem of climate change without the wholehearted participation of the United States, why has the Prime Minister made so little effort to use his unique relationship to persuade the Americans to sign the Kyoto treaty?

Mr. Morley: That is not the case. At the recent meeting that my right hon. Friend the Prime Minister had with President Bush—he was the first leader to meet the newly elected President—climate change was one of the issues on the agenda. However, I do not think that people should delude themselves that the Americans—the President and Congress—have set their face against ratifying the Kyoto agreement. That does not mean that achievements cannot be made by reducing domestic emissions and investing in new technologies. Several US states are interested in introducing carbon trading. California and the north-west states are members of a group known as the climate group, which was launched by my right hon. Friend. We have a great deal of connection with those elements in the US who want to go further than the current Administration, and we should encourage them to do so.

Llew Smith (Blaenau Gwent) (Lab): My hon. Friend the Minister will be aware of the recent flood maps produced by the Environment Agency, which predicts as a flood threat the river Calder, which runs through the Sellafield nuclear plant. Does he agree that it would be foolish to back nuclear power as the saviour technology in combating climate change if one of its main sites, and the site where any new nuclear reactor is likely to be built, is under water?

Mr. Morley: It certainly would not benefit anyone to build nuclear power stations in areas that are a major flood risk. That is taken into account at existing sites. The issue of nuclear power is being addressed in our energy White Paper. We have no current plans for nuclear power. We believe that there is considerable potential for renewables and new technologies, and that those will probably bring a better return than the huge investment that would inevitably be required for a nuclear power programme.

Norman Baker (Lewes) (LD): The Minister's Department is doing its best to make climate change a priority, both internationally and within the Government, but does the Minister not feel a little unhappy when the rug is pulled from underneath him by the Prime Minister, who last month overruled the Department by sanctioning an increase of almost 20 million tonnes of carbon dioxide to be emitted under the EU emissions trading scheme? How can that be described by the Secretary of State in her press release as good news for the environment?

Mr. Morley: The Prime Minister's opinions should not be presented in such a simplistic way. The DTI has carried out detailed modelling of emissions by UK industry. That modelling did not exist before and is quite complex and sophisticated, but the final figure is a 5.2 per cent. decrease on business as usual, which is one of the biggest decreases in the whole of the European Union and takes us way beyond our Kyoto target—the only EU country to achieve that.

Mr. David Kidney (Stafford) (Lab): In our response to climate change, the Department's recent consultation, "Making Space for Water", emphasises two separate challenges: one is preserving a finite and valuable resource; the other is protecting people from unexpected flooding. Can my hon. Friend confirm that land management practices in the future will be a vital way of meeting both those challenges?

Mr. Morley: Yes, I can confirm that. A range of management practices have to be put in place. They include developing whole river basin catchment plans, so that we have a much better understanding of the issue and a more integrated and holistic approach to water management.

EU Sugar Beet Regime

4. **Mr. Henry Bellingham** (North-West Norfolk) (Con): When she next expects to meet representatives of the National Farmers Union in Norfolk to discuss changes to the EU sugar beet regime. [198956]

The Minister for Rural Affairs and Local Environmental Quality (Alun Michael): In the past three months my noble Friend Lord Whitty, who leads on these matters, has had discussions with the president of the National Farmers Union, Tim Bennett. He has also had discussions with Tate and Lyle and with representatives of the African, Caribbean and Pacific countries that are affected by the present regime. There are no immediate plans for local NFU representative meetings.

Mr. Bellingham: Is the Minister aware that for every job that sugar beet supports on farms, there are probably six or seven more jobs in servicing and in the beet factories? That is a lot of jobs in a county such as Norfolk, which grows half the country's beet. Much of that beet is grown not on large farms, but on small farms and county council smallholdings. Given that the UK is a net importer of sugar, surely any cut in its beet quota, which would devastate small farms, would be grossly unfair?

Alun Michael: I hope the hon. Gentleman accepts that the current situation is unacceptable and that doing nothing is not an option. The EU price is three times the world level for sugar, and that is not sustainable. It is therefore important that we move as quickly as possible to the reforms that are needed, in order that everybody knows what they are doing and can plan their future business.

Mr. David Drew (Stroud) (Lab/Co-op): If my right hon. Friend meets the farmers of Norfolk or any NFU representatives, will he politely suggest to them that there is a bigger agenda out there, which must include fairness to the developing world? Of all commodities, sugar is the biggest scandal. The way in which we treat the cane-producing countries is outrageous. Some of us met farmers from the third world this week, and they told us clearly what reforms they need and must have.

Alun Michael: Yes, I too have met representatives of countries affected in that way. I have also met farmers in the course of visits, which makes me aware of the problems of adjustment facing farmers in this country. The starting point for reform must clearly be the approach agreed by the European Council in June 2003. The findings of the Select Committee on Environment, Food and Rural Affairs were very similar to those of the Council, so we know the basis of the way forward, and change is vital.

Pest Control (Barnet)

5. **Mr. Andrew Dismore** (Hendon) (Lab): What assessment she has made of whether Barnet council's pest control service meets the council's statutory duties. [198957]

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs (Mr. Ben Bradshaw): Since my hon. Friend first raised the matter with my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State back in July, we have been in communication with Barnet council to assess whether it is meeting its obligations under the Prevention of Damage by Pests Act 1949. Where a council is found not be meeting its obligations, the Government have powers under the Act to order it to do so.

Mr. Dismore: Since I first raised the matter, I have had a further 21 complaints from all over my constituency with rapidly increasing frequency, which is perhaps not surprising, bearing in mind that a single pair of rats can lead to 15,000 offspring in a year. Short of renaming Hendon "Hamelin" and my hon. Friend donning a pied piper outfit, can he do something to shake the Tory council out of its complacency? The default powers must be used to protect my constituents from the growing and breeding problem of the terrible rat infestation from which we are suffering.

Mr. Bradshaw: I take note of what my hon. Friend says. Since he became so energetically engaged in the issue, we have asked the Central Science Laboratory to give us its view as to whether his local Conservative council is carrying out its duties properly. It has asked the council a series of detailed questions, a copy of which I have passed on to him. I am sure he will hold his local council to account, as will we, if it does not answer those questions properly.

Mr. Adrian Flook (Taunton) (Con) *rose—*

Mr. Speaker: Order. Can the hon. Gentleman tie his question into Barnet council? If so, I call him.

Mr. Flook: Barnet, like all areas, has pests that need controlling, and for some parts of our country it is the number of deer that needs to be controlled. If the current method is to be banned, does the Minister really have a plan for a deer management scheme on Exmoor?

Mr. Bradshaw: You are being very generous in allowing me to answer this question, Mr. Speaker. The hon. Gentleman will know that the Government are working on a new deer management strategy, and it will not rely on stag hunting.

Waste Management

6. **Mr. David Amess** (Southend, West) (Con): If she will make a statement on the role of energy from waste in achieving the Government's waste reduction targets. [198958]

The Minister for the Environment and Agri-environment (Mr. Elliot Morley): Energy from waste cannot contribute towards waste reduction, but does contribute towards more sustainable waste management and the UK's landfill directive targets. Energy from waste is a viable waste management option, as demonstrated by its position in the waste hierarchy—below minimisation, re-use, recycling and composting, but above disposal and landfill.

Mr. Amess: If incinerators are to be built, what is the Minister doing to encourage the construction of combined heat and power plants, which have the advantage of offering cheap power and heat to local communities, and the added advantage of reducing the amount of waste to be taken to landfill?

Mr. Morley: I accept that if there is to be an energy-from-waste plant, for which a number of designs exist, combined heat and power is to be encouraged, and the Government have programmes and procedures for doing that. Through the waste and resources action programme we have supported new technologies as thermal treatments, such as pyrolisis, which also gasify waste, capture the energy and often produce residue that can also be refuse-derived waste. We are interested in all forms of waste treatments and it is up to local authorities to choose the system that they think is most appropriate.

Mr. Barry Sheerman (Huddersfield) (Lab/Co-op): Does my hon. Friend agree that although the Government have done a great deal to stimulate energy-from-waste projects, it often becomes a matter of planning permission? Whether it is an incinerator or pyrolisis, or a different method of mechanical or biological treatments, so often a nimbyish attitude towards such a project prevents us from moving in a positive direction and the contribution that such technology could make is stilted.

Mr. Morley: My hon. Friend is absolutely right, and on many occasions substantial investment in waste treatment facilities, which are not always thermal treatments or incineratory—it can be a range of facilities—is significantly delayed. Planning policy guidance 10 is under review, with consideration being given to waste disposal infrastructure, and we are keen to encourage a regional strategic approach. We do not want to ignore people's legitimate concerns, but nor do we want undue delays in terms of major investment, which is essential to a move towards sustainable waste management.

Sue Doughty (Guildford) (LD): The Minister is well aware of public concerns about the safety of incinerators, and studies show that results from biannual testing for dioxins in incinerators can be up to 50 times different from those provided by continuous monitoring. The matter was raised with the Minister some time ago and he said that he would look into continuous monitoring. Can he give us an update on the progress that is being made?

Mr. Morley: Yes, I can. It is a perfectly reasonable point to make that in relation to incineration capacity there should be regular monitoring of outputs. However, there is a huge difference between modern incinerators and some of the older ones in relation to their outputs and dioxin levels. The hon. Lady will also be aware that the Government have commissioned detailed research into the health effects of all methods of waste disposal, which also helps to inform this debate and the kind of choices that local authorities may want to make.

David Taylor (North-West Leicestershire) (Lab/Co-op): I am rather sceptical about the Government's soft-shoe shuffle towards waste incineration, but at least one form is acceptable, which is in use in Leicestershire, where 20 farmers in a co-operative are using the waste products from timber processing to produce wood pellets for incineration and heating in schools. Does the Minister agree that that is an acceptable use, and will he visit the Orchard school in Castle Donington with me to have a look at its new boiler system, one of several in the county, which I switched on just weeks ago?

Mr. Morley: I am always interested in looking at boilers, and I shall certainly talk to my hon. Friend about that. I agree that that is an innovative and useful way of utilising waste wood in relation to energy capture. I am also impressed with the very large biodigester that has been located in Leicester—another alternative way of dealing with waste.

Miss Anne McIntosh (Vale of York) (Con): Will the Minister take this opportunity to explain the implications for energy from waste of the Waste and Emissions Trading Act 2003? Can he tell the House whether he is blowing hot and cold on combined heat and power? Will he seek to extend plants such as the SELCHIP—south-east London combined heat and power—energy from waste plant to combined heat and power, enabling that plant to live up to its name?

Mr. Morley: Large emitters will fall within the scope of the Waste and Emissions Trading Act 2003. In relation to combined heat and power, the Government have made it clear that we want to encourage a higher proportion of good-quality combined heat and power. There may be some small measures in relation to carbon trading that can help in expanding plants and giving them some encouragement, and I hope that that happens.

Fisheries

7. **Mr. Alistair Carmichael** (Orkney and Shetland) (LD): What discussions she has had with representatives of the fishing industry ahead of the forthcoming European Fisheries Council. [198959]

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs (Mr. Ben Bradshaw): My right hon. Friend the Secretary of State, Ross Finnie and I met UK industry leaders in October. Mr. Finnie and I also met industry representatives at the successful launch in Edinburgh on 4 November of the

North Sea Regional Advisory Council. We expect to have further discussions in the margins of the Fisheries Council next week.

Mr. Carmichael: I thank the Minister for that answer. I know that the process of engagement with the industry will be ongoing over the next few weeks, but may I urge him to recognise that that process should not end at the Council door, but continue throughout the negotiation process, and that the fishing industry's views should be sought before any deal is done? In that way, we might avoid the unintended consequences from the deal that we had last year, whereby fishermen in my constituency were left with a permit scheme that was both bureaucratic and, frankly, unworkable.

Mr. Bradshaw: Yes, I agree. I know very well the problems that the hon. Gentleman describes in his constituency, having visited the Shetland islands myself in the summer. He is right that it is important that we work closely with the industry, as we are doing not only through the new regional advisory councils, but through the science fisheries partnership, investing £1 million every year in collaborative work to try to bring science and the fishing industry closer together. That collaborative work is important. It is not always the case that we can do what the fishing industry wants, but it is still very important that we work together closely to get the best deal for the UK.

Mr. Austin Mitchell (Great Grimsby) (Lab): Will my hon. Friend bend his efforts to ensure that the Commission's proposals are based on accurate up-to-date stock figures that take into account the effects of decommissioning and the conservation measures taken so far, rather than the worst-case scenario of the International Council for the Exploration of the Sea, which the Commission seems to prefer? Secondly, the industry would want to him to recognise that, while the British industry has taken the biggest hit on decommissioning and reduction of the white fish effort, other fishing nations are still building up their white fish effort. That is totally unacceptable to the British industry.

Mr. Bradshaw: I certainly accept that we have to take account of the most up-to-date figures. My hon. Friend is right that, because of the decline of the cod stocks, it is the UK white fish fleet, which has traditionally relied on cod and has the biggest quota of cod, that has suffered the most. I suspect that at the forthcoming December Council, there will be some difficult decisions for the Spanish and others about hake, but we will certainly make it plain to the Commission, as we did at the launch of the regional advisory council, that it is important that it takes into account the decommissioning that has been so painful for his fleets and so many others in the rest of the UK.

Mr. Michael Weir (Angus) (SNP): The Minister may know that the Canadian Fisheries Minister visited last week and had a meeting with the all-party fisheries group. One of the points discussed was the effect of the closure of the Canadian grand bank cod grounds on the cod fishery, but it appears that the long-term closure has had no appreciable effect on cod stocks in Canadian waters. Given that, can the Minister tell us what his attitude will be to the International Council for the Exploration of the Sea recommendation on the closure of the North sea cod fishery, which will have a dramatic impact on the Scottish haddock fishery?

Mr. Bradshaw: The hon. Gentleman may well be aware, if he has studied the history of the grand banks of Canada, of the scientific consensus that the reason cod stocks have not recovered is that the decision to close the fishery was made too late. If cod stocks are depleted to that extent, they often do not recover. Instead, there has been a growth in prawn stocks, which the fishing industry has been able to exploit.

I shall certainly make the hon. Gentleman's point during the December negotiations, but he should note that for the past two years ICES has advised a total closure of the North sea cod fishery. That advice has not been followed in the Council of Ministers.

Mr. Bob Blizzard (Waveney) (Lab): Does my hon. Friend agree that if we are to get our fisheries policy right, we shall need very good information from our scientists? Scientists at the Centre for Environment, Fisheries and Aquaculture Science—CEFAS—in Lowestoft are unhappy about the fact that their rates of pay are significantly below those of my hon. Friend's officials in the Department. Will my hon. Friend look into that? I would not wish the advice that he receives to be impaired by a work force who are becoming really fed up with not being treated very well.

Mr. Bradshaw: I certainly undertake to look into the matter. Let me take this opportunity to pay tribute to the excellent work that my hon. Friend's constituents do at CEFAS, and the invaluable advice that they give not just to us but to other decision-makers in Europe and the rest of the world.

Andrew George (St. Ives) (LD): I am sure that the Minister will join me in welcoming the growing improvement in relations and co-operation between fishermen and scientists, despite the pay levels. As he knows, however, we are one month away from making momentous decisions once again on the future of the fishing industry, and the European Commission has still not published stock assessment or effort control proposals. Is not leaving the opportunity for proper consultation and discussion with the industry until that late hour in December a recipe for the kind of mistakes that the December Council has made all too often?

Mr. Bradshaw: I take the hon. Gentleman's point to some extent. One of the reasons for our attempt to achieve multi-annual recovery plans was not having to go through that annual process, but ICES reports in October, which gives both us and the Commission a fairly tight time frame. That does not mean that we cannot have discussions with the industry based on our best guesstimate of what the Commission will recommend as a result of scientific advice, and we have had such discussions both before and since ICES reported.

Mr. Owen Paterson (North Shropshire) (Con): Last year's Council resulted in a most impractical scheme in the North sea. The Minister did not consult the numerous British fishermen who are currently dotted around various hotels in Brussels waiting for news. Will he give a cast-iron guarantee that this year, before accepting any proposals, he will discuss them in detail and in a practical manner with those fishermen? He did not give such a clear reply to the hon. Member for Orkney and Shetland (Mr. Carmichael).

Mr. Bradshaw: It is not true that we did not consult fishery representatives during last year's Council. I should like to think that we have improved the process this year, not only through the personal contact that I have mentioned between leading fishing industry representatives and the Secretary of State and me, but through my regular, intensive contact with senior fisheries officials. What I cannot guarantee—and I hope the hon. Gentleman would not expect me to—is a veto for the fishing industry on any decision that we might make.

Rural Strategy

8. **Mr. Michael Jack** (Fylde) (Con): If she will make a statement on progress towards implementing her Department's rural strategy 2004. [198960]

The Minister for Rural Affairs and Local Environmental Quality (Alun Michael): We are making very good progress. Last month I announced the launch of seven local pathfinder partnerships, which will test practical ways of improving local delivery. Indeed, the pathfinder in the north-west includes the right hon. Gentleman's constituency. We hope to publish a draft Bill in the new year, and we are also making good progress towards setting up the integrated agency and the new countryside agency.

Mr. Jack: It is interesting that the Minister thinks that he is making good progress. I commend to him the evidence of the centre for rural economy at Newcastle university to the Select Committee, which is inquiring into the matter. The centre has criticised the Minister's strategy for lacking vision and clarity.

The Minister is currently establishing regional rural priority boards. Will they have rurally based business people on them, and how will their work under the aegis of Government offices relate to the economic development work being embarked on by the regional development agencies?

Alun Michael: I will read with interest any comments made by Newcastle university, but it is plain wrong to say that there is a lack of vision because we have a clear vision of a sustainable future for rural communities. We seek to engage with rural businesses in that work. At the beginning of this week, I met business representatives in the west midlands specifically to discuss engagement with rural business. We will provide details of the priority boards in due course, but I assure the right hon. Gentleman that we seek to engage with business and extend all aspects of sustainable development—economic, as well as environmental and social.

Mr. Tim Yeo (South Suffolk) (Con): We are rapidly moving towards a situation in which payments to farmers are decoupled from production. What assessment have the Government made of the risk that UK agricultural output will fall dramatically over the next five years?

Alun Michael: That is an interesting question that goes much wider than the question tabled by the right hon. Member for Fylde (Mr. Jack). We have, of course, assessed the impact of changes on farming and food. Modernisation will challenge the farming industry, and that is why we established the policy commission on the future of farming and food, with which the farming industry has engaged strongly—indeed, Sir Donald Curry led the commission from within the industry.

Paul Flynn (Newport, West) (Lab): Has my right hon. Friend seen the speculation about the subsidies that individuals receive under the present scheme and whether those individuals will continue to receive the same subsidies under the decoupled scheme? Although such matters are private—unfortunately, they do not fall under freedom of information legislation—it has been speculated that one individual in this country gets £20 million a year in subsidy and that a number of others get more than £10 million. Will those individuals continue to receive those subsidies just for keeping their farms pretty and cutting the grass?

Alun Michael: As my hon. Friend anticipates, I will not comment on individual payments. At the moment, farm incomes are increasing by about 15 per cent. and the benefits of decoupling are beginning to work through into the farming industry's performance. We are seeking to strengthen the weaker aspects of the rural economy through the rural development regulation.

Flood Defence

9. **Mr. John Bercow** (Buckingham) (Con): What steps his Department will be taking to streamline flood defence management systems. [198961]

The Minister for the Environment and Agri-environment (Mr. Elliot Morley): We are implementing the outcomes of the flood and coastal defence funding review. Those include making the Environment Agency responsible for all rivers that present the greatest flood risk; providing the Environment Agency with a single stream of Government funding with streamlined scheme approval arrangements; and creating a single tier of flood defence committees.

Mr. Bercow: I am not sure that the Minister's answer is particularly enlightening. He could usefully learn from Lord Falkland's dictum:

> "When it is not necessary to change, it is necessary not to change."

Does the hon. Gentleman accept that there is a risk that Government fiat is a move away from the old system of local control and that local knowledge and expertise about the problems of particular localities will be lost? That will be done in the name of the Government's obsession with regionalism, which few people understand and even fewer people want.

Mr. Morley: A river catchment area is not a political or regional boundary, and the argument for a regional approach is strong and practical. Having said that, I concede that I do not want to lose local knowledge. The regional flood defence committees have a majority representation from local authorities. DEFRA also makes a number of appointments, and we try to reflect the range of interests in flood defence and flood defence management so that we have balanced flood defence committees with broad local knowledge. However, the main motivation is efficiency of delivery.

Ms Sally Keeble (Northampton, North) (Lab): I welcome the changes that my hon. Friend describes. However, he will recall the terrible floods that we had in Northampton and may be aware that criticisms were made of the way in which the flood defence committee's management systems worked, in that they tended to favour agricultural, rather than urban and residential areas. Can he explain how his changes will give a better and clearer voice to urban and residential property owners and landowners, especially in an area that has been designated for growth and where there will be real pressures on the flood plains?

Mr. Morley: I understand very well the point that my hon. Friend makes. The Northampton floods were a seminal event that were responsible for significant changes in the way we approach flood management and defence. As I say, local authorities will have the majority, and we would expect them to have a reasonable cross-section of ability and representation. However, if there was an undue representation of agricultural or farming interests, that could be balanced by DEFRA's appointments.

Mr. Mark Simmonds (Boston and Skegness) (Con): The Minister will be aware that, in many low-lying parts of rural Lincolnshire, efficient flood defence by local internal drainage boards is essential. Will he confirm to the House and to the people of Lincolnshire that DEFRA will pressure the Treasury and the Office of the Deputy Prime Minister to ensure that Lincolnshire local authorities are fully reimbursed for the levy costs so that council tax increases can be kept to a minimum and that there will be no reduction in flood defences through the IDBs as a result of the funding cuts?

Mr. Morley: As vice-president of the Association of Drainage Authorities, I can claim a considerable knowledge of drains that will match that of anyone in this House.

The hon. Gentleman makes an important point. We have to strike the correct balance in the contribution that we make to the Environment Agency and the internal drainage boards in terms of their levy-raising powers. Of course, that gives them some independence in making choices that reflect their own needs. I have always thought that the internal drainage boards do an important job and are very good at reflecting local knowledge and needs.

Mr. Mark Todd (South Derbyshire) (Lab): One critical context for making decisions about how to allocate resources in flood defence will be the new fluvial strategies, three of which are being prepared in my constituency, one of the joys of South Derbyshire being the number of rivers that run through it. Communities such as Ambaston, on the Derwent, Shardlow, Willington and Barrow upon Trent, on the Trent, and Hilton, Hatton and Egginton, on the Dove, are all waiting anxiously for the publication of those strategies. Can we try to ensure that they move with some speed towards their conclusion so that we can start to see some action on the needs of those communities?

Mr. Morley: I know that my hon. Friend has been very much involved in this issue and has raised the potential impact on his local communities with the Department on several occasions. When I last spoke to the Environment Agency, I was told that the strategies are very close to completion. My hon. Friend will understand that, to provide effective flood defence, it is necessary to understand the whole catchment area and the nature of the river or estuary. The approach that the agency has taken in that sophisticated modelling and planning is exactly the right way forward, and I am sure that the report will be available in the very near future.

Mr. Andrew Tyrie (Chichester) (Con): Is the Minister aware that the new single-tier system that is being introduced will create a committee stretching from the Thames estuary to Bournemouth and that that will happen at crucial time for my constituency? The Minister may know that East head has recently been breached. If it is washed away completely, that will shortly threaten villages in my constituency, including West Wittering, with flooding. In the past, he has been very helpful in considering problems in Chichester. Will he now commit to looking urgently and extremely carefully at how we can assist the agencies and the flood defence committee to ensure that East head is not further eroded?

Mr. Morley: I recently spoke to the Environment Agency about East head, and I understand that, although there may be the risk of a breach, there is no immediate threat to properties in the area. I hope that that reassures the hon. Gentleman.

In the longer term, I revert to the point that I made to my hon. Friend the Member for Northampton, North (Ms Keeble). A detailed study of the tidal conditions in the bay and the effect on East head is under way and the agency is considering it. It has been funded to do that. Before taking appropriate action, one has to understand the natural forces and the pressures on them.

I understand the hon. Gentleman's point about regional flood defence committees. Most parts of the country have had large regional areas that have worked effectively for some time. However, I am aware of specific issues in Sussex and I understand that they are being considered.

Rural Payments Agency

10. **Paddy Tipping** (Sherwood) (Lab): When she last met the chief executive of the Rural Payments Agency to discuss progress on implementing new technology systems. [198962]

The Minister for Rural Affairs and Local Environmental Quality (Alun Michael): I meet the chief executive of the Rural Payments Agency frequently to ensure that its programme of modernisation proceeds at a brisk pace.

Paddy Tipping: My right hon. Friend knows that the RPA faces a big change programme against a background of new and different ways of paying farmers and landowners that come into force next year. Is he confident, and will he give an assurance, that single farm payments will be made in December 2005?

Alun Michael: My confidence is growing as the meetings proceed and I can see each step of the way tested. We aim to make payments as early as possible in the window for payments, which starts, as my hon. Friend suggests, on 1 December 2005.

Mr. James Paice (South-East Cambridgeshire) (Con): As the Minister said, that window is not even expected to open until 1 December 2005. This year's payments are already later than last year's. Farmers face one of their worst years ever, with not only low commodity prices but, in many parts of the country, the consequences of a difficult harvest. Does not the Minister understand the cash-flow implications, which are estimated at some £50 million in East Anglia alone, of the delay in payments? Does he accept that anything less than annual payments puts an untold burden on farmers when they are rightly trying to face up to what everybody, including the Minister, accepts are massive changes in the future of farming in this country?

Alun Michael: My postbag, especially from Members of Parliament, reflects a considerable drop in complaints about the RPA and an increase in satisfaction with its performance. The payment window opens on 1 December next year and we are doing all that we can to ensure that everything is in place and works effectively. We are validating and testing everything, from the rural land register, which went live on 6 September, to implementation. All that is due to be completed by the summer. The hon. Gentleman's lack of confidence is therefore unfortunate and misplaced.

Ms Joan Walley (Stoke-on-Trent, North) (Lab): In the discussions that my right hon. Friend is holding with the chief executive about new technology, will he examine businesses that are linked to farming? Following the BSE crisis, they have still not received the full pay-out that they would have expected, to the extent that the Inland Revenue is seeking to reclaim money. Will he ascertain whether getting the payments made can be joined up across Departments?

Alun Michael: I am happy to examine any individual cases that my hon. Friend may have. In general, we are trying to ensure that the system is joined up so that we do not have some of the dysfunctional interfaces that occurred in the past. That is at the centre of what we are trying to achieve.

Rural Development Regulation

11. **Mr. Simon Thomas** (Ceredigion) (PC): If she will make a statement on the implications of the draft EU rural development regulation. [198963]

The Minister for Rural Affairs and Local Environmental Quality (Alun Michael): The Commission's proposals for the new rural development regulation were published in July 2004 for programmes running from 2007 to 2013. We have been negotiating—and continue to do so—for further simplification of the rules; a better focus of the EU rural development expenditure on the delivery of real public benefits; a clearer contribution with shared environmental objectives; and fairer allocation of EU money. We are concerned about the fairer allocation of EU money to this country, of course.

Mr. Thomas: I am worried about the impact of the draft regulation on upland farmers. The Minister knows that less favoured area status, which applies to 80 per cent. of Wales and almost all of my constituency, has been essential to support the sort of upland farming that has given us magnificent scenery that we can exploit for tourism. It has also given us a magnificent upland environment, which is an important part of the way in which we tackle climate change and the future of agriculture in this country. Will he give some assurances about how upland farming can be supported and the Government's attitude to the regulation so that we can maintain viable upland farming throughout the United Kingdom and the essential environment and landscape that is so important for us all?

Alun Michael: The hon. Gentleman is correct to spell out the challenge in respect of upland farming, which we are seeking to address very carefully. In relation to Wales, that is a matter for the National Assembly, and I believe that Carwyn Jones will be in Brussels on Monday when further discussions are taking place. The consultation in England and that undertaken in Wales by the Assembly have both closed recently. We will consider the outcomes and I am sure that there will be discussion between us and the Assembly's representatives, which will include a focus on upland farming.

Mr. Patrick McLoughlin (West Derbyshire) (Con): As I understand it, the draft regulation is accompanied by proposals on common agricultural policy farming, which include the process of revising the designation of less favoured areas. Bearing in mind what DEFRA approved just a few months ago, which the Secretary of State announced, is the Minister aware that clarity and early explanation of what is meant by this are vital for those areas?

Alun Michael: As I understand it, the Commission has proposed that member states redesignate their less favoured areas, removing socio-economic factors from the definitions. That arises from criticism from the European Court of Auditors. We have supported the proposal. We do not expect it to lead to significant changes in the designation of less favoured areas in the UK, but under current Commission proposals there is considerable scope for socio-economic objectives to be met through axis 3 funding. We are also pushing for the criteria for designation to be strongly linked to land management benefits and the positive environmental contribution that the programmes seek to achieve.

Landfill Tax Escalator

12. **Dr. Alan Whitehead** (Southampton, Test) (Lab): What proposals she has to recycle the proceeds of the landfill tax escalator to business over the next three years. [198964]

The Minister for the Environment and Agri-environment (Mr. Elliot Morley): We expect to announce a programme of measures shortly that will recycle additional landfill tax revenues—£284 million over three years from April 2005—back to business by providing support that specifically targets resource efficiency, waste minimisation and diversion away from landfill.

Dr. Whitehead: Does my hon. Friend agree with me on the importance of the initiative in ensuring that business plays a full and important part in the recycling, reuse and minimisation process? Will he consider prioritising funding for schemes that promote recycling and trading in materials between businesses where a material is a waste product of one company's processes, but might constitute raw materials for those of another?

Mr. Morley: My hon. Friend makes a good suggestion. As part of the agreed split on the income from the landfill tax, a lot of it will go towards helping businesses with resource management in the most general sense—energy waste resource management. The idea of one company's waste being used as another's raw material is a good one. I will certainly consider it seriously.

Sewerage Regulation

13. **Dr. Vincent Cable** (Twickenham) (LD): If she will make a statement on the regulation of sewerage operation by water utilities. [198965]

The Minister for the Environment and Agri-environment (Mr. Elliot Morley): Sewerage undertakers are under a statutory duty under section 94 of the Water Industry Act 1991—enforceable by the Secretary of State or the director general of water services—to provide, improve and extend public sewers and to maintain those sewers to ensure the effectual drainage of their area.

Dr. Cable: Some progress is being made on odour pollution from sewage works following court action and an odour abatement notice being made in south-west London in respect of Thames Water and the Mogden plant. Will the Minister acknowledge that, for the court action to be effective, the Government will have to specify the standards that must be met and the water regulator will have to approve the necessary capital investment? Will he take action on those points?

Mr. Morley: I can reassure the hon. Gentleman that action is being taken on that and he will be aware that my noble Friend Lord Whitty paid a visit to his local sewage works to consider some of the odour problems. Enforcement action was taken in November. We are in the process of producing a code of practice that lays out those standards, which the hon. Gentleman has asked for. That will be a useful framework for the sewerage industry to work within as regards the standards that we want to be applied to odour control.

Mr. Ian Cawsey (Brigg and Goole) (Lab): My hon. Friend has already claimed the title of King Drain this morning, so I wonder whether he can do a similar job on sewers. Many Members will think that unadopted sewers, and the role of water utilities in them, are the biggest issue. In Dragonby in my constituency, which used to be in my hon. Friend's constituency, the sewers that are part of the former steel houses, which are now privately owned, cause regular blockages and problems. When does he expect to do something about that, with the water utilities, so that the blight on many of my constituents, and other hon. Members' constituents, can be ended?

Mr. Morley: My hon. Friend makes a good point. As he rightly says, I know the situation in Dragonby, although it appears that the sewers have got worse since my hon. Friend inherited the village. The whole issue of private sewers is very complicated. We want to address it, and we have made clear in relation to the report that we commissioned the options that we can consider. That report showed that up to 50 per cent. of the population are connected directly or indirectly to private sewers, so it is a major issue. I will attend the all-party sewers and sewerage group meeting on 2 December, at which I hope to outline the steps that we can take, the kind of problems faced and some of the solutions that we can consider.

Mr. Roger Williams (Brecon and Radnorshire) (LD): Is it right that, in 2004, many residents still suffer internal sewerage flooding in their homes and gardens? What power has the Minister to ensure that water utility companies put repairs in process immediately?

Mr. Morley: Yes, sewer flooding is an appalling experience for people, particularly for those who suffer it repeatedly. There has been some recent case law on the responsibility of sewer companies in relation to repeat sewer flooding, and I am happy to write to the hon. Gentleman on that, as it might be of use to him in relation to his constituency case. More generally, sewer flooding was a feature of the ministerial guidance to the regulator in relation to his current job of setting the prices for the next five-year period. I am confident that the regulator, who is well aware of these issues and has received direct representations from Members of the House, will bear that in mind in approving companies' business plans for that period.

Fallen Stock

14. **Mr. David Heathcoat-Amory** (Wells) (Con): What additional facilities are planned for the disposal of fallen stock in the event of a hunting ban. [198966]

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs (Mr. Ben Bradshaw): None. Other operators in the fallen stock collection and disposal industry have consistently maintained that they have sufficient capacity to deal with additional quantities of fallen stock.

Mr. Heathcoat-Amory: Is the Minister aware that the Mendip farmers hunt recently opened a facility, built to Ministry specifications, to take fallen stock from the whole Mendip area that will be jeopardised if hunting is banned? Will he state clearly whether rendering and incineration capacity is adequate to cope with the national fallen stock collection service, which is much delayed but is coming into effect later this month? Alternatively, will that shortage of capacity create problems in line with the general ineptitude and incompetence that has surrounded this whole issue and the way it has been dealt with by his Department?

Mr. Bradshaw: No. The National Fallen Stock Company running the scheme is satisfied that the rendering and incineration capacity is sufficient to cope with the stock.

Fruit Farming

15. **Hugh Robertson** (Faversham and Mid-Kent) (Con): If she will make a statement on Government support for fruit farming. [198967]

The Minister for Rural Affairs and Local Environmental Quality (Alun Michael): The Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs funds a substantial research and development programme that is of benefit to fruit farmers. Growers are also eligible for assistance under the England rural development programme.

Hugh Robertson: The Minister will be aware that fruit farmers are feeling the squeeze at the moment. Supermarkets are bearing down on them, which is affecting their income, while at the same time the Agricultural Wages Board has awarded a series of above-inflation wage increases. Given that we now have a national minimum wage, why does agriculture, and agriculture alone, still have a wages board?

Alun Michael: It has been the view of successive Ministers and Departments that the Agricultural Wages Board should continue. There are many differences between agriculture and horticulture. Horticulture has never had the distorting subsidies that agriculture has had. We contribute to the industry as a whole through the research programme, worth some £2.5 million this year. We want the industry to continue to be a success.

Points of Order

12.30 pm

Mr. James Paice (South-East Cambridgeshire) (Con): On a point of order, Mr. Speaker. I should like to raise a point about which I have already forewarned the relevant Minister's office.

You will recall, Mr. Speaker, that in the last oral questions to the Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs on 21 October, the Under-Secretary of State, the hon. Member for Exeter (Mr. Bradshaw), said, in reference to the foot and mouth video of Burnside farm,

"I have not seen the video".—[*Official Report*, 21 October 2004; Vol. 425, c. 1006.]

Later, he did not refute my contention that no Minister had seen it. In a written question on 9 November, I asked the Minister when DEFRA first obtained a copy of the video. He answered

"DEFRA recently obtained copies of the video when it was referred to in correspondence received on 30 September 2004."—[*Official Report*, 9 November 2004; Vol. 426, c. 577*W*.]

Yesterday, Lord Whitty, another DEFRA Minister, wrote to my noble Friend Baroness Byford and made statements that contradict the Under-Secretary of State. First, he stated:

"I confirm that I saw part of the video at the time of Mr. Waugh's trial".

Secondly, he said:

"The first record DEFRA has of receiving a copy of the video . . . is at the beginning of February 2003."

Both Ministers cannot be right. Would it be in order for the Under-Secretary of State to explain why Ministers disagree in explaining what increasingly looks like a cover-up, and to apologise for—no doubt inadvertently—misleading the House?

Mr. Speaker: I am quite sure that the hon. Gentleman will know how to follow up his inquiries, but it is not for me to ask a Minister to apologise.

Mr. Tim Yeo (South Suffolk) (Con): But he is in the Chamber.

Mr. Speaker: Order. I know that the Minister is in the Chamber, but it is not for me to pursue an apology.

Mr. James Gray (North Wiltshire) (Con): Come on, Ben.

Mr. Speaker: Order. It was a point of order, and I am responding to it.

Mr. Oliver Heald (North-East Hertfordshire) (Con) *rose*—

Mr. Speaker: Point of order, Mr. Letwin? *[Interruption.]* Mr. Heald.

Mr. Heald: I think that Mr. Letwin may be a little thinner than I am, Mr. Speaker. My point of order has to do with the amendments tabled by the Minister for Rural Affairs and Local Environmental Quality and his Parliamentary Private Secretary, in lieu of the Lords amendments passed last night. The new proposals were made available in the Vote Office at 12.5 pm—that is, 25 minutes ago. They raise issues that hon. Members of all parties may wish to consider. In those circumstances, would you be prepared to suspend the sitting for a short period, so that hon. Members can familiarise themselves with the new proposals, which are very different from what has gone before?

Mr. Speaker: No, I will not suspend the sitting.

Hugh Robertson (Faversham and Mid-Kent) (Con): On a point of order, Mr. Speaker. You will be aware of the very serious events last night in the Bernabéu stadium, which followed similar incidents in the England under-21 international—

Mr. Speaker: Order. The hon. Gentleman may be aware of that, as he submitted an urgent question on it. I refused the urgent question, so I will not take a point of order on the matter.

Mr. Peter Luff (Mid-Worcestershire) (Con): On a point of order, Mr. Speaker. This is a genuine point of order. [HON. MEMBERS: "Oh!"] It follows on from the point raised my hon. Friend the shadow Leader of the House. That, too, was a genuine point of order, as was, I am sure, the one raised by my hon. Friend the Member for Faversham and Mid-Kent (Hugh Robertson). Will you confirm that it would be in order, in principle, to table manuscript amendments to these very late Government motions? The new proposals mean that those of us who wish to oppose a ban on hunting face difficult decisions. If there is to be a ban, we would want it to be extended for the maximum period before implementation. Are manuscript amendments acceptable in principle? Will you explain how we can submit such amendments if we are to move immediately to the business in hand?

Mr. Speaker: The hon. Gentleman has been a Member of the House for some time. He will know that I will look at and consider manuscript amendments, but that whether I accept them is another matter.

Mr. Paul Goodman (Wycombe) (Con): On a point of order, Mr. Speaker. Yesterday, Doug Smith, chief executive of the Child Support Agency, resigned. Earlier that day, he told the Select Committee on Work and Pensions that the CSA has no contingency plan if the computer system proves to be beyond repair. Have you had any notice from the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions that he intends to come to the House today to explain what the Government's plans now are? We all have constituents who are not getting money because the CSA system does not work and the Government are ultimately responsible for the shambles.

Mr. Speaker: I have had no such notice.

Mr. Heald: Further to my point of order, Mr. Speaker. You have decided that the House must go ahead immediately with the Hunting Bill, but can you give any guidance for the future on the amount of time that the Government should allow hon. Members when amendments in lieu are tabled? Twenty-five minutes are

[Mr. Heald]

not enough. Although I fully understand and accept your decision and the reasons for it, some guidance for the future would be most welcome.

Mr. Speaker: I am not worried about the future; I am worried about getting through today.

Mr. Barry Sheerman (Huddersfield) (Lab/Co-op): On a point of order, Mr. Speaker. Some of those present have been Members of Parliament for a considerable number of years but have never seen the Parliament Act invoked—[Hon Members: "Yes, we have."] There are new Members who have not seen it. I ask for some explanation of the Speaker's role in the Parliament Act.

Mr. Speaker: Old Members and new Members can always go to the Library—it is very conveniently placed only a few yards away and I often use it. It is nice of the hon. Gentleman to make that request on behalf of Members, but that is why the Library exists. It is very useful.

Sir Patrick Cormack (South Staffordshire) (Con): On a point of order, Mr. Speaker. Are you prepared to consider a manuscript amendment that would allow two votes, one on the first part of amendment a and another on the second?

Mr. Speaker: If the hon. Gentleman puts a manuscript amendment to me, I shall consider it.

Sir Gerald Kaufman (Manchester, Gorton) (Lab): On a point of order, Mr. Speaker. I have two matters to raise. First, I should be grateful if you asked the Minister in charge of the Hunting Bill to explain how the commitment that he has repeatedly given at the Dispatch Box, and therefore in the House, that Labour Members of Parliament have a free vote is compatible with the activity of Government Whips trying to get Labour Members to vote for a specific amendment?

Secondly, on a point of order directly for you, last night, when at a high level assurances were given to right hon. and hon. Labour Members—[Hon. Members: "Oh!"] Hon. Members should contain themselves: I am asking the Speaker to clarify procedure. Given that we are now in a position other than the one set out in the assurances given last night to right hon. and hon. Labour Members regarding the Government's view on the implementation date, and given that there are two amendments dealing with the implementation date, one tabled by the Minister for Rural Affairs and Local Environmental Quality and the other by the hon. Member for The Wrekin (Peter Bradley), I seek your guidance on whether, if either amendment is carried, it will affect the integrity of the Bill in relation to the invocation of the Parliament Act?

Mr. Speaker: On the second point, the House makes decisions; I am then guided by the Parliament Act in working out how to proceed from there. As for Whips' activities, Whips are always active and hon. Members know how to handle them.

The Minister for Rural Affairs and Local Environmental Quality (Alun Michael): Further to the first part of the point of order raised by my right hon. Friend the Member for Manchester, Gorton (Sir Gerald Kaufman), Mr. Speaker. I thought that all my right hon. and hon. Friends were aware of this fact, but let me make it absolutely clear: for Labour Members this is a free vote.

Mr. Peter Pike (Burnley) (Lab): On a point of order, Mr. Speaker. I have been listening to one or two people sitting round me in the House, and it is clear that everyone has a different interpretation of what is happening. We recognise that we are in an unusual position, and we are depending on you to guide us to ensure that at the end of the day, this Hunting Bill is carried. *[Interruption.]* That is the will of the House. People in this Chamber believe that there is a rat that smells, and—

Mr. Speaker: Order.

Hunting Bill (Procedure) (No. 3)

12.40 pm

The Minister for Rural Affairs and Local Environmental Quality (Alun Michael): I beg to move the Hunting Bill (Procedure) (No. 3) motion, standing in my name and that of the Leader of the House. It might assist the House if I read out the terms of the motion, so that they are clear to all Members. The—

Mr. Peter Luff (Mid-Worcestershire) (Con) *rose—*

Mr. Speaker: I have taken a point of order from the hon. Gentleman. I hope that this is a different one.

Mr. Luff: On a completely different point of order, Mr. Speaker. It would be helpful if we knew for how long this debate can continue.

Mr. Speaker: The motion is not debatable. The Question will be put forthwith.

Alun Michael: The hon. Member for Mid-Worcestershire (Mr. Luff), through his point of order, makes it clear why it will assist the House if I read out—

Lembit Öpik (Montgomeryshire) (LD) *rose—*

Mr. Speaker: I hope that the hon. Gentleman is rising to make different a point of order.

Lembit Öpik: On a point of order, Mr. Speaker. On the basis of what you have just said, I am surely correct in assuming that it would not be appropriate for the Minister to participate in such a debate, given that the Question has to be put immediately.

Alun Michael *rose—*

Mr. Speaker: The Minister should confine himself to reading the motion.

Alun Michael: I am grateful to you, Mr. Speaker. The motion states:

> That the Orders of 15th September and 16th November shall be supplemented as follows:
>
> 1. At this day's sitting proceedings on consideration of any Lords message relating to the Hunting Bill shall be brought to a conclusion (unless already concluded) one hour after commencement.
>
> 2. For the purpose of bringing proceedings to a conclusion in accordance with paragraph 1 the Speaker shall put the following questions forthwith (and no others)-
>
> (1) any question which has been proposed from the Chair and has not yet been decided, and
>
> (2) the question on any motion moved by a Minister of the Crown.
>
> 3. Paragraphs 3 to 5 of the Order of 16th November shall apply.

Mr. Geoffrey Clifton-Brown (Cotswold) (Con): On a point of order, Mr. Speaker. The—

Mr. Speaker: Order. I am putting the Question.

The House proceeded to a Division.

Mr. Patrick McLoughlin (West Derbyshire) (Con): On a point of order, Mr. Speaker. This Division seems to have gone on for 17 minutes. I think that there is an argument in the Government Lobby. Can it be investigated?

Mr. Speaker: Order. I ask the Serjeant at Arms to find out what is happening.

The House having divided: Ayes 271, Noes 136.

Division No. 337] **[12:44 pm**

AYES

Adams, Irene *(Paisley N)*
Ainger, Nick
Ainsworth, Bob (Cov'try NE)
Allen, Richard
Allen, Graham
Anderson, rh Donald *(Swansea E)*
Anderson, Janet *(Rossendale & Darwen)*
Armstrong, rh Ms Hilary
Atkins, Charlotte
Bailey, Adrian
Baird, Vera
Banks, Tony
Barrett, John
Barron, rh Kevin
Battle, rh John
Bayley, Hugh
Beard, Nigel
Begg, Miss Anne
Bell, Sir Stuart
Blizzard, Bob
Boateng, rh Paul
Bradley, rh Keith *(Withington)*
Bradley, Peter *(The Wrekin)*
Breed, Colin
Brennan, Kevin
Brooke, Mrs Annette L.
Brown, Russell *(Dumfries)*
Bryant, Chris
Burgon, Colin
Burnham, Andy
Cable, Dr. Vincent
Caborn, rh Richard
Cairns, David
Calton, Mrs Patsy
Campbell, Alan *(Tynemouth)*
Campbell, Mrs Anne *(C'bridge)*
Casale, Roger
Caton, Martin
Cawsey, Ian *(Brigg)*
Challen, Colin
Clapham, Michael
Clark, Mrs Helen *(Peterborough)*
Clark, Dr. Lynda *(Edinburgh Pentlands)*
Clark, Paul *(Gillingham)*
Clarke, rh Tom *(Coatbridge & Chryston)*
Clarke, Tony *(Northampton S)*
Clelland, David
Coaker, Vernon
Coffey, Ms Ann
Cooper, Yvette
Corbyn, Jeremy
Cotter, Brian
Cox, Tom *(Tooting)*
Cranston, Ross
Crausby, David
Cruddas, Jon
Cryer, John *(Hornchurch)*
Cunningham, Jim *(Coventry S)*
Cunningham, Tony *(Workington)*
Curtis-Thomas, Mrs Claire
Darling, rh Alistair
Davey, Valerie *(Bristol W)*
David, Wayne
Davidson, Ian
Davies, rh Denzil *(Llanelli)*
Dawson, Hilton
Dean, Mrs Janet
Denham, rh John
Dhanda, Parmjit
Dismore, Andrew
Dobson, rh Frank
Doran, Frank
Dowd, Jim *(Lewisham W)*
Drew, David *(Stroud)*
Drown, Ms Julia
Eagle, Angela *(Wallasey)*
Eagle, Maria *(L'pool Garston)*
Efford, Clive
Ellman, Mrs Louise
Ennis, Jeff *(Barnsley E)*
Etherington, Bill
Farrelly, Paul
Field, rh Frank *(Birkenhead)*
Fitzsimons, Mrs Lorna
Flynn, Paul *(Newport W)*
Foster, rh Derek
Foster, Michael *(Worcester)*
Foster, Michael Jabez *(Hastings & Rye)*
Francis, Dr. Hywel
Gapes, Mike *(Ilford S)*
Gidley, Sandra
Gill, Parmjit Singh
Gilroy, Linda
Goggins, Paul
Griffiths, Win *(Bridgend)*
Grogan, John
Hain, rh Peter
Hall, Mike *(Weaver Vale)*
Hall, Patrick *(Bedford)*
Hamilton, David *(Midlothian)*
Hancock, Mike
Hanson, David
Harris, Dr. Evan *(Oxford W & Abingdon)*
Havard, Dai *(Merthyr Tydfil & Rhymney)*
Henderson, Doug *(Newcastle N)*
Henderson, Ivan *(Harwich)*
Hendrick, Mark
Hepburn, Stephen

Heppell, John
Hesford, Stephen
Hewitt, rh Ms Patricia
Heyes, David
Hodge, Margaret
Holmes, Paul
Hood, Jimmy *(Clydesdale)*
Hopkins, Kelvin
Howarth, rh Alan *(Newport E)*
Howarth, George *(Knowsley N & Sefton E)*
Howells, Dr. Kim
Hughes, Beverley *(Stretford & Urmston)*
Hughes, Kevin *(Doncaster N)*
Hurst, Alan *(Braintree)*
Jackson, Glenda *(Hampstead & Highgate)*
Jackson, Helen *(Hillsborough)*
Jamieson, David
Jenkins, Brian
Johnson, Miss Melanie *(Welwyn Hatfield)*
Jones, Martyn *(Clwyd S)*
Joyce, Eric *(Falkirk W)*
Kaufman, rh Sir Gerald
Keeble, Ms Sally
Keen, Alan *(Feltham)*
Keen, Ann *(Brentford)*
Kelly, Ruth *(Bolton W)*
Kennedy, rh Charles *(Ross Skye & Inverness)*
Kennedy, Jane *(Wavertree)*
Khabra, Piara S.
Kidney, David
Kilfoyle, Peter
King, Andy *(Rugby)*
Knight, Jim *(S Dorset)*
Laxton, Bob *(Derby N)*
Lazarowicz, Mark
Lepper, David
Leslie, Christopher
Levitt, Tom *(High Peak)*
Lewis, Terry *(Worsley)*
Linton, Martin
Love, Andrew
Luke, Iain *(Dundee E)*
McAvoy, Thomas
McCabe, Stephen
McCafferty, Chris
McDonagh, Siobhain
MacDonald, Calum
McDonnell, John
McFall, rh John
McGuire, Mrs Anne
McIsaac, Shona
McKechin, Ann
McKenna, Rosemary
Mackinlay, Andrew
McNulty, Tony
McWalter, Tony
McWilliam, John
Mahmood, Khalid
Mahon, Mrs Alice
Marris, Rob *(Wolverh'ton SW)*
Marsden, Gordon *(Blackpool S)*
Marshall, David *(Glasgow Shettleston)*
Martlew, Eric
Meale, Alan *(Mansfield)*
Merron, Gillian
Michael, rh Alun
Miller, Andrew
Moran, Margaret
Morgan, Julie
Morley, Elliot
Mudie, George
Mullin, Chris
Munn, Ms Meg
Murphy, Jim *(Eastwood)*
Naysmith, Dr. Doug
Norris, Dan *(Wansdyke)*
~~O'Hara,~~ Edward
Olner, Bill
Organ, Diana
Osborne, Sandra *(Ayr)*
Palmer, Dr. Nick
Perham, Linda
Picking, Anne
Pickthall, Colin
Pike, Peter *(Burnley)*
Plaskitt, James
Pollard, Kerry
Pond, Chris *(Gravesham)*
Pope, Greg *(Hyndburn)*
Prentice, Ms Bridget *(Lewisham E)*
Prentice, Gordon *(Pendle)*
Prosser, Gwyn
Pugh, Dr. John
Purchase, Ken
Purnell, James
Quin, rh Joyce
Quinn, Lawrie
Rapson, Syd *(Portsmouth N)*
Reed, Andy *(Loughborough)*
Roche, Mrs Barbara
Rooney, Terry
Ross, Ernie *(Dundee W)*
Roy, Frank *(Motherwell)*
Ruane, Chris
Ruddock, Joan
Russell, Bob *(Colchester)*
Sarwar, Mohammad
Savidge, Malcolm
Sawford, Phil
Sedgemore, Brian
Shaw, Jonathan
Sheridan, Jim
Shipley, Ms Debra
Short, rh Clare
Simon, Siôn *(B'ham Erdington)*
Singh, Marsha
Skinner, Dennis
Smith, rh Andrew *(Oxford E)*
Smith, Angela *(Basildon)*
Smith, John *(Glamorgan)*
Smith, Llew *(Blaenau Gwent)*
Soley, Clive
Spellar, rh John
Starkey, Dr. Phyllis
Steinberg, Gerry
Stinchcombe, Paul
Stoate, Dr. Howard
Stuart, Ms Gisela
Stunell, Andrew
Sutcliffe, Gerry
Tami, Mark *(Alyn)*
Taylor, rh Ann *(Dewsbury)*
Taylor, David *(NW Leics)*
Taylor, Matthew *(Truro)*
Teather, Sarah
Tipping, Paddy
Todd, Mark *(S Derbyshire)*
Touhig, Don *(Islwyn)*
Trickett, Jon
Turner, Dennis *(Wolverh'ton SE)*
Turner, Dr. Desmond *(Brighton Kemptown)*
Turner, Neil *(Wigan)*
Twigg, Derek *(Halton)*
Twigg, Stephen *(Enfield)*
Vis, Dr. Rudi
Walley, Ms Joan
Ward, Claire
Wareing, Robert N.
Watts, David
White, Brian
Whitehead, Dr. Alan
Wicks, Malcolm
Williams, rh Alan *(Swansea W)*
Wills, Michael
Winnick, David
Winterton, Ms Rosie *(Doncaster C)*
Wood, Mike *(Batley)*
Woolas, Phil
Worthington, Tony
Wright, Anthony D. *(Gt Yarmouth)*
Wright, David *(Telford)*
Wright, Iain *(Hartlepool)*
Wright, Tony *(Cannock)*

Tellers for the Ayes:
Joan Ryan and
Mr. Tom Watson

NOES

Arbuthnot, rh James
Bacon, Richard
Baker, Norman
Baldry, Tony
Barker, Gregory
Beggs, Roy *(E Antrim)*
Beith, rh A. J.
Bellingham, Henry
Bercow, John
Blunt, Crispin
Boswell, Tim
Bottomley, Peter *(Worthing W)*
Brady, Graham
Browning, Mrs Angela
Bruce, Malcolm
Burns, Simon
Burnside, David
Burt, Alistair
Cameron, David
Campbell, rh Sir Menzies *(NE Fife)*
Cash, William
Chapman, Sir Sydney *(Chipping Barnet)*
Chope, Christopher
Clappison, James
Clarke, rh Kenneth *(Rushcliffe)*
Collins, Tim
Conway, Derek
Cormack, Sir Patrick
Curry, rh David
Davies, Quentin *(Grantham & Stamford)*
Djanogly, Jonathan
Dodds, Nigel
Donaldson, Jeffrey M.
Dorrell, rh Stephen
Doughty, Sue
Duncan, Alan *(Rutland)*
Duncan Smith, rh Iain
Fabricant, Michael
Fisher, Mark
Flook, Adrian
Forth, rh Eric
Foster, Don *(Bath)*
Francois, Mark
Gibb, Nick *(Bognor Regis)*
Gillan, Mrs Cheryl
Goodman, Paul
Gray, James *(N Wilts)*
Grayling, Chris
Green, Damian *(Ashford)*
Green, Matthew *(Ludlow)*
Grieve, Dominic
Gummer, rh John
Hague, rh William
Harvey, Nick
Hawkins, Nick
Hayes, John *(S Holland)*
Heald, Oliver
Heath, David
Heathcoat-Amory, rh David
Hendry, Charles
Hermon, Lady
Hoey, Kate *(Vauxhall)*
Hogg, rh Douglas
Horam, John *(Orpington)*
Jackson, Robert *(Wantage)*
Jenkin, Bernard
Key, Robert *(Salisbury)*
Kirkwood, Sir Archy
Laing, Mrs Eleanor
Lait, Mrs Jacqui
Lamb, Norman
Laws, David *(Yeovil)*
Leigh, Edward
Letwin, rh Oliver
Liddell-Grainger, Ian
Lidington, David
Lilley, rh Peter
Llwyd, Elfyn
Luff, Peter *(M-Worcs)*
McIntosh, Miss Anne
Mackay, rh Andrew
Maclean, rh David
McLoughlin, Patrick
Malins, Humfrey
Maples, John
Mates, Michael
May, Mrs Theresa
Mercer, Patrick
Moore, Michael
Moss, Malcolm
Murrison, Dr. Andrew
O'Brien, Stephen *(Eddisbury)*
Öpik, Lembit
Paice, James
Paisley, Rev. Ian
Paterson, Owen
Pickles, Eric
Price, Adam *(E Carmarthen & Dinefwr)*
Prisk, Mark *(Hertford)*
Redwood, rh John
Rendel, David
Robertson, Hugh *(Faversham & M-Kent)*
Ruffley, David
Sanders, Adrian
Selous, Andrew
Sheerman, Barry
Shephard, rh Mrs Gillian
Shepherd, Richard
Simmonds, Mark
Smith, Sir Robert *(W Ab'd'ns & Kincardine)*
Spicer, Sir Michael
Spink, Bob *(Castle Point)*
Steen, Anthony
Streeter, Gary
Swire, Hugo *(E Devon)*
Syms, Robert

Tapsell, Sir Peter
Taylor, Ian *(Esher)*
Taylor, Dr. Richard *(Wyre F)*
Taylor, Sir Teddy
Thomas, Simon *(Ceredigion)*
Thurso, John
Tredinnick, David
Trend, Michael
Turner, Andrew *(Isle of Wight)*
Tyler, Paul *(N Cornwall)*
Tyrie, Andrew
Watkinson, Angela
Webb, Steve *(Northavon)*
Whittingdale, John
Wiggin, Bill
Willetts, David
Williams, Roger *(Brecon)*
Winterton, Ann *(Congleton)*
Young, rh Sir George
Younger-Ross, Richard

Tellers for the Noes:
Mr. David Wilshire and
Mr. Geoffrey Clifton-Brown

Question accordingly agreed to.

Mr. Speaker: The Clerk has informed me that a number of manuscript amendments have been tabled and, of course, I have promised hon. Members that I will give them consideration. In view of the number of manuscript amendments, I am going to suspend the House until 1.40 pm.

1.2 pm

Sitting suspended.

Orders of the Day

Hunting Bill

1.44 pm

On resuming—

Lords message considered.

Mr. Paul Tyler (North Cornwall) (LD): On a point of order, Mr. Speaker. The Leader of the House is in his place. Has he given you any indication that he intends to make a statement on what has obviously gone wrong today? Does he accept that this is no way to run a national Parliament, let alone a ping-pong tournament?

Mr. Speaker: Nothing has gone wrong—absolutely nothing. I am running the proceedings in the House.

Mr. Peter Pike (Burnley) (Lab): On a point of order, Mr. Speaker. I seek your guidance. A paper is going around that I have not had the opportunity to see, but if any amendment to the Bill is carried today and if the two Houses cannot reach agreement on the Bill at the end of the day, will you be able to invoke the Parliament Act?

Mr. Speaker: I thank the hon. Gentleman for raising that point of order. The Parliament Act is applicable if agreement on the Bill as a whole is not achieved. That will not be affected if the House agrees to either of the two motions that are being proposed today. Beyond that, I do not want to be drawn into ruling on hypothetical situations, because it might be thought that I was trying to influence the debate. It is up to the Minister to explain the effect of the motion that he is bringing before the House.

Kate Hoey (Vauxhall) (Lab): On a point of order, Mr. Speaker. Will you clarify whether, if you chose to use the Parliament Act and it was used under your guidance—you have to follow the rules—you could be swayed at all by a vote in this House? Do you agree that the only way in which you can be prevented from using the Parliament Act is by a vote in this Parliament telling you not to use it, and can we have that vote?

Mr. Speaker: The hon. Lady is correct; that is the case.

Lords amendments: Nos. 1 to 44 and 46 to 54.

Mr. Speaker: I inform the House that privilege is involved in Lords amendments Nos. 10C, 12C and 52C. If the House agrees to the amendments, I will arrange for the necessary entries to be made in the *Journal*. I inform the House that I have selected the amendment to the Minister's amendment in the name of Opposition Members.

Mr. Peter Luff (Mid-Worcestershire) (Con): On a point of order, Mr. Speaker. For clarity, there are two amendments in the names of Opposition Members. Which one are you referring to?

Mr. Speaker: Amendment No. 1.

The Minister for Rural Affairs and Local Environmental Quality (Alun Michael): I beg to move, That this House insists on its disagreement to Lords amendments Nos. 1 to 44 and 46 to 54, disagrees with the Lords in their amendments 10C, 12C, 46C and 52C, but proposes the following amendment in lieu—

Leave out Clause 15 and insert the following new Clause:—

'Commencement

(1) The following provisions of this Act shall come into force on 31st July 2007—

(a) sections 1 to 4,

(b) Part 2 in so far as it relates to sections 1 to 4,

(c) sections 11 to 14 in so far as they relate to sections 1 to 4,

(d) Schedule 1, and

(e) Schedules 2 and 3, except in so far as they change the law in relation to an activity to which section 5 applies.

(2) The following provisions of this Act shall come into force at the end of the period of three months beginning with the date on which it is passed—

(a) section 5,

(b) Part 2 in so far as it relates to section 5,

(c) sections 11 to 13 in so far as they relate to section 5, and

(d) Schedules 2 and 3 in so far as they change the law in relation to an activity to which section 5 applies.'.

Essentially, I am inviting the House to restore the Bill to the form that we have previously agreed, but I shall also be inviting it to consider proposals in respect of commencement. I want to explain what I am trying to do today. As always, the Government want to be helpful and constructive, giving people time to adjust to the reality of legislation on the statute book. I shall then explain the procedure. I want to do those two things very clearly and without taking interventions, so there is absolutely no doubt about what I am saying. Of course, I will then be prepared to take interventions from hon. and right hon. Members.

This House previously agreed to propose a delay in commencement until July 2006. I have tabled a motion proposing July 2007, and my hon. Friend the Member for The Wrekin (Peter Bradley) has proposed 2006. Those are both choices that would enable this House not only to be reasonable but to be seen to be reasonable by going the extra mile, if we like. The House insists on the Bill as it has already agreed it, with only that date being changed. That is what is before us today.

Let me come to the procedure. I suggest to the House that it is clear but complicated, and I am grateful to you, Mr. Speaker, for the clarification that you gave before we started the debate. I want to give hon. Members complete certainty about the impact of what we are asking the House to agree to today. I am advised that passing either motion on commencement would not in any way affect the application of the Parliament Act. We would be passing not an amendment to the Bill, but a motion to propose an amendment in lieu. In other words, we would send the Bill to the other place as previously passed by this House in its Parliament Actable form. Alongside it, if passed, would be the motion making the proposal that the other place amend the Bill in order to delay commencement of the ban. From that point on, the only question is whether the Bill becomes law with the agreement of the other place or via application of the Parliament Act, with or without the proposed change in the date of commencement.

If we send a motion proposing an amendment to the Lords and they accept it, it will form part of the Bill as enacted. If there are no other disagreements, the Bill will pass without the Parliament Act. If there are disagreements, the Parliament Act will enact the Bill as first sent to the other place, but with the amendments proposed by this House today. If neither of the amendments is carried, I will move that this House insists on its disagreement with all the Lords amendments and disagrees to their amendments in lieu. Our position is very simple.

Mr. Andrew Dismore (Hendon) (Lab): As my right hon. Friend knows, the Countryside Alliance has threatened to drag this through the courts. Can he guarantee that the High Court, the Court of Appeal and the judicial council of the other place will absolutely agree with the interpretation that he has given us today?

Alun Michael: My hon. Friend knows that it would be unwise of any Minister to predict what they will do about anything, be it the original Bill, an amended Bill or any other legislation. I can say, however, that if we do what I suggest and pass the Bill in its Parliament Actable form—that is, if we reject the Lords amendments and invite the Lords to take the common-sense step of agreeing to our proposition for a delay in the date of commencement—that sensible approach would lead only to the courts' considering whether the date of commencement should be a date that we have agreed in this House or the original date three months hence, in February 2005. I think that the position is entirely clear, and although I appreciate the wish of some hon. Members to make it more complicated, I shall do my best to keep it simple.

Mr. A. J. Beith (Berwick-upon-Tweed) (LD) *rose*—

Alun Michael: I give way to the right hon. Gentleman, who I am sure will help me in that regard.

Mr. Beith: I am trying to help with clarification. The Lords having already rejected the 18-month delay, if this House sent that proposal to them by passing the second of the two motions—which would require the Minister to move it—what would happen then? Would the proposal come back to us for further consideration, or for us to suggest a further alternative? If the Lords insisted on, let us say, three years or two and three quarter years, what process would follow?

Alun Michael: I think that if the Lords did not accept our proposed date of commencement, we would have reached the end of the road. The Bill would be Parliament Acted with no change in the date of commencement.

Lembit Öpik (Montgomeryshire) (LD): I am not convinced that the Minister is necessarily correct, but perhaps he can put me right. As I understand it, there are two debates going on, one about the nature of the Bill and the amendments and the other about the date of commencement. The date of commencement is not connected with the question of the Parliament Act. In theory, we could go on arguing about the commencement till kingdom come, regardless of whether the rest of the Bill is enacted.

Alun Michael: In theory, we could indeed continue to argue about it for a long time. I am giving the hon. Gentleman an assurance that we will not.

Gregory Barker (Bexhill and Battle) (Con): Does the Minister understand that everyone in the countryside who cares for liberty and the environment will see that his machinations over commencement have absolutely nothing to do with reasonableness, as he is suggesting, and everything to do with shabby political horse-trading between Labour Members behind the scenes? The whole thing is a disgrace.

Alun Michael: I know that no hon. Member would seek to mislead the House, but it sounds as if the hon. Gentleman wants to mislead the countryside. In our original discussions with organisations that have been involved in this debate for many years, including the Countryside Alliance, those organisations—including the Countryside Alliance—accepted that the issue was cruelty. That is the subject that has dictated the debate about legislation on hunting. Let me also tell the hon. Gentleman, yet again, that people in the countryside are divided on hunting, just as people in urban areas are. This is not about a divide between urban and rural people.

This House voted on Tuesday to insist on the Bill in the form in which we sent it to the Lords in September—that is, what is generally called the banning Bill. The Lords have now insisted on their feeble version of the registration scheme, so it is the Lords who have chosen confrontation, and I regret that. At this stage, I sense no appetite among supporters of a ban in this House for any change in the House's well-established position. It is the will of this House of Commons to have this Bill. I should make clear that it is not this House that is insisting; it will be the House of Lords, if it does not accept what we are saying today, that will have provoked the application of the Parliament Act.

There remains the question of when the Bill is to come into force. As it stands, it will come into force in three months, on 18 February 2005. That three-month period applied to the original Bill, involving a tribunal system which I sought to persuade colleagues to support and which would have come into force three months after the Bill. This House has reasonably proposed a delay of about 18 months, until 31 July 2006, for the start of the ban on hunting—but not on hare coursing events, which would be banned three months after implementation in any case.

In their amendments the Lords suggested a three-year delay for all hunting, including hare coursing events, until 1 December 2007 or even later; but that would be for their registration Bill. At the same time, they voted against our suggested amendment proposing commencement on 31 July 2006. In doing so, they have in effect voted for a ban that will come into force in February next year. All the Lords' decisions on the Bill have been, in my view, irrational. With this one, they have behaved like turkeys voting for Christmas. I cannot believe that they meant it, although my noble Friend Lord Whitty made the position absolutely clear to them.

My proposed amendment in lieu would give the Lords another chance. It takes the same form as our earlier suggested amendment. It would bring the Bill into force on 31 July 2007 for hunting purposes, but again not for the purposes of hare coursing events. By sending it back to the Lords, we will give them a straightforward choice between the date that we suggest and three months from Royal Assent today. If they seek to insert a different date or to change the clause in any other way, this House will insist on the three-month period, because that will keep the Bill within the Parliament Act.

David Winnick (Walsall, North) (Lab): Is my right hon. Friend aware that those of us who want a total ban were willing, and continue to be willing, to go along with the earlier postponement to 31 July 2006, but no later than that? Is there not a danger that what he now proposes will give the impression that we are terrified of the threats of violence and thuggery from those who intend to break the law? Given that the House of Commons has agreed to a total ban six times in the past four years, what we propose—unlike what my right hon. Friend now proposes—is surely compromise enough, and responsibility for any further delay lies entirely with the House of Lords.

Alun Michael: My hon. Friend is quite right. I think it showed great willingness to be reasonable on the part of Members to agree to the delay of commencement until 2006. I am asking them now to go the extra mile. Whether they do so or not is in their hands. It is Members of this House who will vote on the two motions in lieu; I simply seek to persuade them to consider the 2007 option.

My proposal for a delay until July 2007 would indeed be a compromise between the Lords' proposal for 1 December 2007 and the House's earlier proposal for 31 July 2006. Hon. Members will know that my hon. Friend the Member for The Wrekin (Peter Bradley) has tabled an amendment to reinstate the 31 July 2006 commencement date, which gives my hon. Friend the Member for Walsall, North (David Winnick) an opportunity to vote in the way in which he has suggested. I do not feel passionately about the choice between the two dates, but it is important for us to demonstrate—as my hon. Friend the Member for Walsall, North did when he agreed to 2006 on the last occasion—that this House is being reasonable, as well as insisting on the Bill being in the form for which this House has voted on a number of occasions.

2 pm

Rob Marris (Wolverhampton, South-West) (Lab): When the original Alun Michael Bill, as it came to be called, was recommitted to the Standing Committee on which I sat, I tabled 45 amendments, which the Government adopted, to make it a banning Bill. I deliberately did not table amendments to change the three-month implementation period, and nor did the Government. Will my right hon. Friend explain why he appears to have changed his position, because he could have tabled an amendment in Standing Committee to change the three-month period? He did not do so, but he now seeks July 2007.

Alun Michael: When the Bill came before the House last year and it became clear that it could be reintroduced and have the Parliament Act applied to it, I thought that common sense would prevail and that people involved with hunting would say, "Well, if the elected House of Commons in the Parliament of this country is intent on taking that decision, we had better start thinking about it." However, those who oppose a ban on hunting have encouraged their followers to believe that legislation will not be introduced. Ordinary people, who have perhaps been misled by their leadership, should be given time in order to prepare for a ban, deal with animal welfare considerations and change the activities and businesses in which they are involved. That is the common-sense and generous way in which to approach the Bill, without changing the nature of the legislation, on which this House has agreed on more than one occasion.

Clare Short (Birmingham, Ladywood) (Lab): Many of us think that the constant dithering over the Bill brings our political processes into disrepute. We thought that we had reached an agreement with the Government on 2006 to settle the matter. Will the Minister explain what could possibly be gained by extending the implementation date to 2007?

Alun Michael: If my right hon. Friend had listened to my response to my hon. Friend the Member for Wolverhampton, South-West (Rob Marris), the answer would be clear: it is because the people involved in hunting are unwilling to accept that the Bill will completely change their situation and make illegal some of the activities in which they participate. I want law-abiding people to obey the law, and I hope that they will do so. The change in the implementation date will make it more possible for them to obey the law, without giving rise to employment problems or animal welfare difficulties, concerning, for instance, the disposal of packs of dogs. That is a perfectly reasonable way in which to proceed. I say to my right hon. Friend that being reasonable, which is all that I seek, cannot bring this House into disrepute. I ask the House to insist, as it has done, on the nature of the legislation that it passes, but to do so with a reasonable implementation date.

Mr. Douglas Hogg (Sleaford and North Hykeham) (Con): The Minister said that the countryside has been misled. Is not the truth that the countryside has been misled by the honeyed words from No. 10 to the effect that a ban would not be implemented?

Alun Michael: The right hon. and learned Gentleman is totally wrong, as he very often is. I did not say that the countryside has been misled; I said that those who are active in hunting have been misled by their leaders into thinking that this House would not act. My right hon. Friend the Prime Minister has acted with integrity throughout: he made it clear that he wanted to see a compromise and that he supported the Bill in the form in which I brought it to the House. He also made it clear that he respected the fact that for many years this has been a free vote issue for hon. Members—I thought that it was a free vote issue for hon. Members on both sides of this House. That is acting with integrity, and it does the right hon. and learned Gentleman no credit to cast doubt on that.

Mr. Patrick Hall (Bedford) (Lab): I agree with my right hon. Friend on the need to go the extra mile, but will he accept that many Labour Members think that we went that extra mile with the July 2006 date? If he does not feel strongly about 2006 or 2007, will he assist other hon. Members and me by explaining why he has introduced the 2007 implementation date?

Alun Michael: Essentially, the 2007 date gives the House the option of being reasonable, as we were on the last occasion when we proposed 2006. It also gives the House the option to go the extra mile. It is between the date that we proposed and the date agreed in another place. Either 2006 or 2007 would be reasonable, but 2007 would go the extra mile.

Sir Gerald Kaufman (Manchester, Gorton) (Lab): Will my right hon. Friend clarify this point? Two months ago, he moved that the implementation date be postponed to 31 July 2006, and the House of Commons voted in favour of that. Now, he says that he wants to be reasonable by postponing the implementation date for a further year. What has happened between his moving that motion two months ago and today to make 2007 more reasonable than 2006?

Alun Michael: First, if one of the choices is reasonable, the other choice is even more reasonable. Secondly, on what has changed, we have continued to have discussions and arguments in the public domain in seeking to demonstrate that this House is being reasonable, and I have therefore put the two options before the House. I am convinced that the House will be reasonable and that one option is more reasonable than the other.

Andrew George (St. Ives) (LD): Will the Minister clarify whether he accepts the fact that, if the Bill were introduced within three months, it would have a substantial impact on rural areas? If either of the two amendments were defeated in the Lords, is the Minister saying that he accepts in principle that the Bill would have a substantial effect and that he would introduce measures to ameliorate the effect on hunts and on the rural economy?

Alun Michael: No. As I have explained to the hon. Gentleman before, the effect on the rural economy—this is demonstrated in the Burns report—will be small, but the Bill will affect some individuals. Although it is not wrong to impose a three-month limit, which raises no serious issues, delaying implementation until July 2006 would provide a reasonable and generous opportunity to prepare for the application of the legislation, and a delay until 2007 would provide an even greater and more generous opportunity. That is the only difference.

Mr. Elfyn Llwyd (Meirionnydd Nant Conwy) (PC): Earlier this week, it was trailed that some elements within the Government are concerned about the possibility of a judicial review of the procedure. The right hon. Gentleman may know that the main criterion is to have acted reasonably—this afternoon, he has repeated the word "reasonable" 25 times.

Alun Michael: That is because I am being reasonable, and I am glad that the hon. Gentleman has noticed. I have received legal advice, and we are content that the Bill and the process will not lead to difficulties of the sort that, for instance, an attempt at judicial review might bring about. It is, of course, open to organisations to seek judicial review—I understand that the Countryside Alliance has sought to do so—to give notice and to take action in the courts, if they wish to do so. However, my legal advice is clear.

Sir Nicholas Winterton (Macclesfield) (Con): The Minister is not being unreasonable with the House this afternoon, even to those of us who fundamentally disagree with the Bill and who are 100 per cent. in support of hunting. He is advancing a number of propositions, but is he prepared to advocate from the Government Front Bench that Labour Members should vote for 31 July 2007?—*[Interruption.]* I am not saying that he is mandating Government Members; I am suggesting that he might advocate that they vote for the amendment that would enable the country as a whole to take a decision on this issue, because between now and then there will be a general election, which can perhaps finalise the matter.

Alun Michael: I am grateful to the hon. Gentleman for his comments and for his recognition that I am trying to be reasonable. I am glad that he spotted that each individual Member on this side of the House will make up their own mind and vote as they see fit. I have tabled the motion on 2007 and will invite my right hon. and hon. Friends to join me in the Lobby to vote for it. I make it clear—because at that point only motions moved by a Minister will be considered—that I intend, should the 2007 date be defeated, to move the second motion to give the House an opportunity to vote on the date of 2006. I am grateful for the opportunity to clarify that.

Mr. David Clelland (Tyne Bridge) (Lab): On the question of possible challenges in court to the Bill once it is enacted, what legal advice has my right hon. Friend received as to whether such challenges would be more or less likely to succeed if the Bill were to be further complicated by amendments at this late stage?

Alun Michael: I am advised that the Bill is sound and secure with or without any such changes. My hon. Friend can have full confidence in that.

Mr. George Osborne (Tatton) (Con): Given that it is a free vote, will the Minister tell the House how the Prime Minister is likely to vote?

Alun Michael: Given that it is a free vote, it is up to the Prime Minister just as it is up to the hon. Gentleman. The way in which all right hon. and hon. Members vote, or do not vote, will be clear when the record of the Division is published.

David Taylor (North-West Leicestershire) (Lab/Co-op): Will my right hon. Friend confirm that, despite the hyperventilation of some sections of the media, the latest date for a general election is late June 2006? In contradistinction to the hon. Member for Macclesfield (Sir Nicholas Winterton), I suggest to my right hon. Friend that the rationale for his motion might be that to add one further year beyond that latest date for the next election would allow for the election of a more hung Parliament and delay the issue into the middle distance.

Alun Michael: My hon. Friend has made his point. I make proposals based on the practicalities of animal welfare and issues of that sort.

Mr. Tony Banks (West Ham) (Lab): My hon. Friends and I trust my right hon. Friend, but it is what might happen afterwards that really concerns us. If both the amendments on the implementation date fall, he will then move the Bill as it left this place before. In those circumstances, would not it be much clearer were the Government to say—perhaps he can say now—that during the new Session of Parliament a one-clause Bill will be introduced with an implementation date of 2006, so that there is no dubiety, as they say in the trade union movement?

Alun Michael: I am not prepared to do that. It is an option for the Government to introduce a one-clause Bill to delay implementation, but that would have two disadvantages. First, it would be some time later, and part-way through the period to February 2005, and therefore would not provide immediate clarity on the date of commencement. Secondly, it would mean this House and another place spending more time debating this issue, on which plenty of time has been spent over many years. It would be better for us to agree today a motion proposing an amendment in lieu and to invite another place to agree with it, and then to have drawn a line very clearly under the whole issue and to have given a very clear date of commencement for the legislation.

The important point is to put the issue back to the Lords to ask them to think again. Do they want the hunting ban to start this February or at whatever later date this House suggests? They will have a straight choice, and we should leave it to them. They claim to defend the interests of people and animals involved in hunting—I refer of course not to the whole House but to those who support hunting. If they want the ban to start sooner, so be it.

In asking the House to support the motion, I hope that it will respond in the spirit in which Members have questioned me today, and send to the House of Lords a reasonable proposition, as well as the Bill in the form on which this House has already agreed.

2.15 pm

Mr. Speaker: Before I call the hon. Member for North Wiltshire (Mr. Gray) to move his manuscript amendment, I make it clear that the debate will also cover motion b, in the name of the hon. Member for The Wrekin (Peter Bradley).

Mr. James Gray (North Wiltshire) (Con): I beg to move manuscript amendment No. 1,

"leave out from '52C' to end."

Before I speak to the amendment and to the amendments proposed by the other place, I should explain why my name appears on the amendment with what might reasonably be described as a fairly unholy alliance of individuals. Our reason for tabling it is simple and principled—namely, because the way in which the Minister tabled his motion would have required us either to vote against the amendments tabled by the other place in order to secure his timing proposals, or to vote against his timing proposals. That is wrong. It is reasonable that we in this place should speak and vote in support of amendments proposed to us by our noble Friends, and that we subsequently have the opportunity to support what the Minister has proposed with regard to timing. It is unreasonable, however, to place us in the position of being unable to speak in favour of the amendments from the other place in order to try to secure the delay that the Minister proposes. We are therefore ready to consider the entire question of the Minister's motion and to seek to strike down the part of it that is to do with the timing of an outright ban.

Today's debate is not only about implementation dates, which the Minister largely focused on—it is about all the proposals from the House of Lords. I shall try to address several of those as well as the very important issue of when the Bill and the ban should be implemented.

Before I do so, I should say that this debate has all the feelings of the final act of a sombre and melancholy tragic drama. For me, it is the end of a kind of parliamentary nightmare—a ghastly rural soap opera in which ignorant urban interests triumph over the countryside. For a few moments last night, I was glad that this would be the last time that I rose at this Dispatch Box to discuss hunting—*[Interruption.]*

Mr. Speaker: Order. There is far too much noise in the Chamber; it is unfair to the hon. Gentleman.

Mr. Gray: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

It then occurred to me that although this is the last time that I will rise at this Dispatch Box to discuss hunting, I can look forward to the opportunity this time next year of rising at the Government Dispatch Box as the Minister responsible for proposing the repeal of this disgraceful, prejudiced and ignorant little Bill.

Last night, when she moved the amendments in the other place, Baroness Mallalieu, who is, among other things, president of the Countryside Alliance—I pay tribute to her and to the Countryside Alliance for the wonderful work they have done over many years in seeking to save the liberties of the countryside—said that this is a "rank bad" Bill. That sums up the Bill: it is indeed "rank bad". She continued:

"Its foundations are naked prejudice and wilful ignorance. It is without rationality, without principle, and it runs counter to all the evidence gathered . . . at the Government's own inquiries."

Dr. Desmond Turner (Brighton, Kemptown) (Lab): Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

Mr. Gray: I shall get into my stride and then I shall happily do so.

Baroness Mallalieu said that the Bill was a badly drafted measure, which

"allows terrier work . . . in order to protect a pheasant or a partridge but not to protect a lamb or a curlew, which allows the hunting of rats but not mice, rabbits but not hares; which destroys jobs . . . homes . . . and does so without compensation".—[*Official Report, House of Lords*, 17 November 2004; Vol. 666, c. 1556.]

The noble Lady, a Labour peer, puts her finger on the spot. It is a "rank bad" Bill, which her amendments would do much to improve.

The House made clear its views on licensing versus banning less than 48 hours ago. I was delighted to go through the Lobby with the Prime Minister, the Foreign Secretary, the Home Secretary, the Minister for Rural Affairs and Environmental Quality and his boss, the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs to vote for the Lords proposals on licensing, although we ultimately lost the vote. It is odd that we are considering using the Parliament Act to drive through a Bill against which the Prime Minister voted only two days ago. That is a constitutional peculiarity to which I shall shortly revert.

Sir Robert Smith (West Aberdeenshire and Kincardine) (LD): The hon. Gentleman believes that he may not discuss hunting again for some time but, depending on the outcome of votes today, the Minister has already contemplated a one-line Bill. Given the flaws that the hon. Gentleman has already identified, if the Government use the Parliament Act to force through the Bill without accepting the registration scheme, is not there every chance that they will have to revert quickly to the matter to make the measure workable?

Mr. Gray: I fear that the hon. Gentleman is right. The Bill is badly drafted and even if, like so many Labour Members, one were committed to abolishing hunting, the measure is not the way to do it. It will not work; it will prove impossible to police; its definitions are difficult to understand—it is extraordinarily badly drafted. I therefore believe that we shall have to revert to it.

Dr. Turner *rose—*

Sir Gerald Kaufman *rose—*

Mr. Gray: I shall give way to the hon. Member for Brighton, Kemptown (Dr. Turner) and subsequently to the right hon. Member for Manchester, Gorton (Sir Gerald Kaufman), who was so complimentary to me yesterday when we met in the Lobby.

Dr. Turner: Will the hon. Gentleman enlighten me? Perhaps I am being even thicker than usual, but the effect of the manuscript amendment would simply be to disagree with the Lords. We would not change one jot or comma of the Bill. If the amendment were accepted, we would go straight to the point at which the Parliament Act would be invoked. Am I right?

Mr. Gray: I claim no great expertise in some of the more abstruse parts of parliamentary procedure, but my understanding is that the hon. Gentleman is wrong. The purpose of the manuscript amendment is to seek an opportunity to vote in favour of the other place's amendments and subsequently to vote for or against—we will have to decide—the Minister's proposal. The precise consequences will become clear later.

Mr. David Cameron (Witney) (Con): Has my hon. Friend read any legal advice about whether the Bill is more likely to be effectively challenged if the delay is three months, 18 months or three years?

Mr. Gray: I am grateful for that interesting intervention. The answer is a straightforward no. I have seen no legal advice and have no idea whether challenges are more likely if the delay is three months, 18 months or any other time. I suspect that, if the Bill is bad for human rights reasons or if the Government make bad use of the Parliament Act—several legal challenges are pending on that—the courts will find that to be the case, so it is not for us to prejudge the outcome. I fear that I cannot help my hon. Friend.

Sir Gerald Kaufman *rose—*

Mr. Gray: Before I give way to the right hon. Gentleman, I must tell hon. Members that, only yesterday, we met in the Lobby and he was extraordinarily complimentary, not necessarily about what I was saying but at least about the way I was saying it. I am most grateful for that.

Sir Gerald Kaufman: I stand by that. I respect and admire the hon. Gentleman's parliamentary performances, even if I disagree with him. Through some recondite parliamentary procedure, which I do not understand despite all my years in the House, my name has appeared on the amendment. I make it absolutely clear that I shall not vote for the amendment and I shall advise my hon. Friends not to do so.

Mr. Gray: I am most grateful for that clarification. I am relieved that my name and the right hon. Gentleman's do not appear on the same proposal. I am sure that the House will note the great relief all round.

Tom Levitt (High Peak) (Lab): As the *Official Report* will show, the hon. Gentleman told the House a few moments ago that the Prime Minister voted against the Bill. That is not true. I hope that the hon. Gentleman will put the record straight. Like everybody who voted for amendments to the Bill, the Prime Minister did so in the sincere belief that they would improve it. I happen to disagree, but I stress that nobody voted against the Bill the other day when we discussed only amendments.

Mr. Gray: My instinct is to say that anyone who votes for an amendment that fundamentally changes the Bill thereby votes against the measure. If the proposal of the hon. Member for Ogmore (Huw Irranca-Davies) had been accepted on Tuesday, a licensing regime would have been introduced. It seems straightforward to me that the Prime Minister effectively said that he did not want a ban. Even if that were not the effect of his vote on Tuesday, it reflects his comments in press conferences and what his official spokesman has been authorised to say on countless occasions. It is plain that the Home Secretary, the Foreign Secretary, the Prime Minister and others oppose a ban and would like a middle way. Unfortunately, they have not achieved their aim because of the actions of Back Benchers. None the less, that was their view.

Sir Patrick Cormack (South Staffordshire) (Con): Is not the simple truth that the Prime Minister, with the support of many Cabinet colleagues and others, was trying to restore the measure to its original form, which the Minister introduced? He is nodding assent.

Mr. Gray: My hon. Friend makes a good point, which speaks for itself.

Mr. Hogg: Does my hon. Friend agree that we should be careful not to describe the amendment that the hon. Member for Ogmore (Huw Irranca-Davies) tabled as a middle way or a compromise? It proposed a ban through a tight licensing regime.

Mr. Gray: My right hon. and learned Friend is right.

Mr. Peter Atkinson (Hexham) (Con): My hon. Friend mentioned a potential challenge. The Joint Committee suggested that a three-month ban was unreasonable and potentially open to challenge under the Human Rights Act 1998. Has he noticed that coursing is not included in both extensions that the Minister proposes? If something is unreasonable for hunting, why is it not unreasonable for coursing?

Mr. Gray: My hon. Friend makes a good point about the Joint Committee, which has tentatively concluded that a measure that included a three-month ban would not comply with the Human Rights Act 1998. That will be tested in the courts. He also makes a good point about hare coursing, which is, bizarrely, singled out for an immediate ban. Hare coursing kills fewer hares than shooting or hare hunting, which would be allowed. It would be delayed for three years if the Minister's amendment were passed. However, hare coursing, which aims not to kill hares, would be banned in three months.

Lembit Öpik: On legal challenge—*[Interruption.]*

Mr. Speaker: Order. There are still too many conversations. *[Interruption.]* Order. Clare Short, too many conversations are happening. Perhaps they can be conducted elsewhere and not in the Chamber.

Lembit Öpik: In terms of legal challenge, does the hon. Member for North Wiltshire (Mr. Gray) accept that the biggest problem is the way in which the Bill is constructed? For example, if a member of the Royal Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals found a dead mouse in someone's back yard and reported them to the police, it would have to be proved that the cat had killed the mouse, because if the dog was found guilty that person could go to prison.

2.30 pm

Mr. Gray: The hon. Gentleman makes a good but abstruse point. Perhaps we should move on.

I want to focus particularly on the question of when and why the Bill should be implemented—either immediately, or effectively immediately, within three months; within 18 months, as the Minister's Parliamentary Private Secretary, the hon. Member for The Wrekin (Peter Bradley), has suggested; or within two and three quarter years, which the Minister himself seems to be suggesting.

I believe that when the Government originally proposed 18 months it was not for animal welfare reasons; it had about it the stench of political expediency. They wanted to allow the ban to come into force after the general election and for hunting not to become an issue in that general election. In that context, Mr. Speaker, I have to tell you that a number of my right hon. and hon. Friends, and indeed people in the countryside, are, for that very reason, perfectly content with an immediate ban.

A significant number of people who believe in hunting want an immediate ban so as to focus attention on opposition to the Government in the run-up to the general election. I have not gone along with that view, as it seems to me that there are some extraordinarily important animal welfare reasons for seeking to delay the Bill's implementation. This is all to do with animal welfare; it should not be to do with the election, political expediency or arguments. It should be to do with the best way of implementing what is to Conservative Members an obnoxious move.

That is why we are quite content to accept what the Lords propose—namely, a three-year delay. If we were given the opportunity to vote on it, we would doubtless at least consider what the Minister proposes, which is a delay of two and three quarter years. That is reasonably sensible.

It might be worth touching on why I believe that to be the case, why I believe that 18 months is no good at all and why three months is even less good. First, the Minister has said that the reason for the delay is to assist with re-homing hounds, as he calls it. The notion of re-homing hounds is absurd. Anyone who has ever been to a hunt kennels knows that the notion of removing any one of 100 dogs, some of which are as large as this Table and which have been living together for years—indeed, they may have been bred for generations for the purpose of hunting—and re-homing it in the front room of someone's bungalow is a great deal less—

Mark Tami (Alyn and Deeside) (Lab): Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

Mr. Gray: I hope that the hon. Gentleman will forgive me for not giving way. I am just getting into my stride and we do not have much time.

The notion of re-homing hounds is extraordinarily absurd. We need to find a way to reuse the hounds. The animal welfare committee in this House proposed that, for example, they might be exported to take part in hunting overseas. That is an absurd suggestion.

Several hon. Members *rose*—

Mr. Gray: The hon. Member for Brigg and Goole (Mr. Cawsey) was on the animal welfare committee and I happily give way to him.

Mr. Ian Cawsey (Brigg and Goole) (Lab): May I offer clarification to the House? The report that the hon. Gentleman is referring to, which looked into the welfare implications for hunting dogs, was not from a committee of the Associate Parliamentary Group for Animal Welfare. The group commissioned the report, but the people on the committee were from the Kennel Club, the Dogs Trust and the RSPCA, as well as a veterinary surgeon from the university of Bristol, who specialises in dog behaviour. We did not agree with the idea of dogs being re-homed abroad—we had grave reservations about it. We simply said that when a ban was put in place in Scotland that is what some hunts did.

Mr. Gray: I am happy to accept the hon. Gentleman's correction on that point. That was a very select little committee and the report it produced has been rubbished, to use that common new Labour word, by a variety of learned people, including the Royal College of Veterinary Surgeons.

The truth of the matter is that if hunting were banned within three months there would be a significant problem over what to do with hounds. I think everybody agrees with that.

Mark Tami: Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

Mr. Gray: No, I will not. The problem will not only be with hounds. I have here an interesting letter that the British Horse Society addressed to the Minister this week on the subject of the consequences for horses as well as hounds. Incidentally, the person who wrote the letter, Mr. Graham Cory, was until recently the Minister's horse tsar in the Department before becoming chief executive of the society.

Mr. Geoffrey Clifton-Brown (Cotswold) (Con): This is a question not only of animal welfare, but of those who will lose their job, livelihood and income for feeding their family, so will my hon. Friend press the Minister for some form of compensation package for such people in my constituency and elsewhere?

Mr. Gray: My hon. Friend makes an extremely good point, which I shall discuss in a moment.

On the subject of horses, the British Horse Society makes it plain that an immediate or early ban on hunting will have significant consequences for horses. Mr. Cory says:

> "Horses bred mainly or solely for hunting are not pets . . . By temperament and conformation, these are strong and vigorous animals . . . To expect these hunting horses to thrive in roles for which they are not suited by breeding would be as unrealistic as to expect trained sheepdogs to thrive as family pets . . . a sudden influx into the market of thousands of redundant hunters would be beyond the capacity of equine welfare organisations to manage. Some will undoubtedly be slaughtered, others will be forced into roles for which they are wholly unsuited."

The British Horse Society goes to great lengths to make it absolutely plain that there would be significant animal welfare consequences for horses, as well as for hounds, were there to be an immediate ban.

Several hon. Members *rose—*

Mr. Gray: The hon. Member for West Ham (Mr. Banks) has already contributed, so I give way to the hon. Member for Pendle (Mr. Prentice), who has not.

Mr. Gordon Prentice (Pendle) (Lab): There is no reason for any hound to be put down. The hunts can continue as drag hunts.

Mr. Gray: I am most grateful to the hon. Gentleman for raising that point. We could all quote Lord Burns back and forth at each other, but the interesting thing is that he came to only one absolutely clear, absolutely plain and totally agreed conclusion, which is that by no stretch of anybody's imagination could drag hunting replicate hunting at the moment. That is a unanimous opinion in respect of the notion that those horses and hounds could be used for drag hunting.

There is a more interesting point here, none the less. Let us imagine that those hounds were used for drag hunting and that in the course of their drag hunting day they killed a fox accidentally—without that being the intention. Would they be guilty of an offence or not? The Bill does not make that plain. That is one aspect where the legislation is badly drafted. However—

Several hon. Members *rose—*

Mr. Gray: If hon. Members will forgive me, we are not re-entering a substantive discussion on the Bill. We are discussing when the Bill should be implemented.

Mr. Banks *rose—*

Mr. Gray: That is what I want to focus on, which is why I do not intend to take an excessive number of interventions from those whose opinions I am well aware of, having been involved in such discussions a number of times.

Mr. Banks *rose—*

Mr. Speaker: Order. The hon. Gentleman is not giving way. He has made that very clear indeed.

Mr. Gray: Indeed, Mr. Speaker, I have given way reasonably generously. With only 10 minutes left, I cannot accept too many other interventions, although I may do so from time to time.

If today, despite everything, the House decides to use the Parliament Act to force through this bad and illegitimate law, it will do so against the wish of the Prime Minister and the wish of the Home Secretary, who will have to police it. They both voted against it only 48 hours ago. The House will also do so against the wish of the Lord Chancellor, who voted for the Lords amendments that we are considering today.

Kate Hoey: Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

Mr. Gray: In a moment, of course I will.

There can be no possible parliamentary precedent for the use of that ultimate nuclear procedural device, the Parliament Act, to force through a Bill that the leaders of the Government and holders of the great offices of state, who will be required to implement it, specifically and repeatedly voted against. The Parliament Act 1949 will itself be subject to judicial review in the months ahead, as will this most bizarre and unprecedented use of it.

Kate Hoey: Does the hon. Gentleman agree that given the unprecedented nature of the use of the Parliament Act—the majority of Parliament as a whole has voted not to ban hunting in this way—there should be a vote of this House to make Members formally agree to Mr. Speaker using that Act?

Mr. Gray: I agree, which is why I put my name to the motion that the hon. Lady tabled to that effect. We in this House should be asked to vote on whether to use the Parliament Act, although I fear our procedures do not permit that. No doubt when the use of the Parliament Act is considered in the courts, the very point that she makes will be part of that consideration.

The Parliament Act challenge and the Human Rights Act challenge face us in the courts, which is where the battle will move to, assuming that the Parliament Act is used to push the Bill through this afternoon. The battle will be joined in the streets and in the countryside too. Mass protests, civil disobedience within the law and political campaigning of every kind will be unleashed. I appeal to the supporters of hunting and of freedom to remain within the law at all times, to abhor violence or intimidation of any kind, and to seek to avoid inconveniencing the general public, most of whom support our cry for freedom. They should focus their efforts on those people who are responsible for this illiberal law—namely, Labour Ministers and MPs, especially in the run-up to the general election. A Conservative Government will introduce an early Bill to repeal this ban, which makes our task at the general election clearer than ever, both nationally and in Labour and Liberal marginal seats, whose Members should watch out.

If the House decides to use the Parliament Act to force through this disgraceful and illiberal Bill, especially if we decide that it should commence in three months' time, we will send a clear message to lovers of hunting, lovers of shooting and fishing—which, without doubt, will be next—lovers of the countryside, and perhaps above all, lovers of our ancient freedoms that we care more about prejudiced and ignorant political correctness than about animal welfare. There will also be a hidden message to the countryside, which reads: "Cry havoc, and let loose the dogs of war."

Peter Bradley (The Wrekin) (Lab): I beg to move the amendment in my name. I must be brief. I no more wish to prolong the debate than I wish unduly to prolong hunting—

Mr. Beith: On a point of order, Mr. Speaker. Is it possible for the House to have two amendments before it, both moved at the same time?

Mr. Speaker: This is an amendment to a motion, and it is perfectly in order. The right hon. Gentleman can take my word for it.

Peter Bradley: With respect to you, Mr. Speaker, I should point out that it is a Wrekin amendment and not a wrecking amendment. It is characteristic of my right hon. Friend the Minister for Rural Affairs and Local Environmental Quality that he should want to go the extra mile, or, in this case, an extra year. He knows that I, as his Parliamentary Private Secretary, am always right behind him, even if I will not go the extra mile myself this afternoon.

My right hon. Friend has sought to identify common ground with the hunting fraternity and the House of Lords. It is doubtful, however, whether there is a piece of common ground big enough on which to pitch a tent that accommodates all of us. That is why he says that while one amendment before the House is reasonable, the other is more reasonable. It is up to the House, I suggest, to decide which is the more reasonable.

Mr. Beith: On a point of order, Mr. Speaker. The amendment to which the hon. Gentleman has referred can only be voted on if it is moved by a Minister of the Crown. He has now moved it, so it cannot be moved by a Minister of the Crown.

Mr. Speaker: Order. For the sake of clarity, the hon. Member for The Wrekin (Peter Bradley) is actually speaking to his amendment. *[Interruption.]* Order. Many are the times that I have heard hon. Members say that they are moving an amendment when they are not doing so. What a Member says and what he gets are two different things. I am trying to tell the right hon. Member for Berwick-upon-Tweed (Mr. Beith) that although the hon. Member for The Wrekin may have said that he was moving his amendment, he is speaking to it. The right hon. Gentleman's latter point is correct; at the end, when the shutter comes down, only a Minister can move such an amendment.

Mr. Beith: I distinctly heard the hon. Gentleman move the amendment, and I am sure that the record will show that—

Mr. Speaker: Order. I have distinctly heard other hon. Gentlemen say that they are moving an amendment when they are not really doing so; they are merely debating it. I will clarify the matter if it keeps the right hon. Gentleman happy; the hon. Gentleman is not moving his amendment, but speaking to it.

Peter Bradley: As the House can tell, I am not moving, but I am speaking. *[Laughter.]* I am doing so because I want the House to have the opportunity to choose which of the motions on the Order Paper is the most reasonable. I believe that delay until 2006 is reasonable and sensible because it gives hunts the opportunity to adopt drag hunting to save the jobs, the dogs—and the fox for that matter—the fallen stock collection service to farmers and the way of life in which they believe, and will provide opportunities for riders who currently would like to ride across the country but who will not chase a fox.

2.45 pm

Mr. Michael Foster (Worcester) (Lab): Will my hon. Friend give way?

Peter Bradley: In a moment. The delay gives hunters the opportunity to make this an election issue—none of us should be frightened of that—and deprives them of any vestige of an excuse to shoot their dogs or hounds or to support unlawful protest in the countryside.

Mr. Michael Foster: I am grateful to my hon. Friend for speaking so clearly to the amendment. I intend to vote against amendment a, which is in the Minister's name, and for his amendment b. Does he believe that the vast majority of people in this country will understand the reasonableness of our actions when following his lead on this matter?

Peter Bradley: I am grateful to my hon. Friend, whose support is valuable given his reputation on this issue. He is absolutely right; there can be no reason for anyone in the country to believe that the House is acting unreasonably if we provide an 18-month delay to allow hunts to make their arrangements and to change to drag hunting if that is what they choose. What would be unreasonable is for the House of Lords to reject the motion. It would be perverse indeed if those who claimed to support hunting were those who put the last nail in its coffin.

Not many Members have remarked on it but, last Tuesday, those Opposition Members who support hunting voted for a Bill that they voted against on Second Reading just a couple of years ago. I suggest that the confusion is theirs, not ours. We want a ban, but we want it introduced in an orderly fashion and in a reasonable way. I therefore hope that colleagues on both sides of the House will support the motion to bring in a ban on 31 July 2006.

Andrew George *rose—*

Mr. Gerry Steinberg (City of Durham) (Lab): On a point of order, Mr. Speaker.

Mr. Speaker: Order. Time is now up.

It being one hour after the commencement of proceedings on the motion, MR. SPEAKER *put the Question already proposed from the Chair, pursuant to Order [this day].*

The House proceeded to a Division,

Mr. Steinberg: On a point of order, Mr. Speaker. A number of hon. Members are confused about the first vote. What would happen if the amendment in the name of the Opposition spokesman, on which we are now voting, gains a majority? Would there be a further vote, or would the other amendments fall?

Mr. Speaker: We would then vote on the Minister's motion, as amended, because the amendment being voted on is an amendment to the main motion.

The House having divided: Ayes 146, Noes 286.

Division No. 338] **[2:47 pm**

AYES

Arbuthnot, rh James
Atkinson, Peter *(Hexham)*
Bacon, Richard
Baldry, Tony
Barker, Gregory
Beggs, Roy *(E Antrim)*
Beith, rh A. J.
Bellingham, Henry
Bercow, John
Beresford, Sir Paul
Blunt, Crispin
Boswell, Tim
Bottomley, Peter *(Worthing W)*
Breed, Colin
Browning, Mrs Angela
Bruce, Malcolm
Burnside, David
Burt, Alistair
Cameron, David
Campbell, rh Sir Menzies *(NE Fife)*
Cash, William
Chapman, Sir Sydney *(Chipping Barnet)*
Chope, Christopher
Clappison, James
Clarke, rh Kenneth *(Rushcliffe)*
Clifton-Brown, Geoffrey
Collins, Tim
Conway, Derek
Cormack, Sir Patrick
Curry, rh David
Dismore, Andrew
Djanogly, Jonathan
Dorrell, rh Stephen
Doughty, Sue
Duncan, Alan *(Rutland)*
Duncan Smith, rh Iain
Fabricant, Michael
Fallon, Michael
Field, rh Frank *(Birkenhead)*
Field, Mark *(Cities of London & Westminster)*
Fisher, Mark
Flight, Howard
Flook, Adrian
Forth, rh Eric
Francois, Mark
Gale, Roger *(N Thanet)*
Gibb, Nick *(Bognor Regis)*
Gillan, Mrs Cheryl
Goodman, Paul
Gray, James *(N Wilts)*
Grayling, Chris
Green, Damian *(Ashford)*
Green, Matthew *(Ludlow)*
Greenway, John
Grievs, Dominic
Gummer, rh John
Hague, rh William
Hammond, Philip
Harris, Dr. Evan *(Oxford W & Abingdon)*
Harvey, Nick
Hawkins, Nick
Hayes, John *(S Holland)*
Heald, Oliver
Heath, David
Hendry, Charles
Hoban, Mark *(Fareham)*
Hoey, Kate *(Vauxhall)*
Hogg, rh Douglas
Horam, John *(Orpington)*
Hughes, Simon *(Southwark N)*
Jack, rh Michael
Jackson, Robert *(Wantage)*
Jenkin, Bernard
Johnson, Boris *(Henley)*
Key, Robert *(Salisbury)*
Kirkwood, Sir Archy
Knight, rh Greg *(E Yorkshire)*
Laing, Mrs Eleanor
Lait, Mrs Jacqui
Lamb, Norman
Lansley, Andrew
Leigh, Edward
Letwin, rh Oliver
Liddell-Grainger, Ian
Lidington, David
Lilley, rh Peter
Llwyd, Elfyn
Luff, Peter *(M-Worcs)*
McIntosh, Miss Anne
Mackay, rh Andrew
Maclean, rh David
McLoughlin, Patrick
Malins, Humfrey
Maples, John
Marris, Rob *(Wolverh'ton SW)*
Mates, Michael
May, Mrs Theresa
Mercer, Patrick
Mitchell, Andrew *(Sutton Coldfield)*
Moore, Michael
Moss, Malcolm
Murrison, Dr. Andrew
O'Brien, Stephen *(Eddisbury)*
Öpik, Lembit
Osborne, George *(Tatton)*
Paice, James
Paterson, Owen
Pickles, Eric
Price, Adam *(E Carmarthen & Dinefwr)*
Prisk, Mark *(Hertford)*
Redwood, rh John
Robertson, Hugh *(Faversham & M-Kent)*
Rosindell, Andrew
Ruffley, David
Selous, Andrew
Sheerman, Barry
Shephard, rh Mrs Gillian
Simmonds, Mark
Smith, Sir Robert *(W Ab'd'ns & Kincardine)*
Spicer, Sir Michael
Spink, Bob *(Castle Point)*
Spring, Richard
Steen, Anthony
Streeter, Gary
Swire, Hugo *(E Devon)*
Syms, Robert
Taylor, Ian *(Esher)*
Taylor, Dr. Richard *(Wyre F)*
Taylor, Sir Teddy
Thomas, Simon *(Ceredigion)*
Tredinnick, David
Trend, Michael
Turner, Andrew *(Isle of Wight)*
Tyler, Paul *(N Cornwall)*
Tyrie, Andrew
Waterson, Nigel
Watkinson, Angela
Whittingdale, John
Wiggin, Bill
Williams, Roger *(Brecon)*
Wilshire, David
Winterton, Ann *(Congleton)*
Winterton, Sir Nicholas *(Macclesfield)*
Wright, Tony *(Cannock)*
Yeo, Tim *(S Suffolk)*
Young, rh Sir George

Tellers for the Ayes:
Mr. David Heathcoat-Amory
and
Richard Ottaway

NOES

Adams, Irene *(Paisley N)*
Ainger, Nick
Ainsworth, Bob *(Cov'try NE)*
Allan, Richard
Anderson, Janet *(Rossendale & Darwen)*
Armstrong, rh Ms Hilary
Atkins, Charlotte
Bailey, Adrian
Baird, Vera
Baker, Norman
Banks, Tony
Barrett, John
Battle, rh John
Bayley, Hugh
Begg, Miss Anne
Bell, Sir Stuart
Blizzard, Bob
Blunkett, rh David
Boateng, rh Paul
Bradley, rh Keith *(Withington)*
Bradley, Peter *(The Wrekin)*
Brennan, Kevin
Brooke, Mrs Annette L.
Brown, Russell *(Dumfries)*
Bryant, Chris
Buck, Ms Karen
Burgon, Colin
Burnham, Andy
Caborn, rh Richard
Cairns, David
Calton, Mrs Patsy
Campbell, Alan *(Tynemouth)*
Campbell, Mrs Anne *(C'bridge)*
Casale, Roger
Caton, Martin
Cawsey, Ian *(Brigg)*
Challen, Colin
Clapham, Michael
Clark, Mrs Helen *(Peterborough)*
Clarke, rh Tom *(Coatbridge & Chryston)*
Clarke, Tony *(Northampton S)*
Clelland, David
Coaker, Vernon
Coffey, Ms Ann
Cohen, Harry
Colman, Tony
Cooper, Yvette
Corbyn, Jeremy
Cotter, Brian
Cox, Tom *(Tooting)*
Cranston, Ross
Crausby, David
Cruddas, Jon
Cryer, John *(Hornchurch)*
Cunningham, Jim *(Coventry S)*
Cunningham, Tony *(Workington)*
Curtis-Thomas, Mrs Claire
Davey, Valerie *(Bristol W)*
David, Wayne
Davidson, Ian
Davies, rh Denzil *(Llanelli)*
Dawson, Hilton
Dean, Mrs Janet
Denham, rh John
Dhanda, Parmjit
Dobson, rh Frank
Doran, Frank
Dowd, Jim *(Lewisham W)*
Drew, David *(Stroud)*
Drown, Ms Julia
Eagle, Angela *(Wallasey)*
Eagle, Maria *(L'pool Garston)*
Efford, Clive
Ellman, Mrs Louise
Ennis, Jeff *(Barnsley E)*
Etherington, Bill
Farrelly, Paul
Fitzpatrick, Jim
Fitzsimons, Mrs Lorna
Flint, Caroline
Flynn, Paul *(Newport W)*
Foster, rh Derek
Foster, Don *(Bath)*
Foster, Michael *(Worcester)*
Foster, Michael Jabez *(Hastings & Rye)*
Francis, Dr. Hywel
Gale, Roger *(N Thanet)*
Gapes, Mike *(Ilford S)*
George, Andrew *(St. Ives)*
George, rh Bruce *(Walsall S)*
Gidley, Sandra
Gill, Parmjit Singh
Gilroy, Linda
Goggins, Paul
Griffiths, Nigel *(Edinburgh S)*
Griffiths, Win *(Bridgend)*
Grogan, John
Hain, rh Peter
Hall, Mike *(Weaver Vale)*
Hall, Patrick *(Bedford)*
Hamilton, David *(Midlothian)*
Hancock, Mike
Hanson, David
Havard, Dai *(Merthyr Tydfil & Rhymney)*
Healey, John
Henderson, Doug *(Newcastle N)*
Henderson, Ivan *(Harwich)*
Hendrick, Mark
Hepburn, Stephen
Heppell, John
Hesford, Stephen
Hewitt, rh Ms Patricia
Heyes, David
Hodge, Margaret
Holmes, Paul
Hood, Jimmy *(Clydesdale)*
Hopkins, Kelvin
Howarth, rh Alan *(Newport E)*
Howarth, George *(Knowsley N & Sefton E)*
Hughes, Beverley *(Stretford & Urmston)*
Hughes, Kevin *(Doncaster N)*
Hurst, Alan *(Braintree)*

Hutton, rh John
Ingram, rh Adam
Irranca-Davies, Huw
Jackson, Glenda *(Hampstead & Highgate)*
Jackson, Helen *(Hillsborough)*
Jamieson, David
Jenkins, Brian
Johnson, rh Alan *(Hull W)*
Johnson, Miss Melanie *(Welwyn Hatfield)*
Jones, Martyn *(Clwyd S)*
Jowell, rh Tessa
Joyce, Eric *(Falkirk W)*
Kaufman, rh Sir Gerald
Keeble, Ms Sally
Keen, Alan *(Feltham)*
Keen, Ann *(Brentford)*
Kelly, Ruth *(Bolton W)*
Kennedy, rh Charles *(Ross Skye & Inverness)*
Kennedy, Jane *(Wavertree)*
Khabra, Piara S.
Kidney, David
Kilfoyle, Peter
King, Andy *(Rugby)*
Knight, Jim *(S Dorset)*
Laxton, Bob *(Derby N)*
Lazarowicz, Mark
Lepper, David
Leslie, Christopher
Levitt, Tom *(High Peak)*
Lewis, Terry *(Worsley)*
Linton, Martin
Love, Andrew
Luke, Iain *(Dundee E)*
McAvoy, Thomas
McCabe, Stephen
McCafferty, Chris
McDonagh, Siobhain
MacDonald, Calum
McDonnell, John
McFall, rh John
McGuire, Mrs Anne
McIsaac, Shona
McKechin, Ann
McKenna, Rosemary
Mackinlay, Andrew
McNulty, Tony
McWalter, Tony
McWilliam, John
Mahmood, Khalid
Mahon, Mrs Alice
Mallaber, Judy
Mann, John *(Bassetlaw)*
Marsden, Gordon *(Blackpool S)*
Marshall, David *(Glasgow Shettleston)*
Marshall-Andrews, Robert
Martlew, Eric
Meale, Alan *(Mansfield)*
Merron, Gillian
Michael, rh Alun
Miller, Andrew
Moffatt, Laura
Moran, Margaret
Morgan, Julie
Morley, Elliot
Mudie, George
Mullin, Chris
Munn, Ms Meg
Naysmith, Dr. Doug
Norris, Dan *(Wansdyke)*
O'Hara, Edward
Olner, Bill
Organ, Diana

Osborne, Sandra *(Ayr)*
Paisley, Rev. Ian
Palmer, Dr. Nick
Picking, Anne
Pickthall, Colin
Pike, Peter *(Burnley)*
Plaskitt, James
Pollard, Kerry
Pond, Chris *(Gravesham)*
Pope, Greg *(Hyndburn)*
Pound, Stephen
Prentice, Ms Bridget *(Lewisham E)*
Prentice, Gordon *(Pendle)*
Pugh, Dr. John
Purchase, Ken
Purnell, James
Quinn, Lawrie
Rammell, Bill
Rapson, Syd *(Portsmouth N)*
Raynsford, rh Nick
Rendel, David
Roche, Mrs Barbara
Rooney, Terry
Ross, Ernie *(Dundee W)*
Roy, Frank *(Motherwell)*
Ruane, Chris
Ruddock, Joan
Russell, Bob *(Colchester)*
Ryan, Joan *(Enfield N)*
Salter, Martin
Sanders, Adrian
Sarwar, Mohammad
Savidge, Malcolm
Sawford, Phil
Sedgemore, Brian
Shaw, Jonathan
Sheridan, Jim
Shipley, Ms Debra
Short, rh Clare
Singh, Marsha
Skinner, Dennis
Smith, rh Andrew *(Oxford E)*
Smith, Angela *(Basildon)*
Smith, rh Chris *(Islington S & Finsbury)*
Smith, John *(Glamorgan)*
Smith, Llew *(Blaenau Gwent)*
Soley, Clive
Spellar, rh John
Starkey, Dr. Phyllis
Steinberg, Gerry
Stewart, Ian *(Eccles)*
Stinchcombe, Paul
Stoate, Dr. Howard
Stuart, Ms Gisela
Stunell, Andrew
Sutcliffe, Gerry
Tami, Mark *(Alyn)*
Taylor, rh Ann *(Dewsbury)*
Taylor, Dari *(Stockton S)*
Taylor, David *(NW Leics)*
Taylor, Matthew *(Truro)*
Teather, Sarah
Tipping, Paddy
Todd, Mark *(S Derbyshire)*
Touhig, Don *(Islwyn)*
Trickett, Jon
Truswell, Paul
Turner, Dennis *(Wolverh'ton SE)*
Turner, Dr. Desmond *(Brighton Kemptown)*
Turner, Neil *(Wigan)*
Twigg, Derek *(Halton)*
Twigg, Stephen *(Enfield)*
Vis, Dr. Rudi

Walley, Ms Joan
Ward, Claire
Wareing, Robert N.
Watson, Tom
Watts, David
Webb, Steve *(Northavon)*
White, Brian
Whitehead, Dr. Alan
Wicks, Malcolm
Williams, rh Alan *(Swansea W)*
Wills, Michael
Winnick, David

Wood, Mike *(Batley)*
Woolas, Phil
Worthington, Tony
Wright, Anthony D. *(Gt Yarmouth)*
Wright, David *(Telford)*
Wright, Iain *(Hartlepool)*
Younger-Ross, Richard

Tellers for the Noes:
Mr. Jim Murphy and
Paul Clark

Question accordingly negatived.

Main Question put:—

The House divided: Ayes 46, Noes 345.

Division No. 339] [3.03 pm

AYES

Ainger, Nick
Ainsworth, Bob *(Cov'try NE)*
Allan, Richard
Armstrong, rh Ms Hilary
Beckett, rh Margaret
Boateng, rh Paul
Campbell, rh Sir Menzies *(NE Fife)*
Colman, Tony
Cox, Tom *(Tooting)*
Darling, rh Alistair
Drew, David *(Stroud)*
Fisher, Mark
George, Andrew *(St. Ives)*
Grogan, John
Hain, rh Peter
Hanson, David
Harris, Dr. Evan *(Oxford W & Abingdon)*
Heath, David
Hodge, Margaret
Hughes, Simon *(Southwark N)*
Hurst, Alan *(Braintree)*
Hutton, rh John
Ingram, rh Adam
Irranca-Davies, Huw

Kelly, Ruth *(Bolton W)*
Kirkwood, Sir Archy
Laws, David *(Yeovil)*
McAvoy, Thomas
MacDonald, Calum
McGuire, Mrs Anne
Mann, John *(Bassetlaw)*
Michael, rh Alun
Moore, Michael
Purnell, James
Quinn, Lawrie
Sheerman, Barry
Spink, Bob *(Castle Point)*
Stuart, Ms Gisela
Taylor, David *(NW Leics)*
Touhig, Don *(Islwyn)*
Tyler, Paul *(N Cornwall)*
Wills, Michael
Winterton, Sir Nicholas *(Macclesfield)*
Woolas, Phil
Wright, Tony *(Cannock)*
Younger-Ross, Richard

Tellers for the Ayes:
Mr. Jim Murphy and
Paul Clark

NOES

Adams, Irene *(Paisley N)*
Anderson, Janet *(Rossendale & Darwen)*
Arbuthnot, rh James
Atkins, Charlotte
Bacon, Richard
Bailey, Adrian
Baird, Vera
Baker, Norman
Banks, Tony
Barrett, John
Battle, rh John
Bayley, Hugh
Begg, Miss Anne
Beggs, Roy *(E Antrim)*
Beith, rh A. J.
Bell, Sir Stuart
Bercow, John
Beresford, Sir Paul
Blizzard, Bob
Blunt, Crispin
Boswell, Tim
Bottomley, Peter *(Worthing W)*
Bradley, rh Keith *(Withington)*
Bradley, Peter *(The Wrekin)*
Breed, Colin
Brennan, Kevin

Brooke, Mrs Annette L.
Brown, Russell *(Dumfries)*
Bruce, Malcolm
Bryant, Chris
Buck, Ms Karen
Burgon, Colin
Burnham, Andy
Burnside, David
Burt, Alistair
Cairns, David
Calton, Mrs Patsy
Campbell, Alan *(Tynemouth)*
Campbell, Mrs Anne *(C'bridge)*
Casale, Roger
Caton, Martin
Cawsey, Ian *(Brigg)*
Challen, Colin
Chope, Christopher
Clapham, Michael
Clark, Mrs Helen *(Peterborough)*
Clarke, rh Kenneth *(Rushcliffe)*
Clarke, rh Tom *(Coatbridge & Chryston)*
Clarke, Tony *(Northampton S)*
Clelland, David
Clifton-Brown, Geoffrey
Coaker, Vernon

Coffey, Ms Ann
Cohen, Harry
Conway, Derek
Cooper, Yvette
Corbyn, Jeremy
Cormack, Sir Patrick
Cotter, Brian
Cranston, Ross
Crausby, David
Cruddas, Jon
Cryer, John *(Hornchurch)*
Cunningham, Jim *(Coventry S)*
Cunningham, Tony *(Workington)*
Curry, rh David
Curtis-Thomas, Mrs Claire
Davey, Valerie *(Bristol W)*
David, Wayne
Davidson, Ian
Davies, rh Denzil *(Llanelli)*
Dawson, Hilton
Dean, Mrs Janet
Denham, rh John
Dhanda, Parmjit
Dismore, Andrew
Djanogly, Jonathan
Dobson, rh Frank
Doran, Frank
Dowd, Jim *(Lewisham W)*
Drown, Ms Julia
Duncan Smith, rh Iain
Eagle, Angela *(Wallasey)*
Eagle, Maria *(L'pool Garston)*
Efford, Clive
Ellman, Mrs Louise
Ennis, Jeff *(Barnsley E)*
Etherington, Bill
Fallon, Michael
Farrelly, Paul
Field, Mark *(Cities of London & Westminster)*
Fitzpatrick, Jim
Fitzsimons, Mrs Lorna
Flight, Howard
Flint, Caroline
Flook, Adrian
Flynn, Paul *(Newport W)*
Forth, rh Eric
Foster, rh Derek
Foster, Don *(Bath)*
Foster, Michael *(Worcester)*
Foster, Michael Jabez *(Hastings & Rye)*
Francis, Dr. Hywel
Gale, Roger *(N Thanet)*
Gapes, Mike *(Ilford S)*
Garnier, Edward
George, rh Bruce *(Walsall S)*
Gibb, Nick *(Bognor Regis)*
Gidley, Sandra
Gill, Parmjit Singh
Gilroy, Linda
Goodman, Paul
Grayling, Chris
Green, Damian *(Ashford)*
Green, Matthew *(Ludlow)*
Griffiths, Nigel *(Edinburgh S)*
Griffiths, Win *(Bridgend)*
Gummer, rh John
Hague, rh William
Hall, Mike *(Weaver Vale)*
Hall, Patrick *(Bedford)*
Hamilton, David *(Midlothian)*
Hammond, Philip
Hancock, Mike
Harman, rh Ms Harriet
Harvey, Nick
Havard, Dai *(Merthyr Tydfil & Rhymney)*
Hawkins, Nick
Healey, John
Henderson, Doug *(Newcastle N)*
Henderson, Ivan *(Harwich)*
Hendrick, Mark
Hepburn, Stephen
Heppell, John
Hesford, Stephen
Heyes, David
Hoban, Mark *(Fareham)*
Hoey, Kate *(Vauxhall)*
Hogg, rh Douglas
Holmes, Paul
Hood, Jimmy *(Clydesdale)*
Hopkins, Kelvin
Howarth, rh Alan *(Newport E)*
Howarth, George *(Knowsley N & Sefton E)*
Hughes, Beverley *(Stretford & Urmston)*
Hughes, Kevin *(Doncaster N)*
Jackson, Glenda *(Hampstead & Highgate)*
Jackson, Helen *(Hillsborough)*
Jackson, Robert *(Wantage)*
Jamieson, David
Jenkins, Brian
Johnson, rh Alan *(Hull W)*
Johnson, Miss Melanie *(Welwyn Hatfield)*
Jones, Martyn *(Clwyd S)*
Joyce, Eric *(Falkirk W)*
Kaufman, rh Sir Gerald
Keeble, Ms Sally
Keen, Alan *(Feltham)*
Keen, Ann *(Brentford)*
Kennedy, rh Charles *(Ross Skye & Inverness)*
Kennedy, Jane *(Wavertree)*
Key, Robert *(Salisbury)*
Khabra, Piara S.
Kidney, David
Kilfoyle, Peter
King, Andy *(Rugby)*
Knight, rh Greg *(E Yorkshire)*
Knight, Jim *(S Dorset)*
Laing, Mrs Eleanor
Lamb, Norman
Lansley, Andrew
Laxton, Bob *(Derby N)*
Lazarowicz, Mark
Leigh, Edward
Lepper, David
Leslie, Christopher
Letwin, rh Oliver
Levitt, Tom *(High Peak)*
Lewis, Terry *(Worsley)*
Lilley, rh Peter
Linton, Martin
Llwyd, Elfyn
Love, Andrew
Luff, Peter *(M-Worcs)*
Luke, Iain *(Dundee E)*
McCabe, Stephen
McCafferty, Chris
McDonagh, Siobhain
McDonnell, John
McFall, rh John
McIntosh, Miss Anne
McIsaac, Shona
Mackay, rh Andrew
McKechin, Ann
McKenna, Rosemary
Mackinlay, Andrew
Maclean, rh David
McNulty, Tony
MacShane, Denis
McWalter, Tony
McWilliam, John
Mahmood, Khalid
Mahon, Mrs Alice
Malins, Humfrey
Mallaber, Judy
Maples, John
Marris, Rob *(Wolverh'ton SW)*
Marsden, Gordon *(Blackpool S)*
Marshall, David *(Glasgow Shettleston)*
Marshall-Andrews, Robert
Martlew, Eric
May, Mrs Theresa
Meale, Alan *(Mansfield)*
Mercer, Patrick
Merron, Gillian
Miller, Andrew
Mitchell, Andrew *(Sutton Coldfield)*
Moffatt, Laura
Moran, Margaret
Morgan, Julie
Morley, Elliot
Moss, Malcolm
Mudie, George
Mullin, Chris
Munn, Ms Meg
Murrison, Dr. Andrew
Naysmith, Dr. Doug
Norris, Dan *(Wansdyke)*
O'Hara, Edward
Olner, Bill
Öpik, Lembit
Osborne, George *(Tatton)*
Osborne, Sandra *(Ayr)*
Paice, James
Paisley, Rev. Ian
Palmer, Dr. Nick
Paterson, Owen
Picking, Anne
Pickles, Eric
Pickthall, Colin
Pike, Peter *(Burnley)*
Plaskitt, James
Pollard, Kerry
Pond, Chris *(Gravesham)*
Pope, Greg *(Hyndburn)*
Pound, Stephen
Prentice, Ms Bridget *(Lewisham E)*
Prentice, Gordon *(Pendle)*
Price, Adam *(E Carmarthen & Dinefwr)*
Prisk, Mark *(Hertford)*
Pugh, Dr. John
Purchase, Ken
Rammell, Bill
Rapson, Syd *(Portsmouth N)*
Raynsford, rh Nick
Redwood, rh John
Rendel, David
Robertson, Hugh *(Faversham & M-Kent)*
Roche, Mrs Barbara
Rooney, Terry
Rosindell, Andrew
Ross, Ernie *(Dundee W)*
Roy, Frank *(Motherwell)*
Ruane, Chris
Ruddock, Joan
Ruffley, David
Russell, Bob *(Colchester)*
Ryan, Joan *(Enfield N)*
Salter, Martin
Sanders, Adrian
Sarwar, Mohammad
Savidge, Malcolm
Sawford, Phil
Sedgemore, Brian
Selous, Andrew
Shaw, Jonathan
Sheerman, Barry
Shephard, rh Mrs Gillian
Sheridan, Jim
Shipley, Ms Debra
Short, rh Clare
Singh, Marsha
Skinner, Dennis
Smith, rh Andrew *(Oxford E)*
Smith, Angela *(Basildon)*
Smith, rh Chris *(Islington S & Finsbury)*
Smith, John *(Glamorgan)*
Smith, Llew *(Blaenau Gwent)*
Smith, Sir Robert *(W Ab'd'ns & Kincardine)*
Soley, Clive
Speller, rh John
Spink, Bob *(Castle Point)*
Spring, Richard
Starkey, Dr. Phyllis
Steen, Anthony
Steinberg, Gerry
Stewart, Ian *(Eccles)*
Stinchcombe, Paul
Stoate, Dr. Howard
Stunell, Andrew
Sutcliffe, Gerry
Swire, Hugo *(E Devon)*
Syms, Robert
Tami, Mark *(Alyn)*
Taylor, rh Ann *(Dewsbury)*
Taylor, Dari *(Stockton S)*
Taylor, Ian *(Esher)*
Taylor, Matthew *(Truro)*
Taylor, Dr. Richard *(Wyre F)*
Taylor, Sir Teddy
Teather, Sarah
Thomas, Simon *(Ceredigion)*
Tipping, Paddy
Todd, Mark *(S Derbyshire)*
Trickett, Jon
Truswell, Paul
Turner, Andrew *(Isle of Wight)*
Turner, Dennis *(Wolverh'ton SE)*
Turner, Dr. Desmond *(Brighton Kemptown)*
Turner, Neil *(Wigan)*
Twigg, Stephen *(Enfield)*
Tyrie, Andrew
Vis, Dr. Rudi
Walley, Ms Joan
Ward, Claire
Wareing, Robert N.
Watkinson, Angela
Watson, Tom
Watts, David
Webb, Steve *(Northavon)*
White, Brian
Whitehead, Dr. Alan
Whittingdale, John
Wicks, Malcolm
Wiggin, Bill
Williams, rh Alan *(Swansea W)*
Williams, Roger *(Brecon)*

Winnick, David
Wood, Mike *(Batley)*
Worthington, Tony
Wright, Anthony D. *(Gt Yarmouth)*
Wright, David *(Telford)*
Wright, Iain *(Hartlepool)*
Yeo, Tim *(S Suffolk)*
Young, rh Sir George

Tellers for the Noes:
Mr. David Heathcoat-Amory and Richard Ottaway

Question accordingly negatived.

3.15 pm

Mr. Roger Gale (North Thanet) (Con): On a point of order, Mr. Speaker. Can you confirm my understanding that an amended Bill can have the Parliament Act applied to it only if the amendment in question is agreed by both Houses of Parliament, and that those who wish to ban hunting must therefore vote, in respect of the next amendment, for the original Bill and for an immediate ban?

Mr. Speaker: I answered a similar point of order earlier, and to summarise what I said, I will not be drawn into that one. I did invite hon. Members to clarify the matter with the Minister, and the hon. Gentleman had the opportunity to do so. It would be wrong of me to be drawn into such issues while voting is taking place.

Sir Patrick Cormack (South Staffordshire) (Con): On a point of order, Mr. Speaker. As the House has now recorded the biggest majority ever against the banning of fox hunting, may we please move to the next business?

Mr. Speaker: When I was a member of a political party, I used to get involved in tactics—*[Interruption.]* Order. I invite the Minister to move the amendment in the name of Mr. Bradley.

Motion made, and Question put, That this House insists on its disagreement to Lords amendments Nos. 1 to 44 and 46 to 54, disagrees with the Lords in their amendments 10C, 12C, 46C and 52C, but proposes the following amendment in lieu —

Leave out clause 15 and insert the following new clause:—

'Commencement

(1) The following provisions of this Act shall come into force on 31st July 2006—

(a) sections 1 to 4,

(b) Part 2 in so far as it relates to sections 1 to 4,

(c) sections 11 to 14 in so far as they relate to sections 1 to 4,

(d) Schedule 1, and

(e) Schedules 2 and 3, except in so far as they change the law in relation to an activity to which section 5 applies.

(2) The following provisions of this Act shall come into force at the end of the period of three months beginning with the date on which it is passed—

(a) section 5,

(b) Part 2 in so far as it relates to section 5,

(c) sections 11 to 13 in so far as they relate to section 5, and

(d) Schedules 2 and 3 in so far as they change the law in relation to an activity to which section 5 applies.'.—*[Alun Michael.]*

The House divided: Ayes 283, Noes 132.

Division No. 340] **[3:16 pm**

AYES

Adams, Irene *(Paisley N)*
Ainger, Nick
Ainsworth, Bob *(Cov'try NE)*
Allan, Richard
Allen, Graham
Anderson, Janet *(Rossendale & Darwen)*
Armstrong, rh Ms Hilary
Atkins, Charlotte
Bailey, Adrian
Baird, Vera
Baker, Norman
Banks, Tony
Barrett, John
Battle, rh John
Bayley, Hugh
Beckett, rh Margaret
Begg, Miss Anne
Bell, Sir Stuart
Blizzard, Bob
Boateng, rh Paul
Bradley, rh Keith *(Withington)*
Bradley, Peter *(The Wrekin)*
Bradshaw, Ben
Brennan, Kevin
Brooke, Mrs Annette L.
Brown, Russell *(Dumfries)*
Bryant, Chris
Buck, Ms Karen
Burgon, Colin
Burnham, Andy
Caborn, rh Richard
Cairns, David
Calton, Mrs Patsy
Campbell, Alan *(Tynemouth)*
Campbell, Mrs Anne *(C'bridge)*
Casale, Roger
Caton, Martin
Cawsey, Ian *(Brigg)*
Challen, Colin
Clapham, Michael
Clark, Mrs Helen *(Peterborough)*
Clark, Dr. Lynda *(Edinburgh Pentlands)*
Clarke, rh Tom *(Coatbridge & Chryston)*
Clarke, Tony *(Northampton S)*
Clelland, David
Coaker, Vernon
Coffey, Ms Ann
Cohen, Harry
Colman, Tony
Cooper, Yvette
Corbyn, Jeremy
Cotter, Brian
Cox, Tom *(Tooting)*
Cranston, Ross
Crausby, David
Cruddas, Jon
Cryer, John *(Hornchurch)*
Cunningham, Jim *(Coventry S)*
Cunningham, Tony *(Workington)*
Curtis-Thomas, Mrs Claire
Darling, rh Alistair
Davey, Valerie *(Bristol W)*
David, Wayne
Davidson, Ian
Davies, rh Denzil *(Llanelli)*
Dawson, Hilton
Dean, Mrs Janet
Denham, rh John
Dhanda, Parmjit
Doran, Frank
Dowd, Jim *(Lewisham W)*
Drew, David *(Stroud)*
Drown, Ms Julia
Eagle, Angela *(Wallasey)*
Eagle, Maria *(L'pool Garston)*
Efford, Clive
Ellman, Mrs Louise
Ennis, Jeff *(Barnsley E)*
Etherington, Bill
Farrelly, Paul
Fitzpatrick, Jim
Fitzsimons, Mrs Lorna
Flint, Caroline
Flynn, Paul *(Newport W)*
Foster, rh Derek
Foster, Don *(Bath)*
Foster, Michael *(Worcester)*
Foster, Michael Jabez *(Hastings & Rye)*
Francis, Dr. Hywel
Gapes, Mike *(Ilford S)*
George, Andrew *(St. Ives)*
George, rh Bruce *(Walsall S)*
Gidley, Sandra
Gill, Parmjit Singh
Gilroy, Linda
Griffiths, Nigel *(Edinburgh S)*
Griffiths, Win *(Bridgend)*
Grogan, John
Hain, rh Peter
Hall, Mike *(Weaver Vale)*
Hall, Patrick *(Bedford)*
Hamilton, David *(Midlothian)*
Hancock, Mike
Hanson, David
Harman, rh Ms Harriet
Havard, Dai *(Merthyr Tydfil & Rhymney)*
Healey, John
Henderson, Doug *(Newcastle N)*
Henderson, Ivan *(Harwich)*
Hendrick, Mark
Hepburn, Stephen
Heppell, John
Hesford, Stephen
Heyes, David
Hodge, Margaret
Holmes, Paul
Hoon, rh Geoffrey
Hopkins, Kelvin
Howarth, rh Alan *(Newport E)*
Howarth, George *(Knowsley N & Sefton E)*
Hughes, Beverley *(Stretford & Urmston)*
Hughes, Kevin *(Doncaster N)*
Hughes, Simon *(Southwark N)*
Hurst, Alan *(Braintree)*
Hutton, rh John
Ingram, rh Adam
Irranca-Davies, Huw
Jackson, Glenda *(Hampstead & Highgate)*
Jackson, Helen *(Hillsborough)*
Jamieson, David
Jenkins, Brian
Johnson, rh Alan *(Hull W)*
Johnson, Miss Melanie *(Welwyn Hatfield)*

Jones, Martyn *(Clwyd S)*
Jowell, rh Tessa
Joyce, Eric *(Falkirk W)*
Kaufman, rh Sir Gerald
Keen, Alan *(Feltham)*
Keen, Ann *(Brentford)*
Kelly, Ruth *(Bolton W)*
Kennedy, rh Charles *(Ross Skye & Inverness)*
Kennedy, Jane *(Wavertree)*
Khabra, Piara S.
Kidney, David
Kilfoyle, Peter
King, Andy *(Rugby)*
Knight, Jim *(S Dorset)*
Laxton, Bob *(Derby N)*
Lazarowicz, Mark
Lepper, David
Leslie, Christopher
Levitt, Tom *(High Peak)*
Lewis, Terry *(Worsley)*
Linton, Martin
Love, Andrew
Luke, Iain *(Dundee E)*
McAvoy, Thomas
McCabe, Stephen
McCafferty, Chris
McDonagh, Siobhain
MacDonald, Calum
McDonnell, John
McFall, rh John
McGuire, Mrs Anne
McIsaac, Shona
McKechin, Ann
McKenna, Rosemary
Mackinlay, Andrew
McNulty, Tony
MacShane, Denis
McWalter, Tony
McWilliam, John
Mahmood, Khalid
Mahon, Mrs Alice
Mallaber, Judy
Mann, John *(Bassetlaw)*
Marris, Rob *(Wolverh'ton SW)*
Marsden, Gordon *(Blackpool S)*
Marshall, David *(Glasgow Shettleston)*
Marshall-Andrews, Robert
Martlew, Eric
Meale, Alan *(Mansfield)*
Merron, Gillian
Michael, rh Alun
Miller, Andrew
Moffatt, Laura
Moran, Margaret
Morgan, Julie
Morley, Elliot
Morris, rh Estelle
Mudie, George
Mullin, Chris
Munn, Ms Meg
Naysmith, Dr. Doug
Norris, Dan *(Wansdyke)*
O'Hara, Edward
Olner, Bill
Osborne, Sandra *(Ayr)*
Palmer, Dr. Nick
Picking, Anne
Pickthall, Colin
Pike, Peter *(Burnley)*
Plaskitt, James
Pollard, Kerry
Pond, Chris *(Gravesham)*
Pope, Greg *(Hyndburn)*
Pound, Stephen
Prentice, Ms Bridget *(Lewisham E)*
Prentice, Gordon *(Pendle)*
Purchase, Ken
Purnell, James
Quinn, Lawrie
Rammell, Bill
Rapson, Syd *(Portsmouth N)*
Raynsford, rh Nick
Rendel, David
Roche, Mrs Barbara
Ross, Ernie *(Dundee W)*
Roy, Frank *(Motherwell)*
Ruane, Chris
Ruddock, Joan
Russell, Bob *(Colchester)*
Ryan, Joan *(Enfield N)*
Salter, Martin
Sanders, Adrian
Sarwar, Mohammad
Savidge, Malcolm
Sawford, Phil
Sedgemore, Brian
Shaw, Jonathan
Sheridan, Jim
Shipley, Ms Debra
Short, rh Clare
Singh, Marsha
Skinner, Dennis
Smith, rh Andrew *(Oxford E)*
Smith, Angela *(Basildon)*
Smith, rh Chris *(Islington S & Finsbury)*
Smith, John *(Glamorgan)*
Smith, Llew *(Blaenau Gwent)*
Soley, Clive
Spellar, rh John
Spink, Bob *(Castle Point)*
Starkey, Dr. Phyllis
Steinberg, Gerry
Stewart, Ian *(Eccles)*
Stinchcombe, Paul
Stoate, Dr. Howard
Stuart, Ms Gisela
Stunell, Andrew
Sutcliffe, Gerry
Tami, Mark *(Alyn)*
Taylor, rh Ann *(Dewsbury)*
Taylor, Dari *(Stockton S)*
Taylor, David *(NW Leics)*
Taylor, Matthew *(Truro)*
Teather, Sarah
Tipping, Paddy
Todd, Mark *(S Derbyshire)*
Touhig, Don *(Islwyn)*
Trickett, Jon
Truswell, Paul
Turner, Dennis *(Wolverh'ton SE)*
Turner, Dr. Desmond *(Brighton Kemptown)*
Turner, Neil *(Wigan)*
Twigg, Stephen *(Enfield)*
Vis, Dr. Rudi
Walley, Ms Joan
Ward, Claire
Wareing, Robert N.
Watson, Tom
Watts, David
Webb, Steve *(Northavon)*
Whitehead, Dr. Alan
Wicks, Malcolm
Wills, Michael
Winnick, David
Wood, Mike *(Batley)*
Woolas, Phil
Worthington, Tony
Wright, Anthony D. *(Gt Yarmouth)*
Wright, David *(Telford)*
Wright, Iain *(Hartlepool)*

Tellers for the Ayes:
Mr. Jim Murphy and Paul Clark

NOES

Arbuthnot, rh James
Atkinson, Peter *(Hexham)*
Bacon, Richard
Baldry, Tony
Barker, Gregory
Beggs, Roy *(E Antrim)*
Beith, rh A. J.
Bellingham, Henry
Bercow, John
Beresford, Sir Paul
Blunt, Crispin
Boswell, Tim
Bottomley, Peter *(Worthing W)*
Burnside, David
Burt, Alistair
Cameron, David
Campbell, rh Sir Menzies *(NE Fife)*
Cash, William
Chapman, Sir Sydney *(Chipping Barnet)*
Chope, Christopher
Clappison, James
Clifton-Brown, Geoffrey
Collins, Tim
Conway, Derek
Curry, rh David
Dismore, Andrew
Djanogly, Jonathan
Dorrell, rh Stephen
Doughty, Sue
Duncan, Alan *(Rutland)*
Duncan Smith, rh Iain
Fabricant, Michael
Fallon, Michael
Field, Mark *(Cities of London & Westminster)*
Fisher, Mark
Flook, Adrian
Forth, rh Eric
Francois, Mark
Gale, Roger *(N Thanet)*
Garnier, Edward
Gibb, Nick *(Bognor Regis)*
Gillan, Mrs Cheryl
Goodman, Paul
Gray, James *(N Wilts)*
Grayling, Chris
Green, Damian *(Ashford)*
Green, Matthew *(Ludlow)*
Greenway, John
Grieve, Dominic
Gummer, rh John
Hague, rh William
Hammond, Philip
Harvey, Nick
Hawkins, Nick
Heald, Oliver
Heath, David
Hendry, Charles
Hoban, Mark *(Fareham)*
Hoey, Kate *(Vauxhall)*
Hogg, rh Douglas
Horam, John *(Orpington)*
Jack, rh Michael
Jackson, Robert *(Wantage)*
Keeble, Ms Sally
Key, Robert *(Salisbury)*
Kirkwood, Sir Archy
Knight, rh Greg *(E Yorkshire)*
Laing, Mrs Eleanor
Lait, Mrs Jacqui
Lamb, Norman
Lansley, Andrew
Leigh, Edward
Letwin, rh Oliver
Liddell-Grainger, Ian
Lidington, David
Lilley, rh Peter
Llwyd, Elfyn
Luff, Peter *(M-Worcs)*
McIntosh, Miss Anne
Mackay, rh Andrew
Maclean, rh David
McLoughlin, Patrick
Malins, Humfrey
Maples, John
May, Mrs Theresa
Mercer, Patrick
Mitchell, Andrew *(Sutton Coldfield)*
Moore, Michael
Moss, Malcolm
Murrison, Dr. Andrew
Öpik, Lembit
Osborne, George *(Tatton)*
Paice, James
Paisley, Rev. Ian
Paterson, Owen
Pickles, Eric
Price, Adam *(E Carmarthen & Dinefwr)*
Prisk, Mark *(Hertford)*
Robertson, Hugh *(Faversham & M-Kent)*
Rooney, Terry
Rosindell, Andrew
Ruffley, David
Selous, Andrew
Sheerman, Barry
Simmonds, Mark
Smith, Sir Robert *(W Ab'd'ns & Kincardine)*
Spicer, Sir Michael
Spink, Bob *(Castle Point)*
Spring, Richard
Steen, Anthony
Streeter, Gary
Swire, Hugo *(E Devon)*
Syms, Robert
Taylor, Ian *(Esher)*
Taylor, Dr. Richard *(Wyre F)*
Taylor, Sir Teddy
Thomas, Simon *(Ceredigion)*
Tredinnick, David
Turner, Andrew *(Isle of Wight)*
Tyler, Paul *(N Cornwall)*
Tyrie, Andrew
Waterson, Nigel
Watkinson, Angela
Whittingdale, John
Wiggin, Bill
Williams, Roger *(Brecon)*
Wilshire, David

Winterton, Sir Nicholas
  (Macclesfield)
Wright, Tony *(Cannock)*
Yeo, Tim *(S Suffolk)*
Young, rh Sir George
Younger-Ross, Richard

Tellers for the Noes:
Richard Ottaway and
Mr. David Heathcoat-Amory

Question accordingly agreed to.

Civil Contingencies Bill

Mr. Speaker: Under the Order of the House of 17 November, any message from the Lords relating to the Civil Contingencies Bill must be considered forthwith, without any Question put. I have to acquaint the House with the fact that a message has been received from the Lords as follows:

> "The Lords agree without amendment the amendments proposed by the Commons in lieu of certain Lords amendments to the Civil Contingencies Bill to which the Commons have disagreed. They do not insist on certain of their amendments to which the Commons have disagreed, but do propose amendments in lieu thereof, to which amendments they desire the agreement of the Commons. They do not insist on their remaining amendments to which the Commons have disagreed."

Lords amendments considered.

Lords amendment: No. 49B

3.31 pm

The Minister for the Cabinet Office (Ruth Kelly): I beg to move, That this House disagrees with the Lords in the said amendment.

Mr. Speaker: With this we may consider Lords amendment No. 50B.

Ruth Kelly: Following the concerns voiced both in this House and the other place, we have reconsidered the issues of sunsetting and reporting on the use of part 2 of the Bill. The Government remain convinced—*[Interruption.]*

Mr. Speaker: Order. We must have order in the House.

Ruth Kelly: The Government remain convinced that sunsetting the Act itself is not appropriate in this case. The need to be able to respond to the most serious emergencies will not disappear after a given period, and revocation of the legislation would simply necessitate replacing it with something very similar.

As I made clear in Commons consideration of Lords amendments, any use of the powers under part 2 will be subject to detailed and rigorous parliamentary scrutiny and will be limited by the restrictions and safeguards set out in the Bill. Any regulations made under the Bill will be subject to sunsetting after a maximum of 30 days. This is one of the most aggressive sunsetting clauses to be found anywhere on the statute book.

Mr. William Cash (Stone) (Con): I am sure that the Minister has had the opportunity since yesterday to speak to her advisers about the test of reasonableness. The plain fact is that the Bill does not contain an express reasonableness test with regard to the use of emergency regulations. In the light of the debate yesterday, will she explain to the House why that is not in the Bill?

Ruth Kelly: I explained in terms to the hon. Gentleman yesterday that it was not necessary to have express provision for a test of reasonableness in the Bill. I also explained why that was the case.

The Government remain convinced that the sunsetting of regulations, and the need for them to receive the assent of Parliament, is the right way to ensure that the powers cannot be misused and that effective scrutiny takes place. Indeed, we have amended the Bill to specify that regulations must contain provision to ensure that parliamentary scrutiny can take place where this is effected by the emergency in question, or by response efforts.

Mr. Cash *rose—*

Ruth Kelly: I shall give way to the hon. Gentleman one more time.

Mr. Cash: The Minister may recall that the Minister in the Lords continually referred to the use of the powers as a temporary arrangement, yet it is clear from the wording of the Bill as it now is that the powers are not temporary but permanent. Will the Minister explain that as well?

Ruth Kelly: As I explained yesterday to this House, and as has been explained in the other place, the regulations and the exercise of the powers under the Bill are temporary and subject to an aggressive sunsetting clause, in that they fall after 30 days unless Parliament confirms that they should continue and the orders are relaid.

There is no doubt that, given the scale of the emergencies that we are talking about, the Government's handling of such an emergency will be subject to intense scrutiny both inside and outside Parliament after the event. I need only refer to inquiries and reports published after the foot and mouth outbreak—in that case, emergency powers were not necessary—to highlight the fact that post-event scrutiny and review are, and will remain, defining features of the most serious emergencies.

However, in the light of the concerns that have been expressed, the Government are minded to give a firmer assurance to both Houses about the way in which we will ensure that the Bill operates correctly. In the event of the use of emergency powers, the Government would put in place formal arrangements to review the way in which the Bill and its mechanisms, including the safeguards, had worked in practice. To that end, within one year of the end of the point at which the emergency regulations fall, a senior Privy Councillor, appointed by the Government, would carry out a review of the operation of the Bill. The process would be repeated for each emergency for which the Bill is used. That review would be published, and thus be available to Parliament.

The findings will provide a useful tool for the Government, who would aim to learn lessons from any emergency and improve processes wherever necessary. They will be conscious of the need to justify their decision to use the powers and their handling of the emergency in the cold light of day, both before they use the powers and throughout their exercise.

Sir Nicholas Winterton (Macclesfield) (Con): Does the Minister believe that the appointment of a Privy Councillor by the Government is a broad enough base to secure a properly independent view? Would it not be appropriate for Parliament, with Members from all political parties, to agree the appointment of the Privy Councillor?

Ruth Kelly: The Government's approach is consistent with the long-standing convention that, following major emergencies, Governments appoint senior independent figures to review events. The Anderson inquiry into foot and mouth is a good example. There are also strong parallels with the practice used under the Anti-terrorism, Crime and Security Act 2001.

Mr. Oliver Heald (North-East Hertfordshire) (Con): I am grateful for the commitment that the hon. Lady has given, as it substantially meets the Opposition's arguments. It is obviously desirable to have such a report, but can she make a commitment that it would be debated in both Houses?

Ruth Kelly: I would certainly expect it to be debated. The nature of the review would be determined by the nature of the emergency—that is more flexible and less mechanistic than a sunsetting debate a year after the use of the powers, which could be disproportionate and unnecessary, particularly if the exercise of the powers was uncontroversial and effective.

Mr. Douglas Hogg (Sleaford and North Hykeham) (Con): I do not wish to be churlish, but the hon. Lady was asked to give a commitment. What she expressed was expectation, so would she now give a commitment?

Ruth Kelly: I can assure the House that a debate will take place—that is the commitment that I am giving on behalf of the Government. An independent report will be published and debated by Parliament.

Mr. Cash: Can the Minister confirm that the independent Privy Councillor who was appointed would not be a politician? He would be a person of independence and integrity by virtue of his oath, but should not be involved in politics.

Ruth Kelly: I have given a commitment that the Government will appoint a senior independent figure to review events along the lines of the practice adopted under the Anti-terrorism, Crime and Security Act. If we can agree to that—I hope that all hon. Members accept that it represents movement by the Government and a real increase in parliamentary scrutiny—we will have settled on a powerful, dual-track approach. First, actions under the Civil Contingencies Bill will be subject to the existing 30-day sunset provision. Secondly, there will be a slower review of the operation of the Bill itself.

I hope that that gives the House the reassurance that it seeks and demonstrates the Government's commitment to effective review and scrutiny of the use of the emergency powers legislation, not just at the time that it is used but in the longer term, when we can consider its appropriateness in the light of experience and the passage of time.

I have been impressed by the sensible and consensual nature of the debates on this important piece of legislation, both in the House and in the other place. The Bill has, indeed, benefited from a number of helpful amendments made in the light of concerns expressed during debate. I hope that all hon. Members receive this proposal in the same light, and I commend it to the House.

Mr. Heald: I agree with the point on which the Minister ended. The Bill has been fully considered. It started with pre-legislative scrutiny and it was fully considered in Committee. The pity of it is that when it came to Report, which is an important stage of any Bill, such a draconian guillotine was imposed that hon. Members who had taken an interest in the Bill over some time were unable to discuss large parts of part 2. With that caveat, I thank the Minister and her predecessor for the consensual nature of the discussions that we have had on the Bill.

I made my remarks yesterday about sunsetting. It is a good thing to have sunset provisions for draconian powers. Having said that, today in the other place my noble Friend Baroness Buscombe tabled amendments to make the sunset provision take effect a year after any occasion on which the powers in part 2 were used. The purpose of that is to provide an opportunity to reflect on the power itself in the light of the way in which it had been used. None of us knows what circumstances will arise.

I accept that the Minister's commitment today to a report from a Privy Councillor every time that the part 2 provisions are used, followed by an opportunity to debate that report, is a substantial commitment and meets the case. I would like to press the Minister a little on one thing. My hon. Friend the Member for Stone (Mr. Cash) intervened in the Minister's speech to make the point that the person who did the report should be a respected independent figure. Will she say a little more about the independence of the person chosen to produce such a report?

We feel that we have achieved something. I would like to think of it as perhaps not a full loaf but certainly a half.

Mr. Richard Allan (Sheffield, Hallam) (LD): I am pleased that we are able to finish the proceedings on the Bill on a consensual note. It has perhaps a more select audience than the previous Bill that we were debating, but in many senses it is a more significant measure.

The Minister has set out a procedure for reviewing the use of the emergency powers that fits in with what we argued for in the House of Lords and in this House yesterday. Lord Carlile is independent, but I would not say that he is non-political. He is still a political Member of the House of Lords. He reviews procedures used under the Anti-terrorism, Crime and Security Act 2001. That was precisely what we were looking for in the context of this legislation. We have set certain thresholds for Ministers to invoke the powers; as we discussed yesterday, those thresholds remain subjective. A review of the operation of those subjective tests is all-important. The Minister helpfully set out yesterday the way in which the thresholds worked—the difference between the Minister "thinking" and being "satisfied".

I now have that difference straight in my head with the illustration of the Prime Minister's argument that he did not think that Iraq had weapons of mass destruction, but he was satisfied that it had. There is something there that can be tested. Similarly, in the context of a flu outbreak, a Minister might be satisfied that an outbreak was deadly and justified all kinds of emergency provisions being brought into place. That is a testable set of criteria; it is not the Minister simply thinking that a deadly flu outbreak is taking place and that things need to be done. Those are judgments that we believe Ministers are entitled to make, but Parliament is entitled to go over them again to see whether the facts justified the conclusion that was reached.

We think that the procedure that the Minister has set out today will meet our requirements. We are content not to oppose what the Minister suggests as a substitute for the set of arrangements sent to us by the House of Lords. I reiterate the comments that the Minister and the hon. Member for North-East Hertfordshire (Mr. Heald) made about the conduct of proceedings on the Bill. This is the last opportunity that we will have to debate it in this place, but we have a different piece of legislation now from the one with which we started some time ago.

Mr. Heald: Does the hon. Gentleman agree that it is important that the person should be an independent figure? Does he also agree that the one thing that scarred the progress of the Bill was the very stiff programme motion introduced on Report, which meant that we were not able to discuss a large portion of the Bill at that important stage?

3.45 pm

Mr. Allan: I am able to close on a consensual note by agreeing with the hon. Member for North-East Hertfordshire. The way in which the Report stage was handled was disgraceful. Part 2 of the Bill is far more significant than part 1 in terms of civil liberties and its constitutional implications, yet we ended up spending more time on part 1 than on part 2. We certainly did not have enough time to go through all the aspects of part 2 that we wanted to consider. That was reflected in the number of amendments from the Lords to part 2, which showed that there was still plenty of work to be done. I do not want the House of Lords to be used as a Committee stage for the more significant parts of the Bill, while the House of Commons gets to debate just the froth around the edges. The way in which part 2 and the Report stage were handled was disappointing.

I return to the hon. Gentleman's point about the independence of the person who carries out the review. Many of the concerns expressed yesterday from the Opposition Benches were about the fact that when there is an emergency, the requirement for the Government to get a majority in Parliament is not a sufficient safeguard. Under those circumstances, Governments can whip their Back Benchers—by definition, they have a majority of them—behind them, so that is not an adequate safeguard. The hon. Gentleman is right to say that the key test is whether the person who conducts the review will stand outside the normal political melee and be able to reach an independent judgment.

For that to happen, two criteria must be fulfilled. One is that the person makes that judgment at a distance, as the Minister set out today, not in the debate about the emergency regulations themselves. That would be in the heat of the moment, and we want the judgment made at a cool reflective distance. The second criterion is that the person should be outside the normal political arena, so I understand why a Privy Councillor would be appropriate, assuming they were acting as an independent Privy Councillor with the nation's interests at heart, rather than with a party political interest at heart. Having listened to the contributions from right hon. Members in all parts of the House, including the Conservative Benches, I have confidence in the majority of the Privy Councillors present putting the nation's interests ahead of party interests and being very interested in the constitutional implications of the emergency powers.

If that can be achieved, we will have reached a reasonable compromise. I am grateful to the Minister for acceding to our arguments, whereas yesterday she had to argue that the Government did not consider that necessary. I thought we were persuasive and I am glad that she was persuaded to move in this direction.

Sir Nicholas Winterton: I rise to follow up briefly the point that I raised in an earlier intervention, which was supported by my hon. Friend the Member for North-East Hertfordshire (Mr. Heald), the shadow Leader of the House, relating to the appointment of an independent Privy Councillor to review the powers contained in the Bill. As my hon. Friend said, those powers are draconian and if they are to be reviewed, the person reviewing them should be genuinely independent. The hon. Member for Sheffield, Hallam (Mr. Allan), speaking for the Liberal Democrats, highlighted that. He also expressed confidence that a majority of Privy Councillors can display proper and appropriate independence.

I shall press the Minister, however. My hon. Friend the Member for North-East Hertfordshire and the hon. Member for Sheffield, Hallam emphasised that on Report inadequate time was provided for large sections of part 2, which is the most important part of the Bill, to be debated. I hope the Minister, for whom I have considerable affection and regard for her abilities, will take a message back to her party that it is inappropriate that on Report, which is the only stage at which Back Benchers can fully participate in the consideration of legislation, they did not have an opportunity to contribute because of the limitations imposed by the programme motion. Therefore, many of us choose Lords amendments as an opportunity to participate.

Will there be any discussion between the Opposition parties and the Government before a Privy Councillor is appointed, so that there is confidence across the House that the individual who is appointed to undertake this important task is genuinely independent? This legislation is critical. As several of my Opposition colleagues have highlighted during the debate, the powers that are granted to the Government under the legislation are draconian—probably the greatest powers in any legislation to have been vested in Government in the 34 years that my right hon. Friend the Member for Suffolk, Coastal (Mr. Gummer) has been in the House. Therefore, I seek an assurance that the independence of the Privy Councillor is verifiable and that there is genuine consultation across the political parties prior to this person being appointed to undertake this important job.

I am slightly delaying sitting down to enable the Minister to receive the appropriate information from those who advise her. It is an important matter, I hope that she considers it to be an important matter, and I hope that she will reply to my request and that of my hon. Friend the shadow Leader of the House.

Mr. Cash: I am here at the bitter end because I remain deeply concerned about the potential impact of the way in which these powers could be used in terms of the liberty of the subject—not an expression that should be used lightly. But in this particular context, and in view of the rejection of the inclusion in the list beyond the Human Rights Act 1998 of habeas corpus and the duration of Parliament, to give but two particularly important provisions, I remain deeply concerned about the way in which these powers could be misused. In particular, as I have already said, there is no express test of reasonableness, and impermanence is imported into the arrangements, which is unsatisfactory.

With regard to the nature of the decisions that could be taken, even Law Lords have recently, in relation, I think, to the Rehman case, said that political decisions in matters of this kind would be best taken by Ministers rather than by the Lords of Appeal in Ordinary where there are extremely delicate questions about the liberty of the subject in relation to issues of national security. That is where the interface comes between emergency powers on the one hand and questions of national security on the other, because the two are likely to interlock. I simply make the point that the Human Rights Act in itself, irrespective of what the noble Lord Lester of Herne Hill said a few days ago, is inadequate to cover the various difficulties and dangers to the liberty of the subject that I believe are inherent in the proposals.

It is a step in the right direction to have a review by a senior Privy Councillor, but I repeat what I said in an intervention, that under no circumstances whatever should that person come from a political background. I say that because, having regard to the case law that has developed in relation to decisions of the most sensitive nature that I have just described, the view is taken that these are and should be political decisions and that that question has been adjudicated by the courts themselves. In this particular context, there would be a greater degree of independence if no person who held the job came from a political background.

I appreciate that my Front-Bench colleagues and the Liberal Democrats have now concluded that exchanges between the two Houses have reached their final stage. Nevertheless, I fear that the powers could be misused, and I think that the fact that the Government's programme motion impinged on Report, which is in many respects the most important stage in any Bill's consideration—it is particularly important in dealing with a Bill such as this one—was disgraceful.

Mr. John Gummer (Suffolk, Coastal) (Con): Will my hon. Friend remind the House of the distinction that he made between the need for political decision making in the sense of the Minister making a decision and the need for non-party political independence in terms of the Privy Councillor?

Mr. Cash: Absolutely. My right hon. Friend puts it extremely well. On emergency powers and national security, the decision to invoke the powers is bound to be political at that point. Any question of review would need to be balanced with a degree of independence that

[Mr. Cash]

would be guaranteed only by ensuring that any subsequent decision on the review was taken by a person without a political background.

I have made my reservations clear. There will not be another Division on these matters, but they will continue to evolve. Given the permanence of the issues and the incredible importance of getting them right, at least we have fought as hard as possible to ensure that they are dealt with in the right framework for future generations.

Ruth Kelly: I thank the hon. Members for North-East Hertfordshire (Mr. Heald) and for Sheffield, Hallam (Mr. Allan) for the way in which they have approached the Bill and the graciousness with which they have received the Government's proposals, which I have just set out. I also thank the hon. Members for Macclesfield (Sir Nicholas Winterton) and for Stone (Mr. Cash) for recognising that the Government have gone at least some way towards meeting their concerns, even if they have not been met in full.

I understand that there is some natural concern about how the review will be carried out and who will be appointed to lead it. The intention is that a single Privy Councillor will lead the review; but they will of course be assisted by a review team in carrying it out. The review will be independent, and the United Kingdom has a strong track record of appointing independent senior figures to carry out inquiries. In any event, to maximise the lessons learned, the Government would want to appoint someone who could step back from the situation. The report would be published and there would be a debate, and one of the issues debated would surely be the nature of the review itself.

Mr. Paul Tyler (North Cornwall) (LD): I accept what the Minister is saying, but will she draw a distinction between what has been described as a political background, which is not the critical issue, and mindset, context and the way in which the process will be achieved, which will be much more important? Somebody's background will perhaps be irrelevant, as somebody who is not of a political background can have very strong political views. The critical issue is the context and process, not the background.

Ruth Kelly: I completely agree. As I have set out, it would be extremely important for the Government to appoint someone who could step back from the situation. Of course, that ability comes from the personal specifications of the person who is carrying out the review and their willingness and freedom from political influence. It is such concerns that would inform the Government in their choice of Privy Councillor. The Government would of course discuss on Privy Council terms and consult the principal parties, thereby meeting the concerns of the hon. Member for Macclesfield. I hope that those assurances will satisfy nearly, if not all, Members.

I am sorry that doubt has been expressed about whether the Bill has been debated and consulted on enough. I am fairly new to it, but there has been considerable discussion—not least during pre-legislative scrutiny—and, as usual, the amount of time agreed between the political parties was not subject to much dispute.

Mr. Heald *rose—*

Ruth Kelly: The hon. Gentleman may agree to differ with me on that.

4 pm

Mr. Heald: In fact we divided on every programme motion, although we have the highest opinion of the Government Whip involved.

Ruth Kelly: I thank the hon. Gentleman for making that clear. In any event, I think there was considerable scrutiny both in Parliament and outside. We do not follow this course lightly, and I believe that it will create a much more substantial and flexible framework than the one that it replaces.

Mr. Allan: The pre-legislative scrutiny was very helpful, and the Committee stage worked well. The problem arose on Report. The bottleneck relates to time in the Chamber, and that is where the dispute remains. If we learn anything from the process, it will be about expanding the time available to Members who cannot take part in pre-legislative scrutiny and the Committee stage.

Ruth Kelly: I hear what the hon. Gentleman says, but my hon. Friend the Member for Slough (Fiona Mactaggart), the Under-Secretary of State for the Home Department, made it a personal priority to respond fully in writing to points to which she could not respond on Report. I hope that that helped Members to some extent.

Mr. Heald: On a point of order, Madam Deputy Speaker. Members throughout the House, apart from Ministers, have expressed concern about the Report stage, when large parts of the Bill could not be discussed. Would it be possible for you to bring that to the attention of the Chairman of Ways and Means—th Deputy Speaker—who, on occasion, is called on to giv evidence to the Procedure Committee, the House of Lords Constitution Committee and other bodies?

Madam Deputy Speaker (Sylvia Heal): I think I understand the hon. Gentleman's sentiments, and I assure him that the matters he has raised never escape the attention of the Chairman of Ways and Means.

Ruth Kelly: Or, indeed, the attention of Ministers. I have certainly heard what has been said today.

I thank Members on both sides of the House for the scrutiny that they have devoted to the Bill. I think that it has improved significantly as a result, and I believe that the review process will go a long way towards meeting the last remaining concerns.

Lords amendment disagreed to.

Committee appointed to draw up Reasons to be assigned to the Lords for disagreeing to their amendments Nos. 49B and 50B: Mr. Allan, Mr. Heald, Ruth Kelly, Ms Bridget Prentice and James Purnell;

Ruth Kelly to be the Chairman of the Committee; Three to be the quorum of the Committee.—*[Ms Bridget Prentice.]*

To withdraw immediately.

Reasons for disagreeing to certain Lords amendments reported, and agreed to; to be communicated to the Lords.

Madam Deputy Speaker: Pursuant to the Order of the House of 8 November, the sitting is suspended. Shortly before the sitting resumes, I shall cause the Division bell to be sounded.

4.4 pm

Sitting suspended.

6 pm

On resuming—

BUSINESS OF THE HOUSE

Motion made, and Question put forthwith, pursuant to Standing Order No. 15 (Exempted business),

That, at this day's sitting, the consideration of any Lords Amendments and Messages that may be received may be proceeded with, though opposed, until any hour.—*[Ms Bridget Prentice.]*

Question agreed to.

Mr. Deputy Speaker (Sir Michael Lord): Pursuant to the Order of the House of 8 November, the sitting is suspended. Shortly before the sitting resumes, I shall cause the Division bell to be sounded.

6.1 pm

Sitting suspended.

Hunting Bill

9.1 pm

Mr. Speaker: I have to inform the House that a message has been brought from the Lords as follows:

> "The Lords insist on their amendments to the Hunting Bill, to which the Commons have insisted on their disagreement, for which insistence they assign their reasons. They insist on their amendments to which the Commons have disagreed, for which insistence they assign their reasons, and they disagree to the amendment proposed by the Commons in lieu of the Lords amendments, for which disagreement they assign their reason."

Hon. Members: Explain.

Mr. Speaker: I read these messages; I don't understand them. It was not a Glasgow man who wrote that one, anyway.

As the Minister made clear to the House in his remarks earlier today, a rejection on these lines has brought us to the end of the road. I am satisfied that all the provisions of the Parliament Acts have been met. [HON. MEMBERS: "Hear, hear."] Accordingly, I have to tell the House that I have certified the Hunting Bill under section 2 of the Parliament Act 1911, as amended by the Parliament Act 1949. The Bill endorsed by me will be sent for Royal Assent at the time of prorogation in compliance with the provisions of the Parliament Acts.

9.2 pm

Sitting suspended.

ROYAL ASSENT

9.59 pm

Mr. Speaker: I have to acquaint the House that the House has been to the House of Peers, where a Commission under the Great Seal was read, authorising the Royal Assent to the following Acts:

Armed Forces (Pensions and Compensation) Act 2004
Civil Partnerships Act 2004
Housing Act 2004
Pensions Act 2004
Civil Contingencies Act 2004
Hunting Act 2004

Prorogation

Her Majesty's Most Gracious Speech

Mr. Speaker: I have further to acquaint the House that the Lord High Chancellor, one of the Lord Commissioners, delivered Her Majesty's Most Gracious Speech to both Houses of Parliament, in pursuance of Her Majesty's Command. For greater accuracy, I have obtained and also directed that the terms of the speech be printed in the *Journal*. Copies are being made available in the Vote Office.

The Gracious Speech was as follows:

My Lords and Members of the House of Commons

My Government has taken action in support of economic stability and growth, and to deliver reform of the public services, increasing opportunity and social justice.

My Government is committed to delivering a world class education system to allow individuals to achieve their full potential. An Act has been passed to enable higher education institutions to secure the additional necessary funding and ensure fair access for all. My Government has brought forward a Bill to enable some local authorities to pilot new arrangements for school transport to extend provisions to cover more pupils.

An Act has been passed to provide all children born from September 2002 with a child trust fund, encouraging parents and children to save and ensuring that all children have a financial asset at 18.

Legislation has also been passed to protect pension scheme members if companies become insolvent, to encourage employers to provide good quality pensions and individuals to save effectively for retirement.

My Government has published a draft Bill to ensure comprehensive civil rights for disabled people.

In addition, legislation has been passed putting in place a range of measures to streamline the asylum and immigration system and tackle abuse.

My Government continues to make the reduction of crime and the fear of crime a priority, and to enhance security and protection.

An Act has been passed modernising the laws on domestic violence and establishing a Commissioner to support the interests of victims and witnesses.

A Children's Commissioner for England has also been established as part of legislation improving services to protect children.

Draft legislation has also been published on establishing a national identity card scheme.

Legislation has been passed creating a long-term foundation for civil contingency planning in the UK, improving the basis for preparations at a local level and modernising the emergency powers framework.

An Act has been passed to ensure the fire and rescue services can respond effectively to the changing demands they face.

Members of the House of Commons

I thank you for the provision you have made for the work and dignity of the Crown and for the public service.

My Lords and Members of the House of Commons

My Government remains committed to working closely with the political parties and the Irish Government to see an end to all forms of paramilitary activity and to restore as soon as possible a stable and inclusive partnership government in Northern Ireland. An Act has been passed establishing a Northern Ireland Judicial Appointments Commission.

My Government continues to work closely with the devolved administrations in Scotland and Wales. Acts have been passed to retain the current number of members in the Scottish Parliament and to establish a single public audit body for Wales. A Bill to provide the National Assembly for Wales with a range of transport-related powers has been published in draft.

My Government continues to take forward a programme of constitutional reform.

Legislation has been passed to improve traffic flow and manage road works more effectively.

An Act has been passed to establish a Nuclear Decommissioning Authority and to promote secure and sustainable energy supplies.

Legislation has been passed to help create a fairer housing market and protect the most vulnerable, and to make the planning system fairer and faster with greater community participation.

In addition, legislation has been passed implementing the Government's review of the Employment Relations Act 1999, and to improve company law by strengthening accounting, audit and inspection arrangements removing barriers to recruiting directors and creating Community Interest Companies to enable social enterprises to meet the needs of their communities in new and innovative ways.

My Government has brought forward draft legislation on a number of other matters including animal welfare, charities and mental health.

Other important measures have been enacted.

My Lords and Members of the House of Commons

The Duke of Edinburgh and I were pleased to pay a state visit to Nigeria in December and attend the Commonwealth Heads of Government meeting. We were pleased to receive the state visit of His Excellency the President of Poland in May, and to pay a state visit to Germany earlier this month. We were also pleased to mark the centenary of the Entente Cordiale with a state visit to France in April and will receive His Excellency the President of France this week.

My Government played an active role in preparing the North Atlantic Treaty Organisation for further enlargement in March and the European Union for the accession of ten new member states in May. They worked with other member states to conclude negotiations on a new constitutional treaty for the European Union and to strengthen peace and prosperity in Europe.

My Government has worked for a strong partnership between Europe and the United States, and for effective action against the threat from global terrorism and weapons of mass destruction. My Government was active *in securing the first ever generic United Nations Security Council Resolution on the non-proliferation of weapons of mass destruction. The resolution imposes obligations on all states to criminalise the possession, manufacture or trafficking of such weapons, in particular for terrorist purposes. My Government was active, with the Government of the United States, in working with the Libyan Government towards their renunciation of weapons of mass destruction.*

My Government has maintained the United Kingdom's commitment to enhancing stability in the Balkans and in rebuilding Afghanistan and Iraq. My Government worked with the people of Iraq and the United Nations to establish the Iraqi Interim Government in June.

In partnership with France, Germany and other partners, my Government has worked to persuade Iran to address international concerns regarding its nuclear programme. My Government supported international negotiations with North Korea, and has continued to work towards peace in the Middle East.

My Government was active in securing a United Nations Security Council Resolution imposing obligations on the Government of Sudan to take action to end the terrible suffering in the Darfur region. My Government is the second largest bilateral donor working to improve the humanitarian situation in Darfur.

My Government published White Papers providing a statement of Defence Policy, and an assessment of capabilities the Armed Forces will require to meet the new strategic environment. Legislation has been passed giving enabling powers to bring in new pension and compensation arrangements for the Armed Forces.

My Government has worked to reduce poverty and for the achievement of the millennium development goals. It established the Commission for Africa to focus on development and progress in Africa. In addition my Government launched an HIV and AIDS strategy for the developing world which announces the UK's commitment to spend at least £1.5 billion over the next three years.

I pray that the blessing of Almighty God may attend you.

A Commission was also read for proroguing this present Parliament, and the Lord Chancellor said:

"My Lords and Members of the House of Commons; by virtue of Her Majesty's Commission which has now been read, we do, in Her Majesty's name, and in obedience to Her Majesty's Commands, prorogue this Parliament to Tuesday the twenty-third day of this instant November, to be then here holden, and this Parliament is accordingly prorogued to Tuesday the twenty-third day of this instant November."

End of the Third Session (opened on 26 November 2003) of the Fifty-Third Parliament of the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland, in the Fifty-Third Year of the Reign of Her Majesty Queen Elizabeth the Second.

Westminster Hall

Tuesday 2 November 2004

[SIR NICHOLAS WINTERTON *in the Chair*]

Disability Benefits

Motion made, and Question proposed, That the sitting be now adjourned.—*[Vernon Coaker.]*

9.30 am

Mr. Deputy Speaker (Sir Nicholas Winterton): I welcome all Members to Westminster on this somewhat dull day, but I suspect that in the order of world affairs it may be an interesting one.

Mr. Roger Berry (Kingswood) (Lab): I am very grateful for the opportunity to start a debate on disability benefits. It is an issue of great importance not only to the 10 million disabled people in this country, but to their families, friends and all of us who, in the words of the Disability Rights Commission, want a society where disabled people can participate fully as equal citizens.

I want to raise three issues. We could spend hours discussing disability benefits—there is a range of incredibly important issues—but the three issues that I want to focus on are the current debates about incapacity benefit, the recent report by the Joseph Rowntree Foundation on the additional costs of disability, and age discrimination in the system of disability benefits with particular reference to the disability living allowance. It will not be the first time that that issue has been raised in the House; I hope that it might be the last, but we shall find that out when the Minister makes her winding-up speech. I am delighted that the Minister is here to speak on behalf of the Government today. She is an outstanding Minister for disabled people, and is widely respected inside the House and out, particularly among disability organisations.

In recent weeks there has been a spate of hostile media stories about incapacity benefit, which have taken many forms. One group of them has suggested that consideration was being given to cuts in the level of incapacity benefit, or restrictions on eligibility. I was delighted when the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions gave an assurance in the House on 11 October, and I should like to place it on the record again so everyone is clear about it. On 11 October, my hon. Friend the Member for Leeds, North-West (Mr. Best) asked the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions for an assurance that the Government had no plans to cut incapacity benefit or rights to it. The Secretary of State replied:

> "I assure my hon. Friend that we have no such plans."

Later he said:

> "I saw some of those press reports on the first weekend that I took on the job. None of them is based on fact."—[*Official Report*, 11 October 2004; Vol. 425, c. 2–3.]

I was delighted when my right hon. Friend made that statement, and I am delighted that that remains the policy of the Government.

There have been other media stories that have not referred to speculation about the future of IB. Those stories have suggested that incapacity benefit is out of control in some sense. A well-known tabloid had the front-page headline, "Sicknote Britain". I will not name the publication because I do not want to give it any publicity. The "Sicknote Britain" story implied that people can simply pop along to their GP, get signed off and claim incapacity benefit. Every Member knows that they have constituents for whom that description of getting incapacity benefit has no basis in reality. It could not be further from the truth. Many of my constituents—I am sure that this is the case for all hon. and right hon. Members—have enormous difficulty in trying to satisfy a Department for Work and Pensions-approved doctor that they are unable to work because of disability or illness. The most striking thing about the system is that an alarming number of people who are rejected when they make an incapacity benefit application miraculously find that on appeal they get it back. That does not suggest that those who are assessing people for incapacity benefit are doing so in a way that makes life easy for those people. Indeed, I know from personal experience of my constituents that the system makes it incredibly difficult for many deserving applicants for incapacity benefit.

At Prime Minister's questions, the Leader of the Opposition also asserted that

> "incapacity benefit is out of control".—[*Official Report*, 15 September 2004; Vol. 424, c. 1262.]

I obviously had the courtesy to drop him a note to say that I would refer to that. To say that incapacity benefit is out of control is not only nonsense, but arrant nonsense. The number of people in receipt of incapacity benefit has been falling for a decade. It is not only nonsense to support fallacious stories of that kind, but deeply offensive to people who rely on incapacity benefit and who, as I have said, in many cases have to fight very hard to secure that to which they are entitled.

Rev. Martin Smyth (Belfast, South) (UUP): Has the hon. Gentleman discovered that medical examiners are not listening carefully to the clients that they are examining and are ticking off boxes wrongly, and that that is one of the reasons why appeals have been so successful?

Mr. Berry: The hon. Gentleman raises an important point. That is certainly the allegation that has been repeatedly made to me. The fact that such a large proportion of incapacity benefit claimants who have their initial application rejected win on appeal—I think that the figure is close to 50 per cent.—is suggestive to me. But it is not just what I believe is happening; it is what those in the appeal system believe is happening. I would be interested to hear from the Minister how the Department for Work and Pensions plans to address that problem.

The facts are simple. The number of people in receipt of incapacity benefit has fallen by 20 per cent. since 1995. The current number of beneficiaries is fewer than 1.5 million; 10 years ago it was more than 1.8 million. At the same time, as we all appreciate, there has been a huge increase in the number of women entering the labour market, paying national insurance contributions and, therefore, should they be sufficiently ill or disabled not

[Mr. Berry]

to be able to work, having an entitlement to claim. So, there has been a significant and sustained reduction in the number of people in receipt of incapacity benefit at the same time as a growing number of people are entitled to it.

Anybody who believes that incapacity benefit is out of control is more attracted to soundbites and slogans than to the reality of what is going on in our community. People may say that numbers do not matter and that we should be looking at the proportion of the working-age population. That is fine. The proportion of the working-age population in this country in receipt of incapacity benefit has fallen over the past 10 years. Why? It is because, as the Government rightly point out, the number of people flowing into incapacity benefit is falling. It has gone down by about 40 per cent. over the past 10 years, from 1 million on an annual basis to about 600,000. I repeat: let us have no more, please, of this nonsense that incapacity benefit is out of control. Nothing could be further from the truth.

I shall make two final comments about incapacity benefit before I move on. First, fraud is virtually non-existent. People have a legitimate concern that our social security system should be fraud-free. We have a responsibility to chase up people who want fraudulently to claim benefits to which they are not entitled. However, the Office for National Statistics has found that evidence of fraud is virtually insignificant, statistically. The margin of error is less than half of 1 per cent. That is trivial compared with other forms of fraud that occur in our society. Fraud is virtually non-existent, so incapacity benefit is not out of control in that sense either.

Finally, the benefit is not a generous one. On average, it comes to £84.51 a week. I do not know how many hon. or right hon. Members would, if they were sufficiently ill or disabled as to be unable to work, find it easy to survive on £84.51 a week. The benefit is not getting any more generous compared with average earnings. The incapacity benefit payable to a single person qualifying for the long-term rate fell from 17.4 per cent. of average earnings in 1995 to 15.2 per cent. of average earnings in 2003.

Paddy Tipping (Sherwood) (Lab): Will my hon. Friend say a word about those people who receive incapacity benefit who would like to get into work but who face real difficulties in doing so? First, the reorganisation of the Department for Work and Pensions has taken services away. The second real disadvantage is that some people fear that, if they went to work, they would lose their benefits.

Mr. Berry: My hon. Friend must be psychic. I was about to say that, having demonstrated that incapacity benefit is not the problem that some suggest, there is a problem: many disabled people who are in receipt of incapacity benefit because they are unable to or cannot get work, would like to work. Therefore, I warmly welcome the Government's initiatives to enable disabled people to get into work. The new deal for disabled people, access to work, and the pathways to work pilots are making real progress.

As the Department for Work and Pensions announced on 11 October, the results of the pathways to work pilots demonstrate that twice as many incapacity benefit claimants in those areas are finding jobs as are those in other areas. It is a success story. My hon. Friend is right to suggest that the focus on reducing the number of people in receipt of incapacity benefit recognises that many people do not wish to be in receipt of incapacity benefit; they wish to work. The focus on reducing the number of people in receipt of incapacity benefit intends to give support to enable them to do precisely that.

When I think of pathways to work, I think of my right hon. Friend the Member for Oxford, East (Mr. Smith), the previous Secretary of State for Work and Pensions. I place on record my thanks to him for all that he, together with the Minister, did in promoting the pathways to work pilots. It is the right direction in which to go in enabling disabled people to access the labour market. That is the success that we need to build on. There is, therefore, a powerful case for labour market programmes of that kind.

In the UK, we are spending more on labour market programmes, but compared with the rest of the European Union we spend little. The European Commission says that UK spending on labour market programmes for disabled people is about 0.02 per cent. of GDP. That is less than one fifth of the average for the European Union and way behind the support given in Scandinavian countries.

So, the problem with incapacity benefit is not that it is out of control. One problem is that the amount it pays those who are unable to work is far too low. The other problem is that many people on incapacity benefit could secure work if the obstacles to employment were removed. We should, therefore, support the Government's efforts to remove those obstacles.

I turn briefly to a report published a couple of weeks ago by the Joseph Rowntree Foundation on the additional costs of disability. The report was based on a survey of disabled people who were living in different circumstances and had different types of impairment. To my knowledge it is, to date, the only research of that kind. The report demonstrates beyond doubt that disability benefits are substantially below the income required to ensure a decent standard of living.

Paddy Tipping: I am grateful to my hon. Friend for giving way again. The Joseph Rowntree Foundation report is strong on the extra cost faced by people with a disability. Does he, like me and the Joseph Rowntree Foundation, find it rather odd that winter heating allowances are made available to elderly people, but not to people with real and additional needs, such as many people with disabilities? They do not qualify, although their needs are clear.

Mr. Berry: My hon. Friend is absolutely right. One additional cost that the Rowntree report identified was heating. It estimated that heating bills are up to one third higher for disabled people than for non-disabled people. I share my hon. Friend's view that it is not fair that the 1.3 million severely disabled people under the age of 60 and not entitled to winter fuel allowances do not receive support to cover that extra cost. The allowance recognises the problem that particular families may have in meeting heating costs. Why it should be people over 60 only who have that problem, I do not know.

Rev. Martin Smyth: I appreciate the hon. Gentleman's giving way. I appreciate also that he is dealing with disability benefits. When we talk about the cost of disability and of those under pensionable age, however, does he acknowledge that England in particular needs to come into line with Northern Ireland and abolish the means-testing of homes fit for children who are disabled?

Mr. Berry: I very much agree. I have long supported the campaign for England to follow Northern Ireland in that respect, and I warmly welcome the intervention.

Early-day motion 108, which I tabled last November, relates to winter fuel payments for severely disabled people. It has 153 cross-party signatures and reflects the views of my hon. Friend the Member for Sherwood (Paddy Tipping) and myself. I hope that the Minister in her winding-up speech will respond positively to the suggestion that the allowance should be extended to severely disabled people. In terms of a definition, those people on the middle or higher rate of the disability living allowance care component and those on the higher rate of the mobility component fit the bill as those people who need significant additional resources to meet the heating costs arising from their disability.

Overall, the Rowntree report identified that for many disabled people personal assistance was the greatest cost. That includes interpreters for deaf people, support for personal care and so on. Even if that largest cost is left out of consideration and we simply look at other costs, such as food, clothing, transport and housing, according to the report disabled people on benefits are at least £800 a month short of being able to enjoy an acceptable quality of life. Many press reports said that the Rowntree report stated that disabled people are £800 a month short, but that is after the substantial cost of personal assistance has been taken out. If it is included, the figure is much higher.

The shortfall in income has many implications. It must be addressed through environmental improvement, with better access to transport and buildings, and it must be addressed through enhanced service provision, better wages for people who have jobs and improved benefits for those who are unable to work. The first implication of the Rowntree report is that disability benefits are too low. The second conclusion is that current statistics seriously underestimate poverty among disabled people and their families. Government statistics show that 29 per cent.—almost one third—of households with a disabled person are poor, compared with only 17 per cent. of households without a disabled person. The Rowntree report shows that those statistics seriously underestimate the true extent of poverty among disabled people simply because they do not take into account the additional costs of disability.

Therefore, one factor that contributes to poverty and the isolation of disabled people is an ungenerous benefits system. Another is that older disabled people face age discrimination within the benefits system. A few days ago, on 20 October, my hon. Friend the Member for Gower (Mr. Caton) briefly raised this issue in his Adjournment debate on disability living allowance, although he focused mainly on the lower age limit for eligibility for the mobility component. He expressed concern, which many hon. Members share, about the inherent age discrimination in our system of disability benefits, particularly disability living allowance, which cannot be claimed after the age of 65 unless an entitlement has already been established before that age. It is a curious system. People who claim and are awarded DLA before their 65th birthday—for example, on their 64th birthday—can carry it forward beyond the age of 65. However, someone who claims and is awarded DLA on the day after their 65th birthday does not get it and is told to rely on the much more limited attendance allowance.

That is a curious feature of a social security system, not least because attendance allowance is, as we all know, an inadequate alternative for many reasons. It does not contain a mobility component, so those aged 65 and over cannot receive help with mobility costs. Many of my constituents, family and friends over the age of 65 have mobility problems that incur significant additional costs, but, unless they have claimed before their 65th birthday, DLA cannot be used to help out. In addition, the DLA mobility component is the gateway to the Motability scheme to provide adapted cars, powered wheelchairs and so on. The age bar on DLA means that the vast majority of disabled older people are denied access to the scheme. In addition, the attendance allowance has no equivalent of the lower rate of care component of DLA, so again the situation is perverse and older people must have greater care needs than younger people to receive help with care costs.

In summary, I believe that the benefits system should be available to provide support on the basis of need, not of age. The current system devalues the role of older people in society. It does not enable them to participate in society to the full and is clearly age-discriminatory. It is hardly surprising that there is a growing campaign to do something about that.

Hon. Members will be aware of the "Mobilise" campaign to end age discrimination in disability benefits. It was launched earlier this year by more than 20 of the most influential organisations in the field of disability and ageing. Those who support this campaign include the Disability Rights Commission, which was set up by the Government to advise them on how to ensure equal opportunities for disabled people, Age Concern, Carers UK, Citizens Advice, Help the Aged, the Royal British Legion, the Royal National Institute of the Blind, and so on.

In March I tabled early-day motion 953 urging the Government to support the aims of the campaign and to end age discrimination in disability benefits. When I logged on at 9 o'clock this morning, I discovered that 234 right hon. and hon. Members have now signed that early-day motion. Of the 2,040-odd early-day motions on the Order Paper, only 16 have more signatures, and this one is moving up the list. I acknowledge and celebrate the fact that the Government are spending an extra £10 billion every year on pensioners in comparison with 1997. I celebrate the fact that almost half that extra money is going to help some of the poorest pensioners. I acknowledge that, inside and outside the House. However, the fact of the matter is that we still have a

[Mr. Berry]

benefit for disabled people that is age-discriminatory and has the bizarre implication that if someone gets their application in a few hours before they are 65, they are all right, but if they do so a few hours afterwards, they are not.

That policy of age discrimination is in stark contrast to the Government's commendable commitment to equality and diversity. They plan to abolish age discrimination at work by 2006, and I say well done to that—great stuff. The national service framework for older people includes a strong statement against age discrimination in health and social care, but if that is wrong in social care, why is it right in the social security system? I simply do not understand that. All disabled people, regardless of age, should receive financial assistance based on their need to participate equally in society.

The Government have an outstanding record on disability issues. We have a Disability Rights Commission and we passed the Special Educational Needs and Disability Act 2001. Loopholes in the Disability Discrimination Act 1995 have been plugged, and a new disability discrimination Bill is to be introduced any minute—the Minister will tell us at the end of the debate when that will be. We have the new deal for disabled people, more money for access to work and the pathways to work pilots, and, yes, we have had a number of significant improvements in disability benefits. That is a record of which the Government should be proud, but we need to challenge the nonsense that some people still put forward about incapacity benefit, we need to recognise that disability benefits are too low and we need to tackle age discrimination that denies older disabled people the opportunity fully to participate in society.

Rev. Martin Smyth (Belfast, South) (UUP) *rose*—

Mr. Deputy Speaker: I am grateful to the Rev. Martin Smyth for rising hesitantly to his feet.

Rev. Martin Smyth: I was waiting, Mr. Deputy Speaker, as I thought that the spokesman for the official Opposition would be called next. As you know, as a humble man I try to keep my place.

Mr. Deputy Speaker: The hon. Gentleman is indeed a humble and reverent man and much respected, but the Front Benchers wind up; they do not open.

9.58 am

Rev. Martin Smyth: I support the hon. Member for Kingswood (Mr. Berry), with whom I have worked on these issues over the years, and I, too, pay tribute to successive Governments who have improved care and provision for people with disability. However, I learned many years ago that the biggest room in the world is the room for improvement. In that context, I agree with the arguments on age discrimination, particularly the tendency to minimise the opportunity for elderly people to get out and about. That is one reason why I wholeheartedly support the hon. Gentleman's argument that those over 65 should also be entitled to mobility allowance.

However, I want particularly to deal with another aspect of discrimination: in education. This was recently brought to my attention by a family in my constituency. As hon. Members know, we do not have the same opportunity at present to debate such issues in Northern Ireland, so it is important that we raise them in this place.

A young girl with a medical condition that could eventually lead to complete blindness was preparing for further education at the special school in Jordanstown. The education authority was aware of her needs through the reports that were made each year. This year, she moved to the national school for the blind in order to equip herself for her future life. Unfortunately, it seems that the education authority in Belfast did not follow through the reports that were sent to it. As a result, the young girl was turned down for an education grant.

What disturbed me even more was that when I took the matter up with the board and the Minister I was told that no grants were available because the girl was doing an academic course rather than a vocational one. There is discrimination on the grounds of disability and also in respect of future prospects. It is short-sighted to be prepared to equip someone for a vocational job but not in an academic capacity.

I raise the matter in the hope that perhaps somewhere in the labyrinthine pathways of government there will be another examination to determine whether such obstacles to young people who have the potential to develop might be removed, so that they may be enabled to develop and so that eventually young and old might be treated equally in law and in the benefits system.

10.2 am

Paul Holmes (Chesterfield) (LD): I congratulate the hon. Member for Kingswood (Mr. Berry) on securing the debate. It is far from the first time that he and I have taken part in such a debate, whether in Westminster Hall, the main Chamber or elsewhere. He made a powerful case on behalf of disabled people, as he has on every occasion on which I have heard him speak. As always, I agree with almost the entirety of his comments.

The hon. Gentleman began by referring to the recent media hype about pushing people off incapacity benefit. According to some newspapers—and, indeed, some politicians—too many people are claiming benefits who do not deserve them and, who are swinging the lead. The Prime Minister has said that many IB claimants were pushed from unemployment into incapacity benefit in the 1980s and early 1990s in order to massage the unemployment figures. That comment has been repeated several times in recent years, and there have been many comments in the media and from politicians about the perceived problem of the number of IB claimants being out of control. In his opening comments, the hon. Gentleman did a good job of demolishing many such arguments and revealing them to be based on nonsense.

I said that I could agree with almost everything that the hon. Gentleman said in his speech, but of course one has to step back briefly from some of his points. I was a little alarmed to hear that he was reassured by the new Secretary of State, who assured Parliament that there were no plans to crack down on IB claimants. I wonder just how much reassurance we can take from the wording, "there are no such plans." I remember the 1997 general election, when the then Leader of the Opposition, who was about to become Prime Minister, told the London *Evening Standard* that he had no plans to introduce tuition fees.

Mr. Paul Goodman (Wycombe) (Con): The hon. Member for Kingswood (Mr. Berry) was quite right about the exchange in which the hon. Member for Leeds, North-West (Mr. Best) was involved. He no doubt inadvertently did not go on to read the further exchange between the Minister and I, later in the same series of questions. I asked the Minister specifically whether he would rule out putting time limits on incapacity benefit during this Parliament. The Minister said—I think I am quoting him more or less accurately—that he was not ruling anything in or out at this stage.

Paul Holmes: I agree entirely with that point, which reinforces what I was saying. When the words are, "We have no such plans" we have to consider whether, metaphorically or literally, the rider "at the moment" is there. In 1997 we were told that there were "no such plans" to introduce tuition fees, but four months later we discovered that they were going to be introduced and that free grants for poorer students were to be scrapped. We need to consider the context in which things are said.

Given the amount of coverage that this issue has had, we must have a little sceptical doubt about whether the threats will materialise, or whether they will just be part of election media hype, in which the Prime Minister unfortunately seems to want to play to that particular audience, perhaps to keep a certain newspaper proprietor on side.

Mr. Berry: Will the hon. Gentleman at least acknowledge that no Minister has actually made such a foolish statement as the Leader of the Opposition, who has said that incapacity benefit is out of control?

Paul Holmes: I am in the unusual position of so far being able to agree with everyone, from both sides, although I am sure that that will not last. The Leader of the official Opposition has indeed made rather out-of-control statements about how IB is out of control. We have already heard a very good demolition of that argument, with some good statistics to prove that the underlying facts do not back it up. We have heard the Prime Minister, many in the press and many from the official Opposition recently saying that we need to do something about the runaway problem of IB claimants. I agree with the hon. Member for Kingswood that the problem is not quite as it has been portrayed in the press, and I shall return to that later.

We have heard comments about the difficulty that people seeking to go on to IB have in passing through the necessary gateways. One of those, which several hon. Members have mentioned in previous debates, is the problem that people have in getting past the doctors appointed by the Department for Work and Pensions, or by the privatised contractor that runs part of that system, and in getting those doctors to accept that they are genuinely incapacitated or disabled.

I have previously mentioned examples from Chesterfield, which is a coal-mining area—although there are no pits now—with a long legacy of former miners. Many people there have, over many years, gone through the difficult medical process of proving that because of their work in the mines, they suffer from lung disease, vibration white finger and other related illnesses. They have gone through lengthy processes established by the former mineworkers union, the medical system and the Government, including visiting expert medical centres based in Nottingham, and they have established that they are indeed incapacitated. They then go for a quick 20-minute interview with a Government-appointed doctor, who casually ticks off the appropriate boxes on the forms and says, "Oh no, you're fit", or, "You're only 50 per cent. disabled, not 80 per cent."

People come to my surgeries absolutely furious that, having taken two, three or four years to prove their disability with medical experts who specialise in that field, they can then be casually dismissed as all right in 20 minutes, and perhaps have their benefit cut by half because they are told that they are only partially incapacitated. That is often not really a medical assessment at all. A constituent of mine on IB, not a miner this time, was visited by the doctor at home, rather than having to go to an appointment. When the report was submitted, it said that he was not entitled to IB because he had a heavy garage door that was manually operated, which clearly proved that he was able because the car was not parked on the front drive, so it must be inside the garage, whose door the man must be opening and shutting every day. The doctor never asked about or commented on that to the man. In fact, the car was not on the drive because it was an automatic and permanently parked on the road—it was not in the garage, but the doctor had just jumped to an assumption that was nothing to do with medical grounds.

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Work and Pensions (Maria Eagle): I hope that the hon. Gentleman will report any such incidents that he comes across to the Department, because we now have much more rigorous ways of dealing with inappropriate quality in medical services reports. I advise all hon. Members to ensure that they tell us of such incidents that they come across.

Paul Holmes: I accept the Minister's point. In fact, the case has been dealt with and solved.

To finish the story: that was one of the points that the doctor made as part of a so-called medical assessment. A second point was that the claimant's garden was in immaculate condition so clearly he was not so disabled that he could not go out and do the garden every day. Those two observations had no basis in medical fact. They were not discussed with the claimant at all. The doctor simply went away and wrote them up. When I took the case up, both through the Department and the complaints procedures, we got an apology and the total reversal of the finding.

In that instance, a reversal did occur. However, these are not just isolated cases. They are widespread across the country; they do not just occur in my constituency. The number of successful appeals against rulings by Department for Work and Pensions-appointed doctors has been increasing year on year over the past few years. Depending on the category, the success rate for appeals ranges from something like 46 per cent. to 53 or

[Paul Holmes]

54 per cent. The average is about 50 per cent. That figure has been increasing year by year, as questions that I and other hon. Members have tabled in Parliament have shown. There is clearly a problem, and it is not down to one or two rogue doctors, but down to the whole process, which seems to be designed to trick people and to exclude them from benefits because the problem is seen to be out of control. As a result, people are getting unfair treatment.

We heard about the long-running campaign on winter fuel payments for disabled people. We have debated that a number of times over the past few years and hon. Members were debating it long before I entered Parliament in 2001. This year, there is a motion in Parliament, which many MPs have signed and which was tabled by the hon. Member for Kingswood. Last year, I tabled a similar motion and the year before that it was the hon. Gentleman again. This is a cross-party programme that also gets widespread support across all the disability organisations. *Disability Now*, in particular, deserves a lot of credit for the way in which it has spearheaded the campaign over the years.

However, every time that Ministers respond we hear nothing of comfort. It is argued that disabled people get various benefits already so those should cover any extra fuel costs that they have. That seems disingenuous. Pensioners, who might be very well off because they have good private pensions—perhaps they are retired MPs, for example—automatically get the winter fuel payment because they have reached the age of 65, whether they need it or not. They receive the payment whether or not they are able-bodied, poor or particularly suffer from the cold. They may well live in an extremely well appointed and centrally heated house and not need the payment at all.

There are other people, below the age of 65, who are disabled and who, because of the nature of that disability, feel the cold much more than many pensioners, yet they are excluded from the extra payment. A disabled person will not be going out to a place of work, so they have to heat their house 24 hours a day. People at work, in places such as the overheated—in more senses than one—House of Commons, do not need to pay fuel bills for that part of the working week, but a disabled person does not have that advantage. They have to heat their house 24 hours a day, seven days a week and, because of the nature of various disabilities, they will feel the cold much more than other people, including quite a number of pensioners—although the older and frailer pensioners get, the more they need the payment as well.

It seems illogical that although we provide the winter fuel payment to all pensioners automatically—I would not argue against that—we exclude disabled people who might be only 60, 61 or 62, or 30, but who feel the cold in winter to a far greater extent because of their medical condition. This is a long-running campaign. We have debated the issue a number of times and we have still never heard the appropriate Minister give any ground or offer any hope that there will be movement on it. Perhaps, in 30 or 40 minutes' time, we shall all be relieved to hear that the Government are going to move on the issue.

We heard an eloquent description of the problems that age barriers present to older disabled people when trying to access certain things that are available to younger disabled people. That is the reverse of the winter fuel situation. Older disabled people may not be able to get carer's allowance or Motability money because they are pensioners and therefore do not qualify. That seems ludicrous. While campaigning, one of the disability organisations pointed out: "If you are going to have a serious motor accident and become disabled, make sure you do it when you are 64, before your 65th birthday, because a few days before your 65th birthday you will qualify for all sorts of assistance for mobility, care and support. Five days after your 65th birthday, you won't qualify because you don't need that support any more because you are an old-age pensioner." There is no logic whatever to that approach.

We need to step back and carry out some more independent assessments of the purpose of the benefit system in relation to a whole range of benefits. I have pointed out that we have not had an up-to-date definition of poverty since William Beveridge produced one in the 1940s. That is 60 years out of date now. When assessing poverty levels in relation to what is required of benefits, and what is to be achieved through them, we need proper, up-to-date assessment of those levels and of the purpose of the benefit. That particularly applies to disabled people who have become pensioners but can no longer get access to things like Motability. There is no logic to that.

Why are we providing care, attendance allowance and Motability allowances to disabled people? It is because they need it due to their condition. Why would they no longer need it when they pass a certain age limit and become classed as a pensioner?

Maria Eagle: The hon. Gentleman just said "attendance allowance". He is well aware that attendance allowance is paid to pensioners, but he suggested that it was not.

Paul Holmes: I accept the correction on that point.

The opening speech touched on one or two points relating to helping people with disability who were claiming IB to get into work. We shall hear from the Minister in half an hour or so a litany of success and good things that the Government have done, and undoubtedly it is true that the Government have a good record of improving the situation of disabled people, as I have acknowledged a number of times before. However, as we heard in the opening comments, although that record is good by European standards and is much better than what happened prior to 1997, there is an awful lot more ground to cover.

For example, we have a new deal programme to help people into work, which covers a range of people from the young to the elderly, disabled and so on. Just 3 per cent. of the new deal budget of three quarters of a billion pounds per year helps one of the groups that needs help most in order to overcome all sorts of barriers to get into work: the disabled. Only 3 per cent. of the total goes to the group that needs help more than any other.

Maria Eagle: Is the hon. Gentleman suggesting that disabled people cannot benefit from all the new deals? The figures show that 180,000 have been helped back to work by all the new deals and only 45,000 by the new deal for disabled people.

Paul Holmes: I am going to develop the point that disabled people often experience a particular range of circumstances that make it hard for them to get back into work. The standard new deal processes applied with short-term targets lead to a rush to get people into work quickly. Personal advisers meet the targets set for them, and there is a strong tendency—well documented by reports from the Department for Work and Pensions, the National Audit Office and the Public Accounts Committee—to go for the superficial opportunities for people who would find work anyway and to ignore the more difficult cases.

We are talking about disabled people, but I have made the same point in other debates about people coming off drugs and alcohol. There are progress2work programmes for those coming off drugs, one of which is being piloted in the Chesterfield area, and I have been to visit it. That pilot is proving quite successful, but it is a limited one. People with low educational attainment, rather than learning disabilities, would be another category to consider. There are various such categories, of which the disabled is probably the largest, where people experience particular problems in getting into work—much more so than the average jobseeker.

Before staff can even consider helping such people to seek work, they have to start further back with personal confidence, life skills and communication skills. I have talked before about a pilot project set up three years ago by the chamber of commerce in Chesterfield. There are many Government replicas of it throughout the country now. The project began working with people who were disabled and may never have worked in their lives. Before it could even think of trying to get those people into a work experience programme or job placement, it had to spend weeks and months on people's life skills and self-confidence, or on tasks such as showing them a computer and how to use it, which is a huge obstacle in the modern labour market for someone aged 50 who has never worked, let alone someone aged 50 from an old manual industry such as mining. Large groups of people, particularly disabled people, face specific problems that the superficial quick-fix approach of the new deal in general has not dealt with. We should target much more of the new deal money to the particularly hard-to-place groups instead of to the groups that, as reports by the Department for Work and Pensions, the National Audit Office and the Public Account Committee have said repeatedly over the past seven years, will get jobs anyway. The money has not been as well spent as it might have been and there are many examples of that among disabled people.

During the opening speech, we heard some good examples of Government experiments, and all credit to them. The pathways to work experiment is being piloted in half a dozen areas throughout the country, including the Chesterfield and north Derbyshire area. I have talked to the personal advisers who are delivering the scheme, which is not even a year old—it was six months old when I talked to them—and they were full of praise for it. It is an excellent scheme to help disabled people to go back to work. There were problems; one was the Government's obsession with imposing sanctions on vulnerable people, such as writing to every disabled person and telling them to come in for a compulsory interview or else. That had a hugely frightening effect on people. The personal advisers that I spoke to said that they know when the letter will arrive, so they ring the recipient the day before and the day after to tell them not to panic or worry about it and that all they have to do is to come in and have a chat. The personal advisers waste a lot of time trying to undo the harm that is done by the standard letter that threatens sanctions if the recipients do not go in for an interview. We have discussed previously the Government's obsession with sanctions, and an increasing number of reports from the Department for Work and Pensions document the problem of sanctions driving people back to crime, drugs and the black economy, and off benefits.

The pathways to work pilot to help disabled people is excellent. It is less than a year old, but is proving to be extremely successful so far and very innovative. However, it is more intensive and the tick-box targets for putting people into sustained jobs quickly cannot be hit because there are so many initial obstacles to overcome. There are particular problems with benefits. The Liberal Democrats have long argued that there should be a partial benefit that recognises that some disabled people will not be able to return to full-time work. Some disabilities come and go, such as multiple sclerosis, and sufferers may be able to work one week but not the next. There should be a partial benefit that recognises that some disabled people want to work—1 million of them say that they do—but want help to enable them to do so. A partial benefits system would allow such a balance.

One obstacle that all the surveys showed was that when disabled people want to return to work they are scared that, having spent so long getting access to benefits, which are not especially generous, they will lose them if they try a job and find that after a month they cannot keep up with it because of their disability, and will again face the problem of trying to get back on to benefits. The Government are making improvements, but that problem is still a major one for disabled people. The pathways to work experiment is helping in some ways and provides support for people going into work, but only for a year. The pilots are not even a year old yet, so we do not know what happens at the end of a year. What will happen to those who lose the temporary support of payments and benefits and must rely entirely on a wage? Experiments in the right direction are paving the way, but there are not enough of them.

If the Government believe in evidence-based policies—they so often say that, but we do not see them materialise—they should look at the success of their own pilots for disabled people and to help ex-drug addicts and so on.

To return to a comment made during the opening speech, there is progress and there are good experiments, but the expenditure on helping people in those categories to get into work could be increased by 500 per cent. and that would only bring us to the European average. We have started down the path and are making improvements, but we are well behind good examples in this area.

[Paul Holmes]

The Shaw Trust is another success story. I have visited two of its projects, and it is the biggest job broker for the Department for Work and Pensions. It is very successful, dealing with 30,000 people out of 1 million who want work this year alone. That is progress but still a drop in the ocean.

Many projects are being told this year that they are too successful and that they must stop placing disabled people in work. The Shaw Trust has talked to me about that, as has the Groundwork Trust, and the press have documented a whole series of incidents where trusts that are too successful and are outstripping the resources available are being told that they must cut back for the rest of the year and not place any more people. That is so short-sighted, because every disabled person who goes to work saves the Government money in benefits and taxes. Every success story saves the taxpayer money, and it boosts the self-esteem and lifestyle of the person getting back into work. I urge the Minister to look again at what many disabled organisations working in that area are saying. Their budgets are being cut this year because they are too successful at placing people in work.

Maria Eagle: It is absolutely wrong for the hon. Gentleman to suggest that any providers are having their budgets cut.

Paul Holmes: If that is what I said, I will correct it. The trusts are not having their budgets cut; they are having them frozen, because they are outstripping the available money. One can see the short-term logic of that. The Papworth Trust is another, along with the Shaw Trust and the Groundwork Trust, which says that budgets are being frozen, and they cannot all be wrong. I was a head of department in a school, and in any organisation in any year, one has a certain budget that one cannot exceed. In this particular instance, I ask the Minister to look again, because every person who gets into work through such schemes saves the taxpayer money in benefits and taxation. The trusts are a good investment, which saves money over many years. Pilots that are becoming too successful are being told that they will have to lay off staff for the rest of the financial year because they have got too many people into work.

Mr. Deputy Speaker: I call Her Majesty's Opposition spokesman, Mr. Paul Goodman.

10.27 am

Mr. Paul Goodman (Wycombe) (Con): It is a great pleasure to see you in the Chair, Mr. Deputy Speaker. It has been an enjoyable and robust debate. I enjoyed the contribution by the hon. Member for Belfast, South (Rev. Martin Smyth), and it is always good to see him. The hon. Member for Chesterfield (Paul Holmes) was right to say that there are some problems with the Government's contracting arrangements with the Shaw Trust, but he was wrong to say—I think he said this, but the record will reflect it—that there has been no definition of poverty since Beveridge. My recollection is that the Government have a commitment to eradicate child poverty, and there has been considerable debate about what eradication might mean. They have three targets for eradicating child poverty. I am not entirely convinced of the merits of one of them, but it is inaccurate to say that the Government have no targets.

Maria Eagle: The hon. Gentleman is quite right. Far from there not being an acceptable definition, as a result of widespread consultation last year we have the three measures to which he refers. The hon. Member for Chesterfield (Paul Holmes) must have been looking the other way.

Mr. Goodman: The Minister is right on that point. There has been considerable debate about what eradication means, but I will not be sidetracked by a debate on poverty when we are debating disability benefits.

The hon. Member for Kingswood (Mr. Berry) has a long-standing interest in disability. I prepared for the debate by going back to mug up on the gospel according to Berry. I re-read his speech from 21 May 2003 during the debate on the European year of disabled people. It was one of the first that I read when I took up my appointment as shadow Minister for disabled people. I also re-read his speech on Second Reading of the Carers (Equal Opportunities) Bill on 6 May, which was introduced by his hon. Friend the hon. Member for Aberavon (Dr. Francis) and which with all-party support was passed and became the 2004 Act. During that debate, the Under-Secretary of State for Health, the hon. Member for South Thanet (Dr. Ladyman), argued that the carer's allowance stops when pensioners start to claim the retirement pension because that pension, like the carer's allowance, exists to replace lost income. The hon. Member for Kingswood argued in reply:

> "The issue is whether or not carers over 65 should get increased support for their caring activities, not least because if they did not undertake them it would be far more expensive for the Government to fund them."—[*Official Report*, 6 February 2004; Vol. 417, c. 1068.]

When challenged by the hon. Member for Kingswood to name a resource that funds such support, the Minister cited—you might not be surprised to hear this, Mr. Deputy Speaker—attendance allowance. I suspect that neither the hon. Member for Kingswood nor I would be surprised if the Minister advances similar arguments today.

I cited that exchange because it touches on some of the main points raised by the hon. Member for Kingswood. I enjoyed his speech very much, although I thought that some of his statistics were a little selective. For example, the total number of IB claimants in May 1995 was—

Maria Eagle: Say 1997.

Mr. Goodman: I will say 1997 if the Minister likes. In fact, the 1997 figure would be even more helpful to my case. The number of IB claimants in 1997 was roughly 2,370,000. The figure is now 2,404,000. So I am glad that the Minister brought me from 1995 to 1997.

Mr. Berry: I was not referring to the number of claimants. I was referring to the number of people who benefit from and receive—beneficiaries. According to the Department for Work and Pensions, in 1995 the number of incapacity benefit beneficiaries was 1.8 million. The hon. Gentleman, like some of his hon. Friends, should make a clear distinction between claimants, some of whom do not get the benefit, and beneficiaries. I was referring specifically to beneficiaries and was using the Department's statistics, not my own.

Mr. Goodman: I am aware that the hon. Gentleman was referring to beneficiaries and did not for a moment claim that he was not. I was simply pointing out that, by not quoting the claimant figures, he was being somewhat selective with the statistics.

Mr. Berry: I would not press this, but that is a serious accusation. I am being accused of being "selective" in the use of statistics. I specifically referred to incapacity benefit beneficiaries and I specifically quoted the Department for Work and Pension's source. I was not being selective at all.

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Order. Does the hon. Gentleman seek to raise a point of order with me or does he merely seek to intervene on the Opposition spokesman?

Mr. Berry: I was hoping that the hon. Gentleman would do me the courtesy of apologising for the clearly unfounded accusation that I was using statistics selectively.

Mr. Goodman *rose—*

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Before the hon. Gentleman continues his speech, I can only say that this is a matter of debate. The hon. Member for Kingswood made his point. The hon. Member for Wycombe will now respond.

Mr. Goodman: I think that the hon. Member for Kingswood knows that this is a matter for debate. I was not accusing him of misquoting figures. I merely pointed out that he quoted some figures and not others.

I want to step back from that exchange to consider both the problems and the possibilities that the debate on disability benefits opens up. At one end of the life cycle, more disabled children are surviving. At the other end, more people are living for longer and incurring disabilities as they do so. In between, there is greater consciousness of disability than there was. I will give one striking example of that, which relates directly to disability benefits and was, I believe, the point that my right hon. and learned Friend the Member for Folkestone and Hythe (Mr. Howard) made in the remarks that the hon. Member for Kingswood quoted.

I discovered by tabling parliamentary questions that, since 1997, the number claiming incapacity benefit on mental health grounds has risen to 718,000. That is a rise of 38 per cent. It is also one quarter of all incapacity benefit claims. Conditions such as stress and depression account for 65 per cent. of all mental health cases. I believe that there is some element of fraud in the system, although I have no doubt that, as the hon. Gentleman said, it is small. The focus on fraud as part of the debate about incapacity benefit is, to some degree, a red herring. If one studies the figures closely, it seems that what is actually happening as part of the tale of incapacity benefit is that there is a rise in mental health claims, which do appear to be out of control. That tells us not that large numbers of people are engaged in fraud but that large numbers of people are enduring mental health problems.

Mr. Berry: Will the hon. Gentleman therefore simply state whether he agrees with his right hon. and learned Friend the Leader of the Opposition that incapacity benefit is out of control? Is there evidence for that or not?

Mr. Goodman: The hon. Gentleman was not listening to me. It is the rise that is clearly out of control, and it was that to which my right hon. and learned Friend referred. I shall return to incapacity benefit later.

The example in the figures that I gave makes an important point: benefits that are paid to people with disabilities, whether on the objective basis of age or on the more subjective basis of individual assessment, become controversial—perhaps inevitably—as social change gathers pace.

Another example is the current "Mobilise" campaign. I was confident that the hon. Member for Kingswood would refer to it and he duly did so. It is supported by Help the Aged, among others, and aims to remove the upper age limit of 65 for claiming disability living allowance. The campaigners say that older people can now work longer—they are right about that—and that, given social change, the age limit of 65 is outdated as well as discriminatory. In response, Ministers usually say that many benefits contain age rules—child benefit is paid for children, pensions are paid to older people and so on—and that there is no intrinsic reason why the disability living allowance should not have an upper age limit. I anticipate that the Minister may deploy some of those arguments when she speaks in a few moments. Ministers usually do not say that a commitment to remove the upper age limit would have a cost to the public purse and that the Treasury simply would not wear it, at least at present.

I confess to having some sympathy for the dilemma in which Ministers are placed. My party recently launched its largest ever consultation on disability policy. In doing so, we pointed out that 50 per cent. of disabled people have incomes below the poverty line and that there are particular complaints—I have the list here—about non-access to winter fuel payments, which the hon. Member for Kingswood mentioned, the lack of a mobility payment for attendance allowance, the downrating of benefits while disabled people are in hospital and the withdrawal of benefits if they earn income.

Personally, I find the argument about access to winter fuel payments absolutely compelling. It seems curious, to say the least, that a non-disabled person on a relatively high income can obtain the winter fuel payment while a severely disabled person on a low income cannot. This is where my sympathy for the dilemma of Ministers comes in. There is a cost to the taxpayer in meeting human needs and satisfying the demands of the lobbies, but Ministers are aware that there are always more human needs to meet and that the lobbies are never entirely satisfied. Therefore, although

[Mr. Goodman]

I am personally sympathetic to the argument, I cannot make a commitment that my right hon. Friend the shadow Chancellor has not cleared, any more than the Minister can make a commitment today that her right hon. Friend the Chancellor of the Exchequer has not cleared—news that I suspect will come as no surprise to the hon. Member for Kingswood. However, before I am accused of being soft on Ministers, I should make the following points, without in any way anticipating the response to my party's consultation.

First, the benefits system is too complex. My party is committed to keeping the winter fuel payment, but that payment provides an illustration of how creating a more complex system, sometimes in response to the very demands of lobby groups, which have been mentioned today, creates inconsistencies and injustices.

Secondly, a complex system does not just create systematic inconsistencies. It also intensifies human problems. Disabled people often find it difficult, if not impossible, to fill in long, complex forms and undergo long, complex assessments, even if—as is often not the case—they have family or professional support in claiming. Let me give as an example an elderly Kashmiri woman in my constituency for whom English is not a first language, or who might not speak English at all. Such a person will have immense difficulty accessing the system, and the more complex the system becomes, the more difficult she will find it.

Thirdly, a complex system not only intensifies human problems but is felt by many of those who use it to insult human dignity. We all know from our correspondence that older people feel that they have earned the benefits that they receive, and that means-testing, in particular, insults their dignity. That explains the high non take-up rate of pension credit—the Government themselves anticipate a non take-up rate of a quarter even in 2008.

Finally, I return to incapacity benefit. There is a problem on incapacity benefit in particular that is also a problem for the Government more generally: the question of who is actually driving policy. When the hon. Member for Kingswood quoted the new Secretary of State, it sounded to me as though he was not saying that the Government had now entirely satisfied him on that point, but that he was still worried that there might be a question of time-limiting future incapacity benefit claimants. The Prime Minister has recently explicitly linked the payment of higher pensions with reducing the incapacity benefit bill. Having ruled out raising taxes to pay for larger pensions, he has said that it is important to reduce the number of people on incapacity benefit because:

> "It is particularly important as we have got to spend more money on pensions. It is a question of reconfiguring the welfare system."

The Prime Minister did not directly say that the rules that govern IB will be tightened, or that it might be time-limited in the future, but recent reports have suggested that, and the hon. Member for Kingswood is clearly well aware of it. If I read those reports rightly, I rather think that they have come not from the Minister's Department but, as journalists say in the trade, from sources close to No. 10.

When the Minister replies to the debate, will she say whether the Government have ruled out time-limiting IB and, in particular, ruled out doing so before the next election? The hon. Gentleman can then go away entirely satisfied. It would also help him and me if she would say whether the Government have finally ruled out accepting recommendation 17 of the report of the Joint Committee on the draft Disability Bill. We agreed unanimously, even including such well-known drippy wets as Lord Tebbit, that the Government should consider—I emphasise, only consider—whether eligibility for certain disability benefits should automatically provide coverage for a disabled person under the Disability Discrimination Act 1995. That point was agreed by the Committee, on which the hon. Member for Kingswood and I served and on which the Labour party had a majority.

I look forward to the Minister's reply on that and other points.

10.44 am

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Work and Pensions (Maria Eagle): May I first compliment everyone who has taken part in the debate? It has been superb, and quite sharp for so early in the morning. I almost feel as though I do not have to get involved in some of the arguments going on between my hon. Friend the Member for Kingswood (Mr. Berry) and the hon. Member for Wycombe (Mr. Goodman), who seem to be quite capable of having a pretty good argument without my intervention. That is enjoyable for me as a Minister to sit and watch, instead of necessarily having to participate.

I pay tribute to the hon. Member for Belfast, South (Rev. Martin Smyth), who takes whatever opportunities he can to raise issues that matter a great deal to his constituents, particularly his constituents who are people with disabilities, to use the Northern Ireland phrase. I have noticed that he quite rightly finds every opportunity to do that in the House. He made a point about discrimination in education and referred to a particular constituent. If he wants to provide me with the details, I am happy to take the matter up with my colleagues, the Northern Ireland Ministers, and ensure that they are fully aware of the situation.

I pay tribute to the work of my hon. Friend the Member for Kingswood in this field, in which he has an excellent background. He has raised, laser-like, three issues. We could spend all day discussing them, but we have only 15 minutes remaining. I fear that I might not be able to deal with every point raised, but I will do my best to take the most important and I undertake to contact hon. Members by letter about any points that I have inadvertently missed out or have not had time to deal with.

My hon. Friend started his speech with media stories about incapacity benefits. They have been referred to by the hon. Member for Chesterfield (Paul Holmes), who was a little less churlish than he usually is. He must have got out of bed on the right side, and I recommend it to him because it made for a much less tense debate and a friendlier occasion. Those stories have also been mentioned by the hon. Member for Wycombe.

There has been much quotation of the new Secretary of State, which he will be glad to see. I will provide the quotation that people could not quite remember and which the hon. Member for Wycombe raised in an intervention. My right hon. Friend the Secretary of

State said when challenged further on 11 October that he could not formally rule anything in or out for all time. That is obvious. He went on to say:

> "However, I stress that any longer-term reform to incapacity benefit has to build on our existing approach in pathways to work".—[*Official Report*, 11 October 2004; Vol. 425, c. 3.]

That is an important qualification, which I hope provides proper reassurance.

Much as we would like to be in charge of various newspapers, none of us are. I caution hon. Members not to believe too much of what they read in the newspapers. There is often wild speculation that does not necessarily come from any source close to anybody apart from the nearest journalist in the nearest bar. I do not wish to impugn the integrity of journalists, however; they have their job to do as well.

There has been an interesting debate about whether the number of people on incapacity benefit is out of control. I enjoyed hearing the little spat between my hon. Friend the Member for Kingswood and the hon. Member for Wycombe, who was valiantly trying to defend the words of the leader of his party. He obviously must do so, but he put a slightly different interpretation on the numbers by talking about the number of people coming on to incapacity benefit who report stress or low-level mental illness. It was an intriguing and valiant attempt to support his leader, because, having looked at the figures, he clearly does not believe that the number of people on incapacity benefit is out of control.

The number of people in work is higher than ever before. We have our highest employment level for 30 years—75 per cent. of the working age population are in work. We have our lowest level of unemployment for the same period and there are 2 million more jobs in the economy. The inflows on to incapacity benefit have gone down by 25 per cent., and more than 90 per cent. of the increase in the number of people on incapacity benefit between 1979 and this year happened between 1979 and 1997. The hon. Gentleman was not in Parliament at the time, but many of his hon. and right hon. Friends, including his leader, were and they had important jobs, such as running Government employment policy. I hope that puts across my point.

The idea that incapacity benefit is out of control is complete nonsense; I agree with my hon. Friend the Member for Kingswood on that point. However, that does not take away from the fact that we must help those who wish to get back to work and leave the incapacity benefit roll. We must provide proper, targeted help. In that regard, I was pleased to hear from those who have spoken the widespread support for pathways to work and the initiatives that we are piloting. Even the hon. Member for Chesterfield, who usually looks on the dark side of such things, admitted that some good was coming out of the programme. I was glad to hear that.

Of course, these are early days. Three of the pilots have been going for a year, but the other four have been going for only nine months, so we cannot say what the sustained outcomes will be. The pilot programme costs about £100 million in additional resources. It is very exciting to see from the early results that twice as many people are leaving the incapacity benefit rolls in the pilot areas.

Mr. Goodman: Will the Minister give way?

Maria Eagle: I will in a moment, when I have spat out this statistic. I may not have all the statistics, but here is one. In the pilot areas, six times more people are taking up the help that is being offered, and that has to be good.

Mr. Goodman: With reference to the statistics, some of which the Minister recently provided in a written answer to me, when will she be able to tell us how many of the people who have gone into work as a result of pathways to work have stayed in for longer than 13 weeks?

Maria Eagle: The hon. Gentleman could use his calculator to work out that 13 weeks after they have gone into work we might be able to say whether they are still in work. We need another half year. The hon. Gentleman must remember that for the first three months work-focused interviews were just starting. The help that is then given can vary; for example, eight weeks for the condition management programme. Some people may move into work only after that. Of course, with the return-to-work credit and not as much help, some people go straight into work.

We need at least a year. The pilot programmes are two or two and a half years long. Only at the end of that time will we be able properly to evaluate sustained job outcomes, although we will produce information about how the pilots are working as we go. Qualitative and quantitative evaluations will be produced during the life of the pilots, but only at the end of the period will we be able to evaluate the pilots fully and determine how people do, particularly in respect of sustained job outcomes. Obviously, statistics will be made available as they become available to the Department.

We are certainly excited thus far about the early indications, which appear to be good. We must ensure that we build on this approach in order to help people who get stuck on this benefit. Of the people who come on to it, 90 per cent. wish and expect to go back to work but find that after a year the average length of stay on it is eight years. Clearly, there is a problem that must be tackled, and it is fallacious to argue about whether it involves fraud or some kind of psychological effect.

The hon. Member for Chesterfield said that his constituents have to prove that they are incapacitated and that they cannot do this, that or the other. There is a psychology surrounding this benefit that is not helpful. People have to prove what they cannot do; they have to show others that they really are incapacitated. That is not helpful. We want to tackle those issues because, rather than fraud, that is what keeps people on benefit and prevents them from getting into work.

As hon. Members can tell, I could talk about the issue for some time if induced to do so. However, I should move on, as my hon. Friend the Member for Kingswood raised three issues and I want to say something about all of them. He would expect me to do so. Let us move on to age discrimination, which is how his early-day motion refers to it, in the disability living allowance. I believe

[Maria Eagle]

that he said that the rules were "curious", and the hon. Member for Chesterfield also gave some examples of inconsistencies. Since I became a Social Security Minister, I have discovered that benefit rules always have curious aspects to them. One can consider an individual benefit in itself and think how curious it is, but one should also consider how it fits into the rest of the benefits system and what the rationale is for it. When the disability living allowance was established in 1992, the rationale was to ensure that those who were severely disabled earlier in life received additional help. The research that underlay the work that was done to establish the benefit indicated that people who are disabled earlier in life have tougher outcomes, have more extra costs and find it more difficult to get income. The rationale of the benefit was to try to provide targeted extra help to those who are severely disabled earlier in life.

As my hon. Friend the Member for Kingswood and others in the House know, the care and mobility components act as proxies for the extra costs that a disabled person might face in dealing with their disability. I do not think that anybody has ever suggested that the care and mobility components can capture or attempt to capture all those extra costs. I will come on to the Joseph Rowntree Foundation report shortly. It is another attempt to capture those costs. The care and mobility components are proxies for the extra costs that severely disabled people face.

Care and mobility are, I argue, good proxies to capture those extra costs. That is certainly the rationale of the benefit. The aim was to provide extra help to people disabled at a younger age because they would—at that time and now, although the situation is improving—have had less chance to work, less chance to save and, therefore, less income available to them. So, the idea was to focus help on people who are disabled at an earlier age. That is why the mobility components are available in DLA but not in attendance allowance.

I acknowledge that, under DLA run-on, those who qualify for DLA aged under 64 may keep the mobility component after they become 65, and that, under DLA cut-off, those who qualify for extra cost-benefit after the age of 65 cannot take advantage of the mobility component. Both of those rules can, I accept, seem curious if considered in isolation, without having in the back of one's mind the rationale of the benefit. Of course it is possible to change the rationale of a benefit, but that is something that ought to be done when considering how the entire benefit operates. It is not something that can be done piecemeal or easily, or something that should be undertaken lightly.

The hon. Member for Wycombe suggested that I might make some arguments that I have not made, but would have made had he not done so, about the rationale of the benefit. It is not as easy to make these changes as one might think. The hon. Gentleman referred to costs. Of course there would be a huge extra cost if we were to extend the mobility components of DLA into attendance allowance and eligibility for those who qualified after age 65.

We do not have a precise figure about those costs. The figure that was given in parliamentary answers is old and is based on old research. The newer figures must be based on assumptions because, as I have often said to the hon. Member for Chesterfield, it is difficult to know what the take-up of an extra cost benefit such as attendance allowance or disability living allowance will be. One cannot tell. The allowance considers the effect of a disability or condition on the care and mobility needs of an individual. It is difficult to work out what take-up should be. It is easy to work out what take-up of pension credit should be because we know how many pensioners there are and what the income distribution is. It is not so easy to work out what take-up of an extra cost benefit should be. So newer assessments of cost must be based on assumptions rather than on the old research, which is out of date.

Mr. Berry: The argument is that people who require DLA earlier in life should get more support. We would not dream of saying to older parents that their child benefit should be less than that of younger parents on the grounds that they had had the opportunities "to work and save". Is that not the same principle?

Maria Eagle: I am obviously failing to convince my hon. Friend and I am not surprised by that. The rationale of the benefit, when it was formed and now, is to provide extra help to those who are disabled earlier in life in recognition of the fact that it is harder for them to get income in any other way. The mobility components are used as a proxy for that income. That is why the cut-off came about. I do not think that my hon. Friend will be convinced by that argument, but I am trying to explain the rationale, which has not changed. It is difficult to change the rationale of benefits in a piecemeal fashion without causing chaos.

I am running out of time. That measure certainly has a high cost. I acknowledge that. The hon. Member for Wycombe said that, for the same reason, he could not make any promises. There is no doubt about that. I am well aware of the strength of feeling on the part of my hon. Friend and others in the House.

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Order. I am afraid that time is up, despite the importance of the subject.

Defence Aviation Repair Agency

11 am

Mr. John Smith (Vale of Glamorgan) (Lab): I am grateful for this opportunity, however brief, to draw hon. Members' attention to the important matter of the future of the Defence Aviation Repair Agency at RAF St. Athan and, in my opinion, the future of the whole Defence Aviation Repair Agency. This is the first opportunity to debate the subject since the Minister announced his preferred option—I stress "preferred"—on 16 September 2004, effectively to remove the deep repair and maintenance of virtually the entire front-line Royal Air Force fleet of fast jets, the Tornado GR4, from St. Athan to RAF Marham in the east of England. That follows his decision earlier this year to remove repair and maintenance of the Harrier GR9 from RAF St. Athan to RAF Cottesmore in Leicestershire.

The work has been carried out at St. Athan for nearly 50 years. Generations of workers and RAF personnel have successfully carried out repair, deep repair, major repair and overhaul of our front-line fighter fleet at St. Athan for many years. I hope that my right hon. Friend will take my comment in the spirit in which it is intended by a friend and long-standing supporter of the Government's defence policy, which has been brave, radical, and until now, very successful, but I must place it on the record that the decision is wrong in principle and in practice. It will turn out to be bad news for the military and particularly for the RAF, because it will undermine front-line capability, and for British taxpayers, because the cost of the work will spiral out of control, as it did in the past, which was the very reason for creating DARA.

I recognise that the decision is not entirely my right hon. Friend's responsibility, but it will have a devastating effect on the south Wales aviation industry.

Lembit Öpik (Montgomeryshire) (LD): I agree that the decision is bad news for the Welsh aviation industry as a whole, because we are becoming a global centre of excellence in just the areas that the hon. Gentleman is describing.

Mr. Smith: The hon. Gentleman is right, because the success of the south Wales aviation industry has been predicated on the existence of that centre of excellence for military aircraft repair for many years. Many of the industries that now exist have been a spin-off from that. Future plans for the aviation industry in south Wales, most notably the centre of excellence, the aviation business park, will be fundamentally undermined by the decision, because the only way of making it a centre of excellence is to build on the skills and expertise of the people who already operate from the site.

I want to explain why the decision is so wrong and why it is such bad news. However, I had better spend a minute or two explaining what DARA is, because it has not been with us for long. Her Majesty's Government formed the agency as a trading fund as recently as April 2001, with a specific strategic role in supporting our front-line forces: to provide—I shall say this slowly—a competitive alternative to sources of repair in the commercial sector in Britain.

A review carried out by the Ministry of Defence in 2003 came up with three clever options. We either move the work forward to military operational bases, or we move all the work—that is deep support for military aircraft—back to DARA at St. Athan and other locations. Alternatively, we come up with a hybrid solution, which the Minister has done. However, that end-to-end review of logistics undertaken by private consultants and the RAF is fundamentally flawed, because it completely ignores the strategic role of DARA, which was created by the Government as recently as three years ago. DARA became a full trading agency just a few months ago, on 1 April 2004. Within a few months, the role of the agency created by the Government is being ignored and Government policy is being completely reversed.

In the past, there have been four lines of support for the British Air Force and our military aircraft: front-line reinforcement, second-line reinforcement at military operational bases, third-line at DARA and fourth-line within industry and the private sector. Quite rightly, a review of logistics needed to take place to ensure a smaller logistic footprint and a tri-service provision for all our forces—Army, Navy and Air Force—for all aircraft, to stop duplication and waste. There has been a post-cold war consensus by Governments of both persuasions that that is necessary. Of course we support that, but nobody expected that during the end-to-end review the new, critical role given to DARA would be ignored in the way that it has been.

The creation of DARA was based on the post-cold war consensus that there is no longer any military case whatever for servicemen and women to carry out factory repair of aircraft. Clearly, there is a military case for carrying out servicing and immediate repairs—kicking tyres, filling up with petrol and keeping the things in the air—but there is no military case for service personnel acting as factory workers and carrying out major overhauls of aircraft. There used to be such a case during the cold war because of the threat of a direct invasion of this country, and the possibility of a long, high-intensity military engagement in the central plains of Europe and of having to move forward deep repair to support our air-to-air fighter aircraft in the sky. That scenario no longer exists and nobody in government, in opposition or in any other NATO country in the alliance believes that that work should be carried out by military personnel.

The move is a disaster for the military, because if they go back—I stress go back—to carrying out deep repair of military aircraft, which they have not carried out since the origins of DARA in 1991, that will have to be paid for, and the only way to pay for it is to take away capability from the front line.

Everybody knows that the military are not cut out for that sort of work. That is another fundamental mistake made by the review: it makes no proper distinction between military personnel—I speak as an ex-serviceman and member of the Royal Air Force—carrying out their work in the committed and loyal way that they do, under a military code and Queen's regulations, and skilled factory workers, who are civilians operating in a commercial environment, which is what we have at DARA. That is why it took more than 4,000 military personnel just five years ago to undertake the work currently done by 1,450 civilians. Is

[Mr. Smith]

the Minister honestly suggesting that it makes economic sense to move that work back to the military? Of course it does not. It is the economics of the madhouse if we are to expect military personnel to do that work either efficiently or cost-effectively. It will undermine military front-line capability. Members of the services will not be able to carry out the work, which is already happening with the Harriers that have been moved to Cottesmore, where there is a reliance on private contractors being brought in to bail them out. Six aircraft have already been returned to DARA St. Athan, which has been asked to bail out the Royal Air Force. In the past, the RAF has had to turn to the private sector to bail it out with blank cheques, and it will have to do that again in the future.

I recently met representatives of a major defence contractor—I am sure that my right hon. Friend will not have difficulty working out which one—and their smiles went from ear to ear because they knew the consequences of this decision, if implemented: a reliance on contractors to help out the RAF with all its work at military operational bases, or to act as a semi-permanent support. The policy is wrong for the RAF, and in its heart of hearts, the RAF knows that it is wrong. It marks a step change in the strategic defence review, which until now has attempted to introduce smart procurement in many fields. One element of that is the outsourcing of unnecessary tasks that the military has no need to carry out on either economic or military grounds.

The policy is a complete reversal: it is a form of renationalisation through the back door. We have not seen such nationalisation since the Government of Ted Heath and the overnight nationalisation of Rolls-Royce. The previous Conservative Government were going to privatise part of the work—the part of the agency made up by Magda—through "Competing for Quality". The Labour Government said that the work should be outsourced because there is no military case for keeping it, but privatising it carries security risks—there may be no surge capacity in a crisis—so they created DARA at RAF St. Athan to operate in a purely commercial environment for profit, showing a return on investment and with flexibility of labour practices. In the Minister's own words, it was to become a "world-beating centre of excellence" in military aviation.

The policy will be a disaster for the taxpayer, because I confidently predict that he or she will pay through the nose for the work to be undertaken initially by the RAF, and when it fails, through a partnership with the private sector, but with the RAF dependent on the private sector for support. There is no competitive element whatever in the formula—it is a recipe for disaster. That is very sad, because other strategic defence reviews in other NATO countries, and even statements by the former Supreme Allied Commander Europe, General Wesley Clark, used the British example for other countries to follow in relation to outsourcing non-essential work. We did that, and we have done it successfully, and now those countries are contemplating introducing it.

During the past year, £18 million of taxpayers' money has been invested to build a state-of-the-art military hangar at RAF St. Athan. It is the size of six football pitches and is purpose-built to repair 47 fast jets at any time—the entire fleet. We have massive capacity, a work force who have broken all the records for productivity and efficiency gains, and a brand new hangar. Before the hangar was finished, and on the spurious notion that the RAF had all of a sudden invented a need for a deep repair capability in their services to move forward—God knows in what scenario—at times of crisis, the Minister announced that he would split up all the work. The work will now be handed back.

The Minister and the Department are in danger of making the biggest mistake they have made since this Government took on responsibility for defence. Until now, they have been more or less on the right course. I asked the Auditor General to investigate the expenditure, as I believed that it was my duty as a Member of this House to do so, and I am delighted that the Defence Committee will investigate the matter as a result of the letter that I wrote to it.

The decision is bad news for the south Wales economy. It will devastate our aerospace industry for the reasons that I have already given, and it will destroy the training base. The provision for the training colleges sector to train apprentices at the facility will end, as it is dependent on RAF St. Athan and DARA to supply the mainstay of apprentices, and companies such as British Airways Maintenance Cardiff, which carries out major repair and overhaul of private wide-bodied jets for British Airways, the British Airways avionics centre, and General Electric, which repairs engines in south Wales, will all be affected by the decision.

The chances are slim indeed that Red Dragon, which is a joint project of the Ministry and the Welsh Development Agency, will be a success. Red Dragon is in grave danger of becoming a white elephant. We could well see in the six football pitches inside the new hangar just one Hawk training jet. God knows how that can be considered an efficient use of defence expenditure.

I have not had much time to develop many of the arguments, but I hope that I have been able to give hon. Members a flavour of the grave mistake that the Government are about to make. Such a mistake could rub off on other services and provision in the military. Traditionally, the mistakes made in strategic defence reviews have not been the big visions. By and large, "Options for Change", "Front Line First", the strategic defence review and "A New Chapter" have been good visions and have garnered a consensus on where we ought to be going vis-à-vis our defence policy. Where they have fallen down is in the detail, the application and the failure to implement reconfiguration of regiments, organisations and resources. The resulting horse-trading ends up in death by a thousand cuts and huge gaps in military capability.

The decision smacks exactly of horse-trading. I know that my right hon. Friend has had a difficult job persuading the RAF to rationalise, given its new front-line objectives. We will have fewer aircrew and fast jets. We hope that we will have a bigger capability. I must tell him that this is not the way to go about delivering the capability. People in blue uniform would never have joined the RAF if they had known that they would become factory workers. Speak to the workers—the civilians—at St. Athan, almost half of whom are ex-RAF. They did not join the RAF to become garage mechanics permanently based in factories. They will not operate in a commercial environment, and we will pay dearly for this decision.

The trade unions know that the decision is wrong. I understand that for the first time the national unions have come out and failed to agree with the policy. Under the partnership, the Ministry has previously had the support of the unions on every DARA proposition. The local work force and other NATO countries know that the decision is wrong. Deep down, the RAF knows that it is a mistake. I ask my right hon. Friend to think again, and if he is unable in principle to change his preferred option, for goodness' sake, if he intends to implement this strategy he should do it gradually, step by step, and ensure that at each step we see it working, with capability being maintained. We do not want another Airworks debacle—he will be familiar with that because it affected the Tornado.

I hope that I have been able to put some of my arguments across.

11.20 am

The Minister of State, Ministry of Defence (Mr. Adam Ingram): I shall try to answer a 20-minute speech in 10 minutes, and I pay tribute to my hon. Friend the Member for Vale of Glamorgan (Mr. Smith) for his wholehearted advocacy on his constituents' behalf. He is to be congratulated on that, but I do not agree with the fundamental thrust of his arguments, although I recognise some of the graphic scenarios that he painted.

The background to the issue is straightforward. In 2002–03 we undertook a comprehensive end-to-end review of how logistic support was provided to our air and land forces. It looked across the whole logistics process to maximise the opportunities for improving logistic support to our forces. Its clear, fundamental aim was to achieve our target of reducing the £15.4 billion cost of logistics support by £1.4 billion by 2008 so that those savings could be invested directly in the front line. That was the overriding driver.

On support for military aircraft, the review concluded that there was both need and substantial scope for improvement in all areas: in industry, in the Defence Logistics Organisation and in all three services. That reflected the duplication of facilities across the services and in other parts of the MOD such as the Defence Aviation Repair Agency. It also reflected the fact that, with some notable exceptions, the Department and the services were not using industry modern best practice—a given fact—to drive down the cost of supporting military aircraft. The case for significant change was unarguable. It is wrong to ignore those essential features.

The review concluded that aircraft support, which comprises deep repair, scheduled maintenance and modification of aircraft—not garage work, as my hon. Friend suggested, but important technical work, whoever carries it out—could best be rationalised by concentrating facilities at existing military main operating bases.

My hon. Friend set out the background and asked whether the programme should roll forward or back, or whether a hybrid solution can be found. We tested that by having an investment appraisal. There was no predetermined outcome; we decided to examine the matter in the cold light of the information and facts in front of us. We put in place a demonstration phase, launched in September 2003, to test the end-to-end review principles and reduce risk. We also put in place at that time a formal, transparent process to evaluate the options for support infrastructure in the air environment. That was not under the counter; it was all up-front, open examination.

The investment appraisal was led and overseen by head office at the Ministry of Defence, and was conducted under the direction of the Department's senior economic adviser. All interested parties, including DARA and the services, were engaged in the investment appraisal, and there was trade union consultation throughout. As I have said, there was no predetermined outcome. The process was designed to establish the best result for defence in terms of operational effectiveness—that is what the RAF is for, not saving jobs or economic regeneration. The key platforms of Tornado GR4 and F3, Harrier GR9, and the Lynx and Sea King helicopters were addressed in detail in that examination. As my hon. Friend said, it came out with three options: forward, back or the hybrid solution.

That investment appraisal was supplemented by a subsequent affordability analysis, which identified the investment needed for each of the three options. There is no point in conceiving a new way forward if we cannot afford it. However, in order not to prejudice the required in-service date of 2006 for the upgraded Harrier GR9, the investment appraisal focused first on the options for its future depth support. I announced in March that Harrier support will concentrate forward to RAF Cottesmore. My hon. Friend is wrong about the work that is being carried out there. The first Harrier major maintenance there was completed in June 2004. No unexpected issues were experienced and the turn-round time was as planned. It was similar to a minor maintenance undertaken at the base and shorter than that experienced at DARA.

We had budgeted for the major repair to require an additional 500 man hours compared with a minor repair, but in the event only 340 additional man hours were required. No additional skills were needed, so we did not have to undertake any additional training and the Harrier pulse line team and a new joint repair organisation based at Cottesmore undertook all the necessary structural repair work. If my hon. Friend has different information—he keeps raising the matter—I need to see the facts, because as far as I am concerned, they are not as he presented them.

The completed investment appraisal and affordability analysis demonstrated that concentrating support of the Tornado GR4 aircraft forward at RAF Marham would provide best value for money compared with the alternative of concentrating backward at DARA St. Athan. In essence, the choice was either to move the aircraft to an existing main operating base for depth support or to move RAF personnel to DARA St. Athan. The latter would have meant significant up-front infrastructure costs, but either option would have meant a significant reduction in civilian posts. That was the reality. The investment appraisal and affordability

[Mr. Adam Ingram]

analysis also showed that it would not be cost-effective to concentrate the Tornado F3 aircraft either forward or back, given that it will soon be replaced by the Typhoon.

For rotary wing aircraft, helicopters, the investment appraisal and analysis demonstrated that it would provide better value for money to concentrate depth support for the Lynx, Sea King and Chinook back to DARA Fleetlands, a civilian base, not a military base.

On 16 September, I announced my preferred way ahead, which was subject to full trade union consultation. The consultation period ended on 27 October, and I have received a formal response from the trade unions which is now under consideration. I hope to make a final decision shortly and am only a matter of days away from doing so.

I am well aware that my preferred way ahead has substantial adverse implications for DARA St. Athan and its work force, and it would be wrong to pretend otherwise. However, my hon. Friend should be in no doubt that the streamlining of our support functions is not simply an option for defence. We must move forward to streamline that support because transforming logistics through more efficient ways of working is vital if the Ministry of Defence is to make the best use of its resources.

The impact of what we are doing goes wider than DARA St. Athan. We are not sacrificing civilian jobs to protect RAF personnel. Implementation of the end-to-end review will lead to a reduction of some 1,600 RAF personnel, which forms part of the overall reduction of 7,500 set out by my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Defence on 21 July when he announced force structure changes and defence change programmes. We are not protecting the light blue at the cost of civilian workers. We are making a complete examination of the way in which we deliver that support.

I am conscious that that is a hard message, and of the fact that when my father joined the RAF in 1938 the first place he went to was DARA St. Athan, because he wanted a trade and that was the best way to obtain one. He would not like to have been called a garage hand, because of the technical work that he did, although the aircraft were much simpler in those days.

To mitigate the effect, we are working with the Wales Office and the Welsh Assembly Government to consider all the options for sustaining DARA St. Athan after 2009. The Department of Trade and Industry, the Department for Transport and other Departments are working alongside us.

I am sure that my hon. Friend understands that the Ministry of Defence is obliged to deliver maximum front-line capability and to make best use of taxpayers' money. Those have been the key drivers in my preferred way ahead for air depth support. I do not believe that we have achieved one at the expense of the other. Instead, we have achieved the right balance, which will deliver the right outcome and maximum front-line capability for the RAF, the Royal Navy and the Army.

11.30 am

Sitting suspended until Two o'clock.

Anti-retroviral Drugs (Africa)

2 pm

Mr. Deputy Speaker: I warmly welcome the Secretary of State for International Development to Westminster Hall. It is not often that we benefit from the highest Minister in a Department, and I think that this indicates the seriousness with which he takes his job and this subject.

Mr. Hugo Swire (East Devon) (Con): I am very grateful to the House for this opportunity to highlight an appalling situation, particularly in the presence of the Secretary of State, and to highlight again—I think for the second time in as many months—Africa's difficulties in its struggle to combat AIDS. The horrors that this relentless disease inflicts on Africa's people in so many ways—socially, demographically, economically, politically and culturally—are well known, and I do not wish to dwell on that aspect of the crisis just now.

I should like to point out recent figures provided by a 2004 United Nations AIDS report that show the scale of the crisis that Africa still faces. Many people are by now aware that AIDS has been acknowledged as the biggest threat to Africa's development and the No. 1 overall cause of death in Africa, but fewer realise that, on top of that, rates of HIV infection continue to rise in sub-Saharan Africa. Last year alone, an estimated 3 million people in the region became newly infected. The figures are worrying, and all the more so since they come after a decade of international efforts to highlight the devastating effect of AIDS, particularly in Africa.

We must ask ourselves why, after 10 years of campaigning and effort to focus world attention on the issue, only 50,000 of the 4.1 million Africans suffering from AIDS are currently receiving any treatment. That figure is so minimal that it cannot but call into question the entire premise on which the international community's efforts have hitherto been based. Worldwide efforts to generate more publicity for the AIDS pandemic have sadly failed to translate into increased drugs availability for those who need it most: those on the African continent. I want to focus on the best way of tackling that problem to ensure that victims of this terrible disease are provided with the best possible treatment in the 21st century.

The importance of anti-retroviral therapy cannot be stressed enough. Of course, that treatment is not a cure, and it presents new challenges with side effects and drug resistance, but it has dramatically reduced rates of mortality, revitalised communities and significantly improved the quality of life of people with AIDS. Most importantly, because of those drugs, AIDS is now perceived as a manageable chronic illness, rather than as a plague. Sadly, very few African countries can share in that vastly improved prognosis. Currently, the number of people receiving anti-retroviral treatment is minimal. The World Health Organisation estimates that nine out of 10 people who urgently need HIV treatment are simply not being reached. Around 5 million to 6 million people in developing countries will die in the next two years if they do not receive anti-retroviral drugs.

The greatest examples of the production of generic anti-retroviral drugs are in India and Brazil, where the cost of drugs has been successfully reduced. Mumbai in

India launched the first generic anti-retroviral drug in 1994 and since then, India has had great success in developing combinations of that original drug. Brazil, meanwhile, is now home to up to a third of all people being treated for AIDS and has successfully reduced its HIV/AIDS related deaths by more than 85 per cent.—a laudable figure.

Furthermore, the Brazilian Government have estimated that anti-retroviral drugs have made savings of about $2.2 billion in hospital care that would otherwise have been needed by people living with HIV. The other major advantage of that treatment is the opportunity it creates to help prevent HIV transmission by encouraging many more people to learn their HIV status. Those countries with success stories are proof that many more people are willing to learn their HIV status when there is the promise of treatment at the end of it.

Above all, the abiding lesson to take away from countries such as Brazil is the vital importance of the production of generic drugs. It lowers the cost of anti-retroviral therapy and, in doing so, increases the numbers of people able to participate in treatment. I concede that there has been movement in the right direction. However, sadly, the prices that multinational pharmaceutical companies charge for those drugs remains way beyond the affordability of those in developing countries. Africa is all too familiar with that situation, and it must change.

A non-profitable drugs solution to the AIDS crisis in Africa is urgently needed—a solution that has nothing to do with self-interest and everything to do with improving the lives of Africa's AIDS victims. The three-by-five initiative, which was launched by the World Health Organisation and UNAIDS in September 2003, is a perfect example of that. The aim is to provide anti-retrovirals to 3 million people in developing countries by the end of 2005, and the initiative is part of a global movement to mobilise support for AIDS treatment. It is crucial that Africa is made a primary focus of such campaigns, and I would welcome the Secretary of State's support for and comments on that.

With the help of non-governmental organisations, such as the World Health Organisation, African nations can really start to advance their management of the disease. One hopeful advantage for Africa, arising from the successful use of generic drugs in Brazil, is the big advance in co-operation between continents. The 2004 UNAIDS report states:

> "Co-operation continues to increase between those countries with anti-retroviral manufacturing capacity and those in Africa wishing to set up local production facilities."

It is vital to exploit that attitude of preparedness among Africans, to allow them to move on to the next phase in tackling AIDS.

Some African countries have already made significant advances in tackling AIDS—for example, Uganda. The success of that nation highlights the crucial importance of generic competition. In that country, despite the fact that the big five pharmaceutical companies had agreed under the accelerated access initiative to reduce the price of anti-retrovirals, the introduction of generic equivalents from India in October 2000 led to a dramatic fall in the price of the brand-name medicines.

The conclusions of an Oxfam survey report reinforce the need for generic competition. The report discovered that, when generic medicines entered the market, the price of patented medicines fell dramatically. Competition will therefore provide an enormous boost to the accessibility of anti-retrovirals. The report also drew attention to the urgent need to fund health services to deliver treatment. The Secretary of State is nodding—I hope in agreement—because that is an absolutely key part of the argument. The funding of those essential services should go hand-in-hand with massive cuts in prices. The Global Fund to Fight AIDS, Tuberculosis and Malaria provides opportunities for countries such as Uganda to deliver comprehensive programmes, which include treatments using anti-retrovirals. Those health services must be introduced into many more African nations if progress is really to take place.

Naturally, it would be naive to imagine that every African nation is at the same stage of readiness to begin drug production. Some face huge internal obstacles, as one *New Scientist* report pointed out:

> "Some developing countries do not even have the commitment to mobilise national funds to fight the problem."

The South African political system is an example of exactly that kind of difficulty. We all know that, largely because of the personal effects of AIDS on close members of his family, Chief Buthelezi is much more open than President Mbeki, who seems to live in a world of his own on the question of AIDS. Some of his pronouncements on South Africa's AIDS problem beggar belief.

Such political reticence to stand up and confront the truth about AIDS too often translates into a lack of practical support to put in place vital infrastructure components. Unless Governments are committed to providing efficient distribution systems, the benefits of increased drug production will be unattainable to those most in need in isolated communities. The international community and the WHO must therefore remember the need to focus on a political evolution in some places, as well as on a technological one. Attitudes must change before the advances of drug production can begin to take real effect.

My final thought is an extension of that last point. In a speech to the Commission for Africa on 7 October 2004, Bob Geldof spoke about the importance of addressing local cultures. While that may seem unconnected, there is a valuable point to make. Whereas westerners are more likely to seek a medical or a biological explanation of a problem, Africans tend to seek one that is spiritual or politically related. Strategies that do not address local culture will fail. For example, one large AIDS-testing scheme among pregnant women found that only 30 per cent. returned after the birth of their child to get the results. The test did not seem relevant to their needs, nor did it offer sufficient incentive to return, in the form of treatment, to those who tested positive. The answer to that is, naturally, to provide people with an incentive to return through proper drug production and availability. Alongside that, we must ensure that people want to receive treatment. Otherwise, all our efforts will be in vain.

2.12 pm

Tom Brake (Carshalton and Wallington) (LD): I congratulate the hon. Member for East Devon (Mr. Swire) on securing this debate on a critical issue. I am pleased that we have the opportunity to return to the issue of HIV/AIDS in Africa on so many occasions.

[Tom Brake]

I shall focus on the report produced by African AIDS Action, with which I know the Secretary of State is familiar. I commend African AIDS Action for the persistence—in a positive sense—with which it has pushed the idea and for obtaining responses from the Government, including a clear statement of where they stand on the issue.

African AIDS Action helpfully set out at the beginning of its report some of the statistics, which it is worth repeating to remind us of the scale of the problem. Last year, AIDS killed 10 times more Africans than did all the armed conflicts in Africa combined. It is now the leading cause of death among Africans of all ages. Africa is home to 70 per cent. of adults and 80 per cent. of children living with HIV worldwide. In African countries, between one fifth and one third of children have already lost one or both parents to AIDS.

Some 40 million children in Africa are expected to be orphaned by the disease. In 2001, 3.4 million new infections occurred in sub-Saharan Africa. A total of 28.5 million Africans are living with HIV/AIDS in the region. Fewer than 30,000 of them—0.1 per cent. or one in a thousand—are getting treated with anti-retroviral drugs. Those statistics clearly illustrate why African AIDS Action and other organisations are pressing as hard as they can to ensure that a much larger volume of ARVs is made available in Africa for HIV/AIDS sufferers.

African AIDS Action—I shall call it AAA from now on, to avoid repeating myself—aims to produce large quantities of essential anti-AIDS drugs and to price them at an affordable level so that Africans, assisted by the international community, can have universal free access to HIV treatment. It considers itself an humanitarian, not-for-profit mission. It has no intention of seeking profits as conventional pharmaceutical manufacturers do, and it believes that it will be able to make significant cuts to the price and to reduce it to an historical low. We can all agree with those objectives. I thank the Secretary of State for his very detailed reply to my letter to him on this subject. I accept that there may be questions about whether AAA's aims can be achieved on this scale and within the proposed time frame, but I think that the objectives are sound.

The AAA document clearly sets out where it sees its target market, which it has identified in theory as the 28.5 million HIV-positive Africans. Given the number of countries that AAA believes to be in a position to acquire the drugs, however, the scale will be much smaller. It will initially focus its efforts on a core group of countries that it has identified as having a very high level of political commitment to tackling the HIV/AIDS problem, without which there is no point in trying to get drugs to those markets, but it will also focus on countries where the per capita income is more than $500 a year and there is therefore the potential to pay for the drugs.

Clearly, there are doubts, which I am sure the Secretary of State will set out when he responds. To a certain extent, however, AAA's aims have already been achieved, although perhaps not on the same scale, in Thailand and Brazil. In Thailand, the Government Pharmaceutical Organisation produces seven ARV preparations that are two to 25 times cheaper than the cheapest brand equivalents. The use of generic drugs has also allowed the treatment programme to expand more than eightfold in the past three years, with only a 40 per cent. increase in the budget.

Médecins sans Frontières has identified several assets that Thailand has in its favour: a public health system that works well and that has trained doctors—an area that the Government and other organisations believe to be a priority; strong political resolve to combat the AIDS problem; and capability of producing its own ARV medication at a reasonable cost.

Similar things have been achieved in Brazil, where manufacturing laboratories have developed generic ARV drugs. Incidentally, Brazil is promoting the transfer of technology, and I will be interested to hear from the Secretary of State whether he has had any contact with Brazil about the offer that it has made; I understand that it has signed undertakings or agreements with a number of English-speaking countries in Africa, such as Namibia, Zimbabwe, South Africa and Kenya. Brazil has seen one of the most significant drops in the price of drugs produced domestically by private national companies and especially by public manufacturing bodies, and elements of its success story may be relevant to producing drugs in Africa.

I wrote to the Secretary of State about this matter on 8 September and received a detailed reply, for which I thank him, on 13 October. I apologise if I have incorrectly given the impression that AAA met a Minister of State. I understand that that is not the case, although it has met officials from the Department for International Development. I thought that I should correct that point on the record. In his letter, the Secretary of State sets out his concerns about the AAA proposal. The Government have concerns about potential intellectual property challenges, the AAA market forecasts and its six-month production target for producing ARVs for 7.7 million people.

A separate study initiated by the Department also identified problems associated with achieving international quality standards, with a dependence on imported active pharmaceutical ingredients and with the manufacturing capacity that exists in most developing countries, although, as I said, in Thailand and Brazil there seems to be an indigenous manufacturing capacity that is delivering a substantial quantity of drugs to their own domestic markets. I would be interested to know whether the Department has been able to analyse whether there are ways in which Brazil and Thailand have gone about the production of ARVs that would be relevant to Africa and might be relevant to AAA's proposal.

The Secretary of State also refers in his letter to AAA being provided with additional information about alternative funding sources. I hope that he will expand a little on what alternative funding sources might be available for such initiatives.

I also received a briefing from GlaxoSmithKline, and I want to highlight something that I anticipate that the Secretary of State will also emphasise: the importance of health care infrastructure and resources. If there are no medical staff on the ground to deliver ARVs, simply producing them will not be of assistance. One would expect GSK to highlight that issue, but surely those two things can be progressed in parallel and we can work with the health care infrastructure in a country at the same time as trying to introduce some locally produced ARVs that could be distributed through that strengthened health care infrastructure. AAA needs to respond to that issue and to say how it sees ARVs being delivered, even in the limited number of countries that have been identified, if the health care infrastructure is not there to support the distribution.

In conclusion, I want to ask the Secretary of State a couple of questions. First, what further dialogue does his Department intend to have with AAA on its proposal? Secondly, will his Department be able to work with AAA to address the genuine concerns that he has set out, such as achieving international quality standards? I am sure that, working with the Department, those are the sort of issues that could be satisfactorily addressed.

The scale of the HIV/AIDS pandemic requires the international community to investigate all possible avenues. The production of ARVs in Africa, as set out by AAA, may have the potential to deliver significant quantities of cheap ARVs. I hope that the Secretary of State will make it clear that he does not consider that option a dead end.

Mr. Deputy Speaker: I am advised that there may be two Divisions in the House at 2.30. I inform hon. Members so that they can plan accordingly. Clearly, we shall have to wait for two votes—if there are two—but depending on how long the first takes, I suggest that we return to Westminster Hall 10 minutes after the second vote. Given the lack of hon. Members who wish to speak on this important matter, we should be able to complete the debate by the appropriate time of half-past 3. Of course, I do not wish to shorten what the Secretary of State has to say, because of the critical nature of the subject.

2.25 pm

Mr. Alan Duncan (Rutland and Melton) (Con): Thank you for your guidance, Mr. Deputy Speaker. It looks as though I shall be cut off in my prime, but the timing may work in such a way that we can all say what we want to say. I thank my hon. Friend the Member for East Devon (Mr. Swire) for initiating the debate. The issue is enormously important; it affects tens of millions of people. As you point out, Mr. Deputy Speaker, it is a pity that more hon. Members are not present to discuss it, but what we lack in quantity we certainly have in quality this afternoon.

The issue of AIDS and HIV in sub-Saharan Africa is central to our attempts to lift that continent out of poverty, and it rightly forms a central plank of the millennium development goals. Millennium development goal 6 aims:

> "To combat HIV/AIDS, malaria and other diseases."

Target 7 of that goal is even more explicit:

> "To have halted and begun to reverse the spread of HIV/AIDS by 2015."

That is a sensible and necessary goal, but sadly—let us face the truth—there appears to be no chance of meeting it at the moment on current trends. That shows the scale of the problem that we face.

The worldwide epidemic is worsening. In sub-Saharan Africa, AIDS is the leading cause of death, as my hon. Friend the Member for East Devon said. A total of 25 million people there have it, 2.2 million people died from it last year and a further 3 million became infected with it. By any yardstick those are horrifying figures, but they become even more so when one examines the sort of people affected. They are often the most productive people, the ones who are embarking on their working life or who are already employed and are the breadwinners for their families. The destructive effect of the disease on both family life and the economic life of many African countries is such that it undermines any attempt to build economic growth and to lift those countries out of poverty.

Sadly, while progress is being made in some countries—for example, Uganda—progress in tackling the disease globally is pathetically patchy. Despite the very good intentions of those involved—I fully respect the sincerity of the Secretary of State in all that he is doing—I fear that we are hardly scratching the surface of the problem. Often, at international community level, we are engaging in piecemeal schemes on a scale that is utterly inadequate. Whatever the opposite is of using a sledgehammer to crack a nut, that is it.

I read on page 3 of the Department for International Development factsheet on AIDS that drugs to treat AIDS—they get a one-line mention—are

> "far beyond the means of most sufferers".

Although undeniably true, that is a stark statement. I am afraid that the international community will fall woefully short of achieving the target of treating 3 million people by 2005.

Any comprehensive policy will entail education, treatment and cure. Much that has been said and much that I say today will, I hope, enjoy support on both sides of the House. We all recognise the complexity of the problem that we face and its many facets. Today, we are concentrating on treatment, which, in itself, is a hugely complex area of debate with important differences of opinion about patented or generic drug production. It is also true that not all infected people require anti-retroviral drugs, but most do.

Most of those who do need ARVs, if they get them, can convert their death sentence into a lifelong illness. It is probably an exaggeration to say that even 100,000 people in Africa are being treated with ARVs, and most of those are in South Africa, so hardly 0.1 per cent. are receiving treatment. We are not watching failure; we have a ringside seat at an unfolding catastrophe. DFID's factsheet speaks of a

> "lack of action and funding"

at international level, which is what we are trying to overcome.

The agreement signed in 2001 as part of the Doha round of WTO talks—the declaration on trade-related aspects of intellectual property rights and public health, which is known as TRIPS—stated that public health takes priority over private patents, which is an important landmark in respect of ARV production and the use of generics.

2.30 pm

Sitting suspended for Divisions in the House.

2.54 pm

On resuming—

Mr. Duncan: Since 2001, various countries have taken advantage of the clause that allows Governments to use compulsory licences to override patents on public health grounds.

Both the Government and the EU supported the implementation of the declaration. While I appreciate the sensitivities of this subject and the complexities of the issue, I think it right that we recognise the possibilities offered by the declaration. The key issue remaining, however, was that TRIPS still restricted drug-producing countries from producing and exporting generic medicines to countries that do not have the domestic capacity to produce them, even if their Governments were to make use of compulsory licences. An agreement was reached in 2003, but it is fair to say that it is complex, requiring importing and exporting countries to issue compulsory licences. However, that solution for dealing with the competing rights and arguments is the best that has been reached so far, and it is surely right that we explore how it works in practice and whether it delivers the improvements in public health that we all seek.

Let us first consider the costs. The cost of treatment for AIDS used to be a prohibitive $10,000 a year. It is now anything from $200 to $400. That is only $1 a day, but it is $1 a day for those who have only $1 a day. Various options and theses are advanced about how best to address the issue and overcome the financial constraints under which many African economies labour. For instance, given the background that I have outlined, can they not simply import from existing producers, using the compulsory licensing scheme? It is certainly right to test that option, which may yet work. Simplification of the compulsory licensing rules may offer the best way forward. I would appreciate hearing the Secretary of State's views on that, but perhaps it is also right that we consider some other alternatives.

My hon. Friend the Member for East Devon pointed out that Brazil has achieved an 85 per cent. reduction in AIDS-related deaths by establishing local production of ARV drugs. I do not presume to offer a comprehensive solution today—that has eluded everyone for a long time—but I hope that we can consider some options today and widen the debate on the subject.

One option that was forcefully expressed to me recently was also detailed today by the hon. Member for Carshalton and Wallington (Tom Brake). It has been promoted by the charity African AIDS Action, which plans to focus on locally produced ARVs in Africa. The logic of the case, as it was put to me, is to ring-fence a production capability for the area of greatest need, thereby avoiding all the inherent problems of cross-border trade. The plan—the objective—is to make ARVs locally, for local use.

Conventional wisdom says that 50 million people and a gross domestic product of $100 million are necessary for such a production facility to be viable, but I would argue that that is not applicable in this case. We must apply some unconventional wisdom to abnormal economic circumstances. What is needed is not-for-profit production combined with international funding, so that those on $1 a day can win access to the drugs that they so desperately need.

At present, ARVs can be produced at a far lower cost than ever before and there is massive need, but the extreme demand is not accompanied by the necessary purchasing power among the needy. A key policy option would be to bridge that gap by combining the most economic production of ARVs with a dramatic extension of the ability of patients to pay for them.

Like other hon. Members, I find African AIDS Action's case interesting. I look forward to the Secretary of State's response. I fully appreciate the problems inherent in such a proposal; but, equally, I can understand the need for some original thought if we are to address this massive problem. We should explore every option, and that seems a cogent one.

I also fully appreciate that drugs must be distributed once they are made and that patients need proper instruction in how to take them and proper diagnosis in the first place to determine which drugs they need. One of the greatest problems with focusing on generic production in Africa is that not many African countries have the necessary health infrastructure to carry out diagnoses, advise patients and deliver the medicines to the people who need them. However, such problems do not negate the basic concept of producing ARVs locally in Africa. We must be willing to invest, in parallel, in the production of the necessary drugs to treat AIDS and in the infrastructure needed to deliver them to patients.

The call for an African-based production facility puts the spotlight on the efficacy of the Department's entire AIDS assistance strategy. I hope that the Secretary of State will be able to comment not just on the specific suggestions that we have made today, but in broader terms on his Department's strategy for tackling AIDS and the ways in which our forthcoming presidencies of both the EU and the G8 might best be used to drive forward the fight against this dreadful disease.

I well remember that we debated this important subject a little over a month ago, but I am sure that the Secretary of State would agree that we must continue to debate it whenever the opportunity arises and that we must deliver results by taking effective action on the ground. How we approach that dreadful challenge will have a profound effect on how our world develops over the coming decades. The volume production of ARV drugs that can be delivered to the people in the numbers in which they are needed could make an enormous difference to the future health and prosperity of the world.

3 pm

The Secretary of State for International Development (Hilary Benn): I echo the remarks of the hon. Members for Carshalton and Wallington (Tom Brake) and for Rutland and Melton (Mr. Duncan) in congratulating the hon. Member for East Devon (Mr. Swire) on having picked this subject and secured this debate. It is his second contribution on this subject in the past month, and I congratulate him also on an extremely clear and cogent speech about what is literally a matter of life and death.

The hon. Member for East Devon asked the right question: why have we not made more progress, given that AIDS is—I agree with him completely on this—the single biggest threat to development? That is certainly true in sub-Saharan Africa, not only because of what

AIDS is doing, but because it is the part of the world where we are making least progress towards achieving the millennium development goals. Doing something about AIDS in Africa is essential to enabling that continent to progress.

I do not agree with the hon. Gentleman that a lack of progress calls into question everything that we have done until now, because many of the things that we have done hold true. He is right to say that we must ask ourselves what more we can do and how we can do it better. That is why I welcome the debate, which is a chance for us collectively to explore the nature of the challenges that we face and the most effective measures to take, while acknowledging that the problem is complex and requires action on several fronts.

That is the framework within which I want to set my replies. If it were a question merely of doing one thing, as if development as a whole were just a question of aid, the problem would be very easy to fix if one could raise the cash. It is not just a question doing that; it is about action on a number of fronts.

Like other hon. Members, I do not propose to go over the statistics on the scale of the challenge, because we did so fully in the debate in the main Chamber not that long ago. I begin by reminding Members of the steps that the Government have taken. On World Aids Day—1 December last year—we published the "Call for Action on HIV/AIDS", a deliberate call to us and to others to do more, and an invitation to people who are interested in the subject to send us their views and comments on what we should do.

When we published the UK strategy in July, with its commitment to spend £1.5 billion on the fight against AIDS over the next three years, one commitment was to set aside £150 million to support orphans and vulnerable children. I advance that as an example of the Government listening, because one point that came across very clearly from the consultation was that people did not think that enough was being done for orphans and vulnerable children. I hope that that illustrates the willingness of the Department and myself to listen and to respond.

The hon. Member for Rutland and Melton rightly made a point about our G8 presidency. The UK cannot make Africa one of the two centrepieces of its G8 presidency without putting AIDS at the heart of that effort. We are talking about a human tragedy and the impact on the economy of a whole productive generation being in the process of dying. With the older generation looking after the younger generation, they are deprived twice over.

It is a huge task getting the increased effort, energy, money and willingness from the international community to work together in the way that is most effective. I see that as the biggest single challenge that we have, not just for the G8 presidency, but in the context of what will come out of the Sachs report, the Commission for Africa report and the UN millennium summit, and it will form the main opportunity for making 2005 a development year.

No one will argue with the fact that AIDS is a global emergency that requires an emergency response. At the same time, we have to ensure that our schemes to support developing countries themselves in tackling the epidemic are efficient and sustainable over the long term, and that they manage to combine the effort, interest, enthusiasm and money of the international community with building the structures to make the schemes work. That is why we bat on endlessly about harmonisation. We must find the most effective way of bringing all the effort together, which is why the UK has been such a strong supporter of the "three ones"—one plan, one body with responsibility in any country and one way of monitoring progress.

We offer, and will offer in future, substantial support to the fight against AIDS in Africa, and I now turn specifically to anti-retrovirals. We are committed to increasing access to medicines for people in poor countries. One change that I made shortly after becoming Secretary of State for International Development was to make it absolutely clear that DFID was a strong supporter of treatment. We should acknowledge that there has always been debate about the fact that, although there must be treatment, there must also be a mechanism for delivering it. One will not work without the other, and we must make progress on both fronts.

We have been working with pharmaceutical companies and others to try to make medicines more affordable and accessible. At the end of June, we published our paper, "Increasing Access to Essential Medicines in the Developing World: UK Government Policy and Plans", which hon. Members will no doubt have seen. Several hon. Members have referred to the decisions taken through TRIPS, and in particular the agreement last August to allow countries with no capacity or insufficient capacity in their own pharmaceutical industry to import copies of patented medicines. The European Union has now published the draft regulation needed to take that forward. The TRIPS agreements are important in saying that there should not be an intellectual property bar on enabling countries that have their own production capacity and those that do not—this is what the second agreement was about—to import from elsewhere to deal with this public health emergency.

We have seen some progress on the price of drugs, and I agree with the figures given by the hon. Member for Rutland and Melton. I was going to give a figure of about $300 for generic drugs, and he gave a figure of between $200 and $400. That is the average cost that we are talking about for generic medicines, but the cost remains higher for patented medicines: more like $700. However, we still see only a very small number of people having treatment, and I acknowledge the figures that the hon. Member for East Devon gave in that regard.

I turn now to local production of ARVs. Let us be straight: I welcome any steps to increase production of ARVs from all sources, including domestic companies in Africa. As has been said, competition will help to bring down the price of ARVs further, and together with others in the international community, we will then be better placed to work with developing countries to ensure that there is enough financing to support countries in buying medicines. It might be helpful for me to draw hon. Members' attention to some of the activities that are already under way or being planned, although I recognise that the process is quite complex. I shall come to that point when I talk about the specific proposal that we have received from African AIDS Action, to which the hon. Members for Carshalton and Wallington and for Rutland and Melton referred.

[Hilary Benn]

In South Africa, Aspen Pharmacare is already producing under voluntary licences from GlaxoSmithKline and Bristol Myers Squibb. In Ethiopia, Bethlehem Pharmaceuticals is preparing production under licence, working with an African NGO, the Initiative for Pharmaceutical Technology Transfer. The current state of play is that it has submitted all the necessary applications and is awaiting authorisations. Another company, Addis Pharmaceuticals, is trying to do the same in Ethiopia. In Kenya, the company Cosmos now has a voluntary licence and is looking to produce, and there are other examples in countries such as Tanzania and Nigeria. In the Democratic Republic of the Congo, there is a public-private partnership between Pharmakina, a German-French company, and the German technical development agency GTZ. In Ghana, Zimbabwe and Zambia, there is a partnership with the Thai Government pharmaceutical organisation, to which reference has been made. I understand that in the case of Zambia, it is hoping eventually to sell to 13 neighbouring countries.

There are also the partnerships with the Brazilian Government to which the hon. Member for Carshalton and Wallington referred. My understanding is that Brazil is giving $100,000 in technology transfer grants to countries in Africa to help them to develop that generic capacity. It is important to acknowledge that there are several examples on the stocks of people trying to do exactly what the hon. Member for East Devon asked for when raising these issues for debate. Reference has also been made to the substantial generic production taking place in other parts of the world. India and Brazil were mentioned, and there are also China and Thailand. In some of those cases, work is being done with pharmaceutical companies based in Europe, the United States and Japan to try to make sure that the medicines have greater availability worldwide.

On the African AIDS Action proposal, I congratulate the organisation on its enthusiasm and ambition, but as I said in my letter to the hon. Member for Carshalton and Wallington, ambition needs to be achievable and practical. My first point, which is very frank, is that DFID is not in the business of pharmaceutical manufacture. Although we have done our best with our expertise and with what we have been able to call upon to offer an opinion to AAA about the proposals that it has put forward, this is not a field of particular speciality.

I make that point before I refer to what needs to happen, because we have reservations about the credibility of the proposal that has been made. Any proposal has to have a credible business plan, and pharmaceutical production is a complex business that takes quite some time. It has been suggested that the proposal can take place very quickly, and I raise this question: is it achievable in the time suggested? How quickly could production be up and running, given all the other projects that are in train, involving organisations that are trying to achieve exactly the same objectives of increasing production, helping to increase competition and helping to bring down the price to ensure that ARVs are made available much more widely than currently?

We have pointed out that there are several other sources of funding for a credible plan that is likely to work. They include national Governments. To what extent has AAA been able to talk to national Governments and to some of the big pharmaceutical and generic producers? There are also social investors, the European Community's accelerated action programme on AIDS, tuberculosis and malaria, the World Bank, the African Development Bank and the Initiative for Pharmaceutical Technology Transfer, which is an African-owned initiative under the New Partnership for Africa's Development. Our officials have asked African AIDS Action about those potential alternative sources of finance.

Mr. Alan Duncan: On the crucial point of the concept that is being proposed, what would happen if we were to set ourselves the objective, unrealistic though it may be at the moment, of getting treatment to every sufferer of HIV who needs it? Is the global problem at the moment a limit on the productive capacity of the pharmaceutical companies or the absence of funding to pay for people to get the drugs, or both?

Hilary Benn: The hon. Gentleman asks an important question. It anticipates neatly the question that I was coming to: what are the obstacles to making further progress on treatment? In part, they are the two things to which he alluded in his question. I shall put them in the following order, which is not an order of priority.

First, we need more nurses, more doctors and more of a health care service that has the capacity to administer the drugs. As part of that, we need testing. That point was acknowledged earlier. Unless there is testing and people know their HIV status, we will not be in a position to make an effective decision about whether they need treatment. Treatment must also be available. If it is available, people are more likely to come forward to be tested, because there is the possibility of getting something as a result, as opposed to knowing that they are HIV-positive but not being able to do much about it. That is not a great incentive to come forward.

Secondly, the capacity to monitor people's CD4 status is also needed. There are two ways of approaching that issue. In making this point, I hasten to point out that I am not a medical expert. I understand that syndromic management means looking at the patient and saying, "You look pretty ill. We think this is what you've got, but we'll give you some anti-retrovirals." There is also management based on CD4 monitoring, which makes a medical assessment of whether somebody is at the point in their illness where ARVs would be appropriate. That looks at the effective operation or otherwise of the immune system. The danger of the first approach is that it may involve giving drugs to people at a point when they do not need them. There is also always concern about drug resistance developing. In other words, even if we had all the drugs that we needed tomorrow, we would need doctors, nurses, testing and monitoring to make sure that those drugs were used effectively to manage the disease in individuals. There is a need to ensure that people adhere to the drug regime.

Much progress has been made in producing combined therapies. There has been real progress on that front to make things easier for people. One combined pill that people take once a day is much better than many different pills that they must take at different times of day, which was the treatment regime when anti-retroviral treatment was first developed. We have come a long way in that respect.

Mr. Swire: The Secretary of State cites the example of people not being in a regime in which they take the drug every day as part of their treatment. Is he not also concerned at reports that some people who have been put on a course of drugs suddenly have them withdrawn because the drugs simply do not exist?

Hilary Benn: Of course I am concerned about that problem, which undermines the purpose of identifying that people have a need and of ensuring continuity of supply. A break in supply recently occurred in Nigeria, for example. Such a problem is extremely dangerous and damaging. That is why there has been movement in bringing prices down. I congratulate those who have worked hard to make that happen, including those in the pharmaceutical companies who have given a lead—we encourage as many others to follow that lead as possible—and the Global Fund, the Clinton Foundation, the Gates Foundation and others.

We need a system to ensure that, even if all the drugs were available, they could go to people where they live, at the time that they need them, with continuity of supply. That is the very point that the hon. Member for East Devon made. A system must be in place to make that work. Otherwise, drugs might sit in a warehouse, people might pinch them from the warehouse or other practical difficulties might arise. That is the difficulty that we face.

I want to deal with two other points. First, I agree completely with the point that the hon. Gentleman made about local culture in the conclusion of his speech. That is an important point. It is the reason why we are and should collectively be strong advocates of the development of policies and approaches that countries and communities themselves design for dealing with the situation. To use the terrible jargon, I am talking about country ownership. But what is country ownership about? I try hard to avoid terrible jargon wherever possible, and I am sure that the Opposition spokespeople who are present will make common cause with me on that subject, because the problem is to explain these issues in ways that people can understand.

When we say that we want to support developing countries in developing their own plans it is precisely because that is one of the ways in which we can respond to the point that the hon. Gentleman made—the fact that, in the end, the countries themselves have to deal with the epidemic. They have to design their solutions, and we have a responsibility to support them.

The first African country that I ever visited was Malawi; I did so in 2001, when I was first a junior Minister in DFID. Malawi was a desperately poor country and Justin Malewezi, the then vice-president, who had responsibility for dealing with the AIDS crisis, was debating with his advisers at that point how they might use anti-retrovirals to keep some of their population alive. Those involved were faced with an impossible choice: to whom would they give the anti-retrovirals if they did not have enough drugs and enough capacity in the system to provide them to everyone? That experience had a profound effect on me, and it is why I changed and made clear DFID's approach to treatment. It seemed odd that there was a perception that, in dealing with the crisis, we were somehow behind developing countries in Africa themselves. It is now clear that we support prevention, treatment and care in those circumstances.

My final point is that we must continue to support African countries in finding solutions and to work with them. We are giving substantial funding to the Global Fund, as well as through our own bilateral programmes. We are the second largest provider of funding over a period of long-term commitment: the figure is £250 million up to 2008. We are supporting national Governments in building capacity so that they can scale up the treatment that they are offering, for example in Ethiopia and Malawi. We will continue to work with pharmaceutical supply and distribution companies on the issues that have been raised in this extremely important debate. We will increase our AIDS spending, as we have committed ourselves to do, and we will continue to support the Global Fund and to work to ensure that the new TRIPS agreement is effectively implemented.

I give one other assurance: we will continue to reflect on what we do and how we do it, because we have one common interest in this debate. We need to ensure that the resources, effort, capacity and will of this country are put to best effect in fighting the AIDS crisis, and we have a moral obligation across the world to ensure that the collective will, money, resources and effort are used to best effect to help the largest number of people in tackling this dreadful epidemic.

Mr. Deputy Speaker: I am sure that the House thanks the Secretary of State for that very considered and full reply. I congratulate all those who have contributed to this excellent debate, and particularly its initiator, on what has been a positive and helpful contribution to a world problem.

3.24 pm

Sitting suspended.

James Miller

3.30 pm

Nick Harvey (North Devon) (LD): My constituent, James Miller, was 34 when he was killed. During a 14-year career, he had already achieved more than many film-makers would achieve in a lifetime. Documentaries that he had shot had won three Emmys, a BAFTA, five Royal Television Society awards and a Golden Nymph. Had he lived, there is no doubt that he would have gone on to be one of the pre-eminent directors of his generation. He worked in some of the world's most hostile environments, including Algeria, Bosnia, Lebanon, Sierra Leone, Sudan and Iraq. In 2001, he shot "Beneath the Veil" about the repression, terror and war of Taliban-controlled Afghanistan. That film received an Emmy, and he has just won another award at the international film festival in Los Angeles for filming and directing "Armenia: the Betrayed", with Fergal Keane, about the Armenian genocide in 1915. It was screened by the BBC last year. "Death in Gaza", the film he was making when he was killed, has been seen on Channel 4, in the USA and at film festivals around the world, where it has collected several awards and is a candidate for more.

James Miller was shot by the Israel Defence Forces in Rafah, Gaza in the occupied territories on Friday 2 May 2003, exactly 18 months ago today. To date, no one has been charged with his killing and no admissions have been made as to civil liability.

James Miller arrived in Rafah on 16 April 2003. His crew included Saira Shah, his producer, Dan Edge, and others who had worked with him before. They were making a film about the lives of children in the occupied territories. Those who worked with James, often in very dangerous conditions, can testify that he always took a precautionary approach to the crew's security. Given his background and his experience on the ground during the three weeks before his death, the team, although they were working in dangerous territory, approached security in their customary manner. They spent the evening of 2 May 2003 filming in the home of the Al Shaer family. The area where the house is located had been largely bulldozed by the Israeli army during the previous months to clear a security zone between the Palestinian houses and the Egyptian border.

During the evening of 2 May, the crew were recording the response of Najla Al Shaer to the bulldozing of neighbouring houses by the IDF. In front of the house, two bulldozers were operating with two armoured personnel carriers providing security cover for the work. During the evening, the APC soldiers were well aware that the crew were filming at the house. The soldiers shouted over to them, often in a jocular fashion, on a number of occasions. Throughout the evening a light on the veranda of the Al Shaer house remained on, so that those observing could see a film crew there. At about 9 pm, the crew were joined by a cameraman from Associated Press Television News. Not far away, a group of peace activists had been shouting at the bulldozers through a megaphone. At around 9 pm, shots were fired in the direction of the activists, and at around 10 pm there was a small explosion in a nearby building and one of the armoured personnel carriers went briefly to investigate. Thereafter, both of them switched their lights off.

By 11 pm, there having been no activity for an hour, the crew made plans to leave. They ruled out retracing their steps across the road, knowing of the danger of being shot at from an Israeli watchtower. Attracting the attention of the APCs was judged to be the safest way to leave, given that the APC crew knew that the television crew were there and had previously allowed the family to move around as long as they displayed a white flag.

James, with a torch, his colleague, Saira, and interpreter, Aboud, stepped off the veranda wearing press flak jackets and helmets with "TV" emblazoned on the front in fluorescent strips. They held a white flag with James's torch shining on it. The group was entirely visible to onlookers because of the light on the veranda behind them, and they shouted out to the APC soldiers that they were the British journalists. There were no other sounds at the time to drown their words. As they approached the APC, a single shot was fired. The crew froze so that they could be clearly identified, and continued to shout that they were British journalists.

The second, fatal shot was fired a full 13 seconds later. The pinpoint shot struck James in the only vulnerable area of his neck, between his helmet and his flak jacket. It is vital to stress that there was no fighting with Palestinians, no commotion, no noise, and really very little scope for confusion. As James Miller's mother described it to me last night:

> "This was in no sense the heat of a battle. It took the soldier 13 seconds to decide to kill James."

He was pronounced dead at some point shortly after arrival at a military hospital, and according to Saira Shah, pressure was put on her to say, falsely, that at the time of the shooting there had been Palestinian gunfire.

The subsequent sequence of events is important. The next day, 3 May, the army issued a statement that they had been dealing with an arms smuggling ring in the locality, that they had come under fire, and that James had probably been shot by Palestinians. On 4 May 2003, the army issued a further statement that James had been hit in the back of the right shoulder when he was facing an Israeli tank. However, the pathologist, Yehuda Hiss, who conducted the post mortem a few days later, concluded that James had been shot in the front of his neck.

In the days that followed, a British expert, Chris Cobb Smith, flew to Gaza and conducted a preliminary forensic investigation on behalf of the family. This included, as far as he was able to do so, gathering photographic, ballistic and diagrammatic evidence, and staging a reconstruction of events. He passed the material to the Israeli authorities. However, the investigations carried out by the Israeli military had grave shortcomings. Not only was no forensic scene analysis conducted but the area in question was shortly afterwards reduced to rubble.

It is not known when and in what circumstances soldiers from the APCs were interviewed, if at all. The rifles used by the relevant soldiers were not immediately impounded for analysis. As a result of a ballistics examination, conducted on behalf of the family on 2 June 2003, it was established that the bullet came from an M-16 rifle of the kind issued to Israeli army personnel. Under pressure from the family, the Israeli authorities were forced to take steps to secure the rifles for analysis, but this was nine weeks after the killing and it took a further two weeks for the rifles to be produced. The family were informed that 15 rifles were to be produced, but only nine were.

It is worth noting that when a soldier joins the Israel Defence Forces, he is issued with a rifle that he retains throughout his service, but the butts of the nine rifles bore consecutive serial numbers. It seems inconceivable that nine soldiers who joined the army at exactly the same time were on duty in the same unit on the night in question. As a consequence, there is a real likelihood that the military investigation into the use of firearms on 2 May will not identify who was responsible for the fatal shot.

In November 2003, the Israeli authorities completed a general command inquiry report. Although the family were led to believe that they might be given disclosure of at least some of this document, none has been forthcoming. Somewhat inexplicably, the Israelis said that the various investigation materials previously compiled by the family's experts were not used by the army investigators.

By December 2003, the family were informed that a full conclusion would be sent imminently to the judge advocate, and that he would consider possible prosecutions. In April they were told that the investigation was near completion, and in July they were told by Baroness Symons that a General Eiland had suggested a new line of inquiry which would take a few months. It is now November, but the family have still not been given an indication of the conclusions of the military police investigation, let alone access to it or to its underlying documentation. The Israeli Advocate-General has not so far co-operated with the British coroner, who is also investigating the incident.

James Miller's family have never sought to politicise the issues relating to his death, but we must understand the context. A month or so before, in much the same area, an unarmed British peace activist, Tom Hurndall, was shot by members of an IDF unit operating a security watchtower. It is to the credit of the Israeli authorities that the officer responsible for Mr. Hurndall's death has been charged with the equivalent of manslaughter. Perhaps the charge should have been murder, but charging him is, at least, progress. He and other officers have been charged with perverting the course of justice, having initially claimed that they were fighting with Palestinians.

In the view of many observers, the Israeli military is overstretched, has morale and discipline problems and is in some respects out of control. Some of the biggest problems are with Bedouin soldiers, who were those involved in James Miller's case. They are sometimes the least disciplined and some say that they are not infrequent users of hashish.

As recently as 21 October 2004, *The Guardian* reported that a 13-year-old schoolgirl wearing her school uniform while walking into Israel's forbidden zone at the bottom of her street carrying her satchel was shot. The schoolgirl was several hundred metres from the Israeli watchtower. Two shots caught her in the leg. She dropped her bag, tried to hobble away and fell. Even some Israeli soldiers described the platoon commander moving in closer to put two bullets in the child's head. An Israeli soldier told the newspaper:

> "The company commander approached her, shot two bullets into her, walked back towards the force, turned back to her, switched his weapon to automatic and emptied his entire magazine into her. We were in shock. We couldn't believe what he was doing. Our hearts ached for her. Just a girl of 13".

Other soldiers said that they would not serve unless the officer was dismissed. That shows that, in some units, Israeli army commanders are out of control.

In May 2003, our Foreign Secretary pledged to push the Israelis for a full, thorough and transparent investigation. What progress can the Government report into the investigation of the murder of James Miller? Has the Foreign and Commonwealth Office been given any tangible assurance from the Israelis that a full, thorough and transparent investigation is under way? Are the Government committed to assisting the Miller family and the coroner in achieving a thorough and exhaustive inquiry into the murder of James Miller?

We understand that the Israeli authorities have a prime suspect, whom they have interviewed six times. Does the Minister know whether that suspect and the other soldiers under suspicion are still serving in that troublesome area of Gaza or are suspended from duty? Can he give us any indication of when that investigation will be concluded and, specifically, whether it will be concluded within the two-year limit in which the Miller family must institute private legal proceedings, if that is the only course left to them?

It is 18 months to the day since the killing of this fine young journalist. The initial response of the Israeli authorities—first issuing misleading accounts of the cause of James's death, then failing to collect or secure evidence while it still existed—left the family, me and many others in a state of deep despair. Since then, one must acknowledge that some progress has been made. At least investigations of some sort have taken place.

This has gone on for too long. The findings of the investigations have not been disclosed and time is running out. The prosecution in Tom Hurndall's case has given hope—in my case, at least, unexpected hope—and a renewed belief that Israel listens to international opinion. However, for more than 18 months, James Miller's family have put their faith in Israel to pursue justice on their behalf. They continue to do so. Justice needs to be done and it needs to be seen to be done. Time is ticking on—particularly, as I said, in terms of that two-year deadline for a private prosecution. We all understand the difficulties and the horror of the situation in Gaza and understand that there are two sides to that question, but if Israel is to maintain any sort of international reputation or any credibility, it simply must investigate and deal with these issues of grave misconduct. I look to the Minister for an assurance that the Foreign Office, having entered into dialogue with the family over a considerable period, continues to do all that it possibly can to ensure that the Israelis come to a conclusion in a timely fashion.

3.45 pm

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs (Mr. Chris Mullin): I am grateful to the hon. Member for North Devon (Nick Harvey) for securing this debate. James Miller's

[Mr. Chris Mullin]

death was a terrible tragedy, not least because, as the hon. Gentleman said, he was a brave and talented journalist.

The hon. Gentleman graphically described the events surrounding the shooting on 2 May last year, so I shall not go over them again. I share his view that justice must not only be done but be seen to be done, and I know how important it is to Mr. Miller's family and friends that the Israeli authorities carry out a full and transparent investigation into the shooting, and that the family be given access to the evidence in that investigation.

The Government have repeatedly made it clear to the Israelis that we expect them to conduct a full inquiry into the events surrounding Mr. Miller's death and to share the results with the family and us. We continue to press them on that. My right hon. Friends the Prime Minister and the Foreign Secretary, and other Foreign Office Ministers have raised the case on numerous occasions with senior Israeli Ministers, officials and members of the Israel Defence Forces. My right hon. and learned Friend the Attorney-General is currently visiting Israel. Earlier today, he raised the cases of James Miller and Tom Hurndall in detail with the Israeli military Advocate-General. He pressed for a rapid and thorough conclusion and stressed the need for accountability and co-operation with the British coroner.

Our ambassador in Tel Aviv and other Foreign Office officials have also continued to put pressure on the Israeli authorities. I will send the hon. Gentleman a summary of all those contacts, and place copies in the Libraries of both Houses. I hope that he will agree that we have left no stone unturned in this unhappy case. By my reckoning, the matter has been raised with the Israelis on more than 25 occasions, the latest occasion being today, and at all levels in the Government from the Prime Minister downwards.

The Israeli Government have assured us that they take seriously the investigation into the shooting. As the hon. Gentleman is aware, the military general command inquiry into the tragedy was completed in autumn last year, but the Israel Defence Forces have authorised a fuller, more detailed investigation by the military police. That investigation is still under way, and we are pressing for an indication of when it might be concluded.

As the hon. Gentleman said, the Miller family have made available to the Israeli authorities all the evidence that they themselves have collected, including ballistics and pathology reports. The Government have continued to press the Israeli authorities to ensure that the military police investigation is full and thorough, and we also continue to press for access by the Miller family to the evidence considered by the inquiry.

The Government have striven at every stage to keep James Miller's family fully informed of our efforts. Our embassy in Tel Aviv facilitated two visits by family members to Israel. During their most recent visit this April, officials from our embassy joined them in meetings with an adviser to the Israeli Prime Minister and with officials from the Israeli Ministry of Foreign Affairs and the Israel Defence Forces. The family have used their visits to press the Israeli authorities again for a full investigation.

My right hon. Friend the Foreign Secretary met the Miller family in June last year to discuss the Israeli investigation and followed up that meeting with a letter to his Israeli counterpart urging further progress. My colleague Baroness Symons has also spoken regularly to the family to update them on progress and to discuss other possible avenues for urging the Israelis to bring the investigation to a proper conclusion. I discussed the case with her last night, and she asked me to pass on her assurance that she will not let the matter drop.

The hon. Gentleman raised several points. On the Israeli soldiers who have been interviewed in the course of the investigation, the conduct of the investigation is a matter for the Israeli authorities and they remain unwilling to divulge details until it is concluded. We have not had any recent indication of when the investigation will be concluded. Last autumn, the Israelis said that the investigation would be concluded by the end of 2003. Nearly a year on, we share the hon. Gentleman's disappointment at the apparent lack of progress.

I appreciate the Miller family's concern that they are running out of time to bring a private prosecution under Israeli law. I know that the family have taken Israeli and UK legal advice on the matter. We shall continue to press the Israeli Government at every opportunity and at the most senior levels for an early conclusion. I am not in a position to comment on the coroner's process, but I understand that the coroner will likely want to wait for the outcome of the military police investigation.

Nick Harvey: The coroner in this country has been somewhat frustrated in his efforts to conduct any investigation on his own account, because inquiries that he has made of the authorities in Israel have not been answered, and indeed have been given short shrift. Is there anything that the Government can do, perhaps through the Minister's office or any other office, to encourage the Israeli authorities to co-operate with him? He has every right, and indeed a duty in international law, to conduct an investigation into the death of a British subject, and it would be wrong for the Israelis to stand in the way of such an investigation and not afford him full co-operation.

Mr. Mullin: I certainly accept that. It is likely that the coroner will be able to proceed once the results of the inquiry are available. I am sure that he would want to wait for the results of the inquiry, frustrating though that is. I understand that Lord Goldsmith, who, as I mentioned, is in Israel today, raised precisely that question of co-operation with the UK coroner with his Israeli opposite number. It remains to be seen, of course, with what result.

Let me conclude by paying tribute to the dignified way in which the Miller family have coped with James's tragic death. I appreciate that this has been a most difficult 18 months for them. Despite their loss, they have worked with courage and determination to secure from the Israeli authorities a full and transparent investigation, and access to the evidence. The Government will continue to work with them to that end.

3.53 pm

Sitting suspended for a Division in the House.

Child Care (London)

4.10 pm

On resuming—

Ms Karen Buck (Regent's Park and Kensington, North) (Lab): I am grateful to have the opportunity to begin to make a contribution on this important subject.

It is important to start by paying tribute to the national child care strategy and what has been achieved since 1997 with its contribution to the improvement of educational attainment and the reduction of child poverty. Those achievements are visible in my constituency, where we have four Sure Start programmes, several children's centres moving forward with the first approval of their implementation plans, two new neighbourhood nurseries opening in March next year and a number of neighbourhood nurseries initiative-funded places.

Those developments did not happen by accident, and we have had to confront Conservative-controlled councils and, in other areas, Liberal Democrat-controlled councils, which, by attempting to close nurseries, cutting voluntary service provision and reducing subsidies, have undermined what we have tried to do with Government money. It has left the Government, the London Development Agency and the Greater London authority having to plug gaps in local authority provision, and we have not been able to concentrate on building additional services.

Despite those hindrances, we stand on the brink of a new era for child care. The Government are doing nothing less than constructing a new plank of the welfare state, and we are doing so with hard evidence to support the value of the investment, whether in educational terms, as set out in the effectiveness of pre-school education study, or in economic terms, as costed by the latest PricewaterhouseCoopers study.

As well as Government investment, we are fortunate, too, in having the solid support of the Mayor of London and the Greater London authority, the London Development Agency and Association of London Government, for which child care is a priority. However, despite the achievements, vision and investment, very welcome though they are, we must recognise that the whole child care strategy is not delivering in London to the same extent as in other parts of the country. Unless we make some fundamental variations in the 10-year strategy, we will continue to lag behind in the delivery of all the benefits that child care investment can bring.

The key points are in the figures. London has the highest rate of child poverty in the country, with 38 per cent. of children living in poverty; and the figure is 53 per cent., after housing costs, in inner London. Women with children in London face a more severe employment penalty than those elsewhere. The employment rate for women without children is only slightly lower in London than elsewhere in the United Kingdom, but for women with dependent children, employment rates are substantially different. There is a 12 per cent. difference, with 53 per cent. in employment outside London, compared with 65 per cent. in London.

Many parents would prefer to work part-time while their children are very young, but opportunities for this are more limited in London than elsewhere. Nationally, 37 per cent. of women with children are working part-time; in London the figure is only 26 per cent. Parents in London are paying more for child care and they need to pay for more hours of child care, because part-time provision is less likely to be available. The average cost of a full-time day nursery place in London for a child over two years old is £148 a week—20 per cent. higher than the English average. Less than half of London's nurseries have fees for children aged two or over that fit in with the £135 ceiling for the child care element of working tax credit.

The Government explicitly recognise that problem in the Cabinet Office strategy unit report on London. The report, published in July, says that:

> "a lack of accessible and affordable childcare is an important barrier to work"

in London, with the higher cost of child care not being reflected in the tax credit system. The report calculates that a London parent with full tax credit entitlement would have to meet £73 a week of their child care costs.

4.15 pm

Sitting suspended for a Division in the House.

4.25 pm

On resuming—

Ms Buck: I was referring to the Government's Cabinet Office strategy unit report on London and the fact that it had made it clear that the higher costs of child care in the capital are not reflected in the tax credit system. It calculates that a London parent with full tax credit entitlement would have to meet £73 a week of their child care needs themselves, compared with £36 a week elsewhere in the country.

The report also acknowledges that tax credits do not provide support for more than two children and that that disproportionately affects some minority ethnic groups, along with others who have larger families. Figures cited in the report show that 28 per cent. of lone parents in London declare themselves unable to afford child care at all and a further 13 per cent. are unable to find suitable child care.

Research by a new deal for lone parents pilot identified what it called the added logistics problem of organising child care. The report stated that

> "the biggest issue for working mothers was planning and organising the triangular journey involved in leaving home, dropping off children at childcare providers and travelling to work at another location".

It added that that was

> "even more difficult in areas like London".

Underpinning those conclusions is the reality of unmet need for child care provision. The latest Ofsted figures appear to show child care provision in London falling behind the national average in terms of new places. The number of child minders is lower in London: 8.6 per cent. of under-fives have access to a child minder compared with 11.2 per cent. across England.

The problem of sustainability emerges in London in particular. The issue is at the heart of the affordability and cost dilemma and has been raised by people ranging

[Ms Buck]

from those involved with the neighbourhood nurseries initiative right through to those involved with voluntary organisations such as the Pre-School Learning Alliance.

The 10-year child care plan provides an opportunity to develop a vision of what we would like to see in London in 2015 in the key areas of child care and early years, and the related areas of employment and child poverty. We can and should congratulate the Government on what has been achieved so far, but it is precisely because of those achievements that we should not be afraid to look afresh at the scale of the challenge. The strategy must deal with the on-the-ground realities of London, offer a vision of the future and set out the steps that must be taken to turn the vision into reality.

First, the 10-year strategy needs to accommodate the reality of what will happen whatever we do. The most important example is population increase. The Greater London authority population projections show that London will have 87,000 more children under the age of five by 2015, compared with a 2001 base. London will account for the great bulk of growth in that age group at national level. We are therefore in real danger of being behind the curve in such areas as housing provision and pre-school place development. That must not be allowed to happen when it comes to working out the investment for additional child care places. In addition, London's child population will continue to become even more diverse over the period. Diversity need not correlate with poverty and unemployment, but it can easily do so if the right policy responses are not made.

Secondly, the strategy needs to accommodate our aspirations. Clearly, we hope that in 2015 London will be a much less unequal city for children, as the Government's child poverty strategy reduces income disparities. Child poverty in London will probably remain above the national average, but the national average could be far lower and the gaps could have narrowed considerably. Part of the process will involve a significant reduction in the scale of economic disparities between ethnic groups. Female employment rates in London will be far closer to the national average, if we get things right, as the employment outcomes of women with dependent children improve. The gender pay gap in London will have begun to reduce as women with children find it easier to maintain their career paths.

On the pressures that mobility and diversity can put on a city's social fabric, if we are ambitious and imaginative, it will be through children and parents, who all have in common a desire for the best for their children, that we can strengthen neighbourhoods and build social cohesion. However, for that vision to become reality we will need more parents in London to be in employment and the number of children in workless households to have fallen significantly. That will mean that the choices available to parents of young children will need to have improved. There will need to be greater flexibility in employment, improved parental leave and expanded child care and early-years provision. Benefits for those unable to work will also need to increase faster than median incomes, but increased employment will continue to be the main driver of poverty reduction.

Children's centres will also need to be sufficiently real and comprehensive to provide a focus for neighbourhoods. The specific development in child care from the 10-year strategy for which we will be looking in London to help us to ensure that vision becomes reality are that every child under school age will have access to a children's centre, providing high-quality, flexible care and early-years education, and acting as a hub for high-quality child-minding services. The existing universal entitlement is 12 and a half hours' nursery education a week for three and four-year-olds. One option for children's centres will be to expand that universal entitlement and extend it to other age groups under five, to provide at least 20 hours of free care a week for all children, regardless of whether their parents are working. Parents who are working would then be able to purchase additional hours of care with fees based on ability to pay, meaning that parents could purchase the package of care that best suits their requirements in terms of hours and mix of provision in their area of residence.

The cost of providing child care services will have increased by 2015, but quality improvements will mean that that represents an improvement in value for money. However, the funding system will have to be reformed to ensure that large families are no longer penalised in terms of child care support. Funding should increasingly shift towards a subsidy to providers, given the inherent difficulties of varying a national flat-rate tax credit scheme to accommodate sharp regional variation. Alternatively, an expanded and more generous child care tax credit would ensure access for those on all income levels. There are various options for refining the tax credit, which I shall not go into in detail; they are thoroughly developed in representations that the Association of London Government, the Greater London authority and I have previously made to the Government. We have never been able to convince the Government of the need for a regional variation in the tax credit as a fundamental principle, so we will almost certainly need to focus predominantly on increasing the supply side for affordability.

We will expect providers to be part-funded to offer flexible services for younger children. Funding will be required to support the work force model, as labour costs will otherwise push costs above affordability thresholds. We look for funding recognition to be given to support providers, so that affordable options can be given to parents of under-threes who, whether through choice or as a result of unemployment, are out of the work force. Although it is reasonable not to provide full-time day care for such groups, it is not in the interests of the parent or the child, especially among more vulnerable parents and communities such as black and minority ethnic communities, to make child care so dependent on entry into the labour market that it is, to all intents and purposes, a cliff edge, and those not in work are unable to access any meaningful provision until their child turns three.

We will expect child care and early-years education increasingly to be delivered by highly qualified staff. The introduction of stable career progression will lead to far lower rates of staff turnover, and those entering the profession with no qualifications should have access to clear career progression paths. Rates of pay will increase in recognition of the improved skills base, and a London weighting system will ensure that children's centres are a viable career option for parents in the capital.

The expansion of the child care and early years work force will itself lead to a step change in the availability of flexible, locally based employment in London. If we get that right, the knock-on effect will be the gradual emergence of improvements in local economies, especially in some of our more deprived communities. A comprehensive programme of training provision through the learning and skills councils and the London Development Agency, coupled with an active local recruitment policy on the part of providers, will ensure that new opportunities are overwhelmingly taken up by local residents, many of whom will have previously been out of the labour market. New residential developments in London will incorporate child care and early-years facilities as essential social infrastructure as a matter of course.

There should be no embarrassment, and no defensiveness, on the part of the Departments—the Department for Education and Skills or the Treasury—as they have achieved so much, starting from such a low base in 1997. However, I fear that defensiveness might prevent us from accepting the fact that there is a substantial regional shortfall in the provision, and the scale of affordability, of child care. That is having a distinct effect in holding back employment opportunities for parents as a whole, and for lone parents and the most deprived in particular.

I hope that the 10-year strategy will not disappoint Londoners. Although we face a real challenge, if we do not meet it we will not meet our lone parent employment targets or our child poverty reduction targets across the country as a whole. Much will ride on the strategy. I hope that the Minister will respond as far as he can this afternoon, but I hope primarily for an assurance that my points will be taken seriously and that the 10-year strategy will give us a chance to deliver on some of them.

4.35 pm

The Minister for School Standards (Mr. David Miliband): I congratulate my hon. Friend the Member for Regent's Park and Kensington, North (Ms Buck), not just on securing the debate but on the one-woman campaign that she has waged during the past seven years to ensure that the needs of Londoners in respect of child care, housing and employment are recognised in a suitable way. I congratulate her on the passion with which she addresses the issues and the facts and research that she uses to back up many of her arguments.

I hope that, on one score, I can disabuse my hon. Friend and the watching millions of the notion that there is any defensiveness on the part of the Government. My appearance testifies to the confidence with which the whole Department wants to address the issues. She will know that my right hon. Friend the Minister for Children, Young People and Families would have been here but for the fact that, as we speak, she is appearing on the Floor of the House. I hope that my hon. Friend does not take the presence of such a junior Minister as myself as a reflection of the issue's not being made a priority. Instead, I hope that she sees it as an example of joined-up government that the Minister for School Standards takes the issue seriously.

I agree with my hon. Friend that the progress that has been made in developing a serious child care offer for children and parents is significant. I was struck, when examining the extensive research that was carried out for this debate, to see the investment that has gone on in London. To consider just one aspect of the child care offer, of 524 Sure Start programmes throughout the country, 96 are in London boroughs, with more than half of all London boroughs having more than three programmes.

The revenue grant for local programmes working with children under four and their families in the most disadvantaged areas in London alone totals nearly £150 million between 2004 and 2006. London Sure Start local programmes have been allocated higher levels of capital, perhaps reflecting some of the costing issues alluded to by my hon. Friend. More than £165 million of capital has been allocated through local programmes in children's centres, with a further £22.5 million allocated to neighbourhood nurseries in London. I agree with her that such investment, and the seriousness with which staffing and related issues have been taken in respect of under-fives and child care for youngsters over five but not yet independent adults is really significant.

My hon. Friend said that this is a new frontier for the welfare state, which is a good way of considering the challenge that faces us. The relationship between local and central Government, and our interventions to support families and the choices that they make about how to bring up their children, is an issue that has not been addressed in a holistic and serious way by the welfare state since 1945. She is right to say that that challenges the ingenuity and innovation of central and local government. If we are to extend security and opportunity, the child care offer should be at the heart of the welfare state.

In that context, the Chancellor's announcements in the Budget concerning the long-term commitment to funding for Sure Start—an extra £769 million between now and 2007–08—is significant and is a demonstration of the commitment the Government have and the voices we have listened to. Before I deal with my hon. Friend's point about the importance of recognising the regional dimension to the child care strategy, it is worth dwelling for a moment on two aspects of the 10-year strategy that she highlighted. First, there is a need to balance choice and investment—without investment, there is no choice. Although we have been proud of the fact that the pledge to deliver a nursery place for all three and four-year-olds has been delivered, it is up to parents whether they take account of that. She made the point that we have to deliver a range of provision in a range of settings if we are to meet the aspirations of all families. That is an important starting point.

My hon. Friend stressed the need to balance the demand and supply sides of the equation. Our investment has to go in on both sides. We must ensure that the investment is in the hands of families so that they are able to make their choices. That is the purpose of the tax credit system. Equally, we must ensure that the supply side—the range of provision and the staffing of that provision—is of sufficient quality that parents have the confidence to proceed.

[Mr. David Miliband]

The whole Government are working on the 10-year child care strategy that provides the focus for this debate, and it might help my hon. Friend if I make a couple of points about how we are proceeding. We see four key principles at the heart of the strategy. First, the principle of early intervention is essential if we are to obtain the sort of change that we need—a radically improving universal and specialist service for those at risk. Secondly, parenting support needs to be allied to statutory services if we are to obtain the necessary provision. Thirdly, schools should be resources for a child care strategy, not somehow enemies of the strategy, operating separately from it. Fourthly, the range of professional expertise that exists in local government and in the voluntary sector needs to be deployed in the sort of multidisciplinary teams that my hon. Friend referred to. Those four principles will underlie the 10-year strategy as it is developed.

I do not want to repeat what some of my right hon. and hon. Friends have said about the development of the strategy, the commitment to use primary schools for 8 am to 6 pm child care, and the use of secondary schools as the basis for study support activities, because my hon. Friend will know about all that. However, she stressed the need to take account of regional and local variation in the development of the strategy. The important point that I want to make to her is that we are absolutely committed to doing that, and her contribution today will help us to do so. I hope that she takes some confidence—I was going to say solace, but confidence is more appropriate—from the fact that the Government have recognised the need to address some of the specific issues in London by setting up a specific project via the Prime Minister's strategy unit, which has tried to look at some of the issues.

We recognise that there are arguments about a "London effect" in a range of employment and other issues—notably cost, but also in other areas. It would be wrong for me to say that there is an easy answer, but the Government are clear that children and parents in London have as much right as children and parents anywhere else to a child care offer that lives up to their aspirations. The debate that my hon. Friend has helped to promote is certainly one that we want to engage in. On a previous occasion, she talked about the power of Sure Start in her constituency. I know of the North West Kensington and Golborne Sure Start programmes, and I am sure there are others. She has talked powerfully about the impact of those programmes on the life chances of young people, not just before the age of five but as they go through primary and secondary school.

The Government are as inspired as my hon. Friend about the progress that can be made by such strategic investment. We recognise that some of the challenges in London represent a significant hurdle for statutory and voluntary services and we want to deal with them. I assure her that I shall take the message of this debate to my right hon. Friend the Minister for Children, Young People and Families.

Question put and agreed to.

Adjourned accordingly at sixteen minutes to Five o'clock.

Westminster Hall

Wednesday 3 November 2004

[MR. EDWARD O'HARA *in the Chair*]

UK-US Relations

Motion made, and Question proposed, That the sitting be now adjourned.—*[Mr. Watson.]*

9.30 am

Norman Baker (Lewes) (LD): In light of the events of the past 24 hours, this debate is nothing if not topical. I have been up for most of the night, as I imagine have other hon. Members, so I assure the Minister that if I nod off during his reply it will not be a reflection on his speech. The most important thing is that I do not nod off during my own speech. Given the potential result of the election, I am suffering from not only sleep deprivation but a hangover. I do not know whether Ohio has been declared formally, but it seems as though President Bush has won a second term.

On the positive side, the elections were an important victory for democracy. There was a very good turnout; there seem to have been no allegations of corrupt practices or glitches in the procedures; and, given the popular vote, President Bush seems to have won a clear mandate. It must be good for America and, indeed, for the world that there is clarity in the result and that there has been no dispute as there was last time. However, the victory is not greatly welcomed outside the United States. When I was at the United States embassy last night with other hon. Members, I found it interesting that there were loud cheers and applause when Kerry won a state but stony silence when George Bush did so—among not only the Britons but many Americans.

On 15 October, *The Guardian* published a poll that showed that the 10 or 15 countries that had been canvassed throughout the world wanted John Kerry to win, not George Bush. The only exception was Israel, perhaps for obvious reasons. Of those polled in the United Kingdom, 22 per cent. wanted a President Bush victory and 50 per cent. wanted a John Kerry victory. Among those countries that are physically closest to the United States, including Canada and Mexico, even fewer wanted a President Bush victory than the 22 per cent. in the UK. The figure in Canada was 20 per cent., but I think that it was even less in Mexico, so there will not be wild celebrations throughout the world as a result of last night's victory for President Bush. It is incumbent on the American Administration to reflect on that and to consider how they wish to engage with the world. It is also incumbent on us in this country and on other allies of the United States to consider how we should now engage with the US.

Undoubtedly, damage has been done to the traditionally good relations between the UK and the US as a consequence of the policies pursued by the Bush Administration. It is clear from the information to which I have referred that Bush is not well regarded, but when people were asked in the same poll whether they had a favourable or unfavourable opinion of Americans, it emerged that each country polled had a favourable opinion. People can clearly distinguish between their view of their relations with the United States and Americans in general, and their view of the Administration who have been in office for the past four years, and who now look like being in power for a further four years. The poll showed that 62 per cent. of UK residents were favourable towards the Americans, while 21 per cent. had an unfavourable opinion. It is interesting that the UK had one of the lowest positive percentages, although 62 per cent. is still a significant figure.

Before I come to where that result leaves US-UK relations, it is worth my referring to a further question asked in the poll in *The Guardian*. Individuals in different countries were asked:

> "Does the US wield excessive influence on international affairs?"

All countries said yes. The percentage of people who agreed was the highest in all the countries polled. In this country, 73 per cent. of people agreed with that statement, while only 17 per cent. dissented from it.

Has the way in which we have developed our relationship with the United States since 1945 been good for this country? Should we have done anything different? Should we do anything different now, particularly in light of the new four-year Bush Administration and the Republican majority in the Senate and in Congress?

I cannot help thinking that the UK may have made a strategic miscalculation immediately after the second world war by appearing to try to retain some sort of superpower status. Still enamoured of Yalta, we thought that we were one of the big three along with Russia and America, rather than recognising that the sands of time were running out for our status as a world power, and that our future lay, as did that of France and Germany, in being a major European power. We still wield considerable influence in the world and are still, I hope, a force for good, but we are not of the same status as the US or Russia. We tried to retain a world status in line with that of those two superpowers for too long; that damaged our relations with Europe and, in some regards, with the US.

We have been hesitant about our European role since the second world war. This country is still more hostile to the concept of the European Union than other European countries are. That is a failure of successive Governments to explain to the British people the realpolitik of where we are and what our role might sensibly be in the real world. A consequence for UK-US relations is that the policy of successive Governments has been to try to be best buddy to the US, not only to shore up our global position but potentially to give us advantages. That policy is followed by this Government, too.

As the United States has grown in its size, global influence, gross domestic product and what it can deliver in the world, it has lost competitors, most notably the Soviet Union. The United Kingdom, however, has diminished in relative importance since 1945. Obviously, the empire has gone, and so have other things. The so-called special relationship seems to have become less and less important to the United States, but paradoxically it is in some ways more and more important to the United Kingdom. We seem to have to

[Norman Baker]

give more and more to keep the US interested. That is a cul-de-sac that it would be dangerous to go down. It is time to review our relations with the US in light of the balance of power in the world and the relative strengths of individual countries.

We have an unequal relationship, made even less equal by the fact that the US is now the sole superpower, and by the philosophy and approach of President Bush and his Administration. Unlike previous US Administrations, the Bush Administration have been openly dismissive of the need for consensus in the world and of the views of the rest of the world. By implication, they are also more dismissive of the views of the United Kingdom. That manifests itself in several ways.

I was sorry to hear of the situation that arose at Abu Ghraib prison in Iraq, which was clearly a flouting of accepted international behaviour. That was regrettable, and in my view the US has not been sufficiently apologetic for that. There is also the issue of Guantanamo Bay, a no-man's land deliberately set up to hold people without fair trial and without recourse to the normal avenues of justice. People there are not prisoners of war or charged with criminal offences, but are held indefinitely. Of course, to this day there are four Britons held at Guantanamo Bay. Five have been released, it is true, but when they were eventually released it seemed that the reasons why they were held in the first place were less than clear. Certainly, there was no clamour on this side of the Atlantic to press charges against those individuals.

As I say, four UK citizens are still being held, so I welcome the fact that the US Supreme Court recently issued a judgment criticising that situation. Still, we seem to make little progress on the matter. As my right hon. and learned Friend the Member for North-East Fife (Sir Menzies Campbell) said on 25 June:

> "The British government should now consider taking legal action in the United States to compel the return of its citizens."

I have seen no evidence that that is happening.

The line from the Foreign Office appears to have been unchanged for some time. In June, I asked the Foreign Secretary what steps he intended to take to ensure that British nationals held at Guantanamo Bay were subject to a fair trial or released, and what time scale he had set. The answer given by the Under-Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs, the hon. Member for Sunderland, South (Mr. Mullin), on 5 July was:

> "Discussions between the British and US Governments on the situation of the four British detainees at Guantanamo Bay are continuing. The Government will continue to seek to resolve their position. No timescale has been set for this."—[*Official Report*, 5 July 2004; Vol. 423, c. 549W.]

That seems an extraordinarily weak response to a serious situation involving British citizens. I doubt whether the British Government would have been so laid back and relaxed had those British nationals been held by another state.

I do not understand why the British Government have not been more forceful in demanding a regularisation of that position. The answer, I think, is that they do not want to upset the Americans, with whom relations are very important, and that they are not prepared to push the case, even when they have a clearly legitimate case and there is a disagreement on philosophy between them and the US. I happen to think that the Government's response on many such issues is inherently sound; the trouble is that they will not press them, and give way time and again. That is why I say that we need to examine the so-called special relationship and why I think that we are now paying too high a price to stay best buddy of President George W. Bush.

There is also the issue of the prisoners held on death row. I refer particularly to the work done by my hon. Friend the Member for Orkney and Shetland (Mr. Carmichael) on behalf of Kenny Richey. It is intolerable that such a situation should be allowed to drag on indefinitely. I should like to have seen the British Government make a greater effort to resolve that and other similar situations. We have not done ourselves or the US any favours by keeping quiet in public about such matters. The US is now showing a disregard—I do not want to say contempt; that may be a bit strong—for the international rule of law, which it did so much to establish in the post-war era. It was instrumental in creating the international institutions and has done a lot of good for the world as a consequence. It is now dismissing or ignoring those institutions, including on many occasions, I am sorry to say, the United Nations.

We do not seem to have a special relationship when it comes to our prisoners on death row or our people at Guantanamo Bay. The operation of the Extradition Act 2003 is similar in that it gives the United States the power to extradite UK citizens to the US, but does not reciprocate that right to the UK. I am honestly baffled: why are we signing one-sided treaties with the United States that disadvantage us? I hope that the Minister will respond to that. It does not make any sense. We have never had a clear answer to that question, and I hope that we will get one today.

One consequence of the treaty—I have to be very careful about what I say, because I am aware of the legal situation—is that three individuals face extradition to Texas for alleged fraud, involving activities that allegedly took place in London against a British bank. That is of particular concern to me, because one of the individuals, Gary Mulgrew, owns a business—the Allen and Joy building company—which is based in my constituency in Lewes. There is genuine concern among the company's employees that if the extradition goes ahead, Mr. Mulgrew, who is key to the business, will be perforce out of the country for at least two years, even if charges are subsequently dropped or he is found innocent of them—if they are laid against him in that way. As a consequence, the jobs of 21 people and 40 to 50 subcontractors in my constituency will be at risk.

As I understand it, the Extradition Act was meant to be about not fraud but terrorism. If the allegation involves fraud, a British bank and something that allegedly happened in London, why, if there is evidence to justify the charges, cannot a trial take place in the UK? Why might there be an extradition to Texas? That is another example of the British Government responding weakly to an important matter involving UK citizens.

The Government's stance on the middle east is entirely right. The Prime Minister has recognised the need not only for Israel to be secure in its own boundaries but for a viable Palestinian state. Both those things are correct. To his credit, he also recognised very early on that to deal with terrorism and the instability in the middle east it was necessary to make important progress on the Israel-Palestine situation. He understands that and has said so, as has the Foreign Secretary. I do not doubt that the Foreign Office is quite sound on that matter. However, when President Bush suddenly changes policy, having been lobbied by Ariel Sharon, the Prime Minister, rather than saying, "I'm sorry, I don't agree with that", goes meekly along with the new arrangements and the tearing up of US foreign policy after 20 or 30 years' history. The Prime Minister, who was not consulted on that change, simply goes along with it.

It is important that we stand up for what we believe in, and being good friends to a country does not mean always agreeing with them; it can mean being critical friends. The rest of the world expects us to be critical friends. We are led to believe that behind the scenes the Prime Minister influences the United States, talks to President Bush and, by being supportive in public, can achieve progress in private. I am prepared to accept that that is a possible way forward and might, in some ways, be a sensible diplomatic strategy, but it is not without risk—for example, if we end up tied into Iraq, contrary to public opinion and, possibly, international law.

I would be happier with that strategy if clear benefits could be demonstrated, but I have yet to see any. We have ended up in Iraq in an unfavourable situation, the middle east peace plan is falling apart, and in the examples I have given involving British citizens we have not seen the British Government making substantial progress—not even on the release of prisoners from Guantanamo Bay. There is now something coming down the track to do with missile defence.

Andrew George (St. Ives) (LD): Here in the 51st state of the United States of America, many of us are surprised that the Bush campaign refrain, "Four more years", is missing the preface, "Can we cope with another?" Does my hon. Friend agree that four more years of this rather simplistic cowboys versus Indians and good guys versus bad guys foreign policy will act as an effective recruiting sergeant for psychopathic terrorist organisations? If we have four more years of "God bless America to do what the hell it likes" policy, we will have four more years of global warming, four more years of US corporate supremacy over hopes of finding a resolution to world poverty—

Mr. Deputy Speaker (Mr. Edward O'Hara): Order. The hon. Gentleman will have an opportunity to catch my eye for a speech.

Norman Baker: I know where my hon. Friend was going and I agree with him to this extent: I do not think that it is possible to defeat terrorism solely by military means. Terrorism has to be dealt with as a battle for hearts and minds, by persuading friendly nations to come on board in that fight, by respecting international law and conventions and by isolating those who wish to challenge those laws and conventions. The present policy will not achieve the outcome that President Bush wishes. He needs to change policy to bring on board other countries which would be and are sympathetic to his aims, and certainly were so after 9/11.

Mr. Gary Streeter (South-West Devon) (Con): I am interested in the hon. Gentleman's speech. Does he think that President Bush picked a fight with global terrorists and invited 9/11 to happen, and does he think that we can negotiate with these people peacefully and reach some kind of settlement? Is not the war against global terror a particularly unusual war, in that it must be won by military means ?

Norman Baker: Of course President Bush did not invite 9/11. The terrorists operating in al-Qaeda seem to be a different sort and not open to negotiation. However, President Bush can and should persuade others who are not so fanatical to understand the need to challenge al-Qaeda. He can do far more, for example, to bring Arab countries on board and involve them in the fight against terrorism, but at the moment he is alienating them by his treatment of the Palestinians. The Prime Minister understands that, and that is why he is trying to get the middle east peace process back on the road and why President Bush is wrong not to do so. He can do a lot more to isolate the terrorists than he is doing already.

Andrew George: Does my hon. Friend agree that one failing of the United States is its inability to establish a proper international accord? Does he share my concern that the United Nations has had its priorities and agenda deflected by the United States wishing effectively to go it alone if it cannot get its own way?

Norman Baker: The United Nations is a very important part of the international jigsaw, which all of us would do well to respect and enhance. After asking several times when vetoes had been exercised by permanent members of the Security Council, I received a parliamentary answer. The last time that we exercised our veto alone was against Rhodesia, as it was then known, in the early 1970s. France and China have hardly ever exercised their vetoes, and Russia's veto has petered out over the past 10 years. Nearly every single veto—and there have been about 100—has been exercised by the United States. If I can find the relevant parliamentary question in the notes in front of me, I will refer to the exact figures later.

We have a close defence relationship with the United States, and I am not one who says that we should not have that. However, given the apparent weakness of the British Government when dealing with the US, questions naturally arise about the purpose of our engagement with the US, the use of Royal Air Force bases, and whether what is proposed openly or behind the scenes for missile defence is in this country's interest.

We have a series of RAF bases that are RAF in name only. On 13 June 2000, I asked the Defence Secretary

"for what reason there are no RAF personnel at RAF Feltwell."

The rather curious answer was:

> "There is no operational requirement for RAF personnel to be based at RAF Feltwell."—[*Official Report*, 13 June 2000; Vol. 351, c. 559W.]

[Norman Baker]

We have RAF bases that are simply US bases. We ought to be more open and honest with the British people about the engagement process with the United States and the use of the bases, and we should provide an explanation of how that process is in the British national interest.

Rather than the Government smuggling through the possible deployment of missiles, whether at Menwith Hill, Fylingdales or anywhere else in the United Kingdom, with little debate and no opportunity for comment in Parliament, let alone the wider world, why do they not explain their intentions, thinking and long-term strategy and sell the idea? By behaving surreptitiously and not being up front about those matters, I am afraid that the conclusion is that there is something to hide. That is a matter for the British Government, but it is also a sign of their weakness when dealing with the United States Government.

I have mentioned that the present US Government show a disregard for world opinion, which is regrettable. Nowhere is that stronger than on environmental matters. The Minister will be aware that in a statement earlier this year, the Government's chief scientific adviser, Sir David King, mentioned that in his view climate change represents the biggest threat to the planet, and that it was—to paraphrase him—bigger even than terrorism.

The Prime Minister has said that he recognises the great need to deal with climate change. He has said how important it is and that he intends to make climate change and Africa the centrepiece of his work during the European Union and G8 presidencies. I will welcome that if he carries it through. I hope that he does so, but he weakened his case by applying to the EU last week for increases in carbon emissions under the emissions trading scheme.

Be that as it may, the Prime Minister says that he wants to raise the issue in the EU and the G8. If he thinks that it is an important issue and he agrees with his chief scientific adviser that it is more important than terrorism—let us say for the sake of argument that it is as important as terrorism—I presume that he has raised it with President Bush. He has met him many times, he presumably has his ear and he has certainly been to summits with him, but nothing has happened in America with the President and his Administration. The only conclusions are that either the Prime Minister is being disingenuous and telling us that he has raised the matter with the United States when he has not done so, or—this is much more likely—he has raised the issue with the United States and it has paid no attention whatever to his views. That underlines how weak the Government's influence is over the American Administration. The Prime Minister has given the Americans what they want in Iraq. He has gone along with things and been their best buddy, but he has not got much in return. That is my criticism of UK foreign policy with the United States.

The Prime Minister has got nothing on climate change. Just about the first thing that President Bush did on coming to office was to abrogate President Clinton's wish to adhere to the Kyoto treaty. President Bush even suggests that climate change is not happening. He must be one of the few people in the world still to hold that view. In the meantime, the United States, which accounts for 4 per cent. of the world's population, is responsible for 25 per cent. of carbon emissions. That is an intolerable position and it is consistently getting worse.

There is no evidence that President Bush or the American Administration are going to do very much to tackle the situation, but they need to do so. That is not a criticism of the United States, because many states are taking action. In California, both Republicans and Democrats are doing good work—including Arnold Schwarzenegger, who has converted to green politics. A lot of good work is going on and there is investment—some of which President Bush has started, to be fair to him—in the hydrogen economy. However, while the US Administration are in denial about climate change, progress will not be made. The way things are going on climate change, we cannot afford another four years not simply of inactivity but of increasing US emissions. We need to act.

I am bound to say that President Bush has displayed a total disregard for the environment in any case. He has repealed several hundred laws and regulations protecting clean air and water, wilderness, and national parks and wetlands, as well as walking away from Kyoto. He has reneged on a pledge to cut power plant carbon dioxide emissions. He has launched his so-called clear skies initiative, under which 48 million extra tonnes of air pollutants will be released each year over US communities. He has also launched a so-called healthy forests initiative, which will increase logging—that is Newspeak if ever I heard it.

President Bush has modified the Clean Air Act to allow power plants to upgrade without installing new anti-pollution equipment. Thankfully, the Appeal Court blocked that. He has announced logging plans for the rainforest in Alaska. He has postponed by several years the deadline by which coal-burning power plants must cut mercury emissions. He has proposed amendments to the Endangered Species Act 1973 to allow wildlife collectors to import endangered species. President Bush is by all measurements—this is recognised independently in the US, as well—the worst US President in living memory in terms of protecting the environment.

It is not America generally; it is President Bush and his Administration. For example, Bill Ford, the chairman and chief executive of the second biggest US car maker, says that he would support higher fuel taxes in exchange for incentives to promote energy-efficient vehicles. So, there is some movement in the US, even in the car industry, but it is not reflected in the Administration, which is a great pity.

President Bush said in New Jersey in September 2002 that he wanted

> "an energy bill that encourages consumption."

He is so far away from tackling climate change and behaving in an environmentally responsible manner that it is frightening. For me, the test of whether the UK has any influence at all with the US Administration on key issues is whether we are able to influence a new Bush Administration to tackle climate change and put their environmental house in order. What the Americans do is key for the rest of us, because they are such big polluters and America is such a big country with such a large population. I hope that the Prime Minister will take that forward and that his first action this morning will be to ring up President Bush and say, "George, congratulations on winning the election. Now, can we talk about climate change?" It would be great if that were the first thing that he said, but I doubt very much that it will be.

One of the reasons why the Americans and President Bush objected to Kyoto—in addition to the potential impact on the US domestic economy—was that 80 per cent. of the world was exempted from compliance. I understand why the Americans object on the basis of exemptions and I suggest that the Prime Minister consider the Liberal Democrat policy of contraction and convergence, which seeks global agreement on reducing carbon emissions and recognises that that reduction must be spread fairly across all countries, including developing countries. If we pursued that line, which is not only environmentally sensible but might be of interest to the United States, it might overcome one of their two objections.

Such one-sidedness leads me to question the relationship between the UK and the US. We have much in common and have good relations. Many of us, including me, have spent time in the US and enjoyed and learned from it. I was in New York when I was 24. I think that anyone who is 23 or 24 should spend some time in New York. Being in the US is an important part of individual development. We learn much from the US and take a great deal from it. Nothing that I have said is a criticism of the United States as a country. *[Laughter.]* No, it is a criticism of the US Administration. It is important that that point is made.

I also criticise successive British Governments for pretending that there is a special relationship; that relationship has withered away. The Prime Minister has tried to be a bridge between the United States and the European Union, but because of the weakness of our position with the US, he has concentrated on one end of the bridge to the exclusion of the other. There is not much evidence of the pursuance of the EU end, and the danger is that the bridge will fall into the water and that the Prime Minister will end up drowning as a consequence. That is not something that I want to happen—it is not in the interests of this country.

I shall finish by quoting the former Minister, David Clark. He was a very good Minister and the only one to have been sacked for trying to implement the Government's manifesto, by introducing what the Government thought was a too radical right to freedom of information. In an article in *The Guardian* earlier this month, he said:

> "By putting fidelity to the 'special relationship' first, we can only weaken Europe's collective voice and encourage America's unilateralist impulse, further souring transatlantic relations and leaving us exposed—the choice we have always attempted to avoid. The truth is that if we want a durable transatlantic partnership that works in the common interests of Europe and America, it will only become possible if Britain is prepared to abandon the illusion of 'specialness' in relations with America and give priority to the objective of forging a common European approach. This is not primarily a matter of treaties and institutions; it is much more a question of mindset."

Reinforcing the point that I made about our weak position with the US and the tendency to offer more than we ought, David Clark also said:

> "It is entirely likely that Blair, in moments of private reflection, understands that he made an enormous mistake in selling his support to George Bush so cheaply."

I hope that the Prime Minister has realised that that was a mistake and that he will take corrective action in the second Bush term. Our present method of engagement with the US does not help the US or the world, and most of all it does not help us. There is a way forward, but it requires a change of policy from the Government.

10.3 am

Mr. Michael Moore (Tweeddale, Ettrick and Lauderdale) (LD): I congratulate my hon. Friend the Member for Lewes (Norman Baker) on securing the debate and on the typically forthright manner in which he put his case. Under normal circumstances, one might say that it was uncanny timing to secure the debate this morning. Unfortunately, the lack of other participants makes it appear that right hon. and hon. Members prefer to celebrate or commiserate about the election, rather than come here to pontificate on it. Perhaps we will have another opportunity, when more of our colleagues will contribute to what is one of the most important foreign policy issues that faces us.

There is still some uncertainty about the outcome of the US election, although that may end while we are here. Clearly, the protagonists in the presidential election have different world views, but they will undoubtedly face the same challenges. If Mr. Kerry were to win—I appreciate that that now seems unlikely—we might look forward to a more internationalist approach to foreign policy, but he would face serious constraints, some of America's making and others that reflect the challenges in this new world order. If, as is now almost certain, President Bush wins a second term, we must hope that, in the tradition of second-term presidents, he will focus on solutions to some of the most pressing international problems. Regardless of the outcome, we must do our best to be optimistic that the new American presidential term will offer us an opportunity to develop our relationship with the United States and tackle the fearsome difficulties that face us all.

We regularly debate in the House and elsewhere the nature of our relationship with the United States, and how special it is or is not. Whatever one's opinion, the relationship is undeniably unique and strong, but it is not without strains. Its strength is founded on our economic and trading relationship, which is one of the most important that the UK enjoys. There are still extremely close defensive and security ties between the two countries, and underpinning the relationship are the historic links of families, the shared experiences of the world wars and much else besides, which keep the two countries close.

Undoubtedly the balance has shifted with the end of the cold war and more recently with the new realities after 9/11. In the absence of the Soviet Union and the communist threat that went with it, the glue that bound us together has loosened. The US has parallel interests in the Americas and Asia that alter the balance of its outlook. The United Kingdom and Europe are less

[Mr. Michael Moore]

dependent on the United States for security, and increasingly are its competitors in the new globalised economy. In the aftermath of 9/11, we all have a new perspective on what has become a fractured world of new, complex threats with which we are only just getting to grips.

Whatever the strains, the world needs the United States and Europe to bind together. I strongly believe that the UK has the most important role in facilitating that. As my hon. Friend has remarked, the Prime Minister has often characterised Britain's position as the bridge between Europe and America. I join my hon. Friend in urging that the Prime Minister and Foreign Office Ministers pay as much attention to both ends of that, so that we can make the most of our unique position in the world. That will be at its height in 2005, with the G8 and European Union presidencies, which will give our position added strength. Britain should be positioned as a committed European country, able to bring together the different parties and not necessarily having to make a choice between Europe and America.

My hon. Friend has raised some important issues such as Guantanamo Bay, missile defence and the extradition treaty between the UK and the United States, on which I hope that the Minister will have the chance to respond in detail in due course. Those are hugely significant issues that sour our relationship with the United States, and I hope that we will have a constructive reply on them.

One of the most significant issues on which my hon. Friend touched was the environment. As his analysis set out, perhaps on that we have an awful lot more work to do in recognising the scale of the issue facing the whole world and in persuading the Americans, particularly if we are to have President Bush again, that they must play a part. We are pleased that the Kyoto protocol is now to be implemented—it has been long overdue—but, without American participation, there is a huge gap in its effectiveness. We must ensure that we engage with America in that process as a matter of urgency. Whether or not it is the first remark that the Prime Minister makes to the President when they call each other—I suspect that if he calls him this morning, he will get a rather short answer—I hope that it is one of the first issues that the Prime Minister will seek to raise with him.

My hon. Friend touched only briefly on the situation in Iraq, which is one of the most sensitive issues between our two countries. Sadly, that has become more and more precarious, and we wait with some trepidation to see what might happen in Falluja in the coming days and weeks. Whatever one's view, it is increasingly obvious that the safety of everyone in that country is more and more at risk.

I do not want to rehearse all the issues in the Chamber again, but the Liberal Democrats remain deeply concerned about this country's engagement in Iraq and the prospects of developing a realistic and early exit strategy. We all want the elections next January and the year after to succeed, but we must be realistic about the difficulties, which seem to be intensifying rather than ebbing away.

The latest deployment of United Kingdom troops offers us the prospect of mission creep in Britain's contribution to the coalition efforts, and it is still uncertain what will happen once the Black Watch return and other British troops have to be deployed in their place. I hope that the Minister will expand further on explanations given to the House about the long-term exit strategy. We believe that, unless we make it clear to those in Iraq, whether they are terrorists, or the ordinary people of Iraq seeking democratically to go about their business and to make their life, that there is the prospect of a phased withdrawal of coalition forces that is tied to key events such as the elections, there is little prospect of genuine Iraqi sovereignty being passed to the people of Iraq.

My hon. Friend spent some time discussing the difficulties in the middle east, which must also be an early priority for the new presidential term. The quartet's activities in the past year have been subsumed into the American election timetable. That is a basic reflection of the realities. The United States is by far the most important of the parties in the quartet, but it is important that Britain, in its role in the European Union and as a key member of the United Nations Security Council, ensures that the road map is given new impetus and offers the Palestinians a realistic prospect of realising their dream of a viable separate state. We all want Israel and Palestine to live in peace and side by side in viable separate states. We now need the international political will to achieve that.

International terrorism, whether or not the middle east and Iraq are the key drivers of its growth, is one of the most worrying and misunderstood threats to the world as a whole. None of us can be experts on it and offer a simple solution. I accept what the Conservative spokesman, the hon. Member for South-West Devon (Mr. Streeter), said in an intervention about our being duty-bound to tackle international terrorism militarily where necessary, but we must recognise the need to tackle the underlying causes that give rise to it, which either President Kerry or President Bush will be uniquely placed to do.

We should not, however, lose sight of nuclear proliferation, which is a separate issue that has sometimes been lost in the grander debates. In the aftermath of the cold war, there is a danger of becoming increasingly complacent about the threat of nuclear weapons proliferation. We are acutely aware of the situation in North Korea, we are all very anxious about what is happening in Iran, and it goes without saying that we do not want international terrorists to obtain nuclear weapons. However, we in the international community must sharpen up our act on that score. In a recent debate in this Chamber, I characterised the situation with regard to Iran as the Europeans having too many carrots and not enough sticks and the Americans operating in the opposite way. We must bring about convergence between the American and European approaches to tackling Iran and we must hope that, by succeeding there, we will offer the prospect of a reduced risk of proliferation in other parts of the world.

Mr. Eric Joyce (Falkirk, West) (Lab): I am slightly surprised by what the hon. Gentleman has said. Is he suggesting that we are not being tough enough on Iran? One of the things that differentiates our policy from that of the US is our position on Iran, but he has said that we should be tougher, which is what the US is currently implying.

Mr. Moore: I spoke in shorthand to a degree. I refer the hon. Gentleman to the debate that we had on Iran in this very Room a couple of weeks ago. He may have been present at it in a silent capacity.

My criticism is that, although the European Union has offered the prospect of alternatives for Iran to supply a civil nuclear programme, it has not been clear-cut enough about the economic sanctions that would kick in were Iran not to proceed with that programme. My view of the American position is that it has been too willing to see an early reference to the Security Council on Iran without offering the country a way out through developments. The EU and the Government are to be commended for working with France and Germany to develop our position on Iran. However, Europe has offered too many carrots and not enough sticks, and the United States vice versa. I appreciate that the hon. Gentleman and I will continue to have a difference of opinion on the matter, but I hope that I have been able to clarify what I think.

Many of the different problems come together in the United Nations. In recent times, that has been the location of fraught battles involving the United States, Britain and other allies. Not least because of Britain's role in the G8, I hope that we will have an opportunity to revisit the way in which America relates to other countries within the UN. We will have a crucial test in a few weeks when the Secretary-General's high-level panel produces its report on the development of reform in the UN. That will go to the heart of the debate about what legitimises interventions in other countries. It is important that our Government and the Americans engage in the debate that comes out of that report at the earliest opportunity and at the most senior levels. We must recognise that in this fraught world the strength of the UN is a key to maintaining peace.

The United Kingdom's historic ties with America—our shared interests and the common threats we face—make the relationship between the two countries strong and unique. Irrespective of the outcome of the presidential contest, we have new opportunities to work with the United States to tackle the serious challenges facing the world. Instinctively, we always seek to stand shoulder to shoulder with our allies, but we must not lose our ability to be constructively critical or to strike out in a different direction when our interests diverge. The biggest challenge facing our Government is to persuade the American Administration to re-engage with Europe and to broaden the base of its international diplomacy and engagement. With the imminent presidency of the G8 and the later presidency of the EU, the timing has rarely been better.

10.19 am

Mr. Gary Streeter (South-West Devon) (Con): It is always a pleasure to follow the hon. Member for Tweeddale, Ettrick and Lauderdale (Mr. Moore). As always, he has been a voice of reason and moderation. I congratulate the hon. Member for Lewes (Norman Baker) on securing the debate and getting his timing right.

I think that we can now say that President Bush will win the election. I may be the only person in the Chamber today to do so, but I welcome that. It is a good result and I welcome the fact that the Republican party—our sister party—has strengthened its position in the Senate and Congress. I imagine that the Minister has mixed feelings about the outcome, but I believe that it is strong and positive. I welcome the fact that President Bush seems to have won the popular vote by more than 3 million and that there was a high turnout. Let us hope that we have a high turnout here on 5 May 2005, which we all know will be the date of the next general election in this country, despite the smokescreens last weekend. It is good news for America that it has apparently delivered a decisive outcome.

I recognise that the BBC will be in mourning about the result, as will many colleagues. Some people love to criticise America. The hon. Member for Lewes did so—although he made some important points about the environment and other issues—in the general thrust of his comments about the Bush Administration and, by implication, America and its role in the world in recent years. I caution those who love to criticise America—I shall make some specific criticisms in a moment. The world would be a very different and much more dangerous place if America's present President or a future President decided to take their bat and ball home and to exercise a more isolationist policy. I do not think that that would be in the interests of the world. It would be an alarming state of affairs, so let us be more positive in welcoming America's contribution to the world.

When we were approaching the run-up to the most recent war in Iraq, the Prime Minister said in the House of Commons—it must be true, because he said it—that the military might of the USA was the equivalent of the combined military might of the next 27 strongest countries in the world put together. I sometimes reflect on that. It is no wonder that America is the world's only hyperpower. Never before has one country dominated global events in such a way. I believe that 25 per cent. of the global economy is generated in the United States; it is truly a hyperpower and we must work with it.

I admire George Bush and believe that he has strong values. I prefer political leaders to have a strong sense of direction and values rather than to be all men for all seasons. I admire his leadership, but there is one reason in particular for celebrating his victory: a second-term US President has a much stronger chance of effective intervention in the middle east peace process than a first-term President, whether Democrat or Republican. If there is just one matter on which we need to see progress in the next few months it is the middle east peace process. We need to bring the parties together, to get them talking again and to reach some sort of settlement.

The middle east peace process is unusual because the contours of a settlement are clear to all sides. It is important to get the parties together, to make them talk and to thrash out the detail. I welcome the commitment that the Prime Minister expressed at the Labour party conference to re-engage with the issue after the presidential election. A second-term American President and a re-engaged British Prime Minister are a welcome recipe, because there are no issues more important in the world today than resolving that conflict. If we are to resolve or diminish the underlying causes of the war against terror, the most important

[Mr. Gary Streeter]

thing that we can do, apart from taking a gradual approach and attacking global poverty, is to resolve the running sore of the middle east conflict.

It seems that everyone in this country loves to attack America, and I have done my share of that in the past. I often think of a conversation that I had with a Syrian business man in Syria when sitting under a star-filled sky in a beautiful part of the world enjoying a wonderful meal together. I asked the sort of question one asks at about 11 o'clock at night when the conversation is beginning to dry up. I asked him what he thought was the best country in the world. He was a widely travelled man and I thought that he might say Syria or Lebanon or another country in that region. He thought for a while and then said, "Without a shadow of a doubt, the United States of America." That answer surprised me somewhat and I asked him why he had said that. He said, "Because the one thing about the US of A is that people there have freedom, and what I would give for that sort of freedom in this country and throughout many parts of the middle east and the rest of the world."

When we attack the United States, we should sometimes remind ourselves that the US is the land of the free. In many other parts of the world—in most African countries, in China, in many central Asian countries and in Latin American countries—people would be very pleased to swap living standards and their level of freedom for those enjoyed by Americans. We must not lose sight of that important point.

If one considers the role that America has played in global events in the past 50 years, one must admit that, although many mistakes have been made, America has largely been a force for good. The American intervention in world war two helped us to win the war on tyranny. The cold war was a long and difficult process, but in the end, the war against communism was won. I wonder where we would be today if the war against communism had been lost and Russia and the Soviet Union, not the west, had become the dominant world power. Where would this country be today? Would we be having this debate? Would we be having any debates at all?

We are now engaged in a war against terror, and we want to ensure that that war is won. I absolutely agree with the hon. Members for Lewes and for Tweeddale, Ettrick and Lauderdale that the war against terror cannot be won by military means alone and that we must deal with the underlying causes. I accept that we must engage in the middle east peace process and tackle global poverty and the alienation felt by many, but we seem to be dealing with a group of people who do not have a political agenda and whose intentions are to create terror and chaos in the west and to bring it down. That must be dealt with militarily.

I am unashamedly pro-American. I am an Atlanticist, and I rejoice in the special relationship. How could I not be, when I represent a city from which the Mayflower set out in the 1660s and helped to found the land of the free? I was pleased when the Prime Minister said in the run-up to the Iraq debate that for him our special relationship was an article of faith. I know that that did not go down too well in his own party, but I, too, believe in the special relationship. One of the most important planks of UK foreign policy is that we stand shoulder to shoulder with our American cousins and friends.

That policy does not, however, mean that we are the poodle of Bush or of any other President. It does not mean that when the American President says, "Jump," we say, "How high?" It does mean that we should be a candid friend. During those 18 glorious years of Conservative rule in this country recently, when we enjoyed a special relationship with American Presidents of different colours, there were many times when we were critical of them and influenced American opinion. I could go into detail, but I do not want to do that now. I want to give the Minister plenty of time to respond to this debate.

I sometimes think that our special relationship may have become a little lop-sided. Our support for the Iraqi war was very welcome indeed, bearing in mind that British involvement took engagement in the war from being solely American to one involving a coalition. Other countries were involved, but without us, one could not claim that there was a coalition. It is therefore important to President Bush that we were there alongside him. The deal appears to have been that we would have a new initiative on the middle east peace process—a fair exchange. The road map was announced, which was very welcome, but there was not the follow-through that we would have liked. We should have insisted that a special envoy be put in place in Jerusalem to see that matter through, with the full authority of the American President. That did not happen. We have a second chance now, and I very much hope that it will be taken.

There may well be a surge of confidence among Republicans, having won the popular vote fairly decisively—at least, there may be when we finally add up all the numbers. In the next few weeks, we must think through some very sensitive global issues, not least Iran and North Korea, which need to be resolved. We do not, however, want any American President, especially President Bush, to reach for hobnailed boots in which to stamp all over those situations. The UK can and must be a voice of reason to temper that sort of American confidence. There are some things that America does so well, but cultural sensitivity, peacekeeping and sensitive diplomacy are not necessarily the first things that come to mind when one lists the qualities of our American friends.

I have been critical about other issues in the past. I agree that the Guantanamo Bay policy was bad; there have been human rights abuses and it has been a public relations disaster. I wish it were otherwise, and even now I hope that the American President will change that policy.

Not long ago in this very Chamber we had a debate about the treatment of UK citizens by United States immigration officials. Some UK nationals have been handcuffed and manacled in United States airports simply because, for example, they did not have the right visa. That is an overreaction, and we would do well to ensure that the special relationship is a two-way street. We must ensure that that kind of abuse is ended. The Minister might want to comment on that.

There are important issues that the special relationship must cause us to address with the new—or returned—American President. I agree with the hon. Member for

Tweeddale, Ettrick and Lauderdale that we have to see things through in Iraq; there is no plan B. We must ensure that the January elections take place; we must commit sufficient resources to make that happen. The hon. Gentleman talks about an early disengagement plan; I would like that, too. However, the most important thing is to get the job done. We must see Iraq through to a period of democracy and prosperity. We must face down the insurgents, many of whom have come from other countries. We must also see the war on terror through; there must be no let-up on that. I mentioned Iran and North Korea; these issues need to be grappled with in the coming months.

I had a meeting with the British Council recently, in which I was informed that within a few years the majority of American middle management will be of Hispanic rather than Anglo-Saxon extraction. The gathering momentum of that change in the United States may lead to a change in the nature of our special relationship, which is largely cultural, historical and relational. Therefore, there are issues that we will need to address if we are to manage the relationship well over the coming years. However, I believe that the special relationship is crucial to our country's foreign policy, and that in it we can have the best of both worlds. We can have a close working relationship with our American cousins and full engagement with our EU partners, and we can make our own unique contribution to the world, bearing in mind those two relationships. The United Kingdom's special contribution is to promote democracy and good governance and to be at the forefront of the attack on global poverty. We are no longer a superpower, but we have a unique role and we must play it to the full.

10.32 am

The Minister for Trade and Investment (Mr. Douglas Alexander): I join the hon. Members for Tweeddale, Ettrick and Lauderdale (Mr. Moore) and for South-West Devon (Mr. Streeter) in congratulating the hon. Member for Lewes (Norman Baker) on securing this debate, on this day of all days, on the United Kingdom's relationship with the United States. It is a huge topic, and many Members of Parliament—not just those who are present in this Room—have a view on at least one or two aspects of the special relationship. Although disagreements have emerged, there has also been some common ground, not least between the Front-Bench spokesmen. I welcome the opportunity to present the Government's view on the relationship as a whole, and I will seek to address at least some of the specific issues that have been raised in this wide-ranging debate.

In some parts of the United States, the polls closed only a few hours ago. Tempting though it is to be the first Government voice to speak on the outcome of that election, it would be injudicious of me to do so, not least because I imagine that more senior Government figures than me will be making comments. Therefore, I trust that hon. Members will understand if I resist saying anything about the outcome; it would be speculation at this point—at least it was when we entered the Room. Needless to say, the United Kingdom will work closely with whoever wins, to ensure that our partnership remains a positive influence on the global stage.

Britain's relationship with the United States is, and will remain, the most important of our bilateral ties. We share common values, as the hon. Member for South-West Devon acknowledged, and those values outweigh our differences on particular issues. The United States is crucial to the achievement of the UK's international strategic priorities; I will develop that point in my response to the remarks of the hon. Member for Lewes. Both countries believe in freedom and security for all and will continue to work together to combat global terrorism. We also want the global divisions between the haves and have-nots to be narrowed.

As well as our shared values, we have other close ties. Our two countries are each other's largest foreign investors, supporting millions of jobs on both sides of the Atlantic. Given my ministerial responsibilities for trade, that is a matter of direct concern to me. The US-UK trade relationship is worth £60 billion a year, of which half originates in the UK and half in the US. In areas as diverse as science and technology, health, urban redevelopment and law—issues that we did not cover today—our experts exchange best practice knowledge to improve the quality of life for us all and for future generations.

With the greatest respect, I hope that the hon. Member for Lewes will forgive me for saying that the proposition of being lectured by a Liberal Democrat on what it requires to stand up for what one believes in is at least curious. To balance that, I should say that the Liberal Democrat Front-Bench spokesman, the hon. Member for Tweeddale, Ettrick and Lauderdale, made a far more measured and insightful contribution to the debate; there is a fair amount of common ground between us.

If I interpreted the hon. Member for Lewes correctly, his fundamental argument on a range of issues is that the USA's taking a different position to the UK is somehow in and of itself evidence of the failure of British foreign policy. He seemed to be saying that if there is any disagreement, there cannot be any influence on the international stage. I urge him to consider an alternative proposition. Just like the UK, the US develops policies on the basis of its national interest. The challenge for our international relations is to strengthen our influence, recognising that of course there will be disagreements between even the strongest friends. From time to time, all true friends argue and debate with each other the merits of their respective standpoints. It is not always constructive to do so publicly, but it is healthy to admit any differences.

The hon. Gentleman mentioned Kyoto. The UK's objective, as regards Kyoto and other issues mentioned, is to work with the United States to find mutually agreeable solutions. We will continue to do so, both bilaterally and by working with the United States in multilateral institutions. Of course, we will encourage the US to play a leading role in strengthening those institutions in years to come, as we share common values on our view of the global community.

The hon. Gentleman's speech ranged widely, from the latest polls in *The Guardian* to the historic Yalta summit. Personally, I had greater sympathy with the more generous acknowledgement of the hon. Member for South-West Devon of the US's contribution to the cold war and to securing victory in the second world war.

[Mr. Douglas Alexander]

I fear that the hon. Member for Lewes inadvertently made an error by suggesting that the David Clark from *The Guardian* whom he quoted was the former Cabinet Office Minister, Lord Clark of Windermere. I suspect rather that he is David Clark, former special adviser, who writes somewhat more frequently on foreign affairs than the other. I say that with feeling, because David Clark and I are friends. We were contemporaries at Edinburgh university, and if my memory serves me correctly, notwithstanding his membership of the Edinburgh University Labour club, he had been a member of the Young Liberals in the borders of Scotland, so perhaps he is returning from whence he came.

Let me deal with some of the more substantive points raised. On the Extradition Act 2003, on which the Home Office leads for the Government, I am of course willing to raise the matter identified by the hon. Gentleman with my colleagues in the Home Office. In relation to the death penalty, it might be helpful to set out the position. There are 38 states in the US that still have the death penalty on their statute books, as well as the US federal and military courts. We have repeatedly made clear our opposition to the death penalty, and regularly engage on the subject with US authorities, particularly when a British citizen is involved.

The UK opposes the death penalty in all circumstances. Capital punishment has no place in a modern democratic society in the view of this Government. Along with EU partners, we make regular representations to the United States, urging it to abolish the death penalty. The United States Government are in no doubt about our views, and we shall continue expressing our opposition to that practice at every opportunity.

On Guantanamo Bay and the detainees, we have long expressed our reservations about the military commissions, and the US Government suspended all legal proceedings against them at our request soon after two UK detainees were designated in July 2003. After a lengthy series of discussions with the United States, led by our Attorney-General, the Government concluded that the military commissions process would not provide sufficient guarantee of a fair trial according to international standards, so we requested that the nine detainees be returned to the UK. Further discussions at official level explored whether there was any prospect of providing an alternative trial process to the military commissions envisaged, but it has not proved possible to reach agreement.

Five of the detainees have been returned, as the hon. Gentleman acknowledged. Following a visit by officials to Washington in late May, the Prime Minister repeated our request that the remaining four detainees be returned to the United Kingdom. I respectfully suggest that no Government have done as much for their nationals detained at Guantanamo Bay or looked after the welfare of their nationals better than the United Kingdom. We have visited our people more often and have worked harder to resolve the position of the British detainees. We have held more frequent and higher-level talks with the United States Government than any other Government and, as the hon. Gentleman acknowledged, we have successfully secured the return of five British detainees. We will continue to request at the highest levels the return of the remaining four detainees. Our discussions with the United States continue.

I turn to the broad issue that in many ways underpinned the speeches of the hon. Members for Tweeddale, Ettrick and Lauderdale and for South-West Devon—the centrality and importance of the middle east peace process, not least in light of the anticipated results that were referred to earlier. The middle east peace process remains one of the UK's highest foreign policy priorities. As was acknowledged by the hon. Member for South-West Devon, the Prime Minister, speaking at the Labour party conference in September, reiterated the depth of his personal commitment to the middle east peace process and pledged to make progress on resolving the conflict a personal priority.

The United States engagement on the middle east peace process remains critical. We continue to work with the United States and other quartet members to find avenues for progress and ways in which to inject new momentum into the peace process, in inevitably difficult and complex circumstances. We remain committed to helping the parties to implement the road map and to achieve a comprehensive and just settlement. The Prime Minister firmly believes that the road map is the right way forward. The US has made it clear that it agrees. We intend to do all that we can to see it implemented in the months and years ahead.

Prime Minister Sharon's plan to withdraw all settlements from Gaza and some from the west bank is a real opportunity for progress given that, frankly, little progress has been made for many months. We hope to see a withdrawal as soon and as fully as possible. On 26 October, the Knesset voted in favour of disengagement and that was a welcome step towards that goal. Over the coming weeks, we hope to see the parties preparing for disengagement and co-ordinating their efforts. The key will be to see the plan implemented with both sides working to make it a success and taking full advantage of the opportunity to inject forward momentum into the road map process.

We and the United States, along with the rest of the international community, have a vital role to play in consultation with the parties, in preparing the ground for withdrawal and in doing all that we can to make it a success, both for Israel and the Palestinians. It is essential that the quartet leads the international community's involvement. At the same time, the quartet and the parties need to keep their eyes on the bigger objective: negotiations on a final settlement to the conflict. The recent quartet statement of 22 September set out a balanced and constructive way forward. We are supporting the Palestinian Authority in their efforts to improve the security situation in the Gaza strip and the west bank. We believe that that will benefit both sides. Candidly, of course much more work still needs to be done, but we have been encouraged by the possibility of making further progress in the months ahead.

Norman Baker: Will the Minister confirm that the British Government remain opposed to the construction of the wall on Palestinian territory? Will he also confirm that the Government are asking the United States to put pressure on Israel to discontinue its construction?

Mr. Alexander: The position of the British Government remains unchanged in respect of the barrier, not least in respect of its location on what has previously been Palestinian territory. We have made clear our views directly to the Israelis about that. The matter has formed the basis of discussions between ourselves, the Americans and the other quartet partners, as part of the much wider discussions to which I have referred.

The issue of climate change is close to the heart of the hon. Member for Lewes and he has much expertise on it. As he acknowledged, the United States is the world's biggest contributor to climate change. It is therefore essential that, as a country, it is involved fully in global efforts. We remain confident that future international action will include the United States.

From the Prime Minister down—he has particular views on what should be at least the second few words that he says to the President, if the situation turns out as he envisages—and through the work of Ministers and officials from the Foreign and Commonwealth Office, the Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs, the Department of Trade and Industry and the Office of Science and Technology, the United Kingdom is working hard to convince policy makers in the United States that their main fear that reducing emissions will harm economic growth is groundless. The United Kingdom has shown that. The UK economy grew by 36 per cent. between 1990 and 2002, while greenhouse gas emissions fell by about 15 per cent.; but some still clearly need persuading of that.

The United States Government's position against Kyoto is a matter of record. In 1997, the US Senate—notwithstanding the changes to the Senate that seem to be emerging this morning—voted 95 to zero in favour of a resolution that stated that it would refuse to ratify such a treaty. I doubt that time has shifted the numbers radically, and in light of the observations on the composition of the new Senate, there may not have been significant change overnight on that matter.

It is essential to ensure that the United States is fully engaged in international discussions on how to advance beyond Kyoto. Of course, the United States remains a signatory to the United Nations convention on climate change, and regardless of the outcome of the elections we will continue to press the United States to re-engage with international efforts to tackle the matter. After all, a change in the Administration will not cause an overnight change on emissions policy.

The hon. Member for Tweeddale, Ettrick and Lauderdale raised specifically the matter of Iraq, and I will seek to respond to his question on withdrawal. As the Foreign Secretary made clear in the House on 10 September 2003:

> "We do not want to stay, nor will we stay, in Iraq for a moment longer than is necessary."—[*Official Report*, 10 September 2003; Vol. 410, c. 403.]

Our task is to help the Iraqi people rapidly build a nation from the ashes of Saddam's dictatorship. We are doing all we can to help that happen, together with the United States and our allies in the coalition, and the process is well under way. The Iraqi Interim Government are committed to holding elections in January, as the hon. Gentleman acknowledged, and they are on track to meet that deadline.

Iraqis want elections. The hon. Member for South-West Devon spoke eloquently of the importance of freedom, and we are convinced that the Iraqi people share the ambition for free, democratic elections. That is borne out by all the recent opinion polls and discussion in Iraq. We believe that we are working towards that January deadline for elections.

This debate could go on for a long time. It not only underlines the breadth and depth of our relationship with the United States but frankly acknowledges that we disagree on certain issues, notwithstanding the enduring strength of that relationship. Today's debate—given its timing—will not be the last word on the issues raised, and I suspect that it will not be the last word spoken in the House today on the subject. However, I assure the Chamber that we in the Government will seek to work with the next Administration, of whatever hue, as we advance together our national interests on the international stage.

10.47 am

Sitting suspended.

Rural Schools

11 am

Mr. Ian Liddell-Grainger (Bridgwater) (Con): I am grateful to be able to speak on rural schools. I do not want to change the heading, but "Rural Schools (Somerset)" might be the more obvious title.

Today is not the first time that I have been fortunate enough to secure a debate on this important subject. The Minister and I have faced each other in this Chamber on rather too many occasions. It is almost becoming a habit, but I do not make any apology for that.

The vast majority of my constituency is incredibly rural. Some of those areas have enormous rural deprivation, far beyond that in Scotland and probably in most of Wales. Unfortunately, because trade is seasonal, unemployment rates are high. Rural poverty, which is not the same as what is understood more generally by poverty, is more commonplace than most people realise. Unfortunately, crime in rural areas is slowly but inexorably creeping up. That is not because there are not the police; it is because people realise that it is easy to come out of Bristol, commit a crime and go back up the M5 to Bristol. It is a problem that the chief constable, Mr. Steve Pilkington, has endeavoured to resolve over the past few years.

I fear that the business of educating young people in such places is often overlooked at the top. It is terribly easy to see just the pretty side of school life. We have an idyllic view of school. Perhaps we are thinking back to when we were young. We imagine the little villages, the quaint old school buildings, the magnificent surrounding countryside and, as we work in London, the fresh air—unless anyone was at the American embassy last night, where there was more fresh air than could be believed.

The problem of education in rural areas such as Exmoor and West Somerset runs incredibly deep and has done for 20 to 30 years. It often seems to be bypassed by policy makers of all persuasions—it does not matter of which Government or party. That is why I am raising the subject again. Unfortunately, nothing has materially changed since I held my previous debate on the subject. Indeed, there is a danger that some of the problems that we are facing may be getting worse.

I would like to cover three specific concerns. The first is the recruitment and retention of teachers in rural areas—the Minister is well aware of that. The second is the enormous financial burden of school transport. I suspect that that is a problem faced by every rural county, or any urban authority that has to bus children in. I would loosely say that the third is the role of the education authority, but what I am trying to narrow it down to is the way in which the authority deals with special needs and statementing.

I want to paint a picture of a school career from a child's perspective—I seem to have to go back a long time to remember that. It is rather a frightening journey to contemplate. It starts with the friendly local first school, which sometimes has fewer than 30 pupils. We know the problems that that can cause. A few years down the line, the child goes to one of the three middle schools, which are much bigger and, unfortunately, by virtue of that, much further away.

Alternatively, there are two—or in my case, five—excellent community colleges, which are miles apart and have upwards of 1,200 young pupils each. There is only one community college in the whole of West Somerset. I am told—the Minister will probably bear this out—that you can fit London into that area. There are four community colleges in Bridgwater.

In a few years, a child in West Somerset will become, dare I say it, in London terms, a baggy-eyed commuter. They will be plucked from a tiny village school and bunged on a bus. Sometimes, the daily journey equals the amount of time spent studying. A child from Dulverton, which is not in my constituency but in that of my hon. Friend the Member for Taunton (Mr. Flook), who unfortunately cannot be present, will be on a bus for over an hour to get to the community college. An enormous distance is involved.

For a Member of Parliament who represents an urban area, such as the Minister, the situation is sometimes difficult to comprehend, because urban seats are much smaller. At the end of a typical week of schooling, I look at the eyes of some of the children in my constituency: they look tired and I believe that they are tired. Apart from the first few happy years, when the school is just down the road, children leave home early to catch a bus that meanders along winding roads for mile after trying mile. If a person lives in a hamlet on Exmoor, in the Somerset Levels or in the Quantocks and their destination is the West Somerset community schools—Blake, Haygrove, East Bridgwater or Chilton Trinity technology college—they have to be out of bed by half-past six and on the bus by just after seven o'clock in the morning. They will probably not get home until after five.

The cost of daily transportation beggars belief. It always staggers me. I will come on to the details of that later. By the time that the Minister gets to his desk each morning, many of the children in my constituency will have been on the road for two hours. While he sips his steamy latte, although I do not know whether he drinks latte, they get bounced and swung through the lanes of Bridgwater in West Somerset; I suppose that a latte would have become a cappuccino by then. The school day in London lasts five hours. The school day in West Somerset and Bridgwater can last nine hours, simply because of distance. Children going to the two specialist schools in my constituency, Elmwood and Penrose, need a lot of care, but may be travelling for longer because they may be brought from without the county. As the Minister has kindly said, those two schools are marvellous.

The Minister may care to think back to the much trumpeted launch of the Government rural White Paper, which set out to fix the standards of life in rural constituencies such as mine. The idea was to have rural proofing in every aspect of Government business, and that included education. The Minister will not be able to answer this, but what happened to that White Paper, its ideas and ideals? Come to think of it, what happened to the money that we thought was going to come with it? I cannot answer that question. We have a problem, because one cannot expect local education authorities in rural areas to meet the idealistic aspirations of rural proofing without a great big fat wad of the folding stuff to make it happen.

Money, or the lack of it, is one of the abiding problems for teacher recruitment and retention in areas such as mine. There is an excellent TV advert campaign for teacher recruitment. I do not know who did it, but it is very good. It shows the rest of us leaving our heads at home when we go to work. The people shown who use their heads are those who teach.

That is the ideal, but I am afraid that the truth is different. Sometimes, teachers who use their heads think long and hard before coming to work in very rural areas such as Sedgemoor in West Somerset. It is a beautiful place. I recommend it to the Minister if he has not been. As he knows, it has excellent schools. However, housing and transport are a problem. Very big money is needed to buy anything but the humblest home on Exmoor and in the Quantocks. On the level of pay, it is more expensive to live in West Somerset than in London. That is a frightening statistic on what it costs to live in my area. Prices are slowing—the economy is changing a little—but they are still too high for almost everybody, including teachers.

In many cases, that means that teachers, like children, end up clocking more and more hours every day getting to school because they cannot afford to live near the schools where they teach. That is simply because of the price. They may have to commute from Bridgwater to West Somerset or from Taunton. They are forced to live where they can, and the one abiding thing is that that is always miles away.

There are three vacancies at the West Somerset community college. It is looking for a top-notch music and art teacher, a lunchtime supervisor and a very good technician to keep its IT equipment in order. The Minister will remember that the college got technology status through the Government's kindness. Such jobs are very worth while, but the people best qualified to apply may be based on the other side of the county, or possibly beyond it.

I hope that those vacancies and all others will be filled—and quickly. However, I am disturbed by the rapid turnover of teachers in our schools. I do not have a ready answer to the fundamental problems and I am not sure that the Minister has. We as a nation need to address that fundamental question. I know one thing—money talks. I also know that without money there will always be recruitment and retention problems. The Minister will realise that the national figure underlines that point. For every 100 students who complete their courses and become teachers, 68 drop out of the profession for ever within three years. That is not a good statistic—two thirds gone. I do not know what can be done about it. Those figures are from the Minister's Department.

If rural proofing means anything, it should mean financing a palpably higher level of education. There should be an allowance to help to attract the best teachers. That is a difficult concept. There should be more generous financial arrangements to help to pay for those long grim bus journeys to school.

A few weeks ago, the Minister announced that the Government's proposal for a new, green, safe, healthy school transport policy—after being at the American embassy all night, that is a tongue-twister—would become legislation as soon as time allowed, despite severe criticism of the Government's ideas from the Select Committee on Education and Skills. I suggest that the Committee keeps pushing.

The proposal involves, for the first time, means-testing. There would be no guarantee of a free bus ride if someone lives far from school. Under the Government's plans, it will be a question of how much mum and dad own. When suggesting means-testing, will the Minister please bear in mind the rural areas where we do not have that level of support? However, I am less concerned with means-testing than I am with the ethos of the School Transport Bill.

In a press statement a couple of weeks ago, the Minister admitted that the Government spend £500 million on school transport every year. I get the impression that he would prefer to spend a lot less. I expect that the Chancellor of the Exchequer would prefer to spend a lot less. I get the distinct impression that the Bill is being drawn up from an urban perspective rather than a rural one. I am happy to take the Minister's views on that.

The Minister claimed that 40 per cent. of primary school pupils and 20 per cent. of secondary school pupils are driven to school by car and that most of those journeys are less than two miles. The implication is that those journeys are unnecessary. In urban areas, I could not agree more.

I wonder whether the Minister would like to come to West Somerset to see some of the problems that we face in rural areas. I am sure that he would be welcomed. For us, the school bus run is not a luxury but a necessity. We have no choice but to take the bus—the distances are long and the journey is difficult. If the Bill includes a threat to the essential financing of school transport, the Minister will realise that people such as me who represent rural constituencies will have to oppose the Bill. We cannot see the benefits for rural areas.

I will try to persuade the Minister to treat Somerset and other rural areas more generously with a view to the problems that we face. That leads me to the role of the education authority and Somerset county council. There are several issues on which I invite the Minister to comment if he can. The first is potentially controversial. I refer to the needs of children with special needs. For those children, statements are made in order to trigger a statutory protest and to obtain classroom help. There is a widespread feeling in my constituency that the county issues statements on children too late. Learning and behavioural problems are identified early, but those children are only officially statemented after much of the damage has been done to the children's well-being, growth and inclusion in the class.

I will not identify specific schools, although I have had incidents in which head teachers and parents have come to me. I ask the Minister whether he will, through his Department, inquire whether that is a problem in the county. Somerset county council will obviously deny that there is a problem and I understand why, because statementing is always difficult. It costs a lot of money and one is never sure that one has done the right thing.

[Mr. Ian Liddell-Grainger]

Yet again, the problem boils down to money. Special needs children cost money and Somerset just does not have that money. In February, as part of the national report of Somerset's lifelong learning portfolio holder, the following statement was made:

> "Unfortunately we are still not receiving even the national average of funding for our pupils, this year being undervalued by some £19 million".

It seems that Somerset has lost out in the horse-trading between the Minister's Department and the local authorities. I suspect that we were all too naive to realise that arguing for money was all about horse-trading. We come from a rural area. That is why I am in the Chamber again, badgering the Minister, banging the drum for action, blowing the trumpet for rural schools and boasting about the place in which I live, work and was educated. Somerset needs the help of the Minister, and I hope that he can reply to that.

11.15 am

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Education and Skills (Mr. Stephen Twigg): I congratulate the hon. Member for Bridgwater (Mr. Liddell-Grainger) on securing this debate. It enables us to continue our public discussion of some of the important issues that relate to education in rural areas, rural schools in general and schools in his Somerset constituency in particular.

It is timely that we meet today, because this afternoon I will have a regular meeting with the rural schools group. I meet a group of head teachers and people from relevant Government agencies and Departments to discuss some of the challenges that face schools in rural areas. I concur with what the hon. Gentleman says about those challenges and some of the differences between a constituency such as his and one such as mine. Some of the challenges that he faces, in the recruitment and retention of high-quality staff, for example, are in some ways similar to those faced in an urban constituency, but, as he clearly set out, some challenges are different and very particular. He is right to say that important work must be done to deal with them.

I will comment on the substantive item on which the hon. Gentleman closed—special educational needs. I agree with what he said about the special schools in his constituency, Penrose school and Elmwood school. I understand that they are working towards possible amalgamation, that that issue will be addressed locally and that Somerset more broadly is conducting a review of its special educational needs provision. Special educational needs is an important area. In our emphasis on high educational standards and inclusion, schools, whether rural or urban, must personalise their teaching and learning to the needs of the individual child.

Special schools will continue to play an important role in promoting high standards, personalised learning and inclusion. It is difficult to go beyond that statement with respect to Somerset's own review of special educational needs provision, other than to say that it is important that any review engages local people, including parents, pupils, Members of Parliament and the wider community.

The hon. Gentleman perfectly reasonably quoted some local authority statistics about local authority funding and the implications for special educational needs, and he related them to the challenge of recruitment and retention. We have touched on that in previous debates, initiated both by him and by other hon. Members representing constituencies in his county. He knows that we encountered some difficulties last year when we made fundamental changes to the school funding system. For this year and the coming three years, we have sought to bring about stability in the funding system, which has been generally welcomed.

The rural schools group has had many discussions about the new system. As the hon. Gentleman set out, one senses that rural schools feel it is not right for them, that they welcome the extra stability that we have brought in, but that they want us to return to the debate for the longer term. In the five-year strategy for children and learners that the Secretary of State for Education and Skills published shortly before the summer recess, we made it clear that, although in the short to medium term our priority was to provide schools with the stability and predictability that they had not had in recent years, particularly via three-year budgets, we accepted that there was still a debate about the formula, to which we shall return.

The purpose of the changes made to the funding formula is to have a system whereby children in identical circumstances in any part of the country are treated identically. That is what we sought to achieve with that basic level of funding per pupil, wherever the pupil might be.

We then have a number of factors for additional costs. As the hon. Gentleman and I discussed before coming into the Chamber, for a large county, the additional costs will vary between different parts of the county and I recognise that that is part of the picture for Exmoor and West Somerset. That puts a duty on us to get the national formula right, but also on the local authority to look at its local funding formula for schools. If the costs of recruitment and retention in one part of the county are significantly higher than in another part, it is the local education authority's responsibility, when it devises its local funding formula, to ensure that it is flexible enough for school budgets to meet the higher costs. The responsibility is shared. The school has its budget and must use it to great effect, the local authority has a responsibility to divide the money in a way that is equitable and meets the different needs of schools and communities, and we have a responsibility to ensure that the overall capital pot of money that is available to schools is right.

The hon. Gentleman will not be surprised if I use this opportunity to refer to some of the increases in spending that have occurred since 1997. In Somerset, the real-terms increase in expenditure on recurrent funding is £840 per pupil and there has been a significant increase in capital investment in schools. Hon. Members on both sides of the House will agree that there is a decades-long need to improve buildings and equipment in schools. That improvement for Somerset local education authority has been an increase from just below £4 million in 1997–98 to an allocation last year of just below £20 million. That is a significant improvement and the money is desperately needed to ensure that children in the different communities in Somerset have the opportunities that, as he rightly reminded the Chamber, they have the right to receive from their schools.

The broad issue of the financial context clearly underpins many of the questions raised by the hon. Gentleman today about special educational needs, as well as the recruitment and retention of high-quality staff. He said that he did not have all the answers on recruitment and retention and I am happy to say that I do not have all the answers either. We need to learn from what works in different parts of the country. Schools have some flexibility, for example, to attract teachers into shortage subjects, and we will look at some of the possibilities. I undertake to write to him on that specific aspect to set out some of the options that might be available to schools that are suffering some of the recruitment and retention dilemmas and challenges that he set out clearly in his speech.

School transport is a fundamental challenge in all schools and, for obvious reasons, it is a particularly significant challenge in sparsely populated rural areas. Last week, the School Transport Bill had its Second Reading and it goes into Committee next week, when we shall have the opportunity to explore some of the issues that the hon. Gentleman raised, as well as some of the issues that were raised on Second Reading.

The hon. Gentleman correctly said that expenditure on school transport was around £500 million, which is a significant amount. I want to put it on record that I certainly do not come to the School Transport Bill with an agenda of seeking to cut that spending. My agenda is to try use that money more effectively to ensure that school transport is more widely available for students from all backgrounds. That is the central purpose of the Bill. It is an enabling Bill, which will enable a local authority, if it wishes, to pilot an alternative method of providing school transport. An authority that does not want to introduce a pilot will not be made to do so and will be able to remain within the terms of existing legislation, which goes back to the Education Act 1944.

It struck me during the debate last week that for some authorities the flexibility and options provided in the Bill may not be that helpful because, typically, students who use the school bus travel distances that are substantially longer than the two or three miles that are provided as the statutory walking distance in existing legislation. I am aware of that, and the School Transport Bill is only one aspect of a broader approach to promoting sustainable travel to school.

We certainly want a reduction in car use generally. Clearly, the better the quality and reliability of school buses, the less likely it is that parents in rural, semi-rural, suburban or urban areas will resort to using their car. The issues around safety and reliability that were explored on Second Reading will be considered in more detail as the Bill goes through Committee stage and on Report.

I emphasise that the School Transport Bill has strong cross-party support in local government. Expressions of interest have come from authorities led by each of the three main political parties, from authorities that have no overall control and from independents in local government. In his speech on Second Reading last week, the Secretary of State for Education and Skills made it clear that we would issue a series of stipulations before we agreed to any proposed measures to change the existing set-up.

I am fully aware that charging and means-testing are contentious. We shall explore those issues in Committee, but I wish to use this opportunity to reaffirm that the Bill is not a cost-cutting measure but a measure to promote more effective spending of what is presently spent and to promote sustainable travel from home to school.

It is important to note that the Bill does not redistribute money from rural to urban areas. I recognise that the transport requirements of rural areas and schools are different from and typically greater than those of suburban or urban areas. There is no suggestion that a predominantly rural authority will have any less money to spend on school transport as a consequence of the Bill, or that an urban or suburban authority will have any more. The Bill is about how authorities allocate and spend money in their own school budgets.

In my remaining two minutes, I wish to discuss an issue that the hon. Gentleman did not raise but which I know is of concern to him and to colleagues of all parties. Falling primary school roll numbers are a particular challenge in rural areas. Clearly, it is important that local government gets that right. Closing schools is only one option if primary school roll numbers are falling. Wherever practicable—I accept that it is not always practicable—we must consider other options as well, such as whether, instead of closing, smaller schools might become extended schools and use their spare capacity for other purposes. The five-year strategy sets out some options.

Federations are groups of schools that work together in formal and structured ways, sometimes under the provisions of the Education Act 2002. Federations are being considered in the discussions in Somerset, including for Penrose school and Elmwood school, to which the hon. Gentleman referred. I encourage the innovation that the governors and heads of those schools are demonstrating by considering federations. The children's trusts that form part of the Children Bill that received Third Reading this week also offer potential to explore options for different uses of existing school buildings.

I am resolute in my support for rural schools. The Government recognise the differences between the type of school in the hon. Gentleman's constituency and the type of school in urban constituencies such as mine. I am confident that he and others will continue this important dialogue and ensure that we have further opportunities for such debates.

11.29 am

Sitting suspended until Two o'clock.

Department for Work and Pensions Services (North Staffordshire)

2 pm

Ms Joan Walley (Stoke-on-Trent, North) (Lab): I am pleased to have secured this most important debate on the services of the Department for Work and Pensions throughout Staffordshire and in north Staffordshire in particular.

I am a little disappointed, although I understand entirely, that the Minister for Work, who has direct responsibility for these services, cannot be with us today, but I should say from the outset how important it is that the Under-Secretary of State for Work and Pensions, my hon. Friend the Member for Gravesham (Mr. Pond) is in the Chamber. I know of his longstanding involvement with the Low Pay Unit and how much he has been concerned with combating poverty throughout his working life. I also know that he has worked very closely with Mr. Hugh Edwards, who is now the chairman of the Burslem Regeneration Company, which is tasked with regeneration of the Burslem area. I am sure that the Minister will be conversant with the issues that we will discuss this afternoon.

I ask the Minister to listen to our concerns and to take genuine account of them. I do not suggest for a moment that he has a script from his Department this afternoon, but if he does, I ask him not to stick to it entirely but to understand that north Staffordshire MPs care passionately about the area that they represent. We want the Government to modernise and to hold every penny to account, but by the same token we want to hold the Government to account in the way in which they administer their services on our behalf.

We should consider the matter in the round. I hope that the Minister will arrange a follow-up meeting to today's debate in Westminster Hall to address in some detail the particular concerns surrounding Burslem jobcentre, and that in the light of that careful reconsideration, we might find a more appropriate way of delivering the Department for Work and Pensions services that are so important to my constituents and people in the Burslem area in particular.

I am aware that this is a very broad issue, which relates to the services provided by the Department throughout north Staffordshire, and that other colleagues wish to pursue the matter in more detail. It is important that the targets set for the Department are met and that services are delivered so that work is promoted as the best form of welfare for people of working age while the position of those in greatest need is protected. It is also important that the Government require the Department to combat poverty and to promote security and independence in retirement for today's and tomorrow's pensioners. That, of course, involves customers receiving a high quality service in every region. All I am asking is that we receive that high quality service in north Staffordshire and in Burslem in particular.

I shall talk briefly about pension services, which are part of the wider agenda.

Mr. William Cash (Stone) (Con): I am listening carefully to the hon. Lady. Does she accept that the closure of the Stone and Cheadle jobcentres has caused immense damage to my constituency, and that the idea that they could be substituted by telephone lines or internet websites is simply absurd? I protest vigorously against this.

Ms Walley: I share the hon. Gentleman's concern, and I hope that he will have an opportunity in this debate or in further consultations with the Department to set out in more detail the effects that these changes are already having in that part of north Staffordshire.

We have been offered service improvements such as pensioners' surgeries, which have been a closely guarded secret in my area. Not many people know how to access them. Insufficient thought has been given to the front-line services that pensioners in north Staffordshire will require. Will the Minister examine how, under the new order that has been proposed, people will be best served by a processing centre in Wolverhampton. Some of us in north Staffordshire have a sense of déjà vu about such matters. Some years back, I remember arguing strongly that the Post Office should not relocate its sorting office in north Staffordshire to Wolverhampton. That caused us enormous difficulties and I should hate the so-called current rationalisation to result in a similar service, with no easy front-line service and people having to rely on call centres and telephones, not face-to-face contact with a trained and dedicated staff, which often makes the world of difference between receiving the service and not receiving it.

Telephone lines are not necessarily the best way in which to deal with people. They have a part to play, but they are not the only way in which to deliver the service. It bothers me that, in the Department's new vision, there will be less provision for face-to-face contact.The take-up of benefits is complex. To provide that service requires trained, experienced and dedicated front-line staff. Unless great care is taken in how the changes are brought about in north Staffordshire, we will lose an effective service.

I wish now to concentrate on the Burslem jobcentre. It is run by highly trained and committed staff and it is very much appreciated by people in the Burslem area. I pay tribute to the Department for Work and Pensions and its civil servants who look after the 34,000 or so people whom the office serves. The area has seen more job losses than most other areas in north Staffordshire, in the west midlands and in the country as a whole. The last remaining Royal Doulton factory is to close with a loss of 500 jobs. There have been job losses at Wedgwood and throughout the Potteries. Yes, we must bring in new jobs—that is part of our common task—but let us not escape the reality that those job losses are affecting people's lives now.

Set against that, there are new business developments, but in my area they are about 24 per thousand of population compared with the national average of 40. The area is identified as one of the five areas of deprivation by the Government office for the west midlands, and that is why we have such a proactive agenda for regeneration. On the specific instructions of the Secretary of State, the Department of Trade and Industry is making sure that the regional development agency, Advantage West Midlands, is looking at prioritising regeneration, new jobs and new training in the area.

A similar priority is being given to the agenda by the learning and skills council. Within Advantage West Midlands' remit is the North Staffordshire Regeneration Zone and, within that, is the Burslem Regeneration Company, chaired by Hugh Edwards, to which I referred in my opening comments. All such initiatives are in place to deal with people who have lost their jobs and to make sure that investment is made in the area, that we have training and that people are moving from sickness and incapacity into work. It is vital that the Department for Work and Pensions is integrated in all such services.

We also have Renew North Staffordshire, the housing market renewal pathfinder scheme, and Middleport and Burslem are the top priorities in that initiative. In his visit to Stoke-on-Trent, the Minister for Regeneration and the Regions, my noble Friend Lord Rooker, stressed that, whatever else the housing renewal programme does, it must link to the current economic regeneration in Burslem under the Burslem Regeneration Company project. Given that statement from my noble Friend, I should have thought that, at the least, civil servants at the Department for Work and Pensions would want to work with the Office of the Deputy Prime Minister.

Market renewal means that communities are in a fragile state because they are in transition, as a result of which they will need more support, not less. Surely that should have guided and informed the Department for Work and Pensions in its reconfiguration of services as a result of the modernisation programme. Such support needs to be maintained until such time as the housing renewal programme has been completed. I have other examples of Government support for what we are doing, and when I say "we" I mean all the partners across north Staffordshire who are working together against all the odds to build a better future for Burslem.

Just in case the Minister doubts the work that we are doing, I refer him to letters that I have had from the Department for Work and Pensions and to correspondence that I have received from the Treasury. The most recent letter, dated 3 September, sets out all that the Government are doing to support regeneration in Burslem, and ends with the comment:

> "The 2004 spending review revised the Department of Work and Pensions' public service agreement target in order to focus help more effectively on disadvantaged groups and areas"

That is what the Minister's Department should be doing for Burslem.

The crux of the problem is that we have effectively been given a fait accompli: that the Burslem jobcentre is to close. I want to know why, and why we have not been given the opportunity for real consultation on that.

Mr. William Cash (Stone) (Con): Does the hon. Lady agree that in the letter on this subject in September—certainly the one that I received—the statement from the district manager that the

> "new services represent a positive development for all of our customers and the long term improvements to our services will significantly outweigh any short-term deficiencies during the preparation",

is absolutely appalling, and gives us no satisfaction whatever?

Ms Walley: I must say that it is rather strange to find myself agreeing so much with the hon. Gentleman. I received two letters, one of them early in the summer, that set out the thinking behind the long-term programme. I checked very carefully, as hon. Members would expect, whether Burslem was affected, and the original letter made no mention whatever of Burslem jobcentre closing. Somehow, between that original letter and the final letter that announced that the decision had been made, the fact that the Burslem jobcentre was to close crept in, with no reasoning given and no clear vision of why or how. It is that which I want to highlight today.

I state categorically that I have not been consulted on the 7 September letter's proposal to include Burslem, and I do not think that other partners delivering the regeneration agenda in north Staffordshire have been consulted either. That might rest on what is meant by "consultation". It might be that if other partners have had letters telling them that the Burslem office is to close, that is classed as consultation; but I do not count that as consultation, particularly given all the bodies that have been set up by the Government to deliver the most effective agenda.

I have looked very carefully at the 1999 White Paper "Modernising Government", and I cannot quarrel with any of its objectives. It mentions better provision and better services, including better services in jobcentres. It talks about the need for joined-up government and integrated government, commits us all to putting pressure on the obstacles to joined-up working through local partnerships, one-stop shops and other means, and commits the Government to area-based programmes. I go along with all those 1999 objectives, and I am sure that the Government are delivering them all in other parts of the country, but it does not seem as if they are in north Staffordshire.

I also go along with the objectives set out in Sir Peter Gershon's report. When he was addressing an all-party group in the House last night, I made it my business to go along and hear what he had to say on his report, which Ministers are taking very seriously. In that talk, just last night, he said clearly that the objectives of the modernisation programme were to release major resources to front-line services for the period 2005–06 to 2007–08. If that is the objective, it is hard to see how it is to be done in Burslem when the jobcentre there is to be closed. I sincerely bring that to the attention of the Minister.

There is also an issue, which I will come to later, about time scales. If we are meant to be saving money for the period 2005–06 to 2007–08, is the Minister really sure that that time scale is workable in terms of what is happening in Burslem? I am committed to the Lyons review and, along with my north Staffordshire colleagues, I have met local partners to see how we can make a sound business case for the relocation of civil service and private sector jobs from the south-east to north Staffordshire—an area in which there are issues because of the number of jobs that we have lost.

At a constituency meeting only four or five months ago, I remember talking about the importance of the Lyons review and trying to encourage Departments to

[Ms Walley]

relocate. Somebody said to me, "Joan, how can you talk about that when at the same time there is going to be an issue about closing local jobcentres?" We need to consider the matter in a joined-up way and I hope that today's debate will be an opportunity to do that.

The real problem for us in Burslem is that all the Government's objectives sound fine, but the reality of the way in which they are being implemented by the Department for Work and Pensions is completely different. It just does not match the vision. I have a series of questions. I hope that the Minister will consider them and that he and his colleagues will get back to me in the coming weeks.

How can the closure of the Burslem jobcentre office be presented as a done deal? The hon. Member for Stone (Mr. Cash) has already raised the issue of consultation. I just do not accept that it should be a done deal. Even at this 11th hour, is there an opportunity for the Minister to look again at what is being proposed? Why was there no mention of the closure in the original paper that went out under the original service delivery plan? If that had flagged up the possibility of closing Burslem jobcentre, I would have wanted early discussions with all the partners to see what could be done and whether, with the knowledge of those of us who are on the ground, rather than civil servants from elsewhere in the west midlands, we could not have come up with a more workable solution. We want the very best service.

As I have said, according to the original plans the Burslem jobcentre was to stay open. What changed between that service delivery plan and the fait accompli letter of 7 September? Why was there not proper consultation? The Minister will see from dispatches that I was not told about this matter, but nor were those involved with the north Staffordshire regeneration zone or the housing renewal pathfinder given an opportunity to consider the issues raised.

Given that the Minister is answerable to Parliament for the service delivery, how can he be satisfied that the so-called estates challenge, which relates to the White Paper, is anything other than a pure cost-cutting exercise with regard to the way in which it has been implemented in north Staffordshire? I understand that a service administered by civil servants in Staffordshire is under pressure to get rid of uneconomic buildings and floor space, and that the state of buildings and access for disabled people may need to be considered and re-examined. If there are opportunities for shared buildings, of course we should go down that route. Those are all material considerations that should have been taken into account.

However, I wonder just how much of the rationale for the closure of the Burslem jobcentre relates to the rents charged by Land Securities Trillium. Should not the driving factors be about the level of need in the Burslem area? Given that level of need, it makes no sense to have proposals to close the office serving the area. If we look at the figures, it is the area of greatest need. What account has been taken of that? Will the Minister look at the figures? I do not know whether I have the most up-to-date figures. I am sure that he will correct me if I am wrong, but it seems to me that we are talking about an area with an overall population of about 36,000. In the Burslem area, something like 4,730 people are on incapacity benefit. Surely those people should be our priority group. Surely they are the people who need front-line face-to-face interviews with trained, dedicated staff to get them into work and to help us create the new investment that we need for the area.

If the Government are as serious as I am about meeting their public service agreement targets, they should be concentrating on the number of people on incapacity benefits. It is difficult enough for constituents to claim and to go through the process of getting into work following incapacity. Some of my constituents find that path so painful and difficult that they prefer staying in poverty to trying to find a way out. It can be difficult from here in Westminster to understand the levels of poverty and need that exist.

How will the Government deliver their improved services to lone parents, those on new deal, the 18 to 24-year-olds and the over-50s, when they have closed the Burslem jobcentre and people are asked to change the habits of a lifetime by travelling elsewhere? If the Minister has time to visit Stoke-on-Trent, it would be helpful if he did so. We could show him that Stoke-on-Trent is not like most other cities where there is one dedicated city centre; it is a collection of six towns, where people still do not venture outside the area they live in, even if they can afford the bus fares.

The incapacity benefit load is a big issue in Stoke-on-Trent, and particularly in Burslem. I do not see how the Government can meet their targets for getting people from benefit into work without the specialist help of the jobcentre advisers or the support of the local community. This is not the right way to go about getting its support.

The Minister should look at the time scale of all the work that is under way as a consequence of the North Staffordshire Regeneration Zone's initiatives. Had that body been properly consulted about the Burslem closure rather than told about it, I suspect that it could have got all the many partners together around the table and looked closely at what has been proposed within the context of the time scales that it is working to.

There is a need for more support for Burslem, not for less. I will be reminding the Minister for Work at every opportunity that she is responsible for the delivery of the wider objective of full employment in every region over the three years to 2008. I want her to make a good job of that in Burslem. I hope that as a result of this debate we can proceed with a follow-up meeting to look in detail at how we can achieve it collaboratively.

The modernisation agenda is all very well and good, but I owe it to my constituents to put their needs at the heart of an integrated policy. That has not been done, but there is still time to revisit the matter.

2.23 pm

Mr. Mark Fisher (Stoke-on-Trent, Central) (Lab): I am grateful for this opportunity to contribute to the debate, and I congratulate my constituency neighbour, my hon. Friend the Member for Stoke-on-Trent, North (Ms Walley), on securing it. I am surprised that the issues we are discussing have not received greater prominence both in the press and the House. My hon. Friend has done the House in general a service in raising them, because these problems are not confined to north Staffordshire or to her constituency—or even to that of the hon. Member for Stone (Mr. Cash); they affect the whole country, as I am sure other contributors to this debate will emphasise.

My hon. Friend admirably spelled out the particular problems that her constituents will face with the closure of the Burslem jobcentre. Towards the end of her remarks she touched on the strange geography of our city. It is the only non-radial city in the country. It stretches for 13 miles along a valley, and there is no contact into the city centre. Therefore, closures of services in the outlying—the constituent—towns of Stoke-on-Trent always cause problems. We do not have an easily accessible city centre of the kind that on paper perhaps makes sense of closures of commercial or government branch offices because people can get their services by going into that city centre.

We have particular geographical problems, and my hon. Friend described them very well. She was also particularly impressive when dealing with the inconsistent impact of what the Government and we are trying to do in terms of regeneration in north Staffordshire, so I will not return to those matters. I will not even labour the case that has been put to me by staff working in the Hanley jobcentre about the job losses. They made a powerful, moving case and I was impressed by their dedication. For many staff, working in jobcentres is not simply a way to earn a living; they become involved in the delivery of services and with their clients. For front-line staff in the benefits agencies, there is a large element of vocational work involved, with satisfaction gained from helping vulnerable people get what is rightly theirs. However, although that dedication impressed me, that is not why I want to contribute to this debate.

I am concerned about the services that those people provide to my constituents and benefits claimants generally throughout the country, because the changes that the Government are implementing in north Staffordshire and all over the United Kingdom will severely undermine them. The hon. Member for Stone quoted from the letter from a district manager of the Department for Work and Pensions, saying: "This was a positive development." That is incomprehensible. It is difficult to see how this is a positive development for my constituents, or makes better provision or a better service. My constituents, and claimants all over the country, will find it more difficult to get what is rightfully theirs. They need help and advice.

The Minister had an admirable record in the Low Pay Unit, working with people in poverty, before he was elected to the House. He, of all members of this Government, knows the reality of life for people on low incomes—they have never found the details of the welfare state easy to grasp and are particularly vulnerable to the complexities. Given the many passionate speeches he made to conferences on poverty, he must know why such a large proportion of benefits are unclaimed each year from time immemorial. That problem has been inherent in the welfare state over the past 50 years, and it has nothing to do with this Government or the previous one.

The complexity of the system means that there is a relatively low take-up and so much unclaimed by the people who need it most, and to whom it would make the greatest difference to the quality of their life. People in desperate need of benefit—lone parents, unemployed people and those with disabilities, as my hon. Friend said—are vulnerable and do not have first-class degrees and the ability to understand the fine print of documents. That is why they get ripped off by loan sharks and are vulnerable to almost all problems in life that involve bureaucracy. They, of all people, need help when filling in forms. People working in the Benefits Agency and jobcentres have been providing just that. They hold the hands of people as they go in and they sit down with them, giving advice and ensuring that the form is understandable and correctly filled in. That is essential for the claimant and good for the system, because the form is properly completed and is not returned or junked. That makes for a more efficient delivery of the service, but it is not why it is important; it is important because it is often the only way a person can get what they are rightfully entitled to.

All Members of Parliament know about such problems from constituents who attend our surgeries. They have probably seen a counsellor and asked for advice first, after which they see us and ask for our advice. They often bring forms to our surgeries to be completed, but I often find that I do not trust myself to help fill them in because I do not understand them. I am the worst person to give advice and would hate to see my constituents leave with their form wrongly completed. I usually say, "Please don't take it from me. We haven't got time"—it takes 20 minutes or half an hour to go through a form properly, and many other problems in their lives may be uncovered, revealing their entitlement to other benefits—"and I am not the person to do it. I am just an MP—a generalist and non-expert. Please go to your citizens advice bureau, talk to your social worker, if you have one, and go to the benefits agencies, which will help." I have been saying that to my constituents for the past 21 years, and I think it is good and sensible advice.

If we Members of Parliament—who have nice degrees and lots of experience, and who are quite articulate and confident with forms—do not trust ourselves to fill in forms for our constituents, how on earth can many of them fill them in? Some deal with the forms amazingly and admirably, but others have always gone into benefits agencies and said, "Please help me fill in this form." We cannot help them; how on earth will it help when they are told, under the changes, "Get on the phone, or online, and sort it out"? We know from our work as MPs that it is much less satisfactory, both for our constituents and for us, when people ring in with problems than when they sit down with us at our surgeries. Some people are not very confident on the phone, and one cannot pick up on nuances and see where the problems are. If we are trying to help someone with a form that we cannot see, and which is front of him and he is not reading it correctly, we are absolutely lost.

The idea that the most vulnerable people in desperate need are to be told to ring someone in Birmingham, whom they do not know and who does not know what sort of estate they live on, who will help them through their claim for entitlement is frankly extraordinary. There is no way that can be described as an improvement in service, a modernisation or a positive development. For my constituents, it will be a disaster. They may try that system once or twice, but it is unlikely to lead to a satisfactory outcome, and they will give up.

[Mr. Mark Fisher]

As for telling them to get online, many of my constituents do not have telephones; they certainly do not have computers.

I am hopelessly computer-illiterate. I tried to fill in an application form online, but I kept going round in circles and gave up after a bit. Perhaps I am particularly crass, stupid and old; I have just had my 60th birthday, and by God I felt it when I filled in the form. I wanted to join eBay, and it is apparently simple. Everyone says, "Oh, it's easy; it'll take you 10 minutes, and they'll hold your hand throughout the process," but after some 25 minutes I gave up and did not join because I could not work out the system. If I cannot work out something as simple as eBay, which just involves filling in the right details, God help my constituents—forgive my language, Mr. Deputy Speaker—when they fill in their forms, which are about matters of central importance to them and their income for life.

I beg the Minister to look into the system again, because it is not right, although it may look fine. As my hon. Friend said, we all want the Government not to be wasteful, and we all want them to modernise where it is sensible, and so on. We have all signed up to that, and it is not a problem, but when it comes to how we help the poorest members of our society obtain access to the benefits that are rightfully theirs, that desire for efficiency and modernisation must surely be tempered with some human understanding of where those people are coming from and what it is realistic to expect from them, in both the short and medium term.

I fear that the system will lead to considerable poverty and reduction in access. Even if we are talking about only a few tens of thousands of cases a year, it is tens of thousands of the very poorest people in our constituencies who will suffer. I am most upset, as hon. Members can see; I am as upset as my constituents are. I am sure that the scheme makes sense to the Department, which will be able to tell the Treasury that it is using public money very efficiently.

The idea looks good on paper, and for some people who are more confident than I am about filling in online forms it will undoubtedly work in theory, too. Obviously, some people will make the system work. If they do, and it saves the Government money and is not inconvenient for those people, great; that will perhaps speed things up. But to go over so wholeheartedly to a new system with so few and so basic safety nets is bitterly regrettable. I fear that it is too late for a pilot study, but I ask the Minister to consider quickly conducting some study of how the system will work in practice, whether there will be a fall-off in applications and correctly filled-in applications, how many people will use the internet generally and in particular areas, and what successful conclusions can be drawn from those cases that go online. I would be amazed if such a study did not confirm at least some of the fears that I have tried to express this afternoon.

Perhaps I am underestimating the online skills of my constituents and they would in fact be quite happy to stay at home or try to find somebody online on their estate and not flock to Hanley on expensive buses. If I am patronising them by saying that they will have difficulty with online services, I would be very pleased to be proved wrong. I do not know how much consultation there was in advance, but it is not too late for the Minister to conduct a study of how the service is working in practice, talking to those people delivering and receiving it. Perhaps the study will lead to ways of putting in more safety nets to ensure that when people need and want personal services that they have had ever since the welfare state began, those services will continue to be available.

2.46 pm

Paul Holmes (Chesterfield) (LD): I, too, congratulate the hon. Member for Stoke-on-Trent, North (Ms Walley) on securing the debate. I also congratulate the hon. Member for Stoke-on-Trent, Central (Mr. Fisher) on his able contribution.

The hon. Gentleman said in his opening comments that he was sure that subsequent speakers would point out that the problems relating to the closure of the Burslem centre are not unique, and indeed they are widespread and national. Through my regular contact with the unemployed workers centre in Chesterfield and its network of smaller offices, particularly in the Derbyshire coalfield, I hear of those problems. In 2003, there were three such closures that mirror exactly the problems in Burslem that the hon. Member for Stoke-on-Trent, North described in such detail. Offices were closed in New Mills, which is in the High Peak area in the north of Derbyshire, in Bakewell, a west Derbyshire area, and in Eckington, a north-east Derbyshire community, just to the north of my constituency. All closed in 2003 as part of the general centralisation and cost-cutting process.

The example of the Eckington centre particularly mirrors that of Burslem, because it is in a deprived coalfield area that suffered tremendous job losses when the pits were closed down overnight 10 to 12 years ago. It suffered particularly from the closure of the local Renishaw foundry, an issue that the hon. Member for North-East Derbyshire (Mr. Barnes) has raised on several occasions in the House.

Eckington is a regeneration area. As with Burslem and north Staffordshire, it is supposed to receive regeneration support precisely because of the deprivation concentrated there. Yet the local jobcentre that provides such support to people in that area is closed. That means, for example, that residents of Eckington and of the Killamarsh area who went to Eckington, must either go to Sheffield to access services or visit the Chesterfield or Staveley offices in my constituency, the latter being nearer. They have to travel some distance to other areas to access the services that were once provided on their doorstep in the middle of deprived communities.

Colin Hampton, the organiser at the unemployed workers centre in Chesterfield, has done a certain amount of outreach work and campaigning, and when he has been at the Staveley jobcentre on the edge of my constituency, next to North-East Derbyshire, he has talked to some of the people who must visit it because of the closure of the Eckington office. They have said that they have to walk several miles from Eckington to the jobcentre because they cannot afford the bus fare. The people who are being hit by those closures are among the poorest in society. They are most in need of those services, but have to walk a number of miles to the nearest office to get them.

There is some confusion on this issue. When I visited the Chesterfield Jobcentre Plus office, one member of staff told me, off the record, that staff were allowed to tell claimants in that situation that they could be provided with bus fares, but were not supposed to volunteer the information. Staff could tell the claimant only if they were asked. I am sure that the Minister will reassure me and say that that is not the case and that staff are advised to be proactive.

There is another possible area of confusion, about which Colin Hampton talked. Perhaps such fares apply not to new claimants but only to existing claimants whose jobcentre has closed and who have had to move further afield, to Sheffield or Staveley, to access services. There is some uncertainty among the people who work at the jobcentre and on the part of someone who works full time at the unemployed workers centre in Chesterfield. Hopefully, the Minister will be able to clarify that.

Mr. Deputy Speaker (Mr. Edward O'Hara): Order. As has been said, there is a general point to be made, which the hon. Gentleman illustrated by reference to his constituency, but I remind him that the debate is mainly about Department for Work and Pensions services in north Staffordshire.

Paul Holmes: Thank you, Mr. Deputy Speaker. I hope that I explained why I was making such comparisons. The hon. Member for Stoke-on-Trent, Central said that he was sure that subsequent speakers would point out that the problem was nationwide. It is not an isolated one-off. I do not think that the Minister will be able to address the problem completely by talking about one isolated instance, given that the programme is nationwide, with a nationwide pattern.

The general context for the closure of Burslem jobcentre and others, touched on by the two previous speakers, is the modernisation process, the Gershon efficiency review and the 100,000 civil service job cuts, which heavily hit the Department for Work and Pensions. What is the rationale for such closures? One argument is that they will bring the benefits of centralisation and that technology means that we do not need so many outreach stations. As we heard from the hon. Member for Stoke-on-Trent, Central, provision of electronic and internet services will solve some of the problems. Human beings will not be on the doorstep, but people will be able to access electronic machinery, perhaps through local libraries.

So one argument is that centralisation brings more efficiency and allows money to go into better services, and another relates to the use of electronic processes. There is also the argument that the introduction of better computer services into jobcentres means that a more efficient service can be provided—fewer staff are needed because the computer takes a lot of the strain—and that not so many staff are needed in the central building because more centres are scattered around the country, have economies of scale and do everything electronically.

However, all that is based on a myth. We have heard a lot of detail, ably explained, about the fact that many people—especially the unemployed, people on benefits and the elderly in Burslem—do not have an easy familiarity with modern technology or easy access to the hardware and software that facilitates it. In jobcentres, the problem is that a lot of the technology on which the streamlining and rationalisation are based has not worked effectively. Not long ago, the Department for Work and Pensions Committee issued a scathing report on the failures of the IT systems that were supposed to introduce more efficiency and that predicated the closure of small centres such as Burslem.

People have to be slightly sceptical and ask whether the 100,000 job cuts—Burslem is just one small cog in that machine—are based on efficiency and the better delivery of services or whether that figure has been chosen because it is nice and round? If the efficiency cuts are based on a proper, rational assessment of where services are overprovided or no longer needed, why does the figure come out at a nice, round 100,000 rather than at 63,000 or 106,000? Is it just a nice, round figure that is good for headlines, like the target of 50 per cent. entry into higher education? That was plucked out of the air as a nice, round figure that is good for media journalists. There seems to be no proper analysis of where the efficiency savings and closures of small, inefficient units in favour of more efficient units elsewhere should take place. If there has been a proper, rational analysis of where such cuts should take place, why is it that some time after announcing 100,000 job cuts the Government still cannot say specifically where many of the closures and job cuts will occur?

We would not argue that taxpayers' money should be spent on a job that does not actually exist. If the work of the Burslem jobcentre was unnecessary, it would obviously be a gross misuse of taxpayers' money to keep it open. If there were more efficient ways of providing the service, one could not argue against closure, as long as there were not strong downsides resulting from the loss of service. If there is waste of taxpayers' money, fine, that should be reversed and the money should be spent better.

However, if anything, the Department for Work and Pensions staff provide services to the most vulnerable and needy members of society, as we heard in the Burslem example. Centres such as Burslem serve people on benefits or pensions. They include jobseekers, particularly jobseekers in the most hard-to-place categories and people who need the most help from a personal service rather than a distant, impersonal service over a computer line; disabled people, 1 million of whom say that they want to get into work but have numerous problems to overcome before they can access such a service; older people over 50 who have particular problems getting back into work; and people who are less qualified. If anything, a rational analysis would suggest that, rather than cutting a centre such as Burslem and saving money on staff, more staff with better pay, and more, not fewer, outreach centres are needed.

A parallel is the question about the Pension Service that I asked the Minister in oral questions some time ago. In September, the local Pension Service staff were praised in Parliament for going into the community to visit pensioners at home who were not claiming pension credit, and helping them to access pension credit and many other benefits that they may have been missing out on. Yet some of those staff may lose their jobs in the modernisation and efficiency job cuts. If people who

[Paul Holmes]

deliver front-line services lose their jobs, the vulnerable people who benefit from their work will lose out on access to services.

The Department is one of the lowest payers among Government Departments, if not the lowest. I visited a job brokering service in London that is run by Working Links. It pays its personal advisers £21,000, whereas the Department starts their staff on £12,000 to £14,000. Far from cutting a centre such as Burslem and removing the staff completely, such local centres should be kept, and the pay, training and conditions of staff who work under great pressure in delivering key services should be improved.

We must consider the aggressive management style of the Department and the introduction in the centres of performance pay, which has been controversial because of the artificial quotas that determine who qualifies for different levels of pay. We must also consider whether staff training is adequate. A comparable example—again, this is not Burslem—would be some of the unemployed workers centres around the Chesterfield coalfield area. It is reported that, because the small local jobcentres do not have enough staff or their staff are not adequately trained, claimants are sent to unemployed workers centres to ask simple, basic questions about, for example, the new minimum wage or how to access such and such a service.

To conclude, rational analysis of the Burslem centre and other examples nationwide would show that, far from removing such services, we should be increasing the number of small outreach centres and improving the pay, training and facilities for the staff who work in them. I hope that the Minister will respond to many of those specific points about the loss of services to vulnerable, needy people and to a regeneration area into which the Government are putting extra resources with one hand while removing resources with the other hand. Whether in Burslem in north Staffordshire or in the Derbyshire coalfield, there is a need to improve Department services in general rather than to slash them.

2.49 pm

Mr. Andrew Tyrie (Chichester) (Con): I congratulate the hon. Member for Stoke-on-Trent, North (Ms Walley) on securing this debate, which has proved very interesting. When I was preparing for it, I was struck by the similarity between the points that are being made in north Staffordshire and the points that are being made to me in Chichester. I will not linger long in discussing Chichester, save to say that I have a two-page letter from a constituent, Mr. Michael Cameron, which is more or less a summary of the points made in the debate. It is important that the Minister takes on board the fact that the concerns that are being addressed in north Staffordshire are concerns of national significance.

I sympathise with the Minister. In this debate, he is responding at a micro-level to the consequences of the rolling-out of the policy to which the hon. Member for Chesterfield (Paul Holmes) alluded. That is, of course, the sudden policy completely to reverse the large increase in recruitment into the civil service that has taken place for most of the last seven years and start shedding civil service jobs at a high rate. The figure of 100,000 job losses was mentioned. The Department for Work and Pensions is scheduled to lose 30,000 jobs. In addition, the hon. Member for Stoke-on-Trent, North mentioned the Lyons review, which involves the relocation of civil servants and is causing widespread concern in Chichester and many other constituencies.

I referred to the points made by Mr. Cameron. One of them was exactly the same as one of the points made by the hon. Member for Chesterfield. He is understandably concerned about the employment prospects of staff in jobcentres. Will the Minister say how many redundancies there will be in Longton, Staffordshire Moorlands and Leek? He has not yet been asked directly what the number will be, but I am interested to know. How many of those staff will be relocated? Has that been thought through? Are those relocations feasible? While he is at it, perhaps he would send me a letter answering the same questions about Chichester.

What about the people who use jobcentres? The issue has been raised at some length by a number of hon. Members. Let me address a couple of questions. One is: how far will people be expected to travel under the new regime, with far fewer centres available? I note that a Labour local councillor, Paul Robinson, referring to the Leek jobcentre, said:

> "It is not fair to expect people to have to travel to Hanley or Longton, about £3.50 on the bus, just to sign on for benefits. Those people will be struggling for money as it is."

I was particularly struck by the comments made by the hon. Gentleman, who pointed out that some people have been told that money is available, but only if specifically asked for and only if the person is alert enough to realise that that protection is available. Is the figure of £3.50 in the right ballpark? Will the Minister confirm whether travel cost assistance is available? Are we mistaken? What about disabled people? They have not been mentioned so far. They are not in a good position to travel long distances for these interviews.

Will the Minister provide a general clarification on another point? I may be wrong, but as I understand it, the roll-out of Jobcentre Plus is scheduled to be completed by April 2006. Why is Longton jobcentre not scheduled for closure until 2008? Will its service overlap with the new Jobcentre Plus scheme or is the Jobcentre Plus office deemed to provide an insufficient service on its own? Before coming to the debate, I looked at a map and could not understand the logic of what is proposed for the area. Perhaps I do not know enough about the local area, but the Minister should try to respond to the point that I have touched on.

Many of the other points that I might have made were made by other hon. Members and I shall not repeat them. I conclude by making two general points. First, there is undoubtedly a case for rationalisation. That always causes tension and I sympathise with the Minister. The hon. Member for Stoke-on-Trent, Central (Mr. Fisher) made a crucial point about the internet, citing himself. Some of the rationalisation that we are seeking to undertake may be premature. In 10 or 20 years, a whole generation of people will have learned elementary techniques in modern communication and will be much more able to cope with the sort of rationalisation that is proposed. Is it right to do it now? I am not convinced that it is.

My second point is even more general. The Minister's difficulty is a subset of deep tension, which we face in many areas of public policy, between the savings from centralisation—for example, bigger hospitals—and the erosion of a sense of locality and local community, with the decline in the number of post offices, the transport system, the number of local shops and so on. That tension will not go away, but will get worse for all of us. I worry that the Government may not have thought through carefully the implications for local communities, particularly in rural areas and areas that are not close to large conurbations. I do not question the Government's intentions. What I am concerned about is whether they have thought through carefully enough what they are applying.

2.57 pm

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Work and Pensions (Mr. Chris Pond): I, too, congratulate my hon. Friend the Member for Stoke-on-Trent, North (Ms Walley) on securing this important debate and on highlighting some important issues about the provision of Jobcentre Plus services to her constituents. She is known in the House as an energetic and effective campaigner on behalf of her constituents, as was well demonstrated today.

My hon. Friend will acknowledge, as she has done previously, that there has been a significant reduction in the overall level of unemployment in her constituency, as elsewhere in the country, as a result of the new deals and stable macro-economic policy. Overall unemployment at 2.1 per cent. is slightly below the national average and long-term unemployment, especially among young people, has fallen by more than three quarters. However, that part of north Staffordshire, as my hon. Friend reminded us this afternoon, has been hit hard by manufacturing losses, especially in the ceramics industry. As she said, one of the people who are closely involved in seeking to stem such losses and to find alternative employment for people is my good friend, the chair of the Burslem Regeneration Company, Hugh Edwards. Perhaps I should declare an interest, Mr. Deputy Speaker, because he was the chair of the Low Pay Unit of which I was once the director.

As a Government, we give all the support we can to manufacturing, as hon. Members appreciate, but we cannot wholly protect people from the winds of economic change, which is often global. What we can do and what we should do is help people to adapt to those changes and build on the new opportunities when they arise from the dynamic economy in which we live. That is where the services of Jobcentre Plus come in. The House will know that it combines the former Employment Service and those parts of the former Benefits Agency responsible for paying benefits to people of working age. Bringing two agencies together means not only that we have a more efficient operation but that we can provide better quality services to the people whom we seek to serve. We have strengthened the link between receiving benefits on the one hand and the world of work opportunity and independence on the other.

I can tell my hon. Friend and others who have contributed to a very useful debate this afternoon that Jobcentre Plus services are not just about office accommodation but about services in the broadest sense, which we can provide in several different and flexible ways. We have heard about service provision by telephone and, in some circumstances, by internet. I take very much to heart the points made in the debate by my hon. Friend the Member for Stoke-on-Trent, Central (Mr. Fisher) and others that the internet does provide huge opportunities for many people, but that it does not provide access for many others. That is why we also want to ensure that we provide the sort of personal service that people so often need.

The constituency of my hon. Friend the Member for Stoke-on-Trent, North has a high proportion of people on incapacity benefit. She will know that we are considering through the pathways-to-work pilots new and innovative ways of supporting people on incapacity benefit who want to return to work, as the majority do. I appreciate the points that she and others have made about the difficulties sometimes presented by the need to travel albeit a short distance—in this case, to Hanley—but those on incapacity benefit have always reported to Hanley rather than to Burslem, so this will not be a significant change for them, although we do need to ensure that we consider all the time ways of providing more appropriate services to them.

My hon. Friend asked whether the changes that we have been discussing this afternoon are a fait accompli. I assure her that they are not. They are part of an ongoing consultation, which we have not yet completed, on the configuration of Jobcentre Plus services in her part of north Staffordshire. We want to discuss with her and with other hon. Members who are affected, as well as with all the other stakeholders, new and innovative ways in which we can help people to seek work in her constituency. Those ways include the possibility of enhanced outreach facilities, postal signing where appropriate, and even mobile jobcentre services and home visits for those who need them.

The consultation will therefore not only be about whether Burslem jobcentre should continue but about whether there are other ways in which we can provide even better services to the people whom my hon. Friend represents.

Paul Holmes: In the context of the consultation on whether Burslem jobcentre should close, which the Minister reassures us is ongoing, does he have a rough idea of what percentage of local jobcentres throughout the country have been kept open following the consultation in the past year or two? I can think of three examples in Derbyshire.

Mr. Pond: The hon. Gentleman tempts me to stray into a wide range of issues, but given that this is a debate about north Staffordshire, perhaps I should state for the record that when he talked about a reduction of 100,000 members of staff at the Department for Work and Pensions, that was not 100,000 members of staff in north Staffordshire. Some people might believe that it was, given that he raised the issue in this debate.

[Mr. Pond]

Each decision about the closure, merging or improvement of any of the Jobcentre Plus services is a matter for individual consideration. I therefore cannot tell the hon. Gentleman how many jobcentres remained open throughout the country following the consultation. In any case, that figure would be irrelevant, because it would not show that we had a target to close x percent. of jobcentres.

Ms Walley: The Minister's remark that the closure of Burslem jobcentre is not a fait accompli is welcome news. I want to press him a little further about the timetable for the current consultation. I understand that decisions have been reached. As a result of our debate, is my hon. Friend saying that there is an extended period for consultation? Will he confirm that the parties he envisages sitting round the table will include the North Staffordshire Regeneration Zone and the Burslem Regeneration Company?

Mr. Pond: We will be happy to have discussions with all the relevant stakeholders. The process is not yet complete. I cannot give my hon. Friend the assurance that, as a result of those consultations, we will be able to go back on a set of proposals that, from careful consideration, suggest that such action is the way forward. However, we shall be happy to discuss my hon. Friend's concerns with her and others. What has been said in the debate will certainly be part of the discussions.

Ms Walley: In the light of what the Minister has just said and given that the various options will be considered, will he put in the public domain the economic factors that are involved in such matters? Will he explain the cost of the rentals? Can we look at such matters in an open way, so that we can see how the money spent can deliver the service that best meets the needs of my constituents? I do not want the review to be informed by factors such as where most money can be saved, instead of how we can best meet the requirements of people with different benefit needs and who need jobcentre support.

Mr. Pond: Indeed. If I may, I shall say more about the matter in a moment. My hon. Friend has anticipated some of my comments. As for the time scale, the end of the consultation process is discretionary. From our point of view—and, I think, from hers—we want to complete the process by Christmas. I am sure that she will appreciate that.

I will be pleased to meet at the earliest opportunity the manager of the Jobcentre Plus district, who I am sure will pay careful attention to our discussions this afternoon, as will my right hon. Friend the Minister for Work, who is unable to participate in today's debate. As part of our consultation process, we need to examine various alternative flexible ways in which to deliver the service. In some parts of the country, there have been exciting examples of that.

I wish to stray slightly out of north Staffordshire to Hereford and Worcester district, which has been developing flexible services that are designed around customers' needs. It has worked with partners in nine locations to deploy job points and customer access telephones through, for instance, University college in Worcester, three libraries, Bromyard one-stop service centre, Hereford help point, Kington community resource centre and Wychavon district council. We need to consider imaginatively how best we can serve the needs of people in constituencies such as that of my hon. Friend.

As for the Burslem proposal, my hon. Friend will know that it is expected that 80 per cent. of customers will be accessing Hanley jobcentre. It will provide purpose-built premises and excellent transport links, and as it is one of the larger offices it will also provide a wider range of facilities through a larger staff.

Ms Walley: Can the Minister explain the time scale for the proposed Hanley office to be up and running?

Mr. Pond: I will come back to my hon. Friend in a moment on that specific point.

Several hon. Members have referred to the consultation process. My hon. Friend was right to say that, when we first looked at the matter in September 2003, it seemed that Burslem should remain open as part of the service delivery plan. She will know that, when we considered the matter again in September 2004, circumstances had changed. A number of factors emerged from that reconsideration. The reconsideration involved extensive consultation with a number of stakeholder organisations. What had happened between those two dates? We looked at the cost of refurbishing the Burslem jobcentre to bring it up to the sort of standard that my hon. Friend would agree her constituents deserve in terms of space, disability access and general state of repair, and that cost was very considerable.

In the meantime, there was the efficiency challenge that the Department has taken up. That challenge was not about simply making cuts across the board on a proportionate basis, as the hon. Member for Chesterfield suggested; it was about discovering how we could best provide the highest quality of service to our customers within the efficiency constraints with which we are faced.

Ms Walley: May I press the Minister on his undertaking that there was consultation with other stakeholders? Will he make available the full text of that consultation and the responses from those stakeholders?

In respect of the cost of upgrading the Burslem office, I have been pressing previous Ministers for 17 years for the investment in the Burslem office that has been needed for it to meet all the desired standards. I am not saying that the service must be continued in that building for ever, but I am saying that there should be a jobcentre presence in Burslem.

Mr. Pond: I shall write to my hon. Friend about the consultation process. I am told that 196 letters were issued, and I understand that she was one of the recipients of them, along with Hayward hospital, Beat the Cold, the Hibiscus project, the North Staffs Carers Association and 40 Stoke-wide bodies, including disability organisations.

My hon. Friend looks as if she wants to intervene again. If she wants to do so to tell the House that she was not part of that consultation process and that she did not receive notification of it, we should discuss that further when she meets my right hon. Friend the Minister for Work, and I will be happy to discuss it with her myself. Does my hon. Friend wish to intervene again?

Ms Walley: I am loth to do so. I simply want to make the point that the key issue is whether people were told that there would be a proposal to close the jobcentre, and whether they were invited to come up with constructive ideas as to how we could provide the service. I am very grateful for having been allowed to intervene in this way.

Mr. Pond: My hon. Friend asked about the time scale for the new Hanley office; the answer to that is by the end of 2006.

Before the hon. Member for Stone (Mr. Cash) sadly had to leave the Room, he made a point about reliance on the telephone and internet services. Unfortunately, he will be unable to hear me say that we are not simply relying on those services. I understand that he has raised that as an issue in his local press in relation to the closure of the Stone and Cheadle jobcentres. He also raised it briefly in the debate, before his departure. However, I have to say that he has not raised it with the Department for Work and Pensions or Jobcentre Plus. We would welcome the opportunity—perhaps it will arise if he reads the *Hansard* record of this debate—to discuss with him the ways in which we are seeking to meet the needs of his constituents given the reconfiguration of those services, and the way in which people will be able to access face-to-face services in Stafford and Hanley.

I am sure that if the hon. Gentleman were present he would wish to join us in celebrating the fact that as a result of the reduction in unemployment in his constituency the number of people on the jobseeker's allowance register in Stone is now under 200 and in Cheadle it is even smaller, which is why the House will understand that it is not feasible to maintain both or either of those offices.

My hon. Friend the Member for Stoke-on-Trent, Central made a point about support for the most vulnerable to claim the benefits to which they are entitled. Like him, we are committed to increasing take-up of benefits and ensuring that people receive the help to which they are entitled. Part of that involves making the claims process as simple and straightforward as possible.

My hon. Friend raised concerns about the use of technology and shared with us very honestly his anxieties about the use of the internet. We are ensuring that, while some people can use that process, there are still opportunities for face-to-face contact for those who cannot. I mentioned some of the ideas about mobile Jobcentre Plus services and other ways in which people could access those services on a face-to-face basis, even were the decision to close Burslem jobcentre to go ahead.

My hon. Friend also raised the issue of whether we piloted the process. There was extensive piloting through the 56 pathfinder offices to establish Jobcentre Plus. That taught us a great deal about joining up services and ensuring that we could provide people with a one-stop-shop approach.

The hon. Member for Chichester (Mr. Tyrie) asked how many redundancies we anticipated as a result of the changes in north Staffordshire and Chichester, and whether I would write to him about Chichester. Given that we are currently discussing north Staffordshire, that would be the appropriate way of replying. However, I suspect that the answer in that letter will be very similar to that which I am about to give in relation to north Staffordshire: although it is too early to give specific commitments on redundancies, he will know that we consider redundancy to be only a last resort as part of the process of meeting the efficiency challenge. The process is not about reducing the level of jobs.

The hon. Gentleman will also know that, with Jobcentre Plus, we have been reducing the number of people who fulfil some of the roles that have been sometimes unkindly described as backroom operations. They are fundamental to the work that we do, but many of those tasks can now be carried out with greater efficiency through the use of technology. Having fewer people in that area allows us to put more people on to the front line and to give the face-to-face contact that people really need.

I was also asked how far we expected people to travel. In the case of the Jobcentre Plus that we are talking about, the cost of travel is a £2 return fare from Tunstall to Hanley, from Endon to Hanley, from Brown Edge to Hanley, or from Burslem to Kidsgrove. There is comprehensive guidance on the payment of fares and I am happy to write to the hon. Member for Chesterfield, who raised the issue, to set that out. Essentially, we reimburse fares if a person faces a journey of more than one hour from the office and if we have asked that person to attend for a pre-arranged interview. There are special, more discretionary provisions for people who have particular mobility problems. We do not pay fares for jobseekers to attend their normal fortnightly interviews, but in the case of Burslem we need to discuss, for instance, the possibility of postal signing, where that is appropriate and where it would be difficult for people to make the journey.

In the context of overall regeneration, my hon. Friend the Member for Stoke-on-Trent, North is quite right to say that a number of Government agencies are putting in a lot of extra resources and energy. We have heard about Advantage West Midlands, the learning and skills council and the housing renewal programme. She asked for reassurance that Jobcentre Plus and DWP were fully linked up to all those developments. I can tell her that they are. However, we need to recognise that the provision of services, to which we are absolutely committed for her constituents and others, is not just about office accommodation. We want to provide the highest quality of service through whatever mechanism is most appropriate. I hope that she will join our discussion on how we can do that. As I have said, both the Jobcentre Plus district manager and my right hon. Friend the Minister for Work will be happy to meet her to discuss that.

My hon. Friend has served her constituents well this afternoon by raising this matter, and has done us all a service by allowing us to have a useful, important debate on how we ensure that we provide the highest quality

[Mr. Pond]

service to our constituents, albeit in an environment where the Government have made a commitment to provide those services with greater efficiency. I hope that she and other hon. Members will feel that, as part of the consultation process, we can ensure that we continue to drive forward our agendas of giving people opportunities for employment, building a better life for themselves and building on their ambitions and abilities, while doing that in the most efficient and effective way possible.

3.21 pm

Sitting suspended.

Famagusta (Cyprus)

3.30 pm

Tom Cox (Tooting) (Lab): I declare my interest in this debate and in Cyprus. I am and have been for many years the chairman of the all-party group on Cyprus, which has members from all the main parties. We have always stated that we support the rights and security of Turkish Cypriots, as we do the Greek Cypriots.

Since the events of 1974, we in this Parliament have kept alive the issues of Cyprus. To many, the issues that Cyprus has faced since those events could and should have been resolved long ago. For many more, and certainly the people of Cyprus, over the past 30 years, there have been hopes for a solution—not any solution, but an honourable, acceptable settlement that would have seen the rebuilding of trust within the communities and the rebuilding and development of the whole of the island. That, sadly, has not taken place.

Although the recent efforts of the Secretary-General of the United Nations were welcome, his proposals, known as the Annan plan, were not acceptable to a large percentage of the Greek Cypriot community. That rejection came as no surprise to many of us. I do not intend to comment on those aspects of the plan that were unacceptable, as we could spend hours discussing what was wrong with the proposals. The fact is that the plan was rejected—in some ways regrettably—because of the issue of Famagusta. That, however, does not mean that we cannot develop proposals for Cyprus and, especially, for the Greek Cypriot and Turkish Cypriot communities.

One very clear development would open the way to building a future for the whole of Cyprus: the reopening and the redevelopment of the town, and that means the whole town, of Famagusta. It is not a dream. It is the clear wish of the people, be they Turkish Cypriots or Greek Cypriots, whose links are to that town.

I do not know the extent of the knowledge or involvement of my hon. Friend the Minister who will reply to this debate. As for the co-operation of the two mayors of Famagusta, the Turkish Cypriot and Greek Cypriot mayors now meet to discuss their plans, priorities and aspirations for Famagusta—a Famagusta populated by the people of Cyprus. I have with me a letter dated 4 October from the President of the Republic of Cyprus, Tassos Papadopoulos, giving his full support to the sorts of proposals that I will outline. I have met the president of the Famagusta chamber of commerce, Mr. Andreas Matsis. He will work with Greek and Turkish Cypriots to rebuild Famagusta, as will the chamber of commerce.

We start with a vital commitment—the willingness and desire of the two communities to work together. Famagusta has, sadly, been a deserted town for the past 30 years. It was once one of the principal towns on Cyprus and many of us believe that it can be again. That is why I sought this debate. In recent weeks, there has been a marked improvement in the relationship between the communities in Cyprus, and I warmly welcome that. The United Kingdom must be seen to support fully what the people of Cyprus now clearly say that they want.

My right hon. Friends the Prime Minister and the Foreign Secretary and principal spokespeople from the European Union have all recently said that opportunities for Turkish Cypriots must be developed. I put it to the Minister that no area of Cyprus offers the Turkish Cypriot community a greater chance to do that than Famagusta.

Famagusta was once one of the most beautiful and popular tourist areas in Cyprus, and some of the most wonderful hotels in the world were there. All that could happen again. It has excellent harbour facilities, which, when updated, would give it one of the most modern and used ports in that area of the Mediterranean. Famagusta could be the site of the export and import of vast quantities of goods to and from Cyprus. As Cyprus is a member of the European Union, trade links with other countries of the European Union and indeed with the other trading countries of the world would certainly be developed. The Cypriot people have great skills in a wide range of professions. In a reopened, redeveloped Famagusta, there would be every opportunity to develop those skills.

No one would benefit more from such developments than the Turkish Cypriot community. That is to be welcomed, but to many of us the great advantage would be to Cyprus and to its people. It would show them what can be done with real co-operation. As I have said, for some 30 years, much of Famagusta has been deserted. No one can say what the infrastructure of the town is now like, and an in-depth survey of its infrastructure must be a top priority. There are experts who could do that. It would cost money but, in view of recent statements by the European Union, we have a right to look to it for financial support for such a survey, given what can be achieved. Do the Government and the Minister support such a survey?

I put it to the Minister—I ask for his reply to these proposals—that we should invite the two mayors of Famagusta to London to discuss with them and their officials the proposals and plans for the whole of Famagusta. Otherwise, we could ask the British high commissioner in Cyprus to convene a meeting with the same kind of agenda. Let our country, with its long historic links with Cyprus, show the people of Cyprus that we want to work with them and to support them.

I understand that a large sum of European Union money could already be made available to Cyprus. Will the Minister say whether that is correct? If it is, how will that money be spent? In the Cyprus of today, both Greek and Turkish Cypriots clearly want to co-operate, and they have a joint goal in showing that they will use their skills and knowledge for the benefit of the whole island and its people. I have not talked about the events of the past 30 years, because I look to the future for Cyprus and its people, to what can be done and to what the people want done.

I am sure that the Minister knows that in September my hon. Friend the Member for Finchley and Golders Green (Dr. Vis), whom I am delighted to see with us this afternoon, the hon. Member for North Thanet (Mr. Gale) and I spoke to the Foreign Secretary in a friendly meeting, during which we discussed issues concerning Cyprus, many of which I have not mentioned in this debate. The Foreign Secretary has met Mr. Talat to talk about Cyprus. Although there may be a lot of discussion still to take place on some issues, if Mr. Talat wishes to see a Cyprus where Turkish Cypriots are respected and have every opportunity to develop their future and a love of their families, he should support the proposals that I have outlined today. That is what the Turkish Cypriot mayor of Famagusta wants to see, and he speaks on behalf of his people.

Over the past 30 years, Turkey has had influence in the affairs of northern Cyprus, and now the door to its possible membership of the EU has opened. I hope that the Minister and the Foreign Secretary will make it clear to the Turkish Prime Minister and his fellow Ministers that it is time they listened and supported the wishes of the Turkish Cypriots of Cyprus.

I have outlined not a dream or a possible hope but a real opportunity for Cyprus and its people—that is what the reopening and redevelopment of Famagusta will mean to them. The title of this debate is "Famagusta (Cyprus)". That is what I have spoken about and I hope that the Minister's reply will concentrate on that. Do the British Government support such a proposal? What, if any, would be the legal requirements to start discussions on such a proposal? If we support such a proposal, will we promote it in the EU? Will we enter into discussions, as I have suggested, with Mr. Talat about reopening and developing Famagusta with the two people in the forefront of the proposals—the mayors of Famagusta's Greek and Turkish Cypriots—and the Turkish Government? I have already said that the President of the Republic of Cyprus fully supports such proposals.

Please do not let us lose this golden opportunity, which will offer so much to Cyprus and its people. I look forward to hearing the Minister's reply, and I assure him that the people of Cyprus do, too.

3.44 pm

The Minister for Europe (Mr. Denis MacShane): I congratulate my hon. Friend the Member for Tooting (Tom Cox) on securing this timely debate. He talked about a golden opportunity, and I have stood on the golden sands of the port city of Famagusta, looking at the ghost town of Varosha. That is the correct term for an extraordinary, historic geography. I saw a once bustling, beautiful port and seaside resort, its skyscrapers, roads and shops all empty, like a Hollywood ghost town. It is a bizarre, eerie sensation when one thinks of the money, economic activity and pleasure and profit from tourism that could be brought to all the people of Cyprus—Greek-speakers and Turkish-speakers alike. I am grateful to my hon. Friend for securing the debate. I congratulate him sincerely on the comprehensive interventions and tireless work that he has carried out with other colleagues in the House, on both sides of it, who are so committed to securing justice and a peaceful resolution to the Cyprus issue.

Ever since independence in 1960, Cyprus has been a cause of great concern to the House of Commons—not just in the last 30 years but in the last 40 and more. I have visited Cyprus on and off for nearly 30 years. I recently had a positive meeting with President Papadopoulos and other colleagues on the Greek Cypriot side. They are the sovereign Government of the Republic of Cyprus. I also met Mr. Talat and Mr. Serdar Denktas, the leaders of the Turkish Cypriot community.

It is sad that the historic port city of Famagusta, a lively town with a bustling university, and the neighbouring suburb of Varosha, which is one of the most beautiful seaside resorts that I have seen, have been pawns in the various abortive attempts to resolve

[Mr. Denis MacShane]

the division of Cyprus. Nothing symbolises the wasted potential of the island so much as the kilometres of shattered and derelict buildings along some of the most idyllic coastline in Europe.

We are keen to ensure that tens of thousands of former residents of Varosha can return to their properties. I am sure that all hon. Members would like to see Greek and Turkish Cypriots working side by side to return the port of Famagusta to being a thriving Mediterranean port working for the mutual benefit of the whole island—the port, of course, trading with Turkey. As Turkey starts its accession talks for full membership of the EU, we want a normalisation of trade between all the island of Cyprus and the important future European Union member state Turkey.

Dr. Rudi Vis (Finchley and Golders Green) (Lab): On 17 December, a decision will be made about Turkey's accession negotiations. Is Turkey required to recognise the Republic of Cyprus before then?

Mr. MacShane: It certainly matters that Turkey and Cyprus normalise their relations, but no one is laying down any new conditions for a clear yes on 17 December as a precursor to Turkey starting its accession talks with the EU. In my talks with President Papadopoulos and other Government leaders of the Republic of Cyprus when I was in Nicosia 10 days ago, I was glad that there was no threat that they would try to stop what will, I hope, be an historic decision that will send a signal to the world that that great country, Turkey, is turning its face firmly towards Europe and that, during the long period of accession negotiations, it wants to meet all the criteria that membership of the European Union requires.

Before we get to that point, we must welcome the proposal that the Government of the Republic of Cyprus made in July regarding Famagusta and Varosha. It is vital to explore every opportunity for movement and any measure that might contribute to a climate of increased trust and confidence between the two communities. Such measures need to be mutually agreed. They must be balanced and realistic and they must take us forward.

Under the last version of the Annan plan, the Turkish Cypriots would have been able to operate Famagusta port as part of the Turkish Cypriot state, and Varosha would have been returned to its Greek Cypriot owners. Although I know that the July offer was made in good faith, and I welcome the initiative of Nicosia, it is hard to understand why the Turkish Cypriots should be asked to settle for any less today. That is why I welcome the desire for any move or dialogue. I welcome the suggestion of my hon. Friend the Member for Tooting that the respective leaders of the communities of Famagusta and Varosha should meet to discuss the matter and take it forward. In my meetings with Mr. Papadopoulos and Mr. Talat, I suggested that the two of them should find ways of meeting together or, if they cannot for whatever protocol reasons, they should invite their officials to find places and ways of meeting to discuss how the impasse arising out of the Greek Cypriot rejection of the Annan proposals in April can be taken forward.

The sort of initiative that my hon. Friend referred to is a positive way forward. Of course, it will need backing and the agreement of leaders at a higher level but, if we can find a means of taking it forward, I will welcome that and I am happy to ask the high commissioner in Nicosia to see what he can do to facilitate any such meeting. I strongly welcome my hon. Friend's proposals.

The Government of the Republic of Cyprus must now work with the Turkish Cypriot side to examine how the ideas for Famagusta can be taken forward. The international community has done its best to find a solution. We sent our finest diplomats from New York and London and people from Ankara and Athens have also had something to say, but a vote took place. We are all democratically elected here and we live and die by votes, so we must abide by that decision. That is why I said in Cyprus that we must bring the Cyprus problem back to the people of Cyprus, back to the two communities and back to their elected leaders to meet, to discuss and to find ways forward.

3.52 pm

Sitting suspended for Divisions in the House.

4.22 pm

On resuming—

Mr. MacShane: A solution to the stagnation of Varosha needs to be found sooner rather than later, as Mr. Yiannis Skordis, speaking on behalf of its former residents, told *The Independent* on 26 April:

> "We want a solution as soon as possible … We have monuments and a town that needs saving. It has remained untouched for 30 years, if we leave it for another 10 to 20 years it might not be able to be saved."

Mr. Skordis is a mayor who is unable to live in his own community, but his words are absolutely right.

In the same article, a young Turkish Cypriot, Mr. Sherer Sever, who flew back from his PhD studies in London to vote yes in the referendum, stated:

> "I voted for a solution, things have got to change. The ghost town is crazy and needs to have something done about it."

I completely agree with what Mr. Sherer Sever—I hope now Dr. Sherer Sever—said.

I wish that many hon. Members could visit the area, as I did, and see from afar the ghost town of Varosha. They would realise what an affront it is to all European norms and values that it cannot be used for its purpose of allowing people to have very pleasant holidays and of bringing enormous economic benefits to Turkish and Greek Cypriots alike.

I discussed Varosha, Famagusta and many other issues during an extremely useful visit to Cyprus a little under two weeks ago. Cyprus is a valued friend and partner of the United Kingdom and the European Union. We must work together to promote an open, dynamic and globally competitive EU. With its unparalleled location, Famagusta has an important role to play as the EU looks to its southern borders for new trading opportunities.

My hon. Friend the Member for Tooting asked about EU funds. I can report that €259 million has been allocated to help with the development of northern Cyprus. In my view, some of that money could help to unblock the Famagusta-Varosha problem.

Dr. Vis: Will my hon. Friend give way?

Mr. MacShane: If I may, I had better finish my speech. The debate is short, despite the Divisions that we had.

Confidence-building measures are an important step towards achieving that shared vision and any measures that can help to build trade links and reduce the economic gap between the two communities, and between Cyprus and the rest of the world, will make reunification more likely, easier to consolidate and less costly. Trade will increase trust and lay the foundations for co-operation in a reunified Cyprus. I say again that the tourist trade is the obvious breadwinner for that stunningly beautiful island. A widening wealth gap and continued economic division will make a solution much more difficult.

During my visit, my friends in the Cyprus Government expressed the well-known demands for a new approach from Turkey on a number of issues that prevent Cyprus exercising its full sovereignty on trade and other issues. The British Government understand such concerns—I am grateful to my hon. Friends here and to other hon. Members who draw them to my attention regularly—just as we understand the concerns of our friends in the Turkish Cypriot community that economic development and normal tourism, trade and travel are not on offer to them despite their clear vote in April in favour of the plan, backed by the United Nations and every EU Government, to create a united Cyprus.

Britain wants to see trade develop in Cyprus on the basis of EU norms, and that means trade in all directions, in all sectors, 360 degrees around the compass. Trade in the EU and all parts of EU member states is open, normal and no longer controlled by Governments or state-linked bodies. Low-cost airlines can land their planes freely in any airport of their choosing in the EU without let or hindrance by Governments. I hope to see flights to all parts of Cyprus on the basis of commercial viability, not political considerations.

The whole atmosphere would be greatly helped if relations between Ankara and Nicosia could be normalised. It is for the political leaders in those cities to decide whether they can find a means of dialogue, as one sovereign republic to another, to normalise their relations. There is no question of the United Kingdom recognising the Turkish Republic of Northern Cyprus. However, many of my colleagues are asking what practical steps are being taken by all of us as EU member states to meet the "determined" wish of the EU Council of Ministers of 26 April to end the isolation of Turkish Cypriots. That will require a new approach as well.

As I said earlier, I am glad that my talks in Cyprus confirmed the long-held views of the elected leaders of the Republic of Cyprus that no one should seek to veto Turkey's application in December. That will be the beginning of a great deal of hard work, over a number of years, for Ankara. Once the negotiations start, another question will arise: when will Ankara and Nicosia move to normalise their relations, as is the case between all EU member states and between those seeking to join the EU, such as the Balkan states and Turkey?

It is an anomaly that Turkey does not have normal diplomatic relations with one of the 25 EU member states with which it has to negotiate to join the European Union. I hope that that can be solved, although there is no question of its being a precondition. That normalisation should also involve considering the number of troops stationed in Cyprus and the immense amount of money spent by Ankara and the Cyprus Government in Nicosia to maintain troop levels. There are more than two divisions of Turkish troops, and I was informed that £100 million is spent each year. There is a conscription period of more than two years on the Greek Cypriot side. Those are some of the issues that will have to be discussed and resolved soon—the sooner, the better.

In the meantime, if we could start local, serious discussions on finding a way forward on Famagusta and Varosha, no Government would be more delighted than ours. I am grateful to my hon. Friend the Member for Tooting for making his distinguished contribution towards finding a solution to this continuing problem.

Diego Garcia

4.30 pm

Mr. Crispin Blunt (Reigate) (Con): I see this debate not in isolation but as part of Parliament's role in the continuing unhappy and shaming saga of our country's treatment of a small group of its subjects and their descendants, namely, the Chagos islanders, who are drawn principally from Diego Garcia, the largest island in the chain.

I use the term "subjects" advisedly. Although it implies a rather unfashionable view of the relationship between the people and their sovereign, I am entirely clear that my sovereign—in practice, her Government—owes her subjects a profound duty of care. That duty of care is cast as a sacred trust on a sovereign power to promote the welfare and advancement of the people under article 73 of the United Nations charter, but our Government have shamefully and disgracefully honoured it over four decades, and mainly in the breach, in the case of the Chagos islands.

In coming to an understanding of this issue—embarrassingly late, given my service as a special adviser in the Foreign and Commonwealth Office—and in raising it on behalf of my constituents, who are now being invited to pay the nation's price, I am still astonished that a liberal democracy in the early 21st century continues to behave in a shabby manner towards its subjects.

I pay tribute to the hon. Member for Islington, North (Jeremy Corbyn) for his work on the issue and for raising it in the Chamber on 7 July. I also pay tribute to the Father of the House, whose work over four decades on behalf of these unfortunate people is an example to us all.

My remarks should be seen in the context of the debate on 7 July, which focused on the Orders in Council, promulgated on European and local election day on 10 June, which prevented the right of return to the islands as lawfully established four years earlier in a British court. In pursuing the matter, I am in complete harness with my hon. Friends the Members for East Surrey (Mr. Ainsworth) and for Epsom and Ewell (Chris Grayling) in that we all represent council tax payers of the borough of Reigate and Banstead. I am also grateful to my hon. Friends the Members for Chichester (Mr. Tyrie) and for Mole Valley (Sir Paul Beresford) for their support, and for the presence in this debate of the hon. Member for Crawley (Laura Moffatt), whose constituents are also affected by the issue and who has been dealing with it for about a year.

My hon. Friend the Member for East Surrey will be pursuing the issue of the Government's obligation to the council tax payers of Reigate and Banstead in an Adjournment debate tomorrow with the Office of the Deputy Prime Minister. I intend to focus the rest of my remarks on the Government's obligations to the islanders.

Sir Paul Beresford (Mole Valley) (Con): It would be very useful for the ODPM to provide the Minister with a sincere statement about the plight of these people and the cost to local government.

Mr. Blunt: In the era of at least proclaimed joined-up government, I hope that the two debates can be viewed in conjunction with each other. I do not know whether the Minister will have anything to say on behalf of other Departments when he replies, but I will draw attention in the rest of my remarks to the risks that the Government are running under their current policy.

The only thing to be said for the Government's position on the Chagos islanders is that it is clear. The Orders in Council were detailed in a written ministerial statement and left no room for doubt. The statement read:

> "Accordingly, the Government consider that there would be no purpose in commissioning any further study into the feasibility of resettlement; and that it would be impossible for the Government to promote or even permit resettlement to take place. After long and careful consideration, we have therefore decided to legislate to prevent it."—[*Official Report*, 15 June 2004; Vol. 422, c. 33WS.]

The lack of consultation and the way in which the decision was taken and promulgated were outrageous, and I am far from convinced that the decision was correct. Indeed, it was probably practically and morally wrong, but at least it was clear.

The Chagos islanders, in the Government's view, are not going home. That leaves 5,500 islanders and their descendants, who live mainly in Mauritius and the Seychelles and who are now entitled to British citizenship and residence, with no practical alternative if they are to extricate themselves from their largely poverty-stricken existence but to come here in increasing numbers. Some 900 passports have been issued so far by the high commissioners in Mauritius and the Seychelles. The Prime Minister was either misleading or misinformed when he told my hon. Friend the Member for Epsom and Ewell last week that my hon. Friend was exaggerating the number of people who would come. Why does the Prime Minister think that 900 passports have been applied for when these people have perfectly good Mauritian travel documents of their own?

Now that the Government have slammed the door on people returning to the Chagos islands, they must prepare for a significant part of the community to come here. A failure to plan will result in the events that have engulfed the borough of Reigate and Banstead in the past month being repeated a hundredfold. Uncontrolled immigration of those people would be a disaster.

I am advised that 95 per cent. of the original islanders are illiterate, as are 40 to 50 per cent. of their descendants, because of the way in which the Mauritian education system works. If someone fails to meet the necessary standards at 12, their formal education comes to an end. The vast majority speak not English but a French patois, and even now interpreters are being sought to converse with the 32 islanders with whom the borough of Reigate and Banstead is coping, as classical French speakers are deemed inadequate to interpret the reviews of the islanders' circumstances.

The first groups of these British citizens have arrived destitute at Gatwick over the past two years. A few have already settled in the area. In the wake of the Orders in Council, we are facing an uncontrolled immigration of penniless and unqualified British citizens to one part of the country. The huge sympathy for their plight, when understood nationally, will almost certainly rapidly turn to anger and resentment as local services are overwhelmed.

The islanders are bound to concentrate in one area if immigration is uncontrolled, as they will lack the ability to communicate outside their group. The social problems that they endured in Mauritius will simply be repeated here. This country can and should avoid that. The least that we can do is properly prepare those in the community in Mauritius and the Seychelles who wish to exercise their right to move to the United Kingdom.

There is an overwhelming case for controlled immigration. I hope that the Minister will urgently consider a properly funded programme, which would teach such people English, equip them with the skills and training to enable them to be part of the United Kingdom work force, and provide services to enable them to identify jobs and homes in the United Kingdom before they leave Mauritius and the Seychelles. Legally, we cannot control their immigration but, practically, we can prepare for those British citizens, now habitually resident in Mauritius, who wish to come to the United Kingdom.

The Foreign Office is more than capable of administering a suitable programme over several years—that is how long it will take—that will help such people to meet the challenge. It could co-ordinate the resources of the British Council and other Departments in order to do that. I cannot imagine that any teachers sent to the Seychelles or Mauritius on programmes run by the British Council or other Departments will regard it as a punishment posting.

Also, if the Foreign Office administers such a programme, it will at least go a little way towards making up for its unhappy role in the affair of the Chagos islanders over the past four decades. Failure to make investment in such a programme will not save any money. It will cost far more to provide for education, training, housing and social services in the United Kingdom after an unprepared population arrives. In all probability we would cause further social disaster for an isolated and mistreated people. If we do not deal with the issue now, in years to come we may find that we have forced the islanders to turn to crime to support themselves, and the criminal justice budget will then make a contribution to this sorry saga.

The Government's decision to block a return to the islands requires follow-up action now. Telling the local authorities of Crawley, Reigate and Banstead, Surrey and West Sussex that they are on their own could be disastrous. Controlled immigration must be the objective of government policy. As that means discharging our moral obligations generously, we will be doing the right thing for the right reasons. I invite the Government to do so.

4.40 pm

Mr. Peter Ainsworth (East Surrey) (Con): I am grateful to my hon. Friend the Member for Reigate (Mr. Blunt) for the opportunity to make a short contribution to this important debate, and I congratulate him on securing it. As he will know, I intend to return to this issue from a local government perspective tomorrow, and I will return the compliment should he wish to participate in my debate. The issue affects both our local authorities and those of other hon. Members whom he has mentioned.

The Minister is not responsible for local government finance, but I hope that he is sufficiently joined up with the Office of the Deputy Prime Minister to understand that the decisions taken by his Department about the Chagos islanders have direct consequences for local government in this country. The Orders in Council signed by the Government in June are a key reason why three weeks ago a group of 45 people from Diego Garcia turned up at Gatwick airport. As the Minister will know, the Orders in Council overturned a High Court ruling that the ordinance preventing the return of the islanders to their homeland was unlawful. Effectively, the Government acted to ensure that the islanders could not return to their homeland.

Given that the prospect of returning to destitute conditions in Mauritius lacks, shall we say, appeal, as my hon. Friend and I discovered during our recent visit to Horley in my constituency, where many of the islanders are housed, their decision to come to Britain has a certain logic. As British citizens, they have every right to be here but, thanks to this Government, they have no right to go home. The question is what further rights they have to housing, food and other benefits, and those matters are the subject of a complicated and expensive legal process.

I would be grateful if the Minister could let me know when he responds what discussions, if any, took place between his Department and the Office of the Deputy Prime Minister about the likely, indeed inevitable, consequences for local government and local authorities of the decision to issue the Orders in Council. As my hon. Friend pointed out, the treatment of the islanders has been grossly unjust. From the original decision of Harold Wilson's Government to round them up and evict them, to the shabby decision earlier this year to overturn the High Court ruling, the whole story is a discredit to this country. To that injustice is added another. The cost of keeping the islanders in temporary accommodation is falling exclusively on local council tax payers. That is patently unfair. The problem is entirely of the Government's making and the Government should shoulder responsibility for the consequences of their actions.

My hon. Friend and I will return to the issue tomorrow, as the Minister knows. The short-term solution is in the hands of the Office of the Deputy Prime Minister, but the long-term solution lies with this Minister's Department—a just solution that either allows the islanders to return to Diego Garcia, which I admit is unlikely given the Government's attitude, or, as my hon. Friend has suggested, at least provides them with the skills that they will need in order to make successful new lives in this country.

There have been too many evasions and too many excuses already. We look to the Minister to come forward with a clear and positive initiative that is fair to the islanders and to our constituents.

4.43 pm

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs (Mr. Bill Rammell): This is a genuinely important debate, and the second opportunity that we have had to air these issues in this Chamber. I understand the concerns that have been expressed. I congratulate the hon. Member for Reigate (Mr. Blunt) on securing the debate. I hope that the similar debate that takes place tomorrow with the Office of the Deputy Prime Minister will reflect the strategic

[Mr. Bill Rammell]

importance of these issues and the way in which the Government are attempting to work on them across the board.

I assure the hon. Gentleman that I have every sympathy with the predicament in which he and the Reigate and Banstead borough council find themselves as a result of the arrival of that group of Chagossians in his constituency. His is not the first constituency to see such an arrival. Earlier groups arrived in Crawley, and I have had several meetings with my hon. Friend the Member for Crawley (Laura Moffatt) about it. Indeed, I am due to see her early next week to discuss it further.

There is a debate tomorrow on local government provisions for Diego Garcians in Surrey. Therefore, I intend today to concentrate on the history of the British Indian Ocean Territory and the chain of events that has led to the present situation. Properly, I shall leave local government provisions to the Office of the Deputy Prime Minister.

Mr. Andrew Tyrie (Chichester) (Con): Given the huge pressure that councils will find themselves under, particularly West Sussex county council, before the Minister leaves that subject, will he give us some idea of his Department's view in principle on how to handle the extraordinary burden that will be placed on those county councils? How should that be met, and is it acceptable that it should be met entirely by local people?

Mr. Rammell: The hon. Gentleman will be aware that the best way to resolve the issues is not necessarily by one Department telling another on the Floor of the House what it can and should do. Nevertheless, I can assure him that the Foreign Office is in touch with other Whitehall Departments, including the Office of the Deputy Prime Minister, the Department for Work and Pensions and the Department of Health, on this issue. We have also been in contact with West Sussex county council, and that will continue. That is one reason that I am seeing my hon. Friend the Member for Crawley next week.

Sir Paul Beresford: On the same point, if the Minister is in discussions, he will be able to tell us what his Department is contributing and what the other Departments are contributing. That could make tomorrow's debate much simpler.

Mr. Rammell: As I said earlier, it is properly the place of the Office of the Deputy Prime Minister to respond on specific local government provisions.

Hon. Members will forgive me if I am brief, because of the limited time available. If Opposition Members would like more detailed information on the history of the Chagossians and the British Indian Ocean Territory, I should be happy to be contacted after the debate to arrange for such information to be given. However, I shall now give a brief overview of the situation. The islands of the Chagos archipelago, located in the middle of the Indian ocean, were ceded to Britain by the French in 1814 together with Mauritius, of which the islands were a dependency. Under British rule, the islands, which were populated by copra plantation workers and their dependants, continued to be administered as a dependency of Mauritius. Prior to Mauritius achieving independence in 1968, and with the agreement of the Mauritius Council of Ministers—that is an important point—the islands were detached in 1965 to form—

Several hon. Members *rose*—

Mr. Rammell: Let me finish this sentence. I want to make some progress because I have some important background information to get on the record. The islands were at that stage—

Mr. Blunt: May I assist the Minister?

Mr. Rammell: I will finish this point, then I will give way. The islands were detached in 1965 to form part of the British Indian Ocean Territory, which was created to provide for the defence needs of Britain and the United States. The copra plantations were becoming no longer economically viable, and partly for that reason, and partly because of defence requirements, it was eventually decided that the islanders should be relocated. That was done in the late 1960s and early 1970s. The vast majority of islanders—some 1,200—were relocated in Mauritius, but some went to the Seychelles.

Mr. Blunt: All of us here are familiar with the background, and I hoped that the Minister could start his reply from a later point. We understand that the Government have made their decision through the Orders in Council. Does he accept that that is a given? The merits of that were discussed in the debate initiated by the hon. Member for Islington, North (Jeremy Corbyn) and I do not want to revisit them now. I instead invite the Minister to address the question of what we do now in the light of that decision.

Mr. Rammell: With respect to the hon. Gentleman, I was aware that two debates were coming one day after the other, and I spoke to him yesterday to clarify what issues he intended to address. The indication that I then received was that this debate—properly, as it was to be a Foreign Office debate—would be about the background, history and rationale for what we have done and that, properly, the issues about local government finance would be addressed in tomorrow's debate. That is what I am seeking to do.

Although the hon. Gentleman said that people are aware of the background, some of the interventions suggest that not everyone is fully aware of it. I should like to repeat what I said in this Chamber on 7 July about the measures taken by successive Governments, both Conservative and Labour. That is an important point in respect of the speech by the hon. Member for East Surrey (Mr. Ainsworth). I heard the references to Harold Wilson and to this Government but I think that he has forgotten the role of past Conservative Governments. *[Interruption.]* With respect, that is the point that was made, and that is what I am properly responding to.

The measures taken by successive Governments of the 1960s and 1970s to depopulate the islands did not—to say the least—constitute the finest hour of UK foreign policy. I do not seek to justify what was done in the

1960s or the 1970s. On 12 October, the Foreign Secretary indicated in the House that he understood how controversial were the measures taken many decades ago to relocate the Chagossians to Mauritius and the Seychelles.

The nub of the problem, however, is that, regrettable as those measures may have been, this Government have to deal with the situation as it exists today. The responsibility of the UK Government for what was done in the 1960s and 1970s has been acknowledged by successive Governments since then, as is demonstrated by the substantial sums in compensation that have already been paid to the Chagossians.

The issue of compensation is directly relevant to the debate. Compensation was made available on two occasions. At the time of the relocation of the islanders, £650,000—equivalent to almost £5.5 million in today's terms—was made available to the Mauritius Government specifically to assist with resettlement. Subsequent to that, in 1982, an ex gratia payment of £4 million—equivalent to £9 million today—was put into a trust fund for the benefit of the Chagossian community in Mauritius. Furthermore, the Mauritius Government made land available to the value of £1 million. At the time, it was agreed by all concerned, including the Chagossians themselves with the benefit of independent legal advice, that the payment was in full and final settlement of all claims against the UK arising out of the Chagossians' transfer to and resettlement in Mauritius, as well as their preclusion from returning to the Chagos islands.

Those payments amount to more than £14 million in today's prices. The Chagossians' lawyers advised them that that was a fair and reasonable settlement. In 2002, proceedings in the High Court were initiated in an attempt to secure further compensation, and in October 2003 the High Court dismissed the case in full in a comprehensive judgment. On 22 July this year, the Court of Appeal refused leave to appeal against the judgment.

Jeremy Corbyn (Islington, North) (Lab): I apologise for not being present for the opening speech. I was detained in the main Chamber at the time.

Despite all that the Minister has said, can he not accept that the Chagos islanders have been very badly treated? They have lived, and continue to live, in very poor conditions and great poverty, largely in Mauritius and to some extent in the Seychelles, and there is a moral duty on the British Government to recognise that poverty of people who are British citizens, and to ensure that a new assistance package is agreed with them.

As the Minister knows, a delegation is coming here later this month. It will have the opportunity to meet him, so that he can hear at first hand how awful the lives of many Chagossians have been in Mauritius since they were dumped on the quayside all those years ago.

Mr. Rammell: As my hon. Friend knows, I respect his conviction and integrity on this issue and the way that he has campaigned on it. Nevertheless, there has been a High Court ruling, which makes it clear that we are not required to pay further compensation. That is the situation. However, as is proper for any accountable Government, we will receive and listen to representations. I have done that with regard to my hon. Friend and, as he knows, I am prepared to meet with representatives of the Chagossian community later this month.

In 2000, the High Court, in judicial review proceedings brought by the Chagossians, held that the provisions of the British Indian Ocean Territory Immigration Ordinance 1971, which prohibited the unauthorised entry of any person into any part of the territory, were invalid in so far as they applied to the Chagossians. Accordingly, the ordinance was amended so as to remove the prohibition in respect of the Chagossians, except with regard to entry into Diego Garcia itself. Subsequently, an independent study into the feasibility of resettlement, which had meanwhile been commissioned by the Government, concluded that resettlement of the islands on anything other than a short-term and purely subsistence basis would be highly precarious and would involve expensive underwriting by the British Government for an open-ended period, and probably permanently. That is pertinent to some of the points made by the hon. Member for Reigate.

I emphasise that that study was carried out by experts independent of Government, and because of that—and equally because of the need to ensure and to maintain the availability and effective use of the territory for defence purposes, for which it was created and set aside in accordance with the UK's treaty obligations—the Government decided, after long and careful consideration, that resettlement could not take place.

Mr. Blunt: Will the Minister give way?

Mr. Rammell: No. I need to respond to the points that have been made. I will give way if there is time.

Accordingly, the Government legislated to restore full immigration control over the whole territory, and that was done in June 2004.

The hon. Gentleman mentioned the manner in which these changes came about and the fact that they were undertaken through Orders in Council. I remind him that that has been the normal way of legislating on the overseas territories under successive Governments.

Mr. Blunt: All those points are familiar to anyone who read the debate or attended it on 7 July. I understand that the proposals I have made are fresh to the Minister, but all I am seeking from him is an acknowledgement that in the light of the Orders in Council something needs to be done. I understand that that something would have to be the subject of advice from his officials and other Departments.

Mr. Rammell: With respect, I am trying to be as open and frank as I can, and there is a problem with the hon. Gentleman's seeking to initiate a debate on local government finance matters, and then requesting that the Foreign Office responds.

The hon. Gentleman has worked in the Foreign Office. Other hon. Members in the Chamber who have been in government will know the legitimate difficulties involved. Specifically in response to some of the points that he made about the low level of literacy among the Chagossian community, there are currently no aid programmes to assist through the Department for

[Mr. Rammell]

International Development, because Mauritius particularly is a middle-income country and there have been, at today's prices, substantial elements of compensation. Nevertheless—and without commitment—that issue has not been put to us before and I will consider it.

Following the arrival of the Chagossians in Mauritius and the Seychelles, the majority automatically acquired Mauritian or Seychelles citizenship when those countries achieved independence. In addition, most Chagossians retain their status as citizens of the UK and colonies, and the British Overseas Territories Act 2002 gave them the additional status of full British citizens.

Mr. Peter Ainsworth: Will the Minister just try to answer my question about the extent of discussions between his Department and the Office of the Deputy Prime Minister about the consequences of the Orders in Council for local government?

Mr. Rammell: I have already made it clear to the hon. Gentleman and to the hon. Member for Reigate that we have, on a number of occasions, been in contact with other Whitehall Departments, including the ODPM, the Department for Work and Pensions, the Department of Health, and with the local authority, and we will continue to be so. I also made it clear that I was seeing my hon. Friend the Member for Crawley to discuss the matter further. Given my responsibilities, and those of the Foreign Office, I do not believe that I can go further in responding to something that is properly a matter for discussion in the debates tomorrow.

I reiterate that I am not seeking to justify what happened in the 1960s and 1970s. I have said on several occasions that I do not regard that as the finest hour in the conduct of UK foreign policy. However, the fundamental problem faced by this Government was this. It is almost 40 years since the Chagossians last inhabited the islands and, accordingly, given the independent advice on the feasibility and sustainability of the repopulation of the islands, it would not have been responsible for the Government to say, "The repopulation can take place and we will pick up the financial consequences." Considering the matter in the round, that would be a significant financial liability in the context of our overall contingent financial liabilities for the overseas territories.

I understand the points that have been made and I have tried, within the terms of the debate, to respond.

Question put and agreed to.

Adjourned accordingly at one minute to Five o'clock.

Westminster Hall

Thursday 4 November 2004

[MR. EDWARD O'HARA *in the Chair*]

War against Terrorism

[Relevant documents: Seventh Report from the Foreign Affairs Committee, Session 2003–04, HC 441, and the Government's response thereto, Cm. 6340.]

Motion made, and Question proposed, That the sitting be now adjourned.—*[Gillian Merron.]*

2.30 pm

Donald Anderson (Swansea, East) (Lab): I am pleased to introduce for this afternoon's debate the seventh report from Select Committee on Foreign Affairs.

The report is the fifth in a series on foreign policy aspects of the war against terrorism produced by the Select Committee since the tragic events of 9/11. It covers a broad range of issues, from the political and security situation in Iraq to Russia's stockpiles of chemical weapons. Indeed, we made 74 conclusions and recommendations.

I have always believed that such Select Committee reports are useful in allowing Committee members to gain expertise in the field. We produce them not only for the wider public, but for colleagues in both Houses of Parliament. I was delighted that the report was hailed in a debate in the other place in September using glowing superlatives that I would be reluctant to use myself. I am sure that the hon. Member for Tweeddale, Ettrick and Lauderdale (Mr. Moore) would underline the remark made by the then leader of his party in the House of Lords that the report was "brilliant".

As usual, as part of our inquiry, we heard oral evidence, received written evidence from a range of witnesses, and held discussions with senior officials in New York, Washington DC, Moscow, Pakistan and Afghanistan. Some members of the Committee were also able to continue our series of visits to Iraq.

My aim today is first to introduce the report to the Chamber and then to update it. We should recall that the Committee drew its conclusions in the middle of July. An interesting feature of foreign affairs is that events move so speedily. Since then, there have been several key developments in this moving picture. There have been elections, as the Prime Minister mentioned yesterday, not only in Afghanistan, to which I shall refer in a moment, but in the United States. Both elections may be relevant to the matters that we are discussing. Equally, there have been events concerning key leaders such as President Musharraf, and the possibly serious illness of President Arafat, who is in intensive care.

Iraq has become a battleground for al-Qaeda, with appalling consequences for the people of that country. We state that the violence stems from several sources such as members of the former regime, local Islamists and criminal gangs, as well as al-Qaeda. The lack of law and order in some areas has been particularly damaging and has affected the credibility of the coalition. Clearly it is the aim of those who take hostages, blow up pipelines and attack electoral officials to make the country ungovernable and, in effect, to create anarchy. Surely it is the aim of the rest of the world community to isolate, so far as we can, those who can be brought into the tent from the fundamentalists or wreckers.

The Iraqi security forces have made significant progress, but they remain a long way from being able to maintain security. They are also being targeted. There was the appalling incident on 23 October when about 50 army recruits were killed in an apparent ambush—again, part of the campaign by the insurgents to destabilise the country. Until the Iraqi forces can maintain security, foreign forces are likely to be required. Indeed, we hope that following the elections in January, with a new legitimacy for the Government of Iraq, the outside forces will be able to move increasingly into the background and into a supportive role.

United Nations Security Council resolution 1546, adopted in June, gives the multinational force a mandate to be in Iraq

"at the request of the incoming interim Government of Iraq."

It is surely regrettable that countries other than the United States and the United Kingdom have failed to send significant numbers of troops to Iraq, which makes the strain on our forces more intense. It would be particularly beneficial if Islamic states could be persuaded to add their forces. What are the Government doing to encourage other states to send forces to Iraq? Perhaps the result of the election in the United States has made it more difficult for certain countries to respond, but all would be affected if there were a significant failure in Iraq.

We know that British personnel play a vital role in Iraq, and their safety is a serious concern, especially with the increase in the number of kidnappings. Thinking of the dreadful murder of Ken Bigley and the capture of Margaret Hassan, I ask again: what are the Government doing to safeguard the security of British personnel in Iraq?

On the political developments in Iraq and the role of the United Nations, the process of wide-ranging consultation overseen by the United Nations plays an important role in the formation of the Interim Government, but the work of the United Nations is being severely hindered by the security situation. That is understandable, given the tragic events of August 2003 when the then UN leader in Iraq was blown up with so many of his staff.

Mr. David Drew (Stroud) (Lab/Co-op): I am sure that my right hon. Friend, who like me is a Christian, is particularly shocked at the revelation that the Iraqi Christian minority is being deliberately targeted for the most vicious treatment by the terrorists. Will he say a few words to suggest what support the Foreign Office can offer so that that minority can live in freedom? I hope that the Foreign Office will then respond to that. The Christian minority had a degree of stability in their lives even under Saddam, but that stability has now been taken away.

Donald Anderson: That, alas, has been one of the unintended consequences of the invasion. I, too, have seen reports of not only the bombing of Christian churches but threats to individual Christian families.

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That is a long way from the vision of those, including ourselves, who invaded Iraq, where the Christian minority was reasonably well protected and people such as Tariq Aziz were in government at the time. I hope that our Government will take full note of what my hon. Friend has said and that they will, as far as they can, talk to the authorities in Iraq to say that we are very keen on human rights generally, and that we are concerned at the threats that have been made to minorities, including the Christian community.

On the United Nations, I ask my hon. Friend the Minister what progress has been made in creating a force to provide security for UN personnel and facilities. That is particularly relevant given the elections scheduled for January. It is highly desirable that those elections proceed on schedule to foster Iraqi engagement and confidence in the country's political transition. Continued violence can only hinder the validity of that process. Election registration and polling efforts will be key targets for the terrorists, so what are we as an international community doing to assist preparations for the elections? What is being done specifically to provide help and security to UN election workers? It would be a signal triumph for the forces of unreason—the wreckers—if the timetable were not to proceed as hoped for. Although it is clear that there is potential for certain no-go areas to exist—hence the current threat to Falluja—the alternative to a positive outcome in Iraq may be a failed state and regional instability. It is most important that we progress to a legitimate Government who are allowed to make their own mistakes and whom the people see as their own, via the international community.

Mr. Gary Streeter (South-West Devon) (Con): I very much appreciate the right hon. Gentleman's remarks. He mentioned Falluja. Does he agree that before some kind of US-led assault on Falluja takes place, it is crucial that every effort is made to ensure that a peaceful solution is sought with the Iraqi terrorists—perhaps not with those who have come from outside—and that civilians living there have every opportunity to escape? Does he think that such efforts have been made?

Donald Anderson: I know that some efforts have been made. There has been leafleting and an attempt to warn civilians in Falluja to leave in preparation for a potential assault that will try to separate the absolute fundamentalists—the bitter-enders—from the more reasonable elements of the population, many of whom are intimidated and frightened to leave. If one can show that every effort has been made to protect, warn and safeguard the civilian population, it will be a test of whether the Falluja onslaught—if it comes—is legitimate.

I turn to Afghanistan, where the picture is broadly positive but fragile. There has been improvement in key areas such as education, women's rights and even private investment. We welcome security and the support that was given by the United States to the electoral process. We are pleased at the news that President Karzai was officially declared the winner yesterday with 55.4 per cent. of the vote. It is clearly unfortunate that the voting was largely on tribal lines with the Pashtun majority supporting the President and the Uzbeks supporting Mr. Dostum. Despite a number of reported irregularities, the election was a great success and such irregularities were not in themselves sufficient to question the result. The parliamentary elections in Afghanistan scheduled for spring 2005 will obviously pose a greater challenge because of their nature.

It is essential for the democratic process and the accountability of the President that parliamentary elections are held on schedule, so I ask the Minister what the Government are doing to assist the holding of those elections and to encourage broad assistance from the international community. We shall examine with great care what President Karzai does. He clearly has enormous problems; he cannot wipe the slate clean in respect of those around him, but he needs to appoint those not tainted with corruption to his Cabinet. Although he initially had an understandable wish to have a large-tent approach, perhaps he should modify that to ensure that more respectable people are around him, particularly because the security forces are spreading out beyond Kabul.

The other interesting feature from the Committee's point of view is that when we were in Peshawar, we were able to speak to individuals who claimed to be moderate members of the Taliban—if that is not a contradiction in terms. Apparently, there is now an earnest debate going on in Afghanistan as to how they respond to those of the Taliban, in exile in Pakistan and elsewhere, who wish to return.

On the subject of drugs, which was part of our survey in Afghanistan, we concluded that there was little sign of the war against drugs being won and that the situation is likely to get worse, at least in the short term. That in an area in which foreign policy shades into domestic policy. We know that 95 per cent. of heroin in the United Kingdom comes from Afghanistan. We are living in the new globalised world where what happens on the streets of our constituencies is highly relevant to what happens in what in the past might have been called a "faraway place of which we know little".

I am told that our Committee's conclusion on drugs is confirmed by the report on drugs has been complied by the United Nations and which was due to be launched tomorrow, but is now to be launched in a few weeks. The report will show that progress has been much slower than had been hoped and will paint a gloomy picture. Clearly, we need to redouble the efforts, particularly because we in the United Kingdom are head of the counter-narcotics group. Our approach must incorporate eradication and interdiction.

There is also a need for alternative livelihoods that provide a living wage. Given the figures that we were shown about the yield per hectare of heroin and wheat, there is no way in which alternative crops are likely to provide farmers with anything like the income that they will get from heroin. Perhaps only the force of law can prevent farmers from producing that very tempting crop.

There is an overriding need for security and to achieve progress on that and other issues. High-level arrests must be made to demonstrate the unacceptability of links with the drugs trade. We understand that there is also a health problem in relation to addicts in

Afghanistan, including those who have returned from exile. What are the Government doing to reinvigorate efforts to tackle the drug problem in Afghanistan? Is there any evidence that the price of heroin supplies in this country has been affected? What could provide suitable alternative livelihoods for Afghan farmers and what are the Government doing in that area?

Given the gloomy conclusions of the UN report, how are we seeking to monitor the situation before the publication of the next UN report in roughly a year's time? What is being done to establish treatment centres across Afghanistan? Will the Government undertake to report regularly to Parliament on the progress or, sadly, perhaps the lack of progress?

When the Committee was in Afghanistan, it was able to meet both the UK forces in the provincial reconstruction team and the leaders of the NATO forces. We have played an important role in improving the security of the situation. We are training the Afghan army and police units so that they can assume responsibility for their own population. There is clearly an urgent need to achieve disarmament, demobilisation and reintegration. We need to devote greater resources to that. We know that if adequate security resources are not provided, there will be a real danger of implosion in that fragile country.

In Istanbul in June, NATO member states agreed on a major expansion of the alliance's role in Afghanistan, particularly with regard to extending the reach of the international security assistance force beyond Kabul. However, the implementation of the NATO response has been unsatisfactory and there is also the question of national caveats, which hinder the effectiveness of NATO troops. Are the commitments made by the NATO forces sufficient? Indeed, are the commitments being made? Clearly, there is a pressing need for the Government to put pressure on countries to fulfil the undertaking that they gave in Istanbul. Although France and Germany are doing well, other countries, such as Italy and Spain, are way behind.

It is clear that Pakistan has provided invaluable assistance in the war against terrorism, such as by launching campaigns in the tribal areas along the borders with Afghanistan. Many suspected and actual members of al-Qaeda have been arrested. The Committee received a briefing from the senior military officer in Peshawar relating to the problems in the tribal areas and was able to appreciate the real problems in that region, which, although not exactly the wild west, is difficult and turbulent.

We understand the serious domestic constraints under which President Musharraf operates. Some areas are dominated by forces sympathetic to the Taliban and al-Qaeda; indeed, while we were there we passed the area where two attempts were made on President Musharraf's life last December. What are the Government doing to assist Pakistan's effort to reform the education system and to encourage development efforts in the tribal areas? Dealing with the madrassahs is one way we can assist in addressing the root causes of extremism.

We also expressed, quite properly, our concerns about the state of democracy and human rights. On 1 November, Pakistan's upper House passed a Bill allowing President Musharraf to remain head of the army. That legislation will take effect from 31 December this year, despite his having pledged to stand down. The human rights situation in Pakistan remains unacceptable. To turn again to the point that my hon. Friend the Member for Stroud (Mr. Drew) made about the Christian minority's position, I and other colleagues have received briefings from Christian Solidarity Worldwide on the disturbing reports of attacks on Christians in recent months, including the deaths of a number of individuals. However, we recognise that the Shi'a mosques are also affected.

President Musharraf, with all the internal difficulties that he faces, has made speeches in which he has called for a law banning honour killings and recommended that the Hudood ordinances and the blasphemy laws be scrutinised to prevent further abuses. According to the Human Rights Commission of Pakistan, more than 600 women were killed in the name of honour in Pakistan in 2003. We should all welcome the President's words, but encourage him to go further than merely scrutinising the blasphemy laws, which have had such an adverse impact on minority groups, and reform or repeal them. We have to understand the formidably difficult context within which President Musharraf operates, but the Government should do everything possible to encourage Pakistan to do more to adhere to international human rights standards and guarantee the rights of all Pakistani citizens.

The last issue that I shall discuss is the Israel-Palestine conflict. The new factors include the result of the US election and what effect, if any, it will have. Will we see a conventional second term, when the US President, knowing that he does not have to face the electorate and wanting his place in history, is more ready to strike out boldly? Will President Bush be ready to intervene in the conflict as strenuously as President Clinton was and does he realise the enormous damage that is being done to the United States image in the Arab world by the perceived partisan position that the US has taken? The continued violence and suffering of both the Israeli and Palestinian people clearly highlight the need for a resolution of the conflict. That resolution would be an essential component of efforts to defeat terrorism and promote reform in the middle east. Whether the terrorists are using the fact of the Israel-Palestine conflict as a catalyst or excuse, we do not know.

Mr. John Maples (Stratford-on-Avon) (Con): The right hon. Gentleman is implicitly critical of the US Administration's position on the Israel-Palestine problem. However, have they not taken a less forward role because they have come to the conclusion that Arafat is not a partner for peace and that, after what President Clinton tried to do at Camp David and Taba, there has been no point in pursuing the issue very aggressively? Given the present circumstances perhaps that is about to change, but does the right hon. Gentleman think that we need a post-Arafat era before peace can be achieved, or should the Americans have tried to make progress while Arafat was in charge?

Donald Anderson: It is difficult to say clearly what the reasons are. Will history see President Arafat, who is, of course, now gravely ill, as the Hamlet of Palestine, who was never able to reach a decision? To what extent were the political constraints on him too intense? He has had

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several opportunities, but failed to make decisions, so one understands the hesitations of the US. Nevertheless, subject to his illness, he still holds the flag and is still a symbol of the people of Palestine. He has brought them from the refugee camps to at least the possibility of a two-state solution. He is the elected president, and we should do all that we can to work with him—assuming that he is able to resume his duties—rather than to shun him.

My hon. Friend—I think that I can call him that in this context—will know that, towards the end of his presidency, President Clinton expended enormous human and political capital at Camp David on trying to reach a solution, and he came extremely close. Yet, the incoming Bush Administration seemed to want to do anything but become involved. For a year or more, they refused to intervene, if only to be different from Clinton. I hope that there will be no such hiatus or vacuum during the second Administration.

Mr. Maples: My point was that the Bush Administration paid no attention until 11 September precisely because of President Clinton's experience at Camp David and subsequently at Taba. He came to the conclusion, which the Bush Administration presumably understood, that no deal would be reached with Arafat, so it was a waste of time devoting attention to the issue.

Donald Anderson: That is a possible reason, but the European Union, for example, did not reach the same conclusion. At the very least, let us converge by saying that there is no reason for further delays. We should remember that an earlier Administration sent Mr. Baker to the area, and that initiative led via Madrid to Oslo.

Mr. John Bercow (Buckingham) (Con): I rather share the assessment that my hon. Friend the Member for Stratford-on-Avon (Mr. Maples) made of the Americans' motivation. However, as someone who has visited Israel several times and who recently saw the plight of the Palestinians in the west bank and Gaza, let me reinforce the right hon. Gentleman's point by arguing that it is extraordinarily dangerous for the United States to leave a vacuum in the Arab-Israeli dispute. Now is the time for a decisive step forward, lest very ugly forces be unleashed.

Donald Anderson: I agree with the hon. Gentleman. In Prime Minister's questions yesterday, my right hon. Friend the Prime Minister said that the issue is his priority. We know from the documents leaked to *The Daily Telegraph* that the theme of his senior adviser two years ago was to keep the issue of Israel-Palestine high on the agenda. There is now no excuse for not seeking to address it as best we can.

The Committee noted the failure by both sides to implement the measures outlined in the road map. We reiterated our concerns about the lack of significant progress on reforming the Palestinian security sector and about the illegal settlements and the security fence. Clearly, we have to take account of the fragile nature of the coalition in Israel, where certain rabbis are urging members of the Israel defence forces to consider disloyalty or defection in relation to Gaza. That is the political context in which Israel operates, and the coalition will have to be much broader if there is to be progress.

The Committee concluded that the road map may be fatally stalled and that time is running out fast for a viable two-state solution. Nevertheless, we believe that a resolution of the conflict is attainable, and the broad outlines are visible, as the hon. Member for Stratford-on-Avon (Mr. Maples) has outlined on several occasions. Israel's planned withdrawal from Gaza is a welcome development, so long as it is seen as part of the road map—as a first step, not as an end station or a prelude to de facto annexation.

It is clearly important that the international community should work to ensure that the withdrawal from Gaza is fully consistent with a durable solution to the conflict. We need to provide assistance with post-withdrawal peacekeeping, together with Egypt and other key countries. What are we doing to provide such protection in this difficult transition period in Gaza?

The report reiterates our previous conclusion that the case for building a barrier along the green line would be strong and acceptable but to build it within the west bank is not justifiable, acceptable or legal, and gives rise to fears that Israel is doing it simply to annex land. Unilateral efforts to change facts on the ground in the occupied territories have been shown to be wholly illegal under international law. Actions taken so far have failed to stop Israel's construction of the barrier in the occupied territories.

We can understand by imagining the situation transposed to our constituencies how suicide bombings will enrage, anger and frustrate the peace movement in Israel; little seems to have been done by the Palestinian Authority about the propaganda that lauds the forces in question, or to prevent the infiltration. What more are the Government doing to impress on the Israeli Government the illegality of building the barrier in the occupied territories?

I concede that I have skated over a few of the key topics, and not mentioned, for example, the Russian Federation, our reflections on international law, or the international co-operation to tackle terrorism, including the attempt to relate more constructively to the Arab world. However, the broad range of subjects covered in our report reflects the Committee's view that the diverse threats to security posed by terrorism and failed states are or could become interconnected and therefore need to be countered as part of a coherent strategy.

The Committee will keep the matter high on our agenda and we intend to publish a further report on the war against terrorism next spring. I commend the report to the Chamber.

3.2 pm

Sir John Stanley (Tonbridge and Malling) (Con): Like the right hon. Member for Swansea, East (Donald Anderson), I shall focus on Iraq, but not exclusively and in a wider security context beyond that country. First, I want to make it clear that whatever differing views hon. Members in this Chamber may take about the rights or wrongs of the invasion of Iraq in the first place, I consider that we have a wholly unambiguous responsibility to give total support to our armed forces in Iraq in their vital work and to do our utmost to ensure their safe return to our country.

Now that weapons of mass destruction have been found not to exist following the final report of the Iraq survey group, and as the Government were clearly aware that that was the likely conclusion, the Government's justification for the war in Iraq has, of course, changed fundamentally. We have been invited on successive occasions by the Government, and not least by the Prime Minister, to support the war on the ground of the benefit to the Iraqi people from regime change—getting rid of Saddam Hussein.

Undoubtedly, the removal of Saddam Hussein has mostly been beneficial, although as has already been pointed out, the 1 million-strong Christian community in Iraq now faces a degree of virulent and indeed violent persecution in the post-Saddam Hussein era that it never experienced when he was in power. Whether or not it was beneficial to remove Saddam Hussein—I have made it clear that, on balance, I think it most definitely was—it is not the basis on which history will judge whether the invasion of Iraq was justified. In any number of countries around the world, people might have their position improved by the removal of a regime. Indeed, some of us in this Room might argue, as I most certainly would, that regime change in this country might be beneficial for the people. However, regime change is not a justification for military action, particularly if there is no threat.

The question that must be posed now and which will be answered by historians is whether the world has become a safer place as a result of the invasion of Iraq and the removal of Saddam Hussein. I do not pretend for one moment that that fundamental question can be conclusively answered now, but some 18 months away from the invasion and the end of a short war, it is already possible to start drawing at least preliminary conclusions. The pluses and minuses that must be considered in determining whether the world has become a safer place yield initial results that look distinctly discouraging.

On the plus side, we got rid of an aggressor who was responsible for two wars. He was responsible not merely for the invasion of Kuwait, but for starting the Iran-Iraq war, which resulted in an appalling number of deaths. In addition, he had in the past possessed and used weapons of mass destruction. However, we must focus on the situation when the British and American Governments decided to invade Iraq. We now know that at that time Saddam Hussein did not have weapons of mass destruction. He was being successfully contained—perhaps more successfully than we thought—by the no-fly zone policy, which was undoubtedly successful. He was also contained by the UN weapons inspectors who had been in the country since the end of the first Gulf war. We now know that, in addition to having no weapons of mass destruction, there was no production of such weapons. It has not been demonstrated that Saddam Hussein posed a direct threat to British interests such as the sovereign bases in Cyprus. At the time of the invasion, it was difficult to argue that he presented a security threat to us or the worldwide community. Most significantly, given what has happened since, it was not possible to show that he had links with al-Qaeda at the time we invaded Iraq. To all intents and purposes, Iraq was free of al-Qaeda.

Turning to the minus side, the presence of al-Qaeda is the single greatest security change from a worldwide perspective. As was forecast accurately by the Joint Intelligence Committee and reported by the Intelligence and Security Committee before the war, an invasion of Iraq was likely to bring into Iraq an al-Qaeda presence that had not been there previously. The Prime Minister was clearly warned of that. That JIC intelligence assessment has been shown to be wholly correct, and now inside Iraq a considerable number of al-Qaeda operatives have an opportunity to hone their terrorist techniques. Having honed those terrorist techniques, the worldwide risk is that as so many of the operatives come from outside Iraq, they will in due course go back to other countries and practise them.

I was interested in reported comments made by the Iraqi interim Prime Minister Allawi earlier this week. He gave the information that, of those arrested in Iraq in the last two weeks, 167 were foreign fighters. They included four senior members of the al-Zarqawi terrorist group, who, interestingly, have renamed themselves "al-Qaeda in Iraq". The four senior members who were arrested were all foreigners. One was a Palestinian, another Lebanese, another Saudi and the last Egyptian. In a real and practical sense, that illustrates the extent of foreign al-Qaeda penetration in Iraq.

The security consequences are considerable. What is happening in Iraq is that, although we do not wish it, we are inadvertently providing a training area of the highest quality for al-Qaeda operatives. Any experienced military trainer will say that, for training to be first class, there are two requirements. First, the training should, as near as possible, create an operational situation. Secondly, the best training is against the best and toughest. Unhappily, that is precisely the training benefit that we are providing to al-Qaeda in Iraq. It does not have to simulate an operational environment—it has got one. That provides it with the best possible training environment. It is training against the best—British and American forces.

We are training al-Qaeda personnel across the range of potential terrorist weapons and devices. We are giving them the opportunity to use the existing range of terrorist weapons—surface-to-air missiles, rocket-propelled grenades and improvised explosive devices, which are often remotely controlled. We are, of course, also giving them training and experience in the positioning and use of suicide bombers. They can train against the most sophisticated countermeasures that are available against terrorists—those used by American and British forces. I am afraid that I cannot exaggerate the potential benefit to al-Qaeda of being able to use and try to deploy terrorist tactics against those countermeasures.

Those involved are getting training in infiltration—the infiltration of counter-terrorist forces, such as the Iraqi police and Iraqi armed forces. Sadly, it appears without any doubt that they are having success. Reference was made to the brutal, cold-blooded murder of about 50 Iraqi police recruits. From what one reads, all the indications are that that must have been at least in part an inside job. Lastly, they are being trained in intimidation. As we have seen only today, they have intimidated the Christian community in Iraq by

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announcing that they intend to murder one person in every Christian household in the country if Christian women in Iraq continue not to wear headscarves.

Mr. Andrew Tyrie (Chichester) (Con): I am a little confused by my right hon. Friend's remarks. At the beginning of his speech, he seemed to be saying that he supported military intervention in Iraq. He now seems to be saying that we are creating training camps for al-Qaeda. Does he think that there was a method of removing Saddam Hussein using military force, which inevitably meant occupation, without creating such conditions?

Sir John Stanley: What I said at the outset was that we must give total support to our armed forces in the job that they are doing in Iraq. I am now highlighting the security downsides to the intervention.

Perhaps most chilling of all is the fact that the Iraq environment is giving al-Qaeda the ability to develop and use the terrorist weapon of kidnapping, coupled with the use of a particularly brutal form of murder—beheading. One of the most worrying features of kidnapping is its relative ease of exportability. We have already seen the terrorist weapon of kidnapping exported to Saudi Arabia and recently to Afghanistan.

It is a matter of great concern that we are giving al-Qaeda operatives inside Iraq a significant benefit in military and operational terms. It is a bitter irony that having gone to war in Afghanistan, in my view entirely rightly, to remove its Taliban and al-Qaeda training areas, we have by following that with the invasion of Iraq unwittingly created a very high-value training area for al-Qaeda in Iraq.

Mr. Tyrie: I agree with my right hon. Friend, and I am grateful to him for having given way a second time. I am trying to elicit from him whether he now thinks that it was a mistake to invade Iraq, given the consequences, or whether he thinks that there might have been some other method of dealing with Saddam Hussein that would not have resulted in the creation there of training camps for al-Qaeda.

Sir John Stanley: I am happy to explain my position to my hon. Friend. I voted for the war in Iraq on 18 March 2003. I did so with the benefit of what the Prime Minister of this country said to me and the rest of the House of Commons about the threat from Saddam Hussein. We were told that Saddam Hussein had a large number of weapons of mass destruction, some of which could be ready to use within 45 minutes, and that they threatened vital British interests such as the sovereign base areas in Cyprus. That was the basis on which I cast my vote. Knowing what I do now in terms of the threat, I make it clear that if I had had such knowledge at the time, there is no way in which I would have supported an invasion of Iraq.

I want now to move beyond Iraq and point to the consequences for security elsewhere of our huge commitment there. I turn first to Afghanistan. As the House knows, several members of the Select Committee on Foreign Affairs were able to go there earlier this year. There has undoubtedly been a huge consumption of military resources and finance in Iraq. However, we must ask what the impact has been on places such as Afghanistan. I welcome the fact that a successful democratic election has taken place, but the Prime Minister was not justified in seeking to convey the impression in Prime Minister's Question Time yesterday that, because Afghanistan has seen one successful election, that is the end of the country's difficulties. If he runs true to form, he may well suggest after the Iraqi elections in January next year that that will be the end of difficulties in that country. I am afraid that that will not be the case.

On security in Afghanistan, the Committee says—it is not contested—that President Karzai's writ runs in only part of the country, and arguably in a relatively small part. The warlords effectively reign supreme in their own areas. They are flush with funds. They are able to buy the weapons and recruit the militias that they want. The Taliban and al-Qaeda are far from eliminated there; indeed, they are having some success in rebuilding their positions. As the right hon. Member for Swansea, East indicated, we have far too few boots on the ground to provide credible security, yet security is fundamental to a stable democracy.

In reality, the job in Afghanistan is only half done. We have not put in the necessary resources—armed forces and finances—partly, if not largely, because of the substantial commitments made by the British and American Governments in Iraq. We are paying a heavy cost in Afghanistan.

Next is the situation in Russia, which is extraordinarily important. One justification, with which I agreed, that the Prime Minister cited for invading Iraq was the huge, long-term, worldwide danger of the al-Qaeda and extreme Islamic terrorist threat coalescing with the possession of weapons of mass destruction. I agree with him that that is the single greatest threat that the world faces, but he made those remarks about the wrong country. We now know that there are no weapons of mass destruction in Iraq, but what he said is totally valid in relation to Russia and the WMD stockpile of the former Soviet Union. It is the largest stockpile in the world, and it has the potential to be a serious threat if terrorists get their hands on any portion of it.

As far as we know, that stockpile covers the full range of WMD. I shall deal first with the nuclear weapons. As a member of the defence committee of the NATO Parliamentary Assembly, I had the benefit a few months ago of being given a briefing, including pictures and photographs, on the security dimension of the nuclear materials that have been extracted from the reactors of former Soviet naval ships—submarines and surface vessels. Pictures showing the inadequacy of security surrounding those nuclear materials were deeply disturbing.

As for chemical weapons, the Foreign Affairs Committee had the benefit of being briefed in person by US Senator Richard Lugar, one of the world's leading experts on such weapons in the former Soviet Union stockpile. Inside what is now Russia, a huge stockpile of chemical weapons is still waiting to be decommissioned. There are worries about the security of those weapons.

Finally, President Yeltsin admitted that the former Soviet Union had a biological weapons programme, in complete contravention of its signing of the biological weapons convention. There has been an eerie and worrying silence, certainly in terms of any public documentation of which I am aware, as to whether those biological weapons have been destroyed, and if not, where they are.

I hope and believe that the basic problem in Russia is not will. The Russians are keen to get rid of that huge arsenal. With the terrorist problem that they have in their country, one can understand why they should be keen. The problem is money. Huge sums are being spent in Iraq to deal with what must be faced up to as the internal security consequences of our invasion of that country, when those same sums would be of enormous value in dealing with the former Soviet Union's stockpile. In 2003, the Chancellor announced a £3 billion special reserve to cover military operations in Iraq. The US Congress has appropriated a staggering $100 billion for military operations in Iraq. If that money, or even some of it, had been used and was now being used to remove the former Soviet stockpile, that would be a huge improvement in world security.

In conclusion, we cannot reach a definitive view as yet of whether the world is a safer place as a result of the invasion. However, there are grounds for serious worries about what will happen when the al-Qaeda elements that have now poured into Iraq get the benefit of operational experience and go back to other countries around the world. I hope that I am proved wrong, but I fear that there may be some awesome and awful consequences once those al-Qaeda operatives who are working in Iraq, doing such appalling things, get back to other parts of the world.

3.28 pm

Mr. Greg Pope (Hyndburn) (Lab): I am grateful to follow the two right hon. Members who are members of the Committee.

I want first to make a point about Iraq. I supported the war; I voted for it in March last year. Unlike the right hon. Member for Tonbridge and Malling (Sir John Stanley), I think that it was the right thing to do. The world is a better place without Saddam Hussein. All hon. Members must have found it a difficult decision. I certainly found it difficult to decide how to vote.

Whatever we thought about the war, and whatever the rights and wrongs of going into Iraq, we can agree, and should be able to form a consensus on, our duty not to walk away from the people of Iraq now. People in the Stop the War Coalition—not all, but some—urge that British troops should pull out. We cannot leave the people of Iraq to the Ba'athist elements, to the al-Zarqawis of this world, to the al-Qaedas or to the anarchy of terrorism. We have a duty to make Iraq a stable place, to make the elections in January a success and to rebuild and reconstruct Iraq.

We can be enormously proud of the work of the British Army in Iraq. I was fortunate enough to be able to visit Iraq a while ago. I spent a brief time in Baghdad with the British Office and then went to Basra to see the work that British soldiers are doing there. As a House of Commons, we can be enormously proud of the work that our soldiers are doing in some of the most difficult and dangerous circumstances imaginable, especially in the south of the country.

It is quite likely that the Queen's Lancashire Regiment will be recalled to Iraq as part of the reconfiguration of our troops there. The regiment has already served with distinction there, and I know that if it has to go back, it will rise to the challenge and serve with distinction again, but that might be easier if it were not threatened with a merger, or abolition.

I wish to focus also on Afghanistan. I add to those of my right hon. Friend the Member for Swansea, East (Donald Anderson) and the right hon. Member for Tonbridge and Malling my congratulations to President Karzai, whom we were fortunate enough to meet when the Committee visited Afghanistan this year. There has been remarkable success in that country, which had never had elections before. Between 9 million and 10 million people, of whom about 4 million are women, registered to vote in those elections. Women now have a say in the running of Afghanistan for the first time.

We should be proud of our contribution to making Afghanistan a more democratic nation, but that is not to say that there are not problems. There is a problem with drug production and poppy cultivation. We flew over Afghanistan into Kabul and then to Mazar-e-Sharif in the north, and somebody told us that every cultivated field that we could see out of the porthole of the RAF Hercules was a poppy field. They go on for mile after mile. If we are serious about tackling that problem, we must provide some peasant farmers with a viable and profitable alternative. It is too easy for them to fall back on poppy production, which is enormously profitable, and for us to leave them in league with certain warlords.

In south Afghanistan, there is still fighting with Taliban elements; there is fighting along the Pakistan border in the south Waziristan area. At some point, we will have to tackle the warlords. We saw the work that the British Army is doing in Mazar-e-Sharif, in the north, where a small provincial reconstruction team of perhaps 40 British soldiers is doing remarkable work. Those soldiers are winning a hearts-and-minds campaign with the people in that area; they are respected and popular, and we should be proud of them. However, if we put the issue in context, we see that there are 40 British soldiers in north Afghanistan, whereas General Dostum has about 10,000 men under arms in that area. We cannot allow that situation to continue indefinitely.

I agree that there are too few troops on the ground, but that is not necessarily our fault. I do not think that British forces should make up the shortfall in peacekeeping troops in Kabul. We are a member of NATO, and it is about time that some of our colleagues in NATO who enjoy talking about Afghanistan started to put troops on the ground there. However, although we are talking about the extra contribution that our allies could make, we need more money. There is a danger that we are trying to rebuild Afghanistan on the cheap. If we want to see a stable, prosperous, peaceful and democratic Afghanistan, that will require a lot more money than is going in.

My third area of focus is the middle east peace process. During the American presidential elections, it struck me that one name cropped up more than that of most foreigners. That was the name of our Prime Minister. I hope that when he picks up the telephone and

[Mr. Greg Pope]

congratulates President Bush on his re-election, he urges him to breathe life into the middle east peace process. During the Clinton Administration, we saw what a difference it can make if, in his second term, a President does not have to look over his shoulder and worry about a re-election campaign. Instead, he can focus on, and make a difference in, some areas of the world.

In the dying days of his presidency, President Clinton came incredibly close to doing a deal that at least offered a chance of lasting peace in the middle east. It was put to us in Washington—the hon. Member for Stratford-on-Avon (Mr. Maples) will remember this—by somebody who had served in the Clinton Administration that the deal that Clinton had offered to the Palestinians right at the end was not the deal of a lifetime, but the deal of three lifetimes, but the Palestinians walked away from it.

I understand why the hon. Member for Stratford-on-Avon made the points that he did—it is easy to see why President Bush did not make the middle east peace process a top priority given what happened to the Clinton Administration's efforts to find a resolution to the conflict—but we must reinvigorate the process. The sickening endless cycle of helicopter-gunship attacks on Palestinians followed by the atrocities of the suicide bombers cannot possibly be allowed to continue. I am very pleased that our Prime Minister has said that it will be the top foreign policy priority. He is right—it should be.

The Committee saw an Israeli security wall when we visited the area last year. First, we went to a village near Qalqiliya. The village is on a hilltop and is surrounded by razor wire. The Israel defence forces had cut off the water supply to the village, which was slowly being strangled. I suspect that there are no Palestinians left in that village. In Qalqiliya, which is a much larger town on the west bank, the Israelis have built a wall with razor wire that entirely circles the town. People told us that it took up to two hours to go through one checkpoint—there is only one way in and out.

We met a farmer whose farm is on one side of the wall and whose land is on the other. He was sleeping outside because he could not get back through the checkpoint to go home at night. We saw children whose homes were on one side of the wall, but whose school was on the other. I never saw the Berlin wall, but I imagine that it looked like that. The wall in Qalqiliya was enormously high, had watchtowers with Israeli soldiers in them and was incredibly intimidating. There is no possible security justification for encircling entire Palestinian towns on the west bank. I have no sympathy for the suicide bombers, but one can see where the anger comes from—it fuels the suicide bombers—in the degradation, humiliation and oppression of the Palestinian people in towns such as Qalqilya. We should redouble our efforts to tell the Government of Israel that the wall is a disgrace and that such treatment of an entire people is simply unacceptable in the modern world.

I shall briefly talk about Iran, which the Committee was also fortunate enough to visit. This is beginning to sound a little like extreme tourism, as the Committee has visited a variety of places that probably few people would want to visit on holiday. A claim that is often made about British policy is that we are just a poodle of American foreign policy. Nothing gives the lie to that claim better than our approach to Iran. On one side, there is the American neo-con view that Iran is part of an axis of evil. On the other side—the British side—there is the very clear view that we should have constructive engagement with Tehran.

I very much welcome the announcement made this week by our Foreign Secretary, which in effect ruled out a military solution to the threat that Iran poses. That threat, however, is real and needs to be dealt with. Iran is attempting to build a civilian nuclear power programme, although it is hard to think of a country that needs a nuclear power programme less than Iran. It is rich in all sorts of energy resources and does not need such a programme. The obvious fear that it is developing weapons-grade uranium is real. The answer, however, is not military intervention but diplomacy through the United Nations and the troika of European nations—Britain, France and Germany.

Mr. Streeter: I certainly agree that constructive engagement with Iran is very important. However, if later this month the International Atomic Energy Agency reports to the Security Council that there is no compliance and that Iran is still enriching uranium, does not the hon. Gentleman agree that it may be unwise for anyone to rule out any particular sanction, especially the sanction that the Iranians most fear?

Mr. Pope: The corollary of what the hon. Gentleman is saying is that we would leave open the option of a military assault on Iran, but I do not believe that threatening Iran is likely to have the desired effect. If the desired effect is that it should not enrich uranium to build a nuclear weapons programme—I am sure we all agree on that—I am not sure that threatening it will be the most productive way to achieve it.

One problem when considering Iran is that it is tempting simply to look at the Iranian Government and see a fairly unpleasant regime. They have a poor human rights record, they oppress their own people and they may be trying to develop weapons of mass destruction. However, they are not simply a monolith. One thing that most encouraged me when I went to Iran was what a vibrant culture it has. It is a young country—more than half Iran's population are under the age of 20, and many of those people are not happy with their Government. The best beacon of hope that they have is that brave woman, Shirin Ebadi, the Iranian Nobel peace prize winner, whom we were privileged to meet. When she flew back to Tehran, thousands of women flocked to Tehran airport flouting the laws on the wearing of the veil. We should look to people like that. I do not think that threatening the Iranians is the most constructive way of achieving our aims.

I also want to focus on the forgotten conflict in Kashmir. For too long, Kashmir has been locked in a kind of nuclear stalemate. There have been two wars between Pakistan and India, countless incursions from one side or the other and countless deaths. I welcome President Musharraf's recent diplomatic initiatives, which at least have the benefits of showing fresh thinking and moving away from the sloganising that has for so long characterised both the Pakistani and Indian positions on Kashmir. It is a little disappointing that those initiatives have not had a warmer response from the Indian Government, and perhaps my hon. Friend the Minister might mention anything that the British Government can do to encourage a warmer response and reciprocation from the Government of India.

I understand that it is difficult for Britain to be an honest broker in the Kashmir conflict. The legacy of empire is probably a burden too great, and we have too many ties with both countries for us to be able to play that role, but we have a duty to try. I gently say to my hon. Friend that the problems of Kashmir arose on partition in 1947 on the watch of a Labour Government. Perhaps it falls to this Labour Government to try to do whatever they can to heal the divisions. We could try to engage the Americans further in the problem. They have played an effective role between India and Pakistan as a firefighter, and when tensions have been great, they have played an effective role in getting people together. However, perhaps they should be more than just a firefighter when times are bad. They should try to resolve the problem when times are better.

We should bear in mind a deeply held view. I represent a large community of Kashmiri origin in my constituency, and whatever the solution is to the problem—I certainly do not know—it will require the agreement of the people of Kashmir themselves. It is not just a matter of international diplomacy that we can decide on their behalf.

I am happy to support the war on terror, and I have been a loyal supporter of the Government in that, including on the war on Iraq. However, we must not allow the war on terror to diminish our respect for human rights. It is impossible to wage war to promote human rights, as arguably we have in Afghanistan and Iraq, while at the same time withholding the human rights of our opponents. In that context, what is happening in Guantanamo Bay undermines the credibility of the United States in particular, and also of the western nations allied to the United States when we acquiesce in that. We should be far more robust in telling the Americans that the human rights situation in Guantanamo Bay is unacceptable.

I fear that several nations are using the war on terror as a cloak to repress their own people. China, for example, is ruthlessly repressing people in various provinces, claiming that it is doing so because they are terrorists. Frankly—I say this as a critical friend—the response of the British Government to China's abuses has been supine. We should reassess our policy towards China and be far more robust.

Uzbekistan has been a steadfast ally in the war on terror. Its bases and airstrips have been incredibly useful, and we are grateful for them, as are the Americans. The country, however, has arguably the worst human rights record in the world. It has been said that it boils its opponents, and we ought to say to countries such as Uzbekistan, "If you want to be an ally of ours, you cannot behave in this fashion. It is completely unacceptable." It might be helpful if our ambassador in Tashkent were able to raise those issues with the Government there, but we do not have an ambassador in Tashkent. That is a matter of great concern to hon. Members on the Committee and across all parties.

It is not enough just to tackle terrorism. We are rightly robust in facing down the terrorist threat worldwide. One of the most encouraging developments recently was Osama bin Laden's attempted intervention in the American elections. If he is reduced to sending messages by video because he cannot carry out the atrocities that he would undoubtedly love to carry out against us, the Americans and other western nations, we are succeeding in the war on terrorism. That is a good thing, but we must also accept that it is not enough just to be tough on terrorism; we must drain the swamp in which terrorism grows and divide the peoples of areas such as the middle east from the terrorists. To corrupt the Prime Minister's phrase, we need to be tough on terrorism and tough on the causes of terrorism.

3.47 pm

Mr. Andrew Tyrie (Chichester) (Con): I follow a couple of outstanding speeches from which I have picked up a lot. I particularly agree with the hon. Member for Hyndburn (Mr. Pope) about Guantanamo Bay, which deeply concerns me and to which I shall return in a moment. I also strongly agree with the lion's share of the extremely thoughtful and well-researched speech of my right hon. Friend the Member for Tonbridge and Malling (Sir John Stanley) and, in particular, with his allusion to the threat from lack of control and potential loss of control over weapons of mass destruction in the former Soviet Union and, specifically, Russia. I gave quite a lot of thought to that issue during the years in which I worked in that part of the world.

Most people agree that things have not gone according to plan in this war. Most would agree that the price of the invasion of Iraq is considerable. It is worth listing what that price is. We have a western alliance that is divided and seen to be divided by those who resent western and American ascendancy. Our moral authority, to which the hon. Member for Hyndburn alluded, has been badly damaged by Guantanamo Bay and Abu Ghraib. Just as importantly, the limits to western power and to the United States' power in particular have been brutally exposed by Iraq; the US is militarily strong, but that does not appear to be the right or best form of strength to deal with this threat. It looks as if Iraq will be the limit to even the most enthusiastic neo-conservatives' ambitions of rolling out the new foreign policy invented by their Washington think-tanks in the 1990s.

Even now, after 18 months, there is serious insurgency in Iraq, and few of us know how it will be brought to an end. We can hope, but that is all we can rely on. A military solution looks extremely difficult to find. The border, particularly with Iran, is poorly policed where it is policed at all, and the scope for further penetration of Iraq and the building up of what were described as al-Qaeda training camps will certainly continue unless there is some radical change of policy.

A middle east settlement is further away than it has been in many years. Far from accelerating the process, the invasion of Iraq has made it much worse. Far from acting as a deterrent against nuclear proliferation, which is probably the biggest threat to our security, the invasion of Iraq seems to be spurring several countries to maintain or enhance their weapons programmes, the most prominent of which are Iran and North Korea.

[Mr. Andrew Tyrie]

Far from winning over moderates in the middle east who yearn for a more western and democratic style of government, the invasion seems to have succeeded only in alienating large sections of the populations there. The effect of the invasion has been to strengthen Islamic fundamentalism, including militant fundamentalism, and weaken a number of secular Islamic states, some of which are now internally under threat from fundamentalism. There also seems to be a dangerous binding together of Arab nationalism and Islamic fundamentalism. That would worry me deeply, and it is reminiscent of what happened after Suez, which enabled Nasser to bind his breed of nationalism with socialism and anti-colonialism, which all but expelled the west from influencing much of the middle east for more than 20 years.

Finally, there is Iraq itself, to which I have hardly referred in my litany of things that seem to have gone wrong. We are told that up to 100,000 Iraqi casualties may have been sustained, although that may be huge exaggeration; I have no way of knowing. I remain extremely concerned that our action has been deeply detrimental to western interests. We have performed a humanitarian act by removing a brutal dictator, but I can think of few other benefits that we have derived from our military action. Indeed, the Prime Minister seems to admit as much from time to time, when he says that he will apologise for the intelligence on the possible threat that led to the war, to which my right hon. Friend the Member for Tonbridge and Malling alluded, but not for removing Saddam Hussein. By implication, that seems to be saying, "Well, I got rid of Saddam Hussein; he was an evil man, and I will not apologise for having done that good for the world."

A number of hon. Members may think that I have overcooked the down side, but even if they do not agree with all my points, most people would agree that we are in a mess. I want to explain why we are in that mess, and in so doing to make some suggestions on how to get out of it. We are not in the mess because we failed to do adequate post-war planning or did not send in enough troops, or because not enough thought was given to policing the Syrian or Iranian borders or the diplomacy before the invasion with a number of key middle east countries was poor, which it certainly was. Neither are we in a mess because we underestimated the Ba'athist capacity to plan for our occupation and make life difficult once we arrived, or because of al-Qaeda, about which the hon. Member for Hyndburn spoke. Those reasons fall into the category of second-order issues.

We are in a mess because the justification for military action given by George Bush and the Prime Minister has had dramatic repercussions in how foreign policy is being conducted in the world. I am referring, of course, to regime change and pre-emption. Regime change and pre-emptive military action can never become the basis for orderly relations between states, and neither can attempts to impose western values at the barrel of a gun. The weak resent such doctrines, which creates the conditions for harbouring terrorists in otherwise moderate Muslim populations. Meanwhile, those strong enough to seek to protect themselves from such policies will do so. It has not been lost on small states that do not share western values that North Korea—a nuclear power and a far more serious rogue state—did not get the same treatment just after it expelled inspectors, while Iraq was invaded just after letting them in.

The plain fact is that the doctrines used to supply the intellectual support for the military action that we have taken are deeply dangerous and destabilising. They further neither America's nor Britain's national interests. They erode the things that keep order in the world, such as the principle of non-interference—"Don't invade my house and I won't invade yours."

I would be less worried if I felt that we could heap all the blame on ideological zealotry in Washington and particularly on a small group of neo-conservatives. Unfortunately, however, I do not take that view, because my Prime Minister is in the vanguard on such issues and my country has been articulating the rhetoric. He has been arguing for several years that we should use military force to overthrow regimes that do not share western interests. What is more, he has been a vigorous advocate of such intervention even where broad-based support for it could not be obtained in the international community. He has made that clear in several important speeches.

If we persist with such a policy, anarchy ultimately beckons. Larger states that know that they are immune from the regime change treatment will use the same justification for their own actions, adopting the language of George Bush and of the Prime Minister to buttress their foreign policy interests. China has recently used the language of regime change in reference to Taiwan. North Korean spokesmen have been saying for two years that they may need to launch a pre-emptive strike on South Korea.

However, this is not just about language; it is about action, too. Putin has used the same logic to justify military action in Georgia. He is doing so not only to suppress terrorism, but to justify what he says is pre-emptive military action to secure his frontiers. The truth is that that is not what he is doing: he has deep interests in the Caucasus, which go way beyond trying to suppress the insurgency in Chechnya and have much more to do with ensuring that Russia maintains a tourniquet on oil supplies out of the Caspian sea. That is his aim, but he has found a new form of justification for it.

I have given only a hint of what lies in the Pandora's box that we have opened with our new policies. What we are dealing with—we must be clear about this, and I am very frustrated that so many people seem not to be—is a revolution in the foreign policy of the world's leading power, which our country is actively supporting. That revolution is deeply inimical to British interests.

I may be extremely and accidentally selective in the people whom I talk to in the foreign policy world—I talk to quite a few in this country and, indeed, in Washington, where I have a number of links—but I have the impression that the majority of people accept much of what I have said. That includes officials on the policy-making side; they might not put it quite the same way, but they basically accept what I have said. In fact, aside from small cliques and a diminishing number of people in think-tanks, it is difficult to find many supporters in London and Washington for these new doctrines and this new approach to foreign policy. Even the neo-conservatives in Washington are now arguing bitterly among themselves about whether they got things right.

I think that George Bush knows—many of his advisers certainly do—that the new US policy is derived from a number of misconceptions that gained ground after the cold war, and I can summarise them in three sentences. The first is the belief that the US preponderance after the cold war could be harnessed to impose a new world order. The second is the belief that the peoples, if not leaderships, of most countries share a deep-down yearning for American values. The third is that we can make the world a more secure, safe and peaceful place by spreading democracy around the world, even if we initially do so by force.

The first of those suppositions is simply wrong. It is not possible for America to impose a new world order, and I have tried to explain why. Indeed, it will create only a new world disorder. The second and third suppositions—that most countries want western values and that a democratic world inevitably means a more peaceful one—both need heavy qualification. On the second supposition, the truth is that, if anything, the world is becoming more heterogeneous and not more homogeneous in its values. That is a paradox of globalisation. The values that lie behind many communities are diverging, and communities are also becoming more local. Politics in all countries, whether democratic or not, is becoming more deeply local, while at the same time economic forces are pushing countries to become much more interdependent and creating a tension. Managing that tension will be a major challenge for policy makers in the 21st century.

As for the third supposition—the idea that if we make the whole world democratic, peace will break out everywhere—a huge amount of ink has been spilt on this subject. I will not try to launch into a lengthy debate; I shall only point out that the first world war was probably the most popular war in history. Asquith was jeered by a jingoistic crowd just outside this Hall, and the experience apparently had a deep influence on him and led him to change his mind about whether to take Britain into the war in 1914. He was sitting on the fence for a long time. If there had been referendums in Europe on whether to go to war in 1914, I am sure that there would have been three-to-one or four-to-one support in all countries. Indeed, a good number of the countries that participated were democracies or quasi-democracies. The mobilisation of jingoistic populism in democracies can be a source of conflict, just as much as a democratic country's wish to remain prosperous and peaceful can be.

Mr. Streeter: My hon. Friend is making a typically thoughtful speech. I certainly agree that trying to export a Westminster or even US-style democracy to all parts of the world is a huge mistake, but does he not think that some basic democratic principles—rule of law, freedom of speech, some kind of representative governance—are important, and that if they were to take hold in other parts of the word by whatever means, the world would be a better place?

Mr. Tyrie: I think that the world would be better, and I want it to go in that direction. When it comes to a clash of fundamental ideologies between dictatorship and democracy, I am not neutral. I have clear and strong views about the direction in which I want to go, but I am cautious about believing that we will necessarily solve all our problems by going down the democratic road.

I am clear that, in trying to win more of the world round to our values, military coercion is likely to have the opposite effect to the one intended. We won the cold war largely by arguing our case without recourse to military means. It is true that the Afghan war was a proxy war, some of which we are now paying for. Some say that, to some degree, that is where al-Qaeda and certainly the Taliban got going. However, the key ingredients that led to collapse of the former Soviet Union, which was an evil empire, lay in the increasing exposure of the satellite countries of eastern Europe to western values, which finally meant that they were prepared to take a risk and rebel. The velvet revolution, the bringing down of the Berlin wall and the vast migration out of East Germany through Hungary and Czechoslovakia were triggered after a debate—in a sense, it was a vigorous ideological struggle—between east and west that took place over 40 years.

I have taken a moment or two to respond to the intervention of my hon. Friend the Member for South-West Devon (Mr. Streeter), but perhaps I can return to the subject under discussion. I should not have raised the issue of democracy, because it is such a difficult and sensitive subject, but it is important not to have simplistic notions in one's mind or to think that going down one particular route will solve all our problems. It will not.

I said that I would also talk a little about what we should do, bearing in mind the seriousness of the situation. I have half a dozen or so suggestions to make. First, I wish the Government to acknowledge that the muscular nation-building strategy that the Prime Minister articulated in his party conference speech in Brighton and which he also developed in a speech in Chicago in 1999 is a little more difficult than he supposes. That would at least help to change the mood.

Secondly, I hope that the Prime Minister will be more robust during the second presidential term than he was during the first in challenging George Bush's unilateralism. If necessary, he may have to do that publicly. We should have known what was coming. After all, in 2000 Condoleezza Rice wrote in *Foreign Affairs* that

> "a Republican administration will . . . proceed from the firm ground of the national interest, not from the interests of an illusory international community."

Donald Rumsfeld called for a coalition of the willing, the clearest possible statement of unilateralism. We should have been left in no doubt about the limits of British influence in backing the President publicly and hoping at the same time to bend his ear in private.

More than one person in a position to know has given me a vivid description of briefings of the Prime Minister before his meetings with the President at Camp David. I was told that beforehand the Prime Minister would be given a thorough and detailed briefing on each area in which our policy differed from American policy and told how important it was that we got our points across. Apparently, at the subsequent meetings—two were described to me, one of them in starker terms than I shall give now—after the Prime Minister had been wound up

[Mr. Tyrie]

to make certain points, George Bush made suggestions of his own to which the Prime Minister replied, "Yes, yes, yes."

I am not at all convinced that the Prime Minister is using our alleged influence even to bend George Bush's ear in private, and I am not even sure that the Americans, now that they feel that they have done their bit for us by pushing unsuccessfully for a second UN resolution, are listening to us any more than to other countries. That worries me deeply.

Of course, it has been said that we should keep trying none the less and that we should not speak up in public, but keep our differences private, because we will at least have a seat at the table or influence equivalent to that of Colin Powell. When I put that thought—it is not great, but it is something—last year to a pro-British American acquaintance of mine who works in the Pentagon, he laughed and said that we were getting about as much influence as Colin Powell's secretary. We must bear in mind that reality when we talk about how much we gain by keeping completely mum and not allowing a cigarette paper to get between our view of the direction of western foreign policy and the American view. I said that I would make half a dozen suggestions, but I am thinking of more as I go along. I promise not to make this speech too long.

Thirdly, we must be much clearer than we have been so far about the threats to stability and the means of making the world more orderly. On the threat, in what is perhaps a vain effort to justify the invasion of Iraq, the Prime Minister and George Bush have sought to bind together nuclear weapons and chemical and biological weapons in the omnibus phrase, "weapons of mass destruction". The truth is that the threat from nuclear weapons is of a completely different order from that of chemical and biological weapons. It was and continues to be a mistake to give the wider public the impression that they basically represent the same level of threat.

As my right hon. Friend the Member for Tonbridge and Malling said, the twin challenges that we face are terrorism and nuclear proliferation. A policy based on the primacy of nation states is the best security against both. There is such a thing as international society, and America and Britain both have a huge interest in fostering it and in rendering it less anarchic. What we desperately need is the broadest possible coalition of states against terrorists, even if some do not share our values. Such a coalition may include states in the former Soviet Union, whose values we certainly do not share. Shouting at states that may not be going in the direction that we want them to take will certainly not help. Many states will be ready allies even if they do not share our values, for it will not be lost on them that terrorism in one form or another could also be a threat to their regimes. Several middle eastern states and several in former Soviet Asia come to mind.

Fourthly, we need to remind America—I think we should do so publicly—that terrorists thrive on overreaction, which is exactly what we got from the United States after 11 September. Inadvertently, it became a recruiting sergeant for bin Laden. The key to the suppression of most Islamic terrorism lies in winning over the hearts and minds of moderate Muslim opinion at home and abroad. The Government need to stress that view time and time again and to act on it.

Fifthly, it is unlikely that we will be able to prevent nuclear proliferation by coercion, and certainly not the coercion implied by regime change and pre-emption. On the contrary, coercion is likely to lead countries to redouble their efforts to obtain weapons as a protection against it. To discourage proliferation, we need to make countries that might seek nuclear weapons feel more secure, not less so. We need to create by treaty or negotiation conditions in which they do not need those weapons. I am not suggesting that that is an easy or certain route, but I believe it to be, on the whole, a better route than coercion.

Sixthly, I return to moral authority. We need to rebuild the west's moral authority, which has been extremely badly damaged by the events of the past two years. The abuses of human rights in Abu Ghraib and Guantanamo Bay have a lasting resonance in the middle east that we should not underestimate. To a large degree, that problem is created by the Americans, but it is also our problem, because, among other reasons, we handed more than 300 prisoners of war to the Americans. We have an enduring legal and moral responsibility to take care of those people's welfare even after we have handed them over.

It took me a long time to find out what happened to those people. Even now I have been unable to obtain a good deal of the information that I have been seeking. The Government have sought to avoid my parliamentary questions on the issue for months, and I wrote a letter to the Foreign Secretary that has not been answered. I will have another go on a couple of questions now. Will the Minister, now or later, tell me whether any of those 341 prisoners of war were held in Abu Ghraib? Will he tell me whether we have inquired subsequently about whether any of them were mistreated in Abu Ghraib? Will he tell me whether we made any inquiry about the welfare of the POWs while they were held, as was required, agreed and accepted in a protocol that we signed with the United States about the handling of POWs? Did we use the terms of the protocol to visit them, as we had a right to do, to see whether their welfare had been harmed? I raise these points partly as an illustration of the extent to which we have tacitly found ourselves to be participants. To that extent, what went on in Abu Ghraib and what is still going on in Guantanamo Bay is diminishing all of us.

Perhaps most controversially, I want to discuss the handling of policy in Iraq itself. We need to be clear about our motives and to deal with the deep mistrust that now exists in the middle east about western motives. We need to reassure western Muslim opinion about what we are trying to do and to make it clear that we are not bent on suzerainty in the area, and still less on occupation. Perhaps we are moving to the point at which we may gain more by setting a date for the withdrawal of troops from Iraq and trying to persuade the Americans to do the same than by staying there.

That judgment is not easy. We badly need legitimacy to flow from the elections; there is no legitimacy for the current regime. If we were to say that, after a certain period and given certain conditions, we would withdraw our troops after the elections, would those elections be able to confer greater legitimacy on the regime in Baghdad? I cannot say, but the time has come to consider that question.

I realise that, as well as being very long, my speech has been quite pessimistic. I have argued that the world is a less safe and more disorderly place than it was before the Iraq invasion. The war was not only morally wrong, but not in our national interest. However, I want to end on a more positive note. The threats that the world faces are far less than those that we faced at times during the cold war, when miscalculation, accident or malign leadership in the Soviet Union could have resulted in a nuclear exchange and obliteration and when the superpowers were fighting proxy wars around the world much of the time. The challenges that we now face are far more manageable. If the US provides the leadership, they can and will be tackled, just as they were after the second world war, when for half a century America worked as part of the international community and helped to build it.

Unfortunately, we are not being given such leadership by the current American Administration, but as a fervent Atlanticist I am optimistic. Most of Washington opinion knows that much of what I have said today contains at least a grain of truth and that it is not possible to form by command a new international society in America's image. Most of Washington opinion knows that we are all much stronger in alliance than we are working separately. We must work with the Administration, but we must do so with much greater frankness than we have so far shown about what mistakes we think they are making.

4.18 pm

Mr. John Maples (Stratford-on-Avon) (Con): My hon. Friend the Member for Chichester (Mr. Tyrie) has made a typically thoughtful and all-encompassing speech about aspects of foreign affairs. I agree with much of what he said, and what he said about Iraq is almost entirely true. I have a long and substantial speech of my own brewing about Iraq; hon. Members will he happy that I am not going to make it today, but it is coming along.

I do not want to follow my hon. Friend down this route, but I must pick him up on a couple of points. First, force—and certainly the threat of force—has a part to play in international affairs. It cannot always be ruled out. The terrorist attacks were brought to the United States, and an Administration who, at the time, were heavily criticised by many people in Europe for not being interested in international affairs were forced to become interested in them. Although I think that the invasion of Iraq may turn out to have been a terrible mistake, the invasion of Afghanistan was entirely justified. If failed states and rogue states allow international terrorism to brew within their borders and exert its malign effects outside them, we are entitled to interfere in those states by force if necessary. My second criticism is that, although in the end, we won the battle of ideas across the iron curtain, I am not sure that we would have had the necessary 45 years in which to achieve that effect without being prepared to make a substantial military commitment to the defence of western Europe in that time.

I shall touch on a couple of minor themes in the report. One is political reform in the middle east, which covers some points made by my hon. Friend, and the other is the Arab-Israel dispute. We consistently say in the report that we think that political reform in middle-eastern countries is highly desirable. Why, when we see democracy breaking out in Latin America and, to some extent, in the former Soviet Union, does the Arab world seem, almost uniquely, to be immune to it?

I know that people will say that there is a bit of progress in Oman and Yemen. However, the main Arab countries in which reform is needed are Saudi Arabia and Egypt—one has the money and the other has the intellectual clout in the Arab world—but we have not seen much reform in either and both are feeding grounds for terrorism. Although I agree with those, including my hon. Friend the Member for Chichester, who say that we cannot impose our version of democracy by force, we need to encourage something to take root in such places—perhaps the rule of law, a little more openness, a little more distinction between ruling families and the state, or local elections. I do not suggest that those countries move straight to full-blown western-European-style democracy overnight. However, more progress is needed.

In fact, 15 or 16 of the 19 terrorists came from Saudi Arabia—its money is financing the madrassahs, not only at home but in Pakistan. It is not encouraging malign influences, but it is allowing them to have an effect around the world. So far as I can see, Egypt survives entirely on United States aid, without which its economy would collapse, but it publishes the most appalling libels in its newspapers. I would have thought that one of the advantages of running a dictatorship was that one could stop people doing things like that. If it were a democracy, presumably there would be a plurality of opinions of which those would be some.

Reform is needed. I was disappointed in the Government's response to our report, bearing it in mind that it is three years since 11 September 2001. They say:

> "At the June 2004 G8 Sea Island Summit, the G8 adopted a Plan of Support for Reform in the Broader Middle East—"

and that the UK's G8 presidency in the second half of next year would be a very good opportunity to ensure that there was some progress. We need to do things a lot faster and more purposefully than that. We have programmes for promoting greater openness, democracy and the rule of law in the middle east, particularly in those two countries, as do the United States and the European Union. I do not know why the Government do not mention them. I should like the Minister to tell us what the Government feel that they have achieved in that respect, and what we in the west have achieved collectively.

It is not just in our interests to see reform—and, perhaps, circumstances in which terrorism is less likely to be bred or to take root—in those countries; it is in their interests. Saudi Arabia's GDP per head has halved in the past 20 years. Egypt's has not halved, but it was nowhere to start with. Most of the countries in that area are disastrous for their own populations; any prosperity that they enjoy is a result of oil revenues. That is a bit like a child living off a trust fund; it is not very good for building an economy. Unless they have better and less corrupt government, the rule of law and more openness, those countries will not benefit from investment or the

[Mr. John Maples]

establishment of the liberal economic forces that lead to the rising standards of living that can be seen in many other parts of the world, including some countries of eastern Europe. Reform is in their interests and ours.

I take slight issue with my hon. Friend the Member for Chichester in that if such foundations are laid in many Arab countries and their economies start to grow, people will find that they are usefully occupied in running their own businesses or making a living for their families. They will not have time to go to radical clerics and become stirred up into becoming suicide bombers. There is a long way between there and here, but we need to take definite steps in that direction. I would be interested to hear from the Minister what the Government think that they are doing, and what they have achieved. I am not really interested in the second half of our G8 presidency; I should like to know what we have achieved in the past three years.

On the Arab-Israeli conflict, nobody could have tried harder than President Clinton to broker a solution to the problem at Camp David and subsequently at Taba. A deal was very nearly reached. In fact, one Palestinian negotiator said:

> "We were offered 98 per cent. of what we wanted."

I do not think that anybody can blame President Bush for not doing more—certainly in the first part of his presidency before 11 September. He saw what had happened to President Clinton. Arafat was not a partner for peace; he was never prepared to say yes, or to take yes for an answer. There are understandable reasons for that. He has waved the banner for Palestinian nationalism and a Palestinian state for nearly 50 years and perhaps he does not want to be the person who agrees to make a deal that gives up the Palestinian claim to all Palestine and settles for half of it. In that case, we need to wait until we have moved into a post-Arafat era. We have moved halfway into that era with the appointment of various Prime Ministers, but he will never really give them the authority that they need to negotiate a deal.

It remains to be seen during the coming days whether we are likely to move into a post-Arafat era. I cannot help feeling that if we are—whatever one's feelings about Mr. Arafat—the prospects would be better than during the past few years. An example of how disastrous his leadership has been for the Palestinians is that after Taba, where he effectively succeeded in delivering the Israeli electorate to Sharon rather than aiding the re-election of Barak, he completely misguidedly and self-destructively launched the second round of the intifada. Unlike the first intifada, it involved not chucking rocks at Israeli tanks, but letting off suicide bombs in Tel Aviv cafes and Jerusalem pizza parlours.

That has provoked what one could argue is a complete overreaction from the Israelis—it has certainly been a brutal reaction—but if there were no suicide bombers, there would be no fence and no Israeli tanks in Gaza or west bank settlements. Arafat has led them into that; it is an absolute disaster for the Palestinians. There are many questions that the Israelis have to answer about how they have reacted, but there is no question in my mind as to what started the latest round of violence.

To end on a positive note, I would like to suggest a positive way out. We all know what the settlement will be, if it is ever reached. It was very nearly done at Camp David and Taba. It will involve a roughly Palestinian state with its boundaries along the green line as they were set by the UN resolutions in 1948, with its capital in Jerusalem, almost all the Israeli settlements removed from the west bank and a limited right of return for Palestinian refugees to Israel. There will probably need to be a few territorial adjustments. Where there are Israeli settlements right on the border that can be compensated for in some other way, those adjustments should probably take place. A great many of those details were negotiated and discussed at Camp David and Taba.

A formula over the return of refugees was effectively agreed at Taba, where the principle was conceded that the numbers who returned should be controlled by Israel and would be extremely limited. Those who did not come back would be offered alternatives including significant financial compensation. Taba would have allowed the Palestinians to situate the capital of the state of Palestine in Jerusalem.

The parties were very close to a settlement and one cannot help feeling that if Abu Mazen or Abu Ala had been the head of the Palestinian state at Camp David or Taba, a deal would have been reached. I very much doubt whether Sharon and Arafat can ever reach a deal, but Barak and a more moderate Palestinian leader could have done. My point is that we know what the settlement will be. The problem is not identifying the deal, but getting both sides to accept it. Whenever one side is ready to accept it, the other has the kind of Government who are not ready to do so. We are now in a situation in which neither side is ready, but the Palestinians sound keener on a deal than the Israelis.

The road map is completely dead. Any idea that withdrawing from Gaza or that my suggestions could be a way of restarting the road map is whistling in the wind. It was dead from day one. There were two primary things that the opposing sides had to do: the Israelis had to stop building new settlements or expanding old ones, and the Palestinians had to stop the terrorist bombings. As far as I can see, neither side has taken any steps to make even the first move in those directions.

We need to start from a different point of view. The dispute causes externalities—to use an economist's phrase—out of all proportion to the intrinsic problems that it represents. There are other disputes, such as Cyprus. It is self-contained dispute that is similar, but much less violent, and it does not really affect many people outside Cyprus. However, the dispute in the middle east poisons our relations with the Arab world and is one of the causes that bin Laden goes on about—although it was not one of the original causes underlying al-Qaeda's existence and activities. It is desperately in our interests to solve it because it would remove one of the main avowed causes of hatred of the west and of fundamental Islamic terrorism. There is a huge incentive for us to solve it, not just because of the violence that is happening to both sides and the awful lives people have to live, but because of the weight that it would take off our shoulders in dealing with the Arab world.

Because the stakes are so high, it is time to say, "This is the deal," and we should seek to impose it. We could talk to both sides and try to adjust the proposals to take account of any lingering doubts and little problems, but I believe that we and the United States should take the proposed solution to the United Nations Security Council and seek to have it implemented. As a mandatory resolution, it would become international law.

We should tell Mr. Sharon and Mr. Arafat or their successors that that is the deal and that, if they so wished, we would help them to implement it. However, we should make it plain that issues such as the position of the border or whether refugees can return are no longer up for discussion. When both sides do not want to make progress, they always use such matters to trip up the talks; they say that they cannot accept little details here and there. We know what the deal is going to be. In the interests of the international community as well as those of the Palestinians and the Israelis, we should seek to impose it. I see no other way forward.

4.31 pm

Mr. Michael Moore (Tweeddale, Ettrick and Lauderdale) (LD): It is a privilege to participate in the debate.

The right hon. Member for Swansea, East (Donald Anderson) invited me to echo the comments of Baroness Williams, who described the report as brilliant. I am happy to do so. It clearly makes a substantial contribution. As the right hon. Gentleman pointed out, it is the fifth report in the series on the foreign policy aspects of the war on terrorism.

Once again, the Committee has served the House extremely well. The report should be read by all who have an interest in international affairs. As ever, the breadth of the Committee's work is impressive. The hon. Member for Hyndburn (Mr. Pope) should not worry about a charge of political tourism being levelled at the Committee; the return achieved through the visits and the resulting report more than justifies the effort.

We are at an extremely important juncture in connection with the war on terrorism, with the re-election of President Bush helping to define the context in which international problems will now be tackled. It is not new for the Liberal Democrats to highlight differences with the US Administration's policies. Indeed, yesterday in this Chamber, we had the opportunity to debate that very subject. I repeat today that our principal hope is, as the hon. Member for Hyndburn suggested, that the President will take the opportunity in his second term to broaden his international focus and to widen the coalition of interests that seek to combat the threat of international terrorism.

As many right hon. and hon. Members have said, this is a key moment also for the Government. If ever there was a time to exert the influence that we have gained through our unique and strong relationship with the United States, it is now. With the imminent presidency of the G8, and in 2005 of the European Union, the Government have the opportunity to stamp their mark on all those pressing international issues.

The Committee's report highlights the scale of the challenges and the range of issues that fall under the foreign policy agenda in the war on terrorism. That conflict clearly has a military aspect, but it is far too simplistic to paint the picture of what needs to be done in khaki only. The series of reports of which this is the latest lays that fact bare. It goes without saying that we need to defend ourselves: we need to tackle those who, explicitly or by default, would give aid to international terrorists. However, we need also to tackle the underlying conditions that fuel the terrorists' many and complex causes. We must not lose sight of the need to tackle those causes—the poverty that leads to conflict, which breeds further conflict, which lays the grounds for the growth of terrorism. The Committee has been right in interpreting its remit to look at a broad range of countries across the world, including Iraq, Afghanistan, Pakistan, the middle east generally and the Russian Federation, while also re-examining the suitability of our international laws and organisations to address those matters. It is good that some of today's contributions have highlighted the particular importance of human rights in this policy area.

It is hard to do justice to the Committee's brief in the time available. Given our other recent opportunities to debate issues in the report, I shall focus my remarks on just a few key matters.

I draw attention to Russia, which has featured in the debate already. The Committee's focus on Russia has been absolutely right and it paints an alarming picture. It shows in more than one way the importance of Russia to the whole war on terror. Parts of the report, and the evidence supplied in the compilation of it, show that there are many in Russia who are suspicious of the west's terminology and think that the war on terror is simply a cover for spreading western influence through the regions of the world where it is not seen to be strong enough. Others have pointed out that it is a handy cover for some activities into which Russia itself wishes to extend its influence. Certainly, the conflict in Chechnya, in terms of how Russia has pursued and justified it, echoes many of the debates that we have in the west. Since the Committee's report was compiled, we have had the horrors in Beslan—unimaginable, terrible events. Sadly, the response to that from the Russian authorities has been almost exclusively in terms of that event's being part of international terrorism and the need to respond to it robustly. That is a mistaken analysis, and we must do everything to persuade the Russians to resist it.

The Committee has drawn particular attention to the existence of nuclear weapons, nuclear materials and other weapons of mass destruction, such as chemical and biological weapons. The situation in Russia is fundamentally alarming. The scale of the problems that remain since the end of the Soviet Union is beyond belief. Some good practical steps have been taken, which I do not want to decry. In particular, the Committee draws attention to the American initiative—the co-operative threat reduction programme—and Senator Lugar and others are prayed in aid. Their expertise has undoubtedly been useful in focusing attention on that matter.

The report is critical of the European Union and its contribution. I hope that the Minister can clarify the position. It is important, as the report highlights, that we make a contribution to ending the nuclear threat from old weapons, missile material and nuclear material at a level commensurate with our economic size in the world.

[Mr. Michael Moore]

There is a danger in how Russia has been assisting Iran. I appreciate that both sides would maintain that that is an entirely civil programme, and we debated that specific issue here in Westminster Hall recently. However, it is important, as we reach the denouement of the situation in Iran at the International Atomic Energy Agency in the coming weeks, that we can persuade Russia of the importance and dangers of the programme and persuade Iran that it is folly to pursue that path.

Another area where Russia plays an important role is Ukraine. Because of the inconclusive results of the presidential election at the weekend—again, that is something to have arisen since the Committee's report—the process will run to a second round. On that issue we see an overlap between the war on terrorism, and old-fashioned political land grab and the desire of the respective blocs, such as Russia, and the United States and the west, to gain as much influence as possible. We shall have to watch the process with great care, because for all our preoccupation, rightly, with the war on terror, we must not lose sight of other geopolitical concerns.

A common thread of today's contributions and a serious thrust of the report is concern about nuclear proliferation. The case study of Pakistan is one that should alarm us all. The report colourfully depicts the A. Q. Khan network as offering almost tailored packages of nuclear expertise to anybody able to provide the funds to buy them. Indeed, the report quotes someone talking about a "nuclear Wal-Mart" having existed in Pakistan.

I appreciate the sensitivity of our dealings with Pakistan, not least because it has been an important ally in the military battles that we have been fighting in Afghanistan and elsewhere. Equally, Pakistan is not a member of the nuclear non-proliferation treaty and for that reason some regular sanctions that we might hope to use through the IAEA do not exist. In dealing with President Musharraf and his allies in the regime, however, we must be clear that we cannot accept the way in which they have behaved in recent years, whether in the nuclear field or, as has been mentioned, on human rights.

Probably our most important debate in the House and elsewhere in the last couple of years has been about international law. The report makes a major contribution to that debate. We live in a changed world. Do we therefore need changed responses? I will not enter into the debate that the hon. Members for Stratford-on-Avon (Mr. Maples) and for Chichester (Mr. Tyrie) began. They set out cogent arguments that illustrate the complexities of the issue. However, there is no doubt that there is more dispute about how we legitimise interventions and maintain peace and security in the world than there has been for a generation or more.

There are serious international initiatives seeking to tackle the issue, the most important of which is perhaps the high-level panel that the Secretary-General of the United Nations set up. That panel is due to report soon. As I have mentioned in recent debates, I hope that we will have an opportunity to debate its conclusions in the House and come to our own views on the way forward for the international community.

As the report sets out, whether we are talking about self-defence, anticipatory self-defence and how that interleaves with the US pre-emption doctrine, or the grey area of humanitarian intervention, we must be careful in altering our ideas to reflect a changed world situation not to provide arguments that will justify a Chinese intervention in Taiwan or a North Korean strike against South Korea or some other part of the world. That will be a finely balanced set of arguments, and we in this country must be alive to it.

We debated the reform of the United Nations this time last week in the Chamber. I hope that in responding to the Committee's work the Minister might say something about the United Nations counter-terrorism committee. In our Committee's previous reports, the UN committee, originally chaired by Sir Jeremy Greenstock, has been highlighted as a significant development. I support the initiative, which is a very important part of the UN machinery. However, the report expresses real concerns that it has lost its way, although I accept that there have been attempts to update it and to provide it with proper support and political clout in recent months. Will the Minister give us his perspective on that? That is an example of a broader issue: we must collectively modernise the legal and institutional frameworks for our interventions and maintenance of peace in the world. We must not lose sight of that.

I shall comment briefly on situation in the middle east. I echo the comments made by hon. and right hon. Members about the depressing spectacle that it makes. Our pessimism is made more acute by the political weakness of Ariel Sharon and the political and sad physical frailty of President Arafat. Like the hon. Member for Stratford-on-Avon, I worry that the road map is dead and that we have been going through the motions for too long. Now is the time for the Quartet to have its bluff called. We will have to find a new solution if the new term for President Bush means that we cannot make progress. As I said, I am not entirely convinced that the policy proposed by the hon. Member for Stratford-on-Avon would be effective, but it is an alternative view, and to make progress we certainly need something dramatic.

It is always instructive and a pleasure to participate in debates instigated by the Foreign Affairs Committee. Once again, its members have brought a sharp focus to bear on the most pressing of international issues, and its work on this debate shows us that the war against terrorism, however defined, is not simply a military matter. I join others in commending this fine report and in encouraging the Committee to continue its excellent work.

4.47 pm

Mr. Gary Streeter (South-West Devon) (Con): I concur with the hon. Member for Tweeddale, Ettrick and Lauderdale (Mr. Moore) that this has been a debate of the highest quality. It has been a pleasure to listen to robust and thoughtful contributions from both sides of the Chamber. Many questions have been asked and many suggestions made, and it has been a privilege to take part.

I pay tribute to the right hon. Member for Swansea, East (Donald Anderson) and his Committee for a very impressive report that is weighty both in kilograms and in substance. It is a very fine tribute to the hard work done by the right hon. Gentleman, his Committee and the team that supports and advises them.

I also state firmly for the record—I did so slightly yesterday morning, although we were not then entirely sure during our fine debate on US-UK relations of the precise outcome of the presidential election—that I strongly support the re-election of President George Bush, which gives us new opportunities in international affairs. It is obviously thrilling for us to see our sister party do so well in both Houses in the US, and to see a man with such personal convictions succeed. I am all for the result, which is thoroughly commendable. *[Interruption.]* I know that the Minister will reciprocate with equally sincere warm personal wishes and a warm welcome, as, I am sure, will his colleagues.

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs (Mr. Chris Mullin): It was some of the hon. Gentleman's colleagues I was wondering about.

Mr. Streeter: The Minister can wonder about his own colleagues and leave us to wonder about ours.

Mr. Maples: The Minister may not have been entirely clear whether my hon. Friend was speaking for the full Conservative party or for his colleagues when he endorsed President Bush's victory. That was all.

Mr. Streeter: It is very rare indeed for me to speak for the whole Conservative party.

The opportunities are first to see through the job that has been started in Afghanistan and Iraq. We must get those interventions right before anyone starts to think about any more interventions around the globe. I shall say a little more about that in a moment.

Secondly, it is crucial that the US re-engage with the United Nations. The hon. Member for Tweeddale, Ettrick and Lauderdale talked about the United Nations reform proposals, which return to us shortly, and I hope that we can debate them. [illegible] that the US engage fully in those propo[illegible] at future interventions are multilateral and [illegible]ported by the Security Council with formal resolutions.

Thirdly, as President Bush enters his second term and with all that he has learned in the past four years, he has the opportunity to exercise more soft power rather than hard military power in various parts of the world. I hope that the Minister will agree and confirm in his winding-up speech—he will have almost half an hour, so he will have the opportunity to answer fully the many questions that have been asked today—that the United Kingdom has the opportunity to become more assertive in our relationship with the US. Perhaps in some quarters there will be a new enthusiasm for all kinds of activity, so we must ensure it is tempered by good old-fashioned British common sense and responsibility. The Prime Minister is well placed to become more assertive.

I will mention the main focus of the report, and start as others have done on the war against terror being fought in Iraq. We have seen many external insurgents, such as al-Zarqawi, pouring into Iraq, and my right hon. Friend the Member for Tonbridge and Malling (Sir John Stanley) made a powerful and chilling speech about the possibility of Iraq becoming a training ground for al-Qaeda. That is of immense concern and even more reason why we must see the work through and succeed. I do not think that my right hon. Friend or I would have necessarily started from where we are today, but we must see it through.

We have seen distressing acts of savagery—kidnapping and beheading. We think very much still of the family of Kenneth Bigley, and of Margaret Hassan, who is still captive and in our thoughts and prayers. The Minister needs to know that we will stand firmly with him to see the work through and the January elections take place. I have not heard much about engaging the United Nations in that process. The Minister was asked about security for United Nations officials, but what about monitors and support for those vital elections? Will he say more about that? We must also see reconstruction moving on apace, more jobs created for Iraqis and services re-established.

As is well known, we supported the recent deployment of the Black Watch in Iraq because Major-General Rollo confirmed that it was for operational purposes. Will the Minister say any more—we will understand if he cannot—about the proposed action on Falluja? I am concerned about whether we have done everything to reach a peaceful outcome—not with the external insurgents, as that is probably unrealistic, but with the various Iraqi factions. I am concerned also about the 50,000 or so civilians who remain in Falluja. I have no idea what military action is contemplated if any, but what about them? What opportunity is being given to them? Are we really going that extra mile to ensure that collateral damage, or the killing of innocent people, is not part of the story over the next few weeks?

Who will replace the Black Watch, given the firm commitment that it will be involved only for 30 days? Will it be the Scots Guards, as has been mentioned? My daughter has married into the military, and I have recently realised that maximum clarity about what is required of all our armed forces is a very good thing. It was the uncertainty that beset the Black Watch that caused so much distress; once it got its marching orders, things were fine. If the Minister can say any more about what will happen next, it will be most welcome.

On Afghanistan, we must, again, see the situation all the way through. There are some causes for hope, such as the election result. President Karzai is very impressive, but, as has been said by others, his writ runs only in and around Kabul, and that situation must be improved. Will the Minister confirm that President Karzai will be provided with adequate resources to clamp down on the warlords and on terrorist groups, which are raising their ugly heads again?

We are concerned about opium production; we have taken responsibility to deal with it. When the Taliban were in control, opium yield slumped almost to nothing: 185 metric tonnes were produced in 2001, zooming to 3,400 in 2002 and 3,600 in 2003. We expect the figure to be even higher in 2004.

Mr. Mullin: The hon. Gentleman said that the Black Watch was going to be deployed for only 30 days. My understanding is that the only commitment given is that it will be for a limited period, lasting weeks rather than months.

Mr. Streeter: I thought I heard a senior Army officer in Iraq say that it was a 30-day deployment. However, I agree that the Prime Minister made the commitment that the Black Watch would be home by Christmas. I do not seek to challenge that; the Minister has given the answer that he has, and I am sure that is fine.

To return to opium production, it is likely that this year's yield will be even higher than last year's when the next United Nations report comes out. The Government are committed to spend £70 million on the issue over three years. Given the scale of the impact of the yield on the United Kingdom, is that really sufficient spend to try to stamp out that vile trade?

I understand that the Americans put forward a proposal that the poppy fields should be destroyed using strimmers—they call them weed whackers, in their quaint American way—but that we said that that was not the right way forward. Why did we do that and what other ideas do we have to try to destroy those crops?

I want to make a couple of comments and ask a couple of questions about Iran. We certainly agree with and support the Government in their constructive engagement. We want to see the issue of uranium enrichment brought to a successful and harmonious conclusion. How do our Government intend to bridge the gap between the approach taken by the EU, particularly France, Germany and the United Kingdom, and the rather hard-line approach taken by the United States of America? What proposals are there to try to bridge that gap?

What will the United Kingdom say and do if the IAEA reports on 24 November that Iran is still intent on producing enriched uranium? After all, on Sunday the Iranian Parliament passed a law allowing them to continue to do that. Where are we going on that issue? When will we get the military equipment back that the Iranians stole from us when they wrongly captured some of our troops a few weeks ago? They are still holding British military equipment.

I want to touch briefly on the Russian Federation, because some important points have been made. Since the report was produced, we have had the sickening scenes from the Beslan siege, which was an awful outrage. What do the Government make of regular Human Rights Watch reports of Russian heavy-handedness and of the involvement of senior Russian parliamentarians and Government officials in the oil for food scandal? Does the Minister think that that impacted on how they responded to the crucial UN security resolution that they would not support?

My right hon. Friend the Member for Tonbridge and Malling asked some important questions about weapons of mass destruction stockpiled throughout the former Soviet Union. What is our policy to try to do all we can to see that those stockpiles are removed?

I also want to focus briefly on the middle east peace process. President Bush's re-election, as others have said, gives a fresh opportunity. He can be more relaxed about the Jewish lobby and the strong Christian evangelical lobby in the USA, which has a very zealous view of the state of Israel. We welcomed the Prime Minister's commitment at the Labour party conference to re-engage vigorously in the proposal. Can the Minister confirm that he meant it and that he will take that forward over the next few days and weeks?

I have some sympathy with my hon. Friend the Member for Stratford-on-Avon (Mr. Maples), who asked whether the road map exists any longer or whether it has been blown to pieces. What is the strategy either to get the road map back on track or to introduce a new way to bring both sides together? I want the Minister to know that any action that the Government take to bring the Palestinians and Israelis back to the table so that they can negotiate and finally settle the outstanding issues between them will have our full support.

What role is the Government playing as regards security operations to help the Palestinians in Gaza enjoy security during the withdrawal? What is the status of the current Quartet engagement with the road map? Finally, what is the United Kingdom's strategy for taking the matter forward?

Other issues were mentioned. During his sparkling, thoughtful and insightful speech, my hon. Friend the Member for Chichester (Mr. Tyrie) spoke about exporting democracy, and I absolutely agreed with him in my equally sparkling intervention. No one plans to export our style of democracy anywhere—certainly not with hob-nailed boots on—but it is important to underpin and encourage a local expression of democracy in the right way. We should encourage the rule of law, freedom of speech and some kind of representative governance in every country we can, because that is the framework in which people can enjoy freedom.

I agree with my hon. Friend the Member for Stratford-on-Avon that the Government's response to one paragraph in the report was over modest. I have been involved in some work being done by the global opportunities fund in Bahrain. There has been a new Parliament for the past two years, and I hope to return there in a couple of weeks to help parliamentarians learn more about holding a Government to account—something that we do excellently in this country, of course. The Foreign Office is doing some very good work on such issues, and it is important that we know about it and spread it to other countries. It is long-term, often invisible work, but it is important and I strongly support it.

I was recently in Saudi Arabia, where people are holding municipal elections at the end of this year and the beginning of next. While I was there, a raging debate was under way about whether women should be given the right to stand for election and to vote. I did not know whether to be depressed or jubilant about the fact that they were having that debate. None the less, something is moving there.

In a very enjoyable speech, the hon. Member for Hyndburn (Mr. Pope) spoke of not allowing countries to use the war against terror as an excuse for human rights abuses, and I think, in particular, of Uzbekistan. Will the Minister confirm that our man in Tashkent was not recalled simply because he was robust on the issue of human rights and expressed his strong view to the Foreign Office that we should not extract evidence under torture?

Mr. Mullin: Yes, I can confirm that.

Mr. Streeter: I had not finished the questions yet, but that is very welcome. Who took the decision to recall him? Hon. Members have tabled questions about the issue, but we have not really had full replies. Why did the case arise? Why were so many charges of misconduct levied last year but then mysteriously withdrawn? I do not want to be overly accusatory or to overcook this, but there is just a faint whiff of something being not quite right. I hope that the Minister, in his winding-up speech, rather than in an intervention now—

Mr. Mullin *rose—*

Mr. Streeter: Oh, go on then.

Mr. Mullin: If the hon. Gentleman will forgive me, I cannot go into details about the case, because it is liable to be the subject of employment or legal proceedings, and we must obviously await their outcome.

Mr. Streeter: I would like to finish where I started by thanking the Foreign Affairs Committee for its excellent work. The United Kingdom has a significant role to play in international affairs and the war against terror, and the Committee's excellent work is very much part and parcel of that.

5.4 pm

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs (Mr. Chris Mullin): Hon. Members will be grateful to the Committee for its comprehensive and thoughtful report. They will have seen the Government's detailed response, which was published in September. It addresses some questions that I have been asked, and I commend it to hon. Members. We have heard some wide-ranging and impressive speeches, and I shall do my best to address all the points that have been raised. If I cannot respond to some of them, or do not get round to doing so, I shall write to hon. Members.

The report underlines not only the enormous challenges facing the international community but the extent of the international effort to deal with the terrorist threat and its causes. In recent years, 60 nations on five continents have been affected by terrorist acts. In the past five years as many as 4,000 people have died in such attacks—the majority carried out by al-Qaeda-related groups.

International terrorism and the potential of terrorists to acquire and use weapons that kill on a massive scale, to which some hon. Members have referred, present the greatest threat to our security. That is why fighting terrorism and preventing the spread of weapons of mass destruction have become our No. 1 priority. That means not just military action to hunt down terrorists, but dealing with the causes of terrorism—injustice, oppression and poverty, which contribute to the helplessness and despair that, as several hon. Members have mentioned, all too often fuel extreme reactions.

While we continue to strengthen international action to thwart terrorists we must redouble our efforts to strengthen the rule of law, help democracy take root and alleviate the suffering of the world's poorest and most vulnerable people. That is the focus of our efforts to support the modernisation of political and economic structures in the broader middle east region.

I am grateful to the hon. Member for South-West Devon (Mr. Streeter), who referred to the work of the Government's global opportunities fund. Part of my portfolio is the Chevening scholarships, which draw those whom we regard as potential movers and shakers in many parts of the world to this country in an attempt to teach them something about our culture and democratic culture in the hope that they will take it back to their countries.

The hon. Member for Stratford-on-Avon (Mr. Maples) asked what we are going to do to change the regimes in Saudi Arabia and Egypt—I think that that is the gist of what he said. He is right—those are two key countries for progress in the middle east. Where, as in the case of Egypt in particular, Governments are heavily dependent on large amounts of foreign aid, there is some leverage, but I would not want to pretend—I am sure that the hon. Gentleman would not want me to—that it is in our gift to change those regimes or impose reform on them.

All that we can do is hope, where local initiatives are occurring, to exert influence—especially to press the role of women, to which the hon. Member for South-West Devon referred—and to lead by example. However, we have enough on our hands at the moment in Iraq and Afghanistan without opening a new front, if hon. Members will forgive me for putting it so.

The report states, and I agree, that it is important not to impose reform but to encourage and support domestic initiatives where appropriate. That is the basis of the Government's approach.

In passing, I want to touch on an area not covered by the report—Africa. Already, failed states such as Somalia have become a breeding ground for terrorists who have been responsible for atrocities in several African countries, and we must not allow that virus to spread. That is why support for good governance, democracy, the rule of law and human rights is the focus of our work in Africa.

Despite serious incidents in Nairobi, Mombassa and Dar es Salaam, Africa has not yet become a hotbed of terrorism, but it will if we neglect it. That is one reason why the Prime Minister has established the Commission for Africa; it is to take a fresh look at the huge challenges facing that continent. That is also one of the reasons why we already have a huge development programme targeted on Africa.

Donald Anderson: In fact, the Committee dealt with that in a report on bilateral relations with South Africa and in an earlier report in the series.

Mr. Mullin: I am grateful to my right hon. Friend for that information.

[Mr. Mullin]

As the Committee makes clear, 2005 will also be a critical year for Iraq. There is, as we all appreciate, a growing appetite among the Iraqi people for elections. As the hon. Member for Chichester (Mr. Tyrie) said, the legitimacy of any Government in Iraq will flow from those elections. The Iraqis want to be able to determine their own future, and we attach great importance, therefore, to the January elections, which will be a milestone in the transition toward achieving a constitution-based Government by the end of next year.

Several Members have asked about UN involvement. A United Nations team, under the Secretary-General's special representative Ashraf Qazi, is helping the Iraqi independent election commission to prepare for the elections. Political parties and electoral laws have been agreed, a provisional voter registration database, which contains about 14 million names, has been completed and tested, and a public information campaign has started, for which 2 million leaflets are ready for distribution.

The UK and the US are working closely with the UN to ensure that UN personnel get the protection that they need to operate effectively. I assure the House that we take every possible measure to ensure the safety of our personnel. Travel outside secure zones and bases must be in armoured vehicles with close-protection teams, and is limited to essential journeys.

The right hon. Member for Tonbridge and Malling (Sir John Stanley) asked whether the world is a safer place as a result of the invasion of Iraq. He said, I think, that that is a matter future historians will discuss. It has, though, been debated in the House many times, and will be debated many more times. If he will forgive me, I shall not go down that road now, interesting as it is. I will, however, make two points. First, the Iraq survey group report of 6 October confirmed that there were no weapons of mass destruction, but it also made it clear that Saddam intended to resume his WMD programmes after sanctions were lifted.

Secondly, the right hon. Gentleman is right to say that al-Qaeda is now present in Iraq, but most of the attacks have been carried out by former members of the Ba'athist regime.

Mr. Tyrie: Is it the Minister's view that an intention to start a programme to create a weapon can constitute a justification for war?

Mr. Mullin: I did not say that. I merely pointed out a sentence or two that were missing from the account that the right hon. Member for Tonbridge and Malling gave of the 6 October report.

Terrorists and insurgents are stepping up their attacks, but Prime Minister Allawi is determined that as many Iraqis as possible should be able to take part in the elections. Iraqis will able to register to vote in any polling station in Iraq. They do not need to vote in the polling station nearest their home. Prime Minister Allawi has said that he wants the political process to be as inclusive as possible. He has made major efforts to encourage Sunni and Shi'a leaders to join the political process and create the secure, stable conditions needed for the elections to take place. We are giving him, the Iraqi Interim Government and the Iraqi security forces all the support we can.

Security is vital. Already, there are more than 220,000 Iraqi security personnel on the streets. We continue to equip and train the Iraqi security forces, and the multinational force is helping the Iraqis to protect the infrastructure and provide security for key Iraqi personnel.

I note that the Committee expressed disappointment at the number of countries that have so far been prepared to contribute to the multinational force—as did my right hon. Friend the Member for Swansea, East, today—and urges the Government to encourage more countries to do so. We shall indeed do so, but I remind the Chamber that the multinational force is drawn from 30 nations, including 14 European countries. Italy, Poland and the Netherlands are major troop contributors along with South Korea and Ukraine. It is a concerted effort, and we will continue to encourage other nations to join us.

I pay tribute to the courage and determination of UK armed forces, and all the military and civilian personnel from around the world who are putting their lives at risk to help the people of Iraq.

Despite the difficult security situation, reconstruction continues. The hon. Member for South-West Devon asked me for details of that. I have a long list that I can hand to him but, if he will forgive me, I will not read it out.

Electricity distribution is now more equitable across the country and 45 km of water pipes have been laid in Basra alone. In early September, the Secretary of State for International Development announced that the UK would contribute an additional £50 million to help to create jobs and to provide training for Iraqis. That is in addition to the £252 million disbursed in the financial year 2003–04 from the UK's overall commitment of £544 million in the three years to 2006. As the report makes clear, we cannot afford to let Iraq fail. We will continue to urge the international community to support Iraq's rehabilitation, and we will continue to help the Iraqi authorities to create a safe and stable country so that Iraqis can live in peace and rebuild their lives.

We are also working towards that in Afghanistan, where 10.5 million people, including 4 million women, registered to vote in the recent presidential elections. Those were the first democratic elections ever in Afghanistan, and there was a turnout of more than 80 per cent. The next step in the political process is parliamentary elections, which are due to take place next spring. The Afghan people sense a new hope and a new beginning, but I think that we all agree that much needs to be done to improve security across the country.

As the Committee said in its report, the provincial reconstruction teams are one of the success stories of the international engagement in Afghanistan. The report notes, however, that there are differences in the approaches adopted by different PRTs and suggests that they all be brought under the control of the international security assistance force. Unfortunately that is, for the time being, not possible because ISAF's writ does not yet extend throughout Afghanistan. However, as ISAF expands, more PRTs will be brought under its command. The two UK-led PRTs, in Maimana and in Mazar-e-Sharif, were transferred to ISAF on 1 July.

As hon. Members will know, the UK led the way in deploying a PRT and was instrumental in generating the resources necessary to expand ISAF beyond Kabul in the north. By the end of October, ISAF was deploying 9,500 troops from 37 NATO and non-NATO countries. ISAF's contribution to the security of the recent elections—a commitment made at the Istanbul summit—was crucial. ISAF now needs to move to the next stage of expansion, which is to the west. The UK is working with potential contributors and with the NATO authorities to tie down the different offers of resources.

Long-term stability is vital for Afghanistan's economic development. Stability is also the key to tackling the hugely complex problem of opium cultivation. I am grateful to the Committee for its recognition that there are no instant solutions to the problem. Eradication of the opium poppy is a campaign that demands perseverance and long-term commitment. The hon. Member for South-West Devon asked me about the scale of poppy growth. I understand that the results of the UN survey will be published on 18 November. That will provide us with the most up-to-date figures.

The hon. Gentleman also asked me about a programme involving strimming. I do not pretend to know the details, but I am told that there are no plans for such a programme. If I find out anything different, I will get back to him. As the lead country in co-ordinating counter-narcotics activity in Afghanistan, the UK will continue to provide substantial support to help the Afghan Government to implement their national drug control strategy. We have, as the hon. Gentleman noted, committed more than £70 million in three years for counter-narcotics activity and at least £20 million for developing alternative livelihoods.

To encourage Afghans to develop a viable economy, we are funding research on alternatives. We are also considering innovative ways to fund the significant income gap between opium poppy and other crop cultivation and the crippling opium debt that many Afghan farmers have accumulated. We are working with the Afghans and with our international partners on improving law enforcement, eradication, judicial reform and the Afghan public's awareness of the illegality of the opium industry. Winning the war on drugs is central to winning the war on terror, as drug money supports the insurgents and funds weapons. We must tackle the issue not just inside Afghanistan but, as we are already doing, with Afghanistan's neighbours.

I turn now to Pakistan, which is a key ally in the fight against terrorism. We welcome the Select Committee's conclusion that Pakistan is making a meaningful contribution to the war against terrorism. We welcome President Musharraf's support. He has taken considerable personal and political risks to confront the extremist groups operating in Pakistan and to stop the spread of nuclear weapons-building capability. We will continue to support him in his efforts and to work with the Pakistani authorities to promote sustainable development, greater democracy and respect for human rights.

Like my hon. Friend the Member for Hyndburn (Mr. Pope), who has had to leave the Chamber, we warmly welcome the improved relationship with India and continue to encourage India and Pakistan to resolve their differences over Kashmir. However, as my hon. Friend noted, our advice is not always welcomed by either party, so we must tread carefully when proffering it.

Russia is also a key partner in our efforts to combat terrorism, as the Select Committee's report underlines. We will continue to work with Russia, both bilaterally through our joint working group on terrorism and military co-operation, and multilaterally in the UN, the G8—in particular, the important global partnership programme—and the NATO-Russia Council. Although, as the Select Committee says, the war in Chechnya is not purely a terrorist insurgency, it is important to recognise that Russia faces genuine and serious security problems in the north Caucasus. Several Members referred to the horrific tragedy at Beslan, which is only the most recent example.

Finally, I turn to the Israel-Palestine conflict, which, as we all recognise, has done more than anything else to fan the flames of hatred and terrorism that threaten the stability of the entire middle east, if not the world. The Prime Minister has said that reviving the middle east process is one of his personal priorities. We shall continue to work with the new US Administration, our EU partners and members of the Quartet to encourage the Israelis and the Palestinians to move forward. Both sides must deliver their commitments under the road map. We continue to think that that is the best way to achieve a lasting political settlement. I believe that hon. Members will agree that much depends on the extent to which the new American Government are willing to become engaged, and we shall encourage them to do so.

Prime Minister Sharon's plan to withdraw all settlements from Gaza and some from the west bank is an opportunity for progress. We have made it clear, however, that such withdrawals should be a first step rather than an end in themselves. Despite what the hon. Member for Stratford-on-Avon said, we continue to believe that the road map is the best way to achieve a comprehensive and lasting settlement. I am sure that I speak for the Government—I hope I do—when I say that we are unconvinced that we could impose a solution on the parties.

We are also urging the Palestinians to deliver on their security responsibilities, which include serious action against terrorists, especially those who organise suicide bombings. We provide technical assistance and training to the Palestinian security forces to help them to take more effective action against those who plan suicide bombings, and we are urging the Israelis to curb heavy-handed action by their defence forces. As the Prime Minister said yesterday, progress in the middle east, along with democracy in Afghanistan and in Iraq,

"would be the . . . most significant contribution we could make to the reduction of terrorism".—[*Official Report*, 3 November 2004; Vol. 426, c. 299.]

Sir John Stanley: I assure the Minister that this is not tit for tat in return for his comments about my being less than comprehensive in reporting on the Iraq survey group, but will he and the Foreign Secretary reflect on how advisable it is to go on referring to the withdrawal

[Sir John Stanley]

of Israeli settlements from the west bank without making it clear what is involved? Is it not the case that we are talking about the removal of just four out of 138 settlements in the west bank, that the population of those four is less than 1 per cent. of the total number of settlers on the west bank and that, at the same time as that withdrawal was announced, the Sharon Government announced a significant new house-building programme inside the existing settlements?

Mr. Mullin: The right hon. Gentleman is quite right to draw attention to that, and I am sure that it is an issue that we will discuss with the Israelis.

At an international level, we hope that the recommendations of the UN Secretary-General's high-level panel—that may be what the hon. Member for Tweeddale, Ettrick and Lauderdale (Mr. Moore) was referring to—will encourage greater consensus on action to strengthen international security, including tackling emerging threats at an earlier stage. I entirely agree with the hon. Member for Chichester that the key to defeating terrorism is to win over moderate Muslims. I think that every sensible person would accept that and that must be the approach that all sensible countries follow. It is certainly a large part of our strategy.

We must also continue to promote greater understanding between peoples of different faiths, cultures and traditions. I take this opportunity to acknowledge the often unsung work of those working in non-governmental organisations and voluntary organisations around the world to teach and promote learning through educational and cultural exchange. For our part, through the work of the Department for International Development, the Foreign Office and the British Council, we will continue to support political, economic and cultural development in those parts of the world riven by strife.

Mr. Tyrie: Before the Minister finishes, will he return to the questions that I asked about British responsibility for the detainees who may have been held in Abu Ghraib? I refer to the 341 detainees we passed to the United States. Did we check up on what was happening to them while they were detained? Were any of them in Abu Ghraib? Have we checked up on them since they left or made any effort to contact them?

Mr. Mullin: I am grateful to the hon. Gentleman for reminding me. I understand that that is the issue on which he wrote to the Foreign Secretary. He said that he had not had a reply, but I understand that one is in the post, so he will hear shortly.

We all appreciate that greater understanding brings tolerance and with tolerance comes peace. That is our goal and I am sure that it is the goal of us all.

Question put and agreed to.

Adjourned accordingly at twenty-eight minutes past Five o'clock.

Westminster Hall

Tuesday 9 November 2004

[SIR NICHOLAS WINTERTON *in the Chair*]

Breast Cancer

Motion made, and Question proposed, That the sitting be now adjourned.—[*Mr. Hutton.*]

9.30 am

Dame Marion Roe (Broxbourne) (Con): During October, we witnessed another successful breast cancer awareness month. That campaign, which is now in its 11th year, raises at least £10 million annually, and it has helped many of those suffering from breast cancer.

As a joint chairman of the all-party parliamentary group on breast cancer, I am delighted to have the opportunity this morning to initiate a debate on the primary prevention of breast cancer.

The latest figures from Cancer Research UK indicate that a woman's lifetime risk of suffering breast cancer rose between 1995 and 2001 from one in 12 to one in nine. Breast cancer is the most common cancer in the UK; there has been a steady rise in new cases per year—from 21,446 new cases in 1979, to 34,824 in 1998 and 40,989 in 2003.

Dr. Ian Gibson (Norwich, North) (Lab): I thank the hon. Lady for allowing us to debate such an important issue; the work being done on breast cancer is similar to that on many other cancers. However, it is an international problem. In the United States, 192,000 new cases of invasive breast cancer were diagnosed in 2001, and about 50,000 women died of the disease in that year. It is a serious problem. Does the hon. Lady agree that we could play a leading role in an international movement to tackle the disease?

Dame Marion Roe: I thank the hon. Gentleman for that intervention. He is right to say that it is a worldwide problem, and I fully agree that the United Kingdom could take a lead in the fight against this terrible disease.

Breast cancer is currently the most common cancer among women in the UK. Unfortunately, more than 40,000 women are diagnosed with this devastating disease each year, and more than 1,000 women die from it every month. The incidence of breast cancer in the UK continues to rise year on year. However, we should remember that better detection of the disease through the NHS breast screening programme and better breast awareness among women has contributed to that rise.

Mr. Iain Luke (Dundee, East) (Lab): I, too, congratulate the hon. Lady on gaining this debate. We obviously welcome the extension of screening to older women, but when I raised the issue last year, I mentioned the need to reduce the age limit from 45, perhaps to 40, to allow the screening of younger women. There is an increase in the number of younger women suffering from the disease, and earlier screening might allow for more successful treatment.

Dame Marion Roe: More and more younger women are being diagnosed with breast cancer. The hon. Gentleman makes a good point, and I am sure that the Minister will have noted it.

Breast cancer is a complex disease, and we do not yet fully understand what causes it. Scientific evidence indicates that breast cancer is caused by a complex mixture of factors, some to do with lifestyle, some to do with environmental factors, and some genetic—in other words, inherited. Those factors act at many different stages of life, probably starting before birth and continuing to the menopause and beyond. Unfortunately, we do not yet know how to prevent breast cancer.

Professor Jack Cuzick, the head of Cancer Research UK's epidemiology, mathematics and statistics department at the Wolfson Institute of Preventive Medicine in London, has stated:

> "We need to do more to understand the risk factors and develop preventative strategies."

Several established risk factors have been identified, including age, gender and pregnancy. The biggest risk factor for women is age, and as a woman gets older, her risk of getting breast cancer increases. More than 80 per cent. of all breast cancer cases in the UK involve women over the age of 50. Unfortunately, most of the established risk factors, such as age, are outside our control.

However, women could do something about other risk factors, such as alcohol intake. In a recent survey carried out for Breakthrough Breast Cancer, for example, only 7 per cent. of the women surveyed were aware of any link between alcohol and breast cancer. However, an intake of 1 unit of alcohol daily is estimated to result in one extra case of breast cancer among every 100 women who drink, compared with 100 women who do not drink at all. Based on that information, more than half the women surveyed by Breakthrough Breast Cancer said that they would be willing to limit their alcohol intake or to stop drinking completely to reduce their risk of breast cancer. That example highlights the importance of public education and public awareness of breast cancer risk factors. Based on such information, women can make informed choices about their lifestyles.

If breast cancer is to be prevented, its causes must be found. Studies are currently taking place to investigate some of those causes. The Breakthrough Generations study, for example, was launched in September. It will investigate the causes of breast cancer, and in particular gain information about those causes that might be prevented. It will be the largest study of its kind in the world and will cover more than 100,000 women in the UK. It will continue to give information for the next 40 to 50 years, although the first results will be available within the first few years of the study. Similarly, the Long Island breast cancer study project is a multi-study effort to investigate whether environmental factors are responsible for breast cancer in particular areas of America.

Every day, we are all exposed to many different chemicals through our diet, our lifestyle and the environment. Before we can conclusively determine what factors, other than better detection, are contributing to the increasing incidence of breast cancer, we must carry out further in-depth and robust

[Dame Marion Roe]

research. The National Cancer Research Institute analysis of cancer research funding in the UK revealed that only 2 per cent. is spent on prevention.

Although the incidence of breast cancer is increasing, the good news is that the number of people dying from the disease is decreasing, and more women are surviving than ever before. That is partly due to the NHS breast screening programme. As we do not know how to prevent breast cancer, it is important that all women between the ages of 50 and 69 attend their appointments. Most cancers picked up by screening are at an early stage, with five-year survival rates of more than 90 per cent. The World Health Organisation's International Agency for Research on Cancer recently identified a 35 per cent. reduction in mortality from breast cancer among screened women aged between 50 and 69, which may go some way to explaining the dramatic 22 per cent. fall in breast cancer mortality rates in the United Kingdom in the 10 years between 1990 and 1999. More than 1 million women are screened every year in the UK.

Mr. Luke: I agree with the hon. Lady that early detection is important for the prevention and successful treatment of breast cancer. Does she feel that the breast-screening programme for women between 50 and 60 can be impeded by the acknowledged shortage of radiologists, which has delayed screening programmes around the country?

Dame Marion Roe: I again take the hon. Gentleman's point and I am sure that the Minister has listened to his important contribution.

Bearing in mind the importance of the NHS screening programme and the fundamental role that it plays in early diagnosis and, therefore, better prognosis, we should be concerned that not all women are attending their screening appointments. The recent report by the all-party group on breast cancer, entitled "Early Detection Saves Lives: Tackling Inequalities in Breast Screening", found that one in six women not attending screening said that it was because the appointment given to them was not convenient. They cancelled and never rearranged another time. Indeed, in some areas of the country, the uptake of screening falls far short of the programme's 70 per cent. target. For example, in one part of London, the take-up rate was only 51 per cent.—19 per cent. below the target rate.

As a result of the all-party group's report, we are calling on the Secretary of State for Health to encourage screening services to make local changes and increase the choice of when and where women can be screened, including considering the possibility of screening women in units outside their local breast-screening service catchment area—for example, nearer to their place of work. We also call on the Secretary of State to put renewed efforts and resources into public education to promote the importance of attending breast-screening appointments, and to help make people more aware of the common signs and symptoms of cancer.

At the moment, we do not have enough information or the means to prevent breast cancer. However, our growing knowledge of breast cancer risk factors means that we may be able to reduce the risk of developing the disease. More research and better public education about the risk factors are needed. In the meantime, since we do not know how to prevent breast cancer, it is important that women over 50 years of age attend their screening appointments and that women of all ages are breast aware. Being breast aware and having regular mammograms will not prevent women developing breast cancer, but may help them to find it early when it is more likely to be successfully treated.

I want to raise another preventive measure. Last night, many parliamentary colleagues and I attended a reception in the House of Commons organised by Macmillan Cancer Relief to promote its campaign to obtain a better deal for people with cancer—that is to say, to prevent cancer spreading to people's finances. Macmillan claims that cancer patients tell it that they suffer financial hardship as a result of having cancer. More than three quarters of people that it surveyed said that they ran up extra bills, and, for most people affected by cancer, money worries are second only to pain as a cause of stress. However, the disability living allowance and attendance allowance, which should ease the burden for many patients, are designed for long-term conditions. We all know that cancer is different, because the debilitating effects of treatment are frequently immediate and drastic. The sudden extra costs, such as travel for treatment, hospital car parking and heating, can be equally drastic, and generate an urgent need for benefit support.

What action is being taken to arrest the rising incidence of breast cancer in the United Kingdom? What action is being taken to identify the various risk factors for breast cancer and to understand how they affect the risk of breast cancer? What support are the Government giving to breast cancer research, particularly to the causes and possible prevention of breast cancer? Will the forthcoming public health White Paper specifically address the issue of breast cancer incidence and risk? What public health policies do the Government propose to adopt to address the rising incidence of breast cancer and to improve public education about and awareness of breast cancer and its risks?

As many of the risk factors, such as age, are not within the control of any woman, does the Minister agree that it is particularly important that we educate women about risk factors such as alcohol intake and post-menopausal obesity that are within their control so that they can do something about them? How do the Government propose to improve public understanding of those risk factors? What action have the Government taken to increase the uptake of the NHS breast-screening programme, particularly in areas of low uptake and in social groups, such as minority ethnic groups, in which uptake is below the average? What are the Government doing to promote a co-ordinated and joined-up approach to breast cancer research and prevention that involves all relevant agencies, and what are they doing to ensure that every cancer patient is offered specialist benefits advice when diagnosed? Finally, what are the Government doing to improve cancer patients' access to the disability living allowance and attendance allowance? I look forward to the Minister's replies.

Several hon. Members *rose—*

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Order. Before I call the hon. Member for Norwich, North (Dr. Gibson), I advise the Chamber that the hon. Gentleman has told me that he will have to leave the debate early. We all understand why.

9.47 am

Dr. Ian Gibson (Norwich, North) (Lab): I apologise for having to leave the debate early, Mr. Deputy Speaker, but I have a constituency appointment at 10 am.

It is a delight to follow the hon. Member for Broxbourne (Dame Marion Roe) and her erudite exposition of the risk factors of breast cancer and what we should be doing about them. I congratulate her particularly on highlighting the Macmillan campaign event, which I had the pleasure of hosting last night. It was a brilliant event attended by many people, and is another great initiative in our development of cancer services, which have been improving in this country since 1997.

We all realise that the work never stops. We must continue to make improvements until we eliminate the sad incidence of breast cancer, which continues to increase, unlike death rates, many of which the Government have brilliantly turned around. I will not quote the figures, but I will say that I spend a fair bit of time talking to people about breast cancer on Capitol Hill. They are a fearsome bunch. It must be like playing against Thierry Henry of Arsenal. They are brilliant at advancing their arguments, and the breast cancer lobby groups in this country—the hon. Lady is a member of a prominent one in this place—have played a major part and have moved the debate forward. The Government have reacted to that in many ways.

It is agreed in the United States that it should be the goal of medicine to detect breast cancer early and to provide a possible cure. Breast cancer prevention strategies in this country and the States have been developed recently to include a comprehensive breast cancer screening programme, which I agree we should broaden to include risk assessment as well as breast examination and screening mammography. This is a new concept. The hon. Lady described all the risk factors of various degrees. There is a nine-point programme in the States now and one could argue that perhaps every woman, of whatever age, should have this risk assessment.

There is a high incidence of breast cancers caused by genetic factors—some 10 per cent, possibly more. As more genes are discovered we may find that it is more complicated and that genes form the basis. Risk assessment is a way to decide whether better scrutiny, such as every six months or every year, is needed. We need to grasp this nettle. It is a new concept that the Americans have taken on strongly because of the lobby and the interest it has generated.

Incidentally, men get breast cancer too. It is a low incidence, but because men do not present as well as women to the medical profession, many are not diagnosed until a late stage. We should remember that. Men must not feel that they are immune. It happens to a reasonable number of men. Who knows what causes it. Very little work has been done on this. The breast cancer screening guidelines can be applied to the population in general, but patients at this increased risk should be identified through risk assessment.

For those at risk, screening, mammography and proven prevention strategies can be individualised according to the level of risk. There is the most intense debate about how screening should be done, when and how often. I would not like to count the number of times that I have been at conferences debating the issue. Results often conflict. It is difficult to get information. The Swedes say, "Yes, if you do it here it works." Someone else in Britain will say, "No, it does not work." We have to find this out. We know that we do not know all the answers, but we certainly know how to handle some of the problems that we have at this stage.

There will be really big technological developments and advancements in digital mammography. The Government have put in many scanning machines. The technology is moving almost faster than the machines can be put into the district hospitals. We have to encourage that. It will improve the accuracy of the screening method and, I think, reduce breast cancer mortality. The implementation and further development of breast cancer prevention strategies give us hope that the reduction in the incidence of breast cancer may be within reach and may happen within some of our lifetimes. We should be heartened by the political dimension and its interest, but we must continue to press on this issue and keep it high on the agenda in medical practice. I finish by congratulating the hon. Lady once again.

9.53 am

Mrs. Patsy Calton (Cheadle) (LD): I, too, congratulate the hon. Member for Broxbourne (Dame Marion Roe) on securing this important debate. It is just over a year since the last debate. Sadly, there are not quite so many people here today as I would have hoped, but it is first thing in the morning and the morning after a significant event for my party—our annual dinner.

The hon. Lady has once again established the seriousness of this issue. Were it not so serious, one would think it amazing that more money was not being spent on research into the prevention of breast cancer. She said that 2 per cent. of the research money is spent on prevention. This is something that affects 40,000 women and 300 men a year. We are talking about a large section of the population, because families and friends are affected too. This is a scourge on modern life. We do not know enough about it to understand why it happens.

I imagine that few people do not have direct experience of breast cancer in their family or their circle of close friends. Those of us with such experience want our children and grandchildren to know what to do to avoid the very high risk that exists currently.

I want to dwell specifically on prevention. The primary prevention of breast cancer depends on two things—a real knowledge of the associated risk factors, based on hard evidence and research and, as the hon. Lady said, education so that young and old have the

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information necessary to make rational choices about the factors that they can change. We know that breast cancer occurs as a result of complex interactions between genes, lifestyle and environmental factors, but we are finding it difficult to separate those issues out, because we simply do not have the body of research evidence that will give us the necessary information.

The hon. Member for Norwich, North (Dr. Gibson) reported that Cancer Research UK has said that we must do more to establish the risk factors. That is absolutely right; 2 per cent. as a proportion of what is spent on research is simply not enough.

Dr. Gibson: Does the hon. Lady agree with me that the Americans are taking knowledge about cancer to the next level? The National Cancer Institute has developed a risk assessment tool, which is on a website. Using nine factors, it can estimate for anyone the risk of developing breast cancer over five years or a lifetime. Whatever the risk factors are currently, we should plug that information into the equation, which would enable us to see that some people are more at risk than others. That tool seems to provide an accurate reflection of what happens, and we should pick it up. It is great in America; it is possible to find everything to do with cancer on websites there. We should develop that risk assessment technology now.

Mrs. Calton: I thank the hon. Gentleman for his intervention, because I was about to mention that risk assessment tool. It is one of a battery of tools that can be used to assess someone's risk at, say, age 20, 15 or whatever age. Once people have some knowledge of their risk, they can modify the factors that might contribute to it. Obviously, I am talking about the things that they can alter. Clearly, as we have said, age and gender cannot be altered. Those things are part of us and we have to accept that. However, it is very important that people have information about the risks to which they are exposed and that they can do whatever it is possible to do to minimise those risks, if they choose to do so. Personal choice comes into this; people will make their own decisions.

We have heard that one unit of alcohol a day increases the risk of breast cancer by 6 per cent. and 2 units a day increases the risk by 12 per cent. It would be pretty rare for people in our society to say, "Well, that means I won't drink at all." If people wanted to remove the risk, they would be talking about not drinking at all. People will make individual choices about what they intend to do, based on the risk factors that they know about. I agree with the hon. Gentleman that we need the risk assessment tool as one of an armoury of tools, but it will not replace the need for fundamental research. The needs have been identified and the money needs to be spent.

We have talked about age. As the hon. Member for Broxbourne said, the one thing that we can do about age is to attend screening. However, some groups are difficult to reach and do not, for whatever reason, attend screening. The all-party breast cancer group's report clearly pointed out that a high number of women said that it was not convenient to attend screening. There has been passing comment on some women's concern that they will experience pain when they have the test. It would be wrong for us to assume that women's fear of the pain involved is irrational, as some women undoubtedly experience pain. It would be useful if the Minister reflected on what could be done to minimise the pain that some women definitely experience with mammography through a change in technique, and to find out whether pain is caused by the technique or by something in the woman concerned, for example her cycle.

It is fairly common among the women to whom I spoke to experience pain—sometimes severe—when the mammogram is taken. That sort of information passes around women like a piece of folklore. It is not good enough simply to say that it does not happen, or that it need not be taken into account; it should seriously be taken into account. Some women may say that it is inconvenient to go for a mammogram, and may not give it top priority, when really they are worried about experiencing pain. It would be interesting to see how many women will not return for a second mammogram—not when something has been found to be wrong, but in the normal course of events—if they experienced considerable discomfort the first time. That problem needs to be addressed. It is not enough simply to pass it off as one of those things. Some women experience quite severe pain.

We have discussed the gender issue. We have not talked much about family history. We know that small numbers of breast cancer cases run in families, and we think that about 5 per cent. of cases are due to changes in the BRCA1 and BRCA2 genes. It is possible that cancer generally, breast cancer included, is caused by other genetic problems, and that some families' and people's immune systems have an inability to deal with cancer. General research in that area may give the most benefit, because if we can identify why some families experience cancer more often, we may be able to find some way of preventing it, or of boosting the immune system so that cancers do not take hold.

There is little that anyone can do about early periods or late menopause—they happen in the natural course of things—but there is some indication that they are associated with increased rates of breast cancer, probably due to an increased lifetime exposure to oestrogen. However, there is an issue with early periods, because they occur in girls who are heavier than average. If work can be done to prevent young women from becoming obese in their early years, there is a strong possibility that the onset of their periods will be held off for a little longer.

The association with height is also complex, but women over 5 ft 9 in are more likely to get breast cancer. That seems a bit unfortunate, and there is little that they can do about it, but there is a range of established risk factors about which something can be done. Pregnancy is one such factor. In this society, we generally frown upon and are concerned about early pregnancy, particularly teenage pregnancy. Most of us want our children, and other children, to wait until their 20s before their first pregnancy, but a pregnancy before the age of 20 seems to be protective. That is an indication that sometimes such matters are not as black and white as society believes. Perhaps we should be more careful about being so condemnatory of people who have children at a younger age—they may save the country a great deal of money, if they do not get breast cancer at a later stage.

The other worry is that women have an increased risk if they have their first child at over 30 or if they do not have children. That is a matter for women to take into consideration when they are looking at their range of risk factors. Perhaps if women applied the risk factors mentioned by the hon. Member for Norwich, North, they would not delay having children until they were in their 40s or late 30s. Women need to be able to take those issues into consideration. Many women and their families have not had that information, and so have not been able to take those issues into account.

We know that breast feeding for more than a year in total reduces risk. I know that the Government have done considerable work, particularly through the Sure Start programme, in trying to encourage breast feeding. We know that breast feeding is best for children, but society still has a tendency to regard it as unnatural and to imply that it should not take place. We need to do a great deal more to educate the public that breast feeding is good not only for babies but for mothers, and that mothers who breast feed for at least a year in their lives reduce their risk of breast cancer.

The Million Women study reported recently on the effects of hormone replacement therapy. We now know that there is an increased risk of breast cancer with HRT, particularly with the combined oestrogen and progesterone drug, and if the drug is taken over long periods. GPs and their patients are talking about that matter in a considered way, to try to minimise women's risk. There is an indication that once women come off HRT, their risk is lowered within a few years. However, it is important that women are aware, before they engage in HRT, of the effects that it might have.

Similarly, we know that there is a slightly increased risk for women who take the pill. We are told that 10 years after stopping taking the pill, that risk disappears. Women need to know that they increase their risk if they take the pill. Those factors all build up.

Women's weight is a major issue. Women who are overweight, particularly after the menopause, are more likely to get breast cancer. It is thought that that happens because fat tissue is the primary source of oestrogen after the menopause. Therefore, the more fat women carry, the more oestrogen they will produce, and the greater risk they will have of getting breast cancer. If weight gain can be minimised, women have more chance, in those circumstances, of reducing their breast cancer risk.

There is another issue. We cannot isolate breast cancer from everything else. Breast cancer is linked to a range of other diseases. Obesity appears to be associated with a variety of health problems, including heart disease, high blood pressure, diabetes, arthritis and several other cancers. Persuading women to reduce their weight or to keep it within normal bounds will reduce their risk not only of contracting breast cancer but of developing a variety of other health problems. Women who are high risk for breast cancer or who have breast cancer, possibly because they are overweight, are also high risk for those other factors. That needs to be taken into consideration.

The alcohol issue is very important indeed. As an aside, whenever my younger daughter tells me that she is going out for the evening, my standard text message back to her—we text each other, as mothers and daughters do these days—is "Think of your long-term health." She sends a text message back to me saying, "Yes, all right, don't worry." I ask her to be aware that she needs to minimise her alcohol intake and should not go along with the craze for binge drinking, which appears almost to be the norm.

I have recently been concerned about local papers in my area showing pictures of young people who are clearly under the influence of alcohol enjoying themselves. There is nothing wrong with people enjoying themselves, but it is worrying when newspapers make it look as if being over the limit in alcohol and indulging in what most of us would call binge drinking is the norm. Society needs to do more about reducing the tolerance of binge drinking.

We know that radiotherapy can increase the risk of breast cancer. There are some treatments for which a balance of risk factors has to be taken into account. Hodgkin's lymphoma treatment leads to increased risk of breast cancer, because of the site of the radiation therapy. However, if people did not have that radiation therapy, they would be at greater risk from Hodgkin's lymphoma. Those things have to be taken into account.

There are strong suspicions that diet and exercise are inextricably linked with the risk of breast cancer, but we simply do not know enough yet about how they affect it. More work needs to be done on that. Work has been done on diet and exercise separately; indeed, I myself was a subject in a study of diet. There is no clear link between diet and exercise and breast cancer. However, because the issue is complicated and because modifying behaviour seems a likely avenue if the two are in fact implicated, it is important that more research should be done, so that we can iron out some of the conflicts in the existing research.

We are absolutely certain for other reasons, however, that eating a healthy diet rich in fruit, vegetables and whole grains, is good for a range of other things, particularly maintaining lower body weight. Although it is difficult to separate diet and exercise, we know that controlling diet and exercising are important for other health reasons. People are likely to be leaner if they exercise regularly. As somebody who exercises regularly and struggles hugely with her weight, I sometimes think about such things with a wry smile and ask myself, "How much do I have to do to get my weight down?" Well, I can tell the Chamber that it is necessary to do enough training for the London marathon. Weight goes down once exercise gets up to about 25 miles a week; below that, it does not go down particularly.

A further factor, which has not had enough exploration, is exposure to low-dose radiation. Cancer Research UK is doing a great deal of work on mapping the incidence of cancer across the country. I would like research to be done into the effects of low-dose radiation in those areas of the country where background radiation is higher than average. I am thinking of parts of the south-west, where the main rock is granite, a relatively new rock that gives off more radiation. It would be useful to know whether there was a higher incidence of breast cancer in those areas. It is difficult to

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know precisely what anyone would do about it, but it would be useful to have an understanding of whether high radiation levels cause that difficulty.

We do not know about telecommunications masts yet, or about in vitro fertilisation treatment—although studies so far show that that there is no increased risk. We do not know about the impact of stress, although if one talks to people who have had breast cancer they often identify a major stress event in the previous two years, either in their family or affecting them personally. A major stress event could involve the death of someone close, or something else that is really serious; it does not refer to general levels of stress. I think that most of the work that has been done has looked at the background stress that most of us feel as we go about our day-to-day lives; I am talking about the major life events that cause massive stress. We could do with more work on those.

There is some research into exposure to light at night. People who sleep with the light on, it is thought, produce rather less melatonin, and because of that they are more likely to end up with cancers. That is the theory. We need more research into that, because it would be very simple to ensure that one never slept with the light on. That would be something that every one of us could do. Melatonin, we believe, may suppress the growth of breast cancer.

We do not know enough yet about childhood risk factors. The hon. Member for Broxbourne made quite a lot of comments about concerns that breast cancer may start in childhood or even earlier, in the womb. Some research indicates that factors in the womb have an effect.

We do not know enough about ethnicity yet. We know that breast cancer is a worldwide problem and that it affects some populations more than others, but we do not know enough about that.

I make a plea that the newspapers and media are a little more responsible when it comes to parading some of the risk factors. I sometimes wonder where they pluck them from. They suggest that underwired bras could increase the risk, which does not seem to have any research foundation, or that bumps or bruises to the breast, breast implants, abortions, deodorants and anti-perspirants could do so. Research does not show that, but sometimes the media get hold of a piece of research, parade a great headline and frighten people with issues that have not been shown definitively to cause an increased risk.

We do not know about smoking—there have been differences of view about that—or about chemicals that people come into contact with in their environment. We do not know about pesticides. There is a tendency to think that because everybody is exposed to so many chemicals and trace chemicals, we can do nothing about it. I do not agree with that. I was a chemistry teacher. I taught in a school in which, within a fairly short period, something like half the women had a breast lump—a breast cancer—that had to be removed. Clearly, that may just have been an isolated cluster. When people asked me what my occupation was, I did not write just "teacher", but "chemistry teacher", because a chemistry teacher will have a very different exposure to chemicals. It is important that such issues are looked into.

Once again, I congratulate the hon. Lady. She has again brought this important issue to the attention of the Chamber. I do not think that it will go away in the immediate future. I hope that we will see a turnaround in the dreadful figures of 40,000 women and 300 men affected every year, and that that work will be done with some speed. I look forward to the public health White Paper, because I hope that it will address some of those issues in the round, perhaps not just for breast cancer but for women's health—and men's health—in general.

10.20 am

Mr. John Baron (Billericay) (Con): I congratulate my hon. Friend the Member for Broxbourne (Dame Marion Roe) on yet again securing an important debate on this issue; I thank her for doing so, and for all her work on the matter, which is recognised by hon. Members on both sides of the House. I thank other hon. Members, too, for their interesting contributions.

The importance of the debate can be clearly illustrated by the statistics. One in nine women will, as we have heard, develop breast cancer at some point in their lives, and 41,000 cases are diagnosed each year according to the latest figures, and that includes 300 men. Something like 13,000 deaths a year are caused by breast cancer.

It is unusual in some respects to talk about primary prevention strategies in the context of breast cancer. All the major risk factors, such as age, genetic code, endogenous hormone levels, late age at menopause and late age at first pregnancy, are not in any way modifiable through traditional intervention strategies. Meanwhile, drugs that have proved to prevent breast cancer or to have some effect are also of limited use, given their side-effect profile. It has been clearly shown, for example, that tamoxifen reduces the incidence of breast cancer by something like 6 to 8 per cent., but it produces bad side effects, which rules it out of a responsible prevention strategy.

Mrs. Calton: Perhaps we should mention that although tamoxifen is useful for women with the potential for oestrogen-positive tumours, or who have had such tumours, it is not of value for anyone whose tumour is not of that kind.

Mr. Baron: I accept that, but it is still relevant to the issue of breast cancer generally, and breast cancer prevention; as I have said, side effects have ruled it out of any responsible prevention strategy.

Several factors are modifiable through intervention, as my hon. Friend mentioned. One of those is diet. The NHS cancer plan rightly focuses on tackling cancer by reducing the number of people who smoke and promoting a healthier diet through initiatives such as the five-a-day programme. There is strong evidence to suggest that because people have taken more care with their diet over time and have become more knowledgeable about cancer in general, cancer death rates have fallen.

The Government make great claims about the 10 per cent. fall in cancer mortality rates since 1997—which is right—but those declines are part of a longer-term trend not only in this country but on the continent, for example. Under Conservative Governments, between 1990 and 1997, cancer mortality rates also declined by 10 per cent. It is important to recognise that those welcome figures are part of longer-term declines.

There is no doubt that initiatives such as five-a-day are a step in the right direction, but the Government's record on matters such as obesity and drinking has been quite poor overall. Figures from the Health Committee's report on obesity this year found that between 2000 and 2002 the proportion of women who were obese or morbidly obese increased by 7 per cent. I am sure that the Minister will be aware that if present trends continue, one quarter of the population will be obese by 2010.

The biggest failure in tackling obesity—this is relevant to all developed countries, not just this one—is the absence of a co-ordinated programme accommodating individual and public health approaches to the problem. The net effect of the anti-obesity drive, whether in this country or other developed countries, has been the introduction of a wide variety of individual treatment and prevention programmes, the published success rates of which have been disappointing overall.

Those concerns are reflected in current Government policy. As the Under-Secretary of State for Health, the hon. Member for Welwyn Hatfield (Miss Johnson) told the *Health Service Journal* last year:

> "We have a 'five-a-day' programme, the schools' fruit scheme. I'm not sure you need a strategy because we are talking about some very simple messages".

I suggest that that approach is wrong. Indeed, the Health Committee's report highlighted the naivety of approaching obesity in such a simplistic manner. It said:

> "The causes of obesity are diverse, complex and, in the main, underpinned by what are now entrenched societal norms. They are problems for which . . . no one simple solution exists."

Drinking is another matter on which the Government's record could be better. It is a shocking trend that the number of women drinking above recommended guidelines—35 units a week—has risen by more than half during the last 15 years, although I accept that that has taken place not only in very recent years. Breakthrough Breast Cancer believes that, as my hon. Friend mentioned, drinking on average one extra unit of alcohol a day increases a woman's risk of breast cancer by about 6 per cent. and the risk increases by a further 6 per cent. for each additional unit of alcohol consumed on a daily basis.

The important message is that the Government must do far more to make people aware of how many units they drink and that they should drink in moderation. What is needed from the Government, as a matter of urgency, is the implementation of an integrated and co-ordinated wide-ranging programme of solutions to tackle these issues.

We hope that the White Paper on public health, which will be published next week, although it was due in the summer, will tackle these matters. I hope that the Minister will be able to give us an early indication of what is in that White Paper, because the approach to the issue so far has been disappointing—indeed, its approach has been described as "dilatory and disgracefully complacent" and a "calamity" by the BMA as recently as last month.

The Government's failures on obesity and alcohol illustrate perfectly why public health should rest not in the hands of a junior Minister but with the Secretary of State. Public health challenges need to be recognised and tackled at the highest levels across Government, through a broad, population-based programme that aims to change behaviour at a collective environmental level. My colleague Lord Foster's HIV/AIDS campaign is an example of how public health challenges should be tackled.

The Minister should consider our proposal to establish a public health commission—an independent body with a similar role in public health to that of the National Audit Office. Its functions would be to gather evidence, publish reports and make recommendations to Government and Parliament. The commission would ensure that there was a research-effective, evidence-based approach to the matter, which would help to form public health policies.

Meanwhile, we would establish public health directors to work at city or county levels, as there is evidence to suggest that PCTs are too small to carry out population-based interventions to safeguard public health. In addition, we would instruct the National Institute for Clinical Excellence to include in its future work programme reviews of public health measures—for example, in the provision of alcohol clinics and drug therapies for the morbidly obese.

I look forward to hearing from the Minister how the Government will improve their performance on the issue, as there is little doubt that there is a lack of a co-ordinated approach to public health. We sincerely hope that the White Paper will focus on the necessary answers.

Other hon. Members have rightly focused on the importance of screening. As we still know so little about the causes of breast cancer, it is vital that the UK has adequate screening and surveillance programmes in place to aid early detection, which we know saves lives. I hope that the NHS breast-screening programme will continue to be rolled out; NICE guidance published this year recommended that women between the ages of 40 and 49 with a high family risk of breast cancer should be screened annually. I would welcome the Minister's assessment of the extent to which that guidance has been implemented nationally.

As my hon. Friend said, research published last month by Breakthrough Breast Cancer and the all-party group on breast cancer found that, in some areas only about half the women who should be screened were going for screening—20 per cent. below the 70 per cent. target among that group. The report also revealed that one in six women who did not take up their breast screening appointment said that that was because it was not convenient. In addition, as the Minister will be aware, the National Audit Office found this year that women from lower socio-economic groups and ethnic minorities were less likely to attend screening appointments.

The Conservative party fully supports the all-party group and Breakthrough in calling on the Health Secretary to investigate ways of making the screening service more flexible and accessible to the women it was set up to serve and to put renewed effort into promoting public education and the importance of attending

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appointments and making people more aware of the common signs and symptoms of breast cancer. We all know that making women more aware of the importance of screening is, in a way, primary prevention and that the earlier breast cancer is detected, the better the chances of survival. I therefore look forward to hearing what the Government propose to do to address the action points raised by the all-party group and Breakthrough on this important issue.

I want to leave the Minister plenty of time to wind up, so let me briefly add a few words to those of my hon. Friend and other hon. Members about the Macmillan reception yesterday evening. The event tried to focus on something that is almost a crime—the fact that many cancer patients are simply not accessing the disability living allowance or attendance allowance to which they are entitled. Something like half of all cancer patients who die—I think this statistic is accurate—did not receive DLA or AA, to which they were entitled. I would therefore endorse a good number of Macmillan's recommendations, including that all cancer patients should be made aware at diagnosis of the benefits to which they are entitled. That would be a useful way of ensuring that they access those benefits.

At the moment, about £126 million of benefits are unclaimed, and I ask the Minister to address the issue, because there appears to be a lack of co-ordination between the various Departments. Many cancer patients are falling between Departments and suffering as a result. As my hon. Friend the Member for Broxbourne said, people at such a crucial time in their lives, who are having to deal with cancer, should not have to contend with financial stresses.

We all want to improve the primary prevention of breast cancer and the treatment of cancer patients generally. I would be the first to acknowledge—it would be churlish not to—that the Government have made improvements in the provision of cancer services and treatment. However, given the money that has been invested in the NHS, not enough of those improvements have shown up in front-line services—a lot of the money simply is not reaching them.

Many services need urgent attention. There is strong evidence that radiotherapy waiting times are deteriorating badly, and the situation is not helped by "Agenda for Change", which has alienated many radiographers, who will be meeting this Saturday to express their opposition to the changes proposed under it.

We know of the referral lottery, which has, to a certain extent, been created by the Government and their two-week target, under which nearly 10,000 women are routinely referred and subsequently diagnosed with breast cancer. That places GPs in a difficult position, because they are not necessarily best placed to decide what is a routine and what is an urgent referral. We also know about the postcode lottery, which leads to wide disparities across the country in terms of access to cancer drugs such as Herceptin. That is another failing that must be addressed.

Having pointed out those failures, it would be wrong not to return to this morning's discussion and focus on the Government's failures with regard to primary prevention and care. The Government are failing to provide a comprehensive and co-ordinated public health agenda. They are failing to get across the importance of screening and to create a more flexible system of appointments. They are also failing to make sure that benefits are available to cancer sufferers who are entitled to them. I ask the Minister to address those issues in his response.

10.35 am

The Minister of State, Department of Health (Mr. John Hutton): May I join others in warmly congratulating the hon. Member for Broxbourne (Dame Marion Roe) on calling for this debate and drawing the attention of the House to what we all accept is an important issue affecting tens of thousands of women and many families in this country? All hon. Members who have spoken have made thoughtful and balanced contributions. The focus has been on prevention and I shall deal with that in my remarks.

It is a fact of life that many issues divide this House along party political lines. We are all grown up and we accept that—it is partly why we are here. However, breast cancer should not be such an issue. We all have a perspective and we share the general view that we must continue to improve the range of services deployed in the national health service to help tackle and get on top of this serious problem.

The hon. Member for Billericay (Mr. Baron), as a party spokesperson, introduced a more party political tone into the debate than the hon. Member for Broxbourne, my hon. Friend the Member for Norwich, North (Dr. Gibson) and the hon. Member for Cheadle (Mrs. Calton), who made no party political points whatever. It is part of my job as a Minister to respond to some of the party political attacks that have been made. I shall do that briefly, but I do not want to get into a party political debate because the issue is much more important than that.

If more of my hon. Friends were present today, we would all have been slightly puzzled to hear the hon. Member for Billericay complaining about postcode lotteries and insufficient investment, because his party voted against the additional investment that we are giving to the NHS, without which it would have been difficult to sustain the progress that we are making.

Mr. Baron: Will the Minister give way?

Mr. Hutton: No, not yet. The hon. Gentleman also claimed that the Government were not doing enough to tackle the problems of obesity and excess alcohol consumption. I cannot recall a single suggestion that he made about how he would deal with those two problems, other than establishing a public health commission to advise Ministers.

Mr. Baron: Will the Minister give way on that point?

Mr. Hutton: I will in a moment. The hon. Gentleman criticised the Government for setting up arm's-length bodies—he would use the term quangos—yet his suggestion was that we needed another quango to deal with those problems. He also said that it was not proper for a junior Minister to deal with this issue and that it should be the responsibility of the Secretary of State. Everything in the Department of Health is the responsibility of my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State, so I do not understand his point. He wants me to give way, and I am happy to do so.

Mr. Baron: I want to raise two quick issues. The Minister said that I suggested that there had been a cut in investment. I did not. I am the first to admit that there has been an increase in investment, and we would match Labour's planned increase in investment over coming years to the tune of about £34 billion. My point was that, bearing in mind the amount of investment in the NHS, much of the money is not reaching front-line services, of which breast cancer care is, unfortunately, an example. That is not a party political point. We are all trying to improve services for those suffering from breast cancer and it is a perfectly valid point to make.

As for the co-ordinated approach, I suggested to the Minister that we had a well-thought-through policy for dealing with obesity and drinking. We would introduce a much more co-ordinated approach on public health generally—and the HIV campaign co-ordinated by Lord Foster shows what such an approach can achieve. Those are concrete proposals, and I look forward to hearing what the Minister has to say about them.

Mr. Hutton: I really do not want to continue with this; it is a familiar merry-go-round, and it would be rather dispiriting to get bogged down in these issues. The hon. Gentleman says that we need a more co-ordinated approach. With the greatest respect, that is not a specific policy. It is a generalisation. I hoped that he would make some concrete suggestions today, but he may be holding them back for another occasion.

I was not arguing that the hon. Gentleman wanted to reduce expenditure on the NHS, although some of his policies would have that effect. I was simply saying that it is a matter of historical record—it is not contestable, and I do not want spend more time on it—that the present Leader of the Opposition described the increase in expenditure that we announced in 2001 as reckless and irresponsible. It is obviously of interest, therefore, to hear that it is now proper, responsible and the right thing to do. But that is opposition politics.

Mr. Baron: Will the Minister give way?

Mr. Hutton: Let us leave all that to one side. I did not intervene on the hon. Gentleman; and the hon. Member for Broxbourne deserves the courtesy of a proper response to the nine specific questions that she asked me.

The hon. Lady referred to the convenience of a booking system for local screening services, as did the hon. Members for Billericay and for Cheadle. That is an important point. The hon. Lady will be aware of the work that we are doing to move to a system of booked appointments across the NHS, particularly for referrals by GPs for hospital-based appointments for secondary care. People using the NHS will not have to wait for someone to tell them when they can be seen; at the beginning, they will agree with the clinician or the referral service when they are to be seen; they will be able to negotiate the time and place. The system will be built around people's needs, not the convenience of the provider who is running the service.

Exactly the same logic applies to breast cancer screening as applies to booking appointments for secondary care. The hon. Lady was right to raise the issue. I and my ministerial colleagues will reflect on what more can be done to improve the convenience of booking systems for breast cancer screening. However, I am sure that she will understand that it is a local issue. The local primary care trusts and providers are responsible for putting the service in place, and I would expect them to organise similar access arrangements for breast screening services as we hope to achieve with booking appointments for secondary care. There is plenty of food for thought; we need to reflect on what more can be done to promote that sort of approach for local screening services.

The hon. Lady asked us to renew our efforts to promote the importance of breast cancer screening and the need for people to attend appointments. We need to do more on that, and I shall write to the hon. Lady and set out in more detail some of our thoughts on the subject.

Like all who spoke in the debate, the hon. Lady raised the question of access to benefits. In our work as constituency Members, we all have to deal with terminally ill patients who know that benefits are unlikely to arrive in time to provide any measure of comfort to their families. However, we are realistic and know that if a member of the family is terminally ill, it will have an effect on the family's finances. There is no question about it. However, the state's job is to ensure that the maximum amount of help is delivered promptly in such circumstances. I shall refer the hon. Lady's comments to my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions. I shall ensure that she receives a proper response to the points that she raised, particularly about how disability living allowance can be paid conveniently in order to allow for the needs of people with terminal illnesses.

Mr. Baron: Will the Minister specifically consider the Macmillan suggestion that cancer patients should be made aware of benefits, perhaps as early as on diagnosis, in order that they receive the benefits to which they are entitled?

Mr. Hutton: Yes, they should be told; that issue does not come between us. The question is who is best placed to provide that advice. I suspect that health care professionals are probably not well placed to provide proper benefits advice. An interesting trend in many primary care locations is that work is being done to ensure that patients have access to proper welfare benefits advice. I am aware of GPs who work with benefits advice agencies and sometimes with the local authority to provide drop-in clinics at GPs' surgeries so that patients can receive more convenient advice. That is entirely sensible. We have tried to encourage that development, and will continue to do so.

The hon. Gentleman is absolutely right that people should have access to the right advice on which to base the decisions that they need to take to get their lives in order. That is particularly true of benefits advice, which is especially important at a moment of undoubted crisis when someone is told that they have cancer and it could be terminal. There is obviously some common ground between the hon. Gentleman and me on that point, at least.

[Mr. Hutton]

Many statistics have been used in the debate, and I do not take issue with any of them. It is salutary to think that breast cancer is the most common form of cancer in women in Britain today. More than 34,000 new cases are diagnosed each year in our country, and as the hon. Lady rightly said, the incidence of breast cancer is also rising. Between 1996 and 2001, for example, it rose by more than 10 per cent. Those statistics are one reason why preventing cancer and improving services for those who develop the disease should rightly be a top priority for the NHS.

We have made significant progress in reducing deaths from breast cancer. As the hon. Gentleman said, despite the increase in the incidence of breast cancer, mortality in England dropped by more than 10 per cent. between 1997 and 2002. In the past decade, England has seen the greatest decrease in the number of deaths from breast cancer than anywhere else in the world.

Survival rates are improving. A women diagnosed with breast cancer between 1986 and 1990 would have had only a 67 per cent. chance of being alive after five years. A woman diagnosed with the same disease between 1996 and 1999 now has an 80 per cent. chance of being alive five years later. I argue very strongly that the progress that we have been making has been made possible at least partly by the increased investment in the NHS. That has allowed the NHS to employ an extra 1,182 cancer consultants, as well as an additional 2,800 consultants who spend a significant amount of their time caring for cancer patients.

The hon. Gentleman referred to radiography. It is certainly not my argument today that we have enough consultants or radiographers. I am unsure that we will ever be in that position. I do, however, argue that we have significantly more consultants and radiographers than we have ever had. The number of therapeutic radiographers has increased by almost 20 per cent. since we took office, and we also have doubled the number of therapeutic radiography training places.

Mr. Baron: I thank the Minister for his generosity. In a totally non-party political way, may I ask him to explain why, if there is such an increase in numbers, radiotherapy waiting times have deteriorated so badly? There is no dispute about that when one sees the figures.

Mr. Hutton: I probably would want to reflect on what the hon. Gentleman has said, as he has said several times that the figures for radiotherapy waiting times are deteriorating. I want to see the evidence for that, so perhaps he can provide it.

We intend to measure, in a way previous Governments have not, the entire waiting time for patients at various stages on the various care pathways along which they need to go. For the first time, that will include waiting for diagnosis, treatment and therapy.

More diagnostic radiographers and therapeutic radiographers are working in the NHS than ever before. I have not tried to claim today for a second that that is anywhere near enough, but it is worth pointing out that vacancy rates are starting to move in the right direction for radiographers from a peak of more than 10 per cent. last year to 8.8 per cent. this year. I accept that that is not enough, but we are making significant headway.

We are therefore increasing the fiscal capacity of the NHS as well as the human resources that are available to it. Significant investment has been made in new MRI scanners, CT scanners, linear accelerators and breast cancer screening equipment, which have all become available to the NHS since April 2000. That is part of a £520 million capital investment programme. Those investments have helped us to get to the point at which 99 per cent. of women with suspected breast cancer are seen by a specialist within two weeks of being urgently referred by their GP. More than 97 per cent. of women receive treatment within two months of GP referral and 97 per cent. receive it within one month of diagnosis. By 2008, patients will experience a maximum one-month wait from urgent referral to treatment for all cancers, including breast cancer. I hope that hon. Members will welcome those objectives.

The National Institute for Clinical Excellence has also been playing its part in ensuring that the latest drug treatments are made available more quickly to NHS patients. NICE has to date approved for use 15 new cancer drugs, five of which are for use against breast cancer. That is one of the ways we are trying to tackle the problem of variation in access to such treatments.

Mr. Baron: Will the Minister give way?

Mr. Hutton: No, I really do not think that I will any more, although I should like to make one final party political point, because we all like doing it on occasion.

Mrs. Calton: I really am grateful to the Minister for giving way. I have listened carefully to what he has said. He has spoken a great deal about work that is being done on improving treatments, and those of us who have been personally involved are grateful for that. However, the debate is about the prevention of breast cancer. The point that the hon. Member for Broxbourne (Dame Marion Roe) made, and which I reinforced, was that only 2 per cent. of research is currently on prevention. What are the Government planning to do to change the balance of research, so that we look at prevention rather than simply treatment?

Mr. Hutton: I am grateful to the hon. Lady, who anticipates what I want to say later about prevention. She is quite right; I have been focusing on treatment. Perhaps I should have started with prevention, but no speech of mine is ever perfect, so we are where we are.

On the subject of NICE, I feel rather depressed now, because I was about to make my party political point, but I think that I shall move on, except to say in passing that the hon. Member for Billericay and his lot voted against the creation of NICE in the first place.

There is a great deal that we can feel represents good progress, but I do not want to give anyone the sense that we are complacent or make anyone feel that we can rest on our laurels. That would not be right. Many hon. Members still have concerns about breast cancer services, many of which have been raised this morning.

The national cancer director, Mike Richards, published a report earlier this year that showed that not all eligible breast cancer patients had access to Herceptin, for example. The differences in take-up around the country are simply not acceptable. The

Department is taking action to improve information on prescribing and ensure that clinicians all over the country are made aware of the benefits of drugs that have been positively appraised by NICE. We are also working with strategic health authorities where particular problems have been identified.

We are also trying to make better use of staff through new skill-mix programmes, allowing qualified professional staff to focus on the tasks that need their input, by training others to perform the more routine functions. A practical example of that is the introduction of new roles in radiography, which allows radiographers to extend their roles into some of the tasks previously undertaken by oncologists and radiologists, such as reporting on X-rays. In turn, assistant practitioners are being trained to take on roles traditionally performed by radiographers, and can now perform plain film radiography and diagnostic imaging examinations.

All of us will be concerned about the rise in the incidence of breast cancer. I do not think that there is a single explanation for that, and I am sure that other hon. Members share that belief. However, we know that exposure to increased amounts of oestrogen can increase the risk of breast cancer. The hon. Member for Broxbourne referred to that.

We also know that some synthetic chemicals, including some organochlorine insecticides, may have a very weak ability to act as oestrogens in the body. That has led some people to make a connection between organochlorine insecticides and breast cancer. However, there is no evidence at all that such chemicals cause breast cancer. An independent committee that recently published a review on the issue concluded that individuals exposed through air, water or food to environmental levels of DDT, betalindane and lindane insecticides were not at risk of developing breast cancer due to exposure to those chemicals. The committee could not reach a definitive conclusion about dieldrin because of a lack of epidemiology.

It is not permitted to add chemicals that are known to cause cancer by interacting with DNA or chromosomes to food or to use them in food production. We are aware that some environmental contaminants may be present at low levels in food and that others may be formed during cooking, but they have not been linked to breast cancer.

We are firmly of the belief that in the long term the best and most efficient way of beating cancer is prevention, both for individuals and in terms of NHS resources. We know that diet plays a role in about a quarter of cancer deaths in this country, and are taking action to tackle that problem. We are encouraging people to eat more fruit and vegetables through programmes such as the five-a-day initiative, to which the hon. Gentleman referred—I am glad that he supports them—to increase access to fruit and vegetables. We are also testing different ways of increasing physical activity.

The hon. Gentleman invited me to say a few words about the White Paper, as did the hon. Members for Broxbourne and for Cheadle. It was a nice try; obviously, I cannot say anything today about its content, but it will become apparent quite soon. However, I can say that it will set out how we can do more on diet and nutrition, physical activity and obesity, all of which can help to reduce cancers, including breast cancer. It will also have more to say about how we can tackle behaviour that increases the risk of developing cancer.

Of course, even with the best prevention services in the world we would not be able to prevent every case of breast cancer. Early identification and intervention must remain central to our plans, beginning with the overriding importance of teaching women to be breast aware, as 90 per cent. of breast cancer is found by women themselves. We have some of the best national screening programmes in the world. The national computerised call and recall system for breast screening was introduced by the previous Conservative Government in 1988, and was the first such programme in the EU. They made the right decision, and as a result thousands of women are alive today who might otherwise have died. Our predecessors deserve to be congratulated on that.

For our part, we constantly encourage women to attend the NHS breast-screening programme, through which nearly 10,000 cancers were detected in 2002–03—a 13 per cent. increase on the previous year. We have extended the coverage of the screening programme to those aged 65 to 70. Over 250,000 extra women in that age group have been invited to attend since the extension began in April 2001. That number will rise to 400,000 a year when screening is fully established by the end of this year.

However, we can do more. That is why we are working with GPs to help them to identify those patients most likely to have cancer, so that they can receive fast, efficient and targeted specialist investigation. Guidelines are currently being reviewed by NICE, and are due to be published in March next year.

The hon. Members for Broxbourne and for Cheadle asked about research. I accept that we must always look at what more we can do to promote research into the causes, treatment and prevention of breast cancer. The Department provides about £80 million a year for cancer research. Over the past three years we have dramatically increased our ability to do clinical trials of the latest cancer drugs and treatments. The percentage of cancer patients in trials in the UK is twice that in the United States. Breast cancer trials also constitute the highest proportion of trials within the National Cancer Research Network.

To mention just two such trials, Cancer Research UK is trialling a new chemotherapy regime to test whether it improves survival for women who have had surgery for early-stage breast cancer, and NCRN is providing NHS infrastructure support for a major Cancer Research breast cancer prevention trial called IBIS II. I do not know whether the hon. Member for Broxbourne is aware of that, but I will send her details of it. That trial is an international multi-centre study of Anastrozole—I am sure that someone can help me with the pronunciation: I had it last night, but it has gone today—versus a placebo in post-menopausal women who have an increased risk of breast cancer.

As has rightly been acknowledged, the voluntary sector plays a huge and important role in this area. We are committed to working in partnership with bodies in that sector to improve and deliver cancer services. For example, we are working with Macmillan Cancer Relief

[Mr. Hutton]

to develop local cancer user-involvement work, and with the Royal College of Surgeons in its work to develop training for sentinel node biopsy training. The Department funds 19 cancer charities through its section 64 grants scheme.

Breast cancer is a major issue for our country. The action that the Government have taken confirms the priority that we attach to it, and we are seeing progress as a result. Such progress has been made possible first and foremost by the hard work of NHS staff, and is dependent on our maintaining the right level of investment, and continuing to work with patient groups and the voluntary sector so that we can build a proper national consensus on the best way forward.

Mobile Home Parks

11 am

Mr. David Cameron (Witney) (Con): I am grateful for this opportunity, because although the rights of mobile home or park home residents have been discussed and amended recently, I want to highlight a constituency case that shows some of the major problems. I shall talk about the problems at a mobile home park called Thameside Court, near Northmoor in West Oxfordshire, referring also to Kings Court in Carterton; I shall relate those cases to the general state of the law and put some questions to the Minister about how we can ensure that the people involved have meaningful rights and proper security.

A Mr. Tom Hartley bought Thameside Court, which has 60 residents, on 8 September 2003. After receiving a number of complaints from residents, I organised a meeting with the residents at Northmoor village hall this September. The hall was packed. Former residents as well as current ones and their families attended. Many of the people living in Thameside Court have limited means and are worried by the cost of getting proper legal advice, and they are worried about who will look out for their interests. The residents' association is doing a great job, but it is newly constituted and feels, quite understandably, that is up against a highly experienced park owner. It was incredibly moving to hear people's powerful testimony about the way they have been treated and their determination to ensure that others do not suffer in the same way. Why are those people so concerned? There are two issues. The first is about the way in which park rules can be changed. The second is about the rights owners have when selling their homes.

In October 2003, shortly after buying the site, the owner wrote to the residents suggesting a change in the park rules. Some 90 per cent. of residents objected to the new rules and a meeting was requested with the owner. Under his membership of the British Holiday and Home Parks Association he should grant such a meeting, but up to now he has refused to do so, even though a residents' association has now been formed and the request has been made several times, including through me. I am delighted to say that, following letters from me to the BHHPA and other action—possibly including the announcement of this debate—a meeting has now been granted. None the less, the saga of the rules is interesting.

Initially, the site owner refused to respond to a number of letters sent by the residents' association about the issue. When he did, it became very clear that he was not willing to hold a public meeting and would deal only with individual residents. In a letter that the site owner eventually sent to the residents on 7 June 2004, referring to the residents' association he said:

> "It is a fact that I am not obliged to recognise any association."

When I wrote to him, the site owner responded stating his belief that

> "It is only a few residents who have nothing better to do with their time who are trying to cause a problem."

It should be remembered that 90 per cent. objected to the new rules. He ended his letter:

> "I would advise you to spend more of your precious time dealing with more important issues."

As I have said, a meeting will now, I hope, take place.

In her letter to me, Ros Pritchard, director general of the BHHPA, referred to Mr Hartley's "proposed rule changes". I am glad that the word "proposed" was used, because in a letter to the residents on 2 December 2004, the site owner said:

> "Please be advised that the Park Rules which are displayed on the notice board are now fully effective."

I hope that this reflects a genuine change of approach and that a more reasonable dialogue can now be established.

I said that the saga was interesting. It throws up two questions for the Minister. First, does he think that we need proper rights of recognition for residents' associations? Secondly, should the BHHPA guidelines about rule changes and consultation be written into the law? Let me be clear: some of the proposed rules are very significant. One example is: "Strictly no children." A second is:

> "No one to reside in the park under the age of 50."

Vitally, one rule change reads:

> "The tenant/owner of mobile shall not be allowed any kind of advertisement, promotion or for sale sign notice to be attached or exhibited on the outside or any part of the premises."

The situation at Kings Court in Carterton is a little different. The owner there wanted to develop the land to provide housing and applied for planning permission, but there were and are issues about rule changes and rent charges. Residents have worked together and presented quite a united front, which has clearly had an impact.

To return to Thameside Court, I said that the second concern expressed at the public meeting at Northmoor was about the right of owners to sell their homes. The rule changes are, I believe, directly linked to that issue. If we think about the proposed changes—no kids, no one under the age of 50, no one allowed to put up for sale signs—we can see the connection. Some residents felt that they were under pressure to leave because of the rule changes, but even for those people, it was becoming more difficult to sell homes, because they could not put up for sale signs and the like.

Let me read the testimony of one person who felt enormous pressure to sell their home. The quote is quite long, but I hope that hon. Members will indulge me. That person said:

> "My house was up for sale at the time and I had moved into other accommodation in Witney. Hartley could contact me through my park home estate agents, Seekers, but chose not to. Instead, he called my neighbour.
>
> I did call him and he told he that I had no choice but to sell to him at his price as he had a file on me and that as I was not living in my park home any more, I was breaking the terms of the agreement. He threatened to remove my home from the park if I did not comply immediately. At this time he also informed me that he was in possession of my new address. As my house was officially up for sale, he actually had no grounds to do this and I was acting within my rights. Hartley demanded that I meet him later that day at the park to formalise the sale for £25,000. My house was up for sale for £36,000.
>
> When I met him at the park, he inspected my home and declared that it was older than the age stated on my park home agreement by eleven years and that he was not going to tolerate such an old house on the park. He said that he would probably have it taken off anyway as it would take a lot to do up. He said he would pay me £20,000 and no more. I had no choice but to accept in the end as I felt that my family could be at risk and I no longer had the funds to use a solicitor to fight him even though I was in the right. Hartley spent around £5,000 to £7,000 doing up my home and it is now for sale for £89,500."

One resident alleged that the site owner refused to accept the display of notices inside or outside a mobile home advertising it for sale. After it was pointed out to the owner that he was required, as a member of the BHHPA, to permit one for sale notice to be displayed in the window of a home for sale, provided that it does not exceed A4 size, he amended the rules.

There have been a number of accusations of improper behaviour, and I know that the Government recognise the problem of harassment. A press release from the Office of the Deputy Prime Minister on 24 February states:

> "According to residents' associations, one of the most common complaints is the harassment of park owners when they want to sell their home. This often results in properties being sold at low prices to the site owner."

I congratulate the Government on recognising the problem.

When another couple informed the site owner that they intended to sell their home because it was no longer their main residence, he said—this will become familiar—that he could not allow them to do that as the unit was "too old and worthless". He did not want old units on the park and intended to remove their home and burn it. That elderly couple told the residents' association that they were then subjected to threats. The site owner warned them that if they discussed their situation with anyone else, he would leave them with no money at all. In the end, he gave them a cheque for about £5,000 and the unit was carefully dismantled and removed on transporters. The same methods were used with another elderly couple, who had hoped to sell their unit for £70,000. In the end, they sold it to the site owner for £20,000. It is being resold for £90,000. I accept that work has been carried out on those units, but the fact is that people have not been given a fair deal.

What is happening seems fairly straightforward. Owners recognise that the value of these sites is now great, particularly in areas of high housing demand such as West Oxfordshire, and particularly if new units can be erected. On occasion, improper pressure is put on people to sell at a low price or to leave because of other rule changes. The case histories that I heard at the public meeting, some of which I have shared today, are pretty clear. There are cases in which what has happened can be done within the law because, for example, the owner in question has another home, but due process should be followed, and judging by what I have seen and heard, that has not happened in every case.

To give credit where credit is due, the Government have taken action. The press release from the Office of the Deputy Prime Minister on 24 February explained a number of amendments, including the following provisions:

> "To remove 'age' of a home as a criterion for ending an agreement, and to give discretion to courts to adjourn termination proceedings on the grounds of the condition of a park home to allow for repairs to be carried out".

However, some important questions remain for the Minister to answer.

First, what more can be done to stop the abuse of the rules and the exercise of market power? Secondly, what additional role could the local authorities, or even

[Mr. David Cameron]

trading standards departments, play in ensuring that owners of mobile units get a fair deal? The Mobile Homes Act 1983 potentially provides people with extensive rights and the Government's amendments to the Housing Bill will extend that provision. However, those rights are mainly enforceable through the civil courts, which means that people must pursue the action themselves, usually with the assistance of a solicitor. In the case in question, West Oxfordshire district council has been extremely supportive, as has the citizens advice bureau, but the council finds it difficult to intervene directly on a resident's behalf because it can deal only with issues relevant to the site licence conditions, or accusations of harassment if they are properly made and put to the council. My constituents often have neither the funds nor the inclination to drag the matter through the courts, especially because of their shortage of funds, and because they fear the consequences of taking that sort of action.

I welcome the recent Government amendments to the Housing Bill, which sought to address the serious concern about park home owners' rights. However, it is essential that the changes are effective in reality, on the ground, when residents either feel too intimidated to take their case to court, or simply prefer the option to leave, selling their property to the site owner at a very low price. There are many good parks that operate fairly, but I suspect that the type of harassment that I have described is common. One of the main reasons why mobile home residents do not assert their rights under the Mobile Homes Act is that they are often vulnerable and elderly, and many lack the means to take their case to court.

I have spoken about residents' rights, but park owners have rights too. I respect the fact that they are running a business, not a charity or a public service, and I understand that they must be able to take steps to ensure the quality of their parks, to protect their investment and to run an efficient and effective operation. Because up to now Mr. Hartley has not had a meeting with residents, I accept that I have not fully heard his side of the story, although I have called him on the telephone and corresponded with him, as the Minister knows. I look forward to hearing what the Minister has to say. I have become involved only because the residents were distraught and felt that they had nowhere else to go. The stories they told me, especially about trying to sell their homes, are quite chilling. Some people have lost their life savings; they are bitter about that and I am angry on their behalf.

My conclusions are as follows: first, we need a system whereby local authorities and citizens advice bureaux can offer more support. Local councils may need to be given specific powers in that respect and I hope that the Minister will keep an open mind on the issue. Secondly, information for mobile home residents must be clear, concise and specific, telling them about their rights and how to exercise them. It should tell them what to do if they feel they are being mistreated or worse, or ripped off. It should also tell them when not to do something, but to consult the residents' association and seek the advice of a solicitor if they are concerned about what they are being asked to do.

Thirdly, the Government need to keep under review whether more needs to be done about how park rules can be changed and whether a clearer role could be set out for residents' associations. Fourthly, the Government need to examine carefully the rights of owners to sell their mobile homes in a reasonable market and at a fair price. Fifthly, and lastly, residents need to work together: on their own they are likely to be picked off and disadvantaged if faced by an unscrupulous owner, whereas together they can stand up for each other, seek the backing of the law and ensure that their rights are upheld.

At the meeting in Northmoor, there was strong agreement on the following points. First, no one should agree to action set out by the owner without first consulting the residents' association. Secondly, the request for a meeting between the residents' association and the owner should be made again. Thirdly, the residents' association needed to take legal advice about the position with regard to the proposed rule changes and what has happened about the sale of certain homes. I hope that the Minister agrees that that is the right advice. Hon. Members are often put in a difficult position in such situations, because they come between owner and residents. However, I hope that that was reasonable advice to give to park home residents, to ensure that their rights were protected.

I know that the Minister has been examining the issue for some time, and that he is therefore almost certainly more expert than I. However, I hope that I have crystallised some of the issues by raising a constituency case that throws light on the matter, and put forward some thoughts for future consideration. I look forward to hearing what the Minister has to say.

11.15 am

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State, Office of the Deputy Prime Minister (Phil Hope): I congratulate the hon. Member for Witney (Mr. Cameron) on securing the debate and on his speech. I welcome the opportunity to debate mobile home parks—in fact, similar matters were raised in the House only a fortnight ago, at ODPM oral questions.

I am extremely sorry to hear of the problems that the hon. Gentleman has so graphically described—a sorry saga indeed. I hope that, as a result of his intervention, some progress is now being made. The problems that he describes are unacceptable and a response is needed, although I hope that he understands that I cannot speak about individual cases. I shall use this opportunity to outline how current provisions and ongoing reforms in respect of park homes will help not only those residents but others throughout the country who may be experiencing similar difficulties. Certainly, the issue has not had the prominence that it deserves, given the nature of the exploitation by unscrupulous site owners in the past.

I pay tribute to others who have been considering the issue for some time. My noble Friend Lord Graham of Edmonton and my hon. Friend the Member for Lancaster and Wyre (Mr. Dawson) have campaigned on those matters. I also refer the hon. Gentleman to the all-party group on park home owners, which has worked hard on the issue for a number of years.

The Government set up the park homes working party in 1998 in response to the views of many residents that some park owners were behaving in the way described by the hon. Gentleman—pressurising and harassing residents. The working party's aim was to consider the operation of existing controls on residential park homes and to make recommendations on what changes, if any, would constitute a fair and workable solution that struck the right balance between the needs and interests of park owners and home owners. The working party's report on the options it considered was published in July 2000. It made 30 recommendations covering a wide range of issues, including changes to the rules on the sale of homes, the provision of written statements, the ending of agreements, harassment, site licensing and the rates of commission and pitch fee available. The Government accepted 25 of the 30 recommendations and, as the hon. Gentleman said, a number of those have been included in the Housing Bill. Those provisions will strengthen the rights of residents of mobile home parks and, at the same time, ensure that the industry's regulatory framework helps to meet the growing need for quality, affordable housing. The hon. Gentleman is right to say that, when such parks are well run, they provide a good opportunity for people to find affordable places to live.

Turning to the specific points that the hon. Gentleman made, he mentioned the problems of harassment that some residents have experienced. Harassment is one of the most disturbing of the many issues that the hon. Gentleman raised today. Let me make it clear that harassment of any kind has no place on park home sites, or anywhere else. There should be strict enforcement by local authorities, which have clear powers to deal with it. Although, as the hon. Gentleman said, residents can be frightened in such situations, the local authority needs statements from residents who experience such difficulties. Residents must come forward and make statements so that a local authority can bring a prosecution.

Local authorities, in addition to their power to prosecute, can be helpful in offering informal advice and guidance to residents. It appears that the hon. Gentleman, as their Member of Parliament, has also been offering such guidance, which is very helpful to residents. We have issued best practice guidance to local authorities on this subject, following the publication of a report entitled "Harassment and unlawful eviction of private rented sector tenants and park home residents"; there is thus guidance for local authorities.

We have increased the protection for occupiers of park homes against harassment and illegal eviction. The Housing Bill amends the Caravan Sites Act 1968 to mirror the protection under the Protection From Eviction Act 1977, which governs the protection for occupiers with other types of tenure, including tenants of conventional housing, against unlawful eviction and harassment. Importantly, the wording, which refers to a site owner doing

"acts calculated to interfere with the peace or comfort"

of the occupier that cause him to abandon his home has been amended to refer to "acts likely to interfere" with the occupier's peace or comfort, which is obviously an easier test to satisfy in the courts. In addition, a new offence has been introduced, which does not require intent to be shown with respect to the harassment. It will be sufficient if the site owner or agent knows, or has reasonable cause to believe, that his conduct is likely to result in an occupier abandoning occupation. That therefore increases the protection available to occupiers and the chance of successful prosecutions.

The Bill also creates a power whereby the Secretary of State can add additional terms to be implied into the agreement between the site owner and occupier governing the occupation of the site, and to repeal and vary those in the Mobile Homes Act 1983. Because existing agreements are of infinite duration, it is necessary for the Secretary of State to be able to amend the statutory implied terms for existing agreements, where these are clearly inadequate. Provision has therefore been made for the first exercise of the power to have retrospective effect—that is a very powerful measure. Future exercises of the power will be non-retrospective. That was discussed during the consultation on "Park Home Statutory Instruments: Consultation on Implied Terms and Written Statement", which we closed on 22 October. We propose to insert a right of quiet enjoyment of the pitch into all contracts. We are aware that many site owners enter the pitch with a view to harassing residents, so we propose to require site owners to give 24 hours' written notice before they are allowed entry to the pitch.

I shall now speak to some of the other issues that the hon. Gentleman raised, including allegations of illegal eviction. The current written statement that residents receive makes it clear that the specific grounds on which a contract can be terminated by the site owner include a court's being satisfied that a term of the agreement has been breached, that notice to remedy the breach has not been complied with in a reasonable time, and that termination is reasonable. Another ground is that the site owner has applied to a court to terminate an agreement because an occupier is not using the home as their only or main residence. Also, at present, a site owner can apply to a court to terminate an agreement at the end of the current five-year period on the basis that the age and condition of a home is having a detrimental effect on the amenity of the site, or that it is likely to have a detrimental effect before the end of the next five-year period.

In the Housing Bill we have provided that the age of a home should be removed as a relevant criterion for ending an agreement. The amendment will remove the reference to age from the Mobile Homes Act, as we consider that only the condition of the home, not its age, should determine whether it is having a detrimental effect on the amenity of the site. The amendment will also enable courts to consider the condition of the unit and to allow time for appropriate repairs if reasonably practicable, and if the occupier indicates that he intends to carry out those repairs. That would deal with some of the instances that the hon. Gentleman mentioned.

We are examining a number of issues in the implied terms consultation paper on protection from eviction. We aim to remove mention of the relevant five-year period so that the current condition is the only reason for which a site owner can apply to have a home removed. We also propose that a court can evict someone on the basis that their home is no longer their only or main residence only if a court considers it reasonable to do so. That will protect people who have prolonged absences from their home, such as lengthy hospital stays, or to care for a sick relative elsewhere in the country, from an abuse of those circumstances.

[Phil Hope]

The Housing Bill will also improve the transparency of transactions and ensure that the resident has more information on the transaction at the time of purchase. At present, written statements setting out the terms of the agreement between site owner and occupier governing occupation of the site by the occupier may be given up to three months after the agreement has commenced. It is quite amazing that that is the current position. I am pleased to say that the Bill requires a written statement of terms to be given to a prospective occupier 28 days before any agreement for the sale of the mobile home is made; or, if there is no such agreement, not later than 28 days before the occupation agreement is entered into. To clarify, the parties will be able to agree a shorter period than 28 days between themselves, but the prospective occupier must indicate their consent in writing to the specified shorter time scale. That provision is designed to ensure that potential park home occupiers are made aware of the terms under which they will occupy the site before—not three months after—coming on to the site.

The hon. Gentleman gave some examples of restrictions on sales. I cannot talk about specific cases, but will talk about the issue in general. At present, a simple failure to give timely approval to a purchaser, as opposed to the active withdrawing of approval, is a method used by some site owners who wish to force occupiers of older-style homes into selling back to them. If the delays are too long, potential purchasers lose interest and it becomes difficult in practice to sell the home and assign the agreement to anyone. In that way, sale to the site owner becomes the only practicable option. The site owner can then replace the old home with a new model, or do it up, to sell on at considerable profit. The Housing Bill introduces a contractual duty for the site owner to give approval to a prospective purchaser within a time limit of 28 days unless it is reasonable not to do so. If the site owner does not issue a decision within 28 days, or withholds approval unreasonably, the occupier can apply to the court and seek damages for breach of contract. The occupier can also seek an order from the court declaring that the prospective purchaser is approved.

The consultation paper for secondary legislation proposed further changes to aid the transparency of the transaction. The Bill will help to deter site owners from behaving in an unreasonable manner, by making them explain the reasons for withholding consent. However, the process could be made more transparent by the resident already knowing possible reasons for consent being withheld. The consultation paper asks site owners to specify criteria, which, although not exhaustive, would provide a useful checklist of standard criteria applicable in all cases for residents. We propose that it be made available to residents with the written statement.

The hon. Gentleman also raised a number of issues about the amendment of the park rules. That subject is well covered by the Unfair Terms in Consumer Contracts Regulations 1999, which provide that a term may be unfair if it has the object or effect of enabling the seller or supplier to alter the terms of the contract without a valid reason specified in the contract. Where park rules or other obligations are incorporated into the contract made between a park owner and a park resident, the Office of Fair Trading is likely to object to any term that allows the park owner to make substantial alterations that change the balance of advantage under the contract. The OFT takes the view that any such change should be made only with the genuine agreement of the park residents. The OFT is also likely to object to a term that enables the park owner, without a valid reason, to alter important characteristics of the way in which the service will be provided. Unfair contract terms are unlawful and the OFT will look into such matters and take action if necessary. Park residents are legally entitled to receive the service that they agreed to purchase, not one that is merely analogous or similar.

We are shortly to consult on some more recommendations from the park homes working party that deal with site licensing and the recognition of residents' associations. In January next year, we will consider the recognition of residents' associations in park homes; that will an important area for the hon. Gentleman to look at when we publish our consultations in a few months time. We will also consider the reform of the payment regime—the 10 per cent. commission—early next year. Those recommendations will help us to take forward the measures that we have already put in place.

As the hon. Gentleman said, we should not allow the obvious and well-known problems, which are so distressing for individuals, to affect the reputation of all operators, because we know that there are good operators who run parks effectively and we do not want to do them an injustice. Park home living is attractive to many people: it offers a freedom that other forms of occupancy do not, and it provides a livelihood for many responsible site owners who care for their sites and for the residents of the homes on such sites. We have no will to curtail park home provision, and indeed we are happy to encourage more.

I hope that I have answered most of the questions raised by the hon. Gentleman. We are making significant progress and I congratulate him on bringing this debate to the Chamber. It is an important one, and I hope that the measures that we are introducing will be an important first step. We shall press ahead with secondary legislation at the earliest opportunity.

11.30 am

Sitting suspended until Two o'clock.

Seafarers' Employment

2 pm

Mr. Deputy Speaker (Sir Nicholas Winterton): Before I call the hon. Member for Hayes and Harlington (John McDonnell), let me say that he has been courteous enough to tell me that he has not been particularly well over the past couple of days. He has been suffering from flu and various associated things, and I am sure that everyone will understand if he needs to take a drink of water during his speech.

John McDonnell (Hayes and Harlington) (Lab): Thank you, Mr. Deputy Speaker. I have isolated myself in the corner to avoid passing any contagion to you or other Members.

I am grateful for the opportunity to raise this important issue on behalf of the large group of Members who have expressed concern about the tonnage tax and seafarers' employment. I should mention that my right hon. Friend the Member for Southampton, Itchen (Mr. Denham) is currently chairing a Select Committee, so he cannot be with us. However, he wants me to mention his support for the debate and for our proposals on reforming the tonnage tax. I should also declare an interest as the chairman of the RMT—National Union of Rail, Maritime and Transport Workers—parliamentary group.

It is important that we are debating this issue today, because the various Government reviews of the tonnage tax have reached a key stage. We hope that the Under-Secretary of State for Transport, my hon. Friend the Member for Plymouth, Devonport (Mr. Jamieson) will listen, as he always does, before taking away with him some of our messages about overall reform.

The United Kingdom is an island nation and is heavily dependent on ships for its trade, but the number of seafarers has declined dramatically in the past few years. The number of UK seafarer ratings has fallen from 30,000 in 1980 to fewer than 10,000 today. Furthermore, hon. Members on both sides of the House were recently shocked to hear the latest announcement by P&O, which intends to dismiss 1,200 UK seafarers as part of a wide-ranging review of its business. That will involve closing several key ferry routes.

Mr. Gwyn Prosser (Dover) (Lab): Is my hon. Friend aware that the present proposal for 1,200 redundancies in Dover and Portsmouth comes on top of 800 redundancies at P&O less than 12 months ago?

John McDonnell: I am aware of the overall figures and I am sure that my hon. Friend will want to comment later on the impact of those redundancies on his and other Members' constituencies. What all of us find shocking, however, including the Leader of the Opposition, the right hon. and learned Member for Folkestone and Hythe (Mr. Howard), who has made representations on this matter, is the nature of the announced job losses. Rationalisation might be going on in the company, but many of us felt that at least there was an agreed process for taking it forward and that the company could be maintained in profit. We may return to that point.

In December 1998, in response to the fall in the number of seafarers, the Government published a policy document entitled "British Shipping: Charting a new course", which outlined a series of policy measures to address the decline in UK shipping. One of the key objectives that the Government set themselves was to increase the training and employment of UK seafarers. The centrepiece of their measures was the UK tonnage tax, which was eventually broadly welcomed by all parties, all sections of the industry and all organisations representing seafarers. So, we had an agreed way forward.

Currently, the Inland Revenue and the Department for Transport are conducting a review of the tonnage tax. One of the matters being examined is whether there should be a firm link between the tax concession and the training and employment of UK seafarers.

The tonnage tax is a special form of taxation that has been introduced for the UK shipping industry. Several other countries have also introduced tax concessions for their shipping industry in recognition of the competitive nature of the maritime sector. Indeed, the British tonnage tax evolved as a result of the evidence provided to the Government about what other European countries were doing to support their industry. Again, employers and employee representatives' organisations alike provided that information and lobbied on the basis of it.

The tonnage tax is a significant concession to the industry and is worth about £35 million a year. Initially, the Chamber of Shipping said that the cost would be between £10 million and £15 million a year. The RMT believed that it would be considerably more, as did the Government, who believed that it might cost between £45 million and £50 million. In fact, it has cost £35 million.

Shipping companies that enter the tonnage tax regime pay a notional tax levy according to the size of the company fleet, as opposed to the usual form of taxation, which is based on company profits. In addition to the lower tax burden, companies have far greater financial certainty, as they can plan in advance for the amount of tax that they will be required to pay at the end of the financial year.

When the tonnage tax was introduced, everyone believed that there was a real prospect of a win-win situation in which the industry would be made more competitive and tax efficient and that employment would increase. For many years, the UK shipping industry was in decline. That is not a new phenomenon: indeed, the Government deserve credit for taking time to consult industry representatives and formulating proposals to tackle the crisis in the industry.

As I said, the proposed policy measures were outlined in the policy document "Charting a new course", which pointed out that many ships deserted the UK flag throughout the 1980s and 90s and that thousands of UK seafarer jobs were lost. Estimates for 1980 put the number of UK seafarer ratings at 30,000. That figure has now fallen to less than 10,000. The Government and independent organisations have been trying to produce best estimates of how low that number could go. Many fear that a fall on the scale of that of the past two decades could mean that by the end of the next decade we would be left with no UK seafarers at all on British

[John McDonnell]

ships and elsewhere in the industry. That is a dismal prospect for a country, much of whose wealth was founded on the maritime trade.

Mr. Ivan Henderson (Harwich) (Lab): My constituency has a proud maritime history that dates back centuries. May I give my hon. Friend an example of the decline of our ship and seafaring industry since 1984? About 1,800 seafarers used to sail from the port of Harwich, but the number has now fallen to about 60. Is not that a sign that we must do something to retain what we have left and improve those numbers?

John McDonnell: Figures such as those shocked the Government into action and should motivate us to recognise that there is cross-party concern that the matter should be addressed. Cross-party work must follow the decision to retain a maritime industry. We must recognise that we are an island and thus do not want to become dependent on an industry that is controlled from other countries or other states. We must plan for the maintenance and development of a seafaring sector in this country.

Such figures have brought about today's debate. We can no longer stand by and watch the whole industry decline, observing its effect on particular constituencies and communities. Our experience relates very much to what is happening in the coal mining industry and the destruction of whole coal mining communities.

"Charting a new course" outlined a series of measures, but it is quite clear that the tonnage tax measure was very much the centrepiece of the programme to reverse the dramatic decline in numbers. There is little doubt that the tax has contributed to the reversal of fortunes on the UK register, and the maritime unions of course welcome the increase in the number of ships on the register. However, those ships must also provide employment opportunities for UK seafarers. We have a paradox: there is an increasing number of ships on the UK register, but no increase in employment overall. Unfortunately, the majority of the new companies on the register fail to employ UK seafarers.

Before I move on to the substantive issue for debate, I want to mention that the increase in the number of ships on the register is by no means as great as we expected. Between January 2000 and June 2004, the increase in the number of UK direct-owned and registered ships of 500 gross tonnes or more was just 57—from 241 to 298—which is hardly a dramatic return for the amount of money that is being invested in the tonnage tax.

Unfortunately, it is not a condition of entry to the scheme that shipowners register their ships under the UK flag, and current figures indicate that only 35 per cent. of UK-owned tonnage flies the red ensign. So entry to the tonnage tax scheme does not involve a requirement to register, although we accept that there is some incentive for it.

When the scheme was introduced, the seafarer unions pressed for a firm training and employment link for UK seafarers. The Government formulated a minimum training obligation, which required shipping companies to train one cadet for every 15 deck and engine officer posts in companies' effective officer complement. In certain circumstances shipping companies can avoid that requirement by making pilot payments in lieu of training to the Maritime Training Trust. That provision was intended for use only in exceptional circumstances, but unfortunately in practice some shipping companies have entered the scheme without training a single UK seafarer. That is contrary to the overall spirit of the charter for change and the introduction of the tonnage tax.

There is no compulsory commitment for seafarer ratings with respect to training or employment. The ratings' union, RMT, has pressed for a firm guarantee from the owners for a training and employment commitment, but that was not forthcoming. Instead, the minimum training obligation for ratings merely states that companies must review the feasibility of employing or training more UK ratings.

I want to correct a statement that my right hon. Friend the Deputy Prime Minister made on the Floor of the House of Commons. In response to a question from my hon. Friend the Member for Dover (Mr. Prosser) he replied:

> "There has indeed been extra training for them"—

that is ratings—

> "but I was disappointed that my union at the time, the National Union of Rail, Maritime and Transport Workers, did not take up the training arrangements for all British crew members aboard the ships."—[*Official Report*, 9 June 2004; Vol. 422, c. 268.]

I am sure that my right hon. Friend did not want to mislead the House, but that was not an accurate statement, and the union's general secretary, Bob Crow, has written to the Deputy Prime Minister to say that at every opportunity the union has pressed the employers to seek training for ratings, and employment opportunities.

Far from training arrangements not being taken up by the union, the truth is that they have not been forthcoming from the employers' side. That can be discussed elsewhere, and we can go through the details of the offers that have not been made and the opportunities that have been missed; but it is certainly not for want of the union pressing for offers or wanting to take them up.

It is still hoped that the Government's firm policy commitment, which it was estimated would bring about millions of pounds in subsidies to shipowners and a much improved environment for UK shipping, will be enough to generate increased employment for UK seafarer ratings and officers. However, it is quite clear from the practice of recent years that without any firm training obligation companies have simply ignored ratings training and employment—with the sole exception of ratings-to-officers training schemes.

Latest figures from the Department for Transport for decisions to opt into the tonnage tax regime show a total of 758 vessels. Of that total, 408 are on the UK register. The number of companies attracted by the financial benefits of the scheme has increased from an initial 15 in 2001–02 to a current total of 67 companies with ships entered in the scheme for 2003–04. Unfortunately, the number of UK seafarers employed has declined in the last two years. That decline has been witnessed in both officers and ratings, and runs completely counter to the

Government's four key objectives on shipping policy, one of which was increasing employment overall for UK seafarers.

Although the Minister will no doubt tell me that training places for cadets have increased as a result of the tonnage tax, it is also true that the yearly increase is modest. Last year's intake of cadets was only 622 and this year's figure is expected to be no more favourable. Indeed, the requirements for the UK economy that were outlined by the university of Cardiff in 1996 and confirmed in later studies indicate that current cadet recruitment is only about half that required for sufficient seafaring skills to be available on shore. Even with the narrow gain from the tonnage tax, its overall impact on employment has been remarkably limited.

For UK seafaring ratings the picture is without doubt grim. Employment continues to fall, and UK seafarers are being replaced by low-cost foreign nationals. The number of UK ratings in the tonnage tax scheme has also declined. In addition, the number of UK ratings being trained has fallen to an historic low of about 50 per annum. In 1998, the number was about 200 per annum, so current numbers are completely inadequate. The fact that the Chamber of Shipping has failed to honour previous commitments to increase training for ratings and officers by 25 per cent. year on year also graphically illustrates the depth of the crisis that the industry faces.

It is also of profound regret that in the last few years the standards under the UK flag have declined. Increasingly, maritime unions are uncovering instances of appalling low pay on board ships registered in the UK. For example, the International Transport Workers Federation—the ITF—recently uncovered the case of Lapthorn Shipping, which operates UK-registered freight vessels between British ports and Ireland and Rotterdam, and pays Filipino crews less than £2 an hour. The crewing agent pays the seafarers $775 a month, which is not only less than recognised ITF minimums, but less than the minimum standards stipulated by the International Labour Organisation.

The Minister will be aware of the continued discrimination against low-cost foreign national seafarers under the amended Race Relations Act 1976. The low standards of employment that are evident under the UK flag are largely a result of the discrimination against foreign-national seafarers that is specifically allowed for under that legislation, which we have discussed in previous Adjournment debates.

The Minister will recall that when the Government recently reviewed the legislation, discrimination against seafarers on the basis of colour, ethnic origin or race was removed. However, discrimination on the ground of nationality has been allowed to continue. In fact, the removal of the other grounds for discrimination has made no difference whatever, as shipowners can continue to discriminate against foreign-national seafarers recruited abroad, through low pay and worse conditions.

Due to the increasing difficulties experienced by seafarers on UK-flagged vessels, the UK maritime unions have taken the unprecedented step of passing policy that allows for the declaration of a flag of convenience on certain UK-registered vessels, which was confirmed in July 2004 at a meeting of the ITF fair practices committee in Singapore. Never before in our history have British ships been identified under flags of convenience. That is a step back in employment and training practices of almost a century. I sincerely hope that the Minister agrees that standards on the UK flag should continue to be a concern and that taxpayers have every right to question the substantial sums of money that the Treasury has allowed the industry, in the form of the tonnage tax.

The concession has been worth more than £100 million since its introduction in 2000. I believe that concession can be justified, but only if we can demonstrate that there will be sufficient all-round benefits to the UK economy. The generation of employment opportunities for UK seafaring ratings and officers is obviously foremost among those.

When the Government published "Charting a new course", additional training and employment opportunities for UK seafarers was one of the four key objectives set out in the document. It had been preceded by the White Paper on the future of transport in July 1998, which set out four aims for an integrated shipping policy, one of which was to increase employment for UK seafarers.'

The urgency of the training commitment is also illustrated by the increasing age profile of UK seafaring ratings. The last available analysis was provided by the Chamber of Shipping in its manpower survey published in June 2002. It informed us that the average age for UK deck ratings is 43, and for engine room personnel, it is 43.3. That is broadly in line with similar research presented by London Metropolitan university in 2002 in the UK seafarers analysis. The London Metropolitan analysis found that 65 per cent. of UK deck ratings were over 40, and the figure was 62 per cent. for engine room ratings. Given that the level of training for seafaring rating positions has declined since 2000, the age profile will further deteriorate unless corrective action is urgently taken by the industry. It is not an industry in which we want an ageing population.

In the light of those developments, the RMT has submitted a detailed proposal seeking an employment and training link for UK seafaring ratings. An early-day motion signed by a significant number of Members has been submitted in support of the proposal for such a link. At the moment, shipping companies are enjoying the benefits of the financial concessions without delivering training and employment opportunities for UK ratings.

Mr. Greg Knight (East Yorkshire) (Con): What does the hon. Gentleman say to the arguments put forward by the Chamber of Shipping that an employment link on tonnage tax would deter shipping businesses from either coming to or remaining in the UK?

John McDonnell: As in the earlier debates about the development of the tonnage tax, it is a matter of getting the balance right. I suggest that the RMT proposal, which I shall outline shortly, gets that balance right. We need a firmer commitment for UK seafaring ratings and all cadets. We should not impede or overload the industry with financial burdens, but we should get some return from the £100 million that we are investing in it through the tax concession.

Mr. Ivan Henderson: The argument put forward by the right hon. Member for East Yorkshire (Mr. Knight)

[Mr. Ivan Henderson]

was used for many years as a reason for not introducing tonnage tax to encourage the employment of British seafarers. Is the right hon. Gentleman aware of the comments made by one Chamber of Shipping member, Lord Sterling, when the Government introduced tonnage tax? He said that this Government had done more for shipping than any other. Respect should be shown to the shipping industry by returning British seafarers to ships, as the Government have done by giving those concessions and introducing the tonnage tax.

John McDonnell: I understand my hon. Friend's concerns about previous statements that have not been matched by company actions. In this debate particularly, I want us to demonstrate our willingness to work in partnership with shipowners. However, partnership is a two-way street. We lobbied together for the tonnage tax and won that argument, admittedly with a sympathetic Government, but in return we expect what was originally envisaged as part of achieving those objectives for the industry. In reviewing the tonnage tax, it is not too much to ask for some return in terms of UK seafaring ratings jobs.

Mr. Prosser: Does my hon. Friend agree that some of the statements made by the Chamber of Shipping are not helpful, especially the idea that the seafarers' unions aim for an absolute connection between the tonnage tax and British seafarers' jobs? They have never sought that. No one is saying that each ship that has tonnage tax facilities should employ only British seafarers; we say only that it should be a fair proportion.

John McDonnell: It is true to say that the unions, particularly the RMT, are asking for an approach that recognises the long-term development needs of the industry. The industry is not just about delivering profits for shipowners; it is also about delivering employment, and forming a stable sector of the UK economy in the long term. It is not much to ask, in return for taxpayers' money, that shipowners should deliver their side of the bargain, at least with regard to employment initiatives. We want to return to that partnership approach. It is hardly revolutionary; nor is it a flagrant attack on the Chamber of Shipping.

The RMT seeks to introduce two separate commitments—one for training, and one for employment. Both the experience of NUMAST—the National Union of Marine, Aviation and Shipping Transport Officers—and the figures on officers' employment demonstrate that the training commitment is not sufficient on its own. That is especially the case for ratings, when we consider that their training schemes are of much shorter duration than those of officers.

The RMT would include in the scheme a training and employment link for UK ratings and seeks a commitment from companies training UK ratings that at least one in 15 of the total ratings employed will be from the UK. That is hardly revolutionary; nor is it an overwhelmingly costly demand. It is remarkably conservative. In fact, I am beginning to worry that Bob Crow is softening up—no; I take that back, in case he is listening. However, it is a remarkably conservative gesture; the proposal would be practical in the short term and could be built upon in the long term.

The training commitment is followed by an employment commitment. It is calculated on the same basis as the training commitment—one in 15. Companies would be required to maintain the training commitment for at least the first three years of entry to the scheme, and to continue training as and when required in order to ensure compliance with the minimum employment requirement. Again, the concept is training and topping up as required; it would show a spirit of good will, and a joint commitment to ensure UK employment.

I know from discussions that I have already held with the Minister that he is concerned that changes to the scheme should not place in jeopardy the gains made in respect of the increased number of vessels on the UK register. That is why the RMT proposals are extremely modest and reasonable—and extremely pragmatic and practical. Ideally, the RMT and NUMAST, and perhaps the Minister, would like all ships to be crewed entirely with UK seafarers. Why not? However, the proposal asks only for a minimum of one in 15 UK ratings. That is not unreasonable when we consider the generosity of the taxpayers' provision.

The Government deserve credit for introducing a number of measures that have boosted UK shipping, but they must recognise that more needs to be done to increase UK seafarers' employment, especially for ratings. So far, 165 MPs have signed the early-day motion calling for a firm link between the tonnage tax concession and increased employment for UK seafarers, ratings and officers. I hope that the Minister can advise us that, following his review, he will introduce such a link.

We look forward to the outcome of the review, and we hope that today's debate, which takes place as the review is coming to an end, will influence it in a practical way and that it will promote the development of UK seafaring and the stable long-term employment of UK seafarers, which will provide benefits to many of our constituencies and to the UK economy.

Several hon. Members *rose*—

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Order. It is possible that Divisions could be called in the House during the course of our debate. I hope that hon. Members will agree that the sooner we can get back to the debate the better, so I suggest that if the Division bell rings, we should try to return within 10 minutes. If that proposal meets with the wishes of hon. Members, it would be helpful.

2.30 pm

Mr. Gwyn Prosser (Dover) (Lab): I should start by declaring a number of non-pecuniary interests. I am a member of NUMAST, the merchant navy officers' union. I am also a member of the GMB, which is trying to save jobs in Dover along with the other seafaring unions, and a long-time friend of the RMT and its predecessors.

The seafarers' union campaign has gone on for more than a generation. For 25 years it has tried to revitalise the British merchant navy. During my 20-odd years in the service, in which I sailed deep sea, coastal and cross channel, I have been pleased to be part of that campaign. I remember during those difficult days wondering, along with the trade unions, whether any British merchant fleet would be left within a few years. We worried that the numbers of ships and the amount of British shipping activity would decline so much that it would drop over the edge and cease to exist. That would have been a sad story for a nation with such a proud history and proud heritage of ruling the waves and trading by sea.

We keep reminding ourselves in these debates that more than 90 per cent. of our trade still travels by sea. Some of us would like to see a lot more of the internal domestic trade carried by sea. There is much potential and lots to do, but we want to do it with a few more local jobs and a few more British seafarers' jobs.

During the 18 years of Tory Government, the merchant navy fleet was in continuous decline. The number of ships had fallen to just 226 by 1997. It was famously described as being on the point of oblivion. In the first years of this Government, the Chamber of Shipping and the trade unions lobbied hard for the introduction of the tonnage tax. My hon. Friend the Member for Hayes and Harlington (John McDonnell) referred to that in his speech. We wanted to arrest the decline of the fleet. We wanted to have more British registered ships and, we hoped, more ships under the red ensign, but we also wanted more British seafarers' jobs.

I was pleased to be part of the lobby that went to see Transport Ministers and Treasury Ministers. We spent a brief time with my right hon. Friend the Chancellor of the Exchequer trying to put across the idea that a little help for the industry could see a large return for British shipping and a few British seafarers' jobs. It was not a massive manifesto, but a modest request. At the time, we were convinced that if the Ministers agreed and the tonnage tax came into place, the decline in British seafarers' jobs would also be arrested and we could start building up our seafaring numbers again. That was not simply a matter of employing more British seafarers. Although I am partial in these matters, they are considered the best seafarers—be they officers or ratings—in the world. Everyone wants British seafarers, but I suppose that the Minister would say, "If they can afford them."

I have described the background to my involvement, and we also had some useful meetings in my ports committee to which we invited members of the Chamber of Shipping and the seafarers' unions. It was a joint campaign. We all wanted the same thing, and I felt that we all expected to get the same or similar benefits from it.

My hon. Friend described the rapid turn around in the size of the fleet that resulted from those changes and the sad fact that the reversal in the fortunes of the fleet has not been matched by a reversal in the fortune of British seafarers. He also referred to early-day motion 880 in my name and that of other hon. Members present. It contrasts the huge difference in the reversal in fortunes of British shipping and the industry itself with the pretty abysmal results for British seafarers' jobs.

There has been a bit of an advance in training places for officers, but even that is set at a low limit. The legislation states that there should be one training job for every 15 British seafarers employed on a particular vessel. That is pretty small beer, but such modest stuff is appreciated as it has had an effect. However, it does not guarantee employment for the cadet or trainee at the end of their training, and there are many anecdotal stories about people who have gone through the scheme and who were looking forward to a career in the merchant navy.

We should remember the background to the debate: the trades unions and the Chamber of Shipping—both sides of the argument—have been putting resources into gaining young people's interest in a career at sea, because within seven or 10 years there will be a serious skill shortage as the average age of the British seafarer is over 40. They are coming to the age at which they will retire and there is no fresh blood coming in. There is thus a paradox: both the industry and the Government recognise the need for new entrants to fill the gaps and the add-on value that can be generated by British seafarers who are reaching the end of their seagoing careers. Whether they are officers or ratings, they are a versatile group who have transferable skills and can turn their hands to other things. Their work is diverse, from running Lloyd's of London to supporting the fish market up the road. Training seafarers adds value, as one can see from the insurance market and sea and ship broking. It is not by chance that the shipping sector in the City is full of people with former seagoing experience. There are many good reasons for bringing back a link between the tonnage tax and taking on British seafarers and providing more berths for cadets.

I want to re-emphasise the issue of proportionality. No one would suggest that every ship that comes back into the tonnage regime as part of the registry will take on only British seafarers. That would not be sustainable; it would not happen. However, there should be some feedback, at least, and a quid pro quo.

We have heard about the dramatic drop in the number of seafarers, and I want to re-state the figures in terms of the proportion of UK seafarers on tonnage tax vessels in the past few years. Tonnage tax was first introduced in 2000–01, when UK seafarers at rating level were 49 per cent. of the total; the latest figures, for 2003–04 show that only 28 per cent. are British. I contrast the rising fortunes of Lord Sterling and the profitable sectors of the industry with the reducing fortunes of seafarers.

The story is not much better for officers: in 2000–01, 80 per cent. were UK seafarers, and by 2003–04 the figure had fallen to under 50 per cent. Those are pretty stark figures and we should note that the tonnage tax has not necessarily generated additional jobs for UK seafarers, because many positions already existed in shipping companies prior to the change in the regime.

At the Labour party conference this year—you will have missed that, I suppose, Mr. Deputy Speaker—the Chamber of Shipping put on a fringe meeting. I have made a point of going to every one of those fringe meetings since the Chamber of Shipping started coming to the Labour party conference. It has not always done that, but I have gone to every one at which it has had a stand, and I have been joined by some of my colleagues here.

My hon. Friend the Member for Harwich (Mr. Henderson) mentioned Lord Sterling's famous intervention, which I remember. His words—

[Mr. Gwyn Prosser]

paraphrased, but almost to the letter—were that the Labour Government have done more in the past 18 months for British shipping than the last Government had done in the previous 18 years. That was the background to the introduction of tonnage tax, and why we expected some benefit for the trade unions and their members.

At this year's Labour party conference, the Chamber of Shipping entitled its meeting "Tonnage tax and the creation of British seafarers' jobs". I suppose it labelled it that way to try to pull a few more members into the audience. Given the facts and figures outlined by my hon. Friend the Member for Hayes and Harlington, such a title would be pretty ironic at any time. However, that meeting took place at the same time as P&O was announcing the sacking of 1,200 British seafarers, on top of the 800 British seafarers that it had sacked 12 months ago. That background made the meeting even more inappropriate.

Strong views were expressed on the floor of the meeting by officers, sailing ratings and members of the trade unions who had come along to see whether any good news could be related on the back of tonnage tax. From the floor we received stark evidence and stark views of the effect that tonnage tax has had on British jobs. It has been negative, not positive, and that is pretty certain.

I have been fortunate enough to follow my hon. Friend, who set out everything in clear terms. We have had the privilege of meeting the Minister about this very subject and have had correspondence on all the matters. The responses are all confined to a narrow channel, which concerns the wish to be flexible, to have a shipping industry that is open and receptive and can expand and grow, and for there to be no barriers to that. We do not want barriers; we want common sense and proportionality.

My hon. Friend referred to the ITF, which said that we would soon be at the stage at which the British flag—the red ensign of which we have all been so proud for so many years—will be described as a flag of convenience. A large proportion of the vessels that are shipping into the tonnage tax regime, but not under the red ensign, come from what I would describe as some of the saddest registries in the world. If someone registers a ship in such areas, they may get cheap registration, but they also get poor inspection and low safety standards, and that results in a poor safety record.

It is easy to correlate a ship's registry with the number of accidents occurring on those vessels. I had a quick look through the list today, and saw flags from countries such as Antigua, St. Vincent, Liberia, Panama and the Marshall Islands. When I was sailing on the deep seas under the red ensign, we would look at vessels from such registries and literally give them a wide berth. We would wonder whether anyone on the bridge knew where they were going or anyone in the engine room knew what they were doing.If we are not careful, we are in danger of being so flexible, open and receptive that we will allow the standards in our registry and those applying to the ships registered under the tonnage tax regime to reduce until we come to almost the lowest common denominator and have to share the low standards that I have described and that pertain under other flags of registry.

We look forward to the results of the Inland Revenue review. We want to continue the dialogue to find not a structure that straps all tonnage tax ships into 100 per cent. British employment, but a formula that recognises that if they are, in effect, receiving benefits from British taxpayers, British taxpayers such as British seafarers should enjoy some of the benefits too.

2.46 pm

Mr. Ivan Henderson (Harwich) (Lab): I did not intend to speak, but I think that it is worth while to give an example of how a town has been decimated by the loss of the seafaring industry. We are proud of the history of the maritime industry in my constituency. This year, we are celebrating 400 years of the royal charter, and most of the celebrations have centred on the maritime industry, which has had a part to play in the Harwich area for centuries.

Let me give some background. It was so important to have people training for the seafaring industry that my secondary school—it was then the Sir Anthony Dean school but is now the Harwich secondary school—provided seamanship training as part of the curriculum. For most people, there was a natural progression from school to sea, whether they worked on the catering side, on deck or as officers. They would go to the Gravesend training school in Kent. People could also work locally for Trinity House.

The problem that we suffered started in 1984, when the previous Government privatised Sealink. At that time, 13 British-flagged ships were travelling out of Harwich; now there are only two. As I said earlier, at that time, we had 1,800 seafarers; now, there are just over 60 left, going out of, I imagine, Harwich International port.

Until a few weeks ago, the company Stena Line, which now operates out of Harwich International, was threatening to get rid of more British seafarers and replace them with cheaper foreign labour. Fortunately, I managed to talk to the director of Stena Line and he has now stepped back from that and has said that there will be another two years of replacing seafarer with seafarer on one ship and another five years on another, so we have a breathing space. Perhaps other shipping companies will take that on board and do exactly the same. Let us have a breathing space and leave the existing seafarers on the ships, so that we see how we get on with regard to training issues and the employment of more seafarers.

In Harwich, there is the possible massive development of a major port if the proposal goes through the public inquiry. My hon. Friend the Member for Dover (Mr. Prosser) pointed out that many seafaring jobs are important for the future of shore jobs. Let us consider the experience in the dock industry. Most people employed on the docks have had seafaring time and some are ex-captains of ships. Indeed, the chief executive of Harwich Haven Authority is an ex-captain of a ship. We need the seafaring skills to continue, so that they can come ashore in future.

It is also important that we give future younger generations the opportunity to experience and enjoy a maritime career. We do not do that currently. We do not go into schools and offer seafaring as a career any more; that has not been an option because of the decline in the industry.

A few weeks ago, I took part in a scheme called "Get into maritime". It was headed by the Prince's Trust, which was working in partnership with Jobcentre Plus, Stena Line, DFDS Seaways, Trinity House and a maritime company in Ipswich called Fox's Marina. They all sponsored the scheme, which gave young people six days' experience of going to sea before putting them in the maritime industry for two weeks' work experience and giving them a taste of what the industry is all about. I met those young people after their six days spent tasting the adventures of going to sea, and they were really upbeat and wanted to go further in the industry. So, when the industry comes to us saying, "You want us to take on more seafarers, but they're not there," that is not true. Seafaring has not been offered in schools as a career for a long time; if it were, young people would come forward to get a taste of the industry.

As I said, I was not going to speak, and I shall not speak for much longer. Let me say on behalf of my constituency, however, that if the maritime industry were a building, it would be listed. Our country's maritime industry has a proud history; we can read all about it in the history books and see the famous people who have been involved in the industry over the years. It would be a disgrace for any Government to allow the industry to deteriorate and vanish from this country. The ships in my port have been given a temporary stay of execution for a number of years, but we need to ensure—with the help of the Government and the Chamber of Shipping—that the remaining jobs in my port are kept for future years. In that way, we can give other young people the opportunity to get a taste of what people have done in the maritime industry over the years.

2.52 pm

John Thurso (Caithness, Sutherland and Easter Ross) (LD): May I begin by expressing the hope that the hon. Member for Hayes and Harlington (John McDonnell) enjoys a speedy recovery to full health? I thank him for having stuck to his last and for being here to introduce the debate, because he did so exceptionally well. I appreciated the measured way in which he put the case and the fact that he made it clear that we are seeking a balanced approach on which we can work in partnership. Had someone else introduced the debate, they may have demanded 100 per cent. British nationals on every vessel in the British fleet, which would have made it difficult for us to offer our full support. However, the measured way in which the hon. Gentleman put his argument allows us to support it fairly strongly. Indeed, I should say at the outset that I signed early-day motion 880 and encouraged as many of my colleagues as I could to do so.

In his closing remarks, the hon. Member for Harwich (Mr. Henderson) mentioned the proud history of the British merchant fleet, and we should bear that in mind. Three or four years ago, I had the singular honour of being asked to become the founder patron of the Caithness branch of the Merchant Navy Association. In preparation for the debate, I went to the association's website this afternoon and clicked on Scotland, only to discover that Caithness remains the only branch there. However, when I speak to some of the old sailors whom I meet and hear their tales about what they and their predecessors underwent in peacetime and in two world wars, I learn quite a lot. It is worth remembering that 36,000 seamen were killed in two world wars, which certainly puts the current number of about 30,000 ratings into perspective. With Remembrance day approaching, that should be at the back, if not the front, of our minds during the debate.

It is self-evident that the UK, as an island, needs a merchant fleet. The maritime industry will remain of the utmost importance. As has been mentioned, more than 90 per cent. of our freight by weight comes into the country by sea. A huge number of people are employed on passenger ships, which not only go across to the continent, but serve the northern and western isles and other parts of the United Kingdom. It is a matter of great regret that some of those jobs are now being threatened.

As has already been mentioned, we also have a coastal shipping industry, and I believe that that should be helped not only to continue but to expand. To those who are, like me, keen on the environment, using our coastal assets and resources for moving freight is important. There is much to be said for maintaining a sound merchant navy. That means making sure that British seamen and officers crew it. For those reasons, the Government were right to consider in 1997 what they could do to support the maritime industry. Without a shadow of a doubt the tonnage tax measures introduced in the Finance Act 2000 have made a significant contribution to rescuing the industry, and, certainly, to reversing its decline.

I was interested to note that the UK-based fleet has increased to 15 million deadweight tonnes from 7.2 million in 2000 and that the flag tonnage has risen to 10 million from 2.4 million over the same period. If those figures are expressed as ratios, one third was flagged in 2000, whereas now two thirds are flagged. There has been some movement to flag, which is important.

With the introduction of the tonnage tax, the principle of a link between employment and the tax concession has already been made. Placing the training requirement in that context has already established the principle that there should be a return, and some link to employment. Therefore, the argument is not, to my mind, about the introduction of a new principle but about how far the principle should extend.

It is clear that there has not, in the relevant period, been a corresponding increase in employment of UK nationals in the fleet. The number of officers and ratings has been in decline, and projections about further decline have been made. However, unless something can be done, decline is predicted. There is a clear consensus in this Chamber and probably throughout the House that it is desirable to reverse that trend. The question is how to achieve that. In particular, would further links between the tonnage tax and employment increase employment or decrease the prospects for British shipping overall? As I have said, I have already signed early-day motion 880, so I clearly take the view that further links with employment will not damage the

[John Thurso]

British shipping industry—particularly if they are introduced in the balanced and moderate way that is being espoused in the Chamber this afternoon.

The key issues include the employment of senior UK officers but not junior officers. The average age of officers in the merchant navy is 44, but 40 per cent. are over 50. Clearly, the moment is rapidly approaching when the number of senior British officers will diminish as those currently employed at sea either find shore jobs or retire. Finding employment for junior officers is also an issue. Cadet places are available and the training scheme has clearly increased the number of cadets undergoing training, but a lack of junior officer places for them to take up on finishing their training is a matter of concern.

It is a curious imbalance at a time when the world shipping industry is highlighting a worldwide lack of officers that, in this country, we cannot provide places for the junior officers who are being trained. That sends out the message to people who might be interested in entering the industry, "Yes, you can get trained but, no, we can't employ you at the end of the training." A cadet came to see me at a surgery in Invergordon about precisely that worry. He was employed but very unsure of his prospects, and he was certain that he would have to go abroad for much of the early part of his career to gain employment.

There is an imbalance between the training of officers and the training of ratings. In that regard, the training requirement has not been successful. We need measures that increase the training possibilities for ratings. The one-in-15 proposal made by the hon. Member for Hayes and Harlington is very conservative; that is the word that he used, but I never thought that I would find myself taking part in a debate in which the RMT's Bob Crow would be described as conservative.

Clearly, it is important that we find training for ratings; there is genuine consensus regarding objectives, but the problem is working out how to achieve them. Further links would strengthen employment without detracting from the ability of the shipping industry to act in a cost-effective manner. Let us consider, for example, the one-in-15 proposal for ratings. I believe that the rate for a deck hand from a foreign country may be as little as £2 an hour. Let us say, for the sake of argument, that a UK national in training is paid £5 an hour—there is a £3 an hour differential. If one took the cost of one in 15 at £3 an hour and came to a total cost for a voyage and compared it to the total profit generated through the tonnage tax concession, I suspect that one would find it a remarkably small percentage. It is a small return to ask for from a reasonably large concession, which has been effective.

I am reminded of debates that I attended in another place in which we discussed the minimum wage. That would have been in 1997 or 1998, when I was surrounded by employers who said that the minimum wage would decimate my industry—the hospitality and catering industry—and have appalling consequences. I was told that we would all be out of business within a year or two. In fact, the reverse was true. The fact that we introduced more reasonable conditions enabled more people to come into the industry, and allowed better employment conditions. For that reason, I supported the minimum wage as an employer and chief executive. I see the same long-term issue here. In the short-term, employers can say, "Oh dear, look at this cost that has come on us," but the industry should be looking at long-term trends and how we will get the necessary people into the industry in 10 years' time.

The hon. Gentleman will know from my comments that I stand fairly much in support of what he said so eloquently at the start of the debate. It would be impossible to have a British fleet that is manned 100 per cent. by British nationals. No one is asking for that. The balanced approach that is being asked for is a way forward, and I hope that the Government will consider it seriously. A British merchant navy consisting of no British merchant seamen is wholly unthinkable. We owe it to the proud tradition of which I spoke earlier to ensure that there is a proud future.

3.3 pm

Mr. Greg Knight (East Yorkshire) (Con): I congratulate the hon. Member for Hayes and Harlington (John McDonnell) on securing this important debate, and join the hon. Member for Caithness, Sutherland and Easter Ross (John Thurso) in wishing him a speedy recovery. One would not know from his speech today that he is ill. He put his case very well, and spoke with eloquence and passion, as did the other Labour Members who spoke.

The shipping industry plays an important role in the economy of our island nation, especially with ever-increasing global trade. The case for a tonnage tax was first made in earnest back in 1997 by the Chamber of Shipping, and later by the Select Committee. I agree with the comment in the Treasury report that considered the possibility of a tonnage tax. It said:

> "Our shipping industry and the skills of our seafarers have long been part of our success as a trading nation."

Opposition Members certainly want the shipping industry to go from strength to strength. We supported the introduction of the tonnage tax and continue to support it—I believe that the decision on that matter was right.

The hon. Members for Dover (Mr. Prosser) and for Harwich (Mr. Henderson) made great play of the fact that this Labour Government introduced the tonnage tax. That is technically correct. However, I have no doubt that, had we been in office in 2000, when the case for a tonnage tax was focused and well made, we would have done the same thing.

Mr. Prosser: Does the right hon. Gentleman not recall that, for many years before 1997, the industry—the Chamber of Shipping and others—was pressing the Conservative Government to introduce a tonnage tax?

Mr. Knight: I think that the case developed. As it became focused and clear that worldwide pressures meant that the tonnage tax was a fair way to proceed, I have no doubt that a Conservative Government—had we still been in office—would have accepted that case.

Mr. Ivan Henderson: Will the right hon. Gentleman give way?

Mr. Knight: This is history, and I would rather look to the future, but I will give way again.

Mr. Henderson: The right hon. Gentleman probably would not remember the fact that, in my port, seafarers were replaced by Dutch seafarers on some of the main ships. That was because, in Holland, an incentive for ship companies to employ Dutch nationals had already been introduced. The previous UK Government, however, ignored the calls to go down the same road in helping our shipping industry to retain British seafarers.

Mr. Knight: I do not accept that point, because I had a conversation with the hon. Gentleman's predecessor just before I visited his constituency, and that issue was raised. The issue was actively discussed in the Conservative party at the time.

I was pleased to hear that NUMAST and others who are concerned with the industry met at this year's Labour party conference. May I invite them to attend next year's Conservative party conference, when we will be the party of government? I will be happy to welcome them to our proceedings.

Today's debate has focused on the question of employment, but it is also appropriate to acknowledge the economic benefits that tax concessions have brought.

There has been a huge increase in seaborne trade over the past few decades. The number of tonnes transported more than doubled between 1970 and the end of the last century. The International Monetary Fund and the World Bank predict that world seaborne trade will rise to 45,000 billion tonne-miles by 2012. As the hon. Member for Dover correctly said, international shipping is responsible for the carriage of 90 per cent. of world trade. It is therefore not surprising that the United Nations Conference on Trade and Development estimates that merchant shipping generates an annual income of more than $380 billion in the global economy.

Despite the success of the shipping industry and its importance to world trade, the number of seafarers has been decreasing. It is understandable, therefore, that groups such as the RMT and NUMAST are campaigning to protect their members' interests. Indeed, NUMAST's campaign literature states that it is

> "working to develop a new national awareness of our Merchant Navy and to create the conditions in which the industry will flourish and prosper on the back of a core of skilled and experienced professional personnel."

Those are laudable aims.

Figures published by London Metropolitan university show that the number of UK seafarers fell from 30,000 in 1997 to 25,000 in 2001—the year after the tonnage tax was first announced—but that, by 2003, the number had increased to 28,000.

The campaigns being run by the RMT and NUMAST have been successful in raising the profile of the issue. I am sure that many hon. Members on both sides of the House will have received postcards and other correspondence from constituents who are concerned about that matter. We know that representatives from NUMAST have met Ministers and I hope that when the Minister replies to the debate, he will be able to tell us what conclusions he drew from those discussions. NUMAST's principal concern, and that of hon. Members who have spoken today, is that although tonnage tax has led to an increase in British shipping, it has not led to a corresponding increase in employment opportunities for British seafarers. I understand from parliamentary questions tabled by my hon. Friend the Member for Christchurch (Mr. Chope) that 12,500 seafarers are employed on ships in the tonnage tax scheme. Some 39 per cent. of all seafarers and almost 50 per cent. of the officers are UK nationals.

The White Paper, "Future of Transport", which was published in 1998, stated that two of the aims of an integrated shipping policy were:

> "To promote the employment and training of British seafarers in order to keep open a wide range of job opportunities for young people and to maintain a supply of skills and experience vital to the economy",

and

> "To encourage UK ship registration, to increase ship owners identification with the UK, to improve our regulatory control of shipping using UK ports and waters and to maintain the availability of assets and personnel that may be needed in time of war."

The Government have been partly successful in delivering some of those aims, but there are questions still to be answered. Documents published by the RMT on the tonnage tax state that when the RMT expressed support for the idea, following the publication of the Department for Transport's policy paper "Charting a new course", it was expecting more than 200 new ratings to be trained under the new scheme each year. The RMT recently stated:

> "Latest figures on ratings trainees disclosed at the shipping task force would seem to indicate that approximately 50 new ratings trainees are being trained every year."

That is well short of the figure for which it was hoping. It continued:

> "This is less than the number of ratings who were being trained at the time of the discussions on the tonnage tax."

It is not hard to understand its frustration.

It is important for us to recognise that global competition remains tight despite the growth of the worldwide shipping industry, and continues to force costs down. The Select Committee on Transport found that crew wages amount to as much as 70 per cent. of the cost of running a ship. It is therefore unsurprising that operators want to minimise those costs, although I am sure that we would all agree that cost savings must never be allowed to compromise safety. I know that many hon. Members have continuing concerns about that.

I believe that British officers and ratings are among the best trained in the world, and I agree with the hon. Member for Hayes and Harlington that it is important that we encourage shipowners to offer them opportunities. However, it is also important to remember that the president of the Chamber of Shipping, when giving evidence to the Transport Committee, said that

> "many ship owners have the intention of training British seafarers but that any compulsion to do more might frighten companies away from Britain."

I am sure that none of us wants that outcome.

The Chamber of Shipping went further in its press release of 26 August this year, in which it said:

> "A mandatory linkage as proposed by the seafarers unions would deter companies from opting for the tonnage tax or from basing a shipping business in the UK . . . This would be likely to threaten rather than support jobs . . . The tonnage tax is not a subsidy; it is an internationally competitive tax arrangement. The UK is but one of many countries to have adopted a tonnage tax; indeed the only thing unique about the tax here is that it has a training link."

[Mr. Knight]

The Opposition do not want shipping business to go overseas, with the consequent loss of related support jobs. I suspect that the Minister does not want that either. I wonder whether introducing a rigid link that tied tonnage tax to the employment of British personnel would be lawful under EU law. Will the Minister say whether he has considered that?

I look forward to hearing what the Minister has to say on this important issue. I hope that what he does say will give heart to officers and ratings. More importantly, I hope that it will not frighten away from these shores the job providers and wealth creators—the shipowners.

Mr. Deputy Speaker: The Minister of State will respond.

3.14 pm

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Transport (Mr. David Jamieson): Thank you, Mr. Deputy Speaker for the promotion. Alas, I am still the Under-Secretary, but I jolly well ought to have a higher rank. I must declare an interest. As well as being Under-Secretary, I am a member of the GMB.

I congratulate my hon. Friend the Member for Hayes and Harlington (John McDonnell) on securing this debate. I form the third part of a three-pointed parliamentary cross-party accord by wishing him an early release from his illness.

I am pleased to say that much of the public discussion on these issues has been promoted by the maritime trades unions, and I congratulate them on doing so. My hon. Friend asked me to take away his comments and consider them; I assure him that I shall consider carefully not only his comments but those of other hon. Members.

The hon. Member for Caithness, Sutherland and Easter Ross (John Thurso) reminded us that it will be Remembrance Sunday this weekend. I shall be in my constituency on that day. I shall remember not only those from the armed services who gave their lives but, at the huge memorial on Plymouth Hoe, the many merchant seamen who died. The latter gave their lives in large numbers on the Atlantic convoys and in other parts of the world, but I think particularly of those who died on the Arctic convoys. They lived through the most appalling conditions and died in the most dreadful circumstances. We must remember their contribution to our nation's liberation.

My hon. Friend the Member for Dover (Mr. Prosser) and others reminded us that, by weight, about 96 per cent. of all goods are imported and exported by sea. We have one of the longest coastlines in Europe—second only to that of Greece—and it is a sensitive coastline. We have to look after the environment, but it is also important to keep the safety of seafarers at heart. We share with the French one of the most dangerous and hazardous sea lanes in the world—the channel.

The issue is being discussed at two other forums. The right hon. Member for East Yorkshire (Mr. Knight) referred to the Transport Committee inquiry into tonnage tax; I gave evidence to the Committee in June, and we await the report with interest. The Inland Revenue's post-implementation review into the tonnage tax drew to a close in September, and I look forward to the Paymaster General speaking on that matter shortly.

A number of hon. Members, particularly my hon. Friends the Members for Harwich (Mr. Henderson) and for Dover, have strong constituency links with the sea, and so do I. I am instinctively attracted to the idea that we should do everything possible to attract and retain UK seafarers on UK ships. We have a long and honourable seafaring tradition. The Government continue to take pride in all that has been achieved since 1997 in trying to reverse the fortunes of the UK fleet. The White Paper "British Shipping: Charting a new course" set out a comprehensive strategy to reverse the long decline of the UK shipping industry that occurred during the previous two decades.

In answer to a point made by the right hon. Member for East Yorkshire about protecting jobs, within the context of our membership of the European Union, those jobs would be available to people in the European economic area, not to UK residents only.

We now have a thriving and high-quality shipping register. I reject the idea that our register, either by flag or by tonnage tax, is a flag of convenience. It is not. The UK-registered fleet, with our flag, is the sixth largest in the world; and we are at the top of the Paris memorandum of understanding white list. That enables us to punch above our weight in the maritime world. Last week, I had the pleasure of attending the ministerial conference on port state control in Vancouver. I am pleased to report that the United Kingdom is held in extremely high regard on maritime matters. I do not know what sort of accolade it is, but I think that I am now one of the longest serving maritime Ministers in the world. That probably says more about how short a time the others serve than about how long I have served.

In considering whether to introduce an employment link into the UK tonnage tax regime, we must be aware that the issue is finely balanced. My hon. Friend the Member for Hayes and Harlington alluded to that. We want to improve opportunities for employment for seafarers, but we must be careful that, in doing that, we do not jeopardise the progress that we have made in reviving the UK merchant fleet. Increasingly, other countries are introducing tonnage tax regimes. The reduction of the relative competitiveness of the UK tonnage tax scheme might result in shipping companies electing to enter schemes in other countries or leave the UK flag. That would ultimately further reduce employment opportunities for UK seafarers and the shore-based staff who are so important, and, equally important, reduce our control over safety and standards. While we have a fleet of some size, we have some control over the quality of not only the ships themselves, but the employment conditions on board them.

From 2000, when the tonnage tax regime was introduced, to the end of June 2004, deadweight tonnage increased from 5.2 million tonnes to 12.3 million. There has also been a healthy trend in the profile of the register, towards larger and younger ships. Although the number of ships on the register might not be so large, some are very big vessels indeed, and carry a lot of goods and employ a considerable number of people.

Although the tonnage tax has undoubtedly played an important part in the increase of the UK merchant fleet, it is only one of a package of measures. Other factors have also helped to create a highly favourable environment for UK shipping, including the registration reforms that the Maritime and Coastguard Agency instituted. We cannot say that there is a direct causal link between the tonnage tax and the growth of the register, but 54 per cent. of the ships in the scheme are UK-flagged, and the UK-registered fleet is the sixth largest in the world.

I should like to say a few words about the importance of the tonnage tax to the UK economy. London is the world's largest provider of maritime services. The UK is an attractive base for overseas ship managers, with the well known assets of the time zone, the language, stability and the culture. Overseas owners with agencies here sustain more than 4,500 jobs, contributing around £1 billion in overseas earnings and bringing work to City firms that specialise in services related to shipping. The introduction of the tonnage tax is important because of the support that it provides for our shore-based industries.

My hon. Friend the Member for Hayes and Harlington talked about shipping companies avoiding paying and the taxpayer making an investment. If we have given tax relief, it is taxation forgone, rather than an investment that the Government have made. If the tonnage tax regime was not attractive to a company, it could easily switch to somewhere else or decide not to come under our regime. That is why we have been so careful to ensure that coming under our tax regime is attractive to companies.

John McDonnell: What will attract companies to remain and to engage with the tonnage tax, and therefore to employ UK seafarers, is clearly a matter of balance. However, when Lord Alexander made the last independent assessment of the issue in 1999, he made clear his concern at the inadequacy of the commitment to the link between what we gain from the tonnage tax and the employment of UK seafarer ratings. We need to take heed of that independent assessment, because it has proved accurate.

Mr. Jamieson: If we can make that link in a way that ensures that we carry on getting ships on to our flag and under our tonnage tax regime but that does not damage our prospects, we will do just that.

Flags of convenience are usually for ships that will find a country where the inspection level is poor or little regard is given to it. If a ship comes on to our flag, it is given the most rigorous inspection by the Maritime and Coastguard Agency, and it would not be allowed to fly the UK flag if it did not meet those high standards. An assessment is made by the Inland Revenue as part of the process of identifying vessels and companies that qualify for tonnage tax.

The International Transport Workers Federation made an allegation about ships operated by Lapthorn, saying that they do not comply with parts of International Labour Organisation conventions 147 and 178. Those allegations were investigated by the Maritime and Coastguard Agency, which found that, with the exception of a few minor issues relating to ILO convention 178, the vessel was well maintained and had an apparently contented, motivated and industrious crew. If there is any evidence to suggest otherwise, I will be pleased to receive it and will pass it on to the Maritime and Coastguard Agency to ensure that a further inspection takes place.

Mr. Prosser: Is it not the case that a company currently registered in, say, the Marshall Islands—wherever they are—which elects to come under the tonnage tax regime rather than the registry and the flag, can maintain its standards under the original registry, which we all agree are second class?

Mr. Jamieson: But also, to come on to tonnage tax, the company would have to demonstrate that a large part was run from the United Kingdom. It could not simply come under our tonnage tax regime.

My hon. Friend made a sensible and pragmatic contribution to the debate, particularly in mentioning the one in 15 training commitment for officers. After three years, three lots of one in 15 make one fifth. So once a company has been under the tonnage tax regime for more than three years, the training commitment is more than one in 15. The challenge is finding jobs for those trainees.

My hon. Friend the Member for Harwich, as always a strong advocate for his constituency on maritime issues, made the powerful case for employing young people and set out the desperate need to replace some of the older generation working shore side. Young people need experience at sea if they are to be the best people to work shore side in the future. It is important to get people to sea so that they have the relevant experience to maintain the shore side industry, which is equally as important.

We have also seen an encouraging increase in seafarer training. The support for maritime training scheme—SMarT—has been running since 1998. It provides support for the training of officers and ratings, and has a budget of £9.4 million a year. There were 621 new starters during 2003–04. That is not enough, but it was an 11 per cent. increase on the previous year. We are doing all that we can to increase training, but we have started from a low base.

I am sympathetic to the idea of improving our flag and getting more vessels on to tonnage tax. I am also attracted by the idea of getting more UK people on board ships and working either as officers or ratings. It is not only vital for the merchant fleet, but for jobs on shore. We will look carefully to see how we can create an employment link that does not deter new ships from coming on to the tax or our flag.

Mr. Deputy Speaker: I thank the Minister for his reply to that important debate.

Police (Arrest and Charging Times)

3.30 pm

Mr. Graham Allen (Nottingham, North) (Lab): It is my view that we could effectively increase the amount of time that police officers currently spend on the street by 25 or 30 per cent., and today I should like to explain how. First, I pay tribute to the people who work as police officers and prosecutors for the Nottinghamshire constabulary and the Crown Prosecution Service. They do an excellent job and I am indebted to them for their advice in briefing me on this speech; any mistakes and the policy I am about to articulate remain entirely my own.

I come to the subject as the result of a specific incident. As part of my police parliamentary scheme, I did a shift—7 am to 4 pm—in a Nottinghamshire police response car. During the day, which I understand was typical, we dealt with just two cases. The first was a minor neighbours' altercation, which I was surprised to see given the priority of a response vehicle visit. However, the second case was responding to an emergency call to arrest an 18-year-old who had smashed a window in a hostel. The officer located the youth on the street and with great skill calmed him down, persuaded him not to run, and put him in the car under arrest. The arrest was made at 11.43 am. That was the end of the officer's day on the street. He spent the rest of his day until he finished his shift at 4 pm processing the arrest.

Surely the role of an expensively trained, experienced response officer using a costly vehicle—I understand that it is £38,000-worth of Volvo plus all the kit—should be to arrest the individual, bring him to the custody section and give a full statement relevant to his specific involvement. The prisoner and the consequent development of a prosecution file should then be handed over to an appropriate responsible individual so that the front-line officer can within no more than an hour or so be back on the street, using his skills and equipment to do the job we all expect of him or her.

Instead, in this instance, the officer had to do the following—I accompanied him every step of the way, so this is a first-hand account. First, he presented the prisoner to the custody section, helped to fill out the appropriate forms, removed possessions and put the offender in a cell. Secondly, he requested a colleague to get a statement from the people at the scene of the offence. He later had to chase this up and, at the request of other individuals in the chain, require further details on the colleague's statement. Thirdly, he had to type up his own statement. No copy typist is employed. At one point, three fellow response officers, out of four on duty in the division that day, were doing similar tasks in the police station—one-fingered typing while their vehicles remained parked inside the police station. An experienced copy typist, picking up procedural niceties as they went, could retrieve hours of street time for officers.

The statement, which was now one of several pieces of paper beginning to form a prosecution file, then had to be checked by the largely civilian case progression office. Those working in that office do not take responsibility for a case; they critique the paperwork, requesting additions and changes. That necessitated the officer in this instance revisiting the prisoner downstairs in custody and contacting colleagues to collect and collate further information—including, remarkably, being asked to provide the precise dimensions of the window that had been smashed. We then had to visit the arrest investigation team, which is composed of police officers. They, too, requested the officer to undertake various actions.

I was never given a convincing explanation of why a separate CPO and AIT were needed, especially since neither relieved the officer of responsibility for the case. The officer then had to wait in a queue of other officers, who no doubt could have been better employed, to present the file to the Crown Prosecution Service. At that point, the shift ended. I am therefore not sure whether further work was requested by the CPS on another day, or whether there were additional links in the chain that we were yet to reach, because we all went off duty at 4 o'clock.

Police officers have told me that that was a typical experience—indeed, most cases are far more time consuming than that one, which was a very straightforward case, in which the individual had admitted his guilt on arrest and there were no time-consuming care or medical issues. I shall write to the Minister for Crime Reduction, Policing and Community Safety about the care and medical issues rather than delay the hon. Members by detailing them today.

When my colleagues and I say to the public that we have more police officers in Nottinghamshire than ever before, which is absolutely true, the public respond, equally correctly, by asking, "Well where are they?" Perhaps the case I have outlined provides part of the answer. It also raises a number of questions.

First, let me say that CPS charging in stations is a very welcome development. No one was satisfied with the previous charging regime, in which the preparation of case papers was often sloppy, many cases were lost when they went to court, and an incredible amount of time of officers, prosecutors, witnesses and others, including victims, was wasted. However, in putting the process right, we must be careful that the pendulum does not swing too far the other way. Why do the police have to complete such a full file in cases such as the one I described? Do regulations need to be made more flexible so that the CPS is empowered or instructed to do a minimal fast-track file in such cases? Lengthy processes might mean fewer arrests and fewer cases going to court. If only those cases with a 70 per cent., rather than a 50 per cent., chance of winning go ahead, the objective of a higher percentage of cases being successful in court will, of course, be achieved; but if that Government target is achieved at a cost of fewer criminals going in front of the courts and of taking more police off the streets, it will be too high a price to pay.

Secondly, what is the Home Office's expectation of front-line officers? Should we, as one senior police officer told me, expect arresting officers normally to be their own case progression officer? If so, we should be frank with those officers and the public and stop pretending that more officers mean more visible and active street policing, when it does not mean that.

Thirdly, what is the cost of police time? Let us suppose that every officer uses half of his or her time in the way that I described—I was told that the case was typical. If so, of Nottinghamshire police's £168 million budget, how many millions go on getting case papers "CPS ready", as the jargon goes—£20 million, £30 million? Perhaps the Minister can tell us how much it actually costs in Nottinghamshire. I am sure that she will write to me if she does not have the figure to hand. Should the CPS be billed for such work or continue to get a massive hidden subsidy from the police budget, suffering no financial cost and therefore having no incentive to speed up or shorten the process when appropriate, as some police officers contend it does. Let us face up to and allocate the real financial costs as well as the operational costs of running the system as we do, so that we can at least make honest judgments about whether it should be done like that, whether it happens by accident, or whether there is a better way to do it if we intend to release the time of front-line police officers.

When the constabulary asks for yet more officers, it seeks public support by implying that extra personnel would be out there on the estates, tackling antisocial behaviour or arresting villains. If, in fact, half of any additional officers' time is to be spent on file preparation, we should be told; otherwise such a claim could be portrayed as an inadvertent manipulation of the local press. If, however, we expect police station managers to get arresting officers back out on to the streets at the earliest opportunity, the Home Office and the Department for Constitutional Affairs need to be very clear about who takes responsibility for case progression once an arresting officer has made his statement and put the offender in custody. Should that responsible person be a civilian, a retired police officer, or some sort of specialist police case progresser?

No national blueprint has been developed for how to do the administrative support work in the custody suite, so all forces have to invent their own wheel. Most of the work does not need police officers, but chief constables are severely constrained from reducing the number of police officers to pay for more people to work in that field. A specialist grade of professional investigator seems to be an obvious solution. Alternatively, might the CPS itself take on the task after arrest and be directly, honestly and openly funded to employ its own staff for case progression?

Before any of the more radical solutions are considered, the Home Office and the Department for Constitutional Affairs must now demand that better informal liaison be created between local police officers and local CPS prosecutors. Both sets of people whom I encountered were working incredibly hard and are deeply committed to their jobs, yet the degree of misunderstanding between them is massive. Although much can be done at county and divisional level, real progress will be achieved by informal interaction in the canteen and the corridor, which must be generated and promoted.

My attempts to facilitate that at local level have drawn the response that this is "political interference." However, the consequences of failures in the criminal justice system are simply too important to my constituents to be allowed to escape effective scrutiny and accountability, not least by Members of Parliament. The criminal justice system is not some private club of professionals who hide behind professional or judicial independence whenever a question is asked, instead of confidently engaging in dialogue and explanation. Recently, the criminal justice system has been most successful where it has a human face: beat officers, the drug abuse resistance education project and community-nominated work for young offenders have all been fought for or developed locally, all have a human face, and all involve someone who is known to the public. The least successful aspects of the criminal justice system are those where public interface is shunned or resented. However, public involvement and consultation will fail if they are centrally imposed targets—boxes to be ticked rather than deeply felt and systematic local engagement.

All those involved in the criminal justice system are facing massive cultural change. It is often deeply uncomfortable, but at least we are trying at local level. I commend the efforts of all those on the local criminal justice board, the Crown prosecutor in Nottingham, the chief constable of Nottinghamshire and many others who are at least trying to come to terms with the problems. I wonder if the centre can say the same. The criminal justice system must be re-united with the public whom it is meant to serve, just as police officers must be enabled to do the job that we expect of them.

3.43 pm

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for the Home Department (Fiona Mactaggart): I join my hon. Friend the Member for Nottingham, North (Mr. Allen) in thanking his local police, Crown prosecutors and the whole team who keep the community that he represents safe. My colleagues and I welcome his efforts to shed the light of public opinion on community safety and to form and build relationships between partners in community safety.

I am very glad that my hon. Friend secured this important debate on the day that the Home Secretary announced the White Paper on police reform, in which we make clear our commitment to spreading effective neighbourhood policing. That type of policing engages not only the officers but the community and community support officers—some of whom, as my hon. Friend knows, I met in Beeston police station—in providing a service that is focused on the needs of us, their customers. We also make clear our determination to modernise the work force—my hon. Friend made some proposals in that respect—and our recognition of the fact that we need greater involvement of communities and the public in holding the police to account. My hon. Friend has described his efforts to obtain that, and I hope that he will be reassured that that is a clear and substantial part of our ambition set out in the White Paper announced today in the House.

Part of my hon. Friend's concern is about administrative burdens—the paperwork and inefficient working practices that keep police officers away from their fundamental job. Although we must emphasise that keeping records is an essential safeguard in the criminal justice system, providing protection for practitioners and the public, we must consider how we can ensure that process-driven requirements place the minimum burden on our police officers. That is why we are establishing a strategic framework to enable police officers to focus on their key role of tackling crime and providing reassurance to the public.

My hon. Friend raised several important points about the statutory charging scheme. The first phase of a new scheme that requires Crown prosecutors to make the

[Fiona Mactaggart]

charging decision in all but the most minor cases is in many places beginning to replicate the significant benefits achieved in the pilot scheme. According to the latest data from the Crown Prosecution Service, the scheme is demonstrating the potential to bring a further 30,000 additional offences to justice each year. I know that my hon. Friend is concerned that that might not happen in his area. I am citing national data, but we need to make sure that we achieve our ambitions in every area.

Charging is just the first step in the new prosecution team approach being adopted by the police and the CPS. The prosecution team ethos means a joint approach by both agencies to improving performance and bringing more offenders to justice. The shadow scheme, under which CPS duty prosecutors have provided advice to police officers on how an offender should be charged, has been judged a success. Measures introduced in the Criminal Justice Act 2003 mean that it is now a legal requirement for the CPS duty prosecutors to make those decisions as police force areas migrate to the statutory scheme. My hon. Friend's area is at a relatively early stage of that migration.

Police have generally welcomed the opportunity to work with the CPS at the early stage of investigations. They see the value of the development of a prosecution team approach with colleagues in that service to ensure that they have the strongest possible cases to present to them. However, I recognise that the processes and the way they work are the real test of whether every area is delivering value. The aim is to establish processes for referral to senior managers in both police and the CPS in the event of disagreement, and those processes are designed to work speedily, but the key consideration is ensuring either that offenders are brought to justice, or that the appropriate method of disposal is achieved.

The aim of early consultation with the CPS is to add value to the charging process. My hon. Friend rightly raised his concerns about the engagement of police officers in what he referred to as getting case papers "CPS-ready", but I would like to think that we have introduced an important structure of closer working for the benefit of the criminal justice system. Its aim is to improve efficiency and effectiveness and, crucially—I know that my hon. Friend and the police and the CPS in his area share this ambition—to bring offenders to justice. I acknowledge that my hon. Friend has constructive proposals on local case handling, involving clarity of responsibility between police and the CPS, case progress support, and specifying a defined point at which cases should be handed to the CPS. Those are important views, which support the concept of team working that I know he welcomes.

My hon. Friend sort of asked us to produce a blueprint for how the system should work everywhere; he is frustrated that police areas sometimes feel as though they are reinventing the wheel. However, one of the things that pilot schemes have shown is that one size does not fit all. We need to ensure that the impact that charging has made on performance is developed area by area. We want every area to increase the number of cases in which detection leads to successful prosecution. We do not want things to fall off the trail or cases not to be pursued. We want to make it easier to achieve success: from the moment that a police officer engages with a criminal, we want to move as fast as possible from detection to successful prosecution and sentencing.

Like me, in 1997 my hon. Friend put through many of the doors in his constituency a pledge card committing us to bring offenders to justice more speedily. We have made significant progress on that pledge. The scheme has the capacity to make much more progress, but we must be sure that it works in detail. In my hon. Friend's area, there will be an assessment of the data in January 2005 to determine the impact of statutory charging on sanction detection rates—that is, what number of cases are successfully prosecuted.

My hon. Friend made a number of proposals about work force modernisation. Our prisoner processing units aim to provide an appropriate level of expertise in dealing with arrests, including specialist prisoner handling staff who can be assigned to receive prisoners from uniformed officers, who will then be free to return to normal patrol or to conduct specific enquiries regarding the suspect. In some cases—for example in the Wiltshire constabulary, which piloted the scheme—the increase in officer availability through their not having to deal with so many detainees reveals that the time spent on preventive street patrols was increased from 22 per cent. to 27 per cent. When well handled, it can work. I understand that my hon. Friend is concerned that it has not worked well enough. However, while I was in his area, I met a number of CSOs. One powerful feature of that team was that they are not withdrawn from the street. While we are getting the process right, we are ensuring that street patrols are being delivered in his area.

We are committed to reducing unnecessary paperwork of the sort that keeps police off the streets. As I have indicated today, that is being taken forward in a number of ways. We are looking at ways in which officers can remain on the street and deal effectively with offenders, including the introduction of fixed penalty notices to allow the officer to get back on to the street more quickly.

In Nottinghamshire, the police and the CPS went live with the new charging arrangements in July. The new arrangements represent a significant cultural shift for both organisations. The charging programme board remains fully engaged with each of the statutory charging police forces and CPS areas, and is engaged in post-implementation reviews in each area. As my hon. Friend knows, when we met officers last week, we found that many of them thought that the CPS was prosecuting only those cases with a realistic prospect of conviction, and that much of the officers' time was spent queuing up for CPS consideration. On that latter point, Beeston and a number of other stations in the Nottingham area use the central Bridewell court. That results in officers travelling from their station to the Bridewell court from several locations, and there are delays while waiting to discuss their case with the prosecutor. It is an accommodation problem that has resource implications in terms of the number of prosecutors available, but I know that the police and the CPS are looking closely at how to resolve it. The CPS is considering making visits to outlying police stations, but we must ensure that it does that regularly enough so that it can provide the accessibility that the officers require.

The second and crucial concern is that the CPS is being overselective in the choice of cases to proceed to charge and that further inquiries being made at the request of the CPS are on behalf of that agency. I have mentioned the assessment process that will be conducted in January 2005 to consider the impact, both positive and negative, in different parts of the country. We know that new arrangements can result in more efficient use of police and prosecution time and that they can increase the number of offenders brought to justice. We must work together on the board, all of whose members are committed to the process, to ensure that that happens in Nottinghamshire. The issues that my hon. Friend raised, which I know are prevalent in Nottinghamshire, will be considered by the policing bureaucracy steering group on 9 December. There are burdens associated with the charging scheme. That is why the steering group will, with the police, the CPS and the courts, examine how best to deal with those issues.

I galloped through those points because I wanted to make it clear to my hon. Friend that his voice, and that of the people who spoke to me and other Home Office Ministers while we were in Nottingham, play a substantial role in ensuring that we engineer the detail of our ambitious programme to bring more people to justice and get more police on the beat in a way that fits the situation on the ground. My hon. Friend suggested that clearer central guidance might help to achieve that. I suggest that an approach that focuses on key themes and clear central relationships being built up and that draws on the experience on the street, which he so clearly described, is genuinely the best way to deliver the efficiency and effectiveness that we want.

We have ensured that there are more police than ever before in Nottinghamshire. We have added to their number CSOs. We have created a structure that brings together the police, the Crown prosecutors and other aspects of the criminal justice system more closely than previously. We are in the early stages of some new parts of that relationship and it will not always go wonderfully in every respect. However, we know from the pilots that they can produce radical change that means more offenders being brought to justice and more police having more time on the streets. That is what we are seeking to achieve. Our visit to the east midlands proved my next point more powerfully than all the speeches that Ministers can make: it is from the bottom up, by testing new procedures, that we can guarantee that our ambitious plans are delivered in practice. Creating a single central blueprint creates the risk of not policing individual communities properly.

Mr. Allen: The Minister is being generous in her reply. I know that she is not suggesting this, but it would be perverse if we had less well trained CSOs on the front line because trained police officers were tied up with duties in police stations. Might it not be a good idea to have relatively untrained officers doing the investigation in stations on behalf of the CPS, and fully fledged, well trained officers out on the ground, where we have paid them to be?

Fiona Mactaggart: There is a team approach. On work force modernisation, I accept my hon. Friend's point that civilians could take over some roles that are currently undertaken by police officers. We have made substantial improvements in civilianisation, but we should not reduce the value of CSOs, who have a special relationship with the neighbourhoods that they serve.

NHS Funding (Cornwall)

4 pm

Matthew Taylor (Truro and St. Austell) (LD): I welcome the opportunity to have this debate and I appreciate the fact that the Minister met my colleagues and me earlier this year to discuss some of the issues. There are at least two areas on which we certainly agree, and one on which I hope to be able to persuade the Minister to agree with me.

The first area on which we agree is that there are outstanding staff in the national health service, not least in Cornwall. They do an extremely good job in conditions that have traditionally been difficult, and that work is appreciated both across parties and across Cornwall. I get a lot of letters from people expressing their appreciation for the work of staff, particularly at Royal Cornwall hospital, and their concerns about the pressures under which staff work. The second area on which the Minister and I agree, is the Government decision, since the last general election, to raise taxes to increase investment in the NHS. The Liberal Democrats argued for that, so we welcome it and acknowledge that investment in the NHS has increased as a result. It is important to put that on the record; otherwise it might sound as though I do not acknowledge that when I voice my concerns.

The area on which I wish to concentrate—I informed the Minister's office of this in advance—is the concern in Cornwall and Devon about two coming changes in the way in which the Government propose to fund the NHS in future. They are, first, the combination of changes to the market forces factor that have been introduced over the past couple of years and, secondly, the implications for formal NHS funding for the future, particularly once it is formalised into the new tariff system, if it is done in the way that is currently planned.

The market forces factor has been in place for many years. It dates back to 1976. The great majority of its purpose is to adjust funding to allow for the realities of differing local costs in delivering health services in different parts of the country. Some 70 per cent. of it relates to an adjustment to take into account local wage rates, but that adjustment has, until recently, been modified in two respects. First, there was a dampening, so that areas of high wages did not get the full implied benefit in extra funding, and areas of low wages did not get the full implied disbenefit, in recognition of the fact that people in the NHS operate on national pay scales, so, although there may some link to local earnings outside the NHS, it is far from a complete one.

Secondly, and perhaps more significantly from our point of view as MPs representing the poorest county in England, the lowest 47 of the 117 wage zones based around counties, unitary authorities and metropolitan authority areas counted as one block, so, as the poorest, Cornwall was, in effect, raised 47 places in the assessment, the result of which was that the notional funding impact on the NHS in Cornwall was much less than it would have been had there been a direct link to local wages outside the NHS. Although everyone might have argued about it, no one disagreed with the fundamental principle that there should be adjustments to reflect local costs. However, I am not aware of anyone arguing that the NHS costs should directly reflect local wage rates.

Under the old system, the Royal Cornwall Hospitals NHS trust was assumed to be able to operate at 4 per cent. below the national average in funding terms—indeed, it was regarded as efficient because it was operating slightly more cost-efficiently than that. However, a year or so ago, a new system was introduced in relation to the market forces factor. That system introduced a direct 1:1 ratio in respect local wages, with no dampening for low or high-wage areas and, perhaps even more significantly, taking into account all 117 wage zones. In effect, Cornwall dropped 47 places and then got no help in acknowledgement of the fact that the impact of those low wages would not directly transfer into NHS costs.

The result of the introduction of that new system was a huge increase in the range between the highest and the lowest, with the Royal Cornwall Hospitals NHS trust, for example, which is in the lowest-pay county, being at minus 12 per cent. of the level at which it could notionally operate compared with national average funding needs, and the highest hospital in London being at plus 28 per cent. That is a full 40 per cent. range in the levels of costs at which hospitals were assumed to operate, despite the fact that they continued to work on the basis of national pay scales. That change in reference costs meant that, in one year, the RCHT moved from being patted on the back for being relatively efficient against the reference costs, to being told that it was performing very badly, despite the fact that its actual costs had not changed at all.

The basis of the change is questionable. It is hard to see how it can be assumed that the difficulties of recruitment and retention in high-wage areas and the costs of extra agency nurses, and the ease of recruitment and retention in low-wage areas because of the NHS being relatively well paid compared with those outside, could lead to the costs in the NHS being directly related to average wages. It would be a bit of a coincidence if there were a 1:1 link. It is hard to see how there could be.

When I asked where the notional link came from, the first answer that I received was that it was based on research data from Warwick university. However, the university applies only the wage data; it has not done any research that indicates what effect that has on NHS costs. I then asked who had done such research. However, as far as I can determine, there is no independent academic research that verifies the link, nor has there been any internal, Department of Health research that verifies it. It seems to be no more than a theory.

That theory would not matter too much, if it did not relate to the funding that our hospitals will receive in future. However, with the introduction of the system of tariffs, funding will be adjusted over time—it will not happen overnight—to bring the amount that hospitals get for each operation in line with the tariff, and it seems that the tariff is to be directly in line with the notional link between wages outside the NHS and inside it, despite the fact that in my area, we have the lowest wages in the UK outside the NHS, whereas inside the NHS we operate on national pay scales.

As that system is brought in, other areas will receive funding increases, but we will not share equally in the increase, because the aim is to bring the tariff into line with the idea that hospitals' costs are linked to local wages. Cornwall's will then fall gradually to become the worst-funded health service in the UK because, outside the NHS, we have the lowest wages anywhere in the country, and Devon will not be far behind us. The new system assumes a direct 1:1 link between local wages and NHS costs despite national NHS pay scales. The full impact will be a downward adjustment of Devon and Cornwall funding of £102.3 million in 2003–04. As I said at the start, I am not saying that there should be no adjustment to take account of local costs, but it is hard to understand why it is believed that there should be a direct link with our very low local wage levels.

Ms Candy Atherton (Falmouth and Camborne) (Lab): I am interested in the hon. Gentleman's argument and have been following it carefully. What does he think the adjustment should be?

Matthew Taylor: Since 1976, when the last detailed academic research took place, we have operated on the system that I described, which would result in a much smaller adjustment. That is what happened before. In those circumstances, the RCHT was operating at lower costs than expected; now, it is argued that its costs are higher than expected, but the difference for the trust is the difference in funding from a 4 per cent. negative to a 12 per cent. negative compared with the national average. I would certainly prefer the old system—I might argue that even that was ungenerous, given the other costs of operating in a wide geographic dispersed area, the cost of tourism, and so on.

The question for the Minister is why the Government have decided to change from a system that existed until a couple of years ago at the very moment that they are introducing a tariff system that will have a maximum impact on our hospitals. I hope that the hon. Lady will join the Liberal Democrats, who are opposing what, if implemented, will be a huge smash-and-grab raid on Cornwall NHS funding.

Andrew George (St. Ives) (LD): Is my hon. Friend aware that the movement towards greater dependence on the market forces factor contradicts the outcome of a meeting that I had with the Minister of State, Department of Health, the right hon. Member for Barrow and Furness (Mr. Hutton), in June this year? He acknowledged that Cornwall's NHS funding was below national averages and that in the review of formula the intention was to bring Cornwall's funding closer to national parity, because he thought that Cornwall was being underfunded. My hon. Friend seems to contradict what the Minister assured me back in June.

Matthew Taylor: The Government have some history of that, because when the former Secretary of State for Health, the right hon. Member for Holborn and St. Pancras (Mr. Dobson), intervened to keep the cottage hospitals open, he promised that we would get a review of funding that would result in increased funding. He did so precisely because he accepted that the problem in maintaining hospital services in the county was caused by fair money not being made available. However, he was replaced and we heard no more about the change. We now face radical change in the opposite direction, which will mean that Cornwall's NHS will get the worst funding in the country under the Labour Government, because we have the lowest wages outside the NHS. To be frank, that is hard for people to understand and accept. It is particularly hard to accept from a Labour Government who, in many other Departments, are trying their best to improve the situation in Cornwall and to put in increased investment precisely because of our poverty.

In Education questions the other day, I asked the Under-Secretary of State for Education and Skills, the hon. Member for Enfield, Southgate (Mr. Twigg), whether there were plans to introduce the same crazy system in education, where there is a broad area cost adjustment, and therefore more money for high-wage areas than for the rest of the country, but nothing that ties funding directly to local wages. He ruled it out. It is hard to see why it does not apply in education, but does apply in the NHS. That shows a lack of joined-up government—at least I hope that that is the explanation; if not, the implication is that we will see the same trend in police funding, education funding and local government funding. It is hard to see why the Government would not do that if they believed that it was right for the NHS.

The crucial point is that the final decisions have not been made. The Government have said that they will apply a market forces factor and that the principle of that is not open for negotiation. As I have said, we are not arguing that it should not apply. It has for many years been accepted in broad terms across the parties that some kind of adjustment needs to be made. The issues still up for decision are how great the impact will be on individual trusts and whether it will be fair to individual trusts, which I take to mean that the link to very small-scale changes in wages will go all the way through the system so that Cornwall will get the least help of any area. I hope that I can persuade the Minister to go to her colleagues and argue that that cannot possibly be right.

I have some specific questions for the Minister, of which I have notified her. First, I would like an answer to my question about the academic research underpinning the theory. I cannot establish that there is any. If the Minister says that there is, I hope that she will place it in the House of Commons Library so that hon. Members can see it—after all, Cornwall is not the only area affected by such issues, even if it is the worst affected. Secondly, if we are going to base figures on local wage rates, even if only partially, what is the date of the pay survey currently being used and how often will it be updated? Wages can change rapidly, and the anecdotal evidence suggests that they are changing rapidly in Cornwall; public sector employers such as the county council and the hospitals used to find it easy to recruit administrative staff, for example, on relatively low local government and NHS pay grades, but they are now finding it very difficult to recruit or retain staff because private sector salaries are rising. That is a sign of the success of policies such as objective 1 funding in improving the economy, but it suggests that if out-of-date figures are adopted, the results will be very unfair.

I understand that Devon and Cornwall will be the areas worst hit by the change. That would be quite out of line with the effects in most areas. Can the Minister confirm that? When will the final decision on tariffs be taken? My hon. Friend the Member for North Cornwall

[Matthew Taylor]

(Mr. Tyler) wrote to request a meeting through the Secretary of State for Health with one of the departmental team, and we would still appreciate such a meeting. Although I would be grateful to hear from the Minister what was said, we would like to talk the matter through in detail before a final decision is taken.

To be blunt, it is extremely unfair of the Government, and wrong in principle, to assume that there is a direct link between local wages in the poorest parts of the country and the ability to deliver health services in an NHS that still operates on national pay scales. I hope that the Minister can see that, and that although she may not be able to give a final verdict on the decision, she will agree to take the issue back to her colleagues.

4.17 pm

The Minister of State, Department of Health (Ms Rosie Winterton): First, I congratulate the hon. Member for Truro and St. Austell (Matthew Taylor) on securing the debate. He and other hon. Members with constituencies in the south-west peninsula have raised the topic in the House on several occasions. Before I speak to the specific issues, I thank the hon. Gentleman for drawing attention to the very good work that is being done by NHS staff throughout the peninsula and the fact that they are delivering good-quality services. I join him in paying tribute to all the staff, who are dedicated and committed to the process. Ministers from the Department of Health spent a day in the area recently; unfortunately, due to parliamentary business, I could not go, but I know that my colleagues were most impressed by the range of projects and facilities that have been developed across the peninsula. They saw for themselves the commitment of NHS staff in the area.

I thank the hon. Gentleman for acknowledging the Government's increased spending in the NHS. He described concerns about funding, but between 2003 and 2008, in addition to the increased expenditure in the NHS, it will be improved even further, by about £36 billion. That means that NHS organisations in the south-west peninsula are receiving record funding increases. Altogether, primary care trusts in the peninsula will receive a cash increase of nearly £390 million over the three-year period. The three PCTs in Cornwall will receive an increase in funding of more than £125 million—a cash increase of 30 per cent. I am glad that the hon. Gentleman agrees that funding has increased that that it reaching the local level. Some real changes are resulting: waiting times are falling; patients with suspected cancer are seen by a specialist very quickly; 96 per cent. of patients are in and out of accident and emergency within four hours; and new buildings and new facilities are coming on stream .

The hon. Gentleman touched on some of the problems that the area faces in achieving financial balance. Obviously, I am sure that all hon. Members agree that the annual expenditure of the NHS must remain within the resources allocated by Parliament. NHS organisations, including those in Cornwall, receive a fair share of resources and have a corresponding responsibility to manage them effectively. If they do not do that and we have to wipe the slate clean in one area, the money has to come from another area within the NHS.

That is not to say that I do not recognise some of the challenges facing the south-west peninsula. The strategic health authority and the Department's recovery and support unit are working closely: the unit meets the SHA monthly to discuss its progress against key requirements and performance targets. Following representations from local Members, including my hon. Friend the Member for Falmouth and Camborne (Ms Atherton), about the problems sorting out the deficit within the one-year target that was set, we advised the South West Peninsula SHA that we would allow it a maximum of two years to repay the debt and return to recurrent financial balance. That means that the SHA as a whole is working to a maximum deficit control of £15 million for the current year, but must deliver recurrent balance by the end of next year. The latest information from the SHA shows that it is working toward delivery of that control total. Regular meetings take place and we are giving all the central support that we can.

In the past, the weighted capitation formula was criticised for failing to get health services to the areas of greatest health need. We therefore undertook a wide-ranging review of the formula before the latest allocations round. The new formula provides a better measure of health need in all areas. In calculating health needs in rural areas, it takes account of the effects of access, transport and poverty. It also uses better measures of deprivation, which are capable of being updated regularly.

I turn now to the concerns that the hon. Gentleman raised about the workings of the market forces factor. Again, as he acknowledged, the market forces factor is not a new concept. All versions of the allocations formula in the past 20 years have had a market forces factor weighting to recognise the different costs of labour and land across the country. The need for that was identified by the resource allocation working party in 1976 in recognition of the fact that the costs of care may vary from place to place. The current approach has been in place since 1996 and is based on wage rates in the external labour market that are adjusted for occupation, so that they are on a like-for-like basis. They are not based on whether an area is poor or well off: for example, the more deprived areas in central London have some of the highest market forces factors.

There is substantial academic research to support the market forces factor. The current approach was adopted following a 1996 report by academics at the university of Warwick, which was reviewed in 2001. That research is in the public domain and a link was placed on the Department of Health website when the reports were published. However, if the Library does not have copies of the report, I undertake to ensure that it is given them.

Matthew Taylor: I appreciate that, but will the Minister confirm, first, that the full 1:1 link has been made in assessments of local expenditure only in the last couple of years, and that only when the tariff system is introduced will the full impact on the moneys received be seen? Secondly, can she confirm that the Warwick work is an analysis of the distribution of pay on the basis that she described, not an analysis of the way in which that has an impact on NHS costs? The latter is purely a theory, not something that is backed up by academic research.

Ms Winterton: Two changes were made to the market forces factor for the last allocations, which were based on recommendations made by the advisory committee on resource allocation. The 1:1 factor and payment by results will not have an impact on how much funding is directed into an area by the market forces factor, because that is already used as a mechanism to set the general allocations for PCTs.

To answer the hon. Gentleman's question about where the latest evidence comes from, it is based on the last three years of the new earnings survey, so for the 2003–04 to 2005–06 allocations the relevant years are 1999, 2000 and 2001. The hon. Gentleman asked when the data would be updated. I can confirm that we will do that as and when we need to. As I said, we have received advice and recommendations from the advisory committee for the forthcoming allocations round. Although the hon. Gentleman would like us to confirm today what those allocations are, I am afraid that that announcement will have to wait.

I end by saying that I would be more than happy to meet hon. Members from Cornwall and, I hope, discuss even more of the issues that have been raised today. NHS resources are increasing, but there are financial challenges. My Department is working closely with the SHA and others to ensure both that the difficulties being faced do not cause problems for services, and that financial balance is achieved in the local health economy.

Question put and agreed to.

Adjourned accordingly at half-past Four o'clock.

Westminster Hall

Wednesday 10 November 2004

[DAVID TAYLOR *in the Chair*]

Medicines and Healthcare Products Regulatory Agency

Motion made, and Question proposed, That the sitting be now adjourned.—*[Margaret Moran.]*

9.30 am

Dr. Ian Gibson (Norwich, North) (Lab): First, may I thank you, Mr. Taylor, for chairing the sitting? It is the first time that we have crossed paths like this, and I welcome the chance to discuss such a subject with you in the Chair. Secondly, although we are few this morning, that does not reflect on the importance of the issue, and I hope that that fact will come out during the debate.

The Medicines and Healthcare products Regulatory Agency—MHRA for short, although not many people know what the acronym stands for—is an executive agency of the Department of Health with trading fund status. It replaced or merged with the Medical Devices Agency, or MDA, and the Medicines Control Agency, or MCA, on 1 April 2003.

The MHRA's aims are to ensure that medicines for human use, sold or supplied in the United Kingdom, are of an acceptable standard of safety, quality and efficacy; to ensure that medical devices meet appropriate standards of safety, quality and performance; and to promote the safe use of medicines and devices. That is a sterling task. Its stated objectives are to make a major and effective contribution to public health, to provide authoritative and accessible information, to influence international regulation, to support industry and scientific innovation, to operate a successful and fully integrated business, and to minimise the cost of regulation.

The agency's many activities include overseeing those notified bodies that audit device manufacturers, regulating clinical trials of medicines and medical devices, and promoting good practice in the safe use of medicines and devices. Those are some of its functions.

My interest in this area stems from a visit I made to the MHRA during the summer. As a result of that meeting, I felt that not enough people were aware of its work, or of how medicines are regulated. Not enough is being made of its work on public health policy and it could have a far more extensive public profile. I am concerned about the bad press it has attracted recently, which is the result of underlying problems in the organisation and how it functions. Those problems must be addressed before an increasingly bad media reputation damages its future credibility. In short, the agency could be a disaster waiting to happen.

There is nothing more damaging to public trust than a regulatory system that is seen to have no clout, or that seems unwilling to use its power effectively. As the chief executive of the MHRA recently told the Health Committee,

"our prime responsibility is to ensure we protect public health".

With that stated priority, and with a forthcoming public health White Paper, it seems timely to take a look at one of the major agencies charged with safeguarding it.

As I said, I decided to raise the issue in Parliament following a visit to the MHRA to see how it works and what it does. I was enthused by the resources and data that its staff had at their fingertips, but thought that much more needed to be made of it. My concern is primarily to raise the profile of the agency and to see it impact more effectively on public health policy.

I have not been impressed by the agency's communication skills since I secured today's debate. Given its recent bad press over issues such as Seroxat and the Chiron flu vaccine, I would have expected it to take the chance to come forward with some positive messages. However, it sent me a briefing that left me with the impression that it is not interested in putting its name out into the world, or simply that it does not know how to do so.

The agency points out in its briefing that it has just appointed a director of communications—a 21st century activity, and I would not argue with the need for it. I hope that the appointment is not merely cosmetic and that it is backed up by a well thought through communications strategy that can help to build public confidence and improve the flow and exchange of information. That is vital, given the growing public perception that the workings of the drugs industry and its regulators are clouded in secrecy and governed by behind-the-scenes manipulation—a well-nurtured view in communities across the country. It is also vital given that the MHRA is the only regulatory agency that is fully industry funded.

It is a difficult task to convince people that a regulator entirely funded by the industry it regulates is completely impartial. That is why transparency should be at the heart of its agenda. The MHRA is gaining a reputation for not giving out information. It suspended Chiron's licence at the factory at Speke in Liverpool because of concerns about a bacterial contamination blocking half the United States' vaccine supply—48 million doses and 2 million United Kingdom doses. It was alleged in *The Times* that that had happened and that inspectors had been aware of potential problems for some time, but had done nothing about it.

Let me put the matter straight: I do not believe anything much that I read in the press, but I have not read any robust replies to the accusations. On 4 October, *The Guardian* revealed that the relationship between the industry through its organisation, the Association of the British Pharmaceutical Industry, and the regulator might be too close, with evidence of a joint lobbying campaign in Europe, a blueprint by industry for how the MHRA should be run and higher board level representation. Most notoriously, there has been a continuing controversy surrounding the drug Seroxat, the alleged withholding of clinical trial information by GlaxoSmithKline and questionable analysis of the data by the MHRA, as exposed and documented by "Panorama".

Most recently, claims of increased suicide risk in young adults led the European Agency for the Evaluation of Medicinal Products, which licences drugs for use in the European Union, to recommend that Seroxat be prescribed with extra caution for 18 to

[Dr. Ian Gibson]

29-year-olds whose treatment should be monitored closely. The MHRA endorsed those findings, but has dragged its feet over issuing the necessary warnings and information to GPs and the public.

It is time for the culture of secrecy to be dealt with. The legal basis for the giving and withholding of information by the MHRA will change with the implementation of the Freedom of Information Act 2000, but the damage done by the public believing that they have been lied to or defrauded is extremely difficult to repair. The workings of the agency need to be reviewed thoroughly. There should be more lay involvement on the committees, openly published minutes and a greater engagement with the public.

I should acknowledge that there is lay representation on the Committee on Safety of Medicines, which advises the MHRA and runs the yellow card scheme for reporting suspected adverse drug reactions, in which most GPs are involved. I have examined the system and there are piles of yellow cards. The Government have just announced direct reporting by consumers, but, as Mind has stated,

"consumer representation and the championing of consumer rights is not built into the MHRA's structures and processes".

There is a legal requirement to protect genuinely sensitive market information, but sharing information as openly as possible is of optimum importance. People should be able to find out easily what the organisation does, readily access its services and find out what decisions it is taking and how it is taking them. It seems that the MHRA adopts a restrictive approach to sharing information. As the 2003 National Audit Office report on the MCA pointed out, its public profile is weak compared with that of the Food and Drug Administration in the United States of America. That limits its ability to communicate safety messages to the public and engage with them as a source of information on the effects of medicines.

The exemplary model of best practice in this country is the Food Standards Agency, which states on its website that its aims are putting the consumer first, being open and accessible, and being an independent voice. It holds its board meetings and key committee meetings in public, which it advertises well in advance. The independence of the agency is reinforced by its arm's-length relationship with the Government. The FSA website states:

"Although the FSA is a Government agency, it works at 'arm's length' from Government because it doesn't report to a specific minister and is free to publish any advice it issues."

Therefore, I am inclined to support Mind on that issue. It calls for a drug regulatory system that puts consumer safety before commercial pressure and cost. Such a system would require agency access to all trial results, which should be put in the domain of researchers and reviewers and, once a drug is licensed, made available to all.

There should also be a well-supported consumer committee and consumer representation on other MHRA committees. Also, membership and operations should be transparent and accountable. People should have no personal—or even non-personal—interest in the industry that they are reviewing and regulating. The information on which decisions are based should be made available in suitable form.

Such a drug regulatory system should have sufficient legal powers to ensure access to all drug trial information and adequate funding to verify the accuracy of that information. It may need enhanced legal powers to obtain the information it needs from companies and better funding to ensure it has the resources to use the information fully, act promptly on it and publicise any safety messages effectively. Trial data should be provided as soon as they are available. Finally, the system should give consumer experience of drugs comparable weighting to information from drug trials.

I am encouraged by initiatives such as the extension of the yellow card system to include direct reporting of adverse effects by patients and the new paediatric medicines initiative, but we probably need an independent inquiry on the workings of the MHRA. That is a priority. I do not in any way want to suggest anything about individuals, but I and others have looked at the records of heads of enforcement who had long careers with GlaxoSmithKline. There is also a head of licensing who held a major post with that firm. We need to ensure that the workings of the agency are investigated externally as independently as possible.

I want to discuss a few further issues related to the MHRA's remit. The greater emphasis, in terms of discussing its work, seems to be on the medicines side; the medical devices side has been somewhat sidelined since the merger and may well have suffered from it. The MDA was once a leading organisation in Europe, but a senior person has just left it and there is no independence in that area. There is a problem as regards the two arms coming together and both parts having equal weight. It would be interesting to know why there is no head of devices services and diagnostics, and what the agency's intentions are in that regard.

I want to talk briefly about drug reclassification, because it is part of the choice agenda. The Government, in their December 2003 report "Building on the Best: Choice, Responsiveness and Equity in the NHS", make a commitment to doubling the rate of medicine reclassifications from five to 10 a year, which is welcome. However, that should be driven by strong evidence of efficacy and safety, and should not be seen to boost industry's profits in any way—that is a problem—or to shift the cost of treatment from the NHS to the consumer. The process needs to take into account possible consumer detriment resulting from reclassification. I would like to hear something about that from the Minister.

I have looked at some advertising overseen by the agency. In particular, I have a personal interest, as do many others here, in the drug simvastatin, a statin, which has been available in a 10 mg dose over the counter since July 2004.

I do not believe that clinical trials have been conducted in over-the-counter conditions on people deemed to be at moderate risk of coronary heart disease. The public are being subjected to a world-first experiment, as there is no evidence on the safety and efficacy of a 10 mg daily dose of simvastatin for the target group under those OTC conditions. The public need to be alerted to that, although I know that general practitioners have already been alerted. There needs to be a real opening up.

In relation to the drug, we have heard about the issues to do with drinking grapefruit juice and the likelihood of severe muscular damage and so on. Again, although those claims have appeared in one or two newspapers, it is not generally known whether there is good solid evidence for them. Let us hear from the organisation.

Decisions should be based on adequate data and data on efficacy, and nothing should be reclassified if there is doubt about the safety of the target population at the dose specified. It is essential that we have a robust, transparent, impartial regulatory process.

Perhaps we should think seriously about having an inquiry into this organisation. Is it, for example, best equipped to vet pharmaceutical advertising? There are some wonderful advertisements about heart conditions, which I find vague. I know that the words have been changed over the past few months, after various protests but, again, it is the public who see those adverts and think, "I'll have that drug." Sometimes the evidence changes in midstream, or there is no evidence. We need to know that there is good solid evidence and where we can get it.

Are the organisation's aims and objectives beyond its means and is it being pulled in too many directions to be effective? Where do its priorities lie in practice? Is it serving commercial interests and arbitrary targets, such as in reclassification, at the cost of public benefit? We need to know. Do the public even know what it is and what it does, or is that brought to their notice only when things go wrong? In fact, do many MPs know about it?

9.46 am

Paul Flynn (Newport, West) (Lab): I congratulate my hon. Friend the Member for Norwich, North (Dr. Gibson) on securing this important debate. I question one thing that he said. When he referred to the credibility of the organisation, one was tempted to ask, "What credibility?" Recent events have proven that it is not a watchdog; it is a pussycat that purrs in front of the pharmaceutical industry and does what it is told. It has an incestuous relationship with the big pharmas and has a close association with the Association of the British Pharmaceutical Industry. It has a disgraceful recent record. We can look with gratitude to the work not of the Medicines and Healthcare products Regulatory Agency in protecting the public, but of people such as Sarah Boseley of *The Guardian* for her exposé of the organisation, the television programme "Panorama" and Richard Brook of Mind, who courageously resigned from the MHRA in disgust at its activities.

It is a matter of enormous importance that, in recent history, the regulator is not protecting the 25,000 people who suffered heart attacks and the 7,000 who died from taking a painkilling drug for arthritics that was withdrawn by Merck Sharpe and Dohme in September after being promoted by the regulator and by organisations that exist to defend arthritics. I had a conversation the day that it was withdrawn with one of the executives of Arthritis Care—a splendid organisation that I have worked with for many years. It has done pioneering work for people with arthritis, particularly in promoting the real beneficial therapies for arthritis, such as exercise, losing weight and displacing the pain through coping mechanisms: all the non-drug treatments. On the day that Vioxx was withdrawn, it was interesting that those who should have been defending the patients suggested that those who were taking the drug should not panic. I should have thought that panic was the appropriate response when someone was taking a drug that was likely to kill them.

The organisations advised people not to panic, but to find another drug. Over my lifetime, 50 per cent. of medicinal drugs have had nasty, unpleasant side effects, and the other 50 per cent. have nasty side effects that are yet to be discovered. That has been the continuous history of medicinal drugs over the years. Protection did not come from the MHRA.

Neither did protection come with Seroxat. When business collapsed in the House on one day in March, we had an hour and a half to discuss Seroxat at some length. The contribution of the regulatory body has been derisory. Given the lamentable performance of its group when it gave evidence to the Health Committee, I hope that the Committee will produce a hard-hitting report that will finally put the last nail in the coffin. I do not think that the body can be reformed. We have to set up another. We cannot have the public exposed to the greed of the pharmaceutical industry any longer without protection.

That is not a criticism. My hon. Friend the Member for Norwich, North is a distinguished scientist. There is no criticism of the science or the quality of the miraculous discoveries that have been made over the past 200 years in pharmaceuticals. However, there is serious criticism of the marketing of those products, which has been based on obtaining maximum profits, with only a cursory glance at safety.

Seroxat is a licensed drug that is proved to have significant side effects and to induce suicide, particularly in young people. Data have been held on this since 1990. We now know that the MHRA reviewed it five times and always gave it a clean bill of health. However, that organisation, which treats itself seriously and is proud of its qualifications, held information on Seroxat for 10 years, which suggested that dosages above 20 mg were unnecessary and possibly dangerous. Consequently many people may have been wrongly prescribed. It did not do anything about that until 2003.

We believe that 17,000 people were prescribed doses above that level and advice was given very late in the day to doctors to remind them of the recommended dose. It was not the official watchdog that caused something to be done; it was publicity by energetic, intelligent, resourceful journalists—people we often criticise. The real watchdogs are those journalists and organisations such as Mind. It is not an insignificant consideration that Mind does not take a penny in support or sponsorship from the pharmaceutical industry.

It is interesting that Arthritis Care, which promoted Vioxx over the years, states on its website:

> "The redevelopment of Arthritis Care's website has been made possible with support from Merck Sharp & Dohme Limited."

The Depression Alliance Cymru takes very little money from the drugs industry, but the Depression Alliance nationally takes 80 per cent. of its funds from the pharmaceutical industry. As far as I can see its mouth has been bandaged against any criticism of any drug. I have never known it to criticise any drug at any time. That incestuous relationship is something else that the Health Committee is examining.

[Paul Flynn]

It is almost laughable to see the interests of the members of the MHRA. They will all tell us that they are professional people and that they can be regulators at one moment and servants of the pharmaceutical industry the next. However, it is difficult to believe that they can carry out their jobs independently when we look at the relationship of the committee and its sub-committees with the pharmaceutical industry. In the 2002 annual report, 17 of the 34 members of the main committee declare personal interests, which include receiving travel expenses and fees, employment as consultants and the ownership of shares. Fourteen declare non-personal interests such as the receipt of research grants.

All the main pharmaceutical companies are represented, from AstraZeneca to Roche and the trend continues through the sub-committees of the committee on the safety of medicine. The biological sub-committee has 11 members: 10 of them declare personal interests and three declare non-personal interests. These interests run to several pages. I do not want to weary the Chamber, but the chemistry, pharmacy and standards committee has 14 members, seven declaring personal interests and nine declaring non-personal interests. The pharmacovigilance committee has eight members: two have declared personal interests and six have declared non-personal interests.

The whole body is part of the pharmaceutical industry, an industry that has a dreadful record of overselling its products, of disease mongering, of trying to encourage a therapy culture in society by convincing every human being that for every moment of pain, boredom, distress, anxiety they feel in their life, they should take a pill of some kind. The whole myth has been built up, not to help humanity, but to serve the greedy interests of the pharmaceutical industry. Many of the marvellous advances that have been made have been damaged by the overselling of many dangerous and damaging drugs. The problems that we now have with selective serotonin reuptake inhibitors reveal how the system has not worked in the interests of patients and how the agency has been colonised by the drugs companies, whose commercial interests have been protected as a result.

The agency has shown itself not to be worthy of our respect or of continuing in its role. At best, it is ramshackle and ineffective; at worst, it could be corrupt. We cannot give examples by which we can say, "Things haven't happened." I do not think that my hon. Friend the Member for Norwich, North mentioned any names, although I am sorely tempted to. In a newspaper article on 4 October, Sarah Boseley mentioned the name of someone who was in the extraordinary position of advising and serving a drugs company while working for the agency at the same time. That cannot be right. However, the issue would have remained unnoticed had it not been brought to our attention by that newspaper.

Almost everyone in the country relies on medicinal drugs at some time in their lives, and we deserve protection. We deserve a body whose independence is beyond question, but we do not have one now. We have been badly served by the MHRA.

9.56 am

Mr. Paul Burstow (Sutton and Cheam) (LD): I, too, welcome you to the Chair, Mr. Taylor. This is the first time that I have spoken in Westminster Hall under your chairmanship.

I thank the hon. Member for Norwich, North (Dr. Gibson) and congratulate him on securing the debate. He has given us the opportunity to explore an important watchdog regulatory function, which perhaps does not get enough attention in the House, although one or two hon. Members question the agency closely about its work. It is useful to have this debate and to have quite a bit of time to go over the details.

I want to pick up on several points. In opening the debate, the hon. Gentleman made some powerful points about the remit and work of the Medicines and Healthcare products Regulatory Agency. He posed important questions, which the Minister needs to answer, about the degree of transparency and the nature of the engagement between the regulatory agency and the industry, and between the agency, consumers and their interests. We need to ensure that the agency is not only seen to be acting independently, but that it is acting independently. I shall return to that point in a minute.

The hon. Gentleman suggested that there needs to be an inquiry. It is worth noting that the Health Committee is conducting an inquiry into the pharmaceutical industry—it is attempting to paint a very large canvas. I have read the report of some of the evidence sessions that it has conducted so far, and it is clearly looking at the agency's role. Only time will tell whether it concludes that it or someone else needs to do more work and whether it makes specific recommendations about changing the agency and tipping the balance somewhat in favour of the consumer. However, some of the strong points that have been made in the debate lead me to the view that we need to look again at the balance of interests in the agency.

We need to ensure that the public interest is seen to be properly reflected in how medicines are made available to the public. In particular, we need to ensure that the industry is properly involved in the process. We need to consider the large sums that it invests in the development of drugs and in trials and examine how information about such issues is made available in a timely fashion to the regulatory bodies. Furthermore, I take the hon. Gentleman's point that we need to think about how consumer interests are represented. In answers to parliamentary questions, Ministers have rightly made the point that lay people have been involved in the agency since its inception. However, it is important to be clear about how much the lay and consumer interest permeates the whole organisation and its culture. That is the question being asked today and it would be useful to get a response from the Minister.

Reference has already been made to Richard Brook, who served on the Committee on Safety of Medicines working group on SSRIs—selective serotonin reuptake inhibitors. In his evidence, he said:

> "The last point I would make, which I think is a very relevant point, is it takes 40 days for the MHRA on average, in the last annual report, to license a drug and yet it takes two years to review antidepressants; and so there is something about the balance that Andrew was talking about that raises a real issue. If it takes eight weeks to get a drug into the market, why does it take two years to sort out its safety afterwards?"

Some may question whether it really takes eight weeks, but it is relevant to note that Risperidone, a strong anti-psychotic drug that caused concern earlier this year—the hon. Member for Newport, West (Paul Flynn) has taken a close interest in anti-psychotic medication—was being used unlicensed in the UK to treat older people with dementia. The relevant Government watchdog received information in 2002 that the risk of strokes was three times higher among older people prescribed this medication, but it finally warned that the drug should not be used only on 9 March 2004. Patients in Canada were warned of the risk of strokes two years earlier. In an answer I received from the Department of Health on 24 March, it was said that:

> "The MHRA is represented on the CPMP and its Pharmacovigilance Working Party (PhVWP), which meet monthly and provide a regular forum for discussion of drug safety issues within the European Union. An electronic communication system allows rapid exchange of drug safety information between member states."—[*Official Report*, 24 March 2004; Vol. 419, c. 825W.]

The point is that mechanisms are supposed to be in place to allow our regulator to be aware at an early stage of concerns and of the weight to be attached to them. The pharmacovigilance working party is apparently in regular video conference contact with the US Food and Drug Administration yet it took two years for our agencies to come to a conclusion that had already been reached across the Atlantic in Canada and the United States, and to take the necessary protective measures. How many elderly people in care homes or elsewhere suffered strokes or great disability or even lost their lives as a result of being prescribed this drug?

Dr. Gibson: Why does the hon. Gentleman think that it takes two years? Where are the pressures?

Mr. Burstow: I am drawing attention to Richard Brook's contribution and the questions he asked about pressures. I was going to end with this point, but it is worth bringing it up now to respond to that question. Brook's argument, which the Minister must address, is that the organisation is risk averse and is constantly looking over its shoulder, fearful of being a victim of legal action or a challenge in the courts for acting peremptorily.

In his evidence to the Select Committee on 14 October, Richard Brook said:

> "Every time we made difficult decisions, there was always this issue of: 'We have got to be very careful because the pharmaceutical companies will sue us if we get this wrong; they will take us to court and take us through legal processes'; and it was very clear that the MRHA officials were very mindful of the whole time of that dimension, to my view, more than the dimension of public health and public responsibility of the public."

He continued that

> "it is a very difficult thing to be confident about the transparency of the regulator when so many people have got long histories, career histories, in the pharmaceutical company."

That pressure, real or imagined, is clearly having an effect—certainly in Mr. Brook's view.

Dr. Gibson: Is the hon. Gentleman saying that he could never foresee a situation arising in which John Humphrys faced up to Sir John Krebs of the Food Standards Agency and asked, "Come on, have the sheep got BSE?" and Krebs said, "Quite honestly, I really don't know."? Is the Committee on Safety of Medicines so frightened to tell the truth about the accuracy of the data or does it dodge giving any messages at all? Has it ever appeared on Radio 4?

Mr. Burstow: I listen to Radio 4 quite a bit, but not enough to say whether the CSM has appeared on it. The hon. Gentleman's point about a communications director having only recently been appointed says a lot about the organisation's posture. Is it a public-facing organisation or is it an industry-facing organisation? Perhaps it urgently needs to take advantage of that appointment to ensure not only that it informs Members of its work more effectively, but that it makes the public more aware.

To come to my second point, the Government have indicated their willingness in principle for the patient—the consumer—to be much more directly involved in the reporting of adverse reactions, through the yellow card system or a parallel system. That has to be welcome. A number of those who submitted evidence to the Select Committee said that the best way to ensure that more information about adverse reactions was captured in the system would be to involve the person affected directly. The people concerned have the greatest vested interest in reporting, but they are outwith the system.

We know from parliamentary answers that more than 150 people a day are admitted to hospital because of bad reactions to medicine. Approximately 20,000 adverse drug reactions a year are reported to the MHRA and the CSM through the yellow card scheme, of which approximately 3 per cent. are suspected adverse drug reactions with a fatal outcome.

Mr. Iain Luke (Dundee, East) (Lab): The hon. Gentleman is making an important point about communication with individual patients, but does he not also think that the organisation should liaise more closely with the user groups that have sprung up to draw attention to the SSRIs that my hon. Friend the Member for Newport, West mentioned? For instance, the Seroxat group is keen for the new body to take cognisance of its troubles when it regulates new drugs.

Mr. Burstow: The organisation must be seen as genuinely even-handed in its treatment of all parties. It must be more permeable and open to engagement with consumer and interest groups of the kind that the hon. Gentleman mentioned. His point is fair and must be part of any review of how the new body works. That is something that I hope the Select Committee will consider carefully, especially given the recent experiences that the hon. Member for Newport, West described.

I was outlining some of the figures. There were 722 fatal suspected adverse drug reactions in 2003, the last year for which figures are available.

Paul Flynn: Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

Mr. Burstow: Let me finish the figures, then I will be happy to give way. Back in 1997, the figure was 446, so there has been a 62 per cent. increase in the number of

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reported adverse drug reactions with a fatal outcome. That is a significant increase. Adverse drug reactions make up 6 per cent. of hospital admissions, but they are, according to a study by researchers from the university of Liverpool in the *British Medical Journal* earlier this year, in most cases avoidable. Nearly 10 per cent. of adverse drug reactions were definitely avoidable through drug treatment procedure that is consistent with knowledge of good medicine practice, whereas nearly two thirds—63 per cent.—were possibly avoidable.

I recently asked a parliamentary question about what plans the Government had to introduce a system to use the yellow card system to learn about correct dosage and prescribing methods, particularly for children. The answer that I received said:

> "The yellow card scheme is not designed to enable lessons to be drawn about correct dosage or prescribing methods for medicines for children. There are no plans to introduce a system of learning in this context."—[*Official Report*, 3 November 2004; Vol. 426, c. 319W.]

However, the research shows clearly that an awful lot of poor prescribing practice results in people being admitted to hospital. Surely the Government have an interest in reducing inappropriate admissions as a result of such prescribing practices. Will the Minister say whether the Government might still consider action on that?

Paul Flynn: I remind the hon. Gentleman of a previous Minister's answer to my question about the number of deaths from a particular drug. He might be pleased to know that the yellow card figure showed that the number of deaths went down last year from 62 to 48. However, the true figure obtained from coroners' courts showed that the number of deaths had risen from 580 to 640. The yellow card scheme has never given anything but a ludicrous underestimate—a snapshot—of the figures. The system has no credibility.

Mr. Burstow: I am not sure that it has no credibility. The hon. Gentleman is right that it is probably not used anything like as much as it should be, and that there is significant under-reporting. The question that I have to ask the Minister—I believe that the hon. Gentleman has also asked it—is how data collected from the system are analysed and used in the public interest, and who has access to them. The Government have said that they are carrying out a review about who might have access to that data and how and when they are used.

That data could and should be a valuable tool. Some 500,000 records are kept of adverse reactions over the years, which researchers should use much more effectively to obtain a much clearer picture of why there are adverse reactions. I accept the hon. Gentleman's point that often only what amounts to the tip of the iceberg is reported, but the data could be used far better, and I hope that the Minister will say where the Government have got to with the review and when they intend to publish its conclusion. I hope that the conclusion will be that the process will be far more transparent and open.

The hon. Member for Norwich, North referred to access to information, and I was struck by some of the comments made during the Select Committee's consideration of the matter about the difference between the attitude in this country to the control of information and access to it by the public and consumer groups, and the attitude across the Atlantic in the United States. The Federal Drugs Administration has a website that will put almost all this information into the public domain.

We can access the information on the FDA website, but we cannot see it on a website provided by our own regulatory agency. That is an anomalous position in a world that has the internet, which has no such boundaries. The public should be able to see our own agency providing the same sort of service to them. Will the Minister comment on that?

The problem of capturing only the tip of the iceberg needs to be addressed. The National Audit Office carried out research on this a few years ago and recommended that we need to move from a non-mandatory to a mandatory system of reporting. There is certainly a very powerful case to be made for that. France has a mandatory reporting system. When will the Government decide whether we should move away from the current voluntary arrangements?

The expansion in the number of people who can report—the inclusion of nurses and the plans to include patients—is welcome, but when will the reporting system become mandatory, given that GPs in particular say that one reason why they do not submit yellow cards is that it never comes to mind at the right time? They say that they are not sure what should be reported, that it takes too long to fill out the form, that it is not easy to find a yellow card when necessary, and that reporting generates too much extra work. Those are just some of the reasons that GPs give for not submitting their yellow cards. That cannot be an acceptable basis for a system that should be about giving clinicians information about what works and what is risky.

Dr. Andrew Murrison (Westbury) (Con): Does the hon. Gentleman agree that these vital forms might not be filled out because what is really important is sidelined in the great welter of paperwork with which GPs now have to cope?

Mr. Burstow: The hon. Gentleman makes a very fair point about the ever-growing burden of form filling and paperwork on GPs and others, and about the consequences of the target and tick-box culture that drives that. That means that yellow cards are missed on the radar, which is another reason why they must be made mandatory to ensure that more information is captured.

Only 74 incidents were reported in the first year of the electronic yellow card system, which was introduced back in October 2002. It would be useful if the Minister could tell us what is being done to promote wider use of that service and to publicise it. That uptake is surprisingly low for what should be a much simpler way of providing information to the MHRA.

I want to conclude by mentioning the relationship between the MHRA and the pharmaceutical industry. At the beginning of the year Mr. Brooks said to *The Guardian*:

> "At present the MHRA listens far too closely to the concerns of major pharmaceutical companies and not nearly closely enough to people experiencing side effects from drugs that should be making them better, not worse."

His criticism came two months after he resigned from the MHRA experts group on selective serotonin reuptake inhibitors, claiming that it failed to protect patients from potentially harmful doses of the antidepressant Seroxat.

The debate today is about whether the agency, which is funded solely by the industry, provides the safeguards and reassurance that the public should have about the medicines being made available to them. The hon. Member for Newport, West described in very strong terms the concerns that those outside the agency have about its role. It might be characterised as a paper tiger, or a toothless tiger—he described it as a pussycat.

Whether it is a pussycat or a watchdog, there are serious concerns about the fact that two years are spent on some matters by an agency that can give a licence in 40 days; that will not necessarily carry public confidence. The example of the Food Standards Agency given by the hon. Member for Norwich, North is a good one. It has set a benchmark for credibility and confidence building that other Government agencies should perhaps be trying to reach. We need to maintain confidence so that the industry and the public will benefit and, as a result, society as a whole will benefit from medicines.

10.17 am

Dr. Andrew Murrison (Westbury) (Con): It is a great pleasure to serve under your chairmanship, Mr. Taylor. As is the case for other hon. Members, I think this is the first time I have done so. I congratulate the hon. Member for Norwich, North (Dr. Gibson) on obtaining the debate. Although it is sparsely attended, this is one of the more memorable debates that I have attended here and I am sure that the Minister will take home some important material to reflect on.

I confess that, before doing my research for the debate, my knowledge of the Medicines and Healthcare products Regulatory Agency was perhaps a little sketchy. Perhaps the sketchiness of my knowledge will shine through in my remarks.

Dr. Gibson: Will the hon. Gentleman confirm that he was a GP before he became a Member of Parliament?

Dr. Murrison: The hon. Gentleman makes a good point, which rather underscores the one I was about to make—if I, as a shadow health spokesman and, indeed, an ex-GP, know little about the organisation in question, perhaps the general public know even less. That is dreadful, particularly when we compare it with knowledge of the equivalents on the continent and in America. The relevant bodies there are well known and well respected. Importantly, they are listened to.

I suspect that what is already emerging in our debate is the fact that the agency has very few friends. It appears not to be on particularly good terms with patients and the organisations that represent them. Indeed, it seems not to be on particularly good terms with the industry, despite the apparent over-representation of the industry on its board.

I am reluctant to lay into individuals, however. When organisations are being considered, I prefer to examine their structures and how they are constituted. The fault in that context lies with the Government, Ministers and, ultimately, Parliament. We need first to look to ourselves to discover why the organisation, which is apparently failing rather badly, is as it is and how we can either reform or replace it so that it can carry out its stated functions more effectively. I sincerely hope that after this debate, given the strength of feeling that has legitimately been expressed, the Minister will think about the organisation and how to improve it.

I want to focus on some structural problems that I believe have inhibited the agency from doing its job properly. The hon. Member for Norwich, North mentioned my background. My dealings with the MHRA and its predecessors chiefly involved the yellow card system. I was rather horrified to hear him describe seeing piles and piles of yellow cards when he visited the MHRA recently. What were those cards being used for? How was the information on them being collated and transformed by the agency into useful information that might inform any decisions or recommendations that it makes?

Under-reporting is a feature of our health care system. Indeed, the Minister of State, Department of Health, the hon. Member for Doncaster, Central (Ms Winterton), admitted in a recent parliamentary answer:

> "The number of reports received via the yellow card scheme does not directly equate to the number of people who suffer adverse reactions to drugs for a number of reasons including an unknown level of under-reporting."—[*Official Report*, 19 April 2004; Vol. 420, c. 222W.]

That is a gross understatement. A small minority of adverse reactions to medicinal products are reported through the yellow card system or in any other way. To be fair to the MHRA, if it is basing what it does on inadequate information input of that sort, it is hardly surprising that it is failing.

I am very concerned about Seroxat, which is the flagship product that has drawn attention to the MHRA in a negative way. There appears to have been a significant delay after concerns were initially expressed, which perhaps stem from the excess of suicidal behaviour among those taking the product over and above what one would expect from people on a placebo. Such a delay is unacceptable, which is what set alarm bells ringing in relation to the agency.

Paul Flynn: Does not a significant criticism of this body relate to its competence, because in its examinations of Seroxat it did not get into the raw data from the trials that took place? All the agency looked at, and all it had in its possession, were the conclusions. We now know that had the data been looked at, it would have been known that the firm, GlaxoSmithKline, suppressed information. The trials showed that the drug had no utility; it was no better than placebos. Furthermore, it increased suicidal tendencies in the young. This is a question not just of delay, but of whether this body is competent, given that it looked only at the conclusions, not the raw data.

Dr. Murrison: I am grateful for that intervention. I intend to raise the difficulty that we have with the publication of negative conclusions. I think that 38 per cent. of independent studies of medicines produce unfavourable conclusions, whereas only 5 per cent. of studies funded by pharmaceutical companies produce negative conclusions. That is published information. So,

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there is a problem with negative reporting. The Minister must think carefully about how we can encourage negative reports to appear in the literature and require pharmaceutical companies to publish all data, whether negative or positive, because clearly the pharmaceutical industry has an interest in suppressing information showing that its products have a negative or neutral effect. I suspect that some difficulties surrounding Seroxat revolve around that.

These problems do not stop with Seroxat, however, as 3,000 children in this country are on a product that is marketed here as Effexor. Again, that product can cause suicidal and aggressive behaviour. In that connection, we are worried about trialling the product specifically on children—an issue that others have raised—and the possibility of suppression of negative reporting. It is extremely important to realise that the medical press favours positive reports; it does not particularly like negative ones. However, if we are to get a true impression of whether a product has a positive effect that outweighs the negative effects, which I have to say most products have, it is vital that negative reports, as well as the positive ones, are in the public domain and accessible for those such as the MHRA, which, in a reformed state, one hopes would consider all the evidence available when making its recommendations to Ministers and others.

The system for reporting adverse effects stems from the 1960s and relates to thalidomide. At that time, GPs were very willing to report adverse effects and it was assumed that they would report them all fairly rigorously. That practice has fallen away dramatically and we need better surveillance methods to determine whether a product has adverse effects.

I am pleased that the yellow card system has been extended to other health care professionals, principally nurses, and that it is easier for patients to report adverse effects. I am interested in the use of NHS Direct in that connection and I hope that the Minister tells us the early results of that initiative, as they would be useful to know. I am doubtful that it will be particularly effective, given my experience of telephoning NHS Direct: I was kept on hold for 20 minutes. My strong suspicion is that most people who telephone the service, especially those who want to report minor adverse effects, would probably give up in half that time. Nevertheless, it would be interesting to know what part the Minister thinks NHS Direct can play in reporting adverse effects.

Dr. Andrew Herxheimer said recently in the *International Journal of Risk and Safety in Medicine* that the yellow card system is "chaotic and misconceived". I know from my own experience that that is the case. The fault lies with those who are tasked with reporting using the yellow card system. However, the paperwork and bureaucracy—the tick-box culture—among which practitioners now have to work do not help, because they dilute what is essential in reporting.

The yellow card system was set up a long time ago in a different environment, in the downdraft from the thalidomide scandal, and it has perhaps become less important in the minds of many practitioners. However, it is vital that it is brought to the fore. Making reporting mandatory may be a way ahead, but that would be difficult to police. The current system is not acceptable, although I do not entirely share the view expressed by the hon. Member for Newport, West (Paul Flynn) that it is pretty useless.

Paul Flynn: I know of no academic researcher who takes any notice of the yellow card system. If people want data on the side effects of medicines, they go elsewhere for them. The system has never had any such reputation. The Library never quotes the yellow card system when asked for information. In the example I gave, not only did that system underestimate the number of deaths by 90 per cent., but it also gave the wrong trend.

Dr. Murrison: I am grateful to the hon. Gentleman for that information, which perhaps accounts for the piles of yellow cards that the hon. Member for Norwich, North saw and the implication that they were sitting there unattended. I hope that that message does not go out to GPs. I have filled in yellow cards and if I thought that they were not being attended to, I would be even less likely to do anything about them. I suspect that they are filled in if there are severe adverse effects, but not if there are lesser ones.

I entirely agree with the hon. Member for Newport, West that the system is likely to be flawed, but I hope that it is not fatally flawed and that it flags up some serious side effects. I filled in the yellow cards when I was a GP; if I was being honest, I would have to say that I did so when there was a severe side effect, rather than something I was uncertain about.

That is important, especially in the context of side effects associated with the underlying condition, particularly when one is dealing with mental health, for example. Indeed, one side effect of Seroxat appears to be suicidal behaviour, but some would say that that is a feature of the underlying condition for which Seroxat is being prescribed. In those circumstances, one has to feel sympathy for the doctor, who is trying to disentangle what, on the balance of probabilities, is due to the drug and what is due to the underlying condition. I say in all candour that it is often very difficult to determine that.

The cases that I remember reporting using the yellow card system were reasonably barn-door. There were, for example, cases in which hyperkalemia—raised potassium levels—occurred in relation to a drug for which that was a reported known side effect, and in which there was no other particular reason for the patient to have a raised potassium level. In such cases, I suspect that the yellow card system is used reasonably well and in a way that might be effective and might prompt the MHRA, with all its faults, to take some note—providing the data are being collated. However, for the rest, I agree that if the system is to be useful it must be radically overhauled. We need to ensure that all practitioners are aware of it, have confidence in it and feel that the data they are submitting will be useful and used.

I am also concerned about the proliferation of agencies in the field. I wonder whether some problems that the MHRA experiences are related to confusion about the boundaries. We now have, in addition to the National Patient Safety Agency in the immediate area, the National Coordinating Centre for Health Technology Assessment, the National Institute for

Clinical Excellence and the Committee on Safety of Medicines. I am confused about the boundaries between those various organisations. There are many different voices—that does not tend to be the case in other countries—and I wonder whether that dilutes the voice of the MHRA in performing its important function. Will the Minister comment on that?

I said earlier that the MHRA has few friends. The industry—particularly small-scale industry—seems not to be particularly impressed with it. It involves cost that does not apply on the continent. I have been contacted by someone in the field who works across the European Union. He says that in no other health economy is there quite such a burdensome system that applies particularly to small organisations and start-up organisations working out of universities and that that is causing a real problem for those who are trying to bring innovations online.

We need a rigorous way to regulate the industry—one of our tasks in this place is to ensure that public health is protected—but I worry that we have an organisation that is both burdensome to innovators and failing to protect the public adequately. I hope the Minister takes away the comments that have been made in the debate and has a serious look at the organisation.

10.33 am

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Health (Miss Melanie Johnson): I am pleased to answer the points raised in the debate and to congratulate my hon. Friend the Member for Norwich, North (Dr. Gibson) on raising the topic of the Medicines and Healthcare products Regulatory Agency.

As patients and carers become increasingly aware of their own health care choices, it is important that the impact of the work of the UK regulator of medicines and medical devices is better known. Having access to information, in this case about medicines and devices, is at the heart of patient choice, which is a Government priority for the NHS.

In my opening remarks, I want to underline a number of key points about what the agency is, what it is responsible for and the impact that it has. Without doubt, products regulated by the agency have a major impact on all our lives. I will try to give hon. Members a sense of the scale of that impact. In 2001, nearly 600 million prescriptions were dispensed in the UK and some 700 million packages of non-prescription medicines were supplied. Those range from innovative products designed to treat major, life-threatening illnesses to generic versions of common painkillers. Devices ranging from walking aids and examination gloves to radiotherapy machines and resuscitators are used in our hospitals, care homes and, increasingly, in our homes. It is estimated that more than half the UK population has contact with a medical device in any one day.

The MHRA is an executive agency of the Department of Health, which employs some 750 people, and it has an annual budget of about £65 million. It was created on 1 April 2003 from the merger of the Medicines Control Agency and the Medical Devices Agency. Most of its staff are medical, scientific or technical, but the MHRA is also responsible for providing policy advice to Ministers on medicines and devices issues.

The merger was a logical step in the development of the two agencies. Hon. Members have not particularly touched on this, but the boundaries between medicines and devices are blurring: we already have many drug-device combination products such as drug-eluting stents on the market, and emerging technologies, such as nanotechnology and tissue engineering, will require a new approach to regulation. Ultimately, patients, users of medicines and medical devices, and health care professionals who rely on the safety advice of the agency should benefit most from the merger.

I will briefly explain what the agency does. To put it simply, medicines have to be authorised before they can be placed on the market in the UK or European Union. The regulator must be satisfied that the product meets set standards of safety, quality and efficacy. The MHRA also regulates the manufacture of pharmaceuticals, and ensures that rules governing the sale, labelling and advertising of medicinal products are followed. Crucially, it operates a system for the surveillance of products on the market, in which suspected adverse reactions are reported and stored on a database on which more than 500,000 reports have been collected over 40 years. That is the yellow card scheme to which my hon. Friend the Member for Norwich, North and other Members referred.

Devices are regulated quite differently in many respects. I have already mentioned the diversity of products; that diversity influences the way in which the sector is regulated. For most products, the system involves the monitoring of safety in use, rather than pre-authorisation, and is based on the CE mark, which is awarded by a notified body in one of the member states. The regulator audits the notified body to ensure that its decisions are correct.

Before I address the specific issues raised by hon. Members, I will briefly touch on the role of stakeholders. A body with such diverse functions has a wide range of stakeholders. First, of course, come members of the public, patients, clients of social services departments, carers, and all users of medicines and medical equipment, but stakeholders also include professionals in health and social services who need to act on the safety advice broadcast by the agency. Manufacturers of pharmaceuticals and medical devices also have a right to expect high standards of service from the agency.

I turn to the impact of the agency on public health and point out that it regulates products that are in common use. It is therefore of crucial importance. Protecting public health is at the heart of the regulation of devices and medicines. The yellow card scheme is the cornerstone of the UK monitoring scheme. The agency has recently reviewed its policy in that area, and is considering, on behalf of Ministers, ways of increasing access by researchers to the yellow card database.

Monitoring systems for devices, and the system of liaison officers set up in NHS trusts, ensure that any devices issues can be resolved through prompt action by the agency. Surveillance programmes have allowed the agency to lead the way in several high profile areas of drug and device safety to ensure that there is a consistent approach to important issues for public health.

Mr. Burstow: Will the Minister give way?

Miss Johnson: I will in a moment, but I have not addressed any of the points that have been raised. If the hon. Gentleman raised one such point, perhaps he will give me the chance to get to it.

The surveillance programmes include hormone replacement therapy, which has not been mentioned, anti-psychotics, which have the risk of stroke, and selective serotonin reuptake inhibitors, or SSRIs. I will come to those specific points.

The agency uses other resources to protect public health: another key database is the general practice research database, which holds anonymised clinical records supplied by GPs. The database, which has not been mentioned much in the debate, is used by the MHRA and internationally for regulatory pharmacovigilance decision making. The value of such a unique resource has been recognised by the United States Food and Drug Administration, which hon. Members have cited as an exemplar in such matters. The FDA is using the MHRA's database, by acquiring a five-year licence to use the data, to support its own drug safety monitoring programmes, which I hope brings a little doubt to the minds of hon. Members about some of the aspersions that they have cast in the direction of the agency.

Seroxat and selective serotonin reuptake inhibitors have benefited millions of people. I thought that the account of my hon. Friend the Member for Newport, West (Paul Flynn) rather neglected the benefits of medicines and drugs, although he made a passing reference to them, as well as the occasional risks and difficulties—some serious and some not so serious—that are experienced by people who take such medicine. Serious side effects are rare in the case of Seroxat and SSRIs. Seroxat has been used by more than 160 million people worldwide. Suicidal behaviour during treatment may be linked to illness and may not necessarily be due to the drug. However, the Government and the MHRA take such issues seriously.

All medicines, including Seroxat, are licensed on the available data at the time, but their benefits are kept under constant review. Seroxat and the other SSRIs are associated with an improvement in safety in overdose and are better tolerated by patients than other main classes of medicines used in the treatment of depression, the tricyclic antidepressants. An expert working group of the Committee on Safety of Medicines is undertaking a comprehensive, independent scientific assessment of the available data relating to the safety of SSRIs, particularly withdrawal reactions and suicide behaviour.

The expert group sought and considered evidence from a wide range of sources, including a specific objective to listen to the patient voice. I hope that hon. Members know that it has already reached conclusions on the use of SSRIs in children and the Government have published the findings on that, including the results of the clinical trials. That unprecedented step goes further than any regulator has ever done and demonstrates our commitment to being as open as possible in drug regulation. The expert group is now focusing its attention on the use of SSRIs in adults and hopes to conclude its full and thorough review before Christmas. No doubt hon. Members will be interested to receive that information when it is published and to examine the findings.

I want now to discuss the withdrawal of Vioxx and point out to the hon. Member for Sutton and Cheam (Mr. Burstow) that the Canadians took action on Risperdal, which is an anti-psychotic drug, not the drug Vioxx that was withdrawn worldwide in September. The United Kingdom acted on Risperdal as soon as the evidence was available. The drug was licensed for different uses in Canada and was licensed specifically for use by elderly people. That was not replicated in this country. From the advice that I have received, the hon. Gentleman gave the wrong impression about the time scale. The company, Merck Sharp and Dohme, withdrew Vioxx based on the emerging findings of clinical trials, which showed an increased risk, as hon. Members have said, of coronary heart events when people had taken the drug for more 18 months.

We thought carefully about the advice given to patients, but the advice that we received both from the MHRA and our advisers within the Department about the time scale of withdrawal was to allow patients to spend a week or so to see their GPs before they were taken off the drug and put on to another one. The risk was not great enough to necessitate more rapid action. Had it been, we would, of course, have given different advice.

Paul Flynn: Has the Minister communicated with Merck Sharp and Dohme about claims that it knew of the side effects as long ago as 2000?

Miss Johnson: I have not. My noble Friend Lord Warner deals daily with these matters in the Department, but I cannot tell my hon. Friend whether he has communicated with the company on this matter because I have no briefing on it at the moment.

Mr. Burstow: Will the Minister check again and write to me about the chronology of decisions taken by this country's regulatory agencies and the Canadian regulatory agencies? The latter took their decisions some two years ago, or possibly even earlier. The answers that I have so far received to parliamentary questions led me to make the comments that I did. The period of two years seems relevant.

Miss Johnson: All I can comment on at the moment is the advice that I have received and relayed to the hon. Gentleman. I will, of course, reconsider the issues that he raises, and see whether a further point needs to be made. He will not necessarily learn anything new from our simply standing by our answer to an earlier written question.

I will make a point about the agency's relationship with industry that I believe hon. Members will be keen to hear. The working relationship that the agency needs to have with industry does not inhibit the scientific and regulatory independence of the MHRA. Industry representatives do not participate in any management, executive or advisory functions, with the exception of the statutory representation on the agency's medicines commission bodies.

A significant proportion of the MHRA's senior scientific staff are, of course, recruited from, or have a history in, the industry. That is necessary, as they make up the largest single pool of specialist advice for effective drug regulation. They must be drawn from the industry; there is no other source. We do not operate the sort of secondment programme operated by other bodies because of the relationship between the two.

I alert hon. Members to the fact that the agency has been reviewing the advisory committee structure, and has taken the opportunity to reconsider the arrangements in place for managing interests—an issue that my hon. Friend the Member for Norwich, North and others have raised a great deal. Proposals are being drafted that will bring UK policy into line with new EU legislation, which requires that experts should have no financial or other interest in the pharmaceutical industry that could affect their impartiality. My noble Friend Lord Warner will make a more detailed announcement on the issue very shortly. Members will therefore appreciate that there are other issues that I cannot discuss this morning.

Dr. Murrison: I am little confused. I believe that the Minister said that there were no sources other than the industry for the expertise that the MHRA needs. I dispute that.

Miss Johnson: That is not quite what I said.

Dr. Murrison: The Minister can correct me in a minute. She then said that the new EU directives would mean that we will ensure that there are no conflicts of interest of the sort that I believe she was describing. Will she clarify that?

Miss Johnson: We need to accept that the pool of people who may have a background in the drugs industry and who understand how it works are likely to be from the industry. The question is where Members believe we would acquire experts who at no point in their past have some sort of background connected with the drugs industry. The second question relates to the nature of their ongoing relationship. My noble Friend will make an announcement on that point. I repeat for the hon. Gentleman's information that we will bring UK policy into line with the new EU legislation on these matters, which requires that experts should have no financial or other interest in the pharmaceutical industry that could affect their impartiality. That is what we will elucidate soon.

Paul Flynn: The Minister made an appalling statement to back up the nonsense that only people with years of experience in the pharmaceutical industry should police it. That does not happen in any other body—there must be lay members on regulatory bodies. Someone does not need years of experience in an industry to decide to work on the raw data rather than on conclusions provided by the industry to reach life-and-death decisions for millions of people.

Miss Johnson: If I am to make progress, I need to continue without too many interventions. However, in response to my hon. Friend, I am not saying that those are the only people who should be involved with a regulator, but that the expertise should come from those with a background of experience. Lay members are, of course, crucial—we accept and welcome lay involvement. The MHRA seeks to engage patients as stakeholders in a number of ways, including formally through the Committee on the Safety of Medicines and its sub-committees, and in less formal ways that I do not have time to go through. Both the CSM expert group on patient information and the recently established group on patient reporting of suspected adverse drug reactions have lay chairmen and are heavily weighted towards lay membership to reflect medicine users' views. The crucial role of lay people is well accepted; I was making the point that the expert view will often come from people with a background in the industry.

In addition, the agency is seeking to be more transparent in its working, and I point out to my hon. Friend the Member for Norwich, North that it already publishes details of all complaints received about medicines advertising and of the outcomes of its investigations, as well as being more open about how such decisions are made. It has also published summaries of clinical trial data to support key communications on drug safety, when it has been in the public interest to do so—the public interest being an overriding demand.

Freedom of information legislation will make such arrangements even more open from January, and my noble Friend indicated that section 118 of the Medicines Act 1968 will be repealed as part of the preparation for that. My hon. Friend the Member for Norwich, North made a specific point about minutes being published, and I am advised that those minutes are published and will continue to be.

Dr. Gibson: I want to ask my hon. Friend about advertising. There are some very glossy ads for statins. People go to their pharmacies, get statins and are advised by the pharmacist, but many of the adverts are misleading. What does the regulator do to control those advertisements? Should it not publicise what it does? As I said, it changed one advert, but only in a small way. We need to know what the regulator does in terms of its influence on the public buying drugs.

Miss Johnson: I am happy to write to my hon. Friend about advertising, partly because of the growing pressure of time, but also to give him more detail on that subject. As I said, lay members are involved in that work and play a key role in considering those questions.

The points made in the review about a lack of understanding of the role of the agency and the fact that more work has to be done on communications have been accepted. The National Audit Office made a number of recommendations in its value for money review of the agency. Those are being taken forward, including work on communications and more engagement with the public.

We can only consider whether the agency's communications are effective if the safety messages that it generates are properly communicated and acted upon. I hope that the fact that we are having this debate is a sign that the profile of the agency could be, and is being, further improved.

On the creation of the MHRA, as I mentioned, a review was carried out on, among other things, the agency's external profile. The findings are being implemented. For example, work is being done on the redesign of the agency's website to make it more accessible and usable by a range of stakeholders.

[Miss Johnson]

My hon. Friend the Member for Norwich, North asked about the role of the agency in relation to wider public health. Before I come to that, I shall touch on the issue of secrecy and openness and point out that the principle underpinning the existing code is that information should be released except where disclosure would not be in the public interest—for example, on the grounds of personal or commercial confidentiality. In fact, information can be released if that is done in performance of the MHRA's duty. Where there is a risk to public safety or health, the MHRA has an overriding obligation to remove or reduce the risk, even if confidentiality is broken. As I mentioned, that provision is effectively being strengthened by changes under freedom of information that will be implemented from the new year. Of course, there remain some common-law protections in relation to confidentiality, but otherwise the provisions I mentioned are all that would in any way impede the publication of a lot more information.

Regulation does not happen in isolation, and I was honestly confused by the remarks of the hon. Member for Westbury (Dr. Murrison) on the subject. On the one hand, he alleges bureaucracy and complaints about under-reporting on health care; on the other, the official Opposition, for whom he is a spokesman on the subject, believe in no targets, and hence, presumably, on no reporting on many subjects. They also believe in removing bureaucracy—as, indeed, do we where it is pointless.

Dr. Murrison: Will the Minister give way?

Miss Johnson: No, I have only three more minutes to make my closing comments. The hon. Gentleman is giving a confusing message on whether he would welcome a strengthening of provisions.

Dr. Murrison: Will the Minister give way?

Miss Johnson: Very quickly, so that the hon. Gentleman can clarify his position.

Dr. Murrison: That is a disgraceful thing that the Minister said; she must know that reporting adverse affects is completely different from setting central targets. I hope that she will withdraw her comments.

Miss Johnson: I am afraid that I have no intention of withdrawing them. The under-reporting point sounded very much like a desire to have more information at the centre about what is going on. That is exactly what has led us to set targets, which have already lead to huge improvements of more than 12 per cent. in respect of cancer mortality, and to improvements in relation to coronary heart disease of more than 23 per cent. We must recognise that we are making huge progress as a result of the developments that the hon. Gentleman is criticising.

Ministers have been strong advocates of policies to broaden the range of products available over the counter. We believe, importantly, in the concept of patient choice. At the time of the adoption of the NHS plan, there was emphasis on smoking cessation products to support our initiative to reduce coronary heart disease, and on emergency contraception in relation to the issue of unwanted pregnancies. On all those matters, we had the possibility of moving forward as a result of work done on the reclassification of medicines from prescription only to pharmacy.

Regulation can also be used to address the lack of availability of medicines in specific sectors, medicines for children being a key example. The European Commission has now formally issued a draft regulation with the aim of improving the availability of medicines licensed specifically for use in the treatment of children. The Government welcome that initiative, which will complement the work that the UK is already undertaking to address that important issue. We will play a leading role in negotiations on the regulation in the coming months to make sure that it meets the needs of the UK and addresses the points that hon. Members raised in relation to children.

To conclude, I would like to illustrate how regulation really does contribute to the protection of individual patients. In September 1998, the MCA, as it then was, moved to restrict the pack size of paracetamol and aspirin through a change in legislation. Research just completed by Oxford university researchers has shown that suicides have been reduced by 25 per cent. in three years.

David Taylor (in the Chair): Order. We now come to the debate on the closure of the Birds Eye factory in Grimsby.

Birds Eye (Grimsby)

11 am

Mr. Austin Mitchell (Great Grimsby) (Lab): I rise to draw attention to the closure of the Unilever-Birds Eye factory on Ladysmith road in Grimsby, which will mean the loss of 620 jobs. In its last year, the factory has had sales of £56 million and it brings about £10 million a year into the Grimsby economy. It produces frozen prepared meals and boil-in-the-bag meals, both of which are profitable.

I do not want to begin this major complaint about Unilever's behaviour without paying some tribute to the company. Unilever-Birds Eye has done well by Grimsby and the town has done well out of the company. It has been a model employer, and I pay tribute to its sense of social responsibility, which it has demonstrated through cultural sponsorship and in many other ways. However, it has blotted that copybook with what amounts to a betrayal of its work force, its management and the town of Grimsby, which has always worked closely with it.

Unilever is a big corporation, but it is gripped by a corporate panic. That is what led to those betrayals, which have made a mockery of the partnership that has existed between Birds Eye and its workers over the years. Birds Eye has invested in training, and its staff at the plant are active and enthusiastic. It has upgraded standards all round and invested well in health and all the other things that a co-operative work force need. That partnership is now to be rewarded with a P45 for the employees. That is an appalling way to behave.

I understand the problems of big corporations, which cannot behave with the youthful enthusiasm of small, thrusting, dynamic companies or achieve the same rates of return. That would be like a mature person such as me desperately stuffing himself with ginseng and going to the gym to make himself as virile and active as a superstud of 20. Of course, I have high hopes in that direction, but I do not think I will achieve it. In the same way, a big corporation will not achieve the rates of return that Unilever has been seeking.

In 1999, Unilever produced a report called "Path to Growth" to inject a new dynamism into the company and increase profitability and returns on assets. The company, which is, in effect, an amalgam of brands, reduced its 1,600 brands to about 400. It also shed workers, and there was a major reduction in the work force at Grimsby. The plan produced greater profits in 2002–03 and bonuses were paid to the Grimsby work force. Then, all of a sudden, there was a reversal. In October this year, Unilever issued a profit warning.

The plan was a failure because big companies cannot produce the same rates of return as smaller companies, nor should they try to. That is especially true when markets move against them. In Birds Eye's case, supermarket cost-cutting moved against it, there was growth in the chilled food market, rather than the frozen food market for which the Grimsby plant produced, and boil-in-the-bag became less fashionable. However, all those lines were profitable and sold well. In that situation, the correct response of any capitalist organisation that is attempting to revivify itself and cope with market difficulties is to compete and fight back, not to submit to trends. Birds Eye should invest and re-equip. Much of the Grimsby plant is 20 years old, and some was brought from Kirkby. The company can fight back by involving the workers, who want to keep their jobs and keep production going, and by investing in the plant.

Birds Eye can also fight back through promotion. Companies of this scale have enormous power, particularly when it comes to advertising their brands. Advertising was cut back, however, and we have not seen Captain Birds Eye on the television as much. I love Captain Birds Eye. Why do we not see him like we used to? Birds Eye has cut back on advertising, which brand sales depend on, but the correct response is to fight back with new products.

Birds Eye introduced some new products, but, as far as I can see, enjoy! was one of the biggest disasters in food marketing, as it was designed for a yuppie market that did not exist. The employees in Grimsby told the company that enjoy!, which was produced in Germany as far as I can gather, would not sell and did not appeal to the company's basic market. They warned that enjoy! was headed for failure, and so it failed, losing the company some £25 million.

If a company with a strong marketing department, strong brand loyalty and strong advertising cannot devise successful new products, the correct response is to fire the marketing department, not close the plant and fire the workers who produce the products. That would have been one response. Birds Eye should also have looked at new value-added lines, own-label production for supermarkets—anything to use the surplus space in the factory and spread the overheads through bigger production. However, Birds Eye decided that it could do that only by getting somebody else to take over the factory.

A further response could have been to produce for Europe. We are talking about a huge multinational with marketing power all over the place. The pound is coming down and the euro is becoming stronger, increasing the prospects for production and sales from this country, but there was no attempt to produce for a wider market, as a successful and competitive company would have done.

The factory was profitable, as I say: the gross margin was 27 per cent., although Unilever wanted 35, whereas the profit was 13 per cent. and Unilever wanted 16. Those are marginal differences, yet on the basis of them Unilever decided to sell the plant and get rid of it. Those difficulties could have been overcome with the co-operation of the work force and investment in the plant.

Unilever, in the grip of financial panic, decided on a review, which was largely dedicated to trying to get somebody else to take over the factory. Various people were sounded out and came to visit. The effort to sell went on for a whole year, preventing any further action to deal with the problem. That attempt came to an end in September this year. The betrayal—that is, the decision to close—came immediately thereafter, in early October, which was far too quick to allow the consideration of investment and alternatives that should have been used.

James Hill, the managing director, told me that a report on investment would be submitted to the board and that it would be well considered and well put together. I dreamt that I saw James Hill last night, but unfortunately it turned out to be Joe Hill, who

[Mr. Austin Mitchell]

represented another tradition. However, the company cannot have considered investment in the way I have described.

An investment plan was developed by the GMB in co-operation with local management, who think that the plant could and should be kept open. The cost in that investment plan was £10 million. The plan would have been eligible for grants for new investment and new production, so the cost would have come down after making inquiries with the Department of Trade and Industry and Yorkshire Forward, but they were never made. The cost of investment would therefore have been less than £10 million, whereas the cost of closure is £21.4 million, so why is Birds Eye opting to close and waste its money like that? The accusation is that Birds Eye never seriously considered the investment in the plan. Was the plan pushed before the board? Why was closure rushed through in that fashion?

The closure betrayed the work force and the local management. I pay tribute to Roger Norrington, the local manager, who has kept us in close dialogue—I hope that does not imperil his job—and has been helpful in dealing with the situation. The closure betrayed Grimsby as well.

Instead of considering the alternatives, it has been decided to outsource the bulk of production to Rye Valley in Ireland and escape the responsibilities of an employer to the work force, in the same way that Nike has pioneered outsourcing production to south-east Asia. I have a wry view of Rye Valley, because the plant was built with £30 million of European aid to take jobs from this country. It benefits from 15 per cent. corporation tax, as all Irish plants do. The race to the bottom is beginning, and it will get worse, because Estonia is considering corporation tax of 0 per cent. to attract businesses.

In effect, through Europe, the British taxpayer is paying money to Ireland to invest in production that will take jobs from this country because the Irish Government are imposing such a low corporation tax rate to make it attractive to invest in Ireland. Mr. Sarkozy, France's Minister for the Economy, Finance and Industry, argued that

> "if Ireland was unwilling to fund its public services by levying taxes on profitable companies operating here, then it should not get handouts financed by the taxpayers of the rest of Europe."

It is unusual for me to agree with a French Minister, but I agree wholeheartedly with that. It is iniquitous that we should be paying both to lose jobs and in aid to Ireland, which benefits from various tax concessions, to establish a plant that takes those jobs.

A United States Government report indicates that in four years, US multinationals have boosted their profits from £13.4 billion to £26.8 billion by establishing in Ireland. They have absolved themselves of all responsibility, they have an easier life and they do not have to get involved in the messy business of production as it has been transferred to Ireland. That restores the gross margins to the 35 per cent. they want, plus 7 per cent. for marketing, even though the goods are produced by another company.

We have the spectacle of a Labour Government—a Labour Government, to use Neil Kinnock's intonation—using taxpayers' money to clear up the mess and pay the unemployment benefit of the workers in Grimsby who will be out of a job, and allowing the company to transfer jobs to Ireland, without penalties. I draw that to the Minister's attention: something must be done about that outsourcing. We cannot just sit there and say it is inevitable. It is a loss of British jobs.

Under the Companies Act 1985, the directors have a responsibility to have regard to the interests of their employees. In other words, they have a duty of care to them. Is that exercised by closing the factory? I wrote to all the directors of the parent companies, who have that duty of care, pointing out what they were doing and saying that a brand holder divorced from production and relying only on advertising is doomed to failure.

The supermarkets have their own labels, but they have a base in the market and a marketing ability, while brand masters who just produce brands and demand a high rate of return on them have no strength in production or marketing. Effectively, they are doomed to exploitation and they put themselves at the mercy of whoever produces the goods. The have no control over quality. All they are doing is advertising the product, hoping that the returns roll in to finance their comfortable existence without the messy business of production and having to co-operate with the workers, who have given them so much in the case of the Grimsby plant.

Production is power; there cannot be brands without companies having the power to produce them. This is a squalid end to what was a good relationship. There was 40 years of co-operation between Birds Eye and Grimsby, but that co-operation has been rewarded by betrayal.

The workers have been loyal and supportive—I regularly awarded certificates for training and other schemes developed by the union and the company together—so no wonder they feel betrayed. In some ways, this is almost a family plant. Mothers and daughters, husbands and wives—they all work there and they all feel angry and betrayed. They are being asked to continue production until the end of February, when the factory can be handed over to someone else. I thought better of Unilever and Birds Eye than that.

I must ask the Minister whether we can intervene at an earlier stage to make the company aware of any alternative and of what investment the Government might make. Why cannot we penalise the extravagant destruction of British jobs by outsourcing? I am grateful that the Department of Trade and Industry has set up the task force that I asked for, so that employees can be helped into new jobs. I am grateful also that the Department will consider alternative uses for the factory. The closure will have consequences for the Hull and Lowestoft plants, which have so far escaped that fate.

It is essential that the Department intervene to get a better deal for the local work force, as unemployment in Grimsby is higher than the national average. Most of all, Mr. Taylor, I want to say to Unilever, "It is not too late. Nothing becomes you so badly as the leaving of Grimsby. Think again."

11.17 am

Shona McIsaac (Cleethorpes) (Lab) *rose—*

David Taylor (in the Chair): Order. It is important that the Minister has adequate time to respond, as we are debating an important subject. I call the hon. Member for Cleethorpes (Shona McIsaac), but I ask her to be brief.

Shona McIsaac: Thank you, Mr. Taylor. I shall certainly be brief. The essence of what we are debating was well articulated by my hon. Friend the Member for Great Grimsby (Mr. Mitchell), who represents a neighbouring constituency.

Grimsby and Cleethorpes form one urban area, and the workers come from both towns, so the closure also affects many of my constituents. As my hon. Friend said, we are calling upon the company to think again. Even at this late stage, we want the Department and the Government to work with the company if they can—for example, by examining the grants that could be made available to modernise the plant—to protect the 600-plus jobs. What we are asking for is not difficult, we believe.

I want the Government to consider future prospects should those jobs go. The Minister must be aware that the area of Grimsby and Cleethorpes is remote. It is a large urban area, but it is remote from other urban centres. The result is that many of the workers will have to move to other cities and towns should they lose their jobs, although we obviously want the company to think again. It is an isolated area.

We must also consider the fact that many of the workers are women, that our area has a high number of part-time workers and that, as has been said, unemployment is higher than the national average in the constituencies of Grimsby and Cleethorpes. The role of the task force is therefore crucial. We obviously hope, through my hon. Friend the Minister's intervention, that Unilever will think again about closing the Birds Eye factory in Grimsby. However, should the worst come to the worst—I honestly hope that it does not, for the well-being of so many families in our communities—the task force should do all that it can to ensure that those people secure other jobs in our community.

11.19 am

The Minister for Energy and E-Commerce (Mr. Mike O'Brien): I congratulate my hon. Friend the Member for Great Grimsby (Mr. Mitchell) on securing this debate, and on raising the important issues surrounding the closure of the Birds Eye factory. As a constituency MP, it is right that he should bring it to the attention of the House. It is also right that my hon. Friend the Member for Cleethorpes (Shona McIsaac), whose constituents are also affected, should be able to come before the Chamber and raise enormously serious issues that affect the whole area.

The Government certainly want to extend our sympathy and concern to members of the GMB, a union of which I am also a member. I am concerned that they have been put in this position. It is not a matter for the Government to speak for Unilever; it is big enough to speak for itself. However, we have approached Unilever and discussed the situation.

Unilever announced its intention to close the factory on 7 October. The decision, it says, was an extremely difficult one. It explored all the alternatives to closure. It tells us that it considered the possibility of selling to a third party and the viability of retraining its work force and investing in developing new opportunities and products. It explored the various financial sources that might be available. None the less, it concluded that it needed to find a far larger and more flexible plant—in its terms—to be competitive in the industry. Longer-term investment in the Grimsby plant did not match up to the scale and innovation capabilities already available from third parties.

It is remarkable, given the difficult circumstances that we have heard about today, that my hon. Friend the Member for Great Grimsby was able to pay the tribute that he did to Birds Eye as an employer that has shown a sense of responsibility until now. It is right that the company should explain to the work force why it made this decision. It is regrettable that it has taken the decision as part of its review. I understand that two other sites, in Lowestoft and Hull, are to remain unchanged for the foreseeable future.

There has been great concern about the impact that the loss of 620 jobs will have on Grimsby. The departure of Birds Eye is a huge loss for the town. We fully recognise that. Department of Trade and Industry officials at the Government office for Yorkshire and the Humber have made contact with Unilever and early dialogue has begun. That has been assisted by a group of local and regional partners, including Yorkshire Forward, Jobcentre Plus and North East Lincolnshire council officials, to see what can be done to talk through the issue with Birds Eye and about any job losses.

One hope, I am told, is that there are significant job opportunities still in the Grimsby area. In the food industry alone, there are opportunities for 200 jobs. That falls short of the 620 jobs lost, but at such a time 200 jobs are welcome in themselves. A recent press report suggested that local food firms are struggling to fill vacancies. Bizarrely, given the circumstances, North East Lincolnshire council reported that there would be a trade mission to Latvia and Lithuania to try to recruit workers to the area. I suspect that those undertaking the journey may feel that there are opportunities to employ people in the local area, rather than going further afield. They might want to reconsider going there in these difficult circumstances.

The company tells us that it will provide assistance for retraining and skills for new avenues with an offer of between £0.5 million and £0.75 million to be made available. The regional development agency, Yorkshire Forward, has agreed to consider meeting costs to undertake an impact assessment study and has confirmed funds up to £30,000. It is not for the Government to intervene in business decisions, but they will, along with Yorkshire Forward, work closely with the local authority and the appropriate agencies in the remaining months, to secure a more co-ordinated approach to the handling of the circumstances and their immediate impact on the area.

[Mr. Mike O'Brien]

I know that my hon. Friend's constituents will be enormously concerned about the closure of the factory. I assure him that despite that very bad news, the Government remain firmly committed to manufacturing, which is a vital part of our economy. It accounts for one sixth of our national wealth and it is also part of our history. More importantly, it must be part of our future. We want a successful manufacturing sector, encompassing food production, which makes value-added products and involves well paid, highly skilled jobs.

My hon. Friend raised the issue of offshoring. The difficulty is that Britain benefits enormously from offshoring. I remind hon. Members of the factories from other countries that have been set up in the UK—Nissan from Japan and many companies from the USA have located here. They all offshore production into the UK. The UK, as the director general of the CBI, Digby Jones, said a few days ago, is made for globalisation. We are in a very competitive position and we benefit enormously from offshoring into this country—or inshoring, from our point of view. That is one reason why we would not want to take protective measures. The damage to our overall economy and to jobs would be enormous throughout the country.

Mr. Mitchell: There is no reason to believe that taking measures to stop the export of jobs, or to penalise it through the tax system, as Senator Kerry proposed to do during the American election campaign, would deter new companies from entering this country.

Mr. O'Brien: We need to make sure that companies choose to come here because they know that they will not be subject to vast numbers of restrictions. Otherwise, they will not come. We must get the balance right. We need to remain in our present position. We are in second place out of the whole world, behind the US, as a location where people are investing. We are well ahead of many other countries—certainly all our European partners—in getting jobs and investment from abroad.

Those jobs come here because of the infrastructure, the skills of the work force, the stability of our economy and the fact that our public finances are properly managed. All that my hon. Friend's party—and mine—has been so busy doing to manage the economy in the past seven years has contributed to making Britain a place that attracts inward investment.

I appreciate that it is frustrating—it makes constituents like those of my hon. Friend very angry—when jobs go to other countries, and particularly when they go to another member of the European Union that may have received financing for part of the building of the factory. I understand the view that people take in such circumstances. There are, of course, instances when British companies have benefited from EU finance. None of that mitigates the serious problems faced by members of the GMB because of Birds Eye's decision.

All I can say to my hon. Friend is that we will continue to engage with Unilever and to see if there is any way we can assist. We will provide whatever is available to encourage it to look at its decision. We will provide what assistance we can towards dealing with job losses and making retraining available. We will encourage the company to continue, even in these difficult circumstances, to adopt a socially responsible approach to skills retraining and helping workers relocate.

We will do all that we can to work with my hon. Friend. I shall be happy to meet him and I am sure that my right hon. Friend the Minister for Industry and the Regions will be pleased to do the same, if that helps, to talk through the issues and seek a way to mitigate something that is regarded as very damaging for the town of Grimsby.

Sitting suspended until Two o'clock.

Police Funding

2 pm

Mr. David Laws (Yeovil) (LD): I am pleased to have secured a debate that I hope is timely and of great importance to all our constituents throughout England. I am also pleased that the three major English political parties are well represented by hon. Members here today. No doubt they want to raise concerns that exist in their police authority areas and constituencies.

Crime and policing issues are probably among people's principal priorities and concerns, whether in the south-west and the Avon and Somerset constabulary area, which I represent, or others parts of the United Kingdom. No doubt such issues will be prominent in the forthcoming general election. I hope that the Government's mind is focused in particular on the 2005–06 police settlement for England and the concerns expressed recently by chief constables and police authorities about the settlement and its implications for police staffing.

I shall start by talking about general resourcing issues for the police and how those issues have changed in recent years, and go on to describe changes in manning levels that the Government have overseen in the past couple of years. I shall then discuss funding concerns and problems relating to the 2005–06 settlement, before commenting on proposals that the Government should consider if they are to try to avoid a severe funding squeeze next year. That squeeze could reverse the increase in police numbers in recent years.

Vera Baird (Redcar) (Lab) *rose—*

Mr. Laws: It is rather early to accept interventions, but I will give way to the hon. and learned Member for Redcar (Vera Baird). I must then make some progress.

Vera Baird: In the light of the serious attempts in the consultation document yesterday to ensure more diversity in recruitment and more family-friendly training and working hours for the police—I imagine that most people would commend that—is the hon. Gentleman not the slightest bit embarrassed to talk about "manning", as if only males were in the police force?

Mr. Laws: No, I am not. I wish that I had not given way now. I shall make some progress.

The concern throughout the country about policing levels is based not just on an irrational fear of crime but on developments that have taken place in the past few decades, including the increasing volume of crime and the increasing responsibilities that have fallen on our police forces. In 1979—a useful benchmark date—there were about 2.5 million notifiable offences throughout England and Wales; that figure more than doubled to 5.6 million by 1992. There are big debates about the validity of crime statistics and problems with them, but even if we take a category of crime such as burglary, the statistics for which are more reliable than others, we can see that although the figures peaked in 1993 and have fallen for many years since, they are still significantly above 1979 levels.

If we consider other pressures on the police in the past few years, we see that there is a series of areas that require a great deal of money, but that is not necessarily reflected in police numbers. They include the cost of DNA testing, the increasing cost of call handling given the more extensive use of mobile phones by the public, and the inexorable rise in IT costs in the police service as elsewhere. There has been a significant increase in the volume of crime in every category, which has not been reversed to the levels that we experienced in the 1970s. As I said, there have been cost increases in a host of areas, including call handling, DNA technology and other technology. Set against that, the increase in police officer numbers in the past few decades has been quite modest. We started with about 111,000 police officers in 1979 and hit a temporary peak of 127,600 in 1992. There was a small reduction in police numbers during the 1992–97 Parliament, which continued when Labour came to power in 1997 and stuck to Conservative spending plans, so that the police numbers continued to fall to about 124,000 in 2000. It is only in the past couple of years that there have been significant increases in police numbers to just below 140,000. The pressures on the police and the costs of running the police force have increased significantly over the past few decades, but the number of police officers has increased by only 25 per cent.

Norman Lamb (North Norfolk) (LD): My hon. Friend is talking about a range of different cost pressures on the police. I may be pre-empting him, but does he not agree that there is another significant cost? A blip in the number of officers retiring in the coming year will significantly increase the pension bill, and police forces across the country are concerned that that will have a significant impact on budgets, resulting in officers coming off the front line to fill the positions of civilians who have been made redundant.

Mr. Laws: My hon. Friend is right. I want to look at some of the pension pressures that have been affecting police authorities across the country for a number of years, but which will increase particularly in 2005–06.

David Taylor (North-West Leicestershire) (Lab/Co-op): Will the hon. Gentleman include in his litany of pressures the political pressure from the electorate, who have seen police precepts balloon because of an inflexible method of finance? Was he, like me, disappointed yesterday not to see in an otherwise excellent White Paper any reference to the possibility of direct billing from police authorities, rather than wrapping it up with all other forms of local authority provision?

Mr. Laws: I agree entirely with the hon. Gentleman's initial point. Hon. Members are successfully anticipating my speech. I shall therefore push ahead rapidly before I have nothing left to say, and shall allow time later for people to make points about the experience in their areas.

Turning to more recent progress—at last, police numbers have started to rise—we acknowledge that there has been an improved environment over the past couple of years. Police numbers in Avon and Somerset have risen from just under 3,000 in 1998–99 to just over

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3,400 in August this year. At the most local level in the Somerset east police district, police numbers have risen from 241 in 2001 to 278 today. There have been the additional allocations of money for the police community safety officers who are beginning to be deployed by the Government.

The hon. Member for North-West Leicestershire (David Taylor) made an important point when he said that the Government must not forget that many additional police resources have been paid for not out of the Government's central resources, but by people in their local area through significant increases in the police precept. In my area, for every £100 that was spent on policing in 1995–96, less than £15 was raised locally. That figure has now roughly doubled to just under £30. The increases in the police precept in Avon and Somerset were 15 per cent. in 2002–03, 34 per cent. in 2003–04 and 12 per cent. for 2004–05. The police precept has therefore increased by over 60 per cent. in the past three years alone, which is broadly representative of the experience of many areas of the country. Indeed, there are some areas that have experienced even bigger rises—there was a 52 per cent. rise in Gloucestershire in one year alone.

Many people across the country have somewhat begrudgingly paid more in their local police precept over the past few years, because they were convinced by the local police authority that additional police officers and staff would be deployed. People who have paid more in their local taxes would be particularly concerned if the ultimate settlement for the police budget in 2005–06 reverses the recent expansion of staff. Over the past few weeks, we have all been successfully lobbied by our local police forces, who have expressed concerns about the 2005–06 settlement. I suspect that the Minister for Crime Reduction, Policing and Community Safety has received representations from the Association of Police Authorities. I met the chief constable of Avon and Somerset constabulary, Steve Pilkington, who described the experience in his area, and I have no doubt that other Members will have been briefed by their police authorities and chief constables.

There is serious concern that the nature of the settlement that the Government envisage for next year will leave a funding gap of up to £350 million in the budgets of English authorities, and that that gap can only be closed with a reduction in police officers or police staff. The driving concerns—and I will return to the Home Secretary's statement yesterday on the White Paper—are fear that next year's Government grant for police authorities could rise by as little as 3 per cent., and the associated fear that increases in the police precept will be kept down by Government diktat to the low single figures suggested by Ministers in the Office of the Deputy Prime Minister.

Mr. Oliver Heald (North-East Hertfordshire) (Con): Is the hon. Gentleman aware that in a county such as Hertfordshire the standstill pressures on spending are about 6 per cent., and the new spending pressures are about 1 per cent. as a result of the cost of police surgeons, criminal record searches and so on? If the grant were 3 per cent., and there was capping of the sort to which he referred, Hertfordshire would have to make a saving equivalent to the cost of 170 police officers. That would be extremely unpopular, given the need for a visible police presence in our market towns and villages.

Mr. Laws: The hon. Gentleman is right. I have seen the representations from his authority, which are typical of the concerns expressed across England. That brings me neatly to my next point. The Association of Police Authorities has calculated that if the precept is kept down to 3 to 4 per cent. to paper over the fact that the Government have not yet been able to put in place a fairer mechanism than the council tax to raise local funding, and if there is a lower Government settlement, there will be a shortfall of about £350 million in the funding that police authorities have calculated that they need for the standstill budget. They need an average of 5.7 per cent., but the figure is higher for authorities that are experiencing the pension problems to which my hon. Friend the Member for North Norfolk (Norman Lamb) referred. In Avon and Somerset, pension funding is a problem, because a large cohort of officers will retire next year, so the standstill settlement for Avon and Somerset has been calculated at 7.7 per cent.

The first point to make about individual areas of cost pressure and the scope for efficiency savings is that pension costs are increasing significantly across the country. In Avon and Somerset, they will go up by 50 per cent. between 1997–98 and 2004–05, from £25 million a year when Labour came to power to £37.2 million this financial year, and they will continue to rise. We appreciate that the Government are trying to tackle the historic underfunding of the police pension scheme, but that will not have any effect on the situation next year, when there will be a particular problem, as the large cohort of police officers who were recruited in the mid 1970s, are coming up for retirement, resulting in a surge of retirements in most authorities. The Minister may be interested to know that Avon and Somerset anticipates that there will be 150 retirements in 2005–06, compared with just 73 in 2004–05.

David Taylor: Does the hon. Gentleman agree that one problem with public sector pension schemes—this does not apply to the local government scheme, but it does apply to the police scheme—is that they tend to be pay-as-you-go schemes, and are particularly vulnerable to surges in employer requirements, as certain events must be reflected actuarially in the demands on the fund in the years to come?

Mr. Laws: Yes, I agree. It is fair to point out that while individual employees pay contributions, which are obviously not ring-fenced, there is no specific employer contribution. The Government are seeking to address that matter, but they will not have done so by next year. Pension pressures are therefore a significant problem, and they could account for about £100 million of the £350 million gap.

Police authorities are examining other parts of their budgets to see where there are cost pressures and where savings could be made. More than 80 per cent. of most police authorities' costs will be staff or pension costs, so it will be difficult to cut a large proportion of costs without reducing police or staff numbers. In addition, there is the growing cost of technology. DNA technology has been introduced in many areas, and there are attempts to improve telephone centres to make it easier for people to contact the police, thus addressing a problem has caused a great deal of frustration throughout the country.

Many police authorities have made efficiency savings year on year for a number of years, but the proportion of efficiency savings that can be achieved in a cashable way has been reduced. Avon and Somerset has been successful in achieving its targets over recent years, but the proportion of cashable savings has gradually reduced. It therefore anticipates a funding gap of about £10.4 million in the coming year.

Mr. Roger Williams (Brecon and Radnorshire) (LD): If, as my hon. Friend says, the police settlement is limited to 3 per cent., and if there is a cap on the 3 per cent. precept and a standstill in the number of police officers, cuts must be made in the civilian force, which is almost a reverse of the civilianisation that is taking place at present. Police officers will be back in the office doing administrative jobs when we want their presence out on the street.

Mr. Laws: Perhaps unauthorised copies of my speech have been circulating among hon. Members, because every time they speak they anticipate what I am about to say. Given the circumstances, the only mechanism for saving money available to most chief constables is to reduce police staffing—that is certainly the position that the chief constable of Avon and Somerset has described.

There are limits on the areas of staffing that can be reduced without losing ring-fenced funds. The number of police community safety officers cannot be reduced without cutting ring-fenced money from the Government. If the police authorities decide to target back-office staff rather than police on the beat, they risk losing staff who have taken the place of the police officers whom they are trying to deploy on the beat. Consequently, even if they try to protect the number of front-line police officers, those officers could be drawn back from the beat to undertake back-office responsibilities, as my hon. Friend the Member for Brecon and Radnorshire (Mr. Williams) pointed out. One must therefore conclude that if the budget is anything like the one that is expected, there will be severe pressures on police authorities next year.

Dr. John Pugh (Southport) (LD): I shall make a point that my hon. Friend may not be going to make himself. Certain authorities need to increase their expenditure because they are on the front line in the war against terrorism and drugs. Merseyside, in particular, has special pressures and needs to increase expenditure, which are an additional reason why it cannot make cuts this year.

Mr. Laws: My hon. Friend is to be congratulated because I was not going to make that point. I am particularly grateful to him for raising the interests of Merseyside, as he always does so effectively.

There is always scope for examining whether the claims made by any organisation about how cuts will fall are borne out in reality or whether they are worst-case scenarios. However, there is no doubt that if the assumptions about the grant from central Government and from the police precept are borne out, budgetary pressures would result in reductions in staffing in most police authorities. There would be anger throughout the country at any such staff reduction, given that people have paid much more in their police precept over the past few years.

What should the Government do about the situation? The first and most obvious point is that they must look closely at the level of settlement from central Government for English police authorities for 2005–06. I was cheered, but only slightly, by the Home Secretary's response yesterday to a question that followed his statement on the policing White Paper. He said:

> "On spending and the police grant, police authorities believed that they were to get a 3 per cent. uplift. On that basis, they have been lobbying that that is insufficient for them to meet the future demands of the service and they have been demanding 5.7 per cent. Let me make it clear: there is no way that I can deliver a 5.7 per cent. uplift across the board, and I do not believe that the police authorities truly believe that that is feasible. However, I will make sure, along with my right hon. Friends the Chancellor and the Deputy Prime Minister, that the uplift that we deliver in a few weeks will ensure that the programme that we have set out, and its supplementing in the years ahead, will deliver the neighbourhood beat police officers and the 25,000 support officers to which we have committed."—[*Official Report*, 9 November 2004; Vol. 426, c. 711.]

In one sense, that is cheering, because the Home Secretary does not seem to be intent on a settlement as low as 3 per cent. The band seems to be between 3 per cent., which he says is too low, and 5.7 per cent., which he says is too high. Part of this debate is to try to force the Minister for Crime Reduction, Policing and Community Safety and her colleagues towards the upper end of that spectrum.

The central Government settlement should not only deliver the specific and limited targets to which the Home Secretary referred in his statement—for example, ring-fenced police community safety officers—but protect existing staffing levels and additional police that have recently been taken on. I hope that it will at least deliver the existing level of services and the increase in officers that the Government have promised without the need for staff savings elsewhere. To do so, the figure must be closer to 5 per cent. than to the rumoured 3 per cent.

There must be specific provision for pensions. Those of us who represent police authority areas with difficult pension outlooks next year would like a supplement to the police settlement next year that reflects those pressures. There should be an amount additional to the standard uprating of the police central grant. The pension pressures will be severe next year for many authorities because of the retirement bulge that we face, so I hope that the Minister is examining that problem seriously.

I hope that the Government will consider providing greater flexibility in Home Office ring-fenced grants that, for example, pay for police community support officers. Many people will not have found entirely credible the implication in the Home Secretary's statement yesterday that the Home Office is giving more power to police authorities and that there is earned autonomy. The statement implied that authorities can do what they wish and deploy resources as they wish

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provided that they are not failing police authorities. However, at the same time, there is a whole list of ring-fenced central Government schemes, and additional targets are being introduced. The Government and the Home Office do not appear to have decided whether they believe in localism and letting people decide their priorities, or whether they want to nanny police authorities and tell them how to deploy resources, which may lead to a bizarre situation in which police authorities seek to make savings, but are penalised as a result of the ring-fenced budgets that the Home Office has earmarked for specific purposes. I therefore hope that there is additional flexibility.

Finally, if the Minister helps to secure a fairer central settlement and fairer funding for police authorities next year, I hope that instead of trying to cap local police authorities, she will, in the spirit of localism, allow them to decide their priorities and the way in which they set the local police precept in the interests of their areas. I have no doubt that after the huge increases of recent years, many police authorities will want to keep their police precept rises in low single digits, but some may not. Some may wish to make higher increases to fund additional police officers, and that should be their right and choice.

A year or so ago, after the Government had made some progress on education, especially on funding, their policies suffered a fall in credibility. There was growing public discontent because of a funding problem that hit many schools throughout England, not least in the south-west. The Government's reputation for delivering better education suffered a hard knock, and I hope that the Minister accepts that after a couple of years of progress, the Government face the self-same risk in policing and crime. Police chiefs and police authorities have warned them of the problems that they face next year. They will pay the political price in the next general election if they fail to deal with the issue in time.

Miss Anne Begg (in the Chair): I intend to begin the summing-up speeches at 3 o'clock. Eight hon. Members have indicated that they wish to speak, and I have done a quick sum showing that they have about four minutes each. If hon. Members keep to that, everyone will have a chance to speak.

2.26 pm

Mr. Alan Campbell (Tynemouth) (Lab): I am grateful for the opportunity to contribute to the debate and I congratulate the hon. Member for Yeovil (Mr. Laws) on securing it. I shall try to be brief, although I do not know whether four minutes is realistic.

I shall limit my comments to the situation facing the three main police forces in the north-east of England. I acknowledge that the wider debate about the settlement for 2005–06 comes in the context of very good settlements in recent years. A record number of police officers has meant more than 700 additional officers in the Northumbria, Durham and Cleveland police force areas and a continuing fall in crime. That is all the more impressive when one considers that they are additional officers, because throughout the period people have left the force because of retirement, ill health or family reasons or to do other jobs.

In the Northumbria police area alone, funding has risen from £126 per head of population in 1997–98 to more than £166 per head last year. That has meant more police officers in every command unit and in every constituency. I agree with the hon. Member for Yeovil that that makes it more, not less, important, to sustain progress and ensure that the necessary resources are available.

The Minister will have closely studied the case being made by police authorities and chief police officers who have been lobbying Members of Parliament and the Government. That is their job and they have a right to do it, but just as police authorities and chief police officers are doing their job, I would expect the Minister to do hers, which is to ensure that additional resources are available and that they turn into officers on the streets. She must ensure, too, that civilian support staff are available to allow officers to do their job. Ministers have a responsibility to ensure that the taxpayer gets a fair deal for the resources being expended. It is hard to believe that future savings are not possible in the north-east, which has about £0.5 billion in police funding every year.

I shall say one or two things about those savings and changes in the Northumbria police area to illustrate my point. With Government help, Northumbria police has moved to civilianise many posts, which has meant more police officers on the beat; it has also reduced the number of police command units to six, which means that chief officers in those areas can use officers under their command more efficiently and effectively. In that regard, I mention the excellent work of Chief Superintendent Jim Peacock of north Tyneside command unit. He is busy establishing community teams of officers, which will bring them nearer to the community, and allow the better use of resources. We need to avoid undermining those efforts with cuts to civilian staff, which could reverse the trend of constables leaving their offices and going out on to the streets.

The community teams are to be strengthened by community support officers. I hope that the Minister will take this opportunity, in the light of comments made in previous debates—not yet in this debate, I am pleased to say—to pay tribute to community support officers and emphasise the key role that they can play. They provide a uniformed presence on the streets where people want to see it. They also tackle antisocial behaviour. Whatever disputes we may have about crime statistics, antisocial behaviour is the reality for many people in our local communities. It seems that that is what community support officers are there to tackle.

In the light of the comments made by the hon. Member for Yeovil, if the price of getting rid of ring-fencing is that chief police officers reduce the number of community support officers, I would not favour going down that route. Even at this late stage, as my hon. Friend the Minister deliberates on such matters, I lobby her again for more community support officers for Northumbria police. I hope that they will come.

I encourage the Government to begin, or to continue, to think innovatively about future police funding—perhaps not for 2005–06, but beyond. My constituency has what is known as an evening economy, which is a mixed blessing for a seaside town such as Whitley Bay. The downside is alcohol-fuelled disorder, which requires an enhanced police presence. Is it unreasonable to ask businesses that profit from such alcohol sales to contribute towards alleviating the effects? I welcome the press reports today that suggest that the Government are considering such an idea and hope that the Minister will keep an open mind. Although a voluntary scheme may prove the best step initially, it may require legislation. I hope that she will continue to consider that. If football clubs are asked to contribute towards policing costs, it is not unreasonable to ask nightclubs and club owners to make a contribution.

When it comes to the balance between council tax, the precept and central funding, I, like others, have received letters about high council tax. I cannot recall a single letter about the high level of police precept or the increase in police precept, because people see that turning into police officers on the streets, which they want. When the Government consider what powers may be brought to bear on that precept, I ask that they first look carefully at what local authorities are doing. It is the Office of the Deputy Prime Minister that brings those powers to bear.

When a local authority, such as North Tyneside, has a high council tax but is closing centres such as the Linskill centre, we should look at the local authority rather than concerning ourselves too much with the police precept. That is particularly the case in my local area. If the police are recruited locally and are accountable locally, there should be an element of local funding.

Mr. David Drew (Stroud) (Lab/Co-op): Does my hon. Friend agree that one option not mentioned so far, which is the restructuring of police authorities, could be dangerous if it makes the relationship between local funding and local policing even more indistinct ?

Mr. Campbell: Yes, I do. I am not sure that it is wrong to consider the issue and to look continually at whether there is a better way to deliver services, but the trend in public services is that people are looking for them to be delivered locally. They are concerned, first, that they should be delivered, but they also want them delivered locally. We should think carefully before going down the route that my hon. Friend the Member for Stroud (Mr. Drew) warns us against, not least because local authority changes in the past have often come back to bite us.

I re-emphasise the point made by the hon. Member for Yeovil about police pensions. Clearly, they have a distorting effect on the police budget and will continue to do so if, as the Durham constabulary area advises, there is a 12 per cent. increase in the need to draw down from that pension in the next year alone. When will the Government say what they intend to do about that? Are they looking at a national form of funding?

I hope that the Minister will reassure me that there will be as fully funded a settlement as possible in 2005–06, that she will listen to lobbying and that she will appreciate that my comments come from someone who acknowledges the Government's good record so far.

2.34 pm

Mr. Keith Simpson (Mid-Norfolk) (Con): I congratulate the hon. Member for Yeovil (Mr. Laws) on securing this important debate, which enables us to question the Minister on the police funding settlement, as it affects our police authorities. I shall try to keep my speech narrow and examine what is happening in Norfolk. I understand that the provisional funding settlement has been deferred until late November or even mid-December. Can the Minister for Crime Reduction, Policing and Community Safety give me some idea of when the provisional settlement will be announced?

Norfolk is not necessarily the centre of organised crime in the United Kingdom, or at least not until we have a large casino in Great Yarmouth. We have specific problems relating to the geographical extent of the area and its rural sparsity. We have crime that involves drugs and violence, and robberies in rural areas. People fear crime very much because of the sparsity of the population and the limited number of police. I am the first to acknowledge that Norfolk police, with support from the Home Office, have made a great effort over the past few years to concentrate on smashing criminal gangs, increasing the number of police and dealing with the fear of crime.

Norfolk is trialling two good initiatives, which are the use of mobile police stations and post offices, but there are still major funding problems that go back several years: first, the whole business of police communications and, secondly, the continuing dispute between the Home Office and the police authority about Norfolk police having a dedicated police helicopter. Given the size of Norfolk, the extent of the coastline and the fact that some points are vulnerable to terrorist attack, the Home Office must reconsider such matters. As the hon. Member for Yeovil emphasised, many grants are ring-fenced in police authorities and money is increasingly absorbed by nationally applied legal and efficiency targets.

The hon. Gentleman also said that it is acknowledged by everyone that, across the board, most police authorities need about a 5.5 per cent. increase just to stand still. They are between a rock and a hard place. The assessment carried out by Norfolk is that, if we are lucky, the increase will be between 3 and 4 per cent., which means that we will be out by about 1 per cent. As he pointed out, the options are limited. One example is efficiency savings, which, as other hon. Members have said, can be made largely in terms of manpower. Indeed, 85 per cent. of most police funding in police authorities goes on that. There is a threat to get rid of civilian staff, which all chief constables would be reluctant to do, with the absurd possibility that uniformed staff would have to go back into head office. That would undercut all the increases in uniformed policing. Another option is to raise the police precept.

Mr. Mark Simmonds (Boston and Skegness) (Con): Is my hon. Friend aware that the logical conclusion of his argument is that, if police officers have to go back to civilian tasks, ultimately the Home Office grant will fall as the number of policemen falls?

Mr. Simpson: Yes, we are in a bad Catch-22 position. The alternative is that the police precept might have to be raised. The experience of people in Norfolk is unlike that of the hon. Member for Tynemouth (Mr. Campbell), as they knew only too well what part of the council tax was being affected by the rise in the police

[Mr. Simpson]

precept. There is no doubt that the Government are also determined to cap those areas that are thinking of raising the local tax.

I have a simple question for the Minister: if we are between a rock and a hard place, what are we going to do about it? The problem is not one for the police to solve and it is not particularly one for local councils. It is a problem that the Home Office has given us and we want an answer.

I have a final important point to make about Norfolk. Several grants are specifically ring-fenced and tied to the Home Office, and they can be applied to areas such as Norfolk and others. I refer, for example, to the crime fighting fund and to the rural policing fund, which is worth about £2 million per annum to Norfolk. The future of the RPF is still in doubt, so I would be grateful if the Minister said whether Norfolk is to continue to receive that important allocation. If not, Norfolk's problem is even greater.

2.40 pm

Paddy Tipping (Sherwood) (Lab): I am delighted to take part in the debate, and I agree with many of the wider points that the hon. Member for Yeovil (Mr. Laws) made about the challenge and costs of new technology and DNA testing, and about the real problem of pensions.

I want to be more specific: I will talk about the Nottinghamshire police because, as the Minister knows, resourcing Nottingham's police has been very controversial in the area. The Minister also well knows that murder and serious and organised crime, often drug-related, have been a big issue. The cold facts are that the number of offences per officer and per head of population appears to be the highest in the country, which has led to some disillusionment. Just a few days ago, the shadow Home Secretary compared Nottingham to Chicago in prohibition days. Gedling Conservatives are putting out a leaflet that says:

> "We are ashamed of where we live".

I am not ashamed of where I live; I am proud of the honest, decent Nottingham people, and I am backing their effort. My good friend and colleague, my hon. Friend the Member for Gedling (Vernon Coaker), and my hon. Friend the Member for Nottingham, East (Mr. Heppell) are also backing them in putting in place community safety initiatives to build partnerships so that our children are safe on the streets.

People who make such claims are ignorant of the facts. Again, I quote the Gedling Conservatives, who say that the chief constable is

> "having to spin the crime statistics to hide failure"

and that the police and politicians

> "will fiddle the figures and spin deceit."

The facts are rather different, although there is no doubt that Nottinghamshire police have underperformed.

Mr. Andrew Mitchell (Sutton Coldfield) (Con): I certainly do not want to discourage the hon. Gentleman from quoting the excellent literature put out by the hard-working prospective Conservative parliamentary candidate in Gedling, but surely he is shooting himself in the foot. He reads out literature that says that the Nottinghamshire police force is underperforming and then reveals that statistics show that Nottingham's force is indeed one of the least well performing in the country.

Paddy Tipping: I am delighted that the hon. Gentleman has endorsed Gedling Conservatives' comments that they are ashamed of where they live. Given that he used to represent the area, that is quite disgraceful.

The performance of Nottinghamshire police is improving under the chief constable. In the past six months, crime has come down by 13.4 per cent. In particular, burglary and vehicle crime are down, and the number of offences in the past six months is down by 10,803 compared with the previous six months. That is the kind of performance that I applaud and I stick up for. I also stick up for the fact that Her Majesty's inspectorate of constabulary and the police standards unit have been working closely with Nottinghamshire police to achieve those results. That police authority is going forward; it should not be put down.

Of course, we need more resources. Only last Thursday, my hon. Friends the Members for Gedling and for Nottingham, East met the Minister for Crime Reduction, Policing and Community Safety yet again to argue for extra resources for Nottinghamshire police. Again, I quote the excellent literature that we have talked about, which makes this accusation:

> "The Government refuses to give us more police and Gedling's MP has never even raised the issue in Parliament."

The number of police in Nottinghamshire is at a record level. In the past three years, an extra 303 officers have been recruited, backed by 71 new community support officers. In private—he cannot speak publicly in Parliament—my hon. Friend the Member for Gedling has been assiduous and robust on the issue. I must say that my view differs slightly from his in that he has campaigned vigorously for extra police for Nottinghamshire, and I back him on that, while I want improved performance, too. We are beginning to see the results of improved performance.

I hope that my hon. Friend the Minister for Crime Reduction, Policing and Community Safety will reflect on her visit to Nottingham only last Thursday and consider ways to reward Nottinghamshire police. I hope that she has listened carefully to the pleas that we have made privately about the need to tackle serious and organised crime in the county. In particular, there will be an opportunity fairly soon to make decisions and announcements on police community support officers.

People in Gedling, Nottingham and Hucknall—across Nottinghamshire—want a greater police presence on our streets. I applaud yesterday's statement and look forward to seeing more police officers and more community support officers in Nottingham so that we can all be jointly proud of Nottingham and of Nottinghamshire.

Several hon. Members *rose*—

Miss Anne Begg (in the Chair): Order. If all those hon. Members who want to speak are to be able to do so, speeches will have to be kept to three minutes. I would very much appreciate hon. Members' assistance in that.

2.46 pm

Mr. Jonathan Sayeed (Mid-Bedfordshire) (Con): I congratulate the hon. Member for Yeovil (Mr. Laws) on securing the debate. There is no doubt that shortfalls in police authority funding are a problem throughout the country. Nowhere is their effect more pronounced, proportionally, however, than in the Bedfordshire police authority.

Let me say straight away that the force itself is not to blame. Early-day motion 1830 makes it clear that the force, although historically underfunded by central Government, has nevertheless

> "achieved the highest level of cashable efficiency savings of any police authority in England and Wales over the last five years with the highest proportion of officers undertaking front line policing duties".

However, even with the expected increases in council tax and central Government funding, and despite raiding its modest £1 million reserves, which exist only because of the force's effective governance, Bedfordshire police remains set to suffer a £2.2 million shortfall—the equivalent of losing 75 constables.

That shortfall cannot be plugged indefinitely by using council tax to fund essential services, and nor can we reasonably expect the force to make further cuts when it is already operating at the top end of the range of efficiency targets set out by the Government. The only option is likely to be a cut in personnel. Although I accept that efficiency is a virtue and that more should be done with less, once a force is efficient, as the Government recognise the Bedfordshire police force to be, any new demands are likely to require extra resources.

As we know, Bedfordshire police authority has made the efficiency savings demanded by the Treasury, with 83 per cent. of its budget going directly on staffing costs. Any further reduction in the back-room staff essential to keep the force operational is likely to mean that police officers will have to be taken off the beat to fulfil those functions. There is little room to cut already minimal administrative costs when Bedfordshire is feeling the funding shortfall ever more intensely because of pressure from the Metropolitan police, the pension time bomb, the requirement for the normal maintenance of expenditure, and the need to update technology and equipment.

A further squeeze is likely to come from the possible imposition by the Office of the Deputy Prime Minister of a low cap on council tax. The proportion of Bedfordshire police authority budget met from council tax has risen from 14.5 per cent. in 1995–96 to 25.5 per cent. in 2004–05. Although local taxes from a historically underfunded county should not compensate for the lack of funding for essential services that are imposed by, and are the responsibility of, central Government, the removal of the option to plug the central Government funding shortfall has created another hole in the police budget.

The third squeeze on Bedfordshire's police budget comes from the Home Office, which, quite understandably, is imposing demands to put crime prevention at the top of the agenda. However, the Home Office's grand rhetoric and initiatives are not being matched by funding. Similarly, the ring-fencing of available funding, such as for CSOs and so on, is limiting the county's flexibility to decide how best to spend money, even though those concerned are in the best position to be able to do so. I believe that Bedfordshire police has more than fulfilled the Government's demands of it. If the county's policing is, at the very least, to stand still, let alone improve, the Government must put their money where their rhetoric is.

2.50 pm

Vera Baird (Redcar) (Lab): I shall spend one moment emphasising the importance of diversity in the police force. I do so in the light of the sneering response that I received from the—somewhat illiberal—hon. Member for Yeovil (Mr. Laws) when I invited him, in what I thought was a friendly way, not to use sexist language in talking about the composition of the police force. I point out how much his attitude contrasts with that displayed yesterday, publicly and properly, by the Home Secretary, who announced a range of policies intended to encourage diversity in the police force. The Home Secretary made it clear that, unlike the hon. Member for Yeovil, he understands that the police force has lagged behind and needs policies to catch up in its diversity targets.

Women in Redcar, as everywhere else, frequently need the assistance of the police, particularly in response to sexual offences, of which there are a large number and for which the conviction rate is 7.2 per cent. Women find it infinitely easier to talk about such matters with women police officers. Domestic violence is also still an epidemic in this country, producing one phone call every minute to a police force somewhere, every day of every year. Yet the conviction rate is still lower than that for sexual offences. Similarly, women find it easier to talk to women police officers about domestic violence. Truly, in many situations, where women may be being oppressed by antisocial behaviour or by their own delinquent children, they find it easier to talk to women police officers about their needs. It is therefore not political correctness for the Home Office to say in its latest pronouncements that diversity in the police force is key.

Mr. Laws: Will the hon. and learned Lady give way?

Vera Baird: No, not now. It is a great shame that the sexist language that the hon. Gentleman deployed shows that he has not understood—*[Interruption.]* I am afraid that he is making his lack of understanding even clearer as I speak. He has not understood the importance of language in trying to encourage people who are not of the usual kind into a new field of operation.

Before I move on to Cleveland police, which is more important than the hon. Gentleman's inability to understand the modern world, I should like to give him an example from my past. As a barrister, I used to receive letters from the Court of Appeal—happily they no longer come—that said that counsel at the appeal must ensure that "he" tells "his" client that "his" responsibility is to do such-and-such and that "he" must always encourage such-and-such. The consequence of an address of that kind and the use of words such as "manning" is to make it perfectly clear that women are not the norm in a field of activity, but are rather unusual, and to make them feel somewhat peculiar to have

[Vera Baird]

ventured into it. Such language is the utter opposite of encouraging. Indeed, talking to a woman about increasing "manning" in the police force is about the same as talking to a black person about increasing the number of white people in the police force.

I hope that the hon. Member for Yeovil will start to understand the significance of sexist language—although I doubt he will—and I compliment the Home Secretary, who does understand it. The proposals to recruit more diversely, to train in a less residential way, which is obviously difficult for women to follow through on, and to ensure that duties and working hours are more family friendly are long overdue and hugely welcome. Police community support officer posts have proved a ripe source of recruitment from women and black and minority ethnic people. That development has helped with antisocial behaviour and other community problems and with diversity.

I want to sketch in a tiny amount of background on Cleveland—the police service that serves Redcar. There are two points that I want my hon. Friend the Minister to keep in mind. Cleveland police force found a £7.3 million black hole in its finances earlier this year. Imagine the impact of that discovery on the public, coming as it did in the immediate aftermath of a campaign—conducted, I am sure, in good faith by the chief constable—asking for an increase of 29 per cent. in the precept, in order, inter alia, to give every ward a police constable. That campaign was conducted on a roadshow basis but, far from being able to achieve what had been planned, the police needed to put the moneys into the black hole to try to bolster the finances.

A new chief constable was then appointed—Mr. Price, who is rightly not being blamed. It is clear that the old Cleveland police authority had not kept itself as well informed as it might have done. Of course, the National Audit Office was involved, and so was Her Majesty's inspectorate of constabulary. No one was misappropriating funds, but the National Audit Office said that there had been a culture of unbridled growth in Cleveland police, with too little regard for financial management. That had not been challenged by the police authority. Part of what went wrong was insufficient attention to the need to keep balances and reserves high. It was clear by the beginning of this year that Cleveland police reserves were very small indeed.

The Audit Commission reports that the chief constable, the new police authority and the management are working well together. Their next budget and their next financial year, will remain extremely difficult, however, for two reasons. First, Cleveland police force is 30 years old this year, which means that it has a very large number of officers who are going to retire. As I understand it, the availability of pension funding for them must be calculated on the basis that 50 per cent. of them will retire with only 30 days' notice. Consequently, it is important that balances are kept in hand for that. It is probably right to say that pensions will make a higher-than-ordinary impact on policing in Cleveland in the next year or so.

Secondly, the National Audit Office severely criticised the running down of balances by the previous administration in Cleveland police force. Very properly, the current chief constable has spent a good deal of the last finance to be received, both from precept and from grant, on replenishing those balances. However, they are still extremely small.

Because significant balances are not available, it will be very difficult, if there is a shortfall in pension provision or if the expected resignations occur, to meet any shortfall out of balances. It will also be difficult for the current chief constable, whose police force has recently been criticised extraordinarily strongly for the running down of balances, to take more out of them in the teeth of that criticism to fund any shortfall—

Miss Anne Begg (in the Chair): Order. The hon. and learned Lady has had plenty of time. I want to call one more hon. Member for the last minute.

2.59 pm

Mr. Mark Simmonds (Boston and Skegness) (Con): Thank you, Miss Begg; I am not sure what I can say in a minute, but I want to put on the record some issues relating to Lincolnshire, which was the only police authority in England and Wales in 2003–04 to have its funding per head reduced. I want an assurance from the Minister this afternoon that that trend will not continue in the forthcoming financial settlement.

Lincolnshire police authority faces an extra £6.9 million in costs in the financial year 2005–06, £1.8 million of which is specifically for the increased burden of police pensions. Will the Minister and the Home Office consider making a special one-off payment to offset this year's pensions bulge for Lincolnshire police authority?

Early indications are that the Government will provide only a 3 per cent. increase in grant, which leaves Lincolnshire to find £3.9 million from council tax. That shortfall will lead to an increase of up to 20 per cent. in the precept on local people in Lincolnshire, which is totally unacceptable. People realise that they must make a contribution, but it should be a fair one. There is a massive disparity of more than 50 per cent. between the allocation of funding per head in Lincolnshire, which was £102.31 in the 2003–04 financial year, and that in the constituency of the hon. Member for Tynemouth (Mr. Campbell), which is £166 per head. That is completely unacceptable. In this day and age, people in rural areas suffer many of the same problems of drugs and other criminal activity as those in urban areas.

I urge the Minister to ensure that Lincolnshire receives a fair share of police funding. If the police authority received funding at the national average, never mind at the level suggested by the hon. Member for Tynemouth, there would be up to £15 million more to spend, which would enable it to provide a full and proper service to the people of Lincolnshire.

3.1 pm

Mr. David Heath (Somerton and Frome) (LD): This has been an extraordinarily useful and timely debate. It is a great shame that not all Members have had the opportunity to contribute to it, but I congratulate my hon. Friend the Member for Yeovil (Mr. Laws) on introducing it. I could, if I were so minded, come in behind him on matters that pertain to Avon and Somerset, as he is my parliamentary neighbour and I have worked very closely with him over the years in trying to ensure that proper resources are allocated to the Avon and Somerset constabulary.

The paradox is that we are finally having some success. East Somerset is getting a few extra officers on the beat as well as community support officers, which we welcome. Indeed, I will see newly appointed officers this Friday and will welcome them to the area. That has been a long time coming. We were without the resources for many years under the previous Government, and have spent many years under this one without them. What we are trying to say today is that we do not want to turn the clock back again as a result of this year's settlement. If we do not obtain the resources, we will simply not be able to concentrate on areas in which the Government and all Members, whatever their political hue, want action to be taken.

We want greater visibility in rural areas of our constituencies and a greater police presence in the neighbourhoods of our cities. We want effective work to be done on prolific offenders, which Avon and Somerset has been particularly good at, but it is an expensive option that needs resources to make it work. We want better drug interdiction, and burglaries and car crime to continue to be driven down. We want the work on domestic violence to be enhanced. Indeed, we debated that in our consideration of the Domestic Violence, Crime and Victims Bill. We particularly want an effective response to gang warfare, which is all too prevalent in some of our cities—Bristol is no exception.

Mr. Roger Williams: My hon. Friend may remember that the rural policing grant was omitted from the police settlement when that was first announced last year, and reinstated only after lobbying. Does he agree that the Minister could perform a great service today if she confirmed that the rural policing grant will be included in the police settlement?

Mr. Heath: The Minister certainly could do that. She may have made that commitment when we debated the matter recently in response to a debate on West Mercia police, but I will ask her to repeat it today for the benefit of Members who are present.

In recent years, we have seen an increase in police numbers, which is welcome. Less welcome is the fact that it has been funded largely by the council tax payer. We welcome the fact that the Government have allowed that expansion, but we are concerned that they should take credit for it as though the money came from Government resources. In reality, much of the increase has been paid for by local tax payers through the council tax.

For all the reasons that I have given, we want to see more activity, particularly in the more obscure areas covered in the excellent White Paper published yesterday. I give credit to the Government for that—it contains much that we support—but we want the resources to make it happen. Investment is needed now if we are to release officers on to the street and away from their bureaucratic burdens. That cannot be done without cost; there is a front-loading cost to be met if we are to provide the technology that enables the police to pursue their activities on the street, which is where we want them to be.

Many police authority areas have unavoidable commitments, and pensions are a big component of that. We have debated the difficulties of pensions many times. Indeed, I have often repeated the assurance that I was given by the right hon. Member for Penrith and The Border (David Maclean) in 1996 that it would all be dealt with—but it was not dealt with then, nor since. The Government are at last bringing forward proposals, but we remain to be persuaded that the funds are available to resource those proposals without affecting direct policing.

Sue Doughty (Guildford) (LD): Surrey has the highest precept; Surrey people pay 43 per cent. for police funding despite savings of £15.9 million, and they are now at risk of paying more than 50 per cent. Does my hon. Friend agree that one then has to decide who comes first in policing matters—the Home Secretary or the local people, who are paying so much directly?

Mr. Heath: My hon. Friend is right. The Surrey police authority was explicit in its advice to its members. It said:

> "The present funding gap is £350 million UK-wide, and £11.3 million in Surrey; without a change in this situation there will be cuts."

The chief constable of Hampshire constabulary, Paul Kernaghan, said:

> "I am very conscious that the level of grant announced to date is insufficient to maintain our current level of service."

Norfolk constabulary made exactly the same point:

> "By far the largest expenditure item in all constabulary is staff salaries, yet the government now effectively controls police officer establishment levels by means of the Crime Fighting Fund—reductions in police officers result in commensurate reductions in grant."

Devon and Cornwall succinctly said that the lack of resources affects performance.

Mr. Mark Prisk (Hertford and Stortford) (Con): Is the hon. Gentleman aware that, according to the police authority, the gap is 6.9 per cent. in Hertfordshire? Does he share my worry that many home county authorities have a retention problem because London is able to pay £4,000 more per officer?

Mr. Heath: I certainly understand that, but I understand also that the lack of area cost adjustment payments means that many peripheral forces are disadvantaged; they are paying the same scale rates as many of the home county forces, but without the resources to support those payments.

We do not have enough time to do justice to the subject. I am aware of the many pressures on the Home Office budget this year. The burgeoning prison population is a huge drain, as are the pressures caused by asylum and immigration. The need to invest in new technologies and the Government's scheme for identity cards, if it goes ahead, will also have a huge effect on finances. We have yet to discover the costs of the serious and organised crime agency, a measure that I entirely support, but I want to know from where the funding will come.

What worries many of us is not that chief constables and police authorities are engaged in some perverse shroud waving simply for effect—they provide the

[Mr. Heath]

front-line services on which we depend—but that they are taking a candid look at what is needed for next year. They realise that something approaching 3 per cent. will not be adequate, as it will not meet their needs. Although it may not result in fewer police officers, they say that it will certainly result in cuts to front-line services because civilianisation will be put into reverse and police officers will be put back into the police stations to do the backroom jobs. Chief constables and the police authorities are expressing a real concern.

I know from experience in my area that basic command unit commanders are being asked to bring forward budgets for consideration that show real-term cuts. That is what the Government's present spending figures imply. Those who are most committed to the objective of reducing crime, which we share with the Government, will be the hardest hit if the budgets go ahead.

The Home Office needed this debate and it needs more such debates, because it has a battle to win with the Treasury to ensure that the police service gets the funds needed to do the job. I regard the deferral of the announcement as a good sign that perhaps matters are being reconsidered. I welcome what the Home Secretary said yesterday. He pulled half a rabbit out of a hat—if that is not a rather macabre vision—in making it clear that some rethinking is going on.

The Minister needs to confirm that the settlement will be above 3 per cent. and to tell us whether the floors and ceilings will be retained, whether there is any intention to cap police authorities—that would be wholly counter-productive in the coming year—and whether the rural policing fund, which we are told will have no inflation component, will persist beyond the coming year.

Most of all, the Minister needs to tell us whether the Government are really committed to what they say in "Building Communities, Beating Crime: A better police service for the 21st century", the new White Paper. It contains 10 commitments to the police service. Commitment 4 is that the police service should be confident that

> "policing is being supported properly by Government—with officers and staff having the resources, powers and equipment they need to do their jobs effectively".

That is the key to good policing and what many people up and down the country will expect from the Home Secretary and the Minister in years to come. However, it is currently under threat.

3.11 pm

Mr. Andrew Mitchell (Sutton Coldfield) (Con): I congratulate the hon. Member for Yeovil (Mr. Laws) on securing the debate and on the way in which he presented his case. He made a point about increased crime throughout our country, a point to which I shall return. He also talked about the increased costs imposed on the police and he warned of present and future difficulties. Many of my hon. Friends and I have recognised the strength of his argument. It is clear that much Liberal thinking has now embraced the policies of my party as we go forward with developments in respect of the police. I am most grateful to the hon. Gentleman for what he said.

A point made by the hon. Member for Somerton and Frome (Mr. Heath) is equally important: all of us here today are seeking to strengthen the Minister's hand in her negotiations with the Treasury to ensure that the settlement is fair and acceptable. Although I have harsh things to say about the Government's performance in that regard, I hope that if she takes one thing away from the debate, it will be that in the three main political parties, there is a strong view that the police service and therefore our constituents could be short-changed by the settlement that we receive this year. We very much hope that she will be able to ensure that that does not happen.

Mr. John Horam (Orpington) (Con): I am grateful to my hon. Friend for enabling me to get at least a toehold in this important debate. I want to speak on behalf of the Metropolitan Police Authority. I would like the Minister, in the luxury of the 10 minutes that she has available, to say something about the largest police authority in the country.

Mr. Mitchell: I am pleased to have given way to my hon. Friend, not least because hon. Members were deprived of hearing a speech from him in this important debate.

We heard a most interesting contribution from the hon. Member for Tynemouth (Mr. Campbell). He, too, urged the Minister to get a good settlement from the Treasury. I suspect that, with some of the coded words that he used, he was warning her of the importance of that. He suggested that not everyone believes that community support officers are the panacea that the Government think they are. Opposition Members do not oppose CSOs, but we think it a mistake to increase so substantially the funding for them and to increase the number of such officers without any proper independent and reliable evaluation. If we saw such an evaluation, we might have more sympathy with the Government's argument.

My hon. Friend the Member for Mid-Norfolk (Mr. Simpson), as ever, stood up for Norfolk and argued forcefully about the difficulties facing the county. We then heard the most remarkable speech of the day, from the hon. Member for Sherwood (Paddy Tipping). I saw the phalanx of Nottinghamshire Members of Parliament here today and asked myself what they were doing. Nottinghamshire MPs have a reputation for rugged individuality. On the speech of the hon. Member for Sherwood, I will only suggest strongly that the Minister listens more carefully to my right hon. and learned Friend the Member for Rushcliffe (Mr. Clarke) and the hon. Members for Nottingham, South (Alan Simpson) and for Nottingham, North (Mr. Allen) about how she should deal with policing in Nottinghamshire. Secondly, what I take away from the hon. Gentleman's contribution—I shall be on the phone shortly after this debate—is the good news for the Gedling Conservatives. Clearly, Labour is in trouble in Gedling. There is no other conceivable reason why he could have made such a speech. I give way to him with the greatest of pleasure.

Paddy Tipping: I am sure that the Conservatives in Gedling will be interested that the hon. Gentleman endorses the comments that they are disgusted and ashamed of the area where they live. They will take it from him because they will remember him as a failed Member there.

Mr. Mitchell: I rest my case. It is clear that the Labour party is worried about what is happening in Gedling. I neither endorse nor repudiate what was said by the Gedling Conservatives. They are doing a first-class job in standing up for the people of my old constituency.

Reluctantly, I must move on. We heard an excellent speech from my hon. Friend the Member for Mid-Bedfordshire (Mr. Sayeed) about the squeeze on his local police force. We then heard from the hon. and learned Member for Redcar (Vera Baird), who was unduly hard on the hon. Member for Yeovil. I agree that diversity in the police is enormously important, and although I did not agree with everything that she said, she made a most powerful and eloquent argument about that. My hon. Friend the Member for Boston and Skegness (Mr. Simmonds) made his points forcefully for the Lincolnshire police force in a remarkable speech; he managed to get so much into such a short period.

I fear that I will run out of time quite soon but I want to make a number of key points, which I hope tie together some of my hon. Friends' comments. The question of how we pay for the police is at the heart of the debate. Under this Government, there has been a dramatic shift in funding responsibility to the council tax payer. The average precept increase is 20 per cent. in this financial year. The precept increase in North Yorkshire was more than 75 per cent., and it was more than 50 per cent. in Gloucestershire. Police expenditure financed through council tax has doubled in real terms between 1997 and 2004. Council tax now accounts for 20 per cent. of police force expenditure, compared with only 12 per cent. before. The police precept has increased by 87 per cent.

One of the points that our constituents notice is that if one assumes the cost of a police officer is about £50,000, that precept increase could have paid for more than 19,000 officers, instead of the 13,900 that we have received. The council tax precept has paid for increased police numbers, not the Government, and the public have been short-changed out of something like 5,000 police officers.

The police will suffer some serious effects. In the west midlands, which has a police force that serves some 2.5 million people and covers the three major centres of Birmingham—Britain's second city—Coventry and Wolverhampton, crime is at very high levels. The force is fully stretched. It has been seriously affected by the Government's meddling with the police grant funding formula. It lost out by £27 million in the funding settlement because the amount to which it was entitled, according to the Government's funding formula, was capped by the introduction of floors and ceilings. The force lost out again in the 2004–05 funding settlement by a further £27 million because of the flat increase of 3.25 per cent.

Those are serious factors that affect the west midlands. I know that the Minister has some sympathy with the case that we have put in the west midlands, but it would be remiss of me not to stand up for the force in the area that I represent. There is no doubt that recorded crime has risen hugely under this Government. It has risen by some 16 per cent. It is up from 5 million crimes to nearly 5.9 million crimes. Violence against the person is up 90 per cent. Sexual offences are up 44 per cent. Violent crime under this Government has risen by 83 per cent. Robbery is up 51 per cent. Criminal damage is up 37 per cent.

The ultimate condemnation of the Government's performance lies in how detection rates have fallen. Detection rates for violence against the person have fallen from 79 per cent. to 50 per cent., for sex crimes from 77 per cent. to below 40 per cent., for robbery from 27 per cent. to 18 per cent., and for criminal damage from 19 per cent. to 13 per cent.

The Minister appears to be in a state of denial about crime. She mouths to our constituents that crime has fallen under this Government, but the opposite is the truth. She must realise that part of coming to terms with reality is to accept, rather like a drunk, that the first phase of recovery is to acknowledge what the problem actually is. I hope she will say today that she is determined to persuade the Treasury to implement the Conservative party's proposals for an extra 40,000 police, and that she will set about a return to the detection rates that her Government inherited in 1997. She must stop the endless passion of the Home Office for ring-fencing funding and interfering. I hope that in her debates and arguments with the Treasury she will try to ensure that some of the enormous extra tax that the Chancellor of the Exchequer has taken is directed to helping our communities by increasing the money that central Government provide to police forces.

3.21 pm

The Minister for Crime Reduction, Policing and Community Safety (Ms Hazel Blears): I congratulate the hon. Member for Yeovil (Mr. Laws) on securing the debate. It is clear from the number of hon. Members present that we are all concerned about policing and tackling crime and antisocial behaviour in our constituencies. It is also a testament to the lobbying powers of the Association of Police Authorities and the Association of Chief Police Officers, which have made a good case to Members of Parliament.

This has been a very cheerful debate; until the contribution of the hon. Member for Sutton Coldfield (Mr. Mitchell), I was going to say that it had been good-tempered, too. If I were still a Minister at the Department of Health, I might be inclined to give him a bit of advice about his blood pressure.

Many contributions were the result of assumptions about the level of police grant and of precept and uncertainty about how far police forces will be able to drive through their cashable and non-cashable efficiency gains. My hon. Friend the Member for Tynemouth (Mr. Campbell) made a very good contribution about efficiency.

There are several imponderables in our current position on police funding, some of which will become clearer in the next few weeks. Hon. Members press me about funding, and I try to keep as a straight a face as I can—it is a little like playing poker. Before the formal settlement is made, I cannot talk about the general level of police grant or the specific grants other than to reaffirm what I have already said about the rural policing grant, which is that it is £30 million and is

[Ms Hazel Blears]

distributed to about 31 forces. It will still be around for the next year, because we recognise that it has been a great help to many of the forces mentioned by hon. Members.

Mr. Prisk: Will the Minister give way?

Ms Blears: I will not, as I have only seven minutes to try to cover all the points that hon. Members raised.

I am grateful to the hon. Member for Yeovil for acknowledging the improvements that have been made. Many hon. Members also acknowledged that an increased numbers of police officers and community support officers have been out in the community in the last couple of years giving the public the reassurance that they want from the police service, and I am delighted about that.

My hon. Friend the Member for Tynemouth mentioned the pilot study on the civilianisation of the custody function in his constituency. It is one of the most ambitious work force modernisation pilots, which has released 93 police officers for front-line activity, and it is a good example of efficiency.

Hon. Members, including my hon. Friend, asked about the allocation of community support officers, and I am considering my submission on that at present. The fund available is oversubscribed by almost 100 per cent. We have had bids for £100 million, but we have £50 million, so I shall need to make the allocations carefully.

I am delighted that the hon. Member for Mid-Norfolk (Mr. Simpson) acknowledged the progress made. He raised the issue of funding for a helicopter; helicopters have to be funded partly by a contribution from the force, and Norfolk has not so far been prepared to make a contribution, but the door is still open if it wants to discuss the matter further.

My hon. Friend the Member for Sherwood (Paddy Tipping), in an excellent and passionate contribution, reminded me of my visit last Thursday and Friday to Nottingham, where I met police officers, local leaders and residents. I saw the video ID suite, which saves a fortune, and met the robbery team, who are out on the streets driving down robbery.

Despite his position as a Government Whip and his inability to make contributions in the opening part of parliamentary proceedings, my hon. Friend the Member for Gedling (Vernon Coaker) has been a champion for his local area. He has lobbied me for more police officers, community support officers and funding. I can barely walk through Parliament without him constantly stopping me on behalf of his community. I am delighted that the performance of Nottinghamshire police is improving, and we must ensure that investment is used to its best effect. I have received a further report in the past week from Nottingham about the problems of serious and organised crime, and I will deal with it carefully.

My hon. and learned Friend the Member for Redcar (Vera Baird) made an important contribution about diversity. Recruiting more women is important in implementing some of the findings of the White Paper, but we also need a different relationship, culture and set of skills in the police force. We need to recruit more from black and minority ethnic communities and more disabled people. We want the police force to look like the communities it serves.

My hon. and learned Friend spoke about the £7.5 million gap in the budget of Cleveland police. There have clearly been difficulties with financial management in the force. I shall ask officials to engage with the force to see what can be done, but I cannot offer specific extra funding today. I am conscious of the difficulties in that community.

The hon. Member for Somerton and Frome (Mr. Heath) welcomed much of the ongoing improvement. He mentioned technology. With video ID suites, automatic number plate recognition and fingerprinting improvements, we are driving through efficiencies so that we can continue to provide good police services with the available resources.

Several hon. Members mentioned that local precepts have risen to fund extra officers. In fact, 9,650 of the extra 13,000 police officers have been funded through the crime fighting fund rather than through local precepts. I entirely acknowledge that local people have made a big contribution to providing extra officers, but a huge amount has come from central Government funding—we still provide nearly 80 per cent. of police funding. Although local percentage increases have risen, there has been a massive increase in Government funds.

The allegations from the hon. Member for Sutton Coldfield and his intemperate expression of the current situation contrast with what everyone else has said. People have spoken about improvements on the ground, more police officers, performance increases, people feeling safer in their communities and crime falling by 30 per cent. Let us not judge him on what he says, but on the record of his party. There were 11,000 fewer police officers under the Conservatives, and crime doubled. It is easy for him to talk intemperately about these issues, but I ask him to reflect on his party's record, and I ask other hon. Members to judge the Conservatives on what they did, not what they say.

I hope to provide a good police grant settlement. The Home Secretary said yesterday that we are doing everything possible to generate a realistic police grant, as we did last year. We took £140 million from the rest of the Home Office and put it into police grant because we recognised how important tackling crime and antisocial behaviour is for constituents in their communities.

Finally, I shall turn to pensions. There is a pensions increase for most authorities this year. Some authorities have managed to put away £161 million in reserves. Authorities knew that they would have a spike in pensions on retirements, but I appreciate that it is a difficult situation. Rather than delaying, the Government have sought to change the pension scheme from next year, to iron out volatility and avoid peaks and troughs. However, the combination of authorities' reserves, potential efficiencies, a reasonable police grant and a reasonable precept should enable us to carry on providing the excellent levels of policing and community safety on which the Government have a proud record.

Gypsy Encampment (Minety)

3.30 pm

Mr. James Gray (North Wiltshire) (Con): I am very pleased to have the opportunity to raise an extremely important constituency issue. For the record, the correct pronunciation is "Mine-tee", and a wonderful place it is, too. However, in recent weeks and months—indeed, it is getting on for two years—what was a peaceful and remote rural village has, in effect, been wrecked by the presence of 50 or 60 Gypsy caravans, whose owners have illegally occupied a greenfield site.

This is a timely debate because the issue affects not only Minety, but a great many other places throughout England. Most notable among them are Smithy Fen near Cottenham, where the problem that I am about to describe is particularly bad, and North Curry in Somerset, which has recently had the Minety experience again. So the debate is of more than purely constituency interest, and the Minister's reply will be of interest to hon. Members from throughout England. Indeed, even the Prime Minister suggested at Prime Minister's Question Time last Wednesday that he would leave no stone unturned in seeking a solution to this intractable problem, so we are looking forward to hearing what the Minister has to say on his behalf.

Under the Criminal Justice and Public Order Act 1994, we could remove Gypsies when they were illegally camped on public or private land. That was easily done; it was a good Act and it worked rather well. In recent years, however, the pattern has changed: instead of illegally entering public or private land, Gypsies purchase land and occupy it covertly, having put it around that they want it for agricultural purposes. They nearly always invade the site after office hours on a Friday evening so that the local district council has gone home for the weekend. They breach the hedges, bringing in dozens of lorries of hardcore to lay down hard standing. They bring cesspits and even lay on electricity and, in many cases, telephones. An army of caravans then arrives—in my constituency, it was 50 or 60, but there were even more in Cambridgeshire, which was a particularly bad case. The same happened in Newbury and a variety of other places. By Monday morning, when the district council returns to work, it finds a well established Gypsy encampment of 50 or 100 caravans.

The Gypsies then put in a retrospective planning application for the site, which the district council, of course, turns down. Naturally enough, the Gypsies go to appeal on the issue. Attempts are made to remove them. In my constituency, Wiltshire county council tried to use highways matters in the High Court to do that, but the court will defer any such removal action until an appeal has been heard, which, by definition, may be a year to 18 months from the date of the illegal occupation. If the Gypsies take the matter further—they have talked about going to the European Court of Human Rights and to other organisations—it could be several months or years before proper action is taken to end what, by anybody's standards, is an illegal occupation.

The Gypsies seem to hope that inertia will set in and that people will say that it is easier to leave them where they are than to remove them because they have been there for such a long time. Well, I can tell them that, as far as Minety goes, they have chosen the wrong village. People there are up in arms in a big way about the issue. I have held two public meetings, both of which were attended by 400 extremely angry people who wanted to take all kinds of action to have the Gypsies removed.

If the Gypsies think that the MP for the area is a pushover, they have made a mistake there, too. I assure those Gypsies, who are making the lives of several of my constituents hell—I use the word advisedly—that if they think we will roll over and let them stay, they are quite wrong. I have been to two or three such debates in this Chamber, so I know that the same applies to several other areas, where the Member of Parliament is fighting the case very hard.

The debate is particularly timely because, on Monday, the Select Committee on Office of the Deputy Prime Minister produced what, in many ways, was a carefully researched and thought through report on the problem. I welcome the fact that the Committee has done that work, and we look forward to the Government's response. However, I have no hesitation in taking issue with one of the main conclusions reached by the Select Committee—that the solution to the kind of illegal occupancy of land that I have described in Minety is the provision of more Gypsy sites throughout England. The Committee seems to think that if we provide enough Gypsy sites for the 3,500 caravans that are illegally parked at present, that will solve the problem.

If that is the case, where will those sites be built? They would be small sites—perhaps 10 caravans per site—and we would therefore be looking for 300 or 350 more sites just for a few caravans. Given that we are talking only about rural constituencies, that would probably mean three or four proper Gypsy caravan sites in each of those rural constituencies. My constituency would doubtless be one of them, and if I was challenged to find three or four sites for a legal Gypsy encampment in North Wiltshire, I would be hard pressed to do so—indeed, I would not consider doing so.

The Committee's conclusion also ignores the fact that the Gypsies do not seem to want to go to certain parts of England—they seem to want to go to particular places—and also that they do not want to go on to local authority sites. In Wiltshire, for example, we have an abundance of local authority sites—perhaps I exaggerate my case a little by using the word "abundance"—but there are certainly vacancies on local authority sites in Wiltshire. Indeed, a new site was recently opened outside Salisbury. The Gypsies in Minety left a local authority site in Swindon—a legitimate, sensible local authority site—and moved on to their own land.

The pattern appears to be that Gypsies do not to want to live on local authority sites, but on land that they themselves own. I rather encourage that. It seems to me to be eminently sensible to encourage them to set up their own sites legally and with proper planning permission. Local authorities ought to set aside and designate land for Gypsy encampments. The Gypsies could then buy that land and put an encampment on it. That seems a sensible way forward, whereas invading a site and then seeking retrospective planning permission will not work.

[Mr. James Gray]

There is also a problem of what I would describe as a Parkinson's law of Gypsies: there has been an enormous increase in the number of Gypsies in England, which shows no sign of abating. I remember that in the early 1960s, when the original legislation on Gypsy encampments was passed, there were 3,000 caravans in England and about 1,700 illegally parked. Today, there are about 6,000 Gypsy caravans on council-approved sites, 5,000 on private sites, and about 4,000 that are illegally parked—something like 15,000 in total. In other words, the numbers have increased four times since the 1960s.

Recently, I asked a Gypsy at a meeting that I held with them, "Where on earth are all these Gypsies coming from?" and received probably the most disarming response that I have experienced at any recent meeting. He replied, "From their mothers, I reckon." However, I do not think that that is the case—although doubtless they had something to do with it. I suspect that a significant number of Gypsies are coming in from Ireland and Romania. There is a significant influx of Gypsies into England at present and, with the expansion of the European Union, that process will doubtless continue.

I therefore do not accept that simply increasing the number of sites available—putting some sort of requirement on local authorities to provide sites—would necessarily solve the problem. In that context, I am glad to have read a press release in which the Office of the Deputy Prime Minister gave an initial reaction to the Select Committee's report. It stated:

> "A duty to provide sites is not necessarily an appropriate solution. A duty has been tried before and often did not produce sufficient or appropriate provision. A duty which relates solely to the Gypsy and Traveller community reinforces the view that they should be dealt with outside the mainstream housing system."

I hope that the Minister will reiterate that statement today, and confirm that placing some kind of obligation on local authorities to provide more sites would not necessarily solve the problem.

The second point on which many people watching the debate today will be keen to hear a clear statement from the Minister relates to the fact that a number of recent court cases concerning Gypsies have rested to a significant degree on the Human Rights Act 1998. There is some lack of clarity as to whether the Human Rights Act can be used in planning law during consideration of whether to allow those sites. In the recent Chichester case, the media's interpretation was that the Act had led the judge to allow the Gypsies to remain, although I think that that was a misinterpretation of the judgment. In a recent case in Cottenham, the judge delayed any decision on the site pending a legal challenge by the Gypsies using the 1998 Act. In that case, the judge commented that the Gypsies were holding a gun to the head of the councils.

Will the Minister confirm the stance taken by the Under-Secretary of State, Office of the Deputy Prime Minister, the hon. Member for Pontefract and Castleford (Yvette Cooper) at our meeting about six months ago, to which I took a group of councillors and officers from Wiltshire county council and North Wiltshire district council? At that meeting, I asked her whether the Human Rights Act 1998 should have anything to do with planning issues with regard to Gypsies, and she gave a reply that she then confirmed in writing. Her letter states:

> "The European Convention on Human Rights and the Human Rights Act do not grant Gypsies immunity from planning legislation."

She said also that local planning authorities, inspectors and the Secretary of State have always had to comply with convention rights

> "whether the cases involve Gypsies or non-Gypsies."

That sums it up exactly: Gypsies and non-Gypsies alike must conform to planning law, and the fact that some people happen to be of a nomadic frame of mind should not give any presumption in their favour in planning law. They must go through the same processes that any other constituent of mine would have to go through if they wanted to set up their holiday caravan in a field. There is no reason why a person who calls himself a Gypsy, Traveller, new-age Traveller or any of the other descriptions around, should have a presumption in their favour. The presumption against allowing such things should apply to them in the same way as to anyone else.

The European Court of Human Rights confirmed that approach in the Chapman case of 2001, in which it said that any kind of presumption in favour of Gypsies would be

> "tantamount to imposing on the United Kingdom . . . an obligation . . . to make available to the Gypsy community an adequate number of suitably equipped sites."

The court said that it was not convinced that the human rights convention could be interpreted to allow

> "such a far-reaching . . . obligation of general social policy"

to be imposed on member states.

So, the ECHR seems to have laid down that the Human Rights Act does not apply, and the Under-Secretary of State seems to have confirmed that in her letter to me, but the judges in certain recent cases seem to be unclear as to whether the Human Rights Act applies. The Minister might like to use this opportunity, if he does nothing else, to shed some light on this particular legal point about the degree to which Gypsies may use the Act in seeking to obtain a retrospective planning application.

Leaving the legal question aside, it seems to me—and the Prime Minister, if he is to believed—that people in Minety, and many other places across England, should be able to remove people such as the Gypsies in Minety. They are breaking the law; they have illegally moved into a greenfield site in the middle of the countryside. No one disputes that they have broken planning law. Even the Gypsies do not dispute that; they do not say, "We are here legally." They accept that they are there illegally.

The first duty of the Government should be to come up with a mechanism whereby we can remove such people more easily and quickly. Several proposals have been put forward, most notably last year, in the private Member's Bill of an hon. Friend of mine, which would have allowed stop notices to be applied to Gypsies instantly on their discovery, and their instant removal so that they could seek prospective rather than retrospective planning permission for their site. In other words, it would have put them in precisely the same situation as any other applicant. The Ministry or the Government should tell councils such as North Wiltshire district council what they can do better to enforce the planning law.

I readily accept that there are complex legal issues—the fact that the courts are so busily occupied looking into Gypsy sites is evidence of that, but positive discrimination in favour of Gypsies is as bad as negative discrimination against them. I hope that the Minister agrees. It is plain that, in equity, Gypsies should be treated in precisely the same way as anyone else. I have no objection to their nomadic way of life; I respect that they want to live that way. If they want to settle down, I, as a local Member of Parliament, will help them with housing and other issues, but if they want to live a nomadic way of life, they should be treated the same as any constituent who does not. If they prefer to own their sites, that is fine; let us have local authority land designated specifically for Gypsy encampments, but can we please have stronger powers to enforce the will of the local people, as represented by the district councils, for when they will not do that?

Illegal Gypsy encampments of the kind at Minety seem rapidly to be becoming a national crisis. This afternoon, we look to the Minister to show us some ways out of this difficult problem.

3.45 pm

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State, Office of the Deputy Prime Minister (Phil Hope): May I begin by congratulating the hon. Member for North Wiltshire (Mr. Gray) on securing this debate on the important issue of Gypsies and Travellers and unauthorised developments in his constituency? I am sure he is right to say that the debate has a wider resonance than simply the case that concerns him. He will appreciate that I cannot comment on individual planning cases like that of Minety because of the appellate responsibilities of the Secretary of State.

The hon. Gentleman also referred to the Office of the Deputy Prime Minister: Housing, Planning and Local Government Committee, which published its report into Gypsy and Traveller accommodation issues earlier this week. We certainly welcome the interest shown by the Select Committee. It raises many important issues that we are already considering as part of a review of Gypsy and Traveller policy. We will respond to its report in due course. I am glad he would agree that Gypsies and Travellers should enjoy the same rights as everyone else to establish a decent place to live, as long as they do so within the law. That is a point of agreement across the Chamber.

We believe in an inclusive society where members of this community have the right to pursue a traditional nomadic lifestyle and to access essential services, but I also acknowledge the problems that are often caused by unauthorised development and the concerns of the settled community when that occurs. It is for those reasons that the Office of the Deputy Prime Minister is currently undertaking a Gypsy and Traveller policy review. Officials will report to Ministers on the outcome of that shortly.

Mr. Gray: The Minister says "shortly", but how shortly?

Phil Hope: After many years in this place, the hon. Gentleman will know that shortly means shortly. Unfortunately, I cannot define it any more exactly. I think he will appreciate that it does not mean lengthily.

The review has a focus on equality issues for the Gypsy and Traveller community and the mainstreaming of Gypsy and Traveller issues within wider local and national policy. The review is looking at how we can encourage more publicly provided and privately owned sites and how to overcome some of the unnecessary barriers that exist to site provision. We want the planning system to reflect the mainstreaming of Gypsy and Traveller accommodation within the wider social housing context. The hon. Gentleman mentioned that at the end of his remarks. We also want it to support changes that will lead to the improvement of the health of Gypsies and Travellers who have the poorest health status of any black or minority ethnic group in England.

As a part of this wider policy review, we have already started a thorough review of the Gypsy sites planning circular and will be publishing a new draft circular for consultation later in the autumn. That gives the hon. Gentleman some clues as to how close we may be to that process. While the Government recognise that some Gypsies and Travellers wish to embrace a nomadic lifestyle, we know that others prefer to live a more settled existence on local authority or private sites. I want to draw what I hope will be a helpful distinction between unauthorised development and unauthorised camping.

An unauthorised encampment is one where the land is not owned by those setting it up. I will talk about this later if I have time. The focus of the debate today has been on unauthorised developments. An unauthorised development is where a person or persons, be they Gypsies and Travellers or members of the settled community, purchase land and carry out development for which planning permission is required, but where no such permission has been granted. That is considered a breach of planning control and amounts to unauthorised development. Local planning authorities have a range of enforcement powers to deal with unauthorised development.

While I cannot comment on specific planning cases, it might be useful to say a few words about the Government's policy on Gypsy and Traveller sites and planning. Planning policies concerning the provision of suitable locations for Gypsy and Traveller sites, whether local authority provided or private, are set out in the Department of the Environment circular 1/94, published in 1994, entitled "Gypsy Sites and Planning".

The current circular recognises the desire of many Gypsies and Travellers to buy their own sites to develop and manage. Gypsy and Traveller sites constitute development and therefore require planning permission. In formulating their development plans, local authorities are encouraged to discuss Gypsies' accommodation needs with the Gypsies themselves, with a view to identifying suitable locations for Gypsy and Traveller sites in plans wherever possible.

For many local authorities, especially in rural areas, the identification of sites is not easy, as the hon. Gentleman said. Where local authorities find it impossible to identify suitable locations, they must define clear and realistic criteria as the basis for site

[Phil Hope]

provision. It is the responsibility of local authorities to judge how they frame their policies, which are open to public scrutiny and comments at inquiry.

Local plans ~~must~~ take account of local circumstances. For example, Gypsy and Traveller sites are not among the uses that are normally appropriate on greenbelt land, in areas of special scientific interest or on open land where development is severely restricted. The onus is on the applicant to prove special circumstances that overcome the harm through inappropriateness.

Mr. Gray: The Minister specifies the different types of land that circular 1/94 mentions as inappropriate, but he has not yet mentioned areas of outstanding natural beauty. Does the circular make any reference to them? If so, is there a preference against areas of outstanding natural beauty but in favour of other open countryside, or are Gypsy encampments in open countryside of all kinds inappropriate?

Phil Hope: I am going to discuss later in detail how the planning system works when an unauthorised development occurs in a place that, for any number of reasons, might be inappropriate and what the planning authority can do to ensure that matters are put right.

The special circumstances that allow a site to be developed might include health and educational needs, but it would be for the planning authority to decide on that, using the planning system.

The 1994 circular is not working effectively in many areas to identify enough appropriate sites. Recent caravan counts have shown that there are around 3,500 caravans on unauthorised developments and encampments in England—I think that the hon. Gentleman mentioned the figure of 4,000—of which around a third are in the eastern region. The new circular is likely to stress the importance of local authorities undertaking a proper quantitative assessment of need, of meeting that need via proper spatial planning through the new regional planning process, and of the identification of specific sites and achievable criteria that offer some certainty of planning permission being granted.

Unfortunately, some Gypsies and Travellers often proceed to establish sites without first obtaining the necessary planning consent, as the hon. Gentleman described. In many cases, the locations that they choose are inappropriate in land use terms, such as where land is in the green belt or open countryside. Enforcement action by local authorities against such unauthorised development is therefore common.

In addition, the Government expect the standard of the behaviour from Gypsies and Travellers to be the same as that expected in the settled community. Any antisocial behaviour will be dealt with in the same way.

Mr. Gray: Will the Minister give way?

Phil Hope: I have more to say.

Travellers and Gypsies, whatever type of site or encampment they are on, should take responsibility for their plots or for the land next to them, keep them clean, not tip waste, dispose of waste properly and not cause a nuisance to neighbours. The availability of alternative sites can be a consideration when appeals against enforcement notices are determined, but only when considering such sites as alternatives to a proposed location that is not suitable itself in planning terms.

Local authorities have a key role to play in identifying suitable locations for sites and in working with Gypsies to help them find land that they can purchase and develop. A few planning authorities have now adopted that best practice. Although that does not deal with the issues that the hon. Gentleman raised, close co-operation between local authorities and Gypsies is very much the best way forward to reduce instances where Gypsies establish sites unlawfully—in some cases causing friction between the Gypsy and Traveller and settled communities.

The Government share the view that local planning authorities should take appropriate enforcement action if they consider an unacceptable breach of planning control to have occurred. There is a range of tools at local planning authorities' disposal. Under powers in the Town and Country Planning Act 1990, as amended by the Planning and Compensation Act 1991, local planning authorities have wide-ranging enforcement powers to deal with breaches of planning control. There are powers to serve a planning contravention notice, issue an enforcement notice, serve a stop notice and serve a breach of condition notice, the ability to seek an injunction in the High Court and, finally, improved powers of entry on to land. We also recently introduced the temporary stop notice under the Planning and Compulsory Purchase Act 2004. I will write to the hon. Gentleman about what each of those planning powers means, if that would help him, rather than read through the detail here, given the limited time available to me in this debate.

Powers also exist under section 178 of the Town and Country Planning Act 1990 that enable a local planning authority to enter and remove unauthorised developments that are in breach of an enforcement notice. Section 178 provides that where an enforcement notice requires steps to be taken that are not taken within the period of compliance with the notice, the local planning authority may enter the land, take the steps and recover from the person who is the owner of the land any expenses reasonably incurred by them in doing so. We have also undertaken a review of the planning enforcement system as a whole, not only for unauthorised Gypsy and Traveller sites but for other unauthorised developments, and we expect to make an announcement about the review later this year.

The hon. Gentleman mentioned human rights in particular. It is, of course, for the local planning authority to determine planning applications, as I just described, and to take breach notices in the sequence that I just outlined. As part of that process, the local authority needs to consider what impact its decision may have on the human rights of individuals.

I want to make it absolutely clear that Gypsies and Travellers do not have special human rights. Everyone has human rights, and all public authorities must act compatibly with convention rights and take decisions individually case by case. Likewise, when inspectors take decisions about appeals, it is for them to decide, as decision takers, whether human rights issues are involved.

Decisions may be challenged on the ground of human rights, but because of the nature of the system, the outcome of such challenges lies with the courts at the end of the appeal sequence, as the hon. Gentleman knows. It would not be appropriate or possible for me to guess the outcome. The European Court of Human Rights has recognised that complex issues are often involved in planning and that decision takers at all levels are required to exercise discretionary powers in the course of their duties. I want to emphasise that everyone has human rights in these circumstances.

Unauthorised encampments are a local concern, but we know that authorities may operate a policy of toleration to allow such encampments, not developments, to remain temporarily where they are not causing problems. I stress that that policy does not mean tolerating mess, nuisance or bad behaviour. That is not what toleration means. As I said, it means tolerating the existence of encampments where they are not causing problems. Agreed standards must be maintained, or toleration is not an appropriate policy.

There is a range of other powers relating to unauthorised encampments, as distinct from unauthorised developments, with which the hon. Gentleman may be familiar. The Home Office has just consulted on guidance on the new powers against trespassing that were introduced under the Anti-social Behaviour Act 2003. They will be incorporated in the guidance, and will enable the police to remove Gypsies and Travellers from unauthorised encampments with greater speed. They can be used where the police have established, through consultation with local authorities, that a suitable pitch is available on an authorised site in the area. They will obviously be more effective where local authorities have made adequate provision, and are an incentive for local authorities to establish local authority sites. There are several other detailed action points relating to unauthorised encampments, but I will not go into them now, given the time available.

The Gypsy site refurbishment grant is improving conditions on sites throughout the country and is providing new transit sites and stopping places. Revisions to the Gypsy caravan count are being put in place so that we can obtain more accurate and useful data about the network. As I said, we also have a major programme of policy review.

I have not managed to cover all the issues that I wanted to cover, but I hope that I have covered most of them. I will write to the hon. Gentleman with the details of each of the planning powers that local authorities have. We take the accommodation issue of Gypsies and Travellers very seriously. We believe that consultation with local authorities on planning matters relating to Gypsies is the right way forward before buying land on which Gypsies want to live or for planning permission for any subsequent development. I hope that many of the difficulties outlined by the hon. Gentleman may be avoided through such consultation.

South West Water

4 pm

Linda Gilroy (Plymouth, Sutton) (Lab/Co-op): This is a particularly timely debate, because the periodic review of water prices will reach the point of final determination at the beginning of December and there is considerable concern among my constituents about what that will mean for their water and sewerage bills.

I appreciate that the Government have made important progress on water policies since 1997. Leakage has been cut substantially, drinking water is the safest ever and our rivers and beaches are much cleaner. Legislation has ended disconnection and it has improved metering rights, including the right to a free water meter. In a similar debate in December 2001, which took place in the context of the then draft Water Bill, I argued that a new settlement would be needed to guide the resolution of conflicts between environmental, social and economic goals, certainly as far as the area covered by South West Water was concerned and increasingly in some other water areas too.

The experience of the current periodic price review suggests that a reappraisal is now essential. Apart from the question of affordability, there are also wider questions as to whether the present framework serves the interests of companies, shareholders and workers, and the competitiveness of our regional economy. I want to spend a minute or two to reflect on how we came to have such high prices before I go on to discuss how we might find solutions.

Following privatisation in 1989, average household bills increased steeply in the south-west. In 1999, a review was introduced that reduced water prices by 12 per cent. on average across the country and by 12.25 per cent. in the south-west. That was welcome, but it did not by any means undo the previous price hike.

Since disconnections were banned, access to water is not a widespread problem but the costs can be. The average water bill amounts to about 1 per cent. of a household's income. However, for many low-income households, the proportion is many times that. In its sustainability indicators, the Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs set 3 per cent. of household income as a measure of affordability. Nationally, more than 2 million households spend more. A greater proportion of such households are in the South West Water area, where some pensioners and those on jobseeker's allowance pay 9 per cent. and 13 per cent. of their income—significantly more than people in the same position in Birmingham.

The problems in the south-west lie in the original settlement at the time of the Conservative privatisation of the industry. At almost every event that I have attended to seek a solution to the south-west charges, it has been recognised that the south-west share of the green dowry fell far short of what was needed or fair. The inadequacy of the green dowry has given us the highest water bills in the country: more than £100 more than the average bill. Against such a background, an increase of 17 per cent. on the average bill can be viewed only with apprehension by those who have to try to find the means to pay it, as well as by those who have to collect it and those who work hard to make our economy competitive.

[Linda Gilroy]

As WaterVoice South West points out, the Ofwat presentation of price increases is misleading. It cites a 17 per cent. increase in the average bill for the five years between 2004–05 and 2009–10, but the typical measured bill and the typical unmeasured bill over the same period will increase by 29 per cent. and 35 per cent. before inflation. That will put the typical unmeasured bill at nearly £600 by 2010.

I am aware that as part of the periodic review process the Secretary of State said in her initial guidance that due weight must be given to the economic and social effects, especially with regard to vulnerable customers.

Mr. Paul Tyler (North Cornwall) (LD): I am following the hon. Lady's speech with great interest, because she has campaigned on this issue inside and outside Parliament over the same period as I have. Does she accept that the figures that we now face are so much more dramatic precisely because lower-income households in our region have been badly hit over many years and this is only adding to that considerable burden? She said that the original legislation introduced by the Conservative Government in 1989 caused the problem, so does she accept that the absence of any rebate for low-income households in the legislation has been a major factor in the south-west?

Linda Gilroy: I agree that the root of the problem lies in the initial privatisation settlement when, ironically, the leader of the Conservative party, the right hon. and learned Member for Folkestone and Hythe (Mr. Howard), was the Secretary of State for the Environment. Over the past five or so years, there has been some stability compared with that period. We must tackle the issue at some stage, although it will not be easy.

I hope that DEFRA's review is finding ways of addressing concerns about affordability and associated debt matters that many organisations, such as WaterVoice, the National Consumer Council, the Public Utilities Reform Group—PURGe—Water UK and others, have raised over a long time. I pay tribute in particular to the National Consumer Council for its recent work in "Lifelines". As the Minister will know, I have been associated with such issues in Parliament since I was elected as co-chair of the Public Utilities Reform Group.

I suspect, however, that the review will find it challenging to come up with effective answers inside the existing parameters within which the industry and its regulators operate. I therefore wish to set out for the Minister's observation the arguments for dealing with such issues in a wider context. By no means, are they all new ideas, but together they make the case for more fundamental work to be undertaken. Outdated charging systems based on rateable values last looked at in 1989 need to change. Water companies should be required to devise alternatives to charging on that basis, taking account of local conditions—one size may not fit all regions—and undertake a calculation of economic efficiency, environmental sustainability and social justice. According to its latest annual report, the Pennon Group, which owns South West Water, managed to spend £6.5 million on an abortive takeover bid in its non-regulated sector. If it, and other water companies, were to put in a fraction of that amount to fund an independent reappraisal of how the system could be changed, we might begin to find some answers.

The remit of such a review could include an assessment of other relevant issues, such as clarifying the amount allowed in benefits and tax credits for water bills and the relationship between methods of charging and ease of debt collection, which would make it easier to distinguish between people who cannot pay and those who will not pay, a matter about which the industry has some concerns. I have heard about a figure of as much as £10 being passed on from the "won't pays" to other customers, including poor and vulnerable customers.

The review could cover whether the costs involved in the voluntary metering programme is the best means of achieving conservation benefit. I have done a quick back-of-the-envelope calculation on what the 117,000 meters that may be required in the next periodic review will cost. It runs into tens of millions of pounds, especially in the south-west where conservation is perhaps not the prime issue compared with other regions. Again, perhaps one size does not fit all regions.

Some interesting proposals are emerging from a recent study by the Joseph Rowntree Foundation about the impact of green taxes on poor households. In the case of water, the report investigates the effects of universal water metering and of 11 alternative charging methods, including a lower tariff for low-income households on benefit, a free water allowance for some households and a variable tariff linked to the council tax band. Such a review could consider whether it is now time to end the ban on mergers that has resulted in overseas water companies and companies with other United Kingdom activities being able to take on water companies, but does not allow mergers between water companies in this country.

Some 15 years after privatisation, it is a little difficult to think that the injustice of the inadequate green dowry might be unpicked but, given that each periodic price review builds on the unfair settlement, surely it is not unreasonable to look for a solution that will break the vicious circle in which we are caught. I am talking not only about social justice, but the unfair competitive position that our businesses and industry are in.

I would also like the review to look into whether second homes in the south-west pay for a fair share of the costs of providing their water. My hon. Friend the Minister will know that recent changes have been made to council tax to ensure that such second home owners shoulder a fairer proportion of the price for local services. As I understand it, about half of total water and sewerage costs come from infrastructure capital costs. Is it fair that those who come to enjoy the amenity of our clean rivers and beaches and a connection to their second homes end up paying little for the benefit, as they use relatively little metered water, and that at peak times?

I know that my hon. Friend the Minister is working to ensure that the "polluter pays" principle is fully and correctly applied, so that costs that should more appropriately be paid by others are not passed on to customers. I am thinking particularly of the costs of diffuse agricultural pollution. However, I think that I am right in saying that the issue will not be resolved according to that determination. There is also the matter of highways drainage costs, which has considerably exercised WaterVoice South West.

In a previous debate, I mentioned the difficulty arising from the long-term nature of decisions that need to be taken on investment in the water industry, and the problem of aligning those decisions with the five-year price review. In his submission to the Environment, Food and Rural Affairs Committee's first review, which reported at the end of 2003, Dr. Dieter Helm of Oxford university said the difficulty

"creates set-piece artificial decision points, focuses management on the short term, and encourages game playing."

He advocates

"a longer-term view, comprising an overarching policy framework, ten-year fundamental reviews, and much more reliance on"

an interim determination process

"to allow flexibility within periods."

The issue was also the basis of much searching questioning in the most recent review of the determination process, conducted by the Select Committee over the past month.

Those are just a few of the subjects that merit closer examination, not just to help us resolve some of the all-too-obvious tensions in the south-west, but to ensure fairness and transparency and, through that, best value elsewhere in the country. Unless there is fairness and transparency, we will not necessarily have the best possible value. When all is said and done, regulation acts as a substitute for competition in the market, which would otherwise deliver best value.

I hope that a few of the issues raised will be addressed in the hardship review that DEFRA has in hand, but I suspect that most will not. Some of the ideas that I have put forward might provide more effective medium and long-term solutions. The wider review for which I am calling needs two stages. The first would identify the options, shortlist those likely to provide really effective solutions, and identify those that might need legislation. At that stage, all stakeholders would have a role to play. Stage 2 of the review would be for Government to take responsibility for a detailed analysis of the impact of those shortlisted options before arriving at decisions.

The regulator has made a commitment to reviewing the price determination process, but he is constrained by what statute requires of him. Even if he were not so constrained, I suspect that the whole culture of the regulator in the current framework of legislation would mean that he would look at too narrow a range of issues to come up with that full broad range of options that it would be beneficial to consider. They say that for every complex problem there is a simple solution, but that it is usually wrong. For water, that is particularly the case, and that is why I advocate a wide-ranging review.

In conclusion, I hope that by raising these matters at the present point in the price-determination cycle, I will be able to obtain from the Minister a commitment to discuss them with his colleagues in other Departments—such as, perhaps, the Treasury, which would have an interest in aspects of the matter, the Department of Trade and Industry, which has an interest in regulatory and competitiveness issues, and the Department for Work and Pensions. Those Departments come particularly to mind. There is a need to revisit the regulatory framework to stop the price-hike misery for my constituents—which is likely to cause problems, too, for our water company and possibly its shareholders, and to form the basis for a continuing competitive disadvantage to our economy.

4.15 pm

The Minister for the Environment and Agri-environment (Mr. Elliot Morley): I congratulate my hon. Friend the Member for Plymouth, Sutton (Linda Gilroy) not only on the way she has raised this issue but on her long involvement, through PURGe, in campaigning on utilities regulation and prices. The subject is an important one and the debate about how to deal with the issues continues.

My hon. Friend is right to say that the root of the problem is the nature of the privatisation process and the green dowry, and the base prices that were set, which now underpin future price increases and which have clearly worked to the disadvantage of the south-west. I do not dispute that.

I am conscious that water bills can be a significant cost to many households, making price increases significant too. As my hon. Friend said, the Government are currently reviewing the way in which lower-income households are helped with their water and sewerage charges. That includes considering the existing vulnerable groups provision for people on water meters and the potential for other ways of helping, such as, perhaps, setting up trust funds, as happens in some water company areas; they are used to help people on low incomes who have difficulty with bills.

My hon. Friend raised important points about water pricing and the regulatory system in general. There has been considerable discussion about that. The Government reviewed the water charging system in 1997–98. That review resulted in the Water Industry Act 1999, which introduced, for example, protection against disconnection because of important health and welfare considerations.

We have not shut down the idea of a review of structures, prices and tariffs. We remain open to new ideas about them. I shall make a point of looking at what the study done for the Joseph Rowntree Foundation had to say about green taxes and their application. I have considerable sympathy with the idea of variable tariffs, for example, but there are many different ways, as my hon. Friend will know, of applying variable tariffs. Those ideas are nevertheless worth exploring. I have in the past put forward the idea that we should consider them.

Linda Gilroy: Perhaps my hon. Friend would agree that one size does not fit all and that there might be scope in the future to encourage water companies to consider the charging solutions that best suit their region.

Mr. Morley: Yes; if we are to examine the charging system generally, it is not unreasonable to consider regional differences. As we know, there are now regional differences in cost, although the charging mechanism is based on a similar formula.

[Mr. Morley]

There is likely to be an increase in bills. We want to continue with investment, which, as my hon. Friend said, has made this country's rivers and beaches the cleanest they have been in probably 100 years. People are worried about prices and we are sensitive to that, but consumers are also quite keen on high environmental standards and high quality. Those are popular and people want them. Making sure that we get those improvements at the lowest possible cost to consumers is, of course, an issue to be dealt with.

Prices rose an average of 3 per cent. in April, and customers of South West Water paid the most, with an average bill of £361. However, the figures that I have, just as a matter of interest, show that in 1999 the average bill for the company, taking inflation into account, would have been £394.

The Government have commissioned and published research into alternative methods of unmeasured charging, including charges based on council tax bands. However, that research shows that switching to any of the proposed alternatives would create not only winners but a large number of losers, including many of those least able to afford it and particularly those with the lowest rateable value properties. That is one problem with variable charges. It is essential that any proposals for new charging arrangements provide adequate transitional arrangements and that we consider those issues. I accept that we should consider a range of issues and that we can approach that in different ways.

In the south-west, Ofwat's proposals would lead to an average increase in bills of £61 to £418 over the five years to 2010, before inflation. Incidentally, that is less than half what the company has been asking for. I am well aware that that is an average and that there are different price impacts and I know that my hon. Friend is, too.

Linda Gilroy: Because there has been an unusual volume of switching to metered supplies in the south-west, averages are particularly misleading there. There is the average for unmeasured and the average for measured. The gap between them is increasing and one has an impact on the other.

Mr. Morley: I accept the points that my hon. Friend makes. However, most customers in the south-west will save money by switching to meters, and I would encourage them to do so. My hon. Friend is well aware of that. Under water regulations, meters are provided free of charge, and that is one way to reduce bills for a large number of consumers in the south-west. That said, I know that it will not help those who are already on meters and that there are issues about unmeasured charges. There are complexities in this matter and I do not want to be glib about average increases. Let us take the increase, for example, from 1999 to 2009; the average increase in the south-west is 6 per cent. Even though that is a very low figure because of the decrease in the last round, I know that that hides significant increases for other consumers.

Mr. Tyler: I welcome the Minister's open-minded approach, on which I think both the hon. Lady and I would congratulate him. However, I hope that he will recognise that the difficulty with an open-minded approach and saying that many of these issues can be examined might be that that will take a great deal of time, and this is a very urgent problem. Although the rises from 1999 to date are not that great, the rises from 1989 to now are very great. That is the background, and the problem is very urgent for next year.

Mr. Morley: It is true that there was a very sharp increase from 1989 and that prices have been smoothed because of the decrease in the last round and the change that the regulator has suggested to business plans now. That is right and proper. However, there are real complexities with regard to how we consider this issue and the benefits system, for example, and how we measure the affluence of both the country and regions.

There have been positive changes, including in the south-west. Let us consider the reduction in unemployment, for example. The latest figures, which go up to September this year, show that, compared to 1997, there has been a reduction in unemployment in Plymouth, Sutton of 63.5 per cent. There has been a reduction in North Cornwall of 57.5 per cent. That is significant.

The changes in tax and benefits that the Government have introduced in recent years mean that, in real terms, families in the south-west with children are, on average, £1,360 a year better off. Families with children in the poorest fifth of the population will, on average, be £3,000 a year better off. Pensioner households will, on average, be £1,350 year better off—about £26 a week. The poorest third of pensioner households will have gained £1,750 a year. That is the result of the Government focusing on raising overall living standards, particularly those of people on lower incomes.

Linda Gilroy: My hon. Friend has been patient in giving way. As long as the sort of difference that I described exists for those in the south-west with pensions or the jobseeker's allowance, who pay two or three times as much as their equivalents in Birmingham, we will never be able to solve the poverty problem. Much though I welcome the fact that we have taken a million children out of poverty, there is still more to do.

Mr. Morley: I accept that. Part of the equation is the fact that Ofwat's proposals would lead to an increase in bills of between £61 and £418. The company's business plans have been significantly reduced by Ofwat, as my hon. Friend knows. In fact, it will be allowed less than half the increase that it was asking for.

The jobseeker's allowance includes a calculation to reflect the cost of such things as water. The JSA and income support are covered by what is known as the Rossi increase, based on the retail prices index to reflect cost of living increases. The Rossi index takes account of increases in a wide range of goods and services, including water and sewerage charges. However, it takes no account of housing costs or of income support help with mortgage interest payments, which are provided for separately through housing benefit. I know that those payments help people on benefits, but some people on low incomes are just above the benefit level, so not all the issues raised by my hon. Friend have been resolved.

I was interested in my hon. Friend's comments about the merger policy. It is not unreasonable that the policy should be renewed. I have said so publicly. However, I must be careful what I say. When visiting the south-west, I said very mildly that I thought my hon. Friend the Member for Falmouth and Camborne (Ms Atherton) had a reasonable idea about merger policy, but my expression of mild support caused a share price movement. I got into a bit of trouble for that, so I must be careful.

We should look at all options. We should consider everything, including affordability, how to dealt with debt and the polluter-pays issue, which was raised by my hon. Friend the Member for Plymouth, Sutton because it throws costs onto consumers that they should not have to pay. She was right to say that we are addressing the problem, although it will be some time before consumers see the benefits of any measures that we put in place.

We must also consider the question of second homes. I certainly agree that their owners should pay their fair share. However, as my hon. Friend said, there have already been some changes. Indeed, those changes apply to Members of the House, and they are entirely justified. I also take my hon. Friend's point about looking at the legislative and regulatory framework when addressing such issues.

I reassure my hon. Friend that the regulator is dedicated to ensuring that increases are no higher than they need be. That is reflected in how he dealt with the draft business plan. The range of views that my hon. Friend expressed on the potential options need to be examined. It is important to keep an open mind about charging methods, tariffs, how to help people on low incomes, metering and fairer ways to pay for water. It is not always easy, but it is nevertheless important. I give my hon. Friend the assurance that although it will not happen overnight we will seriously consider those issues, which are important for the future.

Question put and agreed to.

Adjourned accordingly at twenty-nine minutes past Four-o'clock.

Westminster Hall

Thursday 11 November 2004

[SIR NICHOLAS WINTERTON *in the Chair*]

Western Balkans

Motion made, and Question proposed, That the sitting be now adjourned.—*[Gillian Merron.]*

2.30 pm

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for International Development (Mr. Gareth Thomas): I am grateful to Mr. Speaker for allowing us to debate the problems of the western Balkans. I appreciate the continuing effort of British soldiers and of our police, non-governmental organisation staff and civil servants who work in the region and on issues concerned with it.

The break-up of the former Yugoslavia in 1991 led to a decade of truly terrible conflict. Walking through Sarajevo last week, I saw constant reminders of the horrors of that conflict—the shell-damaged buildings and the memorials erected in respect of various aspects of the tragedy. One of the most poignant memorials, known as Sarajevo roses, are red marks painted on the ground wherever a shell or grenade killed six or more people.

It is difficult truly to comprehend the scale of suffering that took place on all sides of the conflict. However, the numbers give some indication. In Bosnia alone, about 250,000 people were killed and 400,000 injured, and more than half the population was displaced. That is apart from the appalling atrocities that took place at various points during the wars—and Bosnia is only one part of the region to have suffered. Croatia, Kosovo, Serbia and Macedonia all saw conflict during that time. In Kosovo, as many as 200,000 people may still be displaced.

As well as the human cost, the countries of the region have had to cope with the impact of the conflicts on their economies. They have all had to make the painful transition from planned economies to market economies, and the conflicts clearly did not help the process. In most of former Yugoslavia, the national income has halved, and unemployment has affected large portions of the labour force. Normal economic activity was disrupted and destroyed, and efforts to reform bankrupt economies and to make the successful transition from central planning to the much-needed market economy were severely complicated. Even Albania, which did not face war, suffered economic collapse as a result of the mishandled transition from the Enver Hoxha period.

The destruction caused by the wars created an environment in which criminality was able to flourish. Organised crime, including the trafficking of drugs and people, is a major problem that affects not only those countries themselves but others, including the United Kingdom. One small example is the fact that 80 per cent. of the heroin from Afghanistan that ends up in Britain's cities comes through the western Balkans.

I do not want to paint too gloomy a picture, however, because real progress is being made. Nearly 10 years after the Dayton peace agreement brought the brutal hostilities to an end in Bosnia, the country has taken huge strides forward; as a unified state it has realistic ambitions to become part of NATO and ultimately the European Union. That would have seemed completely fanciful at the time of the Dayton accords. Lord Paddy Ashdown, the international community's high representative, is able to take an increasingly back-seat role, and Bosnians are taking more responsibility for their own politics and development.

People are showing greater confidence in the country. The fact that as many as a million refugees and internally displaced people are now returning to their homes is a sign of confidence. The expectation is that the high representative could be replaced with a European Union special representative, whose role would be to monitor Bosnia's moves towards Europe.

Without exception, all the politicians whom I met last week were clearly focused on the need for Bosnia to become part of the European family of nations, adopting European standards and norms. In part, those politicians saw the clear economic benefits of becoming part of Europe, but more important was the political benefit of a clear road map to a stable and free society, with modern and efficient public administration delivering effective services to the people.

In a country without established institutions and recovering from civil war, such a vision is extremely valuable. The recognition from all political parties—particularly the leaders whom I met—of the value of European integration is important, because it will not always be easy to achieve the various steps along the road to EU accession. It will require considerable political determination from them.

One area where determination will be required, and where progress is fundamental if the countries of the former Yugoslavia are to become part of the European Union, is the need for fuller co-operation with the International Criminal Tribunal for the Former Yugoslavia in The Hague. Twenty one of those indicted by that tribunal for the atrocities that took place still remain at large. Bringing them to justice after the terrible ethnic cleansing and massacres that took place remains fundamental to maintaining progress in the region. If Bosnia and other countries are to join Europe or be fully reconciled, more progress must be made to bring those war criminals to justice.

Within the region, Croatia is leading the way in terms of EU accession. It suffered as much as any other part of the region from the conflicts of the 1990s. With a Government committed to reform established in 2000, its economy has performed strongly. It was accepted by NATO into the partnership for peace programme in 2001, and this year it has been formally accepted as a candidate for membership of the European Union.

Since 1997, the UK has provided more than £150 million through my Department to the western Balkans. We were active in Bosnia during the war and were one of the first donors to deliver assistance to Serbia after the fall of Milosevic in 2000. We also made a huge contribution to the humanitarian effort in Kosovo.

In Bosnia, a terrible legacy of the conflict is the large area of the country still covered by land mines. We are helping to tackle that major problem. Last Thursday, I visited a village about an hour from Sarajevo that had been on the front line of the conflict. Serb and Muslim

[Mr. Gareth Thomas]

villagers had been forced to leave at different times and both forces had laid anti-personnel mines in the village—even the cemetery and the school were mined. I saw the dangerous and painstaking work being undertaken by those working for the Bosnia and Herzegovina mine action centre. I hope that the House will pay tribute to the considerable bravery being shown by those men in clearing the fields of the village and allowing it and other areas of Bosnia to return to normal life.

In Kosovo, the Department is one of the most significant donors to the health sector. Early support ensured that the hospital in Pristina continued to provide effective health care services to the population in the immediate aftermath of the conflict. We improved patient care by helping to strengthen the quality of hospital management and providing new equipment and other support. We are now working to strengthen the capacity of the Ministry of Health to plan and deliver improved services, not only in Pristina, but throughout Kosovo.

We are also working to strengthen a range of social services across the whole of the western Balkans, including pension systems, employment services, social care for vulnerable groups and other forms of benefit systems. We are trying not only to improve delivery of those services but to ensure that they are accessible for the very poorest people and those closest to the poverty line.

My Department has been working throughout the region to improve the capacity of public administration more generally. In the Serb republic in Bosnia, for example, we have assisted the drafting and implementation of a new civil service law that is helping to build an independent, merit-based, depoliticised civil service.

We are helping to strengthen the capability of the Prime Minister's office in Kosovo so that it can implement better co-ordination and delivery of policy. We are also helping the provisional Government to track progress towards meeting the Kosovo standards, which is an essential step along the route to resolving Kosovo's final status.

The combination of the move from a planned economy to a market economy and the destruction wrought by war has left much of the industry in the Balkans in a truly terrible state. Markets have completely disappeared, much of the industrial plant is obsolete, and key suppliers have gone to different markets and different countries. It is essential to revitalise industry and to secure the investment needed to make the necessary economic progress to create jobs and tackle poverty.

In Bosnia, we recently completed a programme of technical advice that has supported the successful restructuring of 32 newly privatised companies employing some 16,000 workers. That is helping to safeguard future jobs and future economic growth there.

The United Kingdom has made a contribution that is broader than simply providing development assistance in the region. British troops have been a fundamental element of the international forces posted in Kosovo and Bosnia. Their professionalism and skill have been vital for maintaining peace and stability in the region. We have also provided strong support for reform efforts in the region and have encouraged Governments to promote their plans for integration into the European Union.

The UK is a key political player in the region. We are active in the contact group and are considering ways in which to resolve the problems of Kosovo's status and the Peace Implementation Council in Bosnia, but it is still impossible to visit the region and not recognise the immense challenges that remain for the countries and the peoples of the region. The area remains politically and economically extremely fragile. Corruption and organised crime continue to blight it, and extremism and ethnic tension remain just under the surface. Return to large-scale conflict is unlikely, but we are reminded all too frequently of the region's fragility.

Kosovo is the greatest challenge to long-term peace in the region. Ethnic Albanian extremism continues to cause much tension. The Chamber will be familiar with the events in March this year, which saw the worst violence in the region since 1999. Violent clashes between Kosovar Albanians and Kosovar Serbs triggered inter-ethnic violence that left 19 people dead and 900 injured. Serb houses and Orthodox churches were also burned down.

Kosovo is now calm, but the situation remains tense. The sudden eruption of violence was a wake-up call to the international community. It highlighted the lack of progress in the past five years and the need to step up progress significantly if we are to maintain stability in the region, despite the UN administration.

My visit to Kosovo last week was made a week after the assembly elections. Although the elections were judged to be free and fair by the international community, they emphasised the continuing divide between the two communities, as only about 1 per cent. of Kosovar Serbs chose to participate in them. That fragility is not unique to Kosovo. The assassination of the Prime Minister in Serbia last year demonstrated the problem of fragility there, too.

In Macedonia, the recent referendum on municipal boundaries threatened to unravel the Ohrid agreement, but fortunately did not succeed. Even in Bosnia, the complex constitutional arrangements that the Dayton accords set in place presents a threat to its stability. The fact that there can be 13 Prime Ministers in Bosnia as well as nine Presidents is symptomatic of the fragility and the need for further progress. Again, in Albania and Serbia, weak and fractious coalition Governments make it difficult to generate the political will to make further economic and social reforms.

One of the aspects that contributes to the fragility of the region is the continuing economic and social problems facing people in rural areas in particular, but also in some of the poorest parts of the urban areas. It is important to remember that the former Yugoslavia was relatively prosperous, but poverty is now widespread across the region. Nearly a quarter of the population live in poverty, and a significant minority live in extreme poverty. Albania undoubtedly remains the poorest country, with some 25 per cent. of the population living on less than $1.50 a day—that is worse than in some parts of Africa.

Unemployment remains a serious concern throughout the region. Official figures suggest that some 60 per cent. of the population in Kosovo is unemployed. There is a general perception that the reforms that have been implemented have failed to provide tangible benefits to the people. That undoubtedly helped to feed the extreme nationalism in parts of the region that has resurfaced recently, and encouraged the activities of organised criminals.

Given that picture, it would be easy to be pessimistic about the future of the western Balkans. However, I believe that we should remain optimistic. In large part, the reason for optimism is the potential role that could be played by the European Union. The countries in the western Balkans are part of Europe and they have legitimate aspirations to join the EU. We have long supported the principle of enlarging the EU and we are committed to including the countries of the western Balkans. Of course, there is still a long way to go before we reach that point, but integration into Europe provides powerful incentives for reform and a vision of what a better future looks like.

The European Commission has responded to the needs of the region. The European Agency for Reconstruction, which was set up in the aftermath of the Kosovo conflict, provided huge sums of money to help with the immediate humanitarian needs as well as the longer-term reconstruction effort.

Kosovo presents particular challenges, and is an important ongoing source of instability in the region. The violence in March galvanised the international community into reassessing its approach to Kosovo. In a hard-hitting report for the UN Secretary-General, the Norwegian diplomat Kai Eide set out the strategy for making sustained progress in Kosovo. I am pleased to say that the UN has broadly endorsed that strategy. The UK Government also strongly support that reform process.

Last week, I was able to meet Soren Jessen-Petersen, the Secretary-General's new special representative in Pristina. He has a refreshingly clear vision of the direction in which he wants to take the UN mission in Kosovo, and of what needs to be done.

Mr. John Wilkinson (Ruislip-Northwood) (Con): Can the Minister enlighten us as to the Government's view on the political future of Kosovo? Do they have an idea of the kind of Government that should be in place there, or will the transitional arrangements remain for ever and aye?

Mr. Thomas: One of the key things that the UN mission in Kosovo has set out, which we support, is a series of standards against which progress must be made before the issue of final status can be resolved. One of those standards is that a proper, functioning democracy should be in place, with respect for minority rights and a fully open market economy. Progress against those standards will be reviewed next year. There are continuing discussions about the nature of the final status of Kosovo. It is important that those discussions continue and that we try to achieve consensus. That is something that Soren Jessen-Petersen is trying to take forward.

As well as addressing standards and the final status issue, we need to make more progress on transferring powers from the UN mission in Kosovo to the provisional institutions of self-government, to increase their responsibility and accountability to the people of Kosovo. That will require fundamental reform and a fundamental change of approach by the UN mission in Kosovo. We must also see progress on economic development and the strengthening of the role of local government.

That is undoubtedly a large reform agenda, and I stressed to Soren Jessen-Petersen the importance of beginning to make progress and of generating sustained momentum in the reform process before the standards review, to which the hon. Member for Ruislip-Northwood (Mr. Wilkinson) alluded. The special representative has made a strong start, but with the elections completed we need to see concrete progress on the ground.

International development assistance has an important continuing role to play in supporting reform and development in the region. The international community has invested £2.5 billion annually in the region. In 2003, the European Commission alone invested £450 million, of which our share was £90 million. We also have a bilateral programme in the Balkans, which is worth almost £14 million this year.

Given the size of our programme and the substantial amounts of other donor funding available, we have prioritised the need to develop Governments' capacity and capability to deliver more effective services. As we know, if countries want to tackle poverty and to have a strong economy, good schools and good health services, it is crucial that they have an effective civil service in place.

We are also focusing on strengthening the effectiveness of overall international assistance. We are working, for example, to ensure that the European accession agenda and the economic and social development agenda, on which the World Bank is leading, are more effectively combined. As I said, we are also seeking to promote Governments' capacity and capability to take forward their own development priorities through poverty reduction strategies. The same is true of their agendas and ambitions for EU accession.

The UK will continue to support peace and reconciliation in the region by working through the contact group and at the UN to make progress on resolving the final status issue and by continuing to provide appropriate military support to international deployments in the region. We also need to continue working closely with Governments in the region to address the scourge of organised crime, particularly where it is involved in drugs and people trafficking.

To conclude, there has been considerable progress in the western Balkans over the past five years, although it is undoubtedly fragile. The prospect of EU accession provides the single most important incentive to cement reform and pursue further progress. It is clear that our development assistance, as well as further sustained international effort, will be fundamental to supporting the economic and social progress that is still necessary in the region, as well as to the issue of EU accession. If we

[Mr. Thomas]

can continue in that way, we can build on the solid foundations that have been put down since the Dayton peace agreement.

Mr. Deputy Speaker (Sir Nicholas Winterton): Before I call the spokesman for Her Majesty's Opposition, let me seek to help hon. Members by advising them that there are likely to be one or more Divisions at 4.25 pm. Hon. Members may wish to plan the length of their speeches accordingly.

2.54 pm

Mr. Julian Brazier (Canterbury) (Con): I welcome the opportunity to discuss this critical region, in which Britain still has a considerable number of troops and a considerable commitment to international development.

The multi-ethnic patchwork of peoples and religions that make up the western Balkans provide the fault lines for the horrendous conflicts that engulfed those nations in the 1990s and have done over the centuries. Before analysing the issues country by country as the Minister did, I want to make some fairly obvious broad points. The countries share a background of political instability, to a greater or lesser extent, and recent ethnic conflict has been a feature in many of them. I shall not, however, repeat the unhappy catalogue that he listed. Strategies are needed to heal the divisions and to develop functional, multi-ethnic states.

I agree with the Minister that a key aim is the eventual integration of the region, bit by bit, into the European Union. If the political leaders in the area know that their nations have a realistic prospect of joining the EU, it will provide an incentive for each to pursue unified and reformist policies to meet the criteria that the EU rightly sets out.

In Bosnia, the declaration of independence in 1992 led to three years of extremely vicious war, which the regime in Belgrade at that time used as a pretext for uniting all the Serbs living in what used to be the Socialist Federal Republic of Yugoslavia. That led to ethnic cleansing of non-Serbs, who were systematically expelled from their homes. It is, however, only half the story to talk just about ethnic cleansing by Serbs; although they were the first to do it and they did it on the largest scale, once the fighting began, no group—Serb, Croat or Bosnian—emerged guilt free from the civil war. Indeed, that cannot be separated from the massive expulsion of hundreds of thousands of Serbs from Krajina towards the end of the conflict in Bosnia.

Since the dark days of the early 1990s, there has been considerable progress in Bosnia towards peace and stability. The presence of NATO troops there has been fundamental, securing a stable and peaceful environment and allowing the country to move forward from its troubled past. I was impressed with the work that they were doing when I visited the area some years ago with the Select Committee on Defence. There is no doubt that international forces continue to be needed there.

Obviously, I am concerned about the planned replacement of the NATO operation by an untried, EU-led force. There are fears that that imminent transfer may have more to do with boosting EU desires for a separate defence capability than with providing the most effective form of policing and security for Bosnia. I hope that those fears are ill-founded and I wish the EU-led force the very best, but it is crucial that EUFOR, which I believe is the right name for the new force, learns as much as possible from the NATO forces from which it is taking over in order to give itself the optimum chance of success. It is true that it is a different job now; security challenges have moved from peacemaking through peacekeeping to tackling organised crime, corruption, border security and so on. Nevertheless, to achieve the accelerated economic and structural reform so vital to Bosnia's future development, a stable security environment, with a clear chain of command, is essential.

The US ambassador to Bosnia, Clifford Bond, told local newspapers that the NATO and EU missions would be clearly separated, with NATO involved in operations demanding logistics, intelligence and military capabilities for which EUFOR does not have the capabilities. Such statements suggest that the US intends the new NATO mission to hold a superior position in relation to EUFOR. It would be helpful if the Minister could clarify NATO's continuing role. There have been hints from America that it may keep troops in the area separate from the EUFOR troops, which would make for a larger total military presence, because EUFOR's numbers will match the existing NATO numbers, and the other troops will be in addition. None the less, it is vital that there is a clearly defined chain of command, and it would be helpful if he said something about that in his winding-up speech.

On a personal note, I was glad to hear the Minister's comments on mine clearing. As chance would have it, my father-in-law set up the UN's original de-mining unit, working for Kofi Annan in his previous job as head of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees. He still goes back as an independent consultant. He is in Afghanistan at the moment, but he spends quite a lot of time in the Balkans. I know from him that the task is huge—indeed, I saw some work in progress when I was over there briefly—and that increasing progress is being made.

The difficulties in respect of Kosovo are the most complex of all. Supposed advances made in 2003 appear to have amounted to rather less than we hoped; arguably, they merely suppressed rather than resolved the main differences dividing the majority Albanian and minority Serb communities. The Minister alluded to the riots in March, when 19 people were killed in the worst clashes since 1999. The democracy of last month's general election was called into question by the Serb boycott, to which he also referred. There are allegations that that was inspired by Belgrade.

When I was in the region, as I was a couple of times shortly after the fighting, we received from our security forces in the area testimony on all sides of the persecution of the Serbs in the area by the Kosovans. The Minister's description of the burning of churches and the attacks on Serb civilians fitted exactly the picture that I remember; his descriptions were depressingly familiar.

The main underlying obstacle to a progressive agenda in Kosovo is the issue of final status. Of course, the main immediate obstacle is the friction between the communities. The Serb election boycott has generated concerns that that was a dress rehearsal for the Serbs' approach to the planned talks about Kosovo's future status. The legitimacy of those talks will inevitably be called into question if there is no Serb mandate for them or at least no Serb acquiescence in them. Increased EU pressure on Belgrade may help to influence the Kosovo Serbs to participate in local institutions, but only if the return of Serb refugees and their security are a condition of the granting of final status. For the foreseeable future, security must remain the responsibility of NATO, so that the Serbs know that they are protected by an international force, rather than just by the Kosovo Protection Corps, which is almost entirely an ethnic Albanian force.

At the time of my original visit, there was not a single prison anywhere in Kosovo. I understand that there has been quite a lot of progress in that regard and that there are now a number of prisons, so that murderers are not simply released after a few days in a police cell. However, I would be interested if the Minister could comment on two parallel issues relating to security. He may wish to write to me, as they are both points of detail. First, has the pay of the Kosovan police been sorted out? They were paid the equivalent of one fifth of the rate of a UN translator—a quite inadequate amount on which to support a family. Corruption was endemic in the police because there was no other way in which they could support their families. Secondly, has there been any progress on the attempt to recruit some Serbs to the police force?

The Kosovan economy is a major obstacle to development, as it has been ever since the fighting. At least three fifths of the population are unemployed; 96 per cent. of the goods consumed in Kosovo are made or produced abroad; and there is, as the Minister acknowledged, a culture of organised crime. It is bizarre to visit a country and see vast numbers of stolen cars. The vast majority of stolen cars on the roads are immediately identifiable as such because they still have the number plates of the countries from which they were stolen.

International aid to the region has fallen substantially in recent years. Despite that reduction, the Chancellor of the Exchequer has publicly criticised the EU for allocating development money to the region rather than to Africa. International aid is essential to tackle the floundering economy and thus political stability in the region. I was glad to hear the Minister confirm that.

The legacy of Milosevic's rule in Serbia has left the country recovering from the psychological scars of conflict and civil war. Much has changed. Perhaps the most visible evidence of that change was the end of the Federal Republic of Yugoslavia in 2003 and its replacement with the new, looser union of Serbia and Montenegro. The fears some years ago about military action by Serbia in Montenegro are now forgotten, and the relationship has clearly matured. The real success of the union, however, will be decided in 2006, when the two countries decide whether to continue the arrangement. Refugee returns remain a pressing issue in Serbia, and I should be interested to hear from the Minister what is being done to assist Serbs who have been displaced from Croatian Krajina and remain refugees.

Other challenges that must be confronted are the economy, in which unemployment remains high, and the problem of organised crime and lawlessness, which was tragically illustrated by the assassination of Prime Minister Djindjic in March last year. Of course, the best way to help Serbia is to provide help and support for democratic Serb and Montenegrin leaders, and to encourage them to adopt a reformist course, however tough the obstacles.

The former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia has had a reasonably good year, with the presidential election in April demonstrating the level of democratic maturity and stability that that nation has now attained. Yet the survival of the state in its present form is still not completely assured. As elsewhere, the remaining significant challenges are to reform the economy and stimulate employment.

Probably the most decisive issue is still the devolution of power to local government units and its impact on the delicate ethnic balance of power in that small country. Perhaps the Minister will tell us whether the British Government are planning to follow the US Administration's decision to recognise the FYRM as Macedonia. I appreciate that there is a problem involving Greece in that context.

Mr. John Randall (Uxbridge) (Con): The United States has just acknowledged that the name of the country is Macedonia. The issue has caused a lot of problems, and I wonder whether my hon. Friend thinks that this country should be following suit.

Mr. Brazier: I am grateful to my hon. Friend for his intervention. I asked the question, but I do not at this stage have a view as to whether it would be wise to take that course. However, given the statement that America has just made, it would be useful to know whether the Government, after receiving representations from the Greeks and from the FYRM, have taken a view on it. The Greeks' opposition stems, of course, from a concern that they have a province called Macedonia and that they do not want their border to be threatened.

The states of the western Balkans have all reached different stages of development, and residual tensions and ethnic prejudices remain, although there are greater problems in some states than in others—problems that stifle or hold back attempts to create prospering, multi-ethnic states. Efforts must be made, through education as well as by more proactive political, legal and economic means, to tackle those difficulties. That is another area in which the international community has much to offer.

Like the Minister, I remain convinced that the prospect of EU membership and eventual membership of NATO will be a powerful spur to reform and progress. An unambiguous commitment should be made that the countries of the region will be welcomed as EU members once they meet the various conditions on human rights, regional co-operation, democracy and economic reform. The EU must for its part make determined efforts to improve its outreach to the politicians of the region and the populations as a whole if it wants to demonstrate its long-term commitment to a progressive agenda in those countries. However, I also believe that the EU must accept, in all humility, that NATO can do more where the security challenges are greatest.

[Mr. Brazier]

We all look forward to the day when the region learns to live with and respect its special multicultural nature. What is needed first is for all parties to be willing to admit to crimes that have been committed on their behalf, and to forgive. It is easy for us to make that comment in the safety of London, but the recent statement by Bosnian Serb leaders in which they said that they sympathised with the pain of the relatives of the victims of the Srebrenica massacre and expressed sincere regrets and apologies was an example of what is needed if progress is to be made in the healing process. Ultimately, the key to the western Balkans has to be people learning to live in peace together. The more we can do to assist them, the better.

3.11 pm

John Austin (Erith and Thamesmead) (Lab): I echo the words of my hon. Friend the Minister in expressing admiration and support for the work of the British troops who have participated in KFOR and SFOR and who do such a valuable peacekeeping job in the region.

I do not want to dwell on the past, but at the beginning of the debate it is important to acknowledge not only the faults in the Balkans but the mistakes that we in the international community may have made. Our failure to recognise the legitimate aspirations of the people of the former Republic of Yugoslavia, when it was clear to any observer that the federation could not survive, and insistence on maintaining that federation under Milosevic led to many of the initial difficulties. There might have been an easier way forward.

Similarly—I think that the hon. Member for Ruislip-Northwood (Mr. Wilkinson) will agree with me, because we discussed this at the time—the Dayton agreement was important for settling the conflict in Bosnia and Herzegovina, but the fate that would befall Kosovo was predictable then, because of the principles on which it was based. We must recognise the mistake that we made in including Milosevic as a partner in the peace process in order to get a quick fix. The sacrificial lamb was Kosovo.

On a more positive note, I very much welcome the speech of my hon. Friend the Minister, and the positive role that the Department for International Development is playing in the regional assistance plan. I should also like to mention the Inter-Parliamentary Union, which I shall chair for a few more weeks and of which the hon. Member for Ruislip-Northwood is currently vice-chairman. We in the IPU have been preaching the same message as my hon. Friend the Minister. We have used every opportunity in our meetings with representatives of the Balkan countries to emphasise the need to demonstrate transparency and good governance, to tackle corruption and crime, to respect minority rights and to co-operate with the International Criminal Tribunal for the Former Yugoslavia.

In September, I visited Montenegro with the hon. Member for Ribble Valley (Mr. Evans). I was representing the IPU at the Cetinje forum, a body that first met in February 2004 in Cetinje, the former capital of Montenegro. It is a forum for parliamentary dialogue. The first meeting in February was attended by the Speakers or Deputy Speakers of the Parliaments of Albania, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Croatia, Greece, Macedonia, and Serbia and Montenegro, with Slovenia in attendance. Earlier this year, as part of its programme of dialogue with fellow parliamentarians, the British group of the Inter-Parliamentary Union hosted a delegation from Serbia and Montenegro, led by the Vice-President of the Assembly of Serbia and Montenegro, Milorad Drlijevic. All right hon. and hon. Members and Members of the other place who attended found it positive and encouraging for the future of the region. The delegates clearly indicated a wish to put the past behind them and work together, both in their country and with their neighbours, towards the aim of eventually taking their place in the European Union. As the Minister said, we saw their aspiration for EU membership as a spur to the necessary economic and constitutional reforms.

What was most encouraging was the desire of those parliamentarians to work with their neighbours to establish stability, for which they sought the help and support of the British group of the Inter-Parliamentary Union. It was for that reason that the hon. Member for Ribble Valley and I represented the IPU at the second Cetinje forum as observers. Also attending were delegates from Romania and Bulgaria, and observers from Italy and the UK. A copy of the final statement that was agreed unanimously by the forum has been forwarded to my hon. Friend the Minister for Europe, with whom I discussed the issue and our possible continued involvement in the forum this week. He welcomed the initiative as a new means of bringing together parliamentary representatives from across the region and the EU to stimulate debate and joint action to help the western Balkans in their progress towards European integration.

The Minister for Europe toured the region this year. He and I agree that the economic and political situation is slowly improving but that there are still many legacies from the past that need to be addressed, not least Kosovo and co-operation with the ICTY. Croatia, I am pleased to say, is well on the way to European Union membership, hopefully alongside Romania and Bulgaria, but there are still hurdles for Serbia and Montenegro. On our visit, the hon. Member for Ribble Valley and I emphasised the need for Serbia and Montenegro to co-operate fully with the ICTY. To be fair, the Montenegrins have co-operated, and it can only be hoped that their presence within the state union will bring further pressure to bear on Serbia. Macedonia and Albania also face many economic and political difficulties before they can be seen as viable candidate countries, but that is their aspiration and it should be encouraged.

As the Minister said, the region has made good progress over the past three years through political, institutional and economic reform. A return to large-scale conflict now seems unlikely, although, as hon. Members have said, we cannot rule it out. The problems of extremism and ethnic tensions are receding, but they remain under the surface, as the violence in Kosovo in March demonstrated. The Kosovars suffered enormously under the Serbian tyranny of Milosevic, and it is easy to understand their anger and suspicion; but the Serbs in Kosovo have rights too, not least a right to live in security and peace. I support the rights of

Kosovars to self-determination, but that can become a reality only if they recognise the rights of the Serbian minority. If we look at Kosovo's past, we can see that the only way forward is through its independence. Under Tito, it was an independent republic in all but name: it had its own judicial system, supreme court, elected assembly and national bank, and it had equality with the other republics of the former Yugoslavia in the presidency. Milosevic destroyed that, and I am sorry to say that the Dayton accords allowed it.

The Minister and the Government recognise the extent to which immature political and economic systems frustrate progress in the region, and how some forces, particularly criminal forces, can impede progress through undue influence and corruption. Systems of good governance and the establishment of accountable law enforcement structures and judiciaries are priorities for the Balkan countries. The problem of refugees and displaced persons remains a key challenge, but the creation of bodies such as the Cetinje forum shows a willingness among parliamentarians in the region to address those issues, and to do so through dialogue, not force. I was pleased that at Cetinje I could outline some of the measures in the Department for International Development's new regional assistance plan.

I welcome the sharp focus of the Department's work. As the Minister has acknowledged, there is a problem in that donors frequently tend to be driven by divergent agendas, in some cases based on specific political interests. The European Union and the World Bank, for example, have different approaches, which can lead to conflicting advice. I welcome his commitment and that of the Department to work with other donors to iron out some of the differences.

DFID's resources are relatively modest, but they are not insignificant. DFID has a key role to play to ensure that the other donors' activities are co-ordinated and lead to best value. I welcome DFID's concentration on poverty reduction strategies and capacity building, which the Minister outlined, and its decision to use its development assistance primarily in support of other donors' activities.

Widespread poverty in parts of the western Balkans, particularly the former Yugoslavia, is a relatively new phenomenon. Yugoslavia had a relatively strong economy, low levels of poverty and a state system to support the vulnerable, but that masked an economy with serious structural problems and unsustainable borrowing. The goal of European integration is the single most effective spur to take measures to bring economic and political stability, but the short-term risks of conflict still need to be addressed and the international community needs to continue to provide support for post-conflict recovery.

The central European experience can provide some lessons for the western Balkans. The most successful countries in central and eastern Europe are those that can attract foreign investment. I am pleased that there are encouraging signs and that countries such as Albania, which is perhaps the furthest from European membership, have taken that issue on board.

Earlier this week, the hon. Member for Daventry (Mr. Boswell) and I met representatives of the chamber of commerce from Albania. Some of them were here partly for the world travel exhibition but also to talk about inward investment in tourism, agriculture, mineral exploration and energy production. I know that DFID, in its strategy as a stakeholder, is engaging with the World Bank, the International Monetary Fund, the EU and European Bank for Reconstruction and Development to assess the appropriate forms of assistance.

As I have recently returned from Montenegro, perhaps I can talk about some of its needs. While I was there, I visited Podgorica for meetings with Prime Minister Djukanovic and the Speaker, Ranko Krivokapic. If time allows, I would like to make some comments later about the outcome of those talks, but I also visited other parts of the country, which included a visit to the port of Bar, and met representatives of the development company Nimont, which is developing the resource, and representatives of the Port of Bar Holding Company.

Clearly, the port has an important future in the economy of Montenegro and its neighbours. It is underused compared with its capacity and the use that it had before the conflict in the region. I have forwarded details of the port and its needs to my hon. Friend the Minister for Trade and Investment, as well as giving details of Montenegro's policies for dealing with inward investment. In order to achieve its potential, improvements are needed in the infrastructure, in roads and railways. The best strategy for poverty reduction in some of the poorest areas in the north would be road developments to enable them to transport and export their agricultural produce.

When in London on their IPU visit in March, the Serbia and Montenegro delegation met representatives of the EBRD as part of the programme organised by the British group. They followed that up in April with a letter to the president of the EBRD, Mr. Lemierre, addressing the two goals set out by the bank: democratic development and the market economy. They spelled out the need for road development to assist the growth of tourism and agriculture as well as the development of hydroelectric power. They have the potential to become an energy exporting country. Sadly, however, no response to that letter had been received when I was in Montenegro in September, although I am pleased to learn that last week the UK director of the EBRD visited Belgrade and Podgorica. I hope that that will lead to significant developments.

One of the key projects is the Adriatic-Ionian highway, which will eventually connect Trieste in Italy with Thessaloniki in Greece. Work is already well under way on that highway in Croatia, which should reach the Montenegran border by 2007. Hopefully the road will continue to its final destination.

There is a need in Montenegro for two further roads to support that highway, one of which is from Bar to Bijelo Polje, via Podgorica. Part of that road is already under construction, with funding from the privatisation process in Montenegro, and donor assistance from the European Union. The second road, which has been argued for persuasively, is from Risan to Pljevlja, which is about 150 miles. Part of that road is already built. If completed it would be the shortest link between Serbia and eastern Bosnia and the sea, and connect the areas of Montenegro most likely to attract inward investment. The other important proposal is to connect the railway

[John Austin]

system, from Podgorica to Albania. Those projects will be crucial measures for the developing economies of Montenegro and its neighbours.

Finally, I should like to comment on the discussions that I had with Prime Minister Djukanovic and the Speaker of the Montenegran Parliament. In my meeting with Prime Minister Djukanovic I stressed the need for the opposition parties to be brought back into the democratic process. At the time they were boycotting the Parliament, so I am pleased that there has been a positive development and that the opposition politicians have re-engaged with the parliamentary process. I also stressed the need for co-operation with the International Criminal Tribunal for the Former Yugoslavia. I said earlier that Montenegro was not the sinner in that, but I hope that it will bring pressure to bear on its neighbours.

I said at the outset that we must recognise the legitimate aspirations of the peoples of the Balkans. We cannot impose on them a settlement that is unacceptable to them; however, it is the view of Her Majesty's Government and the EU that the state union of Serbia and Montenegro offers the best prospects for entry into the EU.

The EU Foreign Ministers decided at Maastricht to open the way for separate discussions with Serbia and Montenegro on tariff issues. The two economies are completely at variance. Serbia still has the dinar, but Montenegro has the euro. The make-up of the two economies is structurally different. Montenegro has none of the problems with subsidies to industry that Serbia has, so it has a different path to follow, so it is right that the EU Foreign Ministers have recognised that with separate discussions.

On the future of the state union, no one can say what the wishes of the Montenegran people are, unless there is a referendum in 2006. I stressed to Prime Minister Djukanovic the view of the EU and of Her Majesty's Government of the importance of the maintenance of the state union. However, I got the distinct impression from almost everyone I spoke to in Montenegro that there is no great desire to continue the union with Serbia. Djukanovic hopes that a peaceful divorce can be negotiated.

Mr. Randall: Would it not be true to say that the results of the most recent referendum in Montenegro were split 50:50? It is strange to hear the hon. Gentleman saying that the majority of Montenegrins do not want the union with Serbia.

John Austin: My comment was that the majority of Montenegrins to whom I spoke expressed that view, including the Prime Minister of Montenegro and the Speaker of the Parliament. On what they thought the likely outcome of a referendum would be, their views differed, ranging from very close to 60:40. However, as we have seen recently in the north-east, predicting results is a dangerous business.

At the end of the day, Montenegro and Serbia will have to reach their own decisions. If they decide, whether by referendum or negotiation, to go their separate ways, we must accept their legitimate democratic wishes. That is not desirable, and I stress to Djukanovic the views of the European Union and our Government that the state union is the best mechanism for entry into the EU. However, in a democracy we have to listen to the will of the people.

3.31 pm

Tom Brake (Carshalton and Wallington) (LD): I welcome this debate and echo the Minister's comments on the important role that British armed forces, police and non-governmental organisations are playing in the region. There is a broad cross-party consensus on the UK's role and the way forward.

The region has a terrible history—other hon. Members have referred to that, so I will not do so in great detail—but it is vital for the United Kingdom and the European Union, and we have a special responsibility to do whatever possible to assist it. The conflict in the Balkans happened in our backyard. I felt, perhaps for the first time, anger and frustration at something happening so close to the UK. It involved people I knew: friends I visited when in Yugoslavia, who subsequently were in Croatia. One served in the Croatian army and was aware of some massacres that happened. As the hon. Member for Canterbury (Mr. Brazier) said, those atrocities were carried out on both sides—Croat forces were involved in atrocities that my friend was aware of. We have a special responsibility to do what we can to ensure that peace and stability are restored to the region.

There are common objectives and areas for us to build on to achieve security, stability, democracy and prosperity in the region. There is not much doubt that the conflict in the Balkans has scarred Europe and remains a real concern. Several hon. Members have referred to the outbreak of violence in March when 19 people were killed. At the time, BBC news reports quoted a Human Rights Watch report stating that NATO peacekeepers and the police force had not co-ordinated their response to the violence that swept through the province. Does the Minister agree with that assessment? If so, is he aware of any measures implemented since to try to improve co-ordination and ensure that any similar event will be better dealt with?

Mr. Brazier: That question is closely related to my question on whether NATO is reaching across the divide in the ethnic balance when recruiting for the police force.

Tom Brake: I thank the hon. Gentleman for that intervention. I am sure that the Minister will address both those points.

Again according to the BBC report, after that incident many people were left homeless. That was in March, so presumably they are no longer homeless. Will the Minister confirm that?

The scale of the international presence is a reminder of the region's fragility. In Macedonia, there are 200 police from the EU. In Kosovo, there are 3,500 police and 18,000 NATO peacekeepers. In Bosnia and Herzegovina, as other hon. Members have said, there is a force of 7,000 NATO troops, who may be replaced by EU troops by the end of this year. In Albania, there are the remnants of the NATO force from the Kosovo conflict. Clearly, there is still great instability and insecurity in the region, which requires substantial forces to achieve the desired stability.

Although territorial ambitions and ethnic tensions remain high, there is some hope and there are examples of progress. Albania and Croatia are involved in the NATO partnership for peace, which aims to forge permanent relationships between partner countries and NATO, and there is also the NATO membership action plan for Macedonia. So, positive moves are being made towards stability and security in the region.

Although our priorities must be to end the conflict and to establish stability and the rule of law, democracy is the next thing that we must tackle. The very different and carefully constructed arrangements that have been put in place in the various countries show how difficult it is to bring democracy to the region. We must strike a balance between realism, or what can be achieved, and the application of legitimate pressure to achieve what we would really like to be achieved.

Bosnia and Herzegovina is a good example of that. For all its faults, the Dayton accord led to the Peace Implementation Council, which, by its very construction, demonstrates how complex the region is. The council, which is headed by my erstwhile leader, Lord Ashdown, comprises no fewer than 55 countries and agencies. They support the peace process by providing financial assistance or troops for the stabilisation force, or by directly running operations in the region.

As hon. Members will know, the rule of law is crucial in the post-conflict scenario and for much of the time it remains an issue. That is despite the fact that the region has had lots of practice, if I can put it that way, with elections. Although municipal elections have been held, they are a reminder that democracy is about more than elections. Civil society, human rights, a functioning bureaucracy, proper legal systems, pluralism and protection for minorities are all necessary, as are the recognition of obligations towards the international community and a positive response to the International Criminal Tribunal for the Former Yugoslavia, which hon. Members have mentioned. A quick glance at the region shows that there is much more work to be done on democracy, and many imperfections must still be dealt with.

I echo the points that hon. Members have made about the region's economies. Twenty years ago, the economic situation was relatively stable, albeit with hidden faults. Certain countries will have to put in many years' hard work before they can return to that situation, and the statistics confirm that. The central role of economic revitalisation was recognised after the Kosovo crisis. The EU stabilisation and association agreements are a positive way forward, and progress is being made by countries such as Bosnia and Herzegovina, which two years ago was declared to have completed the first stages of the EU road map. Its currency has achieved some stability and the World Bank has recognised that the country has moved from post-conflict to transition status. Less progress has been made in Albania, which still has problems with corruption and the rule of law. Negotiations are being held on the stabilisation and association agreements, however, and slow progress is being made.

Croatia is a much better success story. There has been a step change in its co-operation with the ICTY. Slovenia, which is also a very good example in the region, acquired EU membership this year.

We broadly support the regional assistance plan set out by the Government, although the Minister will know that I wrote to him after his visit and as a result of a parliamentary question on the drop in aid to the region after 6 November. The impact of that drop is likely to be felt only in 2005–06, although some countries will receive up to 25 per cent. less funding than they had expected. Have any donors been identified who will fill the funding gap in 2005–06? What will happen to the planned projects that were to be funded by the Department for International Development? Are there contingency plans to address the shortfall?

The Minister's visit to the region was obviously very informative. As a result of what he saw, will he reconsider the funding that DFID provides and see whether there is a need to increase it, perhaps to pre-6 November 2003 levels?

The regional assistance plan set out clear terms for engagement for the region and established the range of assistance that has been offered in recent years. However, the plan makes it very clear that there is a lack of co-ordination among international donors, so I hope the Minister gives us more detail on how the Government intend to address that and on the role that DFID can play.

There is a need to harmonise and focus efforts through the EU. The EU aid programme is not always seen as the best distributor of development assistance, but it may still be the best way forward, given the wider political moves and the role of the EU in the region.

The Government's stated objectives are EU association policies and processes that recognise and support nationally owned, pro-poor development strategies and that work with other donors and partner Governments to agree and implement a common agenda for improved aid effectiveness in each country in the region. The UK Government's policy of active engagement in the region should take account of development concerns. We support that multilateral approach, which is responsive to the needs of the countries and takes account of their wider responsibilities to the international community and their aspirations for closer integration with the rest of Europe.

These are clearly very difficult times for the region. Progress is being made, albeit at a very slow rate, but we believe that the region is on the right track and that the UK Government are right to continue their constructive engagement there.

3.43 pm

Mr. John Wilkinson (Ruislip-Northwood) (Con): We are most fortunate to have a debate on this important subject. The United Kingdom, as the Minister rightly reminded us, has long taken an interest in the Balkans. When you and I first entered the House, Mr. Deputy Speaker, the debates were illumined by contributions from Fitzroy Maclean, on the Yugoslav side as it were, and Julian Amery, on the Albanian. The second world war saw the involvement of other personalities of stature such as Reginald Hibbert in Yugoslavia, Billy Maclean—who was also in the House—and David Smiley in Albania.

[Mr. John Wilkinson]

The problem in recent years has been to stay ahead of the game. That was an implicit part of the speech of the hon. Member for Erith and Thamesmead (John Austin). My honourable colleague, who worked so nobly in the Inter-Parliamentary Union, sought to inject a note of realism, pointing out that we were trying to maintain old structures that had outlived their usefulness.

Perhaps that is understandable for a region that has experienced three empires and a period of centralised communist federation in this century: the Ottoman empire, the Austro-Hungarian empire and the third reich, as well as Tito's Yugoslavia. It has endured a process of very rapid political and social change.

We must try to keep abreast of the realities on the ground. It is good that we have experts of the calibre of the hon. Member for Erith and Thamesmead and my hon. Friend the Member for Uxbridge (Mr. Randall), who is a distinguished Serbo-Croat scholar, to take part in the debate. Our Front-Bench spokesmen have made the debate much clearer, and I am glad of that.

However, I thought that the speech from my political neighbour, the Under-Secretary of State for International Development, the hon. Member for Harrow, West (Mr. Thomas), was perhaps somewhat sanitised and over-optimistic. The reports that I have heard from the west Balkans are not so sanguine as his speech, and the latest one, from Kosovo following the elections there and the boycott of the process by the Serbian community, spoke of continued persecution—that was the phrase that my hon. Friend the Member for Canterbury (Mr. Brazier) used—of the Serb minority.

Therefore, while we applaud the work that Her Majesty's Government, the European Union and NATO are doing, we should be highly cautious about imagining that the stabilisation process can proceed without further setbacks like the one so painfully experienced in Kosovo in March. We need to do everything we can as parliamentarians to bring opinion formers and political leaders together across racial and national boundaries.

Of course, my colleague the hon. Member for Erith and Thamesmead has been doing just that through the IPU, and he has spoken of the conference in Montenegro that he attended. We do the same in the Assembly of the Western European Union and are according generous membership opportunities to the countries of the west Balkans. The Council of Europe, too, constantly monitors progress towards the democratic standards that we enjoin on the countries and peoples in the west Balkans. That is all to the good.

I am apprehensive, however, about the constantly repeated phrase "standards before status" in relation to Kosovo. I understand the EU's desire to set out clear objectives that have to be met before there can be any question of the interim Government of Kosovo acquiring permanent de jure status, but, of course, elected representatives deserve authority, and people, particularly those in the majority, become frustrated if those whom they elect to what they suppose to be power cannot take the decisions because they are second-guessed by the United Nations Interim Administration in Kosovo.

Therefore, as the European Union high representative Javier Solana has realised, and as the EU made clear at the Thessaloniki summit in autumn 2003, it is necessary to move forward. A decision must be taken—I would say in the early part of next year—on the status of Kosovo. I cannot see any basis for making that decision other than self-determination for the people of Kosovo. What other principle will stand the test of time? What other basis will meet the needs of the majority? That is in accordance with all that we espouse in the United Kingdom. Do we not rest our case for sovereignty in the Falklands on self-determination? Do we not maintain the Union of Great Britain and Northern Ireland on that basis? Unless someone can find a better and more durable formula, I would hope that the move towards Kosovo's ultimate status is made on the basis of self-determination.

Until that move is made, there can be no security in the western Balkans. In Bosnia and Herzegovina, no one has come up with any better formula than the Dayton agreement, nor do I think that anyone would wish to tinker or tamper with that formula. It is not ideal, but Bosnia and Herzegovina is a peculiar state. As the Romans would have said, it is supremely sui generis, as, to a lesser extent, is the Federal Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia. As the Minister remarked, it is probably fortunate that the referendum failed and therefore the Ohrid agreement was not called into question. Kosovo, however, is so emotive for the Serbs, and so much the touchstone for all the military and political efforts made by the EU and the Euro-Atlantic community, that we must get it right.

Where do we begin? It is likely that self-determination based on a referendum no doubt carefully monitored and observed by the Organisation for Security and Co-operation in Europe, the Council of Europe and other interested parties—perhaps representatives from the Quintet—will lead to an independent state.

What should that state do and how should it behave? First, it must behave as a good neighbour towards neighbouring states. It must demonstrate respect for their sovereignty and their territorial integrity. In other words, it should be a state within its existing boundaries. I was struck by the historical allusion made by the hon. Member for Erith and Thamesmead, who pointed out that Kosovo was, to all intents and purposes, totally autonomous in Tito's time.

The EU's 1999 declaration spoke of Kosovo having autonomy within Yugoslavia. The significant phrase is "within Yugoslavia". Serbia will have to be persuaded that it is in its interests that the Kosovo question be finally defused. It is in Kosovo's interests to become a member of the EU and a member of partnership for peace, and that it should co-operate in the stability pact for south-eastern Europe. Kosovo must be a state where the rights of all citizens are respected and all their historic traditions are fully safeguarded and regarded as a common patrimony for all citizens. In other words, all citizens must be full citizens and all citizens must be equal under the law, with no discrimination of any kind between them.

Kosovo must also be a state that plays its part in the war against terror. Hon. Members, particularly the two distinguished Front-Bench spokesmen, referred to the drugs problem, the serious unemployment problem in Kosovo and the risk of terrorism in the west Balkans. Kosovo must be part of the struggle against terror and the war against drugs.

Kosovo must also have a currency that makes sense in the modern world. Again, I was struck by the allusion made by the hon. Member for Erith and Thamesmead to the progress that the Montenegrin economy has made. It is a modernising economy that uses the euro. That suits the Montenegrins, but retaining the Yugoslav dinar will not suit Kosovo, although retaining our own currency here in the United Kingdom suits us exceptionally well. Each according to his individual circumstances.

I conclude by saying that the approach must have the support of the United States; it should not be just a European Union approach. The Franco-German-Belgium-Luxembourg axis in other policy areas does not make me very happy, but I hope and trust that on this matter it sticks together and that the Greeks, too, understand that the resolution of the Kosovan problem is important for them. If that can be done, there is genuine hope, especially if the Russians can be kept on side and the Americans persuaded that a stabilised, independent Kosovo is in their interests because over time they will be able to reduce the NATO presence.

On that basis I could share some of the Minister's hopes and aspirations, but his optimism is a little premature at this stage, as Her Majesty's Government are still unwilling to grasp the nettle of the final political status of Kosovo—the *sine qua non* of progress.

3.56 pm

Mr. John Randall (Uxbridge) (Con): I welcome the opportunity to speak in this debate. I did not want to be too gloomy, but having listened to the speeches, I fear that I will end up being like Banquo's ghost at the banquet.

The situation is far from the picture that has been painted. My hon. Friend the Member for Ruislip-Northwood (Mr. Wilkinson) alluded to the fact that many years ago when I was a slim young man, I was lucky enough to study Serbo-Croat at university. That political influences have turned that language into three separate languages is an indication of the situation in the region. I have recently re-read some of the set books that I had to read as a student—thankfully they are now in translation—including, for example, books by the Nobel laureate, Ivo Andrich, who wrote about Bosnia. I recommend "Bridge Over the River Drina" to hon. Members. Bosnia in my student days was diverse; of course, it had the past that hon. Members have spoken of, and there were tensions between Serb and Croat, but Bosnia was a society that worked very well, by and large.

The Balkans are in a more dismal state now than they have been for a long time, and the European nations have not been entirely helpful. Sadly, one outcome is that a lot of people in the region, not only in Serbia, but certainly in Bosnia, Macedonia and Montenegro, probably look back at the days of Tito with nostalgia, which is a mistake, because his regime was far from happy.

I am pleased that many hon. Members recognise that the situation is not quite what we hear it is. Regrettably, because of other political considerations, not least the recent events in Iraq, I have a feeling that Kosovo is being sidelined or even made out to be an example of intervention at its very best, when as we have heard in the debate, what happened there is unresolved. We have got ourselves into a position in which, as my hon. Friend the Member for Ruislip-Northwood said, there is a state that is in effect a protectorate of the United Nations, NATO, the EU or whatever, and it is fundamental to the future of the whole area. There is no simple answer. However, I do not want to be too gloomy, and I pay tribute to the people who are trying to do something positive there.

I was fortunate enough earlier today to have a meeting with the Minister and to hear about his recent visit to the region. I went with Mr. Charles Storer of a charity called Hope and Aid Direct. Its motto sums up what I hope we are trying do, which is to take aid, not sides. Although I might sometimes be portrayed as being more pro-Serb, I certainly do not want to be considered in that way; I want the whole region to be considered fairly.

The situation in Serbia is very difficult. We can talk in this Chamber about all our aspirations for democratic and judicial reforms, but it is not that easy. It has taken centuries to get where we are today. As has been said, in historical terms, Serbia came out from the Turkish empire only in the 19th century. Today, the proliferation of political parties in Serbia makes it difficult to get anywhere. There are a vast number of jokes about how many political parties there are and how many people have to meet in a single room. We value the system that we have. The proliferation of many more parties would simply complicate matters. If we look at what is going on in Serbia, we can see that the situation there is impossible.

Let me return to the issue of Kosovo. I must reiterate that some of the picture that we have is of things getting better slowly, but what I have heard and what we know happened in March show that that is not the case. I am sure that people on all sides are trying hard, but we are talking about a country that has been devastated by war, is still suffering from poverty and underdevelopment and is being ignored, by and large, by the rest of the world. There is incredible polarisation, as we have seen. Now the pendulum has swung and the Serbs, the Roma and other ethnic groups are living in a virtual state of apartheid. I think that the situation is probably worse than apartheid, although I cannot comment on the situation as it was in South Africa, because I have no experience of it.

Mr. Brazier: As one who has been to Kosovo twice and who went to South Africa a number of times before the end of apartheid, I can assure my hon. Friend that the situation is much worse.

Mr. Randall: I do not want to get into that side of things—I make enough enemies as it is—but I think that what is going on is appalling. One lot of violence against one group leads to violence on the other side. Since June 1999, 2,013 Serbs and non-Albanians—some of them children—have disappeared. People do not know what their plight is. Albanians disappeared in that period too.

[Mr. Randall]

We are talking about families. Those things strike at the heart of these people. Talk of reconciliation is a long way off. My hon. Friend the Member for Ruislip-Northwood talked about Northern Ireland. There, history goes back an extremely long way. One cannot mention Cromwell in certain parts of Northern Ireland without being hissed at at best.

What can we do in Kosovo? I include Serbia in this, because it is a forgotten part of the Balkans. One thing we should be doing is improving people's economic position. If we do, they will begin to put aside their hatreds. It is poverty that breeds hatred and nationalism. I visited Northern Ireland a few years ago with a cross-party group. The leader of the Irish Labour party told me that his grandson had been asked, "Do you want Northern Ireland to become part of the Republic?" and that he had answered, "Well, how much would it cost?" It is as if the quality of people's lives means that such issues are not as important in today's world. We must therefore make a big effort to ensure that people in the region feel a lot better off.

Hon. Members have said that there was previously no poverty in some of the areas that we are discussing, but I would dispute that view. I walked around villages in all parts of Yugoslavia and I saw real poverty, but it was not the poverty of sadness, if I can put it like that. Now, there is not only material poverty, but a poverty in terms of people's feelings.

Kosovo is not the success that it is sometimes portrayed as. I wonder how many hon. Members realise that there was an earthquake in Kosovo in April 2002, in which five people died, 180 were injured and 6,000 roofs were destroyed. That has been forgotten; indeed, I cannot remember seeing it in the papers here or on the 24-hour news channels, despite the fact that they are always scratching around for something to talk about.

Infrastructure improvements must be made, but from reports that I have had from Mr. Storer and others in Kosovo, it seems that Government support is unfairly distributed. There are still empty shells everywhere. The Minister spoke about land mines in Bosnia, but what are we doing in Serbia and Kosovo about cluster bombs and the depleted uranium left behind after the NATO intervention? There are major power shutdowns daily.

The hospitals are poorly equipped, but I am not convinced that building a strong civil service is the answer. It might help once hospitals are up and running, but if I were asked whether I wanted a better civil service or a better hospital, I think I know what I would want. Of course, I am simplifying things, and I am sure that I will get into trouble, as I always do, but I am getting old and I do not care too much these days.

We have heard about the unemployment in Kosovo. How can we have any kind of decent state with such unemployment? There is also incredible widespread ethnic fear and tension. I asked the other day whether it was wise for the Serbs to boycott the elections. However, when they visit their cemeteries—the ones that have not been destroyed—they have to go in armoured convoys. It is strange that we should even ask why they think that voting in an election is not a priority and will not really mean anything. If we are to have elections, people must be able to walk to a polling station without having to be surrounded by armoured cars.

People hardly have any food, and what they have is of poor quality. The collecting centres for internally displaced people are appalling. I visited one in southern Serbia last February, and I was appalled by what I saw. As the hon. Member for Carshalton and Wallington (Tom Brake) said, this is in our backyard in Europe. Away from the main areas of Pristina, some people, not just in Serb enclaves, have an awful existence. I am not sure that we are getting to the right people—I am not blaming the British Government because there is a whole European Union out there. Thank goodness for those NGOs that go out and help, but they are pulling out for a variety of reasons, such as frustration or because something has cropped up in another part of the world.

We must all ensure that we never forget what has happened in the Balkans, our part in creating it and our part in restoring faith there.

4.11 pm

Mr. Gareth Thomas: With permission, Mr. Deputy Speaker, I want to respond to this extremely useful debate, which has refocused our attention on the western Balkans region, which, as a series of hon. Members from all parties have said, has disappeared from our media. Like other speakers, I deprecate that.

In the time available, I will try to answer many of the points raised. First, I say to my constituency neighbour, the hon. Member for Ruislip-Northwood (Mr. Wilkinson), that I did not present a sanitised version of the situation. There are genuine reasons to be pleased about the progress made, for example the million refugees returning to Bosnia and Herzegovina. However, as I said, and as every other speaker today has mentioned, the fragility of the situation and the considerable economic and development challenges require the international community to maintain a focus on the western Balkans.

The hon. Member for Canterbury (Mr. Brazier) asked about the military role of NATO as against the role of EUFOR, the European Union force. After the transition, NATO will still have a role in the western Balkans. Rather than continuing to secure the region, it will focus on the hunt for war criminals and help to modernise and reform the local armed forces, for example by promoting ethnic integration. It will also play an as yet to be defined role in counter-terrorism. The UK will have a leading role in EUFOR. There will be close co-operation between EUFOR and NATO, so the hon. Gentleman can be more relaxed about his concerns.

Mr. Brazier: The Minister talked about an as yet to be defined counter-terrorism role. The fact remains that, however large the British involvement, there must be a single, clearly defined chain of command. It must be clear, not only who is responsible for what, but who is answerable to whom. There still seems to be a recipe for confusion.

Mr. Thomas: The hon. Gentleman has more experience than me on these matters, but the need for clarity about roles is well understood by the military—both NATO and EUFOR. I am sure that the issue will be dealt with.

The hon. Gentleman also asked about the pay of the Kosovan police, and I will write to him on that.

On the ethnic mix question, we are working through the global conflict prevention pool on a series of initiatives in the region to promote ethnic mixes in the police force, the armed forces and the civil service.

Let me give as an example a policing project in southern Serbia, which has helped to improve local community and police relations. It is taking place in an ethnically mixed area. As well as building policing skills, it is helping to address community safety, one of the very issues that the hon. Member for Uxbridge (Mr. Randall) mentioned as being of continuing importance for our focus.

The hon. Member for Canterbury also talked about refugees. One of the ways in which we have supported the Serbian Government has been through technical assistance—we have helped them to prepare a comprehensive poverty reduction strategy. Because of the number of refugees and internally displaced people who have yet to be settled in Serbia, one of the key issues for the Serbian Government is how to deal with the poverty and the needs of those people. We have sought to support them in preparing a strategy to tackle the issue.

The hon. Gentleman asked me about the name change, and the American decision on Macedonia. I am aware of no immediate plans to make a corresponding gesture. He also alluded to the remarks of my right hon. Friend the Chancellor. I believe that he has misquoted him in the context of this debate. My right hon. Friend made it clear that there is a need to reform the way in which the EU delivers aid, and I share absolutely his desire to see more money going to low-income countries. However, we also need to ensure that assistance continues to go to the western Balkans. Europe could promote more loans from the European Bank for Reconstruction and Development and more loans and assistance from the European Investment Bank. That is precisely the sort of help with infrastructure projects that my hon. Friend the Member for Erith and Thamesmead (John Austin) said was necessary.

I welcome the work of the Inter-Parliamentary Union—and my hon. Friend's role in its chair—and that of the Western European Union, to which the hon. Member for Ruislip-Northwood alluded, in combating corruption and in the promotion of good governance, minority rights and respect for the ICTY. The sustained engagement of both those key parliamentary bodies with parliamentarians in the western Balkans is warmly to be welcomed.

I am grateful that my hon. Friend the Member for Erith and Thamesmead supports our regional assistance plan; he is right to focus on the continuing need for infrastructure development. In that respect, the role of the European Community, in particular the EBRD and the EIB, is particularly important. I hope that my hon. Friend will be reassured to hear that the EBRD invested some €959 million in south-east Europe in 2003, and has ambitious plans to further expand its lending and its western Balkans operations, in order to promote private sector development as well as the infrastructure development projects that he mentioned.

The hon. Member for Carshalton and Wallington (Tom Brake) asked whether, following my visit, I would be thinking about the level of our funding for the western Balkans. We need to consider our funding in the context of all the funding that goes to the region—it is one of the most aided parts of the world. We want to use our resources to help to make more effective the assistance that is being given by the EC and other donors, and by the World Bank. During my visit last week, I spoke to some of the donors, such as the United Nations Development Programme and the World Bank, about how we can improve donor co-ordination and the effectiveness of the international aid effort in the western Balkans.

The hon. Gentleman also asked me about people made homeless in Kosovo by the violence earlier in the year and whether they are still homeless. Some are still homeless, but the provisional institutions of self-government have actively contributed to the effort to rehouse those who have been homeless since the March riots.

As I said, the hon. Member for Ruislip-Northwood is right to counsel caution and say that the international community needs to remain engaged and to focus on the needs of the western Balkans. He is right that more responsibilities should be transferred from UNMIK to the people of Kosovo, in the form of the provisional institutions of self-government. One of the key issues that I discussed with Soren Jessen-Petersen, the new special representative, was his plan to accelerate that transfer, which I warmly welcome. As was rightly mentioned, the status of Kosovo arouses strong passions in the region. The principle of self-determination must of course be taken into account, but we need to try to build consensus on the future of Kosovo if it is not to be the destabilising force that it has been in the past.

I enjoyed the meeting that I had with the hon. Member for Uxbridge and the NGO Hope and Aid Direct, which has made an impressive contribution in the western Balkans. I hope that I will be able to provide further assistance to its efforts. The infrastructure challenges, which the hon. Gentleman referred to, are considerable. The EC is doing an important job to tackle those issues, through direct assistance and through the EBRD and the EIB. The choice is not between the civil service and the health service. A strong civil service is necessary for the western Balkans to continue developing, but so is a strong health service.

We have given considerable assistance to health services in the western Balkans at different times, but at present we think that we have a niche to help to develop the civil service. Other donors are investing considerable sums to assist health services, education and other services. One of the important things about co-ordinating work with other donors is recognising where problems are not being properly addressed and seeking to provide appropriate assistance. That is why we are focusing on the capacity of the civil service.

This has been an excellent debate, with strong contributions from both Government and Opposition Members. I warmly welcome the opportunity to hear other hon. Members' experience of the region. I hope that this debate ensures that the region will not forgotten in the House, but will start to generate the media attention that it continues to deserve.

Question put and agreed to.

Adjourned accordingly at twenty-four minutes past Four o'clock.

Westminster Hall

Tuesday 16 November 2004

[MR. EDWARD O'HARA *in the Chair*]

AIDS/TB/Malaria (Global Fund)

Motion made, and Question proposed, That the sitting be now adjourned.—*[Vernon Coaker.]*

9.30 am

Dr. Gavin Strang (Edinburgh, East and Musselburgh) (Lab): I am grateful for the opportunity to draw the attention of the Chamber to the work and growing needs of the Global Fund to Fight AIDS, Tuberculosis and Malaria.

In September 2000, Heads of State and Government from across the world met at the United Nations millennium summit to address the major challenges facing humanity at the dawn of the new millennium. The outcome was the millennium declaration—a powerful statement of shared fundamental values and key objectives. Of course, values and objectives are essential, but in a vacuum they are just words. Crucially, the millennium declaration also contains eight goals, with 18 associated concrete, quantifiable and time-limited targets. Nearly 190 countries have signed up to the millennium development goals, and the Department for International Development has made them the main focus of its work. Goal six of the millennium declaration is to

"Combat HIV/AIDS, malaria and other diseases".

The associated targets and indicators commit the international community, by 2015, to have halted and begun to reverse the spread of HIV/AIDS and the incidence of malaria and tuberculosis.

It was clear to anyone who knew anything about AIDS, malaria or TB that we did not have a chance of making so much as a dent in their spread without a massive increase in international effort. The figures speak for themselves. Last year, close to 5 million people acquired HIV, bringing the number of those living with the virus to about 38 million. The AIDS epidemic claimed nearly 3 million lives last year, many as a result of TB. Each year, more than 8 million people become sick with TB, 2 million of whom do not survive. Malaria strikes 300 million to 500 million people every year and kills more than 1 million, nearly all of them in Africa, and most of them children under five years of age. These three diseases are entirely preventable and treatable, but between them they cause more than 6 million deaths worldwide every year, mostly in the developing world. Every death is a personal tragedy. However, the diseases strike not only individuals; they attack communities, regions and nations, causing economic decline, social breakdown and political instability.

In April 2001, invoking the millennium pledges, Kofi Annan announced his proposal for a global fund. In June 2001, the United Nations General Assembly special session on AIDS concluded with a commitment to create such a fund, and the G8 summit the following month announced the launch of a new Global Fund to Fight AIDS, Tuberculosis and Malaria. Just a few months later, in June 2002, the Global Fund board approved the first round of grants to 36 countries.

The Global Fund is an independent public-private partnership. Its 23-person board includes representatives of donor and recipient Governments, non-governmental organisations, the private sector and affected communities. The board also includes representatives of UNAIDS, the World Health Organisation and the World Bank, but those three do not have voting rights. The current chair of the fund is US Secretary of Health and Human Services, Tommy Thompson.

In its first two years, the Global Fund has approved 314 grants in 128 countries, totalling $3 billion. Some 61 per cent. of the grants are to go to Africa, 23 per cent. to Asia and north Africa, and 16 per cent. to Latin America, the Caribbean and eastern Europe.

Mr. David Marshall (Glasgow, Shettleston) (Lab): Does my right hon. Friend agree that there is also a case for including the very poorest nations of the Pacific, such as Papua New Guinea, the Solomon Islands and Kiribati among the countries that urgently require help from the fund?

Dr. Strang: I agree that many countries deserve help from the fund. Provided that their Governments or agencies can introduce meaningful schemes, which will give value for money and tackle the problem, they should get help. My hon. Friend confirms how huge the challenge is.

Some 56 per cent. of the fund's grants are targeted at HIV/AIDS, 31 per cent. at malaria and 13 per cent. at TB. Hon. Members may be interested to hear of some recent achievements. More than 10,000 insecticide-treated nets are being subsidised for pregnant women in Madagascar. Private practitioners in the Philippines are being trained in the internationally recommended directly observed treatment short-course—DOTS—treatment strategy for TB. In Kenya, 250 community centres are being used for HIV prevention outreach work. HIV and TB testing laboratories in Moldova are being modernised.

The Global Fund operates in a series of rounds. Every eight months, it launches a new round, issuing an invitation to interested parties to apply for grants. Applications are then scrutinised by the fund's technical review panel and sent to the fund's board with a recommended course of action. The principal recipient of a grant does not have to be a Government agency. It could be a community-based organisation or an NGO, a faith-based organisation, an affected community, an academic institution or a private sector body.

Proposals are normally made for five years, but a two-year grant agreement is initially negotiated. Disbursements are made during those two years, usually quarterly. Towards the end of that time, the overall performance of the programme is evaluated by the Global Fund to determine whether to renew the grant.

Groundwork is done to ensure that the funded projects are appropriate to local needs. Country co-ordinating mechanisms are partnerships that develop grant proposals designed to fill gaps in local HIV, TB and malaria programmes. Those partnerships also monitor the proposal's implementation, and

[Dr. Strang]

co-ordinate with other domestic programmes. The country co-ordinating mechanisms are expected to have broad representation, although it is argued that, in some countries, the representation is still not broad enough and that there should be better representation of non-government bodies in particular.

Steps are also taken to ensure that the money will be well spent. Prior to paying an approved grant, the fund appoints a local fund agent to assess the fiscal and administrative capacity and systems of the grant's proposed principal recipient. Through a grant agreement with the Global Fund, the recipient is made accountable for its expenditure and results. When further disbursements are requested from the fund, the local fund agent must verify the evidence of the progress achieved.

The secretariat aspires to be as lean an operation as possible. As my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for International Development stated:

> "Administration costs are kept low and . . . are expected to decline as grant expenditure increases."—[*Official Report*, 10 May 2004; Vol. 421, c. 60W.]

Less than 3 per cent. of the annual commitment is used for central administration and management of the Global Fund each year. An additional 2 per cent. is used for local oversight of grants by local fund agents.

The Global Fund has adopted other mechanisms to ensure prudent and efficient spending. For example, the fund must have received all the money for a grant before a grant agreement can be signed. That money then sits in the fund's account for the two or three years of the grant, gradually being disbursed in instalments. The board's comprehensive funding policy understandably errs on the side of caution, so much so that some argue for its rules to be loosened. I would be interested to hear the view of my hon. Friend the Under-Secretary of State for International Development about that live issue.

The global struggle against AIDS, TB and malaria requires huge resources. Donors' records of contributing to the fund are patchy. The G8 had the privilege of launching the fund, and those wealthy nations bear a responsibility to live up to their commitments. The UK's recent record is a good one, and I expect that my hon. Friend will say something about that. On 20 July, the Prime Minister launched the UK's new strategy to tackle AIDS in the developing world, and announced that we would double our contribution to the fund to more than £150 million over the next three years. The UK has also consistently made it clear that our donations to the Global Fund are additional to the resources that we already make available to fight AIDS, TB and malaria.

The United States has significantly increased its pledge this year, agreeing to give up to $547 million to the Global Fund in 2004. However, that pledge was limited to a maximum of one third of the total amount received by the fund. Contributions fell short, despite an urgent appeal to which the UK was the first to respond. Unless the US exercises discretion, it will give $87 million less than its maximum potential contribution this year. Does my hon. Friend have any news on that?

Things look bleaker for next year. The President has requested only $200 million for the fund in 2005. I believe that the House and Senate were due to meet yesterday to discuss proposals for the US contribution to the fund. The Senate was to suggest $250 million, and the House was to propose $400 million for the foreign operations donation. Further sums of up to $300 million are being discussed for labour, health and emergency spending. Again, does my hon. Friend have something to say about that?

There is great concern that there will be a major shortfall in the fund's finances from 2005. The resource needs of the fund will reach $3.4 billion next year, yet the fund has received pledges of just $2.1 billion for 2005 onwards. My hon. Friend knows that last year our Prime Minister joined Jacques Chirac and Romano Prodi in a commitment to work to ensure that Europe provides up to $1 billion to the fund annually. I hope that my hon. Friend will tell the Chamber that that remains the UK Government's position, and that he and his colleagues are working in Europe to achieve that.

The resource needs of the fund are set to expand significantly in the coming years, not only because worthy causes can always use more money, but because we are starting to renew the existing grants. The five-year projects received funding for only the first two years. Operators of the fund will now decide whether those grants merit extension for another three years. If we assume that 85 per cent. of grants from the first three rounds are extended, those renewals will incur programme liabilities of $1.4 billion next year. That is more than the total amount that the fund is expected to provide this year.

Renewing grants for projects that are working well will be vital, but it is not enough for the fund simply to renew existing grants in the year ahead. The AIDS, tuberculosis and malaria epidemics will not stand still for the year, and neither must the fund. It must continue to launch new rounds and invite proposals for new work to combat those terrible diseases.

Operators of the fund have always launched a new round of grants at every second board meeting; that is, every eight months. According to that schedule, the board should have agreed in June to launch round five two months ago, but that did not happen. The board meets again this Thursday and Friday in Arusha, Tanzania. Many people hope that agreement to launch round five can be reached then. My hon. Friend knows that the fund's executive director, Dr. Richard Feachem, fully supports the call for round five to be launched immediately after this week's board meeting.

The launch of round five has already slipped. If the board were to miss another opportunity to launch the round, it would risk losing momentum for the fund at a pivotal time. We know that the need is there, and we know that there are eligible programmes waiting to apply for funding. Will my hon. Friend assure us that the UK will use its influence at the board meeting this week to secure the announcement of a fifth round?

The good example set by the UK must now be used to lever in improved levels of funding from other donor countries to support a new round. Two replenishment conferences are scheduled for next year to make future funding of the fund more certain. It would be helpful if my hon. Friend confirmed that the UK will play a full part in those conferences and that it will be represented at the highest level.

I suppose that no organisation that handles billions of pounds of public money is exempt from criticism, and although the Global Fund is largely popular, it is no exception. The fund has recently had to weather accusations that it has been too slow to disburse its money to people on the ground. That is an easy accusation to make—the fund has approved a total of $3 billion in grants, but only $628 million has been disbursed to date.

In large part, such a discrepancy is inevitable in that the $3 billion represents the total amount that all approved grants will cost over two years. Of course, the fund does not pay out the entire two years' funding at the start: it is paid in instalments, usually quarterly. In addition, the $3 billion total includes round four grants, which were approved only in June and so are barely ready for the disbursements even to start. In fact, disbursements have historically kept pace with the targets set by the fund, and they are only slightly below the target for the third quarter of this year.

I notice that the UK's new strategy for tackling HIV and AIDS in the developing world includes a commitment to work with the fund to disburse money more quickly and effectively, and I welcome that. It is true that there are problems with some grants. In some cases, there are problems with getting a grant agreement in place and, in others, the recipients have problems in meeting the fund's conditions or implementing their commitments.

Donor countries have rightly insisted that the fund should have tough standards for awarding grants, negotiating grant agreements and making disbursements. It has to be accepted that, to some extent, the effect of tough standards will be the delay or cancellation of some disbursements. Provided that that is for good reason, we should accept that as a worthwhile price to pay to protect the fund's reputation for financial responsibility.

The Global Fund offers advantages that many countries' bilateral programmes do not. Although the UK is innocent of aid tying, many countries tie their aid by, for example, insisting that funds are used to buy goods or services based in the donor country. That can have negative consequences and reduce value for money to the recipient country. Global Fund money is not tied in that way.

The Global Fund is participatory. The involvement of all stakeholders has always been part of its operation, from the composition of the board to the country co-ordinating mechanisms on the ground. The fund promotes country ownership, supporting proven interventions identified by the recipient countries, rather than reflecting the ideology of donor countries. Fund awards go where they are most needed. The political or economic interests of donor countries are not a driving force in the allocation of money.

The fund is democratic, and that is reflected in the representative nature of its board. It is transparent, and information about grants is freely available, for example on the fund's website. It has built-in mechanisms to ensure accountability in all its procedures.

The Global Fund is not our only weapon against AIDS, TB and malaria; far from it. The £150 million promised by the UK to the Global Fund is only a part of the £1.5 billion that this country will spend on the international fight against HIV/AIDS over the next three years. Bilateral work has an important role, as has the work of other international agencies and the voluntary sector, but the role of the Global Fund in raising money and spending it in a fair, accountable and effective way is vital if we are to reverse the spread of those diseases and honour our millennium development pledges.

The announcement of the Global Fund in 2001 was a bold initiative, responding to the millennium development goal on AIDS, TB and malaria. It has got off to a reasonable start, and substantial funds have been raised, awarded and disbursed. However, as has been pointed out time and again, support for the fund must be judged against the enormity of the destruction meted out by the diseases worldwide; they cause more than 6 million preventable deaths every year. It is vital that we do all we can to increase the fund and its impact. I urge the Government to do all they can to respond to the challenge, and to encourage other Governments to do likewise.

9.48 am

Tony Baldry (Banbury) (Con): The right hon. Member for Edinburgh, East and Musselburgh (Dr. Strang) has made an excellent speech on the challenges for the Global Fund. He should be congratulated on initiating this important debate. I do not want to repeat what he said, as I agree with much of it. I shall focus briefly on the future, what aid flows go into the Global Fund, and what aid flows come out of it.

The Select Committee on International Development was in India when the Overseas Development Institute held what I understand was an excellent meeting in Portcullis House with Dr. Richard Feachem, head of the Global Fund. My impression is that Dr. Feachem made it pretty clear that, unless countries agreed to a fifth round of proposals next year, he would probably step down. I entirely agree with the right hon. Gentleman that a fifth round of proposals is crucial for the future of the fund, not least because increasingly an underclass of countries is rejected in the first few rounds of proposals. Indeed, some 62 per cent. of countries are rejected. However, a fifth round can happen only with more money.

So far, the Global Fund has the value of two-and-a-half-years' worth of funding, at a rate of some $5.7 billion, but it is looking towards $8 billion, which would carry its work forward for five years. That money is needed, not least to ensure that treatments for AIDS, malaria and TB are increased in middle-income countries, which are still overlooked and would be crucial to round five.

There has, however, been an increasing trend towards bilateral—and not towards multilateral—AIDS programmes of late. Those bilateral measures have seen middle-income countries miss out the most. In the United States, President Bush has pledged significant sums towards fighting AIDS—some $5 billion. That is likely to be renewed with his election and that is good news. However, it is good

[Tony Baldry]

news only for a handful of African countries, such as Uganda and Botswana, where the funding has been ring-fenced. Beyond such countries, there is nothing new from the United States.

It is fair to say that the UK has done a considerable amount of restructuring of its aid flows to fight the pandemic, and that has resulted in a much greater financial commitment by the Government. I think that the UK's contribution to the Global Fund is being doubled to £150 million over three years, which is a significant departure from the stance of the US Government. They have committed only a small part of their total AIDS budget to the Global Fund. It is excellent news that UK Ministers are supporting the Global Fund, and that should be applauded.

However, as always, there are winners and losers with new aid commitments and the losers on AIDS appear to be middle-income countries. For example, all of the UK's HIV/AIDS programmes in Honduras, which has the worst problem in central America, have been cancelled this year. Honduras is one of the poorest countries in the region and it now has 60 per cent. of HIV/AIDS cases in central America. Infection is spreading from coastal regions to big towns and there is little access to affordable drugs because almost half the population live on less than £1 a day.

Two successful UK programmes to fight HIV/AIDS and help sufferers in Honduras will not be renewed after 2005. One programme, worth £450,000, is designed to help direct aid to the most vulnerable people in Honduras. Another UK programme, worth £550,000, trains health workers in preventing AIDS. The Government are also scrapping the £1.75 million poverty reduction programme in Honduras.

The redirection of aid flows from middle-income countries has come exactly as the Government have increased aid flows to other countries. I understand that; it is an issue that we have debated in the past. However, it is worth considering where such flows are going. Top of the list is India. As I said, the Select Committee has just returned from there after a three-week visit, just as Dr. Feachem addressed Members of the House.

It is worth considering what Dr. Feachem has said about India and AIDS. India has overtaken South Africa as the country with the largest number of HIV-infected people. He says that he does not believe official estimates that about 5.1 million Indian citizens are infected with HIV, compared with 5.4 million people in South Africa. He said recently in New Delhi:

> "India is at the centre of the global AIDS pandemic".

Many believe that unless AIDS is contained in India it will increase as it did in African countries during the 1990s, helped by widespread migrant labour, sex workers and stigma about sex and AIDS. The Indian Government have rejected Dr. Feachem's claims. The head of India's national AIDS control organisation said that the rate of new HIV infections and the percentage of people infected remained much lower in India than in South Africa. One of the concerns about HIV/AIDS is that there still appears, even at Government level, to be a stigma about acknowledging infection rates.

Dr. Feachem's warning has been closely followed by the UK Government. The second initiative, which is good news, is the UK's decision to redesign its £123 million strategy to fight HIV/AIDS in India to reflect the new Congress party-led Government's increased willingness to tackle the disease, although many foreign donors and non-governmental organisations have criticised the National AIDS Control Organisation for its bureaucratic approach to managing India's response to the epidemic. Only £28 million of UK aid has been disbursed in the past few years by NACO; £95 million still sits in the bank.

Such redesigns are symptomatic of the difficulties facing the Global Fund. Clearly, Governments are listening to the Global Fund's advice, but they are going it alone, and there is a danger that the extra UK money will be bilateral, not multilateral. The UK has increased its commitments to the Global Fund, but has also moved towards making bilateral commitments, and other countries may do the same. That could undermine the Global Fund just as it is trying to secure the fifth round. India clearly needs the extra money, but the Global Fund should be trusted to invest it, not least because 50 per cent. of the money that it invests is invested because people in recipient countries, rather than the donors, say where it should go. The Global Fund also ensures a fairer disbursement of moneys, and that means that middle-income countries do not miss out.

Unless there are firm financial commitments to the Global Fund and a slowing of bilateral aid programmes, the prospects of the all-important fifth round will be diminished. If the fifth round did not take place, that would be a real setback for such a fledgling institution, especially given that 2005 is seen as the make-or-break year for the millennium development goals.

How could extra funding be found for the fifth round? Two original options are being considered. The first is the suggestion from Dr. Peter Piot, head of UNAIDS, that Africa's $15 billion debt, which is serviced every year, should be channelled instead into health and education, which Dr. Piot has been quoted as saying are

> "the building blocks of the AIDS response".

The other option in the short term—perhaps a more realistic one—is the international finance facility. Dr. Feachem has called for the IFF to be launched in early 2005. I am afraid that the US does not support that initiative, but other international measures have not been supported by the US at their initial launch. Multilateral institutions and NGOs alike see the international finance facility as one of the best prospects of finding the funds to meet the millennium development goals.

Given that the Commission for Africa will report in the spring of next year and that the UK will hold the G8 presidency and give that commission clear substance, I hope that the Prime Minister and the Chancellor will consider printing a clear timetable for launching the international finance facility on the same day as the commission reports or, better still, launch it as part of the commission's report to provide a benchmark by which the commission could be judged and, more important, to bolster the aid needed to make necessary progress on the millennium development goals.

There is no difference among Members of this House on the notion that tackling HIV, tuberculosis and malaria is crucial. Doing that will require greater funds for the Global Fund, and a commitment from all nations to work through multilateral institutions, rather than going it alone.

9.58 am

Mr. David Lepper (Brighton, Pavilion) (Lab/Co-op): I also congratulate my right hon. Friend the Member for Edinburgh, East and Musselburgh (Dr. Strang) on securing this important debate, and at an important time: the board of the Global Fund is due to meet in a few days at Arusha in Tanzania.

I do not want to repeat what has already been said about the development of the Global Fund and the possible threats that it now faces. I would like to focus on the work of the International HIV/AIDS Alliance, which works as part of the Global Fund system. I am proud that the alliance is based in my constituency of Brighton, Pavilion. I am sure that my hon. Friend the Under-Secretary will recall his visit to its headquarters with Dr. Peter Piot and me when it marked the tenth anniversary of its valuable international work.

The International HIV/AIDS Alliance has a long-standing relationship with the Global Fund board, as part of the NGO delegation. It has on the board of directors an employee of its India office, who is also a board member of Communities Living with AIDS, TB and Malaria. It is the principal recipient of global funding in Ukraine. The programme in Ukraine for which the alliance is responsible has been judged one of the 10 best organised programmes in a country that is funded by the Global Fund. The alliance provides technical support to Global Fund recipients in Asia, Africa, Latin America and eastern Europe.

The alliance has worked primarily on providing technical advice and resources to enable the effective participation of civil society organisations in the Global Fund's country co-ordinating mechanisms in 40 countries, including Honduras and Bolivia, as well as working with the Caribbean Regional Network of People Living with HIV/AIDS. It also provides advice and resources to Nigeria, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, the Philippines and the Democratic Republic of Congo.

Since earlier this year, the alliance has been the principal recipient in Ukraine. Its work there focuses on developing community participation and involvement in capacity building among country-based organisations. It centres on preventive work, care and support for people living with HIV/AIDS, clinical care, procurement and supply management, and information and education on policy and advocacy.

In Ukraine, it is estimated that there are now 49 projects, serving an average of 1,000 clients each. The financial support totals about $1 million and the overall number of people who receive services is about 30,000 to 40,000. Over the past quarter, 350,000 condoms have been distributed as part of the work that is being undertaken in Ukraine. The programme is important and its work is best judged by its effect on individuals. The International HIV/AIDS Alliance provides examples that bring home to us what lies behind the talk of funding and programmes—the impact on the lives of individuals.

In Ukraine, Tamila was helped by Light of Hope, a local organisation, with the support of the Global Fund. She is 19 and was admitted to a psychiatric clinic after an unsuccessful suicide attempt. The ambulance doctors found out that she was living with HIV and revealed her status to the doctors at the psychiatric clinic. Tamila was not using drugs and was not involved in the sex trade, but she was treated aggressively and beaten by medical staff in the resuscitation unit at the hospital to which she was taken.

Through the work of Light of Hope, the local organisation with which the International HIV/AIDS Alliance works, there has been intervention in Tamila's case. A review was held and she now receives the emotional, medical and legal support that might not otherwise have been available to her. She would have become another wasted life because of the prejudice that exists towards those living with HIV/AIDS.

I shall cite a further example of the way in which bureaucracy can prevent help from reaching those who should receive it. Working with a locally based charitable foundation called Alternative, the alliance found out about a HIV-positive woman who gave birth and, because of the circumstances in which she was living, left her child in the hospital. She believed that she could not give it proper care. Later, because she had a job and her life became more stable, she felt able to try to reclaim her child, but Ukrainian bureaucracy and stereotyping about socially vulnerable people made getting the child back a complicated task.

The project staff at Alternative, backed by the Global Fund, did all they could to help. Eventually the woman was able to establish her parental rights and her child came back to her, but the child was suffering from TB by then. Once again, agencies funded by the Global Fund, working through the guidance of the International HIV/AIDS Alliance, were able to intervene in people's lives. The lives of those two people might otherwise have been wasted. None of us in the Chamber has any doubts about the importance of the Global Fund's work.

I echo the concerns expressed by other Members. The fifth round is crucial, as are decisions that are to be taken later this week. There has already been delay, and there is concern that the US Government may be pushing for a further delay of the fifth round. That could lead to the removal of funds from some of the most successful work on all three diseases, thus denying many people who desperately need it access to care, support and medicines, such as anti-retroviral treatment, and delaying the start-up of much-needed prevention programmes. Will my hon. Friend the Under-Secretary tell us what the Government are doing to ensure that no such delay occurs?

As hon. Members have said, 2005 is a crucial year for all development programmes: the UK will lead the European Union and G8 presidencies and the millennium development goals will be reviewed next autumn. We know that we are falling short of those goals and that one of the main reasons for that is the failure of many G8 nations to respond adequately to the AIDS pandemic. It is possible to reverse the impact of AIDS and to care for those who are suffering. Next year, the UK Government will be in a central position to influence what happens. What specific commitments are they considering making during their EU and G8 presidencies to ensure that we take those vital programmes forward to combat all three preventable illnesses, and the impact of HIV/AIDS?

10.8 am

John Barrett (Edinburgh, West) (LD): I, too, congratulate the right hon. Member for Edinburgh, East and Musselburgh (Dr. Strang) on securing the debate. I could not disagree with anything he said. Neither could I disagree with anything said by the Chairman of the Select Committee on International Development, whom I congratulate on distributing the new international development magazine. I am sure that its next edition will include an article on the subject of our debate.

I am pleased that the hon. Member for Brighton, Pavilion (Mr. Lepper) mentioned several issues in Ukraine. I worked there some years ago and know that it suffered badly after the Chernobyl disaster.

I will try not to repeat what has been said, but some figures are so stark that I may repeat them. As the right hon. Member for Edinburgh, East and Musselburgh said, the United Nations Secretary-General issued a call to action in April 2001 to battle malaria, TB and HIV/AIDS, to mobilise, manage and disburse funds with the Global Fund and to try to reverse the spread and reduce the consequences of those infectious diseases and others between now and 2010. The Global Fund was created to finance a dramatic turnaround in the fight against those diseases, which kill more than 6 million people a year.

I hope that the Under-Secretary will detail the financial commitments and proposed disbursements for the year ahead, now that we have heard from the right hon. Member for Edinburgh, East and Musselburgh about what has already been committed and disbursed. To date, the Global Fund has committed $3 billion in 128 countries to support aggressive intervention against AIDS, TB and malaria. It is vital.

The fund is truly an international project, with a global impact, fighting three of the deadliest problems that the world faces. The statistics about what it is doing and what it is hoped it will do are impressive. As has been said, TB kills about 2 million people a year—an estimated one third of the world's population may be infected. It is estimated that, in the next 15 years, it could claim 35 million lives and that 200 million may become sick with it. About 250,000 children die each year of TB.

Poverty and TB go together. It costs only $10 for a full treatment course to cure infectious patients. The Global Fund is helping to detect 3.5 million additional cases of infectious TB. It is also hoped that it will cure 2 million people through the directly observed therapy strategy. The fund is also fighting the new scourge—multi-drug-resistant TB—with more than 12,000 new treatments.

We have heard that an estimated 45 million people are infected with HIV worldwide; 95 per cent. of those live in the poorest countries, in what we call the developing world, but more than 20 million have been killed worldwide, and the virus is now the leading cause of death in Africa. Again, children suffer. More than 15 million children have been orphaned by AIDS and that figure is projected to double in the not-too-distant future. Over the next five years, the fund should provide 1.6 million people with anti-retroviral treatment, reach 52 million people with counselling and testing for HIV prevention, and support more than 1 million orphans with medical services, community care and education.

Malaria kills at least 1 million people per year and could cause more than 300 million clinical cases. More than 40 per cent. of the world's population is at risk from malaria. That figure is increasing—in the 21st century, when we should be winning the battle—because of poor health systems, drug resistance, climate change, war and poverty. It is the poorest, and children, who are most vulnerable. Ninety per cent. of malaria deaths occur in sub-Saharan Africa and approximately 3,000 people die of it each day in that region—many of them children. The fund is providing finance for 108 million treated bed nets to protect families from transmission and is delivering 145 million treatments for resistant malaria.

AIDS, TB and malaria are the most lethal combination that one could imagine. That combination is hitting the world's poorest people hard, in Africa. The most vulnerable group, as I have said, are children, many of whom are already orphans. The effect of orphanhood on children in Africa is terrifying. For most people, the death of their child is the worst thing that could ever happen; but what happens to children who are orphaned in some countries seems like a fate worse than death.

In Zambia, 65 per cent. of child prostitutes are orphans. In Addis Ababa, 75 per cent. of child domestic workers are orphans. Such children are more vulnerable to sexual abuse than any other sector of society. There are orphan gangs and orphan delinquents—bewildered, lonely and angry children. Never having known love, they reach adulthood and have their own children. That growing band of potential orphan parents will be one of the highest-risk groups. If they die, their children will have no grandparents to look after them. That is a time bomb that is ready to explode, if it is not already doing so.

Many of those orphans are also the carers for their siblings. I met a young boy in Addis Ababa who told me his story. He was 14, with a 12-year-old brother. His mother and father had died. They lived together in what was basically a cardboard-box and plastic slum dwelling. They spent their days shoe shining and going to school. They earned enough money to buy food to eat. If they earned more, the older boys would steal the money. That is how they existed—and they are vulnerable; one fears for their future.

An objective observer of what is unfolding would be forgiven for thinking that the world had gone mad. At a time when starvation and disease grip parts of our planet, obesity and over-consumption are major problems in the west.

The Global Fund provides some salvation, and its resources give hope to the millions who suffer TB, malaria or AIDS. What can the fund do? Previous speakers told us about what has happened and spoke of its potential, but we must look to the future.

The statistics seem bleak, but only last week I heard at first hand of one case in which the battle against TB had been won and the war against AIDS was being fought with determination. A gentleman called Winston Zulu came to visit me in Parliament. He is from Zambia and is one of 13 children. He was treated for TB and recovered, but he has been living with AIDS since 1990. He had four brothers, all of whom died of TB or HIV.

The last one passed away in March because of a lack of access to anti-TB drugs. I feel for him as I am one of four brothers; he said that he was the only survivor. He was cured of TB in 1997 and he is now an advocate for the changes that can be delivered by the Global Fund.

Winston Zulu is now married and an inspiration to many. I met him not only at Westminster but in Edinburgh, where he was speaking to a group that included another person who deserves mention. Sir John Crofton, a 92-year-old inspirational individual, developed the first co-ordinated drug resistance programme. I think that it provided the foundation for the DOTS programme that the Select Committee saw being delivered so effectively in India, in one of the successes in the battle against TB. It was good to see that the man who developed the treatment 50 years ago is still battling on today.

The Select Committee visited India, but I went there in March to see at first hand how DOTS was unfolding. While there, I spoke to mothers and children who would have been orphans but for the investment of a relatively small amount—$10 per head for a life saved.

I met the Under-Secretary and the Secretary of State after that visit, and I spoke of the concern that the funding of TB programmes might end in the not-too-distant future. I was pleased to receive a letter from the Under-Secretary. The hon. Member for Leicester, East (Keith Vaz[illegible] I had raised with him the question of future fu[illegible] for anti-malaria programmes in India. He wrote:

> "The Government have also told us that the Global Fund for AIDS, TB and Malaria, to which DFID has committed £180 million, has made a grant to India for TB control in Andhra Pradesh and Orissa. They have therefore decided not to ask for DFID assistance for TB in those states, which means that our programme in Andhra Pradesh will end in 2005 as planned."

Credit where credit is due: not only did the Under-Secretary stay in touch and keep me up to date, but DFID is playing its part. I say, "Well done."

Sadly, the opposite was the case in Malawi at the Bottom hospital in Llongwe. There, we saw TB sufferers and AIDS victims being treated in a medical system that appeared to be falling apart. The health workers were falling victim to the same diseases, and 50 per cent. of poor households were affected by AIDS. Although every bed was full in the children's ward, we were told that it was a quiet time—at busy times, there are two or three children to each bed.

The Global Fund can invest in education to ensure prevention and reduce the spread of those diseases that have been mentioned. Again, that is likely to help the most vulnerable—the children, and especially young girls, many of whom miss their education because of the pressure to leave school to become carers when their families need their help.

One statistic on the education of children in Malawi sticks in my mind. We were told that of every 1,000 children who start primary school, two would graduate and one would die of AIDS. That cycle must be broken, and the Global Fund can help. However, the fund is no good without the political will of donors and recipients. We must continue to say that what is happening is unacceptable; the tide of devastation must be turned.

We have just remembered the dead of two world wars, during which resources were made available to defeat the enemy and the political will was unbending. We are now at war in Iraq and spending hundreds of millions of pounds to enable Iraqis to experience democracy. However, at the same time, people are dying by the million of preventable diseases—1 million a year of malaria; 2 million a year of TB, and possibly 3 million a year of AIDS. Those are the real weapons of mass destruction in today's world; they are the killers that we should focus on.

The holocaust that is unfolding is made all the worse by the fact that we know what is required to bring it to an end—resources and political will. The resources must be made available, whatever the mechanism. The Global Fund is needed and our attention should not be diverted from the war that we should be fighting—against poverty and disease. Many people, including me, have expressed their concerns about what is going on in Iraq, but few have seen it as a diversion from a much greater problem: the death toll from malaria, TB and AIDS this week could exceed the total number killed in Iraq since the war began. We cannot go on like that.

I hope that the Under-Secretary will address a number of issues: the future funding of the Global Fund and the proposed International Financing Facility; what we can do to play our part in that when the UK Government chairs both the EU and the G8 in the year ahead, and how we can work in partnerships—no individual country can make progress on its own. Partnership is needed, and ways of ensuring that future disbursement means that money that has been pledged gets through to those who need it most. Most of all, we must play our part in the world to ensure the political will to end this tragedy.

10.22 am

Mr. Julian Brazier (Canterbury) (Con): I am grateful to have the opportunity to discuss the important issue of combating three of the world's most devastating diseases and the role of the Global Fund to Fight AIDS, TB and Malaria in doing so. Like others, I congratulate the right hon. Member for Edinburgh, East and Musselburgh (Dr. Strang) on having secured the debate. He is right that we need to stress the vital role of the Global Fund—particularly at this crucial time when its long-term future is uncertain—in both prevention and treatment. We know only too well the horrors that each of the diseases inflicts on entire populations in so many ways—socially, demographically, economically, politically and even culturally.

We have had a good debate. My hon. Friend the Member for Banbury (Tony Baldry) has brought to it his expertise as Chairman of the Select Committee on International Development. I share his hope that we might persuade the Americans to come on board with the Global Fund on a larger scale, and was interested to hear of the discussion that is going on in Congress on the matter. I was glad that the hon. Member for Brighton, Pavilion (Mr. Lepper) said something about Ukraine, a country that I have been privileged to visit twice, and where I saw some of the most abject poverty that I have seen anywhere. He is right to remind us that there is colossal need in parts of eastern Europe.

[Mr. Julian Brazier]

The UK played a leading role in setting up the Global Fund in 2002 and has remained strongly committed to it, pledging about £154 million for the first seven years of its operation. Because it is still in its infancy, it is possible to measure the impact of the Global Fund anecdotally only, and that is what we have tried to do today. However the transparency and accountability of the fund, two of its core founding principles, have already allowed the organisation to demonstrate its success. The right hon. Member for Edinburgh, East and Musselburgh is right; it would be grossly unfair if, because it is so careful about accountability and transparency, it were to be castigated in its early years for being slow in spending its money.

The UK has doubled its pledge from 2005 to 2008, thus bringing our overall commitment to approximately £259 million. That makes the UK the fourth largest donor to the fund, and we share the Government's pride in that achievement. Earlier speakers have rightly stressed the importance of tying up round five as quickly as possible.

The Global Fund operators tell us that donor contributions have enabled it to approve 296 programmes in 128 countries. Roughly three fifths of that funding goes to Africa, one fifth to Latin America, one fifth to Asia, and very small amounts go elsewhere.

The 2004 UNAIDS report provides fresh evidence—if we needed it—of the scale of the AIDS crisis that Africa is facing. It is universally acknowledged as the biggest threat to Africa's development and the No. 1 cause of death in that continent, yet rates of HIV infection continue to rise in sub-Saharan Africa overall and in most individual countries, with a few encouraging exceptions such as Uganda and Botswana.

Last year alone, an estimated 3 million people in the region became newly infected, but that shocking statistic is only the tip of a very sad iceberg. In earlier debates in this Chamber, we discussed in detail the consequences of that, including destruction of public sector infrastructure, economic and educational collapse, and—worst of all—collapse in the health service itself as some doctors and nurses become infected and others flee to the first world, encouraged by higher salaries and better conditions. Those trends come after a decade of international efforts to highlight the devastating effect of AIDS, particularly on that continent.

The Global Fund has much to offer. There are four key ways in which it can direct its energies into helping to break the AIDS epidemic, and in some respects it is already doing so. A significant proportion of the funds should be spent on the anti-retroviral drugs that are needed to treat people with AIDS. The importance of anti-retroviral therapy has been much discussed in our debates on AIDS. The treatment is still not a cure, and it presents new challenges; there are side effects and there is drug resistance. However, it has dramatically reduced mortality rates, revitalised communities, and brought hope and quality of life to people who are HIV-infected. AIDS is gradually becoming a manageable chronic illness, rather than simply a plague.

Sadly, few African countries are yet sharing in the vastly improved prognosis in first-world countries. The number of people receiving anti-retroviral treatment in Africa is still relatively small. The World Health Organisation estimates that nine out of 10 people who urgently need treatment for HIV are not being reached. It is predicted that 5 million to 6 million people in developing countries will die in the next two years without anti-retroviral drugs.

India and Brazil are the greatest examples for the production of generic anti-retroviral drugs. The cost of drugs in those countries has been reduced. Brazil is now home to up to one third of all the people being treated for AIDS and it has successfully reduced its HIV/AIDS-related deaths by more than 85 per cent. That is a remarkable figure. Furthermore, the Brazilian Government have estimated that anti-retroviral drugs made savings of about $2 billion in hospital care that would otherwise have been needed by people living with HIV. That is a significant figure, as there are also many other diseases to fight. We should think about what else the money that is spent on hospital care for AIDS patients could have been spent on.

I am not suggesting that domestic generic production is the right way forward for every country, and it is important that we always remember to pay tribute to pharmaceutical companies that are lowering their prices to third-world countries. It is worth remembering that Merck is the world's largest corporate donor; if benefits in kind are included, it donates more than Bill Gates.

A recent Oxfam survey report drew attention to the urgent need to fund health services to deliver treatment. The funding of those essential services should go hand in hand with the massive cuts in the prices of drugs that are coming into effect; in some countries they are being provided in domestic programmes. The Global Fund is already providing opportunities for countries such as Uganda to deliver comprehensive programmes that include treatment using anti-retrovirals. Estimates indicate that by 2009 the Global Fund will have increased the number of people living with AIDS on ARV treatment fivefold, to around 1.6 million. Sadly, that is still a small proportion of the total, but it is none the less a remarkable figure. The fund is also expected to have provided voluntary HIV/AIDS counselling and testing services aimed at prevention to 52 million people. Prevention is of course the best cure of all.

Those are encouraging targets, but I should stress the necessity of continuing to prioritise the introduction of health services across Africa if we are really to see tangible global progress. In a recent speech on AIDS in Africa I emphasised the use of anti-retrovirals for pregnant women, which, on the cure side of the equation, is how the greatest number of lives can be saved at the smallest cost.

The final role for the Global Fund should be to strive to encourage more research and development by pharmaceutical companies into the treatment of all three killer diseases. In the past, companies have often invested large sums in drugs that failed to produce a return on their investment while producing a huge benefit for people in developing countries. Indeed, a delegation from Merck told me that much in its corporate donor programmes started from one of its programmes that was a commercial disaster but saved a large number of lives. If we harden up the guarantees for companies on intellectual property rights in the first world, we will encourage them to ensure that the desperately-needed investment in drugs in the third world carries on with fewer side effects.

The figures indicate, I believe, that tuberculosis kills more people than AIDS and malaria combined, although the equation is quite complicated because a lot of people who die of TB are infected with HIV/AIDS. Leaving that grisly statistic aside, however, the fund has an excellent record on TB. Modernisation of labs for TB in Moldova is one example of success in Europe, and the hon. Member for Brighton, Pavilion talked about Ukraine. The training of private practitioners in the recommended TB control strategy known as DOTS—directly observed treatment short-course—in the Philippines is another example. In five years the fund aims to have quadrupled the number of people being treated for multi-drug resistant TB. Furthermore, it estimates that 3.5 million TB patients will have been offered DOTS treatment by then.

I strongly believe that malaria must be tackled by a coupled approach of prevention and cure. The Global Fund aims to do just that. Prevention is best achieved through the drainage and spraying of swamps and ditches where mosquitoes breed and through the use of netting. Much of my mother's family were involved in the colonial service in Africa, and it has been deeply frustrating for me to see the extent to which things went back in the wrong direction after independence. Progress made in fighting mosquito-borne infections, particularly malaria, was lost. For years and years we went in the wrong direction, as basic procedures were lost in countries where relatives of mine worked.

So far, the fund has subsidised more than 10,000 insecticide-treated nets for pregnant women in Madagascar, as well as focusing on a cure through the supply of artemisinin-class combination therapy—ACT—drugs to areas most in need. The all-party group on AIDS has a terrific reputation and I particularly welcome the start of a new group on malaria, which I understand that my hon. Friend the Member for Eddisbury (Mr. O'Brien) chairs. That group has just embarked on a programme of studies that will produce a report for Ministers in the new year.

In a short space of time the Global Fund has undoubtedly achieved much. It is essential, as all hon. Members who have spoken have stressed, that the uncertainty over the fifth round be lifted as quickly as possible, as it needs to go ahead. The scale of the problems with all three diseases is so vast that we have to be quite modest about what can be achieved in the short term, but the Global Fund is achieving a great deal and doing so in a way that is almost entirely corruption free. If the Chamber will forgive an unfortunate military parallel, we are getting more bangs for the buck out of the Global Fund, but there is so much more to do.

We do not even have all the Governments on side. When one listens to the pronouncements from the South African Government on HIV/AIDS, one realises that it is not just about resources; we must arrange delivery structures and change attitudes among Governments and many ordinary people if we are to get rid of the scourge of these three diseases.

The Global Fund has a vital role in all this. I congratulate the Government on their work with it and hope that we can tie up the fifth round as soon as possible.

10.36 am

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for International Development (Mr. Gareth Thomas): I, too, congratulate my right hon. Friend the Member for Edinburgh, East and Musselburgh (Dr. Strang) on securing this debate. He is right to remind us of the urgency of the need to tackle the three epidemics.

The debate brought back memories of my visit in May to Dukathole township in South Africa, where Christian Aid was doing some remarkable work with the South African Anglican Church in supporting a number of women and was providing support to orphans and a number of people dying of TB as part of its AIDS-related work. That example reminds us just how severe the challenges of AIDS, TB and malaria are in making progress on international development. Together, those diseases cause around 6 million deaths. As my right hon. Friend the Member for Edinburgh, East and Musselburgh said, poor countries shoulder the vast majority of the burden associated with diseases that threaten to undermine progress on all the millennium development goals. AIDS, more than any other issue, is reversing the progress that has been made in sub-Saharan Africa, and particularly in southern Africa. AIDS is steadily reversing the development progress that we have seen.

Worldwide, there are almost 60 million people with AIDS. In view of those figures and the need to make more progress, in July we published our strategy on HIV/AIDS for the next three years to support the global effort scale-up on the epidemic in the developing world. We have supported that strategy with a commitment to provide some £1.5 billion over the next three years to work on HIV and AIDS control. That money is particularly important in the context of figures from UNAIDS, which estimates that next year we should be spending some $12 billion in the fight against AIDS and by 2007 we should be spending some £20 billion. The stark statistic is that by 2003 we were spending only some $4.7 billion worldwide. That indicates the importance of the Global Fund and also, more generally, the importance of scaling up assistance for the fight against AIDS, TB and malaria.

The three epidemics feed off each other. After years of decline, the number of TB deaths in Africa is beginning to increase again. TB is the fourth most common cause of death from communicable diseases, and multi-drug resistant TB is an increasing problem. About 100 countries worldwide have malaria, and almost half of those are in sub-Saharan Africa. Like the hon. Member for Canterbury (Mr. Brazier), I welcome the formation of an all-party group on malaria, and I look forward to engaging with it. It will undoubtedly complement the excellent work done by the all-party group on AIDS, in which my right hon. Friend the Member for Edinburgh, East and Musselburgh is an active participant.

The hon. Member for Canterbury alluded to recent advances in the production and widespread distribution of insecticide-treated nets and artemisinin-based therapy for drug-resistant malaria, which give the international community an opportunity to scale up the prevention and treatment of malaria.

As I said, there is a range of methods for us to use to support the fight against AIDS, TB and malaria. The Global Fund is one such method, but the UK has spent

[Mr. Gareth Thomas]

some £1.5 billion since 1997 on strengthening health systems in developing countries—a crucial part of the infrastructure to fight AIDS, TB and malaria.

We also work with, and fund the work of, other equally crucial international bodies, including UNAIDS, the World Health Organisation and its vital three-by-five initiative, and UNICEF, with which we are working to strengthen the response of African Governments to the orphans and vulnerable children crisis. We are also working with organisations such as the Gates Foundation, the Clinton Foundation and major pharmaceutical companies to reduce the cost of drugs and other interventions and to increase access to them.

Like the hon. Member for Canterbury, I pay tribute to the work of pharmaceutical companies, but it is worth remembering just how skewed the worldwide market in drugs is towards the developed world. Some 50 per cent. of the drugs market is based in north America, some 25 per cent. is based in Europe, and only 1 per cent. is based in the continent of Africa. That is a powerful reminder of the fact that further progress is needed to focus on the drugs that developing countries need and to provide access to those drugs. That is the responsibility not only of drug companies but crucially of rich donors, who need to support developing countries and to help them to develop their own regulatory and in-country capacity.

Crucially, we also support the work of key non-governmental organisations. I alluded to the work of Christian Aid, which I saw in South Africa. My hon. Friend the Member for Brighton, Pavilion (Mr. Lepper) rightly paid tribute to the work of the International HIV/AIDS Alliance. I am grateful for the opportunity that he has provided to put on record my appreciation of the hugely significant work that it does. It plays a particularly important role in fighting the stigma and discrimination that still bedevil the fight against AIDS in particular.

The International HIV/AIDS Alliance targets AIDS and campaigns for more assistance to groups such as men who have sex with men and injecting drug users. It also supports needle-exchange programmes, and highlights the needs of sex workers, which is particularly important. We need to continue to support that work, which is why I was pleased to be able to announce an extra £1 million of support to it as part of our decision to increase support to NGOs working in Latin America. The hon. Member for Banbury (Tony Baldry) alluded to the situation in Honduras, where the alliance is already working. Its work is globally respected, and I look forward to continuing to engage with it.

The hon. Member for Edinburgh, West (John Barrett) also rightly alluded to the excellent work of Results UK. I, too, had the privilege of meeting Winston Zulu in the UK last week. He is a remarkable man who is remarkably dignified in the face of the terrible loss that he has experienced. Four of his brothers have died of TB and AIDS for want of access to the drugs that have helped him to survive—a powerful reminder from him and Results UK of the need for us to do more on TB and malaria, as well as on AIDS.

My right hon. Friend the Member for Edinburgh, East and Musselburgh alluded to the fact that the Government played a leading role in setting up the Global Fund in 2001. He also mentioned that it has approved $3 billion of grants to more than 300 programmes in more than 120 countries. Of those grants, 60 per cent. are going to sub-Saharan Africa and more than 20 per cent. are going to Asia, the middle east and north Africa. Approximately 56 per cent. are going specifically on HIV-related work, 30 per cent. are going on malaria and 13 per cent. are going on TB.

Predictable and sustainable financing will be critical to the fund's continued success because it will help the fund plan, give confidence to the poor and make a real and lasting impact on the ground in countries where these epidemics are at their worst. That is one reason why the Government decided in July to double our pledge from 2005 to 2008, bringing our overall pledge to £250 million, or $450 million, and making the UK the fourth largest donor to the fund. In September, following a request from Kofi Annan, Nelson Mandela and the fund's executive director, Richard Feacham, we brought forward £3 million, or $5.3 million, from our pledge for 2005 to help the fund leverage the maximum contribution from the United States. I am pleased to say that a number of other donors followed suit. We are prepared to consider putting more money into the fund, although we obviously have to consider the case for doing so alongside the case for putting money into other funding instruments and our own country programmes.

Showing results will remain essential if the fund is to continue to give donors and beneficiaries the confidence and the information that they need to invest in the fund, and good results will obviously be a powerful factor in attracting more money from donors. The Global Fund management team recognises that and has been working with DFID staff to develop effective and appropriate performance indicators. As my right hon. Friend the Member for Edinburgh, East and Musselburgh suggested, the fund needs to widen its donor base in the G8 and, more importantly, the wider international community. I pay tribute to the work of Richard Feacham, who is seized of that point and who has been actively lobbying outside the fund's traditional circle of donors.

My right hon. Friend asked whether the UK supported a round five, and we do. There will also be high-level UK representation at future replenishment conferences, and we shall be lobbying others to contribute to the fund.

My right hon. Friend alluded to the role of the Americans, and I want to place on record my appreciation not only of their continuing, large contribution to the Global Fund and the fight against AIDS more generally but of their increasing co-operation with the UK through the US/UK taskforce. We are looking at how we can tighten our links and improve co-ordination on the ground in five specific African countries.

My right hon. Friend asked about European Community funding for the Global Fund. The EC pledged £260 million for 2004, and the total EU pledge to the fund represents approximately 48 per cent. of all the pledges for 2004.

The second way in which the fund can make maximum use of its resources is by targeting poor countries—a point made by my hon. Friend the Member for Glasgow, Shettleston (Mr. Marshall) in an intervention. The Government's view has always been that the fund should prioritise its assistance to help the very poorest countries scale up their efforts against AIDS, TB and malaria.

The hon. Member for Banbury, who chairs the Select Committee on International Development, rightly reminded the House that we should not forget the needs of middle-income countries. He highlighted the problems in Honduras, and mentioned the decision of the Department for International Development to withdraw from direct bilateral programmes with that country. By way of reassurance to the hon. Gentleman, I flag up the fact that considerable donor assistance is still going into Honduras—and Latin America more generally—from the World Bank, the United Nations Population Fund, the European Union and the Global Fund.

Through our assistance programmes for Latin America, we are seeking to increase effectiveness and joint working among those donors operating in Honduras and other Latin American countries. We have also increased our funding to NGOs. I mentioned the International HIV/AIDS Alliance; that is one example of benefit for work in Latin America. We are also seeking to improve south-south co-operation in Latin America on, for example, the rolling-out of the excellent work done in Brazil to the wider Latin American continent.

On the point made by the hon. Member for Banbury about middle-income countries, one of the regions on which we continue to concentrate, particularly in terms of the stigma and discrimination that bedevils the response to AIDS, is the Caribbean. My right hon. Friend the Secretary of State is sending me to the Caribbean next week for a crucial conference with Caribbean leaders. The conference will look into the issue of stigma and discrimination and how we can challenge it more effectively in the Caribbean.

The hon. Member for Banbury also alluded to the Select Committee's recent visit to India. It is right to say that we have remodelled our support for the Indian Government's National AIDS Control Organisation. I hope that he has had the chance to hear or meet the new head of that organisation, who is trying to reform its work significantly, speed it up and make it more effective. We recently heard that the new Congress Government have given it even more funding to enable it to extend and increase its work.

We want the Global Fund to continue to focus on working more closely with other donors. For example, it should work more closely and effectively with the US President's emergency programme for AIDS relief, the World Bank's multi-country AIDS programme and a series of other bilateral donors and multilateral initiatives. In particular, we look to UNAIDS as the international agency with the legitimacy and mandate to co-ordinate all those donor initiatives. One reason that we increased our funding to UNAIDS last year was in order to make it more effective at co-ordinating the work of donors.

On TB and malaria, we believe that the Global Fund needs to continue to work closely with implementing agencies such as the stop TB partnership and the roll back malaria programme.

My right hon. Friend the Member for Edinburgh, East and Musselburgh and the hon. Member for Banbury referred to the ninth board meeting due to take place in Arusha in Tanzania on Thursday and Friday. As well as considering a future round five, delegates in Arusha will look in the longer term at the shape and size of the Global Fund. The fund is to be commended on its recent paper on its future role and financing needs. We welcome much of it, but see opportunities to continue to improve the operations of the fund and increase its value for money. Of course, we want to make sure that the fund stays true to its intention of being a lean, effective and efficient funding instrument.

My right hon. Friend the Member for Edinburgh, East and Musselburgh alluded to the fact that the Global Fund needs about $1.3 billion of new money to finance ongoing projects, and a further $1 million to launch a new round.

John Barrett: Before the Under-Secretary concludes, will he touch on the issue of expanding the capacity of potential recipient countries, and on finding out whether there are other methods—particularly, perhaps, that of co-ordination between our medical systems—to increase our capacity? Perhaps our royal colleges could work together to help with training our physicians here and abroad, or with bringing people across. When the Global Fund made the money available, capacity would be increased; the money could be more efficiently spent in the recipient countries.

Mr. Thomas: The need to increase developing countries' capacity to respond to AIDS is one reason for our putting significant money and technical assistance into such countries' health systems since 1997. We need to do more about that. We published a paper on access to medicines in the first six months of this year, looking at what else we could do to build on our work in several countries in Africa to increase both regulatory capacity and in-country production of anti-retroviral and other drugs. Those are two examples of the way in which we are trying to improve developing countries' capacity to respond to the AIDS crisis.

One of the most encouraging things to happen in the past 18 months is the significant drop in the price of anti-retrovirals. The price of some drugs has come down by 95 per cent. I pay particular tribute to the work of the Clinton Foundation for that. However, getting those drugs where they need to be is a particular challenge, particularly in the case of people in rural areas who suffer from AIDS. Continued development of the capacity of in-country health systems must remain an important focus for bilateral donors in particular.

We work closely with the Global Fund in several countries. Staff of the Department for International Development sit on country co-ordination committees and have participated in visits with Global Fund staff. I am aware that the fund has been criticised for high in-country transaction costs and slow procedures. We have been actively working with the secretariat to make changes and improvements, and good progress has been made.

[Mr. Thomas]

The Global Fund is one high-profile part of the response to AIDS, TB and malaria. Along with the other key partners, we want it to scale up its response to become even more effective in the fight against those devastating epidemics. We remain determined to play our part in increasing the effectiveness of the global fund.

The hon. Member for Banbury alluded to the considerable additional donor assistance that is needed if we are to make progress towards meeting the millennium development goals by 2015. The UN estimates that $100 billion is needed annually if we are to continue to make progress; however, just $50 billion is currently being provided. Our response to that has been to increase development assistance significantly over the next three years. The largest increase for any Government Department has been at the Department for International Development. There is a 9 per cent. increase for each of the next three years.

If we continue to make such progress, we shall hit the UN's 0.7 per cent. target by 2013. However, if we are to make significant progress towards establishing funding at the appropriate level, we not only need other countries to progress towards that figure, but, as the hon. Member for Banbury said, we need other countries to sign up in support of the international finance facility. We remain determined to continue to play our part—to continue to generate the political support and momentum to launch the international finance facility next year.

This has been an extremely useful debate. I pay tribute again to my right hon. Friend the Member for Edinburgh, East and Musselburgh for initiating an important reminder of the urgency of the need to respond to AIDS, TB and malaria.

Asylum Seekers (Legal Aid)

10.59 am

Jane Griffiths (Reading, East) (Lab): I am grateful for the opportunity to have this debate and to raise these important matters. This is not the first time that I have initiated a debate on legal aid in Reading in this place. In July 1999, I was fortunate enough to obtain a debate on matters relating to the management of legal aid in Reading. At that time, my concerns were about pressures on office staff, which resulted in inadequate scrutiny of solicitors' claims. I was pleased when a reporter from the *Reading Chronicle* subsequently obtained work in that office and highlighted in even greater detail the concerns that I raised.

Today, I am talking about a different aspect of legal support for people seeking asylum in Reading, but it also relates to the quality of legal support that people receive for the money that we all pay. The subject of this debate is legal aid services for asylum seekers in Reading. Let us imagine that we are asylum seekers who have fled our own country and arrived somewhere with a different language and different customs. We have to go through a process that will decide whether we are allowed to stay in the country. Whom can we rely on to save us from being sent back to the place from which we have fled?

As a society, we see it as a mark of our humanity that we support those who are going through the process that will decide whether they should be allowed to stay in this country. We provide support so they can get effective representation, and we make money available so that they get legal assistance. The point is to ensure that any decision on whether someone can stay or is to be sent back is based on the actual information in the case.

I have sought this debate because I believe that the subject is important. I make no judgment in any of the cases that I shall raise. I will not say, "This person should be allowed to stay in the UK while that person should not." It is not my role to do that. My role is to make the law setting out in what conditions people may remain in the UK. Of course, like all hon. Members, I then have a role as a constituency MP, helping to ensure that people who want to stay in the UK have the full opportunity to make their cases properly. It is an important part of British law that people get an opportunity to make their case, and that any decision is based on the full information in that case. Only in that way can just decisions be made.

Like a lot of MPs, I have a sizeable workload involving people who have come to the UK. This is probably among the most altruistic aspects of our work; the people whom we do the work for do not have a vote, and if their cases are heard and they are given permission to stay, become citizens and get the vote, most of us will probably be long gone by the time that they do so. It must be borne in mind that the people who I see are the ones in whose cases something has gone wrong. If everything goes right, someone makes an application and a decision is made, the constituency MP will not generally become involved. Naturally, I have more experience of dealing with the representatives of Reading-based people seeking asylum than I have of other such people, so any failings of Reading representatives are more obvious to me than those of people elsewhere.

Through doing such work, we get a feel for the people, for whether they are genuine or something is not quite right about their story and for the quality of representation that they receive. Together with our staff, we see the paperwork detailing the work carried out on behalf of the people seeking to stay in the UK—when their legal representatives send them with any. Before long, I and my staff dealing with people seeking to stay in the UK get a clear impression of the quality and amount of work carried out by legal representatives on behalf of those people, and particularly asylum seekers.

I recognise and appreciate the hard work carried out by many legal representatives in the field. I am not seeking to say that there is a widespread problem with the services received by asylum seekers; some legal representatives are very diligent and hardworking. I am seeking to highlight instances in which there have been problems with the service that has been provided. As I said, my staff and I soon get a feeling for the level of support offered to asylum seekers by those representing them. Although there are hardworking legal representatives who diligently carry out work for those whom they represent, they are, unfortunately, not the only kind. It is well known that some do the minimum work necessary to obtain the legal aid money and then send the asylum seeker to an MP, who carries out the rest of the work.

During seven years and more representing asylum seekers in Reading, I have come to know which companies, and even which particular representatives at which companies, carry out the full range of work necessary and which do not. The people who deserve to receive the greatest support and to whose cases particular attention has to be paid are unaccompanied minors seeking asylum—people under 18 who have fled their country and turned up in a strange country alone and seeking help. In the late 1990s, a number of unaccompanied minors arrived in Reading seeking asylum from the former Yugoslavia, principally Kosovo. Work with people from that area who are seeking asylum is admittedly not straightforward. It involves ethnicity, religion and employment of family, and great attention needs to be paid to detail.

Whether through word of mouth from other asylum seekers from the same area, direction from formal agencies or whatever other way, a number of unaccompanied asylum seekers acquired the same legal representative, Rodney Oliver, at one Reading company, Thompson Leatherdale. These were a representative and company of which my office was well aware. We had concerns about the quality of service provided to people on legal aid who were seeking asylum, but never were able to point to any hard evidence.

I pay tribute to the work of an organisation called SASIR—Supporting Asylum Seekers In Reading. In particular, that work has focused on Reading college and has been carried out by the Reading college chaplaincy team. I am especially grateful for the work of Harriet Townsend, who is a volunteer. Harriet has spent large amounts of her time accompanying people to see representatives, going though the case with them, identifying whether what has been put forward is the full case, and writing to the Home Office and to the people's legal representative. Harriet has also acted as a carer for some of those unaccompanied minors.

Spending time on a regular basis with young unaccompanied asylum seekers has meant that that organisation has been able to get details of what happened to people and the level of representation that they have received—something that a busy constituency Member's office very often cannot do so easily. In fairness, a busy legal representative probably cannot do that either. The organisation's work threw up some worrying information about the level of service received by unaccompanied asylum seekers. I repeat that I do not make any judgment on the right or otherwise of the cases that I am about to mention. I am raising them solely because it is so important to ensure that people receive a fair and just decision and that their case is heard.

Let us consider the case of BD, who is very mentally damaged and ill. It is believed that he was exposed to serious trauma. The case is a matter for great concern because of the mental condition of the client, yet his case was not presented properly and his history was given incorrectly. I find it impossible to believe that, in respect of someone so mentally damaged and ill, no medical evidence was presented at the appeal, which was dismissed. The case is believed to be a serious one and is listed to be examined, prepared and submitted for an office for the supervision of solicitors investigation. I believe that that has not been done so far, because of limited resources. I made a call this morning to the OSS, and I got the response, "We can't tell you anything about any of your constituents, because, for us to talk to you, they need to write giving you authority." I understand data protection implications, but I find that a little bizarre.

The next case is that of VM, who is traumatised and has psychological problems, and who arrived aged 16, with no family left, having experienced two conflicts. The case was never properly presented, the statements do not make sense and, again, no medical evidence obtained. No case was prepared to present at appeal, even though a certificate of readiness was lodged by Thompson Leatherdale six months previously. There are events recorded on file that are not true. The appeal was dismissed, and from the determination, it is clear that the impact of previous legal representation was highly significant in the dismissal.

Many other problems have appeared as the OSS investigation progresses, including a statement by the solicitor that the client's asylum case was based on his religion, when in fact it was not. That is also being investigated by the OSS. The investigation has reached the stage of a report being prepared for adjudication due to serious problems having been identified.

EI is traumatised and also has psychological problems and a head injury. EI arrived aged 15 with no family left, having come direct from conflict. Again the case was never properly presented and no medical evidence was obtained. The case was not pursued and Thompson Leatherdale failed to discover that the Home Office issued a refusal due to late submittal of papers; that was discovered two and a half years later by social services. When they informed Thompson Leatherdale, no action was taken on the client's behalf, even though the client would be literally destitute from the day of his 18th birthday. Following representations to the then Minister with responsibility for immigration, his case was reopened; again, the OSS is investigating.

[Jane Griffiths]

The final example that I will give, although it is not the last of these cases, is that of RL, who arrived traumatised, having been beaten. RL was mentally ill and had no family left, and arrived as an unaccompanied minor aged 16, having experienced two wars. RL came direct from conflict. Yet again, the case was never properly presented and bizarre statements were submitted. The wrong geographical area was referred to. Again, no medical evidence was submitted. An appeal was lodged unnecessarily, because exceptional leave to remain had already been granted—a fact that was somehow missed. That was done without the client's instructions or knowledge.

Although I am not a lawyer, it seems to me that an appeal should be based on a client's wish to lodge an appeal and not on the arbitrary decision of a legal representative. The appeal in the case of RL was lodged unnecessarily and without the client's instructions or knowledge, and as a result, the adjudicator decided that the appellant was untruthful. It was clear from the determination that problems with previous representation were significant in the dismissal of the appeal. Documents were not submitted to the court by the deadline, and neither were they presented at the appeal, despite the fact that the form of reply stated that the case was in all respects ready for hearing and was submitted to the court a month previously. Again, that case is being investigated by the OSS and there is documentary evidence to support those complaints.

Those are four serious examples of the continuous failure of Thompson Leatherdale and, in particular, of Rodney Oliver, as the person preparing and carrying out the work on the cases, to do the work properly. My hon. Friend the Member for Reading, West (Mr. Salter) is in a similar position, with a number of cases in his constituency where work was carried out by Thompson Leatherdale in a similarly incompetent manner or was not carried out properly. Those cases are now before the office for the supervision of solicitors. My hon. Friend and I have together had a number of meetings with those concerned, including volunteers who are seeking to help asylum seekers in Reading.

The problem is that the cases have been with the OSS for more than a year. The Government set up the Office of the Immigration Services Commissioner to ensure that people who give advice in such circumstances do so properly. Complaints were made to the office, but it has said that it will wait until the OSS has completed its investigation. We are going around in circles. In the meantime, Mr. Oliver and Thompson Leatherdale have parted company, and the quality of the work done by the firm has improved. However, Mr. Oliver is still carrying out immigration advice work from his home in Reading.

Of course, the cases that I have mentioned are ongoing. Appeals are taking place, decisions are being made and more than one of those concerned have been told that they are liable to be deported. The Minister for Citizenship and Immigration has stated in a letter to my hon. Friend the Member for Reading, West that the existence of such independent bodies ensures quality of representation. In fact, under the Immigration and Asylum Appeals (Procedure) Rules 2000, the client is responsible even when the solicitor is at fault. That seems to me to be against natural justice.

It is vital that those acting on behalf of such people, particularly when they are vulnerable, unaccompanied and under 18, provide a proper service. It is also vital that when people representing asylum seekers are shown not to be doing the job, they are stopped from continuing in it. In Reading, we have a serial failure in one person representing a large number of people. People face deportation as a result of that person's incompetence.

I know that the Minister will not be able to give me answers about particular cases. I ask only whether the number of cases against Mr. Oliver currently with the OSS could be pulled together and looked at as a whole. Not only should the matters in each particular case be investigated, but the serial, continuous and widespread negligence and incompetence in those cases should be looked at together. Is it possible for the OISC to consider the conclusions made so far by the OSS and make an interim decision about the fitness of Mr. Oliver to continue to give legal representation? Is it possible to suspend any approval for Mr. Oliver to represent people seeking asylum until the cases have been investigated and a decision reached?

As I said in my introductory remarks, I sought this debate and raised these issues not to judge the worth of the cases of the people who seek asylum to remain in the UK. That decision is not for me. I want my constituents to have full and effective representation to ensure that any decision made about them is fair and just. In the case of unaccompanied minors from the former Yugoslavia, it is clear that they have been let down by Rodney Oliver. Their cases were not heard properly, and the decisions were not made with possession of the full information. I hope that the Minister will be able to look into the matters raised, and that some action can be taken to ensure that others do not fail to get justice as a consequence.

11.14 am

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Constitutional Affairs (Mr. Christopher Leslie): I congratulate my hon. Friend the Member for Reading, East (Jane Griffiths) on securing this debate. I understand her motivation for raising these issues. They are certainly of importance to her constituents, and many other Members who deal with casework from similar backgrounds will also be interested in the supervision of solicitors.

As things stand, the legal profession is independent and self-regulating. It is therefore not appropriate for me to comment on complaints about solicitors in individual cases. The Law Society has responsibility for the conduct of solicitors. It has set up a separate body, which used to be known as the office for the supervision of solicitors or the OSS, as my hon. Friend called it, but is now known as the consumer complaints service or the CCS—I want to ensure that we get our acronyms correct—to deal with complaints about solicitors. In any case, where complaints are currently being examined, it is important that the investigations are allowed to proceed to a conclusion.

My hon. Friend asked about circumstances in which multiple complaints are lodged against an individual. In such circumstances, it will be up to the CCS to decide whether to pool the complaints and to look at them in the round or to scrutinise each in isolation. She also asked about the potential for suspension of a solicitor, perhaps when they are under investigation. Again, it is my understanding that that is a matter for the Law Society as the designated professional body; it has scope in those matters.

Where the Legal Services Commission—the body set up to organise the legal aid arrangements—receives a complaint about a supplier of legal aid work, it will provide advice on the appropriate complaints procedure. The LSC is not empowered to investigate the legal competency of solicitors, which is a matter for the Law Society, but under the terms of its contract, it may investigate suppliers' internal procedures and processes used in carrying out services, including those relating to customer services. It is a requirement of the LSC contract that all suppliers have an internal complaints procedure and that that is notified to clients.

The LSC carries out annual audits of suppliers where those procedures may be reviewed. Following an audit, it may register quality concerns and require corrective action as a condition of the contract. The LSC has also introduced a system of peer review, whereby it uses a select group of quality-assured solicitors to review the legal content of their colleagues' work. Where the outcome of an audit or peer review is poor, the LSC may intervene in the operation of the contract and impose further conditions or restrictions, and in some cases it may terminate the contract. Ultimately, the LSC may launch an official investigation, which is typically used in cases of fraud or criminality. That has more to do with the operation of the supply of legal aid work.

I should like to refer briefly to the changes to asylum legal aid that were introduced earlier this year, as they include new arrangements to improve the quality of advice given in asylum cases that are relevant to some of the general points made by my hon. Friend. The Government are committed to the provision of publicly funded legal services as a means of promoting social justice and economic well-being, and tackling social exclusion. In respect of asylum and immigration, the Government are committed to protecting people where there is a real and immediate risk of loss of liberty or life. Our country has a long and honourable tradition of offering sanctuary to genuine refugees.

The Government are also under a duty, however, to ensure that the taxpayer receives value for money in public spending. Asylum legal aid costs have increased significantly over the past few years, from about £81 million in 2000 to £204 million in 2003–04. There are many reasons for that; the main one is the increase in the number of people seeking asylum. However, asylum numbers have fallen significantly, from a high of 100,000 to this year's predicted figure of 35,000, and further falls are likely over the next couple of years. It is necessary to bear that in mind when we consider issues relating to the supply of firms and organisations that undertake publicly funded legal advice on asylum and immigration. The Home Office issues statistics on the number of asylum applications each year and each quarter. On the basis of that information, there were just over 80,000 asylum applicants in 2000, 49,000 applications in 2003 and almost 18,000 applications in the first six months of 2004. Again, the trend is downwards.

The increase in costs, together with evidence of over-claiming, duplication and concerns about the quality of some legal work, meant that we had to take action. New measures were introduced in April this year to bring legal aid on asylum under more effective control and cut unnecessary expenditure. Costs are being limited and targeted on the most deserving cases, and quality advice and representation are being rewarded through a new, independently assessed accreditation scheme for solicitors working on publicly funded asylum cases, which will become compulsory from April next year. Following those reforms, most firms indicated that they wished to continue with legal aid work and many new firms applied for contracts. The concern that many suppliers would withdraw from the market once the new measures were introduced proved unfounded.

Where there is a particular need to increase legal aid services for asylum seekers in a particular area, however, the Legal Services Commission has taken steps to ensure that capacity will be improved, through either the awarding of new contracts or increasing the amount of work done by an existing supplier, which is known as case matter starts—the number of cases that the supplier is authorised to proceed with. Consideration can also be given to expanding the regional services provided by the Legal Services Commission's two largest contractors: the Immigration Advisory Service and the Refugee Legal Centre. Sufficient matter starts are allocated to each supplier by the Legal Services Commission to cover the expected level of asylum work during the year, but there is flexibility to adjust the allocation if circumstances change.

On the specific situation in Reading, I reiterate that it is not appropriate for me to comment on issues raised by individual complaints, although my hon. Friend has aired the issues in this debate and no doubt the Law Society and its consumer complaints service will have noted her comments.

Currently, two solicitors' firms in Reading are contracted to provide asylum legal aid services. At the start of the year, 200 asylum case starts were available to those contractors, and to date 73 have been taken up. In addition, the Legal Services Commission allocated 150 case starts for non-asylum immigration matters, and to date 53 of those have been taken up. When requested, the Legal Services Commission has increased the number of asylum and immigration matter starts for both firms. The firms are taking on new asylum cases, and there is every indication that capacity exists to meet need in the Reading area. My hon. Friend's concerns were about the quality of those services, but it is important to set out the context; there is scope for people to get support through the legal aid system.

Additional suppliers are contracted to provide legal aid services for asylum seekers in Slough, Oxford and High Wycombe. The Immigration Advisory Service also provides an outreach service in Slough from its offices in Hounslow. The local office of the Legal Services Commission is in regular contact with suppliers in the area, so that issues of concern can be identified and dealt with promptly.

I want now to give my hon. Friend more details of the accreditation arrangements that are in place for the new legal aid arrangements. We take the issue of good quality advice exceptionally seriously. It is important that taxpayers' money is not used only for general

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advice, but for the best advice that is available. Accreditation involves direct testing of each solicitor and advice provider to ensure that they have appropriate knowledge and experience of the relevant law and procedure. Applicants undergo practical assessments, for example, conducting mock interviews and drafting statements. They are required to submit a portfolio of their work for discussion at interview.

The standards to be achieved have been determined by the Legal Services Commission, following consultation with the Law Society and the Office of the Immigration Services Commissioner. The assessment of individuals is carried out by external independent bodies, appointed and monitored by the Law Society. When the scheme becomes compulsory, individuals who are not accredited will be unable to undertake asylum legal aid work.

We want to ensure appropriate access to asylum legal services throughout the country to reflect the needs of those seeking asylum. Given the substantial reduction in the number of people claiming asylum, we intend to carry out a major national review of the future demand for asylum legal aid services. That will take account of the latest estimates of asylum numbers and the aim will be to ensure that suppliers of adequate quality are available throughout England and Wales in the areas where they are needed.

I understand my hon. Friend's need to raise such issues. I recognise that there are questions about how easy, simple and transparent the complaints processes are when people have a genuine grievance that they wish to pursue about advice that they have received from solicitors. That is something about which I and my colleagues in the Department for Constitutional Affairs are concerned. Several processes are under way that will touch on such matters, such as the Clementi review of legal services and the fundamental legal aid review. Both reviews are matters about which hon. Members have been in correspondence over the past few months.

We are especially keen to strike the right balance between access to free services and cost control, and the level of necessary regulation of those who give advice. We must achieve those important priorities. Having had the opportunity to hear my hon. Friend's worries, I shall certainly talk further to my officials about the lessons that might be learned from such cases. I hope that today's debate has been useful to those who are interested in such matters.

11.27 am

Sitting suspended until Two o'clock.

G8 (UK Presidency)

2.8 pm

Mr. Roger Williams (Brecon and Radnorshire) (LD): I thank the Minister for attending this important debate and I hope that interruptions, due to Divisions in the House, will be kept to a minimum. I am sure that you, Mr. Deputy Speaker, will agree that, although there may be differences between the parties on the issue, the House must remain committed to the principle of debt relief. I commend the work of the all-party group on heavily indebted poor countries for its persistent work in such matters.

The year 2015—the target date for the UN millennium development goals—is drawing ever nearer and the commitment made more than four years ago must now be honoured. We are almost a third of the way to that target date and now is a good time to assess the position and renew our commitment to meeting those goals. The moral case for debt relief is simple. People throughout the world are living half lives; they are lives without hope and basic necessities, and often people lose their lives prematurely. We know that they deserve better and we, as a nation, can do better.

In July 2005, we will welcome the world to Perthshire and host a summit that began as a club for the economic elite, but which has evolved into a mechanism for helping the oppressed and needy. As an institution, the G8 has shown that it has the ability and the will to address the debt of the developing world. The 1999 Cologne summit produced a comprehensive and fairer update of the heavily indebted poor countries scheme. The United Kingdom played a leading role and we can do so again in 2005.

The structure of the G8 gives the host country real power to shape the summit's agenda and the UK presidency will be an opportunity to make a difference to world poverty. The G8 presidency will also coincide in the second half of the year with the UK presidency of the European Council. That fortuitous alignment of the stars is behind the creation of the Make Poverty History coalition—a coming together of the UK-based non-governmental organisations, aid agencies and interest groups, backed by widespread public support. The coalition is well aware of the unique opportunity that 2005 presents to our country to lead seven of the world's most powerful nations. It is up to the Government to seize it and build on the good work that has already been done.

The moral case for debt relief is clear. Nations in Africa, Asia and South America face what can only be described as humanitarian disasters on an unprecedented scale. The Zambian gross national product per capita in real terms was nearly $1,500 in 1970. By 2000 it had been reduced to just under $900. That is a reduction of more than 40 per cent. in 30 years.

Developing nations have not shared in the increases in living standards that other parts of the world have enjoyed. To isolate a single cause for that is impossible, but the state of affairs at present is clear. Life expectancy, for instance, in Botswana is only 38 years; Niger's literacy rate is below 20 per cent.; and 36 per cent. of people in Myanmar lack access to proper sanitation.

Africa is blighted by poverty, but the problem extends to all corners of the globe. There is a danger, when highlighting the problems of the developing world, that in listing those appalling statistics we may lose sight of the individual lives that are involved. Lack of access to clean water may mean a 15 km round trip to fulfil the most basic of human needs. Walking more than 15 km every day means that a basic education is almost out of the question. Who has time to go to school when their prime concern is survival?

The third millennium development goal calls for the promotion of gender equality and the empowerment of women. Women are often responsible for gathering water in societies where opportunity is already limited. They are the first to suffer from malnutrition, as they give their children priority in the fight for survival. The lack of essential water supplies means that women are forced to sacrifice even the most basic education. Women's rights in developing countries are sometimes better served by building a well in the village than by calls for an international Bill of Rights, which might have little practical impact in a developing country.

Debt relief is not a panacea for the ills of the developing world, but it can, in most cases, make a real difference. Funding that would otherwise be used to service debts dating back to the 1970s, which were incurred to mitigate low commodity prices but which have been compounded by high interest rates and oil price surges, can now be invested in building a basic infrastructure, which will, in turn, help to address the rights and needs of local people.

So far, steps taken to reduce the debt of the poorest nations have produced real results. Debt relief has led to landmark educational improvements, essential immunisation schemes and vital water and sanitation projects. All are to be celebrated. Those achievements counter the suggestion that heavily indebted poor countries are unable to address the problems of their citizens. A recent study by the Jubilee debt campaign, to which I pay tribute for its work, shows that 65 per cent. of all revenue freed up through debt reduction has been spent on health and education projects.

Since the introduction of the HIPC project, social spending has risen by about 20 per cent. in participating countries. Uganda, Mozambique, Zambia and Tanzania have all been able to abolish school fees for primary education. Success stories are numerous and those countries have shown that they can truly help themselves if they are given a chance to do so.

Debt relief must be conditional on responsible economic policy and real efforts to tackle corruption, malpractice and unnecessary waste, but we must not forget the rights of developing states as sovereign nations. A solution to this is the creation of national debt relief committees such as those set up in Tanzania and Uganda, which allow the people of heavily indebted poor countries to hold their own Governments to account and to serve to strengthen national democracy. Work by Christian Aid in this area has shown that the demand for accountability already exists in developing countries.

We must also accept our own responsibility in the drive to ensure that development aid and cancelled debt revenue reach those who are most in need. Efforts made in clamping down on terrorists' assets should be extended to those who siphon off Government funds for their own benefit. Good governance is a must if developing nations are to have a chance of recovering from their parlous predicament, the origins of which can be traced back to the 1970s. We must, however, make the distinction between anti-corruption drives, which are essential, and disagreements over economic policy. Corruption is global and not solely the preserve of developing nations. It should not be used to veto or delay help that is already long overdue.

International institutions such as the International Monetary Fund and the World Bank are not a substitute for the voice of the people. They were not elected by the citizens of heavily indebted poor countries and they must accept that they lack the democratic legitimacy of elected Assemblies. A recent World Development Movement report highlighted the IMF's demand that Zambia privatise its state bank despite a vote in Parliament against such a policy. The decision taken by Zambia's Parliament was not simply a knee-jerk reaction, but a response to a 10-year process of privatisation at the behest of the IMF. In the same period, there has been negative economic growth, a rise in foreign ownership of capital and a fall in living standards. I am not suggesting that the IMF is responsible for that state of affairs, but it is absurd that Zambia was asked to take the same medicine over and over again without being allowed to look for an alternative cure.

The Zambian Government were explicitly threatened with the withdrawal of HIPC-prescribed debt relief if they abided by the decision of the nationally elected Assembly. Cases such as this fuel charges that the west is continuing a policy of neo-colonialism through institutions that it can dominate. The export of free-market ideology has not been kind to many impoverished countries, and we must learn that first-world economies do not always provide the solution for developing-world economies.

I call on the Chancellor and the Secretary of State for International Development to use their positions in the IMF and the World Bank to work towards policies tailored to specific countries and to end this one-size-fits-all approach, which has been shown seriously to damage fledgling economies. That would be an important step in addressing some problems that I have already mentioned regarding international monetary institutions.

Changes must ensure that the distinction is made between debts incurred through criminal and irresponsible activity and debt that a country should be required to pay back. In the future, there should be an administrative bankruptcy procedure for nations that cannot repay all their debt.

Finally, a shift in emphasis from a structural macro-economic policy to a focus on outcomes linked to the millennium development goals would ensure that debt relief achieved what it is intended to achieve, rather than acting as an accompaniment to economic ideology.

The much-vaunted success of the Asian tiger economies was based partly on protectionism and partly on state subsidy. Some leeway must be granted in heavily indebted poor countries to protect their firms and producers from international markets. Only yesterday, an article on the BBC's website highlighted

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the problems of international markets facing Mexican maize farmers in the state of Oaxaca. Their low-intensity farming methods do not allow them to compete with heavily subsidised US competitors, and they are forced either to adopt unsustainable practices or to face extinction. Mexico is not classed as a heavily indebted poor country, but that does not mean that it is not home to areas of extreme poverty.

The focus of today's debate is debt relief, but again it is important to note that debt relief alone will not solve the problems of a developing world or achieve the millennium development goals. We must adopt an holistic approach that combines fair trade policies with increasing aid alongside the reformed HIPC scheme.

At this point, perhaps we should consider the impact of the common agricultural policy on developing countries; the damage that it can do has been well established. However, although changes to the policy do not go far or fast enough, they are going in the right direction. When the CAP was established, it was based on intervention and subsidies. Heavily subsidised produce was exported to the world market, driving down world prices even more, which was very disruptive and damaging to developing countries.

In 1990, we moved on to the MacSharry reforms, which involved direct payments to farmers. Now we have come to the mid-term review: the emphasis is not on extending production in Britain or Europe, but on reinvigorating rural development and environmental practices in the countryside. We should compare that with what happens in America, where considerable and increasing subsidies are paid to promote production. That continues to have deleterious effects on developing countries. The European Union's common agricultural policy is not perfect by any means, but it is moving in the right direction and we should ensure that that progress goes on and increasingly meets the needs of developing countries.

The first steps of debt relief have been made, but we must ensure that our commitment is long term and that the early momentum is not lost. I welcome the Chancellor's pledge to meet 10 per cent. of the costs needed for the World Bank and the African Development Bank to cancel multilateral debts. That will ensure that those institutions' resources can be used to fund future projects in the developing world. It is important that debt relief should not be used to substitute for existing Government aid programmes. The Liberal Democrats also support the proposal for the creation of an international finance facility. If that were created and all the signatories contributed, the IFF could play an important role in increasing development aid to the world's poorest nations. It is estimated that the extra $50 million a year needed to achieve the development goals could be raised through the issue of bonds funded by long-term commitments from developed nations.

The Chancellor has referred to that as his Marshall plan for the third world. The ambition of such a project is commendable, but the Chancellor's metaphor highlights another reason for supporting developing nations. The 1948 Marshall plan was an investment in war-torn countries against the perceived threat of the Soviet Union. Today, we must again invest to ensure that there is prosperity and economic development throughout the world. Poverty breeds resentment and frustration with the status quo. The best way to address radical discontent is to take away the conditions in which it thrives. Ignorance, despair and alienation can be countered with education, health care and opportunity. Government-backed bonds are a real investment for the rest of the world. A more stable global environment would be one of the rewards, but there would also be increased opportunities for trade for British companies.

That view is shared by hon. Members in all parties. I welcome the comment made last week by the hon. Member for Mid-Bedfordshire (Mr. Sayeed):

> "When will the EU and the US understand that the richer the world is, the more people are able to afford the goods and services that we produce? Is not it common sense, and in our common interest, to end policies that make the poorest poorer?"—[*Official Report*, 10 November 2004; Vol. 426, c. 833.]

I could not agree more.

We have a moral duty to the people of developing countries to build on what has already been achieved on debt relief. We also have a duty to our own country to ensure that the global economy and international security are as favourable and as sound as possible. Both goals could be advanced by the Government in the next year.

It is vital that the burden of both multilateral and bilateral debt is removed from heavily indebted poor countries, that progress is made on the reform of monetary institutions and that the promise of the IFF is turned into real commitment from the G8, without which it will lack the capacity to make a real difference. I welcome the Government's work in this area and urge the Prime Minister to underline this achievement in Perthshire next summer.

If we expect other nations to follow, we must lead by example. We have done so in the past, and we should remind the other seven G8 nations of that next July. I almost feel like breaking into song and making a contribution to Sunday's re-recording of "Do They Know it's Christmas?", but I am sure that you would rule me out of order, Mr. Deputy Speaker, and that every hon. Member present would leave the Chamber on hearing my voice.

My final message to the Minister is this: 2005 is an important year—make it the year in which we pronounce the death sentence on debt for developing countries and make sure that Britain executes that sentence.

2.25 pm

Mr. Andy Reed (Loughborough) (Lab/Co-op): I congratulate the hon. Member for Brecon and Radnorshire (Mr. Williams) on introducing the debate, which is important because it might be a little too late to drive home the agenda by the time we get to 2005.

It is important to recognise that although the half an hour of Prime Minister's Question Time is all that people generally see of our proceedings, many issues such as this, and others on which I share an interest with the hon. Gentleman, enjoy a great deal of cross-party support. Indeed, that is one of the great joys that most of us get from being in the House. When the Minister sets out the progress that he wishes to make, I am sure he will know that he has almost the entire House behind him.

I am also grateful to the hon. Gentleman for mentioning the all-party group on heavily indebted poor countries. I am the group's secretary, and I just wish that we had a snappier title. When the Jubilee 2000 campaign was set up, the whole of civil society—the non-governmental organisations, Churches, trade unions and others—began working with Members of Parliament. Jubilee 2000 was a nice, snappy title, so being the secretary was much easier. However, the words behind the acronym HIPC probably sum up not only the issue, but the difficulties that we all face.

It is ironic that the Band Aid event is this week, because the very same issue got me involved in politics 20 years ago. Like many others, I was moved by seeing the plight of people in Ethiopia, and we felt that we had to do something. Perhaps I was a naïve teenager, but I did not think it was enough to write to my local Member of Parliament—it was the right hon. Member for Charnwood (Mr. Dorrell), who is still in the House—and I got sucked into politics. Such issues have been my driving force during the past 20 years and during my time in this place.

One of my most moving experiences in this place was meeting Sir Bob Geldof recently. He told us exactly what we still need to do. We use a different language here, but Bob puts it right on the record, and there is no shirking our responsibility to sort this out. Just a few weeks ago, he showed us pictures of the situation in north and central Africa, including pictures of pot-bellied children. He said quite pointedly that, in one sense, their problem is not food, but the politics that prevent food or water from getting to them. We live in a world that can feed itself, but we are still unable to achieve that, so it is down to us to put structures in place to ensure that we can.

Mr. David Drew (Stroud) (Lab/Co-op): I, too, compliment the hon. Member for Brecon and Radnorshire (Mr. Williams) on introducing the debate.

I am sure that my hon. Friend the Member for Loughborough (Mr. Reed) agrees, but is it still valid to suggest that, as well as debt relief, we must bring peace to the various conflicts in Africa? One way of doing that is to ensure that the developed world pays for peacekeeping directly or, as in the case of Darfur, through the African Union. However, anyone who saw Hilary Andersson's "Panorama" report on Monday will understand the dilemmas of a force that is too small trying to deal with an enormous problem. We must address that issue urgently.

Mr. Reed: I am grateful for that intervention. I know that my hon. Friend has visited Sudan at least once, and probably twice, and that he knows the situation well.

That brings me to an issue that I want to develop a little. As secretary of the all-party HIPC group, I recognise that we need a multi-faceted attack. We need the trade justice movement, and many countries, including our own, to increase the aid that they provide. Last night, during the Prime Minister's speech at the Guildhall, I was interested to hear about a modernised United Nations playing an increasing role. That is the means that we must all use to make our contribution.

However, we are talking specifically about the debt part of the campaign, and, as the hon. Member for Brecon and Radnorshire mentioned, the 150 or so NGOs that have come together under the Make Poverty History in 2005 banner recognise that that is only one part of it. Nevertheless, it is crucial, because the matter has become very technical.

I recall from 2000 that the campaign set itself a very tight deadline—it was going to disband after 2000. Jubilee 2000 did its campaign work and disbanded, and there was a general sense that we had achieved a great deal. The headlines were good. The $100 billion of debt relief had been announced and it felt as if individually we had made an enormous contribution. However, part of the problem is that although the campaign did not disappear, because the same people are still campaigning, the mass movement disappeared, thinking that we had achieved a great deal.

The reality is that for many countries the HIPC initiative has not meant a great deal because of its complexities. Of the $100 billion that is always talked about, I think that only $29 billion has so far been delivered, because of the complexity of getting to the decision point and the completion point. Some $24 billion is still to be achieved, which I think will probably happen in the short to medium term, but in the long term we are still left well short of the $100 billion that was offered.

I must congratulate this Government, as I am sure most hon. Members will, as we and Canada have taken a lead on the issue and the agenda. People such as those who were at Birmingham a few years ago should be referred to at this point. As the hon. Member for Brecon and Radnorshire said, the G8 used to be a self-congratulatory club of the leading economies in which issues such as this were not even discussed. I hope and understand that, fortunately, it will now be top of the agenda for the duration of the presidency next year. The fact that the issue is up there, that there is a Commission for Africa and that other things are going on shows that we have made progress.

The reality is that the vast majority of the complexity and the difficulties are caused at World Bank and IMF level. Most bilateral debts with the G7 and G8 countries have been written off, but this is a question of trying to get into the complexity of how the World Bank and IMF operate. It is at that level that we need to work more closely together to ensure that the multilateral debts are written off.

I am sure that most hon. Members who are present will have visited many countries that have benefited. If not, I am sure that they have seen other programmes. I know from my brief experience in Ethiopia last year that the sustainability is not that wonderful, even when the country has reached decision point. The collapse of coffee and other prices last year and the year before had an enormous impact on local economies. Even though Ethiopia was one of those countries at the forefront of its debt relief, the benefit felt by its ordinary citizens was fairly minimal because of the collapse of coffee prices. That is why, on its own, debt relief is not enough; it must be tied in with the Trade Justice Movement and aid. What we saw in Ethiopia was a clear example of that.

I visited a fair trade coffee grower and the difference in the amount of money that that individual farmer received compared with that received by one who was selling coffee and goods direct to the market was enormous; they were probably receiving about three or four times more. Sometimes we pay exactly the same price, but 10p or 15p

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more gives an enormous benefit to an individual farmer. That shows that even if we cannot change the world overnight, at least we can make the world better, one cup of coffee at a time. I often say that to people when they feel daunted by the prospects of trying to deal with the HIPC initiative.

We have good organisations in Loughborough—Christian Aid and others—that work closely together in the constituency. They often have lunches, for example. Sometimes it is difficult to get over the complexity of the decision-making process, but it is possible for individuals to start to make a small difference, one cup of coffee at a time.

A number of organisations have been lobbying quite heavily on the issue, such as Oxfam and others. They produced a paper in October entitled "Fools gold", which puts the case for 100 per cent. multilateral debt cancellation for the poorest countries. I will briefly raise a number of points from it in the hope that the Minister will respond to them.

As the hon. Member for Brecon and Radnorshire will know, there has always been debate on which countries should and should not fit the HIPC definition. We often talk about the 42 countries, but, using different definitions, some feel that there should be slightly fewer and others that there should be slightly more. I would be interested to hear what the Minister has to say about the other low-income countries that would need additional resources through debt relief and aid to reach their millennium development goals.

The other point is that debt relief should not be financed through the existing aid budgets. I seek an assurance from the Minister that that is so in the case of the UK and also through the IMF. Debt relief should not be confined to the HIPCs; it should be extended to other countries, where possible.

As my hon. Friend the Member for Stroud (Mr. Drew) said, it is difficult to get to the decision and completion points in countries where there is conflict, but I hope that we can find other ways to ensure that debt relief, or its equivalent, gets through to the most vulnerable people. Things are particularly bad in war-torn countries or where there is conflict, so we need to find ways of ensuring that it gets through in those places. I am not sure that we have a complete answer on that.

Oxfam also suggests that we need to move things forward in countries with the greatest human development needs. That term also relates to places that suffer from conflict and deprivation.

Finally, there must be a fair, transparent and comprehensive international insolvency process. This is an interesting idea. Some proposals that get floated have little support at the beginning, such as the Chancellor's international finance facility. Support for that, however, is gaining momentum not only in this country—I am glad to hear that the Liberal Democrats are supporting it, and I believe that the official Opposition do, too—but internationally, as 40 or 42 countries have already signed up in principle.

I asked a question about that recently. I want to know how far those countries have gone towards promising to reach the $100 billion a year that is needed. I also want to know what time scale we are working towards in getting the IFF up and running. There are already some pilot projects, but at what stage do we say that we have completely achieved our aim and which countries have promised real money rather than letters of intent and good wishes?

So far, the picture has been mixed. There was a strong sense of purpose among those involved in the non-governmental organisations, the Church groups and civil society who put this matter at the heart of the agenda in 2000. We also congratulate the Government on what they have achieved with international partners to take things forward, but the devil is in the detail with HIPC. Things have not worked as well as they should have because of complexities and difficulties and because of the restrictions that the IMF and the World Bank have put on some programmes.

Uganda is often cited as the best example of debt relief working well. I spoke about this to the Ugandan high commissioner only a couple of weeks ago: where debt relief is directly related to Uganda's primary school building programme, it is possible to see in human terms what debt relief is all about. It is a great joy to see that, instead of the piles of documents, which each of us has seen, on the complexities of the HIPC arrangements.

I know that this is a complicated world, but let us try to look at these matters from the point of view of the person receiving the benefit upwards, rather than downwards from the perspective of the bankers, the IMF and the World Bank. We should simplify the process and get aid through by sustainable debt relief in the long term. We should use the momentum that we have to ensure that we make progress on this matter, so that we do not return to it in 20 years and say, "More could be done." I will not be around then, and I am sure Sir Bob Geldof hopes that he will not have to make another Band Aid record.

2.38 pm

Tom Brake (Carshalton and Wallington) (LD): I congratulate my hon. Friend the Member for Brecon and Radnorshire (Mr. Williams) on securing the debate. His timing is excellent. The United Kingdom's presidency of the G8 starts on 1 January. The Government's thinking about what they want to prioritise during their presidency must therefore almost be set in stone by now, so I hope that the Minister will be able to set out in detail what the UK will seek to achieve in international development terms.

I welcome the Minister's presence, and I also want to thank another member of the Government for his interest in and commitment to resolving the global debt crisis. I refer to the Chancellor, who has given support to innovative thinking on how to build the political will for large-scale debt forgiveness in the form of the international finance facility. That represents the most sustained engagement of a national Finance Minister globally. That must be welcomed.

As my hon. Friend said, the Liberal Democrats support the Government's efforts on the IFF, among other things. We welcome the Chancellor's announcement—technically it is a re-announcement—that the UK will commit up to £100 million a year to write off its share of the debt owed to the World Bank by up to 30 of the world's poorest countries.

The IFF comes with a health warning, to which I referred in Department for International Development questions last week. I understand that France and possibly Canada are supporters of the initiative, along with a number of other countries that might expect to benefit from the IFF. Unfortunately, as far as I am aware, the world's main player, the United States, remains opposed. I hope that the Prime Minister had an opportunity to raise the issue during his recent meeting with President Bush, and to encourage the US to express greater support for the initiative. Without the commitment of the US, the IFF will find it difficult to raise the significant additional sums that will be required to ensure that the millennium development goals are met.

We welcome the momentum that was built up at the October meeting of the IMF, the World Bank and the G7 Finance Ministers in Washington. At the end of that meeting, the Chancellor spoke of a growing consensus around 100 per cent. debt reduction. However, we need to monitor closely the development of that consensus. For example, in the weeks before the meetings to which the Chancellor was referring, the US Government floated for the first time a proposal to cancel 100 per cent. of the debts for up to 42 countries in the HIPC initiative. However, the US proposal envisaged a reduction in aid budgets in order to fund debt cancellation, so it did not include any new resources for poor countries.

I am sure that that way of financing debt reduction would not be acceptable to the UK Government. Again, there may have been an opportunity for the Prime Minister to raise the issues with the President, and I hope that the Minister will tell us whether any such discussions took place. Debt cancellation cannot replace aid. In fact, the cancellation of debt must be combined with more and better financial assistance for development so that poor countries can secure a sustainable exit from debt.

That is just one of the aspects of the debt cancellation agenda that needs to be monitored closely. The nature and shape of how we go about cancelling debt will be critical to our capacity to contribute to alleviating global inequality, so in addition to securing top-line political commitment, we need to ensure that that commitment translates into effective, sustainable and pro-poor policy and practice.

A number of other features will be critical to effective debt cancellation. First, debt cancellation must be pursued by fair and transparent means. The task of calculating how much debt should be cancelled must no longer be left to creditors concerned mainly with minimising their own costs. Instead, we need a fair and transparent international process to ensure that human needs take priority over debt repayments. Of course, that will be less critical if the international community adopts a policy of 100 per cent. debt cancellation, but even then, we will need to agree the criteria according to which countries will be included in the scheme. The debt sustainability ratio that is currently used is not sufficient, as my hon. Friend pointed out.

According to the World Bank and IMF, to which the G8 has effectively delegated the operation of the current HIPC initiative, a poor country's debts are sustainable provided that the ratio of the total debt relative to annual export earnings does not exceed 150 per cent. That is the target for which the bank and the fund aim when assessing how much multilateral debt can be written off, taking into account the bilateral debt cancellation promised by sovereign creditors such as the UK. It is clear, however, that even by that very narrow financial definition, at least 16 of the countries currently in the HIPC initiative will still have spiralling and unsustainable debt burdens after receiving all the relief currently available.

Most importantly, if even the most basic development targets, such as the internationally agreed 2015 millennium development goals, are to be met, no debt repayments can be sustained, given that poor countries desperately lack the resources that they need to meet those goals. In fact, it would make more sense to link debt to the achievement of the millennium development goals than to the ratio currently used. Furthermore, it will make no sense at all and will not be fair to poor countries, if they are still required after having received all the assistance possible under HIPC to service debts to the rich world at the expense of vital expenditure on basic services such as health and education.

The second of the two issues associated with debt cancellation that needs to be monitored is conditionality. International institutions such as the IMF and the World Bank must stop asking poor countries to jump through hoops in order to qualify for debt relief. For instance, poor countries should no longer have to privatise basic services as a condition for getting the debt relief that they so desperately need. By agreeing to cancel their share of multilateral debt and taking a lead on the issue generally, the UK Government have played an important part in breaking the logjam that has prevented international progress on debt cancellation. The next step is to sustain that commitment and for the UK to convince its global peers to follow suit and ensure that the way in which debt is cancelled is the most effective in tackling poverty and delivering on the millennium development goals. It is a commitment to meeting the goals that should be driving us.

As we all know, in 2000, the international community committed itself to meeting eight goals by 2015. They ranged from halving extreme poverty and hunger to securing universal primary education and from reducing gender disparities to reversing the spread of AIDS. These are eight crucial goals that provide the framework for our efforts to cancel debt and increase aid, and around which we desperately need to generate an increased sense of urgency and importance.

We should be looking not to 2015, but to 2005, which is a crucial year for the fight against poverty—a year of challenge and opportunity. In September next year, the international community will return to New York to review its progress in meeting the millennium development goals. I hope that the Minister will say how he expects the Commission for Africa's work to feed into that process and what organisation at the conference he expects to ensure that any recommendations made by the commission are followed through. At that meeting, we will clearly need to consider whether we are on target for 2015.

However, 2005 is the first date of importance, because the gender equity target is due for that year. As I have mentioned in other debates, my visit to Ghana has led

[Tom Brake]

me to think that there is no prospect whatever that it will meet the gender equity target. That is true not only of Ghana, as 60 per cent. of developing countries are unlikely to meet that target on present trends, and one has to doubt whether they will be in line to meet it by 2015. That is clearly a bad start, and it is shameful that there has not been a public uprising to respond and to tackle the issue.

Primary enrolments are going up in developing countries, but more than 100 million children did not go to school this morning. Many hon. Members participated in the event on those matters a couple of months ago. Our education goals require 80 million more primary school places in Africa alone over the coming decade. At the current rate of progress, more than 70 countries will fail to achieve universal primary education by the target date. In sub-Saharan Africa, we will not achieve what we have committed ourselves to achieve by 2015 until 2129 at the earliest. That is a very long way off. At our current rate of progress, as I am sure the Minister knows, we will fail to meet the agreed targets for all the other goals.

Next year's conference to review the millennium development goals will occur in September, when the UK will preside over two of the world's most important multilateral forums—the G8 and the European Union. As my hon. Friend the Member for Brecon and Radnorshire said, CAP reform must feature significantly in the UK's presidency of the EU, as that can deliver substantial improvements to quality of life and well-being in developing countries. Next year presents an exceptional series of opportunities for the UK to take the lead in facilitating international action to cancel poor country debt, and to revitalise commitment and action on meeting the MDGs.

Delivering on those goals does not require a wonder cure or a technological breakthrough; it requires political will. The Liberal Democrats believe that the MDGs can be met and that the UK can play a bigger and more effective part in working for a better world. The Government have demonstrated their commitment by advancing solutions to the global debt crisis, but as hon. Members have said, resolving the challenge of developing country debt, important as it is, will not in itself be enough.

The Liberal Democrats believe that the Government need to use the unparalleled opportunity that they have been granted for international influence in 2005 to secure commitments to more and better development assistance and trade reform. We also have some ideas for UK-led international action, using the G8 and the EU, on HIV/AIDS, arms control, the environment and increasing corporate responsibility. We will return to those issues in the next couple of weeks.

Decades of effort to tackle global inequality remind us of the interrelatedness of the challenges that the developing world faces. As a result, we need comprehensive approaches that address the problems from a range of angles. Cancelling developing country debt is a crucial part of that comprehensive plan. As a result, the Liberal Democrats will support the Government's stated efforts to cancel debt and will encourage other players in the international community to do so, too. We will monitor closely the progress and outcomes of the Government's efforts. Finally, we will look for the same effort from the Government on the other challenges related to global poverty—now, in 2005, and beyond.

2.52 pm

Mr. Alan Duncan (Rutland and Melton) (Con): I thank the hon. Member for Brecon and Radnorshire (Mr. Williams) for initiating this debate. It is timely, because 2005 promises to be the year when the poor of the world find out whether the Prime Minister's bold words are matched by action. In April, the Commission for Africa will publish its report. In July, the UK will host the G8 summit in Scotland and begin its six-month presidency of the European Union. In September, a special UN summit will meet to review progress towards the 2015 millennium development goals. If we are serious about meeting those goals, then at Gleneagles next year Britain must take the lead in pressing for better aid, freer and fairer trade and faster and deeper debt relief.

Britain possesses a unique ability to facilitate action through a number of international organisations. We are the only country that is a member of the G8, the EU, the Commonwealth and the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development, as well as a permanent member of the UN Security Council and a major player in the voting councils of the International Monetary Fund and the World Bank. In the past, we have used that unique position to set the international agenda on development issues. Next year, we have the opportunity again to show global leadership in pressing for action on multilateral debt relief and for freer and fairer trade.

As the hon. Member for Loughborough (Mr. Reed) said, July 2005 also marks the 20th anniversary of Live Aid. That astonishing event raised £30 million for famine victims in Ethiopia and demonstrated yet again the remarkable generosity of the British people, but every year since 1985, Ethiopia has sent back to rich countries more than twice that amount in debt repayments.

Every year, the countries of sub-Saharan Africa—the world's poorest region—spend more than £7 billion on debt repayments. Despite the progress that has been made, many countries are still spending more each year on debt service than on health care and education. Clearly, the current debt relief process needs radical reform. The G8 summit next year provides us with the opportunity to secure an international commitment to achieve that reform. As U2's Bono has said,

> "2005 is our chance to go down in history for what we did do, rather than what we didn't do."

Britain has an excellent record on debt relief. In government, the Conservative party cancelled £1.2 billion of debt owed by the world's poorest countries. It was a Conservative Chancellor, Nigel Lawson, who initiated the first round of bilateral debt relief in 1988, and three years later, John Major led the international community in securing agreement for deeper and more comprehensive debt reduction.

My right hon. and learned Friend the Member for Rushcliffe (Mr. Clarke) was a great champion of debt relief long before it became a high-profile public issue. In 1996, he played a key role in establishing the heavily indebted poor countries initiative, which began the process of cancelling debt owed to multilateral institutions. Even the right hon. Member for Birmingham, Ladywood (Clare Short) said:

> "There is no doubt that the previous Conservative Government took a strong position on debt relief."

We are grateful for her recognition of that.

We have continued that record in opposition. We backed Jubilee 2000, which successfully mobilised many organisations and individuals, including all the Churches of the United Kingdom, to campaign for debt relief. Where Labour has built on the previous Conservative Government's strong record by continuing and, I am happy to say, intensifying debt cancellation, we have been and will remain supportive. We certainly welcome the Chancellor's decision to cancel the bilateral debts of the poorest countries, but there is still much to be done on debt owed to international institutions such as the IMF and the World Bank.

The enhanced HIPC initiative has made a good start in delivering multilateral debt relief. By and large, it has succeeded in ensuring that the money that is released is put to good use and does not line the pockets of corrupt dictators and arms dealers. Well managed debt relief has produced a number of success stories. Uganda used the money to double primary school enrolment and invest in a successful HIV/AIDS plan. Mozambique's debt relief has enabled its Government to immunise 500,000 children, and Benin eliminated school fees in rural areas, allowing thousands of children to attend classes for the first time.

The slow and cumbersome structures of the HIPC initiative do not, however, reflect the urgent need for faster, wider and deeper debt cancellation. Even after getting full relief under the scheme, many countries will still have difficulties in servicing their debts. In the face of a growing HIV/AIDS crisis, we cannot allow red tape and bureaucratic inertia to cost lives. Some much-needed reforms have been made. The two-year extension of the HIPC initiative announced at the 2004 Sea Island summit will potentially allow a further 10 eligible countries to benefit from relief. Additional top-up relief will help countries that have been hit by deteriorating terms of trade.

The debate will turn to whether we should go much further and match the 100 per cent. bilateral cancellation already pledged with 100 per cent. multilateral cancellation for the poorest countries. The plan that the Government announced two months ago proposes just such a radical widening of the HIPC initiative. The Government must champion that plan in the strongest of terms. We cannot afford to miss next year's golden opportunity to generate an international consensus in favour of extending multilateral relief for the poorest countries.

Any relief on debts owed to the IMF should be funded, as the Government have suggested, by the sale or revaluation of IMF gold reserves. New funding commitments would be required to secure 100 per cent. cancellation in the case of debt owed to multilateral institutions, such as the World Bank and the African Development Bank. We are pleased that the Government are pledging to pay our share of the debt service owed to those institutions on behalf of eligible countries. They must now also be forceful in securing similar commitments from the other G8 countries.

At the same time as pressing for more relief, we must take the long view, and work towards achieving ongoing debt sustainability for poor countries. We must ensure that no country slips back into heavy indebtedness after receiving relief. We must also ensure that lending is more responsible than it has been in the past. Our Export Credits Guarantee Department has pledged to ensure that its credit is not misspent. Next year, we must push other countries to make similar commitments.

Next year will be crucial for shaping the path of debt relief for years to come. We also know, however, that it will be only a first step towards achieving the millennium development goals. People of poor countries possess the energy and dynamism to create wealth and work themselves out of poverty, but that potential is stifled by western protectionism in too many cases. Countries that secure good governance, pursue sound macro-economic policies and respect property rights should not be penalised by the protectionist approach of the common agricultural policy.

It is perverse to give poor countries aid and grant them debt relief, but impose restrictions on their produce. Most HIPCs depend on single commodity exports such as gold, copper, cotton, coffee and tobacco. Falling agricultural commodity prices have damaged the ability of almost all HIPCs to earn foreign currency and repay their debt. Reform of international rules to promote free trade and open markets would allow them to increase their proportion of world trade and help them to repay their debts. As well as being good news for British consumers, better access to western markets could be worth tens of billions of pounds for some of the poorest countries. Reform of the CAP could save the British taxpayer up to £3 billion each year. Next year, we should look beyond debt and the G8 meeting. Britain must use its EU presidency to push for a reduction in European tariff barriers, thorough reform of the CAP and a more efficient, poverty-focused European aid budget.

In Iraq, we have recognised the principle that the victims of murderous dictators who rack up huge debts should not be made to pay for their oppressors' follies. That principle should be extended to the countries of Africa. The sins and mistakes of the past should not be allowed to blight the future of an entire continent. Where stable civilian Governments have replaced military regimes, generous and carefully monitored debt relief should be forthcoming. Where people attempt to work and trade their way out of poverty, they should be allowed fair access to our markets. While the Governments of other developed nations drag their feet, Britain must push firmly for action.

The decisions on debt and trade that will be taken next year in the luxurious surroundings of the Gleneagles hotel will affect the lives of millions of the poorest people on the planet. For their sakes, we must make sure that we take the right decisions.

3.2 pm

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for International Development (Mr. Gareth Thomas): I, too, congratulate the hon. Member for Brecon and Radnorshire (Mr. Williams) on securing the debate, and I join him in congratulating the all-party group on

[Mr. Gareth Thomas]

heavily indebted poor countries on its campaigning work in the House on these topics. I welcome his decision to congratulate, rather than ape, Bob Geldof, Fran Healy and others, who have produced the new Live Aid single. I am sure that he, too, will welcome the decision of the Chancellor of the Exchequer to give back the moneys from VAT. I take this opportunity to congratulate Woolworths, which has, I believe, decided not to charge its usual levy for distributing the single. I hope that other distributors follow its example.

We know that one in five of the world's poor lives in abject poverty. We know also that roughly 1 billion people do not have consistent access to clean water and do not have the resources either to afford essential medicines that we take for granted, or, as the hon. Member for Carshalton and Wallington (Tom Brake) said, to send their children to school. Furthermore, some 6 million people die from AIDS, TB and malaria every year.

Those statistics are appalling, but nothing helps one to understand the impact of those epidemics quite like seeing it on the ground. It was sobering for me to see the project supported by Christian Aid and the South African Council of Churches in the Dukathole township in Germiston, just outside Johannesburg, in which a small group of remarkable women supports orphans and people dying of AIDS and TB, as well as those—often grandmothers—who look after the orphans and make sure that they go to school. Those women do a remarkable job.

We know that development assistance works. Kenya, for example, has taken the decision to abolish school fees. The UK has provided £10 million to help to pay for extra school places and to provide proper accommodation for the extra 1 million children who now want to come to school to learn to read and write—who want their opportunity to understand the world.

Another instance of development assistance working is the eradication of polio. The number of countries infected with polio has decreased from 125 to six. We are within sight of the fantastic achievement of the eradication of polio. Perhaps that will be achieved as early as the end of 2006, if we can continue not only the development assistance but the targeted effort to eliminate polio—to get the polio vaccine to the most affected areas and continue to bear down on the epidemic.

I saw for myself, on a visit to India, how the development assistance money for targeting polio is being spent. I pay tribute to the work of the Government of India, but also to Rotary International, which supports that work. I am sure that the House will be pleased to know that three children in a slum in east Delhi were inoculated against polio thanks to my efforts. I am not sure who was most terrified—the children, who screamed all the time while I was trying to administer the inoculations; the supervisors, who were with me; or the mothers. On balance, it was probably the mothers. The work is making a huge difference and we are in sight of the eradication of polio.

Hon. Members have spoken of the huge scale of the challenge of eliminating global poverty, which places on the developed world a moral responsibility to do more to that end. It is in our self-interest to act to eliminate poverty, because disease, political instability and pollution do not stop at national borders. What happens in developing countries has an impact on the UK and other rich countries.

The hon. Member for Brecon and Radnorshire was right to secure the debate and highlight the fact that next year, as Britain takes the G8 presidency, and in the second half of the year, when it takes the presidency of the European Union, we shall have an opportunity to move the agenda forward. Before we take on the presidency of those organisations, the Commission for Africa will report in the spring, while in September the UN millennium declaration review takes place.

My right hon. Friend the Prime Minister created the Commission for Africa, demonstrating his personal commitment to look for solutions to its problems. That commission is bringing together leaders from the developed and developing worlds—Africa and other continents—and from civil society, as well as business representatives and Church leaders. The task of the commission is to try to understand why more progress has not been made in Africa and what can be done to move things forward. The commission intends to bring forward a comprehensive plan for the international community to support African development. Its report will be published early in 2005 and will be presented to the G8 for discussion at the Gleneagles summit in early July.

The millennium summit in 2005, reviewing progress towards the millennium development goals, is another key point. At the current rate of progress some of those goals will not be met until 2165—150 years too late. That summit is the opportunity not only to review progress, but to accelerate the political momentum and the political will that are needed to make further progress.

Professor Jeffrey Sachs will publish the findings of the UN's millennium project next year. It is already clear that the international community will have to provide more financial assistance if we are to get back on track to achieve the millennium development goals by 2015. Next year will provide the international community with an important agenda, which could be set by the United Kingdom, to achieve real change for the world's poorest people.

We know that more aid needs to be provided and that there must be a dramatic increase in assistance. If we are to achieve the millennium development goals, the World Bank and the UN have estimated that $100 billion will be needed each year over the next 11 years. However, only $50 billion is being provided at present. One of the things that the UK has already done to demonstrate leadership on the issue is to give the Department for International Development its largest ever increase in spend—9 per cent. each year over the next three years. If we continue to make progress at that rate, we shall hit the UN's 0.7 per cent. target by 2013.

Tom Brake: The UK's contribution is clearly significant, but it is only a small percentage of the total budget. The Minister may be about to refer to this, but what feedback are we receiving from the Americans on the role that they might be willing to play?

Mr. Thomas: I am grateful to the hon. Gentleman for leading me into my next remarks. We need to give credit where it is due and to recognise that the Americans have significantly increased their assistance, especially on AIDS. We must give credit to President Bush, in particular, for his lead in respect of increasing funding to the global fund and for other AIDS-related work.

The other specific point that I want to flag up in the context of the need for more aid, to which the hon. Member for Brecon and Radnorshire alluded, is the international finance facility. It is the most developed idea for raising the additional finance necessary to meet the millennium development goals. He may know that the Global Alliance for Vaccines and Immunisation—GAVI—has approached the United Kingdom to explore whether the IFF's front-loading principles might be applied to GAVI to increase the resources available for child vaccination and immunisation. We are collaborating with the French and the Gates Foundation to take that initiative forward. We hope to launch that mini-IFF in the early part of next year and I hope that it will serve to provide additional political momentum for making the case for a global version of the IFF.

The hon. Member for Rutland and Melton (Mr. Duncan) made particular reference to the need to make progress on trade. That is absolutely right, but one outcome that would show that the international community recognised the serious situation of Africa is securing a positive outcome at the World Trade Organisation ministerial meeting in Hong Kong in December. It is true that, in the past 10 years, despite rapid growth in world trade, Africa's share of world trade has halved. We accept that more progress needs to be made on this issue. Studies have shown that, if we can achieve an ambitious outcome from the WTO talks, it will produce an annual global benefit of between $250 billion and $600 billion, lifting huge numbers of people out of poverty.

The framework agreement that was reached in August this year offers encouragement that a deal is possible next year. We shall use the opportunities of the G8 and the European Union presidency to make advances and build further political momentum to make the progress that we know is necessary.

Next year we hope to focus on improving the effectiveness of the aid effort, which can be hampered when donors do not work together in developing countries. We will be focusing on better harmonisation and co-ordination of the international aid effort. A high-level forum in Paris next March will provide another important opportunity to advance the case for and the practice of development assistance.

As my right hon. Friend the Prime Minister has said, having the G8 presidency gives us the opportunity to renew the international commitment to making progress on two key issues: Africa and climate change. The G8 is required to report progress on Africa against the commitments in the Africa action plan in 2005. We will use that and the Commission for Africa report to identify gaps in international policy and push for future commitments, including actions to boost aid for Africa through debt relief and more resources elsewhere.

We believe strongly that more needs to be done on debt—I agree with the hon. Member for Brecon and Radnorshire—because we need to ensure that no country is hindered by the burden of unsustainable debt, which we know is already experienced by many countries, in respect of making progress towards the millennium development goals.

As a number of hon. Members have said, the Government have been at the forefront of promoting further progress on debt relief. We continue to press for the full financing and implementation of the HIPC initiative, which is delivering real benefits to some of the world's poorest countries. The hon. Member for Rutland and Melton mentioned a number of them, but a further example is perhaps worth bearing in mind—that of Ghana, which, because of the debt relief that it has secured, has been able to allocate more funding for health services, including exempting pregnant women from paying charges, and to generate more investment in schools, roads and water.

Some $70 billion of debt relief is being provided under the HIPC initiative to some 27 countries, helping to increase social expenditures by some $4 billion since 1999. We want more progress on the HIPC initiative, and I am sure that hon. Members will be pleased to know that it is being extended for two years to allow a further 10 countries, potentially, to benefit from it.

Mr. Williams: The hon. Gentleman makes the case for extending debt relief, but surely that depends on the success of the IFF. Indeed, the hon. Member for Loughborough (Mr. Reed) asked how many countries have gone beyond signing-up to the IFF by making the financial contributions required to achieve the outcomes.

Mr. Thomas: The two initiatives are separate but interconnected. We want more progress on debt relief and support for the IFF at the same time, so we continue to argue the case for the two to go hand in hand. The hon. Member for Carshalton and Wallington asked how many countries have signed up to support the IFF. A considerable number have done so and I am happy to write to the hon. Gentleman with the exact details of that.

We want to use the build-up to our presidencies of the G8 and the European Union to get additional countries from the G8, and other rich nations, to sign up to the IFF. That is why the GAVI pilot—the so-called mini-IFF—provides an opportunity to show how the IFF programme would work, operate on the ground and deliver the real, tangible benefits that all parties recognise it could deliver.

We want to go further on debt relief and we need to ensure that progress is made on multilateral debt relief. The IMF already has the resources to go beyond HIPC and cancel, through better use of its gold reserves, 100 per cent. of the debt owed to it by eligible low-income countries. We also want further debt relief from the World Bank and the African Development Bank. That will need to be funded through additional donor resources. We are committed to paying our share—just over 10 per cent.—of the multilateral debt service costs to those banks for those low-income countries that have strong public expenditure management systems in place.

My hon. Friend the Member for Loughborough (Mr. Reed) asked how that additional relief will be funded. The comprehensive spending review, which

[Mr. Thomas]

included a large increase in aid assistance for DFID, earmarked some of that funding for making progress on debt relief as well as for traditional development assistance. We also agree that debt relief needs to be extended beyond the existing heavily indebted poor countries. The new United Kingdom initiative to which hon. Members alluded will help to pay our share of multilateral debt servicing for all low-income countries with sufficiently strong public expenditure management systems in place. We can then be sure that those resources will be used for poverty reduction.

My hon. Friend alluded to countries where there is conflict. He was right to say that they present the greatest challenge to making progress on the millennium development goals. We estimate that in countries where the policy environment is most challenging, there are more than 340 million poor people. We are seeking to bring donors together early next year to consider how to make more effective the development assistance that goes to those countries. Given the challenge of not always being able to work through Government assistance, perhaps because of corruption or conflict, we need to consider how we can be more effective in such policy environments.

My hon. Friend the Member for Stroud (Mr. Drew) spoke of the need for more ceasefire monitors, particularly in Sudan. He will be interested to know that the UK has funded African Union ceasefire monitors there. We committed some £2 million to that; we were the first donor to do so. I hope that my hon. Friend will be reassured to hear that an additional 3,000 ceasefire monitors are due to be deployed there shortly.

Mr. Reed: Clearly, the individuals in those countries that are in conflict, particularly Sudan, are in the worst situation—because of the conflict, because of corruption or even because of an inability to get aid through to them. What further steps does the Minister believe the Government should take, particularly in Sudan? I have received a number of e-mails from constituents on the subject—as must the Minister, in light of the "Panorama" programme—so how much further does he believe the Government can go to bring not only lasting peace, but the protection necessary to allow aid to get through to those who are most severely affected?

Mr. Thomas: We continue to put pressure on the parties in Sudan for an immediate ceasefire in order to respect the needs of those who have been displaced. We have already provided some £62.5 million of humanitarian relief, and the Prime Minister has committed us to doing more. We also seek to build the capacity of the African Union, so that it can better provide a response in places such as Sudan. Earlier this year, for the first time, it deployed troops under its banner in Burundi, helping to move things forward there.

I conclude by thanking the hon. Member for Brecon and Radnorshire for this timely debate. The hon. Member for Rutland and Melton challenged the Government to do more on international development, debt relief and the IFF. We accept the challenge. We have already shown leadership not only by launching the IFF, but by the substantial increase in assistance in the development budget and the lead that we have given in Europe on the need for more progress on trade. More needs to happen, and we on this side of the House continue to seek opportunities to build the political will and momentum to achieve just that.

3.24 pm

Sitting suspended.

Infantry

3.30 pm

Ann Winterton (Congleton) (Con): I am delighted to have secured this debate for two reasons: first, because I was prevented from taking part in the recent defence debates because of Standing Committee commitments, and, secondly, because this debate on the future of the infantry precedes tomorrow's debate on the Scottish regiments.

I have no doubt that emotions will run high, with the Black Watch at present in the eye of the storm in Iraq. However, the Black Watch is part of the British Army—it is not, as some have described it, part of a Scottish army—and I am sure that the Black Watch itself recognises that what is good for its future is good for all the single battalion regiments threatened with disbandment, merger or forced absorption into larger regiments. We should not be pitting regiment against regiment in the fight for survival. It is also particularly fitting to be discussing these matters just after Remembrance Sunday, when we remember the sacrifice of all our forces who fell in defence of the United Kingdom and to preserve our freedom as a nation state.

The Cheshire Regiment is the only infantry regiment that, in its long and distinguished history, has remained a discrete shire regiment, apart from the Green Howards, a local regiment that recruits from north Yorkshire and Teesside; I am glad to see my hon. Friend the Member for Ryedale (Mr. Greenway) in his place. The Cheshires, together with many other regiments, took a terrible pounding during their recent tour of Iraq, just as they did in Bosnia. We should pay tribute to our British forces, which are the finest in the world. They are perhaps not always the best equipped, but they are certainly the best trained, and they are unique in having a regimental system, which ensures loyalty, stability and support, rather like a close-knit family.

When the Minister announced the future Army establishment figure of about 102,000 on 21 July, he did so in the knowledge that trained strength stood at 104,130, and that the increased target figure had been achieved over the previous three years. The Army Board is therefore recommending a cut in numbers not from trained strength, and the reduction of four shire and local infantry regiments will just involve moving personnel around.

To make the case that those redundant infantry personnel would move to other sectors of the Army—in particular, to logistics, engineers, intelligence and signals—is nonsense. The Army Board knows full well that infantry soldiers are a very different breed, and are not necessarily best suited to joining those corps. They do not have the appropriate qualifications, and neither are such moves actually necessary, because rapid improvement in recruitment to those corps in the past 18 months has nearly removed the shortfall—and, in the case of the Royal Corps of Signals, has achieved a 2.5 per cent. oversupply.

A year ago, the Minister of State, Ministry of Defence, stated in response to a written parliamentary question that

> "there are currently no plans to disband or amalgamate Army infantry battalions".—[*Official Report*, 3 November 2003; Vol. 412, c. 433W.]

In March this year, the Army Board met the colonels for the first time. What happened in those four months to reverse the decision not to disband any single battalion regiment? We are told that the reason was the reduction of battalions in Northern Ireland and the ending of the arms plot. The future Army structure has its advantages, but the Army Board is being over-optimistic if it thinks that the present level of overstretch can be overcome and that normality can be brought back to intervals between roles as a result of what it is recommending.

Training, which is essential and keeps British troops at their very best, still has to be done after operational tours. It is a fact borne out by experience that when regiments have been amalgamated in the past, recruitment has deteriorated. On recruitment, I am awaiting a reply on whether any capping or restriction has taken place. Will the Secretary of State confirm whether the future Army structure relates to or is based on the proposed future rapid effect system formation?

The recent solution was to use the Territorial Army, from which personnel are disappearing fast; the TA is now some 12 per cent. under establishment. The Army Board does not appear to appreciate that the TA comprises, first and foremost, civilian volunteers. Neither they nor their employers will be a position to accept six-month tours of duty stretching to nine months. To state, as the Secretary of State did in a letter to me, that the TA knows what it has signed up to is arrogant. Those who say that TA members get paid should remember that their pay is about 40 per cent. of what a retained fireman receives.

Why do the cuts proposed by the Army Board fall entirely on four shire and local regiments? It is inconceivable that the executive committee of the Army Board has advised that three regiments should go out of two divisions. We know the pressure that the Army is under, yet the Army Board has deliberately pitted the Prince of Wales and King's Divisions against each other as to which will sustain the second cut. It is nothing less than a disgrace that senior command has put those in the front line under such extra pressure.

The Prince of Wales and King's Divisions also have 58 per cent. fewer Commonwealth personnel than the Queen's and Light Divisions. That is one of the criteria listed after recruiting levels. Why, therefore, are reductions not being proposed for the Queen's and Light Divisions, the Parachute Regiment, which has not been used in a paratroop role since the Suez crisis, or the Guards Division?

The shire and local regiments are ideal for peacekeeping and reconstruction work. Today's infantry has to switch rapidly from being an effective fighting force to becoming a policing and social force. The Americans in particular are finding out to their cost that they need such troops, and not just death-or-glory boys or those sitting 20 miles behind a supposed conventional front line surrounded by technology. The whole nation knows that the fight against terrorism and tyranny rests with the infantry, which is 24 per cent. of the trained strength of the Army.

The Prime Minister has pledged 12,500 troops to the European defence force, and 35 per cent. of them—the equivalent of seven battalions—are to be infantry troops. On the one hand, the Army Board recommends

[Ann Winterton]

a cut in a certain sector of the infantry, while on the other, the Prime Minister guarantees a higher-than-ever commitment for that sector. The argument will be that the commitment rests on a case-by-case basis, but can one really see the Prime Minister saying to the European Union, "Sorry chaps, I cannot fulfil my obligations to you"? We can bet that the EU will find some beneficial crisis to bring about EU involvement and that those troops will be called up. Next month, under Operation Althea, the Grenadier Guards will be deployed to Bosnia and Herzegovina as part of an EU force.

The Ministry has made it very clear that those regimental cuts are not down to finance, so perhaps we had better look elsewhere. That is surprising when we see that General Sir Michael Jackson is quoted in today's paper as saying:

> "I would much prefer increasing the size of the Army but that's simply not on offer. I can either accept what's on offer—a reduced size of the Army—or go".

I have tabled three parliamentary questions on finance, but have not yet received a straight answer. Perhaps that is not surprising in the circumstances. General Jackson also said in an interview with *Soldier* magazine that

> "the intent of the wider defence changes announced last month was to move towards the ability to dominate enemies by the so-called network enabling capabilities."

That is why four shire and local regiments are to go: manpower is to be replaced by technology that is not even yet available.

I say to the Secretary of State that there should be no cuts to those regiments until the technology is up, running and of proven capability. If General Jackson thinks that the future rapid effect system will be operational by 2010, I believe that he is much mistaken, as do many others. The recent House of Commons research paper on the defence White Paper "Future Capabilities" clearly points out the disaster areas: the Eurofighter, which was late and over budget; the Astute Class submarine; the Nimrod MR4A; and the Brimstone advanced air-launched anti-armour weapon. Neither should we overlook the Bowman communications system. What a gamble is being taken by throwing caution to the winds and thinking that technology will be delivered on time and on budget, while getting rid of what we know works.

Our forces are not conscripts; they are professional soldiers doing a brilliant job, often under terrible pressure. The Army Board, if the Secretary of State would like to listen, should take better care not to push them over the limit. This affects people's lives and is a very serious matter. However, one can see why General Jackson wants to strengthen the medium section of the Army to comply with the introduction of a rapid reaction force, which means airlift. He is planning a futuristic Army for 20 years down the line, but surely we must learn the lessons of Iraq and Falluja, where technology has played its part, but where street fighting in urban warfare is done by low-tech tanks and infantry. We are no longer fighting conventional wars. The enemy is all around us, dressed in civilian clothes. High technology can of course work in the right situation, but a boy herding goats who has a $20 grenade launcher can take out a multi-million pound piece of high-tech equipment without much difficulty.

The final decision rests with the Secretary of State, and the future of the British infantry rides on his shoulders. It is his head and that of the Government as a whole that will be on the block, and not that of the Army Board. We all know that we live in dangerous times and that British security is under continuing threat. The Government should act responsibly and show caution. In no circumstances should they introduce cuts to existing units until the war on terrorism has been won.

The answer is not to destroy the culture, values, tradition and loyalty of the smaller regiments. Experience has already taught us that larger regiments do not retain the same levels of recruitment. I look forward to meeting the Secretary of State later this afternoon with other colleagues from Cheshire. We will seek to impress on him our conviction that what works and works well should not be destroyed, and that it can never be replaced by unproven future technology.

I trust that common sense will prevail in the end and that the British infantry will not be emasculated in the way that is proposed.

3.41 pm

Mr. John Greenway (Ryedale) (Con): I congratulate my hon. Friend the Member for Congleton (Ann Winterton) on securing this debate, and I thank her for allowing me a few moments to raise the concerns of several Yorkshire Members, including the hon. Member for Calder Valley (Chris McCafferty), about the future of our three Yorkshire regiments—the Duke of Wellington's, the Prince of Wales and the Green Howards, which is one of the oldest regiments in Britain and the one thought to be most at risk in Yorkshire. The Green Howards have recently returned from Afghanistan and served with such distinction that one of their number, Captain Pledger, received a very rare commendation from the commander of the multinational brigade.

If we are to win the hearts and minds of the local population in Afghanistan and defeat terrorism, that is exactly the kind of peacekeeping work that is so sorely needed, and it is what makes the British Army the envy of the world. The support of the local community is what helps to make the difference. In our service of remembrance at Old Malton priory on Sunday, the standard of the Green Howards Association stood proudly, as it has done for generations.

The Army proposed to cut four single battalion regiments. Thus far, I understand that the Army Board has identified a regiment each from the Prince of Wales Division, the King's Division and the Scottish Division, but is having difficulty identifying the fourth regiment. The outcry from Scotland, which will be debated here tomorrow, is obviously aimed at preventing any cut in Scotland, yet if the cuts were shared fairly, there would be two cuts in Scotland and only two in England. It would be completely unacceptable for all the cuts to fall on the English divisions. The Scottish regiments do not have a monopoly on regimental history, traditions and local ties, and the manning criteria set by the Army indicate that Scotland would be very fortunate to escape with one cut if the cuts go ahead.

The King's Division of northern England regiments has already agreed to accept one cut, as the Secretary of State knows, which is likely to fall west of the Pennines.

A second cut against the King's Division would be grossly disproportionate and very wasteful of highly trained infantrymen, and it would lead to undermanning and redundancies.

The Yorkshire regiments are being very positive and constructive in looking to the future by campaigning for a Yorkshire regiment of three battalions and one Territorial Army battalion. I suggest to the Secretary of State that that could be a real success story. This is a highly dangerous time to be cutting infantry battalions at all. The Northern Ireland peace dividend and the ending of arms plotting will not free up as many battalions as was first thought, given present and future operational commitments to which my hon. Friend the Member for Congleton referred.

If there are to be cuts, the Army Board should stick with the three cuts that it has identified and forget about the fourth.

3.44 pm

Sitting suspended for a Division in the House.

3.57 pm

On resuming—

The Secretary of State for Defence (Mr. Geoffrey Hoon): I thank the hon. Member for Congleton (Ann Winterton) for introducing this debate on the future of the infantry. I look forward to explaining once again why we are doing what we are doing and I welcome this opportunity to address some concerns that have been raised about the future size and structure of the Army.

The reasons behind the need to modernise the Army have been well rehearsed previously. Hon. Members will be familiar with our analysis of the changing strategic environment and the new challenges that it represents. We set those out in our December 2003 White Paper and our July 2004 announcement. It is clear both that no organisation can stand still and that the Army is no different. It must evolve and adapt to future challenges as our world changes. Only by doing so will the Army maintain its ability to tackle whatever task it is faced with and continue to achieve the operational success that is the hallmark of Britain's armed forces.

The changes planned for the infantry are part of that evolution. There are two key factors driving our plans. The first is the conclusion by the Army Board that the infantry arms plot no longer represents the best way to deliver operational capability. The decision to end the arms plot demanded restructuring the infantry to sustain the strength of the regimental system. The second factor is the progress towards lasting peace in Northern Ireland and the consequent flexibility to reassign units committed to supporting the Police Service of Northern Ireland, allowing a reduction in the number of infantry battalions.

That change provided the opportunity to transfer resources to strengthen other parts of the Army and concentrate on those capabilities that can best deliver the effect that we require. The decrease in the support needed by the PSNI led us to conclude that the future requirement for infantry battalions would decrease from 40 to 36. Given that making those reductions would free up some 2,500 posts, this offered an opportunity to reinvest the posts to deliver the robust and resilient organisation that we need to meet the challenges of the future.

Let me make it clear that the driver behind the exercise is not financial. In the last spending review, the Government announced an extra £3.7 billion for defence. The exercise reflects the need to ensure that the Army of the future is properly configured to meet the priorities and challenges of the future, rather than of the past. Some 550 of the posts freed up will be reinvested in the remaining infantry battalions to develop more robust and resilient units. The rest will go towards strengthening high-demand trades that are crucial to a sustainable expeditionary capability, such as intelligence, signallers, engineers, logistics—in other words, those areas under still greater pressure as highlighted by our recent operational experience.

Patrick Mercer (Newark) (Con): The Secretary of State will be aware that I commanded his, mine and others' local regiment, the Worcestershire and Sherwood Foresters, when we were a Warrior battalion in Tidworth. We were there for nearly six years, which, at the time, was an unusually long tour. We pretty well negated the effects of the arms plot. My battalion was reinforced by the Cheshire Regiment, the Staffordshire Regiment and regiments across the Prince of Wales Division. I am told that it worked well. We were not a super-regiment; we kept our identity. If it ain't broke, why fix it?

Mr. Hoon: Because it is not working as we would like. The problem with the hon. Gentleman's illustration is that trickle posting certain positions in that way puts extra pressure on the battalions from which those people have come. We have experienced that cascading difficulty for some time.

Furthermore, the proposed reform is simply the continuation of changes that have been brought forward by previous Army Boards and Governments. Half the Army was organised on one basis while the other half was organised on an entirely different basis. In a sense, that is unfinished business for the Army and it really is time that it was completed.

Ann Winterton: The Secretary of State has made a fairly lame excuse. The Government have been in power for seven years and they can do more or less what they like. Frankly, the situation in the world has changed during those seven years and we are now having to deal with terrorism. As I am intervening, will he also confirm whether the future Army structure will be based on the future rapid effect system?

Mr. Hoon: I shall deal with that matter in due course. I gave way to the hon. Lady on the basis that she was about to address the point I was making. My argument is clear: we cannot continue indefinitely with two different structures for our Army—different structures that previous Governments anticipated would change and failed to carry through. This is the Army finishing that business.

I want to make progress. I challenge any hon. Member to say that, given the reduction in the commitment to Northern Ireland—which is real—we

[Mr. Hoon]

should simply put those four saved infantry battalions into the regular order of battle inadequately supported by the enabling trades, rather than look at where the pressures are in the Army today. If Opposition Members really had genuine concern about our armed forces, they would be saying, "Secretary of State, you should be helping those parts of the Army that are most under pressure." I am not suggesting that infantry battalions are not under pressure, but they are not as much under pressure in the context of tour cycles, tour intervals and leave at home with families as precisely those whom we intend to augment. Unless and until Opposition Members can deal with that issue, all they are doing is making cheap points for the benefit of their local newspapers.

Mr. Keith Simpson (Mid-Norfolk) (Con): Until now, I thought that the Secretary of State had been reasonable. However, most informed members of the defence community have seen a credibility gap in that infantry battalions are being disbanded to free up posts for intelligence logisticians. As a result, members of the Black Watch, whoever they are, will be transferred to be logisticians or signallers. No one doubts the fact that there is a requirement for such people, but as General Jackson said in *The Sun* today, the problem is that he would like a larger Army. That is his premise.

Mr. Hoon: I shall deal with that issue in due course.

Bringing to an end the infantry arms plot will ensure that we have far more military capability from our resources. Again, I invite hon. Members to consider the issue carefully. If their complaint is that there is far too much pressure on infantry battalions, what we are doing will relieve that pressure significantly. I shall explain why: for several decades we have moved infantry battalions from role to role and place to place every few years. That action maintained broad experience and variety, but it also hampered the availability of infantry battalions. Times have changed and the Army Board has rightly taken the view that the diminution of our capability through the arms plot is impractical and inefficient.

Some hon. Members will be familiar with the detail, but let me restate it. Of the 40 battalions in the order of battle, seven or eight are unavailable at any one time because they are moving or re-roling. I have heard no objections from Opposition Members to that. Let me give some recent examples. In March, the highlanders moved to Germany to begin their armoured infantry training, which meant that they were unavailable for some seven months. In September 2003, the Scots Guards began its conversion and was similarly unavailable for six months. In terms of physical disruption, our local regiment, the Worcestershire and Sherwood Foresters, to which the hon. Member for Newark (Patrick Mercer) kindly referred and which is serving in Afghanistan, where I visited it last week, will shortly move from Chester to Hounslow. Neither place is particularly near Worcestershire, Nottinghamshire or Derbyshire, where most of the men were recruited.

Patrick Mercer: I am again grateful to the Secretary of State for allowing me to intervene. None of us, particularly those who have suffered at the hands of the nonsense that is the arms plot in today's Army, would argue with him. However, the fact remains—I think he is being a little disingenuous—in respect of this being unfinished business. It is not half the infantry that has been reorganised; it is a third. We went through this process in the 1960s and it failed. The Cheshires, the Staffords, the Sherwood Foresters and the Worcestershire Regiment were to be grouped, believe it or not, as the Mercian brigade. The same tired idea is being resurrected. That organisation was known in the Army as "the Mexicans". I promise him that it is not a good idea to reintroduce it—if it ain't broke, don't fix it.

Mr. Hoon: I had a long conversation with the commanding officer of the Worcestershire and Sherwood Foresters last week and I gently reminded him of what happened in 1970, when people from the Sherwood Foresters—perhaps the hon. Gentleman was among them—said that it would be impossible for people from Nottinghamshire, Derbyshire and the Sherwood Foresters ever to work satisfactorily with the Worcestershires. Now, there is a campaign to preserve that merged identity. I find that slightly ironic in the circumstances.

I want to stress to hon. Members another effect of frequent changes of location. They are massively disruptive to the family life of members of our armed forces. That is such an issue in terms of retention that we have to address it. Because of changes in society, family stability has become much more of an issue. Ending the arms plot will mean that the Army is able to offer much greater stability for soldiers and their families.

Those significant benefits are powerful arguments for change and they explain why those serving in the Army overwhelmingly welcome our proposals. I recognise that there is a concern about our armed forces on the other side of the House and among all hon. Members who have contributed to the debate. However, that concern must not simply be historic, relating to regimental names and titles. Those who genuinely believe that the arms plot must come to an end have also to follow through the logic of how to achieve that.

The hon. Member for Newark has made one suggestion, and I will reflect on it. However, the reality is that the Army believes that the best way to deal with an end to the arms plot is restructuring of the kind that has been outlined. Therefore it is important—

Patrick Mercer: What about the Guards?

Mr. Hoon: We can deal with the Guards in due course, as part of the process. I do not suggest that the logic does not apply equally in that case. In future, battalions will be fixed by role and largely by location. That will release resources routinely tied up in moving location or retraining so that they can, instead, be used on operations. As a result, the Army will be more capable and more effective because—to answer one of specific points raised by the hon. Member for Newark—more battalions will be available for operations and because the new structure will provide continuity of expertise in role and greater brigade coherence, which is dissipated by the arms plot.

That increase in available battalions is over and above the increases resulting from the reduced commitment to Northern Ireland. We will be better off in terms of operational availability. It will be possible for the career development of officers and senior non-commissioned officers to be much more carefully planned. At the moment, it depends partly on what role a battalion has at any given time.

To make that work, however, individuals will need to move between battalions for career development and increased breadth of experience. In the interests of preserving the regimental system and the value that it brings, we need a future infantry structure based on larger regiments of two or more battalions. I emphasise that that is not a new concept. Nearly half the infantry is already organised in that way and it operates extremely effectively. Multi-battalion regiments will allow individuals to move around for personal development while a sense of regimental identity is also maintained. That way, it will be possible to deliver the advantages of ending the arms plot in terms of operational effectiveness and family stability while preserving the benefits and traditions of our regimental system.

All the divisions of infantry have been tasked to consider how they can best model themselves to take full advantage of ending the arms plot, taking account of the need to reduce by four battalions in total. Their recommendations will be put to the executive committee of the Army Board. As my right hon. Friend the Prime Minister has made clear, no decisions have been made, and it is important that the Army is given the opportunity to determine the structure that will best deliver the operational effectiveness we need.

In due course, the Army Board will make recommendations about the future organisation of the infantry. They will be presented to Ministers for final approval, and I expect to announce the outcome before the Christmas recess.

Mr. Simpson: I am grateful to the Secretary of State, who is being very generous in giving way. A few minutes ago, in the context of the reorganisation of the Army, he gave the impression that the restructuring will affect the Household Division. Can he say in what way?

Mr. Hoon: It is important that there is consistency. Part of the argument that I made to the hon. Member for Newark is that we cannot go on with two different structures. Therefore, we need to look at the implications of this for all elements in the Army. No one will be immune; this applies equally well across the board.

Given the emphasis that is placed on history, the point needs to be made that very few of our regiments or corps exist today in the same form as they existed in the relatively recent past. Since 1958, 54 infantry regiments have been subject to amalgamation, 21 of them since "Options for Change" was published in 1990. I have mentioned the amalgamation of the Worcestershire Regiment and the Sherwood Foresters. At the time, that was strongly resisted in the east midlands, but it has produced a strong regiment that works extremely effectively, notwithstanding the fact that there are still people in the east midlands who want to return to having a Sherwood Foresters Regiment. Such is the case in many parts of the country, but it is important that we deal with the reality of operations today and the threats we will face in the future.

There has been a constant process of change and regeneration in which new organisations have been created that have fostered previous military renown while developing their own traditions and reputations to engender loyalty and camaraderie. Many of today's excellent large infantry regiments are perfect illustrations of that process. I have no doubt that the new structure to be recommended for the infantry will not only seek to retain existing geographical linkages, but in due course enhance them. With soldiers and their families at last having a chance of greater stability, the result can only give even greater identity between regiments and their local communities. Given the support that regiments can depend on, that can only be good for all of us. It is important that Members think about the future.

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Order. Time is up.

Renewable Energy

4.13 pm

Ian Lucas (Wrexham) (Lab): It is a pleasure to speak before you this afternoon, Mr. Deputy Speaker, and to have my hon. Friend the Economic Secretary listening to me. I am also glad to have the opportunity to discuss the important issue of fiscal matters relating to renewable energy.

The Government have made clear their strong commitment to reducing emissions from carbon fuels. They have made it equally clear that their chosen vehicle for encouraging the development of renewable energy is the renewables obligation. Earlier this year, they announced a review of that obligation, which we are approximately two years into, and set out their terms of reference for the review in a helpful fashion.

I want to state at the outset that nothing that I say today is intended to challenge the future existence of the renewables obligation, and that the suggestions that I proffer humbly to my hon. Friend are made to encourage an adjustment within the obligation to bring about what I hope will be greater diversity in the means of providing renewable energy in the UK.

The renewables obligation seeks to ensure that 10 per cent. of our electricity is produced from renewable sources by 2010. It is fair to say that progress is being made. According to the DTI's digest of UK energy statistics, during the year to 31 March 2004, 3.3 per cent. of UK energy was attributable to renewable sources. However, the target is a challenging one, and the issues are important.

I attended a meeting in Wrexham with my constituents and Welsh Water, one of the local water companies, to discuss three 100-year record flooding events that had happened in the past five years. Pressing problems have been caused in local communities—problems that accepted science now recognises to be attributable to global warming. Our task to extend renewable energy production is an important answer to the challenges posed by global warming.

Progress in the UK is overwhelmingly in the sphere of wind power, both offshore and onshore. I welcome that development; I have always been a strong supporter of wind power. There is little doubt, however, that the development of wind as a source of renewable energy increasingly encounters opposition. The Campaign for the Protection of Rural Wales has a particularly negative attitude to onshore wind power in particular. Even offshore wind power is causing a great deal of controversy, and there was recently particular difficulty with a proposed wind farm in south Wales. Wind is becoming an increasingly controversial renewable energy source, and the renewables obligation needs to be refined to allow other forms of renewable energy to prosper.

Mr. Andy Reed (Loughborough) (Lab/Co-op): On wind and the possibility of using wind turbines, does my hon. Friend agree that it is important not only that we produce renewables through wind turbines, but that British industry succeeds in providing those turbines? Is he aware that DeWind in my constituency has now pulled out of the wind turbine market because it is unable to secure contracts in the UK and abroad? The big players are squeezing some of the new companies out. Does he agree that the fiscal measures introduced by the Government need to assist British firms, make use of the growth in renewables and benefit local economies, such as my own in Loughborough?

Ian Lucas: I agree entirely with my hon. Friend. In fact, he touches on issues that I hope to return to later. It is important that we see the development of renewable energy as an important energy and manufacturing industry for the future. I hope that the company in his constituency will be part of that.

Diversity in renewable energy supply will help the wind industries to which I have referred. If there were slightly fewer applications for wind farms and more applications for the development of renewable energy in other fields, I suspect that the pressure imposed on wind farms, and the opposition to them, some of which is pretty cynical, would be lessened.

To touch on the remarks that my hon. Friend the Member for Loughborough (Mr. Reed) has just made, the renewable energy industry in the United Kingdom is waiting to happen. It is primed, and companies are willing to enter the renewable energy market. They are simply waiting for the right incentives and indications from the Government. At this stage, it would be helpful for me to make it clear that I was delighted that the Sharp Manufacturing Company of Japan opened its European manufacturing base for photovoltaic cells in Wrexham earlier this year.

Sharp has been in Wrexham for more than 20 years now, and in the past it has been involved in the production of microwave ovens and video recorders. Video recorders are now a passing industry, and it was essential that a new product be brought to Wrexham for the plant to prosper. The decision to situate photovoltaic cell manufacturing in Wrexham is a testament to the excellent work force in the town, the superb relations with the local trade union, Amicus, and the excellent stewardship of the Chancellor of the Exchequer and his marvellous team at the Treasury, which includes my hon. Friend the Economic Secretary. The decision cannot really have been taken because of the photovoltaic cell market in the UK, because, unfortunately, it is extremely small at the present time.

For Wrexham, the prime market for European PV cells is Germany. Most of the units that are currently produced in Wrexham are exported there. The 100,000 roofs programme in Germany has been a phenomenal success. Capacity in photovoltaic electricity increased from 40 MW in 1997 to 400 MW by 2003. In 2003, there was 50 per cent. market growth in Germany. It is worth while to examine the instruments used by the Germans in achieving their success. The German Government concentrated on revenue rather than capital support, and I think that that is one of the major distinctions with regard to the approach that is being pursued in Britain. They specified a fixed long-term price for electricity produced from PV cells. The price was higher for photovoltaics than for some other renewable sources, but it brought certainty to the market for PV manufacturers. German Government advisers emphasised in conversations with me that it was the certainty that fuelled the successes of the programme. The necessary private investment was further encouraged by fixed interest, long-term loans for consumers.

As I mentioned, the approach to support for photovoltaics in Britain has been quite different. The Government have supported the industry by the use of capital grants and initiatives ranging from the domestic solar PV systems field trial in May 2000 through to the major photovoltaics demonstration programme. Unfortunately, the effect to date has been limited. As Keith Howarth points out in his useful article "The poor man of photovoltaics" in the Autumn 2003 edition of *Building for a Future*, PV in the UK just seems to be too expensive, and it takes 70 years to recover present installation costs. That contrasts markedly with the situation in Germany, where revenue support, combined with cheaper installation costs, gives payback within 17 years.

How can we achieve greater diversity in our renewables supply? I have seen the terms of reference of the review of the renewables obligation, and I have noted that, despite the fact that the obligation is itself an instrument that interferes with the operation of the free market, there is a marked reluctance to interfere further with the renewables market. Both fixed price tariffs and feed-in mechanisms are rejected. I am pleased, however, that the Government have recognised in the terms of reference the importance of developing longer-term technologies and have left the door open on providing revenue support for them.

To date, I do not think that we in the UK have recognised the potential that exists for industry here in the renewables field. In north Wales, we are at the forefront of those developments. The North Hoyle wind project off the Rhyl coast is already producing energy, and phase two of the project will introduce a step change in the scale of production. St. Asaph business park has the largest single solar cell power source in the UK and Sharp in Wrexham is expanding rapidly. Last week, I was delighted that a call from the company for 60 extra employees by Christmas appeared on the front page of my local newspaper; its solar cell production is increasing so rapidly that it is taking on that number of jobs in the local economy.

At present, the demand comes from abroad. We have much to learn from the German experience. Even with the current difficulties in the German economy, 3,000 people are employed in the German photovoltaic manufacturing industry. The potential in the UK is huge. The Deputy Prime Minister has announced his intention to build a large number of new homes in the south-east. For example, up to 170,000 homes are to be built in the Milton Keynes and south midlands area in the coming few years. In my constituency, there is increasing pressure for new housing in the public, housing association and private sectors.

Let us imagine for a moment what would happen if PV cells became as standard as double glazing. First, a new form of renewable energy would have become a significant player in the UK. Secondly, householders could supply their own energy to the grid, easing problems of security of supply. Thirdly, a manufacturing industry with thousands of high-quality jobs could be created.

In Wrexham, we have experienced just an indication of what can be achieved by new investment from abroad in a market that is developing. The company has decided to enter the European market and is expanding rapidly, in both Germany and Spain, because of the action that has been taken by the Governments in those areas. I urge the Treasury to consider the types of incentives that have been provided in those countries. There is a thirst for new manufacturing industry in my constituency, and I think that that could be responded to by developing the industry in question.

I am sure that a way can be found, compatible with the renewables obligation, to encourage a more diverse renewables base in the UK. I know that the Renewable Power Association will forward its ideas when the review is considered. It is fortunate that a Treasury Minister is responding to the debate, because the Treasury will play an important role in decisions about the development of renewable energy in the years to come.

The 2010 target is a very challenging one. All parties recognise that that is the case, and much work needs to be done in the coming five years. The prize could be to tackle our renewable energy problems, approach solutions to our climate change challenges and create a new manufacturing industry. That is a prize that is well worth striving for.

4.27 pm

The Economic Secretary to the Treasury (John Healey): I congratulate my hon. Friend the Member for Wrexham (Ian Lucas) on securing the debate. I have known him since he was elected to the House, and he has always been articulate on the challenges of global warming, as his speech made clear. I have also seen how strong an advocate he is of the interests of his constituency and the companies there. I may return to the points that he made about the developments at Sharp PV.

My hon. Friend made it clear that his principal concern is for a greater diversity of sources of renewable energy in the UK. He set out a clear and practical long-term vision of PV cells being as commonplace as double glazing. The context of the debate is important. The policy developments and reviews that he mentioned are taking place in the context of the energy White Paper that the Government published in February 2003. Underlying everything that we are doing and may consider doing are the four principal objectives that were set out in that White Paper.

The four goals of our overarching energy policy are, first, to set ourselves on a path to cutting the UK's carbon dioxide emissions by 60 per cent. by 2050; secondly, to maintain, at the same time, the reliability of our energy supplies; thirdly, to promote competitive markets in the UK and beyond—which perhaps distinguishes us from Germany—and thereby to help to raise the sustainable energy growth rate and improve the UK economy's productivity; and, fourthly, to ensure that every home is adequately and affordably heated.

In general terms, the effective way for the UK to achieve those goals is to conserve our existing energy resources and use them better. My hon. Friend has argued persuasively for improving energy efficiency and increasing the use of alternative energy sources such as renewables; those have been identified as important ways of doing that. That is why the Government have set targets for energy efficiency and the use of renewable energy.

[John Healey]

The energy White Paper reiterated the aim that we set out first in January 2000 for renewables to supply 10 per cent. of UK electricity by 2010, subject, of course, to those costs proving acceptable to the consumer. Our aspiration is to double the renewables share of electricity by 2020 from that 2010 target. We have introduced a comprehensive set of measures to pursue those targets and secure those general energy policy aims.

Although my hon. Friend's debate is about fiscal measures, they are only one part of the strategy. It seems from his speech that he is more interested in non-fiscal measures, particularly the renewables obligation. Fiscal measures that we have taken include the introduction of the climate change levy, with exemptions for renewable generation; the introduction of reduced rates of VAT, which benefit renewable sources such as ground-source heat pumps and micro-CHP systems; backing biofuels through the fiscal system; and the introduction of the world's first emissions-trading scheme.

If we look beyond all the fiscal measures, however, we can see that we have also taken several steps to promote energy efficiency and the use of renewable energy. Principal among those for renewables is the renewables obligation. However, I think that my hon. Friend is aware that, alongside that obligation, the Government are funding further research and development, as set out in the spending review published by my right hon. Friend the Chancellor in July.

The renewables obligation is the main non-fiscal instrument by which we are encouraging renewable energy. It requires all licensed electricity suppliers to supply a specific proportion of their electricity from certified renewable sources. As my hon. Friend knows, that obligation increases steadily from 3 per cent. of sales in 2002–03 to 10.4 per cent. in 2010–11. Late last year, that obligation was extended to 15.4 per cent. by 2015–16 to give potential investors, whom he is concerned should be encouraged, greater certainty with which to plan returns in respect of business investments of the sort that we want to encourage them to make over the next few years. With the climate change exemption, those two mechanisms are expected to provide about £1 billion of support to renewable energy by 2010.

Early indications are that the renewables obligation is working well, with investor confidence growing. In 2003, 2.2 per cent. of electricity was supplied by sources that are eligible under the renewables obligation. We expect that by 2010, wind source will provide 7 to 8 per cent. of electricity, half of which will be from onshore sources with the rest coming from large-scale hydro and landfill gases.

Mr. Reed: Will my hon. Friend give way?

John Healey: I was about to come to a powerful point that my hon. Friend made in an intervention about his keenness for British business to win a share in the growing and increasingly important market in green technologies and green generation. I will ensure that my colleagues in the DTI are aware of his point, as I know that it forms part of their concerns.

My hon. Friend the Member for Wrexham is right to say that we will shortly begin a review of the renewables obligation. In the original White Paper, we committed ourselves to reviewing it in 2005–06 and to taking account of the carbon prices anticipated under the new EU emissions trading scheme, as well as the emerging costs of renewable technologies. The DTI, not the Treasury, is leading the review and aims to complete it by December 2005, with a view, potentially, to introducing any changes to the obligation around the beginning of April 2006.

A central consideration of the review will be to ensure the delivery of the 2010 target, while maximising value for money for consumers. My hon. Friend rightly said that the terms of reference were published on 4 November, following the publication of draft terms of reference in the summer.

From the 90-odd submissions that were received by the DTI when it published the draft terms of reference, it was clear that there was strong support for a limited review on how to improve the effectiveness of the renewables obligation while avoiding changes to the main operating principles of the scheme. The final terms of reference reflect that. The key areas for the review to examine are the effectiveness of the renewables obligation since it began in April 2002; all aspects of the working arrangements for the renewables obligation; the potential impact of the EU emissions trading scheme on carbon; the prices and future cost competitiveness of renewable technologies; and the extent of the obligation beyond 2015–16—the longer term that my hon. Friend is concerned about.

I shall ensure that my hon. Friend's points are brought to the attention of DTI Ministers as part of the consultation. They and I look forward to receiving the submission from the Renewable Power Association, which he mentioned. I am sure that that will contribute to the consultation.

It is clear that there is widespread support in the renewables industry for a technology-neutral renewables obligation that rewards low-cost technologies, coupled with wider support for the longer-term technologies. In the Chancellor's spending review settlement in July, he allocated to the DTI £60 million in each year up to 2007–08 to deliver projects identified under the renewables innovation review, bringing to over £500 million the support between 2002 and 2008 for longer-term renewable technologies.

In addition, £20 million has been allocated in each year of the spending review for 2004 onwards for future energy research and development. That will allow the DTI to fund fuel cells, cleaner fossil fuels, carbon dioxide capture and storage, and hydrogen research. The money has gone into the DTI technology strategy fund.

Turning to solar and photovoltaics, in 2001 the Government made a commitment to embark on a major initiative with the industry and others to achieve a UK solar photovoltaic cell programme, in line with those of our major competitors. That was the start of the Government's provision of significant funding for photovoltaics. The initiative consists of three separate programmes—domestic and large-scale field trials, to which £10 million has been committed; a major photovoltaics demonstration programme, for which the commitment was increased in September to £31 million; and support for PV research and development, through the DTI and the Engineering and Physical Sciences

Research Council. The additional £6 million that was added to the major PV demonstration programme in September will allow the DTI to run the programme for a further year, until March 2006. That will support the market until decisions on the future funding of PV are taken.

In that context, my hon. Friend mentioned Sharp. I was aware that Sharp had been in Wrexham for at least two decades, but I was delighted to learn that it had, within the past year, chosen Wrexham as the base for its European PV manufacture. It is new to the UK market in that field, but not to the UK. As he said, it is likely to sell much of what it manufactures in the PV field to Germany rather than to the UK domestic market, which is still in its infancy.

On the major PV demonstration programme that I mentioned, Sharp is already involved. It is aware of that programme and my hon. Friend might like to know that it is involved both in stream 1—the small scheme for householder applications in which, I think, 57 of the householders who successfully applied used Sharp to supply their installations—and in the larger community building schemes of stream 2. Its contribution to that programme is second only to that of BP Solar.

Although photovoltaics is unlikely to make a significant contribution to the target of 10 per cent. of our UK electricity being provided from renewable sources by 2010—we may argue about the contribution that the technology might make towards our 2020 targets—it is clear that its potential contribution to UK electricity supplies in the long term will be significant. It also has the potential to make a significant contribution to our exports.

The Government are considering the next steps for photovoltaics funding. In that respect, the debate is rather timely. The Government, and principally the DTI, are considering those questions in the context of the spending review settlement and the renewables innovation review. That review proposes a technology-blind capital grants programme, under which renewable features are integrated in the fabric of buildings alongside energy efficiency technologies. Support for building-integrated PV would be an important part of such a programme.

The Government first set out their climate change policies in 2000. The programme made provision for the review to commence in 2004. That review has now started. Since the publication of the first climate change programme, Government policy on tackling the climate change challenge has moved on substantially. The review of the climate change programme provides an opportunity to examine all our policy measures and to value the most cost-effective ways of meeting our climate change objectives. It will be an opportunity also to ensure that our domestic actions are in line with, and in many cases in advance of, what is being achieved internationally—

It being seventeen minutes to Five o'clock, the motion for the Adjournment of the sitting lapsed, without Question put.

Westminster Hall

Wednesday 17 November 2004

[MR. JOHN MCWILLIAM *in the Chair*]

Scottish Regiments

Motion made, and Question proposed, That the sitting be now adjourned.—*[Mr. Watson.]*

9.30 am

Pete Wishart (North Tayside) (SNP): Here we are again, Mr. Deputy Speaker, back in Westminster Hall with Scottish regiments on the agenda. I wish I could say that it was a pleasure to be here, but given the confusion surrounding the fate of the Scottish regiments, I cannot be that generous. It is the same venue and the same plot—perhaps I should say the same arms plot—but with a slightly different cast. In place of the Secretary of State we have the Minister of State, Ministry of Defence, the Armed Forces Minister, who I am sure will respond to the debate in his usual congenial, consensual and constructive manner.

Before going any further, on behalf of my colleagues I extend sympathy and condolences to the family of Private Paul Lowe, whose funeral will take place today. That follows the funeral yesterday of Scott McCardle and precedes the funeral of Sergeant Stuart Gray. Those three brave young men lost their lives in the deserts of Iraq. I have come to know the Black Watch pretty well during the past few months. It is more than a regiment: it is a community, and I am sure that it will offer all necessary support and comfort to those bereaved families.

This is our last opportunity to debate the fate of our regiments before the Army Board or the Government meet to decide their fate. It is the last chance that hon. Members will have to put their case for the retention of the regiments. We debated the subject two months ago, so it is worth looking to see whether any real progress has been made. I have considered what has gone on during the past couple of months, listened to some of the debates and read some of the press comments, but I do not know. Are we any clearer about the Government's intentions about the future of the Scottish regiments? Most important, are we any closer to reassuring the many constituents that we represent that the Scottish regiments, to which they have such an attachment, are any closer to being saved?

The campaign to save our regiments goes on; it has started to grow in strength. Indeed, it has been encouraged during the past couple of weeks because the Government have started to buckle under its pressure. That makes me wonder why the campaign to save our regiments has been so passionate and vocal. The campaign has galvanised communities and has touched every part of Scotland. Every newspaper in Scotland is running a campaign to save the Scottish regiments—and last week, some prematurely claimed credit for saving them.

What is it that people like about the regiments? It might be tradition. People like the fact that the regiments have a past, especially the distinguished and illustrious past of our regiments. It might be that our regiments enjoy fantastic community links—the fact that father, grandfather and son may all have served in the same regiment. It might be that, historically, our regiments have performed an almost unimaginably dangerous task on behalf of us all. I am sure that many shared that sentiment at the Remembrance services on Sunday.

All that might be true, but the campaign to save the Scottish regiments has an extra potency and bite in Scotland. I do not want to talk about the war in Iraq. I do not want to talk about the deployment of the Black Watch in the American sector. However, we must all recognise—I choose my words carefully—that in Scotland the war in Iraq is at best controversial. We can at least say that there was unease about the deployment of the Black Watch in the American sector. It is in that context that the campaign to save the Scottish regiments takes place.

The thing that the Scottish people singularly cannot understand is that, while those regiments and those brave young men are out there doing the Government's bidding in Iraq, the Government plan to stab them in the back by amalgamating the regiments out of existence. That is a heady brew, and it is particularly unpalatable in Scotland. That is why the campaign is gaining strength. That is also why the Government's attempt to spin and brief their way out of the situation completely backfired last week.

Yesterday, we heard that the Black Watch may be coming home in advance of the expected date of 3 December. There was even talk of the regiment arriving home in the next few days. Let us hope so; if one group of people deserves to come home before the end of the mission, it is the brave young men who are fighting in the desert. If they remain in the desert, we will at least know that the decision is political. General Walker was quite clear about that yesterday. He said that the decision to keep British troops deployed in Iraq

> "would be a political decision and militarily irresponsible."

So, we now know that if the Black Watch does not get home in the next couple of weeks, the decision will have been political. Will the Minister confirm that there is a view to having these brave young men home ahead of schedule?

That brings us to the politics of what is going on. Just for a moment last week, the Government seemed as if they were prepared to consider the issue seriously and perhaps to offer a few concessions to those of us who care very much about the future of our Scottish regiments. However, that moment disappeared almost as quickly as it had appeared. I am sure that I am not alone in seeing last Tuesday's spinning, briefing and counter-briefing exercise as bordering on appalling. To brief and spin about the future of our Scottish regiments when they stand in the line of fire was a particularly cynical act.

The hon. Member for Falkirk, West (Mr. Joyce) scuttled backwards and forwards to Millbank, briefing anybody who was prepared to listen that the Prime Minister and No. 10 were going to get involved, but that was as duplicitous as it was thoroughly wrong. We know how determinedly on message the hon. Gentleman is, and it is unfortunate that he is not here, but as you know, Mr. Deputy Speaker, I had a conversation with

[Pete Wishart]

him yesterday and I said that I would mention his activities. The hon. Gentleman would not get out of bed for a scuttle without the full tacit acknowledgement and endorsement of No. 10. So, we have to ask why he was put up to it or, if he was not put up to it, why he did it. Finally, why was he left hanging out to dry?

To the hon. Gentleman's credit, however, he did a fantastic job. I am not praising the things that he did, but he managed to get on the front pages of all the newspapers. The headline in the *Daily Record* is "Saved"; in *The Herald*, it was "Blair signals fresh hope for campaign to save regiments"; and in *The Scotsman* it was "Blair orders MoD to 'save the regiments'". It was a fantastic exercise, and it was a real credit to the hon. Gentleman that he did such a fantastic job—the only problem is that the regiments were not saved. The Prime Minister decided that this was not a matter for the Government—it was a case of "Nothing to do with me, guv." He actually thought that we would swallow that and that the fate of the British infantry had nothing to do with the British Prime Minister. That has to be the biggest pyramid of piffle since the time of the ancient Egyptians.

If that is what the Prime Minister thinks, he should perhaps have told his Defence Secretary, who appeared on "Jonathan Dimbleby" on Sunday, saying that he hoped that the Black Watch might get something out of the changes; he thought that it might be able to preserve its name. Of course, he said that it was a matter for the Army Board, but his ambition was that the Black Watch would get something out of the review. So, we have the Prime Minister saying, "It's nothing to do with me, guv", the Defence Secretary saying, "We've got some ambitions for the Black Watch beyond this change", and the Army Board seemingly left to make the decision. The problem is that the restructuring of our infantry has everything to do with the Government, because they set the parameters for the review, said that four battalions had to go and made the final decision about the fate of the Scottish regiments.

The Minister is a member of the Army Board, as is the Secretary of State. Do they just sit in silence when the board deliberates? They could put the case for the Scottish regiments if they were that way inclined, but no—the only case that we have heard them put in the past few months is the case for amalgamations and disbandment.

Speaking of the Army Board, I come to our good friend General Sir Michael Jackson. It is probably he who has thwarted the ambitions of the hon. Member for Falkirk, West and other Scottish Members who thought that they had brokered a solution at last Tuesday evening's briefing meeting. Some of my hon. Friends and I were at that meeting, which was hosted by the hon. Member for Glasgow, Govan (Mr. Sarwar), and I found some merit in the case that was put. I could not believe, two hours later, that the meeting, which had been described as a get-out-of-jail clause for the Government, had become the "Saved" clause in the *Daily Record.*

I do not know what happened in the intervening two hours, but the proposals that were discussed had some serious merit. The idea for the Scottish Brigade—the coming together with the rest of the regiments—was reasonably sound. The fact that the Royal Scots and the King's Own Scottish Borderers would be disbanded was very disappointing. There were problems with the solution, and I say that candidly. We saw only two sides of a bit of paper on the proposal; we did not see the details.

It takes more than a cap badge, a regimental name and a regimental dinner to make a regiment. Community links and recruitment are important. However, there was merit in the compromise; it is even said that the Prime Minister liked the plan. According to Downing street sources, he found it attractive. He thought that it might get him out of a hole—that, apparently, is what he told General Sir Michael Jackson. Unfortunately, the general was not in a mood to play, and told the Prime Minister that selection and retention of aim is a fundamental principle of war. Seemingly that is military language for "Go and get stuffed."

The general believes that if the Black Watch or any other Scottish regiment is allowed to remain independent, that would run a coach and horses through what he is trying to achieve, the one-regiment solution for the existing Scottish regiments.

So, what is the future for the Scottish regiments; where does all this chaos and shambles leave us? Well, not in a very satisfactory place. The only encouraging sign that I have detected in the past couple of months is that the Government seem to be buckling under pressure from campaigners. I hope that that pressure will now be piled on until we get a satisfactory response and conclusion.

I come to my questions to the Minister. Will the Government accept that the future of the Scottish regiments is a matter for Government—a political decision—and stop hiding behind the Army Board? Will the Government reject the Jackson plans and respond positively to the widespread and overwhelming opposition to them? Finally, will the Minister or any of his colleagues here this morning look members of the Black Watch, deployed in the desert of Iraq, in the eye and tell them that their regiment has a future?

9.42 am

Mr. Iain Luke (Dundee, East) (Lab): I am glad to be called to make this contribution to the continuing debate on the role and future of the Scottish regiments and commend the hon. Member for North Tayside (Pete Wishart) for having secured a further debate on the issue. It is highly charged both because of its local implications and because of its significance for the future effectiveness of the British Army.

On the local side, I am happy to concede that I have major concerns, as do many of my constituents, about the future of our local regiment, the Black Watch, in the light of the MOD's intention to create a Scottish super-regiment. I, and many others, believe that a super-regiment would submerge and eventually extinguish all the individual loyalties, traditions and histories of the Scottish regiments as we know them. That might not matter to the MOD or to General Jackson, but it has created a profound reaction in Dundee, which has traditionally supplied the industrial muscle to balance the rural brawn that recruits from areas such as north Tayside and Perthshire have brought to the regiment.

I am not sure, Mr Deputy Speaker, whether you have ever been in Dundee, or are aware of the city. I am sure that you are, given that you are well travelled in Scotland.

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Order. I did work in the Dundee, East by-election.

Mr. Luke: I remember your telling me that, Mr. Deputy Speaker, so you will know that Dundee is an industrious, hardworking, radical town. Throughout its turbulent history, it has faced change and change again. One of the greatest assets of the city is its people. They are very conscious and proud of their family ties; they are creative, determined and, if sometimes prone to internal dispute, united in the face of intrusion from outside the city boundaries.

Given the long history of recruitment to the Black Watch, virtually every family has a connection with the regiment. My grandfather and great-grandfather served in it. My father, unfortunately, was a Gordon Highlander, but we did not hold against him the fact that he was not one of the "gallant Forty Twa".

So close is the relationship that many claim that the drumbeat of the Black Watch band echoes the city's collective heartbeat. Indeed, a drum of the Black Watch sits high on a ledge above the city chambers in the city square, where I served in the council for 18 years, commemorating the proud ties between the city and the regiment. The regiment has the freedom of the city of Dundee, and has the right and honour to parade through the city, bayonets fixed, colours flying and drums beating.

It is to be hoped that on its return from Iraq—we hope earlier than the prescribed period—the Black Watch will again take the opportunity, as it has done so many times, to exercise that right and to allow the city to rejoice in its safe homecoming from Iraq following a successful tour of duty. Obviously, the dead will be honoured. I associate myself with the comments made by the hon. Member for North Tayside about the sad funerals taking place, in Fife in the main.

That would also be a chance for Dundee to renew its commitment to the campaign for the retention of its own regiment: the Black Watch. Many people in Dundee believe that, if the MOD has its way, the spectacle of the Black Watch marching through the city, as is its right, the members of it being freemen of the city of Dundee, will be lost for ever and will become a thing of the past. The opposition that the Minister faces from this part of Scotland should come as no surprise to him. The issue unites politicians from across the political spectrum.

While stressing the unanimity at a local level, I have to make clear where I diverge from the hon. Gentleman. It has to do with how I see the role of the Scottish regiments, which I hope will—as is widely speculated and as is touted by my hon. Friend the Member for Falkirk, West (Mr. Joyce), who is missing—be brought together in a Scottish Brigade, serving, as they have throughout their proud history, Crown, flag and country. They make a unique Scottish contribution to the British Army in the service of the monarch and carry out their duty under the Union jack, within which the cross of St. Andrew provides a strong and patriotic background setting. They act in defence and promotion of the interests and security of the United Kingdom: an entity to which, as a Scot, I am deeply committed.

I am a strong supporter of the British Army and the British Government in their efforts, as active participants in NATO and other alliances, to ensure the security and well-being of all the countries of Europe, and throughout the world. On those points, perhaps I differ with the hon. Member for North Tayside and his party, but we are united in wanting to ensure that the Black Watch is retained as a unit in the British Army.

The point is: what would be the rationale behind the long histories of those regiments, and what would their brave, selfless and professional service in the British Army amount to if we did not think about those things in the terms that I alluded to earlier when talking about Crown, flag and country? That was the rationale that lay behind my great-grandfather and grandfather joining the ranks of Dundee's regiment, the 42nd Regiment of Foot, in the first and second world wars. Their patriotism was channelled through that regiment and that is why such regiments are so important to the Scottish scene, and why I and so many people are passionate in the cause.

My concern at the threats to the Black Watch and the reduction from six to five Scottish regiments in the new round of cuts is based not only on my family connections, but on a wider concern that the Government are embarking on the cuts and the reorganisation at a critical time, when the security of this country and our allies is under threat from random attack.

The message that we, collectively, should send out from this debate is our commitment to campaign for the Scottish regiments to remain as fully functional separate units in a Scottish Brigade, in the British Army, to support the needs and requirements of the UK Government in countering the growing wave of terrorism. I am glad that the hon. Gentleman has put aside his and his party's—I see his party leader here today—separatist agenda to join us in putting a strong case for the Scottish regiments to retain their unique identities within the British Army. To assist in that cause, we must combine to put the case.

In conclusion, I reiterate the call made by my hon. Friend the Member for Glasgow, Govan (Mr. Sarwar) last week, when he asked the Prime Minister to take note of the concern in Scotland over the future of the Scottish regiments. I further ask the Government to rethink the proposals for the reduction in the strength of the British Army and to do all that they can to promote and encourage recruitment to both regular and territorial units of the Army throughout the UK.

I call for the Government to signal that they are willing to scrap the proposals to create a royal regiment of Scotland and to commit themselves to creating a Scottish Brigade that all the Scottish regiments will operate under, keeping their individual identities. That is the message that Scotland wishes and waits to hear. It is the message that the Black Watch deserves to hear.

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Order. I offer no criticism of those who have spoken thus far. I have no power to control the length of Members' speeches, but I remind them that the purpose of the debate is for the Member initiating it to get an adequate reply from the Minister.

9.50 am

Patrick Mercer (Newark) (Con): I congratulate the hon. Member for North Tayside (Pete Wishart) on having procured this debate.

I want to lay out my credentials. What on earth is an Englishman and a former English Army officer doing here, speaking about Scottish regiments? The answer is simple. I am married to a Skye girl; I served with the Queen's Own Highlanders with great pride and pleasure, despite being described during the whole of a four-month tour in Northern Ireland as "that redcoat"; and a cousin by marriage is about to command the Royal Highland Fusiliers, if it continues to exist.

It seems extraordinary that at the present time of emergency, difficulty and tension, the Government are planning to axe four infantry battalions—it does not matter whether they are Scottish, English, or Welsh. The infantryman is the single most flexible soldier in the British Army. Despite the great phrases, "boots in the mud" and "boots in the dust", technology can never replace the hugely experienced Tommy, Jock or Taffy on the ground, doing his job, killing when necessary, rebuilding when necessary and dishing out sense, kindness and justice wherever he goes. That is what all our soldiers are good at, be they Scottish, English, Welsh or Irish.

To lose four of our battalions now is madness and I want to challenge two comments by the Prime Minister and the Secretary of State for Defence that the size of the Army is not about to shrink. That is just not true. On 21 July, the Secretary of State for Defence made it very clear that the target for the Army is currently 108,500. The Army has failed to meet that, more of which later, but the new target will be 102,000. Whichever way it is cut—"cut" is the word—that is a defence cut. On the back of that, I fear that we shall lose regiments such as the Royal Scots and the King's Own Scottish Borderers, which have survived untainted for 300 years. The Royal Scots came into service in this country in 1633. It has never been amalgamated and has never been merged with any other unit. It has won countless honours and Victoria crosses for this country. Why tinker with a regiment like that? Why tinker with the King's Own Scottish Borderers? That must be wrong.

A second argument is that recruiting in Scotland cannot support six infantry battalions. That is complete and utter rubbish. The Royal Scots Dragoon Guards—I know that it is not an infantry battalion—has been seriously under strength for almost 10 years. When the recruiting restrictions on that fine regiment were removed and it was allowed to spread its wings and to use every tactic and technique allowed to regiments, recruiting to the RSDG rocketed to full manning, only for the Government to slash 100-plus of its well trained men. I believe that any Scottish regiment can bring itself up to full strength if it is allowed to. I did that with my regiment and I am sure that the situation in north Nottinghamshire is no different from that in parts of Scotland. I believe that this country has the potential to maintain six fully manned Scottish infantry battalions, and if the Government would remove the recruiting cap and put the proper resources into the Army Training and Recruiting Agency, that could be achieved. Let us have no more nonsense about recruiting.

Interestingly, anyone who read *The Times on Sunday* will have seen a picture of Colin Campbell commanding that famous regiment, the 1st Battalion, the Argyll and Sutherland Highlanders in Crater. It seems that we are stuck in time in some sort of aspic. We seem to be in the same position as in the late 1960s and the Argylls are under threat yet again with a certain officer leaving his regiment to come into Parliament to argue the case for the Argylls. Anyone who looks carefully at the picture will see what he is wearing on his hat. We used to call the Argylls' cap badge a soup plate. That may be slightly rude, but there we are. He does not have an Argylls' cap badge in his glengarry; he has a super-regiment cap badge of the Scottish Brigade, which came into existence in the mid-1960s and was scrapped in the late 1960s because it failed. What are we again to have? Another super-regiment because of tired, thoughtless and exhausted thinking and because no one in the Ministry Defence has been able to produce anything that is fresh and original.

Yes, we must move forward, the arms plot must go, and more battalions are coming back from Northern Ireland. However, even with the add-back from Ulster and the battalions that are no longer involved in the arms plot, the 24-month gap between battalion deployment tours is nothing like 24 months. It will still average out at less than that.

That is not right. It is an unfair deal, not just for Jock and Tommy but, more importantly, for the wives and children who need to spend time with those men. That is why recruiting is suffering and people are not staying in the Army. The departure of corporals and sergeants—experienced men—adds to the recruiting problem. The Government have embarked on an evil spiral.

The other greatly misguided comment that we have heard in the past couple of days is that the infantry is already half large regiments and half single battalions. That is not the case. The Prince of Wales's, King's, Guards and Scottish divisions are all single battalion organisations. Only the Queen's and Light divisions have gone down this path.

If one were to take, let us say, the Argylls and put their name in brackets after the 4th Battalion of the Royal Scots Regiment, would the name and identity survive? Would the tartan, hat and cap badge survive? Ask the Royal Lincolnshire Regiment or the Royal Leicestershire Regiment. Their names were in brackets after battalions of the Royal Anglian Regiment for a while. Where are they now? If one were to go nine miles from my house and try to join the Royal Lincolnshire Regiment, the response would be, "What on earth is that? I have never heard of it." That regiment, with all its wonderful history, is gone—it has died.

The proposal is desperately misguided and dangerous for the country. It dishonours Scotland's dead, and, militarily, it is enormously foolish. I urge the Minister to think in a fresh direction, as it is not yet too late to save those wonderful regiments.

9.58 am

Mr. Russell Brown (Dumfries) (Lab): I shall begin by echoing the comments of the hon. Member for North Tayside (Pete Wishart) in paying respect to all those who have lost loved ones in recent months, especially in the terrible conflict in Iraq, in which we are still engaged. I welcome the opportunity to speak in this debate. The hon. Gentleman has managed to achieve another debate some two months after the previous one that was held in Westminster Hall on this very issue. It is basically the same debate, but its name is slightly different.

I wish to thank the Minister for taking time on two occasions to meet me and talk about this issue. I also wish to put on record my thanks to the Secretary of State for managing to schedule in his diary meetings with me, in particular the meeting last week with three colleagues from the Liberal Democrat party: the right hon. Member for Berwick-upon-Tweed (Mr. Beith) and the hon. Members for Roxburgh and Berwickshire (Sir Archy Kirkwood) and for Tweeddale, Ettrick and Lauderdale (Mr. Moore). There were also ex-serving members of the King's Own Scottish Borderers at that joint meeting. As individuals with a military background, they were allowed to put their case to the Secretary of State, which is very important.

Mr. Michael Moore (Tweeddale, Ettrick and Lauderdale) (LD): I acknowledge the hon. Gentleman's comments. The meeting that we had last week was productive. Does he agree that the passion that Donald Fairgrieve and the other KOSB representatives brought to it was very telling? The single most important issue for them was the prospect of the KOSB losing its identity in an ill-judged merger with the Royal Scots, which they found ludicrous, even offensive.

Mr. Brown: I thank the hon. Gentleman for his intervention. He is exactly right. His comments return to those made by the hon. Member for North Tayside. It is a matter of communities and the feeling of the wider family. I remember saying to the Secretary of State last week that if we look at the south of Scotland, only one thing links the east coast with the west coast, and that is the King's Own Scottish Borderers. We have our differences in a number of other areas, but that is the one link across the south of Scotland.

We are all incensed by what appears to be going on and with what the future may hold for our Scottish regiments. I am so incensed that I have even managed, albeit for a couple of minutes, to have a one-to-one-face with the Prime Minister earlier to further make the case. We should leave no stone unturned when it comes to what we feel.

Doing nothing is not an option. We have all met constituents over recent weeks and months, some of whom have absolutely no contact or connection with the military. Others are widows of ex-serving members of the armed forces and, in my area, of the King's Own Scottish Borderers, or those who have brothers and uncles who have served. Some are serving at the moment. The future of our armed forces has to be secured.

After the Remembrance day parade and church service in Dumfries on Sunday, it was interesting to take the opportunity to speak to a number of personnel. As one would expect, different people have different views. Some people wanted absolutely no change, but it was good to hear them recount their stories of the time that they served—10, 15 or 20 years plus, for many of them. They said that they wanted absolutely no change, and that we must secure the individual identity of the King's Own Scottish Borderers.

Others, when we got into deeper conversation, realised that today's young men and women are perhaps looking for a secure future with the regiment, but realise that serving in the modern Army is different from 15 or 20 years ago. Some of our young men and women spend a significant amount of time with their regiment, and are then drawn away to support other regiments and to supplement and complement what those regiments are doing because of recruitment shortages.

The question has to be asked: who are we to determine that the same old ways should remain, especially when we consider the future of married personnel? The Government have talked long and hard since they came into power in 1997 about family-friendly policies. We should also, as best we can, have family-friendly policies for those who serve in our armed forces. They are doing a job of work, just like any other member of society who is gainfully employed. Will a political decision be made as soon as we reach the end of the road, or a military decision?

If we look back to the early 1990s, many of us have been in this situation before, although some of us were not in this place at the time. It happened then. We saw the highland regiments amalgamated; we should consider the difficulties from then until now. Recruitment and retention have been serious problems.

The thing that sticks in my craw more than anything else is the suggestion by the Scottish Council of Colonels that we should merge the Royal Scots and the King's Own Scottish Borderers. The council has come up with the worst of all scenarios, as far as I am concerned. I do not say that from a political point of view, but the idea beggars belief. To be open and honest about what happened in the early 1990s, there was a regrettable problem with the Royal Scots in terms of its recruitment and retention. A decision was made then not on military grounds but on political grounds to save someone's political neck. That mistake has come back to haunt us today.

Sir Robert Smith (West Aberdeenshire and Kincardine) (LD): As the hon. Member for Dundee, East (Mr. Luke) will remember, it was the Gordon Highlanders that paid the price to save that political neck.

Mr. Brown: I bow to the hon. Gentleman's greater wisdom. I know that there was a problem that should have been dealt with properly and that there should have been no political shenanigans in the early 1990s.

From what I can gather from speaking to ex-members of the King's Own Scottish Borderers, it was also said in the early 1990s that the shortfall in some of the other regiments would be made good. Lo and behold, that commitment was not fulfilled. I say to the Minister today what I have said to the Secretary of State previously. If at the end of the process there is a commitment to 36 sound and strong regiments that can do a job at any time for this country, whether that is on behalf of this country or to help another nation, that is what we should aim for. If the commitment is to make up those numbers and regiments, we in the House and throughout the country want to see it fulfilled and not merely swept aside, as has happened in the past.

I have heard this morning about the issue of names in brackets. The English language is strange, and the use of brackets or parentheses can mean different things to

[Mr. Brown]

different people. As I have said all along, I want to see young men and women in my locality in southern Scotland—and further afield, as the footprint for the King's Own Scottish Borderers stretches further than merely south Scotland—have the opportunity to join our armed forces and the KOSB for many years to come. That is vital.

If the King's Own Scottish Borderers name has to be retained, we must put the recommendation from the Scottish Council of Colonels in the bid immediately. I have written to General Sir Mike Jackson saying that I believe that we had a positive meeting last week with the Secretary of State for Defence. I made the case in that letter for him to consider what is being said. There are ways out, not just for the Government, the Secretary of State for Defence or the Prime Minister, but for the military, which appears to be making recommendations that make no sense to anyone.

I hope that the Minister will take on board what has been said today—I am sure that he will, because he has done so in the past. We are looking for a positive outcome, and it is vital that the individual identities of the regiments remain.

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Order. Three Members are trying to catch my attention, but I cannot call them all. However, if the next two are brief, I can get them both in.

10.9 am

Mr. A. J. Beith (Berwick-upon-Tweed) (LD): I thank the hon. Member for Dumfries (Mr. Brown). My hon. Friends and I have been glad to work with him in meetings and campaigns about the future of the King's Own Scottish Borderers, including in what I thought was a constructive meeting with the Secretary of State last week.

The King's Own Scottish Borderers has its regimental headquarters in the barracks in Berwick-upon-Tweed, where its regimental museum and association are also based. The regiment has the freedom of the borough, and it marches through it on Minden day every year and on many other occasions. We are proud of the regiment, which recruits in Berwick, the borders, Dumfries and Galloway, and Lanarkshire. It has an excellent recruiting record: over the past 10 years, it has regularly been the first or second-best recruited Scottish regiment and in the top half of all infantry regiments.

Regimental pride is of great importance to the community support that former members of a regiment and their families extend to one another and that communities extend to them. It is also a potent factor in recruitment. Although it would be easy to dwell on the sentimental, nostalgic and honourable reasons for keeping the separate identity of the King's Own Scottish Borderers, the reasons that should be persuasive with the Army Board and the Minister are sensible, practical and highly relevant to the future of the Army—in particular the regiment's ability to recruit throughout the area.

What came as a real body blow to serving and former members of the regiment, as well as to the local community, was the completely ill-judged proposal to force an amalgamation with the Royal Scots, a regiment that has had serious recruitment difficulties over the years and is being pushed into the merger to deal with that problem. As the hon. Gentleman said, the problem should have been dealt with some time ago and is not a problem for the King's Own Scottish Borderers. Why damage success in this way? The foremost consideration in the minds of everyone concerned with the KOSB is to maintain its identity because of its practical value in recruiting for the British Army and providing good soldiers.

On closer examination of the figures, one realises that recruitment in some regiments, including the Royal Scots, depends heavily on Commonwealth citizens. Some of them are extremely good soldiers—for example, Fijians are superb soldiers and we are glad to have them. However, that is also an index of the weaknesses of recruitment in some regiments. The King's Own Scottish Borderers has about nine Commonwealth citizens compared with 89 in the Royal Scots. That is a measure of relative recruitment ability.

It was a bad day when the Scottish colonels—the colonel of the King's Own Scottish Borderers was away in Afghanistan—made a recommendation that did not recognise the key judgment supposed to be at the heart of how to configure these regiments, which is the sustainability of future recruitment. That phrase was used in the official documents concerned. On that count, the KOSB should remain a clearly defined unit of the British Army, preferably a regiment.

There are alternative solutions for the Royal Scots name. It could go to the brigade, to the overall structure, to the TA or be used in a different kind of merger. However, it certainly does not make sense to sacrifice the qualities of the King's Own Scottish Borderers to find somewhere to put the Royal Scots. Therefore, I hope that the Minister, the Secretary of State and the Army Board have already agreed that they must reconsider the one extremely misguided merger in the Scottish proposals.

We can all see the writing on the wall and the amount of military pressure for the creation of a single Scottish super-regiment. People have different views on that. Clearly, some problems have to be addressed, such as the ridiculous and inefficient disruptions of the arms plot, and the destruction of the relationship between a regiment and its region, which is particularly marked in England by the circulation of regiments. It is right to address those problems, but some people find it hard to accept that a super-regiment is the right solution.

Of crucial importance to us in the borders is that the King's Own Scottish Borderers continues to contribute its flow of recruits and its regimental traditions and qualities to the British Army. The borders want that to happen and it is the logical course to follow. Therefore, I ask the Minister to pose the right questions to the Army Board to ensure that the ill-advised recommendation of the Scottish colonels is set aside and the issue is reconsidered.

10.14 am

Annabelle Ewing (Perth) (SNP): As the Member of Parliament for Perth, where the Black Watch has its regimental headquarters, I am pleased to have been called to speak briefly today. I add my condolences to the family of Private Paul Lowe, whose funeral will take place early this afternoon, and I extend my condolences to the families and loved ones of the other six Black Watch soldiers who have died in Iraq.

This is a sad day for the Black Watch, but it will also be a historic day for it and the other Scottish regiments because this may be the last opportunity for debate before the Government implement their plans to axe the entire regimental system in Scotland. We should be clear that the ultimate decision lies with the UK Government—a fact recognised by my constituents, many retired and serving military personnel, and even the Secretary of State for Scotland during Scottish questions on 26 October. It is a pity that neither the Secretary of State nor his deputy, the Under-Secretary of State for Scotland, is present at this important debate.

We should also be clear that the impetus for the decision came from the Chancellor and his Department. That was recognised by Colonel Tim Collins, who, speaking to the BBC on Sunday, said:

> "These reductions are about saving money for the Treasury. It is not about making the army better and it is not about fixing something that is broken."

We have also heard much from the Government about the arms plot argument. That is the apparent basis for the proposed scrapping of the entire regimental system in Scotland. However, senior military figures including Brigadier Gary Barnett, who retired last year having served as colonel of the Black Watch for the preceding 12 years—a man, therefore, of immense military experience—have challenged that purported rationale for the scrapping of the regimental system in Scotland; Brigadier Barnett termed it a red herring. The Minister will be aware of the brigadier's recent detailed submission to the Secretary of State for Defence.

The proposals make no sense militarily, particularly at a time when there is overstretch of our armed forces. A Black Watch officer serving at Camp Dogwood, directly in the line of fire—I am not in a position to release his name—wrote to me and said:

> "Recently, the Black Watch moved from Germany to the UK to become the Army's training battalion. In this role, we should train other battalions for operations, but not deploy ourselves. However, for the first time in the Army's history, and because of troop shortages, we have returned to Iraq a year after we left.
>
> The contradiction between deploying the training battalion on the one hand and yet cutting four battalions on the other, needs to be addressed. The Army has a policy of a 24 month tour interval between 6 month tours. And yet we are back here",

in Iraq,

> "after 12."

That point was echoed by many other Black Watch soldiers who have written to me from Iraq, young serving soldiers who want their regiment to be retained and who reject utterly the Government's proposal. I will briefly quote one of those young serving soldiers, currently at Camp Dogwood:

> "The recent decision to reduce the armed forces can only add to the stress and pressure put on us and our families what with the ever increasing commitments and deployments we are volunteered for. Some of us have been separated from our families for 400 days in the past 2 years.
>
> I am writing to you to fight on my behalf to reverse the decision to reduce our Armed Forces, as I am fighting for my life out here in Iraq in support of the politicians".

In conclusion, it is clear that the Black Watch wants to keep the regiment. It is also clear that the people of Scotland want to keep the Scottish regiments. Will the Minister take the opportunity afforded to him today to end the endless spin and uncertainty that has caused so much anger and distress among the soldiers and their families? Will he tell us today whether soldiers in the Black Watch are coming home to their regiment, or whether they will be amalgamated out of existence?

Mr. Deputy Speaker: I thank hon. Members for their co-operation. If the hon. Member for Glasgow, Govan (Mr. Sarwar) is brief, I shall call him.

10.19 am

Mr. Mohammad Sarwar (Glasgow, Govan) (Lab): I am grateful for the opportunity to speak, and I congratulate the hon. Member for North Tayside (Pete Wishart) on securing this timely debate.

Hundreds of my constituents have raised the future of the regiments with me in recent weeks. Last Tuesday, I organised a cross-party meeting with my hon. Friend the Member for Dundee, East (Mr. Luke) to discuss the issue with the Keep Our Scottish Battalions campaign. I am grateful to the hon. Member for North Tayside and others who attended that lobbying. We met Clive Fairweather, a former commanding officer of the Scottish Division Depot, and Stuart Crawford, who was previously a lieutenant-colonel in the Royal Tank Regiment. The following day, I asked the Prime Minister about the future of the Scottish regiments during Question Time. My right hon. Friend the Prime Minister and the Minister are certainly aware of the depth of feeling about the issue throughout Scotland.

I appreciate that the Chief of the Defence Staff is still considering how best to proceed with changes to infantry deployment and that the Army will make its decision soon. I hope that the weight of public opinion in Scotland will lead to a positive response that retains the regiments' unique historic identities and traditions.

Simply merging Scotland's infantry regiments would be a mistake. Each of them has a proud history of service to our country. The idea of a Scottish Brigade that incorporates our regiments without losing their special identity, as proposed by the Keep Our Scottish Battalions campaign, is worth considering. For centuries, Scottish soldiers have shown professionalism in serving around the world. I am particularly troubled that disbandment could be considered while the Black Watch sees active service in the most dangerous region of Iraq. While the Minister will be aware that I did not support military action in Iraq, we all share a deep respect for those who have served there during the past two years.

I want to pay tribute to my constituent, Russell Beeston, a Territorial Army soldier in the 52nd Lowland Regiment who was killed 15 months ago in southern Iraq. When I joined thousands of Glaswegians in George square on Sunday, we all remembered his sacrifice and that of the Scots and British serving our country from all our regiments. In Glasgow, the Royal Highland Fusiliers has a proud local history of recruitment in my constituency. That could be lost with the merger.

[Mr. Mohammad Sarwar]

I turn now to the training of Scottish recruits. When infantry recruits in both the regular Army and the Territorial Army were trained in Scotland, they were able to maintain close contacts with their families at home. Now all members of the Scottish infantry are trained in Yorkshire and it is more difficult for families to visit or support young recruits. Far more recruits drop out of training. The Minister has always taken a keen interest in improving the standard of training for all recruits throughout the United Kingdom, and we should reconsider training Scottish recruits in Scotland.

My right hon. Friend the Minister might say that he cannot give us further assurances at this time. The hon. Member for North Tayside and others may consider that this debate is the last chance to make the case for Scotland's regiments and the last opportunity for the Government to make their position clear. I am sure that the Minister is listening carefully to the genuine concerns that have been expressed about the matter. I am also certain that the debate will not be the final word on the matter. Two strong grassroots campaigns will continue to lobby their elected Members of Parliaments about the issue, as will many of our constituents. We must all respond accordingly.

10.23 am

Mr. Alan Reid (Argyll and Bute) (LD): I congratulate the hon. Member for North Tayside (Pete Wishart) on securing a second debate on the future of our Scottish regiments. It comes at a particularly appropriate time, a few days after Remembrance Sunday when we commemorated the sacrifice of the men and women who served in our armed forces. That sacrifice continues to this day with the war in Iraq.

The large number of hon. Members who have contributed to the debate have shown what great importance we attach to the future of our Scottish regiments. For many months, great uncertainty has been hanging over the future of the regiments and that uncertainty cannot be good for morale. The uncertainty started in July when the Secretary of State announced that one Scottish battalion would be axed and that the Army structure would in future consist of regiments made up of two or more battalions. It can be deduced from simple arithmetic that the Government intend to reduce the number of Scottish regiments from six to either one or two.

I am not arguing that the status quo should prevail for ever. Naturally, time and circumstances change and the Army must change with the times. However, while changing we must keep the best of what we have inherited from past generations, and the British regimental system, based on geographic areas with which people identify, is an important inheritance that we must keep. Surely one of the lessons of Iraq and Afghanistan is the importance of highly trained and motivated infantry. The British regimental system, based on recruitment from geographical areas, has produced the finest infantry soldiers in the world.

Now is not the time to reduce infantry numbers. In recent years, the infantry has seen action in Iraq, Afghanistan, Sierra Leone, Kosovo and Bosnia and has carried out peacekeeping duties in many other parts of the world. It is also often called on to help out at home, such as during the firefighters' strike and the foot-and-mouth epidemic. That epidemic should serve as a warning for the Government that Army assignments can appear unexpectedly out of the blue. Our armed forces are already overstretched; the future is uncertain, so infantry numbers should not be reduced.

Many hon. Members have referred to the proposal of the Council of Scottish Colonels to merge the Royal Scots and the King's Own Scottish Borderers into a single battalion, reduce the other four Scottish regiments to battalion status and make the five battalions form one new regiment. I do not know what remit the colonels were given, but it looks suspiciously as if they were told to go into a room, play a form of Russian roulette and not come out until they had decided which two regiments should be merged. The Royal Scots and the KOSB were the regiments that lost out.

Like all hon. Members who have spoken this morning, I urge the Government to reject the proposal, which would mean a loss of identity for two regiments that have a long and proud tradition of service to the country. The other four regiments would also suffer a loss of identity by being reduced to battalion status. Recruitment is bound to suffer if the six regiments are merged to form one or two large super-regiments. Throughout Scotland, people identify with the local regiment, which in my case is the Argyll and Sutherland Highlanders. That was obvious at Sunday's Remembrance day parade, when the vast majority of veterans were wearing the famous red and white Glengarry. The message from recent history is that abolishing regiments is not a successful strategy. For example, when the Cameronians were disbanded, 17 per cent. of that regiment's soldiers left the Army.

Several hon. Members have referred to the Scottish Brigade solution. I have a suggestion for the Government that would streamline efficiency but keep regimental identity. They should reverse an earlier round of cuts under which the Scottish division headquarters was moved from Edinburgh castle to Warminster. The existing six Scottish regiments should be kept, but made part of a Scottish division with headquarters in Scotland that has an effective command and control function instead of simply an administrative function, as at present. That would provide a streamlined command and control structure, yet retain the six distinctive Scottish regiments.

Those regiments have contributed so much to the defence of our country through their long and proud history. If the Government see sense, our six Scottish regiments will remain and make a vital contribution to the country's defence for many years to come.

10.29 am

Mr. Peter Duncan (Galloway and Upper Nithsdale) (Con): I add my congratulations to the hon. Member for North Tayside (Pete Wishart), and I express my sympathy with his remarks on the recent bereavements. They remind us of the high price paid by the British Army, and it has been paid by our forces over generations.

There is a considerably improved turnout on the Government Back Benches for this debate, which is obviously related to the Minister's appearance today.

However, the gap between him and his Back Benchers is tangible. I see plenty of room for the hon. Member for Falkirk, West (Mr. Joyce), if he had managed to join us, and for the Under-Secretary of State for Scotland, who could have joined us today for this important debate for Scotland.

It is not the first time that we have debated this issue, and if the Government press ahead with their agenda of cuts, it will not be the last. The proposals have upset and astounded many people in Scotland and throughout the UK. Despite the Defence Secretary's attempts to finesse them, there is no doubt that they signal the end of the six Scottish regiments as we know them. Imprecise talk of identities and traditions is no smokescreen for radical change. A cap badge in a super-regiment is no substitute for a single-battalion regiment in its own right. To pretend otherwise is misleading and ultimately futile.

People have been upset not only by the cuts but by the way in which the Government have handled the issue, especially in recent weeks. In the past month or so, the position has changed more times than I care to remember. First, the Defence Secretary said that the only option was abolition of the Scottish regiments and their merger into one or two super-regiments. Then at Prime Minister's Question Time, the Prime Minister said that no decision had been made. Then at Scottish questions, the Scottish Secretary told me that it was important to take account of public opinion. During First Minister's questions in the Scottish Parliament, the First Minister then said that he supported retention of the regiments, before my colleague David McLetchie caught him out and forced him to admit that he was in favour of the proposals for cuts.

Last week, the soldiers and their families had to endure the ultimate insult: Downing street sent that loyal foot soldier, the hon. Member for Falkirk, West, on a spin mission to the Scottish press on Tuesday night to say that four of our regiments would be saved in their current form. That was a partial victory, we thought, but it lasted all of 12 hours, until the Leader of Her Majesty's Opposition obtained a response from the Prime Minister declining to back up the Falkirk, West line. Instead, he said again that no decision had yet been made.

If the No. 10 spin machine believes that communities throughout the south of Scotland can be persuaded to support a compromise involving the loss of two independent historic regiments—the King's Own Scottish Borderers and the Royal Scots—it is seriously mistaken. Three hundred years of history and some of the strongest community ties in the British Army cannot be cast aside. My constituents, in particular, will continue to fight any Labour proposal to scrap the KOSBies. I support the traditional regimental structure in Scotland and throughout the British Army, and I will continue to fight for the independence of the KOSB.

What is happening is simply not good enough. Soldiers, their families and the whole of Scotland need to know what their fate is. I urge the Minister, in replying to the debate, to tell us today when there will be an answer. The Black Watch would especially welcome that. Her Majesty's Opposition realise that the deployment of Black Watch troops to central Iraq was a military request in a time of war, and we stand by the Government in that undertaking. As tragic events have unfolded, we have continued, and will continue, to support the Government when we think that they are taking such hard but necessary decisions. Unlike some in the House, we will never use the deaths of Scottish soldiers as a vehicle to score political points. To do so would be extremely questionable. However, we will continue our campaign, which is ruthlessly focused on saving all six of our historic regiments.

Scotland's six regiments have battled for Britain for hundreds of years. Our soldiers have fought, bled and died in the name of freedom. In the past century alone, they have protected this island's liberty in two world wars. They have defended our interests in Korea and the Gulf. They have dealt with our internal troubles in Northern Ireland and sought to keep the peace in the Balkans. They have fought to give others, in Afghanistan and now in Iraq, the same freedom as we enjoy. All six regiments have a proud and distinguished history. Four have seen action in the continuing liberation of Iraq. Speculation continues that the Highlanders and the Royal Scots are being readied to go to Iraq, which would mean that all six regiments would shortly have been at the forefront of operations in that theatre.

As I said, the way in which the Government have treated soldiers and their families, especially those of the Black Watch, disgusts me. Families of troops are well aware that their loved ones live a dangerous if incredibly rewarding life. Our soldiers have wives and children, and mothers and fathers, and they deserve to be treated with the utmost respect and admiration, especially at times of war. That has not happened in the past few weeks. That is why I urge the Government to tell Parliament today when they will announce the final decision on Scotland's regimental structure. If they do not know the date for that, the least they can do is admit it. I hope that between now and then the Government take stock and re-evaluate the consequences of the action they seem intent on taking.

Let us not pretend that the Army has asked for this. Yesterday, General Sir Mike Jackson said:

> "I would much prefer increasing the size of the Army but that's simply not on offer. I can either accept what's on offer—a reduced size of the Army—or go."

This is a political decision that goes right the way up to the Prime Minister. It is not a military decision, and that shows. We would be hard pressed to find an Army man who thought that this was a good idea in any respect.

If the Government had set out to choose the most inappropriate, ill-informed and insane time to cut our armed forces, they could not have picked a better time than now. We as a nation have been involved in several conflicts in recent years—not to mention our ever-increasing peacekeeping obligations. Nobody ever said that preserving freedom and helping others to do the same was easy. It comes at a price; that price is maintaining our full fighting force. This is not the first time that cuts in our armed forces have been proposed. However, I cannot remember cuts being proposed at a time of such severe military overstretch. As well as being a wretched betrayal of our troops, it undermines the security of our country.

Many Members in attendance this morning are committed to saving our Scottish regiments.

[Mr. Russell Brown]

Mr. Russell Brown: I am listening intently to what the hon. Gentleman is saying, and if he is going to come on to the topic that I am about to mention, I apologise. I have not heard what his party's position is. He is talking about cuts and financial constraints. Is his party in favour of retaining all the regiments in their current form? If his party were in power, how would they achieve that on a declining budget?

Mr. Duncan: Our policy certainly is to retain all the regiments as they are at present. I have made that perfectly clear, and I will restate it shortly.

The hon. Gentleman mentions a declining budget. That contradicts what the Secretary of State for Scotland said yesterday in this Chamber; he suggested that the budget was increasing. The hon. Gentleman and his colleagues should get their figures correct.

Many Members are committed to saving our Scottish regiments, and I am delighted to see so many of them present. No matter which party they belong to, they must be realistic about how that will be achieved. Scottish National party members argue—somewhat hypocritically—for the maintenance of Scotland's full complement in the British Army. That will add to the momentum of our campaign, but in the final analysis whether the six Scottish regiments are retained is a matter of political will-power. The final decision will depend on who is Prime Minister. Members must be realistic and concede that, notwithstanding a humiliating U-turn by the Government, the only way to save the regiments is for the Conservative party to form the Government after the next general election. For the information of the hon. Member for Dumfries (Mr. Brown), the Leader of the Opposition has stated that within the very first week of our being in power, the next Conservative Government will reverse any Labour cuts to our Scottish regiments.

This is a noble cause that is supported by the majority of Scots; even the Minister has to acknowledge that.

10.39 am

The Minister of State, Ministry of Defence (Mr. Adam Ingram): I thank the hon. Member for North Tayside (Pete Wishart) for securing this debate on the role and future of the Scottish regiments. I also acknowledge the contributions made by my hon. Friends the Members for Dundee, East (Mr. Luke), for Dumfries (Mr. Brown) and for Glasgow, Govan (Mr. Sarwar), by the right hon. Member for Berwick-upon-Tweed (Mr. Beith) and by the hon. Members for Argyll and Bute (Mr. Reid), for Newark (Patrick Mercer) and for Perth (Annabelle Ewing), and of course the contribution of the hon. Member for Galloway and Upper Nithsdale (Mr. Duncan).

In recent debates and elsewhere my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Defence and I have made clear the importance of Scotland's relationship with the armed forces and, more widely, with the Ministry of Defence. I am conscious of the fact that a good number of Members present never attend defence debates. I excuse the hon. Member for Newark and the hon. Member for Mid-Norfolk (Mr. Simpson) who, of course, is on the Conservative Front Bench, but I welcome the new converts to the cause of defence. I look forward to them standing side-by-side with the Secretary of State and me when we campaign for more resources for defence, something that they have not done to date.

The debate centres on the restructuring of the infantry. It is perhaps the most high profile area of change announced in July by my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State. I welcome the opportunity to explain once again what we are doing, why we are doing it and what the implications of not doing it would be.

I am, of course, aware of the debate that surrounds the future of the Scottish regiments. After all, I represent a Scottish seat. The debate highlights how much the Army matters in Scotland. Scotland's infantry regiments have a proud history and continue to serve this country courageously. That was most recently demonstrated by the Black Watch deployment. I commend the bravery of the deployment and offer my condolences to the bereaved families. This is a sad period for the Black Watch. I accept that everyone in the House supports that sentiment.

I wish, however, that we could get a bit more honesty from the party that the hon. Member for North Tayside (Pete Wishart) represents. The SNP does not want to preserve the Scottish regiments as we know them. It has made it clear that, in an independent Scotland, we would withdraw from NATO and would not participate in EU missions, as they are linked to NATO. The SNP would downgrade the Scottish regiments to occasional peacekeeping missions. It is difficult to know precisely where those missions would be because the SNP opposed what our forces were asked to do in the Balkans, in Afghanistan and in Iraq, and questioned our engagements elsewhere.

So, I question the motives of the SNP on the issue. I doubt whether its argument is about preserving the capability of the Scottish regiments. I remind the House of the statement made by an SNP spokesman, who called the Union flag "the butcher's apron". That is an outrageous slur on the courageous men and women of the British Army, not least those serving in the regiments that we are considering. So it is little wonder that I do not take the hon. Member for North Tayside or his party seriously when we are discussing the future of the armed forces.

Throughout its history, the Army has been subject to change—sometimes that change has been dramatic. It must evolve and adapt to meet future challenges. The reason is simple. To ignore reality would be foolhardy and damaging to the high standards expected of a modern fighting force. The changes planned for the infantry are part of that evolution. There are two key reasons for those changes.

The first reason is the conclusion by the Army Board that the infantry arms plot no longer represents the best way to deliver operational capability. I note what the hon. Member for Perth said when praying in aid for a retired brigadier, but the weight of military experience on the Army Board is substantially against her. I expressed my views about where the SNP is coming from. I am only commenting about that particular issue.

Annabelle Ewing: Will the Minister of State give way on that point?

Mr. Ingram: If I have time, I will give the hon. Lady an opportunity to speak.

I read the report from the brigadier in question and I recognise his considerable experience. However, we must set that against the breadth of experience on the Army Board.

So, one reason why we are implementing this change is the considerable arguments that have been advanced—not for the first time—that there is a need to change the arms plot and dispose of it.

The second issue is the progress towards lasting peace in Northern Ireland. I will deal with the impact of events in Northern Ireland. The improved security climate helped us judge that we could remove four battalions from the 14,500 troops allocated to the Province. That provided an opportunity to consider how best to organise the Army for expeditionary warfare. The judgment was that the Army would be best served and best prepared for the challenges of the future if infantry battalions were less reliant on reinforcements when deployed on operations and our forces had the right balance of key enablers: logisticians, engineers, signallers and intelligence personnel. We decided that some 550 posts freed up by the change in Northern Ireland would be reinvested into the infantry to develop more robust, resilient units, and the rest would be used to strengthen the key enablers who are crucial to sustainable operational capability.

However, the most important factor in changes to the structure of the infantry is the decision to end the infantry arms plot—a process whereby we have moved infantry battalions from role to role and place to place every few years. Although the arms plot maintained broad experience and variety, it also hampered the availability of infantry battalions. Currently, only 26 to 27 of the 40 infantry battalions are available for deployment at any time and some seven to eight battalions—about 20 per cent. of the total infantry strength—are unavailable due to the arms plot. I shall give some examples.

In March 2003, the Highlanders moved to Germany to begin their armoured infantry training, which meant that they were unavailable for some seven months. In September 2003 the Scots Guards began their conversion and were unavailable for six months. The Black Watch has been subject to similar disruption, which was brought home to me recently when I visited Black Watch families in Warminster. Not to put too fine a point on it, that is impractical and inefficient and no one has argued against it today, apart from the hon. Member for Perth. I do not think that anyone can deny its impracticality and inefficiency.

Annabelle Ewing: I was quoting Brigadier Gary Barnett, and I am pleased that the Minister recognises his breadth of military experience as a colonel of the Black Watch for some 12 years. The suggestion that the scrapping of the Scottish regiment system is a precondition for the phasing out of the arms plot is, as Brigadier Barnett said, a red herring.

Mr. Ingram: I suggest that the hon. Lady reads again the totality of what has been argued. If she is now saying that the brigadier accepts the removal of the arms plot, perhaps we have unanimity in the Chamber. Let us understand the importance of what is driving this change: the need to have a more efficient and effective means of utilising our infantry battalions.

Ending the arms plot will make most of the 36 battalions available for deployment, as opposed to the 26 or 27 at present. The logic and benefits of that change are undeniable. Ceasing the arms plot will increase our operational capability, not reduce it. Doing so will also assist in achieving a more predictable tour interval across the infantry. I do not gainsay some of the problems that we are experiencing in some areas on tour intervals. We are trying to get back into a better balance.

In future, the battalions will be fixed by role and, largely, by location, which will release the resources that are routinely tied up in moving location or retraining. The Army will, therefore, be more capable and effective, because as well as more battalions being available for operations, the new structure will provide continuity of expertise and role and greater brigade stability. In future career development for officers and senior non-commissioned officers could be much more carefully planned, and individuals would be able to move between battalions for career development and increased breadth of experience. At present that is largely dependent on the role played by an individual battalion, which is restrictive and inefficient.

I could mention many anecdotal comments that I have heard. I probably meet more members of the armed forces than anyone else—probably even more than a good number of generals—because it is the nature of my job to meet them and their families. I have many anecdotes, some from Scottish regiments, many of which come from serving warrant officers, who say "Keep going, because this is about the future Army structure, not about the past Army structure." We can trade comment on this matter, but the important thing is that the debate is out there and many people realise its benefit. It is about career development and the capacity within the armed forces to best use essential resources.

Mr. Keith Simpson (Mid-Norfolk) (Con): Will the Minister give way?

Mr. Ingram: No.

Multi-battalion regiments are not a new concept. A substantial part—we could argue over whether it is half or one third—is organised that way, and operates effectively. That concept has been a success. Let me make it clear that we value highly the benefits and traditions of the regimental system; that is not in dispute. What is being proposed will not undermine the system, but will underpin it.

Mr. Duncan: Does the Minister think that a multi-battalion single regiment will assist or take away from Army recruitment in Scotland?

Mr. Ingram: There is an important debate to be had on that, and I will come to recruitment issues later, but that point is hard to prove one way or the other.

Mr. Simpson: Will the Minister give way?

Mr. Ingram: No, because I want to deal with some of the issues raised.

The frequent moves caused by the arms plot are destructive to family life, and have an adverse impact on retention. It is reflective of the change in wider society

[Mr. Ingram]

that family stability has become much more of an issue for people. As my hon. Friend the Member for Dumfries pointed out, the Government seek to be more family friendly. That is one benefit to ending the arms plot.

The end of the arms plot will also mean that single-battalion regiments, including the Scottish regiments, will need to reorganise themselves to meet the requirement for regiments of two or more battalions.

Pete Wishart: Will the Minister give way?

Mr. Ingram: If I get time. *[Interruption.]* Mr. Deputy Speaker, I will give way when I am ready to give way. If hon. Members want me to answer the issues raised—

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Order. If the Minister gives way, he gives way; if he does not, he does not.

Mr. Ingram: If the hon. Member for North Tayside (Pete Wishart) rose to apologise for his butcher's apron comment, I may be prepared to accept his contribution.

I was making the point that the end of the arms plot will have consequences on the structure and organisation of the Army, and on what will then happen to single battalions. My right hon. Friend the Prime Minister has made it clear that no decisions have been made. It is important that the Army is given the opportunity to determine the structure that will best deliver the operational effectiveness that we need. When it is ready, the Army Board will make recommendations on the future organisation of the infantry, with a final decision being announced before the Christmas recess.

Pete Wishart: I thank the Minister for tearing himself away from the traditional and usual Ministry of Defence speech. I know that he is an avid reader of the *Daily Record*; can he therefore account for why we saw those headlines last week? What on earth happened on Tuesday night? Why were the regiments saved on Tuesday night, only to be told that it was nothing to do with the Prime Minister on Wednesday morning?

Mr. Ingram: I could say, "Stupid boy" to the hon. Gentleman. I wish that he would not ask me to account for newspaper headlines. I do not write the newspapers; I do not even read many of them, because the quality of information imparted is not good and does not deal with the breadth of issues. I take his point that I am an avid reader of MOD speeches. That is because these are important and technical matters, not debating points. The reason why I am setting this out at some length is so that, hopefully, the audience outside the Committee will understand the misrepresentation that has been going on.

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Order. This is not a Committee.

Mr. Ingram: I apologise for that technicality, Mr. Deputy Speaker. I mean outside the arena in which we are debating this issue. We hope also to get our argument over. That is important, because there has been a great deal of misrepresentation and misinformation.

I answered my hon. Friend the Member for Glasgow, Govan (Mr. Sarwan), who asked when we would impart that knowledge. I said that the plan is to do so before the Christmas recess.

Mr. Simpson: Will the Minister give way?

Mr. Ingram: No, I will not give way to the hon. Gentleman. We have many opportunities to debate these issues in defence debates, and I want to deal with the issues that have been raised this morning.

We have not set out to destroy the regimental system, or, as some have argued—although I have not heard it raised in this debate—to create a corps of infantry. Those accusations are simply not true. The regimental system has served the British Army extremely well, and we recognise that it is at the heart of the British infantry. It is vital that we maintain the traditions of the infantry, but that does not mean that the current structure is the right one for the future. That is where the debate lies.

Very few regiments and corps exist in the same form today as in the past. There has been a constant process of change and regeneration; new organisations have been created, which have maintained previous traditions while developing their own. Some of Scotland's regiments are perfect examples of that. The Royal Highland Fusiliers, which recruits in my area of East Kilbride, was formed in 1959 from the amalgamation of the Royal Scots Fusiliers and the Highland Light Infantry. They were previously the 21st Regiment of Foot and the 73rd Regiment of Foot. We can see the long traditions when we unravel what is inherent in the amalgamated and reformed regiments. It is important that traditions carry on in the new structures.

I have no doubt that the new structure for the infantry will not only contain existing geographical linkages, but enhance them. With soldiers and their families having the chance of greater stability, the result can only be even greater identity between regiments and their local communities. It is important that hon. Members understand that the decision to reduce the infantry by one battalion in Scotland and three in England was taken only after careful consideration of a number of factors. It was not a case of members of the Army Board meeting in a smoke-filled room and being told to get on with it: there was careful analysis by military planners and people who have spent all their lives serving their country.

Mr. Sarwar: Will my right hon. Friend give way?

Mr. Ingram: I will give way in a moment. Had the Army Board looked only at the sustainability of manning, the options for the future of the infantry would be very different.

Mr. Sarwar: Does my right hon. Friend accept that if the historic and unique names of the regiments were lost, that would be detrimental to future recruitment?

Mr. Ingram: That becomes a point for debate, and I am coming on to recruitment. Over the past 10 years, compared with other regiments, Scottish regiments have had difficulty recruiting and retaining personnel. Of the six most undermanned regiments in the infantry, four were from the Scottish division. On average, over that period, the Royal Scots were undermanned by 126; the Royal Highland Fusiliers by 69; the King's Own Scottish Borderers by 39; the Black Watch by 73; the Highlanders by 83; and the Argyll and Sutherland Highlanders by 32. That is not a criticism; that is a recognised fact.

I was speaking to a regimental sergeant-major of the Argylls recently, who said that Scotland cannot sustain six regiments. That was his opinion, but the fact of the matter is that he understands what many people have not grasped: demographic problems are affecting recruiting in Scotland. There is a declining population in the key areas of recruitment. Given the number of Scottish battalions, there is also an imbalance, and they struggle to recruit sufficient personnel. Per head of population, Scottish battalions need to recruit roughly three times the numbers of soldiers than other battalions. These demographics will become much more difficult in future. We must attend to the matter now, as we are thinking of the future.

I have tried to set out a range of issues that we are addressing within the Ministry of Defence, and I appreciate that there is a deep feeling about these matters. I am conditioned by it too because I represent a Scottish constituency, but I really do question the motives of some who raised the debate.

Benefit Office Closures

11 am

Mr. Simon Thomas (Ceredigion) (PC): I shall commence as the highland retreat beats its way from the Chamber. I am pleased to have the opportunity to introduce a debate on benefit office closures, which are taking place not only in Wales but throughout the United Kingdom. I want to talk in particular about the impact of such closures on service delivery, as Parliament has not yet had an opportunity to explore that aspect—in fact, we have not had an opportunity to explore any aspect of the closures. The announcement was made at the very last hour on the very last day of the now defunct September recall, and we did not have time to digest it. We returned to our constituencies only to have jobcentre staff furiously phone us on Friday saying, "We must talk." It is a great pity that there was no consultation with members of the public, staff and unions before the announcement was made.

Since the announcement, in my constituency—I am sure that this is reflected throughout the UK—there has been a wave of concern, protest and real anger that the Government are implementing the plan. The anger has arisen in Wales because we have seen such a proposal before: the Conservative Administration brought in a blueprint for change about 10 years ago. The unions, Welsh Labour MPs, Plaid Cymru and, I am sure, the Liberal Democrats fought it tooth and nail, and we were successful. Benefits Agency offices, local processing facilities and not only jobs but services, too, were kept going in communities. The lack of response, particularly from Welsh Labour Back-Benchers, to the impact of the Labour Government's plans is therefore extremely disheartening.

Mr. Elfyn Llwyd (Meirionnydd Nant Conwy) (PC): Like me, my hon. Friend is concerned that the bulk of the jobs that are likely to be lost—some 6,000 of them—will be lost from an objective 1 area in Wales, and that the whole change is predicated on the idea that the vulnerable in society will make their first contact by telephoning an office.

Mr. Thomas: I agree with my hon. Friend, and later I shall expand on that point. It is deeply ironic that whereas high street financial institutions are now reaching out to us saying, "We are opening branches again, you can contact us in person and you can have direct personal customer care," the Government are saying that any level or quality of service can be delivered via telephone or e-mail. I shall address the effect that that will have on disabled people, people with learning difficulties and the most vulnerable people in society, who use such services.

Lembit Öpik (Montgomeryshire) (LD): It is indeed ironic that the private sector is genuinely decentralising but the public sector is centralising through such closures, and doing so in an entirely arbitrary way. The staffing levels that have been set for the centralised offices bear absolutely no relation to what it is possible to achieve in rural areas such as the hon. Gentleman's and mine. Customers will suffer because accountants are calling the shots.

Mr. Thomas: It always pains me to say this, but the hon. Gentleman has a good point. He is right to draw attention to the fact that an arbitrary staffing level has been set for call centres and that it cannot be sustained in rural areas. A whole swathe of territory in mid and west Wales—I am sure that many other parts of the UK are similarly affected—of more than 100 square miles, with 350,000 people in it, will not have a single office with a processing facility. All such work will be shoved to what I call the periphery of Wales, but other people prefer to call its main corridors, along the M4 or the A55 in the north. The hon. Gentleman is right to say that the exercise is accountant-driven.

I wish to thank the staff and the union at my local office, the Aberystwyth benefit office and jobcentre. They have reacted magnificently to this threatening and disturbing news. They have come together and united behind local councillors and organisations such as Access Ceredigion, which is a disability rights organisation in my constituency, and Age Concern. We have persuaded *Cambrian News*, the newspaper for all mid-Wales, to run a campaign among its readers to retain the services in my constituency—and, I think, in that of the hon. Member for Montgomeryshire (Lembit Öpik).

We are discussing public services that at the moment are delivered directly to the public. They are worth fighting for. Civil servants do a decent job and deliver a good-quality service; we should not endanger the quality of services for the most vulnerable and needy.

Annabelle Ewing (Perth) (SNP): In my constituency, the Department for Work and Pensions plans to close the social security office completely, with the loss of 54 jobs. As my hon. Friend rightly says, those people are not faceless bureaucrats; they provide key front-line services to vulnerable members of our society. Does he agree that if the proposed closure goes ahead, it is likely that voluntary bodies and local authority welfare departments will be expected to pick up the pieces on the cheap?

Mr. Thomas: I am sure that my hon. Friend is right. As might be expected, all the hon. Members who have intervened have anticipated what I was about to say.

When the pension credit was introduced in my neck of the woods—I do not know about Perth—there was a huge increase in the number of pensioners who had difficulty contacting offices and understanding the system. Many pensioners came to see me, but I am sure they were only a fraction of those who approached the citizens advice bureau, the local authority, Age Concern or similar organisations that were trying to pick up the pieces on a voluntary basis, without being properly funded to do so.

It is convenient for the Government, as it has been for many financial institutions, to move the cost of accessing services from themselves to the individual, so that it is members of the public who pay for the national telephone call, the e-mail, to log on to the internet, or to be kept on the line for 10 minutes because the person they are talking to says they cannot find their record or their number. Companies have used that trick and now the Government want to use it as well, but that will not do, because we are talking about people who are receiving what the Government say is the minimum that they should have to live on—the minimum to which they are entitled because of a disability or other circumstances. There is a real threat in the Government's actions.

Wales has a problem with continuing disability and sickness benefits. Although it has been announced today that unemployment has increased slightly, it has generally decreased; despite that, the uptake of disability and sickness benefits is on the increase in Wales. That could in part have happened because the Benefits Agency has—rightly—reformed its culture in the past few years: it no longer refuses to tell people what they are entitled to, as it used to do under the Conservatives. The increase in take-up of such benefits is also due to a trend of moving people off the unemployment register and on to sickness and disability payments. The Government say that they now want to reverse that trend, but it will be difficult to do that and to deal with people without having the staff in the offices who understand what is going on in the community and the reasons why people make such claims.

We expect at least 6,000 job losses across the civil service in Wales. That is what the Public and Commercial Services union has forecast, and I think it is a fair estimate. It is a pro rata forecast based on the fact that we in Wales have a slightly higher number of civil servants per capita than elsewhere in the United Kingdom and a much greater reliance on public sector jobs: about 60 per cent. of our gross domestic product is public sector, compared with the UK average of 40 per cent. We are particularly concerned about the first wave of cuts, which will result in 2,000 jobs being lost as local offices are closed and centralised benefit processing centres are created. Those centres will have the minimum number of employees—150 or 200—needed to function. The Government have said that they must have that number of people.

The current system has many virtues. I will talk about my local Benefits Agency office, although practices may vary. The staff there have allocated claimants alphabetically. They know the claimants, so that when someone goes in to consult a member of staff, they talk to a person they met last week, or the week before that, or the previous year. They know that there will be face-to-face contact and that the member of staff will have local knowledge. The fact that the office is local means that a huge support mechanism is in place. In the public meeting that we called to discuss the closure—a very well attended public meeting in Aberystwyth—several people said how grateful they were to the staff for helping them, for example, through periods of bereavement when they did not know where to turn. It is difficult to provide that type of help on the phone, and impossible by e-mail. We all know how psychologically important it is to have eye contact with somebody who is in a state of distress and searching for advice and help. That eye contact will be lost if the office is closed.

I hope the Minister will be able to tell me what alternative procedures will be put in place. Obviously, I am arguing against any closures, particularly in mid-Wales, because we need to retain some provision between Llanelli and Wrexham, but if there are to be closures in Wales or elsewhere in the United Kingdom, what arrangements will be made so that a face-to-face service can continue to be delivered?

With pension credit, surgeries were set up. The only reason that pension credit worked at all in my constituency was that the local service in Swansea made a huge effort to hold local surgeries in the towns and villages of Ceredigion. They are still doing that, but one of the unseen side effects of the new policy that was not much publicised in the announcement is that that service, too, will be reduced. Both benefits processing and the Pension Service are to be hit by a 10 per cent. cut, which will remove the face-to-face link with pensioners. Furthermore, the Child Support Agency is to be hit with up to 50 per cent. cuts in face-to-face services. I have a large pile of CSA cases that I have been wrangling with for four or five years—I am sure that all hon. Members have similar piles. How much more frustrating will it be it if those individuals are not able to call in to a local office for an update about the problems that they are having with the Child Support Agency? Throughout mid and west Wales we will lose that service.

Owing to historical accident, we in Wales have a higher proportion of claimants than the rest of the UK. Our population is much more geographically dispersed than that of the UK. Closing the Aberystwyth office will mean that there are no offices between Llanelli and Wrexham. People living an area where—despite the fact that it is rural—car ownership is lower than average will be asked to travel longer distances.

As my hon. Friend the Member for Perth (Annabelle Ewing) remarked, the change will put pressure on voluntary organisations, councils, politicians and councillors to fill the gap. The primary disability rights organisation in my area, Access Ceredigion, has just lost its local authority funding and it closed last week. At the same time as these cuts are happening, the organisation that brought millions of pounds in extra benefits to Ceredigion is closing. Ten thousand people in Ceredigion claim some form of disability benefit, which is what happens when there is an ageing population in a seaside constituency. Those people will lose their direct contact and their ability to access support through the social fund, bereavement benefit and maternity allowance payments. The whole process will be removed from the local community and relocated at the other end of a phone, where it might not be got hold of.

We all know the history of numerous Government IT projects. One only has to consider the CSA—and when are the magistrates courts going to get their integrated computer system? I think that that system is about seven years overdue. We are putting a lot of faith in technology. We have kept two magistrates courts in Ceredigion, which shows that we have a record of fighting for local services and keeping them. We will try to do so again.

Services are being replaced by unreliable technology that cannot meet human needs, especially the needs of vulnerable people who are suffering and are uncertain about their rights and their future. As my hon. Friend the Member for Meirionnydd Nant Conwy (Mr. Llwyd) remarked, it is ironic that this is happening in an objective 1 area—precisely the type of area that, as the Government acknowledged to the European Union, needs to be uplifted and supported. That means more than just an increase in wage levels in such areas. If people are in need of Government support, they should receive it.

It is doubly ironic that jobs are being lost from Aberystwyth just as the National Assembly decides to decentralise and put jobs back into Aberystwyth. Before anyone thinks, "Oh well, jobs are coming to Aberystwyth so I shouldn't be concerned," let me point out that the jobs in question were centralised 10 years ago by the Conservatives, so we are getting back only what was centralised by the previous Government, and now a Labour Government are centralising again. We are dealing with fashions and trends that go around but do not actually take service delivery into account. I am particularly concerned about that.

I have had lots of correspondence from those who use the service, and I want to read briefly from one constituent's letter, which I received at the start of the week. My constituent writes:

> "As a client of Aberystwyth Benefits Office I am hoping that the Government can be made to 'see sense'"—

I agree 100 per cent.

> "I am . . . on Income Support with a Disability Premium at age almost 58. I have no car",

and my constituent lives five miles outside Aberystwyth, in the country.

> "I have found the staff at Aberystwyth Benefits Office very helpful and I am angry at the thought of them losing their jobs. If saving money is the Government's objective would it not be a better plan to avoid involvement in dodgy wars?"

The public know what is going on, even if some politicians do not.

> "If the Government can treat Ceredigion in this way, then I really feel the sooner we have control over all decisions for Wales, the better."

That is what is happening. The Government's policy is driving people to nationalism, so perhaps we should support that policy, but the fact is that the cuts are seen as an attack on local services and delivery. People are asking why a Labour Government are introducing them when the Labour party has always stood for local services and delivery and always opposed what the Conservatives have said. I see that there are no Labour Members from Wales present apart from the hon. Member for Ogmore (Huw Irranca-Davies), who I understand is on duty this morning.

Finally, I turn to future savings. The statement that we received on 16 September—we have not had anything since—said simply that the modernisation programme

> "will lead to more efficient and effective services for our customers".

That broad statement in no way addresses service delivery. It refers to the Government's objective of saving money, but it does not address the quality of services. However, I want to put on record my understanding that the maintenance and ownership of the buildings has now been put out to Land Securities Trillium Ltd., so when the buildings or offices are closed or run down, there is no huge saving for the Government, because the financial benefits of the offices go to the private company.

The plans need to be re-examined. It is a disgrace that we have not had an opportunity to debate them in detail in Parliament. I have not been able to go into great detail

[Mr. Thomas]

in the short time available, so I have concentrated on examples from my constituency and mid and west Wales. I know that my hon. Friend the Member for Meirionnydd Nant Conwy is to meet the Minister before long to discuss these matters further. As well as a delivery system for mid and west Wales, we need the Government to think again about how they treat the most vulnerable people in our society.

11.18 am

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Work and Pensions (Mr. Chris Pond): I congratulate the hon. Member for Ceredigion (Mr. Thomas) on his impeccable timing in securing the debate—within hours of learning from the latest employment figures that 103,000 more people in Wales are in work, partly as a result of the contribution of Jobcentre Plus and partly because of the Government's overall macro-economic policies. More than 2 million people throughout the country are better off because of the individual efforts that staff have made in the past two years to help people claim the right benefit to move into work and to ensure that employers get the right people to fill their vacancies.

I was pleased to see in the *Cambrian News*, which I often read, that the hon. Gentleman regards the services provided by civil servants in Ceredigion as first class—indeed, he reiterated that point in his contribution. On their behalf, I thank him for those comments, and I add my own tribute to their work.

As Members of Parliament, we all have a responsibility and duty to fight to improve services in our local communities, but I say to the hon. Gentleman and to others who have contributed to the debate that fighting to improve services is not the same as fighting to maintain buildings. Through Jobcentre Plus and our range of other services, we are working in new ways. Of course, as we have made clear, the focus is to ensure efficiencies in the provision of services where possible, but it is also to ensure that we provide the highest-possible quality of service to the people whom we serve.

The ways of working are now different. Gone are the days when we expected jobseekers or pensioners to traipse along to a benefit office to collect their benefit, and then off to an employment office or a jobcentre to look for vacancy information. People physically had to go to the jobcentre to look at a bewildering array of jobs, and had very little support. Jobcentre Plus is not just about offices; it is about the service that we provide, day in, day out, to thousands of people. We are making sure that people can access services without having to go to a Jobcentre Plus office. Comprehensive information is available in local libraries and other places, as well as on the internet. Also, there is a touch-screen service through the job points, an increasing number of which are being installed in convenient locations, including our own offices. They are making more than 400,000 vacancies readily accessible. We are consulting locally on the most appropriate form of provision in each area.

The hon. Member for Montgomeryshire (Lembit Öpik) claimed that the changes were being made in an arbitrary way, and the hon. Member for Ceredigion supported him in that.

Lembit Öpik: My point—and, I am sure, the hon. Member for Ceredigion's—was that the threshold for how many staff are required to make a centre viable is arbitrary. We think that more than 100 members of staff are needed. That threshold is the arbitrary measure that makes it pretty much impossible for any centre in my constituency or the hon. Gentleman's to be viable.

Mr. Pond: Questioning how viable some of our jobcentres are is inevitable, since we are talking about very few staff serving very few people in some jobcentres. However, the numbers are not arbitrary. There is no clear and fixed threshold, although there are guidelines. District managers have to make a decision on how best to provide the highest-quality service to customers in each area. In doing that, they have been consulting with local MPs, local voluntary organisations, staff, the trade unions and many other organisations, including welfare groups, to find out how we can provide our service most efficiently and at the highest quality to the people whom we serve.

Mr. Llwyd: I confess that I have not been consulted at all about the closures. Let me mention one thing that disturbs many of us present today: at the beginning of May, the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions met the First Minister in Cardiff, and they discussed a range of subjects, but the Secretary of State did not even mention that the closures were on the horizon. Why did he not even consult the National Assembly for Wales?

Mr. Pond: I understand that the hon. Gentleman is having a meeting in the near future with my ministerial colleague, which will provide an ideal opportunity to run through some of his concerns. We would be happy for other hon. Members who have contributed to this debate to sit down with us and discuss some of the issues face to face, because we all recognise that these are important issues for our constituents. Valuable though today's opportunity to raise the issue is, it is not possible for us to talk through precisely how we will move ahead at local level during such a short debate, especially when we are talking about several different communities.

In trying to work out the best way forward, our plan is to take account of a wide range of factors in relation to the location of new centres. In some places, such as Aberystwyth, we can refurbish existing premises; in others, we are investing in brand-new acquisitions. We are to open a new 250-seat contact centre in Bangor by December 2005; that contact centre will play a pivotal role in the provision of Welsh language services. I am sure that hon. Members accept that that is one of the ways in which we can improve the provision of Welsh language services in a way that is not always possible through the current office structure. It is also important to stress that the choices remain subject to detailed planning, which is still ongoing. We welcome the discussions with Members on how we should move forward.

When a full Jobcentre Plus presence is neither practicable nor viable, we will adopt more flexible approaches, such as the installation of job points, the use of telephones that give direct access to our facilities and other services delivered through the premises of some of our partners—I am talking mainly about local authorities. Such approaches may be particularly helpful in some areas. We can also consider ways—postal signing, for example—of helping people who find it physically difficult to make the journey to a Jobcentre Plus building. We are running a pilot to establish how telephone signing might work, while making sure that the tailored provision of the personal adviser service is available to people who are able to visit the jobcentre. Sometimes, we shall be able to meet the travel costs of people who are not on a regular signing cycle so that they can get face-to-face support.

Mr. Simon Thomas: In response to my hon. Friend the Member for Meirionnydd Nant Conwy, the Minister talked about consultation and achieving the best way of delivering services to our communities. The statement of 16 September said clearly that the 37 sites will cease to be viable and will close altogether. Is the Minister now saying that if a strong case can be made on service delivery grounds for retention or for a change in those plans, he and his Department will be open to persuasion?

Mr. Pond: I am saying that we will have real discussions with hon. Members. However, they have to accept the fact that we seek to achieve two objectives: greater efficiency and better-quality provision. The assumption in this debate has been that there is a trade-off between the two, but I believe that we can achieve an improvement in both. We shall be happy to discuss the way forward with hon. Members in more detail than is possible in this debate.

In the last few minutes remaining, I should like to focus on staff, particularly those in Aberystwyth. That issue was also raised when we had to make rationalisations in office provision. I want to send out the message that we are committed to doing everything that we can to provide help and support for our staff, whose work we value greatly. We shall continue in our discussions with the trade unions. As we have said, redundancy will only be a last resort in this case, as elsewhere. We will do everything we can to help people to relocate, if that is necessary. We are talking to other Government Departments nationally to establish whether there are alternative forms of employment that people could pursue within the public service—we know of people's commitment to public service. We are currently in discussions with the Welsh Assembly and the Welsh Development Agency to establish whether, given their timetable and ours, we can work more closely together to make sure that jobs are available.

I emphasise that although we have to rationalise some of our processing procedures, we are increasing the overall number of front-line staff. Jobcentre Plus will increase customer-facing staff by 17 per cent. Through the substantial investment that we have made in recent years, we hope to achieve a more efficient system that will provide a better quality of service for the people whom we serve. That will allow us to continue to deliver a high-quality service, and although any job losses are regrettable, we are doing everything we can to minimise them. At the end of the day, the improvement in efficiency will release resources to make further progress towards achieving the objectives that everyone in this Chamber shares: dealing with the problems of child and pensioner poverty, and getting even closer to full employment than today's figures show.

11.30 am

Sitting suspended until Two o'clock.

Lebanon

2.7 pm

Mr. Iain Luke (Dundee, East) (Lab): I rise to speak with some trepidation as a relative newcomer to this elevated plane of international relations. I was pleased to secure this debate because I have had a long-standing interest in Lebanon, and the British people have closely followed the issue for decades. Obviously, it was on television much more frequently during the dreadful happenings of the 1970s and 1980s, with the civil war and the Palestinian refugee camps, and the Israeli invasion in the 1980s, followed by occupation and events such as hostage taking, which is now commonplace in Muslim countries such as Iraq and Afghanistan. No one can forget the trials and tribulations experienced by the three hostages, Terry Waite, John McCarthy and Brian Keenan, in Lebanon during the 1980s. I have read all the accounts of their time in captivity when they were stowed away in darkness in a country that is full of light. They inspired this debate and my involvement in the all-party group on Lebanon.

Issues relating to Lebanon no longer appear so much on our television screens, and some people—such as Nabih Berri and Walid Jumblatt—who became household names as leaders of militia groups during the 1970s and 1980s have now moved into mainstream politics. I was a member of the parliamentary delegation—to which I shall refer later—and was lucky to visit Lebanon in September to meet both those people and other representatives of political parties in Lebanon.

One of the reasons why I am speaking in the debate is that I have been involved with the all-party group on Lebanon, which was formed last year to improve relations between ourselves and Lebanon and which has been reasonably active. I know that a lot of its members are not here today because they are abroad or because they have been delayed by the Division, but I want to pay tribute to people such as my hon. Friends the Members for Erith and Thamesmead (John Austin) and for Edmonton (Mr. Love), and the hon. Members for East Devon (Mr. Swire), for South-East Cornwall (Mr. Breed) and for Wantage (Mr. Jackson), who have formed the nucleus of the all-party group. Those people are much more experienced in international relations than me, and they have helped me to feel my way through my role as an office bearer and as part of the deputation that went out to Lebanon in September.

I want to draw attention to the fact that this is the first time that Lebanon has been debated for a considerable period. The two previous debates took place on 15 July 1994, when John Gunnell, who was then the Member for Morley and Leeds, South, was successful in securing a debate on the refugee problem in Lebanon, and on 28 July 1989. Those debates took place a long time ago and since then there has not been much discussion in Parliament of the situation in Lebanon. It is worth making the point that when the hon. Member for Canterbury (Mr. Brazier) stood up on 28 July 1989, he said that he was grateful for the opportunity to have that Adjournment debate. Like the one in 1994, it was a half-hour debate. I am glad to have an hour and a half for this debate, although I know that the Minister is supposed to go to Brussels today, and is stretched in that regard, so I will try to limit my comments.

The hon. Member for Canterbury said:

> "The public view is of a country filled with warring factions all as bad as one another, but I believe that that is not so and that, although no one faction or side is wholly blameless, we can make some sense of Lebanon, and it is in the West's interest, as well as being its duty, to do so."—[*Official Report*, 28 July 1989; Vol. 157, c. 1460.]

Those words about the west's understanding Lebanon and doing all that it can to aid it are as relevant today as they were then—even more so given what has happened internally in Lebanon in the past four or five months.

As part of a deputation from the Inter-Parliamentary Union, I was lucky to visit Lebanon at first hand and meet a wide range of people, from President Lahoud all the way through to people at the grass roots who were involved in health issues throughout the country. It was an interesting and informative visit, which was heavily promoted by our sister organisation in the Lebanese Parliament, the all-party UK friendship group, which is chaired by Mr. Yassine Jaber.

Yassine Jaber is an influential person. He is an MP for the southern part of Lebanon, which we visited as his guest. We visited the Fatima gate, as many people do, to see the border between Lebanon and Israel. It is a guarded frontier post, from which shots often come, but it was relatively quiet when we were there. Yassine Jaber took a lot of time to show us the country from the north to the south.

Yassine Jaber has played an influential role in creating in Lebanon a sense of the need to build bridges between the UK and the Lebanese Parliament. He was a Minister at some stage, and since the resignation of Prime Minister Hariri, he has been promoted on a temporary basis—I believe that the Administration in a formal sense is still being considered. He is now a Minister serving Lebanon. I am sure that, in that post, he will continue to highlight the need for better relationships between us and Lebanon.

Indeed, that was one of our major aims when we set up the all-party Lebanon group, with the Lebanese ambassador, Mr. Jihad Mortada, in attendance. We were looking to strengthen the ties between our two countries. It is amazing that most of the politicians in Lebanon have a dual existence. Obviously, they are based in Lebanon, but they have strong contacts elsewhere—many of them with the UK, if not with America and western Europe. They are keen to stress the need for better relationships to be struck between our two countries.

I also pay tribute to the hon. Members who came on the trip. The leader of the deputation, who cannot be here today, was my hon. Friend the Member for Cynon Valley (Ann Clwyd), who is active on the issue of reconstruction of Iraq. We also had my hon. Friend the Member for Forest of Dean (Diana Organ), and my hon. Friend the Member for Birmingham, Northfield (Richard Burden), who is certainly interested in the Palestinian situation. I will refer to that issue in my summing-up.

It was important that we went and listened to what was being said. We went at a time when things were stable, despite all the troubles of the 1970s, 1980s and 1990s. An impressive range of reconstruction programmes are going on, primarily in Beirut, which is an impressive centre for any country. However, it was also a time when, despite that reconstruction, there was a lot of uncertainty in the country about where it stands politically, and about where politics there stand.

Just before we arrived, there had been the issue of the extension of President Lahoud's term of office, which was believed by many to be at the behest of the Syrians. That issue certainly caused a lot of controversy. A fairly substantial vote had carried that measure, but a significant number of people in Walid Jumblatt's group, and others—specifically the Maronite Christians—were unhappy about it.

Prime Minister Hariri was under a great deal of pressure while we were in Lebanon. He was the one politician whom we were unable to meet, because he was in Spain accepting an award, from the UN, I think, for the reconstruction of Beirut. He has gone because he was under considerable pressure, and has been replaced on a temporary basis by an MP from Tripoli, Prime Minister Omar Karameh. He has been Prime Minister before, but there are a whole set of uncertainties about the President, the status of the Prime Minister and the relationship between Lebanon and its closest ally and partner, Syria.

We arrived just after UN resolution 1559 was passed by the General Assembly in New York. That was the major issue of contention. Many people asked why that had been done, especially in Lebanon. There is an outstanding remit for the Syrian troops to leave Lebanon. I tabled an oral question and received a written answer from the Minister on that subject. People accept the need for the Syrians to go at some stage, but they are concerned about the strategic need for some Syrian presence to balance what they see as a threat to their integrity and independence from the Israelis.

Mr. Eric Joyce (Falkirk, West) (Lab): On that point, my hon. Friend speaks about things flying over the border from the Israeli side. On Monday, two rockets were fired in the other direction, into Israel. My hon. Friend will recognise that our relationship with Lebanon has the Syrian perspective and experience and the Lebanese experience of Syria in Lebanon bound into it. Given that Syria opposes the middle east peace plan, does he not think that if Syria took a more constructive position that would be good for us, the Lebanese and the Syrians?

Mr. Luke: I do not support the occupation, and a lot of people were unhappy about the occupation—or rather the presence, as it is not an occupation, of Syrian troops in the Lebanon. They feel that it is necessary for strategic reasons. It is a breach of the agreements set down in the Taif agreement in 1989, which talked about the eventual withdrawal of Syrian troops. However, there is a great deal of tension. The south of Lebanon is now dominated by the Hezbollah group, which has been on a war footing against the Israelis in the past and has taken the credit for moving the Israelis out of Lebanon. There is a series of tense border issues. The big issue put to us by the Members that we met was that they wished to keep as calm as possible. The Lebanese do not want to get involved in any conflict with Israel. They told us that they want to work constructively to discuss and resolve some of the issues that have been left open by the occupation.

Water is such an issue. There is a river in the south of Lebanon that flows through parts of the area still occupied by the Israelis, for example the Shebaa farms. That water needs to be used in the north of Lebanon for agriculture and cultivation as well as by the Israelis. The Lebanese want to discuss the arrangements positively with the Israelis.

There are tensions and the Syrians heighten them, so it is to the benefit of everyone to work for an agreement and that the Syrian presence is removed. It is not merely the Syrian presence that upsets people opposed to such actions in Lebanon. As well as the 15,000 troops placed there as a strategic force to balance out the Israelis, there are rumoured to be about 5,000 intelligence officers or people who are not attached to that force and who have an undue influence in Lebanese civil society. There is a need, under the Taif agreement, struck I think in September 1989, to modernise civil society and bring it up to date to what would be considered an acceptable norm for western countries. There is still progress to be made and the physical reconstruction has perhaps not been mirrored by such modernisation and the withdrawal of the Syrian troops.

That modernisation is an end goal. People in Lebanon accept that, but they are still worried about strategic issues related to ongoing problems with the Israelis. The point was made that it is only a 45-minute drive from the Israeli border to Damascus. One of the reasons that the troops are there is perhaps to hold back the threat if there were ever a war between those countries again. It is in everybody's interests to find a lasting and peaceful settlement to all the existing issues, and there are problems on all sides.

The problems I have mentioned were all raised on our visit and resolution 1559 is a specific ongoing issue. Part of our role was to discuss how the parliamentary scene in Lebanon could be safeguarded and improved, and how we could build links and act as a bridge. Lebanon has been a bridge between the west and Arab countries in the middle east, but we wanted to see how we, as parliamentarians from Westminster, could form another part of that bridge and bring about a two-way exchange of knowledge, friendship, understanding and, I hope, economic aspects.

The political situation is fluid at the moment rather than fixed. A lot of impressive work has been done in Beirut, but there is still a big economic problem. Most of the work has been done on borrowed money and there is a large deficit that will need to be controlled if Lebanon is to make economic progress. Despite the fact that Beirut is a cosmopolitan and westernised city, certain areas in the Beka'a valley, the north and the south, are very rural and poor and need attention. The British Council works in those areas. We did not get a chance to visit any British Council programmes—we would have liked to do so, but time was short and we needed to address a series of other ongoing issues during our time in Lebanon.

There is still the question of the 400,000 Palestinian refugees, some of whom have been in Lebanon since 1948, and some have been displaced in subsequent wars. There are issues about their ability to work and discrimination against them. There is a law that Palestinians are not able to hold jobs that would be done

[Mr. Luke]

by professional people. I was not able to visit camps such as Shatila as the numbers allowed in were restricted, but my Liberal Democrat colleague did.

We met the United Nations Relief and Works Agency chief in Beirut. He raised the problem of money that has been received from organisations such as the Department for International Development but that cannot be used to put in proper sanitation or to make sure that medical services work properly because of the Lebanese Government blocking it. UNRWA operates all the medical centres and schools for those who live in the camps.

The British Government can do a lot to help reform and modernisation. The Westminster Foundation for Democracy has been doing a lot of work throughout eastern Europe and the middle east to see how we can assist people to improve and reform their situations. We should be taking a much more active role.

I come now to the Lebanese economy. We saw quite a bit of wealth in Lebanon. We were guests of the Deputy Prime Minister on his yacht. It would not embarrass the Queen to have such a yacht. He was flying out the next day to raise with the UN his unhappiness with resolution 1559. Such wealth, however, is not mirrored throughout the country.

We visited a new health centre in the south of the country. Although it was an impressive building, its equipment and treatment left much to be desired. It was a charitable institution, created by the Speaker of the National Assembly, Mr. Berri, and his family. Such institutions are set up by charitable establishments, not through Government or foreign aid.

The relationship of Syria and Lebanon must be addressed. In answer to a written question, my hon. Friend the Minister stated:

> "My Rt hon Friend the Foreign Secretary discussed the implications of UNSCR 1559 with Syrian Foreign Minister Shara'a when they met in London on 18 October. We will work for the withdrawal of Syrian presence and a strengthening of the Lebanese institutions."

Given that commitment, we would like to see more work done on such matters. My hon. Friend continued:

> "We expect all Lebanon's neighbours to respect Lebanon's sovereignty, territorial integrity and independence."—[*Official Report*, 9 November 2004; Vol. 426, c. 623W.]

I sincerely hope that that happens.

Lebanon has made startling progress since its troubles. To an extent, it is a modern, vibrant society—more modern than Syria and other middle eastern countries. It is a country that prides itself on its relationship with the west, specifically the United Kingdom. We need to build on that to make sure that we have a strong ally in that area and that peace can emanate from that country throughout the region. I hope that the Government will do whatever they can in that area. I am sure that the all-party group and the Inter-Parliamentary Union will continue their activities. I am glad to have had a chance to initiate a debate on Lebanon and I am looking forward to hearing what others have to say.

2.27 pm

Mr. Colin Breed (South-East Cornwall) (LD): I wish to echo many of the thoughts of the initiator of the debate, the hon. Member for Dundee, East (Mr. Luke). I congratulate him on securing the debate because, when we returned from the IPU visit to Lebanon, we were all determined to raise issues in connection with that country. We want people to recognise the incredible change that has taken place within Lebanon in the past 10 years or so. It is impressive how the Lebanese have reconstructed Beirut, which so many of us remember from newsreel reports. It is a modern, vibrant city with new shops. It is the sort of place that it was perhaps 25 years ago.

Although the economy is undoubtedly fragile, improvements are taking place. Since my return, I have noted in the travel press much publicity to attract tourists back to Lebanon. Its enormous wealth of archaeological history would be extremely interesting to many people, and I encourage people to visit that country, which has not been on the tourist destination map for some time, to see its impressive display.

We received an amazing welcome and hospitality. For some time, Lebanon has felt a little isolated within the world community and it wants to welcome people back to the country. I hope that people will respond. Inevitably, it has difficulties and we caught glimpses of them from time to time. The Syrian influence is a two-edged sword. Clearly, some people feel that the Syrian presence has enabled the country to reach a more stable position and to sort itself out. However, others feel that the Syrians have outstayed their welcome and become rather too engaged in some aspects of public life. A case can be made for both those views.

Nobody whom we met—whatever their political stance and whether they were from the poorer or richer end of the economic spectrum—wanted to go back to how it was 10 years ago. They will do anything that is necessary to ensure that that does not happen. That is the strength of their desire to go forward; they recognise and remember the terrible things that happened during the civil war and do not want to return to that situation. Although things are not perfect, politically or economically, there is a great will and desire to make things better and not to go back.

Let me say a few words about the Palestinian camps. I was able to visit Shatila. To those who have been to Gaza, I can say that Shatila camp is every bit as bad, except that one can step outside and, within some 25 m, can be on a modern highway with the impressive buildings of an ordinary city, Beirut. Not only Palestinians live in the camp; Syrians, Lebanese and others live there. Nevertheless, there is undoubtedly a need to try to establish some basic living conditions. The camp is in need of proper clean water, sanitation and protected power. It was horrific to see major electric cables snaking along the alleyways, through puddles of water, with five to seven-year-old children playing next to them. Those of us who have been brought up with health and safety measures and security concerns were horrified. Those are some of the basic things that could be achieved. I hope that, whatever difficulties the Lebanese authorities have—I know that they have some; we discussed the matter with the ambassador—it will be possible to bring some health and safety measures and basic sanitation and water to the people there, regardless of who they are.

Let me also mention our visit to the border with Israel. That was an interesting experience, in that there is a wire fence and it is very clear that Israel is on one side and Lebanon is on the other. Inevitably, there is a feeling that "If you stay on your side and we stay on our side, we can get on." I suspect that there will not be a meeting of minds, but the fact that there is a clear border, respected by both sides, whatever their continuing animosities and political situation, provides an opportunity for peaceful coexistence.

I hope that many of the things that we saw in Lebanon—the creation of an agreed border and the maintenance of people living either side of it—can be translated into the situations in other parts of the middle east that are experiencing difficulties. Beirut can give hope to the sorts of places that we have seen in the occupied territories and now, sadly, in Iraq, in Falluja—

Mr. Joyce: Does the hon. Gentleman think that there is a case for persuading Hezbollah to change its behaviour on the border? Was that what he said? We would all want that to happen.

Mr. Breed: As I said, there is no doubt that people in Lebanon do not want to go back to the past. They recognise the difficulties but do not want to magnify them. They recognise that there will be differences of opinion, but they certainly do not support a return to violence in any way. I think that some influence can be brought to bear on the militia that still have some camps and still have a presence in Lebanon. I think that they are beginning to understand that the Lebanese people do not want such a situation in their country. They want to get on with their lives, pursue peace, build their economy and get away from the things that we saw in the past. Perhaps they can provide an example to others in the way that they handle the militia and the terrorists within their borders.

Mr. Andrew Love (Edmonton) (Lab/Co-op): First, I apologise profusely to you, Mr. Deputy Speaker, and to my hon. Friend the Member for Dundee, East (Mr. Luke), who initiated the debate, for arriving late. I would like to press the hon. Member for South-East Cornwall (Mr. Breed) on Hezbollah's role on the border. Surely a militia such as Hezbollah should be replaced by the Lebanese army in the border area. That would give confidence to everyone in the region.

Mr. Breed: I agree and I hope that such a move will take place. The Lebanese want to control their own security. In line with that, they would ultimately like the Syrian presence to be removed, so that they can deal with the proper security of their own people. That may be a little way ahead, but they are moving in the right direction all the time. To an extent, the passage of time assists the process. As I said, people are determined not to go backwards but to look for ways to improve their democratic processes, which are not perfect as yet, and their internal economy, which is still subject to considerable corruption. People recognise that and are trying to bear down on it. They recognise that they have a critical role to play in the middle east, not least because of the Palestinian refugees who are still within their borders. I wish them well. I was impressed and came away from Lebanon far more optimistic than perhaps I was when I went there. I hope that that optimism will be seen to be well placed as we see the country make progress in future.

2.38 pm

Mr. Michael Moore (Tweeddale, Ettrick and Lauderdale) (LD): I pay tribute to my hon. Friend the Member for South-East Cornwall (Mr. Breed), who understands the situation in the middle east and has a strong commitment to it and particularly to issues relating to Palestine, which was reflected in his speech. I pay particular tribute to the hon. Member for Dundee, East (Mr. Luke), who initiated the debate. He modestly suggested that he was not qualified to do so, but clearly he and his colleagues in the IPU have done the House a very important service through their work in Lebanon. We hope that they will continue and develop that in future.

Given the time constraints on the Minister and others, and given the strange business in the main Chamber this afternoon, I hope to be brief, although perhaps I shall not quite be finished before the next interruption. I shall seek to avoid repeating points that hon. Members have already made, except in a couple of cases.

Most of us associate Lebanon with the difficulties of the 1970s, '80s and '90s. That region of the world was barely out of the television headlines, for terribly sad reasons, throughout that period. It has still had its troubles recently, although there has been a great deal of progress. As both contributors so far have highlighted, the economic situation in the country is fragile, even if it is making progress. Many problems still surround the politics of the country, not least because of the complex demographics and the religious mix. All that has been reflected in the recent, slightly difficult goings-on to do with the country's constitutional arrangements. Lebanon has important democratic credentials in a region where that is sometimes a rare experience. Our concern is that what we have seen in recent times might lose the Lebanese people those valuable credentials. The political crisis in the country has created real unease, to a sufficient degree that the United Nations Security Council passed resolution 1559, expressing anxiety about the need for free elections, to disarm the armed militias and for foreign forces to be withdrawn. Syria's 15,000 or so troops are clearly the main concern, and we should certainly like to see them being withdrawn in line with that UN resolution as quickly as possible.

The security situation in Lebanon is difficult, both internally and because of its strategic significance in the middle east. The proximity of Israel and Syria has led to much conflict and the threat of further conflict. Understandably, Syria has a concern about Lebanon and has been a key player at many of the crucial moments of Lebanon's history and development. However, our fear is that Syria is now overplaying its hand, and must recognise that the concerns of the international community are legitimate by complying with the recently passed resolution.

It is understandable that Israel has concerns about its own security situation. For decades, Lebanon has been used—by Lebanese or others—as a base from which to

[Mr. Michael Moore]

attack Israel. The hon. Member for Falkirk, West (Mr. Joyce) rightly pointed out the recent attacks from Hezbollah, and there is evidence that they have developed new technology and new capabilities that can only make that situation more difficult. The whole position centres around, and will come to bear on, the middle east peace process. I conclude by saying that we have heard, since President Bush was re-elected and the Prime Minister visited him, that the middle east peace process will be the cornerstone of their foreign policy. We must hope that we shall see the fruits of that in Lebanon, sooner rather than later.

2.42 pm

Mr. Gary Streeter (South-West Devon) (Con): I start by congratulating the hon. Member for Dundee, East (Mr. Luke), not just on securing the debate but on reporting to us on his recent interesting visit to Lebanon. We pay tribute to the work of the all-party Lebanon group, which is designed to increase relations with that country, and we hope that that goes well. Although the hon. Gentleman has described himself as a newcomer to international relations, both in this debate and in others in which he has taken part, he in fact speaks like a veteran and brings depth and understanding to our debates, for which we thank him.

I also thank the hon. Member for South-East Cornwall (Mr. Breed), whom I know well as a near neighbour, for his encouraging report on what the all-party group found in Lebanon on its visit. I am aware that I am about to be interrupted, but I should like to put on the record a few thoughts about that strategic country. In biblical times, the name Lebanon was synonymous with prosperity and riches, and many references to cedars and wine from Lebanon were a tribute to its fertility, fruitfulness and prosperity. It was, perhaps, the most prosperous part of the region.

Mr. Luke: The hon. Gentleman refers to the cedars of Lebanon. The Lebanese are still very proud of them, although the actual number of cedar trees is being reduced. There is, however, a very progressive programme—I do not know how well it is going—to reforest much of Lebanon with cedars.

2.44 pm

Sitting suspended for a Division in the House.

2.56 pm

On resuming—

Mr. Streeter: Sadly, to anyone growing of our generation, the names of Lebanon and Beirut are synonymous with conflict, destruction, civil war and strife. However, we have had a happier report from the two hon. Gentlemen who have just come back from Lebanon. Indeed, since the Taif accord there has been a growing measure of stability in the country, which is extremely welcome. Beirut is once again a bustling and safe city, and prosperity is returning, although, as has been mentioned, Lebanon has a debt overhang problem, which it must tackle. None the less, we welcome those more positive reports and, as we know, there is a strong Lebanese community in the United Kingdom, which makes a positive contribution to this country.

Issues of concern have been raised, including Hezbollah's continued presence in Lebanon, particularly on the southern border, and its aggressive attitude towards Israel. I hope that the Minister will touch on Government policy towards Hezbollah.

Mr. Love: If one reads the reports about activity at the border, one sees that they normally speak of finely tuned rules working between Hezbollah and the Israeli authorities. Does the hon. Gentleman accept that although there continues to be friction on the border, it is well controlled?

Mr. Streeter: I think the hon. Gentleman is right. In the turmoil of the middle east, the current situation on the border is relatively calm and peaceful, although there are incidents. It was he, I think, who suggested that Hezbollah's presence on the border should be replaced by a proper Lebanese border control, and that would be most welcome.

The continued presence of Syrian forces and Syria's continued reach into Lebanese politics are, of course, matters of concern. We have heard reference to Security Council resolution 1559, which was passed recently and which we support. It would be interesting to hear how the Government intend to continue the conversation with Syria on complying with that resolution. I would be interested in the Minister's assessment of the Lebanese population's attitude towards the Syrian presence. We have heard that it takes some comfort from their presence because of concern about Israeli attitudes, and that is understandable, but it would be interesting to hear the Minister's take on that.

The hon. Member for Dundee, East expressed concern at recent events, including the extension of President Lahoud's term of office. Such things sometimes happen around the globe, although they nearly always happen in controversial circumstances and nearly always turn out to be a mistake. I would be interested to hear the Government's view of that extension, of the resignation of Mr. Hariri and his Cabinet, and of the implications the new Prime Minister might have for stability in the country.

It is reassuring to hear from the hon. Member for South-East Cornwall that the people of Lebanon do not want to go back to the old days of strife and civil war, but it would be interesting to know the Government's assessment of the implications for stability of recent changes. We have also heard about recent opportunities for a new initiative on the middle east peace process. Those opportunities are there—with the Prime Minister's commitment and President Bush's recent words and, we hope, a new Palestinian leader to be elected on 9 January, whom the Palestinian people will get behind and who will support engagement in the peace process and withdrawal from Gaza. All of those things are positive.

Will the Minister comment on the engagement, or lack thereof, of Syria and Lebanon in the road map and the middle east peace process? Does he think that there should be a greater buy-in to that process by and for them, and that they should be bound to an overall settlement? Does he intend to raise the situation in Lebanon with President Chirac while he is in the country, to see if the President of France can shed any light on the situation, given their long relationship?

Is not the situation in Lebanon an example of how complex it is to try to increase democracy in the middle east? That country has some kind of elections, but not as we know them. Whatever we do to encourage democracy in any middle east country, or anywhere else in the world, is it not important that any such democracy has its own local flavour and grows out of the community, provided that the rule of law, freedom of speech and some kind of representative governance are part and parcel of that democratic process? It should not be about exporting Westminster or US-style democracies, or about imposing anything on those people; it should be about encouraging their version of democratic principles to take root and take hold.

Is it not also the case that, of necessity, the pace of change will be slow in most middle east countries, and that we would be mistaken to try to force the pace of change at an unsustainable rate? We can take some encouragement from the progress that Lebanon has made over the past 10 years. It will be interesting to hear the Government's view on the likely impact of recent changes.

The plight of Palestinian refugees has been mentioned. What future does the Minister think they will have if we are fortunate enough to see some kind of final status agreement reached between Israel and Palestine in the next three to six months? How will that affect the 400,000 Palestinians living in the refugee camp that was described so vividly by the hon. Member for South-East Cornwall? Does the Minister believe that some of them will have the opportunity to return to Palestine or Israel under the right-to-return proposals, or is their future to remain in Lebanon? If so, I strongly support the call for improved facilities for them.

3.3 pm

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs (Mr. Bill Rammell): I congratulate my hon. Friend the Member for Dundee, East (Mr. Luke) on securing the debate, throughout which he demonstrated his knowledge and understanding of the political situation in Lebanon. His comments, and those of other hon. Members, showed a degree of modest confidence that progress is being made in the Lebanon; that came through strongly in several hon. Members' contributions. I welcome this chance to set out the Government's view, not only of the difficulty facing the Lebanon, but of the opportunities that exist for it to prosper and make a real contribution to peace and stability in the region.

Britain has had long, close and constructive relations with the Lebanon. The two countries are joined by ties of affection dating from the Lebanon's achievement of independence, with British support, in 1943. Lebanon's sovereignty and independence continue to be of special importance to us. Lebanon has historically done a great deal to develop modern political thought in the Arab world as a whole, and has brought to that role the tolerance, learning and openness that are marks of its society. Lebanese educational institutions retain their leading place in the region, and the vigorous, lively ethos of the Lebanese media, which enjoys a wide degree of freedom, has been a positive stimulus to the emergence more widely of an increasingly open and free Arab press. Those elements—modern education and a free press—are essential to the development of what the people of the region aspire to more than anything else. Many of us who travel to that part of the world would underline that point.

Democratic forms of government derived from the Arab world's long and rich culture are also important; that relates to the point made by the hon. Member for South-West Devon (Mr. Streeter). Such government does not mean that we simply transplant the systems that we have in the west; it means the emergence of a home-grown version of democracy from the needs and aspirations of an increasingly articulate Arab public opinion—a version that fits the culture, mores and traditions of the country. That is how the process should go forward.

I started by describing Lebanon's cultural influence on the region. It would not be enough to consider the situation in Lebanon without setting that in the wider political, international and regional context; that is why Britain attaches particular importance to the health of Lebanon's democratic institutions, which reflect a long tradition of parliamentary rule successfully practised in the region. Those institutions are under pressure at the moment, and our concerns should be directed towards them.

My hon. Friend raised the issue of United Nations resolution 1559. One of the reasons that led the Government to support that resolution was our concern that foreign intervention in the operation of Parliament, the Government and the judiciary is unacceptable, and is degrading and damaging the ability of Lebanon to face important policy challenges with the necessary commitment and support of the Lebanese people. We share the concern of many Lebanese citizens about corruption in the public sector, the ultimate inability of Governments over a number of years to provide adequate economic and social policies and the weaknesses of the judicial system.

My hon. Friend asked a question about resolution 1559. I shall paraphrase him; I think that his point was that he recognised the need for Syria to withdraw from Lebanon, but had worries in the short term about the results of complete withdrawal and what would fill the vacuum. In response, I say that we welcome the withdrawal of Syrian troops that has already taken place. With the international community, we will work with the Lebanese Government to assist them in the development of their own security forces. That has to be a key factor. One of the key terms of resolution 1559 is the disarming of the militia, particularly of Hezbollah. A number of hon. Members have raised that issue, which is a key element of the process.

The concerns that I have addressed are shared by many of Lebanon's other friends abroad. The strategic aim of the European Union's Mediterranean programme and the new European neighbourhood policy, with Britain's full support, is to bring improvements to the quality of governance in countries such as Lebanon. Only with such improvements, based on a strict respect of the rule of law and for Lebanon's independence, will Lebanon be able to meet its many challenges.

[Mr. Bill Rammell]

Lebanon borders the European Union, and its stability, prosperity and success, like that of all countries in the region, is a major European interest to which we fully subscribe. That is why Europe is offering assistance to Lebanon in the form of the technical co-operation offered under the European Union-Lebanon association agreement, and that is an important, positive step forward. I believe that that mechanism will soon be ratified. We also have a small bilateral assistance programme, and, as my hon. Friend said, the British Council contributes to education and the cultural industries. As important is the consistent political support that we give the principles of democracy and independence that were recently enshrined in the Security Council resolution to which I referred.

As my hon. Friend said in his opening comments, Lebanon has an integral role to play in the search for a just and lasting settlement of the conflict between Israel and the Palestinians, which would include a solution to the conflict between Israel and its neighbours Lebanon and Syria. Since the implementation of UN Security Council resolution 425, Lebanon has had no fundamental quarrel with Israel, and that has been a welcome development. The occupation by the latter of Shebaa farms, which Lebanon claims is its territory and which Israel and the United Nations Security Council considers to be Syrian, is as much a symptom as a cause of the continuing tension in the wider region. That and other territorial issues will ultimately be solved by negotiation between the parties concerned, within the road map framework. That has to be the way forward.

The long-standing division between Israel and Palestine is at the core of the problem in the middle east, but there are associated conflicts that must also be addressed within the road map process.

Mr. Love: I rise to take up the point of the hon. Member for South-West Devon (Mr. Streeter). There appears to be no room in the road map process for some of the states that any solution will have an impact on. That is strongly felt in Lebanon. When the road map process begins again, can efforts be made to involve all the states in the region?

Mr. Rammell: That was the point that I was trying to make. The concerns of neighbouring states where there are residual and continuing conflicts that impact on the overall middle east peace process must be taken into account. That is set out in the road map process; those issues must be resolved.

It is a matter of real concern to us that the Hezbollah militia continues to maintain a state of tension along the blue line, with the encouragement of Iran and Syria and the acquiescence of the Lebanese authorities. Israel also bears its share of responsibility for that tension as a result of its frequent illegal and provocative invasions of Lebanese air space. However, we are discussing Lebanon, and the UN Security Council has made clear the requirement on the Lebanese Government to end the operations of the Hezbollah militia and to extend their effective control over all their territory. That obligation extends equally to those states that fund and support Hezbollah. We urge restraint and good sense from all parties.

Mr. Luke: The Minister has referred to Hezbollah, but would he pay tribute to Ayatollah Fadlallah in Lebanon, who is very moderate and preaches co-operation and dialogue between communities—Sunni, Shi'a and Maronite Christian—in order to build a new understanding that bridges the religious divides in the country?

Mr. Rammell: Progressive voices that preach moderation, tolerance and understanding are to be welcomed from wherever they come.

We welcome Lebanon's commitment to fighting terrorism, which it recently demonstrated by arresting al-Qaeda terrorists who were planning to attack the Italian embassy in Beirut in September. We would like to help the Lebanese to build a better counter-terrorism capacity within the rule of law, through more effective policing, better border control, and aviation and maritime security. Earlier this year, the Metropolitan police visited Lebanon to review how we might help its internal security force and we are considering how to take that assistance forward. I think that all parties would welcome that.

I understand that some hon. Members visited the camps housing Palestinian refugees during the IPU visit in September. To echo some of the concerns expressed in the debate, the Government are concerned by the living conditions of Palestinians in camps in Lebanon. We have made that known to the Lebanese Government on a number of occasions. We would welcome action from them to improve the situation of the Palestinian population living in Lebanon by allowing them easier access to education and opportunities for better paid employment.

Ultimately, the answer to the problem is a permanent peace settlement of which a just resolution of the refugee question would be a part. It would be best if that were pursued as part of the road map. The UK fully supports the Quartet's efforts to achieve a political solution that will deliver a better future for all Palestinians.

Mr. Love: I thank the Minister for his generosity in giving way. I wanted to touch briefly on the Palestinian camps. The important point to stress is that the hopelessness in those camps breeds terrorist activity. If we are not careful, that will become a factor not only in the Lebanese situation, but more widely. It is therefore important that the Government make that entirely clear and known to the Lebanese authorities.

Mr. Rammell: I need to be clear: nothing justifies terrorism. Nevertheless, I understand the thrust of my hon. Friend's point. The issue of the injustice felt by refugees in those camps has to be addressed; that was my point. We put our views about the condition of the refugees in those camps to the Lebanese Government.

The hon. Member for South-East Cornwall (Mr. Breed), who is leading for the Liberal Democrats, referred to the middle east peace process and the Government's recent initiatives to re-inject some urgency into the process. I can tell him that the issue is genuinely consuming time within Government; it is a real priority for us. Nothing could contribute more towards beginning to rebuild and tackle divisions in the world than finding a solution to conflict in the middle east. However, that is easier said than done, although it is a priority for the Government. The Prime Minister has made it clear that it is a personal priority, and that was a central feature of his discussions with the US President at the end of last week.

The hon. Member for South-West Devon talked about the Syrian presence flowing from the internationally supported Taif accord. It is important to make it clear that that has contributed to the past decade's stability in Lebanon. The Lebanese people recognise that, but they want to move on. Parliamentary elections are due in 2005, and we are certainly of the view that territorial integrity, independence and democracy in Lebanon are paramount in that process. It is fundamentally for the people of Lebanon to determine their country's relationship with Syria.

I finish by again congratulating my hon. Friend the Member for Dundee, East on securing this debate, which has allowed us to discuss a number of issues affecting Lebanon. As highlighted by the recent UN Security Council resolution, it remains a country of great interest to the United Kingdom and the wider international community. My hon. Friend referred to the fact that it has been a long time since there has been an Adjournment debate on the subject, and I hope that it will not be too long before we have another opportunity. I also thank all hon. Members involved in this debate for their co-operation in helping me with my personal commitment to get to a train in time.

Mr. Deputy Speaker: I should explain what is about to happen. In this place, time is relative—well, it is relative anyway, in a mathematical sense, but in this place it is very relative. The next debate is due at 3.30 pm, as we have now caught up the time lost. If there is a Division before then, the sitting will be suspended for 15 minutes from the start of that Division. That Division has to be no later than 3.31 pm precisely. The sitting is suspended.

3.18 pm

Sitting suspended.

Guantanamo Bay (UK Detainees)

3.23 pm

Mr. Roger Godsiff (Birmingham, Sparkbrook and Small Heath) (Lab): First, I welcome the Under-Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs, my hon. Friend the Member for Sunderland, South (Mr. Mullin). I am particularly pleased that he is here. It has been a long time since we crossed swords—in fact, I believe it was in the early 1980s, when my good friend was at the forefront of the Bennite crusade for socialism in the Labour party while I was on the side of sanity. Since then I have watched with interest his progress along the road to ministerial office, moving from Bennite to born-again Blairite. I make those points because I hope that in this debate my hon. Friend will revert to his old self and show some of the campaigning principles that he showed when fighting the case of the Birmingham Six, who were unjustly imprisoned on charges that subsequently proved to be totally false. He played an honourable role in that fight.

Sadly, there are many hundreds of prisoners of different nationalities currently detained at Guantanamo Bay, including four British citizens: Feroz Abbasi, Martin Mubanga, Richard Belmar and my constituent Moazzam Begg. Let me say at the start that I have consistently supported action by the international community against international terrorism, which is a threat to us all; the civilised values that we stand for must be upheld and fought for. The perpetrators of 9/11, the Bali bombings and the Madrid outrages have to be pursued and destroyed, but we stand for bringing people accused of such crimes before courts of law, for democracy, for freedom of speech and for the rule of law. If we not prepared to offer those rights to people who are accused of such serious crimes, we bring ourselves down to the same level as international terrorists.

I first raised the incarceration of my constituent, Moazzam Begg, nearly three years ago. Had anybody told me then that three years later I would still be raising his case, I would not have believed it; nor would I have believed that he would still be imprisoned at Guantanamo Bay. Although the process is currently suspended, Moazzam Begg and Feroz Abbasi still face the possibility of being brought before a US-style military commission, where the military personnel acting as interrogators, prosecutors, defence counsel, judges and—in cases where the death penalty is imposed—executioners are all appointed by the US Defence Secretary.

Three years ago, I would not have believed that Moazzam Begg and other British citizens could remain in the legal, physical and mental black hole of Guantanamo Bay, even though no charges that are recognisable in international law have been laid against any of them, no evidence has been presented of their guilt, and no access to independent legal counsel has been provided for them. I would not have believed that we could have a US Government who make no pretence that Guantanamo Bay is covered by the Geneva conventions—the men are designated enemy combatants, not prisoners of war. Equally, I would not have believed that representatives of the US judiciary have, almost unanimously, had to petition courts in America, including the Supreme Court, to make it clearly known that Guantanamo Bay is unconstitutional.

[Mr. Roger Godsiff]

Each person who is detained in Guantanamo Bay is kept in a wire-mesh cell 6 ft 8 in by 8 ft and allowed out for 20 minutes solitary exercise three times a day. There is growing evidence that torture has been used at the camp. The simplest considerations that any detainee should have—for example, the right to be visited by members of his or her family—have been denied to the four British citizens in Guantanamo Bay, including my constituent.

Originally, I went along with the Foreign Office viewpoint that publicising Moazzam Begg's case could damage his long-term prospects. The Foreign Office suggested that if I raised the profile of the case, it could impede any future visits to Mr. Begg by his family, when such visits were allowed, and the flow of news about their son that the family so desperately needed. However, that was before the true nature of what has been happening in Guantanamo Bay came out—and that was more than three years ago.

Freedom is something we in the House seek to uphold as democrats. A former American Republican presidential candidate, Wendell Wilkie, who stood just after the second world war, once said:

> "Freedom is an indivisible word. If we want to enjoy it, and fight for it, we must be prepared to extend it to everyone, whether they be rich or poor, whether they agree with us or not, no matter what their race or the colour of their skin."

Let me add to that the first paragraph of an editorial from the *The Mail on Sunday* on 6 July 2003. I do not wish to be disrespectful, but that paper is not noted for its libertarian attitude towards civil rights. None the less, the editorial stated:

> "Let us be blunt here. If the men involved were white and Christian, and if the country behaving like this was anywhere but the USA, the Prime Minister would already have sent the Foreign Secretary on wings of wrath to demand their handover for trial here."

It is certainly the belief of the wider Muslim community in this country that double standards are being applied in respect of the British Government's attempt to get those four British citizens returned to the United Kingdom.

It appears that the Prime Minister—

3.30 pm

Sitting suspended for a Division in the House.

3.37 pm

On resuming—

Mr. Godsiff: As I was saying, it would seem that the Government's position as enunciated by the Prime Minister, who is a lawyer, as is his good wife, is that the British detainees should be either tried fairly in accordance with international standards or returned to the United Kingdom. I welcome that. The Government have expressed strong reservations to the US Administration about the use of military commissions and legal proceedings against two British detainees have been suspended. I welcome that, too. The Government requested that nine British detainees be returned to the UK, and five were returned in March. All British detainees have now been informed of the combatant status review tribunals and of their right to challenge in United States courts the legality of their detention with regard to their status as enemy combatants and not as prisoners of war. I welcome all those things—I welcome all the work done by the Government and the Foreign Office to try to resolve the situation—but is it enough? Was it ever enough? How much longer will the process run? For months? For years?

Last weekend, the Prime Minister went to the United States to renew our special relationship with the new Administration. I would like to know whether the four British detainees, including Moazzam Begg, were discussed while he was there. The clear perception of the community in Birmingham is that the Government are feeding off crumbs from the American Administration. In the meantime, the family of Moazzam Begg have to survive on welfare reports passed on by the Foreign Office.

My constituent and those other British citizens still live under threat of being tried by a military commission, so I ask the Minister to state for the record what the British Government will do if the Bush Administration decide to continue with the commissions. Will the Government deem that the process has been a failure? Will the Prime Minister refuse to accept his congressional medal of honour? Will the FCO continue to deliver welfare reports to the Begg family when Moazzam faces possible execution, or a life sentence with no prospect of early release? In short, do the Government have a plan B, and if so, would the Minister like to tell us what it is?

Ms Diane Abbott (Hackney, North and Stoke Newington) (Lab): I congratulate my hon. Friend on securing this important debate. Last week, I had the privilege of meeting the families of Richard Belmar and Martin Mubanga. The lives of those men and their families are the small change of international diplomacy, but, as my hon. Friend said, two or three years after these events started, the families remain desperate. They do not understand why a Prime Minister who is supposedly the Bush Administration's best friend in the world cannot secure a charge and a proper trial for the men. It may be that Ministers, as in the Birmingham Six case, have given a nod and a wink and asked, "What were the men doing out there anyway, to get picked up?" but I would argue that, as British citizens, the men are entitled to be charged and subjected to a fair trial.

Mr. Godsiff: I entirely concur with my hon. Friend. Again, I make it plain that we must pursue international terrorists who carry out evil atrocities. As an individual MP, I consistently supported the war against international terrorism and the invasion of Afghanistan in pursuit of the al-Qaeda organisation. I opposed the invasion of Iraq because I believed that it was a distraction in the war against international terrorism. However, what separates us from the international terrorists is the fact that we respect the rule of law that underpins our democratic society. When we catch people who we believe are involved in international terrorism, we undermine our own values unless we try them in accordance with our laws.

I return to the editorial in *The Mail on Sunday*, to which I referred earlier. It begins:

> "More than 200 years after they were written, the words of America's Bill of Rights still speak clearly and forcibly: 'In all criminal prosecutions, the accused shall enjoy the right to a speedy trial by an impartial jury . . . and to be informed of the nature and cause of the accusation; to be confronted with the witnesses against him; to have compulsory process for obtaining witnesses in his favour; and to have the assistance of counsel for his defence.'"

The basic rights that were written into the American constitution are being denied to four British citizens who are incarcerated at Guantanamo Bay. I end by quoting the words of Moazzam Begg himself. In a letter written by him and published recently, he states:

> "I am a law-abiding citizen of the UK and attest vehemently to my innocence before God and the law of any crime—though none has ever been alleged. I have neither ever met Osama Bin Laden, nor been a member of al Qaida—or any synonymous paramilitary organisation, party or group. Neither have I engaged in hostile acts against the USA, nor assisted such groups in the same . . . I reiterate my intention to seek justice at every possible level available".

Is not that the least that we can give him?

3.44 pm

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs (Mr. Chris Mullin): Let me say at the outset that I share the frustration of my hon. Friend the Member for Birmingham, Sparkbrook and Small Heath (Mr. Godsiff) at the circumstances in which his constituent and others have been detained. I assure him that the Government have been doing everything in their power to resolve the matter—in fact, I would go so far as to say that no Government with citizens detained at Guantanamo Bay have worked harder to try to resolve the situation.

Since the first British national was transferred to Guantanamo Bay in 2002, we have repeatedly and persistently pursued the issue with the United States authorities including, as my hon. Friend acknowledged, at the highest level. The Prime Minister has raised it with President Bush; the Foreign Secretary has raised it with the Secretary of State, Colin Powell; the Attorney-General has led talks with the US Government; and Ministers, senior officials and lawyers have pursued the matter relentlessly and will continue to do so.

We have achieved some success. The release of five of the nine detainees earlier this year was the result of representations by the British Government. We have blocked the trial by military commission of two of the remaining four detainees and, as my hon. Friend acknowledged, we have secured improvements in the conditions in which the detainees have been held. The most recent example of that is the removal of Moazzam Begg and Feroz Abbasi from a form of solitary confinement and into the main detention camp. That was a response to our concerns about their isolation and lack of access to daylight.

The UK's overall position in relation to British nationals at Guantanamo Bay has been made clear from the outset. It is more or less the same as the one enunciated a moment ago by my hon. Friend: British detainees should either be tried fairly, in accordance with international standards, or they should be returned to the UK. With regard to the four remaining detainees, discussions at official level explored whether there was any prospect of providing an alternative trial process to the military commissions, but it has not proved possible to reach an agreement. In June, the Prime Minister personally repeated our request that the four be returned to the UK, and he raised Guantanamo again with President Bush during their talks in Washington last week. The United States Government has expressed its reluctance to return the remaining detainees because of security concerns. Our discussions with the US are continuing and we are seeking to address their concerns in the hope that the four might be returned.

It might be helpful if I explain the various legal proceedings surrounding the detainees. My hon. Friend will be aware of the habeas corpus cases in the US district court, one of which has been brought on behalf of his constituent. The cases follow the Supreme Court's June ruling that detainees have the right to challenge the legality of their detention. US lawyers have now visited those involved in those cases, including Mr. Begg, and we welcome that. The Government have been asked to submit an amicus curii brief in one of the cases, and we are now examining the petition. My hon. Friend will also be aware of the ruling last week in a US district court in the case of Guantanamo detainee Salim Hamdan. The court rejected the US Government's argument that the third Geneva convention did not apply to al-Qaeda detainees captured in Afghanistan. It decided that a detainee must be afforded prisoner of war status until a competent tribunal decides otherwise, and stated that neither a combatant status review tribunal nor the US President is a competent tribunal for those purposes.

Ms Abbott: Is the Minister able to say that the Government are confident that there is no substance to the allegations of physical torture at Guantanamo Bay?

Mr. Mullin: I shall come to those allegations, but at the moment I am dealing with the ruling of the US district court last week, which I think is relevant to the situation of the detainees. The court held that trial by military commission would be unlawful as long as the rules of procedure allowed for the use of secret evidence and the exclusion of the accused from proceedings for reasons unconnected with his conduct. The US Government has indicated that it will appeal the court's ruling, and we are, of course, following the case.

Following the Supreme Court ruling, combatant status review tribunals have been established by the US to determine whether Guantanamo Bay detainees are properly classified as enemy combatants and to permit each detainee the opportunity to contest that classification. The Government are not a party to the tribunals, but we are following their progress and monitoring the case of the British detainees. I understand that Mr. Abbasi's tribunal has been completed with the conclusion that he is an enemy combatant, and his family have been informed of the decision.

From the outset, the welfare of the detainees has been a priority for the Government. We were the first to visit our nationals in Guantanamo Bay, and British officials have made nine welfare visits to the British detainees, the most recent of which was between 2 and 5 October.

[Mr. Mullin]

As on all other occasions, a written statement on the visit was made to Parliament, and it might be helpful if I repeat the key points:

> "The British detainees appeared in sound physical health, are frustrated by their continued detention but heartened by recent access to legal representation, in the case of three of the detainees. Individual medical and detention matters raised during this and previous welfare visits by the detainees were pursued with the Camp authorities. Most have now been addressed. The Government will continue to pursue the outstanding matters. All the detainees say that they welcomed the welfare visits."—[*Official Report*, 4 November 2004; Vol. 426, c. 15WS.]

As well as providing a written statement to Parliament, the Government have given the families of the detainees a detailed report on their condition, and we shall continue to keep them informed.

My hon. Friend the Member for Hackney, North and Stoke Newington (Ms Abbott) raised the allegations of mistreatment at Guantanamo Bay. I covered the issue in the previous Adjournment debate on the subject in July, but I want to take this opportunity to update hon. Members.

My hon. Friends will be aware that the British detainees who returned to the UK this year subsequently made a number of allegations of mistreatment. Despite the opportunity to do so during our repeated welfare visits to Guantanamo Bay, none of the men alleged to us while they were detained there that they were systematically abused. Furthermore, none of them has raised the allegations of mistreatment with the Government since their return to the UK. We have, however, taken up a number of their allegations with the US authorities. In response, they have said that the men were treated humanely, but they are continuing to investigate some of the other allegations made by former British detainees.

There is particular concern about the treatment of Moazzam Begg, who is a constituent of my hon. Friend the Member for Birmingham, Sparkbrook and Small Heath, so perhaps I should address that case specifically. My hon. Friend will be aware of a letter written by Mr. Begg from Guantanamo Bay, which was recently made public. He has never alleged to us that he has been systematically abused at Guantanamo Bay in the way that is now being suggested; on the contrary, he said that he had been treated well, and he confirmed that to a British official who saw him in Guantanamo a few days after the letter was reported in the media. However, Mr. Begg has said that he was mistreated when he was detained at Bagram air base in Afghanistan, and we asked the American authorities to investigate. They have told us that they can find no information to support that claim, and we have asked them to carry out a second, more detailed investigation.

My hon. Friend will be aware of a request by Azmat Begg, Mr. Begg's father, that he, Dr. James MacKeith and Lord Rea visit Moazzam at Guantanamo Bay to carry out an independent psychiatric assessment. Baroness Symons has supported that request. We have written to the US authorities to make the request and we continue to pursue it. We await a US response.

Ms Abbott: What is being done to secure family visits for the other British detainees, particularly Martin Mubanga and Richard Belmar?

Mr. Mullin: As I said, we have repeatedly made representations to the Americans on the subject of visits for families, but so far those requests have been denied.

Throughout the past two or three years, the Government have sought to meet the twin objectives of pursuing the fight against international terrorism and safeguarding the interests of British citizens detained overseas. It is important to remember the context in which the detentions at Guantanamo took place: 11 September was the most appalling terrorist attack ever—more than 3,000 people, including 67 British nationals, died on the US mainland. Following the attack, thousands of individuals who were believed to be al-Qaeda or Taliban fighters or their supporters were detained. The majority were released in Afghanistan, but the US sent those whom it deemed to pose a substantial risk to Guantanamo Bay for detention and questioning about their knowledge of al-Qaeda. As a result, valuable information has been gained, which has helped the international community fight terrorism.

Mr. Godsiff: Does the Minister not agree that any organisation that detains people, even the Birmingham Six—he had experience of that miscarriage of justice—should not keep them incommunicado for three years?

Mr. Mullin: Yes, the British Government and I agree with everything that my hon. Friend said about the need to treat suspects according to the rule of law. There is no difference between us on that.

I hope that I have been able to reassure my hon. Friend about the Government's commitment to work for the release of the remaining detainees and to ensure their well-being while they remain detained at Guantanamo Bay. Our discussions with the US authorities continue in relation to both issues. As I said at the outset, I understand the frustration of my hon. Friend and his constituents' relatives, but the Government are doing all in their power to bring an end to the unhappy situation and we will continue to do so.

Mr. Deputy Speaker: In order to protect the last Adjournment debate and bearing in mind that there will be a Division in the House at one minute past 4 at the latest, I suspend the sitting until a quarter past four.

3.56 pm

Sitting suspended.

4.14 pm

On resuming—

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Order. It appears to me that there is going to be a run of votes in the House—perhaps as many as 12, although that is unlikely. I am therefore going to suspend until five minutes after the last of those votes, when it becomes clear that there are not going to be any more. We shall then all assemble here and see whether we can get the debate in before we get interrupted again.

4.15 pm

Sitting suspended.

Pensioner Poverty (West Edinburgh)

4.25 pm

John Barrett (Edinburgh, West) (LD): The first report of the Pensions Commission made stark reading for the Government and hon. Members. It set out clearly and fairly the tough choices that lie ahead in respect of pensions, and the even tougher consequences of any failure to act. One of the true measures of a decent, fair and free society is how it treats its older citizens. Surely one of the most important social issues facing any Government is the need to ensure that older people can, after a lifetime of contributing to their country, retire with dignity, free from poverty. That challenge can be broken into two basic parts: how do the Government alleviate the pensioner poverty of today, and how do they prevent the pensioner poverty of tomorrow?

I am pleased to have secured this Adjournment debate, because it will allow me to raise some problems faced by pensioners in my constituency. The Minister for Pensions, whom I am delighted to see in his place, is well known for his considered replies and I look forward to such a response today. In that spirit, I say at the outset that the position in my constituency is far from being all doom and gloom. The fact is that pensioner incomes vary enormously. Many pensioners in my constituency enjoy a high standard of living, often because of the extra savings that they made throughout their working lives. However, too many others in Edinburgh, West do not enjoy the standard of living that they should be able to expect.

Given that 2 million pensioners still live below the poverty line in this country—the fourth richest in the world—there is no room for complacency. However, it would be wrong of me not to acknowledge the measures that the Government have taken to benefit pensioners in my constituency. I do not want to steal the Minister's thunder, but it does not take much foresight to predict that he will refer to such measures as the winter fuel payment, free television licences, the Christmas bonus, the £100 towards council tax bills and pension credit. I recognise that each of those measures has, in its own way, benefited a section of people in my constituency. However, I have to warn the Minister against simply rattling off that list as a defence, because as welcome as many of the measures are, if the Government really have done everything right and delivered a fair deal for pensioners, I must ask why I receive so many letters and telephone calls from older people in Edinburgh, West arguing to the contrary.

The Government hold up the pension credit as their flagship mechanism for tackling pensioner poverty. The latest information from the Department for Work and Pensions shows that more than 2.5 million pensioner households benefit from the pension credit. That figure is not to be sniffed at, but it stands short of the 2.8 million target set by the DWP for October 2004. The Minister will also know that the rate of increase in claims is falling off sharply. The September 2004 increase of just 15,000 new claims was the lowest monthly increase since the take-up campaign started. If the number of claimants is plateauing, as it appears to be, that raises the question of when, or indeed if, the Government will reach their target.

The latest pension credit progress report, which I obtained from the Vote Office, shows that some 2,700 pensioner households in my constituency benefit

[John Barrett]

from the pension credit. However, a written parliamentary answer that I received last year from the Under-Secretary of State for Work and Pensions, the hon. Member for Liverpool, Garston (Maria Eagle), said that more than 1,400 people in Edinburgh, West were already benefiting from the minimum income guarantee. They would simply be transferred over to the guarantee element of the pension credit, so the figure for new pensioners in my constituency to benefit stands at about 1,300.

According to another parliamentary answer that I received from the DWP that uses the number of winter fuel payments as a guide, there are some 86,250 pensioner households across the six Edinburgh parliamentary constituencies. The Department admitted before introducing pension credit that it expected approximately 40 per cent. of pensioner households in Scotland to be eligible for it. For Edinburgh, that would mean about 34,500 households, but the latest progress report shows that only 18,148 pensioner households in the capital are claiming the credit—53 per cent of those eligible.

To the Government's credit, they have worked hard to promote the availability of pension credit before and since its introduction last year. Although I have taken issue with the Government over the emphasis on means-testing, I genuinely wanted to see the credit work and for eligible constituents to get the money that they deserve. As a result, I contacted each household in my constituency twice through newsletters about the credit, providing basic details and making it clear that any person who wanted further information or an application pack could contact my constituency office. I am glad to say that many pensioners did just that, and I put on record my thanks to those working in the Pension Service in Scotland who helped me with that campaign. I know that the Minister will agree that the considerable contribution made by those working in the Pension Service has been much appreciated by constituents. I have always found the team in Scotland to be helpful, friendly, accessible and professional in their work.

None the less, despite the promotions, the advertising, the work of the Department for Work and Pensions and the Pension Service, the home visits and the roadshows, many pensioners eligible for pension credit still do not claim it. That presents a new problem for the Minister. We are no longer talking about people being unaware of the existence of the credit—although I accept that some still are—but about people who know about it and are making a conscious decision not to make a claim for some reason.

During my local take-up campaign, I received a number of letters from pensioners who found the process of applying for the means-tested benefit complicated and degrading. One constituent from Drylaw in Edinburgh wrote to tell me how she felt "stripped of all dignity" by the questions asked and had decided not to proceed with her application. Another constituent from Queensferry told me that she did not want to

"go through hoops for the sake of a few extra pounds a week."

I have lost count of the number of times I have heard older people say something like, "I have never had to claim benefits in my life and I am not going to start now", or, "I have gone through my entire working life without asking for help, and I'm not going to ask the Government for help."

The fact is that we are talking about a proud section of society. Last Sunday, I was fortunate enough to attend two Remembrance day events in my constituency, in Corstorphine and Davidson's Mains. The immense pride that older people rightfully feel on such occasions illustrates the honour and dignity that they too should be granted. It is no wonder that so many of them do not want to go, as they describe it, "cap in hand" to the Government. They feel that the process is degrading and no amount of information will convince them otherwise. That shows one underlying problem with the Government's mass means-testing of pensioners—as a policy it is neither desirable nor effective.

My party and I believe that the only guaranteed way of getting more money to the poorest pensioners is by increasing the wholly inadequate basic state pension. The Minister will be well aware of the Liberal Democrats' pensions package, even if some members of his party have chosen deliberately to misrepresent it. He will know that pensioner poverty is particularly acute among women, because of the rules on national insurance contributions. Just a few days ago, the TUC pointed out that 70 per cent. of female pensioners are getting less than the full basic state pension, compared with just 15 per cent. of men. A system that assumes that a woman does not need a pension if she has a husband is grossly outdated.

The so-called citizen's pension, which my party proposes, is the kind of basic reform that the UK pension system needs, because it would be linked to residency and uprated in line with earnings. The citizen's pension would make an enormous contribution to alleviating pensioner poverty, especially among women. An extra £100 a month for over-75s would lift 1 million people out of means-testing overnight.

There are a few other issues that I would like to touch on and I hope that the Minister will find time to comment on them, too. Another major problem facing pensioners in my constituency is the cost of council tax. Nationally, pensioner incomes have risen, in percentage terms, by less than half the increase in council tax bills. In Edinburgh, the average council tax bill has risen by 22 per cent. in four years. The £100 offered to older pensioners in my constituency was welcome, but it ignores the underlying root of the problem. Also, because it was targeted at older pensioners, it left no help for many younger pensioners who are struggling to make ends meet because of their council tax bill. Council tax remains one of the most regressive and unfair taxes. It hits disproportionately those on fixed incomes and low incomes, including pensioners. The result has been that pensioners in my constituency are spending a huge chunk of their pension on council tax; that is money that they should be spending on heating their homes and on food for their meals. Just as with pension credit, too many pensioners—almost a third—are not claiming the council tax benefits to which they are entitled. Estimates given to me by Help the Aged suggest that some £2.5 billion worth of benefits, including council tax benefit, is going unclaimed by pensioners.

Thankfully, in Scotland, the Scottish Executive is undertaking a review into local government finance, and the Liberal Democrats will argue strongly for council tax to be abolished and for a new, fairer, local income tax to be introduced. The system would be based on income, not property values. Thousands of pensioners in my constituency and throughout Scotland would benefit. As fairness would be built into the system, we would also remove the need for council tax benefit and resolve the take-up problems.

Turning to poverty among disabled pensioners, the Minister will be aware of the strong and widespread feeling among Members about the discrimination in relation to disability benefits. Early-day motion 953, which concerns the Mobilise campaign to allow over-65s to claim disability living allowance, now stands out as one of the most popular EDMs this Session. Almost 250 MPs from all parties have backed it. The main support for the Mobilise campaign has come about because of the in-built injustice that it seeks to end. Surely it cannot be right that under-65s are entitled to help with their mobility costs while the under-65s are not? The allowance of £41 a week would go a long way in helping elderly people who suffer from mobility problems and who have to use their pension to pay for help. Such a move would also have other positive effects. DLA acts as a gateway allowance; entitlement to it also means access to other benefits, such as the Motability scheme and exemption from car tax. The 20 charities that formed the Mobilise campaign have done a power of work on raising awareness of the issue, both inside and outside Parliament. I hope that, at some point, the Minister will confirm that their work has not been in vain, and that changes to the rules will be introduced as soon as possible.

I remember when the Prime Minister promised to learn from what he described as a mistake—the 75p increase in the state pension, which many pensioners found insulting. That was one of the big mistakes of Labour's first term, and one of the big mistakes of their second term has been the abolition of pension books. Although that has not added to pensioner poverty, it has added to the general anger and frustration felt by many pensioners. It comes down to the attitude of the Government—an attitude that has led to their setting a target to end child poverty by 2020, but setting no such target and making no such commitment for older people. That attitude has fostered feelings of injustice and unfairness among the pensioners whom I represent. After all their contributions to society, they are only asking for what is fair. The Government should offer no less.

4.39 pm

The Minister for Pensions (Malcolm Wicks): I thank the hon. Member for Edinburgh, West (John Barrett) for the way in which he approached the debate. We will not agree on everything, but I would like to thank him for his tribute to our local Pension Service. It is the first time that we in these countries have had a dedicated Pension Service, and its work at local level is quite outstanding. It is particularly helpful when it can link up with a local Member of Parliament. I am pleased with the way in which the hon. Gentleman is approaching that work in his constituency.

Whatever the difference between us about policies, such as pension credit, it is our duty as Members of Parliament to play our role in ensuring that all our constituents claim their entitlements. I thank the hon. Gentleman for his approach.

I am hoping that, in the next day or two, the Pensions Bill will become the Pensions Act, although there are still some discussions to be held about it. It would bring much-needed security in the future to those people with final salary pension schemes ending the scandal whereby, when a company goes bust and a scheme does not have enough money, pension rights are, in fact, not rights. We are making sure that the pension promise will be kept in the future.

The hon. Gentleman referred briefly to the Pensions Commission. We will consider its recommendations when they are published in the commission's second report next year and examine some of the fundamental issues about which any Government need to decide.

Understandably, the hon. Gentleman spoke much about the situation facing today's pensioners. It was certainly the case that, when the Government came to power in 1997, one of the great challenges facing us was pensioner poverty. Under the previous Government's income support system, a single pensioner was being asked to live on an income as low as £69 a week. Moreover, under income support, any extra money that the pensioner had, such as savings or a small works pension, was deducted pound for pound from the person's entitlement to income support. Poverty was certainly blighting the lives of many of our senior citizens in our countries. That is why we focused not all but much of the additional money that we can spend on pensioners.

I accept that there is always the argument that we should be spending more, but we will be spending £10 billion a year more on pensioners in 2004–05 than was spent under the old system. Of that £10 billion, about half—nearly £5 billion—is going to the poorest one third of pensioners. The hon. Gentleman talked about means-testing but, whether or not he agrees with our approach, we are proud of the fact that, through such measures as pension credit, we are enabling many additional resources to go to the poorest. Indeed, average pensioner households are receiving £1,350 more a year—£26 a week—while the poorest third receives £1,800 a year more, which is about £35 a week. It goes directly into the pockets and the purses of the poorest pensioners. That is important.

I do not want this to be a single-issue debate, but I feel obliged to make several points about pension credit. We have moved away from the intrusive, punitive means test of the past that put many people off taking up what was rightfully theirs. In the past, taking up entitlements meant perhaps a visit to an uninviting social security office and the daunting prospect of filling out a 40-page claim form. As the hon. Gentleman and I acknowledged, we have established a dedicated Pension Service that is tailored to our customers' needs, with a simple free phone application process that includes a local service in the community, which works jointly with our partners in the statutory and voluntary sectors, to provide not only pension credit but housing benefit, council tax benefit and other social care entitlements.

[The Minister for Pensions]

Members need not take my word for it, although I am sure the hon. Gentleman would want to: a recent survey undertaken by our partners, Age Concern, found that about 70 per cent. of people who had applied for pension credit considered that the application process was easy, while 85 per cent. said that they would recommend it to someone else. Pension credit is designed to provide extra money to those pensioners with modest savings for their retirement. Before it was introduced, many people who had managed to save a little were often left no better off than people who had not saved at all. That is the importance of the savings element of pension credit.

In Edinburgh, West, the hon. Gentleman's constituency, the average pension credit is just over £38 a week. I am pleased that, on the latest count, 3,206 individuals in his constituency are receiving pension credit. That extra money enables many of our older citizens to lead more independent and dignified lives—which they deserve and which we would wish for them.

One group that benefits from pension credit is women pensioners. There has been an uneven distribution of caring responsibilities. For example, many of the hon. Gentleman's older constituents—those in their 80s—might have brought up a number of children. They may also have been responsible as the main carer for elderly relatives within the extended family. As a result, they would have had less time to pursue a career and therefore less access to a decent occupational pension scheme. As the hon. Gentleman remarked, such women were less likely to have a full national insurance contribution record and therefore less likely to have a full basic state pension. That gender issue will need to be addressed in future, but we must also address it now. It is no coincidence that two-thirds of people getting pension credit are women—partly because they are older and partly because of the other caring responsibilities that I mentioned.

It is not only pension credit that can make the difference: for the first time, about 2 million pensioner households now quality for more help with council tax and/or housing benefit. The number qualifying for those benefits has increased because pension credit recipients can now claim those benefits.

On the issue of council tax benefit, which the hon. Gentleman highlighted, I should note also that, as part of the winter fuel payment, an extra £100 will be paid to those households in which one or more members are over the age of 70. It is being paid this year only in order to take a bit of the sting out of the council tax increases—increases that concern us all.

I recognise that the take-up of council tax benefit has often been appalling. It has been a grey area, not a highlighted benefit. We are trying to change that, working with local authorities in Scotland and across England and Wales. The winter fuel payments that are now going to our constituents include a special leaflet about council tax benefit, urging people who think that they might be eligible to apply. They must apply to the local authority, which is very important.

I now turn specifically to the situation in Scotland—indeed, the majority of Members here this afternoon represent Scottish seats. As at the end of September, more than 273,000 pensioner households had already taken up their entitlement to pension credit, and that number is growing. As I said, by the end of September more than 2,700 households—about 3,206 individuals—in Edinburgh, West will receive pension credit. We believe that there should be a simple income test. The forms are shorter, home visits can be made and people can visit the local surgery.

I have one good news story about the local service. Staff recently visited a couple in Edinburgh, West to help them with a pension credit application. Although the couple were in receipt of a state pension and had been awarded attendance allowance, they had not yet applied for the pension credit. As a result of our approach, they are now receiving more than £49 a week, with a backdated payment of more than £1,300. That is just one example of the difference that pension credit can make to pensioners across our countries. The backdating is important because anyone claiming pension credit can now have it backdated for 12 months, so people could receive considerable lump sums.

We are determined to strengthen our joint working arrangements in Scotland, in order to reach more pensioners who have yet to take up pension credit. That is why the Pension Service in Scotland is working in partnership with the health and care group and the older people's unit within the Scottish Executive. Our approach is not limited to the poorest pensioners alone. It was vital that we got more money to them as quickly as possible. That is what pension credit is all about.

In response to the question of non-take-up, I have always acknowledged that there are both advantages and disadvantages to any pension strategy. The advantage of pension credit, which is income tested, is that by definition it is designed for the poorest, and we have an especial duty to reach the poorest. The challenge is always to maximise the take-up, but I am never sure that hon. Members are right when they say that we should simply do away with means-testing. It is a difficult issue.

As Minister for Pensions, my aspiration is that more people in the younger cohorts should be enabled to retire on incomes based on a combination of state pensions and state second pensions or occupational pensions that put them significantly above the means-tested level. That has to be our long-term aspiration. However, we have a group of people already retired who are poor—often women and often the older elderly. Would it really be right to say to such an 80-year-old constituent, jogging along on £60 or £70 a week when we came into power, that we will give them the same pension increase as someone with a big investment income or an occupational pension, who is earning £50,000 a year in retirement?

Should we treat everyone the same? It would be simpler administratively and there would not be a take-up problem, but would it be fair and just? That is the question, and that is why we believe that, in the short to medium term, pension credit is the right approach to righting the injustice that many of those constituents face during their lives. They have done the right thing in bringing up their children and caring for elderly relatives, but then they pay the pension penalty: they do not get the full basic state pension but they have not accrued rights to occupational pensions. Pension credit is designed to help that group. It is controversial, but I am convinced that it is the right strategy and that we all need to put a lot of effort into boosting take-up.

That is our strategy. We are doing what we can for all pensioners by raising the basic state pension, always at least in line with prices and often more. There are winter fuel payments, which, we should remember, are now worth £300 for our constituents over 80 and £200 for the over-60s. They take a lot of the sting out of the arrival of the electricity and gas bill, and I am proud of that.

John Barrett: Before the Minister finishes, will he address the issue of disabled pensioners?

Malcolm Wicks: I will reflect on the hon. Gentleman's thoughtful speech, and I will write to him on any points that I cannot cover now. I shall also bring his remarks to the attention of the Under-Secretary of State for Work and Pensions, my hon. Friend the Member for Liverpool, Garston (Maria Eagle), who has responsibility for disability issues.

We have in place a range of disability benefits and, through social work departments in Scotland and social services departments in England, measures to try to help people with disabilities. We always want to do more—the Disability Discrimination Act 1995 is an indication of our intent in that regard. However, we hope that the disability benefits and the carer's allowance will provide ways of tackling some of the financial hardship faced by both the person with the disability and their carer. I will reflect on the hon. Gentleman's remarks, and my ministerial colleague may write to him if I have missed any points.

I hope that I have addressed many, if not all, the issues that the hon. Gentleman raised. I am pleased that, on this busy day, we have managed to fit in such an important debate. I congratulate him on securing it and on the measured way in which he has approached the subject.

Mr. Deputy Speaker: I thank the hon. Members for Edinburgh, West (John Barrett) and for Greenock and Inverclyde (David Cairns) and the Minister for their assistance in achieving a proper Adjournment debate on the one day in the year on which it is almost impossible to do so. The test of the elasticity of the relatively new Standing Orders was interesting for me in a technical sense.

Question put and agreed to.

Adjourned accordingly at six minutes to Five o'clock.

Westminster Hall

Thursday 18 November 2004

[SIR NICHOLAS WINTERTON *in the Chair*]

Health and Safety

[Relevant documents: Fourth Report of the Work and Pensions Committee, Session 2003–04, HC 456, and the Government's response thereto, Third Special Report, Session 2003–04, HC 1137.]

Motion made, and Question proposed, That the sitting be now adjourned.—*[Gillian Merron.]*

7

2.30 pm

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Before I put the question, may I make it clear that I shall ask the Clerk to write to Mr. Speaker and to the Government to seek to rearrange this important debate at a very early date? We are in uncharted waters, as Divisions will come at any time, and an important debate such as this would be unnecessarily and unacceptably interrupted. I am very happy to accept the motion proposed by the Government Whip.

Question put and agreed to.

Adjourned accordingly at twenty-nine minutes to Three o'clock.

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Written Ministerial Statements

Monday 1 November 2004

CABINET OFFICE

Sickness Absence (Civil Service)

The Minister for the Cabinet Office (Ruth Kelly): The report "Analysis of Sickness Absence in the Civil Service 2003" prepared for the Cabinet Office by Aon Limited shows that the headline figure for the average level of sickness absence was 10.0 days per staff year. This represents a 0.2 days per staff year increase over the equivalent figure of 9.8 days set out in the report for 2002. The report contains a comprehensive analysis of the 2003 figures by department/agency. Copies have been placed in the Library.

Departments have established service delivery agreements, which contain their individual targets for reducing sickness absence. Overall, the civil service was targeted to reduce sickness absence by 30 per cent. (to 7.2 days per staff year) by 2003 against the 1998 baseline. In July 2004 my right hon. Friend the Chancellor announced a review into the extent of short and long-term sickness within the civil service, and the results of that are due to be published shortly. Meanwhile, the Cabinet Office is continuing to work with other departments and agencies as they take forward their plans to reduce sickness absence.

TREASURY

Efficiency Technical Notes

The Chief Secretary to the Treasury (Mr. Paul Boateng): In the spending review White Paper "2004 Spending Review: New Public Spending Plans 2005–2008" (Cm 6237), and following Sir Peter Gershon's independent review of public sector efficiency, the Government announced the publication of departmental efficiency technical notes (ETNs). Departments are now publishing these ETNs on their websites, in line with the end of October deadline. Links to the ETNs can be found at www.hm-treasury.gov.uk/performancedocs/.

DEPUTY PRIME MINISTER

Representation of the People Order

The Minister for Local and Regional Government (Mr. Nick Raynsford): We have today launched a short consultation paper on the increase to the maximum limits of candidates' election expenses for ward elections and elections by liverymen in common hall in the City of London.

Copies of the consultation paper are available in the House Library.

Comments are invited by 29 November.

NORTHERN IRELAND

Police Fund

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Northern Ireland (Mr. Ian Pearson): I have today placed in the Library a copy of the report produced by John Steele CB OBE TD DL following his review of the Northern Ireland Police Fund. The Government accept the recommendations in principle and will work with the Police Fund on the implementation process.

Copies of the report have been placed in the Library of both Houses.

PRIME MINISTER

Committee on Standards in Public Life

The Prime Minister (Mr. Tony Blair): I am pleased to announce that I appointed Lloyd Clarke and the right hon. Baroness Jay of Paddington to the Committee on Standards in Public Life.

Lloyd Clarke replaces Baroness Neuberger of Primrose Hill who stood down from the Committee in April 2004. Baroness Jay takes up appointment as the Labour party nominee in succession to my right hon. Friend the Member for Islington, South and Finsbury (Mr. Smith) who is stepping down from the Committee following completion of his first term of appointment. Both appointments are effective from 1 November 2004 and are for three years in the first instance.

I would like to thank Baroness Neuberger and my right hon. Friend for their contribution to the work of the Committee during the past three years.

TRADE AND INDUSTRY

Regional Development Agencies

The Minister for Industry and the Regions (Jacqui Smith): As part of a rolling programme of appointments, I have decided to appoint five new members to East of England Development Agency and South East England Development Agency. The new appointees will take up their positions on 14 December 2004 and their names are set out below.

The new board members will replace members whose terms of office end in December this year and will bring experience from business, local authorities, rural affairs, trade unions and education.

Decisions on the appointments have been made following open competition in accordance with the guidelines set down in the Commissioner for Public Appointments' code of practice, and following consultation with key national and regional players.

EEDA
Celia Cameron
Sheila Childerhouse
Paul Burall
SEEDA
Prof. William Wakeham
Imtiaz Farookhi

TRANSPORT

Working Time Regulations (Road Transport)

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Transport (Mr. David Jamieson): Draft regulations and formal guidance implementing the Road Transport (Working Time) Directive (2002/15/EC) have today been published. A short six-week consultation exercise has been launched seeking views on both documents. This follows a full consultation exercise earlier this year on how the directive should be implemented. We are placing copies of the documents in the Libraries of both Houses.

The regulations will provide extra protection for drivers and crew of heavy goods and public service vehicles, who carry out road transport activities covered by the EU Drivers' Hours Rules—Regulation (EEC) 3820/85. The main provisions of the regulations include:

> Weekly working time is limited to an average 48 hours.
>
> Up to 60 hours work can be performed in a single week, as long as the average 48-hour limit is maintained.
>
> Night workers are restricted to 10 hours working time in any 24-hour period.
>
> Some additional break requirements

As announced on 29 April 2009, the draft UK regulations implement the following:

> Where there is either a collective agreement or a workforce agreement at company level between the employer and employees, firms will be able to use the derogations available under the directive:
>
> (a) The four-month reference period for calculating the average 48-hour week can be extended to six months.
>
> (b) The 10 hour limit, over a 24 hour period, for night workers can be exceeded, though the 60 hour weekly limit will still apply, and drivers will still have to respect EU driver's hours rules.
>
> The definition of "night time" is a period between 00.00-04.00 for drivers and crew of goods vehicles, and 01.00-05.00 for drivers and crew of passenger vehicles.
>
> VOSA (DVTA—NI) will enforce the new regulations; primarily in response to complaints they receive. This approach will be reviewed before March 2009.
>
> Self-employed drivers will not be covered by UK regulations until March 2009.

In addition, under the draft Road Transport (Working Time) Regulations:

> Workers who occasionally perform road transport activities will be subject to the Working Time Regulations 1998 (as amended), rather than these new regulations.
>
> There is a new method of calculating average working time.
>
> Working time is restricted to road transport activities.

Formal guidance for industry on the draft legislation, including the definitions (notably, working time and periods of availability) and occasional drivers is also available.

WORK AND PENSIONS

Disability and Carers Service

The Secretary of State for Work and Pensions (Alan Johnson): On 27 January 2004 as part of the Department's wider programme of reform, the then Secretary of State announced that the disability and carers service (DCS) would be assigned formal executive agency status. Work to establish the agency is now complete. It will retain its current title, the disability and carers service, and is launched from today with Terry Moran appointed as chief executive.

The role of DCS is to support disabled people and carers by providing a customer-focused service that delivers disability and carer benefits efficiently. These benefits comprise disability living allowance, attendance allowance, carer's allowance and vaccine damage payments.

The 2004–05 targets for the DCS are contained within the disability and carers directorate business plan, a copy of which is available in the Library. Accountabilities for the DCS align with those of other departmental agencies and are set out within the departmental framework.

DCS will embark on a significant programme of change by putting the experience of its customers at the heart of its plans to transform the service.

I am confident that these changes will benefit the customers served by the DCS and support our agenda for improvements in public service generally and also achieve greater efficiency.

Written Ministerial Statements

Tuesday 2 November 2004

CABINET OFFICE

Central Office of Information

The Minister for the Cabinet Office (Ruth Kelly): The targets set for the Central Office of Information for the 2004–05 financial year are:

Financial:

To break even on an accruals basis.

Efficiency:

To achieve a unit cost reduction of 2.5 per cent.

Quality:

For the customer satisfaction system:

To achieve a customer satisfaction score of 8.25 out of 10;

To achieve 96 per cent of customer satisfaction scores of six or higher;

To achieve a response rate of 62 per cent.

DEPUTY PRIME MINISTER

Planning Obligations

The Minister for Housing and Planning (Keith Hill): The system of planning obligations in England has been widely criticised for some time for its often opaque nature and its contribution to delays in the planning process. The Government are therefore publishing today a draft revised circular, aimed at improving the way in which planning obligations are negotiated under s106 of the Town and Country Planning Act 1990 (amended by the 1991 Act).

The draft revised circular on negotiated agreements, which will now be consulted on for three months, aims to contribute to the speeding up of the planning system and therefore the creation of sustainable communities.

The circular brings planning obligations into line with the new arrangements established by the Planning and Compulsory Purchase Act 2004. Given the possibility of more major reforms to the system of planning obligations in the next few years, referred to in my statement of 17 June 2004, the circular seeks to minimise the additional administrative burdens placed on local planning authorities and developers, whilst seeking to streamline the system and promote best practice.

It seeks to ensure that affordable housing continues to be secured through s106 on a more consistent basis and in line with the direction of reform to Planning Policy Guidance Note 3 (Housing). ODPM consulted on proposed updates to PPG3 last year entitled "Influencing the Size, Type and Affordability of Housing", and "Supporting the Delivery of New Housing". Concerns have been expressed about the proposed policy update on housing mix in particular. The office continues to discuss these issues with stakeholders. The intention is to publish the PPG3 updates by the end of the year.

The draft circular has been produced following extensive discussions with stakeholders to seek their views on the difficulties experienced with the current system. In addition, the work of the Advisory Group on Planning Obligations has been useful in helping to formulate the proposals being published today.

Following public consultation, a final version of the circular will be issued in spring 2005, accompanied by good practice guidance, which is being prepared by Halcrow group.

In the meantime, the Government are continuing to consider Kate Barker's proposal for a planning-gain supplement, made in her final report of her "Review of Delivering Stability: Securing our Future Housing Needs", 17 March 2004. Depending on the outcome of further work over the next 12 months, further changes to the system of planning obligations may be required.

ENVIRONMENT, FOOD AND RURAL AFFAIRS

Winter Supplementary Estimates

The Minister for Rural Affairs and Local Environmental Quality (Alun Michael): We intend to make a full statement on the contents of our winter supplementary shortly.

Countryside and Rights of Way Act

The Minister for Rural Affairs and Local Environmental Quality (Alun Michael): Today I am launching two consultation papers dealing with proposals to implement the rights of way joint orders and rights of way registers provisions in the Countryside and Rights of Way Act 2000.

In the first consultation paper, I offer proposals for the contents of registers that Local Authorities are required to establish under various provisions in schedules 5 and 6 to the Countryside and Rights of Way Act 2000. The registers, which will be available for public inspection, will help to better inform landowners, user groups and the general public about applications that could result in changes to the definitive map and statement—the local authority's legal record of rights of way. This is particularly important in the in the light of the 2026 cut off date for adding historic rights of way to the definitive map and statement.

The second consultation paper is concerned with the new rights of way joint orders procedure under schedule 5, paragraph 2 of the Countryside and Rights of Way Act 2000.

This new procedure will enable public path orders and legal event modification orders (orders that enable the local authority to alter the definitive map and statement to record changes resulting from public path orders) to be combined where they are made by the same authority. Local authorities are at present required to make separate orders. This will ensure that the definitive map is updated continuously and reduce uncertainty about rights of way, which will benefit both land managers and the public.

Copies of both of the consultation papers have been deposited in the House Library. The closing date for the consultations is 31 January 2005.

FOREIGN AND COMMONWEALTH AFFAIRS

Guide to the European Union

The Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs (Mr. Jack Straw): On 1 November 2004, the Foreign and Commonwealth Office published a guide to the European Union (EU) which sets out how the EU works and explains the main points of the Treaty establishing a Constitution for Europe. The guide has been awarded the Plain Language Commission's clear English standard mark, which means it has passed rigorous checks of its clarity, grammar and layout. This guide will be available in all public libraries and on the Foreign and Commonwealth Office website: www.europe.gov.uk. Members of the public can also request a hard copy of the guide. Copies have been placed in the Library of the House and are also available from the Vote Office.

NORTHERN IRELAND

Companies Registry

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Northern Ireland (Mr. Barry Gardiner): In accordance with Article 677 of the Companies (Northern Ireland) Order 1986, copies of the Companies Registry annual report 2002–03 have been placed today in the Libraries of both Houses.

Credit Unions

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Northern Ireland (Mr. Barry Gardiner): In accordance with article 81 of the Credit Unions (Northern Ireland) Order 1985 and section 100 of the Industrial and Provident Societies Act (Northern Ireland) 1969, copies of the Credit Unions Annual Report 2002 have been placed today in the Libraries of both Houses.

Independent Monitoring Commission (Normalisation Report)

The Secretary of State for Northern Ireland (Mr. Paul Murphy): On 20 July I published a report by the Independent Monitoring Commission (IMC) on the security normalisation activity undertaken in Northern Ireland. The Commissioners have written to me to advise me that they received, from the Ministry of Defence, revised figures for troop numbers in Northern Ireland for the period the report covers. I have been asked to publish the revised figures and have placed copies in the Library. It appears that the information originally in the report over-stated the numbers of troops based in Northern Ireland. I note that IMC have concluded that they would not have changed the conclusions in their report had they been in receipt of this information during the writing of the report.

WORK AND PENSIONS

Stakeholder Pensions

The Minister for Pensions (Malcolm Wicks): We are today publishing a consultation document on changes to the stakeholder pensions regulations.

The changes are part of the Government's wider strategy to introduce a suite of simple, low-cost, risk-controlled savings and investment products that can be sold through a new basic advice process.

The main change is that for people who do not want to choose how their pension savings are to be invested, we are going to require stakeholder pension schemes to provide lifestyling. "Lifestyling" means that at least five years before retirement, the members' pension savings will start to be moved into less volatile investments in order to reduce the risk of a sudden drop in value shortly before retirement.

We have already announced that the charge cap for the stakeholder pension is to increase. From April 2005, pension providers will be able to make an annual charge of 1.5 per cent. for the first ten years that the product is held and 1 per cent. thereafter. However, I am announcing today that charges will still be capped at 1 per cent. for existing members.

We aim to make and lay these regulations in early 2005, to come into force on 6 April 2005.

Written Ministerial Statements

Wednesday 3 November 2004

DEPUTY PRIME MINISTER

Planning Policy Statement 23

The Minister for Housing and Planning (Keith Hill): I am announcing today the publication of a new planning policy statement on "Planning and Pollution Control". The new Planning Policy Statement 23 (PPS23) and its two annexes covering pollution control, air and water quality and development on land affected by contamination, will replace the remaining extant parts of Planning Policy Guidance Note 23 (PPG23), "Planning and Pollution Control", published in 1994.

A draft of PPS23 was issued for public consultation in July 2002. The key policy aims of PPS23 are to facilitate planning for good quality, sustainable development that takes appropriate account of pollution and contaminated land control issues while avoiding duplication of the existing pollution control systems. The aim is to enable the planning system to contribute to improvements in the quality of air and water and to assist in the remediation of contaminated land through the process of development—which is the main driver in bringing such land back into beneficial use.

Local planning authorities will need to have regard to the policies in PPS23 in preparing their local development documents, as should regional planning bodies in the preparation of regional spatial strategies. The policies will also be material to decisions on individual planning applications where pollution issues arise or which concern contaminated land. Planning authorities have an important role to play in ensuring that development proposals do not risk adding to pollution, and properly address pollution issues and the action needed to bring contaminated previously developed land back into safe and sustainable use.

Copies of PPS23 are being made available in the Libraries of both Houses following publication. It is also being made available on the website of the Office of the Deputy Prime Minister.

HEALTH

Pharmaceutical Price Regulation Scheme

The Minister of State, Department of Health (Ms Rosie Winterton): We have today agreed a 7 per cent. price reduction for branded prescription medicines with the Association of the British Pharmaceutical Industry (ABPI). The reduction has been agreed as part of a new pharmaceutical price regulation scheme (PPRS) agreement. It will save more than £1.8 billion over the next five years on these medicines. This money will be channelled back into front-line national health services by local primary care trusts.

The new PPRS agreement will last for five years. Its objectives are to:

> secure the provision of safe and effective medicines for the NHS at reasonable prices;
>
> promote a strong and profitable pharmaceutical industry capable of such sustained research and development expenditure as should lead to the future availability of new and improved medicines;
>
> encourage the efficient and competitive development and supply of medicines to pharmaceutical markets in this and other countries.

It is important that we continue to encourage the pharmaceutical industry in its first-class research and development work to deliver new and improved medicines for patients. For this reason, the agreement includes improved incentives for the research and development of new medicines, including those for children.

The PPRS is a voluntary agreement between the ABPI and the four health departments in England, Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland. It is backed by section 33 of the Health Act 1999. It allows companies freedom of pricing for new active substances (new medicines) when launched on the UK market, and sets a target rate of return on capital and allowances for research and development and marketing expenditure. Companies that exceed the level of profit allowed under the scheme are required to repay the excess.

Those branded pharmaceutical companies that elect not to join the PPRS will be subject to a statutory scheme under sections 34 to 38 of the Health Act 1999.

HOME DEPARTMENT

Youth Justice Board

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for the Home Department (Paul Goggins): The Youth Justice Board's annual review for 2003–04 has today been laid before both Houses of Parliament. Copies have been placed in the Libraries of both Houses.

The Youth Justice Board is an executive non-departmental public body established under the Crime and Disorder Act 1998 to monitor the operation and performance of the youth justice system and to identify and disseminate good practice to prevent offending by children and young people. The board is also responsible for commissioning services for young people under 18 who are sentenced and remanded to secure facilities.

The annual review 2003–04 reports on the ongoing improvements to the youth justice system and early intervention initiatives. The review highlights:

> the continued development of youth inclusion and support panels and youth inclusion programmes which target prevention activity at young people at risk of offending;
>
> continued successful delivery of the Government's pledge to halve the time from arrest to sentence for persistent young offenders; and the development of the Board's quality assurance programme.

NORTHERN IRELAND

Northern Ireland Housing Executive

The Minister of State, Northern Ireland Office (Mr. John Spellar): The accounts of the Northern Ireland Housing Executive (NIA 115/03) for the year ended 31 March 2004 incorporating the report of the Comptroller and Auditor General thereon will be laid before the Northern Ireland Assembly on Wednesday 3 November 2004.

Copies of the Northern Ireland Assembly paper have been placed in the House of Commons Library at Westminster and in the Northern Ireland Assembly Library at Stormont.

Written Ministerial Statements

Thursday 4 November 2004

CABINET OFFICE

Regulatory Impact Assessments

The Minister for the Cabinet Office (Ruth Kelly): The Government are committed to ensuring that regulations are necessary, give effective protection, balance cost and risk, are fair and command public confidence. In accordance with this, we require Departments to produce and publish regulatory impact assessments (RIAs) for all regulatory proposals likely to have an impact on business, charities or voluntary bodies. Since 1 April 2004, RIAs have also been carried out on proposals with a significant impact on the public sector.

I have today presented to Parliament a Command Paper (Cm 6329) listing RIAs published between 1 January and 30 June 2004. Copies of those listed have been placed in the Libraries of both Houses. This is the 21st such Command Paper.

DEFENCE

Gulf Veterans' Illnesses

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Defence (Mr. Ivor Caplin): As part of the Government's commitment to investigate 1990–91 Gulf veterans' illnesses issues openly and honestly and to learn lessons of the past, the Ministry of Defence has today published the paper "*The 1990–91 Gulf Conflict Health and Personnel Related Lessons Identified*". The purpose of the paper is to focus on the health and personnel related issues resulting from the First Gulf Conflict (Operation GRANBY), with the key aim of learning from the problems identified. In producing the paper, we have attempted to be as open and forthright as possible in examining the health problems experienced by serving personnel, veterans and civilians since the First Gulf Conflict.

The paper identifies what the Ministry of Defence has already done to improve procedures and assesses how these have been applied to the current Iraq deployment (Operation TELIC). It also indicates where improvements are still required. In making these assessments it has been acknowledged that during operations it is not always possible to achieve the ideal situation; inevitably, in the heat of battle there will always be some things that do not go as intended. The aim of this paper is not to seek to attribute blame but to identify how the Ministry of Defence can do better in future. I am today placing copies of the paper in the Library of the House and it is also being placed on the Ministry of Defence website at: www.mod.uk/issues/gulfwar.

EDUCATION AND SKILLS

Secondary School Admissions

The Secretary of State for Education and Skills (Mr. Charles Clarke): I am today laying before Parliament the Government's response to the report by the Education and Skills Select Committee on secondary school admissions. This is the fourth part of their inquiry into secondary education.

I welcomed the report when it was published at the end of July. It is thoughtful and detailed, focusing on the nature of the school admission and the school admission appeals codes of practice and on selection and standards. Our response shares that focus.

We agree with the Committee that every school should be a good school and we welcome their belief that schools are improving. We share their concern that not all schools are or are perceived to be good schools. Earlier this year we published our five-year strategy for children and learners. In it we set out our plans for greater diversity and freedoms for schools to drive up standards so that parental choice becomes more meaningful. We also expect schools to work more collaboratively and to take collective responsibility for all children in their area. Our response to the Committee's report needs to be seen in the context of the five-year strategy.

We understand the Committee's wish to see stronger codes of practice and we will amend them in a number of areas and include a list of appropriate and acceptable admissions oversubscription criteria. This clearer guidance will be helpful to the schools adjudicators who must have regard to the code in determining objections to admission arrangements referred to them.

We continue to believe in the local decision-making framework for admissions, with its emphasis on local discussion and consensus, which we put in place in 1998. We strengthened that framework in 2002 and it is too early to evaluate the effect of those measures—in particular co-ordination of admissions and the working of admission forums. We do not think it necessary or appropriate to consider new regulatory measures before we see the results of those changes. Nevertheless we do want to help admission forums to work effectively. We are therefore developing— as set out in our five year strategy—guidance for admission forums on how to develop protocols for hard-to-place children and how to seek agreement with admission authorities on them.

We are mindful of the Committee's concerns on the quality of some admission appeals. We have already produced some training materials for appeal panel members but we have committed in the response to developing exemplar letters and other Materials for admission authorities to use in their communications with parents on their appeals.

Our position on selection is clear. We do not support academic selection at age 11 and do not wish to see it extended. We have looked very carefully at the Committee's concerns about aptitude selection. We want all secondary schools to play to their strengths and provide a flexible curriculum to meet the needs of individual pupils. Selection by aptitude allows a small number of pupils who would not otherwise have the opportunity to do so to benefit from particular curriculum strengths.

The Schools Adjudicator takes the view that it is possible to assess aptitude—rather than academic ability—in subject areas such as sport, the visual and performing arts and languages. The Government believe there is general acceptance that such a distinction is possible and will continue to allow admission authorities that wish to do so to select a small percentage (up to 10 per cent.) of pupils in these subjects. We intend to prohibit new aptitude selection in design and/or information technology but allow schools already using such selection to continue to do so. We are not intending to introduce aptitude selection in any other area.

We share the Committee's aspirations for an admissions system that is transparent and fair. The changes we are intending to make in response to the Committee's report will ensure that this is the case.

FOREIGN AND COMMONWEALTH AFFAIRS

Guantanamo Bay Detainees

The Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs (Mr. Jack Straw): A Foreign and Commonwealth Office official visited Guantanamo Bay between 2 and 5 October 2004 to check on the welfare of the four British detainees. This was the ninth welfare visit to Guantanamo Bay.

The FCO official saw all the UK detainees individually. US officials observed the meetings. The FCO official talked to all the British detainees about mail, their health, exercise, diet, living conditions, treatment by the Camp authorities and status, the value of the welfare visits and about the British Government's policy towards their detention. The detainees' families have been given details of the visit.

The official gave personal mail and reading material to the detainees and brought mail back to their families in reply. The detainees are also able to send and receive mail through the Camp authorities and ICRC. Delivery times have been irregular but are improving following a review of the US mail system.

The British detainees appeared in sound physical health, are frustrated by their continued detention but heartened by recent access to legal representation, in the case of three of the detainees. Individual medical and detention matters raised during this and previous welfare visits by the detainees were pursued with the Camp authorities. Most have now been addressed. The Government will continue to pursue the outstanding matters. All the detainees said that they welcomed the welfare visits.

The official explained the British Government's policy towards their detention—that, in absence of a fair trial, the British detainees should be returned to the UK—and that talks between the British and US Governments on their detention continued. The official also explained to two detainees designated for trial by Military Commission that the legal proceedings concerned remained suspended.

The Camp authorities were open and co-operative throughout the visit.

NORTHERN IRELAND

Paramilitary Activity

The Secretary of State for Northern Ireland (Mr. Paul Murphy): On 28 October 2004 I received a report from the Independent Monitoring Commission (IMC). This report was made under articles 4 and 7 of the international agreement that established the commission. The report makes an assessment of paramilitary activity in Northern Ireland during the six-month period March 2004 to September 2004. I welcome this report. I have considered its content and I am today bringing it before Parliament. I have placed copies in the Library of the House.

The IMC's report concludes that some paramilitary groups have scaled back the intensity of their activity but none have materially wound down their capacity to commit violent or other crime. Dissident republican groups are the most committed to continuing terrorism. Paramilitary violence in the form of murder, shootings and assaults has considerably reduced in the past six months but remains at a disturbingly high level. The proportionate reduction is greater on the part of republican groups. Most violence is attributable to loyalist groups. The range of paramilitary activity remains wide. Paramilitary groups from both sides remain deeply engaged in serious organised crime.

The IMC makes several recommendations in its report. The first set of these are about paramilitary involvement in organised crime. I remain very committed to addressing the issue of organised crime in Northern Ireland. Partner agencies will work with our counterparts nationally and internationally to take effective action to disrupt the workings of the criminal organisations. If criminal proceedings cannot be brought, cases will be referred to the Assets Recovery Agency to retrieve the proceeds of crime, through either civil action or taxation. The IMC also recommend that guidance be prepared for those who have to engage with paramilitaries. This is a complex issue. I will examine the recommendation in detail.

In April, I said I would review the current suspension of block financial assistance imposed on Sinn Fein and the Progressive Unionist Party on receipt of this report. I am giving careful consideration to this, and I will of course take into account the matters set out by the IMC.

TRANSPORT

Safety Cameras

The Secretary of State for Scotland (Mr. Alistair Darling): I have today published the 2005–06 handbook of rules and guidance for the national safety camera programme in England and Wales, and placed copies in the Library of the House. They have been updated in consultation with the Association of Chief Police Officers and representatives of local highway authorities, along with members of the Motorists' Forum and the Government's road safety advisory panel. The handbook has been updated annually since the programme began and will continue to be subject to review.

Written Ministerial Statements

Monday 8 November 2004

NORTHERN IRELAND

Education, Research and Technology Transfer

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Northern Ireland (Mr. Ian Pearson): On 31 March 2003 I announced the Government's final decisions in response to the O'Hare report on the Department of Agriculture and Rural Development's arrangements for the provision of agri-food education and research and development (R&D) in Northern Ireland.

I am today announcing my intention to set up an advisory non-departmental public body to provide independent advice on education, R&D and technology transfer in response to one of the O'Hare report recommendations. The body will be called the DARD research and education advisory panel.

The body will comprise a chairperson and eleven members, five with scientific or education expertise, one with economics expertise and five with knowledge and experience of one or more of the four themes underpinning the DARD business strategy 2004–05: namely competitiveness of the agri-food sector, animal, fish and plant health, environmentally sustainable activity and development of the rural economy and society.

Members will be appointed by an open and transparent process, following the Commissioner for Public Appointments code of practice. It is intended that these positions will be advertised in a range of local and national publications during the week commencing 8 November 2004. Details of the appointments will also be placed on the DARD website, http://www.dardni.gov.uk/ and the public appointments unit website http://www.publicappointments.gov.uk/.

It is anticipated that the body will meet four times per year and will consider such strategic issues as:

> Research needs over the short, medium and long term of agri-food, agri-environment, animal health & welfare, fisheries & forestry sectors and rural development;
>
> Priorities in light of the competing demands for the total budget available across all DARD funded R&D;
>
> Technology transfer of relevant local, national and international research;
>
> The level and extent of the required education and training programme for the sector, and
>
> Progress on achievement of education, R&D and technology transfer targets.

It will play a key role in the development of the Department's forthcoming strategies for agri-food education, R&D and technology transfer in Northern Ireland and, in doing so, will be required to consult industry and other stakeholders.

The body will perform a purely advisory role. It will not have a budget nor employ any staff. A review of the body will be carried out before the end of its first four years of existence.

I am confident that this new body offers the best option for the provision of consistent, high quality and independent advice to the Department about the future provision of agri-food education and research.

Further Information

The O'Hare review was conducted by an independent panel, consisting of three ministerial appointees. The panel's report was completed in April 2002. Public consultation on the Government's response to the O'Hare report took place between 25 November 2002 and 28 February 2003.

The O'Hare report made a total of seven recommendations for the future provision of undergraduate and postgraduate education and R&D in agriculture and food science in Northern Ireland. One of these, in relation to a new central decision making process, recommended the setting up of an independent expert advisory committee consisting of an independent chairman and approximately 10 members to provide advice on education, R&D and technology transfer. The report also suggested that the committee would receive representations from consumers and from industry, education, R&D and other stakeholders including through ad-hoc working groups. The Government accepted this recommendation.

Work is continuing within the Department of Agriculture and Rural Development to implement the remaining measures arising from the Government's final response to the O'Hare report announced by Ian Pearson on 31 March 2003.

Education and Library Boards

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Northern Ireland (Mr. Barry Gardiner): The statements and summary of the 2000–01 education and library boards' accounts were deposited in the Libraries of both Houses today.

Weights and Measures Triennial Report

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Northern Ireland (Mr. Barry Gardiner): Today I have deposited a copy of the Department of Enterprise, Trade and Investment's Weights and Measures Triennial Report for the period from 1 April 1999 to 31 March 2002 in the Libraries of both Houses. The report gives an overview of the Department's proceedings under the Weights and Measures (Northern Ireland) Order 1981 and generally about the operation of the order. It also includes details of the provisions enacted by the Weights and Measures (Amendment) Act (Northern Ireland) 2000.

PRIME MINISTER

Surveillance Commissioners

The Prime Minister (Mr. Tony Blair): I am pleased to announce that I have approved the re-appointment of the right hon. Lord Sutherland, the right hon.

Sir Michael Hutchison and Sir Charles McCullough as surveillance commissioners under the terms of section 91 of the Police Act 1997.

Their re-appointments start on 1 November 2004 and are until 31 October 2007.

TRADE AND INDUSTRY

Regional Development Agencies

The Minister for Industry and the Regions (Jacqui Smith): I would like to inform Members of the House that, as part of a rolling programme of appointments, I have decided to appoint two new board members to the South West of England Regional Development Agency. The new appointees will take up their positions on 14 December 2004 and their names are set out below.

The new board members will replace members whose terms of office end in December this year, and they will bring experiences from business and local authorities.

I have also agreed to extend the appointment of Nigel Costley by one year, so that his appointment is due to end on 13 December 2005.

Decisions on the appointments have been made following open competition in accordance with the guidelines set down in the Commissioner for Public Appointments code of practice, and following consultation with key national and regional players.

SWRDA (New Members)

Christine Channon

Alan Courts

SWRDA (one-year extension to appointment)

Nigel Costley

UK Company Participation

The Minister for Trade and Investment (Mr. Douglas Alexander): Details of UK Trade and Investment's £16 million programme of support for UK company participation in supported groups at overseas exhibitions, seminars and sector focused outward missions will be placed in the Library of the House. Accredited trade organisations that bid for support to arrange groups are being informed.

These overseas exhibitions, seminars and sector focused outward missions continue to be an important component of trade development work worldwide. UK Trade and Investment recognises that accredited trade organisations need the flexibility to react to changing international events and opportunities. The operation of the programme during the 2005–06 financial year will continue to provide this flexibility, within the constraints imposed by the overall budget provision, and the need for prudent budget management and efficient administration.

WORK AND PENSIONS

Pensions

The Minister for Pensions (Malcolm Wicks): We are aware that trustees of schemes whose sponsoring employers are currently in financial difficulty are uncertain as to whether they would be able to be considered for PPF compensation once the PPF is launched next year.

The Government are now able to state that eligible schemes, whose sponsoring employer has already entered insolvency proceedings may still be able to receive PPF compensation. The scheme will still have to satisfy other PPF eligibility criteria—in particular, the sponsoring employer will need to have an insolvency event after the introduction of the PPF and the pension scheme must not have commenced wind up prior to that date.

The Pensions Bill provides a power that could be used to exclude schemes that have an insolvency event before the PPF is launched. We wish to make it clear that we have no plans to use this power.

Written Ministerial Statements

Tuesday 9 November 2004

TREASURY

Second World War Commemorative Coin

The Chancellor of the Exchequer (Mr. Gordon Brown): Her Majesty the Queen has been graciously pleased to approve my recommendation that a £2 coin should be issued in 2005 commemorating the 60th anniversary of the end of the second world war.

Collector versions of the coin will be released at a premium above face value and, during the course of the year, the coin will also become available at its face value from banks and post offices.

DEPUTY PRIME MINISTER

Housing Revenue Account

The Minister for Housing and Planning (Keith Hill): We have today issued for consultation the drafts of the Housing Revenue Account (HRA) subsidy and Item 8 determinations for 2005–06, which set out proposed figures for subsidy allocations for individual housing authorities. Copies of the draft determinations and supporting material are being made available in the Library of the House, and will be available on the Office of the Deputy Prime Minister's website. These allocations are based on the most up-to-date information available to us from authorities, and may change as that information is refined. Authorities have until 10 December to comment on the draft determinations.

For 2005–06, we will increase the resources per dwelling available at the national level for management and maintenance allowances by almost 11 per cent. in cash terms. This follows from the previously announced 6 per cent. real increase, and allowances for inflation and changes due to rent restructuring. It will provide authorities with an extra £144 per dwelling compared with 2004–05.

The major repairs allowance will increase by about 3.6 per cent. per dwelling in cash terms at the national level.

In addition, the draft determinations propose to continue the reforms in the calculation and allocation of management and maintenance allowances, which began in last year's determination round. The proposals for the management and maintenance allowances in 2005–06 take account of better and more representative data.

Data for the maintenance formula has been expanded to take account of criminal damage to dwellings, re-let data has been expanded to include re-let and terminations, whilst the property void rate is to be averaged across the year rather than simply being taken at year end.

Similarly, for management allowances, we propose now to use crime figures based on harassment data, and take data from the 2004 index of deprivation, rather than the 2000 index that was used last year. Management allowances will also benefit from the same expanded definition of re-lets and terminations as used in maintenance allowances. Most local authorities will gain from the changes proposed in the draft determinations, and some will benefit substantially.

The Government also announced that the consultation on the three-year review of rent restructuring, which had recently closed, had highlighted some issues around the data used which required further analysis and consideration. It is important that we get this right. So we have listened to these concerns and decided to defer change for a year to ensure that we have the right basis for moving forward. We have reflected this in the allocation of allowances to authorities within the subsidy system. It remains our intention that social rents will be restructured and that over time tenants in social housing should pay similar rents for similar properties regardless of landlord.

DEFENCE

Warship Support Agency Targets (2004–05)

The Minister of State, Ministry of Defence (Mr. Adam Ingram): Key targets have been set for the chief executive of the WSA for financial year 2004–05 as follows:

Title	*Details*	*Target*
KT 1a—Provision Of Available Force Element Days	The measurement of the number of days when the material condition of a vessel enables it to perform its scheduled task on that day.	To provide Commander-In-Chief Fleet (CINCFLEET) with the Target level of Available Force Element Days agreed in the CINCFLEET/Defence Logistics Organisation (DLO) Customer Supplier Agreement (CSA).
KT 1a—Provision Of Available Force Element Days	The measurement of the number of days when the material state of a vessel enables it to meet its required Readiness Category.	To provide CINCFLEET with the Target level of the Ready Force Element Days agreed in the CINCFLEET/DLO Customer Supplier Agreement (CSA)
KT 2—Timely Completion Of Upkeep Periods	The measurement of the amount by which the upkeep periods overrun.	To meet the planned delivery dates for vessels undergoing deep maintenance and repair within the agreed Upkeep Factor tolerance.
KT 3—Timely Completion Of The High Priority Capability Improvement Programme	The measurement of the number of high priority upgrades implemented in accordance with the agreed and published installation plan.	To fit 87 per cent. of the high priority, Type A Capability Improvements (Alterations & Additions—A&A) selected by the Equipment Capability Customer (ECC).

Title	*Details*	*Target*
KT 4—Provision Of Single Living Accommodation	The measurement of the increase in available Single Living Accommodation (SLA)	To provide CINCFLEET, 2SL/CNH and Naval Base Lodger Units with the required quantity and quality of Single Living Accommodation for their entitled personnel, as articulated in DLO CSA.
KT 5—Provision Of Operational Support Services At The Naval Bases	The measurement of the delivery of Operational Support Services to a satisfactory standard.	To provide CINCFLEET with the Operational Support Services articulated in DLO Customer Supplier Agreements (CSA) at the agreed ISO 9000 Quality Management Standard.
KT 6—Maintenance Of WSA Capacity To Support The Naval Force Generation Plan	- the assurance that the Agency has the capacity to contribute to the Naval Force Generation Plan.	To achieve a satisfactory assessment against all elements of the Agency's contribution to the Naval Force Generation Plan.
KT 7—Delivering Planned Efficiencies	The measurement of the delivery of planned efficiencies.	To ensure delivery of 90 per cent. of the planned efficiency savings in the DLO Benefits Tracking Tool that are scheduled to be achieved this Financial Year.

Director of Operational Capabilities (2nd Reappraisal of Initial Training)

The Minister of State, Ministry of Defence (Mr. Adam Ingram): In my statement to the House on the Ministry of Defence's response to the Surrey police report into the four tragic deaths of Deepcut Barracks on 24 May 2004, *Official Report*, columns 1306–21, I informed right hon. and hon. Members that the Director of Operational Capability would undertake a further reappraisal of initial training in the armed forces to assess progress in the implementation of the recommendations of his first report.

This reappraisal, that included visits to 12 units across the three services, and interviews with 1,252 recruits and trainees and 307 instructor staff, command and administrative authorities and representatives of welfare, social and emotional support groups, is now complete.

The report confirms that significant progress has been made in implementing all the recommendations set out in the original report. It concludes that particular advances have been made in the field of duty of care arrangements for recruits and trainees, and highlights the considerable energy, imagination and leadership that is being applied in an effort to improve the regime in which recruits and trainees are trained. That said, it identifies areas where further work is required, to ensure that the training organisation meets the highest standards demanded. We are now taking these matters forward.

I am today placing copies of the report in the Libraries of both Houses.

Written Ministerial Statements

Wednesday 10 November 2004

CONSTITUTIONAL AFFAIRS

Better Regulation Task Force

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Constitutional Affairs (Mr. David Lammy): My right hon. and noble Friend the Secretary of State for Constitutional Affairs (Lord Falconer of Thoroton) has made the following statement:

> "The Government has today published its response to the Better Regulation Task Force report, "Better Routes to Redress". Copies of the Government response have been placed in the Libraries of both Houses. Further copies of this response may be obtained from the Department for Constitutional Affairs and is available on its website at http://www.dca.gov.uk. The BRTF report "Better Routes to Redress" and the Government response are also available on the BRTF website at http://www.brtf.gov.uk"

FOREIGN AND COMMONWEALTH AFFAIRS

Human Rights

The Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs (Mr. Jack Straw): I will today lay before Parliament the Foreign and Commonwealth Office annual report on Human Rights 2004. This is the seventh such report, which was an innovation by my right hon. Friend the Member for Livingston (Mr. Cook) when the present Government took office.

Copies will be placed in the Library of the House and the Vote Office. A copy will also be available on the Foreign and Commonwealth Office website www.fco.gov.uk.

This report provides an overview of the main challenges to human rights around the world. It explains the Government's overall activities and policies to address those challenges in both multilateral and bilateral contexts. The report covers the 12-month period until the end of July 2004. In some cases, such as the situation in Iraq and the continuing humanitarian crisis in the Darfur region of Western Sudan, we have provided updates until the annual report went to print in mid-August 2004. Owing to the tragic events in Beslan, I decided to delay the launch of the annual report, which was originally due to be held on 16 September. The report was updated to reflect the atrocity that took place there.

HOME DEPARTMENT

Accession State Nationals

The Minister for Citizenship and Immigration (Mr. Desmond Browne): I am publishing a report today containing provisional management information from the worker registration scheme and data from our monitoring of benefits, housing and national insurance number applications for the period 1 May to 30 September 2004. The report is available on the Home Office website at www.homeoffice.gov.uk. Data from the worker registration scheme is informing the Government's assessment of the impact of enlargement, and is being taken into account in the ongoing review of employment migration schemes.

Early indications that people from the new EU Member States, "The Accession States", would come to the UK to work, not to claim benefits, are borne out by the figures published today. Significant numbers of Accession nationals have come to Britain to work, but very few have claimed benefits. The number of people applying to register peaked in the summer, and had decreased considerably by August and September. The report shows that the Government were correct to expect that many of the people who chose to come to the UK to work would take on seasonal jobs for short periods of time, before returning home. There is also evidence that those who cannot find work are not staying in the UK.

Between 1 May 2004 and 30 September 2004 just under 91,000 people applied to register under the worker registration scheme. This amounts to 0.3 per cent. of the UK workforce. Of the applicants issued with a decision, at least 32 per cent, over 27,500 people, were already in the UK before 1 May. A further 13 per cent. of applicants, 11,410, did not state when they last entered the UK. It is reasonable to assume, therefore, that a significant proportion of those registering were already here illegally before 1 May, and have been able to legitimise their status so they can work legally, paying tax and national insurance contributions.

The number of people applying to register declined dramatically after the first three months. For example, there were around half as many applicants in September as in June or July, reflecting the fact that a large proportion were registering to work in the agricultural sector. Although the worker registration scheme does not directly monitor when a person leaves employment, feedback from a sample of over 100 employers showed that almost 60 per cent. of workers in the agricultural sector who had registered since 1 May had left their jobs to return home. There is anecdotal evidence that this is also occurring to some extent in other sectors. Applications from workers in the agricultural sector have fallen substantially since July, the number of workers registering in this sector fell from 4,725 in June to 1,330 in August and 830 in September. Anecdotal evidence from Accession State embassies and employers also suggests that many of the agricultural workers were students doing summer jobs in the UK, crop harvesting and fruit picking, who went back to continue university courses in their home countries. The quota for the seasonal agricultural workers scheme has been reduced to 16,250 from 1 January 2005 to take account of the fact that employers can now access labour from the Accession States. We continue to keep this quota under review.

Early analysis suggests that workers registered under the worker registration scheme are making an important contribution to the ongoing success of the UK economy, taking on jobs in sectors where there are intense skills shortages and significant recruitment difficulties. We will continue to monitor the impact of enlargement on the UK labour market as more data becomes available. Conservative estimates suggest that during the first five months after enlargement, the policy of allowing Accession State nationals to work in the UK has contributed £120 million to UK GDP, and registered workers have paid approximately £20 million in tax and national insurance. In the three months to August 2004, there were 29.78 million economically active people aged 16 or over in the UK. Even if every worker registered under the scheme between May and September was still in the UK—and we have good evidence that they are not, though it is too early to have precise information on this—Accession nationals would still represent only a third of 1 per cent. of the UK workforce. On this basis, we would not expect to see any measurable impact at the national level. Recent labour market statistics confirm that this is the case.

Our economy continues to perform strongly: the number of people working is at record levels. In June to August 2004 there were 10,000 more people in work than in the previous three months. The UK employment rate is 74 per cent. and every region has an employment rate above the EU average. The internationally recognised ILO measure of unemployment is down by 51,000 this quarter and by 105,000 over the last year, to 1.39 million. We have the lowest number of people claiming Jobseeker's Allowance since 1975, September 2004 834,000 claimed; down 95,100 on the same month last year.

The UK is currently carrying over 600,000 vacancies and our labour market is well able to absorb the workers who have registered. For example, 108,000 vacancies were reported in "real estate and business management"; 20 per cent. of registered workers were employed in administration business and management. Importantly, the report published today shows that workers from the Accession States are filling vacancies in sectors where there are key skills shortages and recruitment difficulties. For example, according to the 2003 National Employer Skills Survey, the health and social work sector accounted for the highest share of all "hard to fill" vacancies; 3,150 workers, i.e. 4 per cent, registered in this sector between 1 May and 30 September 2004. The construction industry reported the second highest proportion of skills shortages; between 1 May and 30 September, 3,560, i.e. 4 per cent, workers registered in this sector. The national employer skills survey also showed that the highest density of vacancies were reported in hotels and catering, where we know the majority, 24,170 workers; 30 per cent. of Accession country nationals are working, providing vital support to the UK's tourism industry. Earlier this year we reduced the number of places on the sectors based scheme by 25 per cent. to take account of the numbers of Accession nationals who would come to the UK to work in the food processing and hospitality and catering sectors. We are keeping the quota under review.

As expected, the UK economy is benefiting in other ways from EU enlargement. Data from the international passenger survey published by the Office for National Statistics today, shows that there were 655,000 visitors from the eight Accession States to the UK between May and September, 9 per cent. of the total number of arrivals from the EU for the same period. These visitors are boosting the UK tourism industry, and enabling the development of new business opportunities and trade links. The international passenger survey shows that the majority of visitors are here on holiday, to see friends or on business 60 per cent. of Accession nationals visiting the UK did so for leisure purposes. This does not include business or study. The International Passenger Survey also shows that 92 per cent. of visitors from the eight Accession countries in the three-month period ending September 2004 intended to stay for less than three months.

The report also shows that concerns that opening our labour market to Accession State nationals would put additional pressure on our public services and welfare system were unfounded. Some 98 per cent. of applications for National Insurance numbers were for employment purposes and the profile of workers continues to be as we had expected: workers are young, 84 per cent. were aged between 18 and 34, and single, only one in 31, or 3 per cent. of registered workers who applied in the first five months after enlargement had dependants aged 16 or under living with them in the UK. Consistent with this age profile, the usage of hospital and education services by Accession nationals appears to be low. In fact the report shows that many workers are contributing directly to the provision of key public services. For example, in July to September alone, there were 25 hospital doctors, including five consultants, 55 bus drivers, 55 teachers, 155 childminders, 1,070 care assistants and home carers and 20 social workers. The vast majority of registered workers are in full time employment, 96 per cent., and based across the country, not just in the South East. For example, 19 per cent. of registered workers are based in Anglia, 11 per cent. in South Central England and 8 per cent. in the Midlands.

The Government's policy is that Accession nationals are welcome to come to the UK to work but not to claim benefits. To back this up, the Government strengthened controls on access to benefits—and publicised information on workers' rights and responsibilities in the Accession countries. In part because of this—but mainly because the vast majority of accession nationals are hard-working people, contrary to press speculation earlier this year—the number of benefit claims has been extremely low. Only 108 applications for income support, 370 for income-based jobseekers allowance and one for pension credit were made by Accession nationals between 1 May and 30 September. Of the applications made, only 16 satisfied the new requirements and were allowed to proceed to be considered under other criteria. A total of 2,789 applications for child benefit were received between 1 May and 30 September, and of the 1,239 applicants who have responded to inquiries about the date of their arrival in the UK, we know that 80 per cent. were in the UK before 1 May. There were a negligible number of applications for tax credits, 314 in total. Applications for social housing and homelessness assistance also continue to be statistically insignificant. For example, between May and September, there were 14 lettings to A8 nationals, representing just 0.02 per cent. of the average number of lettings to all new tenants over a typical five-month period.

The next set of quarterly figures will be made available in February 2005.

NORTHERN IRELAND

Tourism Ireland Limited

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Northern Ireland (Mr. Barry Gardiner): Tourism Ireland Ltd.'s annual report and accounts 2003 were deposited in the Houses of Parliament today.

Copies have been placed in the Library.

Written Ministerial Statements

Thursday 11 November 2004

DEFENCE

Côte D'Ivoire

The Secretary of State for Defence (Mr. Geoffrey Hoon):) The UK places the utmost priority on protecting its citizens, whether at home or abroad. We are always prepared to deploy British forces to evacuate UK nationals should their lives be placed in jeopardy. In the light of the deteriorating security situation in Côte D'Ivoire, a military reconnaissance team deployed earlier this week to assess the requirement to evacuate UK nationals. I wish to inform the House that, following this reconnaissance, the Foreign and Commonwealth Office has requested British forces to undertake an evacuation of UK nationals and others over the next few days. Some 400 people are entitled to our protection.

While I cannot give the House precise details of the mission for reasons of operational security, we have now established liaison teams in Abidjan, and at Accra in Ghana. Concurrently, we have ordered the deployment of the Spearhead lead company group comprising Royal Gurkha Rifles personnel to assist with this evacuation. The company group is pre-positioning in Accra and will be on immediate notice to be called forward to support the evacuation in Abidjan. It is intended to support this evacuation with a number of RAF transport aircraft. In total this equates to a deployment of around 300 personnel.

As an additional contingency we have redirected the landing platform dock HMS Albion towards Côte D'Ivoire, and reduced the notice to move for other force elements should they be required. We would expect the operation to last days, not weeks.

Our ability to react quickly to the situation on Côte D'Ivoire is testament to the flexibility and capability of Britain's armed forces, and to the professionalism of British servicemen and women. The UK is working in close co-operation with international partners to monitor and respond to the situation in Côte D'Ivoire as it develops. In particular, we are working with the French and Ghanaians, who have offered significant enabling support to British forces.

MOD Police Operational Report 2003–04

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Defence (Mr. Ivor Caplin): The Ministry of Defence police operational report for the year 2003–04 is published today. After the introduction of the Anti-Terrorism Crime and Security Act 2001, which gave the Ministry of Defence Police extended jurisdiction, recommendations were made by the House of Commons Defence Committee that an operational report should be presented annually to Parliament.

A copy of the report has been placed in the Library of the House.

Project Aquatrine

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Defence (Mr. Ivor Caplin): The contract for project Aquatrine package B, which covers the Ministry of Defence's estate in Scotland, has been awarded to Thames Water Nevis Ltd., a wholly owned subsidiary of Thames Water whose major partner will be Scottish Water.

Project Aquatrine is one of the Government's leading and most significant public-private partnership (PPP) projects and will transfer the responsibility for the operation and maintenance of the Department's water and wastewater assets and infrastructure throughout Great Britain to private sector providers. This project will enable the transfer of environmental risk to those in the private sector who are best placed to manage it and enable the Ministry of Defence to focus on its core activities. It is a 25-year arrangement worth £2.3billion across three packages that cover the MOD's estate in Great Britain.

Following a pre-commencement period, Thames Water Nevis Ltd. in partnership with Scottish Water will commence services in March 2005.

Defence Estates and English Partnerships

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Defence (Mr. Ivor Caplin): Defence Estates and English Partnerships (EP) have marked their close working relationship by means of a joint working agreement. This "framework" document provides further guidance on the sale of surplus MOD property to EP in accordance with the latest Government accounting rules.

The agreement builds upon a number of recent transactions undertaken between both organisations and will allow them to work even closer together in the future to meet the Department's disposal programme and help to deliver the objectives of the "sustainable communities plan".

In particular, the document will ensure that MOD receives market value for any sales to EP and maintains market confidence.

I am placing a copy of this document in the Library of the House.

EDUCATION AND SKILLS

Supplementary Estimates

The Secretary of State for Education and Skills (Mr. Charles Clarke): Subject to parliamentary approval of any necessary supplementary estimate, the Department for Education and Skills departmental expenditure limit (DEL) (including the Office for Her Majesty's chief inspector of schools (OFSTED) which has a separate estimate) will be increased by £467,748,000 from £27,695,021,000 to £28,162,769,000 and the administration costs limits will be increased by £4,875,000 from £267,487,000 to £272,362,000.

Within the DEL change, the impact on resources and capital are as set out in the following table:

DfES	*Resources*				*Capital*			
	Change £'000	*New DEL £'000*	*Of which: Voted £'000*	*Non-voted £'000*	*Change £'000*	*New DEL £'000*	*Of which: Voted £'000*	*Non-voted £'000*
RfR 1	460,170	23,188,059	7,505,333	15,682,726	6,335	3,692,894	2,211,498	1,481,296
RfR 2	−17,963	757,578	757,578	0	0	114,205	114,205	0
RfR 3	56	195,490	195,490	0	0	33	33	0
OFSTED	18,441	213,301	213,301	0	709	1,309	1,309	0
Sub Total	460,704	24,354,428	8,671,702	15,682,726	7,044	3,808,341	2,327,045	1,481,296
Depreciation[1]	−549	−48,017	−12,271	−35,746	0	0	0	0
Total	460,155	24,306,411	8,659,431	15,646,980	7,044	3,808,341	2,327,045	1,481,296

[1] Depreciation, which forms part of resource DEL, is excluded from the total DEL, in the table above, since capital DEL includes capital spending and to include depreciation of those assets would lead to double counting.

Within the administration cost limits changes, the impact is set out in the following table:

DfES	*Original £'000*	*Change £'000*	*Revised £'000*
DfES (RfR1)	237,487	4,875	242,362
OFSTED	30,000		30,000
Total	267,487	4,875	272,362

Resource DEL

The change in the resource element of the DEL of £460,704,000 arises from a £45,787,000 increase in the voted element of the resource DEL and an increase of £414,917,000 in the non-voted element of the resource DEL mainly to the Department's non-departmental public bodies.

Voted Resource DEL

The £45,787,000 increase in the voted element of the resource DEL arises from a £45,253,000 increase in RfR1; from the movement of £360,056,000 to non-voted resource DEL; the transfer to the Department for Constitutional Affairs of £3,705,000 for the Adoption and Children's Act implementation costs; the net transfer from the Department of Culture, Media and Sports of £2,023,000 for the schools physical education schools sport and club links project team, the schools sports partnership programme and the museums and galleries education programme; the net transfer from the Department of Health of £4,615,000 for the education health partnerships, aim higher health care and a shared nurse advisor; the transfer to the Department for Trade and Industry of £450,000 for foundation degree development; the transfer to the Department for Work and Pensions of £23,000,000 for the adult basic skills delivery of the short intensive basic skills programme; the net transfer from the Home Office of £3,492,000 for prison education capital, positive activities for young people and pay and accommodation costs, prison education offenders in Wales, contracted prisons and young peoples substance misuse partnership; the net transfer to the Office of the Deputy Prime Minister of £2,100,000 for the key worker programme, Government office regional co-ordination unit, extend schools and local public service agreements; the net transfer to OFSTED of £2,601,000 for spending review 2002 funding, local education authority strategic planning, evaluation of employability and adult learning qualifications, benchmarking and qualifications framework; the transfer from the Office for National Statistics of £126,000 for neighbourhood support; the transfer to the Welsh Assembly of £591,000 for student hardship loans; the take up of £387,500,000 end year flexibility (EYF); the take up of new resources £40,000,000 for employer training pilots.

The £17,963,000 decrease in RFR2 arises from the movement of £20,866,000 to non-voted resource DEL; the transfer from the Department for Work and Pensions of £4,503,000 for extended schools, childcare pilots and Sure Start unit research and evaluation; transfer to OFSTED of £1,600,000 for spending review 2002 funding.

The £56,000 increase in RfR3 for the take up of invest to save budget for child contact centres.

The £18,441,000 increase in the Office of Her Majesty's Chief Inspector of Schools in England (OFSTED) from the net transfer of £4,201,000 from the Department for Education and Skills for spending review 2002 funding, local education authority strategic planning, evaluation of engaging adults in learning qualifications, benchmarking and qualifications framework; the take up of £3,632,000 end year flexibility; the take up of £10,608,000 Department for Education and Skills EYF for spending review 2002 funding.

Administration Cost Limits

The £4,875,000 increase in the administration cost limit arises from a £5,199,000 increase due to the reclassification of administration receipts to programme administration receipts; the transfer from the Department for Culture, Media and Sport of £23,000 for the schools physical education schools sport and club links project team; the transfer from the Department of Health £15,000 for a shared nurse advisor; the net transfer from the Home Office £112,000 for pay and accommodation costs; the transfer to the Office of the Deputy Prime Minister £600,000 for Government office regional co-ordination unit and local public service agreements; the transfer from the Office of National Statistics £126,000 for neighbourhood support.

Non-voted Resource DEL

The £414,917,000 increase in non-voted resource DEL arises from the movement of £380,922,000 from voted resource DEL; the net transfer from the Department of Health of £25,330,000 for the implementation of a new consultant clinical academic contract (through HEFCE), Selly Oak and Ruskin colleges, training improvement programmes and national health service pensions indexation; the take up of £12,566,000 EYF; the reclassification of £3,901,000 from resource to capital DEL for various non-departmental public bodies own capital.

Capital DEL

The change in the capital element of the DEL of £7,044,000 arises from a £2,709,000 increase in the voted element of capital DEL and an increase of £4,335,000 in the non-voted element of the capital DEL.

Voted Capital DEL

The £2,709,000 increase to the voted element of capital DEL arises from a £2,000,000 take up of EYF in RFR1 for specialist schools.The take up of £709,000 EYF in the office of Her Majesty's chief inspector of schools in England.

Non-Voted Capital DEL

The £4,335,000 increase to the non-voted element of capital DEL arises from the reclassification of £3,901,000 from resource to capital DEL for various non- departmental public bodies own capital. The take up of £434,000 EYF for partnerships for schools own capital.

NORTHERN IRELAND

Youth Council

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Northern Ireland (Mr. Barry Gardiner): The 2002–03 accounts of the Youth Council for Northern Ireland were deposited in the Libraries of both Houses on 11 November 2004.

Human Rights Commission

The Minister of State, Northern Ireland Office (Mr. John Spellar): As directed under Paragraph 5(2) of Schedule 7 of the Northern Ireland Act 1998, the 5th annual report of the Northern Ireland Human Rights Commission will be laid before the House on 11 November 2004.

TRADE AND INDUSTRY

One North-East

The Minister for Industry and the Regions (Jacqui Smith): I would like to inform members of the House that, as part of a rolling programme of appointments, I have decided to appoint five new members to One North-East. The new appointees will take up their positions on the 14 December 2004 and their names are set out below.

The new board members will replace members whose terms of office end in December this year and will bring experience from business, local authorities and the voluntary sector.

Decisions on the appointments have been made following open competition in accordance with the guidelines set down in the Commissioner for Public Appointments code of practice, and following consultation with key national and regional players.

ONE (new Board members)

Christopher Thompson

Susan Underwood

Robert Symonds

Alison Thairi

Raymond Mallon

East Midlands Development Agency

The Minister for Industry and the Regions (Jacqui Smith): I would like to inform Members of the House that, as part of a rolling programme of appointments, I have decided to appoint five new board members to the East Midlands Development Agency. The new appointees will take up their positions on the 14 December 2004 and their names are set out below.

The new board members will replace members whose terms of office end in December this year, and they will bring experiences from business and local authorities.

Decisions on the appointments have been made following open competition in accordance with the guidelines set down in the Commissioner for Public Appointments code of practice, and following consultation with key national and regional players.

emda (new members)

Steve Brown

Cllr Geoffrey Stevens

Cllr Jonathan Collins

Cllr Gary Hunt Professor

Phillip Tasker

TRANSPORT

GoSkills Funding

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Transport (Charlotte Atkins): I am pleased to announce that the Department for Transport (DfT) will be making a contribution towards the funding of GoSkills, the new sector skills council for passenger transport. The DfT funding, which amounts to £780,000 over three years, is particularly intended to reflect GoSkills1 input into skills and training initiatives for the taxi/private hire sector and the community and voluntary transport sector.

WORK AND PENSIONS

Eastbourne Borough Council (Benefit Fraud)

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Work and Pensions (Mr. Chris Pond): On behalf of my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions, the benefit fraud inspectorate (BFI) inspection report on Eastbourne borough council was published today and copies of the report have been placed in the Library.

Following the housing Green Paper "Quality and Choice: A Decent Home for All", published in April 2000, the Department for Work and Pensions developed a performance framework for housing benefits. The performance standards for housing benefits allow local authorities to make a comprehensive self-assessment of whether they deliver benefit effectively and securely. They are the standards that the Department for Work and Pensions expects local authorities to aspire to and achieve in time.

In 2002–03, Eastbourne borough council administered some £31.8 million in housing benefits, about 52 per cent. of its gross revenue expenditure.

In April 2004 BFI carried out a second inspection of Eastbourne borough council and found that many of the issues highlighted in the 1999 inspection were still outstanding. For example, claims verification was still weak in some areas, there was a lack of management assurance checking, comprehensive guidance for staff was not available and the management of counter-fraud activity was poor. The review of the entire overpayments process that BFI recommended in 1999 had not been carried out.

The report notes that performance in administering benefits does not meet key best value performance indicators, and management information is not analysed or used to manage processes or identify staff training requirements. Comprehensive policies relating to benefits are not in place and there has been no dedicated counter-fraud manager since August 2003, resulting in a lack of effective counter-fraud measures.

The council's high level commitment to provide an effective benefits service is not adequately reflected in its operational planning and staff objectives. The organisational structure has also contributed to a lack of direction and effective communication within the service.

The BFI reports that although the council has not reached standard in any of the seven performance standards, there are some areas of strength. There is support for the benefits service at a corporate level, and a new management structure that was put in place just before the on-site phase of the BFI inspection.

The report makes recommendations to help the council address weaknesses and to further improve the administration of housing benefit and council tax benefit, as well as counter-fraud activities.

My right hon. Friend the Secretary of State is now considering the report and will be asking the council for its proposals in response to the BFI's findings and recommendations.

Lambeth Council (Benefit Fraud)

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Work and Pensions (Mr. Chris Pond): On behalf of my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions, the benefit fraud inspectorate (BFI) inspection report on the London borough of Lambeth was published today and copies of the report have been placed in the Library.

Following the housing Green Paper "Quality and Choice: A Decent Home for All", published in April 2000, the Department for Work and Pensions developed a performance framework for housing benefits. The performance standards for housing benefits allow local authorities to make a comprehensive self-assessment of whether they deliver benefit effectively and securely. They are the standards that the Department for Work and Pensions expects local authorities to aspire to and achieve in time.

In 2003–04,. the London Borough of Lambeth administered some £114.9 million in housing benefits, about 10.37 per cent. of its gross revenue expenditure.

In May 2004 BFI carried out a follow-up inspection on the London Borough of Lambeth assessing progress against the recommendations from the first inspection report published in 2001. The report notes that the council has not reached standard in any of the seven performance standards. There are some good practices in strategic areas, including a clear corporate vision, underpinned by policies and high level plans. Overpayment recovery has also improved and is supported by good procedural guidance.

However, the council's corporate commitment to provide an effective benefits service is not followed through into operational planning, staff objectives or local targets. The organisational structure does not support the effective delivery of benefits or effective communication. Performance in administering benefits remains poor, does not meet best value performance indicators and is hampered by the continuing backlog of work.

BFI reports that the counter-fraud policies have led to a number of successful sanctions and prosecutions but numbers of referrals from the benefits service are falling, management controls are inadequate and communications between benefits and investigation staff are poor.

The report makes recommendations to help the council address weaknesses and to further improve the administration of housing benefit and council tax benefit, as well as counter-fraud activities.

My right hon. Friend the Secretary of State is now considering the report and will be asking the council for its proposals in response to the BFI's findings and recommendations.

Swale Borough Council (Benefit Fraud)

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Work and Pensions (Mr. Chris Pond): On behalf of my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions, the benefit fraud inspectorate (BFI) inspection report on Swale borough council was published today and copies of the report have been placed in the Library.

Following the housing Green Paper "Quality and Choice: A Decent Home for All", published in April 2000, the Department for Work and Pensions developed a performance framework for housing benefits. The performance standards for housing benefits allow local authorities to make a comprehensive self-assessment of whether they deliver benefit effectively and securely. They are the standards that the Department for Work and Pensions expects local authorities to aspire to and achieve in time.

In 2003–04, Swale borough council administered some £29.1 million in housing benefits, about 48 per cent. of its gross revenue expenditure.

In June 2004 BFI carried out a third inspection on Swale borough council and found that the council's benefits service had failed to fully implement 56 per cent. of the recommendations made in the second inspection report, published in September 2002.

The report notes that the council has not reached standard in any of the seven performance standards. The council did not monitor performance and the lack of reliable management information undermined the council's ability to effectively manage its benefits service and counter-fraud activity.

The council averaged 168 days to process new claims, and 66 days to process changes of circumstances, compared with performance standards of 36 and nine days respectively.

BFI reports that nearly 25 per cent. of telephone calls to the benefits service were unanswered. Decision letters needed to give clearer guidance and information to customers. There were delays in dealing with complaints and replies frequently did not cover the facts, were misleading and lacked sufficient detail.

The management of the council's counter-fraud resources and quality of the investigative work was poor. Delays in dealing with changes of circumstances increased the level of preventable overpayments. Between March 2003 and March 2004, outstanding debt increased by 95 per cent.

The report makes recommendations to help the council address weaknesses and to further improve the administration of housing benefit and council tax benefit, as well as counter-fraud activities.

My right hon. Friend the Secretary of State is now considering the report and will be asking the council for its proposals in response to the BFI's findings and recommendations.

Written Ministerial Statements

Monday 15 November 2004

CABINET OFFICE

Supplementary Estimates

The Minister for the Cabinet Office (Ruth Kelly): Subject to parliamentary approval of any necessary supplementary estimate, the Cabinet Office departmental expenditure limit (DEL) will be decreased by £11,159,000 from £250,017,000 to £238,858,000 and the gross administration costs limits will be decreased by £2,102,000 from £219,130,000 to £217,028,000. Within the DEL change, the impact on resources and capital are as set out in the following table.

£'000

		New DEL		
	Change	*Voted*	*Non-voted*	*Total*
Resource	-11,159	258,005	0	258,005
Capital	0	31,000	0	31,000
Depreciation*	0	-50,147	0	-50,147
Total	-11,159	238,858	0	238,858

*Depreciation, which forms part of resource DEL, is excluded from the total DEL since capital DEL includes capital spending and to include depreciation of those assets would lead to double counting.

The change in the resource element of the DEL arises from reductions due to machinery of Government transfer of shareholder executive to the Department for Trade and Industry of £2,585,000, transfer of £10,057,000 to the Ministry of Defence for funding of the national met programme, end year flexibility drawn of £1,000,000 to fund the "go in, stay in, tune in" public information campaign and net transfers from other government departments of £483,000.

There is no change to the capital element of the DEL.

TREASURY

Supplementary Estimates

The Paymaster General (Dawn Primarolo): Subject to parliamentary approval of any necessary supplementary estimate, the H M Customs and Excise departmental expenditure limit will be increased by £75,736,000 from £1,331,872,000 to £1,407,608,000 and the administration costs limit will be increased by £34,476,000 from £1,184,015,000 to £1,218,491,000. Within the DEL change, the impact on resources and capital are as set out in the following table:

		New DEL		
	Change	*Voted*	*Non-voted*	*Total*
Resource	71,966	1,327,032	-	1,327,032
Capital	3,770	79,576	1,000	80,576
Depreciation*	—	-44,780	—	-44,780
Total	75,736	1,361,828	1,000	1,362,828

**Depreciation, which forms part of resource DEL, is excluded from the total DEL since capital DEL includes capital spending and to include depreciation of those assets would lead to double counting.*

The change in the resource element of the DEL arises from:

administration costs increases resulting from the take up of £41,914,000 end year flexibility entitlement (EYF) as set out in the public expenditure outturn White Paper (CM6293). This is partially offset by a transfer of £1,645,000 to HM Treasury to meet the costs of the transfer of policy work and virement from administration costs to programme expenditure of £5,793,000; and

programme expenditure changes relating to: the draw down of £25,000,000 to cover additional costs of lorry road user charging, which formed a part of spending review 2004; an award from the efficiency challenge fund of £300,000; transfers from the Home Office to meet additional costs of anti-terrorism work of £2,336,000, funding from the recovered assets incentivisation fund of £4,161,000 to meet operational and legal costs and £40,000 towards the CIDA project. Further there is a transfer to the Home Office of £140,000 in support of two specific projects and electro mechanical services.

The change in the capital element of the DEL arises from the draw-down of capital EYF amounting to £3,680,000 and a transfer from the Home Office of £90,000 to support anti-terrorism work.

Supplementary Estimates

The Financial Secretary to the Treasury (Mr. Stephen Timms): Subject to parliamentary approval of any necessary supplementary estimate, HM Treasury DEL will be increased by £17,115,000 from £225,574,000 to £242,689,000 and the administration costs limits will be increased by £5,618,000 from £146,891,000 to £152,509,000. Within the DEL change, the impact on resources and capital are as set out in the following table:

£'000

		New DEL		
	Change	*Voted*	*Non-voted*	*Total*
Resource	17,115,000	203,324,000	39,365,000	242,689,000
Capital	0	9,075,000	0	9,075,000
Depreciation*	390,000	-7,654,000	0	-7,654,000
Total	17,505,000	204,745,000	39,365,000	244,110,000

*Depreciation, which forms part of resource DEL, is excluded from the total DEL since capital DEL includes capital spending and to include depreciation of those assets would lead to double counting.

The change in the resource element of the DEL arises from:

Voted

an increase in total Treasury administrative costs of £5,618,000 resulting from:

a partial draw down of end year flexibility (eyf) of £98,000 for administration of the Invest to Save Budget (ISB);

a transfer from the Evidence Based Policy Fund (EBPF) of £35,000 for a research project on regional inequalities in the United Kingdom;

a transfer of £5,485,000 from the Inland Revenue and HM Customs and Excise to fund the switch of taxation policy responsibility to HM Treasury as recommended by the O'Donnell review;

an increase in A in A of £200,000 and a matching £200,000 expenditure for secondments.

a partial draw down of programme eyf of £139,000 for the ISB team;

a draw down of £300,000 EBPF programme and its subsequent transfer to the Office for National Statistics for a project on the measurement of public sector output as recommended by the Atkinson review. This transfer is DEL neutral for HM Treasury;

a transfer to Home Office of £30,000 programme spend for the GRECO project, which assesses national anti-corruption arrangements;

an increase in A in A programme of £5,900,000 and a matching £5,900,000 increase in spend for the Office of Paymaster General to bring the estimate in line with forecasts;

a DEL neutral virement of £316,000 between sections in HM Treasury's RfR 1;

an increase in A in A programme of £229,000 and a matching £229,000 increase in spend for the Coinage RfR 2, following the sale of scrap metal;

Non-voted

a partial draw down of programme eyf of £3,810,000 for an increase in Bank of England agency payments, to cover restructuring costs of gilt administration;

a partial draw down of programme eyf of £232,000 for resettlement payments to Members of the European Parliament;

an increase in OGC programme spend of £7,800,000, funded by the Efficiency Challenge Fund, as agreed in the 2004 spending review, to be drawn down for use via the Estimates as initiatives are identified and agreed with HM Treasury.

An increase in DEL CFERs of £454,000.

Supplementary Estimates

The Paymaster General (Dawn Primarolo): Subject to parliamentary approval of any necessary supplementary estimate, the Inland Revenue departmental expenditure limit will be increased by £152,750,000 from £3,205,460,000 to £3,358,210,000 and the administration costs limits will be increased by £86,282,000 from £2,989,475,000 to £3,075,757,000. Within the DEL change, the impact on resources and capital are as set out in the following table:

			New DEL	
	Change	*Voted*	*Non-voted*	*Total*
Resource	107,764	2,751,476	331,418	3,082,894
Capital	44,986	275,316	-	275,316
Depreciation*	-942	-152,595	-	-152,595
Total	151,318	2,874,197	331,418	3,205,615

*Depreciation, which forms part of resource DEL, is excluded from the total DEL since capital DEL includes capital spending and to include depreciation of those assets would lead to double counting.

The change in the resource element of the DEL arises from the draw down of £90,121,000 administration costs EYF; take up award from the efficiency challenge fund of £20,700,000 programme costs. Additionally, the change relates to minor inter-departmental PES transfers, to HM Treasury reducing administration costs by £3,840,000; and from the Home Office increasing programme costs by £782,000.

The change in the capital element of the DEL arises from the draw down of capital EYF and other resource EYF, totalling £44,496,000 as set out in the "Public Expenditure Outturn" White Paper (CM6293), and an increase of £490,000 to VGA net costs for impairment.

Supplementary Estimates

The Financial Secretary to the Treasury (Mr. Stephen Timms): Subject to parliamentary approval of any necessary supplementary estimate, the Office for National Statistics DEL will decrease by £422,000 from £178,426,000 to £178,004,000 and the administration costs limit will decrease by £417,000 from £153,677,000 to £153,260,000. Within the DEL change, the impact on resources and capital are as set out in the following table:

£'000

			New DEL	
	Change	*Voted*	*Non-voted*	*Total*
Resource	-417	153,339	-	153,339
Capital	-5	24,665	-	24,665
Depreciation*	-	-13,837	-	-13,837
Total	-422	164,167	-	164,167

*Depreciation, which forms part of resource DEL, is excluded from the total DEL since capital DEL includes capital spending and to include depreciation of those assets would lead to double counting.

The change in the resource element of the DEL arises from a transfer of £917,000 in total to other government departments in relation to work to develop the neighbourhood statistics programme. The transfers comprise £518,000 to the Office of the Deputy Prime Minister, £195,000 to the Department of Health, £126,000 to the Department for Education and Skills, £44,000 to the Department of Constitutional Affairs and £34,000 to the Department for Transport. This is partially offset by a transfer in to ONS of £500,000 from other government departments. These transfers comprise £300,000 from HM Treasury to fund work on the Atkinson Review of Government Output and Productivity and £200,000 from the Department for Constitutional Affairs in respect of registration services' gender recognition project.

The change in the capital element of the DEL arises from a transfer of £5,000 to the Department of Health in relation to work to develop the neighbourhood statistics programme.

CONSTITUTIONAL AFFAIRS

Broadcasting Courts Consultation Paper

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Constitutional Affairs (Mr. Christopher Leslie): The Government's consultation paper on broadcasting courts is published today, and copies have been placed in the Library.

In the paper, the Government considers the question of broadcasting courts with an open mind. We are making no recommendations to change the existing law—our purpose is to open the debate on this subject and to gauge stakeholder and public opinion prior to developing policy.

Although no proposals are being made, throughout the paper the Government maintains the position that nothing must be done that would harm the process of justice in any way. In particular, no changes will be made that might place added pressure on vulnerable participants in court proceedings, such as victims and witnesses.

In addition to the usual consultation with stakeholders, the Government wishes to encourage responses to the paper from the general public. To this end, an electronic copy of the consultation paper will be available on the DCA website, alongside an interactive copy of the questionnaire which can be completed online. There will also be a discussion forum, accessible via a link from the DCA website, on which interested parties will be able to share their views.

Magistrates Courts

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Constitutional Affairs (Mr. Christopher Leslie): On Thursday 11 November, my right hon. and noble Friend the Secretary of State made a statement in respect of supporting magistrates to provide justice.

The problems dealt with every day in the magistrates courts are at the very top of the public agenda. We rely on them to be the frontline in terms of the dealing with crime, youth justice, and many family issues.

Magistrates courts should be more:

connected to their communities;

respected for what they do and their orders obeyed with the public having confidence in them; and

effective at what they do—dispensing local justice.

To realise this, my Department is working in partnership with the magistracy, the district judges and those working in magistrates courts to identify what can be done to achieve this and that will supplement the substantial changes already taking place in the magistrates courts.

As part of this programme of work, "supporting magistrates to provide justice", tomorrow, my Department is writing to every single lay magistrate in England and Wales inviting them to complete a questionnaire to give me their ideas and suggestions.

The questionnaire will also be made available to the professional judiciary, all those who work in the magistrates courts and all organisations within the Criminal Justice System.

Further detail on the scope and objectives of this work, as well as electronic versions of the questionnaire, can be found on the internet at www.dca.gov.uk/magistrates.htm

CULTURE, MEDIA AND SPORT

Supplementary Estimates

The Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport (Tessa Jowell): Subject to parliamentary approval of the necessary supplementary estimate, the Department for Culture, Media and Sport DEL will be increased by £171,751,000 from £1,444,030,000 to £1,615,781,000 and the administration costs limits will be increased by £5,342,000 from £45,912,000 to £51,254,000.

Within the DEL change, the impact on resources and capital are as set out in the following table:

		New DEL		
	Change	*Voted*	*Non-voted*	*Total*
Resource	79,720,000	191,030,000	1,343,571,000	1,534,601,000
Capital	98,732,000	50,259,000	130,235,000	180,494,000
Depreciation*	-6,701,000	-4,867,000	-94,447,000	-99,314,000
Total	171,751,000	236,422,000	1,379,359,000	1,615,781,000

**Depreciation, which forms part of resource DEL, is excluded from the total DEL since capital DEL includes capital spending and to include depreciation of those assets would lead to double counting.*

The change in the resource element of the DEL arises from increased expenditure offset by increased appropriations in aid of £3,150,000 to the Royal Parks Agency.

Take up of end-year flexibility £85,033,000 in respect of: listed places of worship (£26,000); culture online (£2,160,000); museums, libraries and archives council (£1,000,000); public lending right (£92,000); strategic commissioning (£256,000); DCMS/Wolfson improvement fund (£104,000); school sports co-ordinator project (£3,000,000); English Heritage (£123,000); the royal household (£200,000); non-cash requirements (£13,015,000); tourism (£75,000); and to fund other ongoing projects within NDPBs (£64,836,000), specifically: Imperial War Museum—£2,800,000; National Gallery—£3,450,000; National Museums Liverpool—£2,468,000; Tate Gallery—£13,500,000; British Library—£8,880,000; Arts Council—£14,018,000; Sport England—£7,920,000; UK Sports Council—£4,250,000; English Heritage—£3,000,000; UK Film Council—£4,550,000.

Transfers from other Government Departments of £1,000,000 from DfES in respect of strategic commissioning: museums and galleries education programme and £4,000,000 from DfT in respect of Wembley development costs.

Transfers to other Government Departments of £3,000,000 to DfES in respect of school sport coordinators programme; £23,000 to DfES in respect of staff costs of PESSCL; £770,000 to MoD for grant to the Met Office.

A reserve claim of £1,250,000 to cover the costs of the sale of the TOTE.

The increase in the Department's administration costs limit arises from take up of end-year flexibility of £5,865,000 in respect of: broadcasting reviews (500,000); cash management bonus 2002–03 and 2003–04 (£63,000 and £55,000 respectively); to meet ongoing commitments (£5,247,000).

The change in the capital element of the DEL arises from take up of end-year flexibility of £130,796,000 in respect of capital modernisation fund projects (£68,803,000); ERDF (£27,630,000); and to fund ongoing projects within the Department's NDPB's (£34,363,000), specifically from 2002–03 EYF entitlement: museums, galleries and libraries—£30,385,000; arts—£89,000; historic buildings monuments and sites—£439,000; sport—£207,000; from 2003–04 EYF entitlement National Museum of Science and Industry—£800,000; Tate Gallery—£963,000; Sir John Soanes Museum—£200,000; Sport England—£1,000,000; English Heritage—£280,000.

Transfers to DWP of £20,800,000 in respect of repayment of ERDF/ESF loan from 2003–04 under the PES pool arrangement to increase European development fund expenditure borne on the Office of the Deputy Prime Minister's Estimate.

DEFENCE

Supplementary Estimates

The Secretary of State for Defence (Mr. Geoffrey Hoon): Subject to parliamentary approval of the necessary supplementary estimate, the Ministry of Defence departmental expenditure limits will be increased by £476,763,000 from £29,868,175,000 to £30,344,938,000. Within the DEL change, the impact on resources and capital are as set out in the following table:

£'000

			New DEL	
	Change	*Voted*	*Non-voted*	*Total*
Resource	364,763	31,393,762	561,434	31,955,196
Capital	112,000	6,437,780	1,220	6,439,000
Depreciation*		-7,879,258	-170,000	-8,049,258
Total	476,763	29,952,284	392,654	30,344,938

*Depreciation, which forms part of resource DEL, is excluded from the total DEL since capital DEL includes capital spending and to include depreciation of those assets would lead to double counting.

The change in the resource element of the DEL arises from:

A transfer from Capital DEL to Resource DEL of £350,000,000 as agreed in SR 04.

Transfers totalling £14,750,000 from the Cabinet Office (£10,057,000), the Scottish Executive (£1,112,000), the Welsh Assembly (£611,000), the Department for Culture, Media and Sport (£770,000) and the Department of Trade and Industry (£2,200,000) as their share of the National Meteorological Programme and Weather Warning Service costs under a pan Government agreement.

A transfer of £13,000 from the Department of Work and Pensions as a contribution to the Veteran Agency's helpline.

An increase in Resource Appropriations in Aid of £16,300,000 from receipt of a special dividend from the Hydrographic Office.

The change in the capital element of the DEL arises from:

the take up of end year flexibility of £168,000,000 CDEL;

to reflect the balance sheet capitalisation of £335,000,000 for MOD main building, Whitehall, following a PFI refurbishment;

a transfer from Capital DEL to Resource DEL of £350,000,000 as agreed in SR04;

to recognise a Capital DEL reduction of £41 million in RfR1, for the advanced purchase of programmed equipment as UORs, under RfR2 in 2003–04.

The changes to CDEL and RDEL will lead to an increased net cash requirement of £141,763,000.

DEPUTY PRIME MINISTER

Supplementary Estimates

The Deputy Prime Minister (Mr. John Prescott): Subject to parliamentary approval of any necessary supplementary estimate, the Office of the Deputy Prime Minister's departmental expenditure LImits for 2004–05 will change as follows:(1) the Office of the Deputy Prime Minister's Main Programmes DEL will be increased by £87,881,000 from £7,041,948,000 to £7,129,829,000 and the administration costs limit will be increased by £26,889,000 from £327,916,000 to £354,805,000. Within the DEL change, the impact on resources and capital are as set out in the following table:

£'000

			New DEL	
	Change	*Voted*	*Non-voted*	*Total*
Resource	134,571	2,896,885	1,950,019	4,846,904
Capital	-46,690	995,951	1,286,974	2,282,925
Depreciation*		-10,961	-4,200	-15,161
Total	87,881	3,881,875	3,232,793	7,114,668

**Depreciation, which forms part of resource DEL, is excluded from the total DEL, since capital DEL includes capital spending and to include depreciation of those assets would lead to double counting.*

The change in the resource element of the DEL arises from:

(i) take up of end-year flexibility of £121,441,000 comprising:

(a) £35,743,000 for housing programme expenditure;

(b) £1,340,000 for ordnance survey expenditure;

(c) £3,000,000 for e-planning;

(d) £331,000 from invest to save budget for fire services;

(e) £41,163,000 for fire services programme expenditure including transitional funding;

(f) £1,950,000 for Fire Service College;

(g) £4,500,000 for regional policy (regional assemblies);

(h) £896,000 for research expenditure;

(i) £7,987,000 (administration costs) for Planning Inspectorate Executive Agency;

(j) £3,000,000 for central administration provision;

(k) £21,020,000 non-voted for regional development agencies;

(l) £511,000 non-voted for the housing corporation.

(ii) a net transfer of £ 47,786,000 to other Government Departments, comprising:

Programme Expenditure

(a) £109,000 from the Scottish Executive for Housing;

(b) £130,000 from Home Office for Special Grants Programme;

(c) £10,000,000 from Department of Trade and Industry to non voted for English Partnerships;

(d) £3,000,000 from Department for Education and Skills to non voted for Housing Corporation;

Administration Costs (Central/ODPM)

(e) £80,000 from the Department for Transport for the Equality and Diversity Unit;

(f) £39,000 from the Home Office for anti social behaviour;

(g) £518,000 from the Office of National Statistics;

Administration Costs (Government Offices)

(h) £19,451,000 from the Home Office to the Government Offices for work on Crime Reduction Unit, Active Community Unit, Street Crime, Community Cohesion, Drugs Prevention Advisory Service, Communities Policy, Business Crime Advisors, Criminal Justice intervention Programme, Youth Crime, Restriction on Bail, Local Delivery Managers and core funding;

(i) £3,999,000 from the Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs to the Government Offices for work on Core Agenda;

(j) £600,000 from Department for Education and Skills to the Government Offices for work on Core Agenda;

(k) £58,000 from Department of Work and Pensions to Government Offices for additional work on the European Social Fund;

Programme Expenditure

(l) £77,169,000 to Department of Trade and Industry for non cash expenditure of Regional Development Agencies;

(m) £1,500,000 to Department for Education and Skills from Neighbourhood Renewal;

(n) £258,000 to Department for Environment, Food & Rural Affairs in support of the Liveability Toolkit;

Administration Costs (Central ODPM)

(o) £6,507,000 to Department for Environment, Food & Rural Affairs to cover the baseline budget for the rent on Ashdown House;

(p) £48,000 to the Department for Transport for Counselling and Support Services;

(q) £45,000 to the Highway Agency for Counselling and Support Services;

(r) £30,000 to the Maritime and Coastguard Agency for Counselling and Support services;

(s) £3,000 to the Vehicle Certification Agency for Counselling and Support Services;

(t) £210,000 to the Department of Constitutional Affairs for Accounting Services;

(iii) A net increase in receipts of £528,000 after offsetting

(a) increases in provision of £300,000 for Housing, £100,000 for Building Regulations, £200,000 for Planning, £736,000 for Fire Services, £1,333,000 for Civil Resilience, £550,000 for Research, £126,000 for administration costs, £100,000 to non voted for Housing Corporation; and

(b) decreases in provision of £1,287,000 for Fire Service College, £510,000 voted and £1,120,000 non voted for the Ordnance Survey programme expenditure.

(iv) A transfer of £2,510,000 to Request for Resources 2 to fund Comprehensive Performance Assessment (CPA) Inspection.

(v) A transfer of £68,426,000 from capital to resource investment within non voted for the Housing Corporation

(vi) A transfer of £5,000,000 from resource investment to capital within non voted for English Partnerships

(vii) A net transfer of £8,673,000 from non-voted to voted provision comprising:

(a) A transfer of £12,600,000 to Housing programmes from non voted for the Housing Corporation

(b) A transfer of £3,577,000 from voted to non voted within the Other Growth Areas (£400,000 in respect of SEEDA and £3,177,000 for English Partnerships);

(c) A transfer of £350,000 from Planning to non voted for English Partnerships;

(viii) As a result of the changes to Request for Resources 1, The Office of the Deputy Prime Minister's administration provision has been increased by £28,889,000 from £329,043,000 to £ 357,932,000.

The change in the capital element of the DEL arises from:

(ix) take up of end year flexibility of £18,253,000 comprising of

(a) £5,440,000 for the Housing programme expenditure;

(b) £2,200,000 for E—Planning;

(c) £50,000 drawn down of Invest to Save Budget for Fire services;

(d) £240,000 for expenditure by the Planning Inspectorate Executive Agency;

(e) £6,678,000 ODPM (C) Capital for Strategic IT;

(f) £915,000 for Government Offices;

(g) £1,030,000 non voted for Departmental Unallocated Provision;

(h) £1,700,000 non- voted for the Housing Corporation.

(x) A transfer of £68,426,000 from capital to resource investment within non-voted for the housing corporation.

(xi) A transfer of £1,517,000 to the Department for Transport for Capital Strategic IT

(xii) A transfer of £5,000,000 to capital from resource investment within non-voted for English Partnerships

(xiii) Within the capital element of the DEL there is a net transfer of £71,612,000 from non-voted to voted provision comprising of; £59,968,000 from non voted for Local Authority Supported Capital Expenditure to Other Housing and Homelessness; £5,000,000 from non voted for English Partnerships to voted for Coalfields Enterprise Fund; £5,456,000 from voted to non voted within Other Growth Area and £12,100,000 from non-voted Housing Corporation to Other Housing and Homelessness

(2) The Office of the Deputy Prime Minister's Local Government DEL will be increased by £83,059,000 from £43,684,096,000 to £43,767,155,000. Within the DEL change, the impact on resources and capital are as set out in the following table:

£'000

	Change	*Voted*	*New DEL Non-voted*	*Total*
Resource	35,609	43,290,206	104,515	43,394,721
Capital	47,450	363,484	8,950	372,434
Depreciation	786	-913	1,699	786
Total	83,845	43,652,777	115,164	43,767,941

The change in the resource element of the DEL arises from:

(i) Take up of End Year Flexibility of £30,974,000 comprising:

(a) £4,241,000 for Valuation Services;

(b) £5,303,000 for Best Value Intervention Costs;

(c) £8,132,000 for Local Government Research and Publicity (including £530,000 draw down from the Invest to Save Budget);

(d) £75,000 for Local Governance;

(e) £12,722,000 for Other Grants and Payments;

(f) £501,000 non voted for the Standards Board

(ii) A transfer of £2,510,000 from Request for Resources 1 to fund Comprehensive Performance Assessment (CPA) Inspection.

(iii) A transfer of £100,000 from voted resource consumption DEL to non- voted capital DEL for the Standards Board.

(iv) A transfer of £3,900,000 to the Department of Constitutional Affairs.

(v) Increase in provision of £6,000,000 for the Efficiency Challenge Fund.

(vi) A transfer from Other Government Departments of £125,000.

The change in the capital element of the DEL arises from

(a) Take up of End Year Flexibility of £47,000,000 for Local Government on Line;

(b) Take up of End Year Flexibility of £350,000 for Valuation Tribunal Service;

(c) A transfer of £100,000 from voted resource consumption DEL to non- voted capital DEL for the Standards Board.

ENVIRONMENT, FOOD AND RURAL AFFAIRS

Supplementary Estimates

The Minister for Rural Affairs and Local Environmental Quality (Alun Michael): Subject to Parliamentary approval of any necessary Supplementary Estimate, the Department for Environment Food and Rural Affairs DEL will be increased by £40,704,000 from £3,137,743,000 to £3,178,447,000 and the administration costs limits will be increased by £18,078,000 from £339,494,000 to £357,572,000. Within the DEL change, the impact on resources and capital are as set out in the following table:

£000

	Change	New DEL Voted	New DEL Non-voted	Total
Resource	66,160	2,387,335	681,790	3,069,125
Capital	-25,456	204,192	103,980	308,172
Depreciation*	0	-101,733	-97,117	-198,850
Total	40,704	2,489,794	688,653	3,178,447

**Depreciation, which forms part of resource DEL, is excluded from the total DEL since capital DEL includes capital spending and to include depreciation of those assets would lead to double counting.*

The change in the resource element of the DEL arises from *(i)* a take up of end-year flexibility of £119,098,000 programme resources and £15,396,000 administration resources as set out in the public expenditure 2003–04 provisional outturn paper (Cm 6293); (ii) take up of £6,189,000 administration resources from the Office of the Deputy Prime Minister for accommodation costs relating to Ashdown House; (iii) re-classification of £25,456,000 of Environment Agency's non-voted capital as non-voted resource, to reflect the correct accounting treatment of these funds; (iv) take up of £4,400,000 of programme resources from the efficiency challenge fund as set out in the spending review for 2004; *(v)* take up of £258,000 of programme resources from the Office of the Deputy Prime Minister for the Cleaner, Safer, Greener Communities programme; (vi) a transfer of £3,999,000 administration resources to ODPM for Government Offices running costs; (vii) take up of £350,000 programme resources from DTI for the Cereal Industry Forum; (viii) take up £193,000 administration resources and £520,000 programme resources from ODPM, Home Office, Department for Transport, and the Scottish Executive, for the Government Decontamination and Recovery Scheme; (ix) take up of £49,000 administration resources from the Department for Transport for the Coast Protection Act; (x) take up of £125,000 administration resources each from Department for Transport and ODPM for Ashdown House telephony charges; (xi) transfer of £3,000,000 programme resources to the National Forestry Commission to fund increased applications and proportion of contracts being implemented under the Woodland Grants scheme; (xii) transfer of £400,000 programme resources to the National Forestry Commission to enable access to its estates under the Countryside Rights of Way Act; (xiii) transfer of £3,600,000 programme resources to the Department for Constitutional Affairs for implementation of the Obstructions to Rights of Way section of the Countryside Rights of Way Act; (xiv) surrender £95,000,000 of non-voted DEL for annual payments for the Environment Agency pension scheme, as under resource accounting a provision has been opened for the full liability of the scheme.

The change in the capital element of the DEL arises from: *(i)* reclassification of £25,456,000 of Environment Agency's non-voted capital as non-voted resource, to reflect the correct accounting treatment of these funds.

The increases are offsetting inter-departmental transfers and take-up of end-year flexibility, and will not therefore add to the planned total of public expenditure.

Supplementary Estimates

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs (Mr. Ben Bradshaw): Subject to parliamentary approval of any necessary supplementary estimate, the Forestry Commission's DEL will be increased by £8,743,000 from £78,391,000 to £87,134,000. Within the DEL change, the impact on resources and capital are as set out in the following table:

£'000

	Change	New DEL Voted	New DEL Non-voted	Total
Resource	8,881	85,021	3,231	88,252
Capital	114	904	-700	204
Depreciation*	-252	-1,322	-	-1,322
Total	8,743	84,603	2,531	87,134

*Depreciation, which forms part of resource DEL, is excluded from the total DEL since capital DEL includes capital spending and to include depreciation of those assets would lead to double counting.

The change in the resource element of the DEL arises from the take up of £5,481,000 end of year flexibility to meet woodland grant scheme and VAT commitments and also a transfer of £3,400,000 from Department of Environment, Food and Rural Affairs. Of this £3,000,000 will fund woodland grants and the remaining £400,000 is to fund the dedication of the freehold element of the public estate for public access.

The change in the capital element of the DEL arises from the take up of £114,000 end of year flexibility that will be used for the purchase of office machinery and equipment.

FOREIGN AND COMMONWEALTH AFFAIRS

Supplementary Estimates

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs (Mr. Bill Rammell)): Subject to parliamentary approval of any necessary supplementary estimate, the Foreign and Commonwealth Office departmental expenditure limit (DEL) will be increased by £266,923,000 from £1,616,521,000 to £1,883,444,000 and the administration costs limit will be increased by £4,665,000 from £788,341,000 to £793,006,000. Within the DEL change, the impact on resources and capital are as set out in the following table:

£'000

			New DEL	
	Change	*Voted*	*Non-voted*	*Total*
Resource	238,771	1,564,261	219,675	1,783,936
Capital	28,152	90,708	8,800	99,508
Depreciation*	0	-106,218	-26,800	-133,018
Total	266,923	1,552,751	197,675	1,750,426

* Depreciation, which forms part of resource DEL, is excluded from the total DEL since capital DEL includes capital spending and to include depreciation of those assets would lead to double counting.

The change in the resource element of the DEL arises from

RfR1

I. Draw down of the £9,600,000 from the Efficiency Challenge Fund.

II. Reserve claim of £6,800,000 for funds to implement changes recommended by the review of FCO security and £4,000,000 for enhanced security for British Council premises and staff overseas.

III. Reserve claim of £6,139,000 for the Afghanistan Delivery Plan.

IV. Take up of full entitlement to End Year Flexibility (EYF) of £45,429,000 for administration relating to the 2003–04 underspends.

V. A PES transfer from the Department of Trade and Industry (DTI) of £300,000 for the return to the FCO of admin resource transferred in 2003–04.

VI. A PES transfer from the Department of Trade and Industry (DTI) of £136,000 in respect of "netting off" procedures introduced in April 2003.

VII. A PES transfer from the Home Office of £2,000,000 in respect of the Afghanistan Delivery Plan.

VIII. A PES transfer to the Security and Intelligence Agencies (SIA) of £19,000 for planned programme activity.

IX. A PES transfer to the Security and Intelligence Agencies (SIA) of £500,000 in respect of the Good Governance Project.

X. A PES transfer of £100,000 to the Department of Trade (DfT) in respect of the "Hamilton Project".

RfR2

XI. Draw down of £95,000,000 and £73,000,000 being the balance of FCO peacekeeping main estimate provision.

XII. A PES transfer to the Security and Intelligence Agencies (SIA) of £2,514,000 for planned programme activity.

XIII. A PES transfer to the Cabinet Office of £500,000 for the countries at risk of instability (CRI) pilot.

The change in the capital element of the DEL arises from:

I. Reserve claim of £14,500,000 for funds to implement changes recommended by the review of FCO security.

II. Take up of full entitlement to end year flexibility (EYF) of £13,652,000 relating to the 2003–04 underspends.

Butler Review

The Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs (Mr. Jack Straw): My right hon. Friend the Prime Minister told the House in his statements on 14 July, *Official Report*, column 143 and 20 July, *Official Report*, column 195, that the Government fully accept the conclusions of Lord Butler's review of intelligence on weapons of mass destruction. A detailed programme of work is now underway to take forward work dealing with those conclusions.

As part of this work, Sir David Omand, the Security and Intelligence Co-ordinator, has established a committee of senior officials that will meet regularly to oversee the various strands of work under-way to implement the recommendations of the Butler review.

In addition, a dedicated study team led by a senior FCO official is considering Lord Butler's specific recommendations relating to the role, size and shape of the central assessments staff and wider analytical support the intelligence community receives. The study team will present its final report in the new year.

The Intelligence and Security Committee is being kept informed of the progress of this work.

HEALTH

Supplementary Estimates

The Secretary of State for Health (Dr. John Reid): Subject to the necessary supplementary estimate, the Department of Health's element of the departmental expenditure limit (DEL) will be increased by £757,138,000 from £71,541,721,000 to £72,298,859,000 and the administration cost limit will be increased by £7,194,000 from £250,776,000 to £257,970,000. The Food Standards Agency DEL will be increased by £12,803;000 from £139,675,000 to £152,478,000. The overall DEL including the Food Standards Agency will increase by £769,941,000 from £71,681,396,000 to £72,451,337,000. The impact on resource and capital are set out in the following table.

£ million

			New DEL	
	Change	*Voted*	*Non-voted*	*Total*
Department of Health				
Resource DEL	651.950	69,411.276	-242.715	69,168.561
Capital DEL	105.188	248.365	2,881.933	3,130.298
Total Department of Health DEL	757.138	69,659.641	2,639.218	72,298.859
Depreciation*	0.045	-510.381	-44.477	-554.858
Total Department of Health spending (after adjustment)	757.183	69,149.260	2,594.741	71,744.001

£ million

		New DEL		
	Change	*Voted*	*Non-voted*	*Total*
Food Standards Agency				
Resources	12.803	151.831	0	151.831
Capital	0	0.647	0	0.647
Total Food Standards Agency DEL	12.803	152.478	0	152.478
Depreciation*	0	-2.004	0	-2.004
Total Food Standards Agency spending (after adjustment)	12.803	150.474	0	150.474

**Depreciation, which forms part of resource DEL, is excluded from the total DEL since the capital DEL includes capital spending and to include depreciation of those assets would lead to double counting.*

The change in the DEL arises from the take up of end year flexibility £826,367,000 (£7,014,000 administration costs) for capital, revenue and administration budgets as set out in table 6 of the Public Expenditure 2003–04 Provisional Outturn White Paper Cm 6293 published in July 2004. A transfer to the Department for Education and Skills of £29,945,000 (£15,000 administration costs) mainly for pay and pension indexation, contributions to the healthy schools programme and a project to widen access to health care professions. A net transfer to the Home Office of £25,537,000 mainly for the substance misuse planning grant, offset by funding for prison healthcare and a contribution to the work of the national oversight group and drug action teams. A net transfer to the Scottish Executive of £2,777,000 for out of area treatments and health publicity material, offset by a contribution for the high security infectious disease unit. A transfer to the National Assembly for Wales of £11,160,000 for out of area treatments and health publicity material. A transfer from the Office of National Statistics of £200,000 (£195,000 administration costs) for a contribution to the data development work of the neighbourhood statistics programme. A transfer to the Office of the Deputy Prime Minister of £10,000 for older people's services.

The administration cost limit has increased by £7,194,000 from £250,776,000 to £257,970,000 as detailed above.

The changes to the Food Standards Agency resource element of the departmental expenditure limit arise from a claim for end year flexibility of £12,803,000 (£9,444,000 programme and £3,359,000 administration costs) to fund on-going FSA activity including a publicity campaign to raise salt awareness with consumers and the transfer of £2,700,000 from the FSA to the Meat Hygiene Service, an executive agency of the FSA.

The Food Standards Agency (FSA) administration cost limit has increased by £3,359,000 from £50,335,000 to £53,694,000 as a result of incorporating administration cost EYF.

Medicines Act Advisory Committees

The Minister of State, Department of Health (Ms Rosie Winterton): My noble Friend the Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State, Department of Health (Lord Warner) made the following written ministerial statement on 11 November 2004.

Following a public consultation earlier this year on proposals to restructure the advisory committees laid down in the Medicines Act 1968, I am pleased to inform the House of the new structure that the Government have decided to put in place. I am also informing the House of proposals to revise the code of practice on interests that will be applied to them.

In summary, the new advisory committee structure will comprise:

> a new commission that amalgamates the responsibilities of the present medicines commission and the committee on safety of medicines and will advise Ministers direct on regulatory matters associated with medicines for human use;
>
> a number of Section 4 committees which will be able to advise Ministers direct on issues for which they are responsible;
>
> sub-committees and expert advisory groups (EAGs);
>
> a list of experts on whom the commission and the other committees and groups can call for advice;
>
> lay patient representatives on each of the committees, sub-committees and groups.

The new structure will closely align the advisory bodies established under the Medicines Act with the structures being established in the European medicines regulatory system. This will allow the Department's medicines and healthcare products regulatory agency (MHRA) to continue to play a highly effective role in that system. There will be greater public and patient involvement in the regulatory process that will strengthen the agency's ability to take account of the public interest. As patients become increasingly knowledgeable about healthcare we want to ensure that there is a means to enable them to advise on the safety and efficacy of their medicines.

Today a public consultation is being launched on proposals to revise the code of practice on interests that applies to chairmen and members of the advisory bodies established under the 1968 Medicines Act. This is part of a wider programme of restructuring the advisory bodies that advise Ministers on matters relating to the Act, the exercise of powers under it and otherwise relating to human and veterinary medicines.

These proposals will also provide the means to comply with new EU legislation dealing with the financial and other interests of experts concerned with the authorisation and surveillance of medicinal products. Indeed our proposals go further than the requirements set out in the EU legislation.

The proposals cover the financial and non-financial interests of the chairmen and members of the new commission, the Section 4 Committees established under the Medicines Act (except the British Pharmacopoeia Commission), the sub committees and expert advisory committee and any experts co-opted onto the committees. We are also proposing that chairmen and members must declare interests of immediate family of which they are aware, and any other matter that may affect, or may reasonably be perceived as affecting, their impartiality.

A wide range of bodies, representing patients, industry and healthcare professionals is being consulted. I am placing a copy of the consultation document—LX316—in the Library, together with today's press release announcing these new measures. The consultation document can also be obtained from the MHRA website.

The Government are committed to ensuring that the MHRA operates in a transparent and open way. Because medicines form such an essential component of effective healthcare delivery, we are also committed to ensuring that patients and the public have an effective role to play in the regulatory process.

HOME DEPARTMENT

Supplementary Estimates

The Secretary of State for the Home Department (Mr. David Blunkett): Plans of changes to the departmental expenditure limit and administrative cost limit for 2004–05.

Subject to parliamentary approval of the necessary supplementary estimate, the Home Office's departmental expenditure limits for 2004–05 will be increased by £425,962,000 from £12,907,509,000 to £13,333,471,000 and the administration costs limits will be increased by £123,687,000 from £3,496,679,000 to £3,620,366,000. Within the DEL change, the impact on resources and capital are as set out in the following table:

£'000

			New DEL	
	Change	*Voted*	*Non-voted*	*Total*
Resource	201,802	10,598,506	1,740,337	12,338,843
Capital	200,175	956,335	246,405	1,202,740
Depreciation*	23,985	-207,390	-722	-208,112
Total	425,962	11,347,451	1,986,020	13,333,471

*Depreciation, which forms part of resource DEL, is excluded from the total DEL since capital DEL includes capital spending and to include depreciation of those assets would lead to double counting.

(a)

The change in the resource element of the DEL arises from:

End Year Flexibility totalling £243,278,000 comprising:

Administration costs, £142,552,000:

£58,251,000 to section A; £2,536,000 to section F; £2,862,000 to section G; £78,903,000 to section I being carry forward of 2003–04 DEL underspending into 2004–05 under the DEL EYF scheme.

Programme costs, £100,726,000:

£36,760,000 to section A; £9,488,000 to section B; £20,099,000 to section D; £8,196,000 to section F; £14,535,000 to section G; £9,861,000 to section H; £1,500,000 to section I; £287,000 to section M being carry forward of 2003–04 DEL underspending into 2004–05 under the DEL EYF scheme.

Invest to Save fund totalling £2,091,000 comprising:

£285,000 to section A for the Inner London Detox Centre; £350,000 section E for providing seamless access to treatment for drug mis-using offenders; £85,000 to section L for the south west prisons family support service; £891,000 to section M to fund the Peterborough Migration and Asylum Service project and £480,000 to the Youth Justice Board for family group conferencing and youth inclusion and support panels.

Transfers from Other Government Departments totalling £42,230,000 comprising:

£3,120,000 from the Department for Education and Skills comprising £1,002,000 to section E for substance misuse training for personal advisors as contribution to the pooled budget for the Young Peoples Substance Misuse Partnership Grant;

£1,500,000 to section K for education funding in the contracted prison estate; £618,000 to section L to fund education and training of offenders and delivery of targets in Wales; £38,940,000 from the Department of Health to section E as a contribution to the pooled budget for the Young People's substance misuse partnership grant. £140,000 from HM Custom & Excise to section P for special projects and electro mechanical services.

£30,000 from HM Treasury to section F as contribution to group of states against corruption (GRECO).

Transfer to other Government Department totalling £193,297,000 comprising:

£285,000 from section D to the Assets Recovery Agency to implement a communications strategy for maximising transfer of skills.

£89,170,000 to the Crown Prosecution Service comprising £1,129,000 from section B for 12 regional ASB Prosecutors to tackle anti-social behaviour; £6,591,000 from section D to maintain a Receiver's Panel to contribute to Regional Asset Recovery Tribunals and contribution to costs of Proceed of Crime Act and; £81,450,000 administration costs from the Criminal Justice System reserve.

£48,758,000 to the Department for Constitutional Affairs comprising £18,000 from section B for JSB—county court and juveniles; £337,000 from Section D for the centralisation of enforcement in centres' of excellence and £23,580,000 admin and £24,823,000 programme costs from the Criminal Justice System reserve.

£100,000 from section D to DEFRA as contribution to the Government Decontamination and Recovery Service Project.

£1,570,000 to the Department for Education and Skills comprising £1,500,000 from section G for funding Positive Activities for Young People and £70,000 admin costs from the DUP.

£13,403,000 to the Department of Health comprising £1,979,000 from section E for Arrest Referral Grant payments to Drug Action Teams to continue the development of heroin pilots; £10,400,000 from section K for prison healthcare payments and £1,024,000 from section I for Women's Services Primrose project; Sex Offenders Treatment Research community project; Cognitive Behavioural Therapy programme at Ashworth Hospital.

£2,000,000 to the Foreign & Commonwealth Office comprising £1,000,000 from section D and £1,000,000 from section E as contributions to the Afghanistan Drugs plan.

£6,537,000 from section D to HM Customs & Excise for Project Cyclamen; regional asset recovery teams; cash forfeiture litigation team and the CIDA project.

£782,000 from section D to the Inland Revenue for the Money Laundering team in London and four regional asset recovery teams.

£1,033,000 to the National Assembly for Wales comprising of £315,000 from section A for operation Tarian; £654,000 from section B for Crime Reduction team and Business Crime Reduction advisor in NAW; £64,000 from section G for CCU pathfinder grant programmes.

£19,596,000 to ODPM comprising £244,000 from section A for local delivery managers funding; £9,697,000 from section B for the following activity in Government Offices: RCU tariffs for Crime: Reduction teams; Business Crime Reduction advisors; street crime work; Youth Crime Task Force (London) £6,579,000 from section E for: the former Drug Prevention Advisory service following integration in Government Offices in the Regions; capacity building in Criminal Justice Intervention Programme in the Regions; £2,356,000 from section G for: CCU pathfinder grant programmes; cross Government funding to DTA; capacity building framework and partnership work and £720,000 from the DUP for part of the core funding agreed in SR02 contribution for Government office network.

£10,033,000 from section A to the Scottish Executive for Airwave police communication systems £30,000 from section D to the Cabinet Office as contribution towards the funding of serious crime project.

Del Reserve Claims totalling £62,500,000 comprising:

£50,000,000 to section A for additional police funding and £12,500,000 to section O from the Efficiency Challenge Fund.

Classification changes totalling £45,000,000:

Re-classification of £45,000,000 Criminal Justice System reserve funding from capital to administration costs.

(b)

End Year Flexibility totalling £156,425,000 comprising:

£13,343,000 to section A; £653,000 to section B; £38,099,000 to section D; £608,000 to section F; £90,987,000 to section I; £8,789,000 to section K; £3,946,000 to section M being carry forward of 2003–04 DEL underspending into 2004–05 under the DEL EYF scheme.

Invest to Save funds totalling £360,000 comprising:

£300,000 to section A for the Inner London Detox Centre; £18,000 to section E for seamless access to treatment for drug mis-using offenders; £4,000 to section L for the south-west prisons family support service; £38,000 to the Youth Justice Board for family group conferencing and youth inclusion and support panels.

Transfer to other government departments totalling £11,610,000 comprising:

£90,000 from section D to HM Custom & Excise for Project Cyclamen.

£5,000,000 from section I to the Department for Education and Skills for prison education.

£6,520,000 from the Criminal Justice System reserve to the Department for Constitutional Affairs as part of the capital reserve settlement.

Del Reserve Claims totalling £100,000,000:

£100,000,000 to section M reflecting the revised settlement for the single Asylum fund.

Classification changes totalling £45,000,000:

Re-classification of £45,000,000 Criminal Justice System reserve funding from capital to administration costs.

NORTHERN IRELAND

Supplementary Estimates

The Secretary of State for Northern Ireland (Mr. Paul Murphy): Subject to parliamentary approval the Northern Ireland Office (NIO) will be taking a 2004–05 winter supplementary estimate. The effect this will have is to increase the NIO's DEL by £29,789,000 from £1,206,401,000 to £1,236,190,000. Within the DEL change, the impact on resources and capital are as set out in the following table:

Resources				*Capital*			
Change	*New DEL*	*Of which: voted*	*Non-voted*	*Change*	*New DEL*	*Of which: voted*	*Non-voted*
3,981	1,153,454	333,295	820,808	25,808	82,736	35,661	47,075

The change in the resource element of the DEL by £3,981,000 arises from the draw-down of £3,996,000 end year flexibility and the surrender of a PES transfer of £15,000 administration to security and intelligence agencies, to contribute towards administrative funding.

The extra resource costs cover a range of areas within the Department such as prisons, the Bloody Sunday inquiry, forensic science, central administration and the police service.

The change in the capital element of the DEL arises from the draw-down of £25,808,000 end year flexibility.

The extra capital costs cover a range of areas within the Department such as central administration, criminal justice and prisons.

PRIME MINISTER

Supplementary Estimates

The Prime Minister (Mr. Tony Blair): Subject to parliamentary approval of any necessary supplementary estimate, the Security and Intelligence Agencies' departmental expenditure limit (DEL) will be increased by £37,811,000 from £1,274,329,000 to £1,312,140,000 and the administration costs limits will be increased by £18,787,000 from £584,730,000 to £603,517,000. Within the DEL change, the impact on resources and capital are as set out in the table:

£'000

		New DEL		
	Change	*Voted*	*Non-voted*	*Total*
Resource	25,750,000	1,122,050,000	15,450,000	1,137,500,000
Capital	12,061,000	190,062,000	6,000,000	196,062,000
Depreciation*	-	140,967,000	-	140,967,000
Total	37,811,000	1,453,079,000	21,450,000	1,474,529,000

* Depreciation, which forms part of resource DEL, is excluded from the total DEL since capital DEL includes capital spending and to include depreciation of those assets would lead to double counting.

The change in the resource element of the DEL arises from:

1. The take up of end of year flexibility of £22, 672,000.

2. A transfer of £3,033,000 from the Foreign and Commonwealth Office for conflict prevention.

3. A transfer of £30,000 from the Home Office for funding a Serious Crime project.

4. A transfer of £15,000 from the Northern Ireland Office to contribute towards administrative funding.

The change in the capital element of the DEL arises from:

1. The take up of end of year flexibility of £12,061,000.

2. A further increase in capital of £5,000. This is offset by an increase in non-operating appropriations in aid of £5,000.

SCOTLAND

Supplementary Estimates

The Secretary of State for Scotland (Mr. Alistair Darling): Subject to parliamentary approval of the necessary supplementary estimates, the Scotland departmental expenditure limit (DEL) will be increased by £428,550,000 from £21,575,971,000 to £22,004,521,000.

The DEL increase takes account of the following routine adjustments to the Scottish Executive provision: the take-up of end-year flexibility (EYF) by the Scottish Executive amounting to £500,000,000.

The DEL increase also includes the following transfers between the Scottish Executive and other Government Departments, amounting to a net decrease of £71,450,000. These are:

a transfer of £10,033,000 from the Home Office;

net transfers of £2,777,000 from the Department of Health;

a transfer of £1,059,000 from the Department for Work and Pensions;

a transfer of £100,000 from the Department for Constitutional Affairs;

net transfers of £83,948,000 to HM Treasury;

a transfer of £ 1,112,000 to the Ministry of Defence;

a transfer of £250,000 to the Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs; and

a transfer of £109,000 to the Office of the Deputy Prime Minister.

The increases will be offset by interdepartmental transfers as detailed above or charged to the DEL reserve and will not therefore add to the planned total of public expenditure.

TRADE AND INDUSTRY

Supplementary Estimates

The Secretary of State for Trade and Industry (Ms Patricia Hewitt): Subject to parliamentary approval of the necessary supplementary estimate, the Department of Trade and Industry's DEL will be increased by £527,542,000 from £4,966,261,000 to £5,493,803,000 and the administration costs limit will be increased by £7,958,000 from £428,847,000 to £436,805,000.

Within the DEL change, the impact on resources and capital is as set out in the following table:

£000s

		New DEL		
	Change	*Voted*	*Non-voted*	*Total*
Resource	486,509	1,049,695	4,245,715	5,295,410
Capital	41,033	-94,664	293,057	198,393
Depreciation*	0	-20,841	-93,159	-114,000
Total	527,542	934,190	4,445,613	5,379,803

*Depreciation, which forms part of resource DEL, is excluded from the total DEL since capital DEL includes capital spending and to include depreciation of those assets would lead to double counting.

The change in the resource element of the DEL (all RfR1) arises from:

(i) utilisation of £10,210,000 from the unused balance of the Department's end-year flexibility entitlement in respect of the Rover Task Force;

(ii) utilisation of £500,000 from the unused balance of the Department's end-year flexibility entitlement in respect of the roll out of Consumer Direct;

(iii) utilisation of £500,000 from the unused balance of the Department's end-year flexibility entitlement in respect of emergency planning related to security of energy supply;

(iv) utilisation of £2,000,000 from the unused balance of the Department's end-year flexibility entitlement in respect of business links support to start-up businesses;

(v) utilisation of £75,000,000 from the unused balance of the Department's end-year flexibility entitlement in respect of modernisation of the Post Office Network;

(vi) utilisation of £5,800,000 from the unused balance of the Department's end-year flexibility entitlement in respect of launch/delivery and evidence gathering for business support products;

(vii) utilisation of £700,000 from the unused balance of the Department's end-year flexibility entitlement in respect of establishment of the Single Equality Body;

(viii) utilisation of £3,000,000 from the unused balance of the Department's end-year flexibility entitlement for external financial and legal advisers in relation to British Energy;

(ix) utilisation of £1,800,000 from the unused balance of the Department's end-year flexibility entitlement in respect of UNITAS Release 2;

(x) utilisation of £4,000,000 resource and £2,000,000 capital grants from the unused balance of the Department's end-year flexibility entitlement in respect of University Innovation Centres;

(xi) utilisation of £5,000,000 from the unused balance of the Department's end-year flexibility entitlement in respect of the manufacturing package;

(xii) utilisation of £20,000,000 from the unused balance of the Department's end-year flexibility entitlement in respect of capital grants for investment aid to the Coal Industry;

(xiii) utilisation of £900,000 from the unused balance of the Department's end-year flexibility entitlement in respect of R&D related to offshore wind farms and strategic environment assessment;

(xiv) utilisation of £2,000,000 from the unused balance of the Department's end-year flexibility entitlement in respect of the financial reporting council;

(xv) utilisation of £268,000 from the unused balance of Ofcom's end-year flexibility entitlement;

(xvi) utilisation of £962,000 from the unused balance of Ofcom's Departmental unallocated provision;

(xvii) a transfer of £17,000 from the Cabinet Office in respect of the senior salaries pay review body;

(xviii) a transfer of £450,000 from the Department for Education and Skills in respect of the National Council for Graduate Entrepreneurship;

(xix) a transfer of £350,000 to the Department for Constitutional Affairs in respect of the Civil Partnership Bill;

(xx) a transfer of £2,200,000 to the Ministry of Defence in respect of the National Meteorological Programme and Severe Weather Warning Service;

(xxi) utilisation of £10,800,000 from the Efficiency Challenge Fund in respect of the accommodation strategy and the Pay and Workforce Strategy;

(xxii) utilisation of £6,500,000 from the Performance and Innovation Fund in respect of renewable energy;

(xxiii) reclassification of £2,000 from voted expenditure to non-voted expenditure by the Regional Development Agencies in relation to the Pan Government Agreement for Supply of Ordnance Survey Data;

(xxiv) reclassification of £11,000,000 from voted expenditure to non-voted expenditure, to reflect funding of Enterprise Fund capital grants via Regional Development Agencies;

(xxv) reclassification of £271,000 from voted expenditure to non-voted expenditure, to reflect the funding of Smart and Enterprise Grant Teams and Business link regional teams co-location costs, via Regional Development Agencies;

(xxvi) reclassification of £638,000 from voted expenditure to non-voted expenditure, to reflect the delivery of Enterprise Fund grants in the regions;

(xxvii) an increase of £1,010,000 in the non-voted expenditure of Postwatch accompanied by an equivalent increase in voted receipts;

(xxviii) a classification change of £17,683,000 in respect of the National Measurement System Private Finance Initiative.

Also within the change to resource DEL (all RfR1), the changes to administration costs limit are:

(i) utilisation of £1,310,000 from the unused balance of the Department's end-year flexibility entitlement in relation to the accommodation strategy;

(ii) utilisation of £2,530,000 from the unused balance of the Department's end-year flexibility entitlement in respect of UK Trade and Investment administration;

(iii) utilisation of £452,000 from the unused balance of the Department's end-year flexibility entitlement in relation to the Insolvency Service Invest to save project;

(iv) a transfer of £2,585,000 from the Cabinet Office in respect of a Machinery of Government change for the Shareholder Executive;

(v) a transfer of £17,000 from the Department for Constitutional Affairs for the Senior Salaries Pay Review Body;

(vi) a transfer of £436,000 to the Foreign and Commonwealth Office in relation to "Netting off" procedures and UK Trade and Investment E-business;

(vii) implementation of an agreed virement from programme to administration of £1,500,000 in respect of the Liabilities Management Authority.

Non-voted

There is also utilisation of £185,000,000 from the unused balance of the Department's end-year flexibility entitlement in respect of payments in relation to British Energy liabilities, an increase of £77,169,000 to reflect the transfer of non-voted, non-cash RDA budgets from the Office of the Deputy Prime Minister, utilisation of £300,000 from the unused balance of the Department's End-Year Flexibility entitlement for non-voted expenditure of the Equal Opportunities Commission, and utilisation of £2,400,000 resource and £69,642,000 capital grants from the unused balance of the Department's End-Year Flexibility entitlement for non-voted expenditure of the Regional Development Agencies.

Office of the Deputy Prime Minister Main Estimate

There is also a transfer of £22,000,000 to the Department for Work and Pensions in relation to European Regional Development Fund expenditure, in repayment of the Department's overspend on this activity in 2003–04 that was funded by the Department for Work and Pensions.

The change in the capital element of the DEL (all RfR1) arises from:

(i) utilisation of £444,000 from the unused balance of the Department's End-Year Flexibility entitlement for Rover Task Force;

(ii) utilisation of £1,600,000 from the unused balance of the Department's End-Year Flexibility entitlement for implementation of the Parental Leave Regulations;

(iii) utilisation of £15,500,000 from the unused balance of the Department's end-year flexibility entitlement for support for the National Measurement System;

(iv) utilisation of £300,000 from the unused balance of the Department's end-year flexibility entitlement for the Insolvency Service;

(v) utilisation of £16,600,000 of capital from the unused balance of the Department's end-year flexibility entitlement in respect of accommodation, electronic filing and e-purchasing.

(vi) utilisation of £424,000 from the unused balance of Ofcom's end-year flexibility entitlement;

(vii) utilisation of £25,000 from the unused balance of Ofcom's Departmental unallocated provision;

(viii) utilisation of £3,500,000 from the Performance and Innovation Fund in respect of renewable energy.

Non-voted

There is also utilisation of £2,640,000 from the unused balance of the Department's end-year flexibility entitlement for non-voted expenditure by Regional Development Agencies.

Supplementary Estimates

The Secretary of State for Trade and Industry (Ms Patricia Hewitt): Subject to parliamentary approval of the necessary supplementary estimate, UK Trade & Investment's Resource DEL will be increased by £1,800,000 from £97,287,000 to £99,087,000. Within the DEL change, the impact on resources and capital are set out in the following table:

£'000

			New DEL	
	Change	*Voted*	*Non-voted*	*Total*
Resource	1,800	99,087	0	99,087
Capital	0	248	0	248
Depreciation*	0	-187	0	-187
Total	1,800	99,148	0	99,148

*Depreciation, which forms part of resource DEL, is excluded from the total DEL since capital DEL includes capital spending and to include depreciation of those assets would lead to double counting.

The change in the resource element of the DEL arises from:

i) utilisation of £2,000,000 from the unused balance of the Department's end-year flexibility entitlement to meet increased requirement for resources particularly in the regions and on inward investment.

ii) a transfer of resources to the Department of Transport of £200,000 in respect of the travel costs for the special representative for International Trade and Investment.

Supplementary Estimates

The Secretary of State for Trade and Industry (Ms Patricia Hewitt): The Postal Services Commission capital DEL will by increased by £135,000 from £150,000 to £285,000. Within the DEL change, the impact on resources and capital are as set out in the following table:

£'000

			New DEL	
	Change	*Voted*	*Non-voted*	*Total*
Resource	0	1	0	1
Capital	135	150	135	285
Depreciation*	0	-400	0	-400
Total	135	-249	135	-114

*Depreciation, which forms part of resource DEL, is excluded from the total DEL since capital DEL includes capital spending and to include depreciation of those assets would lead to double counting.

The change in the capital element of the DEL arises from draw-down of end-year flexibility of £135,000 to fund investment of IT.

There is no change to the resource element of the DEL.

Supplementary Estimates

The Secretary of State for Trade and Industry (Ms Patricia Hewitt): Subject to parliamentary approval of any necessary supplementary estimate, the Office of Gas and Electricity Markets Net Cash Requirement will be increased by 5,771,000 from £1,785,000 to £7,556,000. The administration costs limits and DEL will remain unchanged. The impact on resources and capital are as set out in the following table:

£'000

			New DEL	
	Change	*Voted*	*Non-voted*	*Total*
Resource		701,000	-	701,000
Capital		950,000	-	950,000
Depreciation*		-1,250,000	-	-1,250,000
Total	NIL	401,000	-	401,000

*Depreciation, which forms part of resource DEL, is excluded from the total DEL since capital DEL includes capital spending and to include depreciation of those assets would lead to double counting.

The increased net cash requirement arises from a cash payout in July 2004 to surrender an onerous building lease contract. There is no change in the administration cost or DEL because the financial impact in the form of a provision was taken in a previous financial year.

TRANSPORT

Supplementary Estimates

The Secretary of State for Transport (Mr Alistair Darling): Subject to parliamentary approval of any necessary supplementary estimate, the Department for Transport DEL for 2004–05 will be increased by £192,077,000 from £10,751,785,000 to £10,943,862,000 and the administration costs limits will be decreased by £12,843,000 from £228,327,000 to £215,484,000. Within the DEL change, the impact on resources and capital are as set out in the following table:

£'000

			New DEL	
	Change	*Voted*	*Non-voted*	*Total*
Resource	313,179	4,245,683	3,518,593	7,764,276
Capital	-126,297	2,068,596	1,457,113	3,525,709
Depreciation*	5,195	-329,801	-16,322	-346,123
Total	192,077	5,984,478	4,959,384	10,943,862

*Depreciation, which forms part of resource DEL, is excluded from the total DEL since capital DEL includes capital spending and to include depreciation of those assets would lead to double counting.

The £247,422,000 increase in the voted resource element of the DEL arises from:

(i) take up of £106,311,000 end year flexibility, comprising:

(a) £74,609,000 for the London and Continental Railways maintenance depot at temple Mills;

(b) £4,500,000 for Rail Accident Investigation Branch costs;

(c) £10,328,000 for the Maritime and Coastguard Agency;

(d) £11,500,000 for the Highways Agency Dartford Crossing Maintenance Fund;

(e) £2,500,000 for services purchased by the central department from the Vehicle and Operator Services Agency;

(f) £356,000 for the Mobility and Inclusion Unit in respect of the Forum of Mobility Centre's e-business systems; and

(g) £2,518,000 for subsequent transfer to Department for Culture, Media and Sport in respect of the provision of improved public transport facilities for Wembley National Stadium.

(ii) a net transfer of £3,887,000 to other Government Departments, comprising:

(a) £4,000,000 to the Department for Culture, Media and Sport in respect of Wembley National Stadium (including the £2,518,000 funded from end year flexibility);

(b) £344,000 to the Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs in respect of ports and telephony services (administration costs) (£174,000) and programme costs in respect of government decontamination and recovery services (£170,000); partly offset by

(c) £200,000 from UK Trade and Investment in respect of travel costs for the Special Representative of International Trade and Investment;

(d) £100,000 from the Foreign and Commonwealth Office for the Hamilton project;

(e) £77,000 from the Department for Work and Pensions (Health and Safety Executive) in respect of central administration costs;

(f) a net transfer of £46,000 from the Office of the Deputy Prime Minister in respect of the Maritime and Coastguard Agency for counselling and support services (£30,000); the Highways Agency (administration costs) (£45,000); Vehicle Certification Agency programme costs (£3,000); partly offset by a net transfer in respect of central administration costs (£32,000); and

(g) £34,000 from the Office of National Statistics in respect of central administration costs.

(iii) a net transfer from non-voted resource provision of £1,177,000 comprising:

(a) a reclassification of £2,750,000 to voted Central Administration from the non voted Departmental Unallocated Provision;

(b) a reclassification of £1,273,000 to voted Highways Agency administration from the non voted Departmental Unallocated Provision; partly offset by

(c) £1,546,000 transfer from Central Administration to non voted provision for the Driver and Vehicle Licensing Agency trading fund; and

(d) £1,300,000 transfer to non voted provision for the British Transport Police Authority.

(iv) a net transfer from non-voted capital provision of £143,821,000 comprising:

(a) £133,821,000 to fund the maintenance depot at Temple Mills, Northern Ticket Hall Kings Cross and St Pancras works; and

(b) £10,000,000 for the extension of the National Cycle network in schools.

(v) £12,793,000 reclassification of front line staff (administration costs to programme) for the Maritime and Coastguard Agency (£10,263,000), Air Accident Investigation Branch (£2,184,000) and Radioactive Materials Transport (£346,000).

(vi) With the agreement of HM Treasury, the expenditure of the Vehicle Certification Agency has been reclassified as programme. This is in line with the recommendations made by Sir Peter Gershon in his Efficiency Review that the application of administration costs limits should not result in cuts to outputs of front-line services undertaken by civil servants. The Department for Transport therefore no longer has a net administration costs limit.

Within the non-voted resource element of the DEL, there has been an increase of £65,757,000 comprising:

(i) take up of £70,289,000 end year flexibility, comprising:

(a) £66,000,000 for the Strategic Rail Authority; and

(b) £4,289,000 for the Driver and Vehicle Licensing Agency trading fund;

(ii) a net transfer of £1,177,000 to voted resource; and

(iii) a net transfer of £3,355,000 to non voted capital comprising:

(a) £3,925,000 for the Driver and Vehicle Licensing Agency trading fund: partially offset by

(b) £570,000 to fund Cycle Parking at Railways project.

As a result of the above changes to the resource element of the DEL there has been a net decrease of £12,843,000 in the gross administration costs limit, from £228,327,000 to £215,484,000.

The increase of £11,216,000 in the voted capital element of the DEL arises from:

(i) a take up of £10,299,000 end year flexibility comprising:

(a) £7,999,000 in respect of Home Zones' Challenge Fund project; and

(b) £2,300,000 for the Maritime and Coastguard Agency in respect of the Portland Helicopter Hangar;

(ii) a transfer of £1,517,000 from the Office of the Deputy Prime Minister for Central Administration; partially offset by

(iii) a transfer of £600,000 to non voted capital provision for the British Transport Police Authority;

The net decrease of £137,513,000 in the non-voted capital element of the DEL arises from:

(a) Take up of £2,353,000 end year flexibility for the Driver and Vehicle Licensing Agency trading fund;

(b) A transfer of £600,000 from voted capital;

(c) A transfer of £143,821,000 to voted resource; and

(d) A net transfer of £3,355,000 from non voted resource.

The increases will be offset by inter-departmental transfers or charged to the DEL Reserve and will not therefore add to the planned total of public expenditure.

Eurostar Maintenance Facility

The Minister of State, Department for Transport (Mr. Tony McNulty): The Department has agreed with London & Continental Railways to bring forward the construction of a Eurostar maintenance depot on existing railway lands at Temple Mills in east London. A depot at Temple Mills has always been envisaged as part of the final plan for the Channel Tunnel Rail Link (CTRL) and bringing it forward will provide for a much more efficient operation of the complete CTRL and the Eurostar trainsets. This decision will enable the new depot to be provided in time for commencement of Eurostar services on CTRL Section 2 in 2007.

Original plans envisaged Eurostar trains gaining access from St Pancras to the existing North Pole International depot via the North London Line, but further investigation indicated that this would require costly and disruptive infrastructure works and significantly reduce capacity on what is already a congested line. Implementing the Temple Mills depot straightaway therefore provides a more cost-effective overall solution.

The Department has agreed in principle with London & Continental Railways to provide the funding for the depot as a Government change to the CTRL development agreement at a total cost not exceeding £402 million including land acquisition and relocation costs, subject to agreement of the detailed financial and contractual conditions.

WORK AND PENSIONS

Supplementary Estimates

The Secretary of State for Work and Pensions (Alan Johnson): Subject to parliamentary approval of any necessary supplementary estimate, the Department for Work and Pensions departmental expenditure limit (DEL) will be increased by £274,207,000 from £8,222,834,000 to £8,497,041,000 and the administration costs limits will be increased by £92,659,000 from £5,903,307,000 to £5,995,966,000. Within the DEL change, the impact on resources and capital are as set out in the following table:

£000

		New DEL		
	Change	*Voted*	*Non-voted*	*Total*
Resource	220,368	6,934,766	1,389,572	8,324,338
Capital	50,463	266,645	24,002	290,647
Depreciation*	3,376	-117,230	-714	-117,944
Total	274,207	7,084,181	1,412,860	8,497,041

*Depreciation, which forms part of resource DEL, is excluded from the total DEL since capital DEL includes capital spending and to include depreciation of those assets would lead to double counting.

The change in the resource element of the DEL arises from:

RfR2

i. an increase in provision due to additional spending of £542,000 (administration costs) by the Rent Service (take up of End Year Flexibility);

ii. an increase in provision due to additional spending of £87,000,000 (administration costs) by Working Age (take up of End Year Flexibility);

iii. an increase in provision due to additional spending of £10,000,000 (other current) on Employment Programmes (take up of End Year Flexibility);

iv. an increase in provision due to additional spending of £48,000,000 (grants) on Housing and Council Tax Benefit administration grants (take up of End Year Flexibility);

v. an increase in provision due to additional spending of £5,798,000 (administration costs) by the Health and Safety Executive (take up of End Year Flexibility);

vi. an increase in provision of £23,000,000 (other current) as a result of a transfer from the Department for Education and Skills for Basic Skills programmes;

vii. an increase in provision of £9,200,000 (grants) as a result of a transfer from the Welsh Assembly for expenditure on Administration Subsidy;

viii. a decrease in provision of £28,000 (other current) as a result of a transfer to the Department for Constitutional Affairs for Work Based Learning for Adults in Wales;

ix. a decrease in provision of £5,659,000 (other current) as a result of transfers to the Department for Education and Skills (£4,416,000), the Scottish Executive (£1,059,000), and the Welsh Assembly (£184,000) for Sure Start;

x. a decrease in provision of £87,000 (other current) as a result of a transfer to the Department for Education and Skills for evaluation of the Neighbourhood Nursery Initiative;

xi. a decrease in provision of £77,000 (administration costs) as a result of a transfer to the Department for Transport due to a transfer of posts in relation to the Carriage of Dangerous Goods;

xii. a transfer of provision of £50,000,000 from resource in Section B to capital in Section A in connection with the roll-out of Job Centre Plus;

RfR3

xiii. a decrease in provision of £50,000 (administration costs) as a result of a transfer to the Office of the Deputy Prime Minister for a Local Government Association Best Practice Planning Event;

RfR4

xiv. a decrease in provision of £13,000 (administration costs) as a result of a transfer of funding to the Ministry of Defence for the Veterans' Agency Helpline;

RfR6

xv. an increase in provision of £50,000,000 (other current) due to the setting up of an Efficiency Challenge Fund as provided for in the 2004 Spending Review;

xvi. an increase in provision of £20,800,000 (grants) in Section C with a corresponding increase in appropriations in aid in Section F due to a transfer from the Department of Culture, Media and Sport in connection with European Social Fund expenditure;

xvii. an increase in provision of £22,000,000 (grants) in Section C with a corresponding increase in appropriations in aid in Section F due to a transfer from the Department of Trade and Industry in connection with European Social Fund expenditure;

xviii. a reduction in provision of £58,000 (administration costs) due to a transfer to the Office of the Deputy Prime Minister in respect of Government Office work for the European Social Fund.

The change in the capital element of the DEL arises from:

RfR2

xix. an increase in provision of £463,000 due to additional spending by the Rent Service (take up of End Year Flexibility);

xx. a transfer of provision of £50,000,000 from resource (other current) in Section B to capital in Section A in connection with the roll-out of Job Centre Plus.

Administration Costs

The movement in the Administration Cost limit arises from those items noted above as affecting administration costs plus the following items which are neutral in terms of overall resource DEL but which impact the Administration Cost limit:

xxi. a transfer of £295,000 from administration to other current in respect of the Health and Safety Executive;

xxii. a transfer of £70,000 from administration to other current (non-voted) for the Centre for Policy on Ageing;

xxiii. a transfer of £ 118,000 from administration to other current (non-voted) for the Disability Rights Commission.

Departmental Unallocated Provision (DUP)

Additionally there are the following draw downs from the DUP which are neutral in overall DEL terms:

xxiv. £2,400,000 into RfR3 for additional costs associated with the Financial Assistance Scheme and the Pension Credit Marketing Campaign;

xxv. £12,143,000 into RfR6 for expenditure associated with the Joint International Unit;

xxvi. £49,088,000 to meet increased expenditure in RfR6 on the Estates budget.

Written Ministerial Statements

Tuesday 16 November 2004

CONSTITUTIONAL AFFAIRS

Supplementary Estimates

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Constitutional Affairs (Mr. Christopher Leslie): Subject to parliamentary approval of any necessary supplementary estimate, the Department for Constitutional Affairs, Northern Ireland Court Service and national archives: Public Records Office and Historical Manuscripts Commission DEL will be increased by £280,221,000 from £3,256,319,000 to £3,536,540,000 and the administration costs limit will be increased by £116,908,000 from £886,273,000 to £1,003,181,000. Within the DEL change, the impact on resources and capital are as set out in the following table:

			New DEL	
	Change	*Voted*	*Non-voted*	*Total*
Resource	201,429,000	1,330,463,000	2,107,386,000	3,437,849,000
Capital	76,792,000	167,973,000	11,000,000	178,973,000
Depreciation*	2,000,000	-78,609,000	-1,673,000	-80,282,000
Total	280,221,000	1,419,827,000	2,116,713,000	3,536,540,000

*Depreciation, which forms part of resource DEL, is excluded from the total DEL since capital DEL includes capital spending and to include depreciation of those assets would lead to double counting.

The change in the resource element of the Department of Constitutional Affairs DEL arises from:

RfR1

Take-up of DEL end-year flexibility:

£31,790,000 administration costs as set out in the public expenditure outturn White Paper; £27,200,000 administration costs in relation to receipts for the sale of Birmingham Priory Courts; £343,000 administration costs in relation to the online forms finance-invest to save budget (ISB) 387; £201,000 resources in the form of grants to the Legal Services Commission in relation to the invest to save budget (ISB) project award—legal services to prisoners; £167,000 resources in the form of grants to Legal Services Commission in relation to the ISB award—live and interactive (project Eagle); £10,000 administration costs in relation to the invest to save budget project 384 computer enquiry system; £3,304,000 administration costs, £2,990,000 programme costs, in relation to the CJS Reserve; £7,555,000 administration costs, £6,574,000 programme costs in relation to the single asylum fund (SAF) for 2004–05;

Transfers from Central HM Treasury funds:

£15,000,000 administration costs from the in relation to the single asylum fund (SAF) for 2004–05 SR02 uplift; £6,000,000 programme costs in relation to election pilots; £2,000 resources in the form of grant to Legal Services Commission in relation to the ISB award—live and interactive (project Eagle) ref: 297;

CJS Reserve

£23,580,000 administration costs and £24,823,000 programme costs, from Home Office in relation to the CJS reserve;

Single Asylum fund

£2,745,000 administration costs to DCA headquarters, £590,000 administration costs to the Court Service and £23,918,000 programme costs to DCA headquarters from the Home Office in relation to the single asylum fund (SAP);

Transfers from other Government Departments:

£3,900,000 programme costs from the Office of the Deputy Prime Minister to the Court Service in relation to Election Pilots Transfer for Elections Claims Unit (ECU); £3,600,000 resources from the Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs to the Court Service in relation to section 53 of the Countryside and Rights of Way Act 2000; £517,000 administration costs from the Department for Education and Skills, and £2,858,000 administration costs to the Court Service in relation to the implementation costs for S.118 of the Adoption and Children Act 2002; £337,000 administration costs from Home Office in relation to the recovered asset incentivisation fund; £330,000 resources from the Department for Education and Skills to Legal Services Commission: administration in relation to the implementation costs for S.118 of the Adoption and Children Act 2002; £330,000 administration costs to DCA headquarters and £20,000 administration costs to the Court Service from the Department of Trade and Industry in relation to the Civil Partnership Bill; £210,000 administration costs from the Office of the Deputy Prime Minister in relation to funding for election claims service level agreement (SLA); £62,000 administration costs from the Ministry of Defence in relation to Naval Courts Martial; £44,000 administration costs in relation to the transfer of the neighbourhood statistics programme (NeSS) admin fund 2004–05 from the Office for National Statistics; £4,000 administration costs from the Home Office and £14,000 programme costs in relation to the Anti Social Behaviour Act part 2—Juvenile County Court pilot;

Transfers to other Government Departments:

£22,000,000 programme costs to the Northern Ireland Court Service in relation to funding the Legal Services Commission in Northern Ireland; £200,000 administration costs to the Office for National Statistics in relation to funding the gender recognition project; £34,000 administration costs to the Northern Ireland Court Service in relation to the Civil Partnership Bill; £17,000 administration costs to the Department of Trade and Industry being contribution to the apportionment of the fees for senior salaries review body (SSRB) members;

RfR3

A transfer to the Wales Office of £490,000 resources from the National Assembly for Wales to cover DCA merger.

The change in the resource element of the Northern Ireland Court Service DEL arises from:

A PES transfer from the Department for Constitutional Affairs of £22,034 in respect of the funding of publicly funded legal services in Northern Ireland (£22,000), expenditure arising from the introduction of the Civil Partnership Bill in Northern Ireland (£34,000) and an adjustment (£10,138) to convert the baseline for publicly funded legal services from a cash to a resource basis.

The change of £2,000,000 in the resource element of the national archives DEL arises from:

Expenditure on the development of digital information systems for the implementation of the Freedom of Information Act and development of online services for the national archives website further to improve access to catalogues and records. The increase sought comprises £2 million end year flexibity draw down and a reduction of £2 million in depreciation provision offset against a £2 million increase in resources DEL. Additionally, to allow the national archives to develop wider market sales operations, a neutral change is sought to allow for £3.4 million of expenditure on events, on wholesale publishing, book purchases and record copying intended for sale through the national archive's retail sales outlets and wholesale distribution channels. This expenditure is offset by additional wider market receipts generated by these retail sales of £3.4 million. The 2004–05 main estimate provided £36.7 million administration cost limit. The winter supplementary estimate requests an increase in the original provision of £2 million, making the new limit £38.7 million.

The change in the capital element of the Department of Constitutional Affairs DEL arises from:

RfR1

Take-up of DEL End Year Flexibility:

£16,115,000 capital costs as set out in the public expenditure outturn White Paper; £30,900,000 capital costs in relation to receipts for the sale of Birmingham Priory Courts; £9,580,000 capital, in relation to the CJS Reserve; £8,400,000 capital in relation to the Capital Modernisation Fund (CMF); £2,000,000 capital costs in relation to the Single Asylum Fund (SAF) for 2004–05;

CJS Reserve

£6,520,000 capital from Home Office in relation to the CJS Reserve;

The change in the capital element of the Northern Ireland Court Service DEL arises from:

The change in the capital element of the DEL arises from the draw down of £2,000 in end year flexibility to fund a programme of major refurbishment and IT related projects.

The change in the capital element of the national archives DEL arises from:

Expenditure on the development of digital information systems for the implementation of the Freedom of Information Act and development of online services for the national archives website to further improve access to catalogues and records. This increase comprises a £1.3 million end-year flexibility draw-down.

DEFENCE

Côte D'Ivoire

The Secretary of State for Defence (Mr. Geoffrey Hoon): In a statement on 11 November 2004, I outlined the military planning that was in hand to support an evacuation of UK nationals from Côte d'Ivoire.

The deteriorating security conditions in Côte d'Ivoire last week subsequently led to an evacuation of UK nationals from the country, following a recommendation by Her Majesty's ambassador to Côte d'Ivoire that he judged this a prudent course of action. This recommendation was formulated after receiving technical military advice from the operational liaison and reconnaissance team, which had deployed on 10 November 2004 to monitor the situation in the region as part of the Ministry of Defence's contingency planning.

The spearhead lead element was initially deployed to a forward mounting base in Accra, Ghana, where the operation was commanded by elements of the UK's joint task force headquarters. The majority of these forces were drawn from the spearhead lead element based on the 1st Battalion Royal Gurkha Rifles, but the operation was supported and enabled by Royal Air Force transport aircraft from RAF Brize Norton and RAF Lyneham. As an additional contingency measure, the landing platform dock HMS Albion was also diverted towards Côte d'Ivoire.

It is indicative of the armed forces' capacity to undertake comprehensive contingency planning, and their flexibility and capability to respond quickly to events, that within 24 hours of receiving a formal request from the Foreign Secretary nearly 300 service personnel were on the ground in Ghana, engaged in preparations for the evacuation.

Between 11 and 13 November 2004, UK forces evacuated some 220 individuals from Abidjan and Yamoussoukro to Ghana, where the Foreign and Commonwealth Office had set up a reception centre to cater for the men, women and children who wished to leave Côte d'Ivoire.

All Service personnel involved in the evacuation operation have now returned to the UK, with the exception of HMS Albion which has returned to normal duties.

The success of this operation is in no small part due to the high degree of co-operation that existed between the deployed forces, Her Majesty's ambassador and his staff in country, and with international partners in the region, in particular Ghana and France.

The successful completion and efficient recovery of our deployed forces is m impressive achievement and one which took place without impact on the UK's enduring commitments across the globe. This is testament to the professionalism of the men and women who serve in the UK armed forces and in particular to those who participated in this operation.

Future Rapid Effect System (FRES)

The Minister of State, Ministry of Defence (Mr. Adam Ingram): I am pleased to announce that the Ministry of Defence has signed a contract with Atkins in respect of the systems house role for the future rapid effect system (FRES).

The Ministry of Defence will be providing strategic direction, with Atkins, who are a major British company in this field, leading a number of key activities designed to inform MOD's major programme decisions during the assessment phase. Atkins' independence from product will enable them to take an objective view of the ideas and technologies that may be applicable to FRES, and marry new approaches to the knowledge that we already have as a result of previous work. Their comprehension of the risks inherent in complex systems of systems integration will be vital in determining feasible solutions. In addition, they will be managing a programme of risk reduction activities, mitigating the risks of certain technologies to determine if they are suitable for FRES. Technologies will only be inserted into FRES when they are sufficiently mature, whether initially or as part of an incremental technology insertion programme. The proactive management of these diverse de-risking activities will be key to achieving a manageable level of risk at the Main Gate investment point.

We will seek maximum appropriate competition during all programme phases, enabling industry to engage at all levels, within the context of our defence industrial policy. We will be transparent and inclusive with industry from the earliest possible stage in terms of the defence industrial policy factors that may affect acquisition decisions. To this end we have published a paper setting out our plans in this respect and identifying constraints where they apply. Understanding the broad factors that are likely to impact those decisions will enable industry to make informed judgments on whether they wish to bid and, if they choose to do so, to ensure that their bids take due account of the declared criteria.

Finally, FRES is a complex programme, with obvious tension between competing demands such as capability, time to delivery and affordability. However, the award of this contract to Atkins provides us with the necessary industrial expertise and realism to examine those competing demands in detail and to make informed decisions in order to achieve the optimum FRES solution.

HEALTH

NHS Research Ethics Committees

The Minister of State, Department of Health (Ms Rosie Winterton): My noble Friend the Parliamentary Under Secretary of State, Lord Warner, announced at the Grand Committee on the Human Tissue Bill on 15 September, column GC432, that he intended to seek independent advice on the operation of the research ethics committee system, including the Central Office for National Health Service Research Ethics Committees.

My noble Friend has asked Michael O'Higgins, a managing partner of PA Consulting Group Ltd., to chair a small ad-hoc group of scientists and lay members. It will undertake a review of the systems that support NHS Research Ethics Committees in England, and make recommendations for further steps to improve their operation, building on changes already under way.

The group will first meet in November and will report to Health Ministers by the end of March 2005. Details of the group's membership and terms of reference can be found on the Department's website www.dh.gov.uk.

HOME DEPARTMENT

Zimbabwe

The Minister for Citizenship and Immigration (Mr. Desmond Browne): In January 2002 the Home Secretary announced the temporary suspension of removals of failed asylum seekers to Zimbabwe. This was in response to concerns at that time about the serious deterioration in the situation in Zimbabwe in the run-up to the presidential election held in March that year. We did not regard it as unsafe to return failed asylum seekers to Zimbabwe, but in view of the turbulent political conditions we considered that it would be appropriate not to enforce returns at that time.

During the period of the suspension, asylum and human rights claims made by Zimbabwean nationals have continued to be considered on their individual merits in accordance with our obligations under the 1951 UN Refugee Convention and the European Convention on Human Rights (ECHR). Each application is considered against the background of the latest available country information from a wide range of reliable sources including international organisations, non-governmental organisations, the Foreign and Commonwealth Office and the media.

As with any other nationality, Zimbabweans who meet the definition of a refugee in the 1951convention are granted asylum. If they do not qualify for asylum, but there are other circumstances that make them particularly vulnerable and engage our obligations under the ECHR, they are granted humanitarian protection or discretionary leave. If their application is refused, they have a right of appeal to the independent appellate authorities. In this way we ensure that we provide protection to those Zimbabweans who need it. But if an asylum and human rights claim by an individual of any nationality is refused, and any appeal to the independent appellate authorities is unsuccessful, that means that it would be safe for that particular individual to return to their country of origin.

It is clear that there are Zimbabweans in need of international protection from persecution. Our asylum system provides that and will continue to do so. We have continued throughout the period of the suspension of enforced returns to consider cases and grant asylum or other forms of protection to Zimbabweans where necessary. The latest asylum statistics published today show that at initial decision stage in the first nine months of this year we granted asylum to 195 Zimbabweans and some other form of protection to more than 25 others. But this was out of a total of 2,025 decisions, meaning that very nearly 90 per cent. of claims were refused. 82 per cent. of subsequent appeals to the independent adjudicator were dismissed or withdrawn, the clear message is that the majority of Zimbabwean asylum applicants are able safely to return to Zimbabwe. We expect these individuals to leave voluntarily, and significant numbers have done so, but if they do not leave voluntarily we consider it entirely proper to seek to enforce their removal as we would nationals of any other country.

While there has not been any improvement in conditions in Zimbabwe since enforced removal of failed asylum seekers was suspended, the proportion of claimants whose claims are not well-founded has increased markedly over the period of the suspension. It is clear that the absence of enforced returns increasingly acts as a "pull factor" for Zimbabweans, and for others posing as Zimbabweans, who do not need international protection but nonetheless make asylum claims confident that even when unsuccessful they will not be forcibly removed. This is a misuse of the asylum system. We are therefore today bringing our policy on returns of failed Zimbabwean asylum seekers into line with that on every other country and ending the temporary suspension of enforced returns of failed Zimbabwean asylum seekers.

This change in asylum policy does not reflect any change in our categorical opposition to human rights abuses in Zimbabwe. We will continue, bilaterally and with our international partners, to push the Government of Zimbabwe to end human rights abuses there, and restore democracy, so that all Zimbabweans can in time return safely to help build a prosperous and stable country. There is no doubt that political persecution, abuses of human rights and denial of basic freedoms persist in Zimbabwe and the asylum decision-making and appeal system will continue to ensure that Zimbabweans who face persecution and claim asylum in the UK will continue to receive the international protection they need.

Asylum Seeker Families

The Minister for Citizenship and Immigration (Mr. Desmond Browne): The National Asylum Support Service (NASS) has been reviewing their processes and policies with a view to increasing efficiency and reducing numbers in emergency accommodation.

A concession in the dispersal policy, where NASS departed from the policy of dispersal if a family had a child that had attended a particular school for a year, was part of this review. The concession, was designed to enable us to ensure that asylum seeker families in receipt of DWP benefits and who were transferring to NASS support, following receipt of a negative asylum decision—such cases are often referred to as disbenefited cases—could continue to be supported in the accommodation they had been living in while in receipt of benefits.

I agreed in August that this concession should be amended. In considering the change, regard was given to the need to balance disruption to the education of a child with the availability of suitable accommodation in non-dispersal areas. Consideration was also given to the number of families who remained in emergency accommodation—which is not intended for long-term occupation—in London and other areas for long periods of time.

The revised policy came into force on Friday 13 August 2004. The change in policy was announced by a letter dated 13 August, from the director of NASS to the membership of the National Asylum Support Forum, copied to LGA, ALG, COSLA and the Chief Asylum Support Adjudicator. A copy of the letter was placed on the Home Office website and NASS wrote to all families affected by this change.

Under the new policy, dispersal is temporarily deferred where an asylum seeker has a dependant child in their household who has started the final school or college year leading up to their GCSE, AS or A-level exams, or their equivalents. This is provided they have been enrolled at that school or college for a significant part of the previous school or college year.

However, families will not benefit from this concession if they have been unco-operative, for example, if they have failed to travel to dispersal accommodation without reasonable excuse or have switched the type of their NASS application without good reason, and this has resulted in their dispersal being delayed until their child is in the final school year leading to their GCSE, AS or A Level exam.

Families with children who are in the school year leading to Statutory Assessment Tasks (SATs) will not benefit from the concession.

If a family has a child with special educational needs who has gained entry to an appropriate school, dispersal will normally be postponed until arrangements are in place for the child to transfer to a suitable school in the dispersal area.

Cases that fall outside the revised criteria will be examined on their own merits, although the expectation is that dispersal will normally be appropriate. Families in emergency accommodation who applied for support before 13 August 2004—and whose dispersal may have been postponed as a result of the previous policy—have been reassessed under the new policy. This assessment took account of all known circumstances and consideration was given to whether dispersing the family would be reasonable. In order to minimise disruption to children and schools NASS aimed to arrange for a move to new accommodation to take place before the start of the new school year.

Disbenefited families supported by NASS prior to 13 August 2004, who met the terms of the concession in place before that date and where arrangements have been made with a local authority to pay their rent and utilities, will not be reassessed under the new policy, unless their accommodation becomes unsustainable for some reason.

We are considering other changes to the policy on dispersal and I may announce any further changes to the House when decisions have been taken.

PC Gerald Walker

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for the Home Department (Paul Goggins): On 25 March I placed in the House Library a copy of the report by Professor Rod Morgan which I and the Minister for Policing had commissioned into the circumstances leading up to and following the death of PC Gerald Walker as a consequence of the actions of David Parfitt, who was then unlawfully at large following the revocation of his licence and recall to prison. I also placed in the Library a copy of the action plan which I had agreed with the director general of national probation service representing the police, prison and probation services and which set out a clear plan for delivering changes to national policy and practice recommended by Professor Morgan in light of his inquiry findings.

The director general of the national probation service has now reported to me on the progress achieved in delivering the action plan and I am today placing a copy of that report in the House Library.

I am very pleased that the director general is able to confirm that, of the 10 recommendations in Professor Morgan's report, two have already been met in full, a further four will be the subject of comprehensive advice which will be issued during November, and three other recommendations will result in guidance being issued before the end of December. Progress is being made to reach agreement with the employing authorities for probation staff on the final recommendation, which requires a change to the terms and conditions of some probation grades, but the director general is hopeful that there will be agreement in time for changes to be implemented early in 2005–06.

As I made clear in my written statement to the House on 25 March, PC Walker's death was an irreplaceable loss to the Nottinghamshire constabulary and to the community they serve, and a personal tragedy for his wife and two children. The changes to national practices that Professor Morgan recommended, and the action plan is delivering, cannot make up for that loss. Those changes will, however ensure that the legacy of PC Walker's sacrifice will be better supervision of offenders, more effective inter-agency working between the police and correctional services, and, by reducing the risk of similar events recurring, greater security to the public in future.

Yarl's Wood and Harmondsworth Disturbances

The Secretary of State for the Home Department (Mr. David Blunkett): I am today publishing the report by the prisons and probation ombudsman, Stephen Shaw, of his investigation into the serious disturbance at Yarl's Wood immigration removal centre on 14 and 15 February 2002.

Immediately after the disturbance, Stephen Moore, a senior member of the Prison Service, was asked to conduct an investigation of what had happened. He made significant progress but was unable to have access to the information necessary to complete his investigation until associated court proceedings had been completed. On 19 June 2003, my right hon. Friend the then Minister for Citizenship and Immigration announced in a written statement that she had decided that Stephen Shaw, who had been providing an independent overview of the work done up to that point, should take overall responsibility for the investigation, in order to ensure that it was fully independent. As Mr. Shaw notes in his report, he had unfettered access to papers and staff. I am grateful to him for the care with which he has examined what was by any standards an extremely serious incident and for a very thorough report, and to Stephen Moore for the considerable effort he invested in the earlier stages of the investigation.

The report criticises the handling by the contractor Group 4 of the incident which gave rise to the disturbances. It identifies weaknesses in design and materials which it attributes to the time constraints under which the centre was built, and which, in Mr. Shaw's view, rendered it unfit for purpose and unable to withstand the assault on it that occurred on 14 and 15 February 2002. It finds that "the operation that ended the disturbance seems to have worked well", but that there was a lack of clarity as to who was in charge and the command structure. It notes the lack of information held centrally at that time on detainees, of the kind that would have supported a more effective risk assessment of the detained population.

Stephen Shaw pays tribute, as I do, to the bravery shown by individual members of the Prison Service and Group 4 staff, by members of the emergency services and those detainees who rescued staff who were trapped. As he says, there was no loss of life, but the disturbance and fire were traumatic events for those involved.

It is important to remember the context in 2000 and 2001, when the Yarl's Wood and Harmondsworth removal centres were built. Asylum applications had risen significantly in 1999 and remained at high levels. All those involved—Ministers and officials alike—were rightly convinced that part of the solution was the creation of significantly more detention accommodation than had previously existed to support the removal of failed asylum seekers. In that context, the creation of such additional accommodation was understandably seen as an urgent priority. It is easy to be wise with hindsight, but I readily acknowledge that the weaknesses in design and materials identified by Stephen Shaw existed and made the centre more vulnerable to a disturbance than it would otherwise have been.

The important thing is that there were clear lessons to be learned, and they were. As the report notes, the Colnbrook removal centre, which opened recently, was built to a much more robust design. The Harmondsworth centre, originally built to the same design as Yarl's Wood, was extensively refurbished, with the installation of sprinklers and the strengthening of parts of the infrastructure, as was the surviving part of Yarl's Wood. The command structure in the event of a disturbance was clarified and improved, and effort invested in staff training.

I am also publishing today the report of an investigation of the more recent disturbance at Harmondsworth on 19 July this year by Sue McAllister, the head of the security group in the Prison Service. I am grateful also to Ms. McAllister for her work. This has been a more limited investigation, because a number of those involved in the disturbance still face criminal proceedings. It is, however, clear from the report that, as a result of the refurbishments I have described, Harmondsworth was significantly more able to withstand a serious disturbance than would otherwise have been the case. Damage was limited, the command arrangements for responding to the incident generally worked well, and the restoration of order was, in Ms McAllister's words, "a successful operation" in which Prison Service, police and other staff acquitted themselves well. There were no injuries to either staff or detainees and there were no escapes from the centre. The centre was up and running again within three months of the incident. The inherent weaknesses in the design were, however, a factor in the extent to which the disturbance spread throughout the centre, and fire safety requirements limited the measures that could be taken to control detainees, including preventing their confinement to their rooms. Officials have been addressing urgently with the contractor and fire authorities what more can be done to improve control without jeopardising fire safety.

Ms McAllister comments on the lack of systems for assessing the suitability of detainees for the open regime at Harmondsworth, and recommends a more strategic approach to the management of disruptive individuals. It is important to recognise that the expansion of the immigration removal estate was in part a result of the decision to end the practice of detaining immigration offenders in prisons. Since the Yarl's Wood disturbance, the Immigration and Nationality Directorate has strengthened arrangements for assessing the risk which individual detainees represent and for considering the case for moving disruptive detainees elsewhere in the estate or into prison accommodation. These arrangements are however being reviewed again in the light of experience at Harmondsworth and Ms. McAllister's comments, and there are plans to enhance the assessment process. Perhaps the most significant development is that the new centre at Colnbrook, built to a more robust design, provides an option for managing the more difficult detainees short of transfer to the prison estate—an option which did not previously exist.

These two reports highlight the challenge which the management of immigration detainees now represents. Detainees are not convicted criminals. As Stephen Shaw notes, one of the factors in the design of Harmondsworth and Yarl's Wood was the aim to create an environment which, while secure, was not a prison environment; these events have shown the tension between this aim and the need to maintain control and security. As Stephen Shaw notes in his report, as the effectiveness of the removals process increases, detainees are now spending, on average, much shorter periods in detention. This is, in itself, welcome, but it tends to raise levels of tension among the detained population, and limits the scope for constructive activities of the kind that longer-term custodial institutions provide. That said, we have to ensure within the detention estate a humane regime that provides purposeful activities and is strong on contact between staff and detainees. That, rather than the structure of the buildings (important as that is), is the surest means by which the risk of disaffection and disturbance can be kept to the minimum. I have already accepted Stephen Shaw's recommendation (number 60) that a forum comprising officials, contractors and relevant interest groups be set up to consider provision of purposeful activity in removal centres. The forum will be chaired by the senior director, operations in IND, and the Chief Inspector of Prisons will be invited to be represented.

Stephen Shaw's report makes a large number of other recommendations, many of which have already been acted on, while others will now be considered carefully and progressed, along with relevant conclusions of Sue McAllister's report. I have asked IND senior management to draw up an action plan based on these for publication in early 2005.

There have been many improvements to the management of the detention system—indeed of IND as a whole—since these events took place but I am determined that we should learn any further lessons of these very serious events, and do everything we can to prevent a recurrence.

NORTHERN IRELAND

Northern Ireland (Murder Inquiries)

The Secretary of State for Northern Ireland (Mr. Paul Murphy): On 1 April this year, I published Justice Cory's reports into allegations of state collusion in four murders in Northern Ireland. In doing so, I confirmed my intention to establish inquiries into the deaths of Robert Hamill, Billy Wright and Rosemary Nelson. I am pleased to be able to confirm today both the identities of the inquiry panels and the inquiries' terms of reference.

In each case, the panels will be chaired by a judge and will include both a member with specialist expertise and a lay member. The terms of reference have been deliberately drawn to allow the inquiries to consider both the allegations of collusion that have been made in these cases and also the issue of possible negligence.

The Robert Hamill inquiry will be chaired by Sir Edwin Jowitt, a retired member of the High Court of England and Wales. He will be joined on the inquiry panel by Sir John Evans (former Chief Constable of Devon and Cornwall) and Reverend Baroness (Kathleen) Richardson of Calow (former moderator of the Free Churches' Council of England and Wales). The inquiry will be held under section 44 of the Police (Northern Ireland) Act 1998. Its terms of reference will be:

> "To inquire into the death of Robert Hamill with a view to determining whether any wrongful act or omission by or within the Royal Ulster Constabulary facilitated his death or obstructed the investigation of it, or whether attempts were made to do so; whether any such act or omission was intentional or negligent; whether the investigation of his death was carried out with due diligence; and to make recommendations."

The Billy Wright inquiry will be chaired by the right hon. Lord (Ranald) MacLean of the Court of Session in Scotland. He will be supported in this role by Professor Andrew Coyle (director of the International Centre for Prisons Studies at King's College, London) and the Right Reverend John Oliver (retired diocesan Bishop of Hereford). The inquiry will be held under section 7 of the Prison Act (Northern Ireland) 1953. Its terms of reference will be:

> "To inquire into the death of Billy Wright with a view to determining whether any wrongful act or omission by or within the prison authorities or other state agencies facilitated his death, or whether attempts were made to do so; whether any such act or omission was intentional or negligent; and to make recommendations."

The Rosemary Nelson inquiry will be chaired by Sir Michael Morland, a retired member of the High Court of England and Wales. The other panel members will be Sir Anthony Burden (former Chief Constable of South Wales police) and Dame Valerie Strachan (vice chair of the big lottery fund and former chairman of the Board of Customs and Excise). The inquiry will be held under section 44 of the Police (Northern Ireland) Act 1998. Its terms of reference will be:

> "To inquire into the death of Rosemary Nelson with a view to determining whether any wrongful act or omission by or within the Royal Ulster Constabulary or Northern Ireland Office facilitated her death or obstructed the investigation of it, or whether attempts were made to do so; whether any such act or omission was intentional or negligent; whether the investigation of her death was carried out with due diligence; and to make recommendations."

As I said in my statement of 8 July, all three inquiries will have full powers to compel disclosure of documents and attendance of witnesses.

The inquiries will start work as soon as possible.

SOLICITOR GENERAL

Supplementary Estimates

The Solicitor-General (Ms Harriet Harman): Subject to parliamentary approval of any necessary supplementary estimate, the Attorney General's DEL will be increased by £104,952,000 from £516,157,000 to £621,109,000 and the administration costs limits will be increased by £83,950,000 from £384,759,000 to £468,709,000. Within the DEL change, the impact on resources and capital are as set out in the following table:

£'000

			New DEL	
	Change	*Voted*	*Non-voted*	*Total*
Resource	96,670	597,217	7,000	604,217
Capital	8,282	23,015	0	23,015
Depreciation*	0	-6,123	0	-6,123
Total	104,952	614,109	7,000	621,109

*Depreciation, which forms part of resource DEL, is excluded from the total DEL since capital DEL includes capital spending and to include depreciation of those assets would lead to double counting.

The Crown Prosecution Service's element of the Attorney General's DEL will be increased by £94,438,000 from £466,991,000 to £561,429,000 and the administration costs limits will be increased by £81,450,000 from £353,527,000 to £434,977,000.

The change in the resource element of the DEL arises from:

Administration costs changes in respect of a transfer of £81,450,000 from the Criminal Justice System Reserve to fund the CPS's core business so that it can continue contributing to meeting criminal justice performance targets. Specific initiatives funded include the narrowing the justice gap and the charging programmes; better services for victims and witness through the speaking up for justice and direct communication with victims programmes; support for the effective trial management programme and tackling cross border crime;

Programme expenditure changes in respect of a transfer of £6,100,000 from the Home Office to support the joint delivery of government targets for recovering proceeds of crime; a transfer of £141,000 from the Home Office recovered assets incentivisation fund to fund the appointment of a Receivership Panel; a transfer of £350,000 from the Home Office recovered assets incentivisation fund to provide additional resources to regional asset recovery teams; a transfer of £1,129,000 from the Home Office to support joint working and improve effective use of enforcement measures for anti-social behaviour; and

The change in the capital element of the DEL arises from the take-up of the CPS's end year flexibility of £5,268,000 from the capital modernisation fund (CMF) funding across 2004–05.

The increases will be offset by inter-departmental transfers or charged to the DEL reserve and will not therefore add to the planned total of public expenditure.

The Serious Fraud Office's element of the Attorney General's DEL will be increased by £7,500,000 from £33,140,000 to £40,640,000 and the administration costs limit will be increased by £2,500,000 from £21,240,000 to £23,740,000.

The change in the resource element of the DEL arises from additional costs, £2,500,000 for administration expenditure and £5,000,000 for programme expenditure, relating to two fraud cases and will be charged to the DEL reserve and will not therefore add to the planned total of public expenditure.

Treasury Solicitors' Department (TSD) element of the Attorney General's DEL will be increased by £3,014,000 from £16,026,000 to £19,040,000. There is no increase in the TSD's administration cost limit and it remains at £9,992,000. There is no change in the resource element of the DEL for the Treasury Solicitors' Department (TSD).

The increase in capital of £3,014,000 from £3,400,000 to £6,414,000 arises from the procurement of a practice and case management system, which enables the Department to manage and monitor its caseload more efficiently, and a new electronic records and electronic document management system, which will be implemented this year. Capital funding is also required to purchase the furniture and fittings required in advance of TSD's change of accommodation in 2005–06. The increase will be offset by end year flexibility on capital DEL from 2003–04 and will not therefore add to the planned total of public expenditure.

Crown Prosecutors

The Solicitor-General (Ms Harriet Harman): My right hon. Friend the Attorney General has made the following ministerial statement:

The review of the code for Crown prosecutors, which I announced on 18 March 2004, *Official Report, column WS25*, is now complete. Copies of the revised code have been printed and have been placed in the Libraries of both Houses.

The fundamental evidential and public interest considerations have not changed. However, the code has been amended to reflect the new role played by the Crown Prosecution Service in statutory charging whereby Crown prosecutors, rather than the police, will normally decide whether or not to charge a suspect and will determine the appropriate charge or charges. The new code also properly reflects other key developments in the four years since the code was last reviewed. These include: the developing role of prosecutors in assisting the sentencing court and seeking post conviction orders such as antisocial behaviour orders; alternatives to prosecution such as conditional cautioning; and new public interest factors in favour of prosecution relating to confiscation and any other orders, children, and community confidence. To ensure the code's accessibility, it will be published in audio and Braille and, in addition to English and Welsh, the most commonly spoken community languages.

I welcome the revised code and commend it to all prosecuting authorities. Copies of the code for Crown prosecutors will be available on the Crown Prosecution Service website which can be found at www.cps.gov.uk.

TRADE AND INDUSTRY

European Company Law—Cross Border Mergers

The Minister for Industry and the Regions (Jacqui Smith): The House will be aware that, between June and September 2004, the Government consulted on the proposed draft directive on cross border mergers. The consultation document set out in factual terms how the provisions of the directive would operate and invited comments. Ten responses were received from companies, legal advisers and industry bodies. The Government are grateful to those who took the time and trouble to contribute.

The Government support the facilitation of corporate restructuring activities across the European Union to promote the single market. An effective framework of European company law, which facilitates cross-border mergers and provides legal certainty and adequate safeguards for those who deal with the companies involved, is essential for that purpose. The proposed directive is intended to provide this. Responses to the consultation indicated that introducing a mechanism for cross border mergers for UK companies would not have a significant impact, as UK companies have historically tended to favour restructuring by means of takeovers rather than mergers. Therefore, the Government intend to proceed with negotiations in a manner which is balanced and proportionate and which seeks to achieve the best outcomes for UK business. The Government will also look closely at options for implementation and consult further with stakeholders before decisions are taken on the most appropriate vehicle for implementation.

Although there were a limited number of respondents, a variety of views were expressed on the scope of the directive (the types of company to which the directive should apply) where as views tended to be more aligned on the issue of employee participation. As most respondents were clear that the scope of the directive should apply to small and medium enterprises as well as larger companies, the Government have sought to achieve a broad approach to scope—whilst ensuring this provides necessary legal certainty.

The Government have considered carefully the responses on the employee participation provisions of the directive. Employee participation is a system that exists within some EU countries (such as Germany and Sweden) for the representation of employees on the board of companies over a certain size. The term also covers employees' rights to recommend and/or oppose the appointment of board members. The consultation showed that there are concerns that this process could be too burdensome upon business if it were to follow the precedent set in the European company statute model, as this is a complicated, time consuming and potentially costly solution. This model requires that there are negotiations on employee participation issues in cases where a European company is formed by cross border merger involving one or more companies with an existing system of employee participation.

Realistically, the Government cannot expect to negotiate a directive that would have the effect of removing employee participation rights where they exist in a company in another member state. For several member states, it is of fundamental importance to ensure that this directive does not undermine employee participation rights. Therefore, the Government have carefully considered the responses and will work towards an approach that keeps the burdens on UK companies to a minimum. In addition, it should be borne in mind that companies will be under no obligation to engage in a cross border merger and if they do not elect to, there will be no impact upon them.

Statutory mergers of the kind covered by the proposal are little used by UK companies and the evidence indicates that it is unlikely that UK companies will choose to merge with companies in countries that have high levels of employee participation. We intend to seek improvements to the proposal to develop a more flexible process for agreeing employee participation arrangements and are committed to the objective of making the merger process available and less burdensome for UK companies

I have placed copies of the summary of responses to the consultation in the Libraries of both Houses.

Written Ministerial Statements

Wednesday 17 November 2004

DEFENCE

Defence Intelligence and Security Centre Agency Key Targets

The Minister of State, Ministry of Defence (Mr. Adam Ingram): The Defence Intelligence And Security Centre (DISC) is the centre for defence intelligence training in the UK. CE DISC is responsible for training authorised personnel in intelligence, security and information support disciplines and maintaining an operational capability. The key targets for the agency for the 12 months from April 2004 are:

Key Target 1—Training Quantity and Efficiency

> To produce trained personnel in accordance with defence requirements, while reducing wastage by 1 per cent. in FY 2004–05.

Key Target 2—Training Quality

> To ensure that training complies with defence training quality standards and customer requirements.

Key Target 3—Operations

> To satisfy all operational tasking.

Key Target 4—Change Programme

> To deliver process improvement milestones in accordance with the owner's directive.

Defence Geographic and Imagery Intelligence Agency Key Targets

The Minister of State, Ministry of Defence (Mr. Adam Ingram): DGIA is responsible for meeting defence needs for responsive, accurate geospatial and imagery intelligence. The key targets for the agency for the 12 months from April 2004 are:

Key Target 1—Provision of Imagery Intelligence

> To meet defence needs for imagery intelligence against an Imagery Intelligence Exploitation Programme agreed with customers.

Key Target 2—Provision of Geospatial Intelligence

> To meet defence needs for geospatial intelligence against a Geospatial Intelligence Programme agreed with customers.

Key Target 3—Provision of Deployable Functions

> To provide force elements at a level of operational readiness agreed with customers.

Key Target 4—Provision of Training Capability

> To meet defence needs for Geographic Training against a Geospatial Training Plan agreed with customers.

Key Target 5—Efficiency

> To improve the efficiency of production within DGIA by one per cent. in 2004–05.

Defence Storage and Distribution Agency Key Targets

The Minister of State, Ministry of Defence (Mr. Adam Ingram): Key targets have been set for the chief executive of the Defence Storage And Distribution Agency (DSDA) for financial year 2004–05. The targets are as follows:

Key Target 1

> To meet the customers' requirements as negotiated and agreed in business agreements (BAs). This key target is broken down into two sub targets:
>
> *Key Target 1a:*
>
> For explosive matériel; to supply 95 per cent. of available maintained munitions within Demand timescales.
>
> *Key Target 1b:*
>
> Some 95 per cent. of the number of issues of non-explosive matériel to consumers, as forecast and agreed in BAs, to meet that element of the supply chain pipeline time (SCPT) for which DSDA has a responsibility.
>
> *Key Target 1c:*
>
> To process within limits, agreed with each individual customer, 98 per cent. of all receipts that conform to the specifications laid down in the contract and/or matériel regulations.

Key Target 2

> To achieve an average 5 per cent. reduction in the unit cost of output.

Key Target 3

> The value of inventory written off as a result of DSDA's actions to be less than the levels agreed with each business agreement. This key target is broken down into two sub targets:
>
> *Key Target 3a:*
>
> The value of explosive matériel written off as a result of DSDA's action to be less than 0.02 per cent.
>
> *Key Target 3b:*
>
> The value of non-explosive matériel written off as a result of DSDA's action to be less than levels agreed within each specific customer supplier agreement.

Incident (Majarr Al Kabir)

The Secretary of State for Defence (Mr. Geoffrey Hoon): The appalling incident at Al Majarr Al Kabir on 24 June 2003 resulted in one of the most serious losses suffered by British Forces since the beginning of operations in Iraq. It was felt deeply within the British Army, in particular the Royal Military Police, and struck a grievous blow to the families of the six soldiers. From the moment news of the incident came through we have been doing all that we can, in conjunction with the Iraqi authorities, to bring the perpetrators of this crime to justice. We have also been working hard to find out as much as we can about the circumstances leading up to deaths of the six soldiers, to ensure that if there were lessons for the service then these would be learned for the benefit of future operations.

The service board of inquiry into the circumstances surrounding the deaths of the six soldiers has now completed its work. This inquiry is fundamentally about learning lessons to prevent a recurrence. It is not about attributing blame or calling individuals to account. These are governed by separate procedures. It is also entirely internal in nature. However, we recognise that the families of the six soldiers have a close and fundamental interest in the board's work and its findings. We have therefore sought to keep the families as closely informed as we can on both these processes. To this end, representatives of the bereaved families are today receiving a briefing from the board president, following which I will meet them to hear their views and discuss any outstanding concerns they may have.

We recognise, too, that there is a wider parliamentary and public interest at stake, which is why we have taken the unusual step of providing a summary of the board of inquiry's findings for Parliament and the press. I am therefore making arrangements for a copy of the board's opinion, findings and recommendations, together with the overlaid opinions of the chain of command, to be placed in the Libraries of both Houses.

So as not to prejudice the criminal investigation, the board was instructed to look at the events leading up to the incident in which the six soldiers died and not to examine the particular circumstances of their deaths. The board of inquiry was an exhaustive internal review conducted for service reasons and its report is an open and frank account of the events of 24 June 2003. The board made 10 recommendations, a further two were subsequently added by the chain of command concerning military policies and procedures. Most of these have been accepted and will be implemented as a matter of priority.

The board found that the incident at Al Majarr Al Kabir was a surprise attack, which could not reasonably have been predicted. The board also found that a number of factors may potentially have had a bearing on the deaths of the six soldiers, including issues relating to ammunition, communications and command relationships within the battle group to which the Royal Military Police platoon was attached. The board was not, however, able to state that any of these factors, either in isolation or in combination directly determined the six soldiers' fate.

I am aware that some of the families have been critical of the Army's response to the deaths of the six soldiers. I hope they recognise the board's work for the thorough and detailed review that it is. I hope, too, that they now have a much better understanding of the events leading up to the death of their loved ones and the wider context in which the events occurred, and can take some comfort from this.

The families will shortly receive fall copies of the board's documentation. A separate meeting will be arranged with the board president once the families have had a chance to digest this detail. This will be a farther opportunity for the families to ask questions and to increase their understanding of the circumstances surrounding this tragic incident.

DEPUTY PRIME MINISTER

Building Regulations

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State, Office of the Deputy Prime Minister (Phil Hope): Further to the written statement on 29 June 2004, *Official Report*, columns 7–8WS, the Government are pleased to announce that they have accepted the recommendations of the Building Regulations Advisory Committee and approved six further competent person self-certification schemes to support the introduction of Part P of the Building Regulations (Electrical Safety in Dwellings) on 1 January 2005. Part P is being introduced in order to reduce the number of deaths, injuries and fires caused by defective fixed electrical installations.

The approved schemes to be operated by CORGI Services Ltd, ELECSA Ltd, NAPIT Certification Ltd, NICEIC Certification Services Ltd and the Oil Filing Technical Association for the Petroleum Industry Ltd are aimed at those carrying out electrical installation work as an adjunct to or in connection with their primary business activity. Gas installers, kitchen fitters and bathroom fitters would be examples of forms for which these schemes would be suitable. NAPIT Certification Ltd also applied to operate a scheme aimed at those carrying out electrical installation work as their primary business and this also has been approved.

Regulations to give formal legal authorisation to these schemes will be laid very early in the new session of Parliament. The regulations will also provide that conservatories and porches are within the scope of Part P, that the special precautions necessary in kitchens apply also where part of a room is used as a kitchen and that telephone and extra low voltage wiring for communication and signalling purposes will be non-notifiable work unless located in a bathroom or other special location.

FOREIGN AND COMMONWEALTH AFFAIRS

Iraq (Casualty Estimates)

The Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs (Mr. Jack Straw): This statement provides a response to the article "Mortality before and after the 2003 invasion of Iraq: cluster sample survey" published in the *Lancet* on 29 October concerning civilian casualties since the beginning of military action in Iraq in March 2003.

The Security Context

It is important to recall the background to the current violence in Iraq. In the period of major combat activities in Iraq between the coalition and Iraqi forces loyal to Saddam Hussein, there were inevitably civilian casualties caused by military action by both sides. Every effort was made, on the part of the coalition, to minimise the civilian casualties as required by international humanitarian law.

Casualties—civilian and military—which have occurred since major combat activities ended on 1 May 2003 have done so directly as a result of those determined to undermine the political process. Security Council Resolution 1546, adopted on 8 June 2004, noted the request of the Iraqi Interim Government that the Multi-National Force should remain to help the sovereign Government of Iraq to ensure security and reaffirmed its authorisation on that basis. The Multi-National Force has been acting under that mandate, in support of the Iraqi security forces, to ensure the maintenance of security and stability in Iraq. The mandate specifically authorises action against terrorists.

The Iraqi Government continue to face a violent insurgency. Every day brings grim evidence that the targets of this insurgency are not merely a supposed occupation force. They include members of Iraqi civil institutions and security forces, ordinary Iraqis and foreigners working to build a better future for Iraq.

They include children killed when co-ordinated bombs were detonated near a water treatment plant in Baghdad, Iraqi army trainees and police butchered with premeditation and foreigners executed in front of the cameras. The scale of the threat has prompted international humanitarian agencies to close their operations in the country.

In those many parts of Iraq where there have been no terrorist incidents, there have been no casualties. If the terrorists and insurgents gave up their campaign, the violence in Iraq would cease.

However, while the insurgents continue in their attempts to destroy the political process leading to a constitutionally elected government, and to attack those rebuilding Iraq's infrastructure and public services, the Multi-National Force will support the efforts of the Iraqi Government and security forces to defeat them. That may include military action if there is no alternative.

The Multi-National and Iraqi forces continue to act so as to minimise civilian casualties. This is despite the fact that the insurgents have shown no compunction in using mosques, schools and hospitals as defensive bases. The MNF is currently providing food and other supplies to civilians in the Fallujah area, and working closely with the Iraqi Ministry of Health to ensure medical supplies reach there.

The Iraqi Government and their international partners remain committed to defeating the terrorists and insurgents in Iraq. I pay tribute to all those who are working to build a safe and democratic country.

The legal context

The *Lancet* study suggests that there is an obligation deriving from Article 27 of the fourth Geneva convention for the multi-national force (MNF) itself to have a reckoning of the number of civilian casualties it has caused. There is nothing in article 27, or elsewhere in the fourth Geneva convention, to support this suggestion.

The basic obligations under international humanitarian law as regards civilian casualties in an armed conflict are set out in additional protocol 1 to the Geneva conventions, which also reflects customary international law. In particular, indiscriminate attacks are prohibited, and this includes any

> *"attack which may be expected to cause incidental loss of civilian life, injury to civilians, damage to civilian objects, or a combination thereof, which would be excessive in relation to the concrete and direct military advantage anticipated"*.

This obligation under international humanitarian law has been fully complied with by the United Kingdom in respect of all military operations in Iraq.

Casualty Estimates

In many cases it would be impossible to make a reliably accurate assessment either of the civilian casualties resulting from any particular attacks or of the overall civilian casualties of a conflict. This is particularly true in the conditions that exist in Iraq. However, since 5 April 2004 the Iraqi Ministry of Health has sought to collect casualty data. Explaining the procedure, the Iraqi Minister of Health stated on 29 October:

> *"Every hospital reports daily the number of civilians (which may include insurgents) who have been killed or injured in terrorist incidents or as a result of military action. All casualties are likely to be taken to hospital in these circumstances except for some insurgents (who may fear arrest) and those with minor injuries. The figures show that between 5 April 2004 and 5 October 2004, 3,853 civilians were killed and 15,517 were injured. I am satisfied that this information is the most reliable available."*

We share this view. The Ministry's figures do not of course cover the whole of the period since military action was taken, but they do include the months of April and August, when casualty figures were particularly high.

Other figures are proposed by NGOs. www.iraqbodycount.net an NGO-based website, provides a running estimate of civilian casualties based on media and other reports. This has suggested that from March 2003 to the present there have been between 14,284 and 16,419 civilian deaths. This is an estimate relying on media reports, and which we do not regard as reliable. It includes civilian deaths at the hands of terrorists as well as of the coalition forces. It relies on media reporting to decide who is a civilian and who is not. It does help to show however that the Iraqi Ministry of Health figures are not the only ones to differ widely from the *Lancet*'s estimate.

The Lancet

The article estimates that between 8,000 and 194,000 more people died following the invasion of Iraq than previous rates of mortality would have predicted, with the most likely figure being 98,000 extra deaths. Some 73 of the total of 142 deaths recorded by the survey in the period since the invasion are judged to have occurred through violence from the coalition forces or from terrorists. Other deaths recorded were the result for example of heart attacks or road accidents, not of coalition or terrorist action.

The *Lancet*'s researchers acknowledge that they encountered no evidence of widespread wrongdoing on the part of individual Multi-National Force (MNF) soldiers on the ground.

The design of the *Lancet* study and its statistical methodology passed the process of peer review before publication and is similar to that followed in cases where the data are difficult to obtain. But that should not mask the fact that any methodology critically depends on the accuracy of the data subject to its analysis.

As the authors of the study themselves acknowledge, it was carried out under exceptionally difficult conditions which in particular restricted the size of the samples surveyed. As the *Lancet* article says, the estimate of deaths is based on an extrapolation from an increase from 46 deaths in 110,538 person-months before the conflict, to 142 deaths in 138,439 person-months after the conflict. Of those, 61 deaths were attributed to coalition forces, most of them in Falluja, a sample which the authors admit is an "extreme statistical outlier".

The figures derived from the survey's data on Falluja would have resulted in an estimated 200,000 excess deaths within Falluja alone over the past 18 months. This would amount to almost two-thirds of the total population of the town—which is just not credible. The authors of the study understandably discounted the data. In general they have noted that the data on which they based their projections was of "*limited precision*". This limited precision is reflected in the very large range which they use for their estimate of excess mortality (8,000–194,000). Although the levels of probability vary across its range, any figure within this range is consistent with the data.

We doubt the survey's attribution of 61 violent deaths to action by Coalition forces. Only two deaths are attributed in the survey to "*anti-coalition forces*". This is an astonishingly small proportion of those said to have died from violence, given the large numbers of Iraqis we know have died in individual incidents at the hands of terrorists. Since 58 of the 61 deaths attributed to Coalition forces were said to have been caused by

"*helicopter gunships, rockets or other forms of aerial weaponry*",

it cannot have been possible for the families in every case to have known for certain who was responsible. It is also possible that they would have been afraid to have blamed the deaths of their relatives on the insurgents.

The authors also acknowledge that

"*many of the Iraqis reportedly killed by US forces could have been combatants*".

The greatest increase in deaths which they report was among 15–59 year old men, while for instance among the elderly in the survey there was effectively no increase in the death rate at all.

Other questions about the *Lancet* study relate to the significant differences between its estimate and other evidence, notably the figures on casualties produced by the Iraqi Ministry of Health and quoted above.

If the *Lancet* survey is accurate we could have expected Iraqi Ministry of Health figures, compiled by hospitals, to show many more times the number of people killed and wounded over that period than they in fact do. Hospitals in Iraq have no obvious reason to under-report the number of dead and injured. The *Lancet* article does not explain this discrepancy.

So while recognising the bravery and professionalism of those conducting the *Lancet* study, the Government do not accept its central conclusion, and continue to believe that the most reliable figures for casualties in Iraq are those provided by Iraqi hospitals to the Iraqi Ministry of Health.

HOME DEPARTMENT

Voluntary and Community Organisations

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for the Home Department (Fiona Mactaggart): I am today announcing the publication of a report on central Government funding of voluntary and community organisations for 1982–83 to 2001–02, which updates an earlier report published in 2001.

The Home Office has lead responsibility for the voluntary and community sector in England. As part of this remit, it has provided information on the funding of voluntary and community organisations by central Government Departments and their associated agencies and non-departmental public bodies (NDPBs) in the UK since 1979–80.

The report is based on research and analysis carried out for the Home Office by the Charities Aid Foundation. It provides information on trends in funding from 1982–83 onwards and shows that there were substantial increases in total funding between 1999–2000 to 2001–02. At current prices actual total funding was £2,238.4 million in 1999–2000; £2,755.3 million in 2000–01; and £3,323.7 million in 2001–02. It increased by 23.1 per cent. between 1999–2000 and 2000–01 and 20.6 per cent. between 2000–01 and 2001–02.

These increases were primarily caused by increases in non-housing association funding and not, as in earlier years, by increases in housing association funding. The increases in non-housing association funding are among the largest increases recorded in the last 20 years.

Copies of the document are available in the House Library and on the Home Office website at http://www.homeoffice.gov.uk/rds/voluntary1.html.

Organised Crime White Paper

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for the Home Department (Caroline Flint): We published on 29 March a White Paper: "One Step Ahead, a 21st Century Strategy to Defeat Organised Crime" (Cm 6167). Although crime has fallen overall, a great deal still needs to be done to tackle specific areas of criminality, including organised crime. Organised crime is big business; its effects are corrosive and it operates across frontiers while at the same time reaching into every neighbourhood, especially some of the most deprived parts of our country.

The White Paper set out clear objectives of year-on-year reductions in the harm that organised crime causes and to make the UK one of the most difficult environments in the world for organised crime to operate. The White Paper also set out our plans to create a serious organised crime agency and for new powers to disrupt activity and to convict organised criminals.

Since it was published, we have received comments from over 50 individuals and organisations with an interest in tackling organised crime, as well as holding workshops with practitioners. The responses have been supportive of our proposed approach and make a number of practical suggestions relating to the different components. We are grateful for these comments and have taken them into account as we start to deliver on the different elements of the strategy.

I am grateful to those who commented and am publishing today a summary of the responses on the Home Office website. A copy of the summary document has been placed in the Library of the House.

NORTHERN IRELAND

Independent Monitoring Commission

The Secretary of State for Northern Ireland (Mr. Paul Murphy): Under section 11 (1) of the Northern Ireland (Monitoring Commission etc.) Act 2003, I am required to lay before Parliament each year a report on the operation of the agreement between the British and Irish Governments that established the Independent

Monitoring Commission and the operation of the relevant provisions inserted into the Northern Ireland Act 1998.

The first annual report, published today, covers the 12-month period to 18 September 2004. The report sets out the steps that have been taken to establish the IMC in accordance with the agreement between the two Governments.

The report refers to the two IMC reports published in the reporting period, and describes the actions taken as a consequence of those reports. The various documents and reports referred to in my annual report are all in the public domain.

The IMC continues to fulfil an important and valuable role in Northern Ireland and I am grateful to the Commissioners for their dedication and efforts to date.

TRADE AND INDUSTRY

DTI Five Year Programme

The Secretary of State for Trade and Industry (Ms Patricia Hewitt): The Department of Trade and Industry five-year programme, "Creating Wealth from Knowledge", was published today. Copies have been placed in the Libraries of both Houses and are available from the DTI web site at: www.dti.gov.uk/fiveyearprogramme.html.

On 18 September 2003 I published the DTI strategy, setting out the measures which my Department will take to raise productivity in the UK and achieve our vision of prosperity for all. The five-year programme reaffirms the priorities of the DTI Strategy. It sets out how the UK will develop a strong, modern knowledge-based economy which can meet the challenges posed by the rapidly emerging economies and new technologies.

The five-year programme recognises that we are building on solid foundations. Living standards have gone up, on average, by almost 3 per cent. a year, since 1997. For the first time in nearly half a century the UK has the best growth and employment record of the G7, and we have overtaken France to become the fourth largest economy in the world. However, our world is undergoing a transformation; China is set to be the largest economy in the world within a generation; India produces 3 million highly skilled graduates a year; the new central and eastern European democracies, with wage costs which are 10 per cent. of ours, have joined the EU. In order for the UK to maintain, and build on our strong economic position, we will have to respond to this changing environment.

The five-year programme argues that innovation through the application of science and technology, with highly skilled people, is the key to our country's future prosperity. In the modern world, the countries that create a climate where innovation flourishes will succeed. Those that do not will struggle. The UK already has many strengths to succeed: world class universities; a tradition of science and research; a dynamic and flexible labour market; and world-beating businesses which make use of new technologies and provide high value-added services.

My Department is at the cutting edge of our country's ambition to create wealth from knowledge. Our five-year programme outlines the means by which we will achieve this, working with other Departments, business, trade unions and other partners at home, in Europe and globally. It sets out the policies needed, over the next five-years, to stimulate the industries and jobs of the future through science and innovation; to create new partnerships with industry to promote enterprise; to delivery new approach to regulation; and to lead the drive for reform in Europe.

WORK AND PENSIONS

Building on New Deal

The Minister for Work (Jane Kennedy): In June this year we announced the publication of a paper "Building on New Deal: Local Solutions Meeting Individual Needs", setting out the Government's strategy for building on the success of our employment programmes. Today, I am announcing the locations for building on new deal prototypes.

We have achieved significant success in our new deal programmes, helping over a million people into work. We are determined to build on this achievement to deliver more support for those people who face the most difficult barriers to work. Building on new deal will give personal advisers and local managers greater flexibility, allowing them to provide tailored support better to meet the needs of individuals and of local labour markets. It will also give them more scope to work in partnership with employers and other agencies to tackle local problems that prevent more people moving from benefit dependency to work.

We will test these flexibilities from late 2005 in 11 Jobcentre Plus prototype districts. The prototypes will provide valuable practical experience of how advisers and managers use their flexibilities. We will be using the lessons learned to determine how best, and when, to extend these improvements nationally.

We will be working with the devolved Administrations, our private and voluntary sector partners, employers and other organisations to successfully deliver this new approach.

The building on new deal approach will be tested in the following Jobcentre Plus districts:

Ayrshire, Dumfries, Galloway and Inverclyde
[—Inverclyde from April 2006]
Buckinghamshire and Oxfordshire
Calderdale and Kirklees
Cardiff and Vale
Cheshire and Warrington
Cornwall
Norfolk
Northamptonshire
North East London
The Marches
Gateshead and South Tyneside [—from April 2006]

Written Ministerial Statements

Thursday 18 November 2004

CULTURE, MEDIA AND SPORT

Television Licence Fee

The Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport (Tessa Jowell): The television licence fee settlement announced by the Government in February 2000 provides for changes in the licence fee of RPI plus 1.5 per cent. for each year from 2000–01 to 2006–07. This settlement is designed to enable the BBC to provide a strong and distinctive schedule of high quality programmes and remain at the forefront of broadcasting technology. The settlement includes a requirement for the corporation to raise over £1 billion through efficiency savings and increased income over the same period.

Application of the RPI figure of 3.1 per cent. for the year to September 2004, plus 1.5 per cent, to the current unrounded licence fees produces new rounded totals of £126.50 for a colour licence and £42.00 for a black and white licence. The necessary regulations to bring these fees into force will be laid before the House in due course. The changes will come into effect from the 1 April next year.

DEFENCE

Defence Training Review

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Defence (Mr. Ivor Caplin): I am now able to update the House on the defence training review (DTR) following the initial statement by my right hon. Friend the Minister for the Armed Forces on 25 November 2002, *Official Report*, columns 1–2WS. The process to determine the most appropriate and cost effective means of delivering rationalised specialist training has been completed, and we have now issued invitations to negotiate (ITNs) to the shortlisted bidders.

The DTR rationalisation programme will modernise and improve specialist training by rationalising training delivery and facilities on defence rather than single service lines and through the more efficient use of a reduced training estate. A partnering arrangement with industry is envisaged to take this programme forward. In addition to confirming the significant benefits of better accommodation, improved utilisation of training facilities, and more modern specialist training delivery, discussions with industry and stakeholders have also identified the scope for economies of scale through the packaging of individual training-streams. We propose two contractual packages, comprising:

Package 1:

Aeronautical Engineering, Electro-Mechanical Engineering and Communication and Information Systems

Package 2:

Logistics, Police and Personnel Administration and Security, Languages, Intelligence and Photography

By consolidating training activity on a reduced number of sites we expect to achieve significant savings through a more cost-effective use of a reduced training estate, including the disposal of a number of surplus sites.

We have sought proposals that capture our requirement for flexibility, joint working and continuous improvement, in terms of quality and cost, appropriate incentives and transfer of risk.

The next step will be for bidders to develop their proposals, and we expect to receive these by 16 September and 17 October 2005. Decisions on the locations for these rationalised defence training establishments will follow the evaluation of these proposals, and selection of the preferred bidder for each package.

This is one of the Department's major change programmes and we recognise the need to keep the personnel potentially affected informed of developments. We will continue to consult fully with the trade unions.

DEPUTY PRIME MINISTER

Local Government Finance

The Minister for Local and Regional Government (Mr. Nick Raynsford): On 19 May 2004, the Office of the Deputy Prime Minister published a consultation paper asking for views on options for the principles to be used in amending the 2003–04 local government finance report and the 2004–05 local government finance report. Responses to this paper were invited from local government and other interested parties, by 10 August.

Following analysis of the consultation responses, we are now publishing full details of our proposals for the 2003–04 amending report. A summary analysis of responses received to the consultation has also been published today. Copies of all related documents have been placed in the Vote Office and the Library of the House.

This announcement launches a further period of consultation on the amending report for 2003–04. The consultation period will end on the same date as the forthcoming consultation on proposals for the 2005–06 local government finance settlement, the date for which will be announced in due course. This will allow local authorities some additional time to consider the effects of the amending report in their budgeting proposals.

After consideration of the views expressed by local authorities in consultation, I have decided to postpone the issuing of the amending report for 2004–05 until next year. This will ensure that all possible revisions to the data used in the 2004–05 settlement will be included.

HOME DEPARTMENT

Police Authorities (Amended Grant Allocations)

The Minister for Crime Reduction, Policing and Community Safety (Ms Hazel Blears): I have today placed in the Library a copy of the draft police grant report (England and Wales) 2003–04 (amending report 2004–05). The Minister for Local and Regional Government, my right hon. Friend the Member for Greenwich and Woolwich (Mr. Raynsford), has previously announced to the House that there would be an amending report for 2003–04 this year to take account of changes to Office for National Statistics population data. A consultation exercise by the Office of the Deputy Prime Minister ran from 19 May to 10 August 2004.

This announcement launches a further period of consultation on the amending report for 2003–04. The consultation period will end on the same date as the forthcoming consultation on proposals for the 2005–06 police and local government finance settlements to be put before Parliament shortly. This will allow local police authorities some additional time to consider the effects of the amending report in their budgeting proposals. My right hon. Friend the Minister for Local and Regional Government will make a statement in due course about the Government's proposals for local government finance in 2005–06. Authorities may wish to take this into account in considering their response to this consultation.

After consideration of the views already expressed by police and other local authorities in the consultation, the issue of the amending report for 2004–05 has been postponed until next year. This will ensure that all possible revisions to the data used in the 2004–05 settlement will be included.

Amended allocations for each police authority against original allocations are set out in the table below.

Police Authority	*2003–04 Original Allocation[1] £m*	*2003–04 Amended Allocation[1] £m*	*Change between original and amended 2003–04 £m*	*%*
English Shire forces				
Avon & Somerset	157.1	157.1	0.0	0.0%
Bedfordshire	60.1	59.9	−0.2	−0.3%
Cambridgeshire	71.1	71.2	0.1	0.2%
Cheshire	103.9	104.1	0.2	0.2%
Cleveland	84.1	84.2	0.2	0.2%
Cumbria	57.7	57.5	−0.2	−0.4%
Derbyshire	97.9	97.9	0.0	0.0%
Devon & Cornwall	161.5	161.5	0.0	0.0%
Dorset	61.6	61.6	0.0	0.0%
Durham	81.5	81.1	−0.4	−0.5%
Essex	155.9	155.9	0.0	0.0%
Gloucestershire	57.0	57.0	0.0	0.0%
Hampshire	184.5	184.5	0.0	0.0%
Hertfordshire	101.5	101.5	0.0	0.0%
Humberside	110.9	111.2	0.2	0.2%
Kent	176.8	176.8	0.0	0.0%
Lancashire	177.1	177.5	0.4	0.2%
Leicestershire	98.8	98.5	−0.3	−0.3%
Lincolnshire	58.7	58.7	0.0	0.0%
Norfolk	79.6	79.1	−0.5	−0.6%
North Yorkshire	70.4	70.4	0.0	0.0%
Northamptonshire	62.2	62.4	0.1	0.2%
Nottinghamshire	123.6	123.0	−0.5	−0.4%
Staffordshire	105.8	105.8	0.0	0.0%
Suffolk	63.9	63.9	0.0	0.0%
Surrey	85.4	85.4	0.0	0.0%
Sussex	153.1	153.1	0.0	0.0%
Thames Valley	205.9	205.9	0.0	0.0%
Warwickshire	48.2	48.2	0.0	0.0%
West Mercia	104.4	104.4	0.0	0.0%
Wiltshire	58.7	58.6	−0.1	−0.2%
Total	3,218.8	3,217.8	−1.0	0.0%
English Metropolitan forces				
Greater Manchester	380.8	381.6	0.8	0.2%
Merseyside	240.5	241.0	0.5	0.2%
Northumbria	214.3	214.8	0.4	0.2%
South Yorkshire	172.3	171.3	−1.0	−0.6%
West Midlands	386.5	387.3	0.8	0.2%
West Yorkshire	289.4	290.0	0.6	0.2%
Total	1,683.8	1,686.0	2.2	0.1%
London forces				
GLA—Police	1,764.1	1,768.3	4.2	0.2%
City of London	96.2	96.2	0.0	0.0%
Total	1,860.3	1,864.5	4.2	0.2%
English Total	6,762.9	6,768.3	5.4	0.1%

Police Authority	*2003–04 Original Allocation*[1] *£m*	*2003–04 Amended Allocation*[1] *£m*	*Change between original and amended 2003–04* *£m*	*%*
Welsh forces				
Dyfed-Powys	49.3	49.3	0.0	0.0%
Gwent	69.6	69.3	−0.3	−0.4%
North Wales	73.3	73.1	−0.2	−0.3%
South Wales	163.0	163.0	0.0	0.0%
Welsh total	355.2	354.7	−0.5	−0.1%
TOTAL	7,118.1	7,123.0	4.9	0.1%

Notes:

1. Grant includes principal Home Office Police Grant, ODPM/WAG Revenue Support Grant and National Non Domestic Rates, as calculated under the Local Government Finance Report (England) and Local Government Finance Report (Wales). Figures are rounded to the nearest £100k and percentages rounded to one decimal point. Grant includes the effects of floors and ceilings.
2. RSG figures for the City are allocated to the Common Council of the City of London as a whole in respect of all its functions. The City is in the Education floors and ceilings group and received a ceiling settlement of 8%.
3. Welsh figures include Home Office specific grant floor payments for Dyfed-Powys and South Wales.

NORTHERN IRELAND

North/South Implementation Bodies

The Secretary of State for Northern Ireland (Mr. Paul Murphy): I have today placed in the Library papers relating to decisions that have been taken during the period 6 July 2004 to 30 September 2004 which relate to the North/South Implementation Bodies and Tourism Ireland Ltd under the terms of the exchange of notes of 19 November 2002 (Cmnd 5708).

Decisions that have been taken during the period 6 July 2004 to 30 September 2004 which relate to the North/South Implementation Bodies and Tourism Ireland under the terms of the exchange of notes of 19 November 2002 (Cmnd 5708):

Foyle Carlingford and Irish Lights Sector

IP/FCILC 12—Foyle, Carlingford and Irish Lights Sector. Remuneration of staff and conditions of service.

IP/FCILC13—Foyle Area and Carlingford Area (close seasons for angling) (Amendment) Regulations 2004.

Food Safety Sector

IP/FS 9—Food Safety Promotion Board.

Remuneration of staff and conditions of service.

The North/South Language Body

IP/LAN 15—Irish Language and Ulster-Scots Agency. Remuneration and other conditions of the chief executive of the Ulster-Scots Agency.

IP/LAN 16—Ulster-Scots Agency in-year bid for additional funding.

Trade and Business Development Sector

IP/TB7—Remuneration of staff and conditions of service. (Inter*Trade*Ireland)

IP/TB 8—Inter*Tråde*Ireland. (Annual Report and Accounts for 2003.)

Tourism Sector

IP/TOU 14—Framework for determination of starting salaries of staff in North/South Implementation Bodies/ Tourism Ireland (except chief executives).

Inland Waterways Sector

IP/WI 7—Remuneration of staff and conditions of service. (Waterways Ireland.)

Political Parties, Elections and Referendums Act

The Minister of State, Northern Ireland Office (Mr. John Spellar): I made a statement on 6 May on the review of the Political Parties, Elections and Referendums Act 2000 (Disapplication of Part IV for Northern Ireland Parties) Order 2001, and I announced to the House that I would report back on developments following further consultation on the issues involved.

The Government have now concluded in the light of lengthy consultations with the parties and the Irish Government that it would not be appropriate to move away from the current disapplication as soon as next February, and that the current arrangements should be extended for a further two years. It is clear that concerns about intimidation remain across the community. And there is a range of complex technical issues that will need to be fully worked through with the Irish Government before we are in a position to legislate in a way that takes account of the particular role of the Irish Republic in the political life of Northern Ireland. The Northern Ireland parties will also need some time to adjust to any new arrangements.

This will take some time and require detailed discussions with the political parties, the Irish Government and the Electoral Commission. However, the Government are determined that there should be a move to greater transparency in the political donation arrangements in Northern Ireland. The Government have no wish to return to Parliament to seek any further extensions of this disapplication. So I have today invited the parties formally to submit to me by the end of March 2005 proposals for a reformed system.

PRIME MINISTER

Ministerial Committees of the Cabinet

The Prime Minister (Mr. Tony Blair): I have placed a copy of the current list of Cabinet Committees, their full membership and terms of reference in the Libraries of both Houses. Details have also been updated on the Cabinet Office website.

TRADE AND INDUSTRY

Commission for Equality and Human Rights

The Secretary of State for Trade and Industry (Ms Patricia Hewitt): The Commission for Equality and Human Rights (CEHR) will be a champion of equality and human rights and a key step towards realising our vision of a fairer, more cohesive and prosperous Britain based on mutual respect and understanding.

In May we launched the White Paper "Fairness for All: A New Commission for Equality and Human Rights", (Cm 6185) setting out our vision for the CEHR. The White Paper stimulated a wide-ranging debate that showed the strong interest in our proposals from all sides. We are grateful for the many high quality responses received, which have helped shape and refine our proposals. We have given them very careful consideration.

We have today published the Government's response to the comments made on the White Paper, which has been placed, together with a list of respondents in the Libraries of both Houses. Copies of individual responses are available from the Department of Trade and Industry Library.

The Government welcome the general support for our proposals, and especially for the foundations of equality, human rights and good relations that will underpin the CEHR. We note the strong welcome given too to the contribution the CEHR will make in Scotland and Wales, the duty on the CEHR to involve stakeholders and the public as it develops its plans, the proposals for regional arrangements and the distinct arrangements for the CEHR's work on disability. Employers welcomed the emphasis on working in partnership with business, and better access through the CEHR to advice on all areas of equality law. The potential benefits to small and medium sized enterprises were particularly noted.

The Government recognise that some groups, especially black and minority ethnic communities, have reservations about the proposals, and are pledged to maintain dialogue with them so as to find a basis for the CEHR in which all key interests can share. The new approaches set out in the Government's response demonstrate that we have been listening to all stakeholders including BME communities over recent months and working closely with the Commission for Racial Equality (CRE).

The Government confirm our intention, set out in the White Paper, to proceed with legislation to establish the CEHR as soon as parliamentary time allows, but as a result of consultation, with some important improvements, set out below, on the White Paper proposals.

We intend to legislate too to introduce provisions to outlaw discrimination in the provision of goods, facilities and services, and are giving consideration to including public functions, and a general framework to introduce a duty on public bodies to promote equality of opportunity between women and men and to prohibit sex discrimination in the exercise of public functions.

New approaches

The CEHR's fundamental objectives

Our vision for the core purpose of the CEHR, is to:

build and nurture respect for equality, diversity and human rights

work towards compliance with equality and human rights legislation

promote good relations between communities.

These are balanced, interlinked roles, each underlining a fundamental aspect of the CEHR's work. Each is critically important in helping deliver a fairer society, in which everyone has the chance to fulfil their potential and be treated with respect and dignity.

Within this, the CEHR's work will comprise three pillars of equal importance: equality and diversity, human rights and good relations. These are mutually reinforcing and together will create a new framework to challenge prejudice and discrimination.

Equality and diversity, human rights and good relations

The CEHR will promote an inclusive vision of equality while respecting the specific experiences of discrimination of different groups. It will work to tackle discrimination and build new understandings of equality as key to a flourishing society, working both through influencing attitudes and practice and through the use of its enforcement powers. While effective promotional work by the CEHR will lead to improved compliance with the law, the Government recognise that the CEHR's enforcement powers are an essential element of its role and expect it to use them effectively.

Promoting a culture of respect for human rights will be at the heart of the CEHR's work. The CEHR will promote protection, awareness and understanding of human rights in society generally. It will bring a step change in raising public bodies' awareness of their obligations under the Human Rights Act and supporting them to achieve compliance.

The Government believe that the CEHR's role in promoting good relations between different communities will help contribute to a more cohesive society based on shared core values and a new sense of British identity. It will be particularly important to build on the CRE's good relations work and we intend that the CEHR's statutory duties in this area should give priority to work with race and faith communities, while encouraging the CEHR to work more broadly where it will add value. We will ensure too that the CEHR's powers give it an explicit remit to combat prejudice and work to reduce crime affecting particular communitiesgroups, such as hate crime and crimes of incitement to hatred.

Consulting and involving

Respondents warmly welcomed the White Paper's emphasis on the CEHR reaching out to stakeholder communities and involving them in all facets of its work—supported by the proposed statutory duty to consult on its strategic plan. We look to the CEHR to develop innovative means to secure public involvement and ensure that marginalised groups and communities are given a voice.

A duty to monitor progress

Respondents shared our vision of the CEHR as a driver of change towards a fairer society, and it will be important to be able to assess systemic progress towards this goal. We therefore intend to place on the CEHR a specific duty to monitor progress towards broad equality and human rights goals by publishing a periodic "state of the nation" report, which will track progress on a range of indicators. This will provide a powerful, objective means to show where effort needs to be directed and to measure success. To deliver this, the CEHR will need to develop a comprehensive information base across the strands, informed by its own research, and other existing data sources. This will reinforce the call in "Fairness for All" for the CEHR to develop a strong evidence base to underpin its work.

The CEHR's powers and duties

The CEHR's powers and duties need to support its role as a modern, effective regulator, working robustly for compliance with the law, and its role as an agent for change. While the powers and duties proposed in the White Paper were generally welcomed, many valuable proposals were made to enable the CEHR to carry out its mission better. New powers relating to its equality and human rights remit, which will provide a tailored, flexible set of tools to drive up good practice and ensure compliance, are set out below. New powers to supporting its good relations duties, including combating crime and prejudice, have been described above.

Supporting cases

Supporting court or tribunal cases under the equality legislation will be a key function of the CEHR, as it is for the existing commissions. While the White Paper proposed some criteria to guide the CEHR in making decisions on which cases to support, we recognise the strength of views expressed that the CEHR needs complete discretion in making these decisions. Accordingly, we no longer intend to include any criteria for case support in legislation, so providing more flexibility than the current discrimination statutes allow. We expect however the CEHR to consult on and make clear the criteria it will use in practice.

As well the CEHR's direct support to individuals, there will be important benefits from its work with other advice giving organisations to equip them better to provide advice and support on discrimination and human rights issues.

"Fairness for All" sought views on whether the CEHR should be able to continue to support cases which draw on both discrimination and human rights arguments once the discrimination arguments have fallen away. The Government agree that provision should be made for the CEHR to be able to provide such support but believes that experience should be gained first of the number and nature of cases coming forward. We intend therefore to include in legislation an order-making power that would allow this power to be conferred.

We can clarify that the CEHR will be able to bring proceedings in its own name against persons committing acts of unlawful advertising, instructions and pressure to discriminate, maintaining the current powers, though this was not explicitly stated in "Fairness for All".

Inquiries and investigations

We note the concern of many respondents that the CEHR's powers of inquiry and investigation should cover the full range of options available to the existing commissions, and provide a full and flexible set of tools. We intend therefore to recast the powers proposed so that they carry forward all the powers conferred in current legislation.

This means that the CEHR will be able to investigate named bodies not only in respect of alleged unlawful discrimination or harassment, which as now will need to be triggered by some evidence, but also to conduct inquiries relating to any other area of the CEHR's responsibilities—though no sanctions could follow such an inquiry. This will give it a flexible tool to look into practice in equality, human rights and good relations as appropriate, and work with the bodies concerned for improvement on a partnership basis, on the lines of the current powers of the Disability Rights Commission (DRC) in respect of its remit and those of the Equal Opportunities Commission (EOC) and CRE set out in their founding statutes. However, the CEHR will not be able to make any finding of fact that a public authority has breached its obligations under section 6(1) of the Human Rights Act 1998, a finding that is properly made by a court or tribunal where necessary.

We also intend that there should be no restriction on the CEHR's powers to compel evidence in the course of an inquiry or investigation, in contrast to the earlier proposal to require the authorisation of the Secretary of State. This will enable the CEHR to act fully independently in its conduct of inquiries and investigations—subject to a safeguard that a person can apply to the court to have a request set aside if it appears unnecessary or unreasonable.

Public duty

The Government attach great importance to the CEHR's role in promoting and enforcing the duty on public bodies to promote race equality, and the duties proposed for disability and gender, so that public services are more responsive to diverse needs. As foreshadowed in "Fairness for All", we intend to introduce a power for the CEHR to assess a public body's performance of the duty, as a flexible, graduated means of securing improvement and as an alternative to compliance action enforceable through the courts. This will form part of the suite of inquiry and investigation powers. A range of outcomes might follow from an assessment, ranging from recommendations and an action plan, though formal enforcement could ensue if this is justified.

Disability

The White Paper proposed measures to ensure that CEHR takes full account of the distinctive nature of disability discrimination and provides disabled people with a clear voice.

The Disability Committee will have wide delegated powers in the areas of the CEHR's work that are unique to disability, covering discrimination, including the duty of "reasonable adjustment" relating to access to goods, facilities and services, education, and transport (Parts 3 and 4 of the Disability Discrimination Act as it will be amended by the Disability Discrimination Bill). The committee will also exercise the CEHR's functions in relation to Part 1 of the Act, which deals with the definition of disability. The CEHR will be obliged to involve the committee in its cross-cutting work on employment and on the public sector duties, and ensure that the committee's work is properly resourced. The committee will have powers to advise the CEHR on disability matters generally.

While welcoming these proposals, disabled people and their organisations have made clear the importance they attach to the continuation of the order-making power in the DRC Act to enable DRC to give assistance in proceedings brought otherwise than under the Disability Discrimination Act, where a person's disability is a key factor. The Government recognise the strength of this concern and will include an equivalent provision in the CEHR's legislation.

Scotland and Wales

Devolution has created a new British context for equality and human rights. The CEHR must be able to respond directly to the specific needs of each nation, taking account of the distinct legal, political and cultural framework in which both now operate.

We have responded to the strong calls for the CEHR in Scotland and Wales to have autonomy to set their own priorities. Statutory committees in Scotland and Wales will have responsibility for a wide range of activities, in particular for the CEHR's promotional work, and will be able to determine how these activities should be delivered. The CEHR board will also be charged with a duty to consult the national committees in respect of functions outside the committees' remit.

Religious discrimination

Concern was expressed about imbalances in the current legislative provision in the Race Relations Act, where it has emerged from case law that Jews and Sikhs are protected from discrimination but not other religions or beliefs. The need to afford protection from discrimination is felt particularly acutely by Muslims in Britain, and the case for doing so was powerfully made in the responses from the Muslim Council of Britain and the Commission for Racial Equality. Similar calls were heard in the course of the Government's strength in diversity consultation exercise.

The Government have long recognised these concerns. We have already taken action by way of the Employment Equality (Religion or Belief) Regulations 2003 to implement the religion or belief strands of the European Council Directive 2000/78/EC of 27 November 2000 in Great Britain which affords protection to all religions or beliefs in employment and occupation.

We intend to change the law to make religious discrimination unlawful in the provision of goods, facilities, services and premises, and are actively considering the extension of this protection to public functions. We intend to afford protection in this area from direct discrimination, indirect discrimination and victimisation.

The regional dimension

Empowering the CEHR to engage regionally and locally, so that it draws from experience "on the ground", will be an important facet of its work. We shall be working with all the interests concerned to develop the further the White Paper proposals for the CEHR to have a regional presence, which received a very positive response.

Equality legislation

Many stakeholders expressed concerns about imbalances in the current legislative provision for the different equality areas in their responses to the consultation on the CEHR. The Government have long recognised these concerns. We are beginning to consider the best mechanisms for reviewing the current discrimination legislation framework, as part of its continuing work in reviewing barriers to equality, taking into account the interests of the many different stakeholders who would be affected by any changes to the current position. The CEHR will clearly have an important role to play in this review and will separately be empowered to recommend changes to discrimination legislation as it sees fit.

Establishment of CEHR

The Government intend to appoint the Chair and Commissioners by 2006 so that the body will be up and running in 2007. A process of phased entry is anticipated for the existing commissions, with all of them being incorporated by 2008–09.

WORK AND PENSIONS

Ethnic Minority Employment Taskforce

The Minister for Work (Jane Kennedy): On 23 November we will be publishing the first yearly progress report of the ethnic minority employment taskforce.

The taskforce was set up in response to the Prime Minister's strategy unit report on ethnic minorities in the labour market and delivers the first cross-government ethnic minority employment strategy. The SU report arose out of concern that, in a strong labour market, people from an ethnic minority background are still facing formidable barriers to employment, as demonstrated by their employment rates.

As well as comprising Ministers from across government, the taskforce has representatives from the Commission for Racial Equality, the Trades Union Congress and the Confederation of British Industry—all of whom have contributed significantly to the development of our strategy and the first year's progress report.

This report will represent the first of three reporting stages, with the final report due in 2006. It will set out the evidence base for our ethnic minority employment strategy and the progress the taskforce has made in its first year towards delivering its objective that no one should be disadvantaged in their employment prospects because of their ethnicity.

The report will also demonstrate those areas that the taskforce will seek to develop further—highlighting the importance of doing more than just meeting the strategy unit recommendations. It will set out the Government's continuing commitment to reducing the ethnic minority employment gap and the issues and challenges that face us in achieving this goal.

Copies of the report will be placed in the Library on 23 November.

Unit Costs Targets 2004–05

The Secretary of State for Work and Pensions (Alan Johnson): I am pleased to be able to announce today performance targets in respect of the customer facing businesses of the Department for Work and Pensions: Jobcentre Plus, the Pension Service, the Disability and Carers Service and the Child Support Agency.

In line with the Department's public service agreement we are committed to improve the efficiency and effectiveness of our services. In order to demonstrate this we require our businesses to achieve published unit cost targets. The published targets are supported by a developing range of more detailed unit cost information used by operational managers.

The table below sets out 2004–05 targets for Jobcentre Plus, the Pension Service, the Disability and Carers Service and the Child Support Agency together with the actual unit costs and published targets for 2003–04.

	Definition	*2003–04 Actual* £	*2003–04 Target* £	*Target 2004–05* £
Jobcentre Plus	Benefit Processing Job Broking	11.30 57.98	10.20 64.60	*28.18 191.49
The Pension Service	Cost per customer	24.98	25.00	24.00
Disability and Carers Service	Cost per customer contact	131.74	138.13	132.15
The Child Support Agency	Cost per case	**209	184	***202

- * Jobcentre Plus has extended the cost base being measured by more than £1.1 billion compared with 2003–04 which means that the 2004–05 target is not directly comparable with the 2003–04 figures.
- ** A figure of £189 for 2003–04 CSA unit costs was published in the Agency's annual accounts earlier this year. Whilst actual costs were used in producing this figure, the caseload figure used was a forecast, as accurate information on out turn was not available at that time. A revised estimate for CSA unit costs based on actual caseload figures for March 2004 is published here.
- *** In 2003–04, the Child Support Agency's caseload proved to be lower than forecast, and the costs higher. The target for 2004–05 is therefore based on revised cost and caseload assumptions.

Written Answers to Questions

Monday 1 November 2004

INTERNATIONAL DEVELOPMENT

Afghanistan

Mr. Simmonds: To ask the Secretary of State for International Development what steps have been taken to encourage Afghan farmers to move from growing poppies to other food crops. [193437]

Mr. Gareth Thomas: DFID is supporting organisations that are working in a number of poppy growing provinces across Afghanistan, including Badakhshan, Kandahar and Helmand. These organisations, including the Aga Khan Foundation and the United Nations Food and Agriculture Organisation, are working with farmers to help them identify and try a range of legal crops, providing seeds, fertilizer and tools. However, crops alone are not the only way to help those involved in opium poppy farming to earn a legal income. These projects also work to identify and help with non-crop and off-farm opportunities, including help with animal rearing, improving animal welfare, and training in crafts such as tailoring.

Mr. Drew: To ask the Secretary of State for International Development what recent discussions he has had with the Revolutionary Association of the Women of Afghanistan on the possibility of helping with their funding. [195279]

Mr. Gareth Thomas: None.

China

Tom Brake: To ask the Secretary of State for International Development how much aid his Department has *(a)* pledged and *(b)* distributed to China since 1999. [194073]

Mr. Gareth Thomas: DFID does not make specific pledges of expenditure for country programmes. Since the Financial Year of 1999–2000, DFID has distributed £162,948,000 for development assistance in China. Further information and a breakdown by financial years is available in DFID's Statistics for International Development 2004 (Table 7.3). This is available on-line on the DFID website: http://www.dfid.gov.uk and will soon be available in the Library of the House.

Commission for Africa

Mr Ancram: To ask the Secretary of State for International Development what the budget is of the Government's Africa Commission; which Department oversees the budget; and what the criteria are governing expenditure. [195135]

Hilary Benn: The budget for the Commission for Africa is £5.9 million. This is met and overseen by the Department for International Development (DFID). It covers the cost of the Commissioners' travel on Commission business; the cost of Commission meetings; the cost of consultation and of analytical work in preparation of the Commission's report; and the cost of the Commission's Secretariat. All expenditures are made in line with the objectives and priorities of the Commission.

Consultants

Dr. Julian Lewis: To ask the Secretary of State for International Development how many consultancy firms or companies have been retained by the Department since June 2001; what the projects are for which each has been retained; and what the total is of the fees paid or incurred in each case. [193421]

Hilary Benn: The following table gives the number of consultancy companies and of individual consultants awarded DFID contracts in each of the last three years, together with the value of contracts awarded. The purposes of contracts are set out in the list of 'Contracts Issued 1 April 1999 to 31 March 2004', which has been placed in the Libraries of the House.

	Number of consultancy companies awarded contracts	*Number of individual consultants awarded contracts*	*Total value of contracts awarded (£ million)*
2001–02	338	176	282
2002–03	276	131	262
2003–04	245	123	228

These figures do not include lower value contracts issued by DFID's overseas offices, details of which cannot be provided without incurring a disproportionate cost.

Mobile Phones

Mr. Prisk: To ask the Secretary of State for International Development how many mobile phones were used by *(a)* Ministers and special advisers and *(b)* officials in his Department in each year since 1997; how many were (i) lost and (ii) stolen; and what their cost was. [191433]

Hilary Benn: Over the last two years, the number of mobile phones in use in the UK, and their costs (including equipment, call charges and access charges) are as follows:

		(£000)
2003–04	230	89,500
2004–05 to date:	434	92,800

These figures include the two mobile phones for Ministers and two for the Special Advisers.

Mobile phones were not managed under a central contract prior to this period, and therefore information for earlier years (and information on mobile phones in overseas offices) is not readily available and could not be provided without incurring a disproportionate cost.

The total number of mobile phones lost or stolen since 1997 is 28.

New Deal

Dr. Julian Lewis: To ask the Secretary of State for International Development how many personnel the Department has recruited under the New Deal in each of the past five years. [194855]

Mr. Gareth Thomas: I refer the hon. Member to the reply given by the Minister for the Cabinet Office on 25 October 2004, *Official Report* column 1052W.

Press Releases

Pete Wishart: To ask the Secretary of State for International Development how many press releases have been issued by his Department in each month of 2004; and if he will make a statement. [195364]

Mr. Gareth Thomas: The number of press releases issued each month by DFID Press Office in London in 2004 is as follows:

	Number
January	10
February	6
March	13
April	12
May	10
June	8
July	16
August	6
September	11
October	10
Total	102

Special Advisers

Matthew Taylor: To ask the Secretary of State for International Development how many unpaid special advisers the Department has; what their names are; and which Government *(a)* bodies, *(b)* committees and *(c)* strategy groups each unpaid adviser (i) belongs to, (ii) advises and (iii) works alongside. [194081]

Mr. Gareth Thomas: I refer the hon. Member to the answer given by my hon. Friend the Minister for the Cabinet Office on 28 October 2004, *Official Report*, columns 1380–470W.

LEADER OF THE HOUSE

European Travel Allowance

Mr. Allen: To ask the Leader of the House what use hon. and right hon. Members have made of their facility to visit European institutions in each of the years for which figures are available; and what his policy is on encouraging hon. and right hon. Members to make fuller use of the provision. [193598]

Mr. Woolas: During 2003–04 200 hon. Members claimed against the European travel allowance for a total of 272 journeys to European institutions and agencies and the Parliaments of EFTA countries, EU member countries, candidate and applicant countries. 50 Members made two visits each and 11 made three visits each. For information about earlier years I refer the hon. Member to the answers given by my right hon. Friend the Leader of the House on 15 July 2003, *Official Report*, column 189W, and on 1 September 2003, *Official Report*, column 709W.

My right hon. Friend the Leader of the House has invited the Modernisation Committee to consider the operation of this scheme, as part of its inquiry into the Scrutiny of European Business, and in particular whether it would be practicable within the existing budget to enable those Members who have regular and valuable contact through approved visits to do so more than three times.

SOLICITOR-GENERAL

Domestic Violence

Miss McIntosh: To ask the Solicitor-General what guidance has been given on the level of evidence needed to bring a successful prosecution for offences of domestic violence. [193877]

The Solicitor-General: The Code for Crown Prosecutors requires prosecutors in all cases to be satisfied that there is a realistic prospect of conviction and that it is in the public interest to prosecute. There is also CPS Policy and Guidance on prosecuting cases of domestic violence. Both documents make reference to the standard of evidence needed for successful prosecutions. The Code for Crown Prosecutors and the Policy and Guidance on Domestic Violence are currently being revised to reflect recent legislative and procedural changes and are due to be published soon.

New Deal

Dr. Julian Lewis: To ask the Solicitor-General how many personnel the Department has recruited under the New Deal in each of the past five years. [194028]

The Solicitor-General *[holding answer given 26 October 2004]:* I refer the hon. Member to the answer given by my hon. Friend the Minister of State for the Cabinet Office on 25 October 2004, *Official Report*, column 1052W.

ENVIRONMENT, FOOD AND RURAL AFFAIRS

Magpies

Mr. Hurst: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what assessment she has made of the effects of magpies on the populations of song-birds in urban areas and the fringes of urban areas. [188547]

Mr. Bradshaw: The Magpie is known to take songbirds although the available evidence suggests that this does not have a significant adverse effect on their population levels. Defra issues a general licence allowing year round control of Magpies, and a small number of other species, to conserve wild birds. This licence may be used by authorised persons only and the landowner's permission must be obtained. This licence is among a number of general licences relating to birds that is currently the subject of a consultation exercise.

There is no evidence to suggest that Magpies or birds of prey have played a major role in the declines of songbirds. The population status of songbird and farmland bird species is monitored and Defra is aware of declines in certain species.

By contrast a Mammal Society survey suggests that 275 million wild animals (including birds) are killed each year by Britain's estimated 8 million cats.

Public Perception Survey

Norman Lamb: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs (1) what surveys of public perceptions of her Department and of its areas of responsibility have taken place over the last 12 months; what the *(a)* title and *(b)* nature of these surveys was; what the findings of each survey were; where these findings have been published; what the cost of such surveys was; and if she will make a statement and place copies of the surveys in the Library; [176951]

(2) when she will reply to question 176951, tabled on 7 June, on surveys of public perceptions of her role. [188899]

Alun Michael: In April 2004 the Communications Directorate of Defra commissioned an omnibus tracking survey to measure public awareness of Defra, knowledge of its responsibilities and opinions on its performance.

The aim of the research was to provide a benchmark from which to track subsequent shifts in public awareness and opinion. The results will act as point of reference from which views on the Department's performance in the public arena and will help to identify where improvements need to be made.

I am placing a copy of the research in the Library of the House. The total cost of the omnibus tracking survey was £14,950 (excluding VAT). I apologise for the delay in answering these questions.

Supermarket Code of Practice

Andrew George: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what recent assessment she has made of the impact on farmers of the Supermarkets Code of Practice. [190125]

Alun Michael: The supermarkets Code of Practice seeks to regulate a limited number of practices engaged in by the major supermarkets in their dealings with their direct suppliers, relatively few of whom are farmers.

Responsibility for the Code rests with the Office of Fair Trading (OFT). In February OFT published a report of their review of the operation of the code. This can be found on their website at www.oft.gov.uk/news/press + releases/2004.htm.

The review concluded that there was a widespread belief among suppliers that the Code was not working properly, but it found no hard evidence for this belief. Given the reluctance of suppliers to provide specific evidence of alleged breaches of the Code, the OFT has commissioned a focused audit of the four supermarkets bound by the Code. The purpose of the audit is to establish hard facts about compliance with the Code as a basis for any further action. The OFT hopes to publish a report of the audit by the end of the year.

Warm Front Programme

Norman Baker: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs (1) how many leaflets have been produced and sent this year relating to the Warm Front programme; and what the cost of this exercise has been; [192301]

(2) what criteria were used in deciding to which addresses leaflets relating to the Warm Front programme grants should be sent; [192302]

(3) how many leaflets relating to the Warm Front programme she estimates have been delivered to addresses which *(a)* do and *(b)* do not qualify for grant status in 2004. [192303]

Mr. Morley: The Warm Front scheme managers, Powergen Warm Front Ltd. and Eaga Partnership are responsible for all marketing to promote the scheme.

A range of marketing techniques are used to reach those who may be eligible for assistance. This includes direct marketing, local and national campaigns and advertising through leaflets in various facilities such as doctors surgeries, libraries and community centres. The Scheme Managers also use range of techniques to target those areas likely to contain a higher proportion of eligible households. The success rate of the various marketing strategies are monitored by the Scheme Managers to assess their impact.

Detailed information on the delivery of these activities is commercially sensitive.

WALES

Consultants

Dr. Julian Lewis: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales how many consultancy firms or companies have been retained by the Department since June 2001; what the projects are for which each has been retained; and what the total is of the fees paid or incurred in each case. [193426]

Mr. Touhig: I refer the hon. Member to the answer given by the Secretary of State for Wales on 12 March 2003, *Official Report*, column 129W.

Since the beginning of financial year 2004–05 the Wales Office have used only one consultant firm to provide floor plans, at a cost of £569.

Ministers' Private Offices

Mr. Prisk: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what the running costs of Ministers' private offices in his Department have been in each year since 1997. [191375]

Mr. Hain: I refer the hon. Member to the answer my predecessor gave on 15 April 2002, *Official Report*, column 750W.

The Wales Office annual report was published in April 2004 as Cm 6228, instead of a departmental report. It is available in the Library and gives information on Wales Office running costs.

Press Officers

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales how many press officers the Department has employed in each of the past five years. [195271]

Mr. Touhig: I refer the hon. Member to the answer given to him on 3 June 2003, *Official Report*, column 314.

TRANSPORT

Air Cargo

Patrick Mercer: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport (1) what volume of cargo arriving at each British airport has been *(a)* inspected and *(b)* searched in each year since 2001; [194706]

(2) how many staff have been employed to inspect and search air cargo at each airport in each year since 2001. [194711]

Charlotte Atkins: Responsibility for the security of cargo flown to UK airports from outside the country rests with the relevant authorities in the country of export. Cargo that is to be carried on any commercial flight originating in the UK, whether being flown to a domestic destination or internationally, must be screened to a standard sufficient to ensure that it is safe. The screening processes can be carried out either by the airline, or by a regulated agent in the vicinity of the airport, or by exporters whose security arrangements have been approved by DfT-accredited independent validators.

The Department carries out regular visits to cargo agents and airlines to monitor compliance with the regulations.

Air Navigation Services

Mr. Stringer: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what plans he has to change the basis for charging airlines for air navigation services; and if he will make a statement. [194537]

Charlotte Atkins: The Single European Sky (SES) regulations, which came into force on the 20 April 2004, require the development of a common charging scheme for the recovery of the costs of air navigation services provided to airlines and other airspace users. An implementing rule to specify the details of the new charging scheme is under development by the European Commission but has not yet been finalised.

Airport Security

Patrick Mercer: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport if he will make a statement on security inspections undertaken at British airports. [194704]

Charlotte Atkins: The Department carries out an extensive programme of aviation security compliance monitoring activity. This includes announced and unannounced inspections and tests of the security procedures implemented by industry at our direction. We seek corrective action from industry where necessary.

Commercial Cargoes

Mr. Sanders: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what powers he can seek to exercise with EU agreement to prevent the transportation of commercial cargoes within EU waters. [190627]

Mr. Jamieson: EU waters do not exist, as the territorial waters adjacent to the European coast belong to the states concerned.

Cycling

Bob Spink: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what estimate he has made of the number of people in the UK who used a pedal cycle at least once a week in the last period for which figures are available. [194913]

Charlotte Atkins: It is estimated from the National Travel Survey for 2003 that 8 million residents of Great Britain aged 5 and over (14 per cent.) used a bicycle at least once a week.

Gatwick Express

Mr. Yeo: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport if he will make a statement on his plans for the Gatwick Express franchise. [194643]

Mr. Darling: The Strategic Rail Authority (SRA) is consulting on the Brighton Main Line Route Utilisation Strategy, which includes possible changes to non-stop London Victoria to Gatwick airport services. The current Gatwick Express franchise runs until 2011 and any change would be subject to commercial negotiation between the National Express Group and the SRA.

M6 Toll Expressway

Mr. Kidney: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport how many representations he has received in response to his consultation on a proposed toll M6 Expressway. [193817]

Mr. Jamieson: As from the closing date of responses for the M6 Expressway consultation, we had received approximately 5,260 responses as well as a number of petitions that amount to around 3,000 signatures.

Mark 1 Trains

Mr. Yeo: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport if he will take steps to ensure that all Mark 1 slam door trains from the South of England rail network are withdrawn from service by 30 November 2005. [194712]

Mr. McNulty: The revised deadline recently set by the Health and Safety Executive for the withdrawal of Mark 1 and vehicles from passenger service is 30 November 2005. In fact, we expect all Mark 1s to have been taken out of service ahead of that deadline.

Mr. Yeo: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what has caused the delay in the withdrawal of the Mark 1 slam door trains from the South of England rail network. [194645]

Mr. Darling: Power supplies to the south-of-the-Thames network are being upgraded to cater for new rolling stock, which draws more power than the Mark 1 trains it is replacing. The power upgrade project was not handled well by Railtrack but, the Strategic Rail Authority and Network Rail now have a firm grip on it. We expect it to be complete in good time to allow all Mark 1s to be removed from passenger service ahead of the deadline of November 2005 set by the Health and Safety Executive.

Motorcycle Direct Access Scheme

Lembit Öpik: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what plans he has for the future of the Motorcycle Direct Access Scheme; and if he will make a statement. [194509]

Mr. Jamieson: The Advisory Group on Motorcycling (AGM), which submitted its report to Government on 2 August, commented that since the majority of novice riders choose to pass their test via the Direct Access route, as a relatively fast route to big bike riding, it is timely for Government to consider a range of issues in reviewing its effectiveness. It also recommended that the Government seek to negotiate a third EC licensing Directive to retain UK subsidiarity, in so far as possible, over training and testing arrangements, and especially with respect to Direct Access. A copy of the report is lodged with the House.

The AGM conducted a five-year programme of work and its report includes wide-ranging suggestions and recommendations for the future of motorcycling. The future of Direct Access is just one of a range of issues on training and testing discussed by the AGM. We are reviewing these carefully in drawing up a national motorcycling strategy that we are aiming to have developed by the end of the year. Should that review lead to proposals for change, we would consult before implementing them. Our review will need to take account of the third licensing Directive. The Commission's proposals do include arrangements which member states will have to abide by on testing to gain a licence to ride a motorcycle. But we aim to achieve a Directive which furthers the interests of road safety in the UK, and allows maximum latitude for us, and other member states, to tailor future testing arrangements to suit our own needs, and especially in respect of Direct Access.

Night Flights

Mrs May: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what guidance the Government have given to the British Airports Authority on the membership of the BAA Consultative Committee on night flights; and if he will make a statement. [195200]

Charlotte Atkins: Separate consultative committees exist at BAA (and other) airports to discuss various matters relating to the management of each airport, including (but not limited to) environmental issues such as night flights. The Department issued revised non-statutory guidance on the constitution and operation of airport consultative committees in December 2003. This may be viewed on and downloaded from the Department's website:

www.dft.gov.uk/stellent/groups/dft_aviation/documents/page/dft_aviation_026254.hsp

Mrs May: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what research his Department has undertaken into the effects of sleep deprivation in the context of night flights. [195201]

Charlotte Atkins: There is no unique technical definition of sleep 'deprivation' but it is generally taken to mean substantial periods of reduced sleep duration over one or more nights. It is distinct from sleep 'disturbance' which is also variously defined, but in general can encompass both transient arousals from sleep, and longer-lasting awakenings.

The principal UK Government research in this area was the "Report of a Field Study of Aircraft Noise and Sleep Disturbance", published by the then Department of Transport in December 1992. This study, which followed earlier work based mainly on social surveys, focused mainly on objective disturbance to sleep rather than overall sleep deprivation, but was nevertheless able to conclude that:

> "Aircraft noise itself is most unlikely to increase sleep disturbance rates to the point at which after-effects upon health or performance would be noticeable" (p35)

A smaller-scale methodology trial was conducted for the Department in 1999 by ISVR[1] Southampton and others ("Aircraft Noise and Sleep-1999 UK Trial Methodology Study"—http://www.isvr.co.uk/environm/sleep.htm). This included laboratory as well as field investigation.

A review of research in this area was published on behalf of the then DETR in 2000 ("Adverse effects of night-time aircraft noise", NATS/DORA[2] R&D Report 9964). This discussed potential deprivation effects including reduction in total sleep duration, reduction in slow-wave sleep and sleep-fragmentation, and consequential next-day effects; but was again unable to determine that such phenomena occurred to any significant extent due to aircraft noise, although it noted that:

> " . . . Nevertheless, the possibility of noise-induced sleep loss cannot be ruled out in the case of especially sensitive people." (p9, para 2.26)

A summary of Government-sponsored research into aircraft noise and sleep disturbance is available on the DfT website:

http://www.dft.gov.uk/stellent/groups/dft_aviation/documents/page/dft_aviation_503578.hcsp

[1] Institute of Sound and Vibration Research.

[2] National Air Traffic Services/Department of Operational Research and Analysis. The relevant division is now the Environment Research and Consultancy Department of the Civil Aviation Authority (CAA/ERCD).

Pedestrian Crossings

Ann Winterton: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what estimate he has made of the cost of the Highways Agency's new specifications for upgrading puffin pedestrian crossings; and what the reasons are for the upgrading. [194380]

Mr. Jamieson: My Department estimates the additional cost of installing a new Puffin crossing compared with a new Pelican crossing to be approximately £2,500. This is due to additional items of equipment required for the crossing operation. The cost of converting an existing Pelican crossing to a Puffin crossing may be higher depending on local factors, and often equipment upgrades and other improvements are made at the same time. Local authorities are not obliged to change to Puffin crossings.

The Puffin crossing was developed in response to complaints arising from poor understanding and use of Pelican crossings by pedestrians and drivers, especially confusion caused by the flashing green man and flashing amber vehicle signals. With Puffin crossings, drivers are held at a red signal when pedestrians are crossing and the crossing time is automatically extended for slower pedestrians. The advantages for drivers are that the lights will change back to green sooner than at a Pelican crossing and they will not be stopped if pedestrians cross in a gap in the traffic before the signals change.

The Puffin crossing pedestrian signal is at the near-side of the road. This allows pedestrians to watch the traffic and the pedestrian signal simultaneously. The position of the near side signal is also helpful to visually impaired pedestrians who may not see clearly signals mounted at the far side of the road.

Port of Newhaven

Mr. Waterson: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what the levels of *(a)* vehicular and *(b)* pedestrian traffic using the Port of Newhaven have been in each of the last five years. [193906]

Mr. Jamieson: The available information is as follows:

Thousand

	Road goods vehicles and trailers	*Passenger cars and buses*	*Ferry passengers*
1998	24	136	621
1999	1	78	337
2000	—	73	313
2001	9	76	337
2002	24	78	379

Notes:

1. '—' less than half the final digit shown.
2. Ferry passenger figures include drivers of road goods vehicles buses and cars, accompanying passengers, and foot passengers. The figures include traffic both in and out of the port.

Port Police

Patrick Mercer: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport how many officers there have been in each port police force in each year since 2001. [194702]

Mr. Jamieson: We do not have a breakdown available for each of the last four years as the Port Authorities are not required to supply employment figures to the Department. However information collected by the Department showed that in 2003 the seven port police forces in England and Wales employed a total of 198 sworn-in officers (exclusive of civilian support staff). Figures for the individual ports were as follows.

Port	*Number*
Bristol	25
Dover	52
Falmouth	4
Felixstowe	27
Liverpool	65
Tees and Hartlepool	12
Tilbury	13

Patrick Mercer: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what plans he has to change the *(a)* powers, *(b)* remit and *(c)* number of port police forces. [194703]

Mr. Jamieson: We have no current plans to change the powers, remit or number of port police forces.

Public-Private Partnership Arbiter

Mr. Yeo: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport who funds the Office of the Public-Private Partnership Arbiter; and if he will make a statement on the future funding of the Office. [194644]

Mr. Darling: The PPP Arbiter is funded by grant in aid from the Department for Transport. The level of grant is agreed each year.

Rail Crossing Orders

Bob Spink: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport how many applications for rail crossing *(a)* extinguishment and *(b)* diversion orders have been (i) submitted and (ii) approved in each of the last five years. [194931]

Mr. McNulty: Applications for rail crossing extinguishment and diversion orders are made by rail infrastructure controllers to local highway authorities, who retain records locally.

Rail Security

Patrick Mercer: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport how many suspicious bags and packages have been inspected on *(a)* London Underground, *(b)* national rail services and *(c)* at railway stations in each year since 2001. [194710]

Mr. McNulty: The number of suspect packages that have been inspected for London Underground, national rail services and railway stations is as follows:

	Number
2000–01	312
2001–02	410
2002–03	302
2003–04	676

Regulation UN/ECE104

Mr. Drew: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport (1) if he will report on *(a)* discussions in and *(b)* outcomes of the recent meeting of the Working Party on Lighting and Light-signalling of the United Nations Economic Committee for Europe in respect to the German proposal to make Regulation UN/ECE 104 mandatory in UN/ECE 48; and if he will make a statement; [194675]

(2) pursuant to the answer of 16 July 2004, *Official Report*, column 1391W, on heavy goods vehicles, who has been awarded the contract to conduct a cost-benefit analysis of making ECE 104 mandatory; when he expects the report to be completed; when he expects to publish the final report; what the earliest date is that action could be taken to implement measures recommended by the report; and if he will make a statement. [194676]

Mr. Jamieson: My Department has awarded the contract to Ergonomics and Safety Research Ltd., part of Loughborough University. We expect the report to be completed and published by the end of February 2005. Any recommendations from the report would then be subject to consultation with interested parties in the UK.

Any requirement for UNECE Regulation 104 reflective contour marking tape to be fitted to new vehicles would have to be agreed and implemented at a European level.

At the recent meeting of the UNECE Working Group of technical experts on vehicle lighting ("ORE"), the delegates agreed to await the results of a cost-benefit analysis that is being carried out by the European Commission before deciding whether or not to adopt the proposal by Germany to mandate the installation of Regulation 104 tape on newly designed heavy vehicles.

A report of the discussions will be published on the UNECE website when it is available.

The proposal will be discussed again at the next GRE meeting scheduled for April 2005. If it were agreed at that meeting, then it could be applicable to new approvals under UNECE Regulation 48 no earlier than 1 July 2006.

As UNECE Regulation 48 is not mandatory in the UK for heavy vehicles, this would then require national legislation to require new vehicles to be fitted with the tape.

Road Noise

Mr. Fallon: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport how much has been spent by the Highways Agency on main road noise protection measures in each of the last five years; and how much is planned to be spent in each of the next three years. [193620]

Mr. Jamieson *[holding answer 25 October 2004]:* The Highways Agency invests in three separate noise protection measures. These are concrete road resurfacing, noise fencing and bunds, and secondary glazing. The total approximate cost of noise mitigation measures for the last five years is £163 million. The detailed breakdown of this figure is set out in the following tables.

In addition, new road schemes will have included noise mitigation measures within the scheme design. It is not possible to separate this element from the overall scheme costs.

Planned major maintenance schemes involving carriageway resurfacing now use lower noise materials.

Concrete resurfacing

£ million

	Cost
1999–2000	7.5
2000–01	6.0
2001–02	0
2002–03	50.1
2003–04	78.0
Total	141.6

Noise fencing and bunds

£ million

	Cost
1999–2000	[1]—
2000–01	3.6
2001–02	6.5
2002–03	5.9
2003–04	4.7
Total	20.7

[1] Separate data not available.

Secondary glazing

	Cost (£)
1999–2000	0
2000–01	3,400
2001–02	205,987
2002–03	121,363
2003–04	98,230
Total	428,980

Forward programmes of work are agreed on an annual basis and it is not possible to give an explicit indication of the amount to be spent on noise protection measures over the next three years.

Sea Containers

Patrick Mercer: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport how many sea containers have arrived at each British sea port in each year since 1997. [194698]

Mr. Jamieson: The available information is as follows:

Thousand

Port	*1997*	*1998*	*1999*	*2000*	*2001*	*2002*	*2003*
Aberdeen	[1]—	[1]—	[1]—	1	12	14	13
Belfast	55	59	60	61	55	57	64
Boston	[2]—	[2]—	[2]—	8	2	2	4
Bristol	10	11	14	16	25	29	30
Cardiff	[2]—	[2]—	[2]—	13	13	11	15
Clyde	9	9	12	14	17	18	23
Felixstowe	800	857	913	929	936	871	807

Thousand

Port	*1997*	*1998*	*1999*	*2000*	*2001*	*2002*	*2003*
Forth	32	32	33	40	40	47	53
Goole	[2]—	[2]—	[2]—	36	37	26	9
Grimsby and Immingham	79	80	86	21	23	53	36
Harwich	27	25	24	34	7	9	7
Hull	73	77	71	81	69	46	83
Ipswich	[1]—	1	3	6	12	18	19
Liverpool	152	156	163	167	159	148	168
London	172	205	234	194	243	280	301
Medway	129	165	160	162	165	172	161
Portsmouth	[1]—	[1]—	[1]—	[1]—	17	19	11
Southampton	296	279	301	346	371	403	425
Tees and Hartlepool	84	80	74	14	23	35	38
Tyne	10	12	12	7	14	16	13
Warrenpoint	8	9	8	8	7	8	5

[1] Less than half the final digit shown

[2] Not available

Note:

Information for 1997–99 is not directly comparable with subsequent years because of changes to the reporting system in 2000 (containers carried on ship by shipborne port to port trailers were included in 1997–99, but only partially included from 2000. The ports mainly affected by this change are Grimsby and Immingham, Tees and Hartlepool and London). Estimates have been made of the number of inwards containers in 1997–99, from inwards and outwards traffic combined.

Patrick Mercer: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport how many staff have been employed at each port of entry to inspect and search sea containers in each year since 2001. [194700]

Mr. Jamieson: All ports handling international traffic must meet Government set standards for security. However, the actual number of staff that are employed by a port is a commercial decision for the ports themselves. We therefore do not hold this information centrally.

Security (Clapham Junction)

Patrick Mercer: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport if he will make a statement on security procedures at Clapham Junction. [194708]

Mr. McNulty: All railways stations are required to comply with certain security standards as set out in the Department for Transport National Railways Security Programme and the Station Security Instruction issued on 27 May 2004 under the terms of the Railways Act 1993. It is not our practice to detail the required security measures or procedures at individual stations for obvious reasons.

Strategic Rail Authority

Mr. Yeo: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport when he will set a date for the abolition of the Strategic Rail Authority. [194652]

Mr. McNulty: The Secretary of State for Transport said at the time of the publication of the White Paper "The Future of Rail" (July 2004), that the Strategic Rail Authority would be wound up 'probably in the second half of next year'. The exact timing of the closure of the SRA is dependent on the necessary legislation being in place. The Government will introduce legislation as soon as Parliamentary time permits.

Vehicle Checks

Mr. McCabe: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport how many vehicle identity checks under the Vehicle (Crimes) Act 2001 have been recorded in each month since April 2003. [195054]

Mr. Jamieson: The number of vehicle identity checks undertaken each month since the scheme began in April 2003 are recorded in the table.

	Number of checks
2003–04	
April	2
May	243
June	902
July	1,798
August	1,846
September	2,564
October	3,184
November	3,030
December	2,946
January	3,361
February	3,597
March	3,760
2004–05	
April	3,111
May	2,963
June	3,379
July	3,338
August	3,094
September	3,674
October	[1]2,505
November	—
December	—
January	—
February	—
March	—

[1] To 22 October 2004

Mr. McCabe: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport how many vehicles have been presented to each test station for vehicle identity checks since April 2003; and what the pass rate is at each test centre. [195055]

Mr. Jamieson: The number of vehicle identity checks conducted at each test station and the respective pass rate for each station since the scheme began in April 2003 are listed in the following table.

Very few vehicles fail the vehicle identity check. This was expected as the aim of the scheme was to deter ringing crime rather than detect it.

Station	*Number of checks*	*Pass rate*
Aberdeen	145	100.0
Aberystwyth	62	100.0
Bristol	1,106	99.9
Berwick	31	100.0
Beverley	990	99.6
Bicester	564	99.6
Birmingham	3,866	99.8
Caernarvon	13	100.0
Cardiff	1,362	99.8
Carlisle	194	100.0
Manchester North	4,216	99.9
Charlesfield	182	100.0
Chelmsford	3,555	99.9
Cowes	52	98.1
Darlington	1,530	99.9
Derby	1,744	100.0
Doncaster	3,780	99.9
Dumfries	127	100.0
East Fortune	26	100.0
Livingston	599	99.7
London North	2,964	99.9
Exeter	895	99.8
Gillingham	1,574	99.9
Glasgow	1,224	99.9
Gloucester	492	99.8
Guildford	671	99.7
Haverfordwest	45	100.0
Inverness	56	98.2
Kidderminster	794	99.9
Kirkwall	15	100.0
Lerwick	6	100.0
Liverpool	459	100.0
Llandrindon Wells	23	100.0
Lochgilphead	5	100.0
Milnthorpe	246	99.6
London South	2,736	99.9
Montrose	112	100.0
Newbury	263	99.6
Newcastle	1,673	99.9
Newton Stewart	33	100.0
Northam SVA	232	99.6
Norwich	931	100.0
Perth	376	100.0
Peterborough	1,342	99.9
Poole	493	99.8
Redruth	769	99.9
Shrewsbury	24	100.0
Shrewsbury SVA	662	100.0
Southampton	528	100.0
Speke	833	99.9
Stornoway	4	100.0
Ammanford	704	99.9
Taunton	393	100.0
Walton	641	99.7
Watford (Edmonton)	2,151	100.0
Wick	4	100.0
Wrexham	778	100.0

Vehicle Registrations

Mr. Pickles: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what plans he has to review the regulations controlling the display of motor vehicles' registration letters and numbers. [194328]

Mr. Jamieson: The regulations that govern the display of motor vehicles' registration letters and numbers were last reviewed in 1999. The British number plate is considered to be one of the clearest in Europe and there are no plans to review the regulations again at present.

ADVOCATE-GENERAL

Cullen Inquiry

Miss McIntosh: To ask the Advocate-General (1) what role she played in the decision to place a 100-year closure on the Cullen Inquiry into the Dunblane tragedy; [193769]

(2) on what basis the decision was taken to place a 100-year closure on the Cullen Inquiry into the Dunblane tragedy; [193770]

(3) what statutory basis was cited in placing a 100-year closure on the Cullen Inquiry. [193771]

The Advocate-General for Scotland: I played no role in the decision to place a 100-year closure on the Cullen Inquiry into the Dunblane tragedy and, accordingly, had no part in any decision regarding closure periods relating to that Inquiry.

Given the above, I was not involved in any citation of a statutory basis for placing a 100-year closure on Cullen Inquiry papers. I understand, however, that there is no statutory basis for the closure of records created by Scottish public bodies. The Public Records (Scotland) Act 1937 ("the 1937 Act") makes provision for the preservation, care and custody of the public records of Scotland. The terms of the legislation are permissive. I understand that the criteria for closures longer than 30 years were defined in the 1993 White Paper on Open Government (Cm 2290) and that the principles set out in that White Paper are relevant in decision-making on disclosure.

TREASURY

Stamp Duty

Mrs. Spelman: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what the average amount of stamp duty charged on a Right to Buy council property was in the last year for which figures are available. [194689]

Mr. Timms: The information requested is not available. It is not possible from our survey data to identify Right to Buy council properties.

Betting and Duties Gaming Act

Mr. Byers: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer (1) what steps he will take to ensure that advertisements at English Premier League football grounds comply with the Betting and Duties Gaming Act 1981; [195187]

(2) what action he plans to take to ensure that Mansion.com complies with the provisions of the Betting and Duties Gaming Act 1981. [195188]

John Healey: Enforcement of the provisions of the Betting and Gaming Duties Act is an operational matter for Her Majesty's Customs and Excise. They are pursuing this issue with the relevant parties.

Civil Servants

Mr. Jenkins: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what the average length of continuous service for civil servants within the Department is. [194406]

Mr. Timms: The information requested is shown in the following table:

	Years
HM Treasury	10.0
HM Customs and Excise	16.9
Inland Revenue	14.7

Civil Partnership Bill

Mr. Leigh: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what estimate the Government have made of the amount in forgone tax liabilities likely to arise from the amendments to the Civil Partnership Bill made by the House of Lords. [194727]

Dawn Primarolo: The information requested is not available.

Cleethorpes Constituency

Shona McIsaac: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer how many residents in Cleethorpes constituency, broken down by electoral ward, are aged between *(a)* 60 to 64, *(b)* 65 to 69, *(c)* 70 to 74, *(d)* 75 to 79 and *(e)* over 80 years. [194614]

Mr. Timms: The information requested falls within the responsibility of the National Statistician, who has been asked to reply.

Letter from Colin Mowl to Shona McIsaac dated 1 November 2004:

The National Statistician and Registrar General for England and Wales has been asked to reply to your recent Parliamentary Question asking how many residents of Cleethorpes constituency, *broken down by electoral ward, are aged between (a) 60 to 64, (b)* 65 to 69, *(c)* 70 to 74, *(d)* 75 to 79, and *(e)* over 80 years. I am replying in his absence. (194614).

Mid-year population estimates are not available at ward level. I have therefore provided figures taken from the 2001 Census.

The attached table shows the number of people in each age group who were resident in each ward within Cleethorpes constituency on Census day (29 April 2001). The figures have been extracted from Table S001 on the 2001 Census Standard Tables for wards for England and Wales DVD, which is available on request from Census Customer Services (census.customerservices@ons.gov.uk).

Residents of Cleethorpes constituency aged 60 and over, 29 April 2001

		All people aged 60 and over				
Area	*All People*	*60 to 64*	*65 to 69*	*70 to 74*	*75 to 79*	*80 or over*
Cleethorpes	20,690	5,069	4,544	3,860	3,298	3,919
Croft Baker	3,202	633	648	596	621	704
Haverstoe	2,782	683	617	528	476	478
Humberston and New Waltham	2,902	726	633	560	444	539
Immingham	2,329	625	525	478	359	342
Sidney Sussex	1,987	555	436	329	245	422
Waltham	1,847	412	410	332	283	410
Wolds	1,495	369	356	278	214	278
Barton	2,070	504	463	343	346	414
Ferry	2,076	562	456	416	310	332

Source:
2001 Census Standard Tables for wards for England and Wales

Departmental Policies (South Dorset)

Jim Knight: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he will set out, with statistical evidence relating as closely as possible to the South Dorset constituency, the effects of changes to departmental policy since 1997 on the South Dorset constituency. [194964]

Mr. Timms: The Government has put in place a radical programme of both macroeconomic and microeconomic reform since 1997 to improve the economic performance of all parts of the UK. There is significant evidence that these policies have already yielded considerable benefits for the South Dorset constituency. For example, since May 1997, claimant unemployment has fallen by over three quarters, long-term unemployment overall has been almost eradicated and long-term youth unemployment has fallen by over 90 per cent.

The Neighbourhood Statistics Service provides a wide range of statistical information at Parliamentary Constituency level, taken from the 2001 Census and other sources. This service is freely available via the National Statistics website at http://neighbourhood.statistics.gov.uk/.

Departmental Publications (Access)

Mr. Goodman: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer how many and what proportion of publications issued by his Department are available in *(a)* Braille, *(b)* autoprint, *(c)* large print and *(d)* easy read format. [194296]

Mr. Timms: All documents published by HM Treasury, HM Customs and Excise and Inland Revenue are available on request in Braille, large print, audio tape or CD. These Departments have dealt with over 28,000 such requests in the past year.

The Treasury routinely produces Braille and audio versions of the Budget, Pre-Budget Report and Spending Review Summary Leaflets and Press Notices. Websites for all three Departments enable resizing and printing of documents in large text, are compatible with text-to-speech software, and contain links to pages providing advice for those who need to adapt on-line documents for ease of reading.

ECOFIN

Mr. Hood: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what the outcome was of the ECOFIN Council held on 21 October; what the Government's stance was on the issues discussed, including its voting record; and if he will make a statement. [194071]

Mr. Gordon Brown: The Council reviewed measures the Netherlands has taken following the Recommendation it issued under the EU's excessive deficit procedure. On the basis of a statement by the Commission, the Council took note that, at present, the action taken by the Dutch authorities in response to the Council's Recommendation of 2 June appears adequate to put an end, by 2005, to the present excessive deficit situation in the Netherlands. The Commission and the Council will continue to monitor the action taken.

The Council was briefed by the Commission on last month's fiscal notifications by member states. Six member states—Greece, Germany, Italy, Hungary Slovakia and Cyprus—would record 2004 deficits significantly higher than previously reported.

The Commission detailed that Greece's annual fiscal deficits were at least 2 percentage points higher than those stated in its returns every year starting from 2000. The Council looks forward to a detailed report from the Commission in time for the next ECOFIN, on Greece's deficit and debt data back to 1997.

Poland highlighted the fact that Eurostat's decision on the accounting treatment of pension funds had added up to 2 percentage points to their deficit. Ministers raised concerns that statistical treatment should not result in perverse incentives to undertake necessary pension reforms and will return to the issue.

The Council discussed the potential administrative burden for business of complying with legislation and regulation. The Council supported the development of a common European methodology, based on the recommendations of the EPC, to measure the administrative burden of EU legislation and regulation by, among others setting up pilot projects to determine the technical characteristics of the methodology and its application. The Council adopted Conclusions calling for the Commission to implement an administrative cost assessment for its proposals by 2005. ECOFIN will return to the topic of regulation, in particular the issue of competitiveness testing, later in the year, and regulatory reform will be discussed at 5 November European Council.

The Council took note of the presentation by the Commission on: the 2003 annual report on protection of the EU's financial interests in the fight against fraud; a proposal for an anti-fraud action plan for 2004 and 2005; and a proposal for a Regulation on mutual assistance in the protection of the EU's financial interests. The Council was also briefed by the Commission on the conclusion and ratification of the EU's anti-fraud agreement with Switzerland and on a 12-year anti-contraband agreement reached by the Commission and 10 member states with Philip Morris International.

The Council held an exchange of views on flexibility arrangements under the budget and the Commission's proposals for the 2007–13 period. The Council concluded that the current levels of flexibility were adequate, and that any changes to the Inter-Institutional Agreement would need to be taken in the context of the next Multi-Annual Financial Framework (2007–13). The Council received a presentation notifications by the Commission on proposals for modifying the EU's system of own resources.

Over lunch, Ministers were informed of the outcome of the Eurogroup meeting held on 20 October. They discussed the EU's financial framework for the 2007–13 period and met Mr. James Wolfensohn, President of the World Bank, for a discussion of progress toward the Millennium Development Goals.

Jon Cunliffe, Managing Director Macro-economic Policy and International Finance of the Treasury, represented the UK at ECOFIN.

Employment (Cleethorpes)

Shona McIsaac: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer how many jobs have been created in Cleethorpes constituency since 1997. [194188]

Mr. Timms: The information requested falls within the responsibility of the National Statistician, who has been asked to reply.

Letter from Len Cook to Shona McIsaac, dated 1 November 2004:

As National Statistician, I have been asked to reply to your Parliamentary Question about jobs created in Cleethorpes (194188)

While statistics of new jobs created are not available explicitly, statistics from surveys enable comparisons to be made of net changes in numbers of jobs from year to year.

The attached table shows the information requested, relating to jobs in Cleethorpes, for 1997 and 2002, which is the latest year available.

Number of employees[1] with workplace in Cleethorpes parliamentary constituency, 1997 and 2002

Number, percentage

	Total
1997	27,700
2002	29,700
Change from 1997 to 2002[2]	
Absolute	2,000
Percentage	7.1

[1] Employee jobs only, not self-employed jobs.

[2] The 1997 to 2002 change has been rounded to the nearest hundred separately from rounded levels for 1997 and 2002.

Source:

1997: Annual Employment Survey, rescaled 2002: Annual Business Inquiry (ABI).

Financial Services Authority

Mr. Kidney: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what assessment he has made of the performance of the Financial Services Authority in *(a)* recruiting and *(b)* retaining appropriate staff for discharging its role of regulating businesses in the financial sector. [194231]

Mr. Timms: The Financial Services Authority (FSA) is operationally independent of Government. The management of the recruitment and retention of appropriate FSA staff is a matter for the FSA Board.

The FSA annual report for 2003–04 noted that appropriate strategies are in place for staff recruitment and retention and that these are key to the delivery of the FSA's business priorities.

Household Debt

David Taylor: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what recent assessment has been made of the effect in socio-economic classes *(a)* 5, *(b)* 6, *(c)* 7 and *(d)* 8 of household debt on income levels in (i) North West Leicestershire, (ii) the East Midlands and (iii) England. [194503]

Mr. Timms: Information is not available in the form requested. Research on the relationship between debt and income includes the work of the Task Force on Tackling Over-indebtedness and the related Household Survey (www.dti.gov.uk/ccp/topicsl/overindebtedness.htm), and research reports such as "Characteristics of families in debt and the nature of indebtedness" (211, June 2004, www.dwp.gov.uk/iad/asd5/rports2003–2004/rrep211.asp) and "Low-income Families and Household Spending" (192, July 2003, www.dwp.gov.uk/iad/asd5/rrep192.asp). The Government set out its policy in the Consumer Credit White Paper (Cm 6040).

Immigration

Mrs. Spelman: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what estimate he has made of the level of net immigration into *(a)* England and *(b)* the United Kingdom over the next 20 years. [195125]

Mr. Timms: The most recent estimates come from the Government Actuary's latest (2003-based) national population projections. The information requested is available from the GAD website at: http://www.gad.gov.uk/Population/2003/methodology/migrass.htm

Income Tax

Mr. Willetts: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer how many pensioners were paying income tax on the latest date for which figures are available; and if he will break down the total amount into amounts paid by each gender in five-year age ranges. [194837]

Dawn Primarolo: I refer the hon. Member to table 3.12 'Income and tax for the elderly, by region and country' on the Inland Revenue website at www.inlandrevenue.gov. uk/stats/income_distribution/table-312–2001–02.xls.

The total amount of income tax in 2001–02 paid by pensioners aged 65 and over by each gender and five-year age ranges is given in the following table.

	Amount of income tax (£ million)	
Age range	*Male*	*Female*
65 to 69 years	2,410	710
70 to 74 years	1,580	620
75 to 79 years	980	490
80 to 84 years	470	350
85 + years	280	300
All (65 + years)	5,710	2,470

Note:
Estimates have been rounded so may not sum to the totals.

Estimates are based upon the Survey of Personal Incomes 2001–02.

Mrs. Spelman: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what assessment he has made of the effect of increasing income tax on levels of tax avoidance. [195263]

Dawn Primarolo: This Government has committed itself not to increase the basic or top rates of income tax. Tax avoidance undermines the principle of fairness that underpins the tax system and the Government keeps under review factors that may influence the behaviours of taxpayers. When considering changes in tax policy, the Government takes into account behavioural impacts that have a significant and quantifiable effect upon the level of tax avoidance.

Local Councils

Mr. Drew: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he will make a statement on the ability of town and parish councils administering funds on behalf of arm's length projects or organisations which are largely funded by Government to reclaim VAT expenditure incurred on behalf of those projects or organisations. [195294]

Dawn Primarolo: Local authorities can reclaim the VAT incurred on goods and services they purchase in connection with either their taxable activities or their non-business activities.

There are long-established guidelines on the recovery of VAT when other organisations are involved as well. To qualify for refunds in those circumstances, a local authority should place the order for the purchase; receive the goods or services ordered; be in receipt of a VAT invoice addressed to it; and pay for the purchase from its own funds.

Red Diesel

Mr. Carmichael: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer how many litres of red diesel were purchased in the UK in each year since 1997. [194212]

John Healey: Hydrocarbon oils clearance figures are published by Customs and Excise in the Hydrocarbon Oils Bulletin a copy of which can be found on the UK Trade Information website www.uktradeinfo.com.

Royal Residences

Mr. Alan Williams: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer how much has been spent in the last 10 years on refurbishment of the property in Windsor Great Park recently leased by HRH the Duke of York; and from what sources. [191343]

Mr. Timms: Under the terms of which the Queen Mother occupied Royal Lodge, the internal works were the responsibility of her office while The Crown Estate was responsible for the maintenance of the exterior of the building and the surrounding grounds. Total Crown Estate expenses on all such maintenance (exterior building and grounds) over the last 10 years amounts to £711,087. During that time no external work has been undertaken which could be described as refurbishment.

The Crown Estate has incurred no expenditure on internal refurbishment work.

Shareholder Executive

Gregory Barker: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what appointments he has made to the Shareholder Executive. [192783]

Mr. Boateng: The Treasury makes no appointments to the Shareholder Executive.

Sustainable Energy (CHP Provisions) Order

Mr. Stunell: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what measures *(a)* the Office for National Statistics, *(b)* the Board of Inland Revenue, *(c)* HM Customs and Excise and *(d)* his Department (i) has undertaken and (ii) plans to undertake to comply with the Sustainable Energy (CHP Provisions) Order 2003. [194436]

John Healey: Neither Inland Revenue nor Customs and Excise uses CHP. The estate properties do not generally lend themselves to offering good opportunities for CHP as there is little industrial or high consumption usage on individual facilities. Currently, PFI contractors are looking at certain Customs and Excise and Inland Revenue sites to see if they have the potential to use CHP.

The heating to the Treasury HQ in 1 Horse Guards Road is provided by the Whitehall district heating system, which is supplied from CHP plant.

ONS are currently negotiating with OGC for a CHP energy supply to meet the framework target. ONS purchase 100 per cent. of the Southport site's energy from renewable sources, this is equivalent to 10 per cent. of the estate's requirement. ONS are about to commission a feasibility study for a CHP plant at the Newport site.

Unemployment (Greater London)

Tom Cox: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what percentage of people over the age of 60 years living within the Greater London area have been unemployed for longer than 12 months. [194154]

Mr. Timms: The information requested falls within the responsibility of the National Statistician, who has been asked to reply.

Letter from Colin Mowl to Mr. Tom Cox, dated 1 November 2004:

The National Statistician has been asked to reply to your Parliamentary Question about unemployment. I am replying in his absence. (194154)

It is estimated that for the three months ending August 2004, the proportion of economically active people over the age of 60 (i.e. those either in a job or seeking a job) resident in the Greater London area who had been unemployed for 12 months or more, was 1.6%.

These estimates from the Labour Force Survey are, as with any sample survey, subject to sampling variability.

CHURCH COMMISSIONERS

Ancient Churches

26. **Mr. Gordon Prentice:** To ask the hon. Member for Middlesbrough, representing the Church Commissioners what representations the Commissioners have made to the Government about the use of public funds for the upkeep of ancient churches. [194593]

Sir Stuart Bell: The Commissioners have made no such representations. However, as members of the Church of England's Church Heritage Forum, they are joined in the statement "Building faith in our future" which celebrates the unique contribution of church buildings and seeks the kind of partnerships with Government, local authorities and others that will enhance that contribution for the benefit of future generations.

CONSTITUTIONAL AFFAIRS

Civil Servants (Yorkshire)

Hugh Bayley: To ask the Parliamentary Secretary, Department for Constitutional Affairs how many full-time equivalent jobs *(a)* his Department and *(b)* its executive agencies had in (i) Yorkshire and the Humber and (ii) the City of York in (A) 1997 and (B) the latest year for which figures are available. [191838]

Mr. Lammy: I refer the hon. Member to the answer given on 25 October 2004, *Official Report*, column 1053W, by my right hon. Friend the Minister for Cabinet Office.

Licensing

Mr. Dobson: To ask the Parliamentary Secretary, Department for Constitutional Affairs what the estimated saving to the Magistrates Courts Service is of the transfer of licensing functions from magistrates courts to local authorities. [194112]

Mr. Leslie: On 10 July 2003, the Licensing Act received Royal Assent. The Act transfers responsibility for the administration of licences from magistrates courts to licensing authorities, although magistrates will hear appeals against the licensing authorities' decisions.

Currently, the principle is that the cost to magistrates courts of the administration of licensing is covered by the licensing fees charged. As such there is no separate budget in the magistrates courts allocated to licensing which will be saved due to the changes. Fee levels for the new system are still being negotiated but they should allow the licensing authorities to recover the full costs associated with their administration, inspection and enforcement functions under the Licensing Act 2003.

Mental Capacity

Paul Holmes: To ask the Parliamentary Secretary, Department for Constitutional Affairs what steps he plans to take to ensure that all individuals who manage the finances of those who lack capacity to manage their own finances *(a)* are bound by the first principles of the Mental Capacity Bill and *(b)* are subject to the safeguards and the new criminal offences that are in the Mental Capacity Bill. [194736]

Mr. Leslie: The principles in the Mental Capacity Bill will apply to all those who act under the provisions of the Bill on behalf of those who lack capacity. This will include anyone doing an act in connection with care or treatment to which clause 5 applies, attorneys under any Lasting Powers of Attorney, and deputies appointed by the Court of Protection.

It will also include any person appointed a receiver under Part 7 of the Mental Health Act 1983.

The Bill will be accompanied by a Code of Practice, which provides detailed guidance on how to comply with the principles of the Bill. The Public Guardianship Office will produce guidance for attorneys, deputies and receivers advising them of the principles of the Bill and that they must act in the best interest of the person lacking capacity at all times. The Department for Constitutional Affairs and Department of Health will provide guidance for health and social care professionals and all those who care for someone with incapacity.

The principles will not formally apply to attorneys under existing Enduring Powers of Attorney (EPAs). At the time of execution of the EPA the parties have a legitimate expectation that the power will be capable of being used in the future on the same basis as the one on which it was created. In addition, we do not know how many EPAs exist as they do not have to be registered before use, and therefore we have no means of contacting the attorneys to advise them of the Bill's first principles. However those appointed in such a capacity will still have fiduciary and common law duties towards the person lacking capacity. Guidance issued by the Public Guardianship Office advises attorneys that they must act in the best interests of the client at all times. We will be promoting the principles of the Bill as good practice for those involved with people lacking capacity.

Donees of EPAs and receivers are already monitored in similar fashion to the provisions for monitoring of attorneys and deputies in the Mental Capacity Bill. The Bill does, however, provide greater safeguards for registration of powers of attorney. People with capacity may therefore wish to replace their Enduring Power of Attorney with a lasting power of attorney, the benefits of which we will actively publicise.

The new criminal offence proposed in the Mental Capacity Bill is intended to capture those individuals who are in a position of trust, care and power over people who are then ill-treated or neglected. If an attorney under an EPA has the care of a person who lacks or whom he reasonably believes to lack capacity and ill-treats or wilfully neglects that person, he may be guilty of the offence.

Paul Holmes: To ask the Parliamentary Secretary, Department for Constitutional Affairs what checks are undertaken by the Court of Protection if there is a complaint made about a receiver misusing the patient's money. [194737]

Mr. Leslie: All receivers are required to account annually to the Court of Protection. Any complaints of misuse on the part of a receiver are investigated by the Public Guardianship Office, which is the administrative arm of the Court. The outcome of the investigation is then referred to the Court for a decision on what action, if any, should be taken against the receiver. The Court has the power to replace a receiver and/or call in the security bond that the receiver deposited when the receivership order was made.

Paul Holmes: To ask the Parliamentary Secretary, Department for Constitutional Affairs what checks are undertaken by *(a)* the Court of Protection and *(b)* the Public Guardianship Office to ensure that an individual's monies are being used in his best interests. [194814]

Mr. Leslie: Receivers appointed by the Court of Protection are required to account annually for monies received and spent.

The Lord Chancellor's Visitors report to the Court and the Public Guardianship Office (PGO) on whether clients' needs are being met and make suggestions on how to improve their quality of life.

ELECTORAL COMMISSION

General Elections

27. **Bob Spink:** To ask the hon. Member for Gosport, representing the Speaker's Committee on the Electoral Commission what recent advice the Electoral Commission has given regarding the regulation of General Elections. [194594]

Mr. Viggers: As provided for in the Political Parties, Elections and Referendums Act 2000, and other relevant legislation, the Electoral Commission regularly provides advice to political parties and others on the rules relating to elections.

EDUCATION AND SKILLS

CAFCASS

Mr. Laxton: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills what guidance is given to CAFCASS as to whether a parent should be present when a child is interviewed during proceedings to decide how much contact each parent should have with the child. [193013]

Margaret Hodge: The CAFCASS Service Principles and Standards state:

> "3.5 Except where the Practitioner is acting as a Reporting Officer, all children who are the subject of proceedings will normally be seen on one or more occasions by them."

"3.6 The Practitioner will also take all reasonable steps to see adult parties to the proceedings and any other relevant children and adults unless directed otherwise by the Court."

Thus, when the practitioner is acting in private law proceedings relating to contact between children and their parents following separation or divorce, CAFCASS expects that its practitioners will see all children who are involved in a case. CAFCASS practitioners have high level skills and experience and are relied upon to exercise their professional judgement in each case. It is important that CAFCASS practitioners tailor their approach to working with children and families, in accordance with the individual circumstances of each case.

Parental presence, during an interview with a child will depend on the following factors:

the circumstances specific to the case;

the age and developmental stage of the child; and

the practitioner's professional judgement.

Rule 4.11 (1) of the Family Proceedings Rules 1991 requires the practitioner, among other things, to "have regard to the ascertainable wishes and feelings of the child concerned considered in the light of the child's age and understanding".

Mr. Clappison: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills what proportion of families involved in separation and divorce cases were referred to the Children and Family Court Advisory and Support Service in *(a)* 2001–02, *(b)* 2002–03 and *(c)* 2003–04. [194218]

Margaret Hodge: Such information as is available is in the table. It refers to the total number of private law cases referred to the Children and Family Court Advisory and Support Service (CAFCASS) and residence and contact applications to the courts (the cases most commonly associated with divorce and separation).

	Number
CAFCASS referrals (financial years)	
2001–02	17,352
2002–03	34,761
2003–04	33,803
Private law contact and residence applications (calendar years)	
2001	92,382
2002	97,323
2003	106,534

Notes:

1. Family Justice System (FJS) Data obtained from Judicial Statistics 2001–2003, published by the Department for Constitutional Affairs.

2. FJS Statistics are measured by calendar year and CAFCASS statistics are measured by financial year. The two sets of data are not comparable and therefore a proportion cannot be derived. In addition, there is a time lag between application to court and referral to a CAFCASS officer, and there may be more than one application per family.

3. FJS applications are in respect of all tiers of the courts and they show the total number of applications for residence and contact orders, whether or not they are withdrawn or refused.

Mr. Clappison: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills what percentage of cases dealt with by the Children and Family Court Advisory and Support Service (CAFCASS) in *(a)* 2001–02, *(b)* 2002–03 and *(c)* 2003–04 resulted in orders reached by consent following intervention by CAFCASS staff. [194219]

Margaret Hodge: The Children and Family Court Advisory and Support Service does not collect the data requested. CAFCASS's intervention has helped parties to reach agreement in many cases. CAFCASS is aiming to collect such data in the future.

Mr. Clappison: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills what role the presumption of co-parenting plays in the policy of the Children and Family Court Advisory and Support Service. [194221]

Margaret Hodge: The Children and Family Court Advisory and Support Service strongly supports the principles of children maintaining a strong relationship with both parents where it is safe for them to do so. Co-operation between parents who separate is critical for the well-being of the children and is encouraged by CAFCASS. The service works to ensure that both parents and wider family members continue to have a real and meaningful relationship with their children through high quality, supported contact arrangements.

Capital Funding

Mr. Hoban: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills pursuant to the answer of 26 October 2004, *Official Report*, column 1156W, on capital funding, if he will list the specific capital programmes and the expenditure on each for *(a)* 2001–02, *(b)* 2002–03, *(c)* 2003–04, *(d)* 2004–05 and *(e)* 2005–06. [194953]

Mr. Miliband: I will write to the hon. Member with the information requested and place a copy of my reply in the Library.

Mr. Hoban: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills pursuant to the answer of 26 October 2004, *Official Report*, column 1156W, on capital funding, what capital funding was received in *(a)* 2001–02, *(b)* 2002–03, *(c)* 2003–04, *(d)* 2004–05 and *(e)* 2005–06 by local education authorities (LEAs) and schools within LEAs taking part in the pilot and wave 1 projects in Building Schools for the Future. [194954]

Mr. Miliband: We do not hold information in the form requested. The following table shows total capital allocations to date to LEAs and schools in wave 1 of Building Schools for the Future (BSF), including pathfinders, from 2001–02 to 2005–06. These figures include specific devolved formula capital allocations to schools. However, since local authorities devolve other funding to schools, and formulaic allocations will include abatements for BSF areas to avoid double funding, actual information of capital received by schools is held locally.

Capital Allocations to pathfinder and wave 1 LEAs of BSF

£000 *LEA name*	*2001–02*	*2002–03*	*2003–04*	*2004–05*	*2005–06* [1]
Bradford	53,480	51,583	20,819	35,284	14,919
Bristol, City of	16,115	13,219	[2]73,789	16,368	7,369
Gateshead	8,005	7,271	22,804	6,957	[2]62,903
Greenwich	11,319	9,628	9,051	16,361	10,283
Knowsley	7,728	9,276	7,495	6,688	2,632
Lancashire	29,778	46,470	62,607	44,234	17,790
Leeds	19,377	28,101	28,263	[2]63,654	[2]121,912
Leicester	9,950	7,419	12,329	18,259	5,915
Lewisham	7,825	[2]75,005	16,601	15,070	7,662
Manchester	23,337	21,337	[2]56,424	24,853	8,331
Newcastle upon Tyne	[2]54,956	8,364	16,280	[2]70,368	5,082
Newham	[2]38,635	14,093	[2]50,660	16,028	11,539
Sheffield	20,427	18,705	[2]58,357	[2]83,165	15,238
Solihull	7,156	13,733	9,424	9,801	4,407
South Tyneside	4,051	8,063	6,596	[2]21,922	2,602
Southwark	7,033	12,331	12,593	27,031	17,758
Stoke-on-Trent	10,510	11,598	11,333	14,891	5,211
Sunderland	[2]29,627	15,259	13,436	11,049	4,803
Waltham Forest	8,620	[2]65,547	10,364	10,260	4,490
Total	367,929	437,002	499,225	512,243	330,846

[1] Does not include BSF funding, allocations for which are still being finalised.

[2] Includes PFI credits.

Ann Keen: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills how much has been spent on the *(a)* repair and *(b)* modernisation of school buildings in the London borough of Hounslow in each of the past five years. [192588]

Mr. Miliband: We do not hold this information centrally. The bulk of capital funding is allocated to local authorities and schools by formula so that they can decide their priorities for investment in line with locally decided asset management plans. Records of how this funding is used should therefore be held locally.

The following table shows the capital allocations to Hounslow and its schools from 2000–01 to 2004–05.

Capital allocations to Hounslow local education authority

£000

Type of funding	*2000–01*	*2001–02*	*2002–03*	*2003–04*	*2004–05*
Total	6,426	4,300	6,664	3,6193	9,515
Of which:					
LEA formulaic funding for:					
Modernisation and condition need	3,121	1,251	2,660	3,781	4,462
New pupil places	779	218	297	488	531
Devolved capital to schools	1,455	1,198	1,816	2,854	3,242

Children Bill

Mrs. Iris Robinson: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills how proposals in the Children Bill [*Lords*] on information exchange and proposed new systems developed by local authorities will deal with children who enter and leave the jurisdiction of England from or to other parts of the UK; and what discussions his officials have had with officials from the Department of Health, Social Services and Public Safety in Northern Ireland on this matter. [192915]

Margaret Hodge *[holding answer 25 October 2004]*: Clause 12 of the Children Bill, now before Parliament, sets out proposals for databases, to be established at local, regional or national level or a combination thereof, containing information about all children in England. The databases are a tool to facilitate early intervention and help ensure effective action to meet the needs of children before a crisis develops. Practitioners working with children will be able to see who else is working with a child and if a concern about a child has been recorded. This will prompt them to get in touch with other practitioners and, together, gain a better, all-round picture of the child's needs and how they might best be met.

Our intention is that children entering England from other parts of the UK will be included on the databases following their first contact with the health or education service or another children's service. Although the databases will not contain detailed case data, they will include basic identifying data and contact details of professionals who are or have recently been working with a child, and an indicator if a professional has a concern about that child and therefore wishes to be contacted by others. We recognise the desirability of having effective mechanisms for transfer of such data between the databases in England and any appropriate systems in Northern Ireland, Wales and Scotland.

Clause 29 of the Children Bill contains provisions for Wales which parallel those for England. My officials will work closely with the Welsh Assembly as databases are implemented in both countries to ensure data can be transferred.

Although Scotland does not yet have parallel provisions in legislation, a number of information-sharing pilots in Scottish local authority areas are under way and officials from the Scottish Executive are keeping in close touch with my officials as the proposals are developed.

My officials are also in contact with officials in the Department for Health, Social Services and Public Safety in Northern Ireland to improve mutual understanding of the position in respective countries and will continue to develop these links as the DHSSPS develops its Strategy for Children in Need for children's services.

Children's Commissioner

Stephen Hesford: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills what role children and young people will have in the selection of a Children's Commissioner for England. [194132]

Margaret Hodge: I confirm that the Government intend to involve children and young people in the selection of the Children's Commissioner. A Government amendment to the Children Bill was tabled on 26 October 2004, which would require the Secretary of State, to the extent and in such manner as he saw fit, to involve children in the appointment of the Children's Commissioner.

Contact Centres

Mrs May: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills pursuant to his answer of 25 October 2004, *Official Report*, column 977W, on contact centres, how much funding was announced in March for establishing supervised contact centres; if he will list the 14 new centres; and what the cost of each is expected to be. [194886]

Margaret Hodge: Funding has been made available to establish 14 new supervised contact centres. This funding was announced in March 2004, just before the start of the current financial year. £2.5 million of the total £3.5 million DfES/Sure Start joint investment fund is designated to support the operation of these new services in the period up until March 2006. The 14 supervised centres and the amounts allocated to each are as follows:

	£
York (Family Mediation Service)	190,519
Stoke (Mediation Advisory Service)	174,370
Nottinghamshire (Nottinghamshire Domestic Violence Forum)	148,500
North Wiltshire (Family Mediation Service)	140,508
Merseyside (National Youth Advocacy Service)	196,000
Blackburn (Diocese)	137,785
South London (African Caribbean Family Mediation Service)	254,066
Cambridge (Pyramids Family Centres)	40,000
West London (Domestic Violence Intervention Programme)	201,565
Scunthorpe (The Forge)	68,050
Leeds (Family Service Unit)	157,423
Northamptonshire (Spurgeons)	94,441
NCH Herefordshire	209,263
NCH Bristol	265,209
Total	2,477,699

Education Maintenance Allowances

Mr. Sheerman: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills (1) how many and what percentage of young people starting post-16 education in 2004 have been awarded education maintenance allowances in *(a)* Kirklees and *(b)* England; [194068]

(2) how many students have been awarded education maintenance allowance in *(a)* Kirklees and *(b)* England in 2004; and how much each was awarded. [194069]

Mr. Ivan Lewis: By the end of September 1,292 young people from the Kirklees local authority area had received an EMA Notice of Entitlement, of which 987 had enrolled for EMA at a school or college and 899 had received an EMA payment. The percentage of 16-year-olds awarded EMA in Kirklees as a proportion of the total estimated number in full time education is 24 per cent.—987 enrolled on EMA compared to an estimated 4,120 16-year-olds in full-time education. These figures continue to improve as those who applied late have had their applications assessed and are enrolled for payment.

Nationally, it is estimated that just over half (50.5 per cent.) of 16-year-olds in full-time education will be eligible for EMA. By the end of September 150,000 16-year-olds had received an EMA Notice of Entitlement, 113,000 had enrolled for EMA with their school or college, and 103,600 had received an EMA payment. The numbers enrolled for EMA at the end of September represents about 22 per cent. of the estimated 16-year-old population in full-time education (506,310). The percentage of those on EMA receiving the full £30 award is 78 per cent., with 10 per cent. receiving the £20 rate and 12 per cent. the £10 rate.

Private Finance Initiative

Mr. George Osborne: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills what guidance is provided to procuring authorities within the education system about the treatment of PFI arrangements in the accounts of public bodies. [193890]

Mr. Miliband: For schools PFI projects, the appropriate guidance is the Treasury Taskforce Technical Note 1: How to Account for PFI Transactions.

Social Inclusion

Mr. Alan Campbell: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what steps his Department is taking to improve social inclusion for children and young people with complex health needs. [193338]

Margaret Hodge: The children's national service framework sets standards for children's health services and social services, and how these services should interface with education. The NSF addresses the particular needs of children who are often at risk of achieving poor outcomes and devotes an entire standard to services for disabled children and children and with complex health needs.

The children's national service framework addresses the needs of the 'whole child' and recognises that services must promote social inclusion for all children to enable them to participate in childhood, family and community activities. Children with complex health needs and their families are also expected to receive the information that enables them to make decisions about how their services are designed and delivered. From September 2005 and over the following three years, joint area reviews of children's services between Ofsted, the Healthcare Commission, the Commission for Social Care Inspection and other inspectorates, will assess the extent to which NHS and local authorities are able to demonstrate that their services are improving and promoting inclusion.

Teachers' Pay (Lincolnshire)

Shona McIsaac: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills what the average full-time equivalent gross pay of teachers in the state sector in *(a)* North East Lincolnshire and *(b)* North Lincolnshire was (i) across all grades and (ii) at each grade in each year since 1997. [194183]

Mr. Miliband: The following table gives the gross average salary, across all grades and for each grade, of full-time regular qualified teachers in the maintained schools sector in North East Lincolnshire and North Lincolnshire local education authorities in each year from 1997. The latest information available is for 2003.

	1997	*1998*	*1999*	*2000*	*2001*	*2002*	*2003*
North East Lincolnshire							
All grades	22,690	23,270	24,110	24,940	27,220	28,610	30,190
Classroom teachers	21,570	22,110	22,870	23,630	25,520	26,730	28,090
Assistant head teachers[1]	—	—	—	—	35,060	36,160	38,280
Deputy head teachers	27,610	28,580	29,790	30,780	34,550	36,440	38,280
Head teachers	31,150	32,190	33,550	36,140	39,480	41,870	44,670
North Lincolnshire							
All grades	22,650	23,260	24,010	25,100	27,160	28,520	30,420
Classroom teachers	21,490	22,070	22,780	23,700	25,560	26,810	28,510
Assistant head teachers[1]	—	—	—	—	34,810	37,070	38,710
Deputy head teachers	27,740	28,380	29,600	30,650	32,910	34,940	37,200
Head teachers	30,430	31,670	33,060	35,950	38,200	40,510	43,220

[1] There were no assistant heads prior to 2001.

Source:

Database of Teachers' Records

CULTURE, MEDIA AND SPORT

School Sport

12. **Mr. Amess:** To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport what plans her Department has to promote sport in schools; and if she will make a statement. [194577]

Mr. Caborn: The Government is investing over £1 billion in England to transform school sport. This is delivering an ambitious Public Service Agreement target to increase the percentage of 5–16 year olds who spend a minimum of two hours each week on high quality PE and school sport to 75 per cent. by 2006 and to 85 per cent. by 2008.

Gambling Bill

13. **Mr. Illsley:** To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport, what representations she has received regarding grandfather rights for certain gambling operators in the Gambling Bill. [194578]

Mr. Caborn: All sectors of the industry have sought assurances that gambling which is now permitted under the current law will continue to be permitted under the Bill. Where we are satisfied that this reassurance can be provided without compromising necessary protections for children and the vulnerable we have provided it; and Schedule 15 of the Bill makes provision for this. But in other cases we have made it clear that protection in the public interest must take priority.

15. **Alistair Burt:** To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport, what assessment she has made of the effect on the number of people with gambling problems of the provisions of the Gambling Bill. [194581]

Mr. Caborn: We are providing in the Gambling Bill a comprehensive package of new protections for children and the vulnerable which are designed to ensure that problem gambling does not increase. We shall, however, keep the position under close and continuing review, and will not hesitate to make use of the powers in the Bill to adjust the balance of regulation should the need arise. Without the Bill it is very likely that problem gambling in Britain will increase, as those concerned with prevention and treatment have recognised.

Regional Opera Companies

14. **Mr. Greenway:** To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport, what plans she has to increase the support given to regional opera companies. [194579]

Estelle Morris: Arts Council England investment in regional opera will increase by almost £1 million next year, bringing funding to over £17 million.

This increasing level of support for regional opera funds the equivalent of 57 touring weeks every year, bringing high quality opera to every region.

A further £500,000 has been allocated to smaller scale touring opera, producing an additional 124 performances in 89 venues across the country.

British Grand Prix

16. **Mr. Syms:** To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport, what representations her Department has made regarding the future of the British grand prix. [194582]

Mr. Caborn: While we support and desire a British Grand Prix at Silverstone, the Government's role has been one of dialogue and facilitation. The current commercial negotiations between the British Racing Drivers Club (BRDC) and Formula One Management (FOM) to reach an agreement to secure the British Grand Prix on the 2005 Formula 1 Calendar are a matter for them. However, where appropriate, Derek Mapp, Chair of the East Midlands Development Agency and I have done everything we can to help bring the parties together to broker a suitable outcome.

National Guild of Jesters

17. **Mr. Dhanda:** To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport, what recent discussions she has had with the National Guild of Jesters. [194583]

Mr. Caborn: My right hon. Friend the Secretary of State has not had discussions with the National Guild of Jesters. The Minister for Media and Heritage has recently written to the hon. Member for Salisbury about the concerns of the National Guild with the recent appointment of a jester by English Heritage.

Olympic Games

19. **Miss McIntosh:** To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport what the impact will be on North Yorkshire of the Olympic bid for London 2012. [194585]

Mr. Caborn: Yorkshire Forward fully support the London bid for the 2012 Olympics. We and London 2012 will work with them and with RDAs throughout the country to ensure that North Yorkshire and the whole UK can benefit.

Mr. Rosindell: To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport what assessment she has made of the benefits to Romford of holding the 2012 Olympics in London. [192658]

Mr. Caborn: The London Development Agency have advised that potential benefits to Romford would include:

The opportunity to motivate young Romford schoolchildren to take up sport and get more active,

Romford residents will be just minutes by train from the biggest sporting and cultural event on earth,

The games will need the support of a huge variety of businesses,

And people in the local community will be free to access job opportunities in sectors such as tourism, construction, food and the media.

Organisations like the London Development Agency and the East London Business Alliance have recognized these opportunities and are fully supportive of the bid.

Pete Wishart: To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport whether she has made an assessment of the response of voluntary organisations in relation to the proposed London Olympics. [194171]

Mr. Caborn: My right hon. Friend the Secretary of State has noted the response of voluntary organisations to the London Olympic bid. Some organisations have expressed concern at the potential impact of the proposed Olympic lottery games on income to the existing lottery good causes. There is, however, widespread support in the voluntary sector for the Olympic bid generally, because of the benefits the games would bring to the UK, including opportunities for volunteering.

Pete Wishart: To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport what plans she has for events in the proposed London Olympics to be held *(a)* in Scotland and *(b)* outside London. [194172]

Mr. Caborn: London 2012 is responsible for selecting the venues for the bid to host the Olympic and Paralympic games and their plans are for the Olympic football competition to be held in stadia across the country including Hampden Park, Glasgow. Sailing events will take place in Weymouth and Portland, the rowing events at Eton Dorney and mountain bike events in Brentwood.

Key agencies in Scotland and throughout the UK have been meeting to co-ordinate arrangements and to agree how best to maximise the benefits that can be derived from a London Olympics.

In addition the Cultural Olympiad will take place across the UK over the four years up to and including 2012 and the 2012 Olympic Torch Relay is likely to involve every major city and town throughout the UK over several months.

Pete Wishart: To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport what her most recent assessment is of the cost to public funds of the proposed London Olympics in 2012; and if she will make a statement. [194207]

Mr. Caborn: As set out in the Command Paper 5867, laid before the House in June 2003, provision has been made for a public sector funding package of up to £2.375 billion to fund Olympic costs.

Pete Wishart: To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport whether Sportscotland will be contributing funding for the proposed Olympic games in London in 2012. [194208]

Mr. Caborn: In the event of a successful London bid, the sports lottery distributors, including Sportscotland, will contribute a total of £340 million to the overall lottery funding package of up to £1.5 billion. This money will be used to fund elite sport and associated sports infrastructure development. Sport England has already committed £40 million towards the development of an aquatics centre in the Olympic Park. Exactly how the remaining £300 million expenditure will be allocated is a matter for the sports lottery distributors. They are now collectively considering how best to contribute to this element of the lottery funding package in order to maximise Olympic opportunities for elite sport and on-going community legacies. Any expenditure by Sportscotland as part of its contribution will be entirely for the benefit of Scotland, for investment in its elite athletes and associated sports infrastructure.

Pete Wishart: To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport what her latest estimate is of the proportion of funding for the proposed London Olympics which will come from the national lottery. [194211]

Mr. Caborn: As set out in paragraph 12 of the Command Paper 5867, laid before the House in June 2003, the expectation is that public funding for Olympic staging will be met in the ratio 11:24, where 11 is the Olympic precept in London, and where 24 is grants by the national lottery. Additionally, as set out in paragraph 11 of the Command Paper, up to £300 million from the sports lottery distributors will be used to fund elite sport and associated sports infrastructure development. A substantial proportion of the overall costs will be met by Olympic revenues or by the private sector.

Mr. Jim Cunningham: To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport how much of the allocated spending for the 2012 Olympics will be used on *(a)* construction costs and *(b)* promotional costs. [191901]

Mr. Caborn: We are in the process of finalising the budget for staging the Olympic and Paralympic Games in London in 2012 should we be successful in our bid. However, the current intention, which is unlikely to change significantly, is that the bulk of the expenditure will go on the construction of venues, provision of transport facilities and the various operational costs associated with staging the games, and that the promotional costs will only be a small proportion of the total.

Mr. Mark Field: To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport (1) whether Point 17 of the Olympic Funding: Memorandum of Understanding between the Government and the Mayor of London requires council tax payers in London to fund any overspend associated with the proposed London 2012 Olympics; [194016]

(2) whether the Olympic Funding: Memorandum of Understanding between the Government and the Mayor of London requires the Government to fund any cost overspend associated with the proposed Olympics in London in 2012. [194017]

Mr. Caborn: The robust and business-like approach to planning and financial controls on the part of the Olympic Stakeholders is designed to prevent such overspend. As the memorandum of understanding, laid before Parliament as Command Paper 5867, states in paragraph 17, in the event of any overspend the Government will be the ultimate guarantor. We further reported this to Parliament in a departmental minute dated 2 December 2003. As the memorandum goes on to say, the Government expects to discharge that responsibility (should it arise) in a sharing agreement to be agreed as appropriate with the Mayor of London and through seeking additional national lottery funding in amounts to be agreed at the time. At this stage however, no such specific sharing arrangements exist. Whatever the arrangements which might apply, levels of any London council tax precept would be a matter for the Mayor of London.

Arts Grants (Barking and Dagenham)

Jon Cruddas: To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport how much the arts in the London borough of Barking and Dagenham have received in Government grants in each year since 2001. [194422]

Estelle Morris: The Department for Culture, Media and Sport does not fund the arts directly, but through Arts Council England, who are responsible for distributing public money from Government.

The following table supplied by Arts Council England provides a breakdown of the information requested.

Funding stream	*Grant programme*	*2001–02*	*2002–03*	*2003–04*
Grant in aid	Regularly Funded Organisations	33,530	43,542	38,030
	Grants for the arts, Individuals[1]	—	—	5,000
Lottery	Regional Arts Lottery Programme	22,000	75,040	17,399
	Grants for the arts, Organisations[1]	—	—	233,500
	Capital	—	—	40,000
	Total	55,530	118,582	333,929

[1] Grants for the arts, Individuals and Organisations, was launched in 2003–04.

Chorley Football Club

Mr. Hoyle: To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport what grants are available to Chorley Football Club to enable it *(a)* to stay at Victory Park and *(b)* to move to a new ground. [194622]

Mr. Caborn: Grants are available from the Football Foundation's Football Stadia Improvement Fund (FSIF) to clubs playing in the football league, conference or national league system, down to step seven and below, who wish to improve their facilities or relocate to new grounds.

The type of projects which qualify for FSIF funding and the amount of grant available depend upon the level at which clubs are playing.

Clarence House

Mr. Alan Williams: To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport what accommodation is occupied by *(a)* HRH Prince Charles and *(b)* his staff at Clarence House. [193942]

Mr. Caborn: Clarence House is the official London residence of HRH The Prince of Wales and the main office for His Household.

The ground floor rooms of Clarence House are used by The Prince of Wales for receiving and entertaining official guests and visitors; approximately 4,000 were received or entertained during the last year. The rooms are open during the summer when His Royal Highness is not in residence; approximately 42,500 members of the public visited Clarence House this summer.

The first and second floors provide private accommodation for The Prince of Wales and for Princes William and Harry when they are in London.

The third floor provides permanent accommodation for one member of staff and overnight accommodation for staff when The Prince of Wales is in London on official duties.

There are 37 rooms in Clarence House that accommodate 48 of The Prince of Wales's office staff.

Consultants

Mr. Don Foster: To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport if she will list the contracts awarded by her Department to consultants in *(a)* 1996, *(b)* 1997 and *(c)* 1998; what the (i) name of the consulting company, (ii) value of the contract and (iii) purpose of the contract was in each case; and if she will make a statement. [194662]

Mr. Caborn: Detailed records of contracts are not retained for the years 1996, 1997 and 1998. In the financial year 1995–96 the cost of consultants was £164,000, in 1996–97 it was £309,000 and in 1997–98 it was £728,000.

Dr. Julian Lewis: To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport how many consultancy firms or companies have been retained by the Department since June 2001; what the projects are for which each has been retained; and what the total is of the fees paid or incurred in each case. [193415]

Mr. Caborn: I refer the hon. Member to the answer I gave on 18 October 2004, *Official Report*, columns 442–43 to the hon. Member for Stratford-on-Avon (Mr. Maples).

Creative Partnerships

Mr. Don Foster: To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport how much her Department spent on Creative Partnerships in each year from 2003–04 *(a)* in total and *(b)* as a percentage of the total budget of Creative Partnerships; how much she estimates her Department will spent in each year until 2007–08; and if she will make a statement. [194661]

Mr. Caborn: The information requested is set out in the table. Outturn figures for the current financial year and budget figures for 2006–07 and 2007–08 are not yet available.

	Budget allocated by DCMS	*Outturn*	*Percentage of budget*
2003–04	33,500	23,100	69
2004–05	25,300	n/a	n/a
2005–06	45,000	n/a	n/a

Departmental Documents

Mr. Bellingham: To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport what the Department's target is for the interval between publication of *(a)* departmental announcements and documents and *(b)* material published by public bodies for which her Department has oversight and their posting online; and what the average interval was in the latest year for which figures are available. [195399]

Mr. Caborn: The Department aims to make all announcements and documents available online at the same time as they are otherwise released. No 30-minute target exists. However, we require a maximum of three days lead-in time to make documents compliant with the Disability and Discrimination Act accessibility guidance when they are to be published online so, in certain circumstances, simultaneous publication is not possible. The information on the targets set by DCMS bodies for publishing online could be discovered only at disproportionate cost.

Departmental IT

Brian White: To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport what percentage of the Department's *(a)* implemented and *(b)* planned computer systems use open source software; and what plans are in place to raise this level. [195660]

Mr. Caborn: My Department uses a number of open source applications but it would not be meaningful to express those in terms of a percentage of computer systems.

My Department was involved with the recent OGC led review of open source and our future plans will take account of the revised Open Source Software Policy Version 2.0.

Departmental Press Officers

Mr. Ruffley: To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport how many press officers are employed in her Department; and how many were employed in each year since 1996–97. [195361]

Mr. Caborn: There were 12 press officers, including two non-permanent staff, employed by the Department in 2003–04. Numbers of press officers employed in each year from 1996–97 are as follows:

	Number
1996–97	7
1997–98	7
1998–99	9
1999–2000	8
2000–01	9
2001–02	8
2002–03	9

Departmental Salaries

Tim Loughton: To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport how many people in her Department earn more than a whole-time equivalent salary of £57,485 per year. [195330]

Mr. Caborn: The Department for Culture, Media and Sport have 25 people who earn more than a whole-time equivalent salary of £57,485 per year.

Digital Broadcasting

Tom Levitt: To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport if she will make a statement on the timetable for providing free to air digital broadcasting to High Peak. [194267]

Estelle Morris: Free to air digital services via Digital Terrestrial Television are unlikely to be available throughout the High Peak area until Switchover because of spectrum constraints. The BBC and Ofcom believe that Switchover could start to happen as early as 2007 and be completed by 2012.

Discussions are taking place between the Government, Ofcom, and the Public Service Broadcasters and other stakeholders on the detailed plans for switchover. However, no specific dates have been set for the conversion of individual transmitters (with the exception of the Technical Trial transmitter in Ferryside where we plan Switchover in March 2005).

Some free to air services are available via digital satellite. Unfortunately, a regional breakdown of digital satellite reception is not possible, but, according to Ofcom figures, digital satellite coverage currently stands at between 96 per cent. and 98 per cent. of all UK households.

Mrs. Brooke: To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport if she will make a statement on the date for the switch-off of analogue television transmissions. [194584]

Estelle Morris: I refer the hon. Member to the answer I gave earlier today to the hon. Members for Torbay (Mr. Sanders) and Orkney and Shetland (Mr. Carmichael).

Football

Tony Lloyd: To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport what discussions she has had with the relevant authorities regarding codes of conduct within football. [194361]

Mr. Caborn: The Government understand the important role that sports men and women have as role models in our society. As Minister of Sport I have impressed upon the Football Association, Premier League, and the Football League, on a number of occasions, the importance of upholding codes of conduct within the game. I have also written to all the football club chairmen highlighting this.

Gambling

Miss Kirkbride: To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport what protocols are in place governing the attendance of her departmental officials at trade conventions promoting the interests of the foreign gaming industry. [193799]

Mr. Caborn: Officials attend trade conventions, conferences or similar outside events when it is judged that this use of official time is justified by the opportunity to obtain information relevant to the conduct of policy which will enhance their ability to advise Ministers, or to pursue discussions with commercial and other interest groups which are relevant to the assessment of the benefits, costs and risks of policy options or proposals and their implementation. All attendances are subject to the rules laid down in the Civil Service Code and the Department's Staff Guide.

Mr. Liddell-Grainger: To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport if she will make a statement on her proposals for gaming machines. [194574]

Mr. Caborn: I am proposing that machines which may be played by children will be available in fewer places than at present, and will have lower stakes and prizes than at present. Machines with the highest stakes and prizes will be available only in the strictly regulated environment of regional casinos—unlike Australia. And the Bill provides new and extensive controls over the operation of all gaming machines, wherever sited.

Licensing Act

Mrs. Spelman: To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport what estimate she has made of the cost to local authorities of implementing the Licensing Act 2003, in terms of *(a)* set-up and transition costs and *(b)* ongoing costs. [194693]

Mr. Caborn: We estimate that the costs falling on licensing authorities of start up and during the transitional period, which is expected to last for nine months, will be approximately £41 million and that the costs in each of the first three years after the regime becomes fully operational would be approximately £34 million, £30 million and £31 million. These costs would be recovered through fees charged for authorisations under the Act. The fees are to be set centrally by the Secretary of State by regulations made under the provisions of the Licensing Act 2003. We expect to commence a public consultation on our estimates of costs and proposed fee levels imminently. A small number of licensing authorities are not local authorities.

New Deal

Dr. Julian Lewis: To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport how many personnel the Department has recruited under the New Deal in each of the past five years. [194853]

Mr. Caborn: I refer the hon. Member to the reply given by my hon. Friend the Minister for the Cabinet Office on 25 October 2004, *Official Report*, columns 1052–54W.

Public Libraries

Shona McIsaac: To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport if she will make a statement on her Department's policies towards provision of public libraries in north east Lincolnshire. [194595]

Estelle Morris: My right hon. Friend the Secretary of State has a duty under the Public Libraries and Museums Act 1964 to superintend the provision of public library services by the 149 library authorities in England to secure the proper discharge by them of their responsibilities, under the same legislation, to provide a "comprehensive and efficient" service. Public libraries are funded through a combination of the Local Authority Settlement, locally raised taxation, and income that they generate for themselves. Public library funding is a matter of local discretion and it is a matter for each library authority to decide how much to spend on their libraries. The Department issues national standards for public libraries and last year produced "Framework for the Future" a ten year vision for public libraries.

Mr. Rosindell: To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport if she will conduct a review of the way libraries are funded. [192667]

Estelle Morris: The Department with the Museums, Libraries and Archives Council will shortly commission a study of the book supply chain and the most effective and efficient ways for libraries to spend, which will include a look at the sources of libraries income.

Quality Schemes

Mr. Sanders: To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport how much funding her Department has provided for England's Quality Schemes in this financial year; and what expenditure on such schemes is planned for future years. [195228]

Mr. Caborn: There are three quality schemes for accommodation in England; managed by the AA, the RAC and VisitBritain. The AA and RAC schemes are run as part of their commercial operations and receive no public funding.

VisitBritain supports its National Quality Assurance Standards for accommodation and the Visitor Attraction Quality Assurance Scheme from the grant in aid it receives from the Department of Culture Media and Sport. The budget for these schemes for this financial year is £1,454,000. It is anticipated that this figure will remain broadly constant for the foreseeable future, but detailed forward plans have not been finalised.

St. James' Palace

Mr. Alan Williams: To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport what accommodation HRH Princess Anne and her staff occupy at St. James' Palace. [193941]

Mr. Caborn: HRH The Princess Royal has a private apartment in St. James's Palace. The Princess's office, and office accommodation for her immediate staff are in Buckingham Palace. None of The Princess Royal's staff live in either St. James's Palace or Kensington Palace.

Television Licences

Simon Hughes: To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport how many households in *(a)* North Southwark and Bermondsey, *(b)* Camberwell and Peckham and *(c)* Dulwich and West Norwood are receiving a free television licence for over-75s. [194232]

Estelle Morris: TV Licensing, who administer free television licences for people aged 75 or over as agents for the BBC, are not able to provide geographical breakdowns of the number of free licences issued. However, 2001 Census data indicate that there are approximately *(a)* 5,400 people in the North Southwark and Bermondsey constituency, *(b)* 3,500 people in Camberwell and Peckham and *(c)* 5,100 people in Dulwich and West Norwood aged 75 or over.

Tourism

Mr. Sanders: To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport what action her Department is taking to improve collection of data about the tourism industry. [195229]

Mr. Caborn: Better business data for the tourism sector is one of the key priority work areas set out in Tomorrow's Tourism Today, which my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State launched in July. The Review of Tourism Statistics, published in June in co-operation with the Office of National Statistics, recommended a number of changes to the UK Tourism Survey and other sources of sectoral data. The Tourism Statistics Implementation Planning Group, which is led by my Department and includes representatives of the Devolved Administrations and Tourist Boards, is considering the recommendations and will publish an action plan before the end of the year.

Mr. Sanders: To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport what her estimate is of the percentage growth per annum required to reach the £100 billion target value for the tourism industry by 2010. [195267]

Mr. Caborn: The target of a £100 billion UK tourism industry by 2010 was agreed by my Department with VisitBritain, the Tourism Alliance, the Regional Development Agencies and the Local Government Association, and included in the national strategy document, Tomorrow's Tourism Today, in July. The target was based on a baseline figure of £76 billion for 2002.

Since that target was agreed, my Department has adopted a revised method of calculating the value of the tourism sector. Tourism Satellite Accounting produces a more accurate estimate of total turnover, and is the accepted international standard. Using the revised method, the total value of expenditure by tourists on UK trips in 2002 was £73.7 billion.

The target of £100 billion by 2010, against the revised baseline of £73.7 billion, stands. The achievement of that target would entail a percentage growth rate of 3.9 per cent. per annum.

HOME DEPARTMENT

Asylum Seekers

Mr. Rosindell: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many people are held in each asylum detention centre. [191452]

Mr. Browne: Information on the number of persons recorded as being in detention in the United Kingdom solely under Immigration Act powers as at 26 June 2004 is shown in the following table.

Information on numbers detained, by place of detention, is published on a quarterly and annual basis. The next quarterly statistics, providing the numbers detained at the end of September, will be available on 16 November on the Home Office Research Development and Statistics Directorate web site at http://www.homeoffice.gov.uk/rds/immigration1.html.

Persons recorded as being in detention in the United Kingdom solely under Immigration Act powers as at 26 June 2004, by place of detention[1,2]

Number of individuals

Place of detention	*Total detainees*	*Of whom: asylum seekers*[3]
Oakington Reception Centre	350	350
Immigration Service Removal Centres		
Harmondsworth	375	285
Dover	240	195
Campsfield House	165	120
Tinsley House	105	80
Haslar	85	70
Lindholme	85	65
Dungavel	70	55
Yarl's Wood	60	50
Immigration Short-term Holding Facilities		
Dover Harbour	20	15
Manchester Airport	10	5
Harwich Abbey	5	5
Prison establishments		
Belmarsh	15	5
Norwich	10	10
Wandsworth	10	5
Elmley	10	5
Wormwood Scrubs	10	5
Pentonville	5	5
Brixton	5	*
Other prison establishments[4]	100	60
Total	1,735	1,385

[1] Figures rounded to the nearest 5, with * = 1 or 2, and exclude persons detained in police cells and those in dual detention.

[2] A recent assessment of figures supplied by IND on immigration detention has highlighted an undercount of detainees held in prisons.

[3] Persons detained under Immigration Act powers who are recorded as having sought asylum at some stage.

[4] Other prison establishments with five or fewer detainees.

Tom Cox: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many appeals against a refusal to grant asylum are awaiting hearing in the Greater London area. [193969]

Mr. Lammy: I have been asked to reply.

As at 26 October 2004, information drawn from the Immigration Appellate Authority (IAA) database IRIS indicates that, at IAA Hearing Centres within the boundaries of the M25, there are approximately 2,229 appeals against a refusal of being granted asylum which are awaiting a hearing before an Immigration Adjudicator. This information does not include appeals which are currently in the process of being created following receipt by the IAA, or cases where a subsequent appeal has been made to the Immigration Appeal Tribunal (IAT) on a point of law.

Mr. Rosindell: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many people have used the channel tunnel illegally to gain access to the United Kingdom to seek asylum. [191255]

Mr. Browne: Information on entry routes of those claiming asylum, including on the number of asylum applicants entering the UK via the channel tunnel, is unavailable. Most asylum applicants conceal their route of entry.

Information on asylum applications is published on a quarterly and annual basis. The next publication covering the third quarter of 2004 (July to September) will be available on 16 November on the Home Office Research Development and Statistics Directorate website at:

http://www.homeoffice.gov.uk/rds/immigration1.html.

Mr. Battle: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what his latest estimate is of the number of asylum applicants who have been refused section 4 support; and if he will make a statement. [189981]

Mr. Browne: Since January 2004 a total of 788 unsuccessful asylum seekers have been refused section 4 support.

Biometric Identifiers

Mrs. Curtis-Thomas: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department when the results of the UK Passport Service's trial into biometric identifiers will be made available. [191328]

Mr. Browne: The enrolment of volunteers on the UK Passport Service biometrics trial is expected to be completed in November 2004. This will be followed by evaluation and quality assurance of the results with the findings being released as soon as possible thereafter.

Vehicle Crime

Mr. Jim Cunningham: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what initiatives his Department have implemented to reduce the number of car thefts. [194168]

Ms Blears: The Home Office is taking forward work within the broad strategy published by the Vehicle Crime Reduction Action Team in 1999 for meeting the Government's target to reduce vehicle crime by 30 per cent. over five years.

The initiatives on which the Home Office has taken the lead include:

bringing into effect the Motor Salvage Operators Regulations in October 2002;

working to improve police performance including, with the Association of Chief Police Officers, publication in 2003 of good practice advice in tackling vehicle crime;

getting across car crime prevention advice to motorists through national communications campaigns and by using opportunities provided by the Driver and Vehicle Licensing Agency;

providing funding to support vehicle crime reduction work undertaken by the National Criminal Intelligence Service (£1.41 million between 2000–01 and 2004–05) installing CCTV schemes in 1,222 car parks (£106 million between 1999–2000 and 2002–03);

the Safer Parking Scheme (£865,000 between 2001–02 and 2004–05, including its predecessor the ACPO Secured Car Park Scheme) and the Tenants Participation Advisory Service 'Partnership into Practice' competitions to identify and disseminate good practice for community groups (£37,000 in 2003–04 and £40,000 estimated for 2004–05).

In addition, other Home Office funding available to support vehicle crime reduction work, as well as other interventions to reduce crime according to local priorities includes that available to the police through the Police Standards Unit (£23.1 million in 2003–04 and £20 million in 2004–05); the Basic Command Unit Fund (£50 million in both 2003–04 and 2004–05); and that available to Crime and Disorder Reduction Partnerships through the Building Safer Communities Fund (£9[illegible] million from 2002–03 to 2004–05, including its predecessor, the Safer Communities Initiative).

These, together with other initiatives undertaken by other Government Departments and key stakeholders, have resulted in British Crime Survey estimates from interviews in the year ending June 2004 showing a reduction of 33 per cent. in vehicle related thefts against 1999 (British Crime Survey 2000).

Consultants

Mr. Maples: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department, if he will list the contracts awarded by his Department to consultants in each of the last five years, stating in each case *(a)* the name of the consulting company, *(b)* the value of the of the contract and *(c)* the purpose for which the contract was awarded; and if he will make a statement. [191731]

Fiona Mactaggart: The Home Office does not hold central records of all the contracts awarded to consultants in each of the last five years. To obtain the information requested for each of the last five years would result in disproportionate costs.

The Home Office is currently addressing this problem with the implementation of an Oracle Enterprise Resource Planning (ERP) system, Adelphi, in the core Home Office and in the Prison Service, Phoenix, which will provide accurate management information on the Department's use of consultants.

The use of external consultants in the Home Office provides the Department with specialist knowledge, skill, capacity and technical expertise that is not otherwise available in the House.

Correspondence

Tom Cox: To ask the Secretary of State for The Home Department what the average time for a reply to be sent to an hon. Member from a Minister in the Home Office was in the last period for which figures are available; and if he will make a statement. [191969]

Fiona Mactaggart: My Home Office colleagues and I replied within 15 working days to 70 per cent. of letters received in August, an improvement on the 60 per cent. achieved in respect of letters received in January.

We aim to reply to 95 per cent. of Members' letters within 15 working days except in the case of correspondence relating to the Immigration and Nationality Department and HM Prison Service, when we aim to reply within 20 working days.

Improving performance against targets is recognised as a priority across the Department. The computerised Correspondence Tracking System has recently been extended to cover the immigration and nationality areas and this should result in further improvements in performance.

Data on the average time for a reply to be sent is not held and could be made available only at disproportionate cost.

Tom Cox: To ask the Secretary of State for The Home Department whether it is the policy of his Department to send acknowledgement cards to honourable Members who have written to his Department; and if he will make a statement. [191970]

Fiona Mactaggart: All Members' correspondence processed on the Home Office's correspondence tracking system should be acknowledged.

During August and September technical difficulties meant that in some cases no acknowledgement was sent and in others multiple acknowledgements were generated. These problems have now been resolved.

Counter-terrorism

Mr. Dismore: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how much of the extra £90 million for counter-terrorism measures announced on 29 September will be made available to the Metropolitan Police Service; and when the breakdown of allocations will be announced. [192534]

Mr. Blunkett: For security reasons we would not wish to comment on the allocation of specific counter terrorism funding. However I can say that additional funding is being made available to the Police Service in England and Wales and on which we are currently consulting with the Association of Chief Police Officers, which includes senior officers from the Metropolitan Police Service.

Custody Suites

Mr. Heath: To ask the Secretary of State for The Home Department how many custody suites were available in each police authority area in England and Wales in each year from 1993 to 2004. [192146]

Ms Blears: This information is not held centrally.

English Language Testing System

Keith Vaz: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will make a statement on the new requirement for Ministers of Religion who wish to come to the UK to provide an international English Language Testing System certificate. [190795]

Mr. Browne: I would refer my hon. Friend to the written statement which my right hon. Friend the Home Secretary, made to the House on 22 July.

Under the new Rules, which came into force on 23 August, those seeking entry as a Minister of Religion are required to demonstrate that they have a basic command of spoken English by providing an International English Language Testing System (IELTS) certificate at the "limited user" level (Level 4). We intend to raise this requirement to level 6 spoken and written English after an interim period of two years.

For people with existing English skills—for example those educated in an English speaking nation—discretion may be applied to allow entry where evidence is provided that an individual speaks competent English.

Keith Vaz: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many Sikh ministers of religion have taken the International English Language Testing System certificate test this year. [190796]

Mr. Browne: International English Language Testing System (IELTS) is jointly managed by the University of Cambridge Local Examination Syndicate, the British Council and IDP Education Australia.

We would only become aware of a person's IELTS qualification once an application to enter the United Kingdom under the Immigration Rules as a Minister of Religion had been made.

ICT Consultants

Mr. Jenkins: To ask the Secretary of State for The Home Department how much the Department spent on outside information technology and communication specialist consultants and engineers in the 2003–04 financial year. [191906]

Fiona Mactaggart: The Home Office does not hold central records on how much was spent on outside information communications and technology (ICT) specialist consultants and engineers in the financial year 2003–04. To obtain the information requested would incur disproportionate costs.

The Home Office is currently addressing this problem with the implementation of an Oracle Enterprise Resource Planning (ERP) system, Adelphi and Prison Service Phoenix, which will provide accurate management information on the Department's use of consultants and engineers.

The use of specialist consultants and engineers in the Home Office and its agencies provides the Department with specialist knowledge, skill, capacity and technical expertise that is not otherwise available in House.

Much technical ICT consultancy and engineering is provided by the Home Department's ICT service providers, notably in 2003–04 by EDS, Fujitsu, Siemens and Steria, as part of their overall service provision charge.

Identity Cards

Mrs. Curtis-Thomas: To ask the Secretary of State for The Home Department whether the identity card scheme will be covered by the Data Protection Act 1988. [191891]

Mr. Browne: The identity cards scheme will be covered by the Data Protection Act 1998.

Immigration and Nationality Directorate

Bob Spink: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many people were employed in the Immigration and Nationality Directorate in *(a)* 1996–97 and *(b)* 2003–04. [190961]

Mr. Browne: In 1996–97 5,432 full-time equivalent staff were employed in the Immigration and Nationality Directorate; the figure for 2003–04 was 13,716.

Tony Lloyd: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what the average time taken was at the latest available date for cases received by the Immigration and Nationality Department's Appeals Processing Centre, to be processed and sent to the Independent Appellate Authority. [191370]

Mr. Browne: Data on the average time between appeals being processed by the Appeals Processing Centre and the papers being sent out to the Immigration Appellate Authority is unavailable and could be obtained only at disproportionate cost by examination of individual case records.

It is planned that performance against PSA targets relating to 2003–04, including those relating to the speed of processing, will be published in due course (once the data is judged sufficiently reliable) in the regular quarterly asylum statistics, a copy of which is available in the Library and from the Home Office's Research Development and Statistics website:

http://www.homeoffice.gov.uk/rds/immigration1.html

Immigration Officers

Mr. Rosindell: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what the pay scales for immigration officers are. [191267]

Mr. Browne: The pay scales for immigration officers are as follows:

£

	Minimum	*Target rate*
Inner London	18,757	23,930
Gatwick	18,757	23,930
National	18,380	23,449

Knives

Keith Vaz: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many attacks involving knives used by under-aged offenders the Leicestershire police authority has recorded in 2004. [194759]

Ms Blears: This information is not collected centrally.

Manchester Airport

Chris Grayling: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what recent representations he has received concerning the standard of immigration checks at Manchester Airport. [190499]

Mr. Browne: The Secretary of State has received no representations about the standard of immigration checks at Manchester Airport this year. There have been four formal complaints to the Immigration and Nationality Directorate about the conduct of immigration officials at Manchester Airport this year. In addition, immigration officials at Manchester Airport have received nine complaints about local procedures and issues, such as the standard of facilities, at the airport during that time.

Muslim Council

Mrs. Curtis-Thomas: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will make a statement on his recent meetings with the Muslim Council. [191539]

Fiona Mactaggart: My right hon. Friend the Home Secretary holds regular meetings, on a roughly quarterly basis, with the Secretary General of the Muslim Council of Britain. These meetings enable the Home Secretary to keep abreast of issues relating to the safety and security of Muslim communities, their relations with other communities and progress in addressing concerns about equality and discrimination.

The Government are keen to have good relations with all faith communities in the UK. The Home Secretary and his colleagues both in the Home Office and in other departments engage with members of faith communities in a number of ways and are always open to meetings with faith leaders and representatives.

Naturalisation

Mr. Chope: To ask the Secretary of State for The Home Department what qualifications suffice for the purposes of establishing a sufficient knowledge of English for the purposes of an application for naturalisation. [191362]

Mr. Browne *[holding answer 15 October 2004]:* Any qualifications which establishes knowledge of English at a level equivalent to, or higher than ESOL (English for Speakers of Other Languages) Entry 3, will be accepted as establishing a sufficient knowledge of English for naturalisation purposes.

Mr. Chope: To ask the Secretary of State for The Home Department when it will be possible for applicants for naturalisation to obtain a certificate from a designated person to demonstrate sufficient knowledge of English; and when he intends to publish the list of designated persons. [191471]

Mr. Browne *[holding answer 15 October 2004]:* They can do so now. The Home Office website indicates which people are designated to certify that a person is a native English speaker or has English language skills at a similar level. Notaries are currently designated for that purpose, and following discussions with their professional bodies, solicitors will shortly be added. Other professional groups may be added in due course.

EU Accession States

Keith Vaz: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many citizens from EU accession countries have registered with the workers' registration scheme; and what the five professions with the most registrations are. [190792]

Mr. Browne: I would refer my hon. Friend to my statement of 7 July 2004, *Official Report*, columns 35–37WS, which sets out published (provisional) figures for May and June 2004. In May and June just under 20,000 applications to the Worker Registration Scheme were approved. The top five sectors were: hospitality and catering; administration, business and management; agriculture; manufacturing; and retail.

Data for July, August and September will be published later this year.

Passports

Tim Loughton: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department (1) when free passports will be available to all over 75-years-old; [189426]

(2) what discussions he has had with the Treasury about the cost of providing concessionary passports to over 75-year-olds; and how the scheme will be funded. [189427]

Mr. Browne: My right hon. Friend, the Home Secretary announced on 13 October that the scheme to grant free passports to those who were 16 or over at the end of World War II—on 2 September 1945, will be implemented on Monday 18 October 2004.

All British Nationals who were born on or before 2 September 1929 will be able to apply for their free passports from that date.

The Home Office will fund the scheme this year, and will seek to recover the costs in future years from the general passport fee.

We have no plans to issue free passports to all over 75-years-old on an ongoing basis.

Bob Spink: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department when he will implement his policy of free passports for the elderly; and if he will make a statement. [190690]

Mr. Hancock: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department from what date he intends to make passports for people over 75 years free of charge. [189115]

Mr. Chope: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department when older pensioners will be able to apply for free passports. [191474]

John Barrett: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department when free passports for people over 75 years will be introduced; and if he will make a statement. [187457]

Mr. Browne: My right hon. Friend the Home Secretary announced on 13 October that the scheme to grant free passports to those who were 16 or over at the end of World War II—on 2 September 1945, will be implemented on Monday 18 October 2004.

All British nationals who were born on or before 2 September 1929 will be able to apply for their free passports from that date.

Press Officers

Matthew Taylor: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what his projection is of the number of press officers employed in his Department for 2004–05. [187553]

Fiona Mactaggart: The number of press officers is currently 39 and this is the projection of the total number that will be required for 2004–05.

In 2003–04 the Press Office news desk answered 60,039 calls, and the Press Office issued 583 press notices and held 29 briefings for the media.

Racist Attacks

Keith Vaz: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many racist *(a)* attacks and *(b)* threats the Leicestershire police authority has recorded in 2004. [194758]

Ms Blears: The available information relates 2003–04 and covers offences of racially or religiously aggravated less serious wounding and common assault. There were 101 offences of racially or religiously aggravated less serious wounding and 110 offences of racially or religiously aggravated common assault recorded in Leicestershire. Information on racist threats is not collected centrally.

Sikh Ministers of Religion

Keith Vaz: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many Sikh Ministers of Religion have been denied entry to the UK this year. [190875]

Mr. Browne: Information on the number of Sikh Ministers of Religion denied entry to the UK is not available except by examination of individual case files at disproportionate cost.

Terrorism Act

Lynne Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department (1) if he will give the reasons for the differences in the figures for the number of searches under section 44(1) of the Terrorism Act 2000 conducted in *(a)* England and Wales and *(b)* the Metropolitan Police district in 2002–03 given in the answer of 27 January 2004, *Official Report*, column 268W, and page 39 of the Home Office report Statistics on Race and the Criminal Justice System-2003; [190780]

(2) if he will give the reasons for the differences in the figures for the number of searches under section 44(1) of the Terrorism Act 2000 conducted in *(a)* England and Wales and *(b)* the Metropolitan Police district in 2001–02 given in the answer of 27 January 2004, *Official Report*, column 268W, and page 38 of the Home Office report Statistics on Race and the Criminal Justice System-2003. [190821]

Mr. Blunkett: The Statistics on Race and the Criminal Justice System 2003 report is concerned with detailing stop-searches by ethnicity, therefore, the number of stop-searches carried out on vehicles and not the occupants is omitted. The Home Office Statistical Bulletin, the source for the answer of 27 January, includes instances where the police have stop-searched just the vehicle and not any of the occupants.

Lynne Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will give the reasons for the differences in the three figures for the number of searches under section 44(1) and (2) of the Terrorism Act 2000 conducted in Gloucestershire in 2002–03 as given in *(a)* the answer of 27 January 2004, *Official Report*, column 268W, *(b)* the answer of 6 February 2004, *Official Report*, column 1121W, on police and *(c)* page 37 of the Home Office report Statistics on Race and the Criminal Justice System 2003. [190781]

Mr. Blunkett: The Statistics on Race and the Criminal Justice System 2003 report is concerned with detailing stop-searches by ethnicity, therefore the number of stop-searches carried out on vehicles and not the occupants is omitted. The Home Office Statistical Bulletin, the source for the answer of 27 January, includes instances where the police have stop-searched just the vehicle and not any of the occupants.

I can confirm that the correct number of stop-searches under Section 44 (2) for the period is nil. The figure 299 was wrongly quoted in the response of 6 February due to an administrative error, for which I apologise. A breakdown of these figures from the Home Office Statistical Bulletin is shown in the following tables. This can be found on the Research and Statistics section of the Home Office website.

Table 4.6: Total "stop and searches" under s44(1 and 2) of the Terrorism Act 2000 by ethnicity 2001–02 to 2002–03

	White		*Black*		*Asian*	
	2001–02	*2002–03*	*2001–02*	*2002–03*	*2001–02*	*2002–03*
Avon and Somerset	0	0	0	0	0	0
Bedfordshire	3	18	1	3	2	8
Cambridgeshire	0	0	0	0	0	0
Cheshire	334	242	0	1	1	2
Cleveland	0	0	0	0	0	0
Cumbria	0	0	0	0	0	0
Derbyshire	10	0	0	0	2	0
Devon and Cornwall	120	0	1	0	5	0
Dorset	0	0	0	0	0	0
Durham	0	0	0	0	3	0
Essex	0	2	0	1	0	1
Gloucestershire	28	511	1	0	2	2
Greater Manchester	22	285	3	26	9	54
Hampshire	12	245	0	4	6	24
Hertfordshire	0	0	0	0	0	0

Table 4.6: Total "stop and searches" under s44(1 and 2) of the Terrorism Act 2000 by ethnicity 2001–02 to 2002–03

	White		*Black*		*Asian*	
	2001–02	*2002–03*	*2001–02*	*2002–03*	*2001–02*	*2002–03*
Humberside	0	0	0	0	0	0
Kent	255	57	0	6	2	14
Lancashire	0	152	0	0	0	3
Leicestershire	130	70	2	2	2	10
Lincolnshire	0	0	0	0	0	0
City of London	2,715	3,377	232	477	220	422
Merseyside	0	0	0	0	0	0
Metfopolitan police	2,038	8,359	258	1,175	459	2,241
Norfolk	0	3	1	0	1	0
Northamptonshire	0	0	0	0	0	0
Northumbria	0	0	0	0	0	0
North Yorkshire	3	71	0	4	5	35
Nottinghamshire	0	0	0	0	0	0
South Yorkshire	58	0	0	0	0	0
Staffordshire	0	0	0	0	0	0
Suffolk	0	2	0	0	0	0
Surrey	2	47	0	4	0	6
Sussex	894	256	30	22	61	25
Thames Valley	0	687	0	19	0	130
Warwick	0	0	0	0	0	0
West Mercia	5	0	0	0	0	0
West Midlands	0	25	0	1	0	10
West Yorkshire	0	13	0	0	0	2
Wiltshire	0	0	0	0	0	0
Dyfed Powys	0	0	0	0	0	0
Gwent	0	7	0	0	0	0
North Wales	0	0	0	0	0	0
South Wales	0	0	0	0	0	0
England and Wales	6,629	14,429	529	1,745	744	2,989

	Other		*Not recorded*		*Total*	
	2001–02	*2002–03*	*2001–02*	*2002–03*	*2001–02*	*2002–03*
Avon and Somerset	0	0	0	0	0	0
Bedfordshire	2	1	0	1	8	31
Cambridgeshire	0	0	0	0	0	0
Cheshire	2	6	43	11	380	262
Cleveland	0	0	0	0	0	0
Cumbria	0	0	0	0	0	0
Derbyshire	0	0	3	0	15	0
Devon and Cornwall	1	0	0	0	127	0
Dorset	0	0	0	0	0	0
Durham	0	0	0	0	3	0
Essex	0	3	0	0	0	7
Gloucestershire	0	1	1	380	32	894
Greater Manchester	0	6	2	49	36	420
Hampshire	0	15	0	4	12	292
Hertfordshire	0	0	1	0	1	0
Humberside	0	0	0	0	0	0
Kent	0	45	0	11	257	133
Lancashire	0	0	0	0	0	155
Leicestershire	0	2	0	0	134	84
Lincolnshire	0	0	0	0	0	0
City of London	181	326	146	0	3,494	4,602
Merseyside	0	0	0	0	0	0
Metropolitan police	152	770	56	698	2,963	13,243
Norfolk	0	0	0	0	2	3
Northamptonshire	0	0	0	0	0	0
Northumbria	0	0	0	0	0	0
North Yorkshire	0	0	0	0	8	110
Nottinghamshire	0	0	0	0	0	0
South Yorkshire	0	0	0	0	58	0
Staffordshire	0	0	0	0	0	0
Suffolk	0	0	0	0	0	2
Surrey	0	2	0	0	2	59
Sussex	20	15	8	1	1,013	319
Thames Valley	0	64	0	0	0	900
Warwick	0	0	0	0	0	0
West Mercia	0	0	0	0	5	0

	Other		*Not recorded*		*Total*	
	2001-02	*2002-03*	*2001-02*	*2002-03*	*2001-02*	*2002-03*
West Midlands	0	0	0	0	0	36
West Yorkshire	0	3	0	0	0	18
Wiltshire	0	0	0	0	0	0
Dyfed Powys	0	0	0	0	0	0
Gwent	0	0	0	0	0	7
North Wales	0	0	0	0	0	0
South Wales	0	0	0	0	0	0
England and Wales	358	1,259	260	1155	8,550	21,577

Table P3 Searches of vehicles and occupants under section 44(1) and searches of pedestrians under section 44(2) of the Terrorism Act 2000[1] *and resultant arrests, by police force area—England and Wales 2002–03*

Numbers

	Stops and searches of vehicles and occupants under 44(1)		*Stops and searches of pedestrians under 44(2)*	
Police force area	*Searches*	*Resultant arrests*	*Searches*	*Resultant arrests*
Avon and Somerset	—	—	—	—
Bedfordshire	31	1	—	—
Cambridgeshire	—	—	—	—
Cheshire	302	4	18	3
Cleveland	—	—	—	—
Cumbria	—	—	—	—
Derbyshire	—	—	—	—
Devon and Cornwall	—	—	—	—
Dorset	—	—	—	—
Durham	—	—	—	—
Essex	2	—	5	—
Gloucestershire	898	3	—	—
Greater Manchester	210	3	299	9
Hampshire	256	8	38	—
Hertfordshire	—	—	—	—
Humberside	—	—	—	—
Kent	67	28	74	1
Lancashire	155	—	—	—
Leicestershire[2]	45	—	—	—
Lincolnshire	—	—	—	—
London, City of	4,369	96	275	11
Merseyside	—	—	—	—
Metropolitan police	19,677	146	3,764	53
Norfolk	5	—	—	—
Northamptonshire	—	—	—	—
Northumbria	—	—	—	—
North Yorkshire	110	—	—	—
Nottinghamshire	—	—	—	—
South Yorkshire	105	2	—	—
Staffordshire	—	—	—	—
Suffolk	3	—	—	—
Surrey	31	—	36	1
Sussex	113	—	238	3
Thames Valley	900	—	—	—
Warwickshire	—	—	—	—
West Mercia	—	—	—	—
West Midlands	16	1	20	6
West Yorkshire	18	1	—	—
Wiltshire	—	—	—	—
Dyfed Powys	—	—	—	—
Gwent	—	—	7	—
North Wales	—	—	—	—
South Wales	—	—	—	—
Total	27,313	293	4,774	87

[1] Formerly section 13A and 13B of the Prevention of Terrorism (Temporary Provisions) Act 1989 and repealed under the Terrorism Act 2000 which came into force on 19 February 2001.

[2] Stops and searches of vehicles and occupants and pedestrians are not separately identifiable.

Work Permits

Keith Vaz: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department whether there are differences in the procedures for granting work permits from overseas in the public and the private and voluntary sectors. [190775]

Mr. Browne: There are no differences in the procedures for considering work permit applications for work in the public, private and voluntary sectors. All work permits applications pass through the same set of procedures irrespective of the sector from which the application is made.

Keith Vaz: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what assessment has been made of *(a)* the time taken to process and *(b)* the success rate of applications for a permit to work in the (i) private and voluntary and (ii) public sector. [190776]

Mr. Browne: No assessment has been made. This information is not recorded centrally and could be obtained only by incurring disproportionate costs.

Youth Crime

Mr. Willis: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what measures his Department is taking to tackle youth crime during the summer holiday period; and if he will make a statement. [185360]

Paul Goggins: As set out in the Home Office Strategic Plan, "Confident Communities in a Secure Britain", published on 19 July, the Home Office works with other Departments to deliver a wide-ranging programme to tackle youth crime.

This programme includes the Positive Activities for Young People programme which again this year provided a range of activities for young people, aged 8 to 19, during the school summer holidays in high crime areas. Over 75,000 young people benefited from the programme in 2003, and a similar level of provision was available this year.

The Positive Activities for Young People programme is in addition to year round youth crime prevention activity, such as the Youth Inclusion Programme which at present targets the 13 to 16-year-olds assessed as being at greatest risk of criminality in 72 of the most deprived neighbourhoods in England and Wales. Following the SR2004 Spending Review we intend to increase the coverage of the Youth Inclusion Programme.

DEPUTY PRIME MINISTER

Council Tax

Mrs. Spelman: To ask the Deputy Prime Minister how much revenue is projected to be raised from council tax in England in 2004–05. [194690]

Mr. Raynsford: The total council tax requirement budgeted by local authorities and police and fire authorities in England for 2004–05 is £20.299 billion.

Mr. Cousins: To ask the Deputy Prime Minister how much revenue from council tax each *(a)* London borough and *(b)* Metropolitan authority received in (i) 2003–04 and (ii) 2004–05. [194753]

Mr. Raynsford: The information requested for 2003–04 is tabled as follows. The figures exclude amounts funded from council tax benefit.

Comparable figures for 2004–05 will not be available until after the end of the financial year.

£ million

	Council taxes received in 2003–04 irrespective of year to which they relate
London boroughs (including City)	
Barking and Dagenham	38.932
Barnet	131.787
Bexley	80.858
Brent	73.616
Bromley	115.261
Camden	79.391
City of London	3.843
Croydon	116.585
Ealing	104.829
Enfield	96.419
Greenwich	63.872
Hackney	49.198
Hammersmith and Fulham	65.696
Haringey	69.630
Harrow	89.279
Havering	91.935
Hillingdon	92.948
Hounslow	78.341
Islington	56.402
Kensington and Chelsea	73.695
Kingston upon Thames	67.088
Lambeth	78.272
Lewisham	70.024
Merton	71.855
Newham	46.358
Redbridge	79.818
Richmond upon Thames	98.364
Southwark	67.077
Sutton	68.499
Tower Hamlets	45.387
Waltham Forest	65.351
Wandsworth	59.292
Westminster	58.041
Metropolitan districts	
Barnsley	55.782
Birmingham	223.307
Bolton	74.189
Bradford	114.899
Bury	54.469
Calderdale	58.533
Coventry	81.007
Doncaster	72.779
Dudley	81.063
Gateshead	54.971
Kirklees	110.470
Knowsley	31.217
Leeds	181.776
Liverpool	95.487
Manchester	87.149
Newcastle-upon-Tyne	69.425
North Tyneside	58.810
Oldham	61.301
Rochdale	53.489
Rotherham	66.935
Salford	59.804
Sandwell	64.976
Sefton	84.882
Sheffield	137.565
Solihull	69.603
South Tyneside	37.225
St. Helens	49.753
Stockport	99.190
Sunderland	65.664
Tameside	57.820
Trafford	61.790
Wakefield	82.307
Walsall	71.121
Wigan	84.807
Wirral	98.504
Wolverhampton	59.375

Source:
QRC4 returns to ODPM

Mr. Edward Davey: To ask the Deputy Prime Minister what discount on council tax is applicable for *(a)* second homes and *(b)* empty properties in each local authority area. [195056]

Mr. Raynsford: Since 1 April this year, billing authorities have had the freedom to reduce council tax discounts for second homes in all or part of their area from 50 per cent. to between 10 per cent. and 50 per cent., and to reduce or remove the 50 per cent. discount for domestic properties in all or part of their area that have been empty for more than six months. Information on the actual use of these freedoms this year is currently being collected from local authorities. Figures are expected to be available early next year.

Mr. Edward Davey: To ask the Deputy Prime Minister if he will estimate the total council tax revenue *(a)* raised by local authorities from charging on empty homes in 2004–05 and *(b)* to be raised by local authorities from charging on empty homes in 2005–06. [195057]

Mr. Raynsford: This information for 2004–05 is currently being collected from local authorities. An estimate is expected to be available in January.

The information for 2005–06 is due to be collected in October and November 2005, and an estimate is expected to be available in January 2006.

Mr. Edward Davey: To ask the Deputy Prime Minister if he will estimate the total council tax revenue *(a)* raised by local authorities from charging on second homes in 2004–05 and *(b)* to be raised by local authorities from charging on second homes in 2005–06. [195058]

Mr. Raynsford: Information that will allow the requested estimate to be made for 2004–05 is currently being collected from local authorities. An estimate is expected to be available early next year.

Information that will allow the requested estimate to be made for 2005–06 is due to be collected in October and November 2005, and an estimate is expected to be available in early 2006.

Diego Garcians

Mr. Peter Ainsworth: To ask the Deputy Prime Minister what measures he is taking to assist Reigate and Banstead Borough Council in housing and feeding the exiled Diego Garcians recently arrived from Mauritius; and if he will make a statement. [194857]

Mr. Raynsford: It is understood that Reigate and Banstead Borough Council are currently accommodating a number of persons recently arrived from Mauritius.

Local housing authorities' obligations to provide temporary accommodation under the homelessness legislation apply principally in cases where the Council have a reason to believe that the applicants may be eligible for assistance, unintentionally homeless and in priority need. I understand that the recent arrivals from Mauritius were found by the Council to be ineligible for homelessness assistance on the basis that, despite being British citizens, they are persons from abroad who are not habitually resident. The Council originally decided not to exercise their power to provide them with accommodation pending an internal review of that decision. The decision is now the subject of judicial review proceedings and the Council are currently accommodating them pending the outcome of those proceedings.

Local housing authorities are funded for the provision of homelessness services through revenue support grant and are expected to meet the costs of dealing with situations such as the need to provide housing support for small groups of migrants, or, as in the case of the Chagossians, the return of British citizens from abroad, from within existing provision.

Reigate and Banstead Borough Council are a district council and do not have social services functions. District councils do not have a statutory obligation under housing legislation to meet the subsistence needs of homeless persons.

Mr. Peter Ainsworth: To ask the Deputy Prime Minister what representations he has received, and when, regarding the cost to Reigate and Banstead Borough Council of housing exiled Diego Garcians now resident in Horley; and what action he has taken. [194859]

Mr. Raynsford: The Office of the Deputy Prime Minister has received one letter dated 19 October on this issue from the hon. Member. A reply will be given shortly.

High Hedges

Mr. Pickles: To ask the Deputy Prime Minister when he will produce the regulations under Part 8 of the Anti-social Behaviour Act 2003. [194339]

Phil Hope: I refer the hon. Member to the answer given on 27 October 2004, *Official Report*, column 1301W.

Houses in Multiple Occupation

Mr. Jon Owen Jones: To ask the Deputy Prime Minister what estimate he has made of the *(a)* number and *(b)* proportion of three storey houses in multiple occupation in Wales that will not be subject to the mandatory HMO licensing scheme envisaged in the Housing Bill. [194519]

Keith Hill: No such estimates have been made by the Office of the Deputy Prime Minister as these are matters for my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Wales.

Jon Trickett: To ask the Deputy Prime Minister what recent estimate he has made of the *(a)* number and *(b)* proportion of three-storey houses in multiple occupation (HMOs) in England that will not be subject to the mandatory HMO licensing scheme envisaged in the Housing Bill. [194808]

Keith Hill: The information requested is not held centrally, and could be provided only at disproportionate cost.

Housing

Jon Cruddas: To ask the Deputy Prime Minister how many empty homes there are in each *(a)* Inner London and *(b)* Outer London local authority. [194420]

Keith Hill: The latest information on empty dwellings in each local authority in inner and outer London is tabled as follows. This data has been provided from the Office of the Deputy Prime Minister's annual Housing Investment Programme returns and Housing Corporation's annual Regulatory Statistical returns, as reported by local authorities and registered social landlords respectively.

Total number of vacant dwellings at 1 April 2004

	Number of dwellings vacant
London	99,890
Inner London	47,329
Camden	2,305
City of London	40
Hackney	3,757
Hammersmith and Fulham	2,180
Haringey	2,883
Islington	2,201
Kensington and Chelsea	5,978
Lambeth	3,769
Lewisham	3,964
Newham	2,779
Southwark	4,480
Tower Hamlets	6,430
Wandsworth	2,545
Westminster	4,018
Outer London	52,561
Barking and Dagenham	656
Barnet	4,122
Bexley	1,787
Brent	5,104

Total number of vacant dwellings at 1 April 2004

	Number of dwellings vacant
Bromley	5,296
Croydon	4,942
Baling	2,956
Enfield	4,393
Greenwich	3,287
Harrow	1,631
Havering	2,697
Hillingdon	2,190
Hounslow	1,778
Kingston upon Thames	[1]—
Merton	[1]—
Redbridge	2,115
Richmond upon Thames	687
Sutton	2,356
Waltham Forest	3,39

[1] Data not known or available.

Source:

ODPM's Housing Investment Programme returns and Housing Corporation's Regulatory Statistical returns.

Local Authority Income

Mrs. Spelman: To ask the Deputy Prime Minister what the total net income of local authorities in England is projected to be for 2004–05. [194691]

Mr. Raynsford: The projected total net income for all local authorities in England in 2004–05 is £78,711 million. This figure is as reported by local authorities and is taken from the revenue account (RA) budget form for 2004–05.

The net income figure is calculated as the sum of police grant, revenue support grant, redistributed non-domestic rates, general Greater London authority (GLA) grant, special and specific grants inside aggregate external finance (AEF) and the council tax requirement. It excludes any income from sales, fees and charges.

Shona McIsaac: To ask the Deputy Prime Minister how much *(a)* North East Lincolnshire council and *(b)* North Lincolnshire council received in Government grant in (i) cash and (ii) real terms in each year since each council was established; and by how much in real terms the grant changed in each of those years. [194181]

Mr. Raynsford: The amount of Government grant North East Lincolnshire council and North Lincolnshire council has received in (i) cash and (ii) real terms each year since 1996–97 and the real terms percentage change is tabled as follows.

£000

	North East Lincolnshire			*North Lincolnshire*		
	Cash	*Real terms*	*Real percentage terms change*	*Cash*	*Real terms*	*Real percentage terms change*
1996–97	101,899	123,891	—	91,583	111,349	—
1997–98	102,620	121,645	-1.8	94,622	112,165	0.7
1998–99	109,554	126,228	3.8	97,542	112,387	0.2
1999–2000	117,798	132,830	5.2	100,972	113,857	1.3
2000–01	126,909	141,462	6.5	109,688	122,266	7.4
2001–02	137,538	149,503	5.7	115,957	126,045	3.1
2002–03	144,007	151,439	1.3	126,042	132,547	5.2
2003–04	154,867	158,441	4.6	137,020	140,182	5.8
2004–05	166,272	166,272	4.9	139,028	139,028	-0.8

The data shown, as reported by the local authority, are outturn figures for all years except 2003–04 and 2004–05 which are budget estimates.

Government grants is defined here in terms of Revenue Support Grant, SSA Reduction Grant, Police Grant, Central Support Protection Grant and the distributed amount from non-domestic pool i.e. Formula Grant, plus specific and special grants within Aggregate External Finance (AEF).

The figures have been revalued for previous years at 2004–05 prices using the latest GDP deflators.

The data have been taken from returns made by local authorities and so do not allow for transfers of funding and function. In particular the figures for 2003–04 and earlier years include funding for Fire where as the 2004–05 figures exclude such funding which now goes directly to the combined fire authority.

Local Government Finance

Lembit Öpik: To ask the Deputy Prime Minister what plans he has to link tax with income to fund local government; and if he will make a statement. [194653]

Mr. Raynsford: The Government has appointed Sir Michael Lyons to undertake an independent inquiry that will consider, in the light of the report by the Balance of Funding Review, the detailed case for changes to the present system of local government funding and make recommendations on any changes that are necessary and how to implement them. The inquiry will, among other things, make recommendations on how best to reform council tax, taking into account the forthcoming revaluation of domestic property and conduct thorough analysis of options other than council tax for local authorities to raise supplementary revenue, including local income tax, reform of non-domestic rates and other possible local taxes and charges, as well as the possible combination of such options.

Local Government Pension Scheme

Mr. Grieve: To ask the Deputy Prime Minister what the total cost was in the financial year 2002–03 of the employers' contribution to the Local Government Pension Scheme. [194813]

Phil Hope: The total cost of the employers' contributions to the Local Government Pension Scheme in 2002–03 was £2.91 billion.

Manufacturing (Glass)

Mr. Bill O'Brien: To ask the Deputy Prime Minister if he will make a statement on the number of planning applications for new glass container manufacturing plants in England since 2000; and what the estimated output of each new plant is. [194721]

Keith Hill: The information requested is not held centrally and could be provided only at disproportionate cost.

Ministerial Travel

Mr. Jenkin: To ask the Deputy Prime Minister whether his journey to and from the studio for the BBC's *Politics Show* on 24 October incurred public expenditure. [195208]

Phil Hope: My right hon. Friend the Deputy Prime Minister's journey was conducted in accordance with "Travel by Ministers".

New Deal

Dr. Julian Lewis: To ask the Deputy Prime Minister how many personnel the Department has recruited under the New Deal in each of the past five years. [194854]

Phil Hope: I refer the hon. Member to the answer given by my hon. Friend the Member for Bolton, West (Ruth Kelly) on Monday 25 October 2004, *Official Report*, column 1052W.

Park Homes

Mr. Purchase: To ask the Deputy Prime Minister what recent representations he has had from park home site owners; and if he will make a statement. [194463]

Keith Hill: The Office of the Deputy Prime Minister has recently consulted on our proposals to follow up the provisions on park homes in the Housing Bill through subsequent secondary legislation. These are aimed at strengthening the contractual terms which are implied by law and which form part of the agreements that allow park home occupiers to place a park home on site and occupy it.

The Office of the Deputy Prime Minister is currently analysing the 300 or so replies received, and will consider laying the necessary order once the Bill receives Royal Assent.

Park-and-ride Schemes

Mr. David Atkinson: To ask the Deputy Prime Minister what his Department's latest guidance is on proposed developments on designated green belt land, with particular reference to proposals for park and ride schemes. [195708]

Keith Hill: National planning policy on development in the green belt is set out in Planning Policy Guidance note (PPG) 2. Policy on park and ride schemes is set out in PPG 13 (2001) on transport. This, at Annex E, updated PPG2 to take account of park and ride schemes. The key elements are that green belt locations should only be chosen where they are the most sustainable option, and they will not seriously compromise the purposes of including land in the green belt. Park and ride proposals which fail to satisfy these and the other criteria set out in PPG2 (as amended by PPG13) will be inappropriate development.

Planning (Port Sunlight)

Mr. Ben Chapman: To ask the Deputy Prime Minister what representations he has received on planning proposals at Port Sunlight. [194143]

Keith Hill: The Office of the Deputy Prime Minister has received five letters from local residents who are opposed to proposals for housing development at Port Sunlight. Those proposals are currently the subject of planning applications which are before Wirral metropolitan borough council.

Reviews (Lancashire and Chorley)

Mr. Hoyle: To ask the Deputy Prime Minister what assessment he has made of the implications of the *(a)* Gershon Review and *(b)* Spending Review on the budgets of (i) Lancashire county council and (ii) Chorley borough council. [194625]

Mr. Raynsford: The Government looked with local authorities in the context of the Spending Review 2004 (SR04) at the pressures councils face up to 2007–08, along with the scope for efficiency savings. SR04 provides continued investment in local government services with £7.2 billion more in general grant for local government programmes by 2007–08 over 2004–05. The Gershon Review's expectation is each authority creates efficiency gains from existing budgets of at least 2.5 per cent., at least half of which is cashable. There will be no impact on authorities' overall budgets as there is no intention to increase or reduce planned budgets as a result of implementing the review. Efficiency gains made by each authority can be re-invested into front line local services. The provisional local government finance settlement for 2005–06 will be announced shortly which will be followed by a consultation period where authorities will be able to make written representations on the Government's proposals.

Social Housing

Mr. Alan Campbell: To ask the Deputy Prime Minister how many properties are available for rent from Housing Associations in each local authority area in Tyne and Wear; and how many were available in 1997. [193342]

Keith Hill: Housing Association properties available for rent in each local authority area in Tyne and Wear in 2003, and 1997, are tabled as follows:

Local authority	*2003*	*1997*
Gateshead	4,441	4,374
Newcastle	7,365	7,595
North Tyneside	4,921	4,529
South Tyneside	4,135	4,138
Sunderland	39,145	4,711

Note:

Latest available Government figures.

Source:

Regulatory Statistical Return (RSR), Part O.

Ms Oona King: To ask the Deputy Prime Minister what the average price of a 25 per cent. stake in a *(a)* one-bedroom, *(b)* two-bedroom and *(c)* three-bedroom shared ownership property in (i) Tower Hamlets, (ii) the East London sub-region, (iii) London and (iv) England was in the latest year for which figures are available; and what the average (A) rent and (B) service charge was on the 75 per cent. stake held by the registered social landlord in each instance. [194674]

Keith Hill: The table shows the average price of a 25 per cent. stake, together with the average rent and service charges for the 75 per cent. stake held by the registered social landlord, broken down by the number of bedrooms, in Tower Hamlets, the East London sub-region, London and England in 2003–04.

Shared ownership sales during 2003–04

	Number of sales	Average price of 25 per cent. stake purchased (£)	Monthly rent (£)	Monthly service charges (£)
One bedroom				
Tower Hamlets	0	—	—	—
East London	8	35,844	283.72	48.32
London	77	47,151	281.15	71.18
England	121	38,268	241.72	68.34
Two bedrooms				
Tower Hamlets	1	68,750	179.43	0.00
East London	29	52,858	340.19	85.80
London	117	54,076	332.78	76.48
England	280	41,126	262.22	51.57
Three bedrooms				
Tower Hamlets	0	—	—	—
East London	17	58,632	400.40	54.62
London	35	55,957	355.02	40.94
England	117	41,603	272.41	25.99

Notes:

1. Because the buyer took a 25 per cent. stake the average price paid by the buyer represents one-quarter of the property.

2. The figures include the following schemes: Do-It-Yourself Shared Ownership, Shared Ownership for the Elderly, Leasehold Schemes for the Elderly, Ordinary Shared Ownership Schemes.

3. East London sub-region is an amalgamation of the London boroughs of: Barking and Dagenham, Hackney, Havering, Newham, Redbridge, Tower Hamlets, Waltham Forest.

Source:

Housing Corporation, CORE sales

Youth Services (London)

Jeremy Corbyn: To ask the Deputy Prime Minister what the average expenditure per capita of each London borough on youth services was in each year since 1996–97; and if he will make a statement. [194010]

Mr. Miliband: I have been asked to reply.

The information requested is contained within the following table:

Average net current expenditure per capita by each London LEA on youth services since 1996–97

LEA name	*1996–97*	*1997–98*	*1998–99*	*1999–2000*	*2000–01*	*2001–02*	*2002–03*
City of London	428	337	371	749	195	623	565
Camden	159	137	151	188	253	200	225
Greenwich	100	99	115	130	141	143	143
Hackney	107	79	70	96	0	1	52
Hammersmith and Fulham	124	143	105	160	155	91	92
Islington	279	293	241	410	312	323	276
Kensington and Chelsea	412	425	313	513	517	442	413
Lambeth	82	92	92	94	123	174	269
Lewisham	77	92	89	109	127	140	112
Southwark	189	197	207	129	163	154	141
Tower Hamlets	228	207	194	186	205	207	183
Wandsworth	177	171	185	186	187	186	196
Westminster	225	226	181	165	155	175	134
Barking and Dagenham	100	94	90	80	64	61	60
Barnet	60	63	75	94	64	59	50
Bexley	64	65	81	89	96	86	87
Brent	116	105	107	97	101	95	79
Bromley	40	42	46	53	55	55	41
Croydon	65	62	66	73	104	107	110
Ealing	41	38	43	48	71	69	54
Enfield	34	40	42	43	43	39	40
Haringey	72	65	84	73	91	103	107
Harrow	55	39	43	41	46	44	46
Havering	47	57	64	71	78	87	68
Hillingdon	80	75	82	72	75	76	60
Hounslow	53	52	62	50	46	50	42
Kingston-upon-Thames	54	54	49	55	60	66	73
Merton	40	36	39	54	51	46	43
Newham	94	95	75	69	69	98	123
Redbridge	65	56	62	71	86	88	76
Richmond-upon-Thames	75	74	77	62	66	55	61
Sutton	88	81	84	80	80	78	78
Waltham Forest	97	101	114	105	114	95	105

Notes:
1. Data are collected at local education authority (LEA) level. Included here are the data for all London LEAs.
2. Recorded here is expenditure in relation to the authority's youth service. This includes provision at residential and non-residential youth centres, including activity, outdoor and urban studies centres related to youth service provision. Also includes development workers, advisors and youth leaders not based at youth centres. This excludes any capital expenditure.
3. The expenditure data to 1998–99 are drawn from the annual 'RO1' spending returns which local authorities submitted to the ODPM. Figures for 1999–2000 to 2001–02 were drawn from section 52 (table 3) outturn statements which LEAs submitted to the DfES. Figures for 2002–03 are taken from section 52 (table A) outturn statements.
4. The priority age group for youth services is 13–19 (although youth services can also provide support for targeted groups in the 11 to 13 and 19 to 25 age ranges). In order to provide a figure for expenditure per capita on youth services we have divided each London LEA's net current expenditure on youth services by the total population aged 13–19 within that authority. The population figures are estimated resident mid year population figures from the Office for National Statistics (ONS) and these have recently been revised following the 2001 Census. Thus for financial year 1996–97 we have used the population estimate from mid year 1996 and for 1997–98 we used the mid 1997 estimate (and so on).
5. Data (cash terms) are as reported by the LEA at 24 October 2004.

FOREIGN AND COMMONWEALTH AFFAIRS

Afghanistan

Paul Flynn: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what the expected crop of opium poppies in Afghanistan in 2004 is, expressed in *(a)* area of land cultivated and *(b)* tonnes of opium produced. [194268]

Mr. Rammell: The United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime will publish on 4 November its annual survey into the level of opium poppy cultivation and production in Afghanistan. The figures are not yet available. However, we anticipate a significant increase in cultivation levels this year. Increases in production may be proportionally lower given lower yields due to drought and disease.

As lead nation on counter narcotics in Afghanistan, co-ordinating international assistance, the UK works closely with the Afghan Government to support delivery of the Afghan National Drug Control Strategy. We have committed more than £70 million over three years for counter narcotics activity plus significant development funding and support for alternative livelihoods. We will be looking to increase that activity over the coming year and are also encouraging the international community to do more in order to achieve a reduction in cultivation next year.

Angola

Mike Gapes: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will make a statement on the United Kingdom's relations with Angola. [R] [192605]

Mr. Mullin: The UK has good relations with Angola. I met the Angola Finance Minister in April 2004. My right hon. Friend the International Development Secretary met Angola's Minister for Assistance and Social Reintegration in London on 17 March. We have worked closely with Angola for the last two years in the Security Council. The UK, through the Department for International Development, provided £9.4 million in bilateral assistance in 2003/2004.

Cayman Islands

Mr. Rosindell: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what discussions he has had with the executive body of the Cayman Islands relating to illicit drug trafficking. [192611]

Mr. Rammell: The UK adopted a Security Co-operation Plan with CARICOM partners, of which the Cayman Islands is an associate member, when I visited Jamaica on 20 October. We already fund a regional maritime training initiative that encompasses the Cayman Islands.

Correspondence

Sir Gerald Kaufman: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs (1) when he will reply to the letter to him dated 6 September 2004 from the right hon. Member for Manchester, Gorton with regard to Mr. Usman Ilyas and Mrs. Iram Usman; [190619]

(2) when he will reply to the letter to him dated 6 September 2004 from the right hon. Member for Manchester, Gorton with regard to Mr. Ilyas; [192540]

(3) when he will answer the letter to him dated 6 September 2004 from the right hon. Member for Manchester, Gorton, with regard to Mr. Ilyas. [193936]

Mr. Mullin: My right hon. Friend the Foreign Secretary replied on 20 October 2004.

Sir Gerald Kaufman: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs (1) when he will reply to the letter to him dated 1 September 2004 from the right hon. Member for Manchester, Gorton with regard to Mr. Abdul Rauf; [192541]

(2) when he will answer the letter to him dated 1 September from the right hon. Member for Manchester, Gorton, with regard to Mr. Abdul Rauf. [193937]

(3) when he will reply to the letter to him dated 23 August from the right hon. Member for Manchester, Gorton with regard to Ms Saira Asif; [192542]

(4) when he will answer the letter to him dated 23 August from the right hon. Member for Manchester, Gorton, with regard to Ms Saira Asif. [193938]

Mr. Mullin: My right hon. Friend the Foreign Secretary replied on 29 October.

Tony Lloyd: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs when UKvisas intends to reply to the letters dated *(a)* 14 July regarding Mr. M. A., ref ISB/725541, *(b)* 16 July regarding Mr. M. A., Yemen, ref 301/04, *(c)* 4 August regarding Ms H. E. and *(d)* 19 August regarding Mrs. R O, ref GV 100/83235. [193026]

Mr. Mullin: The information is as follows:

UKvisas had no trace of having received my hon. Friend's letter of 14 July, regarding Mr. M. A. UKvisas has since obtained a copy of this letter and a reply was sent on 28 October.

UKvisas replied to my hon. Friend's letter of 16 July, regarding Mr. M. A., on 8 September.

UKvisas replied to my hon. Friend's letter of 4 August, regarding Ms H. E., on 28 October.

UKvisas replied to my hon. Friend's letter of 19 August, regarding Mrs. R. O., on 14 September.

Further copies of UKvisas' letters of 8 and 14 September were sent to my hon. Friend on 28 October.

Sir Gerald Kaufman: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs when he will answer the letter to him dated 14 September from the right hon. Member for Manchester, Gorton, with regard to Pastor D. Lindsay. [193939]

Mr. Mullin: My right hon. Friend the Foreign Secretary replied on 29 October.

Cuba

Mr. Donaldson: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what representations have been made by the UK Government to the Cuban Government for the release of *(a)* Jorge Perez (Autunez) and *(b)* Dr. Biscet. [195053]

Mr. Rammell: We regularly raise human rights cases—including these two—with the Cuban authorities in London and in Havana. We have been monitoring their situation and health, and embassy staff maintain close contacts with local human rights groups involved in their cases and with friends and family of the individuals. Dr. Biscet visited the embassy in November 2002 shortly before his arrest, and the Embassy last met his wife, Elsa Morejon, on 14 July. We are aware of considerable public interest in the fate of both prisoners.

UK policy on Cuba is governed by the EU Common Position, which has human rights enshrined as its key principle and which was reaffirmed on 14 June. The EU regularly issues statements condemning the imprisonment of human rights activists and other political prisoners.

Diego Garcia

Mr. Peter Ainsworth: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what estimate he has made of the number of exiled Diego Garcians who have been granted British citizenship with the right to reside in the UK; and if he will make a statement. [194858]

Mr. Rammell: There are no precise figures but it is estimated that there are about 5,000 Chagossians who enjoy British citizenship with the right of abode in the UK following the coming into force of the British Overseas Territories Act in May 2002. Since then, the British High Commissions in Mauritius and Seychelles have issued more than 900 British passports to Chagossians.

EU-Israel Association Agreement

Lynne Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs pursuant to the answer of 20 October 2004, *Official Report*, column 753W, on the EU-Israel Association Agreement, whether Israel is in full compliance with the human rights conditions of the EU Israel Association Agreement; whether there is an equivalent trade agreement with the Palestinian Authority; and what the official *(a)* UK and *(b)* EU definition of sanctions is. [194830]

Mr. MacShane: Article 2 of the EU-Israel Association Agreement states that "Relations between the Parties, as well as the provisions of the Agreement itself, shall be based on respect for human rights and democratic principles, which guides their internal and international policy and constitutes an essential element of this Agreement".

We have raised our concerns about Israeli actions on human rights grounds with the Israeli Government both bilaterally and through the EU. Following the recent violence in Gaza, EU Foreign Ministers, at the 11 October General Affairs and External Relations Council, condemned "the disproportionate nature of the Israeli military actions in the Gaza Strip". The EU has also regularly raised issues of concern, including human rights, at EU/Israel Association Councils.

I can confirm that an interim trade agreement with the PLO has been agreed and is in force.

Neither the UK nor the EU uses a particular definition of sanctions in the context of the EU-Israel Association Agreement. However, Article 79 of the EU/Israel Association Agreement provides that a Party may take "appropriate measures" where either Party considers that the other Party has failed to fulfil an obligation under the Agreement.

European Trade Agreements

Angus Robertson: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will list the main *(a)* logistical and *(b)* institutional obstacles to the implementation of (i) Europe agreements with the countries of central and eastern Europe and (ii) free-trade agreements with the Baltic States addressed by the committee on the arrangements for implementing Europe agreements with the countries of central and eastern Europe and free-trade agreements with the Baltic States during the Greek presidency of the EU; which of these were brought to the attention of the committee by the UK Government expert present; what recommendations the committee made for each; and if he will make a statement. [192494]

Mr. MacShane: I refer the hon. Member to the reply I gave him on 26 October 2004, *Official Report*, column 1175W.

Under the Greek presidency, various EU bodies handled Europe agreements with countries with whom accession negotiations were underway.

Information on these discussions is not held centrally and could be provided only at disproportional cost.

Human Rights Annual Report

Adam Price: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what changes have been made to the text of the Annual Report on Human Rights since the decision to delay publication. [195243]

Mr. Rammell: The text of the Annual Report is changed and updated throughout its editorial and publication process, which usually begins in January and ends in September. Owing to the tragic events in Beslan, my right hon. Friend the Foreign Secretary decided to delay the launch of the Annual Report which was originally due to be held on 16 September. The Foreign and Commonwealth Office has subsequently updated the text of the Annual Report to reflect the tragedy in Beslan. There have been no other significant changes to the text. The Foreign and Commonwealth Office has not delayed publication of the Annual Report on Human Rights to dilute criticism of any country. The Foreign Secretary will launch the Annual Report on Human Rights on 10 November.

Iraq

Mr. Heathcoat-Amory: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what proportion of meetings of the Iraqi National Security Committee have been attended by a British representative. [192990]

Mr. Rammell: The Iraqi Ministerial Committee for National Security, the MCNS, issues strategic policy direction and guidance on national security issues. It is chaired by Prime Minister Allawi. It is always attended by a senior British diplomat, usually now Ambassador Chaplin.

Llew Smith: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what information was provided by the United Kingdom to United Nations Security Council members on Iraq's alleged weapons of mass destruction prior to the vote on UNSC Resolution 1441 on 8th November 2002; what steps were taken to test the reliability of this information prior to passing it on to other UNSC members; and what steps he has taken to correct inaccuracies in this information following the publication of the Iraq Survey Group report. [191732]

Mr. MacShane: The Government made available its September 2002 dossier to members of the Security Council to inform them of Iraq's weapons of mass destruction programmes prior to the vote on UN Security Council Resolution 1441. The dossier was compiled by the Joint Intelligence Committee following analysis of intelligence available to it at the time.

The genesis of the dossier, and the background information that formed its basis was examined in detail by the review headed by Lord Butler of Brockwell. Following further investigation by the SIS in the light of Lord Butler's conclusions, my right hon. Friend the Foreign Secretary announced in a written statement to the House on 12 October 2004, *Official Report*, column 14WS, the formal withdrawal of the lines of intelligence relating to the "45 minute claim" and Iraqi production of biological agent.

Glenda Jackson: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs pursuant to his answer of 13 October 2004, *Official Report*, column 306W, on Iraq, if he will request US authorities to furnish him with a copy of the *(a)* terms of reference and *(b)* findings of the investigation; and if he will place copies in the Library. [192987]

Mr. Rammell: This is a matter for the US military authorities. The UK is not party to this investigation. We have asked the US military authorities in Baghdad for a copy of the investigation report. We will place a copy in the Library of the House provided the US security classification of the report permits this.

New Agenda Coalition

Jeremy Corbyn: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what discussions have been held with members of the New Agenda Coalition in advance of the Non-Proliferation Review Conference in 2005; and if he will make a statement. [194003]

Mr. MacShane: The Government regularly includes discussions of nuclear non-proliferation in its bilateral contacts with New Agenda Coalition countries. In that context, we make clear that we are fully committed to the nuclear non-proliferation treaty and emphasise the importance of full compliance with the Treaty by all States Party. We also express our desire to see the immediate resumption of substantive work at the Conference on Disarmament, starting with the negotiation of a Fissile Material Cut-off Treaty.

Non-proliferation Treaty

Jeremy Corbyn: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what discussions have been held with Iran on *(a)* the inspection of nuclear facilities and *(b)* its policy on the Non-Proliferation Treaty; and if he will make a statement. [194004]

Mr. MacShane: Senior officials from the UK, France and Germany held discussions with Iranian counterparts in Vienna on 21 and 27 October on a range of nuclear issues.

Jeremy Corbyn: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what discussions have been held by officials of his Department with *(a)* North Korea, *(b)* India, *(c)* Pakistan and *(d)* Israel on the Non-Proliferation Treaty Review Conference in New York in 2005; and if he will make a statement. [194005]

Mr. MacShane: There have been no discussions by officials with North Korea, India, Pakistan or Israel on the Non-Proliferation Treaty Review Conference to be held in New York in 2005. However, non-proliferation issues form a regular part of our continuing dialogue with all four states.

Jeremy Corbyn: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs when he expects to publish a statement of the UK Government's aspirations for the Non-Proliferation Treaty Review Conference in 2005. [194006]

Mr. MacShane: At this time, the Government have no plans to publish a statement of their aspirations for the Non-Proliferation Treaty (NPT) Review Conference in 2005. However, the Government are strongly committed to the NPT, which is the cornerstone of the nuclear non-proliferation regime. The UK's goals for the review conference are to make the case for stronger and more effective counter-proliferation measures and to emphasise the importance of compliance with the treaty. We will do this in the context of emphasising the UK's good record on nuclear disarmament, and we will produce a final report of the studies that we have conducted on the verification of nuclear disarmament. We look forward to working with the chair and other countries before and during the Conference itself to help secure a successful outcome.

Jeremy Corbyn: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs who the members of the UK delegation to the Non-Proliferation Treaty Review Conference in 2005 will be. [194007]

Mr. MacShane: Current plans are that the UK delegation to the 2005 Non-Proliferation Treaty Review Conference will be headed by ambassador John Freeman, the United Kingdom's Permanent Representative to the Conference on Disarmament in Geneva. He will be accompanied by officials from the Foreign and Commonwealth Office, the Ministry of Defence and the Department of Trade and Industry.

People's Mojahedin Organisation

Mr. Hancock: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs pursuant to the answer of 15 September 2004, *Official Report*, column 1617, on the People's Mojahedin Organisation, what information has been passed to the UK Government about the status of the residents of Camp Ashraf, with particular reference to the activities of the People's Mojahedin Organisation of Iran personnel; whether this information has been passed to the Secretary of State for the Home Department; and if he will make a statement. [190302]

Mr. Rammell: The situation of the residents of Camp Ashraf was until 28 June a matter for the US authorities. The Iraqi Interim Government (IIG) is now responsible for Ashraf. With the concurrence of the IIG, US forces continue to provide security there. The US has informed us that most residents are being treated as protected persons under the Fourth Geneva Convention, some have unresolved claims to be Prisoners of War from the Iran/Iraq war, and a small number are the subject of US or international warrants. The IIG, US and other interested parties are continuing to discuss practical arrangements for their future.

The Mojahedin-e Khalq (MEK, or People's Mojahedin Organisation of Iran) is proscribed in the UK under the Terrorism Act 2000. We take a close interest in the activities of MEK personnel, and have discussed them on many occasions with foreign Governments, including those of Iran, Iraq and the US. FCO and Home Office officials are in regular contact about the MEK.

Special Advisers

Matthew Taylor: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs how many unpaid special advisers the Department has; what their names are; and which Government *(a)* bodies, *(b)* committees and *(c)* strategy groups each unpaid adviser (i) belongs to, (ii) advises and (iii) works alongside. [194065]

Mr. Straw: None. My noble Friend the Lord Carter of Coles is heading a review of public diplomacy work and has assisted in reviewing efficiency in the Department. He is unpaid, but does not have the status or role of special adviser.

Sudan

Tom Brake: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what assessment his Department has made of the effect that China's economic interests in Sudan might have on China's position in relation to an UN Security Council resolution calling for oil sanctions against Sudan. [194134]

Mr. Rammell: China made clear that it opposed the threat of oil sanctions and gave reasons for its position in its explanation of vote during the adoption of resolutions 1556 and 1564, copies of which I have placed in the Library of the House.

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what assessment he has made of the *(a)* implementation and *(b)* effects of the concept of safe areas in the August Plan of Action agreed by the United Nations and the Sudanese Government. [194459]

Mr. Mullin: The concept of areas of enhanced security, or "safe areas", agreed by the United Nations and the Government of Sudan in the August Plan of Action, was envisaged as an initial basis on which to improve the overall security situation in Darfur. The United Nations Special Representative to the Secretary-General, Jan Pronk, reported throughout August and September that security in the camps had improved, although overall insecurity continued to be a major problem due to violations of the ceasefire by all sides and continuing banditry. The expanded African Union mission will help facilitate improvements in security for the whole of Darfur.

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what recent discussions he has had with the Government of Sudan on direct and indiscriminate attacks by Government forces on civilians and civilian objects. [194479]

Mr. Mullin: My right hon. Friend the Prime Minister raised the continuing insecurity and ceasefire violations with President Bashir and First Vice President Taha during his visit to Sudan on 6 October. He made clear that the fighting must stop and that there can be no impunity for the grave crimes against humanity which have been committed in Darfur. There is an urgent need to deploy the expanded AU mission as soon as possible in order to address the continuing insecurity in Darfur. The UK has allocated £12 million to support this. We have also impressed on the rebels the need to abide by the ceasefire and cease attacks on aid workers.

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what discussions he has had with the Government of Sudan about the case for amending Article 3 of its National Security Forces Act. [194480]

Mr. Mullin: Our embassy in Khartoum has made regular representations to the Government of Sudan on the need to repeal the National Security Forces Act. Article 3 of this Act defines the various bodies referred to in the text: we have made no representations on this specific article. Article 33, however, deals with the criminal trials of members or agents of the National Security Forces. We have made very clear to the Government of Sudan that there can be no impunity for any crimes against humanity or violations of human rights perpetrated in Darfur, or elsewhere. The International Commission of Inquiry will investigate reports of violations of human rights in Darfur and identify the perpetrators, with a view to ensuring those responsible are held accountable.

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what discussions he has had with the Government of Sudan about the need to amend the decrees instituting the special courts or specialised criminal courts in Darfur to ensure their fair trial without the possibility of the death penalty or cruel, inhuman or degrading punishments. [194481]

Mr. Mullin: Our embassy in Khartoum follows cases that pass through these courts and raises, both bilaterally and through the EU-Sudan dialogue, our concerns with the Sudanese Government, focusing not only on the sentences passed but also the lack of due legal process and the right to a fair trial. The Government of Sudan have given assurances that no death and cross-amputation sentences have been carried out since the creation of the specialised courts on 31 March 2004. However, there are no reliable means of verifying this. We continue to press for the specialised courts to be removed and the full rights of appeal to be made available.

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what discussions he has had with the Government of Sudan about the need to ensure that victims of past human rights violations have access to redress. [194482]

Mr. Mullin: During my visit in September, I raised with the Government of Sudan the need for reparations to be made to the victims and families of victims of human rights violations. I also stressed the importance of rapid progress on the comprehensive peace agreement: this provides that the parties will initiate a process of national reconciliation throughout the country, based on mechanisms to be worked out by the Government of National Unity.

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what representations he has made to the Government of Sudan on ensuring that investigations into alleged war crimes in the country include *(a)* forensic examinations of graves, *(b)* a systematic documentation of sexual violence and rape, *(c)* compilation of lists of people killed and *(d)* mapping of villages that have been destroyed. [194483]

Mr. Mullin: There are several mechanisms deployed across Darfur to monitor allegations of violations of human rights and extra-judicial killings. These include the National Darfur Investigation Committee, three Rape Committees, the African Union Ceasefire Monitoring Commission, the International Commission of Inquiry and UK-funded human rights monitors from the Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights. Recent visits by Amnesty International and Human Rights Watch, facilitated by my right hon. Friend the Foreign Secretary, also documented human rights violations in Darfur. Their reports are available online.

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what assurances he has received from the Government of Sudan about the centrality of human rights in the peace talks in Naivasha, Kenya and Abuja, Nigeria. [194484]

Mr. Mullin: Respect for the rights of internally displaced persons and refugees, together with measures to ensure that violators of those rights are held accountable, are central to the Humanitarian Protocol negotiated by the parties in the Abuja peace talks. On 6 October, the Government of Sudan gave its commitment to my right hon. Friend the Prime Minister to immediately and unilaterally implement this protocol.

The Protocol on Power Sharing, agreed by the Government of Sudan and the Sudan People's Liberation Movement in Naivasha in May 2004, commits the parties to comply in full with their obligations under international human rights treaties to which they are, or become, a party. The Protocol also provides for the establishment of a National Human Rights Commission.

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what representations he has made to the Government of Sudan about the need to ensure the participation of women in the peace process. [194485]

Mr. Mullin: We regularly remind the Government of Sudan and the rebel groups of the need for the peace processes to be as fully inclusive as possible. The equal right of men and women to all civil, political and fundamental human rights is one of the principles set down in the power sharing protocol agreed between the Government of Sudan and the Sudan People's Liberation Movement, in Naivasha, Kenya in May 2004.

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what assessment he has made of progress in disarming and disbanding the Janjaweed militias, including those members who have been incorporated into the Popular Defence Forces, the People's Police and other paramilitary forces. [194487]

Mr. Mullin: In August, the Government of Sudan claimed to have disarmed 30 per cent. of the Popular Defence Forces, although this could not be independently verified. The September report of the UN Special Representative made clear that not enough progress had been made on disarmament of militias or on security issues. The Government of Sudan has committed itself to further disarmament of the Popular Defence Forces, its allied militias and the "Janjaweed". The expansion of the African Union monitoring mission will allow independent verification of disarmament by both the Government of Sudan and the rebel groups.

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs how many people in Darfur who are suspected of violations of international human rights or humanitarian law have been removed from posts in the *(a)* army, *(b)* judiciary, *(c)* police and *(d)* civil service. [194488]

Mr. Mullin: Exact figures for the number of officials removed from their posts in Darfur are not available. However, the Government of Sudan has provided our embassy in Khartoum with numbers of armed forces and National Security Forces personnel tried and convicted there between January and June 2004 of crimes under various articles of the criminal act.

These figures show that in Darfur, 24 members of the armed forces were either tried and convicted or were awaiting trial as of 31 May 2004 for crimes under Article 130 of the Criminal Act. 28 members of the National Security Forces were tried for various offences in the same period, 25 of whom were convicted.

The Government of Sudan also informed our embassy that, as of 31 May 2004, 266 members of the police force were under investigation for various crimes.

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what discussions he has had with the Government of Sudan about the need to train the country's police in international human rights standards. [194491]

Mr. Mullin: During my right hon. Friend the Prime Minister's visit to Khartoum on 6 October, the Government of Sudan agreed to a civilian police monitoring role as part of the expanded African Union mission in Darfur. Various UN agencies have also started to establish training programmes in humanitarian and human rights law for the Government of Sudan police force.

The UK's Department for International Development, together with the UN Joint Assessment Missions, has been engaged with the Government of Sudan and Sudan People's Liberation Movement on the issue of police training following the successful completion of a peace deal. This would include the mainstreaming of human rights training and increased accountability within the police forces.

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what assessment he has made of the effectiveness of the monitoring mission of the African Union in Sudan. [194492]

Mr. Mullin: The current African Union (AU) mission of approximately 150 military observers is now carrying out regular investigations into alleged violations of the ceasefire agreement. The information from these investigations helps the international community to monitor the situation on the ground and to hold the parties to account for their activities. The AU's strategy is to use monitoring to reduce the scope for the parties to the ceasefire to violate it with impunity.

However we have been pressing for some time for a larger, and better-equipped mission which could have a more direct impact on the ground in terms of improving the security situation, and building confidence. This is why we fully support the planned expansion of the mission and have allocated £12 million for this purpose.

UN Relief and Works Agency

Mrs. Ellman: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what discussions he has had with the UN on the statement made by the head of the UN Relief and Works Agency (UNRWA) that UNRWA employs Hamas members. [194816]

Mr. Rammell: We have not raised this matter formally with the United Nations, but British officials in New York have discussed the issue with other UN Security Council members and the UN Secretary-General. Kofi Annan has stated that although the United Nations Relief and Works Agency (UNRWA) could not question its staff about their political affiliations, the UN is fastidious about their behaviour, insisting that all employees act in accordance with the established principles and practices of the UN.

The UK provides funding to UNRWA and supports its work, which includes delivery of essential relief supplies to civilian communities in Gaza.

Uzbekistan

Keith Vaz: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs how many cases of torture have been brought to his Department's attention in the last 10 years in *(a)* Uzbekistan and *(b)* all countries. [194447]

Mr. Rammell: We receive reports of incidents of torture and human rights abuses from various sources, including individuals and NGOs, from all over the world, including Uzbekistan. The UK has a strong record, in conjunction with international partners, of acting on such reports.

We do not keep lists of all reported incidents of torture we receive. However, the Government have published an Annual Report on Human Rights since 1997. It provides an overview of the main challenges to human rights around the world, including torture, and explains the Government's overall activities and policies to address those challenges, in both bilateral and multilateral contexts. The report incorporates comments and recommendations we receive over the year from the House of Commons Foreign Affairs Committee and from a number of NGOs.

The report has been critical of Uzbekistan's human rights record and we shall be equally forthright in the 2004 report when it is published in November.

Keith Vaz: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what representations he received on *(a)* promoting democracy and *(b)* eradicating human rights abuses in Uzbekistan. [194448]

Mr. Rammell: The Foreign and Commonwealth Office monitors and takes action on reports of human rights abuse in Uzbekistan as well as lobbying the Uzbek Government to introduce democratic reform. We benefit from a regular dialogue with NGOs such as Human Rights Watch and Amnesty International, both at Ministerial and at official level, in London.

We also have frequent, informal contact with local NGOs in Uzbekistan. We receive reports from and have regular consultations with organisations such as the Initiative Group of Independent Human Rights

Defenders of Uzbekistan and Mothers against the Death Penalty and Torture, as well as from families and other human rights defenders. Our Embassy in Tashkent has also received representations from independent political parties regarding registration and the forthcoming parliamentary elections.

We value the NGO expertise we receive concerning Uzbekistan and will continue to be in regular contact with the NGO community on issues of human rights and democracy there in the future. As an example of this, our Embassy in Tashkent is funding an NGO Registration and Capacity Building Project to improve the capacity of local independent human rights NGOs in Uzbekistan.

Water Supply (Iraq/Turkey)

Tom Brake: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what discussions his Department has initiated between Iraq, Syria and Turkey on water supply issues. [194798]

Mr. MacShane: The Foreign and Commonwealth Office has not initiated any discussions between Iraq, Syria and Turkey on water supply issues.

Tom Brake: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what assessment he has made of the relevance of international treaties covering water supply issues to the dispute between Iraq and Turkey over water. [194932]

Mr. MacShane: There is a longstanding dispute over the distribution of water resources between Iraq and Turkey. A committee was set up in 1983 between Iraq, Turkey and Syria to agree an equitable water-sharing arrangement but it has not met for a number of years. Modern international law provides few specific guidelines to resolve water-sharing disputes. Turkey is not a signatory of the 1997 UN Watercourses Convention. The Foreign and Commonwealth Office has not carried out a detailed assessment of the relevance of international treaties covering water supply issues to the dispute between Iraq and Turkey over water.

TRADE AND INDUSTRY

Alternative Fuels

Mr. Weir: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry how much funding the Government have given to investigations into alternative fuels for transport in the last year; and how much they plan to invest in research and development of alternative fuels for transport in each of the next five years. [193285]

Mr. Jamieson: I have been asked to reply.

The Government have in place a large number of programmes to help fund the research, development and demonstration of low carbon vehicles and fuels. Details of some of the most significant programmes are set out in the Second Annual Report of the Powering Future Vehicles Strategy, published in October 2004 and available on the Department for Transport's website. Over £1 million of spending on programmes in the financial year 2003–04 was specifically for alternative fuels for transport.

Brumark Case

Mr. Todd: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry whether she plans to change the statement on behalf of Crown Departments relating to the Brumark case to take account of National Westminster Bank plc. *v.* Spectrum. [193816]

Mr. Sutcliffe: No. The case of National Westminster Bank plc. *v.* Spectrum is still finally to be determined and is subject to an appeal to the House of Lords.

Car Repair Industry

Chris Ruane: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry how many *(a)* government and *(b)* non-government schemes have been introduced to monitor the motor car repair industry in the past 30 years; and if she will make a statement. [194679]

Jacqui Smith: My Department is not aware of any Government introduced schemes to monitor performance in the motor car repair industry in the past 30 years (although there have been some ad hoc research exercises). There have been a number of non-government schemes and codes of practice which have incorporated some elements of performance monitoring. The Office of Fair Trading monitors complaints and enforcement action in relation to specific offences across all consumer activity including the car repair sector.

The Office of Fair Trading has recently approved the code of the Vehicle Builders and Repairers Association. One of the criteria to be met in order to achieve approval is that there should be in place effective means of monitoring performance against code content. The OFT also recently approved a code by the Society of Motor Manufacturers and Traders which in part covers manufacturers' activity in relation to repairs required under new car warranty.

China

Tom Brake: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry how much UK investment there has been in China since 1999. [194127]

Mr. Timms: I have been asked to reply.

The information requested falls within the responsibility of the National Statistician, who has been asked to reply.

Letter from Colin Mowl to Mr. Tom Brake, dated 1 November 2004:

The National Statistician has been asked to reply to your recent question about UK investment in China since 1999. I am replying in his absence. (194127)

The results for the annual surveys into Foreign Direct Investment are published in the Business Monitor MA4 "Foreign Direct Investment", which is available on the National Statistics Website at: http://www.statistics.gov.uk/downloads/theme_economy/MA4_2002.pdf

The latest information is for the year 2002. Figures for China do not include Hong Kong, which is shown separately.

Total Foreign Direct Investment (FDI) Flows and International Investment Position UK to China, 1999–2002

Year	Net FDI Flows	Net FDI International Investment Position[1]
1999	604	1,254
2000	410	1,505
2001	662	2,106
2002	643	3,359

[1] Position at the end of the year, book value

Source:

ONS Business Monitor MA4: Foreign Direct Investment 2002

Total Foreign Direct Investment (FDI) Flows and International Investment Position UK to Hong Kong, 1999–2002

Year	Net FDI Flows	Net FDI International Investment Position[1]
1999	312	5,533
2000	-3,309	4,745
2001	590	6,638
2002	933	5,735

[1] Position at the end of the year, book value

Source:

ONS Business Monitor MA4: Foreign Direct Investment 2002

Citizens Advice Bureaux

Mr. Jim Cunningham: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry how many citizens advice bureaux are operating. [194166]

Mr. Sutcliffe: From information provided by Citizens Advice and Citizens Advice Scotland, the umbrella organisations for the Citizens Advice Bureaux Service in the UK, there are 566 Citizens Advice Bureaux operating in the UK. Many of these operate from more than one source, including for example, hospitals and magistrates courts, and in total there may be some 2,800 points of delivery.

Coal Health Scheme

Mr. Clapham: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry (1) what the average cost paid by the Department under the Coal Health Scheme to each of its contractors was when a living claimant *(a)* agreed an expedited settlement and *(b)* settled after going through the Medical Assessment Process in the last period for which figures are available; [194412]

(2) what the average cost paid by the Department under the Coal Health Scheme to each of its contractors was *(a)* when a living widow accepted an expedited settlement and *(b)* when the settlement followed the appraisal of the deceased's documentation by the Medical Assessment Process in the last period for which figures are available; [194413]

(3) what the average cost paid by the Department under the Coal Health Scheme to each of its contractors was *(a)* when a claim on behalf of the estate agreed an expedited settlement and *(b)* when the settlement followed the appraisal of the deceased's documents by the Medical Assessment Process in the last period for which figures are available. [194414]

Nigel Griffiths: The Department's claim handlers do not record the information in the format requested. Processing expedited settlements is not costed separately. There are not expected payments to widows or their estates for deceased claims.

The average cost paid to contractors for handling a respiratory disease claim—live and deceased—is approximately £1,300. I am advised that more than half this cost is accounted for by medical assessments.

Copyright

Mr. Whittingdale: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry (1) what her policy is on the extension of the term of copyright protection granted in the EU to the creators of sound recordings; [193045]

(2) what response she intends to make to the Internal Market Directorate-General's consultation on the review of the Term of Protection Directorate (DIR 93/98/EEC). [193046]

Ms Hewitt: The Term of Protection Directive harmonises copyright term across the EU. The Commission has argued against pursuing any extension of the term of protection for sound recordings at the moment. We believe that the copyright term for sound recordings in the EU must take into account all relevant factors, and we are therefore currently examining the Commission's views and the evidence presented to us by UK industry.

We agree with the light-touch approach to updating the EU copyright framework, including the Term Directive (93/98/EEC), as set out in the Commission's staff working paper. The Commission has made it clear that its consultation is directed at interested parties but not member states. We are therefore urging the creative industries and other key sectors in the UK to make their views known to the Commission.

East Midlands Development Agency

Mr. Dorrell: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry how many full-time equivalent employees were working for the East Midlands Development Agency in each year since its establishment. [192939]

Jacqui Smith: I am advised by the East Midlands Development Agency that the number of full time equivalent employees working for it in each year since its inception is as follows:

	Number of full-time equivalent employees
1999–2000	113
2000–01	124
2001–02	141
2002–03	170
2003–04	185

Energy Research

Norman Baker: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what steps the Government are taking to ensure basic energy research is being carried out in the UK; and how much her Department spent on such research in each of the last three years. [191182]

Mr. Mike O'Brien *[holding answer 15 October 2004]:* The Science and Innovation Framework for 2004–14, published in July, sets out the Government's ambition for UK science and innovation over the next decade. Sustainable energy is a key theme and priority. The Office of Science and Technology will review departmental science and innovation plans for their quality and effectiveness following the spending round negotiations and assess the extent to which these align to wider Government priorities, including those in support of sustainable energy.

The Government support energy research through two main mechanisms. Industrial research is supported under the DTI New and Renewable Energy Programme, which has now been subsumed within the DTI Technology Programme. Research in universities and academia, including basic research, is supported by the Research Councils.

Expenditure under the DTI New and Renewable Energy Programme, the fusion research programme, and by the Research Councils on energy related research for the last three years is as follows:

	Expenditure (£ million)
2001–02	35.8
2002–03	43.0
2003–04	46.0

Responsibility for funding for fusion research transferred from DTI to the Engineering and Physical Sciences Research Council (EPSRC) in April 2003.

The main Research Council energy related research programmes are currently: "Towards a Sustainable Energy Economy" with £28 million funded jointly between Natural Environment Research Council, EPSRC and Economic and Social Research Council, which includes funding for the UK Energy Research Centre; "SuperGen" with £25 million for sustainable energy generation funded by EPSRC; "Carbon Vision" with £14 million funded jointly by EPSRC and the Carbon Trust for research into energy efficiency and low carbon innovation; and the fusion programme with £48 million from EPSRC.

The Tyndall Centre for Climate Change Research (with a budget of £10 million over 2000–05 from NERC, ESRC and EPSRC) also undertakes energy related research.

Export Control Advisory Committee

Mr. Godsiff: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what the purpose is of the Export Control Advisory Committee; when it was set up; which organisations are represented on it; and if she will make a statement. [194756]

Nigel Griffiths: The Export Control Advisory Committee was set up to enable the Export Control Organisation (ECO) to engage in a structured dialogue with representatives of industry who are subject to the strategic export control regulations administered by ECO. This is particularly important following the implementation of the Export Control Act 2002 which imposes new controls on exporters of strategic goods. The Committee is chaired by the Director of ECO and consists of representatives of trade associations whose members are users of the export licensing system. It meets every six months starting from 13 May 2004.

Fair Trade

Mr. Burstow: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry if she will make it her policy to ensure that all Government-funded hospitality is sourced from fair trade producers. [192901]

Mr. Alexander: The Department of Trade and Industry works closely with other Government departments to promote fair trade, and the Government are committed to supporting fair trade through its own suppliers wherever possible within the boundaries set by the public procurement rules.

Since September 2002 the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry has ensured that Fairtrade products were made available throughout the DTI offices, and many of her Cabinet colleagues have responded to her urging to do likewise. Government departmental restaurants and cafeterias are continually adding to their range of FairTrade products. In addition to FairTrade coffee and tea, staff, visitors, and Ministers can now enjoy FairTrade cereal and chocolate bars, and FairTrade hot chocolate, sweetened with FairTrade sugar.

Glass Packaging Sector

Mr. Bill O'Brien: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what recent reports she has received on the glass packaging sector, with particular reference to its *(a)* market structure, *(b)* output levels and *(c)* key characteristics, including job losses; and if she will make a statement. [194720]

Jacqui Smith: The Department has recently received an ECOTEC Report commissioned by Barnsley Development Agency on the economic impact assessment of the glass packaging sector on the Yorkshire and Humber economy.

The report considers the current as well as the likely future impacts of a proposed new glass packaging plant in Cheshire which is the subject of an RSA application currently with the Department.

Officials are currently considering developments on this case and will respond in more detail when they are in a position to do so.

Mr. Bill O'Brien: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry if she will make a statement on the *(a)* recent development of the glass container industry and *(b)* impact that development of the industry will have on jobs in the Yorkshire region. [194724]

Jacqui Smith: The recent ECOTEC report commissioned by Barnsley Development Agency suggests that since 2000 demand for glass packaging has grown by 1 per cent. per year. In the near future, growth in demand for glass packaging is expected to continue at approximately 1–2 per cent. per annum.

It is difficult to say what the impact on the development of the industry will have on jobs in the Yorkshire region but it is for Industry, in partnership with Government and key stakeholders such as the Regional Development Agency, to help manufacturing companies fulfil their potential.

Research and Development

Mr. Stephen O'Brien: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what the forthcoming competition deadlines are for grants for research and development in each region. [193784]

Nigel Griffiths: The first round of competitions in all English regions closed on 28 May 2004. A second competition in West Midlands closed on 8 October 2004 and a second competition is underway in the North East which closes on 12 November 2004. We are working closely with the Regional Development Agencies on the timing of future competitions.

Mr. Stephen O'Brien: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what the value is of the awards offered by her Department from the grant for research and development regional competitions held in May this year *(a)* in total and *(b)* broken down by region. [193785]

Nigel Griffiths: The value of Grant for Research and Development offers made in the first round of regional competitions that closed on 28 May 2004 are shown on the following table:

Region	*Value of Awards (£000)*
East	4,039,232
East Midlands	490,041
London	1,591,000
North East	621,759
North West	1,684,309
South East	711,954
South West	127,564
West Midlands	490,736
Yorks and Number	849,129
Total	10,605,724

Mr. Stephen O'Brien: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what plans she has to involve staff from the regional development agencies in the administration of the grant for research and development. [193789]

Nigel Griffiths: Regional Development Agency (RDA) staff will administer the Grant for Research and Development from 1 April 2005. Officials in the Small Business Service, the current administrators of the product, are working closely with RDA staff to ensure business continuity at the handover date.

Mr. Stephen O'Brien: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what change there has been in her Department's spending priorities to accommodate an increase in funds for grants for research and development in 2003–04 and 2004–05. [193790]

Nigel Griffiths: The increased expenditure on Grant for Research and Development are contained within DTI's overall expenditure.

National Institute for Medical Research

Mr. Pollard: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what discussions she has had with the Medical Research Council on alternatives to the closure and dispersal of the National Institute for Medical Research; and if she will make a statement. [193157]

Ms Hewitt: The future of the National Institute for Medical Research (NIMR) is a matter for the Medical Research Council (MRC). However, my noble Friend the Parliamentary Under Secretary of State for Science and Innovation met with NIMR staff and Union representatives last year and has discussed with MRC the handling of the process. I have not been personally involved in any discussions with MRC. OST is continuing to monitor developments and remains in close contact with the MRC on this matter.

DEFENCE

Armed Forces Deployment

Mr. Rosindell: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence in how many different combat zones British forces are deployed. [191664]

Mr. Ingram: British Service personnel are deployed on operations in the principal locations as follows:

Afghanistan
Balkans
Cyprus
Democratic Republic of Congo
Gulf Region
Georgia
Iraq
Liberia
Sierra Leone

The list does not include personnel serving in loan/diplomatic posts, in permanent garrisons, personnel stationed on British overseas territories or on training detachments.

Arms Exports

Harry Cohen: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence how many F680 applications *(a)* received clearance and *(b)* did not receive clearance in each year since 1997, broken down by applicant country. [194360]

Mr. Ingram: Information on F680 applications cleared and refused is set out in the following tables.

	F680 cleared						
Country	*1997*	*1998*	*1999*	*2000*	*2001*	*2002*	*2003*
Albania	—	—	—	1	—	—	—
Algeria	14	17	15	5	2	3	10
Angola	2	2	3	—	—	—	—
Argentina	1	5	16	5	3	3	1
Australia	110	148	163	68	105	100	79
Austria	26	7	17	19	19	9	24
Bahamas	—	—	—	1	—	—	—
Bahrain	32	22	15	15	11	17	17
Bangladesh	19	12	10	10	4	10	10
Barbados	1	1	1	1	—	—	2
Belarus	2	1	—	1	2	—	1
Belgium	38	55	62	73	66	40	38
Belize	1	1	1	1	—	—	—
Bermuda	—	—	1	1	—	—	—
Bhutan	1	—	—	—	—	—	—
Bolivia	2	1	2	1	—	—	—
Bosnia-Hercegovina	—	3	—	1	—	—	—
Botswana	7	6	7	2	3	2	3
Brazil	44	43	45	32	32	27	20
Brunei	39	19	25	18	18	21	11
Bulgaria	2	7	6	3	8	10	7
Burundi	—	1	—	—	—	—	—
Cambodia	—	1	1	1	—	—	—
Cameroon	3	1	4	1	—	1	—
Canada	77	70	79	52	113	46	89
Cayman Islands	—	—	—	—	—	1	1
Central African Republic	—	—	1	—	—	—	—
Chile	50	40	27	17	19	16	33
China	31	40	30	15	35	29	6
Colombia	12	15	17	6	6	2	3
Costa Rica	2	—	—	—	1	—	—
Croatia	4	1	—	2	1	1	2
Cuba	1	—	1	—	—	—	—
Cyprus	5	3	4	6	6	7	—
Czech Republic	22	17	33	16	14	13	22
Denmark	46	59	48	56	35	43	44
Dominican Republic	—	—	1	—	1	—	—
Ecuador	23	16	9	3	9	2	—
Egypt	53	32	32	34	32	18	15
El Salvador	1	1	1	1	1	—	—
Eritrea	—	1	—	—	—	—	—
Estonia	5	4	6	2	4	3	3
Ethiopia	3	5	1	—	1	1	—
European Community	2	—	—	—	—	—	—
Falkland Islands	—	—	2	1	2	—	—
Fiji	1	1	—	1	—	1	—
Finland	29	37	56	40	35	27	47
France	123	164	139	169	157	141	120
Gabon	—	2	1	—	—	2	—
Gambia	—	—	—	2	—	1	—
Georgia	—	1	1	2	—	—	—
Germany	109	135	106	127	113	62	93
Ghana	6	2	6	3	2	3	—
Gibraltar	—	—	4	—	—	—	—
Greece	51	84	60	54	56	53	57
Guatemala	3	—	1	1	—	—	1
Guinea	—	—	—	—	—	1	—
Guyana	1	3	1	1	1	—	—
Honduras	3	—	1	—	—	1	—
Hong Kong	8	12	9	7	3	8	3
Hungary	17	16	15	13	13	11	19
Iceland	4	11	13	9	8	39	29
India	84	60	75	49	41	55	47
Indonesia	59	30	20	11	26	14	12
Israel	31	37	24	30	23	3	31
Italy	62	108	85	97	65	87	81
Ivory Coast	2	—	3	—	—	—	—
Jamaica	2	—	—	1	2	2	—
Japan	64	76	103	100	53	48	45
Jordan	13	24	25	24	10	12	12

	F680 cleared						
Country	*1997*	*1998*	*1999*	*2000*	*2001*	*2002*	*2003*
Kazakhstan	—	2	1	4	2	3	—
Kenya	13	3	12	7	3	3	4
Korea, South	141	65	105	77	78	71	42
Kuwait	44	32	30	23	17	27	32
Kyrgyzstan	—	1	1	—	1	—	—
Laos	—	1	—	—	—	2	—
Latvia	8	5	4	—	3	2	3
Lebanon	5	4	5	2	34	2	1
Lesotho	1	1	—	—	—	1	—
Libya	—	—	2	—	—	—	—
Liechtenstein	—	—	—	1	1	—	—
Lithuania	5	5	6	2	2	3	5
Luxembourg	6	13	13	12	11	7	17
Macedonia	1	1	1	—	3	7	—
Madagascar	—	—	1	—	—	1	—
Malawi	1	—	2	—	—	1	—
Malaysia	76	64	58	62	41	50	41
Maldive Islands	1	—	1	1	—	—	1
Mali	—	—	—	1	—	—	—
Malta	—	—	3	2	3	1	1
Mauritania	—	1	1	—	—	—	—
Mauritius	—	4	1	—	1	5	—
Mexico	12	5	7	4	12	9	2
Moldova	—	—	—	—	1	1	—
Monaco	—	1	—	—	—	—	—
Morocco	10	13	10	3	3	2	14
Mozambique	1	—	2	—	1	—	—
Namibia	3	3	2	—	1	1	—
Nato	—	—	—	—	—	1	—
Nepal	1	1	—	2	—	4	—
Netherlands	74	92	96	73	60	59	59
New Zealand	33	33	59	22	37	37	35
Nicaragua	1	—	1	1	—	1	—
Niger	2	—	—	—	—	—	—
Nigeria	1	1	14	3	8	4	2
Norway	57	84	78	62	46	54	75
Oman	49	29	34	31	62	32	46
Pakistan	60	57	35	21	25	15	26
Panama	2	—	4	1	1	7	—
Papua New Guinea	1	—	2	1	2	—	—
Paraguay	1	3	1	2	1	—	—
Peru	22	14	10	8	13	2	5
Philippines	35	29	33	18	16	7	10
Poland	23	39	37	28	30	31	33
Portugal	40	49	40	34	43	30	44
Qatar	44	27	26	16	21	14	14
Ireland	6	10	17	10	17	30	38
Romania	17	10	12	10	14	17	21
Russia	6	22	18	15	10	10	3
Rwanda	—	1	—	—	—	—	—
Saudi Arabia	73	42	44	32	65	47	62
Senegal	2	—	—	1	—	1	—
Serbia and Montenegro	1	—	—	—	1	—	6
Seychelles	—	—	—	1	—	—	—
Sierra Leone	—	—	10	—	—	1	—
Singapore	77	72	69	43	55	32	30
Slovak Republic	1	—	1	1	—	—	2
Slovakia	4	9	3	5	13	4	4
Slovenia	8	12	4	4	6	8	3
South Africa	46	61	86	43	26	27	34
Spain	64	82	74	67	65	58	73
Sri Lanka	16	8	13	16	9	5	10
Suriname	—	2	—	—	—	—	—
Sweden	78	73	112	55	49	43	76
Switzerland	15	10	29	30	28	7	37
Syria	3	3	8	4	5	5	3
Taiwan	36	30	25	23	14	11	28
Tajikistan	—	—	—	—	1	—	—
Tanzania	5	1	1	—	1	1	—
Thailand	48	27	34	21	33	26	25

Country	*F680 cleared* *1997*	*1998*	*1999*	*2000*	*2001*	*2002*	*2003*
Togo	—	—	—	1	—	—	—
Trinidad and Tobago	—	3	2	—	—	1	4
Tunisia	8	10	6	5	4	1	6
Turkey	93	108	93	86	67	48	73
Turkmenistan	—	1	—	—	1	—	—
UAE	77	43	43	37	78	41	39
Uganda	7	2	2	—	—	—	—
Ukraine	2	5	3	2	3	2	—
Uruguay	7	7	5	5	2	2	—
USA	255	278	394	282	288	188	258
Uzbekistan	—	2	—	1	1	—	1
Venezuela	29	18	22	7	18	6	3
Vietnam	18	15	6	2	2	5	12
Yemen	7	9	8	3	5	2	8
Zambia	3	3	2	—	—	—	—
Zimbabwe	4	7	1	—	—	—	—
Total	3,143	3,128	3,319	2,548	2,625	2,122	2,409

Country	*F680 refused* *1997*	*1998*	*1999*	*2000*	*2001*	*2002*	*2003*
Albania	—	—	—	—	—	1	1
Algeria	8	3	3	3	3	4	4
Angola	—	—	1	—	1	—	—
Argentina	—	5	11	7	2	1	—
Armenia	—	—	—	—	—	1	—
Australia	—	—	—	1	1	13	1
Azerbaijan	—	1	—	—	—	1	—
Bahrain	—	—	—	—	—	—	1
Bangladesh	—	3	5	2	—	—	—
Belarus	1	—	—	—	1	1	
Belgium	—	—	—	1	1	—	—
Bhutan	—	—	1	—	—	—	—
Bolivia	—	—	1	—	—	—	—
Bosnia-Hercegovina	—	—	—	1	—	2	—
Brazil	3	—	5	1	2	—	1
Brunei	—	—	—	—	—	2	—
Bulgaria	—	—	—	—	—	1	—
Burma	—	1	2	—	—	—	—
Burundi	—	—	1	—	—	—	—
Cambodia	2	—	1	1	—	—	—
Cameroon	1		1	—	—	—	—
Canada	—	1	—	—	—	2	1
Central African Republic	—	—	1	—	—	—	—
China	12	12	10	28	6	16	12
Colombia	4	—	1	—	—	—	—
Congo	—	—	2	—	—	—	—
Croatia	2	3	—	1	1	4	1
Cuba	—	—	1	—	—	—	—
Cyprus	3	4	2	1	2	4	4
Czech Republic	1	—	4	—	1	2	—
Denmark	—	—	—	—	4	—	—
Djibouti	—	—	1	—	—	—	—
Ecuador	—	2	1	1	—	—	—
Egypt	2	8	3	1	3	3	5
El Salvador	—	1	—	—	—	—	—
Equatorial Guinea	—	1	—	—	—	—	1
Eritrea	—	—	1	—	—	—	—
Estonia	—	—	—	1	—	2	—
Ethiopia	—	—	4	1	—	—	—
Finland	—	—	—	1	—	4	—
France	1	—	2	4	8	4	2
Germany	2	—	—	5	3	1	1
Ghana	1	—	—	—	—	—	—
Greece	—	—	1	—	2	2	—
Guatemala	—	2	1	—	—	—	—
Guinea-Bissau	—	—	1	—	—	—	—
Hong Kong	2	—	1	2	—	—	4
Hungary	—	—	2	—	1	1	—
Iceland	—	—	—	2	—	—	—

	F680 refused						
Country	*1997*	*1998*	*1999*	*2000*	*2001*	*2002*	*2003*
India	1	6	12	7	5	7	15
Indonesia	9	1	4	1	4	2	4
Iran	—	—	—	1	—	2	1
Israel	2	6	1	5	4	11	6
Italy	1	1	—	—	2	1	1
Japan	—	—	—	—	4	1	1
Jordan	—	—	1	2	—	—	—
Kazakhstan	—	—	—	—	—	1	—
Korea, South	—	—	4	1	1	8	1
Kuwait	—	1	—	—	—	1	4
Laos	—	—	—	—	—	—	1
Latvia	—	—	—	—	—	2	—
Lebanon	—	—	1	1	1	1	—
Liberia	—	—	—	—	1	—	—
Libya	—	—	3	2	1	1	—
Lithuania	—	—	—	1	—	2	—
Luxembourg	—	—	2	—	1	—	—
Macao	—	—	1	—	—	—	—
Macedonia	—	—	—	—	—	2	1
Malaysia	2	—	2	—	1	1	2
Mali	1	—	—	—	—	—	—
Malta	—	—	—	—	1	—	—
Mexico	2	4	—	—	—	—	—
Morocco	—	1	—	—	5	—	—
Myanmar	—	—	—	1	—	—	—
Nepal	—	—	—	1	—	1	—
Netherlands	—	—	—	3	2	—	—
New Zealand	—	—	—	—	—	2	—
Nigeria	5	1	1	—	3	2	—
Norway	—	—	—	—	4	1	2
Pakistan	3	2	6	21	5	10	1
Peru	2	—	1	—	—	—	—
Poland	—	—	1	—	1	1	—
Portugal	—	—	—	—	1	—	—
Qatar	—	—	—	1	—	—	2
Romania	—	2	—	1	—	—	—
Russia	—	2	1	2	3	1	6
Rwanda	—	—	1	—	—	—	—
Saudi Arabia	—	—	1	1	—	1	1
Seychelles	—	—	—	—	—	1	—
Sierra Leone	1	—	1	—	—	—	—
Singapore	1	—	8	—	2	3	7
Slovakia	—	—	—	2	—	—	—
Slovenia	5	—	—	—	—	2	—
Somalia	—	—	1	—	—	—	—
South Africa	6	6	5	1	1	1	2
Spain	—	1	1	4	2	—	1
Sri Lanka	1	—	3	1	—	2	—
Sudan	1	—	1	—	—	—	—
Sweden	2	—	4	—	—	1	1
Switzerland	1	1	—	2	—	1	—
Syria	1	—	2	—	—	2	—
Taiwan	8	11	1	6	4	7	2
Tajikistan	—	—	—	1	1	—	—
Thailand	—	—	—	1	1	—	—
Togo	1	—	—	—	—	—	—
Tunisia	—	—	—	—	—	1	—
Turkey	6	2	—	—	2	—	—
Turkmenistan	—	—	—	2	—	—	—
UAE	—	1	—	1	—	3	2
Ukraine	—	—	—	—	1	—	—
USA	1	2	2	7	6	3	6
Uzbekistan	—	1	—	—	—	—	—
Venezuela	—	—	1	—	1	1	—
Vietnam	2	2	—	—	—	—	1
Yemen	1	—	1	1	1	—	5
Yugoslavia	—	—	2	—	—	3	—
Zaire	1	—	1	—	—	—	—
Zimbabwe	—	—	4	—	1	—	—
Total	112	102	152	145	114	165	115

Army

John Thurso: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what the *(a)* establishment, *(b)* funded liability and *(c)* actual strength was for the Army in each year since 1997; what it is in 2004–05; and what it is expected to be in 2005–06. [192160]

Mr. Caplin: I will write to the hon. Member and place a copy of my letter in the Library of the House.

Ann Winterton: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence upon which sectors of the Army the 6,500 reduction in manpower is expected to fall; and if he will make a statement. [194383]

Mr. Caplin: As my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Defence made clear in July, the force structure, organisation and capabilities of the armed forces are to be modernised in order to meet the challenges of the 21st century. The decision to cease the infantry arms plot and encouraging progress in Northern Ireland has meant that we are able to restructure the infantry as part of this process and reduce the number of infantry battalions from 40 to 36. As I have made clear in my previous answers to the hon. Member, all of the manpower freed up from the reduction in infantry battalions will be reinvested across the army, to strengthen key enabling capabilities such as engineers, signals and intelligence.

For the future we envisage an Army of about 102,000. This is however, dependent on achieving full normalisation in Northern Ireland. In the meantime therefore, the strength of the Army will remain broadly as it is today.

Ann Winterton: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what financial saving is expected from reducing Infantry Battalions from 40 to 36. [194388]

Mr. Ingram: I refer the hon. Member to the answer I gave on 20 October 2004, *Official Report*, column 713W.

Black Watch

Annabelle Ewing: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what meetings he has had with US officials to discuss lines of command if UK soldiers are to be redeployed in US controlled areas in Iraq. [193247]

Mr. Hoon: The Black Watch remain under the operational command of General Rollo, the UK General Officer Commanding Multi-National Division (South-East). On a day-to-day basis, the Black Watch co-ordinates its activity with the US chain of command in the locality, but any changes in the mission or the tasking would be referred back to General Rollo.

Bowman Radios

Mr. Drew: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence how many complaints he has received about Bowman radios; and what the nature of the complaints was. [191106]

Mr. Ingram: I am aware of media reports about Bowman radios. In common with other MOD equipment, the Bowman tactical communications system has an incident reporting system which captures any user comments about the performance of the system.

Combat Clothing

Mr. Gordon Prentice: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence how many contracts for combat wear for the Army were awarded to UK companies and manufactured in the UK since 2001; and what percentage of the total number of contracts awarded this represented in each year. [194391]

Mr. Ingram: The total number of contracts for all combat wear awarded to UK companies and manufactured in the UK since 2001 are as follows:

	Total number of contracts awarded	*Number awarded to UK companies manufacturing in UK*	*Percentage of UK based contracts*
2001	42	33	78
2002	48	22	46
2003	63	33	52
2004	58	45	78

Mr. Hoyle: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what assessment was made of the financial position of Cooneen Watts and Stone Textiles before the recent award of a contract by his Department; and what representations he has received since then regarding the company's financial situation. [194536]

Mr. Ingram: The financial position of the individual companies within Cooneen Watts and Stone Ltd. was evaluated by the Ministry of Defence accountants and based upon the nature of the contract the company was assessed as acceptable. Unsolicited representations have recently been received concerning the company's financial position and the validity of these comments is being investigated.

Mr. Hoyle: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what assessment his Department made of whether there would have been a cost saving by splitting the Cut and Sew tender between Cookson and Clegg. [194534]

Mr. Ingram: The selected contractor was assessed as having the best overall ranking against the published award criteria. They also offered the best price.

Our assessment was that Cookson and Clegg Ltd did not offer the most economically advantageous solution for any single work package within this competition, to be the sole supplier. Splitting the contract award, on a lowest price basis, would not in any case have been compliant with the award criteria and the aim of appointing a single supplier with whom we could develop a partnering relationship for the next five years.

Mr. Hoyle: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence whether Factory Number 3533 will be used to print and supply the camouflage fabric for the Cut and Sew tender DC4BESL/1002. [193791]

Mr. Ingram *[holding answer 25 October 2004]*: The terminology "Factory Number 3533" is not a designation known to the Ministry of Defence team responsible for this contract. The selection of where manufacturing takes place is a commercial matter for the United Kingdom Prime Contractor and would be withheld under Exemption 7 of the Code of Practice on Access to Government Information.

End to End Review

Annabelle Ewing: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence when the final decision will be announced on the conclusions of the End to End Review. [193480]

Mr. Ingram *[holding answer 25 October 2004]*: The End to End Review into logistics support in Air and Land concluded with a written report on 1 July 2003. This led to a six-month period of Demonstration activities to test the efficacy of the assumptions, conclusions and recommendations contained in the Final Report.

Since 1 April 2004, all End to End focused activities have been combined with the extant Defence Logistics Organisation Change Programme, to form the Defence Logistics Transformation Programme, under the guidance of the Chief of Defence Logistics as logistics process owner across Defence.

Delivery of the Defence Logistics Transformation Programme is likely to require announcements and decisions on future logistics support solutions. The announcement I made on 16 September 2004, *Official Report*, columns 164–65WS, on the future locations of air depth maintenance support was the first major statement and represents a key component of the programme.

FRES Programme

Ann Winterton: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence pursuant to the Answer of 4 October 2004, *Official Report*, column 1874W, on the FRES Programme, if he will outline the procurement procedure for the family of medium weight armoured vehicles. [191858]

Mr. Ingram: The Assessment Phase of the Future Rapid Effects System (FRES) Programme was formally launched in May 2004. On 6 October, Atkins was nominated as Preferred Bidder for the role of Systems House to lead a number of Assessment Phase activities. It is anticipated that a contract will be in place by the end of the year. The Systems House is independent of product and manufacturing capabilities, and is therefore in a strong position to obtain the widest possible industrial involvement in the Programme.

Studies, analysis and technology risk reduction activities conducted during the Assessment Phase will consider a range of options for FRES. The results of this work will be used to develop optimum procurement and support strategies and to inform decisions for future phases of the programme. All such decisions will take account of the Defence Industrial Policy.

Ann Winterton: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence when the Future Rapid Effects System is expected to be fully operational. [191868]

Mr. Ingram: As I said on 4 October 2004, *Official Report*, column 1874W, the Future Rapid Effect System (FRES) is still early in its Assessment Phase, which will determine when the initial operating capability and full operating capability could be achieved. Our current planning assumption, however, is that early FRES variants will be introduced around the turn of the decade, with further variants introduced at the most appropriate point in the programme, using a phased approach to achieving full operational capability.

Ann Winterton: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence which British Army medium vehicles have the technological capability to contain the Future Rapid Effects System. [194387]

Mr. Ingram: I refer the hon. Member to the answer I gave on 4 October 2004, *Official Report*, column 1875W.

Future Offensive Air System

Mr. Jack: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will make a statement on the Future Offensive Air System project; what the project's objectives are; which countries are participating in it; which UK and European aerospace companies are involved; what funding his Department has contributed to its work to date for each of the last five years; and when he expects to make public the outcome of this work. [193496]

Mr. Ingram: The Future Offensive Air System (FOAS) work is assessing our future strike capability requirement from around 2020 onwards.

FOAS is a MOD programme. Work on FOAS is supported in part by the European Technology Acquisition Programme (ETAP), which is designed to develop European technologies for future combat air systems. France, Germany, Italy, Spain and Sweden participate in ETAP along with the UK. FOAS also has links with Australia.

The principal companies involved in FOAS are BAE Systems, MBDA, Thales UK, LogicaCMG, and QinetiQ.

MOD expenditure on FOAS in the last five years has been:

	£ million
1999–2000	15
2000–01	20
2001–02	20
2002–03	15
2003–04	14

As the project consists of a number of studies, and outcomes are study-dependant, there is no planned schedule of announcements related to FOAS at this time.

Harpoon Missile

Mr. Hancock: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what plans he has *(a)* to remove Harpoon from Type 22 and Type 23 frigates and *(b)* to develop a successor to Harpoon; and if he will make a statement. [189753]

Mr. Ingram: Harpoon, in its current or future variants, is expected to remain in service on Type 22 and Type 23 frigates until their planned out of service dates. There is an ongoing surface warfare study considering future weapons solutions.

Helicopters (Sheppey)

Mr. Wyatt: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence (1) how many military helicopters have flown over the Isle of Sheppey at a height of *(a)* less than 1,000 metres, *(b)* 1,000 metres, *(c)* 2,000 metres and *(d)* over 2,000 metres since May; [195141]

(2) what permission military helicopters require when flying over the Isle of Sheppey below 2,000 metres. [195140]

Mr. Caplin: The western tip of the Isle of Sheppey lies within the Thames Valley Avoidance Area (TVAA). To operate within the TVAA below 2,000 feet military aircraft require permission from MoD Head Office, must make a booking with the low flying booking cell and will also be under air traffic control.

The Isle of Sheppey lies predominantly within Low Flying Area 18, which includes most of Kent and parts of Sussex. If Military helicopters are flying below 500ft they are operating in the Low Flying System, in which case flights need to be pre-planned, and suitably authorised. Otherwise no specific permission is required for flying over the Isle of Sheppey below 2,000 metres. There is an avoidance for all helicopters over the Swaleside Prison.

The information in respect of overflights is not available in the form requested. Details of the number of helicopter flights above 500ft are not held. Data for flights below that height is recorded according to the Low Flying Area (LFA) within which aircraft are operating. Since May 2004, 247 helicopter sorties, totalling 157 hours have been recorded for LFA 18.

Iraq

Jeremy Corbyn: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence how many depleted uranium tipped shells have been used in Iraq since March 2003; and what the total weight is of depleted uranium so used. [192722]

Mr. Ingram: There are no depleted uranium (DU) tipped shells in UK service.

I refer my hon. Friend to the answer I gave on 19 April 2004, *Official Report*, column 339W, in respect of the use of DU by United Kingdom armed forces since March 2003.

Pete Wishart: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what plans he has for maintaining a reserve battalion in south east Iraq following the redeployment of *(a)* the Black Watch and *(b)* other troops in Iraq. [193303]

Mr. Ingram *[holding answer 5 October 2004]*: I refer the hon. Member to the statement made by the right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Defence in the House on 21 October 2004, *Official Report*, columns 1035–37.

Paul Flynn: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what weapons are available to *(a)* US, *(b)* British and *(c)* Iraqi troops serving in Iraq. [193647]

Mr. Ingram: British forces in Iraq deploy with the appropriate weapons and other capabilities for the situation they face, which varies over time and different geographical areas. These range from Challenger II tanks and Warrior Armoured Vehicles, through to small arms. For reasons of operational security, I am not able to go into further details. I am therefore withholding that information under Exemption la of the Code of Practice on Access to Government Information.

The equipment provided to US forces in Iraq is a matter for the US Government.

The equipment and weapon systems used by the Iraqi Security Forces (ISF) are matters for the Iraqi Interim Government, and it would not be appropriate for me to release details. A procurement programme is in place to ensure that the ISF have the right capabilities for the security tasks they face now and in the coming months.

Mr. Soames: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what the Order of Battle in the Iraq theatre of operation will be from 1 November; and if he will make a statement. [193967]

Mr. Hoon: As I announced in the House on 17 June 2004, *Official Report*, columns 48–49WS, land forces in Iraq are currently undergoing a roulement between the component units of 1 Mechanised Brigade and 4 Armoured Brigade. By 15 November, the roulement will be complete and the anticipated Order of Battle for UK forces in Iraq will be as follows:

Land contribution

Headquarters 4 Armoured Brigade
The Queens Dragoon Guards
The Royal Dragoon Guards
1st Battalion Welsh Guards
1st Battalion Scots Guards
1st Battalion The Duke of Wellington's Regiment
40 Commando (Royal Marines)
1st Battalion Black Watch
4th Regiment Royal Artillery
Phoenix Battery 32 Regiment Royal Artillery
21 Engineer Regiment
Field Support Squadron, 28 Engineer Regiment
1 Battalion REME
Logistic elements from 7 Transport Regiment RLC
Squadron from General Support Medical Regiment
East and West Riding Rifles (TA Force Protection)

At 1 November, the roulement will still be under way, and elements of 1 Mech Brigade will still be in theatre. Troop levels in Iraq are kept under constant review.

Maritime Contribution

HMS Somerset
HMS Echo
RFA Bayleaf (also supporting other operations)

Air Contribution

14 Squadron Tornado GR4 Detachment
10 Squadron VC 10 Detachment
Kinloss Maritime Wing Nimrod MR2 Detachment
24/30 Squadron Hercules Detachment
Joint Helicopter Force—Iraq
32 Squadron HS 125 Detachment
51 Squadron RAF Regiment

Joint Strike Fighter

Mr. Gerald Howarth: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what consultations the Government has had with the US Administration about technology transfer and access with regard to the Joint Strike Fighter. [193109]

Mr. Ingram: Ministers and officials regularly discuss Joint Strike Fighter technology access and data release issues with the US Administration.

Mr. Gerald Howarth: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what effect the changes to the internal weapons bays of the Joint Strike Fighter will have on the UK's future weapons requirement for that aircraft. [193110]

Mr. Ingram: The longer term trend is toward smaller, more accurate weapons, and therefore the changes to the internal weapons bay of the Short Take Off Vertical Landing Variant of the Joint Strike Fighter are not seen as a major impediment to future weapons capability. If the need arose, the variant could still carry large weapons externally. The changes do not impact on the weapons requirements at the In Service Date.

Mr. Gerald Howarth: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence when he expects to sign a contract for the STOVL variant of the Joint Strike Fighter. [193122]

Mr. Ingram: Contracts will be let by the US on behalf of all Joint Strike Fighter partner nations, and will cover all variants of the aircraft, as required nationally. In common with all the nations, the United Kingdom's first contribution to the production phase is likely to be in 2007, when a commitment to non recurring production costs for the overall production run will be required. Actual orders for UK aircraft are not planned before 2009.

Naval Procurement

Mr. Nicholas Brown: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence whether the fabrication of individual blocks, in addition to design, final assembly and integration, is covered by his commitment that warships for the Royal Navy will be built in the UK. [194449]

Mr. Ingram: It is government policy that the fabrication and assembly of new Royal Navy warship hulls should be undertaken in United Kingdom yards. This includes the fabrication of individual blocks of warship hulls.

Mr. Nicholas Brown: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will make a statement on his proposals for aligning the future naval procurement programme with UK domestic industrial capacity. [194452]

Mr. Ingram: The Ministry of Defence is currently engaged in discussions with appropriate members of United Kingdom industry to align the future naval procurement programme and available UK industrial capacity. The detail will be refined in the coming months as work to develop an industrial strategy for the UK naval shipbuilding industry matures.

Offshore Patrol Vessels

Mr. Hancock: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence when the lease of the three River Class Offshore Patrol Vessels is due to expire; and what plans he has to *(a)* purchase these vessels, *(b)* extend their lease and *(c)* return them to Vosper Thorneycroft (UK) Ltd. [194681]

Mr. Ingram: The current lease for the three River class OPVs will expire in 2008. We have not yet taken any decisions regarding our future requirement for these ships.

Race Relations Act

Mr. Hague: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what discussions his Department has had with the Commission for Racial Equality concerning the applicability of the Race Relations Act 1976 to service personnel serving on sovereign bases outside the European Union. [193710]

Mr. Caplin: There have been no such discussions to date. However, with the adoption of the EU Race Discrimination Directive in July 2003, the Race Relations Act has been amended, so that it would apply to service personnel serving on sovereign bases outside Great Britain, and in relation to allegations of race discrimination, which took or take place after the change in the law.

Scottish Regiments

Mr. Foulkes: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what the percentage of personnel in each of the Scottish regiments are originally from *(a)* Scotland, *(b)* the rest of the United Kingdom and *(c)* overseas. [193162]

Mr. Caplin: The information is as follows:

Nationality of UK trained regular army personnel in each of the Scottish regiments as at 1 September 2004

Percentage[1]

	Nationality		
	Scottish[2]	*Rest of UK*	*Overseas*
The Royal Scots Dragoon Guards	61	35	4
1st Battalion the Scots Guards and F Company Scots Guards	60	37	3
1st Battalion The Royal Scots	70	13	16
1st Battalion The Royal Highland Fusiliers	85	10	5
1st Battalion The Kings Own Scottish Borderers	82	16	2
1st Battalion The Black Watch	80	15	5
1st Battalion The Highlanders	71	22	7
1st Battalion The Argyle and Sutherland Highlanders	88	11	2

[1] The sum of percentages may not add up to 100 per cent. due to rounding.

[2] Scottish includes those who have specified themselves as British/Scottish. It will not include those who are Scottish but recorded as British.

The information in the table refers to the nationality recorded on the individual's Record of Service and is their current nationality, not necessarily their nationality at birth.

Figures do not include Full-Time Reserve Service (FTRS), Gurkhas or mobilised reservists. The information relates to the strength of UK Trained Regular Army personnel in the Scottish Regiments, regardless of whether they serve away from the main body of the regiment. It does not include members of other regiments and arms/services attached to these regiments.

Seyntex

Mr. Hoyle: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence pursuant to the answer of 25 October 2004, *Official Report*, column 950W, on Seyntex, if he will make a statement on the bid by Cookson and Clegg with specific reference to delivery. [194535]

Mr. Ingram: Cookson and Clegg did not bid in the competition to supply General Service Tents, to which my hon. Friend refers.

SFOR

Ann Winterton: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence pursuant to the answer of 19 October 2004, *Official Report*, column 596W, on SFOR, how many of the 1000 UK personnel on the SFOR mission Operation Althea will be infantry. [194382]

Mr. Ingram: The EU-led Operation Althea will be launched on 2 December 2004, following the termination of NATO's SFOR mission. Manning levels will not change significantly from those in SFOR which, at 15 October 2004, were around 1,000 troops in theatre. The British contribution to Operation ALTHEA will include an infantry deployment of 1st Battalion Grenadier Guards, which will comprise up to 500 personnel.

Submarines

Mr. Gordon Prentice: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what the cost was of the rescue operation for HMCS Chicoutimi and returning her safely to port; and if he will make a statement. [194440]

Mr. Ingram: The full internal costs for the rescue of the HMCS Chicoutimi are not yet available. The cost of the tow, including the hire of the tug, Anglian Princess, is an estimated £190,000. It is not MOD policy to recover costs for assistance in life threatening situations.

Mr. Hancock: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence when ownership of HMS Upholder transferred from his Department. [194467]

Mr. Ingram: The Ministry of Defence remains the owner of HMS Upholder. Canada is leasing the submarine, re-named as HMCS Chicoutimi, over an eight-year period which commenced at handover on 2 October 2004. Under the terms of the contract between the United Kingdom and Canada, Canada has the right to buy out the lease of the submarines at any time. Canada will pay a token £1 at the end of the lease period to assume full ownership.

Mr. Hancock: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence who was responsible for the cost of the *(a)* refit, *(b)* maintenance and *(c)* crew training for HMS Upholder. [194468]

Mr. Ingram: Prior to the handover to, and acceptance by Canada of, the Upholder Class Submarines, the Defence Procurement Agency was responsible for the costs of the reactivation (refurbishment) and maintenance of the submarines. Shore training associated with the lease of the submarines to Canada was covered in a separate contract between BAE Systems and Canada. To oversee the shore training, the Ministry of Defence created a specialist team that also provided further onboard training under a Memorandum of Understanding with Canada.

Mr. Hancock: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what payments have been received by the Government from the Canadian Government in respect of the Upholder class of submarines. [194469]

Mr. Ingram: The United Kingdom Ministry of Defence has received to date Canadian $310 million in respect of the lease to Canada of the four Upholder Class submarines.

Suez Medal

Bob Spink: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence (1) how many veterans who are eligible for the Suez medal he expects will *(a)* not have received them and *(b)* have received them by 14 November; [194925]

(2) what progress has been made in distributing the Suez medals; and when he estimates distribution will be completed. [194918]

Mr. Caplin: By 14 November 2004 it is estimated that 19,100 applications will be awaiting assessment. Assumptions based upon the ratio of veterans found eligible from applications assessed to date suggest that some 15,300 eligible veterans who have applied will not have received their Suez Medal. It is estimated that by 14 November some 18,600 medals will have been issued.

As at 22 October 17,291 Suez Medals had been issued, and it is estimated that all eligible personnel who have applied should have received their medals by December 2005.

Tomahawk Cruise Missiles

Dr. Julian Lewis: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence pursuant to his answer of 9 March 2004, *Official Report*, column 1405W, on Tomahawk Cruise Missiles, what estimate he has made of the *(a)* cost and *(b)* practicability of fitting Tomahawk cruise missiles to a Type 45 destroyer; and which would be the first in the series of these ships to which the missiles could be fitted. [170655]

Mr. Ingram: There is currently no requirement for the Type 45 destroyer to be fitted with Tomahawk cruise missiles, and so no requirement for a detailed costing to be undertaken. If a requirement is subsequently identified, the appropriate ship in the build or upkeep cycle would be identified as the first to receive such missiles.

Type 23 Frigate

Mr. Hancock: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what the running costs of a Type-23 frigate were in the last financial year for which figures are available. [194466]

Mr. Ingram: We do not now manage costs on the basis of individual types of ships. There is therefore no distinct, identifiable budget for Type 23 frigates. But we estimate the average direct running costs for any of the 16 ships of this type in 2003 to be £8.93 million.

Typhoon

Mr. Hoyle: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will make a statement on Tranche 3 of Typhoon. [194620]

Mr. Ingram: The first tranche of 55 Typhoons is on order, and the aircraft are now successfully entering service with the RAF. Negotiations for the second tranche of 89 aircraft are making good progress. Negotiations on an order for Tranche 3 are not expected to start before 2007.

Warships

Mr. Hancock: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what plans he has to transfer *(a)* HMS Newcastle, *(b)* HMS Cardiff and *(c)* HMS Glasgow to an overseas navy. [194470]

Mr. Ingram: There are currently no plans to transfer HMS Newcastle and HMS Glasgow to an overseas navy. The Ministry of Defence's Disposal Services Agency (DSA) will investigate the possibility of a commercial sale. The disposal route for HMS Cardiff is yet to be agreed.

Whittington Barracks, Lichfield

Michael Fabricant: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence (1) which bases will be used in England over the next five years for the Army Training Regiment; [193946]

(2) if he will make a statement on the future use of the army barracks at Whittington, Lichfield; [193947]

(3) what plans he has to sell land occupied by the Whittington barracks near Lichfield; [193944]

(4) whether he plans to move the Army Training Regiment for Lichfield. [193945]

Mr. Caplin: The Army Training and Recruiting Agency (ATRA) is currently conducting a study to evaluate the capacity requirements for Phase 1 soldier training and to determine the most long term economical use of the existing Phase 1 training real estate, which includes four Army Training Regiments (ATRs); ATR Bassingbourn, ATR Winchester, ATR Pirbright, ATR Lichfield and the Army Foundation College Harrogate. The study will identify and develop a range of options including the feasibility of closing one of the ATRs. No decisions have yet been reached as the study involves a detailed business case and economic appraisal to determine value for money in any restructuring of Phase 1 training. It is hoped to conclude the study early in 2005.

Any site identified for possible closure would be assessed for alternative uses within the MOD. In the event that another user could not be identified, the site would be closed. The site that is recommended for closure would result in its recruits being reallocated to the remaining three ATRs, with some expansion at the remaining sites to create greater efficiencies in training.

PRIME MINISTER

Black Watch Deployment

Alan Simpson: To ask the Prime Minister if he will give an assurance that when Black Watch troops return to the UK for Christmas they will not be replaced by other British troops in forward deployments outside the Basra area. [194757]

The Prime Minister: I refer my hon. Friend to the answer I gave to the right hon. Member for Ross, Skye and Inverness, West (Mr. Kennedy) at Prime Minister's questions on 27 October 2004, *Official Report*, column 1425.

Gambling

Miss Kirkbride: To ask the Prime Minister which *(a)* UK and *(b)* international organisations have submitted written representations to his office concerning the Government's proposals for changes to legislation on gambling; and on what dates each representation (i) was received and (ii) was given a substantive response. [194513]

The Prime Minister: The information is not available in the format requested. Since the beginning of the year I have received over 65 letters on the issue of gambling. Given the volume of correspondence I receive, over one million letters and cards in the last year covering a broad spectrum of issues, my office records letters by subject rather than by the view expressed. My office works hard to ensure that all letters receive appropriate responses.

Miss Kirkbride: To ask the Prime Minister if he will list the overseas visits made by *(a)* Ministers and *(b)* officials in his office in relation to proposed changes to legislation on gambling; what the itinerary was for each visit; how long each visit lasted; which hotels were used; what the cost was in each case; and how each visit was funded. [194544]

The Prime Minister: Since 1999 the Government have published an annual list of all visits overseas undertaken by Cabinet Ministers costing £500 or more during each financial year. Copies of these lists are available in the Library of the House. Information on the number of officials accompanying me on overseas visits is included in the list. All travel is undertaken in accordance with the rules set out in the Ministerial Code and Travel by Ministers, and the Civil Service Management Code.

Llew Smith: To ask the Prime Minister what the basis is for the statement he made at his monthly press conference at Downing street on 25 October that the granting of additional powers to local authorities to give planning permission for large leisure complexes and casinos will aid regeneration in these areas. [195389]

The Prime Minister: The evidence of the potential regenerative benefits of resort casinos is summarised in chapter 8 of the report of the Joint Committee on the Draft Gambling Bill (HC 139–1), copies of which are available in the Vote Office and on the Parliament website.

Iraq

Mr. Dodds: To ask the Prime Minister what assurances were given to the US Administration in March 2002 regarding the policy of the British Government on regime change in Iraq. [194617]

The Prime Minister: I refer the hon. Member to the reply given by my hon. Friend the Minister of State at the Foreign and Commonwealth Office (Mr. Alexander) to the hon. Member for Montgomeryshire (Lembit Opik) on 27 October 2004, *Official Report*, column 1254W.

Press Releases

Pete Wishart: To ask the Prime Minister how many press releases have been issued by his Department in each month of 2004; and if he will make a statement. [195452]

The Prime Minister: Press releases issued by my office since the beginning of this year are available on the No. 10 website.

Strategy Unit Budget

Paul Flynn: To ask the Prime Minister what the sources of funding for the Strategy Unit budget are in 2004–05. [190749]

Mr. Milburn: I have been asked to reply.

The Strategy Unit is funded mainly by the Cabinet Office with contributions for some projects from other Government Departments.

Travel Costs

Charles Hendry: To ask the Prime Minister if he will make it his policy to ensure there are no costs to the taxpayer for visits abroad by his wife for *(a)* personal and *(b)* business purposes. [195270]

The Prime Minister: Subject to the usual security considerations, there should be no additional cost to the taxpayer from any purely private visit.

WORK AND PENSIONS

Agency Staff

Dr. Julian Lewis: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions how many agency temporary staff have been working for his Department in each of the last five years, excluding those working for agencies for which no data are kept centrally. [195246]

Maria Eagle: The information requested could be obtained only at disproportionate cost.

ATOS Origin

Malcolm Bruce: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions (1) pursuant to the answer of 18 October 2004, *Official Report*, column 478W, on telephone inquiries, whether ATOS Origin employs an incentive or rating scheme in relation to *(a)* inquiries and *(b)* mailings related to the direct payment of pensions and benefits; [193486]

(2) pursuant to the answer of 18 October 2004, *Official Report*, column 478W, on telephone inquiries, what the terms are of the contract with ATOS Origin; and whether incentive schemes are in operation for ATOS Origin operatives. [195293]

Mr. Pond: There is a commercial contract in place to deliver the conversion of benefit and pensions customers to Direct Payment through a customer conversion centre. Elements of the contract contain commercially confidential information and we are unable to disclose them, however I can say that there is no incentive scheme within the terms of this contract for staff involved in the process of converting customers to Direct Payment.

Benefit Payments (Pensioners)

Mr. Weir: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions how many pensioners are in receipt of *(a)* council tax benefit and *(b)* housing benefit in (i) Angus and (ii) Scotland. [193450]

Mr. Pond: Information on the numbers of pensioners receiving housing benefit and council tax benefit is not available below National or Government Office Region level. The available information is in the table.

Housing benefit and council tax benefit recipients aged 60 and over in Scotland: May 2003

	Benefit units [1]	*Beneficiaries* [2]
Housing benefit	197,000	230,000
Council tax benefit	275,000	324,000

[1] Pensioners are defined as pensioner benefit units where the claimant and/or partner are aged 60 or over. This may be a single person, couple or family.

[2] 'Beneficiaries' are the sum of claimants and partners aged 60 or over.

Notes:

1. The figures are based on a 1 per cent. sample and are therefore subject to a degree of sampling variation.

2. The figures have been rounded to the nearest thousand.

3. Council tax benefit totals exclude any Second Adult Rebate cases.

4. Housing benefit figures exclude any Extended Payment cases.

Source:

Housing Benefit and Council Tax Benefit Management Information System, Annual 1 per cent. sample, taken in May 2003.

Correspondence

David Winnick: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions when the hon. Member for Walsall, North will receive a reply to his letter of 9 August sent to the Department for Education and Skills, transferred to the Department for Work and Pensions on 17 August, and passed to Jobcentre Plus, ref. POS(7)10644/0039; and what the reasons are for the delay in replying. [194944]

Jane Kennedy: The administration of Jobcentre Plus is a matter for the Chief Executive of Jobcentre Plus, David Anderson. He will write to my hon. Friend.

Letter from Stephen Hewitt to Mr. David Winnick, dated 29 October 2004:

The Secretary of State for Work and Pensions has asked me to reply to your question concerning your letter of 9 August to the Department for Education and Skills and to explain the reasons for the delay. This is something which falls within the responsibilities delegated to David Anderson as Chief Executive of Jobcentre Plus. I am replying on his behalf as a member of the Jobcentre Plus Board.

Your letter was transferred to the Correspondence Team in Jobcentre Plus on 17 August but, unfortunately, we did not receive it. It was only when you enquired about the lack of response that this problem came to light. We finally received your letter on 8 October. I am currently in the process of investigating the issues you have raised and will send you a reply by 5 November. I apologise for the delay and, in light of the problems you have experienced, we will review the processes of both the Department and Jobcentre Plus to ensure this does not recur.

I hope this is helpful.

CSA

Rob Marris: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions for what reason the net administration costs of the Child Support Agency increased by 9.75 per cent. from 2002–03 to 2003–04. [190708]

Mr. Pond: The administration of the Child Support Agency is a matter for the Chief Executive, Mr. Doug Smith. He will write to the hon. Member with the information requested.

Letter from Doug Smith to Rob Marris, dated 25 October 2004:

In reply to your recent Parliamentary Question about the Child Support Agency the Secretary of State promised a substantive reply from the Chief Executive.

You asked the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions, for what reason the net administration costs of the Child Support Agency increased by 9.75 per cent. from 2002–03 to 2003–04.

The total increase in gross administrative costs between the two years is £28.716 million. £23.149 million of this increase relates to non-staff costs and £5.567 million relates to staff costs.

Non-Staff Costs

All fixed price IT services are reported in the accounts of the Department for Work and Pensions. This year there was a change in methodology for recharging this cost. This increased our charge by £6.785 million.

Departmental corporate re-charges for services such as finance, personnel, commercial management, postage, accommodation and assurance increased by £6.974 million.

The expenditure on Child Support Reform is reported in the accounts of the Department for Work and Pensions. The Department for Work and Pension reimburse the Agency for activity on these programmes. The amount of this reimbursement fell in the 2003–04 financial year by £18.202 million.

Efficiencies in other areas have resulted in other non-staff costs principally Agency expenditure on postage, printing and stationery, travel and subsistence and office services falling by £8.812 million.

Staff Costs

Last years pay settlement added 4 per cent. to the Agency pay costs, and changes to employer national insurance rates added a further 1 per cent. This was offset because the average number of staff employed was slightly lower in 2003–04 than in the previous year. This is explained further in Note 2 to the Administration Accounts.

Rob Marris: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions for what reason the non-staff administration costs of the Child Support Agency increased by 27 per cent. from 2002–03 to 2003–04. [190709]

Mr. Pond: The administration of the Child Support Agency is a matter for the Chief Executive, Mr. Doug Smith. He will write to the hon. Member with the information requested.

Letter from Doug Smith to Mr. Rob Marris, dated 25 October 2004:

In reply to your recent Parliamentary Question about the Child Support Agency the Secretary of State promised a substantive reply from the Chief Executive.

You asked the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions, for what reason the non-staff administration costs of the Child Support Agency increased by 27 per cent. from 2002–03 to 2003–04.

The increase in non-staff costs between the two years is £23.149 million. This is referred to at Note *5(b)*, *5(c)* and *5(d)* to the 2003–04 Administrative Account. In summary the main factors increasing expenditure are:

All fixed price IT services are reported in the accounts of the Department for Work and Pensions. This year there was a change in methodology for recharging this cost. This increased our charge by £6.785 million.

Departmental corporate re-charges for services such as finance, personnel, commercial management, postage, accommodation and assurance increased by £6.974 million.

The expenditure on Child Support Reform is reported in the accounts of the Department for Work and Pensions. The Department for Work and Pensions reimburses the Agency for activity on these programmes. The amount of this reimbursement fell in the 2003–04 financial year by £18.202 million.

Efficiencies in other areas have resulted in other non-staff costs principally Agency expenditure on postage, printing and stationery, travel and subsistence and office services falling by £8.812 million.

Departmental Redundancies

Chris Ruane: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions what funding has been set aside to retrain staff from job centres and benefits agency offices who lose their jobs. [190677]

Jane Kennedy: The administration of Jobcentre Plus is a matter for the Chief Executive of Jobcentre Plus, David Anderson. He will write to my hon. Friend.

Letter from David Anderson to Mr. Chris Ruane, dated 1 November 2004:

The Secretary of State has asked me to reply to your questions concerning the funding that has been set aside to retrain staff from job centres and Benefits Agency offices. This is something which falls within the responsibilities delegated to me as Chief Executive of Jobcentre Plus.

The Department for Work and Pensions will only consider compulsory redundancies when absolutely necessary. However where redundancies are deemed necessary the department will fund outplacement support for staff affected and is currently working with external partners regarding this provision. As we are currently in negotiation with the providers we are not able to divulge outplacement costs at this stage as this would be to provide contractual information prior to the contract being signed.

I hope this is helpful.

Gangmasters/Employment Agencies

Jim Sheridan: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions whether his Department has access to the data collated from the ACU1 forms, ACU2 forms and 46ACU forms that are returned to the Inland Revenue Agricultural Compliance Unit by those using the services of a gangmaster or employment agency. [192596]

Mr. Pond: DWP has access to the data collated on forms ACU1, ACU2 and 46ACU through Section 109 of the Social Security Act 1992 when the documents are held at a place of work and through Section 122 of the Social Security Act 1992 when the documents are held by the Inland Revenue.

Gas Installers Qualifications

Helen Southworth: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions what training opportunities are available for older workers who wish to retrain to achieve Council for Registered Gas Installers qualifications; and how local information on access to those opportunities can be obtained. [193628]

Jane Kennedy: Training opportunities may be available through Ambition:Energy which is a national pilot programme aimed at addressing skill shortages in the energy sector, whilst providing quality job opportunities for unemployed or inactive people aged 18 and over. Ambition:Energy recently won a prestigious National Training Award for the partnership between Jobcentre Plus and Energy and Utility Skills.

Ambition:Energy offers training to NVQ level 2 in Domestic Gas Installation and Maintenance, which enables the qualification holder to become CORGI registered. The training comprises 27 weeks' technical and lifeskills training plus work experience with a potential employer, while the individual remains on benefit plus a training allowance. Participants also receive driving tuition, if required. Once in employment, participants complete a further eight weeks' training and assessment to achieve the full NVQ2, normally within the first six months.

Although Ambition:Energy is a national programme, courses are only run where employer commitment to real jobs has been clearly defined. As a result, 929 people have successfully secured jobs as domestic gas installers

(69 per cent. of those starting the programme) and 89 per cent. remain in employment for at least six months.

When employer engagement has been defined, intensive advertising is undertaken in the recruitment area through the Jobcentre Plus network. This involves a combination of Jobcentre Plus Adviser awareness activities, publicity materials and engagement with outreach organisations.

Housing Benefit

Mr. Oaten: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions what the average time taken to process housing benefit claims was in each local authority in each of the last two years. [194538]

Mr. Pond: Since September 2002, DWP has published a range of performance indicators showing the speed and accuracy for all local authorities in the administration of housing benefit and council tax benefit. The statistics are published on the DWP website on a quarterly basis at www.dwp.gov.uk/asd/asd1/hb_ctb/performance.asp and are also available in the Library.

The publication of the fourth quarter's data of 2003–04 on 24 June 2004 provided the final audited figures for 2002–03, and un-audited annual figures for 2003–04.

Mr. Oaten: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions what percentage of housing benefit claims were refused in the last period for which figures are available. [194539]

Mr. Pond: In 2003–04 the percentage of housing benefit claims that were refused was 11.8 per cent. This figure is based on un-audited data provided to the Department by local authorities on a quarterly basis.

Incapacity Benefit

Mr. Goodman: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions what percentage of those claiming incapacity benefit also received *(a)* income support and *(b)* disability premiums in each year since 1997; and if he will estimate the cost of income support and disability premium payments to incapacity benefit claimants in each year since 1997. [193001]

Maria Eagle *[holding answer 21 October 2004]*: The information is in the tables.

Working age claimants of Incapacity Benefit (IB), Severe Disablement Allowance (SDA), or National Insurance credits only (Credits only)

	All claimants of IB/SDA/Credits only	*Claimants of IB/SDA/Credits only with Income Support*	*Percentage of all IB/SDA/Credits only claimants*	*Claimants of IB/SDA/Credits only with Income Support disability premium*	*Percentage of all IB/SDA/Credits only claimants*
May 1997	2,522.4	1,030.8	40.9	720.4	28.6
May 1998	2,534.9	1,071.5	42.3	776.2	30.6
May 1999	2,558.0	1,110.7	43.4	813.4	31.8
May 2000	2,584.4	1,157.5	44.8	860.8	33.3
May 2001	2,652.1	1,224.7	46.2	915.6	34.5
May 2002	2,655.0	1,237.7	46.6	960.9	36.2
May 2003	2,669.0	1,273.8	47.7	991.8	37.2
May 2004	2,665.0	1,269.5	47.6	1,003.4	37.6

Notes:

1. Figures are rounded to the nearest hundred and shown in thousands.
2. Working age claimants are men aged 16–64 and women aged 16–59.
3. Numbers are taken from a 5 per cent. sample and are subject to a degree of sampling error.
4. Working age client group dataset excludes a small number of Incapacity Benefit (IB) claimants who are over State Pension Age (SPA), and Income Support claimants above SPA (whether or not they have a partner under SPA).
5. Figures cover individuals claiming both IB/SDA and IS. There will be some additional cases where a person claims IB/SDA with their partner claiming IS on behalf of the benefit unit. The number of such cases is unknown.

Source:

IAD Information Centre, 5 per cent. samples

Income support paid to people receiving Incapacity Benefit payments

	Nominal terms £ million		*Real terms £ million, 2004–05*	
	With or without a disability premium	*With a disability premium*	*With or without a disability premium*	*With a disability premium*
1997–98	501	300	594	356
1998–99	511	325	589	374
1999–2000	529	341	597	385
2000–01	577	376	643	419
2001–02	694	457	754	497
2002–03	677	467	712	491
2003–04	745	514	762	526
2004–05	714	500	714	500

Income support paid to people receiving Incapacity Benefit payments

	Nominal terms £ million		*Real terms £ million, 2004–05*	
	With or without a disability premium	*With a disability premium*	*With or without a disability premium*	*With a disability premium*
Income Support paid to people receiving Incapacity Benefit credits				
1997–98	2,230	1,633	2,643	1,936
1998–99	2,446	1,852	2,818	2,134
1999–2000	2,708	2,074	3,054	2,339
2000–01	2,979	2,319	3,321	2,585
2001–02	3,338	2,621	3,628	2,849
2002–03	3,541	2,851	3,724	2,998
2003–04	3,843	3,119	3,932	3,191
2004–05	3,999	3,289	3,999	3,289

Notes:

1. Figures show total cost of Income Support paid to Incapacity Benefit recipients, and people receiving National Insurance Credits on grounds of incapacity, whether they receive a Disability Premium in Income Support or not, and separately, spending only for those that receive a Disability Premium. Spending on the latter group is a subset of the expenditure on the former group.
2. Figures are estimates based on a 5 per cent. sample of the caseload, taken in February, May, August and November each year. They have been calculated by multiplying weekly average amounts for each group by the caseload in each group. This figure was multiplied by 52 to give an estimate of annual costs.

Mr. Goodman: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions which medical services that receive referrals from Jobcentre Plus with reference to incapacity benefit have since appointment *(a)* hit and *(b)* missed their 32 working-day target by which they aim to complete their part of the examination process. [194739]

Maria Eagle: The current target of an Average Actual Clearance Time (AACT) of 32 working days for ATOS Origin Medical Services to complete their part of the incapacity benefit examination process has been in place since April 2003. The target is measured in each of the three contract package areas.

The level of achievement against the target up to the end of September 2004 is in the table.

Contract package area	*Number of months where target was achieved*	*Number of months where target was missed*
North	17	1
South-east	15	3
South-west	15	3

Incapacity/Severe Disablement Benefit

Mr. Berry: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions how many people in receipt of invalidity benefit prior to 12 April 1995 were transferred to incapacity benefit and have been continuously in receipt to the present date, broken down by *(a)* age, *(b)* gender, *(c)* region and *(d)* diagnosis group. [190906]

Maria Eagle: As at 31 May 2004, a total of 781,300 incapacity benefits claimants began their claim on or before 12 April 1995.

The requested breakdown of the available information has been placed in the Library.

Notes:

1. The figure in the answer above has been rounded to the nearest hundred.
2. It is based on a 5 per cent. sample, and therefore subject to a degree of sampling variation.
3. The figure includes all those who were in receipt of invalidity benefit, sickness benefit, non-contributory invalidity pension or national insurance credits only, prior to 13 April 1995 and who have remained continuously in receipt of incapacity benefit, severe disablement allowance or national insurance credits only up to 31 May 2004.

Source:

IAD Information Centre 5 per cent. sample

Mr. Goodman: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions what the cost was of administering the appeal system for incapacity benefit and severe disablement allowance in each year since 1997. [191679]

Maria Eagle: This is a matter for Christina Townsend, Chief Executive of the Appeals Service. She will write to the hon. Member.

Letter from Norman Egan to Mr. Paul Goodman, dated 1 November 2004:

The Secretary of State has asked Christina Townsend to respond to your question regarding the cost of administering the appeal system for Incapacity Benefit and Severe Disablement Allowance in each year since 1997. Christina is away from the office at the moment and I have been asked to reply.

The information you have requested is only available from 2001 and is attached in the table below. Please note that we do not hold exact figures for each benefit type, so the amounts quoted are calculated on average administrative and judicial costs, including overheads.

	£ million
2001–02	8.2
2002–03	9.5
2003–04	11.6

I hope this reply is helpful.

Mr. Goodman: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions what the cost was per appellant of each hearing of an appeal against the withdrawal or denial of incapacity benefit and severe disablement allowance in each year since 1997. [191680]

Maria Eagle: This is a matter for Christina Townsend, Chief Executive of the Appeals Service. She will write to the hon. Member.

Letter from Norman Egan to Mr. Paul Goodman, dated 1 November 2004:

The Secretary of State has asked Christina Townsend to respond to your question regarding the cost per appellant of each hearing of an appeal against the withdrawal or denial of Incapacity Benefit and Severe Disablement Allowance in each year since 1997. Christina is away from the office at the moment and I have been asked to reply.

The information you have requested is only available from 2001 and is attached in the table below. Please note that we do not hold exact figures for each benefit type, so the amounts quoted are calculated on average administrative and judicial costs, including overheads.

	£
2001–02	222
2002–03	235
2003–04	243

I hope this reply is helpful.

Mr. Goodman: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions how many claimants of incapacity benefit and severe disablement allowance who entered paid employment in 2002–03 registered for the 52 week linking rule; and how many of them reclaimed benefit under the terms of the rule in the following 52 weeks, broken down by *(a)* age and *(b)* region. [191681]

Maria Eagle: The available information is in the tables.

	Incapacity benefit and severe disablement allowance claims terminating between 1 June 2002 and 31 May 2003 with a termination reason of 'Return to work'	*Claimants returning to IB/SDA within 52 weeks*
Great Britain	24,500	2,700
North East	1,900	[1]200
North West	4,500	600
Yorks and Humber	2,300	[1]300
East Midlands	1,600	[1]300
West Midlands	2,300	[1]200
South West	1,600	[1]200
East	1,500	[1]100
London	1,300	[1]100
South East	2,500	[1]200
Scotland	2,900	[1]300
Wales	2,200	[1]200

	IB/SDA claimants terminating between 1 June 2002 and 31 May 2003 with a termination reason of 'Return to work'	*Claimants returning to IB/SDA within 52 weeks*
All ages	24,500	2,700
Under 25	1,100	[1]100
Age 25–39	6,300	700
Age 40–49	7,500	700
Age 50–59	8,300	1,100
Age 60 and over	1,300	[1]100

[1] Numbers are based on very few sample cases and will be subject to a high degree of sampling variation. These figures should be used as a guide to the current situation only.

Notes:

1. Figures are based on 5 per cent. samples, and are therefore subject to a degree of sampling variation.
2. Figures have been rounded to the nearest hundred. Totals may not sum due to rounding.
3. Incapacity benefit claimants include those getting national insurance credits only.
4. Claimants do not need to register for the 52 week linking rule, it is applied automatically.

Source:

IAD Information Centre, 5 per cent. Samples.

Job Centres

Chris Ruane: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions which job centres are to be closed in north Wales; which job centres will remain open; and what the timescale is for those remaining open to become Jobcentre Plus. [190675]

Jane Kennedy: The administration of Jobcentre Plus is a matter for the Chief Executive of Jobcentre Plus, David Anderson. He will write to the hon. Member.

Letter from David Anderson to Chris Ruane, dated 1 November 2004:

The Secretary of State has asked me to reply to your questions concerning the closure of Jobcentres in North Wales. This is something which falls within the responsibilities delegated to me as Chief Executive of Jobcentre Plus.

The Jobcentre Plus District of Wrexham and North Wales Coast covers the four counties of Wrexham, Flintshire, Denbighshire and Conwy. Under the current Service Delivery Plan, the new Jobcentre Plus integrated service should be delivered from the following locations:

Colwyn Bay
Rhyl
Flint
Wrexham (Ty Maelor, Grosvenor Road)
Llandudno
Mold
Connah's Quay

All offices scheduled under the current plan to deliver this service will be fully converted by the end of March 2006. The work will be phased to minimise the disruption to our customers whilst the conversion work is undertaken.

The following Jobcentre sites will remain open until the sites delivering the new service have been fully enhanced and Flexible Service Delivery is in operation across the four counties:

Conwy
Prestatyn
Holywell
Cefn Mawr
Llanrwst
Denbigh
Llangollen.

These seven offices will then close.

The Jobcentre Plus District of North West Wales and Powys covers the three counties of Ynys Mon, Gwynedd and Powys. This District already delivers the new integrated Jobcentre Plus service from offices in the following locations:

Amlwch
Bangor
Brecon
Caernarfon
Dolgellau
Holyhead
Llandrindod Wells
Llangefni
Machynlleth
Newtown
Porthmadog
Pwllheli
Welshpool
Ystradgynlais

In addition Flexible Service Delivery operates in the following locations:

Barmouth
Beamaris
Blaenau Ffestiniog
Builth Wells
Knighton
Penygroes
Tywyn

I hope this is helpful.

Jobcentre Plus

Paul Holmes: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions (1) what steps he is taking to increase awareness of the Jobcentre Plus Customers Charter among *(a)* customers and *(b)* staff; and if he will make a statement; [193260]

(2) what steps he will take to *(a)* improve the quality and volume of information on benefit entitlements available to customers in relation to Jobcentre Plus, *(b)* provide an improved telephone service and *(c)* improve staff attitudes; and if he will make a statement; [193263]

(3) if he will make a statement on the Jobcentre Plus National Customer Satisfaction Survey 2004. [193281]

Jane Kennedy: The administration of Jobcentre Plus is a matter for the Chief Executive of Jobcentre Plus, David Anderson. He will write to the hon. Member.

Letter from Mr. David Anderson to Mr Paul Holmes, dated 1 November 2004:

The Secretary of State for Work and Pensions has asked me to reply direct to your questions about increasing awareness of the Customers' Charter amongst customers and staff; about the steps being taken to improve the quality and volume of information on benefit entitlements available to customers, providing an improved telephone service and improving staff attitudes and about the National Customer Satisfaction Survey 2004. These are matters which fall within the responsibilities delegated to me as Chief Executive of Jobcentre Plus.

The current Customers' Charter was developed before the launch of Jobcentre Plus and involved consultation with customers, their representative groups and our staff. Its aim was to make clear the minimum standards of service customers could expect from the new agency.

Awareness of the Charter is high amongst staff. However, the results of the 2003 National Satisfaction Survey showed that less than a third of customers knew about the Charter and understood its purpose. That finding was explored in greater depth in late 2003 when an independent research organisation (GHK) was commissioned to complete a review of the Charter involving customers, their representatives' groups and our staff.

A number of recommendations were made from staff and customers about style, content and the need to raise awareness of our customer service commitments. We are considering these recommendations with a view to making changes to the existing Charter and how we communicate our service standards in 2005.

Jobcentre Plus has robust systems and procedures in place to ensure that both written and verbal information offered to customers on benefit entitlements is accurate. In addition, Jobcentre Plus checks the accuracy of written information it provides to its customers by a 6 monthly review of the content of all leaflets about benefits and services for people of working age. This forms part of an agreement made with the Secretary of State each year.

In April 2004, we conducted research into our customers' requirements of information on work and benefits. As a result of these findings the existing leaflets for working age customers are being replaced with a new range of products, restructured to better meet customer requirements and fit into Jobcentre Plus' business processes. We anticipate that the new leaflets will become available on a rolling basis during 2005.

We have also changed the way we provide information and guidance to our own staff in order to ensure that it is accurate and up to date. We have implemented an electronically based system which all staff can access through their desk top PCs. The guidance is centrally maintained to ensure currency and accuracy and it is structured to provide links to learning material and other relevant guidance.

Jobcentre Plus is establishing a network of modern contact centres to answer calls from customers about claims to benefit and looking for work. When the network is complete, access to Jobcentre Plus by telephone will be simpler and more straightforward.

We are committed to ensuring our staff have the appropriate skills and professional approach when dealing with our customers. We have a range of learning products available on areas such as customer service, equal opportunities, interviewing and communication skills.

Furthermore, we expect managers to play an important part in ensuring that correct attitudes and behaviours are displayed by observing and giving feedback as part of their role. In support of this activity, we are developing a Quality Assurance Framework which defines our customer service standards and the behaviours which support them. This product will be available in early 2005 and will help managers work with their staff to identify levels of attainment and on-going learning needs.

The first National Customer Satisfaction Survey was published in September 2003 and acts as a baseline measure against which subsequent surveys can be measured. The Surveys seek to determine customers' levels of satisfaction with the delivery of customer service standards as described in the Customers' Charter.

The 2004 National Customer Satisfaction Survey was undertaken by the Policy Research Institute (PRI), Leeds Metropolitan University. The research showed that overall level of satisfaction with the customer service provided is high, with 80% of respondents reported being very or fairly satisfied with the standard of service they received.

The findings in 2004 are consistent with the 2003 baseline results with improvements showing in a number of areas of service. These include the proportion of customers considering staff attitudes as a reason for complaining which has fallen from 26% in 2003 to 19% in 2004.

We also asked respondents whether they thought service had improved, stayed the same or deteriorated in the past 12 months. 24% felt it had improved, while 69% felt it had stayed the same.

While we are encouraged by these findings, we recognise the importance of continually improving customer service and, in relation to the service standards in the Charter, will continue to focus on improving the ability of staff to determine the needs of customers and provide relevant and appropriate information.

Paul Holmes: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions if he will make a statement on training provisions for Jobcentre Plus staff. [193279]

Jane Kennedy: The administration of Jobcentre Plus is a matter for the Chief Executive of Jobcentre Plus, David Anderson. He will write to the hon. Member.

Letter from Mr. David Anderson to Mr. Paul Holmes, 1 November 2004:

The Secretary of State has asked me to reply to your question concerning the training provision available for Jobcentre Plus staff. This is something which falls within the responsibilities delegated to me as Chief Executive of Jobcentre Plus.

Jobcentre Plus is committed to the training and development of its entire staff and is an accredited Investor in People.

We provide an extensive range of training provision (over 300 learning products) and delivered over 600,000 learning days during 2003/04, which focused on the knowledge, skills and attitude required to enable our staff to effectively support our customers.

Line Managers play a key role in identifying learning needs through our performance and development system and in supporting the individual to build the knowledge and skills they need.

Jobseeker's Allowance

Paul Holmes: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions how many incorrect payments of jobseeker's allowance were made in each month of the last three years, broken down by *(a)* age, *(b)* ethnicity and *(c)* gender; and if he will make a statement. [193261]

Mr. Pond: Incorrect payments include both overpayments and underpayments which occur as a result of fraud, customer error and official error. Jobseeker's allowance is paid fortnightly and the following figures therefore refer to fortnightly payments.

In 2001–02, we estimate that 3.4 million incorrect JSA payments were made to claimants. The equivalent figure for 2002–03 was 3.2 million. Figures for 2003–04 are not yet available.

No breakdown is available by month, age, ethnicity or gender.

Pension Credit

Mr. Laurence Robertson: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions if he will disregard war disablement pension payments when calculating pension credit; and if he will make a statement. [194668]

Malcolm Wicks: War pensions act as an income replacement. Totally ignoring them would mean that income from a war pension would be paid in addition to the guarantee and any savings credit. Consequently, people with a war pension would be treated much more generously under pension credit than other pensioners.

We already recognise the special nature of war pensions and disregard the first £10 of a war pension. Also war pensions are treated as qualifying income for the savings credit so are rewardable under pension credit. We believe that war pensioners should receive this generous treatment in view of service they have given.

Tsar Appointments

Mr. Goodman: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions how many tsars have been appointed with responsibilities which cover part of the work of his Department; and if he will make a statement. [191926]

Maria Eagle: The Department has not appointed any tsars. No other appointees who cover part of the work of the Department bear that title.

Welfare to Work Programme

Paul Holmes: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions how many people have left the New Deal for Young People to enter the Welfare to Work Programme *(a)* after claiming jobseeker's allowance for six months or more and *(b)* after claiming jobseeker's allowance for less than six months because they have (i) a physical disability, (ii) a learning disability and (iii) been advised to by a personal adviser, in each year for which the information is available. [193572]

Jane Kennedy: The available information is in the table.

New Deal for Young People (NDYP)

Period	*Total starts to the programme*	*Of which, claimed jobseeker's allowance for six months or more at start date*	*Of which, claimed jobseeker's allowance for less than six months at start date*	*Of those claiming jobseeker's allowance for less than six months at NDYP start date, number self-recorded as disabled*
January to December 1998	212,930	180,870	32,060	8,110
January to December 1999	192,290	159,100	33,190	6,350
January to December 2000	174,770	146,620	28,150	5,280
January to December 2001	162,700	134,550	28,150	4,940
January to December 2002	164,220	131,420	32,800	5,620
January to December 2003	171,890	136,850	35,040	6,100
January to June 2004	85,190	68,440	16,750	3,070
Total	1,163,990	957,850	206,140	39,470

Notes:

1. Data is for total rather than individual starts to the programme and could include people who have started the programme more than once.
2. Information is not available on whether participants have a physical or learning disability, only on whether they self-record as having a disability.
3. Information is not available on whether participants entering the programme before they have claimed jobseeker's allowance for less than six months have done so on the advice of a personal adviser.
4. Latest information is to June 2004.
5. Figures are rounded to the nearest 10.

Source:

DWP Information and Analysis Directorate

Work Preparation Programmes

Mr. Goodman: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions how many people have entered *(a)* an Access to Work programme, *(b)* a Work Preparation programme and *(c)* Workstep in each year since 2001, broken down by (i) region and (ii) age. [191711]

Maria Eagle: The available information is in the tables.

Number of new Access to Work Beneficiaries

Region	*2002–03*	*2003–04*	*Total*
Yorkshire and the Humber	1,478	2,354	3,832
North East	954	750	1,704
North West	1,686	1,637	3,323
Scotland	1,704	1,475	3,179
Wales	1,004	973	1,977
West Midlands	1,492	1,279	2,771
East Midlands	663	1,699	2,362
East of England	753	967	1,720
South West	986	1,695	2,681
London	2,568	1,058	3,626
South East	1,911	1,546	3,457
Total	15,199	15,433	43,769

Notes:

1. Information is not available broken down by age.
2. Information is not available broken down by region prior to 2002. The total figures for 2001–02 were 13,137.

Source:

Disability Rehabilitation Division

Number entering the Work Preparation programme

Region	*2002–03*	*2003–04*
North West	900	357
Northern	890	418
Yorkshire and the Humber	1,249	1,236
East Midlands	509	471
West Midlands	498	556
South West	816	1,023
London	576	460
Wales	1,187	1,290
Scotland	484	648
East of England	—	330
South East	—	575
Totals	7,109	7,364

Notes:

1. East of England and South East regions did not have Work Preparation contracts in 2002–03.

2. Figures are not available broken down by region prior to 2002. The total numbers for 2001–02 were 7,679.

3. Information is not available broken down by age.

Source:

Disability and Rehabilitation Division

Number of people starting work through WORKSTEP (including Remploy)

Age Bands	*Total job starts*
2001–02	
16–25	961
26–35	1,028
36–45	670
46–65	730
Total	3,389
2002–03	
16–25	1,035
26–35	879
36–45	703
46–65	702
Total	3,319
2003–04	
16–25	922
26–35	795
36–45	732
46–65	734
Total	3,183

Note:

Information is not available broken down by region.

Source:

Disability and Rehabilitation Division

CABINET OFFICE

Members' Allowances

Mrs. Brooke: To ask the Minister for the Cabinet Office on what basis *(a)* honourable Members are paid at the rate of 57.7 pence per mile and *(b)* civil servants are paid at a rate of 25 pence per mile for car use. [194120]

Ruth Kelly: For hon. Members, the rates of motor mileage allowance were set in 1996 to reflect motoring costs and have been uprated each year by Retail Price Index (RPI). In common with employees in all sectors, they pay income tax and national insurance on the excess over the Inland Revenue approved rate.

For civil servants, the setting of motor mileage allowances has been delegated to Departments since 1993, so rates will vary.

Strategy and Delivery Units

Paul Flynn: To ask the Minister for the Cabinet Office if she will list the *(a)* public and *(b)* private reports the Strategy Unit produced in each of the last two years. [190242]

Mr. Milburn: The Strategy Unit undertakes a range of projects. The majority culminate in a published report; the remainder are presented as confidential advice to Ministers.

The following is a list of published reports and publications since the Strategy Unit was created in June 2002.

2004

London Project Report

Improving the Life Chances of Disabled People: Interim Analytical Report

Designing a Demonstration Project: An Employment Retention and Advancement

Demonstration for Great Britain—second edition

Life Chances and Social Mobility: An Overview of the Evidence (pdf, 289kb)

Net Benefits: A sustainable and profitable future for UK Fishing

Alcohol Harm Reduction Strategy for England

Personal Responsibility and Changing Behaviour: the state of knowledge and its implications for public policy (pdf, 352kb)

Managing Offenders, Reducing Crime

2003

Trying It Out—The Role of 'Pilots' in Policy-Making

Strategic Audit: Discussion Document

Large Scale Social Experimentation in Britain: What Can and Cannot be Learnt from the Employment Retention and Advancement Demonstration

Innovation in the Public Sector

Quality in Qualitative Evaluation: A framework for assessing research evidence

Alcohol Misuse: Interim Analytical Report

Field Work: Weighing up the Costs and Benefits of GM Crops

Designing a Demonstration Project

Ethnic Minorities and the Labour Market

2002

Life Satisfaction: the state of knowledge and implications for Government

Assessment of Technological Options to Address Climate Change

Game Plan: a strategy for delivering Government's sport and physical activity objectives

Electronic Networks: Challenges for the Next Decade

Satisfaction With Public Services

High Performing Cities—Future Challenges

Waste Not, Want Not Report

Risk: Improving Government's capability to handle risk and uncertainty

In Demand Adult skills in the 21st century—part 2

Delivering for Children and Families

Private Action, Public Benefit

Creating Public Value

Geographic Mobility

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Paul Flynn: To ask the Minister for the Cabinet Office what proportion of the Strategy Unit's budget was spent on *(a)* public and *(b)* private reports in each of the last two years. [190243]

Mr. Milburn: The total Strategy Unit budget for 2003–04 was 4.7 million. Disproportionate costs would be incurred in calculating the proportion of the Strategy Unit budget spent on public and private reports.

Paul Flynn: To ask the Minister for the Cabinet Office pursuant to the answer of 4 October 2004, *Official Report*, columns 1863–64W, who financed the Strategy Unit report on drug supply. [190294]

Mr. Milburn: The report on drugs was financed by the Cabinet Office.

Ministerial Expenses

Mr. Prisk: To ask the Minister for the Cabinet Office how much the Department spent on *(a)* maintenance, *(b)* renovation, *(c)* council tax and *(d)* running costs of residential properties used by Ministers and officials in each year since 1997. [191400]

Ruth Kelly: Admiralty House contains residential accommodation for Ministers and the occupying Departments are responsible for relevant costs associated with each of the residential flats. No Cabinet Office Ministers are currently accommodated in Admiralty House. The Cabinet Office is responsible for costs associated with the common parts, as well as for maintaining the fabric of the entire building.

The Cabinet Office's share of the maintenance costs of Admiralty House for 2003–04 was £12,237.

No major refurbishment work was undertaken in 2003–04.

The Cabinet Office's share of the running costs of Admiralty House (i.e. excluding the appropriate share of the costs from the occupying Departments) for 2003–04 was £383,109. For information, I refer the hon. Member to the response given on 19 November 2003, *Official Report*, column 879W.

Information about the costs of official residences used by Ministers for previous financial years is already in the public domain.

During 2003–04, three Cabinet Office officials were occupying accommodation in residential properties in the grounds of the Emergency Planning College in Easingwold. The number of properties varied from month to month. One flat was occupied by an official working at the Emergency Planning College on detached duty. The other occupants paid a market rent for the properties, established by independent valuers appointed by the Office of Government Commerce. Records are not held separately of the maintenance, renovation and running costs associated with these properties in particular and these costs could be provided only at disproportionate cost. The council tax for 2003–04 associated with the property occupied by the individual on detached duty was approximately £205.

Since 13 May 2002, when the Cabinet Office entered into a PPP contract with Initial Style Conferences Limited (ISC) for the latter to provide a range of services at the Centre for Management Policy Studies College at Sunningdale, the Department has incurred no costs in providing residential properties to Ministers or officials.

Parliamentary Questions

Dr. Julian Lewis: To ask the Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster when he will reply to the question tabled by the hon. Member for New Forest, East for named day reply on 25 October 2004, ref.193672. [194856]

Mr. Milburn: I replied to the hon. Member on 25 October 2004, *Official Report*, column 1053W.

Theft and Fraud

Mr. Prisk: To ask the Minister for the Cabinet Office what her estimate is of the cost of theft and fraud to *(a)* her Department, *(b)* its agencies and *(c)* non-departmental public bodies in each year since 1997. [191412]

Ruth Kelly: The cost of theft and fraud to the Department, its agencies, and non-departmental public bodies, in each of the last seven financial years are shown in the following table.

£000

	Department	*Agencies*	*NDPBs*	*Total*
1997–98	15	0	0	15
1998–99	48	0	1	48
1999–2000	32	0	0	32
2000–01	34	0	1	34
2001–02	35	0	1	35
2002–03	12	0	0	12
2003–04	0	0	0	0

HEALTH

Drug Rehabilitation

Mr. Laws: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what assessment he has made of progress in reducing waiting times for drug rehabilitation assistance in *(a)* south Somerset and *(b)* Somerset; and if he will make a statement. [192070]

Miss Melanie Johnson: The National Treatment Agency (NTA) set national waiting time targets for drug treatment services in December 2001. The average waiting time figures for Somerset in December 2001, the current waiting times and the national waiting time targets set for April 2004 are shown in the table. Data on waiting times is only routinely collected at drug action team (DAT) level, so I am not able to provide specific data in relation to south Somerset.

Waiting time in weeks

Modality	*December 2001*	*NTA national waiting time target—April 2004*	*September 2004*
Inpatient treatment	13	2	0
Residential rehabilitation	6	3	6
Specialist prescribing	21	3	6

Waiting time in weeks

Modality	December 2001	NTA national waiting time target—April 2004	September 2004
General practitioner prescribing	13	2	3
Day care	[1]—	3	[1]—
Structured counselling	8	2	2

[1] Not available. Somerset does not have structured day care services available.

The work of the NTA South West regional team to reduce waiting times has included:

> An improvement programme put in place this year has produced more effective and robust partnership structures to drive forward reduction of waiting times and other improvements in treatment.
>
> Agencies who are partners in Somerset DAT have plans in place to develop a new structured day programme in order to provide problem drug users resident in Somerset with access to the full range of treatment modalities in the county.

Mr. Laws: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what estimate he has made of the waiting time between assessment and prescribing for people wanting help to avoid reliance on illegal drugs in Yeovil constituency; and if he will make a statement. [192069]

Miss Melanie Johnson: Waiting time figures are only available at drug action team (DAT) level, so I am not able to provide specific data in relation to Yeovil.

However, the latest average waiting times in Somerset, of which Yeovil is a part for specialist and general practitioner prescribing services, is shown in the table. For comparison, I have shown the latest figures against the average waiting times in December 2001, when the National Treatment Agency (NTA) set national waiting time targets for drugs treatment services, which are also shown.

The data shown is in terms of weeks.

	Modality	
	Specialist prescribing	*GP prescribing*
December 2001	21	13
NTA national waiting time target April 2004	3	2
September 2004	6	3

Air Ambulances

David Taylor: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what guidance is provided to NHS trusts on the use of air ambulances. [193964]

Ms Rosie Winterton: Air ambulances are provided through charitable organisations.

The Department informed ambulance services and their commissioners in January 2002 that the cost of clinical staff on air ambulances should from 1 April 2002 be met by the national health service on a continuing basis.

The Department has issued guidance on "Use of military helicopters by the NHS" [HSG(97)33] and this is available on the Department's website at: www.dh.gov.uk/PublicationsAndStatistics/LettersAndCirculars/HealthServiceGuidelines/HealthServiceGuidelinesArticle/fs/en?CONTENT_ID=4018355&chk=eziOGO.

NHS Staff (Assaults)

Tom Cox: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many members of staff working in accident and emergency departments in hospitals in the Greater London area have been assaulted by members of the general public during the last 12 months. [195370]

Dr. Ladyman: The information requested is collected at national health service organisation level, rather than for individual accident and emergency departments. Information on the number of reported violent incidents against NHS staff for the NHS organisations within the five London strategic health authority areas for 2002–03 is shown in the table.

Reported violent incidents against NHS staff in London 2002–03

		Number
London	Strategic health authority (SHA) or NHS trust	15,421
Q04	North West London SHA	3,308
Q05	North Central London SHA	2,531
Q06	North East London SHA	1,811
Q07	South East London SHA	3,424
Q08	South West London SHA	2,136
RRU	London Ambulance Service NHS Trust	2,211

Notes:

1. Figures are the total of all violent incidents reported by organisations within the London SHAs and London Ambulance Service NHS Trust.

2. London Ambulance Service NHS Trust cannot be assigned to a particular SHA.

Source:

Department of Health Survey of Violence, Accidents and Harassment 2002–03.

Back Pain

Mrs. Iris Robinson: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what estimate he has made of the total public expenditure resulting from back pain in each of the last five years. [194075]

Dr. Ladyman: No estimate has been made.

Care Homes

Mr. Hepburn: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many people have been on the waiting list for care homes in *(a)* the Jarrow constituency, *(b)* South Tyneside, *(c)* Tyne and Wear and *(d)* England in each year since 1997. [193634]

Dr. Ladyman: The information requested is not collected centrally.

Carers

Jon Cruddas: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many *(a)* carers and *(b)* young carers of school age there are in the London borough of Barking and Dagenham. [194416]

Dr. Ladyman: The numbers of carers of all ages in the London borough of Barking and Dagenham, as recorded in the 2001 Census, are shown in the table.

Table population: All people in households—Geographical level Barking and Dagenham

All people	*Total*	*Provides no care*	*Provides care: one to 19 hours*	*Provides care: 20 to 49 hours*	*Provides care: 50 or more hours*
Age	162,713	146,824	9,356	2,136	4,397
0 to 4	12,530	12,530	—	—	—
5 to 7	7,467	7,447	17	—	3
8 to 9	4,978	4,919	47	6	6
10 to 11	4,748	4,671	58	9	10
12 to 14	6,359	6,199	127	13	20
15	2,241	2,155	66	11	9
16 to 17	4,432	4,211	175	34	12
18 to 19	4,079	3,847	170	39	23
20 to 24	10,284	9,633	474	99	78
25 to 34	26,008	23,637	1,487	310	574
35 to 44	24,376	21,070	2,050	472	784
45 to 49	9,017	7,348	1,103	217	349
50 to 54	9,339	7,435	1,160	282	462
55 to 59	7,171	5,688	877	207	399
60 to 64	6,141	5,113	535	142	351
65 to 74	12,043	10,335	721	189	798
75 to 84	8,912	8,071	284	93	464
85 to 89	1,789	1,726	5	13	45
90 and over	799	789	—	—	10

Notes:

1. The term "unpaid care" covers any unpaid help; looking after or supporting family members; friends; neighbours or others because of long-term physical or mental ill-health or disability or problems related to old age.

2. Cells in this table have been randomly adjusted to avoid the release of confidential data.

Source:

2001 Census—Office for National Statistics (ONS) table S025—Sex and age by general health and provision of unpaid care.

Consultant Waiting Times

Tom Cox: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what the average waiting time is in hospitals within the Greater London area for a person referred by a general practitioner to see a hospital consultant. [194141]

Dr. Ladyman: Information requested for the five London strategic health authorities is shown in the table.

Waiting times for first consultant outpatient appointment following general practitioner referral: London strategic health authorities (SHAs)—Quarter 1 2004–05

Strategic health authority	*Median waiting time (weeks)*
North West London	7.18
North Central London	7.15
North East London	7.51
South East London	7.28
South West London	6.63

Source:

Department of Health form QM08.

Dementia

Tom Cox: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many people living in Greater London have dementia; and how many of them are over the age of 65. [195367]

Dr. Ladyman: The information requested is not held centrally.

Tom Cox: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many *(a)* men and *(b)* women living in the Greater London area suffer from Alzheimer's disease. [195368]

Dr. Ladyman: The information requested is not collected centrally.

Dentistry

Andy Burnham: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many tooth extractions under general anaesthetic were carried out on children aged under 10 years in the last two years in each strategic health authority in England. [191277]

Ms Rosie Winterton *[holding answer 20 October 2004]:* The latest information available is shown in the table.

Main Operation (OPCS-4 Operative procedure code F09 or F10) tooth extractions
Count of finished consultant episodes (FCEs) by strategic health authority (SHA) of residence
Age at start of episode = 0–9
NHS hospitals, England 2001–02 and 2002–03

		Finished consultant episodes	
	SHA of Residence	*2001–02*	*2002–03*
Q01	Norfolk, Suffolk and Cambridgeshire HA	867	820
Q02	Bedfordshire and Hertfordshire HA	546	536
Q03	Essex HA	706	960
Q04	North West London HA	863	956
Q05	North Central London HA	473	568
Q06	North East London HA	1,386	1,473
Q07	South East London HA	1,493	1,380

Main Operation (OPCS-4 Operative procedure code F09 or F10) tooth extractions
Count of finished consultant episodes (FCEs) by strategic health authority (SHA) of residence
Age at start of episode = 0–9
NHS hospitals, England 2001–02 and 2002–03

	SHA of Residence	*Finished consultant episodes* 2001–02	*Finished consultant episodes* 2002–03
Q08	South West London HA	1,237	1,261
Q09	Northumberland, Tyne and Wear HA	1,157	861
Q10	County Durham and Tees Valley HA	509	577
Q11	North and East Yorkshire and Northern Lincolnshire HA	654	542
Q12	West Yorkshire HA	1,833	1,790
Q13	Cumbria and Lancashire HA	2,448	2,548
Q14	Greater Manchester HA	3,456	3,424
Q15	Cheshire and Merseyside HA	948	1,049
Q16	Thames Valley HA	340	383
Q17	Hampshire and Isle Of Wight HA	874	723
Q18	Kent and Medway HA	401	615
Q19	Surrey and Sussex HA	1,206	1,052
Q20	Avon, Gloucestershire and Wiltshire HA	2,013	2,431
Q21	South West Peninsula HA	2,072	2,257
Q22	Dorset and Somerset HA	903	978
Q23	South Yorkshire HA	2,541	2,646
Q24	Trent HA	1,357	1,644
Q25	Leicestershire, Northamptonshire and Rutland HA	620	428
Q26	Shropshire and Staffordshire HA	220	172
Q27	Birmingham and the Black Country HA	913	683
Q28	Coventry, Warwickshire, Herefordshire and Worcestershire HA	379	137
S	Scotland	2	5
U	England—not otherwise specified	2	17
W	Wales	32	25
X	Foreign (Including Isle of Man and Channel Islands)	11	14
Y	Not known	86	72
	England, NHS Hospitals	32,548	33,027

Notes:

1. An FCE is defined as a period of admitted patient care under one consultant within one health care provider. Please note that the figures do not represent the number of patients, as a person may have more than one episode of care within the year.
2. Figures are grossed for both coverage and missing/invalid clinical data, except for 2002–03, which are not yet adjusted for shortfalls.
3. The main operation is the first recorded operation in the HES data set and is usually the most resource intensive procedure performed during the episode. It is appropriate to use main operation when looking at admission details, eg. time waited, but the figures for "all operations count of episodes" give a more complete count of episodes with an operation.

Source:

Hospital Episode Statistics (HES), Department of Health.

Mr. Gordon Prentice: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what the average annual payment made by the NHS to a dentist working full-time and with a wholly NHS patient list was in the last year for which figures are available. [191761]

Ms Rosie Winterton: Information from which we could exclude national health service dentists with mixed private and NHS practices is not routinely available. In the year 2003–04, dentists with a significant NHS commitment received average gross income including payments such as seniority and commitment payments of about £150,000 in England and Wales. Gross payments to a dentist cover both net income to the dentist and the dentist's expenses.

Foundation Trusts

Keith Vaz: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what steps have been undertaken by his Department to monitor progress in setting up *(a)* foundation hospitals and *(b)* foundation boards. [193332]

Mr. Hutton: The process of setting up national health service foundation trusts is set out in the Health and Social Care Act 2003. In summary, applicant NHS trusts must first obtain the Secretary of State's approval to submit an application to Monitor (whose statutory name is the independent regulator of NHS foundation trusts). To obtain this, applicants must demonstrate their suitability to go forward to be considered by Monitor by submitting their proposed human resources strategy, a service development strategy and their proposed governance arrangements (on which they must hold public consultation on their proposals).

Applicants that are successful can then apply to Monitor, which is responsible for authorising applications for NHS foundation trust status. As part of the authorisation process, Monitor must satisfy itself about an applicant's preparedness and viability and be satisfied that applicants have met the statutory requirements set out in the Act. Details of Monitor's requirements are outlined in its "Guide to Applicants", which is published on its website at www.nhsft-regulator.gov.uk. Once authorised, it is the responsibility of Monitor to oversee the operation of NHS foundation trusts and to ensure they remain within their terms of authorisation and legislative framework.

Gender Dysphoria

Lynne Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for Health pursuant to his answer of 20 October 2004, *Official Report*, column 791W, on gender dysphoria, if he will make it his policy to collect centrally the average waiting times for a first appointment at each gender identity clinic for people suffering from gender dysphoria. [194032]

Ms Rosie Winterton: The Department collects data on waiting times by consultant-led specialty. We have no plans to collect data by sub-specialty.

Health Services (York)

Hugh Bayley: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many full-time equivalent jobs *(a)* his Department and *(b)* its executive agencies had in (i) Yorkshire and the Humber and (ii) the City of York in (A) 1997 and (B) the latest year for which figures are available. [191849]

Ms Rosie Winterton: The information available is shown in the table. We do not hold any specific information about the number of posts in the City of York as our data are collected by Government region.

					April			
Elsewhere in Yorkshire and Humberside	*1997*	*1998*	*1999*	*2000*	*2001*	*2002*	*2003*	*2004*
COREDH	[1]—	[1]—	[1]—	[1]—	929.5	896	918.2	868.3
Medicines Control Agency (MCA)	[1]—	[1]—	[1]—	[1]—	0	5.2	4.2	[2]—
Medical Devices Agency (MDA)	[1]—	[1]—	[1]—	[1]—	0	0	0	5.7
NHS Estates	[1]—	[1]—	[1]—	[1]—	93.4	107.5	97.2	108.9
NHS Pensions Agency	[1]—	[1]—	[1]—	[1]—	0	0	0	0
NHS Purchasing and Supply Agency	[1]—	[1]—	[1]—	[1]—	43.5	52.7	57.5	58.3
Departmental total	1,035	961	1,127	1,040	1,066.4	1,061.4	1,077.1	1,041.2

[1] No data held.

[2] As one below MCA and MDA.

Hospital Infections

Mr. Lansley: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will list the trusts which require consultation as a mandatory step between infection control teams and contract tendering procedures for *(a)* new build projects, *(b)* cleaning, *(c)* laundry services and *(d)* catering services. [193458]

Miss Melanie Johnson: The information requested is not available.

All national health service trusts are required to appoint a director of infection prevention and control to take an active role in ensuring infection control issues are taken into account when decisions are being made on the provision of these services.

NHS Estates guidance recommends the involvement of the infection control team at all stages of the planning, design and construction of buildings, and the provision of non-clinical support services, to address infection control risks.

Hospital Trusts

Mr. Hoyle: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what procedures are in place to ensure that evidence given by a hospital trust is accurate; and what action he can take against hospital trusts who submit inaccurate and misleading information. [192288]

Miss Melanie Johnson: We expect all national health service trusts to act with probity and integrity in their conduct. In this, NHS trusts are performance managed by strategic health authorities.

The Code of Conduct for NHS managers was issued in October 2002 under the National Health Service Act 1977 and the National Health Service and Community Care Act 1990. The code is set out as a series of principles that NHS managers will observe. This includes the principle that a manager:

> " . . . will be honest and act with integrity and probity at all times. I will not make, permit or knowingly allow to be made, any untrue or misleading statement relating to my own duties or the functions of my employer."

Medical Students (Bursaries)

Mr. Drew: To ask the Secretary of State for Health why final year medical students have not yet received notification of their bursary awards. [194359]

Mr. Hutton *[holding answer 28 October 2004]*: Students are usually notified at the time a final decision on their award is made. Currently, the NHS Pensions Agency grants unit has finalised the awards for 3,474 new medical and dental students. Due to constraints within the existing computer system, students whose academic year began before 1 September 2004 have not yet received notification, although payment has been made where appropriate. Action is in hand to improve the system.

Mental Health Services

Mrs. Iris Robinson: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what public spending on mental health services was per head of population in England in each of the last five years. [194074]

Ms Rosie Winterton: Information on expenditure by the national health service on mental health services per head of population in England in each of the last five years is shown in table 1, which employs the hospital and community health service deflator. Table 2 provides the same information in cash terms. The data exclude social care spend on people with mental health problems, and expenditure concerning people treated in primary care for whom a specific diagnosis has not been reached. The figures therefore underestimate the total mental health expenditure.

Table 1

Gross expenditure (volume terms)	*1998–99*	*1999–2000*	*2000–01*	*2001–02*	*2002–03*
Mental illness day patient (DP) (£ million)	377	372	369	330	344
Mental health in-patient (IP) (£ million)	2,157	2,319	2,507	2,532	2,689
Mental health out-patient (OP) (£ million)	396	419	447	507	655
Community mental illness (MI) nursing (£ million)	687	760	843	839	911
Total mental health (MH) (£ million)	3,617	3,870	4,166	4,208	4,598
Total hospital and community health services (HCHS) (£ million)	30,226	31,351	32,773	33,128	35,087
Population (number)	49,586,455	49,730,320	49,871,203	50,008,548	50,142,274
MH proportion (percentage)	11.97	12.34	12.71	12.70	13.11
MH expenditure per head of population (£ million)	72.94	77.82	83.54	84.15	91.71

Notes:

1. The figures are taken from the expenditure per head of population (EPHoP) analysis of healthcare spend. EPHoP measures activity from inpatients, outpatients and community based patients against expenditure taken from the hospital and community health service programme budget.

2. The programme budget is compiled using NHS accounts: a combination of finance returns from strategic health authorities, NHS trusts, primary care trusts and the strategic health authority summarisation schedules.

3. Activity data from a range of sources, for example hospital episode statistics, Körner community returns, the Living in Britain survey, etc. are used to distribute the expenditure figures for each sector (i.e. mental health, acute services, etc.) proportionally across the whole population.

4. Using the combination of expenditure and activity figures, the treatment cost is for each person within each age group and for each type of activity is calculated.

Table 2

Gross expenditure (cash terms)	*1998–99*	*1999–2000*	*2000–01*	*2001–02*	*2002–03*
Mental illness DP (£ million)	318	328	338	318	344
Mental health IP (£ million)	1,819	2,044	2,303	2,444	2,689
Mental health OP (£ million)	334	370	411	490	655
Community MI nursing (£ million)	580	670	775	810	911
Total MH (£ million)	3,051	3,411	3,826	4,062	4,598
Total HCHS (£ million)	25,494	27,633	30,099	31,977	35,087
Population (number)	49,586,455	49,730,320	49,871,203	50,008,548	50,142,274
MH proportion (percentage)	11.97	12.34	12.71	12.70	13:11
MH expenditure per head of population (£ million)	61.52	68.59	76.73	81.23	91.71

Notes:

1. The figures are taken from the expenditure per head of population (EPHoP) analysis of healthcare spend. EPHoP measures activity from inpatients, outpatients and community based patients against expenditure taken from the hospital and community health service programme budget.

2. The programme budget is compiled using NHS accounts: a combination of finance returns from strategic health authorities, NHS trusts, primary care trusts and the strategic health authority summarisation schedules.

3. Activity data from a range of sources, for example hospital episode statistics, Körner community returns, the Living in Britain survey, etc. are used to distribute the expenditure figures for each sector (i.e. mental health, acute services, etc.) proportionally across the whole population.

4. Using the combination of expenditure and activity figures, the treatment cost is for each person within each age group and for each type of activity is calculated.

Mesothelioma

Mr. Battle: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what Government funding has been provided for research into mesothelioma in the last 10 years; and what funding is available over the next five. [192681]

Miss Melanie Johnson: The NHS Plan announced that the Department would provide an additional £20 million per year to establish a national cancer research network. The National Cancer Research Network (NCRN) and the National Translational Cancer Research Network were established as a result. The NCRN is currently providing national health service infrastructure support for four mesothelioma studies. These are:

the MS01 trial (jointly funded by cancer charities, the British Thoracic Society and a pharmaceutical company)—a trial of chemotherapy for patients with malignant pleural mesothelioma;

the MALCS study (funded by the Health and Safety Executive)—a population based case-control study of mesothelioma and lung cancer in relation to occupation in British men and women under the age of 60;

the MARS (Mesothelioma and Radical Surgery) study (funded by Cancer Research UK and the June Hancock Mesothelioma Research Fund). This is a pilot study to determine the feasibility and acceptability of performing a randomised trial comparing extra-pleural pneumonectomy (EPP) against no EPP surgery within the context of trimodality therapy (chemotherapy, surgery, post-operative radiotherapy);

the VATS study (funded by the BUPA Foundation)—a prospective randomised controlled trial of video-assisted thoracoscopic (VATS) cytoreductive pleurectomy compared to talc pleurodesis in patients with suspected or proven malignant mesothelioma.

No other information is available to the Department on research into mesothelioma showing Government funding support.

Out-of-Hours Services

Sandra Gidley: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what recent guidance his Department has issued to primary care services with regard to out-of-hours services; and if he will make a statement. [192553]

Ms Rosie Winterton: On 14 October, we published the Government's response to the Health Committee Report on general practitioner out-of-hours services (Cm 6352).

On the same day, we launched the "New Quality Requirements in the Delivery of Out-of-Hours Services" and commentary. These standards ensure that out-of-hours care, wherever provided, is delivered to a consistently high standard. The requirements come into force from 1 January 2005, replacing the current national quality standards, which have been in force since November 2002.

The new requirements will ensure that if patients need to access care out-of-hours, they can be confident that, wherever they live, they will receive high quality care, responsive to their needs.

Ovarian Tissue Transplantation

Mr. Sarwar: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will make a statement on ovarian tissue transplantation. [190570]

Miss Melanie Johnson: The National Institute for Clinical Excellence (NICE) published, in February 2004, a clinical guideline for the national health service on the assessment and treatment for people with fertility problems. Part 1.15 of the guideline, covering applications of cryopreservation in cancer treatment, says:

> "Women preparing for medical treatment that is likely to make them infertile should be offered oocyte or embryo cryostorage as appropriate if they are well enough to undergo ovarian stimulation and egg collection, provided that this will not worsen their condition and provided that sufficient time is available. They should be informed that oocyte cryostorage has very limited success and that the cryopreservation of ovarian tissue is still in an early stage of development."

A recent report from the United States of America mentioned a patient who apparently has had a successful ovarian transplantation involving her sister as a donor. We note that the British Fertility Society regards this procedure as an interesting development that must be viewed as experimental, probably applicable only to an exceptionally small number of patients.

Over-30 Month Cattle Scheme

Mr. Wiggin: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what work the Food Standards Agency is conducting on the over-30 month cattle scheme safely. [189629]

Miss Melanie Johnson: The information requested is already published on the Food Standards Agency's website at http://www.food.gov.uk/news/newsarchive/2004/sep/boardupdateseptember2004.

Paediatric Services

Mr. Burstow: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many doctors there were in the NHS in England working in paediatric specialities in each year since 1992, broken down by *(a)* speciality and *(b)* grade, expressed as a (i) whole-time equivalent and (ii) headcount figure. [194243]

Mr. Hutton: The information requested is shown in the table.

Hospital, Public Health Medicine and Community Health Services (HCHS): medical staff within the Paediatrics Group of specialties by grade and year

	Number (headcount) and whole-time equivalent (wte)							
	1992		*1993*		*1994*		*1995*	
England as at 30 September each year	*No.*	*wte*	*No.*	*wte*	*No.*	*wte*	*No.*	*wte*
Paediatric Group	2,819	2,559	3,106	2,833	3,350	3,070	3,892	3,551
of which:								
Consultant	854	782	932	856	1,009	915	1,103	1,008
Associate Specialist/Staff Grade	35	29	56	49	92	81	296	224
Registrar Group	573	520	641	579	721	659	763	705
Senior House Officer	1,202	1,187	1,325	1,309	1,386	1,374	1,571	1,557
House Officer	8	8	5	5	8	8	14	14
Hospital Practitioner/ Clinical Assistant	145	33	147	36	134	32	144	41
Other Hospital	2	0	-	-	-	-	1	1
Other CHS	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
of which:								
Paediatric cardiology	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
of which:								
Consultant	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
Associate Specialist/Staff Grade	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
Registrar Group	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
Senior House Officer	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
House Officer	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
Hospital Practitioner/Clinical Assistant	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
Other Hospital	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
Other CHS	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
Paediatrics	2,819	2,559	3,106	2,833	3,350	3,070	3,892	3,551
of which:								
Consultant	854	782	932	856	1,009	915	1,103	1,008
Associate Specialist/Staff Grade	35	29	56	49	92	81	296	224
Registrar Group	573	520	641	579	721	659	763	705
Senior House Officer	1,202	1,187	1,325	1,309	1,386	1,374	1,571	1,557
House Officer	8	8	5	5	8	8	14	14
Hospital Practitioner/ Clinical Assistant	145	33	147	36	134	32	144	41
Other Hospital	2	0	-	-	-	-	1	1
Other CHS	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-

	1996		*1997*		*1998*		*1999*	
	No.	*wte*	*No.*	*wte*	*No.*	*wte*	*No.*	*wte*
Paediatric Group	4,011	3,680	4,344	4,018	4,542	4,196	4,750	4,365
of which:								
Consultant	1,156	1,063	1,227	1,130	1,299	1,192	1,355	1,246
Associate Specialist Staff Grade	342	269	341	274	411	339	458	374
Registrar Group	762	710	913	859	1,016	955	1,103	1,028
Senior House Officer	1,605	1,586	1,717	1,699	1,678	1,651	1,699	1,651
House Officer	14	14	18	18	26	26	36	36
Hospital Practitioner/Clinical Assistant	132	38	126	37	112	33	99	31
Other Hospital	-	-	2	2	-	-	-	-
Other CHS	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
of which:								
Paediatric cardiology	39	38	39	37	55	53	52	49
of which:								
Consultant	13	13	16	16	17	17	18	17
Associate Specialist/Staff Grade	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
Registrar Group	13	13	13	13	21	21	21	20
Senior House Officer	12	12	9	9	17	16	10	10
House Officer	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
Hospital Practitioner/Clinical Assistant	1	0	1	0	-	-	1	0
Other Hospital	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
Other CHS	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
Paediatrics	3,972	3,643	4,305	3,981	4,487	4,142	4,698	4,316
of which:								
Consultant	1,143	1,051	1,211	1,115	1,282	1,176	1,337	1,229
Associate Specialist/Staff Grade	342	269	341	274	411	339	456	372
Registrar Group	749	697	900	846	995	935	1,082	1,008
Senior House Officer	1,593	1,574	1,708	1,690	1,661	1,634	1,689	1,642
House Officer	14	14	18	18	26	26	36	36
Hospital Practitioner/Clinical Assistant	131	38	125	37	112	33	98	31
Other Hospital	-	-	2	2	-	-	-	-
Other CHS	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-

	2000		*2001*		*2002*		*2003*	
	No.	*wte*	*No*	*wte*	*No.*	*wte*	*No.*	*wte*
Paediatric Group	5,027	4,590	5,127	4,645	5,608	5,155	5,960	5,516
of which:								
Consultant	1,443	1,307	1,507	1,332	1,695	1,538	1,807	1,641
Associate Specialist Staff Grade	560	437	602	478	673	581	736	638
Registrar Group	1,146	1,055	1,107	1,019	1,166	1,074	1,226	1,149
Senior House Officer	1,747	1,722	1,727	1,700	1,832	1,799	1,963	1,933
House Officer	43	43	41	41	51	51	69	69
Hospital Practitioner/Clinical Assistant	88	25	86	31	85	29	70	18
Other Hospital	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
Other CHS	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
of which:								
Paediatric cardiology	51	49	68	65	115	108	110	102
of which:								
Consultant	23	22	29	27	64	58	69	61
Associate Specialist/Staff Grade	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
Registrar Group	19	19	18	17	31	29	21	21
Senior House Officer	8	8	9	9	0	20	20	20
House Officer	-	-	2	2	-	-	-	-
Hospital Practitioner/Clinical Assistant	1	0	-	-	-	-	-	-
Other Hospital	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
Other CHS	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
Paediatrics	4,976	4,541	5,059	4,581	5,493	5,048	5,850	5,414
of which:								
Consultant	1,420	1,285	1,478	1,304	1,631	1,480	1,738	1,581
Associate Specialist/ Staff Grade	560	437	602	478	673	581	736	638
Registrar Group	1,127	1,036	1,089	1,002	1,135	1,045	1,205	1,128
Senior House Officer	1,739	1,714	1,708	1,681	1,812	1,779	1,943	1,913
House Officer	43	43	39	39	51	51	69	69
Hospital Practitioner/Clinical Assistant	87	25	86	31	85	29	70	18
Other Hospital	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
Other CHS	-	-	57	45	106	83	89	67

Notes:

'–' denotes zero

'0' denotes less than one, more than zero

Figures have been rounded to the nearest whole number

Source:

Department of Health medical and dental workforce census.

Depression

Mrs. Iris Robinson: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what information he collects on the proportion of pain sufferers who are diagnosed with depression. [194077]

Ms Rosie Winterton: This information is not centrally available.

Prescription Charges

Mr. Burstow: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will estimate the expected total income from prescription charges in real terms in *(a)* 2005–06, *(b)* 2006–07, *(c)* 2007–08, *(d)* 2008–09 and *(e)* 2009–10. [192900]

Ms Rosie Winterton: The expected total income from prescription charges for the years specified, are shown in the table.

	£ million
2005–06	467
2006–07	482
2007–08	499
2008–09	517
2009–10	534

The figures are forecasts and as such will be subject to change.

Processed Food (Salt)

Ms Shipley: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what discussions his Department has had with the major supermarkets on salt in food since the 18 September deadline for supermarkets to improve their salt reduction action plans. [191131]

Miss Melanie Johnson: The Department and the Food Standards Agency (FSA) are currently analysing responses received from the food industry in response to the 18 September deadline. The Department and the FSA will consider what further action needs to be taken when the analysis has been completed.

Public Health Bodies

Mr. Burstow: To ask the Secretary of State for Health pursuant to the answer of 13 September 2004, *Official Report*, column 1470–1471W, on public health bodies, what the expected timetable is for the budget allocation process. [191699]

Ms Rosie Winterton: An implementation framework, setting out the timetable and process for agreeing arm's length body budgets over the spending review period, will be published shortly.

Queen's Ambulance Medal

Mrs. Lait: To ask the Secretary of State for Health when he expects the first Queen's Ambulance Medal to be announced; and what steps are being taken to ensure that its existence is widely known. [192879]

Ms Rosie Winterton: We are currently reviewing the process and timetable for introducing the proposed Queen's Ambulance Service Medal while we take into account the conclusions of the current Honours review. We hope to confirm the way forward shortly.

Radiographers

Mr. Burstow: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what the vacancy *(a)* rate and *(b)* number of radiographers in the NHS was in (i) England and (ii) each strategic health authority in each year since 1997. [194242]

Mr. Hutton: Information on the number and rate of vacancies lasting three months or more for radiographers in each year since 1999, the first year vacancy information was collected centrally, by health authority until 2001 and by strategic health authority since 2001, has been placed in the Library.

The rate of vacancies lasting three months or more for diagnostic radiographers has fallen from 6.1 per cent., to 4.8 per cent., for diagnostic radiographers and from 10.7 per cent., to 8.8 per cent., in between March 2003 and March 2004.

The fall in vacancy rates for radiographers reverses the trend of increasing vacancies and reflects the Government's successes in increasing both the national health service radiography workforce and also the numbers of students entering training to become radiographers.

Refugee Doctors

Mr. Burstow: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what estimate he has made of the number of trained refugee doctors in England who are not working in the NHS; and what estimate he has made of the average cost of retraining a refugee doctor to work in the NHS. [192791]

Mr. Hutton: This information requested is not held centrally.

The British Medical Association (BMA) holds a database to monitor the number of refugee doctors in the United Kingdom. Of the 1,001 doctors registered on the database:

69 have secured posts in the national health service.

126 have passed Part II of the General Medical Council's (GMC) Professional and Linguistic Assessment Board (PLAB) examination.

94 have passed Part I of the PLAB examination.

The majority of the rest are either studying for PLAB Part I or developing their English language skills in preparation for the CMC's English language tests.

The cost of any retraining a doctor may need may vary on an individual basis. Most of the doctors registered on the BMA database need only to pass the CMC's PLAB exam in order to be eligible to apply for jobs and thereby qualify for limited registration with the GMC.

Rural Proofing

Mr. Kidney: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what work his Department carries out for the rural proofing of NHS targets. [192355]

Miss Melanie Johnson: National health service targets include minimum guarantees on access to services which everyone, both in rural areas and elsewhere, can expect. Primary care trusts (PCTs) are responsible for ensuring that NHS trusts meet national standards and targets. The reduction in national targets gives PCTs the flexibility to develop local services, including those in rural areas, to meet the particular needs of their communities.

Smart and Biometric Cards

Mr. Oaten: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what assessment he has made of the likely number of *(a)* smart card and *(b)* biometric card readers which will be needed in hospitals and general practitioner surgeries in the next 10 years. [193995]

Mr. Hutton: The number of smart card readers eventually needed for use across the national health service will depend on the nature and number of functions for which smart cards technology is required and the pace at which it is developed and implemented. The costs and benefits of a smart card are currently being assessed. There are no current plans to place biometric data on smart cards, but the use of biometrics is an option which is being studied for use in the longer term.

Transplantation

Dr. Evan Harris: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what discussions his Department has had with the Unrelated Live Transplant Regulatory Authority regarding live unrelated *(a)* altruistic and *(b)* paired donations for transplantation. [191713]

Ms Rosie Winterton: The Unrelated Live Transplant Regulatory Authority (ULTRA) has kept the Department fully informed of all discussions regarding the issue of live unrelated altruistic and paired donation. The last ULTRA meeting was held on 5 October 2004.

Transport (North Yorkshire)

Miss McIntosh: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what action is being taken by primary care trusts to improve transport links to healthcare facilities in North Yorkshire. [193892]

Miss Melanie Johnson: The four primary care trusts (PCTs) in North Yorkshire are working to improve transport links to healthcare facilities. They are working in partnership with the Tees, East and North Yorkshire Ambulance National Health Service Trust (TENYAS) to review current patient transport services to ensure that patients' transport needs are met. The PCTs are also working with local authorities, the voluntary sector and transport providers to ensure access to healthcare facilities.

Wheelchairs

Ms Walley: To ask the Secretary of State for Health (1) what information the Wheelchair Services Collaborative holds on waiting times for assessment and delivery of wheelchairs; [194035]

(2) which wheelchair services participate in the Wheelchair Services Collaborative; [194036]

(3) what waiting times apply to the North Staffordshire Wheelchair Service; and if he will make a statement. [194037]

Dr. Ladyman: Figures on waiting times for people requiring wheelchairs are not collected centrally. The information may be available from the 151 national health service wheelchair services, which actually arrange for the provision of wheelchairs in England. 45 centres participated in the wheelchair services collaborative, which ran until June 2004. The services that participated were:

Wheelchair service	*Organisation*
Bexhill and Rother Wheelchair Service	Bexhill and Rother Primary Care Trust (PCT)
The Wirral Wheelchair Assessment Centre	Birkenhead and Wallasey PCT
Wheelchair Service	Brent PCT
Bromley Wheelchair Service	Bromley PCT
South East Staffordshire Wheelchair Service	Burntwood, Litchfield and Tamworth PCT, South Staffordshire Healthcare NHS Trust
Chantry Wheelchair Services	Central Suffolk PCT
Southern Derbyshire Wheelchair Service	Derbyshire Dales and South Derbyshire PCT
Wheelchair Services	Doncaster East PCT
South Durham Wheelchair Service	Durham and Chester Le-Street PCT
Enfield Wheelchair Service	Enfield PCT
Haringey Wheelchair Service	Haringey Teaching PCT
Hillingdon Wheelchair Service	Hillingdon PCT
Occupational Therapy and Wheelchair Services	Isle of Wight Healthcare NHS Trust
The Wheelchair Service	King's Lynn and Wisebech Hospitals NHS Trust
Leeds Wheelchair Service	Leeds Teaching Hospital NHS Trust
North Essex Wheelchair Services	Maldon and South Chelmsford PCT, Essex Rivers Healthcare NHS Trust
Wheelchair Services	Milton Keynes PCT
Disablement Services Centre	North Bristol NHS Trust
North Cumbria Wheelchair Service	North Cumbria Acute Hospitals NHS Trust
Wheelchair Centre	North Lincolnshire Primary Care NHS Trust
North West Surrey Wheelchair Service	North Surrey PCT
Harrow Wheelchair Service	North West London Hospitals NHS Trust
Occupational Therapy and Wheelchair Services	Northamptonshire Heartlands PCT
Oxford Centre for Enablement	Nuffield Orthopaedic Centre NHS Trust
Wheelchair Assessment Centre, Thameside General Hospital	Oldham PCT/Thameside and Glossop

Wheelchair service	*Organisation*
Wheelchair Service and Community Equipment Service	Redditch and Bromsgrove NHS PCT
Exeter Mobility Centre	Royal Devon and Exeter Healthcare NHS Trust
Wheelchair Service	Sedgefield PCT
Birmingham Wheelchair Service	South Birmingham PCT
Sussex Rehabilitation Centre	South Downs NHS Trust
South Tyneside (Healthcare NHS Trust) Wheelchair Services	South Tyneside PCT
South Warwickshire PCT	South Warwickshire PCT
Wheelchair Services	Sussex Downs and Weald PCT
Shropshire Wheelchair Service	Telford and Wrekin NHS PCT
Liverpool Wheelchair Service	The Royal Liverpool and NHS Broadgreen University Hospitals
Tower Hamlets Wheelchair Service	Tower Hamlets NHS PCT
Wheelchair Service at the Rehabilitation Centre	United Lincoln Hospitals NHS Trust
Leicestershire Wheelchair Service	University Hospital of Leicester NHS Trust
Wheelchair Services	Walsall PCT
Wheelchair Service	Wandsworth NHS PCT
West Dorset Wheelchair Service	North Dorset PCT
The Wheelchair Service	West Kent NHS and Social Care Trust (Medway PCT, Dartford, Gravesham and Swanley PCT)

Written Answers to Questions

Tuesday 2 November 2004

ENVIRONMENT, FOOD AND RURAL AFFAIRS

Forestry Commission (Grants)

Mr. Paice: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what sum was awarded in grants to private woodland owners by the Forestry Commission in *(a)* 1998–99 and *(b)* 2002–03; and what proportion was funded from EU sources. [190917]

Mr. Bradshaw *[holding answer 18 October 2004]*: The value of grants awarded to private woodland owners in Great Britain by the Forestry Commission in:

(a) 1998–99 was £42.5 million of which £14.1 million was co-financed by the European Union; and

(b) 2002–03 was £37.8 million of which £12.6 million was co-financed by the European Union.

Sites of Special Scientific Interest

Mr. Sarwar: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what assessment she has made of the impact of Network Rail's permitted development rights on sites of special scientific interest. [192825]

Mr. Bradshaw *[pursuant to the reply, 21 October 2004, Official Report, c. 842W]*: The answer given did not reflect the most up-to-date position and should have read as follows.

No specific assessment has been made. In exercising its statutory functions on SSSIs in England, Network Rail must notify English Nature and unless it follows English Nature's advice, it must minimise any damage and restore the site as far as practical. In Scotland, these are matters for the Scottish Executive and Scottish Natural Heritage.

TREASURY

Tax Credits

Miss McIntosh: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer how many complaints were received by the tax credit office in *(a)* 1997, *(b)* 2001 and *(c)* 2004; what targets his Department has set for the number of errors reported in tax credit cases next year; what measures his Department is taking to ensure that the number of cases containing errors is reduced; and what compensation will be made to those people whose claims are dealt with incorrectly. [194495]

Dawn Primarolo: Details of the accuracy target up to 2004–05 for tax credits claims, renewals (for 2004–05 only) and changes of circumstance appear on page 29 of Inland Revenue's annual report for the year ending 31 March 2004. This can be found on the Department's website, www.inlandrevenue.gov.uk, at about/annual_reps.htm. The target for 2005–06 has yet to be agreed.

The Inland Revenue's approach to compensation is set out in Code of Practice 1 "Putting things right". This is also available on the Department's website, at leaflets/c11.htm.

Allowances and Thresholds

Mr. Andrew Turner: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what estimate he has made of the effect on *(a)* income to the Treasury and *(b)* the number of taxpayers in each band, (i) assuming no other changes and (ii) assuming consequential savings in benefits of tax credits, of (A) raising the single person's allowance to (1) £10,000, (2) £15,000 and (3) £20,000, and (B) raising other allowances and thresholds proportionately. [195105]

Dawn Primarolo: The information is given in the following table.

		(b) Change in taxpayer numbers (Thousand)			
	(a) Cost (£ billion)	*Starting rate*	*Savers rate*	*Basic rate*	*Higher rate*
(A) (1) PA increased to £10,000	28	-300	120	-4,690	-950
(A) (2) PA increased to £15,000	49	-580	110	-9,540	-1,490
(A) (3) PA increased to £20,000	63	-1,110	50	-13,130	-1,860
(B) (1) PA increased to £10,000 and other allowances and thresholds increased proportionately[1]	45	1,600	-110	-7,320	-2,750
(B) (2) PA increased to £15,000 and other allowances and thresholds increased proportionately[2]	68	2,160	-280	-13,360	-3,130
(B) (3) PA increased to £20,000 and other allowances and thresholds increased proportionately[3]	82	1,470	-430	-17,080	-3,260

[1] The thresholds and allowances were increased by 211 per cent. (£10,000 divided by £4,475—the PA in 2004–05)

[2] The thresholds and allowances were increased by 316 per cent. (£15,000 divided by £4,475)

[3] The thresholds and allowances were increased by 421 per cent. (£20,000 divided by £4,475)

Notes:

1. The estimates are based upon the Survey of Personal Incomes 2001–02 and are in line with final budget assumptions.
2. The estimates relate to the year 2004–05.

There would be no savings from lower tax credits since tax credit entitlement is based on gross income.

The personal allowance is currently linked to the primary and secondary class 1 national insurance contributions thresholds and the class 4 lower profits limit. No cost has been included to increase these thresholds in line with the personal allowance.

The figures exclude any estimate of behavioural response to the tax change, which could be significant given the scale of the changes.

Correspondence

David Winnick: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he will instruct the office of Mr. J. Harra, Director, Inland Revenue, Tax Credit Office, Preston *(a)* to acknowledge without delay letters sent by hon. Members to him on behalf of their constituents and *(b)* to ensure that substantive replies are sent within 14 days. [195501]

Dawn Primarolo: I refer the hon. Gentleman to the reply I gave him on 19 October 2004, *Official Report*, column 583W.

Customs and Excise

Mr. Amess: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer how many IT consultants are currently contracted to work for Her Majesty's Customs and Excise at Alexandra House, Southend-on-Sea; and if he will make a statement. [195712]

Dawn Primarolo: There are currently 102 IT consultants contracted to work for Her Majesty's Customs and Excise at Alexander House, Southend-on-Sea.

Mr. Amess: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what the hourly rate of pay is of each IT consultant working on contract to Her Majesty's Customs and Excise; and if he will make a statement. [195713]

Dawn Primarolo: Her Majesty's Customs and Excise does not engage IT Consultancy on an hourly rate basis.

Customs and Immigration Regulations

Patrick Mercer: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer (1) how many sea containers entering each port have been found to be in contravention of British customs and immigration regulations in each year since 2001; [194701]

(2) what volume of cargo arriving at each airport has been found to be in contravention of British customs and immigration regulations in each year since 2001. [194707]

Dawn Primarolo: Her Majesty's Customs and Excise report against the prohibitions and restrictions they enforce in their annual and spring reports, which are available in the Library of the House.

Information is not held in the format requested. A breakdown of all the possible contraventions of British customs and immigration regulations at ports and airports for the last four years in respect of sea containers and air cargo could be obtained only at disproportionate cost.

Gambling

Miss Kirkbride: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what *(a)* representations he has received regarding the exemption of and *(b)* plans he has to exempt regional casinos offering category A machines from EU laws on money laundering. [194654]

John Healey: To inform our ongoing negotiations on the third EU Money Laundering Directive, HM Treasury held a wide-ranging consultation which has now closed. Representations have been received from a range of interested parties, including from the casino industry, and we are considering these.

Income Tax Evasion

Mrs. Spelman: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what estimate he has made of the level of evasion of income tax. [195254]

Dawn Primarolo: As tax authorities around the world recognise, the tax gap in relation to tax on income and profits is very difficult to measure, and presently there is no reliable method for estimating it. Nevertheless, the Inland Revenue is continuing to develop methodologies for measuring the tax gap in relation to all direct taxes.

National Minimum Wage

Lynne Jones: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer pursuant to the answer of 27 October 2004, *Official Report*, columns 1244–245W, on national minimum wage, what the level of underpayment on the national minimum wage was in *(a)* Birmingham and *(b)* the West Midlands in each year listed. [195725]

Dawn Primarolo: The Inland Revenue does not maintain separate records for the areas specified.

Stamp Duty

Sue Doughty: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer how many residential properties sold in England and Wales during 2003 attracted stamp duty at *(a)* 0 per cent., *(b)* 1 per cent., *(c)* 3 per cent. and *(d)* 4 per cent.; and what the average price paid for a house during 2003 was in each of those stamp duty bands. [194327]

Mr. Timms: The estimate of the number of residential property transactions in each of the stamp duty bands for 2003 and the corresponding average prices are given in the following table. The 0 per cent. band includes transactions between £60,000 and £150,000 in value that have qualified for disadvantaged area relief.

Stamp duty rate (Percentage)	*Number of residential property transactions (£000)*	*Average price (£000)*
0	350	41
1	731	143
3	102	342
4	21	995

UK Shipping Industry

John McDonnell: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what the value was of financial concessions to the UK shipping industry through the tonnage tax scheme in financial year 2003–04. [194052]

Dawn Primarolo: The latest estimates, for 2002–03 and 2003–04, of the Exchequer cost of the tonnage tax regime can be found on the Inland Revenue's website at www.inlandrevenue.gov.uk/stats/tax_expenditures/tableb1.pdf.

TRANSPORT

Data Protection

Michael Fabricant: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what procedures are in place *(a)* to check the criminal records of civil servants in his Department and agencies responsible to his Department, including the Driver and Vehicle Licensing Agency, who have access to computer databases containing confidential information on the public and *(b)* to ensure that there can be no improper use of computer databases containing confidential information on the public; and if he will make a statement. [194598]

Charlotte Atkins: All DfT and Agency staff, including DVLA, undergo a Basic Check on recruitment, which includes a self-declaration regarding criminal convictions. Human Resources carry out criminal record checks on all DfT posts that require security clearance, and serving staff are required to declare/report any criminal charges/convictions.

To ensure that there can be no improper use of computer databases containing confidential information on the public, DfT and Agencies enforce the "need to know" principle. Appropriate access controls to systems, comprehensive auditing and tracking are also carried out and staff are instructed on computer misuse policies and made aware of current legislation including the Data Protection Act etc.

Air Cargo

Patrick Mercer: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what volume of cargo has arrived at each British airport in each year since 1997. [194705]

Charlotte Atkins: The amount of freight that has arrived at airports in Great Britain with at least one thousand tonnes of freight arriving each year since 1997 to 2003 is set out in the table.

Freight arrived at airports in Great Britain, 1997–2003

Thousand Tonnes

	1997	*1998*	*1999*	*2000*	*2001*	*2002*	*2003*
Heathrow	579	620	649	663	595	627	639
East Midlands	61	60	66	93	99	109	114
Stansted	65	95	92	86	86	98	111
Gatwick	134	137	142	147	131	106	102
Manchester	48	55	61	62	58	64	75
Kent International	1	2	13	20	25	26	34
Prestwick	24	30	33	30	31	28	28
Luton	12	14	14	19	13	14	16
Edinburgh	4	7	8	10	9	12	14
Birmingham	11	11	21	6	7	7	6
Liverpool	7	7	7	8	6	4	3
Glasgow	6	5	5	5	3	2	2
Isle of Man	4	4	2	2	1	1	2
Aberdeen	2	2	2	2	2	1	1
Coventry	4	4	2	2	1	2	1

Source:

Civil Aviation Authority, http://www.caaerg.co.uk.

Departmental Publications (Accessibility)

Mr. Goodman: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport how many and what proportion of publications issued by his Department are available in *(a)* Braille, *(b)* autoprint, *(c)* large print and *(d)* easy read format. [194288]

Charlotte Atkins: The Department's policy is to make publicity material available in alternative formats on request. Our rationale for this is based on: budgetary considerations; the fact that many publications are for small, specialist audiences; and that all are placed on the DfT website, which complies fully with accessibility standards. This policy means that of 886 DfT titles held at our distribution centre, 14 are in Braille, 15 are audio cassettes and one is large print.

We also allow anyone to reproduce and distribute our material in alternative formats free of the need for copyright permission.

For the future, we shall be making all major public consultation documents and white papers available in audio and easy read formats.

Level Crossings

Bob Spink: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport if he will take action to ensure that unmanned pedestrian level crossings of main rail lines are closed where *(a)* pedestrian usage is low and *(b)* alternative safe crossings by bridge or tunnel are already available to pedestrians; and if he will make a statement. [194930]

Mr. McNulty: It is for Network Rail, as infrastructure manager, to make applications for orders to close crossings and then for local highway authorities to consider and approve such applications. Highway authorities consider applications for level crossing closures on behalf of the Secretary of State for Transport under the Highways Act 1980.

One of the continuing main aims of the Health and Safety Executive's (HSE) policy for reducing risks at level crossings is to seek the closure or upgrade of level crossings where this is reasonably practicable; HSE does not support the construction of new level crossings other than in exceptional circumstances. Local people should be consulted on such plans.

This approach is supported fully by the National Level Crossing Safety Group, which includes HSE, the police, the Rail Safety and Standards Board, Network Rail, railway operators, local authorities, highway authorities and organisations representing level crossing users. Network Rail has produced a level crossing policy and strategy that sets out to reduce the risks associated with level crossings through a variety of methods including a programme of risk assessment to identify reasonably practicable risk reduction measures. Network Rail's overriding principle is to ensure that no new permanent crossings are constructed, other than in exceptional circumstances and it seeks to close existing crossings where this is feasible.

London Bus Drivers

Tom Cox: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport how many bus drivers employed within the Greater London area were subjected to physical attacks in the last 12 months. [193477]

Charlotte Atkins: Over the period 2003–04, there were 1,270 attacks on bus drivers within the Greater London Area. Data on the nature of assaults are not kept.

Overcrowding (Railways)

Mr. Luff: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport if he will place in the Library copies of risk assessments that have been prepared on overcrowding *(a)* on train services between Worcestershire and Birmingham and *(b)* on station platforms in (i) Worcestershire and (ii) Birmingham. [194520]

Mr. McNulty: Responsibility for the day-to-day safety, welfare and convenience of passengers using the railway and stations rests with Train Operating Companies (TOCs) and Network Rail. Network Rail, which is responsible for Birmingham New Street station, has undertaken a risk assessment at this station. This risk assessment is an internal Network Rail document. As such it is for them to determine whether to disclose its contents.

No risk assessments have been undertaken for stations in Worcestershire. However as part of its safety monitoring and enforcement responsibilities Her Majesty's Rail Inspectorate (HMRI) has asked Central Trains to provide it with information about how it manages overcrowding risks at stations and on trains. HMRI will write directly to the honourable Gentleman once it has concluded its investigation.

Port Security

Patrick Mercer: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport if he will make a statement on security inspections undertaken at British sea ports. [194697]

Mr. Jamieson: A compliance regime inspection programme is underway to monitor and evaluate compliance with the International Ship and Port Security (ISPS) Code that came into force on 1 July 2004.

Both announced and unannounced inspections are undertaken by Department for Transport Security Directorate (TRANSEC) inspectors to ensure port and ship compliance with the new security requirements.

It is not our policy to comment in detail on how many or which ports have been inspected, but our current programme of compliance inspection visits covers over 560 UK port facilities.

Potters Bar Rail Crash

Mr. Clappison: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what plans he has to hold a public inquiry into the Potters Bar rail crash. [194169]

Mr. McNulty: The Secretary of State expects to be in a position to take a decision on whether or not to hold a public inquiry after the Health and Safety Executive's investigation team has reported its conclusions to the Investigation Board and to him in November 2004 and decisions have been taken on prosecutions.

Rail Franchises

John Thurso: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport when decisions will be made on the awarding of the *(a)* East Coast Mainline and *(b)* Integrated Kent Franchises; and whether these decisions will be made by the (i) Strategic Rail Authority and (ii) Department for Transport. [192601]

Mr. McNulty: The information is as follows:

(a) On 6 October the SRA issued an Invitation to Tender (ITT) for the new InterCity East Coast franchise inviting the four pre-qualified companies to submit detailed bids. An announcement on a Preferred Bidder will be made early next year. *(b)* Invitations to tender for the Integrated Kent Franchise will be issued to the four pre-qualifying bidders later in the autumn. The franchise is expected to commence in late 2005.

Decisions on new or replacement franchises are currently taken by the Strategic Rail Authority with regard to the Directions and Guidance issued by the Secretary of State.

The Rail White Paper, "The Future of Rail", proposes the abolition of the Strategic Rail Authority. The strategic and financial responsibilities of the SRA will pass to the Department for Transport. Implementing this will require primary legislation and we will introduce a Bill as soon as parliamentary time permits.

Regional Transport Plans

Mrs. Spelman: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what the estimated cost is of producing regional transport plans. [195126]

Charlotte Atkins: We do not hold information on the cost of producing regional transport strategies, which are prepared by Regional Planning Bodies as part of Regional Spatial Strategies. Such information could be obtained only at disproportionate cost.

Ship Inspections

Mr. Carmichael: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport pursuant to his answer of 11 October, *Official Report*, column 6W, on ship inspections, whether inspections take place to enforce compliance with the International Ship and Port Facilities Code. [195692]

Mr. Jamieson: An inspection programme exists to monitor and evaluate compliance with the International Ship and Port Security (ISPS) Code. This involves both port facility and ship inspections. Enforcement action, if required would be taken on the basis of the results of the inspection.

Mr. Carmichael: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport pursuant to his answer of 11 October, Official Report, column 6W, on ship inspections, what follow-up action is being taken in respect of those ships issued with non-compliance letters. [195694]

Mr. Jamieson: The respective Flag States were informed that control measures had been imposed on their ships. Further enforcement action on such ships has not been necessary because on subsequent return to the UK they have been found to be compliant.

Train Horns

Bob Spink: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport (1) if he will make a statement on the Rail Safety and Standards Board review of the use of train horns and noise pollution; [194928]

(2) in what circumstances the use of train horns will be restricted on approaching unmanned pedestrian level crossings. [194929]

Mr. McNulty: The Rail Safety and Standards Board (RSSB) is responsible for specifying the requirements for when and where train horns must be used and Network Rail is responsible for deciding how train operators comply with them. The RSSB's Review concluded with a number of recommendations which come into effect on 6 November 2004.

The main recommendations are that the minimum permissible level for train horns will be reduced by up to eight decibels and the sounding of train horns when entering a tunnel and at frequent intervals when passing through long tunnels will no longer be necessary.

It will still be necessary for train drivers to sound horns at all times, day or night, whenever anyone is seen on or near a line on which a train is travelling; when approaching any pedestrian crossings; where shunting movements are taking place and staff may be on the line; during failures of signalling equipment or other degraded operations and in an emergency.

The sounding of horns between the hours of 2330 and 0700 is not permitted, when drivers are approaching an automatic level crossing or an open level crossing except as an emergency.

These standards take into account the need to ensure effective safety management whilst also aiming to alleviate the noise disturbance experienced by residents living near railway lines.

Transfer Passengers (Airports)

Mrs May: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport how many transfer passengers passed through UK airports last year. [195096]

Charlotte Atkins: The number of transfer passengers at surveyed UK airports in 2003 was 32 million.

Transfer passenger statistics for 2003 are available only for those airports where the Civil Aviation Authority ran the Departing Passenger Survey. These were Birmingham, Bristol, Cardiff, East Midlands, Exeter, Gatwick, Heathrow, Liverpool, London City, Luton, Manchester and Stansted. Transfer statistics for some of these airports are for the 2003–04 financial year.

Tsar Appointments

Mr. Goodman: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport how many tsars have been appointed with responsibilities which cover part of the work of his Department; and if he will make a statement. [191921]

Charlotte Atkins: None.

HOUSE OF COMMONS COMMISSION

Lifts

Norman Baker: To ask the hon. Member for Roxburgh and Berwickshire representing the House of Commons Commission (1) how many lifts there are on the Parliamentary Estate; and how much energy was consumed by these lifts in each of the last three years; [194332]

(2) what measures are in place to ensure that lifts on the Parliamentary Estate minimise energy use by only moving to a floor when requested to by a user; [194333]

(3) how many escalators there are on the Parliamentary Estate; how many of these are potentially motion-activated; and how much energy was consumed by escalators in the last year for which figures are available; [194334]

(4) for what reasons the escalators connecting Portcullis House with the main building are no longer motion-activated. [194335]

Sir Archy Kirkwood: There are 66 passenger and heavy goods lifts on the parliamentary estate. The optimal balance between energy efficiency, short waiting times and emergency provision is subject to an engineered solution in each location. There are three escalators on the estate and all have the potential to be motion activated. The escalators at Portcullis House are not currently motion activated for reasons of safety and the high traffic rate during working hours. They change to manual control outside sitting hours. The lifts and escalators do not have individual electricity meters.

WALES

Antisocial Behaviour Orders

Mr. Wiggin: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales how many antisocial behaviour orders have been breached in Wales in each year since their introduction. [195697]

Mr. Touhig: The available information is given in the following table.

The number of convictions of breach for within Wales, by period, from 1 June 2000 to 31 December 2002[1]

Period (by appearance date)	*Total*
1 June–31 December 2000	0
1 January–31 December 2001	3
1 January–31 December 2002	9
Total	12

[1] Breach data are compiled from breaches reported on the Home Office Court Proceedings Database. Home Office are reviewing the breach methodology and Data for 2003 has yet to be published.

Note:

Individuals breaching their ASBO more than once in the same year are counted only once for that year. Individuals breaching more than once, but in different years, are counted separately for each year.

Mr. Llwyd: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales if he will list by police area in Wales the number of antisocial behaviour orders in force; and if he will make a statement. [195776]

Mr. Touhig: Data are not collected centrally on the number of ASBOs in force at any given time.

The number issued from 1 April 1999 to 30 June 2004 was as follows:

Magistrates Courts Committee Area	*Number issued*
Dyfed Powys	16
Gwent	18
North Wales	28
South Wales	52
Total	114

Police Numbers

Mr. Wiggin: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales how many police officers there were in Wales in each year since 1996. [195677]

Mr. Touhig: Police officers in Wales in each year since 1996 are as follows:

As at March	*Police officer numbers in Wales*
1996	6,440
1997	6,592
1998	6,617
1999	6,645
2000	6,633
2001	6,927
2002	7,194
2003	7,268
2004	7,414

Press Releases

Pete Wishart: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales how many press releases have been issued by his Department in each month of 2004; and if he will make a statement. [195448]

Mr. Touhig: The Wales Office has issued the following number of press releases for each month of 2004 thus far:

	Number
January	7
February	3
March	16
April	7
May	7
June	3
July	6
August	1
September	5
October	6

These figures do not include operational notes or contributions to joint press releases with other organisations.

EDUCATION AND SKILLS

Teenage Pregnancy

Mrs. May: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills how much each local authority in Greater London spent on tackling teenage pregnancy in *(a)* 1997, *(b)* 2002 and *(c)* 2003. [194898]

Margaret Hodge: Figures are not available for years before the launch of the Government's teenage pregnancy strategy in 1999. Details of the teenage pregnancy local implementation grant allocated to each local authority in Greater London for 2002–03 and 2003–04 are provided in the following table. Where indicated, figures for 2003–04 include monies to support young parents through the Sure Start Plus pilots operating in authorities with the highest under-18 conception rates.

£

Local authority	*Allocation in 2002–03*	*Allocation in 2003–04*
Barking and Dagenham	70,000	99,000
Barnet	45,000	88,000
Bexley	65,000	92,000
Brent	65,000	106,000
Bromley	45,000	93,000
Camden	50,000	93,000
Croydon	180,000	240,000
Ealing	65,000	103,000
Enfield	95,000	126,000
Greenwich	95,000	142,000
Hackney and City of London	190,000	[1]325,000
Hammersmith and Fulham	63,000	93,000
Haringey	115,000	157,000
Harrow	55,000	84,000
Havering	55,000	95,000
Hillingdon	120,000	150,000
Hounslow	62,000	100,000
Islington	75,000	105,000
Kensington and Chelsea	37,000	82,000
Kingston Upon Thames	38,000	79,000
Lambeth	230,000	[1]386,333
Lewisham	230,000	[1]372,333
Merton	75,000	98,000
Newham	170,000	[1]299,000
Redbridge	55,000	85,000
Richmond Upon Thames	37,000	78,000
Southwark	230,000	[1]377,334
Sutton	65,000	87,000

£

Local authority	Allocation in 2002–03	Allocation in 2003–04
Tower Hamlets	120,000	[1]236,000
Waltham Forest	70,000	104,000
Wandsworth	110,000	152,000
Westminster	38,000	87,000
Total	3,015,000	4,814,000

[1] Includes allocation for Sure Start Plus pilots

Assertive Discipline

Mr. Hoban: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills what assessment has been made of the effectiveness of assertive discipline. [194770]

Mr. Stephen Twigg: The Department has not carried out an assessment of the effectiveness of assertive discipline. However, the Key Stage 3 Behaviour and Attendance strand has provided training and support for all secondary and middle schools since September 2003. Schools use an audit tool to identify their key priorities for action and use a range of materials and measures to address these.

Council Tax

Mrs. Spelman: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills what estimate he has made of the financial contribution that local education authorities made to school funding from council tax in England in 2004–05. [194694]

Mr. Miliband: The funding for local authorities is in the form of general revenue grant and covers education, social services, transport, and other local services. It is administered by the Office of the Deputy Prime Minister. The formula takes into account each authority's relative need to spend on each service and each authority's ability to raise resources. The authority decides how much resource to raise locally and what budget to set for each service. The budget for each service is not divided up into central Government resource and council tax.

Education Maintenance Allowances (Ilford, North)

Linda Perham: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills how many students in Ilford north constituency are receiving education maintenance allowances. [194119]

Mr. Ivan Lewis: By the end of September 677 young people from the Redbridge local authority area had received an EMA Notice of Entitlement. Of those, 482 had enrolled for EMA at a school or college and 397 had received an EMA payment. These figures continue to improve as those who applied late have had their applications assessed and are enrolled for payment.

Ethnic Minority Pupils

Mr. Clappison: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills what estimate he has made of the proportion of pupils attending *(a)* state and *(b)* independent schools who are from an ethnic minority. [194195]

Mr. Stephen Twigg: In January 2004, 16.9 per cent. of pupils (of compulsory school age and above) in maintained primary and secondary schools were classified as minority ethnic origin.

Information on pupils' ethnic origin is not collected from independent schools.

EU Education Committees

Angus Robertson: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills how many times during the Greek presidency of the EU *(a)* the Advisory Committee on veterinary training, *(b)* the Advisory Committee on training in architecture and *(c)* the Committee on the second general system for the recognition of professional education and training met; when and where these meetings took place; which UK Government expert was present at each meeting; what (i) technical and (ii) financial issues were raised by the UK Government expert at each meeting; what recommendations each Committee produced during that period; what actions were (A) proposed and (B) taken by (1) the EU and (2) the UK Government as a result of each Committee's recommendations; and if he will make a statement. [194350]

Mr. Ivan Lewis: There have been no meetings of the EU Advisory Committee on veterinary training or the EU Advisory Committee on training in architecture during the Greek presidency.

A meeting of the committee established under the second general system for the recognition of professional education and training was held on 25 June 2003 at which technical amendments were discussed. The following amendments to Annex C of that directive were adopted in respect of:

Germany: change title of "occupational therapist" to "occupational therapist/ergotherapist"

Italy: delete the profession of "chiropodist"

Austria: insert the profession of "bookkeeper"

UK: insert the profession of "listed veterinary nurse".

A Commission Decision of 28 January 2004 published these amendments in the *Official Journal* of the European Union.

Five Year Strategy for Children and Learners

John Thurso: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills if he will publish an assessment of the implications for traffic levels arising from the implementation of the Five Year Strategy for Children and Learners. [192230]

Mr. Stephen Twigg: The Five Year Strategy for Children and Learners aims to clarify the context for reform, to set the goals we strive to deliver, and to lay out the priority initiatives to get us there, across the early years, primary and secondary education, adult skills and higher education sectors.

There are no plans at this stage to publish a detailed assessment of the implications for traffic level arising from the implementation of the Five Year Strategy.

With regard to schools, we recognise that there may be traffic implications as a result of the new patterns of learning outlined in the strategy and we have already put a number of measures in place to address these. In September 2003, DfES and DfT jointly launched the Travelling to School initiative with the aim of creating conditions which will enable more children to walk, cycle or travel by public transport in safety. By the end of the decade we want every school to draw up a travel plan which, through consultation, identifies the issues of concern—including trips during the school day—and details how and by when these will be addressed.

DfES and DfT are jointly providing £7.5 million per annum to fund a network of school travel advisers to support schools in developing travel plans. DfES has also allocated up to £20 million pa in capital grants to state funded schools which draw up robust plans, which they can spend on items like lockers and secure cycle storage. In addition, the School Transport Bill, will give the flexibility local authorities require to design travel schemes for the 21st century.

Fixed Term Exclusion Orders

Mr. Hoban: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills who is responsible for the education of pupils subject to fixed term exclusion orders. [194769]

Mr. Stephen Twigg: The governing body of the school that the pupil attends is responsible for ensuring the pupil receives suitable education during the fixed period exclusion. This responsibility is usually discharged by setting work for the pupil to do at home. For longer fixed period exclusions, although schools still have a responsibility to provide education, we expect them to work with the local education authority, where possible, to do this and to plan for the pupil's reintegration into school at the end of the exclusion.

Knives

Mr. Nigel Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills (1) what assistance he is providing to *(a)* head teachers and *(b)* local education authorities to combat the carrying of knives and other bladed weapons in schools; and if he will make a statement; [193038]

(2) if he will review advice given to *(a)* local education authorities, *(b)* head teachers and *(c)* school governors over disciplinary action to be taken over pupils found carrying knives and other bladed weapons in schools; and if he will make a statement. [193039]

Mr. Stephen Twigg: My Department's guidance makes it clear that head teachers can permanently exclude pupils for a range of first or one-off offences, including actual or threatened violence and the criminal offence of carrying an offensive weapon on school premises. Police have long-standing powers to enter schools and conduct personal searches of pupils where they have reasonable suspicion that a pupil may be carrying an offensive weapon.

Over 20 recommendations by the Working Group on School Security on improving school security have been acted on. The group continues to advise DfES. The Department keeps the advice under review and whether further measures would assist in dealing with this problem.

Pupil Exclusions

Mr. Hoban: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills what schemes are available to assist families of children who have been permanently excluded from school. [194771]

Mr. Stephen Twigg: The Department funds the Advisory Centre for Education (ACE) to provide a telephone helpline for parents of excluded pupils. Some local education authorities have schemes, often delivered through partnership and multi-agency working, to assist the families of children who have been permanently excluded from school. Information on the number and location of such schemes is not held centrally. If the local education authority consider that parenting is a factor in the misbehaviour leading to exclusion, they may provide support to the parent by offering a parenting contract or applying for a parenting order.

Mr. Hoban: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills what remedies are available to an independent appeals panel which decides that a pupil has been wrongly excluded from a school. [194772]

Mr. Stephen Twigg: There are two remedies available to an independent appeal panel if it decides that a pupil has been wrongly excluded. It may direct that he or she is to be reinstated either immediately or by a date specified in the direction, or it may decide that, because of exceptional circumstances or for other reasons, it is not practical to give a direction requiring his or her reinstatement, but that it would otherwise have been appropriate to give such a direction.

Mr. Hoban: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills what guidance the Department issues on the education of children with special educational needs who have been permanently excluded from school. [194773]

Mr. Stephen Twigg: Under the Education Act 1996, local education authorities have a duty, where necessary, to identify, assess and arrange suitable provision to meet the special educational needs of children from their areas for whom they are responsible, whether they are in or out of school. When doing so they must have regard to the Special Educational Needs Code of Practice which gives guidance on meeting children's special educational needs. The Code of Practice is available to those who make provision for excluded children.

School Uniform

Helen Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills what the average cost of providing school uniform and other required clothing is for a child starting *(a)* primary and *(b)* secondary school. [194357]

Mr. Stephen Twigg: The information my hon. Friend has requested is not collected by the Department for Education and Skills.

Sexual Health

Mrs. May: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills how much was spent by each local education authority in the Greater London area on promoting responsible sexual behaviour in *(a)* 1997, *(b)* 2002 and *(c)* 2003. [194899]

Mr. Miliband: Information about individual local education authority expenditure on promoting responsible sexual behaviour is not collected by the Department.

Educating young people about sexual health and safer sex are key elements of the Government's sexual health strategy. The Teenage Pregnancy Strategy has a multi-faceted approach which includes helping young people resist pressure to have early sex, improving sex and relationship education and access to effective contraception and sexual health services.

Truancy

Charles Hendry: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills how many schoolchildren played truant in schools in East Sussex in each of the past five years; and how many days in total were lost through truancy in the county in each of those years. [193703]

Mr. Stephen Twigg *[holding answer 25 October 2004]*: The available published information is as follows:

Number of pupils that missed at least a half day session[1] due to unauthorised absence in schools in East Sussex LEA

Academic Year (September–May)	*Primary Schools*	*Secondary Schools*
2000	5,491	5,310
2001	5,832	6,310
2002	5,246	7,754
2003	6,089	8,275
2004	7,942	9,000

Number of pupils that missed at least a half day session[1] due to authorised absence in schools in East Sussex LEA

Academic Year (September–May)	*Primary Schools*	*Secondary Schools*
2000	31,510	23,202
2001	32,054	25,111
2002	31,761	24,976
2003	31,142	24,990
2004	30,131	23,952

Number of sessions[1] missed due to unauthorised absence in maintained schools in East Sussex

Academic Year (September–May)	*Primary Schools*	*Secondary Schools*
2000	44,513	87,624
2001	47,354	91,736
2002	37,154	111,064
2003	40,528	107,476
2004	53,048	112,206

Number of sessions[1] missed due to authorised absence in maintained schools in East Sussex

Academic Year (September–May)	*Primary Schools*	*Secondary Schools*
2000	542,361	578,089
2001	579,820	623,361
2002	578,403	631,515
2003	529,910	564,304
2004	465,785	510,926

Number of pupils of compulsory school age in East Sussex

Academic Year (September–May)	*Primary Schools*	*Secondary Schools*
2000	34,512	25,272
2001	34,776	26,154
2002	34,068	26,689
2003	33,600	27,312
2004	33,069	25,543

[1] A session equates to half a day.

Youth Clubs

Charles Hendry: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills how many youth clubs have been run *(a)* by local authorities and *(b)* by voluntary organisations in each of the past seven years. [194817]

Mr. Ivan Lewis *[holding answer 1 November 2004]*: This information is not held centrally.

HEALTH

New Health Centres

14. **Mr. Pike:** To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many new health centres linked with sports facilities are being developed under local investment finance trust projects. [195012]

Miss Melanie Johnson: This information is not held centrally across all LIFT schemes. The East Lancashire LIFT project has a proposal for a joint Health and Leisure Centre at St. Peter's, in Burnley. I would like to commend my hon. Friend for the commitment and support he has shown to this project, which will transform access to health and leisure services in the centre of Burnley.

Pneumonia Vaccinations

17. **Mrs. Helen Clark:** To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will make a statement on the availability of pneumonia vaccinations for elderly people. [195015]

Dr. Ladyman: The pneumococcal immunisation programme for older adults is being introduced over a three-year period. From April this year, all those aged 75 years and over become eligible to receive the vaccination. From 1 April 2005, the programme will be extended to all people aged 65 years and over.

Smoking

18. **David Taylor:** To ask the Secretary of State for Health what assessment he has made of the Scientific

Committee on Tobacco and Health's report, "Second-hand Smoke: A Review of Evidence since 1998"; and if he will make a statement. [195016]

Miss Melanie Johnson: The SCOTH report will be published alongside the White Paper.

Green Minister

19. **Mrs. Calton**: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will make a statement on the work undertaken by his Department's Green Minister in the last three months. [195017]

Miss Melanie Johnson: As the Department's Green Minister, I have a number of responsibilities that contribute to sustainable development goals. These include tackling health inequalities, healthy eating and physical activity. Our public health consultation, Choosing Health? which ran until the end of June, will also make an important contribution to the sustainable development agenda.

Foundation Hospitals

21. **Mr. Gibb:** To ask the Secretary of State for Health what his assessment is of the effectiveness of the foundation hospital policy. [195019]

Mr. Hutton: The first 20 NHS Foundation Trusts were established in April and July of this year. I am informed by the Chairman of Monitor (whose statutory name is the Independent Regulator of NHS Foundation Trusts) that they are using their freedoms to raise additional capital to invest in improved services for patients.The Healthcare Commission is currently undertaking its review of NHS Foundation Trusts policy. It is our expectation that the report of the outcome of the review will be published next summer.

Worcestershire Royal Hospital

23. **Mr. Michael Foster:** To ask the Secretary of State for Health what his estimate is of the number of accident and emergency admissions at the Worcestershire Royal hospital in each of the last five years. [195021]

Dr. Ladyman: The data requested are not collected for individual hospitals.

Zero-star-rated Trusts

24. **Helen Jones:** To ask the Secretary of State for Health what assessment he has made of the effectiveness of the assistance provided to national health service trusts which have received a zero star rating. [195022]

Mr. Hutton: Zero star trusts receive support from their Strategic Health Authorities and the Modernisation Agency's Performance Development Team. Some 40 of the 51 trusts who received support improved their star rating. Independent evaluations have confirmed the effectiveness of the support provided, which is focussed mainly on organisational and cultural change.

Pharmacists

25. **Mr. Pollard:** What role he plans for pharmacists in *(a)* promoting health care and *(b)* providing information to patients. [195023]

Ms Rosie Winterton: The new contractual framework for community pharmacists, subject to a ballot of contractors, should go live from April 2005. Nationally, it comprises a range of services which all pharmacists will provide, including helping patients make better use of medicines through repeat dispensing, promoting public health, providing information and support to patients, as well as signposting them to other healthcare providers. Primary care trusts will be able to commission a range of additional services from community pharmacists to meet specific patient needs locally.

Breast Cancer

Charles Hendry: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what the average waiting time is for radiotherapy treatment for people diagnosed with breast cancer for each strategic health authority. [195274]

Miss Melanie Johnson *[holding answer 1 November 2004]*: Data on waiting times for radiotherapy are not collected centrally. The national health service cancer plan set out maximum waiting time targets for cancer treatment, which may include radiotherapy where this is given as a first definitive treatment. From December 2001, there is a one month maximum wait from diagnosis to first treatment for breast cancer and from 2002, there is a maximum two month wait from urgent referral to treatment for breast cancer. Both these targets are being achieved for 97 per cent. of patients. Further information on cancer waiting times performance is available on the Department's website at www.performance.doh.gov.uk/cancerwaits/.

To tackle radiotherapy waiting times, we are increasing the numbers of therapy radiographers in post and in training, making better use of existing staff, making unprecedented investment in new radiotherapy equipment and streamlining the patient journey.

Charity Food Labelling

Ann Winterton: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what plans he has to introduce regulations requiring mandatory labelling on homemade cakes, biscuits and jams sold in aid of charity; and if he will make a statement. [193879]

Miss Melanie Johnson: There are no such plans.

Chesterfield and North Derbyshire Royal Hospital

Paul Holmes: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what percentage *(a)* of all patients, *(b)* of patients aged 65 years and over and *(c)* of patients with mental health problems were seen and treated within four hours at the Chesterfield and north Derbyshire Royal Hospital's Accident and Emergency department, in each year since 2001; and if he will make a statement. [194781]

Dr. Ladyman: The information is shown in the following tables. However, this data has only been collected centrally by the Department since 2002–03. It should be noted that the information in relation to patients over 65, or for patients with mental health problems is not collected centrally.

Chesterfield and north Derbyshire Royal Hospital National Health Service Trust—Major accident and emergency

Year[1]	Quarter	Total attendances	Percentage of patients who spent less than four hours in A&E
2002–03	2	14,029	83.1
2002–03	3	12,791	86.3
2002–03	4	12,963	94.2
2003–04	1	14,760	91.6
2003–04	2	15,152	91.0
2003–04	3	13,681	91.4
2003–04	4	13,690	95.2
2004–05	1	15,209	96.0

All A&E/minor injuries units/walk in centres

Year[1]	Total attendances	Percentage of patients who spent less than four hours in A&E
2003–04	14,760	91.6
2003–04	15,152	91.0
2003–04	13,681	91.4
2003–04	13,690	95.2
2004–05	15,209	96.0

[1] Data against the four hour A&E performance target has only been collected since quarter 2 in 2002–03. Quarterly data, rather than annual information, has therefore been provided.

Civil Servants

Mr. Jenkins: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what the average length of continuous service for civil servants within the Department is. [194402]

Ms Rosie Winterton: The average length of continuous service for civil servants within the Department and its agencies is nine years.

Complementary Therapies

Mr. Tredinnick: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what account he will take of recent statements by the right hon. Member for Neath (Mr. Hain) on complementary therapies when developing policy on health care. [195013]

Miss Melanie Johnson: I always take account of the comments of my right hon. Friend. National health service access to complementary therapies is at the discretion of individual trusts and clinicians.

Dentistry

Jon Cruddas: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what proportion of the population of the London Borough of Barking and Dagenham is registered with the general dental service. [194417]

Ms Rosie Winterton: At 31 August 2004, the latest data available, registrations with general dental service dentists in the Barking and Dagenham Primary Care Trust (PCT) area were 36.7 per cent. of the population in the PCT area. People may attend a dental surgery in a different area from the one in which they live.

Jim Dobbin: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what steps he is taking to increase the number of dentists treating NHS patients in Heywood and Middleton. [195014]

Ms Rosie Winterton: Each Primary Care Trust has been asked to draw up an action plan setting out how they are using their proportion of the £59 million additional funding we have allocated to improve access to NHS dentistry. Heywood and Middleton PCT has been allocated £83,000, which will improve access for at least 5,000 new patients this year.

Geriatric Hospital Beds

Tom Cox: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what his policy is on providing geriatric hospital beds covering the Greater London area; how many geriatric beds there are in such hospitals; and if he will make a statement. [194133]

Dr. Ladyman: The provision of hospital beds is for local determination by strategic health authorities (SHAs) with primary care trusts and national health service providers. Information on the number of geriatric beds within the London SHA areas is shown in the table.

Average daily number of available beds in the geriatric sector—SHAs in London, 2003–04

Org. ID	Name	Number
	England	27,431
Q04	North West London SHA	795
Q05	North Central London SHA	939
Q06	North East London SHA	911
Q07	South East London SHA	796
Q08	South West London SHA	657

Source:
Department of Health form KH03, published 15 October 2004.

Health Education

Mr. Burstow: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what steps he is taking to ensure that school children develop a thorough knowledge of healthy eating and living. [194235]

Mr. Stephen Twigg: I have been asked to reply.

Children learn about healthy eating and living through a range of National Curriculum subjects, principally Food Technology, Science, Personal, Social and Health Education and Physical Education.

In September 2004 schools received a Healthy Living Blueprint, a practical guide on promoting healthy living including using the full capacity and flexibility of the curriculum. The Blueprint and a supporting web portal bring together for schools the range of Government and non-Government initiatives and support which contribute to healthy lifestyles.

Heart Disease

Mr. Best: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what plans the Department has to introduce national guidance on diet and lifestyle to combat heart disease. [195499]

Miss Melanie Johnson: In March 2000, the Department published the national service framework (NSF) for coronary heart disease (CHD), which set out modern standards and service models for the national health service for the prevention and treatment of CHD.

The White Paper on improving health, due for publication later this year, will also contribute to the prevention and treatment of CHD.

Hospices (Greater London)

Tom Cox: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what financial support the Government are giving to hospices in the Greater London area. [194633]

Dr. Ladyman: There is no centrally collated information on how much money the national health service gives to hospices. The level of NHS funding provided to local hospices is a matter for discussion and agreement between the hospice and the appropriate primary care trust.

The Government pledged in the NHS Cancer Plan (2000) to increase NHS investment in specialist palliative care, including hospices, by an extra £50 million per annum by 2004. This pledge has been met. Working in partnership with all local stakeholders, including those in the voluntary sector, each cancer network has drawn up and agreed plans for the use of their allocation from the £50 million. The national partnership group for palliative care assessed all local plans and is now monitoring the use of this funding. The £50 million represents an increase of nearly 40 per cent., in the amount of funding provided by the NHS for specialist palliative care over 2000 levels.

Hospital Infections

Tom Brake: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will make a statement on his Department's policy on hospital-acquired infections. [195018]

Mr. Hutton: We are actively implementing the plans set out in "Winning Ways and Towards Cleaner Hospitals". Once these measures, particularly the new target to reduce MRSA blood stream infections year on year, start to have an impact we expect to see infection rates decline.

Sir Michael Spicer: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what assessment has been made of the variation in rates of hospital-acquired infection between hospitals. [195020]

Mr. Hutton: The only information which is collected across all of the NHS is for methicillin resistant *Staphylococcus aureus* (MRSA) blood stream infections. Rates are generally highest in specialist trusts. This is not surprising as these trusts are likely to have more vulnerable patients and undertake more invasive and high-risk specialist care.

Medicines (Children and Infants)

Mr. Burstow: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what the timetable is for introducing a revised version of the British National Formulary for children. [194253]

Ms Rosie Winterton: The British Medical Association and the Royal Pharmaceutical Society of Great Britain, who produce the British National Formulary (BNF), expect the first edition of the BNF for children to be available during the summer of 2005.

Mental Health

Mr. Randall: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many patients have been referred to Hillingdon Mental Health Trust from Heathrow airport in each of the last three years. [194726]

Dr. Ladyman: The information requested is not collected centrally.

Sir Nicholas Winterton: To ask the Secretary of State for Health whether it is his Department's policy to increase provision of community care for mentally ill mothers with babies; and if he will make a statement on the introduction of home treatment teams. [194373]

Ms Rosie Winterton: Specialised perinatal psychiatric services, including the provision of mother and baby units, have been considered by an expert group chaired by the national director for mental health and the conclusions from that group are expected to be published early in the new year.

Local delivery plans produced by strategic health authorities show that they have plans to establish 335 crisis resolution teams in England by the end of 2004. These teams are designed to respond quickly to people in crisis to provide assessment and treatment wherever they are, and prevent unnecessary admissions to psychiatric in-patient care.

Midwives

Charles Hendry: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what the vacancy rate is for midwives for each hospital trust. [195272]

Mr. Hutton *[holding answer 1 November 2004]:* Information on the rate of vacancies lasting three months or more for midwives in each national health service trust has been placed in the Library.

Myasthenia Gravis

Mr. Stunell: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what advice he has received on *(a)* the diagnosis, treatment and management of myasthenia gravis and *(b)* support for patients and carers; and if he will make a statement. [194875]

Dr. Ladyman: Myasthenia gravis is a neurological condition, characterised by fluctuating levels of muscle weakness. There is no cure, but treatment includes medication, surgery and palliation.

The national service framework for long term conditions will focus on improving services for people with neurological conditions. While the framework will not cover myasthenia gravis specifically, it will recommend improvements in standards, care and support that will benefit everyone with a neurological condition.

We are committed to publishing the framework as soon as possible.

It is for health authorities, in partnership with other local stakeholders to determine how best to use their funds to provide health services for their populations, including those with myasthenia gravis.

NHS

Mr. Burstow: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how much was spent on NHS administration in each year since 1980 in real terms. [192786]

Mr. Hutton: Real terms expenditure on administration in the national health service was not collected prior to 1996. Expenditure from then is shown in the following table.

	NHS administration costs (£ million)	*NHS total expenditure England (£ million)*	*Percentage of NHS administration costs as a proportion of total NHS expenditure*
1997–98	2,150	34,664	6.2
1998–99	2,180	36,608	6.0
1999–2000[1]	—	39,981	—
1999–2000[2]	2,261	40,201	5.6
2000–01	2,315	43,932	5.3
2001–02	2,625	49,021	5.3
2002–03	[3]—	—	—
2003–04[4]	2,489	63,667	3.9

[1] Expenditure pre 1999–2000 is on a cash basis.

[2] Expenditure tables from 1999–2000 to 2002–03 are on a Stage 1 resource budgeting basis (and consistent with figures published in table 3.4a of the Departmental Report 2004).

[3] Not available.

[4] Expenditure for 2003–04 is on a stage 2 resource budgeting basis (and consistent with figures published in table 3.4b of the Departmental Report 2004).

Mr. Drew: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will make a statement on the functioning of the NHS Bursary Department *(a)* hotline, *(b)* e-mail system and *(c)* correspondence facility and how many letters of complaint he has received on this issue. [194358]

Mr. Hutton *[holding answer 1 November 2004]:* The NHS Pensions Agency student grants unit deals with very high volumes of inquiries from students, universities and other organisations. The unit's work is seasonal by nature peaking from June to October. Throughout the majority of the year, the unit deals effectively with all customer inquiries but they acknowledge that during their busiest period many callers have had difficulty contacting them within a reasonable time.

Work is ongoing to improve the unit's customer service both in the short and long term. This includes extra helplines to deal specifically with clinical placement travel claims, disabled student allowances and the new child care allowance. In addition, a new website has been set up where a dedicated team will answer frequently asked questions.

Between April and September, the unit processed 41 complaints.

Dr. Murrison: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what criteria are used to determine whether patients may *(a)* opt out of and *(b)* anonymise entries in the national programme for IT in the NHS. [195078]

Mr. Hutton *[holding answer 1 November 2004]:* Good clinical management requires that healthcare professionals keep a record of key information about their patients and about individual treatment episodes. The national programme for information technology is incorporating stringent security controls and safeguards that will mean patients have more control over who has access to their information than is possible with existing systems. A fundamental principle in the implementation of the national health service care records service (NHS CRS) is that confidentiality and privacy of sensitive patient information must not be compromised.

Patients will have the right to specify that detailed information recorded at the point of contact with the NHS should not be available to other NHS organisations via the summary record held on their NHS care record. They will also have the right to define some information as especially sensitive and only accessible under terms of explicit consent. This reinforces the key statutory safeguards set out in the Data Protection Act 1998, with which all information users must comply. These facilities have been designed in to the NHS CRS.

The Data Protection Act also provides patients with a right, where they are suffering substantial damage or distress, to object to processing of their data, including to prevent their data being held at all in an identifiable form, though this is expected to be a very rare event. We are currently considering how this right should apply to implementation of the NHS care record.

Tom Cox: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what the average amount of NHS spending per head of population of people living in the Greater London area has been in each of the last three years. [194629]

Dr. Ladyman: Figures are shown in the table which relate to expenditure by national health service bodies which were, or are, within the five existing London strategic health authority (SHA) areas.

Expenditure per weighted head of population

	£
2001–02	951.36
2002–03	1,050.14
2003–04	1,200.57

Notes:

1. Expenditure is taken from audited health authority (HA) accounts and primary care trust (PCT) summarisation schedules, which are prepared on a resource basis and therefore differ from cash allocations in the year. The expenditure is the total expenditure by the relevant HAs and the commissioner costs of the PCT.
2. The total NHS expenditure cannot be identified by health authority area, because the majority of general dental services expenditure is not included in the individual health authority accounts or PCT summarisation schedules and is separately accounted for by the Dental Practice Board. The majority of pharmaceutical services expenditure is accounted for by the Prescription Pricing Authority and not by HAs or PCTs.
3. Figures for 2002–03 and 2003–04, based on strategic health authority (SHA) areas, have been adjusted to eliminate expenditure which would be double counted where an authority acts as a lead in commissioning healthcare.

Sources:

Audited HA summarisation forms 2001–02.
Audited SHA summarisation forms 2002–03 and 2003–04.
Audited PCT summarisation schedules 2001–02 to 2003–04.
Weighted population figures.
2003–04 data remains provisional.

Organ Transplants

Mr. Burstow: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many people have died waiting for an organ transplant in each year since the organ donation register began. [194263]

Ms Rosie Winterton: Details of the number of patients dying while registered for an organ transplant in the United Kingdom during each 12 month period since the start of the national health service organ donor register is shown in the table.

As at October	*Number who died while on list*
1994–95	502
1995–96	555
1996–97	537
1997–98	539
1998–99	536
1999–2000	495
2000–01	460
2001–02	425
2002–03	406
2003–04	380
Total	4,835

Over-30-months Scheme

Mr. Salmond: To ask the Secretary of State for Health (1) what recent discussions his Department has had with the Scottish Executive regarding the over-30-months scheme; and if he will make a statement; [193684]

(2) what recent discussions his Department has had with the Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs regarding the over-30-months scheme; and if he will make a statement; [193685]

(3) what recent discussions his Department has had with the Welsh Assembly Government regarding the over-30-months scheme; and if he will make a statement; [193686]

(4) what recent discussions his Department has had with the Meat and Livestock Commission regarding the over-30-months scheme; and if he will make a statement. [193687]

Miss Melanie Johnson: The Government are considering the Food Standards Agency's advice on the over-30-months rule and an announcement will be made in due course.

The Department has not discussed the over-30-months rule with the Meat and Livestock Commission.

Powered Wheelchairs

Paul Holmes: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many powered wheelchairs were issued by the national health service in each year since 1997; and if he will make a statement. [194780]

Dr. Ladyman: The information requested is not collected centrally.

Radiotherapy

Charles Hendry: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what the ratio is of radiotherapy machines to population in each strategic health authority area; and what the average waiting time is for radiotherapy treatment in each of those areas. [195275]

Miss Melanie Johnson *[holding answer 1 November 2004]:* The information requested is shown in the table.

The ratios ignore the significant patient flows across strategic health authority (SHA) boundaries. The SHA populations are not directly related to the populations served by specific radiotherapy centres.

SHA	*Linacs[1] per million in 2004–05*
Norfolk Suffolk and Cambs.	5.1
Beds. and Herts.	5.0
Essex	3.7
N W London	3.4
N C London	8.2
N E London	4.5
S E London	3.3
S W London	6.9
Northumberland, Tyne and Wear	5.1
County Durham Tees Valley	3.5
N and E Yorks. and N Lincs.	1.9
W Yorks	4.3
Cumbria and Lancs.	4.2
Greater Manchester	4.8
Cheshire and Merseyside	3.8
Thames Valley	3.4
Hampshire and Isle of Wight	5.1
Kent and Medway	3.8
Surrey and Sussex	3.5
Avon, Gloucs. and Wilts.	5.6
S W Peninsula	5.7
Dorset and Somerset	3.4
S Yorks.	5.5
Trent	3.8
Leics. Northants and Rutland	4.5
Shropshire and Staffordshire	4.0
Birmingham and Black Country	5.3
West Midlands South	3.2

[1] Linac = Linear accelerator.

Data on waiting times for radiotherapy are not collected centrally. The national health service cancer plan set out maximum waiting time targets for cancer treatment, which may include radiotherapy where this is given as a first definitive treatment. From December 2001, there is a one month maximum wait from diagnosis to first treatment for breast cancer and a one month wait from urgent general practitioner referral to first treatment for children's cancers, testicular cancer and acute leukaemia. From 2002, there is a maximum two month wait from urgent referral to treatment for breast cancer. By 2005, there will be a maximum two month wait from urgent referral to treatment and a maximum one-month wait from diagnosis to first treatment for all cancers.

Silzone Heart Valves

Mr. Hunter: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will take measures to ensure that cardiothoracic surgeons and cardiologists maintain long-term follow-up with the recipients of Silzone heart valves. [193092]

Miss Melanie Johnson: It is established clinical practice to maintain regular follow-up appointments with all patients receiving heart valve replacements, both in the short and long-term.

Skipton Fund

Pete Wishart: To ask the Secretary of State for Health (1) what criteria have been developed for the appointment process of the directors of the Skipton Fund; and if he will make a statement; [193653]

(2) what the term of office is for the directors of the Skipton Fund once they have been appointed; and if he will make a statement; [193654]

(3) whether, when the Skipton Fund was established, its directors were drawn from the Macmillan Fund; and if he will make a statement; [193656]

(4) from what backgrounds the directors of the Skipton Funds have been recruited. [193657]

Miss Melanie Johnson: Three trustees and the chairman and chief executive of the Macfarlane Trust were asked to take on the role of directors and company secretary for the Skipton Fund on an interim basis. This decision was made so that we could make progress with establishing the Skipton Fund. The trustees have a background in management, administration and working with haemophilia patients.

We have been seeking advice about the recruitment of directors to the Skipton Fund on a more permanent basis.

Sustainable Energy (CHP Provisions) Order

Mr. Stunell: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what measures his Department *(a)* has undertaken and *(b)* plans to undertake to comply with the Sustainable Energy (CHP Provisions) Order 2003. [194427]

Ms Rosie Winterton: The Department is committed to purchasing up to 100 per cent. green energy, where possible, for its buildings and replacing boilers with more energy-efficient models as the need arises. The anticipated reduction in the departmental estate in 2005 will reduce energy consumption.

Transport (Rural Areas)

Mr. Kidney: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will ensure that the transport needs of patients living in rural areas will be addressed within the Health and Social Care Standards and Planning Framework including in individual national service frameworks. [192356]

Miss Melanie Johnson: "Standards for Better Health", the first ever set of national health care standards for all health care provided under the national health service, published as part of "The Health and Social Care Standard and Planning framework" in July 2004, requires that:

> " . . . health care organisations enable all members of the population to access services equally and offer choice in access to services and treatment equitably".

In addition, the standards, which all health care organisations are expected to meet, requires existing national targets for ambulance services to be maintained beyond April 2005. Primary care trusts are responsible for providing or securing the provision of ambulance services, which could include patient transport services, for their local populations. It is, therefore, for the local NHS to decide how these services are provided.

From April 2005, the independent Healthcare Commission will calculate and award a rating for NHS organisations, including ambulance trusts, which will cover an assessment of their performance against the health care standards.

To support implementation of the national service framework for renal services, two projects, one rural and one urban, are being established which will focus on improving patient transport services for renal dialysis patients.

Waiting Times/Lists

Peter Bottomley: To ask the Secretary of State for Health in how many primary care trusts and in what proportions *(a)* there were higher numbers of patients waiting for in-patient treatment for (i) between six and nine months and (ii) between nine and 12 months and *(b)* the (iii) mean and (iv) median waiting times were higher. [192691]

Mr. Hutton: There are no primary care trusts (PCTs) in which the number, or proportion, of nine to 12 month waiters is greater than the number of six to nine month waiters.

Information showing the estimated inpatient mean and median waiting time in weeks by England and PCT for August 2004 has been placed in the Library.

PRIME MINISTER

EU Membership

Mr. Andrew Turner: To ask the Prime Minister pursuant to his oral Answer of 27 October to the right hon. Member for Folkestone and Hythe (Mr. Howard), what the evidential basis is for his assertion that millions of jobs depend on UK membership of the EU; and how many millions of jobs so depend. [195235]

The Prime Minister: I refer the hon. Member to the answer given to the hon. Member for South-West Bedfordshire (Andrew Selous) by my hon. Friend the Minister for Europe (Mr. MacShane) on 5 July 2004, *Official Report*, column 594W.

Ministerial Residences

Charles Hendry: To ask the Prime Minister which Ministers were provided with official residences in financial years *(a)* 2001–02, *(b)* 2002–03 and *(c)* 2003–04. [195774]

The Prime Minister: I refer the hon. Member to the answers I gave the hon. Member for Lewes (Mr. Baker) of 28 February 2002, *Official Report*, columns 1443–44W and 5 June 2000, *Official Report*, columns 49–50W.

Since my answer of 28 February 2002, the then President of the Council and Leader of the House of Commons (Mr. Cook) vacated his official residence (Carlton Gardens) in spring 2003. The Secretary of State for Defence (Mr. Hoon) was allocated an official residence (Flat 3, Admiralty House) in the summer of 2002.

The Deputy Prime Minister also has the use of Dorneywood.

DEPUTY PRIME MINISTER

Beach Safety

Mrs. Brooke: To ask the Deputy Prime Minister pursuant to his Answer of 25 October 2004, *Official Report*, column 1075W, on beach safety, who is responsible for beach safety in a given local authority area. [194997]

Phil Hope: Beach safety and management is generally at the discretion of the owner of the beach, whether it be a private owner or a local authority. The owner or occupier may have certain responsibilities under the common law such as laws of negligence, or under statute, such as laws concerning occupier's liability or health and safety at work. A local authority also has a power to make byelaws under the public health legislation relating to public bathing and to the use of pleasure boats. The Health and Safety executive or a local authority is the enforcing authority for certain Health and Safety matters in relation to some beach activities.

Fire Control Centre (South-West)

Ms Atherton: To ask the Deputy Prime Minister whether a building design has been commissioned in relation to a regional fire control centre for the south-west. [195131]

Mr. Raynsford: A building design has been commissioned by the Office of the Deputy Prime Minister with regional input. The need for national resilience calls for a single basic design which, in turn, will bring economies of scale. Local variations will result from differences between sites, the need to fit in with local planning requirements and options for internal aesthetics.

The design has been developed with input from control room staff and presented to a wide range of stakeholders, including existing control room staff, and has been subject to independent peer review. Further details are available at the FiReControl website, which is in the public domain (www.firecontrol.odpm.gov.uk).

Land Sales

Mr. Edwards: To ask the Deputy Prime Minister which local authorities have applied for Article 4 directives with respect to subdivision and sale of *(a)* agricultural land, *(b)* woodlands and *(c)* meadows. [195288]

Keith Hill: The information requested is not held centrally, and could be provided only at disproportionate cost. An informal survey of Government Offices for the Regions, prior to the hon. Member's Adjournment Debate of 12 October on the Sale of Woodland, suggested that the South-East and the West Midlands are at present the two regions where Article 4 directions are most commonly used to deal with unacceptable development associated with plot-sales and subdivision of rural land.

Landfill Allowance Trading Scheme

Dr. Starkey: To ask the Deputy Prime Minister what plans he has to make payments through the local government settlement to compensate local authorities in growth areas as a result of the Landfill Allowance Trading Scheme making no allowance for population growth. [194946]

Mr. Raynsford: The Government are currently exploring options to make the local government finance settlement more forward looking. Using projected data for population, for example, would benefit high population growth areas.

Mobile Phone Masts

Tom Cox: To ask the Deputy Prime Minister what arrangements are in place to seek the views of the public before planning permission for mobile phone masts is given; and if he will make a statement. [195586]

Keith Hill: Current planning guidance for all electronic communication developments is set out in Planning Policy Guidance Note 8 (revised) (PPG8). The Office of the Deputy Prime Minister has also issued a Code of Best Practice on Mobile Phone Network Development.

When the Government published PPG8 we strengthened public consultation requirements for prior approval for mast proposals of 15 m and below and for masts on buildings and structures so that they are exactly the same as applications for planning permission.

The statutory requirements for public consultation require that as a minimum, authorities have to notify neighbours directly or place a notice on or near the site. Representations should be made within 21 days. It is, of course, open to authorities both to notify neighbours and to post a site notice if they consider it appropriate to do so. The Office of the Deputy Prime Minister's approach is to give local planning authorities the flexibility to decide the most suitable method of publicity in each case.

Apart from the statutory minimum, advice is also given to local planning authorities to consider what other methods of publicity are available for attracting a wider audience. Local planning authorities should consider whether the press, local amenity societies and residents' associations should be made aware of proposed developments.

Guidance also underlines that school governors must be consulted on proposals for new masts on or near a school.

Outside designated areas licensed operators are authorised under the Town and Country Planning (General Permitted Development) Order 1995 to install specified small scale apparatus without the need to make a planning application to the local authority. However, simply because these small developments do not need planning permission it does not mean that there is no public consultation. The Code of Best Practice that was produced jointly by central and local government and the mobile phone industry is clear that operators will assess every potential site and rate it using the "Traffic Light Model". The Traffic Light Model allows a site to be rated according to its likely sensitivity in terms of environmental, planning and community considerations. This model determines the level of public consultation that will be required if the site is selected for the installation.

Pension Funds (Suffolk)

Mr. Spring: To ask the Deputy Prime Minister whether the *(a)* Suffolk county council and *(b)* Forest Heath district council pension funds are in (i) surplus and (ii) deficit; and by how much. [195719]

Phil Hope: The most recent actuarial valuation report of the Suffolk county council pension fund showed that its assets represented 83 per cent. of their accrued liabilities as at 31 March 2001. The contribution rate for participating employers, set by the fund actuary for the triennial period ending 31 March 2005, has been certified as being sufficient to ensure the on-going solvency of the fund. The results of the 2004 valuation exercise are not available.

Forest Heath district council is not responsible for a pension fund although it contributes as an employer to the fund administered by Suffolk county council.

Regional Assemblies

Mrs. Spelman: To ask the Deputy Prime Minister if he will list the Housing Market Renewal Pathfinders in England; and which local authority area each covers. [195167]

Keith Hill: The pathfinders cover sub-regional housing markets, which straddle parts of two or more local authority areas. The nine pathfinder areas cover parts of the following local authorities:

Pathfinder	*Local authorities*
Birmingham and Sandwell	Birmingham city council and Sandwell Metropolitan borough council
East Lancashire	Blackburn with Darwen borough council, Hyndburn borough council, Burnley borough council, Pendle borough council and Rossendale borough council
Hull and East Riding of Yorkshire[1]	Hull city council and East Riding of Yorkshire
Manchester and Salford;	Manchester city council and Salford city council
Merseyside	Liverpool city council, Sefton council and Wirral Metropolitan borough council
Newcastle and Gateshead;	Newcastle city council and Gateshead council
North Staffordshire	Stoke city council, Newcastle under Lyme borough council and Staffordshire Moorlands district council
Oldham and Rochdale;	Oldham council and Rochdale Metropolitan borough council
South Yorkshire	Sheffield city council, Barnsley Metropolitan borough council, Rotherham council and Doncaster Metropolitan borough council

[1] The Hull and East Riding pathfinder covers Hull City only.

Mrs. Spelman: To ask the Deputy Prime Minister what compensation central Government will make to local authorities for the extra costs of *(a)* the introduction of regional spatial strategies and *(b)* the consequent revision of existing local strategies. [195384]

Keith Hill: In recognition of the initial additional cost of the introduction of regional spatial strategies and the consequent revision of existing local strategies, total funding for regional planning bodies (RPBs) was raised from £9,150,000 in 2003–04 to £12,987,000 in 2004–05. This significant increase was in recognition of the pivotal role that RPBs would play within the new planning system and the additional statutory responsibilities that would be placed on them by the Planning and Compulsory Purchase Act.

Planning Delivery Grant was introduced in 2003–04 providing £350 million over three years, 2003–06, to help local authorities to improve and importantly move in to the new planning system of local development frameworks. 2004–05 is the second year of the grant and £130 million has been distributed to regional planning bodies and local authorities, in 2005–06 planning delivery grant will total £170 million. A further £255 million has been identified for the financial years 2006–07 and 2007–08.

Special Advisers

Matthew Taylor: To ask the Deputy Prime Minister how many unpaid special advisers the Department has; what their names are; and which Government *(a)* bodies, *(b)* committees and *(c)* strategy groups each unpaid adviser (i) belongs to, (ii) advises and (iii) works alongside. [194067]

Phil Hope: I refer the hon. Member to the answer given by my hon. Friend the Member for Bolton, West (Ruth Kelly) on 28 October 2004, *Official Report*, column. 1380W.

Traveller Sites

Mr. Flook: To ask the Deputy Prime Minister what plans he has for new legislation on illegally encamped traveller sites in England; and if he will make a statement. [195497]

Keith Hill: There are no plans for further legislation relating to unauthorised encampments at this time, however the final version of the joint Office of the Deputy Prime Minister/Home Office guidance document, "Managing Unauthorised Camping" will be published in the near future. The Government have also introduced amendments into the Housing Bill with the intention of increasing the availability of sites for Gypsies and Travellers, which will help to reduce unauthorised camping. New Regulations will also be introduced shortly which will prescribe circumstances when temporary stop notices may be used to prevent illegal encampments.

HOME DEPARTMENT

Motor Vehicle Registration Plates

Mr. Pickles: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many prosecutions there were for failure to display a motor vehicle registration plate in the last five years for which figures are available, broken down by police authority area. [194343]

Caroline Flint: The Home Office Court Proceedings Database does not separately identify the specific offence of failure to display a motor vehicle registration plate.

Animal Rights Extremists

Michael Fabricant: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what guidance his Department gives police forces regarding the use of the law on criminal conspiracy in relation to the activities of animal rights extremists; and if he will make a statement. [193280]

Caroline Flint: The Home Office provides no specific guidance to the police on the use of the offence of criminal conspiracy in relation to the activities of animal rights extremists. However the Association of Chief Police Officers has produced a good practice guide for policing animal rights extremism including information on all the relevant legislation. Forces can also seek advice and support on tackling Animal Rights Extremism from the National Extremism Tactical Co-ordination Unit.

Animal Testing

Norman Baker: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will make a statement on the classification of animal testing procedures as *(a)* mild, *(b)* moderate and *(c)* substantial severity, with particular reference to their effect on animals. [193084]

Caroline Flint: The classification of severity limits to be applied to the protocols of licensed scientific procedures using animals is described in the publication entitled Guidance on the Operation of the Animals (Scientific Procedures) Act 1986. This was presented to Parliament on 23 March 2000 (HC 321—a copy will be in the Library).

For ease of reference the following is a relevant extract from the publication:

> *Protocol Severity Limits*
>
> 5.40 The severity limit for each protocol is determined by the upper limit of the expected adverse effects that may be encountered by a protected animal, taking into account the measures specified in the licence for avoiding and controlling adverse effects. It represents the worst potential outcome for any animal subjected to the protocol, even if it may only be experienced by a small number of the animals to be used.
>
> 5.41 In assessing the severity limit of a protocol, account should be taken of the effect of all the procedures (whether regulated or not) applied to each animal or group of animals; the nature and extent of the likely adverse effects; the action taken to mitigate these effects; and the humane endpoints to be applied.
>
> 5.42 The severity limits of the protocols in the licence are categorised as follows:
>
> *Unclassified*
>
> Protocols performed entirely under general anaesthesia, from which the animal does not recover consciousness. This includes the preparation and use of decerebrated animals.
>
> *Mild*
>
> Protocols that, at worst, give rise to slight or transitory minor adverse effects. Examples include: small infrequent blood samples; skin irritation tests with substances expected to be non-irritant or only mildly irritant; minor surgical procedures under anaesthesia such as small superficial tissue biopsies or cannulation of peripheral blood vessels. However, if used in combination or repeated in the same animal, the cumulative severity may be increased beyond mild. Protocols may also be regarded as mild if they have the potential to cause greater suffering but contain effective safeguards to initiate effective symptomatic or specific treatment or terminate the protocol before the animal shows more than minor adverse effects.
>
> *Moderate*
>
> Protocols regarded as moderate include toxicity tests (which do not involve lethal endpoints) and many surgical procedures (provided that suffering is controlled and minimised by effective post-operative analgesia and care). Protocols that have the potential to cause greater suffering but include controls which minimise severity, or terminate the protocol before the animal shows more than moderate adverse effects, may also be classed within the moderate severity limit.
>
> *Substantial*
>
> Protocols that may result in a major departure from the animal's usual state of health or well-being. These include: acute toxicity procedures where significant morbidity or death is an endpoint; some efficacy tests of anti-microbial agents and vaccines; major surgery; and some models of disease, where welfare may be seriously compromised. If it is expected that even one animal would suffer substantial effects, the procedure would merit a 'substantial' severity limit.

The Secretary of State will not license any procedure likely to cause severe pain or distress that cannot be alleviated [Section IO(2A)].

The use of severity limits and bands (relating to whole licensed projects, as also described in the published Guidance) is currently being considered by the Animal Procedures Committee, who have been asked to see whether any changes might usefully be made.

Anti-social Behaviour Orders

Tom Cox: To ask the Secretary of State for The Home Department whether he intends to review the working of anti-social behaviour order legislation following the High Court decision in the case involving the press road crew; and if he will make a statement. [191964]

Ms Blears: We are committed to issuing further guidance on anti-social behaviour orders (ASBOs) following the judgement in the Stanley v. London Borough of Brent/Metropolitan Police Judicial Review. We are also looking into ending automatic reporting restrictions for people under 18 who breach their ASBOs, as set out in our Strategic Plan published in July this year.

Tony Cunningham: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many antisocial behaviour orders have been issued in the Workington constituency. [191034]

Ms Blears *[holding answer 21 October 2004]:* Antisocial behaviour orders (ASBOs) have been available to the courts since 1 April 1999. From commencement, up to 31 March 2004 (latest available), the Home Office has been notified of four ASBOs issued where restrictions imposed are specific to the Allerdale borough council area, in which the constituency of Workington is located.

Mr. Clappison: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department (1) how many antisocial behaviour orders (ASBOs) have been breached *(a)* once, *(b)* twice and *(c)* on three or more occasions since the inception of ASBOs; and in how many cases breaches have been dealt with by way of (i) conditional discharge and (ii) a custodial sentence; [191514]

(2) how many breaches in antisocial behaviour orders (ASBOs) on *(a)* a second occasion and *(b)* a third or later occasion have been dealt with by way of (i) a conditional discharge, (ii) a community sentence other than a conditional discharge and (iii) a custodial sentence in each year since the inception of ASBOs. [191515]

Ms Blears: The information is not available in the form requested. However, of the 855 antisocial behaviour orders (ASBOs) notified to the Home Office as being issued between 1 June 2000 and 31 December 2002, 305 were breached, within the same period, on one or more than one occasion. As a result, 152 persons were given a custodial sentence, 93 received community sentences, and 60 received other sentences of which four received a conditional discharge. The sentence counted is the severest across all breaches.

Binge Drinking

Dr. Pugh: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what assessment the Department has made of the effectiveness of anti-binge drinking campaigns. [191549]

Ms Blears: The Alcohol Misuse Enforcement Campaign ran for eight consecutive weekends over the summer period. It was the first step in sending a strong signal that the irresponsible sale and consumption of alcohol will not be tolerated. The campaign provided a clear picture of where we need to focus our efforts and it made significant progress in supporting police and partners in making our streets safe. Data were captured in order to monitor the use of tactics and to establish a baseline for further work. The effectiveness of the campaign was also measured by feedback from participating areas and has been compiled in a 'Lessons Learned' document that will be published shortly.

Child Protection

Tom Cox: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what action is being taken to ensure that young children taken abroad are accounted for when their parents or guardians return to this country; and what checks are made. [193146]

Mr. Mullin: I have been asked to reply.

There are currently no routine checks in place to monitor the return of young children travelling overseas with their parents or guardians.

Community Support Officers

Simon Hughes: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what the figures from the evaluation of the Metropolitan Police Service's participation in the Community Support Officer detention power pilot were for *(a)* the average length of detentions, *(b)* the number of instances in which the 30 minute period was exceeded, *(c)* the number of instances in which the detainee had to be released because the time limit had been reached, *(d)* the outcome at the end of each detention and *(e)* the total number of times the power was used. [193888]

Ms Blears: The information is as follows:

(a) During the pilot, detentions were recorded in seven bands ranging from one to five minutes to over 30 minutes. The distribution was as follows:

Duration (minutes)	*number of detentions*	*percentage*
1–5	5	3.6
6–10	54	39.1
11–15	7	5.1
16–20	47	34.1
21–25	1	0.7
26–30	19	13.8
30	5	3.6
Total	138	100

(b) As shown in the table, the 30 minute period was exceeded in five cases.

(c) The detainees had to be released because the time limit was exceeded in two cases

(d) The outcomes at the end of each detention were as follows. There were 75 arrests by a police officer. 31 were released after the arrival of a police officer, 28 were released after giving a satisfactory name and address, two were released because the time limit had been reached and two absconded.

(e) The detention power was used 138 times during the pilot.

Correspondence

Tony Lloyd: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department when his Department will reply to the letters from the hon. Member for Manchester, Central dated *(a)* 6 May, regarding Mr. O. K. A., ref PO5195/4, *(b)* 2 July, regarding Mr. A. O. ref PO7752/4, *(c)* 19 July, regarding Mr. A. T. ref T1078617 and *(d)* 3 August, regarding Ms. F. O. H., ref PO8969/4. [191371]

Mr. Browne: The information is as follows.

(a) I replied to my hon. Friend's letter of 6 May on 1 November.

(b) I replied to my hon. Friend's letter of 2 July on 8 July.

(c) I wrote to my hon. Friend on 4 August. A duplicate letter has been sent on 14 October.

(d) My hon. Friend the Member for Slough (Fiona Mactaggart) replied to my hon. Friend's letter of 3 August on 11 October.

Council of Ministers

Sue Doughty: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will provide a Written Ministerial Statement outlining the key points on the agenda for each of the Council of Ministers' meetings at which his Department is represented in advance of each meeting. [188187]

Caroline Flint: This is a useful suggestion and Her Majesty's Government will consider it further, in line with its policy of keeping Parliament better informed on EU business.

CPS

Mrs. Curtis-Thomas: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department (1) how many and what percentage of trials in Merseyside courts resulted in a conviction in the last year for which figures are available; [146248]

(2) how many and what percentage of *(a)* domestic violence and *(b)* homophobic crime trials in Merseyside courts resulted in a conviction in the last year for which figures are available. [146249]

Paul Goggins: The following table gives the number of defendants who were proceeded against at magistrates' courts and found guilty at all courts for all offences in the Merseyside Police Force area, 2002:

Defendants proceeded against at magistrates' courts and found guilty at all courts for all offences in the Merseyside police force area 2002[1]

Proceeded against	57,072
Found guilty	44,126
Conviction rate[2] (percentage)	77

[1] These data are on the principal offence basis.

[2] Proportion of defendants proceeded against who were found guilty.

Offences involving domestic violence and homophobia are not identifiable on the Home Office Court Proceedings database as no specific statute covers such offences. Prosecutions brought might range from common assault to homicide depending on the level of violence, and as the circumstances of the offences for which prosecutions are brought are not collected centrally, offences involving domestic violence and homophobia cannot be distinguished from other offences within these categories.

Statistics for 2003 will be published on 18 November.

Crime

Mr. Flook: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many convictions there have been for antisocial behaviour in *(a)* Taunton and *(b)* Avon and Somerset Police Force area in each year since 2000. [193872]

Ms Blears: Information on convictions is available by offence, of which some may have involved antisocial behaviour. Such circumstances are not identified by the Home Office Court Proceedings database.

Mr. Jim Cunningham: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many *(a)* drug offences, *(b)* thefts from vehicles and *(c)* burglaries were recorded in the last 12 months in Coventry, South. [192981]

Ms Blears: The latest available information relates to 2003–04 and is for the Coventry Crime and Disorder Reduction Partnership (CDRP) area. There were 869 drug offences, 3,843 thefts from vehicles and 5,846 burglaries recorded by the police in the Coventry CDRP area.

Tom Cox: To ask the Secretary of State for The Home Department how many *(a)* violent crimes, *(b)* thefts from vehicles, *(c)* burglaries and *(d)* drug offences were recorded by the Metropolitan Police force for the last year for which figures are available. [191954]

Ms Blears: The information requested is given in the table.

Offences recorded by the Metropolitan Police—2003–04

	Number of offences
Violent crimes	237,028
Theft from vehicles	103,899
Burglaries	105,361
Drug offences	32,332

Mr. Laws: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what the level of *(a)* burglary, *(b)* violent crime and *(c)* car crime was in (i) East Somerset District and (ii) Avon and Somerset in each year from 1992–93; and if he will make a statement. [191310]

Ms Blears: The available information is given in the tables. Information is available for calendar years until 1997 and on a financial year basis thereafter. Information at the local level relates to the Somerset East Basic Command Unit and is available centrally only from 1999–2000. The statistics for burglary for this BCD are only available for burglary in a dwelling.

Table 1: Offences recorded by the police 1992 to 2001–02[1]

	Somerset East			*Avon and Somerset*		
	Burglary in a dwelling	*Violent crime*	*Vehicle crime*	*All burglary*	*Violent crime*	*Vehicle crime*
1992	n/a	n/a	n/a	43,163	7,057	64,117
1993	n/a	n/a	n/a	40,655	8,529	62,238
1994	n/a	n/a	n/a	37,397	9,597	56,828
1995	n/a	n/a	n/a	34,111	10,252	48,172
1996	n/a	n/a	n/a	35,151	11,868	47,470
1997	n/a	n/a	n/a	31,220	12,176	41,715
1998–99[2]	n/a	n/a	n/a	29,194	14,985	37,823
1999–00	1,308	1,705	3,323	27,804	16,061	34,411
2000–01	1,232	2,285	3,264	25,805	19,071	32,348
2001–02	1,427	2,760	4,232	32,865	23,670	40,791

n/a = Not available.

[1] The data in this table is prior to the introduction of the National Crime Recording Standard in April 2002. These figures are not directly comparable with those for later years.

[2] Expanded coverage and revised counting rules came into force from April 1998.

Table 2: Offences recorded by the police 2002-03 to 2003-04[1]

	Somerset East			Avon and Somerset		
	Burglary in a dwelling	*Violent crime*	*Vehicle crime*	*All burglary*	*Violent crime*	*Vehicle crime*
2002-03	1,737	3,098	4,257	30,182	25,816	36,249
2003-04	1,051	4,090	2,856	24,564	30,954	29,008

[1] The data in this table takes account of the introduction of the National Crime Recording Standard in April 2002. These figures are not directly comparable with those for earlier years.

Hugh Bayley: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many *(a)* crimes, *(b)* burglaries, *(c)* thefts and *(d)* vehicle-related crimes were reported to the police in (i) Yorkshire and the Humber, (ii) North Yorkshire and (iii) City of York in (A) 1979, (B) 1997 and (C) the most recent year for which figures are available. [191230]

Ms Blears: The available information is given in the following tables. Figures for the City of York relate to the York Crime and Disorder Reduction Partnership (CDRP) area and are only available for 2003–04.

Offences recorded by the police in 1979

	Yorkshire and the Humber region	*North Yorkshire*	*York CDRP*
Total crimes	255,097	21,887	n/a
Burglaries	60,738	4,804	n/a
Thefts[1]	84,450	8,168	n/a
Vehicle-related crimes	50,918	3,805	n/a

n/a—Not available.

[1] Excluding vehicle-related crimes.

Offences recorded by the police in 1997

	Yorkshire and the Humber region	*North Yorkshire*	*York CDRP*
Total crimes	546,684	50,252	n/a
Burglaries	152,660	11,359	n/a
Thefts[1]	115,940	14,301	n/a
Vehicle-related crimes	132,701	11,721	n/a

n/a—Not available.

[1] Excluding vehicle-related crimes.

Offences recorded by the police in 2003–04[1]

	Yorkshire and the Humber region	*North Yorkshire*	*York CDRP*
Total crimes	680,467	71,473	29,347
Burglaries	121,175	11,062	4,529
Thefts[2]	142,606	19,890	8,377
Vehicle-related crimes	115,899	9,516	4,868

[1] The data in this table takes account of the introduction of the National Crime Recording Standard in April 2002. These figures are not directly comparable with those for earlier years.

[2] Excluding vehicle-related crimes.

Hugh Bayley: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what percentage of crimes reported to the police were cleared up in *(a)* Yorkshire and the Humber, *(b)* North Yorkshire and *(c)* City of York in (i) 1997 and (ii) the most recent year for which figures are available. [191231]

Ms Blears: The available information is given in the table. No information is currently available centrally for clear-ups for all offences in the York Crime and Disorder Reduction Partnership.

Percentage of offences cleared up by the police in 1997 and 2003–04

	1997[1]	*2003–04*[2]
Yorkshire and the Humber Region	26	21
North Yorkshire	26	28
York CDRP	n/a	n/a

n/a—Not available.

[1] Figures for offences cleared up are affected by changes to the detections counting rules in 1998–99 and the introduction of the National Crime Recording Standard in April 2002. The figures for the two years are therefore not directly comparable.

Hugh Bayley: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how much has been spent on CCTV in York since 1997. [191233]

Ms Blears: Since 1997, the Home Office has specifically provided the City of York with £228,000 for Close Circuit Television. This was as a result of Round Two of the Crime Reduction Programme.

Other years' crime reduction funding has been allocated directly to the local Crime and Disorder Reduction Partnership and Basic Command Unit in York to finance a variety of interventions, including CCTV. Information about the allocation of that funding is not held centrally.

Doorstep Selling and Cold Calling

Mr. Truswell: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what steps his Department is taking to combat doorstep crime; and if he will make a statement. [189740]

Ms Blears: The Home Office has been working since 2000 to help prevent distraction burglary—i.e. those cases where a falsehood, trick or distraction is used on an occupant of a dwelling to gain or try to gain access to the premises to commit burglary. Among other things, we have:

> issued good practice guidelines to those tackling the problem on a local level, including those who work with older people;
>
> funded pilot projects and disseminated the good practice that has emerged;
>
> produced and distributed videos and other publicity material aimed at informing older people about this crime and what they can do to reduce their chances of becoming victims;
>
> encouraged and, in certain areas, helped fund work in to improve the appearance and security of homes; and
>
> encouraged the sharing of intelligence between all the agencies involved.

Other doorstep crimes—such as those committed by rogue traders—often involve breaches of consumer laws that are the responsibility of the Department for Trade and Industry. We are working closely with them on tackling these crimes.

Drunk Driving

Tom Cox: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what proportion of breath tests taken in the Greater London area resulted in arrests for drunk driving during the last 12 months. [194135]

Caroline Flint: The number of arrests resulting from positive or refused breath tests are not collated centrally. However, 24 per cent. of screening breath tests carried out in 2002, in Greater London were positive or refused.

Statistics for 2003 will be available in the spring 2005.

Firearms

Paddy Tipping: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many accidental *(a)* fatalities and *(b)* injuries have been caused by licensed people using (i) shotguns and (ii) rifles in the field in each of the last 10 years for which figures are available. [163013]

Caroline Flint: No information is collated centrally in relation to accidents resulting from the use of shotguns and rifles in the field.

Internet (Material Seizure)

Mr. Allan: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what recent discussions he has had with US law enforcement agencies concerning the seizure of material from UK-based internet hosting providers; and if he will make a statement. [191627]

Caroline Flint: I can confirm that my right hon. Friend the Home Secretary has had no discussions in regard to the matter referred to in the question posed by the hon. Member. In the circumstances I do not therefore believe that it is necessary for me to make a statement.

Knife Crimes

Mr. Nigel Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many incidents involving knives and other bladed weapons were reported to the police in each year since 1997 for which figures are available; and if he will make a statement. [193040]

Ms Blears: This information is not collected centrally. The number of offences involving knives are not separated out in the recorded crime statistics. The Homicide Index holds details on the number of homicides where the apparent method of killing was the use of a sharp instrument. The available information from 1997–98 to 2002–03 is given in the table.

Number of homicides involving the use of a sharp instrument

	Number
1997–98	202
1998–99	202
1999–2000	213
2000–01	214
2001–02	262
2002–03	272

Louise-Ann Nel

Mr. Pickthall: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department when he will reply to the letter from the hon. Member for West Lancashire of *(a)* 20 April and *(b)* 18 May concerning Louise-Ann Nel (Home Office Refs E1000813/N1012865) [194806]

Mr. Browne: My hon. Friend the Member for Slough (Fiona Mactaggart) wrote to my hon. Friend on 26 October.

Mobile Phones

Janet Anderson: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what assessment he has made of the effectiveness of enforcement of the ban on the use of handheld mobile telephones while driving. [194824]

Caroline Flint: The new specific offence of using a hand-held phone while driving is intended essentially as a deterrent and to provide a simple, objective offence to enforce and prosecute which does not depend on judgements of degree of control or carelessness. The Association of Chief Police Officers have welcomed it as a straightforward method of dealing with this dangerous behaviour. The police will enforce the offence as operationally appropriate.

I understand that the Department for Transport is monitoring the use of mobile phones by drivers. The most recent survey carried out on weekdays in September 2004 found that the use of hand-held phones by car drivers had dropped by over 25 per cent. since September 2003.

Pedestrian Footways

Bob Spink: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department whether he intends to change the guidance he gives to the police in respect of cycling on pedestrian footways; and if he will make a statement. [193504]

Caroline Flint: Chief officers of police are best placed to assess the nature and cause of cycling offences locally and to decide the most appropriate response.

The Government do not condone irresponsible cycling and will continue to promote safe behaviour on bicycles. To help the police with enforcement we have made it possible for Community Support Officer (CSOs) appointed under the Police Reform Act 2002 to issue £30 fixed penalty notices for cycling inconsiderately or irresponsibly on pavements.

The cycling infrastructure and environment are currently under improvement as a result of our National Cycling Strategy. We expect this improvement to reduce the incentive to cycle on the pavement.

Police

Tom Cox: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what the average per capita spending on the Metropolitan Police force is in the current financial year. [190253]

Ms Blears: The budget requirement of the Metropolitan Police Authority in 2004–05 is £2,650 million. This includes the net revenue budget and spending for targeted programmes and for capital provision[1].The estimated population is 7.348 million[2].

Average per capita spending on the Metropolitan Police Service in 2004–05 is £361. Grant towards funding the expenditure is £2,132 million or £290 per head of population.

[1] Includes Crime Fighting Fund, Airwave, DNA Expansion Programme, Community Support Officer funding, London and South East Allowances, Free Travel, Basic Command Unit funding, Street Crime Initiative, Special Priority Payments, Counter Terrorism funding and capital provision. Forces may use revenue funding to support additional spending on capital.

[2] *Source:*

Mid 2002 population estimate—Office of the Deputy Prime Minister.

Mr. Amess: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what the cost of the police force in Southend was in each of the last five years; and what the performance indicators are for the force. [191134]

Ms Blears: The Chief Constable of Essex Police informs me that the expenditure of Southend Basic Command Unit (BCU) in each of the last five years is as follows:

	Expenditure (£ million)
1999–2000	10.3
2000–01	9.7
2001–02	10.3
2002–03	10.7
2003–04	11.5
2004–05[1]	12.0

[1] Estimate.

In addition, the Southend BCU benefits from use of central force facilities, including traffic policing and air support.

The Police Performance Monitoring Report for 2003–04, published in September 2004, shows performance for forces over six domains of policing responsibility. At BCU level, data are available for two of those domains: Reducing Crime and Investigating Crime.

The Reducing Crime domain measures the number of domestic burglaries, vehicle crimes and robberies per 1,000 population. Figures for the Southend BCD are:

Crime type	*Number of crimes (2003–04)*	*Crimes per 1,000 population (2003–04)*	*Change from 2002–03 (percentage)*
Domestic burglary	832	12	-23
Vehicle crime	2,254	14	+2
Robbery	408	3	+30

The Investigating Crime domain measures sanction detections and offences brought to justice (OBTJ) per recorded crime. OBTJ data are only available at force level, but detection data are available at BCU level. Detection rates (including administrative detections) for 2003–04 for the crime types listed above in the Southend BCU are given in the table.

Crime type	*Detections per crime (2003–04) (percentage)*
Domestic burglary	13
Vehicle crime	8
Robbery	20

Mr. Maples: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what the total spending by Warwickshire police *(a)* was in each of the last seven years and *(b)* is expected to be in 2004–05; how much in each case was spent by the force on pensions; and how much of the total expenditure in each case was funded from (i) central government and (ii) council tax. [191985]

Ms Blears *[holding answer 18 October 2004]*: The information is set out in the following table.

£ million

	Total government funding[2]	*Other*[3]	*Council Tax*	*Total Gross Revenue Expenditure*	*Net Expenditure on Pensions*
1997–98	41.6	2.8	9.3	53.7	7.1
1998–99	42.5	0.9	11.1	54.5	6.8
1999–2000	43.3	1.8	12.7	57.8	8.0
2000–01	46.3	0.7	14.1	60.9	8.4
2001–02	49.1	1.6	15.8	66.5	8.8
2002–03	50.3	1.1	19.0	70.4	7.9
2003–04	52.2	2.9	22.1	77.2	[illegible]
2004–05[1]	53.8	4.1	24.1	82.0	12.3

[1] 2004–05 estimates provided by Warwickshire police.

[2] Includes Principal Home Office police grant, ODPM Revenue Support Grant and National Non Domestic Rates, special grant, revenue for Airwave, Crime Fighting Fund, Rural Policing Grant, Loan Charges grant, and other smaller specific grants.

[3] Includes all other force income and movements in reserves.

Source:

Chartered Institute of Public Finance and Accountancy Police Statistics (Actuals 1997–98 to 2002–03 and Estimates 2003–04).

Prisons

Mrs. Helen Clark: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department (1) what fire safety advice is made available to prisons; and whether there are regional variations in the advice made available; [189682]

(2) what the outcome was of the recent independent management review of Prison Service fire safety advisors; and if he will make a statement on its implementation, with particular reference to costs; [189683]

(3) what the cost was of the independent management review of Prison Service fire safety advisors; [189684]

(4) what apparatus is available to members of the Prison Service to deal with fires. [189685]

Paul Goggins: Each establishment has a dedicated fire officer, who has attended relevant training. This person acts as a first line of advice to the Governor of the establishment. This structure is supported by the Prison Service Fire Safety Section in which experienced and appropriately qualified fire professionals are available to offer support and advice on policy. There are no regional variations as policy is generated from the centre thereby maintaining a consistent approach.

There has been no independent review of Prison Service fire advisors. All reviews have been commissioned on an in-house basis by the Prison Service and after careful consideration Fire Safety Section has been restructured and the new arrangements started on 4 October 2004. The cost of work undertaken in assessing the work of Fire Safety Section is not available because the revision was part of the Prison Service's overall Human Resource programme.

Within each establishment a range of fire fighting equipment is available for staff use, including fire reels, extinguishers, cell inundation points and use of short duration breathing apparatus.

Mrs. Gillan: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how much the Prison Service has spent defending equal pay employment tribunal cases in each year since 1997. [189864]

Paul Goggins: On 9 September 2004 the Prison Service had spent £1,034,741 since 1997 on equal pay tribunal cases.

Racist Attacks

Keith Vaz: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many racist *(a)* attacks and *(b)* threats police authorities have recorded in 2004. [193801]

Ms Blears: The available information relates 2003–04 and covers offences of racially or religiously aggravated less serious wounding and common assault. There were 4,840 recorded offences of racially or religiously aggravated less serious wounding and 4,017 offences of racially or religiously aggravated common assault. Information on racist threats is not collected centrally.

Retail Crime

Brian Cotter: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department (1) what action the Government is taking on retail crime; [191509]

(2) what assistance is given to retailers to help tackle retail crime; and how retailers can receive such assistance. [191527]

Ms Blears: The Government recognises the detrimental impact that crime can have on retailers, their staff and the communities they serve and is taking positive action to reduce it.

On 12 October 2004 I met with senior retailers and their trade associations to discuss the key issues faced by retailers and to seek their views on joint action to reduce retail crime. Actions coming out of this will build on the work already under way.

The Home Office has supported the work of the British Retail Consortium in developing retail crime reduction partnerships and is providing £899 of funding for them to set up the Action Against Business Crime (AABC) Group. This Group will provide a national network of business crime reduction partnerships in town and shopping centres across England and Wales. 100 new partnerships will be set up in addition to the 100 or so already established, who will be provided with a support network.

Recognising that a large proportion of retail crime is drug related, pilot outreach schemes have been set up, with £170,000 Home Office funding, in Brighton and Northampton to tackle the link between retail crime and drugs misuse.

We have recently completed the 'Small Retailers in Deprived Areas' initiative which provided £15 million of Government funding to the most vulnerable businesses to enable them to install security measures. Over 12,500 businesses benefited from the scheme which also included a training programme on crime reduction for retailers.

Advice on crime reduction information is available from the Home Office produced postcards 'Don't Discount Crime' and 'Putting Crime out of Business', both of which provide easily accessible crime reduction advice to small businesses. These are available on the Home Office website. The Health and Safety Executive has also produced specific advice on managing the risk of work related violence.

Retailers can obtain further specific advice and assistance on crime reduction from the Business Crime Reduction Advisers based in each of the Government Offices, the Home Office website and their trade associations.

From November 2004 the police will be able to issue fixed penalty notices for some cases of retail or commercial theft. This will ensure that more minor incidents of such theft are dealt with quickly and effectively and the £80 penalty will act as a strong deterrent for first time offenders.

John Mann: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department (1) how many fixed penalty notices for shoplifting a repeat offender receives before being taken to court; [190704]

(2) what guidance his Department has issued about the proposed move to fixed penalty notices for shoplifting with regard to repeat offenders. [190707]

Ms Blears *[holding answer 14 October 2004]:* Operational guidance on issuing fixed penalty notices for disorder, as provided for under section 6 of the Criminal Justice and Police Act 2001, was provided to the police for the pilots of penalty notices for disorder which commenced from August 2002.

10 new penalty offences were added to the scheme by Order 2004 number 2,540 made on 27 September. Theft is one of these offences. The operational guidance is now being revised and updated in consultation with the police, retail sector representatives and other stakeholders.

The amended guidance will provide advice on issuing fixed penalty notices for the new penalty offences coming into effect from 1 November 2004. The revised police operational guidance will be made available via the Home Office website for general access shortly, when it has been finalised.

The police operational guidance will advise that offenders who repeatedly shoplift will not be suitable for fixed penalty notice disposal.

John Mann: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department whether all fixed penalty notices for retail theft are made available to retail establishments when recruiting new personnel. [190705]

Ms Blears *[holding answer 14 October 2004]:* Retailers will be responsible for setting their own recruitment policies in respect of declaration of fixed penalty notices.

John Mann: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department under what circumstances a repeat offender for shop-lifting receiving two or more fixed penalty notices is neither fingerprinted nor photographed. [190706]

Ms Blears *[holding answer 14 October 2004]*: Theft is a recordable offence. The police have the power to take fingerprints and DNA on arrest for all recordable offences. These will be logged against the individual's name on the police national computer (PNC). It is expected that most cases of shoplifting will involve the person's arrest. The police will check on PNC for previous offending. If the person is identified as having already had fingerprints and DNA taken and entered on the databases they would not need to be taken again.

Where a person has not been identified as a previous offender and has not been arrested, police may seek the person's consent to provide an identifying fingerprint.

Operational guidance provided to the police advises that offenders who repeatedly shop lift will not be suitable for being dealt with by fixed penalty notice.

Mr. Blizzard: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many people were convicted of shoplifting in Waveney in *(a)* 2001, *(b)* 2002 and *(c)* 2003; and how many of these led to (i) a caution, (ii) probation and (iii) a custodial sentence. [189462]

Paul Goggins: The information contained in the table gives the number of persons cautioned and the number found guilty at all courts and those sentenced to a community rehabilitation order (formerly a probation order) or immediate custody for "stealing from shops and stalls" in the Suffolk police force area, 2001 and 2002.

The information collected centrally does not enable cases in the Waveney constituency to be identified.

Statistics for 2003 will be published in the autumn.

Number of persons cautioned, and the number found guilty and sentenced for "stealing from shops and stalls" at all courts, Suffolk police force area, 2001 and 2002[1]

	2001	*2002*
Cautioned	599	396
Found guilty	771	743
Sentenced	770	739
Of which:		
Community rehabilitation order[2]	94	88
Immediate custody	102	112

[1] These data are on the principal offence basis.

[2] Formerly a probation order.

Stop and Search

Mrs. Curtis-Thomas: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department whether the Association of Chief Police Officers has *(a)* reviewed and *(b)* revised its guidelines on stop and search procedures. [191322]

Ms Blears: The Association of Chief Police Officers (ACPO) last issued guidance on stop and search procedures in August 2001 (Manual of guidance on stop and search). They have no plans to revise or review this guidance but have contributed to the Recording of 'stops' Implementation Guide (issued by the Home Office in March 2004) and the 'Interim Guidance on Stop and Search' (issued by the Home Office, ACPO, and the APA in July 2004). They will also be a member of the Stop and Search Action Team Delivery Board that will deliver the Stop and Search Manual in 2005.

Mrs. Curtis-Thomas: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department with which groups he has had discussions regarding stop and search and arrest and detention powers. [191540]

Ms Blears: The Home Office launched the Stop and Search Action Team (SSAT) in July 2004 to ensure that the police use their powers of stop and search fairly and as effectively as possible. The SSAT are working with both police and community representatives to deliver their work programme.

The PACE Codes that govern arrest and detention powers are consulted on widely by the police service, authorities and community groups. This is then referred to the Home Affairs Select Committee and then onto Parliament for approval.

Violent Crime

Mr. Jim Cunningham: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many violent attacks against Asian men were recorded in each of the last five years, broken down by police force area. [192980]

Ms Blears *[holding answer 25 October 2004]*: This information is not collected centrally. It is not possible to identify the ethnicity of victims of violent attacks from the recorded crime statistics.

Tom Cox: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many reported cases of violence against women there have been in the Metropolitan police force area during the last 12 months. [193800]

Ms Blears: This information is not collected centrally. However, the Commissioner of Police of the Metropolis reports as follows:

Female victims of violence against the person recorded by the Metropolitan police: October 2003–September 2004

	Number
Murder	41
GBH	964
ABH	20,236
Common assault	42,742
Offensive weapon	331
Harassment	19,814
Other violence	5,833
Total	89,961

The British Crime Survey provides a measure of incidents of violence against women which includes those offences that are not reported to the police. Further information is available in chapter 5 of Home Office Statistical Bulletin 10/04 'Crime in England and Wales 2003/04'. A copy is available in the Library and it can also be accessed via the Home Office website.

Women Chief Constables

Tom Cox: To ask the Secretary of State for The Home Department how many women are chief constables in each of the policing divisions. [191955]

Ms Blears: Four women currently hold chief constable or equivalent posts in police forces in the United Kingdom.

CULTURE, MEDIA AND SPORT

Creative Partnerships Programme

Mr. Boris Johnson: To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport what contribution her Department has made to the additional £70 million funds allocated to the Creative Partnerships programme until 2006. [195402]

Estelle Morris: The Department allocated all of the additional £70 million for the delivery of the Creative Partnerships programme until 2006. This is enabling the programme to continue to support the existing 16 partnerships, and to expand to nine new areas this year and a further 11 areas in 2005. DfES has allocated an additional £2.5 million to the programme in 2004–05.

Mr. Boris Johnson: To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport which indices of multiple deprivation were used to select those areas included in *(a)* phase one, *(b)* phase two and *(c)* phase three of the Creative Partnerships programme. [195403]

Estelle Morris: The primary indices of deprivation used to select areas for inclusion in the first phase of Creative Partnerships were: the DETR Index of Multiple Deprivation 2000; the DfEE Free School Meal Index; and, the list of DETR Rural Development Areas. For phases two and three of the programme, the primary indices were the list of Neighbourhood Renewal Fund Areas and the Index of Multiple Deprivation 2000.

For all three phases of the programme, the regional offices of Arts Council England were permitted some flexibility in selecting areas, to take account of cultural and regional priorities, and the need for the programme to achieve a national spread.

Mr. Boris Johnson: To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport what plans she has to extend the Creative Partnerships programme beyond phase three areas. [195404]

Estelle Morris: There are currently no plans to extend Creative Partnerships beyond the 36 areas already directly involved in the programme. However, the Creative Partnerships team will continue to work nationally and locally with colleagues from other areas to spread the lessons being learned through the programme more widely.

National Lottery

Mr. Dobson: To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport what assessment her Department has made of the impact of more casinos on the *(a)* takings and *(b)* disbursements of the national lottery. [194114]

Mr. Caborn: The position remains as set out in paragraph 5.11 of "A safe bet for success", laid before Parliament as Cm 5397.

Social Exclusion (Lottery Funding)

Vera Baird: To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport what assessment she has made of the contribution that the lottery has made to combating social exclusion in the Tees Valley. [194580]

Estelle Morris *[holding answer 1 November 2004]*: Lottery distributors are required to take into account the need to reduce economic and social deprivation in making awards. It is not possible to identify the exact value of funding to the Tees Valley, or to identify the exact value of funding specifically to target social exclusion. Redcar has received a total of 234 awards amounting to £18,730,581 from the lottery.

Lottery funding has transformed the lives of thousands of people across the UK; it has raised over £16 billion for good causes and funded over 160,000 projects.

Tourism

Mr. Sanders: To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport what the growth rates in the tourism industry were in each of the last 10 years for which figures are available. [195224]

Mr. Caborn: Tourism industry growth rates are currently available on a consistent basis only since 2000, and these are shown in the table:

Tourism industry growth

	Gross value added (£ billion)	*Growth (%)*
2000	32.0	—
2001	31.5	-1.5
2002	32.2	2.1
2003	32.8	1.9

Source:

UK Tourism Satellite Accounts First Steps project, September 2004

Mr. Sanders: To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport what her estimate is of current growth rates in the tourism industry. [195250]

Mr. Caborn: The latest estimate for growth in the tourism industry is for 2002–03, and stood at 1.9 per cent. This estimate is from the UK Tourism Satellite Account First Steps Project, which was published in September 2004.

INTERNATIONAL DEVELOPMENT

Antiretroviral Drugs

Mr. Best: To ask the Secretary of State for International Development what plans the Government has to encourage the World Trade Organisation to change the TRIPS rules on antiretroviral drugs; and if he will make a statement. [195500]

Hilary Benn: On 30 August 2003 the World Trade Organisation (WTO) reached an agreement to enable countries with insufficient or no manufacturing capacities in the pharmaceutical sector to make effective use of the compulsory licensing provisions already present in the TRIPS Agreement. The decision which the WTO Members made should improve access to cheaper medicines, including antiretrovirals, for poor countries lacking production capacity.

Discussions continue in Geneva, with a view to turning the 30 August Decision into an amendment to the TRIPS Agreement itself. The UK Government would prefer to see a swift conclusion to these discussions and an amendment which faithfully reflects the agreement reached on 30 August. However, delay in agreeing an amendment to the TRIPS Agreement will not affect developing countries' ability to use the Decision.

Our view is that developing countries should be able to take full advantage of the flexibilities in the TRIPS Agreement—including compulsory licensing—as set out in the Doha Ministerial Declaration on TRIPS and Public Health.

CDC

Gregory Barker: To ask the Secretary of State for International Development if he will list firms liquidated by CDC/Actis Capital by *(a)* sector, *(b)* country, *(c)* original investment amount and *(d)* liquidation return amount since 1998. [193287]

Hilary Benn: The following table contains the information for companies put into liquidation since 2000. Earlier information cannot be obtained except at disproportionate cost.

			£ million	
Investment company	*Sector*	*Country*	*Original investment amount*	*Capital returned*
Adesemi Communications International Inc	Telecommunications	Tanzania	2.2	0.3
Afribrand Holdings Ltd.	Food manufacture	South Africa	5.2	0.0
Africarco Haulage Ltd.	Transport and logistics	Tanzania	0.8	0.7
Bonair Fashion Ltd.	Textiles	Mauritius	1.3	1.3
Enterprise Capital Fund	Venture capital fund	South Africa	3.3	1.3
Guyana Housing and Development Co Ltd.	Housing finance	Guyana	0.4	0.4
Guyana Mortgage Finance Co Ltd.	Housing finance	Guyana	1.7	1.7
Guyana State Corporation	Agribusiness	Guyana	0.5	0.5
Hala Spinning Ltd.	Textiles	Pakistan	1.6	1.6
Karimjee Agriculture Ltd.	Agribusiness	Tanzania	3.4	3.2
Langa National Brickworks (Pty) Ltd.	Brick manufacture	Swaziland	1.0	0.0
Mananga Management Centre	Agricultural training	Swaziland	0.9	0.9
MacGregor Property Pty Ltd.	Property	Papua New Guinea	2.5	1.8
Minaco Fabrics Ltd.	Textiles	Pakistan	2.5	1.1
Mubarik Dairies Ltd.	Agribusiness	Pakistan	0.1	0.0
Natex Holdings Ltd.	Textiles	Swaziland	16.7	3.6
Nusantara Investment Fund Ltd.	Venture capital fund	Indonesia	4.5	1.5
Shape Fabrics Ltd.	Textiles	Mauritius	0.3	0.0
Tropical Glass Co Ltd.	Glass manufacturing	Ghana	1.1	1.1
Woventex Ltd.	Textiles	Mauritius	1.4	0.0

Gregory Barker: To ask the Secretary of State for International Development what proportion of China Capital Partners Ltd. CDC has owned in each year since 1999; and if he will list its other investors by *(a)* amount and *(b)* proportion since 1999. [193320]

Hilary Benn: From 1999 to 2004, China Capital Partners Ltd. was owned 50 per cent. by CDC Group plc and 50 per cent. by Aviva plc. It is now owned 100 per cent. by Actis. The amount paid by Aviva for its investment in China Capital Partners is confidential to the parties involved.

China Capital Partners

Gregory Barker: To ask the Secretary of State for International Development if he will list China Capital Partners Ltd.'s investments by *(a)* sector, *(b)* location, *(c)* amount and *(d)* percentage of ownership. [193321]

Hilary Benn: The information *(a)* *(b)* and *(c)* is shown in the following table:

Investment company	*Sector*	*Location*	*Amount invested (US$ million)*
NorthPole	Manufacturing	China, Sri Lanka and Bangladesh	30.0
Mengniu Dairy	Dairy producer	Mongolia	7.5
Powercom	Telecoms	Shenzhen, Guangdong	12.0
China Wolfberry	Beverages	Shongwei, Zhonghing	10.0
China National Offshore Oil Company (CNOOC)	Minerals, oil and gas	Offshore China	25.0

(d) The stake in CNOOC has been sold. The other stakes are minority holdings. The exact percentages are commercially sensitive.

Climate Change

Paul Flynn: To ask the Secretary of State for International Development whether the UK's international development policies are assessed for their impact on climate change. [194270]

Hilary Benn: The goal of UK development assistance is poverty eradication and the achievement of the Millennium Development Goals. DFID supports developing countries in the planning and implementation of their development strategies, for example national poverty reduction plans, including responding to climate related risks. We also support multilateral work to support low carbon development.

DFID's environmental safeguard policies require all bilateral programmes to be screened for a range of environmental impacts, including climate change. The screening requirements are due for review in 2005 and we will be examining ways to improve our treatment of climate risks.

With respect to aid funds delivered through multilateral organisations, DFID is working with them to ensure that their environmental screening policies address climate change, and to raise awareness about tackling climate change proactively. Following the 2001 review of the World Bank's role in oil and gas extraction and mining (the Extractive Industries Review), we secured a commitment from the World Bank Group to increase investments in energy efficiency and renewable energy over the period 2005 to 2010. However, we consider the World Bank's target of doubling investment in energy efficiency and renewable energy too modest, and have called for further review in 2005.

The UK is committed to helping developing countries manage risks and adapt to impacts of climate change. DFID has issued preliminary guidance as part of an overall adaptation strategy. We plan to develop more detailed guidance in 2005, in partnership with the UN International Strategy for Disaster Reduction and the World Bank.

Ministers' Private Offices

Mr. Prisk: To ask the Secretary of State for International Development what the running costs of Ministers' private offices in his Department have been in each year since 1997. [191382]

Hilary Benn: It is difficult to separate out the running costs of Ministers' Private Offices from the total expenditure of DFID's Top Management Group, which includes the Permanent Secretary, the Directors General and their staff.

For the financial year 2003–04, the best estimate of Ministers' Private Office running cost expenditure is £1,149,559. This includes salary for Ministers and their staff (including the Parliamentary and Correspondence Units), travel and subsistence, training, subscriptions, post and telecommunications.

For previous years, I refer the hon. Member to the response I gave to the hon. Member for Arundel and South Downs (Mr. Flight) on the 17 July 2003, *Official Report*, column 573W. Figures from previous years are not directly comparable given revised budgeting procedures and for a short period in 2003–04 there was an additional Ministerial position and Private Office.

Palestinian Equity Fund

Linda Perham: To ask the Secretary of State for International Development if he will make a statement on his Department's policy on the Palestinian Equity Fund. [194822]

Hilary Benn: The Palestinian Equity Fund is a new scheme to provide small loans to Palestinian olive farmers to modernise the olive oil industry. DFID has considered very carefully proposals that we should fund this initiative. Small enterprise development and agriculture are not however focus areas for DFID as set out in our Country Assistance Plan for Palestinians 2004–06. We have advised the organisers of the fund of possible alternative sources of support.

Sustainable Energy (CHP Provisions) Order

Mr. Stunell: To ask the Secretary of State for International Development what measures his Department *(a)* has undertaken and *(b)* plans to undertake to comply with the Sustainable Energy (CHP Provisions) Order 2003. [194434]

Hilary Benn: DFID has commissioned a feasibility study for the use of Combined Heat and Power (CHP) generated electricity in our main London Building. We are awaiting the report from this study. Under the targets set out in the Framework for Sustainable Development for the Government Estate, Departments are required to source at least 15 per cent. of electricity from Good Quality Combined Heat and Power by 2010, but allowances will be made for those departments that already purchase 100 per cent. renewable electricity. In our case, 100 per cent. of the electricity used at this site is already generated from renewable sources, and since July 2004 this is also the case for our second main UK office at East Kilbride.

TRADE AND INDUSTRY

China

Tom Brake: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry how much Chinese investment there has been in the UK in each year since 1999. [194131]

Mr. Alexander: Since 1999, UK Trade and Investment has recorded the following number of inward investment projects from China in the UK. Figures for 1999–2000 to 2003–04 have been updated since the publication of annual reports that have been laid in the Libraries of the House in each financial year. These figures are based on information provided by companies at the time of the announcement of the decision to invest in the UK. These figures take no account of subsequent developments. There is no requirement to notify UKTI and so the figures include only those projects, where UKTIs Inward Investment Group and its regional partners were involved or which have come to their notice.

	Number of projects
1999–2000	0
2000–01	11
2001–02	18
2002–03	22
2003–04	23

Commercial Debts (Late Payment)

Bob Spink: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what recent representations she has received regarding late payment of commercial debts; and if she will make a statement. [193505]

Nigel Griffiths: I meet the key SME representative organisations regularly, and this issue is not among their top three concerns. However, the Government have always recognised that late payment of debts can have serious effects on the cash flow of smaller companies, which is why we had a manifesto commitment to introduce a Late Payment Act to allow small business to:

claim interest on late payment from other business or public bodies;

allow creditors to claim a fixed sum of compensation to cover debt recovery costs, should late payment happen.

The Government also established the Better Payment Practice Group whose website lists the payment record of companies.

Data Protection

Michael Fabricant: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what procedures are in place *(a)* to check the criminal records of civil servants in her Department and agencies responsible to her Department who have access to computer databases containing confidential information on the public and *(b)* to ensure that there can be no improper use of computer databases containing confidential information on the public; and if she will make a statement. [194599]

Ms Hewitt: The information is as follows:

(a) The DTI has a framework of personnel security controls that are applied to civil servants who, in the course of their work, have access to computer databases containing confidential information on the public; and

(b) all access to DTI systems and databases is authenticated and audited to prevent improper use and to keep a record of the actions of legitimate users.

East Midlands Development Agency

Mr. Greg Knight: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry how much the East Midlands Development Agency is spending on a radio competition to find the Greatest East Midlander of All Time; and under which of the Agency's aims and objectives the competition is being organised. [194497]

Jacqui Smith: I am advised by the East Midlands Development Agency (Emda) that they will spend £5,000 for a 4-week campaign to find the Greatest East Midlander. They will use the competition to showcase successful and famous East Midland's entrepreneurs to feed into their New Business New Life campaign, which aims to stimulate an enterprising culture in the region.

Energy Projections

Malcolm Bruce: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry when the revised updated energy projections will be published. [193825]

Mr. Mike O'Brien: Headline results from the updated projections, covering CO_2 emissions, have been made available as part of our announcements on Wednesday 27 October in relation to the UK's National Allocation Plan for the EU Emissions Trading Scheme. More detailed results of the central case projections will be published in November.

EU Committees

Angus Robertson: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry how many times during the Greek presidency of the EU Standing Committee on the approximation of the laws of the member states relating to machinery met; when and where these meetings took place; which UK Government expert was present at each meeting; what *(a)* technical and *(b)* financial issues were raised by the UK Government expert at each meeting; what recommendations the Committee produced during that period; what actions were (i) proposed and (ii) taken by the (A) EU and (B) UK Government as a result of the Committee's recommendations; and if she will make a statement. [194887]

Mr. Alexander: The mandate of the machinery Standing Committee is contained in Article 6.2 of the Machinery Directive 98/37/EC. The provisions of this Article have not yet been put into effect, so the Committee has never met.

Angus Robertson: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry how many times during the Greek presidency of the EU the Committee on the directives on names and labelling of textile products met; when and where these meetings took place; which UK Government expert was present at each meeting; what *(a)* technical and *(b)* financial issues were raised by the UK Government expert at each meeting; what recommendations the Committee produced during that period; what actions were (i) proposed and (ii) taken by the (A) EU and (B) UK Government as a result of the Committee's recommendations; and if she will make a statement. [194889]

Mr. Alexander: No meeting of the EU Committee on Directives on names and labelling of textile products took place during the Greek presidency.

EU Presidency (Greece)

Angus Robertson: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry how many times during the Greek presidency of the EU the Standing Committee for the approximation of the laws of the member states *(a)* relating to lifts and *(b)* concerning pressure equipment met; when and where each meeting took place; which UK Government expert was present at each meeting; what (i) technical and (ii) financial issues were raised by the UK Government expert at each meeting; what recommendations the Committee produced during that period; what actions were (A) proposed and (B) taken by (1) the EU and (2) the UK Government as a result of the Committee's recommendations; and if she will make a statement. [194346]

Ms Hewitt: The mandate of the lifts Standing Committee is contained in Article 6.3 of the Lifts Directive 95/16/EC. The Committee did not meet during the Greek presidency.

The mandate of the pressure equipment Standing Committee is contained in Article 7.2 of the Pressure Equipment Directive 97/23/EC. The provisions of this Article have not yet been put into effect, so the Committee has never met.

Export Credits Guarantee Department

Malcolm Bruce: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry if she will break down the Export Credits Guarantee Department's unrecovered claims on a debtor-by-debtor basis on guarantees issued since 1991. [192385]

Mr. Alexander: As my predecessor explained in his answer of 13 January 2004, *Official Report*, column 696W, it is not possible to provide unrecovered claims information on a debtor by debtor basis. To do so could prejudice negotiations ECGD is having or will have about recovering debt. However, I am able to supply the information you have requested on a market basis.

Market	*Unrecovered claims*
Algeria	30,133,495.16
Australia	7,952,684.73
Belgium	23,352,522.61
Cote D'Ivoire	14,604,414.00
Ghana	51,714,850.73
Indonesia	662,642,881.98
Kuwait	48,257.35
Mexico	1,272,839.45
Pakistan	6,832,438.05
Seychelles	1,042,876.69
Switzerland	27,503,646.86
Turkey	1,937,906.33
Zimbabwe	88,397,437.94
Dominica	1,355,281.31
Brazil	2,151,047.97
Canada	20,786,267.78
Colombia	1,294,028.97
Paraguay	17,430.03
Grand total	943,040,307.94

All amounts are in sterling as at 30 September 2004

Malcolm Bruce: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry on how many occasions since May the Export Credits Guarantee Department has used its new audit powers to audit customer books. [193169]

Mr. Alexander *[holding answer 25 October 2004]:* None. ECGD's programme of external compliance reviews is based on a sample of cases issued in prior years. Cases issued in 2004 containing new audit powers will become eligible for selection as part of the programme of reviews.

Fireworks

John Barrett: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what discussions he has had with Scottish Ministers regarding efforts to raise the public awareness of the new laws on firework misuse. [195158]

Mr. Sutcliffe: My Department has been working closely with the Scottish Executive not only on the substance of the new Fireworks Regulations 2004—but also on issues to do with publicity. The DTI is also running it annual Fireworks Safety Awareness Campaign which covers the whole of the UK. This year there is particular emphasis on changes to the law which the Fireworks Regulations 2004 introduced.

Gas Supplies

Mr. David Stewart: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what assessment she has made of when the UK will cease to be self-sufficient in gas supply. [195117]

Mr. Mike O'Brien: Our most recent assessment is that the UK may be a net importer of gas from 2005.

Glass Packaging Sector

Mr. Bill O'Brien: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what assistance her Department is offering to the glass container industry to develop new markets for glass containers; and if she will make a statement. [194722]

Jacqui Smith: The Government continues to provide assistance to manufacturing industry, which includes the glass container industry. I was able to see at first hand one such example of this support when I opened a new green glass furnace at Rexam Glass in July 2003. The plant had received substantial Regional Selective Assistance from my Department.

For companies looking for assistance to develop additional markets, UK Trade and Investment supports UK companies, in their efforts to identify potential new markets.

A recent scoping mission by UK Trade and Investment's Giftware Sector (which includes some of the glass container industry) has identified the top 10 key markets for the sector. Further information can be obtained from the UKT&I's website www.trade.uktradeinvest.gov.uk.

Imports

Tom Brake: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry which 40 countries made the greatest value of exports to the UK in each year from 2001 to 2004. [193725]

Mr. Alexander: According to information published by HM Customs and Excise, the top 40 sources of UK imports of goods, in each year from 2001 to 2003 and for January to August 2004 are as given in the following table. Comprehensive information on imports of services, by partner country, is not available.

Top 40 sources of UK imports of goods

Rank	*2001*	*2002*	*2003*	*January-August 2004*
1	USA	Germany	Germany	Germany
2	Germany	USA	USA	USA
3	France	France	France	France
4	Netherlands	Netherlands	Netherlands	Netherlands
5	Belgium	Belgium	Belgium	Belgium
6	Italy	Italy	Italy	Italy
7	Irish Republic	Irish Republic	Irish Republic	Irish Republic
8	Japan	Japan	China	China
9	Spain	Spain	Spain	Spain
10	Hong Kong	China	Japan	Japan
11	China	Hong Kong	Norway	Norway
12	Norway	Norway	Hong Kong	Hong Kong
13	Switzerland	Switzerland	Sweden	Sweden
14	Sweden	Sweden	Switzerland	Canada
15	Canada	Canada	Canada	Switzerland
16	South Africa	Denmark	South Africa	Singapore
17	Finland	South Korea	Denmark	Turkey
18	Taiwan	South Africa	Singapore	South Africa
19	South Korea	Finland	Turkey	Russia

Top 40 sources of UK imports of goods

Rank	2001	2002	2003	January-August 2004
20	Denmark	Taiwan	Austria	South Korea
21	Singapore	Turkey	Finland	Denmark
22	Russia	Austria	South Korea	Taiwan
23	Malaysia	Singapore	Russia	Austria
24	India	Russia	Taiwan	India
25	Austria	India	India	Finland
26	Australia	Malaysia	Portugal	Malaysia
27	Turkey	Australia	Malaysia	Portugal
28	Thailand	Portugal	Australia	Australia
29	Portugal	Thailand	Thailand	Poland
30	Brazil	Brazil	Poland	Thailand
31	Philippines	Poland	Brazil	Brazil
32	Poland	Czech Republic	Czech Republic	Hungary
33	Indonesia	Indonesia	Hungary	Czech Republic
34	Czech Republic	Botswana	Botswana	Saudi Arabia
35	Botswana	Philippines	Indonesia	Botswana
36	Saudi Arabia	Israel	Israel	Indonesia
37	Israel	Hungary	Dubai	Israel
38	Puerto Rico	Saudi Arabia	Saudi Arabia	Romania
39	Hungary	Puerto Rico	Philippines	Vietnam
40	Mexico	Greece	Romania	New Zealand

Manufacturing

Mr. Jim Cunningham: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry how many UK jobs are in manufacturing; and what percentage this represents. [192569]

Mr. Alexander *[holding answer 21 October 2004]*: I refer the hon. Member to the ONS Report of June 2004, a copy of which has been placed in both Libraries of the House.

Passport Applications (Postal Security)

John Cryer: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what security measures are in place within the Post Office and Royal Mail to prevent the theft of passport applications and accompanying documents. [194734]

Mr. Sutcliffe: Royal Mail Group regards maintaining the integrity of the mail as one of its top priorities. The company has its own dedicated security and investigations unit. A recent further review of its procedures and practices in the letters business has resulted in the implementation of additional measures to improve security, and the recruitment, vetting and training of staff.

For passport applications Post Office Ltd. recommend customers use its Check and Send service, available at selected Post Office branches, which checks the passport application form for common errors; sends the application form to the appropriate passport office; provides the applicant with a receipt; and provides the applicant with a phone number in order to track the progress of their application.

RDAs

Mr. Greg Knight: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry which regional development agencies in England have spent money on radio advertising in the last five years for which figures are available; and how much each agency has spent. [194496]

Jacqui Smith *[holding answer 28 October 2004]*: None of the regional development agencies have identified any radio advertising to promote the agency. Some agencies have contributed to campaigns or projects which have used radio advertising as part of their promotional activities.

Research and Development

Mr. Stephen O'Brien: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what the budget is for the grant for research and development for each year between 2004 to 2007. [193786]

Nigel Griffiths: The baseline budget for Grant for Research and Development between 2004 and 2007 is shown in the following table.

£ million

	Baseline budget
2004–05	27
2005–06	27
2006–07	27

In 2004–05 DTI has been able to increase the expenditure on Grant for Research and Development to £36 million.

Textiles

Sir Archy Kirkwood: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what estimate she has had made of the likely change in the level of textile imports in 2005. [193158]

Mr. Alexander: EU quota restrictions under the Multi-Fibre Arrangement (MFA) against WTO member countries will be removed on 1 January 2005. Given the large number of different factors involved in commercial buying decisions—such as price, quality, transport costs, proximity to market and speed of reaction to fashion changes, etc.—it is difficult to give an accurate forecast of the likely rise in imports. However a recent WTO study estimated that imports into the EU market will rise from 52.5 per cent. to 53.0 per cent. for textiles and from 48.5 per cent. to 51.0 per cent. for clothing. The higher increase for clothing imports reflects the fact that the clothing sector has more quota restrictions than the textiles sector.

Sir Archy Kirkwood: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what the value of exports of textiles *(a)* including clothing and *(b)* excluding clothing from (i) the UK and (ii) Scotland was over the last three years in (A) cash and (B) real terms. [193184]

Mr. Alexander: Available export figures are as follows:

	Current prices[1] (£ million)			*Constant prices[2] Index 2001 = 100*	
	Textiles and Clothing	*Of which: Textiles*	*Clothing*	*Textiles*	*Clothing*
UK					
2001	5,529	2,994	2,535	100	100
2002	5,368	2,855	2,512	95	96
2003	5,648	2,953	2,695	95	99

	Current prices[1] (£ million)			*Constant prices[2] Index 2001 = 100*	
	Textiles and Clothing	*Of which: Textiles*	*Clothing*	*Textiles*	*Clothing*
Scotland[3]					
2001	456	246	210	n/a	n/a
2002	406	224	181	n/a	n/a
2003	398	204	194	n/a	n/a

[1] *Source:*

HM Customs and Excise Regional Trade in Goods (Overseas Trade statistics basis).

[2] *Source:*

Office for National statistics Monthly Review of External Trade Statistics (Balance of Payments basis).

[3] Identified to traders in Scotland.

Note:

Standard International Trade Classification division 65, textile yarns & fabrics, and division 84, apparel & clothing accessories.

Vision Boards

Mr. Hoyle: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry (1) how many vision boards have been established in Lancashire; what area each vision board will cover; who will serve on each vision board; and who the chairperson of each board is; [193625]

(2) if she will make a statement on the role of vision boards. [193626]

Jacqui Smith: The North West Development Agency has established three vision boards in Lancashire, in Burnley, Lancaster and Preston. The aim is to promote leadership at a local level with a focus on private sector engagement. Membership details are available from the relevant local authorities.

Wind Turbines

Adam Price: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry how many 2MW wind turbines are situated in *(a)* the UK and *(b)* Wales; and how many wind turbines of all specifications are situated in the UK. [194508]

Mr. Mike O'Brien: The information is as follows.

(a) There are 74 x 2MW turbines in the UK

(b) There are 30 x 2MW offshore turbines in Wales (North Hoyle)

There are 1,180 wind turbines of all specifications situated in the UK.

DEFENCE

40 Commando RM

Mr. Flook: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence when 40 Commando of Royal Marines is due to return to Norton Manor Camp, Taunton. [193869]

Mr. Ingram: 40 Commando (Royal Marines) is due to complete its tour of duty in Iraq in January 2004, and will then return to Norton Manor Camp, Taunton.

Mr. Flook: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence how many troops of 40 Commando are in Iraq. [193870]

Mr. Ingram: About 500 members of 40 Commando (Royal Marines) are currently deployed in Iraq on Operation Telic.

Afghanistan

Sue Doughty: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what the monetary cost of the United Kingdom's contribution to NATO's missions in Afghanistan has been over the last 12 months; and if he will make a statement. [188067]

Mr. Ingram: The net additional costs of operations in Afghanistan in 2003–2004 were published in the Ministry of Defence's Annual Report and Accounts 2003–2004 and totalled £35.9 million. It is too early to provide a firm figure for the costs that are being incurred this financial year. We will ask the House to vote the necessary funds in Supplementary Estimates in due course.

Archive Files

Norman Baker: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence how many archive files have been destroyed this year. [194545]

Mr. Caplin *[holding answer 1 November 2004]:* Between 1 January and 26 October 2004, some 13,556 files from departmental archives have been destroyed under the normal departmental review process.

Norman Baker: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence on what date his Department discovered that archive files held in the basement of the old War Office building were contaminated with asbestos; on what date the committee responsible first met to discuss this; and if he will make a statement on the time which elapsed between the two events. [194546]

Mr. Caplin *[holding answer 1 November 2004]:* The presence of asbestos in the basement area of the Old War Office Building was confirmed in May 2003.

A decision was immediately made to safeguard the information contained on these files and during the period June to December 2003 the files were progressively packed to ensure they could be safely handled. At the same time it was possible to implement the decontamination of the affected area. Some 3,000 crates of affected files were transferred to a new location during May 2004. This work fell within the Department's Main Building Redevelopment project.

During this period, the Departmental Records Officer's (DRO's) staff were investigating options for the future handling of the potentially contaminated material. In August 2004, the DRO decided that this work should be overseen by a formal Project Board, including a member from The National Archives. This Board first met on 14 September 2004.

Norman Baker: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence whether it is his policy that the archive files found to be contaminated with asbestos will be rendered safe and made eligible for release in response to requests under the Freedom of Information Act 2000. [194547]

Mr. Caplin *[holding answer 1 November 2004]:* Yes.

Norman Baker: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence how many of his Department's files are classified as subject to temporary retention. [194548]

Mr. Caplin *[holding answer 1 November 2004]:* Eight collections of records are currently the subject of temporary retention in department on administrative grounds under Lord Chancellor's Instruments.

Army Boards of Inquiry

Mr. McNamara: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence (1) how many army boards of inquiry into non-combat deaths have been held in each of the past five years; [190267]

(2) what the average period of time between circumstances that required the establishment of an army board of inquiry and that inquiry being set up is in the past two year; [190268]

(3) in how many instances army Boards of Inquiry have been delayed by *(a)* ongoing police investigations, *(b)* civil legal proceedings, *(c)* criminal legal proceedings and *(d)* other circumstances in the past five years. [190269]

Mr. Ingram: This information is not held centrally and could be provided only at disproportionate cost. Arrangements are in hand to improve the central tracking of Boards of Inquiry within the Army and to identify and bear down on the cause of delay. Since June 2004 Boards of Inquiry into all unnatural deaths and serious injury must be convened within 48 hours of the incident taking place.

Correspondence

Mr. Swayne: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence, pursuant to the oral statement by the Minister for Veterans, on 15 September 2004, *Official Report*, column 467WH, regarding Mrs. Crowton, when he will write to the hon. Member for New Forest, West. [192109]

Mr. Caplin: I replied to the hon. Member on 1 November.

Defamation

Adam Price: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence whether members of the armed forces seeking to bring a defamation case against national newspapers in relation to allegations connected with their official duties are obliged to first seek permission from *(a)* Ministers and *(b)* officials before proceeding. [195302]

Mr. Ingram *[holding answer 1 November 2004]:* There is no requirement that would oblige members of the armed forces to first seek permission from Ministers or officials before bringing a defamation case against national newspapers.

Falcon Communications System

Mr. Martyn Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will make a statement on progress on the Army's Falcon tactical formation-level secure communications system. [193912]

Mr. Ingram: Competitive assessment phase contracts for Increment A of the Falcon programme were placed with BAE Systems and Marconi Selenia in January 2003. Proposals were received in March 2004 and are being evaluated. We expect to make a decision on the main investment phase around the turn of the year.

Harley Dingle Site

Mr. Roger Williams: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence (1) when his Department started using the Harley Dingle site for *(a)* the training of personnel and *(b)* the testing of weapons; and when each activity ceased; [190226]

(2) whether the Harley Dingle site was ever used by his Department as a testing ground for *(a)* armour piercing munition and *(b)* any munition containing depleted uranium. [193875]

Mr. Caplin: The Ministry of Defence has never owned the Harley Dingle site nor have we any record of the MOD's involvement in the testing of weapons, including armour piercing munition or any munition containing depleted uranium, at the site. No direct training of military personnel has been conducted at the site, although land belonging to the site has been traversed (with permission of the owners) during the course of low level military exercises for at least 10 years.

HMCS Chicoutimi

Mr. Robathan: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence on what date HMCS Chicoutimi was handed over to the Royal Canadian Navy; and whether problems were identified on the sea trials before docking at Campbell Town on 25 September. [191618]

Mr. Ingram *[holding answer 15 October 2004]:* HMCS Chicoutimi (ex HMS Upholder) was handed over to the Canadian Department of National Defence on 2 October 2004.

Sea trials of any vessel are intended to prove the performance of the vessel and identify any defects in systems and equipment. The trials conducted on HMCS Chicoutimi were in this respect no different from any other. At the time of the handover there were no known defects affecting ship safety.

HMS Royal Oak

Mr. Viggers: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence whether HM Government plans to designate of HMS Royal Oak as a war grave. [194805]

Mr. Ingram: The term "war grave" is reserved for those graves on land which come under the ambit of the Commonwealth War Graves Commission. The Ministry of Defence considers the wreck of HMS Royal Oak to be a military maritime grave. The Protection of Military Remains Act (PMRA) 1986 allows protection from unauthorised interference to be afforded to wrecks that were in military service when lost. Statutory Instrument 2002 No. 1761 designated HMS Royal Oak (among others) as a controlled site within the meaning of the Act.

Iraq

Adam Price: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence pursuant to the answer of 7 September 2004, *Official Report*, column 1176W, on Iraq, when the 11 October 2003 International Committee of the Red Cross working paper was passed to *(a)* UK service personnel and *(b)* officials of his Department. [189289]

Mr. Ingram *[holding answer 16 September 2004]:* The 11 October 2003 International Committee of the Red Cross working paper was passed to MND(SE) by the Americans in October 2003. Nothing in the report merited it being passed to officials in the UK, and we have no record of this being done at the time. A copy of the report was sent to officials in the UK in August 2004.

Mr. Rosindell: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will make a statement on the Public Accounts Committee's report on the quality and supply of kit for British forces in Iraq. [191662]

Mr. Ingram: The formal response to the Public Accounts Committee report on Operation Telic is due to be published on 11 November 2004. This response will address the Committee's recommendations and conclusions on the quality and supply of equipment for British forces in Iraq.

Mr. Steen: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence which category of reservists are being called up to serve in Iraq; what the criteria are for calling up particular reservists; how long they will be serving in Iraq; whether all the reservists being called up have the same status; and whether, after the completion of their Iraq tour, they are eligible to do another tour of Iraq on their return. [193955]

Mr. Caplin *[holding answer 26 October 2004]:* Members of the Volunteer Reserve, Regular Reserve and Sponsored Reserve have and continue to be mobilised to support operations in Iraq. A number of trades, the majority from the Army, are required. All reservists must meet the required medical standards and be suitably trained for the role they are to perform before they are accepted into full time service. Generally a tour in theatre will last seven months (some nine months in total if pre-deployment training and post operational leave is included), although some specialist reservists may serve a shorter term. Once mobilised they remain reservists, but have the same status and are treated exactly the same way as their regular counterparts. The amount of time a reservist can be mobilised is limited by statute. Therefore, whether an individual reservist may serve another tour in Iraq (or on any other operation) will be dependent on the length of their initial deployment.

Mr. Jim Cunningham: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence how many *(a)* British Army soldiers and *(b)* Royal Air Force airmen are involved in the Explosive Ordnance Disposal Unit in Iraq. [194167]

Mr. Ingram *[holding answer 1 November 2004]:* As at 24 October there were 70 members of the UK armed forces, 57 soldiers and 13 airmen, who make up the Explosive Ordnance Disposal units deployed on Operation Telic.

Ann Winterton: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what assessment he has made of the length of time it will take UK forces moving into the American sector of Iraq to become communication-compatible with US forces. [194386]

Mr. Ingram: Throughout their deployment to the North Babil province the Black Watch battlegroup will be able to communicate with US forces in the area.

Llew Smith: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what information he has received from *(a)* his United States counterpart and *(b)* the International Atomic Energy Agency on the disappearance in Iraq of 380 tons of special high explosives; and what threat assessment he has made of the danger posed to British forces in Iraq from this material, were it to be obtained by hostile forces. [194912]

Mr. Hoon: I was first informed of the disappearance of these high explosives on 25 October 2004, when a copy of a letter written by the Director General of the International Atomic Energy Agency was passed from the UN Secretary General to the President of the Security Council.

In terms of the threat to British forces, insurgents have acquired explosives from a number of sources. Given the amount of explosives that were already in Iraq, and the fact that the missing explosives seem to have been removed over a year ago, our overall threat assessment has not changed.

Medical Downgrading

Mr. Keetch: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence, how many *(a)* officers and *(b)* other ranks in each service were medically downgraded as unfit for front line duties at April 1 in each of the last five years; in how many cases (i) the downgrading was attributable to service and (ii) the injuries were (A) temporary and (B) permanent; and if he will make a statement. [183346]

Mr. Caplin *[pursuant to the reply, 19 October 2004, Official Report, c. 593W]:* I regret that part of the table contained some inaccuracies. The table details the revised footnote. Information on whether medical downgradings have been attributable to Service cannot be provided due to disproportionate cost.

UK regular forces medically downgraded

	July 2001			April 2002		
	Total	Permanent	Temporary	Total	Permanent	Temporary
Officers						
RN[1]	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a
RM[1]	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a
Army[2,3]	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a
RAF[4]	580	230	320	580	230	340

UK regular forces medically downgraded

	July 2001			April 2002		
	Total	*Permanent*	*Temporary*	*Total*	*Permanent*	*Temporary*
Other Ranks						
RN[1]	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a
RM[1]	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a
Army[2,3]	9,650	n/a	n/a	10,210	n/a	n/a
RAF[4]	3,360	690	2,660	3,390	740	2,650

	April 2003			April 2004		
	Total	*Permanent*	*Temporary*	*Total*	*Permanent*	*Temporary*
Officers						
RN[1]	280	30	250	290	40	250
RM[1]	20	—	10	20	—	20
Army[2,3]	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a
RAF[4]	610	220	390	630	230	400
Other Ranks						
RN[1]	2,190	260	1,930	2,480	300	2,180
RM[1]	560	200	360	720	200	520
Army[2,3]	11,990	n/a	n/a	12,530	n/a	n/a
RAF[4]	3,610	900	2,710	3,840	910	2,930

n/a = Denotes note available

— = notes zero or rounded zero

[1] Data for medically downgraded personnel within the Royal Navy and Royal Marines are not available before April 2003.

[2] Army Officer data are not available from April 2001 due to a coding error. This error has now been rectified and new data should be available from August 2004 (July position).

[3] The Army do not split medical downgradings by Permanent/Temporary.

[4] RAF totals include Officers and Other Ranks classed as "other".

Medical Staff

Mr. McNamara: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what the target complement of medical staff is at Catterick Barracks; how many of each type of medical staff are employed; and what the turnover of medical staff has been in the past five years. [183799]

Mr. Caplin: The table details the complement of staff at the resident units at Catterick Garrison as at 13 October 2004.

Whole-time equivalents

Post Title	*Rank/Grade*	*Complement*	*In post if different*
General Practitioner SMO	Lieutenant Colonel	2	—
General Practitioner Regimental Medical Officer	Lieutenant Colonel	1	—
	Major	3	—
	Captain	2	—
General Practitioner Civilian Medical Practitioner	CMP	5.75	3. 75 in post
Senior Nurse	G Grade	1	—
Nurse Practitioner	G Grade	1	—
Nurse	F Grade	2	—
	E Grade	19.5	18 in post
	D Grade	2	—
Combat Medical Technician	Staff Sergeant	1	—
	Sergeant	2	—
	Corporal/Lance Corporal	22	—
Regimental Medical Assistant	Sergeant	1	—
	Corporal	17	—
Consultant Psychiatrist	Lieutenant Colonel	1	—
	Squadron Leader	1	—
Psychiatrist	Lieutenant Colonel	1	—
Physiotherapist	Major	1	—
	Captain	2	—
	SNR1	9	—

Whole-time equivalents

Post Title	*Rank/Grade*	*Complement*	*In post if different*
Registered Mental Nurse Manager	Major	1	—
Registered Mental Nurse	Captain	1	—
	Sergeant	2	—
	Civilian	1	—
Community Psychiatric Nurse	Sergeant	1	—
	Corporal	1	—
Liaison Officer/Community Psychiatric Nurse	Civilian	1	—
Senior Dental Officer	Lieutenant Colonel	1	—
Principle Dental Officer	Colonel	1	—
Dental Officer	Lieutenant Colonel	1	—
	Major/Captain	4	—
Dental Support Specialist	Staff Sergeant	1	—
	Sergeant	3	—
	Lance Corporal	5	—
Civilian Dental Practitioner	CDP Band 2	1	—
	CDP	2	—
Dental Assistant	DA1	7	—
Dental Hygienist	Staff Sergeant	1	—
	Corporal	1	—
Pharmacist	D Grade	1	—
Pharmacy Technical	MT02	3	—
	MTO3	1.5	—
Social Worker	Civilian	1	—

Records relating to the turnover of medical staff over the past five years are not held centrally. Military staff turnover has been in accordance with normal service posting plots.

Meteor Jets

Mr. Wiggin: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence where the Meteor jets will be located when Llanbedr airfield is closed. [194619]

Mr. Caplin: The airworthy Meteor jet is owned by QinetiQ, the company operating activities at the Llanbedr site on behalf of the MoD. The aircraft has been relocated to Boscombe Down in anticipation of closure of the airfield at Llanbedr. At present its future is uncertain. The remaining Meteor, which is not airworthy, is owned by the MoD. A number of options for its disposal are being considered, including the possibility of placing it with an aviation related charity.

Rapid Deployment

Ann Winterton: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will list the infantry regiments available at short notice for deployment. [194385]

Mr. Ingram: I have assumed that the hon. Member is referring to infantry battalions currently available for short notice deployments. These are: 2nd Battalion The Princess of Wales's Royal Regiment; the 1st Battalion, The Queens Lancashire Regiment; 1st Battalion the Royal Gurkha Rifles; and the 2nd Battalion The Parachute Regiment.

This will shortly change to 2nd Battalion The Princess of Wales's Royal Regiment; 1st Battalion the Royal Highland Fusiliers; 1st Battalion the Royal Gurkha Rifles, and the 2nd Battalion The Parachute Regiment.

Royal Military Police

Mr. McNamara: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence how many investigations have been undertaken by the Royal Military Police Special Investigations Branch using the Home Office Large Major Enquiry System in each year since its acquisition; how many persons were prosecuted as a result of each investigation; and how many prosecutions resulted in convictions. [183342]

Mr. Caplin: The Home Office Large Major Enquiry System (HOLMES) has been used to assist in four investigations since its acquisition: one in 2000 and three in 2001. In one case five individuals were prosecuted but none was convicted. In another case one individual was successfully prosecuted.

Two further investigations are currently being pursued jointly between the SIB and the Ministry of Defence Police Headquarters in Wethersfield.

Service Non-public Funds

Mrs. Lait: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence (1) how many service non-public funds there are; and how much they are worth; [194464]

(2) what the estimated compliance cost to *(a)* service non-public funds and *(b)* the Department would be of their registration as charities under the draft Charities Bill. [194465]

Mr. Caplin: This information requested will take some time to collate. I will therefore write to the hon. Member and place a copy of my letter in the Library of the House.

Submarines

Mr. Gordon Prentice: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence (1) how many decommissioned submarines are *(a)* laid up and *(b)* being refurbished following their sale; [194394]

(2) whether decommissioned submarines are cannibalised for spare parts; and if he will make a statement. [194392]

Mr. Ingram: The only decommissioned submarines are nuclear powered and it is not the Department's policy to offer these up for sale. Any re-usable equipment is removed and where appropriate, is recycled for use on in-service submarines. The used fuel is removed from the Reactor Pressure Vessel for long-term storage at BNFL Sellafield, and the submarine containing the reactor compartment, where any remaining radioactive material remains, is stored safely afloat. There are currently eleven decommissioned and defuelled submarines stored in this way.

Temporary Staff

Dr. Julian Lewis: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence how many agency temporary staff have been working for his Department in each of the last five years, excluding those working for agencies for which no data is kept centrally. [195245]

Mr. Caplin *[holding answer 1 November 2004]:* This information is not held centrally and could be provided only at disproportionate cost.

CABINET OFFICE

Public Engagements

Dr. Julian Lewis: To ask the Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster pursuant to the answer of 25 October 2004, *Official Report*, column 1053W, on engagements, (1) what public engagements he fulfilled in the week beginning 18 October, in addition to the general ministerial responsibilities referred to in his answer to the hon. and learned Member for Harborough (Mr. Garnier) of 20 October 2004, *Official Report*, column 720W; [195674]

(2) if he will list his public engagements carried out in the week from 25 October. [195673]

Mr. Milburn: I refer the hon. Member to the answer I provided to the hon. and learned Member for Harborough (Mr. Garnier) on 20 October 2004, *Official Report*, column 720W. In addition, and from time to time, I meet individuals and organisations outside Government, including right hon. and hon. Members of Parliament, to discuss Government-related business.

FOREIGN AND COMMONWEALTH AFFAIRS

Argentina

Mr. Ancram: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what talks he had with his Argentine counterpart while at the United Nations in September; what was discussed; and what the result was. [195152]

Mr. Straw: I had a short meeting with Argentine Foreign Minister Bielsa during the United Nations General Assembly on 22 September. We discussed a variety of issues. I congratulated Foreign Minister Bielsa on Argentina's election to the UN Security Council. We agreed that the UK and Argentina should work together for the next two years on Security Council issues. We also discussed Falkland Island issues.

Cuba

Mr. Wiggin: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what research his Department has commissioned regarding human rights in Cuba; and what statistical information his Department has compiled regarding human rights violations. [186776]

Mr. Rammell: The UK closely monitors the human rights situation in Cuba through our Embassy in Havana. The Embassy has frequent contact with local human rights groups and with the peaceful opposition across Cuba. They keep track on human rights trends and political prisoners, and regularly report back to London. We also maintain dialogue with international NGOs who study Cuba.

The EU, through the local Presidency in Havana, also monitors the human rights situation and submits comprehensive reports to all member states. The local Presidency regularly seeks opportunities to raise human rights and individual cases of concern with the Cuban authorities.

UK policy toward Cuba is governed by the EU Common Position, which has respect for human rights and fundamental freedoms enshrined as its key principle. The Common Position is reviewed annually but, in view of the lack of progress, has stood unchanged since its adoption in 1996. The last review was on 15 June 2004.

Following a major crackdown on opposition in Cuba in March 2003 and the imprisonment of a further 75 peaceful opposition members, EU member states agreed unanimously to additional measures that reflected our human rights concerns. The Cuban response was to reject all EU development aid through official channels and to 'freeze' contact with EU Embassies in Havana. Six of the 75 prisoners have since been released, and we shall continue to evaluate the situation. We remain committed to dialogue and actively seek ways to engage in all areas; recent cooperation includes law enforcement, cultural links and development work.

Diego Garcia

Mr. Salmond: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs pursuant to his answer of 21 June, *Official Report*, column. 1221W, on which date the US Administration last gave an assurance that no prisoners are held or transported through Diego Garcia; whether this was a *(a)* written and *(b)* verbal assurance; and if he will make a statement. [187613]

Mr. Rammell: The US authorities have repeatedly given us verbal assurances, most recently in May 2004, that no prisoners have at any time passed in transit through Diego Garcia or its territorial waters or have disembarked there. The British Representative on Diego Garcia has confirmed this to be the case.

G8 Summit

Annabelle Ewing: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will list *(a)* businesses throughout Scotland and *(b)* non-governmental agencies with whom the Government are working in advance of the G8 summit. [195119]

Mr. Alexander: We are in touch with several hotels and transport operators in central Scotland, where delegates and media will stay. In due course we shall be in touch with other Scottish businesses about other requirements for the summit.

A variety of Government Departments with an interest in the summit are working with a large range of non-governmental organizations in advance of the summit. Not all of these contacts are just related to the G8, but they include: the 'Make Poverty History' coalition, the BOND British Overseas NGOs for Development network, and the British Overseas Aid Group.

Annabelle Ewing: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what arrangements are in place to ensure that businesses based in Perth and Kinross benefit from the holding of the G8 Summit in Gleneagles. [195121]

Mr. Alexander: The Foreign and Commonwealth Office will be awarding some contracts for the supply of services at the Summit. These will be awarded on a competitive basis and businesses in Perth and Kinross will be able to bid. There will also be sponsorship opportunities available, and the Scottish Executive is working with Perth and Kinross Council to identify these for local companies. In the short term, the other main commercial opportunities are likely to lie with spending by attendees (4,000 or more delegates and media will use hotels, restaurants and transport) and suppliers to the main contractors. Longer term economic benefits to Perth and Kinross are expected to arise from the increased international profile of the area and of Scotland in general.

Annabelle Ewing: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what related events the Government intend to hold *(a)* at and *(b)* in advance of the G8 Summit; and where. [195122]

Mr. Alexander: The G8 Summit is the principal event of the presidency. We plan other ministerial meetings too, including separate Foreign and Finance Ministers events in London.

In addition, there will be a programme of consultation events with civil society. These meetings will take place both in G8 capitals (including London) and in other parts of the UK. A G8-related climate change science conference will take place in Exeter.

Annabelle Ewing: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what plans the Government have to compensate businesses and individuals in Perth and Kinross who suffer loss as a direct result of the holding of the G8 Summit in Gleneagles. [195123]

Mr. Alexander: The decision to hold the G8 Summit in Scotland has been warmly welcomed by the Scottish Executive. The Summit will be an excellent opportunity for the promotion of Scotland as a world-class destination for business, leisure and study. And it is expected to bring significant benefits to Scotland and in particular the areas close to the Summit, in the lead up to, during and in the long-term as a result of greater media exposure and visitors.

The UK Government, working alongside the Scottish Executive, are committed to ensuring that the Summit at Gleneagles and the surrounding area is safe and secure. The policing of the event, as a devolved responsibility, is the responsibility of the Scottish Executive.

Some people living in the vicinity of the Gleneagles Hotel have expressed some concerns over possible loss as a result of the Summit. The Foreign and Commonwealth Office and Scottish Executive are jointly exploring the issues. We expect the position to be clarified well before the Summit in July 2005.

Annabelle Ewing: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what assessment has been made of the environmental impact of the 2005 G8 Summit on Perth and Kinross. [195258]

Mr. Alexander: My right hon. Friend the Prime Minister has announced that the two priorities for the UK's G8 presidency in 2005 will be Africa and Climate Change. He has said that Climate Change represents the world's greatest environmental challenge.

We are taking environmental impacts into account during our planning for the Gleneagles Summit and considering how to offset carbon that is unavoidably generated by it.

Annabelle Ewing: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what assistance is being provided by the Scottish Executive to his Department in connection with the *(a)* identification and *(b)* facilitation of access to local businesses and organisations for the sourcing of local products and services (i) in preparation for and (ii) during the G8 Summit in Gleneagles. [195259]

Mr. Alexander: We are working closely with the Scottish Executive and its Agencies on procurement for the G8 Summit. The Executive is helping us identify Scottish suppliers and is helping to ensure that Scottish companies are aware of the procurement opportunities.

Guantanamo Bay

Keith Vaz: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs when he last discussed British prisoners at Guantanamo Bay with his US counterpart; and what was discussed. [194897]

Mr. Mullin: My right hon. Friend the Foreign Secretary has frequent contact with his US counterpart on a wide range of issues, including Guantanamo Bay.

The Government's position has been that the British detainees should either be tried fairly in accordance with international standards or they should be returned to the UK. In the absence of the prospect of a fair trial in accordance with international standards, we requested that the nine British detainees be returned to the UK. Five returned in March. Following a visit by officials to Washington in May, my right hon. Friend the Prime Minister repeated our request that the remaining four detainees be returned to the UK. We continue to work to resolve their situation.

We are also continuing to pursue actively with the US authorities our outstanding welfare concerns.

International Atomic Energy Agency

Mr. Ancram: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs how many UK nationals are working with the International Atomic Energy Agency; where they are posted; and how many have recently worked in Iran. [195149]

Mr. Straw: Staff are employed at the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA) on an individual and not a national basis. The Government cannot, therefore, maintain its own records of UK nationals employed at the IAEA.

According to the IAEA Secretariat, as of 29 October 2004, 73 UK Nationals were employed in professional positions at the IAEA. The overwhelming majority of these were employed at the Agency's Headquarters in Vienna; four were posted at the Agency's laboratory in Seibersdorf, Austria and one at the IAEA Marine Environment Laboratory in Monaco.

IAEA staff travel on short term missions for a variety of purposes related to the IAEA's functions. It is not the practice of the IAEA to release information on who travels on such missions.

Mauritius/Chagos Islands

Mr. Salmond: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs on what date the European Convention on Human Rights was applied to Mauritius and the Chagos Islands; and if he will make a statement. [187610]

Mr. Rammell: The European Convention on Human Rights was extended to Mauritius, together with a number of other territories for whose international relations the United Kingdom Government was then responsible, on 23 October 1953. It ceased to apply to Mauritius when that country became independent on 12 March 1968. It has not been extended to the British Indian Ocean Territory, which has no settled population.

Russian Espionage

Tom Brake: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs (1) what recent discussions he has held with the Russian Government on spying in the UK by Russians; [194796]

(2) what recent representations he has made to the Russian Government about spying in the UK by Russians. [194797]

Mr. Straw: We have a regular dialogue with the Russian Government on a number of operational intelligence issues. However, it is the Government's well-established practice under exemptions l(a) and l(b) of Part 2 of the Code of Practice on Access to Government Information not to comment on the detail of bilateral exchanges on security and intelligence matters, or on allegations of espionage activity.

Somalia

Mr. Martyn Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what assessment he has made of progress in the peace building framework and role of the United Nations in Somalia. [193916]

Mr. Mullin: The UN Secretary General, like the European Union, has welcomed the election of Abdullahi Yusuf as the transitional President of Somalia. We regard this as an important step towards the restoration of peace and stability in Somalia and look forward to the formation of a transitional federal Government in the near future.

The UN is already active in Somalia and is planning to expand its role once there is a Government. I met Abdullahi Yusuf in Nairobi on 20 October.

Sudan

Angus Robertson: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what assessment his Department has made of the reported bombing in the Allaiet area in eastern Darfur; and if he will make a statement. [194825]

Mr. Mullin: We have received reports that on 22 October the Sudan Liberation Movement tried unsuccessfully to retake Allaeit, the commercial capital of Berti Province, from the Government of Sudan's police force. We will continue to press the Government of Sudan and the rebel groups to stop violating the N'Djamena Ceasefire Agreement of 8 April, to which they are all signatories.

Angus Robertson: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what the terms of the ceasefire are in Darfur; when these terms were *(a)* proposed and *(b)* agreed to; by whom; what assessment his Department has made of the Sudanese Government's compliance with the ceasefire terms; and if he will make a statement. [194826]

Mr. Mullin: The terms of the ceasefire are detailed in the N'Djamena Ceasefire Agreement signed by the Government of Sudan, Sudan Liberation Movement and Justice and Equality Movement on 8 April. I have placed a copy in the Library of the House. Officials from the British Embassies in Khartoum and Addis Ababa are in regular contact with the African Union (AU) Mission which is responsible for monitoring the ceasefire. The AU have reported ceasefire violations on all sides, about which we remain extremely concerned. We are continuing to press all sides to respect the ceasefire.

Angus Robertson: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what discussions *(a)* he, *(b)* members of his Department, *(c)* other Members of the UK Government and *(d)* UK representatives in Rwanda have had with their (i) EU and (ii) African Union counterparts concerning the logistical assistance to be given to African Union ceasefire monitors and soldiers in their deployment to Darfur; and if he will make a statement. [194828]

Mr. Mullin: We are in regular contact with our EU and African Union (AU) partners concerning logistical assistance for the expanded AU mission. My right hon. Friend the Prime Minister has raised this with President Obasanjo, Chairman of the AU. Both my right hon. Friends the Foreign Secretary and the Secretary of State for International Development have raised this with their EU counterparts. I discussed the issue with the AU Commission Chair, Alpha Oumar Konare, on 26 October. Officials from the Foreign and Commonwealth Office and the Department for International Development in London, Brussels, Abuja, Khartoum, Kigali and Addis Ababa are also in regular contact with their opposite numbers. As the Prime Minister announced in Addis Ababa on 7 October, the UK will provide £12 million to support the expanded mission.

Angus Robertson: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what assessment his Department has made of the possible inclusion of security issues in the humanitarian protocol being negotiated by the Government of Sudan and rebel groups from Darfur; and if he will make a statement. [194829]

Mr. Mullin: We have urged the Government of Sudan and the Sudan Liberation Movement to sign and implement immediately the Abuja Humanitarian Protocol. In accordance with the agenda set by the African Union, security issues are being discussed separately. We have pressed all parties to engage fully at the highest level and to conclude a security agreement as soon as possible. A UK observer is currently at the peace talks in Abuja.

Uganda

Mr. Ancram: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what assistance the Government are providing to the Ugandan authorities in their efforts to combat the Lord's Resistance Army. [195150]

Mr. Straw: We are working actively with the Ugandan authorities to end the crisis in northern Uganda. We are the leading cash donor to the humanitarian operation. We are seeking to enhance the effectiveness of the Ugandan armed forces through our financing of a comprehensive defence review. And, since we doubt that the Lords Resistance Army threat can be overcome by purely military means, we have also supported Ugandan efforts to promote dialogue and reconciliation to help secure a comprehensive and sustainable end to this conflict.

Women's Rights (Africa)

Mr. Ancram: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs how many countries in Africa have adopted the Protocol on the Rights of Women; and whether the protocol will by addressed by the Africa Commission. [195148]

Mr. Straw: 31 countries in Africa have signed, and four ratified, the Protocol on the Rights of Women in Africa. This is a Protocol to the African Charter on Human and Peoples' Rights.

The Commission for Africa has identified gender and the rights of women and girls as an important issue for its work across a broad range of themes. The Commission is actively considering how Africa and the international community working together can best address these issues to maximum effect.

CONSTITUTIONAL AFFAIRS

Post Mortems

Mrs. Iris Robinson: To ask the Parliamentary Secretary, Department for Constitutional Affairs what the eligibility for compensation is of individuals in the Province whose deceased relatives underwent a coroner's post mortem without appropriate consent. [194640]

Mr. Leslie: The Coroner does not require the consent of the family members to direct that a pathologist should carry out a post-mortem to assist him in the determination of the cause of death. His authority is found in Section 28 of the Coroners Act (Northern Ireland) 1959 therefore the issue of compensation does not arise.

Civil Servants (Criminal Records)

Michael Fabricant: To ask the Parliamentary Secretary, Department for Constitutional Affairs what procedures are in place *(a)* to check the criminal records of civil servants in the Department and agencies responsible to the Department who have access to computer databases containing confidential information on the public and *(b)* to ensure that there can be no improper use of computer databases containing confidential information on the public; and if he will make a statement. [194607]

Mr. Lammy: The majority of computer databases held by my Department and the agencies responsible to my Department do not contain confidential information on the public. Names, addresses and in some cases dates of birth may be held, but this information is personal, not necessarily confidential. All staff working for my Department and its agencies have a character check carried out prior to commencing employment. This includes completion of a criminal records declaration. This does not involve checks with either the Criminal Records Bureau or the Police National Computer, as these checks are only carried out for staff who work in posts where individuals deal with children or vulnerable adults or where staff require national security clearance. All of the databases held by my Department and its agencies have access restricted to those who work with or need access to the information.

The Public Guardianship Office (PGO) hold confidential information on computer database. As a result, these databases have very restricted access and password and user accounts are only issued to staff who have undergone the character check upon appointment (as is standard) and provided proof of identity in the presence of their line manager. Further to this, the systems have comprehensive auditing facilities and all changes to personal data are added to an audit trail to which only the system administrator has access.

The Official Solicitor and Public Trustee Office (OSPT) hold confidential information on internal systems. As with all staff in my Department and its agencies, OSPT staff must undertake a character check prior to commencing employment. Thereafter, this information can only be viewed over the computer network in the building, as there is no remote access. There are differing levels of access control incorporated to ensure that staff can only view information relevant to their area of work.

More generally, existing staff are under an obligation to report any change of circumstances, including any criminal convictions to their line manager, who in turn should contact the Human Resources Directorate for advice and guidance. There are specific disciplinary procedures in place to deal with any misconduct that may impact on the reputation of my Department or the civil service as a whole and these are in accordance with the Civil Service Management Code.

In addition to this, all staff have been recently informed of my Department's procedures on IT misuse in an IT awareness guide. On logging on to systems, staff are required to confirm they have read and understood the Department's policy on misuse.

Court of Protection

Paul Holmes: To ask the Parliamentary Secretary, Department for Constitutional Affairs what checks are undertaken by the Court of Protection on an individual who has applied to be a receiver. [195233]

Mr. Leslie: All applicants are required to complete a receiver's declaration. The declaration is designed to make the applicant aware of the duties they will be undertaking as receiver, and is also used by the Court of Protection and Public Guardianship Office to assess the applicant's suitability to act as receiver. The declaration requires the applicant to confirm he has no outstanding judgment debts and is not an undischarged bankrupt.

It is open to the Court to request that a check on the applicant should be made with the Criminal Records Bureau.

Paul Holmes: To ask the Parliamentary Secretary, Department for Constitutional Affairs what checks are undertaken by the Court of Protection to ascertain whether the person for whom there is an application for receivership lacks the capacity to manage his or her financial affairs. [195234]

Mr. Leslie: All applications for receivership must be accompanied by a medical certificate, completed by a doctor, as the jurisdiction of the Court of Protection is established by such evidence. The medical certificate should specify the mental incapacity suffered and the reasons why the person is unable to manage his or her financial affairs.

Data Protection

Mrs. Spelman: To ask the Parliamentary Secretary, Department for Constitutional Affairs what estimate he has made of the annual cost of compliance with the Data Protection Act 1998 to local authorities. [194745]

Mr. Leslie: The Regulatory Impact Assessment prepared at the time of the introduction of the Data Protection Bill (now the Data Protection Act 1998) estimated the compliance costs to local authorities (including schools) at a non-recurring cost of £104 million, with on-going cost of £29 million per year.

Disclosure of Convictions

Mr. Frank Field: To ask the Parliamentary Secretary, Department for Constitutional Affairs in how many cases since 1991 judges have disclosed to juries the conviction for similar offences of a defendant. [195291]

Mr. Leslie: The information requested is not collected centrally and can be provided only at disproportionate cost.

Franchise (Non-UK Nationals)

Mrs. Spelman: To ask the Parliamentary Secretary, Department for Constitutional Affairs if he will make a statement on the Government's policy on allowing non-UK nationals to vote in *(a)* general elections and *(b)* referendums. [195260]

Mr. Leslie: The Representation of the People Act 1983 provides that, in addition to British citizens, qualifying Commonwealth citizens and citizens of the Republic of Ireland are entitled to vote in UK parliamentary elections. The position of Commonwealth and Irish citizens in the United Kingdom reflects the traditionally close ties that exist between our countries, and other non-UK nationals are not entitled to vote in UK parliamentary elections. The franchise for referendums is determined on an individual basis and is set out explicitly in the relevant dedicated enabling legislation.

Freedom of Information

Mrs. Spelman: To ask the Parliamentary Secretary, Department for Constitutional Affairs what estimate he has made of the annual cost to local authorities of Freedom of Information Act 2000 *(a)* compliance and *(b)* information requests. [194746]

Mr. Leslie: The cost of compliance will vary from authority to authority according to the efficiency of their procedures and the effectiveness of their records and information management. The volume and complexity of FOI requests will vary according to the functions of the authorities and the nature of their current business. The more contentious an authority's business the greater the volume of the requests it receives is likely to be.

The Department is working with the LGA to estimate the additional overall cost for local authorities. For local government, we will reimburse councils for any additional costs, in 2005–06 and beyond, falling on them as a result of the FOI Act.

NORTHERN IRELAND

Belfast Metropolitan Area Plan

Mr. Beggs: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland what the original target date was for completion of the Belfast Metropolitan Area Plan; if he will list subsequent target dates; what the current target completion date is; and if he will make a statement on the principal reasons for delays. [192546]

Angela Smith: When work commenced in early 2001, the original target date for completion to Draft stage was December 2002. As work progressed, the target date was revised on a number of occasions between 2003 and March 2004. The principal reasons for these revisions relate to the scale of the project, which has meant that each stage has taken longer than normally anticipated. I gave the current late autumn 2004 target date in May of this year and this is being adhered to.

The publication date for the Plan is presently being finalised and will be announced within the next few weeks for a date in late November 2004.

Cattle (Over 30 months)

Mr. Lidington: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland what estimate he has made of the risk to human health of allowing cattle aged over 30 months to re-enter the food chain in Northern Ireland. [193918]

Angela Smith: In May this year the Food Standards Agency revised its estimates of additional vCJD cases which might arise over the next five years if the over-30-month rule is replaced with BSE-testing. The figures which they arrived at suggest for Great Britain, a best estimate of the number of vCJD cases that would result directly from foodborne exposure during 2004–09 is 0.5, with a realistic worst case of 2.5 vCJD cases. Results for Northern Ireland were approximately of the order of one-tenth of those for Great Britain. The Food Standards Agency estimates and subsequent advice are currently being considered by Ministers.

Child Poverty

David Burnside: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland what targets are in place for the progressive reduction of child poverty in Northern Ireland. [190425]

Mr. Spellar: In The draft Priorities and Budget 2005–08 for Northern Ireland, which was launched by my hon. Friend the Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Northern Ireland (Mr. Pearson) on 12 October 2004, the Government have committed to reducing child poverty in Northern Ireland.

Supplementary targets are currently being consulted on as part of the development of an anti-poverty strategy for Northern Ireland. These are outlined in "Towards An Anti-Poverty Strategy, New TSN—The Way Forward, a Consultation Document".

Child Support Agency

Mr. Dodds: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland what the average length of time is for the Child Support Agency in Northern Ireland to process a case. [194612]

Mr. Spellar: The average length of time taken for the Northern Ireland Child Support Agency to process applications under the new scheme to assessment stage is 15 weeks. The average time to reach collection stage is 22 weeks. The figure of 22 weeks is inflated by the number of cases that cannot be progressed due to system defects.

Civic Forum

Mrs. Iris Robinson: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland how much has been spent on the Civic Forum in the last 12 months. [187807]

Mr. Paul Murphy: The Civic Forum ceased to operate on suspension of the NI Assembly in October 2002. Since then, some expenditure has arisen in maintaining accommodation for the Civic Forum. In addition, there was budgetary provision for Civic Forum staff who were redeployed on other duties but who, it was anticipated, would return to Civic Forum duties immediately on restoration. Those costs amounted to some £97,000 in the last 12 months (1 September 2003 to 31 August 2004).

Civil Service

Rev. Ian Paisley: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland how many working hours have been lost as a result of the recent strike action in the Northern Ireland Civil Service. [193599]

Mr. Pearson: During the period of strike action from 11 December 2003 to 14 September 2004 inclusive, it is estimated that approximately, 409,378 working hours were lost by the 11 Departments of the Northern Ireland Administration.

Council of Ministers

Sue Doughty: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland (1) if he will make a Written Ministerial Statement outlining the key points on the agenda for each of the Council of Ministers' meetings at which his Department is represented in advance of each meeting; [188198]

(2) if he will make a Written Ministerial Statement outlining for each meeting of the Council of Ministers at which his Department is represented as soon as is

practicable following that meeting *(a)* the key items of discussion, *(b)* the positions of the Government on those items, *(c)* the key positions taken by other member states that Ministers consider should be noted by hon. Members and *(d)* any preliminary discussion on the timing and the agenda of the following meeting. [188199]

Mr. Paul Murphy: I refer the hon. Member to the answer given by my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs on 13 September 2004, *Official Report*, column 1451W.

Delayed Discharge

Mrs. Iris Robinson: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland what the average duration of delayed discharge was at each hospital in the Province in each of the last five years. [192875]

Angela Smith: Figures for the average duration of delayed discharge for 2003–04 are detailed according to hospital in the following table. Figures for years previous to 2003–04 are not available. Analysis of these data would require a manual exercise and could be obtained only at disproportionate cost.

Hospital	*Average duration of delayed discharge 2003–04*
Belfast City hospital	31
Musgrave Park hospital	39
Forster Green	47
Ards hospital	22
Ulster hospital	23
Bangor	14
Royal Victoria hospital	25
RVH Elderly	50
Mater Infirmorum hospital	22
Lagan Valley hospital	27
Downe hospital	22
Robinson Memorial hospital	59
Dalriada	95
Causeway	37
Moyle hospital	45
Whiteabbey hospital	59
Mid-Ulster hospital	61
Antrim hospital	40
Braid Valley hospital	48
South Tyrone hospital	74
Loane house	139
Mullinure	41
Lurgan hospital	18
Craigavon Area hospital	18
Daisy Hill hospital	45
Altnagelvin hospital	27
Erne hospital	39
Tyrone County	30
Northern Ireland total	37

Notes:

Duration of delayed discharge is measured as the number of bed days lost, and is recorded in respect of episodes of delay, which occurred throughout the year.

Delayed discharges are recorded as a snapshot of the position at the end of each month. Episodes of delay are recorded only for those patients who were delayed at the last day of any month in the year.

Please note that the 2003–04 figures are provisional.

Mrs. Iris Robinson: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland how many bed days were lost as a result of delayed discharges at each hospital in the Province in each of the last five years. [192876]

Angela Smith: The number of bed days lost due to delayed discharges for the year 2003–04 is as follows. Corresponding data for previous years is not available, as analysis of these data would require a manual exercise and could be obtained only at disproportionate cost.

Hospital	*Number of bed days lost 2003–04*
Belfast City hospital	9,860
Musgrave Park hospital	3,734
Forster Green	327
Ards hospital	239
Ulster hospital	9,922
Bangor	155
Royal Victoria hospital	1,704
RVH Elderly	9,431
Mater Infirmorum hospital	1,531
Lagan Valley hospital	2,046
Downe hospital	938
Robinson Memorial hospital	1,291
Dalriada	2,376
Causeway	4,653
Moyle hospital	4,533
Whiteabbey hospital	9,057
Mid-Ulster hospital	4,193
Antrim hospital	3,163
Braid Valley hospital	8,651
South Tyrone hospital	3,314
Loane House	3,463
Mullinure	3,489
Lurgan hospital	2,275
Craigavon Area hospital	2,178
Daisy Hill hospital	4,255
Altnagelvin hospital	2,653
Erne hospital	1,246
Tyrone County	304
Northern Ireland total	100,981

Notes:

The number of bed days lost is recorded in respect of episodes of delay which occurred throughout the year.

Delayed discharges are recorded as a snapshot of the position at the end of each month. Episodes of delay are recorded only for those patients who were delayed at the last day of any month in the year.

Please note that the 2003–04 figures are provisional.

Departmental Accountancy Practice

Mr. Bacon: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland who the finance director of the office is; what accountancy qualifications the director holds; and on how many occasions there has been a qualified opinion on (i) the resource accounts and (ii) other accounts of the office in each of the last five years. [183422]

Mr. Paul Murphy: The information is as follows.

Part (1)

Director of resources (equivalent of finance director) for the Northern Ireland Office is Paul Priestly. He does not hold an accounting qualification, but the head of finance who works to the director of resources is a fellow member of the Chartered Institute of Management Accountants.

Part (2)

There has been a qualified opinion on the resource accounts on two occasions (2000–01 and 2001–02) in the past five years.

There has been no qualified opinion on other accounts of the department during the same period.

Departmental Spending

Mr. Lidington: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland how much his Department has spent on *(a)* hospitality and *(b)* taxi costs in (i) 1996–97 and (ii) the lastest year for which figures are available. [188766]

Mr. Paul Murphy: The Northern Ireland Office (including its agencies but excluding NDPBs as we do not have a breakdown of their costs) has spent the following on:

	£
(a) hospitality	
(i)1996–97	269,613
(ii)2003–04	319,741

	£
(b) taxis	
(i) 1996–97[1]	—
(ii)2003–04	19,213

[1] The amount is not available as at that time there was not a specific code for taxi expenditure.

Mr. Lidington: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland how much his Department has spent on *(a)* headhunters and recruitment consultants and *(b)* management consultants in (i) 1996–97 and (ii) the latest year for which figures are available. [188770]

Mr. Paul Murphy: The Northern Ireland Office (including its agencies but excluding NDPBs as we do not have a breakdown of their costs) has spent the following on:

	£
(a) headhunters and recruitment consultants	
(i) 1996–97	nil
(ii) 2003–04	4,944

	£
(b) management consultants	
(i) 1996–97	180,968
(ii) 2003–04	238,802

Mr. Lidington: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland how much has been spent by his Department on *(a)* advertising and *(b)* public relations consultants in (i) 1996–97 and (ii) the latest year for which figures are available. [188771]

Mr. Paul Murphy: The Northern Ireland Office (including its agencies but excluding NDPBs as I do not have a breakdown of their costs) has spent the following on:

	£
(a) advertising	
(i) 1996–97	480,160
(ii) 2003–04	558,797

	£
(b) public relations consultants	
(i) 1996–97	3,995
(ii) 2003–04	136,260

Disposable Nappies

Mrs. Iris Robinson: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland what estimate he has made of the number of disposable nappies used in the Province in the last year for which figures are available; and what the resultant cost of disposal was. [193704]

Angela Smith: There are no figures collected relating specifically to the use of disposable nappies annually in Northern Ireland. However, the Northern Ireland Household Waste Characterisation Study (2000) by NI2000 stated that disposable nappies made around 4 per cent. of the waste of the average Northern Ireland household. In 2003, a total of 901,136 tonnes of household waste was produced in Northern Ireland which, applying the 4 per cent. factor, implies a total of some 36,000 tonnes of disposable nappy waste. At 200 grammes per disposable nappy, this amounts to approximately 180 million such nappies per year.

The three sub-regional Waste Management Groups are due to submit their Annual Performance Reports for 2003, which will include costs of waste disposal per district council, by the end of November. Based on the composition of the waste stream, it will be possible to estimate a figure for the costs associated with nappy disposal.

Copies of the documents referred to will be placed in the Library, and I will write to the hon. Lady.

Equality Schemes

Peter Bottomley: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland if he will estimate the number of pages in each equality scheme required under section 75 of the Northern Ireland Act 1998. [183678]

Mr. Spellar: An equality scheme is a public statement of a public authority's commitment to fulfilling their statutory duties and sets out how they intend to fulfil these duties. The Equality Commission for Northern Ireland's "Guide to the Statutory Duties" lays out the key elements, as a minimum, which must be included in the equality scheme. Public authority's can, if they so wish, include additional information over and above this.

The number of pages in equality schemes varies, depending on the nature of the public authority's business, the detail included (over and above the minimum required by Equality Commission for Northern Ireland), the physical layout of the document and the language used.

The average number of pages contained in the equality schemes of the 11 Departments of the Northern Ireland Administration and the Northern Ireland Office is approximately 75 pages (including annexes).

Fixed Penalty Notices

Mr. Beggs: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland whether *(a)* English, *(b)* Scottish, *(c)* Irish and *(d)* Welsh driving licence holders can pay fixed penalty notices for traffic offences committed in Northern Ireland without having to be present in court. [192531]

Angela Smith: The Department of the Environment has introduced legislation for the mutual recognition of driving disqualifications and endorsable road traffic offences between Northern Ireland and Great Britain. The Road Traffic (Driving Disqualifications) (Northern Ireland) Order 2003, which came into operation on 11 October 2004, allows the holder of a Great Britain driving licence to pay a fixed penalty notice for a traffic offence without having to be present in court. The holder of a Republic of Ireland driving licence cannot avail of the fixed penalty procedure and offences must be processed through the court system.

Fuel Costs

Mr. Gregory Campbell: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland what assessment he has made of *(a)* the availability of cheaper fuel to people living close to the border with the Irish Republic and *(b)* the impact of the availability of such fuel on (i) deprivation levels and (ii) economic regeneration in border areas of Northern Ireland. [193640]

Mr. Spellar: No assessment has been made of this situation.

GP Prescribing

Mrs. Iris Robinson: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland (1) what the cost was in 2003 of the prescribing of mediboxes by each general practitioner surgery in the Province; [193759]

(2) what the cost was in 2003–04 of prescribing mediboxes on a weekly basis, broken down by general practitioner surgery in the Province. [194985]

Angela Smith: The information requested is not available. Mediboxes are not available on health service prescription but can, however, be privately prescribed, purchased, or provided in a variety of other ways.

Hazardous Waste

Lady Hermon: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland what definition he uses of *(a)* special waste and *(b)* hazardous waste. [193723]

Angela Smith: Special Waste is defined under the Special Waste Regulations (Northern Ireland) 1998.

Hazardous waste is defined under the Landfill Regulations (Northern Ireland) 2003 and the Pollution Prevention and Control Regulations (Northern Ireland) 2003 as "any waste as defined in Article 1(4) of Council Directive 91/689/EEC (the Hazardous Waste Directive)".

The Department intends to subsume the Special Waste Regulations into new Hazardous Waste Regulations which, together with a new List of Wastes Regulations, will have the effect of implementing the definition set out in the Hazardous Waste Directive. Once these Regulations are in force the term "special waste" will no longer be used.

Health Service Data (Access)

Mrs. Iris Robinson: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland what steps he is taking to increase access of patients and their next of kin to information within the Province's health service; and if he will make a statement. [194715]

Angela Smith: The Department and all health and social services bodies, including boards, trusts, agencies and councils, are preparing for the implementation of the Freedom of Information Act 2000, which comes fully into force from 1 January 2005. The Act covers information held by a public authority which includes those bodies listed above and information relating to the provision of services provided by general practitioners, dentists, opticians, optometrists and pharmacists. The Act gives everyone a general right of access to information held by a public authority. The Act also requires a response to a request for information, subject to exemptions set out in the Act, to be provided normally within 20 working days of the receipt of the request.

High Hedges

Lady Hermon: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland when his Department's consultation on nuisance high hedges in Northern Ireland commenced; when it is expected to be completed; which parties have been consulted; what steps he has taken to publicise this consultation; and if he will make a statement. [191834]

Angela Smith: The consultation paper on nuisance high hedges in Northern Ireland has not yet issued. It was my intention that this consultation paper should issue in the autumn 2004. However, in light of workload pressures in the Planning Service and the need to focus resources on managing our unprecedented volume of planning applications, I have agreed that the consultation paper can be rescheduled and expect it to issue in September 2005.

Lignite Mining

Rev. Ian Paisley: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland if he will make a statement on his policy on lignite mining. [193601]

Mr. Spellar: Government policy generally in relation to lignite is reflective of the fact that the extensive reserves are of strategic significance to Northern Ireland. A considerable amount of data has been compiled as a result of exploration activity over the past two decades and this has led the Department of Enterprise, Trade and Investment to suspend the issue of any further prospecting licences for lignite in the Ballymoney area. The position will be reviewed in three years.

In the event of a company lodging an application for a mining licence or lease, it will continue to be necessary for that company to obtain planning and other statutory approvals, dependant on the nature of the operation, before a licence or lease would be granted. Planning Policy in relation to lignite mining seeks to balance the economic benefits with environmental effects. Applications would therefore be required to be accompanied by an Environmental Statement which details the likely significant effects of the proposal and mitigation measures.

Memorial Fund

Mrs. Iris Robinson: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland which groups and individuals have received grants from the Northern Ireland Memorial Fund through its multiple programmes; and what amounts were received in each case. [193696]

Angela Smith: The Northern Ireland Memorial Fund (NIMF), an independent charity, was established in 1998 in response to a recommendation in Sir Kenneth Bloomfield's Report "We Will Remember Them". Its aim is to provide practical help and support to victims and survivors of the Northern Ireland troubles.

Since then Government has allocated over £7 million in funding to the NIMF which, to date has paid almost £6 million in grants to approximately 7,000 applicants through eight schemes. The breakdown of expenditure by scheme is as follows:

	£
Amputee Assessment Scheme	156,000
Back to School Scheme	411,000
Chronic Pain Management Scheme	190,000
Discretionary Hardship Scheme	71,000
Education and Training Scheme	517,000
Short Break Scheme	1,353,000
Small Grant Scheme	2,983,000
Wheelchair Assessment Scheme	148,000

The NIMF does not provide financial assistance to groups. Applications are accepted only from individuals. For reasons of client confidentiality the NIMF does not disclose details of individual awards.

MOT Testing

Lady Hermon: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland what plans he has to bring Northern Ireland into line with the rest of the United Kingdom in relation to MOT testing. [193384]

Angela Smith: I have no plans at present to change the way that MOT testing is carried out in Northern Ireland. Despite recent difficulties, the Driver and Vehicle Testing Agency has a good track record of delivering a consistent, objective and independent service, providing value for money, and meeting key targets. Alternative arrangements have been considered previously, but each time the conclusion has been that the existing system best serves the needs of the people of Northern Ireland.

Planning Service

Rev. Ian Paisley: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland how many planning applications were lodged with the Planning Service, broken down by region in Northern Ireland in *(a)* 2001–02 and *(b)* 2002–03; and how many cases in each region have not to date been determined by the Planning Service. [193600]

Angela Smith: The following table sets out, by council area, the number of valid planning applications received and the number that have not been determined to date for 2001–02 and 2002–03.

Council area	*2001–02*	*2002–03*	*Applications received 2001–02 which are still outstanding*	*Applications received 2002–03 which are still outstanding*
Antrim	825	1,064	6	15
Ards	1,052	1,247	4	41
Armagh	1,322	1,258	13	50
Ballymena	908	1,164	8	37
Ballymoney	568	641	1	12
Banbridge	963	1,325	2	12
Belfast	2,573	2,361	23	39
Carrickfergus	302	313	5	11
Castlereagh	576	572	6	8
Coleraine	1,023	1,030	4	49
Cookstown	737	845	7	12
Craigavon	973	1,147	4	29
Derry	932	951	15	31
Down	1,322	1,541	10	56
Dungannon	1,182	1,345	8	23
Fermanagh	1,292	1,564	10	32
Larne	362	369	2	7
Limavady	464	542	5	26
Lisburn	1,339	1,487	11	63
Magherafelt	973	1,118	13	47
Moyle	437	424	2	14
Newry and Mourne	2,066	2,368	25	85
Newtownabbey	662	688	5	10
North Down	758	758	1	17
Omagh	1,037	1,103	17	26
Strabane	633	686	8	18

Public Appointments

Mr. Gregory Campbell: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland how many *(a)* Protestant, *(b)* Roman Catholic and *(c)* Non-determined appointees there have been to (i) the Child Support Agency in Northern Ireland, (ii) general service grades of the Civil Service in Northern Ireland and (iii) the Northern Ireland Housing Executive in the last 12 months; and what percentage of appointees this represents in each case. [190816]

Mr. Pearson: The Northern Ireland Civil Service publishes its recruitment figures in an annual report.

The report for the period 1 April 2003 to 31 March 2004 has been prepared but has not yet been published. These are the most recent figures available.

Northern Ireland Civil Service

These are overall figures for NICS and include appointments to the Child Support Agency.

General service grades

	Permanent		Temporary	
	Number	*Percentage*	*Number*	*Percentage*
Protestant	1,037	4 5	462	39
Roman Catholic	1,240	5.4	694	5.9
Non-determined	22	1	25	2
Total	2,299		1,181	

Child Support Agency

These appointments, included in the previous table, are identified as appointments to the Child Support Agency.

General service grades

	Permanent		Temporary	
	Number	*Percentage*	*Number*	*Percentage*
Protestant	91	41	33	35
Roman Catholic	132	59	58	62
Non-determined	1	less than 1	2	2
Total	224		93	

Northern Ireland Housing Executive

General service grades

	Appointees	
	Number	*Percentage*
Protestant	170	38.9
Roman Catholic	223	51
Non-determined	44	10.1
Total	437	

Public Employees (Religion)

Mr. Gregory Campbell: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland what the religious breakdown is of the employees of the Probation Board for Northern Ireland. [188736]

Mr. Spellar: The breakdown of Probation Board for Northern Ireland employees by religious community at May 2004 was as follows:

	Number	*Percentage*
Protestant community	135	40.5
Roman Catholic community	150	45.0
Community not determined	48	14.5
Total	333	100

Public Housing Stock

Mr. Gregory Campbell: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland what the total amount of cash receipts has been from the sale of public housing stock in Northern Ireland over the last five years. [194787]

Mr. Spellar: The total amount of cash receipts from the sale of public housing stock in Northern Ireland over the last five years was:

	Net cash receipts[1] (£ million)
1999–2000	70,132
2000–01	95,339
2001–02	99,507
2002–03	142,905
2003–04	138,236

[1] Receipts net of legal expenses/fees.

Sexual Abuse

Mrs. Iris Robinson: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland what estimate he has made of the percentage of sexual abuse that is perpetrated by teenagers. [187439]

Mr. Spellar: The information is not available in the form requested. However, I can confirm that 14 per cent. (36) of the 249 persons convicted of sexual offences in Northern Ireland in 2002 were aged 19 and under.

Tourism

Rev. Ian Paisley: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland how many tourists visited Northern Ireland between April and September; what locations they visited; and how many overnight stays they made. [193603]

Mr. Spellar: A total of 419,000 visitors from outside the island of Ireland stayed 1,781,000 nights in Northern Ireland for the period April-June 2004[1].

A break down by location and how many overnights stays is not available for the above. However provided in the following table are the district council creas visited and total nights stayed by visitors who entered Northern Ireland directly, (via an Air or Seaport)[2].

[1] Figures have been extracted from the Northern Ireland Passenger Survey and the Survey of Overseas travellers (Failte Ireland). Data does not include trips taken by ROI residents to Northern Ireland in 2004 but does include those who entered via ROI. The data for July to September 2004 and ROI residents will be available in December 2004.

[2] Figures have been extracted from the Northern Ireland Passenger Survey (NITB) for January to June. The Survey of Overseas Traveller does not record locations visited in NI. Data does not include all visitors who entered via ROI and ROI residents, just those who entered Northern Ireland directly. The data for July to September 2004 and all visitors who entered via ROI and ROI residents will be available in December 2004. Some visitors stayed in more than one location so they will be counted more than once.

District council areas visited and total nights stayed of visitors who entered Northern Ireland directly April-June 2004.

District council area	*Total nights stayed*
Londonderry	24,400
Limavady	7,600
Coleraine	22,500
Ballymoney	2,800
Moyle	17,800
Larne	9,200
Ballymena	15,800
Magherafelt	4,500
Cookstown	5,600
Strabane	4,600
Omagh	9,200
Fermanagh	13,200
Dungannon	9,000
Craigavon	6,100
Armagh	4,900
Newry and Mourne	10,100
Banbridge	3,400
Down	14,600
Lisburn	19,800
Antrim	19,300
Newtownabbey	12,800
Carrickfergus	9,100
North Down	20,300
Newtownards	12,700
Castlereagh	4,200
Belfast	134,100
Total	417,600

Mr. Gregory Campbell: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland what steps are being taken through the Northern Ireland Tourist Board to protect and sponsor the specific Northern Ireland identity at its outlets and overseas promotional events. [194795]

Mr. Spellar: The Northern Ireland Tourist Board (NITB) is responsible for the direct marketing of Northern Ireland tourism within NI and the Republic of Ireland.

Each year the NITB and Tourism Ireland Ltd. (TIL), which has responsibility for overseas marketing, work together to produce marketing plans built around the NI tourism product and agree a programme of overseas promotional events.

In delivering these measures NITB staff work closely with TIL to ensure inter alia that the Northern Ireland identity and brand is promoted in an effective manner.

Travelling Community

Lady Hermon: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland what his latest estimate is of the size of the travelling community in Northern Ireland. [193559]

Mr. Pearson: The Northern Ireland Statistics and Research Agency (NISRA) produces statistics on self-reported ethnic group, the most comprehensive source being the 2001 Census of Population. The 2001 Census reported that 1,710 people belonged to the ethnic group 'Irish Traveller'.

Unlicensed Private Hire Vehicles

Mr. Gregory Campbell: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland how many people have been prosecuted for engaging in business involving vehicles not licensed for hire or reward over the last five years. [191889]

Angela Smith: During the period April 1999 to March 2004, 629 operators were successfully prosecuted for operating vehicles without being licensed to carry goods for hire or reward.

The Transport Act (Northern Ireland) 1967, which regulates the licensing of operators and vehicles, does not include an offence provision that would enable the prosecution of people who contract the services of unlicensed operators and vehicles.

Victim Support

Mr. McGrady: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland whether the review of the operation of Victim Support Northern Ireland has been completed; and if he will make a statement. [187827]

Mr. Spellar: Victim Support Northern Ireland (VSNI) is core funded by Government to provide support, practical help and information to victims of crime in Northern Ireland. In accordance with the conditions of grant, an external review of VSNI was completed by PA Consulting in May 2003.

A number of the recommendations have been completed and Government are monitoring closely the implementation of the remaining recommendations.

WORK AND PENSIONS

Benefits

Mr. Webb: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions if he will break down the 38 per cent. reduction in income support and jobseekers' allowance fraud since 1997 referred to in his Department's press release, Dutch Counterparts to Crack Down on Benefit Fraud, of 20 October, by category of benefit. [193923]

Mr. Pond: The 38 per cent. reduction of fraud in income support (working age) and jobseeker's allowance since 1997 breaks down as a 36 per cent. reduction in income support (working age) fraud and a 42 per cent. reduction in jobseeker's allowance fraud.

Paul Holmes: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions what actions are taken by his Department when a complaint is made about an appointee misusing the benefit income of the claimant. [195232]

Mr. Pond: All complaints made about an appointee misusing the benefit income of the customer they act for are investigated. Where there is evidence that the appointee is not acting in the best interests of the customer the appointee is interviewed and reminded of their duties and responsibilities. Where the appointee has failed to meet these responsibilities the Secretary of State can revoke the appointment.

John Barrett: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions how many benefit recipients have been contacted about conversion to direct payment; what percentage have chosen to open a post office card account; and what percentage have so far failed to select a direct payment option. [195155]

Mr. Pond: Key figures on the progress of conversion to direct payment are available in the Library updated every four weeks.

We are continuing to contact existing customers to invite them to provide account details. Those customers who have not yet provided their account details will be contacted again to discuss their account options, unless they have already advised the Department that they genuinely cannot open or manage an account.

Paul Holmes: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions what checks are undertaken by staff in his Department to ensure that the benefits paid to an appointee are used on behalf of the claimant. [195231]

Mr. Pond: Currently formal monitoring of appointeeships is not carried out. However, officers acting on behalf of the Secretary of State can revoke the authority of appointees where there are concerns that they are not acting in the interests of the claimant.

We are looking at our current appointee arrangements, including post-appointment monitoring. The proposed codes of practice will help to inform any future guidance in this area.

Tom Cox: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions how many people living in England and Wales receive industrial injury benefit as a result of suffering from asbestosis. [193973]

Jane Kennedy: Information is not available in the format requested. The available information is in the table.

Number of people in receipt of industrial injuries benefit for prescribed diseases D1 . D3. D8 and D9 as at March 2002

Prescribed disease	*England*	*Wales*
D1	7,700	2,200
D3	700	[1]100
D8	[1]100	[2]—
D9	2,000	[1]200

[1] Figures are subject to a high degree of sampling error and should only be used as a guide to the correct situation.

[2] Denotes nil or negligible.

Notes:

1. Figures are from a 10 per cent. sample.

2. Industrial injuries disablement benefit is currently payable for four prescribed diseases to people whose jobs involved working with asbestos or being exposed to asbestos after 4 July 1948. These are: D1—pneumoconiosis, D3—diffuse mesothelioma, D8—primary carcinoma of the lung with accompanying evidence of one or both (A) asbestos (B) unilateral or bilateral diffuse pleural thickening and D9—unilateral or bilateral diffuse pleural thickening.

3. D1 relates to all pneumoconiosis cases only some of which (an unknown proportion) are asbestos related. D3, D8 and D9 are all asbestos related cases.

Job Search (Assistance)

Mr. Laurence Robertson: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions what provision is made at Job Centres for people who have *(a)* poor literacy standards and *(b)* no information technology skills with respect to helping them find jobs; and if he will make a statement. [195503]

Jane Kennedy: The administration of Jobcentre Plus is a matter for the Chief Executive of Jobcentre Plus, David Anderson. He will write to the hon. Member.

Letter from David Anderson to Mr. Laurence Robertson, dated 2 November 2004:

The Secretary of State has asked me to reply to your question concerning the provision made at job centres for people who have poor literacy standards and no information technology skills with respect to helping them find jobs.

In April 2001 Jobcentre Plus introduced its strategy for identifying customers with literacy, numeracy and language needs and a suite of provision to help improve those skills. This involved Jobcentre Plus screening all jobseekers for literacy, numeracy and language needs at or before their six-month interview. Those identified with a potential need are offered referral to an independent contractor to assess their current skill levels and identify the most appropriate provision to help meet their needs.

For those assessed as requiring a small amount of assistance t improve their skills Jobcentre Plus offers a Short Intensive Basi Skills course. This course lasts for up to eight weeks, incorporate job search activities and aims to help participants achieve th National test at level 1.

For customers assessed as requiring more in-depth help t improve their skills, Basic Employability Training for customer aged 25 and over, and Full Time Education and Training for 1 to 24 year olds offer up to 26 weeks learning in a work contex tailored to individual need. These programmes can be extende for up to 52 weeks for participants requiring more help and bot aim to improve skills by at least one level and offer wor placements and job search activities.

For those customers with an identified need for training i Information Technology, and who are eligible for Work Base Learning for Adults, New Deal for Young People (NDYP) o New Deal for Adults aged 25 and over (ND25 plus), appropriat training can be provided through these programmes to enabl participants to be able to compete more effectively in the labou market. The training that is offered will differ according to th needs of each customer and is dependent on what is available i their local area.

Medical Referrals

Paul Holmes: To ask the Secretary of State for Wor and Pensions in how many cases the staff in hi Department have referred to a medical practitioner t establish whether a claimant lacked the capacity t manage his or her benefits in the last year for whic figures are available. [1952

Mr. Pond: The information is not available.

The Department does not normally require a repo by a qualified medical officer before granting a appointeeship. A visiting officer, experienced appointee work, will make an independent assessme of a customer's ability to manage his or her own affai based on Department guidelines. In cases where there doubt the opinion of a suitably qualified profession may be sought, for example, a social worke community psychiatric nurse or general practitioner.

Special Advisers

Matthew Taylor: To ask the Secretary of State f Work and Pensions how many unpaid special advise the Department has; what their names are; a which Government *(a)* bodies, *(b)* committees a *(c)* strategy groups each unpaid adviser (i) belongs t (ii) advises and (iii) works alongside. [1940

Alan Johnson: I refer the hon. Member to the answ given by my hon. Friend and Minister for the Cabi Office (Ruth Kelly) on 28 October 2004, volume 4 column 1380W.

Special advisors, whether paid or unpaid, a employed under the terms and conditions set out in t Model Contract for Special Advisers. Unpaid advis are appointed in accordance with the requirements paragraph 51 of the Ministerial Code.

Written Answers to Questions

Wednesday 3 November 2004

WALES

Fallen Stock

9. **Ann Winterton:** To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what recent discussions he has had with his colleagues in the National Assembly regarding the National Fallen Stock Collection Scheme. [194559]

Mr. Touhig: We have regular discussions with Assembly colleagues on agricultural issues and I am pleased to note that the National Fallen Stock Scheme will begin on 22 November.

Community Support Officers

10. **Mr. David:** To ask the Secretary of State for Wales how many police community support officers have been employed in Wales. [194560]

Mr. Hain: 130 at 30 September. An additional 40 are being recruited as part of the third round of Home Office funding.

Business Regulations

12. **Mr. Bellingham:** To ask the Secretary of State for Wales when he next expects to meet representatives of small business organisations in Wales to discuss business regulation. [194562]

Mr. Hain: I have regular meetings with representatives of the business community. I am looking forward to addressing an awards ceremony later this month to celebrate the achievement of Welsh small businesses.

Minimum Wage

13. **Ann Clwyd:** To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what discussions he has had with Cabinet colleagues on the impact in Wales of recent changes in the minimum wage. [194563]

Mr. Hain: Tens and thousands of low-paid workers stand to benefit from the increases to the national minimum wage in October, including for the first time young workers aged 16 and 17 who will receive £3 an hour.

Albert Owen: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what discussions he has had with his Cabinet colleagues on the impact in Wales of recent changes in the minimum wage. [194561]

Mr. Touhig: Tens of thousands of low-paid workers stand to benefit from the increases to the national minimum wage in October, including for the first time young workers aged 16 and 17 who will receive £3 an hour.

Recycling

15. **Paul Flynn:** To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what discussions he has had with the First Minister of the National Assembly for Wales regarding recycling. [194565]

Mr. Touhig: Regular ones. The Assembly's Waste Strategy sets escalating targets requiring at least 40 per cent. of municipal waste to be recycled or composted by 2010.

I know that Newport Wastesavers has a good record of developing successful recycling initiatives. Performance during their current trial of collecting recyclables and residual waste in alternate weeks has been most encouraging.

Railways

Mrs. Betty Williams: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what plans he has to discuss the railway service between London Euston and North Wales with the relevant train operating companies. [194564]

Mr. Touhig: I have no immediate plans to do so.

I do, however, welcome the recent introduction of the first direct train service between Llandudno and London since 1964.

PRIME MINISTER

Butler Report

Mr. Frank Field: To ask the Prime Minister what steps he has taken since the publication of the Butler Report to improve the machinery and operating procedures of government. [195695]

Mr. Gordon Prentice: To ask the Prime Minister whether he has *(a)* adopted and *(b)* implemented all the recommendations of the Butler report. [195282]

The Prime Minister: As I said in my statements to the House on 14 and 20 July, we fully accept the conclusions of the Butler Review. We have a detailed programme under way to take forward work into addressing those conclusions. Progress will be reported to the Intelligence and Security Committee.

TRANSPORT

Cheap Flights (EU)

Malcolm Bruce: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport if he will make a statement on measures taken by the EU to encourage cheaper flights between EU countries. [195292]

Charlotte Atkins: The European Community has been the driving force in the liberalisation of air services within Europe through the progressive establishment of the European single market in aviation during the late 1980s and 1990s. This has allowed European airlines to compete freely on intra-EU routes, offering services and setting fares according to their commercial judgement. The Government fully supports this process, as we believe that fair competition between air carriers in a liberalised market is the best guarantee of a good deal for air passengers. A good example of this is the rapid growth of the so-called "no-frills" sector, which would not have been possible without the development of the European single aviation market.

Colitis/Crohn's Disease

Mr. Goodman: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport when he intends to publish the research into the independent mobility needs of people with colitis and Crohn's disease to determine whether eligibility to the blue badge scheme should be extended; and if he will make a statement. [195213]

Charlotte Atkins *[holding answer 1 November 2004]*: The research we will be undertaking will consider the mobility needs of a number of groups of disabled people who are currently excluded from the scheme. I can confirm that this research will include the needs of those with colitis and Crohn's disease.

This is one of three research projects we are taking forward as a direct result of the review of the scheme. We are finalising the work specifications and intend to go out to tender later this year for all three. On this particular project we would expect to have results and recommendations in the course of next year.

Consultants

Mr. Maples: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport if he will list the contracts awarded by his Department to consultants in each of the last five years, stating in each case *(a)* the name of the consulting company, *(b)* the value of the contract and *(c)* the purpose for which the contract was awarded; and if he will make a statement. [191734]

Charlotte Atkins: The Department was formed in May 2002. Lists of the consultants used and the total value of orders raised against each in 2002–03 and 2003–04 have been placed in the Libraries of the House. The values of each individual contract and the purpose of the work in every case are not held centrally and could be obtained only at disproportionate cost.

Network Rail (Masts)

Mrs. Spelman: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what estimate the Government has made of the number of Network Rail telecommunications masts that Network Rail are planning to erect. [195255]

Mr. McNulty: Network Rail advises that as part of its programme to introduce the Global System for Mobile Communication for Railways it is planning to erect approximately 2,000 new telecommunication masts nationally by 2013.

Night Flights

Mrs. May: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what discussions *(a)* he and *(b)* his Department have held with counterparts overseas on night flight arrangements at airports; and if he will make a statement. [196034]

Charlotte Atkins: No discussions have been held recently between Ministers on an international level on the subject of night flight arrangements at airports. The subject is discussed regularly at international official-level meetings, most recently during the environmental debates at the 35th Assembly of the International Civil Aviation Organisation (27 September–8 October 2004). On that occasion, the trigger for discussion was a working paper by the Government of India entitled "Problems caused by night curfews in some parts of the world", in which it was argued that night curfews were a hindrance to market access and the growth of air transport operations and hence should be removed. The discussion concluded that

> "this matter should be further studied by the [ICAO] Council, resources permitting, particularly with a view to determining the scope and scale of the problem".

Rail Security

Patrick Mercer: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport if he will make a statement on security inspections undertaken across the British rail network. [194658]

Mr. McNulty: The Department for Transport's security inspectors regularly monitor the security at railway stations to ensure the requisite standards are being met.

Special Advisers

Matthew Taylor: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport how many unpaid special advisers the Department has; what their names are; and which Government *(a)* bodies, *(b)* committees and *(c)* strategy groups each unpaid adviser (i) belongs to, (ii) advises and (iii) works alongside. [194062]

Charlotte Atkins: For information relating to numbers and names of unpaid advisors I refer the hon. Member to the answer given by my right hon. Friend the Prime Minister on 22 July 2004, *Official Report*, columns 466–70W.

Special advisors, whether paid or unpaid, are employed under the terms and conditions set out in the model contract for special advisors. Unpaid advisors are appointed in accordance with the requirements of paragraph 51 of the Ministerial Code.

LEADER OF THE HOUSE

Deferred Divisions

Bob Spink: To ask the Leader of the House since its introduction, how many deferred divisions have been held in each parliamentary Session since they were introduced. [194916]

Mr. Hain: The number of deferred divisions held in each parliamentary Session since they were introduced is as follows:

	Number of deferred divisions
2000–01	37
2001–02	12
2002–03	15
2003–04	5 so far

TREASURY

Departmental Publications

Mr. Bellingham: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what the Department's target is for the interval between publication of *(a)* departmental announcements and documents and *(b)* material published by public bodies for which his Department has oversight and their posting online; and what the average interval was in the latest year for which figures are available. [195395]

Mr. Timms: No figures are currently available for the average interval in the latest year between the publication of a document or announcement by any of the Chancellor's departments and its posting on their website.

The Debt Management office has targets to publish the results of gilt auctions within 40 minutes, the results of Treasury bill tenders within 30 minutes and the results of ad hoc or other tenders within 15 minutes. In 2003–04 the intervals met these targets.

The Chancellor's other departments do not have interval targets. For scheduled releases, documents and announcements are in general uploaded at the same time as publication. For unscheduled releases, the departments and public bodies aim to upload documents and announcements as soon as possible after publication.

Independent Savings Accounts

Huw Irranca-Davies: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what plans he has to change the amount of tax-free savings it is possible to deposit in independent savings accounts. [195582]

Mr. Timms: The Government regularly keep under review incentives for saving, including Individual Savings Accounts (ISAs). Decisions on these issues are a matter for the Chancellor as part of the normal Budget process.

ENVIRONMENT, FOOD AND RURAL AFFAIRS

Consultants

Dr. Julian Lewis: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs how many consultancy firms or companies have been retained by the Department since June 2001; what the projects are for which each has been retained; and what the total is of the fees paid or incurred in each case. [193418]

Alun Michael: The information requested is not held centrally and cannot be provided at proportionate cost.

Farming

Andrew George: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs how much has been spent on the implementation of recommendations of the Curry Report. [190108]

Alun Michael: Implementation of recommendations in the report of the Policy Commission on the Future of Farming and Food, chaired by Sir Donald Curry, is being taken forward through the Government's Strategy for Sustainable Farming and Food (SSFF), which was launched in December 2002. As part of the 2002 Spending Review, the Government announced a sum of £500 million to implement the strategy. This is in addition to existing spending by Defra and other Government Departments which is already being used to deliver aspects of the strategy.

The additional funding provided covers a number of major aspects of the strategy. These include the new Environmental Stewardship Scheme (Entry Level and Higher Level) and the IT system to underpin all the England Rural Develop Programme (ERDP) schemes; improvements in livestock traceability and other major animal health and welfare measures; and new food chain initiatives such as the Food Chain Centre and English Farming and Food Partnerships.

The table shows the actual spending in 2003–04 and the broad breakdown over the remainder of the Spending Review period.

£ million

	2003–04	*2004–05*	*2005–06*	*Total*
Additional money to be made available via grant schemes	9	11	11	31
Investment into research and new technology	1.8	1.8	1.8	5.4
Development and implementation of new agri-environment and rural development schemes, including IT development costs	33	54	151	238
Development and implementation of new Whole Farm Approach to reduce bureaucracy and burden on farmers	2.7	7	8	17.7
IT systems to support livestock identification and tracing	3	65	68	136
Investment to reduce the likelihood and impact of an animal disease outbreak	21	49	45	115
Total				543.1

Delivery of the strategy in the English regions is being facilitated by many public body and industry representatives and these organisations are working together with both resource and funding support to deliver the vision set out in the strategy. They are making use of Government grants, industry support and the resources of Government Offices and Regional Development Agencies, as well as other Government bodies participating in regional steering groups. Existing support programmes, including the ERDP have been targeted to deliver SSFF regional action plans. Given the number of public and industry bodies contributing to regional delivery, it is not possible to quantify precisely the level of support being made available to fund delivery of the strategy.

Foxes

Peter Bottomley: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs between what ranges she estimates the fox population has fluctuated in the last five years; what estimate she has made of how many foxes died in each of those years, broken down by cause; and what estimate she has made of those figures in future years if hunting with hounds is ended. [189814]

Alun Michael: Lord Burns reported that the pre-breeding fox population of England and Wales was estimated to total some 217,000. He noted that this almost trebled during the breeding season, but that the pre-breeding population was roughly stable, suggesting that some 400,000 foxes died each year. He also noted that hunts were estimated to kill some 21,000 to 25,000 foxes annually, which equated to approximately 6 per cent. of fox deaths per year. This does not suggest that a ban on hunting will have a significant impact on overall fox numbers in future years. Defra does not itself make estimates of the fox population nor provide a year by year comparison.

Grey Squirrel

Diana Organ: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what estimate she has made of the cost of the destruction of trees in *(a)* community forests and *(b)* other planting schemes by the grey squirrel. [192516]

Mr. Bradshaw: No specific estimate has been made of the likely cost of grey squirrel damage to woodland planted under the community forest programme or any other support mechanism. However, it is accepted that grey squirrels can cause serious damage to woodlands.

New Deal

Dr. Julian Lewis: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs how many personnel the Department has recruited under the New Deal in each of the past five years. [194027]

Alun Michael: I refer the hon. Member to the answer given by the Minister of State for the Cabinet Office on 25 October 2004, *Official Report*, column 1052W.

INTERNATIONAL DEVELOPMENT

CDC

Gregory Barker: To ask the Secretary of State for International Development if he will list *(a)* current and *(b)* former CDC/Actis Capital import-export investments by (i) country, (ii) investment fund, (iii) amount and (iv) sector since 1997. [193323]

Hilary Benn: Neither CDC nor Actis has made investments in companies whose business is import-export.

Departmental Staff

Tim Loughton: To ask the Secretary of State for International Development how many people in his Department earn more than a whole-time equivalent salary of £57,485 per year. [195283]

Hilary Benn: DFID has 102 staff earning more than a whole-time equivalent salary of £57,485 per year.

Fossil Fuel Energy

Tom Brake: To ask the Secretary of State for International Development what the 10 highest-costing fossil fuel energy generation projects funded by his Department in 2003–04 were. [194760]

Hilary Benn: The only fossil fuel energy generation projects funded by DFID in 2003–04 were in Iraq, involving the provision of emergency diesel generators. These were carried out as part of the efforts to restore electricity supplies for essential services such as water supplies, sewage treatment and hospitals.

Iraq

Adam Price: To ask the Secretary of State for International Development what discussions he has had with counterparts in the US Administration on cutting off water supplies in Iraq. [192088]

Hilary Benn: I have had no such discussions.

Press Officers

Mr. Ruffley: To ask the Secretary of State for International Development how many press officers are employed in his Department; and how many were employed in each year since 1996–97. [195360]

Hilary Benn *[holding answer 1 November 2004]:* The number of press officers employed by the Department for International Development since 1996–97 is as follows:

	Number of press officers
1996–97	6
1997–98	6
1998–99	4
1999–2000	3.3
2000–01	4.5
2001–02	4
2002–03	5
2003–04	6
2004–05	6

The staff numbers for 1999–2000 and 2000–01 include personnel working part-time.

DEPUTY PRIME MINISTER

Council Tax Bands

Mrs. Spelman: To ask the Deputy Prime Minister how many households were in each council tax band in England in each year since 1997–98. [195249]

Mr. Raynsford: The information requested for all England is tabled as follows.

Thousand

As at March	*Band A*	*Band B*	*Band C*	*Band D*	*Band E*	*Band F*	*Band G*	*Band H*	*Total*
1998	5,530	4,048	4,513	3,068	1,885	987	718	111	20,860
1999	5,552	4,072	4,538	3,100	1,912	1,003	728	113	21,018
2000	5,565	4,093	4,562	3,133	1,940	1,021	739	115	21,168
2001	5,566	4,111	4,586	3,166	1,968	1,038	750	116	21,299
2002	5,562	4,131	4,614	3,200	1,998	1,054	760	118	21,437
2003	5,561	4,155	4,647	3,236	2,025	1,071	770	119	21,583
2004	5,568	4,184	4,683	3,276	2,050	1,084	111	121	21,742

Data Protection

Michael Fabricant: To ask the Deputy Prime Minister what procedures are in place *(a)* to check the criminal records of civil servants in his Department and agencies responsible to his Department who have access to computer databases containing confidential information on the public and *(b)* to ensure that there can be no improper use of computer databases containing confidential information on the public; and if he will make a statement. [194605]

Phil Hope: The Office of the Deputy Prime Minister and its agencies do not maintain databases that contain confidential information on members of the public, and staff thus do not have access to such databases.

The Office of the Deputy Prime Minister does nevertheless carry out character checks prior to unconditional offers of employment being made. It is a condition of employment for staff to report if they are convicted of a criminal offence or charged with an offence relating to their official position, and failure to do so may result in disciplinary action.

Government Offices for the Regions

Mr. Pickles: To ask the Deputy Prime Minister what role Government offices for the regions play in the planning process. [194330]

Keith Hill: The Government offices for the regions (GOs) are the primary vehicle through which a wide range of Government policies are delivered in the English regions. The GOs promote Government policies and programmes and use their influence to enable communities in their regions to become better places in which to live, through the effective alignment and delivery of national, regional and local priorities.

On planning, the GOs advise the First Secretary of State, my right hon. Friend the Deputy Prime Minister, on regional spatial strategies and local development documents; monitor and engage with local planning authorities to improve and maintain their performance and to ensure the authorities can meet their planning targets; advise whether planning applications should be called-in for ministerial determination; and decide on behalf of Ministers certain other planning cases which, under the Town and Country Planning Acts and other legislation, fall to the First Secretary of State, my right hon. Friend the Deputy Prime Minister to determine. More generally, they represent Ministers in dealings with regional partners, making links between planning and other programmes such as housing.

Housing

Mrs. Spelman: To ask the Deputy Prime Minister how many dwellings his Department plans to be constructed in England over the next 20 years. [195164]

Keith Hill: Existing Regional Spatial Strategies and the Mayor's London Plan provide for approximately 162,000 additional dwellings a year to be built in England over and above existing stock. The time period covered by each RSS varies and none of them specifically cover the next 20 years to 2024. The equivalent gross figure—which is not available, as the Regional Planning Bodies are required to provide net returns—would also include the number of reconstructions post demolition.

Neighbourhood Wardens

Ms Atherton: To ask the Deputy Prime Minister how many neighbourhood wardens are deployed in Cornwall; and in which communities. [195104]

Phil Hope: The Office of the Deputy Prime Minister funds two neighbourhood warden schemes in Cornwall, deploying 10 wardens.

Eight neighbourhood wardens (including one Environmental worker, one Community worker, one youth worker and a part time youth worker) are deployed in North Kerrier. They cover Higher Broadlane in Pool, Pengeran in Camborne and Close Hill in Redrath.

Two neighbourhood wardens are deployed in St. Austell, covering Polgrean Place, Landreath Place and Bobspen estates in St. Blazey.

Network Rail

Mr. Spring: To ask the Deputy Prime Minister (1) what discussions he has had with Network Rail about potential uses for the Global System for Mobile communications—Railway plan other than in connection with the movement of traffic by rail; [194938]

(2) what discussions he has had with Network Rail about the erection of telecommunication installations on land in *(a)* areas of outstanding natural beauty and *(b)* conservation areas; [194939]

(3) what discussions he has held with Network Rail about its methods of consultation with local communities when erecting telecommunication installations. [194941]

Keith Hill: My right hon. Friend the Deputy Prime Minister has had no discussions with Network Rail about these issues.

Regional Assemblies

Mrs. Spelman: To ask the Deputy Prime Minister what mechanisms will be put in place to resolve differences between elected local authorities over the content and adoption of a regional spatial strategy by a regional chamber. [195256]

Keith Hill: If there are still unresolved issues at the point at which the Regional Planning Body (RPB) submits draft Regional Spatial Strategy (RSS) revision to the Secretary of State, my right hon. Friend the Deputy Prime Minister, these will be addressed in the context of the independently facilitated Examination in Public (EiP). The EiP considers representations made by interested parties and a Panel report is subsequently submitted to the Secretary of State, my right hon. Friend the Deputy Prime Minister, and the report published. The Secretary of State, my right hon. Friend the Deputy Prime Minister, will then publish and consult on proposed changes before approving and issuing the final RSS.

Mrs. Spelman: To ask the Deputy Prime Minister if he will make a statement on the Government's policy on allowing non-UK nationals to vote in *(a)* local elections, *(b)* regional government elections and *(c)* regional assembly referendums. [195261]

Mr. Raynsford: The information is as follows:

(a) Under the Representation of the People of the People Act 1983, those entitled to vote in local government elections are British citizens, other qualifying Commonwealth citizens, citizens of the Republic of Ireland and citizens of the European Union states. Those who are not included in any of these categories are not eligible to be included in the electoral register and are therefore not eligible to vote in local government elections. *(b)* The Government intend that the franchise for regional assembly elections will be based on the local government elections franchise, in this respect, and will be set out explicitly in the relevant dedicated enabling legislation. *(c)* The franchise for regional assembly referendums is based on the local government elections franchise and is set out explicitly in the Regional Assemblies (Preparations) Act 2003.

Special Grants (Lincolnshire)

Mr. Austin Mitchell: To ask the Deputy Prime Minister what *(a)* funding and *(b)* grants additional to the rate support grant have been made available to North East Lincolnshire over the last two financial years. [195137]

Phil Hope: In the last two financial years, the amount of funding and grant made available to North East Lincolnshire, in additional to the revenue support grant, are tabled as follows.

£000

	2003–04	*2004–05*
Special and specific grants inside aggregate external finance (AEF)	21,578	32,276
Redistributed non-domestic rates	47,847	44,134
Total	69,425	76,410

The data are as reported by local authorities and are taken from the Revenue Account budget estimate forms for 2003–04 and 2004–05.

Shona McIsaac: To ask the Deputy Prime Minister if he will list the special grants awarded to *(a)* North Lincolnshire council and *(b)* North East Lincolnshire council in each year since 1997; and what the value was of each grant. [195212]

Phil Hope: The grants within Aggregate External Finance that have been awarded to *(a)* North Lincolnshire council and *(b)* North East Lincolnshire council since 1997–98 are tabled as follows.

The data are as reported by the local authority and use outturn data for 1997–98 to 2002–03 and budget data for 2003–04 and 2004–05.

North East Lincolnshire UA

£000

Grants within AEF	*1997–98*	*1998–99*	*1999–2000*	*2000–01*
Access and Systems Capacity	—	—	—	—
Additional HB and CTB administration due to Pension Credit	—	—	—	—
Adoption Support and Special Guardianship	—	—	—	—
AIDS/HIV Support	4	4	4	4
Asylum Seekers	—	28	28	953
Building Care Capacity	—	—	—	—
Carers Grant	—	—	—	—
Child and Adolescent Mental Health Services (CAMHS)	—	—	—	—
Child Care and Early Years	—	—	—	239
Children's Services	—	—	—	356
Children's Social Services	[illegible]	—	—	—
Choice Protects	—	—	—	—
Class Size Reductions	—	—	—	715
Community Care Special Transitional Grant	972	1,095	1,095	—
Council Tax Benefit Administration	206	208	208	241
Deferred Payment	—	—	—	—
Delayed Discharges	—	—	—	—
Detrunking	—	—	—	—
Drug and Alcohol Misusers	—	—	—	10
Education Budget Support Grant	—	—	—	—
Education Maintenance Allowances	—	—	—	—
Ethnic Minorities Achievement Grant	—	30	30	25
Excellence in Cities	—	—	—	—
General Sure Start Grant	—	—	—	—
Guardians ad Litem	31	—	—	—

North East Lincolnshire UA

£000

Grants within AEF	*1997–98*	*1998–99*	*1999–2000*	*2000–01*
Homelessness Strategies	—	—	26	—
Housing Benefit Administration	281	277	277	271
Leadership Incentive	—	—	—	—
Magistrates Courts	625	752	752	758
Mental Health	159	174	174	339
Nursery Education Grant for four year olds	—	—	—	218
Nursery Education for three year olds	—	—	—	—
Performance Fund	—	—	—	—
Preserved Rights	—	—	—	—
Probation (Ordinary 80 per cent. Grant)	985	1,026	1,026	1,150
Promoting Independence	—	—	—	—
Promoting Independence: Carers	—	—	—	156
Promoting Independence: Partnership	—	—	—	664
Promoting Independence: Prevention	—	—	—	93
Provision for three year olds	—	—	—	649
Residential Allowance	—	—	—	—
Rural Bus Challenge	—	—	—	—
Rural Bus Services	—	42	42	43
Rural Bus Subsidy	—	—	—	—
Safeguarding Children	—	—	—	—
School Standards Grant	—	—	—	—
Section 11 (Ethnic Minorities) Grant (excluding SRB)	25	—	—	—
Social Services Training Support Programme	190	169	169	228
Standards Fund	754	1,173	1,173	3,736
Supported Employment	64	—	—	61
Supporting People Administration	—	—	—	—
Supporting People Implementation Grant	—	—	—	—
Supporting People Programme—Housing	—	—	—	—
Supporting People Programme—Social Services	—	—	—	—
Sure Start	—	—	—	679
Teachers Pay Reform	—	—	—	345
Teenage Pregnancy Local Implementation	—	—	—	—
The Private Finance Initiative	—	—	—	—
Training Support Programme	—	—	—	—
Under fives specific grant	—	20	20	—
Urban Bus Challenge	—	—	—	—
Waste Re-Cycling Challenge	—	—	—	—
Workstep	—	—	—	—
Young Peoples Substance Misuse Planning	—	—	—	—
Youth Justice	—	—	—	10
Other grants within AEF	—	129	129	450
Total grants within AEF	4,265	5,127	5,127	12,393

£000

	2001–02	*2002–03*	*Budget 2003–04*	*Budget 2004–05*
Access and Systems Capacity	—	—	527	1,428
Additional HB and CTB administration due to Pension Credit	—	—	—	177
Adoption Support and Special Guardianship	—	—	—	75
AIDS/HIV Support	6	9	6	9
Asylum Seekers	771	592	641	450
Building Care Capacity	—	506	—	—
Carers Grant	—	267	312	389
Child and Adolescent Mental Health Services (CAMHS)	—	—	146	198
Child Care and Early Years	685	466	549	—
Children's Services	—	—	1,828	—
Children's Social Services	903	1,904	—	—
Choice Protects	—	—	—	98
Class Size Reductions	662	—	—	—
Community Care Special Transitional Grant	—	—	—	—
Council Tax Benefit Administration	258	267	241	546
Deferred Payment	—	3	136	—
Delayed Discharges	—	—	—	313
Detrunking	—	—	—	10
Drug and Alcohol Misusers	51	—	—	—
Education Budget Support Grant	2,237	—	—	—
Education Maintenance Allowances	—	737	—	—
Ethnic Minorities Achievement Grant	—	—	—	—
Excellence in Cities	—	—	869	1,542
General Sure Start Grant	—	—	—	759
Guardians ad Litem	—	—	—	—
Homelessness Strategies	—	—	—	—
Housing Benefit Administration	279	383	1,063	915

£000

	2001-02	*2002-03*	*Budget 2003-04*	*Budget 2004-05*
Leadership Incentive	—	—	675	884
Magistrates Courts	882	1,034	1,247	1,353
Mental Health	398	478	405	401
Nursery Education Grant for four year olds	—	—	—	—
Nursery Education for three year olds	—	824	—	—
Performance Fund	—	67	297	—
Preserved Rights	—	2,032	2,143	1,561
Probation (Ordinary 80 per cent. Grant)	—	—	—	—
Promoting Independence	929	484	—	—
Promoting Independence: Carers	220	—	—	—
Promoting Independence: Partnership	—	—	—	—
Promoting Independence: Prevention	—	—	—	—
Provision for three year olds	730	—	—	—
Residential Allowance	—	294	—	2,313
Rural Bus Challenge	—	—	118	113
Rural Bus Services	55	62	—	—
Rural Bus Subsidy	—	—	63	74
Safeguarding Children	—	—	—	294
School Standards Grant	360	2,261	2,744	2,953
Section 11 (Ethnic Minorities) Grant (excluding SRB)	—	—	—	—
Social Services Training Support Programme	251	235	—	—
Standards Fund	5,673	7,005	3,082	5,306
Supported Employment	—	—	—	—
Supporting People Administration	—	—	261	179
Supporting People Implementation Grant	—	122	—	—
Supporting People Programme—Housing	—	—	—	2,582
Supporting People Programme—Social Services	—	—	—	4,003
Sure Start	—	—	—	—
Teachers Pay Reform	2,275	2,226	1,690	1,819
Teenage Pregnancy Local Implementation	—	171	198	222
The Private Finance Initiative	221	580	478	535
Training Support Programme	—	—	216	382
Under fives specific grant	—	—	—	—
Urban Bus Challenge	—	—	153	111
Waste Re-Cycling Challenge	—	—	583	—
Workstep	—	—	—	78
Young Peoples Substance Misuse Planning	—	23	—	—
Youth Justice	—	—	—	—
Other grants within AEF	1,850	404	907	178
Total grants within AEF	19,696	23,436	21,578	32,276

North Lincolnshire UA

£000

Grants within AEF	*1997-98*	*1998-99*	*1999-2000*	*2000-01*
Access and Systems Capacity	—	—	—	—
Additional HB and CTB administration due to Pension Credit	—	—	—	—
Additional HB and CTB administration due to Tax Credits	—	—	—	—
Adoption Support and Special Guardianship	—	—	—	—
AIDS/HIV Support	8	4	6	6
Asylum Seekers	—	2	17	36
Building Care Capacity	—	—	—	—
Carers Grant	—	—	—	—
Child and Adolescent Mental Health Services (CAMHS)	—	—	—	—
Child Care and Early Years	—	—	—	170
Children's Services	—	—	159	250
Children's Social Services	—	—	—	—
Choice Protects	—	—	—	—
Class Size Reductions	—	—	1,011	945
Community Care Special Transitional Grant	919	989	—	—
Council Tax Benefit Administration	149	168	—	—
Deferred Payment	—	—	—	—
Delayed Discharges	—	—	—	—
Detrunking	—	—	—	—
Drug and Alcohol Misusers	—	—	—	6
Education Budget Support Grant	—	—	—	—
Ethnic Minorities Achievement Grant	—	506	183	164
Excellence in Cities	—	—	—	—
Guardians ad Litem	36	—	—	—
Homelessness Strategies	—	—	—	—
Housing Benefit Administration	202	186	354	351
Human Resources Development Strategy	—	—	—	—
Leadership Incentive	—	—	—	—
Local Public Service Agreement (LPSA) Performance Reward	—	—	—	—

North Lincolnshire UA

£000

Grants within AEF	*1997–98*	*1998–99*	*1999–2000*	*2000–01*
Magistrates Courts	506	—	—	—
Mental Health	150	165	342	387
National Training Strategy	—	—	—	—
Nursery Education Grant for four year olds	—	—	186	850
Nursery Education for three year olds	—	—	—	—
Performance Fund	—	—	—	—
Preserved Rights	—	—	—	—
Probation (Ordinary 80 per cent. Grant)	940	—	—	—
Promoting Independence	—	—	—	—
Promoting Independence: Carers	—	—	42	137
Promoting Independence: Partnership	—	—	718	599
Promoting Independence: Prevention	—	—	50	75
Provision for three year olds	—	—	—	495
Residential Allowance	—	—	—	—
Rural Bus Subsidy	—	133	253	257
Safeguarding Children	—	—	—	—
School Budget Support Grant	—	—	—	162
School Standards Grant	—	—	—	—
Section 11 (Ethnic Minorities) Grant (excluding SRB)	195	—	—	—
Social Services Training Support Programme	183	178	180	172
Standards Fund	670	2,034	2,073	3,906
Supported Employment	168	174	182	210
Supporting People Administration	—	—	—	—
Supporting People Implementation Grant	—	—	—	—
Supporting People Programme	—	—	—	—
Supporting People Programme—Housing	—	—	—	—
Supporting People Programme—Social Services	—	—	—	—
Sure Start	—	—	—	20
Teachers Pay Reform	—	—	—	765
Teenage Pregnancy Local Implementation	—	—	—	—
Training Support Programme	—	—	—	—
Under fives specific grant	—	183	—	—
Waste and Recycling	—	—	—	—
Workstep	—	—	—	—
Youth Justice	—	—	—	15
Other grants within AEF	4,496	2,182	185	1,033
Total grants within AEF	8,622	6,904	5,941	11,011

£000

	2001–02	*2002–03*	*Budget 2003–04*	*Budget 2004–05*
Access and Systems Capacity	—	—	488	1,324
Additional HB and CTB administration due to Pension Credit	—	—	—	40
Additional HB and CTB administration due to Tax Credits	—	—	—	32
Adoption Support and Special Guardianship	—	—	—	53
AIDS/HIV Support	16	27	15	26
Asylum Seekers	24	26	34	47
Building Care Capacity	—	454	—	—
Carers Grant	—	232	271	340
Child and Adolescent Mental Health Services (CAMHS)	—	—	101	139
Child Care and Early Years	437	958	1,020	—
Children's Services	—	—	555	—
Children's Social Services	643	1,075	—	—
Choice Protects	—	—	—	89
Class Size Reductions	808	—	—	—
Community Care Special Transitional Grant	—	—	—	—
Council Tax Benefit Administration	—	—	404	429
Deferred Payment	—	—	124	—
Delayed Discharges	—	—	—	290
Detrunking	—	—	—	359
Drug and Alcohol Misusers	40	—	—	—
Education Budget Support Grant	100	—	—	—
Ethnic Minorities Achievement Grant	—	—	—	—
Excellence in Cities	—	—	579	1,032
Guardians ad Litem	—	—	—	—
Homelessness Strategies	—	—	—	38
Housing Benefit Administration	381	502	386	404
Human Resources Development Strategy	—	—	—	58
Leadership Incentive	—	—	625	650
Local Public Service Agreement (LPSA) Performance Reward	—	—	402	—
Magistrates Courts	—	—	1,063	—
Mental Health	406	452	409	394
National Training Strategy	—	—	—	77

£000

	2001–02	*2002–03*	*Budget 2003–04*	*Budget 2004–05*
Nursery Education Grant for four year olds	—	—	—	—
Nursery Education for three year olds	—	845	—	—
Performance Fund	—	62	274	—
Preserved Rights	—	1,959	1,792	1,403
Probation (Ordinary 80 per cent. Grant)	—	—	—	—
Promoting Independence	813	434	—	—
Promoting Independence: Carers	190	—	—	—
Promoting Independence: Partnership	—	—	—	—
Promoting Independence: Prevention	—	—	—	—
Provision for three year olds	794	—	—	—
Residential Allowance	—	261	269	1,534
Rural Bus Subsidy	329	381	388	393
Safeguarding Children	—	—	—	207
School Budget Support Grant	—	—	—	—
School Standards Grant	2,247	2,314	2,745	3,022
Section 11 (Ethnic Minorities) Grant (excluding SRB)	—	—	—	—
Social Services Training Support Programme	206	200	—	—
Standards Fund	3,977	6,219	2,597	4,300
Supported Employment	222	—	—	—
Supporting People Administration	—	—	189	164
Supporting People Implementation Grant	57	170	—	—
Supporting People Programme	—	—	1,835	—
Supporting People Programme—Housing	—	—	—	515
Supporting People Programme—Social Services	—	—	—	3,058
Sure Start	—	—	—	—
Teachers Pay Reform	1,944	3,240	1,787	—
Teenage Pregnancy Local Implementation	—	131	157	175
Training Support Programme	—	—	197	127
Under fives specific grant	—	—	—	—
Waste and Recycling	—	44	—	—
Workstep	—	—	225	208
Youth Justice	—	—	—	—
Other grants within AEF	991	1,470	1,844	205
Total grants within AEF	14,625	21,456	20,775	21,132

SCOTLAND

Press Releases

Pete Wishart: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland how many press releases have been issued by his Department in each month of 2004; and if he will make a statement. [195456]

Mrs. McGuire: The number of news releases issued by the Scotland Office in each month from 1 January 2004 to 29 October 2004 is as follows, and does not include operational notes issued to the media in connection with public engagements carried out by Ministers, or Scotland Office contributions to joint news releases with other organisations:

	Number
January	4
February	4
March	4
April	3
May	2
June	4
July	4
August	3
September	6
October	2

Special Advisers

Matthew Taylor: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland how many unpaid special advisers the Department has; what their names are; and which Government *(a)* bodies, *(b)* committees and *(c)* strategy groups each unpaid adviser (i) belongs to, (ii) advises and (iii) works alongside. [194061]

Mrs. McGuire: I refer the hon. Member to the answer given by my hon. Friend the Minister for the Cabinet Office on 28 October 2004, *Official Report*, column 1380W.

CABINET OFFICE

Civil Servants

Mr. Jenkins: To ask the Minister for the Cabinet Office what the latest figure is for the average length of continuous service for civil servants within the Cabinet Office. [194405]

Ruth Kelly: The latest figures for the average length of continuous service for civil servants in departments and agencies (where known) as at 1 April 2004 have been placed in the Library.

Departmental Responsibilities

Dr. Julian Lewis: To ask the Minister for the Cabinet Office pursuant to the answer of 11 October 2004, *Official Report*, column 59W, on departmental responsibilities, what sum has been earmarked from within the existing Cabinet Office budget to meet the cost of appointing a separate Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster. [191819]

Ruth Kelly *[holding answer 18 October 2004]*: The cost will be accounted for in the Cabinet Office Annual Report and Resource Accounts.

MINISTER FOR WOMEN

Special Advisers

Matthew Taylor: To ask the Minister for Women how many unpaid special advisers her unit has; what their names are; and which Government *(a)* bodies, *(b)* committees and *(c)* strategy groups each unpaid adviser (i) belongs to, (ii) advises and (iii) works alongside. [194056]

Ms Hewitt: I refer the hon. Member to the reply given to him by my hon. Friend the Minister for the Cabinet Office on 28 October 2004, *Official Report*, column 1380W.

HOUSE OF COMMONS COMMISSION

Official Report/Order Paper

Norman Baker: To ask the hon. Member for Roxburgh and Berwickshire, representing the House of Commons Commission how many paper copies of the *(a) Official Report* and *(b)* Order Paper are (i) produced, (ii) distributed to hon. Members, peers, staff and visitors and (iii) unused, on an average sitting day; what use is made of paper copies of the *Official Report* and the Order Paper which are not distributed to hon. Members, peers, staff and visitors; and what the total cost per day of producing the (A) *Official Report* and (B) Order Paper was in the last period for which figures are available (1) per copy and (2) in total. [194340]

Sir Archy Kirkwood: Typically, 1,736 copies of the daily part of the *Official Report* and 2,930 copies of the Order Paper are produced overnight for issue in that form. This includes copies produced for sale. The House of Commons takes 1,089 copies of the daily part of the *Official Report* and 2,693 copies of the Order Paper.

493 copies of the *Official Report* are distributed direct to Members, the Press Gallery and Departments of the House. The Bookshop receives 50 copies. The remaining House copies are retained in the Vote Office for the whole of the current and subsequent Session of Parliament, as required by the House, for issue on demand over that period to anyone entitled to receive a copy. Other than for purposes of management of overall paper stocks within limited storage space, which is infrequent, copies are not disposed of during this time. At the end of the period any remaining copies are disposed of as waste for recycling.

1,423 copies of the Order Paper are distributed direct to Members, to the Galleries for visitors, to the Press Gallery and Departments of the House. The remaining House copies are retained in the Vote Office for issue on demand to anyone entitled to receive a copy. Other than a few record copies, copies of the Order Paper are not retained beyond the day of issue and any remaining are disposed of as waste for recycling. The surplus varies widely, but ranges between fewer than 100 copies and up to 300 copies. The print run is regularly reviewed to ensure any consistent surpluses are minimised.

The daily and copy costs of producing the *Official Report* and the Order Paper are not held in the form requested, as the present printing contract pricing structure allows for payments in relation to printing consolidated classes of papers supplied complete, with rebates for quantities exceeding pre-determined limits. Internal staff, and other costs, are not associated with them or apportioned to individual documents. The following figures have been derived from printing contract data. The total printing expenditure per sitting day on the daily part of the *Official Report* for financial year 2003–04 is estimated at approximately £10,000, which equates to about £9.30 per House copy. The total printing expenditure per printing day on the Order Paper for the same period is estimated at approximately £5,400, which equates to about £2.00 per House copy.

Passes

Tom Cox: To ask the hon. Member for Roxburgh and Berwickshire, representing the House of Commons Commission how many passes have been issued to former hon. Members in each of the last 10 years. [194749]

Sir Archy Kirkwood: 120 former hon. Members have passes at present. A breakdown by year of issue cannot readily be provided.

Mr. Gummer: To ask the hon. Member for Roxburgh and Berwickshire, representing the House of Commons Commission what percentage of 9A and 9B House of Commons hon. Members' staff passes are held by hon. Members' staff employed on the Department of Finance and Administration's contract of employment and whose salaries are met from the hon. Members' staffing allowance. [194800]

Sir Archy Kirkwood: There are currently 1,451 pass holders with category 9A and 9B passes. All of these passes are held by Members staff, on the basis of an application from the Member concerned. Category 9A and 9B passes are not limited to those paid on the standard Department of Finance and Administration contract of employment, nor to those whose salaries are met from the staffing allowance. Because pass records are not sorted by the contractual status of the individual concerned, I am unable to give the percentage figure sought.

DEFENCE

Departmental Properties

Mr. Andrew Turner: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will list the properties occupied *(a)* by his Department and *(b)* by its agencies in (i) 1997 and (ii) 2004, showing (1) for each and (2) in aggregate (A) the area and (B) the annual rental value. [195428]

Mr. Caplin: The information is not held centrally. I will write to the hon. Member and place a copy of my letter in the Library of the House.

Iraq

Pete Wishart: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what impact the redeployment of troops outside South East Iraq will have on his decision to cut the number of regiments in the Army. [193304]

Mr. Ingram *[holding answer 25 October 2004]*: The requirement to reduce the infantry is a result of two factors. First, the improving security situation in Northern Ireland and the prospect of normalisation—which has provided us with an opportunity to make reductions in the routine support that the Army provides to the Police Service of Northern Ireland (PSNI)—and second, the decision by the Army Board to stop the infantry arms plot.

The Army is working on its proposals for a restructured infantry which, with more battalions at its general disposal, will be more, not less, deployable.

Lady Hermon: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence how many military reservists from Northern Ireland have so far been mobilised for operations in Iraq; and what the average period of Service is. [193558]

Mr. Caplin: So far approximately 360 members of the Territorial Army and Regular Army Reserves from Northern Ireland have been mobilised for operations in Iraq. The average period of their Service is nine months, six of which are spent in theatre.

Paul Flynn: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what role Iraqi troops are playing in Iraq. [193649]

Mr. Ingram: The role of the Iraqi Security Forces is to support the Iraqi Interim Government in providing security in Iraq. They continue to develop the capacity to undertake this activity through a variety of security organisations, namely, the Iraqi Police Service, National Guard, Army, Facilities Protection Service, Coastal Defence Forces, Air Force and the Department of Border Enforcement.

Missile Defence

Llew Smith: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence whether the information referred to in paragraphs 7.2 to 7.7 of the Memorandum of Understanding between the United Kingdom and United States on research, development, tests and evaluation of ballistic missile defence capabilities and systems will be subject to the Freedom of Information Act 2000. [195385]

Mr. Hoon: All recorded information held by the Ministry of Defence is subject to the Freedom of Information Act 2000. The paragraphs in question refer to information generated by both past and future collaborative work. We would consider on a case-by-case basis any requests for such information to be disclosed under the Act.

Llew Smith: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what the total budget agreed to date for implementation of co-operation with the United States on research, development, tests and evaluation of ballistic missile defence capabilities and systems is; and what proportion will be paid by the United Kingdom. [195386]

Mr. Hoon: There is no agreed budget with the United States for co-operation on ballistic missile defence. Under the terms of the recently signed Research Development Test and Evaluation Annex, any such funding will be agreed on a project-by-project basis; to date there are no agreed projects. Details of the United Kingdom funding for ballistic missile defence research were given in my reply of 7 June 2004, *Official Report*, column 211W, to the hon. Member for Aldershot (Mr. Howarth).

Llew Smith: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will make a statement on the relationship between the 1958 (as amended) US/UK mutual Defense Agreements on Atomic Energy Matters and the US/UK Memorandum of Understanding on research, development, test and evaluation of ballistic missile defence capabilities and systems, dated 12 June 2003. [195387]

Mr. Hoon: I assume my hon. Friend is referring to the Research, Development, Test and Evaluation Annex signed on 12 October 2004, the Introduction to which recognises the 1958 US/UK Mutual Defence Agreement. This reference is an acknowledgement that, in the event that any exchange of background nuclear information was required to inform ballistic missile co-operative work, such an exchange would need to take place under the information exchange provisions of the 1958 Agreement.

Llew Smith: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence pursuant to the written statement of 12 October 2004, *Official Report*, columns 9–10WS, on missile defence, how many officials and scientists from his Department have been seconded to the US Missile Defense Agency; what plans there are for future secondments to that Agency; how many US Department of Defense officials and scientists have been seconded to the United Kingdom Missile Defence Centre; and what plans there are for future secondments to the Centre. [195411]

Mr. Hoon: Under the provisions of the Participating Personnel Attachment to the 2003 UK/US Ballistic Missile Defence Framework Agreement, two Ministry of Defence personnel are currently seconded to the Missile Defence Agency (MDA) or MDA-sponsored posts and plans are in place to send a further two by spring 2005. The US currently has two personnel seconded to the UK Missile Defence Centre (MDC) or MDC-sponsored posts under this agreement and two further secondments are being planned.

Playing Fields

Kate Hoey: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will list playing fields and other sites used now or previously for sport and recreation which have been identified for disposal in the period 1 April 2005 to 31 March 2008, broken down by *(a)* location and *(b)* county; and what estimate has been made of likely receipts. [195595]

Mr. Caplin: The information is not held centrally and will take time to collate. I will write to the hon. Member and place a copy of my letter in the Library of the House.

Warships

Mr. Hancock: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence in what year he plans to order replacements for *(a)* HMS Talent, *(b)* HMS Triumph, *(c)* HMS Torbay and *(d)* HMS Trenchant. [194473]

Mr. Ingram: We are not directly replacing the Trafalgar class of nuclear attack submarines platform by platform. HMS Astute will be the first of the next class of nuclear attack submarines, with a planned in service date of 2009. The first three Astute class boats are currently on order; decisions on further buys will be made when appropriate.

TRADE AND INDUSTRY

Vision Boards

Geraldine Smith: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what the *(a)* names and *(b)* biographical details are of the members of Lancaster Vision Board; and what the (i) names and (ii) addresses are of the businesses or organisations that they represent. [192976]

Jacqui Smith *[holding answer 21 October 2004]:* I refer my hon. Friend to the answer I gave her today to question numbers: 192919, 192920, 192921,192922, 192926, 192927 and 192928.

Geraldine Smith: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry (1) who funds the running costs of *(a)* vision boards in the North West and *(b)* Lancaster vision board; [192919]

(2) under whose authority a vision board is set up; [192920]

(3) what the procedures are for *(a)* appointing to and *(b)* removing members from a vision board; [192921]

(4) how many vision boards there are in the North West of England; [192922]

(5) who is entitled to apply to become a member of a vision board; and what the procedures governing such applications are; [192926]

(6) where copies of the constitution for the Lancaster vision board are made available; [192927]

(7) what criteria are used for appointing members to the Lancaster vision board. [192928]

Jacqui Smith: The Northwest Development Agency has encouraged the establishment of vision boards in the North West, with the aim of promoting economic leadership at a local level with an emphasis on private sector engagement.

Vision boards have either been established, or are being developed, in Burnley, Cumbria, Lancaster, Northwich and Preston. Local authorities are taking a leading role in determining local structures. The secretariat resources for the vision boards are provided through the local authority with the exception of Cumbria Vision.

Details of the membership and constitution of the Lancaster Vision Board can be obtained from Lancaster city council.

Post Offices

Mr. Bill O'Brien: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry when she last met Postwatch to discuss *(a)* the protection of Post Office customers and *(b)* its action in ensuring that over 95 per cent. of people live within one mile of the nearest Post Office; and if she will make a statement. [194952]

Mr. Sutcliffe: Ministers and officials of the Department meet frequently with Postwatch to discuss a wide range of issues relating to customers. Responsibility for meeting its commitment to ensure that, at the end the urban network reinvention programme at least 95 per cent. nationally of the population in urban areas will still live within 1 mile of their nearest post offices rests with Post Office Ltd.

John Barrett: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry how many post offices in Scotland have closed as part of the Urban Network Reinvention Programme. [195159]

Mr. Sutcliffe: I understand from Post Office Ltd. that 100 post office branches have closed to date in Scotland as part of the Urban Network Reinvention programme.

John Barrett: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry how many post offices proposed for closure under the Urban Reinvention Programme and not opposed by Postwatch have since been kept open as a result of the public consultation. [195160]

Mr. Sutcliffe: Decisions on post office closures are an operational matter for Post Office Ltd. and I have therefore asked the Chief Executive to reply direct to the hon. Member.

John Barrett: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry how many responses Post Office Ltd received to the public consultations on the proposed closure of *(a)* Clermiston, *(b)* East Craigs, *(c)* Strachan Road, *(d)* South Gyle, *(e)* Saughtonhall, *(f)* Stenhouse Cross, *(g)* Murrayfield, *(h)* Fairmilehead, *(i)* Mayfield, *(j)* Joppa and *(k)* Newhaven post offices in Edinburgh. [195161]

Mr. Sutcliffe: This is an operational matter for Post Office Ltd. and I have therefore asked the Chief Executive to reply direct to the hon. Member.

Social Chapter

Mr. Brady: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry if she will list European legislation passed under the Social Chapter since 1997; and what assessment the Government has made of the cost to business in the United Kingdom of meeting the requirements of the legislation. [195829]

Mr. Sutcliffe: Since 1997, four Directives have been agreed under the EU Social Chapter:

the Burden of proof in sex discrimination cases Directive;

the Part-time Workers Directive;

the Fixed Term Work Directive and

the Information and Consultation Directive.

The Government has implemented all of these in the United Kingdom, with the exception of the Information and Consultation Directive, which is due to come into force in April 2005.

In addition, as it agreed when it ended the UK's opt out of the EU Social Chapter, the Government has implemented the Parental Leave Directive and European Works Council Directive, which were agreed before 1997.

These new rights have helped to set decent minimum standards in the workplace. In doing so, the Government has kept burdens on business to a minimum. The administrative costs to employers of providing the Social Chapter rights account for well under 1p for each worker each week. The policy costs are under £500 million.

Power Industry Workers

Bob Spink: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry how many current or former power industry workers have been *(a)* diagnosed with and *(b)* died from asbestos-related diseases related to their employment in each of the last five years. [190966]

Jane Kennedy: I have been asked to reply.

There are no definitive records of the number of people diagnosed with asbestos-related diseases. However, the best indication comes from the cases identified through the DWP industrial injuries and disablement benefit scheme. These figures are in the table. There are no records of deaths from asbestos related diseases that can be broken down by industry. Tragically, nearly all cases of mesothelioma and lung cancer will result in death. Very few asbestosis cases and no cases of pleural thickening would be expected to be fatal.

Cases of asbestos-related diseases identified through the industrial injuries and disablement benefit scheme in Great Britain in the last five years

Year ending 31 December	*Asbestosis (prescribed disease D1)*	*Mesothelioma (prescribed disease D3)*	*Lung cancer (prescribed disease D8)*	*Pleural thickening (prescribed disease 9)*	*Total*
1999	30	40	5	15	85
2000	15	35	<5	15	65
2001	20	45	5	20	90
2002	40	55	5	40	145
2003	45	65	5	35	150

Notes:

1. The power industries have been taken as electricity, gas and water supply, manufacture of coke, refined petroleum products and nuclear fuel.
2. To maintain the anonymity of customers, figures have been rounded to the nearest 5—except where the number of customers is below 5.
3. Figure for year-ending December 2003 is provisional.

Special Advisers

Matthew Taylor: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry how many unpaid special advisers the Department has; what their names are; and which Government *(a)* bodies, *(b)* committees and *(c)* strategy groups each unpaid adviser (i) belongs to, (ii) advises and (iii) works alongside. [194057]

Ms Hewitt: I refer the hon. Member to the reply given to him by my hon. Friend the Minister for the Cabinet Office on 28 October 2004, *Official Report*, column 1380W.

Travel Protection

Mr. Oaten: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what representations she has received regarding improving travel protection, with particular reference to circumstances where an airline goes bankrupt. [195239]

Charlotte Atkins: I have been asked to reply.

The Department has received written representations from the following:

The Commons Transport Committee;

The Civil Aviation Organisation; and

The Association of British Travel Agents.

Mr. Oaten: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry when she expects to respond to the Civil Aviation Authority recommendations for widening the scope of travel protection. [195240]

Charlotte Atkins: I have been asked to reply.

In a joint statement with the Civil Aviation Authority issued on 27 October, the Government announced that they had asked the CAA to carry out more detailed work on other options to address the decline in the proportion of people covered by the Air Travel Organisers' Licensing scheme. This work is expected to be completed early next year. A copy of the statement is available in the Libraries of the House.

Mr. Oaten: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what estimate she has made of the number of people covered by ATOL protection in each of the last three years. [195241]

Charlotte Atkins: I have been asked to reply.

Based on figures published by the Civil Aviation Authority, the number of people covered by ATOL protection in each of the last three years was as follows:

	Million
2001	29.1
2002	27.9
2003	27.6

SOLICITOR-GENERAL

Departmental Staff

Hugh Bayley: To ask the Solicitor-General how many full-time equivalent jobs the Law Officers' Departments had in *(a)* Yorkshire and the Humber and *(b)* City of York in (i) 1997 and (ii) the latest year for which figures are available. [191822]

The Solicitor-General: I give as follows the figures for the Serious Fraud Office and HMCPS Inspectorate. The figures for the Crown Prosecution Service were included in the answer given by the Minister for the Cabinet Office on 25 October. The Treasury Solicitor has no staff in Yorkshire and Humberside.

	Serious Fraud Office			*HMCPS Inspectorate*		
	York	*Elsewhere in Yorkshire and Humberside*	*Total*	*York*	*Elsewhere in Yorkshire and Humberside*	*Total*
1997	0	0	0	0	0	0
1998	0	0	0	0	0	0
1999	0	0	0	0	0	0
2000	0	0	0	11	—	11
2001	0	4	4	11	—	11
2002	0	4	4	11	—	11
2003	0	4	4	11	—	11
2004	—	3	3	11	—	11

CULTURE, MEDIA AND SPORT

Formula One

Brian White: To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport what discussions she has had on the future of Formula One racing. [195603]

Mr. Caborn: My right hon. Friend the Secretary of State has had no recent discussions about the future of Formula One racing. However, the East Midlands Development Agency is currently leading discussions on behalf of the Government about the future of the British Grand Prix at Silverstone, and developments around the circuit. Furthermore, the Government recently invested £16 million into motorsport, including Formula One, to ensure that the motorsport industry maintained and enhanced its position in an increasingly competitive global market.

Royal Palaces

Mr. Rosindell: To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport how many tourists visited the Royal Palaces in each of the last five years. [192642]

Mr. Caborn: The following table shows visitor numbers to the Royal Palaces for each of the last five years:

Thousand

	1999–2000	*2000–01*	*2001–02*	*2002–03*	*2003–04*
Occupied Royal Palaces	1,924	1,735	1,476	1,918	1,836
Historic Royal Palaces	3,358	3,185	2,823	2,891	2,762
Osborne House (managed by English Heritage)	267	237	264	230	231

Tourism

Mr. Sanders: To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport if she will make a statement on the views expressed by the London Development Agency regarding the accessibility of London's hotels, shops and attractions to people with disabilities; and if she will assess the impact of such a lack of accessibility on the £100 billion target value for the tourism industry by 2010. [195210]

Mr. Caborn: Tourism in London is the responsibility of the Mayor of London, and accessibility is embedded in the London Development Agency's (LDA's) Action Plan for tourism. I welcome the commitment of the Mayor and the LDA to making London as accessible as possible for all visitors, including those with disabilities, the elderly and families with young children. This can only work for the benefit of the tourism industry and the achievement of the Government's target for 2010.

Mr. Sanders: To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport what support is available from her Department to assist *(a)* small hotels, *(b)* guest houses and *(c)* other tourism businesses to enhance the skills of employees. [195225]

Mr. Caborn: Support for skills training for the tourism sector is one of the key priority work areas set out in Tomorrow's Tourism Today, which my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State launched in July.

DCMS does not directly fund skills training, which is an issue for regional and local institutions, but we are the sponsoring department for People 1st, the new sector skills council for the tourism and hospitality industries. People 1st received its charter earlier this year and I am pleased to note the excellent progress it is making in forging regional skills alliances to map training provision and need. It will have a strategic role in tracking all the funding schemes for skills training and ensuring that provision responds to employer demand.

Mr. Sanders: To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport what support is available from her Department to assist *(a)* small hotels, *(b)* guest houses and *(c)* other tourism businesses to meet the requirements of the Disability Discrimination Act 1995. [195262]

Mr. Caborn: Visit Britain's National Accessible Scheme (NAS) was established in 1999 to help hotels, guesthouses and self-catering accommodation to improve access and quality for those with hearing, mobility and visual impairment. It includes a self-assessment pack, which businesses can complete to see where improvements should be made to improve access.

The Department has also agreed to pay a grant of £15,000 to Tourism for All for their Holiday Care information service in 2004–05. Tourism for All provides an important service to disabled people and helps the tourism industry to meet their obligations under the Disability Discrimination Act.

EDUCATION AND SKILLS

A-level Mathematics

Mr. Denham: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills (1) what discussions he has had with the Royal Society of Chemistry concerning the adequacy of A-level mathematics for undergraduate chemists; [195636]

(2) what plans he has to review the A-level mathematics syllabus to place greater emphasis on the needs of future science undergraduates; [195637]

(3) what discussions he has had with the Royal Society regarding the adequacy of the mathematics A-level for undergraduate scientists; and if he will make a statement; [195638]

(4) what assessment he has made of the adequacy of the mathematics A-level for students undertaking undergraduate chemistry; and if he will make a statement. [195639]

Dr. Howells: My right hon. Friend the Secretary of State is not responsible for reviewing the adequacy or otherwise of the content of an A-level specification. It is for the Qualifications and Curriculum Authority to determine content in discussion with interested parties including HE institutions, subject and professional associations, employers, awarding bodies and providers.

Access Agreements

Mr. Clappison: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills further to the answer of 27 October 2004, *Official Report*, column 1271W, on guidance on access agreements, whether he expects the Director of Fair Access to publish the guidance to institutions on access agreements; and if he will put a copy of such guidance in the Library. [195383]

Dr. Howells: I expect the Director's guidance to institutions on access agreements to be available publicly and I will place a copy in the Library when it is available.

Mr. Clappison: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills what factors he expects the Director for Fair Access to take account of in evaluating the milestones of individual universities; and whether the Director will make public his policy on *(a)* the milestones he will expect universities to include in their access agreement and *(b)* how he will ascertain whether milestones are stretching enough under paragraph 6.6.2 of the guidance given by the Secretary of State. [194836]

Dr. Howells: It will be for the Director to determine what factors he will take account of in evaluating institutions' own milestones, in the light of the Secretary of State's letter of guidance. The Director will issue guidance to institutions on access agreements in due course.

Mr. Clappison: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills what data he expects higher education institutions to draw upon in setting milestones for their access agreements under the provisions of paragraph 6.6.1 of his guidance to the Director of the Office for Fair Access. [194832]

Dr. Howells: The milestones will be the institutions' own. They may draw on a range of data.

Capital Funding

Mr. Hoban: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills how much his Department paid to Capita in respect of *(a)* outsourcing and *(b)* consultancy work in (i) 2001–02, (ii) 2002–03 (iii) 2003–04 and (iv) 2004–05. [195048]

Mr. Charles Clarke *[holding answer 1 November 2004]*: Records of major individual service contracts show the following expenditure with Capita in financial years 2001–02, 2002–03, 2003–04 and 2004–05 to date.

	£000
2001–02	41,725
2002–03	24,679
2003–04	30,477
2004–05	17,346

My Department does not hold a central record of individual agreements, and information relating to consultancy work could be provided only at disproportionate cost.

Class Sizes (West Suffolk)

Mr. Spring: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills what the average *(a)* middle school and *(b)* upper school class size in the West Suffolk constituency was in (i) 1996–97 and (ii) 2003–04. [194988]

Mr. Miliband: The information requested is given in the table.

Maintained secondary schools: Average class size[1], West Suffolk parliamentary constituency[2]

	Position in January each year	
	1997	*2004*
Middle		
Number of pupils	3,120	3,750
Number of classes	140	160
Average class size	23.1	24.0
Upper		
Number of pupils	2,440	2,390
Number of classes	140	120
Average class size	17.5	19.4
Total		
Number of pupils	5,570	6,130
Number of classes	280	280
Average class size	20.2	22.0

[1] Classes taught by one teacher during a single selected period in each school on the day of the census in January.

[2] Figures have been rounded to the nearest 10. There may be discrepancies between the sum of constituent items and totals as shown.

Source:

Annual Schools Census.

Compulsory Testing (Wales)

Mr. Dhanda: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills if he will assess the merits of introducing in England the changes to compulsory testing in schools in Wales made by the Welsh Assembly. [195581]

Mr. Miliband: We are aware of the recent consultation by the Welsh Assembly on changes to assessment arrangements in Wales. In England we have listened to sensible concerns about testing at the end of Key Stage 1 and have introduced reforms this year so that the results of standard tasks and tests are combined with the teacher's assessment in one comprehensive judgment. But we continue to believe that national curriculum tests at the end of Key Stages 2 and 3 provide an effective and objective means of assessing all pupils in England on a consistent basis against national standards. They assure the accountability of schools to parents and taxpayers and help inform parents and teachers about each child's progress.

Departmental Policies (South Dorset)

Jim Knight: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills if he will set out, with statistical evidence relating as closely as possible to the South Dorset constituency, the effects of changes to departmental policy since 1997 on the South Dorset constituency. [194970]

Mr. Miliband: The constituency South Dorset lies within Dorset local education authority. The Department for Education and Skills (DfES) provides information by constituency, through the "In Your Area" website available at http://www.dfes.gov.uk/inyourarea.

This website allows users to access key facts and local information about education and skills based on postcodes. The data available within the site offers comparisons between 1997 and the latest available year and covers five geographies. These are parliamentary constituency, ward, local authority district, local education authority, Government office region. England figures are also provided

The information available within the website is grouped in a number of broad categories including literacy and numeracy at age 11, literacy and numeracy at age 14, GCSE/GNVQ results, pupils with special educational needs, school initiatives, school work force, school funding and resources, children's social services, early years, class sizes, post 16, higher education and adult education

Additional information could be provided only at disproportionate cost. However, my Department is investigating ways in which we can disseminate more information about the effects of our policies at a local level. The inyourarea website will be further developed over the coming months to include additional information about adult education, school funding, school initiatives, school performance, school work force and post 16.

Departmental Staff

Hugh Bayley: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills how many full-time equivalent jobs *(a)* his Department and *(b)* its executive agencies had in (i) Yorkshire and the Humber and (ii) the City of York in (A) 1997 and (B) the latest year for which figures are available. [191837]

Mr. Charles Clarke: I would refer my hon. Friend to the reply given by my hon. Friend the Minister for the Cabinet Office on 25 October 2004, *Official Report*, column 1053W.

Disabled Students Allowance

Paul Holmes: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills how many students have benefited from the disabled students' allowance in each of the last three years; how much has been spent in total on these students *(a)* in England and *(b)* broken down by local education authority; and if he will make a statement. [194784]

Dr. Howells: Data on disabled students' allowance (DSA) payments made by local education authorities (LEAs) for English domiciled students are shown in the first table. Data on DSA payments made by the Open University (OU) are shown in the second table.

Academic year	*Student numbers (Thousand)*	*Expenditure (£ million)*
2000/01	28	42
2001/02	35	40
2002/03	44	50

Data are collected from the LEAs to produce national estimates. The data collection exercise does not allow for the production of firm figures below this level, and therefore data by LEA are not available.

	Student numbers (Thousand)		
Calendar year	*English domiciled*	*Welsh and Northern Ireland domiciled*	*Expenditure (£ million)*
2001	1,039	61	2.6
2002	1,438	92	2.7
2003	2,002	151	3.4

The OU's academic year is consistent with a calendar year. The OU records aggregate expenditure on DSAs for English, Welsh and Northern Ireland students.

Drug Awareness Programmes

Tom Cox: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills how much money was spent within the Greater London area on drug awareness programmes in each of the last five years. [195377]

Mr. Stephen Twigg: Figures for local drug awareness programmes are not held centrally. However, the Department has allocated funding to Greater London local education authorities (LEAs) to support drug education, awareness and prevention in schools, as detailed in the following table:

	£ million
1999–2000	1
2000–01	[1]25
2001–02	2
2002–03	2
2003–04	2

[1] Drug Prevention was part of a larger grant which included Social Inclusion and the Youth Service.

These figures include both Government and local authority contributions. LEAs and schools are also free to spend on drug awareness programmes from within their own budgets.

A new cross Government grant, Young People Substance Misuse Partnership Grant, for 2004–05 supports drug education, prevention and early intervention for young people. The total allocated to London through the grant this year is £12.7million.

Free Milk Scheme

Lynne Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills what his estimate is of the *(a)* set up and *(b)* recurrent annual cost of providing free chilled milk to all children at Key Stages (i) 1 and (ii) 2. [195747]

Mr. Stephen Twigg: The Milk Development Council has helped us develop estimates. It is likely that set up costs would be around £21 million, and the cost of providing milk each year would be around £65 million. This estimate includes the EU school milk subsidy, but excludes any amount for repair and depreciation of equipment.

Higher Education Costs

Mr. Clappison: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills what the average cost was of an undergraduate degree in each of the universities in the UK in the last year for which figures are available. [191506]

Dr. Howells: The data requested are not available. Universities and higher education colleges receive their funding as block grant through the funding councils. This includes funding for teaching and research. For students at institutions in England, total funding for teaching is based on the number of planned publicly funded students in the sector and for 2004–05 is on average £5,300[1]. This protects the unit of funding per student and helps maintain the quality of the student experience.

[1] As published in Table 2.7 of the Departmental Report for the Department of Education and Skills 2004.

Home-School Distances

Mr. Willis: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills how many *(a)* primary and *(b)* secondary school pupils lived more than three miles from the school that they attended on the latest date for which data are available. [195143]

Mr. Miliband: The information requested is shown in the following table:

Number and percentage of pupils in maintained primary and secondary schools who live more than three miles from the school they attend, January 2004[1]

	Over three miles	
	Number	*Percentage*
Primary[2]	156,806	3.7
Secondary[2]	588,699	17.8

[1] Measured as a straight line distance.

[2] Includes middle schools as deemed.

Source:

Pupil Level Annual Schools Census 2004.

New Schools (Lambeth)

Kate Hoey: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills what criteria are being used in assessing the Building Schools for the Future bid in Lambeth. [195138]

Mr. Miliband: The criteria for assessing all Building Schools for the Future bid are those published in the guidance issued to local authorities in July 2003, namely that bids are prioritised in accordance with educational and social need, (as defined by GCSE rates of attainment and eligibility levels for free school meals) moderated by programming efficiency requirements.

Kate Hoey: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills what plans he has to ensure that future demand for new school places in Lambeth is met. [195139]

Mr. Stephen Twigg: The DfES is committed to ensuring that all parents have a choice of good schools for their children to attend. Historically, there has been a lack of provision of secondary school places in Lambeth, with up to 50 per cent. of Lambeth residents being educated outside the borough. In addition, population growth in London means that we will be providing 20 new schools in the capital over five years, concentrated in areas where there are currently large outflows of secondary pupils to other parts of London. Consequently, there are plans to increase provision in Lambeth substantially, to absorb demographic growth and to enable Lambeth residents to be educated locally. The Lambeth Academy, opened by Her Majesty the Queen on 26 October 2004 as a wholly new school, already provides extra places for 180 children each year. We are planning with Lambeth to make further significant increases in provision in the borough, as outlined in our joint document "A Vision for Lambeth Schools", which includes plans for at least two further wholly new schools.

Kate Hoey: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills what proposals there are to improve the existing buildings of Lambeth's secondary schools. [195197]

Mr. Miliband: Chapter 4 of our "Five Year Strategy for Children and Learners", published in July 2004, sets out eight key reforms for secondary schools, five of which concern their buildings. Every secondary school which is up to the standard should be a specialist school, which triggers a capital grant for specialist facilities. All secondary schools will have the freedom, as foundation schools, to own their land and buildings and manage their assets, if they wish. We have introduced dedicated capital funding to encourage more places in popular schools. We will expand the academies programme to provide for 200 by 2010. Every secondary school will be refurbished or rebuilt to a modern standard through Building Schools for the Future.

Office for Fair Access

Mr. Clappison: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills what consultations he is carrying out regarding the appointment of an independent person or panel responsible for reviewing the decisions of the Office for Fair Access on appeal by the universities; who will appoint the independent person or panel; whether there is a requirement of political neutrality on the part of the independent person or panel; and what his timetable is for the creation of such a body. [194196]

Dr. Howells: A consultation document was issued earlier this month to interested parties, including Universities UK, on how the review procedure might work in practice. The Secretary of State will make the appointment, in accordance with the principles set out in the Code of Practice for Ministerial Appointments to Public Bodies, as set out the regulations recently approved by Parliament. The usual requirements concerning political activity will apply. The Secretary of State expects to make an appointment before the Director of Fair Access makes his first formal decisions.

Part-time Students

Chris Grayling: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills how many and what percentage of undergraduate students at higher education institutions in England are part-time students. [194774]

Dr. Howells: The latest available figures are shown in the table.

Undergraduate students[1] at English HE institutions 2002/03

	Number	*Percentage*
Full-time	893,900	67
Part-time	434,700	33
Total	1,328,600	100

[1] Covers students normally domiciled in the UK, and those from overseas. Includes students at the Open University.

Source:

Higher Education Statistics Agency (HESA).

Chris Grayling: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills what estimate he has made of the income that higher education institutions will receive from employer contributions to undergraduate part-time student fees in 2006–07. [194775]

Dr. Howells: Part-time fees are unregulated: higher education institutions set the fee level for their part-time courses. The income that institutions receive will depend on the level of fees they set and the take-up of places. Data on the income received by institutions from employer contributions specifically are not available centrally.

SATs

Mr. Dhanda: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills what representations he has received in the past 12 months about the effectiveness of SATs. [195612]

Mr. Miliband: 265 representations have been received in the past 12 months about the national curriculum tests. Of these, 32 were about the content and format of the tests; 60 about the effects of testing; 27 seeking the abolition of testing; and 146 about the administration and marking of the tests. Of these 146, 83 related to Key Stage 3 English and 26 to Key Stage 2 English.

Schools (Bury)

Mr. Chaytor: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills how much was spent per pupil in *(a)* primary and *(b)* secondary schools in Bury in each of the last 10 years; what his estimate is for each of the next two years; and if he will make a statement. [195406]

Mr. Miliband: The information requested for the years 1993–94 to 2002–03 is given in the table. The Department is currently collecting the information for 2003–04. The information for 2004–05 is not due to be collected until October 2005.

School based expenditure[1] per pupil[2] in primary and secondary schools in Bury in each of the last 10 years[3, 4]

£

Year[3, 4]	*Primary education[5]*	*Pre-primary and primary education[5, 6]*	*Secondary education*
1993–94	[7]—	1,440	2,000
1994–95	[7]—	1,480	2,040
1995–96	[7]—	1,520	2,080
1996–97	[7]—	1,570	2,150
1997–98[8]	[7]—	1,490	2,160
1998–99[9]	[7]—	1,640	2,330
1999–2000	1,780	1,800	2,500
2000–01	2,010	2,040	2,650
2001–02	2,180	2,220	2,810
2002–03	2,220	[7]—	2,900

[1] School-based expenditure includes only expenditure incurred

directly by the schools. This includes the pay of teachers and school-based support staff, school premises costs, books and equipment, and certain other supplies and services, less any capital items funded from recurrent spending and income from sales, fees and charges and rents and rates. This excludes the central cost of support services such as home to school transport, local authority administration and the financing of capital expenditure.

[2] Pupil numbers include only those pupils attending maintained establishments within each sector and are drawn from the DfES Annual Schools Census adjusted to be on a financial year basis.

[3] 1999–2000 saw a change in data source when the data collection moved from the RO1 form collected by the ODPM to the Section 52 form from the DfES. 2002–03 saw a further break in the time series following the introduction of Consistent Financial Reporting (CFR) and the associated restructuring of the outturn tables. The figures in italics indicate the change in sources. In 2002–03 school based expenditure is taken from Section 52 Outturn Table A line 51 net current expenditure (NCE). For 2001–02 and earlier years the expenditure is calculated as lines 1 to 12 less lines 29, 30, 35 and 37. This differs from the old Net Institutional Expenditure (NIE) calculation only in the treatment of meals and milk which is *no longer excluded and no adjustments* for balances are now made. This is taken from Section 52 Outturn Table 3 for 1999–00 to 2001–02 and from the RO1 form previously.

[4] The 2002–03 calculation is broadly similar to the calculation in previous years. However, 2001–02 and earlier years includes all premature retirement compensation (PRC) and Crombie payments, mandatory PRC payments and other indirect employee expenses, while in 2002–03 only the schools element of these categories is included. In 2001–02 this accounted for approximately £70 per pupil of the England total, while the schools element of these categories accounted for approximately £50 per pupil of the England total in 2002–03. Also, for some LEAs, expenditure that had previously been attributed to the school sectors was reported within the LEA part of the form in 2002–03 and would therefore be excluded, though this is not quantifiable from existing sources.

[5] Expenditure was not distinguished between the pre-primary and primary sectors until the inception of Section 52 for financial year 1999–2000.

[6] School-based expenditure in nursery schools was not recorded in 2002–03.

[7] Not available.

[8] Spending in 1997–98 reflects the transfer of monies from local government to central Government for the nursery vouchers scheme. These were returned to local government from 1998–99.

[9] The 1999–2000 figures reflect the return of GM schools to local authority maintenance.

Notes:

1. Figures are rounded to the nearest 10.
2. Data is as reported by the LEA in cash terms.

Student Fees/Finance

Tom Cox: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills (1) what review is taking place of the cost of student fees for students from Commonwealth countries who wish to study here; and if he will make a statement; [193488]

(2) what plans his Department has to bring the cost of student fees for students from Commonwealth countries wishing to study here into line with the fees students from a member state of the European Union pay; and if he will make a statement. [193492]

Dr. Howells: We have no plans to bring the cost of fees paid by students from Commonwealth countries into line with the fees paid by students from a member state of the European Union. The Government offer scholarships to Commonwealth students through the Commonwealth Scholarship and Fellowship Plan and the Shared Scholarship Scheme.

Norman Lamb: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills (1) what discussions he has had with Student Finance Direct with regard to the delayed payment of student loans; and if he will make a statement; [193778]

(2) what information he has received concerning delays in education authorities assessing entitlement to student grants and payment of fees. [193779]

Dr. Howells: Some 800,000 applications for student finance had been received by 18 October, 521,000 of which were received on or before 2 July 2004 (which is the published deadline for new applications).

All applicants who submitted a fully and properly completed application form on or before 2 July should receive, shortly after their university or college confirms their attendance, either a fully-assessed loan payment or an interim payment (under our contingency arrangements for continuing students). Some 13,000 interim payments have been made to date and these students will receive full assessments and a further loan payment (if appropriate) within a few weeks. A further 700 interim payments are scheduled for release once confirmation of the relevant students' attendance is received from the appropriate institutions.

Over 279,000 applications have been received since the deadline passed, of which fewer than 89,000 applications are still being processed. As is the case every year, a significant number of students have applied well after the published deadlines (over 94,000 applications have been received since early September). Local authorities and the Student Loans Company have never been able to guarantee payment at the start of term to late applicants. The Student Loans Company has paid out over 549,000 loans to date, with a further 80,000 fully approved and scheduled for payment as soon as the students' attendance is confirmed by their institution.

There has been some local variation in the speed with which some individual local education authorities have been able to process applications, but the Department and the SLC have worked closely with the LEAs affected to ensure that students are not disadvantaged. The vast majority of LEAs are now processing late applications within a maximum of six weeks, which is the normal service standard set by the Department. As in previous years, the Department has written to higher education institutions asking them to be supportive of students who do not have loans in place at the start of term.

Student Numbers

Mr. Lilley: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills (1) how many students were enrolled in full-time higher education courses at UK universities and colleges in each year since 1990; how many of those students were from other EU countries; and how many were from outside the EU; [193669]

(2) how many students from other EU countries studied at UK universities in each year since 1997; what the aggregate cost of tuition was for those students; and how much those students and their sponsors contributed towards that cost. [193670]

Dr. Howells *[holding answer 25 October 2004]*: The student figures are shown in the table. The Department does not have either the aggregate cost of tuition for EU domiciled students at British universities or the private contribution to fees of these students.

Full-time undergraduate students in the UK[1]

		Of which, those from:		
Academic year	*Total students*	*UK*	*EU*	*Other overseas*
1990/91	663,500	612,300	17,800	33,300
1991/92	747,700	690,400	22,400	34,900
1992/93	852,800	789,300	27,100	36,400
1993/94	948,600	875,800	32,900	39,900
1994/95	1,009,000	924,400	41,100	43,500
1995/96	1,048,400	947,000	51,700	49,700
1996/97	1,076,100	963,000	59,300	53,800
1997/98	1,107,300	984,400	65,500	57,300
1998/99	1,114,200	991,800	66,900	55,600
1999/2000	1,109,000	988,000	65,100	55,900
2000/01	1,115,800	994,900	61,300	59,600
2001/02	1,138,700	1,016,700	55,800	66,200
2002/03	1,174,600	1,046,200	52,200	76,200

[1] Covers HE students studying at universities, HE institutions and FE colleges.

Note:

Figures may not sum to totals because of rounding.

Teacher Absence

Mr. Willis: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills if he will estimate the impact of stress-related sickness on teacher absences; and if he will make a statement. [195142]

Mr. Miliband: The Department collects information centrally on the number of teachers taking sickness absence, but not on the cause. The most recent figures show that in 2003 the average number of days lost to sickness absence was 5.4. This compares favourably with other occupations in both the public and private sectors. We nevertheless have a range of measures to ensure that teacher health and well-being is taken seriously, which include a focus on tackling sources of stress and excessive workload. Research conducted for the Department in the autumn term of 1999 by the School of Education at the University of Cambridge found that colds, influenza and associated respiratory tract infections were reported to be the most important causes of teachers' absence, followed by upset stomach, headache and stress or depression.

Tuition Fees

Mr. Clappison: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills how much has been recovered in fees from students dropping out from a course of higher education *(a)* in total and *(b)* from those dropping out in the first year of their course, in each year since 1997. [194193]

Dr. Howells: Payments are made to Higher Education Institutions (HEIs) in respect of tuition fees grants for those students confirmed to be in attendance three months after the beginning of their course. No payment is made in respect of those who have left a course within three months of the beginning of the academic year. No money is recovered from HEIs for those students who subsequently withdraw after three months.

Mr. Clappison: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills what the average amount paid per student in respect of tuition fees has been in each year since their inception. [194194]

Dr. Howells: New student support arrangements came into effect at the start of academic year 1998/99 when new entrants to higher education were expected to contribute towards the cost of their tuition. The amount of the contribution depends on family income.

The average amount paid per student from public funds in respect of tuition fees for English and Welsh domiciled students for academic years 1998/99 to 2002/03 (latest year for which data are available) are shown in the table:

Average LEA/SLC fee expenditure per student (rounded to nearest £10)[1,2]

Academic year	*Student support scheme students*[3]
1998/99	590
1999/2000	550
2000/01	510
2001/02	530
2002/03	530

[1] Includes placement year sandwich students. For student support scheme students, the maximum fee contribution for these students was £540 in 2002/03.

[2] Public expenditure on fees assessed for payment from public funds. In 1998/99 these payments were made by LEAs; from 1999/2000 these payments in respect of student support scheme students were made by the Student Loans Company (SLC).

[3] Students starting their course from 1998/99 under the new arrangements.

Source:

Form F503G survey of local education authorities

National level data are published annually in the Department's Statistical First Releases (SFRs) (SFR 12/2004 for 2002/03). Updated data for academic years 2003/04 and 2004/05 will be published by the SLC in November 2004 (SLC SFR 01/2004).

University Admissions

Mr. Clappison: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills (1) what plans he has to review the benchmarks for university admissions based on *(a)* state schools and *(b)* socio-economic status; and if he will make a statement; [192930]

(2) what plans the Higher Education Funding Council for England (HEFCE) has for additional benchmarks for universities; what consultations HEFCE carries out in respect of benchmarks; and whether he expects the Director of the Office for Fair Access to be included in such consultations. [193568]

Dr. Howells: The Performance Indicators Steering Group (PISG) is the body which approves the content and methodology of the Performance Indicators (PIs) and associated benchmarks. The PISG is chaired by HEFCE (The Higher Education Funding Council for England), and includes representatives from Universities UK, the Standing Conference of Principals, and HESA (Higher Education Statistics Agency). Individual Higher Education Institutions are notified of their provisional PIs well before publication and are able to comment and take up any issues with the HESA, and/or the HEFCE prior to publication. Suggestions for new PIs can come from a variety of sources and are considered by the PISG for approval. The White Paper "The Future of Higher Education" said that the Government favoured moving towards more sensitive indicators and I am in discussion with HEFCE about how best to do this. I am also looking at the benchmarks to see if there is any way they can be improved or better understood. There are no plans to consult with the Director of OFFA in relation to performance indicators or benchmarks.

Mr. Clappison: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills what reports he has received on the milestones presently in existence for universities in respect of their admissions; whether he plans to publish them; by what means they are publicly available; and whether he expects to be informed by universities of changes in their milestones. [194950]

Dr. Howells: The access agreements that institutions will have from 2006 with the Director of Fair Access will include the institutions' own milestones, or measures of success. The milestones may draw on a range of data. Access agreements will be published. The Secretary of State has not received any report in respect of these milestones. These milestones are separate from the Performance Indicators that were published recently by the Higher Education Statistics Agency. Published annually, these current indicators provide comparative data on the performance of institutions in widening participation, student retention, learning and teaching outcomes and research output. They cover publicly funded higher education institutions in the UK.

HOME DEPARTMENT

Airwave

Mrs. Curtis-Thomas: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what assessment he has made of the implementation of Airwave technology to the police force. [195477]

Caroline Flint: The rollout of Airwave is progressing well. It is currently available in 41 forces with 78,000 live users to date. Users report excellent coverage and clarity of signal. All forces in England, Scotland and Wales are expected to be using Airwave by mid-2006.

Animal Testing

Michael Fabricant: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will seek the setting up of a Royal Commission to *(a)* review the (i) effectiveness of and (ii) justification for animal experiments and *(b)* examine alternatives set out in the document, New Life for Animals published by the Labour Party in 1997. [192905]

Caroline Flint: The Government have no plans to do so. Although we have not ruled out a Royal Commission, in the light of the report of the House of Lords Select Committee on Animals in Scientific Procedures, published in July 2002, we do not believe that a Royal Commission, or other form of public inquiry, would serve any useful purpose at the present time. The Select Committee concluded that there is at present a continuing need for animal experiments both in applied research to develop human and veterinary medicine and to protect humans and the environment, and in research aimed purely at extending knowledge. The Government endorsed this conclusion in our response to the Select Committee report published in January 2003. Instead, we would rather use the available resources to make continuing improvements to the operation of the 1986 Act and to promote the fullest application of the 3Rs—replacing the use of animals with alternative methods; reducing the number of animals needed for a particular purpose and refining the procedures to minimise suffering.

In this latter regard, earlier this year we announced the creation of a new national centre for replacement, refinement and reduction of animals in research (NC3Rs) building on the existing Medical Research Council Centre for Best Practice in Animal Research (CBPAR). The national centre's mission is to advance and promote the 3Rs in research and testing using animals. Responsibility for the national centre rests with the Office of Science and Technology.

Antisocial Behaviour

Huw Irranca-Davies: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many *(a)* acceptable behaviour contracts, *(b)* curfew orders, *(c)* parenting orders, *(d)* dispersal orders, *(e)* fixed penalty notices for antisocial behaviour and *(f)* antisocial behaviour orders have been issued by (i) South Wales Police, (ii) Bridgend Division of South Wales Police and (iii) Rhondda Cynon Taff Division of South Wales Police. [193349]

Ms Blears: The information is as follows:

Acceptable Behaviour Contracts (ABCs)—statistics on the use of ABCs are not routinely collected centrally. However, snapshot figures, from the National Survey on Antisocial Behaviour, released on Thursday 28 October, show that 5,383 contracts have been signed in England and Wales. These data are not broken down by force but show that 219 ABCs have been agreed within Wales.

Curfew Orders—Table A shows the number of Curfew orders with and without electronic monitoring made at courts in each of the petty sessional areas in South Wales (including those made at the Crown court if committed there by magistrates courts in South Wales) from 1999 to 2002.

Statistics for 2003 will be available later in the year.

No applications have yet been received to establish a local child curfew scheme under section 14 of the Crime and Disorder Act 1998. Some local authorities and police forces have considered the possibility but concluded that other measures should be taken to tackle relevant local problems.

Parenting Orders—Youth Justice Board figures are given in Table B by financial year up to 31 March 2004. Data are given by Youth Offending Team area.

Dispersal Orders—Results from the National Survey of Anti-Social Behaviour, published on Thursday 28 October 2004, show that a total of 418 dispersal orders have been made to tackle the problem of intimidating groups in England and Wales between

January and September 2004. These data are not broken down by police force area but figures indicate that 11 have been issued in Wales.

Fixed Penalty Notices for disorder—Complete information on the numbers issued is not available.

Antisocial Behaviour Orders (ASBOs)—Table C shows the number of ASBOs issued within South Wales, as notified to the Home Office, up to 30 June 2004 (latest available), by all courts and where restrictions have been imposed for a specific local authority area. Data are not available at divisional police force level.

Table A: Number of persons given curfew orders[1,2] in South Wales, 1999 to 2002

Petty sessional area	*1999*	*2000*	*2001*	*2002*
Cardiff	2	6	15	37
Cynon Valley	—	—	—	5
Merthyr Tydfil	—	1	—	7
Miskin	—	—	6	12
Neath and Port Talbot	1	12	10	23
Newcastle and Ogmore	2	8	17	20
Swansea	—	9	17	40
Vale of Glamorgan	3	7	4	23
Total	8	43	69	167

[1] Electronic and non-electronic orders.

[2] Based on principal offence.

Source:

Home Office Court Proceedings Database

Table B: Number of Parenting Orders, issued within South Wales, by Youth Offending Team area, 2000 to 2004

	2000-01	*2001-02*	*2002-03*	*2003-04*
Bridgend	0	1	1	12
Cardiff	0	1	3	2
Merthyr Tydfil	0	1	0	0
Neath Port Talbot	0	0	0	0
Rhondda Cynon Taff	0	0	1	0
Swansea	0	0	1	1
Vale of Glamorgan	0	18	0	0
Total	0	21	6	15

Source:

Youth Justice Board

Table C: Number of ASBOs, as notified to the Home Office by all courts within South Wales, where restrictions have been imposed for a specific local authority area, 1 April 1999 to 30 June 2004 (latest available)

Local authority area	*Total issued*
South Wales	52
of which	
from 1 April 1999 to 31 May 2000 by pfa	0
from 1 June 2000 to 30 June 2004 by unitary authority area	52
Cardiff CC	20
Merthyr Tydfil CBC	10
Neath Port Talbot County BC	10
Rhondda Cynon Taff County BC	9
Swansea CC	2
Vale of Glamorgan Council	1

Note:

Between 1 April 1999 to 31 May 2000 data available by police force area (pfa) only.

Source:

ASBO database

Tom Cox: To ask the Secretary of State for The Home Department how many antisocial behaviour orders have been issued to young *(a)* men and *(b)* women in the last 12 months; and if he will make a statement. [191963]

Ms Blears: The available information is given in the table.

Number of notifications reported to the Home Office, by magistrates courts and the Crown court[1], of antisocial behaviour orders (ASBOs) issued, by age group, from 1 April 2003 to 31 March 2004, England and Wales

Age	*Male*	*Female*
18–20	200	16
21–25	106	33
Total	306	49

[1] Excludes ASBOs issued at the county courts because date of birth details are not supplied.

Association of Chief Police Officers

Mr. Gibb: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department whether he is provided with copies of *(a)* memoranda and *(b)* policy guidance issued to chief constables by the Association of Chief Police Officers. [194128]

Ms Blears: Non-sensitive memoranda and policy guidance is published by the Association of Chief Police Officers (ACPO) on their public website.

Additionally, memoranda and policy guidance may be provided to the Secretary of State for the Home Department when requested or when considered of interest, and in practice, the vast majority of literature is copied to relevant policy sections.

Badger Baiting

Mr. Nigel Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many successful prosecutions against badger baiters there have been in each of the last five years. [195350]

Caroline Flint: The information requested is not available centrally.

Bail Hostels

Mr. Shepherd: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will list the *(a)* occupancy rates and *(b)* running costs for each bail hostel in the west midlands in each of the past five years. [188007]

Paul Goggins *[holding answer 13 September 2004]*: *(a)* No published data are available on the occupancy rates of approved probation and bail hostels (approved premises). *(b)* The West Midlands Probation Board have advised the Home Office of the following information on running costs for approved premises.

Expenditure of west midlands approved premises

£000

Approved premises	*1999–2000*	*2000–01*	*2001–02*	*2002–03*	*2003–04*
Bilston	221	271	365	354	382
Carpenter House	219	274	364	349	432
Crowley House	264	307	389	386	454
Elliott House	297	346	400	421	485
Stonnal Road	207	273	316	319	361
Sycamore Lodge	266	327	449	442	574
Welford House	275	296	381	384	439
Total	1,749	2,094	2,664	2,655	3,127

Notes
1. After 1 April 2001, approved premises received 100 per cent. grant from the Home Office, including housing benefit. Prior to this they received 20 per cent. of their funding from local authorities, and housing benefit direct.
2. With effect from 1 October 2002 property costs were included in the budgets.

CCTV

Tom Cox: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how much money the Government have invested in CCTV systems in local authorities covering the Greater London area. [194142]

Ms Blears: The Home Office provided a total of £33.44 million to local authorities in Greater London for Closed Circuit Television schemes through the Crime Reduction Programme's CCTV initiative.

This was broken down as:

CCTV Round 1: Local authorities in Greater London were awarded £19.49 million for CCTV.

CCTV Round 2: Local authorities in Greater London were awarded £16.95 million for CCTV.

Since the completion of the Crime Reduction Programme, crime reduction funding has been allocated directly to local Crime and Disorder Reduction Partnership (CDRPs) through the Building Safer Communities fund and to Basic Command Unit (BCD) commanders through the BCU fund. These funding streams fund a variety of interventions, including CCTV, to tackle local crime priorities. Information about the interventions funded is not held centrally.

Mr. Pickthall: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how much public funding has been spent on CCTV security cameras in West Lancashire since 1997. [171721]

Ms Blears: The Home Office has provided a total of £884,404 to West Lancashire for Close Circuit Television schemes through the Crime Reduction Programme's CCTV initiative.

This breaks down as:

Under CCTV Round 1, West Lancashire was awarded £166,948 for CCTV in Ormskirk Town Centre.

Under CCTV Round 2, West Lancashire was awarded £696,703 followed by an additional £20,753 to provide a network of cameras in priority rural and urban locations across the borough, incorporating public transport and "hard to reach" areas.

All funding was claimed.

Other crime reduction funding has been allocated directly to the local Crime and Disorder Reduction Partnership and Basic Command Unit in West Lancashire to fund a variety of interventions, included CCTV. Information about the allocation of that funding is not held centrally.

Mr. Pike: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how much public funding has been spent on CCTV security cameras in Burnley since 1997. [168317]

Ms Blears: As part of the Crime Reduction Programme, Burnley claimed £198,526 to extend the existing CCTV coverage to Padiham, enhance the current town centre scheme and relocate the control room.

Other crime reduction funding has been allocated directly to the local Crime and Disorder Reduction Partnership and Basic Command Unit in Burnley to fund a variety of interventions, included CCTV. Information about the allocation of that funding is not held centrally.

Correspondence

Mr. Arbuthnot: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department when he will reply to the letters from the right hon. Member for North-East Hampshire of 26 May, 1 July and 12 August, regarding a constituent, Mrs. Babur. [190865]

Mr. Browne *[holding answer 14 October 2004]*: I wrote to the right hon. Member on 3 November.

Crime (Tamworth)

Mr. Jenkins: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many *(a)* successful and *(b)* unsuccessful criminal prosecutions were brought for crimes perpetrated in Tamworth constituency in each year since 1997; and how many criminal charges were pressed for crimes perpetrated in the Tamworth constituency in each year since 1997. [188112]

Paul Goggins: Statistics for defendants charged with offences are not collected centrally, nor is it possible to break down the court proceedings data collected centrally to constituency level.

The following table, however, gives the number of defendants *(a)* convicted and *(b)* not convicted in the Staffordshire police force area as a whole.

Defendants convicted and those not convicted of offences of all types at all courts in the Staffordshire police force area, 1997 to 2002

	Defendants convicted	Defendants not convicted[1]
1997	31,504	10,119
1998	33,009	9,256
1999	29,562	8,734
2000[2]	21,514	7,737
2001	16,783	6,948
2002	18,891	7,280

[1] Includes defendants whose proceedings were discontinued, those discharged under section 6 MCA 1980, and those, whose charges were withdrawn, dismissed or acquitted.

[2] Staffordshire police force were only able to supply a sample of data for magistrates courts proceedings covering one full week in each quarter for 2000. Estimates based on this sample are included in the figures as they are considered sufficiently robust at this high level of analysis.

Statistics for 2003 will be published in November.

DNA Database

Mrs. Curtis-Thomas: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department whether an assessment has been made of the usefulness of the DNA database. [194872]

Caroline Flint: An assessment of the usefulness of the National DNA Database has been carried out through the on-going evaluation of the Home Office DNA Expansion Programme. The programme was set up in April 2000 to fund police forces to increase the collection of offender DNA samples and facilitate the build up of DNA profiles on the database. It also funds the retrieval of more DNA material left by offenders at crime scenes. It has provided £182.6 million to police forces between April 2000 and March 2004 in addition to £19 million per annum approximately from forces' own budgets. The majority of the £182.6 million is used by forces to cover the costs of processing DNA samples in forensic laboratories and the cost of 650 additional Scenes of Crime and Intelligence Staff and equipment.

The programme's target was to hold a DNA profile for all known active suspect offenders on the database by March 2004 (it held 760,000 DNA profiles from suspect offenders in April 2000). This was achieved. There are currently 2.73 million DNA profiles taken from 2.45 million suspected offenders on the database (as at end September 2004), the great majority of known active suspect offenders. The UK now leads the world in terms of its ability to identify offenders and eliminate suspects by using a DNA database.

Police data returns show that there were over 45,200 DNA "offender-to-scene" matches in 2003–04. The chance of a match with a subject profile when a crime scene profile is first added to the database is now about 45 per cent. The match rate increases to about 70 per cent. when matches obtained later as new subject profiles are loaded and included.

Evaluation of the DNA Expansion Programme has shown that the database can make a significant contribution to crime detection by linking DNA evidence found at crime scenes to offenders and significantly increasing the probability of crime detection. Where crime scene DNA is added to the database the rate of detection can be significantly increased. In 2003–04, the overall detection rate was 23 per cent. but where DNA was successfully recovered from a crime scene and loaded on to the National DNA Database the detection rate rose to 43 per cent.

The DNA detection rates for volume crime show striking increases—as shown in the table.

Percentage

Crime category	National	DNA rate
All recorded crime	23	43
Domestic burglary	15	45
Burglary OTD	10	53
Theft of vehicle	13	26
Theft from vehicle	6	54

Evaluation of the impact of the programme and of the usefulness of the database is continuing in 2004–05.

Great Gorilla Run

Miss McIntosh: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department pursuant to his answer of 15 October 2004, *Official Report*, column 412W, on the Great Gorilla Run, how many police were provided to redirect traffic during the Great Gorilla Run in London on 19 September; how many roads were closed; and how many diversions were created. [194656]

Caroline Flint: No roads were closed and no diversions were created as a result of the Great Gorilla Run. I understand that five police officers were present during the event in a public safety capacity.

Hate Crime

Mr. Woodward: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if the Government will amend legislation on hate crimes against *(a)* people with disabilities and *(b)* gay, lesbian and bisexual people to make it as extensive as that which applies to hate crimes on the grounds of race and religion; and if he will make a statement. [186890]

Paul Goggins: The Criminal Justice Act 2003 provides that where criminal offences are motivated by prejudice or hostility against the victim's sexual orientation or disability, as well as race or religion, the courts should treat this as an aggravating factor in sentencing.

This is to act as a deterrent and so help protect these groups from harassment and attack, as well as sending a clear message that such behaviour is unacceptable in our society.

The Government work continuously to ensure that legislation meets the needs of society, and will continue to keep under review the protection offered to different groups.

Mrs. Curtis-Thomas: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will make a statement on the Merseyside Police's Hate Crime Policy. [146244]

Ms Blears: Merseyside Police Hate Crime policy was originally produced as a result of the Stephen Lawrence inquiry in 1999. The policy offers procedural guidance in the identification of hate crime/incidents and the reporting, recording and investigation of such crime/

incidents. The policy also includes information in respect of the third party reporting process and a self-reporting process.

The policy was formally launched in February 2003 and then internally reviewed in March 2004. The good practice contained within the policy has been recognised by several other forces, including the authors of the Association of Chief Police Officers hate crime policy. This policy has been created by Merseyside Police and is their responsibility.

Indymedia

John McDonnell: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department on what *(a)* grounds and *(b)* legal authority the web servers of the news agency Indymedia were seized on 7 October. [193709]

Caroline Flint: I can only confirm that no UK law enforcement agencies were involved in the matter. I am not at liberty to discuss the specific case in more detail.

Knife Crimes

Mr. Nigel Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many victims of reported crimes were *(a)* injured and *(b)* killed by knives or other bladed weapons in each year since 1997; and if he will make a statement. [193041]

Ms Blears: Information on victims of recorded crime injured by knives is not collected centrally. The British Crime Survey (BCS) collects information on the use of weapons in violent incidents, whether or not the incident was reported to the police.

The 2002–03 BCS estimates that weapons were used in 26 per cent. of violent incidents. A knife was used in 8 per cent. of violent incidents, and another type of stabbing implement was used in 2 per cent. of violent incidents (more than one type of weapon could be used in an incident). These figures were published in Crime in England and Wales 2002–03 Supplementary Tables: Nature of burglary, vehicle and violent crime, an internet only publication available at: www.homeoffice.gov.uk/rds/crimeew0203_tables_bvv.html

However the use of a weapon does not necessarily mean that injuries were sustained as the weapon may have been used to threaten the victim. No data is available from the BCS on injuries caused by a weapon, only on injuries sustained in violent incidents generally.

Injuries were sustained in 50 per cent. of violent incidents in the 2003–04 BCS. Cuts were sustained in 14 per cent. of violent incidents where injury occurred (more than one type of injury could have occurred); however these were not necessarily caused by a weapon. These figures were published in Crime in England and Wales 2003–04.

Statistics on victims of homicide killed with a sharp instrument are published annually in a Home Office Statistical Bulletin. The latest available figures were published in Home Office Statistical Bulletin number 01/04, "Crime in England and Wales 2002–03: Supplementary Volume 1: Homicide and Gun Crime".

For 2002–03, there were 272 currently recorded homicides where the method of killing involved a sharp instrument.

Mr. Nigel Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will make it his policy to review *(a)* sentencing for and *(b)* provisions for deterrence of crimes using knives and other bladed weapons; and if he will make a statement. [193043]

Caroline Flint: We are conducting an analysis of the nature of knife related crime and actions which can and should be taken to tackle it. This includes examining the legislation and penalties to deal with the possession or use of knives and offensive weapons.

Mr. Nigel Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will introduce a licensing system for owners of *(a)* swords, *(b)* machetes, *(c)* meat cleavers and *(d)* similar bladed instruments; and if he will make a statement. [193044]

Caroline Flint: Section 139 of the Criminal Justice Act 1988 already prohibits the possession of an article with blade or point in a public place without good reason or lawful authority, with the exception of a folding pocket knife with a blade not exceeding three inches.

We have no plans to introduce a licensing system for these weapons. Many of these items are used legitimately and such a move would penalise law-abiding people. Licensing would also be expensive to administer and would involve the police in considerable extra work, which inevitably will affect their other policing priorities.

Keith Vaz: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will implement a ban on carrying all kinds of knife other than for professional use. [193068]

Caroline Flint: Section 139 of the Criminal Justice Act 1988 already prohibits the possession of an article with blade or point in a public place without good reason or lawful authority, with the exception of a folding pocket knife with a blade not exceeding three inches. It is a defence for a person to prove that the article is for use at work, for religious reasons or as part of a national costume.

This legislation is kept under constant review but there are no plans to introduce legislation to prevent the carrying of folding pocket knives.

Keith Vaz: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what steps the Government are taking to tackle the problem of assaults on children involving knives. [193070]

Caroline Flint: It is unacceptable for young people to carry knives and the Government take their responsibility for public safety in this area extremely seriously. There is a range of legislation and police powers in place aimed at preventing the possession or use of knives and offensive weapons and this is kept under constant review to ensure it is comprehensive and effective.

It is essential to educate young people about the dangers and consequences of becoming involved in criminality associated with weapon-carrying and the Home Office funds and operates a number of community-based initiatives aimed at encouraging good citizenship and turning vulnerable young people away from crime.

Leicestershire Police

Keith Vaz: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many times he has met the Chief Constable of Leicestershire police since January. [194374]

Ms Blears: My right hon. Friend the Home Secretary has met the Chief Constable of Leicestershire Constabulary twice since January.

Metropolitan Police (Racism)

Tom Cox: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will make a statement on progress made by his Department in combating racism within the Metropolitan Police Force. [194156]

Ms Blears: The Government and the Metropolitan Police Service (MPS) remain committed to combating racism within the MPS.

The MPS has made significant progress in combating racism as an organisation. It has acted robustly around the recommendations from the Stephen Lawrence Inquiry Report and continues to take a strong stance against any suggestion of racist behaviour.

The MPS were one of the first forces to adopt the new assessment procedures for police recruitment. The assessment centre tests candidates' attitudes to race and diversity at least seven times across the process, including at interview. Those who do not score sufficiently highly are not offered a job—irrespective of how well they do in the rest of the selection process.

Sir Bill Morris is currently chairing an inquiry into the conduct of the MPS in relation to: complaint, allegation and grievance matters, employment tribunal claims and the resolution of workplace conflicts. The MPS is not complacent and will continue to develop as an organisation in all fields of diversity and currently awaits the outcome of the Morris Inquiry as part of this development.

While the BBC programme "Secret Policeman" did not portray the MPS, the Commissioner of Police for the Metropolis tasked Assistant Commissioner Ghaffur with undertaking a thorough review of practices within the MPS. The review made a number of recommendations that included issuing guidance on behaviour. In particular, recruits now sign a "Principles of Conduct" statement which clearly sets out the Met's expectations of individuals regarding their own and others' behaviour.

The MPS has also produced guidance for potential recruits and training school staff on appropriate behaviour, tolerance, respect and politeness. This puts a responsibility on new recruits and training school staff to eliminate and not tolerate racist behaviour.

National Offender Management Service

Mr. Drew: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department whether the role of probation officers dealing with serious sex offenders will be included within the National Offender Management Service. [172842]

Paul Goggins: Offender managers will have responsibility for the full range of offenders, including serious sex offenders.

Overseas Corruption

Mr. Hancock: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many of the cases on the register of allegations of overseas corruption offences have been categorised as requiring no further action. [194717]

Caroline Flint: The National Criminal Intelligence Service currently has 10 cases on the register of allegations of overseas corruption offences that have been categorised as requiring no further action.

Mr. Hancock: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many of the allegations on the register of allegations of overseas corruption offences have come from *(a)* the Foreign and Commonwealth Office, *(b)* the Export Credits Guarantee Department, *(c)* foreign jurisdictions, *(d)* Interpol, *(e)* local police stations within the UK *(f)* suspicious activity reports, *(g)* whistle-blowers and *(h)* other sources. [194685]

Caroline Flint: The register of allegations of overseas corruption offences is made up allegations from the following sources:

	Number
(a) Foreign and Commonwealth Office	15
(b) Export Credits Guarantee Department	6
(c) Foreign jurisdictions	0
(d) Interpol	3
(e) Local police stations within the UK	0
(f) Suspicious activity reports	0
(g) Whistleblowers	0
(h) Other sources	13

Mr. Hancock: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department on how many occasions the National Criminal Intelligence Service has reported to the authorities of a foreign jurisdiction allegations of overseas corruption that they believe to be worthy of investigation. [194716]

Caroline Flint: At this time the National Criminal Intelligence Service has not reported any allegations of overseas corruption to any authorities for further investigation, other than to the appropriate UK law enforcement agencies.

Police

Chris Ruane: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what the net expenditure on policing in England and Wales has been in each year since 1979, expressed in real terms at today's prices, broken down by police authority area in England and Wales. [190842]

Ms Blears: Information in a common format has been available since 1990. Information for the years 1990–91 to 2003–04 has been placed in the Library.

Overall, police expenditure has increased in real terms by 38 per cent. since 1990–91.

Mr. Damian Green: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what his target number is for police officers per head of population in *(a)* urban and *(b)* rural areas. [193909]

Ms Blears: No target is set by central Government for the number of police officers per head of population.

The Government have recognised the particular problems of policing sparsely populated areas. We are allocating an additional £30 million to 31 forces under the Rural Policing Fund. It is for the Chief Officer of Police to decide how he will deploy available resources to improve the policing of sparsely populated areas.

On 31 March 2004 there was 268 police officers to 100,000 population in England and Wales. Police/population ratios can be found on a force-by-force basis at Table 4 of Home Office Statistical Bulletin 13/04 ("Police Service Strength—England and Wales, 31 March 2004") published on 29 September 2004.

Mrs. Curtis-Thomas: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will make a statement on the first phase of police reform; what the key elements of the second phase of police reform are; and what the timetable is for further developments on police reform. [194860]

Ms Blears: The Government are engaged in a sustained programme of police reform which began with the publication of the white paper "Policing a New Century" in December 2001. The first phase of reform has produced real successes—a performance management culture has been embedded within the service; the National Intelligence Model has been implemented in all 43 forces ensuring an intelligence led approach to policing; we now have 4,000 Community Support Offices providing a visible, reassuring uniformed presence on the streets; we have a record 140,000 police officers and record investment in the service; and a major pay and conditions package has been implemented to provide a fairer, more flexible and modernised system of pay and rewards.

The Government will shortly publish a further white paper building on the first phase of reform and the broad endorsement for the direction of travel received in response to the November 2003 consultation "Policing: Building Safer Communities Together". The focus of this phase of reform will be around spreading a system of responsive neighbourhood policing throughout England and Wales and building a stronger customer service culture within policing. Further modernisation of the workforce and strengthened accountability mechanisms will help to deliver this vision.

Some of the proposals outlined in the paper will require legislation which will be taken forward as soon as parliamentary time allows. However, many of the changes can begin to be made immediately and the Government will work closely with police forces, authorities and other partners to take this forward.

Mrs. Curtis-Thomas: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will make a statement on the work of the Police Standards Unit. [194861]

Ms Blears: The Police Standards Unit (PSU) was set up by the Home Secretary in June 2001 to help deliver the Government's commitment to raise standards and improve the operational performance of the police. The focus of PSU's activities is to:

measure and assess police forces' performance;

understand the underlying causes of performance variations;

provide support and focused assistance to forces where a problem with performance has been identified;

sponsor and disseminate proven good practice.

Performance management

PSU has driven the development of 'iQuanta', an on-line analysis tool for police performance data. Through iQuanta there is now timely data on the performance of all forces and Basic Command Units across all the major crime types. This data is also available to forces themselves and police authorities, who now have a means of holding forces to account. PSU's work on the audit of performance data has helped ensure accuracy and consistency in recording practices across forces.

The development of a National Standard for Incident Recording (NSIR) should help measure and handle the police response to the weight of non-crime incidents more effectively.

The on-going development of the Policing Performance Assessment Framework (PPAF) is helping to understand police performance in the round. PPAF has been accepted by the Association of Chief Police Officers (ACPO) and the APA as a fair means of assessing the complexities of police duties.

Operational support

PSU is engaged with seven under-performing or "target" forces: Cambridgeshire, Cleveland, Greater Manchester, Humberside, Nottinghamshire, Northants, and West Yorkshire. This proactive role has changed the dynamic of the Department's relationship with the police service, underpinned by a sound analytical and evidence-based footing, and demonstrating a new and effective way of doing business. Each engagement has been different. In some, PSU has helped a force's own improvement regime to go further and faster. In others, the unit has been a catalyst for change. In the third category, PSU's involvement has a more fundamental process of attempting to put the force on a path towards recovery.

In liaison with the ACPO, PSU launched the high profile, national Alcohol Misuse Enforcement Campaign. This links in to the government's Alcohol Harm Reduction Strategy and aims to crack down on alcohol-fuelled disorder, as well as using tough enforcement measures to take action against irresponsible drinkers and vendors who are fuelling anti-social behaviour. This campaign was positively received and early data has provided a baseline to measure the impact and success of this.

PSU's work on national projects, such as Automatic Number-Plate Recognition (ANPR), National Video Identification (NVIS) and the Policing Priority Areas (PPAs) have been widely recognised as a success. In the period June 2003 to May 2004, during the ANPR project, 173,000 vehicles were stopped, 13,000 arrests made, 51,000 FPNs issued and £8 million property recovered. £1 million in hypothecated income has been generated and the rate of 100 arrests per full-time officer is 10 times the national average.

PSU's role in police use of forensic science has also been successful, in particular on DNA and NAFIS (Fingerprint Automation) and through reviewing and changing force-level forensic processes. This has helped the 62 per cent. increase in the number of DNA matches achieved and the 34 per cent. increase in the number of "DNA detections" delivered. PSD have led on the development of a computer simulation model for forces to identify blockages in their forensic processes. A work-package of good practice is to be disseminated to all forces.

Launched in March 2002, the Policing Priority Areas (PPA) Programme was aligned to the Government's Strategy for Neighbourhood Renewal and sites were first piloted in Bradford, Bristol, Camberwell, Rhyl and Stoke. Each has demonstrated how working with small communities suffering from crime, the fear of crime and anti-social behaviour can bring about significant improvements in police and partnership working. This police-led programme has now been extended and there are now 29 identified sites. There has been significant success in reducing crime and providing public reassurance in the existing PPAs and the programme continues to build on the progress made so far.

Improving performance through applied knowledge for the policing community

PSU has established a Programme Board to bring together the main stakeholders: ACPO, HMIC, NCPE, PITO, as well as the Home Office Partnership and Regions Drugs Unit (PRDU), and Research, Development and Statistics (RDS). This will provide a forum for coordinating and driving forward our knowledge needs, and the roles of the key stakeholders have been mapped out to ensure that these fit together most effectively.

Mrs. Curtis-Thomas: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what the Government's main priorities are for the police in terms of science and technology. [194870]

Caroline Flint: The Government's priorities for the police's use of science and technology were first outlined in the Police Science and Technology Strategy 2003–2008, which was published by the Home Office in January 2003. A second strategy, which builds on the original and provides an updated position, was published in May 2004

The strategy identifies where science and technology can have the greatest impact on policing over the next five years. The priority applications for police science and technology set out in the strategy are, in order:

Identifying and eliminating threats to public safety, taking account of the increased risk of terrorist activity.

Effective use of intelligence-gathering technology.

Secure exchange of data between forces and other agencies.

Mobile data input and retrieval.

Maximising the value of evidence.

Effective management of investigations including the use of intelligent systems to assist decision-making.

Monitoring offenders that pose a threat.

Undertaking effective surveillance.

Effective location and recovery of evidence.

Protection of officers and vulnerable individuals.

The Strategy's key aims are:

to establish priorities for current and future science and technology applications and research,

to co-ordinate the development and implementation of technology between users and suppliers to ensure a coherent and effective process, and

to implement processes for future scanning to ensure that the police service can exploit new technology at the earliest opportunity and is prepared for new technology-based threats.

The strategy builds on the Government's key priorities for policing as laid out in the National Policing Plan 2004–07. It also provides a framework for forces, police authorities, and key providers like the Forensic Science Service, the Police Scientific Development Branch and Police Information Technology Organisation, to draw up their individual plans for the use of science and technology.

Copies of both editions of the Police Science and Technology Strategy can be found in the Library.

Mrs. Curtis-Thomas: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what assessment he has made of the *(a)* work of and *(b)* resources available to the National Centre for Policing Excellence. [194903]

Ms Blears: All of the work by the National Centre for Policing Excellence (NCPE) on doctrine development is subject to extensive consultation with the Home Office, as well as the Police Service and other key stakeholders.

The NCPE itself was inspected by Her Majesty's Inspectorate of Constabulary (HMIC) during summer 2003 as part of its overall inspection of Centrex, and a report was published in January 2004. Future inspection will be based on the result of monthly performance reports which will be submitted to HMIC, and an annual European Foundation Quality Management (EFQM) self-assessment.

The NCPE is resourced from the overall grant-in-aid allocated to Centrex by the Home Office. This process is overseen by the Centrex Board, on which the Home Office are represented. The Home Office also allocate additional ring-fenced funding to the NCPE. In 2004–05 this additional funding amounts to £5 million. We are confident that the NCPE is adequately resourced in order to meet their key aims and objectives.

Mrs. Curtis-Thomas: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what measures will be introduced to address variations in training between police forces. [194905]

Ms Blears: From summer 2005, Her Majesty's Inspectorate of Constabulary (HMIC) will collect information about training through its baseline assessment of all forces. This information will be analysed within HMIC and published on the internet. Any matters for concern in terms of trends, or individual forces being out of step with others, will be picked up by HMIC.

Within the Home Office, officials are working with key stakeholders and forces to facilitate collaboration between forces and common standards in training.

Mrs. Curtis-Thomas: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what representations he has received from Her Majesty's Inspector of Constabulary on the most recent National Policing Plan. [194906]

Ms Blears: To date, we have received no representations from Her Majesty's Inspectorate of Constabulary on the draft National Policing Plan for 2005–08.

Mrs. Curtis-Thomas: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department which major recommendations of the O'Dowd report on police bureaucracy remain unimplemented; and if he will make a statement on progress with implementation. [194910]

Ms Blears: We have made good progress with implementing the recommendations of the O'Dowd report. Those outstanding mostly require legislation, developments in IT or wide-ranging changes to the criminal justice system.

Among our achievements to date, over 7,700 forms have been made obsolete across all 43 forces; all 43 forces now undertake video identity parades; over 72,000 police officers and staff now use Airwave radios in 40 forces; the national rollout of the penalty notice for disorder scheme was completed in April 2004 with over 20,000 tickets having been issued at the end of August; and we are investing £13 million over two years into 10 pilot projects which test out new ways of using police staff.

Mrs. Curtis-Thomas: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will repeat the study, "A Diary of a Police Officer", in 2005. [194919]

Ms Blears: We have no plans to do so at present.

Mrs. Curtis-Thomas: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what assessment has been made of the effects of updating and integrating police IT systems on police bureaucracy. [194921]

Caroline Flint: We are committed to tackling the administrative burdens and inefficient working practices that keep officers from front line duties. A steering group has been set up to oversee the work on reducing bureaucracy in the police service, which includes the development and more efficient use of information technology.

The Custody and Case Preparation Programme will deliver an electronic and paperless system for the handling of an arrest through the provision of a case file for the Crown Prosecution Service and courts. It will also allow courts to input results of cases directly onto the case file, which will automatically update the Police National Computer.

The National Management Information System will reduce much of the work required of forces in their statistical and performance reporting to the Home Office. The Police Portal is already enabling both the public and police to benefit from efficiency savings through the development of the "minor" online crime notification facility.

Intelligence Management Prioritisation Analysis Co-ordination and Tasking (IMPACT), the programme to create a national IT system to support police intelligence and enable sharing of intelligence data between forces will deliver significant business benefits.

Jeremy Corbyn: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what the average spending per capita on policing in the Islington, North constituency was in each year since 1996–97. [194015]

Ms Blears: Resources are allocated directly to borough operational command units using the Service's resource allocation formula. I understand from the Commissioner of Police for the Metropolis that the provision for Islington, North is now part of the overall provision for the Islington command unit and can be apportioned as follows:

	£ per capita
1999–2000	102
2000–01	104
2001–02	108
2002–03	117
2003–04	142
2004–05	151

Notes:

1. In 1990–2000, separate budgets were available for Holloway division (Islington, North) which represented 47 per cent. of Islington borough's total budget. The following years have been calculated as 47 per cent. of Islington borough's total budget.
2. Earlier budget information is not available owing to a change in the financial system in April 1999.

In addition, borough units are able to call upon all London Units (such as dog sections, Territorial Support Group, Traffic and Air Support Units) when operational priorities dictate.

Police Federation

Keith Vaz: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department when he next plans to meet the chairman of the Police Federation. [194378]

Ms Blears: My right hon. Friend the Home Secretary meets the chair and other officials of the Police Federation on a regular basis. Their next meeting is scheduled for December 2004.

Police Stations

Mr. Amess: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what criteria he has set on deciding whether a new police station should be built; and what the criteria are for consultation with *(a)* the public and *(b)* the local hon. Member. [191133]

Ms Blears: It is the Government's role to allocate grant funding to police force areas. It is for the Police Authority and Chief Officer to decide on planning and deployment of available resources.

Under the provisions of the Police Act 1996 (s.96) police authorities are required to make arrangements for obtaining the views of their community on policing in their area.

Rackspace

David Taylor: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what recent representations he has received from the Federal Bureau of Investigation concerning the activities of UK-based customers of the US company Rackspace; and if he will make a statement. [193230]

Caroline Flint: The Secretary of State did not receive any representations from the Federal Bureau of Investigations in this matter. In the circumstances I do not therefore believe that it is necessary for me to make a statement.

Safer Neighbourhoods Programme (London)

Linda Perham: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will ensure continuity of funding in the roll-out of the Safer Neighbourhoods Programme in London over the next few years. [194130]

Ms Blears: Operational policing initiatives are matters for each police chief officer, within plans and budgets set by the police authority. The Metropolitan Police Authority (MPA) /Metropolitan Police Service (MPS) are developing the Safer Neighbourhood Programme within their own budget. Police authorities receive general grant to help fund their budgets, broadly in relation to their relative needs for policing and in the light of local resources. This year, general grant provides for about 79 per cent. of the MPA's net budget requirements. The level of grant is considered annually.

The Government have provided an increase in police funding of 21 per cent. in real terms since 1997 and has helped to secure higher police officer numbers through the Crime Fighting Fund.

Neighbourhood policing is one of Government's key priorities for the next five years and it will support a significant expansion of accessible and responsive neighbourhood policing across all forces. The Government are providing funding to increase the numbers of community support officers in England and Wales to 5,500 by March 2005 and will provide further funding to increase numbers to 24,000 by the end of 2007–08.

Special Constables

Mr. Andrew Mitchell: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many special constables have become members of the full-time police force in each of the last five years. [193894]

Ms Blears: Information on those joining the Police Service and the wastage rates for the special constabulary is published annually in a Home Office Statistical Bulletin. Recruits who had served previously as special constables are not separately identified.

Tobacco Smoke Testing

Norman Baker: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department for what reasons it is his policy to grant licences under the Animals (Scientific Procedures) Act 1986 to test the effects of tobacco smoke. [191135]

Caroline Flint: The Government stand firmly by their ban on tests which involve animals in the development and testing of tobacco products announced in November 1997. No such tests have been authorised under the Animals (Scientific Procedures) Act 1986 since that time. However, applications may be considered for licence authorities involving the potential exposure of animals to tobacco smoke when this is the only means of studying an important feature of the development or treatment of a number of health problems.

Under-age Drinking

Mrs. Gillan: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many of the *(a)* on licence and *(b)* off licence premises discovered to be selling alcohol to underage young people during the Home Office's Police Standards and ACPO summer initiative have been prosecuted successfully. [193740]

Ms Blears: Statistics on the number of successful prosecutions during the Home Office's Police Standards and the Association of Chief Police Officers (ACPO) summer initiative cannot be separately identified on the Home Office Court Proceedings database. However the Police Standards Unit is monitoring the progress of prosecutions resulting from the summer campaign. At present it is too early to determine the outcome of these prosecutions.

HEALTH

Alcoholism (Greater London)

Tom Cox: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what discussions he has had, and with whom, on co-ordinating policy to reduce alcoholism in Greater London. [194155]

Dr. Ladyman: The Government's alcohol harm reduction strategy for England was published in March 2004 and includes a range of actions to tackle all aspects of alcohol-related harm. Responsibility for implementation lies jointly with the Department and the Home Office.

The strategy contains actions that focus on tackling serious alcohol problems and alcohol dependence, for example, improving training for doctors, nurses and other health professionals, emphasising early identification of alcohol problems. The Department is conducting an audit of the demand for and provision of alcohol treatment in England by the end of January 2005. The audit will provide information on gaps between demand and provision of treatment services both locally and nationally and will be used as a basis for the Department to develop a programme of improvement to treatment services. The information will provide local data on all areas including Greater London that can be used by local strategic planners.

Autism

Paul Holmes: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what training general practitioners receive in autism awareness; and if he will make a statement. [194783]

Dr. Ladyman: The training of general practitioners is a matter for the relevant professional bodies. This question should be addressed to the Royal College of General Practitioners.

Care Homes

Mr. Hepburn: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many *(a)* care homes and *(b)* care home beds there have been in (i) the Jarrow constituency, (ii) South Tyneside, (iii) Tyne and Wear and (iv) the UK in each year since 1997. [193605]

Dr. Ladyman: I understand from the chair of the Commission for Social Care Inspection (CSCI) that figures for later years were collected by the National Care Standards Commission, and now the CSCI, but that comparable details are not available. The number of care homes and care home beds for the nearest equivalent areas are shown in the tables.

Table 1 shows the number of care homes in Gateshead and South Tyneside, Newcastle and North Tyneside, Northumberland, and England at 31 March for the years 1997 to 2001.

Table 2 shows the number of care home places in Gateshead and South Tyneside, Newcastle and North Tyneside, Northumberland, and England at 31 March for the years 1997 to 2001.

Table 1: The number of care homes in Gateshead and South Tyneside, Newcastle and North Tyneside, Northumberland, and England, 1997–2001[1]

Rounded numbers

	Residential homes			Nursing homes [2]	
	Local authority	*Private*	*Voluntary*	*Independent*	*Total*
England					
1997	2,260	16,830	3,850	5,920	28,850
1998	2,230	16,610	3,930	6,180	28,950
1999	2,070	16,640	3,860	6,110	28,680
2000	2,030	16,460	3,950	5,880	28,320
2001	1,870	15,980	3,940	5,680	27,480
Gateshead and South Tyneside					
1997	30	60	50	40	170
1998	40	90	30	40	190
1999	40	100	20	40	190
2000	30	90	30	30	180
2001	30	100	30	30	190
Newcastle and North Tyneside					
1997	30	130	30	60	240
1998	20	130	30	50	240
1999	20	140	40	60	250
2000	20	160	40	60	280
2001	20	120	40	60	250
Northumberland					
1997	20	100	30	20	170
1998	20	100	20	30	170
1999	20	110	30	30	180
2000	20	110	30	30	180
2001	10	100	30	30	170

[1] Nursing relates to Gateshead and South Tyneside health authority (HA), Newcastle and North Tyneside HA and Northumberland HA; Residential care relates to Gateshead Council with Social Services Responsibilities (CSSR), South Tyneside CSSR, Newcastle CSSR, North Tyneside CSSR, and Northumberland CSSR.

[2] Nursing home figures include places in general nursing homes, mental nursing homes and private hospitals and clinics.

Source:

RA and RH(N) form A.

Table 2: The number of care home places in Gateshead and South Tyneside, Newcastle and North Tyneside, Northumberland, and England, 1997–2001[1]

Rounded numbers

	Residential			Nursing[2]	
	Local authority	*Private*	*Voluntary*	*Independent*	*Total*
England					
1997	65,820	213,140	59,170	196,270	534,410
1998	63,980	223,130	60,790	205,590	553,490
1999	59,030	226,290	58,720	202,150	546,190
2000	55,460	229,720	60,720	193,330	539,240
2001	50,860	228,340	61,970	186,830	528,000

Table 2: The number of care home places in Gateshead and South Tyneside, Newcastle and North Tyneside, Northumberland, and England, 1997–2001[1]

Rounded numbers

		Residential		*Nursing*[2]	
	Local authority	*Private*	*Voluntary*	*Independent*	*Total*
Gateshead and South Tyneside					
1997	890	1,490	310	1,460	4,150
1998	860	1,560	310	1,720	4,460
1999	830	1,590	300	1,500	4,220
2000	770	1,630	330	1,480	4,210
2001	760	1,670	300	1,360	4,090
Newcastle and North Tyneside					
1997	630	2,150	540	1,750	5,070
1998	540	2,810	470	1,810	5,610
1999	460	2,570	450	1,740	5,220
2000	520	2,970	510	1,630	5,630
2001	470	2,490	570	1,700	5,220
Northumberland					
1997	620	1,680	340	830	3,470
1998	500	1,790	400	1,030	3,720
1999	520	1,900	380	990	3,790
2000	530	1,970	380	980	3,870
2001	480	1,990	390	990	3,840

[1] Nursing relates to Gateshead and South Tyneside health authority (HA), Newcastle and North Tyneside HA and Northumberland HA; Residential care relates to Gateshead Council with Social Services Responsibilities (CSSR), South Tyneside CSSR, Newcastle CSSR, North Tyneside CSSR, and Northumberland CSSR.

[2] Nursing home figures include places in general nursing homes, mental nursing homes and private hospitals and clinics.

Source:

RA and RH(N) form A.

Childhood Vaccinations

Angela Watkinson: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what arrangements are in place for parents who wish their babies to receive each childhood vaccination separately. [194213]

Miss Melanie Johnson: The Department provides the combined childhood vaccine because it provides the most effective protection against a number of potentially serious diseases. Single vaccines are not provided on the national health service as they leave the child at risk of infection for a longer period of time. Also, some single antigen vaccines are not manufactured.

Consultants

Dr. Julian Lewis: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many consultancy firms or companies have been retained by the Department since June 2001; what the projects are for which each has been retained; and what the total is of the fees paid or incurred in each case. [193420]

Ms Rosie Winterton: The Department does not hold centrally a record of individual contracts, nor does it have similar details for its agencies. To secure such details could be obtained only at disproportionate cost.

Departmental Publications (Access)

Mr. Goodman: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many and what proportion of publications issued by his Department are available in *(a)* Braille, *(b)* autoprint, *(c)* large print and *(d)* easy read format. [194303]

Ms Rosie Winterton: Where we assess that a publication will have wide interest, including consultation documents and public facing information, materials are produced as standard in alternative formats on, or as close as possible, to the initial publication launch date. Many of the Department's public facing materials are produced in large print format (conforming to Royal National Institute for the Blind guidelines) as a matter of course.

Additionally, the Department undertakes to produce all publications in alternative formats upon request. Alternative formats may include Braille, audio-cassette, British Sign Language video, compact disc, large print format and versions for people with learning difficulties.

Documents are simultaneously published on the Department's website, which conforms to Government guidelines and W3C (World Wide Web consortium) accessibility standards at level "A".

Recently, the Department's website has been speech enabled with software which reads webpages aloud, highlighting text as it goes. This makes content more accessible for those who are dyslexic; have learning difficulties; for whom English is not their first language and those with mild visual impairment.

The Department does not centrally record information about individual requests and subsequent production of alternative formats and so it is not possible to provide figures on the numbers of publications available in each format.

Energy/Carbon Strategy

Malcolm Bruce: To ask the Secretary of State for Health when the energy/carbon strategy by NHS estates will be published; and how it has taken into consideration the role of good quality combined heat and power plant. [193826]

Mr. Hutton: The NHS Estates document entitled "Carbon/Energy Management in Healthcare—Best practice advice for the NHS in England on the meeting of mandatory carbon/energy targets", will be published at the end of November 2004. A copy will be placed in the Library.

The document will contain a checklist of actions for new build programmes, or refurbishments, advising the national health service to consider installing combined heat and power plant (CHP) to maximise efficiencies, benefit from exemptions from the Climate Change Levy and contribute towards the Government CHP target (10,000 more CHP plants by 2010).

Epidermolysis Bullosa

Simon Hughes: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what steps are being taken to improve *(a)* awareness of and *(b)* training on epidermolysis bullosa for health professionals; and if he will make a statement. [194234]

Dr. Ladyman: The Department is not responsible for setting curricula for health professional training. However, we do share a commitment with statutory and professional bodies that all health professionals are trained, so that they have the skills and knowledge to deliver a high quality health service to all groups of the population with whom they deal.

The General Medical Council's Education Committee published recommendations on undergraduate medical education in 2002. It states that graduates must know and understand normal and abnormal function including the natural history of human diseases and disease presentations.

We are committed to improving services for patients with genetic diseases, such as epidermolysis bullosa. The Department published a £50 million strategy to harness the potential of advances in genetics for the benefit of national health service patients in June 2003. The White Paper "Our Inheritance, Our Future—Realising the potential of genetics in the NHS" set out the Government's commitment to developing genetics knowledge, skills and provision within the NHS.

Free Eye Tests (Cleethorpes)

Shona McIsaac: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many pensioners in Cleethorpes constituency have had free eye tests since they were introduced. [194184]

Miss Melanie Johnson: Figures for the number of sight tests by constituency or pensioners are not collected centrally.

The following table shows the number of national health service sight tests paid by South Humber Health Authority (HA) for the years ending 31 March 2000 to 2003 and the two primary care trusts (PCTs) that now cover the old South Humber HA area for the year ending 31 March 2004.

General ophthalmic services: Number of sight tests paid by South Humber HA for patients aged 60 and over for the years ending 31 March 2000 to 2004

	HA/PCT name	*Number of sight tests for aged 60 and over*
1999–2000	South Humber HA	23.1
2000–01	South Humber HA	26.4
2001–02	South Humber HA	28.7
2002–03	South Humber HA	30.2
2003–04	North East Lincolnshire PCT	18.2
	North Lincolnshire PCT	13.9
Total	South Humber HA	32.1

HIV

Tom Cox: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many *(a)* men and *(b)* women living in the Greater London area are HIV positive. [195371]

Dr. Ladyman: The survey of prevalent diagnosed HIV infections showed there were 13,131 men and 5,972 women of all ages with diagnosed HIV infection living in London in 2003.

Hospital Infections

Pete Wishart: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many staff members the Skipton Fund are employing to respond to the applications for help from those infected with Hepatitis C; and if he will make a statement. [193651]

Miss Melanie Johnson: There are four members of staff employed by the Skipton Fund. In addition, support services, including financial assistance, are provided by the staff members of the Macfarlane Trust.

Long-term Care

Mr. Burstow: To ask the Secretary of State for Health pursuant to the answer of 21 October 2004, *Official Report*, column 927W, on long-term care, whether the study established what proportion of those people *(a)* were discharged to their own homes with no further need for personal care at that time, *(b)* were discharged to their own homes with further domiciliary care provided, *(c)* were admitted to hospital and *(d)* died. [194238]

Dr. Ladyman: The study involved a longitudinal follow-up of a sample of people admitted to residential or nursing care. It revealed that after 42 months had elapsed some 0.9 per cent. of the original sample had been discharged to private households (it is not possible to split *(a)* and *(b)*), 0.4 per cent. had been admitted to hospital and 67 per cent. had died.

Data taken from "Survey of Admissions to Residential and Nursing Home Care—final report of the 42 month follow-up" by Bebbington, Darton et al, Discussion paper 1675, Personal Social Services Research Unit, University of Kent—August 2000.

Matrons

Mr. Jenkin: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many people are employed as matrons by Essex Rivers Health Care at *(a)* Colchester General Hospital and *(b)* Essex County Hospital. [195832]

Dr. Ladyman: The information requested is not collected centrally. Information is collected on the number of nurse managers, which includes matrons, at national health service trust level and figures for Essex Rivers Healthcare NHS Trust are shown in the table.

NHS hospital and community health services: Nurse managers as at 30 September 2003

	RDE *Essex Rivers Healthcare NHS Trust*
Whole-time equivalent	4
Headcount	4

Note:

Whole-time equivalent figures are rounded to the nearest whole number.

Medicines (Children and Infants)

Mr. Burstow: To ask the Secretary of State for Health (1) if he will estimate what proportion of medicines prescribed to *(a)* children and *(b)* infants have never been tested on children or infants; [194246]

(2) for what proportion of medicines prescribed to *(a)* children and *(b)* infants there is no agreed level of dosage; [194252]

(3) what recent assessment he has made of drugs which are not licensed for that purpose being used for the treatment of children; [194255]

(4) what percentage of medicines used for treatment of children do not have a dosage approved by the Medicines and Healthcare Products Regulatory Agency; and if he will make a statement. [194258]

Ms Rosie Winterton: The Medicines and Healthcare Products Regulatory Agency (MHRA) does not have access to data in a form that would allow any of the requested estimates to be made. For many medicines, there is a dosage regimen for use in children and infants which has been agreed by an authoritative body of health professionals, based on clinical experience, medical practice and evidence from the published literature. Such dosage regimens, for example, are set out in the Medicines for Children Formulary, which is published by the Royal College of Paediatricians and Child Health and is to be replaced in 2005 by the British National Formulary for children, published by the British Medical Association and the Royal Pharmaceutical Society of Great Britain. However, the dosage regimens, although agreed by health professionals, are not necessarily authorised by the MHRA.

We are unable to provide the percentage of medicines that do not have an authorised dosage regimen for use in children, as we do not hold data in that form. In addition, some medicines are authorised for some, but not all appropriate, paediatric age ranges.

Mr. Burstow: To ask the Secretary of State for Health (1) what progress has been made on a European regulation to encourage more drug companies to research specific medicines for children; [194254]

(2) what steps he is taking to ensure that pharmaceutical companies in the United Kingdom provide clear dosage information for children and adults on all drugs they produce; and if he will make a statement. [194257]

Ms Rosie Winterton: The Government published on 17 August a strategy to produce improvements in the short and medium term in the availability of medicines licensed for use in the paediatric population and to improve the information available on paediatric use. This includes requesting companies to submit completed paediatric clinical trials and assessing the data with a view to including information on paediatric use in the summary of product characteristics (SmPC). The Medicines and Healthcare Products Regulatory Agency (MHRA) is also stressing the need to provide data on paediatric use in its discussions with companies prior to the submission of marketing authorisation applications. The MHRA offers free scientific and regulatory advice to companies wishing to discuss paediatric drug development and grants a fee waiver to applications for certain applications to introduce paediatric information into the SmPC. It will consult shortly on a fee waiver for new applications for authorisations for paediatric use.

The European Commission published a proposal for a Regulation on medicines for paediatric use on 29 September. It contains a requirement that companies provide paediatric data for all new applications for marketing authorisation and for certain changes to existing authorisations. The member states will begin discussing the text of the draft Regulation on October 29 under the Dutch presidency. The United Kingdom will have an opportunity to drive the negotiations forward during its presidency in the second half of 2005. It is anticipated that the Regulation will not be finalised before the end of 2006.

Mr. Burstow: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what estimate he has made of the number of children who *(a)* died and *(b)* were injured as a result of treatment with drugs not licensed for the treatment of children in each of the last five years; and if he will make a statement. [194256]

Ms Rosie Winterton: The following table shows the total number of suspected adverse drug reaction (ADR) reports received via the yellow card scheme from 1 January to 31 December for each of the last five years, where the patient age was specified as 18 years or less. We do not have a sub-analysis of reports received in association with medicines not licensed for use in children.

Calendar year	*Number of suspected ADR reports received, where patient age specified as 18 years or less*	*Number of suspected ADR reports received with a fatal outcome, where patient age specified as 18 years or less*	*Total number of suspected ADR reports received*
1999	2,820	29	18,486
2000	12,495	39	36,152
2001	1,809	39	21,467
2002	1,717	37	17,622
2003	2,592	35	19,267

Please note that data held on the adverse drug reactions on-line information tracking (ADROIT) database is dynamic and may be subject to change.

It is important to note that a report of an adverse drug reaction does not necessarily mean that it was caused by the drug. Many factors have to be taken into account in assessing causal relationships including temporal association, the possible contribution of concomitant medication and the underlying disease.

Mr. Burstow: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what plans he has to introduce a system of learning from the yellow card system about the correct dosage and prescribing methods for medicines for children. [194259]

Ms Rosie Winterton: The yellow card scheme is not designed to enable lessons to be drawn about correct dosage or prescribing methods for medicines for children. There are no plans to introduce a system of learning in this context.

Reports of suspected adverse drug reactions (ADRs) are held on a purpose designed computer database known as the adverse drug reactions on-line information tracking (ADROIT) database, which was introduced in 1991. Data held on ADROIT is dynamic and may be subject to change.

The Committee on Safety of Medicines/Medicines and Healthcare products Regulatory Agency (CSM/MHRA) request that all suspected ADRs which occur in children are reported, regardless of whether the medicine is licensed for use in children. This is because the nature and course of illness and ADRs may differ between adults and children. In general, children are not exposed to medicines in clinical trials, many drugs which are routinely used to treat children are not licensed for use in this age group. It is therefore particularly important to focus on the safety of medicines in children.

We are interested in any side effects of medicines as used in clinical practice, regardless of whether they are being used according to the terms of the licence, as described in the product information.

It is important that we are aware of side effects which arise when medicines are used "off label", so that we can act to warn health professionals if necessary. However, the treatment of individual patients remains the responsibility of the doctor.

Mr. Burstow: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what progress has been made on the initiative in the Trent region to encourage reporting of adverse drug reactions in the use of medicines in the treatment of children. [194260]

Ms Rosie Winterton: Between 1998 and 2001 the Medicines Control Agency (MCA) the predecessor of the Medicines and Healthcare products Regulatory Agency (MHRA) funded a pilot scheme in Trent to stimulate reporting of adverse drug reactions (ADRs) to medicines used in the treatment of children. The project had limited success in stimulating reporting. Following on from this and using lessons learned, the MHRA has pursued a wider strategy to enhance existing data collection mechanisms.

This has included working with the British Paediatric Surveillance Unit (BPSU), of the Royal College of Paediatricians and Child Health and working with the Committee on Safety of Medicines Regional Monitoring Centres to promote ADR reporting in children.

The strategy will be taken forward in the European Regulation on medicines for paediatric use. In addition the MHRA is currently leading the development of a European guideline on paediatric pharmacovigilance.

Mr. Burstow: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will estimate the *(a)* time spent in hospitals and *(b)* cost involved in treating a person who has experienced an adverse drug reaction. [194261]

Ms Rosie Winterton: We do not hold data to answer this question. However a recent study, funded by the Medicines and Healthcare products Regulatory Authority and published in the British Medical Journal, provides relevant information.[1]

Of 18,820 patients aged over 16 years admitted to hospital over a six month period and assessed for cause of admission, there were 1,225 admissions judged to be related to an adverse drug reaction (ADR), giving a prevalence of 6.5 per cent. Of these 1,225, the ADR was judged to lead directly to the admission in 80 per cent. of cases. The median bed stay was eight days, accounting for 4 per cent. of the hospital bed capacity. The projected annual cost of such admissions to the NHS is £466 million. The overall fatality was 0.15 per cent. Most reactions were either definitely or possibly avoidable. Drugs most commonly implicated in causing these admissions included low dose aspirin, diuretics, warfarin, and non-steroidal anti-inflammatory drugs other than aspirin, the most common reaction being gastrointestinal bleeding. There was no assessment made of whether the ADR was associated with off-label or unlicensed use.

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[1] *Source:*

British Medical Journal. 2004 July 3;329(7456):15–9 Adverse drug reactions as cause of admission to hospital: prospective analysis of 18,820 patients. Pirmohamed M., James S., Meakin S., Green C., Scott A.K., Walley T.J., Farrar K., Park B.K., Breckenridge A.M. Department of Pharmacology and Therapeutics, University of Liverpool, Liverpool L69 3GE.

Mental Health

Mr. Burstow: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many carers of people with mental health problems have been identified by NHS trusts; and how many of those carers have received care plans. [194239]

Ms Rosie Winterton: The information is not collected centrally.

In line with the sixth standard of the national service framework for mental health (1999), all individuals who provide regular and substantial care for a person on care programme approach should have an assessment of their caring, physical and mental health needs, and be given their own written care plans which are implemented in discussion with them.

Up to 700 carer support workers will be in post by the end of the year to increase the breaks available for carers and to strengthen carer support networks. To consolidate the progress that is being made and to build on good practice and research, the Department has published guidance, entitled "Developing Services for Carers and Families of People with Mental Illness", in 2002.

Military Low Flying

Adam Price: To ask the Secretary of State for Health pursuant to the Answer of 16 September 2004, *Official Report*, column 1762W, on military low flying, if he will undertake a study into the health effects of military low flying on people living within military tactical training areas. [193728]

Miss Melanie Johnson: The Department has recently set up an expert advisory group to look at the effects on health of environmental noise. A report is expected in 2005.

National Clinical Director

Mr. Goodman: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will list the 11 individuals appointed to the post of National Clinical Director or its equivalent. [194738]

Ms Rosie Winterton *[holding answer 1 November 2004]:* The 11 individuals appointed to the post of national clinical director or equivalent are listed in the table.

Appointee	
Professor Sir George Albert	Emergency access
Professor Louis Appleby	Mental health
Professor Al Aynsley-Green	Children's services
Dr. Roger Boyle	Heart disease
Mr. Harry Cayton	Patient experience and the public
Dr. David Colin-Thomé	Primary care services
Mrs. Kathryn Hudson	Social care
Professor Ian Philp	Older people's services
Professor Mike Richards	Cancer
Dr. Sue Roberts	Diabetes
Mr. Surinder Sharma	Equality and human rights

Mr. Goodman: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what *(a)* salaries and *(b)* payments have been made to the 11 individuals appointed to the post of National Clinical Director or its equivalent since their appointments; and if he will make a statement. [194740]

Ms Rosie Winterton *[holding answer 1 November 2004]:* Three directors have been appointed as senior civil servants on pay band 2 of the senior civil service scale, which covers the range £73,762 to £155,008. All other directors are seconded from their existing employers, and have retained their previous salaries. Two directors receive compensation for loss of earnings from private practice.

National Programme for IT

Dr. Murrison: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what steps he has taken to ensure that all local service providers are fully insured against failure to deliver the national programme for IT in the NHS. [194894]

Mr. Hutton: The National Programme for Information Technology requires its contractors to maintain insurance policies as required by applicable law and as appropriate for the performance of services of the size and type contracted. These policies remain in force throughout the contract term and for a suitable subsequent period.

Organ Donation

Mr. Swayne: To ask the Secretary of State for Health pursuant to the answer of 16 June 2004, *Official Report*, column 1009W, on organ donation, what research has shown that non heart beating donors may prove to be a good source of lungs for transplantation; and if he will place the research studies in the Library. [193739]

Ms Rosie Winterton: There are a significant number of studies relating to non-heart-beating donors as a source of lungs for transplantation. A selection of these have been placed in the Library.

Over-30-months Scheme

Mr. Drew: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what recent discussions he has had with Ministers from the *(a)* Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs and *(b)* Treasury on the over-30-months scheme; and when a decision is expected on its cessation. [194197]

Miss Melanie Johnson: The Government are considering the Food Standards Agency's advice on the over-30-months rule and an announcement will be made in due course.

Mr. Drew: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what representations he has received from those requesting an end to the over-30-months scheme. [194198]

Miss Melanie Johnson: Written representations have been received from the National Beef Association and from a small number of hon. and right hon. Members on behalf of beef farmers.

Primary Care Trusts (Leeds)

Mr. Mudie: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what the expenditure was of primary care trusts in Leeds in *(a)* 2002–03 and *(b)* 2003–04; and what the estimated expenditure is for 2004–05. [194618]

Miss Melanie Johnson: Information on expenditure is not available for 2004–05. Expenditure for 2002–03 and 2003–04 is shown in the table.

Expenditure by Leeds primary care trusts (PCTs)

£ million

	Expenditure
2002–03	699.277
2003–04	755.308

Note:
2003–04 data are provisional.
Source:
Audited summarisation schedules of the Leeds PCTs 2002–03 and 2003–04.

Private Finance Initiatives

Mr. George Osborne: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what guidance is provided to procuring authorities within the NHS about the treatment of PFI arrangements in the accounts of public bodies. [193889]

Mr. Hutton: In determining the accounting treatment of private finance initiative (PFI) arrangements, public bodies are required to follow United Kingdom generally accepted accounting practice, including financial reporting standards (FRSs) issued by the Accounting Standards Board (ASB). The specific guidance issued by the ASB for accounting for PFI is "Application Note F to FRS 5—Private Finance Initiative and Similar Contracts," as supplemented by the Treasury-issued "Technical Note No. 1 (Revised)—How to Account for PFI transactions."

Mr. George Osborne: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will list the private finance initiative arrangements in which the Department is engaged; what the total cost of each arrangement is *(a)* over its lifetime and *(b)* in each year of its operation; and how the arrangement appears in the Department's public accounts. [193980]

Mr. Hutton: Information showing details of unitary payments for all signed contracts for private finance initiative hospital schemes (PFI) with a capital value of £10 million and over has been placed in the Library. These will be accounted for by each contracting trust. Detailed information is not held centrally for schemes below this capital value.

Individual national health service trust accounts are not currently consolidated within the Department's resource accounts, but those for primary care trusts are, so any assets or liabilities related to their PFI schemes would be reflected in them.

NHS trust accounts are consolidated into the NHS trust summarised accounts.

Silzone Heart Valves

Mr. Hunter: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will place in the Library copies of the reports which the Medicines and Health Care Products Regulatory Agency has received concerning adverse incidents involving the St. Jude Silzone heart valve. [193088]

Ms Rosie Winterton: The Department is unable to provide copies of these reports due to statutory obligations under the terms of the European Medical Devices Directives. Furthermore, such reports contain individual patient information, which cannot be released for reasons of confidentiality. However, extensive action has been taken to warn clinicians and thereby patients implanted with this particular heart valve.

Skipton Fund

Pete Wishart: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what assessment he has made of the ease of access for applicants to information about the progress of their applications from the Skipton Fund; and if he will make a statement. [193652]

Miss Melanie Johnson: Since the Skipton Fund became operational on 5 July, a key priority for the fund has been the despatch and process of stage 1 application forms.

Each applicant who has registered with the Skipton Fund may telephone the Skipton Fund helpline to inquire about progress with their application. The Haemophilia Society website, at www.haemophilia.org.uk, provides an update on the range of applications that are being processed.

Smoking

Mr. Dobson: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what his Department's estimate is of the number of people who die from smoking-related diseases in each of the last five years. [194199]

Miss Melanie Johnson: The latest data available on smoking related deaths estimated that in the United Kingdom in 1995, smoking caused more than 120,000 deaths of people aged 35 years or over ("The UK smoking epidemic: Deaths in 1995."—Health Education Authority 1998. A copy is available in the Library).

The Health Development Agency is undertaking a similar study, updating this work, estimating the number of smoking attributable deaths. A report will be published in due course.

Mr. Dobson: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will carry out an assessment of the Irish ban on smoking in enclosed public spaces. [194200]

Miss Melanie Johnson: The Government are aware of the reports from Ireland on the effect of the smoking ban in workplaces, including those from the Office of Tobacco Control. No additional assessment is planned.

Mr. Burstow: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many smokers there are in England. [194240]

Miss Melanie Johnson: It is estimated that in England in 2002, 26 per cent. of adults aged 16 and over smoked cigarettes regularly, at least one cigarette a day; this is around 10.3 million adults.

Mr. Burstow: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how much has been spent by his Department on prevention of smoking, broken down by *(a)* advertising and *(b)* smoking cessation services, in each year since 1997. [194241]

Miss Melanie Johnson: Prior to 1999–2000, the Health Education Authority ran the public education campaign on the dangers of smoking. The Department took over this work in December 1999.

Table 1 shows advertising expenditure on the dangers of smoking from 1999–2000 to date.

	Amount (£ million)
1999–2000	6.18
2000–01	8.97
2001–02	7.79
2002–03	7.88
2003–04	19.36

The national health service stop smoking services, formerly smoking cessation services, were launched in the health action zones (HAZs) in 1999–2000, with services rolled out across the NHS in 2000–01.

Table 2 shows financial allocations to the NHS stop smoking services from 1999–2000 to date.

	Amount (£ million)
1999–2000	[1]10
2000–01	20
2001–02	23
2002–03	23
2003–04	41
2004–05	46

[1] HAZs only.

Mr. Pike: To ask the Secretary of State for Health (1) how many people attended the smoking cessation clinic held on the Parliamentary Estate on 2 March; what plans there are to run a quit clinic within the Parliamentary Estate in the near future; and if he will make a statement; [195732]

(2) whether he has received representations from those within the Parliamentary Estate to provide smoking cessation services within the Estate for staff of the House, Members of both Houses and their staff; and if he will make a statement. [195735]

Sir Archy Kirkwood: I have been asked to reply.

The smoking cessation clinic took place on 2 March 2004, and was run in partnership by Cancer Research UK, QUIT and the Occupational Health, Safety and Welfare Service of the Houses of Parliament. The initiative ran with the approval of Parliament's Medical Panel and was timed to help raise the profile of the national No Smoking Day, 10 March 2004. The promotion was open to all passholders of the Parliamentary Estate and just under 100 people attended the clinic (including Members and Peers), either to see a QUIT counsellor or to gain general advice on smoking-related health issues and ways to reduce their risk of developing cancer. Following the event a survey of attendees was carried out and responses indicated that it had been very well received and should be repeated in the future.

Currently information and advice on smoking cessation is available via the Occupational Health, Safety and Welfare Service, including information packs. Plans are in hand also to make this information available via the parliamentary intranet.

No representations about smoking cessation services have been received by the Commission. The Occupational Health, Safety and Welfare Service are planning a schedule of health awareness events for 2005, including a smoking cessation clinic. Discussions are taking place with Cancer Research UK with a view to running one at about the same time as the next national No Smoking Day, 9 March 2005.

Special Advisers

Matthew Taylor: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many unpaid special advisers the Department has; what their names are; and which Government *(a)* bodies, *(b)* committees and *(c)* strategy groups each unpaid adviser (i) belongs to, (ii) advises and (iii) works alongside. [194060]

Ms Rosie Winterton: For information relating to numbers and names of unpaid advisers, I refer the hon. Member to the reply given by my hon. Friend the Minister for the Cabinet Office on 28 October 2004, *Official Report*, column 1380W.

Specialist Services (Funding)

Mr. Burstow: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what safeguards are in place to ensure that the introduction of payment by results does not indirectly divert resources away from specialist services which are not covered by tariffs. [194362]

Mr. Hutton: Primary care trusts (PCT) are responsible for commissioning health and social care for their local communities. It will be a matter for PCTs, working with those organisations providing treatment, to ensure that all relevant services to meet health care needs are commissioned and funded. PCTs will also be responsible for monitoring activity within service level agreements and taking appropriate action in cases of under- or over-delivery.

Work is continuing to develop the scope of the payment by results scheme and it is expected that all services will be brought into the scheme by 2008–09.

Spinal Surgery (Dorset)

Mrs. Brooke: To ask the Secretary of State for Health (1) if he will make a statement on the provision of spinal surgery for people living in the Poole and Bournemouth area; [194549]

(2) what provision of spinal surgery is available for people living in the Poole and Bournemouth area. [194550]

Ms Rosie Winterton *[holding answer 2 November 2004]:* It is the responsibility of primary care trusts (PCTs), in conjunction with their strategic health authorities, to assess the health care needs of their population and commission in-patient services, including specialist facilities such as spinal injury units.

The national health service organisations responsible for planning and commissioning spinal surgery in the Bournemouth and Poole areas are the Bournemouth Teaching PCT, the Poole PCT and the South and East Dorset PCT.

I am informed that these PCTs have adequate and effective commissioning arrangements in place for the provision of prompt and clinically appropriate services, including spinal surgery.

Stair Lifts

Mr. Oaten: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what responsibility the Medicines and Healthcare Products Agency has for ensuring that stair lifts are installed and maintained safely. [R] [195242]

Dr. Ladyman: The Medicines and Healthcare products Regulatory Agency (MHRA), in its role of safeguarding public health and adverse incident investigation, gives advice to persons responsible for the provision of stair lifts on the importance of ensuring that approved installers are used and that maintenance procedures are carried out in accordance with manufacturers instructions. Providers are also advised on the need for a full assessment of the patient and their living environment to ensure safe use.

The MHRA has issued guidance document DB9801, "Medical Device and Equipment Management for Hospital and Community-based Organisations", which contains guidance on maintenance and repair.

Taiwan (World Health Organisation)

Tom Cox: To ask the Secretary of State for Health whether his Department supports the request by Taiwan to be given observer status at the World Health Organisation; and if he will make a statement. [194631]

Mr. Hutton: As a United Nations specialised agency, the World Health Organisation (WHO) requires statehood as a prerequisite for full membership. At the World Health Assembly last May, the Presidency of the European Union Council expressed the hope that the WHO secretariat and others organising technical and working groups under WHO auspices would show flexibility in finding mechanisms to allow Taiwanese medical and public health officials to participate in these activities. Her Majesty's Government will continue to look at ideas for finding that flexibility.

Waiting Lists/Times

Tom Cox: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many people have been waiting for 12 weeks or more for their first appointment with a consultant at St. George's Hospital, Tooting. [194630]

Dr. Ladyman: The information requested is not available centrally.

At quarter ending June 2004, there were 518 patients waiting 13 weeks and over at St. George's Healthcare National Health Service Trust for their first consultant out-patient appointment following general dental practitioner referral.

Bob Spink: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many patients in Essex are waiting for cardiac surgery. [194926]

Dr. Ladyman: The requested information is collected on a provider basis. There are no patients waiting at providers within the Essex strategic health authority area.

Bob Spink: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many patients in Essex are waiting for *(a)* knee and *(b)* hip replacements. [194927]

Dr. Ladyman: The information requested is not held centrally.

NORTHERN IRELAND

Cancer Screening

Mr. Lidington: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland what the uptake rate is for breast cancer screening in Northern Ireland. [195420]

Angela Smith: The uptake rate for breast screening in Northern Ireland during the three years ending 31 March 2004 was 75 per cent., and is in respect of all women aged 50–64 who were invited for screening.

Mr. Peter Robinson: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland what assessment he has made of the extent to which those with learning difficulties in the Province make use of screening programmes for *(a)* breast and *(b)* cervical cancer. [194525]

Angela Smith: All women in Northern Ireland who are in the screening age group are routinely invited for breast and cervical screening. Routine data are available to show the uptake and coverage rates for the breast and cervical screening programmes as a whole. Data specifically relating to the number of women with learning difficulties being screened are not routinely collected as there is no single database that will provide a comprehensive list of women with learning difficulties.

Mr. Lidington: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland what the coverage is of the cervical screening programme in Northern Ireland. [195419]

Angela Smith: The cervical screening programme in Northern Ireland covers women aged 20–64. Over the five-year period ending March 2003 (the latest date for which such information is available), 72 per cent. of women in that age group had been screened.

Carers

Rev. Martin Smyth: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland what plans the Government have to introduce a non-means tested payment for carers who stay at home to look after elderly parents and relatives; and if he will make a statement. [195217]

Mr. Spellar: Carer's allowance, which is a non-means tested social security benefit, is already available to carers aged 16 or over who provide regular and substantial care to people, including older people, in receipt of attendance allowance, or the equivalent rates of disability living allowance care component, or an equivalent benefit paid under the war disablement pensions scheme, or the industrial injuries disablement benefit scheme.

Child Care Provision

Mr. Beggs: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland whether a review of out-of-school play care provision within Northern Ireland has been conducted; and if he will make a statement. [195778]

Angela Smith: Any review of out-of-school hours provision in Northern Ireland will be undertaken within the context of the overall review of "Children First"—the Northern Ireland Childcare Strategy. As this review will be comprehensive in its remit, one of the specific areas it will look at is that of out-of-school hours provision.

Child Support Agency

Mr. Dodds: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland what steps he is taking to tackle problems within the Child Support Agency in Northern Ireland. [194613]

Mr. Spellar: The Child Support Agency is continuing to work closely with Electronic Data Systems (EDS) to remove the defects within EDS's computer service and which are causing many of the current delays in processing cases. They have implemented a number of software releases and hardware upgrades that are progressively improving that service. There are plans for further releases later this year and in the early part of next year. EDS are also providing further guidance, advice and coaching to members of teams handling new applications with a view to increasing their productivity even within the constraints of the existing computer service.

Contractors (Security Clearance)

Mr. Donaldson: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland how many *(a)* contractors, *(b)* sub-contractors and *(c)* their employees have (i) been refused and (ii) had withdrawn security clearance to work in prison and security force establishments in each year since 2000, to date. [195051]

Mr. Pearson: Statistics for contractors who have been refused security clearance by the Northern Ireland Prison Service from 2000 to 2004 are as follows.

	Security clearance refusals
2000	4
2001	5
2002	1
2003	9
2004	29

The increase in the number of refused applications is due to some applicants not disclosing all previous convictions.

The PSNI does not vet companies for security clearance but does vet individuals that companies propose to employ on police sites. The following table provides a breakdown of the 453 individuals who have been refused clearance to work on police sites since 2000:

	Security clearance refusals
2000	46
2001	75
2002	62
2003	142
2004 (to 27 October)	128

The PSNI do not keep a separate record of contractor employees whose clearance has been withdrawn.

Statistics are not available separately for contractors, sub-contractors or employees nor for the number of security clearance applications withdrawn. Producing such figures would incur disproportionate costs.

My right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Defence has also advised me that for the year 2004 to date there were 1,519 applications for contractor's clearance on to security force establishments with 42 denials. Figures prior to that year are not readily available and could be provided only at a disproportionate cost.

Crimestoppers

Lady Hermon: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland how many people called Crimestoppers in Northern Ireland in each of the past four years; and what budget allocation has been made in each year to cover the costs of the scheme. [193554]

Mr. Pearson: The total number of calls made to Crimestoppers in each of the past four years are as follows.

	Total calls
2000	19,126
2001	19,019
2002	16,188
2003	27,262
2004 (until 30 September)	17,663

Crimestoppers is a registered charity and as such its general running costs are not met from public funds although some funds have been made available to finance publicity campaigns.

Crowd Control (Policing Ombudsman)

Mr. Gregory Campbell: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland in how many instances in the last year police in Northern Ireland have dealt with crowds of people involved in riotous behaviour or behaviour likely to lead to a breach of the peace resulting in the case being referred to the Policing Ombudsman. [194794]

Mr. Pearson: The Police Ombudsman has advised that the office has recorded 16 incidents in the last 12 months, which they would classify as public order incidents, in relation to which complaints have been received.

Dementia

Mrs. Iris Robinson: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland if he will make a statement on provision of care *(a)* within the community and *(b)* in residential or nursing homes for those in the Province with learning disability who suffer dementia. [194635]

Angela Smith: Health and Social Services Boards are expanding and developing services to meet the needs of people with a learning disability who also suffer from dementia. The aim is to support such people in familiar surroundings. In the community, this need is primarily met by psychiatric, nursing, allied health professional and social care within learning disability services. Appropriate day activity places are also being provided to meet the particular needs of individuals.

For people who require nursing or residential care, Boards endeavour to place each individual in a setting most appropriate to their assessed needs.

Mrs. Iris Robinson: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland what steps he has taken to improve the provision of care for those with learning disability who suffer dementia; and if he will make a statement. [194636]

Angela Smith: Health and Social Services Boards are reviewing their provision for people with learning disability who suffer dementia. This has resulted in awareness training in dementia for staff in learning disability services; the development of specific day care provision and the purchase of some dementia specific residential provision. Further service development will be subject to the availability of additional resources.

Mrs. Iris Robinson: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland what plans he has to develop services in the Province so those with learning disability who develop dementia can access mainstream dementia services in their locality. [194637]

Angela Smith: As people with a learning disability may develop dementia at a younger age it is not always appropriate for them to be cared for in settings designed for older people. Those for whom mainstream services are considered to be appropriate can already access local services.

An Expert Working Committee on Issues in Old Age has been established as part of the review of mental health to take forward further work on this issue. As dementia is not exclusive to older people, the Committee has been asked to consider the subject in its broadest sense.

Mrs. Iris Robinson: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland what change there has been in the prevalence of dementia in the Province among *(a)* males and *(b)* females with learning disabilities in the last 10 years. [194638]

Angela Smith: The information requested is not available.

Disabled Patients (Health Service Access)

Mr. Peter Robinson: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland what steps have been taken by each of the Province's health trusts to ensure disabled patients have the same access to services as the rest of the population. [194528]

Angela Smith: Health and social services trusts have been taking a range of action to meet their obligations under the Disability Discrimination Act 1995 (DDA). The action has included reviewing practices, policies and procedures on service provision, providing auxiliary aids or alternative services to improve access, and disability awareness training for staff. Trusts have also undertaken access audits of buildings and identified remedial work has been factored into planned maintenance schedules.

The Department has provided an additional £3.5 million in 2003–04 and a further £5 million in 2004–05 to address DDA remedial work. It has also recently appointed Disability Action to carry out a review of action taken to date by health and social services boards, trusts and agencies to comply with the access provisions of the DDA. A report of the review is expected in May 2005.

Education Funding

Rev. Ian Paisley: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland what the per pupil funding in each of the education and library board areas in Northern Ireland is in the current financial year. [195238]

Mr. Gardiner: The following information is taken from the Budget statements published by each of the education and library boards:

2004–05 formula funding

Education and library board	*Per capita (£)*
BELB	2,473
NEELB	2,340
SEELB	2,327
SELB	2,397
WELB	2,437

In addition to Formula Funding allocations, schools also have access to certain earmarked funds and central services provided on their behalf by the education and library boards.

Farm Payments

Mr. Lidington: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland how many, and what value of farm payments that were due to be paid by 30 June have not yet been paid, broken down by category of farm payment. [195831]

Mr. Pearson: The number and potential value, if paid in full, of farm subsidy claims currently outstanding is as follows:

	Applications unpaid	*Value (£ million)*
Beef special premium	1,972	0.9
Slaughter premium	1,167	0.6
Suckler cow premium	285	0.3
Extensification payment	1,158	2.5

These applications relate to unresolved cases where there is a query or penalty to be applied. It is not expected, therefore, that all claims will be paid in full.

Fire Tenders

Mr. Donaldson: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland how many of the fire tenders manufactured by Sidhean Teo of Galway and delivered to the Northern Ireland Fire Brigade in July are now in full operational service. [195052]

Angela Smith: All of the fire tenders manufactured by Sidhean Teo of Galway are in full operational service.

Fireworks (Hospital Admissions)

Mr. Gregory Campbell: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland how many admissions to hospitals in Northern Ireland in September and October of each of the last five years were primarily as a result of involvement with, or being in close proximity to, fireworks. [194788]

Angela Smith: Information on the number of admissions to hospitals in Northern Ireland during September and October in each of the last five years as a result of involvement with, or being in close proximity to, fireworks is not available. However, information on the number of patients reporting to A&E Departments and Minor Injuries Units with injuries from fireworks and those admitted to hospital, over a selected 4–5 week period covering the end of October and start of November (Halloween period) is available and is detailed in the following table.

	Number of patients reporting to A&E/Minor Injuries Units during Halloween period	*Number admitted after reporting to A&E/Minor Injuries Units during Halloween period*
1999	139	17
2000	100	6
2001	136	19
2002	38	6
2003	45	5

Notes:

1. Figures do not include injuries from fireworks outside the survey period and will not include injuries, which were not sufficiently serious to warrant attendance at an A&E Department or Minor Injuries Unit.

2. Numbers admitted included those admitted to the hospital attended and those transferred to another hospital.

Higher Education Access

Mr. Gregory Campbell: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland what plans there are to ensure greater access to higher education by people living in East Londonderry constituency. [194790]

Mr. Gardiner: The Department for Employment and Learning is committed to improving access to higher education to people throughout Northern Ireland including in East Londonderry, and in particular those groups who are currently underrepresented.

Measures to improve access include a marked expansion in domestic HE provision. Since 1998, DEL has allocated the University of Ulster some 1,367 additional full-time equivalent (FTE) student places. It is for the university, as an autonomous body, to determine the distribution of places among its various campuses including the Coleraine campus. The university also has the flexibility to accommodate as many part-time and post-graduate students as it wishes.

There has also been significant growth in higher education provision delivered in the further education sector. One of the main purposes behind the expansion of higher education courses delivered in further education colleges is to widen access to higher education for mature students, students wanting to study part-time, students who want to study close to home, disabled students and students who do not have traditional qualifications.

In addition, a number of measures have been introduced to widen access to higher education by disadvantaged groups. These include: a package of student support measures to assist students from low income families; a widening access premium for students from disadvantaged backgrounds; and a widening access premium for students with disabilities and capital funding to assist the universities improve access for disabled students.

The Department has also provided special project funding specifically aimed at allowing the universities to carry out "outreach" activities in schools with traditionally low levels of participation in HE in order to raise the aspiration, motivation and academic performance of pupils to progress to higher education. These outreach activities include the tutoring of pupils, "taster" programmes, university open days, and summer schools. Decisions on where outreach activities take place are a matter for the universities.

Hospital Deaths

Mrs. Iris Robinson: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland what plans he has to introduce more rigorous methods of investigating hospital deaths in the Province; and if he will make a statement. [194642]

Angela Smith: A Safety in Health Care Steering Group was established by the Department of Health, Social Services and Public Safety following the publication of the consultation document entitled "Best Practice, Best Care" in April 2001. In July it issued interim guidance (HSS (PPM) 06/04) to the HPSS and special agencies on the reporting and management of serious adverse incidents.

The Department has also established a multi-agency group comprising departmental officials and representatives from the Police Service of Northern Ireland, the Health and Safety Executive (HSE), and the coroners' service to develop a memorandum of understanding for the investigation of death and serious incidents in hospitals. This will take account of a recent memorandum of understanding issued for consultation in England and Wales: "Investigating patient safety incidents (unexpected death or serious untoward harm): a protocol for liaison and effective communications between the NHS, Association of Chief Police Officers and HSE", which can be viewed at: http://www.dh.gov.uk/assetRoot/04/08/48/61/04084861.pdf.

MMR Vaccinations

Mr. Lidington: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland what the rate of uptake of the MMR vaccination is among children aged 24 months in Northern Ireland. [195418]

Angela Smith: The rate of uptake of the MMR vaccination for children aged 24 months in Northern Ireland is shown for the four quarters of the financial year 2003–04 in the following table:

Vaccination against measles, mumps, rubella (MMR)

	Percentage
June 2003	87.8
September 2003	87.2
December 2003	88.9
March 2004	87.6

Note:

The uptake rate is in respect of children who reached their second birthday during the relevant quarter. The information is published on a quarterly basis.

Intravenous Fluid Management

Mrs. Iris Robinson: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland what action he has taken to *(a)* improve knowledge of intravenous fluid management and *(b)* prevent deaths of children from dilutional hyponatraemia in hospitals in the Province and if he will make a statement. [194641]

Angela Smith: There is undergraduate teaching on fluids and electrolytes and the topic of fluid management is included during the induction training of junior doctors. Also the Department of Health, Social Services and Public Safety has issued guidance on the prevention of hyponatraemia in children (March 2002) and the Clinical Resource Efficiency Support Team (CREST) has also issued guidance on the management of hyponatraemia in adults (June 2003).

The guidance issued by the Department in March 2002 stresses that hyponatraemia can be extremely serious and potentially fatal. The guidance has been prepared as an A2 sized poster for display in all hospital units where children may receive IV fluids or oral rehydration.

Learning Disabilities (Health Provision)

Mr. Peter Robinson: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland what steps are being taken to ensure that those with learning disabilities make use of screening for *(a)* breast and *(b)* cervical cancer. [194532]

Angela Smith: Each of the four Health Boards in Northern Ireland is actively involved in health promotion activities within their Board area. Staff are continuously working to increase awareness and educate all women about breast and cervical screening with particular focus being placed on disadvantaged areas, ethnic minority groups, women with learning/literacy difficulties and individual groups with special needs. Specialist literature for women with learning difficulties has been produced by the National Screening Committee. Plans are also in place to produce a DVD aimed at women with learning difficulties. A partnership approach has been developed with Action Cancer with the provision of special screening clinics for women with learning difficulties. Tailored training and education programmes have been introduced for GP's, Action Cancer and Ulster Cancer Foundation personnel and Community Learning Disability Nurses; information sessions have been introduced for clients, carers, staff and supporters in Day/Adult Centres.

Mr. Peter Robinson: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland how many individuals there are in the Province with a learning disability. [194521]

Angela Smith: Information on the total number of people with a learning disability is not available, as many people with learning disabilities are not in contact with healthcare providers. However, provisional figures for the year 2003–04 indicate there were 9,692 people in the Learning Disability Programme of Care who were in contact with social services.

Mr. Peter Robinson: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland what role those with learning disabilities, and their carers and families, have in the planning and commissioning of health services in the Province. [194522]

Angela Smith: Each of the four Health and Social Services Boards has a strategy for the development of learning disability services in their areas. These have been developed through consultation with people with a learning disability and their carers.

In a number of Health and Social Services Trust areas there are groups of people with a learning disability and carers who are consulted on local service development. Local advocacy services are being developed, as resources permit, for those with communication difficulties to enhance this process.

The Learning Disability Working Committee, which is reviewing learning disability policy and services, has a person with a learning disability and a carer in its membership. It has also established two reference groups, one for people with a learning disability and the other for carers, to inform its work. The Committee has consulted widely with people with a learning disability and their carers through public meetings staged at venues around the Province.

Mr. Peter Robinson: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland what proportion of those with learning difficulties in the Province are registered with a general practitioner. [194526]

Angela Smith: Information on the proportion of those with learning difficulties in the Province registered with a general practitioner is not available centrally.

Everyone who is resident in Northern Ireland has an equal right to register with a general practitioner. However, those with severe learning disabilities who require dedicated facilities and are resident within a hospital are not registered with a general practitioner as their needs are covered by the relevant Trust.

Mr. Peter Robinson: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland (1) what training in disability awareness is provided to staff by health trusts in the Province; [194529]

(2) what training on learning disability staff receive from health trusts in the Province; and whether individuals with learning disabilities are involved in any aspect of such training. [194530]

Angela Smith: All trusts provide induction training to staff covering disability awareness. In addition, mandatory, role specific and specialist training is provided to enable staff deliver the needs of user groups. Organisations such as the Royal National Institute for the Deaf and the Royal National Institute for the Blind are involved in the construction and delivery of training programmes. Staff can also avail of a wide range of other training opportunities provided by in-service training units and other education providers.

I am satisfied that trusts are acutely aware of and are pro-active in recognising their obligations in providing appropriate training for staff who care for users with learning and other disabilities. Where possible, trusts involve disabled people in identifying and delivering appropriate staff training.

Lucy Crawford

Mrs. Iris Robinson: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland whether a police investigation has begun into the death of Lucy Crawford, which was broadcast on 21 October. [194801]

Mr. Pearson: A Senior Investigating Officer was appointed to carry out an investigation into the death of Lucy Crawford prior to the UTV insight programme on 21 October 2004.

Medical Schools

Mrs. Iris Robinson: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland how many medical school places there are in the Province. [192871]

Mr. Gardiner: For the 2004–05 academic year, 844 Home and EU full-time undergraduate students have been awarded places in the medical school at Queen's University, Belfast. This reflects numbers on all five years of the degree programme in medicine.

Organ Retention

Mrs. Iris Robinson: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland what steps have been taken to assist those in the Province who wish to pursue compensation following the retention without permission of organs of their deceased relatives; and if he will make a statement. [194639]

Angela Smith: Since July 2003 my Department has held meetings with the relevant boards, trusts and legal advisers to facilitate a consistent and co-ordinated approach to handling claims for compensation that have arisen from the removal, retention and disposal of human organs at hospital post mortem examinations in Northern Ireland. Compensation claims in respect of coroners' post mortems are a matter for the NI Court Service.

It has been agreed that the possibility of using Alternative Dispute Resolution (ADR) in as many cases as possible should be explored with claimants' solicitors, but it is accepted that ADR might not suit all claimants and those who wish to proceed by litigation remain free to do so.

Boards and trusts have agreed to actively seek a speedy solution to as many cases as possible. In addition, my Department has continued to keep the Relatives' Reference Group apprised of any developments in relation to the handling of compensation claims.

Patient Confidentiality

Mrs. Iris Robinson: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland under what circumstances doctors in the Province may refuse to provide evidence in court during cases regarding patients who were under their care; and if he will make a statement. [194634]

Angela Smith: In almost all respects the duty of a doctor in court proceedings is that of any citizen. They are required to provide evidence to help a court reach its decision. They are not obliged to answer questions that may be considered incriminating. Further, they must maintain patient confidentiality. Confidential matters may be disclosed on the order of the court. There must be a clear legal basis for a doctor refusing to provide evidence, if so ordered.

Pensioners

Mr. McGrady: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland if he will take steps to allow those over 65 *(a)* to claim exemption from Vehicle Excise Duty and *(b)* access to the Motability Scheme. [194949]

Mr. Spellar: Entitlement to the higher rate mobility component of disability living allowance provides access to *(a)* Vehicle Excise Duty exemption and *(b)* the Motability scheme as part of the assistance focused on people who are severely disabled early, or relatively early, in life and who therefore face significantly more difficulties than those who become disabled and develop mobility problems after the age of 65. Attendance allowance, which provides help with the disability-related extra costs of people who experience the onset of disability after age 65, is part of the wide range of support that the Government makes available to older people. There are no plans to change these arrangements.

Previous Convictions (Disclosure)

Rev. Ian Paisley: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland what plans he has to extend to Northern Ireland changes in the legal system that would permit juries in child sex and theft cases to be made aware of previous similar convictions of defendants; and if he will make a statement. [195106]

Mr. Spellar: The Criminal Justice Act 2003 contains provisions in sections 98 to 110 to allow evidence of a defendant's previous convictions and other misconduct to be admitted at trial where these are relevant to the case and provided their value is greater than the risk that such evidence might unduly prejudice the fairness of the trial. These sections of the Act already apply to Northern Ireland. I am currently considering the Home Secretary's proposals for the first categories of offence to be covered by the Act with a view to commencement of the evidence of bad character provisions for Northern Ireland in April 2005.

Special Advisers

Matthew Taylor: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland how many unpaid special advisers the Department has; what their names are; and which Government *(a)* bodies, *(b)* committees and *(c)* strategy groups each unpaid adviser (i) belongs to, (ii) advises and (iii) works alongside. [194059]

Mr. Paul Murphy: I refer the hon. Member to the answer given by my hon. Friend the Minister for the Cabinet Office on 28 October 2004, *Official Report*, column 1380W.

School Expulsions

Rev. Ian Paisley: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland how many children were expelled from *(a)* secondary schools and *(b)* grammar schools in Northern Ireland in the past five years, broken down by education and library board area. [195237]

Mr. Gardiner: The information sought is not available in the form requested. However, the number of pupils in each education and library board area in Northern Ireland who have been expelled in each of the past five years is as follows:

	1998–99	*1999–2000*	*2000–01*	*2001–02*	*2002–03*
BELB	6	19	5 (5)	7 (7)	18 (18)
WELB	18	25	19 (19)	16 (16)	12 (10)
NEELB	29	20	29 (29)	18 (18)	17 (16)
SEELB	6	3	11 (11)	12 (12)	16 (16)
SELB	14	16	16 (14)	23 (23)	7 (7)
Total	73	83	80 (78)	76 (76)	70 (67)

Note:

Figures in brackets denote the number of pupils expelled from post-primary schools. The Department does not have this breakdown prior to 2000–01.

CONSTITUTIONAL AFFAIRS

Barristers

Mr. Allen: To ask the Parliamentary Secretary, Department for Constitutional Affairs what the dining requirements necessary to become a barrister are; what plans he has to remove these requirements; and if he will make a statement. [193589]

Mr. Lammy: From the beginning of the 1997–98 academic year the dining requirement forming part of the criteria for call to the Bar was changed. Students are now required to complete 12 qualifying units in order to be called to the Bar. This can be achieved in a number of ways, including attendance at education days and dining sessions (which normally include a lecture). Admission to an Inn is required before registration on the Bar Vocational Course, although many undergraduates join before this stage in order to participate in the activities, use the library, or start dining. At present the Bar have no plans to alter these arrangements. It is possible, though by no means certain, that following the Government's consideration of Sir David Clementi's report, that changes will be made to the training and education requirements.

Correspondence

Mr. Amess: To ask the Parliamentary Secretary, Department for Constitutional Affairs when he will reply to the hon. Member for Southend, West's letter of 1 September, forwarded to his office from Her Majesty the Queen's Private Secretary, Mr. Montazir Khan; and if he will make a statement. [195836]

Mr. Lammy: My officials wrote to the hon. Member for Southend, West on 15 October requesting further documentation. We have yet to receive a reply. However, to avoid further delay, I wrote to the hon. Member on 1 November on the basis of the documentation we currently hold. I apologise for the delay.

Court of Protection

Paul Holmes: To ask the Parliamentary Secretary, Department for Constitutional Affairs in how many cases since 1974 a receiver has been appointed by the Court of Protection. [195685]

Mr. Lammy: There are presently 19,964 cases under administration where a receiver has been appointed by the Court of Protection.

There are also 3,869 cases where the client has died and case closure proceedings are not complete and 4,991 cases where an application has been made but no receiver has yet been appointed.

In the financial year 2003–04, 6,854 receivers were appointed by the court.

WORK AND PENSIONS

Benefit Claimant Appointees

Paul Holmes: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions how many benefit claimants there are for whom an appointee has been appointed under Regulation 33 of the Claims and Payments regulations. [195684]

Mr. Pond: The information requested is not available. The only available information is for the number of pension credit and income support claimants with appointees.

At the end of February 2004 there were 174,700 pension credit appointees.

At the end of February 2004 there were 118,200 income support appointees.

Source: IAD Information Centre

Paul Holmes: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions what checks are undertaken on an individual who has applied to be an appointee to make and receive benefits on behalf of a claimant. [195686]

Mr. Pond: An officer experienced in appointee work will interview the prospective appointee to obtain information from them to establish whether they are an appropriate and suitable person to act.

The officer will also advise the prospective appointee of the roles and responsibilities of the appointment and confirm that they understand these and are willing to undertake them before any appointment is made. They will be asked to sign a declaration that they will act in the best interests of the claimant.

The prospective appointee will also be advised that the appointment can be revoked.

Paul Holmes: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions what checks are undertaken by staff in his Department to ascertain whether a claimant lacks the capacity to manage his benefit income. [195687]

Mr. Pond: A visiting officer, experienced in appointee work, undertakes an independent assessment of a customer's ability to manage his or her own affairs based on departmental guidelines. In cases where there is doubt, the opinion of a suitably qualified professional may be sought, for example a social worker, community psychiatric nurse or general practitioner.

Benefit Processing

Mr. Dismore: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions on what date he expects benefit processing will move from Edgware benefit office to another London location; what the other London location will be; and if he will make a statement. [194848]

Jane Kennedy: The administration of Jobcentre Plus is a matter for the Chief Executive of Jobcentre Plus, David Anderson. He will write to the hon. Member.

Letter from David Anderson to Mr. Andrew Dismore, dated 3 November 2004:

As Jobcentre Plus is an Executive Agency, the Secretary of State has asked me to reply to your question concerning the movement of benefit processing from Edgware Social Security Office.

On 16 September the Secretary of State announced that, subject to further detailed planning, Jobcentre Plus benefit processing would be centralised in 81 sites by 2008.

As part of this process our intention is that the benefit processing work for North London, currently processed in five sites including Edgware, will be moved to Stratford in stages over the first three quarters of next year.

I hope this is helpful.

Consultants

Mr. Maples: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions if he will list the contracts awarded by his Department to consultants in each of the last five years, stating in each case *(a)* the name of the consulting company, *(b)* the value of the contract and *(c)* the purpose for which the contract was awarded; and if he will make a statement. [191736]

Jane Kennedy: The Department for Work and Pensions was established in June 2001.

The information from June 2001 to March 2004 is not available in the format requested and could be obtained only at disproportionate cost.

Housing Benefit

Tom Cox: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions how many convictions for fraud regarding the payment of housing benefit there have been in the last 12 months. [194150]

Mr. Pond: In the 12 months up to 30 September 2004, the total number of convictions for fraud regarding housing benefit and council tax benefit was 4,135. Information is not available on the number of convictions for housing benefit only.

Information and Communication Specialists

Mr. Jenkins: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions how much the Department spent on outside information technology and communication specialist consultants and engineers in the 2003–04 financial year. [191914]

Maria Eagle: The Department for Work and Pensions spent £139.66 million on outside information technology and communication specialist consultants and engineers in the 2003–04 financial year.

Jobcentre Plus Offices

David Taylor: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions what advice on debt management is available from Jobcentre Plus offices. [194501]

Jane Kennedy: The administration of Jobcentre Plus is a matter for the Chief Executive of Jobcentre Plus, David Anderson. He will write to the hon. Member.

Letter from David Anderson to Mr. David Taylor, dated 3 November 2004:

The Secretary of State has asked me to reply to your question concerning what advice on debt management is available to people from Jobcentre Plus offices. This is something which falls within the responsibilities delegated to me as Chief Executive of Jobcentre Plus.

Jobcentre Plus has distributed to offices a short leaflet produced by DWP which provides basic information on debt and dealing with it, the benefits of seeking advice and where to obtain it. We have also updated our guidance for Personal Advisers to emphasise the importance of referring customers with debt problems to debt advice provision, and distributed debt fact sheets produced by the Social Exclusion Unit to all districts.

Customers in receipt of Jobseekers Allowance (JSA) can receive support relating to debt problems via the New Deal for Young People and New Deal 25 plus programmes. When required, New Deal Personal Advisers have the discretion to secure suitable provision to enable customers to receive debt counselling and advice.

Jobcentre Plus is also making £3 million available this financial year and a further £3 million in 2005–06 to buy in additional advice, if needed, on debt to help some of our most vulnerable customers return to work. This scheme will enable lone parents, other benefit recipients (excepting those in receipt of Jobseekers Allowance), and partners of benefit recipients to get help where debt is proving to be a barrier to taking-up work.

I hope this is helpful.

New Deal

John Barrett: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions how many people have gained work through the New Deal for Lone Parents in *(a)* the Edinburgh West constituency, *(b)* the City of Edinburgh local authority area, *(c)* Scotland and *(d)* the UK. [194989]

Jane Kennedy: The available information is in the following table.

Number of people who have gained work through the New Deal for Lone Parents

	Number
Edinburgh West constituency	320
City of Edinburgh local authority	2,250
Scotland	30,620
Great Britain	276,690

Notes:
Figures are from the start of the programme in October 1998 to June 2004, and have been rounded to the nearest 10.
Source:
New Deal Evaluation Database

John Barrett: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions how many people are participating in the New Deal for Lone Parents in *(a)* the Edinburgh West constituency, *(b)* the City of Edinburgh local authority area, *(c)* Scotland and *(d)* the UK. [194990]

Jane Kennedy: The available information is in the following table.

Number of people participating in the New Deal for Lone Parents at the end of June 2004

	Number
Edinburgh West constituency	120
City of Edinburgh local authority	930
Scotland	10,910
Great Britain	106,670

Notes:
1. Figures relate to the number of people participating in New Deal for Lone Parents at the end of June 2004, and have been rounded to the nearest 10.
Source:
New Deal Evaluation Database

David Wright: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions how many people in Telford have secured work through the New Deal for lone parents. [195426]

Jane Kennedy: 730 lone parents in Telford have gained work through the New Deal for lone parents since the start of the programme in October 1998.

FOREIGN AND COMMONWEALTH AFFAIRS

Argentina

Mr. Ancram: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs (1) whether, under the terms of the Ottawa Convention on landmines, there is an obligation on the Argentine Government to provide funding for landmine clearance in the Falkland Islands; and what obligation for landmine clearance in the Falklands rests with the *(a)* United Kingdom Government and *(b)* Argentinean Government; [195588]

(2) what progress has been made under the Memorandum of Understanding between the United Kingdom and the Argentine Government on landmine clearance in the Falkland Islands; [195589]

(3) which Minister will represent the United Kingdom at the Ottawa Convention Review in Kenya in November; [195590]

(4) what funding the Government have made available for landmine clearance in the Falkland Islands since the Ottawa Convention came into force; [195591]

(5) how many landmines were lifted in the Falkland Islands during the periods *(a)* 1997 to 2001 and *(b)* 2001 to 2004; [195592]

(6) what progress has been made in clearing landmines in the Falkland Islands since the Ottawa Convention was signed in 1997. [195593]

Mr. Straw: Since 1999 and the entry into force of the Ottawa Convention no funds have been specifically dedicated to the clearing of landmines in the Falklands Islands. Given the unpredictability of the environment, landmine clearance in the Falklands is particularly hazardous. Since August 1982 the landmines have been clearly marked and have very little impact on the local community. When landmines do surface they are cleared by the Explosive Ordnance Disposal teams based on the islands as part of their duties. Between 1997–2001, 156 mines were discovered and destroyed in this way. Between 2001–04, 268 mines were discovered and destroyed.

Under the Ottawa Convention, the obligation to clear all the landmines by 2009 falls upon the United Kingdom. States Parties in a position to do so are obliged to provide assistance for mine clearance and related activities.

On a bilateral basis, the United Kingdom and the Argentine Government signed a Joint Statement in 1999 and under the heading of Confidence-Building it was noted that:

> "the two Governments will continue to work together to evaluate the feasibility and cost of clearing the land mines still present in the Falklands Islands."

Subsequently, an Exchange of Notes dated 11 October 2001, detailed how the UK and Argentina should proceed on the landmine issue. It included a provision for the establishment of a Joint Working Group, the first meeting of which took place in Buenos Aires on 3–4 December 2001. The second meeting was in London, on 26–27 October 2004.

At the 2004 meeting a list of action points was agreed, including the need for the preparation of a draft work programme and draft budget for a Feasibility Study, both of which are to be considered at the next Joint Working Group, due to be held in Buenos Aires during the second quarter of 2005.

The composition of the UK delegation to the Ottawa Convention Review Conference has not been decided. It is likely that it will be at senior official level.

Bermuda

Mr. Simmonds: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs whether the EU savings directive will be implemented in Bermuda. [195480]

Mr. Rammell: At the European Council of Santa Maria de Feira in June 2000 it was agreed that before the savings directive could be adopted and implemented, reassurances were required from relevant dependent and associated territories (including the Channel Islands, the Isle of Man, and the Caribbean Overseas Territories) for the adoption of the same measures, and from key third countries (Switzerland, Andorra, Liechtenstein, Monaco and San Marino) for the adoption of equivalent measures.

In June 2004 the member states agreed that the directive would take effect from 1 July 2005, on the basis that assurances had been given by all of the relevant third countries and dependent and associated territories that they would be in a position to apply measures equivalent to (in the case of third countries), or the same as (in the case of territories), those provided for by the directive from 1 July 2005.

Bilateral agreements between the relevant dependent or associated territories and the member states have been prepared so as to apply to each of them the measures under the directive from 1 July 2005.

Bermuda is not included in the list of relevant dependent or associated territories agreed at the Feira European Council.

British Overseas Territories

Mr. Andrew Turner: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will list for each British overseas territory the population and the number of elected representatives at the highest local level of responsible government. [195429]

Mr. Rammell: The details are as follows:

	Population	*Elected representatives*
Anguilla	[1]12,200	7
Bermuda	[2]62,059	36
British Virgin Islands	[1]21,333	13
Cayman Islands	[1]43,103	18
Falkland Islands	[3]2,913	8
Gibraltar	[3]28,231	15
Montserrat	[3]4,491	9
Pitcairn	[6]47	6
St. Helena and Dependencies		
St. Helena	3,954[5]	12
Ascension Island	1,002[6]	7
Tristan da Cunha	287[4]	8
Sovereign base areas of Akrotiri and Dhekelia in Cyprus	6,967 Cypriots and approximately 7,800 military and UK-based civilian personnel and their dependants[3]	None
Turks and Caicos Islands	[1]20,020	13
British Antarctic Territory, British Indian Ocean Territory and South Georgia and South Sandwich Islands	These territories have no settled population.	

[1] 2003 estimate
[2] 2000 census
[3] 2001 census
[4] 2003 count
[5] 2004 estimate
[6] 2004 count

China

Mr. Dhanda: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what discussions he has had with the Ambassador of the People's Republic of China in connection with arrests of Christians in Kaifeng City and Sujiazhuang on 6 August and what representations he has made to the Chinese Government about expanding religious freedom. [195545]

Mr. Rammell: We are aware of the arrests of Christians in Kaifeng City and Sujiazhuang and are monitoring events closely.

I raised human rights concerns with Assistant Foreign Minister Li Hui during my visit to China in October this year.

Foreign and Commonwealth Office officials raised concerns about religious freedom, including the mass arrests at Kaifeng City and the arrest of 23 members of the Baoding diocese, with Wang Zuo'an, Deputy Director General of the State Administration for Religious Affairs, during his visit to the UK in September.

We also raised religious freedom at the May round of the UK-China Human Rights Dialogue and made clear that the prohibition of some religious/spiritual groups and the legal restrictions on others are not acceptable.

Departmental Press Officers

Mr. Ruffley: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs how many press officers are employed in his Department; and how many were employed in each year since 1996–97. [195358]

Mr. Alexander *[holding answer 1 November 2004]*: There are currently 17 Press Officers working in the Foreign and Commonwealth Office's Press Office. For previous years, I refer the hon. Member to the answer given by my hon. Friend the Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State at the Foreign and Commonwealth Office (Mr. Rammell) to the hon. Member for Yeovil (Mr. Laws) on 25 March 2004, *Official Report*, column 1040W.

Iraq

Mr. Ancram: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what contingency plans his Department has in place in the event of the elections in

Iraq not taking place in January 2005; what later date has been considered as a possible election date; and if he will make a statement on the forthcoming elections. [195153]

Mr. Straw: We fully support the Iraqi Interim Government's commitment to hold elections in January 2005. All the indications are that a large majority of Iraqis are eager to vote in a free election for the first time in their history. The Independent Electoral Commission of Iraq (IECI) supported by the UN are still working to the January timetable for elections. We are doing all we can to support the IECI and the UN to ensure that elections take place on time, as provided for in UNSCR 1556.

Glenda Jackson: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs pursuant to his reply of 26 October 2004, *Official Report*, column 1177W, if he will break down the development of Iraq's national economy, referred to in paragraph 3, page 3 of the ISG, Regime Finance and Procurement, by *(a)* industry, *(b)* banking and *(c)* services; what the value was of each category; and who the financial partners were of such activities. [195194]

Mr. Rammell: The report from the Iraq Survey Group points to the former Iraqi regime implementing strategies, policies and methods to try to terminate sanctions and generate illicit revenue, including under the Oil for Food Programme. We are unable to assess the value of illicit funds generated by each of the banking, industrial and service sectors. However, under the terms of Security Council resolution 1483 (22 May 2003), more than $1 billion of former Iraqi regime assets have so far been frozen internationally and transferred to the Development Fund for Iraq, for the benefit of the Iraqi people.

There have been widespread allegations that a number of individuals and entities around the world were complicit in corruption under the programme, for their own benefit and the benefit of the former regime. However, it would be premature to comment on the allegations and the financial outcome of any possible corruption until the independent inquiry appointed by the UN Secretary-General has reported its findings.

Glenda Jackson: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs pursuant to his reply of 26 October 2004, *Official Report*, column 1177W, if he will list those import items, prohibited under UN sanctions, referred to in paragraph 2, page 3 of the ISG Regime Finance and Procurement, by *(a)* type, *(b)* quantity and *(c)* value; and if he will list those trade intermediaries involved in these activities. [195195]

Mr. Rammell: Under the terms of United Nations Security Council resolutions implementing sanctions and the Oil for Food Programme, Iraq was only permitted to import items approved by the UN Security Council's Iraq Sanctions Committee. The report from the Iraq Survey Group points to the former Iraqi regime implementing strategies to procure illicit goods. We are unable to assess precisely the type, quantity and value of those goods.

There have been widespread allegations that a number of individuals and entities around the world were complicit in corruption under the programme and through smuggling, for their own benefit and the benefit of the former regime. However, it would be premature to comment on the allegations until the independent inquiry appointed by the UN Secretary-General has reported its findings.

Glenda Jackson: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs (1) pursuant to his answer of 26 October 2004, *Official Report*, column 1177W, whether he was informed in July 2000 of claims by the Iraqi Ba'athist paper, *Al Thawrah*, of victory over UN sanctions; and when he urged the UN to take steps to restore sanctions; [195196]

(2) whether he was informed in August 2001 of the statement by Iraqi Foreign Minister Sabri that UN sanctions efforts had collapsed; and when he urged the UN to take steps to restore sanctions. [195199]

Mr. Rammell: The Foreign and Commonwealth Office was aware of a number of claims that sanctions were failing. The United Kingdom continually worked hard at the United Nations Security Council to limit Iraq's efforts to erode sanctions, and ensure the effective implementation of the Oil for Food Programme. As the Iraq Survey Group reported, sanctions were successful in curbing Iraq's ability to import weapons and technology. Sanctions were maintained against Iraq from 1990 until the adoption of resolution 1483 on 22 May 2003, when economic sanctions were lifted and the arms embargo was left in place.

Mr. Gordon Prentice: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what steps will be taken to protect polling stations in Iraq from suicide bombers. [195216]

Mr. Rammell: The Iraqi Ministry of the Interior is responsible for election security in Iraq. The Iraqi Police Service will provide appropriate security to polling stations, supported if necessary by the Iraqi National Guard. The Multinational Force will continue to support the Iraqi Interim Government in providing area security in order to assist the political process as mandated by UNSCR 1546.

Joan Ruddock: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs how the *(a)* elections and *(b)* political parties in Iraq will be organised to meet the constitutional requirement for 25 per cent. of seats to be held by women. [187618]

Mr. Rammell: The UK strongly supports the constitutional requirement for 25 per cent. of the seats in the Transitional National Assembly to be held by women. The Iraqi Electoral Law (CPA Order 96) stipulates (Section 4, Paragraph 3) that,

> "No fewer than one out of the first three candidates on the [electoral] list must be woman; no fewer than two out of the first six candidates on the list must be woman; and so forth until the end of the list".

Written Answers to Questions

Thursday 4 November 2004

ENVIRONMENT, FOOD AND RURAL AFFAIRS

Compensation (Destroyed Animals)

Paul Flynn: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what estimate she has made of the percentage of compensation payments for animals destroyed because of *(a)* suspected foot and mouth and *(b)* bovine tuberculosis which may have been paid at above the level of average market values in each of the past five years. [192881]

Mr. Bradshaw: No estimate has been made of what percentage of the compensation payments for animals compulsorily slaughtered because of FMD in 2001 were above the level of average market values. The average value for each type of livestock increased during the epidemic, peaked in May 2001 and gradually declined. No compensation for FMD was paid in each of the other four years.

For bovine tuberculosis it is not possible to provide a meaningful assessment of the percentage of animals that might have received compensation over and above "average market values". However, there is evidence to show that the provision of above market value compensation has been a significant problem in England and Wales, particularly since the outbreaks of foot and mouth disease in 2001. This is one of the reasons why my Department will shortly be consulting stakeholders on a proposed new compensation system.

Composting/Recycling

Mr. Hoyle: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what estimate she has made of the number of households in *(a)* Lancashire and *(b)* Chorley which (i) composted and (ii) recycled in the last period for which figures are available. [194623]

Mr. Morley: Local authorities do not currently report on the number of households participating in recycling and composting schemes, or the numbers that carry out home composting. The 2002–03 Municipal Waste Management Survey established that 14.5 per cent. of household waste in England was recycled, about one third of which was centrally composted. Chorley borough council recycled and composted 16 per cent. of household waste, and Lancashire county council 20 per cent. The Government's Best Value Performance Indicators for local authorities show that in 2002–03, 86 per cent. of the population of Chorley were served by a kerbside collection scheme, or lived within 1 km of a recycling centre. The regional average for Lancashire was 80.3 per cent.

Mr. Jim Cunningham: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs how many UK households are recycling and composting; and whether the national target is being met. [194165]

Mr. Morley *[holding answer 1 November 2004]*: Waste is a devolved issue. In England, the Government have set national targets to recycle or compost 17 per cent. of household waste by 2003–04 and 25 per cent. by 2005–06. The latest (2001) Defra survey of public attitudes to quality of life and to the environment found that in England, paper was recycled on a regular basis by 53 per cent. of households, glass by 42 per cent. cans by 30 per cent., plastic by 23 per cent. and kitchen waste by 20 per cent. Local authorities do not report on the number of households participating in recycling schemes or on the numbers that carry out home composting, but the 2002–03 Municipal Waste Management Survey identified that 14.5 per cent. of household waste was recycled in England, about one third of which was centrally composted. Audited figures for 2003–04 are expected in December.

Cormorants

Mr. Randall: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs how many licences to shoot cormorants have been *(a)* applied for and *(b)* granted since her Department announced its change of policy on obtaining such licences on 14 September. [194341]

Mr. Bradshaw: The announcement of new measures to help alleviate cormorant predation problems at fisheries was made on 16 September 2004.

Up until 22 October, the Department has received 195 applications for a licence to kill cormorants to prevent serious damage to fisheries. Of these, we have granted 104.

Sir Paul Beresford: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs pursuant to the answer of 20 October 2004, *Official Report*, columns 695–96W, on cormorants, what non-lethal alternatives to culling she is considering to control the population of cormorants. [194810]

Mr. Bradshaw *[holding answer 1 November 2004]*: There are a number of non-lethal methods that can be used to control cormorants. These include the use of enclosures, scarers, roost management, stocking control and fish refuges. Further details may be found in a technical advice note:

www.defra.gov.uk/corporate/rds/publications/technical/TAN 14.pdf

Sir Paul Beresford: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs pursuant to the answer of 20 October 2004, *Official Report*, columns 695–96W, on cormorants, what advice her Department has received from the Moran Committee regarding deterrents to predation by cormorants of fish stocks. [194812]

Mr. Bradshaw *[holding answer 1 November 2004]*: The Moran Committee was set up in 1997 to provide a co-ordinated platform of organisations to address angling and fisheries issues. The Committee has recently forged links with other nature conservation groups such as the Environment Agency, English Nature and the RSPB in order to identify common ground on the bird predation issue and to ensure that a reasonable balance is struck between the need to conserve both fish and birds. The Group has also established a useful dialogue with Defra and CEFAS.

The Committee has provided advice through producing leaflets such as "Cormorants—The Facts" and "Protecting your Fisheries from Cormorants". Further information may be found on www.cormorants.info

Departmental Publications (Accessibility)

Mr. Goodman: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs how many and what proportion of publications issued by her Department are available in *(a)* Braille, *(b)* autoprint, *(c)* large print and *(d)* easy read format. [194295]

Alun Michael: Defra's policy is to follow best practice on diversity and to ensure that publications meet guidelines on type size, font clarity and general ease of readability.

We make all publications available on demand in Braille, large print format and audio. During the past year, we have fulfilled 20 requests for Braille publications and one for audio.

Eastern Irish Sea Fishery

Mr. Paterson: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs (1) whether she plans to seek EU Commission approval for Fleetwood fishermen to use 110mm mesh in cod ends in the plaice fishery in the Eastern Irish Sea while retaining their full allocation of 22 days at sea per month; [192946]

(2) what representations she has received from Fleetwood fishermen on effects of the operation of the Cod Recovery Plan on the plaice fishery in the Eastern Irish Sea; and what action she has taken in response. [192953]

Mr. Bradshaw: I have met representatives of the Fleetwood fishing industry on several occasions this year. They expressed concerns that the EU days at sea scheme did not allow them sufficient days to use their preferred 100mm plus nets to target plaice and that they were therefore forced to use smaller mesh nets (which attracted a higher number of days) and thus increase their catches of undersized and juvenile fish. My officials explained that the scheme did, in fact, allow them to continue with their normal fishing patterns and offered to provide individual guidance, where required, to the fishermen concerned—which was subsequently taken up. Separately, we are discussing with the commission potential improvements to the operation of the scheme for the benefit of fishermen generally.

Mr. Paterson: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what the *(a)* quota allocations and *(b)* landings for cod were for the Fleetwood over 10 m fishing fleet in the last five years. [192949]

Mr. Bradshaw: UK fish quotas are managed by the allocation of shares of the national quota to fishermen's producer organisations for them to manage through the year. The quota allocations made to the Fleetwood Producer Organisation and their actual landings of cod in the years requested are given as follows. These data include activity by all vessels based in Fleetwood of over 10m overall length.

Tonnes

Live weight of cod	*1999*	*2000*	*2001*	*2002*	*2003*
Annual quota[1]					
West of Scotland cod VIa, Vb(EC)	119	82	41	89	27
North Sea cod	70	13	7	13	5
Cod VIIa (Irish Sea)	267	121	108	152	78
Cod VIIb-k	31	31	19	11	15
Uptake					
West of Scotland cod VIa, Vb(EC)	57	40	23	47	26
North Sea cod	1	5	5	4	4
Cod VIIa (Irish Sea)	148	89	105	99	72
Cod VIIb-k	10	28	16	10	11

[1] End-year allocations of quota after incorporating swaps of quota with other producer organisations.

EU Committees

Angus Robertson: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs how many times during the Greek presidency of the EU the Committee *(a)* on the conservation of natural habitats and of wild fauna and flora (Habitat) and *(b)* for the protection of species of wild fauna and flora by regulating trade met; when and where these meetings took place; which UK Government expert was present at each meeting; what (i) technical and (ii) financial issues were raised by the UK Government expert at each meeting; what recommendations the Committee produced during that period; what actions were (A) proposed and (B) taken by (1) the EU and (2) the UK Government as a result of the Committee's recommendations; and if she will make a statement. [193398]

Mr. Bradshaw: *(a)* The Committee on the Conservation of Natural Habitats and of Wild Fauna and Flora (the Habitats Committee) met once during the period of the Greek presidency, in Brussels on 10 March 2003.

UK representation consisted of two officials from my Department, one official from the Scottish Executive and a scientific expert from the Joint Nature Conservation Committee. The main agenda items considered were:

Establishment of the Natura 2000 network

Projects to Co-finance under Life Nature (opinion of the Committee)

Points of Information/Progress Update (including Marine Working Group, Article 12 Working Group, Monitoring, Large Carnivores, Enlargement, Financing, Communication Issues, Article 16 and 17 Reporting and Compensation)

At this meeting the UK representative provided technical information regarding progress on the submission of the UK list of Natura 2000 sites for the Atlantic region. In discussions concerning the Report on the Financing of Natura 2000 the UK representative highlighted the importance of marine areas for the cost estimates of the network and the uncertainties due to the outstanding designations. The UK representative also asked for clarification on the timing and format of member state's reactions to the Commission's Communication which will follow on from the Report on Financing Natura 2000.

The Commission proposed the following actions

Member states to submit sites for the Bio-geographic regions by the agreed deadlines

Member states to provide comments on the Monitoring Document presented by the Commission

Member states, who had not already done so, were asked to complete questionnaire on Large Carnivores

Member states were requested to provide comments on the draft common report for Article 16 and 17 reporting

As a consequence of discussions at the meeting, the Commission has adopted the Alpine List of Sites of Community Interest, published the list of successful projects for co-financing under LIFE Nature, published its Communication on Financing Natura 2000, and presented papers on Monitoring and Surveillance at the EU Nature Directors meeting on the 10 April 2003.

(b) The EC CITES Committee (The Committee on Trade in Wild Fauna and Flora) met once during the period of the Greek presidency, in Brussels on 13 March 2003.

UK representation normally comprises officials from my Department. At this meeting the UK representative raised a number of technical issues: introducing a discussion paper on Ivory; the use made of Article 8.2 of Council Regulation 338/97 in other member states; licensing of trade in vaccines, cell lines, etc.; the marking/identification of parts and derivatives; the role of the EU at the UN Food and Agriculture Organisation meetings and the release of meeting documents to NGOs. The UK representative also asked for the implementation of the mahogany listing to be added to the agenda for the next EC meeting. On financial issues the UK representative inquired over EU financial assistance to the CITES initiative—Monitoring the Illegal Killing of Elephants (MIKE) programme.

The Commission proposed the following actions: adding the species "oxymura jaimaicensis" and "Chrysemys picta" to Annex D of Council Regulation 338/97 and considering further the case for the addition of "Padda Fuscata" to Annex D. The Commission also proposed looking further at: a proposal for an Annex B listing for certain Italian endemic species; intra-EU certificates for transboundary movements pending implementation of new CITES appendices; and the UK proposals in relation to the licensing of trade in vaccines, cell lines, etc. No actions were proposed by the UK.

The Committee on Trade in Wild Fauna and Flora is chaired by the European Commission. It makes decisions, not recommendations, in relation to the implementation of Council Regulation 338/97. Copies of the Summary of Conclusions for the meeting which took place on 13 March 2003 have been made available in the House of Commons Library.

Fox Hunting

Mr. Llwyd: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what research has been undertaken to assess the effect of a ban on the hunting of foxes on the predation of ground nesting birds; and if she will make a statement. [195775]

Alun Michael: The Department is not aware of specific academic research into the predation of foxes on ground nesting birds. However, we recognise the damage that foxes can do to such birds. The Hunting Bill, introduced into the House of Lords, which would have introduced a general ban on hunting with dogs, included a specific exemption related to this issue. This is designed to ensure that gamekeepers or others can continue to use dogs to control pests that threaten ground nesting birds in their care.

Illegal Waste Dumping

Shona McIsaac: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs if she will list the successful prosecutions for illegal dumping of waste in each of the past three years; and what the penalty issued in each case was. [194616]

Mr. Morley: The information is as follows:

	Prosecutions	*Fines*	*Average fine (£)*
2002	584	346	2,158
2001	468	286	1,723
2000	370	228	2,615

Notes:

1. Data are based on number of defendants proceeded against at magistrates courts under s33 Environmental Protection Act 1990.
2. Data from 2003 will not be available until the end of November when the 2003 criminal statistics have been published.

Ministerial Expenses

Mr. Prisk: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs how much the Department spent on *(a)* maintenance, *(b)* renovation, *(c)* council tax and *(d)* running costs of residential properties used by Ministers and officials in each year since 1997. [191395]

Margaret Beckett: The amount spent on residential properties for Ministers and officials since the formation of Defra has been as follows:

£

	Maintenance	*Renovation*	*Council tax*	*Running costs*
2001-02	0	0	0	[1]177,565.46
2002-03	0	0	0	[1]276,398.01

	Maintenance	*Renovation*	*Council tax*	£ *Running costs*
2003–04	0	0	0	[1]204,153.01
2004–05[2]	0	0	0	195,500.00

[1] Actual

[2] As per forecast

The running costs are those paid by the Department to the Cabinet office in respect of the capital charge and the costs for utilities, the Whitehall District Heating System, security and facilities management.

Information about the costs of official residences used by Ministers for previous financial years is already in the public domain.

Organic Farming

Mr. Drew: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what assessment she has made of the impact of organic farming on biodiversity. [193293]

Mr. Bradshaw: Defra last year funded a major fully referenced study (OF0405). An Assessment of the Environmental Impacts of Organic Farming (May 2003). This can be seen on www.defra.gov.uk/farm/organic/research/env-impacts2.pdf

An additional item of research is the English Nature and Royal Society for the Protection of Birds report "Does Organic Farming Benefit Biodiversity?" This has been published electronically by the journal Biological Conservation (10 August 2004).It can be seen on http://www.sciencedirect.com/science searching for "organic farming".

Both of these reports point to a general increase in biodiversity resulting from organic farming methods.

Defra has also funded a five year research project (OF0165)—Factors influencing biodiversity within organic and conventional systems of arable farming—which has recently been completed (30 September 2004). The full report should be available in due course.

TRADE AND INDUSTRY

Solar Panels

10. **Norman Lamb:** To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry if she will make a statement on the operation of schemes to promote solar panels. [195869]

Mr. Mike O'Brien: The DTI provides support for two capital grant schemes that promote use of solar panels.

The Major Photovoltaics Demonstration Programme launched in 2002 has committed some £16.3 million to 148 large-scale projects and some £4.7 million to 700 small-scale projects.

The Clear Skies programme provides grants for a number of renewable technologies including solar thermal. The programme has offered some £1.9 million for solar in 3,887 households and £1,821,623 for solar in 138 community projects.

Energy Prices

11. **Mr. Connarty:** To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what assessment she has made of the impact of rising energy prices on British manufacturing. [195870]

Mr. Mike O'Brien: DTI officials and Ministers meet regularly with industry groups and companies to discuss concerns on energy prices.

Recent increases are in the main a result of market forces and follow a period in which energy prices have generally been at historically low levels in real terms.

Business Link (Northampton)

12. **Ms Keeble:** To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what assessment she has made of Business Link Services in Northampton. [195871]

Nigel Griffiths: I am advised that Business Link Northamptonshire has performed well. During the 2003–04 financial year the Business Link operator had a market penetration rate of 34.5 per cent. compared to the England average of 33.8 per cent. This continued in 2004–05 where Northamptonshire's penetration rate remains higher than the England average at 34 per cent. as compared to 33.9 per cent.

Customer satisfaction with its services also remains strong. It exceeded the England average in both 2003–04 and 2004–05 of 89 per cent., by achieving a 91 per cent. satisfaction level.

Regulatory Impact

14. **Mr. Amess:** To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry if she will make a statement on the level and cost of regulation imposed on business by her Department since 1997. [195874]

Ms Hewitt: DTI has produced 1,080 statutory instruments since 1997. Regulatory impact assessments are produced for SIs, covering impacts on business and others. These are placed in the Libraries of the House.

Power Generation

15. **Ann Winterton:** To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what steps she is taking to ensure that power generating companies are able to meet future energy demands. [195875]

Mr. Mike O'Brien: As set out in the Energy White Paper published in 2003, the Government have put in place a market-based framework for the energy industry in which price signals will show when new build is both needed and economically viable. The market is working well to deliver secure energy supplies. We expect it to continue to do so. National Grid are forecasting that the GB plant margin will rise over the next few years, reaching over 30 per cent. in 2007–08 and remaining around that level to the end of the decade.

Electricity Supply (Rural Areas)

16. **Mr. Luff:** To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what assessment she has made of the reliability of electricity supplies in rural areas. [195876]

Mr. Mike O'Brien: DTI inspectors monitor the performance of rural networks in response to storms and carry out more detailed investigations in extreme circumstances. This work follows on from the publication of a major investigation into the storm of 27 October 2002, which affected 2,000,000 customers. Inspectors have also been working with the electricity industry to explore opportunities to improve storm performance, and a report was published in December last year.

In addition, Ofgem, the industry regulator provides incentives to companies to improve the reliability of electricity supplies.

Premium Rate Calls

17. **Ms Drown:** To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what action she is taking to protect computer users from unsolicited premium rate calls being made from their machines. [195877]

Mr. Mike O'Brien: The Government have asked the Office of Communications (Ofcom), to carry out a review of premium rate services regulation in order to examine ways of improving consumer protection in the future. The review is expected to report in November.

Motor Sport/Performance Engineering Industries

18. **Richard Burden:** To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what assessment she has made of the importance of the *(a)* motor sport and *(b)* performance engineering industries to the UK's industrial base. [195878]

Jacqui Smith: These industries form an important and highly successful part of the UK's industrial base. They employ some 40,000 people and have a sales value of £5 billion, over half of which is export sales.

The Motorsport Competitiveness Panel, which was co-chaired by my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry, undertook a detailed assessment of the significance and future potential of the motor sport and performance engineering sectors. Its report was published on 11 July 2003 and is available in the Libraries of the House.

The panel also made a number of recommendations to secure the future of these industries. We have pledged £16 million in support of these actions, which include widening participation in motor sport and improving the provision of training and qualifications.

Call Centres

Angela Watkinson: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what steps she is taking to minimise the movement of call centre jobs to eastern Europe and Asia. [195863]

Ms Hewitt: The Government share the concerns expressed about the impact of offshoring of services on individuals and communities in the UK. Nonetheless DTI's study into the competitiveness of UK call centres shows the UK call centre sector continuing to grow. The Government's focus must remain on enhancing UK competitiveness, and helping improving skills and on help to improve the skills of those who do lose their jobs to get back into work as quickly as possible.

Civil Partnerships

Mr. Leigh: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry pursuant to her answer of 25 October, *Official Report*, column 996W, on civil partnerships, whether the estimated costs given refer only to those aged over 30 years who have been living for 12 years with a close family member; and whether they assume 100 per cent. take-up rate. [195191]

Ms Hewitt: The estimated costs refer only to those over 30 years and who have lived together for 12 years. However, the estimated costs do not assume 100 per cent. take-up.

Correspondence

Mr. Andrew Turner: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry when she will reply to the letter from the hon. Member for the Isle of Wight to the Secretary of State for Constitutional Affairs dated 11 May, which was referred to her via the Home Secretary. [194153]

Ms Hewitt: When the Home Office inquired whether the hon. Member's constituent's concerns were the responsibility of my Department, my office responded on the same day explaining that the issues raised were not ones for this Department.

I understand that the Office of Fair Trading is now preparing a response.

Electricity Generation

Mr. Caton: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry if she will make a statement on the development of airblown gasification combined cycle technology developed by British Coal for making electricity from coal. [193829]

Mr. Mike O'Brien: After British Coal ceased trading, the practical development of air blown gasification cycle technology was transferred to an industrial consortium termed the Clean Coal Power Generation Group headed by GEC-Alstom. With some financial support from the European Commission, GEC-Alstom together with Mitsui Babcock and Scottish Power undertook a design study examining the concept of installation of this technology at significant demonstration plant scale in the UK. The report associated with this study was completed but subsequent lack of financial interest has prevented the air blown gasification cycle technology proceeding further in the UK. Components and know how associated with this technology reside with various parties and UK bases who are able to exploit it.

Mr. Caton: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry if the Government will make available to other countries, proposing to construct coal-fired power stations, the airblown gasification combined cycle technology developed by British Coal. [193830]

Mr. Mike O'Brien: The intellectual property rights of the components comprising the air blown gasification cycle technology reside with industrial parties, not the Government. These parties are at liberty to exploit such components in their own right and in association with other parties whether of UK or overseas origin.

Emissions Trading

Sue Doughty: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry if she will pursue improvements to the EU Emissions Trading Scheme to ensure that combined heat and power projects benefit fully from the scheme; and if she will make a statement. [194489]

Mr. Morley: I have been asked to reply.

Combined Heat and Power (CHP) is an important element of the Government's new energy policy, as set out in the Energy White Paper. While developing the EU Emissions Trading Scheme (EU ETS), the Government undertook analysis to assess whether the proposed methodology would act as a disincentive to good quality CHP capacity. This analysis concluded that, on average, the baseline methodology used for the National Allocation Plan published earlier this year resulted in a baseline emissions level that was no lower for CHP plants than for installations in the power stations sector. It was therefore decided that the allocations to CHP should be calculated on the same basis as for other installations.

However, following consultation earlier in the year on whether various types of change to installations would be eligible to apply for a free allocation of allowances from the new entrant reserve, the Government have now decided to seek the Commission's agreement to extending eligibility to include, among other things, significant increases in the "good quality" capacity of CHP schemes. New combined heat and power (CHP) installations[1] which come online from 1 January 2004 onwards will also be eligible for allowances from the new entry reserve (NER).

This is intended to assist CHP, and help industry meet the CHP target of 10GW good quality CHP capacity by 2010 as outlined further in the Energy White Paper published in February 2003.

[1] Only CHP installations that meet the threshold in Schedule 1 of the Greenhouse Gas Emissions Trading Scheme 2003 will fall within the scope of the EU ETS.

Sue Doughty: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry whether universities will be able to benefit from emissions trading; and if she will make a statement. [194490]

Mr. Morley: I have been asked to reply.

Emissions trading is potentially an efficient and cost effective way to achieve emissions reductions. Installations covered by the EU Emissions Trading Scheme (including some universities) have the opportunity to benefit from trading by reducing their emissions below the number of allowances allocated by Government and selling these on the EU market.

Some universities are already benefiting from emissions trading. Through a carbon club, three universities participate in the UK Emissions Trading Scheme and have gained experience of trading through the UK market. These universities, along with other Direct Participants, have been granted temporary exclusion from the EU Emissions Trading Scheme until the UK scheme ends in 2006.

Energy Bills

Lembit Öpik: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what the average percentage increase in domestic bills for *(a)* gas and *(b)* electricity has been since May 1997; and if she will make a statement. [194713]

Mr. Mike O'Brien: Data for gas and electricity bills are published on an annual basis, based on a quarterly census of domestic suppliers.

The change in gas bills for domestic customers between 1997 and 2004, based on provisional 2004 bills are given in the table by payment method. In all cases, prices for 2004 are no higher in cash and real terms than in 1997.

Change in gas bills by payment method between 1997 and 2004

Payment method	*Percentage change in real terms between 1997 and 2004*	*Percentage change in current terms between 1997 and 2004*
Standard credit	15	No change
Direct debit	16	1
Prepayment	16	1

The change in electricity bills for domestic customers between 1997 and 2004, based on provisional 2004 bills are given below by payment method. In all cases, prices for 2004 are lower in cash and real terms than in 1997.

Change in electricity bills by payment method between 1997 and 2004

Payment method	*Percentage change in real terms between 1997 and 2004*	*Percentage change in current terms between 1997 and 2004*
Standard credit	25	11
Direct debit	26	13
Prepayment	24	10

Note Data covering bills for 2004 are provisional, although the size of any revisions to these data should be relatively small.

EU Presidency (Greece)

Angus Robertson: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry how many times during the Greek presidency of the EU the Committee for the adaptation to technical progress of directives on the removal of technical barriers to trade in the sector of electric materials used in an explosive atmosphere met; when and where these meetings took place; which UK Government expert was present at each meeting; what *(a)* technical and *(b)* financial issues were raised by the UK Government expert at each meeting; what recommendations the Committee produced during that period; what actions were (i) proposed and (ii) taken by the (A) EU and (B) UK Government as a result of the Committee's recommendations; and if she will make a statement. [194884]

Mr. Alexander: During the Greek presidency, there were no meetings of the Committee for the adaptation of technical progress of directives on the removal of technical barriers to trade in the sector relating to electrical equipment intended for use in potentially explosive atmospheres.

Angus Robertson: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry how many times during the Greek presidency of the EU the Committee for the adaptation to technical progress of directives on the removal of technical barriers to trade in the sector of protective equipment and systems for use in an explosive atmosphere met; when and where these meetings took place; which UK Government expert was present at each meeting; what *(a)* technical and *(b)* financial issues were raised by the UK Government expert at each meeting; what recommendations the Committee produced during that period; what actions were (i) proposed and (ii) taken by the (A) EU and (B) UK Government as a result of the Committee's recommendations; and if she will make a statement. [194885]

Mr. Alexander: It is my understanding this question relates to the Standing Committee set up to assist the European Commission under article 6.3 of the Equipment and Protective Systems for Use in Potentially Explosive Atmospheres Directive, (the "ATEX" Directive) 94/9 EC. There was one meeting of this Committee on 6–7 February 2003 in Brussels which was attended by two UK expert officials, one from the DTI and one from the Health and Safety Executive. They raised for discussion a number of issues.

The Committee produces non-binding guidance rather than more formal outputs. This guidance was adapted to include agreed solutions to the issues raised by the UK and others. It forms the basis for advice to industry on these matters.

The Committee does not address questions relating to financial issues.

Angus Robertson: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry how many times during the Greek presidency of the EU the *(a)* Advisory Committee on standardisation in the field of information technology (Sogits) and *(b)* the Standing Committee for the harmonisation of national legislation relating to recreational craft met; when and where each meeting took place; which UK Government expert was present at each meeting; what (i) technical and (ii) financial issues were raised by the UK Government expert at each meeting; what recommendations the Committee produced during that period; what actions were (A) proposed and (B) taken by (1) the EU and (2) the UK Government as a result of the Committee's recommendations; and if she will make a statement. [194347]

Ms Hewitt: It is my understanding that the hon. Member is referring to the Standing Committee set up under Article 6 of the Directive 94/25/EC (as amended) on the approximation of the laws, regulations and administrative provisions of member states relating to recreational craft. The Standing Committee met in Brussels on 27 January 2003. Two officials from the Department of Trade and Industry represented the United Kingdom.

The UK contributed a number of points to the discussion of various terms of guidance for industry and other stakeholders. No financial issues were discussed. The UK also made technical contributions to a further informal meeting on the same day, attended by many of the same officials plus industry representatives.

The Committee did not make any formal recommendations but its proceedings influenced the work of the Commission and of member states.

Export Credits Guarantee Department

Mr. Arbuthnot: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what representations she has received from industry following her statement on the planned Export Credits Guarantee Department Trading Fund on 1 July. [194498]

Mr. Alexander: Representations about ECGD's future as a Trading Fund were made by industry and its trade bodies prior to my right. hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry's announcement of 1 July 2004, *Official Report*, column 22WS. None have been received since. We are committed to consulting on the outcome of the period of operating as a Pilot Trading Fund, which is due to begin next April.

Mr. Arbuthnot: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what plans she has for how the budget for improving efficiency and effectiveness of the Export Credits Guarantee Department will be spent over the next two years. [194499]

Mr. Alexander: I refer the right hon. Member to the answer I gave in the *Official Report* on 11 October, Column 119W. We are awaiting proposals from the Chief Executive of ECGD before taking decisions.

Mr. Arbuthnot: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what change she has specified to the current requirement of Export Credits Guarantee Department to obtain Treasury Consents annually, as the Export Credits Guarantee Department *(a)* moves into Pilot Trading Fund status in April 2005 and *(b)* becomes a fully capitalised Trading Fund in April 2007. [194506]

Mr. Alexander: Sections 1, 2 and 3 of the Export and Investment Guarantees Act 1991 ('the Act') confer various powers on the Secretary of State acting through the Export Credits Guarantee Department, subject to the consent of the Treasury as required by section 4(2) of the Act. The requirement for ECGD to obtain Treasury consent will therefore continue throughout the Pilot Trading Fund, and during its status as a fully capitalised Trading Fund.

Fallow Field Initiative

Mr. David Stewart: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry how many new *(a)* gas and *(b)* oil reserves have been identified from the fallow field initiative. [195066]

Mr. Mike O'Brien: My Department's fallow initiative seeks to put blocks and discoveries in the hands of who can explore and develop them. Activity prompted by the fallow initiative has already resulted in a number of discoveries, 12 of which have resulted in fields with active plans for development. Collectively these are likely to have reserves ranging between 200 and 250 million barrels of oil equivalent. I have provided an overall estimate because specific figures on oil and gas reserves for individual fields and accumulations are commercially sensitive and provided to my Department in confidence by the operating company.

Fair Trade

Mr. Burstow: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry if she will make it her policy that, during the UK's presidency of *(a)* the EU and *(b)* the G8, all hospitality is sourced from fair trade producers. [192899]

Mr. Alexander: The Department of Trade and Industry works closely with other Government departments to promote fair trade, and the Government are committed to supporting fair trade through their own suppliers wherever possible within the boundaries set by the public procurement rules.

The Government will work to ensure that hospitality offered by their caters within Government departments, when hosting EU Presidency and G8 events, will be sourced from fair trade products. Furthermore, the Government will work to ensure that hospitality provided for UK hosted EU Presidency and G8 events by any outside caterers is sourced from fair trade products where available.

Gas

Mr. Evans: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry how much gas *(a)* was exported from the UK to Europe and *(b)* was imported from Europe to the UK in each year from 1999 to the latest year for which figures are available. [195805]

Mr. Mike O'Brien: The amount of gas exported to and imported from Europe for the years 1999 to 2003 are shown in the table.

GWh

	Exports	*Imports*
1999	84,433	12,862
2000	146,342	26,032
2001	138,330	30,464
2002	150,731	60,493
2003	177,039	86,298

Mr. David Stewart: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry if she will make a statement on her *(a)* plans and *(b)* timetable for bringing gas interconnectors on-stream. [195049]

Mr. Mike O'Brien: Government policy, as set out in the White Paper "Our energy future-creating a low carbon economy" published in February 2003, is to have a market-based approach to deliver energy supply. There are commercial plans to expand the capacity of the existing interconnector from Zeebrugge planned to be operational by Winter 2005 (first phase) and Winter 2006 (second phase). There are also commercial plans to build a new interconnector between the Netherlands and the UK, aiming to be operational 2006–07, and the Langeled pipeline is planned to join the Norwegian Continental Shelf to Britain in 2006–07. The Joint Energy Security of Supply Working Group (JESS) publishes a regular overview of security of supply indicators over the medium term to assist market participants investment decisions and the information collected includes details of forthcoming planned gas interconnector projects.

Mr. David Stewart: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what assessment she has made of the gas reserves in the UK Continental Shelf. [195114]

Mr. Mike O'Brien: My Department publishes an annual assessment of the oil and gas reserves on the UK continental shelf (UKCS). The latest assessment is on the web at http://www.og.dti.gov.uk/information/bb_updates/chapters/reserves_index.htm. As at the end of 2003, proven, probable and possible gas reserves were estimated to total 590, 315 and 336 billion cubic metres (bcm) respectively. In addition, there are estimated to be a further 74–276 bcm of gas in potential additional reserves, which are not currently technically or commercially producible, and undiscovered resources of between 279 and 1,259 bcm. Gas production from the UKCS to end 2003 was just over 1,800 bcm; production is currently around 100 bcm per annum.

Mr. David Stewart: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what plans she has for gas storage over the next decade. [195065]

Mr. Mike O'Brien: This is a commercial matter, however, I understand there are public plans to build five gas storage facilities at Aldbrough, Byley, Humbly Grove, Welton and Preesall. These facilities are at different stages of the planning and delivery process.

The Joint Energy Security of Supply Working Group (JESS) publishes a regular overview of security of supply indicators including the status of potential and planned gas storage.

Mr. David Stewart: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what assessment she has made of the implications for gas storage requirements to meet peak winter gas demand when the UK becomes a net importer of gas. [195068]

Mr. Mike O'Brien: The market is best placed to assess business opportunities for gas storage based on a commercial evaluation. Storage is only one method of providing the flexibility of gas supply to meet peak winter demand. The Joint Energy Security of Supply Working Group (JESS) publishes a regular overview of security of supply indicators and provides information to the market on the need for peak supply capacity. In addition, DTI writes to local planning authorities, considering gas storage projects, to ensure that they are aware of the national need for additional supply-side flexibility, including storage capacity, as North Sea gas production declines.

Mr. David Stewart: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry if she will make a statement on her plans to ensure the security of supply of gas. [195116]

Mr. Mike O'Brien: As set out in the White Paper "Our energy future-creating a low carbon economy" published in February 2003, the Government believe that allowing the free operation of a competitive British market, within an appropriate regulatory framework, is the most efficient way to ensure security of supply of gas. Commercial operators have incentives to ensure a diversity of sources of gas, of supply routes and of entry points so as to reduce the risk of supply interruption through disruption of any one source or supply route. The Government are working towards liberalised and competitive markets both within the EU and beyond, and are using the EU's relations with Russia and other countries to support our energy objectives.

The Joint Energy Security of Supply Working Group (JESS) publishes a regular overview of security of supply indicators over the medium term to assist market participants investment decisions.

Inward Investment

Mr. David Rendel: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what proportion of investment between European Union countries other than investment by the UK came to the United Kingdom in each year since 2001. [192268]

Mr. Alexander *[holding answer 18 October 2004]*: The UK received 9.7 per cent. (9.1 per cent.) of all foreign direct investment (FDI) inflows between EU-15 member states in 2002 (figures for EU-25 members in brackets). The UK received the fourth largest share behind Luxembourg with 33.6 per cent. (31.5 per cent.), France with 12.7 per cent. (11.9 per cent.) and Germany with 10.1 per cent. (11.9 per cent.).

This data are only available in terms of financial flow figures rather than in terms of inward investment stocks (by which we measure our PSA targets).

The latest UNCTAD world investment report shows that in 2003 the UK had the largest inward FDI stocks within the EU from all countries, including those outside the EU, with 20 per cent. of the EU-15 total, followed by Germany (16 per cent.) France (13 per cent.), Netherlands (10 per cent.) and Luxembourg (10 per cent.).

Job Creation (Lancashire)

Geraldine Smith: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry how many jobs have been created as a result of the Luneside East development; how many jobs have been created to be taken up by residents of communities in need; and what the estimated cost per job created is. [192923]

Jacqui Smith: The scheme is expected to create 315 jobs and includes new and improved cycle and pedestrian links to improve access to job opportunities for local communities in need.

Lancaster City council will also work to maximise the take up of jobs locally through Employment Action Plans targeting these communities.

The net cost per job is £25,000, which is comparable to other projects of this type.

National Minimum Wage

Mr. David Stewart: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry how many full-time staff have been responsible for the enforcement of minimum wage legislation in each year since 1999. [195110]

Mr. Sutcliffe: The Inland Revenue carries out enforcement of the national minimum wage.

Details of Revenue staff responsible for the enforcement of minimum wage legislation

1999–2000	77
2000–01	93
2001–02	97
2002–03	117
2003–04	115
2004–05	120

In addition to the figures quoted above, there has been a small Revenue head office team of between four-six staff each year.

In addition the DTI has a small policy team dealing with national minimum wage issues currently numbering four people.

Mr. David Stewart: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry how many prosecutions there have been for offences in breach of minimum wage legislation in each year since 1999. [195111]

Mr. Sutcliffe: To date there have been no prosecution cases for offences in breach of minimum wage legislation. We monitor the effectiveness of enforcement action and will use prosecution should this become appropriate.

The National Minimum Wage Act 1998 contains a number of provisions empowering compliance officers to take civil action against non-paying employers. The majority (around 90 per cent.) of minimum wage cases are solved, at present, without the need for any formal enforcement action. In tackling the minority of more difficult cases, compliance officers may serve an enforcement notice which requires the employer to start paying the minimum wage and make good any arrears of pay. Where an employer ignores the enforcement notice, the officer may then serve a penalty notice. The penalty notice imposes a financial penalty on the employer of twice the adult rate of the minimum wage for each worker named in the enforcement notice from when it was issued.

Mr. David Stewart: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what representations she has received from *(a)* employers and *(b)* employees about the operation and enforcement of minimum wage legislation with respect to security guards. [195112]

Mr. Sutcliffe: In the last 12 months the Inland Revenue and the Low Pay Commission have received no representations from employers or employees about the operation and enforcement of minimum wage legislation with respect to security guards.

In the same period the DTI has received one letter from a security guard, but this was principally about the number of hours paid during holidays.

Mr. David Stewart: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry if she will make a statement on her plans to improve enforcement of minimum wage legislation. [195113]

Mr. Sutcliffe: The hon. Member may know that the Government introduced the National Minimum Wage (Enforcement Notices) Act 2003 last year to ensure that former workers were properly covered by the minimum wage legislation, and that we introduced a package of measures in the Employment Relations Act 2004 to improve enforcement of the minimum wage. We work closely with the Inland Revenue to ensure that enforcement continues to be effective.

Mr. Sarwar: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry how many 16 and 17 year olds are expected to benefit from the national minimum wage in *(a)* Glasgow, *(b)* Scotland and *(c)* the United Kingdom in the next financial year. [190565]

Mr. Sutcliffe: The information is as follows:

(a) and *(b)* it is not possible to comment on the number of beneficiaries in Glasgow and Scotland.

(c) The DTI estimates that over 25,000 16 to 17-year-old workers will benefit from the national minimum wage rage of £3.00 per hour in October 2004. This estimate was made in the DTI March 2004 National Minimum Wage Regulatory Impact Assessment.

Nuclear Plants (IT Systems)

Llew Smith: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what information she has received from the International Atomic Energy Agency in respect of its evaluation of the adequacy of computer systems installed at nuclear plants in support of safety and security requirements. [195388]

Mr. Mike O'Brien: The International Atomic Energy Agency has not evaluated the adequacy of computer systems installed at nuclear plants in support of safety or security within the UK and has no remit to do so.

Sellafield

Mr. Laurence Robertson: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry if she will make a statement on the future of the reprocessing plant at Sellafield. [194671]

Mr. Mike O'Brien *[holding answer 1 November 2004]*: I refer the hon. Member to the answer I gave on 4 October 2004, *Official Report*, column 1859W to the hon. Member for Lewes (Norman Baker).

Shareholder Registers (Animal Rights Activists)

Mr. Stephen O'Brien: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what her assessment is of the security implications of the legal requirement for companies targeted by animal rights activists to provide copies of their shareholder registers; and what plans she has to restrict the right of access to companies' share registers in such cases. [193787]

Ms Hewitt: The UK has one of the strictest regulatory regimes in the world to control the use of animals for medical research and the Government have expressed their determination to stop the illegal and sometimes violent conduct of a small group of extremists who are attempting to intimidate individuals and companies going about their lawful business. I am concerned that these extremists can and do misuse information that is in the public domain to direct their attacks.

The Companies Act requires every company to provide a copy of its Register of Members to those who ask and to list the company's directors. It does not, however, require the company's members or shareholders to provide their home addresses. Directors' home addresses are currently held on the public record but those who are under a serious risk of violence or intimidation can apply for a confidentiality order to remove these addresses from public inspection. Our intention in the Companies Bill will be to implement the recommendation of the company law review that directors should only need to provide a service address for the public record, with home addresses being held on a register to which access is restricted.

Software Patents

Mrs. Ellman: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what estimate she has made of the financial contribution of the licensing of software patents to the UK economy in each year from 1974 to 2003. [194755]

Ms Hewitt: Licensing is in essence a private business activity. The information requested could only be obtained at disproportionate cost.

EDUCATION AND SKILLS

A-Level Results

Mr. Chaytor: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills if he will list the average A-level points score for *(a)* school sixth forms, *(b)* sixth form colleges and *(c)* general further education colleges in each of the last three years; and if he will make a statement. [193182]

Mr. Miliband: The average GCE/VCE A/AS point score per candidate aged 16 to 18 in 2002 to 2004 is shown in the following table:

	2001/02	*2002/03*	*2003/04 (provisional)*
All schools	280.9	282.8	286.1
Sixth form colleges	263.1	273.8	277.0
Other FE sector colleges	166.5	169.0	181.2
All schools and FE sector colleges	254.7	258.9	265.6

Mr. Chaytor: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills if he will list the average A-level points score per pupil for 11 to 18 years schools with sixth forms containing *(a)* 50 or fewer, *(b)* 51 to 100, *(c)* 101 to 150, *(d)* 151 to 200, *(e)* 201 to 250 and *(f)* more than 250 pupils in each of the last three years; and if he will make a statement. [193181]

Mr. Miliband: The average GCE/VCE A/AS point score per candidate aged 16 to 18 in school sixth forms in 2002 to 2004 is shown in the following table:

Number of students in sixth form	*2001/02*	*2002/03*	*2003/04 (provisional)*
Fewer than 50	227.1	224.1	242.6
51 to 100	239.3	244.4	250.0
101 to 150	258.6	253.1	259.2
151 to 200	278.4	278.3	278.3
201 to 250	291.0	293.1	292.0
More than 250	296.4	299.8	303.3
Total	280.9	282.8	286.1

Area Cost Adjustment

Mr. Luff: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills which local education authorities receive area cost adjustment in 2004–05. [195921]

Mr. Miliband: The education authorities in the following list received area cost adjustment in their Education Formula Spending Share for 2004–05.

LEAs Receiving Area Cost Adjustment in EFSS for 2004–05.

Barking and Dagenham
Barnet
Bath and north east Somerset
Bedfordshire
Bexley
Birmingham
Bolton
Bracknell Forest
Bradford
Brent
Brighton and Hove
Bromley
Buckinghamshire
Bury
Calderdale
Cambridgeshire
Camden
Cheshire
City of Bristol
City of London
City of Peterborough
Coventry
Croydon
Dudley
Ealing
East Sussex
Enfield
Essex
Gloucestershire
Greenwich
Hackney
Halton
Hammersmith and Fulham
Hampshire
Haringey
Harrow
Havering
Hertfordshire
Hillingdon
Hounslow
Isle of Wight
Isles of Scilly
Islington
Kensington and Chelsea
Kent
Kingston upon Thames
Kirklees
Knowsley
Lambeth
Leeds
Lewisham
Liverpool
Luton
Manchester
Medway
Merton
Milton Keynes
Newham
North Somerset
Northamptonshire
Oldham
Oxfordshire
Portsmouth
Reading
Redbridge
Richmond upon Thames
Rochdale
Salford
Sandwell
Sefton
Slough
Solihull
South Gloucestershire
Southampton
Southend
Southwark
St. Helens
Stockport
Surrey
Sutton
Swindon
Tameside
Thurrock
Tower Hamlets
Trafford
Wakefield
Walsall
Waltham Forest
Wandsworth
Warrington
Warwickshire
West Berkshire
West Sussex
Westminster
Wigan
Wiltshire
Windsor and Maidenhead
Wirral
Wokingham
Wolverhampton

Children in Care

Mr. Jim Cunningham: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills how many children are in public care in the West Midlands. [195689]

Margaret Hodge: At 31 March 2003, 7,120 children were looked after by local authorities in the West Midlands. This figure excludes children looked after under an agreed series of short-term placements.

Foundation Schools

Helen Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills whether a school that a local education authority proposes to close can apply to become a foundation school. [196090]

Mr. Miliband: The governing body of a school which the LEA proposes to close, may seek to change its category to foundation but it must follow the proper statutory process. Publishing proposals for a change of category will not prevent or delay the consideration of any proposals already published for closure.

In deciding both proposals, a School Organisation Committee (SOC) or schools adjudicator must have regard to the Secretary of State's guidance. The guidance makes it clear that the SOC or adjudicator need not delay their consideration of the first proposals in such cases. They may consider the proposed closure first and then take account of that decision when considering the change of category proposals.

Under the new fast track arrangements we are proposing for community and voluntary controlled secondary schools to change category to foundation, the governing body would decide change of category proposals, LEAs will retain the right to publish proposals to close foundation schools and the SOC will continue to decide these.

Learning and Skills Council

Mr. Laurence Robertson: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills what discussions he has had with the Gloucestershire Learning and Skills Council about its support for *(a)* The Prince's Trust and *(b)* the Connexions programmes; and if he will make a statement. [194669]

Mr. Ivan Lewis *[holding answer 1 November 2004]*: The Secretary of State has had no discussions, but is aware that the Gloucestershire Learning and Skills Council (LSC) indirectly supports the Prince's Trust, which delivers Entry to Employment (E2E) programmes. E2E is an important part of the work to re-engage young people in learning.

Gloucestershire LSC works in partnership with the Connexions Service to ensure that quality advice and guidance is available to enable young people to benefit from appropriate learning opportunities.

Mr. Laurence Robertson: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills if he will make a statement on the funding he is providing to the Learning and Skills Council in this financial year. [194670]

Mr. Ivan Lewis *[holding answer 1 November 2004]*: The budget allocated to the Learning and Skills Council for the 2004–05 financial year was set out in the Grant Letter to the LSC on 4 December 2003. The budget figure in the letter is £8,674 million. This amount represents a record level of investment in the learning and skills sector.

Parliamentary Questions

Mr. Clappison: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills when he will reply to the question tabled by the hon. Member for Hertsmere on 18 October 2004, ref 192930, on benchmarks for university admissions. [196502]

Mr. Stephen Twigg: A reply was issued to the hon. Member on 3 November 2004, *Official Report*, columns 290–91W.

Post-16 Education

Chris Grayling: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills what funding streams are available to support students in post-16 non-university based education. [194804]

Mr. Ivan Lewis: The Government are committed to encouraging more students to continue in education and training, and to raise attainment levels. Young People from lower income households who are aged 16 at the start of the 2004/05 academic year can apply to receive the Education Maintenance Allowance (EMA). We are phasing in the scheme nationally from September 2004 to successive 16 year old year groups. By 2006 all young people aged 16 to 19 who meet the eligibility requirements will be able to receive EMA.

Learner Support Funds (LSFs) are available for students aged 16 and over to help with costs associated with further education, including books and equipment, transport, childcare support funds and residential bursaries. LSF continues to be an effective safety net for disadvantaged students from lower income households wishing to remain in education.

Young people in unwaged work-based learning, including Entry to Employment, are entitled to at least £40 a week Minimum Training Allowance paid by the learning provider through the LSC. local LSCs can increase this allowance to meet local needs and can also provide discretionary funding to help with transport, equipment or similar costs. The intention is that from 2006 this arrangement will be replaced by the extension of EMA principles to this group of young people.

Announced as part of the Government's Skills Strategy, the new Adult Learning Grant offers an allowance of up to £30 per week to adults on lower incomes studying full-time for a first full level 2 qualification (equivalent to 5 GCSEs or a National Vocational Qualification at level 2) and young adults (aged 19+) on lower incomes studying full-time for a first full level 3 qualification (equivalent to two A levels or a National Vocational Qualification at level 3).

Career Development Loans, which are operated by the Department and three high street banks, are designed to help individuals pay for vocational education and training. Loans of between £300 and £8,000 are available to pay for all course-related costs on courses for up to two years. The loan can also cover living expenses if the course is full time. The Department pays the interest on the loen while the student is training and repayment starts only after the course has been completed.

Press Officers

Mr. Ruffley: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills how many press officers are employed in his Department; and how many were employed in each year since 1996–97. [195362]

Mr. Charles Clarke *[holding answer 1 November 2004]*: The information requested is set out in the following table.

	Number of press officers
1996/97	19
1997/98	20.5
1998/99	29.5
1999/00	28
2000/01	28
2001/02	28
2002/03	23.4
2003/04	18.5
2004/05	17

Schools (Bury)

Mr. Chaytor: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills how many teaching assistants were employed in schools in Bury in each of the last 10 years; and if he will make a statement. [195405]

Mr. Miliband: The following table gives the number of teaching assistants employed in maintained schools in Bury at January in each year. The latest information available is for 2004.

	Number
1995	210
1996	250
1997	270
1998	260
1999	280
2000	330
2001	360
2002	460
2003	480
2004	540

Source:
Annual School Census

The information requested from 1997 has also been published in table 20 of the Statistical First Release 34/2004 on 23 September 2004. The SFR can be accessed from the following URL:

http://www.dfes.gov.uk/rsgateway/DB/SFR/s000493/index.shtml

Sex Education

Mrs. May: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills how much money was granted by each local education authority in the Greater London area to be spent on sex education in *(a)* 1997 and *(b)* 2003-04. [196035]

Mr. Miliband: Information about individual local education authority expenditure on sex education is not collected by the Department.

Educating young people about sexual health and safer sex are key elements of the Government's sexual health strategy. The Teenage Pregnancy Strategy has a multi-faceted approach, which includes helping young people resist pressure to have early sex, improving sex and relationship education and access to effective contraception and sexual health services. All maintained secondary schools have a statutory requirement to teach sex and relationship education.

DEFENCE

Electoral Registration

Mr. Tyrie: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence how many British service personnel are registered as service voters on the armed forces personnel registration scheme; and how many were registered in 2000. [195222]

Mr. Caplin *[holding answer 1 November 2004]*: The Representation of the People Act 2000 gave Service personnel the option of either registering to vote at their private or other qualifying address, or to register by means of a Service declaration. Both are administered by local authority Electoral Registration Officers and the Services no longer maintain an Armed Forces Register of Electors. The number choosing to register by means of the Service declaration is not held by the Ministry of Defence.

Mr. Tyrie: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence for what reasons the armed forces personnel registration scheme moved to annual re-registration in 2000; and what assessment was made of the implications of the change for the number of servicemen registered to vote. [195223]

Mr. Caplin *[holding answer 1 November 2004]*: The move to annual re-registration brought the arrangements for armed forces personnel in line with those for other voters. The change was considered likely to encourage Service personnel to use their vote, and to register with the local authority Electoral Registration Officer for their up-to-date address.

Missile Defence

Llew Smith: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence pursuant to the written statement of 12 October 2004, *Official Report*, columns 9–10WS, on missile defence, when negotiations on the ballistic missile defence agreement began; and when agreement on the final text was reached. [195410]

Mr. Hoon: Negotiations for a new agreement to replace the 1985 Strategic Defence Initiative Memorandum of Understanding began in early 2003. A "Framework" Agreement, setting out general principles for co-operation on missile defence, was signed on 12 June 2003. Negotiations were conducted in parallel on two Annexes to this Agreement dealing with the upgrade of the Early Warning Radar at RAF Fylingdales, and with co-operation in Research, Development, Test and Evaluation of ballistic missile defence capabilities and systems. These were signed on 18 December 2003 and 12 October 2004 respectively.

Travel Costs

Dr. Cable: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what the travel costs were of civil servants in *(a)* his Department and *(b)* its related agencies in each year since 1997. [183900]

Mr. Caplin: This information is not held centrally and could be provided only at a disproportionate cost. I can confirm that all civilian travel is conducted in compliance with Civil Service Management Code, and in the most cost-effective manner.

Windows 2000 Combat Management System

Michael Fabricant: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence (1) what systems have been put in place to cope with a failure in the planned Windows 2000 operating system in the Type 45 Destroyers; [191620]

(2) whether there has been an external review of the Windows 2000 Combat Management System Type 45 Destroyer Project; [191621]

(3) what the proposed cost was of implementing Unix as the operating system for the Combat Management System in the Type 45 Destroyers; [191622]

(4) what the cost is of implementing Windows 2000 as the operating system for the Combat Management System in the Type 45 Destroyers; [191623]

(5) what steps he has taken to ensure that the Windows 2000 Combat Management System in the new Type 45 Destroyers is reliable. [191643]

Mr. Ingram: The Type 45 prime contractor, BAE Systems, and their sub-contractor, are responsible for selecting an operating system that meets the requirements placed on them by the Defence Procurement Agency (DPA). Industry's decision to use Windows 2000 was in any case the subject of a review conducted by the Ministry of Defence which included specialist representatives from QinetiQ and the Defence Science and Technology Laboratory (DSTL). The review concluded that the choice of Windows 2000 represented the lowest risk choice of operating system. In particular, the review concluded that any residual risks associated with reliability were well understood by the contractor and that the normal process of regression and integration testing would quantify and reduce these risks before Type 45 is accepted into service.

The system design has built-in redundancy, with automatic, and transparent, switch-over to a back-up system if the primary system has a problem. This would provide continuity of operation and ensure that no data were lost. The system design also ensures that comprehensive hardware mechanisms will be in place to avoid any other safety or technical issues.

The cost of implementing an operating system for the Combat Management System in the Type 45 is a matter for the prime contractor, BAE Systems, and their sub-contractor. The Department does not have, or require, visibility of costs at that level of detail.

CULTURE, MEDIA AND SPORT

Analogue Switch-off

Brian White: To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport what estimate her Department has made of the number of television aerials that will need to be upgraded to allow analogue switch-off to proceed. [195605]

Estelle Morris: A small number of viewers are likely to be using a roof-top aerial which is in poor condition and delivering substandard analogue signals. They may have to replace their aerial in order to continue receiving the public service channels after digital switchover. However, we do not have a reliable figure of the number of households who may be affected in this way.

British Grand Prix

Mr. Dhanda: To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport if she will make a statement on the British Grand Prix; and whether she expects public money to be made available to secure the future of the British Grand Prix. [195610]

Mr. Caborn: We desire and support a British Grand Prix at Silverstone, but the current commercial negotiations between the British Racing Drivers Club (BRDC) and Formula One Management (FOM), to reach an agreement to secure the British Grand Prix on the 2005 Formula One Calendar, are a matter for them. However, where appropriate, Derek Mapp, Chair of the East Midlands Development Agency and I have done everything we can to help bring the parties together to broker a suitable outcome. There is no prospect of the Government entering into the current commercial negotiations as a direct financial participant.

Correspondence

Mr. Malins: To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport when she will reply to the letter from the hon. Member for Woking, dated 14 October, concerning Skanska UK Plc. [194507]

Estelle Morris: The letter was received in the Department on the 18 October and I wrote to the hon. Member on 3 November.

We aim to reply to all departmental correspondence within 18 working days.

Departmental Policy (South Dorset)

Jim Knight: To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport if she will set out, with statistical evidence relating as closely as possible to the South Dorset constituency, the effects of changes to departmental policy since 1997 on the South Dorset constituency. [194972]

Mr. Caborn: Since 1997 the Government have introduced a range of initiatives and increased the funding available to develop the cultural, sports and tourism sectors and improve access to cultural and sporting opportunities across the country. There is evidence that these policies are benefiting the South Dorset constituency.

A number of arts organisations in Dorset, which are active in the South Dorset constituency, are receiving significant increases in their public funding. For example, Artsreach and Dorset Dance Forum will each receive over £50,000 from Arts Council England in 2005–06, representing increases of 73 per cent. and 55 per cent. respectively compared with 2002–03. Ten feature films and television programmes have been filmed in and around South Dorset in the past two years and a number of film projects have received Lottery funding, including the Purbeck Film Festival. Museums in Dorset are receiving support from the South West Museums, Libraries and Archives Council under the Government's Renaissance in the Regions initiative.

This support is aimed at helping smaller museums develop their documentation and funding a second museum development officer post for the county. The Tank Museum has received over £350,000 since 1999 under the Government's Designation Scheme to recognise outstanding collections in non-national museums.

Tourism in Dorset has increased with the assistance of Government-funded marketing activity. The latest available data are for 2002, when expenditure by staying tourists in Dorset rose to £768 million from £664 million in 2001. In April 2003, the Government established VisitBritain with a new domestic marketing remit for England, and we gave strategic responsibility for tourism development to the Regional Development Agencies. Tourism in South Dorset benefits from these changes, as does the rest of England, and will benefit further if London's bid for the 2012 Olympic Games is successful as Weymouth and Portland have been chosen to host the sailing events.

Information from the Lottery distributors indicates that since 1997 South Dorset has benefited from over 300 awards totalling over £10 million. Of these 40 awards worth £2.3 million were made by the New Opportunities Fund which was established by the Government in 1999.

Departmental Recruitment

Mr. Don Foster: To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport how many full-time equivalent staff her Department has employed in the *(a)* corporate services, *(b)* tourism, libraries and communities, *(c)* creative industries, broadcasting, gambling and the Lottery, *(d)* arts and culture, *(e)* sport, *(f)* strategy and communications and *(g)* legal advisors' directorate in each year from 1997; and if she will make a statement. [194659]

Mr. Caborn: The Department has undergone a number of reorganisations since 1997. We are currently organised into three Directorates General and one Directorate with full-time equivalent staff as follows:

	Number
Economic Impact	135
Children, Young People and Communities	207.5
Corporate Services and Modernisation	141.9
Strategic Communications	26

DCMS contracts out its legal service to the Treasury Solicitor's Department, who employ staff on our behalf. Information for previous structures for earlier years could be provided only at a disproportionate cost.

Export Bodies

Mr. Don Foster: To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport how many employees the *(a)* Export Licensing Unit and *(b)* Advisory Council on the Export of Works of Art had in each year from 1997; what the cost to public funds of each body was in each year (i) in total, (ii) for staffing costs, (iii) for other administrative costs and (iv) for other costs; and if she will make a statement. [195062]

Estelle Morris: Details of the staffing levels of DCMS are not recorded in the kind of detail that would be required in order to provide information about the precise staffing levels of the Export Licensing Unit on a year by year basis since 1997. Accordingly, details of precise costs cannot be calculated. The current staffing of the Unit consists of approximately 20 per cent. of a Grade B, two Grade Cs and two Grade Ds. This has involved a slight increase since 1997 as staff numbers have been adjusted according to the number of licence applications needing to be processed.

The Advisory Council on the Export of Works of Art provides advice to both the Reviewing Committee on the Export of Works of Art and DCMS directly from time to time. The Council therefore involves no specific costs to DCMS as it is serviced as a small part of the work of the Reviewing Committee's secretariat.

Football Association

Mr. Don Foster: To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport what steps her Department has taken to review the Football Association; and if she will make a statement. [195400]

Mr. Caborn: While all sports national governing bodies are independent from Government, the Government's aim is for them to be fit for purpose. The FA is no exception. The FA has been discussing a review of the organisation, including its structure and governance, since the spring of 2004. The Board and Council are committed to a review headed by an independent person, who will want to take a view on when they will be able to report. My right hon. Friend the Secretary of State wrote to the FA in August 2004, and I have been in regular contact with the FA during this time.

Gambling

Miss Kirkbride: To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport what assessment has been made of the competition implications under EU rules of placing a cap or ceiling on the number of regional casinos. [194655]

Mr. Caborn: Any statutory limitation on the number of regional casinos would potentially raise issues of compliance with EU law which would need due consideration.

Lottery Terminals

David Taylor: To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport what discussions her Department has held with Camelot on the purchase and supply of National Lottery terminals to *(a)* newsagents and *(b)* shops in the UK. [195848]

Estelle Morris: Issues concerning National Lottery terminals are a matter for the National Lottery operator acting under its licence from the National Lottery Commission. I and my officials have regular meetings with both Camelot and the National Lottery Commission which discuss all areas of the National Lottery; but these have not involved any detailed discussion of terminal supply matters.

Olympic Athletes (Ireland)

Hugh Robertson: To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport how many Olympic athletes who have received public funding from the UK have competed for the Republic of Ireland. [195178]

Mr. Caborn *[holding answer 1 November 2004]*: There were four competitors from Northern Ireland at Sydney 2000 and seven at Athens 2004 who received lottery funding from the Sports Council for Northern Ireland and who competed for the Republic of Ireland.

Temporary Staff

Mr. Blunt: To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport how many agency temporary staff have been working for the Department in each of the last five years, excluding those working for agencies for which no data are kept centrally. [196052]

Mr. Caborn: The Department employs temporary agency staff on the basis of a booking which can last from as little as one day to many months. The number of individual bookings in each of the last five years is shown in the following table:

	Number
2003–04	106
2002–03	86
2001–02	92
2000–01	143
1999–2000	[1]47

[1] Second half year figure only—first half year figure no longer available.

However, this does not represent the number of temporary agency staff working in the Department at any one time; or the average annual person years worked. There are 17 temporary agency staff currently working in the Department.

Tourism

Mr. Sanders: To the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport how much funding her Department plans to contribute for *(a)* marketing, *(b)* e-tourism, *(c)* improving the quality of tourism products and *(d)* skills and training towards achieving the £100 billion target value for tourism by 2010. [195226]

Mr. Caborn: This year we have made £48.4 million available to VisitBritain for marketing, e-tourism and quality. My Department expects to announce the new funding allocations for VisitBritain over the coming weeks. Funding for the improvement of skills and training in the tourism industry is provided by the Department for Education and Skills. This includes up to £4 million over three years for the Sector Skills Council/People 1st.

Mr. Sanders: To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport what ratio of funding between the Government and the private sector she expects in meeting the £100 billion target value for tourism by 2010. [195227]

Mr. Caborn: The Department has made £48.4 million of public investment available to VisitBritain this year, alongside our investment in the museums, galleries, heritage sites, arts and sports events and other attractions that encourage tourists to spend their holidays here. Other Government Departments, the Devolved Administrations, Regional Development Agencies and local authorities also make significant public investment which directly and indirectly benefits tourism. However, inbound and domestic tourism is worth almost £74 billion to the UK economy and clearly the vast majority of investment will be made by private firms, investing in their products and marketing their services to the public.

CONSTITUTIONAL AFFAIRS

Consultants

Pete Wishart: To ask the Parliamentary Secretary, Department for Constitutional Affairs how much expenditure his Department has incurred in each year since 2002 on employing external consultants to deal with the press and public relations of his Department; and if he will make a statement. [195459]

Mr. Lammy: From March 2002, my Department's expenditure with press and public relations consultants was as follows:

	£
2002–03	12,000.00
2003–04	37,362.00
2004 to date	28,436.00

Departmental IT

Brian White: To ask the Parliamentary Secretary, Department for Constitutional Affairs what percentage of the Department's *(a)* implemented and *(b)* planned computer systems use open source software; and what plans are in place to raise this level. [195661]

Mr. Leslie: My Department's procurement of software solutions follows the 'level playing field' Government Open Source Software (OSS) Policy. The Government consider OSS solutions alongside proprietary ones in IT procurements and that contracts should be awarded on a value for money, case by case basis. The OSS policy can be viewed at www.govtalk.gov.uk

My Department works with its suppliers so that OSS is used, where appropriate, in the developments currently under way or under consideration. For example, my Department makes use of OSS in the hosting of its main websites.

Where OSS is used it is with a mixture of bespoke and proprietary software in a variety of environments, which makes it impossible meaningfully to estimate the percentages attributable to each type of software.

Departmental Publications (Access)

Mr. Goodman: To ask the Parliamentary Secretary, Department for Constitutional Affairs how many and what proportion of publications issued by his Department are available in *(a)* Braille, *(b)* autoprint, *(c)* large print and *(d)* easy read format. [194297]

Mr. Lammy: It is my Department policy to make printed publications available in alternative formats on request.

In cases where a significant demand for such formats is anticipated, alternative formats are produced at the same time as the main publication. For example, the application form for lay magistrates is available in both large print and Braille. Easy to read versions have been produced of two of my Department's booklets: "Making Decisions: Helping people who have difficulty deciding for themselves" and the "Guide to the Human Rights Act".

My Department is obliged by the Disability Discrimination Act 1995 to make online publications accessible and to provide alternative user-friendly formats on request. It adheres to guidelines outlined by the Web Accessibility Initiative (WAI). Online publications are therefore accessible via screen readers and Braille displays, thus allowing users to adjust font sizes and change fore and background colour schemes.

10 per cent. of my Department's online content is available in Portable Document Format (PDF). Alternative user-friendly file formats are available on request.

Large print versions of Court Service leaflets are available on the Court Service website. The Court Service makes its printed publications available in alternative formats on request.

All Public Guardianship Office customer booklets are available in large print on the PGO website or in hardcopy. Their booklets are made available in easy-read format and in Braille on request.

Press Officers

Dr. Julian Lewis: To ask the Parliamentary Secretary, Department for Constitutional Affairs how many press officers the Department and its predecessors have employed in each of the past five years. [196046]

Mr. Lammy: The number of press officers and support staff employed by the Department for Constitutional Affairs headquarters and the Court Service and its predecessor are as follows:

	Press officers	*Support staff*
2004	[1]16	6
2003	[1]13	5
2002	10	5
2001	6	5
2000	4	5

[1] This includes the head of news who was appointed in September 2003.

These figures do not include the director and deputy of communications who do speak to the media but on a far more infrequent basis than press officers.

Special Advisers

Matthew Taylor: To ask the Parliamentary Secretary, Department for Constitutional Affairs how many unpaid special advisers the Department has; what their names are; and which Government *(a)* bodies, *(b)* committees and *(c)* strategy groups each unpaid adviser (i) belongs to, (ii) advises and (iii) works alongside. [194053]

Mr. Lammy: For information relating to numbers and names of unpaid advisers I refer the hon. Member to the answer given by my right hon. Friend the Prime Minister on 22 July 2004, *Official Report*, columns 466–70W.

Special advisers, whether paid or unpaid, are employed under the terms and conditions set out in the Model Contract for Special Advisers. Unpaid advisers are appointed in accordance with the requirements of paragraph 51 of the Ministerial Code.

Sustainable Energy (CHP Provisions) Order

Mr. Stunell: To ask the Parliamentary Secretary, Department for Constitutional Affairs what measures his Department *(a)* has undertaken and *(b)* plans to undertake to comply with the Sustainable Energy (CHP Provisions) Order 2003. [194437]

Mr. Leslie: My Department is committed to working with the Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs (DEFRA) on Sustainable Development. We continue to progress action and respond positively to targets published by DEFRA against the strands of the Framework for Sustainable Development in the Government Estate. Good progress has been made on energy targets; we already source more than 10 per cent. of electricity from renewable sources and our programme of energy works has achieved significant reductions in consumption and emissions. Use of Combined Heat and Power schemes forms part of our overall strategy; we already participate in a scheme in Sheffield and are currently considering schemes proposed for Nottingham and Birmingham. Subject to financial viability, we will be considering other opportunities for CHP schemes as they arise.

CABINET OFFICE

Performance and Innovation Unit

Bob Spink: To ask the Minister for the Cabinet Office what new projects are *(a)* planned and *(b)* under consideration for the Performance and Innovation Unit. [194917]

Mr. Milburn: The Performance and Innovation Unit no longer exists. In June 2002 it merged with the Forward Strategy Unit and the Policy Studies Directorate of the Centre for Management and Policy Studies to create the Strategy Unit. New Strategy Unit projects are announced on the Unit's website as Ministers approve them unless they are intended to give confidential advice to ministers.

Departmental Expenditure

Mr. Cameron: To ask the Minister for the Cabinet Office how much his Office has spent on *(a)* mobile telephone costs, *(b)* hospitality and *(c)* taxi costs in (i) 1996–97 and (ii) the last year for which figures are available. [185240]

Ruth Kelly *[holding answer 19 July 2004]*: Financial information prior to the 1997–98 financial year was recorded on a previous accounting system and cannot be readily retrieved without incurring disproportionate cost.

Expenditure on mobile telephone is not separately identifiable on the Department's accounting system and therefore the information requested cannot be readily retrieved without incurring disproportionate cost.

The department spent £484,000 on entertainment expenses in 2003–04. This amount includes refreshments provided at meetings, working lunches and other forms of hospitality.

All expenditure on official entertainment and hospitality is made in accordance with published departmental guidance on financial procedures and propriety, based on the principles set out in "Government Accounting". The giving and receiving of hospitality is conducted fully in accordance with the guidance set out in the "Ministerial Code" and "Civil Service Code".

For information on taxi costs I refer the hon. Member to the response given to the hon. Member for Arundel and South Downs (Mr. Flight) on 13 November 2003, *Official Report*, column 397W.

Owing to changes in the Department's accounting system expenditure on taxis since 2002 is not separately identifiable and the information requested could only be provided at disproportionate costs.

Mobile Phones

Mr. Prisk: To ask the Minister for the Cabinet Office how many mobile phones were used by *(a)* Ministers and special advisers and *(b)* officials in her Department in each year since 1997; how many were (i) lost and (ii) stolen; and what their cost was. [191441]

Ruth Kelly: Information relating to mobile telephones and their cost is not held centrally and is not separately identifiable on the Department's accounting system. It cannot therefore be readily retrieved without incurring disproportionate cost.

HEALTH

Drug Rehabilitation Places

David Davis: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many residential drug rehabilitation places there are, broken down by *(a)* police authority and *(b)* government office region. [190932]

Miss Melanie Johnson: We do not have information on the number of residential drug rehabilitation places broken down by police authority.

Residential drug treatment services are registered voluntarily in the residential drug treatment services directory. Based on those who have an entry in the directory, the numbers of residential drug rehabilitation places within each Government region are shown in the table.

Region	*Number of places*
East Midlands	80
Eastern	150
London	437
North East	110
North West	292
South East	538
South West	593
West Midlands	57
Northern and Yorkshire	125

Source:
National Treatment Agency residential directory.

It should be noted that drug action teams commonly commission residential drug rehabilitation places outside their own locality or region.

School Fruit Scheme

Norman Baker: To ask the Secretary of State for Health from which holding locations fruit is supplied to schools under the National School Fruit Scheme; and by what methods it is transported. [194271]

Miss Melanie Johnson: There are 17 distributors to the school fruit and vegetable scheme operating out of 23 distribution centres around the country. These are shown in the following table.

Distributor	*Location of distribution centres*
Pioneer Foods	Cumbria
NCB	Liverpool
CATS	Preston
Wilson Catering	Manchester
G W Price	North Yorkshire
Country Fresh	South Yorkshire
F W Gedney	Norfolk/Suffolk
Arthur Brett	West Midlands
Minor Weir and Willis	East Midlands, London, South East
Peachey's	Essex
Croydon Fruiterers	London
H B Hawkes	London
Prescott Thomas	London
A G Axton	Berkshire
West Country Foods	Cornwall
George Cossey	Somerset
Redbridge	Hereford, Stoke-on-Trent, Gateshead, Southampton, Bristol

The distributors primarily use diesel powered long wheelbase transit-type vans. Distributors are located strategically around the country to attempt to minimise the journey time to schools.

Norman Baker: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many schools are participating in the National School Fruit Scheme; and how many deliveries are made per week to these schools. [194272]

Miss Melanie Johnson: As at 27 October 2004, 13,354 schools were participating nationally in the school fruit and vegetable scheme. The total number of eligible schools is 16,796.

The national roll-out of the school fruit and vegetable scheme is currently in progress. This means that the number of participating schools is expected to increase over the following month, as schools in the South West, South East, East of England and Yorkshire and Humber regions join the scheme. By the end of the year, we anticipate that roughly 16,500 schools will be participating in the scheme.

The number of deliveries varies from school to school. Each school receives at least five deliveries over a two week cycle, but more commonly each school will receive three deliveries per week.

Agency Nurses

Tom Cox: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will make a statement on the use of agency nurses within NHS hospitals within the Greater London area. [195792]

Dr. Ladyman: Information on the number of agency nurses within national health service hospitals within the Greater London area is not available centrally.

The NHS does not separately record the cost of employing agency staff. Data are collected on the total expenditure by NHS bodies on nursing, midwifery and health visiting staff who are not directly employed by NHS bodies. Data for 2003–04 are provisional, but shows, within the five London strategic health authority areas, a decrease in expenditure from £220,780,586 in 2002–03 to £186,428,833 in 2003–04.

NHS Professionals and the London agency project, a procurement process for the NHS in London to arrange the supply of temporary nursing, midwifery, health visitor and healthcare assistant staff, are working to reduce agency costs in London.

Alcohol-related Deaths

Mr. Tynan: To ask the Secretary of State for Health (1) how his Department records and collates alcohol-related deaths that fall outside the scope of the World Health Organisation ICD 10 codings for death directly attributable to alcohol; [195781]

(2) how many alcohol-related deaths were recorded in England and Wales in each of the last five years. [195782]

Miss Melanie Johnson: Numbers of deaths in England and Wales, regarded as being directly alcohol-related according to a definition used by the Office for National Statistics based on the International Classification of Diseases, are shown in the table. This presents the number of deaths certified as due to alcohol abuse, dependence and poisoning, and diseases directly related to alcohol use from 1999 to 2003, the latest year for which figures are currently available. Information on the part that alcohol may have played in deaths from other causes, including other accidents, suicides and violence, is not available from death certificates.

A number of health and lifestyle factors can also contribute to diseases such as cancer, stroke and coronary heart disease, and it can be difficult to isolate alcohol consumption as the most important of these factors.

In the Strategy Unit Alcohol Harm Reduction Project: Interim Analytical Report[1] it was estimated that in 2000 there were between 15,000 and 22,000 alcohol-related deaths in England and Wales.

[1] Prime Minister's Strategy Unit Alcohol Harm Reduction Project. Interim Analytical Report, 2003, p44, available at www.number10.gov.uk/files/pdf/SU interim report2.pdf.

Alcohol-related deaths registered in each calendar year, England and Wales, 1999 to 2003

	Number of deaths
1999	5,473
2000	5,543
2001	6,020
2002	6,100
2003	6,511

Notes:

For the years 1999–2000 the cause of death was defined using the International Classification of Diseases, Ninth Revision (ICD-9). The codes used by the Office for National Statistics to define alcohol-related deaths are listed as follows:

291: Alcoholic psychoses
303: Alcohol dependence syndrome
305.0: Non-dependent abuse of alcohol
425.5: Alcoholic cardiomyopathy
571: Chronic liver disease and cirrhosis
E860: Accidental poisoning by alcohol

For the years 2001–2003 the International Classification of Diseases, Tenth Revision (ICD-10) was used. To maintain comparability with earlier years the following codes were used:

F10: Mental and behavioural disorders due to use of alcohol
142.6: Alcoholic cardiomyopathy
K70: Alcoholic liver disease
K73: Chronic hepatitis, not elsewhere classified
K74: Fibrosis and cirrhosis of liver
X45: Accidental poisoning by and exposure to alcohol

The selection of codes to define alcohol-related deaths is described in:

Baker A and Rooney C (2003). Recent trends in alcohol-related mortality, and the impact of ICD-10 on the monitoring of these deaths in England and Wales. Health Statistics Quarterly 17, pp 5–14.

St. George's Hospital, Tooting

Tom Cox: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many patients are waiting for *(a)* hearing aids and *(b)* other audiology treatment at St. George's Hospital, Tooting. [195790]

Dr. Ladyman: There are no patients waiting at St. George's Healthcare National Health Service Trust for the specialty audiological medicine.

Information is collected at specialty level but not specifically on waits for hearing aids or other specific treatments within this specialty.

Tom Cox: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many women have been treated with IVF treatment at St. George's hospital, Tooting in each of the last three years. [195791]

Dr. Ladyman: Figures for in vitro fertilisation (IVF) treatment at St. George's hospital, Tooting are shown in the table.

	Number of patients
2001–02	313
2002–03	148

Source:
The Human Fertilisation and Embryology Authority.

The assisted conception service at the St. George's Healthcare National Health Service Trust closed in 2002 and the last recorded IVF treatment at the hospital was in September 2002.

B144 Blood Testing Strips

Derek Conway: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will make a statement on the withdrawal of B144 blood testing strips from NHS prescription supply. [195521]

Ms Rosie Winterton: Roche Diagnostics say that they have manufactured the BM-Test 1–44 blood testing strip for a number of years. However, as blood glucose monitoring technology has developed over the years, with faster test times and less blood required, the demand for this product has steadily declined among people with diabetes. It is within this context that Roche Diagnostics has withdrawn the product from the market.

Derek Conway: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what estimate he has made of the cost of providing blood-testing meters to those qualifying for financial assistance with NHS prescriptions in each of the last five years. [195522]

Ms Rosie Winterton: We have made no such estimate. Blood glucose testing meters are available to patients on loan from the national health service.

Cancelled Operations

Mr. Burstow: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many operations were cancelled at the last minute in the NHS in each year since 1980. [192807]

Mr. Hutton: The information requested is shown in the tables. The specific definition used is operations cancelled on or after the day of admission. The information was first collected in 1994 and the table shows the figures for each quarter since then.

Operations cancelled on or after the day of admission for non clinical reasons

	Number of cancelled operations			
	Quarter 1	*Quarter 2*	*Quarter 3*	*Quarter 4*
1994–95	11,603	10,186	11,874	14,466
1995–96	11,860	11,457	14,514	16,652
1996–97	11,595	11,055	13,023	16,374
1997–98	12,019	11,550	12,476	14,460
1998–99	12,384	11,470	14,611	17,685
1999–2000	12,313	12,017	15,769	20,143
2000–01	17,033	16,965	18,844	24,976
2001–02	20,833	20,901	20,036	19,973
2002–03	14,808	14,826	17,706	19,914
2003–04	14,092	14,364	17,782	20,065
2004–05	14,677			

Cancelled operations as a percentage of elective activity

	Quarter 1	*Quarter 2*	*Quarter 3*	*Quarter 4*
1994–95	1.1	0.9	1	1.2
1995–96	1	1	1.2	1.3
1996–97	1	0.9	1.1	1.4
1997–98	1	1	1	1.2
1998–99	1	0.9	1.1	1.3
1999–2000	0.9	0.9	1.2	1.5
2000–01	1.3	1.2	1.4	1.8
2001–02	1.1	1.6	1.5	1.5
2002–03	1.1	1.1	1.3	1.4
2003–04	1.1	1	1.3	1.4
2004–05	1.1			

Data Protection

Michael Fabricant: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what procedures are in place *(a)* to check the criminal records of civil servants in his Department and agencies responsible to his Department who have access to computer databases containing confidential information on the public and *(b)* to ensure that there can be no improper use of computer databases containing confidential information on the public; and if he will make a statement. [194602]

Ms Rosie Winterton: All departmental staff are subject to, at least, the basic security check, which includes criminal records. There is clear personnel guidance requiring staff to inform their line manager and human resources (HR) team if civil action is being taken against them or if they are arrested on any charge or served with a summons on a criminal charge. Staff who are subsequently convicted must also report this to their line manager and HR team.

Staff are also advised that a prosecution action taken against them, whether successful or not, may affect their employment with the Department.

The departmental security unit (DHSU) provides guidance to all staff on information technology (IT) and general security. This includes the need to protect all official information and the IT Misuse Policy. Security policy, principles and guidance are based upon the Manual of Protective Security, published by Cabinet Office.

Staff are reminded that they are all responsible for security and that the compromise of information, either deliberately or through carelessness, is treated very seriously and may result in disciplinary action.

Physical and IT controls prevent staff having unauthorised access to confidential information. DHSU take regular action to raise staff awareness of security issues, including information security.

Departmental Administration Costs

Mr. Burstow: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how much his Department has budgeted for departmental administration costs in *(a)* 2004–05, *(b)* 2005–06, *(c)* 2007–08, *(d)* 2008–09 and *(e)* 2009–10. [194264]

Ms Rosie Winterton: The Department's provisional net administration budgets from 2004–05 are shown in the table.

£ million

	Amount
2004–05	278
2005–06	245
2006–07	238
2007–08	225

These figures will be finalised in the light of the Department's restructuring programme and the review of arm's length bodies.

Figures for 2008–09 and 2009–10 have not yet been agreed.

E111 Forms

Mr. Don Foster: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what measures the Government have taken to alert British citizens to the 31 December deadline after which E111 forms issued before August will be invalid; how much has been spent on *(a)* television advertising, *(b)* radio advertising, *(c)* newspaper advertising, *(d)* leaflets and *(e)* other campaigns; and if he will make a statement. [194665]

Mr. Hutton: The Department is carrying out a number of measures to publicise the arrangements for the new E111. The Department is working closely with a number of other Government Departments and agencies including the Foreign and Commonwealth Office and the Passport Agency, using channels of communication which already exist with the travelling public. We are working through organisations in the travel industry, such as the Association of British Insurers, the Association of British Travel Agencies and the Federation of Tour Operators to ensure the message is sent to their membership companies and to the travelling public. We have produced leaflets and posters which have been distributed to travel agents and other outlets, including Thomas Cook, MyTravel, Boots the Chemists and British Airways travel shops. We have also worked with the Post Office, who process the E111, to ensure the new form is publicised in their outlets. Finally we have placed press advertising in the travel supplements of national newspapers across the United Kingdom and in travel trade magazines. Final costs are not yet available as this publicity is on-going but about £170,000 has been spent to date.

Health Service Ombudsman

Mr. Burstow: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many complaints were received by the Health Service Ombudsman in each year since 1997; and if he will make a statement. [196195]

Ms Rosie Winterton: The Health Service Ombudsman publishes information about the handling of cases in her annual report, copies of which are available in the Library and on the Ombudsman's website at: www.ombudsman.org.uk

Health Spending (Chesterfield)

Paul Holmes: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what the health expenditure per head of the population in Chesterfield constituency has been in each year since 1997. [195577]

Dr. Ladyman: The information is not available in the format requested.

Expenditure per weighted head of population in the Trent Strategic Health Authority (SHA) area, which includes the Chesterfield constituency, has increased from £610.10 in 1997–98 to £862.03 in 2002–03. However, this does not represent the total expenditure per head, as an element of health expenditure cannot be identified by SHA area.

Hearing Aids

Helen Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will ensure that guidelines on priorities for fitting digital hearing aids *(a)* take into account situations where a patient has mental health problems as well as hearing loss and *(b)* ensure that trusts carry out a holistic assessment of patients waiting for digital hearing aids. [196066]

Dr. Ladyman: Audiology services should develop their own priorities and guidelines for fitting digital hearing aids in consultation with primary care trusts and commissioners. Best practice would suggest that all clinical teams in the national health service should be undertaking holistic assessments of their clients, including consideration of any mental health problems, but this is a matter for trusts to determine and implement.

HIV

Mr. Jim Cunningham: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many people living in the West Midlands area are HIV positive. [195690]

Dr. Ladyman: There were 1,695 patients seen for statutory medical HIV-related care in the West Midlands in 2003, including 24 children born to infected mothers whose HIV infection status had not been confirmed.

Source:

Health Protection Agency—survey of prevalent HIV infections diagnosed for 2003.

Hospital Infections

Mr. Andrew Turner: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many cases of MRSA were recorded in each year since 1997; and how many resulted in death *(a)* in and *(b)* not in hospital. [193550]

Miss Melanie Johnson *[holding answer 25 October 2004]:* Available data on methicillin resistant *Staphylococcus aureus* (MRSA) blood stream infections from the voluntary and mandatory surveillance systems are shown in the tables. One of the reasons that the Government introduced mandatory surveillance in April 2001 was that the previous voluntary system produced incomplete data. Neither of these systems provides information on patient outcomes, including death, but an in-depth study of deaths possibly related to health care acquired infections (including MRSA) is being commissioned by the Chief Medical Officer.

Methicillin resistant Staphylococcus aureus bacteraemia (blood stream) laboratory reports (voluntary reporting scheme), England and Wales, 1997–2003

	Number
1997	2,422
1998	2,851
1999	3,332
2000	4,272

Source:
Health Protection Agency.

Reports under the mandatory MRSA bacteraemia surveillance system (acute NHS trusts, England)

	Number
April 2001 to March 2002	7,250
April 2002 to March 2003	7,384
April 2003 to March 2004	7,647

Source:
Health Protection Agency.

Simon Hughes: To ask the Secretary of State for Health which strains of MRSA primary care trusts are required to report; and if he will make a statement. [194233]

Miss Melanie Johnson: Primary care trusts are not required to report methicillin resistant Staphylococcus aureus (MRSA). The mandatory reporting of MRSA blood stream infections applies to acute trusts.

Hysterectomy

Mr. Edwards: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what information is provided by the NHS to women on treatment options for *(a)* menorrhagia and *(b)* uterine fibroids; and what alternatives to hysterectomy are available through the NHS for the treatment of each condition. [195029]

Dr. Ladyman: The National Institute for Clinical Excellence (NICE) guidance is provided in formats written for patients, carers and the public. NICE issued guidance on endometrial ablation for menorrhagia on 28 April 2004. It has issued guidelines on alternative surgical treatments for menorrhagia, including balloon thermal endometrial ablation (August 2003), uterine artery embolisation for fibroids (August 2003), free and fluid thermal endometrial ablation March 2003.

NICE is developing a clinical guideline on hysterectomy, which is likely to include guidance on menorrhagia, as part of its eighth wave work programme. The anticipated publication date of this guideline is February 2006.

The Royal College of Obstetricians and Gynaecologists (RCOG) also produces information for patients, developed from guidelines. The RCOG leaflet on hysterectomy advises that alternative treatments may be appropriate for patients and that their doctors will be able to fully advise on these. The national electronic library for health programme is working with national health service libraries to develop a digital library for NHS staff, patients and the public and has recently developed a specialist library covering women's health.

Iraq

Jeremy Corbyn: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what arrangements are available for Iraqi nationals who are victims of violence in the war and who cannot be treated in Iraq due to medical deficiencies to be treated in hospitals in England; and if he will make a statement. [194014]

Mr. Hutton: Iraqi nationals are treated in civilian health care facilities in Iraq wherever possible. Some requiring care may be treated by military field hospitals and, exceptionally for specialist care, may be brought back to United Kingdom hospitals where additional capacity has been made available.

IT Systems

Mr. Burstow: To ask the Secretary of State for Health pursuant to the answer of 14 June 2004, *Official Report*, column 685W to the hon. Member for Westbury (Dr. Murrison) on IT systems, if he will break down the estimated costs by *(a)* procurement, *(b)* implementation and *(c)* running cost; and on what assumptions the estimates were based. [194363]

Mr. Hutton: The procurement phase of the national programme for information technology (NPfIT) is now complete and contracts awarded are shown in the following table.

	£ million
Local service providers	4,988
National health service care records service/spine	620
New national network (N3)	530
E-booking	65
Total	6,203

These figures relate to contractual commitments. They cover ongoing funding of core deliverables and the connection of existing systems to national applications from central budgets.

The £2.3 billion, earmarked in the 2002 spending review to fund the IT development and NPfIT central programme costs over the three years 2003–04 to 2005–06, was based on individual project business case assumptions about the speed and scope of deployment in the period concerned. This figure does not include the cost of training NHS staff or local change management costs.

Funding for the local NHS service implementation and running costs of NPfIT will come from normal NHS allocations, which are being increased year on year and will reach £90 billion by 2008. This will involve prioritising normal expenditure, including training budgets to include NPfIT in local training programmes.

Future funding to the NHS determined by the SR2004 expenditure settlement will enable trusts to achieve the target of 4 per cent. for total NHS spending on IT, set by the 2002 Wanless Report, "Securing our Future Health". This total includes spending on IT provision outside the NPfIT remit, such as human resources and finance IT systems.

Junior Doctors

Dr. Murrison: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what assessment he has made of unemployment levels among non-UK trained junior doctors living in England. [195580]

Mr. Hutton: In September 2003, the national health service employed almost 36,000 doctors who had obtained their medical qualification outside of the United Kingdom. The Department does not collect information about the unemployment levels of junior doctors.

Junior doctors who have trained outside of the UK have to pass the Professional and Linguistic Assessment Board (PLAB) examination before being accepted onto the General Medical Council (GMC) register. The GMC has surveyed doctors who have taken the PLAB examination in the last year to find out how quickly they obtain posts. The survey has shown that 93 per cent. have obtained a post within a year.

Mental Health

Lynne Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what steps he is taking to ensure that the patient choice agenda extends to mental health patients. [195783]

Ms Rosie Winterton: A mental health choice steering group has been established under the auspices of the National Institute for Mental Health England (NIMHE). The group aims to inform the development of choice policy in mental health and has produced a discussion document which will be presented to the mental health taskforce in December.

In 2002–03, NIMHE's Access, Booking and Choice in Mental Health programme was rolled out across each of its eight development centres in order to provide stakeholders from across local mental health communities with proven tools and techniques of service redesign. Detailed outcomes of this NIMHE programme are described in "Improving Access and Choice: Service Improvement Guide, 2003" which is available on the NIMHE website at http://www.nimhe.org.uk/downloads/ABC%20ImproGuide%20Corr%27d%207 03.pdf

Lynne Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what steps he is taking to ensure that patients with severe mental health problems have access to *(a)* useful information and *(b)* the highest quality treatments. [195784]

Ms Rosie Winterton: The national service framework for mental health (1999) set national standards and identified key interventions for working age adults with mental health problems.

Clinical guidelines published by the National Institute for Clinical Excellence (NICE) provide guidance on the appropriate treatment and care of people with specific mental health problems within the national health service.

Technology appraisals published by NICE provide guidance on the use of new and existing medicines and treatments within the NHS.

NICE runs a web-based online environment, the knowledge community (http://kc.nimhe.org.uk/), to help improve the delivery of mental health services. The knowledge community represents the diversity of approaches and perspectives that exist within the mental health field, and provides a practical means by which these can be brought together to improve services.

Lynne Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for Health whether the proposed five-yearly review of the national service framework for mental health will examine issues relating to patient choice, with particular reference to *(a)* the availability of cognitive behaviour therapy and *(b)* implementation of guidance from the National Institute for Clinical Excellence for atypical antipsychotics where choice is central to that guidance. [195787]

Ms Rosie Winterton: The national director for mental health's review of the national service framework for mental health (1999) looks at the implementation of its seven standards and the supporting programmes. The review will also take a forward look outlining future priorities for mental health including how these will align with broader national health service initiatives such as choice.

Lynne Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what objectives he has set the National Director for Mental Health in relation to patient choice. [195788]

Ms Rosie Winterton: No specific objectives in relation to patient choice have been set for the national director for mental health. However, he is actively involved in the mental health choice steering group, which has been established under the auspices of the National Institute for Mental Health England to inform the development of choice policy in mental heath.

Lynne Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for Health (1) what assessment he has made of the implementation of current guidance from the National Institute for Clinical Excellence in relation to atypical antipsychotics; [195785]

(2) what monitoring he undertakes of the extent to which patients with newly diagnosed schizophrenia are being offered a clear choice of treatment, in line with guidance from the National Institute for Clinical Excellence; and what assessment he has made of the barriers to implement that guidance. [195786]

Ms Rosie Winterton: Responsibility to implement guidance published by National Institute for Clinical Excellence (NICE) is devolved within the National Health Services to local trusts, supported and performance managed by strategic health authorities. The Department has made no assessments of the kind outlined by my hon. Friend.

However, the Department routinely monitors prescribing trends of all antipsychotics. For the year ending June 2004, atypical antipsychotics accounted for 60 per cent. of all prescription items of antipsychotics dispensed in the community in England, compared to 48 per cent. of all antipsychotics for the year ending June 2002, when the relevant NICE appraisal guidance was published.

Since January 2002, the National Health Service has had three months from the date of publication of each technology appraisal guidance to provide funding so that clinical decisions made by doctors involving NICE recommended treatments or drugs can be funded.

Leighton Hospital

Sir Nicholas Winterton: To ask the Secretary of State for Health (1) if he will make a statement on the future of the mother and baby unit in the mental health unit at Leighton hospital; [194367]

(2) what representations he has received about the proposed closure of the mother and baby unit in the mental health unit at Leighton hospital; [194368]

(3) for what reasons the mother and baby unit in the mental health unit at Leighton hospital will be closed; [194369]

(4) what assessment he has made of the effect on *(a)* patients and *(b)* patients' families of the closure of the mother and baby unit in the mental health unit at Leighton hospital; [194371]

(5) what provisions there is for mentally ill mothers with babies in the *(a)* Cheshire, *(b)* Wirral, *(c)* Merseyside, *(d)* North Wales, *(e)* Shropshire and *(f)* North Staffordshire areas; and if he will make a statement. [194372]

Miss Melanie Johnson: The provision of services for people locally is the responsibility of primary care trusts (PCTs), in partnership with their local communities to ensure that adequate arrangements are in place which will meet the needs of client groups. Strategic health authorities are responsible for performance managing their local PCTs to ensure that appropriate services are commissioned for the communities they serve.

The future of the mother and baby unit at Leighton hospital is a matter for the Cheshire and Wirral Partnership NHS Trust, in partnership with its local PCTs. The trust has put forward proposals regarding the mother and baby unit, which are considered to be consistent with current developments in perinatal mental health.

According to departmental records, one letter and six questions from hon. and right hon. Members have been received on this issue.

Sir Nicholas Winterton: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will calculate the cost of running the mother and baby unit in the mental health unit at Leighton hospital in each of the last five years for which figures are available. [194370]

Miss Melanie Johnson: The information requested is not collected centrally.

MRI/CT Scanners

Mr. Burstow: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many *(a)* MRI and *(b)* CT scanners each NHS trust has; and what the age of each machine is. [194266]

Miss Melanie Johnson: There are currently 230 magnetic resonance imaging (MRI) scanners and 335 computed tomography (CT) scanners installed in the national health service in England. The complete list, detailing the location and age of each scanner, has been placed in the Library.

To date, new and replacement equipment provided through central programmes includes: 66 new MRI scanners, 83 linear accelerators, 166 CT scanners and over 700 items of breast screening equipment; all delivered since April 2000.

This means that, in total, approximately 50 per cent. of MRI scanners, 67 per cent. of CT scanners and 56 per cent. of linear accelerators now in use in the NHS are new since January 2000.

NHS Consultants/Doctors

Shona McIsaac: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many full-time NHS *(a)* consultants and *(b)* other hospital doctors there were in each speciality in hospitals in (i) Scunthorpe and (ii) Grimsby in each year since 1994. [194186]

Miss Melanie Johnson: The information requested has been placed in the Library.

NHS Live 2004

Mr. Damian Green: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what the budget is for NHS Live 2004 in the area covered by Kent and Medway Strategic Health Authority. [193910]

Ms Rosie Winterton: The NHS Live budget is not broken down by specific strategic health authority area.

NHS Logistics Authority

Jon Trickett: To ask the Secretary of State for Health (1) what recent discussions he has had with trade unions in relation to the proposed abolition of the NHS Logistics Authority; [195027]

(2) if he will make a statement on the future of the NHS Logistics Authority. [195028]

Ms Rosie Winterton: "Reconfiguring the Department of Health's Arm's Length Bodies" (July 2004) included the proposal that the work of the National Health Service Logistics Authority would be market-tested. This involved the publication of a contract notice in the Official Journal of the European Union (OJEU), which notified potential bidders in member states of the European Union of the Department's intention to market test the proposed outsourcing of the supply chain and procurement services for the NHS. This was published on 19 August 2004.

Organisations interested in bidding for the contract had to apply to the Department in order to participate in the competition. These interested parties have had to complete and submit a pre-qualification questionnaire (PQQ). This will ensure that only suitably qualified candidates will be short-listed to submit bids. The PQQ closed on 8 October and the Department is currently in the process of evaluating the responses.

At this stage, no decision has been taken about contracting out. Only when the market testing has been completed will a final decision be made. However, consultation with the unions has begun. Representatives from the NHS Logistics Authority, NHS Purchasing and Supply Agency (PASA) and the commercial directorate were invited to Unison's initiative day on 13 September. A representative from the Public and Commercial Services union was also present. This was the start of the formal consultation process.

For the purposes of consultation, Unison has established a group comprising a representative from each distribution centre within the NHS Logistics Authority. This team meets monthly with the NHS Logistics Authority, NHS PASA and the commercial directorate.

Ritalin

Alistair Burt: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many children aged *(a)* up to five, *(b)* five to 10 and *(c)* 10 to 14 years are currently being treated with ritalin within *(a)* North East Bedfordshire, *(b)* Bedford Primary Care Trust area and *(c)* Bedfordshire Heartlands Primary Care Trust; what percentage of children within each cohort these figures represent; and if he will make a statement. [195766]

Dr. Ladyman: Information is not available in the form requested. The Department does not hold data on the number of people who receive a particular medication. However, the figures in the table show the total number of prescription items of methylphenidate hydrochloride dispensed in the community for a 12 month period up to June 2004. Ritalin is one brand of the drug methylphenidate.

Total items dispensed

	(Thousand)
England	263.7
Bedfordshire and Hertfordshire Strategic Health Authority	8.5
Bedford Primary Care Trust (PCT)	0.6
Bedfordshire Heartlands PCT	1.9

Source:

Prescription cost analysis data from the Prescription Pricing Authority.

In 2003, it is estimated that around 90 per cent., of all prescription items of methylphenidate were dispensed in the community to children.

Smear Tests

David Davis: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many patients in Hull and the East Riding had smear tests in *(a)* 2003 and *(b)* 2004. [195136]

Miss Melanie Johnson: The information is shown in the table.

Cervical screening programme: number of tests and coverage of target age group (25–64) by primary care organisation, 2002–03 and 2003–04

	Number of women screened (Thousand)		*Coverage (less than 5 years since last adequate test) (Percentage)*	
	2002–03	*2003–04*	*2002–03*	*2003–04*
North and East Yorkshire and North Lincolnshire Strategic Health Authority	108.4	106.6	85.2	84.5
East Yorkshire Primary Care Trust	10.9	10.6	87.9	87.4
Eastern Hull Primary Care Trust	7.7	7.4	84.7	83.6
West Hull Primary Care Trust	9.5	9.3	82.2	81.3
Yorkshire Wolds and Coast Primary Care Trust	10.1	10.0	86.2	85.6

Source:

Department of Health Statistical Bulletin: Cervical Screening Programme, England: 2003–04

Pharmacists

Mr. Jim Cunningham: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what the cost will be of the new community pharmacy contract to pharmacists looking to expand their practices. [195474]

Ms Rosie Winterton: The new funding arrangements for community pharmacy have been informed by a cost of service inquiry for existing provision and detailed modelling of the costs of new services. The cost to community pharmacies of expanding services to include those detailed in the new contractual framework will vary. Cost will be dependant on the size of the pharmacy, how easily premises can be adapted to offer additional services, staffing levels and which services are to be provided.

Processed Food (Salt)

Ms Shipley: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what action he will take to ensure that supermarkets and food manufacturers reduce the salt content of processed food products. [191130]

Miss Melanie Johnson: The Department and the Food Standards Agency are working together with all parts of the food industry, including retailers and manufacturers, to reduce the salt levels of processed foods. The aim is to reduce average intakes of salt to six grams per person per day by 2010.

Waiting Times

David Davis: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many people in Hull and the East Riding waited 13 weeks or more for an out-patient appointment in *(a)* 2003 and *(b)* 2004. [194957]

Miss Melanie Johnson: The information is shown in the table.

Waiting times for first consultant out-patient appointment following General/Dental Practitioner referral

	Quarter	NHS Trust	Patients who waited over 13 weeks
2002–03	4	Hull and East Riding Community Health NHS Trust	28
		Hull and East Yorkshire Hospitals NHS Trust	15,994
2003–04	1	Hull and East Riding Community Health NHS Trust	26
		Hull and East Yorkshire Hospitals NHS Trust	3,901
2003–04	2	Hull and East Riding Community Health NHS Trust	13
		Hull and East Yorkshire Hospitals NHS Trust	4,708
2003–04	3	Hull and East Riding Community Health NHS Trust	11
		Hull and East Yorkshire Hospitals NHS Trust	5,007
2003–04	4	Hull and East Riding Community Health NHS Trust	20
		Hull and East Yorkshire Hospitals NHS Trust	4,287
2004–05	1	Hull and East Riding Community Health NHS Trust	0
		Hull and East Yorkshire Hospitals NHS Trust	3,262

Source:

Department of Health form QM08.

Virginia Bottomley: To ask the Secretary of State for Health (1) what changes there have been to NHS waiting list times for residents of South West Surrey in the past seven years; [195087]

(2) how many in-patients in the primary health trust covering South West Surrey had to wait more than *(a)* three, *(b)* six, *(c)* nine and *(d)* 12 months for treatment in each year since 1997; and what the percentage change was in each case. [195100]

Ms Rosie Winterton: The numbers of people waiting more than three, six, nine and 12 months for treatment in each year since 1997 and the comparisons for the last seven years are shown in the tables.

Patients waiting for elective in-patient admission: Position at month-end

	Health authority (HA) or primary care trust (PCT)	Total patients waiting	Patients waiting over: Three months	Six months	Nine months	12 months
1997[1]	West Surrey HA	15,339	8,810	4,925	2,449	838
1998[1]	West Surrey HA	17,648	10,892	6,996	3,952	1,602
1999[1]	West Surrey HA	14,521	8,920	5,491	2,809	1,180
2000[1]	West Surrey HA	15,400	9,739	5,965	3,416	1,618
2001[1]	West Surrey HA	14,608	8,595	5,188	3,009	1,420
2002[1]	West Surrey HA	13,718	7,404	3,970	1,806	558
2003[1]	Guildford and Waverley PCT	4,436	2,196	973	302	0
2004[1]	Guildford and Waverley PCT	4,117	1,601	375	0	0
2004[2]	Guildford and Waverley PCT	3,778	1,486	328	0	0

[1] March

[2] August

Source:

Department of Health form QF01 and monthly monitoring.

Patients waiting for elective in-patient admission: Percentage of change on previous period

Month end	Health authority (HA) or primary care trust (PCT)	Patients waiting over: Three months	Six months	Nine months	12 months
1997[1]	West Surrey HA	—	—	—	—
1998[1]	West Surrey HA	23.6	42.1	61.4	91.2
1999[1]	West Surrey HA	-18.1	-21.5	-28.9	-26.3
2000[1]	West Surrey HA	9.2	8.6	21.6	37.1
2001[1]	West Surrey HA	-11.7	-13.0	-11.9	-12.2
2002[1]	West Surrey HA	-13.9	-23.5	-40.0	-60.7
2003[1]	Guildford and Waverley PCT	—	—	—	—
2004[1]	Guildford and Waverley PCT	-27.1	-61.5	-100.0	—
2004[2]	Guildford and Waverley PCT	-7.2	-12.5	—	—

[1] March

[2] August

Willerby Call Centre

David Davis: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what call statistics have been collated for the East Riding NHS Direct call centre in Willerby for the last 12 months. [194977]

Miss Melanie Johnson: This information is not held centrally.

Yellow Card Scheme

Paul Flynn: To ask the Secretary of State for Health (1) whether he plans to make the Yellow Card scheme a compulsory component of clinical training of medical students; [190500]

(2) what plans he has to increase awareness of the Yellow Card scheme among *(a)* health professionals and *(b)* patients; [190501]

(3) what measures he has taken in response to the findings of the Report of an Independent Review of Access to the Yellow Card scheme; [190502]

(4) what plans he has to allow patients to send yellow card reports to the Medical and Healthcare Products Regulatory Agency. [190701]

Ms Rosie Winterton: The report of an independent review of access to yellow card scheme was published in May 2004 and my noble Friend, the Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Health, Lord Warner, immediately accepted the recommendation to introduce a system of direct patient reporting of suspected adverse drug reactions (ADRs) to the Medicines and Healthcare products Regulatory Agency (MHRA). An expert working group of the Committee on the Safety of Medicines (CSM) has been established to advise on how best to develop effective patient reporting nationally, including aspects of communication and evaluation. The expert working group is chaired by Dr. Patricia Wilkie, a lay-member of the CSM; is multidisciplinary, has broad representation and has met twice to date. Work has commenced on the development of pilot patient reporting schemes.

In advance of the first formal pilot, the MHRA has already begun work on a pre-pilot survey of patients who have experienced suspected adverse drug reactions during the last year, so the patient perspective can be built into the development of pilot schemes from the outset. Invitations to patients to be involved in this survey, which will help to shape the future design of direct patient reporting systems are going out this week, to coincide with "Ask About Medicines" week.

The independent review of access to the yellow card scheme also includes recommendations to strengthen the scheme by raising public awareness of the important role the scheme has in protecting public health. The report recommends that a communications strategy should be developed to improve professional and public education and provision of information about the yellow card scheme and that the scheme should receive greater emphasis during the clinical training of all health professionals, whether they prescribe or not. These specific recommendations are being considered in conjunction with the other recommendations in the report.

INTERNATIONAL DEVELOPMENT

Consultancy Services

Tom Brake: To ask the Secretary of State for International Development pursuant to his answer of 19 October 2004, *Official Report*, columns 562–64W, on consultancy services, (1) if he will list the contracts awarded to Options Consultancy Services Ltd. in 1999–2000, listing *(a)* the type of work conducted under the contract, *(b)* the value of the contract and *(c)* the country in which the work was conducted; [195739]

(2) if he will list the contracts awarded to Deloitte & Touche South Africa in 2002–03, listing *(a)* the type of work conducted under the contract and *(b)* the country in which the work was conducted; [195745]

(3) if he will list the contracts awarded to Adam Smith International Ltd. in each year from 1999–2000 to 2002–03, listing *(a)* the type of work conducted under the contract, *(b)* the value of the contract and *(c)* the country in which the work was conducted; [195756]

(4) if he will list the contracts awarded to The Crown Agents for Overseas Governments and Administrations Ltd. in each year from 1999–2000 to 2002–03, listing *(a)* the type of work conducted under the contract, *(b)* the value of the contract and *(c)* the country in which the work was conducted; [195757]

(5) if he will list the contracts awarded to Arcadis BMB in 2001–02 listing *(a)* the type of work conducted under the contract, *(b)* the value of the contract and *(c)* the country in which the work was conducted; [195740]

(6) if he will list the contracts awarded to Maxwell Stamp plc in 2002–03, listing *(a)* the type of work conducted under the contract and *(b)* the country in which the work was conducted; [195749]

(7) if he will list the contracts awarded to WSP International Ltd. in each year from 1999–2000 to 2001–02, listing *(a)* the type of work conducted under the contract and *(b)* the country in which the work was conducted; [195750]

(8) if he will list the contracts awarded to ATOS KPMG Consulting Ltd. in *(a)* 2000–01 and *(b)* 2002–03; what was conducted under the contract; what the value of the contracts was; and in which country the work was conducted; [195741]

(9) if he will list the new contracts awarded to each consultancy during 2003–04; what work was conducted under each contract; and in which country; [195742]

(10) if he will list the contracts awarded to Futures Group Europe Ltd., listing *(a)* the type of work conducted under the contract and *(b)* the country in which the work was conducted; [195751]

(11) if he will list the contracts awarded to IHSD Ltd./HLSP in each year from 1999–2000 to 2002–03, listing *(a)* the type of work conducted under the contract, *(b)* the value of the contract and *(c)* the country in which the work was conducted; [195752]

(12) if he will list the contracts awarded to Oxford Policy management Ltd. in each year from 2000–01 to 2002–03, listing *(a)* the type of work conducted under the contract, *(b)* the value of the contract and *(c)* the country in which the work was conducted; [195743]

(13) if he will list the contracts awarded to the British Council in each year from 1999–2000 to 2002–03, listing *(a)* the type of work conducted under the contract and *(b)* the country in which the work was conducted; [195744]

(14) if he will list the contracts awarded to GRM International Ltd., listing *(a)* the type of work conducted under the contract, *(b)* the value of the contract and *(c)* the country in which the work was conducted; [195753]

(15) if he will list the contracts awarded to Roughton International, listing the type of work conducted under the contract, the value of the contract and the country in which the work was conducted; [195754]

(16) if he will list the contracts awarded to Enterprise plc, listing the type of work conducted under the contract, the value of the contract and the country in which the work was conducted; [195755]

(17) if he will list the contracts awarded to PricewaterhouseCoopers in 1999–2000, listing *(a)* the type of work conducted under the contract, *(b)* the value of the contract and *(c)* the country in which the work was conducted. [195758]

Hilary Benn: The information requested will be placed in the Libraries of the House shortly, in a document entitled "Top 20 Consultancy Firms 1999 to 2004—Contracts Awarded"

Departmental Estate

Mr. Andrew Turner: To ask the Secretary of State for International Development if he will list the properties occupied by *(a)* his Department and *(b)* its agencies in (i) 1997 and (ii) 2004; and what the (A) area and (B) annual rental value (1) in aggregate and (2) in each case was in each year. [196071]

Hilary Benn: The properties occupied by DFID in the UK in 1997 and in 2004, their area, and annual rental value, are as set out in the table. There are no agencies for which DFID is responsible. The rent at 20 Victoria Street increased following a rent review in 2002 and because DFID took over full occupancy of the building

	Area (sq m)	*Rental value (£ million)*
1997		
94 Victoria St. London	13,093	4,659,300
20 Victoria St. London	1,055	250,000
Abercrombie House, East Kilbride	8,755	575,500
Total	23,026	5,484,800
2004		
1 Palace St. London	15,910	4,693,450
20 Victoria St. London	1,178	462,820
Abercrombie House, East Kilbride (including extension)	9,755	669,100
Total	26,843	5,825,370

Departmental IT

Brian White: To ask the Secretary of State for International Development what percentage of the Department's *(a)* implemented and *(b)* planned computer systems use open source software; and what plans are in place to raise this level. [195653]

Hilary Benn: Less than 5 per cent. of DFID's current computer systems use Open Source Software (OSS) components. It is expected that by 2007, up to 70 per cent. of DFID's computer systems will include some OSS components, using the definition adopted by the Open Source Initiative. DFID's policies for software procurement follow the Office of Government Commerce's "level playing field" policy in relation to OSS. This does not require the raising of levels of OSS usage in Government, rather that Government considers OSS solutions alongside proprietary ones in IT procurements and that contracts should be awarded on a value for money, case by case basis. The policy can be viewed at www.govtalk.gov.uk

Ghana

Tom Brake: To ask the Secretary of State for International Development when the IPPD2 Ghana payroll system project started; what the initial contract value of the project was; what the projected total contract value is; what the *(a)* original and *(b)* current estimated completion date is; and what assessment has been made of the value for money represented by the project. [194942]

Hilary Benn: A project for the replacement of the Government of Ghana's Integrated Personnel and Payroll Database (IPPD2) was agreed between Britain and Ghana in May 1999. The total commitment was £3.5 million, of which £1.5 million was designated for contracts for goods and services and £2 million was designated for financial aid to the Government of Ghana. The projected completion date was October 2000. When that date was reached, expenditure amounted to £2.3 million, of which £1.2 million had been spent on contracts for goods and services and £1.1 million had been spent on financial aid. However, DFID decided that there were serious obstacles to the achievement of the project's objectives, and informed the Government of Ghana that the funding commitment would not be extended.

Since then there have been extensive discussions with the Government of Ghana over restarting the project. A further grant of £3.9 million was agreed in principle, in October 2002, but lapsed in March 2004. £129,000 was spent under the grant for an audit of the previous work and advice on options. However, there is presently no agreed project receiving DFID support, and no date for completion of the IPPD replacement.

The project has previously been reported to the House as "only partly achieving [its] purpose and output during 2003"—*Official Report*, 20 May 2004, columns 1122–23W. A subsequent analysis of the project's implementation status found that the project had not met its objectives.

Temporary Staff

Mr. Wilshire: To ask the Secretary of State for International Development how many agency temporary staff have been working for the Department in each of the last five years, excluding those working for agencies for which no data is kept centrally. [196062]

Hilary Benn: DFID currently has no central record of agency workers, and therefore this information could be obtained only at a disproportionate cost.

FOREIGN AND COMMONWEALTH AFFAIRS

Civil Servants

Mr. Jenkins: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what the average length of continuous service for civil servants within the Department is. [194398]

Mr. Alexander: In 2003 (the latest date for which figures are available) civil servants then employed by the Foreign and Commonwealth Office had been in continuous employment for an average of just over 13 years.

Consultants

Pete Wishart: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs how much expenditure his Department has incurred in each year since 2002 on employing external consultants to deal with the press and public relations of his Department; and if he will make a statement. [195461]

Mr. Rammell: As set out in my reply to the right hon. and learned Member for Devizes (Mr. Ancram) on 20 July 2004, *Official Report*, column 171W, in FY 2002–03—the most recent year for which audited figures are available—the Foreign and Commonwealth Office's (FCO) central expenditure on public relations external consultancy totalled £291,971. Of this, £268,862 was paid to a single agency for work on the consular awareness-raising campaign "Know Before You Go".

The FCO's overseas posts and its non-departmental public bodies occasionally employ public relations external consultants, but details are not recorded centrally. Information about the costs incurred by these activities could be obtained only at disproportionate cost.

The FCO is unaware of any central expenditure on press-related external consultancy.

Departmental Disciplinary Procedures

Mr. Mark Field: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what the total cost in each of the last three financial years was of his Department's internal disciplinary procedures; and how much was spent on *(a)* external lawyers and *(b)* commissioning independent experts and adjudications. [195794]

Mr. Alexander: We do not have precise figures readily available for the costs incurred as a result of Foreign and Commonwealth Office (FCO) internal disciplinary procedures over the last three years. The information requested could be provided only at disproportionate cost. In the majority of cases legal advice is provided by FCO legal advisers. We would commission specialist external advice only if there were a need to consult on a detailed question of employment law.

Departmental Staff

Mr. Wilshire: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs how many agency temporary staff have been working for the Department in each of the last five years, excluding those working for agencies for which no data are kept centrally. [196063]

Mr. Alexander: We do not have a central record of the numbers of staff employed under contract from agencies; to obtain these figures would incur disproportionate costs. We do, however, have the costs, which are:

	£
2000–01	1,255,817
2001–02	1,933,841
2002–03	1,850,779
2003–04	1,630,613

Entry Clearance

Keith Vaz: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs how many entry clearance refusals he has overturned in 2004. [194446]

Mr. Mullin: My right hon. Friend the Foreign Secretary has not overturned any refusals in 2004 but I, as the Minister responsible for entry clearance matters overseas, have overturned 13 refusals in 2004 to date.

EU Savings Directive

Mr. Simmonds: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what assessment his Department has made of the impact of the EU Savings Directive on the *(a)* British Virgin Islands, *(b)* Cayman Islands and *(c)* other dependent territories. [195828]

Mr. Rammell: I refer the hon. Member to the reply given by my right hon. Friend the Paymaster General to the hon. Member for Eddisbury (Mr. O'Brien) on 25 October 2004, *Official Report*, column 1057W.

Gabon

Mr. Simmonds: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what plans he has for the establishment of a British *(a)* consulate and *(b)* embassy in Gabon; and if he will make a statement. [195439]

Mr. Mullin: We have no plans to open either a consulate or an embassy in Gabon. The British high commissioner to Cameroon, who is resident in Yaoundé, is accredited as ambassador to Gabon. We have also appointed a British honorary consul who is resident in Libreville.

Gibraltar

Tom Cox: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what recent discussions he has had with the Government of Gibraltar; and which issues were discussed. [195587]

Mr. MacShane: My right hon. Friend the Foreign Secretary met with the Chief Minister of Gibraltar on 20 October. They were also in contact on 27 October to discuss the content of the joint statement made by the Foreign Secretary and his Spanish counterpart, Senor Moratinos. The Chief Minister confirmed that he was entirely content with the joint statement.

Iraq

Mr. Drew: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what discussions he has had with his US counterparts concerning measures to protect *(a)* Christian communities and *(b)* Christian churches from terrorist attacks in Iraq. [195064]

Mr. Rammell: We are in regular contact with our US counterparts at all levels on security issues in Iraq. UK and US officials in Iraq regularly meet with members of the Christian communities. And we have raised their concerns with the Iraqi authorities. Our missions in Iraq are monitoring the situation closely.

Hugh Robertson: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what role the Government plan for the UN in ensuring independent monitoring of the forthcoming elections in Iraq. [195180]

Mr. Rammell *[holding answer 1 November 2004]:* The UN is supporting elections in Iraq as mandated in UNSCR 1546 through providing advice and training to the Independent Electoral Commission of Iraq (IECI), the lead body responsible for preparing elections. Among its many tasks, the IECI with the help of the UN is training independent Iraqi election monitors.

Sudan

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what assessment he has made of the extent of access for humanitarian and human rights organisations to all parts of Sudan. [194460]

Hilary Benn: I have been asked to reply.

The issue of access is key to the precarious humanitarian situation in Darfur and the rest of Sudan. Humanitarian access has been improving. In the initial stages of the crisis the humanitarian community faced many obstacles in responding to the situation. Significant pressure was placed on the Government of Sudan by the UK and others to help ensure the entry and movement of humanitarian staff, commodities, and equipment into Darfur. As a result, the Government of Sudan have made positive steps in enhancing access and DFID is monitoring the situation. This progress is reflected in the rise in the number humanitarian staff operating in Darfur. This has increased from 2,043 staff of which 322 were international on 1 July 2004 to a figure of 6,154 staff on 1 October, of which 779 were international.

Access by the UN to people involved has gradually improved. In the UN's most recent Humanitarian Needs Profile (1 October), it reported that it had reached 88 per cent. of the 2 million people affected by the conflict. The level of access differs from 98 per cent. of the affected population in West Darfur to 89 per cent. in North Darfur, and 73 per cent. in South Darfur.

Humanitarian access in Darfur mainly depends on two factors: the degree of insecurity on the ground and road and weather conditions. Although the UN has agreed operating procedures with the Sudan Liberation Movement, access to Sudan Liberation Army-held areas remains problematic due to recent restrictions imposed by the rebel groups as well as several security incidents. Across the rest of the country, the picture is mixed. It is still difficult for some agencies to access areas such as Southern Blue Nile and parts of Kassla State (Hamesh Koreb). Elsewhere, access is better, although the security situation can change at short notice.

The British Government take the problems in Sudan extremely seriously. In the last two months, the Prime Minister, the Foreign Secretary, the Minister for Africa and myself, visited Sudan and urged the Government of Sudan to meet the commitments they gave to the UN regarding humanitarian access and security. The Foreign Secretary secured the Government of Sudan's agreement to access to Darfur for human rights agencies previously denied visas. In Khartoum, the ambassador has taken the lead in establishing regular meetings with the Government of Sudan, NGO's and donors to discuss among other things, the question of access in Sudan, highlighting specific instances of ongoing bureaucratic difficulties.

The UN and the UK Government along with others, continue to press both the Government of Sudan and the rebels to allowed unfettered access throughout Darfur. We are also pressing all parties to sign and deliver on the Abuja humanitarian protocol.

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what representations he has made to the Government of Sudan about the need to ensure that all parties to the peace process grant the International Committee of the Red Cross the assistance it needs to carry out its protection mandate. [194486]

Hilary Benn: I have been asked to reply.

The UK is actively trying to ensure access for all humanitarian agencies, including the International Red Cross Committee (ICRC). DFID works with colleagues from the UN, and other Development Ministers, to press both the Government of Sudan and the rebels to allowed unfettered access throughout Darfur. DFID is pressing all parties to sign and deliver on the Abuja humanitarian protocol.

In the last two months, the Prime Minister, the Foreign Secretary, the Minister for Africa and myself have all visited Sudan to urge the Government of Sudan to meet the commitments it gave to the UN regarding humanitarian access and security.

DFID regularly raises the importance of protection of civilians in our discussions with the Government of Sudan.

Through direct aid, the UK continues to support the humanitarian community and is now the second biggest bilateral donor in Sudan, allocating since March this year £55.5 million for Darfur and £35 million for Sudan as a whole. Of this, DFID has committed £4.5million to the ICRC for the whole of Sudan.

Uzbekistan

Sir Menzies Campbell: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will make a statement on the withdrawal of Mr. Craig Murray, former Ambassador to Uzbekistan. [195508]

Mr. Straw: Operational staffing decisions are taken by senior Foreign and Commonwealth Office (FCO) officials, in accordance with long-standing convention. My officials decided to withdraw Mr. Murray from his post as he was no longer able to perform effectively the full range of duties required in the conduct of our relations with Uzbekistan. Mr. Murray has since been suspended on full pay pending investigation into his conduct in relation to a number of statements which have been made about the FCO.

Mr. Carmichael: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will set up an inquiry into the leaking of a confidential report from former British Ambassador to Uzbekistan, Craig Murray, to The Financial Times. [195938]

Mr. Alexander: The Foreign and Commonwealth Office launched an investigation on 14 October into the leak of a confidential document to the *Financial Times*, in accordance with Cabinet Office guidelines.

Zimbabwe

Sir Nicholas Winterton: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will estimate the number of British war *(a)* veterans and *(b)* widows living in Zimbabwe; and if he will make a statement. [195044]

Mr. Mullin: There are currently 13,000 British nationals resident in Zimbabwe but the records do not specify how many of them are war veterans and widows.

Sir Nicholas Winterton: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what assessment he has made of the *(a)* financial and *(b)* physical wellbeing of British war (i) veterans and (ii) widows living in Zimbabwe; and if he will make a statement. [195045]

Mr. Mullin: We do not make assessments of financial or physical wellbeing of British nationals living overseas, whether war veterans or not. If a British national is in need of consular assistance, we will help as much as we properly can.

Sir Nicholas Winterton: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what plans Her Majesty's Government have to organise the emergency repatriation of British war *(a)* veterans and *(b)* widows living in Zimbabwe who express a wish to return to the UK; and if he will make a statement. [195047]

Mr. Mullin: Although we have emergency evacuation plans for British nationals in the event of certain scenarios, for example civil disorder or natural disaster, we do not have any specific plans to repatriate those British war veterans and widows who express a wish to return to the UK.

If British war veterans or widows express a wish to return to the UK, we will offer all appropriate advice and assistance we can, eg contacting relatives or friends in the UK for financial or other assistance. We may also be able to help with travel documents. We can also provide information on such things as state benefits, health and education services, citizenship and employment, to inform returning UK nationals about the options available to them on return to the UK.

NORTHERN IRELAND

Closed-circuit Television

Mr. Gregory Campbell: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland what assessment he has made of change in criminal activity in Northern Ireland since the introduction of CCTV in a number of urban centres. [194786]

Mr. Spellar: There are currently 19 publicly funded town centre CCTV systems installed across Northern Ireland for the purposes of tackling crime and antisocial behaviour.

The former Police Authority for Northern Ireland who handled the allocation of funding for most of the town centre schemes in Northern Ireland, required each individual scheme to arrange an evaluation of their performance in the two years after the CCTV system became operational. All evaluations received to date indicate that in the areas where CCTV was in operation, crime was reduced or, the rate of increase was slower than other areas and the level of detection of crime increased. In some areas the level of reported crime increased as the cameras witnessed crimes not normally reported, thought this was usually combined with an increase in detection.

It is also important to point out that levels of recorded crime have fallen across Northern Ireland over the past two years. This is due to a number of factors, including improved police performance. However, I have little doubt that CCTV has also played a part in this reduction.

Explorers Programme

Mr. Lidington: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland what criteria he has used to assess the value for money of the Department of Enterprise, Trade and Investment's Explorers Programme; what assessment he has made of that programme's performance; and if he will make a statement. [195543]

Mr. Spellar: The Explorers Programme was externally assessed by KPMG in December 2001. This assessment confirmed that the programme offered value for money and made a positive contribution to the Northern Ireland economy.

A wide range of criteria were used to assess the achievement of both tangible outputs reflected in growth in exports by participating companies and intangible outputs such as addressing psychological barriers to exporting.

The programme continues to be assessed internally using the broad portfolio of measures identified and applied by KPMG and is currently meeting its targets and objectives.

The programme contributes to addressing commitments and targets contained in the Programme for Government published by the former Northern Ireland Executive, which are in turn reflected in the objectives of the Invest NI Corporate Plan 2002–05.

Health Service

Rev. Martin Smyth: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland how much of the money raised by the introduction of water charges is planned to be spent on the Health Service. [195218]

Mr. Spellar: The self-financing arrangements for water and sewerage services to be introduced from 2006–07, or as soon as practicable thereafter, will require all customers, domestic and non-domestic, to contribute directly towards the cost of the services they receive. The charges will be used solely for the purposes of water and sewerage services. The introduction of self-financing arrangements will therefore free resources within the Northern Ireland Departmental expenditure limit for allocation to other public spending priorities, as determined within the annual public expenditure planning process.

Library Board Suspensions

Mrs. Iris Robinson: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland if he will make a statement on the recent suspension of officials from the *(a)* Belfast education and library board and *(b)* South Eastern education and library board following the discovery of budget deficits. [195915]

Mr. Gardiner: I have been informed by the Belfast education and library board that both its chief executive and its deputy chief finance officer are currently under precautionary suspension. I understand that the South Eastern board has suspended its chief finance officer, again as a precautionary measure.

As these suspensions are precautionary measures, it would be inappropriate for me to comment further on the specifics of each case.

Prisons

Mr. Lidington: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland whether slopping-out is still required in any prisons in Northern Ireland. [195541]

Mr. Pearson: Generally, daily slopping-out of cells is no longer required in any prisons in Northern Ireland. Maghaberry has in-cell sanitation and both Hydebank Wood and Magilligan operate an electronic unlock to facilitate access to toilets. Both of the latter establishments do provide plastic chamber pots, if requested, but these are for emergencies only and are seldom asked for or used.

Mr. Lidington: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland what the *(a)* baseline certified normal accommodation, *(b)* in-use certified normal accommodation, *(c)* operational capacity, *(d)* useable operational capacity and *(e)* current population is of each prison and young offenders institution in Northern Ireland; and if he will make a statement. [195542]

Mr. Pearson: The information is as follows:

	Cells	*Inmates*
(a) Baseline certified normal accommodation	1449	—
(b) In-use certified normal accommodation	1283	—
(c) Operational capacity	1303	—
(d) Useable operational capacity	1303	—
(e) Current population:		
HMP Maghaberry Prison	—	723
HMP Magilligan Prison	—	348
Hydebank Wood Young Offenders Centre	—	263

Note:

The number of cells at *(a)* and *(b)* exclude Healthcare Centres and Special Supervision Units. Due to insufficient staff resources, 146 cells are currently out of use, including 58 in Mourne House, Maghaberry, which is being held as contingency accommodation. The figures shown at *(e)* include prisoners on temporary release

Schools (Maintenance Work)

Mr. Lidington: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland what the backlog was of *(a)* high priority and *(b)* other maintenance work in the schools estate in Northern Ireland at (i) 31 March 2001, (ii) 31 March 2002, (iii) 31 March 2003, (iv) 31 March 2004; what the backlog is now; and if he will make a statement. [195436]

Mr. Gardiner: The information is as follows.

(a) Estimates of maintenance work are identified through ongoing condition surveys of the schools' estate. High priority maintenance is defined as work required on buildings in either a poor or very poor condition. The estimated cost of addressing the high priority maintenance backlog in the school estate at the dates requested is as follows:

Backlog at 31 March	*£000*
(i) 2001	[1]139,400
(ii) 2002	131,980
(iii) 2003	126,200
(iv) 2004	123,800
(v) Estimated figures at 31 October 2004	125,704

[1] The first set of condition surveys was not fully completed by 31 March 2001. The total estimate for 2001 is based on an estimate of £114.4 million as calculated at the time plus £25 million subsequently identified once the surveys were completed.

(b) Other maintenance—no information is currently held on the estimated costs of "other maintenance".

Over the period April 2001 to March 2004 some £41.5 million was spent on addressing high priority maintenance work.

Temporary Classrooms

Mr. Lidington: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland how many temporary classrooms there are in schools in Northern Ireland; how many there were at the end of each financial year since 2000–01; and if he will make a statement. [195435]

Mr. Gardiner: The Department of Education has recently carried out a survey to ascertain the number of temporary classrooms currently in use. The outcome of the survey indicated that at 31 March 2004 there were 2,964 temporary classrooms in the school's estate.

Similar surveys were not undertaken in previous years so it is not possible to provide comparative figures for those years. The number of temporary classrooms in use changes in line with the resources available and schools' needs. Over the three year period from April 2001 to March 2004 a total of 369 temporary classrooms were removed from the schools' estate, and 69 classrooms were added. There are plans to remove 165 temporary classrooms in 2004–05 and 746 in subsequent years based on investment already planned for the schools' estate.

Tsar Appointments

Mr. Goodman: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland how many tsars have been appointed with responsibilities which cover part of the work of his Department; and if he will make a statement. [191924]

Mr. Spellar: None.

TREASURY

Equity Release Schemes

Lynne Jones: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer pursuant to the answer of 28 October 2004, *Official Report*, column 1381W, on equity release schemes, what plans he has to change the inheritance tax rules which impact on equity release schemes. [195726]

John Healey: We have no such plans.

Income Tax (Pensioners)

Mrs. Spelman: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer how many pensioners paid *(a)* no income tax, *(b)* 10 per cent. income tax, *(c)* basic rate income tax and *(d)* higher rate income tax, in England, in (i) 1997 and (ii) the latest year for which figures are available. [194688]

Dawn Primarolo: I refer to the answer I gave to the hon. Member for Havant (Mr. Willetts) on 2 July 2002, *Official Report*, column 288W.

The numbers of pensioner taxpayers over state retirement age in the UK for the year 2001–02 are given in the table.

2001–02	*Number (Thousand)*
(a) No tax[1]	6,070
(b) Starting rate tax	1,000
Savers rate	550
(c) Basic rate	3,020
(d) Higher rate	210

[1] *Source:*
ONS mid-year population estimates and GAD population projections

The estimates are based upon the Survey of Personal Incomes.

Working Tax Credit

Mr. Denham: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what estimate he has made of the number of cases in which errors in the calculation of working tax credit were caused by mistakes by staff in the last period for which figures are available. [195917]

John Healey: I refer my right hon. Friend to the reply my right hon. Friend the Paymaster General gave to the hon. Member for North Norfolk (Norman Lamb) on 22 March 2004, *Official Report*, column 666W.

WORK AND PENSIONS

70-plus Payment

Mr. Webb: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions if he will estimate how many people will need to make a claim for the one-off 70-plus Payment; how many claims have been received; and whether there is a deadline before which a claim needs to be submitted to ensure payment before 25 December. [194696]

Malcolm Wicks: It is impossible to estimate with confidence how many people will have to claim the one-off 70-plus payment but we think very few indeed of the approximate 6.4 million pensioners who are entitled will have to claim. One person has claimed so far but this pensioner would have been paid automatically. The deadline for claiming is 30 March 2005. Any who claim will be paid as soon as possible.

Mrs. Iris Robinson: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions what the cost was in 2003–04 of benefits payable because the beneficiary had a medical condition or disability; and how much of that sum constituted payments for which the beneficiary qualified because of chronic pain. [194983]

Maria Eagle: In 2003–04, total Disability Living Allowance and Attendance Allowance payments amounted to some £11 billion and of this sum an estimated £4.1 billion was paid to people for whom their recorded main disabling condition was one usually associated with chronic pain.

Benefit Payments (Pensioners)

Mr. Webb: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions if he will estimate the value of expenditure *(a)* in cash terms, *(b)* at current prices and *(c)* as a share of gross domestic product on (i) retirement pensions, (ii) winter fuel payments, (iii) means-tested benefits for pensioners, (iv) all other benefits for pensioners and (v) free television licences in each year from 1992–93 to the end of the public expenditure planning period. [193664]

Malcolm Wicks: The information is in the following tables.

Table 1: Retirement pension

	Nominal terms (£ million)	Real terms 2004–05 prices (£ million)	Share of GDP (percentage)
1992–93	27,955	37,648	4.54
1993–94	29,559	38,775	4.53
1994–95	30,191	39,036	4.38
1995–96	31,235	39,249	4.29
1996–97	33,045	40,176	4.27
1997–98	34,393	40,770	4.18
1998–99	36,169	41,673	4.16
1999–2000	38,092	42,953	4.14
2000–01	38,868	43,325	4.04
2001–02	42,041	45,698	4.19
2002–03	44,519	46,816	4.21
2003–04	46,609	47,684	4.17
2004–05	48,824	48,824	4.15
2005–06	51,426	50,162	4.14
2006–07	54,153	51,442	4.14
2007–08	57,425	53,117	4.19

Table 2: Winter fuel payment

	Nominal terms (£ million)	Real terms 2004–05 prices (£ million)	Share of GDP (percentage)
1992–93	—	—	—
1993–94	—	—	—
1994–95	—	—	—
1995–96	—	—	—
1996–97	—	—	—
1997–98	191	226	0.02
1998–99	194	224	0.02
1999–2000	759	856	0.08
2000–01	1,749	1,950	0.18
2001–02	1,681	1,827	0.17
2002–03	1,700	1,788	0.16
2003–04	1,935	1,980	0.17
2004–05	1,957	1,957	0.17
2005–06	1,986	1,937	0.16
2006–07	1,352	1,284	0.10
2007–08	1,387	1,283	0.10

Table 3: Income-related benefits

	Nominal terms (£ million)	Real terms 2004–05 prices (£ million)	Share of GDP (percentage)
1992–93	7,221	9,725	1.17
1993–94	8,026	10,528	1.23
1994–95	8,302	10,734	1.20
1995–96	8,449	10,617	1.16
1996–97	8,551	10,396	1.11
1997–98	8,581	10,172	1.04
1998–99	8,533	9,832	0.98
1999–2000	8,820	9,945	0.96
2000–01	9,375	10,450	0.97
2001–02	10,121	11,001	1.01
2002–03	10,517	11,059	0.99
2003–04	11,076	11,332	0.99
2004–05	12,552	12,552	1.07
2005–06	13,388	13,059	1.08
2006–07	14,475	13,750	1.11
2007–08	15,580	14,411	1.14

Table 4: Over-75 TV licences

	Nominal terms (£ million)	Real terms 2004–05 prices (£ million)	Share of GDP (percentage)
1992–93	—	—	—
1993–94	—	—	—
1994–95	—	—	—
1995–96	—	—	—
1996–97	—	—	—
1997–98	—	—	—
1998–99	—	—	—
1999–2000	—	—	—
2000–01	306	341	0.03
2001–02	365	397	0.04
2002–03	385	405	0.04
2003–04	397	406	0.04
2004–05	422	422	0.04
2005–06	444	433	0.04
2006–07	467	443	0.04
2007–08	467	455	0.04

Table 5: Other benefits for pensioners

	Nominal terms (£ million)	Real terms 2004–05 prices (£ million)	Share of GDP (percentage)
1992–93	210	283	0.03
1993–94	226	296	0.03
1994–95	231	298	0.03
1995–96	235	296	0.03
1996–97	233	284	0.03
1997–98	260	309	0.03
1998–99	269	310	0.03
1999–2-00	263	296	0.03
2000–01	282	314	0.03
2001–02	286	311	0.03
2002–03	283	297	0.03
2003–04	292	299	0.03
2004–05	798	798	0.07
2005–06	296	288	0.02
2006–07	298	283	0.02
2007–08	302	279	0.02

Notes:

1. Figures are consistent with Spending Review 2004.
2. Gross Domestic Product (GDP) as at 30 June 2004.
3. All expenditure figures are rounded to the nearest million.
4. Table 1—contributory and non-contributory retirement pension or equivalent benefit paid to those over state pension age.
5. Table 2—includes over-80s payment from 2000–01–2005–06.
6. Table 3—includes income support over 60/minimum income guarantee/pension credit and housing benefit and community charge/council tax benefit.
7. Table 5—includes contributory and non-contributory Christmas bonus, severe disablement allowance, Over-70 payment (2004–05 only) and pensions compensation board.

Source:

All tables: Benefit Expenditure Tables 1 and 2, published on the internet at http://www.dwp.gov.uk/asd/asd4/expenditure.asp

Benefit Payments

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions what percentage of people in the United Kingdom are claiming *(a)* incapacity benefit, *(b)* the children's tax credit, *(c)* bereavement benefit, *(d)* attendance allowance, *(e)* council tax credit, (*f*) invalid care allowance, (*g*) housing benefit and (*h*) disability living allowance. [191083]

Maria Eagle: The available information is in the table.

Percentage of the population receiving benefits

	Percentage of GB population	*Percentage of relevant population*	*Relevant age group*
Incapacity Benefit[1]	5	7	16 and over
Bereavement Benefits[1]	0.08	0.37	Bereavement Allowance-45 to State Pension Age Widowed Parent's Allowance-16 and over
Attendance Allowance[1]	2.4	15	65 and over
Council Tax Benefit[2]	9.7	12.4	16 and over
Carers Allowance[3]	0.7	0.9	16 and over
Housing Benefit[4]	7.8	9.7	16 and over
Disability Living Allowance[1]	4.5	4.5	All[6]

Notes:

1. Information is not available at UK level and can be provided only at GB level.
2. No information about the percentage of people claiming the child tax credit is yet available. As at July 2004, about 4.37 million in-work families in the United Kingdom were receiving the child tax credit.
3. Council tax benefit totals exclude any Second Adult Rebate cases.
4. Housing benefit figures exclude any Extended Payment cases.
5. Incapacity benefit totals include credit-only cases.
6. People up to age 65 can claim disability living allowance(DLA), although no new claims are allowed once a person reaches the age of 65. People who reach 65 can continue receiving DLA if it is already in payment.
7. Column "Percentage of relevant population," refers to those in receipt of benefit within the age group stated in the third column.

Sources:

1. IAD Information Centre, 5 per cent. sample.
2. Council Tax Benefit Management Information System, Annual 1 per cent. sample, taken in May 2003.
3. IAD information Centre, 100 per cent. sample.
4. Housing Benefit Management Information System, Annual 1 per cent. sample, taken in May 2003[2]
5. Population data sources: Office for National Statistics (ONS) and General Register Office, Scotland (GROS) using the mid 2003 population estimates.

Child Support Agency

Mr. Webb: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions pursuant to the oral evidence of the right hon. Member for Oxford East (Mr. Smith) of 11 February to the Work and Pensions Select Committee, on the Child Support Agency reforms, when the recovery programme to enable old CSA cases to be transferred to the new system began; how many cases have so far been transferred; how many cases are still to be transferred; what upgrades to the telephony and computer system have been made; and if he will make a statement. [193719]

Mr. Pond: The administration of the Child Support Agency is a matter for the Chief Executive, Mr. Doug Smith. He will write to the hon. Member with the information requested.

Letter from Doug Smith to Mr. Steve Webb dated 4 November 2004:

In reply to your recent Parliamentary Question about the Child Support Agency the Secretary of State promised a substantive reply from the Chief Executive.

You asked the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions, pursuant to the Right honourable Member for Oxford East's oral statement of 11th February to the Work and Pensions Select Committee, on the Child Support Agency reforms, when the recovery programme to enable old CSA cases to be transferred to the new system began; how many cases have so far been transferred; how many cases are still to be transferred; what upgrades to the telephony and computer system have been made; and if he will make a statement.

EDS commenced their remediation work on their computer system last November following an external review commissioned by them. Its intention is to remove defects within that system. They will then provide the software necessary to migrate existing cases to their new system. Meanwhile, the only cases moving from the existing IT system to the new system are those linked in some way to a new application. At the end of 30 June 2004 around 409,000 cases had been migrated. At the same date around 893,000 cases remained on the 'old system'.

Since November EDS have made the following upgrades to their computer and telephony service:

> Four CS2 computer system upgrades in January, March, May and July. These upgrades addressed system defects, principally the rectification of issues with stuck cases. They also delivered a number of functional and performance improvements in the areas of system throughput, system stability and response times.
>
> Two telephony system upgrades in January and March which addressed synchronisation problems between the CS2 system and the telephony system, leading to service improvements in the number of calls answered, and improved system stability.
>
> Three Management Information System releases delivering improvements in the range and quality of operational, management and statutory reports.

Mr. Kidney: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions what assistance the Child Support Agency is able to give applicants for child support in investigating the financial circumstances of the parent responsible for paying child support. [193837]

Mr. Pond: The administration of the Child Support Agency is a matter for the Chief Executive, Mr. Doug Smith. He will write to my hon. Friend with the information requested.

Letter from Doug Smith to Mr. David Kidney dated 4 November 2004:

In reply to your recent Parliamentary Question about the Child Support Agency the Secretary of State promised a substantive reply from the Chief Executive.

You asked the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions, what assistance the Child Support Agency is able to give applicants for child support in investigating the financial circumstances of the parent responsible for paying child support.

The Child Support Agency does not directly assist applicants to investigate the financial circumstances of the parent responsible for paying child support. If the applicant has concerns regarding the circumstances of a non-resident parent in receipt of benefit, it will normally refer the case to Jobcentre Plus to investigate. If the non-resident parent is an employee the Agency can verify the financial circumstances through the employer or through liaison with the Inland Revenue. If the non-resident parent is self employed then liaison with the Inland Revenue can also be used or we can seek to inspect the relevant business records.

Since January 2001 it has been a criminal offence, for anyone involved in an application for child support, to provide false information[1].

Mr. Frank Field: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions for how many children, broken down by age, Child Support Agency payments have been calculated in each year since the Agency's inception. [193907]

Mr. Pond: The administration of the Child Support Agency is a matter for the Chief Executive, Mr. Doug Smith. He will write to my right hon. Friend with the information requested.

Letter from Doug Smith to Mr Frank Field dated 4 November 2004:

In reply to your recent Parliamentary Question about the Child Support Agency the Secretary of State promised a substantive reply from the Chief Executive.

You asked the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions, for how many children broken down by age Child Support Agency payments have been calculated in each year since the Agency's inception.

I am not able to provide the information you seek in this format. I can however indicate the number of qualifying children linked to the Agency's caseload in each year.

Period (As at March)	*Number*
New System:	
2003	12,900
2004	328,500
Old System:	
1999	1,273,900
2000	1,420,500
2001	1,459,300
2002	1,488,500
2003	1,373,700
2004	1,064,100

Mr. Frank Field: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions how many parents with care applied for Child Support Agency (CSA) maintenance after 1 March 2003 and have been prevented from applying on the new scheme because the absent parent is judged by the CSA as having to pay maintenance for children from a previous partner under the old scheme. [194275]

Mr. Pond: The administration of the Child Support Agency is a matter for the Chief Executive, Mr. Doug Smith. He will write to my right hon. Friend with the information requested.

Letter from Doug Smith to Mr. Frank Field, dated 4 November 2004:

In reply to your recent Parliamentary Question about the Child Support Agency the Secretary of State promised a substantive reply from the Chief Executive.

You asked the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions, how many parents with care applied for Child Support Agency (CSA) maintenance after 1st March 2003 and have been prevented from applying on the new scheme because the absent parent is judged by the CSA as having to pay maintenance for children from a previous partner under the old scheme.

No parents with care have been prevented from applying on the new scheme because the non-resident parent is judged by the CSA as having to pay maintenance for children from a previous partner under the old scheme.

Mr. Frank Field: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions if he will place in the Library a copy of the EDS contract for the Child Support Agency's new IT system. [194277]

Mr. Pond: The administration of the Child Support Agency is a matter for the Chief Executive, Mr. Doug Smith. He will write to my right hon. Friend with the information requested.

Letter from Mike Isaac to Mr. Frank Field, dated 4 November 2004:

In reply to your recent Parliamentary Question about the Child Support Agency the Secretary of State promised a substantive reply from the Chief Executive. As he is currently on leave I am replying on his behalf.

You asked the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions, if he will place in the Library a copy of the EDS contract for the Child Support Agency's new IT system.

The EDS contract is commercially sensitive and is accordingly regarded as confidential to the parties involved in it. This is in line with Paragraph 13, Part 2 of the Code of Practice on Access to Government Information.

Mr. Frank Field: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions what the *(a)* shortest, *(b)* average and *(c)* longest time taken to process a Child Support Agency case from when the application is made to closure or the payment of maintenance to the parent with care was in the last period for which figures are available. [194278]

Mr. Pond: The administration of the Child Support Agency is a matter for the Chief Executive, Mr. Doug Smith. He will write to my right hon. Friend with the information requested.

Letter from Doug Smith to Mr. Frank Field, dated 4 November 2004:

In reply to your recent Parliamentary Question about the Child Support Agency the Secretary of State promised a substantive reply from the Chief Executive.

You asked the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions, what the *(a)* shortest *(b)* average and *(c)* longest time taken to process a Child Support Agency case from when the application is made to closure or the payment of maintenance to the parent with care was in the last period for which figures are available.

I am unable to provide the information that you have requested because we do not collect or hold it in this way

Mr. Dodds: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions what the total cost of the new computer system for the Child Support Agency is to date. [194627]

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[1] Child Support, Pensions and Social Security Act 2000, Section 13*(b)*, inserted this Section 14 offence into the Child Support Act 1991, on the 31/01/01.

Mr. Pond: The administration of the Child Support Agency is a matter for the Chief Executive, Mr. Doug Smith. He will write to the hon. Member with the information requested.

Letter from Doug Smith to Mr. Nigel Dodds, dated 4 November 2004:

In reply to your recent Parliamentary Question about the Child Support Agency the Secretary of State promised a substantive reply from the Chief Executive.

You asked the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions, what the total cost of the new computer system for the Child Support Agency is to date?

Between 3rd March 2003 and 19th September 2004, EDS were paid £62.08 million. In that period the Agency retained £12.1 million because of performance problems.

Child Support Scheme

Mr. Webb: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions if he will place the latest New Child Support Scheme Progress Report in the Library. [193666]

Mr. Pond: I refer the hon. Member to the written statement from my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State on 28 October 2004, *Official Report*, columns 55–57WS.

Citibank

Chris Ruane: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions (1) whether there is an agreed maximum time that Citibank may take to process *(a)* State Pension payments and *(b)* other benefit payments; on how many occasions the agreed time has been breached; and if he will make a statement; [192016]

(2) how many outstanding *(a)* state pension payments and *(b)* other benefits are awaiting processing by Citibank; [192017]

(3) how long on average Citibank are taking to process *(a)* pension payments and *(b)* other benefits; and what the average length of time taken was in the five years prior to the awarding of the contract for payments to Citibank. [192021]

Mr. Pond: The Department of Work and Pensions has a contract with Post Office Ltd. (POL) for the provision of the Post Office card account at post offices. POL in turn has a contract with Electronic Data Services (EDS) and Citibank for the provision of the banking element to these services. In line with all other major banks, Citibank receive payment data on the second day of an overall three day BACS cycle and have the payment information credited to Post Office card accounts by 9.00 am on day three of the cycle. There have been no occasions identified when Citibank have breached this timescale. The only State Pension payments and other benefits awaiting processing by Citibank are those within the BACS cycle. The three-day BACS timescale for Citibank to process payments has been in operation in the five years prior to the awarding of the contract for the Post Office card account.

We are unable to make any comment on accounts run by Citibank other than the Post Office card account.

Correspondence

Mr. Hunter: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions when the Chief Executive of the Pension Service expects to reply to the letters to him of 18 May and 3 August from the hon. Member for Basingstoke on behalf of his constituent, Mrs. F. Hughes. [193080]

Malcolm Wicks: A reply was sent to the hon. Member on 27 October 2004.

Council Tax Benefit

Mrs. Spelman: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions how many and what percentage of pensioners *(a)* were in receipt of council tax benefit in 1997 and *(b)* are in receipt of council tax benefit. [190616]

Mr. Pond: The information is in the table.

Council tax benefit (CTB) beneficiaries aged 60 and over, Great Britain: May 1997 and 2003

	CTB beneficiaries aged 60 and over (Thousand)	CTB Beneficiaries aged 60 and over as percentage of relevant population
1997	3,229	27.5
2003	2,815	23.2

Notes:

1. Caseload figures are based on a 1 per cent. sample and subject to a degree of sampling variation.
2. Percentages are rounded to one decimal place and caseloads to the nearest thousand.
3. Council tax benefit totals exclude any Second Adult Rebate cases.
4. "Beneficiaries" are all claimants and partners aged 60 or over.
5. No figures on the number of recipients of council tax benefit have been produced since the introduction of pension credit.

Sources:

1. Housing Benefit and Council Tax Benefit Management Information System, Annual 1 per cent. sample, taken in May 1997 and 2003.
2. Office for National Statistics mid year population estimates 1997 and 2003.

Jobcentres (North Wales)

Chris Ruane: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions how many clients attended each Jobcentre not due for closure in North Wales in each of the last 10 years. [196207]

Jane Kennedy: The administration of Jobcentre Plus is a matter for the Chief Executive of Jobcentre Plus, David Anderson. He will write to my hon. Friend.

Letter from David Anderson to Mr. Chris Ruane, dated 4 November 2004:

The Secretary of State has asked me to reply to your question concerning how many clients attended each Jobcentre not due for closure in North Wales in each of the last ten years. This is something that falls within the responsibilities delegated to me as Chief Executive of Jobcentre Plus.

I am unable to state the exact number of callers to each of the Jobcentres staying open covering the last ten years. Information showing the monthly average number of clients registering for Jobseeker's Allowance in each of the last ten years ending in

August is shown in the table attached. Separate records are not available for some of the very small sites, and their figures are included in their parent office within the same chain of management. Each of these customers is expected to attend the Jobcentre every fortnight for an interview about their job search activity and they represent most of the traffic into the offices.

Monthly average number of clients registering for jobseeker's allowance in each of the last 10 years ending in August

	1 September to 31 August				
	1994–95	*1995–96*	*1996–97*	*1997–98*	*1998–99*
Bangor	1,971	1,910	1,968	1,558	1.427
Caemarfon	1,654	1,563	1,617	1,357	1.161
Colwyn Bay	1,522	1.441	1,341	865	884
Flint	449	360	317	235	267
Holyhead and Amlwch	2,081	1,813	1,814	1,439	1,285
Llandudno	1,843	1,845	1.888	1,261	1.154
Llangefni	929	824	874	708	664
Mold	1,685	1,467	1.326	879	750
Porthma dog and Dolgellau Pwlheli	1,186	1.148	965	793	655
Rhyl	3,374	3,256	3,355	1,652	1.339
Shotton	1,248	1,053	1,113	779	787
Wrexham	5,163	4,679	4,435	3,014	2,655

	1 September to 31 August				
	1999–2000	*2000–01*	*2001–02*	*2002–03*	*2003–04*
Bangor	1,211	1,145	1,053	887	787
Caemarf on	1,019	869	836	732	589
Colwyn Bay	828	688	646	783	710
Flint	272	259	227	234	229
Holyhead and Amlwch	1.170	1,024	1,071	889	774
Llandudno	1,019	879	745	419	348
Llangefni	601	580	544	490	502
Mold	701	638	493	480	447
Porthma dog and Dolgellau Pwlheli	559	485	401	331	237
Rhyl	1,198	1,094	994	831	741
Shotton	766	689	677	609	619
Wrexham	2,329	2,120	1,971	1,986	1.571

Work is currently in progress to develop options for Flexible Service Delivery in the locations where offices will close. This work will, of course, be undertaken in partnership with MPs, Assembly Members and other relevant stakeholders to tailor these options to meet the needs of the local community.

I hope this is helpful.

Pension Credit

Mr. Goodman: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions what estimate he has made of how much money available for pension credit has not been claimed because of non-take up by pensioners. [195813]

Malcolm Wicks: The information is not available. The most recent available estimates of the amount of money unclaimed by pensioners entitled to the main income-related benefits relate to the financial year 2001–2002 and cover the Minimum Income Guarantee (which Pension Credit replaced in 2003), Housing Benefit and Council Tax Benefit. These estimates are published in the Department's report: "Income Related Benefits: Estimates of Take-up in 2001–2002", a copy of which is in the Library.

Pensioners

Mrs. Spelman: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions what proportion of pensioners receive an income from their own investments or savings. [195252]

Malcolm Wicks: The latest available information shows that, in 2002–03, 86 per cent. of pensioner units in Great Britain were in receipt of some private income on top of state benefits (92 per cent. of pensioner couples and 82 per cent. of single pensioners.)

66 per cent. of all pensioner units had some private pension (occupational and/or personal pension) income, of which, 61 per cent. of all pensioner units received an occupational pension income and 9 per cent. some income from a personal pension.

72 per cent. of all pensioner units had income from private investments. However, half of all pensioner units receiving investment income receive less than £4 per week, and only a small number of pensioners receive large amounts of income from investments (roughly 5 per cent. have investment income of over £150 per week).

Notes:

1. The FRS, and hence the Pensioners' Incomes Series 2002–03, does not reflect the situation of roughly 280,000 pensioners in care homes.

2. Pensioner units are either:

a. Single pensioners, i.e. people over state pension age; or

b. Pensioner couples i.e. married or cohabiting pensioners where the man is over state pension age.

Source:

Pensioners' Incomes Series 2002–03 based upon data from the Family Resources Survey (FRS).

Jon Cruddas: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions how many households in the London borough of Barking and Dagenham received *(a)* winter fuel payments and *(b)* free television licences in 2003. [194418]

Malcolm Wicks: In winter 2003–04 there were 20,500 households in the London borough of Barking and Dagenham which received the winter fuel payment.

The number of households with at least one resident aged 75 or over in the London borough of Barking and Dagenham is 9,165. Each of these households would therefore be eligible for a free TV licence.

Notes:

1. Number is rounded to the nearest five.

2. Any residence found to have four or more occupants is not included in these figures as it is assumed to be a residential care or nursing home.

3. Local authorities are assigned by matching postcodes against the relevant ONS postcode directory.

Source:

IAD Information Centre, WFP data winter 2003–04 100 per cent. sample.

Jon Cruddas: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions how many *(a)* men and *(b)* women living in the London borough of Barking and Dagenham are in receipt of the state retirement pension; what percentage of the borough's population these figures represent; and how many pensioners living in the borough are in receipt of the additional payments made to pensioners over the age of 80 years. [194419]

Malcolm Wicks: The number of men and women living in the London borough of Barking and Dagenham who were in receipt of state pension as at 31 March 2004 and the percentage of the borough's population these figures represent is in the table:

	Recipients of state pension in the London borough of Barking and Dagenham	*Percentage of the London borough of Barking and Dagenham population*
Men	8,500	10.6
Women	15,600	18.1
All	24,100	14.5

Notes:

1. State pension recipient figures relate to people getting any state pension (basic or additional) or graduated retirement benefit who reside in the London borough of Barking and Dagenham.
2. Population figures are taken from mid-2003.
3. The population data source is the Office for National Statistics.
4. Figures for state pension recipients and age addition are from a 5 per cent. sample and are rounded to the nearest hundred.
5. The additional winter fuel payment figure represents a 100 per cent. sample rounded to the nearest five.
6. Figures for state pension recipients and age addition payments are obtained from a 5 per cent. sample of cases and are therefore subject to a high degree of sampling variation.
7. Local authorities are assigned by matching postcodes against the relevant Office for National Statistics postcode directory.

Source:

1. IAD information centre, 5 per cent. sample for state pension and age addition figures.
2. IAD information centre, 100 per cent. sample for winter fuel payment figure.

As at 31 March 2004, there were 6,800 state pension recipients in the London borough of Barking and Dagenham over the age of 80 in receipt of the age addition to state pension.

In winter 2003–04, the total number of pensioners in the London borough of Barking and Dagenham who received the additional winter fuel payment for those aged 80 or over was 5,965.

Pensions

Lembit Öpik: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions what the percentage increase in the State Pension has been since May 1997; and if he will make a statement. [194714]

Malcolm Wicks: The information requested is in the following table:

	Percentage increase on previous year	*Retail Prices Index percentage*
1997–98	2.1	2.1
1998–99	3.6	3.6
1999–2000	3.2	3.2
2000–01	1.1	1.1
2001–02	7.4	3.3
2002–03	4.1	1.7
2003–04	2.6	1.7
2004–05	2.8	2.8

State Pension is increased each year to ensure that, as a minimum, it retains its value in relation to prices. For the future lifetime of this Parliament we are committed to increasing the basic State Pension by the higher of 2.5 per cent, or the Retail Prices Index. For the years 2001–02 to 2003–04, the basic State Pension only was increased by more than the Retail Prices Index.

Mr. Willetts: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions how many *(a)* self-employed people, *(b)* people earning less than the lower earnings limit, *(c)* unemployed people and *(d)* other non-contributing people did not have second-tier pension arrangements in each year since 2002. [194835]

Malcolm Wicks: We estimate that there are around 7 million people who are not accruing State Second Pension rights nor making private pension provision.

These seven million consist of:

(a) 1.5 million self-employed

(b) 1.2 million employees earning less than the lower earnings limit

(c) 1.1 million unemployed

(d) 3.2 million other non-contributors.

Note:

1. These figures have been estimated using the Family Resources Survey, 2002–03.

Mr. Willetts: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions what his latest estimate is of the number of people who are contracted out of the State Second Pension. [194847]

Malcolm Wicks: At the end of the 2000–01 tax year—the latest year for which information is available—it is estimated that there were around 14.3 million people contracted out of the State Earnings Related Pension Scheme. We expect to be able to publish estimates of the number of people contracted out of the State Second Pension in the 2001–02 and 2002–03 tax years by the end of this year.

John Barrett: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions how many people are in receipt of the state pension in the City of Edinburgh local authority area. [195156]

Malcolm Wicks: As at 31 March 2004, the number of people in receipt of State Pension in the city of Edinburgh Local Authority was 74,000. Of these 26,300 were male and 47,800 were female.

Source:

IAD information Centre, 5 per cent. sample.

Notes:

1. State Pension recipient figures relate to people getting any State Pension (basic or additional) or Graduated Retirement Benefit who reside in the city of Edinburgh Local Authority.

2. Figures are taken from a 5 per cent. sample and are subject to a high degree of sampling variation.

3. Figures are rounded to the nearest hundred and totals may not sum due to rounding.

4. Local Authorities are assigned by matching postcodes against the relevant Office for National Statistics, postcode directory.

Tom Cox: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions how many pensioners living in the UK are in receipt of supplementary benefits. [194157]

Malcolm Wicks: The information requested is not available.

As at May 2003, the latest date for which this information is available, the total number of beneficiaries, aged 60 and over, receiving income-related benefits in Great Britain was 3.28 million. Income-related benefits include income support, housing benefit and council tax benefit and job seekers allowance (income based).

Pension credit replaced income support for people aged 60 and over from 6 October 2003. As at 31 August 2004 there were 2.61 million households, equivalent to 3.17 million individuals, receiving pension credit.

Notes:

1. The figures are based on 1 per cent. and 5 per cent. samples and are therefore subject to a degree of sampling variation.

2. The income-related benefits, figure excludes all overlaps between benefit recipients and refers to those in receipt of at least one of the following benefits: HB/CTB/IS/JSA(IB).

John Barrett: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions what percentage of average earnings the state pension was in each year since 1997. [194149]

Malcolm Wicks: The information as is available is set out in the table.

	Percentage
1997–98	21
1998–99	20
1999–2000	20
2000–01	19
2001–02	20
2002–03	20
2003–04	20

Notes:

1. State pension figures are derived from a five per cent. sample of Department for Work and Pensions administrative data taken at March in each year.

2. Average earnings is represented by the average earnings of all adult full-time employees taken from the Annual Abstract of Statistics 2003 published by the Department for Work and Pensions.

3. State pension is calculated as the maximum rate of basic state pension plus the average amount of additional state pension in payment for recently retired men aged 65 and women aged 60.

4. The figures have been rounded to the nearest percentage point.

Press Officers

Gregory Barker: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions how many press officers the Department has employed in each of the past five years. [196060]

Maria Eagle: The Department for Work and Pensions was formed on 8 June 2001 from parts of the former Department of Social Security, the former Department for Education and Employment and the Employment Service. Information on costs prior to 2001 is not held centrally and could be obtained only at disproportionate cost.

	National press officers	*Regional press officers*
2001–02	21	0
2002–03	16	13
2003–04	20	20

Note:

Staffing figures are whole time equivalents.

SERPS

Mr. Denham: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions pursuant to the answer of 19 October 2004, *Official Report*, column 639W, on SERPS, what rating was applied to the *(a)* basic state pension and *(b)* additional state pension in each of the past 10 years. [195934]

Malcolm Wicks: The information requested is in the table.

Uprating date	*Basic state pension percentage increase on previous year*	*Additional state pension percentage increase on previous year*
April 1995	2.2	2.2
April 1996	3.9	3.9
April 1997	2.1	2.1
April 1998	3.6	3.6
April 1999	3.2	3.2
April 2000	1.1	1.1
April 2001	7.4	3.3
April 2002	4.1	1.7
April 2003	2.6	1.7
April 2004	2.8	2.8

Sure Start

Shona McIsaac: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions how many mothers in Cleethorpes constituency have received Sure Start maternity grants in each year since 1997. [195211]

Mr. Pond: Sure Start maternity Grants were introduced in 2000–01 to replace maternity grants. The change was phased in from 27 March 2000, with Sure

Start maternity grants being available to claimants whose babies were expected, born, adopted or the subject of a parental order on or after 11 June 2000.

Data are not available by Parliamentary Constituency, only by District.

The available information is in the tables.

Awards in South Humberside Social Fund District

	Award type	Number of awards
1997-98	MP	1,596

Awards in area covered by Mercia Operations East Eastern Division Social Fund District

	Award type	Number of awards
1998-99	MP	2,026
1999-00	MP	1,941
2000-01	MP	226
2000-01	SSMG	2,061

Awards in (enla[illegible]ercia Operations East Eastern Division Social Fund District

	Award type	Number of awards
2001/02	SSMG	3,045
2002/03 to Oct	SSMG	2,139

Awards in area covered by (reduced) Mercia Operations East Eastern Division Social Fund District

	Award type	Number of awards
2002-03 Nov	SSMG	275

Awards in area covered by South Humberside Interim District

	Award type	Number of awards
2002-03 from Dec	SSMG	538
2003-04 to May	SSMG	277

Awards in area covered by South Humberside Jobcentre Plus District

	Award type	Number of awards
2003-04 from June	SSMG	1,505

Source:

DWP Social Fund Policy, Budget and Management Information System

Note: Cleethorpes Parliamentary Constituency has formed part of the Grimsby site since before 1997. This site has been involved in a large number of boundary changes since 1997:

1997-98	Cleethorpes Parliamentary Constituency was part of the Grimsby site within South Humberside Social Fund District
Apr 1998	Grimsby site (which includes Cleethorpes) moved into Wash Coast Social Fund District and the new district renamed Mercia Operations East Eastern Division Social Fund District
Apr 2001	Mercia Operations East Eastern Division Social Fund District enlarged by the addition of Scunthorpe site.
Nov 2002	Mercia Operations East Eastern Division Social Fund District reduced by the export of Skegness, Louth and Boston.
Dec 2002	Mercia Operations East Eastern Division Social Fund District further reduced by the export of Kings Lynn, and renamed South Humberside Interim District
Jun 2003	South Humberside Interim District enlarged by the addition of Isle of Axholme and renamed South Humberside Jobcentre Plus District.

The 6 tables above therefore refer to six different areas, so the data in different tables are not comparable.

TV Licence Fees

Tom Cox: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions how many pensioner households in the London borough of Wandsworth are in receipt of a free television licence. [195374]

Malcolm Wicks: The number of households with at least one resident aged 75 or over in the London borough of Wandsworth is 10,370. Each of these households would therefore be eligible for a free TV licence.

Notes:

1. Number is rounded to the nearest five.

2. Any residence found to have four or more occupants is not included in these figures as it is assumed to be a Residential Care or Nursing Home.

3. Local Authorities have been allocated using the relevant ONS postcode directory.

Source:

IAD Information Centre, WFP data winter 2003-2004 100 per cent. sample.

CHURCH COMMISSIONERS

Responsibilities

Mr. Key: To ask the hon. Member for Middlesbrough, representing the Church Commissioners if he will list the responsibilities for which he answers to the House. [195957]

Sir Stuart Bell: The Second Church Estates Commissioner answers in relation to the Church Commissioners' trustee responsibilities, namely the management of their investment portfolio; their funding commitments for clergy pensions, the work of bishops and cathedrals and the support of parish ministry in areas of need; and the administration of the legal framework for pastoral reorganisation and settling the future of redundant churches. These responsibilities are closely interwoven with the full range of the Church of England's activity—its nation-wide ministry and the upkeep of its built heritage—and the Second Commissioner will speak more broadly to those areas when the matter raised by hon. Members requires it.

TRANSPORT

Air Pollution (Heathrow)

Mrs. May: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what assessment his Department has made of the effects on air pollution of widening the M4 around Heathrow. [195098]

Mr. Jamieson: An air quality assessment was made of the effects on air pollution of proposals to widen the M4 between Junctions 3-4b in connection with Heathrow Terminal 5. It was included in the Environmental Statement published in May 1996 with the Draft Highway Orders. The assessment covered a range of pollutants including nitrogen dioxide, fine particles, carbon monoxide and benzene. The air quality assessment was further developed in connection with the Planning Inquiry for Heathrow Terminal 5.

Buses

Mr. Stringer: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what estimate he has made of the proportion of the national bus fleet which is subject to annual random inspections by the Traffic Commissioners. [196092]

Charlotte Atkins: The Vehicle and Operator Services Agency (VOSA) carries out targeted roadworthiness inspections of coaches and buses through spot and fleet checks as part of its work to support the Traffic Commissioners. During 2003-04 some 25,000 vehicles were inspected as a result of these checks representing an annual proportion of approximately 29 per cent. of the national bus and coach fleet.

Mr. Stringer: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport how many buses were inspected by Vehicle and Operator Services Agency officials in each of the last five years; and how many were subject to *(a)* immediate prohibition notices and *(b)* delayed prohibition notices. [196093]

Charlotte Atkins: Data held on the number of public service vehicles (PSVs) inspected by Vehicle and Operator Services Agency (VOSA) includes all buses and coaches licensed to carry nine or more fare paying passengers. Details of roadworthiness inspections carried out on these vehicles are shown in the following table:

	Roadworthiness spot and fleet checks[1]					*Exhaust emissions checks*		
		Prohibition rates at roadworthiness spot checks (Percentage)		*Prohibition rates at fleet roadworthiness Checks (Percentage)*			*Number of prohibitions issued*	
	Number of vehicles examined	*Immediate*	*Delayed*	*Immediate*	*Delayed*	*Number of vehicles examined*	*Immediate*	*Delayed*
2003-04	25,112	7.3	8.0	6.6	7.5	5,402	4	12
2002-03	24,669	6.3	8.2	6.6	7.9	5,447	3	24
2001-02	23,086	6.8	8.7	5.6	7.6	6,733	3	37
2000-01	26,357	6.10	8.4	5.4	6.6	6,919	0	36
1999-2000	28,814	5.9	7.5	4.9	6.0	8,827	2	43

[1] These figures exclude vehicles checked as part of the annual PSV baseline survey. Only one prohibition notice is issued per vehicle although it may list several defects/offences

In addition to roadworthiness items VOSA examiners also check for drivers hours, tachograph and records offences as well as overloading. Serious infringements can result in drivers and/or vehicles being prohibited. Details of prohibitions issued for these infringements during the last five years are shown in the table:

	Number of vehicles examined (including the number weighed)	*Prohibited for drivers hours, tachograph and records*[1]	*Prohibited for overloading*
2003-04	13,450	364	14
2002-03	13,265	226	11
2001-02	10,768	96	8
2000-01	15,003	—	7
1999-2000	17,161	—	5

[1] Prohibitions for drivers hours offences for UK vehicles were only introduced in 2001-02

Mr. Stringer: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport how many Vehicle and Operator Services Agency officials in each of the English regions are responsible for *(a)* checking the safety of bus vehicles and *(b)* surveying the reliability and punctuality of bus services. [196094]

Charlotte Atkins: The Vehicle and Operator Services Agency (VOSA) deploys some 1,100 frontline staff responsible among other duties for checking the safety of public service vehicles (PSVs) throughout England, Scotland and Wales.

Nine Bus Compliance Officers (BCOs) responsible for surveying the reliability and punctuality of bus services are deployed in the five English regions of the Traffic Area Network. They are distributed on the following basis:

Traffic area	*Number of BCOs*
North Eastern/North Western	3
West Midlands	1
Western	2
South Eastern and Metropolitan	2
Eastern	1

Departmental Estate

Mr. Andrew Turner: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport if he will list the properties occupied by *(a)* his Department and *(b)* its agencies in (i) 1997 and (ii) 2004; and what the (A) area and (B) annual rental value (1) in aggregate and (2) in each case was in each year. [196072]

Charlotte Atkins: The Department for Transport was formed in May 2002 and as a result the information provided relates to the period from then. As a result information is available only for 2003–04.

The information requested relating to the year 2003–04 covers over a thousand properties and has been placed in the Libraries of the House. Some information requested relating to smaller properties is not kept on record centrally, but by the Agency in question. To obtain this information would result in a disproportionate cost.

Press Officers

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport how many press officers the Department has employed in each of the past five years. [195273]

Charlotte Atkins *[holding answer 1 November 2004]*: I refer the hon. Member to the answer given by my hon. Friend the then Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State (Mr. McNulty) to the hon. Member for Yeovil (Mr. Laws) on 25 March 2004 *Official Report*, columns 983–84W.

ITC Consultants

Mr. Jenkins: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport how much the Department spent on outside information technology and communication specialist consultants and engineers in the 2003–04 financial year. [191910]

Charlotte Atkins: The value of orders raised in 2003/04 for information technology and communications specialist consultants and engineers by the Department for Transport was £5,541,670.25.

Ministers' Private Offices

Mr. Prisk: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what the running costs of Ministers' private offices in his Department have been in each year since 1997. [191379]

Charlotte Atkins: I refer the hon. Member to the answer my hon. Friend the Member for Harrow, East (Mr. McNulty) gave to the hon. Member for Arundel and South Downs (Mr. Flight) on 15 July 2003, *Official Report*, column 170W. The final outturn for the running costs of Ministers' private offices in 2003–04 is £1.4 million.

Motor Traders

Mr. Goodman: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what security measures have been taken to protect the public from terrorist use of vehicles passed between motor traders. [195777]

Charlotte Atkins *[holding answer 3 November 2004]*: Motor traders are not currently required to be recorded as vehicle keepers on the DVLA records. They generally sell vehicles on quickly and do not want to devalue them by adding additional keepers to the record.

One of the recommendations of the Home Office-led Vehicle Crime Reduction Action Team (VCRAT) report was that the movement of vehicles between motor traders, as well as in and out of the trade, should be recorded. An electronic system for this purpose will be introduced by DVLA in 2005. This will ensure that DVLA will have details of where such vehicles are at any time, and which traders are involved. The new system will make vehicles in the hands of the motor trade less attractive to criminals and terrorists.

Sustainable Energy (CHP Provisions) Order

Mr. Stunell: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what measures his Department *(a)* has undertaken and *(b)* plans to undertake to comply with the Sustainable Energy (CHP Provisions) Order 2003. [194429]

Charlotte Atkins: The only combined heat and power plant on the DfT estate is operated by the DVLA at their Morriston site in Swansea and has been operational since June. It generates about 50 per cent. of the electricity needed at the large site accommodating some 4,500 staff and as a consequence is likely to make a major contribution to the Department achieving the framework target of obtaining 15 per cent. of electricity form CHP by 2010. DVLA was awarded the Energy Management/Environmental Award from the Energy Industries Council Utilities Awards 2004 for the organisation that has invested in energy management initiatives to take into account their impact on the environment.

Elsewhere in the Department we will be looking to OGC buying solutions to assist in sourcing and procuring energy from CHP generators in the energy market using their expertise and significant buying power.

Temporary Staff

Mr. Randall: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport how many agency temporary staff have been working for the Department or its predecessors in each of the last five years, excluding those working for agencies for which no data is kept centrally. [196057]

Charlotte Atkins: The Department for Transport was formed on 29 May 2002. Due to machinery of Government changes, information on temporary agency staff who have worked or who are currently working for DfT (C) is only available from December 2002, broken down as follows:

	Number
December 2002	35
January 2003 to December 2003	93
January 2004 to date	80

Train Fares

Mr. Laxton: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport (1) if he will investigate the level of unregulated train fares; and what measures are in place to control such fares; [195035]

(2) by how much *(a)* regulated and *(b)* unregulated rail fares have changed in each year since 1997, (i) in total and (ii) broken down by train operating company. [195036]

Mr. McNulty: Unregulated fares are a commercial matter for the train operating companies.

The average price changes in regulated and unregulated fares since 1995 are set out in the Rail Fares Index in the Strategic Rail Authority's Document "National Rail Trends Yearbook 2003–04". Copies of this publication are available in the House Library. Information on fare changes by individual train operating companies is not available.

DEPUTY PRIME MINISTER

Commercial Property Leases (Consultation)

Matthew Green: To ask the Deputy Prime Minister how many responses the Government received to the recent Office of the Deputy Prime Minister consultation paper, "Commercial Property Leases: Options for Deterring or Outlawing the Use of Upward Only Rent Review Clauses"; and if he will break down the number of responses by *(a)* representative organisations, *(b)* landlords and *(c)* property occupiers. [195433]

Keith Hill: The Office of the Deputy Prime Minister has received 87 responses to its consultation on options for deterring or outlawing the use of upward only rent review clauses in commercial property leases. We are currently analysing the responses and a breakdown of respondents by category will be available when the results of consultation are published next year.

Departmental Publications (Accessibility)

Mr. Goodman: To ask the Deputy Prime Minister how many and what proportion of publications issued by his Department are available in *(a)* Braille, *(b)* autoprint, *(c)* large print and *(d)* easy read format. [194294]

Phil Hope: The Office of the Deputy Prime Minister complies with the requirements of the Disability Discrimination Act, 1995. All current publications in *(a)* Braille, *(b)* print-on-demand, *(c)* large print and *(d)* easy read formats are available on request and contracts are in place to ensure that such requests can be satisfied within a short time period.

Within the last 12 months the following specific requests have been made:

3,422 copies in Braille;
seven copies in print-on-demand;
30,032 copies in large print
one audio and
0 copies in easy read formats.

Employment (Greater London)

Tom Cox: To ask the Deputy Prime Minister what recent discussions he has had on the use of European structural funds to create employment in the Greater London area. [195375]

Phil Hope: My right hon. Friend the Deputy Prime Minister has held no recent discussions on the use of European structural funds in London, but Ministers receive regular reports on progress with the delivery of European structural funds programmes in London and elsewhere.

The Office of the Deputy Prime Minister is just over midway through the 2000–06 Objective 2, Objective 3 and Urban II structural funds programmes in London. These provide over £600 million to support economic development and tackle barriers to labour market participation. Targets over the lifetime of the three programmes include the creation of over 23,000 jobs.

Land Reclassification

Mr. Edward Davey: To ask the Deputy Prime Minister how many hectares of land were reclassified from *(a)* agricultural and *(b)* industrial-commercial use to land for residential use in each of the last five years for which figures are available. [195134]

Keith Hill: Proportions of land changing to residential use by previous use in England between 1999 and 2003 are tabled as follows.

Agriculture accounted for 40 per cent. of land changing to residential use in 1999, but this has decreased to 30 per cent. in 2003. The proportion of land changing to residential use from industrial and commercial land has remained at about 12 per cent. throughout the period. A further 29 per cent. of land changing to residential use in 2003 was from vacant and derelict land and much of this will at one time have been industrial and commercial land.

Estimates for absolute amounts changing in any one year are not reliable. Over the last few years the average amount of land changing to residential has been about 5,500 to 6,000 hectares a year.

Previous use of land changing to residential use in England: 1999–03[1, 2]

Previous uses	*1999*[3]	*2000*	*2001*	*2002*	*2003*[4]
Agriculture	40	39	32	30	30
Other not previously-developed	14	14	14	13	12
All not previously-developed land	54	53	46	43	42
Industry and commerce	12	10	12	13	12
Vacant and derelict land	20	21	24	25	29
Other previously-developed land	14	16	18	20	17

Previous use of land changing to residential use in England: 1999–03[1, 2]

Previous uses	*1999*[3]	*2000*	*2001*	*2002*	*2003*[4]
All previously-developed land	46	47	54	57	58
All land changing to residential use	100	100	100	100	100

[1] Information relates to map changes recorded by Ordnance Survey as at the end of 2003, where the year of change has been estimated by surveyors from available information.

[2] Percentages for the most recent years may have a margin of error of 2 per cent. as new data are added.

[3] 1999 estimates subject to some uncertainty due to incomplete data.

[4] Provisional.

Park and Ride Schemes

Mr. David Atkinson: To ask the Deputy Prime Minister what his Department's latest guidance to local authorities is on the development of park and ride schemes. [195709]

Keith Hill: Policy on park and ride schemes is set out in Planning Policy Guidance note (PPG) 13 (2001) on Transport. The key elements are that schemes need to be developed as an integral part of the planning and transport strategy for the area, schemes need to be subject to robust assessment, including the consideration of alternative sites, the impact on local amenities and travel. PPG 13 Annex E amends PPG 2 on park and ride schemes in the green belt.

Phone Masts

Mrs. Spelman: To ask the Deputy Prime Minister in what circumstances it is acceptable for a mobile communications mast to be operated without a valid ICNIRP certificate being available for public inspection. [194692]

Keith Hill: The Stewart Group recommended that, as a precautionary approach, the ICNIRP guidelines for public exposure be adopted for use in the UK rather than the NRPB guidelines (paragraph 1.27 of the report) but were not convinced of the need to incorporate the ICNIRP guidelines in statutes. (1.28)

The Government agreed that in line with the recommended precautionary approach, that the emissions from mobile phones and base stations should meet the ICNIRP guidelines for public exposure as expressed in the EU Council Recommendation of 12 July 1999 on the limitation of exposure of the general public to electromagnetic fields (0 Hz to 300GHz). The Government further agreed that the guidelines did not need to be incorporated into statutes.

Planning Policy Guidance Note 8 on Telecommunications states that

> "All new mobile phone base stations are expected meet the ICNIRP guidelines. However, all applicants should include with their applications, a statement that self-certifies to the effect that the mobile phone base stations when operational will meet the guidelines. In line with the Group's recommendations the mobile network operator should also provide to the local authority a statement for each site indicating its location, the height of the antenna, the frequency and modulation characteristics and details of power output. Where a mobile phone base station is added to an existing mast or site, the operator should confirm that the cumulative exposure will not exceed the ICNIRP guidelines."

John Cryer: To ask the Deputy Prime Minister what powers are available to local authorities to prevent the erection of mobile telecommunications masts when permission has been refused. [194729]

Keith Hill: Development that has gone ahead without the required permission can be considered by the local planning authority to be a breach of planning control and the local planning authority can take remedial enforcement action. They have a wide range of discretionary powers. The local planning authority must decide the most appropriate action in each case in the light of local circumstances.

Under powers in the 1990 Town and Country Planning Act, as amended by the 1991 Planning and Compensation Act, local-planning authorities have:

> the power to serve a "planning contravention notice". This may be used where it appears that there may have been a breach of planning control and the local planning authority require information about the activities on the land or to find out more about the nature of the recipient's interest in the land.
>
> the power to issue an 'enforcement notice', requiring steps to be taken to remedy the breach within a given period. There is a right of appeal to the Secretary of State against an enforcement notice. If the notice is upheld, failure to comply is an offence with a maximum penalty on conviction of £20,000.
>
> the power to serve a "stop notice". This has the effect of immediately stopping any activity which contravenes planning control guidelines and where there are special reasons which justify doing this. If contravened the resulting offence can be prosecuted in the magistrates court with a maximum penalty on conviction of £20,000.
>
> the power to serve a "breach of condition notice" where there is a failure to comply with any condition or limitation imposed on a grant of planning permission.
>
> the ability to seek an "injunction" in the High Court or county court to restrain any
>
> actual or expected breach of planning control.
>
> powers of entry on to land for authorised officers of the local planning authority for them to obtain information required for enforcement purposes.

Mr. Spring: To ask the Deputy Prime Minister what discussions about mast sharing he has held with *(a)* telecommunication companies and *(b)* local authorities as an alternative to the development of new mast sites. [194940]

Keith Hill: Ministers in the Office of the Deputy Prime Minister meet regularly with the Mobile Operators Association to discuss a range of issues including the operators' progress in meeting their 10 commitments which includes a commitment on site sharing. The Association also sends statistics relating to site sharing to the Planning Minister every quarter. Ministers have not discussed this issue with representatives of local planning authorities.

PPG8

Mrs. Spelman: To ask the Deputy Prime Minister what plans his Department has to revise Planning Policy Guidance Note 8. [195253]

Keith Hill: The Office of the Deputy Prime Minister has no plans to change Planning Policy Guidance Note 8 (revised) at present.

Regeneration Funding

Mr. Chaytor: To ask the Deputy Prime Minister what plans he has to incorporate the information contained in the 2004 Index of Multiple Deprivation into future allocations of regeneration funding; and if he will make a statement. [193689]

Phil Hope: It will be up to individual Government Departments how to use the revised Indices of Deprivation 2004 (ID04) to allocate their funds. For funds distributed by the Office of the Deputy Prime Minister, such as the Neighbourhood Renewal Fund (NRF), no decision has yet been taken on how ID04 might be used to help determine future allocations.

Spending Review 2004 (SR04) made available just over £1 billion of new NRF resources (£525 million in 2006–07 and £525 million for 2007–08). No decisions have yet been made on how these resources are to be allocated. Ministers are considering options for allocating the NRF for these years in the light of all available evidence, including the ID04. A decision on the final allocations is expected in the new year.

The allocation of NRF resources has already been determined for 2004–05 and 2005–06. For these years the resources will continue to go to the 88 existing NRF areas.

Housing Development

Mrs. Spelman: To ask the Deputy Prime Minister what interim guidance his Department will give to district local authorities on housing numbers up to 2016 if county structure plans are withdrawn before regional spatial strategies are adopted; and if he will make a statement. [195257]

Keith Hill: The Office of the Deputy Prime Minister issued policy guidance in September, entitled "Planning Policy Statement 12: Local Development Frameworks", explaining what local planning authorities need to take into account when preparing their frameworks. It advises how authorities can deal with issues such as housing numbers during the transition from the old system of local plans to local development frameworks. In order to ensure there is strategic policy in place for developing local development frameworks, PPS12 provides for structure plan policies to be saved for a period of three years from commencement of Parts 1 and 2 of the Planning and Compulsory Purchase Act 2004 or adoption of the structure plan, whichever is the later. Structure plans can also be saved for a longer period to avoid a policy void provided that there is sufficient justification.

Officials in the Office of the Deputy Prime Minister are currently undertaking a series of regional events with key stakeholders, including local planning authorities, to explain the Government's approach towards local development frameworks and address issues such as this, which, by their nature, will vary according to local circumstances. Following these events, we will consider the need for interim guidance or whether such issues are still best addressed at the individual level.

Sustainable Communities Plan

Brian White: To ask the Deputy Prime Minister what steps *(a)* his Office and *(b)* its agencies are taking to ensure the Sustainable Communities plan meets or exceeds the Government's energy objectives of achieving a low carbon economy. [195182]

Phil Hope: The Sustainable Communities plan will encourage an energy-efficient built environment through changes to building regulations—including better boiler standards—and our Decent Homes programme. We are also supporting exemplary development schemes and research in the Growth Areas, and will pilot the new Code for Sustainable Buildings in the Thames Gateway and elsewhere. In addition, English Partnerships requires residential building on its land to reach the BREEAM EcoHomes "very good" standard, which includes an assessment of energy efficiency and transport CO_2 impacts. From 2005–06, the Housing Corporation will require funded affordable housing schemes to reach the EcoHomes "good" standard.

Sustainable Energy (CHP Provisions) Order

Mr. Stunell: To ask the Deputy Prime Minister what measures his Department *(a)* has undertaken and *(b)* plans to undertake to comply with the Sustainable Energy (CHP Provisions) Order 2003. [194428]

Phil Hope: The Office of the Deputy Prime Minister presently has Combined Heat and Power (CHP) installations operating in two if its London HQ buildings. These units have a capacity of 960 kWh of electrical energy, the "waste" heat from the CHP units is used to supplement building heating in winter and cooling in summer.

The Office of the Deputy Prime Minister and its agencies have adopted the target to source at least 15 per cent. of electricity from Good Quality Combined Heat and Power by 2010 and continues to explore viable schemes for embedded electrical generation. Until such time as suitable systems can be incorporated, the Office of the Deputy Prime Minister will be working with the Office of Government Commerce to obtain sufficient energy from accredited suppliers to meet the targets required by the Sustainable Energy (CHP Provisions) Order 2003 and detailed in specific terms in the Framework for Sustainable Development on the Government Estate (Chapter E4).

Temporary Staff

Mr. Blunt: To ask the Deputy Prime Minister how many agency temporary staff have been working for the

Department in each of the last five years, excluding those working for agencies for which no data is kept centrally. [196051]

Phil Hope: The Office of the Deputy Prime Minister was formed on 29 May 2002. Records are not kept centrally of the recruitment and termination of temporary staff within the Office of the Deputy Prime Minister. However at any one time the Office of the Deputy Prime Minister employs approximately 120 temporary staff through the employment agencies with whom we have contracts.

PRIME MINISTER

Arctic Medal

Annabelle Ewing: To ask the Prime Minister if he will create an Arctic Medal for those who sailed in the Russian convoys. [196209]

The Prime Minister: The sacrifice of those who sailed in the Russian convoys is of course undisputed. Those who took part in the wartime convoys to Russia were honoured at the time with the award of the Atlantic Star. Indeed, the Command Paper that set out the criteria for the Atlantic Star explicitly included the convoys to North Russia, as recognition of their importance. This remains the position, though these matters are kept under review.

ADVOCATE-GENERAL

Devolution

Miss McIntosh: To ask the Advocate-General what devolution issues she has considered since 25 October. [194533]

The Advocate-General for Scotland: Since 25 October, 23 devolution issues have been intimated to me. 19 of these issues were in the civil sphere and concerned personal injury actions in respect of prison conditions. The remaining four devolution issues related to criminal matters, including pre-trial delay, self-incrimination under section 172 of the Road Traffic Act 1988, the use of lay justices to determine criminal proceedings in the district courts and one case which raises issues about both the lack of an appeal to the House of Lords in extradition proceedings in Scotland under the Extradition Act 2003, and a challenge to Ministers of the Scottish Executive in relation to extradition proceedings.

MINISTER FOR WOMEN

Pregnant Workers

22. **Ms Drown:** To ask the Minister for Women what steps she is taking to ensure that *(a)* employers and *(b)* employees are informed of women's rights at work when pregnant. [195883]

Jacqui Smith: Government provide a range of guidance for employers and employees. Additionally, free confidential advice is available from the Acas national telephone helpline.

Women's Pensions

23. **Ms Keeble:** To ask the Minister for Women what assessment she has made of proposals in the Turner Report relating to women's pensions. [195884]

Ms Hewitt: The Government welcome the Pensions Commission report, and are well aware that women make up 64 per cent. of the pensioner population. Tackling specific problems that women face in retirement is therefore high on our agenda.

Pension Inequalities

25. **Mr. Carmichael:** To ask the Minister for Women what assessment she has made of the findings of the First Report of the Pensions Commission in relation to pension inequalities between men and women. [195886]

Ms Hewitt: For today's female pensioners we have introduced pension credit, two thirds of those entitled to pension credit are women. And for future women pensioners, state second pension extends second-tier pension right for the first time to people without earnings who are caring for young children or a disabled adult.

However, we have acknowledged there is more to be done and will be looking at options in advance of the Pension Commission's final report in autumn 2005.

Non-traditional Work

Julie Morgan: To ask the Minister for Women what plans she has to encourage women to go into non-traditional areas of work. [195882]

Ms Hewitt: I was delighted to participate with my right hon. Friend the Chancellor of the Exchequer in the Equal Opportunities Commission's Gender and Productivity Summit last week, where I launched a cross Government plan to encourage women (and men) into non-traditional areas of work.

This plan will be taken forward in the context of the Women and Work Commission announced by my right hon. Friend the Prime Minister on 24 July.

Women Priests

Mrs. Anne Campbell: To ask the Minister for Women what discussions she has had on encouraging the appointment of women priests to the highest offices in the Church. [195885]

Jacqui Smith: I fully endorse the views expressed on an earlier occasion by my hon. Friend the Minister for Women. This is a matter for the Church of England, but I am in principle against any kind of glass ceiling—stained glass or otherwise.

SCOTLAND

Correspondence

Sir Gerald Kaufman: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland when he intends to reply to the letter to him dated 23 August from the right hon. Member for Manchester, Gorton with regard to Mrs. J. A. Higham. [193574]

Mr. Darling: I replied to my right hon. Friend on 3 November.

Temporary Staff

Mr. Randall: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland how many agency temporary staff have been working for the Department in each of the last five years, excluding those working for agencies for which no data is kept centrally. [196055]

Mrs. McGuire: The Scotland Office was established on 1 July 1999. Since that date the Office has had a number of individuals under contract from companies that provide staff on a temporary basis. They were engaged to fill vacancies in the complement of the Office and were not additional to the staff numbers reported in the Departmental and Annual Reports of the Office. Many individuals were employed for a short period only; some posts were filled by a succession of individuals. The figures in the table represent the total number of individuals employed:

	Number of individual temporary staff
1999–2000	13
2000–01	16
2001–02	19
2002–03	15
2003–04	20

Press Officers

Gregory Barker: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland how many press officers the Department has employed in each of the past five years. [196059]

Mrs. McGuire: The Scotland Office was established on 1 July 1999. Details of the number of press officers employed are given in the following table:

	Number of press officers
1999–2000	4
2000–01	4
2001–02	4
2002–03	4
2003–04	[1]3

[1] One of whom is part-time.

WALES

Renewable Energy (Planning Guidance)

Mr. Llwyd: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales when he last discussed the implementation of TAN8 with his colleagues in the National Assembly for Wales. [195729]

Mr. Hain: The implementation of TAN 8 is a matter for the National Assembly for Wales. I understand that they are currently considering responses to the consultation exercise, which closed on 5 November.

Temporary Staff

Mr. Wilshire: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales how many agency temporary staff have been working for the Department in each of the last five years, excluding those working for agencies for which no data is kept centrally. [196064]

Mr. Hain: Information is not readily available for the whole period. However, the Wales Office has employed agency temporary staff to cover four posts in 2002, seven in 2003 and nine in 2004.

HOME DEPARTMENT

GM Food

Alistair Burt: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department (1) how many convictions there have been against restaurants for failing to display their policy on GM foods in each year since August 1999; [195716]

(2) how many prosecutions have been brought against restaurants for failing to display their policy on GM foods in each year since August 1999. [195717]

Miss Melanie Johnson: I have been asked to reply.

There is no legal obligation for restaurants to display their policy on genetically modified (GM) foods. However, a requirement was introduced in 1999 for caterers to identify any GM ingredients in the foods that they sell. I am not aware of any prosecutions brought against restaurants under the relevant regulations, which came into force in September 1999.

Police (West Midlands)

Mr. Jim Cunningham: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many ethnic minority police officers there are in the West Midlands region. [195688]

Ms Blears: The Home Office Statistical Bulletin published on 29 September 2004 showed that, on 31 March 2004, West Midlands police had 499 ethnic minority officers out of a total officer strength of 8,008 (6.2 per cent).

Written Answers to Questions

Monday 8 November 2004

ENVIRONMENT, FOOD AND RURAL AFFAIRS

Common Land (SSSIs)

Mr. Drew: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what areas of common land classified as sites of special scientific interest in England are in unfavourable condition; and what assessment she has made of the need for changes to regulations to ensure favourable condition of such common land is achieved. [196287]

Mr. Bradshaw: In July 2002, our Common Land Policy Statement set out proposals for addressing the main barriers to the sustainable management of common land. One of our key aims is to enable commoners to manage their own activities more effectively. This in turn will help contribute to the achievement of a number of biodiversity objectives, including the SSSI PSA target.

Following further public consultation in 2003, we have been working up more detailed legislative proposals. We remain committed to introducing legislation as soon as parliamentary time allows.

The areas of common land SSSIs in favourable or unfavourable condition are given in the table and broken down according to English Nature area team.

Area of common land with Sites of Special Scientific Interest

ha

English Nature area team	*Favourable or recovering condition*	*Unfavourable condition*	*Total*
Bedfordshire and Cambridgeshire	146	189	335
Cheshire to Lancashire	1,523	906	2,429
Cornwall and Isles Of Scilly	2,659	1,664	4,323
Cumbria	26,100	22,416	48,516
Devon	14,893	9,935	24,828
Dorset	514	413	927
EMR—Eastern	95	51	146
EMR—Peak District and Derbyshire	179	1,050	1,229
Essex, Hertfordshire and London	377	261	638
Hampshire and Isle of Wight	1,258	758	2,016
Herefordshire and Worcestershire	655	787	1,442
Humber to Pennines	1,936	8,959	10,895
Kent	141	22	163
Norfolk	2,443	90	2,533
North and East Yorkshire	24,255	21,170	45,425
North Mercia	2,743	1,521	4,264
Northumbria	8,651	20,540	29,191
Somerset and Gloucestershire	4,753	3,789	8,542
Suffolk	841	185	1,026
Sussex and Surrey	6,980	2,009	8,989
Thames and Chilterns	1,319	69	1,388
Wiltshire	405	9	414
Grand Total	102,866	96,793	199,659

Data Protection

Michael Fabricant: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what procedures are in place *(a)* to check the criminal records of civil servants in her Department and agencies responsible to her Department who have access to computer databases containing confidential information on the public and *(b)* to ensure that there can be no improper use of computer databases containing confidential information on the public; and if she will make a statement. [194603]

Alun Michael: A basic character check is carried out on all staff before they are allowed unsupervised access to Defra's IT systems. It is also a departmental requirement that staff must declare criminal convictions. Criminal records checks are carried out in cases where staff dealing with particularly sensitive material require formal vetting in line with central Government guidelines. Defra's IT security policy is designed *(a)* to protect the confidentiality, integrity and availability of computer systems and information to a level that meets business needs and *(b)* to ensure that accounting and audit processes exist. This is achieved by: ensuring all processes and actions are authorised; all authorised users can be identified and monitored; and all systems and associated personnel perform in a consistent manner. The security policy is available to all staff on our internal intranet and regular reminders are issued.

Extensification Payment Scheme

Paddy Tipping: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs how much has been paid out under the Extensification Payment Scheme in each county in England in 2003–04; and if she will make a statement. [195510]

Alun Michael: The amount paid out under the Extensification Premium Scheme in each county in England for the 2003 scheme year (1 January 2003–31 December 2003) and paid between 1 April 2004 and 31 October 2004 are set out in the following table. We are currently unable to provide figures for 2004 as the scheme year does not end until 31 December 2004 and payments will not commence until 1 April 2005.

County	*Gross amount paid £ million*
Bedfordshire	181,442
Berkshire	280,284
Buckinghamshire	1,336,191
Cleveland	111,457
Cambridgeshire	406,007
Cheshire	522,962
Cornwall	3,542,585
Cumbria	5,060,984
Derbyshire	1,489,980
Devon	7,275,747
Dorset	988,321
Durham	1,653,048
Essex	476,922
Gloucestershire	1,408,049
Hampshire	917,587
Isle of Wight	186,395
Hereford & Worcester	1,985,153
Hertfordshire	275,355
Kent	868,356
Lancashire	1,385,828
Leicestershire	1,026,848
Lincolnshire	1,177,116

County	*Gross amount paid £ million*
Merseyside	30,849
Greater London	8,645
Greater London	18,964
Norfolk	1,139,392
Northamptonshire	1,168,500
Tyne and Wear	112,132
Northumberland	4,629,514
Nottinghamshire	432,303
Oxfordshire	1,012,987
Avon	733,456
Shropshire	2,138,763
Somerset	2,490,115
Staffordshire	1,041,743
Suffolk	492,629
Scilly Isles	2,209
Surrey	390,225
East Sussex	932,700
West Sussex	670,336
Warwickshire	667,962
Greater Manchester	209,490
Wiltshire	1,570,796
West Midlands	79,499
South Yorkshire	417,433
North Yorkshire	4,100,230
West Yorkshire	771,885
North Yorkshire	143,371
Humberside	589,804
Total	58,552,549

Heathrow

Mrs. May: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs (1) what work her Department has undertaken to update the 1982 Social Survey on the impact of night flights around Heathrow; [195093]

(2) what plans her Department has to conduct a social survey of the impact of night flights around Heathrow. [195094]

Charlotte Atkins: I have been asked to reply.

In December 2000, a report funded by the then DETR was published on Perceptions of Aircraft Noise, Sleep and Health (Diamond et al, http://www.socstats.soton.ac.uk/research/noisereport.doc). This study included surveys in the vicinity of Heathrow, Gatwick, Manchester, East Midlands, and Coventry airports. A broader study of Attitudes to Noise from Aircraft Sources in England, which covers both night and daytime noise, is currently being undertaken on the Department's behalf, the lead contractor being The MVA Consultancy.

Findings from further social research as well as objective studies of sleep disturbance were summarised in the NATS/DORA (now CAA/ERCD) R and D Report 9964, Adverse effects of night-time aircraft noise, published in March 2000.

In addition to these social survey studies, the Department has consulted regularly on the night restrictions at Heathrow, Gatwick and Stansted. The Stage 1 consultation on restrictions from 30 October 2005 was published in July and the consultation period closed on 29 October.

Noise

Mrs. May: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what action has been taken by the Government to achieve the targets recommended by the WHO Guidelines for Community Noise; and in which year she expects to attain the targets recommended in the Guidelines. [195095]

Charlotte Atkins: I have been asked to reply as the WHO guidelines bear predominantly on transport noise sources. The Government is a signatory to the WHO Charter on Transport, the Environment and Health, and is thereby committed to take account of the WHO Guidelines.

The noise levels cited in the WHO Guidelines mark the approximate onset of various annoyance and disturbance effects. As such, they are not limits but information to which the Government will have regard when developing policy and seeking to strike the balance between the three pillars of sustainable development. It is not feasible, and will not become practicable in the foreseeable future, to eliminate all such effects, either in the UK or in other signatory States.

The relevance of the guidelines in the context of night noise from aircraft was discussed further in the Department's recent Stage 1 consultation on the night restrictions at Heathrow, Gatwick and Stansted, paragraphs 3.8–3.13.

Off-road Motor Cycles

Huw Irranca-Davies: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what examples of best practice are available to *(a)* local authorities and *(b)* police authorities on (i) making provision for off-road motorcycles and (ii) tackling irresponsible off-road motorcycling. [195779]

Alun Michael: The departmental publication, "Making the Best of Byways", provides advice and practical examples to local authorities on managing mechanically propelled vehicles on byways and includes guidance on identifying suitable off-road sites. The Department is currently working on a comprehensive revision to the document.

We are preparing new enforcement guidance for both police authorities and local authorities to help them deal with inappropriate and illegal use of motor vehicles off road. The guidance will set out the extensive statutory powers already available to deal with misuse and will draw on existing best practice examples of police and local authorities working in successful partnerships.

Copies of "Making the Best of Byways" have been placed in the House Library. The revised document and new enforcement guidance will be available next year.

Sea Fishing (Licences)

Mr. Steen: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what her policy is on whether anglers should be required to hold licences for the right to fish at sea. [196949]

Mr. Bradshaw: The Review of Marine Fisheries and Environmental Enforcement, which was published in July, recommends that, in return for improvements which would benefit sea anglers, a licensing scheme for them be considered. The consultation period on the review ended on 29 September. My officials are now evaluating the replies, and I have not yet made any decisions.

Sharpness Dock Basin

Mr. Drew: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs if she will make a statement on the condition of Sharpness Dock Basin, with particular reference to the views expressed by the Gloucester Harbour Trustees. [194282]

Alun Michael: As statutory harbour authority, British Waterways is fully aware of the Gloucester Harbour Trustees' concern about the condition of Sharpness Docks. It has identified improvement works for the docks of some £4–5 million over the next four to five years. It is considering the phasing of this work as part of its asset management programme.

HOUSE OF COMMONS COMMISSION

Parliamentary Security Co-ordinator

Dame Marion Roe: To ask the hon. Member for Roxburgh and Berwickshire, representing the House of Commons Commission pursuant to his Answer of 19 October 2004, *Official Report*, column 566W, if he will make a further statement on the appointment of a Parliamentary Security Co-ordinator. [197193]

Sir Archy Kirkwood: I can confirm that the House of Lords authorities have agreed to the establishment of a Parliamentary Security Co-ordinator. An appointment will be made as soon as practicable, initially on secondment. The Parliamentary Security Co-ordinator would be expected, among other responsibilities, to oversee the project of implementing new security measures arising from the joint review, to improve co-ordination of security matters between the two Houses and advise on issues which need to be dealt with across the Estate as a whole, and to provide a focus for liaison with the Metropolitan police and security service. The Parliamentary Security Co-ordinator would be accountable for his/her performance to Mr. Speaker in the Commons and the Lord Chairman of Committees in the Lords, and would come under the Chief Executives of the two Houses for day-to-day management purposes, working with Black Rod and the Serjeant at Arms, who would continue to hold executive responsibility, to ensure the security of their respective Houses.

LEADER OF THE HOUSE

Written Questions

Mr. Greg Knight: To ask the Leader of the House if he will bring forward proposals to allow the tabling of written questions during periods when the House is in recess for answer on a named day during the recess. [196392]

Mr. Hain: I have no plans to do so.

PRIME MINISTER

Carbon Emissions

Norman Baker: To ask the Prime Minister what role he played in the decision announced by the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs that the UK should apply to the EU for an increase in permissible carbon emissions under the EU Emissions Trading Schemes. [196847]

The Prime Minister: This was a collective decision in accordance with the Ministerial Code.

Congressional Gold Medal

Derek Conway: To ask the Prime Minister when he intends to collect his congressional gold medal; and if he will make a statement. [197205]

The Prime Minister: I refer the hon. Member to the answer I gave the hon. Member for Lewes (Mr. Baker) on 18 May 2004, *Official Report*, column 878W.

Iraq

Mr. Paul Marsden: To ask the Prime Minister to what proportion of next of kin of armed forces personnel killed in Iraq he has written condolence letters. [195892]

The Prime Minister: During the Iraq conflict, the policy on official governmental letters of condolence was reviewed in consultation with single Service Chiefs of Staff. I announced my intention to write to the next of kin of all those Service personnel who were killed in action on operations.

Mr. Paul Marsden: To ask the Prime Minister what discussions he held with President Bush on the timing of war with Iraq during his visit to the US commencing on 7 September 2002. [195893]

The Prime Minister: I regularly have discussions on a wide range of issues with President Bush including on Iraq. As with previous Administrations, it is not the practice of this Government to make public details of discussions with foreign governments.

Keith Vaz: To ask the Prime Minister when he last held discussions with the UN Secretary-General regarding Iraq. [196001]

The Prime Minister: I refer my hon. Friend to the answer I gave to the hon. Member for Faversham and Mid Kent (Hugh Robertson) and my hon. Friend the Member for Blaenau Gwent (Llew Smith) on 25 October 2004, *Official Report*, column 1025W.

Glenda Jackson: To ask the Prime Minister pursuant to the answer of 27 October 2004, *Official Report*, column 1257W, on Iraq, when he was first informed by British military commanders of the request they had received from the US military for the re-deployment of British troops. [196038]

The Prime Minister: I refer my hon. Friend to the statement made by my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Defence (Mr. Hoon) on 18 October 2004, *Official Report*, column 625–26.

Glenda Jackson: To ask the Prime Minister when he last discussed with Coalition allies ways of minimising civilian casualties in the course of military operations in Iraq. [196292]

The Prime Minister: I refer my hon. Friend to the answers I gave the hon. Member for Newry and Armagh (Mr. Mallon) and my hon. Friend the Member for Halifax (Mrs. Mahon) at Prime Minister's Questions on 3 November 2004, *Official Report*, columns 301 and 305–06.

President Bush

Keith Vaz: To ask the Prime Minister when he last held discussions with President Bush. [196000]

The Prime Minister: I refer the hon. Member to my statement of 3 November 2004 which is available on the No. 10 website.

DEPUTY PRIME MINISTER

Barker Review

Mrs. Spelman: To ask the Deputy Prime Minister what plans he has to revise chapter 9 of the regional planning guidance in light of the Barker review; and if he will make a statement. [195165]

Keith Hill: The Secretary of State, my right hon. Friend the Deputy Prime Minister, has only recently published in July this year a revised Chapter 9 of Regional Planning Guidance for the South-East (RPG9). The South East England Regional Assembly is currently in the process of reviewing the spatial strategy set out in RPG9 with a view to submitting a draft Regional Spatial Strategy (RSS) for the South-East to the Secretary of State, my right hon. Friend the Deputy Prime Minister, in the summer of 2005. The Government have already highlighted to the Assembly the expectation that in their review the Assembly takes into account key messages emerging from the Barker review.

Casinos

Mr. Cousins: To ask the Deputy Prime Minister if he will place in the Library a copy of the responses to the consultation on a separate use class order for casinos from each of the planning authorities in Tyne and Wear. [196362]

Keith Hill: After the second report of the Joint Scrutiny Committee, my right hon. Friend the Deputy Prime Minister undertook to review the possibility of a change to the classification of casinos and invited comments by the end of October. The Office of the Deputy Prime Minister did not receive any comments from planning authorities in Tyne and Wear.

Civil Servants

Mr. Jenkins: To ask the Deputy Prime Minister what the average length of continuous service for civil servants within the Department is. [194397]

Phil Hope: I refer my hon. Friend to the answer given by my hon. Friend the Member for Bolton West (Ruth Kelly) on 3 November 2004, *Official Report*, column 268W. The only part of the Office of the Deputy Prime Minister which are not MANDATE reliant are the Fire Service College where the average length of service is 6.5 years and the Queen Elizabeth II Conference Centre where it is 5.38 years.

Decent Homes Standard

Mr. Purchase: To ask the Deputy Prime Minister what plans he has to review the funding under the decent homes standard for local authorities whose tenants choose to remain owned and managed by the local authority. [195705]

Keith Hill: The Government is not looking at any other options for delivering additional resources beyond the existing three options. The existing options of Arms Length Management Organisations (ALMO), Private Finance Initiatives (PFI) and transfer are proving highly successful and there is no need to create alternative options. There is not and will not be a 'fourth option' for additional funds, and the Deputy Prime Minister has recently written to all leaders of councils of stock owning local authorities to make this clear.

However, the Office of the Deputy Prime Minister is always looking at ways of improving how housing finance works, for example, this year has seen greater freedoms introduced by prudential borrowing and increased Management and Maintenance allowances above inflation.

Departmental IT

Brian White: To ask the Deputy Prime Minister what percentage of the Department's *(a)* implemented and *(b)* planned computer systems use open source software; and what plans are in place to raise this level. [195667]

Phil Hope: The Office of the Deputy Prime Minister does not have statistics on the use of open source software, but to date it is very limited. We follow established Government policy, which is to consider open source software options alongside proprietary ones in IT procurements on a level playing field basis, and award contracts on a value for money, case-by-case basis. The policy can be viewed at www.govtalk.gov.uk.

Fire Control Centre (South-West)

Ms Atherton: To ask the Deputy Prime Minister what decisions he has taken in relation to a regional fire control centre for the South West. [195268]

Mr. Raynsford: The Office of the Deputy Prime Minister is currently running a competitive procurement for fire and rescue regional control centres under the EU Restricted Services Directive, (OJEU Notice 2004/S 78–066658). Submitted sites have been evaluated against criteria such as accessibility (to both people and services), demographics, vulnerability to threats such as flooding, and suitability for development. A shortlist of three bidders has been selected for the South West region and tenders invited from them. The final decisions on locations are expected early next year.

During the procurement process we are unable to release any information on the tenderers and their proposals to anyone who is not directly involved in the process.

Government Offices for the Regions

Mr. Pickles: To ask the Deputy Prime Minister what pieces of primary legislation Government Offices for the regions are able to use to implement their work. [194336]

Phil Hope: The Government Offices for the Regions (GOs) carry out activities on behalf of 10 Government Departments. A list of all the primary legislation relied upon by those Departments in carrying out their functions through the GOs is not held centrally and could only be provided at disproportionate cost.

Mr. Pickles: To ask the Deputy Prime Minister what the responsibilities of the Government Offices for the Regions *(a)* were in 1997 and *(b)* are now. [194337]

Phil Hope: In 1997 the responsibilities of the Government Offices for the Regions (GOs) included work for four Government Departments: Department of Trade and Industry, Department of Education and Employment, Department of the Environment, and Department of Transport.

Since 1997, the GOs have been given more responsibilities and they now carry out work on behalf of 10 Government Departments. Their current responsibilities are set out in the Regional Co-ordination Unit and Government Office Network Corporate Plan 2004–05. A copy of this has been available in the Library of the House.

Mr. Pickles: To ask the Deputy Prime Minister what additional regulatory powers Government Offices for the Regions have gained since 1997. [194439]

Phil Hope: The Government Offices for the Regions (GOs) are part of the central Government Departments for whom they carry out activities but are based in the regions. A regulatory impact assessment is required for powers which impact on business, charities or the voluntary sector (and from April 2004 a public sector impact test), and on which Departments rely in carrying out their functions through the GOs. A list of those powers is not held centrally and could only be provided at disproportionate cost.

HMOs

Jon Trickett: To ask the Deputy Prime Minister what estimate the 1996 English House Condition Survey made of the *(a)* number and *(b)* proportion of houses in multiple occupations that have three or more storeys. [196986]

Keith Hill: None. A detailed analysis of the 1996 survey data could be provided only at a disproportionate cost.

Jon Trickett: To ask the Deputy Prime Minister what plans he has to publish an analysis of houses in multiple occupation in the private rented sector from the information contained in the 2001 English House Condition Survey. [196990]

Keith Hill: The most robust figures that can be provided are published in Table 2.2 on page 33 of the English House Condition Survey 2001 main report, a copy of which is tabled as follows. The size of the survey sample of houses in multiple occupation precludes any detailed breakdown by tenure.

The Office of the Deputy Prime Minister expects that the majority of bedsits and shared houses will be in the private rented sector, and households with lodgers will be owner-occupied. The survey indicates that in the order of 45 per cent. of self-contained converted flats are private rented.

Table 2.2: Dwellings, buildings, accommodation units, households and people in main HMO categories, 2001

	Shared house/flat		*Household with lodger*		*Bedsits*		*Converted flat*		*All main HMOs*	
	Thousand	*Percentage*	*Thousand*	*Percentage*	*Thousand*	*Percentage*	*Thousand*	*Percentage*	*Thousand*	*Percentage*
Number of dwellings	293	26.7	91	8.3	82	7.5	631	57.5	1,098	100
Number of buildings	293	45.9	91	14.3	82	12.9	171	26.9	638	100
Number of accommodation units	293	20.4	91	6.4	423	29.4	631	43.9	1,438	100
Number of households	293	22.1	91	6.9	36	27.4	579	43.7	1,327	100
Number of people	965	36.7	272	10.3	418	15.9	974	37.0	2,629	100

Planning

Mr. Andrew Mitchell: To ask the Deputy Prime Minister (1) what the average cost to a planning department of processing a planning application was in each of the last three years; and what the average costs were for applications processed by Birmingham city council; [196222]

(2) how many planning applications were resubmitted *(a)* to planning departments in England and *(b)* to Birmingham city council planning department in each of the last three years; [196223]

(3) what the average number of hours needed by planning officers to process a planning application was *(a)* in England and *(b)* in Birmingham city council in each of the last three years; [196224]

(4) what percentage of planning applications that were resubmitted were from *(a)* private individuals and *(b)* property developers in each of the last three years; [196226]

(5) what the average fee charged by planning departments to process a planning application was to *(a)* private individuals and *(b)* property developers in each of the last three years. [196227]

Keith Hill: The information requested is not held centrally and could be provided only at disproportionate cost.

Mr. Andrew Mitchell: To ask the Deputy Prime Minister what the average fee charged for submitting a planning application was *(a)* in England and *(b)* in Birmingham city council in each of the last three years. [196225]

Keith Hill: The information requested is tabled as follows.

	Fees[1] *(£ million)*	*Applications*[2] *(thousand)*	*Average*[3] *(£)*
England			
2001–02	142	582	240
2002–03	171	635	270
2003–04	185	675	270
Birmingham			
2001–02	1.8	6.2	280
2002–03	2.3	6.8	340
2003–04	2.4	7.9	310

[1] Reported receipts grossed for non-reporting councils; excluding fees for 'county matters' applications. Neither listed building consents nor conservation area consents attract fees.

[2] Applications for planning permission, grossed for non-reporting councils. Statistics on total applications received are only collected, so consequently include listed building consents and conservation area consents.

[3] Fees per application.

Note:

'County matters' applications and fees, covering mainly waste disposal and mineral extraction, have been excluded. These number only around 2,000 decisions annually for England as a whole.

Post Office

Clive Efford: To ask the Deputy Prime Minister what assessment he has made of the impact of the closure of sub-post offices on regeneration strategies in neighbourhood renewal areas. [194443]

Phil Hope: The June 2000 Performance and Innovation Unit report on modernising the Post Office network proposed a special fund be established to help sustain and improve post offices in deprived urban areas, in recognition of their important contribution to their communities. The £15 million Deprived Urban Post Office Fund was subsequently set up to support post offices at risk of closure in the most deprived areas.

Clive Efford: To ask the Deputy Prime Minister what discussions his Department has had with the Department of Trade and Industry on the impact of closure of sub-post offices in neighbourhood renewal areas. [194444]

Phil Hope: The Office of the Deputy Prime Minister has worked closely involved with the Department of Trade and Industry in setting up the £15 million Deprived Urban Post Office Fund which supports sub-post offices at risk of closure in the most deprived areas.

Regional Assemblies

Mrs. Spelman: To ask the Deputy Prime Minister if he will make a statement on the implementation of the recommendations contained in the Barker report on housing supply. [195162]

Keith Hill: Kate Barker's proposals build on the approach adopted in the Communities Plan, launched by the Deputy Prime Minister in February 2003. Her analysis has reinforced the Office of the Deputy Prime Minister's case and strategy for more growth. In particular, in their initial response to her report, my right hon. Friends the Deputy Prime Minister and the Chancellor of the Exchequer accepted Kate Barker's central recommendation that there should be a step change in housing supply. The Office of the Deputy Prime Minister intends to set a national market affordability goal as part of a package of measures to achieve this, by the end of 2005.

In addressing the specific suggestions in her report the Office of the Deputy Prime Minister will adopt the same principles as set out in the Communities Plan. We want to create sustainable communities; thriving and vibrant places where people want to live and work, and which will stand the test of time. We retain a firm commitment to preserving the Green Belt and using higher densities to minimise the land take from new development. In the recent Spending Review, my right hon. Friend the Chancellor of the Exchequer allocated funds which, with additional Private Finance Initiative (PFI) funding, aim to provide an extra 10,000 new homes for social let annually. The Spending Review also provides the resources that will help deliver the 200,000 new homes identified in the Sustainable Communities Plan in Thames Gateway and the other growth areas by 2016 and go further by responding to new proposals for growth.

New housing must be supported by public services (schools, hospitals, transport, water and power supply) as they grow. Departments are working together to ensure this. The Office of the Deputy Prime Minister has made a start through the spending review in creating a Community Infrastructure Fund. An extra £50 million in 2006–07 and £150 million in 2007–08 will be available to finance transport projects needed to sustain housing growth.

The Office of the Deputy Prime Minister is currently consulting on proposals to strengthen regional integration by bringing together regional planning bodies and regional housing boards. This will help to ensure that regional housing strategies are better integrated with Regional Spatial Strategies in line with other regional strategies such as the regional economic strategy. This consultation also covers the arrangements to be put in place to provide the new regional bodies with independent advice on housing need and market assessments and on how to interpret the Government's affordability goal at regional level.

The Barker Review also made a number of recommendations for changes to the way in which land is allocated and released for housing development. The Office of the Deputy Prime Minister will consult widely with key interests on specific proposals made by Barker and intend to produce a draft consultation on revisions to Planning Policy Guidance 3—Housing, during 2005.

The Office of the Deputy Prime Minister is also committed to considering the Barker Review's proposals for the introduction of a Planning Gain

Supplement to capture increase in land values arising from development for the provision of infrastructure, and to come to a decision by the end of 2005.

Government alone will not be able to deliver the growth required. House builders and developers must respond. Kate Barker laid down specific challenges to the house building industry to improve productivity, design and customer satisfaction. The Office of the Deputy Prime Minister looks forward to working with the industry to address these issues and achieve the extra growth required.

Mrs. Spelman: To ask the Deputy Prime Minister what assessment he has made of the likely impact of net immigration on housing demand in England over the next 20 years. [195163]

Keith Hill: The Government estimates that net immigration contributes only a minority of household growth. The Office of the Deputy Prime Minister has prepared interim estimates of household growth over the period to 2031, using the 2002 Government Actuary's Department figures. These predict that household growth will average 189,000 between 2001 and 2021. We estimate that around one third—or around 60,000—households per year will be directly due to net immigration between 2001 and 2021. Fully updated 2003-based household projections will be published next year. The Government takes the impact of migration on our housing stock seriously and has recently amended social housing allocations policy following the enlargement of the European Union.

Mrs. Spelman: To ask the Deputy Prime Minister if he will estimate the number of houses to be demolished in each of the Pathfinder areas of England. [195166]

Keith Hill: I refer the hon. Member to the answer given to my hon. Friend the Member for Pendle (Mr. Prentice) on 28 October 2004, *Official Report*, columns 1321–22W.

Students

Mr. Best: To ask the Deputy Prime Minister what recent discussions he has had with the Secretary of State for Education and Skills on the problems associated with the *(a)* geographical concentration and *(b)* accommodation of higher education students. [196859]

Keith Hill: Earlier this year I discussed these issues at a meeting with my right. hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions (Alan Johnson) at which universities UK (UUK) and the local government association (LGA) were present. As a result the Department for Education and Skills agreed to help fund a joint project between UUK and the LGA to establish some good practice in the provision of student accommodation in the community.

The study will look at existing schemes with the aim of identifying best practice in managing student accommodation. A specification for the project has now been agreed and UUK are currently in the process of seeking suitable parties to undertake the research. The aim is to have completed the research and to have produced a good practice guide by Spring 2005.

TRADE AND INDUSTRY

BHG Group

Mr. Alan Duncan: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what steps her Department has taken to investigate the activities of Better Health Global Ltd. and the BHG group of companies; and if she will make a statement. [195678]

Mr. Sutcliffe *[holding answer 2 November 2004]*: Winding-up orders have been made against three companies, part of the BHG group of companies; Betterhealth Global Ltd., Betterhealth International Ltd. and Self-Pay (International) Ltd. The winding-up orders were obtained on 23 June 2004 on the petition of companies' bankers.

The official receivers' investigation into the failure of the companies in liquidation is on-going.

With respect to other companies in the Betterhealth Global group, my Department does not comment on the affairs of live companies that are not the subject to insolvency proceedings.

Mr. Alan Duncan: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what estimate her Department has made of the total losses incurred by investors and creditors as a result of the liquidation of Better Health Global Ltd. (BHG); what estimate has been made of the cost to the Department of grants to companies used to fund BHG; and if she will make a statement. [195679]

Mr. Sutcliffe *[holding answer 2 November 2004]*: The estimated deficiency of assets over liabilities in the liquidation of Betterhealth Global Ltd. is £346,840.

The official receiver's investigation into the failure of the company is on-going and will include the question of how the company was funded.

Mr. Alan Duncan: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry when her Department was first informed of alleged malpractice by the directors of Better Health Global Ltd., and the BHG group of companies; and if she will make a statement. [195680]

Mr. Sutcliffe *[holding answer 2 November 2004]*: The official receiver was appointed liquidator of Betterhealth Global Ltd., Betterhealth International Ltd. and Self-Pay (International) Ltd. on the making of the winding-up orders on 23 June 2004, and the investigations into the causes of failure of each company are on-going.

With respect to other companies in the Betterhealth Global group, my Department does not comment on the affairs of live companies that are not the subject of insolvency proceedings.

Mr. Alan Duncan: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what steps the official receiver *(a)* has taken and *(b)* is planning to take to investigate the circumstances surrounding the liquidation of Better Health Global Ltd.; and if she will make a statement. [195681]

Mr. Sutcliffe *[holding answer 2 November 2004]*: The official receiver has interviewed the principle UK based director of Betterhealth Global Ltd.; the investigations into the causes of failure of the company are on-going.

Mr. Alan Duncan: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what representations she has received about alleged malpractice by the directors of Better Health Global Ltd. and the BHG group of companies; and if she will make a statement. [195682]

Nigel Griffiths *[holding answer 2 November 2004]:* It would be inappropriate for me to comment on the affairs of BHG until the official receiver's investigations into the company's causes of failure have been completed.

With respect to other companies in the Betterhealth Global group, my Department does not comment on the affairs of live companies that are not the subject of insolvency proceedings.

EU Presidency (Greece)

Angus Robertson: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry how many times during the Greek presidency of the EU *(a)* the Committee on implementation of the multiannual programme for enterprise and entrepreneurship, in particular for small and medium-sized enterprises and *(b)* the Committee on the specific programme for research, technological development and demonstration on promotion of innovation and participation of small and medium-sized enterprises met; when and where these meetings took place; which UK Government expert was present at each meeting; what (i) technical and (ii) financial issues were raised by the UK Government expert at each meeting; what recommendations each committee produced during that period; what actions were (A) proposed and (B) taken by (1) the EU and (2) the UK Government as a result of each committee's recommendations; and if she will make a statement. [194352]

Nigel Griffiths: The Enterprise Programme Management Committee met once during the Greek presidency, at the European Commission in Brussels on 13 March 2003. Two members of the Small Business Service represented the UK. Article 14 of the Rules of Procedure states that the committee's discussions shall be kept confidential.

The Horizontal Configuration of the Programme Committee of the FP6 Specific Programme, "Integrating and Strengthening the European Research Area", which considers SME issues, met twice during the Greek presidency, at the Commission on 4 March and 21 May. A DTI official from the Office of Science and Technology represented the UK. Article 14 of the Rules of Procedure states that the committee's discussions shall be kept confidential.

Gas

Mr. Stephen O'Brien: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what assessment she has made of prospective changes to the wholesale price of gas in the UK in the course of *(a)* 2005 and *(b)* 2006. [196025]

Mr. Mike O'Brien: UK wholesale prices are linked indirectly to movements in oil prices. Markets in continental Europe are not fully competitive and gas prices are contractually linked to oil prices. The UK therefore imports the gas-oil link through the Bacton-Zeebrugge Interconnector. Expectations are that, in the short run, oil prices will remain relatively high.

Wholesale prices are also in part driven by uncertainty about potential tightness of supply as the UK makes the transition to becoming a net gas importer. There is, however, strong evidence that there are a number of infrastructure projects due to come on stream that will increase gas supply. These include the doubling of the import capacity of the Interconnector and three major LNG import terminals. The DTI and Ofgem Joint Energy Security of Supply Group monitors the situation and provides information to ensure the market is aware of developments.

Nuclear Decommissioning

Llew Smith: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry (1) what proportion of the revenues accrued to the Nuclear Decommissioning Authority in its first operational year are earmarked to come from income generated from *(a)* Thorp and *(b)* the Sellafield Mox Plant; [196421]

(2) pursuant to the answer to the hon. Member for Portsmouth South (Mr. Hancock) of 14 September 2004, *Official Report*, columns 1536–37W, on Mox Plant (Sellafield), for what reasons the details of *(a)* the Sellafield Mox Plant annual revenues and *(b)* SMP profits are classified as commercially confidential. [196459]

Mr. Mike O'Brien: Details of the Thermal Oxide Reprocessing Plant (THORP) and the Sellafield MOX Plant (SMP) annual revenues and profits are classified as commercially confidential, as they relate to future income which if divulged could lead to improper gain or advantage by BNFL's competitors and customers.

The Government recognise that, while THORP and SMP are operational, there will be interest in how the plants perform. The Nuclear Decommissioning Authority's (NDA) annual report and accounts will therefore include information, consistent with the requirements of commercial confidentiality, on the financial and operational performances.

Post Office Closures

Michael Fabricant: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry (1) what steps she will take to provide alternative services following the closure of Crown post offices in city centres; [195932]

(2) if she will make a statement on the closure of Crown post offices by Royal Mail. [195933]

Mr. Sutcliffe *[holding answer 4 November 2004]:* Decisions on individual closures and conversions are operational and commercial matters for Post Office Ltd. The company has no plans for the large scale closure of directly managed post offices and anticipates that fewer than five directly managed branches will close in 2005–06. Post Office Ltd.'s policy is to maintain a core network of directly managed post offices while continuing to drive efficiencies, with the aim of making the business commercially viable. This strategy includes the conversion of some individual directly managed offices to franchise or agency status where suitable opportunities arise.

Renewable Energy

Mr. Lazarowicz: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what plans she has to allocate further funding to support the development of renewable energy. [195935]

Mr. Mike O'Brien *[holding answer 4 November 2004]*: The Government have announced that they have allocated in total over £500 million in support for research and development and demonstration projects for longer term renewables and low carbon energy generation technologies, over the period from 2002 to 2008.

This includes the additional funding announced in the 2004 Spending Review during the summer. We are currently considering how this additional funding will be allocated between the different renewables technologies.

In addition, the Renewables Obligation, taken together with the exemption from the climate change levy for renewable electricity, is estimated to provide support for renewables of around £1 billion a year by 2010.

EDUCATION AND SKILLS

CAFCASS

Mr. Clappison: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills how many reports were completed by the Children and Family Court Advisory and Support Service (CAFCASS) in the last financial year; and in how many cases contact between children and the father was absent at the commencement of proceedings and then re-established following the intervention of CAFCASS staff. [194222]

Margaret Hodge: CAFCASS completed 33,803 reports in the last financial year. CAFCASS does not record the number of cases where contact between children and their father was absent. However, a one-off survey of 300 families (carried out by the National Association of Probation Officers in the summer of 2002) reported that prior to commencement of CAFCASS involvement, there was no contact with the non-resident parent in 42 per cent. of cases; following the completion of CAFCASS work, only 6 per cent. of non-resident parents remained without contact. The information in the survey was non gender specific.

A survey conducted by the Office of National Statistics (ONS) asked a sample of resident and a sample of non-resident parents about the contact arrangements with their children following relationship breakdown. Results for the non-resident parent sample showed that 78 per cent. of children whose parents had made informal contact arrangements had direct (face-to-face) contact with their non-resident fathers at least once a month. The resident parents sample reported that 61 per cent. of children had direct contact at least once a month.

Carers

Mr. Dhanda: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills what support is available for people who take responsibility for grandchildren who would otherwise be in care; and if he will increase this support. [195609]

Margaret Hodge: Anyone caring for a child under 16 is entitled to claim child benefit and to apply for child tax credits (CTC) subject to the usual eligibility criteria. Where a child is orphaned or one parent has died and the other is missing, the carer may also be entitled to claim guardian's allowance.

Local authorities are also empowered to assist with the care of children and young people under the Children Act 1989. Where the local authority determines that a child is "in need" the authority may then provide services to meet those needs, or, in exceptional cases, provide financial assistance, under Section 17. Some local authorities also support families who have a Residence Order in respect of the child that they are looking after. This type of allowance is generally a contribution towards the cost of accommodating and maintaining them. In both cases the services and payments are provided once an assessment of need has been carried out and are at the discretion of the local authority.

Disabled Students (Access)

Mr. Edwards: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills what duties *(a)* colleges and *(b)* schools have with respect to access for people with disabilities; and what assessment he has made of the progress of (i) colleges and (ii) schools in complying with the Disability Discrimination Act 1995. [195280]

Margaret Hodge: The SEN and Disability Act (SENDA) 2001 amended Part 4 of the Disability Discrimination Act (DDA) 1995 to bring access to education within the remit of the Act. From September 2002 it has been unlawful for schools and institutions providing post-16 education to discriminate against disabled pupils or students for a reason relating to their disability, without justification. Both have a duty to make reasonable adjustments to ensure that disabled pupils and students are not put at a substantial disadvantage in comparison to those who are not disabled. For schools this does not include the provision of auxiliary aids or services or making changes to physical features.

Schools are under a duty to plan strategically to increase access over time. This duty includes planning to increase access to school premises, to the curriculum and providing written material in alternative formats to ensure accessibility. In the first planning period, 1 April 2003 to 31 March 2006, some £300 million is being made available to local education authorities in England through the Schools Access Initiative for projects to improve the accessibility of mainstream schools to disabled pupils.

Post-16 institutions have been required to make reasonable adjustments, including the provision of auxiliary aids and services, since September 2003; and from September 2005 they will also have a duty to make changes to physical features. Since 2002, £180 million has been allocated to help colleges of further education and local education authority adult education provision in England, become accessible.The duties not to discriminate apply to responsible bodies in England, Wales and Scotland. The planning duty applies in England and Wales only. The Scottish Parliament has legislated separately to introduce a similar duty in Scotland.

The Secretary of State asked the Office for Standards in Education (Ofsted) to report on the progress being made by schools in England in implementing the duties they acquired under SENDA and their report "Special educational needs and disability: towards inclusive schools" was published last month. Ofsted will continue to monitor the disability duties as part of their on-going inspections of schools.

The Learning and Skills Council (LSC) requires all colleges of further education in England to comply with the requirements of the DDA. The LSC's Annual Equality and Diversity Report for 2002–03 includes an assessment of overall progress towards compliance.

The DDA requires schools and post-16 institutions as employers not to unjustifiably discriminate against current or prospective employees with disabilities, or those who have had disabilities in the past, and as service providers not to unjustifiably discriminate against disabled people, where they provide non-educational services. More details about these duties may be found at the Disability Rights Commission's website: www. drc-gb.org.

Education Maintenance Allowances

Mr. Sheerman: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills what the total cost of the education maintenance allowance *(a)* has been in 2004 and *(b)* is expected to be in 2004, broken down into (i) total value of allowance awarded, (ii) administration costs and (iii) other costs. [194070]

Mr. Ivan Lewis: The amount already spent on EMA this year is £64 million. The estimated cost this year for EMA is £275 million which is broken down as follows: payments to young people £232.6 million, administration costs £37 million and other costs of £5.2 million.

Foster Carers

Annabelle Ewing: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills (1) if he will review the payment regime for foster carers; [195082]

(2) if he will apply the national minimum wage rules to foster carers. [195083]

Margaret Hodge: The Secretary of State has tabled amendments to the Children Bill which would enable regulations to be made prescribing a national minimum allowance to be paid to foster carers in England and Wales.

We propose to work closely with local authorities over the next couple of years to try and find ways of simplifying and making more transparent the payment structures which they have in place. We shall be monitoring progress very closely and this amendment gives us the power to prescribe a national minimum allowance if that is considered appropriate.

Annabelle Ewing: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills what plans he has to assist local authorities in recruiting younger couples into the fostering profession. [195085]

Margaret Hodge: The Green Paper, 'Every Child Matters' explicitly encourages more people to consider fostering, including groups such as single people, older people, unmarried couples and lone parents who may not realise they are eligible. In February this year we produced a Fostering Publicity Pack designed to help local authorities to run targeted local campaigns to recruit new foster carers for looked after children. We have also awarded a 3-year grant of £180,000 to the Fostering Network to support Foster Care Fortnight, which has a particular focus on recruitment.

Frontline Technologies Limited

Mr. Forth: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills what the purpose was of the action against Frontline Technologies Limited (European patent UK MO 0 664 061); what the cost to the Government was of the case; how much of this was borne by the Department; and what the outcome of the case was. [R] [190292]

Mr. Charles Clarke *[holding answer 15 October 2004]*: My Department issued proceedings against Frontline Technology Limited to challenge the validity of European Patent UK MO 0 664 061 which covers the process of exchanging student data over a wireless network using portable computers and transceivers in an educational environment. The patent encompasses a wide range of school activity including, for example, wireless electronic pupil registration and attendance management systems.

These proceedings were primarily brought because the patent restricted schools' access to a full range of technology. Additionally, my Department assessed the potential additional costs to schools for licence fees, based on Frontline Technology's published terms and scale of charges, to be substantial over the life of the patent to 2013.

The costs of the litigation are subject to negotiation between the parties and in the circumstances it would not be appropriate to cite a figure for those costs. However, the litigation costs incurred to date are a fraction of the potential cost that schools could have incurred by way of licence fees.

The written judgment of the patent court (Deputy Judge David Young) was handed down on 17 June 2004. My Department substantially won its case thus giving greater freedom to schools to buy wireless products and services of their choice, reducing costs for schools and stimulating the wireless technology market through greater competition. Frontline Technology Limited has applied to amend its patent by way of a statutory procedure. My Department is challenging the scope of the proposed amendment.

Integrated Children's System

Tim Loughton: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills what plans the Government have to abolish the Child Protection Register; and on what time scale. [195337]

Margaret Hodge: The Government made it clear, in "Keeping Children Safe: The Government's response to the Victoria Climbié Inquiry Report and Joint Chief Inspectors' Report Safeguarding Children", that in the short to medium term, the training materials commissioned to accompany the booklet "What To Do If You're Worried A Child Is Being Abused" would include a section on child protection registers. In the longer term, as the Integrated Children's System becomes widely used, it will allow staff to identify those children who, for example, have been the subject of inquiries into whether they are at risk of suffering, or have suffered, significant harm, have been the subject of a child protection conference, or are the subject of a child protection plan. The child protection register will therefore no longer be necessary. It can then be discontinued as a separate register at a date to be agreed when the Integrated Children's System has been fully introduced across England and Wales.

Minister for Children

Mrs. Gillan: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills for what reason the right hon. Member for Barking (Margaret Hodge) will not meet Mr. T. Perry, a constituent of the hon. Member for Chesham and Amersham. [195804]

Margaret Hodge: Heavy diary commitments do not allow the right hon. Member for Barking to meet with Mr. Perry. However Mr. Perry has had lengthy telephone conversations with departmental officials and has received detailed replies to his correspondence, if Mr. Perry wishes to write a further letter to the right hon. Member for Barking, he will be assured of a reply.

Pupil Exclusions

Mr. Hoban: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills if he will break down by type of special educational need pupils with special educational needs who were excluded from schools in 2002–03. [194762]

Margaret Hodge: The requested information is not currently available.

Pupil Referral Units

Mr. Hoban: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills what the latest available figure is for the average period that a pupil at each key stage spends in a pupil referral unit. [194766]

Margaret Hodge: The requested information is not collected centrally.

Residential Care (Children)

David Davis: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills how many children were in residential care in *(a)* England and *(b)* the East Riding of Yorkshire in each of the last two years. [194960]

Margaret Hodge: The information requested is given in the table.

Children looked after in residential placements at 31 March 2002 and 2003

	31 March 2002	*31 March 2003*
England	7,900	7,700
East Riding of Yorkshire	30	35

Notes:

1. Figures have been taken from the CLA100 return.
2. Figures exclude children looked after under an agreed series of short-term placements.
3. Residential placements include secure units, children's homes and hostels, and residential schools.
4. National figures have been rounded to the nearest 100. Local authority figures have been rounded to the nearest 5.

HOME DEPARTMENT

Antisocial Behaviour Orders

Tom Cox: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will take steps to encourage local authorities and the police to name young people convicted of offences under antisocial behaviour legislation; and if he will make a statement. [191965]

Ms Blears: The identity of any young person who commits a criminal offence is protected by automatic reporting restrictions under the Children and Young Persons Act 1933.

Antisocial behaviour orders (ASBOs) are civil orders rather than criminal penalties and are not subject to the same restrictions. Full details of the order, including the name and address of the perpetrator, can be publicised. However, the breach of an ASBO is a criminal offence, which means the identity of the youth is protected; we will be taking steps to change this.

In our Strategic Plan, published in July this year, we made a commitment to look into ending anonymity for people under 18 who breach the conditions of their ASBOs.

Asylum Seekers

Mr. Rosindell: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many applications for asylum this year have been unsuccessful; and how many unsuccessful applicants have been deported. [191449]

Mr. Browne: 26,360 initial decisions were made between January and June 2004, the latest date for which figures are available. Of these, 890 were granted asylum, 80 were granted Humanitarian Protection, 2,085 were granted Discretionary Leave and 23,305 were refusals.

32,370 appeals were determined by adjudicators between January and June 2004, the latest date for which figures are available. Of these, 6,755 were allowed, 24,875 were dismissed and the remainder were withdrawn or abandoned. Appeals do not necessarily relate to initial decisions made during January and June 2004.

6,450 principal asylum applicants were removed from the UK between January and June 2004, 7,810 including dependants. This includes people who have departed "voluntarily" after enforcement action had been initiated against them and those leaving under the

Assisted Voluntary Returns Programmes run by the International Organisation for Migration. Removals do not necessarily relate to initial decision or appeal determinations made during January and June 2004.

Information on initial decisions, appeals and removals are published on a quarterly and annual basis. The next publication covering the third quarter of 2004 (July to September) will be available on 16 November on the Home Office Research Development and Statistics Directorate website at http://www.homeoffice.gov.uk/rds/immigration1.html.

Mrs. Curtis-Thomas: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department under what circumstances asylum seekers are required to attend in person their appeal decision. [196622]

Mr. Lammy: I have been asked to reply.

There are currently no circumstances in which the Immigration Appellate Authority (IAA) requires asylum seekers to attend the giving of their appeal decision in person.

Appeals against immigration decisions taken by the Secretary of State for the Home Department are made to the IAA. The procedures of the IAA are governed by The Asylum and Immigration (Procedure) Rules 2003 which contain provisions for the tribunal to serve a written determination upon every party and any representative acting for a party.

Correspondence

Sir Gerald Kaufman: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department (1) when he will reply to the letter to him dated 14 September from the right hon. Member for Manchester, Gorton, with regard to Hanaf Attita; [195517]

(2) when he will reply to the letter to him dated 22 September from the right hon. Member for Manchester,Gorton, with regard to Mrs. R. Faiz; [195518]

(3) when he will reply to the letter to him dated 14 September from the right hon. Member for Manchester, Gorton, with regard to Mr. A. Hussain, transferred to him by the Attorney General; [195520]

(4) when he will answer the letter to him dated 14 September from the right hon. Member for Manchester Gorton with regard to Mr. Arshad Hussain. [196116]

Mr. Blunkett: I wrote to my right hon. Friend on 4 November 2004.

Crime/Sentencing Statistics

David Davis: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many people were charged with crimes in each year since 1995, broken down by *(a)* gender, *(b)* age and *(c)* type of offence. [190789]

Ms Blears: Statistics of defendants charged with crimes are not collected centrally. The table, which has been placed in the Library, however, gives the number of defendants proceeded against at magistrates courts by gender, age and offence type for England and Wales 1995 to 2002.

Statistics for 2003 will be published in November.

Graffiti

Mrs. Curtis-Thomas: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will make a statement on the progress of the graffiti removal notice pilots. [191897]

Ms Blears: The Government recognises that graffiti causes offence to communities and individuals, leads to the fear of crime and is criminal damage.

The Anti-social Behaviour Act 2003 sections 48 to 52 gave local authorities the powers in 12 pilot areas to issue graffiti removal notices to speed up the removal of graffiti and recover their costs on certain types of property. This can be applied to the owners of street furniture, statutory undertakers and educational establishments. The Home Office is currently conducting a consultation and associated RIA on the impact and associated costs of national roll-out of these powers. The consultation period finishes on 31 December 2004.

The 12 pilot areas have demonstrated that constructive partnerships between local authorities, statutory undertakers and the owners of street furniture have led to the rapid and efficient removal of graffiti. We have also seen local authorities, the telecommunication industry and local police sharing their knowledge to secure prosecutions against graffiti vandals.

Illegal Immigration

Mr. Rosindell: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will make a statement on his plans to cut the levels of illegal immigration to the UK. [191269]

Mr. Browne: We have already made significant progress in strengthening the UK's borders. The measures we have put in place have reduced by half the number of asylum claims and they also serve to prevent would-be illegal migrants from circumventing our immigration controls. The operation of juxtaposed control operations and deployment of detection equipment overseas impact directly on those attempting to enter the UK illegally, regardless of whether they intend to abuse our asylum system or to reside or work here without entitlement.

We are committed to maintaining robust pre and on entry controls to prevent illegal immigration into the United Kingdom and there are many strands of work currently being undertaken to ensure the integrity of UK border controls. These include:

Reflex, the multi-agency forum which brings together key law enforcement players including the Immigration Service, as well as relevant government Departments and the Security Services, under the chair of the National Crime Squad to tackle organised illegal immigration (including human smuggling and trafficking). We have trebled funding for Reflex to tackle organised immigration crime with 20 million each year over the next three years.

As part of a longer-term strategy, the National Criminal Intelligence Service (NCIS) manages an expanding network of Immigration Liaison Officers in key overseas posts who work closely with local law enforcement agencies to combat illegal migratory flows.

The deployment of New Detection Technology overseas.

The extension of Juxtaposed Controls, now including Calais, Coquelles, Paris and from the end of October Brussels to allow the admissibility of passengers to be determined prior to embarkation to the UK.

The ongoing deployment of our Airline Liaison Officer network overseas.

An informed and robust visa strategy.

Introduction of a criminal offence to arrive without a valid travel document.

Close working with other UK border agencies and European and International partners.

The measures we have already taken to control illegal immigration and unfounded asylum claims are subject to on-going review and we will continue to use and develop our initiatives, resources and response capabilities to allow us to focus on areas of potential abuse whilst expediting the clearance of bona fide passengers.

Indymedia Servers

Mr. Allan: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department whether prior notification was received by his Department concerning the seizure of the Indymedia servers on 7 October. [194455]

Mr. Blunkett *[holding answer 28 October 2004]:* I can confirm that the Home Office received no prior notification in relation to this matter.

Money Laundering

Ross Cranston: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will make a statement on his Department's consultation on money laundering and accountants' obligations to report money laundering. [191981]

Caroline Flint: On 4 August the Home Office issued an informal consultation paper seeking views on whether, and if so how, the law on the obligations of accountants to report money laundering needed to be changed to bring it into line with European law. This was in response to representations from the Institute of Chartered Accountants in England and Wales which challenged the treatment of accountants, auditors and tax advisers under Part 7 of the Proceeds of Crime Act 2002.

The consultation period ended on 30 September and around 40 responses have been received. The Home Office is giving full consideration to the responses, in consultation with other Departments. The Government have not reached a final view on whether the Proceeds of Crime Act 2002 and the Money Laundering Regulations 2003 need to be changed.

Travel Documents (Prosecutions)

Mr. Malins: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many prosecutions have been brought in the last 12 months against people who were suspected of destroying their travel documents. [195468]

Mr. Browne: Section 2 of the Asylum and Immigration (Treatment of Claimants) Act 2004 makes it an offence, in certain circumstances, to fail to produce a travel document when applying for leave to enter. Between 22 September 2004, when this legislation was implemented, and 30 October 2004, 79 people have been charged. This may include people who are suspected of destroying their travel documents.

There have been 15 convictions in the same period. This figure is provided from locally collated management information and may be subject to change.

SOLICITOR-GENERAL

Iraq

Adam Price: To ask the Solicitor-General pursuant to the answer of 26 October 2004, *Official Report*, columns 1105–06W, whether the Attorney-General has sought the Prime Minister's view on the veracity of Iraqi declarations on weapons of mass destruction in the light of the evidence now available. [195390]

The Solicitor-General: No.

WORK AND PENSIONS

Private Pensions

20. **Mr. Rosindell:** To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions what steps the Government have taken to encourage individuals to take out private pensions. [196336]

Malcolm Wicks: The Government are very keen to encourage individuals to take out private pensions. We have introduced stakeholder pensions, a low charge, flexible and portable pension arrangement as an alternative option to personal pensions, which can be costly and inflexible.

Pensions also offer more generous tax treatment on pensions than on any other form of investment. In addition we want to encourage individuals to plan for their retirement. Clauses in the Pensions Bill will enable us to promote and facilitate financial planning for retirement as part of our wider Informed Choice agenda.

Disabled Discrimination

21. **David Wright:** To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions what plans he has to tackle discrimination against disabled people in the workplace. [196337]

Maria Eagle: By extending the Disability Discrimination Act from 1 October this year, we have provided comprehensive protection against disability discrimination in employment. The employment provisions now cover an additional one million employers and seven million more jobs, and we will be undertaking a targeted publicity campaign to highlight to employers their duties under the Act. In addition, provisions in the draft Disability Discrimination Bill would extend the protection of the Act, including in employment, to more people with HIV, cancer and MS.

State Retirement Pension

23. **David Taylor:** To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions what recent submissions he has

received in relation to state retirement pensions from the National Pensioner's Convention; and if he will make a statement. [196339]

Malcolm Wicks: I received a copy of the National Pensioners Convention "Pensioners Manifesto" earlier this year. The Government shares its aims of securing dignity and fulfilment for both today's and future generations of pensioners.

My hon. Friend may also be interested to know my right hon. Friend, the Secretary of State is due to meet Rodney Bickerstaff, president of the National Pensioners Convention on 15 November.

Economic Inactivity

24. **Mr. Andrew Turner:** To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions if he will make a statement on the Department's policies for reducing economic inactivity. [196340]

Jane Kennedy: Between 1979 and 1997 the number of people receiving incapacity benefit trebled and had that trend continued there would be around 4 million people now on incapacity benefit instead of 2.7 million.

Almost all of those who move on to incapacity benefits want and expect to go back to work, and our reforms will give them the opportunity and full range of help needed to realise that goal.

Agency Staff

Dr. Julian Lewis: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions pursuant to the answer of 1 November 2004, *Official Report*, column 113W, on agency staff, how many agency temporary staff were working for his Department in its central headquarters buildings in as many of the last five years as may be calculated without incurring disproportionate cost. [196617]

Maria Eagle: None of the information requested could be provided without incurring disproportionate cost.

Construction Industry

Mr. Todd: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions how many *(a)* deaths and *(b)* notified injuries there have been in the construction industry in each year since 1996. [195407]

Jane Kennedy: The table shows fatal and total injuries in construction reported to HSE under the RIDDOR Regulations during the period 1996–97 to 2003–4[1].

Injuries to workers in the construction industry— reported to all enforcing authorities 1996–97 to 2003–04[1]

Status	*Year*	*Fatal injuries*	*Total injuries*
Workers	1996–97	90	13,810
	1997–98	80	14,671
	1998–99	65	14,297
	1999–2000	81	15,334
	2000–01	105	14,609
	2001–02	80	14,370
	2002–03	70	14,369
	[1]2003–04	70	[2]—

Injuries to members of the public in the construction industry— reported to all enforcing authorities 1996–97 to 2002–03

Status	*Year*	*Fatal injuries*	*Total injuries*
Members of the public	1996–97	3	408
	1997–98	6	345
	1998–99	3	381
	1999–2000	6	409
	2000–01	8	324
	2001–02	5	386
	2002–03	5	268
	[1]2003–04	3	[2]—

[1] Provisional

[2] Provisional non-fatal injury figures for 2003–04 will be available on 18 November 2004 following the publication of Health and Safety Statistics Highlights.

Note:

The construction industry is identified using Standard Industrial Classification 1992 Section F.

Injuries are reported and defined under the Reporting of Injuries, Diseases and Dangerous Occurrences Regulations (RIDDOR) 1995. These include injuries to employees, self-employed people and members of the public.

Council Tax Benefit

Mr. Swire: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions how many people are not claiming the council tax benefit to which they are entitled; and if he will make a statement. [196318]

Mr. Pond: Our most recent estimate, 2001–02, is that between 1.7 million and 2.3 million people who are entitled to council tax benefit are not receiving it.

Since then we have been working hard with local authorities to ensure that those people who are entitled to council tax benefit, get it.

Mrs. Spelman: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions how many *(a)* households and *(b)* pensioner households claimed council tax benefit in England in (i) 1997 and (ii) the latest year for which figures are available. [194687]

Mr. Pond: The available information is in the table.

Council tax benefit recipients in England

	All cases	*Aged 60 and over*
May 1997	4,627,000	2,223,000
May 2003	3,851,000	1,953,000
May 2004	3,993,600	[1]—

[1] Not available.

Notes:

1. Data refers to benefit units which may be a single person, couple or family.

2. Figures at 1997 and 2003 are rounded to the nearest thousand. The figure for May 2004 is rounded the nearest hundred.

3. 1997 and 2003 figures are based on a 1 per cent. sample and are therefore subject to a degree of sampling variation.

4. Council tax benefit totals exclude any Second Adult Rebate cases.

5. "Aged 60 and over" refers to cases where the claimant and/or partner is aged 60 or over.

6. May 2004 data includes estimates for any non-responding local authorities.

7. The latest figures available for recipients aged 60 or over are May 2003.

9. No figures on the number of recipients of council tax benefit have been produced since the introduction of pension credit.

Source:

Housing Benefit and Council Tax Benefit Management Information System, Annual 1 per cent. sample, taken in May 1997 and 2003. Housing Benefit and Council Tax Benefit Management Information System Quarterly 100 per cent. caseload stock-count taken in May 2004.

Disability Rights Legislation

Mrs. Betty Williams: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions what *(a)* areas, *(b)* groups and *(c)* services have been affected by the extension of rights under disability rights legislation since 1997. [196332]

Maria Eagle: Since 1997, this Government has significantly extended and improved rights for disabled people in employment, access to goods and services, education and transport. The Disability Discrimination Act now provides substantial protection against disability discrimination for around 10 million disabled adults and 700,000 disabled children.

Miss Begg: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions what impact the extension of the Disability Discrimination Act 1995 on 1 October has had on disabled people's rights. [196338]

Maria Eagle: The improvements we made to the Disability Discrimination Act on 1 October this year extend the employment duties to a further 1 million employers and cover an additional 7 million jobs, including 600,000 in which disabled people already work. By requiring service providers to tackle physical barriers to disabled people accessing their services, they will also open up access to goods and services for the 10 million disabled adults and 700,000 disabled children covered by the Act.

EU Commissions

Angus Robertson: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions how many times during the Greek presidency of the EU the Audit Board of the Administrative Commission on Social Security for Migrant Workers met; when and where these meetings took place; which UK Government expert was present at each meeting; what (i) technical and (ii) financial issues were raised by the UK Government expert at each meeting; what recommendations the Committee produced during that period; what actions were (A) proposed and (B) taken by (1) the EU and (2) the UK Government as a result of the Committee's recommendations; and if he will make a statement. [196102]

Mr. Hutton: I have been asked to reply.

The audit board of the administrative commission on social security for migrant workers met once during the Greek presidency, on 7–8 May 2003 in Brussels. Officials from the Department attended. The first day was a plenary session and the second devoted to a series of bilateral discussions.

The United Kingdom presented a paper setting out the average costs of treatment given by the national health service in the UK for the year 2000. A number of other member states also presented average cost papers. After analysis and discussion all were accepted by the audit board apart from that for France which was remitted to the next meeting for further explanations and study.

During the Greek presidency, the audit board considered matters concerning: improvement of the administration of, and the then current position on, the payment of old claims between member states; questions concerning the revision of Regulation (EEC) no. 574/72 in the light of work then in progress to simplify and update Regulation (EEC) no 1408/71. The audit board also discussed several other more minor matters which required further deliberation at subsequent meetings or at the administrative commission.

UK officials had bilateral talks on 8 May 2003 with Austria, Belgium and Italy concerning reimbursements of mutual claims.

Jobcentre Plus

Chris Ruane: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions how many additional Jobcentre Plus employees have been employed in the last two years; and what the projected increase over the next three years is for each existing or planned Jobcentre Plus office in North Wales. [190876]

Jane Kennedy: The administration of Jobcentre Plus is a matter for the Chief Executive of Jobcentre Plus, David Anderson. He will write to the hon. Member.

Letter from David Anderson to Mr. Chris Ruane, dated 8 November 2004:

The Secretary of State has asked me to reply to your questions concerning how many extra Jobcentre Plus employees have been employed in the last two years; and the projected increase over the next three years. This is something which falls within the responsibilities delegated to me as Chief Executive of Jobcentre Plus.

When Jobcentre Plus was created in April 2002 the staff headcount for North Wales stood at 973.15 (whole time equivalent posts). In real terms, no extra staff have been employed since April 2002 in the two Jobcentre Plus Districts that cover North Wales. Whilst there has been some use of casual staff to meet short term business needs, there has been a year-on-year reduction in staffing levels, in order to meet strict head count targets, as shown in the table below.

Year ending	*Headcount target*	*Staff in post*
31 March 2003	885.2	876.73
31 March 2004	882.3	875.69

Note:

The figures are expressed as whole time equivalent (WTE) posts.

For the current year, we are working towards a head count target of 841.12 (WTE posts), by March 2005. Head count targets for the coming three years have yet to be finalised.

These reductions in staffing levels must be seen against the background of a significant investment in the modernisation of our office network and IT infrastructure, which will enable us to operate more efficiently, releasing more of our staff for customer facing roles. Improved services and efficient ways of working mean that, overall, we will need fewer staff to meet our targets and to deliver to our customers.

I hope this is helpful.

Pension Offices (Backlogs)

Norman Lamb: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions if he will make a statement on backlogs in local pension offices. [196341]

Malcolm Wicks: The current Pension Service workloads are within the normal parameters for intake and clearance and are closely monitored at a local level ensuring a consistent service is provided nationally. Where there are problems at individual pension centres, action is taken to remedy this as soon as possible.

Pension Service

Mr. Webb: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions (1) how many and what percentage of calls made to the Pension Service in each month since January *(a)* were answered, *(b)* were abandoned and *(c)* received an engaged tone; [193926]

(2) how many calls were made to the pension credit application line in each month since July; and how many and what percentage of calls *(a)* were answered within 30 seconds, *(b)* received an engaged tone or recorded message that all agents are busy and *(c)* were abandoned. [193988]

Malcolm Wicks: The information is given in tables 1 and 2 as follows. The figures are comparable with private sector norms of 90 per cent. of calls answered and 80 per cent. answered within 20 seconds. The pension credit application line, in particular, aims to answer 95 per cent. of calls and has achieved that standard for the period since it became operational.

Table 1: Calls to the Pension Service, January-August 2004

	Calls answered		*Calls abandoned*		*Calls blocked*	
	Number	*Percentage*	*Number*	*Percentage*	*Number*	*Percentage*
January	1,765,520	92.1	113,830	5.9	3,850	0.2
February	1,599,720	88.8	157,510	8.7	85,060	5.1
March	1,600,030	87.2	214,370	11.7	178,980	10.2
April	1,378,000	85.6	173,770	10.8	92,400	6.1
May	1,240,810	92.9	70,630	5.3	10,550	0.9
June	1,346,200	93.4	86,800	6.0	9,010	0.7
July	1,268,250	92.5	88,310	6.4	16,680	1.4
August	1,231,950	90.9	113,220	8.4	5,200	0.4

Table 2: Calls to the pension credit application line, July-August 2004

	July	*August*
Calls received	239,990	151,540
Calls answered within 30 seconds		
Number	212,390	138,970
Percentage	93.99	95.06
Calls receiving engaged tone or recorded message		
Number	30	5,320
Percentage	0.01	3.36
Calls abandoned		
Number	3,520	1,400
Percentage	1.48	0.93

Notes:

1. Numbers of calls are rounded to the nearest 10.
2. Table 1 does not include calls to the pension credit application line.
3. In both tables, the numbers of calls answered, abandoned and engaged (blocked) are not calculated on precisely the same basis and in some cases the rows will not add up to exactly 100 per cent.
4. The number of calls to the application line which received the engaged tone or a recorded message was high in August as a result of the telephone system being down for a time.
5. The number of calls received by the application line is a measure of the total number of calls from customers made to the application line number 0800 99 1234. The number of calls answered within 30 seconds is a measure of all calls answered in application line sites and excludes any calls abandoned by the customer.
6. The number of calls to the application line abandoned includes only calls abandoned after the customer has received the recorded message.

Personal Injury Claims

Mr. Dismore: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions what progress he has made on his plans for a pilot scheme for personal injury claims handling; and if he will make a statement. [193867]

Jane Kennedy: The Department is working with insurers, lawyers, employers and employee representatives to develop a specification for a pilot scheme for resolving ELCI claims cost effectively, more transparently and quickly. The Department is about to produce a third version of the pilot specification which addresses all the issues and concerns raised by stakeholders to date. Once stakeholders agree a specification, the first pilots can be launched.

Select Committees

Mr. Allen: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions how many recommendations by parliamentary select committees have been adopted by his Department since June 2001. [196293]

Alan Johnson: The information requested is not collected centrally.

The Government are required to respond formally to reports produced by select committees. In doing so the Government set out their views on the recommendations made by select committees, including whether or not it proposes to adopt a particular recommendation.

Copies of all Government responses are available in the Library.

State Second Pension

Mr. Willetts: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions what plans he has to move state second pension to a flat rate. [196436]

Malcolm Wicks: No decision has been taken as yet regarding whether and when to make the state second pension a flat-rate scheme.

INTERNATIONAL DEVELOPMENT

Adam Smith Institute

Mr. Jim Cunningham: To ask the Secretary of State for International Development how much the Government have spent on funding to the Adam Smith Institute for research into utilities in developing countries in 2004. [195919]

Hilary Benn: DFID has not funded any research by the Adam Smith Institute into utilities in developing countries. The consultancy company Adam Smith International Ltd. have provided advice to development partners this year on reform of public enterprises, including utilities, in Ghana, South Africa, Iraq and the West Bank and Gaza.

Afghanistan

Mr. Simmonds: To ask the Secretary of State for International Development what assessment has been made of viable crop alternatives to poppy cultivation in Afghanistan; and whether alternative crops would be predominantly *(a)* supplied to domestic markets and *(b)* exported. [196264]

Hilary Benn: The Department for International Development is funding practical research into alternative ways for those cultivating the opium poppy production to earn a living. This research is generating a variety of alternative and improved products to supply both the domestic and export markets.

DFID has established a Research in Alternative Livelihoods Fund for Afghanistan. The fund is providing £3 million over three years for applied research into natural resource-based livelihoods, including crops, livestock, natural products, post-harvest processing and rural services.

The fund is presently supporting seven projects. Three projects aim to identify local, national and international market opportunities for alternative crop varieties and test a variety of agro enterprises and marketing strategies including an organic export feasibility study. Other projects include improved forage and milk production and the introduction of legumes and vegetable crops as viable alternatives to opium poppy cultivation.

DFID is also funding the development of viable crop alternatives to poppy cultivation in Badakhshan. This includes the establishment of nurseries and greenhouses for fruit and vegetable production, apricot drying, honey bee keeping, poultry farms, cashmere and silk production and a tthan-weaving programme.

Bangladesh

Tom Brake: To ask the Secretary of State for International Development if he will make a statement on the effects of the floods in Bangladesh on *(a)* the Bhairab Bridge project and *(b)* the Road Rehabilitation II and III projects funded by his Department; and what plans he has to secure further funding for projects funded by his Department and devastated by the floods. [195987]

Mr. Gareth Thomas: The UK was the first bilateral donor to announce support for the flood-affected people of Bangladesh. On 26 July 2004, the UK Government allocated £10 million through DFID to meet immediate flood emergency needs. On 18 August 2004, I announced a further £15 million in response to the UN Consolidated Appeal. On 26 October 2004, I approved a further £4 million to be disbursed through the World Food Programme. The UK's overall contribution has been channelled through several agencies to address both the food and non-food emergency needs of the worst affected poor people.

Bhairab Bridge was opened in 2002. DFID continues to provide technical assistance to the Roads and Highways Department (RHD) of the Government of Bangladesh to help with the maintenance of the bridge.

Between mid-July 2004 and the end of August 2004, the bridge experienced the first extensive flood since its completion. The landscaped area surrounding the bridge was submerged by one foot of water and the jetty road at Bhairab was submerged to a depth of approximately three feet. However, the flood did not cause any major damage to the bridge apart from some top soil sliding on the embankments. Where minor damage has taken place the operator has taken immediate steps to repair the damage.

The roads constructed with World Bank loans under the Road Rehabilitation and Maintenance Projects (RRMP2 and RRMP3) survived the floods without serious damage. DFID has not directly financed the construction of roads under these projects; UK support has been restricted to developing capacity in the Roads and Highways Department (RHD) and Bangladesh Road Transport Authority (BRTA) of the Ministry of Communications.

Within the £29 million emergency response to the floods, DFID approved £3.9 million in September for emergency repairs to roads and bridges. RHD has decided that this should be spent on road repairs in Dhaka Zone, one of the worst flood affected areas. RHD has, with the help of a DFID-funded consultant, rapidly agreed a set of criteria for selecting those roads most in need of repair.

The monsoon season is now over and the flood situation continues to improve. All the emergency food shelters have closed. DFID's aid framework for Bangladesh continues to grow, but the emphasis is now shifting from emergency assistance to long-term development.

Belarus

Mr. Rosindell: To ask the Secretary of State for International Development how much aid the United Kingdom has given Belarus in each year since its independence from the Soviet Union. [196159]

Mr. Gareth Thomas: Belarus became independent in 1992. The following table shows UK Bilateral aid to Belarus in each year since then.

UK bilateral aid to Belarus

Fiscal year	*UK gross public expenditure (£000)*
1992–93	26
1993–94	183
1994–95	593
1995–96	1,139
1996–97	972
1997–98	698
1998–99	472
1999–2000	278
2000–01	82
2001–02	61
2002–03	57
2003–04	49

Belarus has also benefited from assistance from multilateral organisations to which the UK contributes. The following table shows, in £ million, the UK share of spending in Belarus through multilateral organisations:

UK share of multilateral aid to Belarus

£ million

Calendar year	*EC*	*Other*	*UN*	*Total*
1992	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0
1993	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0
1994	1.0	0.0	0.0	1.0
1995	5.6	0.0	0.1	5.7
1996	1.2	0.0	0.1	1.3
1997	0.8	0.0	0.0	0.8
1998	0.5	0.1	0.1	0.7
1999	0.8	0.0	0.1	0.9
2000	0.2	0.3	0.1	0.6
2001	0.4	0.1	0.1	0.6
2002	0.3	0.0	0.1	0.4

Caribbean

Mr. Foulkes: To ask the Secretary of State for International Development what assistance is being given by his Department to disaster-prevention work in the Caribbean. [195907]

Mr. Gareth Thomas: DFID is enhancing the region's pre-emptive disaster management capacity through its support of multilateral and regional initiatives and direct assistance for the UK's Caribbean Overseas Territories.

DFID has committed £3.75 million to the disaster mitigation and preparedness programmes of the Pan American Health Organisation's Programme for Emergency Preparedness and Disaster Relief (PAHO PED) for the period 2003–08. DFID has also supported PAHO PED's emergency work in Montserrat and Haiti in 2004. PAHO PED focus on three key activities:

preparing the health sector for disasters

reducing the vulnerability of hospitals

reducing the vulnerability of water and sanitation systems.

PAHO PED has also trained many professionals in the Caribbean region on disaster risk reduction policy and practice.

DFID has an institutional partnership agreement with the International Federation of the Red Cross that includes support to its Disasters and Emergencies Relief Fund through an annual contribution, currently £221,000. This support enables the Federation to provide immediate support to National Societi around the world to help mobilise immediate emergenc relief action following natural disasters. As well as i use in response to the recent hurricanes, the fund available to ensure swift response to future disaste affecting the Caribbean.

DFID's will be providing £265,000 of the Europea Union's (EU) €3 million Caribbean disaster manageme project. It will be co-ordinated by the Caribbean Disast Emergency Response Agency (CDERA) in collaboratio with the University of the West Indies, the Caribbe Development Bank, Government agencies, no Government organisations, the Organisation of Americ States and the Canadian International Developme Agency. It will strengthen the region's capacity to co with disasters through development of disast management legislation and regulations; national disast awareness campaigns; the capacity for assessing a disseminating disaster management information on-li and enhancing the ability to undertake disast management teaching and research.

DFID is already providing £1.1 million, through i share of a €13.2 million EU project, to strengthen ear warning systems in the region, by providing four ne digital radars in Barbados, Guyana, Belize and Trinid and Tobago. The Barbados system will also serve t countries of the Eastern Caribbean.

DFID's strategy for UK's Caribbean Overse Territories (COT) calls for

> "more disaster preparedness to mitigate the risk of natu catastrophes, such as hurricanes and volcanic events."

All hazard risk reduction is increasingly integrated in the assistance given to the COTs by DFID and in o partnership with the Foreign and Commonweal Office. Policy direction is complemented by t appointment (since 2001) of a Disaster Manageme Adviser for the Overseas Territories and a distin programme, with an annual budget of £350,000. Th programme, through advocacy, training and t introduction of good practice, is helping to raise O disaster preparedness and risk reduction capabilities appropriate standards.

DFID continues to be closely involved in t humanitarian response to Hurricanes Frances and Iv and is committed to learning lessons from the devastating events and, if necessary, to identi opportunities for DFID to provide further support risk reduction efforts in the region from our ongoi partnerships.

Civil Servants

Mr. Jenkins: To ask the Secretary of State f International Development what the average length continuous service for civil servants within t Department is. [1944

Mr. Gareth Thomas: The average length continuous service for permanent and pensionable ci servants within DFID is 11 years six months.

Darfur

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Secretary of State f International Development what his latest estimate is the number of people displaced in Darfur. [1962

Hilary Benn: Although it is difficult to accurately calculate the numbers of people displaced in Darfur, Western Sudan, the latest United Nations Humanitarian Profile estimates that approximately 1.6 million people are internally displaced within Darfur as a result of the crisis. The regional breakdown of this figure is 218,000 in North Darfur, 539,000 in South Darfur, and 653,000 in West Darfur. In addition to this figure, it is estimated that there are 200,000 Darfur refugees in neighbouring Chad.

The overall total of internally displaced people has risen by approximately 151,000 in the last month. Although increased insecurity and the pull of aid in major settlements accounts for two thirds of this rise, the remaining third represents new access to previously inaccessible locations that hold concentrations of internally displaced people—these are not therefore newly displaced people.

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Secretary of State for International Development what his latest assessment is of the number of people who have died in each month in 2004 from malnutrition and disease in Darfur. [196203]

Hilary Benn: It is very difficult to provide accurate monthly figures of mortality in Darfur in 2004, given that there was very little access to large proportions of the Darfur in the early part of this year. The latest projections provided by the World Health Organisation (WHO) indicate that between 35,000 and 70,000 deaths occurred between March and September. In presenting these figures, WHO stated that further work was needed to estimate what proportion of these deaths were due to different causes, though it perceived that most were due to diarrhoeal diseases exacerbated by malnutrition.

The large variation in these figures is due to the fact that they are based on the findings of the WHO's retrospective mortality survey, which only covered North and West Darfur. Assessment in South Darfur was hampered by insecurity. The WHO found that between 15 June and 15 August, the crude mortality rate was 1.5 deaths per 10,000 per day in North Darfur and was 2.9 deaths per 10,000 people per day in South Darfur. Based on the numbers of internally displaced persons at the time, WHO estimated that between 6,000 and 10,000 people were dying per month.

It should be noted that these figures refer to mortality rates amongst the displaced. Further deaths may have occurred due to malnutrition, disease and for other reasons that have not been captured in the survey. DFID has urged the WHO to complete its survey in South Darfur and to undertake regular monitoring of morbidity and mortality levels throughout Darfur.

Environmental Audits

Gregory Barker: To ask the Secretary of State for International Development pursuant to the answer of 26 October 2004, *Official Report*, column 1138W, if he will publish the 2004 environmental audits. [194840]

Hilary Benn: The audit was commissioned by Pacific Rim Palm Oil and not by DFID. It is therefore a matter for the management of Pacific Rim Palm Oil to decide whether to publish this report.

Palestinian Authority

Mr. Foulkes: To ask the Secretary of State for International Development what assessment he has made of progress in improving financial transparency and accountability within the Palestinian Authority. [195906]

Hilary Benn: Substantial progress has been made since 2002 in improving the transparency and accountability of the Palestinian Authority's (PA) financial management systems. This has largely been driven by the Palestinian Finance Minister with donor encouragement.

A World Bank country financial accountability assessment completed in 2004 endorsed the major improvements made. It also identified key actions needed to further improve the systems. The World Bank public financial management reform trust fund has encouraged further financial reform. Disbursement of funding is conditional on the PA's achievement of agreed benchmarks, including on financial control management, auditing, and procurement.

St. Helena

Tom Cox: To ask the Secretary of State for International Development what recent discussions he has had with representatives of St. Helena on the improvement of transport facilities to and from the island. [195373]

Mr. Gareth Thomas: I have discussed this issue on a number of occasions this year with representatives of St. Helena, including the former Governor and island Councillors. In addition, DFID staff and their counterparts in St. Helena are in daily contact regarding ongoing work to review future options for maintaining access to and from the island after the present ship is withdrawn from service. I expect to consider a full report on this shortly.

Turkey

Tom Cox: To ask the Secretary of State for International Development what payments were made to Turkey in each of the last three years; for what purpose this money was paid; and if he will make a statement. [195585]

Mr. Gareth Thomas: The following table sets out total British Government bilateral aid to Turkey.

£000

Activity	*2001-02*	*2002-03*	*2003-04*
Ankara Gas Project	2,845	2,069	1,866
Humanitarian Assistance	7	—	—
FCO Drugs and Crime Fund	648	231	210
Total	3,140	2,300	2,076

The Ankara Gas Project represents the remaining contractual obligation to the Exports Credit Guarantee Department under the now defunct Aid and Trade Provision scheme (ATP). The project, which converted Ankara to natural gas usage, was completed in 1993; it was undertaken on commercial, but low-interest terms. DFID involvement under ATP was to fund the difference between commercial interest rates and the soft rate paid by the Turkish authorities. This was a 20-year arrangement and final interest payments will fall due in 2008.

The Foreign and Commonwealth Office also provides assistance under its Drugs and Crime Fund to assist local law enforcement agencies to combat the heroin trade in Turkey.

In addition, the UK share of EC aid to Turkey was:

Calendar year	*£ million*
2001	26
2002	17
2003	19

This assistance was mainly targeted at support for Turkey's eventual accession to the EU.

Vietnam

Mr. Ben Chapman: To ask the Secretary of State for International Development if he will make a statement on the work of his Department in Vietnam; and what relationship his Department has with the Government of Vietnam. [195549]

Mr. Gareth Thomas: The Vietnam Country Assistance Plan sets out the Department's priorities in Vietnam for the next two-three years: to promote the efficient, effective and equitable use of public financial resources; strengthen the Government's efforts to achieve development which benefits all social groups, and improve the accountability of Government to its citizens; to support economic transition from a planned to a market economy; and to promote greater effectiveness of the entire international development effort.

DFID will contribute £20 million in poverty reduction budget support to the Government of Vietnam for the Poverty Reduction Strategy Credit (PRSC 3) in 2004. The PRSC supports a range of reforms across the areas of economic reform, governance and social sectors. DFID continues to support public financial management reform and the findings of a recent public expenditure review indicate concrete progress towards improving public financial management within the Government of Vietnam. To help combat corruption and waste in public resource management, DFID has provided technical training in performance auditing and planning and investment inspection. DFID has also helped to set up links between the National Assembly and UK Parliament, and our support to the National Assembly to strengthen its oversight function has helped increase the accountability of the Government.

Regarding World Trade Organisation (WTO) accession, DFID has provided negotiation skills training to key officials, and supported analytical work to assist the Government understand the various accession options and their possible impacts on the poor. The Government of Vietnam's agreement with the European Union at the Asia/Europe meeting in October is a significant step towards Vietnam's goal of acceding to the WTO in 2005.

DFID continues to play a strong role in prima
education with a new professional competen
framework that set standards for a more mode
teaching force now being trialled. DFID has al
supported work that led to a regulation on minimu
quality standards in primary schools nationwide, a
has supported districts to implement these standard
DFID support in the northern mountains has led
investment in roads, irrigation, village classroon
commune health centres, and clean water schemes in
of the poorest provinces in Vietnam. Our continu
support in transport means that DFID and World Ba
resources are financing roads that link communes
markets in rural Vietnam. Alongside this support we
training people in rural road maintenance a
distributing HIV education material in every commu
DFID is co-funding an HIV prevention initiative
distribute condoms to high-risk groups and providi
information on HIV prevention and condom
through advertising campaigns on both radio a
television.

DFID remains at the forefront of making aid m
effective in Vietnam. We have been working
partnership with the Japanese and others to promote
provision of aid through government systems. We
designing three aid instruments which will demonstr
how to channel finance direct to the poor without setti
up parallel structures. This includes support for
Government of Vietnam's own poverty reducti
targeted programmes that provide finance for scho
health centres, water and sanitation schemes for
poorest communes.

DFID enjoys a very constructive dialogue with
Government of Vietnam on development issues as p
of the UK's wider relationship. I have met a number
key Vietnamese Government interlocutors including
Deputy Prime Minister Vu Khoan in September 2
who highlighted the value of DFID's assistance
welcomed the devolved presence of DFID staff. I h
also met Minister Phuc of Planning and Investm
firstly in April this year, and again during the Presid
of Vietnam's visit to the UK in May. Increasingly,
Department's development assistance to Vietnam
being directed through the Government's o
administrative systems supported by actions
strengthen those systems and improve the focus
achieving positive results.

DFID also supports poverty reduction in Vietn
through the European Commission, whose Vietn
programme focuses on human development
economic integration. The EC has committed to sp
78 million Euros (£55 million) in Vietnam in 2004,
is likely to spend 24 million Euros (£17 million) in 2

Water Supplies

Mr. Jim Cunningham: To ask the Secretary of S
for International Development what his policy is
water utility companies seeking prepayment for w
supplies in developing countries. [19

Hilary Benn: Very few developing countries h
chosen to implement prepayment mechanisms for w
(South Africa being a notable exception), though m
have done so for electricity and mobile pho
Experience so far indicates that these mechani

require levels of technical sophistication and social sensitivity which can be very hard to achieve in poorest communities. The Department for International Development (DFID) aims to ensure that the poor benefit from improved water and sanitation services, through subsidies for the poorest if required.

TRANSPORT

Motoring Costs

Mr. Burnett: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what his Department's estimate is of the average cost of motoring per mile including depreciation, fuel and servicing; what sources were used to make the estimate; what factors are included in the estimate; and when the estimate was last revised. [195676]

Mr. Jamieson *[holding answer 2 November 2004]*: The estimated average cost of motoring per mile by car in 2002–03 was 39p for cars available to residents of households in Great Britain. This includes household expenditure on purchase, spares, repairs, insurance, taxation, fuel and parking, but excludes depreciation and costs paid by employers.

The Expenditure and Food Survey for 2002–03 was used for estimates of household expenditure on motoring and the National Travel Survey for 2002–03 was used for estimates of mileage by car drivers for personal travel. The estimate was produced for the purpose of answering this question.

Air Navigation Services

Mr. Stunell: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what representations he has received on the draft Single European Sky Implementing Rule on a Common Charging Scheme for air navigation services from *(a)* regional airlines and representative bodies and *(b)* the general aviation industry and representative bodies; and what assessment he has made of the economic impact of the proposals on the (i) regional airline and (ii) general aviation industry. [195824]

Charlotte Atkins: The Department has received 75 written representations from regional airlines, general aviation and their representative bodies on the draft Single European Sky Implementing Rule for a common Charging Scheme for air navigation services.

The Department has undertaken no formal assessment of the economic impact of the charging proposals as the detail of the Implementing Rule has not yet been finalised.

Air Safety

Mr. Paul Marsden: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport how long it has taken to implement air safety recommendations made following each air safety incident since 1997. [195887]

Charlotte Atkins: The Air Accidents Investigation Branch (AAIB) makes safety recommendations to a wide range of organisations including the UK Civil Aviation Authority (CAA), overseas regulatory bodies, the new European Aviation Safety Agency, and aircraft and engine manufacturers.

The CAA publishes its responses to relevant AAIB recommendations by means of a FACTOR (Follow-up Action on Occurrence Report), and progress on implementation is recorded in an annual Progress Report. Since 2000, the CAA Annual Progress Reports have also included information on recommendations made to other bodies, though information on these is less detailed. The progress reports are available on the CAA website.

In the Annual Progress Report, recommendations addressed to the CAA will be classified as "open" or "closed". "Closed" indicates that all actions judged appropriate by the CAA have been completed or that the recommendation was not accepted by the CAA, and "open" indicates that action is on-going. In some instances further action may still be being progressed on closed recommendations by organisations outside the jurisdiction of the CAA. In these cases the CAA will continue to monitor progress as part of its normal regulatory activity.

Since 1 January 1997 the AAIB has made a total of 537 recommendations, of which 260 have been made to the CAA. Of the 235 recommendations accepted or partially accepted by the CAA, 34 remain open as at 3 November 2004. These include one from 2000, two from 2001, two from 2002, 20 from 2003 and nine from 2004. The timescales for implementation of accepted recommendations by the CAA vary considerably, from immediate action to a number of years, depending upon the impact upon safety and any requirements for further research.

Mr. Paterson: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport (1) whether he has *(a)* contacted and *(b)* been contacted by (i) the European Aviation Safety Agency and (ii) other European certification agencies regarding failures in the winch manufactured by Hydrotechnics and used by the Aerophile Aerostat in the past five years; [196546]

(2) what representations he has *(a)* made to and *(b)* had from (i) the European Aviation Safety Agency and (ii) other European certification agencies concerning failures in any part of the Aerophile Aerostat in the past five years. [196548]

Charlotte Atkins: In the UK, aerostats (captive balloons) were exempt from any requirement for airworthiness certification prior to 28 September 2003, as explained in the answer of 6 October 2003, *Official Report*, columns 1057- 60W, given to the hon. Member. There was no reason for communications with any European certification body prior to that date.

Since 28 September 2003, neither the Government nor the Civil Aviation Authority has had contacts with EASA or other European certification agencies regarding any failures in any part of the Aerophile Aerostat.

Mr. Paterson: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport (1) what powers he has to revoke licences for airworthiness certificates for aerostats currently in operation in the UK whose certification came through Grandfather rights; [196547]

(2) what account the certifying authority takes of a track record of a proven aerostat system when considering applications for certification; [196550]

(3) which organisation is responsible for administering the process of aircraft type certification for applications made in respect of UK manufactured products; and which organisation makes the final decision on whether specific type certification should be granted in respect of an application from a UK manufacturer; [196551]

(4) what applications for type certifications *(a)* have been made, *(b)* are pending and *(c)* have been granted in respect of tethered gas balloons manufactured in the UK; [196552]

(5) whether the organisation responsible for processing the aircraft type certification is required to carry out technical studies of *(a)* the winch apparatus and *(b)* other components of the Aerostat system; and whether it is (i) entitled and (ii) otherwise permitted to accept third party attestations regarding such components from responsible bodies for the purposes of processing such certifications; [196553]

(6) whether he has ascertained from the European Aviation Safety Agency whether the Health and Safety Executive is deemed to be a responsible body for the purposes of safety accreditation such that its certification of winch apparatus may be deemed sufficient for the purposes of aircraft type certification; [196554]

(7) whether the Health and Safety Executive is deemed by the Civil Aviation Authority to be a responsible body for the purposes of safety accreditation of the winch apparatus forming part of an Aerostat system such that its certification may be deemed sufficient for the purposes of aircraft type certification; [196555]

(8) what steps Lindstrand Technologies Limited of Oswestry, Shropshire, should take in order to acquire the necessary certification allowing the sale of their HiFlyer Aerostat in *(a)* the UK and *(b)* the EU; [196556]

(9) what formal certification of specification has been promulgated for tethered gas balloons (aerostats); on what date it was promulgated; and by which organisation. [196654]

Charlotte Atkins: The historical background to the certification of aerostats (also known as gas balloons) is set out at length in the answer of 29 September 2003, *Official Report*, 6 October 2003 columns 1057–60W given to the hon. Member. This answer outlines the changes to the treatment of such aircraft that were brought about by EC Regulation 1592/2002 on common rules in the field of civil aviation and establishing a European Aviation Safety Agency (EASA) and related provisions for grandfather rights and transitional arrangements. EASA took up its certification responsibilities on 28 September 2003 and the necessary Commission Regulations detailing how these responsibilities are implemented are set down in Commission Regulations No. 1702/2003 and 2042/2003.

Article 10(1) of EC Regulation 1592/2002 provides that member states may react immediately to a safety problem which involves a product subject to the provisions of that regulation; this would cover the revocation of a Certificate of Airworthiness for aerostats currently in operation in the UK whose certification came through grandfather rights.

Prior to 28 September 2003, the CAA were responsible for both administering the process of aircraft type certification for UK products and made the final decision on granting the certification. Since that date, with some minor exceptions, these have been the responsibility of EASA.

The only application to date for type certification for a UK manufactured tethered gas balloon has been for the Lindstrand HiFlyer (also known as the HiFlyer Aerostat) and was made on 9 September 2003. It is therefore subject to transitional arrangements whereby the UK Civil Aviation Authority (CAA) has continued to carry out the necessary certification exercise, which involves satisfying itself that the aircraft meets the applicable safety standards; its compliance findings would be deemed to have been made by the agency. The sale of this product in either the UK or the EU can be achieved by either continuing with and completing the current certification exercise through the CAA or by making a new application directly to EASA. The latter would also be likely to involve the CAA being asked to conduct the detailed certification work on behalf of the agency.

Under the procedures which the CAA is currently following for certifying the HiFlyer, the authority is required to satisfy itself that both the winch apparatus and all other components of a tethered gas balloon/aerostat meet applicable safety standards. This requires specific work to be carried out to show that compliance with the requirements is achieved. If the aerostat had a proven positive track record prior to the application the CAA will note it, but it will not defray any compliance showing. If the proven track record is adverse, the CAA will assure itself during the process that the designer is addressing the issues.

The formal certification specifications and processes have not yet been formally adopted and published by EASA. On 27 February 2003, the European Commission, through the auspices of the Central JAA, promulgated for comment a draft of a proposed certification specification and the CAA has been using these, in consultation with the agency, in order to progress the work on the HiFlyer.

The draft certification processes provide that use can be made of third part attestations such as "expert body" accreditations of winches and ground equipments, but the agency has not yet defined how particular organisations should be accepted as "expert bodies". For this reason, neither the agency nor the CAA has been able to deem formally that the Health and Safety Executive is a responsible body for the purposes of safety accreditation of the winch apparatus forming part of an aerostat system. However, the authority is reviewing the existing HSE accreditation and if satisfied that compliance is shown with safety standards will be able to accept its findings as a suitable third party attestation. There is no obligation to accept such attestations.

Mr. Paterson: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what reports he has received from certification agencies *(a)* in the UK and *(b)* elsewhere in the world concerning failures with the HiFlyer Aerostat manufactured by Lindstrand Technologies Ltd of Oswestry, Shropshire. [196549]

Charlotte Atkins: None.

British Transport Police

Harry Cohen: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport when he expects to make a decision on the capital funding for the British Transport Police for 2005–06; and if he will make a statement. [196493]

Mr. McNulty: Capital funding for the British Transport Police for 2005–06 is under consideration as part of the detailed allocation of the Department's Spending Review 2004 Settlement. Regular meetings have been held between the Department and the BTP to discuss this matter and we expect to be in a position to let the BTP know shortly the sum of their capital funding.

Buses

Mr. Stringer: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what assessment he has made of the main causes of delay caused to bus services by *(a)* traffic congestion, *(b)* in-service mechanical failure and *(c)* fleet management. [196289]

Charlotte Atkins: Information on the causes of delays to bus services is not collected. However, data on bus mileage lost because of traffic congestion, mechanical problems and staffing problems are collected from bus operators. The results of this survey are published in the quarterly Bus Quality Indicators Bulletin, which is available in the House of Commons Library. In the latest quarter, the percentage losses of mileage for English bus services were 0.4 per cent. (traffic congestion), 0.4 per cent. (mechanical problems) and 0.4 per cent. (staffing problems).

Car Registrations

Mr. McCabe: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport how many suppliers of car registration plates have been registered since January 2003; how many have been subject to investigation due to concerns about their probity; and what action has resulted from such investigations. [195063]

Mr. Jamieson: As of 29 October 2004, there were 30,869 registered businesses operating from 37,466 retail outlets.

The Driver and Vehicle Licensing Agency (DVLA) responds to complaints about possible breaches of the regulations by writing to the supplier concerned and also to the appropriate trading standards office. DVLA has appointed three full-time enforcement officers who make follow-up visits where a supplier's procedures are in doubt. Cases where vehicle ringing is suspected are reported to the police.

There have been three prosecutions, all leading to convictions with fines totalling £1,600 plus costs. The police have also issued a number of cautions.

Child Accidents

Tom Cox: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport how many children died in road accidents in the Greater London area during the last 12 months. [193154]

Mr. Jamieson: There were 12 Child (under 16 years of age) road accident fatalities in the Greater London area during 2003, the last full year for which figures are available.

Civil Servants

Mr. Jenkins: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what the average length of continuous service for civil servants within the Department is. [194400]

Charlotte Atkins: I refer my hon. Friend to the answer given on 3 November 2004, *Official Report*, column 268W, by my hon. Friend the Minister for the Cabinet Office. In addition, the Marine and Coastguard Agency has an average length of service of 8.92 years.

Consultants

Dr. Julian Lewis: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport how many consultancy firms or companies have been retained by the Department since June 2001; what the projects are for which each has been retained; and what the total is of the fees paid or incurred in each case. [193425]

Charlotte Atkins: I refer the hon. Member to my answer of 3 November 2004, *Official Report*, column 251W given to the hon. Member for Stratford-on-Avon (Mr. Maples)

Pete Wishart: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport how much his Department has spent in each year since 2002 on employing external consultants to deal with the press and public relations of his Department; and if he will make a statement. [195450]

Charlotte Atkins: The Department uses Public Relations contractors primarily to promote our THINK! road safety and sustainable travel campaign messages to the public through print and broadcast media. In the current year we are also using a PR contractor to help publicise the benefits to the public of our Transport Direct website, which has been introduced to provide integrated travel information. Our aim is to raise awareness of our safety and travel messages and extend the reach of public service campaigns through features and promotions. Costs in financial years 2002–03 and 2003–04 were £496,004 and £347,666 respectively.

Crossrail

Mr. Rosindell: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport if he will meet the Romford Crossrail Action Group to discuss concerns about Crossrail. [196174]

Mr. McNulty: Ministers have no current plans to meet the Romford Crossrail Action Group. Cross London Rail Links Ltd. (CLRLL) have undertaken two separate rounds of consultation on the Crossrail scheme, providing the opportunity for interested parties to register their views. In the course of their consultation, CLRLL have met with the Romford Crossrail Action Group and other concerned local parties on a number of occasions. The Group's views will be considered by CLRLL along with all those received through the consultation.

Departmental Staff

Hugh Bayley: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport how many full-time equivalent jobs *(a)* his Department and *(b)* its executive agencies had in (i) Yorkshire and the Humber and (ii) the City of York in (A) 1997 and (B) the latest year for which figures are available. [191851]

Charlotte Atkins: I refer my hon. Friend to the answer given on 25 October 2004, *Official Report,* column 1053W, by my hon. Friend, the Minister for the Cabinet Office. In addition, the Maritime and Coastguard Agency (MCA) currently has a total of 65 full-time equivalent posts located at its Bridlington, Beverley and satellite offices. MCA does not have offices in the City of York.

In 1997, the work currently undertaken by the MCA was the responsibility of the Marine Safety Agency (MSA) and The Coastguard Agency (TCA). Both agencies merged in April 1998 to form the MCA. Given the existence of the two agencies at that time, we are unable to confirm figures for 1997. However, it is unlikely there has been any significant variation at either of the offices in question since 1997.

Disabled Parking Bays

Tom Cox: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what discussions his Department has had with Greater London local authorities on the provision of disabled parking bays. [196535]

Charlotte Atkins: The Department has not held discussions with local authorities specifically on the provision of such bays. Advice has been issued to local authorities in Traffic Advisory leaflet 5/95 on the provision of disabled person's parking bays and officials are available to advise on issues raised by local authorities and others with an interest. Copies of the leaflet have been placed in the Libraries of the House.

Generally, The Road Traffic Regulation Act 1984 gives a wide range of powers to local authorities to provide parking places, including designated bays for disabled people. The decision to provide a bay is ultimately for the local authority.

Emissions

Mrs. May: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what work has been undertaken to reduce emissions around Heathrow airport. [195202]

Charlotte Atkins: As a condition of the planning permission for Terminal 5, BAA plc is required to produce and keep under review an action plan that sets out how it intends to minimise emissions from Heathrow airport. The "Air Quality Strategy and Action Plan 2001–2006" is available from BAA's website (www.baa.com). The airport also lies within an Air Quality Management Area declared by the London boroughs of Hillingdon and Hounslow and Spelthorne borough council. In accordance with the duties placed upon them by the Environment Act 1995, these authorities are now preparing air quality action plans, identifying the steps that will be taken in pursuit of UK air quality objectives.

Norman Baker: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what steps he is taking to reduce carbon dioxide emissions from road traffic. [196809]

Mr. Jamieson: The Transport White Paper ("The Future of Transport: a network for 2030"), published in July 2004 and available via the Department for Transport's website, summarised in some detail the main steps the Government is taking to reduce emissions of carbon dioxide from road transport. The review of the climate change programme, on which the Government is due to publish a consultation document very shortly, will consider the scope for additional measures to reduce carbon dioxide emissions from the transport sector and other sectors.

Ferry Services

Mr. Wilson: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport if he will list those ferry services operating within UK domestic waters for which onshore ticketing *(a)* is mandatory and *(b)* is to become mandatory. [194365]

Mr. Jamieson: Ticketing arrangements are a matter for commercial decision and there are no ferry services operating within UK domestic waters for which onshore ticketing is mandatory. However, improvements to the security of some domestic ferry services have been sought by my Department since March 2003. The introduction of onshore ticketing is, in some cases, part of the response to the need for such improvement. No decision has been taken on future legal requirements.

Government Powers

Mr. Sanders: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what powers he can seek to exercise with EU agreement to prevent the transportation of commercial cargoes within the territorial waters of EU member states. [196431]

Mr. Jamieson: Agreement by EU institutions is not relevant to the exercise of powers of the Secretary of State in relation to the territorial waters of EU Member States. We would not wish to intervene in the waters of other Member States, and the position as regards those of the United Kingdom is set out in my answer of 19 October to the hon. Gentleman's earlier question *Official Report*, column 608W.

Noise (Environmental Pollution)

Brian White: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport which agencies are responsible for monitoring noise and environmental pollution at motorway service stations. [195604

Mr. Jamieson: Motorway service areas are operated privately. The local planning authority, who in genera will have approved the development at a site, i responsible for monitoring noise and environmenta pollution at an individual service area. The Environment Agency may monitor the releases to foul sewer or surface waters from an MSA, depending on the size of the releases.

Mrs. May: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what studies have been undertaken to determine the noise effects of mixed mode runway operation at Heathrow. [195097]

Charlotte Atkins: Analysis of the noise impacts of a variety of possible mixed mode scenarios is set out in a supporting document to "The Future of Air Transport" White Paper entitled "ERCD Report 0308: Revised Future Aircraft Noise Exposure Estimates for UK Airports". This is available from DfT's website (www.dft.gov.uk). Further analysis of the potential for mixed mode operations at Heathrow is being taken forward as part of the Project for the Sustainable Development of Heathrow. "The Future of Air Transport" makes clear that further development of Heathrow will only be considered on the basis that it results in no net increase in the total area of the 57dBA noise contour compared with summer 2002 (an area of 127km^2). It also commits the Government to public consultation ahead of any introduction of mixed mode operations at Heathrow.

Rail Freight

Patrick Mercer: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport how many staff have been employed to inspect and search rail freight in each year since 2001. [194709]

Mr. McNulty: Security standards for domestic rail freight are set out in the National Railways Security Programme (NRSP) (dated June 2004). This document is issued to Network Rail, TOCs and others (Freight Operating Companies) with direct involvement in railway security. The document details both mandatory and best practice standards for the industry.

International rail freight via the channel tunnel or UK ports is liable to security checks.

The Department does not hold information on the number of staff required to meet these requirements.

Railways

Norman Baker: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what percentage change from the 2003 base he anticipates for *(a)* rail passenger mileage and *(b)* rail freight mileage by (i) 2008, (ii) 2013, (iii) 2018 and (iv) 2023. [196829]

Mr. McNulty: The SRA in their Strategic Plan 2003 forecast an increase in rail passenger mileage from 2000–01 to 2010–11 of between 25 per cent. and 35 per cent. Copies of this are available in the Libraries of the House. No forecasts of changes in rail freight mileage have been made.

Mr. Clifton-Brown: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what the current level of debt of *(a)* Network Rail and *(b)* the Strategic Rail Authority is. [193885]

Mr. McNulty: This information may be found in Network Rail Limited Annual Report and Accounts 2004 and the Strategic Rail Authority Annual Report and Accounts 2003–04, copies of which are available in the Libraries of the House.

Sea Containers

Patrick Mercer: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport how many sea containers arriving at each British sea port have been *(a)* inspected and *(b)* searched in each year since 2001. [194699]

John Healey: I have been asked to reply.

Information is not held in the format requested. A breakdown could be obtained only at disproportionate cost.

Strategic Rail Authority

Mr. Yeo: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport how much he expects the Strategic Rail Authority to have cost from its inception to its abolition. [186789]

Mr. Darling: It is estimated that the Strategic Rail Authority and its subsidiary organisation will have incurred about £237 million of running costs between its establishment on 1 February 2001 and its winding up.

Transport White Paper

Mr. Stringer: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what plans he has *(a)* to issue additional guidance and *(b)* to amend the guidelines for the implementation of quality contracts document following the 2004 Transport White Paper. [196290]

Charlotte Atkins: The draft guidance which the Department issued for consultation in June will be updated to take account of matters raised in the "Future of Transport" White Paper so far as they can be achieved without new primary legislation.

"The Future of Rail" put forward a proposal to make it easier for Passenger Transport Executives to create quality contracts, where this is part of a strategy which involves replacing some rail services with bus services. This requires primary legislation amending the Transport Act 2000. The guidance will be further amended in the event of such legislation being enacted.

Vehicle Excise Duty

Mr. Chaytor: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport how many vehicles are licensed in each of the vehicle excise duty bands; and what the total revenue from each band was in the last period for which figures are available. [195346]

Charlotte Atkins: The information requested is as follows:

Vehicle Category	*Number of Vehicles*	*Vehicle Excise Duty Gross £ million*
Private and light goods	28,364,279	4,442,725,639
Motorcycles, scooters and mopeds	1,042,148	45,635,309
Public Transport	97,954	29,623,173
Heavy goods	428,906	276,967,418
Others	80,846	12,125,195
Crown and exempt	1,910,859	0
Total	31,924,992	4,817,879,350

Zero-emission Trams

Norman Baker: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what assessment he has made of the potential for tackling climate change from the introduction of zero emission fuel cell powered light trams; and if he will make a statement. [196828]

Mr. Jamieson: The Department for Transport has not made any detailed assessment of the potential for fuel cell powered light trams to tackle climate change. The extent to which such vehicles would deliver carbon savings would depend, among other things, on how the hydrogen for the fuel cell was produced, distributed and stored. The cost of delivering these carbon savings would need to be considered against the costs of delivering similar carbon savings from other sectors. The review of the Government's climate change programme, on which a consultation document is due to be published shortly, will consider the scope for securing additional carbon savings from the transport sector and other sectors.

TREASURY

Accountancy Standards

David Taylor: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what regulatory powers are available to the Financial Services Authority to uphold standards in *(a)* international accountancy and *(b)* international financial consultancy. [196404]

Mr. Timms: The FSA has no direct powers to uphold standards in international accountancy.

The FSA can take enforcement action against listed issuers who publish annual reports and accounts which breach the listing rule requirements regarding the making of misleading, false or deceptive announcements under listing rule 9.3A.

The Secretary of State for Trade and Industry has principal responsibility for oversight of audit. The Government intends to delegate this oversight role to the Professional Oversight Board for Accountancy of the Financial Reporting Council (FRC) early in 2005. The FRC has responsibilities for setting, monitoring and enforcing auditing and accounting standards and overseeing the regulatory activities of the professional accountancy bodies.

With regard to international financial consultancy, unless the activity constitutes a regulated activity under the Financial Services and Markets Act 2000, the FSA has no locus in this area.

Average Earnings

Simon Hughes: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what the average earnings were of full-time employees in *(a)* the North Southwark and Bermondsey constituency, *(b)* the Camberwell and Peckham constituency and *(c)* the Dulwich and West Norwood constituency in (i) April 1997, (ii) April 2001, (iii) April 2002, (iv) April 2003 and (v) April 2004. [194309]

Mr. Timms *[holding answer 28 October 2004]:* The information requested falls within the responsibility of the National Statistician, who has been asked to reply.

Letter from Len Cook to Mr. Simon Hughes, dated 8 November 2004:

As National Statistician I have been asked to reply to your recent Parliamentary Question asking what the average earnings for full time employees were in *(a)* the North Southwark and Bermondsey constituency, *(b)* the Camberwell and Peckham constituency and *(c)* the Dulwich and West Norwood constituency in (i) April 1997, (ii) April 2001, (iii) April 2002, (iv) April 2003 and (v) April 2004. (194309)

Average earnings are estimated from the Annual Survey of Hours and Earnings (ASHE) and are provided for full-time employees on adult rates of pay whose pay was unaffected by absence during the pay period, by their place of work. This is the standard definition used for ASHE tables. The ASHE does not collect data on the self employed and people who do unpaid work.

I attach a table showing the average gross weekly wage for full time employees in the North Southwark and Bermondsey constituency, the Camberwell and Peckham constituency and the Dulwich and West Norwood constituency for 2001 to 2004.

Data for 1997 is currently only available from a different survey which is discontinuous with the Annual Survey of Hours and Earnings (ASHE). Data from ASHE will not be available until later 2004 following a QA process.

The ASHE, carried out in April of each year, is the most comprehensive source of earnings information in the United Kingdom. It is a one per cent sample of all employees who are members of pay-as-you-earn (PAYE) schemes, but because of its sampling frame, it has difficulty capturing data on people with very low pay. It is therefore likely to under-represent relatively low paid staff earning below the tax threshold.

The Annual Survey of Hours and Earnings publication criteria ensures that all estimates are undisclosive. A number of estimates have been removed from the published tables for these reasons.

Median gross weekly earnings for North Southwark and Bermondsey, Camberwell and Peckham and Dulwich and West Norwood, 2001–04

	2001		2002		2003		2004 exc		2004 inc	
Constituency	*Median (£)*	*CV%*[1]	*Median (£)*	*CV%*[1]	*Median (£)*	*CV%*[1]	*Median (£)*	*CV%*[1]	*Median (£)*	*CV%*[1]
North Southwark and Bermondsey	591.0	2.6	599.7	2.5	631.0	3.6	596.7	4.3	596.7	4.3
Camberwell and Peckham	457.3	11.0	467.1	12.0	482.1	13.0	455.9	12.1	457.5	10.0
Dulwich and West Norwood	408.2	9.1	365.1	7.3	360.6	9.9	371.7	11.0	362.8	12.0

Data Source:

Annual Survey of Hours and Earnings, ONS

Mean gross weekly earnings for North Southwark and Bermondsey, Camberwell and Peckham and Dulwich and West Norwood, 2001–04

	2001		*2002*		*2003*		*2004 exc*		*2004 inc*	
Constituency	*Mean (£)*	*CV%*[1]	*Mean (£)*	*CV%*[1]	*Mean (£)*	*CV%*[1]	*Mean (£)*	*CV%*[1]	*Mean (£)*	*CV%*[1]
North Southwark and Bermondsey	637.9	2.1	644.9	2.3	685.7	2.0	698.6	2.9	693.3	2.8
Camberwell and Peckham	495.8	5.2	510.5	6.1	537.0	8.3	533.2	8.8	520.9	8.0
Dulwich and West Norwood	464.7	9.6	410.3	7.0	426.0	8.3	439.3	8.0	428.6	8.7

[1] Key to quality:
Precise: CV ≤ 5%, reasonably precise: CV > 5% and ≤ 10%, Acceptable: CV > 10% and ≤ 20%

Notes:

Data for 1997 is currently only available from a different survey which is discontinuous with the Annual Survey of Hours and Earnings (ASHE). Data from ASHE will not be available until later 2004 following a QA process.

The table provides data on the average gross weekly earnings for full time employees on adult rates of pay whose pay for the pay period was unaffected by absence, who worked in North Southwark and Bermondsey, Camberwell and Peckham and Dulwich or West Norwood, for the years 2001 to 2004.

The Annual Survey of Hours and Earnings, (ASHE), carried out in April of each year, is the most comprehensive source of earnings information in the United Kingdom. It is a one per cent sample of all employees who are members of pay-as-you-earn (PAYE) schemes. The ASHE replaces the New Earnings Survey (NES) from October 2004. The main difference between the ASHE and NES being that estimates are weighted to population totals from the Labour Force Survey.

Gross weekly earnings for Adult Full-Time Employees whose pay for the survey period was not affected by absence.

ASHE results for 2004 have been produced on 2 separate basis. Firstly a similar basis to 2003 for comparison purposes labelled as 2004exc and also including a range of new supplementary surveys designed to improve the coverage labelled 2004inc, which is our best estimates of the level of earnings in 2004.

Data Source:

Annual Survey of Hours and Earnings, ONS

Keith Vaz: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what the latest figures are for average earnings of *(a)* women and *(b)* men in the UK. [196018]

Mr. Timms: The information requested falls within the responsibility of National Statistician, who has been asked to reply.

Letter from Len Cook to Keith Vaz, dated 8 November 2004:

As National Statistician, I have been asked to reply to your recent Parliamentary Question what the latest figures are for average earnings of *(a)* women and *(b)* men in the UK. (196018).

Average earnings are estimated from the Annual Survey of Hours and Earnings and are provided for full-time employees on adult rates of pay whose pay was unaffected by absence during the pay period, by their place of work. This is the standard definition used for Annual Survey of Hours and Earnings tables. The survey does not collect data on the self-employed and people who do unpaid work.

The median gross weekly earnings in 2004 for women was £358.0 and £462.0 for men. The mean gross weekly earnings in 2004 for women was £420.2 and £556.8 for men.

This data is available on the statistics web site: http://www.statistics.gov.uk/STATBASE/Product.asp?vlnk = 13101.

The Annual Survey of Hours and Earnings, carried out in April of each year, is the most comprehensive source of earnings information in the United Kingdom. It is a one per cent sample of all employees who are members of pay-as-you-earn schemes, but because of its sampling frame, it has difficulty capturing data on people with very low pay. It is therefore likely to under-represent relatively low paid staff earning below the tax threshold.

The Annual Survey of Hours and Earnings publication criteria ensures that all estimates are undisclosive. A number of estimates have been removed from the published tables for these reasons.

Cancer Statistics

Tom Cox: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer how many *(a)* men and *(b)* women died of cancer in England and Wales in the last 12 months. [195926]

Mr. Timms: The information requested falls within the responsibility of the National Statistician, who has been asked to reply.

Letter from Len Cook to Mr. Tom Cox, dated 8 November 2004:

As National Statistician I have been asked to reply to your recent question asking how many *(a)* men and *(b)* women died of cancer in England and Wales in the last 12 months. (195926)

The latest year for which data are available is 2003. Figures on the numbers of deaths due to cancer are shown in the table below for that year.

Number of deaths where the underlying cause of death was cancer[1] by sex in England and Wales, 2003[2]

	All ages	*Aged 15 and over*
(a) Males	70,814	70,663
(b) Females	65,141	65,010

[1] The cause of death was defined using the International Classification of Diseases, Tenth Revision (ICD-10) codes C00-C97.

[2] Number of deaths occurring in the calendar year.

Data Protection

Michael Fabricant: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what procedures are in place *(a)* to check the criminal records of civil servants in his Department and agencies responsible to his Department, including the Inland Revenue and Customs and Excise, who have access to computer databases containing confidential information on the public and *(b)* to ensure that there can be no improper use of computer databases containing confidential information on the public; and if he will make a statement. [194597]

Mr. Timms: The Chancellor's Departments and agencies have systems in place to ensure that appropriate character and security checks are carried out prior to unconditional offers of employment being made. Security clearance procedures are carried out in line with Cabinet Office guidance and reviewed at regular intervals. All staff are made aware of their obligation to maintain the confidentiality of data and information and that any misuse of departmental systems, or failure to follow established security procedures or policies, may lead to disciplinary action. Procedures are in place for serving staff to report any convictions.

Departmental IT

Brian White: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what percentage of the Department's *(a)* implemented and *(b)* planned computer systems use open source software; and what plans are in place to raise this level. [195668]

Mr. Timms: The use of open source software is below1 per cent. in both implemented and planned computer systems. Treasury, Customs and Revenue, follow the Government's published policy, considering open source solutions alongside proprietary ones in IT procurements, and awarding contracts on a value for money basis. The policy can be viewed at the UK Govtalk website.

Departmental Staff

Mr. Blunt: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer how many agency temporary staff have been working for the Department in each of the last five years, excluding those working for agencies for which no data is kept centrally. [196050]

Mr. Timms *[holding answer 4 November 2004]*: The Chancellor's Departments do not keep central records of agency staff employed; only staff on the Departments' payrolls are recorded.

The Chancellor's Departments use agency staff where this is the most cost-effective way of filling a vacancy in the short-term.

Economically Inactive People

Mr. Wills: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what recent estimate he has made of the number of economically inactive *(a)* males and *(b)* females aged (i) 40 to 49 and (ii) 50 to 59; and what estimate he has made of the number of economically inactive males aged 60 to 65. [196032]

Mr. Timms: The information requested falls within the responsibility of the National Statistician, who has been asked to reply.

Letter from Colin Mowl to Mr. Michael Wills, dated 8 November 2004:

The National Statistician has been asked to reply to your Parliamentary Question about economic inactivity. (196032)

The attached table gives the latest estimates of the number of economically inactive people by age and gender resident in the United Kingdom for the three months ending August 2004.

These estimates from the Labour Force Survey are, as with any sample survey, subject to sampling variability.

People economically inactive[1], United Kingdom, three months ending in August 2004 not seasonally adjusted

Thousand

Age	*Men*	*Women*
40–49	363	882
50–59	676	1,211
60–65	838	—

[1] Refers to people who are neither in employment nor unemployed.

Source:

ONS: Labour Force Survey.

David Davis: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer how many people were unemployed in Haltemprice and Howden in *(a)* the last month for which figures are available and *(b)* each of the preceding 12 months. [194961]

Mr. Timms: The information requested falls within the responsibility of the National Statistician, who has been asked to reply.

Letter from Len Cook to Mr. David Davis, dated 8 November 2004:

As National Statistician, I have been asked to reply to your Parliamentary Question about unemployment. (194961)

Estimates from the Labour Force Survey for the twelve-month period ending in February 2003 show that there were 1,000 residents aged 16 and over in the Haltemprice and Howden Parliamentary Constituency who were unemployed. The corresponding figure for the twelve-month period ending in February 2002 was also 1,000.

The unemployment estimates are based on small sample sizes and are therefore subject to a high degree of sampling variability. They should therefore be treated with caution.

The Office for National Statistics also compiles statistics of those claiming Jobseeker's Allowance for local areas including Parliamentary Constituencies. The attached table gives the number of people resident in the Haltemprice and Howden Parliamentary Constituency claiming Jobseeker's Allowance benefits for September 2004 and each of the preceding 12 months. The data are not seasonally adjusted.

JSA claimants in the Haltemprice and Howden parliamentary constituency (not seasonally adjusted)

Date	*Level*
September 2003	766
October 2003	719
November 2003	733
December 2003	734
January 2004	812
February 2004	783
March 2004	770
April 2004	743
May 2004	687
June 2004	654
July 2004	660
August 2004	675
September 2004	647

Source:

Jobcentre Plus administrative system

Economic Statistics

Hugh Bayley: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer how many full-time equivalent jobs *(a)* his Department and *(b)* its Executive agencies had in (i) Yorkshire and the Humber and (ii) the City of York in (A) 1997 and (B) the latest year for which figures are available. [191853]

Mr. Timms: The number of full-time equivalent jobs in the Debt Management Office and the Office of Government Commerce in Yorkshire and the Humber is published in "Civil Service Statistics" which is available in the Library, and at www.civil-service.gov.uk/statistics.

The number of full-time equivalent jobs in the Debt Management Office and the Office of Government Commerce in the City of York can be found in the following table.

Department/agency	*1997*	*Current*
Debt Management Office	0	0
Office of Government Commerce	n/a	1

For all other Chancellor's Departments, I refer my hon. Friend to the answer given by my hon. Friend the Minister for the Cabinet Office on 25 October 2004, *Official Report*, column 1053W.

Tony Lloyd: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer how many jobs were lost in *(a)* Manchester Central constituency, *(b)* the City of Manchester, *(c)* Greater Manchester and *(d)* the North West in each of the last 10 years. [195168]

Mr. Timms *[holding answer 1 November 2004]*: The information requested falls within the responsibility of the National Statistician, who has been asked to reply.

Letter from Len Cook to Mr. Tony Lloyd, dated 8 November 2004:

As National Statistician, I have been asked to reply to your Parliamentary Question about jobs lost in Manchester Central, City of Manchester, Greater Manchester and the North West. (195168)

While statistics of jobs lost are not available explicitly, statistics from surveys enable comparisons to be made of net changes in numbers of jobs from year to year.

The attached table shows the information available. The latest year available is 2002. Data comparable to this are available back to 1995.

Number of employee jobs[1] with workplace in Manchester Central, City of Manchester, Greater Manchester and North West—1995 to 2002

Thousand

	Manchester Central[2]	*City of Manchester[2]*	*Greater Manchester[2]*	*North West*
Number of employee jobs				
1995	150	258	1,029	2,615
1996	145	251	1,054	2,645
1997	158	266	1,061	2,701
1998	158	268	1,071	2,789
1999	166	281	1,117	2,841
2000	171	286	1,122	2,846
2001	175	293	1,130	2,895
2002	194	314	1,152	2,974
Year on year change[3]				
1996	-5	-7	25	30
1997	13	14	8	56
1998	0	2	9	88
1999	8	13	46	52
2000	5	5	5	5
2001	4	7	9	49
2002	18	21	21	79

[1] Excludes self-employed jobs.

[2] These figures are aggregates from which agriculture class 0100 (1992 SIC) have been excluded.

[3] The year on year change from 1995 to 2002 change has been rounded to the nearest thousand separately from rounded levels for 1995 to 2002.

Source:

1995–1997 rescaled Annual Employment Survey; 1998–2002 Annual Business Inquiry

Fair trade

Mr. Burstow: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer whether it is his policy to ensure that hospitality within his Department is sourced from fair trade producers wherever possible within the boundaries set by the public procurement rules. [197057]

Mr. Timms: I refer the hon. Member to the answer given to the hon. Member for Buckingham (Mr. Bercow) on 8 December 2003, *Official Report*, column 335W.

GDP (Manufacturing)

Mr. Illsley: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what percentage of gross domestic product was comprised of the manufacturing sector in *(a)* 1997 and *(b)* the last year for which figures are available. [197006]

Mr. Timms: The information requested falls within the responsibility of the National Statistician, who has been asked to reply.

Letter from Colin Mowl to Mr. Eric Illsley, dated 8 November 2004:

The National Statistician has been asked to reply to your recent Parliamentary Question concerning what percentage of gross domestic product was comprised of the manufacturing sector in *(a)* 1997 and *(b)* the last year for which figures are available. I am replying in his absence. (197006)

The manufacturing sector comprised 21.2 per cent. of gross value added (GVA) in 1997. The latest year for which fully reconciled figures are available is 2002, when manufacturing comprised 15.9 per cent. of GVA.

The contribution of industries to the economy is normally shown by their contribution to GVA. The difference between GVA and gross domestic product is taxes less subsidies on products (e.g. VAT, excise duties) which cannot be allocated across industries.

Gershon Review

Kate Hoey: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer how much his Department spent on management consultants employed in connection with the Gershon Review. [195835]

Mr. Boateng: The Efficiency Review Team, led by Sir Peter Gershon, drew on a wide range of experience and expertise from both the public and private sectors and identified efficiency savings of over £20 billion. A number of management consultants provided advice during the Review, many of whom were made available to Sir Peter's team at no charge. A number of consultants' services were paid for at a cost of approximately £595,000 for the 11-month period of the Review.

Gun Deaths

Keith Vaz: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer how many people in the UK have died from gunshot wounds in each of the last 10 years. [196007]

Mr. Timms: The information requested falls within the responsibility of the National Statistician, who has been asked to reply.

Letter from Len Cook to Mr. Keith Vaz, dated 8 November 2004:

As National Statistician, I have been asked to reply to your recent Parliamentary Question asking how many people in the UK have died from gunshot wounds in each of the last 10 years. (196007)

The most recently available information is for deaths in 2003. Figures for deaths from firearms are shown in the table below for the calendar years 1994 to 2003.

Number of deaths from firearms injury[1], United Kingdom, 1994 to 2003[2]

	Number
1994	341
1995	358
1996	254
1997	201
1998	203
1999	210
2000	204
2001	167
2002	169
2003	163

[1] Cause of death was defined using the International Classification of Diseases, Ninth Revision (ICD-9) codes E922, E955.0-E955.4, E965.0-E965.4, E985.0-E985.4 and E970 from 1994 to 2000 and the International Classification of Diseases, Tenth Revision (ICD-10) codes W32-W34, X72-X74, X93-X95, Y22-Y24 and Y35.0 from 2001 onwards.

[2] Data for England and Wales are for deaths occurring in the calendar year (which were registered before the release of the routine annual publication). Data for Scotland and Northern Ireland are for deaths registered in the calendar year.

Household Incomes

Mr. Wills: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer when data will be available for the number of Households Below Average Income in each ward in each constituency. [196372]

Mr. Timms: The information requested falls within the responsibility of the National Statistician, who has been asked to reply.

Letter from Colin Mowl to Mr. Michael Wills, dated 8 November 2004:

The National Statistician has been asked to reply to your recent question asking when data will be available for the number of Households Below Average Income in each ward in each constituency. I am replying in his absence. (196372).

Estimates for income by constituency are not available but ONS have recently published experimental ward-based average household income estimates (although these do not provide an income distribution within the ward). They cover England and Wales for 1998/99. These estimates have been developed specifically for small areas where traditional survey methods do not capture sufficient data. They have been produced using a modelling approach that enables survey data to be combined with Census and administrative data to estimate at the small area level. We advise against combining the ward level estimates to constituencies or other higher levels. The best estimates for these higher levels may require different methods or statistical models.

These model-based estimates are of a different nature from standard survey estimates because they are dependent upon correctly specifying the relationship between weekly household income and the census/administrative information. The main limitation of estimates for small areas, either those estimated directly from responses to surveys or model-based, is that they are subject to variability. We have also produced the confidence intervals associated with the model-based estimates in order to make the accuracy of the estimates clear.

These estimates are described in more detail on the National Statistics website at: http://neighbourhood.statistics.gov.uk/ShowMetaData.asp?tn = Product&id = 5060 and are available at http://neighbourhood.statistics.gov.uk/NoHSubject.asp?SID = 3BAB80A42E8941369E910AE3325975A9&B = True&E = 4,0#4,0

We are doing research into developing other estimates of income distribution for small areas.

DWP's annual publication Households Below Average Income (HBAI) is sourced from the Family Resources Survey (FRS), and gives information on the location of individuals on the income distribution.

The publication presents results covering Great Britain for children, working-age adults pensioners, and all individuals in separate chapters but due to small sample sizes only shows results by geographic area disaggregated by Government Office Region. One set of tables presented in the publication show the proportion of individuals that fall below various low income thresholds. The current FRS series spans the years 1994/5—2002/03. The next publication showing results for 2003/04 is scheduled for March 2005.

Imported Primates

Mr. Banks: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer how many illegally imported primates were seized by HM Customs and Excise in the last five years, broken down by species. [197044]

John Healey: Customs has made the following seizures of imported primates in each of the past five years:

Item seized	*Number*	*Common name*	*Latin name*
1999			
Live animals	6	Mona monkeys	Cercopithecus mona
Live animals	6	Spot nosed monkeys	Cercopithecus Spp
Cooked monkey	1	Patas monkey	Erythrocebus patas
Parts of monkey	8	Not known	Not known
2000			
Live animal	1	Gibbon	Hylobates Spp
Live animal	1	Lesser white nosed monkey	Cercopithecus petaurista
Live animal	1	Golden cheeked gibbon	Hylobates gabriellae
Smoked monkeys	11	Not known	Not known
2001			
—	—	—	—
2002			
Dried monkey	1	Not known	Not known
Monkey tail	1	Not known	Not known
Baboon skull	1	Not known	Not known
2003			
Baboon skulls	3	Hamadryas baboon	Papio hamadryas
Monkey skulls	4	Not known	Cercopithecus Spp
Monkey skull	1	Not known	Not known

This information is included in the seizures report that Customs provide to the CITES Secretariat for publication.

Customs has also made a number of seizures under its enforcement responsibilities regarding products of animal origin, and some of these may have included meat from primates.

Influenza

David Davis: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer how many people aged 65 years or over died of influenza in *(a)* the East Riding of Yorkshire, *(b)* Hull and *(c)* England in each year since 2001. [194979]

Mr. Timms: The information requested falls within the responsibility of the National Statistician, who has been asked to reply.

Letter from Len Cook to Mr. David Davis, dated 8 November 2004:

As National Statistician, I have been asked to reply to your recent Parliamentary Question asking how many people aged 65 years or over have died of influenza in *(a)* East Riding of Yorkshire, *(b)* Hull, *(c)* the UK in each year since 2001. (194979)

Figures for East Riding of Yorkshire and Kingston upon Hull, (City of) unitary authorities and the United Kingdom are provided in the table.

Numbers of deaths from influenza[1], 2001 to 2003[2] for East Riding of Yorkshire and Kingston upon Hull, (City of) unitary authorities and the United Kingdom[3]

	East Riding of Yorkshire	Kingston upon Hull, City of	United Kingdom
2001	[4]—	[4]—	27
2002	[4]—	[4]—	34
2003	[4]—	[4]—	64

[1] Deaths with an underlying cause of influenza defined using the International Classification of Diseases, Tenth Revision (ICD-10) codes J10 and J11.

[2] Figures are for deaths occurring in each calendar year, except for data for Scotland and Northern Ireland included in the United Kingdom totals. These are deaths registered in each calendar year.

[3] Deaths of usual residents of these areas.

[4] Fewer than five deaths.

Job Creation (Dagenham)

Jon Cruddas: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer how many jobs have been created in the Dagenham constituency since *(a)* 1997 and *(b)* 2001. [196453]

Mr. Timms: The information requested falls within the responsibility of the National Statistician, who has been asked to reply.

Letter from Colin Mowl to Mr. Jon Cruddas, dated 8 November 2004:

The National Statistician has been asked to reply to your Parliamentary Question about jobs created in the Dagenham constituency. I am replying in his absence. (196453)

While statistics of new jobs created are not available explicitly, statistics from surveys enable comparisons to be made of net changes in numbers of jobs from year to year.

The attached table shows the information requested, relating to jobs in Dagenham for 1997, 2001 and 2002, which is the latest year available.

Number of employee jobs[1] with workplace in Dagenham parliamentary constituency, 1997, 2001 and 2002

	Total
Number	
1997	26,400
2001	23,200
2002	21,900
Change[2]	
1997 to 2002	-4,400
2001 to 2002	-1,300

[1] Excludes self-employed jobs.

[2] The 1997 to 2002 change and 2001 to 2002 change has been rounded to the nearest hundred separately from rounded levels for 1997, 2001 and 2002.

Source:

1997 rescaled Annual Employment Survey; 2001–02 Annual Business Inquiry

Oil and Gas (Windfall Tax)

Alan Simpson: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he will assess the case for a windfall tax on profits accruing to UK gas and oil producers as a result of recent and future oil price increases; and if he will make a statement. [196494]

John Healey: All taxes are kept under review on a Budget by Budget basis. The Government are committed to delivering a tax regime for the North Sea which promotes investment and takes a fair share of revenue derived from a national resource.

Older Workers

Mr. Willetts: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer pursuant to the answer of 7 September 2004, *Official Report*, column 1195W, on older workers, if he will break down the figures provided by *(a)* gender and *(b)* age. [194833]

Mr. Timms: The information requested falls within the responsibility of the National Statistician, who has been asked to reply.

Letter from Len Cook to Mr. David Willetts, dated 8 November 2004:

As National Statistician, I have been asked to reply to your recent Parliamentary Question about older workers broken down by gender and age. (194833)

The attached table gives estimates of the number of people above state pension age in employment and resident in the United Kingdom for the three months ending in May each year from 1992 to 2004.

These estimates from the Labour Force Survey (LFS) are, as with any statistical sample survey, subject to sampling variability.

Number of people above state pension age[1] in employment—United Kingdom—three months ending in May each year from 1992 to 2004—not seasonally adjusted

Thousand

	60–64[2]	65–69	70–74	75+	Total 65 and over (men) and 60 and over (women)
All persons					
1992	338	286	125	68	818
1993	347	261	111	55	774
1994	357	269	101	56	782
1995	350	276	118	52	797
1996	352	261	107	52	773

Number of people above state pension age[1] in employment—United Kingdom—three months ending in May each year from 1992 to 2004—not seasonally adjusted

Thousand

	60–64[2]	65–69	70–74	75+	Total 65 and over (men) and 60 and over (women)
1997	374	271	104	57	805
1998	334	291	93	60	778
1999	354	301	108	56	819
2000	372	289	110	60	831
2001	397	274	101	46	818
2002	408	319	103	55	885
2003	405	352	104	69	930
2004	453	361	127	52	993
Men					
1992	—	176	79	46	301
1993	—	154	67	35	255
1994	—	164	63	37	264
1995	—	179	75	35	288
1996	—	158	71	37	266
1997	—	162	68	39	269
1998	—	179	57	37	274
1999	—	182	71	35	288
2000	—	176	72	40	287
2001	—	172	64	31	267
2002	—	193	64	35	291
2003	—	220	69	50	339
2004	—	227	76	35	338
Women					
1992	338	110	46	22	517
1993	347	108	44	20	518
1994	357	104	38	19	518
1995	350	98	43	18	509
1996	352	103	36	15	507
1997	374	109	36	18	536
1998	334	111	36	22	504
1999	354	119	36	21	531
2000	372	113	38	20	544
2001	397	102	37	15	552
2002	408	126	40	20	594
2003	405	132	35	19	591
2004	453	134	51	17	655

'—' = No data available

[1] This refers to men aged 65 and over and women aged 60 and over.

[2] Figures are based on women only as men in this age group are below pension age.

Source:

ONS Labour Force Survey

Pensioners

Mrs. Spelman: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer how many households in England are *(a)* single occupation with one pensioner, *(b)* occupied by two pensioners and no other adults and *(c)* occupied by pensioners only. [195251]

Mr. Timms: The information requested falls within the responsibility of the National Statistician, who has been asked to reply.

Letter from Len Cook to Mrs. Caroline Spelman, dated 8 November 2004:

As National Statistician and Registrar General for England and Wales I have been asked to reply to your recent Parliamentary Question asking how many households in England are *(a)* single occupation with one pensioner, *(b)* occupied by two pensioners and no other adults and *(c)* occupied by pensioners only. (195251)

The table shows the number of exclusively pensioner households in England on Census day (29 April 2001), with special attention to one and two pensioner households. The figures have been extracted from Table T08 on the CD supplement to the Census 2001 National Report for England and Wales, which is available in the House of Commons Library.

Number of exclusively pensioner households in England on Census day, 29 April 2001

Pensioner households[1]	*All households*
One pensioner household	2,939,465
Two pensioner household	1,891,401
All pensioner household	4,848,304

[1] Pensionable Age is 65 and over for males and 60 and over for females

Source:

Table T08 2001 Census National Report for England and Wales

Press Officers

Dr. Julian Lewis: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer how many press officers the Department has employed in each of the past five years. [196045]

Mr. Timms *[holding answer 4 November 2004]*: I refer the hon. Member to the answer I gave to the right hon. Member for Charnwood (Mr. Dorrell) on 25 October 2004, *Official Report*, column 1057W.

Royal Lodge, Windsor

Mr. Alan Williams: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what the accommodation consists of at Royal Lodge, Windsor. [193943]

Mr. Timms: The accommodation consists of:

(a) Royal Lodge consisting of the main house including staff accommodation, gardens and grounds of 40.3 hectares including tennis court and the Miniature Welsh Cottage;

and within these grounds

(b) Gardener's Cottage;

(c) Chapel Lodge and

(d) No. 6 Lodge Cottages.

Somalia

Dr. Gibson: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer how many Somalian nationals are resident in the UK. [195301]

Mr. Timms: The information requested falls within the responsibility of the National Statistician, who has been asked to reply.

Letter from Len Cook to Mr. Ian Gibson, dated 8 November 2004:

As National Statistician, I have been asked to reply to your recent Parliamentary Question about Somalian nationals. (195301)

It is estimated that, for the three months ending in August 2004, there were 60,000 Somalian nationals resident in the United Kingdom.

This estimate from the Labour Force Survey is, as with any statistical sample survey, subject to sampling variability.

Unclaimed Assets

Mr. Waterson: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what the value of unclaimed gilts was in each of the last five years. [196108]

Mr. Timms: The following figures have been extracted from the Government Stock register currently maintained by the Bank of England:

The moneys unclaimed in respect of British Government Stock are:

£ million

As at 1 November	*Unclaimed redemption moneys*	*Unclaimed dividend payments*	*Total unclaimed*
2004	23.7	20.9	44.6
2003	22.9	20.4	43.3
2002	33.1	21.1	54.2
2001	24.3	23.0	47.3
2000	24.6	24.8	49.4

Efforts have been, and continue to be, made to reunite unclaimed funds with their rightful recipient.

Mr. Waterson: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he will make a statement on progress on the proposal in the 2004 Budget to apply unclaimed assets for charitable purposes. [196109]

Mr. Timms: We plan to assess and report on progress in this year's PBR.

VAT (Charities)

Mrs. Lawrence: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he will make a statement on VAT as applied to charities. [197375]

Mr. Gordon Brown: The Government will make a one-off donation to the Band Aid Charitable Trust equivalent to the VAT collected on sales of the new Band Aid record and the Live Aid DVD, so that all of the money will benefit the people that need it most in the poorest African countries.

Working Women

Keith Vaz: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer in what industry the largest proportion of women in the UK are employed. [196019]

Mr. Timms: The information requested falls within the responsibility of the National Statistician, who has been asked to reply.

Letter from Colin Mowl to Mr. Keith Vaz, dated 8 November 2004:

The National Statistician has been asked to reply to your Parliamentary Question about which industry employs the largest proportion of women in the UK. I am replying in his absence. (196019)

The industry grouping with the largest proportion of women in employment is Health and social work. In June 2004, 83 per cent. of the jobs in this area were held by women.

CULTURE, MEDIA AND SPORT

Big Lottery Fund

Mr. Chris Smith: To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport if she will ensure that provision is made by the Big Lottery Fund for the funding of children's play facilities across the country. [196105]

Estelle Morris: We are reforming the lottery to make it more responsive to community needs and more flexible in its delivery. The fund is now consulting on themes, outcomes and suggested priorities, which include play. The Big Lottery Fund will be responsible for designing programmes, identifying the most appropriate means of delivery and selecting projects. We will be discussing with the fund how they can best achieve the spirit of the Government's commitment to play, within the framework of funding priorities.

British Library Music Collection

Ms Atherton: To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport what plans she has to require music companies to provide a copy of each CD or DVD that they produce for the British Library collection. [196327]

Estelle Morris: There are no plans to make the deposit of sound recordings a statutory obligation. The existing scheme of voluntary deposit is working well.

Ms Atherton: To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport what rationale underlies the policy of not requiring music companies to provide a sample copy of each CD or DVD produced for the British Library collection. [196343]

Estelle Morris: DCMS's policy is to support the successful voluntary deposit arrangements that exist between the music industry and the British Library. Under the voluntary scheme 85 per cent. of the total UK output of sound recordings are deposited in the Sound Archive of the British Library.

The voluntary deposit arrangement between the music industry and the British Library is working well.

Children's Play

Paddy Tipping: To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport when she will respond to the Dobson review of children's play; and if she will make a statement. [196363]

Mr. Caborn: I refer my hon. Friend to the answer given on 21 October 2004, *Official Report*, column 821W, to my hon. Friend the Member for Gloucester (Mr. Dhanda).

Departmental Offices

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport what the cost of *(a)* decoration and *(b)* refurbishment of the London office of the Department was in each of the last four years. [196153]

Mr. Caborn: I refer the hon. Member to the answer given to the hon. Member for Meirionnydd Nant Conwy (Mr. Llwyd) on 26 March 2004, *Official Report*, column 1118W. Since that date £26,000 has been spent on redecoration in two of the four buildings occupied by the Department.

Departmental Publications (Accessibility)

Mr. Goodman: To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport how many and what proportion of publications issued by her Department are available in *(a)* Braille, *(b)* autoprint, *(c)* large print and *(d)* easy read format. [194289]

Mr. Caborn: All DCMS publications are available in disability versions on demand. Additionally, all DCMS publications are on the DCMS website which is available by phone.

Departmental/Lottery Spending

Mr. Don Foster: To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport how much *(a)* departmental and *(b)* Lottery funding has been spent on (i) sport, (ii) museums, galleries and libraries, (iii) arts, (iv) historic buildings, monuments and sites, (v) the Royal Parks, (vi) tourism, (vii) broadcasting and media, (viii) commemorative services and (ix) administration and research in each year from 1997; how much was unallocated; and if she will make a statement. [194660]

Mr. Caborn: Information on departmental spending in these categories from 1998–99 is available in the departmental report 2004 (Cmd. 6220, pages 67 to 73 refer). Copies of the departmental report are placed in the House of Commons Library and it is also available on the DCMS website. Information on departmental spending in 1997–98 is not available on a comparable basis because of the change to resource accounting.

Tourism and broadcasting/media are not direct beneficiaries of Lottery funding. Information on Lottery spending (i.e. the amount authorised for payment out of the National Lottery Distribution Fund to the distributing bodies for grant payments) for the good causes, including sport, the arts and the national heritage, can be obtained from the National Lottery Distribution Fund Annual Accounts for the years 1997–98 to 2002–03 inclusive. In each year's Accounts, a table headed "Reconciliation of amounts available to distributing bodies" gives the amounts "Authorised for payment to distributing bodies". This equals the amount drawn down (and is equivalent to spending from) the NLDF by the distributors. Copies of the NLDF accounts are available in the House of Commons Library.

The NLDF annual accounts for 2003–04 are currently being audited prior to publication.

Digital Terrestrial Television

Mr. Steen: To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport when digital terrestrial television will be available throughout Totnes constituency, with particular reference to *(a)* Blackawton and *(b)* Halwell. [196947]

Estelle Morris: Due to the topography of the land and technical constraints on Digital Terrestrial Television (DTT) transmissions from the Beacon Hill transmitter, digital terrestrial services are not predicted to be available to viewers in Blackawton and Halwell before Switchover.

The Government are committed to ensuring that at Switchover everyone who can currently receive the main public service broadcasting channels on analogue will be able to do so on digital systems.

No firm dates for Switchover have been set, but current discussions suggest that Switchover could start to happen as early as 2007 and be completed by 2012.

English Heritage

Mr. Don Foster: To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport how much English Heritage spent on skills and education projects in each year from 1997; and if she will make a statement. [194664]

Mr. Caborn: Since 1997, English Heritage has spent the following on education projects:

English Heritage—money spent on education projects since 1997

	£ million
1997–98	1,150,000
1998–99	1,100,000
1999–2000	1,150,000
2000–01	1,222,000
2001–02	1,210,000
2002–03	1,145,000
2003–04	1,343,000

English Heritage does not undertake specific skills projects, therefore a similar breakdown cannot be provided. They take a strategic approach towards skills development, co-ordinating action across industry, education, other public bodies and government. Since 1997 they have spent £300,000 on supporting the work of the National Heritage Training Group and conducting research into the condition of the traditional building sector, plus £474,000 on supporting parks, gardens and landscape maintenance skills.

Fair Trade

Mr. Burstow: To ask the Secretary of State fo Culture, Media and Sport if she will make it her policy to ensure that all hospitality within her Department i sourced from Fair Trade producers wherever possibl within the boundaries set by the public procuremen rules. [196655

Mr. Caborn: It is already the policy in DCMS for al catering to make use of Fair Trade goods and provision wherever possible.

Free Television Licences

Jon Cruddas: To ask the Secretary of State fo Culture, Media and Sport how many households i Dagenham receive the free television licence for th over-75s. [196454

Estelle Morris: TV Licensing, who administer fre television licences for people aged 75 or over as agent for the BBC, are not able to provide geographica breakdowns of the number of free licences issued However, 2001 Census data indicate that approximatel 6,600 people living in the Dagenham constituency ar aged 75 or over.

Gambling

Mr. Gordon Prentice: To ask the Secretary of State fo Culture, Media and Sport where she expects th proposed new casinos to be located, broken down b region. [19466

Mr. Caborn *[holding answer 1 November 2004]*: When the Gambling Bill is implemented it will be for operators to decide where to site new casino premises, provided that they have the necessary operating licences, premises licences and planning permission.

Heritage Lottery Fund

Mr. Chris Smith: To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport what her policy is in relation to the provision of funds by the Heritage Lottery Fund for heritage properties overseas that have a particular British connection and relevance. [196107]

Mr. Caborn: Decisions on the provision of funds by the Heritage Lottery Fund (HLF) are a matter for the board of trustees who are independent of Government: it is not open to Ministers to intervene in these decisions. The HLF only supports projects that relate to the national, regional or local heritage of the UK.

Licensing Act

Claire Ward: To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport when she expects the Licensing Act 2003 to be fully implemented; and if she will make a statement on progress with implementation. [196576]

Mr. Caborn: We are making good progress with the implementation of the Licensing Act 2003. On 7 July, the Secretary of State announced that the first appointed day, when the transitional period begins, would be 7 February 2005, and that full implementation of the 2003 Act was therefore expected for November 2005. Draft regulations, which provide details on how the new licensing system will operate, are currently the subject of a public consultation that ends on 10 November. We announced a separate consultation with regard to the draft on Thursday 4 November.

Lottery Funding (Scotland)

Pete Wishart: To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport what her estimate is of the displacement of lottery funding to Scotland that would be consequent on a successful London bid for the 2012 Olympics. [195265]

Tessa Jowell: In the event of a successful bid, new Olympic Lottery games may lead to a sales diversion from core national lottery games. This, and the possible change to percentage shares after 2009 should the full lottery contribution towards the games be required, could result in a loss of income to the existing good causes of around 5 per cent. before 2009 and up to 12 per cent. between 2009/2012. This displacement of funding will occur at the same level for Scotland as for the rest of the country.

Lottery Games

Pete Wishart: To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport what assessment she has made of the likely overall impact of the new London Olympic lottery game on the existing national lottery. [195264]

Tessa Jowell: It is estimated that sales diversion to Olympic lottery games, which will only be introduced if the Olympic bid is successful, will reduce income to the existing good causes by about 5 per cent. overall. The effect is likely to be lower in the early years, and to increase as the games approach.

Lotto Terminals

Anne Picking: To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport how many representations have been made to her expressing concern about the process used by Camelot when selecting outlets for lotto terminals; and if she will make a statement. [195923]

Estelle Morris: In the last two years my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State has received eight representations expressing concern about the selection process used by Camelot when selecting outlets for lotto terminals. Issues concerning national lottery terminals are a matter for the national lottery operator acting under its licence from the National Lottery Commission.

Olympic Games

Pete Wishart: To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport if she will make a statement on financial guarantees the Government has given to the International Olympic Committee with regard to the London Olympic bid. [194170]

Tessa Jowell: In the Applicant Questionnaire, submitted to the International Olympic Committee (IOC) on 15 January 2004 for the first stage of the bid process, the Government confirmed it would be the ultimate guarantor of Olympic funding should there be a shortfall between Olympic costs and revenues.

For the next stage, in the Candidature File, the IOC are seeking detailed guarantees, within that existing Government commitment, which relate to financing the various elements of the Games. They cover the infrastructure, transport, economic shortfall of the OCOG and government related services such as security, medical, customs and immigration. In agreeing these guarantees the Government will be careful to ensure that the commitments made are consistent with the Olympic funding Memorandum of Understanding laid before Parliament as a Command Paper 5867 and further reported to Parliament in a Departmental Minute dated 2 December 2003.

Pete Wishart: To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport what assessment she has made of the impact of a successful London Olympic bid on tourism on each *(a)* country and *(b)* region of the UK. [194174]

Tessa Jowell: We are assessing the impact of staging a London Olympics on various economic sectors, including on tourism. This does not include an attempt to estimate a breakdown of that impact by UK nation and region.

Pete Wishart: To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport what her estimate is of the value to the UK economy of the proposed London Olympics; and whether she has made an assessment of employment generated by the proposed games in each *(a)* country and *(b)* region of the UK. [194209]

Tessa Jowell: We are assessing the impact of staging a London Olympics on the economy, but this does not include an attempt to estimate employment generation by UK nation and region.

Sport (Suffolk Schools)

Mr. Spring: To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport what plans her Department has to promote sport in Suffolk schools. [196504]

Mr. Caborn: The Government are investing over £1 billion to transform school sport throughout England. This is delivering an ambitious Public Service Agreement target to increase the percentage of 5 to 16-year-olds who spend a minimum of two hours each week on high quality PE and school sport to 75 per cent. by 2006 and to 85 per cent. by 2008.

As part of this investment the Government are establishing a network of School Sport Partnerships to increase and enhance school sports opportunities for all children in their areas. All maintained primary, special and secondary schools will be in a School Sport Partnership from September 2006. Currently 54 per cent. of schools are in a School Sport Partnership. Suffolk Local Education Authority has four School Sport Partnerships, comprising 23 secondary schools and 76 primary schools.

CABINET OFFICE

Civil Service Pensions

Mrs. Lait: To ask the Minister for the Cabinet Office what the latest figure is for the average length of payment of civil service direct benefit pension. [195720]

Ruth Kelly: Based on the most recent assessment of the Principal Civil Service Pension Scheme carried out by the Scheme Actuary as at 31 March 2003, the average life expectancy for someone retiring at age 60 was 23.2 years (men) and 26.2 years (women).

FOREIGN AND COMMONWEALTH AFFAIRS

African Union

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what discussions he has had with the African Union about monitoring of *(a)* ceasefire violations and *(b)* breaches of international (i) human rights and (ii) humanitarian law. [196083]

Mr. Mullin: We are in daily contact with the African Union (AU) about their Monitoring mission in Darfur. In recent months my right hon. Friends the Foreign Secretary and the Secretary of State for International Development, have both spoken to the Chair of the AU Commission, Alpha Oumar Konare, and the AU Commissioner for Peace and Security, Said Djinnet. I met with both Mr. Konare and Mr. Djinnet during my visit to Addis Ababa on 26 October.

British Overseas Territories

Mr. Andrew Turner: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will list for each British overseas territory, the responsibilities which in England would be those of a central Government Department but which in that territory are exercised by *(a)* him and *(b)* the Crown's representative. [195430]

Mr. Rammell: Most of the Overseas Territories enjoy a large degree of internal self-government and control over their own domestic affairs. However, certain reserved powers are retained by the Governor or equivalent (HM the Queen's representative in each Overseas Territory), in order to protect the UK Government's overall responsibility for the good governance of the Overseas Territories and for their defence and external affairs. In general, defence, internal security, external affairs, nationality and administration of the public service and police remain the responsibility of the Governor or equivalent. My right hon. Friend the Foreign Secretary does not exercise direct responsibilities in the territories, but may instruct Governors or their equivalents as to the exercise of many of their functions.

The main responsibilities of the Governor in each territory are as follows:

Anguilla

External affairs; defence; internal security (including the police); offshore finance; the public service.

Bermuda

External affairs; defence (including armed forces); internal security and the police; certain senior appointments.

British Virgin Islands

External affairs; defence; internal security (including the police); the public service.

Cayman Islands

External affairs; internal security (including the police); defence; the public service.

Falkland Islands

External affairs; the public service; (with the Commander British Forces) defence and internal security.

Gibraltar

All matters not specifically allocated to local Ministers; in particular for defence, external affairs and internal security.

Montserrat

External affairs; defence; internal security (including the police); offshore finance; public service.

Pitcairn Islands

External affairs; defence of the Islands; some other broad policy issues (Pitcairn islanders manage their day-to-day internal affairs through the Island Council and the Island Internal Committee).

St. Helena and dependencies

External affairs; defence; internal security; the police; finance; shipping; the public service.

Turks and Caicos Islands

Defence; external affairs; offshore finance; internal security (including the police); management of the public service.

Sovereign Base Areas of Akrotiri and Dhekelia in Cyprus

The Sovereign Base Areas (SBA) are military bases. My right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Defence has overall responsibility for the Sovereign Base Areas, but day-to-day responsibility for the bases rests with the SBA Administration.

British Antarctic Territory, British Indian Ocean Territory and South Georgia and South Sandwich Islands

In these Territories, most governmental functions are exercisable by the Commissioner or by officers subordinate to the Commissioner. There are no settled populations and, accordingly, there are no local representative institutions.

Commonwealth Countries

Mr. Rosindell: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs of which countries the Queen is the head of state. (186895)

Mr. Rammell *[Pursuant to the reply, 7 September 2004, Official Report, c. 1060–61W]:* There were a number of errors in my hon. Friend the Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State at the Foreign and Commonwealth Office Mr Mullin's answer of 7 September to the hon. Member, for which I apologise. The correct answer should read as follows:

Her Majesty The Queen is the Sovereign and Head of State of the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland, Her Majesty's Realms, Her Majesty's Overseas Territories, and Her Majesty's Crown Dependencies.

HM Realms are:

Antigua and Barbuda

Australia

The Bahamas

Barbados

Belize

Canada

Grenada

Jamaica

New Zealand

Papua New Guinea

St Kitts and Nevis

St. Lucia

St. Vincent and the Grenadines

Solomon Islands

Tuvalu

HM Overseas Territories are:

Anguilla

Bermuda

British Antarctic Territory

British Indian Ocean Territory

British Virgin Islands

Cayman Islands

Falkland Islands

Gibraltar

Montserrat

Pitcairn, Henderson, Ducie and Oeno Islands

St Helena and her Dependencies of Ascension Island and Tristan da Cunha

South Georgia and the South Sandwich Islands

The Sovereign Base Areas of Akrotiri and Dhekelia on Cyprus

Turks and Caicos Islands

Her Majesty's Crown Dependencies are:

The Isle of Man

The Bailiwick of Jersey

The Bailiwick of Guernsey

Correspondence

Sir Gerald Kaufman: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs when he will reply to the letter to him dated 1 September from the right hon. Member for Manchester, Gorton, with regard to Pastor D. Lindsay. [195515]

Mr. Mullin: My right hon. Friend the Foreign Secretary replied on 29 October.

Sir Gerald Kaufman: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs when he will reply to the letter to him dated 23 August from the right hon. Member for Manchester, Gorton, with regard to Ms Saira Ash. [195516]

Mr. Mullin: My right hon. Friend the Foreign Secretary replied on 29 October.

Custodial Sentences (Foreign Jails)

Mrs. Gillan: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs how many British citizens are serving custodial sentences in foreign jails, broken down by country. [195802]

Mr. Mullin: The Foreign and Commonwealth Office does not collate the numbers of British Nationals serving custodial sentences overseas. Providing the hon. Member with the requested information could be provided only at disproportionate cost. We do, however, collate annual and quarterly figures for all British Nationals detained who have requested consular assistance, whether they are on remand or in custody. I refer the hon. Member to the replies I gave to my hon. Friend the Member for Bury, North (Mr. Chaytor) on 13 May 2004, *Official Report*, columns 514–15W.

Departmental IT

Brian White: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what percentage of the Department's *(a)* implemented and *(b)* planned computer systems use open source software; and what plans are in place to raise this level. [195656]

Mr. Mullin: The Foreign and Commonwealth Office (FCO) currently makes no significant use of open source software.

It is the FCO's practice to procure IT on the basis of best value for money. In doing this we are careful not to exclude open source solutions, but we have no specific objective to increase our use of open source software.

Departmental Offices

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what the cost of *(a)* decoration and *(b)* refurbishment of the London office of the Department was in each of the last four years. [196154]

Mr. Rammell: The cost of decoration and refurbishment of the Foreign and Commonwealth Office's London offices (King Charles Street and the Old Admiralty Building) in each of the last four years is as follows:

£

	Decorations	*Refurbishment*
2001	100,368	70,000
2002	68,197	629,000
2003	74,342	583,000
2004	113,000	10,000

Eritrea/Ethiopia

Mr. Simmonds: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what steps the Government have taken to ensure that Ethiopia *(a)* accepts the 2002 World Court ruling regarding its border dispute with Eritrea and *(b)* withdraws from the occupied town of Badme. [195825]

Mr. Mullin: The UK continues to press Ethiopia to accept the final and binding decision of the Boundary Commission. I raised this most recently with Prime Minister Meles in Addis Ababa on 26 October.

Mr. Simmonds: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what recent discussions he has had with the governments involved in the Eritrean-Ethiopian border dispute. [195826]

Mr. Mullin: The UK discusses the Ethiopia-Eritrea border dispute with both parties on a regular basis. I raised the issue with Eritrean President Isaias in Asmara on 15 January and most recently with Ethiopian Prime Minister Meles in Addis Ababa on 26 October.

Mr. Simmonds: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what discussions he has had with the *(a)* UN, *(b)* EU and *(c)* African Union regarding the Eritrea-Ethiopia border dispute. [195827]

Mr. Mullin: The UK discusses the Ethiopia-Eritrea border dispute with the EU, UN and the African Union on a regular basis and is actively supporting their efforts to promote a lasting peace. I discussed the issue with UN Special Envoy Lloyd Axworthy in London on 3 November.

India (Brood Mares)

Mr. Spring: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs whether he has discussed with the Indian Government restrictions on the importation of British brood mares into India. [194936]

Alun Michael: I have been asked to reply.

India is only prepared to import breeding horses from countries which have been free from contagious equine metritis (GEM) for at least three years. The UK cannot currently comply with this requirement which goes beyond the Office International des Epizooties (International Organisation for Animal Health) Terrestrial Animal Health Code guidelines on GEM. We have, on a number of occasions, pressed the Indian authorities to accept health assurances for breeding horses in line with OIE guidelines, but without success.

Iraq

Lynne Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs pursuant to the answer of 26 October 2004, *Official Report*, column 1177W, on Iraq, what factors obstructed verification of the 45 minute claim between the start of the US-led administration in Iraq and the publication of *(a)* the Hutton report and *(b)* the Butler report. [195793]

Mr. Straw: The validation of human intelligence sources is described in Chapter 5.9 of Lord Butler's report. The report commended SIS for the thoroughness with which it had sought to validate these sources after the war. These matters have been examined during the course of the Butler Review and other inquiries, and covered during debates and statements on Iraq.

Lynne Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs pursuant to the answer of 28 October, *Official Report*, column 1386W, on the Iraq Survey Group Report, whether the intelligence relating to the assertion in the September 2002 dossier that Iraq sought to procure uranium from Africa, which was not shared with the Iraq Survey Group, was shared with Lord Butler of Brockwell's Review Committee. [195967]

Mr. Straw: Yes, as was confirmed in paragraph 503 of Lord Butler's report.

Khartoum University

Mr. Drew: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will make a statement on the recent arrests of students at the University of Khartoum; and whether he has interceded on their behalf. [191122]

Mr. Mullin: In September five students from the University of Khartoum, and one from Port Sudan were arrested. All have now been released.

On 9 October, students at the University of Khartoum set fire to the Student Support Fund offices on the university campus in protest at perceived irregularities in the way the fund is run. Sudanese police announced that 37 arrests were made in connection to this incident. As of 11 October, 32 had been released and five were detained pending further investigations.

Our embassy in Khartoum regularly raises the detentions of students and activists with the Government of Sudan.

Overseas Parliaments (English Teaching)

Mr. David Atkinson: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what projects are undertaken by *(a)* British embassies and *(b)* the British Council to offer members of overseas parliaments free lessons to learn the English language; and if he will make a statement. [195707]

Mr. Mullin: Neither the Foreign and Commonwealth Office (FCO), nor the British Council runs centrally-funded programmes to provide free English lessons to overseas parliamentarians. The British Council provides English language training on a repayment basis. Where this is sponsored by other organisations, including FCO posts, it may be free to participants, including parliamentarians. Although central records are not kept, and the following list may not be definitive, these projects have been carried out by the British Council on behalf of the sponsoring bodies indicated:

Country	*Details*	*Sponsor*
Bulgaria	15 x 30-hour courses between autumn 2002 and autumn 2004 for MPs and Ministers and occasional courses for parliamentary Members and Deputy Ministers/Ministers	British embassy
Morocco	30 hours for eight Ministers—total 240 hours	British embassy
Romania	540 hours for the presidential administration	UNDP
Sri Lanka	100 hours for parliamentary administrators	UNDP
Ukraine	75 hours for one MP and tuition for four other British embassy members of the Verhovna Rada Committee for European Integration	
Georgia	Tuition for over 50 Members of Parliament	British embassy/British Council

Parliamentarians may be nominated for Chevening Fellowships sponsored by the FCO. These courses include an optional opportunity for the Fellows to improve their English, which is free to participants.

Press Releases

Pete Wishart: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs how many press releases have been issued by his Department in each month of 2004; and if he will make a statement. [195460]

Mr. Straw: To date the Foreign and Commonwealth Office (FCO) have issued 314 press releases in 2004 on various subjects:

	Number
January	22
February	31
March	21
April	36
May	36
June	33
July	31
August	31
September	34
October	35
November	4

FCO missions overseas issue their own press releases directly to their host country's media. A record of these is not held centrally.

Sudan

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs how many prisoners of conscience in Sudan, detained for the non-violent expression of their opinions, have been released in the last six months. [194458]

Mr. Mullin: The Sudan Organisation Against Torture (SOAT) estimates that, during the last six months, 139 people have been arrested in Sudan for the non-violent expression of their opinions. Of these, 24 have so far been released.

SOAT is closely monitoring the cases of those who remain in custody. Our embassy in Khartoum makes regular representations to the Government of Sudan on the need for due process in its judicial system and maintains close contact with Sudanese human rights organisations.

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what steps his Department has taken to provide the support necessary for the Office of the UN High Commissioner for Human Rights to strengthen its monitoring capacity in Darfur. [196205]

Mr. Mullin: We strongly welcomed the decision by the Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights to expand its monitoring mission in Darfur. The UK provided £250,000 for the deployment of the original eight OHCHR monitors to Darfur, and have made clear our willingness to provide support to assist the expansion.

Trinidad and Tobago

Mr. Foulkes: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs when the travel advice for Trinidad and Tobago was last updated. [195958]

Mr. Rammell: The date of the most recent review of all Foreign and Commonwealth Office Travel Advice notices is given at the top of the advice. The Travel Advice for Trinidad and Tobago was last updated on 19 October 2004.

Mr. Foulkes: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs when a Minister from his Department last visited Trinidad and Tobago; and what plans he has to visit Trinidad and Tobago. [195959]

Mr. Rammell: I was the last Foreign and Commonwealth Office Minister to visit Trinidad and Tobago in March of this year. It is not our practice to announce visits until they are firm. Because of the unpredictable nature of world events, final decisions on overseas visits are often not possible until very shortly before the day of travel.

My right hon. Friend the Foreign Secretary met the Foreign Minister of Trinidad and Tobago, the hon. Knowlson Gift, at the UK-Caribbean Forum in London in May this year.

Turkey (Penal Code)

Mr. Dismore: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what his policy is on section 306 of the new Turkish penal code and the new criminal offence of speaking against the national interest, with particular reference to comments in Turkey on *(a)* the Armenian genocide and *(b)* the withdrawal of troops from Cyprus, in the context of Turkey's application for accession to the EU; and if he will make a statement. [194850]

Mr. MacShane: Article 306 of the Turkish penal code is about the recruitment of militia against a foreign state. Article 305, however, concerns Turkish citizens acting against national interests in return for material benefits from a foreign individual or organisation. The wording of this article only refers to such national interests as independence, territorial integrity and national security. There is no mention of Cyprus or the Armenian genocide.

The commission, with our support, will monitor implementation of all laws closely to ensure Turkey meets its international legal obligations.

Uzbekistan

Sir Menzies Campbell: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what assessment he has made of the US State Department's conclusions in relation to Uzbekistan regarding *(a)* its absence of democracy and a free press and *(b)* its use of torture as a routine investigation technique; and if he will make a statement. [195509]

Mr. Straw *[holding answer of 4 November 2004]*: The US State Department conclusions to which the right hon. Gentleman refers represent the basis upon which the US Secretary of State took the decision in July to withdraw up to $18 million in aid programmes to Uzbekistan. The decision was taken because of Uzbekistan's lack of progress in meeting its commitments to improve its human rights record under the strategic partnership framework agreed in 2002 between Uzbekistan and the US.

The US position is consistent with messages conveyed to the Uzbek Government by the UK and EU partners.

Vietnam

Mr. Ben Chapman: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will make a statement on the work of the British Council in Vietnam. [195550]

Mr. Mullin: The British Council in Vietnam operates in Hanoi and Ho Chi Minh City. It has about 100 staff. Its main activities are English language training, education development, governance, promotion of UK creativity, and of UK education and qualifications, and managing the Chevening Scholarships programme.

The Council has a Memorandum of Understanding with the Vietnamese Education and Training Ministry covering support in education development and advice on teaching English. Demand for its education services is growing rapidly, with Hanoi being one of its fastest-growing teaching centres world-wide. Its information centres provide information on all aspects of UK education, life and culture. It has showcased UK achievements in science and technology through a DNA50 exhibition and work on governance issues through programmes such as journalist training.

It is also engaged in a capacity-building programme for senior Vietnamese officials.

Visas

Tom Cox: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs how many visitors' visas were granted by high commission offices in *(a)* India, *(b)* Pakistan and *(c)* Sri Lanka during the last 12 months. [194139]

Mr. Mullin: For the period from 1 October 2003 until 1 October 2004, the figures are as follows:

	Visit visas issued
India (to include Chennai, Calcutta, Mumbai and New Delhi)	122,732
Pakistan (to include Islamabad and Karachi)	61,128
Sri Lanka (Colombo only)	11,674

NORTHERN IRELAND

Free Transport Scheme

Mr. Gregory Campbell: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland how many journeys on *(a)* Ulsterbus, *(b)* Citybus and *(c)* Northern Ireland Railways were undertaken by senior citizens using the free transport scheme in the year ending 31 December 2003. [196511]

Mr. Spellar: Translink have advised that in the year ending 31 December 2003 the following free journeys were ticketed by senior citizens using the Northern Ireland Concessionary Fares Scheme:

(a) 3,659,599 on Ulsterbus,

(b) 3,596,629 on Citybus, and

(c) 153,859 on Northern Ireland Railways (NIR).

The figures for NIR reflect the fact that new ticketing systems, which record free journeys taken, were progressively introduced on the railway network throughout 2003.

Magilligan-Greencastle Ferry

Mrs. Iris Robinson: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland pursuant to the answer of 20 October

2004, *Official Report*, column 811W, on the Magilligan-Greencastle Ferry, what information he has collated on the sums provided by *(a)* Limavady borough council and *(b)* Donegal county council towards operating the Magilligan-Greencastle Ferry Service since its introduction. [196281]

Mr. Spellar: The Magilligan-Greencastle ferry is funded directly by Limavady borough council and Donegal county council. I have passed your query on to the Chief Executive of Limavady borough council.

Paramilitary Criminal Activity

David Burnside: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland what his estimate is of the *(a)* size, *(b)* scale and *(c)* range of criminal activities being carried out by (i) the UDA, (ii) the UVF, (iii) PIRA and (iv) INLA; and what action is being taken to stop such activities. [196501]

Mr. Pearson: The Organised Crime Task Force (OCTF) Threat Assessment, which was launched on 11 May 2004, clearly indicated that all Northern Ireland based paramilitary groups remain involved in organised crime, particularly in respect of counterfeiting, drugs, oils fraud, extortion, money laundering, robbery and illegal tobacco.

The IMC reports of 20 April and 4 November also provide a clear assessment of the criminal activities of all paramilitary groups.

The Organised Crime Task Force provides the strategic framework for the law enforcement agencies to share intelligence and agree priorities for tackling organised crime in Northern Ireland. The effectiveness of this approach is clearly evidenced by the partner agencies' continuing successes against organised criminal gangs.

Pension Shortfall

Lady Hermon: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland what steps he is taking to introduce relief for homeowners facing the prospect of being forced to sell or re-mortgage their homes because of an income reduction caused by a pension shortfall. [193562]

Mr. Timms: I have been asked to reply.

The Government are tackling pensioner poverty through personal tax and benefit changes which mean that the average pensioner household is now £26 per week better off in 2004–05 than they would have been under a continuation of the 1997 system. One of the key measures that offers extra financial support to the poorest and most vulnerable is the pension credit. This guarantees pensioners a minimum weekly income of £105.45 for single pensioners and £160.95 for couples and rewards pensioners who have low or moderate income or who have saved for their retirement.

For those who face a shortfall from their occupational pension schemes, from next April, when a company becomes insolvent and is unable to honour employees' Defined Benefit pension rights, the new Pension Protection Fund will offer a scheme that offers compensation, thus reducing the shortfall that they would otherwise suffer. To help members of schemes that wind-up before April 2005 DWP are developing a Financial Assistance Scheme

Planning

Mrs. Iris Robinson: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland what action he will take to prevent development without prior planning permission through the operation of the retrospective planning process. [193439]

Angela Smith: The planning system aims to stop unacceptable development and to allow other development to proceed, subject to conditions. In certain circumstances, it is appropriate to accept retrospective planning applications, but generally, development in advance of planning permission is discouraged. To strengthen this, I shall bring forward legislation in the forthcoming Planning Reform Order enabling the Department to apply a multiple of the normal planning fee to retrospective planning applications.

The Department is also implementing recommendations from its benchmarking of planning enforcement against planning authorities in Great Britain that enable more effective action against unauthorised development. This includes an experienced, well equipped and well trained body of enforcement staff commensurate to its workload that can act within reasonable timescales, further development of working relationships with district councils and seeking the application of more realistic fines by the courts.

Prisons

Mr. Lidington: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland how many cells in prisons in Northern Ireland are occupied by more prisoners than those cells were designed to hold. [195531]

Mr. Pearson: At present there are 156 cells designed for single occupancy that now accommodate two prisoners per cell.

Telecommunications Masts

Mr. Gregory Campbell: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland what consultations are being held with the mobile telecommunications industry on the need for further dialogue between communities living in the immediate vicinity of masts and their possible relocation. [194789]

Angela Smith: My Department is not involved in any formal consultations with the telecommunications industry on this matter.

As you will be aware, all proposals for the erection of mobile phone masts in Northern Ireland require planning permission and are considered on their individual merits against prevailing planning policies, taking account of representations received following normal advertising and consultation arrangements.

The telecommunications industry does, however, appreciate that the Government would support greater public consultation by operators prior to planning applications for new telecommunications equipment being lodged.

It was for this reason the Mobile Operators Association (MOA), which represents the main mobile telecommunications operators, developed the Traffic Light Rating Model for Public Consultation, as part of the operators 10 commitments. The guide is to assist the operators in ascertaining the amount and type of public consultation that is required for any proposed site. The consultation that is carried out under this process by the operator is in addition to that already carried out by the Planning Service for planning permission.

CONSTITUTIONAL AFFAIRS

Child Witnesses (Court Delays)

Mrs. Curtis-Thomas: To ask the Parliamentary Secretary, Department for Constitutional Affairs what assessment he has made of the *(a)* level and *(b)* length of delays in court cases involving a child witness since 1997. [196639]

Mr. Leslie: The waiting time for a child called as a prosecution witness in the Crown courts in June 2004 was 118 minutes, down from 155 minutes in 1997. For a child called as a defence witness, the waiting time was 54 minutes, compared to 189 minutes in November 1997.

In the magistrates courts, the waiting time for a child called as a prosecution witness was 92 minutes, down from 97 minutes in 1997. For a child called as a defence witness, the waiting time was 134 minutes compared to 153 minutes in November 1997.

The Effective Trial Management and "No Witness No Justice" Programmes will reduce the numbers of ineffective trials and delay at court and further improve services for victims and witnesses, including child witnesses.

Civil Servants

Mr. Jenkins: To ask the Parliamentary Secretary, Department for Constitutional Affairs what the average length of continuous service for civil servants within the Department is. [194404]

Mr. Lammy: I refer the hon. Member to the answer given by my right hon. Friend the Minister for the Cabinet Office (Ruth Kelly), on 3 November 2004, *Official Report*, column 267W.

Electoral Registration

Mr. Evans: To ask the Parliamentary Secretary, Department for Constitutional Affairs what action he is taking to ensure that Electoral Registration Officers are proactive in registering overseas voters. [196738]

Mr. Leslie: Electoral Registration Officers each year invite electors who have applied to be added to the overseas electors' list to renew their applications to be included in the electoral register. The independent Electoral Commission provides information and advice to British citizens living abroad on their electoral rights and has produced a registration form for use by eligible British citizens.

Magistrates

Mr. Allen: To ask the Parliamentary Secretary, Department for Constitutional Affairs if Ministers in the Department will make it their policy to encourage magistrates to meet tenants' leaders, neighbourhood watch co-ordinators and other community leaders in the areas they serve; and if he will make a statement. [196211]

Mr. Leslie: There are existing and successful programmes in operation so that magistrates can engage with their local communities, such as "Magistrates in the Community" which aims to raise awareness of the magistracy and its work.

The Secretary of State has commissioned a programme entitled "Supporting Magistrates to Provide Justice". This initiative will be seeking input from all those who work within, and with, the magistrates courts. Ideas from here will be fed through to the very good work that is already being carried out under the Magistrates in the Community Programme, and further foster community links. Further announcements in relation to this initiative will be made in due course.

In addition, the Courts Boards that are being established will provide another means of engaging with representatives of the local community.

Mr. Allen: To ask the Parliamentary Secretary, Department for Constitutional Affairs if he will make it his policy to encourage magistrates to meet hon. Members who serve courts in their constituency. [196212]

Mr. Leslie: Hon. Members can meet with magistrates to discuss the general concerns of their constituency, where both parties are content. In order to preserve judicial independence, magistrates should not be asked to discuss individual cases.

Public Services

Mr. Rosindell: To ask the Parliamentary Secretary, Department for Constitutional Affairs what his Department has done in the last 12 months to fulfil its role as a Department improving the quality of and people's confidence in public services. [192656]

Mr. Leslie: Public service delivery is at the heart of the Department for Constitutional Affairs. Putting people at the centre of the Department's work is a vital component in our vision for better quality service. Justice for all is as central to the objectives of this Government as is education for all and health care for all. So since the creation of the Department for Constitutional Affairs in June 2003 we have been working to make sure that the Department delivers for the people who use its services—especially in our justice system, where people seeking redress either against crime or against civil injustices are at the centre of what the system exists to achieve.

That means offering particular support to victims, to witnesses and to jurors. It means improving and reforming our justice system and our legal system to make sure that they offer the best possible help to those who make use of them. It means making our courts work better so that the public's confidence can be raised. A vital part of that will be the creation in April next year of a unified courts administration—for the first time, bringing all courts together administratively. It means making sure, for example, that the market for legal services is working as well as it should be. It was for this reason we established a far-reaching review of legal services headed by Sir David Clementi, which will report shortly. It is also why we have established a fundamental review of our legal aid system. The new consumer strategy review within the DCA will also help to make sure that we put people first in all that we do.

We believe that these and a range of other steps are contributing to the quality of public service, which this Department is committed to deliver, and to people's confidence in those services. There is a great deal more to do. But we believe that we have made a good start.

HEALTH

Agenda for Change

Phil Sawford: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what his estimate is of the total cost of implementing "Agenda for Change"; and if he will ensure that these costs are fully funded by central Government. [195144]

Mr. Hutton: The latest estimate of costs for implementing "Agenda for Change" is that expected costs nationally represent 1.8 per cent. of the non-medical pay bill in 2004–05 and 3.7 per cent. of non-medical pay bill in 2005–06. The corresponding total levels of funding for "Agenda for Change" in each of those years, expressed as percentage of non-medical pay bill, are 2.1 per cent. and 3.8 per cent. respectively.

Aimspro

Mr. Chaytor: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what assessment the National Institute for Clinical Excellence has made of the current trials of the use of Aimspro for multiple sclerosis sufferers; and if he will make a statement. [195107]

Ms Rosie Winterton: The treatment Aimspro is not licensed for use in the United Kingdom and has not been referred to the National Institute for Clinical Excellence for assessment.

Dr. Tonge: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what research has been done into the effects of Aimspro on MS sufferers. [195648]

Ms Rosie Winterton: Aimspro is a product being developed by Daval International, a United Kingdom company, for a number of indications, including multiple sclerosis and rheumatoid arthritis. The company is conducting or planning to conduct a number of trials in these disease areas. The only clinical data available currently to the Medicines and Healthcare products Regulatory Agency comes from individual patient case reports and we are not aware of any formal clinical trial data or scientific publications on Aimspro.

Available Beds

David Davis: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many beds were available in the Hull and East Yorkshire hospitals NHS trust in the last two quarters for which figures are available. [194974]

Miss Melanie Johnson: Information on the number of beds is collected and published on an annual basis. In 2003–04, the average daily number of open and staffed beds in the Hull and East Yorkshire hospitals national health service trust was 1,425, including 1,332 general and acute beds.

Breast Cancer Units

Tom Cox: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many breast cancer units there are at NHS hospitals within the Greater London area. [195899]

Dr. Ladyman: The information requested is not collected centrally.

Bus Service

Mr. Dismore: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will make a statement about the future of the Tilley bus service between Edgware and Barnet hospitals. [196361]

Dr. Ladyman: This is an operational matter for Barnet and Chase Farm Hospitals National Health Service Trust.

Children's Wards

Tom Cox: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will list the hospitals covering the Greater London area which have children's wards. [195925]

Dr. Ladyman: Information on the national health service bodies within the five London strategic health authorities (SHAs) who have reported on wards open in the day and overnight relating to children is shown in the tables.

Trusts from the five London SHAs that reported in one or more of the ward classifications 1,2,7,8,13,14,20,21 : (beds in wards open overnight)

SHA	*Organisation identifier*	*Name*
Q04	RV3	Central and North West London Mental Health NHS Trust
Q04	RQM	Chelsea and Westminster Healthcare NHS Trust
Q04	RC3	Ealing Hospital NHS Trust
Q04	RQN	Hammersmith Hospitals NHS Trust
Q04	RV8	North West London Hospitals NHS Trust
Q04	RT3	Royal Brompton and Harefield NHS Trust
Q04	RJ5	St. Mary's NHS Trust
Q04	RAS	The Hillingdon Hospital NHS Trust
Q04	RFW	West Middlesex University NHS Trust
Q05	RVL	Barnet and Chase Farm Hospitals NHS Trust
Q05	5A9	Barnet PCT
Q05	RRP	Barnet, Enfield and Haringey Mental Health NHS Trust
Q05	5C1	Enfield PCT
Q05	RP4	Great Ormond Street Hospital For Children NHS Trust
Q05	5K8	Islington PCT
Q05	RP6	Moorfields Eye Hospital NHS Trust
Q05	RAP	North Middlesex University Hospital NHS Trust
Q05	RAL	Royal Free Hampstead NHS Trust
Q05	RAN	Royal National Orthopaedic Hospital NHS Trust
Q05	RKE	The Whittington Hospital NHS Trust
Q05	RRV	University College London Hospitals NHS Trust
Q06	RF4	Barking, Havering and Redbridge Hospitals NHS Trust
Q06	RNJ	Barts and the London NHS Trust

Trusts from the five London SHAs that reported in one or more of the ward classifications 1,2,7,8,13,14,20,21 :(beds in wards open overnight)

SHA	*Organisation identifier*	*Name*
Q06	RWK	East London and the City Mental Health NHS Trust
Q06	RQX	Homerton University Hospital NHS Trust
Q06	RNH	Newham Healthcare NHS Trust
Q06	5C5	Newham PCT
Q06	RAT	North East London Mental Health NHS Trust
Q06	RGC	Whipps Cross University Hospital NHS Trust
Q07	RG3	Bromley Hospitals NHS Trust
Q07	RJ1	Guy's and St. Thomas' NHS Trust
Q07	RJZ	King's College Hospital NHS Trust
Q07	RG2	Queen Elizabeth Hospital NHS Trust
Q07	RGZ	Queen Mary's Sidcup NHS Trust
Q07	RV5	South London and Maudsley NHS Trust
Q07	RJ2	The Lewisham Hospital NHS Trust
Q08	RVR	Epsom and St. Helier NHS Trust
Q08	RAX	Kingston Hospital NHS Trust
Q08	RJ6	Mayday Healthcare NHS Trust
Q08	RQY	South West London and St. George's Mental Health NHS Trust
Q08	RJ7	St. George's Healthcare NHS Trust
Q08	RPY	Royal Marsden NHS Trust

Ward	*classifications (beds in wards open overnight)*
1	Intensive care: neonates
2	Intensive care: paediatric
3	Intensive care: wholly or mainly adult
6	Terminally ill palliative care: wholly or mainly adult
7	Younger physically disabled
8	Other general and acute: neonates and children
9	Other general and acute: elderly: normal care
10	Other general and acute: elderly: limited care
11	Other general and acute: other
12	Maternity
13	Mental illness: children: short stay
14	Mental illness: children: long stay
15	Mental illness: elderly: short stay
16	Mental illness: elderly: long stay
17	Mental illness: other ages: secure unit
18	Mental illness: other ages: short stay
19	Mental illness: other ages: long stay
20	Learning disabilities: children: short stay
21	Learning disabilities: children: long stay
22	Learning disabilities: other ages: secure unit
23	Learning disabilities: other ages: short stay
24	Learning disabilities: other ages: long stay

Trusts from the five London SHAs that reported in the 'Neonates and Children' ward classification (beds in wards open day only)

SHA	*Organisation identifier*	*Name*
Q04	RQM	Chelsea and Westminster Healthcare NHS Trust
Q04	RC3	Ealing Hospital NHS Trust
Q04	RQN	Hammersmith Hospitals NHS Trust
Q04	RV8	North West London Hospitals NHS Trust
Q04	RJ5	St. Mary's NHS Trust
Q04	RAS	The Hillingdon Hospital NHS Trust
Q05	RP4	Great Ormond Street Hospital For Children NHS Trust
Q05	RKE	The Whittington Hospital NHS Trust
Q05	RRV	University College London Hospitals NHS Trust
Q06	RNJ	Barts and the London NHS Trust
Q06	RNH	Newham Healthcare NHS Trust
Q06	5C5	Newham PCT
Q07	RJ1	Guy's and St. Thomas' NHS Trust
Q07	RJZ	King's College Hospital NHS Trust
Q07	RG2	Queen Elizabeth Hospital NHS Trust
Q08	RVR	Epsom and St. Helier NHS Trust
Q08	RJ6	Mayday Healthcare NHS Trust
Q08	RJ7	St. George's Healthcare NHS Trust
Q08	RPY	The Royal Marsden NHS Trust

Complementary Medicine

Mr. Burstow: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will estimate the amount spent on complementary and alternative medicine in England in each of the last five years. [194236]

Miss Melanie Johnson: The Department does not collect such data.

Consultant Surgeons

Tom Cox: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many consultant surgeons working in hospitals in the Greater London area have been suspended from duty in each of the last three years; and if he will make a statement. [195930]

Dr. Ladyman: The Department routinely collected information on the number of consultants suspended for more than six months until June 2004. This information was not broken down by speciality. The number of consultants suspended for more than six months within the five London strategic health authority areas for the last three years is shown in the table.

Period	*Suspensions*
Quarter 2, 2001 to quarter 2, 2002	1
Quarter 3, 2002 to quarter 2, 2003	2
Quarter 3, 2003 to quarter 2, 2004	2

Delayed Discharges

Tom Cox: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what measures he is taking to tackle delayed discharges from hospitals within the Greater London area. [195903]

Dr. Ladyman: The Community Care (Delayed Discharges, etc.) Act 2003 places new duties on councils and the national health service relating to joint working between health and social care systems and with patients and carers around hospital discharge. From January 2004, the Act introduced a financial incentive to avoid delayed discharges. That is supported by the delayed discharges grant.

Latest figures show the total number of patients delayed in an acute hospital bed on any one day, within the five London strategic health authority areas, is now 318—a reduction of 67 per cent., since September 2001.

Dentistry

Tom Cox: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what steps he is taking to encourage recruitment of NHS dentists within the Greater London area. [195931]

Dr. Ladyman: We have undertaken a review of the dental primary care workforce in consultation with representatives of the dental profession—professional bodies, dental academics, as well as the British Dental Association (BDA). We have worked closely with the BDA to draw up proposals for a new contract from April 2005, which will remove the treadmill of item of service.

This links with the new duties primary care trusts (PCTs) will have from April 2005 to secure the provision of primary dental care services, either through contracts with individual practices, or by providing services themselves. PCTs, including those within London, have been drawing up local dentistry action plans, setting out how they are using their proportion of the £59 million additional funding we have allocated to improve access to NHS dentistry this year and their priorities for commissioning in 2005–06.

The NHS workforce will be increased by the equivalent of 1,000 dentists by October 2005, allowing up to an extra two million people to be treated nationally.

Departmental IT

Brian White: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what percentage of the Department's *(a)* implemented and *(b)* planned computer systems use open source software; and what plans are in place to raise this level. [195655]

Ms Rosie Winterton: The Department does not use open source software (OSS) on any of its implemented or planned computer systems.

Software procurement by the Department follows the 'level playing field' Government OSS Policy, which does not require the raising of levels of OSS usage in Government; rather that Government considers OSS solutions alongside proprietary ones in information technology procurements and that contracts should be awarded on a value for money, case by case basis. This policy can be viewed at www.govtalk.gov.uk.

Departmental Offices

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what the cost of *(a)* decoration and *(b)* refurbishment of the London offices of the Department was in each of the last four years. [196137]

Ms Rosie Winterton: The information requested is shown in the following table.

£

	Decoration works	*Refurbishments*
2000–01	85,542.20	652,456
2001–02	171,202.51	1,029,000
2002–03	116,738.31	1,978,000
2003–04	178,968.54	2,841,000

Dermatology

Mr. Burstow: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many days training an undergraduate medical student receives in dermatology; and if he will make a statement. [196237]

Mr. Hutton: Individual university medical schools determine their own undergraduate medical curriculum in the light of recommendations from the General Medical Council's education committee, which has the statutory responsibility to determine the extent and knowledge and skill required for the granting of primary medical qualifications in the United Kingdom.

The education committee's most recent recommendations on undergraduate medical education are contained in "Tomorrow's Doctors," which was published in July 2002. It recommends curricular themes and is not a complete guide.

Gunshot Wounds

Keith Vaz: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many victims have been treated for gunshot wounds in UK hospitals in each of the last five years. [196005]

Ms Rosie Winterton: Information on the number of patients admitted to hospital in England as a result of gunshot injuries in the last five years is shown in the table. Information is not collected centrally on the number of patients treated in accident and emergency but not admitted. The information covers England only.

Injuries from gunshots—primary diagnosis (ICD-10 SOO—T98) injury. Cause code (ICD-10 W32—W34)—discharge from firearm. Count of finished admission episodes—national health service hospitals, England 1998–99 to 2002–03

Year	*Admissions*
1998–99	134
1999–2000	117
2000–01	102
2001–02	155
2002–03	129

Notes:

1. A finished admission episode is the first period of in-patient care under one consultant within one healthcare provider. Please note that admissions do not represent the number of in-patients, as a person may have more than one admission within a year.
2. The cause code is a supplementary code that indicates the nature of any external cause of injury, poisoning or other adverse affects.
3. The primary diagnosis is the first of up to 14 (seven prior to 2002–03) diagnosis fields in the hospital episode statistics data set and provides the main reason why the patient was in hospital.

Health Spending (Leeds)

Mr. Truswell: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how much has been spent in each year since 1990 by Leeds Primary Care Trust and its predecessor health care commissioning bodies. [195379]

Miss Melanie Johnson: Expenditure by the Leeds Primary Care Trusts (PCTs) and their predecessor commissioning bodies from 1991–92 to 2003–04 is shown in the table.

	Expenditure
1991–92	355,557,000
1992–93	375,741,000
1993–94	397,178,000
1994–95	418,162,000
1995–96	457,889,000
1996–97	491,271,000
1997–98	485,232,000
1998–99	539,539,000
1999–2000	613,214,000
2000–01	647,260,000
2001–02	670,609,000
2002–03	699,277,000
2003–04	755,308,000

Sources:
Audited Leeds Family Health Services Authority accounts 1991–92 to 1995–96.
Audited Leeds Healthcare District Health Authority accounts 1991–92 to 1995–96.
Audited Leeds Health Authority (HA) accounts 1996–97 to 1998–99.
Audited Leeds HA summarisation forms 1999–2000 to 2001–02.
Audited Leeds PCTs summarisation schedules 2002–03 and 2003–04.
2003–04 data remain provisional.

The geographical areas of the organisations are the same for the PCTs/HA. The figures are not directly comparable for the commissioning organisations because expenditure on medicines was switched from HAs to the Prescription Pricing Authority in 1997–98.

Information is not available prior to 1991–92.

Mr. Truswell: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what funding has been received in each year since 1990 by the Leeds Teaching Hospitals NHS Trust and its predecessor bodies. [195380]

Miss Melanie Johnson: Income for the Leeds Teaching Hospital National Health Service Trust and its predecessor trusts from 1991–92 to 2003–04 is shown in the following table.

	Income
1991–92	222,027,000
1992–93	251,443,000
1993–94	271,038,000
1994–95	289,905,000
1995–96	360,152,000
1996–97	377,538,000
1997–98	410,305,000
1998–99	432,071,000
1999–2000	472,694,000
2000–01	504,292,000
2001–02	550,749,000
2002–03	596,678,000
2003–04	627,148,000

Source:
Audited NHS trust summarisation schedules 1991–92 to 2003–04.
2003–04 data remain provisional.

Hospital Infections

Mr. Lansley: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many patients in each *(a)* hospital and *(b)* trust in England have contracted methicillin resistant *staphylococcus aureus* in the NHS since 1997, broken down into age groups *(a)* 0–10, *(b)* 11–20, *(c)* 21–30, *(d)* 31–40, *(e)* 41–50, *(f)* 51–60, *(g)* 61–70, *(h)* 71–80, (i) 81–90 and *(j)* older than 90 years. [193457]

Miss Melanie Johnson: Information for individual national health service trusts and hospitals broken down by age is not available.

Pete Wishart: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many *(a)* UK and *(b)* Scottish recipients are anticipated to qualify for the Skipton Fund support for those who have contracted Hepatitis C from infected NHS blood products; and if he will make a statement. [193650]

Miss Melanie Johnson: It is not possible to provide accurate figures on the number of people who will benefit from the Hepatitis C ex-gratia payment scheme.

Mrs. Curtis-Thomas: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will make a statement on the work of Directors of Infection Control. [195487]

Miss Melanie Johnson: The director of infection prevention and control should oversee local control of infection policies and their implementation; and report directly to the chief executive and trust board. We expect these authoritative figures to play a key role in producing a national health service culture where infection control is everyone's business, rather than the job of specialists. They should have the authority to challenge inappropriate clinical hygiene practice as well as antibiotic prescribing decisions. Directors should have the appropriate expertise and authority to act to reduce local infection rates and one of their tasks is to produce a public annual report on progress.

Hysterectomy

Mr. Edwards: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many adverse incidents have been recorded from *(a)* uterine fibroid embolisation, *(b)* endometrial ablation and *(c)* hysterectomy, in each year since 1999. [195030]

Ms Rosie Winterton: The National Patient Safety Agency (NPSA) has been established to improve the safety of national health service patient care by promoting an open culture and by introducing a new national reporting and learning system for patient safety incidents. The reporting system is being implemented across the NHS during 2004 and will provide information about reported patient safety incidents, including potentially any involving uterine fibroid embolisation, endometrial ablation or hysterectomy.

Junior Doctors

Dr. Murrison: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what measures he will take to improve the retention of junior doctors wishing to train part-time. [194986]

Mr. Hutton: In the last few years, there has been an increase in the number of junior doctors training on a part time basis under the existing flexible training scheme. This success means that more doctors are seeking part time posts in the national health service, and the Department is currently working with the British Medical Association and deaneries to develop new proposals for flexible trainees, which will better integrate into the NHS work force.

Dr. Murrison: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what plans he has to increase post-graduate deanery budgets to accommodate *(a)* part-time training and *(b)* increasing numbers of junior doctors. [194987]

Mr. Hutton: When the new contract for junior doctors was introduced in 2000, additional funding (£7 million) was provided to the service to fully resource the new arrangements for both full-time and part-time trainees. This funding is recurrent. It is for the deaneries, working on behalf of strategic health authorities (SHAs), to decide how these funds are allocated between part-time and full-time trainees—local needs must be fully considered. There are no plans to increase this amount.

This year (2004–05) additional funding has been provided to SHAs in their multi professional education and training (MPET) allocations for 134 new general practitioner registrars, 119 new specialist registrars and 203 new pre-registration house officers. The MPET budget for 2005–06 has yet to be determined, but further funding will be provided for additional GP registrars, specialist registrars and pre-registration house officers, on top of funding provided for existing trainees.

Leukaemia

Keith Vaz: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many children were diagnosed with leukaemia in each of the last five years. [196004]

Mr. Timms: I have been asked to reply.

The information requested falls within the responsibility of the National Statistician, who has been asked to reply.

Letter from Len Cook to Mr. Keith Vaz, dated 8 November 2004:

As National Statistician, I have been asked to reply to your recent question concerning the number of children in the UK who were diagnosed with leukaemia in each of the last five years. (196004)

The most recent available figures are for the year 2001. The number of newly diagnosed cases of leukaemia registered in the years 1997 to 2001 are given in the table below.

Number of newly diagnosed cases of leukaemia[1] in children[2] in the UK, 1997–2001

	Number of cases
1997	459
1998	493
1999	479
2000	423
2001	421

[1] International Classification of Diseases Tenth Revision (ICD-10), codes C91-C95.

[2] Those aged 0 to 14 years.

Sources:
Office for National Statistics,
Welsh Cancer Intelligence & Surveillance Unit,
Scottish Cancer Registry,
Northern Ireland Cancer Registry

National Programme for IT

Dr. Murrison: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what steps he has taken *(a)* to promote public awareness that patient data will be held centrally under the National Programme for IT in the NHS and *(b)* to ensure that patients are aware of their ability to opt out of centrally held databases in the NHS. [194892]

Mr. Hutton: A major public awareness campaign is being planned by the national programme for information technology (NPfIT) to address the full range of issues posed by implementation of a national health service care records service (NHS CRS) and to ensure that NHS patients know their rights and how information about them can be used within the health service. This campaign will commence in 2005 and will run for a number of years. To maximise the impact of the campaign, relevant information will be made available to NHS staff and to the public record in each local health community in the months running up to the go-live date for the NHS CRS.

The campaign will comprise written materials in various languages, web resources, and training tools and a media pack for health communities to use according to their local circumstances. It will complement communications activity in the NHS that is already required under Data Protection legislation and Departmental policy.

A key component of the NPfIT relates to the access controls that will protect data. Patients will be able to restrict who may see different elements of the data that is held about them and may choose to opt-out of having any data shared through the new systems. The Data Protection Act 1998 also provides patients with the right to object to the processing of data that can identify them where this may cause them substantial damage or distress. The NPfIT is considering how this right should apply to implementation of the NHS CRS.

NHS Doctors (Appraisal and Revalidation)

Mrs. Iris Robinson: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what estimate he has made of the costs arising from the new appraisal and revalidation processes for NHS doctors. [190580]

Mr. Hutton: The General Medical Council (GMC) is currently in the process of consulting on proposed guidance for United Kingdom doctors undergoing revalidation, which it intend to introduce from July 2005. The implications for the national health service will depend very much on the outcome of the consultation and subsequent agreement with the GMC as to what systems we adopt for supporting NHS doctors to revalidate.

We will aim to introduce systems which do not entail significant extra bureaucracy for the NHS, while ensuring that doctors are supported in keeping up to date and fit to practise. That is why we have linked appraisal and revalidation, by using broadly the same data for both.

NHS Trust Boards

Tom Cox: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many *(a)* men and *(b)* women he has appointed to NHS trust boards in the last 12 months. [195927]

Ms Rosie Winterton: Appointments to national health service trust boards are delegated to the NHS Appointments Commission. I have asked the chair of the Commission, Sir William Wells to write to my hon. Friend with the information requested.

Operating Theatres (Fires)

Mr. Burstow: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many fires there have been in operating theatres in the NHS in England in each year since 1997. [194237]

Mr. Hutton: The numbers of reported fire incidents originating in operating departments in the national health service in England are shown in the table. A fire incident is defined as any incident where fire alarms have been activated and the fire service has attended.

	Number of incidents
1997	10
1998	8
1999	12
2000	11
2001	22
2002	9
2003	16
2004	[1]7

[1] To 25 October 2004.

Overseas Nurses

Tom Cox: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many overseas nurses have been recruited to work in the NHS during the last 12 months. [194632]

Mr. Hutton: The information requested is not collected centrally.

The Nursing and Midwifery Council (NMC) registers all nurses who work in the United Kingdom and produces a statistical breakdown of its register. An analysis of the register can be found on the NMC website at www.nmc-uk.org.

In the last 12 months 14,124 non-United Kingdom nurses were admitted to the NMC register.

A copy of the most recent data has been placed in the Library.

Paediatric Services

Mr. Burstow: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what the total expenditure on *(a)* the NHS in England and *(b)* NHS paediatric services in England has been in each year since 1992. [194245]

Dr. Ladyman: The data available is shown in the table.

Total NHS expenditure, and expenditure on paediatric services in England 1994–95 to 2002–03

£ millio

	Total expenditure-all ages	*Expenditure on childre (ages 0–15) excludin expenditure o maternity service*
2002–03	35,086.70	3,851.18
2001–02	31,922.53	3,372.24
2000–01	30,008.45	3,629.12
1999–2000	27,463.88	3,581.63
1998–99	25,759.30	3,195.86
1997–98	23,583.74	2,853.23
1996–97	22,679.55	2,894.46
1995–96	23,578.75	3,309.84
1994–95	22,237.10	2,908.36

Source:
Hospital and community health services programme budget.

Patients' Complaints

Tom Cox: To ask the Secretary of State for Healt what action he has taken to ensure that patients' complaints against NHS hospitals within the Greate London area are dealt with immediately; and if he wil make a statement. [195898

Dr. Ladyman: The National Health Servic (Complaints) Regulations 2004 came into force o 30 July. They contain all the time scales for loca resolution. Supporting guidance was issued at the sam time. Both are available on the Department's website a http://www.dh.gov.uk/assetRoot/04/08/81/57/04088157.pd

PFI (Greater London)

Tom Cox: To ask the Secretary of State for Health i he will list the private finance initiative hospital building programmes under consideration for the Greate London area. [195929

Dr. Ladyman: Information on the schemes within th five London strategic health authority areas is shown i the table.

NHS Trust	*Value (£ million)*	*Private finance initiative/Public*	*Financial close/tende award dat*
Queen Mary's Hospital—Sidcup	15	PFI	Ope
Queen Elizabeth Hospital—Greenwich	96	PFI	Ope
Oxleas	11	PFI	Ope
Barnet and Chase Farm	54	PFI	Ope
North East London Mental Health	11	PFI	Ope
East London and The City Mental Health—Newham	15	PFI	Ope
King's College Hospital	76	PFI	Ope
Bromley Hospitals	118	PFI	Ope
West Middlesex University Hospital	60	PFI	Ope
St. George's Healthcare	46	PFI	Ope
The Whittington	32	PFI	Under constructio
University College London Hospitals	422	PFI	Under constructio
Brent Primary Care Trust—Willesden	21	PFI	Under constructio
Newham Healthcare	52	PFI	Under constructio
North West London Hospitals—Central Middlesex	69	PFI	Under constructio
Wandsworth PCT—Queen Mary's Roehampton	75	PFI	Under constructio
Lewisham Hospital	51	PFI	Under constructio
Barking, Havering and Redbridge Hospitals	238	PFI	Under constructio
Whipps Cross University Hospital	328	PFI	In procuremen
Barts and The London	1,052	PFI	In procuremen
Kingston Hospital	28	PFI	In procuremen
North Middlesex University Hospital	74	PFI	In procuremen
Barnet and Chase Farm Hospitals	76	PFI	Pre-procuremen
St. Mary's (Paddington Basin)	800	PFI	Pre-procuremen
Total value	3,819		

Pharmacists

Mr. Jim Cunningham: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what estimate he has made of the cost of the new community pharmacy contract to pharmacists who wish to expand their practices. [195920]

Ms Rosie Winterton: I refer my hon. Friend to the reply I gave him on 4 November 2004, *Official Report*, column 398W.

Postgraduate Deaneries

Dr. Murrison: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how much central funding was given to postgraduate deaneries in each year since 1997. [195724]

Mr. Hutton: Central funding for postgraduate medical and dental education and training since 1997 has been:

	Amount (£ million)
1996–97	533
1997–98	592
1998–99	621
1999–2000	657
2000–01	821
2001–02	864
2002–03	1,156
2003–04	1,235
2004–05	1,344

This represents an increase of 132 per cent., or £811 million. These sums formed part of the overall national health service training budgets allocated to regional health authorities and, more recently, to strategic health authorities. The amounts that postgraduate deaneries actually received will have been determined locally in the light of local priorities and national work force targets.

Radiologists

Mr. Edwards: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what plans he has to increase the number of clinicians performing interventional radiology. [195032]

Mr. Hutton: Interventional radiology is the use of imaging guidance for the purpose of treating patients.

Many clinical radiologists undertake interventional radiological procedures and most of them combine diagnosis and intervention in their practice. There is no certificate of completion of specialist training in interventional radiology, therefore the Department does not collect data on the numbers of interventional radiologists practising in the national health service.

Since September 1997, numbers of consultants in clinical radiology have increased by 417, or 29 per cent. Consultant numbers are expected to increase further as a result of the significant investment in training capacity in this speciality.

Between 2002–03 and 2004–05, 166 additional centrally funded specialist registrar posts have been allocated to clinical radiology. In 2005–06, there are plans in place to create up to 60 posts for the new clinical radiology academies.

Reducing Bureaucracy

Jon Trickett: To ask the Secretary of State for Health pursuant to the written ministerial statement of 22 July 2004, *Official Report*, columns 73–77WS, on reducing bureaucracy, what assessment he has made of the future role of private contractors in NHS procurement. [195025]

Mr. Hutton: The Department's commercial directorate is scrutinising the business processes and procurement activities of many of the central services of the Department's arm's length bodies (ALBs) to establish the full scope of the efficiencies to be made, especially in relation to the money—about £3 billion—that is spent by ALBs on behalf of frontline organisations on national health service supplies, temporary staff and litigation services. This includes evaluation of the value that could be achieved by partnering with the private sector.

The commercial directorate's work on the NHS supply chain is already well advanced, suggesting savings of approximately £500 million per annum by 2007–08.

South Dorset

Jim Knight: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will set out, with statistical evidence relating as closely as possible to the South Dorset constituency, the effects of changes to departmental policy since 1997 on the South Dorset constituency. [194968]

Ms Rosie Winterton: The Government have put in place a programme of national health service investment and reform since 1997 to improve service delivery in all parts of the United Kingdom. There is significant evidence that these policies have yielded considerable benefits for the South Dorset constituency.

For example:

At the end of August 2004, the number of people more than nine months for in-patient treatment within South West Dorset Primary Care Trust (PCT) has fallen to zero from 22 in June 2002.

At the end of June 2004, the number of patients waiting over 13 weeks for out-patient treatment within the South West Dorset PCT has fallen to four from 182 in June 2002.

In 2002, at the West Dorset General Hospitals NHS Trust, 80.4 per cent. of patients spent less than four hours in accident and emergency from arrival to admission, transfer or discharge. Figures for June 2004 show an improvement to 93.2 per cent.

Between September 1997 and June 2004, the number of consultants at West Dorset General Hospitals NHS Trust has increased from 58 to 85. The number of nurses increased from 690 in September 1997 to 803 in September 2003.

General practitioner figures are stable, with an increase from 112 to 115 from September 2002 to June 2004.

Figures for September 2004 show that 100 per cent. of patients within South West Dorset PCT are able to be offered an appointment with a primary care professional within two working days.

South West Dorset Primary Care Trust allocation has risen to £134.3 million for 2004–05, a cash increase of 9.5 per cent.

A new catheter laboratory at West Dorset General Hospitals NHS Trust at a cost of £1.4 million, which opened on 1 October 2004.

A redevelopment of Portland Hospital at a cost of £2 million, which will include the building of a new ward and complete renovation of existing facilities.

Upgrade of services currently provided in Portland at a cost of approximately £2 million, including 16 general medical practitioner beds, out-patient department, physiotherapy and occupational therapy, x-ray facilities and the minor injuries unit.

Westhaven Hospital site development, where South West Dorset has invested £800,000 as part of a £10 million development to build an innovative new complex to meet the needs of older people living in and around Weymouth. The development has been designed to meet a range of housing and care needs.

Transport

Norman Baker: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will make a statement on the provision of transport for individuals needing to access hospitals some distance away, with specific reference to rural areas. [196820]

Ms Rosie Winterton: Primary care trusts are responsible for providing or securing the provision of ambulance services, which could include patient transport services, to such extent as they consider necessary to meet all reasonable requirements. It is, therefore, for the local national health service to decide who provides transport services for patients in its area.

Guidance has been issued to the NHS, which states that:

> "... patient transport service should be seen as part of an integrated programme of care. A non-emergency patient is one who, whilst requiring treatment, which may or may not be of a specialist nature, does not require an immediate or urgent response. A clinical need for treatment does not imply a medical need for transport. Medical need for non-emergency patient transport must be determined by a doctor, dentist or midwife and will depend upon the medical condition of the individual patient, the availability of private or public transport and distance to be travelled. The principle which should apply is that each patient should be able to reach hospital in a reasonable time and in reasonable comfort, without detriment to their medical condition".

A copy of the guidance, "Ambulance and other patient transport services: Operation, use and performance standards", has been placed in the Library.

Waiting Times

David Davis: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many patients in *(a)* 2003 and *(b)* 2004 in Hull and the East Riding waited longer than eight weeks after being referred to a cancer specialist. [194975]

Miss Melanie Johnson: Information on the number of patients waiting longer than eight weeks after being referred to a cancer specialist is not collected by the Department. Statistics are collected on the number of patients who wait more than 28 days for a first out-patient appointment following general practitioner urgent referral with suspected cancer. For Hull and East Yorkshire hospitals national health service trust, when the referral was received within 24 hours, three patients waited more than 28 days to see a cancer specialist in 2002–03 and no patients waited longer than 28 days in 2003–04.

Mrs. Curtis-Thomas: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what the average change in the total in-patient/day case waiting list has been in *(a)* England and *(b)* Crosby since July 2003. [195493]

Mr. Hutton: The table shows the average change in the total in-patient/day case waiting list since July 2003 both for England and for the two national health service trusts in the Crosby area.

Patients waiting for elective in-patient—position at month end

	England		Aintree hospitals NHS trust		Southport and Ormskirk hospital NHS trust	
Month end	*Total waiting list*	*Percentage change*	*Total waiting list*	*Percentage change*	*Total waiting list*	*Percentage change*
July 2003	1,966,356	—	5,949	—	5,216	—
August 2004	1,710,028	-13.0	5,239	-11.9	3,886	-25.5

Source:
Department of Health monthly monitoring.

Whiplash

Mr. Gordon Prentice: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many people have required hospital treatment for whiplash arising from a car accident in each year since 2000. [195214]

Miss Melanie Johnson: The number of people admitted to hospital where the primary diagnosis has been sprain and strain of cervical spine and where the cause has been a transport accident since 2000 is shown in the table.

	Number of admissions
2000–01	534
2001–02	474
2002–03	454

Winter Plans

Mrs. Curtis-Thomas: To ask the Secretary of State for Health whether all NHS organisations in Cheshire and Merseyside have updated their winter plans. [195491]

Miss Melanie Johnson: The emergency services action team (ESAT) was commissioned by the Cheshire and Merseyside strategic health authority to manage winter planning across the Cheshire and Merseyside area. The ESAT has collated winter plans from local health communities and assessed them against set criteria to ensure the plans are robust. Each local health community has a plan in place that aims to minimise the risk of predicted increases in demand on national health service organisations.

Working Time Directive

Dr. Murrison: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what assessment he has made of funding charges necessary to support the medical training requirements of the European working time directive. [195079]

Mr. Hutton *[holding answer 1 November 2004]:* The requirement to comply with the working time directive (WTD) does not directly affect investment in medical education and training. Achieving compliance for doctors in training from August 2004 has been taken forward as part of a wider modernisation programme designed to improve both the quality of services and working patterns for doctors. We have supported this through central investment in pilot work across a number of national health service trusts over recent years. We have disseminated the lessons we learned across the NHS. We have also made more postgraduate medical training places available to help the recruitment of extra doctors.

We assess regularly the number of training places we need for doctors and consequently the level of funding required to support them. Continuing compliance with the WTD is one of the factors that influence decisions on the future number of doctors.

DEFENCE

A400M

Mr. Hoyle: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will make a statement on progress with the A400M procurement; and how many countries have expressed interest in purchasing the aircraft. [194621]

Mr. Ingram: A contract for the development and production of the A400M aircraft was signed with Airbus Military (AM) on 27 May 2003 on behalf of the partner nations. The UK off-take is 25 aircraft out of a total 180. The contract milestones are being achieved.

The participating nations within the programme are Germany, France, Turkey, Spain, Belgium, Luxembourg and United Kingdom. Portugal and Italy participated during the preparation stage but withdrew before MOU/Contact signature. While a number of other countries are potential customers for A400M, none of them have expressed formal interest.

Air Depth Maintenance

Annabelle Ewing: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence when the consultation period on the future locations of air depth maintenance support announced on 16 September expires. [196210]

Mr. Ingram *[holding answer 4 November 2004]:* The Trade Union consultation period on the preferred way ahead on End-to-End Logistics Air Depth Support ended on 27 October.

Aircraft Carriers

Dr. Cable: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence which US companies have been invited to bid for *(a)* management and *(b)* construction work on the project for the Royal Navy's new aircraft carriers since the appointment of BAE Systems and Thales to lead the project. [194315]

Mr. Ingram *[holding answer 28 October 2004]:* Since the start of the Future Aircraft Carrier (CVF) Assessment Phase in 1999, and the subsequent announcement of the alliancing strategy in January 2003, both BAE Systems and Thales UK have involved a number of US companies, including Lockheed Martin, Northrop Grumman and Raytheon. As part of implementing the alliance strategy, we are currently running a competition to select the company best placed to fulfil the role of physical integrator (PI). The PI would be expected to provide a management role to co-ordinate the ship building aspects of the carriers, which will be acquired in line with the current Government policy of building warships for the Royal Navy in the United Kingdom. Six companies were invited to submit proposals including Bechtel and KBR, an operating segment of the Halliburton Company.

Armed Forces (Work with Children)

Sue Doughty: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence under what circumstances military personnel *(a)* are and *(b)* may in future work with children; and if the Government will ensure criminal records checks are made on members of the armed forces who interact with children. [196440]

Mr. Ingram: There are a number of circumstances where military personnel, in the course of their duty, may be involved with children. In the main, but not exclusively, they are the medical services, some legal staff, welfare and families staff, Padres, cadet and youth training teams, recruitment staff, cadet instructors and administrative staff, and Service community police. In all instances Service personnel appointed to these posts undergo a criminal records check to an appropriate level of disclosure.

Armed Services (Voter Registration)

Mr. Viggers: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what steps he is taking to promote registration to vote amongst service personnel. [196097]

Mr. Caplin: The Ministry of Defence issues a Defence Council Instruction explaining the procedure for registration. Assistance is provided to personnel, especially those overseas, and personnel are notified of all parliamentary elections. We are also considering the use of other media to promote registration.

Army (Specialists)

Ann Winterton: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what the Army's *(a)* present and *(b)* anticipated strength against establishment is in (i) Signals, (ii) Logistics, (iii) Engineers and (iv) Intelligence. [194381]

Mr. Caplin: The Army's strength against establishment as at 1 September 2004 in the Corps requested is set out as follows.

Corps	*Strength*	*Establishment*
Royal Corps of Signals	8,850	8,630
Royal Logistic Corps	15,540	16,200
Corps of Royal Engineers	8,770	9,160
Intelligence Corps	1,380	1,410

Notes:

1. The present establishment relates to the last trained requirement published figure contained in Tri-Service Publications 3 and 4.
2. Both sets of figures are for UK trained regular army and therefore exclude Gurkhas, Full Time Reserve Service Personnel, the Home Service Battalions of the Royal Irish Regiment and mobilised reservists. The figures also exclude those with the rank of Colonel and above who are held against "staff" strength and requirement.

Army Strength

Ann Winterton: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence how many infantry are *(a)* on operational tour, *(b)* training to go on operations and *(c)* on recreational and training tour. [194389]

Mr. Ingram: There are currently *(a)* seven Infantry Battalions and one Infantry Company deployed on operations and; *(b)* seven Infantry Battalions training for operations. In answering part *(c)* of the question, I have assumed that the hon. Member is referring to Infantry Battalions on overseas training exercises, of which there is one. Details can be found in the following table:

Infantry Battalions deployed on operations

Operation	*Unit*
Iraq	1st Battalion The Black Watch, 1st Battalion The Duke of Wellington's Regiment, 1st Battalion The Welsh Guards, 1st Battalion The Scots Guards
Northern Ireland (roulement battalion)	2nd Battalion The Light Infantry
Afghanistan	1st Battalion The Worcestershire and Sherwood Foresters Regiment
Bosnia	1st Battalion The Grenadier Guards
Falkland Islands	1st Battalion The Royal Gloucestershire, Berkshire and Wiltshire Regiment (Company Level Deployment)

Infantry Battalions training for operations

1st Battalion The Royal Regiment of Fusiliers

1st Battalion The Highlanders

1st Battalion The Staffordshire Regiment

1st Battalion The Royal Anglian Regiment

1st Battalion The Coldstream Guards

3rd Battalion The Parachute Regiment

1st Battalion The Royal Gurkha Rifles

Infantry Battalions on overseas training exercises

1st Battalion The Welsh Guards

Ann Winterton: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence which Army personnel recommended the reduction of three battalions from two divisions. [196219]

Mr. Ingram: Advice on all aspects of Army organisation, management and structure is put to Ministers by the Executive Committee of the Army Board, the senior official committee of the Army. It is chaired by the Chief of the General Staff and its membership comprises: the Second Permanent Secretary, the Commander in Chief Land Command, the Adjutant General, the General Officer Commanding Northern Ireland, the Quartermaster General, the Master General of the Ordnance.

Mr. Gordon Prentice: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence on how many occasions he has consulted retired field marshals about *(a)* proposed changes to the Army and *(b)* operational matters. [196460]

Mr. Ingram: My right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Defence has not consulted retired Field Marshals on either issue.

Canberra Aircraft

Mr. Bellingham: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence how many accidents there have been during the service life of the Canberra that have *(a)* been the direct or indirect result of training for emergency situations and *(b)* taken place during asymmetric approaches or landing simulating engine failure; and how many civilian casualties have occurred as a result of those training accidents. [195173]

Mr. Ingram: We only hold verifiable statistical data on Canberra accident rates dating from 1974. Since then, the RAF has lost 12 Canberra aircraft in accidents, at a rate of 0.35 per 10,000 flying hours. Of these, three were attributed to training for emergency situations. Of the three losses in emergency training, all were during the take off or overshoot phase while simulating engine failure. During the same period there have been over 100 incidents involving Canberra aircraft where engines have had to be shut down during flight.

Three civilians were killed and six injured as a result of a training accident in 1977.

Mr. Bellingham: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what steps his Department is taking to provide *(a)* improved ejection seats and *(b)* a flight simulator for the (i) operational and (ii) training aircraft used for training in emergency situations for Canberra PR9s. [195174]

Mr. Ingram: There are no plans to update the ejection seats or to develop flight simulator training for the Canberra. Modifications to Canberra ejection seats would take up to four years to develop and embody, exceeding the planned Canberra out of service date of 31 March 2006.

Chile (Rover Class Tanker)

Mr. Hancock: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what discussions he has had with *(a)* the Chilean Government, *(b)* the Chilean navy and *(c)* others concerning the transfer of a Rover class tanker to Chile. [194682]

Mr. Ingram: In response to an approach from the Head of the Chilean Naval Mission in London in July 2003 concerning the availability for sale of RFA Rover Class and other naval ship types, the Ministry of Defence's Disposal Services Agency (DSA) informed him that, in line with current plans, no Rover Class tankers would be decommissioned from service until later in the decade. This issue was subsequently raised by the Chilean Navy in September 2004. There have been no discussions with any other parties.

Departmental Expenditure Limit

Mr. Keith Simpson: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what his Department's cash Departmental Expenditure Limit is for the current financial year. [196464]

Mr. Ingram: The Ministry of Defence has been set Departmental Expenditure Limits for Resource and Capital expenditure only. However, the Department's programme this year is expected to remain within a 'cash equivalent' (Resource DEL plus Capital DEL less anticipated depreciation and Cost of Capital costs) of £26.5 billion as set out in "Spending Review 2004, New Public Spending Plans 2005–08" (HM Treasury July 2004. Cm 6237) and, subject to any changes voted in Supplementary Estimates within the total cash figure voted by Parliament in Main Estimates (HC 466, April 2004) of £28.6 billion.

Departmental Secondments

Bob Spink: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence how many staff in his Department and its agencies were seconded from the *(a)* private and *(b)* academic sector in each of the last three years. [175364]

Mr. Caplin: The information requested is set out in the following table:

	Inward secondments	
Financial year	*Private sector*	*Academic sector*
2003–04	24	1
2002–03	14	0
2001–02	3	0

EU Battlegroups

Ann Winterton: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence pursuant to the answer of 28 October 2004, *Official Report*, column 1367W, on EU battlegroups, who has command of a battlegroup once it has been deployed; and to whom the commander will be directly responsible. [196213]

Mr. Hoon: Any deployed EU battlegroup would have a force commander and an operation commander. The force commander would be determined on a case-by-case basis. For a battlegroup operating under the Berlin Plus arrangements, the operation commander would be DSACEUR. For a battlegroup not operating under the Berlin Plus arrangements, the operation commander would be determined on a case-by-case basis. We would expect them to be drawn from the nation or nations making the major troop contributions to the battlegroup concerned.

As with all EU operations, the political control of a battlegroup mission, including any decisions appointing commanders, would rest with the 25 member states, acting by unanimity through the Political and Security Committee (PSC). The force commander of a deployed battlegroup would be directly responsible to the operation commander, who would be directly responsible to the PSC.

Iraq (Depleted Uranium)

Llew Smith: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will place in the Library a copy of the letter written by his Department's legal adviser to the legal secretary to the Law Officers dated 12 March 2003, in respect of the legal position on taking military action against Iraq, to which reference is made in paragraph 382, page 95, of the Butler Committee Report on intelligence on weapons of mass destruction, HC898. [185191]

Mr. Hoon: The correspondence to which paragraph 382 of the Butler Committee Report refers was considered by the Committee, and is covered by legal professional privilege. I am withholding the letter under Exemptions 2 and 4 of the Code of Practice on Access to Government Information.

Military Personnel (Commonwealth)

Ann Winterton: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what percentages of the *(a)* Guards, *(b)* Scottish, *(c)* Queen's, *(d)* King's, *(e)* Prince of Wales's and *(f)* Light divisions are comprised of personnel from Commonwealth countries. [196218]

Mr. Caplin: The following table shows the percentages of the personnel from Commonwealth countries in *(a)* Guards, *(b)* Scottish, *(c)* Queens, *(d)* Kings, *(e)* Prince of Wales and *(f)* Light divisions. Figures relate to Regular Army trained officers and soldiers as at 1 September 2004.

	[1]*Commonwealth percentage*
Footguards	2.3
Scots divisions	5.9
Queens divisions	8.9
Kings divisions	5.2
Prince of Wales divisions	5.2
Light divisions	7.5

[1] Excluding UK

Missile Defence

Llew Smith: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence pursuant to the written statement of 12 October 2004, *Official Report*, columns 9–10WS, on missile defence, what the *(a)* names and *(b)* qualifications are of the United Kingdom appointments to the (i) Executive Steering Committee and (ii) Senior Management Committee of the joint US/UK Ballistic Missile Defence programme. [195412]

Mr. Hoon: The United Kingdom is represented on the Executive Steering Committee by the Ministry of Defence's Chief Scientific Advisor, Professor Roy Anderson, whose qualifications are available on the MOD website. The name of the UK's representative on the Senior Management Committee is being withheld in accordance with Exemption 12 to the Code of Practice on Access to Government Information, as are details of their qualifications. No specific qualifications are stipulated for these appointments, which are made on the basis of the individuals' current posts, experience and technical expertise.

Harry Cohen: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence whether he expects that the United Kingdom will receive funding from the United States for arrangements provided for the facilitation of its missile defence programme; what the latest estimate is of what it would cost the United Kingdom to have the missile defence programme cover defence of the UK mainland; and if he will make a statement. [196401]

Mr. Hoon: I do not expect to receive funding for the new arrangements at RAF Fylingdales, since the United States have borne the full cost of upgrading the radar for missile defence purposes. The only other arrangements with the US in the missile defence field cover cooperative research and development programmes, for which there is no agreed budget with the US. Under the terms of the Research, Development, Test and Evaluation Annex MOU, announced to the House on 12 October, *Official Report*, columns 9–10WS, any such funding will be agreed on a project-by-project basis; to date there are no agreed projects. Regarding costs for the protection of the United Kingdom, the Government have taken no decisions about the need for such protection, nor the architecture and systems required. Since costs would be very dependent on these factors, as well as on the level of involvement that might be agreed with allies, it is not possible to give an estimate.

Harry Cohen: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence whether the Government have received a request in connection with the stationing of missiles as part of the United States' Missile Defence Programme; and if he will make a statement. [196402]

Mr. Hoon: I refer my hon. Friend to the answer I gave on 28 October 2004, *Official Report*, column 1372W, to the right hon. and learned Member for North-East Fife (Sir Menzies Campbell).

Nuclear Materials Transport

Mr. Chaytor: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence whether his Department is providing military support to the BNFL ships due to transport weapons grade plutonium from Charleston to Cherbourg; and if he will make a statement. [190097]

Mr. Ingram *[holding answer 11 October 2004]:* The Ministry of Defence did not provide support to the BNFL ships transporting plutonium from the USA to France.

Press Officers

Mr. Ruffley: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence how many press officers are employed in his Department; and how many were employed in each year since 1996–97. [195355]

Mr. Caplin *[holding answer 1 November 2004]:* On 2 November 2004 there were 16 press officers employed in the Ministry of Defence's central press office in London.

The number of press officers employed by the MOD in each year since 1996–97 is shown in the following table:

	Press officers
1996–97	12
1997–98	12
1998–99	13
1999–2000	18
2000–01	17
2001–02	20
2002–03	18
2003–04	18

The information in the table above relates to those employed in a press officer role at any time during the financial year. Furthermore, these figures relate solely to those press officers employed in the Department's central press office in London. The information does not include those employed as press officers in Regional Press Offices, Defence Agencies, the Permanent Joint Headquarters, single Service Commands and at unit level, some of whom have a press officer task in addition to their main role. Accurate information on this is not held centrally and could be provided only at disproportionate cost.

RAF Aldergrove

David Burnside: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what environmental impact assessment has been made of the effect on service personnel and their families at RAF Aldergrove of the proximity of asbestos storage and destruction at Crosshill Quarry, Crumlin. [196074]

Mr. Ingram: None. It is the responsibility of the person making the planning application to conduct an environmental impact assessment. The Ministry of Defence has however, considered the health and safety implications of the proposed storage facility for service personnel and their families.

Ranger Stuart McMaster

Rev. Ian Paisley: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence whether his Department has pressed for a criminal investigation of the circumstances of the death of Ranger Stuart McMaster at Skydive Ranch in Canada in 2002. [194984]

Mr. Ingram: The death of Ranger Stuart McMaster has been investigated by the Royal Canadian Mounted Police (RCMP), who concluded that the circumstances of the death were not suspicious. Subsequently, the Royal Military Police Special Investigation Branch conducted additional inquiries to support HM Coroner's investigations. Should any new and substantive evidence come to light from any source, this will be considered and, if appropriate, referred back to the RCMP.

Request for Resources 1

Mr. Keith Simpson: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence how much of his Department's 2003–04 Request for Resources 1 underspend has been carried forward to the current financial year in *(a)* cash terms and *(b)* resource terms. [196468]

Mr. Ingram: None. Approval for carry-forward will be sought in Winter Supplementary Estimates to be put to the House later this month. End Year Flexibility entitlements, based on provisional outturn figures, were published in the Public Expenditure Outturn White Paper in July 2004 (Cm 6293).

Salisbury Plain

Mr. Key: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what management procedures are in place in the Salisbury Plain training area to restrict military training on environmental grounds in response to severe weather conditions; and how quickly the military can respond to those procedures. [196020]

Mr. Caplin: As the hon. Member will have seen during his visit on 29 October, the Army Training Estate (Salisbury Plain) takes extremely seriously its environmental responsibilities. It has well established procedures to ensure that training plans can be adjusted quickly to take account of changing conditions. These procedures are kept under constant review and are adjusted and improved where appropriate.

Second World War 60th Anniversary

Keith Vaz: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what activities his Department's plans to commemorate the 60th anniversary of the end of the Second World War. [196582]

Mr. Caplin: I refer my hon. Friend to the announcement I made on 9 June 2004, *Official Report*, column 309. I shall be making a further announcement very shortly.

Soldiers (Media Contact)

Mr. Gordon Prentice: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what rules apply to serving soldiers speaking to the media about deployments and other operational matters; and if he will make a statement. [196269]

Mr. Ingram: The general rules for service and civilian MOD personnel governing contact with the media, and for writing or speaking in public, were re-issued on 29 October 2004 as Defence Council Instruction (DCI) General 200/04.

The key principle is that service and civilian MOD staff should only contact the media (or write or speak in public) on defence matters if they have prior authorisation. This principle is not new, and reflects previous versions of the DCI, and relevant sections of Queen's Regulations for the Armed Forces and the Civil Service Code.

The normal channels for contact with the media are the main defence press office, subsidiary press offices and press information centres or spokespeople with deployed forces. Nonetheless, large numbers of other personnel do have contact with the media on particular occasions in approved circumstances. Joint Warfare Publication (JWP) 3-45 extends and adapts the general provisions of the DCI to cater for the needs of deployed forces.

The rules are designed to ensure that standards of political impartiality and public accountability are maintained, and to enable appropriate support to be given to personnel.

The substantive content of the DCI and of the JWP will be made available in the 'Publications and Reports' section of the MOD website, and copies will be placed in the Library of the House.

Zimbabwe

Sir Nicholas Winterton: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence how much financial assistance has been granted to British war *(a)* veterans and *(b)* widows living in Zimbabwe in each of the last 10 years for which figures are available; and what plans the Government have to provide further financial assistance. [195046]

Mr. Caplin: Information is not available in the form requested. However, 40 pensions are currently in payment to former service personnel resident in Zimbabwe. We do not have readily available information for previous years or on the value of the pensions in payments and this could be provided only at disproportionate cost.

Disabled veterans and the widows of veterans may be entitled to a war pension or an Armed Forces Pension Scheme (AFPS) pension if a disablement or death was caused by service. We do not have information available for the number or value of such AFPS pensions in payment. However, the information available relating to war pensions in payment to people resident in Zimbabwe is set out in the following tables.

Table 1: The number of war pensions in payment with Zimbabwe as the recorded country of residence

	Type of pensioner	
Numbers as at end of March	*War disablement*	*War widow*
2000	90	20
2001	75	20
2002	60	20
2003	50	20
2004	40	20

Notes:

1. All data have been rounded to the nearest five.
2. Figures exclude those cases with no recorded country of residence.
3. In each year, there were a small number (less than five) of entitled ongoing war disablement pensioners whose cases were dealt with manually rather than on the computerised payment systems. These are not included in the table.

Table 2: Average weekly amount of pension entitlement for war pensioners with Zimbabwe as the recorded country of residence

	Type of pensioner	
Average weekly amount as at end of March	*War disablement*	*War widow*
2000	56.61	167.33
2001	54.24	168.62
2002	56.35	176.50
2003	58.56	180.24
2004	63.67	182.86

Notes:

1. The average has been calculated using the mean of all weekly entitlement information for those war pensioners included in Table 1.
2. Amounts include both the basic war disablement or war widows' pension and additional allowances.

In addition, records show that 18 payments of £10,000 each have been made under the Far East Prisoner of War and Civilian Internee Ex Gratia Payment Scheme to ex-servicemen or to the widows of servicemen living in Zimbabwe.

Upholder Class Submarines

Mr. Gordon Prentice: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence whether the Upholder Class submarines were sold to Canada with a warranty; and if he will make a statement. [194502]

Mr. Ingram: The Ministry of Defence (MOD) does not provide a warranty to Canada for the design and build of the Upholder Class submarines and neither does it provide a warranty for any equipment on board the submarine. The MOD has, however, undertaken to exercise on Canada's behalf right granted to it under any third party arrangement, such as the guarantee on the work by BAE Systems under contract to the MOD.

Mr. Gordon Prentice: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence whether HMCS Chicoutimi was manned by a Canadian crew during its sea trials prior to handover; and if he will make a statement. [195215]

Mr. Ingram: During sea trials, HMCS Chicoutimi, formerly HMS Upholder, was manned by a Canadian crew under the command of a Royal Navy Commanding Officer. At handover and acceptance the Canadian Commanding Officer designate assumed command.

Written Answers to Questions

Tuesday 9 November 2004

INTERNATIONAL DEVELOPMENT

Commission for Africa

Dr. Tonge: To ask the Secretary of State for International Development if he will make a statement on the Commission for Africa. [197191]

Hilary Benn: Following the second successful meeting of the Commission for Africa in Addis Ababa, the Commission has produced its consultation document, which is now available on its website. The Commission will be seeking the views of governments, civil society and businesses within and beyond Africa, on this document until 17 December. I hope that hon. Members will continue to feed in their views and comments on the Commission's work over the coming months. I expect that the final report will be published in March 2005.

Departmental Offices

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Secretary of State for International Development what the cost of *(a)* decoration and *(b)* refurbishment of the London offices of the Department was in each of the last four years. [196142]

Mr. Gareth Thomas: The cost of redecoration and refurbishment of DFID's two London offices in each of the last four years were as follows:

1 Palace Street redecoration:

2000–01: Nil
2001–02: £7,975
2002–03: Nil
2003–04: £615

20 Victoria Street redecoration:

2000–01: Nil
2001–02: Nil
2002–03: Nil
2003–04: Nil

In addition to the above, major refurbishment projects were carried out on the two offices. These were:

1 Palace Street, 2000–01 to 2001–02, total project cost £27 million

20 Victoria Street, 2001–02, total project cost £1.2 million.

Fair Trade

Mr. Burstow: To ask the Secretary of State for International Development whether it is his policy to ensure that hospitality within his Department is sourced from fair trade producers wherever possible within the boundaries set by the public procurement rules. [197060]

Mr. Gareth Thomas: I can confirm that it is DFID's policy that all tea, coffee and orange juice served within the Department is sourced from fair trade producers. Our external catering company also promotes and make use of fair trade products wherever possible in our staff restaurant.

Horn of Africa

Angus Robertson: To ask the Secretary of State for International Development what assessment his Department has made of the impact of the current drought in the Horn of Africa; and if he will make a statement. [196667]

Hilary Benn: The drought conditions in the Horn of Africa have caused serious stress to the most vulnerable communities in the region, in some cases resulting in humanitarian crisis. DFID is committed to ensuring the most urgent humanitarian needs are met. At the same time, and where possible, DIFD is working with governments to reduce vulnerability to these shocks.

Successive years of drier than normal rainfall conditions especially in the Horn of Africa, during the last five years, have led to reduced pasture and water availability in many key areas—northern Somalia, eastern and southern Ethiopia, eastern Kenya, parts of Eritrea, northern Sudan and a part of western Chad.

DFID has doubled humanitarian expenditure in Somalia and Sudan over last year. In Ethiopia DFID is responding to humanitarian needs with direct support and is also working with the Government of Ethiopia to reduce vulnerability to these kinds of shocks in a more sustainable way—while increasing the overall level of resources substantially. DFID has also recently agreed £5 million for humanitarian relief in affected parts of Kenya.

DFID continues to monitor the situation in Somalia and Eritrea and is considering the best means of assistance to address the most urgent humanitarian needs resulting from the drought there.

Overseas Aid

Tom Brake: To ask the Secretary of State for International Development what *(a)* expenditure was allocated prior to 6 November 2003 and *(b)* adjusted expenditure was allocated after 6 November 2003 to middle-income countries for (i) 2003–04, (ii) 2004–05 and (iii) 2005–06; and how much was allocated to (A) South Africa, (B) China, (C) Sri Lanka, (D) Russia, (E) Jamaica, (F) Guyana, (G) Brazil, (H) Bolivia, (I) Serbia and Montenegro, (J) Bosnia, (K) Albania, (L) Kosovo, (M) Belize and (N) Windward Islands in each year. [196036]

Hilary Benn: On 6 November 2003, I announced changes to DFID's planned bilateral aid programme allocations to middle-income countries for 2004–05 and 2005–06. The changes resulted from decisions taken on the Government's pledge on reconstruction and humanitarian aid in Iraq, together with DFID's commitment to increase the proportion of its bilateral aid going to the poorest countries to 90 per cent. by 2005–06.

Planned bilateral commitments to middle-income countries prior to 6 November 2003 totalled £234 million in 2003–04, £249 million in 2004–05 and £220 million in 2005–06. After 6 November the comparative figures were

£443 million, £304 million and £228 million respectively, of which Iraq accounted for £207 million in 2003–04, £91 million in 2004–05 and £86 million in 2005–06.

The following table sets out the changes to allocations in the countries requested:

£ million

	Allocations 2003–04		*Allocations 2004–05*		*Allocations 2005–06*	
Country	*Pre 6 November 2003*	*Post 6 November 2003*	*Pre 6 November 2003*	*Post 6 November 2003*	*Pre 6 November 2003*	*Post 6 November 2003*
(A) South Africa[1]	35	35	35	35	35	25
(B) China	38	38	60	45	55	35
(C) Sri Lanka	15	15	20	14	8	4.0
(D) Russia	19.7	19.7	17.7	13.0	12.4	5.0
(E) Jamaica	3.25	3.25	3.25	3.25	3.25	2.5
(F) Guyana	5.73	5.73	5.23	5.23	4.73	4.5
(G) Brazil	5.7	5.7	5.0	4.5	4.7	1.5
(H) Bolivia	8.3	8.3	6.0	4.9	5.5	1.5
Latin America Regional[2]	1.25	1.25	1.25	1.25	1.25	4.25
(I) Serbia and Montenegro	3.7	3.7	3.7	3.6	3.7	2.7
(J) Bosnia	6.0	6.0	6.0	5.9	6.0	4.5
(K) Albania	3.0	3.0	3.0	2.9	3.0	2.3
(L) Kosovo	3.7	3.7	3.7	3.6	3.7	2.7
(M)/(N) Caribbean Regional[3]	6.32	6.32	6.12	6.12	6.32	3.5

[1] This figure represents SACU MIC countries (South Africa, Botswana, Namibia and Swaziland).

[2] The reduced allocations for Brazil and Bolivia in 2005–06 are part of a move to a more regional approach, focused on support for the Inter-American Development Bank and the World Bank's Latin America operations. This is shown in the increased Latin America regional budget for 2005–06.

[3] Includes Belize/Windward Islands.

The figures for 2005–06 are indicative planning figures and will be reviewed as part of DFID's annual resource allocation exercise that will conclude in the new year.

Sudan

Angus Robertson: To ask the Secretary of State for International Development how many internally displaced people are *(a)* known and *(b)* estimated to be hosted by camps near Nyala in Darfur; and if he will make a statement. [196663]

Hilary Benn: The most recent UN Humanitarian Profile (October 2004) indicated that approximately 529,000 internally displaced people are in the South of Darfur, of which Nyala is the capital. A large proportion of these are in camps and settlements. The UN reports that 170,963 are internally displaced people known to be hosted in camps in the Nyala area. It is likely that there are further numbers of displaced persons in host communities and recent arrivals due to insecurity moving into the area.

On 2 November, the Government of Sudan forcefully relocated of 6–8,000 internally displaced people from the El Geer camp (previously known as the El Seraif camp) in the Nyala area. This occurred without prior consultation with the UN. It was therefore in breach of the established and agreed mechanism to determine voluntary return and movement of people. The UK strongly condemns any forced relocations, and through our Ambassador to Sudan, has made representations to the Government of Sudan to adhere to its obligations and commitments under the Memorandum of Understanding on Darfur, between the Government of Sudan and the International Organisation for Migration, which prohibits involuntary movement of internally displaced persons. This has been echoed by the EU and UN. DFID continues to monitor the situation closely.

Angus Robertson: To ask the Secretary of State for International Development what estimate his Department has made of the number of internally displaced people in *(a)* Sudan and *(b)* Darfur; how many there are estimated to have been in each month since September 2003; and if he will make a statement. [196664]

Hilary Benn: According to the latest UN Humanitarian Profile in October, there are 1.6 million people displaced in Darfur. It is estimated that a further 4 million have been displaced in Sudan as a whole. In addition there are a further 200,000 displaced from Darfur into Eastern Chad as refugees.

It is very difficult to provide accurate monthly figures of internally displaced people in Sudan as a whole of Darfur due to the issue of access constraints, notably due to problems of security affecting agency movements.

Due to very limited access in Darfur up until April 2004, the UN did not estimate figures on a monthly basis beyond its September 2003 report of 250,000 displaced people. From April 2004 until August, the UN estimated that there were just over 1 million displaced people. From September this figure reached 1.5 million. The reasons for this increase is due to the on-going violence and improving access to Darfur. For Sudan as a whole, the UN has not made monthly estimates. It has been estimated that in September 2003 there were 3.7 million displaced.

The UK continues to monitor the situation.

Angus Robertson: To ask the Secretary of State for International Development what assessment his Department has made of the number of internally displaced people displaced by the conflict in *(a)* southern Sudan and *(b)* Darfur; and if he will make a statement. [196665]

Hilary Benn: It is difficult to determine accurately the numbers of people displaced in Darfur and southern Sudan primarily due to the problem of access. The latest United Nations Humanitarian Profile estimates that approximately 1.6 million people are internally displaced within Darfur as a result of the crisis there. It is estimated that up to 4 million people have been displaced in Sudan as a whole. In addition to this figure, it is estimated that there are 600,000 Sudanese refugees in neighbouring countries, of which 200,000 from Darfur have been displaced into Eastern Chad.

The UK continues to press both the Government of Sudan and the rebels to allow greater access as well as pressing all parties to sign and deliver on the Abuja humanitarian protocol. The UK strongly condemns any forced relocations of conflict affected persons.

ELECTORAL COMMISSION

Overseas Voters Electoral Register

Mr. Evans: To ask the hon. Member for Gosport, representing the Speaker's Committee on the Electoral Commission what action the Electoral Commission is taking to ensure that all British citizens who are living abroad are able to vote in any forthcoming general election. [196735]

Mr. Viggers: The Electoral Commission provides information and advice to British citizens living abroad and has produced a registration form for use by eligible British citizens. The Commission has also provided information to the Foreign and Commonwealth Office both for dissemination to its staff and for use when dealing with inquiries from British citizens resident abroad about their electoral rights in the United Kingdom.

Mr. Evans: To ask the hon. Member for Gosport, representing the Speaker's Committee on the Electoral Commission what estimate the Electoral Commission has made of the number of people *(a)* living in the US for 15 years or less and *(b)* living abroad who will be eligible to vote in a UK general election. [196734]

Mr. Viggers: The Electoral Commission has made no estimate of either the number of people living abroad, or of the number who have lived in the United States for 15 years or less, who will be able to vote in a United Kingdom parliamentary election.

DEPUTY PRIME MINISTER

Departmental Properties

Mr. Andrew Turner: To ask the Deputy Prime Minister if he will list the properties occupied by *(a)* his Department and its predecessors and *(b)* its agencies in (i) 1997 and (ii) 2004, stating (A) for each and (B) in aggregate, the area; and what the aggregate rental value was in each year. [195129]

Phil Hope: The Office of the Deputy Prime Minister was established in May 2002, and thus figures do not exist for 1997. The list of properties occupied on 1 April 2004 is as follows:

Property	*Net internal area m²*	*Annual rent paid (£000)*
26 Whitehall London[1]	5,045	n/a
Eland House London	22,650	12,350
Ashdown House London	6,727	2,633
Portland House London	2,163	2,880
Temple Quay Bristol	278	54
Ashdown House Hastings	722	75
Hempstead House Hemel Hempstead	1,198	153
Exchange Tower London	710	145
1 High street Glossop	107	10
Building 3 Garston	297	37
Fire Experimental Unit Moreton-in-Marsh[1]	1,354	n/a
Hangar 97 Little Rissington[1]	4,401	n/a
Marchington Primary site Staffordshire	39,018	1,029
Marchington Secondary site Staffordshire	4,645	143
Total	89,315	19,509
Government Offices		
Riverwalk House London GOL	6,206	1,940
Citygate Newcastle GONE	6,095	1,181
Sunley Tower Manchester GONW[1]	13,476	1,202
Cunard Building Liverpool GONW	3,507	277
Eastbrook Cambridge GOE	5,195	707
2 Rivergate Bristol GOSW	3,537	171
Mast House Plymouth GOSW	1,656	722
77 Paradise Circus Birmingham GOWM	3,285	560
Chamberlain House Birmingham GOWM	1,591	280
The Belgrave Centre Nottingham GOEM	4,096	519
City House Leeds GOYH	4,480	545
25 Queen street Leeds GOYH	1,137	329
Silkstone House Rotherham GOYH	712	84
Bridge House Guildford GOSE	3,731	1,025
Total	58,704	9,542
Fire Service College Moreton-in-Marsh[1]	30,779	n/a
QEIICC London	7,570	n/a
Planning Inspectorate Temple Quay Bristol	6,841	1,326
Total	45,190	1,326

[1] Denotes freehold property. Figures for the rental value of these can be provided only at disproportionate cost.

Except where indicated the above properties are occupied either wholly or partly on a leasehold basis. Where the Office of the Deputy Prime Minister shares the leasehold occupation with other Government Departments the figures represent only the space occupied by the Office of the Deputy Prime Minister.

Although the Office of the Deputy Prime Minister has overall responsibility for the buildings occupied by Government Offices, they carry out functions on behalf of 10 Government Departments.

Green Spaces

Mr. Rosindell: To ask the Deputy Prime Minister what the Government's strategy is for improving inner-city green spaces. [195963]

Phil Hope: The Government have already established a programme to improve urban parks and green spaces. This is set out in the Office of the Deputy Prime Minister's reports "Living Places—Cleaner, Safer, Greener" (ODPM 2002), and "Sustainable communities: building for the future" (ODPM 2003). The initiatives they contain are currently being implemented through the cross-government "Cleaner, Safer, Greener Communities" programme.

The 8 per cent. increase to 71 per cent. satisfaction with parks and open spaces over the last three years shows that the Office of the Deputy Prime Minister's programme is working.

HMO National Licensing Scheme

Chris Ruane: To ask the Deputy Prime Minister what cross-departmental co-operation his Department is encouraging with *(a)* police, *(b)* the fire service, *(c)* local government, *(d)* the Benefits Agency and *(e)* the Inland Revenue in implementing the National Licensing Scheme for Houses in Multiple Occupation. [196206]

Keith Hill: The Office of the Deputy Prime Minister has close working relations with other Government Departments and relevant bodies that have an interest in the Houses in Multiple Occupation (HMO) Licensing scheme. In particular we have worked very closely with the Local Government Association, the Home Office and the Department of Works and Pensions in the development of the licensing scheme and we shall continue to do so as we work towards in its implementation. Local authorities will be responsible for the implementation of the national scheme in their areas and we expect that other relevant bodies, such as the police and fire service, will work with them in achieving this, in so far as they are able to do so.

Affordable Housing

Ms Oona King: To ask the Deputy Prime Minister (1) pursuant to the answer of 5 July 2004, *Official Report*, columns 450–51W, on affordable housing, what the affordability criteria for the new shared ownership properties are in each London borough; [196823]

(2) whether his Department monitors the number of shared ownership properties built in each London borough that are more expensive than the stated affordability criteria for that area. [196824]

Keith Hill: London boroughs' Unitary Development Plans contain policies on the provision of affordable housing generally, in accordance with national planning policy. These policies should define what the authority considers to be affordable in the local plan area in terms of the relationship between local income levels and house prices or rents for different types of households. Affordable housing policies in local plans should not be expressed in favour of any particular form of tenure.

Registered social landlords operating shared ownership schemes are expected to have regard to the affordability of schemes to first time buyers. The Office of the Deputy Prime Minister does not monitor the affordability criteria for shared ownership properties by local authority area. However, the Office of the Deputy Prime Minister keeps the general operation of the scheme funded by the Housing Corporation under review to ensure that it continues to meet our policy objectives and the needs of the intended client group.

My right hon. Friend the Deputy Prime Minister announced on 26 September that the Office of the Deputy Prime Minister is developing an initiative to help more first time buyers onto the first rung of the housing ladder. The aim is to achieve better value for money and more housing options by making smarter use of public sector-owned land and by driving down construction costs. Details are still being worked up and more information will be set out in the Office of the Deputy Prime Minister's strategic plan.

Ms Oona King: To ask the Deputy Prime Minister when he expects the Housing Corporation to begin publication of the new Shared Ownership Performance Indicators; and if he will make a statement. [196825]

Keith Hill: The Housing Corporation has published the new Shared Ownership Performance Indicators on the 8 November 2004, on its Performance Indicator Profiles website www.housingpis.co.uk.

Ministers' Private Offices

Mr. Prisk: To ask the Deputy Prime Minister what the running costs of Ministers' private offices in his Department have been in each year since 1997. [191380]

Phil Hope: The Office of the Deputy Prime Minister was established following the Machinery of Government changes on 29 May 2002.

The total running costs (Admin Pay Cost and Admin Nonpay Costs) of the Ministers' private offices for the financial year 2003–04 was £1,556,886.0.

The final outturn figures for Departmental running costs are published in Departmental appropriation and resource accounts.

Rough Sleepers

Mr. Willetts: To ask the Deputy Prime Minister if he will place in the Library a copy of his Department's guidelines on the definition of rough sleepers used for surveys of their numbers. [196517]

Keith Hill: The guidance on the definition of rough sleepers for the purpose of count exercises was first published in 1996 and developed in partnership with charities and voluntary organisations helping people sleeping rough.

The definition of people who should be included in rough sleeper counts is clearly set out on page 5 in the guidance. It is:

> "People sleeping, or bedded down, in the open air (such as on the streets, or in doorways, parks or bus shelters); people in buildings or other places not designed for habitation (such as barns, sheds, car parks, cars, derelict boats, stations, or "bashes")."

A copy of the guidance will be placed in the Libraries of the House. The guidance is also available on the Office of the Deputy Prime Minister's website at: http://www.odpm.gov.uk/stellent/groups/odpm_homelessness/documents/page/odpm_home_024817.hcsp

WALES

Consultants

Pete Wishart: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales how much expenditure his Department has incurred in each year since 2002 on employing external consultants to deal with the press and public relations of his Department; and if he will make a statement. [195449]

Mr. Touhig: None.

Mr. Weir: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales how much his Department spent in each year since 2002 on employing *(a)* external management consultants and *(b)* external human resources consultants; and if he will make a statement. [195764]

Mr. Touhig: I refer the hon. Member to the answer given to my hon. Friend the Member for Castle Point (Bob Spink) on 12 May 2004, *Official Report*, column 183W.

The Wales Office has not incurred any cost relating to external management consultants and external human resources consultants since 1 April 2004.

Departmental Advertising Costs

Charles Hendry: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what the cost of *(a)* creative work, *(b)* media spend and *(c)* administration for his Department's advertising activity has been in each financial year since 1997–98, broken down by contractor. [197303]

Mr. Touhig: The Wales Office runs no publicity campaigns and hence has spent nothing on advertising since its creation in July 1999.

TRANSPORT

A27

Norman Baker: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what the *(a)* maximum and *(b)* average speeds of vehicles along the A27 Lewes bypass were in the most recent year for which figures are available; and if he will make a statement. [196832]

Mr. Jamieson: The Highways Agency does not routinely measure vehicle speeds along the A27 Lewes bypass. Exceptionally, readings were taken at the approaches to the Ashcombe roundabout in February 2002, for use in the design of a proposed speed reduction scheme, as shown in the table:

Miles per hour

	Location	*Maximum speed*	*Average speed*
February 2002	Westbound approach to Ashcombe roundabout	Not available	61.1
February 2002	Eastbound approach to Ashcombe roundabout	Not available	56.9

Carbon Dioxide Emissions

Norman Baker: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport (1) what data local authorities are required to collect on carbon dioxide emissions; and whether this includes emissions from road traffic; [196806]

(2) what the level of carbon dioxide emissions from road traffic was in each local authority area in the last year for which figures are available. [196808]

Mr. Jamieson: There is no legal requirement on local authorities to collect data on carbon dioxide emissions in their areas, and there are therefore no centrally held data on carbon dioxide emissions from road transport in each local authority area.

Norman Baker: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport if he will make a statement on the processes involved in the collection of data on carbon dioxide emissions from road traffic. [196807]

Mr. Jamieson: The figures for total carbon dioxide emissions from UK road transport are compiled by the National Environmental Technology Centre (NETCEN) and published in the National Atmospheric Emissions Inventory (NAEI). They are based on DTI annual statistics on fuel sales and the carbon content of the fuels. The NAEI allocates this to different vehicle categories on the basis of fuel consumption rates and total kilometres travelled for each vehicle type.

EU Committees

Angus Robertson: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport how many times during the Greek presidency of the EU *(a)* the Advisory Committee on access for Community air carriers to intra-Community air routes, *(b)* the Advisory Committee on the definition and use of compatible technical and operating standards and specifications for the procurement of air traffic management equipment and systems and *(c)* the Committee on the harmonisation of technical requirements and administrative procedures in the field of civil aviation met; when and where these meetings took place; which UK Government expert was present at each meeting; what (i) technical and (ii) financial issues were raised by the UK expert at each meeting; what recommendations the Committee produced during that period; what actions were (A) proposed and (B) taken by (1) the EU and (2) the UK Government as a result of the Committee's recommendations; and if he will make a statement. [193389]

Mr. McNulty: A meeting of the market access advisory committee took place during 2003, to consider restrictions on the approaches to Zurich airport. The exact date of the Committee meeting is not recorded. The outcome of the meeting is referred to in Commission Decision 2004/12/EC. The UK Government were not represented. The other information requested would require an unreasonable diversion of resources to obtain.

There were no meetings of the other two Committees during the Greek Presidency.

Details of developments during the Greek Presidency can be found in Cm6097 "Developments in the European Union, January to June 2003, the Greek Presidency" which was laid before Parliament in January 2004 and is available at www.fco.gov.uk/commandpapers.

Angus Robertson: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport how many times during the Greek presidency of the EU the Committee on *(a)* application of the legislation on access to the groundhandling market at Community airports, *(b)* unfair pricing practices in maritime transport and *(c)* application of the legislation on the minimum level of training for seafarers and the recognition of certificates issued by training institute or administrations of third countries met; when and where these meetings took place; which UK Government expert was present at each meeting; what (i) technical and (ii) financial issues were raised by the UK Government expert at each meeting; what recommendations the Committee produced during that period; what actions were (A) proposed and (B) taken by (1) the EU and (2) the UK Government as a result of the Committee's recommendations; and if he will make a statement. [193394]

Mr. McNulty: There were no meetings of the Committee on the application of the legislation on access to the groundhandling market at Community airports during the Greek presidency.

UK involvement in the Committee on unfair pricing is not the responsibility of the Department for Transport.

During the Greek Presidency, there were three meetings of the Committee on seafarer training, on 6 February, 12 February and 4 March 2003. All took place in Brussels. The meeting discussed the text of proposed amendments to Directive 2001/25. Department for Transport and Maritime and Coastguard Agency officials attended. The identities of the individuals concerned are withheld under exemption 15 of the Code of Practice on Access to Government Information.

The other information requested would require an unreasonable diversion of resources to obtain.

Details of developments during the Greek Presidency can be found in Cm6097 "Developments in the European Union, January to June 2003, the Greek Presidency" which was laid before Parliament in January 2004 and is available at www.fco.gov.uk/commandpapers.

Angus Robertson: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport how many times during the Greek presidency of the EU the Committee on *(a)* application of legislation on application of tonnage measurement of ballast spaces in segregated ballast of oil tankers, *(b)* minimum requirements for vessels bound for or leaving Community ports and carrying dangerous or polluting goods and *(c)* the transfer of ships from one register to another within the Community met; when and where these meetings took place; which UK Government expert was present at each meeting; what (i) technical and (ii) financial issues were raised by the UK Government expert at each meeting; what recommendations the Committee produced during that period; what actions were (A) proposed and (B) taken by (1) the EU and (2) the UK Government as a result of the Committee's recommendations; and if he will make a statement. [193395]

Mr. McNulty: No meetings of these Committees took place during the Greek presidency.

Angus Robertson: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport how many times during the Greek presidency of the EU *(a)* the Committee for the establishment of conditions for the interoperability of the trans-European high-speed rail system, *(b)* the Committee on the adaptation to scientific and technical progress of legislation concerning the transport of dangerous goods and *(c)* the Committee for the adaptation to technical progress of recording equipment in road transport (tachographs) met; when and where these meetings took place; which UK Government expert was present at each meeting; what (i) technical and (ii) financial issues were raised by the UK Government expert at each meeting; what recommendations each committee produced during that period; what actions were (A) proposed and (B) taken by (1) the EU and (2) the UK Government as a result of each committee's recommendations; and if he will make a statement. [193007]

Mr. McNulty: During the Greek Presidency there were two meetings of the Committee for the establishment of conditions for the interoperability of the trans-European high-speed rail system, on 4 February 2003 and 23–24 June 2003. Both took place in Brussels. The UK was represented at these meetings by the Strategic Rail Authority. The Committee is primarily responsible for assisting and overseeing the production, adoption and revision of Technical Standards of Interoperability (TSIs). The purpose of these specifications is to technically harmonise the European railway supply market. The Committee oversees the development of these TSIs for both the High Speed (96/48/EC) and the Conventional Interoperability (2001/16/EC) Directives. During the specified period, the Committee discussed principles for the drafting groups to adhere to in writing the TSIs and monitored the progress being made on the production of these TSIs. It also considered the cost-benefit analyses that accompany the TSIs and the co-ordination of notified bodies (organisations appointed in Europe to verify compliance with TSIs.). The other information requested would require an unreasonable diversion of resources to obtain.

The Committee on the adaptation to scientific and technical progress of legislation concerning the transport of dangerous goods met once during the Greek Presidency, on 4 June 2003 in Brussels. It discussed derogations and modifications of the annexes to three Directives on the transport of dangerous goods. It also discussed the date of implementation of the transportable pressure equipment Directive and the work of the Committee of Experts on the Transport of Dangerous Goods. The other information requested would require an unreasonable diversion of resources to obtain.

The Committee for the adaptation to technical progress of recording equipment in road transport (tachographs) met once during the Greek Presidency, on 26 June 2003 in Brussels. It considered and approved amendments to the technical specification to Commission Regulation (EC) 1360/2002, adapting to technical progress Council Regulation (EEC) 3821/85 on recording equipment in road transport (tachographs). These amendments were subsequently published as a corrigendum to that regulation.

Where a UK Government official attended the name is withheld under exemption 15 of the Code of Practice on Access to Government Information.

Details of developments during the Greek Presidency can be found in Cm6097 "Developments in the European Union, January to June 2003, the Greek Presidency" which was laid before Parliament in January 2004 and is available at www.fco.gov.uk/commandpapers.

Angus Robertson: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport how many times during the Greek presidency of the EU the *(a)* Advisory Committee on transport, *(b)* Community-Switzerland Transport Committee (rail and road) and *(c)* Committee on the system of charging for the use of transport infrastructure met; when and where these meetings took place; which UK Government expert was present at each meeting; what (i) technical and (ii) financial issues were raised by the UK Government expert at each meeting; what recommendations the committees produced during that period; what actions were (A) proposed and (B) taken by (1) the EU and (2) the UK Government as a result of the committee's recommendations; and if he will make a statement. [193011]

Mr. McNulty: Information in respect of the Advisory Committee on Transport is not centrally available.

The Management Committee for the Agreement between the European Economic Community and the Swiss Confederation on the carriage of Goods by Road and Rail met on 19 February 2003, in Brussels.

The Committee on the system of charging for the use of transport infrastructure did not meet during the Greek Presidency.

The other information requested would require an unreasonable diversion of resources to obtain.

Where a UK Government official attended the name is withheld under exemption 15 of the Code of Practice on Access to Government Information.

Details of developments during the Greek Presidency can be found in Cm6097 "Developments in the European Union, January to June 2003, the Greek Presidency" which was laid before Parliament in January 2004 and is available at www.fco.gov.uk/commandpapers.

Angus Robertson: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport how many times during the Greek presidency of the EU the *(a)* Committee for granting Community financial aid in the field of trans-European telecommunications networks, *(b)* Advisory Committee on the management of the research programme for management and storage of radioactive waste and management of the Community plan of action in the field of radioactive waste and *(c)* Advisory Committee on measures to be taken in the event of a crisis in the market in the carriage of goods by road and for laying down the conditions under which non-resident carriers may operate national road haulage services within a member state met; when and where these meetings took place; which UK Government expert was present at each meeting; what (i) technical and (ii) financial issues were raised by the UK Government expert at each meeting; what recommendations the committees produced during that period; what actions were (A) proposed and (B) taken by (1) the EU and (2) the UK Government as a result of the committee's recommendations; and if he will make a statement. [193012]

Mr. McNulty: UK involvement in the Committees at *(a)* and *(b)* is not the responsibility of the Department for Transport.

There were no meetings of the Advisory Committee on crisis management in the haulage industry during the Greek Presidency.

Details of developments during the Greek Presidency can be found in Cm6097 "Developments in the European Union, January to June 2003, the Greek Presidency" which was laid before Parliament in January 2004 and is available at www.fco.gov.uk/commandpapers.

Angus Robertson: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport how many times during the Greek presidency of the EU *(a)* the Committee on implementation of Protocol 9 to the Act of Austria concerning transport by road and rail and combined transport (Ecopoints), *(b)* the Committee for the adaptation to technical progress of roadworthiness tests of vehicles and *(c)* the Committee for a transparent system of harmonised rules for restrictions on heavy goods vehicles involved in international transport on designated roads met; when and where these meetings took place; which UK Government expert was present at each meeting; what *(a)* technical and *(b)* financial issues were raised by the UK Government expert at each meeting; what recommendations each committee produced during that period; what actions were (i) proposed and (ii) taken by (1) the EU and (2) the UK Government as a result of each committee's recommendations; and if he will make a statement. [193015]

Mr. McNulty: The Ecopoints Management Committee met twice during the Greek Presidency, on 7 May and 10 June 2003, in Brussels. The identity of the UK Government official who attended is withheld under exemption 15 of the Code of Practice on Access to Government Information. The other information requested would require an unreasonable diversion of resources to obtain.

There were no meetings of the Committee for the adaptation to technical progress of roadworthiness tests of vehicles during the Greek Presidency.

As the Community has yet to adopt legislation on harmonised driving restrictions no such Committee exists.

Details of developments during the Greek Presidency can be found in Cm6097 "Developments in the European Union, January to June 2003, the Greek Presidency" which was laid before Parliament in January 2004 and is available at www.fco.gov.uk/commandpapers.

Angus Robertson: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport how many times during the Greek presidency of the EU the Committee on the driving licence met; when and where these meetings took place; which UK Government expert was present at each meeting; what *(a)* technical and *(b)* financial issues were raised by the UK Government expert at each meeting; what recommendations the Committee produced during that period; what actions were (i) proposed and (ii) taken by

(1) the EU and (2) the UK Government as a result of the Committee's recommendations; and if he will make a statement. [193019]

Mr. McNulty: The European Commission's Committee on the driving licence met three times during the Greek presidency of the EU, on 7 February 2003, 28 March 2003 and 29 April 2003, in Brussels. Officials from the Department for Transport, the Driving Standards Agency and the Driver and Vehicle Licensing Agency attended as necessary to cover the matters raised. Their identities are withheld under exemption 15 of the Code of Practice on Access to Government Information. Items discussed at these meetings included medical standards, driving licence codes (which codify the entitlements which an individual's licence confers) and vehicle adaptation for disabled people, driving test requirements and Commission research projects. The other information requested would require an unreasonable diversion of resources to obtain.

Details of developments during the Greek Presidency can be found in Cm6097 "Developments in the European Union, January to June 2003, the Greek Presidency" which was laid before Parliament in January 2004 and is available at www.fco.gov.uk/commandpapers.

Angus Robertson: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport how many times during the Greek presidency of the EU *(a)* the Advisory Committee for the application of legislation on the development of the Community railways met, *(b)* the Advisory Committee for the application of uniform principles on costing for railway undertakings and *(c)* the Advisory Committee for the harmonisation and comparability of the accounting and annual accounts of railway undertakings met; when and where these meetings took place; which UK Government expert was present at each meeting; what (i) technical and (ii) financial issues were raised by the UK Government expert at each meeting; what recommendations each Committee produced during that period; what actions were (A) proposed and (B) taken by (1) the EU and (2) the UK Government as a result of each Committee's recommendations; and if he will make a statement. [193020]

Mr. McNulty: The Advisory Committee for the application of legislation on the development of the Community railways met once in this period, on 31 January 2003, in Brussels. The UK was represented by officials from the Department for Transport and the Office of the Rail Regulator. The identity of the individuals concerned is withheld under exemption 15 of the Code of Practice on Access to Government Information. The main agenda items were a tour de table on the status of the implementation of the Infrastructure Package Directives (Directives 2001/12/EC, 2001/13/EC, 2001/14/EC), reports on managing the transition process until full implementation of the infrastructure package Directives, and an outline from the European Commission on its intentions for future legislation in the railways sector. The Commission subsequently adopted new proposals in March 2004 as the Third Rail Package.

Also during the Greek Presidency, the European Commission published a draft proposal for a recommendation on the use of a common European format for licences issued in accordance with Council Directive 95/18/EC on the licensing of railway undertakings. This recommendation was based on advice from the Advisory Committee for the application of legislation on the development of the Community railways. The Commission adopted the recommendation on 7 April 2004 and published in the Official Journal on 20 April 2004 (L313).

Neither the Advisory Committee for the application of uniform principles on costing for railway undertakings nor the Advisory Committee for the harmonisation and comparability of the accounting and annual accounts of railway undertakings met in this period.

Details of developments during the Greek Presidency can be found in Cm6097 "Developments in the European Union, January to June 2003, the Greek Presidency" which was laid before Parliament in January 2004 and is available at www.fco.gov.uk/commandpapers.

Angus Robertson: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport how many times during the Greek presidency of the EU *(a)* the Advisory Committee for the application of legislation on the conditions under which non-resident carriers may operate national road passenger transport services within a member state, *(b)* the Committee on the reciprocal recognition of national boatmasters' certificates for the carriage of goods and passengers by inland waterway and *(c)* the Advisory Committee on aids to transport by rail, road and inland waterway met; when and where these meetings took place; which UK Government expert was present at each meeting; what (i) technical and (ii) financial issues were raised by the UK Government expert at each meeting; what recommendations each Committee produced during that period; what actions were (A) proposed and (B) taken by (1) the EU and (2) the UK Government as a result of each Committee's recommendations; and if he will make a statement. [193021]

Mr. McNulty: None of these Committees met during the Greek Presidency. Details of developments during the Greek Presidency can be found in Cm6097 "Developments in the European Union, January to June 2003, the Greek Presidency" which was laid before Parliament in January 2004 and is available at www.fco.gov.uk/commandpapers.

Angus Robertson: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport how many times during the Greek presidency of the EU *(a)* the Committee on the development of trans-European transport networks, *(b)* the Committee for granting Community financial aid in the field of trans-European energy networks and *(c)* the Committee for granting Community financial aid in the field of trans-European transport networks met; when and where these meetings took place; which UK Government expert was present at each meeting; what (i) technical and (ii) financial issues were raised by the UK Government expert at each meeting; what recommendations each Committee produced during that period; what actions were (A) proposed and (B) taken by (1) the EU and (2) the UK Government as a result of each Committee's recommendations; and if he will make a statement. [193022]

Mr. McNulty: The Committee on the development of trans-European transport networks met twice during the Greek Presidency, on 4 March and 3 June 2003, in Brussels. The agenda comprised items regarding progress towards completion of the TEN-T and its further development.

UK involvement in the Committee for granting Community financial aid in the field of trans-European energy networks is not the responsibility of the Department for Transport.

The Committee for granting Community financial aid in the field of trans-European transport networks met once during the Greek Presidency, on 30 June 2003, in Brussels. The agenda comprised issues regarding the financing of the network and the projects of common interest on it.

Where a UK Government official attended the name is withheld under exemption 15 of the Code of Practice on Access to Government Information.

The other information requested would require an unreasonable diversion of resources to obtain.

Details of developments during the Greek Presidency can be found in Cm6097 "Developments in the European Union, January to June 2003, the Greek Presidency" which was laid before Parliament in January 2004 and is available at www.fco.gov.uk/commandpapers.

Fair Trade

Mr. Burstow: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport whether it is his policy to ensure that hospitality within his Department is sourced from Fair Trade producers wherever possible within the boundaries set by the public procurement rules. [197058]

Charlotte Atkins: At the Department's headquarters building, Great Minster House, the hospitality arrangements include the provision of Fair Trade bulk brew filter coffee and Down to Earth Fair Trade enveloped tea. The restaurant also serves the above as well as Fair Trade sweets and chocolate.

Heathrow Airport

Tom Cox: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what criteria are used to made decisions on changing airport flight paths into London Heathrow airport. [196534]

Charlotte Atkins: Routes within UK airspace are subject to regulation by the Civil Aviation Authority (CAA) and changes are agreed by the CAA against criteria set out in its Civil Air Publications 724 and 725, available on the CAA website. These include consideration of the operational, environmental, economical and safety impacts of any changes. Under section 66 of the Transport Act 2000, the Secretary of State for Transport has issued Directions to the CAA requiring it to take account of environmental and other considerations and to seek his approval in certain circumstances.

There are no set routes for arriving aircraft between the point where they leave a holding "stack" and the point where they join the Instrument Landing System for final approach. Aircraft are individually directed by Air Traffic Control who ensure safe traffic separation, but they are also required whenever practicable to follow "continuous descent approach" with a view to minimising noise impacts.

Aircraft departing Heathrow are required to follow specific paths called noise preferential routes which are designed as far as possible to minimise over-flight of built-up areas.

Motorcycle Casualties

Mr. Wiggin: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what the evidential basis is of his statement that there is an increase in motorcycle casualty rate per mile at 33BHP. [195999]

Mr. Jamieson: We have made no such statement. However, we are aware of reports attributed to the Government that we would like motorcyclists to have experience on a 125cc motorcycle for two years before gaining access to a larger motorcycle. We certainly believe that some motorcyclists who gain their licence via Direct Access arrangements, allowing them to ride large motorcycles without earlier experience on a smaller machine, are at risk, simply through inexperience of riding a powerful motorcycle.

The Advisory Group on Motorcycling (AGM), amongst other things, concluded that since the majority of novice riders choose to pass their test via the Direct Access route, as a relatively fast route to big bike riding, it is timely for the Government to consider its effectiveness (a copy of the report is lodged with the House). We will do so, in the context of wider ranging AGM suggestions and recommendations for the future of motorcycling. Should that review lead to proposals for change, we would consult before implementing them.

Road Schemes (Birmingham)

Richard Burden: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what assessment he has made of the likely effects of the Birmingham Northfield Relief Road project in relation to *(a)* transport movements in the area and *(b)* regeneration of South West Birmingham. [196718]

Charlotte Atkins: The Northfield Relief Road was given provisional approval for funding under the Local Transport Programme in December 2000 in the light of an appraisal carried out by Birmingham city council which included consideration of the contribution the scheme would make to improved transport movements and regeneration of the area it serves. The appraisal included benefits such as improved journey times, improved access for pedestrians and buses and improving the vitality and viability of the Northfield shopping area. Following completion of statutory procedures an updated appraisal was received in July 2004 in support of a request from Birmingham city council for full approval of this scheme which is currently being considered.

Terrorism

Patrick Mercer: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what measures have been taken to protect the security of railway tunnels and bridges since 2001. [196308]

Mr. McNulty: The Department for Transport, British Transport Police and other central Government agencies support the rail industry in security matters affecting operations and infrastructure. It would be inappropriate to provide details of the specific measures taken for obvious reasons

Uninsured Drivers

Tom Cox: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what steps his Department has taken in conjunction with the Metropolitan police to reduce the number of uninsured drivers on the roads of Greater London. [196536]

Mr. Jamieson: The steps already taken to deal with the problem of uninsured driving include a review of motor insurance arrangements in the UK by Professor David Greenaway and, following publication of his report on 11 August, the setting up of an implementation board to see that action follows.

Working jointly with the insurance industry we now plan to introduce legislation, improve procedures and design education, publicity and enforcement programmes to drive down uninsured driving. These measures will be available to all police forces in Great Britain.

ENVIRONMENT, FOOD AND RURAL AFFAIRS

Aircraft Emissions

Mrs. May: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what the projected improvement is in emissions from aircraft engines over the next 25 years on which Government predictions of emissions are based. [195088]

Charlotte Atkins: I have been asked to reply.

In February 2004, the Government published technical reports in support of the Air Transport White Paper that include projections of improvement in aircraft engine emissions. The report "Aviation and Global Warming" includes assessments of fleet renewal, fuel efficiency improvement and emissions improvement. The report Air Quality Assessments Supporting the Government's White Paper "The Future of Air Transport" focuses more on prospects for engine improvements in emissions of oxide of nitrogen (NO_x). Technology projections relate to different timescales up to 2030 and span a range of emissions performance given uncertainty over proving technologies and bringing them to market. These technical reports are available at www.aviation.dft.gov.uk

Animal By-products Regulations

Mr. Gray: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs whether carcases of horses and donkeys may be buried on the owner's land under the Animal By-products Regulations. [196270]

Mr. Bradshaw: The regulation allows member states to apply for various derogations regarding the disposal of animal by-products, and, among others, we have applied the derogation to permit the burial of dead pet animals. However, this does not automatically mean that all horses and donkeys may be buried.

The definition of a pet animal given within the regulation is: any animal belonging to species normally nourished and kept, but not consumed, by humans for purposes other than farming.

The situation with regard to equines is complicated. Although it can be argued that humans within the UK do not consume members of the equine family, the UK does export horses/ponies which may be used for human consumption. Under a strict interpretation the EU regulation would, therefore, ban the burial of pet equines but we would expect local authorities, who enforce the legislation, to take a sensible approach to the burial of horses that are clearly pets.

Bees

Mr. Steen: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs how much funding the Government have given to the National Bee Unit for the current financial year; how many bee inspectors there are; what estimate has been made of the number of bees under serious threat from the varroa mite; and what advice and assistance is given by the National Bee Unit to beekeepers in the South West. [194159]

Alun Michael: In the current financial year the National Bee Unit will receive funding of £1,235,000 from Defra and £283,000 from the Welsh Assembly Government.

There are 45 bee inspectors in England and Wales of whom 36 are part-time, seasonal bee inspectors.

It is estimated that there are 250,000 honey bee colonies in England and Wales, maintained by some 37,000 beekeepers. Since varroa is now endemic throughout almost the whole of the United Kingdom, its presence is a challenge to all beekeepers but this can be managed through good bee husbandry.

In addition to the statutory inspection programme, which has given rise to over 900 visits and the inspection of almost 4,000 colonies in Devon, Cornwall and Somerset between April and September 2004, the NBU provides laboratory diagnoses, the destruction or treatment of colonies infected with European Foul Brood, and a testing programme for varroa resistance to treatment with pyrethroids. Over 2,500 beekeepers attended advisory lectures, field demonstrations and liaison meetings provided by NBU in the South West in 2003–04. Beekeepers in the region also have access to a national telephone help-line, advisory leaflets and the NBU website.

Burnside Farm

Mr. Paice: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs when her Department was first informed of the existence of a video of Burnside Farm taken by Northumberland Trading Standards officers on 23 February 2001; and when her Department first obtained a copy of the video. [194308]

Mr. Bradshaw *[holding answer 28 October 2004]:* A Defra official was present at Burnside Farm on 24 February 2001 when the video of the conditions on the farm was being made by Northumberland Trading Standards Department. Defra officials saw some of the video when it was shown at Robert Waugh's trial in May 2002. Defra recently obtained copies of the video when it was referred to in correspondence received by Defra officials on 30 September 2004.

Mr. Paice: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs whether a representative of her Department was present at the trial of Mr. Bobby Waugh for breach of his waste food feeding licence in May 2002. [194307]

Mr. Bradshaw *[holding answer 28 October 2004]:* The trial was attended by four officials from Defra, three of whom gave evidence.

Civil Servants

Mr. Jenkins: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what the average length of continuous service for civil servants within the Department is. [194399]

Alun Michael: I refer the hon. Member to the answer given by my hon. Friend, the Minister of State, Cabinet Office (Ruth Kelly) on 3 November 2004, *Official Report*, column 268W.

Conservation Areas

Sue Doughty: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what the *(a)* scientific and *(b)* socio-economic objections to the designation of (i) Bolton Fell Moss and (ii) Solway Moss as special areas of conservation are; and when she expects to conclude each consultation. [194493]

Mr. Bradshaw: Generic scientific issues raised by the objectors to the proposed SAC designations on Bolton Fell and Solway Moss are:

> that sites which are mainly areas of bare peat is contrary to EU and Joint Nature Conservation Committee (JNCC) guidance;
>
> sites with bare peat do not contain National Vegetation Classification (NVC) plant communities typical of raised bogs;
>
> the designation of these two peatland sites in conjunction with others already classified as cSACs is not necessary to achieve favourable conservation status for raised bogs;
>
> the National Peatland Resource Inventory has been wrongly interpreted which has led to far more degraded raised bogs being selected as pSACs than is necessary to satisfy the guidance received from the European Commission;
>
> the site selection process was partial and ad hoc and the criteria was written after sites were selected instead of developing the selection criteria and then selecting sites;
>
> English Nature did not consider selecting sites which were wooded, afforested or contained peat underlying agricultural sites;
>
> English Nature placed undue emphasis on the restorability and/or size of the site when selecting sites and this overrode other considerations;
>
> that contextual information required to list appropriate areas of active and degraded raised bogs is not available, and finally, that English Nature did not follow JNCC guidance on the number of sites to be selected from the first moderation process.

Objections on socio-economic grounds to both designations are:

> local employment issues concerning the closure of peat-extraction operations at either site;
>
> loss of revenue to landowner from peat-extraction operator; after-use restriction on ability of landowner at Bolton Fell Moss to generate income following end of peat extraction.

Once the scientific objections have been resolved, and it is confirmed that the sites meet the selection criteria for SAC protection, they will be designated forthwith. It is not currently clear how long this will take.

Contagious Equine Metritis

Mr. Spring: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs when the last outbreak of contagious equine metritis in British horses was recorded; and where. [194937]

Mr. Bradshaw: The last outbreak of contagious equine metritis in Great Britain occurred in late 2002 in Staffordshire, with the last individual case linked to this outbreak occurring in early 2003, again in Staffordshire.

Cormorants

Sir Paul Beresford: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs pursuant to the answer of 20 October, *Official Report*, columns 695–96W, on cormorants, what action is being taken through the European Union to tackle cormorant numbers at a European level. [194811]

Mr. Bradshaw *[holding answer 1 November 2004]:* At the European level the REDCAFE group (Reducing the conflict between cormorants and fisheries on a Pan-European scale) was set up in 2001, to synthesise current cormorant and fisheries information and identify and evaluate methods of reducing Europe-wide conflict between conservationists and fishery interests. Initial conclusions emphasise site-specific management as the key. Further work has been agreed, on an inter-disciplinary approach taking account of social and economic interests. Discussions at ORNIS (the EC Committee covering the Birds Directive), also covered the Development of a Framework for Biodiversity Reconciliation Action Plan (RAP): The data from REDCAFE will be input into this process, along with other European initiatives such as the IMEW (Integrated Management of European Wetlands). The RAP aims to fully quantify the problems, develop a solution and provide synthesis and dissemination of the results. This process will provide a participatory decision strategy. The approach is being supported with EU research funding, and member states are also encouraged to participate.

Departmental IT

Brian White: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what percentage of the Department's *(a)* implemented and *(b)* planned computer systems use open source software; and what plans are in place to raise this level. [195657]

Alun Michael: The information is as follows:

(a) The percentage of implemented computer systems in Defra that use open source operating systems such as Linux is small, less than 5 per cent., but many Defra systems comply with the Government eGIF standards that allow easy and open exchange of data.

(b) Defra has recently outsourced its IT operations. There are no targets imposed on the supplier to implement open source software, a level playing field will apply in procurement of software solutions. The IT supplier is bound to work within eGIF standards and many of the planed IT systems will include a significant proportion of open source code. In addition the supplier will be conducting a number of additional pieces of work to test the business benefits to Defra of extending the use of open source.

Directive 2002/49/EC

Mrs. May: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what the timetable is for transposing Directive 2002/49/EC into UK law. [195203]

Alun Michael: Directive 2002/49/EC relating to the assessment and management of environmental noise requires that member states of the European Union must comply with Directive 2002/49/EC on the assessment and management of environmental noise by 18 July 2004 (Article 14). Unfortunately, due to the practical complexities of the Directive the UK has been unable to meet this deadline.

We are continuing to work to comply with the Directive as soon as possible and we will be putting our proposed approach to complying with the Directive to public consultation in due course. We will use the responses to the consultation to inform our final approach to complying with the Directive.

Equine Exports

Shona McIsaac: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs how many equines were exported from the UK in each of the past 10 years; and if she will make a statement. [193517]

Mr. Bradshaw *[holding answer 27 October 2004]:* Available information on the number of equines certified for export from the UK is as follows:

	Number
1996	1,169
1997	8,119
1998	11,086
1999	9,579
2000	9,176
2001	14,284
2002	10,785
2003	9,130

The figures are derived from computer based systems introduced in late 1996 relating to export health certification from the UK. The figures are subject to updating and amendment.

Except for part of 2001 and 2002, the figures exclude the movement of certain horses to France and Ireland which, under a Tripartite Agreement, do not require export health certification.

Fallen Stock

Nick Harvey: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what discussions she has held with organic certification bodies on the effect that non-burial of fallen stock might have on the soil's microbiology. [193624]

Mr. Bradshaw: Although no specific consultation has taken place with organic certification bodies the Department undertook an extensive public consultation process in respect of the Animal By-products Regulation, which bans on-farm burial of fallen stock. Several of the certification bodies, notably the Soil Association, have made the Department aware of their concerns that the effect that non-burial of fallen stock might have on the soil's microbiology. These concerns have been duly noted.

Mr. Drew: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs how many farmers have signed up to the National Fallen Stock Scheme. [196112]

Mr. Bradshaw: None. We will not know how many farmers will register until the scheme begins on 22 November.

Government Grants

Ms Buck: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs which funding streams have been allocated by her Department using a funding formula which includes rankings or scores on the Index of Multiple Deprivation 2000; and if she will list the amount of funding allocated in such a way *(a)* nationally by the Department or *(b)* to all Government sponsored bodies reporting to the Department. [191529]

Alun Michael: Defra has four funding streams which have been allocated taking account of the Index of Multiple Deprivation. In all cases the Index has contributed to identifying the least well performing rural areas in terms of economic productivity but, other factors, including quality of application and nature of enterprise, are taken into account in awarding projects. The first two funding streams below are both part of the Department's Rural Voluntary and Community Sector and Social Inclusion Programme.

(a) Nationally:

(1) A contribution to The Pensions Partnership Fund which seeks to increase benefits uptake by the elderly. £834,000 has been allocated in 2004–05 to fund projects in the priority wards in rural areas.

(2) An action research contract examining social enterprise in rural areas. Some £500,000 has been allocated in 2004–05 to fund projects in four English Regions, with priority being given to those which operate in priority wards.

(3) For the Warm Front programme, the Index of Multiple Deprivation 2000 has not been used as a sole indicator for any allocation purposes. It is considered with a number of other indices—including the fuel poverty indices under the English House Condition Survey. In 2004–05 the Fuel Poverty budget is £169 million.

(4) Defra uses the Index as one of a number of measures which contribute to the priority scores of proposed flood and coastal erosion risk management improvement projects, when

considering which projects should receive grant from the ring-fenced national budget. The budget being allocated in 2004–05 is £56 million across local authorities and internal drainage boards.

(b) Government Sponsored Bodies:

The Environment Agency is a Non-Departmental Public Body sponsored by Defra and its share of the flood and coastal erosion risk management improvement projects funding in 2004–05 is £76 million.

Heathrow

Mrs. May: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what representations she has received on the methodology for drawing up a noise map for Heathrow. [195090]

Alun Michael: My right hon. Friend, the Secretary of State, has not received any representations on the methodology for drawing up a noise map for Heathrow.

Mrs. May: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what plans her Department has to publish *(a)* a strategic noise map for Heathrow, *(b)* an action plan to manage noise issues around Heathrow and *(c)* a public consultation on plans to manage noise levels at Heathrow. [195204]

Alun Michael: Strategic noise maps and action plans for Heathrow and other specified airports will be produced as part of the requirements of Directive 2002/49/EC on the assessment and management of environmental noise (the Environmental Noise Directive). There will be public consultation on the action plans as this is also a key requirement of the Environmental Noise Directive. Details of proposed options to transpose the Directive will be put out to public consultation in due course.

Noise from aircraft using Heathrow is regulated by my right hon. Friend, the Secretary of State for Transport, under section 78 of the Civil Aviation Act 1982. The DfT's Stage 1 consultation on night restrictions from 30 October 2005 closed on 29 October and the second stage of this consultation process will be undertaken in due course.

Daytime noise at Heathrow was considered in last year's consultation on the "Future of Air Transport in the UK—South East" and "The Future of Air Transport" White Paper (Cm 6046) set out (paras 11.52–53) the Government's view that all practicable steps should be taken to prevent any deterioration in the noise climate there.

Mrs. May: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs when her Department will start the work to produce a strategic noise map for Heathrow. [195205]

Alun Michael: Details of our proposed options to transpose the Directive will be put out to public consultation in due course. That will include proposals regarding the competent authorities for the production of strategic noise maps for airports under Directive 2002/49/EC on the assessment and management of environmental noise (the Environmental Noise Directive).

A pilot project to produce noise contours for Heathrow in terms of noise indicator required by the Environmental Noise Directive (L_{den}) was carried out in 2003 by the Civil Aviation Authority for Defra as part of the development of the National Ambient Noise Strategy. These contours have been published and can be seen at www.defra.gov.uk/environment/noise/mapping/aviation/index.htm

In addition daytime noise contours for Heathrow are produced annually for the Department for Transport.

Local Food Chains

Mr. Drew: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what advice she is offering to *(a)* central and *(b)* local government on public procurement with regard to assisting local food chains. [194283]

Alun Michael: Defra has published advice on its website to help central and local government implement the Public Sector Food Procurement Initiative (PSFPI). A key objective is to increase the opportunities for small and local suppliers to compete to supply food to public sector bodies.

Within the EC policy and legal framework they can inform local suppliers of forthcoming contract opportunities and explain to them how the procurement process works and what is expected of them. There is also scope to specify more in-season food, rather than out of season or exotic produce that can only be supplied from abroad, and to organise the size of contracts and lots within contracts so that small and local suppliers have more chance of being able to meet demands. Public bodies do, of course, have an overarching duty to secure value for money and so must ensure that the measures they adopt to encourage more supplies of local food are proportionate and justified. They are also required by the EC treaty, the EC procurement directives and the UK regulations that implement them to ensure that public procurement is fair, transparent and not used to discriminate by setting up barriers to free trade. We are also encouraging public sector bodies to work with their food service companies to play an active part in achieving this aim by ensuring that local suppliers are given opportunities to be part of their supply chains, provided they are able to provide value for money and meet their requirements on quality, consistency of supply and food safety etc.

The newly restructured PSFPI website contains more detailed guidance, best practice case studies (including one for South Gloucestershire schools) and links to other sources of useful information. URL: http://www.defra.gov.uk/farm/sustain/procurement/index.htm.

Online Publications

Mr. Bellingham: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what the Department's target is for the interval between publication of *(a)* departmental announcements and documents and *(b)* material published by public bodies for which her Department has oversight and their posting online; and what the average interval was in the latest year for which figures are available. [195398]

Alun Michael: Defra statements, announcements and documents are published on the departmental website as soon as possible—generally on the same day or the following day. Operational procedures and resources of staff and equipment are continually reviewed and reassessed with the aim of minimising the number of occasions when it is not possible for statements to be published on the website on the same day as they are made available through other channels.

Information on posting targets for material published by public bodies for which Defra has oversight is not collated centrally and could be obtained only at disproportionate cost.

Rural Services

Charles Hendry: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what the total cost was of producing and distributing the Rural Services Review, including staff time allocated to the project. [195277]

Alun Michael: The Rural Services Review, published on 1 November 2004, continues the commitment from the Rural White Paper "Our Countryside: the future" to inform rural people how they can ensure fair access to public services for their community.

The total cost of production and distribution of the Rural Services Review is set out in the table:

Cost of Rural Services Review

	Supplier	*Final spend (£) (plus VAT)*
Design	Stairway Communications	9,814 plus 383 total = 10,197
Print (50,000 run)		17,800 (no VAT charged)
Distribution (of 30,000 copies)		[1]14,000
Copywriting	COI	15,540
Photography	Total	[1]3,315
Proof reading	COI[1]	324
Staff costs		[2]22,864
Total		[1]84,040

[1] These costs are based upon estimates as final invoices have not yet been received.

[2] Defra staff costs for this project were £22,864. This figure is based upon average pay rates, by grade and location and includes accommodation overheads.

The total production, distribution and staff costs give a unit cost for the Rural Services Review of £1.68 a copy.

The Rural Services Review came about as a consequence of the evaluation of the Rural Services Standard, which took place during 2003. The review builds upon the recommendations of the independent evaluation report produced by the University of Gloucester. A copy of this report is available on the Defra website at http://defraweb/rural/pdfs/rss_review.pdf.

The Rural Services Review identifies key standards that affect people living and working in the countryside and illustrates the difference the standards can make, through the use of case studies. Copies of the review are available through Defra publications (08459 556000) or online at www.defra.gov.uk/rural/services.

Sustainable Energy (CHP Provisions) Order

Mr. Stunell: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what measures her Department *(a)* has undertaken and *(b)* plans to undertake to comply with the Sustainable Energy (CHP Provisions) Order 2003. [194430]

Alun Michael: The Framework for Sustainable Development on the Government Estate requires all Departments to source at least 15 per cent. of electricity from Good Quality Combined Heat and Power by 2010 (with allowance made for those Departments that already purchase 100 per cent. renewable energy.) Within Defra the following action has been taken:

(a) In the year ending 31 March 2004 Defra and its Executive Agencies sourced 15.3 per cent. of electricity used from Good Quality CHP plant on our own estate.

(b) A further Good Quality CHP plant is to be installed in a major refurbishment project at one of Defra's HQ buildings.

Tsar Appointments

Mr. Goodman: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs how many tsars have been appointed with responsibilities which cover part of the work of her Department; and if she will make a statement. [191918]

Alun Michael: The Secretary of State has not appointed any tsars covering the work of any part of the Department.

SOLICITOR-GENERAL

Sustainable Energy (CHP Provisions) Order

Mr. Stunell: To ask the Solicitor-General what measures *(a)* the Crown Prosecution Service, *(b)* the Serious Fraud Office, *(c)* the Treasury Solicitor's Office and *(d)* the Legal Secretariat to the Law Officers (i) has undertaken and (ii) plans to undertake to comply with the Sustainable Energy (CHP Provisions) Order 2003. [194438]

The Solicitor-General: The Crown Prosecution Service, the Serious Fraud Office, the Treasury Solicitor's Department and the Legal Secretariat to the Law Officers do not currently occupy premises whose heating and electrical supplies are provided by CHP systems. Each Department regularly reviews their heating and electrical power consumption to ensure that the supplies they use are obtained and consumed in the most sustainably efficient and cost effective way.

SCOTLAND

Cullen Report

Mr. John Taylor: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland for what reasons parts of the Cullen report on Dunblane are to be protected for 100 years; and if he will make a statement. [190639]

Mr. Darling: This is a matter for the Scottish Executive.

The Public Records (Scotland) Act 1937 makes provision for the preservation, care and custody of the public records of Scotland. There is not, however, any statutory basis for closure of records created by Scottish public bodies.

By contrast, in England and Wales the Public Records Act 1958 (as amended by the Public Records Act 1967) sets a statutory "closure period" of 30 years after which records must, with limited exceptions, be made available to the public. The 1937 Act does not impose similar obligations on Scottish Executive departments, but in practice those procedures are followed in Scotland.

The criteria for closures longer than 30 years were defined in a White Paper on Open Government published in 1993 (Cm 2290), which stated that it is for the department responsible for depositing the material to decide on the closure period.

Documents containing information about individuals, whose disclosure would cause either substantial distress, or endangerment from a third party to persons affected by disclosure or their descendants can be subject to a variable closure period of between 40 and 100 years.

At the conclusion of Lord Cullen's inquiry, the papers were lodged with the then Scottish Record Office. As is normal practice, the closure periods were identified by the SRO, in consultation with the Secretary to the Inquiry and the Crown Office and Procurator Fiscal Service. In light of the obvious sensitivities in relation to the information about children and alleged offences against them the productions were closed for 100 years. This closure was in accordance with the Government guidelines published in the White Paper "Open Government" Cm 2290 (1993) and Lord Cullen was content with these arrangements.

However, subsequently the Lord Advocate decided that the material from the Dunblane inquiry should be catalogued by staff at the National Archives of Scotland in a way which did not lead to the identification of children. The cataloguing of the productions has recently been completed. Officials from the Crown Office and Procurator Fiscal Service are currently reviewing this material and considering what information is suitable for release either in its entirety or in an edited format. However, the sensitive nature of the information contained in some of the material will obviously prevent its release before the end of the 100-year closure period.

Gambling Bill

Mr. Lazarowicz: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland whether he has been informed that the Scottish Executive plans to bring forward a sewel motion in respect of the proposals contained in the Gambling Bill; and if he will make a statement. [196311]

Mrs. McGuire: Following consultation with Scottish Ministers, the Gambling Bill contains provisions conferring functions in reserved areas on the Scottish Ministers. Since the Bill therefore varies the executive competence of the Scottish Ministers the consent of the Scottish Parliament will therefore be sought by the Scottish Executive in accordance with the Sewel Convention.

TRADE AND INDUSTRY

Accident Group

Mr. Austin Mitchell: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what investigation has been undertaken into the closure of the Accident Group; and if she will institute an inquiry by her Department into the affairs of that company. [195115]

Mr. Sutcliffe: A winding up order was made against AG (Manchester) Ltd. (formerly called The Accident Group Ltd.) on 15 January 2004. As a result, the Official Receiver was appointed first liquidator and has a duty to investigate the causes of the company's failure and generally it's promotion, formation, business, dealings and affairs and the conduct of its directors. These investigations are continuing.

Better Health Global

Mr. Alan Duncan: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what steps her Department has taken to investigate the activities of the Better Health Global group of companies in *(a)* Ireland, *(b)* Belgium, *(c)* Australia and *(d)* Canada; and if she will make a statement. [195837]

Jacqui Smith: The Department does not have authority to investigate the affairs of companies which are registered and trading in a foreign jurisdiction and does not comment on the affairs of live companies that are not the subject of insolvency proceedings.

Mr. Alan Duncan: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what discussions her Department has held with the Crown Prosecution Service about the conduct of the directors of Better Health Global Ltd. and the BHG Group of companies; and if she will make a statement. [195839]

Jacqui Smith: None.

Correspondence

Mr. Allen: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry if she will review the correspondence from the hon. Member for Nottingham, North regarding the case of Mr. Frederick Jones of Neston Drive, Bulwell, Nottingham, following the judgment in Meadows *v.* North London Securities. [196286]

Mr. Sutcliffe: I would like to thank my hon. Friend for bringing this case to my attention. You will understand that I am unable to intervene in individual cases such as this, which must be resolved by agreement between the parties or by recourse to the courts.

As my hon. Friend is aware I have written to John Vickers, Chair of the Office of Fair Trading, alerting him to the complaints made to me about this lender by a number of hon. Members.

Credit Contracts

Helen Southworth: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry if she will set an upper limit on interest rates for consumers taking out credit contracts. [196390]

Mr. Sutcliffe: The DTI commissioned research into the effect of interest rate ceilings in France, Germany and the USA, which found that: lenders do not provide credit for small loans repayable over a short period, excluding some low-income consumers from the market or leading others to take out larger loans than they need; the choice of products is reduced, limiting competition; some low-income consumers will take out credit on products that have extra charges that are not included in the interest rate calculation, but which low income consumers are particularly likely to incur, such as late payment charges; and the percentage of consumers who admitted to having borrowed from unlicensed or illegal lenders was twice as high in Germany and France as in the UK.

Helen Southworth: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what steps she is taking to ensure that customers taking out credit agreements have clear, comprehensive and understandable information on *(a)* interest charges, *(b)* other charges and *(c)* penalties. [196391]

Mr. Sutcliffe: The White Paper "Clear, Fair and Competitive—The Consumer Credit Market in the 21st Century" set out the Governments' plans to increase the quality and transparency of information available to consumers about the costs and other terms of credit at all stages in the contractual process.

To that end, Regulations have already been made governing the advertising of consumer credit; the provision of pre-contractual information; and the form and content of credit agreements.

The Consumer Credit (Advertisements) Regulations 2004 which came into force on 31 October this year—require lenders to present a balanced picture of the costs of a product; and establish the typical APR as the prime comparator.

The Consumer Credit (Agreements) (Amendment) Regulations 2004 will require lenders to disclose full details about interest and other charges in the credit agreement. Penalties are illegal under consumer credit law. Interest charges will need to be listed under the prescribed "Key Financial Information" heading. Other charges will need to be listed under the "Other Financial Information" and "Key Information" headings. The Consumer Credit (Disclosure of Information) Regulations 2004 require the lender to provide similar information in advance of the agreement being made. Both of these Regulations come into force on 31 May 2005.

The Government have also announced their intention to introduce a Bill as soon as parliamentary time permits that will include proposals to require creditors to provide debtors with regular information about the state of their accounts throughout the life of the agreement, including:

providing an annual statement showing the activity on the account for the previous 12 months for fixed term agreements of more than one year in length;

providing information about sums in arrears when the debtor gets into arrears for all forms of credit (e.g. loans and credit cards);

providing information about fees, charges and interest applied to the account where there is a default; and

providing debtors with information sheets published by the OFT and setting out user-friendly and relevant information about managing debt issues and seeking advice with all arrears and default notices.

It is proposed that failure by a creditor to provide the required information may mean that the creditor cannot enforce the agreement or recover interest in respect of the period of their failure.

EU Regional Development Aid

Andrew George: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what discussions she has had in respect of the future round of EU Regional Development Aid. [196787]

Ms Hewitt: I and my ministerial colleagues are in regular contact with Ministers from other member states, representatives of the European Commission, and Members of the European Parliament regarding the reform of the EU Structural and Cohesion Funds. At the same time, we meet regularly with stakeholders in the UK and their representatives to explain the Government's position on reform of the funds.

EU Committees

Angus Robertson: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry how many times during the Greek presidency of the EU the Standing Committee on the Approximation of the Laws relating to Construction Products met; when and where these meetings took place; which UK Government expert was present at each meeting; what recommendations the Committee produced during that period; what actions were (i) proposed and (ii) taken by (A) the EU and (B) the UK Government as a result of the Committee's recommendations; and if she will make a statement. [195572]

Keith Hill: I have been asked to reply.

The Standing Committee on Construction met once during this period on 13–14 May 2003 in Brussels. The UK Government experts present were Tariq Nawaz and Stephen Phillips.

Recommendations produced by the Committee during this period were in the form of agreements to proposals and consultations of the Committee and are contained either in the minutes of the above meeting or the exchanges of correspondence which have been made available in the Library of the House. The actions proposed and taken by the EU and the UK Government as a result of the Committee's recommendations are contained either in the minutes of the meeting or in the correspondence referred to above.

Loan Debts

Mr. Allen: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what her policy is on loan sharks; and if she will make a statement. [195772]

Mr. Sutcliffe: Loan sharks are moneylenders who operate illegally and unregulated outside the current Consumer Credit Licensing regime.

Illegal loan sharks prey on vulnerable consumers and their sometimes brutal methods of obtaining repayment can cause great suffering and hardship in communities.

To tackle this problem on 6 September 2004 I launched the Loan Shark Pilot, which will be operated by Birmingham and Glasgow Trading Standards Department. Both Departments have established teams of investigators who will investigate complaints received from members of the public about illegal money lenders.

The Government have committed £2 million over a period of two years to the project. A campaign has commenced in both cities advertising the presence of the illegal money lending teams and they have both been inundated with calls from members of the public. The teams are already investigating more than 40 live cases. The Birmingham team has recently announced that one arrest has been made.

EDUCATION AND SKILLS

Classroom-building Projects

Dan Norris: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills how much ring-fenced money for classroom building projects has been given to schools in *(a)* Wansdyke, *(b)* Bath and North East Somerset and *(c)* South Gloucestershire in each year since 1997. [196763]

Mr. Miliband: Capital funding is largely allocated to local authorities and schools by needs related formulae and supported through the Single Capital Pot. Decisions on how resources should be allocated are taken locally in accordance with their asset management plans. The capital allocations for Bath and North East Somerset and for South Gloucestershire in each year since 1997 are set out in the table. The Department does not hold details of capital allocations by constituency.

£000

	Bath and North East Somerset	*Bath and North East Somerset of which basic need*[1]	*South Gloucestershire*	*South Gloucestershire of which basic need*[1]
1997-98	2,765	1,221	5,139	4,414
1998-99	1,825	42	4,116	325
1999-2000	2,099	60	6,656	1,415
2000-01	5,406	203	11,821	3,132
2001-02	6,288	733	13,483	3,775
2002-03	8,727	1,429	12,925	2,569
2003-04	14,446	1,237	17,454	5,147
2004-05	5,794	384	15,592	6,086

[1] Allocated on new pupil places criteria, but not ring-fenced.

Combined Heat and Power

Malcolm Bruce: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills what percentage of *(a)* schools and *(b)* universities in England utilise combined heat and power. [195942]

Mr. Miliband: Neither DfES nor HEFCE collect these statistics. However we do know that there are a large number of CHP installations in universities. They are popular where there are large energy loads. Some local authority district CHP schemes supply a school as well as local housing and other community buildings. Smaller micro-chp units are also currently being trialled where the school has a large enough heat load throughout the year.

Criminal Record Checks

Michael Fabricant: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills what procedures are in place *(a)* to check the criminal records of civil servants in his Department and agencies responsible to his Department who have access to computer databases containing confidential information on the public and *(b)* to ensure that there can be no improper use of computer databases containing confidential information on the public; and if he will make a statement. [194604]

Mr. Charles Clarke: My Department undertakes 'Character Enquiry' checks prior to any unconditional offers of employment being made as part of its recruitment procedures. The procedure requires potential recruits to complete a stencil detailing any current or previous criminal convictions. Any declared convictions are followed up by obtaining details directly from the relevant courts. Decisions on whether the information would prevent the Department from offering the individual an appointment are taken as appropriate at this stage.

Additionally, procedures are in place for serving staff to report any convictions received since their employment with the Department commenced. If the position requires working in direct contact with children or vulnerable adults, Criminal Record Bureau (CRB) checks are carried out prior to any unconditional offers of employment being made. The information is available to staff and managers via the Department's Intranet. Personal criminal convictions, are potentially disciplinary issues, as is the failure to declare a conviction.

It is DfES policy to ensure that its IT systems and the information they contain are secure, while letting those in DfES carry out its business. All access to the Internet are monitored internally by the Department's Information Services. Again, IT misuse policy is available through the Department's Intranet system, and staff are required to familiarise themselves with the Department's guidance on IT security.

Departmental IT

Brian White: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills what percentage of the Department's *(a)* implemented and *(b)* planned computer systems use open source software; and what plans are in place to raise this level. [195658]

Mr. Charles Clarke: Currently less than 1 per cent. of the Department's computer systems use Open Source Software in the Department. Also none of the planned computer systems will make use of Open Source Software.

Our future use of Open Source Software will follow the Government policy as published in version 2 of the Open Source Software policy on 28 October 2004.

The draft policy document is available for viewing at http://www.govtalk.gov.uk

Departmental Press Releases

Pete Wishart: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills how many press releases have been issued by his Department in each month of 2004; and if he will make a statement. [195454]

Mr. Stephen Twigg: The number of press notices issued by the Department for Education and Skills in each month of 2004 is as follows:

Month	*Number of press notices issued*
January	18
February	15
March	25
April	28
May	22
June	9
July	15
August	6
September	13
October	9

Education Funding

Mr. Luff: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills what the total funding per pupil in cash terms is for each local education authority for 2004–05, using the same format as that for 2003–04 and prior years as set out on his Department's website. [195922]

Mr. Miliband: It is not clear to which figures the hon. Member refers. The table shows local education authorities in England in 2003–04 and 2004–05, the total funding per pupil in cash terms.

The information requested has been placed in the Libraries.

Dan Norris: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills how much on average per child was contributed from public funds to the education of *(a)* primary school children and *(b)* secondary school children in (i) Wansdyke, (ii) Bath and North East Somerset and (iii) South Gloucestershire in each year since 1997 for which figures are available. [196770]

Mr. Miliband: The following tables give the total funding per Primary and Secondary pupil in real terms from 1997–98 to 2004–05, separately for the Bath and North East Somerset and South Gloucestershire local education authority areas. Funding information on a constituency basis is not available.

Total funding per Primary and Secondary pupil in real terms 1997 to 2005 for England, Bath and North East Somerset and South Gloucestershire

£

	Bath and North East Somerset	*South Gloucestershire*
Total funding per pupil aged 3–10		
1997–98	2,140	2,120
1998–99	2,250	2,230
1999–2000	2,400	2,390
2000–01	2,600	2,570
2001–02	2,730	2,680
2002–03	2,770	2,720
2003–04	2,930	2,880
2004–05	3,020	2,960
Change[1]	870	840
Total funding per pupil aged 11–15		
1997–98	2,900	2,930
1998–99	2,960	2,990
1999–2000	3,120	3,100
2000–01	3,350	3,310
2001–02	3,450	3,410
2002–03	3,510	3,480
2003–04	3,630	3,630
2004–05	3,780	3,810
Change[1]	890	870

[1] Change since 1997–98

Notes:

1. Price Base: Real terms at 2003–04 prices, based on GDP deflators as at 30 June 2004.
2. *Figures reflect relevant sub-blocks of* education SSA/EFS settlements and exclude the pensions transfer to EPS and LSC.
3. Total funding also includes all revenue grants in DfES Departmental Expenditure Limits relevant to pupils aged 3–10 and 11–15 and exclude EMAs and grants not allocated at LEA level. For those LEAs in receipt of advance of [illegible] under the transitional support arrangements for 2004–05, [illegible]nce grant funding is included in the year of payment (2004–05). There will be a consequential reduction in DfES grant for these LEAs in future years (either 2006–07 and 2007–08 or 2006–07 to 2008–09, depending on the terms on which the advance was given to the LEA).
4. The pupil numbers used to convert £ million figures to £ per pupil are those underlying the SSA/EFS settlement calculations plus PLASC 3-year-old maintained pupils and estimated 3–4 year olds funded through state support in maintained and other educational institutions where these are not included in the SSA pupil numbers.
5. Rounding: Figures are rounded to the nearest 10.
6. Status: 2004–05 figures are provisional as some grants have not yet been finalised/audited.
7. 1997–98 figures for LEAs subject to Local Government Reorganisation in that year have been estimated, pro-rata to their post LGR figures.

Education Maintenance Allowance

Jon Cruddas: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills how many students in the Dagenham constituency are receiving education maintenance allowance. [196451]

Mr. Ivan Lewis: By the end of October 967 young people from the Barking and Dagenham local authority area had received an EMA Notice of Entitlement. Of those, 722 had enrolled for EMA at a school or college and 672 had received an EMA payment. These figures continue to improve as those who apply late have their applications assessed and then become eligible for payment.

Entry to Employment Programme

Phil Sawford: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills how many young people have taken part in the Entry to Employment programme since it was introduced in 2003. [196345]

Mr. Ivan Lewis: This is a matter for the Learning and Skills Council. Mark Haysom, the Council's Chief Executive, will write to the hon. Member with this information and a copy of his reply will be placed in the House Library.

Phil Sawford: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills how many young people started on the Entry to Employment programme in 2003–04; and how many places for new starts will be available in 2004–05. [196479]

Mr. Ivan Lewis: This is a matter for the Learning and Skills Council. Mark Haysom, the Council's Chief Executive, will write to the hon. Member with this information and a copy of his reply will be placed in the House Library.

Foreign Language Teaching

Mr. Gordon Prentice: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills how many and what percentage of primary schools offer a foreign language to their pupils. [196456]

Mr. Stephen Twigg: On 30 September this year my Department published the results of research, undertaken in the 2002–03 academic year, *into the* extent and nature of foreign language learning activities at Key Stage 2. This research highlighted that 44 per cent. of all schools teaching Key Stage 2 pupils in England were offering language learning programmes in some form, with 35 per cent. using curriculum time to do so. This represents a significant increase since the Qualifications and Curriculum Authority and University of Warwick published research in 2000 that stated that 20 per cent. of primary schools were teaching foreign languages.

Mr. Gordon Prentice: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills what steps he is taking to promote foreign language teaching in schools; and if he will make a statement. [196457]

Mr. Stephen Twigg: Since the publication of the National Languages Strategy in December 2002, we have made much progress with promoting Modern Foreign Languages in both primary and secondary schools.

Nineteen local education authorities have taken up Key Stage 2 language pathfinder roles to develop ways of delivering primary languages; we are consulting on a draft framework for the teaching and learning of Key Stage 2 languages; we have recently committed £5 million to support primary language learning in 2005–06; and by the end of this year will have trained well over 1,000 new teachers with a modern foreign language specialism.

A Framework to support the teaching, planning and learning of Modern Foreign Languages at Key Stage 3 was introduced into schools in 2003, and is already being used widely. A new voluntary assessment scheme to recognise and accredit individuals' language skills—The Languages Ladder—is currently being piloted in three languages and will be made available to all schools in eight languages from September 2005. We are also seeking to increase the range of vocational and academic options that are available to young people who wish to learn a language at Key Stage 4.

Foster Carers

Annabelle Ewing: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills what plans he has to introduce a national standard for fostering. [195084]

Margaret Hodge: All fostering agencies are already under a statutory obligation to comply with the Fostering Services Regulations 2002 and are expected to meet the Fostering Services National Minimum Standards 2002. The Standards are intended to assess the quality of care provided by fostering service providers in relation to the needs of looked after children. The Commission for Social Care Inspection is responsible for the inspection and regulation of fostering service providers against these standards and encourages improvement in the quality of the care provided through its inspection reports and performance assessment of councils.

Foundation Schools

Helen Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills what steps he intends to take to increase accountability *(a)* in decision-making and *(b)* in the use of public funds for (i) governors of foundation schools and (ii) governors *appointed by* charitable foundations. [196091]

Mr. Miliband: The existing legal framework within which foundation schools operate provides for accountability in decision-making and the use of public funds. All governors of maintained schools of any category, however they are elected or appointed, are subject to the same requirements with regard to their conduct, and all governing bodies are collectively accountable for their decisions. Governors are equally accountable to those who appoint them, to the school's funders, and to parents, pupils and the wider community.

Free Fruit Scheme

Lynne Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills what estimate he has made of the annual cost of extending the free fruit scheme to Key Stage 2 pupils. [195746]

Miss Melanie Johnson: I have been asked to reply.

No estimate has been made about the annual cost of extending the school fruit and vegetable scheme to Key Stage 2 pupils.

The Department has set aside £77 million over the 2004–05 and 2005–06 financial years to fund the school fruit and vegetable scheme. A full evaluation of the scheme is due in the first half of 2005.

Once the rollout is complete at the end of November, two million four to six-year-olds in 16,500 local education authority-maintained infant, primary and special schools across England will be receiving a fresh piece of fruit or vegetable each school day.

Free School Meals

Mr. Frank Field: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills what proportion of pupils are eligible for free school meals in each ward, listed in descending order. [192770]

Mr. Stephen Twigg: It is the Department's policy not to publish figures about individual schools unless the schools concerned have had the opportunity to check or confirm that information with the performance tables.

Free school meal figures are not routinely checked with schools. Certain wards only have one individual school for instance. Therefore as my answer contains confidential information, I will communicate privately with my right hon. Friend.

Free School Transport

Brian Cotter: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills how many children in North Somerset receive free transport to school provided by the local authority. [196616]

Mr. Stephen Twigg: We do not routinely collect that information. However a joint survey of school transport policies, expenditure and pupil numbers transported, conducted in 2003 by DfES and the Confederation of Education Service Managers (ConfEd) reported the following:

Number of pupils receiving free or assisted home to school transport

Type of school setting	*Compulsory school age*	*Sixth formers*	*All pupils*
North Somerset			
Primary	893	—	893
Secondary	2,088	184	2,272
Special	284	84	368
Others	50	—	50
Total	3,315	268	3,583

Source:

DfES/ConfEd "Home to School Transport Survey" 2003

Havering School Funding

John Cryer: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills how much public funding has been allocated to schools within the London borough of Havering under the school Standards Fund since 1998. [196708]

Mr. Miliband: Standards Fund grants are allocated to local education authorities, not directly to schools. The amount allocated to schools is a matter for local decision. The following table gives the Standards Fund recurrent and capital allocations, including local authority contributions, for the London borough of Havering from 1998–99 to 2004–05. From 1999–2000 the Standards Fund included a grant to support the statutory reduction of infant class sizes. In 2003–04 this class size funding was transferred to Education Formula Spending baselines. The amount transferred for Havering was £535,000.

Standards fund allocations for London borough of Havering

£000

Financial year	*Capital*	*Recurrent*	*Total*
1998–99	990	1,529	2,519
1999–2000	1,507	2,691	4,197
2000–01	3,602	5,122	8,724
2001–02	8,149	7,974	16,123
2002–03	6,391	8,733	15,124
2003–04	8,895	7,883	16,779
2004–05	8,326	8,761	17,088

Home Education

Mr. Flook: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills pursuant to his answer of 27 October 2004, *Official Report*, columns 1265–66W, on home education, what assessment he has made of the reasons underlying the one-year fall in the number of pupils not in school in Somerset local education authority in 2003. [195498]

Mr. Miliband: My Department has carried out an investigation into the one-year fall in the pupil numbers not in school in Somerset local education authority in 2003. At the time of the 2003 data collection the figures returned to the Department were checked and confirmed by Somerset LEA as being correct on 8 March 2003.

However, following the hon. Member's previous question, further investigation has been carried out. The LEA has now informed the Department that a group of pupils was omitted from the 2003 return. They have supplied an amended 2003 total.

A revised table showing this amendment is given as follows:

Number of pupils not in school and being otherwise educated 1997–2004—Somerset local education authority and England

	Somerset local education authority			
	Pupils aged 5–10	*Pupils aged 11–15*	*Pupils aged 16 plus*	*Total*
1997	63	77	1	141
1998	71	234	9	314
1999	83	308	5	396
2000	93	344	3	440
2001	24	337	1	362
2002	64	119	19	202
2003[1]	—	—	—	261
2004	82	165	1	248

[1] An age breakdown for 2003 is not available.

Source:

8B Survey

National Grid for Learning

John Cryer: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills what assessment he has made of the operation of the National Grid for Learning within the London borough of Havering. [196712]

Mr. Charles Clarke: My Department does not assess the operation of the National Grid for Learning (NGfL) programme, or its successor the ICT in Schools programme, at individual local authority level. Each authority is responsible for making sure that ICT in Schools' funding is used to best effect in support of national priorities. The NGfL Pathfinders and ImpaCT2 studies investigated the roll out and effect of the programme nationwide. These reported the different approaches to implementing the then National Grid for Learning taken by authorities and ImpaCT2, for example, reported that the effective use of ICT could improve levels of pupil attainment by the equivalent of half a grade at GCSE.

Ofsted Inspections

Lynne Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills how many complaints were made about Ofsted inspections in 2003–04. [196696]

Mr. Miliband: This is a matter for Ofsted. HM Chief Inspector, David Bell, will write to my hon. Friend and place a copy of his letter in the Library.

Lynne Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills whether he expects the new school inspection system to be in place nationwide by September 2005. [196697]

Mr. Miliband: Subject to parliamentary scrutiny, time and approval, we plan for the new system to be operational as planned.

Pupil Exclusions

Mr. Hoban: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills how many children with special educational needs were subject to *(a)* a permanent exclusion and *(b)* a fixed term exclusion in the most recent period for which data is available. [194763]

Margaret Hodge: The requested information relating to permanent exclusions is given in the table.

The Department started to collect information on fixed period exclusions from summer term 2003 and published some information about the first term on 29 July. However, there were concerns about the reliability of some of the data. They were not sufficiently robust to provide an analysis by special educational needs. We expect that future surveys will result in improved data quality.

Maintained primary, secondary and all special schools[1,2]: Number of permanent exclusions by special educational needs (SEN)—2002/03 (estimates)[3]—England

	Number of permanent exclusions	*Percentage of permanent exclusions*	*Percentage of school population[4]*
Pupils with SEN	6,170	66	0.45
of which:			
Pupils with statements of SEN	1,030	11	0.43
SEN pupils without statements	5,140	55	0.46

[1] Includes middle schools as deemed.

[2] Includes maintained and non-maintained special schools.

[3] Estimates based on incomplete pupil level data.

[4] The number of excluded pupils expressed as a percentage of the school population by SEN.

Note:

Totals may not appear to equal the sum of constituent parts because numbers have been rounded to the nearest 10.

Source:

Annual Schools Census

Mr. Hoban: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills what the latest figures are for the average periods between a child *(a)* with special educational needs and *(b)* without special educational needs being permanently excluded from school and being placed in a Pupil Referral Unit. [194765]

Margaret Hodge: The requested information is not collected centrally.

Religious Education

Mr. Allen: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills what plans he has to extend the recently issued guidelines regarding the study of religious faiths other than Christianity to faith schools. [196076]

Mr. Miliband: The Qualifications and Curriculum Authority (QCA), in partnership with the Department, recently launched a new non-statutory national framework for Religious Education to support the delivery of high quality religious education (RE) in schools. While it provides for opportunities for pupils to study all of the principal religions in Great Britain, and other religious traditions and secular philosophies in line with the Government's goals of inclusion, tolerance and diversity, it also reinforces the position of Christianity as the dominant religion of this country. All of the major UK faith and belief communities and professional groups were involved in its development.

While the Framework is non-statutory, we will be encouraging Standing Advisory Councils on Religious Education (SACREs) and Agreed Syllabus Conferences (ASCs) to use it in drawing up their locally agreed syllabus for schools in their area. Voluntary aided schools of a religious character are required to deliver RE within the tenets of their own faith, but we hope they too will see the value of the Framework and adopt it to enhance their existing RE provision.

School Leavers

Mr. Rosindell: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills what percentage of pupils left full time education at the age of 16 in England in the last year for which figures are available. [196164]

Mr. Miliband: The provisional estimate of young people aged 16 who were not in full-time education in the previous academic year, 2003–04, is given in Table 1. Many of these were in Apprenticeships or other training, so the proportion of young people in the age cohort who were not in any education or training is also shown in the table.

Table 1

	Percentage
Not in full-time education[1]	27.6
Not in any education or training	12.9

[1] This group comprised of those who were in work based learning programmes; employer funded training; other education and training; and those who were not in any education or training

These estimates are taken from snapshot information as at the end of the calendar year. They are taken from the Department's Statistical First Release (SFR 18/2004) entitled, 'Participation in Education, Training and Employment by 16–18 year olds in England: 2002 and 2003'.

School Standards Grant

Mr. Dhanda: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills (1) if he will make a statement on proposals to review the school standards grant; [195548]

(2) if he will assess the merits of *(a)* increasing the number of bands for the school standards grant and *(b)* allocating the school standards grant on a per pupil basis. [195611]

Mr. Miliband: Revenue funding for schools will increase by some £3.5 billion overall between 2005–06 and 2007–08. That means increased revenue funding for schools by about £1,300 per pupil or 45 per cent. in real terms in the 10 years since 1997.

We look forward in the months ahead to discussions with schools and local education authorities on the best way to deliver all the resources which support schools. There will be a new ring-fenced budget for schools from 2006–07 and the Government are committed both to delivering three year budgets for schools and to rationalising the existing funding streams.

Secondary School Funding

Claire Ward: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills what the funding per head for secondary school pupils in Watford constituency *(a)* was in 1997 and *(b)* is in 2004. [196573]

Mr. Miliband: The information requested is produced according to local education authority areas rather than districts within an area. Watford is a district of Hertfordshire local education authority. Total funding per pupil for pupils aged 11–15 in Hertfordshire was £3,260 in 1997–98 and £4,090 in 2004–05, an increase of 25 per cent. in real terms. This includes funding via Education Formula Spending/Standard Spending Assessment and Grants, and excludes the pensions transfer to EPS.

Notes

1. Price base: Real terms at 2003–04 prices, based on GDP deflators as at 30 June 2004.
2. Figures reflect relevant sub-blocks of education SSA/EFS settlements and exclude the pensions transfers to EFS made in 2003–04 and 2004–05.
3. Total funding also includes all revenue grants in DfES Departmental Expenditure Limits relevant to pupils aged 11–15 and exclude Education Maintenance Allowances (EMAs) and grants not allocated at LEA level.
4. The pupil numbers used to convert £ million figures to £ per pupil are those underlying the SSA/EFS settlement calculations. The figures are rounded to the nearest £10.
5. The 2004–05 figures are provisional as some grants have not yet been finalised/audited.

Sustainable Energy (CHP Provisions) Order

Mr. Stunell: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills what measures his Department *(a)* has undertaken and *(b)* plans to undertake to comply with the Sustainable Energy (CHP Provisions) Order 2003. [194431]

Mr. Stephen Twigg: My Department remains committed to reducing energy use. We already have a number of measures in place including the purchase of renewable energy and a building heated from the incineration of waste material. Performance is regularly monitored, reviewed and updated to ensure continuous improvement.

The Framework for Sustainable Development on Government Estate target already forms part of the Department Energy Strategy. Plans to integrate the requirements of the CHP Sustainable Energy Act 2003 are already being considered. These include the purchase of electricity from these sources and the feasibility of developing on-site CHP plant capability.

CULTURE, MEDIA AND SPORT

Departmental Press Releases

Pete Wishart: To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport how many press releases have been issued by her Department in each month of 2004; and if she will make a statement. [195441]

Mr. Caborn: Numbers of press releases issued by the Department in each month of 2004 were as follows:

2004	*Number*
January	6
February	7
March	20
April	15
May	15
June	20
July	11
August	8
September	10
October	22
Total	134

Gambling

Mr. Gordon Prentice: To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport what the locations are of the casinos already in existence in the UK. [194666]

Mr. Caborn *[holding answer 1 November 2004]*: There are currently 134 casinos operating in the United Kingdom. A list of these casinos and their locations is as follows.

Casinos-currently operating

Casino name	*Licensing area*
International Casino	Aberdeen
Gala Casino	Aberdeen
Stanley Wirral Casino	Birkenhead
Stanley China Palace Casino	Birmingham
Stanley Midland Wheel Club	Birmingham
Rainbow Casino	Birmingham
Grosvenor Casino	Birmingham
Gala International Casino	Birmingham
Stanley Casino	Birmingham
Stanley Casino	Blackpool
Paris Casino	Blackpool
Grosvenor Casino	Blackpool
Stanley Casino	Bolton
Gala Casino	Bournemouth
Stanley Casino	Bournemouth
Napoleons Casino Club	Bradford
Gala Casino	Bradford
Brighton International Casino	Brighton and Hove
Rendezvous Casino	Brighton and Hove
Grosvenor Casino x2	Brighton and Hove
Gala Casino	Bristol
Triangle Casino	Bristol
Grosvenor Casino	Bristol
Stanley Annabelle Casino	Bristol
Grosvenor Casino	Cardiff

Casinos-currently operating

ino name	*Licensing area*
Croupiers Casino	Cardiff
la Electric Casino	Cardiff
nley Casino	Coventry
nley Annabelle Casino	Coventry
rlton Casino Club	Derby
nley Casino	Derby
stle Hill Casino	Dudley
la Casino	Dundee
nley Edinburgh Casino	Edinburgh
la Maybury Casino	Edinburgh
nley Cascades Casino	Edinburgh
ndezvous Casino	London (South Western)
poleons Casino	London (South Western)
St. James	London (South Western)
rd Rock Casino	London (South Western)
ckfords Club	London (South Western)
pinall's	London (South Western)
lden Nugget	London (South Western)
s Ambassadeurs Club	London (South Western)
ala Casino (Piccadilly)	London (South Western)
rosvenor Casino	London (West)
ndon Park Tower Casino	London (West)
int Casino	London (West)
e Connoissuer Club	London (West)
axims	London (West)
ton International Casino	Luton
rosvenor Casino	Luton
anley Casino	Luton
anley St. Anne's Casino	Lytham St. Anne's
rosvenor Casino (Empire St)	Manchester
anley Strand Casino	Manchester
anley Casino (The Circus)	Manchester
endezvous Casino Club #	Manchester
rosvenor Casino (Whitworth)	Manchester
ard Rock Casino	Manchester
rosvenor Casino (George Street)	Manchester
tanley Cascades Casino	Margate and Ramsgate
tanley Casino	Newcastle-upon-Tyne
rosvenor Casino	Newcastle-upon-Tyne
ala Regent Casino	Northampton
ala Casino	Northampton
ala Casino (Bridlesmith Gate)	Nottingham
ala Casino (Maid Marion Way)	Nottingham
ictoria Club	Nottingham
rosvenor Casino	Plymouth
tanley Grand Casino	Plymouth
rosvenor Casino	Portsmouth and Southsea
tanley Berkeley Casino	Edinburgh
tanley Berkeley Casino	Glasgow
ala Merchant City Casino	Glasgow
ala Riverboat Casino	Glasgow
ala Casino	Glasgow
ala Rotunda Casino	Glasgow
rosvenor Casino	Great Yarmouth
tanley Kings Casino	Great Yarmouth
rosvenor Casino	Huddersfield
apoleons Casino Club	Kingston-upon-Hull
ala Casino	Kingston-upon-Hull
rosvenor Casino (Merrion)	Leeds
apoleons Casino Club	Leeds
ala Casino	Leeds
rosvenor Casino (Moortown)	Leeds
Stanley Annabelle Casino	Leicester
Stanley Casino	Leicester
Stanley Grand Casino	Liverpool
Stanley Casino	Liverpool
Leo Casino	Liverpool
Grosvenor Casino	Liverpool
Gala Casino	London (East Central)
Gala Casino	London (East Central)
Grosvenor Victoria Casino	London (North Western)
Gala Golden Horseshoe	London (North Western)
Gala Barracuda Casino	London (North Western)
Palm Beach Casino	London (South Western)
Ritz Club	London (South Western)
Colony Club	London (South Western)
Clermont Club	London (South Western)
Stanley Casino	Portsmouth and Southsea
Grosvenor Casino (Osborne)	Portsmouth and Southsea
Grosvenor Casino	Ramsgate
Grosvenor Casino	Reading
Reading Sporting Club	Reading
Stanley Albion Casino	Salford
Grosvenor Casino	Salford
Grosvenor Casino	Scarborough
Grosvenor Casino	Sheffield
Napoleons (Ecclesall)	Sheffield
Napoleons (Owlerton)	Sheffield
Grosvenor Casino	Southampton
Harbour House Casino	Southampton
Stanley Casino	Southampton
Westcliff Sporting Club	Southend-on-Sea
Spielers Casino	Southend-on-Sea
Rendezvous Casino Club	Southend-on-Sea
Stanley Casino	Southport
Casino 36	Stockport
Gala Casino	Stockport
Grosvenor Casino	Stoke-on-Trent
Stanley Casino	Stoke-on-Trent
Gala Casino	Sunderland
Grosvenor Casino	Swansea
Gala Casino	Teesside
Stanley Torquay Casino	Torbay (Torquay)
Sorrento Casino	Walsall
Grosvenor Casino	Walsall
The Shaftesbury Casino	West Bromwich
Gala Casino	Wolverhampton
Rubicon Casino	Wolverhampton

Note:

Brighton and Hove currently has two Grosvenor casinos in its licensing area.

Hut Preservation (Ross Island)

Mr. Chris Smith: To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport what discussions she has had with Ministerial colleagues in relation to the preservation of the huts built on Ross Island in Antarctica by the expeditions of Robert Falcon Scott and Ernest Shackleton; and if she will make a statement. [196106]

Mr. Caborn: My right hon. Friend the Secretary of State has discussed the on-going preservation and conservation of the huts of the Antarctic explorers Scott and Shackleton with the Prime Minister of New Zealand which has territorial responsibility for the Ross Dependency in Antarctica where the huts are located. In September, my right hon. Friend the Minister for Media and Heritage met the High Commissioner of New Zealand to discuss proposals by the New Zealand Antarctic Heritage Trust to preserve the huts.

The British Government are keen to support New Zealand's efforts to preserve these historic huts. In 2002, the Government, through the Government of the British Antarctic Territory, donated £70,000 to support the proposed Ross Sea heritage restoration project developed by the New Zealand Antarctic Heritage Trust. Officials in my Department have also been exploring funding options to assist with this but no suitable sources of funding within the UK heritage sector have been found. However, the Government will continue to support fundraising efforts for the preservation of these unique huts.

DEFENCE

Administration Costs

Mr. Keith Simpson: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence pursuant to the answer of 22 July 2004, *Official Report*, column 483W, on Ministry of Defence administration costs, what estimate he has made of the Ministry of Defence's administration budget for financial years 1997–98 to 2007–08. [196580]

Mr. Ingram: The Ministry of Defence has agreed to introduce an administration costs control regime to cover the Spending Review 2004 period. The MOD is still working with the Treasury to finalise the details of what will be encompassed and how it will be measured. The new regime will take effect in the financial year starting in April 2005. There are no plans to estimate administration costs for previous years.

Army Support Vehicles

Ann Winterton: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence whether the recent contract for Army support vehicles will include *(a)* electronics and *(b)* the ability to add electronics. [196215]

Mr. Ingram: Support vehicles will include an embedded electronic engine management system, which will record modifications to the engine, assist in fault diagnosis, control fuel usage and exhaust emissions, together with recording a profile of the vehicles' usage.

It will be possible to upgrade this system in the future, if required.

Ann Winterton: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence whether the requirement by the Army for a range of family medium vehicles will include the possibility of purchasing the US Stryker family of vehicles. [196216]

Mr. Ingram: Studies planned for the Assessment Phase will consider a range of options for delivering the Future Rapid Effects System capability. The Assessment Phase work is in its very early stages, therefore it is too early to pre-judge the merits of potential candidates.

Capital Commitments

Mr. Keith Simpson: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence pursuant to note 20 of his Department's Annual Report and Accounts 2003–04, HC 1080, if he will list the capital commitments that have been contracted but not provided for. [196466]

Mr. Ingram: I will write to the hon. Member and a copy of my letter will be placed in the Library of the House.

Combat Clothing

Mr. Watts: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence where the production centres that will produce combat clothing for the armed forces are located. [195597]

Mr. Ingram: The Ministry of Defence generally places contracts for combat clothing with UK and EU suppliers who, depending on the item involved, choose to either manufacture or sub-contract at locations in the UK, mainland Europe and overseas.

Mr. Watts: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what measures his Department has taken to ensure that the quality of combat clothing is maintained. [195598]

Mr. Ingram: In any clothing contract, including combat clothing, suppliers identify controls within their accredited quality systems to ensure performance levels are maintained. The Ministry of Defence requires ISO accreditation from prime contractors and has quality surveillance methods, including sample testing, to ensure that finished items are compliant with the contracted specification.

Departmental Databases

Mr. Keith Simpson: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence (1) if he will place in the Library a list of the tables and related fields of the *(a)* Defence Balanced Scorecard Application, *(b)* RAPID database, *(c)* CDRT database, *(d)* the CLIME database, *(e)* Defence Procurement Agency's OATS database and *(f)* Defence Procurement Agency's COO database, together with diagrams showing the table relationships; [196477]

(2) if he will place in the Library a list of the tables and related fields of *(a)* his Department's parliamentary questions database, *(b)* his Department's GODIVA database, *(c)* the Defence Bills Agency Monthly Journal of Records database, *(d)* his Department's Departmental Financial Management System database, and *(e)* the Defence Procurement Agency's ORACLE financial analyser database together with diagrams showing the table relationships. [196476]

Mr. Ingram: I will write to the hon. Member and place a copy of my letter in the Library of the House.

Departmental Management Groups

Mr. Keith Simpson: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will place in the Library organisational diagrams showing his Department's *(a)* top level budget holders, *(b)* intermediate management groups and *(c)* management groups for financial years 1999–2000 to 2003–04. [196578]

Mr. Ingram: Yes.

HMS Sandown/Inverness/Bridport

Mr. Hancock: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what plans he has to transfer *(a)* HMS Sandown, *(b)* HMS Inverness and *(c)* HMS Bridport to an overseas navy. [194683]

Mr. Ingram: The Ministry of Defence's Disposal Services Agency (DSA) is seeking to secure a Government-to-Government sale for these vessels with an overseas navy. Initial exploratory discussions have taken place with several overseas nations and will continue.

Iraq

Pete Wishart: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence (1) what assessment he has made of changes in the security situation in the south east of Iraq since June; [193306]

(2) whether the security situation in south east Iraq has improved since June. [193307]

Mr. Ingram *[holding answer 25 October 2004]*: British personnel and other Coalition members are working closely with the Iraqi security forces to increase stability in the south east of Iraq. There have been peaks in insurgent activity, such as that in August, which have presented particular challenges to the Coalition but progress continues to be made towards successful elections in January.

Military Afloat Reach and Sustainability

Mr. Gerald Howarth: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence whether he expects the solution for the Military Afloat Reach and Sustainability (MARS) requirement to be achieved as part of a Private Finance Initiative. [193127]

Mr. Ingram: The Military Afloat Reach and Sustainability (MARS) project is still in its early stages and, as yet, no final decisions have been made on the scope of the capability sought and how best to deliver that requirement. However, from the studies so far, it is not currently envisaged that a Private Finance Initiative (PFI) solution will be adopted, although innovative solutions, including Public Private Partnering principles, will be welcomed.

RAF Lyneham

Mr. Gray: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what discussions he has had with Virgin Atlantic about further usage of RAF Lyneham. [192173]

Mr. Ingram: Following a Question Book correction, pursuant to the answer given to the hon. Member by my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for the Environment, Food and Rural Affairs on 19 October 2004, *Official Report*, column 595W, I can confirm that Defence Ministers have had no such discussions.

Submarines

Mr. Gordon Prentice: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what warranty comes from the manufacturer on submarines commissioned into the Royal Navy; and if he will make a statement. [195219]

Mr. Ingram: It is the Ministry of Defence's policy to obtain Express Warranties from the contractor for the procurement of technically complex or safety critical equipment, such as submarines, where these offer value for money. Express Warranties are likely to offer greater benefit than remedies implied by General Law, are clearly defined, and include warranty claims procedures that provide greater certainty. The last submarines to be commissioned into service with the Royal Navy were the Vanguard Class and each submarine had a 12-month Express Warranty from the manufacturer.

Mr. Gordon Prentice: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence (1) how many submarines commissioned into the Royal Navy since 1974 have had defects affecting their seaworthiness identified and remedied during their sea trials prior to handover; [195220]

(2) how many submarines commissioned into the Royal Navy since 1974 developed defects affecting their seaworthiness within six months of handover. [195221]

Mr. Ingram: Before a submarine goes to sea it undergoes an extensive series of trials and equipment setting-to-work in the shipyard. It is not unusual for defects to emerge during the course of the Sea Trials, or within six months of a newly commissioned submarine entering service, and careful planning is undertaken to ensure such defects can be dealt with as they arise. The vast majority of these defects have no impact on a submarine's seaworthiness. Systems that could affect seaworthiness generally have some form of back up to prevent the submarine from being at risk as a result of a single failure; this is inherent in the design. Safety is of paramount importance and a submarine would not be sent to sea unless it was safe to do so.

Statistical data on Contractor Sea Trials that are carried out for each new submarine prior to acceptance into service with the Royal Navy are not centrally held and could be provided only at disproportionate cost.

Territorial Army (Iraq)

Mr. Keith Simpson: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence how many Territorial Army soldiers deployed to Iraq since March 2003 have been graded *(a)* skilled and *(b)* average in their weapons test. [194164]

Mr. Ingram *[holding answer 28 October 2004]*: Following the conclusion of the Court Martial of Lance Corporal Blaymire and Lance Corporal Sherratt, officials are collating these data. I will write to the hon. Member and a copy of my letter will be placed in the Library of the House.

Warships

Mr. Hancock: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what plans he has for the replacement of RFA Argus. [194471]

Mr. Ingram: It is currently planned that the Joint Casualty Treatment Ship will replace the medical facility provided by RFA Argus and that other vessels will be able to deploy anti-submarine helicopters. Options for replacing the air training capability provided by RFA Argus are being examined.

HOME DEPARTMENT

Antisocial Behaviour

John Cryer: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what assessment he has made of measures taken to tackle antisocial behaviour within the Hornchurch constituency. [194731]

Ms Blears: The Anti-social Behaviour Act 2003 is the single biggest package of measures tackling antisocial behaviour. They were introduced after widespread consultation with communities and practitioners. These powers are part of the Government's Together campaign to help local people and agencies tackle the menace of yob behaviour. The Act and Together apply across all of England and Wales including the hon. Member's Constituency.

Havering Community Safety Partnership (HCSP) are aware that antisocial behaviour is a key concern for residents, and has responded by developing an Antisocial Behaviour Strategy that seeks to develop a co-ordinated approach to tackling antisocial behaviour, by joining up initiatives currently operating in the borough.

The strategy focuses on four key work areas:

Targeting hotspots

Targeting persistent offenders and those at risk

Tackling environmental crime

Protecting and supporting victims and witnesses

Figures released on Thursday 28 October from the National Survey on Antisocial Behaviour show that between April 1999 and June 2004 that the London borough of Havering have issued:

	Number
Antisocial Behaviour Orders	5
Dispersal Orders	2
Acceptable Behaviour Contracts	6

I understand from Havering's return to this survey that their overall antisocial behaviour strategy has proved successful in improving community confidence.

Mr. David Atkinson: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many antisocial behaviour orders have been issued in Bournemouth since their introduction. [195710]

Ms Blears: Antisocial behaviour orders (ASBOs) have been available to the courts since 1 April 1999. The number of notifications received by the Home office of ASBOs issued, up to 30 June 2004 (latest available), where the restrictions imposed are specific to the local government area of Bournemouth, is one.

Communications Interception

Norman Baker: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many applications submitted by public authorities other than MI5, MI6 and GCHQ for authorisation for direct surveillance and the use of covert human intelligence sources were *(a)* approved and *(b)* rejected under sections 28 and 29 of the Regulation of Investigatory Powers Act 2000 for each year since the inception of the Act. [188050]

Caroline Flint: Numbers of authorisations granted for the carrying out of directed surveillance (under section 28 of the Regulation of Investigatory Powers Act 2000 (RIPA)) or for the conduct or the use of covert human intelligence source (under section 29) are published in the Annual Reports of the Chief Surveillance Commissioner.

Sections 28 and 29 of RIPA came into force on 25 January 2000. The published figures cover include authorisations granted under sections 28 and 29 of RIPA, within law enforcement agencies since 1 April 2001 and for other public authorities since 1 April 2003. Details of all authorisations granted within law enforcement agencies and other public authorities have been available to the Surveillance Commissioners for inspection since 2000 but only collected centrally since April 2003.

Section 28 (directed surveillance)

	Law enforcement[1]	*Other public authorities*
2000–01	[2]—	[2]—
2001–02	27,800	[2]—
2002–03	26,400	[2]—
2003–04	26,986	6,398

[1] The National Criminal Intelligence Service, the National Crime Squad, the Scottish Drug Enforcement Agency, HM Customs and Excise and police forces.

[2] Not held centrally.

Section 29 (covert human intelligence source)

	Law enforcement	*Other public authorities*
2000–01	[1]—	[1]—
2001–02	5,400	[1]—
2002–03	5,900	[1]—
2003–04	5,907	273

[1] Not held centrally

Numbers of applications put to persons entitled to grant authorisations under section 28 and 29 of RIPA that have not resulted in the grant of authorisation are not collected centrally.

As the exercise of powers under sections 28 and 29 of RIPA is kept under review by the Intelligence Services Commissioner and not the Chief Surveillance Commissioner, the number of authorisations made by the intelligence services are excluded from the figures published by the Chief Surveillance Commissioner.

Community Support Officers

Ms Atherton: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many community safety officers are deployed in Cornwall. [195103]

Ms Blears: At the end of September 39 community support officers were deployed in Cornwall.

Correspondence

Sir Gerald Kaufman: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department when he will reply to the letter to him dated 9 September from the right hon. Member for Manchester, Gorton, with regard to Dr. Yousef Daabaj. [195519]

Mr. Blunkett: I wrote to my right hon. Friend on 1 November 2004.

Crime

Mr. Alan Campbell: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many *(a)* thefts from vehicles, *(b)* thefts of vehicles and *(c)* burglaries were recorded in North Tyneside in each of the last 24 months. [193333]

Ms Blears: The available data are quarterly and relates to the North Tyneside Crime and Disorder Reduction Partnership (CDRP) area.

Offences recorded by the police in North Tyneside CDRP

Period	Thefts from vehicles	Thefts of vehicles	All burglaries
April-June 2002	321	162	653
July-September 2002	342	134	551
October-December 2002	304	184	678
January-March 2002	299	160	583
April-June 2003	321	168	609
July-September 2003	325	173	471
October-December 2003	326	127	539
January-March 2004	332	165	516

Mr. Flook: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many incidents of *(a)* racially aggravated offences, *(b)* violent crime, *(c)* robbery of personal property and *(d)* drug offences have been recorded in (i) Avon and Somerset constabulary area and (ii) England in each year since 1997. [193871]

Ms Blears: The available information is given in the tables.

Avon and Somerset adopted the National Crime Recording Standard (NCRS) in October 2000 but the force acknowledged a reinforced effort from April 2001 which reflected a further increase in the number of offences recorded. The NCRS was introduced nationally across England and Wales in April 2002. An analysis of the impact of NCRS, both nationally and for individual forces, was published in two companion volumes to 'Crime in England and Wales 2002–03'. Both volumes are available on the Home Office website. The volume covering the national picture is available at: http://www.homeoffice.gov.uk/rds/pdfs2/rdsolr3103.pdf and the volume covering individual forces is available at: http://www.homeoffice.gov.uk/rds/pdfs2/rdsolr3203.pdf

For the reasons outlined, the information requested is provided in separate tables for Avon and Somerset and England.

Table 1: Offences recorded by the police in Avon and Somerset[1]

	Number of offences			
Period	Racially aggravated offences[2]	Violent crime	Robbery of personal property	Drug offences[3]
1997–98	—	13,219	—	461
1998–99[4]	—	14,985	1,694	2,145
1999–2000	240	16,061	2,177	2,017
2000–01	478	19,071	2,573	1,990
2001–02	700	23,670	4,585	1,860
2002–03	900	25,813	3,289	2,308
2003–04	1,256	30,954	2,682	2,457

[1] The force moved to a National Crime Recording Standard approach in advance of the national implementation in April 2002. As a result, their figures may not reflect the picture for England as a whole.

[2] Includes religiously aggravated offences from April 2002.

[3] Trafficking in controlled drugs only for 1997–98. Includes possession and other drug offences thereafter.

[4] Expanded coverage and revised counting rules came into force from April 1998.

Table 2: Offences recorded by the police in England

	Number of offences			
Period	Racially aggravated offences[1]	Violent crime	Robbery of personal property	Drug offences[2]
1997–98	—	332,683	—	21,774
1998–99[3]	—	571,031	55,645	126,355
1999–2000	21,122	662,521	71,387	113,345
2000–01	24,303	692,563	82,010	105,106
2001–02	29,223	781,906	107,458	113,350
2002–03[4]	29,721	935,059	95,735	130,835
2003–04[4]	33,584	1,052,602	89,948	131,551

[1] Includes religiously aggravated offences from April 2002.

[2] Trafficking in controlled drugs only for 1997–98. Includes possession and other drug offences thereafter.

[3] Expanded coverage and revised counting rules came into force from April 1998.

[4] This denotes the national implementation of the National Crime Recording Standard in April 2002. Figures for subsequent years are not directly comparable with those for earlier years.

Mr. David Atkinson: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many alcohol-related crimes have been reported in Bournemouth in each year since 1997. [195711]

Ms Blears: The information requested is not collected centrally.

Criminal Records Bureau

Bob Spink: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department whether the Criminal Records Bureau standard application information includes details of bank account *(a)* sort code and *(b)* account number; and if he will make a statement. [190728]

Ms Blears: Sections E and F of the Criminal Records Bureau (CRB) Disclosure application form contains a number of fields for completion by applicants, including bank account details, for the purposes of assisting in verifying the individual's identity. However, since December 2002 the CRB no longer requires applicants to provide such details. The Bureau communicated this change to Registered Bodies in January 2003 and the Guidance Notes state that this section is no longer to be completed. The section was formally revoked by the Police Act (Criminal Records) (Amendment No. 2) Regulations 2003 with effect from February 2003.

In response to concerns from Registered Bodies, employers, voluntary organisations and customers about the need to provide the personal information asked for in Sections E and F of the application form, the CRB carried out a review of its authentication rules and processes. This review concluded that:

> the removal of Section E from the process of identity validation and verification would not compromise the overall authentication of an applicant's identity and;
>
> there had been no instances to date, where the CRB had used information from Section F as part of the authentication rules. The requirement to provide this information could therefore be removed without compromising the overall authentication of an applicant's identity.

Departmental Recruitment

Dr. Julian Lewis: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many personnel the Department has recruited under the New Deal in each of the past five years. [193674]

Fiona Mactaggart *[holding answer 25 October 2004]*: I refer the hon. Member to the reply given by my hon. Friend, the Minister of State for the Cabinet Office (Ruth Kelly) on 25 October 2004, *Official Report*, column 1052W.

Driving (Mobile Telephones)

Mr. Pound: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department (1) how many people have been charged within the area of responsibility of the Metropolitan Police Service with the use of a mobile telephone while driving, at the latest date for which records are available; [195185]

(2) if he will require the Metropolitan Police Service to publish details of convictions for driving while using a mobile telephone on a borough basis. [195186]

Ms Blears: Data on the number of people charged by the police are not collected centrally.

Data on police action (written warnings, fixed penalty notices and court proceedings) for 2003 on the new offence of driving while using a hand held mobile telephone will not be available until early in 2005. The number of defendants convicted of this new offence in the Metropolitan Police Service area will be available by petty sessional area, which is a grouping of magistrates courts. Those in the Metropolitan Police force area are listed in the table.

We do not propose asking the Metropolitan Police Service to publish their figures on a borough basis.

2004 data are expected to be published in autumn 2005.

Petty sessional areas within Greater London

Outer London area	*Inner London area*
Stratford (Newham MCC)	South Westminster
Acton (Ealing MCC)	South Eastern
Barnet	North Westminster
Bromley	South Western
Bexley	Thames
Croydon	South Central
Sutton	West London
Ealing	East Central (Highbury)
Hendon (Barnet MCC)	—
Haringey	—
Enfield	—
Harrow	—
Brent	—
Wimbledon (Merton MCC)	—
Hillingdon (Hillingdon MCC)	—
Richmond upon Thames	—
Brentford (Hounslow MCC)	—
Kingston upon Thames	—
Waltham Forest	—
Barking	—
Red bridge	—

Merseyside Crime Initiative Unit

Mrs. Curtis-Thomas: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will make a statement on the work of Merseyside Police's domestic violence units. [146243]

Ms Blears: There are a number of initiatives to tackle domestic violence, which are being delivered by Merseyside Police Family Support Units. The units were set up in January to provide a pan-Merseyside multi agency approach to domestic violence to improve the services which are offered to victims.

There are six base command units within Merseyside Police, which cover Wirral, Sefton, St. Helen's, Knowsley and North and South Liverpool. Each of these units has a Family Support Unit, which liaises with their local Domestic Violence Forum, and Domestic Violence Steering Group to provide local services on domestic violence. The units also link to the multi agency public protection arrangements.

Responsibility for the forces domestic violence strategy lies with the Public Protection Unit. The Police Public Protection Unit and the Family Support Units meet on a monthly basis to discuss local initiatives and to share good practice.

The initiatives, which have been put in place within the Family Support Units, include:

A Domestic Violence Awareness Raising Week—run this September;

Panic attack alarms and mobile phone scheme—alarms and some mobile phones are given to those victims who are most at risk;

Development of a risk assessment referral form—allows the police to pass on victims details to other agencies;

Bronze, Silver and Gold Response initiative has been set up for the units to determine the level of risk to a victim;

999 First in Line Pilot—This will provide training to front line police officers on the referral, identification and support of victims of domestic violence. The pilot is due to start in December;

A Crown Prosecution Service Custody Charging Pilot is currently running within Merseyside Police Custody Suites for Custody Officers dealing with domestic violence cases;

A computerised case tracking system called PROTECT has been introduced and allows Merseyside Police to track domestic violence cases through the court process;

Polaroid camera scheme—where police vehicles are equipped with camera's for front line officers to take photo's of victim's injuries.

In addition to these initiatives Merseyside Police will be running, the Operation Goodwill Christmas campaign this year. The focus of the initiative will be on offenders of domestic violence—with a clear message that offenders will be and can be prosecuted through independent prosecutions.

Police

Mrs. Curtis-Thomas: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what procedures are in place to ensure that officers on career breaks are kept up to date with new developments. [194868]

Ms Blears: The career break scheme for police officers is set out in Home Office Circular 4/2001 and requires chief officers to agree with the officer concerned the obligations and expectations on the officer and the force during the career break. These should include any need to keep up to date with new legislative requirements, how this will be achieved and refresher training on return to the force.

Mrs. Curtis-Thomas: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department when special priority payments in the police service will be evaluated. [194923]

Ms Blears: A review was carried out by the Police Negotiating Board (PNB) in October 2003. This resulted in agreement to increase the percentage of officers eligible to receive payments from 30 per cent. to 40 per cent. and a requirement that forces monitor the impact on diversity. The Home Office keeps under review all aspects of the impact of the 2002 PNB agreement on pay and conditions for police officers.

Ms Atherton: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many police officers were deployed in the Falmouth and Camborne constituency in each year from 1997 to 2004. [195081]

Ms Blears: The Falmouth and Camborne parliamentary constituency is part of the Cornwall and Isles of Scilly Basic Command Unit (BCU) of the Devon and Cornwall Constabulary. Information on strength at BCU level is collected annually and reflects the position at the end of March. Information on BCU strength is only available from 2002. BCU strength between March 2002 and March 2004 is set out in the table.

Cornwall and Isles of Scilly basic command unit

As at 31 March	*Number of police officers*
2002	706
2003	737
2004	774

It is not possible to provide police numbers at constituency level.

The deployment of officers to BCUs is a matter for the Chief Constable (Mrs. Maria Wallis QPM) and within the Cornwall and Isles of Scilly BCU deployment of officers is a matter for the Divisional Commander.

Police Disciplinary Procedures

Tom Cox: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department when he plans to introduce reforms of police disciplinary procedures for the Metropolitan police; and if he will make a statement. [195584]

Ms Blears: The police disciplinary procedures are detailed in the Police (Conduct) Regulations 2004 and apply to all police officers across the police service in England and Wales.

My right hon. Friend the Home Secretary has asked for a review of the police disciplinary arrangements to report to him in December 2004 and this review is under way. Following receipt of this report the Home Secretary will consider the appropriate next steps.

Terrorism

Paul Flynn: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what assessment he has made of the risk of a terrorist attack involving anthrax. [194326]

Ms Blears *[holding answer 28 October 2004]*: Many different terrorist threats have been considered, and scenarios are constantly being tested and reviewed. We do not publicly go into the detail of threat and risk assessments or scenarios, since the information could be useful to terrorists.

The threat is monitored very closely and is regularly assessed.

Ross Cranston: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many people have been arrested for terrorist offences since 11 September 2001; and how many of them *(a)* have been charged, *(b)* have been released without charge, *(c)* have been bailed, *(d)* are still in custody, *(e)* were prosecuted in court for terrorist offences, *(f)* were convicted for terrorist offences and *(g)* were handed over to immigration officials; and in relation to those convicted of terrorist offences (i) with what offences they were charged and (ii) what sentences the court imposed. [187962]

Mr. Blunkett: The figures requested are not routinely collected centrally by the police in the form requested. However, their records show that, cumulatively from 11 September 2001 until 30 June 2004, 609 people were arrested under the Terrorism Act 2000. 61 of these were charged under the Act and 38 under both the Terrorism Act and other legislation. The remainder were either released without charge, bailed to return, cautioned, charged under other legislation (such as that for murder, grievous bodily harm and use of firearms or explosives), or dealt with under immigration or mental health legislation. Of the 99 individuals charged under the Terrorism Act, 15 have been convicted.

It will continue to be the case that some persons arrested under the Terrorism Act will be charged with offences such as murder, grievous bodily harm, use of firearms or explosives which are all outside the scope of the Terrorism Act. A simplistic quote from the Terrorism Act statistics is therefore not the best way to evaluate the success of the Police and the Security Services.

The figures now appear on the Home Office website and will be updated every six months.

Home Office Research Development and Statistics publish a Command Paper and supplementary volumes of criminal statistics annually. A breakdown of prosecutions and convictions under the Terrorism Act 2000 for 2001 and 2002 is attached. Figures for 2003 will not be available until later in the year.

Number of defendants proceeded against at magistrates courts, found guilty and sentenced at all courts for offences under the Terrorism Act 2000, England and Wales 2002[1]

				Sentence breakdown		
Offence description	*Statute*	*Proceeded against*	*Found guilty*	*Sentenced*	*Fine*	*Immediate custody*
Relating to membership of proscribed organisations	Terrorism Act 2000, Sec 11	1	1	1	—	1
Wearing any item of dress in support of a proscribed organisation	Terrorism Act 2000, Sec 13a	—	—	—	—	—
Wears, carries or displays any article in support of a proscribed organisation	Terrorism Act 2000, Sec.13b	1	1	1	1	—
Contributions towards acts of terrorism	Terrorism Act 2000, Secs 15–18 & 22	8	1	1	—	1
Failure to disclose knowledge or suspicion of acts of terrorism	Terrorism Act 2000, Sec.19	—	—	—	—	—
Failure to leave a cordoned area immediately when ordered to do so by a constable in uniform	Terrorism Act 2000, Sec.36(1)(a)	1	—	—	—	—
Failure to leave premises, which abut or are wholly or partially within a cordoned area, immediately if ordered to do so by a constable in uniform	Terrorism Act 2000 Sec.36(1)(b)	1	—	—	—	—
Failure of driver or person in charge of a vehicle which is in a cordoned area to immediately move the vehicle if ordered to do so by a constable in uniform	Terrorism Act 2000 Sec.36(c)(d)(e)	—	—	—	—	—
Contravention or a prohibition or restriction order made by a constable in uniform to a cordoned area	Terrorism Act 2000 Sec.36(f)	—	—	—	—	—
Making any disclosure likely to prejudice an investigation about acts of terrorism or failing to disclose information about acts of terrorism	Terrorism Act 2000 Sec.39	—	—	—	—	—
Failure to stop (Power to stop and search vehicles and pedestrians)	Terrorism Act 2000, Secs.43, 44 and 47(1)(a)(b)(2)	1	—	—	—	—
Wilful obstruction (Power to stop and search vehicles and pedestrians)	Terrorism Act 2000 Secs.43, 44 and 47(1)(c) and (2)	—	—	—	—	—
Failure to move vehicle when ordered to do so by a constable in uniform, (vehicle had been permitted to remain at rest in contravention of any prohibition or restriction)	Terrorism Act 2000, Secs.48and 51(2)	—	—	—	—	—
Leaves a vehicle, or permits a vehicle to remain at rest, on a road in contravention of a prohibition or restriction	Terrorism Act 2000 Secs.48 and 51(1)	—	—	—	—	—
Provides instruction; invites another to receive instruction in weapon training.	Terrorism Act 2000 Sec.54	1	—	—	—	—
Directing terrorist training	Terrorism Act 2000 Sec.56	1	—	—	—	—
Collect, record or possession of information or articles likely to be of use to terrorists	Terrorism Act 2000 Sec.57 and 58	3	1	1	—	1
Failure to furnish information when required by examining officer	Terrorism Act 2000 Sch.7(5)(a)and(18)	1	—	—	—	—
Failing to produce either a valid passport or identifying document when required by examining officer	Terrorism Act 2000 Sch.7(5)(b)and(18)	—	—	—	—	—
Failing to declare or produce any relevant documents when required by examining officer	Terrorism Act 2000 Sch7(5)(c)(d)and(18)	—	—	—	—	—
Failing to submit to search by examining officer or person acting on his/her behalf	Terrorism Act 2000 Sch7(7)(8)and(18)	—	—	—	—	—
Failing to complete and produce an embarkation card when required to by examining officer	Terrorism Act 2000 Sch 7(16) and (18)	1	—	—	—	—
Wilfully obstructing a constable in the execution of his duty in a cordoned area	Terrorism Act 2000 Sch.5Sec.36(1)(2)	—	—	—	—	—
Wilfully obstructing or seeking to frustrate the object of a search in a cordoned area	Terrorism Act 2000 Sch5(1–3)	—	—	—	—	—
	Total	20	4	4	1	3

[1] These data are on the principal offence basis.

Tsar Appointments

Mr. Goodman: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many tsars have been appointed with responsibilities which cover part of the work of his Department; and if he will make a statement. [191917]

Fiona Mactaggart: There are no individuals with the term 'Tsar' in their job title currently employed by the Home Office.

WORK AND PENSIONS

Benefit Payments

John Barrett: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions how many pension and benefit recipients receive their money by way of a post office card account in *(a)* Scotland and *(b)* the City of Edinburgh local authority area. [195157]

Mr. Pond: The information is not available in the format requested.

Information is available on the number of pension and benefit accounts paid into a post office card account as at September 2004. This is shown in the table.

	Number of benefits paid into card account
(a) Scotland	180,040
(b) Edinburgh	9,935

Data refer to the benefit through which the payment is being made. Therefore if a person is receiving two benefits paid separately into a post office card account, they will be counted twice. Due to the nature of the data it would be difficult to try and accurately match these accounts to a single figure.

A customer is allowed only one post office card account into which pension and benefit payments are made. If a person receives two or more benefits they would only have one post office card account for receipt of all their payments.

Pathway Pilots

Mr. David: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions, if he will make a statement on the Pathways to Work pilots. [196335]

Maria Eagle: The Pathways pilots are showing exciting early signs of success. We know that a combination of helping people on incapacity benefit to overcome the barriers they face and tackling discrimination in the workplace can pay dividends for sick and disabled people—opening up job opportunities for them and benefiting society in general as they take their rightful place in the economic life of this country.

Sustainable Energy (CHP Provisions) Order

Mr. Stunell: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions what measures his Department *(a)* has undertaken and *(b)* plans to undertake to comply with the Sustainable Energy (CHP Provisions) Order 2003. [194432]

Mr. Pond: The Department, in conjunction with its estates partners—Land Securities Trillium—are currently considering the feasibility of installing a combined heat and power plant within one major building on the estate. In order to meet the CHP target contained within the energy section of the "Framework for Sustainable Development on the Government Estate" we will also consider the purchase of electricity generated by CHP from the grid.

CONSTITUTIONAL AFFAIRS

Fair Trade

Mr. Burstow: To ask the Parliamentary Secretary, Department for Constitutional Affairs whether it is his policy to ensure that hospitality within his Department is sourced from fair trade producers wherever possible within the boundaries set by the public procurement rules. [197066]

Mr. Lammy: The Department for Constitutional Affairs also replies on behalf of its associated offices and the Court Service.

Within the context of the Government's value for money policy and the EU procurement rules, we take every opportunity to encourage the purchase of fair trade goods in line with the Government's commitment to supporting ethical trading, including for hospitality purposes.

For example, in the Department's headquarters building the caterers always provide fair trade tea and coffee for hospitality and also source fruit juices, honey and other products wherever possible. In addition, the caterers in courts in the northern, north eastern and midlands regions and Wales are able to offer fair trade tea and coffee for hospitality in line with our developing policy.

New contracts for catering across the HMCS will be let during 2005. These will include a requirement that hospitality within my Department is sourced from fair trade producers wherever possible within the boundaries set by the public procurement rules.

CABINET OFFICE

Civil Servants

Brian White: To ask the Minister for the Cabinet Office what the Government's definition is of a civil servant. [195601]

Ruth Kelly: The Government are committed to consultation on their proposals for a Civil Service Bill in this parliamentary Session. The definition of a civil servant is one of the issues for consultation.

Contingency Plans

Mr. Paul Marsden: To ask the Minister for the Cabinet Office what additional powers the police have for arresting *(a)* UK and *(b)* foreign citizens following a declaration of a state of emergency. [195853]

Ruth Kelly: A declaration of a state of emergency under the Emergency Powers Act 1920 allows the Government to make special temporary legislation (emergency regulations) to deal with the most serious of emergencies. The content of any regulations made would depend entirely on the nature of the emergency and no powers would be conferred automatically. The need for any additional powers would be determined on a case by case basis, and given effect by the regulations.

Data Protection

Michael Fabricant: To ask the Minister for the Cabinet Office what procedures are in place *(a)* to check the criminal records of civil servants in the Department and agencies responsible to the Department who have access to computer databases containing confidential information on the public and *(b)* to ensure that there can be no improper use of computer databases containing confidential information on the public; and if she will make a statement. [194608]

Ruth Kelly: The Cabinet Office undertakes pre-appointment checks on all staff, which includes the completion of a character inquiry form asking individuals whether they have ever been convicted in a civil court or been the subject of a court martial. Cabinet Office employees are also subject to a criminal record check as part of the security vetting process described in the then Prime Minister's Statement of 15 December 1994, *Official Report*, columns 764–66W. Serving members of the Department are required to report convictions to Human Resources. This requirement is set out in the Department's code of conduct, which is available to all staff via the Department's intranet.

The Department's code of conduct includes a section dealing specifically with the Department's rules on the use and misuse of information, including electronic information and communications. The Department monitors emails for inappropriate use and a reminder on this appears at each login to the Department's IT system. All new users also receive an email on this matter when their accounts are opened.

Any misuse or abuse of information held within the Department (whether on computer databases or elsewhere) is subject to the Department's disciplinary procedures.

Departmental IT

Brian White: To ask the Minister for the Cabinet Office what percentage of the Department's *(a)* implemental and *(b)* planned computer systems use open source software; and what plans are in place to raise this level. [195644]

Ruth Kelly: There are no statistics currently available on the percentage of open source software (OSS) used in or planned to be used in the Cabinet Office. The Cabinet Office follows the Government's OSS Policy (version 2 was published on the 28 October 2004), which requires that Government consider OSS solutions alongside proprietary ones in information technology procurements and awards contracts on a value for money basis. It does not therefore have plans in place to raise the level of OSS use, but rather will make software procurement decisions on a case by case basis.

Departmental Staff

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Minister for the Cabinet Office what percentage of the staff of the office in *(a)* 2002 and *(b)* 2003 were people with disabilities. [196128]

Ruth Kelly: The percentage of staff in Government Departments with disabilities in 2002 and 2003 are detailed on the Cabinet Office statistics website, http://www.civilservice.gov.uk/management_information/statistical_information/statistics/archived_data/index.asp on the summary tables by disability for the relevant years. The tables show the numbers and percentage of staff who have declared a disability by all staff, and are as at 1 April each year.

Figures relating to 1 April 2004 are also available on our website at http://www.civilservice.gov.uk/management_information/statistical_information/statistics/whats_new/index.asp

Copies of these documents are also available in the Library.

Duchy of Lancaster

Mr. Rosindell: To ask the Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster how many visits he has made to land controlled by his Duchy since his appointment. [195956]

Mr. Milburn: I have met with Sir Michael Bunbury BT, Chairman, and Paul Clarke, Chief Executive and Clerk of the Council of the Duchy and I intend to visit Lancashire later this year, when I will be meeting a number of Duchy tenants and visiting Lancaster University.

Engagements

Mr. Rosindell: To ask the Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster if he will list his official engagements for the next three months. [195975]

Mr. Milburn: My official meetings include meetings with Cabinet colleagues relating to my cross-Government role in the co-ordination of Government policy; my responsibilities for the work of the Strategy Unit and the Policy Directorate; my Duchy of Lancaster role; and my membership of Cabinet.

Ministerial Meetings

Mr. Rosindell: To ask the Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster if he will make a statement on his cross-government role in the co-ordination of Government policy; which policies he has been responsible for overseeing; what meetings he has had with other Ministers of State, excluding Cabinet meetings, to formulate policy; and what the outcomes of these meetings were. [195968]

Mr. Milburn: For information on my responsibilities, I refer the hon. Member to the answer provided by my hon. Friend the Minister for the Cabinet Office to the hon. Member for New Forest, East (Dr. Lewis) on 14 October 2004, *Official Report*, column 358W.

For information on meetings, I refer the hon. Member to the answer I provided to the hon. and learned Member for Harborough (Mr. Garnier) on 20 October 2004, *Official Report*, column 720W.

Office Costs

Mr. Rosindell: To ask the Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster what his office's budget is for this financial year. [195951]

Mr. Milburn: I refer the hon. Member to the answer that my hon. Friend the Minister for the Cabinet Office gave to the hon. Member for New Forest, East (Dr. Lewis) on 3 November 2004, *Official Report*, columns 268–69W.

Press Officers

Dr. Julian Lewis: To ask the Minister for the Cabinet Office how many press officers the Department has employed in each of the past five years. [195675]

Ruth Kelly *[holding answer 2 November 2004]*: The Cabinet Office press office numbers also includes the Press Secretary to the Leader of the House of Commons and the Press Secretary to the Leader of the House of Lords.

For information on press officers between 2000 and 2002, I refer the hon. Member to the response given on 21 January 2003, *Official Report*, column 1050W.

The number of press officers employed in the Cabinet Office press office between 2003 and 2004 are shown in the table:

January	*Number*
2003	8.5
2004	[illegible]

Note:
.5 refers to an official whose duties were split between two roles, one being a part time press officer.

Public Engagements

Dr. Julian Lewis: To ask the Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster if he will list each of his public engagements for the week beginning 1 November. [197311]

Mr. Milburn: I refer the hon. Member to my answer to him on 2 November 2004, *Official Report*, column 233W.

Strategy Unit

Mr. Rosindell: To ask the Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster if he will make a statement on his function of overseeing the work of the *(a)* Strategy Unit and *(b)* Policy Directorate. [195978]

Mr. Milburn: I refer the hon. Member for Romford to the answer given to the hon. Member for New Forest, East (Dr. Lewis) by the Minister for the Cabinet Office, on 14 October 2004, *Official Report*, column 358W.

Temporary Staff

Dr. Julian Lewis: To ask the Minister for the Cabinet Office how many agency temporary staff have been working for the Department in each of the last five years, excluding those working for agencies for which no data are kept centrally. [195244]

Ruth Kelly *[holding answer 1 November 2004]*: According to records held centrally a total of 69 agency temporary staff were employed in the Cabinet Office at various times during 2003 and 147 so far in 2004. Central records for earlier years are not available.

The Queen

Mr. Rosindell: To ask the Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster how many meetings he has had with Her Majesty the Queen since his appointment. [195955]

Mr. Milburn: This information is withheld under exemption 3 of the Code of Practice of Access to Government Information.

FOREIGN AND COMMONWEALTH AFFAIRS

European Constitution

14. **Mr. Syms:** To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will make a statement on the ratification of the European Constitution. [196794]

Mr. MacShane: The Treaty must be ratified by all member states in line with their respective constitutional requirements. In the UK this means passing the necessary primary legislation through both Houses of Parliament. The Government have given the further commitment that the Treaty will only pass into UK law if directly approved by the British people in a referendum.

Iraq

15. **Mr. Plaskitt:** To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will make a statement on progress with voter registration in Iraq. [196795]

Mr. Rammell: The distribution of voter registration forms began on 1 November. The registration period will run until 15 December. It is encouraging that the Independent Electoral Commission of Iraq is already receiving forms back. All remains set for elections to be held on time in January.

22. **Richard Ottaway:** To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will make a statement on the grounds for the war in Iraq. [196802]

Mr. Rammell: Our decision to take military action to enforce Iraq's disarmament obligations, in accordance with the relevant UN Security Council resolutions, was taken as a last resort. The Iraqi regime's refusal to co-operate left us with no option. Our decision was supported by a large majority in the House of Commons on 18 March 2003.

Hugh Robertson: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what steps the Government are taking to ensure independent monitoring of the forthcoming elections in Iraq. [195179]

Mr. Rammell *[holding answer 1 November 2004]*: The Independent Electoral Commission of Iraq (IECI) is responsible for preparing for elections in January 2005. The IECI is being advised and trained by the United Nations, including on the training of independent Iraqi election monitors.

We will consider any request, that we might receive from the Iraqi authorities for assistance with independent monitoring of the elections.

Miss McIntosh: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will make a statement on EU-US relations on Iraq since the elections in the US. [197076]

Mr. MacShane: The EU, like the US, agrees that it should work in partnership with the Iraqi Interim Government and the Iraqi people in order to ensure a secure, stable, unified, prosperous and democratic Iraq that will make a positive contribution to the stability of the region.

Iran

16. **Andy Burnham:** To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will make a statement on his latest assessment of Iran's nuclear programme. [196796]

Mr. Straw: The Government continue to be concerned about Iranian programmes to enrich uranium, which could be used to produce weapons-grade fissile material for use in a nuclear weapons programme. These activities appear to be inconsistent with the planned extent of Iran's civil nuclear power programme, and have, in some cases, been pursued covertly for many years.

Mr. Foulkes: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what his latest assessment is of the threat posed by Iran's nuclear programme. [195905]

Mr. MacShane: The Government continue to be concerned about Iranian programmes to enrich uranium, which could be used to produce weapons-grade fissile material for use in a nuclear weapons programme. These activities appear to be inconsistent with the planned extent of Iran's civil nuclear power programme, and have, in some cases, been pursued covertly for many years.

Lebanon

17. **Mr. Luke:** To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs If he will make a statement on the presence of Syrian troops in Lebanon. [196797]

Mr. Rammell: We co-sponsored UN Security Council Resolution 1559, calling for the withdrawal of all foreign forces from Lebanon. My right hon. Friend the Foreign Secretary discussed the implications of UNSCR 1559 with Syrian Foreign Minister Shara'a when they met in London on 18 October. We will work for the withdrawal of the Syrian presence and a strengthening of Lebanese institutions. We expect all Lebanon's neighbours to respect Lebanon's sovereignty, territorial integrity and independence.

Sudan

18. **Rev. Martin Smyth:** To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what his assessment is of the human rights situation in Sudan. [196798]

Mr. Mullin: I refer the hon. Member to the answer I gave earlier.

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what representations he has made to the *(a)* Government of Sudan, *(b)* Special Representative of the UN Secretary and *(c)* International Committee of the Red Cross about an inter-agency strategy for the protection of the internally displaced population in Darfur which fully respects the UN Guiding Principles on Internal Displacement. [196082]

Mr. Mullin: The UK Government regularly raise with the Government of Sudan the need for them to ensure the protection of all civilians—including displaced persons—in Darfur, and to adhere by the UN Guiding Principles on Internal Displacement, including on the need for all returns to be voluntary and appropriate.

During our respective visits to Sudan, my right hon. Friend the Foreign Secretary and I both met the UN Special Representative Jan Pronk. We discussed the need for a co-ordinated approach by the international community to help bring security to Darfur.

We are therefore working with all agencies with a protection mandate, including UN agencies, the International Committee of the Red Cross and the African Union, to develop and implement a coherent protection strategy which has just been approved by the UN Country Team.

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what discussions he has had with the US Secretary of State about the US Administration's formal declaration of genocide in Darfur; and if the UK Government will make an equivalent declaration. [196199]

Mr. Mullin: My right hon. Friend the Foreign Secretary has had regular discussions with the US Secretary of State about the situation in Darfur. During discussions following Colin Powell's declaration to the Senate Foreign Relations Committee on 9 September, both the Foreign Secretary and Colin Powell agreed that the key priority was to stop the fighting. The UK and US Governments have been working closely to achieve this.

We therefore co-sponsored Security Council resolution 1564, which called for the establishment of the International Commission of Inquiry. This Commission began its work on 25 October. It will be for the Commission to determine the nature of the crimes which have taken place in Darfur and to make recommendations on how they should be dealt with.

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what estimate he has made of the number of displaced people in Southern Sudan. [196200]

Mr. Mullin: Sudan is host to Africa's longest running civil war, which has been raging in southern Sudan since 1983. While there are no reliable figures, estimates suggest that up to four million people have been displaced as a result.

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what estimate he has made of the number of fatalities in Southern Sudan since the war began in 1983. [196201]

Mr. Mullin: While there are no reliable figures, estimates suggest that up to two million people have been killed as a result of the civil war which began in 1983.

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what discussions he has had with the Home Secretary about the provision of international police monitors to support the national police force in Darfur. [196204]

Mr. Mullin: My right hon. Friend the Foreign Secretary has not discussed the issue of international police monitors with my right hon. Friend the Home Secretary. However, we strongly welcomed the inclusion of a civilian police monitoring element in the expanded African Union (AU) mission in Darfur. A UK police planner, on secondment from the Home Office, helped the AU develop its plan in Addis Ababa. We have made clear our willingness to provide personnel and technical expertise to the AU mission, should it be required.

Angus Robertson: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs (1) what assessment his Department has made of reports of the World Food Programme on 2 November of the Sudanese army and police surrounding internally displaced people camps near Nyala in Darfur; and if he will make a statement; [196669]

(2) whether his Department has sought an explanation from the Sudanese Government with regard to reports by the World Food Programme of moves by the Sudanese army and police to surround internally displaced people camps near Nyala in Darfur; and if he will make a statement. [196670]

Mr. Mullin: The Memorandum of Understanding between the Government of Sudan and the International Organisation for Migration (IOM) requires prior consultation before any displaced persons are removed or relocated. This was not done. We have made clear to the Government of Sudan that we hold them fully responsible. We expect the Government of Sudan actively to involve the UN, IOM and the African Union in any voluntary and appropriate return or relocation of displaced persons and we have demanded the withdrawal of Government of Sudan forces from around the camps.

Angus Robertson: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs (1) what reports he has received of Sudanese army movements in the Darfur region in Western Sudan since May; and if he will make a statement; [196671]

(2) what assessment his Department has made of the *(a)* movements, *(b)* activities and *(c)* impact of the Sudanese army in Darfur, Western Sudan; and if he will make a statement. [196672]

Mr. Mullin: The African Union ceasefire commission produces regular reports on ceasefire violations. All sides have been violating the N'Djamena ceasefire agreement since it was signed in April.

We continue to press the Government of Sudan on the need for it to refrain from all hostile military action in Darfur, under the obligations placed on it by Security Council resolutions 1556 and 1564.

We have also called on the Government of Sudan not to retaliate against increased rebel activity in the region, including attacks on police stations.

Angus Robertson: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what channels of communication *(a)* his Department and *(b)* UK representatives in Sudan have established with (i) the Justice and Equality Movement and (ii) the Sudan Liberation Army and Movement; and if he will make a statement. [196673]

Mr. Mullin: We are in regular contact with the Sudan Liberation Movement (SLM) and the Justice and Equality Movement, both through our embassy in Khartoum and the joint Department for International Development/Foreign and Commonwealth Office Sudan Unit in London. I met the leadership of the SLM in London on 13 October.

A UK observer has been present at the Darfur peace talks in Abuja, where he has been active in pressing the rebel groups and the Government of Sudan to reach a political solution.

Middle East

19. **Jim Knight:** To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what progress is being made on the Middle East Peace Process. [196799]

Mr. Rammell: On 26 October the Knesset voted in favour of Prime Minister Sharon's disengagement plan. We welcome the vote and hope the way is now clear for the withdrawals to be implemented. Any withdrawals would be a significant step towards the goal of a two-state solution. We look forward to working with international partners to make the best of this opportunity and to give new impetus to the Middle East Peace Process.

Richard Burden: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what discussions he has had with *(a)* his European Union counterparts and *(b)* the European Commission on securing compensation from Israel for the cost of damage to EU-funded projects in the Palestinian territories resulting from Israeli military action. [196574]

Mr. Rammell: The damage inflicted by Israeli military action on development projects, and the homes and livelihoods of ordinary Palestinian people, has been substantial. We and our European partners have repeatedly made representations to the Israeli Government about the scale of the damage. The European Commission has also sought compensation on several occasions. So far they have only been successful once, in relation to a food warehouse in Gaza. UK officials in Brussels continue to discuss with European Union partners how to take this forward.

Richard Burden: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what assessment he has made of the impact of *(a)* house demolitions and *(b)* the barrier being built by Israel on the town of Wadi Fukin; and what representations he is making on the issue. [196077]

Mr. Rammell: The Palestinian village of Wadi Fukin lies between the Green Line and the proposed route of the Israeli barrier, and near to several Israeli settlements. We understand that the Israel Defence Forces (IDF) have issued orders to appropriate Wadi Fukin agricultural lands for 'security purposes', although there have not as yet been any demolitions. IDF checkpoints have resulted in significant restrictions on freedom of movement for the town's population.

We fully recognise Israel's right to defend itself against terrorist attack. But it must act within the parameters of international law. The demolition of homes amounts to collective punishment, harms innocent civilians and exacerbates tension. We have repeatedly made clear our objections to the route of the barrier through, and demolitions within, the Occupied Territories. We have not made specific representations about the town of Wadi Fukin.

Maldives

20. **Mr. Amess:** To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs when he next plans to meet representatives from the Maldives Government to discuss the political situation in the country; and if he will make a statement. [196800]

Mr. Mullin: My right hon. Friend the Foreign Secretary has no current plans to meet representatives of the Maldivian Government. My hon. Friend the Minister of State for Trade and Investment (Mr. Alexander), will discuss the political situation with the Maldivian High Commissioner to London on 13 December.

Afghanistan

23. **David Cairns:** To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what assessment he has made of the 2004 Afghanistan opium survey by the United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime. [196803]

Mr. Rammell: The United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime has not yet published the results of its 2004 poppy cultivation survey in Afghanistan. We anticipate the launch of the survey later this month.

Mr. Simmonds: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what recent discussions have taken place between US and UK counter-narcotics officials in Afghanistan regarding the prioritisation of resources for *(a)* eradicating poppy cultivation and *(b)* providing alternative livelihoods for Afghan farmers. [196262]

Mr. Rammell: UK and US officials in London, Washington and Kabul have regular discussions on how best to support the Afghan Government's National Drug Control Strategy. We are already providing support to the Afghan Government for poppy eradication and alternative livelihoods for farmers as well as for interdiction to tackle drug trafficking, judicial reform, demand reduction and public awareness. We have committed more than £70 million over three years for counter-narcotics activity plus significant development funding and support for alternative livelihoods. We are working with our international partners to increase activity in all areas of the strategy.

Mr. Simmonds: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs how many successful counter-narcotics operations there have been in Afghanistan since the fall of the Taliban; and if he will make a statement. [196424]

Mr. Rammell: The UK has committed more than £70 million over three years for counter-narcotics activity plus significant development funding and support for alternative livelihoods. The UK supports the comprehensive Afghan National Drug Control Strategy, which includes law enforcement activity against traffickers, eradication, judicial reform, alternative livelihoods for farmers, demand reduction and public awareness.

Since it became operational in January 2003, the Afghan Special Narcotics Force, with UK funding and advice, has destroyed over 50 tonnes of opiates, 32 labs and made over 20 arrests. The Counter Narcotics Police of Afghanistan, which was created in January 2003 with UK support, report that to date they have seized 2.1 tons heroin and 13.6 tons opium, over 1.5 tons of which were achieved in UK supported operations together with 4.6 tons of precursor chemicals. The Afghan general and border police also seize opiates in the course of their work, but we do not have reliable figures.

Zimbabwe

Mr. Bellingham: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs when he next expects to meet his EU colleagues to discuss the effectiveness of EU sanctions against Zimbabwe. [196801]

Mr. Mullin: We regularly meet our EU colleagues to discuss the situation in Zimbabwe. If Zimbabwe does not comply with the EU's demands on human rights and democracy by February, when the current measures are due for renewal, we will be urging our EU partners to agree that those sanctions be renewed.

Emerging Democracies

John Mann: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what support his Department is giving to free trade unions in emerging democracies. [196804]

Mr. MacShane: The FCO continues to attach importance to the establishment of free trade unions as an integral part of a functioning civil society. Our ambassadors regularly raise the rights of unions to organise in a number of countries and protest when International Labour Organization core labour standards are infringed. We also support specific projects to aid the establishment and operation of free trade unions in emerging democracies and post conflict countries.

Armenian Community (Turkey)

Mr. Brady: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what steps he is taking to promote reconciliation between the Armenian community in Turkey and the Government of Turkey. [196115]

Mr. MacShane: As the European Commission's 6 October report noted, Turkey has put in place reforms to minority rights and religious freedoms in its bid to open accession negotiations with the EU. In January a 'Minority Issues Assessment Board' was set up to address the problems of non-Muslim minorities, such as the Armenians. Further progress, however, is still required and I continue to press the Turkish Government for further reforms.

Belarus

Mr. Rosindell: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs how many visits he has made to Belarus since his appointment as Foreign Secretary. [196155]

Mr. MacShane: Current EU policy, based on the 1997 General Affairs Council Conclusions, restricts ministerial level contact between the EU and Belarus. My right hon. Friend the Foreign Secretary has not visited Belarus during this time.

Mr. Rosindell: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs which external bodies monitored the recent elections in Belarus; and what their assessments were. [196156]

Mr. MacShane: According to the Central Election Commission in Belarus, approximately fifteen international organisations were given accreditation to monitor the 17 October 2004 parliamentary elections. The main organisations were the Organisation for Security and Cooperation in Europe's (OSCE) Office for Democratic Institutions and Human Rights (ODIHR) and organisations working together under the umbrella of the Commonwealth Independent States (CIS). In its preliminary findings and conclusions, the OSCE/ODIHR stated that the elections "fell significantly short of OSCE commitments for democratic elections". CIS observers concluded that the elections were "conducted in accordance with the norms of existing electoral legislation and were found free, fair, legitimate and transparent."

Mr. Rosindell: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will raise the situation in Belarus at the next meeting with his counterparts in Russia. [196157]

Mr. MacShane: My right hon. Friend the Foreign Secretary has no meetings planned in the immediate future with his Russian counterpart, Sergei Lavrov, although they speak regularly on the telephone. The agenda for the next call has not yet been set. We do discuss Belarus regularly in our bilateral contacts with Russia, including in Moscow via our Embassy. Our Ambassador has recently discussed Belarus with both Mr. Lavrov and Igor Ivanov, the Security Council chief.

Mr. Rosindell: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will make a statement on human rights violations in the Republic of Belarus. [196160]

Mr. MacShane: Belarus' record on human rights is poor and represents a continuing obstacle to the development of closer relations between the UK and Belarus. In the past year numerous independent newspapers, NGOs and opposition parties have faced increased harassment and closure, particularly in the run up to the 17 October parliamentary elections. We remain concerned about the situation and, together with our EU partners, regularly raise our concerns with the Belarusian authorities, both bilaterally through our Embassies in Minsk and in multilateral fora including the OSCE Permanent Council in Vienna.

Mr. Rosindell: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what meetings he has held with officials from the Republic of Belarus in the last 12 months; and what the outcome of those meetings was. [196161]

Mr. MacShane: My right hon. Friend the Foreign Secretary has not met with any Belarusian officials in the last 12 months.

Mr. Rosindell: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will make a statement on the recent elections in Belarus. [196162]

Mr. MacShane: I refer the hon. Member to the reply I gave to the hon. Member for Boston and Skegness (Mr. Simmonds) on 27 October 2004, *Official Report*, column 1249W.

Mr. Rosindell: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what plans he has to visit Minsk in the next 12 months. [196165]

Mr. MacShane: Current EU policy, based on the 1997 General Affairs Council Conclusions, restricts ministerial level contact between the EU and Belarus. Accordingly, my right hon. Friend the Foreign Secretary has no plans to visit Minsk in the next 12 months.

Mr. Rosindell: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will raise the situation in Belarus at the next meeting of the United Nations. [196166]

Mr. MacShane: My right hon. Friend the Foreign Secretary has no immediate plans to raise the situation in Belarus at the United Nations. The Government, together with our EU partners, have previously co-sponsored two resolutions at the United Nations Commission on Human Rights and will continue to consider further action within the framework of the United Nations.

Mr. Rosindell: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs whether the British Government recognises the legitimacy of the recent elections in Belarus. [196167]

Mr. MacShane: I refer the hon. Member to the declaration on the conduct of the election and referendum in Belarus issued by the EU on 20 October. We fully support this declaration. We are deeply concerned about the issues raised in the preliminary findings and conclusions of the Organisation for Security and Cooperation in Europe's (OSCE) International Election Observation Mission (IEOM). We will assess the conclusions of the OSCE IEOM's final report when this is published, and will press Belarus to implement any recommendations.

The full text of the EU declaration is available on the Presidency's website at http://www.eu2004.nl.

Mr. Rosindell: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will make a statement on involvement by Belarus in the illicit drugs trade. [196168]

Mr. Rammell: We have no evidence to suggest that trafficking groups are using Belarus as a significant route to smuggle drugs to the UK.

Mr. Rosindell: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what meetings he has held with the Council of the Belarusian Democratic Republic in Exile. [196172]

Mr. MacShane: My right hon. Friend the Foreign Secretary has not held any meetings with the Council of the Belarusian Democratic Republic in Exile this year.

Mr. Rosindell: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what recent representations he has received from the Council of the Belarusian Democratic Republic in Exile. [196173]

Mr. MacShane: My right hon. Friend the Foreign Secretary has not received any representations from the Council of the Belarusian Democratic Republic in Exile this year.

Correspondence

Mr. Lidington: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs when UKvisas will reply to the letter of 7 July from the hon. Member for Aylesbury about the case of Mr. S J of Pakistan, husband of Mrs. S H of Aylesbury (ref. GU100/86120/MJG; post 861093); and if he will make a statement. [197313]

Mr. Mullin: UKvisas replied to the hon. Member today.

Council of Ministers

Sue Doughty: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs pursuant to the answer of 13 September 2004, *Official Report*, column 1451W, on the Council of Ministers, whether he has concluded his further consideration of the matter. [195904]

Mr. MacShane: I am currently discussing the possibilities with ministerial colleagues.

Cyprus

Mr. Lyons: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what steps he is taking to encourage movement towards a settlement in Cyprus. [R] [196875]

Mr. MacShane: Following the referendum on the UN Secretary General's comprehensive settlement plan in which the Greek Cypriots voted "no" and the Turkish Cypriots "yes", the EU agreed to end the isolation of the Turkish Cypriots. In practice, we are working to reach EU agreement on regulations to enable preferential direct trade between north Cyprus and the rest of the EU, and to disburse the £259 million of aid allocated for the north of the island.

We support these measures as we believe it is important for the EU to bring Turkish Cypriots closer to Europe, and help to build trade links and reduce the economic gap between the two communities. This will make reunification more likely, easier to consolidate and less costly. Trade will increase trust and lay the foundations for co-operation in a reunified Cyprus. A widening wealth gap and continued economic division will make a solution much more difficult.

As I told the Greek Cypriot leadership during my recent visit to the island, we understand the concerns that made Greek Cypriots vote "no" to the UN plan and look forward to seeing Greek Cypriot proposals on moving the process forward. If we believe the proposals are reasonable and have a realistic chance of success, we will encourage the UN Secretary-General to re-engage and put all our resources and influence behind finding a solution on the basis of the Annan Plan that is acceptable to all sides. We continue to believe that the Annan Plan offers the only realistic basis for a settlement to the Cyprus problem.

Departmental Events (Funding)

Charles Hendry: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will list the *(a)* conferences, *(b)* publications, *(c)* initiatives, *(d)* projects and *(e)* receptions organised by his Department which have received funding from outside commercial bodies since May 1997, broken down by (i) funding body and (ii) amount paid. [196608]

Mr. Rammell: The Foreign and Commonwealth Office does not separately record the information requested. The information requested could be provided only at disproportionate cost.

Diego Garcia

Llew Smith: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs whether the United States military forces have established a store for radioactive waste on Diego Garcia. [196496]

Mr. Rammell: There is no radioactive waste store on Diego Garcia.

Equatorial Guinea

Mr. Ancram: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs when the Government was first informed of the Equatorial Guinea attempted coup plot. [195151]

Mr. Straw: In late January 2004.

General Affairs and External Relations Council

Mr. Hood: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what the outcome was of the General Affairs and External Relations Council held on 2–3 November; what the Government's stance was on the issues discussed, including its voting record; and if he will make a statement. [196923]

Mr. MacShane: The answer is as follows:

Outcome of the 2 November 2004 General Affairs and External Relations Council

I represented the UK at the General Affairs and External Relations Council (GAERC) in Brussels on 2 November in the absence of my right hon. Friend the Foreign Secretary. John Grant (UK's permanent representative to the EU) accompanied me. This was a short half-day GAERC, which dealt primarily with the preparation of the European Council held on 5 November 2004.

Conclusions were agreed on Iraq and Sudan.

General Affairs Session

Preparations For The European Council (5 November 2004)

The Council examined draft conclusions prepared by the Presidency for the European Council. These were finalised prior to the GAERC by officials. The Presidency outlined the main items that the European Council was due to discuss. These were:

Economic issues—Presentation by Mr. Wim Kok, chairman of a high-level group advising the Commission on the preparation of the mid-term review of the economic reform strategy laid down at Lisbon in March 2000.

Justice and home affairs—Adoption of a new multi-annual agenda for the EU's area of freedom, security and justice.

Communicating Europe—The European Council would examine how better to communicate to the public on the EU's work and its relevance to people's daily lives.

EU enlargement—The President of the Commission would present a number of policy documents regarding Bulgaria, Romania, Croatia and Turkey's applications to join the EU.

External relations—Conclusions were expected on Iran, Iraq, the Middle East and Sudan. The Conclusions agreed at the GAERC on Iraq and Sudan were forwarded to the Council and attached to a Council Declaration. Draft conclusions for Iran and the Middle East were not discussed at the GAERC. These were discussed in the run-up to the European Council.

The European Council would also meet for the first time with Mr. Josep Borrell, the new President of the European Parliament.

External Relations Session

Preparation Of The Eu-Russia Summit

The Council was briefed by the Presidency, the Commission and High Representative Javier Solana on preparation of the EU-Russia Summit to be held in The Hague on 11 November.

The summit, the fourteenth to be held under the EU-Russia Partnership and Co-operation Agreement, is due to address the building of four "common spaces" for the EU and Russia, namely the common economic space, the common space of freedom, security and justice, the common space of external security and the common space of research and education. International and regional issues, such as the Middle East (including Iran and Iraq), terrorism, Moldova and the South Caucasus, are also likely to be discussed. The Presidency noted that the four "spaces" were part of a single package.

AOB—Somalia

On the agenda at Italian request, the Council held a brief exchange of views on the situation in Somalia following the election of Mr. Abdullahi Yusuf as President on 10 October and the expected formation of a transitional government. The Presidency reiterated support for the peace process in Somalia and emphasised the EU's willingness to contribute to the country's stabilisation and reconstruction, notably through support for African Union initiatives.

AOB—African Great Lakes Region

The Council was briefed by the Belgian Foreign Minister on efforts to bring peace and security to the African Great Lakes region, with particular focus on the Democratic Republic of Congo, in the light of his recent visit in the region.

AOB—Guinea Bissau

The Council was briefed by the Portuguese Foreign Minister on recent developments in Guinea-Bissau following unrest on 6 October and on efforts led by the international community, including Portuguese-speaking States, with a view to contributing to a stabilisation of the situation.

AOB—Belarus

At the suggestion of the Polish delegation, the Council briefly discussed EU policy with regard to Belarus in the light of irregularities in the parliamentary elections and referendum on 17 October and attacks on opposition leaders and media representatives at a political demonstration in Minsk on 19 October. It will discuss the matter in greater detail at its meeting on 22 November.

Guide to the European Union

Mr. Brady: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what costs were incurred in the publication and distribution of the Guide to the European Union. [196394]

Mr. MacShane: The cost of printing 207,000 copies of the Guide to the EU is approximately £45,000. Distribution to public libraries and individuals is estimated at £6,000. No further decisions on distribution have been taken.

Mr. Brady: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what discussions he had with *(a)* opposition parties and *(b)* the No campaign to ensure that the Guide to the European Union published by his Department presents a balanced assessment of the proposed EU Constitution. [196395]

Mr. MacShane: None.

Mr. Brady: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what discussions he had with the Electoral Commission prior to publication of the Guide to the European Union to ensure compliance with the rules governing referendums. [196396]

Mr. MacShane: The Guide to the EU is part of the Government's commitment to provide information for the general public on the EU. In line with previous practice, discussions were not held with the Electoral Commission. The Foreign and Commonwealth Office is confident that the Guide to the EU meets Government Information and Communication Service guidelines on such publications.

HEALTH

Accident and Emergency

Mr. Wilshire: To ask the Secretary of State for Health on what date the Accident and Emergency Department at Ashford (Middlesex) hospital was closed and replaced by an emergency department; and what the difference is between the two facilities. [196526]

Ms Rosie Winterton *[holding answer 8 November 2004]:* I refer the hon. Member to my response of 25 March 2004, *Official Report,* columns 1047–48W.

Autism

Paul Holmes: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what guidance his Department provides to *(a)* general practitioners and *(b)* other primary care professionals on working with people with autism spectrum disorders. [194782]

Dr. Ladyman: The Department does not consider it necessary to supplement the training of primary care professionals with additional guidance. The Department, together with the Department for Education and Skills, produced "Autism Spectrum Disorders: Good Practice Guidance" in 2002 and the national service framework for children, young people and maternity services was published on 15 September, 2004.

Brazil Nuts

Mr. Key: To ask the Secretary of State for Health whether Brazil nuts are being withheld from sale due to health concerns; and if he will make a statement. [196488]

Miss Melanie Johnson: Brazil nuts are not being withheld from sale in the United Kingdom. The main exporting country for unshelled Brazil nuts, Brazil, has not been exporting this commodity into the European Union since July 2003, when the EU imposed special conditions on these imports to ensure they do not exceed the regulatory limits for aflatoxins.

Cancer Patients/Services

Mr. Chaytor: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many suspected cancer patients in the Bury North constituency were seen by an NHS consultant within two weeks of referral in each of the last 10 years; and if he will make a statement. [195348]

Miss Melanie Johnson: Information on the number of suspected cancer patients seen has been collected since 2001. This is shown in the table.

Waiting times for first out-patient appointment following urgent G(D)P referral with suspected cancer

	Quarter	National health service trust	Patients seen within 14 days	Percentage seen within 14 days
2000-01	4	Oldham NHS Trust	167	93.3
2000-01	4	Rochdale Healthcare NHS Trust	200	99.0
2000-01	4	North Manchester Healthcare NHS Trust	200	93.9
2000-01	4	Bury Healthcare NHS Trust	374	97.1
2001-02	1	Oldham NHS Trust	181	94.8
2001-02	1	Rochdale Healthcare NHS Trust	224	97.8
2001-02	1	North Manchester Healthcare NHS Trust	242	94.9
2001-02	1	Bury Healthcare NHS Trust	345	96.1
2001-02	2	Oldham NHS Trust	162	96.4
2001-02	2	Rochdale Healthcare NHS Trust	227	93.0
2001-02	2	North Manchester Healthcare NHS Trust	298	90.6
2001-02	2	Bury Healthcare NHS Trust	385	99.0
2001-02	3	Oldham NHS Trust	181	98.9
2001-02	3	Rochdale Healthcare NHS Trust	235	99.6
2001-02	3	North Manchester Healthcare NHS Trust	286	94.7
2001-02	3	Bury Healthcare NHS Trust	398	99.5
2001-02	4	Oldham NHS Trust	197	98.5
2001-02	4	Rochdale Healthcare NHS Trust	209	99.5
2001-02	4	North Manchester Healthcare NHS Trust	302	99.7
2001-02	4	Bury Healthcare NHS Trust	450	100.0
2002-03	1	Pennine Acute Hospitals NHS Trust	2,430	98.8
2002-03	2	Pennine Acute Hospitals NHS Trust	2,480	99.1
2002-03	3	Pennine Acute Hospitals NHS Trust	2,650	98.4
2002-03	4	Pennine Acute Hospitals NHS Trust	2,380	95.8
2003-04	1	Pennine Acute Hospitals NHS Trust	2,428	92.2
2003-04	2	Pennine Acute Hospitals NHS Trust	2,348	94.9
2003-04	3	Pennine Acute Hospitals NHS Trust	2,552	97.6
2003-04	4	Pennine Acute Hospitals NHS Trust	2,372	97.4
2004-05	1	Pennine Acute Hospitals NHS Trust	1,263	98.6

Source:
Department of Health forms QMCW and CWTDB.

Bob Russell: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what representations he has received on the location of specialist cancer services in the Mid-Anglia Cancer Network area. [196298]

Dr. Ladyman: Records show that one letter has been received in September 2004.

Care of the Elderly

Tom Cox: To ask the Secretary of State for Health with which organisations his Department *(a)* has discussed and *(b)* plans to discuss his proposals to improve national standards for the care of elderly people; and if he will make a statement. [195897]

Dr. Ladyman: On 27 October 2004, we announced the start of the review of the national minimum standards and the associated legislative framework for adult social care. We intend to involve a range of service user and provider organisations in the process of reviewing the standards and will consult fully on any resulting changes.

Cheshire and Merseyside Health Protection Agency

Mrs. Curtis-Thomas: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will make a statement on the role of the newly established Cheshire and Merseyside Health Protection Agency. [195488]

Miss Melanie Johnson: The Health Protection Agency's Cheshire and Merseyside Health Protection Agency was established on 1 April 2003 as an integral part of the new Health Protection Agency. It has offices n Moorgate Point in Knowsley, near Liverpool, and within the microbiology laboratory in the Countess of Chester hospital. The unit has 32 staff.

The unit's catchment area has 2.4 million residents, iving in a mix of rural, urban and city areas, including reas of major deprivation. The unit provides the full ange of local HPA services and support to the local ational health service and other partners, particularly for investigation of reportable cases and outbreaks of nfectious disease in community facilities and other settings.

There are significant connections with other agencies, particularly local authorities, in responding to chemical incidents and investigation of environmental hazards.

Children's Diets

Alistair Burt: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what assessment he has made of studies of the relationships between diet and hyperactivity or attention deficit hyperactivity disorder in children; whether he has plans for further studies in this area; and if he will make a statement. [195767]

Miss Melanie Johnson: The Food Standards Agency is funding research to look at a possible link between food additives and children's behaviour, for which current evidence is inconclusive. However, there are no plans to look at overall diet and hyperactivity.

We are committed to tackling children's diet and health issues. Action to address this will be taken forward in the Government's White Paper on improving health.

Choose and Book Initiative

Mr. Wills: To ask the Secretary of State for Health (1) what estimate he has made of the cost of offering, by December 2005, a choice of four to five alternative providers to all patients who need surgery; [195995]

(2) what estimate he has made of the cost of offering, by December 2008, the right to choose any healthcare provider which meets the Healthcare Commission's standards, which can provide the care within the price that the NHS will pay, and which can meet the 18 weeks' waiting time target to all patients. [195996]

Mr. Hutton: A delivery framework for the implementation of choose and book was published in August 2004. Local health communities are currently reporting on their state of readiness for 2005 and are required to confirm they have the necessary resources.

Detailed work on arrangements for 2008 is ongoing and will consider the cost implications of implementing the policy.

Mr. Burstow: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what the timetable is for implementation of the choose and book initiative in the NHS. [196235]

Mr. Hutton: From 2005, patients in the national health service will be offered a choice of hospital to attend. This will be underpinned by the NHS choose and book service. Some 10 million patients a year will have this choice from December 2005.

The decision when to implement the choose and book service locally will be based on organisational readiness and system compliance. Implementation has been taking place across the country since July 2004 and will continue during 2005.

Combined Heat and Power

Malcolm Bruce: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what percentage of *(a)* hospitals and *(b)* health centres in England utilise combined heat and power. [195941]

Mr. Hutton: In 2003–04, 7 per cent. of national health service hospital sites derived energy from combined heat and power plants (CHP). Information is not collected centrally on the number of health centres that use CHP.

Generally, CHP is most efficient and economically viable when it can be run continuously for long periods (usually in excess of 17 hours per day) and is therefore unlikely to be of significant benefit to buildings that are only used during part of the day.

Deaths after Surgery

David Davis: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many and what proportion of patients' deaths occurred within 30 days of surgery in Hull and the East Riding in *(a)* 2003 and *(b)* 2004. [194956]

Miss Melanie Johnson: The information requested is available from the Healthcare Commission's star rating website at

http://ratings2004.healthcarecommission.org.uk/Reports/AcuteTrustDetail.asp?TrustCode = RWA&alternativeReportType =

Dentistry

Mr. Gordon Prentice: To ask the Secretary of State for Health (1) how many dentists who were awarded a Dental Care Development Fund grant have subsequently stopped NHS dental treatment for adults; [190756]

(2) how many applications have been made by dentists in *(a)* England and *(b)* East Lancashire for a grant from the Dental Care Development Fund in each year since 2000; what conditions are attached to the grant concerning the dentist's commitment to NHS dentistry; and how many applications were successful. [190757]

Ms Rosie Winterton: In the 2000–01 financial year, grants were made to 72 health authorities (HAs), which were furthest from the Government's targets for improving access to national health service dentistry, for extending practices or purchasing new equipment to enable them to treat more patients. Responsibility for administering the scheme was delegated to the HAs with advice that they imposed the following conditions:

that the practices guaranteed an average level of return of no less than 100 new NHS patients registered per £1,250 granted;

that the additional capacity was maintained for an agreed period, normally at least three years; and

that the practice contributed to the project normally at a level around 50 per cent. of the amount granted.

Mr. Burstow: To ask the Secretary of State for Health pursuant to the answer of 23 September 2004, *Official Report*, columns 1959–61W, on dentistry, how many dental practices were shown on the nhs.uk website on 8 September. [191773]

Ms Rosie Winterton: The number of general dental service or personal dental service practices in England shown on the nhs.uk website as accepting new national health service patients on 8 September 2004 is shown in the table.

	Number
Registering children aged 0–18 years for NHS treatment	3,938
Providing occasional NHS treatment to non-registered patients	1,572
Registering charge-exempt adults for NHS treatment	2,968
Registering charge-paying adults for NHS treatment	2,604
Total number of dental practices in England on the 'nhs.uk' website	8,669

Sandra Gidley: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many dental technicians had the necessary skills to construct dentures in England in each year since 1997. [195523]

Ms Rosie Winterton: As dental technician is not yet a registrable profession, there is no official record of their numbers or competencies. We estimate that, since 1997, the number of dental technicians who are capable of manufacturing or contributing to the manufacture of dentures has remained fairly constant at about 9,000. Subject to the approval of an Order to be made under Section 60 of the Health Act 1999, we plan to give the General Dental Council powers to register dental technicians early in 2005.

Sandra Gidley: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what proportion of dentists' training dealt with dentures in each year since 1997; and if he will make a statement. [195525]

Ms Rosie Winterton: Precise information is not available centrally, but I understand from the General Dental Council, which is responsible for the curriculum for dental undergraduate education, that the proportion has reduced. The reasons are that there has been an encouraging reduction in the number of edentulous patients—from 37 per cent. of adults in 1968 to 12 per cent. in 1998—and recognition that most dentists now delegate the manufacture of dentures to dental technicians.

Dermatology

Mr. Burstow: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what estimate he has made of the proportion of patients waiting over 13 weeks for a first out-patient appointment that is comprised of dermatology referrals; and if he will make a statement. [196193]

Mr. Hutton: At 30 June 2004 the number of patients, waiting over 13 weeks for a dermatology first out-patient appointment was 7 per cent. of the total number of patients waiting for a first out-patient appointment. The national health service is on track to achieve the target of having no patients waiting over 13 weeks for first out-patient appointments by December 2005.

Mr. Burstow: To ask the Secretary of State for Health (1) if he will make a statement on the numbers of specialists in dermatology; [196239]

(2) what the vacancy rates for dermatology specialists were in each strategic health authority in the last year for which figures are available; and if he will make a statement. [196247]

Mr. Hutton: As at June 2004, there were 425 consultant dermatologists working in the national health service in England. This is an increase of 114, or 37 per cent., since September 1997.

Between September 1997 and 2003, the number of dermatologists in the registrar group increased by 42, or 37 per cent.

We are also increasing training capacity within the specialty. Between 2002–03 and 2004–05, central funding has been distributed to support the implementation of 27 additional specialist registrar (SpR) posts in dermatology. All the posts have now been implemented. Trusts have also had the opportunity to create up to 40 locally funded SpR training opportunities and the latest survey suggests 23 are due to be implemented so far.

The table shows the three-month vacancy rates for consultant dermatologists by strategic health authority (SHA), as at March 2004. The national three-month vacancy rate for dermatology has decreased from 6.1 per cent. in March 2003 to 4.7 per cent. in March 2004. This comes at the same time as increases in the dermatology workforce.

Three month vacancy rate and number for consultants in dermatology by SHA for England: March 2004

	3 month vacancy rate (percentage)	*3 month vacancy number*	*Staff in post (whole-time equivalent)*	*Staff in post (headcount)*
England	4.7	18	373	427
Avon, Gloucestershire and Wiltshire	0.0	0	17	19
Bedfordshire and Hertfordshire	9.7	1	9	12
Birmingham and the Black Country	0.0	0	17	18
Cheshire and Merseyside	6.0	1	16	17
County Durham and Tees Valley	15.1	2	11	12
Cumbria and Lancashire	8.4	1	11	12
Dorset and Somerset	[1]—	0	6	7
Essex	[1]—	0	7	8
Greater Manchester	10.8	2	17	19

Three month vacancy rate and number for consultants in dermatology by SHA for England: March 2004

	3 month vacancy rate (percentage)	3 month vacancy number	Staff in post (whole-time equivalent)	Staff in post (headcount)
Hampshire and Isle of Wight	0.0	0	12	16
Kent and Medway	19.7	2	8	9
Leicestershire, Northamptonshire and Rutland	0.0	0	12	12
Norfolk, Suffolk and Cambridgeshire	4.9	1	20	21
North and East Yorkshire and Northern Lincolnshire	[1]—	0	9	9
North Central London	0.0	0	15	17
North East London	0.0	0	15	18
North West London	11.2	2	16	23
Northumberland, Tyne and Wear	[1]—	1	8	9
Shropshire and Staffordshire	[1]—	0	9	10
South East London	0.0	0	23	28
South West London	[1]—	0	9	10
South West Peninsula	0.0	0	11	11
South Yorkshire	6.5	1	14	16
Special Health Authorities and other statutory bodies	[2]—	0	0	0
Surrey and Sussex	0.0	0	19	21
Thames Valley	10.9	2	16	22
Trent	0.0	0	16	17
West Midlands South	0.0	0	11	12
West Yorkshire	9.1	2	20	22

[1] Where the sum of the staff in post and number of vacancies is less then ten.

[2] Where the sum of the staff in post and number of vacancies is zero.

Notes:

1. Three month vacancies are vacancies which trusts are actively trying to fill, which had lasted for three months or more (whole time equivalents).
2. Three month vacancy rates are three month vacancies expressed as a percentage of three month vacancies plus staff in post.
3. Vacancy and staff in post numbers are rounded to the nearest whole number.
4. Percentages are rounded to one decimal place.

Eye Tests

Jon Cruddas: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many pensioners in the Dagenham constituency have had free eye tests since they were introduced. [196452]

Dr. Ladyman: Figures for the number of sight tests by constituency, or pensioners are not collected centrally. However the Department does collect statistics on the number of sight tests paid for patients aged 60 and over.

These data are shown in the table, which shows the number of national health service sight tests paid by Barking and Havering health authority (HA) for the years ending 31 March 2000 to 2003 and the primary care trust (PCT), covering Barking and Dagenham for the year ending 31 March 2004.

General ophthalmic services: number of sight tests paid by Barking and Havering HA for patients aged 60 and over for the years ending 31 March 2000 to 2004

	HA/PCT name	Number of sight tests for people aged 60 and over (Thousand)
1999–2000	Barking and Havering	24.9
2000–01	Barking and Havering	29.3
2001–02	Barking and Havering	33.1
2002–03	Barking and Havering	36.1
2003–04	Barking and Dagenham PCT	9.3
	Havering PCT	26.0
Total	Barking and Havering	35.3

Notes:

1. Eligibility for NHS sight tests was extended to patients aged 60 and over from 1 April 1999.
2. PCTs took over responsibilities from HAs in October 2002.

It should be noted that the number of sight tests cannot be equated to the numbers of patients. Most people do not come back for a sight test within the year, but some patients suffering from medical conditions are advised to have re-examinations sooner.

GP Vacancies

Mr. Lansley: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what the general practitioner vacancy rates were for each primary care trust in England at *(a)* 31 March 2003, *(b)* 30 September 2003, *(c)* 31 March 2004 and *(d)* 30 September 2004. [195806]

Mr. Hutton: The information requested is not available at primary care trust level.

The estimated three-month general practitioner vacancy rate in England decreased from 3.4 per cent. in March 2003 to 3 per cent. in March 2004.

EU Committees

Angus Robertson: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many times during the Greek presidency of the EU the *(a)* Advisory Committee on Medical Devices, *(b)* Committee of senior officials on public health and *(c)* Pharmaceutical Committee met; when and where these meetings took place; which UK Government expert was present at each meeting; what (i) technical and (ii) financial issues were raised by the UK Government expert at each meeting; what recommendations each Committee produced during that period; what actions were (A) proposed and (B) taken by (1) the EU and (2) the UK Government as a result of each Committee's recommendations; and if he will make a statement. [196100]

Mr. Hutton: The Medical Devices Expert's Group (MDEG) met once during the Greek Presidency. The meeting took place on 7–8 April 2003 in Brussels. A senior official from the Medicines and Healthcare products Regulatory Agency (MHRA) represented the United Kingdom. There were no technical or financial issues raised by the UK representative at the meeting. MDEG is chaired by the EU Commission and composed of representatives from member states, industry, Notified Bodies and the various Standard organisations. It has no decision making powers and accordingly there were no recommendations proposed by it during the Greek Presidency.

The Committee of Senior Officials on Public Health met during the Greek presidency, on 30 June in Brussels. UK Government experts attended the meeting, at which a wide range of relevant topics was discussed. These included EU enlargement, the status of third country nationals, exchange of information on professionals' fitness to practise, the Tennah-Durez ECJ judgment, implementation of the SLIM Directive, and updates on implementation in member states of directives on mutual recognition of professional qualifications in respect of dentists, doctors, nurses and midwives. Actions flowing from these discussions have been pursued through the appropriate channels.

The Pharmaceutical Committee met once during the Greek Presidency. The meeting took place on 15 May 2003 in Brussels. The UK is usually represented by senior officials from the Department and the MHRA. There were no technical or financial issues raised by the UK representative at the meeting. The Pharmaceutical Committee is an advisory committee and has no decision-making powers. There were, therefore, no recommendations proposed by the committee during the Greek Presidency.

Hospital Funding

Mr. Wilshire: To ask the Secretary of State for Health (1) what the *(a)* brought forward debt at the start of the year, *(b)* overspending during the year before the provision of any special funding to help balance the books, *(c)* carried forward debt at the end of the year and *(d)* amount of special funding provided by the NHS Bank to address the debt was for the Ashford and St. Peter's hospitals NHS trust in each of the last five financial years; [196523]

(2) what the projected overspend is for 2004–05 before the deduction of the £13 million special grant for the Ashford and St. Peter's hospitals NHS trust. [196524]

Ms Rosie Winterton *[holding answer 8 November 2004]:* Published information about debt, overspend, projected overspend and special funding for Ashford and St. Peter's hospitals national health service trust is shown in the table.

At month six, the trust is forecasting a break-even year end position after £13 million special assistance.

Financial year	*Brought forward*	*Surplus deficit before special assistance*	*Special assistance*	*Carried forward*
1999–2000	1,725	-1,613	0	112
2000–01	112	-4,846	0	-4,734
2001–02	-4,734	-1,409	0	-6,143
2002–03	-6,143	-10,828	9,500	-7471
2003–04	-7,471	-18,495	18,500	-7,466

Notes:

1. NHS Bank funding commenced in 2000–03.
2. Minus sign represents deficits.

Mr. Wilshire: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how much additional funding was made available to Ashford and St. Peter's hospitals NHS trust for implementing the new consultants' contracts; and what percentage of the total cost this figure represents. [196525]

Ms Rosie Winterton *[holding answer 8 November 2004]:* We do not allocate funding to national health service trusts. NHS trusts, as providers of services, receive the bulk of their revenue funding from primary care trusts (PCTs), via their commissioning arrangements.

The local delivery planning process ultimately informs the level of funding for provider organisations. The funding for NHS trusts is therefore dependent on the level of services they are able to contract with commissioning PCTs.

Hysterectomy

Mr. Edwards: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what estimate he has made of the cost to the NHS of post-hysterectomy treatment, including drug therapy, in the last year for which figures are available. [195031]

Dr. Ladyman: This information is not available centrally.

IT

Dr. Murrison: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will place in the Library copies of the minutes of meetings of the board of the national programme for IT in the NHS. [196985]

Mr. Hutton *[holding answer 8 November 2004]:* We have no current plans to do so.

The board of the national programme for information technology (NPfIT) is primarily concerned with regular review of the performance of these private sector organisations. The contracts between the NPfIT and the organisations concerned include legally binding confidentiality undertakings, in line with standard commercial contract terms. Agreement to publish board minutes would, therefore, put the NPfIT in breach of these undertakings.

Mr. Burstow: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what research has been undertaken by the National Programme for IT on the views of *(a)* hospital doctors and nurses, *(b)* general practitioners and other practice staff and *(c)* all other NHS staff on the introduction of the new IT system for the NHS. [196240]

Mr. Hutton: Engaging clinicians and national health service management in planning and preparation for successful implementation of the national programme has always been, and continues to be, a key priority. As well as the national professional bodies and groups, the national programme team has also consulted closely with individual expert primary and secondary care practitioners, including practising general practitioners. A series of workshops has also been held across the NHS involving clinicians to help inform the information technology development by suppliers.

In addition, the care record development board, established in July and chaired by Mr. Harry Cayton, the Department's director for patients and the public, has its membership drawn from clinicians as well as representatives of patients and social care. The board brings together patients, public, social and healthcare professionals to provide clinical and patient input into the national programme's work. The work of the board will enable wider consultation and input into the way the NHS care records service is being developed and aims to ensure the NHS maximises the benefits that the new IT has to offer to support improvements in care.

Arrangements for clinical engagement are being further strengthened by the appointment of clinical leads to represent GPs, hospital doctors, nurses and allied health professionals at national, cluster and local health community level.

Mr. Burstow: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how the National Programme for IT is meeting concerns of general practitioners about *(a)* the change over to the new IT system and *(b)* the loss of IT systems in which local GP practices have previously invested. [196241]

Mr. Hutton: The national programme for information technology (NPfIT) has always made it clear that the best use should and will be made of the existing asset base so long as it continues to provide value and be fit for purpose. General practitioners are being advised that, certainly in the short and medium term, existing clinical systems can continue to be used subject to compliance criteria. This message has been repeated in guidance published by the national programme, aimed at existing systems suppliers. No practice will be expected to move from current systems until the same or greater levels of functionality than GPs currently enjoy are available under the national programme, unless that is part of an agreed strategy or by choice for specific reasons.

However, in the longer term it may be necessary for some existing systems to be replaced or integrated. At that stage each GP practice will have a choice of more than one system so long as these have been accredited against national standards and can deliver the required functionality. This undertaking is spelt out in guidance agreed jointly with the British Medical Association.

Individual GP practices will receive funding to upgrade to NPfIT systems through their primary care trusts. Systems provided by NPfIT will be at no cost to GP practices. In addition, the National Programme will cover centrally the cost of supplier-developed training material, including e-training services, and training the trainers in the use of new IT services.

Medicines (Children and Infants)

Mr. Burstow: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will estimate the frequency of medication errors in the administration of medicines to children. [194262]

Ms Rosie Winterton: Because of low reporting rates, the current incidence of medication errors within the national health service is not known. The Government have established the National Patient Safety Agency (NPSA) to collect, collate, review and analyse error reports and produce and disseminate solutions to ensure that we learn from errors and reduce, risk. Medication errors are an early priority for the NPSA, and its reporting and learning system will provide data on their frequency overall, and in children.

We are committed to making drug treatment for children as safe as possible and have taken a number of steps to achieve this. The Chief Pharmaceutical Officer issued guidance for health professionals and NHS organisations in January this year, entitled "Building a safer NHS for patients: improving medication safety." This included a chapter on improving medication in children. The national service framework for children, young people and maternity services, launched in October includes a standard for medicines management in children, with a chapter on safe medication practice.

Additionally, the Government launched a strategy on medicines for children in August this year, which among other issues highlighted the need for a single source of authoritative information on paediatric prescribing. The first children's British National Formulary will be available during the summer of 2005 and will be published annually thereafter.

NHS Foundation Trusts

Mr. Dobson: To ask the Secretary of State for Health when the Regulator of NHS foundation trusts completed the vetting of the finances of each successful applicant for foundation status. [195080]

Mr. Hutton: Monitor (whose statutory name is the independent regulator of national health service foundation trusts) is an independent corporate body established under the Health and Social Care (Community Health and Standards) Act 2003. It is Monitors responsibility to authorise, monitor and regulate national health service foundation trusts (NHSFTs).

In authorising NHSFTs, Monitor must be satisfied that they are legally constituted, financially sustainable, effectively governed and locally representative. These are essential requirements for NHSFTs to be able to operate with sufficient autonomy, to deliver NHS priorities and to become increasingly responsive to local needs.

The authorisation process is a critical part in this process. Careful assessment at this stage ensures that financially sustainable NHSFTs with responsible management are established which will create a robust system and minimise the need for intervention. I am informed by the chairman of Monitor that full details of the authorisation process are set out in Monitor's publication "Applying for authorisation as an NHS Foundation Trust—A Guide for Applicants" (reference IRG 15/04) which is publicly available on their website at www.monitor-nhsft.gov.uk.

I am further informed by the chairman of Monitor that consideration of each successful applicant for NHSFT status, which included the vetting of their finances, was completed at meetings of Monitor's board as follows:

NHS Foundation Trust	*Date of board meeting*	*Date of authorisation*
Basildon and Thurrock University Hospitals	30 March 2004	1 April 2004
Bradford Teaching Hospitals	30 March 2004	1 April 2004
Countess of Chester Hospital	30 March 2004	1 April 2004
Doncaster and Bassetlaw Hospitals	30 March 2004	1 April 2004
Homerton University Hospital	30 March 2004	1 April 2004
Moorfields Eye Hospital	30 March 2004	1 April 2004
Peterborough and Stamford Hospitals	30 March 2004	1 April 2004
Royal Devon and Exeter	30 March 2004	1 April 2004
The Royal Marsden	30 March 2004	1 April 2004
Stockport	30 March 2004	1 April 2004
Cambridge University Hospitals	28 June 2004	1 July 2004
City Hospitals Sunderland	28 June 2004	1 July 2004
Derby Hospitals	28 June 2004	1 July 2004
Gloucestershire Hospitals	28 June 2004	1 July 2004
Guy's and St. Thomas'	28 June 2004	1 July 2004
Papworth Hospital	28 June 2004	1 July 2004
Queen Victoria Hospital	28 June 2004	1 July 2004
Sheffield Teaching Hospitals	28 June 2004	1 July 2004
University College London	28 June 2004	1 July 2004
University Hospitals Birmingham	28 June 2004	1 July 2004

Minutes of the meetings are publicly available on Monitor's website.

Mr. Burstow: To ask the Secretary of State for Health (1) at which NHS Foundation trusts other than Bradford Teaching Hospitals NHS Foundation Trust, Monitor has notified his Department of financial difficulties; [194247]

(2) when Monitor notified his Department about the financial difficulties at Bradford Teaching Hospitals NHS Foundation Trust; [194248]

(3) what information Monitor provides to his Department on a regular basis about the operation of foundation trusts. [194249]

Mr. Hutton: Monitor, the statutory name of which is the independent regulator of national health service foundation trusts (NHSFTs), is an independent corporate body established under the Health and Social Care (Community Health and Standards) Act 2003. It is therefore Monitor's responsibility to authorise, monitor and regulate NHSFTs.

I am informed by the chairman of Monitor that the monitoring exercise for the first quarter of the financial year identified that financial performance at the Bradford Teaching Hospitals NHSFT was significantly behind that forecast at the point of authorisation. At its meeting of 29 September 2004, Monitor's board concluded that formal action under section 23 of the Act (failing NHS foundation trusts) was necessary. Minutes of the meeting are publicly available on Monitor's website at www.monitor-nhsft.gov.uk.

Section 10 of the Act requires Monitor to publish a copy of any notice made under section 23 on the register of NHSFTs, which is publicly available on Monitor's website. This is the first and only occasion, to date, on which Monitor has exercised its powers under section 23 of the Act.

A close working relationship is required at all levels between Monitor and the Department to ensure that both parties can effectively perform their statutory functions to ensure that the NHS continues to deliver a high and improving quality of service to the public.

A memorandum of understanding was signed in September 2004, which sets out how this relationship works in practice, while at the same time safeguarding Monitor's independence. It includes an undertaking that Monitor and the Department will keep each other promptly and regularly informed about all developments and issues in which the other party may have an interest, and to ensure that the other party is given adequate warning of, and sufficient information about, any planned public announcements which might be considered to affect the interests of the other party. A copy of the memorandum is available in the Library.

In keeping with the principles set out in the memorandum of understanding between them, Monitor advised the Department of its board's decision in early October.

Mr. Dobson: To ask the Secretary of State for Health (1) how many staff with *(a)* accountancy and *(b)* similar qualifications work for the Regulator of NHS Foundation Trusts; [194115]

(2) how many of the staff of the Regulator of NHS Foundation Trusts previously worked in the NHS. [194116]

Mr. Hutton: Monitor, the statutory name of which is the independent regulator of national health service foundation trusts (NHSFTs), is an executive non-departmental public body and has statutory power to employ its own staff.

I am informed by the chairman of Monitor that it is by design a small organisation of less than 50 people, which has employed a variety of staff on a permanent, fixed-term, secondment and contract basis since its creation in January 2004. Staff engaged in the assessment of applicants for NHSFT status come from a variety of backgrounds, including business, financial analysis, accountancy and the NHS. Although the profile of Monitor's establishment is variable during the present start-up phase, currently, 20 of its staff are qualified accountants and three are qualified lawyers. Nine staff have previously worked in the NHS.

Mr. Dobson: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what the salary is of the *(a)* chair and *(b)* chief executive of the Regulator of NHS Foundation Trusts. [194117]

Mr. Hutton: Monitor, the statutory name of which is the independent regulator of national health service foundation trusts, is an independent corporate body established under the Health and Social Care (Community Health and Standards) Act 2004. Dr. William Moyes was appointed by my right hon. Friend, the Secretary of State (Dr. Reid), as executive chairman of Monitor in December 2003. His salary is £195,000 per annum.

Mr. Dobson: To ask the Secretary of State for Health whether the *(a)* chairman, *(b)* chief executive and *(c)* other staff of the Regulator of NHS Foundation Trusts have experience of (i) electoral registration and (ii) the conduct of elections. [194179]

Mr. Hutton: Before a national health service trust can be authorised as a NHS foundation trust (NHSFT), Monitor, the statutory name of which is the independent regulator of NHSFTs, must be satisfied that there is a board of directors and a board of governors, formed in accordance with the NHSFT's constitution.

Elections must be held in accordance with the election rules incorporated in the constitution. Any election, if contested, must be by secret ballot. In 2005, the Department will be issuing regulations on the conduct of elections. In the meantime, we have issued guidance on electoral systems for NHS foundation trusts and a set of detailed model rules for elections.

I am informed by the chairman of Monitor that all elections for all but two out of the 20 NHSFTs authorised to date were conducted by Electoral Reform Services, the specialist balloting and related services wing of the Electoral Reform Society. In the other two cases, they were conducted by the local authority and Computershare respectively. This information, together with full details of the election results for the 20 NHSFTs authorised to date, is contained in Monitor's publication, "NHS Foundation Trusts—report on elections and membership (August 2004)" [IRREP 01/04], which is available on Monitor's website at www.monitor-nhsft.gov.uk. I understand that a copy of this report was sent to the hon. Member when it was first published. Copies are also available in the Library.

NHS Logistics Authority

Jon Trickett: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many people are employed by the NHS Logistics Authority in *(a)* the Hemsworth constituency, *(b)* the Yorkshire and Humber region and *(c)* England. [195024]

Mr. Hutton: No persons are employed in the Hemsworth constituency. We believe that the NHS Logistics Authority Normanton distribution centre is entirely within the Pontefract and Castleford constituency. There are 283 people employed at the Normanton distribution centre which is the number employed in the Yorkshire and Humber region. The NHS Logistics Authority employs 1483 people in England.

Jon Trickett: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what the total budget of the NHS Logistics Authority was in each of the last five years. [195026]

Mr. Hutton: The total budget for the NHS Logistics Authority for the last five years is shown in the table.

	Operating costs (£ million)
2000–01	58.2
2001–02	63.4
2002–03	64.3
2003–04	68.3
2004–05	70.7

NHS Treatment Abroad

Tom Cox: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many people living in the Greater London area have been treated under the NHS in European hospitals; and if he will make a statement. [195369]

Mr. Hutton: The Government are committed to expanding the national health service more than ever before to reduce waiting times and to give patients greater choice. This includes making use of the spare capacity in overseas health systems. Since January 2002, we have been sending patients to Europe for simple elective surgery procedures such as knee and hip replacements, hernia and cataract procedures. From January 2002 to May 2004, 872 patients were treated in hospitals in France and Belgium.

Since October 2002, the London patient choice project has been offering choice of hospital at six months for patients across 32 primary care trusts in London. It has been offering patients who would otherwise wait more than six months for elective care the choice of an alternative provider for faster treatment. These providers include hospitals in Belgium. By the end of September 2004, 436 patients from the Greater London area have chosen to receive their hospital treatment in Europe.

Prescription Charges

Mr. Burstow: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will estimate the total cost of administering *(a)* the system for collecting prescription charges and *(b)* prescription charge exemptions in the last year for which figures are available. [192902]

Ms Rosie Winterton: In 2003–04, the cost in England of administering the sale of prescription pre-payment certificates was around £1.5 million. Other costs, including those for charge collecting activities by community pharmacists and dispensing doctors, or those for investigating potential fraud, are not separately identifiable.

In 2003–04, the cost in England of administering maternity and medical exemptions from prescription charges was around £1.3 million.

In 2003–04, the cost in England of administering arrangements for certificates on the grounds of low income was around £3.92 million. However, this covers exemption from a range of other health costs and includes the costs of applications from people who are exempt from prescription charges on grounds such as age but are seeking help with other costs.

In 2003–04, the cost in England of administering the prescription charge refund scheme, for those who are exempt but initially pay the charge, amounted to £70,000.

Radiation Exposure (Eastern Europe)

Llew Smith: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what plans he has to take up recommendation nine from chapter four of the final report of the Committee Examining Radiation Risks of Internal Emitters concerning the availability of data sets from Russia, Kazakhstan and the Ukraine on worker exposure to radiation. [195392]

Miss Melanie Johnson: The Department is considering all of the recommendations in both the report of the Committee Examining Radiation Risks of Internal

Emitters (CERRIE) and the advice to Government contained in the 9th report of the Committee on Medical Aspects of Radiation in the Environment (COMARE) and will respond in due course.

Radiographers/Radiologists

Mr. Swire: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will make a statement on the number of *(a)* radiographers and *(b)* radiologists in the NHS. [195988]

Mr. Hutton: Since September 1997, numbers of consultants in clinical radiology have increased by 417 or 29 per cent. Consultant numbers are expected to increase further as a result of the significant investment in training capacity in this speciality.

Between 2002–03 and 2004–05, 166 additional centrally funded specialist registrar posts have been allocated to clinical radiology. In 2005–06, there are plans in place to create up to 60 further posts for the new clinical radiology academies.

Between September 1997 and 2003, the number of radiographers employed in the national health service has increased by 1,573 or 13 per cent. Since 1996–97, the number of students entering training to become a radiographer has more than doubled.

Residential Care (Greater London)

Tom Cox: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many people are living in long-term residential care within the Greater London area. [194628]

Dr. Ladyman: Information about the number of places in residential care is collected, but information about the number of people in those places is not centrally available.

In March 2001 there were 47,400 care home places in London for adults aged 18 and over. This includes 29,300 places in residential care homes and 18,100 places in general and mental nursing homes, private hospitals and clinics.

I understand from the chair of the Commission for Social Care Inspection (CSCI) that figures for later years were collected by the National Care Standards Commission, and now CSCI, but comparable details are not available.

Skipton Fund

Pete Wishart: To ask the Secretary of State for Health (1) how many recipients of the Skipton Fund have previously been beneficiaries of the Macmillan Fund; and if he will make a statement; [193658]

(2) how many of those who have received financial compensation from the Skipton Fund, were Scottish residents; and if he will make a statement. [193659]

Miss Melanie Johnson: Information on the number of stage one applications that have been paid by the Skipton Fund is shown in the table.

	Paid stage one applicants
England	1,508
Wales	119
Scotland	270
Northern Ireland	63
Total	[1]1,960

[1] Figures as at 22 October 2004.

The Skipton Fund has indicated that 329 ex-gratia payments were paid to registrants of the Macfarlane Trust.

Smoking

Keith Vaz: To ask the Secretary of State for Health for how many people who died in the UK in each of the last three years smoking cigarettes was identified as a primary cause. [196006]

Miss Melanie Johnson: Information is not available in the form requested. The Health Education Authority 1998 report: "The UK Smoking Epidemic: Deaths in 1995" estimated that in the UK in 1995, smoking caused more than 120,000 deaths of people aged 35 years or more. A copy of this report is available in the Library.

David Taylor: To ask the Secretary of State for Health when the findings of the Health Development Agency's study into the number of smoking-attributable deaths in the UK each year will be published. [195059]

Miss Melanie Johnson: The Health Development Agency's study into the number of smoking-attributable deaths in the United Kingdom each year will be published shortly.

Mr. Pike: To ask the Secretary of State for Health (1) what provision his Department has made to provide help to those who want to quit smoking to access services where they work, where this is different from where they are registered as a health patient; and if he will make a statement; [195731]

(2) what representations he has received regarding barriers to accessing smoking cessation clinics; and if he will make a statement; [195733]

(3) what representations he has received regarding difficulties in accessing smoking cessation clinics for those who travel to work or work irregular hours; what proposals he has to enable more people to access one-to-one or group support who wish to stop smoking; and if he will make a statement. [195734]

Miss Melanie Johnson: The Government have not received specific representations regarding difficulties in accessing national health service stop smoking services. NHS stop smoking services are available free across England and are accessible to all smokers who want to stop.

Primary care trusts (PCTs) are responsible for providing services for people in the workplace. We have issued advice to the NHS covering the circumstances where a stop smoking service might be provided for commuters at their workplace—"Department of Health Stop Smoking Services Quarterly Monitoring Return 2004–05". Copies have been placed in the Library.

PCTs have developed local strategies to reach smokers in their locality and, where appropriate, have made links with community groups to provide services. PCTs are encouraged to offer services that are accessible and flexible and meet the needs of the smoker. The Government will continue to seek ways to enhance and improve NHS stop smoking services.

Tobacco Advertising

Tom Cox: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many representations he has received in the last 12 months supporting a ban on tobacco advertising; and if he will make a statement. [195896]

Miss Melanie Johnson: The Tobacco Advertising and Promotion Act 2002 came into force on 14 February 2003. The Act bans press, billboard and magazine advertising of tobacco products and the promotion of smoking through free distribution of tobacco products, coupons and mailshots in the United Kingdom.

A public consultation on the Act was held between August and October 2002.

Trainee Midwives

Tom Cox: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many trainee midwives there are in the NHS. [195902]

Mr. Hutton: National health service funded training is provided by higher education institutions, trainee midwives are therefore not employed directly by the NHS.

In 2003–04, 2,226 students entered training to become a midwife, which is an increase of 35 per cent. since 1996–97.

Waiting Times

David Davis: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many patients admitted to Accident and Emergency in Hull and the East Riding in *(a)* 2003 and *(b)* 2004 waited for more than 12 hours before being treated or transferred to a ward. [194958]

Miss Melanie Johnson: The NHS Plan set a target to reduce the maximum wait in accident and emergency (A&E) from arrival to admission, transfer or discharge to four hours by 2004. The Department collects data against this target. This information is shown in the table.

Total time spent in A&E Departments, Hull and East Yorkshire Hospitals NHS Trust

Year	*Quarter*	*Total attendances at major A&E*	*Percentage of patients who spent less than four hours in A&E*
2004–05	1	29,180	90.3
2003–04	4	26,131	91.5
	3	25,664	92.4
	2	27,501	89.7
	1	26,147	91.4
2002–03	4	23,919	84.6

Source:
Hospital Activity Statistics, Department of Health

Walk-in Centres

Mrs. Curtis-Thomas: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how much funding Southport Primary Care Trust and Halton Primary Care Trust will receive to establish new walk-in centres. [195489]

Mr. Hutton: A total of £1.6 million is being allocated by the Department in 2004–05 and 2005–06 to Southport and Formby Primary Care Trust and Halton Primary Care Trust towards the costs of establishing two new national health service walk-in centres.

TREASURY

Accountancy Standards

David Taylor: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what recent discussions he has had with representatives of *(a)* PricewaterhouseCoopers, *(b)* KPMG, *(c)* Ernst and Young and *(d)* Deloitte regarding compliance with the international accountancy guidelines contained within the Sarbanes-Oxley Act. [196422]

Mr. Timms: None, so far as I am aware.

Bowel Cancer

Mr. Jim Cunningham: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer how many deaths due to bowel cancer have occurred in England in the last five years. [196444]

Mr. Timms: The information requested falls within the responsibility of the National Statistician, who has been asked to reply.

Letter from Colin Mowl to Mr. Jim Cunningham, dated 9 November 2004:

The National Statistician has been asked to reply to your recent Parliamentary Question concerning how many deaths due to bowel cancer have occurred in England in the last five years. I am replying in his absence. (196444)

The most recent available figures are for the year 2003. The number of deaths from bowel cancer (colorectal cancer) that occurred in the years 1999 to 2003 are given in the table.

Number of deaths from bowel cancer[1,2] in England, 1999–2003

	Number of deaths
1999	13,613
2000	13,223
2001	13,182
2002	13,387
2003	13,079

[1] For deaths between 1999 and 2000, bowel cancer was identified using the International Classification of Diseases, Ninth Revision (ICD-9) codes 153–154. For deaths between 2001 and 2003, the International Classification of Diseases, Tenth Revision (ICD-10) codes C18–C21 were used.

[2] The introduction of ICD-10 for coding cause of death in 2001 resulted in the number of deaths coded as cancer at all ages increasing by 2.5 per cent. for males and 2.2 per cent. for females. For this reason, figures are not completely comparable with those for years before this date and should therefore be interpreted with caution. A description of the effects of the change in classification in 2001 on deaths from cancer was published in Health Statistics Quarterly in May 2002.*

* Office for National Statistics. Results of the ICD-10 bridge coding study, England and Wales, 1999. Health Statistics Quarterly 14 (2002), 75–83.

Source:
Office for National Statistics

Child Benefits

Mr. Best: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what timetable he has set for the extension of *(a)* child benefit and *(b)* child tax credit to the parents of children aged 16 to 19 years undertaking unwaged training. [196849]

Dawn Primarolo: The Government are committed to ensuring that all young people reach the age of 19 ready for higher education or skilled employment. In "Supporting young people to achieve", published alongside Budget 2004, we consulted on proposals for the reform of financial support for 16 to 19-year-olds, including the extension of child benefit and child tax credit to the parents and carers of unwaged trainees, in order to support young people's choices between education and unwaged training.

Correspondence

David Winnick: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer pursuant to the answer of 2 November 2004, *Official Report*, column 153W, on correspondence, if he will instruct the director, Inland Revenue, Tax Credit Office to reply personally to letters from hon. Members on behalf of constituents; and what percentage of substantive replies sent to hon. Members in the last 12 months were sent within 14 days. [196527]

Dawn Primarolo *[holding answer 8 November 2004]:* It would not be practical for the director of the Tax Credit Office (TCO) to reply personally to all of the correspondence he receives. The director remains responsible for each reply concerning his department.

The TCO aim to reply to 80 per cent. of letters from hon. Members within 15 working days. In the seven months from 1 April 2004 to 31 October 2004, TCO replied to around 85 per cent. of letters from hon. Members within 15 working days.

Departmental Properties

Mr. Andrew Turner: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer (1) if he will list the properties occupied by *(a)* his Department and *(b)* its agencies in (i) 1997 and (ii) 2004, stating (A) for each and (B) in aggregate, the area; and what the aggregate rental value was in each year; [195127]

(2) if he will list the properties occupied by *(a)* his Department and its predecessors and *(b)* their agencies in (i) 1997 and (ii) 2004, showing (A) for each and (B) in aggregate the area; and what in aggregate the annual rental value was. [196370]

Mr. Timms *[holding answer 1 November 2004]:* The following table setting out, by Department and Agency, the information available.

Department/Property	*1997 Area sqm*	*1997 Rental Value (£000)*	*2004 Area sqm*	*2004 Rental value(£000)*
DMO:				
Eastcheap Court London	Not applicable	Not applicable	1,311	740
DMO Total	Nil	Nil	1,311	740
Royal Mint:				
Llantrisant	38,905	Not able to provide[1]	46,233	Not able to provide[1]
Grosvenor Gardens London	942	500	Not applicable	Not applicable
Royal Mint Total	39,847	Not able to provide[1] (+500)	46,233	Not able to provide[1]
GAD:				
22 Kingsway London	2,193	Not able to provide[1]	Not applicable	Not applicable
Furnival Street London	Not applicable	Not applicable	1,846	646
GAD Total	2,193	Not able to provide[1]	1,846	646
OGC:				
Trevelyan House London	Not able to provide[1]	Not able to provide[1]	5,411	1,922
Rosebery Court Norwich	Not able to provide[1]	Not able to provide[1]	6,574	819
Alexandra House Leeds	Not able to provide[1]	Not able to provide[1]	573	92.5
George Road Birmingham	Not able to provide[1]	Not able to provide[1]	765	95.7
Thistle Street Edinburgh	Not able to provide[1]	Not able to provide[1]	1,043	162.8
OGC Total	Not able to provide[1]	Not able to provide[1]	14,366	3,092
Buying. solutions:				
Royal Liver Building Liverpool	Not able to provide[1]	Not able to provide[1]	2,385	262.6
Buying.solutions Total	Not able to provide[1]	Not able to provide[1]	2,385	262.6
NS&I:				
Preston Road Blackpool	17,007	Not able to provide[1]	Not applicable	Not applicable
Milburngate House Durham	30,011	Not able to provide[1]	Not applicable	Not applicable
Cowglen Glasgow	50,018	Not able to provide[1]	Not applicable	Not applicable
Charles House London	3,717	Not able to provide[1]	3,717	600
NS&I Total	10,0753	Not able to provide[1]	3,717	600
HMT:				
Treasury Chambers London	23,495	Not able to provide[1]	Not applicable	Not applicable
Allington Towers London	5,500	Not able to provide[1]	Not applicable	Not applicable
Horse Guards Parade London	Not applicable	Not applicable	22,215	Not able to provide[1]
HMT Total	28,995	Not able to provide[1]	22,215	Not able to provide[1]

Department/Property	*1997 Area sqm*	*1997 Rental Value (£000)*	*2004 Area sqm*	*2004 Rental value (£000)*
ONS:				
Bessborough Street London	7,071	Not able to provide[1]	7,071	Not able to provide[1]
Drummond Gate London	10,220	Not able to provide[1]	10,220	Not able to provide[1]
Trafalgar Road Southport	9,584	Not able to provide[1]	9,584	Not able to provide[1]
Somerford Road Christchurch	12,027	Not able to provide[1]	12,027	Not able to provide[1]
Segensworth Road Fareham	19,359	Not able to provide[1]	19,359	Not able to provide[1]
Cardiff Road Newport	20,480	Not able to provide[1]	20,480	Not able to provide[1]
Annex, Cardiff Road Newport	993	Not able to provide[1]	993	Not able to provide[1]
Myddleton Street London	4,228	Not able to provide[1]	4,228	Not able to provide[1]
Barnes Wallace Road Fareham	1,456	Not able to provide[1]	1,456	Not able to provide[1]
East Lane house Runcom	2,187	Not able to provide[1]	2,187	Not able to provide[1]
ONS Total	87,605	Not able to provide[1]	87,605	Not able to provide[1]
IR/VO/HM CE[2]:				
IR/VO/HMCE Total	Not able to provide[1]	Not able to provide[1]	1,800,000 (estimate)	Not able to provide[1]

[1] This information is not held centrally and could be provided only at disproportionate cost.

[2] Inland Revenue/Valuation Office/HM Customs and Excise have not been able to provide areas or rental values for individual properties as the information is not held centrally and would be available only at disproportionate cost. Lists of locations of properties have been provided in attached annexes 1–5.

Employment Rates

Jeff Ennis: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what the employment rate was in *(a)* Barnsley East and Mexborough, *(b)* South Yorkshire, *(c)* Yorkshire and the Humber and *(d)* England in (i) 1997 and (ii) 2004. [196480]

Mr. Timms: The information requested falls within the responsibility of the National Statistician, who has been asked to reply.

Letter from Len Cook to Mr. Jeff Ennis, dated 9 November 2004:

As National Statistician, I have been asked to reply to your Parliamentary Question about employment. (196480)

The attached table gives the available percentages of people in employment resident in the Barnsley East and Mexborough Parliamentary Constituency, in South Yorkshire, in Yorkshire and the Humber and in England for the twelve month periods ending February of 1997 and 2003. More recent data are not yet available.

These estimates from the Labour Force Survey are, as with any sample survey, subject to sampling variability.

Working age[1] people in employment—12 months ending in February 1997 and 2003

Percentage[2]

	1997	*2003*
Barnsley East and Mexborough (Parliamentary Constituency)	59.5	64.8
South Yorkshire	65.2	72.9
Yorkshire and the Humber	71.1	75.7
England	69.3	74.5

[1] Working age refers to men 16–64 and women 16–59.

[2] The percentage of all people of working age who are in employment.

Source:

ONS Labour Force Survey

Incomes

Keith Vaz: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer how many *(a)* women and *(b)* men in the UK last year earned above (i) £25,000, (ii) £50,000, (iii) £75,000, (iv) £100,000 and (v) £150,000. [196016]

Dawn Primarolo: I refer my hon. Friend to table 3.3 "Distribution of total income before and after tax by gender" on the Inland Revenue website http:// www.inlandrevenue.gov.uk/stats/income distribution/ table3 3 september04.xls.

Tax Credits

Mr. John Taylor: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer pursuant to the answer of 16 September 2004, *Official Report*, column 1661W, on tax credit, if he will investigate the handling of the tax credit case of a constituent of Onslow Crescent in Solihull whose name has been communicated to him. [196936]

Dawn Primarolo *[holding answer 8 November 2004]:* It would not be appropriate for me to discuss publicly the cases of individual customers. However, the Inland Revenue has made a thorough investigation of your constituent's case and will reply to the hon. Member shortly.

Mr. Tynan: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what discussions are taking place with the IT contractors to resolve problems with tax credits. [192986]

Mr. Webb: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what *(a)* legal and *(b)* other action his Department has taken against EDS in relation to the introduction of new tax credits; and if he will make a statement. [194809]

Dawn Primarolo *[holding answer 1 November 2004]:* The Inland Revenue and EDS are trying to reach agreement without recourse to formal, legal processes and have engaged in a process of negotiation supported by legal and other experts on both sides, with an independent suitably qualified neutral adviser. While discussions between the Inland Revenue and EDS are still under way it is inappropriate for me to say any more at this stage.

Mr. Tyler: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer whether the staff of the Inland Revenue dealing with working tax credit and child tax credit have access to the general Inland Revenue computer system in order to *(a)* confirm the income stated on credit applications, *(b)* avoid errors and *(c)* combat fraud. [195723]

Dawn Primarolo *[holding answer 9 November 2004]:* Tax credits staff can access other Inland Revenue computer systems. The tax credit computer system uses other Departmental systems to check and verify information given on tax credit claim forms. Depending on circumstances, income figures given by claimants and used in calculations may be validated against other income data held by Inland Revenue. Every step is taken to use all the information held by the Department to prevent errors and combat fraud.

Keith Vaz: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer how many single women have benefited from *(a)* the child tax credit and *(b)* working tax credit. [196015]

Dawn Primarolo: The numbers of in-work single women benefiting up to April 2004 are shown at Table 3.1 of the various issues of "Child and Working Tax Credits. Quarterly Statistics".

Table 2.3 of each issue shows broad estimates of the number of not-in-work single adults with children benefiting from tax credits, most of whom are women. This includes all single adults with children receiving income support or income-based jobseeker's allowance.

The documents are on the Inland Revenue website, at www.inlandrevenue.gov.uk/stats/personal-tax-credits/menu.htm.

Miss Begg: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what proportion of those estimated overpayments of the new tax credits as reported in Figure 6 of the Inland Revenue's Annual Report and Accounts *(a)* written off and *(b)* remaining to be recouped represents (i) recipients of the family element of the child tax credit alone, (ii) recipients of any additional elements of the child tax credit, beyond the family element, (iii) recipients of the child element of the child tax credit (with or without additional elements), (iv) recipients of the working tax credit and (v) recipients of the child care element of the working tax credit. [196315]

Dawn Primarolo: It is not possible to break down the overpayments referred to so as to attribute them to different elements in the tax credits awards

Mr. Ben Chapman: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he will make a statement on recovery policy regarding overpayment of tax credits. [197215]

Dawn Primarolo: The Inland Revenue's Code of Practice 26 ("What happens if we have paid you too much tax credit?") sets out their approach to handling overpayments of tax credits.

Mr. Denham: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer how many recipients of working tax credit are being paid manually; and if he will make a statement. [195916]

Dawn Primarolo *[holding answer 4 November 2004]:* The number of interim payments made during 2003–04, and the reasons for these payments, are explained at paragraph 2.14 of the Report of the Comptroller and Auditor General attached to the Inland Revenue Annual Report for the year ended 31 March 2004.

Most such payments are one-off, and any future payment will only be made following a review of the case. Around 7,000 families (about one seventh of one per cent. of the tax credits total caseload) are currently being paid manually on a regular basis for technical reasons.

VAT on Fuel

Mr. Weir: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer how much money his Department received in VAT on fuel in each of the last 12 months. [196911]

Dawn Primarolo: HM Customs and Excise do not collect data on VAT from individual goods and services.

Working Age Statistics

Mr. Willetts: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what percentage of the total working age population was aged 16 to 34 years in each year since 1979; and what the rate of inflation was in each year. [196507]

Mr. Timms: The information requested falls within the responsibility of the National Statistician, who has been asked to reply.

Letter from Len Cook to Mr. David Willetts, dated 9 November 2004:

As National Statistician I have been asked to reply to your recent Parliamentary Question concerning what percentage of the total working age population was aged 16 to 34 years in each year since 1979, and what the rate of inflation was in each of those years. (196507)

Table 1 shows the annual percentage of persons that were aged 16 to 34 as part of the total working age population (ages 16–64 for males, 16–59 for females) in England and Wales for each year from mid-1979 to mid-2003.

Table 2 shows the annual rate of UK inflation over the period concerned.

Table 1: Proportion of persons aged 16–34 as a percentage of total working age[1] population in 1979–2003 in England and Wales

	Percentage
1979	46.8
1980	47.2
1981	47.5
1982	47.0
1983	46.7
1984	46.6
1985	46.7
1986	46.8
1987	47.0
1988	46.9
1989	46.8
1990	46.7
1991	46.4
1992	46.0
1993	45.4
1994	44.9
1995	44.4
1996	43.9
1997	43.4
1998	42.7
1999	42.1
2000	41.6
2001	41.1
2002	40.7
2003	40.4

[1] Working age is defined as 16 to 59 years old for females and 16 to 64 years old for males.

Source:

Office for National Statistics.

Table 2: Annual average rate of RPI inflation, 1979–2003

	Percentage
1979	13.4
1980	18.0
1981	11.9
1982	8.6
1983	4.6
1984	5.0
1985	6.1
1986	3.4
1987	4.2
1988	4.9
1989	7.8
1990	9.5
1991	5.9
1992	3.7
1993	1.6
1994	2.4
1995	3.5
1996	2.4
1997	3.1
1998	3.4
1999	1.5
2000	3.0
2001	1.8
2002	1.7
2003	2.9

Source:

Office for National Statistics.

NORTHERN IRELAND

Sports Boards

Hugh Robertson: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland how much money the Sports Council distributed to Northern Ireland sports boards in *(a)* 2001, *(b)* 2002 and *(c)* 2003. [195177]

Angela Smith: The total exchequer and lottery funding distributed by the Sports Council for Northern Ireland to sporting bodies, (including governing bodies and sports clubs) in the financial years 2001–02, 2002–03 and 2003–04 is as follows:

£

	2001–02	*2002–03*	*2003–04*
Exchequer	3,545,000	3,794,000	4,752,000
Lottery	3,405,223	3,595,894	3,211,916

Blood Donation

Lady Hermon: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland if he will make a statement on the regulations in Northern Ireland which prevent wheelchair users from being eligible to donate blood through the Blood Donation Service. [193930]

Angela Smith: The Northern Ireland Blood Transfusion Service's (NIBTS) policies and procedures for selection of blood donors are based on national guidelines produced and agreed by the four United Kingdom Blood Transfusion Services. NIBTS policy and practice for wheelchair users is consistent with these guidelines.

Any donor may suffer adverse reactions to blood donation, which on occasions can be quite severe. Such reactions must be dealt with on a proper blood donation couch (not a wheelchair) so that they can be addressed safely. Donors must therefore not donate blood in their wheelchair, and be able to climb on and off the donation couch. If the underlying cause of disability in the case of a wheelchair user, or others, is not a contraindication, blood donation may be acceptable. However, certain causes of disability may preclude individuals from donating for reasons of safety to the recipient as well as the donor. Health and safety issues for staff normally preclude donors being physically lifted onto a donor couch. NIBTS provides wheelchair access at all its fixed (permanent) donation venues including the purpose designed BloodMobile and also at the vast majority of mobile donation sessions throughout the province.

Lady Hermon: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland what review he has carried out of the operation of the regulations in Northern Ireland which prevent permanent wheelchair users from donating blood; and what plans he has to amend them. [193931]

Angela Smith: The Northern Ireland Blood Transfusion Service operates under the United Kingdom guidelines produced and agreed by the four national Blood Transfusion Services. The Joint Professional Advisory Committee (JPAC) of the United Kingdom Blood Transfusion Service and the National Institute for Biological Standards and Control is responsible for the guidelines. JPAC receives professional advice from the standing advisory committees that form part of its structure. The criteria are reviewed regularly and users of the guidelines must ensure that they have the latest version and that recent changes (usually within three months) have been implemented by the respective national service There are no plans to amend the guidelines locally in relation to wheelchair users.

Breast Cancer

Mr. Dodds: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland how many incidents of breast cancer have been recorded in *(a)* north Belfast, *(b)* Belfast and *(c)* Northern Ireland in each year since 1997. [194609]

Angela Smith: The following table details the numbers of incidences of breast cancer since 1997.

	Year of diagnosis					
	1997	*1998*	*1999*	*2000*	*2001*	*2002*
Breast cancer						
Northern Ireland	862	992	955	972	927	952
Belfast	138	165	160	183	158	168
North Belfast	42	52	50	62	48	49
Breast cancer females only						
Northern Ireland	860	916	947	966	918	944
Belfast	138	162	157	183	154	168
North Belfast	42	52	49	62	46	49

Note:

This information has been provided by the Northern Ireland Cancer Registry.

Mr. Dodds: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland how many people have died of breast cancer in *(a)* north Belfast, *(b)* Belfast and *(c)* Northern Ireland in each year since 1997. [194610]

Mr. Pearson: The following table gives the number of registered breast cancer deaths *(a)* of Belfast, North parliamentary constituency residents, *(b)* of Belfast local government district residents and *(c)* in Northern Ireland for each year between 1997 and 2003.

Number of breast cancer deaths by registration year and area

	Area		
Registration year	*Belfast, North parliamentary constituency*	*Belfast local government district*	*Northern Ireland*
1997	13	58	267
1998	17	54	299
1999	18	54	286
2000	17	48	289
2001	16	60	316
2002	18	54	278
2003[1]	18	57	291

[1] Data for 2003 are provisional

British/Irish Sign Languages

Rev. Martin Smyth: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland when the final report of the Department of Culture, Arts and Leisure working group on British and Irish Sign Languages will be published; and what the proposed timescale is for implementation of the recommendations of that report. [196886]

Angela Smith: A Sign Language Partnership Group, comprising representatives of the Deaf Community in Northern Ireland and departmental officials, is addressing a number of key issues regarding the provision of tutors and interpreters, raising awareness, and best practice guidance. The Group's proposals are expected to be submitted to Ministers by the end of the year. It is anticipated that publication of the proposals and implementation will commence early next year.

Bullying

Mrs. Iris Robinson: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland what estimate he has made of the financial cost resulting from bullying in Northern Ireland's *(a)* schools and *(b)* workplaces in the last year for which figures are available. [196260]

Mr. Gardiner: The information sought in respect of schools is not available and could be collected only with considerable difficulty and at disproportionate cost.

The Department for Employment and Learning does not make estimates in relation to the financial costs resulting from bullying in workplaces.

The Office of the Industrial Tribunals and the Fair Employment Tribunal cannot specify the costs of bullying to Northern Ireland workplaces. While bullying may form part of an applicant's complaint to a tribunal there is no specific jurisdiction relating to bullying. Any award made by a tribunal relates to the jurisdiction specified in the complaint and an award made will be determined within the parameters set out in the relevant legislation.

Cancer Treatment

Mr. Dodds: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland how many incidents of cancer have been recorded in *(a)* north Belfast, *(b)* Belfast and *(c)* Northern Ireland in each year since 1997. [194611]

Angela Smith: The information requested is as follows:

All cancers

	Year of diagnosis					
	1997	*1998*	*1999*	*2000*	*2001*	*2002*
Northern Ireland	8,533	8,665	8,645	8,733	8,632	8,923
Belfast	1,645	1,691	1,624	1,654	1,506	1,604
North Belfast	577	568	551	569	516	538

Note:

Non-malignant skin cancers have been included in this table.

This information has been provided by the Northern Ireland Cancer Registry.

Child Support Agency

Mr. Dodds: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland what action he is taking to tackle the backlog of cases in the Child Support Agency in Northern Ireland. [197107]

Mr. Spellar: The current backlog of applications in the Northern Ireland Child Support Agency is due to cases that cannot be progressed due to system defects within the new computer system. All of the defects have been logged with the service provider, Electronic Data Systems Limited (EDS). These cases can only be progressed once EDS have resolved the incident and freed up the case.

EDS, along with the Great Britain Child Support Agency, have implemented a recovery plan to address problems with the computer system and cases are progressively being released. The Northern Ireland Child Support Agency is part of this overall recovery plan.

Latest management information shows that since the end of June 2004 the weekly number of cases assessed has risen by 30 per cent.

Civil Service

Mr. Lidington: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland if he will make a statement on progress in the re-tendering exercise to put in place electronic document and record management systems throughout the Northern Ireland Civil Service. [195539]

Mr. Pearson: On 27 April 2004 the NICS (through its Central Procurement Directorate) established a Framework Agreement for the provision of EDRM products under the Negotiated Procedure of the Public Contracts (Services) Regulations 1993 (as amended). The Framework Agreement is available for use to the NICS and the wider NI public sector. A secondary competition was applied under the Framework Agreement to select an EDRM product for piloting in the Department of Enterprise, Trade and Investment, the Department for Culture, Arts and Leisure and the Office of the First Minister and Deputy First Minister (contract awarded on 17 September 2004). Depending upon the evaluation of the pilots, this product may be used across the NICS; however no commitment to do so has been made.

Mr. Lidington: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland what the cost has been to date of the tendering and re-tendering exercises by the Department of Enterprise, Trade and Investment to put in place electronic document and record management systems throughout the Northern Ireland Civil Service. [195540]

Mr. Pearson: The total apportioned project costs (including staff time, travel and subsistence and consultancy) to establish the EDRMS category of the Framework Agreement and conduct secondary competition for selection of the EDRMS product is £207,000.

Mr. Gregory Campbell: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland how many Civil Service jobs have been relocated from the Greater Belfast area to East Londonderry constituency in the last five years. [194792]

Mr. Pearson: There have been no Civil Service jobs relocated from the Greater Belfast area to East Londonderry in the last five years (1 April 1999 to 31 March 2004).

Cory Collusion Inquiry

Mr. McGrady: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland pursuant to his oral answer of 1 April 2004, *Official Report*, columns 1760–61, on the Cory Collusion Inquiry, what the terms of reference will be for the public inquiry into the Finucane case. [194951]

Mr. Paul Murphy: The inquiry into the death of Patrick Finucane is to be held on the basis of new legislation, which is to be introduced shortly. I cannot pre-empt the decision of Parliament on the terms of this legislation or on any matter flowing from it.

Dentistry

Mr. Lidington: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland what proportion of three to five year olds in Northern Ireland are registered with a general dental practitioner. [195415]

Angela Smith: 60 per cent. of three to five year olds in Northern Ireland are registered with an NHS general dental practitioner. Figures are not available for persons who may be solely registered for private treatment.

Mr. Lidington: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland what proportion of two year olds in Northern Ireland are registered with a general dental practitioner. [195416]

Angela Smith: 41 per cent. of two year olds in Northern Ireland are currently registered with an NHS general dental practitioner. Figures are not available for persons who may be solely registered for private treatment.

Department of Education Budget

Mr. Donaldson: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland how much of the budget for the Department of Education has remained unspent in each year from 2000 to date. [196528]

Mr. Gardiner: The proportion of the Department of Education budget unspent in each of the financial years 2000–01 to 2003–04 is as follows:

	Unspent (percentage)
2000–01	1.4
2001–02	3.4
2002–03	2.4
2003–04[1]	3.3

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[1] Provisional

Under approved end-year flexibility arrangements, sums unspent on capital investment, executive programme funds and, from 2001–02, Education and Library Board resources are carried forward for use in a subsequent year and are thus not "lost" to Education. Carry over relates mainly to *(a)* Education and Library Board resources, principally to facilitate the operation, under Local Management of Schools (LMS) arrangements, of schools' delegated budgets and *(b)* capital investment, in particular to take account of the rephasing of expenditure on existing projects.

Departmental IT

Brian White: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland what percentage of the Department's *(a)* implemented and *(b)* planned computer systems use open source software; and what plans are in place to raise this level. [195652]

Mr. Paul Murphy: There is minimal use of Open Source Software (OSS) among the Northern Ireland Departments.

To date, only the Department of Agriculture and Rural Development (DARD) and the Department of Finance and Personnel Business Development Service operate a very limited open source system which comprises products such as Linux, Apache and MYSQL.

There are no immediate plans to increase usage of OSS throughout the Northern Ireland Departments at present. However, the possible future use of Open Source will be considered as part of the forthcoming ICT Strategy for the Northern Ireland Civil Service which is to be commissioned early in 2005.

Disabled Staff

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland what percentage of the staff in his Department in *(a)* 2002 and *(b)* 2003 were people with disabilities. [196125]

Mr. Pearson: Of those staff in the eleven departments of the Northern Ireland Administration and the Northern Ireland Office who provided information on their disability status, the percentage who declared they had a disability, was as follows:

(*a*) 4.9 per cent. at 1 April 2002; and

(*b*) 4.7 per cent. at 1 April 2003.

Down's Syndrome

Lady Hermon: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland if he will make a statement on the provision of education for (*a*) adults and (*b*) children with Down's Syndrome in Northern Ireland. [197036]

Mr. Gardiner: Children with Down's Syndrome have a range of educational ability. Under the existing legislation, children's special educational needs, including the needs of those with Down's Syndrome, are assessed by the Education and Library Boards and met on an individual basis. Provision may be made in special schools, special units attached to mainstream schools or in mainstream classes themselves. It may also consist of home tuition, hospital tuition or pre-school support. Boards also operate specialist outreach services including support for children with literacy problems and if appropriate, children with Down's Syndrome avail of these services.

The Department for Employment and Learning has put in place a range of initiatives and funding streams designed to promote access to post 16 provision by students with disabilities including those with Down's Syndrome. These include the publication of a good practice guide; support for staff development activities for senior management, and financial assistance towards the costs of technical or carer support for learners.

Lady Hermon: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland how many children with Down's Syndrome in each education and library board area in Northern Ireland were educated in (*a*) mainstream and (*b*) special schools in each of the past five years. [197019]

Mr. Gardiner: The North Eastern and Southern Education and Library Boards cannot provide this information as it is gathered according to the special educational needs, e.g. Moderate Learning Difficulty (MLD) or Severe Learning Difficulty (SLD), and not by the name of the specific condition.

The Belfast, South Eastern and Western Education and Library Boards can only provide current figures for children with Down's Syndrome and this information is not available within the time scale. I will write to the hon. Lady again as soon as it is available.

The Education and Library Boards are currently working on a five Board Special Educational Needs Management Information System which in future years will gather statistical information on a wider range of special educational needs than is currently available. It is hoped to introduce this system in 2005.

Drug/Alcohol Abuse

Mr. Rosindell: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland what steps he has taken to combat drug and alcohol abuse in Northern Ireland in the last three years. [196189]

Angela Smith: In May 2001 the Northern Ireland Executive endorsed the Joint Implementation Model to carry forward the collective aims of the Drugs and Alcohol Strategies to reduce the level of drug and alcohol-related harm in Northern Ireland.

Since then a regional implementation structure has been put in place to ensure that action is driven forward across a wide number of fronts. There are currently 305 regional and local projects funded through the Northern Ireland Drugs and Alcohol Campaign. These cover the fields of education and prevention, treatment, research and criminal justice across the statutory and community sectors.

A review of the campaign and the strategies and structures that support it commenced in 2004. This will report in March 2005, after which a new strategic direction will be developed to start in April 2006.

Education and Library Boards

Mr. Lidington: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland, what weight he gives to experience of and skills in financial management when considering candidates for appointment to education and library boards. (195513)

Mr. Gardiner: Internal appointments to education and library boards are, with the exception of appointments at chief executive and chief librarian level which must be approved by the relevant Department, a matter for individual boards and the level of qualifications and experience sought varies from post to post.

Public appointments to boards are made in accordance with the Education and Libraries Order 1986 which provides for nominations to be made by the local councils that fall within the board's boundaries, as well as by transferors of schools and the trustees of maintained schools. 35 per cent. of members are appointed through the open public appointments process and the criteria for the selection of these candidates take account of the need for the membership to include a balance of skills and background. Selection of these members is on merit and in accordance with the Code of Practice of the Commissioner for Public Appointments.

Financial Planning

Mr. Lidington: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland what assumptions he has made for the purposes of financial planning about the expected revenue of each of the next three years from (*a*) business rates and (*b*) domestic rates. [195736]

Mr. Pearson: The forecast revenue from the regional rate for the years 2005–06 to 2007–08 is £251.0 million/£268.7 million/£287.1 million for the non-domestic sector, and £205.9 million/£229.8 million/£249.2 million for the domestic sector. These projections have been included in the proposals presented in the Draft Priorities and Budget 2005–08 document, launched for public consultation on 12 October 2004.

Free Health Care

Rev. Martin Smyth: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland how many *(a)* Republic of Ireland citizens, *(b)* other EU nationals and *(c)* non-EU nationals have received free health care in private healthcare units and residential homes in Northern Ireland in the last five years, broken down by health board. [195192]

Angela Smith: The information requested could be provided only at disproportionate cost.

Rev. Martin Smyth: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland what the estimated cost to the Exchequer is of *(a)* Republic of Ireland citizens, *(b)* other EU nationals and *(c)* non-EU nationals receiving free healthcare in Northern Ireland's private healthcare units and residential homes in the last five years, broken down by health board. [195193]

Angela Smith: The information requested could be provided only at disproportionate cost.

Greencastle-Magilligan Ferry

Mr. Gregory Campbell: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland what plans the Northern Ireland Tourist Board has to assist in the upgrading of facilities for tourist traffic using the Greencastle-Magilligan Ferry. [196510]

Mr. Gardiner: The Northern Ireland Tourist Board (NITB) itself has no direct plans to assist with the upgrading of facilities for tourist traffic as this is the responsibility of Department of Regional Development (DRD) Roads Service and the local council.

NITB does however consider the Greencastle-Magilligan Ferry as an important tourist link between Co. Donegal and Co. Londonderry. Magilligan lies within the area identified in the Ministerial Causeway and Glens Tourism Masterplan 2004–13 which NITB is currently assisting to implement. Two actions have been identified in the associated Action Plan that may have a direct effect on facilities for tourist traffic in the Magilligan area:

> Upgrade existing and provide new coach parks to allow coach visitors access to key attractive settlements and their services.
>
> Gateway towns and villages programme—enhancement programme for gateways e.g. Larne, Bally castle and Magilligan.

NITB is also progressing the identification and development of a tourist trail along the A2 coastal route. It is anticipated that the trail will include Magilligan along the route.

With regard to road infrastructure improvements, the DRD's Roads Service has advised that planning approval for the ferry was given on the basis that a number of infrastructure improvements were carried out along Point Road, which runs between the Seacoast Road and the ferry terminal. These improvements included the localised widening of the road at a number of locations, and the resurfacing of the road. This work was carried out by the applicant, Limavady borough council.

Discussions are currently on-going with Limavady borough council with a view to providing directional/information signage for the ferry. Signage being considered includes the use of variable message signs on Point Road, which would provide information for ferry passengers, similar to that being used at the Strangford Ferry.

Health and Social Services

Mr. Lidington: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland how many *(a)* days and *(b)* days per full-time equivalent employee were lost through staff sickness in each of the last four financial years in each (i) health and social services board and (ii) health and social services trust; and if he will make a statement. [195425]

Angela Smith: The information requested is as follows:

Table 1: Days of sick absence

	2000–01	*2001–02*	*2002–03*	*2003–04*
HSS Boards:				
Eastern	2,013.1	2,163.2	2,418.2	2,540.8
Northern	1,218.5	1,935	1,439.5	1,896.5
Southern	1,280.7	1,095.2	1,682.8	1,449.2
Western	720	729	735	842
HSS Trusts:				
Altnagelvin	23,963.90	27,430.80	28,088.70	23,993.10
Armagh and Dungannon	27,044.3	23,053.0	22,622.8	24,700.2
Belfast City	40,408.4	42,276.7	47,393.0	50,937.4
Causeway	31,885.4	38,148.1	44,755.8	41,848.5
Craigavon Area Hospital	22,331.6	24,920.9	23,900.4	22,703.5
Craigavon and Banbridge	15,176	15,691	15,871	16,428
Down Lisburn	44,708	50,137	48,069	50,475
Foyle	n/a	25,024.9	28,425.5	30,794.5
Greenpark	18,351.60	17,946.70	18,424.60	3,983.80
Homefirst	51,502	57,013.3	60,954.80	55,561.7
Mater	15,327	12,560	16,309	15,790
Newry and Mourne	20,909.8	23,119.2	25,023.2	25,970.7
Norih and West Belfast	42,444	46,425	50,610	51,454
NI Ambulance	18,905	17,232	19,350	15,346
Royal	73,290	75,255	80,364	87,753
South and East Belfast	38,735.4	40,241.9	37,765.1	44,705.7
Sperrin Lakeland	n/a	45,870.5	48,413	39,100
Ulster	47,505.1	55,064.1	59,862.7	60,057.3
United	39,070	40,204	45,656	44,183

n/a = not applicable

Table 2: Days of sick absence per full-time equivalent employee

	2000–01	*2001–02*	*2002–03*	*2003–04*
HSS Boards:				
Eastern	8.00	8.22	7.3	7.45
Northern	5.13	7.95	4.99	6.2
Southern	6.00	4.87	6.97	5.3
Western	4.94	4.91	3.88	3.80
HSS Trusts:				
Altnagelvin	10.03	11.14	10.89	8.86
Armagh and Dungannon	13.64	14.05	13.56	13.08
Belfast City	9.75	9.67	10.38	10.64
Causeway	13	14	15	13
Craigavon Area Hospital	7.75	9.57	8.84	8.21
Craigavon and Banbridge	14.5	14.7	14.5	13.1
Down Lisburn	13.4	14.6	13.6	13.8
Foyle	n/a	14.96	15.29	16.04
Greenpark	14.76	14.77	14.51	3.41
Homefirst	13.2	15.0	15.5	13.3
Mater	18.11	15.12	18.34	15.78
Newry and Mourne	10.55	11.85	12.45	12.25
North and West Belfast	15.78	16.73	17.54	17.42
NI Ambulance	23.5	21.3	22.8	16.9
Royal	10.94	11	11.7	13
South and East Belfast	13	14	13	15
Sperrin Lakeland	18.6	18.3	18.8	13.4
Ulster	9.98	11.4	11.97	11.58
United	11	11	12	11

n/a = not available

The Department keeps absenteeism under careful review. Targets have been set for Trusts to reduce their levels of sickness absence, and the outcome of this is being monitored.

Hospital Waiting Times

Mr. Lidington: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland how many patients in *(a)* Northern Ireland, *(b)* each health and social services board area and *(c)* each health and social services trust were waiting more than 18 months for hospital inpatient or day treatment in (i) June 2002 and (ii) June of each year since; and if he will make a statement. [195421]

Angela Smith: The most recent published waiting list data available shows the position at 30 June 2004. Data for quarters ending 30 June from 2000 to 2004 are as follows:

(i) Northern Ireland: Number of people waiting more than 18 months for in-patient admission to hospital[1]

Quarter ending 30 June	*Number*
2000	5,916
2001	6,877
2002	8,864
2003	6,655
2004	3,230

[1] Includes normal in-patients and day cases

(ii) Provider[1] *health and social services board area: Number of people waiting more than 18 months for in-patient admission to hospital*[2]

	Quarter ending 30 June				
Health board	*2000*	*2001*	*2002*	*2003*	*2004*
Eastern	4,790	5,380	6,214	4,455	2,302
Northern	280	425	754	820	178
Southern	810	1,021	1,859	1,304	715
Western	36	51	37	76	35

[1] Health board where the patient will be receiving treatment

[2] includes normal in-patients and day cases

(iii) Health and social services trust: Number of people waiting more than 18 months for in-patient admission to hospital[1]

	Quarter ending 30 June				
Trust	*2000*	*2001*	*2002*	*2003*	*2004*
Mater Infirmorum	0	81	71	28	14
Belfast City	1,509	1,681	1,842	861	708
Royal Group	1,429	1,757	2,196	1,755	1,045
Green Park	948	1,000	1,130	845	147
UC and HT	862	852	965	953	386
Down Lisburn	42	9	10	13	2
United	167	226	424	428	177
Causeway	113	199	330	392	1
Craigavon Group	794	990	1,750	1,230	703
Newry and Mourne	16	31	109	74	12
Altnagelvin	32	35	33	72	35
Sperrin Lakeland	4	16	4	4	0

[1] Includes normal in-patients and day cases

I have set targets for 2004–05 that no patient has to wait more than 18 months for treatment by March 2005, and no more than 15 months by March 2006.

Mr. Lidington: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland how many people waiting for hospital inpatient or day treatment *(a)* in Northern Ireland, *(b)* in each health and social services board area and *(c)* each health and social services trust in (i) June 2002 and (ii) June of each year since 2000; and if he will make a statement. [195422]

Angela Smith: The most recent published waiting list data available show the position at 30 June 2004. Data for quarters ending 30 June from 2000–04 are as follows:

(a) Northern Ireland: Number of people waiting for in-patient admission to hospital[1]

Quarter ending 30 June	*Number*
2000	49,995
2001	54,892
2002	59,951
2003	55,414
2004	50,975

[1] Includes normal in-patients and day cases.

(b) Provider[1] *health and social services board area: Number of people waiting for in-patient admission to hospital*[2]

	Quarter ending 30 June				
	2000	*2001*	*2002*	*2003*	*2004*
Eastern	30,757	33,391	34,874	32,145	30,261
Northern	6,680	7,550	9,281	8,451	6,095
Southern	7,198	7,914	9,563	8,818	8,188
Western	5,360	6,037	6,233	6,000	6,431

[1] Health board where the patient will be receiving treatment.

[2] Includes normal in-patients and day cases.

(c) Health and social services trust: Number of people waiting for in-patient admission to hospital[1]

	Quarter ending 30 June				
	2000	*2001*	*2002*	*2003*	*2004*
Mater Infirmorum	1,491	1,667	2,058	1,887	2,096
Belfast City	6,481	7,594	7,405	6,559	6,331
Royal Group	11,599	12,398	13,061	11,916	10,551
Green Park	4,983	5,106	5,360	4,882	5,185
UC and HT	5,340	5,732	6,004	5,925	5,078
Down Lisburn	863	894	986	976	1,020
United	5,122	5,402	6,553	6,222	5,263
Causeway	1,558	2,148	2,728	2,229	832
Craigavon Group	6,262	7,004	8,503	7,678	7,412
Newry and Mourne	936	910	1,060	1,140	776
Altnagelvin	3,750	4,027	4,017	4,164	4,853
Sperrin Lakeland	1,610	2,010	2,216	1,836	1,578

[1] Includes normal in-patients and day cases.

Considerable progress has been made in recent years in reducing the number of patients waiting and I am keen to see this sustained. I have set targets for 2004–05 that no patient has to wait more than 18 months for treatment by March 2005, and no more than 15 months by March 2006.

ICC Trophy Tournament

Mrs. Iris Robinson: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland what assistance *(a)* his Department and *(b)* Government agencies are providing to aid preparations for hosting the ICC trophy cricket tournament in the Province in July 2005. [194982]

Angela Smith: No Northern Ireland Departments are directly involved in providing assistance to aid preparations for hosting the ICC trophy cricket tournament.

However, the Sports Council for Northern Ireland and the Northern Ireland Events Company are in discussions with the promoters of the tournament about possible assistance.

The Northern Ireland Tourist Board has issued an events marketing support scheme application to the organisers, which will be considered once it has been submitted.

Immunisations

Mr. Lidington: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland what the rate of uptake of primary immunisations is for children aged 12 months in Northern Ireland. [195417]

Angela Smith: The rate of uptake of primary immunisations for children aged 12 months in Northern Ireland is shown for the four quarters of the financial year 2003–04 in the following table:

	Immunisation against:						
Quarter ending:	*Diphtheria*	*Tetanus*	*Polio*	*Pertussis*	*Haemophilus Influenza B*	*Measles, Mumps, Rubella*	*Meningitis C*
June 2003	95.1	95.1	95.1	94.7	94.9	0.1	95.1
September 2003	95.1	95.1	95.1	94.7	95.4	0.0	95.6
December 2003	95.4	95.4	95.4	95.0	95.5	0.0	95.7
March 2004	94.4	94.4	94.2	94.0	94.5	0.0	94.7

Note:

The uptake rate is in respect of children who reached their first birthday during the relevant quarter.

Primary immunisation for measles, mumps and rubella is not normally given to children under 12 months of age.

The information is published on a quarterly basis.

Laurelhill School

Mrs. Iris Robinson: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland whether the South Eastern Education and Library Board has employed a public relations company to deal with public and media inquiries concerning the Laurelhill School dispute and the boards deficit; and if he will make a statement. [196876]

Mr. Gardiner: I have been advised by the Chief Executive of the South Eastern Education and Library Board that the board did not employ a public relations company in relation to the board's financial deficit. However, Laurelhill Community College, on the advice of the board, engaged a public relations company to assist it to deal with the national media attention which arose as a result of industrial action taken by teaching staff at the school.

Learning Disability

Mr. Peter Robinson: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland how many individuals in the Province Northern Ireland with a learning disability are offered an annual health check; and what steps he is taking to increase this total. [194523]

Angela Smith: Annual health checks have not been routinely offered to people with a learning disability.

The terms of the recently revised GPs contract do not require the offer of annual health checks to patients who have a learning disability. However, GPs provide the same level of care to those with a learning disability as they do to other patients, when they present with a health problem.

The current independent review of mental health and learning disability has identified the physical health of people with a learning disability as an area for particular action. The review will be making a number of recommendations on the delivery of primary care services that would benefit people with a learning disability. The recommendations will inform the future development of these services.

Mr. Peter Robinson: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland what steps he is taking to increase the number of individuals with learning disabilities who are registered with a general practitioner. [194527]

Angela Smith: The independent review of mental health and learning disability, commissioned by the Department of Health Social Services and Public Safety, is currently consulting on their report on learning disability "Equal Lives" and hopes to present their recommendations to Government early next year.

Among other things, the review has been examining the health and wellbeing of people with a learning disability. While the report finds that for many such people, the family GP plays a very significant role, it calls for a number of improvements to ensure access to the full range of health services for people with a learning disability. These will be considered once the report is presented to the Department.

Mr. Peter Robinson: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland what measures are being taken to ensure that literature on health is provided in an easy-to-read format for those with learning disabilities. [194531]

Angela Smith: In line with its Equality Scheme, the Department makes its publications available on request in alternative formats to meet people's differing needs. In 2004 the Department issued good practice guidance to the Health and Personal Services on access to information. The Department is currently taking forward a project on providing health and social care information in accessible formats and this includes consideration of the needs of people with learning disabilities.

Lucy Crawford

Mrs. Iris Robinson: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland (1) if he will conduct a full independent inquiry into *(a)* the death of Lucy Crawford in the Erne hospital in April 2000 and *(b)* subsequent investigations conducted by the Sperrin Lakeland Health Trust; and if he will make a statement; [194802]

(2) what investigations he has conducted into the actions of Sperrin Lakeland Trust following the death of Lucy Crawford in April 2000. [194803]

Angela Smith: I believe it is of the highest importance that the general public have confidence in the quality and standards of care provided by our health and social services. Consequently I have announced that Mr. John O'Hara QC is to conduct an independent inquiry into the issues raised regarding the deaths of Lucy Crawford, Raychel Ferguson and Adam Strain.

Ministerial Meetings (Paramilitaries)

David Burnside: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland when he last met *(a)* members of the Brigade staff of (i) the UDA, (ii) the UVF and (iii) the INLA and *(b)* members of the Army Council of the Provisional IRA; and what he discussed on each occasion. [196500]

Mr. Pearson: In the course of advancing the political process I have met with a number of groups that give political analysis to paramilitary organisations, and who assure me that they are serious about committing themselves to a political path and an end to violence. Such meetings are a means of testing that commitment and I will continue to encourage that process at every opportunity. I have made it clear that continuing paramilitary activity is unacceptable and only serves to undermine the standing of those who are engaged in the political process.

Neutral Working Environments

Mr. Dodds: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland what action he has taken in response to complaints against the chief executive of the Child Support Agency in relation to a breach of his Department's policy on wearing Gaelic Athletic Association sports clothing. [197106]

Mr. Spellar: This is an internal personnel matter in relation to an individual and has been dealt with in accordance with the Department's personnel procedures.

Nursery Schools (Strabane)

Mrs. Iris Robinson: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland what plans he has to improve nursery school provision in the Strabane area. [196285]

Mr. Gardiner: The following improvements to nursery school provision are planned to take place in the current year:

Ballycolman Nursery School, Strabane

The provision of a new soft play area.

Edwards Primary School, Castlederg

A new school is under construction at present, which includes nursery provision. It is expected that the main school will be occupied around Christmas, although the nursery unit may open before then.

Patient Exemption Fraud

Mr. Lidington: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland what the estimated level of patient exemption fraud was in the family practitioners service in each financial year from 1999–2000; and if he will make a statement. [195423]

Angela Smith: The estimated level of patient exemption fraud in the family practitioners service from 1999–2000 is as follows:

	£ million
1999–2000	13.8
2000–01	11.3
2001–02	10.0
2002–03	10.0
2003–04	8.0

The Department of Health, Social Services and Public Safety, together with the Health Boards and the Central Services Agency, continues to make considerable efforts to reduce losses through patient exemption fraud. There has been good progress and tackling fraud remains a key priority.

Police Funding

Mr. Rosindell: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland what the average spending on policing was per capita in Northern Ireland in 2003–04. [196177]

Mr. Pearson: The average policing cost per head of population is £405.75. This figure is based upon revenue running costs including non cash items and excluding Capital and Patten expenditure.

Pre-school Education

Mr. Dodds: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland how full-time nursery education in the pre-school year will be implemented for children in *(a)* Greater Shankill and *(b)* North Belfast. [197110]

Mr. Gardiner: With the exception of the nursery places at Hazelwood Integrated Primary School, which were created under the Pre-School Education Expansion Programme, all nursery places in North Belfast and the Greater Shankill area are already full-time.

The Pre-School Education Expansion Programme in Northern Ireland provides only funding for part-time provision I have no plans to fund full-time nursery places at Hazelwood Integrated Primary School at this time. Any future decision to do so will depend on the outcome of the review of pre-school education.

Mr. Dodds: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland when he intends to publish the outcome of the review of pre-school education. [197112]

Mr. Gardiner: It is expected that the outcome of the Review of Pre-School Education in Northern Ireland will be published in March 2005.

Probation Board

Mr. Rosindell: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland if he will make a statement on the recent appointment of the head of the Probation Board for Northern Ireland. [196170]

Mr. Paul Murphy: The maximum period of appointment to the position of chairman of the Probation Board for Northern Ireland is two three year terms, that is six years in all. The present chairman will complete this period at the end of this month. Following an open competition conducted in accordance with the Code of Practice of the Office of the Commissioner for Public Appointments, I have therefore appointed Ronald Spence as chairman of the Probation Board for a three year term starting on 1 December 2004.

Public Sector Pay

Mr. Lidington: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland whether it is his policy to introduce *(a)* regional and *(b)* local pay for the public sector in Northern Ireland. [195530]

Mr. Pearson: The Government recognise that pay flexibility at regional and local levels is an important part of their objectives for greater efficiency in the delivery of public services and for regional development. In Northern Ireland, this approach is being taken forward through the development and maintenance of a Pay and Workforce Strategy. This uses objective evidence to support pay policies that reflect regional and local labour market conditions whenever possible and ensure that pay is sufficient to recruit, retain and motivate staff to deliver public services to the standards required.

Schools (East Londonderry)

Mr. Gregory Campbell: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland how many *(a)* primary and *(b)* post primary schools will need to be replaced in the East Londonderry constituency within the next five years; and what the planned timetable is for each school. [196512]

Mr. Gardiner: In the East Londonderry constituency three primary schools and one post-primary school have received approval to proceed to tender. The completion date for each will be dependent on the planning, procurement and construction work required so it is only possible to provide approximate timescales at this stage.

A further three primary and two post-primary schools have been identified by the relevant school authorities as requiring a major capital works scheme. These have been assessed by the Department of Education as having a need for a scheme and economic appraisals will be undertaken to determine the options. Progressing the schemes following the appraisal process will be subject to the availability of resources.

The relevant school authorities have also identified a further eight potential schemes for assessment within the next five years.

The schools and their current status are as follows.

1. Schemes approved for funding:

Primary

Dungiven, Largy and Burnfoot primary schools—A new amalgamated replacement primary school. Estimated completion date autumn 2006.

Carnalridge Primary School, Portrush—a new school on existing site. Estimated completion date autumn 2006.

Glasvey and Limegrove Special Schools—a new amalgamated school in Limavady. Estimated completion date autumn 2007.

Post-primary

Coleraine College—an extension/refurbishment on existing site. Estimated completion date autumn 2007.

2. Schemes in planning which have been assessed by the Department of Education as having a major capital need and are at the economic appraisal stage

Primary

Ballykelly Primary School

Crossroads Primary School, Kilrea

St. Canice's Primary School, Dungiven

Post Primary

Dominican College, Portstewart

Coleraine High School

3. Other schools notified to the Department by the relevant school authorities for future assessment (within next five years)

Primary

Drumachose Primary School, Limavady

Millburn Primary School, Coleraine

Portstewart Primary School

Killowen Primary School, Coleraine

Gorran Primary School, Aghadowey

Macosquin Primary School, Coleraine

Millstrand Integrated Primary School

Post-primary

St. Patrick's High School, Dungiven

Self-employment

Mr. Gregory Campbell: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland what percentage of those in full-time employment in Northern Ireland during 2004 are self-employed. [196514]

Mr. Gardiner: Latest figures from the summer (June-August) 2004 Labour Force Survey estimated that 17.4 per cent. of people in full-time employment in Northern Ireland are self-employed.

Vehicle Registration

Rev. Ian Paisley: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland how many registered *(a)* private vehicles and *(b)* powered two-wheel vehicles there are in Northern Ireland. [195236]

Angela Smith: The Northern Ireland vehicle register does not easily distinguish between vehicles in private and company ownership. At 18 October 2004 the number of licensed vehicles and vehicles with Statutory off the Road Notifications on the Northern Ireland vehicles register was 914,970. 32,378 of these were powered two-wheel vehicles.

Water Conservation

Lady Hermon: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland what steps have been taken to promote water conservation as part of the reform of water and sewerage services in Northern Ireland. [195845]

Mr. Spellar: Water conservation and the sustainable and long-term management of water resources is an objective of the Water Framework Directive. This Directive puts forward pricing as a means of achieving this objective and it requires that, by 2010, the price charged to water consumers for abstraction, water supply and collection and treatment of waste water reflects the true cost of the provision of the services. The proposed charging regime for water and sewerage services, which I announced on 13 September, has been developed in light of the Directive and the water pricing policies within it will require a contribution from households and other sectors towards the cost of the water and sewerage services they receive as an incentive to use water efficiently.

Water Service is taking forward a wide range of measures to promote water conservation and reduce demand for water.

Written Answers to Questions

Wednesday 10 November 2004

ENVIRONMENT, FOOD AND RURAL AFFAIRS

Graffiti/Fly-posting (Merseyside)

Mrs. Curtis-Thomas: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs on how many occasions a Merseyside *(a)* local authority officer, *(b)* community support officer and *(c)* person accredited by the Chief Constable has issued a fixed penalty notice for minor graffiti and fly-posting offences. [191327]

Ms Blears: I have been asked to reply.

The number of fixed penalty notices issued is not held centrally. The power to issue such notices for minor graffiti or fly posting has not been used on Merseyside by Community Support Officers or accredited persons.

Agriculture and Fisheries Council

Mr. Hood: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what the outcome was of the Agriculture and Fisheries Council on 18–19 October; what the Government's stance was on the issues discussed, including its voting record; and if she will make a statement. [195376]

Margaret Beckett: My hon. Friend the Parliamentary Secretary and I represented the United Kingdom at a meeting of the Agriculture and Fisheries Council in Luxembourg on 18 October 2004. The Scottish Minister for Environment and Rural Development was also present.

As this was the last Council expected to be attended by Commissioners Franz Fischler and David Byrne, the Council took the opportunity to pay warm tribute to the contribution that they had made during their time in office.

As to the agenda, the Council responded to a number of key questions arising from a Commission report on the simplification of the common market organisation in fruit and vegetables. I joined several delegations in noting that, while changes to the regime agreed in 1996 have had a positive effect, we need to look constructively at the scope for further changes, including increased flexibility and subsidiarity in the regime. Its impact on developing countries and on the Doha Development Agenda would also be important factors. We should be wary of further intervention in the market but we could look at the scope for promotion of fruit and vegetable consumption. The Commission will reflect upon the exchanges before tabling any proposals for further reform. Discussion will resume at official level.

The Council took note, without discussion, of discussions on the European Action Plan for Organic Food and Farming and agreed conclusions supporting a range of further actions.

On fisheries, my hon. Friend the Parliamentary Secretary emphasised the importance of consistent and effective enforcement of the Common Fisheries Policy (CFP), and welcomed the proposal for a Community Fisheries Control Agency. However, he emphasised that the Agency should act in a co-ordinating, not instructing role; that it should build on work to develop a regional input to the CFP; and that it should be cost neutral. Many delegations made similar points. Discussion will continue between officials.

The Council held an initial exchange of views in preparation for this year's negotiation on a fisheries agreement with Norway. My hon. Friend made clear the high priority the United Kingdom attaches to ensuring that the EU has access to the full amount of Arctic cod quota it is entitled to under the terms of the EEA Agreement, and identifying stocks that the EU can offer Norway in exchange without making use of mackerel which is a fully utilised quota stock. There was general agreement that the Commission needed to take a robust line with Norway. Further preparations for the negotiation will be taken forward by officials.

The Council held a policy debate on Commission proposals for recovery plans for hake and Norway lobster in the Cantabrian Sea and for sole stocks in the Western English Channel and Bay of Biscay. My hon. Friend made clear the United Kingdom's commitment to sustainable management of western Channel sole which is an important stock for fishermen in south-west England, but that we do not believe western Channel sole should be a recovery stock or that the Commission's effort control proposals are appropriate. He drew attention to the advice on this stock delivered by the International Council for the Exploration of the Seas (ICES) in August which suggests that this stock is less likely to be outside safe limits than other sole stocks, confirming the results of collaborative research carried out with commercial fishing vessels in the south-west. He called for inconsistencies between this advice and the most recent ICES draft advice to be clarified urgently. Other member states expressed a range of views on the recovery plan proposals. Discussions will continue among officials.

The Commission reported on the state of play on a number of important trade negotiations. On the WTO, Commissioner Fischler welcomed the framework agreement reached in Geneva in the summer as a basis for continued detailed negotiations which safeguard essential European interests. He also reported on the continuing attempts to make progress in the EU/Mercosur negotiations; on work to agree a tariff-only arrangement for reform of the banana regime; and on resolving outstanding negotiations with certain third country suppliers of rice. Among a long list of many other business items, I and several others supported a Danish request to consider how best to include low fat dairy products in the school milk programme. Several, mostly central European, member states drew attention to the problems on the EU cereals market following this year's harvest. Other matters raised were: the impact of the US Bio-terrorism Act, implementation of the reformed CAP in Denmark, state aid for weather damage in Lithuania, the co-existence of GMO and other crops, the impact on fishing of increased diesel prices in France and the EU/Angola Fisheries

Agreement. The Commission tabled a written report on continuing BSE control measures. France reported on its action to deal with a recent case of rabies in an imported dog. Spain reported an outbreak of blue tongue disease in cattle in southern Spain and drew attention to a forthcoming conference on plant genetic resources.

Aircraft Emissions

Mrs May: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs on what basis noise measurements will be taken to draw up a noise map for Heathrow. [195092]

Alun Michael: Details of the proposed options will be put out to public consultation in due course. As yet, no decision has been taken as to who will be the competent authorities for the production of strategic noise maps for airports under Directive 2002/49/EC on the assessment and management of environmental noise (the Environmental Noise Directive), or the methodology to be used.

The pilot project to map Heathrow in terms of the noise indicator L_{den} and the annual daytime contours produced for the DfT are produced using the calculation model, ANCON. This model is validated from empirical noise measurements for the various aircraft types included in the model.

Carbon Dioxide Emissions

Mr. Drew: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what discussions she has had with the Department for Trade and Industry on its target for greenhouse gas emissions; and which is the lead Department in setting those targets. [195343]

Mr. Morley *[holding answer 2 November 2004]*: The Spending Review 2004 reconfirmed the UK's targets to reduce greenhouse gas emissions to 12.5 per cent. below 1990 levels in line with our Kyoto commitment and to move towards a 20 per cent. reduction in carbon dioxide emissions below 1990 levels by 2010. These Public Sector Agreement (PSA) targets are shared jointly with the Department of Trade and Industry and the Department for Transport. The Government also announced in last year's Energy White Paper that we would put ourselves on a path to cut our carbon dioxide emissions by some 60 per cent. by 2050.

The UK Climate Change Programme published in 2000 sets out the Government's approach to tackling climate change. It contains a framework of policies and measures intended to achieve the emissions reductions necessary to deliver the UK's commitment under the Kyoto Protocol and move towards the 20 per cent. reduction in carbon dioxide emissions. Progress towards the Kyoto Protocol commitment and national goals are discussed by Ministers regularly, in particular through the Sustainable Energy Policy Network, whose ministerial group oversees the delivery of the Energy White Paper commitments. The group is jointly chaired by my right hon. Friends the Secretary of State and the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry.

Mr. Clapham: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what her latest estimate is of total UK tonnage of carbon dioxide emissions; what proportion is produced by *(a)* aircraft transport, *(b)* road and rail transport and shipping in territorial waters, *(c)* coal burned in power stations, *(d)* oil burned in (i) power stations, (ii) domestic heating and (iii) industrial heating, *(e)* gas burned in (A) power stations, (B) domestic heating and (C) industrial heating, *(f)* orimulsion/shale oil burned in power stations and *(g)* industry, broken down by sector. [195672]

Mr. Morley *[holding answer 2 November 2004]:* Total emission estimates of carbon dioxide (CO$_2$) in the UK in 2002 were 550,965,312 tonnes. The following table shows the proportion of these emissions that occurred from the sources listed. Figures quoted for oil and gas burnt by both the industrial and domestic sectors are total fuel figures for each sector, as it is not possible to disaggregate emissions to display heating only.

Orimulsion has not been burnt by any sector since 1997.

	Source	*Fuel*	*Percentage UK total CO$_2$ emissions in 2002*
(a)	Aircraft transport	All fuels used in category	0.5
(b)	Road transport	All fuels used in category	21
(b)	Rail transport	All fuels used in category	0.2
(b)	Shipping	All fuels used in category	0.3
(c)	Power Stations	Coal	18
(d)(i)	Power stations	Oil	0.4
(d)(ii)	Industry	Oil	2.4
(d)(iii)	Domestic	Oil	0.002
(e)(A)	Power Stations	Gas	10
(e)(B)	Domestic	Gas	13
(e)(C)	Industry	Gas	9

CITES Import Permits

Mr. Banks: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what safeguards there are to ensure that primates imported into the UK under Convention on International Trade in Endangered Species regulations are kept by people who have sufficient knowledge to care for and house the animals. [197043]

Mr. Morley *[holding answer 8 November 2004]:* A CITES import permit may only be issued when certain conditions have been met. One of the conditions is that the scientific authority must be satisfied that the intended accommodation for an Annex A specimen (great apes, chimpanzees etc) at the place of destination is adequately equipped to conserve and care for it properly. For Annex B specimens (most other primates) documentary evidence that the accommodation is suitable must be provided.

Departmental Expenditure

Andrew George: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs if she will break down the budget set by her Department for public expenditure on wildlife, countryside and better regulation for financial years *(a)* 2004–05 and *(b)* 2005–06 by programme. [196689]

Alun Michael: The Department's plans for public expenditure on wildlife, countryside and better regulation for the two years 2004–05 and 2005–06 consist of the following programmes:

£ million

Programme	*2004–05*	*2005–06*
Rural Support Services	15.7	20.1
English Nature	69.5	71.4
National Forest Company	2.9	2.9
Landscape Protection, Recreation and Public Access	10.2	15.0
National Parks and Broads Authority	28.3	28.2
Wildlife and Biodiversity Promotion	5.4	10.4
Total	132.0	148.0

Andrew George: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs if she will break down the budget set by her Department for public expenditure by the Rural Payments Agency on *(a)* the Over-Thirty Month Scheme, *(b)* direct payments under the Common Agricultural Policy and *(c)* other schemes for the financial years (i) 2004–05 and (ii) 2005–06 by scheme. [196692]

Alun Michael: The current budget allocation that has been set by Defra for the Rural Payments Agency (RPA) for the 2004–05 financial year is as follows.

(a) Over-Thirty Month Scheme—£300 million

(b) Direct payments under the Common Agricultural Policy—£1,792 million

(c) Other schemes[1]—£167million

The public expenditure for the RPA for the 2005–06 financial year is under consideration. The expenditure figures are before any reimbursement by the European Union.

[1] Other schemes total includes the following main schemes:

England Rural Development—£124 million

Structural Funds (European Agriculture Guidance and Guarantee Fund Guidance)—£27 million

Transmissible Spongiform Encephalopathies Surveillance—£15 million

Hydrofluorocarbons

Mr. Stringer: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs if she will make a statement on progress on her policies and measures for reducing HFC emissions as outlined in paragraphs 72–76, section two, chapter four of Climate Change—the UK Programme (November 2000). [196288]

Mr. Morley *[holding answer 8 November 2004]:* Good progress has been made in developing effective measures to reduce HFC emissions. Political agreement to an EC regulation on certain fluorinated greenhouse gases, and a directive amending Existing Vehicle Type Approval in relation to Mobile Air Conditioning (MAC) in cars was reached in October 2004.

The regulation includes measures on: containment through responsible handling during use, recycling and end-of-life recovery; reporting on quantities produced, supplied, used and emitted; certain application specific bans on use and placing on the market. The directive includes a ban on the use of fluorinated gases with high Global Warming Potential (GWP) in MACs from 2011 (new vehicle types) and 2017 (all new vehicles).

Jubilee River

Mr. Grieve: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what assessment she has made of the conclusions of the Atkins report into the construction of the Jubilee River; and if she will make a statement. [195683]

Mr. Morley *[holding answer 2 November 2004]:* Operational responsibility, including the planning, design, construction, maintenance and operation of the Jubilee River rests with the Environment Agency (EA).

I am advised that all independent reports so far, including the Atkins report, confirm that the effect of the operation of the Jubilee River on downstream water levels during flood events is minimal. The EA advise that the Atkins report recommended further investigations and survey work, particularly regarding the height of the river banks and further monitoring of flows while the scheme is being operated.

I understand that as a result of the report the EA will conduct surveys prior to consideration of further works to improve capacity.

Landfill

Mr. Drew: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what discussions she has had with waste disposal authorities on the Landfill Allowance Trading Scheme; and what contingency plans she has put in place if local authorities fail to reduce landfill by their targets. [195344]

Mr. Morley *[holding answer 2 November 2004]*: Ministers and officials in Defra have had extensive discussions with local authorities on the Landfill Allowances Trading Scheme ranging from bilateral meetings with individual councils through to regional roadshows aimed at all local authorities. In addition, local authority representatives sit on the Landfill Allowances Trading Scheme stakeholders group that discuses all issues in respect of the scheme.

If local authorities fail to meet their landfill reduction targets the draft Regulations laid before this House on 13 October make provision for financial penalties. Local authorities are being encouraged to make full use of the flexibilities built into the Landfill Allowances Trading Scheme to avoid exceeding their allowances.

Mr. Drew: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what plans she has to review the level of fines to be levied as a result of the Landfill Allowance Trading Scheme Regulations 2004. [195345]

Mr. Morley *[holding answer 2 November 2004]*: The draft Regulations laid before this House on 16 October 2004 set the penalty at £200 per tonne. This represents the most expensive option available to local authorities taking account of the marginal cost of landfill compared with the most expensive diversion option. Government will keep the level of penalties under review, taking account of changes in marginal costs or other factors. A full review of the operation of the scheme, including penalty levels, is planned for 2007.

Water Bills

Mr. Heyes: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs if she will replace current arrangements for assisting water customers who have difficulty paying their bills with payments through the benefits and tax credit system. [195108]

Mr. Morley *[holding answer 8 November 2004]:* A cross-Government steering group is reviewing the way in which lower income households are helped with their water and sewerage charges, in discussion with a range of stakeholders. A report will be published by the end of the year.

Refrigerators

Mr. Peter Ainsworth: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs pursuant to the answer of 16 September 2004, *Official Report*, column 1676W, to the hon. Member for Guildford (Sue Doughty), on refrigerators, what measures she has taken to prevent the loss of ozone depleting substances from refrigerators during their working life. [190869]

Mr. Morley *[holding answer 14 October 2004]:* EC Regulation 2037/2000 includes a requirement to take all precautionary measures that are practicable to prevent and minimise leakages of ozone depleting substances. This includes checking fixed equipment with a refrigerating fluid charge of more than 3 kg annually for leakages.

Domestic and small commercial refrigerators are manufactured with hermetic seals and so are designed not to leak.

Poaching

Mr. Gray: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs how many *(a)* arrests, *(b)* prosecutions and *(c)* convictions there have been under the (i) Hares Act 1848, (ii) Night Poaching Act 1828, (iii) Game Act 1831, (iv) Game Licences Act 1860, (v) Ground Game Act 1880 and (vi) Deer Act 1991 in the last 30 years. [194304]

Paul Goggins: I have been asked to reply.

Information collected centrally on arrests is available only by main offence group for "notifiable offences" and does not extend to individual offence level.

The information contained in the table gives the number of defendants proceeded against at magistrates courts and found guilty at all courts for offences under the: (i) Hares Act 1848, (ii) Night Poaching Act 1828, (iii) Game Act 1831, (iv) Game Licences Act 1860, (v) Ground Game Act 1880 and (vi) Deer Act 1991, England and Wales 1983 to 2002. Data for these offences prior to 1983 is not available on the Home Office Court Proceedings database.

Statistics for 2003 will be published on 18 November.

Number of defendants proceeded against and found guilty at all courts for certain offences, England and Wales, 1983 to 2002[1]

		1983		*1984*		*1985*	
Offence description	*Principal statute*	*Proceeded against*	*Found guilty*	*Proceeded against*	*Found guilty*	*Proceeded against*	*Found guilty*
Selling hares out of season	Hares Preservation Act 1892, Section 2	—	—	—	—	—	—
Taking or destroying game or rabbits on lands etc. by night or entering lands at night to take or destroy game	Night Poaching Act 1828, Section 1	342	304	414	373	368	325
Dealer or other person having game in possession out of season	Game Act 1831 section 4 as amended by the Game Act 1970	27	25	8	8	8	7
Sale of game by persons not licensed to kill or sell game	Game Act 1831, Section 25	3	3	7	3	1	1
Private individuals etc. buying game from persons not licensed as dealers	Game Act 1831, Section 27 as amended by the Game Act 1970	—	—	—	—	—	—
Dealer buying game from unlicensed person	Game Act 1831, Section 28	—	—	—	—	—	—
Laying poison to destroy or injure game, killing game illegally, killing or taking without certificate, taking or destroying the eggs of game, wild fowl etc. or having eggs so taken in possession	Game Act 1831, Sections 3, 12, 23 and 24	149	133	104	89	83	70
Offences against game laws	Game Licences Act 1860	172	170	150	146	143	135
Killing ground game by night or with poison	Ground Game act 1880, Section 6	3	2	4	3	—	—
Offence against killing or injury to deer by shooting, trap, snares etc.	Deer Act 1991 (replaces provisions under Deer Act 1963 and Deer Act 1980)	51	38	30	26	33	24
Total		747	675	717	648	636	562

Offence description	*Principal statute*	*1986* *Proceeded against*	*1986* *Found guilty*	*1987* *Proceeded against*	*1987* *Found guilty*	*1988* *Proceeded against*	*1988* *Found guilty*
Selling hares out of season	Hares Preservation Act 1892, Section 2	—	—	—	—	—	—
Taking or destroying game or rabbits on lands etc. by night or entering lands at night to take or destroy game	Night Poaching Act 1828, Section 1	341	303	324	294	336	285
Dealer or other person having game in possession out of season	Game Act 1831 section 4 as amended by the Game Act 1970	11	11	6	4	5	5
Sale of game by persons not licensed to kill or sell game	Game Act 1831, Section 25	—	—	3	3	—	—
Private individuals etc. buying game from persons not licensed as dealers	Game Act 1831, Section 27 as amended by the Game Act 1970	—	—	—	—	—	—
Dealer buying game from unlicensed person	Game Act 1831, Section 28	—	—	—	—	1	1
Laying poison to destroy or injure game, killing game illegally, killing or taking without certificate, taking or destroying the eggs of game, wild fowl etc. or having eggs so taken in possession	Game Act 1831, Sections 3, 12, 23 and 24	66	59	72	58	75	64
Offences against game laws	Game Licences Act 1860	100	90	64	61	61	60
Killing ground game by night or with poison	Ground Game act 1880, Section 6	2	—	1	1	1	1
Offence against killing or injury to deer by shooting, trap, snares etc.	Deer Act 1991 (replaces provisions under Deer Act 1963 and Deer Act 1980)	26	22	35	22	24	22
Total		546	485	505	443	503	438

Offence description	*Principal statute*	*1989* *Proceeded against*	*1989* *Found guilty*	*1990* *Proceeded against*	*1990* *Found guilty*	*1991* *Proceeded against*	*1991* *Found guilty*
Selling hares out of season	Hares Preservation Act 1892, Section 2	—	—	—	—	—	—
Taking or destroying game or rabbits on lands etc. by night or entering lands at night to take or destroy game	Night Poaching Act 1828, Section 1	389	332	278	213	269	211
Dealer or other person having game in possession out of season	Game Act 1831 section 4 as amended by the Game Act 1970	3	3	10	9	3	3
Sale of game by persons not licensed to kill or sell game	Game Act 1831, Section 25	—	—	2	2	1	1
Private individuals etc. buying game from persons not licensed as dealers	Game Act 1831, Section 27 as amended by the Game Act 1970	1	1	—	—	—	—
Dealer buying game from unlicensed person	Game Act 1831, Section 28	—	—	—	—	—	—
Laying poison to destroy or injure game, killing game illegally, killing or taking without certificate, taking or destroying the eggs of game, wild fowl etc. or having eggs so taken in possession	Game Act 1831, Sections 3, 12, 23 and 24	77	66	81	68	50	29
Offences against game laws	Game Licences Act 1860	76	70	86	66	76	65
Killing ground game by night or with poison	Ground Game act 1880, Section 6	2	2	—	—	—	—
Offence against killing or injury to deer by shooting, trap, snares etc.	Deer Act 1991 (replaces provisions under Deer Act 1963 and Deer Act 1980)	34	25	19	15	11	6
Total		582	499	476	373	410	315

Offence description	*Principal statute*	*1992* *Proceeded against*	*1992* *Found guilty*	*1993* *Proceeded against*	*1993* *Found guilty*	*1994* *Proceeded against*	*1994* *Found guilty*
Selling hares out of season	Hares Preservation Act 1892, Section 2	—	—	—	—	—	—
Taking or destroying game or rabbits on lands etc. by night or entering lands at night to take or destroy game	Night Poaching Act 1828, Section 1	206	154	181	147	157	122
Dealer or other person having game in	Game Act 1831 section 4 as amended	4	—	3	3	8	7

		1992		*1993*		*1994*	
Offence description	*Principal statute*	*Proceeded against*	*Found guilty*	*Proceeded against*	*Found guilty*	*Proceeded against*	*Found guilty*
possession out of season	by the Game Act 1970						
Sale of game by persons not licensed to kill or sell game	Game Act 1831, Section 25	2	2	—	—	—	—
Private individuals etc. buying game from persons not licensed as dealers	Game Act 1831, Section 27 as amended by the Game Act 1970	—	—	1	1	—	—
Dealer buying game from unlicensed person	Game Act 1831, Section 28	—	—	—	—	—	—
Laying poison to destroy or injure game, killing game illegally, killing or taking without certificate, taking or destroying the eggs of game, wild fowl etc. or having eggs so taken in possession	Game Act 1831, Sections 3, 12, 23 and 24	38	24	73	54	27	22
Offences against game laws	Game Licences Act 1860	70	64	24	20	17	16
Killing ground game by night or with poison	Ground Game act 1880, Section 6	4	1	—	—	—	—
Offence against killing or injury to deer by shooting, trap, snares etc.	Deer Act 1991 (replaces provisions under Deer Act 1963 and Deer Act 1980)	27	22	13	7	21	7
Total		348	267	295	232	230	174

		1995		*1996*		*1997*	
Offence description	*Principal statute*	*Proceeded against*	*Found guilty*	*Proceeded against*	*Found guilty*	*Proceeded against*	*Found guilty*
Selling hares out of season	Hares Preservation Act 1892, Section 2	—	—	—	—	—	—
Taking or destroying game or rabbits on lands etc. by night or entering lands at night to take or destroy game	Night Poaching Act 1828, Section 1	137	108	98	81	69	42
Dealer or other person having game in possession out of season	Game Act 1831 section 4 as amended by the Game Act 1970	2	2	3	3	3	—
Sale of game by persons not licensed to kill or sell game	Game Act 1831, Section 25	—	—	1	1	—	—
Private individuals etc. buying game from persons not licensed as dealers	Game Act 1831, Section 27 as amended by the Game Act 1970	1	1	—	—	—	—
Dealer buying game from unlicensed person	Game Act 1831, Section 28	—	—	—	—	—	—
Laying poison to destroy or injure game, killing game illegally, killing or taking without certificate, taking or destroying the eggs of game, wild fowl etc. or having eggs so taken in possession	Game Act 1831, Sections 3, 12, 23 and 24	19	14	22	22	21	19
Offences against game laws	Game Licences Act 1860	11	9	5	4	13	10
Killing ground game by night or with poison	Ground Game act 1880, Section 6	—	—	—	—	—	—
Offence against killing or injury to deer by shooting, trap, snares etc.	Deer Act 1991 (replaces provisions under Deer Act 1963 and Deer Act 1980)	10	6	14	9	20	10
Total		180	140	143	120	126	81

		1998		*1999*		*2000*[2]	
Offence description	*Principal statute*	*Proceeded against*	*Found guilty*	*Proceeded against*	*Found guilty*	*Proceeded against*	*Found guilty*
Selling hares out of season	Hares Preservation Act 1892, Section 2	—	—	—	—	—	—
Taking or destroying game or rabbits on lands etc. by night or entering lands at night to take or destroy game	Night Poaching Act 1828, Section 1	70	52	62	42	48	36
Dealer or other person having game in possession out of season	Game Act 1831 section 4 as amended by the Game Act 1970	17	16	6	6	2	2
Sale of game by persons not licensed to kill or sell game	Game Act 1831, Section 25	—	—	—	—	—	—
Private individuals etc. buying game from persons not licensed as dealers	Game Act 1831, Section 27 as amended by the Game Act 1970	—	—	—	—	2	1
Dealer buying game from unlicensed	Game Act 1831, Section 28	—	—	—	—	—	—

Offence description	Principal statute	1998 Proceeded against	1998 Found guilty	1999 Proceeded against	1999 Found guilty	2000[2] Proceeded against	2000[2] Found guilty
person							
Laying poison to destroy or injure game, killing game illegally, killing or taking without certificate, taking or destroying the eggs of game, wild fowl etc. or having eggs so taken in possession	Game Act 1831, Sections 3, 12, 23 and 24	20	14	25	20	9	7
Offences against game laws	Game Licences Act 1860	6	5	4	3	8	5
Killing ground game by night or with poison	Ground Game act 1880, Section 6	1	1	—	—	—	—
Offence against killing or injury to deer by shooting, trap, snares etc.	Deer Act 1991 (replaces provisions under Deer Act 1963 and Deer Act 1980)	14	9	4	—	5	2
Total		128	97	101	71	74	53

Offence description	Principal statute	2001 Proceeded against	2001 Found guilty	2002 Proceeded against	2002 Found guilty
Selling hares out of season	Hares Preservation Act 1892, Section 2	—	—	—	—
Taking or destroying game or rabbits on lands etc. by night or entering lands at night to take or destroy game	Night Poaching Act 1828, Section 1	7	3	28	15
Dealer or other person having game in possession out of season	Game Act 1831 section 4 as amended by the Game Act 1970	1	1	1	1
Sale of game by persons not licensed to kill or sell game	Game Act 1831, Section 25	—	—	8	8
Private individuals etc. buying game from persons not licensed as dealers	Game Act 1831, Section 27 as amended by the Game Act 1970	—	—	—	—
Dealer buying game from unlicensed person	Game Act 1831, Section 28	—	—	—	—
Laying poison to destroy or injure game, killing game illegally, killing or taking without certificate, taking or destroying the eggs of game, wild fowl etc. or having eggs so taken in possession	Game Act 1831, Sections 3, 12, 23 and 24	7	7	7	4
Offences against game laws	Game Licences Act 1860	7	6	2	1
Killing ground game by night or with poison	Ground Game act 1880, Section 6	—	—	—	—
Offence against killing or injury to deer by shooting, trap, snares etc.	Deer Act 1991 (replaces provisions under Deer Act 1963 and Deer Act 1980)	6	6	5	1
Total		28	23	51	30

[1] These data are on the principal offence basis.

[2] Staffordshire police force were only able to submit sample data for persons proceeded against and convicted in the magistrates courts for the year 2000. Although sufficient to estimate higher orders of data, these data are not robust enough at a detailed level and have been excluded from the table.

Private Finance Initiative

Mr. George Osborne: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs if she will list the private finance initiative arrangements in which the Department is engaged; what the total cost of each arrangement is *(a)* over its lifetime and *(b)* in each year of its operation; and how the arrangement appears in the Department's public accounts. [193982]

Alun Michael: The Department is engaged in three private finance contracts.

The Environment Agency, which is a non-departmental body of Defra, has let two public/private partnership contracts for flood risk management—(i) the Broadland Flood Alleviation Scheme in Norfolk and (ii) the Pevensey Bay Sea Defences in Sussex. Costs shown in the table are actual up to 2003–04 and estimates thereafter.

The Department has also agreed a private finance contract with Kajima plc for its offices at (iii) Brooklands Avenue, Cambridge. The site is shared and the contracted annual costs are apportioned between the site's occupants. Defra's accounts reflect the share of costs estimated to fall on the Department; the table shows the total contract costs.

£000

	i. Broadland	*ii. Pevensey*	*iii. Cambridge*
(a) Totals	141,882	31,698	149,020
(b) Annual Cost			
2000–01	—	1,136	—
2001–02	1,979	1,358	—
2002–03	1,972	1,480	20
2003–04	4,948	1,734	3,400
2004–05	10,676	1,822	3,600
2005–06	5,804	1,810	3,600
2006–07	7,513	1,787	3,700
2007–08	6,878	1,754	3,700
2008–09	11,855	1,746	4,100
2009–10	13,856	1,741	4,100
2010–11	8,275	1,736	4,200
2011–12	14,070	1,077	4,200
2012–13	11,748	946	4,300
2013–14	8,331	946	4,700
2014–15	4,565	946	4,700
2015–16	4,671	946	4,800
2016–17	4,743	946	4,800
2017–18	4,723	946	4,900
2018–19	5,189	946	5,400
2019–20	4,811	946	5,400
2020–21	4,528	946	5,600
2021–22	747	946	5,700
2022–23	—	946	5,700
2023–24	—	946	6,300
2024–25	—	946	6,300
2025–26	—	219	6,400
2026–27	—	—	6,500
2027–28	—	—	6,500
2028–29	—	—	6,500
2029–30	—	—	6,500
2030–31	—	—	6,700
2031–32	—	—	6,700

In determining the accounting treatment of PFI arrangements, the Department's Resource Accounts follow United Kingdom Generally Accepted Accounting Practice, including Financial Reporting Standards (FRSs) issued by the Accounting Standards Board (ASB). The specific guidance issued by the ASB for accounting for PFI is "Application Note F to FRS 5—Private Finance Initiative and Similar Contracts", as supplemented by the Treasury-issued "Technical Note No. 1 (Revised)—How to Account for PFI transactions".

The Department has also supported a number of PFI/PPP contracts which are not reportable in the Defra Resource Accounts, including infrastructure developments by British Waterways, the "SPIRIT" IT systems used by the Countryside Agency, and waste management schemes operated by the following local authorities:

Isle of Wight CC

Kirklees MBC

Hereford and Worcester CC

South Gloucestershire DC

Surrey CC

Leicester City

East London Waste Authority (partnership)

East Sussex and Brighton and Hove.

These are noted here for completeness but information on these contracts is not held centrally by the Department and is reported separately by the contracting bodies.

PRIME MINISTER

Departmental Contracts

Pete Wishart: To ask the Prime Minister (1) if he will list the 30 largest contracts awarded by his Office between *(a)* May 2001 and April 2002, *(b)* May 2002 and April 2003, *(c)* May 2003 and April 2004 and *(d)* May 2004 and the latest date for which figures are available, indicating in each case (i) the values of the contracts and (ii) the companies with which the contracts were placed; [196940]

(2) which non-accounting and non-information technology external organisations which had previously held contracts with his Office *(a)* won new contracts at the culmination of the existing contracts and *(b)* won new contracts after a period of inactivity with his Office in each of the past four years; [196941]

(3) which non-accounting and non-information technology external organisations have won new contracts with his Department in each of the past three years. [196942]

The Prime Minister: For these purposes my Office is part of the Cabinet Office. The specific information requested cannot be provided without incurring disproportionate costs.

Gambling

Mr. Don Foster: To ask the Prime Minister if he will list the occasions on which he has met representatives of *(a)* US casino operators, *(b)* British casino operators and *(c)* casino operators from other countries to discuss gambling issues, broken down by date of meeting. [195072]

The Prime Minister: As my official spokesman made clear on Monday 1 November 2004, I have not had any meetings with the industry in connection with the Gambling Bill.

Since the publication of the report of the Gambling Review Body (Cm 5206) in July 2001, officials have undertaken an extensive programme of consultations with interested bodies about options and proposals for changes to gambling law in Great Britain. There have been two formal consultations, the first on the Review Body's report and the second on the draft clauses published for pre-legislative scrutiny in November 2003. In addition to these consultations, officials have corresponded with and met individual companies, trade associations, charities and other bodies concerned with the problem gambling or who benefit from lotteries, local authorities, trade unions, law enforcement agencies, academics and many other public bodies and individuals, including members of the public with an interest. These contacts, designed to ensure that the Government's policy proposals are sound and take full account of all relevant benefits, cost and risks, have involved both Ministers and officials. All meetings were undertaken in accordance with the rules set out in the Ministerial Code and the Civil Service Management Code.

Mr. Gray: To ask the Prime Minister what contacts Mr. William Perrin of the Number 10 Policy Unit has had with companies involved in the *(a)* British and *(b)* US gaming industry in the past 24 months; and whether he has undertaken fact-finding visits in the United States in the company of employees of the (i) British and (ii) US gaming industry. [195391]

The Prime Minister *[holding answer 1 November]*: I refer the hon. Member to the answer I gave to him, the hon. Member for Bromsgrove (Miss Kirkbride), and my right hon. Friend the Member for Birkenhead (Mr. Field) on 28 October, *Official Report*, column 1392W.

Since the publication of the report of the Gambling Review Body (Cm 5206) in July 2001, officials have undertaken an extensive programme of consultations with interested bodies about options and proposals for changes to gambling law in Great Britain. There have been two formal consultations, the first on the Review Body's report and the second on the draft clauses published for pre-legislative scrutiny in November 2003. In addition to these consultations, officials have corresponded with and met individual companies, trade associations, charities and other bodies concerned with the problem gambling or who benefit from lotteries, local authorities, trade unions, law enforcement agencies, academics and many other public bodies and individuals, including members of public with an interest. These contacts, designed to ensure that the Government's policy proposals are sound and take full account of all relevant benefits, cost and risks, have involved both Ministers and officials. All meetings were undertaken in accordance with the rules set out in the Ministerial Code and the Civil Service Management Code.

Iraq

Mr. Paul Marsden: To ask the Prime Minister what records were kept of discussions with President Bush on the timing of going to war with Iraq during his visit to the US commencing on 7 September 2002. [195894]

The Prime Minister: Records of ministerial discussions and meetings are maintained in accordance with Cabinet Office Records.

Harry Cohen: To ask the Prime Minister pursuant to the answer from the Solicitor-General of 26 October 2004, *Official Report*, columns 1104–05W, on Iraq, what sources he used to make his assessment of whether Iraq *(a)* made false statements or omissions in its declarations and *(b)* complied with and co-operated with the terms of UN Resolution 1441; which omissions and false statements in Iraq's declaration of December 2002 which he considered to be fact at the time (i) have been confirmed and (ii) have not been confirmed subsequently as fact; and if he will make a statement. [197544]

The Prime Minister: I refer my hon. Friend to paragraph 385 of the report of the Butler Review of Intelligence on Weapons of Mass Destruction (HC898).

Pacific Islands

Mr. David Marshall: To ask the Prime Minister what discussions he has had with the Prime Minister of New Zealand on the possibility of sharing diplomatic premises on the Pacific Islands; and if he will make a statement. [197652]

The Prime Minister: I have discussions on a wide range of issues with the Prime Minister of New Zealand. As with previous Administrations, it is not the practice of this Government to make public details of discussions I have with foreign Governments.

Russia

Mr. Jim Cunningham: To ask the Prime Minister what recent discussions he has held with the Russian Government on *(a)* terrorism and *(b)* Chechnya. [196774]

The Prime Minister: I regularly discuss a wide range of issues with President Putin. As with previous Administrations, it is not the practice of this Government to make public details of discussions I have with foreign Governments.

ADVOCATE-GENERAL

Scottish Human Rights Commission

Mr. Lazarowicz: To ask the Advocate-General what discussions she has had with Scottish Ministers in relation to potential overlap with reserved matters in the establishment of a Scottish Human Rights Commission. [196313]

The Advocate-General for Scotland: I have had no discussions with the Scottish Ministers regarding potential overlap with reserved matters in the establishment of a Scottish Human Rights Commission. My role is to give legal advice when appropriate.

Policy discussions on reserved matters relating to the creation of a Scottish Human Rights Commission are for the Scottish Executive Ministers, the Department for Constitutional Affairs and Department of Trade and Industry.

SCOTLAND

Departmental Staff

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what percentage of the staff of the Department in *(a)* 2002 and *(b)* 2003 were people with disabilities. [196129]

Mrs. McGuire: I refer the hon. Member to the answer given by my hon. Friend the Minister for the Cabinet Office, on 9 November 2004, *Official Report*, column 619W.

INTERNATIONAL DEVELOPMENT

Iraq

7. **Mr. MacDougall:** To ask the Secretary of State for International Development if he will make a statement on the humanitarian situation in Iraq. [197146]

Hilary Benn: Iraqi ministries, United Nations agencies, the Red Cross and Red Crescent, and Iraqi NGOs and citizens are providing emergency humanitarian assistance where people are affected by fighting. An Emergency Working Group has been established to coordinate these efforts.

DFID has committed £333 million to humanitarian assistance and reconstruction in Iraq since March 2003, contributing towards the progress that has been made in restoring essential services, delivering food rations, reopening hospitals and schools and beginning the process of longer-term reconstruction.

8. **Dr. Cable:** To ask the Secretary of State for International Development how much UK spending on Iraqi reconstruction has been incurred to date; and how much is planned for the remainder of the current financial year. [197147]

Hilary Benn: Since March 2003 DFID has spent £113 million on humanitarian assistance and £127 million on reconstruction in Iraq. An additional £17 million had been allocated for Iraq from the joint DFID, FCO and MOD Global Conflict Prevention Pool (the GCPP). The MOD has spent around £20 million on Quick Impact Projects in Iraq. These projects, intended for immediate local effect, are primarily used as a means of creating an environment in troops can operate safely.

Present plans are to spend a further £67 million this financial year on reconstruction and £7 million from the GCPP.

Mr. Paul Marsden: To ask the Secretary of State for International Development what percentage of households in Iraq have clean potable water supplied to them. [195843]

Hilary Benn: Estimates suggest that immediately after the 2003 conflict, 60 per cent. of urban and 30 per cent. of rural populations had access to safe water. Considerable work has taken place since May 2003 to improve the quality, quantity and reliability of water supplies.

In Basra the water supply system is now better than before the 2003 conflict. Informal estimates by the former Coalition Provisional Authority indicated that in southern Iraq water supply coverage increased by 10–15 per cent. from May 2003 to July 2004. Further work on restoring water treatment plants has continued since July. In Baghdad, specialists from the USA are working with local government officials to improve water treatment throughout the city. Drinking water is also supplied by bottle and from tankers.

Afghanistan

9. **Mr. Jim Cunningham:** To ask the Secretary of State for International Development how much his Department has spent on independent research on Afghanistan since 2001; and if he will make a statement. [197148]

Mr. Gareth Thomas: DFID has spent £2,222,905 on research undertaken by independent organisations in Afghanistan since September 2001. This has included research into food security, alternatives to poppy production, private sector development and analysis of the budget and budgetary process.

The results of this research have been shared with the Afghan Government, international donor community and non-governmental organisations working in Afghanistan and is helping to shape development policy and practice.

12. **Miss McIntosh:** To ask the Secretary of State for International Development he will make a statement on humanitarian aid to Afghanistan. [197151]

Mr. Gareth Thomas: In common with many donors, DFID is now focusing the majority of it's support to Afghanistan on reconstruction efforts, however we continue to make funds available for humanitarian assistance. In the current financial year DFID has made £3 million specifically available for humanitarian assistance in Afghanistan. Our main focus is assistance to refugees and Internally Displaced Persons; both in their temporary accommodation and to assist them in their return home, and to this end we will be providing £2.5 million to the UNHCR and £0.5 million to the International Organisation for Migration.

In addition to planned assistance, we continue to monitor the on-going humanitarian situation in Afghanistan. DFID have recently made a further £3 million available for drought-affected areas in the south and west of the country, following the recent appeal from the Afghan Government and UN agencies.

Nigeria

10. **Mr. Tynan:** To ask the Secretary of State for International Development if he will make a statement on the level of aid given to Nigeria in 2003–04. [197149]

Hilary Benn: In 2003–04, DFID's aid to Nigeria was around £32 million. The EC (to which DFID contributes) gave about £9 million.

Nigeria is making good progress: The economic team put in place by President Obasanjo is vigorously pursuing reform: Nigeria recently launched a strategy for poverty reduction; is fighting corruption; and it has implemented sound macro-economic policies.

Support is critical to sustain this momentum, and Nigeria is severely under-aided. It receives only $1–2 per capita in aid compared with a Sub-Saharan average of $21. We are therefore doubling our aid to £70 million in 2005–06, and supporting a sustainable solution to Nigeria's debt problems.

European Constitution

11. **David Burnside:** To ask the Secretary of State for International Development what assessment he has made of the consequences of the proposed European Constitution on the executive powers and responsibilities of his Department. [197150]

Mr. Gareth Thomas: The new Constitutional Treaty does not have any direct impact on DFID's role and responsibilities in the field of development cooperation. The Treaty reconfirms development cooperation as an area of shared competence between the Union and its member states.

We welcome the fact that the new Treaty gives strong prominence to poverty reduction as the main aim of its development actions, and to the principle of better coherence between the Union's external policies and its development policies.

East Africa

13. **Alistair Burt:** To ask the Secretary of State for International Development what his assessment is of the contribution being made by faith-based NGOs in tackling housing and poverty issues in east Africa. [197152]

Hilary Benn: Faith-based organisations play an important role in East Africa, both in rural and urban areas. In informal settlements they often provide leadership to enable slum dwellers to organise themselves in dealing with concerns over land, infrastructure and services. This sometimes brings them into conflict with municipal authorities and vested interests. The poor have limited access to resources and services, and the support and voice offered by faith-based organisations is highly valued.

Palestinian Territories

14. **Huw Irranca-Davies:** To ask the Secretary of State for International Development if he will make a statement on his Department's work in the Palestinian territories. [197153]

Hilary Benn: DFID is working with partners to help end conflict and create a viable Palestinian state that will reduce poverty. A Country Assistance Plan for Palestinians, published in July, provides a comprehensive statement of DFID's planned work in the Palestinian Territory over the next two years. Its central themes are enhancing the prospects for peace, promoting better Palestinian governance institutions and systems and making international aid and development assistance more effective.

Burma

15. **Mr. Bercow:** To ask the Secretary of State for International Development what projects his Department is supporting in Burma. [197154]

Mr. Gareth Thomas: We are currently supporting the following projects in Burma: Health Unlimited's work to enhance basic health care of Kachin and Wa refugees; the United Nations Development Programme Joint Programme for HIV/AIDS; the Burmese Border Consortium Relief Programme; the International Committee of the Red Cross; and the BBC World Service Trust Drama Project on HIV/AIDS.

Our total bilateral expenditure during the current financial year is expected to be £6.4 million.

Aid Budget

Adam Price: To ask the Secretary of State for International Development what percentage of the UK's GNP has been spent on the international aid budget in each year since 1997 for which figures are available. [196816]

Hilary Benn: The percentage of the UK's Gross National Income (GNI) spent on official development assistance (ODA) in each year from 1997 to 2003 is shown in the following table.

UK ODA as percentage of GNI: 1997 to 2003

	Percentage
1997	0.26
1998	0.27
1999	0.24
2000	0.32
2001	0.32
2002	0.31
2003	0.34

Note:

We have used GNI rather than GNP because the new system of National Accounts (SNA 1993) co-sponsored by the Organisation for Economic Co-Operation and Development (OECD) and other major international organisations broadened the coverage of Gross National Product and it was renamed Gross National Income.

Source:

Statistics in International Development 2004, Table 16.1

TREASURY

Cancer

Jon Trickett: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what the latest five year survival rate is for *(a)* prostate cancer and *(b)* breast cancer in (i) the Hemsworth constituency, (ii) the Wakefield area and (iii) England are; and if he will make a statement. [197258]

Mr. Timms: The information requested falls within the responsibility of the National Statistician, who has been asked to reply.

Letter from Colin Mowl to Mr. Jon Trickett, dated 10 November 2004:

The National Statistician has been asked to reply to your recent Parliamentary Question concerning the latest available figures of five year survival for *(a)* prostate cancer and *(b)* breast cancer in (i) Hemsworth constituency, (ii) the Wakefield area and (iii) and England. I am replying in his absence. [197258]

The latest available survival statistics for prostate cancer and breast cancer at the sub-national level are for patients[1] diagnosed during 1994–96 and followed up to 31 December 2001. These data are available for West Yorkshire strategic health authority, which contains Wakefield West and Eastern Wakefield primary care trusts. Data are not available for the Hemsworth constituency.

Five-year age standardised relative survival (%) for patients[1] diagnosed in 1994–96 and followed up to 31 December 2001: Wakefield strategic health authority and England

	Survival (%)	*(95% CI)*[2]
West Yorkshire strategic health authority		
Prostate	59	(56–63)
Breast (Women)	77	(75–78)
England		
Prostate	60.2	(59.6–60.9)
Breast (Women)	74.9	(74.5–75.3)

[1] Adults aged 15–99 years.

[2] The 95% confidence intervals (CI) show the range of uncertainty around each survival rate.

IT Contracts

Pete Wishart: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer which non-accounting and non-information technology external organisations have won new contracts with *(a)* his Department and *(b)* executive agencies for which he is responsible in each of the past three years. [196905]

Mr. Timms: Over the last three years, the Chancellors' Departments have awarded a large number of contracts, varying in value and covering a wide range of goods and services (other than accounting and IT). Details of every individual contract could only be provided at disproportionate cost. However, details of contracts of significant value (i.e. over £100,000) have been placed in the Library of the House.

Crown Estates Properties

Mr. Alan Williams: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer how many properties are on lease from the Crown Estate; how many of these are on lease for *(a)* 75 years or over, *(b)* 50 to 74 years and *(c)* 25 to 49 years; and how many houses are on lease from the Crown Estate for £1 million or more. [195133]

Mr. Timms: The Crown Estate has over 10,000 leases and licences covering both land and properties.

(a) Approximately 1,900 leases are for over 75 years.

(b) Approximately 1,000 leases are for between 50–74 years.

(c) Approximately 1,800 leases are for between 25–49 years.

The Crown Estate has 15 houses with leases valued at over £1 million.

Electoral Roll (Wandsworth)

Tom Cox: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer how many electors were on the electoral roll in each constituency in the London borough of Wandsworth in each year since 1997. [196729]

Mr. Timms: The information requested falls within the responsibility of the National Statistician, who has been asked to reply.

Letter from Len Cook to Mr. Tom Cox, dated 10 November 2004:

As National Statistician, I have been asked to reply to your question regarding electoral roll numbers for parliamentary constituencies in the London borough of Wandsworth. (196729)

The table below show these figures for the constituencies of Battersea, Putney and Tooting over the period 16 February 1997 to 1 December 2003, taken from our published annual electoral statistics tables.

Electoral roll totals for parliamentary constituencies in the London borough of Wandsworth, 1997 to 2003 [1,2]

	16 February:				*1 December:*	
Constituency	*1997*	*1998*	*1999*	*2001*	*2001*	*2003*
Battersea	67,236	66,796	66,985	67,539	70,230	68,649
Putney	60,538	60,206	60,226	60,677	61,436	61,010
Tooting	67,027	66,461	66,692	68,518	72,246	69,906

[1] Owing to data quality issues, no electoral data were published for parliamentary constituencies in 2000.

[2] In a number of areas, including Wandsworth, 2002 electoral data could not be split between constituencies within a borough. Consequently no figure for 2002 is shown.

Source:

ONS

Equity Release Schemes

Mr. George Osborne: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer (1) what assessment he has made of the likely impact of the taxation of pre-owned assets on equity release schemes; [194291]

(2) whether the reversion scheme equity release plan will be affected by the changes made in the Finance Act 2004 to the taxation of pre-owned assets. [194292]

Dawn Primarolo: We will ensure that the pre-owned assets measures have no impact on the full range of bona fide equity-release schemes with arms-length providers, while continuing to bear down on schemes aimed merely at avoidance. The Inland Revenue are in discussion with equity release providers to define what provision is needed to ensure this. We will be making further announcements about the pre-owned asset regulations following the conclusion of the current consultation.

Fuel Prices

Mr. Weir: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer (1) what measures he plans to implement to protect *(a)* fishermen and fisheries and *(b)* farmers from rising fuel bills; and if he will make a statement; [196912]

(2) what measures he plans to put in place to restrict the increase in the price of industrial diesel; and if he will make a statement. [196913]

John Healey: Oil prices have been volatile and high during this year. On 1 October, the Chancellor issued a statement identifying four steps to reduce the risk of high oil prices denting confidence and pushing up inflationary pressures. Firstly, OPEC must continue to take necessary action to return prices to levels consistent with global prosperity. Secondly, actions are needed to improve the transparency and efficiency of the oil markets. Thirdly oil producing countries need to promote sustainable investment in their reserves and productive capacity. Fourthly, all countries must promote greater energy efficiency and develop new sources of energy.

Oil price rises affect the whole of the UK economy, and therefore are not limited to specific sectors. The Chancellor takes account of relevant economic, social and environmental factors when deciding taxation policy.

Funding (Hertfordshire)

Claire Ward: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what representations he has received from

Hertfordshire police authority on funding of services; and if he will make a statement on the funding of *(a)* Hertfordshire and *(b)* other shire counties. [197139]

Mr. Timms: The 2002 spending review provided for record growth in spending on crime, justice and communities, from £16.5 billion in 2002–03 to £20.5 billion in 2005–06. The 2004 spending review has built on this progress by embedding the Government's success in delivery and further increasing spending in these areas by £3.5 billion by 2007–08, compared to 2004–05. The Home Secretary is due to announce specific policing allocations for 2005–06 shortly.

Productivity

Mr. Trimble: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what the levels of Gross Value Added per employee in the *(a)* manufacturing sector and *(b)* private services sector were for each year from 1997 to 2003 in Great Britain. [196865]

Mr. Timms: The information requested falls within the responsibility of the National Statistician, who has been asked to reply.

Letter from Len Cook to Mr. David Trimble, dated 10 November 2004:

As National Statistician, I have been asked to reply to your recent Parliamentary Question on the levels of Gross Value Added per employee in the manufacturing sector and in the private services sector for each year from 1997 to 2003 in Great Britain. (196865)

The table below shows the index levels of UK manufacturing output per job for each year from 1997 to 2003.

Manufacturing output per job index (2001 plus 100)

	Index levels
1997	85.9
1998	87.0
1999	90.9
2000	96.6
2001	100.0
2002	101.5
2003	106.6

We do not produce private services sector productivity. Total services industries output per job is available on the National Statistics website as part of the release of experimental statistics on services sector productivity. The web address of the latest release of service sector productivity is given below:

http://www.statistics.gov.uk/statbase/Product.asp?vlnk=9339.

Income Tax Evasion

Mr. Jim Cunningham: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what steps his Department is taking to reduce the level of income tax evasion. [196778]

Dawn Primarolo: The Inland Revenue has a programme of risk assessment directed at tackling income tax evasion. In addition, in Budget 2003 and again in 2004 the Government funded a package of further compliance initiatives. These included work on tackling evasion via offshore trusts and improving the inflow of information to the Inland Revenue. The proposed formation of HM Revenue and Customs, by merging Inland Revenue and HM Customs and Excise, will further enhance the effectiveness of the work currently undertaken by those departments.

Older Workers

Mr. Willetts: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what percentage of *(a)* men and *(b)* women of each age from 50 to 70 years were in work on the latest date for which figures are available. [194849]

Mr. Timms: The information requested falls within the responsibility of the National Statistician, who has been asked to reply.

Letter from Len Cook to Mr. David Willetts, dated 10 November 2004:

As National Statistician, I have been asked to reply to your Parliamentary Question about employment. (194849)

The attached table provides the percentages of men and women at each age from 50 to 70 who are in employment.

These estimates from the Labour Force Survey are, as with any sample survey, subject to sampling variability.

People aged 50–70 in employment, 12 months ending in August 2004, United Kingdom

Percentage[1]

	All Persons	*Men*	*Women*
All 50 to 70	52.1	59.2	45.2
50	81.4	87.4	75.5
51	79.6	84.4	74.8
52	79.5	83.6	75.3
53	77.0	82.1	72.1
54	75.3	80.2	70.7
55	72.6	78.1	67.5
56	70.9	78.1	63.9
57	67.6	74.9	60.3
58	63.8	72.7	54.9
59	60.6	67.9	53.4
60	50.9	61.9	40.1
61	46.2	56.6	35.9
62	41.7	54.4	29.4
63	35.6	49.5	22.9
64	30.0	43.1	18.0
65	17.6	23.2	12.5
66	15.9	20.5	11.3
67	13.6	16.8	10.8
68	9.7	12.8	6.8
69	9.2	11.8	6.7
70	7.6	9.3	6.0

[1] Percentage of people in the relevant age and gender group who are in employment.

Source:

ONS Labour Force Survey.

Employment (Pendle)

Mr. Gordon Prentice: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer how many jobs have been created in the Pendle constituency since *(a)* 1997 and *(b)* 2001. [197035]

Mr. Timms: The information requested falls within the responsibility of the National Statistician, who has been asked to reply.

Letter from Len Cook to Mr. Gordon Prentice, dated 10 November 2004:

As National Statistician, I have been asked to reply to your Parliamentary Question about jobs created in the Pendle constituency. (197035)

While statistics of new jobs created are not available explicitly, statistics from surveys enable comparisons to be made of net changes, in numbers of jobs, from year-to-year.

The attached table shows the information requested, relating to jobs in Pendle, for 1997, 2001 and 2002, which is the latest year available.

Number of employee jobs[1] with workplace in the Pendle parliamentary constituency: 1997, 2001 and 2002

	Total
Number of employee jobs	
1997	29,900
2001	30,500
2002	32,100
Change[2]	
1997 to 2002	2,200
2001 to 2002	1,700

[1] Excludes self-employed jobs.

[2] The 1997 to 2002 change and 2001 to 2002 change has been rounded to the nearest hundred separately from rounded levels for 1997, 2001 and 2002.

Source:

1997 rescaled Annual Employment Survey; 2001–2002 Annual Business Inquiry

Social Service Volunteer Drivers

Ms Walley: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what steps he is taking to ensure that increases to Inland Revenue mileage allowances for social service volunteer drivers reflect fuel price increases; and if he will make a statement. [196291]

Dawn Primarolo: Volunteer drivers are not taxed on payments to reimburse them for costs of using their own cars. For convenience, organisations can reimburse volunteer drivers using the statutory approved mileage allowance rates that apply to employees generally. But, if the actual costs of using their own car exceed the rates, volunteer drivers can be reimbursed the higher amount without giving rise to a tax charge.

VAT

Mr. Bellingham: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what the cost would be to the Treasury in a year of a reduction in VAT on all home repair maintenance and improvement works to *(a)* 12 per cent. 10 per cent. and *(c)* five per cent. [197450]

Dawn Primarolo: Customs do not collect data on VAT from individual goods and services, therefore no such estimates are available.

Sandra Gidley: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what commodities have been subject to changes in the rate of VAT since 1997; and if he will make a statement. [197216]

Dawn Primarolo: Details of changes to the rate of VAT on supplies of goods and services are published annually in the Financial Statement and Budget Report (FSBR), which is available in the Library of the House.

In addition, clarification of the VAT treatment of specific goods and services, including clarification of the boundaries for zero or reduced rates, results from court judgements and decisions of the VAT Tribunal. A full list of these minor changes for the period since 1997 could be produced only at disproportionate cost.

Working Hours

Mr. Willetts: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what the number of hours in the average working week has been in each year since 1992; what figure was used for the number of workers in each year for the purposes of that calculation; and what the total number of hours worked in the economy was in each of those years. [194834]

Mr. Timms: The information requested falls within the responsibility of the National Statistician, who has been asked to reply.

Letter from Len Cook to Mr. David Willetts, dated 10 November 2004:

As National Statistician, I have been asked to reply to your Parliamentary Question about employment. (194834)

The attached table from the Labour Force Survey (LFS) provides the information requested for the three-month period ending August each year from 1992 to 2004. Average actual weekly hours are calculated using the number of people in employment who have reported hours of work. This employment figure excludes a small number of people on Government supported training and employment programmes who, in the Labour Force Survey reference week, were attending college and were not asked for their hours of work.

These estimates from the Labour Force Survey are, as with any sample survey, subject to sampling variability.

Actual weekly hours worked, three months ending in August each year from 1992 to 2004 seasonally adjusted

	Average actual weekly hours[1]	*Employment estimate used for calculating average hours[2] (Thousand)*	*Total actual weekly hours[1, 2] (Million)*
All People			
1992	33.0	25,416	838.7
1993	33.1	25,161	831.4
1994	33.2	25,422	844.1
1995	33.2	25,766	855.8
1996	33.3	25,988	865.2
1997	33.2	26,460	877.5
1998	33.0	26,792	885.0
1999	32.9	27,114	892.5
2000	32.7	27,512	899.2
2001	32.7	27,677	905.7
2002	32.0	27,881	892.9
2003	32.2	28,140	906.7
2004	31.8	28,341	902.6
Men			
1992	38.6	13,985	539.5
1993	38.7	13,727	531.6
1994	39.0	13,873	541.6
1995	39.0	14,062	547.9
1996	38.9	14,158	551.2
1997	38.8	14,423	559.2
1998	38.6	14,602	563.0
1999	38.3	14,747	564.3
2000	38.0	14,897	565.7
2001	37.9	15,007	568.5
2002	37.0	15,057	556.5
2003	37.2	15,252	566.7
2004	36.7	15,336	563.4
Women			
1992	26.2	11,432	299.2
1993	26.2	11,434	299.8
1994	26.2	11,548	302.4
1995	26.3	11,703	307.9
1996	26.5	11,830	314.0
1997	26.4	12,037	318.4
1998	26.4	12,191	321.9
1999	26.5	12,366	328.2
2000	26.4	12,615	333.5

Actual weekly hours worked, three months ending in August each year from 1992 to 2004 seasonally adjusted

	Average actual weekly hours[1]	*Employment estimate used for calculating average hours*[2] *(Thousand)*	*Total actual weekly hours*[1, 2] *(Million)*
2001	26.6	12,670	337.2
2002	26.2	12,824	336.4
2003	26.4	12,888	340.0
2004	26.1	13,005	339.3

[1] Average and total hours worked in the reference week are calculated including overtime and excluding lunch breaks.

[2] See text of answer for explanation of these employment figures.

[3] Total actual hours for all people are calculated as the sum of hours for men and women separately.

Source:

ONS Labour Force Survey

HEALTH

Boots Medical Services

Mr. Webb: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what assessment he has made of the impact on patient confidentiality in relation to NHS records of the transfer of optical and dental patients from Boots Opticians laser eye clinics and Boots dental clinics to Optical Express; and if he will make a statement. [197374]

Ms Rosie Winterton: A number of the optical and dental treatments provided by Boots plc are on a private basis and therefore outside the scope of national health service services. Where Boots or Optical Express (DCM optical Clinic and Matland Ltd.) are providing services to NHS patients, they will be required to comply with NHS standards of patient confidentiality as part of their contracts with the NHS.

Departmental Estate

Mr. Andrew Turner: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will list the properties occupied by *(a)* his Department and *(b)* its agencies in (i) 1997 and (ii) 2004; and what the (A) area and (B) annual rental value (1) in aggregate and (2) in each case was in each year. [196073]

Ms Rosie Winterton *[holding answer 4 November 2004]:* The properties occupied by the Department and its agencies in 1997 and 2004 are as follows.

1997

Department

Bartholomew House, Birmingham
Berkeley Square, Bristol
Canons Park, Stanmore
Chalfont Drive, Nottingham
Cressington House, Liverpool
Eastbourne Terrace, London
Eileen House, London
Fulwood House, Sheffield
Glenthorne YTC, Birmingham
Hannibal House, London
Government Offices, Hinchley Wood
John Snow House, Durham
Ladywood House, Birmingham
Market Towers, London
Block A Millennium Business Park, Warrington
Block B Millennium Business Park, Warrington
Premier Buildings, Nelson
Quarry House, Leeds
Richmond House, London
St. James Place House, Nottingham
Skipton House, London
Tarrant House, Milton Keynes
Tynebridge Tower, Gateshead
Wellington House, London
West Point, Manchester
West Riding House, Leeds
Westward House, Bristol

Agency

Canons Park, Stanmore
Chantry House, Chester
Crown House, Hitchin
East Grinstead House, East Grinstead
Furness Drive, Poulton-le-Fylde
Hesketh House, Fleetwood
Government Offices, Hinchley Wood
Market Towers, London
Prudential House, Leeds
Trevelyan Square, Leeds
Wheelchair Evaluation Centre, Blackpool

2004

Department

Belgrave Road, London
Berkeley Square, Bristol
Canons Park, Stanmore
Chalfont Drive, Nottingham
Dominions House, Bristol
Eileen House, London
Ferguson House, London
Hannibal House, London
Heron House, London
Government Offices, Hinchley Wood
IAA Building, Manchester
Kierran Cross, London
Market Towers, London
Block A, Millennium Business Park, Warrington
New Kings Beam House, London
Palace Yard Mews, London
Premier Buildings Nelson
Quarry House, Leeds
Richmond House, London
Skipton House, London
Tynebridge Towers, Gateshead
Wellington House, London

Agency

Bartholomew House, Birmingham
Canons Park, Stanmore
Chantry House, Chester
Crown House, Hitchin
Dominions House, Bristol
Dudley, Birmingham
Flockton House, Sheffield
Government Offices, Hinchley Wood

Greycoat Place, London
Highcroft Lodge, Winchester
Hunter House, York
Lightfoot Street, Chester
Lisbon House, Leeds
Millennium House, Sheffield
Market Towers, London
Newbridge Hill, Bath
3 North Terrace, Newcastle
Palace Yard Mews, Bath
Premier House, Reading
Prudential House, York
Trevelyan Square, Leeds
Victory House, Cambridge
West Solarium, Cambridge
Wheelchair Evaluation Centre, Blackpool
Windsor House, Harrogate
10 Woodside, Plymouth

The areas and annual rentals are shown in the following table.

	Department	*Agencies*	*Total*
1997			
Area (square metres)	114,730	17,003	131,733
Rental (£000)	14,135	877	15,012
2004			
Area (square metres)	95,743	10,708	106,451
Rental (£000)	16,540	1,720	18,260

Eye Health Services

Mr. Baron: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many NHS sight tests have been taken by individuals over 60 years in each year since 1999. [190914]

Ms Rosie Winterton *[holding answer 14 October 2004]:* The table shows the number of national health service sight tests paid by health authorities (HAs) and primary care trusts (PCTs) in England for the years ending 31 March 2000 to 2004.

General ophthalmic services: number of sight tests paid by HAs/PCTs in England for patients aged 60 and over for the years ending 31 March 2000 to 2004

	Number (million)
1999–2000	3.3
2000–01	3.8
2001–02	4.0
2002–03	4.1
2003–04	4.3

Sight tests cannot be equated to the numbers of patients. Although most people do not need a repeat sight test within the year, some patients suffering from medical conditions are advised to have re-examinations sooner.

Disabled People

Miss McIntosh: To ask the Secretary of State for Health pursuant to the answer of 4 October 2004, *Official Report*, column 1965W, on disabled people, if he will renew central Government funding for disability charities. [196722]

Dr. Ladyman: The Government will continue to fund charities and other voluntary sector organisations through our section 64 programme.

Decisions about 2005–06 bids will be made shortly.

Domiciliary Care

Mrs. Anne Campbell: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will make a statement on recruitment and retention in domiciliary care services. [196295]

Dr. Ladyman: The Department does not employ social care domiciliary workers and it is the responsibility of the employers to tackle problems of recruitment and retention, but the Government are taking a lead with employers in a range of initiatives to deal with the problems. These include additional funding to employers to facilitate joined up working and human resource development, new types of worker pilot schemes and a new national information service.

For the second consecutive year, we are investing £1.5 million in a national social care recruitment campaign. The next television campaign is planned for January 2005 and will run for four weeks into early February. The previous television campaign, in February and March 2004, attracted over 80,000 contacts. All callers to the information service were either sent a suitable careers publication or, if they had an immediate interest in applying for a job, they were transferred to their nearest Job Centre Plus contact.

Health and Social Care

Paul Holmes: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what plans he has to ensure that health and social care professionals carry out a full assessment of capacity about the matter in question when planning or providing health and social care to someone whose capacity is in doubt. [194735]

Dr. Ladyman *[holding answer 10 November 2004]:* The Mental Capacity Bill takes a functional approach to capacity. The question of who assesses an individual's capacity will depend on the particular decision to be made. The more serious the decision, the more formal the assessment of capacity may need to be.

For most day-to-day decisions, the carer most directly involved with the person at the time the decision has to be made will assess the person's capacity. Formal processes are rarely required, unless the assessment is challenged or there is reason for doubt. Whoever assesses capacity must be prepared to justify his or her findings.

Where consent to medical treatment or examination is required, the doctor proposing the treatment must decide whether the patient has capacity to consent and should record the assessment process and findings in the person's medical notes.

If a person's capacity to do something is disputed, or there is serious doubt, it is a question for the court to decide. Cases referred to the new Court of Protection will require evidence of the assessment of capacity. The code of practice will set out possible situations when a formal assessment of capacity is required and examples of where cases may be referred to the court.

Low Vision Aids

Mr. Baron: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what steps he is taking to encourage social services departments to provide low vision aids, free of charge to any person requiring them. [196428]

Ms Rosie Winterton: Low vision aids are already available free on loan to any person requiring them. It is for local areas to decide how best to organise their low vision services. Most services are provided in a hospital setting by the hospital eye service, because prescription of the aid and training in its use must be done in the context of vision assessments. The hospital eye service will assess the needs of the individual and provide any necessary low vision aids, which could be in the form of strong reading glasses, magnifiers or telescopes.

Social services departments have responsibility for assessing the needs of individuals who request help due to problems with their vision. This is usually in the form of modifications to a person's home, such as improved lighting and hi-marks for cookers. Any help offered will be following a comprehensive assessment of the individual's needs.

The Government-funded integrating community equipment services initiative aims to produce better general equipment services for people by integrating separate national health service and social services equipment services.

NHS Dentistry

Mr. Burstow: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what estimate he has made of the cost of *(a)* recruiting the equivalent of 1,000 dentists by October 2005 and *(b)* increasing training places for dentists by 170 from 2005. [187294]

Ms Rosie Winterton: £50 million was provided across the national health service to increase the amount of NHS work carried out by practising dentists during 2004–05. Other costs are under review.

The total cost to the Department and the Higher Education Funding Council for England of increasing training places by 170 is estimated as £40 million revenue and £95 million capital.

David Davis: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many children in Hull and East Riding were registered with an NHS dentist on *(a)* 1 September 2003 and *(b)* 1 September 2004. [194976]

Ms Rosie Winterton: There were 75,214 children under 18 registered with national health service dentists in the four primary care trusts covering Hull and the East Riding on 1 September 2003 and 74,366 on 1 September 2004.

Waiting Times

Lynne Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for Health pursuant to the answer of 1 November 2004 to question 194032, what the average waiting time for a first appointment with a consultant in *(a)* psychiatry, *(b)* urology and *(c)* endocrinology were in the last period for which figures are available. [196604]

Ms Rosie Winterton: The information requested is shown in the table.

Average (median) times for consultant outpatient appointment following general practitioner referral

Specialty	*Median waiting times (weeks)*
Urology	5.11
Endocrinology	5.49
Mental handicap	3.56
Mental illness	3.72
Child and adolescent psychiatry	5.33
Forensic psychiatry	2.00
Psychotherapy	5.11
Old age psychiatry	3.80

Source:
Department of Health form QM08.

TRANSPORT

Acoustic Screening

Mr. Robathan: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what the cost was of the acoustic screening erected within the last three years on both sides of the M1, north and south of Junction 11; what noise-level studies led to their installation; and what the results of those studies were. [195947]

Mr. Jamieson: In September 2003 the Highways Agency completed the first phase of a scheme to provide acoustic fences on both sides of the M1 at Junction 11 at Luton. Because of the cost and complexity of the scheme, the work is being carried out in two phases.

The cost of completing Phase 1 was £2.4 million.

Phase 2 is due to start this month with completion expected in April 2005. The cost for Phase 2 is estimated at £1.9 million.

In March 1999 the Government established revised criteria and a ring-fenced annual budget of £5 million to deal with some of the most serious and pressing cases of traffic noise on existing trunk roads. A written reply to a parliamentary question raised by my hon. Friend the Member for Chatham and Aylesford (Jonathan Shaw) on 11 November 1999, *Official Report*, column 681W, contained a letter from Lawrie Haynes, the then chief executive of the Highways Agency, identifying those locations where previous concerns about noise had been expressed which were found to satisfy the new criteria (location list known as the "Hansard" list). The M1 between Junctions 10 and 11 and between Junctions 11 and 12 were included on the list.

In September 1999, the agency commissioned its managing agents to carry out a detailed study of noise conditions between Junctions 10 and 12 of the M1 at Luton. The study report identified 772 properties in an area chiefly concentrated around Junction 11 with a noise greater than 68 dB(A). The report concluded that through the provision of noise barriers over extended lengths and varying in height between two and three metres, it would be feasible to provide substantial noise reducing benefits for many properties. 280 properties would receive a noise reduction of at least 3 dB(A); equivalent to a halving of the traffic. Another 492 properties would receive a smaller but nonetheless tangible benefit as a result of the scheme.

Air Travel (Financial Protection)

Mr. Key: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport if he will place in the Library the Civil Aviation Authority Consumer Protection Group's July advice to Government on Financial Protection for Air Travellers and Package Holidaymakers; and if he will make a statement. [197183]

Charlotte Atkins: The advice from the Civil Aviation Authority on Financial Protection for Air Travellers and Package Holidaymakers in the Future can be found on the CAA website. Copies have been placed in the Libraries of both Houses.

In a joint statement with the CAA issued on 27 October, the Government announced that they had asked the CAA to carry out more detailed work on other options to address the decline in the proportion of people covered by the Air Travel Organisers' Licensing scheme. This work is expected to be completed early next year.

In the meantime, the Government will continue work with the CAA and industry on putting in place a range of interim voluntary measures to improve consumer protection.

Bus Lanes

Tom Cox: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport how many bus lanes have been created within the Greater London area in each of the last three years. [197122]

Mr. McNulty: The Mayor and the boroughs are responsible for the introduction of bus lanes in Greater London. The number of bus lanes introduced in the Greater London area in each of the last three years is shown in the following table:

	Bus lanes
2001–02	77
2002–03	100
2003–04	51

Buses

Mr. Yeo: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport how much has been given in bus subsidy since 1997. [197221]

Mr. Darling: The totals for bus subsidy in England for each year for the period 1997–98 to 2002–03—the last year for which figure are currently available—are shown in the following table.

	£ million
1997–98	762
1998–99	846
1999–2000	917
2000–01	1,056
2001–02	1,188
2002–03	1,440

Totals comprise Bus Service Operators Grant (formerly called Fuel Duty Rebate), support and grants for buses by local authorities and by Transport for London, and local authority expenditure on bus concessionary fares.

Mr. Yeo: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what plans the Government have to encourage bus use outside of London. [197233]

Mr. Darling: In "The Future of Transport" White Paper, which I published in the summer, I outlined a range of Government action to encourage the use of buses. These include funding of bus priority measures to reduce journey times, rural bus subsidy grant, real time information systems and regulations to facilitate demand-responsive bus services. The White Paper also encourages local authorities and bus operators to work together in partnership, and offers the opportunity for additional funding for authorities who wish to radically enhance bus services, perhaps through quality contracts, where the enhancement is combined with plans to tackle congestion.

Carbon Dioxide Emissions

Norman Baker: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what estimate he has made of carbon dioxide emissions from road traffic in *(a)* 1990, *(b)* 1997, *(c)* 2003, *(d)* 2010, *(e)* 2015 and *(f)* 2020. [196810]

Mr. Jamieson: Estimates of carbon emissions from road traffic are set out in the table below. The data is taken from the National Atmospheric Emissions Inventory (NAEI) and is for the UK. The NAEI will not have 2003 emissions data available until early next year.

	UK—million tonnes carbon
1990	29.7
1997	31.7
2002	31.9

The latest DfT projections of carbon emissions are produced by the National Transport Model (NTM). Projections for 2010, 2015 and 2025 are shown in the following table.

	GB—million tonnes carbon
2010	32.0—32.6
2015	30.5—31.5
2025	28.6—30.2

The NTM operates at the Great Britain level. The National Environmental Technology Centre (NETCEN) estimates for 2001 suggest that UK emissions were around 3.8 per cent. higher than emissions for Great Britain. A good deal of uncertainty is attached to all forecasts and the numbers should be treated as indicative, illustrating possible trends. The range reflects uncertainty about several important factors that influence travel demand, e.g. economic growth and how people will respond in future to changes in the costs of travel.

Norman Baker: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport if he will estimate the level of carbon emissions from rail haulage in each year since 1990. [196844]

Mr. McNulty: Carbon dioxide emissions attributable to rail for years between 1990 and 2002, expressed as a percentage of total UK carbon dioxide emissions, are:

	Percentage
1990	0.4
1991	0.4
1992	0.4
1993	0.4
1994	0.4
1995	0.4
1996	0.4
1997	0.3
1998	0.3
1999	0.3
2000	0.3
2001	0.3
2002	0.2

Figures for years since 2002 are not yet available. The figures include direct emissions from diesel rail vehicles; those associated with electricity generation for the rail industry, most of which is used to power electric trains; and refinery emissions associated with the refining of fuel used by the industry. The last two categories between them make up around 14 per cent. of the total.

Container Security Initiative

Patrick Mercer: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport which UK ports are fully operational as far as the Container Security Initiative is concerned; which other ports will become part of the initiative; and for ports that are to become part of the initiative, how long their procedural development (testing) phase will last before they become operational. [196312]

John Healey: I have been asked to reply.

The ports of Southampton, Felixstowe, Liverpool, Tilbury and Thamesport are fully operational. No other UK ports are scheduled to be included in the initiative.

Drink Driving

Tom Cox: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport how many road traffic accidents were caused by drink driving in the Greater London area in each of the last three years. [197120]

Mr. Jamieson: Whether an accident was caused by drink driving is not recorded as part of the Department's personal injury accident database. However, the following table shows the number and severity of accidents in Greater London where at least one of the drivers involved provided a positive breath test or refused to provide a breath test.

Accidents involving positive breath tests in Greater London

	Fatal or serious	*Slight*	*Total*
2001	192	830	1,022
2002	202	734	936
2003	181	676	857

Rail Services (Punctuality Statistics)

Norman Baker: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what steps he has taken to prevent train operating companies setting artificially late arrival times at London terminals in order to avoid incurring penalties for late arrivals. [196831]

Mr. McNulty: Franchise agreements between train operating companies and the Strategic Rail Authority (SRA) include minimum service requirements which specify the maximum permissible journey times. Train operators may only change these times with the permission of the SRA. The avoidance of penalties for lateness would not be acceptable grounds for such a change.

Rail Travel Demand

Norman Baker: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport whether it is his policy to constrain demand for rail passenger travel by allowing an increase in travel costs above the rate of inflation. [196830]

Mr. McNulty *[holding answer 8 November 2004]*: No. Last year's fares review concluded that regulated fares should move from RPI − 1 per cent. to RPI + 1 per cent. This move was made in order to help redress the balance of funding between the fare payer and the general tax payer and to recognise the fact that the travelling public is now seeing the benefits of a significant increase in investment in the railway.

Road Noise

Mr. Robathan: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what funds are available to his Department for noise mitigation on motorways; whether these funds are dedicated to noise mitigation measures; whether they are ring-fenced for acoustic barriers and quieter surfaces; and if he will make a statement. [196717]

Mr. Jamieson: Under the 10-year plan, 60 per cent. of the strategic road network, including motorways, is to be treated with quieter road surfacing in line with maintenance need. These resurfacing works are funded from a Roads Renewals budget, the value of which varies annually.

A list of locations having serious and pressing noise problems, but where there was no early prospect of quiet surfacing being installed as part of planned maintenance, was announced on 11 November 1999. Measures to relieve noise problems at these locations, by providing either acoustic barriers or quieter surfacing as appropriate, have been funded from an annual £5 million ring-fenced budget.

I gave more specific details of the overall strategy for dealing with noise mitigation on the strategic road network in the adjournment debate on motorway noise in Leicestershire held on 30 March 2004, *Official Report*, column 419WH.

Noise mitigation measures installed as part of a new road construction scheme, which may include measures such as earthwork bunds and secondary glazing, are funded from the overall budget assigned to the scheme.

Norman Baker: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what the average cost per mile is of resurfacing a standard dual carriageway with the new quieter surface. [196833]

Mr. Jamieson: The average cost per mile for resurfacing a standard dual carriageway (assumed as two lanes in each direction) with a quieter surface is £500,000.

Road Schemes

Mr. Norman: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport when he will make an announcement on the priorities within the Targeted Programme of Trunk Road Improvement. [197176]

Mr. Jamieson: We plan to do so shortly.

Search Warrants

Mr. McCabe: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport how many search warrants under the provisions of the Vehicles (Crime) Act 2001 have been implemented in each police authority area; and what action has resulted from such police investigations. [195061]

Ms Blears: I have been asked to reply.

Information about numbers of search warrants is not held centrally and could be obtained only at disproportionate cost.

Statistics on prosecutions and convictions are published annually. The most recently published statistics cover the year ending December 2002. These show that there were no completed prosecutions or convictions under the Vehicles (Crime) Act 2001 between October (the earliest time the provisions became enforceable) and December 2002. Statistics for 2003 will be published in December.

Transport for London

Mr. Yeo: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport (1) what recent discussions have taken place between his Department and Transport for London about transfer of further powers to Transport for London; [197212]

(2) what plans the Government have to change the powers of London borough councils in relation to transport. [197226]

Mr. Darling: The "Future of Railways" White Paper set out a number of areas where consideration would be given to extending the Mayor's responsibilities for rail services. Since then regular discussions have taken place with Transport for London (TfL) and these are ongoing.

My Department is also taking forward work on the Crossrail scheme, together with TfL. As noted in my statement to the House of 20 July 2004, were powers to be secured to construct Crossrail, the implementation of the scheme could subsequently be transferred to TfL.

The Traffic Management Act 2004 provides TfL with new powers to co-ordinate local highway authority works on a strategic road network. London boroughs will remain the highway authority for these roads but TfL will have powers to veto works on these roads, or on other roads that will adversely affect strategic roads.

Vehicle Salvage

Mr. McCabe: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport how many vehicle salvage operators have been registered in each month since October 2002; and how many have been registered in total in each police authority area. [195060]

Ms Blears: I have been asked to reply.

This information is not held centrally and could be obtained only at disproportionate cost.

DEFENCE

Army Redundancies

Ann Winterton: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence whether all personnel from the regiments to be made redundant will be allowed to leave the Army with a full compensatory package. [196220]

Mr. Caplin: Members of the regular armed forces who leave on redundancy are entitled to the redundancy terms set out in the Armed Forces Pension Scheme.

Iraq

Adam Price: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence whether Iraqi civilians apprehended by British service personnel have been treated in a manner consistent with the "UN Body of Principles for the Protection of all Persons under Any Form of Detention or Imprisonment". [184828]

Mr. Ingram: The document "UN Body of Principles for the Protection of all Persons under Any Form of Detention or Imprisonment" provides guidance to the armed forces of member states who are engaged in UN operations. We are confident that the procedures we have adopted would be effectively consistent with it, though it does not apply to UK forces in Iraq which are operating under Security Council Resolution 1546 and are not engaged on UN Operations. Persons detained by UK forces are treated in accordance with the Geneva Conventions and other relevant international conventions, which include guidance on basic prisoner treatment.

Lynne Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence pursuant to the answer of 15 March 2004, *Official Report*, column 48W, on Iraq, what criteria were used to determine which pages of the Iraqi declaration on its weapons of mass destruction were relevant for translation from Arabic. [187391]

Mr. Hoon: The Iraqi Declaration on WMD programmes contained over 12,000 pages. The Declaration was split into two parts, the main text and the supporting documents. The main text contained over 5,000 pages, of which 650 were in Arabic; all of these were translated. Around 3,000 pages of the supporting documents were in Arabic, and only those judged to be of potential WMD significance were translated.

Mr. Best: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will investigate the whereabouts of the research conducted by Professor Huda Ammash, Dean of Baghdad University, and other scientists, into the contamination of Iraq from depleted uranium. [196761]

Mr. Caplin: The Ministry of Defence carries out regular reviews of all peer reviewed scientific literature relating to the use of depleted uranium munitions by subscription to international scientific and medical databases such as PubMed and Web of Science. No record of any work by Professor Huda Ammash relating to depleted uranium has been found on these databases.

Mirach Target Service

Mr. Wiggin: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence pursuant to his answer of 13 July 2004, *Official Report*, column 1042W, on Llanbedr Airfield, when the Mirach target service will be taken out of service; and what will replace it. [196545]

Mr. Caplin: The Mirach target service, operated from Aberporth, replaced the Jindivik aerial target towing vehicles, which, until recently, were launched from Llandbedr. Operations at Llanbedr ceased on 31 October this year and Jindivik is no longer used. Mirach has only recently been introduced at Aberporth and QinetiQ, the company operating the service at that site on behalf of the Ministry of Defence, currently has no plans to replace it. MOD is currently considering proposals for a Combined Aerial Target Service, with a view to placing a single contract for the provision and operation of tri-service target support from 2006. It is not known, at this stage, whether Mirach will form part of this future service.

Satanism

Miss McIntosh: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will make a statement on the policy of allowing members of the *(a)* Royal Navy and *(b)* armed forces to register their religion as satanist. [R][196739]

Mr. Caplin: There is no provision allowing members of the armed forces to record their religion as satanist.

Territorial Army

Ann Winterton: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence how many Territorial Army personnel have resigned within 12 months of returning from a six-month tour of overseas duty in each of the last three years. [196214]

Mr. Caplin: The information requested is not held centrally and could be provided only at disproportionate cost.

FOREIGN AND COMMONWEALTH AFFAIRS

Aegis Defence Services

Harry Cohen: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what the value is of contracts agreed with Aegis Defence Services by the *(a)* UK, *(b)* Coalition and *(c)* Iraqi administration; what the contracts are for; what other contracts the UK Government has awarded to the company; in what countries; and if he will make a statement. [197041]

Mr. Rammell: The UK Government have no contracts with Aegis Defence Services in Iraq or elsewhere.

The US Department of Defense has awarded Aegis Defence Services a contract worth $293 million over three years to provide security support to its Project Management and Contracting Office in Iraq. Her Majesty's Government is not a party to the contract, nor was it involved in any way in its negotiation.

We are not aware of any contracts between the Government of Iraq and Aegis Defence Services.

Afghanistan

Mr. Simmonds: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what steps the Government are taking to facilitate the admission of Afghanistan to the World Trade Organisation; and if he will make a statement. [196263]

Mr. Alexander: The Government supports the accession of Afghanistan to the World Trade Organisation on the right terms.

Afghanistan applied to accede to the WTO in April 2003 but their application for WTO membership has yet to be considered.

Following the successful conclusion of elections in Afghanistan the UK will consult with the European Commission and other European partners on how to facilitate Afghanistan's accession request. The European Commission has sole competence to negotiate WTO accession applications on behalf of the EU.

Mr. Jim Cunningham: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what strategy his Department plans to use to tackle opium in Afghanistan. [196445]

Mr. Rammell *[holding answer 9 November 2004]*: The UK, as lead nation, is committed to supporting the Afghan Government in the implementation of their comprehensive National Drug Control Strategy. As well as co-ordinating the activity of international partners, we are providing substantial—spending more than £70 million over three years in support of the strategy as well as providing significant funding for alternative livelihoods. Our work is focusing on: providing poppy farmers with alternative livelihoods; targeted eradication campaigns; law enforcement and interdiction; a fast track counter narcotics element in the developing criminal justice system; drug demand reduction and an information campaign to alert farmers to the illegality and risks of poppy cultivation and to raise drug awareness.

British Indian Ocean Territory

Tom Brake: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs on what dates discussions have taken place with the Department for International Development on resettlement costs for the Chagos Islands in the last year. [183930]

Mr. Rammell: Foreign and Commonwealth Office and Department for International Development officials were in contact on various occasions in late June and early July this year on the issue of possible resettlement costs relating to outer Islands in the British Indian Ocean Territory.

China

Mr. Ben Chapman: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will make a statement on the level of economic growth in China in the last 10 years. [196768]

Mr. Rammell: The level of economic growth in China over the last 10 years has been, by any measure, astounding: GDP has averaged 9 per cent. growth over the last decade, according to official figures. It has helped lift millions out of poverty. We welcome the Chinese Government's desire to encourage more balanced development across the country and between urban and rural regions. We hope that the Chinese Government will now try to implement political reform to support China's further economic development.

Commencement of Legislation

Brian White: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what pieces of legislation passed in the last 30 years that the Department is responsible for remain to be brought into force, broken down by year of enactment. [195624]

Mr. Straw: The Foreign and Commonwealth Office is responsible for the following primary legislation enacted in the last 30 years which has not yet been brought into force.

Antarctic Minerals Act 1989 (to the extent that it has not been repealed). This was an Act to implement the Antarctic Minerals Convention. That convention never came into force. The Act was mainly repealed by the Antarctic Act 1994, which implemented the Environmental Protocol to the Antarctic Treaty. The remaining provisions of the 1989 Act are jurisdictional provisions, which supported the Minerals Convention, but go wider. They would allow UK courts to deal with offences committed on British Antarctic Territory. It has not been thought necessary so far to bring them into force.

Arms Control and Disarmament (Inspections) Act 2003. This is an Act to implement an amendment to the Conventional Armed Forces in Europe Treaty (1991); that amendment has itself not yet come into force and can only do so when the treaty change has been ratified by all the states parties to the 1991 treaty.

Departmental Disciplinary Procedures

Mr. Mark Field: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will make a statement on the disciplinary complaints procedure used in relation to senior officials in his Department. [195795]

Mr. Alexander: The Foreign and Commonwealth Office (FCO) Misconduct Procedure applies to all FCO UK-based staff regardless of grade and includes the following stages:

an investigation into the allegation followed by a decision on whether there is a case to answer;

if there is a case to answer, a disciplinary hearing is convened;

if the allegation is upheld the officer has a right of appeal;

the officer who is subject to the allegation has the right to be represented by a work colleague or trade union representative at both hearing and appeal stage;

if dismissed, the officer has a further external right of appeal to the Diplomatic Service Appeal Board or the Civil Service Appeal Board, as appropriate, as well as to the Employment Tribunal under the appropriate act.

The FCO Misconduct Procedure is consistent with best practice and statutory obligations. A copy of the Procedure has been placed in the Library of the House.

Departmental Staff

Tim Loughton: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs how many people in his Department earn more than a whole-time equivalent salary of £57,485 per year. [195327]

Mr. Alexander: There are currently 409 full-time Foreign and Commonwealth Office employees with a salary of £57,485 or more.

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what percentage of the staff of the Department in *(a)* 2002 and *(b)* 2003 were people with disabilities. [196132]

Mr. Alexander: The percentage of staff in the Foreign and Commonwealth Office who declared themselves disabled were 2.2 per cent. in 2002 and 2.02 per cent. in 2003.

Tibet

Harry Cohen: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what representations he has received concerning the denial of access to detainees at Drapchi Prison, Lhasa, to the UN Working Group on Arbitrary Detention; and if he will make a statement. [197048]

Mr. Rammell: We have received no representations about the UN Working Group on Arbitrary Detention's difficulties in interviewing some prisoners at Drapchi Prison.

However, I raised this issue with Assistant Foreign Minister Li Hui during my visit to China earlier this month.

East Africa

Mr. Simmonds: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what steps have been taken to facilitate the implementation of the 2002 world court ruling on Badme in the context of the Eritrea-Ethiopia border dispute. [195437]

Mr. Mullin: We are continuing to press Ethiopia to accept the final and binding decision of the Boundary Commission, and to press Eritrea to participate in the comprehensive political dialogue proposed by the UN Secretary General's Special Envoy, Lloyd Axworthy.

Fair Trade

Mr. Burstow: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs whether it is his policy to ensure that hospitality within his Department is sourced from Fair Trade producers wherever possible within the boundaries set by the public procurement rules. [197062]

Mr. Rammell: It is not current policy within the Foreign and Commonwealth Office (FCO) for all hospitality within the Department to be sourced from Fair Trade producers where possible. However all suppliers are encouraged to provide produce from Fair Trade producers where it is feasible to do so.

The FCO policy is currently being reviewed as part of DEFRA's Food Procurement Initiative, and the FCO are taking an active role in its development and implementation.

G8 Summit

Annabelle Ewing: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs pursuant to the Answer of 2 November 2004, *Official Report*, column 225W, on the G8 Summit, what contracts for the supply of services at the G8 Summit the office plans to award; when he expects the contract award procedures to commence; how the contract award procedures will be publicised; and what estimate he has made of the monetary value of the contracts. [196529]

Mr. Alexander *[holding answer 8 November 2004]*: The Foreign and Commonwealth Office (FCO) will employ a production company to provide some of the meeting facilities for the Summit, and to set up and manage the Summit media centre. A host broadcaster will be taken on to handle the technical aspects of the media operation. The FCO advertised these requirements in the *Official Journal* of the European Union on 15 October, inviting companies to send expressions of interest by 18 November. The FCO will then invite tenders and award contracts according to Public Procurement Guidelines on a competitive basis. The monetary value of the contracts will depend on the tenders received.

The FCO may require other services but these have not yet been defined.

Gabon

Mr. Simmonds: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs how many visas were granted to Gabonese students through the British high commission in Yaounde in Cameroon in the last year for which figures are available; and if he will make a statement on these arrangements. [195438]

Mr. Mullin: In 2003, there were 39 student applications from Gabonese nationals, of which 14 were issued. So far in 2004, there have been 21 such applications of which six have been issued.

The United Kingdom currently has no representation in Gabon and visa applicants are invited to apply in Yaounde or the nearest accessible post. Yaounde offers a same-day service to all visa applicants.

General Election (Overseas Voters)

Mr. Evans: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what action he is taking to ensure that British High Commissions are providing information for British citizens on how to vote in any forthcoming general election. [196737]

Mr. Mullin: In advance of a general election, the Foreign and Commonwealth Office (FCO) instructs all its missions overseas, including British High Commissions, to seek every opportunity to publicise the provisions for overseas electors. This includes issuing press releases, using radio and TV broadcasts, and seeking free advertising space in local English-language newspapers.

We have also assisted the Electoral Commission in its efforts to make available information on overseas voter registration. Working with the Commission, we have developed guidance for the FCO website www.fco.gov.uk linked to the Electoral Commission's own website www.electoralcommission.org.uk where registration forms are available.

We have made the guidance available on a majority of the FCO's local Post websites and on our internal intranet.

Guide to the European Union

Llew Smith: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what the cost of production of the Guide to the European Union was; how many copies have been printed; how many imprints and downloads in respect of the documents have been made on his Department's website; and what steps are being taken to distribute the document. [197207]

Mr. MacShane: 207,000 copies of the Guide to the EU have been printed at a cost of approximately £45,000. The EU Guide has been sent to every public library in the UK and over the coming months will be distributed at events and venues nation-wide. It is also available online at www.europe.gov.uk and members of the public can request individual copies from the Foreign and Commonwealth Office. No further decisions on distribution have been taken. The EU Guide website had received 951 visits by 8 November 2004.

Iraq

Mr. Best: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what *(a)* forensic and *(b)* other assistance is being provided by the UK for the (i) uncovering and (ii) investigation of mass graves in Iraq. [196860]

Mr. Rammell: The UK provided a forensic assessment team under the Coalition Provisional Authority, which was involved in recording and assessing reported mass gravesites. Overall the UK has allocated some £2 million to support the Iraqis in dealing with the issue of mass graves. This includes funding to support the development of a comprehensive mass grave action plan and to train a full Iraqi forensic investigation team.

Sudan

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what representations he has made to the UN International Commission of Inquiry into alleged human rights abuses in Darfur about the need for a declaration by the Government of Sudan under Article 12(3) of the Rome Statute. [196080]

Mr. Mullin: It would not be appropriate for the UK or any other state to make representations to the International Commission of Inquiry. Although set up under UN auspices, it will be important for the Commission to have as much independence and autonomy as possible. We will however carefully consider any requests for assistance.

The precise judicial mechanism which will be used in Darfur will be decided following the investigations of the International Commission of Inquiry. We believe that the Government of Sudan should consider voluntarily accepting the jurisdiction of the International Criminal Court under Article 12.3 of the Rome Statute.

Uganda

Angus Robertson: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what assessment his Department has made of Prosecutor Luis Moreno Ocampo's statement on 1 November concerning the International Criminal Court's decision not to prosecute child soldiers in northern Uganda; and if he will make a statement. [196668]

Mr. Rammell: Article 26 of the Rome Statute of the International Criminal Court expressly excludes from its jurisdiction persons under 18 years old at the time of the alleged commission of a crime. The Prosecutor's statement was therefore not a decision, but a clarification that in northern Uganda, the child soldiers of the Lord's Resistance Army will not and cannot be prosecuted by the court.

Angus Robertson: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what assessment his Department has made of the International Criminal Court's decision to investigate the activities of the Lord's Resistance Army in northern Uganda; and if he will make a statement. [196674]

Mr. Mullin: The International Criminal Court is independent and we respect any decision it takes to begin an investigation. We will do all we can to support the court in its activities. We continue to urge that all avenues—including dialogue—should be explored in the search for a comprehensive and sustainable end to this conflict.

Angus Robertson: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what assistance his Department has *(a)* offered and *(b)* provided to the International Criminal Court in its investigation of northern Uganda's Lord's Resistance Army; and if he will make a statement. [196675]

Mr. Mullin: The UK has offered, and is already providing general practical support and advice in a variety of key areas, including witness protection and the enforcement of sentences. In addition, the UK has made a voluntary contribution to the International Criminal Court's (ICC) Trust Fund for Victims.

Because of the need to respect judicial independence, and to protect the integrity of the court's operations, we cannot comment on the operational aspects of specific ICC investigations; nor can we reveal what specific UK support is provided in that regard.

Ukraine

Mr. Trend: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will make a statement on the first round of the presidential elections in the Ukraine; and whether he has assessed this as a free and fair campaign and vote. [197220]

Mr. MacShane: I refer the hon. Member to the declaration on the conduct of the elections in Ukraine issued by the EU Presidency on 1 November, to the Conclusions issued by the European Council on 5 November and to the press statement I on 3 November.

In the Conclusions the European Council regretted that the first round of the presidential election did not meet international standards and called on the Ukrainian authorities "to address the noted deficiencies in lime before the second round of the elections and to create conditions allowing for free and fair elections, in particular by ensuring equal access to state media for both contenders."

The full text of the Council's Conclusions and the EU Presidency's declaration are available on the Presidency's website at www.eu2004.nl and my press statement at www.fco.gov.uk.

HOME DEPARTMENT

Anti-terrorism Legislation

Jeremy Corbyn: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many foreign nationals have been detained on his authority under anti-terrorist legislative powers; how many are now detained; and for how long each individual has been detained. [194001]

Mr. Blunkett: 16 people have been certified and detained under Part 4 of the Anti-terrorism, Crime and Security Act 2001(ATCSA). One further person has been certified but is detained under other powers. Those detained under Part 4 of the ATCSA 2001 are free to leave the country at any time; and two have done so.

Of these, 12 remain in detention and one has been released from detention under strict bail conditions.

Details of the 12 remaining in detention and their dates of certification are as follows:

	Date of certification
A	17 December 2001
B	5 February 2002
C	17 December 2001
E	17 December 2001
H	22 April 2002
Rideh	17 December 2001
P	15 January 2003

	Date of certification
Abu Qatada	23 October 2002
I	22 April 2002
K	2 October 2003
S	7 August 2003
Q	15 January 2003

Each case is reviewed quarterly.

Further details are available on the Home Office website at: homeoffice.gov.uk/docs3/atcsa_detainees

Anti-Social Behaviour

Mrs. Curtis-Thomas: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what measures are in place to reduce *(a)* begging and *(b)* street drinking. [146265]

Ms Blears: Since the end of July this year, begging has been included as a trigger offence under the Criminal Justice Interventions Programme. This will mean that those charged with begging will be drug tested and will enhance their opportunities for the underlying causes of their behaviour to be addressed and to route out repeat offending by offering treatment.

We need to ensure that we address the underlying causes of those who beg. If we help those who beg because of drug use to get access to effective treatment we help them, help communities and help those intimidated by begging. Better use of enforcement powers and alternative giving schemes will help to address the underlying and immediate problems.

Street drinking, like begging can be intimidating. In June 2003 70 local authorities notified the Home Office that they had set up designated public places orders (DPPOs) to restrict antisocial public drinking in areas that have experienced alcohol related disorder or nuisance. The Licensing Act 2003 has also extended the powers of the police to confiscate alcohol from individuals in a public place which is designated as a non drinking zone.

Fixed penalty notices for disorder which were strengthened in the Anti-social Behaviour Act 2003 are also proving useful tools for dealing with offences such as drunk and disorderly and drunk on a public highway.

Anti-Terrorism, Crime and Security Act

David Taylor: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will make a statement on the prospects for those detained *(a)* at HMP Belmarsh and *(b)* elsewhere within the Prison Service since 2001, under part 4 of the Anti-Terrorism, Crime and Security Act 2001, to be brought to trial or released. [193569]

Mr. Blunkett: Part 4 of the Anti-Terrorism, Crime and Security Act 2001 (ATCSA) is an immigration power which enables me to certify and detain foreign nationals who are suspected of involvement in international terrorism and who are believed to pose a risk to national security, but who can not currently be removed from the United Kingdom. Those detained under part 4 of the ATCS Act are free to leave the country at any time; and two have done so. The detainees have also been offered transfer to special facilities at Woodhill prison—and their lawyers on their behalf have rejected this.

As the House debated at the time, the admissibility of the evidence presented for certification required the special process under the Special Immigration Appeals Commission (SIAC) to avoid exposure of security services and techniques.

The detainees' cases are kept under review. Only those who pose a continuing threat to national security are detained.

David Taylor: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many prisoners held at Broadmoor Hospital are detained under provisions of the Anti-terrorism, Crime and Security Act 2001. [193660]

Mr. Blunkett: Two individuals who are the subject of a certificate under part 4 of the Anti-Terrorism, Crime and Security Act 2001 (ATCSA) have been transferred to Broadmoor under s48 of the Mental Health Act 1983.

Asylum Seekers

Mr. Rosindell: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what comparative assessment he has made of levels of *(a)* immigration and *(b)* asylum claims in the UK and the rest of the EU. [191466]

Mr. Browne: Assessment of levels of immigration and asylum claims in the UK and the rest of the UK is part of an ongoing process for policy development.

In the most recent full-year figures, asylum claims in the UK fell by 40 per cent. while the rest of the EU fell by 10 per cent. (2003 compared with 2002).

RDS have commissioned three reports which have assessed and reported on the patterns and trends of international migration:

1. Dobson et al (2001) International Migration and the United Kingdom: Recent Patterns and Trends. RDS Occasional Paper 75.

2. Clarke et al (2004) Migration Policies and Trends: International Comparisons. (Published on the UCL website).

3. Zetter et al (2003) An assessment of the impact of asylum policies in Europe 1990–2000. Home office Research Study 259.

The Home Office statistical bulletin on asylum statistics and the quarterly annual statistics report include tables to show asylum applications to European Countries. Comparative assessments are also made by Immigration Research and Statistic Service (IRSS) on an ad hoc basis.

The National Audit Office carried out a review of the Home Office's asylum and migration statistics. Part of the review was to examine whether changes in the number of asylum applications have impacted on other forms of migration within the UK. There was no clear statistical evidence that such an impact had occurred.

In addition numerous international bodies (Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD), Council of Europe, International Organisation for Migration (IOM), United Nation High Commission for Refugees (UNHCR) and Eurostat) regularly publish comparative data on the trends and levels of immigration and asylum claims.

IRSS is the UK contact point for the European Migration Network, which aims to build up and facilitate the exchange of comparative information in the field of migration and asylum across European Member States.

Communications Interception

Norman Baker: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what percentage of, and how many, proposed interceptions of communications under the Regulation of Investigatory Powers Act 2000 submitted to him for approval by officials he rejected in the last year for which figures are available. [188048]

Mr. Blunkett: Records are not kept in a form which would enable the information requested to be extracted without disproportionate cost. Each application for interception is subject to careful scrutiny at a number of stages before a warrant is issued. The application is submitted by a very senior officer following scrutiny within the agency concerned. Within my Department, it will normally be examined by officials at four successive levels of seniority before being presented to me for approval. I consider each application carefully before issuing the warrant. At any stage in this process the case may, and on occasion is, referred back to the agency for clarification or further detail. This may, and sometimes does, result in a decision that the application should be withdrawn or that a warrant should not be issued.

The whole process including rejected applications is scrutinised by the Intercept Commissioner.

Consultants

Mr. Cousins: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what the *(a)* nature and *(b)* value was of all contracts, consultancies and other services placed with (i) Deloitte & Touche, (ii) Ernst & Young, (iii) KPMG, (iv) PricewaterhouseCoopers and (v) PA Consulting since 2000-01 by the Department and its agencies. [188714]

Fiona Mactaggart: The information held by the Home Office on the value of all contracts, consultancies and other services placed with Deloitte & Touche, Ernst & Young, KPMG, PricewaterhouseCoopers and PA Consulting since 2000–01 by the Home Office and it's agencies is as follows:

Value of all contracts, consultancies and other services placed since 2000–2001

£

Company	2000-01	2001-02	2002-03	2003-04	2004-
Deloitte & Touche	262,066	33,274	438,717	67,667	0
Ernst & Young	0	0	0	1,867,782	0
KPMG	0	114,477	54,689	93,136	65,541
PricewaterhouseCoopers	2,264,239	5,578,449	1,472,817	184,429	237,000
PA Consulting	2,400,267	2,366,666	4,196,057	138,737	165,566

The nature of work carried out on behalf of named Home Office units and its executive agencies by Deloitte & Touche, Ernst & Young, KPMG, PricewaterhouseCoopers and PA Consulting is listed:

Deloitte & Touche:

To provide advice on the accounting treatment of new PFI prisons at Peterborough & Ashford. (Office of Contracts and Competitions)

Provision of consultancy services. (UK Passport Service)

Research—National Asylum Support Service: Interim Process Review—Induction Centre Briefing: A Process and Impact Evaluation. (Research, Development & Statistics)

Consultants to The National DNA Database. (Forensic Science Service)

Ernst & Young:

Provision of consultancy services on Data Exchange Project (UK Passport Service)

Consultancy and implementation of Operational Management System Phase 2—Procurement and Finance Modules, (Forensic Science Service)

Review of Operational Management System Phase 1. (Forensic Science Service)

KPMG:

Consultancy on Financial Issues. (UK Passport Service)

Consultancy Services. (HM Prison Service)

Police Performance Assessment Framework—Creation of Domains. (Research, Development & Statistics)

PricewaterhouseCoopers:

Independent Internal Auditors. (Criminal Records Bureau)

Financial Advisors for 2 Marsham Street PFI Deal. (Building and Estates Management Unit)

Advice in respect of arrangements to launch a 'Variation Bond' to provide additional funding for 2 Marsham Street. (Building and Estates Management Unit)

Provision of internal audit services. (UK Passport Service)

Consultancy on development of sampling strategy (fraudulent passports). (UK Passport Service)

Consultancy for development of Prisons Cost Model. (HM Prison Service)

Services—Requirement for recruitment and executive search and selection. (HM Prison Service)

Production of Wider Markets business case. (Forensic Science Service)

PA Consulting:

Development of model office pilot, pre-implementation review and testing. (Criminal Records Bureau)

Independent IT advice and support. (Criminal Records Bureau)

Assistance and advice in the development of a business continuity plan. (Criminal Records Bureau)

General specialist advice and support. (Criminal Records Bureau)

Programme and project management—STEPS 2 Project. (National Probation Directorate)

Structure review:

Review of court escort contracts.

Directors office requirement for review of workforce planning.

Requirement for review of finance function across prison service.

Review of Planning Group (HM Prison Service)

Provision of Consultancy Services: Various Projects (UK Passport Service)

Research:

Diary of a police officer.

Development and piloting of a sentence information system for England and Wales.

Pathfinder study into the Government's target for persistent offenders.

Evaluation of pilot schemes for the early involvement of the Crown Prosecution Service

Bringing Repeat Young Offenders To Justice Study

Evaluation of the Crown Prosecution Service Pilot Scheme—Stage 2

Alternatives to transcripts of video taped interviews with vulnerable witnesses.

The use of external consultants has helped the Department to successfully deliver projects across the office, which has resulted in improved business processes. A further benefit has been the transfer of specialist skill and knowledge, otherwise not available in house, to staff.

Parliamentary Questions

Mrs. Gillan: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department when he will reply to the question tabled by the hon. Member for Chesham and Amersham on 7 January 2004, reference 147368, on overcrowding and poor conditions in prisons. [184166]

Paul Goggins *[holding answer 15 July 2004]:* I replied to the hon. Member on 18 October 2004, *Official Report*, column 486W.

Crime

Mr. David Atkinson: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many occurrences of each category of crime there have been in Bournemouth in each year since 1997. [195536]

Ms Blears: Bournemouth is a Crime and Disorder Reduction Partnership
(CDRP) area. The data available centrally is for six key offences and is available only from 1999–2000. See attached tables.

Table 1: Recorded offences in Bournemouth CDRP—1997–98 to 2001–02

Period	*Violence against the person*	*Sexual offences*	*Robbery*	*Burglary in a dwelling*	*Theft of a vehicle*	*Theft from a vehicle*
1997–98	[1]—	[1]—	[1]—	[1]—	[1]—	[1]—
1998–99	[1]—	[1]—	[1]—	[1]—	[1]—	[1]—
1999–00	1,271	118	143	1,391	1,386	3,082
2000–01	1,456	113	188	1,216	1,089	2,584
2001–02	1,732	168			959	2,955

[1] Not available.

Note: The data in this table is prior to the introduction of the National Crime Recording Standard in April 2002. These figures are not directly comparable with those for later years.

Table 2: Recorded offences in Bournemouth CDRP—2002–03 and 2003–04

Period	*Violence against the person*	*Sexual offences*	*Robbery*	*Burglary in a dwelling*	*Theft of a vehicle*	*Theft from a vehicle*
2002–03	2,991	200	275	1,227	923	2,954
2003–04	3,294	256	284	1,463	952	2,565

Note: The data in this table takes account of the introduction of the National Crime Recording Standard in April 2002. These figures are not directly comparable with those for earlier years.

Hugh Bayley: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what the average time taken from arrest to trial for young offenders was in *(a)* Yorkshire and the Humber and *(b)* York in (i) 1997 and (ii) 2003–04. [191234]

Paul Goggins: The figures we collect are the average number of days from arrest to sentence for persistent young offenders, by police force area. The figures for the years concerned are:

	1997	*2003–04*
Humberside	129	68
North Yorkshire	125	57
South Yorkshire	134	66
West Yorkshire	149	73

Miss McIntosh: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many crimes were committed in *(a)* North Yorkshire and *(b)* England and Wales in 2003; and what percentage resulted in (i) an arrest, (ii) an individual being charged, (iii) a conviction and (iv) a custodial sentence in each case. [190448]

Paul Goggins: Recorded crime data is published on a financial year basis. The latest information relates to 2003/04 and shows that there were 71,473 recorded crimes in North Yorkshire, and 5,934,580 such crimes in England and Wales as a whole.

Arrests and court proceedings data relate to offenders. They are not directly comparable with the recorded crime statistics and it is not therefore possible to provide comparable percentage figures.

Table 1 gives the available information for those arrested in 2002 and Table 2 gives details of the numbers of defendants proceeded against, found guilty and sentenced to immediate imprisonment.

Table 1: Persons arrested for notifiable offences as recorded by the police for 2002

Police force area	*Persons*
North Yorkshire	20,443
England and Wales (estimated)	1,308,800

Note: Not all forces have been able to supply the information to the detail required and in a few cases no information at all. Estimates have therefore been made to provide a national figure.

Source:

OCJG/RDS (M&SDC 299A-04) 12 October 2004

Table 2: Number of defendants proceeded against at the magistrates' courts and found guilty and sentenced to immediate custody at all courts for all offences, North Yorkshire police force area and England and Wales 2002[1]

	Proceeded against	*Found guilty*	*Sentenced to immediate custody*
North Yorkshire PFA	19,170	13,834	1,010
England and Wales	1,924,828	1,421,285	111,607

[1] These data are on the principal offence basis.

Physical Restraint Techniques

Ms Keeble: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many training sessions in physical restraint techniques for staff have been carried out in each secure training centre in each of the last five years. [190479]

Paul Goggins: The information is not available in the form requested. All custodial staff in secure training centres must be certified as custody officers by the Home Secretary. To gain certification, they must undergo appropriate training, including training in Physical Control in Care, the restraint technique used in secure training centres. Additionally, the providers of secure training centres are contractually obliged to provide regular refresher training in restraint techniques.

Custodial Sentences

Mrs. Curtis-Thomas: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many and what percentage of *(a)* parents aged between 18 and 25 years and *(b)* all other individuals convicted of crimes were sentenced to a custodial sentence in each of the last five years. [191687]

Paul Goggins: It is not possible, in the court proceedings statistics collected centrally, to identify persons who are parents, but the following table shows persons aged 18 to 25 who were convicted and sentenced for indictable offences and the number and percentage who received a custodial sentence compared with persons of other ages.

Persons sentenced for indictable offences at all courts and those receiving immediate custody, by age, England and Wales, 1998 to 2002

	Persons aged 18 to 25 years			*Persons of other ages*		
		Sentenced to custody			*Sentenced to custody*	
	Total sentenced	*Number*	*Percentage*	*Total sentenced*	*Number*	*Percentage*
1998	136,091	32,370	23.8	203,545	44,942	22.1
1999	134,842	33,121	24.6	205,462	46,667	22.7
2000	129,154	34,029	26.3	195,728	46,755	23.9
2001	126,965	33,889	26.7	194,901	46,384	23.8
2002	128,915	34,911	27.1	206,608	50,240	24.3

Statistics on court proceedings for 2003 will be published in November.

Departmental Expenditure

David Davis: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how much was spent by his Department on *(a)* headhunters and recruitment consultants and *(b)* management consultants in each of the last eight years. [184806]

Fiona Mactaggart: *(a)* Information on the cost to the Home Office of headhunters or recruitment consultants in each of the last eight financial years is not held centrally, to obtain this information would incur disproportionate costs.

(b) The available information held by the Home Office on the cost of management consultants to the Department in each of the last eight financial years is as follows:

	£
1996–97	n/a
1997–98	7,627,016
1999–2000	10,302,672
2000–01	27,877,286
2001–02	21,147,058
2002–03	n/a

We do not hold information on the cost to the Home Office of using external consultants for 1996–97 and to obtain this information would incur disproportionate cost.

The increase in expenditure on consultancy in 2000–01 was due to a major investment programme in the modernisation of the Home Office and in particular on IT related modernisation.

The high spend figures for 2001–02 includes costs on a wide variety of Immigration and Nationality Directorate projects, the cost of setting up the National Probation Directorate and various consultancies on IT business change in both the Home Office and its Executive agencies.

Following the National Audit Office report "Purchasing Professional Services" the Office of Government Commerce (OGC) issued guidance that re-defined consultancy to include the purchasing of all professional services and not just management consultancy. Information on the cost of consultants to the Home Office for the financial year 2002–03 was not collected centrally in order that the new OGC definition of consultancy could be embedded into Home Office policy.

Information for the financial year 2003–04 is currently being collated but is not yet available.

Ministers' Private Offices

Mr. Prisk: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what the running costs of Ministers' private offices in his Department have been in each year since 1997. [191386]

Mr. Blunkett: Running costs for my Department, Ministers' offices, the private office management support unit and parliamentary secretariat for each year from 1997 were as follows:

£

	Pay costs	*Running costs*
1997–98	1,551,644	572,622
1998–99	1,566,018	1,202,633
1999–2000	1,619,459	791,588
2000–01	1,223,794	841,809
2001–02	1,643,622	943,022

The running costs for the whole of private office, including the non-ministerial offices in 2002–03 was £5,176,925. The figure for 2003–04 was £5,552,690 which represented 0.05 per cent. of the total Home Office budget for that period.

Changes in financial recording systems from 2001 mean that it is no longer possible, without disproportionate cost, to separate the costs of ministerial from non-ministerial offices and figures provided after 2001–02 are therefore not directly comparable with earlier figures.

Police

Mrs. Curtis-Thomas: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what measures are in place to prevent overlap between the work of the Police Standards Unit and the National Centre for Policing Excellence. [194862]

Ms Blears: The Police Standards Unit (PSU) and the National Centre for Policing Excellence (NCPE) have different and complementary roles with limited overlap between their work.

PSU seeks to improve policing performance through performance monitoring and measurement, for example through the Policing Performance Assessment Framework (PPAF), and through targeted support for police forces.

NCPE seeks to encourage continuous professional development and inform high standards of police practice through its work on doctrine. As part of Centrex (the Central Police Training and Development Authority), for which the Home Office is the sponsor Department, NCPE also offers specialist and technical learning and development courses in a number of areas.

Both organisations have an interest in developing good practice in policing.

This co-ordination is being driven forward by 'Improving Performance through Applied Knowledge' (IPAK). The programme is structured to avoid overlaps or gaps between the work of NCPE and PSU. Key stakeholders of the programme also include Her Majesty's Inspectorate of Constabulary (HMIC) and the Association of Chief Police Officers (ACPO) and Sir David Phillips, the NCPE Director, is a member of the IPAK Programme Board.

At a working level, PSU works closely with NCPE on a variety of areas. For example, the NCPE guidance to the police on the management of volume crime is explicitly intended to sit above the PSU tactical guidance on dealing with domestic burglary, street robbery and vehicle crime.

Mrs. Curtis-Thomas: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what action has been taken to tackle racist attitudes within the police service. [194866]

Ms Blears: Tackling racist attitudes remains a high priority for both the Government and the police service.

New assessment procedures for police recruitment have been put in place which test candidates' attitudes to race and diversity at least seven times across the process, including at interview. Those who do not score sufficiently highly in the competency "Respect for Race and Diversity" are not offered a job—irrespective of how well they do in the rest of the selection process. Candidates are also rejected automatically if, at any time during the recruitment process, they behave or speak inappropriately. Although no assessment and selection system is infallible, we have made the procedure as robust as possible in order to identify and root out racists and others with unacceptable attitudes.

The Police Service will also be rolling out a new probationer learning and development programme from April next year. The training will be based in the community and probationers will need to demonstrate their understanding and knowledge and carry out their tasks with due regard to community relationships and diversity.

Learning and development for police officers and police staff is also seen as central to tackling racist attitudes in the police service. Under a new Strategy for Improving Police Performance in Race and Diversity, which has been agreed by all the key stakeholders, and which will be published in November 2004, individuals will be made responsible for their performance in this area. Individual performance will be assessed against National Occupational Standards relating to race and diversity and through the Performance and Development Review process. Learning resources, which take into account an individual's rank or role and local policing environment, will be used with the aim of developing the individual's knowledge, understanding, skills, attitudes and behaviour in this area.

Mrs. Curtis-Thomas: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department whether an assessment has been made of the *(a)* merits and *(b)* effects of the career break system for police officers. [194867]

Ms Blears: I have asked the independent secretariat of the Police Negotiating Board to advise on how best to evaluate the operation of the scheme.

Mrs. Curtis-Thomas: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what alternatives to the current 43-force structure are being assessed. [194909]

Ms Blears: Her Majesty's Inspectorate of Constabulary have been commissioned to look at the issue of force structures and will report to my right hon. Friend the Home Secretary in early 2005. The focus of this work is to gather an evidence base for whether any changes are needed.

Mr. Jim Cunningham: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how much council tax revenue will be spent on police services in the West Midlands in 2004–05. [195691]

Ms Blears *[holding answer 4 November 2004]:* The West Midlands police authority will raise £61.3 million through the police precept on council tax in 2004–05. The final net budget requirement, most of which is funded by police grant, is £460.6 million.

Prisons

Mr. McNamara: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department pursuant to the answer of 23 March 2004, *Official Report*, column 820W, what further compensation payments have been made to meet claims arising from HMP Wormwood Scrubs. [190234]

Paul Goggins: A full list of payments is set out in the following table. Figures are not yet available, in all cases, for legal costs. The figures do not include claims for loss of property or accidents.

£

	Date of incident	*Amount*	*Costs*
1	3 September 1997	30,000	62,760
2	21 May 1993	9,000	26,700
3	15 March 1998	42,000	24,500
4	4 May 1996	20,000	19,400
5	8 October 1997	22,000	23,500
6	16 August 1995 to 18 September 1995	100,500	—
7	24 February 1997	20,000	34,000
8	Unknown	2,000	—
9	7 August 1995	24,500	29,500
10	8 November 1997	28,000	15,845
11	15 May 1997	23,250	—
12	1 July 1998	20,000	21,873
13	14 April 1995	71,560	16,500
14	Unknown	16,500	—
15	21 May 1998	20,000	21,000
16	Unknown	18,000	35,540
17	8 April 1994	25,000	—
18	November 1997 to January 1998	24,000	18,717
19	22 November 1994	8,000	—
20	Unknown	22,000	—
21	23 February 1998	22,500	—
22	Unknown	2,000	4,850
23	15 November 1992	22,000	15,147
24	Unknown	19,000	—
25	Unknown	4,000	6,977
26	Unknown	2,000	—
27	16 September 1997	22,500	—
28	1 February 1996	20,000	40,500
29	15 April 1998	20,000	6,000
30	Unknown	10,000	9,125
31	Unknown	23,000	—
32	27 July 1996	41,000	—
33	Unknown	27,000	45,000
34	8 October 1997	25,000	—
35	Unknown	19,000	—
36	31 July 2002	20,000	—
37	20 August 1997	24,000	—
38	18 October 1996 to 1 October 1997	55,000	—
39	4 February 1998	32,500	—
40	20 November 1995	17,000	13,500
41	Unknown	64,425	—
42	24 September 1999	27,000	—
43	Unknown	6,500	15,603
44	July 1996	20,000	—
45	3 to 7 July 1996	55,000	—
46	20 to 28 January 1994	13,500	17,400
47	Unknown	21,000	—
48	7 January 1998	5,000	4,594
49	Unknown	16,000	—
50	Unknown	16,250	—
51	4 June 1996	33,750	—
52	Unknown	15,000	30,000
53	21 May 1998	20,000	7,313
54	Unknown	25,000	—
55	12 September 1996 and 13 January 1998	13,000	—
56	3 June 1996	14,000	13,400
Total		1,339,235	579,243

Mrs. Curtis-Thomas: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department on how many occasions prisons have used video-link equipment in each of the last five years; and which prisons have video-link facilities. [191330]

Paul Goggins: Records on the use of video links for court hearings are only available from December 2002. Video links have been used on the following occasions:

	Number
December 2002	1,790
January-December 2003	32,100
January-September 2004	28,025

Video links facilities are available in the following 57 prisons:

Prisons with video links facilities

HMP Altcourse

HMP/YOI Ashfield

HMP Bedford

HMP Belmarsh

HMP Birmingham

HMP Blakenhurst

HMYOI Brinsford

HMP Bristol

HMP Brixton

HMP Brockhill

HMP Bullingdon

HMP Cardiff

HMP/YOI Castington

HMP/YOI Chelmsford

HMP/YOI Doncaster

HMP Dorchester

HMP Durham

HMP/YOI Eastwood Park

HMP Edmunds Hill

HMP Elmley

HMP/YOI Exeter

HMP/YOI Feltham

HMP/YOI Forest Bank

HMYOI/RC Glen Parva

HMP/YOI Gloucester

HMP Highdown

HMYOI Hindley
HMP/YOI Holloway
HMP Holme House
HMP Hull
HMP/YOI Lancaster Farm
HMP Leeds
HMP Leicester
HMP/YOI Lewes
HMP Lincoln
HMP Liverpool
HMYOI Low Newton
HMP Manchester
HMP/YOI New Hall
HMP/YOI Norwich
HMP Nottingham
HMYOI Onley
HMP/YOI Parc
HMP Parkhurst
HMP Pentonville
HMP Preston
HMYOI/RC Reading
HMP Shrewsbury
HMYOI Stoke Heath
HMP/YOI Styal
HMP Swansea
HMP Wakefield (operational from January 2005)
HMP Wandsworth
HMYOI Wetherby
HMP Winchester
HMP Woodhill
HMP Wormwood Scrubs

Mrs. Curtis-Thomas: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what plans there are to build new prisons in the next two years. [191686]

Paul Goggins: There are currently a number of projects under way to increase the operational capacity of the prison estate. These include the building of a new prison, Her Majesty's Prison Peterborough, which is due to open in March 2005 as well as new accommodation at existing prisons. The National Offender Management Service has purchased two sites at Ashworth and Belmarsh for which there is outline planning consent for new prisons.

RAF Fairford (Protests)

Lynne Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what evidence he has of the number of cudgels taken by protesters to RAF Fairford as described in answer to Oral Questions 59 to 61 of evidence to the Home Affairs Select Committee on 11 September 2003. [190779]

Mr. Blunkett: As I made clear in my answers to the Home Affairs Committee, the powers under the section 60 of the Criminal Justice and Public Order Act 1994 are intended to allow the police to seize offensive weapons where they believe serious violence may take place. I cannot comment further on particular cases, some of which are subject to appeal. I understand however that a range of items were seized from protesters using section 60. Contrary to my understanding at the time, I now understand that these did not include cudgels.

Restricted Alcohol Scheme (Romford)

John Cryer: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what assessment he has made of *(a)* the effectiveness of the restricted alcohol zone in Romford town centre and *(b)* impact of the restricted zone on surrounding areas. [194730]

Ms Blears: Initial indications indicate a drop in disorder as a result of the Restricted Alcohol Zone in Romford. The effectiveness of the zone is being monitored with the initial six month evaluation due to be completed at the end of November. I am not aware that the restricted alcohol zone has impacted on the surrounding areas.

Road Safety

Mr. Oaten: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many prosecutions have taken place for misuse of a mobile phone while driving. [190567]

Paul Goggins: Using a hand-held mobile phone became a specific offence on 1 December 2003. Data by police action (written warnings, fixed penalty notices and court proceedings) for 2003 will not be available until early 2005.

2004 data is expected to be published in autumn 2005.

Sex Offenders

Tom Cox: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many *(a)* men and *(b)* women are registered on the sex offenders register. [190254]

Paul Goggins: An overview of the 2003–04 Multi-Agency Public Protection Arrangements (MAPPA) annual reports, available in the Library, states that on 31 March 2004 there were 24,572 registered sex offenders living in the community. It is not possible to state the gender breakdown of these statistics.

Terrorism Act

Mrs. Curtis-Thomas: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department (1) what representations he has received regarding the use of police powers under section 44 of the Terrorism Act 2000; [191319]

(2) if he will make a statement on the ethnic breakdown of individuals subject to stop and search under the Terrorism Act 2000; [191537]

(3) what assessment he has made of the effectiveness of section 44 of the Terrorism Act 2000. [191544]

Mr. Blunkett: The Government believes that the powers under section 44 of the Terrorism Act 2000 are essential in the on-going fight against terrorism. As part of a structured counter-terrorist strategy, their use helps to deter and disrupt terrorist activity.

For the period 2001–02 and 2002–03, the ethnic breakdown of individuals stopped and searched in England and Wales under sections 44 (1) and (2) of the Terrorism Act 2000 is as follows:

	Number of s.44 (1) and (2) stops and searches 2001-02	*Percentage of those stopped and searched under s.44*	*Number of s.44 (1) and (2) stops and searches 2002-03*	*Percentage of those stopped and searched under s.44*
Black	529	6.19	1,745	8.09
Asian	744	8.7	2,989	13.85
White	6,629	77.53	14,429	66.87
Other	358	4.19	1,259	5.83
Not recorded	260	3.04	1,155	5.35
Total	8,550		21,557	

Source:

Statistics on Race and the Criminal Justice System 2003 http://www.homeoffice.gov.uk/rds/pdfs04/s95race2003.pdf

The increasing use made of section 44 powers over the above two year period is the result of the heightened threat to the UK from international terrorism following the events of 11 September 2001, and the subsequent rise in the number and scale of police counter-terrorist operations.

It is essential that our policing and counter-terrorism powers are used with the support of all communities and that we are able to actively demonstrate that these powers are not directed at or against Muslims or Islam, or any individual community. We are therefore formulating an outreach programme to explain counter-terrorism powers more fully. This work will involve the building of significant and productive relationships through regular meetings with key opinion formers in religious and ethnic communities, and by undertaking a comprehensive programme of visits by senior officials to those communities to explain the purpose and operation of our counter-terrorism powers.

In addition, the Stop and Search Action team, formed from within the Home Office, has been established to review the use of all stop and search powers, including the use of section 44 powers. It receives advice and scrutiny from a Community Panel with representatives from various community groups and a Delivery Board evolved from the Lawrence Steering Group sub-group on stop and search.

Mrs. Curtis-Thomas: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department on how many occasions an individual has been held in detention for 14 days under the Terrorism Act 2000. [191538]

Mr. Blunkett: Police records show that since 20 January 2004, when the maximum period available to police to detain suspects without charge under the Terrorism Act 2000 was increased from seven to 14 days, 25 persons have been detained for periods between seven and 14 days.

The extension reflects the evolution of the methodology and equipment available to terrorists over recent years. Police are now required to undertake a number of time consuming activities relating to evidence gathering, including testing the chemical substances found on or with suspects, examining hard drives of computers, and the detailed work required to establish the identity of suspects.

The safeguards built into Schedule 8 of the Act remain in place and cover areas including recording of interviews and reviewing grounds for detention.

Mrs. Curtis-Thomas: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many confirmations he has authorised regarding the use of section 44 powers under the Terrorism Act 2000. [191545]

Mr. Blunkett: An authorisation under section 44 of the Terrorism Act 2000 has to be signed by a police officer of Association of Chief Police Officer rank and submitted to the Home Office. I, or one of my Ministers, has to confirm the authorisation within the 48 hour period specified in the Terrorism Act 2000 or the authorisation lapses.

	Authorisations	*Not confirmed*
2001	259	3
2002	220	0
2003	259	3
2004	180	9

Thailand

Mr. Grogan: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what recent discussions he has had with the Government of Thailand regarding the prisoner transfer agreement concluded in 1992. [195715]

Mr. Mullin: I have been asked to reply.

We review prisoner transfer agreements and their efficacy on a case-by-case basis. The bilateral prisoner transfer agreement with Thailand forms part of the regular discussions that we have with the Government of Thailand about general prisoner welfare issues.

Theft and Fraud

Mr. Prisk: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what his estimate is of the cost of theft and fraud to *(a)* his Department, *(b)* its agencies and *(c)* non-departmental public bodies in each year since 1997. [191410]

Fiona Mactaggart: The information is as follows.

£000

	Fraud and thefts			
Accounting period	*Home Office*	*Agencies*	*NDPB*	*Total*
1997–98	—	—	—	[1]113
1998–99	3.8	114.4	70.1	188.3
1999–2000	204.3	165.4	0.0	369.7
2000–01	79.8	84.4	0.0	164.2
2001–02	12.1	121.3	9.0	142.4
2002–03	68.6	95.1	8.2	171.9
2003–04	123.1	30.2	57.7	211

[1] Analysis between Home Office, Executive agencies and non-departmental public bodies cannot be provided.

The Home Office has an Anti Fraud and Corruption Strategy that is based upon increasing the awareness of staff, use of cost effective methods to inhibit fraud and corruption and establishing procedures to respond effectively to incidents of alleged fraud including the provision of confidential "hot lines". The Department's overall security arrangements provide the basis for combating theft, supported by reminders to staff about preventative measures available to them. Individual line managers are responsible for combating fraud, corruption and theft in their own areas.

The totals represented here account for just 0.001 per cent. of the Home Office's £15 billion annual budget.

Wildlife Crime

Mr. Nigel Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what plans he has to classify wildlife crime as recordable. [195342]

Ms Blears: Crimes in the notifiable offence list, and therefore in the coverage of the police recorded crime statistics, are normally limited to indictable and triable either way offences (i.e. those that can be tried in the crown court). Most wildlife crimes are summary offences, but if such instances come to the attention of the police, then they will be subject to the National Standard for Incident Recording, which is currently being piloted. Statistics are available for the number of suspects being proceeded against in the courts for wildlife offences.

Mr. Nigel Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department when he will publish detailed proposals to reduce the level of wildlife crime. [195351]

Ms Blears: We are currently considering the conclusions and recommendations of the Environmental Audit Committee's Report on Wildlife Crime published on 2 October 2004. Our response to the Committee is due by 6 December 2004.

DEPUTY PRIME MINISTER

Casinos/Amusements

Mr. Battle: To ask the Deputy Prime Minister how many planning applications put to local authorities in England and Wales for *(a)* amusement arcades and *(b)* casinos which have been (i) objected to by (A) local residents and (B) local elected councillors and (ii) opposed by the local authority planning committee have been approved in the last year; and if he will make a statement. [196731]

Keith Hill: Information about the numbers of planning applications for specific proposals received by English and Welsh local authorities which have been objected to by local residents and locally elected councillors is not held centrally and could be provided only at a disproportionate cost.

In cases where the local planning authority have not approved an application, and the applicant has appealed to the Secretary of State, my right hon. Friend the Deputy Prime Minister, the appeal is heard by the Planning Inspectorate. In the last year (September 2003 to October 2004) the Inspectorate received:

(a) 19 appeals for development of amusement arcades. Of these, five were withdrawn, five were allowed, the rest are awaiting decision.

(b) Casinos lie within Use Class D2. The Inspectorate records appeals under this heading rather than the individual use. There were 22 D2 appeals, of which two were withdrawn, six were allowed, five dismissed, and the remaining nine await a decision.

Commercial Property Leases (Consultation)

Matthew Green: To ask the Deputy Prime Minister how many responses the Department received to its consultation paper on commercial property leases: options for deterring or outlawing the use of upward only rent review clauses, broken down by *(a)* representative organisations, *(b)* landlords and *(c)* property occupiers. [195722]

Keith Hill: I refer the hon. Member to the answer given on 4 November 2004, *Official Report*, column 435W.

Compulsory Purchase

Mr. Byrne: To ask the Deputy Prime Minister what guidance has been circulated to local authorities in England concerning the issue of compulsory purchase orders where ownership of a particular site is in dispute or unknown. [197239]

Keith Hill: The ability of an acquiring authority to acquire land compulsorily is not affected by the fact that the land is in unknown or disputed ownership.

Part 1 of the Memorandum to the Office of the Deputy Prime Minister's Circular 06/2004 "Compulsory Purchase and the Crichel Down Rules" (replacing predecessor CPO circulars) provides guidance to acquiring authorities in England on the use of compulsory purchase powers. Appendix U to Part 1 of the Memorandum to the Circular includes advice on how land in unknown or disputed ownership should be included in an order. Appendix T to Part 1 of the Memorandum to the Circular also refers to the procedure for notification of the making of an order in respect of land in unknown ownership at section 6(4) of the Acquisition of Land Act 1981.

Departmental Publications

Mr. Bellingham: To ask the Deputy Prime Minister what the Department's target is for the interval between publication of *(a)* departmental announcements and documents and *(b)* material published by public bodies for which his Department has oversight and their posting online; and what the average interval was of the latest year for which figures are available. [195396]

Phil Hope: The Office of the Deputy Prime Minister aims to publish departmental announcements and documents online simultaneously with printed publications. Typically online content is published on the Office of the Deputy Prime Minister's website on the same day as the printed publication.

Fair Trade

Mr. Burstow: To ask the Deputy Prime Minister whether it is his policy to ensure that hospitality within his Department is sourced from fair trade producers wherever possible within the boundaries set by the public procurement rules. [197064]

Phil Hope: The purchasing policy of the Office of the Deputy Prime Minister reflects the Government's value for money policy and the EC procurement rules, which require the procurement of goods and services to be based on value for money and acquired by competition, unless there are convincing reasons to the contrary, and the objectives of the Office of the Deputy Prime Minister.

Fair trade products are widely available in the Office of the Deputy Prime Minister. The restaurants sell fair trade products including coffee, tea and chocolate bars. The catering menus include options that allow for fair trade tea and coffee to be provided, on request, for official meetings and conferences.

Green Belt

Mr. Byrne: To ask the Deputy Prime Minister what reports he has received of sites designated as green belt wedge within a unitary development plan being redeveloped for community sports and recreation uses. [197236]

Keith Hill: In the first instance, all new development proposals are considered by the local planning authority, having regard to relevant policies in the adopted development plan for the area and any other material considerations. The First Secretary of State, my right hon. Friend the Deputy Prime Minister is notified when the local planning authority is minded to grant planning permission for development that does not accord with the development plan. Such 'departures' from the plan should include applications for inappropriate development in the green belt.

Since 2001 the following planning applications in the West Midlands region involving development of community sports and recreation uses on green belt land have been referred to the First Secretary of State, my right hon. Friend the Deputy Prime Minister as departures from the development plan:

Little Aston Parish Hall, Lichfield—replacement village hall

Smestow Bridge Industrial Estate, Wombourne, South Staffordshire—conversion of industrial unit to health and fitness centre

Wye Road Community Centre, Newcastle-under-Lyme, Staffordshire—extension and alterations to existing community centre

St. James Church, Newcastle-under-Lyme, Staffordshire—extension to church community hall

Three Hammers Golf complex, Coven, South Staffordshire—indoor golf academy

Friary Grange, Lichfield—recreation centre building, and outdoor multi-purpose activity areas/pitches

City Technology College, Kingshurst, Solihull—installation of all-weather pitch on area of playing field land

Leamington Rugby Football Club—extension of existing sports field

Aston Villa Football Club Training Ground, Bodymoor [illegible] Warwickshire—indoor pitch and block including [illegible] facilities

Nuneaton Football Club, Nuneaton, Warwickshire [illegible] football stadium and associated development

Woodlands School, Coventry—new sports hall, pavilion and floodlit pitches

Allard Way, Coventry—outdoor pitches with indoor recreation and community facilities

Dosthill Lake, Kingsbury, North Warwickshire—water ski and nature conservation centre

Wasthills Playing Fields, Bromsgrove—all weather sports pitch

Abbey Stadium, Birmingham Road, Redditch—athletics stadium, leisure complex.

Mr. Byrne: To ask the Deputy Prime Minister what the legal constraints are on developing sites within an area designated as a green belt wedge within a unitary development plan for community and recreational uses; and what the process is for seeking to revise planning consents for such an initiative. [197237]

Keith Hill: Development proposals are subject to the provisions of planning legislation. Most new development requires planning permission. It is for the local planning authority in the first instance to determine planning applications. Section 38 (6) of the Planning and Compulsory Purchase Act 2004 requires that planning applications shall be determined in accordance with the development plan, unless material considerations indicate otherwise.

In preparing their development plan the local planning authority should have regard to national Planning Policy Guidance on Green Belts (PPG2). PPG2 makes clear that there is a general presumption against inappropriate development in the green belt, which should not be approved, except in very special circumstances. It is for the applicant to demonstrate that very special circumstances exist which clearly outweigh the harm that inappropriate development would cause to the green belt.

The construction of new buildings within a designated green belt is inappropriate development, except in certain circumstances as set in PPG2. For example, where the new buildings would provide essential facilities for outdoor sport and outdoor recreation, the development would not be inappropriate.

Once planning permission has been granted for a development, generally only the courts can set it aside. However, where outline planning permission has been granted for a new building, the applicant must still apply to the local planning authority for approval of the details of the scheme, known as reserved matters. In these circumstances, the authority may attach conditions to the consent covering details such as siting and design. What is proposed in detail must be consistent with the outline permission. Otherwise a fresh application will need to be made.

Housing Renewal (Birmingham)

Mr. Byrne: To ask the Deputy Prime Minister if he will make a statement on projected capital investment in housing renewal in Birmingham, Hodge Hill in each of the next four years. [197244]

Keith Hill: Mainstream capital funding for housing investment from central Government is allocated in all cases to the strategic housing authority, which in the case of Hodge Hill is Birmingham city council. It is the responsibility of the city council to determine the strategic priorities for investment within the Birmingham area.

Annual capital housing allocations

Provisional housing capital allocations for 2005–06 were announced in December 2003, and the allocation for Birmingham city council was £35.082 million.

Included in the 2005–06 total is £3.271 million allocated to a Birmingham-led consortium of west midlands housing authorities, to focus specifically on improvements in private sector housing.

The confirmation of the 2005–06 allocations is expected in December 2004, and provisional allocations for 2006–07 and 2007–08 are expected to be announced in December 2005. No date is yet fixed for 2008–09 allocations.

Major repairs allowance (MRA)

Authorities with council housing stock receive the major repairs allowance (MRA), which is an annual subsidy calculated according to the number of dwellings and the estimated annual investment requirement for depreciation and on-going repairs.

The MRA is generally announced as part of the Housing Revenue Account. Determinations are made in December each year, and so the figure for 2005–06 is not yet available.

The allowance is re-calculated each year to take account of changes in the number of dwellings, and the projected costs of capital repairs, but as a guide the 2004–05 allowance for Birmingham city council was £39.036 million.

Other housing funding

Funding for a housing market renewal area feasibility study

The announcement of regional housing capital allocations in December 2003 included a separate sum of £1.66 million for 2005–06 (as well as £1 million in 2004–05) to take forward a research project, to be commissioned by the Regional Housing Board, to test the feasibility of developing a housing market renewal initiative in East Birmingham/North Solihull.

Housing Corporation

The Housing Corporation allocates the annual Office of the Deputy Prime Minister funding for registered social landlords (RSLs) for provision of new supported and affordable housing, with a small element of renewal investment. This funding goes directly to individual RSLs, which typically have a number of sites and projects across a number of local authorities. It is not therefore possible to identify separately what level of funding will be going into the Hodge Hill area.

Mr. Byrne: To ask the Deputy Prime Minister if he will list the funding streams from which Birmingham city council might access capital investment for housing renewal over the next four years; and through which organisational options such funding might be delivered. [197245]

Keith Hill: Birmingham city council can access external funding streams for housing renewal investment, and in addition has the flexibility to access certain corporate funding streams for investment in housing renewal as set out.

External funding

West Midlands Regional Housing Board—makes recommendations to Ministers in the Office of the Deputy Prime Minister for the annual allocations of capital housing funding to local authorities. Allocations for 2004–05 and provisional allocations for 2005–06 were announced in December 2003. The confirmed allocation for 2005–06 will be announced in December 2004, and allocations for the following two years (2006–07 and 2007–08) are expected to be announced in December 2005.

Major Repairs Allowance (MRA)—The Office of the Deputy Prime Minister's funding stream direct to local authorities to meet the ongoing capital investment needs of council housing stock. The level of funding is reviewed annually, and announced around December each year.

North West Birmingham Housing Market Renewal Pathfinder "Urban Living" —The Office of the Deputy Prime Minister's funding for housing renewal in a defined area in North West Birmingham and Sandwell MBC and is administered through the Urban Living Project Board. Funding for the first two years of the 10 to 15 year project was announced in July 2004.

English Partnerships—are strategic partners in the North West Birmingham/Sandwell Housing Market Renewal Pathfinder "Urban Living", and have committed to invest resources into Pathfinder projects during the first two years of the initiative (2004–05 and 2005–06)

Housing Corporation—allocates the annual the Office of the Deputy Prime Minister's Approved Development Programme (ADP) to Registered Social Landlords for provision of new supported and affordable housing, with a small element of renewal investment. Allocations for 2004–05 and 2005–06 were announced in December 2003, with the following two years expected to be announced in December 2005.

New Deal for Communities—The Office of the Deputy Prime Minister's funding for two renewal initiatives in Birmingham (Aston and Kings Norton) to tackle a range of deprivation issues, including those related to housing and the physical environment.

The NDC Partnership Board in each area administers funding over the life of the project up to March 2011.

Corporate Resources

Single Capital Pot (SCP)—all local authorities have flexibility in how they allocate corporately their annual Government capital allocations for the four key service areas of housing, education, social services, and transport.

Right to buy receipts—all local authorities have flexibility in how they allocate corporately receipts from the sale of council houses under the "Right to Buy" provisions.

Capital receipts from housing or land disposal—local authorities have flexibility in how they allocate these funds corporately.

Planning gain—S106 Commuted Sums—through the planning system local authorities can require developers to provide either social housing or local amenities on site, or to provide monies in lieu of housing/amenities—

these are known as "commuted sums". Local authorities have flexibility in how they allocate these funds corporately.

Prudential borrowing—a freedom introduced through the Local Government Act 2003, effective from April 2004, enabling local authorities to undertake borrowing through any source.

Local Authority Housing

Mr. Skinner: To ask the Deputy Prime Minister how much funding in grants has been paid to local authorities that have surrendered their housing stock. [197091]

Keith Hill: £157 million—£6 million for homelessness services and the rest for capital programmes—was provided in grants and other funding in 2003–04 to support housing spend by local authorities in England that had transferred their housing stock to a housing association or other registered social landlord by the start of the financial year. Authorities can also fund spend on homelessness and housing services (other than for council housing) from general Revenue Support Grant. In addition to this some £207 million was made available in 2003–04 for provision of affordable housing in these authorities through the Housing Corporation's Approved Development Programme.

Low-cost Housing

Ms Oona King: To ask the Deputy Prime Minister whether the Housing Corporation requires housing associations bidding for Approved Development Programme funding for new low cost home ownership schemes to provide information on the *(a)* ethnicity, *(b)* type of needs met and *(c)* size of household of people being housed. [196714]

Keith Hill: The Housing Corporation's Guide to the Allocation Process 2004–05 and 2005–06 sets out the information that housing associations are expected to provide as part of their bid for Approved Development Programme (ADP) funding. This includes information on the number of units, the number of persons and the type of household (e.g. family) as well as that on the ethnic client groups for which the scheme is intended to provide accommodation.

Ms Oona King: To ask the Deputy Prime Minister (1) if he will break down the 569 low cost home ownership units planned for Tower Hamlets in the Housing Corporation's 2004–06 Approved Development Programme by *(a)* one-bed, *(b)* two-bed, *(c)* three-bed and *(d)* four-bed or more; [196715]

(2) if he will break down the 569 low cost home ownership units planned for Tower Hamlets in the Housing Corporation's 2004–06 Approved Development Programme by *(a)* commercial-shared ownership, *(b)* do-it-yourself shared ownership, *(c)* Homebuy and *(d)* other forms of low cost home ownership. [196716]

Keith Hill: The Housing Corporation have so far allocated resources to fund a total of 678 low cost home ownership units in Tower Hamlets over the years 2004–06. Of these 310 are conventional shared ownership, 348 are Key Worker Shared ownership. The remaining 20 are Homebuy Market Purchase. The corporation has not funded do-it-yourself shared ownership schemes through the Approved Development Programme (ADP) since 1999–2000.

The following table shows the split of low cost homeownership schemes by one, two, three and four or more bedrooms. The figure for Homebuy Market Purchase cannot be broken down until the individual properties are purchased.

Low cost home ownership in Tower Hamlets

	Dwellings	*One-bed*	*Two-bed*	*Three-bed*	*Four-bed*
Homebuy Market Purchase	20	n/k	n/k	n/k	n/k
Keyworker Shared ownership	348	128	213	7	0
Shared ownership	310	113	195	2	0
Total	678	241	408	9	0

Ms Oona King: To ask the Deputy Prime Minister how many shared ownership properties were sold in Tower Hamlets in each year since 1997; and how many of those properties were purchased by *(a)* a person in social housing in that area, *(b)* a person on the single housing register in that area and *(c)* a key worker. [196826]

Keith Hill: Estimates of annual shared ownership sales in Tower Hamlets from 1997–98 to 2003–04 are tabled as follows:

	Total shared ownership (SO) sales in Tower Hamlets	*SO sales to people who were previously social tenants in Tower Hamlets*	*SO sales to purchasers who were registered on a local authority waiting list/common housing register*
1997–98	76	14	23
1998–99	29	5	10
1999–2000	95	21	41
2000–01	17	1	8
2001–02	92	15	27
2002–03	64	11	24
2003–04	22	1	7

Note:

The occupation of purchasers was not collected as part of CORE Sales during the period 1997–98 to 2003–04. Consequently it is not possible to provide figures on the number of key workers that bought shared ownership properties in Tower Hamlets during this period.

Source:

Housing Corporation: CORE Sales

Thames Gateway Development (Police)

Bob Spink: To ask the Deputy Prime Minister what estimate he has made of the number of additional *(a)* police stations and *(b)* police officers which will be required under the Government's plan for an additional 120,000 houses to be built between 2003 and 2016 in the Thames Gateway. [190687]

Keith Hill: The Government's agenda for an additional 120,000 homes in the Thames Gateway includes 80,000 homes already committed in the planning system. It therefore entails an additional 40,000 homes spread across the London, Essex and Kent Gateway areas.

The Thames Gateway sub-region covers three separate police forces—the Metropolitan police and the Essex and Kent forces. Policing policy falls under the jurisdiction of the Secretary of State for Home Affairs, but the management of the police estate and allocation of resources are matters for each Chief Constable and police authority, who will make decisions according to local operational plans and priorities.

General grants funding for police authorities is allocated on the basis of relative need, with resident population forming the most significant single factor in this assessment. It is a matter for the Chief Constable and police authority of each force to determine budget requirement and allocate resources in accordance with local operational priorities.

The Office of the Deputy Prime Minister and the Home Office will work together to assist police authorities in planning future needs, for example, by providing forecasts of population changes in the Thames Gateway. General police grants are calculated using a formula weighted largely on population estimates, with the management and allocation of these resources being matters that are decided locally.

Regional Fire Control Centres

Mr. Swire: To ask the Deputy Prime Minister whether he will fund the move of regional brigades to a centralised regional fire control centre; and whether the costs of such a relocation will be taken out of the brigades' existing budget. [196489]

Mr. Raynsford: There are no current proposals to create regional fire and rescue authorities or brigades. The creation of regional fire and rescue control centres will lead to considerable efficiencies and improved resilience. However if, during the transition period, authorities incur a net additional expense, new burdens principles will apply. The new burdens principle means that, where a central government department's policies or initiatives lead to a net increase in the cost of providing local authority services, Government will fund the additional expenditure, provided that the aggregate value all department's burdens across all local authorities in England in any financial year is greater than £100,000.

Mr. Swire: To ask the Deputy Prime Minister whether he has *(a)* contracted a company to design a building for a regional fire control centre for the South West and *(b)* estimated how many people would be working in such a building; what type of equipment will be needed in such a building; and whether outline planning permission has been sought for this building. [196491]

Mr. Raynsford: A generic design for the regional control centres (RCCs) has been developed in consultation with fire and rescue service staff by a professional design team. The developer selected to build the RCC in each region will be required to complete the design to reflect local requirements, including site conditions and planning.

Work is in progress on staffing models for the RCCs. The number of staff to be employed in each RCC will vary regionally, reflecting different demand levels.

The Office of the Deputy Prime Minister is undertaking a major procurement under the EU's 'Negotiated Procedure' rules to provide modern, high quality technology, including integrated command and communications systems, mobilising and resource management system, GIS and gazetteer, and an automatic vehicle location system, for each RCC. The procurement will also provide networking equipment to connect together the RCCs, creating a national resilient network.

Planning status was one of the criteria for site location.

Right to Buy

Mrs. Spelman: To ask the Deputy Prime Minister what changes the Government has made to right to buy *(a)* discounts and *(b)* eligibility in England since 1997; and if he will make a statement. [197086]

Keith Hill: Following consultation, the Government reduced maximum Right to Buy discounts in February 1999 to levels that reflected more closely the actual cost of buying a home in each of the nine English regions. The previous nationwide limit of £50,000 was replaced by nine regional limits:

	£000
London, South East	38,000
Eastern	34,000
South West	30,000
North West, West Midlands	26,000
Yorkshire and the Humber, East Midlands	24,000
North East	22,000

In March 2003, the Government reduced to £16,000 the maximum Right to Buy discount available in 41 areas that were under the greatest housing pressure, as evidenced by high levels of homelessness and high local house prices. The position in all 354 local housing authority areas in England was considered. The 41 areas were:

Region	*Areas*
London	All London boroughs except Barking and Dagenham and Havering
South East	Chiltern, Epsom and Ewell, Hart, Oxford, Reading, Reigate and Banstead, Tonbridge and Mailing, Vale of White Horse, West Berkshire,
Eastern	Watford

The Government has made no changes to eligibility for the Right to Buy. Its Housing Bill, which is currently completing its progress through Parliament, proposes to increase the initial qualification period from two years to five years. Tenants will however qualify for the same percentage of discount after five years as they would have done under the current rules.

EDUCATION AND SKILLS

Access to Universities

Mr. Clappison: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills whether he intends to include milestones for individual universities in their access agreements in his annual report to Parliament under Schedule 5 of the Higher Education Act 2004; whether they will otherwise be published by *(a)* him and the Director General of the Office for Fair Access; and whether comments made by the Director General in respect of milestones for individual universities will be published. [194838]

Dr. Howells: Access agreements, which will include institutions' own milestones, will be published documents. It is a matter for the Director whether he includes milestones for individual universities in his annual report or whether he publishes any comments he makes on them.

Apprenticeships

Dan Norris: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills how many young people in Bath and North East Somerset are on apprenticeship schemes. [196759]

Mr. Miliband: The information requested is only available for local Learning and Skills Council (LSC) areas. In July 2004, there were 2,900 people on Apprenticeships in the West of England LSC area.

CAFCASS

Mr. Clappison: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills what percentage of separation and divorce cases referred to the Children and Family Court Advisory and Support Service during 2001/02 and 2002/03 were resolved without a formal court hearing. [194220]

Margaret Hodge: The Children and Family Court Advisory and Support Service (CAFCASS) does not collect the data requested. However, in many cases, CAFCASS's intervention has helped parties to reach agreement either by consent order or alternative arrangements so that parties have not proceeded to formal court hearings.

Child Care (Cleethorpes)

Shona McIsaac: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills how many child care places there have been in *(a)* Cleethorpes constituency and *(b)* Great Grimsby constituency in each year since 1997. [194182]

Margaret Hodge: The information is not available in the form requested.

Figures for 2003 and 2004 are shown in Table 1.

Table 1: Number of day care places[1, 2] by type of provider North East Lincolnshire local education authority 2003 and 2004

	Position at 31 March each year 2003	2004
Full day care	700	1,000
Sessional day care	700	600
Childminders	500	600
Out of school day care	400	500
Crèche day care	60	70

[1] The figures have been rounded.

[2] Data Source: Ofsted.

Figures for 1997–2001 are shown in Table 2.

Table 2: Number of day care places[1, 2] by type of provider North East Lincolnshire local education area 1997–2001

				Position at 31 March each year	
	1997	*1998*	*1999*	*2000*	*2001*
Day nurseries	200	300	300	400	500
Playgroups and pre-schools	900	1,000	1,000	800	700
Childminders	500	300	300	300	300
Out of school clubs	40	200	300	200	300
Holiday schemes[3]	0	200	[4]800	[5]200	200

[1] The figures have been rounded.

[2] Data Source: Children's Day Care Facilities Survey.

[3] From 1999, places were counted once for each school holiday. Before 1999, places were counted once each year.

[4] Places may have been counted once rather than once for each school holiday; see 3 above.

[5] Includes schemes that were exempt from registration.

The figures for 2003 and 2004 are not directly comparable with the figures for 1997–2001 because the figures for 2003 and 2004 were derived from the Ofsted database of registered child care providers and the figures for 1997–2001 were derived from the Children's Day Care Facilities Survey, which was discontinued in 2001. There are no figures for 2002.

With the introduction of the National Day Care Standards and the transfer of responsibilities for registration and inspection of childcare providers from local authority social service departments to Ofsted in September 2001; childcare places were classified according to the type of day care provided: full day care, sessional day care, childminder, out of school day care or crèche day care. Ofsted have produced figures based on this classification on a quarterly basis from March 2003. Their latest figures were published on 21 October 2004 in their report "Registered Childcare Providers and Places, 30 September 2004" which is available on their website, www.ofsted.gov.uk/publications

Up until March 2001 child care providers were classified according to the type of provider; day nurseries, playgroups and pre-schools, childminders, out of school clubs and holiday schemes. Figures based on this classification were published in a series of statistical bulletins, which are available from the Department's website, www.dfes.gov.uk/statistics

Children Bill

Mr. Swayne: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills what provisions in the Children Bill in respect of children do not apply to the children of those seeking asylum in the UK; and if he will make a statement. [194677]

Margaret Hodge: Asylum seeking children are not excluded from the Children Bill. Its provisions are designed to ensure that services work to improve outcomes for all children, and this includes those who are the children of asylum seekers or themselves seeking asylum. The Children's Commissioner will have the function of promoting the views and interests of all children, including those seeking asylum.

The immigration service is acutely aware of the need to offer protection to vulnerable children. A number of new procedures have been introduced to ensure that any concerns about children are acted upon and to promote close working with local authorities and other agencies. Unaccompanied asylum seeking children are supported by local authorities in the same way as UK children and are therefore afforded the same protection.

Contact Centres

Mrs. May: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills what funding has been available from the Joint Investment Fund for *(a)* contact centres and *(b)* supervised contact centres in each of the last three years. [192529]

Margaret Hodge: The £3.5 million DfES/Sure Start Joint Investment Fund was announced in March 2004 and represents a major investment in child contact centres for the three financial years 2003–04 to 2005–06. In 2003–04 £100,000 was made available. In 2004–05 £1.8 million is being made available and in 2005–06 £1.6 million will be available.

Of the £3.5 million, £2.5 million has been allocated to the establishment of 14 new supervised contact centres in England. A sustainability fund of £430,000 will provide financial support to existing supervised and supported contact centres who are members of the National Association of Child Contact Centres (NACCC). £570,000 of training and consultancy support will be made available to supervised contact centres.

Mrs. May: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills how many contact centres are in operation in England; and how many of these are supervised contact centres. [192530]

Margaret Hodge: A mapping exercise conducted by the (former) Lord Chancellor's Department (now the Department for Constitutional Affairs) in autumn 2002, identified approximately 520 voluntary sector child contact centres in England and Wales. 483 of these centres were based in England.

Of the 483 centres in England, 47 offered supervised child contact services only, while a further 73 centres offered both supervised and supported child contact services.

Under the 2002 Spending Review, funding has been made available through a DfES/Sure Start joint investment fund to establish 14 new supervised contact centres. This funding was announced in March 2004. The operation of these new supervised centres will be supported by £2.5 million from the total £3.5 million joint investment fund, up until March 2006.

Departmental Staff

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills what percentage of the staff in his Department in *(a)* 2002 and *(b)* 2003 were people with disabilities. [196121]

Mr. Charles Clarke: I refer the hon. Member to the reply given by my hon. Friend the Minister for the Cabinet Office on 9 November 2004, *Official Report*, column 619W.

EU Diploma Recognition

Angus Robertson: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills how many times during the Greek presidency of the EU the Co-ordination Group to promote uniformity of application of the general system for the recognition of higher education diplomas (first general system) met; when and where these meetings took place; which UK Government expert was present at each meeting; what *(a)* technical and *(b)* financial issues were raised by the UK Government expert at each meeting; what recommendations the Committee produced during that period; what actions were (i) proposed and (ii) taken by (A) the EU and (B) the UK Government as a result of the Committee's recommendations; and if he will make a statement. [196676]

Dr. Howells: A meeting of the EU Co-ordination Group was held on 24 June 2003 in Brussels. The agenda comprised points of information from the Commission and discussions on other technical areas on the recognition procedure including assimilated diplomas, lists of regulated professions and statistical reports. No decisions were made.

Fair Trade

Mr. Burstow: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills whether it is his policy to ensure that hospitality within his Department is sourced from fair trade producers wherever possible within the boundaries set by the public procurement rules. [197063]

Mr. Stephen Twigg: I refer the hon. Member to the answer provided by the Chief Secretary on 9 December 2002, *Official Report*, column 92W which read as follows:

> "There is no Government-wide approach to the procurement of Fair trade products. Each Government Department is responsible for making its own decisions on such products, against the background of the Government's value for money

> policy, the EC procurement rules and the Department's objectives. However, as my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for International Development has made clear, the Government are committed to supporting ethical trading wherever possible and provide significant support to the Fair trade Foundation's efforts in promoting the supply and marketing of Fair trade products".

In line with Government procurement policy the evaluation of tenders is based on value for money considerations having due regard to propriety and regularity. The use of fair trade products was given due consideration alongside other requirements during the last catering service procurement with a subsequent clause included within the contract requiring that Fair trade goods are offered for sale in all DfES Head Office restaurants.

Foundation Schools

Helen Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills whether schools applying to become foundation schools are obliged to consult on their proposal; how long the required period of consultation is; and what guidance the Department issues on how the consultation should be carried out. [196089]

Mr. Miliband: The Governing Body of any school that wishes to change category to become a foundation school must first consult interested parties. They must have regard to the Secretary of State's guidance on consultation. The guidance does not stipulate the length of a consultation period nor the form that consultation should take. However, the guidance makes it clear that the proposers must allow adequate time and provide sufficient information for consultees to form a considered view and must also make clear how the consultees can make their views known. The proposers must be able to show that they have taken account of views expressed during consultation in reaching their decision on whether to publish proposals.

We are currently consulting on plans to introduce a new fast track process for community and voluntary controlled secondary schools to change to foundation category. If implemented, these will remove the requirement to consult interested parties earlier before formally publishing the proposals, although they will be advised to discuss their plans with their local education authority. Local people will, of course, have the opportunity to make their views known about the proposals after publication and governing bodies will be required to take account of representations received.

Home Education

Mr. Hoban: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills what measures are in place to monitor the provision of education at home. [194768]

Margaret Hodge: Parents who elect to home educate their children must ensure that they receive full-time education of a good quality and suitable to each child's age, ability and aptitude and to any special needs they may have. It is the duty of local education authorities (LEAs) to monitor the quality of education being provided to home educated children of compulsory school age. Precisely how this is done, and how often, is a matter for the LEA. My officials are currently drafting guidelines for LEAs on elective home education, which are due to be issued early next year.

Information Technology (Schools)

Dan Norris: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills what the computer to pupil ratio was in Bath and North East Somerset in each year since 1997. [196764]

Mr. Miliband: The information is not available in the form requested.

Figures for England, which were derived from a sample of schools, are shown in the table. Figures at sub-national level are not available as the sample was not large enough to provide reliable estimates.

Average number of pupils[1] per computer[2] by type of school—England

Year end March	*Maintained primary*	*Maintained secondary*	*Maintained special*
1996	19.0	9.0	4.0
1997	n/a	n/a	n/a
1998	17.6	8.7	4.5
1999	13.4	8.4	3.7
2000	12.6	7.9	3.7
2001	11.8	7.1	3.2
2002	10.1	6.5	3.4
2003	7.9	5.4	3.0
2004	7.5	4.9	3.1

n/a = not available.

[1] Full-time equivalent numbers of pupils.

[2] Used solely or mainly for teaching and learning purposes.

The latest provisional data on ICT in schools was published in the Statistical First Release Survey of Information and Communications Technology in Schools 2004 which is available on the Department's website www.dfes.gov.uk/rsgateway/.

Medical Students

Tom Cox: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills how many *(a)* men and *(b)* women are training to be doctors at medical schools. [195924]

Dr. Howells: The available information is given in the table.

Enrolments to clinical and pre-clinical medicine courses at UK HE institutions, 2002/03

Gender	*Enrolments*
Male	17,245
Female	22,630
Total	39,875

Note:

Figures are a snapshot as at 1 December and are rounded to the nearest 5.

Source:

Higher Education Statistics Agency (HESA).

Ofsted Inspections

Tom Cox: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills how many Ofsted inspections of schools in *(a)* the Greater London area and *(b)* London borough of Wandsworth there have been in each of the last three years. [196726]

Mr. Miliband: This is a matter for Ofsted. HM Chief Inspector, David Bell, will write to my hon. Friend and place a copy of his letter in the Library.

Physical Education

Mr. Amess: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills how many teachers are employed in schools solely to teach physical education, broken down by education authority; and if he will make a statement. [196506]

Mr. Miliband: This information is not collected centrally.

Table 24 of the School Workforce in England Statistical Volume, 2003 edition shows the numbers of teachers of physical education in secondary schools in England. The table includes all teachers who teach some physical education not just those employed solely to teach it. The information is not available by local education authority.

A copy of the volume has been placed in the House of Commons Library. Alternatively it may be accessed at the following URL: www.dfes.gov.uk/rsgateway/DB/VOL/v000380/index.shtml

Performing Arts

Sue Doughty: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills how many people were studying for a degree or other Level 4 qualification in the performing arts in the most recent year for which information is available *(a)* in England, *(b)* in England from overseas and *(c)* in each region of England, broken down by type of Level 4 qualification. [196412]

Dr. Howells: The available information has been taken from the Higher Education Statistics Agency (HESA) and is given in the table.

Students on undergraduate performing arts[1] courses at English HE institutions, 2002/03

Government Office Region of institution	*First degree*	*Foundation degree*	*Diploma of HE*	*HND*	*Other UG[2]*	*Total UG*
North East	615	25	0	35	45	720
Yorkshire and Humberside	2,415	0	0	0	100	2,515
North West	3,975	0	0	135	115	4,225
East Midlands	1,230	0	0	115	5	1,345
Eastern	1,675	50	0	190	185	2,095
South East	3,105	30	90	335	400	3,955
London	6,795	5	90	125	695	7,710
South West	1,435	65	5	190	560	2,255
West Midlands	2,120	0	20	50	160	2,345
All English HEIs	23,355	175	200	1,170	2,265	27,170
Of which overseas3	1,690	5	15	20	195	1,915

[1] 'Performing Arts' has been taken to include music, dance and drama.

[2] Includes students studying for professional qualifications and other certificates and diplomas at undergraduate level.

[3] Includes EU domiciled students.

Note:

Figures are a snapshot as at 1 December and are rounded to the nearest 0 or 5.

Source:

HESA.

Sue Doughty: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills in what circumstances performing arts students are entitled to student loans and fee support; and if he will make a statement on the Government's policy on support for Level 4 students. [196413]

Dr. Howells: The Government supports a range of performing arts students with the standard package of Higher Education fees and loans for training at Level 4. This includes those pursuing degrees or diplomas on courses designated for student support in mainstream Higher Education, at universities or other institutions providing HE courses.

In addition, 525 students start courses each year supported by the Dance and Drama Awards which provide support with fees and means tested support for the student fee contribution and living costs The Awards provide performance training at Level 4 leading to Trinity College London Diplomas in private schools of dance and drama.

Pupil Referral Units

Mr. Hoban: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills what assessment he has made of the effectiveness of Pupil Referral Units in *(a)* raising levels of attainment, *(b)* enabling pupils to return to mainstream schools and *(c)* improving attendance. [194767]

Mr. Stephen Twigg: Pupil Referral Units (PRUs) are inspected by Ofsted to assess the quality of the provision being delivered by LEAs and to address any instances where it falls below our expectations. PRUs form a significant element within each LEA's alternative provision strategy. However, in June 2003, Ofsted reported that the quality of alternative provision made for older pupils is variable. Well run PRUs make a great difference to their pupils, and we are disseminating guidance on good practice to help LEAs improve their effectiveness. We will also expect PRUs to work with groups of schools which take collective responsibility for managing excluded pupils and those at risk of exclusion, and provision for them.

School Playing Fields

Mr. Byrne: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills whether he has *(a)* received and *(b)* been notified of proposals to sell school playing fields since the publication of new guidance on the matter. [197238]

Mr. Stephen Twigg: On 27 August, we announced our intention to tighten up the criteria against which applications for consent to dispose of school playing fields would be assessed. Following consultation with the independent School Playing Fields Advisory Panel, we have published the new guidance today. I have not yet received, or been notified of, any proposals to sell school playing fields under the new guidance.

Scientists in Higher Education

Mr. Denham: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills what assessment he has made of the retention rate of scientists employed by universities. [195633]

Dr. Howells: We have made no assessment of the retention rate of scientists employed by universities. However, we do have access to the latest available information from the Higher Education Statistics Agency, which is shown in the following table. We have taken 'scientists' to mean academic staff in all science subjects.

Retention rates[1] of academic staff[2] on permanent contracts UK HE institutions

		Percentage
Academic year	*Staff in science departments[3]*	*All staff*
1994/95	97	97
2002/03	96	96

[1] The retention rate is defined as the proportion of staff who were recorded at the same institution at both the beginning and end of the academic year.

[2] Covers full-time and part-time staff on permanent contracts.

[3] Includes staff in cost centres covering all science subjects.

Source:
Higher Education Statistics Agency's Staff Record.

Mr. Denham: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills what the average age is of scientists with permanent contracts employed by universities; and what the average age was 10 years ago. [195634]

Dr. Howells: The latest available figures from the Higher Education Statistics Agency, are shown in the following table. Information for 1992/93 is not held centrally. We have taken 'scientists' to mean academic staff in all science subjects. As well as figures for science staff, we have shown figures for all staff for comparison.

Average age of academic staff[1] UK HE Institutions

Academic years	*Staff in science departments[2]*	*All staff*
1994/95[3]	45	45
2002/03	46	46

[1] Covers full-time and part-time staff on permanent contracts.

[2] Includes staff in cost centres covering all science subjects.

[3] Earliest comparable figures—information for 1992/93 is not held centrally.

Source:
Higher Education Statistics Agency's Staff Record.

Special Educational Needs

Mr. Cameron: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills whether it is the Government's policy that conductive education should be made available to all children with special educational needs; what research he has commissioned on conductive education in special education; and what guidance has been issued on the use of conductive education for children with motor disorders. [194626]

Margaret Hodge: Decisions about how to provide for children with special educational needs (SEN) are taken locally in light of all the individual circumstances. Local education authorities (LEAs) have a statutory duty to identify, assess and provide for children with SEN, taking advice from professionals and other agencies as necessary. Some individual placements at specialist centres providing conductive education are being funded by LEAs, social services and health.

A research project by the University of Birmingham to evaluate the effectiveness of conductive education was funded by the Department in 1993. This found no evidence that children receiving conductive education progress better than comparable children at maintained special schools.

There are no plans to give all pupils with special educational needs access to conductive education or to provide guidance. The Government's strategy for SEN—"Removing Barriers to Achievement"—launched in February this year, sets out our vision for giving children with SEN and disabilities the opportunity to succeed according to their personal needs and aptitudes. This strategy builds on proposals for the reform of the children's services in "Every Child Matters". It sets a new agenda for improvement and action at a national and local level.

University Admissions

Mr. Clappison: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills pursuant to the answer of 3 November 2004, *Official Report*, column 290W, on university admissions, what his timescale is for consideration of the benchmarks on university admissions; and whether he plans to announce the outcome of this consideration. [197050]

Dr. Howells: I have said that I will look at the benchmarks to see if there is any way they can be improved or better understood. I have not yet announced a specific timescale, nor at this stage any plans to make an announcement.

CONSTITUTIONAL AFFAIRS

Data Protection

Chris Ruane: To ask the Parliamentary Secretary, Department for Constitutional Affairs if he will reform the data protection laws to allow *(a)* local government and *(b)* national government to share information between departments. [196208]

Mr. Leslie: The Data Protection Act 1998 does not prevent the sharing of information between public bodies, it regulates the way in which such sharing must be done to ensure compliance with principles of good information handling. Data sharing between public bodies is also a matter of administrative law, common law and human rights. Guidance on how data sharing can be carried out on a lawful basis is set out in "Public Sector Data Sharing: Guidance on the Law" published by the Department for Constitutional Affairs in November 2003, copies of which are available in the Library.

Departmental Staff

Mr. Wilshire: To ask the Parliamentary Secretary, Department for Constitutional Affairs how many agency temporary staff have been working for the Department or its predecessors in each of the last five years, excluding those working for agencies for which no data are kept centrally. [196065]

Mr. Lammy: Within my Department, temporary staff are defined as individual contract staff employed through an agency. They are used to fill vacancies in a wide variety of support roles.

My Department has a national contract for the provision of agency staff workers. This contract has been in place since 2001. Prior to 2001 agency staff data were not held centrally. Information regarding the number of agency workers provided to the Department under this contract is provided in the following table. Prior to 2001 agency staff data were not held centrally.

Information relating to workers employed through other agencies is not held centrally and could be provided only at disproportionate cost.

The Department uses agency workers to meet short-term requirements and in areas where it is difficult to recruit and retain staff.

Use of DCA national contract for provision of agency workers

Financial year	*Estimated average headcount*
1999–2000	Information not available
2000–01	Information not available
2001–02	Not applicable—did not begin using contract until following year
Lord Chancellor's Department and associated offices	170
Court Service—including the Immigration Appellate Authority	259
2002–03	283
2003–04	

UN Conventions (Channel Islands)

Mr. Austin Mitchell: To ask the Parliamentary Secretary, Department for Constitutional Affairs when the United Nations Convention *(a)* on the Rights of the Child and *(b)* on the Elimination of Discrimination Against Women will be extended to (i) Jersey and (ii) Guernsey; what commitments the authorities in the Islands have given to implement the necessary legislation; and by what date. [197182]

Mr. Lammy: The United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child and the United Nations Convention on the Elimination of Discrimination Against Women both cover areas where the Governments of the Crown Dependencies have domestic competence. The Insular Authorities in Jersey and Guernsey have both made a commitment to have the necessary legislation in place when it is practicable to do so. Once that legislation is in place the Insular Authorities may then request the extension of the conventions, that may be done by declaration.

TRADE AND INDUSTRY

Burma

Vera Baird: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what the total value of imports from Burma was in the first six months of 2004; and if she will break down the items imported by value. [196719]

Mr. Alexander: According to figures published by HM Customs and Excise, the UK's imports of goods from Burma in the first six months of 2004 were as follows:

Product	*£000*
Fish, (not marine mammals), crustaceans, molluscs, and aquatic invertebrates and preparations thereof	2,347
Vegetables and fruit	188
Cork and wood	454
Petroleum, petroleum products and related materials	8
Leather, leather manufactures nes and dressed furskins	5
Cork and wood manufactures (excl. furniture)	150
Paper, paperboard, and articles of paper pulp; etc.	172
Textile yarn, fabrics, made-up articles, nes	42
Non-metallic mineral manufactures	40
Manufactures of metal nes	518
Power generating machinery and equipment	1
Specialised industrial machinery	198
General industrial machinery and equipment, nes and machine parts nes	393
Office machines and ADP equipment	85
Telecommunications and sound recording and reproducing apparatus	389
Electrical machinery, apparatus and appliances, nes and electrical parts thereof	390
Road vehicles	70
Other transport equipment	8
Prefabricated buildings; sanitary, plumbing, heating and lighting fixtures and fittings	29
Furniture and parts thereof; bedding, mattresses, supports, cushions and similar stuffed furnishings	2,032
Travel goods, handbags and similar containers	18
Articles of apparel and clothing accessories	34,983
Footwear	4
Photographic apparatus, equipment, and supplies and optical goods nes; watches and clocks	18

Product	*£000*
Miscellaneous manufactured article nes	478
Commodities not elsewhere classified	150
Total	43,168

nes = not elsewhere specified

Notes:

Products are classified according to the Standard International Trade Classification (Rev 3).

Export Credits Guarantee Department

Malcolm Bruce: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry pursuant to the answer of 27 October 2004, *Official Report*, column 1240W, on corruption, if she will make a statement on the issues surrounding the details and practical application of anti-corruption procedures which she will be seeking to resolve. [195961]

Mr. Alexander *[holding answer 8 November 2004]:* ECGD wrote to its customers on 5 November 2004 advising them of the outcome of discussions with industry about the terms of its procedures to combat bribery and corruption. I am putting a copy of this letter in the Library of the House. Revised application forms, reflecting the procedures now being put in place in the light of these discussion, will be posted to the ECGD website (www.ecgd. gov.uk) on 8 November 2004 and will come into force from 1 December 2004.

Malcolm Bruce: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry pursuant to the answer of 27 October 2004, *Official Report*, column 1242W, on the Export Credits Guarantee Department (ECGD), if she will place a copy of the interim arrangements which the ECGD agreed with Airbus on anti-corruption procedures in the Library. [195962]

Mr. Alexander *[holding answer 8 November 2004]:* Two documents formed the basis of ECGD's interim anti-bribery and corruption arrangements in respect of this business. I have placed in the Library of the House:

i. A specimen application form

ii. The schedule to the application form

The existing anti-bribery and corruption provisions that applied to Airbus pre 1 May 2004 supplemented the aforementioned documents.

Electricity

Miss McIntosh: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry if she will make a statement on the security of electricity supply in the Vale of York. [196741]

Mr. Mike O'Brien: I am arranging an investigation into one particular complaint with regards to a series of power cuts in the Green Hammerton parish council area in the Vale of York.

Miss McIntosh: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what discussions she has had with the Secretary of State for Health on the health effects of electricity pylons. [196744]

Mr. Mike O'Brien: None.

Miss McIntosh: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what recent research she has evaluated on the health effects of electricity pylons. [196745]

Mr. Mike O'Brien: A comprehensive report was published on 31 March 2004 by the National Radiological Protection Board. The contents of the report and the accompanying advice to Government have been welcomed by Government and are being acted upon.

Miss McIntosh: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what discussions she has had with National Grid Transco on the health effects of electricity pylons. [196746]

Mr. Mike O'Brien: My officials and those in the Department of Health hold ad hoc discussions with National Grid Transco on issues that may have a bearing on possible ill health effects from high voltage overhead lines.

EU Emissions Trading Scheme

Norman Baker: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what the role of her Department is in respect of the EU Emissions Trading scheme. [196845]

Mr. Mike O'Brien: The Department for the Environment, Food and Rural Affairs has the lead responsibility for the EU ETS.

DTI's role is to consider all aspects of the EU Emissions Trading Scheme (EU ETS) that impact on the energy and business sectors. This includes making sure that the competitiveness of UK industry is maintained and ensuring that issues affecting security of supply, energy prices and North Sea oil and gas production are taken into account.

In addition, DTI has the responsibility for the energy and carbon dioxide projections that form an integral part of the UK's National Allocation Plan under the EU ETS.

DTI has substantially contributed to policy development in relation to new entrants and closures.

DTI also supports the industry-led Emissions Trading Group and assists business on opportunities arising from emissions trading through UK Trade and Investment and the joint DTI/Defra Climate Change Projects Office.

Gas Network

Mr. Clapham: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry how her Department interprets the value for money criterion in terms of connecting communities to the mains gas network; what estimates her Department has made of the number of communities and households not connected to the network for whom cost-effective connection is possible; what sources of funding are available to extend the gas network; and what contribution her Department makes to this investment. [197069]

Mr. Mike O'Brien: The economic viability of connecting individual communities to the gas network will depend on a wide range of circumstances. Over 1,200 clusters of more than 150 households lie within 2 km of a gas main. It is likely that the communities that could most economically be connected to the network would fall within this group. A wide range of funding sources is available to facilitate connections. These will also vary from community to community, but include the Energy Efficiency Commitment, Warm Front and the European Regional Development Fund and contributions from gas transporters and suppliers. The Department's Design and Demonstration Unit is working with local authorities and others to design, develop and deliver pilot gas extension projects as a model for further activity.

Nuclear Clean-up

Llew Smith: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what recent initiatives she has taken in respect of co-operation on nuclear clean-up with the Russian Federation Atomic Energy Agency; and what resources have been committed to this collaboration. [197206]

Mr. Mike O'Brien: The UK is a key contributor to the G8 Global Partnership against weapons and materials of mass destruction, which was established at the G8 Kananaskis Summit in 2002, where the Prime Minister committed up to $750 million over 10 years. Under this programme the UK is working in partnership with the Russian Federation and other international partners on a variety of areas including redirection of former weapons scientists, improving protection of nuclear and radioactive material, and nuclear clean-up and submarine dismantlement in North West Russia. The annual budget for the UK's programme is £32.5 million.

The UK's nuclear clean up programme in the Russian Federation is primarily focused on two major projects near Murmansk—the Atomflot facility where the UK is funding a storage site for spent nuclear fuel and Andreeva Bay, where we and other international donors are contributing to making spent nuclear fuel assemblies safe and secure. The UK has also funded the decommissioning of two Oscar class submarines at the Zvezdochka shipyard near Archangelsk and is an active participant in the Arctic Military Environmental Programme alongside Norway, the US and the Russian Federation. Negotiations are also under way on various other programmes where final decisions on funding have not yet been reached. The total UK contribution to these projects amounts to £19 million in 2004–05 and approximately £23 million in 2005–06.

In December 2004, the Department of Trade and Industry, jointly with the Foreign and Commonwealth Office and the Ministry of Defence, will publish a second Annual Report on the UK's programmes under the G8 Global Partnership, which will be placed in the Library of the House.

Nuclear Waste

Llew Smith: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry if she will ask the Chairman of the new Nuclear Decommissioning Authority to provide an estimate of the additional volumes of *(a)* low, *(b)* intermediate, *(c)* high level and *(d)* plutonium contaminated nuclear wastes that will be added to the current stockpiles of each of the radioactive waste categories as a result of the continued operation of (i) Thorp and (ii) the Sellafield Mox Plant. [196423]

Mr. Mike O'Brien: The information requested is contained in the 2001 UK Radioactive Waste Inventory. This provides estimates of the additional volumes of wastes expected to be produced from Thermal Oxide Reprocessing Plant (THORP) and the Sellafield Mox Plant (SMP). Routine low level waste sent to Drigg is expected to total around 15,000 cubic metres. Around 5,400 cubic metres of conditioned intermediate level waste and about 400 cubic metres of conditioned plutonium contaminated material (PCM) is also estimated. Vitirfication will reduce future amounts of high-level liquid waste to around 280 cubic metres.

It has been the position since 1995 that all HLW from overseas reprocessing will be returned to BNFL's customers. The programme to return overseas high level reprocessing wastes is planned to begin in 2007–08.

Power Cuts

Mr. Greg Knight: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what assessment she has made of the risk of power cuts in the UK this winter; what measures are in place to ensure such risk is kept to a minimum; and if she will make a statement. [196958]

Mr. Mike O'Brien: The Government are committed to maintaining secure energy supplies—it is one of the four goals of the Government's energy policy as set out in the Energy White Paper, published last February.

A market-based approach is the best way of delivering energy security.

National Grid's assessment in their "Winter Outlook Report" is that there is enough electricity generating capacity to meet demand even in a very severe winter. The forecast plant margin is over 20 per cent., and it could rise further if generators bring more mothballed plant back into service.

Through the Joint Energy Security of Supply Working Group (JESS), the DTI and Ofgem continually monitor developments in the market, and look for ways of helping the market to work effectively to deliver secure energy supplies. We also provide valuable information to market participants, which can help them to plan investment decisions.

However, we can never guarantee that supplies will always be 100 per cent. secure. Storms and their aftermath remain the most likely cause of disruption this winter. I have therefore sought assurances from the electricity distribution network operators that they have done everything which can be reasonably expected of them to maintain network resilience this coming winter; and that they are implementing the recommendations outlined in the Network Resilience Working Group report "Proposals for Improved Storm Performance for Electricity Distribution Networks", published last December.

Research and Development

Mr. Jim Cunningham: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what criteria are used to distribute grants for research and development to help *(a)* individuals and *(b)* small and medium-sized businesses to research and develop technologically innovative products and processes. [196776]

Nigel Griffiths: The criteria against which applications from eligible individuals and small and medium-sized businesses for grants for research and development are judged are explained in the guidance notes for applicants and are (i) the level of technological innovation and risk; (ii) the commercial potential; (iii) the background and experience of the applicant and business; (iv) wider aspects such as environmental and social impacts; and (v) the need for the grant.

Small Firms Loan Guarantee Scheme

Malcolm Bruce: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what the default rate was on Small Firms Loan Guarantee Scheme loans broken down by numbers of loans made, in each year since 1990; and what the cost to her Department was in each year since 1990. [197251]

Nigel Griffiths: The information is contained in the following table.

	Number of guaranteed loans	*Number of loans defaulted/claims made*	*Net cost of claims (£)*
1995–96	7,484	814	27,556,269
1996–97	6,942	1,642	33,728,325
1997–98	5,081	2,085	41,339,760
1998–99	4,482	1,957	33,984,344
1999–00	4,279	1,779	29,940,471
2000–01	4,312	1,531	25,190,429
2001–02	4,369	1,624	35,615,658
2002–03	3,616	1,690	40,725,825
2003–04	5,966	1,578	41,053,159

The numbers of claims made each year are made up from loans that could have been guaranteed any time during the previous 10 years. Therefore, it is inappropriate to make any comparison between the number of loans guaranteed and the number of claims made each year.

Figures are not available before 1995.

Malcolm Bruce: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry how many loans have been guaranteed through the Small Firms Loan Guarantee Scheme in each year since 1997; what the value of these loans was *(a)* in total and *(b)* by sector; and what proportion was made to start-ups. [197252]

Nigel Griffiths: The following table shows the number of guarantees in the financial years 1997 to 2004 and their total value and the total number of guarantees to start ups and their value.

Financial Year	*Number of guarantees*	*Value (£ million)*	*Number of guarantees to start ups*	*Value of guarantees to start ups (£ million)*
1997–98	5,081	201.34	1,378	39.09
1998–99	4,482	188.80	1,209	37.62
1999–2000	4,279	205.99	1,180	40.34
2000–01	4,312	240.46	1,323	53.17
2001–02	4,269	254.69	1,286	53.857
2002–03	3,916	269.461	1,024	50.719
2003–04	5,966	409.258	1,850	42.205

Malcolm Bruce: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry how many and what value of loans were made through the Small Firms Loan Guarantee Scheme in each year since 1997. [197253]

Nigel Griffiths: The following table shows the number of guarantees in the financial years 1997 to 2004 and their total value.

Financial Year	*Number of guarantees*	*Value (£ million)*
1997–98	5,081	201.34
1998–99	4,482	188.80
1999–2000	4,279	205.99
2000–01	4,312	240.46
2001–02	4,269	254.69
2002–03	3,916	269.461
2003–04	5,966	409.258

Malcolm Bruce: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what financial provision her Department has made in respect of the Small Firms Loan Guarantee Scheme in each year since 1997. [197254]

Nigel Griffiths: The following table shows the financial provision for the Small Firms Loan Guarantee for the years 1997 onwards.

Financial Year	*Provision (£ million)*
1997–98	49.15
1998–99	45.07
1999–2000	47.34
2000–01	41.09
2001–02	40.2
2002–03	43.28
2003–04	45.77
2004–05	58.7

Trinidad and Tobago

Mr. Foulkes: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry when a Minister from her Department last visited Trinidad and Tobago; and what plans there are for a Minister from her Department to visit the islands. [195960]

Mr. Alexander: The last DTI Minister to visit Trinidad and Tobago from 31 October-4 November 2001, was the then Minister for Employment Relations, Industry and the Regions (Alan Johnson). There are currently no plans for a DTI Minister to visit the islands.

Unsolicited Calls

Mr. Steen: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry how many complaints about unsolicited silent calls by commercial power diallers have been referred to *(a)* Ofcom and *(b)* the Independent Committee for the Supervision of Telephone Information Services by consumers in the past 12 months. [196948]

Mr. Mike O'Brien *[holding answer 8 November 2004]:* The information requested is as follows.

(a) The Office of Communications (Ofcom) has received 302 complaints from consumers about unsolicited silent calls since Ofcom became fully operational on 29 December 2003. It is difficult to estimate how many of these complaints involved commercial power diallers, as some consumers may not be aware of such equipment or be certain that it has been used to make the calls.

(b) The Independent Committee for the Supervision of Telephone Information Services (ICSTIS) has received no complaints during the past 12 months about unsolicited silent calls made by commercial power diallers.

Working Parents

Mr. Wills: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what estimate she has made of the percentage of people who are employed by small and medium-sized enterprises who are parents of children aged *(a)* under five and *(b)* over five. [196028]

Nigel Griffiths: This information is not readily available. I will write to my hon. Friend and a copy of my letter will be placed in the Library of the House.

CABINET OFFICE

Departmental Responsibilities

Dr. Julian Lewis: To ask the Minister for the Cabinet Office pursuant to the answer of 3 November 2004, *Official Report,* columns 268–9W, on departmental responsibilities, what decision has been made on the sum to be earmarked from the existing Cabinet Office budget to meet the cost of appointing a separate Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster. [197333]

Ruth Kelly *[holding answer 9 November 2004]:* The costs of appointing a separate Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster will be met from the existing Cabinet Office budget, and will be accounted for in the 2004–05 Cabinet Office Annual Report and Resource Accounts.

CULTURE, MEDIA AND SPORT

Analogue Spectrum

Mr. Don Foster: To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport what estimates of the market value of the released analogue spectrum available after digital switchover informed the Cost Benefit Analysis of July 2003; whether her Department has made subsequent estimates; and if she will make a statement. [194663]

Estelle Morris: The Cost Benefit Analysis model developed by Government economists for digital switchover does not make an estimate of the market value of the released spectrum. As is standard in CBA methodology, economists have used estimates of the value of the consumer surplus that would be created by the new services which use released spectrum. We made the simplifying and conservative assumption that the providers of the new services would cover their costs.

The assessment of the consumer surplus is based on estimates of consumers' willingness to pay, using evidence from a revealed and stated preference survey. Consumers are asked to value services, some of whose features are novel and potentially available only in the future. The results give estimates with a wide range.

The Cost Benefit Analysis of Digital Switchover published by DTI and DCMS in September 2003 and is available at www.digitaltelevision.gov.uk. This showed that the quantifiable benefits of switchover were in the region of £1.5—£2 billion in net present value terms for the central case. Further work to refine estimates of the costs and benefits of switchover continues. This includes incorporating the results of a fresh consumer survey undertaken in spring 2004. The updated cost benefit analysis will inform the decisions on how and when switchover should be implemented.

Church Building Stock

Sir Nicholas Winterton: To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport what steps her Department is taking to survey the state of church building stock; and what assessment she has made of church building stock's future repair needs. [196925]

Mr. Caborn: The Government currently have no plans to survey the state of the church building stock. However the Department does draw on work by individual denominations, such as the Church of England parochial return form, which is sent out annually to all Church of England parishes, and in 2003 asked for information about outstanding repair costs.

Consultants

Pete Wishart: To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport how much expenditure her Department has incurred in each year since 2002 on employing external consultants to deal with press and public relations; and if she will make a statement. [195440]

Mr. Caborn: There was no expenditure by the Department on employing external consultants to deal with press and public relations in either 2002–03 or 2003–04. The Department's Promotions and Publicity Unit has spent £8,142 on a public relations consultant for the digital television project since April 2004.

The Unit has also recently appointed a public relations consultancy for the public information campaign on the switchover from analogue to digital television. This work has been budgeted for £100,000 and is expected to run until March 2005.

Departmental Advertising

Charles Hendry: To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport what the cost of *(a)* creative work, *(b)* media spend and *(c)* administration for her

Department's advertising activity has been in each financial year since 1997–98, broken down by contractor. [197302]

Mr. Caborn: The only advertising activity undertaken by the Department since 1997–98 has been a short radio advertising campaign for the BBC Charter Review—'Your BBC Your Say'. The total costs were:

	£
Production (including creative and administration)	3,225
Media (including administration costs)	12,907.36

Departmental Estate

Mr. Andrew Turner: To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport if she will list the properties occupied by *(a)* her Department and *(b)* its agencies in (i) 1997 and (ii) 2004, showing (A) for each and (B) in aggregate the area; and what in aggregate the annual rental value was. [196367]

Mr. Caborn: Since 1997 DCMS has disposed of two of its premises, at lease termination, and acquired alternative premises, so that direct aggregated comparisons are not possible. The rents paid for the premises vacated in 1999 are not now known. The two premises occupied in 1997 had floor areas of: 1,365.36 sq m and 8,744 sq m with rents of £507,500 and £3,437,397 respectively. In 2004 floor areas remained the same and rents of £507,500 and £4,015,000 are paid following rent reviews in 2002. The two premises acquired in 1999 have floor areas of 1,320.05 sq m and 1,840.45 sq m and rents of £488,000 and £408,062.52 respectively. The Royal Parks Agency properties, listed as follows, are all freehold, hence no rents are paid.

Royal Parks property

		Park occupied		
Property		*1997*	*2004*	*Floor (sq m)*
Chapel	Brompton Cemetery	Yes	Yes	—
Stockyard Education Centre	Bushy Park	—	—	—
Storeyard Complex	Bushy Park	Yes	Yes	367
River Lodge	Bushy Park	Yes	Yes	—
3 Upper Lodge	Bushy Park	Yes	Yes	—
4 Upper Lodge	Bushy Park	Yes	Yes	—
Gamekeepers Lodge	Bushy Park	Yes	Yes	—
White Lodge	Bushy Park	No	Yes	—
Greenwich Park Offices	Greenwich Park	Yes	Yes	[1]670
Vanburgh Gate Lodge	Greenwich Park	Yes	Yes	—
Lookout centre	Hyde Park	Yes	Yes	[1]29
Serpentine Lodge	Hyde Park	Yes	Yes	—
Rangers Cottage	Hyde Park	Yes	Yes	—
New Lodge	Hyde Park	Yes	Yes	—
Old Police House	Hyde Park	Yes	Yes	[1]204
Prince of Wales Lodge East	Hyde Park	No	Yes	—
Ranger's Lodge	Hyde Park	Yes	Yes	[2]244
The Magazine	Kensington Gardens	Yes	Yes	[1]448
Queen's Gate Lodge	Kensington Gardens	Yes	Yes	—
Black Lion Gate Lodge	Kensington Gardens	Yes	Yes	—
Park Offices	Regents Park	Yes	Yes	[1]260
Benhard Baron Pavilion	Regents Park	Yes	Part	[1]560
New Lodge	Regents Park	Yes	Yes	—
Nursery Lodge	Regents Park	Yes	Yes	—
1 St. Marks Bridge Lodge	Regents Park	Yes	Yes	—
2 St. Marks Bridge Lodge	Regents Park	Yes	Yes	—
2 Gloucester Gate Lodge	Regents Park	Yes	Yes	—
3 Gloucester Gate Lodge	Regents Park	Yes	Yes	—
Ladderstile Gate Lodge	Richmond Park	Yes	Yes	—
Venision House	Richmond Park	No	Yes	[3]—
West Stable Block	Richmond Park	Yes	Yes	[1]213
Work shop building	Richmond Park	Yes	Yes	[1]55
Ship lap building	Richmond Park	Yes	Yes	[1]130
Richmond Gate Old Lodge	Richmond Park	Yes	Yes	—
Kingston Gate Lodge	Richmond Park	Yes	Yes	—
Bishops Lodge	Richmond Park	Yes	Yes	—
Sheen Gate Lodge	Richmond Park	Yes	Yes	—
Oak Lodge	Richmond Park	No	Yes	—
Holly Lodge	Richmond Park	Yes	Yes	[1]594
Holly Lodge Training Building	Richmond Park	Yes	Yes	[1]545
Holly Lodge—Sawmill	Richmond Park	Yes	Yes	[1]182
Holly Lodge—Workshop building	Richmond Park	Yes	Yes	[1]124
Ivy Lodge	St. James Park	Yes	Yes	—
Storeyard East Block	St. James Park	Yes	Yes	[1]398

[1] Gross internal area

[2] Net Internal Area

[3] New building

Greyhounds

Ms Dari Taylor: To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport whether the increased rate of voluntary payments from bookmakers to the British Greyhound Racing Fund will *(a)* enable all retired greyhounds to be re-homed and *(b)* guarantee adequate funding for greyhound rescue centres. [196983]

Mr. Caborn: The Government do not have control over the use of the voluntary payments made by bookmakers to the British Greyhound Racing Fund (BGRF). We understand that the distribution of the increased payments, agreed between bookmakers and the sport earlier this year, has not yet been determined.

Places of Worship

Sir Nicholas Winterton: To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport if she will establish a cross-departmental governmental group to consider the impact of policy proposals on churches and places of worship; and if she will make a statement. [196924]

Mr. Caborn: There are currently no plans to create a cross-departmental Government group.

However the Department is involved in cross-departmental discussions regarding the ecclesiastical built heritage and actively seeks to keep all relevant parties engaged when necessary.

Sir Nicholas Winterton: To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport what discussions her Department has had with the Office of the Deputy Prime Minister on the importance of places of worship in planning decisions. [196926]

Mr. Caborn: The Department for Culture, Media and Sport considers listed places of worship as part of the built heritage as a whole, and therefore the Department and Office of the Deputy Prime Minister regularly discuss the importance of places of worship, including the current Ecclesiastical Exemption Review.

Sir Nicholas Winterton: To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport if she will make a statement on the operation of the Listed Places of Worship Scheme. [196927]

Mr. Caborn: To date over £22.9 million has been distributed under the Listed Places of Worship Scheme, and almost 5,000 listed places of worship UK-wide have now claimed under it. The scheme was intended as an interim measure pending the outcome of the review, presently under way, of Annex H of the European Union's sixth VAT Directive, which governs which goods and services are permitted reduced rates of VAT. The UK Government are committed to trying to secure a permanent lower rate of VAT to apply to repairs and maintenance of listed places of worship as part of this review.

However, as the future of these negotiations is uncertain at present, the Chancellor announced in the March 2004 Budget that listed places of worship would be able to claim the full amount of VAT paid on eligible carried out on and after 1 April 2004. The scheme is currently due to continue until 31 March 2006.

Sir Nicholas Winterton: To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport what discussions she has had with the Chancellor of the Exchequer about the level of public funding for historic church buildings; and if she will make a statement. [196928]

Mr. Caborn: My right hon. Friend the Secretary of State has no specific discussions with the Chancellor of the Exchequer about the current level of public funding for historic church buildings. DCMS officials have met with Treasury officials to discuss the continuation of funding for the Listed Places of Worship Scheme.

Gambling

Mr. Win Griffiths: To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport what information she has collated on the number of problem gamblers in *(a)* Wales, *(b)* Scotland, *(c)* Northern Ireland and *(d)* each region of England. [197199]

Mr. Caborn: The available information is set out in "Gambling behaviour in Britain: Results from British Gambling Prevalence Survey", published by the National Centre for Social Research, which was summarised in the report of the Gambling Review Body (CM 5206).

Regulatory Compliance Costs

Mr. Redwood: To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport (1) what the aggregate annual cost as measured by the regulatory impact assessments is of compliance with regulations introduced by her Department since 1997; [196570]

(2) what her latest estimate is of the total cost in a year of compliance with regulations for which her Department is responsible. [196571]

Mr. Caborn: All proposals which impact on business, charities or the voluntary sector require a regulatory impact assessment (RIA) which includes details of the costs, benefits and risks of the proposal. RIAs are subject to public consultation and copies of final RIAs are available from the House Libraries and on departmental websites.

Special Advisers

Matthew Taylor: To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport how many unpaid special advisers the Department has; what their names are; and which Government *(a)* bodies, *(b)* committees and *(c)* strategy groups each unpaid adviser (i) belongs to, (ii) advises and (iii) works alongside. [194055]

Mr. Caborn: I refer the hon. Member to the answer given to him by my hon. Friend the Minister of State for the Cabinet Office (Ruth Kelly) on 28 October 2004, *Official Report*, column 1380W.

Sport Participation

Paul Flynn: To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport what estimate she has made of the number of children under the age of 18 who *(a)* play rugby, *(b)* play football, *(c)* play cricket and *(d)* take part in boxing. [197370]

Mr. Caborn: According to surveys undertaken in 2003, the numbers of children under the age of 18 who play rugby, football, cricket and take part in boxing are as follows:

	Number
Rugby	1,064,000
Football	4,593,000
Cricket	2,599,000
Boxing	4,519

Windsor Castle (Power)

Norman Baker: To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport what the cost to public funds will be of the provision of two hydro-powered turbines at Windsor Castle. [196835]

Mr. Caborn: None: the cost of the provision of four small turbines, rather than two large ones, is being met by the electricity generating company.

WORK AND PENSIONS

Winter Fuel Allowance

Paddy Tipping: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions what estimate he has made of the annual cost of extending the winter fuel allowance to disabled people aged below 60 years who are in receipt of *(a)* middle or higher rate care and *(b)* the higher mobility component of disability living allowance. [196779]

Malcolm Wicks: The estimated annual cost of extending the winter fuel payment to disabled people aged below 60 years who are in receipt of either the middle or higher rate care component or the higher mobility component of disability living allowance is £235 million for 2004–05.

NORTHERN IRELAND

Age-related Macular Degeneration

Mrs. Iris Robinson: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland what assessment he has made of the prevalence of age related macular degeneration in the Province. [196249]

Angela Smith: Information on age related macular degeneration is routinely collected through current eye examinations to determine serious visual impairment.

Analysis of that information is undertaken by the Ophthalmology Department at the Royal Victoria hospital. It has advised that prevalence rates of macular degeneration in Northern Ireland are consistent with those elsewhere in Europe and the United States.

Prevalence rates are typically around 5 per cent. of those aged 60; 10 per cent. of those aged 70; and 20 per cent. of those aged 80 or over.

Anti-TNF Medications

Mrs. Iris Robinson: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland whether there is an upper age limit for treatment with anti-TNF medications in the Province. [196250]

Angela Smith: There is no prescriptive upper age limit for treatment with anti-TNF therapies. However, local clinicians do take the age of the patient into account when considering whether the potential clinical benefits arising from treatment outweigh the risk of side effects. As individuals get older, there is an increased risk of serious infection in those with a longer duration of inflammatory disease, and where patients have complex medical histories.

The decision to prescribe an anti-TNF medicine is, therefore, a clinical one, which takes account of the specific needs of the individual and experience of use of these new products.

Asbestos

Lady Hermon: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland if he will list the sites in Northern Ireland where *(a)* asbestos and *(b)* asbestos products can be legally disposed of; and what safety measures are in place at these locations to protect members of the public. [197068]

Angela Smith: There are currently no facilities in Northern Ireland for the disposal of asbestos or wastes containing asbestos. However there is one facility, a waste transfer station located in Belfast, which is presently licensed to accept asbestos waste, on a temporary basis, prior to onward movement for disposal in Great Britain. This facility operates under a waste management licence which provides conditions for the environmentally sound management of the wastes accepted at the site.

Autism

Mrs. Iris Robinson: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland where in the Province autism early intervention teams *(a)* are operating and *(b)* will be introduced within the next 12 months. [196956]

Angela Smith: Within the Eastern Health and Social Services Board, there are teams with specialist skills and experience in Autistic Spectrum Disorders (ASDs) located in each of the Trust's Child Development Clinic structures, which are locality based.

There are diagnostic teams within the Northern Health and Social Services Board. Within the next 12 months, Homefirst Trust will be developing its team further to include post-diagnostic support.

Within the Southern Health and Social Services Board there is an area wide Attention Behaviour Communication Specialist Assessment Clinic and Early Intervention (ABC) Clinic. The Board hopes to strengthen this clinic within the next 12 months with additional intervention workers and also associated training for professional and parents.

The Western Health and Social Services Board has been developing plans for enhancing diagnostic and assessment services during 2004/05 and 2005/06. The

Board has also funded PAPA to employ, from 1 March 2004, an early intervention worker to pilot early intervention service.

Aviation

Lady Hermon: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland what progress has been made in developing an aviation strategy for Northern Ireland. [197067]

Mr. Spellar: The Government's policy in relation to the future of air transport in Northern Ireland was set out in the Air Transport White Paper published in December 2003.

Back Pain

Mrs. Iris Robinson: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland what his most recent estimate is of the number of days lost from work in a year in the Province as a result of back pain. [196352]

Mr. Gardiner: I refer the hon. Lady to the answer I gave on 7 June 2004, *Official Report*, columns 138–39W. A more recent estimate is not available.

Breast Radiologists

Mrs. Iris Robinson: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland what steps he is taking to increase the number of breast radiologists *(a)* in the Northern Board Area and *(b)* elsewhere in the Province. [196349]

Angela Smith: Staffing is the responsibility of Health and Social Services Trusts, taking into account factors such as service needs and available resources. Nevertheless, the Department reviews the Consultant medical workforce, across all hospital-based specialties, annually and this informs decisions on the number in training. The requirement for breast radiologists is taken into account in this process.

In recognition of the demand for radiologists, the number of specialist trainees has been increased from 20 in 1999 to 34 in August 2004, out of which it is expected that two breast radiologists will be available within the next year.

Civil Service

Mr. Beggs: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland what steps he will take to ensure that services will not be adversely affected by the proposed cuts in Civil Service jobs announced on 12 July. [196520]

Mr. Pearson: The proposed reduction in Civil Service numbers is part of the Government's wider efficiency agenda. The question of any adverse impact on services does not apply, as the key aim of the efficiency agenda is to redirect resources to priority front line areas, and thus enhance the quality of public services.

Consultant Pain Sessions

Mrs. Iris Robinson: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland how many regular consultant pain sessions took place at each hospital in the Province in the last period for which figures are available. [196354]

Angela Smith: Information on the number of regular pain sessions held is not collected centrally. However, the number of clinics held during 2003–04 in the anaesthetics and pain management specialties are as follows:

Number of outpatient clinics held for the anaesthetics specialty by hospital during 2003–04

Hospital	*Number of clinics held*
Causeway hospital	16
Mater Infirmorum	80
N.I. total	96

Number of outpatient clinics held for the pain management specialty by hospital during 2003–04

Hospital	*Number of clinics held*
Altnagelvin area	113
Antrim	87
Belfast City	233
Causeway hospital	47
Craigavon area	40
Daisy Hill	76
Erne	76
Musgrave Park	52
South Tyrone	35
Tyrone County	33
Ulster	214
Whiteabbey	12
N.I. total	1,018

Notes:

1. Figures for the anaesthetic and pain management specialties have been provided. The treatment of pain can be classified as either of these specialties according to the contract of the consultant providing the treatment.
2. Data for 2003–04 is provisional and may be subject to change.

Consultant Radiologists

Mrs. Iris Robinson: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland during which periods in the last 10 years there have been vacancies for consultant radiologist posts in the Northern Board Area. [196347]

Angela Smith: The information requested is provided in the following table.

Number of vacancies for consultant radiologist posts in the Northern Board Area each year since 1999

Year[1]	*Total number (part year or full year)*
1999	2
2000	7
2001	6
2002	3
2003	5
2004	5

[1] United Hospitals Group HSS Trust are only able to trace figures back to 1999. Their Personnel Department moved location and installed a new computer package in 1999. Old records were not kept. Manual recruitment files are only retained for three years.

Decommissioning

Mr. Rosindell: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland what progress there has been towards decommissioning of arms in the last 12 months. [196184]

Mr. Pearson: There have been four acts of decommissioning to date. The latest act occurred on 21 October 2003, when the Independent International Commission on Decommissioning (IICD) reported that it had witnessed a third event in which IRA weapons were put beyond use. What progress there has been since is a confidential matter between the IICD and those interlocutors representing both republican and loyalist organisations.

Dentistry

Mrs. Iris Robinson: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland what dental provision is available to the public outside normal working hours and at weekends in Northern Ireland. [196252]

Angela Smith: General Dental Practitioners providing health service dentistry have a contractual obligation to ensure that a registered patient has access to urgent treatment outside of normal surgery hours. In addition, Health and Social Services Boards have arrangements to provide out of hours emergency dental services for all patients at times when dental surgeries would not normally be open.

Doctors

Mrs. Iris Robinson: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland what estimate he has made of the number of *(a)* people living in the Province who are medical graduates and *(b)* whole-time equivalent doctors working within the NHS in the Province. [196261]

Angela Smith: The information requested regarding the number of people living in Northern Ireland who are medical graduates is not available.

The number of whole-time equivalent doctors working within the NHS at 30 September 2004 are detailed in the following table.

	Wte
Doctors Working within the NI HPSS	2,975.37
GPs	983.75
Total	3,959.12

Education and Library Boards

Mr. Lidington: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland if he will make a statement on the financial situation of *(a)* the South East Education and Library Board and *(b)* the Belfast Education and Library Board. [195511]

Mr. Gardiner: Both boards have confirmed that they overspent their financial allocations for 2003–04. The South Eastern Education and Library Board has recorded, in its accounts for 2003–04, a deficit of £5.6 million. The figure for the Belfast Education and Library Board is expected to be confirmed at £5.4 million.

Both boards were asked, as a matter of urgency, to bring forward plans setting out the actions that would need to be taken to ensure that expenditure in the current financial year is contained within the budgetary limits voted by Parliament. I have now received these plans and will examine them carefully to assess the impact that the proposed actions are likely to have.

I remain concerned about standards of financial management and control in both boards. That is why I am today announcing an inquiry into the financial position in both boards. The inquiry will focus on the financial controls in place in each board and on how each board has discharged its responsibilities, including those responsibilities that fall personally to its designated Accounting Officer.

Dr. Bill Jack, the former Comptroller and Auditor General for Northern Ireland, has agreed to lead this inquiry. I believe that his experience, independence and expertise will ensure a fair and thorough process. To help him in his work, we have decided that this should be a Statutory Inquiry, thus allowing Dr. Jack full powers to access all relevant documentation and information. I envisage that findings from this inquiry will be available very early in the new year.

Mr. Lidington: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland what *(a)* the budgeted expenditure and *(b)* the actual expenditure out-turn was for each education and library board in each of the last four years. [195512]

Mr. Gardiner: The available information, taken from the published Statements and Summary of the Education and Library Boards' Accounts for 2000–01, is set out in the table. A number of outstanding issues remain to be resolved with the Comptroller and Auditor General in respect of various Boards' accounts for subsequent years, hence Statements and Summary of the Education and Library Boards' Accounts for those years are not yet available.

£000

	Total allocation	*Total expenditure*
2000—01		
BELB	182,368	[1]184,926
NEELB	225,338	221,650
SEELB	208,816	204,688
SELB	234,995	[2]235,522
WELB	203,591	202,346

[1] The excess of expenditure over allocation relates to an increase in non-teaching pension costs for which a provision has been created during the year.

[2] The excess of expenditure over allocation relates to capital expenditure and is explained by the fact that, due to the changeover from cash-based to resource-based accounts, the expenditure figures are based on accrued spend whilst the allocation was on a cash basis.

Mr. Lidington: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland what arrangements he has put in place to ensure good quality financial controls at education and library boards. [195514]

Mr. Gardiner: In common with all public bodies, education and library boards are expected to have in place robust and effective financial control arrangements. Those arrangements are based on model guidance from the Department of Finance and Personnel and set out in each board's Financial Memorandum. It is also the personal responsibility of chief executives as accounting officers to ensure the effective maintenance and operation of these financial controls and to ensure that approved expenditure is contained within the authorised budget.

Given the occurrence of overspends in two boards and wider concerns about financial control arrangements, I have decided to commission a wider review of education and library boards' resource budgeting and accounting and financial control, monitoring and reporting arrangements. This review, which has now begun, will run alongside the work I have asked to be undertaken by the South-Eastern and Belfast Boards to tackle the systems and other weaknesses that contributed to the overspends and to their late discovery.

Enviromental Heritage Service

Mr. Gregory Campbell: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland what *(a)* facilities and *(b)* assistance are available at properties under the control of the Environmental Heritage Service in Northern Ireland for the admission of visitors with mental and physical disabilities. [196915]

Angela Smith: Environment and Heritage Service (EHS) manages over 250 sites. These include monuments in state care or guardianship, country parks and nature reserves.

At the major sites, there are visitor centres, at which visitors with mobility difficulties have access to reception and exhibition areas, classrooms, lecture theatres, toilets and cafes. Some stretches of the paths at each country park are accessible to wheelchairs. At some of these sites special facilities have been provided. These include a special trail for the visually impaired at Roe Valley Country Park, mobility scooters at Crawfordsburn and Roe Valley Country Parks, and a narrow-gauge railway at Peatlands Park, which can take people with disabilities. A stair-lift takes visitors to the upper floor of Bellaghy Bawn, and one is planned for the keep at Carrickfergus Castle. A new ferry, capable of taking people with mobility difficulties to the monastic site on Devenish Island, is to be in place by Easter 2005.

The staff who assist visitors at EHS's most popular sites receive formal training in customer care and disability awareness. Individual tours, tailored to the requirements of visitors with special needs, are provided by educators and tour guides at all major visitor attractions.

However, given the nature and location of some of the minor EHS properties, it is not possible to provide access to all sites for people with mobility difficulties.

EHS is carrying out a disability audit of its main priorities to identify any improvements which could be made.

External Terrorism

Mr. Rosindell: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland what steps he is taking to protect the Province from the threat of external terrorism. [196186]

Mr. Pearson: The Government are committed to the fight against terrorism, whatever its origin. Since the terrorist attacks in the USA on 11 September 2001, the Government and their partners have been completely overhauling arrangements to protect the UK, working both to help prevent terrorist attacks wherever possible, and to minimise the impact of an attack. Northern Ireland is fully involved in that programme where appropriate.

Foetal Alcohol Syndrome

Mrs. Iris Robinson: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland if he will make a statement on the prevalence of foetal alcohol syndrome in the Province. [196254]

Angela Smith: It is not possible to provide data in the manner requested that will enable a statement on the prevalence of foetal alcohol syndrome (FAS) in Northern Ireland to be made as there is no database or registry of people in Northern Ireland with FAS.

Glycogen Storage Disease

Mrs. Iris Robinson: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland what the prevalence of glycogen storage disease is in the Province; and if he will make a statement. [196350]

Angela Smith: The number of patients admitted to hospital in Northern Ireland with a diagnosis of glycogen storage disease is very low. Records held indicate three admissions in 2000–01, no admissions in 2001–02 and one admission in 2002–03.

General Practitioners

Mrs. Iris Robinson: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland what assessment he has made of the most common reasons for attending general practitioner surgeries in the Province. [196314]

Angela Smith: Information is not collected on the specific reasons why people in Northern Ireland visit their general practitioner surgeries and thus no assessment has been made of the most common reasons.

Mrs. Iris Robinson: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland pursuant to the answer of 18 October 2004, *Official Report*, column 510W, on general practitioner contract/services, from whom, and in what form he has received representations regarding the implementation of the new general practitioner contract in the Province. [196283]

Angela Smith: Representations have been made to the Department in the form of correspondence from the General Practitioners Committee (NI) of the BMA, Members of the Legislative Assembly, the Royal College of Nursing (NI) and a small number of GP practices. A number of PQs have also been raised by hon. Members. Some of these representations have been received since my previous reply to the hon. Lady on this matter on 18 October.

In addition, the Department has held regular meetings with representatives of the General Practitioners Committee (NI) on matters concerning implementation of the new general practitioner contract.

Hazardous Waste

Lady Hermon: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland pursuant to his answers of 27 October 2004, *Official Report*, columns 1261–62W, on hazardous waste, what assessment has been made of the sources of illegal special waste being dumped in Northern Ireland; if he will list the nature of the special waste being dumped; and what action is being taken to prevent future incidences of the illegal dumping of special waste. [197071]

Angela Smith: The majority of special waste illegally deposited is the residual material produced from the illegal laundering of diesel with a small amount (less than 2 per cent.) of waste asbestos accounting for the remainder.

Given the very nature of the waste and the way in which it is deposited (fly-tipped usually at night), it is difficult to trace the source. In most cases there is insignificant evidence or eye witness accounts to identify the culprit and hence pursue a prosecution.

The Department carries out a comprehensive programme of audits and inspections of those involved in the movement of special waste, including those producing special waste, the waste carriers and the facilities receiving the waste, to ensure compliance with the regulations. The Department also works closely with other Agencies, sharing information and intelligence.

Hospital Waiting Times

Mr. Lidington: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland how many patients and what proportion of relevant patients had to wait *(a)* up to six months, *(b)* six to 12 months, *(c)* 12 to 18 months and *(d)* more than 18 months for hospital inpatient or day treatment in each of the last four years in (i) Northern Ireland, (ii) each health and social services board area and (iii) each health and social services trust. [195363]

Angela Smith: The most recent published waiting list data available shows the position at 30 June 2004. Data in the tables refer to the position at this date in 2004 and at the same date in the previous four years.

(i) Northern Ireland—Number of people waiting for inpatient admission to hospital (includes normalinpatients and day cases) by time waiting

	Patients waiting for Inpatient Admission								
Quarter Ending	*(a) Up to 6 months*	*percentage*	*(b) 6 to 12 months*	*percentage*	*(c) 12 to 18 months*	*percentage*	*(d) More than 18 months*	*percentage*	*Total*
30 June 2000	29616	59	9807	20	4656	9	5916	12	49995
30 June 2001	31655	58	11010	20	5350	10	6877	13	54892
30 June 2002	32596	54	12281	20	6210	10	8864	15	59951
30 June 2003	33670	61	10201	18	4888	9	6655	12	55414
30 June 2004	34242	67	9875	19	3628	7	3230	6	50975

(ii) Provider[1] Health and Social Services Board Area—Number of people waiting for inpatient admission to hospital (includes normal in patients and day cases) by time waiting

		Patients waiting for Inpatient Admission								
Quarter Ending	*Health Board*	*(a) Up to 6 months*	*percentage*	*(b) 6 to 12 months*	*percentage*	*(c) 12 to 18 months*	*percentage*	*(d) More than 18 months*	*percentage*	*Total*
30 June 2000	Eastern	16850	55	6067	20	3050	10	4790	16	30757
	Northern	4491	67	1280	19	629	9	280	4	6680
	Southern	4264	59	1420	20	704	10	810	11	7198
	Western	4011	75	1040	19	273	5	36	1	5360
30 June 2001	Eastern	17818	53	6675	20	3518	11	5380	16	33391
	Northern	5033	67	1446	19	646	9	425	6	7550
	Southern	4345	55	1632	21	916	12	1021	13	7914
	Western	4459	74	1257	21	270	4	51	1	6037
30 June 2002	Eastern	17729	51	7181	21	3750	11	6214	18	34874
	Northern	5492	59	2063	22	972	10	754	8	9281
	Southern	4978	52	1657	17	1069	11	1859	19	9563
	Western	4397	71	1380	22	419	7	37	1	6233
30 June 2003	Eastern	18278	57	6346	20	3066	10	4455	14	32145
	Northern	5677	67	1314	16	640	8	820	10	8451
	Southern	5229	59	1470	17	815	9	1304	15	8818
	Western	4486	75	1071	18	367	6	76	1	6000
30 June 2004	Eastern	19546	65	6094	20	2319	8	2302	8	30261
	Northern	4600	75	947	16	370	6	178	3	6095
	Southern	5191	63	1595	19	687	8	715	9	8188
	Western	4905	76	1239	19	252	4	35	1	6431

[1] Health Board where the patient will be receiving treatment

(iii) Health and Social Services Trust—Number of people waiting for inpatient admission to hospital (includes normal inpatients and day cases) by time waiting

		Patients waiting for Inpatient Admission								
Quarter Ending	*Trust*	*(a) Up to 6 months*	*percentage*	*(b) 6 to 12 months*	*percentage*	*(c) 12 to 18 months*	*percentage*	*(d) More than 18 months*	*percentage*	*Total*
30 June 2000	Mater Infirmorum	1184	79	239	16	68	5	0	0	1491
	Belfast City	3093	48	1123	17	756	12	1509	23	6481
	Royal Group	6220	54	2754	24	1196	10	1429	12	11599
	Green Park	2341	47	1026	21	668	13	948	19	4983
	UC&HT	3287	62	854	16	337	6	862	16	5340
	Down Lisburn	725	84	71	8	25	3	42	5	863
	United	3475	68	996	19	484	9	167	3	5122
	Causeway	1016	65	284	18	145	9	113	7	1558
	Craigavon Group	3572	57	1242	20	654	10	794	13	6262
	Newry & Mourne	692	74	178	19	50	5	16	2	936
	Altnagelvin	2716	72	778	21	224	6	32	1	3750
	Sperrin Lakeland	1295	80	262	16	49	3	4	0	1610
30 June 2001	Mater Infirmorum	1349	81	193	12	44	3	81	5	1667
	Belfast City	3716	49	1418	19	779	10	1681	22	7594
	Royal Group	6305	51	2858	23	1478	12	1757	14	12398
	Green Park	2286	45	1070	21	750	15	1000	20	5106
	UC&HT	3406	59	1040	18	434	8	852	15	5732
	Down Lisburn	756	85	96	11	33	4	9	1	894
	United	3553	66	1099	20	524	10	226	4	5402
	Causeway	1480	69	347	16	122	6	199	9	2148
	Craigavon Group	3637	52	1523	22	854	12	990	14	7004
	Newry and Mourne	708	78	109	12	62	7	31	3	910
	Altnagelvin	2902	72	906	22	184	5	35	1	4027
	Sperrin Lakeland	1557	77	351	17	86	4	16	1	2010
30 June 2002	Mater Infirmorum	1605	78	303	15	79	4	71	3	2058
	Belfast City	3430	46	1281	17	852	12	1842	25	7405
	Royal Group	6225	48	3173	24	1467	11	2196	17	13061
	Green Park	2358	44	1137	21	735	14	1130	21	5360
	UC&HT	3331	55	1141	19	567	9	965	16	6004
	Down Lisburn	780	79	146	15	50	5	10	1	986
	United	4025	61	1456	22	648	10	424	6	6553
	Causeway	1467	54	607	22	324	12	330	12	2728
	Craigavon Group	4221	50	1540	18	992	12	1750	21	8503
	Newry and Mourne	757	71	117	11	77	7	109	10	1060
	Altnagelvin	2678	67	993	25	313	8	33	1	4017
	Sperrin Lakeland	1719	78	387	17	106	5	4	0	2216
30 June 2003	Mater Infirmorum	1486	79	261	14	112	6	28	1	1887
	Belfast City	3821	58	1279	19	598	9	861	13	6559
	Royal Group	6176	52	2659	22	1326	11	1755	15	11916
	Green Park	2332	48	1104	23	601	12	845	17	4882
	UC&HT	3565	60	991	17	416	7	953	16	5925
	Down Lisburn	898	92	52	5	13	1	13	1	976
	United	4333	70	1036	17	425	7	428	7	6222
	Causeway	1344	60	278	12	215	10	392	18	2229
	Craigavon Group	4422	58	1293	17	733	10	1230	16	7678
	Newry and Mourne	807	71	177	16	82	7	74	6	1140
	Altnagelvin	3023	73	793	19	276	7	72	2	4164
	Sperrin Lakeland	1463	80	278	15	91	5	4	0	1836
30 June 2004	Mater Infirmorum	2017	96	53	3	12	1	14	1	2096
	Belfast City	3799	60	1295	20	529	8	708	11	6331
	Royal Group	6473	61	2134	20	899	9	1045	10	10551
	Green Park	2889	56	1626	31	523	10	147	3	5185
	UC&HT	3557	70	811	16	324	6	386	8	5078
	Down Lisburn	811	80	175	17	32	3	2	0	1020
	United	3829	73	894	17	363	7	177	3	5263
	Causeway	771	93	53	6	7	1	1	0	832
	Craigavon Group	4530	61	1532	21	647	9	703	9	7412
	Newry and Mourne	661	85	63	8	40	5	12	2	776
	Altnagelvin	3481	72	1091	22	246	5	35	1	4853
	Sperrin Lakeland	1424	90	148	9	6	0	0	0	1578

Note:
Percentages may not total 100 per cent. due to rounding.

Mr. Lidington: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland how many and what percentage of patients had to wait more than two hours in accident and emergency departments in *(a)* Northern Ireland, *(b)* each health and social services board area and *(c)* each health and social services trust between a clinician's decision to admit and admission to a ward in each year since 2000–01: and if he will make a statement. [195414]

Angela Smith: The information provided is based on quarterly returns received by the Department from HSS Trusts.

(a) Northern Ireland— Patients waiting more than two hours in Accident and Emergency Departments between a clinician's decision to admit and admission to a ward

	Patients waiting more than twohours for Admission	
	Number	Percentage
2000–01	10,346	14
2001–02	15,041	19
2002–03	25,131	26
2003–04	29,978	29

(b) Provider[1] Health and Social Services Board Area —Patients waiting more than two hours in Accident and Emergency Departments between a clinician's decision to admit and admission to a ward

	Patients waiting more than two hours for admission							
	2000–01		2001–02		2002–03		2003–04	
Health Board	Number	Percentage	Number	Percentage	Number	Percentage	Number	Percentage
Eastern	5,843	15	8,441	22	13,367	26	16,666	31
Northern	1,244	8	1,735	11	5,294	28	6,891	35
Southern	2,392	19	3,740	27	4,759	31	4,551	25
Western	867	10	1,125	13	1,711	17	1,870	15

[1] Health Board where the patient receives treatment

(c) Health and Social Services Trust—Patients waiting more than two hours in Accident and Emergency Departments between a clinician's decision to admit and admission to a ward

	Patients waiting more than two hours for admission							
	2000–01		2001–02		2002–03		2003–04	
Trust	Number	Percentage	Number	Percentage	Number	Percentage	Number	Percentage
Royal Group	281	5	531	19	1,503	15	1,981	16
Belfast City	1,173	10	1,712	13	2,245	18	3,076	25
UC and HT	3,293	23	3,991	30	5,805	41	6,461	48
Down Lisburn	772	13	1,108	17	589	8	859	12
Mater Infirmorum	324	46	1,099	38	3,225	43	4,289	59
Causeway	16	3	100	12	1,311	84	2,172	80
United	1,228	8	1,635	11	3,983	23	4,719	28
Craigavon Group	2,349	19	3,717	28	4,702	32	4,462	25
Newry and Mourne	41	7	23	6	57	9	89	13
Armagh and Dungannon	2	2	0	0	—	—	—	—
Altnagelvin	864	17	1,125	21	1,701	29	1,817	24
Sperrin Lakeland	3	0	0	0	10	0	53	1

Note:
Data for 2003–2004 is provisional and may be subject to change. I have set a target for 2004–05 to reduce the number of patients waiting more than two hours in an A&E department between the clinician's decision to admit and admission to a ward by one third compared to 2003–04 levels.

Mr. Lidington: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland what the average waiting time is for each speciality in elective surgery in each *(a)* health and social services board and *(b)* health and social services trust; what the equivalent figures for the last three financial years were; and if he will make a statement. [195424]

Angela Smith: Waiting list information is collected by time band. It is therefore not possible to calculate the arithmetic mean length of time waiting. It is however possible to identify the median or mid point waiting time band.

(a) Median waiting time band by specialty for each health and social services board

		As at 30 June:			
Provider board	Specialty	2001	2002	2003	2004
Eastern	Anaesthetics	12–14	6–8	0–2	0–2
Eastern	Cardiac Surgery	3–5	3–5	3–5	0–2
Eastern	ENT	3–5	3–5	3–5	3–5
Eastern	General Surgery	6–8	6–8	3–5	3–5
Eastern	Gynaecology	3–5	3–5	3–5	0–2
Eastern	Neurosurgery	15–17	15–17	15–17	15–17
Eastern	Ophthalmology	3–5	3–5	3–5	3–5
Eastern	Oral Surgery	3–5	3–5	3–5	6–8
Eastern	Paediatric Dentistry	0–2	3–5	0–2	0–2
Eastern	Paediatric Surgery	3–5	3–5	3–5	3–5
Eastern	Plastic Surgery	12–14	12–14	9–11	6–8

(a) Median waiting time band by specialty for each health and social services board

Provider board	Specialty	As at 30 June: 2001	2002	2003	2004
Eastern	Restorative Dentistry	6–8	—	0–2	12–14
Eastern	T and O Surgery	6–8	6–8	6–8	3–5
Eastern	Thoracic Surgery	3–5	12–14	6–8	3–5
Eastern	Urology	3–5	3–5	3–5	3–5
Northern	ENT	3–5	6–8	3–5	3–5
Northern	General Surgery	3–5	3–5	3–5	0–2
Northern	Gynaecology	3–5	3–5	3–5	3–5
Northern	Urology	3–5	3–5	3–5	0–2
Southern	ENT	3–5	6–8	3–5	3–5
Southern	General Surgery	6–8	6–8	3–5	3–5
Southern	Gynaecology	0–2	0–2	3–5	0–2
Southern	Ophthalmology	6–8	3–5	6–8	3–5
Southern	Oral Surgery	0–2	0–2	0–2	0–2
Southern	Urology	6–8	6–8	3–5	6–8
Western	ENT	3–5	3–5	3–5	3–5
Western	General Surgery	0–2	0–2	0–2	0–2
Western	Gynaecology	0–2	0–2	0–2	0–2
Western	Ophthalmology	3–5	3–5	3–5	3–5
Western	Oral Surgery	0–2	3–5	0–2	0–2
Western	T and O Surgery	3–5	6–8	3–5	3–5
Western	Urology	3–5	3–5	3–5	0–2

(b) Median waiting time band by specialty for each health and social services trust

Trust	Specialty	As at 30 June: 2001	2002	2003	2004
Altnagelvin	ENT	3–5	0–2	0–2	6–8
Altnagelvin	General Surgery	0–2	3–5	3–5	3–5
Altnagelvin	Gynaecology	0–2	0–2	0–2	0–2
Altnagelvin	Ophthalmology	3–5	3–5	3–5	3–5
Altnagelvin	Oral Surgery	0–2	3–5	0–2	0–2
Altnagelvin	T and O Surgery	3–5	6–8	3–5	3–5
Altnagelvin	Urology	3–5	3–5	3–5	0–2
Belfast City	Anaesthetics	12–14	6–8	24+	—
Belfast City	ENT	3–5	3–5	3–5	3–5
Belfast City	General Surgery	12–14	12–14	6–8	6–8
Belfast City	Gynaecology	3–5	3–5	3–5	3–5
Belfast City	Plastic Surgery	—	—	6–8	3–5
Belfast City	Thoracic Surgery	0–2	0–2	0–2	3–5
Belfast City	Urology	3–5	6–8	3–5	3–5
Causeway	General Surgery	3–5	6–8	3–5	0–2
Causeway	Gynaecology	0–2	3–5	0–2	0–2
Causeway	Urology	3–5	3–5	3–5	0–2
Craigavon Group	ENT	6–8	6–8	3–5	3–5
Craigavon Group	General Surgery	6–8	6–8	3–5	3–5
Craigavon Group	Gynaecology	0–2	0–2	3–5	0–2
Craigavon Group	Ophthalmology	6–8	3–5	6–8	3–5
Craigavon Group	Oral Surgery	0–2	3–5	0–2	0–2
Craigavon Group	Urology	6–8	6–8	3–5	6–8
Down Lisburn	ENT	0–2	6–8	0–2	0–2
Down Lisburn	General Surgery	0–2	0–2	0–2	0–2
Down Lisburn	Gynaecology	0–2	0–2	0–2	0–2
Down Lisburn	Ophthalmology	0–2	0–2	6–8	3–5
Down Lisburn	Urology	0–2	3–5	0–2	3–5
Green Park	T and O Surgery	6–8	6–8	6–8	3–5
Mater Informorum	Anaesthetics	0–2	0–2	0–2	0–2
Mater Informorum	ENT	0–2	0–2	0–2	0–2
Mater Informorum	General Surgery	0–2	3–5	0–2	0–2
Mater Informorum	Gynaecology	3–5	6–8	9–11	0–2
Mater Informorum	Ophthalmology	3–5	0–2	0–2	0–2
Mater Informorum	Oral Surgery	—	—	0–2	0–2
Mater Informorum	Urology	0–2	0–2	0–2	0–2
Newry and Mourne	ENT	0–2	0–2	0–2	0–2
Newry and Mourne	General Surgery	0–2	3–5	0–2	0–2
Newry and Mourne	Gynaecology	0–2	3–5	3–5	3–5
Newry and Mourne	Oral Surgery	0–2	0–2	0–2	0–2
Royal Group	Cardiac Surgery	3–5	3–5	3–5	0–2
Royal Group	ENT	3–5	6–8	3–5	3–5
Royal Group	General Surgery	6–8	9–11	9–11	3–5

(b) Median waiting time band by specialty for each health and social services trust

Trust	*Specialty*	*As at 30 June:* *2001*	*2002*	*2003*	*2004*
Royal Group	Gynaecology	3–5	6–8	3–5	3–5
Royal Group	Neurosurgery	15–17	15–17	15–17	15–17
Royal Group	Ophthalmology	3–5	3–5	3–5	3–5
Royal Group	Oral Surgery	3–5	3–5	3–5	6–8
Royal Group	Paediatric Dentistry	0–2	3–5	0–2	0–2
Royal Group	Paediatric Surgery	3–5	3–5	3–5	3–5
Royal Group	Plastic Surgery	18–20	21–23	15–17	12–14
Royal Group	T and O Surgery	0–2	6–8	12–14	9–11
Royal Group	Thoracic Surgery	3–5	12–14	6–8	3–5
Royal Group	Urology	15–17	24+	24+	0–2
Sperrin Lakeland	ENT	3–5	3–5	3–5	0–2
Sperrin Lakeland	General Surgery	0–2	0–2	0–2	0–2
Sperrin Lakeland	Gynaecology	0–2	0–2	0–2	0–2
UC and HT	ENT	3–5	3–5	0–2	0–2
UC and HT	General Surgery	3–5	3–5	3–5	3–5
UC and HT	Gynaecology	3–5	3–5	0–2	0–2
UC and HT	Paediatric Dentistry	3–5	24+	—	—
UC and HT	Paediatric Surgery	0–2	0–2	0–2	3–5
UC and HT	Plastic Surgery	9–11	9–11	6–8	6–8
UC and HT	Restorative Dentistry	6–8	—	0–2	12–14
UC and HT	T and O Surgery	24+	24+	6–8	0–2
UC and HT	Urology	0–2	0–2	0–2	0–2
United	ENT	3–5	6–8	3–5	3–5
United	General Surgery	3–5	3–5	3–5	0–2
United	Gynaecology	3–5	3–5	3–5	3–5

I have set targets for 2004–05 that no patient has to wait more than 18 months for treatment by March 2005, and by no more than 15 months by March 2006.

ICT Consultants

Mr. Jenkins: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland how much the Department spent on outside information technology and communication specialist consultants and engineers in the 2003–04 financial year. [191908]

Mr. Pearson: The 11 departments of the Northern Ireland Administration and the Northern Ireland Office spent £1,961,593 on information and communication technology consultants and engineers in the 2003–04 financial year.

This investment was made to provide expertise and/or resource that was not available within the internal ICT resource.

The figure provided relates to specific ICT consultancy engagements. It does not include on-going and planned contractual arrangements between NI Departments and the private sector for operational ICT systems and services.

Intellectual Property

Mr. Rosindell: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland what steps he has taken to combat intellectual property crime in the last three years. [196171]

Mr. Pearson: The Police Service of Northern Ireland have had significant success in disrupting and frustrating those criminal networks involved in intellectual property crime and from 2002 have seized approximately £18 million of counterfeit and pirated goods. That important enforcement work is continuing.

Under the umbrella of the Organised Crime Task Force, the PSNI continue to work in partnership with industry and brand holders to identify illicit product, improve understanding of the scope of trademark and copyright law and to raise public awareness of the risks associated with the purchase of counterfeit goods.

Juvenile Justice Centre

Lady Hermon: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland what the required notice period is for Commissioners of the Northern Ireland Human Rights Commission to visit the Juvenile Justice Centre; whether they are allowed *(a)* unrestricted and *(b)* private access to young people at the centre; and if he will make a statement. [197025]

Mr. Spellar: There is no prescribed period of notice required for Commissioners of the Northern Ireland Human Rights Commission to visit the Juvenile Justice Centre and the degree of access to the young people in the centre would be commensurate with the accessed level of risk and subject to the consent of the young people and their parents.

Lady Hermon: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland whether the methods of restraint used in controlling young offenders at the Juvenile Justice Centre have recently been reviewed. [197070]

Mr. Spellar: This is an operational responsibility of the chief executive of the Youth Justice Agency of Northern Ireland (Bill Lockhart). He has advised me that the Director of the Juvenile Justice Centre has been invited to take part in a United Kingdom review on the use of restraint methods and will be meeting with colleagues across the UK to undertake this task.

Learning Disability

Mr. Peter Robinson: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland how the health concerns of those with learning difficulties are represented in health equity audits in the Province. [194524]

Angela Smith: In Northern Ireland means other than health equality audits are used to assess the needs of people with learning disabilities, including specially commissioned research, engagement with relevant non-government organisations, consultations on new policies as they are being developed, and equality screening and equality impact assessments carried out on existing and emerging policies.

The Department of Health, Social Services and Public Safety is currently implementing a strategy to develop community learning disability services to resettle long-stay hospital patients, prevent inappropriate hospital admissions and re-admissions, and focus hospital services on assessment and acute short-term treatment. The Independent Review of Mental Health and Learning Disability (NI) will shape policy and service development over the next 10 to 15 years. The report of this review is expected to be submitted to the Department early in the new year. This will contain a number of recommendations to address the particular health needs of people with a learning disability.

Mental Health

Mrs. Iris Robinson: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland what percentage of health and personal social services funding was spent on mental health services in each of the last five years. [196351]

Angela Smith: The information requested is as follows:

Percentage of health and personal social services funds spent on mental health services in Northern Ireland

Year end March	*Mental health spend as percentage of total*
1999	9.2
2000	9.0
2001	8.8
2002	8.6
2003	7.8

MRI Scanning

Mrs. Iris Robinson: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland if he will make a statement on provision of MRI scanning in the Province; and what improvements are planned to such provision. [196348]

Angela Smith: There are currently nine MRI scanners available across the province: one each at Altnagelvin, Antrim, Belfast City, Belvoir Park, Craigavon Area, Royal, and Ulster hospitals and two at Musgrave Park hospital.

The new imaging centre at the Royal group of hospitals will incorporate a further MRI scanner. It is intended that this will be fully operational from April 2006. The Regional Cancer Centre at Belfast City hospital, due to open in early 2006, will also incorporate an MRI scanner.

MRSA

Mrs. Iris Robinson: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland if he will list the products used within the Province's health service to try to eradicate MRSA. [196255]

Angela Smith: Health and Personal Social Services organisations use the following products for the management of MRSA:

Products used for environmental and equipment decontamination	*Products for hand decontamination*	*Products for eradication of MRSA carriage in colonised patients*
Detergent and water	Liquid soap.	CX powder
Cream cleanser	Antiseptic skin cleanser	Corsodyl throat spray
Buffered hypochlorite	Alcohol hand rub	Mupirocin (Bactroban)
70 per cent. alcohol	—	Tricolasan 2 per cent., 0.3 per cent. (paediatrics)
Cidex OPA 0.55 per cent.	—	Hibiscrub antiseptic cleanser
—	—	Fucidin with polyfax
—	—	Aquasept skin cleanser
—	—	Chlorhexidine washes

For the treatment of MRSA infection, antibiotics would be prescribed as appropriate.

Organic Foodstuffs

Mr. Gregory Campbell: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland what assistance is being offered to those engaged in the *(a)* growing and *(b)* distribution of organic foodstuffs in Northern Ireland. [196914]

Mr. Pearson: The Organic Farming Scheme (OFS) delivered by the Department of Agriculture and Rural Development provides financial support to farmers during the period when they are converting their farm business from conventional to organic production. The scheme has played a valuable role in assisting some 75 producers to convert their farm business to help meet consumer demand for organic produce.

The Organic Farming Scheme is complemented by the Organic Farming (Conversion of Animal Housing) Scheme, which opened in December 2003. The Organic Housing Scheme provides a total of £2 million to assist organic livestock producers to convert existing animal housing to comply with organic standards.

An organic conversion information service is also available to all producers in Northern Ireland. Growers and farmers can avail of short courses provided by Greenmount Campus, College of Agriculture, Food and Rural Enterprise. Assistance with conversion planning and sector specific production issues is also available.

The Department is also seeking to establish an independently chaired Organic Lead Group, as per the first recommendation of the action plan published in "Organic Farming in Northern Ireland: A Development Strategy". This group, the membership of which will be drawn from the local organic sector, will facilitate the growth of the local organic sector and give strategic direction across a range of issues, including the production and distribution of organic produce.

Organised Crime

Mr. Rosindell: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland if he will make a statement on organised crime in Northern Ireland. [196181]

Mr. Pearson: The levels of organised criminality remain unacceptably high in Northern Ireland. The Organised Crime Task Force Threat Assessment, which was published on 11 May 2004, indicated that approximately 235 organised criminal gangs operate in Northern Ireland.

The partner agencies of the task force continue to have significant success against organised criminal gangs. Every seizure, arrest and conviction further disrupts and frustrates the efforts of organised criminal gangs and I pay tribute to PSNI, Customs and the Assets Recovery Agency for their on-going effectiveness and commitment to tackle this problem.

Mr. Rosindell: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland if he will make a statement regarding the Northern Ireland Organised Crime Task Force. [196179]

Mr. Pearson: The Organised Crime Task Force provides the strategic framework for the law enforcement agencies to share views on intelligence flows and operational details, and to agree priorities for tackling organised crime in Northern Ireland.

The task force is actively engaged with over 40 agencies and has formed significant links with the private sector to develop new initiatives in response to specific crime types. This is a clear example of effective partnership working at a local level.

Planning Service

Mrs. Iris Robinson: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland how many full-time planning service employees there have been in each of the last 15 years. [196284]

Angela Smith: The information in relation to full time employees is only available for the period from 1996 when the Planning Service became an Agency of the Department of the Environment. It is set out as follows.

Financial year	*Number of full-time staff in Planning Service*
1996–97	366
1997–98	363
1998–99	364
1999–2000	376
2000–01	420
2001–02	474
2002–03	524
2003–04	583
2004–05	645

Parades

Mr. Rosindell: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland when he next intends to carry out a review of the regulatory framework for parades. [196180]

Mr. Pearson: The Government are currently reviewing the existing regulatory framework and will publish proposals shortly.

Psychiatric Beds

Mrs. Iris Robinson: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland pursuant to the answer of 25 October 2004, *Official Report*, column 1072W, on psychiatric beds, in what periods, since the number of child and adolescent psychiatry inpatient beds has been increased to its present level, it was not possible to operate on full bed occupancy as the result of insufficient staff being available. [196282]

Angela Smith: Since the number of adolescent psychiatric beds was increased in August 2002, the period in which it has not been possible to operate on full bed occupancy as the result of insufficient staff being available is from August 2004 to the present.

Smoking

Mrs. Iris Robinson: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland how many recent representations he has received from groups and individuals seeking a ban on smoking in public places; who they were from; and in what form they were received. [196251]

Angela Smith: Since 1 January 2004, 17 representations have been received in support of a ban on smoking in public places, all in written form. A breakdown of the source of the representations is shown in the following table.

Category	*Number*
Political representatives	4
Health professionals	2
Local councils	4
Voluntary organisations	3
Statutory consultative bodies	1
General public	3

Mrs. Iris Robinson: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland what research he has evaluated into a putative link between passive smoking and cot death. [196253]

Angela Smith: United Kingdom and international research in this area links both prenatal maternal smoking and children's exposure to second-hand smoke (passive smoking) to a range of conditions including sudden infant death syndrome. However, the relative impact on the foetus of maternal smoking in pregnancy, and the infant through subsequent exposure to second-hand smoke remains unclear.

Written Answers to Questions

Thursday 11 November 2004

TREASURY

Economic Growth Projections

14. **Mr. David:** To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what the most recent growth projections for the British economy are. [197397]

Mr. Boateng: The Government last published forecasts for the UK and world economy in the Budget on 10 March 2004, with UK GDP projected to grow by 3 to 3.5 per cent. both this year and next. We will update our forecasts, as usual, in the forthcoming 2004 pre-Budget report.

Business Link

15. **Ms. Keeble:** To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he will make a statement on plans to change the tax status of Business Link organisations. [197398]

Dawn Primarolo: Changes to the way Business Link organisations deliver their services mean that an increased part of their service is being provided free of charge. This has implications for VAT. It is a basic principle of VAT that when an activity is provided free of charge there is no supply for VAT purposes and the supplier therefore cannot recover the VAT incurred on purchases.

Customs are currently working with the Small Business Service, Regional Development Agencies and Business Link organisations to put in place simplified arrangements to enable Business Link organisations to calculate their tax liabilities.

Start-up Companies

16. **Chris Grayling:** To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what assessment he has made of the impact on start-up companies of section 22 of the Finance Act 2003. [197399]

John Healey: We are aware, from sector representations, that reform of the taxation of employee shares through schedule 22 of Finance Act 2003 has resulted in uncertainty of tax treatment for researchers in universities starting up spinout companies.

Officials are working closely with the sector to identify solutions that provide certainty of tax treatment. the Government are committed to creating a clear fiscal environment that enables public sector research establishments to grow companies based on their research.

Growth Forecasts (North-West)

17. **Mr. Hendrick:** To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what changes he has made to his forecasts for growth in the North West since this year's Budget. [197400]

Mr. Timms: HM Treasury does not produce economic forecasts for individual regions of the United Kingdom. However, I can report that the regional policies this Government has put in place to level up the performance of all regions to that of the best has seen the North West enjoying above UK average growth of GVA per capita in recent years and the highest employment and lowest unemployment since records began.

Employment

18. **Mrs. Humble:** To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what steps he is taking to achieve progress towards full employment. [197401]

Mr. Timms: The Government's long-term goal is employment opportunity for all—the modern definition of full employment. Its aim is to ensure a higher proportion of people in work than ever before by 2010. The Government's strategy is set out in "Full Employment in Every Region", published alongside the 2003 pre-Budget report, and is based on maintaining macroeconomic stability and ensuring a dynamic and flexible labour market that equips people to adapt to change.

Indirect Taxation

19. **Mr. Peter Atkinson:** To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he will make a statement on the change in the level of indirect taxation between 1997 and 2004. [197402]

Dawn Primarolo: In 1996–97, revenues from taxes collected by Her Majesty's Customs and Excise totalled £89.8 billion, equivalent to 10.7 per cent. of Gross Domestic Product. In 2003–04, the corresponding figures were £115.7 billion, or 10.4 per cent. of GDP.

The change reflects a combination of factors including strong economic growth and consumer spending, policy changes—including real-terms cuts in the duties on fuel and alcohol, and increases in tobacco duties—and successful efforts by Customs and Excise to measure and tackle losses from fraud, avoidance and non-compliance.

Workforce Skills

20. **Jon Trickett:** To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what recent discussions he has held with the Secretary of State for Education and Skills on the effects on the economy of developing workforce skills. [197403]

Mr. Timms: Treasury Ministers have regular dialogue with their colleagues in the Department for Education and Skills about a range of issues, including the importance of developing the skills of the workforce.

Third World Debt

21. **Mr. MacDougall:** To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer when he last met G8 leaders to discuss progress towards reducing Third World Debt. [197405]

Mr. Timms: At the Annual Meetings of the World Bank and International Monetary Fund in Washington, donors agreed to work together to extend the HIPC initiative for a further two years. This will enable another 10 countries to benefit from over $30 billion of debt relief, freeing up resources which can be spent on health and education and the eradication of poverty.

G8 Finance Ministers have been asked to report back by the end of the year on additional measures that can further help developing countries address the sustainability of their debt, including the UK's decision to provide our share of up to 100 per cent. cancellation of multilateral debt for the poorest countries.

Climate Change

22. **Miss McIntosh:** To ask The Chancellor of the Exchequer if he will make a statement on the role of economic instruments in tackling climate change and global warming. [197406]

John Healey: The Government have introduced a number of economic instruments to help tackle the challenge of climate change—including the climate change levy, enhanced capital allowances, and the reform of company car taxation. The role of economic instruments in tackling environmental challenges was set out in "Tax and the Environment: using economic instruments", published alongside PBR2002. The Government continues to explore options for using cost-effective economic instruments, alongside other policies, to tackle climate change and global warming, taking into account all social, economic and environmental objectives.

Millennium Goals

23. **Mr. Win Griffiths:** To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what progress has been achieved in meeting the millennium goals. [197407]

Mr. Timms: The world is on track to meet the poverty reduction goal. Progress towards the other seven goals varies. On current rates of progress, Sub-Saharan Africa will not meet any of the goals by 2015. For this reason, the Prime Minister set up the Commission for Africa to generate further international action on Africa. The Government are also seeking to raise the finance needed to meet the Millennium Development Goals, through the International Finance Facility.

G7 Presidency

24. **Clive Efford:** To ask The Chancellor of the Exchequer if he will make a statement on the economic objectives of the UK's presidency of the G7. [197408]

Mr. Timms: The Government sees the UK's Presidencies of the G7 and the EU in 2005 as an opportunity to develop consensus for, and action towards, the appropriate responses to the challenges and opportunities of today's global economy.

This includes: a greater focus on development to ensure that the world's poorest can share in rising prosperity; structural economic reform in the developed world to increase flexibility; and ensuring that we have the correct structures and institutions in place to deal with these challenges and opportunities.

Drug-related Deaths

Mr. Jim Cunningham: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer how many drug-related deaths were recorded in England in the last five years. [196443]

Mr. Timms *[holding answer 9 November 2004]*: The information requested falls within the responsibility of the National Statistician, who has been asked to reply.

Letter from Len Cook to Mr. Jim Cunningham, dated 11 November 2004:

As National Statistician, I have been asked to reply to your recent Parliamentary Question asking how many drug-related deaths were recorded in England in the last 5 years. (196443)

Available figures are related to deaths from drug poisoning, not on the number of deaths which were drug-related. The most recently available information is for deaths in 2002. Figures are shown in the table below for the calendar years 1998 to 2002.

Number of deaths from drug-related poisoning[1], England, 1998 to 2002[2]

	Number
1998	2,753
1999	2,788
2000	2,772
2001	2,699
2002	2,507

[1] Cause of death was defined using the International Classification of Diseases, Ninth Revision (ICD-9) codes 292, 304, 305.2-305.9, E850-E858, E950.0-E950.5, E962.0 and E980.0-E980.5 for 1999 and 2000, and the International Classification of Diseases, Tenth Revision (ICD-IO) codes FII-F16, FI8-F19, X40-X44, X60-X64, X85 and YJO-Y14 from 2001 onwards.

[2] Data are for deaths occurring in each calendar year.

Gambling

Miss Kirkbride: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer (1) what meetings *(a)* he, *(b)* his departmental Ministers and *(c)* advisers and officials have held with representatives of (i) Sun City International, (ii) MGM Mirage, (iii) Mandalay Resort Group, (iv) Kerzner International, (v) Las Vegas Sands, Inc., (vi) Harrah's Entertainment, (vii) Caesar's Entertainment and (viii) other foreign casino firms; what the (A) dates and (B) venues of the meetings were; and which individuals were present; [193763]

(2) which *(a)* UK and *(b)* international organisations have submitted written representations to the Department concerning the Government's proposals for changes to legislation on gambling; and on what dates each representation (i) was received and (ii) was given a substantive response; [194512]

(3) on what dates *(a)* Ministers and *(b)* officials in the Department have held meetings with representatives of the UK gambling industry to discuss proposed changes to legislation on gambling. [194516]

Mr. Don Foster: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he will list the occasions on which *(a)* he and *(b)* other Ministers in his Department have met representatives of (i) US casino operators, (ii) British casino operators and (iii) casino operators from other countries to discuss gambling issues, broken down by date of meeting. [195071]

John Healey: The Chancellor keeps all taxation under review. As part of policy development and analysis, Treasury Ministers and officials receive representations from, and have meetings with, a wide range of organisations and individuals, including the gambling industry. All such contacts are conducted in accordance with the "Ministerial Code" and the "Civil Service Management Code".

Miss Kirkbride: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he will list the overseas visits made by *(a)* Ministers and *(b)* officials in the Department in relation to proposed changes to legislation on gambling; what the itinerary was for each visit; how long each visit lasted; which hotels were used; what the cost was in each case; and how each visit was funded. [194543]

John Healey *[holding answer 1 November 2004]:* Since 1999 this Government have published an annual list of all visits overseas undertaken by Cabinet Ministers costing £500 or more during each financial year. The Government have also published on an annual basis the cost of all Ministers' visits overseas. Copies of the lists are available in the Libraries of the House.

An official of HM Customs and Excise visited France in connection with the proposed changes to legislation on gambling. The cost of the visit was met by the Department.

Physical Activity

Mr. Don Foster: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what the average level of physical activity *(a)* including and *(b)* excluding walking was in each region for each year in which the General Household Survey has been published since 1990; and if he will make a statement. [197365]

Mr. Timms: The information requested falls within the responsibility of the National Statistician, who has been asked to reply.

Letter from Len Cook to Mr. Don Foster, dated 11 November 2004:

As National Statistician, I have been asked to reply to your recent Parliamentary Question about the average level of physical activity including and excluding walking in each region for each year in which the General Household Survey has been published since 1990. (197365)

The General Household Survey, carried out by the Office for National Statistics, periodically publishes participation rates in at least one sport, game or physical activity (including and excluding walking). The latest available estimates are for the 2002 survey. The attached tables show participation rates in the 4 weeks before interview for:

(a) Government Office Region, 2002;

(b) Standard Region, 1996;

Unfortunately, regional analyses for 1990 to 1993 are not readily available.

In England, adults living in the North, West Midlands and Yorkshire and Humberside regions were the least likely to have taken part in some sport or physical activity during the four weeks before interview (57%, 59% and 61% respectively) and those living in the South West, East Anglia or the two South East regions outside of London were the most likely to have participated (66%, 67%, 68% and 67% respectively). Adults living in Scotland also had high participation rates (66%) compared with England (64%) and Wales (63%).

Scotland had the highest participation rate at 62% compared with 58% in England and 57% in Wales. In England, adults living in the South West were more likely than those in other regions to have participated in at least one activity excluding walking (50% compared with 37% to 46% for other regions in England).

As with any sample survey, estimates from the General Household Survey are subject to sampling variability.

Games and Physical activities: participation rates in the four weeks before interview by Standard Region 1996[1].
Persons aged 16 and over Great Britain: 1996

	Percentages participating in the 4 weeks before interview		
	At least one activity excluding walking	*At least one activity*	*Unweighted sample base–100 per cent.*
North	41	57	966
Yorkshire and Humberside	43	61	1362
North West	47	63	1739
East Midlands	44	64	1182
West Midlands	42	59	1456
East Anglia	52	67	635
Greater London	45	62	1661
Outer Metropolitan Area	51	68	1518
Outer South East	49	67	1450
Total South East	48	66	4629
South West	46	66	1433
England	46	64	13402
Wales	42	63	842
Scotland	46	66	1452
Great Britain	46	64	15696

[1] Regional data are only available from the General Household Survey for 1996 and 2000

Source:

General Household Survey

Games and Physical activities: participation rates in the four weeks before interview by Government Office Region 2002[1] Persons aged 16 and over Great Britain: 1996

	Percentages participating in the 4 weeks before interview			
	At least one activity excluding walking	*At least one activity*	*Weighted base (000s) = 100 per cent.*	*Unweighted sample[2]*
North East	37	55	2,005	695
North West	41	56	4,951	1770
Yorkshire and the Humber	41	56	3,693	1292
East Midlands	42	57	2,998	1106
West Midlands	39	54	3,737	1317
East of England	45	60	3,766	1316
London	44	55	5,179	1640
South East	46	63	6,025	2249
South East	50	65	3,713	1376
England	43	58	36,067	12841
Wales	40	57	2,083	756
Scotland	44	62	3,737	1222
Great Britain	43	59	41,887	14819

[1] Regional data are only available from the General Household Survey for 1996 and 2002

[2] Weighting for non-response was introduced on the General Household Survey in 2000, in order to reduce non-response bias and improve the quality of data. For 2002 the weighted base (000's) shown is the base for percentages. Bases for earlier years are of similar size and can be found in GHS reports for each year.

Source:

General Household Survey

Hospices (VAT Relief)

Lady Hermon: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer pursuant to the answer of 19 October 2004, *Official Report*, column 580W, on hospices (VAT relief), on which purchases hospices can benefit from specific VAT zero rates. [193727]

Dawn Primarolo *[pursuant to the reply, 27 October 2004, Official Report, c. 1295 W]:* I very much regret that the opening sentence of my earlier answer inadvertently contained information that was incorrect. It should have read:

The construction of a new building for use as a hospice and the first sale of a hospice converted from an existing non-residential building is VAT zero-rated.

I apologise for this mistake.

Voluntary Sector Funding

Mrs. Helen Clark: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he will make a statement on funding for the voluntary sector. [197404]

Mr. Boateng: Government funding represents a significant proportion of overall revenue for the voluntary and community sector, and is rising in absolute and percentage terms. The Home Office plans to publish a report on central Government funding for the voluntary sector at the end of November.

HOUSE OF COMMONS COMMISSION

Ex-Members

Tom Cox: To ask the hon. Member for Roxburgh and Berwickshire, representing the House of Commons Commission what facilities an ex-Member of the House of Commons who holds an ex-Member's pass is able to use within the Palace of Westminster; and if he will make a statement. [196730]

Sir Archy Kirkwood: An ex-Member's pass allows the holder to use the Terrace Cafeteria and the Strangers' Bar and, on Monday lunchtimes only, the Members' Dining Room (the smaller of the two) in the House of Commons.

Green Travel Plan

Norman Baker: To ask the hon. Member for Roxburgh and Berwickshire, representing the House of Commons Commission what plans he has to introduce a green travel plan for the parliamentary estate to include hon. Members. [196982]

Sir Archy Kirkwood: Travel arrangements made by hon. Members to or from the parliamentary estate are not primarily the responsibility of the House of Commons Commission. Cycle parking facilities are provided on the estate for hon. Members, their staff and staff of the House of Commons. In the past year, former Member's car parking bays in Star Chamber Court have been converted into cycle parking racks, and additional racks have been provided outside 7 Millbank.

WALES

Departmental Events (Funding)

Charles Hendry: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales if he will list the *(a)* conferences, *(b)* publications, *(c)* initiatives, *(d)* projects and *(e)* receptions organised by his Department which have received funding from outside commercial bodies since May 1997, broken down by (i) funding body and (ii) amount paid. [196602]

Mr. Touhig: None.

Departmental Publications (Accessibility)

Mr. Goodman: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales how many and what proportion of publications issued by his Department are available in *(a)* Braille, *(b)* autoprint, *(c)* large print and *(d)* easy read format. [194301]

Mr. Touhig: The Wales Office has never been requested to provide any of its publications in any of these formats. In the event that such a request was received, the Office would endeavour to meet it.

Theft and Fraud

Mr. Prisk: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what his estimate is of the cost of theft and fraud to *(a)* his Department, *(b)* its agencies and *(c)* non-departmental public bodies in each year since 1997. [191423]

Mr. Touhig: I refer the hon. Member to the answer given by the Secretary of State for Wales to the hon. Member for Buckingham (Mr. Bercow) on 21 January 2003, *Official Report*, column 73W.

The Wales Office was established on 1 July 1999. The Wales Office does not sponsor any agencies or non-departmental public bodies.

Since this time, there has been no reported theft or fraud against this office.

INTERNATIONAL DEVELOPMENT

Departmental Staff

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Secretary of State for International Development what percentage of the staff in his Department in *(a)* 2002 and *(b)* 2003 were people with disabilities. [196126]

Mr. Gareth Thomas: I refer the hon. Member for Buckingham to the reply given by my hon. Friend, the Minister for the Cabinet Office on 9 November 2004, *Official Report*, column 619W.

Development Awareness Fund

Mr. Jim Cunningham: To ask the Secretary of State for International Development how much funding his Department has spent on the Development Awareness Fund. [197201]

Mr. Gareth Thomas: Since 1998–99 a total of £27.6 million has been spent on the Development Awareness Fund.

	Amount spent (£ million)
1998–99	1.5
1999–2000	3.0
2000–01	5.0
2001–02	5.4
2002–03	6.2
2003–04	6.5
Total	27.6

Nigeria

Mr. Jim Cunningham: To ask the Secretary of State for International Development what recent discussions the Government have had with the Nigerian Government on the implementation of the UK's Country Assistance Plan in Nigeria. [197202]

Hilary Benn: The Department for International Development has carried out extensive consultations on the new Nigeria Country Assistance Plan (CAP) with the Nigerian Government, both at federal and state level. We have also consulted widely with the private sector and civil society organisations. Discussions have included the Minister of Finance, the Chief Economic Adviser to the President, other members of the Economic Reform Team, the National Planning Commission, the Nigerian High Commission in London, and various federal Government agencies. State and local governments were consulted in a series of meetings held across the country. I personally met with a range of government representatives during my visit to Nigeria in September.

We will continue to work closely with our Nigerian partners in Government, Civil Society, the Private Sector and the Nigerian Diaspora as we move to implement the new CAP.

I will arrange for a document entitled "Report on the Outcomes of DFID Nigeria's CAP Consultation with Key Stakeholders in Nigeria and the UK" to be placed in the Libraries of the House.

ENVIRONMENT, FOOD AND RURAL AFFAIRS

CHP

Brian White: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what representations she has received on the new energy efficiency commitment being used to stimulate the market for micro-combined heat and power and domestic heat pumps. [195183]

Mr. Morley: The consultation exercise on proposals for the Energy Efficiency Commitment after 2005 received a number of suggestions for the inclusion of an incentive for innovative technologies. The consultation period closed on 13 August. Following the formal consultation process, we received a number of representations from Members of Parliament in support of a specific amendment to the Order. They hoped that their proposal would assist the promotion of new energy efficient technologies, such as domestic heat pumps and micro combined heat and power.

We have been considering all suggestions as part of the development of the draft legislation for the next phase of the Energy Efficiency Commitment to be laid before Parliament shortly.

Coastal Defences

Mr. Gummer: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what discussions she has had with *(a)* the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport and *(b)* English Heritage concerning the weighting given to heritage in the calculation of need for coastal defences. [193493]

Mr. Morley: I have had no direct discussion on this issue with my right hon. Friend, the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport.

However English Heritage, as the Government's statutory adviser on matters concerning the conservation of England's historic built environment, was consulted during development of guidance on environmental appraisal of flood and coastal defence projects and of the scoring system for prioritising such projects for Defra grant aid. English Heritage is also represented on Defra's Stakeholder Forum to inform the Government's new Strategy for Flood and Coastal Erosion Risk Management.

Economic justification for proposed defences should as far as possible take into account benefits arising from protection of all assets, including heritage assets. Higher benefits in relation to costs will tend to increase a proposed project's priority score and, additionally, a specific allowance is made for protection of heritage assets in the scoring system. It is important to note that the priority scoring system does not attempt to determine the need for defences in an absolute sense but to prioritise proposed projects so that finite funding is allocated to best effect nationally.

Cattle Farming (Payments)

Paddy Tipping: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs how much has been paid out under *(a)* the Beef Special Premium Scheme, *(b)* the Suckler Cow Premium Scheme, *(c)* the Slaughter Premium, *(d)* the Over 30 Scheme and *(e)* the Beef National Envelope in each county in England in 2003–04; and if she will make a statement. [193847]

Alun Michael: The total amount paid out under the *(a)* Beef Special Premium Scheme (BSPS), *(b)* Suckler Cow Premium Scheme (SCPS), *(c)* Slaughter Premium Scheme (SPS), *(d)* Over 30 Month Scheme (OTMS), and the *(e)* Beef National Envelope (BNE) for each county in England for the 2003 scheme year is as detailed in the following table:

			Total amounts made		
County	*(a) BSPS*	*(b) SCPS*	*(c) SPS*	*(d) OTMS*	*(e) BNE*
01 Bedfordshire	432,540.82	240,698.36	260,205.60	234,000.00	45,870.70
02 Berkshire	489,940.96	410,595.45	353,921.03	510,000.00	78,266.76
03 Buckinghamshire	2,345,326.78	1,466,641.36	1,058,461.15	1,203,000.00	279,563.27
04 Cleveland	484,420.23	269,010.57	348,417.18	272,000.00	51,277.32
05 Cambridgeshire	870,222.23	628,872.20	585,820.00	357,000.00	119,873.56
06 Cheshire	2,165,219.46	660,405.88	1,989,998.51	8,049,000.00	125,884.70
07 Cornwall	7,710,376.93	4,958,967.33	3,618,278.56	6,682,000.00	945,231.52
08 Cumbria	9,741,203.17	7,467,836.09	4,265,407.90	10,437,000.00	1,423,453.80
09 Derbyshire	3,673,310.08	2,500,454.59	2,213,018.78	4,532,000.00	476,613.97
10 Devon	13,797,973.56	8,610,686.40	6,432,639.94	11,804,000.00	1,641,091.49
11 Dorset	2,168,117.29	1,219,356.00	1,018,214.39	5,023,000.00	232,416.77
12 Durham	2,779,920.32	2,896,096.95	1,735,019.51	1,366,000.00	552,030.33
13 Essex	929,050.32	560,300.53	580,036.71	620,000.00	106,778.33
14 Gloucestershire	3,162,696.63	1,211,174.12	1,822,607.11	3,015,000.00	293,014.10
15 Hampshire	1,717,528.99	1,237,519.04	847,533.61	1,848,000.00	235,783.48
16 Isle of Wight	300,052.71	214,320.57	125,992.05	296,000.00	40,853.26
17 Hereford and Worcester	5,200,790.71	2,504,898.90	3,280,198.57	3,625,000.00	601,249.05
18 Hertfordshire	312,645.64	485,520.53	157,470.52	325,000.00	92,548.87
20 Kent	1,123,229.26	1,433,191.12	558,292.48	1,267,000.00	273,189.53
21 Lancashire	3,302,878.80	1,836,426.53	2,109,256.60	6,458,000.00	350,035.06
22 Leicestershire	3,219,375.30	1,384,127.62	2,069,433.71	2,634,000.00	263,837.62
24 Lincolnshire	3,109,331.55	2,225,424.75	1,835,109.80	1,408,000.00	424,198.71
25 Merseyside	239,286.09	99,161.82	251,119.55	212,000.00	18,817.21
26 Greater London (part)	16,442.15	68,032.48	11,455.37	54,000.00	12,968.19
27 Greater London (part)	14,511.55	0.00	6,626.64	0.00	0.00
28 Norfolk	2,116,814.56	2,183,499.61	1,818,087.25	1,639,000.00	416,200.35
29 Northamptonshire	2,445,541.30	1,528,972.90	1,395,496.34	1,138,000.00	291,386.02
30 Tyne and Wear	236,962.03	207,716.69	127,183.73	131,000.00	39,583.08
31 Northumberland	5,162,258.53	6,952,500.29	2,039,489.93	2,355,000.00	1,325,163.76
32 Nottinghamshire	1,614,252.26	573,274.04	1,242,231.74	1,023,000.00	109,270.98
33 Oxfordshire	1,961,406.47	1,284,953.85	1,026,067.39	1,184,000.00	244,934.61
34 Avon	1,672,506.73	701,479.68	864,697.85	2,019,000.00	133,668.68
35 Shropshire	5,685,861.05	3,369,253.54	3,475,584.96	6,212,000.00	642,120.99
36 Somerset	4,401,889.67	3,372,014.16	2,418,302.03	7,857,000.00	642,664.34
37 Staffordshire	3,859,998.67	1,580,475.29	2,681,077.52	5,423,000.00	301,204.98
38 Suffolk	936,882.72	879,760.67	808,893.34	763,000.00	167,689.97
39 Scilly Isles	3,100.45	2,825.31	1,335.60	6,000.00	538.55
40 Surrey	648,561.85	488,615.84	285,808.05	612,000.00	93,134.30
41 East Sussex	1,173,121.24	1,149,025.44	486,532.06	1,006,000.00	219,007.40
42 West Sussex	1,217,128.60	747,389.83	677,473.53	1,242,000.00	142,413.88
43 Warwickshire	1,950,038.81	638,252.60	1,174,791.46	1,359,000.00	179,209.00
44 Greater Manchester	504,131.57	423,963.59	404,606.03	529,000.00	80,805.64
45 Wiltshire	2,884,149.06	1,974,269.04	1,466,467.67	4,107,000.00	376,312.19

£

County	Total amounts made (a) BSPS	(b) SCPS	(c) SPS	(d) OTMS	(e) BNE
46 West Midlands	139,245.82	129,896.76	78,896.54	216,000.00	35,207.03
47 South Yorkshire	1,311,858.90	632,002.10	825,752.06	1,462,000.00	120,464.19
48 North Yorkshire (part)	11,320,053.41	5,961,202.88	8,331,910.94	8,624,000.00	1,136,149.36
49 West Yorkshire	1,907,878.25	1,397,405.50	1,193,640.48	225,000.00	266,370.30
50 North Yorkshire (part)	744,329.85	0.00	578,822.63	0.00	0.00
51 Humberside (North)	2,357,999.09	1,377,996.63	1,361;126.80	1,035,000.00	262,656.01
Total	125,562,362.42	82,146,465.43	72,298,411.20	123,398,000.00	15,911,003.21

Consultants/Advisers

Mr. Yeo: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs how much of her annual departmental budget was spent on the payment of professional advisers and private sector consultants in each year since June 2001. [197223]

Alun Michael: Details of expenditure on professional advisers and private sector consultants since June 2001 are not held centrally.

For the financial year 2003–04, the Department spent £45 million on externally provided professional services, approximately 10 per cent. of core departmental expenditure on goods, services and works.

Mr. Yeo: T[illegible] the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and R[illegible]ffairs how many of the private sector consultants a[illegible] professional advisers employed by the Department since June 2001 are former civil servants; and, of those, how many were previously employed by her Department and its predecessor. [197224]

Alun Michael: The information requested cannot be provided as the Department does not keep records of the employment of staff after they leave the Department. The criteria for the selection of professional service providers in Defra are eligibility, economic and financial standing, and the ability and technical capacity to provide the services required at best whole life cost.

Convention on International Trade in Endangered Species

Mr. Amess: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs how the UK defines a specialist private keeper when processing Convention on International Trade in Endangered Species importation applications for primates; and if she will make a statement. [196415]

Mr. Morley: This is not an expression defined by CITES or used by the UK CITES management authority.

Dairy Farming

Mr. Hoyle: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what the average dairy farm income in *(a)* England and *(b)* Lancashire was in the last period for which figures are available. [194624]

Alun Michael: In 2002-03 the average net farm income for dairy farms in England was £18,300 and for the north-west Government office region £16,800. There are insufficient farms in the sample to quote county levels of income by farm type for Lancashire. Net farm income is the return to the principal farmer and spouse for their manual and managerial labour and to the tenant-type capital of the business.

Andrew George: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs how many *(a)* dairy cows and *(b)* dairy herds there were in the UK in each of the past 10 years for which records are available. [196688]

Alun Michael: The following figures show the number of dairy cows and the number of holdings with dairy cows in England from 1994 to 2003.

	(a) Dairy cows	*(b) Holdings with dairy cows*
1994	1,897,024	25,830
1995	1,809,282	24,678
1996	1,783,327	23,798
1997	1,700,250	22,932
1998	1,642,636	22,316
1999	1,659,210	21,326
2000	1,575,320	20,094
2001	1,490,226	18,125
2002	1,462,155	16,897
2003	1,434,727	16,027

Notes:

1. Figures for the other UK countries fall under the jurisdiction of the devolved authorities.
2. Figures prior to 2000 show main holdings only. From 2000 onwards all holdings are included.

Source:

June Agricultural Census

Departmental Expenditure

Andrew George: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs if she will break down the budget set by her Department for public expenditure on the food industry and crops for financial years *(a)* 2004–05 and *(b)* 2005–06 by programme. [196693]

Alun Michael: The Department's plans for public expenditure on food industry and crops for the two years 2004–05 and 2005–06 consist of the following programmes:

£ million

Programme	*2004–05*	*2005–06*
Support for Development of Arable Crops Policy	6.2	6.2
Plant Health	4.8	4.8
Plant Varieties and Seeds	1.8	1.8
Promoting and Assisting the Food Chain	10.5	13.5
Marketing Inspections	11.1	11.1
Home Grown Cereals Authority	10.3	10.3
Milk Development Council	8.6	8.6

£ million

Programme	*2004–05*	*2005–06*
Horticultural Development Council	4.8	5.0
British Potato Council	6.5	6.5
Farm marketing support	9.8	9.8
Total	74.4	77.6

Egg Imports

Mr. Kidney: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what the status will be of egg imports from other EU countries where the eggs are produced in conditions that would not meet the standards set for the welfare of laying hens in this country. [193929]

Alun Michael: Council Directive 1999/74/EC sets down standards for the protection of laying hens and all eggs produced in the UK or imported from other EU countries have to meet these standards.

World Trade Organisation (WTO) rules do not permit the prohibition of imports of goods on animal welfare grounds alone. Restrictions can only be applied where there is a threat to human, animal or plant health in the importing country. Restriction on trade of goods based on method of production is not permitted and would put us in breach of WTO rules.

Energy Efficiency/Targets

Brian White: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what steps her Department is taking to ensure that energy efficiency measures are implemented in the Government's Sustainable Communities Plans. [195189]

Mr. Morley: The Office of the Deputy Prime Minister lead on delivery of the Government's Sustainable Communities Plans. Defra is working closely with ODPM at all levels to ensure that these plans encourage, among other things, an energy-efficient built environment. Low-carbon technologies, including CHP, changes to planning policy and building regulations, support for exemplary development schemes and research in the growth areas all have a role to play in this. Defra is also actively contributing to the development of the Code for Sustainable Buildings, to be demonstrated in the Thames Gateway and elsewhere.

Malcolm Bruce: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs when Government Departments will publish their plans detailing the actions they will take to deliver energy targets. [193824]

Mr. Morley: Under the Framework for Sustainable Development on the Government Estate, all Departments were required to publish their delivery plans (within six months for civil Departments, eight months for MOD) detailing the actions they will take to deliver energy targets. These energy targets were published in February 2004. Delivery plans should be posted on departmental websites and can be accessed via the framework website at http://www.sustainable≫development.gov.uk/sdig/improving/progressa.htm.

EU Committees

Angus Robertson: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs how many times during the Greek presidency of the EU the committees *(a)* for the adaptation to scientific and technical progress and implementation of the directives on waste met, *(b)* on the directive on packaging and packaging waste and *(c)* for the adaptation to technical and scientific progress of the directive on the protection of the environment, and in particular of the soil, when sewage sludge is used in agriculture; when and where these meetings took place; which UK Government expert was present at each meeting; what (i) technical and (ii) financial issues were raised by the UK Government expert at each meeting; what recommendations the committee produced during that period; what actions were (A) proposed and (B) taken by (1) the EU and (2) the UK Government as a result of the committee's recommendations; and if she will make a statement. [193396]

Mr. Morley: During the Greek Presidency, which took place between January to June 2003, the technical adaptation committee (TAC) on waste met twice in Brussels on 15 January and 7 May. On 15 January, the committee voted to adopt a commission decision establishing component and material coding standards for vehicles pursuant to directive 2000/53/EC on end-of-life vehicles. This subsequently appeared in the Official Journal on 28 February 2003, and was transposed in the UK by the End-of-Life Vehicles Regulations 2003 (S.I.2003/2635).

No decisions were taken at the TAC meeting on 7 May, but there was preliminary discussion on a common system for demonstrating compliance with the recovery and recycling targets in the ELV directive.

The packaging and packaging waste committee met once during the Greek Presidency, on 29 January 2003, in Brussels. The committee's role is to exchange information on and progress harmonisation of related issues including data reporting by member states to the commission and marking of packaging.

The committee in relation to the Recycling to Agricultural Land Sewage Sludge Directive (86/278/EEC) did not meet during the Greek Presidency. Command Paper 6097 "Developments in the European Union, January to June 2003, the Greek Presidency" was laid before Parliament in January 2004 and is available at www.fco.gov.uk/commandpapers, and gives further information on progress during the Greek Presidency.

EU Registration, Evaluation and Authorisation of Chemicals Directive

Norman Baker: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what steps she has taken to minimise the number of experiments that will need to be conducted on animals following the introduction of the EU Registration, Evaluation and Authorisation of Chemicals Directive. [196821

Alun Michael: Keeping animal testing to the necessary minimum is a prime objective of the UK Government in negotiating the REACH regulation. Our aim is to protect human health and the environment whil keeping bureaucracy to a minimum and keeping animal testing down both by use of alternative methods and by avoiding duplicates. Our proposal for "one substance one registration" commands support because it is designed to meet all these UK negotiating requirements and discussions in Council Working Groups are continuing on that basis.

We welcome the fact that there is now widespread acceptance of the need to minimise animal testing. Concerns of the UK and others have led to several provisos being included in the legislative proposal to encourage maximum use of existing data, avoid duplication of testing and to require the use of alternative methods wherever possible and appropriate.

The Commission proposal includes a pre-registration phase which should allow for data sharing. There are also incentives to encourage consortia formation through sharing fees incurred in the registration process. The UK has proposed a mandatory system of "one substance, one registration" to ensure data sharing and decrease the burden on regulators, and this is currently being discussed in Council Working Groups.

The UK Government have in place a programme for work on improving animal welfare in research and in May 2004 we set up a New Centre for the Replacement, Refinement and Reduction of Animals in Research with a doubling of the budget for the current year to £660,000. The new centre will develop a UK strategy for the implementation of the 3Rs, fund high quality research that advances the 3Rs, provide advice on the 3Rs and animal welfare to the scientific community and work with regulators on the acceptance of alternative methods for regulatory toxicity testing. The work of the centre will help to reduce the animal experiments required under REACH.

Norman Baker: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs if she will estimate how many extra experiments will need to be conducted upon animals in each of the next five years as a result of the UK's implementation of the EU Registration, Evaluation and Authorisation of Chemicals Directive. [196822]

Alun Michael: The UK Government's approach to REACH is to achieve the best possible outcome in terms of protecting human health and the environment while keeping both the bureaucratic burdens on industry and the extent of animal testing to the necessary minimum. REACH is currently under negotiation in Council and in the European Parliament and is unlikely to be agreed before 2006. Once agreed REACH will phase in existing substances over 11 years. REACH is still being negotiated and any estimate of how many experiments would be needed over each of the next five years could be misleading.

The information needed by REACH to provide the basis for protecting human health and the environment may come from a number of sources, of which animal testing is only one. The chemical industry already has some of this information while there are other sources of information such as mathematical modelling and read-across of data from one chemical to another which will reduce the number of new experiments that will be required.

Another factor that will lead to further reductions in the number of experiments that will be conducted under REACH is the significant amount of testing that has taken place internationally over recent years and is ongoing on high production volume chemicals (those produced or imported in quantities over 1,000 tonnes per year) that will not need to be repeated.

It is an overall objective for the UK Government, in negotiating the REACH Regulation, to ensure that animal testing is kept to the minimum necessary to protect human health and the environment.

We hope that our proposal for "one substance, one registration" will have significant impact in minimising animal testing and that meaningful estimates can be provided once the process of negotiation is complete.

Executive Agencies

Hugh Bayley: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs how many full-time equivalent jobs *(a)* her Department and *(b)* its executive agencies had in (i) Yorkshire and the Humber and (ii) the City of York in (A) 1997 and (B) the latest year for which figures are available. [191850]

Alun Michael: I refer the hon. Member to the answer given by my hon. Friend, the Minister of State, Cabinet Office on 25 October 2004, *Official Report* column 1053W.

The information placed in the Library of the House did not include the Rural Payments Agency, which had 420 permanent staff in Yorkshire and the Humber on 1 April 2004. None of these staff were located in the City of York. Data is not available for 1997 as RPA was created in November 2001.

Extensification Payment Scheme

Mr. Flook: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs whether the information requested in the "Extensification Payment Scheme 2004: Status of Subsidiary Holdings" is also available on pages 17 and 18 of Farm's 2003 Integrated Administration and Control System form. [193874]

Alun Michael: The information requested by the Rural Payments Agency in a letter entitled "Extensification Payment Scheme 2004: Status of Subsidiary Holdings" is not available in answers given on a producer's Integrated Administration and Control System application or any of the bovine scheme claim forms.

Fair Trade

Mr. Burstow: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs if she will make it her policy to ensure that hospitality within her Department is sourced from fair trade producers wherever possible within the boundaries set by the public procurement rules. [196656]

Alun Michael: We have introduced fair trade food and drink products into nine of the eleven Defra staff restaurants, including the Department's headquarters and a number of regional offices in Guildford, Reading, York and Crewe. At all of these sites the teas and coffees served as official hospitality are fair trade products.

The position in Defra generally is explained in a case study published on the Public Sector Food Procurement Initiative web site. URL: http://www.defra.gov.uk/farm/sustain/procurement/casestudies/tea-coffee.htm.

The web site also provides advice on fair trade considerations at http://www.defra.gov.uk/farm/sustain/procurement/trade.htm, including a link to the Office of Government Commerce's "Guidance on Fair and Ethical Trading".

Flooding

Mr. Dismore: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs if she will make a statement on the latest position on the proposed flood defence scheme for the Silk Stream, Edgware and Colindale. [194851]

Mr. Morley: Main works at Prince Edward's Playing Field in Harrow are expected to be complete by December 2004 and work on the flood storage area in Summerhouse Lake is expected to start in April 2005. Construction to enhance flood storage at Stoney Wood Lake is expected to start in September 2005 subject to the availability of funds in the Environment Agency (EA)'s Capital Programme for 2005–06.

The EA's proposed Compulsory Purchase Order (CPO) needed for the new flood storage areas at Bury Farm and Edgwarebury Park is currently being implemented and a revised planning application for the proposed work will be submitted in December 2004. Subject to funding and the satisfactory resolution of any objections to the CPO, work is scheduled to begin at both sites in 2006.

Mr. Rosindell: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what reports the Department has received from the Met Office about potential flooding in the UK during the coming winter. [196002]

Mr. Morley: The Department receives twice-weekly briefings on the flood risk outlook from the Environment Agency, which are based on forecast information that they receive from the Met Office. The Met Office does not claim to be able to make predictions of rainfall and other major meteorological drivers of flooding for more than about five days ahead.

Glass Container Industry

Mr. Bill O'Brien: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what assessment she has made of the effect of recent development of the glass container industry upon the industry's prospects for meeting the 2008 target for glass recycling under the EU Packaging and Packaging Waste Directive; and if she will make a statement. [194723]

Mr. Morley: No assessment has been made of the UK's ability to meet the Packaging Directive's glass target of 60 per cent. in 2008 following the recent developments within the glass container industry.

While the UK glass container industry alone is unlikely to have sufficient reprocessing capacity to deliver the glass target in 2008, there is work being carried out with Industry, WRAP and the Agencies to open up viable alternative markets for recycled glass in order to bridge the gap. The Department, in conjunction with the Advisory Committee on Packaging, is continuing to monitor progress on glass recycling closely and fully expects the UK to comply with the target in 2008.

Greenhouse Gases

Mr. Rosindell: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs (1) what progress the Government have made in meeting targets for emissions of greenhouse gases in the UK; [195980]

(2) what further plans the Government have for achieving a reduction in the output of greenhouse gases in the UK. [195964]

Mr. Morley: The UK remains on course to achieve its Kyoto target to reduce greenhouse gas emissions by 12.5 per cent. below 1990 levels by 2008–12. Total UK emissions of greenhouse gases in 2003 are provisionally estimated to have fallen by 14 per cent. compared to 1990. Emissions of carbon dioxide for 2003 are provisionally estimated at about 7 per cent. lower than in 1990.

The UK climate change programme published in 2000 sets out the Government's approach to tackling climate change. It contains a framework of policies and measures intended to achieve the emissions reductions necessary to deliver the UK's commitment under the Kyoto protocol and move towards the 20 per cent. reduction in carbon dioxide emissions.

The Government recognise that additional measures may be needed to achieve the domestic goal of a 20 per cent. reduction in carbon dioxide emissions. The current review of the UK climate change programme aims to provide a comprehensive assessment of the progress that the Government and the devolved Administrations have made towards reducing greenhouse gas emissions since the programme was published in 2000 to see whether the UK is still on track to meet its domestic goal of reducing carbon dioxide emissions by 2010. If not, the Government will look carefully at whether to introduce new policies and measures, and/or strengthen existing ones. The review will also consider the action that the UK will need to take to ensure it is on course to make "real progress by 2020" towards the ambitious longer-term goal of reducing carbon emissions by 60 per cent. by 2050, as set out in the Energy White Paper.

Mr. Stringer: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what measures she intends to take to reduce the loss of greenhouse gases from refrigerators during their lifetime; and if she will make a statement. [196075]

Mr. Morley: Most major UK manufacturers of domestic refrigeration now use hydrocarbon refrigerants. The refrigerant charge in domestic refrigerators is also hermetically sealed and therefore designed not to leak.

The EC proposal for a Regulation on certain fluorinated greenhouse gases includes a range of measures for the containment and recovery of these gases from commercial refrigeration. Political agreement was reached in October 2004.

Hunting

Mr. Drew: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what plans the Government have to offer a payment to those affected by a ban on hunting; and whether this would apply if the individual were to emigrate. [193448]

Alun Michael: The Government have no plans to pay compensation to anyone affected by a ban on hunting.

Landfill

Mr. Rosindell: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what controls regulate the disposal of waste in landfill sites. [195972]

Mr. Morley: The disposal of waste to landfill is controlled by the Landfill (England and Wales) Regulations 2002 as amended by the Landfill (England and Wales) (Amendment) Regulations 2004. This legislation is regulated by the Environment Agency.

Mr. Rosindell: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what percentage of waste in England was *(a)* sent to landfill sites for disposal and *(b)* recycled in 2003–04. [195973]

Mr. Morley: The Municipal Waste Management Survey of English local authorities, conducted annually by Defra, shows that 75 per cent. of municipal waste was sent to landfill in 2002–03 and 16 per cent was recycled. Audited data for 2003–04 are not yet available.

Figures for the amount of commercial and industrial and construction and demolition waste are not collected annually. However, the Environment Agency's National Waste Production Survey of a sample of 20,000 businesses, conducted in 1998–99, estimated that 50 per cent. of commercial and industrial waste was sent to landfill and 30 per cent. was recycled, while 35 per cent. of construction and demolition waste was recycled and 24 per cent. sent to landfill. A further estimated 41 per cent. of construction and demolition waste was used on landfill sites as day cover.

Leisure Boats

Mr. Carmichael: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what assessment the Government have made of the environmental impact of privately-owned leisure boats; and if she will make a statement. [195579]

Mr. Morley: Privately-owned leisure boats are subject to a range of general environmental legislation, specific statutory controls and good practice guidance designed to mitigate any harmful effects on the environment. These measures are developed through regular contact with relevant associations such as the Royal Yachting Association and the British Marine Federation.

Formal consultation is carried out with stakeholders to gauge environmental impacts and to ensure measures adopted take into consideration the studies carried out by agencies, navigation authorities, environmental groups and private bodies into specific aspects of leisure boat use.

In addition, work is carried out within Government Departments and through external consultants to gauge the impact of the leisure sector on the environment, for example the generation of marine litter washed up on the UK shoreline.

Litter

Mr. Rosindell: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what estimate she has made of the cost of dealing with litter *(a)* dropped and *(b)* wrongly disposed of during each of the last five years. [195965]

Alun Michael: It is not possible to separate costs for litter cleansing. These costs are included within the overall street cleansing figures. ODPM has provided the total expenditure figures on street cleaning not chargeable to highways, as follows:

	£ million
1998–99	386
1999–2000	413
2000–01	448
2001–02	469

It is estimated that 2002–03 will be £492.45million.

Mr. Rosindell: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs if her Department will increase penalties for people who drop litter on the streets. [195966]

Alun Michael: Yes. We have already made that intention clear and consulted on our proposals.

Mr. Rosindell: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what the Government's strategy is over the next five years for dealing with litter on the streets. [195969]

Alun Michael: The recent Clean Neighbourhoods consultation set out a number of practical proposals for dealing with litter and improving the local environment everywhere in the country. We hope to take forward several of the measures contained therein through the earliest suitable legislative opportunity.

Recent pilots have resulted in a significant reduction in fast food litter and as a result we are currently finalising the Voluntary Code of Practice for "Food on the Go".

We have recently published the segmentation research into chewing gum droppers, at www.defra.gov.uk/environment/localenv/litter/index.htm. The research will inform a national campaign to target gum users to change the behaviour of gum droppers. The campaign will be launched in the summer.

All this work is underpinned by the annual Local Environmental Quality Survey of England, developed on the Government's behalf by ENCAMS. The survey provides the most precise picture we have ever had of the state of the local environment throughout the country.

The survey also enables us to accurately assess how successful the above measures are working on the ground.

Ministerial Expenses

Mr. Prisk: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what the running costs of Ministers' private offices in her Department have been in each year since 1997. [191385]

Alun Michael: The running costs of Ministers' private offices since Defra was formed in June 2001 are:

Financial year	*Amount (£)*
2001–02 (part year)	943,101
2002–03	1,194,162
2003–04	1,064,083

These figures incorporate the staff and administration costs incurred, by financial year.

New Forest

Mr. Swayne: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs whether back-up grazing land belonging to commoners of the New Forest is defined as land used for horses for the purposes of the single farm payment scheme; and if she will make a statement. [194672]

Alun Michael: Any land held by commoners outside the area of the common, whether grazing horses or not, is potentially eligible for the single payment, subject to the conditions that generally apply.

Refrigerators

Linda Perham: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what proportion of new sales of domestic refrigerators did not rely on hydrofluorocarbon technology in the last year for which figures are available; and what plans she has to phase out the use of this technology in domestic refrigeration. [194118]

Mr. Morley: Hydrofluorocarbon technology in domestic refrigerators has already largely been phased out in the EU.

All major UK manufacturers of domestic refrigerators now use hydrocarbon based refrigerants. A small amount of imported domestic refrigeration equipment uses hydrofluorocarbons.

Linda Perham: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs (1) what the purpose is of the study on commercial refrigeration commissioned by her Department; [194125]

(2) whether her Department's study on commercial refrigeration is related to her objective of ensuring that the UK reduces its emissions of global warming gases. [194126]

Mr. Morley: This study is part of a larger piece of work intended to update data relevant to projections of emissions of fluorinated greenhouse gases. The study will review the relevant section of an earlier Defra commissioned report by AEA Technology.

The work will review the calculation methodology used in the emissions model, the activity and emission factors used, and the baseline assumptions concerning future market trends and developments (e.g. uptake of alternative fluids). The assumptions required for the emissions model will be clearly defined, and an estimate of uncertainties provided where possible. Industry and other stakeholders will be contacted during this task, and their views reported.

Regulation (Compliance Cost)

Mr. Redwood: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what the aggregate cost of compliance with her Department's regulations was in the last year for which figures are available. [196559]

Alun Michael: All proposals which impact on business, charities or the voluntary sector require a Regulatory Impact Assessment (RIA) which includes details of the costs, benefits and risks of the proposal. RIAs are subject to public consultation and copies of final RIAs are available from the House Libraries and on departmental websites.

Rural Development

Andrew George: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs if she will break down by programme the budget set by her Department for public expenditure on land management and rural development, including the Entry Level Scheme, other England rural development programme schemes and other schemes for financial years *(a)* 2004–05 and *(b)* 2005–06. [196652]

Alun Michael: The budget profile and breakdown for the England Rural Development Programme (ERDP) in 2004–05 are shown in the following table. This is the full resource-based budget and relates specifically to the anticipated value of payments to be made to beneficiaries.

The agri-environment schemes are the Countryside Stewardship Scheme (CSS), the Environmentally Sensitive Areas scheme (ESA) and the Organic Farming Scheme (OFS). The Entry Level Stewardship budget of £2.0 million shown below relates to the ongoing pilot agreements only.

Defra has not yet concluded its formal business planning process for the 2005–06 financial year. Figures will be provided as soon as that process is complete. Subject to European Commission approval, a new agri-environment scheme called Environmental Stewardship (ES) will be launched in England in 2005 to replace the three existing schemes (CSS, ESA, OFS). Environmental Stewardship will consist of three separate elements: Entry Level Stewardship (ELS), Organic Entry Level Stewardship (OELS) and Higher Level Stewardship (HLS).

Agri-environment schemes are budgeted a year in arrears, which means that the expenditure reflects agreements signed in the previous year. Current planning assumptions about the expected rate of uptake to the Entry Level element of Environmental

Stewardship suggest that by 2006–07 expenditure will be in the region of £132 million and will rise further thereafter.

In addition to the England Rural Development Programme budgets shown, Rural Development funding of £21.2 million in 2004–05 and £19.3 million in 2005–06 is also available under the Objective 1 Programme. This funding stream is directed to beneficiaries in the three, geographically defined Objective 1 areas in England: Cornwall and the Isles of Scilly, Merseyside and South Yorkshire.

ERDP 2004–05	*Total (£ million)*
Agri-environment schemes (ESA, CSS, OFS)	155.8
Entry Level Stewardship Pilot	2.0
Hill Farm Allowance	27.2
Rural Enterprise Scheme	30.0
Vocational Training Scheme	4.0
Processing and Marketing Grant	8.0
Energy Crops Scheme	1.4
Farm Woodland Premium Scheme	11.8
Woodland Grant Scheme	22.0
Total ERDP	262.2

Set-aside

Paddy Tipping: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs how much has been paid out under set aside in each county in England in 2003–04; and if she will make a statement. [194815]

Alun Michael: The amounts paid out under set aside in each county in England for Arable Area Aid claims submitted in 2003 are set out in the following table. The figures for Arable Area Aid claims submitted in 2004 are not yet available as the payment window has not yet closed.

£

County	*Set-aside*	*Non food*	*Total*
Cumbria	730,169.80	63,845.87	794,015.67
Lancashire	887,983.57	27,450.82	915,434.39
Tyne and Wear	381,448.14	58,993.84	440,441.98
Northumberland	3,371,591.74	558,749.92	3,930,341.66
Bedfordshire	2,336,203.00	392,492.76	2,728,695.76
Cambridgeshire	6,527,823.77	1,243,450.80	7,771,274.57
Essex	5,577,359.24	1,626,756.10	7,204,115.34
Hertfordshire	2,333,831.36	568,430.69	2,902,262.05
Norfolk	8,969,722.22	630,205.78	9,599,928.00
Suffolk	6,869,461.72	1,121,912.61	7,991,374.33
Cheshire	1,085,066.75	58,221.24	1,143,287.99
Merseyside	424,793.37	39,596.69	464,390.06
Shropshire	3,033,511.30	346,657.85	3,380,169.15
Staffordshire	1,783,741.77	227,652.39	2,011,394.16
Greater Manchester	279,184.85	6,718.74	285,903.59
Cleveland	572,857.63	137,485.08	710,342.71
Durham	1,767,852.86	219,414.10	1,987,266.96
South Yorkshire	1,532,015.77	291,676.16	1,823,691.93
North Yorkshire *(a)*	5,838,019.20	995,992.79	6,834,011.99
North Yorkshire *(b)*	1,207,173.68	286,774.73	1,493,948.41
West Yorkshire	701,920.36	202,654.13	904,574.49
Humberside	5,073,076.57	2,002,497.78	7,075,574.35
Dorset	2,282,786.18	387,725.96	2,670,512.14
Avon	890,999.38	45,256.31	936,255.69
Somerset	2,107,174.17	193,877.42	2,301,051.59
Wiltshire	5,361,556.53	661,297.17	6,022,853.70
Gloucestershire	3,410,306.49	327,907.47	3,738,213.96
Hereford and Worcester	3,789,181.89	409,796.38	4,198,978.27
Warwickshire	3,392,255.18	338,511.51	3,730,766.69
West Midlands	287,814.52	9,857.50	297,672.02
Derbyshire	1,098,000.08	227,114.18	1,325,114.26
Leicestershire	4,098,296.77	527,959.64	4,626,256.41
Lincolnshire	12,216,159.03	1,866,352.86	14,082,511.89
Northamptonshire	4,337,738.80	650,522.00	4,988,260.80
Nottinghamshire	3,410,748.69	761,019.40	4,171,768.09
Cornwall	1,906,635.42	55,681.06	1,962,316.48
Devon	2,930,665.50	136,289.50	3,066,955.00
Berkshire	1,808,852.45	168,473.63	1,977,326.08
Buckinghamshire	2,395,375.84	262,178.48	2,657,554.32
Hampshire	4,400,958.59	825,754.28	5,226,712.87
Isle of Wight	529,988.84	8,267.37	538,256.21
Kent	3,782,009.18	1,005,116.76	4,787,125.94
Greater London *(a)*	120,875.16	16,615.36	137,490.52
Greater London *(b)*	133,045.85	18,479.20	151,525.05
Oxfordshire	5,696,425.10	369,510.94	6,065,936.04
Surrey	957,912.86	10,490.25	968,403.11
East Sussex	1,686,748.36	39,966.16	1,726,714.52
West Sussex	2,329,687.63	114,663.70	2,444,351.33
Total	136,647,007.16	20,546,315.36	157,193,322.52

Note:

All values are before Modulation

Sheep Payments

Paddy Tipping: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs how much was paid out under *(a)* the Sheep Annual Premium and *(b)* the Sheep National Envelope in each county in England in 2003–04; and if she will make a statement. [194415]

Alun Michael: The amounts paid out under *(a)* the Sheep Annual Premium and *(b)* the Sheep National Envelope in each county in England submitted in 2003 are set out in the following table. Payments were made during the payment window of 16 October 2003 to 31 March 2004. Over 97 per cent. of applicants received their Premium and Sheep National Envelope payments within the first two weeks of the opening of the payment window. The figures for claims submitted in 2004 are not yet available, as the payment window has not yet closed. However over 98 per cent. of qualifying applicants received their premium during the first few days of the payment window opening.

£

County name	*2003 premium payments*	*2003 SNE payments*
Bedfordshire	244491.00	3988.89
Berkshire	327640.11	5345.48
Buckinghamshire	1077098.09	17572.96
Cleveland	220235.62	3593.16
Cambridgeshire	326388.36	5325.06
Cheshire	1069131.53	17442.97
Cornwall	3183824.27	51945.37
Cumbria	13832914.03	225685.47
Derbyshire	2543377.02	41495.45
Devon	9594551.82	156569.55
Dorset	1227869.11	20032.81
Durham	3366262.07	54920.92
Essex	324461.20	5293.62
Gloucestershire	1953961.60	31879.08
Hampshire	707545.96	11543.69
Isle of Wight	179547.01	2929.33
Hereford and Worcester	5632496.70	91894.75
Hertfordshire	160775.98	2623.07
Kent	2335685.40	38106.94
Lancashire	4056209.13	66177.46
Leicestershire	1844621.58	30095.19
Lincolnshire	957432.07	15620.60
Merseyside	28802.75	469.92

County name	*2003 premium payments*	*2003 SNE payments*
Greater London	6014.06	98.12
Greater London	3357.63	54.78
Norfolk	648052.10	10573.02
Northamptonshire	1769303.46	28866.39
Tyne and Wear	64509.54	1052.48
Northumberland	8288442.42	135226.80
Nottinghamshire	447134.06	7295.03
Oxfordshire	999387.54	16305.13
Avon	446286.76	7281.21
Shropshire	4876551.87	79561.45
Somerset	3074285.31	50164.64
Staffordshire	1418024.61	23135.21
Suffolk	445803.31	7273.32
Scilly Isles	0	0
Surrey	286833.90	4679.72
East Sussex	1556025.79	25386.70
West Sussex	511447.48	8344.31
Warwickshire	1726662.97	28170.68
Greater Manchester	395244.99	6448.47
Wiltshire	1042745.72	17012.52
West Midlands	111949.69	1826.47
South Yorkshire	445145.54	7262.60
North Yorkshire	10689173.06	174394.95
West Yorkshire	1187397.94	19372.50
North Yorkshire	156715.45	2556.83
Humberside	605564.35	9879.85
Total	96,397,381.96	1,572,774.92

Single Farm Payment

Miss McIntosh: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs how payments under the single farm payment between 1 December 2005 and 30 June 2006 will be made; and when they will be made. [R] [193775]

Alun Michael: The European Regulations require payments for 2005 to be made between 1 December 2005 and 30 June 2006 and our objective is to make payments as promptly as possible within that period. Payments will be made by bank transfer in line with the way IACS payments are made at present.

Temporary Staff

Mr. Blunt: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs how many agency temporary staff have been working for the Department or its predecessors in each of the last five years, excluding those working for agencies for which no data is kept centrally. [196053]

Alun Michael: The information requested is not held centrally. I refer the hon. Member to the answers I gave on 22 April 2004, *Official Report*, columns 583–85 and column 588; and on 23 June 2004, *Official Report*, column 1427. Defra came into being in June 2001.

Waste Disposal/Management

Bob Spink: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what proportion of London's waste was disposed of in Essex in the last year for which figures are available; and at which sites. [194915]

Mr. Morley: This information is not held centrally by Defra.

Information on the destination of waste for disposal is being gathered for the first time by Defra through WasteDataFlow, an online comprehensive waste data reporting system for local authorities introduced in April 2004, and will not be available until mid 2005.

The Greater London Authority and the Environment Agency may be able to provide an answer based on data held by them.

Mr. Laws: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs how much waste in Somerset by *(a)* tonnage and *(b)* percentage was disposed of by (i) landfill, (ii) recycling and (iii) incineration since 1997–98. [195147]

Mr. Morley: Results from the Defra Municipal Waste Management Survey show the following municipal waste disposal routes for Somerset Waste Disposal Authority and North Somerset Unitary Authority. Both authorities reported no incineration over the period. Full results for Somerset are not available for 1997–98.

Somerset county

	Landfill		*Recycled and composted*		*Total disposed*	
	Number	*Percentage*	*Number*	*Percentage*	*Number*	*Percentage*
1998–99	311,093	88	43,190	12	354,283	100
1999–2000	324,379	87	50,393	13	374,772	100
2000–01	330,694	85	58,573	15	389,267	100
2001–02	355,153	85	62,288	15	417,441	100
2002–03	375,415	83	76,995	17	452,410	100

Results from the 2003–04 Defra Municipal Waste Management Survey will be available in early 2005.

Mr. Rosindell: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs how the Department plans to develop the strategy for managing waste over the next 10 years. [195970]

Mr. Morley: The Government's strategy on waste is set out in "Waste Strategy 2000", published in May 2000. The Government outlined further plans in May 2003 in response to the Prime Minister's Strategy Unit Report "Waste Not, Want Not". The Government is committed to reviewing its strategy on waste in 2005. A small team has been established in the Department to take forward the review.

Water Framework Directive

Mr. Key: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs if she will make a statement on progress in implementing the water framework directive. [196022]

Mr. Morley: I refer the hon. Member to the answer given on 13 September 2004, *Official Report*, column 1582W.

TRANSPORT

Aviation White Paper

Norman Baker: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport if he will publish a report on the action he has taken since the publication of the White Paper on Aviation to achieve the goals set out therein. [193081]

Charlotte Atkins: Following the publication of "The Future of Air Transport" White Paper in December 2003, we have been working to implement its policies and proposals and have already completed a number of specific actions. These include:

Removing the parliamentary passenger air transport movement limit (PATM) at Stansted airport so that it is regulated by the local planning authority, in line with other UK airports;

Issuing a consultation on night flying restrictions at Heathrow, Gatwick, and Stansted airports;

Publishing guidance to airport operators on the preparation of airport master plans; Publishing a consultation on the protection of regional air services to London.

Airport Operators are also undertaking work to deliver the White Paper proposals. We expect them to publish outline master plan statements by the end of this year and full master plans by the end of next year. The first new runway in the South East should be at Stansted and BAA, the airport operator, is taking work on this forward.

We will report on progress made by the end of 2006.

British Transport Police

Tom Cox: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what recent discussions his Department has had with the British Transport Police on combating vandalism and anti-social behaviour at railway stations covering the Greater London area. [196533]

Mr. McNulty: Ministers and officials of the Department met the Chairman of the British Transport Police (BTP) Authority, Sir Alistair Graham, on 26 October for a wide ranging discussion on the work of the BTP. I also have regular meetings with the BTP Chief Constable, most recently on 10 November. I discussed with him the steps being taken by the Force to combat vandalism and anti-social behaviour at railway stations in the context of the Force's Annual Policing Plan.

Crossrail

Mr. Rosindell: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport if he will make a statement on funding of the Crossrail project. [197488]

Mr. McNulty: I refer the hon. Member to the written statement on Crossrail that the Secretary of State for Transport made on 20 July 2004.

Drivers (Regulations)

Mr. Jim Cunningham: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what assessment he has made of the impact of the regulation of drivers of commercial and public vehicles on the jobs available in those areas. [197203]

Mr. Jamieson: The two key pieces of regulation affecting drivers of commercial and public service vehicles are the EU driver's hours rules (3820/85/EEC) and the new EU directive (2002/15/EC) regulating the working time of drivers. The drivers' hours rules were introduced in 1988 and the working time rules need to be implemented by 23 March 2005.

Last year we published a partial regulatory impact assessment on the impact of the new working time legislation. The assessment concluded that an extra 12,300 drivers (just over 2.5 per cent. of the current workforce) would be required.

Great Yarmouth (Outer Harbour)

Mr. Keith Simpson: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport when he intends to announce his decision on the outer harbour at Great Yarmouth. [197456]

Mr. Jamieson: The Government expect to be making a decision very shortly on whether public funding of the East Port project would be appropriate. The Secretary of State for Transport would then determine the outstanding application for an HRO in the light of that.

Railway Stations (Wheelchair Access)

Dr. Gibson: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what assessment the Department has made of the recent judgment in the High Court in the case of Mr. Keith Rhodes, concerning wheelchair access at rail stations. [197415]

Mr. McNulty: We have been following the progress of this case with interest and will be considering the implications of the recent judgment.

Ship Inspections

Mr. Carmichael: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport pursuant to his answer of 11 October 2004, *Official Report*, column 6W, on ship inspections, whether the Marine Coastguard Agency is targeting ships for inspection in accordance with the criteria set by the Paris Memorandum of Understanding on Port State Control; and whether ships are being targeted on security grounds. [195693]

Mr. Jamieson: The Maritime and Coastguard Agency is selecting ships for inspection in accordance with the criteria set by the Paris Memorandum of Understanding on Port State Control. The criteria does not include a security factor. Procedures are, however, in place to deploy duly authorised officers where security-related concerns have been identified.

Transport for London

Tom Cox: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport how much funding his Department has given to Transport for London in each of the last three years. [197121]

Mr. McNulty: The Department has provided Transport for London with the following funding though the GLA Transport Grant over the last three years:

	£ million
2004–05	2,224.536
2003–04	1,681.932
2002–03	1,024.118

The increase in funding between 2002–03 and 2004–05 largely reflects the transfer of London Underground to TfL in July 2003.

TRADE AND INDUSTRY

"Fit for the Future"

Ms Walley: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what progress has been made with the "Fit For the Future" programme. [194092]

Ms Hewitt: The "Fit for the Future" programme was, with a number of other best practice programmes, integrated into the new "Achieving best practice in your business" theme released in April. Replacing an array of schemes has allowed my Department to rationalise and simplify its support for the promotion and implementation of best practice, including offering direct grant support to SMEs.

The material in the theme helps provide ideas and insights into how businesses can improve performance in a range of areas, such as leadership, skills and E-Business. The material can be viewed at www.dti.gov.uk/bestpractice. There is also a range of free printed brochures that can be ordered from the DTI Publication Orderline on 0870 150 2500. Over 70,000 brochures have been ordered since launch in April. Both the website and brochures contain reports, guides and case studies, as well as a range of self-assessment tools. These have won an award of excellence at this year's "Communications in Business Awards".

Agency Temporary Staff

Mr. Randall: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry how many agency temporary staff have been working for the Department in each of the last five years, excluding those working for agencies for which no data is kept centrally. [196058]

Ms Hewitt: DTI currently has 135 full-time equivalent agency temporary staff. Prior to April 2004 agency temporary staff were aggregated with core service contractors and programme consultants for tracking purposes and so it is not possible to provide estimates of historic agency temporary staff numbers. However, a departmental snapshot in spring 2003 estimated the total number of full-time equivalent agency temporary staff to be approximately 350. Both quoted numbers are based on core DTI HQ and Small Business Service staff and exclude UK Trade and Investment.

Business Support

Malcolm Bruce: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry through which business support products her Department provides subsidised consultancy. [197250]

Nigel Griffiths: DTI's nine business support products take a variety of forms including grants, loan guarantees and subsidised consultancy.

Two of the nine business support products use subsidised consultancy as their means of delivering assistance to business. These are Grant for Investigating an Innovative Idea and Support to Implement Best Business Practice.

Departmental Offices

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what the cost of *(a)* decoration and *(b)* refurbishment of the London offices of the Department was in each of the last four years. [196148]

Ms Hewitt: My Department undertakes a wide variety of projects as part of on-going maintenance and improvements in its current stock. The cost of projects involving significant works to the building services and fabric for the last four complete financial years are as shown in the table. These figures relate only to the DTI headquarters London estate.

		£000
Financial year	*(a) Decoration*	*(b) Refurbishment*
2000–01	233	1,402
2001–02	Nil	4,321
2002–03	432	1,230
2003–04	79	2,058

Departmental Press Officers

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry how many press officers the Department has employed in each year since 2003. [195408]

Ms Hewitt *[holding answer 1 November 2004]:* The number of press officers employed in DTI in each year since 2003 is as follows:

As at 1 January	*Number*
2003	23
2004	19

Departmental Staff

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what percentage of the staff in her Department in *(a)* 2002 and *(b)* 2003 were people with disabilities. [196122]

Ms Hewitt: The Department collects disability data on a voluntary basis. The information tabulated as follows is extracted from our personnel records database and gives the position in DTI Headquarters as at 31 December 2003 respectively:

DTIHQ—Staff who have declared a disability as a percentage of total number of staff

	Percentage
(a) 2002	7.4
(b) 2003	2.1

Electricity

Miss McIntosh: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry how many new electricity pylons are planned to be constructed in *(a)* the Vale of York and *(b)* North Yorkshire in (i) 2004, (ii) 2005 and (iii) 2006. [196742]

Mr. Mike O'Brien: The Government do not have this data as they do not centrally plan the electricity network. It is a matter for the network operators to bring forward proposals as the need arises and these will be subject to appropriate scrutiny under section 37 of the Electricity Act 1989.

Miss McIntosh: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry if she will make a statement on the potential to construct new electricity cables in the Vale of York underground. [196743]

Mr. Mike O'Brien: Under grounding new power lines is very much more expensive than putting them overhead, particularly at higher voltages and this may be reflected in electricity prices to the consumer. Technological developments are unlikely to change that equation in the immediate future. The network companies concerned will consider representations to underground all or part of proposed overhead line developments in working up the details of their proposals, and it is possible that underground cables may be appropriate in certain circumstances. But expectations must be realistic.

Employment Tribunals

Mr. Stephen O'Brien: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what the reasons are for the removal of the Register of Employment Tribunal Applications from the public domain via the Employment Tribunals (Constitution and Rules of Procedure) Regulations 2004; and what representations she has received from *(a)* trade unions and *(b)* legal professionals on the subject. [195647]

Mr. Sutcliffe: The Government carried out a full and open consultation on the future of the public register, as part of a wider public consultation, between December 2003 and March 2004, on reform of the employment tribunal regulations and rules of procedure. The Government response summarising the outcome of that exercise was published in July 2004. It noted that the balance of views among key stakeholders was that the register's advantages—in terms of freedom of information and access to sources of advice and support that the parties might not otherwise know to approach—were outweighed by its significant disadvantages. The disadvantages cited included compromising the privacy of the parties, and leaving them open to receiving numerous unwelcome, and in some cases misleading approaches from "ambulance chasers". Evidence of such approaches was provided by some consultees.

Many consultees, including the TUC, individual unions and a number of employment law firms, favoured complete abolition of the register. There were concerns that the register was used for blacklisting purposes. There was, however, support expressed by some for the retention of the aspect of the register recording judgments. This was considered to be useful for monitoring purposes, and to ensure that there continued to be a public record of judgments reached in the tribunals.

The Government decided, in the light of the consultation responses, and having given further careful consideration to the matter, that pre-judgment details of claimants and respondents should no longer be entered on the public register, but that judgments should continue to be recorded. This decision was implemented in the new regulations, which came into effect on 1 October 2004.

EU Committees

Angus Robertson: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry how many times during the Greek presidency of the EU the Standing Committee on the harmonisation of national legislation on cableway installations designed to carry passengers met; when and where these meetings took place; which UK Government expert was present at each meeting; what *(a)* technical and *(b)* financial issues were raised by the UK Government expert at each meeting; what recommendations the Committee produced during that period; what actions were (i) proposed and (ii) taken by the (A) EU and (B) UK Government as a result of the Committee's recommendations; and if she will make a statement. [194890]

Mr. McNulty: I have been asked to reply.

No meetings of the Standing Committee on the harmonisation of national legislation on cableway installations designed to carry passengers took place during the Greek presidency.

The European Community directive 2000/9/EC, which introduced common standards for the construction and putting into service of cableway systems designed to carry persons has been implemented in the UK by the Cableway Installations Regulations 2004, which came into force on 3 May 2004.

Details of developments during the Greek presidency can be found in Cm6097 "Developments in the European Union, January to June 2003, the Greek Presidency" which was laid before Parliament in January 2004 and is available at www.fco.gov.uk/commandpapers.

Fair Trade Sourcing

Mr. Burstow: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry if she will make it her policy to ensure that all hospitality within her Department is sourced from fair trade producers wherever possible within the boundaries set by the public procurement rules. [196657]

Ms Hewitt: I refer the hon. Gentleman to the answers given to him and the hon. Member for Buckingham (Mr. Bercow) on the policy adopted for the use of fair-trade products in hospitality on 15 December 2003, *Official Report*, column 641W, 1 November 2004, *Official Report*, column 88W and 4 November 2004, *Official Report*, columns 362–63W.

It is departmental policy to include the promotion of and use of fair trade products within our contracted hospitality, including tea, coffee, drinking chocolate, orange juice, cereal snack bars and sugar.

Gas

Malcolm Bruce: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry (1) what assessment her Department has made of the impact of the recent rise in the cost of wholesale gas on the competitiveness of British companies; and what steps she plans to take to minimise this impact; [197177]

(2) what assessment her Department has made of the price differential between the gas markets in the UK and continental Europe; and if she will make a statement. [197192]

Mr. Mike O'Brien: Historically, industrial gas prices in Great Britain have been at or among the lowest in the EU. Although it is too early for official comparative data to be available, gas industry sources and intelligence indicate that wholesale gas prices have also increased (under the influence of higher oil prices) in continental Europe. A recent report by Oxford Economic Research Associates shows that the UK had the most competitive energy markets in the EU and G7 in 2002, and provisionally also for 2003. (The report is on the DTI website at www.dti.gov.uk/energy/gas_and_electricity/competitiveness_structure/index.shtm.l.

Malcolm Bruce: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what her policy is on a European Commission investigation into the impact of a liberalised gas market. [197178]

Mr. Mike O'Brien: My Department has been encouraging the European Commission to use its existing competition powers to the full extent to ensure timely progress towards a liberalised and competitive EU energy (gas and electricity) market.

Glass Container Industry

Mr. Illsley: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what representations she has received regarding cost increases to the glass container industry as a consequence of new emissions limits. [197007]

Jacqui Smith: Over the past year my Department has received a number of representations from the glass container industry about cost increases and other issues arising from new emissions limits, particularly in relation to CO_2. This has included contact with Ministers at plant visits, in ministerial correspondence and at meetings at official level.

Mr. Bill O'Brien: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what advice and assistance her Department has given to the glass container industry on *(a)* closure of plants in recent years and *(b)* challenges facing the industry; and if she will make a statement. [194725]

Jacqui Smith: In August 2002 the Department commissioned the British Glass Manufacturers Confederation to examine the requirements for a full scale competitiveness study of glass manufacturing and manufacturing sectors.

A precursory study of competitiveness in the UK glass manufacturing sector was completed in February 2003.

Officials continue to meet with the British Glass Manufacturers Confederation to discuss a number of issues that have an impact on the sector.

The Department and the Regional Development Agency remain committed to providing support and advice if plant closures occur.

IT Skills

Michael Fabricant: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what measures she plans to take to ensure that the people who need to upgrade their IT skills, referred to in the e-Skills UK research published on 1 November, receive the training they require. [197047]

Ms Hewitt: Following the recommendations of the industry report "Skills for the Information Age", over the three years 2000–03, DTI invested £7 million in action programmes to increase the supply of advanced skills for the IT, electronics and communications sector. This programme promoted a positive image of ITEC in schools, helped students to develop the necessary skills required by ITEC employers and supported Work-Life Balance and diversity initiatives for the ITEC sector.

To follow up this programme, further ITEC skills initiatives have been taken forward directly by the recently appointed Sector Skills Councils for the ITEC sector, working in partnership with the industry, the Sector Skills Development Agency, DTI and DfES. A high priority for DTI is to make the UK the most competitive global location for IT skills. We are working closely with e-Skills UK, companies in the sector and across Government to match the current and future IT skills supply with business demand. DTI and DfES are also working with industry to improve diversity in employment in the IT sector, particularly the severe under-representation of women in the IT sector.

Miners' Compensation

Jeff Ennis: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry whether her Department is using Capita as a contractor in relation to the miners' compensation schemes. [194163]

Nigel Griffiths *[holding answer 28 October 2004]*: Yes. A Press release to this effect was issued on 16 February 2004.

Non-financial Reports

John Robertson: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry if her Department will require public-listed companies to publish annual non-financial reports. [197471]

Jacqui Smith: My right hon. Friend will be making an announcement shortly about the implementation of a new non-financial report—the proposed Operating and Financial Review.

Offshore Wind Farms

Mr. Ben Chapman: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what assessment she has made of the environmental impact of the construction of offshore wind farms. [196276]

Mr. Mike O'Brien: In respect of offshore wind farms both developers and Government are undertaking a significant amount of environmental impact work. In preparing their consent applications developers must undertake a comprehensive environmental impact assessments to consider a range of impacts for example on coastal processes, benthic ecology, fishing, navigation, birds and seascape. Where appropriate Government has made monitoring of impacts during the construction and post construction phases of wind farms a condition of Round 1 licences. In addition, this summer under the auspices of a newly created Research Advisory Group my Department launched a two-year £2.5 million programme of research to support offshore impact studies with further support coming from other Departments. The research group has already identified the highest priority studies and work programmes are under way for birds, navigation and fishing.

Parliamentary Questions

Jeff Ennis: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry when she expects to make a substantive reply to the question tabled by the hon. Member for Barnsley, East and Mexborough for Named Day answer on 28 October, reference 194163. [197756]

Nigel Griffiths: I have answered today.

Post Offices

Sir John Butterfill: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what assessment she has made of the likely impact on *(a)* the general public and *(b)* businesses of the proposal by the Post Office to close a number of Crown post offices; and if she will make a statement. [196850]

Mr. Sutcliffe: Decisions on individual closures and conversions of directly managed (Crown) post offices are operational and commercial matters for Post Office Ltd. Post Office Ltd.'s current policy, which has the Government's support, is to maintain a core network of directly managed post offices while continuing to drive efficiencies, with the aim of making the business commercial viable.

Post Office Ltd. has clarified in a letter of 3 November to all Members of Parliament that the company is working with the trade unions to develop proposals that will help address the significant losses generated by the network of directly managed post offices. Though plans are yet to be finalised, fewer than five directly managed branches are expected to be closed in 2005–06 and the company will continue to seek to transfer operation of directly managed post offices to franchise partners where suitable opportunities arise while ensuring that products and services for customers remain unchanged.

Lady Hermon: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry if she will list the Crown post offices in Northern Ireland which have been earmarked for closure; and if she will make a statement. [197260]

Mr. Sutcliffe *[holding answer 10 November 2004]*: The Government have no such list. Decisions on individual post office closures and conversions are operational and commercial matters for Post Office Ltd.

Post Office Ltd has clarified in a letter of 3 November to all Members of Parliament that the company is working with the trade unions to develop proposals that will help address the significant losses generated by the network of directly managed (Crown) post offices. Though plans are yet to be finalised, fewer than five directly managed branches are expected to be closed in 2005–06 throughout the UK. The company will continue to seek to transfer operation of directly managed post offices to franchise partners where suitable opportunities arise, whilst ensuring that products and services for customers remain unchanged.

Annabelle Ewing: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what discussions she has had with Post Office Ltd concerning its review of directly managed post offices. [196773]

Mr. Sutcliffe *[holding answer 9 November 2004]*: Ministers and officials are in regular contact with Post Office Ltd on a variety of post office issues. The Government do not, however, intervene in the day to day running of the business. The management of directly managed offices is, like the rest of the post office network, a commercial and operational matter for the company. Post Office Ltd has the Government's support for their strategy, which is to maintain a core network of directly managed post offices while continuing to drive efficiencies with the aim of making the business commercially viable.

Post Office Ltd has clarified in a letter of 3 November to all Members of Parliament that the company is working with the trade unions to develop proposals that will help address the significant losses generated by the network of directly managed post offices. Though plans are yet to be finalised, fewer than five directly managed branches are expected to be closed in 2005–06 and the company will continue to seek to transfer operation of directly managed post offices to franchise partners where suitable opportunities arise while ensuring that products and services for customers remain unchanged.

Private Finance Initiative

Mr. George Osborne: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry if she will list the private finance initiative arrangements in which the Department is engaged; what the total cost of each arrangement is *(a)* over its lifetime and *(b)* in each year of its operation; and how the arrangement appears in the Department's public accounts. [193977]

Ms Hewitt: The Department has three PFI contracts. They are *(a)* the provision of centralised IT within the Department (ELGAR) running until 2013–14; *(b)* the rebuilding of the National Physical Laboratory at Teddington running until 2023–24; and, *(c)* Constructionline which provides information on approved contractors within the construction industry.

The figures for the National Physical Laboratory are given as follows. Figures for 2004–05 onwards are estimated. The Constructionline PFI arrangement has no cost implications for the Department. The information for the provision of centralised IT within the Department is Commercial in Confidence and is therefore subject to exemption 13 Third Party Commercial Confidences—of the code of practice on access to Government Information.

The arrangements for reporting these contracts are set out in the Department's resource accounts for 2002–03 (in notes 1.20, 11 and 26). The accounts are available from the House of Commons Library.

Royal Mail Holdings

Malcolm Bruce: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what reports she has *(a)* requested and *(b)* received from the Shareholder Executive regarding the privatisation of Royal Mail Holdings plc. [197179]

Mr. Sutcliffe: I have not requested or received any reports from the Shareholder Executive.

Privatisation of the Royal Mail is not on the Government's agenda. There are no plans to dispose of the Government's shareholding in the Royal Mail.

Trans-European Energy Network

Mr. Tynan: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what assessment she has made of the role that the EU-sponsored trans-European energy network might play in providing energy security for the UK. [197561]

Mr. Mike O'Brien: The trans-European energy network programme (TENs) provides assistance for feasibility studies and pre-construction development for infrastructure projects, particularly interconnectors, between member states and between the EU and its neighbours. Gas and electricity interconnectors make an important contribution to security of supply. The annual budget for TENs is small (currently €20 million) compared to the investment necessary to bring projects to fruition. TENs support can, however, be a catalyst for investment by supporting the initial stages of projects. Information from the Commission shows that in the period 1996–2001 a total of 140 actions in 53 projects received assistance totalling €123 million, with 56 per cent. going to natural gas projects and the remainder to electricity projects. UK projects have received a proportionate level of support from the TENs energy programme.

CULTURE, MEDIA AND SPORT

Casinos

Mr. David Marshall: To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport what the location of each gaming casino in Scotland is. [197647]

Mr. Caborn: The Gaming Board for Great Britain report that casinos are licensed in the following locations in Scotland.

	Casinos
Aberdeen	2
Dundee	1
Edinburgh	4
Glasgow	5

Departmental Documents/Staff

Mr. Bellingham: To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport what the Department's target is for the interval between publication of *(a)* departmental announcements and documents and *(b)* material published by public bodies for which her Department has oversight and their posting online; and what the average interval was in the latest year for which figures are available. [195399]

Mr. Caborn *[pursuant to the reply, 1 November 2004, Official Report, c. 42W]:* I regret that my earlier answer did not take into account the amended wording of the question.

The Department aims to make all announcements and documents available online at the same time as they are otherwise released. The Department does not keep a record of timings from which an average interval could be calculated. We would expect our sponsored bodies to adhere to the same target but information on the average interval for publishing online by DCMS bodies could be discovered only at disproportionate cost.

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport what percentage of the staff of the Department in *(a)* 2002 and *(b)* 2003 were people with disabilities. [196133]

Mr. Caborn: I refer the hon. Member to the answer given to him by my hon. Friend the Minister for the Cabinet Office on 9 November 2004, *Official Report*, columns 619–20W.

Football Association

Mr. Don Foster: To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport what plans she has to appoint *(a)* a regulator to oversee the operation of the Football Association and *(b)* an independent adviser to oversee constitutional change at the Football Association; and if she will make a statement. [196769]

Mr. Caborn: The Government's aim for the Football Association is for them to be fit for purpose. The FA's Board and Council are committed to a review headed by an independent person and I remain in regular contact with all parties concerned.

Gambling Bill

Mr. Lazarowicz: To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport on which dates the proposals contained within the Gambling Bill were discussed at the Joint Ministerial Committee; and in what format. [196310]

Mr. Caborn: I have no knowledge of this Committee.

Horse Racing

Peter Bottomley: To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport if she will propose an extension to the horse racing levy system and board. [197905]

Mr. Caborn: We have no plans to do so. We are, however, asking the British Horseracing Board for an assessment of the possible implications of a recent judgment of the European Court of Justice in relation to database rights.

Lottery Grants

Mr. Skinner: To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport how many swimming pools have been constructed with Lottery grants in each of the last 10 years. [197117]

Estelle Morris: 92 swimming pools, including those integrated with sports and leisure centres, have been constructed in the last 10 years. The year-by-year breakdown is as follows:

	Pools constructed
1995	14
1996	9
1997	11
1998	13
1999	10
2000	10
2001	10
2002	8
2003	7

Figures for 2004 are not yet available, and no lottery-funded swimming pools were constructed in 1994, as the first lottery panel did not convene until March 1995.

Mr. Skinner: To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport if she will list the constituencies which have received Lottery grants for the construction of swimming pools in the last 10 years. [197118]

Estelle Morris: In the last 10 years, the following constituencies have received lottery grants for the construction of swimming pools:

> North Devon; Brigg and Goole; Weaver Vale; West Dorset; Penrith and the Border; Leominster; Truro and St. Austell; Surrey Heath; Vale of York; Cambridge; North Cornwall; Tiverton and Honiton; Richmond (Yorkshire); Ealing North; South East Cambridgeshire; South East Cornwall; Bristol North West; Wells; Forest of Dean; Aylesbury; Harrogate and Knaresborough; Yeovil; South West Norfolk; Liverpool Wavertree; North Wiltshire; Hitchin and Harpenden; Arundel and South Downs; Erith and Thamesmead; South Norfolk; East Devon; East Surrey; Rushcliffe; Woodspring; North West Leicestershire; Tiverton and Honiton; Ludlow; North Warwickshire; Bexleyheath and Crayford; Berwick-upon-Tweed; Hertsmere; Liverpool West Derby; Morecambe and Lunesdale; Bexhill and Battle; North West Hampshire; Epping Forest; Leicester South; Harrow East; West Chelmsford; Middlesbrough South and Cleveland; East; Totnes; Skipton and Ripon; Southport; Stockton South; Mid Dorset and North Poole; Westmorland and Lonsdale; Maidstone and The Weald; Somerton and Frome; Lewisham West; Croydon Central; Norwich South; Bath; Cheltenham; Nuneaton; Hertsmere; Grantham and Stamford; St. Ives; North Norfolk; Torridge and West Devon; Berwick-upon-Tweed; Durham North; Horsham; Newcastle East/Wallsend; Harborough; Beckenham; Liverpool, Riverside; Calder Valley; Upminster; Camberwell and Peckham; Blackpool South; Walsall South; Sunderland South; Liverpool, Garston; Department for Culture, Media and Sport Parliamentary Branch, 2–4 Cockspur Street, London SW1Y 5DH www.culture.gov.uk Morley and Rothwell; Huddersfield; Loughborough; Southampton Test; Cambridge; Hackney N. and Stoke Newington; Gloucester; East Ham; Norwich South; and Manchester Central.

Hugh Robertson: To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport how much money was distributed to sport through the Lottery in each of the last 10 years. [197457]

Estelle Morris: The following amounts have been awarded to the sports good cause in each calendar year. The figures for 2004 are the latest available and will represent a lag in the reporting process.

	Awarded (£ million)
1995	1.7
1996	2.1
1997	1.8
1998	1.9
1999	6.1
2000	10.4
2001	13.1
2002	9.7
2003	4.9
2004	1.4
Total	53.1

The Big Lottery Fund and Awards for All programme (which receives contributions from Sport England, Arts Council England, Heritage Lottery Fund and Big Lottery Fund) also channel funding into projects that may involve an element of sport, however it is not possible to disaggregate precisely sports funding.

The information is freely available from the Department's searchable Lottery award database at www.lottery.culture.gsi.gov.uk, which uses information supplied by the Lottery distributors.

PRIME MINISTER

Consultants

Mr. Weir: To ask the Prime Minister how much his office spent in each year since 2002 on employing *(a)* external management consultants and *(b)* external human resources consultants; and if he will make a statement. [195762]

Pete Wishart: To ask the Prime Minister how much expenditure his Department has incurred in each year since 2002 on employing external consultants to deal with the press and public relations of his Department; and if he will make a statement. [195453]

The Prime Minister: For these purposes my office is part of the Cabinet Office. I refer the hon. Members to the answer my hon. Friend the Minister for the Cabinet Office gave the hon. Member for North Tayside (Pete Wishart) today.

Departmental Estate

Mr. Andrew Turner: To ask the Prime Minister if he will list the properties occupied by *(a)* his Department and *(b)* its agencies in (i) 1997 and (ii) 2004, showing (A) for each and (B) in aggregate the area; and what in aggregate the annual rental value was. [196365]

The Prime Minister: For these purposes my office is part of the Cabinet Office. I refer the hon. Member to the answer given to him by my hon. Friend the Minister for the Cabinet Office today.

DEFENCE

156 Provost Company

Bob Russell: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will issue posthumous medals to the members of 156 Provost Company, Royal Military Police, killed on active service in Iraq; and if he will make a statement. [196299]

Mr. Hoon: The armed forces do not, as a matter of course, make recommendations for the award of military honours to all those who have died in the line of duty.

However, service personnel who die on operations are awarded Campaign Medals. All the Royal Military Policemen who died in Al Majarr al Kabir last year were awarded posthumously the Iraq Campaign Medal, which was presented to their families at a service at the Royal Military Police Training School Chapel on 4 September 2004.

Bob Russell: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence when he will publish the findings of the report of the investigation into the deaths of members of 156 Provost Company, Royal Military Police, killed on active service in Iraq. [196300]

Mr. Hoon: The Board of Inquiry into the deaths of the six Royal Military Policemen who died in Al Majarr al Kabir last year has now concluded and I expect to be able to publish information on the outcome of that inquiry shortly.

The Royal Military Police Special Investigation Branch (SIB) investigation has been referred to the central criminal court of Iraq. In line with usual practice we have no plans to make public the SIB findings.

Channel Islands

Tom Cox: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence how many *(a)* British service personnel and *(b)* ships will take part in the 60th anniversary celebration of the liberation of the Channel Islands in May 2005; and if he will make a statement. [196727]

Mr. Caplin: Arrangements are being made for the armed forces to be represented at events in the Channel Islands in May 2005, but at this stage it is too early to be more specific.

Departmental Publications (Accessibility)

Mr. Goodman: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence how many and what proportion of publications issued by his Department are available in *(a)* Braille, *(b)* autoprint, *(c)* large print and *(d)* easy read format. [194298]

Mr. Caplin: Due to the lack of demand, the Ministry of Defence no longer routinely holds in store copies of its corporate publications in formats such as Braille and large print. However, in accordance with the Ministry's equality and diversity guidelines and legislative requirements, alternative formats of corporate publications are provided as and when they are requested.

Falklands War

Mr. Hoyle: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if the Ministry of Defence will sponsor a commemoration in the UK of the 25th anniversary of the liberation of the Falkland Islands. [173790]

Mr. Caplin *[holding answer 17 May 2004]:* I refer my hon. Friend to the answer I gave him at Defence questions on 25 October 2004, *Official Report*, columns 1133–34.

Temporary Staff

Dr. Julian Lewis: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence pursuant to the answer of 2 November 2004, *Official Report*, column 223W, on temporary staff, how many agency temporary staff have been working for his Department in its central headquarters buildings in each of the last five years. [196615]

Mr. Caplin *[holding answer 8 November 2004]:* I refer the hon. Gentleman to the answer I gave him on 2 November 2004, *Official Report*, column 223W.

US Military Personnel (Europe)

John Robertson: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what assessment his Department has made of the implications for UK security of the decision by the US Department of Defense to re-organise its military personnel in Europe. [187568]

Mr. Hoon: US plans for the disposition of their forces are a matter for them. Our assessment, however, of the US proposals for future deployments in Europe that have, so far, been made public is that they are entirely consistent with the historic US commitment to European security and to the NATO alliance. They reflect moves across the alliance to develop more flexible and rapidly deployable force structures, including through the development of the NATO Response Force and Allied Command for Transformation. The US have made clear their intention to continue to consult allies, including the UK, as their plans develop.

DEPUTY PRIME MINISTER

Central Government Grant

Mr. Michael Foster: To ask the Deputy Prime Minister what changes there were in central Government grant allocated to *(a)* Hereford and Worcester county council for each year between 1992 and 1998 and *(b)* Worcestershire county council since 1998. [197379]

Mr. Raynsford: The amount of central Government grant allocated to *(a)* Hereford and Worcester county council for each year between 1992 and 1998 and *(b)* Worcestershire county council since 1998 are in the following tables.

Hereford and Worcester

	£000
1993–94	318,044
1994–95	328,233
1995–96	277,981
1996–97	290,772
1997–98	292,429

Worcestershire

	£000
1998–99	234,279
1999–2000	253,735
2000–01	275,842
2001–02	296,776
2002–03	316,844
2003–04	341,186
2004–05	365,693

It is not possible to give figures for 1991–92 and 1992–93 as, under the community charge system which was in operation then, some grant was paid into the collection funds operated by lower tier authorities and hence supported expenditure by more than one tier.

The data are taken from the Revenue Summary (RS) (outturn) forms for all years except 2003–04 and 2004–05 when the data are taken from the Revenue Account (RA) (budget) form. These forms are completed each year by individual local authorities.

Grants in the table include special and specific grants inside "Aggregate External Finance", Standard Spending Assessment (SSA) reduction grant, Police grant, Revenue support grant, Central support protection grant and Redistributed Non- domestic rates.

Commonwealth Citizens (Voting Rights)

Dame Marion Roe: To ask the Deputy Prime Minister under which legislation Commonwealth citizens are entitled to vote in local government elections in the UK; and what the eligibility criteria are. [196446]

Mr. Raynsford: Qualifying Commonwealth citizens are entitled to vote in local government elections under section 2 of the Representation of the People Act 1983.

To be eligible to vote in a local government election qualifying Commonwealth citizens must be registered in the register of local government electors for that area; must not be subject to any legal incapacity to vote, age apart; and must be of voting age, that is 18 years or over.

Qualifying Commonwealth citizens are those who do not require leave to enter or remain in the UK under the Immigration Act 1971, or those who require leave, but for the time being have any description of such leave.

Dame Marion Roe: To ask the Deputy Prime Minister whether his Department is planning to review the entitlement of Commonwealth citizens to vote in UK elections for which his Department is responsible in countries in which British citizens are not entitled to vote in elections. [196878]

Mr. Raynsford: The Office of the Deputy Prime Minister has no plans to carry out such a review.

Council Tax

Miss McIntosh: To ask the Deputy Prime Minister if he will make a statement on the effect of council tax revaluation and regional banding on Harrogate district. [196740]

Mr. Raynsford: The Government have accepted the conclusion of the Balance of Funding Review that council tax should be retained but reformed. However, no decisions have yet been taken on what that reform should be. The Government looks to the Independent Inquiry, being undertaken by Sir Michael Lyons, to consider the detailed case for changes to the present system of local government funding, and to make recommendations on any changes that are necessary and how to implement them. This will include looking at how best to reform council tax, taking into account the revaluation in 2007 of English domestic property. Sir Michael is due to report by the end of 2005.

Claire Ward: To ask the Deputy Prime Minister what representations he has received from *(a)* Hertfordshire police authority and *(b)* other authorities within Hertfordshire on the capping of council tax; and if he will make a statement. [197138]

Mr. Raynsford: The Office of the Deputy Prime Minister received representations from authorities in Hertfordshire in advance of the 2004–05 capping round, which has now been completed, but has not received representations about future capping action. However, I understand that Hertfordshire MPs have made representations to my right hon. Friend, the Secretary of State for Home Affairs, after having been contacted by Hertfordshire police authority.

Departmental Offices

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Deputy Prime Minister what the cost of *(a)* decoration and *(b)* refurbishment of the London offices of the Department was in each of the last four years. [196145]

Phil Hope: The Office of the Deputy Prime Minister does not retain details of redecoration costs. However the costs of any redecoration as part of a refurbishment project exceeding £15,000 will be included in the following figures.

The Office of the Deputy Prime Minister was established in May 2002. Since that date the following has been spent on refurbishment of the London headquarters offices and the Government office for London.

	Total (£)
2002–03	2,097,441
2003–04	823,205

The figures provided, which exclude VAT, are gross expenditure and do not reflect receipts from other building occupants.

Although the Office of the Deputy Prime Minister has overall responsibility for the buildings occupied by Government offices, they carry out functions on behalf of 10 Government Departments.

Departmental Policy (South Dorset)

Jim Knight: To ask the Deputy Prime Minister if he will set out, with statistical evidence relating as closely as possible to the South Dorset constituency, the effects of changes to departmental policy since 1997 on the South Dorset constituency. [194971]

Phil Hope: The Office of the Deputy prime Minister is determined to develop to improve the lives of people across the UK, including the south-west.

In the local government finance settlements since the Office of the Deputy Prime Minister took office we have been able to increase the amount of government grant given to local authorities by £19.1 billion. This is a 30 per cent. increase in real terms and compares with a 7 per cent. cut in the previous four years before 1997–98.

The two local authorities in South Dorset have received average annual increases in formula grant since 1997 of 2.3 per cent. for Purbeck and 2.7 per cent. for Weymouth and Portland. Residents of South Dorset have also benefited from Dorset county council's increase in grant of 4.5 per cent.

The Office of the Deputy Prime Minister is determined that everyone should have the opportunity to have a decent home. Where extra money is not required to achieve this, tenants can choose for their homes to remain under direct council management. Those local authorities requiring additional funding have three options: setting up an arm's length management organisation (ALMO), creating a private finance initiative (PFI) and transfer. This strategy has meant that in 2004 the number of social sector non-decent homes in England will have been reduced by 1 million.

Since 1997 Purbeck transferred a total of 1,622 dwellings of which 835 were non-decent, to Purbeck Housing Trust, an RSL. In the same period Weymouth and Portland has transferred 3,105 dwellings to Weymouth and Portland Housing RSL.

This year the Office of the Deputy Prime Minister has provided £10.5 million in supporting people grant to Dorset county council to enable it to deliver housing related support services to vulnerable people in the area. Currently this provides over 7,000 units of support to a range of people, including homeless families, older people, people with learning disabilities and young people at risk.

The Neighbourhood Statistics Service provides a wide range of statistical information at parliamentary constituency level, taken from the 2001 Census and other sources. This service is available on the National Statistics website at http://neighbourhood.statistics.gov.uk./.

Deprived Wards (England)

Mr. Keith Bradley: To ask the Deputy Prime Minister if he will list the top 10 per cent. of the most deprived wards in England. [197546]

Phil Hope: It is not possible to list the top 10 per cent. of the most deprived wards in England. The IMD2004 is not based on wards but on a new geography called Super Output Areas (SOAs). These are geographical areas which are designed to be similar in size and consistent over time. They have a population of approximately 1,000 to 3,000 people. There are 32,482 SOAs in England. A list of the top 10 per cent. of these, i.e. the most deprived 3,248 SOAs, has been made available in the Library of the House.

East of England Assembly

Mr. Amess: To ask the Deputy Prime Minister what plans he has for holding a referendum on setting up a Regional Assembly in the East of England. [197873]

Mr. Raynsford: None.

Brownfield Land

Llew Smith: To ask the Deputy Prime Minister what assessment he has made of the implications for the re-use of reclaimed brownfield land of the European Court of Justice case concerning the leakage of petrol from a petrol station involving the parties Texaco and Van de Walle. [194873]

Mr. Morley: I have been asked to reply.

Judgments by the European Court of Justice are binding on member states and their "competent authorities". The Department is assessing the implications of the Court's judgment in Case C-1/03 for land affected by contamination and the remediation of such land. On conclusion of this assessment, I intend to publish a statement of the Department's views on the judgment's implications. I am not yet in a position to confirm when this will be but I recognise the need for our competent authorities and industry to be informed as soon as possible of our conclusions.

Energy Efficient Buildings (EU Directive)

Malcolm Bruce: To ask the Deputy Prime Minister what steps he will take to implement the EU Energy Performance in Buildings Directive requirement in relation to *(a)* combined heat and power and *(b)* district heating or cooling. [197348]

Phil Hope: The Office of the Deputy Prime Minister published on 21 July proposals for implementing these requirements as part of the revision of the Building Regulations energy efficiency provisions. The proposals can be inspected on the Office of the Deputy Prime Minister's web site, www.odpm.gov.uk. The consultation closed on 22 October and there has been a good response. This is now being considered by the Building Regulations Advisory Committee.

Fire Service

Mr. Mackay: To ask the Deputy Prime Minister what the *(a)* staff and *(b)* consultancy costs were of the

(i) Fire Service Effectiveness Division, (ii) Fire Service Improvement Team and (iii) Fire Safety Legislation and Pensions Division from January 2002 to date. [196078]

Mr. Raynsford: These divisions were formed in June 2003 following publication of the White Paper, "Our Fire and Rescue Service". Figures from that date are:

	£000
(a) Staff costs	
(i) Fire Service Effectiveness Division	1,903
(ii) Fire Service Improvement Team	2,088
(iii) Fire Safety Legislation and Pensions Division	1,316
(b) Consultancy costs	
(i) Fire Service Effectiveness Division	13,446
(ii) Fire Service Improvement Team	1,891
(iii) Fire Safety Legislation and Pensions Division	119

Key Workers (Housing)

Mr. Edward Davey: To ask the Deputy Prime Minister pursuant to his answer of 19 July 2004, *Official Report,* columns 10–11W, on key workers (housing), if he will make a statement on the progress of his discussions with employers and other Government departments about additional land contributions and access to accommodation. [196840]

Keith Hill: Over 750 dwellings of accommodation available for health staff have been made available to all key workers; further work is progressing with the Department of Health, the NHS Trusts and their RSL partners to increase the access of this type of short term rented accommodation for all key workers. Discussions are on-going with other Government Departments about contributing land.

Leukaemia

Ms Keeble: To ask the Deputy Prime Minister what assessment he has made of the implications for planning policy of the preliminary findings of the study by the Childhood Cancer Research Group at Oxford University into possible links between power lines and increased rates of childhood leukaemia. [197003]

Keith Hill: Following the publication of the National Radiological Protection Board's (NRPB) new Electromagnetic Field (EMF) guidelines in March 2004 and the associated advice to Government, the Government are committed to taking forward the issue of building near power lines in consultation with all the relevant stakeholders. The Office of the Deputy Prime Minister's officials are participating in this process.

The Office of the Deputy Prime Minister takes advice from the Department of Health, which considers the implications of medical research projects.

Local Elections (Spending Limits)

Mrs. Spelman: To ask the Deputy Prime Minister what the candidate spending limits will be for the 2005 local elections in England; and if he will make a statement. [197439]

Mr. Raynsford: The Government will shortly be inviting the Electoral Commission to make recommendations on what the limits should be for candidates' election expenses for parliamentary and local government elections. The Government will consider carefully any recommendation the Commission makes. The Government are presently consulting upon an inflation increase to such expenses limits for City of London ward elections and elections by liverymen in common hall.

Local Government Finance

Mr. Hogg: To ask the Deputy Prime Minister what steps he takes to reflect the cost of providing local authority services in rural areas of England in central government funding; and if he will make a statement. [197493]

Mr. Raynsford: The relative cost of providing local authority services for all appropriate authorities, including rural areas, is assessed using the individual Formula Spending Share (FSS) formulae. The formulae split the total amount of FSS for the service between authorities taking into account their various socio-economic factors. They are generally of the form of:

a basic amount for each client (for example, primary school pupils) that is the same for each authority;

a deprivation top-up that allows for the additional cost of providing services in deprived areas;

an area cost top-up that recognises that wages and business rates vary across the country; and

other top-ups that take into account a number of other cost pressures including rural sparsity, density and visitors and commuters.

Mr. Hogg: To ask the Deputy Prime Minister if he will use up to date population figures in the formula grant calculations made by his Department for the support of local authority services; and if he will make a statement. [197494]

Mr. Raynsford: Yes. The formula grant calculations are based on the latest available mid-year population estimates. For example, the 2005–06 Local Government Finance Settlement will be based on the mid-2003 population estimates released on 9 September 2004.

Mr. Hogg: To ask the Deputy Prime Minister if he will increase the area cost adjustment; and if he will make a statement. [197495]

Mr. Raynsford: The Office of the Deputy Prime Minister calculates the area cost adjustment (ACA) for 53 areas in England and Wales. The 25 areas with the lowest wage costs are protected by the lower limit, and receive an ACA of one. For the remaining 28 ACA areas, the size of the ACA in each area is determined using data on local wage and business premises costs. We do not intend to change the way the ACA is calculated during the current formula freeze.

The majority of the data the Office of the Deputy Prime Minister expects to use in calculating the 2005–06 provisional Formula Spending Shares for each authority is now available on the internet at: http://

www.local.odpm.gov.uk/finance/0506/grant.htm. This includes the 2005–6 ACA factors for each local authority.

Mr. Hogg: To ask the Deputy Prime Minister what the average per capita external grant support for all local authority services was in 2004–05 in *(a)* England, *(b)* inner London, *(c)* outer London and *(d)* Lincolnshire. [197497]

Mr. Raynsford: The following table shows the average per capita amount of revenue support grant (RSG) and redistributed business rates (NNDR) for all services for the areas requested.

Area	*All service RSG plus NNDR per head (£ per head)*
England	846.54
Inner London boroughs excluding the City of London	1,300.05
Outer London boroughs	971.78
Lincolnshire	742.54

Lincolnshire's all service amount per head has been calculated as the weighted average of the all service amount per head for each of its districts. These are tabled as follows:

Area	*All service RSG plus NNDR per head (£ per head)*
Boston	753.46
East Lindsey	755.64
Lincoln	765.42
North Kesteven	724.51
South Holland	746.13
South Kesteven	727.36
West Lindsey	730.74

The differences in the all service amount per head reflect differences in both the socio-economic characteristics of the area and the relative ability of councils to raise council tax.

Mr. Hogg: To ask the Deputy Prime Minister if he will change the rules which limit the gains local authorities may make in grant settlements as a result of formula changes; and if he will make a statement. [197499]

Mr. Raynsford: The distribution method for formula grant includes a formula that takes account of the relative socio-economic characteristics of local authority areas; an element that takes account of the relative ability of councils to raise council tax; and guaranteed minimum grant increases (the "floors"). Grant floors must be paid for within the total amount of grant that goes to authorities each year. In recent years, the cost of the floor has been recovered both from a "ceiling"—a maximum grant increase—and a scaling factor applied to grant increases between the floor and the ceiling. Decisions on the level of floors and how to fund them in 2005–06 have not yet been taken.

Mr. Hogg: To ask the Deputy Prime Minister what the per capita external grant support from his Department to *(a)* Lincolnshire county council, *(b)* Lincolnshire Police Authority, *(c)* Boston borough council, *(d)* East Lindsey district council, *(e)* City of Lincoln council, *(f)* North Kesteven district council, *(g)* South Holland district council, *(h)* South Kesteven district council and *(i)* West Lindsey district council was in 2004–05. [197496]

Mr. Raynsford: A table showing Revenue Support Grant (RSG), redistributed business rates (NNDR), the sum of RSG and NNDR, mid-2002 population estimates and the sum of RSG and NNDR per head, for the authorities requested, is tabled as follows.

Authority	*Revenue Support Grant (£ million)*	*Redistributed business rates (£ million)*	*RSG plus NNDR (£ million)*	*Mid-2002 population estimates (Number of people)*	*RSG plus NNDR per head (£ per head)*
Lincolnshire	241.838	172.220	414.058	657,843	629.42
Lincolnshire Police	13.725	8.959	22.685	657,843	34.48
Boston	3.533	1.544	5.077	56,686	89.56
East Lindsey	8.550	3.611	12.161	132,571	91.73
Lincoln	6.384	2.341	8.725	85,947	101.52
North Kesteven	3.232	2.638	5.870	96,852	60.61
South Holland	4.351	2.155	6.506	79,125	82.22
South Kesteven	4.546	3.418	7.965	125,501	63.46
West Lindsey	3.214	2.211	5.425	81,161	66.84

The mid-2002 population estimates given are those published on 27 January 2004. These were used in the calculation of the 2004–05 Revenue Support Grant and redistributed business rates. It should be noted that the Office for National Statistics published revised mid-2002 population estimates on 9 September 2004.

Regional Fire Control Rooms

Richard Younger-Ross: To ask the Deputy Prime Minister whether his Department sought advice from *(a)* the Strathclyde fire control centre and *(b)* the London fire control centre in developing its proposals for regional fire control rooms. [197358]

Mr. Raynsford: The Office of the Deputy Prime Minister looked at the experience of a range of control centres dealing with emergency calls in developing our proposals for regional fire control centres. These included Strathclyde and London as well as other fire and rescue services, the Maritime and Coastguard Agency, Highways Agency, and police services across the UK. The Office of the Deputy Prime Minister did not specifically seek advice from the Strathclyde fire control centre but the London fire control centre has provided advice and assistance to the FiReControl project, along with other fire and rescue services. The FiReControl project has several experienced fire control managers seconded from English fire and rescue services to provide advice as the project progresses.

Richard Younger-Ross: To ask the Deputy Prime Minister in what percentage of calls from *(a)* land line phones and *(b)* mobile phones the location of the call can be identified in fire control rooms. [197359]

Mr. Raynsford: In 2002–03, the most recent year for which data are available, fire control staff in England and Wales handled 1,797,193 emergency calls. It is not currently possible to disaggregate the data between mobile or landline calls, nor is any information available centrally on the proportion of calls where the location of the call can be identified in fire control rooms.

Mortgage Costs

Andrew George: To ask the Deputy Prime Minister what proportion of household income was spent on mortgages by first-time buyers in *(a)* rural and *(b)* urban areas in England and Wales in each of the past 10 years for which records are available. [196685]

Keith Hill: Estimates of initial mortgage repayments by first-time buyers as a percentage of the gross income on which their mortgage application was based are tabled as follows. Figures are provided for each of the English regions and for Wales. However it is not possible to provide a breakdown by urban and rural areas.

Percentage

	North East	*North West*	*Yorks and Humber*	*East Midlands*	*West Midlands*	*East*	*London*	*South East*	*South West*	*England*	*Wales*
1994	15.2	17.1	17.0	17.1	17.7	18.3	18.9	18.8	18.3	18.0	16.8
1995	16.4	18.1	17.9	17.9	18.3	19.2	20.4	19.8	19.6	19.0	17.6
1996	15.9	16.9	16.0	16.4	16.6	17.2	18.8	18.2	17.8	17.5	16.3
1997	15.6	17.3	16.8	16.6	17.5	17.9	19.8	18.9	18.5	18.2	16.6
1998	17.1	18.1	17.9	18.1	18.8	19.7	21.4	20.6	20.3	19.7	18.5
1999	15.4	16.7	16.9	16.6	17.2	18.3	20.3	19.5	18.7	18.4	16.7
2000	16.6	18.0	17.9	17.8	18.7	20.0	21.9	21.3	19.9	19.8	17.7
2001	16.6	17.2	16.9	17.7	18.3	19.2	21.1	19.7	19.7	19.1	17.3
2002	14.8	16.1	15.6	17.8	17.0	18.5	20.2	20.0	19.4	18.5	16.4
2003	16.1	17.4	16.7	18.8	18.5	21.3	22.6	22.1	20.5	20.5	17.1

Notes:

1. The mortgage interest rates used in the calculations are the general rates that applied at the time that the first-time buyers made their purchase. And, for those years when MIRAS existed, they reflect the net interest rates after MIRAS.

2. For consistency, it is assumed throughout that the type of mortgage was a "repayment" mortgage. In other words the repayments reflect both payments of both interest and part capital.

3. Data up to and including 2002 are based on a 5 per cent. sample of mortgage completions. The 2003 figures are based on a significantly larger sample.

Source:

Survey of Mortgage Lenders

Regional Government

Mr. Evans: To ask the Deputy Prime Minister if he will make a statement on the timetable for a referendum on regional government in the north-west; [197376]

Mr. George Osborne: To ask the Deputy Prime Minister whether he plans to proceed with referendums on regional government in the *(a)* North West and *(b)* Yorkshire and the Humber. [197377]

Mr. Raynsford: I refer the hon. Member to the statement given by my right hon. Friend the Deputy Prime Minister on 8 November 2004, *Official Report*, columns 587–606.

Social Rented Homes

Mr. Edward Davey: To ask the Deputy Prime Minister (1) what proportion of the 10,000 social rented homes to be provided annually by 2007–08 will be funded from *(a)* the additional £430 million in Approved Development Programme funding and *(b)* efficiency savings; [196836]

(2) if he will break down by Government office region the location of the 10,000 social rented homes to be provided annually by 2007–08. [196837]

Keith Hill: The Office of the Deputy Prime Minister will provide an additional 10,000 homes a year for social rent funded by direct investment through the Approved Development Programme, an expanded private finance initiative programme and efficiencies in procurement.

Decisions have not yet been taken on how regional housing pot funding, of which the Housing Corporation's Approved Development Programme is one element, for 2006–07 and 2007–08 (including the additional funding for affordable housing) is split between regions. This needs to reflect the different pattern of needs across regions and the Government's national housing priorities, including development of the growth areas, and targets. The Office of the Deputy Prime Minister aims to complete this work, which raises some complex issues, by the end of the year.

The Office of the Deputy Prime Minister will announce decisions on allocation of funding within regions next summer in the light of recommendations from Regional Housing Boards, which are due in May next year.

Even after the regional allocations are decided the location of the additional social housing rented units will not be known until after the respective bidding rounds. In many cases the homes will be provided through a combination of grant and efficiency savings.

Mr. Edward Davey: To ask the Deputy Prime Minister what plans he has to require social rented and shared ownership housing to be built on the same sites as his Department's proposed 60,000 homes for first time buyers. [196838]

Keith Hill: The Office of the Deputy Prime Minister remains strongly committed to the provision of mixed tenure communities and we will set out full details in the Office of the Deputy Prime Minister's Strategic Plan.

Mr. Edward Davey: To ask the Deputy Prime Minister whether he plans to limit access to his Department's proposed 60,000 homes for first time buyers to people in social rented housing or on housing waiting lists in that area. [196839]

Keith Hill: The Office of the Deputy Prime Minister is currently considering criteria for eligibility and will set out further details of the scheme in the Office of the Deputy Prime Minister's Strategic Plan.

South West Regional Assembly

Mrs. Browning: To ask the Deputy Prime Minister if he will take steps to abolish the South West Regional Assembly; and if he will make a statement. [197463]

Mr. Raynsford: No. The South West Regional Assembly is a voluntary body recognised by Government for certain purposes. The Government have no plans to alter that position.

Strategic Plan

Mr. Edward Davey: To ask the Deputy Prime Minister when he expects to publish his Department's Five-Year Strategic Plan. [196841]

Phil Hope: The Office of the Deputy Prime Minister intends to publish the Plan shortly.

Wilf Ward Trust

Miss McIntosh: To ask the Deputy Prime Minister (1) what funding has been provided to the Wilf Ward Family Trust through a Supporting People grant in 2003–04; [196753]

(2) what funding has been allocated to the Wilf Ward Family Trust through a Supporting People grant for 2005–06. [196754]

Keith Hill: The Office of the Deputy Prime Minister provides grants directly to Administering Authorities to enable them to procure housing related support services. The amount of funding provided to individual services is therefore a matter of local discretion.

CONSTITUTIONAL AFFAIRS

Commonwealth Citizens (Voting Rights)

Dame Marion Roe: To ask the Parliamentary Secretary, Department for Constitutional Affairs how many Commonwealth citizens voted *(a)* at the UK general election in 2001, *(b)* at the Birmingham, Hodge Hill by-election in 2004 and *(c)* at the Leicester, South by-election in 2004. [196397]

Mr. Leslie: No record is kept of the country of origin or nationality of voters participating in UK elections.

Dame Marion Roe: To ask the Parliamentary Secretary, Department for Constitutional Affairs under which legislation Commonwealth citizens are entitled to vote in *(a)* general elections and *(b)* European parliamentary elections in the UK; what the eligibility criteria are in each case; and whether all Commonwealth citizens are entitled to vote in referenda in the UK. [196447]

Mr. Leslie: Entitlement to vote in UK parliamentary elections is set out at section 1 of the Representation of the People Act 1983, and in European parliamentary elections at section 8 of the European Parliamentary Elections Act 2002. These statutory provisions provide for Commonwealth citizens to vote in UK and European parliamentary elections. Only those persons who are included on the electoral register are entitled to vote and eligibility to register is set out at section 4 of the Representation of the People Act 1983 (persons who are registered for UK parliamentary election are also eligible to vote in European parliamentary elections). Section 4 of the Act entitles 'qualifying' Commonwealth citizens to register to vote and they are defined as Commonwealth citizens who do not require leave under the Immigration Act 1971 to enter or remain in the United Kingdom, or such persons who for the time being have any description of such leave. The franchise for referendums is determined on an individual basis and is set out explicitly in the relevant dedicated enabling legislation.

Dame Marion Roe: To ask the Parliamentary Secretary, Department for Constitutional Affairs whether his Department is planning to review the entitlement of Commonwealth citizens to vote in UK elections for which his Department is responsible in countries in which British citizens are not entitled to vote in elections. [196877]

Mr. Leslie: My Department has no plans at present to carry out such a review.

Consultants

Mr. Maples: To ask the Parliamentary Secretary, Department for Constitutional Affairs if he will list the contracts awarded by his Department to consultants in each of the last five years, stating in each case *(a)* the name of the consulting company, *(b)* the value of the contract and *(c)* the purpose for which the contract was awarded; and if he will make a statement. [191727]

Mr. Lammy: Information on the value of individual consultancy contracts and the purposes for which they were awarded is not held centrally by my Department and could be provided only at disproportionate cost.

The Department does however collect details of expenditure with consultants on an annual basis. The Department's expenditure over the last five financial years is as follows:

	£ million
1999–2000	1.9
2000–01	2.6
2001–02	6.5
2002–03	5.7
2003–04	9.0

The Department uses consultants for the provision of expert professional advice and support on specific, time-limited tasks, usually in connection with projects, but sometimes in support of the ongoing operation of the Department. Services performed include customer and market surveys, risk assessments, provision of technical advice (e.g. IT Security, Health and Safety), undertaking specific studies and reviews and supporting the implementation of major projects and programmes.

The recent increase reflects the wide-ranging and fast-paced programme to modernise the Department's work, to increase efficiency, provide better customer service, and value for money for the taxpayer.

Delivering such a programme, in the most effective and efficient way, has necessitated the use of external expertise and skills to supplement the Department's own resources.

Departmental Staff

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Parliamentary Secretary, Department for Constitutional Affairs what percentage of the staff of the Department in *(a)* 2002 and *(b)* 2003 were people with disabilities. [196127]

Mr. Lammy: I refer the hon. Member to the answer given by my hon. Friend the Minister for the Cabinet Office on 9 November 2004, *Official Report*, column 619W.

District Judges' Salaries

Mr. Rosindell: To ask the Parliamentary Secretary, Department for Constitutional Affairs what the total expenditure was on district judges' salaries and expenses in each of the last 10 years. [192687]

Mr. Leslie *[pursuant to the reply, 20 October 2004, Official Report, c. 772W]:* The figures provided in my previous answer also included expenditure on other judicial office holders not paid from the consolidated fund. These include masters and registrars in the High Court, tribunal adjudicators and chairman. The following table sets out the net salary costs for county court district judges over the last six years, as well as the total expenditure by the Court Service departmentally paid judicial salaries including employers national insurance and superannuation contributions.

£

	DJ salaries exclusive of NI/superannuation	All judicial salaries of NI/superannuation
1998–99	27,566,445	46,626,845
1999–2000	29,858,574	53,747,583
2000–01	32,815,714	60,841,891
2001–02	34,389,992	66,009,217
2002–03	36,242,439	72,311,129
2003–04	38,949,490	88,286,003

Norman Baker: To ask the Parliamentary Secretary, Department for Constitutional Affairs pursuant to the answer to the hon. Member for Romford (Mr. Rosindell) of 20 October 2004, *Official Report*, column 772W, on district judges' salaries, what factors underlie the size of the annual increases from 1998–99 to 2003–04; and what the projected figure for 2004–05 is. [196827]

Mr. Leslie: I refer the hon. Member to the pursuant answer I gave today to the hon. Member for Romford (Mr. Rosindell).

The annual increases from 1998–99 to 2003–04 on district judges' salaries are largely due to the increase in the number of district judges (these have increased from 385 in 1998–99 to 436 in 2003–04), annual pay increases, as recommended by the SSRB and increases in superannuation and national insurance.

The projected district judge salaries figure for 2004–05 (net of national insurance and superannuation) is £40,208,534.

CABINET OFFICE

Buying British

Mr. Rosindell: To ask the Minister for the Cabinet Office what the Cabinet Office policy is on buying British goods. [195953]

Ruth Kelly: I refer the hon. Member to the answer given to the hon. Member for South, West Bedfordshire (Andrew Selous) by my predecessor my hon. Friend for Paisley, South (Mr. Alexander) on 20 April 2004, *Official Report*, column 154.

Civil Service

Annabelle Ewing: To ask the Minister for the Cabinet Office how many UK civil service jobs are located in Scotland, broken down by *(a)* constituency and *(b)* local authority area; and what percentage of the total number of civil service jobs those located in Scotland represent. [196954]

Ruth Kelly *[holding answer 9 November 2004]:* The number of civil service jobs is not available centrally at constituency level. The number of civil service jobs at local authority area is also not available centrally.

The number of jobs as at 1 April 2003, in Scotland is shown in Table D of Civil Service Statistics 2003, which is available on the internet at http://www.civilservice.gov.uk/management_information/statistical_information/statistics/index.asp. and in the Library. These figures are updated annually.

Commencement of Legislation

Brian White: To ask the Minister for the Cabinet Office what pieces of legislation passed in the last 30 years that the Department is responsible for remain to be brought into force, broken down by year of enactment. [195613]

Ruth Kelly: There is no legislation passed in the last 30 years for which the Cabinet Office is responsible which has yet to be brought into force.

Consultants

Pete Wishart: To ask the Minister for the Cabinet Office how much expenditure her Department has incurred in each year since 2002 on employing external consultants to deal with press and public relations; and if she will make a statement. [195443]

Ruth Kelly: The Department spent £13.39 million and £15.93 million on external consultancy in the financial years 2002–03 and 2003–04 respectively. External consultancy encompasses several areas including financial, information technology and communications.

Expenditure on press and public relations consultancy is also contained within the external consultancy figures and cannot be separately identified without incurring disproportionate cost.

Consultation

Mr. Rosindell: To ask the Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster if he will list the organisations and individuals outside his Department who are *(a)* sent information on and *(b)* consulted about individuals who may be proposed for appointment to posts for which he is responsible. [195952]

Mr. Milburn: Those consulted in relation to Duchy appointments depend upon whether the appointment is public or personal to Her Majesty the Queen; many of which are ceremonial.

Public appointments apply almost entirely to the Palatinate magistracy. Local advisory committees are set up for the recruitment and subsequent recommendation of suitable candidates for appointment as Justice of Peace.

Personal appointments by Her Majesty the Queen are not public appointments but, in each case, wide consultation is undertaken with the Duchy Officers as well as: the Lord Lieutenants of Lancashire, Merseyside and Manchester; Lancashire county council; the Prime Minister's Secretary of Appointments; local parish committees; and various local bodies and individuals with relevant experience of the post or who may know an identified candidate for the position.

Departmental Properties/Staff

Mr. Andrew Turner: To ask the Minister for the Cabinet Office if she will list the properties occupied by *(a)* the Cabinet Office and *(b)* its agencies in (i) 1997 and (ii) 2004, stating (A) for each and (B) in aggregate the area; and what the aggregate rental value was in each year. [195128]

Ruth Kelly *[holding answer 1 November 2004]*: Figures requested in respect of the Cabinet Office's estate are as follows:

	2004–05	
Building	*Size (m^2) (n/a)*	*Rental value as at April 2004 (£)*
Cabinet Office buildings		
70 Whitehall[1]	7,319	19,930,000
10–12 Downing Street[1]	3,388	16,700,000
36 Whitehall[1]	2,031	6,600,000
53 Parliament Street[1]	892	3,400,000
Centre for Management Policy Studies College (Sunningdale)	2,411	2,070,000
Centre for Management Policy Studies College (London)	1,896	n/a
GOGGS/1 Horse Guards Road	323	n/a
7 St. James's Square	1,202	388,000
Admiralty Arch[1]	7,383	23,500,000
22 Whitehall[1]	4,579	20,000,000
9 Whitehall	1,622	567,000
10 Great George Street	1,354	504,000
35 Great Smith Street	1,813	580,000
2 Little Smith Street	610	200,000
67 Tufton Street	2,087	674,000
Stockley House	2,937	1,087,000
St. Clements House (Norwich)	284	n/a
Grosvenor House (Basingstoke)	1,695	n/a
Emergency Planning College (Easingwold)[1]	10,230	n/a
Government News Network space (overall)		
Newcastle	200	n/a
Manchester	419	n/a
Leeds	447	n/a
Birmingham	357	n/a
Bristol	309	n/a
Notts	172	n/a
Cambridge	220	n/a
London	156	n/a
Guildford	165	n/a
Scotland	29	n/a
NDS	110	n/a
Centre for Management Policies Studies College (Edinburgh)	46	27,000
Hercules House (COI)	10,000	1,800,000
Total	66,687	98,709,000
Cabinet Office agencies buildings		
GCDA London	5,806	615,000
GCDA Cardiff	143	7,400
GCDA Birmingham	26	1,150
GCDA Bradford	98	6,843
Total	6,073	630,393

[1] Freehold properties. Remaining properties are either held as leasehold properties or via a Memorandum of Terms of Occupation (MOTO) with another department.

Notes:

1. Figures for 1997–98 and those marked 'n/a' can be obtained only at disproportionate cost.
2. Figures for the size of buildings exclude space occupied by another Government department.
3. Figures shown under the 'rental value' column are as at 1 April 2004. For leasehold properties or those occupied via a MOTO, the figures shown are the estimated open market rental values. For freehold properties the figures are the 'existing use value' figures, adjusted to reflect any space occupied by other departments.

Tim Loughton: To ask the Minister for the Cabinet Office how many people in the Office earn more than a whole-time equivalent salary of £57,485 per year. [195332]

Ruth Kelly: Information of the number of civil servants in departments and agencies (where known) whose whole-time equivalent salary exceeds £57,485 per annum has been placed in the Library. The information provided is at 1 April 2004.

London Project

Mr. Rosindell: To ask the Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster if he will make a statement on the London Project. [195974]

Mr. Milburn: The Strategy Unit's London Project published its final report in July 2004. The work is now being taken forward by a Cabinet Committee chaired by my right hon. Friend, the Minister of State at the Office of the Deputy Prime Minister (Keith Hill).

Press Releases

Pete Wishart: To ask the Minister for the Cabinet Office how many press releases have been issued by her Department in each month of 2004; and if she will make a statement. [195442]

Ruth Kelly: The Government News Network (GNN) issues press releases on behalf of all departments except the Prime Minister's Office, the Scotland Office, the Wales Office and the Northern Ireland Office. The information requested is shown in the following table.

Period: January-October 2004

Department	*Total Releases*
Attorney Generals Office	24
Cabinet Office	81
Department for Constitutional Affairs	302
Department for Constitutional Affairs (Judicial Appointments)	165
Department for Culture, Media and Sport	179
Department for Education and Skills	141
Department for International Development	20
Department for the Environment, Food and Rural Affairs	1065
Department for Transport	599
Department for Work and Pensions	255
Department of Health	396
Department of Trade and Industry	1492
Foreign and Commonwealth Office	597
HM Treasury	197
Home Office	458
Ministry of Defence	349
Office of The Deputy Prime Minister	854

Notes:

1. Departments not issuing through NDS—House of Commons, Northern Ireland Office, Privy Council Office, Scotland Office, Wales Office and Prime Minster's Office.
2. The above figures include both national and regional releases

Public Appointments

Mr. Rosindell: To ask the Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster what public appointments he has made since taking office. [195949]

Mr. Milburn: Since 13 September 2004 I have approved, as the Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster, the appointment of magistrates to the Benches within the Duchy area.

In making these appointments the Duchy follows the procedures laid down by the Department for Constitutional Affairs.

The Duchy Office has appointed members to its Advisory Committees on Justices of the Peace.

Furthermore, Advisory Committee Chairmen were appointed, selected from the existing Advisory Committee.

Sustainable Energy (CHP Provisions) Order

Mr. Stunell: To ask the Minister for the Cabinet Office what measures her Department *(a)* has undertaken and *(b)* plans to undertake to comply with the Sustainable Energy (CHP Provisions) Order 2003. [194425]

Ruth Kelly: Cabinet Office buildings in Whitehall make use of heating from CHP via the Whitehall District Energy Scheme, although this does not extend to CHP generated electricity.

We will aim to contribute to the CHP generated electricity commitments set out in the Framework for Sustainable Development on the Government Estate where there is likely to be no significant costs and/or further increase the percentage of electricity supplies currently being generated from renewable sources.

Working Mothers

Keith Vaz: To ask the Minister for the Cabinet Office (1) what estimate she has made of the number of women working for the Government who have children; [196011]

(2) how many women working for the Government are single parents. [196012]

Ruth Kelly: The information requested is not collected centrally.

FOREIGN AND COMMONWEALTH AFFAIRS

Ambassadors

Mr. Gordon Prentice: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs whether ambassadors are expected to learn the official language of the country of their posting; and if he will make a statement. [196867]

Mr. Alexander: Yes, all Heads of Mission posted to a country where English is not an official language are expected to learn the official language. They are given language training to enable them to do so.

Armenia/Azerbaijan

Mr. Simmonds: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what steps the Government have taken to encourage Armenia to withdraw from Azerbaijani territories in accordance with 1993 UN Security Council Resolutions 822, 853 and 874. [197089]

Mr. Rammell: The OSCE Minsk Group is the framework that leads on negotiation towards a settlement to the Nagorno Karabakh dispute. While the UK is not a member of the Minsk Group, we support its work and remain in close touch through the work of the UK Special Representative Sir Brian Fall. The UK will support any mechanism for the resolution of the Nagorno Karabakh dispute which both parties can accept and which has a realistic chance of delivering a lasting political settlement.

Mr. Simmonds: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will make a statement regarding the changes in the demographic make-up of the Nagorno Karabakh region of Azerbaijan. [197090]

Mr. Rammell: Since the fighting began in 1988 in Nagorno Karabakh, large numbers of Azerbaijanis and Armenians have been displaced throughout the region. There are strong humanitarian reasons for negotiating a settlement that improves the conditions of those displaced as a result of the conflict. We urge all parties to the dispute to seek a lasting political settlement through negotiation. We note that the Government of Azerbaijan has introduced for debate at United Nations General Assembly the subject of settlement in Nagorno Karabakh and the surrounding seven districts outside Azeri control.

Bangladesh

Mr. Hancock: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what representations he has made to the Government of Bangladesh on *(a)* the burning of the Ahmadiyya Mosque in Brahmanbaria and *(b)* harassment of the Ahmadiyya community in that country; and if he will make a statement. [197180]

Mr. Alexander: On 5 November, EU Heads of Mission in Dhaka visited the main Ahmadiyya mosque in Dhaka to demonstrate EU concern over the attack at Brahmanbaria. Officials in London and at our High Commission in Dhaka regularly raise the treatment of religious minorities, including the Ahmadiyyas, with the Bangladeshi authorities. We remain concerned about the Ahmadiyyas and continue to encourage the Bangladeshi authorities to ensure that they are suitably protected. We will continue to monitor the situation closely and make representations whenever appropriate.

Cayman Islands

Mrs. Brooke: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs whether there will be an independent review of the handling of the state of emergency in the Cayman Islands; and if he will make a statement. [197310]

Mr. Rammell: In the immediate aftermath of Hurricane Ivan striking the Cayman Islands, a state of emergency was declared, in accordance with the Cayman Island's constitution, on 11 September 2004 and revoked on 27 September. We see no need for an independent review as this was a prudent measure. There were reports of opportunistic looting following the Hurricane. The Government provided funding for police officers from neighbouring Overseas Territories to provide short-term support for the local police force. We also assisted with immediate needs for medical supplies, technical expertise and helping restore essential services. We continue to be engaged in the post-hurricane recovery effort.

Commonwealth

Dame Marion Roe: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs how many countries, excluding the UK, belong to the Commonwealth; if he will list them; and what the population is of each country. [197134]

Mr. Rammell: In addition to the United Kingdom, 52 sovereign nations are members of the Commonwealth. Full details, including population, are updated annually and published in "The Commonwealth Yearbook". A copy of the publication is held in the Library of the House.

Correspondence

Clare Short: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs when the right hon. Member for Birmingham, Ladywood will receive a substantive reply to her letter of 23 August on behalf of a constituent Mrs. Shamila Shaheen Sia concerning her husband, Mr. Raja Rashad Majeed Khan (reference: GV100/98911/NMJ). [197344]

Mr. Mullin: UKvisas replied to my right hon. Friend on 10 November.

Departmental Contracts

Pete Wishart: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will list the 30 largest contracts awarded by his Department from *(a)* May 2001 to April 2002, *(b)* May 2002 to April 2003, *(c)* May 2003 to April 2004 and *(d)* May 2004 to the latest date for which information is available, indicating in each case (i) the values of the contracts and (ii) the companies with which the contracts were placed. [196920]

Mr. Rammell: Because of the large quantity of information required to answer the question, the Foreign and Commonwealth Office has made it available in the Library of the House in spreadsheet format.

Some of the contracts awarded by the Foreign and Commonwealth Office involve security matters. I am therefore withholding this information under Exemption 1*(a)* of Part 2 of the Code of Practice on Access to Government Information, which covers information whose disclosure would harm national security.

Pete Wishart: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs (1) which non-accounting and non-information technology external organisations which previously held contracts with his Department *(a)* won new contracts at the culmination of the existing contracts and *(b)* won new contracts after a period of inactivity with his Department in each of the past four years; [196921]

(2) which non-accounting and non-information technology external organisations have won new contracts with *(a)* his Department and *(b)* executive agencies for which he is responsible in each of the past three years. [196922]

Mr. Rammell: This detailed information could be provided only at disproportionate cost.

Ivory Coast

Jeremy Corbyn: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what representations he has made to the Government of France concerning the military situation in Ivory Coast; and if he will make a statement. [197669]

Mr. Mullin: On 7 November my right hon. Friend the Foreign Secretary expressed his condolences to the French Foreign Minister for the deaths of nine French peacekeepers killed in an airstrike on 6 November. He confirmed our support for French actions to defend civilians in Abidjan, and thanked them for their support of the UN operation. He expressed our gratitude for French help in protecting British nationals in Abidjan.

Jeremy Corbyn: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what discussions *(a)* he and *(b)* his officials had with the Government of Ivory Coast concerning its security situation prior to the recent emergency meeting of the UN Security Council. [197670]

Mr. Mullin: Since the signing of the Linas Marcoussis Agreement in January 2003 we have maintained an intense dialogue with the Ivorian Government, and indeed major Ivorian parties, to urge all Ivorian signatories to fulfil their responsibilities and deliver sustainable peace.

Last weekend we expressed our deep concern to the Cote d'Ivoire Government at the security situation, calling for an end to the violence, and emphasising that the Government of Cote d'Ivoire is responsible for the safety of all British Nationals.

Jeremy Corbyn: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what discussions have been held with the Organisation of African Union concerning the situation in the Ivory Coast; and if he will make a statement. [197671]

Mr. Mullin: We discussed the situation in Cote d'Ivoire with President Obasanjo of Nigeria, the current Chair of the African Union (AU) on 7 November.

On 6 November, the AU and the Economic Community of West African States met to discuss the Ivorian political crisis. The AU has condemned the Ivorian airstrikes, and is working to develop a political solution to the crisis. We welcome this.

We strongly condemn the breach of the cease-fire and have called on the Government of Cote d'Ivoire to end all military action and to guarantee the safety of foreign nationals.

Nigeria/Cameroon

Mr. Simmonds: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what steps the Government are taking to encourage Nigeria to cede sovereignty of the Bakassi peninsula to Cameroon, as required under the October 2002 ruling by the International Court of Justice. [197130]

Mr. Mullin: We have made clear to both Nigeria and Cameroon our support for the International Court of Justice ruling. I refer the hon. Member to the reply I gave him on 13 October 2004, *Official Report*, column 299W.

We support the work of the UN Mixed Commission and look to Nigeria and Cameroon to negotiate the detail of implementation. We hope the decision at the last meeting in October to remit further discussion to the respective Heads of State, and the UN Secretary-General, will lead to a swift resolution.

Romania

John Robertson: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what recent discussions he has had with the Foreign Minister of Romania in connection with that country's application for EU membership. [197478]

Mr. MacShane: My right hon. Friend the Foreign Secretary and I regularly meet Romanian Foreign Minister Mircea Geoana in London, Brussels and Bucharest. I met him most recently during the visit of President Iliescu on 8 September 2004. We regularly discuss Romania's preparations for EU accession. Mr. Geoana often expresses his gratitude for the UK's continuing support and assistance.

Rwanda

Ms Oona King: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will assess the threat posed to the security of Rwanda by the presence of Ex-FAR/Interahamwe in the East of the Democratic Republic of Congo; and whether the level of threat has altered since 1994. [197433]

Mr. Mullin: The Ex-FAR/Interahamwe are a well armed force of several thousand. Since 1994, their strength and potency has diminished, but they continue to pose a threat to the security and stability of Rwanda's border regions and eastern Democratic Republic of Congo.

Southern Thailand

Mr. Simmonds: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what recent discussions have taken place between the Government and Thailand regarding instability in the provinces of Narathiwat, Pattani and Yala. [197132]

Mr. Alexander: We have expressed our concerns to the Thai Government at the loss of life during and after clashes between protestors and members of the Thai security forces on 25 October.

An independent committee is investigating the tragedy. We welcome this investigation and hope the committee can swiftly establish the facts to allow those responsible to be held fully accountable.

We remain in close contact with the Thai Government about the situation in the far south of Thailand.

Turkey

Mr. Ben Chapman: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will make a statement on Turkey's proposed accession to the EU accession. [197698]

Mr. MacShane: I refer my hon. Friend to the reply I gave to my hon. Friend the Member for Glasgow, Govan (Mr. Sarwar) on 18 October 2004, *Official Report*, column 473W.

HEALTH

A and E Staff

David Davis: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many staff were employed in the accident and emergency departments in Hull and East Yorkshire NHS Trust on 1 October *(a)* 2004 and *(b)* 2003, broken down by grade. [194973]

Miss Melanie Johnson: Figures for the number of staff employed in accident and emergency departments on 1 October 2004 have not yet been published. The figures for 2003 are shown in the table.

Hospital, public health medicine and community health services: medical staff within Hull and East Yorkshire National Health Service Trust with a specialty in accident and emergency medicine

As at 30 September 2003	*Number (headcount)*
Grand total	34
Of which	
Consultant	5
Non-consultant career grade	5
Registrar group	1
Senior house officer	22
House officer	0
Hospital practitioner/clinical assistant	1

Source:
Department of Health medical and dental workforce census

Breast Cancer

Shona McIsaac: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what the waiting times for breast cancer treatment were in each year since 1997 in North Lincolnshire and Goole NHS Trust; and if he will make a statement. [194187]

Miss Melanie Johnson: The information requested is shown in the following tables.

Waiting times from diagnosis to treatment of breast cancer: Northern Lincolnshire and Goole hospitals national health service trust

		Number of patients waiting				
	Quarter	*0 to 31 days*	*32 to 38 days*	*39 to 48 days*	*49 to 60 days*	*Over 60 days*
2001-02	4	38	0	0	0	0
2002-03	1	47	0	0	0	0
2002-03	2	51	6	1	2	0
2002-03	3	68	4	0	1	0
2002-03	4	44	7	0	0	0
2003-04	1	60	3	0	0	0
2003-04	2	61	1	0	0	0
2003-04	3	63	2	0	0	0
2003-04	4	47	1	0	0	0
2004-05	1	38	0	0	0	0

Note:
Data was collected from 2001.

Waiting times from urgent general practitioner referral with suspected breast cancer to treatment for breast cancer: Northern Lincolnshire and Goole hospitals NHS Trust

		Number of patients waiting	
	Quarter	*0 to 62 days*	*Over 63 days*
2003-04[1]	1	27	2
2003-04	2	33	3
2003-04	3	36	4
2003-04	4	22	4
2004-05	1	25	1

[1] Earliest data collected.
Source: Department of Health forms QMCW and CWTDB.

Cancelled Operations

David Davis: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many operations in Hull and the East Riding in *(a)* 2003 and *(b)* 2004 were cancelled for non-clinical reasons; and what proportion of admissions these figures represent in each case. [194978]

Miss Melanie Johnson: The information requested is shown in the table.

RWA—Hull and East Yorkshire Hospitals National Health Service Trust		*Number of last minute cancellations for non-clinical reasons in the quarter*	*Cancellations as a percentage of elective admissions*
2002-03	Quarter 4	249	1.6
2003-04	Quarter 1	199	1.3
	Quarter 2	241	1.5
	Quarter 3	205	1.3
	Quarter 4	222	1.3
2004-05	Quarter 1	217	1.4

Source:
Hospital activity team, QMCO.

Cancer

Jon Trickett: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what progress has been made since the publications by the National Audit Office of its report, "Tackling cancer in England: saving more lives", HC364, Session 2003–04, in improving *(a)* five year survival rates and *(b)* mortality rates. [197259]

Miss Melanie Johnson *[holding answer 9 November 2004]:* No new assessment has been made comparing progress to other countries as regards cancer survival and mortality since the National Audit Office report was published.

Capital Investment

Mr. Byrne: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will make a statement on the progress of capital investment in primary care facilities in Hodge Hill; and what future capital investments will be made in *(a)* 2005, *(b)* 2006 and *(c)* 2007. [197235]

Miss Melanie Johnson: There are four schemes for capital investment in primary care facilities in the Eastern Birmingham primary care trust area, which includes the Hodge Hill constituency. These have either been completed or there is a planned investment within the period 2003–04 to 2006–07. The schemes are as follows:

Pearl Medical Centre—completed in 2003–04 with an investment of £200,000.

Washwood Heath—refurbishment costs of £50,000 in 2004–05.

Saltley Medical Centre—an interim solution at a cost of £600,000 in 2004–05. A permanent solution through the local investment finance trust (LIFT) programme is planned, at a cost of £6.5 million, scheduled to commence in 2006.

Kitts Green Medical Centre—a LIFT scheme of £3.5 million is planned to start in 2007.

Care Assistants

Mrs. Anne Campbell: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what estimate he has made of the proportion of care assistants working in the UK who are from *(a)* the UK, *(b)* Eastern Europe and *(c)* the Philippines. [195842]

Dr. Ladyman: The information is not available centrally.

Data collected by the local government employers' organisation showed that, as at 30 September 2001, grossed estimated number of care workers working in residential, dual registered and nursing homes in the independent and voluntary sector was 285,300, and the number of domiciliary care workers was 111,600.

Data collected by the Department in respect to local authority headcount indicates 110,985 staff at 30 September 2003 employed as care staff in day centres, residential establishments and specialist needs establishments and in domiciliary care.

Workforce data collected by both the employers' organisation and the Department includes broad ethnic group broad ethnic groups, but nothing to identify those from Eastern Europe, the Philippines or even the United Kingdom.

Dementia

Sir Nicholas Winterton: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will ensure that guidance is issued on the uniform prescribing of anti-dementia drugs; and if he will make a statement. [196930]

Dr. Ladyman: The National Institute for Clinical Excellence (NICE) has produced guidance on the use of drugs for the treatment of Alzheimer's disease and will be producing new guidance on pharmaceutical treatments for non-Alzheimer dementias by May 2005.

NICE is also developing a comprehensive guideline on all aspects of the management of dementia in older people. This guideline is currently planned for release in February 2007. This will bring together and build on the drug appraisals referred to above.

Dental Care

Mr. Gordon Prentice: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many dental suites there will be in the Yarnspinners Wharf Medical Centre in Nelson; and if he will make a statement. [196461]

Ms Rosie Winterton: The dental action plan for the Burnley, Pendle and Rossendale Primary Care Trust indicates that there will be four dental suites within the Yarnspinners Wharf local investment finance trust development in Nelson. This forms part of the new health centre development that will replace the current Nelson Health Centre in 2004–05.

Eye Test Charges

Mr. Keith Bradley: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many residents in Manchester, Withington aged over 60 years have benefited from the abolition of charges for eye tests. [197878]

Miss Melanie Johnson: Data for the number of sight tests by constituency or by the number of senior citizens is not collected centrally.

The total number of national health service sight tests paid for by the Greater Manchester strategic health authority in 2002–03 for patients in the aged 60 and over category was 189,900. The total number eligible for a free sight test for those aged 60 and over was 493,100. Sight tests cannot be equated to the numbers of patients.

Fluoridation

Mr. Challen: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what the estimated costs are of the capital works which would be necessary to fluoridate domestic water supplies in the West Yorkshire strategic health authority area; and what the annual revenue costs are estimated to be. [191140]

Miss Melanie Johnson: The University of York health economic consortium conducted a study in 1998 in "Water Fluoridation—An Economic Perspective". Applying the figures in this study to a population the size of West Yorkshire strategic health authority, the initial capital cost would be around £3 million. Figures from the water industry suggest that recurring revenue costs would be approximately 80 pence per head of population. Research indicates that the fluoridation of water is capable of increasing the number of children without tooth decay by 15 per cent.

Free Fruit

Sandra Gidley: To ask the Secretary of State for Health when *(a)* Broughton, *(b)* Stockbridge, *(c)* Wallop, *(d)* Wherwell and *(e)* Barton Stacey schools will have access to the free fruit in school scheme. [196918]

Miss Melanie Johnson: Schools in Broughton, Stockbridge, Wallop, Wherwell and Barton Stacey that have joined the school fruit and vegetable scheme will have received their first delivery of fruit and/or vegetables on either 2 or 3 November. The first consumption date for children in those schools will have been either 3 or 4 November.

Roll out of the school fruit and vegetable scheme is currently being staggered to eligible schools in the four remaining regions, including the South East.

GP Services

Miss McIntosh: To ask the Secretary of State for Health (1) if he will make a statement on out-of-hours services for general practitioners in North Yorkshire; [197079]

(2) if he will make a statement on the extent of the use of locum doctors for out-of-hours general practitioner services in North Yorkshire. [197485]

Miss Melanie Johnson: The four primary care trusts have contracted with North Yorkshire Emergency Doctors for the provision of out-of-hours general practitioner-services. North and East Yorkshire and Northern Lincolnshire Strategic Health Authority estimates that around 20 per cent. of this service is currently provided by locum doctors.

Health and Social Care

Paul Holmes: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what support will be given to an individual to enable them to express their wishes when an assessment of individual capacity is carried out by health and social care professionals. [194807]

Dr. Ladyman *[holding answer 1 November 2004]:* The Mental Capacity Bill starts from the assumption that a person has capacity unless it is established that he or she lacks it. It includes an obligation in the principles set out in clause 1 to take "all practicable steps" to help the person make his or her own decision. This will include the provision of communication and other forms of support to make sure that the person is not too readily regarded as lacking capacity and enabling them to express their wishes.

The code of practice will provide detail about the types of communication support, which should be made available when health and social care professionals make an assessment of capacity. This includes taking time to be with someone to explain the decision in a way that the person can understand, the provision of electronic and other technical aids and language experts, where appropriate.

We have issued guidance to local authorities to explain the importance of involving independent advocates when appropriate in assessments of need and the Code of Practice emphasises this as well.

Health Protection Agency

Mr. Burstow: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what the administration costs were of the Health Protection Agency in the last year for which figures are available; and how many staff it employed. [196118]

Miss Melanie Johnson: The administration costs for the Health Protection Agency (HPA) for the year ended 31 March 2004 were £7.9 million. These costs were incurred for the key central activities of human resources, finance, audit and corporate affairs.

The HPA employed 2,518 whole-time equivalent (wte) staff during 2003–04. In addition, over the same time period, a further 200 wte staff were employed on agency, secondment or similar arrangements.

Hospital Infections

Mr. Lansley: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many patients in each *(a)* hospital and *(b)* trust in England have contracted methicillin resistant *Staphylococcus aureus* in the NHS since 1997. [193456]

Miss Melanie Johnson: Information by individual named trust is only available from 2001, when we introduced mandatory surveillance for methicillin resistant *Staphylococcus aureus* (MRSA) blood stream infections. The data is available on the Department's website at http://www.dh.gov.uk/assetRoot/04/08/58/93/04085893.pdf.

Copies have been placed in the Library.

Information by individual hospital is not available.

Leukaemia

Ms Keeble: To ask the Secretary of State for Health when he plans to publish the report on research by the Childhood Cancer Research Group at Oxford University into possible links between power lines and childhood leukaemia. [197002]

Miss Melanie Johnson: A report by the Childhood Cancer Research Group at Oxford University into possible links between power lines and childhood leukaemia is being submitted to the Department this week. At the same time, the report will be sent to a scientific journal for publication. In accordance with the usual practice, publication will follow the appropriate peer review process. This is expected to take a few weeks.

Mr. Andrew Mitchell: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will make a statement on research conducted by his Department on possible links between high voltage power lines and incidence of leukaemia in children under 15-years-old. [197551]

Miss Melanie Johnson: I refer the hon. Member to the reply I gave to my hon. Friend, the Member for Northampton North (Ms Keeble) today.

Nappies

Mr. Curry: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what assessment he has made of the environmental *(a)* benefits and *(b)* disbenefit of the use of (i) disposable and (ii) re-usable nappies in NHS hospitals. [196968]

Dr. Ladyman *[holding answer 8 November 2004]:* Issues relating to the environmental impact of the use of disposable or re-usable nappies are a matter for the Department for Environment and Rural Affairs.

The use of disposable or re-usable nappies in the national health service is a matter for individual maternity units and trusts to determine locally.

Mr. Curry: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what guidance he has issued to NHS Trusts on the use of disposable nappies in maternity units. [196969]

Dr. Ladyman *[holding answer 8 November 2004]:* The use of disposable or re-usable nappies in the national health service is a matter for individual maternity units and trusts to determine locally.

Neck Surgery

Mr. Paterson: To ask the Secretary of State for Health whether patients awaiting neck surgery will be affected by the investigation by the NHS Counter Fraud Service into the Shrewsbury and Telford NHS Trust as a result of the appointment of the head of neck surgery as the acting chief executive. [195305]

Miss Melanie Johnson: Shropshire and Staffordshire Strategic Health Authority reports that patients waiting for head and neck surgery or consultation at the Shrewsbury and Telford Hospital National Health Service Trust will not be affected by the appointment of Mr. Andrew Prichard as acting chief executive.

NHS Bureaucracy

Mr. Burstow: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many forms that are included in central returns of information and statistics to *(a)* his Department and *(b)* his Department's arm's length bodies are required from NHS organisations in each year. [193410]

Miss Melanie Johnson: Information on the number of forms included in central returns is not available centrally for the Department or its arm's length bodies. The overall number of central returns and changes to the burden these impose on the national health service is strictly controlled.

At the end of 2003–04 there were 127 ongoing central returns, and this number will be reduced by at least 20 per cent., by the end of 2004–05.

NHS Dentists

Mr. Cameron: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many NHS dentists operate in West Oxfordshire; and how many were operating in West Oxfordshire in *(a)* 1997 and *(b)* 2001. [195432]

Ms Rosie Winterton: The numbers of general (GDS) and personal dental service (PDS) dentists in the South West Oxfordshire Primary Care Trust (PCT) area at 30 September 1997, 2001 and 2004 are shown in the table.

Number of GDS and PDS dentists at September each year

	South West Oxfordshire Primary Care Trust
1997	69
2001	92
2004	95

Source:
Dental Practice Board

Dentists have been included in the South West Oxfordshire PCT area on the basis of their practice postcodes.

North Cheshire Hospitals Trust

Helen Southworth: To ask the Secretary of State for Health pursuant to the answers of 26 October 2004, *Official Report*, column 1202W, to questions 193629, 193630 and 193631, on the North Cheshire hospitals trust, if he will provide the information for the last 12 months for which figures are available. [196378]

Miss Melanie Johnson: The Information for 2003–04 is not yet available. However, the latest available data for the numbers of people who have received treatment for diabetes, coronary heart disease and stroke is shown in the following table.

Primary diagnosis—selected groups of diagnoses—counts of finished admission episodes for North Cheshire hospital trust (organisation code RWW). NHS hospitals, England 2002–03

Primary diagnosis	*Finished admission episodes*
Type I diabetes	241
Type II diabetes	329
Coronary heart disease	1,148
Stroke	424

Notes:
1. A finished admission episode is the first period of in-patient care under one consultant within one healthcare provider. Please note that admissions do not represent the number of in-patients, as a person may have more than one admission within the year.
2. The primary diagnosis is the first of up to 14 (seven prior to 2002–03) diagnosis fields in the hospital episode statistics (HES) data set and provides the main reason why the patient was in hospital.
3. Definition of selected group of diagnoses:
Type I diabetes: 3 character primary diagnosis code = E10 or 4 character primary diagnosis code = 0240.
Type II diabetes: 3 character primary diagnosis code = E11 or 4 character primary diagnosis code = 0241.
Coronary heart disease: 3 character primary diagnosis code between 120 to 125.
Stroke: 3 character primary diagnosis code between 160 to 164
4. Figures have not (yet) been adjusted for shortfalls in data (i.e. the data are ungrossed).
Source:
HES, Department of Health.

Helen Southworth: To ask the Secretary of State for Health pursuant to the answers of 26 October 2004, *Official Report*, column 1202W, to questions 193632 and 193645, on NHS services in Warrington and North Cheshire, if he will *(a)* obtain the information and *(b)* publish it. [196380]

Miss Melanie Johnson: The information requested on the number of people suffering from chronic pain is not available. It is not possible to determine which patients are suffering from this condition using diagnosis codes.

The number of people receiving support from a national health service dietician in Warrington is not held by the Department and can be obtained from the Warrington primary care trust.

Nurses' Pay

Shona McIsaac: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what the average full-time equivalent gross pay of nurses in North Lincolnshire and Goole NHS Trust was in each year since 1997 *(a)* across all grades and *(b)* at each grade. [194185]

Miss Melanie Johnson: The information requested is not collected centrally.

Pylons

Miss McIntosh: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if his Department will publish the report on the health effects of electricity pylons. [196748]

Miss Melanie Johnson: I refer the hon. Member to the reply I gave to my hon. Friend the Member for Northampton, North (Ms Keeble) today.

Miss McIntosh: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what discussions he has had with the Prime Minister on the health effects of electricity pylons. [196749]

Miss Melanie Johnson: None.

Miss McIntosh: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what recent research he has evaluated on the health effects of electricity pylons. [196750]

Miss Melanie Johnson: At the request of the Department, the National Radiological Protection Board (NRPB) has recently undertaken a comprehensive research evaluation of the health effects of electromagnetic fields (EMF) to support its most recent advice on limiting EMF exposure. This advice was published in March 2004 in the series, "Documents of the NRPB" (Volume 15, No. 2, 2004). NRPB information on extremely low frequency fields (ELF) such as those from power lines was principally drawn from a report on "ELF Electromagnetic Fields and the Risk of Cancer" (2001) by the NRPB's independent advisory group on non-ionising radiation.

In providing advice on EMF, the NRPB continually monitors world-wide research and works closely with the International Commission on Non-Ionizing Radiation Protection and the World Health Organization

Renal Dialysis

Helen Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many patients from Warrington are travelling outside the local area for renal dialysis. [197641]

Miss Melanie Johnson: The information requested is not held centrally.

Sexual Health

Tim Loughton: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will make a statement on the report by the Independent Advisory Group for Sexual Health and HIV on training general practitioners to perform medical and surgical terminations. [197981]

Miss Melanie Johnson: The Department is considering all of the recommendations contained in the annual report for 2003–04 of the Independent Advisory Group for Sexual Health and HIV and will be publishing a response in due course.

Shrewsbury and Telford NHS Trust

Mr. Paterson: To ask the Secretary of State for Health (1) which hospitals will be affected by the NHS Counter-Fraud Service inquiry into the Shrewsbury and Telford NHS Trust; [195306]

(2) if he will ensure that any financial shortfall discovered by the NHS Counter Fraud Service inquiry into the Shrewsbury and Telford NHS Trust arising from financial misconduct or other irregularities will be made good from public funds; [195307]

(3) whether the findings of the inquiry by the NHS Counter Fraud Service into the Shrewsbury and Telford NHS Trust will be made public; [195308]

(4) when the inquiry by the NHS Counter Fraud Service into the Shrewsbury and Telford NHS Trust will report. [195309]

Miss Melanie Johnson: Shrewsbury and Telford hospital national health service trust covers the Royal Shrewsbury hospital, Shrewsbury and the Princess Royal hospital, Telford. Both hospitals will be involved in the investigation which is in the hands of the NHS Counter Fraud Service. Any further action will depend on the outcome of the investigation. When the investigation is concluded, and subject to legal advice, it is the trust's intention to make the findings public.

Smallpox Vaccine

Patrick Mercer: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many full, undiluted, tons of the smallpox vaccine his Department holds. [196304]

Miss Melanie Johnson: Quantities of smallpox vaccine are given in doses rather than tonnage. The United Kingdom Government currently has over 40 million doses of undiluted smallpox vaccine. The National Institute for Biological Standards and Control has tested the potency and stability of the vaccine, supplied from several sources, and has certified it as being suitable for use in the event of a smallpox emergency.

Transport

Miss McIntosh: To ask the Secretary of State for Health (1) what funding has been allocated to the provision of transport to health care facilities in North Yorkshire in *(a)* 2004–05 and *(b)* 2005–06; [197307]

(2) what plans he has to secure funding additional to that already allocated for improvements to transport links to health care facilities in North Yorkshire. [197308]

Miss Melanie Johnson: Funding for the provision of transport to health care facilities is included in the baseline allocation to primary care trusts (PCTs). In the financial year 2004–05, the four PCTs that cover North Yorkshire received baseline allocations totalling £668.6 million.

Waiting Lists/Times

Mr. Skinner: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what the change in waiting lists for hospitals covering the constituency of Bolsover has been since 1997. [197093]

Dr. Ladyman: Information relating to those national health service trusts most likely to cover the Bolsover constituency is shown in the following table.

Patients waiting for elective in-patient admission: position at month-end (March)

Trust	*1997*	*1998*	*1999*	*2000*	*2001*	*2002*	*2003*	*2004*	*2004*[1]
Nottingham City Hospital	6,081	5,937	4,804	4,596	4,481	5,517	5,252	4,208	4,005
Queens Medical Centre	12,779	11,892	10,313	9,728	8,674	9,327	9,149	6,327	5,775
Chesterfield and North Derbyshire Royal Hospital	7,715	8,311	7,163	5,972	5,274	4,852	4,686	3,530	3,679
King's Mill Centre for Health Care Services	5,111	5,991	5,013	4,792	4,749	5,374	4,962	5,196	4,978
Southern Derbyshire Acute	—	—	11,319	10,565	10,461	10,428	9,636	7,742	7,045

[1] As at August 2004

Source: Department of Health form KH07 and monthly monitoring.

Peter Bottomley: To ask the Secretary of State for Health (1) how many in-patients in the primary care trust covering the Sedgefield constituency had to wait more than *(a)* three, *(b)* six, *(c)* nine and *(d)* 12 months for treatment in each year since 1997; and what the percentage change was in each case; [195101]

(2) what changes there have been to NHS waiting list times for residents of the Sedgefield constituency in the past seven years. [195102]

Miss Melanie Johnson: Information is not gathered on a constituency basis. The table shows the requested information for the Sedgefield Primary Care Trust and its predecessor body.

Patients waiting for elective in-patient admission: position at month-end

			Patients waiting over:			
Month end	*Health authority (HA) or primary care trust (PCT)*	*Total patients waiting*	*3 months*	*6 months*	*9 months*	*12 months*
March 1997	County Durham and Darlington HA	12,501	5,625	2,443	733	0
March 1998	County Durham and Darlington HA	12,925	6,019	2,748	872	26
March 1999	County Durham and Darlington HA	11,474	4,979	2,226	704	10
March 2000	County Durham and Darlington HA	11,656	5,219	2,292	719	48
March 2001	County Durham and Darlington HA	11,083	4,432	1,852	551	23
March 2002	County Durham and Darlington HA	12,049	5,632	2,580	832	1
March 2003	Sedgefield PCT	1,386	579	209	54	0
March 2004	Sedgefield PCT	1,287	431	103	0	0
August 2004	Sedgefield PCT	1,245	426	126	0	0

Percentage change on previous period

		Patients waiting over:			
Month end	*Health authority (HA) or primary care trust (PCT)*	*3 months*	*6 months*	*9 months*	*12 months*
March 1997	County Durham and Darlington HA	—	—	—	—
March 1998	County Durham and Darlington HA	7.0	12.5	19.0	—
March 1999	County Durham and Darlington HA	-17.3	-19.0	-19.3	-61.5
March 2000	County Durham and Darlington HA	4.8	3.0	2.1	380.0
March 2001	County Durham and Darlington HA	-15.1	-19.2	-23.4	-52.1
March 2002	County Durham and Darlington HA	27.1	39.3	51.0	-95.7
March 2003	Sedgefield PCT	—	—	—	—
March 2004	Sedgefield PCT	-25.6%	-50.7	-100.0	—
August 2004	Sedgefield PCT	-1.2%	22.3	—	—

Source:
Department of Health form QF01 and monthly monitoring.

HOME DEPARTMENT

Airport Police

Dr. Fox: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what the cost of policing independently owned airports in the UK was in the last year for which figures are available; and what contribution to this cost was made by airport owners. [191317]

Ms Blears *[holding answer 15 October 2004]:* The majority of airports in the UK are independently owned. Some groups own a number of airports, such as BAA (which owns Heathrow, Gatwick, Stansted, Glasgow, Edinburgh, Aberdeen and Southampton) and Manchester Airports Group plc (which owns Manchester, Nottingham, East Midlands, Bournemouth and Humberside.) Only a few airports are owned by the local authority, such as City of Derry airport.

The policing of airports is a matter for the Chief Constable of each force who is advised by the National Co-ordinator of Ports Policing. Uniform policing arrangements are made on a territorial basis as the circumstances of each airport dictate.

Funding has been made available to the police service in England and Wales to enable them to respond to the current threat from international terrorism and which includes funding for policing at non-designated airports. For security reasons we would not wish to comment on the level of funding allocated to individual police forces for specific reasons.

Under the Aviation Security Act 1982, for those airports which are "designated", the airport and the police agree between them the relevant contribution to the costs of policing. Sir John Wheeler's report on Aviation Security recommended a review of the arrangements by which airports are "designated" for uniform policing purposes. A working group has been established and is taking this forward.

Antisocial Behaviour

Mr. Best: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what discussions he has had with the alcohol industry on financial contributions the industry may make towards the costs of policing alcohol-related antisocial behaviour. [196848]

Ms Blears: We are working with the industry to draw up a social responsibility scheme and a code of practice. The scheme will be voluntary, but will include a financial contribution from retailers, where necessary, towards managing the local crime and disorder consequences of alcohol misuse.

Brian Cotter: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many antisocial behaviour orders have been issued in North Somerset since their introduction. [196694]

Ms Blears: Antisocial behaviour orders (ASBOs) have been available to the courts since 1 April 1999. The number of notifications received by the Home office of ASBOs issued, up to 30 June 2004 (latest available), where the restrictions imposed are specific to North Somerset council, is four.

Asylum Seekers

Mr. Rosindell: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what plans he has to visit other countries to assess their immigration and asylum procedures. [191272]

Mr. Browne: Formal discussion of immigration and asylum procedures takes place in a number of fora at both EU and international level. Myself and other Ministers also undertake bilateral visits to meet our counterparts in other countries, which provides opportunities to assess their immigration and asylum procedures.

For example, along with other Ministers, I will be visiting other EU member states in the run up to the UK presidency, primarily in order to promote the justice and home affairs agenda. This will be combined with my usual ministerial duties and will give me an opportunity to assess the immigration and asylum procedures in the states which I visit. As part of this programme I have recently visited Hungary and the Czech Republic.

The UK also maintains strong co-operation with the Governments of our key cross-channel partners on immigration and asylum issues. The Home Secretary leads on these contacts and meets with his counterparts when possible. He will be meeting with his French counterpart in mid-November.

In terms of visits further afield, at the end of October I visited China and Vietnam as part of the UK's continuing engagement with the Chinese and Vietnamese Governments on asylum and immigration issues. China remains the source of a significant number of asylum applications and illegal entrants. During my visit I discussed with Chinese Ministers and senior officials how the number of unfounded applications can be reduced and how the UK and China can work together to dismantle the criminal gangs responsible for facilitating illegal entry to the UK. We also considered how we can improve the system for returning those who have no leave to remain in the UK. Asylum applications from Vietnam have shown year-on-year increases from 2001 to 2003, and we are working closely with the Vietnamese Government to address this. My trip included a day in Vietnam where I was able to discuss this further with Ministers and officials. While in Hanoi, I also signed a Memorandum of Understanding between the UK and Vietnam on migration issues which will facilitate the return to Vietnam of Vietnamese citizens residing illegally in the UK and also sets out a framework for future co-operation on migration.

Mr. Rosindell: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what the principal countries of origin were of *(a)* legal and *(b)* illegal immigrants to the UK in each of the last 25 years. [191273]

Mr. Browne: Statistics on the number of persons granted indefinite leave to remain (settlement) in the UK are shown in the table.

Prior to 1991 data is shown in five-year intervals, as it would incur disproportionate cost to produce the requested information from manual records.

There is no information available on the country of origin of illegal migrants. Illegal migrants are motivated to remain hidden, so by definition they fall outside official statistics and therefore it is difficult to obtain information about them.

In the light of this, information on those illegal migrants who are detected by the Immigration Service would not necessarily reflect the principal countries of origin.

Grants of settlement by nationality, including EEA nations, 1976, 1981, 1986, 1991–2002

Geographical region and nationality	*1976*	*1981*	*1986*	*1991*	*1992*	*1993*	*1994*	*1995*
All nationalities								
Europe[4]								
Austria	140	110	80	120	110	90	50	10
Belgium	n/a	70	110	50	30	10	20	10
Denmark	n/a	150	140	100	70	50	30	10
Finland	140	120	110	130	130	140	50	10
France	n/a	440	490	250	180	100	60	30
Germany	10	520	550	280	180	100	50	40
Greece	430	220	230	40	40	40	20	10
Iceland	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	20	20	10	[2]—
Ireland	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	—	—	—	—
Italy	n/a	660	400	170	120	90	50	20
Luxembourg	n/a	[1]—	[1]—	—	—	—	[2]—	—
Netherlands	n/a	250	410	170	100	80	40	20
Norway	200	190	170	220	210	220	80	10
Portugal	1,170	640	210	150	100	40	30	20
Spain	1,970	590	360	210	110	10	[2]—	[2]—
Sweden	280	260	350	520	360	430	120	20
Total EC	1,630	[3]—	[3]—	[3]—	[3]—	[3]—	[3]—	[3]—
Europe[5]	5,970	4,220	3,610	2,410	1,750	1,430	620	220
Remainder of Europe								
Bulgaria	n/a	10	20	60	90	80	100	150
Cyprus	1,510	580	370	320	250	220	190	220

Grants of settlement by nationality, including EEA nations, 1976, 1981, 1986, 1991–2002

Geographical region and nationality	*1976*	*1981*	*1986*	*1991*	*1992*	*1993*	*1994*	*1995*
Former Czechoslovakia	30	20	20	60	50	70	100	190
Of which:								
Czech Republic	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a
Slovakia	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a
Hungary	50	40	40	90	100	110	100	130
Malta	140	190	160	80	90	70	60	80
Poland	660	620	250	700	610	560	490	580
Romania	30	10	20	60	70	100	120	190
Switzerland	250	170	160	180	180	160	140	150
Turkey	510	570	420	1,050	800	1,420	1,840	1,170
Former USSR	40	40	40	140	270	340	400	610
Of which:								
Estonia	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a
Latvia	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a
Lithuania	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a
Russia	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a
Ukraine	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a
Other former USSR	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a
Former Yugoslavia	260	120	130	390	380	470	460	550
Of which:								
Croatia	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a
Slovenia	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a
Serbia and Montenegro	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a
Other former Yugoslavia	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a
Other Europe	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	10	20
Remainder of Europe	3,480	2,370	1,630	3,130	2,890	3,600	4,010	4,030
Europe	9,450	6,580	5,240	5,530	4,650	5,020	4,620	4,250
Americas								
Argentina	80	90	50	50	70	40	80	60
Barbados	230	80	40	60	60	80	70	70
Brazil	80	120	160	260	320	340	300	330
Canada	1,000	880	1,220	680	790	760	810	940
Chile	60	250	40	60	70	80	50	40
Colombia	130	310	140	270	230	320	270	280
Cuba	10	—	—	[1]—	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a
Guyana	380	220	140	190	180	170	210	190
Jamaica	1,100	440	490	1,310	1,250	1,270	1,280	1,400
Mexico	80	60	60	90	90	90	60	90
Peru	40	40	50	100	70	100	100	100
Trinidad and Tobago	590	150	160	210	230	270	380	360
USA	3,500	3,510	3,790	3,910	3,850	4,060	3,990	3,960
Uruguay	n/a	10	[1]—	10	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a
Venezuela	40	70	40	30	40	50	40	40
West Indies Associated States	400	90	[3]—	[3]—	[3]—	[3]—	[3]—	[3]—
Other Americas	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	270	310
Americas	7,720	6,330	6,380	7,220	7,250	7,640	7,890	8,180
Africa								
Algeria	80	120	60	240	240	330	400	440
Angola	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	10	30	30	40
Congo (Dem. Rep.)[6]	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	10	90	70	120
Egypt	500	400	260	380	340	300	300	270
Ethiopia	n/a	30	50	70	130	540	310	170
Ghana	690	340	520	1,480	1,340	1,350	1,620	1,820
Kenya	1,540	430	350	480	450	470	550	530
Libya	n/a	100	130	100	120	100	120	70
Mauritius	1,360	510	270	310	290	280	340	390
Morocco	240	200	140	790	770	700	510	430
Nigeria	770	250	570	2,870	2,550	2,750	3,090	3,260
Sierra Leone	140	50	90	290	270	290	420	440
Somalia	n/a	40	70	510	690	1,530	1,380	760
South Africa	1,200	850	780	1,050	890	1,100	1,260	1,300
Sudan	n/a	60	50	100	160	190	140	150
Tanzania	1,030	280	250	260	200	210	200	250
Tunisia	50	50	50	120	70	80	100	80
Uganda	170	40	90	110	120	220	230	440
Zambia	600	80	120	170	120	150	150	190
Zimbabwe	240	220	280	240	220	200	270	330

Grants of settlement by nationality, including EEA nations, 1976, 1981, 1986, 1991–2002

Geographical region and nationality	*1976*	*1981*	*1986*	*1991*	*1992*	*1993*	*1994*	*1995*
Other Africa	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	380	490
Africa	8,610	4,060	4,130	9,580	9,000	10,900	11,880	12,000
Asia								
Indian sub-continent								
Bangladesh	3,980	5,810	4,760	2,780	2,520	2,550	3,050	3,280
India	11,020	6,590	4,210	5,680	5,500	4,890	4,780	4,860
Pakistan	11,700	8,970	5,580	5,820	7,060	6,650	6,240	6,310
Indian sub-continent	26,700	21,370	14,550	14,290	15,070	14,090	14,070	14,450
Middle East								
Iran	490	1,380	1,770	1,170	1,060	1,070	990	1,120
Iraq	280	330	460	580	540	610	570	540
Israel	330	330	340	430	380	330	250	290
Jordan	n/a	120	140	180	160	130	160	150
Kuwait	n/a	n/a	10	40	20	20	10	30
Lebanon	n/a	270	190	330	240	300	280	400
Saudi Arabia	n/a	20	40	40	40	30	60	40
Syria	n/a	90	80	120	120	100	70	100
Yemen	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	140	210	190	160
Other Middle East	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	40	60
Middle East	1,100	2,560	3,030	2,900	2,710	2,800	2,620	2,880
Remainder of Asia								
China	40	160	100	390	440	640	960	1,130
Hong Kong	1,930	1,450	880	1,890	1,590	1,520	1,490	1,310
Indonesia	40	50	60	80	60	90	100	100
Japan	470	900	1,060	1,970	1,970	1,810	2,060	1,870
Malaysia	2,080	660	580	690	630	650	640	660
Philippines	1,310	1,760	990	1,190	1,130	1,200	920	1,090
Singapore	260	120	110	190	150	180	140	170
South Korea	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	170	240	280	260
Sri Lanka	700	790	840	660	1,000	1,940	1,860	1,370
Taiwan	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	[2]—	20	40
Thailand	n/a	220	410	660	650	650	540	520
Other Asia	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	220	270
Remainder of Asia[7]	6,830	6,120	5,030	7,720	7,790	8,920	9,210	8,790
Asia	34,630	30,050	22,610	24,920	25,570	25,830	25,900	26,120
Oceania								
Australia	3,390	2,440	2,870	1,450	1,480	1,680	1,740	2,020
New Zealand	1,580	2,060	2,510	990	840	970	1,080	1,390
Other Oceania	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	40	40
Oceania	4,970	4,500	5,380	2,440	2,340	2,650	2,850	6,450
UK Passport holders	11,660	[3]—	[3]—	[3]—	[3]—	[3]—	[3]—	[3]—
All other territories	820	[3]—	[3]—	[3]—	[3]—	[3]—	[3]—	[3]—
British Overseas citizens	n/a	2,780	1,680	1,350	1,190	820	710	690
Stateless[8]	1,600	3,890	1,550	1,430	1,490	1,570	1,170	780
Other nationalities	[3]—	[3]—	[3]—	[3]—	[3]—	[3]—	[3]—	[3]—
Other countries not elsewhere specified	1,310	870	750	1,440	1,090	1,210	[3]—	[3]—
All nationalities	80,740	59,060	47,820	53,900	52,570	55,640	55,010	55,480

Geographical region and nationality	*1996*	*1997*	*1998*	*1999*	*2000*	*2001*	*2002*	*[9,10]2003*
All nationalities								
Europe[4]								
Austria	[2]—	[1]—	—	n/a	n/a	n/a	25	n/a
Belgium	[2]—	[1]—	[1]—	n/a	n/a	n/a	35	n/a
Denmark	10	5	10	n/a	n/a	n/a	40	n/a
Finland	[2]—	[1]—	5	n/a	n/a	n/a	10	n/a
France	30	10	25	n/a	n/a	n/a	335	n/a
Germany	10	10	25	n/a	n/a	n/a	265	n/a
Greece	10	5	15	n/a	n/a	n/a	170	n/a
Iceland	[2]—	[1]—	—	n/a	n/a	n/a	[1]—	n/a
Ireland	—	—	—	n/a	n/a	n/a	105	n/a
Italy	20	10	25	n/a	n/a	n/a	305	n/a
Luxembourg	—	—	—	n/a	n/a	n/a	[1]—	n/a
Netherlands	10	15	25	n/a	n/a	n/a	125	n/a
Norway	10	5	[1]—	n/a	n/a	n/a	40	n/a
Portugal	20	25	115	n/a	n/a	n/a	565	n/a
Spain	[2]—	10	15	n/a	n/a	n/a	175	n/a

Geographical region and nationality	*1996*	*1997*	*1998*	*1999*	*2000*	*2001*	*2002*	*[9, 10]2003*
Sweden	10	10	[1]—	n/a	n/a	n/a	90	n/a
Total EC	[3]—	[3]—	[3]—	[3]—	[3]—	[3]—	[3]—	[3]—
Europe[5]	120	105	270	n/a	n/a	n/a	2,285	n/a
Remainder of Europe								
Bulgaria	200	165	185	275	295	310	365	n/a
Cyprus	240	240	275	425	515	260	270	n/a
Former Czechoslovakia	290	285	405	505	760	920	875	n/a
Of which								
Czech Republic	n/a	n/a	245	270	415	490	495	n/a
Slovakia	n/a	n/a	160	230	345	430	380	n/a
Hungary	200	175	185	190	250	215	270	n/a
Malta	80	55	70	60	75	95	80	n/a
Poland	640	565	580	615	830	945	875	n/a
Romania	270	220	240	290	310	360	390	n/a
Switzerland	210	200	255	220	220	220	145	n/a
Turkey	3,720	4,235	2,360	5,225	5,220	3,310	2,920	n/a
Former USSR	820	870	1,185	1,395	2,095	2,025	2,535	n/a
Of which								
Estonia	n/a	n/a	15	25	25	40	50	n/a
Latvia	n/a	n/a	45	35	60	70	75	n/a
Lithuania	n/a	n/a	50	110	150	135	170	n/a
Russia	n/a	n/a	855	870	1,185	1,025	1,365	n/a
Ukraine	n/a	n/a	140	200	385	405	460	n/a
Other former USSR	n/a	n/a	80	160	300	340	415	n/a
Former Yugoslavia	680	595	1,505	6,650	4,450	5,080	2,830	n/a
Of which								
Croatia	n/a	n/a	185	315	660	710	310	n/a
Slovenia	n/a	n/a	10	20	20	10	25	n/a
Serbia & Montenegro	n/a	n/a	870	5,760	2,640	2,785	1,540	n/a
Other former Yugoslavia	n/a	n/a	440	550	1,130	1,575	955	n/a
Other Europe	20	30	55	130	135	255	190	n/a
Remainder of Europe	7,370	7,640	7,305	15,980	15,155	13,990	11,740	15,300
Europe	7,500	7745	7,575	15,980	15,165	13,990	14,030	n/a
Americas								
Argentina	50	50	60	60	80	120	120	n/a
Barbados	80	55	100	65	95	115	100	n/a
Brazil	390	330	350	405	460	575	510	n/a
Canada	970	980	1,050	1,010	1,325	1,320	1,300	n/a
Chile	60	70	50	55	80	75	100	n/a
Colombia	270	240	365	650	820	785	805	n/a
Cuba	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a
Guyana	200	175	185	135	200	210	190	n/a
Jamaica	1,420	1,030	1,120	1,060	2,095	2,855	2,675	n/a
Mexico	110	125	120	90	125	130	160	n/a
Peru	80	110	105	140	160	150	155	n/a
Trinidad and Tobago	340	280	320	280	490	365	410	n/a
USA	4,030	3,905	3,945	3,760	4,585	4,385	4,355	n/a
Uruguay	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a
Venezuela	50	45	65	65	80	85	80	n/a
West Indies Associated States	[3]—	[3]—	[3]—	[3]—	[3]—	[3]—	[3]—	[3]—
Other Americas	430	395	2,945	750	945	810	720	n/a
Americas	8,470	7,790	10,785	8,515	11,550	11,975	11,680	16,635
Africa								
Algeria	400	370	710	1,130	1,015	775	855	n/a
Angola	30	60	95	520	320	280	660	n/a
Congo (Dem. Rep.)[6]	90	90	120	2,575	935	800	1,260	n/a
Egypt	330	330	360	385	485	420	500	n/a
Ethiopia	140	205	190	2,165	2,745	475	345	n/a
Ghana	1,970	1,285	1,550	3,475	3,140	2,440	2,585	n/a
Kenya	590	495	535	760	1,135	1,025	1,056	n/a
Libya	110	120	165	160	375	370	445	n/a
Mauritius	460	380	450	460	675	375	455	n/a
Morocco	460	405	425	430	590	575	520	n/a
Nigeria	3,220	2,535	2,955	3,185	6,525	5,045	5,325	n/a
Sierra Leone	570	485	545	1,060	1,075	875	855	n/a
Somalia	680	985	2,945	3,180	12,495	8,405	10,000	n/a
South Africa	1,040	1,290	2,260	2,955	4,300	4,755	6,135	n/a

Geographical region and nationality	*1996*	*1997*	*1998*	*1999*	*2000*	*2001*	*2002*	[9, 10]*2003*
Sudan	360	2,180	465	545	1,555	655	560	n/a
Tanzania	220	155	220	235	430	310	290	n/a
Tunisia	90	75	115	160	125	190	160	n/a
Uganda	1,040	695	500	1,400	3,445	755	745	n/a
Zambia	220	180	205	235	440	345	330	n/a
Zimbabwe	360	345	405	435	955	1,040	3,530	n/a
Other Africa	600	550	870	1,570	2,090	2,015	2,550	n/a
Africa	12,970	13,205	16,090	27,025	44,845	31,925	39,165	44,565
Asia								
Indian sub-continent								
Bangladesh	2,720	2,870	3,635	3,285	3,685	4,050	4,725	n/a
India	4,620	4,645	5,430	6,295	8,050	7,320	8,005	n/a
Pakistan	6,250	5,565	7,355	11,865	11,105	11,645	11,935	n/a
Indian sub-continent	13,590	13,085	16,420	21,440	22,840	23,020	24,665	29,995
Middle East								
Iran	1,720	1,060	930	1,560	1,985	1,560	1,715	n/a
Iraq	1,580	1,615	1,650	2,210	2,780	1,715	1,955	n/a
Israel	290	275	305	260	365	320	375	n/a
Jordan	120	150	130	145	255	175	170	n/a
Kuwait	20	40	55	60	60	30	65	n/a
Lebanon	660	635	595	760	990	265	385	n/a
Saudi Arabia	40	30	45	55	50	45	40	n/a
Syria	110	120	115	140	245	195	170	n/a
Yemen	180	150	225	260	295	380	300	n/a
Other Middle East	70	85	125	145	205	140	190	n/a
Middle East	4,790	4,160	4,175	5,590	7,230	4,830	5,345	n/a
Remainder of Asia								
China	1,180	1,225	1,545	1,525	1,710	1,515	1,705	n/a
Hong Kong	1,240	895	810	485	795	605	460	n/a
Indonesia	90	90	115	200	210	205	225	n/a
Japan	1,780	1,760	1,885	1,590	1,720	1,695	1,785	n/a
Malaysia	610	505	545	510	780	710	745	n/a
Philippines	1,030	890	950	1,190	1,915	1,355	1,505	n/a
Singapore	150	160	125	170	230	225	220	n/a
South Korea	270	220	275	305	485	480	485	n/a
Sri Lanka	2,180	1,625	2,105	5,365	7,615	4,240	2,935	n/a
Taiwan	60	85	100	120	175	165	200	n/a
Thailand	550	495	535	830	955	1,260	1,335	n/a
Other Asia	350	420	530	775	1,265	3,840	4,980	n/a
Remainder of Asia[7]	9,500	8,370	9,520	13,060	17,850	16,305	16,575	24,890
Asia	27,880	25,615	30,115	40,090	47,920	44,155	46,585	n/a
Oceania								
Australia	2,120	1,915	2,195	2,410	2,925	3,205	3,500	n/a
New Zealand	1,360	1,155	1,440	1,670	1,925	2,185	2,645	n/a
Other Oceania	40	25	50	40	55	60	100	n/a
Oceania	3,520	3,095	3,685	4,120	4,905	5,455	6,250	7,175
UK Passport holders	[3]—	[3]—	[3]—	[3]—	[3]—	[3]—	[3]—	[3]—
All other territories	[3]—	[3]—	[3]—	[3]—	[3]—	[3]—	[3]—	[3]—
British Overseas citizens	620	540	965	560	635	520	330	n/a
Stateless[8]	780	740	575	815	930	390	215	n/a
Other nationalities	[3]—	[3]—	[3]—	[3]—	[3]—	[3]—	[3]—	1,120
Other countries not elsewhere specified	[3]—	[3]—	[3]—	[3]—	[3]—	[3]—	[3]—	[3]—
All nationalities	61,730	58,725	69,790	97,115	125,945	108,410	118,255	139,675

n/a = Not available.

— = Nil

[1] Negligible (i.e. two or less).

[2] Five or fewer.

[3] Not applicable.

[4] 1976 data for Germany is for East Germany only. Greece joined the EC on 1 January 1981. Portugal and Spain entered the EC in 1986.

[5] Includes Liechtenstein.

[6] The Democratic Republic of the Congo, formerly known as Zaire.

[7] Data for 2003 includes Middle East.

[8] Includes refugees from South East Asia.(10) Data for 2003 is provisional.

[9] Does not include EEA nationals.

[10] Data for 2003 is provisional.

Mr. Rosindell: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what discussions he has had with his French counterparts on limiting illegal immigration to this country. [191453]

Mr. Browne: The French and UK Governments have a long-standing working relationship on immigration matters, working closely together to deal with the problems of illegal immigration from France. Ministers and officials meet frequently in forums such as the biannual Anglo-French Summit and the Cross Channel Commission, and other bilateral meetings. The UK and France also maintain regular contact between staff and exchange intelligence at an operational level.

Following a number of constructive meetings in the summer and autumn of 2002, my right hon. Friend the Home Secretary and the French Interior Minister agreed a substantial package of measures, including the closure of the Sangatte Red Cross Centre through which around 67,000 people passed in three years. The centre had served as a magnet for would-be illegal immigrants and a centre for people smugglers. This package of measures has formed the basis for much of the work that is currently ongoing of moving the UK's border controls to France.

Working in co-operation with French counterparts, the Immigration Service continues to deploy a range of initiatives to deter and detect illegal entry to the UK. These include: the enhancement of the juxtaposed controls established at Calais, Dunkerque, Boulogne, Paris and Lille; the continued deployment of UK personnel detection technology in France; and continued efforts to ensure the closest co-operation between carriers, port authorities and French colleagues. These measures successfully prevented over 9,000 people reaching the UK from France during 2003.

British Crime Survey

Mrs. Curtis-Thomas: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what the differences are in the data collected for the British Crime Survey and police recorded crime. [196700]

Ms Blears: The British Crime Survey (BCS) and police recorded crime statistics are complementary series that together provide a better picture of crime than could be obtained from either series alone. Together they ensure that we have available the most comprehensive picture of crime in England and Wales.

Police statistics provide a good measure of trends in well-reported crimes, are an important indicator of police workload, and can be used for local crime pattern analysis.

For the crime types it covers, the BCS can provide a better reflection of the true extent of crime because it includes crimes that are not reported to the police. The BCS count also gives a better indication of trends in crime over time because it is unaffected by changes in levels of reporting to the police, and in police recording practices.

The British Crime Survey (BCS) includes all crimes experienced by adults aged 16 and over living in private households in England and Wales, with the following exceptions:

Murder (since we cannot interview the victims)

Corporate crime

Fraud (although credit card fraud is covered separately).

By definition, the BCS does not include commercial victimisation nor crimes against under 16's.

Police recorded crime counts all those offences that are reported to the police and recorded by them in accordance with the Home Office Counting Rules for Recorded Crime and the National Crime Recording Standard. All reports of incidents result in the registration of an incident report by the police. Following that registration, an incident will be recorded as a crime, if, on the balance of probability, the circumstances as reported amount to a crime defined by law and there is no credible evidence to the contrary.

British Transport Police

Harry Cohen: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many community safety officers *(a)* are operating and *(b)* are expected to operate under the auspices of the British Transport police; what their role will be; what funding has been applied for their function; for what purposes; when he expects a decision to be made on the application; and if he will make a statement. [196486]

Mr. McNulty: I have been asked to reply.

The British Transport police (BTP) are accountable through the BTP Authority to the Secretary of State for Transport. The force is funded by the rail industry and the authority approves its budget. There are currently no community support officers (CSOs) operating under the auspices of the BTP. The authority has approved the recruitment of 151 CSOs and a recruitment process is under way. The role of the CSOs will be to provide a high visibility presence at stations, on trains and on London underground. They will reassure the public and staff; help prevent, deter and disrupt terrorism, crime and disorder; and support BTP officers and allow them to be released to deal with more serious issues when appropriate.

Centrex Action Plan

Mrs. Curtis-Thomas: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department when the response to Centrex's Action Plan will be published. [194904]

Ms Blears: We are currently considering the Centrex (Central Police Training and Development Authority) Action Plan, produced in response to the recent Her Majesty's Inspection of Constabulary (HMIC) inspection, and are liaising with Centrex and HMIC regarding it. We have no plans to publish a formal response to the Action Plan.

Community Support Officers

Mrs. Curtis-Thomas: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will make a statement on the integration of community support officers into a long-term policing strategy. [195475]

Ms Blears: The primary role of Community Support Officers (CSOs) is to provide a high visibility and reassuring presence in the communities where they patrol.

CSOs will be a key component of neighbourhood policing teams which will provide a visible, accessible and responsive presence in communities. We will support the roll-out of neighbourhood policing with substantial investment through the new Neighbourhood Policing Fund (NPF) which will deliver 24,000 CSOs by 2008.

We are also working with stakeholders to develop a minimum set of powers which all CSOs need to play a full part in neighbourhood policing, and to develop role profiles linked to national occupational standards to enable forces to match recruitment, training and development programmes to the work that CSOs perform.

Claire Ward: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department when funding for community support officers in Watford will end; and what discussions he has had with *(a)* the police and *(b)* local authorities on (i) the requirement and (ii) the funding for these officers. [196577]

Ms Blears: We have notified forces that Home Office funding for community support officer (CSO) posts allocated under the three CSO funding rounds since 2002 is available until the end of March 2008.

Out target is to have 24,000 CSOs in place by 2008. We have allocated £50 million under the first round of the Neighbourhood Policing Fund (NPF) to recruit new CSOs before the end of March 2005 and to support their salary and related costs in 2005–06. Forces will be notified of their allocations shortly. Funding under this round of the NPF will also continue to be available until the end of March 2008.

Details of further rounds of the NPF will be announced next year. Decisions on funding arrangements for CSOs after 2008 will be made in the context of the next spending review.

The deployment of CSOs is an operational decision for chief officers.

Crime Victims

Stephen Hesford: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what measures he is taking to improve services to victims of crime. [190592]

Paul Goggins: The Domestic Violence, Crime and Victims Bill introduces a code of practice, binding on criminal justice agencies, which lists the services they should be delivering to victims. The code will create tangible statutory rights for all victims around the themes of information, advice, support and protection. The Bill will also establish a Commissioner for Victims and Witnesses to champion the interests of victims and witnesses across Government.

The Bill includes measures to improve the police response to domestic violence by making common assault an arrestable offence; and making breach of a non-molestation order a criminal offence, punishable by up to five years' imprisonment. It will also extend protection to victims by giving courts the power to impose a restraining order where a defendant has been acquitted but the court believes the victim needs protection.

In April this year, we established a Victims Fund with the announcement of £4 million from the proceeds of crime to be spent on victims of sexual offending over the next two years. Some of this will be used to extend the number and coverage of sexual assault referral centres.

We also continue to support the voluntary organisation Victim Support in their work with victims and witnesses. Between 1997 and 2004 the Home Office's funding of Victim Support nearly trebled, from £11.7 million to £30 million.

In addition, we have been working to extend specialist support services for road traffic victims. Pilot projects, subject to independent evaluation, have been established in three areas to test approaches to service provision. Findings from the evaluation will steer future developments on national provision.

Criminal Injuries Compensation Scheme

Mr. Dismore: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will amend the Criminal Injuries Compensation Scheme to enable a child injured by a foster parent with whose family he or she had been placed by a local authority to recover compensation under the scheme. [192742]

Paul Goggins: A child in such a case has in fact been eligible for compensation since the scheme rules were changed with effect from 1 October 1979 to admit cases of intra-family violence (where the victim and assailant were living together as members of the same family), which had previously been excluded. Proposals to admit cases involving intra-family violence occurring before the 1 October 1979 rule change have been considered whenever amendments to the scheme have been mooted. However, successive administrations have decided not to change the rule because it would add a large and unacceptable burden to the costs of the scheme.

Dispersal Order Scheme

John Cryer: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what assessment he has made of the effectiveness of the dispersal order scheme at *(a)* Elm Park, *(b)* Hornchurch and *(c)* Upminster Bridge stations. [194728]

Caroline Flint: I understand from British Transport Police that the use of dispersal powers under section 30 of the Anti-social Behaviour Act 2003 together with other measures has contributed to a visible fall in groups of youths loitering on stations and causing disorder on the eastern end of the District Line, together with a significant reduction in recorded crime.

Drugs

David Davis: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many arrestees in *(a)* Haltemprice and Howden, *(b)* the East Riding of Yorkshire and *(c)* the Humberside police authority area tested positive for category A and B drugs in each of the last four quarters for which figures are available. [194981]

Caroline Flint: It is not possible to provide figures for the number of individuals testing positive at arrest for Class A or Class B drugs. However, the Criminal Justice and Court Services Act 2000 gave the police power to drug test arrestees once they are charged with a trigger offence. Data on the number of individuals testing positive at charge for opiates and/or cocaine and/or crack are available from three drug testing sites in Humberside police force, and are shown in table 1. There is no data available for the areas of Haltemprice, Howden and East Riding of Yorkshire as they are not currently drug testing sites.

Table 1: Drug test results for opiates and/or cocaine/crack at Humberside police force—October 2003 to September 2004

	Number of tests attempted	*Number of positive tests*	*Proportion of tests that were positive (Percentage)*
October to December 2003 BCU: Kingston upon Hull	446	180	40
January to March 2004 BCU: Kingston upon Hull	579	202	35
April to June 2004 BCU: Kingston upon Hull, North Lincs, North East Lincs	721	205	28
July to September 2004 BCU: Kingston upon Hull, North Lincs, North East Lincs	809	246	30

Brian White: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what classification of drugs has taken place in Thames Valley police area during the last 12 months. [195606]

Caroline Flint: The number of illegal drugs seized by the Thames Valley police area during the last 12 months is not currently available. The latest data that are available for the Thames Valley police force are for 2002. The information is analysed from the Home Office Drug Seizures Database and relates to all drugs classified under the Misuse of Drugs Act 1971. The data have been published in the Home Office Statistical Bulletin on Drug Seizure and Offender Statistics 2001 and 2002 (maps 1, 2 and 3 on pages 10, 15 and 19 of the main bulletin and tables A1.1 to A 1.5 of the area tables). The bulletin is available on the RDS website and in the House Library.

http://uk.sitestat.com/homeoffice/homeoffice/s?rds.hosb0804 pdf&ns_type=pdf&ns_url=%5B

http://www.homeoffice.gov.uk/rds/pdfs04/hosb0804.pdf%5D

http://uk.sitestat.com/homeoffice/homeoffice/s?rds.hosb0804 areapdf&ns_type=pdf&ns_url=%5B

http://www.homeoffice.gov.uk/rds/pdfs04/hosb0804area.pdf %5D

Fixed Penalty Notices

Mr. Willetts: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many fixed penalty notices have been issued under section 72 of the Highways Act 1835, in each year since 1999, broken down by *(a)* police and *(b)* local authority area. [196411]

Caroline Flint: The regular collection of data on fixed penalties for motoring offences does not identify separately offences peculiar to driving a motor vehicle on a footpath (section 72 of the Highways Act 1835), from other motoring offences of neglect of pedestrian rights. Neither are fixed penalty data collected centrally on the number of pedal cyclists riding on a footpath or obstructions caused by animals (also under section 72 of the Highways Act 1835).

However, the table shows information collected as part of a special exercise conducted in 2001 on the number of fixed penalties issued by police force area, for specific offences under section 72 of the Highways Act 1835, in 1999 and 2000 only.

Fixed penalty offences: Number of substantive tickets issued, England and Wales, August to December 1999 and January to December 2000 for cycling and driving on the footpath (pavement) offences under section 72 of the Highways Act 1835 by police force area

	Cycling on the footpath (pavement)		*Driving on the footpath (pavement)*	
Police force area	*1999*	*2000*	*1999*	*2000*
Avon and Somerset	19	34	16	42
Bedfordshire	—	—	—	—
Cambridgeshire	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a
Cheshire	6	14	2	6
Cleveland	5	5	—	—
Cumbria	12	20	4	24
Derbyshire	3	8	3	11
Devon and Cornwall	28	34	4	43
Dorset	7	17	7	1
Durham	7	11	1	1
Essex	76	55	5	7
Gloucestershire	25	47	6	4
Greater Manchester	38	78	[1]n/a	[1]n/a
Hampshire	52	52	—	4
Hertfordshire	11	6	3	13
Humberside	19	64	1	14
Kent	48	44	39	92
Lancashire	8	20	41	11
Leicestershire	13	5	2	1
Lincolnshire	15	4	3	2
London, City of	10	3	10	—
Merseyside	18	20	5	7
Metropolitan Police	29	66	8	22
Norfolk	[3]8	14	[2]1	3
Northamptonshire	2	7	—	—
Northumbria	21	27	9	58
North Yorkshire	18	16	53	191
Nottinghamshire	5	1	2	3
South Yorkshire	11	34	61	111
Staffordshire	[2]3	4	[2]—	5
Suffolk	53	30	—	—
Surrey	13	1	4	16
Sussex	15	9	—	—
Thames Valley	8	6	2	3
Warwickshire	2	3	2	2
West Mercia	36	17	5	6
West Midlands	4	9	1	17
West Yorkshire	[3]—	2	[3]2	—
Wiltshire	6	23	1	7
Dyfed-Powys	7	3	1	—
Gwent	—	1	1	—
North Wales	n/a	[4]1	34	[4]1
South Wales	4	6	38	60
Total (42 forces)	665	821	377	788

n/a = Not available

[1] Included within cycling on the footpath (pavement).

[2] October to December 1999 only.

[3] November and December 1999 only.

[4] October to December 2000 only.

Mr. Beggs: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will arrange for the payment of fixed penalty notices issued in Great Britain to holders of driving licences issued in Northern Ireland to be payable by cheque without the necessity of appearance at court in Great Britain. [196419]

Caroline Flint: If a driver is able to avail himself of the fixed penalty system, he does not have to appear in court. Holders of driving licences issued in Northern Ireland are now in this position. The Crime (International Cooperation) Act 2003, which came into effect on 11 October 2004, allows NI driving licences holders to apply for a GB counterpart to the licence. The possession of the counterpart allows them access to the fixed penalty system for endorsable road traffic offences committed by them while driving in Great Britain.

The decision to offer a fixed penalty is for the police. They may choose prosecution if they consider that the more appropriate course.

Foreign Agencies

John McDonnell: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what correspondence his Department had with foreign agencies prior to the seizure of web servers from the office of Rackspace; from which agencies correspondence was received; and what authorisations were granted to these foreign agencies. [195833]

Caroline Flint: The Home Office received no correspondence from foreign agencies in relation to this matter, and gave no authorisations.

Forensic Science Service

Mrs. Curtis-Thomas: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will make a statement on the proposal to convert the Forensic Science Service into a public-private partnership. [196631]

Caroline Flint: As my right hon. Friend the Home Secretary made clear following the independent review of the Forensic Science Service (FSS), radical change is the only realistic option if the potential for forensic science is to be maximised.

Since then, we have been working closely with the FSS and the police to ensure that we are clear about how the necessary changes can best be managed, taking into account the demands of the criminal justice system, ongoing developments in the use of forensic science and the business needs of the FSS itself.

An Outline Business Case has been prepared that provides an analysis of those needs and of the forensic science market. The results are the subject of on-going discussions with key stakeholders.

Gambling

Mrs. Curtis-Thomas: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what assessment has been made of the likely impact of the provisions of the Gambling Bill on criminal activity. [196630]

Mr. Caborn: I have been asked to reply.

The Bill should ensure either a reduction or no increase in criminal activity associated with gambling, since it will extend the scope of effective regulation to forms of gambling which currently lack it and establish important new investigative and enforcement powers, including the power for the Gambling Commission to exchange information with other regulators.

Hunting

Mr. Blizzard: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what steps he will take to enforce the proposed ban on hunting with dogs in the event of deliberate law-breaking. [191001]

Caroline Flint: Enforcing the proposed ban on hunting, as with other offences, is a matter for the police. The Association of Chief Police Officers have made it clear that they consider the Bill to be enforceable. Deferring commencement will help the police prepare for the ban.

Indymedia

Lynne Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department whether he authorised the seizure of web servers belonging to Indymedia. [191015]

Caroline Flint: I can confirm that no UK law enforcement agencies were involved, so no authorisations were needed.

Metropolitan Police

Tom Cox: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many officers serving in the Metropolitan police force have resigned from the force in each of the last three years to transfer to another police force in the United Kingdom. [193475]

Ms Blears: The Commissioner of Police of the Metropolis has advised me that the number of Metropolitan officers who have transferred to other UK forces in the previous three years is as follows:

	Number
2001-02	442
2002-03	430
2003-04	381

Note:
The information has been recorded as full-time equivalent. The number of individual officers is not available. The recording period is from April to March, as per the financial year.

The total police officer strength as at 31 March in each of the given years for the Metropolitan police is contained in the following table:

	Number
2001	24,878
2002	26,223
2003	27,984
2004	29,735

Linda Perham: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department whether his Department keeps the funding of the Metropolitan Police Service's capital city functions under review; and if he will make a statement. [194129]

Ms Blears: The Metropolitan Police Service uniquely receives special additional provision within its police formula grant in recognition of its capital city and national functions. The additional provision was £207 million in 2004–05. The amount is reviewed annually and we are currently considering the level for next year. This will be announced shortly as part of the provisional funding settlement for 2005–06.

Motor Cycling

Huw Irranca-Davies: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what examples of best practice are available to *(a)* local authorities and *(b)* police authorities on (i) making provision for off-road motorcycles and (ii) tackling irresponsible off-road motorcycling. [195780]

Caroline Flint: We have given the police a power to seize any vehicle being used without authority off-road, or inconsiderately on-road, where such usage causes alarm, distress or annoyance. The vehicles are then released only on payment of prescribed fees for removal and storage. This puts an immediate stop to the nuisance. We are aware that a number of police forces have been working with their local authorities and other members of local crime and disorder reduction partnerships to make best use of this power and to take other steps to reduce the problem, including via the provision of facilities for lawful off-road motor-cycling. We are currently discussing with the Association of Chief Police Officers the effective use of the power, the identification of good practice and any need for further central guidance.

National Intelligence Model

Mrs. Curtis-Thomas: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will make a statement on the implementation of the National Intelligence Model [197174]

Caroline Flint: Implementation of the National Intelligence Model (NIM) which was planned for in the 2001, "Policing a New Century" White Paper, has ensured that the NIM has become the cornerstone of policing in England and Wales. All 43 forces have now reached the minimum standards for NIM compliance.

Police forces' approaches to implementation of NIM have varied both in format and intensity and the challenge now is for forces to continue to work on developing and enhancing the model in order to ensure that it is fully embedded in operational policing.

Overseas Corruption

Mr. Hancock: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department with which foreign jurisdictions his law enforcement agencies are co-operating on investigations into overseas corruption cases. [194718]

Caroline Flint: We cannot comment on individual reports received in order not to prejudice criminal investigations.

Police

Mr. Laws: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many police officers there were in *(a)* Avon and Somerset and *(b)* East Somerset district in each quarter from 1992–93 to 30 September; and if he will make a statement. [191312]

Ms Blears: The latest available information on police officer numbers is published in Home Office Statistical Bulletin number 13/04, "Police Service Strength in England and Wales 31 March 2004", a copy of which should be available from the House of Commons Library or internet site http://www.homeoffice.gov.uk/rds/hosbpubs1.html.

In England and Wales, the numbers of police officers employed in Avon and Somerset and East Somerset district are given in the following table. For Avon and Somerset police force area, only six monthly figures are available for years March 1995 to March 2004 and annual figures for March 1992 to March 1994.

For East Somerset district, data are only available for March.

	Avon and Somerset police force area		*East Somerset district*
	Police officers	*Police staff*	*Police officers*
March 1992	3,081	899	—
March 1993	3,068	1,171	—
March 1994	3,033	1,195	—
March 1995	3,000	1,204	—
September 1995	2,986	1,180	—
March 1996	2,981	1,213	—
September 1996	3,004	1,209	—
March 1997	2,989	1,439	—
September 1997	2,973	1,344	—
March 1998	2,976	1,393	—
September 1998	2,966	1,435	—
March 1999	2,999	1,424	—
September 1999	2,989	1,468	—
March 2000	2,934	1,436	—
September 2000	2,941	1,437	—
March 2001	2,994	1,452	—
September 2001	3,040	1,531	—
March 2002	3,096	1,611	—
September 2002	3,119	1,714	—
March 2003	[1]3,149	[1]1,767	257
September 2003	[1]3,273	[1]1,901	—
March 2004	[1]3,401	[1]1,998	266

[1] Comparable with previously published data (i.e. excludes staff on career breaks or maternity/paternity leave).

Mr. Greenway: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what proportion of the North Yorkshire Police Authority budget was met from council tax receipts in *(a)* 1997–98 and *(b)* 2004–05. [193904]

Ms Blears: The information is set out in the table.

	1997–98	*2004–05*[1]
Total gross revenue expenditure (£000)	74,485	132,874
Total government funding[2] (£000)	59,295	79,957
Proportion of gross revenue expenditure met by government funding (percentage)	79.6	60.2
Other[3] (£000)	1,990	3,964
Proportion of gross revenue expenditure met by other income (percentage)	2.7	3.0
Council tax (£000)	13,200	48,953
Proportion of gross revenue expenditure met by council tax (percentage)	17.7	36.8

[1] 2004–05 estimates provided by North Yorkshire police.

[2] Includes Principal Home Office police grant, ODPM Revenue Support Grant, National Non Domestic Rates, special grant, revenue for Airwave, Crime Fighting Fund, Rural Policing Grant, Loan Charges grant, and other smaller specific grants.

[3] Includes all other force income and movements in reserves.

Source:

Chartered Institute of Public Finance and Accountancy Police Statistics (Actuals 1997–98).

Adam Price: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many police officers have been recruited in England and Wales in each year since 2001. [196815]

Ms Blears: Information on police officers joining the police service is published annually in a Home Office Statistical Bulletin. The latest figures appeared in Home Office Statistical Bulletin number 13/04, copies of which are available in the Library or on the internet site:

http://www.homeoffice.gov.uk/rds/hosbpubs1.html

Police officers joining the service since 2001 in England and Wales are as follows:

As at 31 March:	*Number*
2001	7,415
2002	10,215
2003[1]	13,126
2004[1]	13,137

[1] Not comparable with previous recruitment figures as data includes transfers from other England and Wales forces.

Mr. Allen: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what the average number of arrests per day was for police officers in England and Wales in the six months *(a)* before and *(b)* after the commencement of the Charging Initiative of the Crown Prosecution Service. [196233]

Ms Blears: The Charging Initiative is being implemented in two phases: statutory and shadow. In May 2004 the first area moved to statutory charging. The first areas to fully implement shadow charging went live in June 2004. Statutory charging will have been implemented in the 13 priority areas by November 2004. By the end of 2004–05 all but six areas will have full shadow charging in place.

Figures for the number of persons arrested for notifiable offences are available centrally only up to 31 March 2003. Data for the financial year 2003–04 are due to be published in December 2004. No meaningful before and after comparisons will be available until the 2004–05 arrest data are published at the end of 2005.

Mrs. Spelman: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department which local authority wards comprise each police authority basic command unit in England and Wales. [195176]

Ms Blears: The information requested will be placed in the House Library.

Mrs. Curtis-Thomas: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will make a statement on the future funding of *(a)* community support officers and *(b)* regular officers. [195476]

Ms Blears: We have made £50 million available under the first phase of the Neighbourhood Policing Fund (NPF) to help forces recruit additional Community Support Officers (CSOs) by March 2005. Under this round we will pay 100 per cent. of salary costs, up to a maximum of £24,5000 per annum, until the end of 2005–06. We shall continue to meet at least 75 per cent. of the salary costs allocated in this round in 2006–07.

The NPF will provide further support to deliver our target of 24,000 CSOs by 2008.

We will also provide 50 per cent. of the salary and related costs of CSOs recruited as part of earlier funding rounds until the end of 2007–08.

The provisional police funding settlement will be announced shortly and will be followed by a six week consultation period.

Mrs. Curtis-Thomas: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what steps he will take to ensure that funding is available for moves to new technology in the police force. [195478]

Caroline Flint: The Home Office has and will continue to provide significant funding to support the delivery of new technology in the police force.

The science and technology initiatives set out in the Home Office Science and Technology Strategy support the Government's key priorities for policing as set out in the National Policing Plan 2004–07. The Home Office will seek to fund these initiatives from the recent SR2004 settlement.

Mrs. Curtis-Thomas: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how cost implications of new technology for the police force are assessed and monitored by the Department. [195479]

Caroline Flint: The cost implications of new technology for the police force are subject to an assessment and monitoring process. As far as police information and communications technology is concerned the central customer function of the Police Information Technology Organisation (PITO) supports the police service in articulating its business requirements for ICT. Its function is to provide robust business cases and to encourage the deployment of solutions in forces that meet those needs and enable the realisation of policing benefits.

The priorities and business requirements set by the central customer will fully reflect those set by the Department in the National Policing Plan and the Home Office Police Science and Technology Strategy.

The police forces can also purchase technology based on local needs and priorities including non-ICT items of technology. These are assessed and costed locally by the police force and relevant police authority.

PITO are currently subject to an end to end review and a key aspect of the review is how the provision of ICT to the police should be managed both nationally and locally. The findings of the review will be closely aligned to proposals currently under consideration as part of the Police Reform agenda.

Brian Cotter: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many police officers have *(a)* been recruited to and *(b)* left the Avon and Somerset police force in each year since 1997. [188668]

Ms Blears: The available information is given in the table:

Avon and Somerset

As at 31 March:	*Joiners*	*Leavers*	*Total officer strength*
1997	174	160	2,989
1998	138	148	2,976
1999	142	104	2,999
2000	104	146	2,934
2001	184	160	2,994
2002	274	156	3,096
2003	[1] 264	[2] 205	[3] 3,149
2004	[1] 389	[2] 142	[3] 3,401

[1] Not comparable to previous joining figures as data includes transfers from other England and Wales forces and officers returning after a period of secondment.

[2] Not comparable to previous leaving figures as data does not include transfers to other England and Wales forces and officers leaving after a period of secondment.

[3] Comparable with previously published data (i.e. excludes staff on career breaks or maternity/paternity leave.

Tom Cox: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many police officers there are in the London borough of Wandsworth; and how many are from ethnic minorities. [193478]

Ms Blears: I am told by the Commissioner of Police of the Metropolis (Sir John Stevens) that at the end of September 2004 the Wandsworth Operational Command Unit had 572 police officers of whom 39 (6.8 per cent.) were from ethnic minorities.

Probation Service

Lynne Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how long it took the Workload Measurement Tool Working Group for the Probation Service to be established. [197000]

Paul Goggins: A Project Board for the Workload Measurement Tool (WMT) first met on 25 April 2002, it included representatives from probation areas, the National Probation Directorate (NPD), Napo and Unison. A WMT user group comprising members of eight pilot areas, Napo, Unison and the Probation Board Association (PBA) was set up on September 2002.

RAF Fairfield

Mr. Drew: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department for what reasons Gloucestershire Constabulary was not fully re-funded for the cost of policing RAF Fairfield during the recent Iraqi conflict. [195296]

Ms Blears: The Home Secretary has agreed a special grant of £7.29 million towards the £7.72 million costs of policing RAF Fairford. This was over 94 per cent. of the total cost.

Police authorities are normally expected to hold sufficient reserves to meet exceptional costs, up to a sum equal to one per cent. of the force budget. Grant is considered on the balance above this amount. In the extraordinary circumstances of this case the Home Secretary reduced the threshold to 0.5 per cent.

Road Safety

Janet Anderson: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what assessment he has made of the effects of the development of automatic number plate recognition on the level of enforcement of the ban on the use of hand-held mobile telephones while driving. [196416]

Caroline Flint: Police intercept teams stopped a total of 180,543 vehicles across 23 forces during a year-long pilot of automatic number plate recognition (ANPR) technology from 1 June 2003 to 31 June 2004.

44 per cent. (78,768) of all vehicle stops were as a result of officer observations as vehicles passed. Of these, 2.7 per cent. of stops were for the offence of using a hand-held mobile phone while driving.

Sexual Offences

Mrs. Curtis-Thomas: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what assessment has been made of sex abuse victims' satisfaction with their contact with the police. [196635]

Ms Blears: Home Office Research Study 237 "Rape and sexual assault of women: the extent and nature of the problem—findings from the British Crime Survey" reports on the findings of self-completion questionnaires included in the 1998 and 2000 British Crime Surveys (BCS).

This report showed that about a third of rape victims (32 per cent.) were "very satisfied" with the way in which the police handled their (most recent) case, and a further quarter (25 per cent.) were "fairly satisfied". However, about a fifth were "very dissatisfied" (22 per cent.), and 16 per cent. were "a bit dissatisfied". The remaining five per cent. said that it was too early to say. Table A7.3 in the report has further detail.

Terrorism Act

Mrs. Curtis-Thomas: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will make a statement on the number of prosecutions resulting from arrests under section 41 of the Terrorism Act 2000. [191541]

Mr. Blunkett: Statistics on arrests, charges and prosecutions have recently been updated on the Home Office website. I think it would be useful to set out the full picture as follows. We are unable to provide figures for Section 41 in isolation.

Police records show that from 11 September 2001 until 30 September 2004, 664 people were arrested under the Terrorism Act 2000.

118 of these were charged under the Act. Of these, 44 were also charged with offences under other legislation. 135 were charged under other legislation. This includes charges for terrorist offences that are already covered in general criminal law such as murder, grievous bodily harm and use of firearms or explosives.

17 Individuals have been convicted of offences under the Terrorism Act.

The following table gives the outcome for those not covered previously:

Outcome	*Number*
Transferred to immigration authorities	55
On bail to return	21
Cautioned	7
Dealt with under mental health legislation	7
Awaiting extradition	1
Returned to Prison Service custody	1
Released without charge	315

At the time these figures were collated four individuals were not yet dealt with by police.

There can be a number of reasons for the difference between the number of those arrested under the Terrorism Act 2000 and the number of charges resulting from those arrests. For example, where an intelligence-led search of premises is made as part of an investigation, the police may find more than one person there. In these circumstances it is possible that a number of individuals could be arrested and subsequently released without charge because it is not clear at that stage which is the individual sought. This was envisaged when Parliament approved the legislation.

Alternatively, if the search is for explosives for example, the police may well arrest all the individuals found on the premises and hold them for questioning to establish what connection they have with any materials found. Again, those subsequently found not to be involved would be released without charge.

It will continue to be the case that some persons arrested under the Terrorism Act will not subsequently be charged under the Act but will be charged with offences such as murder, grievous bodily harm, use of firearms or explosives which are contained within other Acts.

Home Office Research Development and Statistics publish a Command Paper and supplementary volumes of criminal statistics annually. A breakdown of prosecutions and convictions under the Terrorism Act 2000 for 2001 and 2002 are in the accompanying table. Figures for 2003 will not be available until later in the year.

Number of defendants proceeded against at magistrates' courts and found guilty at all courts for offences under the Terrorism Act 2000, England and Wales 2001 and 2002[1]

		2001		*2002*	
Offence description	*Statute*	*Proceeded against*	*Found guilty*	*Proceeded against*	*Found guilty*
Relating to membership of proscribed organisations	Terrorism Act 2000, Sec.11	3	—	1	1
Wearing any item of dress in support of a proscribed organisation	Terrorism Act 2000, Sec.13a	—	—	—	—
Wears, carries or displays any article in support of a proscribed organisation	Terrorism Act 2000, Sec.13b	—	—	1	1
Contributions towards acts of terrorism	Terrorism Act 2000, Secs.15–18 and 22	1	—	8	1
Failure to disclose knowledge or suspicion of acts of terrorism	Terrorism Act 2000, Sec.19	—	—	—	—
Failure to leave a cordoned area immediately when ordered to do so by a constable in uniform	Terrorism Act 2000, Sec.36(1)*(a)*	—	—	1	—
Failure to leave premises, which abut or are wholly or partially within a cordoned area, immediately if ordered to do so by a constable in uniform	Terrorism Act 2000 Sec.36(1)*(b)*	—	—	1	—
Failure of driver or person in charge of a vehicle which is in a cordoned area to immediately move the vehicle if ordered to do so by a constable in uniform	Terrorism Act 2000 Sec.36*(c)(d)(e)*	—	—	—	—
Contravention or a prohibition or restriction order made by a constable in uniform to a cordoned area	Terrorism Act 2000 Sec.36*(f)*	—	—	—	—
Making any disclosure likely to prejudice an investigation about acts of terrorism or failing to disclose information about acts of terrorism	Terrorism Act 2000 Sec.39	—	—	—	—
Failure to stop (Power to stop and search vehicles and pedestrians)	Terrorism Act 2000, Secs.43, 44 and 47(1)*(a)(b)*(2)	1	—	1	—
Wilful obstruction (Power to stop and search vehicles and pedestrians)	Terrorism Act 2000, Secs.43, 44 and 47(1)*(c)* and (2)	—	—	—	—
Failure to move vehicle when ordered to do so by a constable in uniform, (vehicle had been permitted to remain at rest in contravention of any prohibition or restriction)	Terrorism Act 2000, Secs.48 and 51(2)	—	—	—	—
Leaves a vehicle, or permits a vehicle to remain at rest, on a road in contravention of a prohibition or restriction	Terrorism Act 2000, Secs.48 and 51(1)	—	—	—	—
Provides instruction; invites another to receive instruction in weapon training.	Terrorism Act 2000, Sec.54	1	—	1	—
Directing terrorist training	Terrorism Act 2000, Sec.56	—	—	1	—

Number of defendants proceeded against at magistrates' courts and found guilty at all courts for offences under the Terrorism Act 2000, England and Wales 2001 and 2002[1]

Offence description	*Statute*	2001 *Proceeded against*	2001 *Found guilty*	2002 *Proceeded against*	2002 *Found guilty*
Collect, record or possession of information or articles likely to be of use to Terrorists	Terrorism Act 2000 Secs.57 and 58	—	—	3	1
Failure to furnish information when required by examining officer	Terrorism Act 2000, Sch.7(5)(*a*) and (18)	—	—	1	—
Failing to produce either a valid passport or identifying document when required by examining officer	Terrorism Act 2000, Sch.7(5)(*b*) and (18)	—	—	—	—
Failing to declare or produce any relevant documents when required by examining officer	Terrorism Act 2000, Sch.7(5)(*c*)(*d*) and (18)	—	—	—	—
Failing to submit to search by examining officer or person acting on his/her behalf	Terrorism Act 2000, Sch.7(7)(8) and (18)	—	—	—	—
Failing to complete and produce an embarkation card when required to by examining officer	Terrorism Act 2000, Sch.7(16) and (18)	—	—	1	—
Wilfully obstructing a constable in the execution of his duty in a cordoned area	Terrorism Act 2000, Sch.5 Sec.36(1)(2)	—	—	—	—
Wilfully obstructing or seeking to frustrate the object of a search in a cordoned area	Terrorism Act 2000, Sch.5(1–3)	—	—	—	—
Total	—	6	—	20	4

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[1] These data are on the principal offence basis.

Theft

Andrew George: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what estimate he has made of the number of thefts from farms in each of the past 10 years for which records are available. [196686]

Ms Blears: No information is collected by the Home Office on thefts from farms. Such offences cannot be separately identified in the recorded crime series or in the British Crime Survey.

Vehicle Scanning System

Mr. Jim Cunningham: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what assessment he has made of the impact that the increase in the funding for the vehicle scanning system will have on the number of police officers patrolling the roads. [197204]

Caroline Flint: My right hon. Friend, the Home Secretary, announced on 2 November 2004 that £15 million will be available to help the expansion of Automatic Number Plate Recognition (ANPR) across England and Wales. This might include for example, converting existing CCTV systems to become ANPR-enabled and provide mobile technology.

It will not lead to an increase in the number of police officers ANPR; rather it will enable existing police officers to use the latest available technology to build on the success highlighted by the Evaluation Report "Driving Down Crime".

The Home Office will ask that forces who receive funding demonstrate their commitment to ANPR by deploying sufficient resources in order to maximise this investment opportunity while not diverting from other policing priorities.

This funding represents a significant boost to ANPR. The Government are keen that the momentum provided by the ANPR pilot projects is maintained.

Wildlife Crime

Mr. Nigel Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what assessment he has made of the link between wildlife crime and organised crime. [195352]

Ms Blears: The National Wildlife Crime Intelligence Unit of the National Criminal Intelligence Service (NCIS) monitors the links between organised wildlife crime and other areas of criminality, including money laundering, fraud, deception and distribution of drugs. That assessment by its very nature has operational and intelligence information not intended for publication.

Mr. Nigel Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what steps he has taken to ensure the employment of at least one full-time wildlife crime officer by each police force. [195353]

Ms Blears: The employment of police officers in each force area is an operational matter for the chief officer concerned based on operational priorities.

Mr. Nigel Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many police forces have a full time wildlife crime officer. [195354]

Ms Blears: Figures are not held centrally. The appointment of officers on operational duties is a matter for the chief officer of each individual force.

Young Offenders Institutions

Ms Keeble: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what plans he has to outsource the management of young offenders' institutions; and if he will make a statement. [190421]

Paul Goggins: We are currently considering how to take forward contestability within the National Offender Management Service but no decision has yet been taken.

Mrs. Curtis-Thomas: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what educational assessments are carried out on each young offender entering each young offenders' institution. [191895]

Paul Goggins: Each young person entering custody undergoes a range of educational assessments. When they are referred to a young offenders' team by the police, they undergo a standard assessment with an assessment tool called ASSET. The assessment includes a section on education needs. They also undertake the PLUS Strategy assessment for literacy and numeracy and diagnostic assessment. They can be referred to an educational psychologist or the establishment's special education needs co-ordinator if there is a need identified during assessment and induction.

WORK AND PENSIONS

Caravan Parks

Mark Tami: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions what requirements are placed on the *(a)* owners and *(b)* operators of holiday caravan parks to ensure that ponds or lakes do not pose a safety hazard to children. [196853]

Jane Kennedy: The Health and Safety at Work etc Act 1974 (HSWA) protects members of the public affected by work related activity. HSWA will apply to holiday caravan parks.

Employers or the self-employed are required to take reasonably practicable precautions to adequately control risks, including those posed by lakes or ponds. The duty holder can be the operator, owner or both depending upon the circumstance.

Caravan parks, apart from the local authority owned ones, are also licensed under the Caravan Sites and Control of Development Act 1960. The local authority issues the licence.

Carers

Mr. Sanders: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions what financial support is available to people who are unable to work *(a)* full-time and *(b)* part-time because of caring responsibilities; and if he will make a statement. [196917]

Maria Eagle: Carers are entitled to the full range of social security benefits if they meet the usual qualifying rules. In particular, carer's allowance is available to those who are 16 years of age and over, not in full-time work and provide regular and substantial care for at least 35 hours a week to a severely disabled person. It is possible to combine entitlement to carer's allowance and part-time work provided that earnings do not exceed the national insurance lower earnings limit (currently £79 per week) after deduction of allowable expenses.

Entitlement to carer's allowance gives carers access to the carer premium in income support, housing benefit and council tax benefit and to the carer's additional amount in pension credit. In addition, carers can get help through the carers grant which was introduced in 1999 to support local councils in providing breaks in caring and services for carers.

Departmental Offices

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions what the cost of *(a)* decoration and *(b)* refurbishment of the London offices of the Department was in each of the last four years. [196150]

Maria Eagle: LandSecurities Trillium (LST) owns the estate occupied by the Department for Work and Pensions. Ownership of accommodation transferred to LST under a PFI scheme (PRIME) in 1998. This PFI Contract was further expanded in December 2003 to include the former Employment Service (ES) estate following the merger of the former Department of Social Security and ES to create DWP.

Under the PRIME PFI Contract DWP pays a unitary charge that includes an element for all aspects of building maintenance and repair (which includes routine decoration and refurbishment), this is known as Life Cycle Capital Expenditure (LCCE). The elements of decoration and refurbishment cannot be disaggregated from the overall LCCE expenditure.

Departmental Publications (Access)

Mr. Goodman: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions how many and what proportion of publications issued by his Department are available in *(a)* Braille, *(b)* autoprint, *(c)* large print and *(d)* easy read format. [194285]

Maria Eagle: We are committed to giving disabled people access to the same information as non-disabled people and ensuring a consistent approach in providing information to all our customers.

We make a large number of our publications available in alternative formats, either readily available or upon request. Of 276 national publications, 50 are available in large print format, 64 are available in Braille, and 59 are available on audio tape.

However, virtually all our publications are available in the above formats upon request.

The Department does produce more publications than are detailed above. However, information concerning those publications could be provided only at disproportionate cost.

Departmental Staff

Hugh Bayley: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions how many full-time equivalent jobs *(a)* his Department and *(b)* its executive agencies had in (i) Yorkshire and the Humber and (ii) the City of York in (A) 1997 and (B) the latest year for which figures are available. [191845]

Maria Eagle: I refer the hon. Member to the reply given by my hon. Friend, the Minister of State for the Cabinet Office (Ruth Kelly) on 25 October 2004, *Official Report*, column 1053W.

My hon. Friend's reply gave figures collected via the Cabinet Office mandate system. The figures in the following table are not collected by the mandate system and are in addition to those published. Figures are not available prior to April 2002.

Jobcentre Plus	*2002*	*2003*	*2004*
City of York	100	90	90
Elsewhere in Yorkshire and Humberside	3,950	4,190	4,000
Total	4,050	4,280	4,090

Notes:

1. Figures are full time equivalents and are consistent with Cabinet Office definitions.
2. Figures are rounded to the nearest 10.
3. Temporary staff are not included.
4. Figures are as at 30 April for 2002 and 31 March for 2003 and 2004.

Farm Machinery (Child Accidents)

Mr. Gordon Prentice: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions how many children under 16 were injured in accidents involving *(a)* tractors and *(b)* farm machinery in the last year for which figures are available; and if he will make a statement. [196458]

Jane Kennedy: There were no reported injuries to children under 16 years involving tractors and three injuries to children under 16 involving other farm machinery in 2002–03. There was one fatality to a 12-year-old boy involving a tractor during the same period. Two children were run over and killed by farm vehicles in 2003–04. The latest provisional non-fatal injury figures for 2003–04 will be published on 18 November 2004.

The small number of child farm deaths in recent years reflects the considerable effort invested by HSE and the farming community to tackle this problem, and the wider health and safety problems of the agricultural industry where deaths among the self-employed are a particular concern.

Greek Presidency

Angus Robertson: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions how many times during the Greek presidency of the EU the Restricted Committee of the Safety and Health Commission for the mining and other extractive industries met; when and where these meetings took place; which UK Government expert was present at each meeting; what *(a)* technical and *(b)* financial issues were raised by the UK Government expert at each meeting; what recommendations the Committee produced during that period; what actions were (i) proposed and (ii) taken by (A) the EU and (B) the UK Government as a result of the Committee's recommendations; and if he will make a statement. [194876]

Jane Kennedy: The Restricted Committee of the Safety and Health Commission for the Mining and Other Extractive Industries (SHCMOEI) met once, in Luxembourg on 4 June 2003, during the Greek presidency of the EU.

A member of the Health and Safety Executive represented the UK Government at the 4 June 2003 Restricted Committee of the SHCMOEI.

The UK Government representative raised technical issues relating to: the minutes of the previous meeting; proposed changes to the draft 2002 Annual Report of the Safety and Health Commission; a "Coal Worker Pneumoconiosis" document tabled for adoption and commented on the cancellation of a planned meeting of the Committee on Underground Workings.

The UK Government representative did not raise any financial issues at the Restricted Committee of SHCMOEI on 4 June 2003.

The Restricted Committee made the following recommendations: amended and approved the minutes of the previous meeting, agreed representation for the Advisory Committee planning group; amended and adopted the 2002 Annual Report of the Safety and Health Commission and agreed the date for their next meeting.

I am not aware of any proposals for action or actions that were taken by either (A) the EU or (B) the UK Government as a result of the Restricted Committee's recommendations made by the SHCOMEI committee meeting on 4 June.

Angus Robertson: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions how many times during the Greek presidency of the EU the Advisory Committee on employment met; when and where these meetings took place; which UK Government expert was present at each meeting; what *(a)* technical and *(b)* financial issues were raised by the UK Government expert at each meeting; what recommendations the Committee produced during that period; what actions were (i) proposed and (ii) taken by (A) the EU and (B) the UK Government as a result of the Committee's recommendations; and if he will make a statement. [194877]

Mr. Pond: There were four meetings of the Employment Committee during the Greek Presidency, on 28 January 2003 in Brussels, on 20/21 February in Vasilitsa (Greece) and on 23 April 2003 and 14–15 May 2003, both in Brussels.

Officials from the Department for Work and Pensions attended all of these meetings. In addition: an official from the Department for Education and Skills attended one meeting; an official from the United Kingdom Permanent Representation to the EU attended another. An official from the Department for Work and Pensions chaired two of these meetings.

During the Greek Presidency the Committee produced Opinions on: the preparation to the spring 2003 European Council; Commission proposals for a Council Decision on Guidelines for member states' employment policies; a Commission recommendation for a Council Recommendation on the implementation of member states' employment policies; and on a Commission recommendation on the Broad Economic Policy Guidelines. The Committee also agreed the work programmes for subsidiary Committees (the Committee on Employment Incentive Measures and the Indicators Group). The Employment Committee discussed several other issues, without making any formalised recommendations.

Contributions by UK officials primarily focused on ensuring that outcomes reflected the broad policy principles of the Lisbon reform agenda, rather than specific financial or technical issues. The UK delegation consistently argued for a set of guidelines that reflected the reform agenda and were clear, simple and outcome focused.

The EU and the UK took forward Committee's conclusions in the context of applying Article 128 of the Treaty establishing the European Community. The

Council therefore takes the Committee's Opinion into account when agreeing the Employment Guidelines in accordance with Article 128.2, which the United Kingdom subsequently takes into account in national employment policies. On the basis of these Guidelines, the government produced the annual report referred to at Article 128.3 (ie the National Action Plan for Employment for 2004, copies of which were placed in the Library of the House on 19 October 2004.)

For general information on the Greek Presidency please see Cm 6097 'Developments in the European Union, January to June 2003, the Greek Presidency' which was laid before Parliament in January 2004.

Guarantee Credit

Mr. Webb: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions how many households were in receipt of the guarantee credit at the end of each of the past 12 months. [195526]

Malcolm Wicks: The information is given in the following table.

Households in receipt of the guarantee element of pension credit, October 2003 to September 2004

	Number
2003	
October	1,784,020
November	1,837,225
December	1,858,235
2004	
January	1,879,015
February	1,920,260
March	1,979,445
April	1,997,685
May	2,018,180
June	2,036,865
July	2,049,260
August	2,059,255
September	2,065,455

Note:
Figures are rounded to the nearest five.

Jobseeker's Allowance

Paul Holmes: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions pursuant to the answer of 1 November 2004, *Official Report*, column 124W, on jobseeker's allowance, when figures will be available for 2003–04. [196975]

Mr. Pond: We expect to publish estimates of the number of incorrect payments of jobseeker's allowance in 2003–04 in spring 2005.

Ministers' Private Offices

Mr. Prisk: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions what the running costs of Ministers' private offices in his Department have been in each year since 1997. [191391]

Maria Eagle: The Department for Work and Pensions was formed in June 2001 from the former Department of Social Security and parts of the former Department for Education and Employment including the Employment Service. Expenditure prior to June 2001 relates solely to the former Department of Social Security.

	Cost (£)
2003–04	3,200,000
2002–03	2,900,000
2001–02	2,600,000
2000–01	2,500,000
1999–2000	2,600,000
1998–99	2,300,000

Notes:
1. Information for 1997–98 is not available.
2. Running costs cover the cash spend on the day-to-day expenditure for Ministers' private offices including: Ministers' and officials' civil service pay, travel and subsistence; resource spending on accommodation; capital charges; and office services, stationery, postage, and IT equipment.

Pension Credit

John Barrett: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions how many people are in receipt of pension credit in *(a)* Scotland and *(b)* the City of Edinburgh local authority area. [195154]

Malcolm Wicks: Information on the number of pension credit recipients in *(a)* Scotland and *(b)* the City of Edinburgh local authority area at the end of September is given in the table.

Pension credit recipients—September 2004

	Households	Individuals
Scotland	273,395	327,225
City of Edinburgh	17,290	20,070

Notes:
1. Figures are rounded to the nearest five
2. Individual recipients include a small number of partners under age 60

Mr. Willetts: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions pursuant to his answer to the hon. Member for North Down (Lady Hermon) of 27 October 2004, *Official Report*, column 1289W, on pension credit, what the absolute figures for the male and female population aged 60 used for the answer were; and how many *(a)* men and *(b)* women are receiving pension credit. [196448]

Malcolm Wicks: The figures on which the answer was based are given in the following table. At 30 September there were *(a)* 1,067,650 male and *(b)* 2,117,030 female individual recipients of pension credit in Great Britain.

Pension credit recipients as proportion of population aged 60 or over, England and Wales, 31 August 2004

	Females	Males
Population aged 60 or over (number)	6,178,795	4,881,190
Individual recipients of pension credit		
Number	1,888,920	951,355
Percentage	30.6	19.5

Notes:
1. Figures are rounded to the nearest five.
2. Individual recipients include a small number of partners under age 60.

Brian Cotter: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions how many people living in the Weston-super-Mare constituency are *(a)* eligible for and *(b)* in receipt of pension credit. [196695]

Malcolm Wicks: Information on the number of people likely to be eligible for pension credit is not available at constituency level. However, we estimate that approximately 300,000 households in the South West Government Office Region (GOR), corresponding to approximately 400,000 individuals—rounded to the nearest 50,000—are likely to be eligible for pension credit in 2004–05. Information on the number of pension credit recipients in the South West GOR and in Weston-super-Mare at the end of September is given in the table.

Pension credit recipients—30 September 2004

	Households	*Individuals*
South West GOR	217,195	265,250
Weston-super-Mare	5,080	6,145

Notes:

1. Figures are rounded to the nearest five.
2. Individual recipients include a small number of partners under age 60.

Mr. Keith Bradley: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions how many people are *(a)* eligible for and *(b)* in receipt of pension credit in the Manchester, Withington constituency. [196910]

Malcolm Wicks: Information on the number of people likely to be eligible for pension credit is not available at constituency level. However, we estimate that approximately 500,000 households in the North West Government Office Region (GOR), corresponding to approximately 600,000 individuals (rounded to the nearest 50,000), are likely to be eligible for pension credit in 2004–05. Information on the number of pension credit recipients in the North West GOR and in Manchester Withington at the end of September is given in the table.

Pension credit recipients—30 September 2004

	Households	*Individuals*
North West GOR	348,525	420,680
Manchester Withington	4,010	4,690

Notes:

1. Figures are rounded to the nearest five.
2. Individual recipients include a small number of partners under age 60.

Pension Service

Jon Trickett: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions how many letters of invitation were sent by the Pension Service to people coming up to pensionable age during the last financial year. [196537]

Malcolm Wicks: The number of automatic invitations issued to customers inviting a claim to state pension during the period April 2003 to March 2004 was 607,719.

Pensioners Poverty

Mr. Wills: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions what estimate he has made of the cost of eradicating pensioner poverty. [196030]

Malcolm Wicks: The information requested is not available. Poverty and social exclusion are complex and multi-dimensional issues, affecting many aspects of peoples' lives—including their living standards, health, housing, the quality of their environment and not just low income. It is not therefore possible to estimate the cost of eradicating poverty with any assurance.

The sixth annual "Opportunity for all" report (Cm 6239) sets out the Government's strategy for tackling poverty and social exclusion and reports progress against a range of measures. In 2002–03 the Government spent £6 billion a year more on pensioners than we would if policies in 1997 had continued. This helped to cut the number of pensioners in low income (in households under 60 per cent. of median income after housing costs) from £2.7 million to £2.2 million in 2002–03 (which does not reflect the introduction of pension credit). This year the Government is spending £10 billion more than we did under 1997 policies, of which £5 billion goes to the poorest third.

Mr. Jenkins: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions what the Department's estimate is of the number of pensioners in the UK. [197536]

Malcolm Wicks: The Government Actuary's Department currently estimates that there were 11.126 million pensioners in the UK at mid-year 2004. A pensioner is considered to be an individual over state pension age.

Mr. Jenkins: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions how much has been paid in means-tested benefits to pensioners in each year since 1999. [197552]

Malcolm Wicks: The information is in the table.

Total income related benefits paid to pensioners

	Nominal terms	*£ million 2004–05 prices*
1998–99	8,587	9,894
1999–2000	8,876	10,007
2000–01	9,435	10,518
2001–02	10,190	11,075
2002–03	10,596	11,143
2003–04	11,125	11,382

Notes:

1. All figures have been rounded to the nearest £ million.
2. All figures quoted are income related benefits paid to people aged 60 and over.
3. Totals include minimum income guarantee/pension credit, housing benefit and council tax benefit.

Source:

Figures as at Spending Review 2004, published on the internet at http://www.dwp.gov.uk/asd/asd4/expenditure.asp, table 7.

Pensions

Mr. Cousins: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions what the average amount of basic state pension paid to *(a)* men in their own right, *(b)* women in their own right and *(c)* couples was in (i) 1997 and (ii) 2003; and how many people were in each group in each year. [194752]

Malcolm Wicks: The information is not available in the format requested. Such information as is available is in the table.

	Average basic state pension (£)	*Number of recipients of Category A basic state pension (Thousand)*
1997		
Men	61.51	3,490
Women	50.54	1,626
2003		
Men	75.94	3,808
Women	62.71	1,912

Notes:

1. Basic state pension refers to Category A pensions obtained from a person's own national insurance contributions plus basic state pensions derived from a former spouse's national insurance contributions. It excludes people with entitlement to a Category A pension where their Category B pension is more than their Category A pension.
2. Amounts are rounded to the nearest pence and numbers of recipients are rounded to the nearest thousand.
3. Amounts and numbers are for Great Britain.

Source:

Figures are derived from a 5 per cent., sample of DWP administrative data taken at September in each year.

Mr. Willetts: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions what the *(a)* median and *(b)* mean pension income was in each year since 1997, broken down between (i) state benefits, (ii) occupational pension, (iii) personal pension, (iv) earnings and (v) other sources. [196418]

Malcolm Wicks: The information requested is in the tables.

Table A: Mean incomes of pensioner units from 1996–97 to 2002–03, broken down by source income

£ per week

	1996–97	*1997–98*	*1998–99*	*1999–2000*	*2000–01*	*2001–02*	*2002–03*
All pensioner units							
Gross income	230	234	243	252	265	273	277
Benefit income	121	123	124	130	133	139	142
Occupational pension	59	61	63	65	70	72	74
Personal pension	3	4	4	5	7	7	8
Investment income	27	27	29	29	30	28	24
Earnings	18	18	20	21	23	25	25
Other income	1	1	2	2	3	3	3
Pensioner couples							
Gross income	334	340	349	357	379	392	388
Benefit income	148	149	149	156	159	165	170
Occupational pension	97	100	102	102	114	113	114
Personal pension	5	7	9	11	12	14	14
Investment income	45	47	47	47	48	46	39
Earnings	37	35	39	39	42	49	47
Other income	1	2	2	2	3	4	4
Single pensioners							
Gross income	165	167	176	183	192	194	203
Benefit income	104	106	109	114	115	121	124
Occupational pension	36	37	38	41	42	44	48
Personal pension	1	1	1	1	3	2	3
Investment income	16	15	18	17	19	16	15
Earnings	6	8	8	8	10	9	11
Other income	1	1	2	2	2	2	3

Table B: Net median income of pensioner units after housing costs

£ per week

	1996–97	*1997–98*	*1998–99*	*1999–2000*	*2000–01*	*2001–02*	*2002–03*
All pensioners	126	131	134	142	148	159	164
Pensioner couples	197	202	208	216	227	235	242
Single pensioners	88	91	95	103	109	117	122

Table C: Median values of different sources of pensioner incomes for those in receipt

£ per week

	1996–97	*1997–98*	*1998–99*	*1999–2000*	*2000–01*	*2001–02*	*2002–03*
Occupational pension							
All pensioners	56	60	60	63	66	71	74
Pensioner couples	79	86	88	94	101	106	107
Single pensioners	42	44	45	45	48	50	55
Personal pension							
All pensioners	29	31	32	31	34	41	35
Pensioner couples	35	32	40	41	38	44	37
Single pensioners	23	27	21	19	29	34	26

Table C: Median values of different sources of pensioner incomes for those in receipt

£ per week

	1996–97	*1997–98*	*1998–99*	*1999–2000*	*2000–01*	*2001–02*	*2002–03*
Investment income							
All pensioners	6	5	6	5	5	5	4
Pensioner couples	11	10	11	10	10	9	8
Single pensioners	3	3	3	3	3	3	2
Earnings							
All pensioners	130	125	158	146	155	137	156
Pensioner couples	157	142	173	164	180	148	174
Single pensioners	90	97	141	104	127	120	128

Notes:

1. Incomes are presented as pounds per week. Figures for incomes are given in 2002–03 prices and rounded to the nearest pound. Totals may not equal their components due to rounding.

2. The Pensioners' Incomes Series analysis is for pensioner units, which are either: single pensioners (ie people over state pension age) or pensioner couples (i.e. married or cohabiting pensioners where the man is over state pension age.)

Source:

Tables A, B and C: The Pensioners' Incomes Series 2002–03 which is based on data from the Family Resources Survey.

Redeployment Units

Mr. Willetts: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions how many staff in his Department and its agencies were in redeployment units during 2003; and how many have been in such units in 2004. [196518]

Maria Eagle: The Department did not have any redeployment units in 2003. The Pension Service redeployment unit was set up in July 2004 and is currently the only redeployment unit within the Department. 228 staff have been in the redeployment unit, 120 of whom have moved on.

Sign Language

Rev. Martin Smyth: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions what plans there are to include *(a)* British and *(b)* Irish Sign Language in the European Charter of Minority Languages. [196887]

Maria Eagle: The Council of Europe's Charter for Regional or Minority Languages does not include provision for sign languages. The Council's Parliamentary Assembly made a recommendation to the Council on the protection of sign languages used in member states to which the Council's Committee of Ministers responded on 5 July 2004. The reply notes that before deciding on the question of any possible future instrument a study of the needs of sign language users should be conducted in consultation with them and their organisations. The Government have indicated a willingness to participate in further work to move the process forward.

Social Security Benefits

Mr. Boswell: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions what plans he has following the introduction of the Mental Capacity Bill to modernise the system for appointment to receive social security benefits in lieu of the beneficiary. [194820]

Maria Eagle: We are looking at our current appointee arrangements in the light of the Mental Capacity Bill, in particular the initial assessment of incapacity and 'best interests'. The proposed codes of practice will provide the opportunity to review and bolster our existing guidance and arrangements. We are also looking at possible post-appointment monitoring systems.

TV Licence Fees

Tom Cox: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions what discussions he has had, and with whom, on the possibility of changes to the present television licence fee for people who are in receipt of state retirement pension. [195372]

Estelle Morris: I have been asked to reply.

A range of matters relating to BBC funding, including television licence fee concessions, need to be considered in the context of BBC Charter Review. As part of the Charter Review process, the Government have carried out an extensive public consultation exercise and have also commissioned supplementary research. In the course of this process a wide range of issues have been raised concerning the television licensing regime.

Women Pensioners

Lady Hermon: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions what assessment he has made of the reasons for differences in the percentages of women pensioners entitled to a full basic state pension in England and Wales and in Northern Ireland. [197013]

Vera Baird: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions what assessment he has made of the reasons for the differences between the number of women pensioners in *(a)* Northern Ireland and *(b)* England and Wales in receipt of the full basic state pension. [197075]

Malcolm Wicks: The differences between the proportions of women receiving a full basic state pension in England and Wales and in Northern Ireland can be attributed to variations in the extent to which women's own contribution records entitle them to qualify for a full basic state pension in their own right: and numbers of women who are widowed or divorced and qualify for a full basic state pension based on their late or former husband's contributions.

Work-related Illness

Mr. Burstow: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions if he will estimate the number of working days lost in each year since 1997 as a result of work-related *(a)* illness and *(b)* stress in (i) England and (ii) each region, broken down by gender. [196236]

Jane Kennedy: Currently the only data on work-related sickness absence since 1997 is from the survey of work-related illness undertaken in 2001–02. Estimates of the number of working days lost in 2001–02 for all self-reported work-related illness and self-reported work-related stress, depression or anxiety from this survey are shown by English region in the table.

Sample numbers are too small to provide reliable estimates for region by gender. However, for Great Britain as a whole an estimated 19.2 million working days were lost in 2001–02 due to work-related ill-health among males and 13.7 million among females. Similar estimates of working days lost in 2001–02 attributed to work-related stress, depression or anxiety in Britain indicate 6.3 million working days lost for males and 7.1 million working days lost for females.

Thousand

English Government office region	*Estimated working days lost in 2001–02 due to:* *All work-related ill-health*	*Work-related stress, depression or anxiety*
North East	1,979	[1]662
North West	4,213	1,532
Yorkshire and the Humber	3,538	1,146
East Midlands	1,918	687
West Midlands	3,594	1,380
East	2,560	921
London	3,339	1,606
South East	4,476	2,153
South West	2,954	1,172
All England	28,571	11,258

[1] This estimate is based on less than 40 sample cases.

Mr. Burstow: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions how many instances of self-reported work-related stress there were in each of the last five years by women in the 16 to 34 year age range; and if he will make a statement. [196245]

Jane Kennedy: Two surveys one in 1998–99 and one in 2001–02 provide estimates of the prevalence (long standing as well as new cases) of self-reported work-related stress, anxiety or depression since 1997. Data from these surveys indicates that the estimated prevalence of self-reported work-related stress, anxiety or depression among females aged 16 to 34 was 68,000 cases in 1998–99 and 85,000 cases in 2001–02. However, these survey data are not directly comparable because of a difference in survey methodology.

Mr. Burstow: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions if he will estimate the incidence of work-related mental illness in each of the last five years for *(a)* teachers, *(b)* police officers, *(c)* nurses and *(d)* prison workers; and if he will make a statement. [196243]

Jane Kennedy: The following table shows cases of work-related mental ill-health seen for the first time by psychiatrists and occupational physicians reporting to schemes in the Health and Occupation Reporting network (THOR) in each year from 1999 to 2003 for teachers, police officers, nurses and prison officers.

	Estimated cases of work-related mental ill-health by years: *1999*	*2000*	*2001*	*2002*	*2003*[1]
Teachers	565	612	732	425	391
Nurses	576	468	552	532	628
Police officers	276	204	252	275	289
Prison officers	[2]—	[2]—	[2]—	[2]—	148

[1] Data for 2003 is based on a different occupational coding structure to the other years.

[2] Number of reported cases are too low in individual years to make individual year estimates reliable. For all years 1999–02 there were in total an estimated 184 cases of work-related mental ill-health among prison officers.

Source:

THOR comprises seven surveillance schemes for work-related ill-health. Each scheme has reporters from a specific medical specialty and new cases seen by the specialist are reported that the specialist believes are related to work. This network is run for HSE by Manchester university.

NORTHERN IRELAND

Child Pornography

Mr. Gregory Campbell: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland how many persons have been convicted of charges relating to the production, possession or distribution of material connected with child pornography in Northern Ireland in the past two years. [196513]

Mr. Spellar: Offences relating to the production, possession or distribution of material connected with child pornography are prosecuted under the Protection of Children (NI) Order 1978. The following tables, which has been provided by NIO Research and Statistics Branch, details the number of convictions for offences related to child pornography in Northern Ireland for the years 2001 and 2002. This is the most current data available in the NIO courts dataset which is based on extractions from the PSNI operational database, ICIS (Integrated Criminal Information System).

Table 1: Number of prosecutions for offences relating to obscene publications involving children

Offence	*2001*	*2002*
Taking indecent photographs of children	0	0
Distributing indecent photographs of children	3	2
Possessing indecent photographs of children	0	0
Possessing indecent photograph of a child	1	0
Taking etc. indecent photographs or pseudo photographs of children	2	4
Copying indecent photographs or pseudo		

Table 1: Number of prosecutions for offences relating to obscene publications involving children

Offence	*2001*	*2002*
photographs of children	2	0
Publishing advertisement relating to indecent photographs of children	0	1
Total	8	7

Table 2: Number of convictions for offences relating to obscene publications involving children

Offence	*2001*	*2002*
Taking indecent photographs of children	0	0
Distributing indecent photographs of children	2	2
Possessing indecent photographs of children	0	0
Possessing indecent photograph of a child	1	0
Taking etc. indecent photographs or pseudo photographs of children	2	4
Copying indecent photographs or pseudo photographs of children	1	0
Publishing advertisement relating to indecent photographs of children	0	1
Total	6	7

Note:

Where proceedings involve more than one offence dealt with at the same time, the figures relate to the principal offence. The basis for selection of the principal offence is laid down in rules by the Home Office. In summary these indicate that, where there is a finding of guilt, the principal offence is usually that for which the greatest penalty was imposed. Where there has not been a finding of guilt (e.g. on acquittal or committal for trial) it is usually that for which the greatest penalty could have been imposed.

Departmental Funding/Offices

Mr. McGrady: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland what amounts of the regional rate for 2003–04 were allocated to each Government Department in Northern Ireland. [194948]

Mr. Pearson: I refer the hon. Gentleman to the answer I gave to the hon. Member for East Antrim (Mr. Beggs) on 25 October 2004, *Official Report*, column 1073W.

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland what the cost of *(a)* decoration and *(b)* refurbishment of the London offices of the Department was in each of the last four years. [196143]

Mr. Pearson: The information requested is as follows.

	£
2000–01	
Refurbishment	3,836.34
2001–02	
Refurbishment	29,726.59
Decoration	6,354.54
2002–03	
Refurbishment	36,724.72
Decoration	1,054.59
2003–04	
Refurbishment	No expenditure
Decoration	No expenditure

Crime

Mrs. Iris Robinson: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland how many *(a)* burglaries, *(b)* armed robberies and *(c)* car thefts have occurred in each of the Province's Westminster constituencies in each of the last six years. [196258]

Mr. Pearson: The statistics are not held by Westminster constituency, however, the following table provides the information for each of the Province's district command units over the past six financial years.

	1998–99	*1999–2000*	*2000–01*	*2001–02*	*2002–03*	*2003–04*
(a) Burglaries						
Northern Ireland	15,480	16,064	15,845	17,143	18,659	16,389
Antrim	453	368	367	422	559	458
Ards	582	746	766	630	749	667
Armagh	310	338	469	421	503	425
Ballymena	742	601	750	610	682	565
Ballymoney	131	136	163	223	209	142
Banbridge	231	304	377	343	364	336
Carrickfergus	379	498	276	282	242	201
Castlereagh	485	446	499	634	648	578
Coleraine	524	669	552	738	683	623
Cookstown	164	289	208	249	226	204
Craigavon	497	667	676	1,041	1,289	1,034
Down	722	716	659	749	914	770
Dungannon and South Tyrone	426	514	512	403	445	342
East Belfast	1,214	1,099	963	1,026	1,174	913
Fermanagh	478	345	398	420	400	466
Foyle	814	861	678	979	885	991
Larne	227	252	232	260	263	186
Limavady	230	256	251	248	235	239
Lisburn	792	741	943	970	1,010	1,019
Magherafelt	165	207	200	220	204	153
Moyle	83	105	110	157	173	162
Newry and Mourne	557	621	678	720	881	759
Newtownabbey	725	744	693	845	937	862
North Belfast	1,080	1,094	849	1,025	997	915
North Down	675	738	737	691	855	734
Omagh	465	444	421	377	399	360
South Belfast	1,583	1,455	1,733	1,704	2,045	1,694
Strabane	304	269	230	248	256	241
West Belfast	442	541	455	505	432	350

	1998-99	1999-2000	2000-01	2001-02	2002-03	2003-04
(b) Armed robberies						
Northern Ireland	632	682	927	1,191	1,375	1,042
Antrim	26	20	20	32	31	25
Ards	20	9	15	31	56	31
Armagh	12	18	8	15	11	24
Ballymena	53	22	17	27	11	21
Ballymoney	6	7	14	6	8	6
Banbridge	1	5	6	6	4	6
Carrickfergus	11	8	22	28	20	14
Castlereagh	19	27	30	36	72	53
Coleraine	25	26	33	23	33	29
Cookstown	2	6	6	4	3	4
Craigavon	18	19	26	41	55	31
Down	10	13	25	33	24	20
Dungannon and South Tyrone	2	9	3	3	7	5
East Belfast	56	80	75	121	137	106
Fermanagh	6	4	5	7	6	12
Foyle	51	43	35	35	34	39
Larne	2	4	7	11	3	2
Limavady	8	7	16	4	7	1
Lisburn	36	29	48	55	53	62
Magherafelt	2	4	3	6	3	6
Moyle	2	1	5	2	2	5
Newry and Mourne	37	25	26	38	45	39
Newtownabbey	35	36	73	78	102	74
North Belfast	54	43	97	154	223	133
North Down	22	38	62	50	69	40
Omagh	3	4	7	8	6	13
South Belfast	62	104	149	245	239	169
Strabane	7	13	11	10	10	7
West Belfast	44	58	83	82	101	65
(c) Theft/unauthorised taking of a motor vehicle						
Northern Ireland	9,715	10,196	10,806	11,635	8,410	5,369
Antrim	382	268	254	307	263	188
Ards	188	213	305	412	275	131
Armagh	138	147	141	131	128	94
Ballymena	220	175	117	160	133	120
Ballymoney	37	32	44	35	43	27
Banbridge	70	80	100	115	98	100
Carrickfergus	88	108	119	108	118	50
Castlereagh	306	379	325	454	284	182
Coleraine	200	157	154	167	132	128
Cookstown	81	88	75	87	60	59
Craigavon	324	427	374	469	258	241
Down	310	394	335	425	328	205
Dungannon and South Tyrone	175	174	182	163	150	112
East Belfast	418	538	587	611	640	267
Fermanagh	135	118	126	112	92	75
Foyle	412	329	255	350	265	243
Larne	83	68	51	94	49	45
Limavady	46	46	110	63	35	43
Lisburn	1,033	1,220	1,223	1,061	757	546
Magherafelt	136	76	90	58	75	29
Moyle	41	32	33	51	51	28
Newry and Mourne	387	423	379	474	404	280
Newtownabbey	432	418	402	487	392	246
North Belfast	880	896	1,023	1,248	882	568
North Down	316	235	264	440	239	121
Omagh	167	192	151	86	90	46
South Belfast	1,618	1,785	2,312	2,593	1,472	732
Strabane	64	52	95	77	87	53
West Belfast	1,028	1,126	1,180	797	610	410

Fisheries

Mrs. Iris Robinson: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland what assessment he has made of the impact of increases in fuel prices on the viability of the Northern Ireland fishing fleet. [197336]

Mr. Pearson: Fuel prices are particularly volatile at the moment and I am conscious that this may be having an impact on the local fishing industry in terms of vessel profitability. I have asked the Department of Agriculture and Rural Development to continue to monitor the situation.

Economic Output Statistics

Mr. Trimble: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland what the level of Gross Value Added per employee in the *(a)* manufacturing sector and *(b)* private services sector was in each year from 1997 to 2003 in Northern Ireland. [196864]

Mr. Gardiner: The Office for National Statistics has responsibility for official productivity measures, but do not produce regional estimates of GVA per employee by industrial sector as requested. However, the Department of Trade and Industry publishes GVA per workforce job by broad industry sector for the UK regions. The most recent Northern Ireland and UK data available for this measure is provided in the following table for 1997 to 2001.

Gross value added per workforce job[1] by broad industry sector for NI and UK

£000

	UK	*NI*
Manufacturing		
1997	34.2	28.8
1998	34.5	29.4
1999	35.7	31.7
2000	36.8	34.2
2001	38.2	36.2
Services		
1997	23.2	20.7
1998	24.1	21.7
1999	25.0	22.2
2000	25.8	22.6
2001	26.9	23.3

[1] Workforce jobs are calculated by summing employee jobs, self-employment jobs from the Labour Force Survey, HM Forces and government-supported trainees.

Source:

Regional and Local Division, ONS and Department of Enterprise Trade and Investment

Housing Executive

Mr. Gregory Campbell: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland how many properties owned by the Northern Ireland Housing Executive in 2003 took three months or more to repair and refurbish after the departure of the previous tenant. [196916]

Mr. Spellar: The information is not available. However, the Housing Executive, as part of the good management of its stock, carries out post vacancy inspections and depending on demand for housing in the area, any work required to be done will be prioritised with a view to having it completed within a maximum of six weeks from the date the contract is awarded. Basic health and safety checks of the electric and heating systems would be undertaken within one to two days and the timescale for completing other work would vary according to the cost and nature of the work.

Part-time Reserve

Lady Hermon: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland for what reasons new members of the part-time reserve are allowed to serve beyond the age of 62 years; what plans he has to amend this policy; and if he will make a statement. [197261]

Mr. Pearson: In accordance with the Police Service of Northern Ireland Reserve (Part-Time) Regulations 2004, part-time reserve members appointed after 8 February 2004 (the date on which the regulations came into force) shall be compulsory retired at age 65. These regulations also contain transitional arrangements for existing part-time reserve members.

I have been informed by PSNI that given the community focus of the new part-time officers (as per Patten), it makes sense for their composition to reflect more broadly the community at large. This includes, inter alia, attracting older applicants. It was for this reason that the PSNI recommended an upper age limit of 65 and they have advised there are no plans to amend this position.

Police Recruitment

Mr. Rosindell: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland what the recruitment figures have been for *(a)* the Police Service of Northern Ireland and *(b)* the Royal Ulster Constabulary in each of the last 10 years. [196183]

Mr. Pearson: The following table provides the total number of recruits to the Royal Ulster constabulary and the Police Service of Northern Ireland from 1994 to date:

	Number of recruits
RUC year	
1994	195
1995	175
1996	226
1997	287
1998	179
1999	243
2000	36
PSNI year	
2001	106
2002	475
2003	448
2004 (To date)	494

Pre-school Education

Mr. Dodds: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland if he will provide sufficient funding to ensure all children in nursery education benefit from having a teacher fully qualified in nursery education. [197111]

Mr. Gardiner: All children in nursery education do receive their pre-school education from a fully qualified teacher.

PSNI Flag

Lady Hermon: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland what advice the Northern Ireland Office has given the Police Service of Northern Ireland (PSNI) Chief Constable regarding the flying of the PSNI flag at police stations on official flag days. [197021]

Mr. Pearson: It is solely a matter for the Chief Constable to decide when the PSNI flag is flown in line with the Police Emblems and Flags Regulations (Northern Ireland) 2002. A copy of these regulations is available in Library of the House.

Public Appointments

Mr. Gregory Campbell: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland pursuant to the answer of 2 November 2004, *Official Report*, columns 242–43W, on public appointments, what action is being taken regarding the levels of appointments from the Protestant community to temporary positions in the general service grades of the *(a)* Northern Ireland Civil Service and *(b)* Northern Ireland Housing Executive. [196888]

Mr. Pearson: Protestants and men are currently under-represented in temporary positions in the general service grades of the Northern Ireland Civil Service. To encourage applications from these groups advertisements for general service temporary positions have included the following welcoming statement:

> "As Protestants and men are currently known to be under-represented among applicants for employment in this grade in the NICS, applications from the Protestant section of the community and from men would be particularly welcome."

As part of current outreach measures, Recruitment Service attends careers events throughout Northern Ireland to encourage young people to consider a career in the Northern Ireland Civil Service. Officials from my Department have also met careers teachers from a predominantly Protestant catchment area in an initiative to ensure that careers in NICS are perceived in a positive way by young Protestant school leavers and that applications received are representative of the entire community. Further outreach measures consistent with achieving a more representative and diversified workforce in the NICS are now being developed. The Northern Ireland Housing Executive has implemented an Affirmative Action Plan in agreement with its Board and the Equality Commission for Northern Ireland. The Plan outlines a series of measures developed to specifically encourage the Protestant community to consider working for the Housing Executive in the future, and therefore apply for vacancies, whether permanent or temporary, when they arise. The measures put in place include:

a. ensuring the recruitment process is targeted effectively;

b. encouraging more applications through the establishment of a community out reach service;

c. promoting employment opportunities through a schools programme; and

d. carrying out research on equality and employment opportunities as well as gauging public perception in relation to the organisation as a potential employer.

Republican Terrorism

Mr. Rosindell: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland if he will make a statement on republican terrorism in the last 12 months. [196169]

Mr. Pearson: The Provisional IRA maintains its capability but as the recent IMC report states, there is no evidence of intent to return to a campaign of widespread terrorism and its paramilitary activities have declined in recent months. Dissident republicans have continued to carry out attacks although many of their activities have been thwarted, intercepted or nullified by the security forces. INLA's activities have been confined principally to 'civil administration'. The report by the Independent Monitoring Commission published on 4 November gives further details of the activities of all republican terrorist organisations.

Strategy 2010

Mr. Trimble: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland what procedures are in place to assess the progress Strategy 2010 is making towards meeting its 10-year targets; what progress has been made since 1999; and if he will make a statement on the relationship between Strategy 2010 and the draft Economic Vision published in October. [196861]

Mr. Gardiner: The Economic Development Forum (EDF), chaired at ministerial level, was set up as one of the recommendations of Strategy 2010. Subsequently EDF used the information in Strategy 2010, including proposals on targets, in formulating its Medium Term Strategic Priorities (MTSPs) and associated targets for the Northern Ireland economy. EDF has given a commitment to monitor Northern Ireland's economic performance against targets on an annual basis. EDF's first statement on progress towards the MTSPs targets was published in January 2004.

The draft Economic Vision is a proposed corporate and cohesive view of the Northern Ireland economy going forward and overarches all other strategies.

Copies of the MTSPs and the draft Economic Vision referred to above have been placed in the House Library.

Student Suspensions

Mr. Beggs: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland how many students have been suspended from each of Northern Ireland's universities in each of the last five years; and how many have been suspended for anti-social behaviour that took place off-campus. [193668]

Mr. Gardiner: Universities are independent, autonomous institutions responsible for their own policies and practices in relation to student discipline, where appropriate. The Department for Employment and Learning does not maintain statistics pertaining to student discipline as this lies within the locus of the Universities. Queen's University and The University of Ulster have provided statistics on suspensions within their Institutions.

Calendar year/University	*Suspended from University*	*Suspended because of off campus antisocial behaviour*
Queen's University Belfast		
2000	812	0
2001	951	0
2002	2,797	0
2003	1,246	0
2004[1]	8	0
University of Ulster		
2000	8	0
2001	30	1
2002	9	0
2003	47	2
2004[1]	8	8

[1] As at 21 October 2004.

Terrorism Act

Mr. Rosindell: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland how many people have been arrested and charged under the Terrorism Act 2000 in Northern Ireland in each of the last three years. [196178]

Mr. Pearson: The following table provides details of the number of persons arrested and charged under section 41 of the Terrorism Act 2000 from 19 January 2001 (when the Act came into force) to 31 December 2003.

	Number of persons arrested	*Number of persons charged*
19 February–31 December 2001	179	50
2002	236	80
2003	359	121

Sources:
NIO Research and Statistical Bulletins 7/2002, 4/2003 and 3/2004—'Northern Ireland Statistics on the Operation of the Terrorism Act 2000: Annual Statistics 2001, 2002 and 2003'.

Water Charges

Mr. Beggs: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland whether charges for water applied through the regional rate will be removed when water meters are introduced. [193564]

Mr. Pearson: I refer the hon. Gentleman to the answer I gave on 25 October 2004, *Official Report,* column 1073W.

EDUCATION AND SKILLS

Civil Servants

Mr. Jenkins: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills what the average length of continuous service for civil servants within the Department is. [194403]

Mr. Charles Clarke: I would refer my right hon. Friend to the reply given by the Minister for the Cabinet Office on 3 November 2004, *Official Report,* column 268W.

Departmental Offices

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills what the cost of *(a)* decoration and *(b)* refurbishment of the London offices of the Department was in each of the last four years. [196147]

Mr. Stephen Twigg: The cost of decoration and refurbishment carried out in my London Headquarter Offices in each of the last four years is set out in the following table:

	£
2000–01	774,744
2001–02	1,335,207
2002–03	1,154,363
2003–04	2,108,082

The way in which my Department holds the information means we are unable to break the figures down.

Foreign Language Teaching

Helen Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills what steps he is taking to ensure that there are adequate numbers of teachers available to teach foreign languages in primary schools. [197640]

Mr. Charles Clarke: There has been considerable progress on the development of language learning in primary schools, underpinned by the launch in December 2002 of the Government's National Languages Strategy for England. Implementation of the Strategy is being driven by Lid King, the National Director for Languages.

The Strategy recognises the importance of developing a workforce and resources to support successful implementation of primary language learning, and much of our work to date has focussed on these areas.

In developing a school workforce, we are building up a cadre of specialist teachers and non-teacher specialists to support primary language learning. 580 places have been allocated this year for Primary Initial Teacher Training with a specialism in French, German, Spanish or Italian, and we intend to expand this programme further next year. This means that over 1200 teacher trainees will have been trained by the end of this year. In addition we have allocated 50 primary MFL places a year to the Graduate Teacher Programme.

For existing teachers, we have funded primary MFL Advanced Skills Teacher posts and are working with the TTA to develop and pilot CPD courses for existing primary teachers to enhance language skills and MFL pedagogy.

For non-teacher specialists, we are working with the British council to extend the foreign language assistants programme into primary schools, and are developing training for teaching assistants to support primary language learning.

Information Technology (Schools)

Dan Norris: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills what research has been commissioned to establish the proportion of *(a)* primary and *(b)* secondary teachers who were confident about using ICT in each year since 1997. [196762]

Mr. Charles Clarke: My Department has carried out an annual survey of ICT in schools since 1998 which includes a question about the confidence of teachers in using ICT in their job. The full survey data is in the House of Commons Library. It shows that the percentage of teaching staff who feel confident to use ICT in their subject teaching has risen as follows:

	Primary	*Secondary*
1998	65	61
1999	68	66
2000	67	65
2001	76	70
2002	81	75
2003	87	82

Although my Department has not commissioned any research studies specifically about teachers' confidence in using ICT, this topic has been covered in a number of other recent research and evaluation studies, such as the evaluations of Computers for Teachers, Laptops for Teachers and Curriculum Online.

References:

Becta (2001) Computers for Teachers: An evaluation of Phase 1: survey of recipients. NGfL Research and Evaluation Series No. 3. Becta/DfES.

Kington, A. et al (2003) Computers for Teachers: a qualitative evaluation of Phase 1. ICT in Schools Research and Evaluation Series No. 14. Becta/DfES.

Kitchen, S. et al (2003) Evaluation of Curriculum Online: Report of the baseline survey of schools. ICT in Schools Research and Evaluation Series No. 15. Becta/DfES.

Cunningham, M. et al (2004) Laptops for Teachers: An evaluation of the first year of the initiative. ICT in Schools Research and Evaluation Series No. 19. Becta/DfES.

Mr. Skinner: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills how many *(a)* primary and *(b)* secondary schools in the constituency of Bolsover were connected to the internet at the latest available date. [197096]

Mr. Miliband: The information is not available in the form requested.

It is estimated from a sample survey of schools that over 99 per cent. of both primary and secondary schools in England were connected to the internet at 31 March 2003.

The latest provisional data on ICT in schools was published in the Statistical First Release "Survey of Information and Communications Technology in Schools 2004", which is available on the Department's website www.dfes.gov.uk/rsgateway/.

School Governors

Mr. Clifton-Brown: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills what rights of appeal a school governor has against suspension. [197657]

Mr. Miliband: A school governor has no right of appeal against suspension.

Any motion to suspend a governor must be specified as an agenda item of a meeting for which at least seven days notice must be given. Before the governing body votes to suspend a governor, the governor or governors proposing the suspension must give their reasons for doing so and the governor who is proposed for suspension must be given the opportunity to make a statement in response. A vote on the issue must then be taken at a meeting of the full governing body.

A governing body can only decide to suspend a governor in the very limited range of circumstances as set out in the School Governance (Procedures) (England Regulations 2003. These are:

(a) the governor is paid to work at the school and is the subject of disciplinary proceedings in relation to his employment; or

(b) the governor is the subject of any court or tribunal proceedings, the outcome of which may be that he is disqualified from continuing to hold office as a governor under schedule 6 of the Constitution Regulations; or

(c) the governor has acted in a way that is inconsistent with the school's ethos or with the religious character and has brought or is likely to bring the school or the governing body or his office of governor into disrepute; or

(d) the governor is in breach of his duty of confidentiality to the school or to the staff or to the pupils.

Mr. Clifton-Brown: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills what process a school governing body has to undertake to remove a governor. [197677]

Mr. Miliband: A governing body may remove from office community governors, any parent governors who have been appointed, and sponsor governors. Sponsor governors may also be removed at the request of the nominating body. The governing body may not remove any parent governors who have been elected, any staff governors or any LEA governors. LEA governors may, however, be removed by the LEA that appointed them. In the case of the removal of any community governor, appointed parent governor, or sponsor governor whose removal is requested by the governing body, the governor(s) proposing the removal must give the reasons for the proposed removal and the governor in question must be given the opportunity to make a statement in response before a vote is taken on a resolution to remove the governor in question.

A governing body's decision to remove any community, sponsor, or appointed parent governor must be confirmed at a second meeting not less than 14 days after the first meeting. At both meetings, the removal of the governor in question must be specified as an agenda item.

School Inspections

Ms Shipley: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills if he will reduce the inspection requirements on schools with a good inspection track record. [197184]

Mr. Miliband: In June 2004, the Department and Ofsted published "A New Relationship with Schools", setting out our plans for a shorter, sharper school inspection system, based around a schools own self-evaluation. From September 2005 all school inspections will provide schools with less notice of an inspection, involve fewer inspectors, spending less time in schools. Hence all schools will experience a significantly reduced weight of inspection. The proposals will require that all schools be inspected at least once every three years, providing more relevant information for parents and their communities, but will operate such that higher performing schools can expect to receive fewer inspection visits. There are no plans to introduce further differentiation in inspection requirements at this stage.

Teacher Applicants

Mr. Win Griffiths: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills how many applicants have been refused in each year since the establishment of qualified teacher status. [197200]

Mr. Miliband: This information is not collected centrally.

School Targets

Mr. Liddell-Grainger: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills if he will list all the schools targets set by the Government in Spending Reviews since 1997, indicating whether or not they have been reached. [186472]

Mr. Miliband: The following table lists all the schools targets set by the Government in spending reviews since 1997. My hon. Friend may wish to note that only CSR 1998 targets have had a final assessment, all others are ongoing. Progress reports against PSA targets from the 2000 and 2002 Spending Reviews are set out in the 2004 DfES departmental report, a copy of which I have placed in the House of Commons Library.

Annex A: Reconciliation table—DfES targets

CSR 1998 PSA Targets	*Spending Review 2000 PSA Targets*	*Spending Review 2002 PSA Targets*	*Spending Review 2004 PSA Targets*
1. The number of pupils aged five, six or seven in infant classes of over 30 to fall from 477,000 to zero by September 2001 at the latest. Target met			
2. Increase the proportion of those aged 11 meeting the standard of literacy for that age (level 4 in the Key Stage 2 test) from 63 per cent. to 80 per cent. by 2002. 75 per cent. by 2002	1. Increase the percentage of 11 year olds at or above the expected standard of literacy and numeracy for their age. By 2004: Increase the percentage of children who achieve level 4 in each of the key stage 2. English and maths tests beyond the targets for 2002 of 80 per cent. in English and 75 per cent. in maths to 85 per cent. by 2004; and Reduce to zero the number of local education authorities where fewer than 78 per cent. of pupils at level 4 or above achieve these standards.	1. Raise standards in English and maths so that: by 2004, 85 per cent. of 11-year-olds achieve level 4 or above and 35 per cent. achieve level 5 or above with this level of performance sustained until 2006; and by 2006, the number of schools in which fewer than 65 per cent. of pupils achieve level 4 or above is significantly reduced.	1. Raise standards in English and maths so that: by 2006, 85 per cent. of 11-year-olds achieve level 4 or above, with this level of performance sustained to 2008; and by 2008, the proportion of schools in which fewer than 65 per cent. of pupils achieve level 4 or above is reduced by 40 per cent.
3. Increase the proportion of those aged 11 meeting the standard of numeracy for that age (level 4 in the Key Stage 2 test) from 62 per cent. to 75 per cent. by 2002. 73 per cent. by 2002			
4. A reduction by one third in school truancies (from 0.7 per cent. to 0.5 per cent. half days missed a year through unauthorised absence); (Unauthorised absence remained at 0.7 per cent. as it has since 1994) and exclusions (from 12,500 to 8,400 permanent exclusions a year) by 2002. Target met	2. On pupil inclusion: By 2004, reduce school truancies by 10 per cent. compared to 2002 and to sustain the new lower level, and improve overall attendance levels thereafter. ensure that all pupils who are permanently excluded obtain an appropriate full-time education.		2. Improve levels of school attendance so that by 2008, school absence is reduced by 8 per cent. compared to 2003.
5. Increase the proportion of those aged 16 who achieve one or more GCSEs at Grade G, or equivalent from 92 per cent. to 95 per cent. by 2002. 94.6 per cent. by 2002			
6. Increase the proportion of those aged 16 who achieve five or more GCSEs at Grades A*-C from 45 per cent. to 50 per cent. by 2002. Target met (51.6 per cent.)	3. Increase the percentage of pupils obtaining five or more GCSEs at grades A*-C (or equivalent): increase the proportion achieving the standard by 4 percentage points between 2002 and 2004; and at least 38 per cent. to achieve this standard in every LEA by 2004.	3. Raise standards in schools and colleges so that: between 2002 and 2006 the proportion of those aged 16 who get qualifications equivalent to five GCSEs at grades A*-C rises by 2 percentage points each year on average and in all schools at least 20 per cent. of pupils achieve this standard by 2004 rising to 25 per cent. by 2006: and	3. By 2008, 60 per cent. of those aged 16 to achieve the equivalent of 5 GCSEs at grades A*-C; and in all schools, at least 20 per cent. of pupils to achieve this standard by 2004, rising to 25 per cent. by 2006 and 30 per cent. by 2008. (This target may be reviewed in the light of recommendations in the Tomlinson report.)
	4. Increase the percentage of 14 year olds at or above the standard of literacy, numeracy, science and ICT for their age. by 2007, 85 per cent. to achieve level 5 or above in each of the key stage 3 tests in English, maths and ICT and 80 per cent. in science; as milestones towards that target 75 per cent. to achieve level 5 in English, maths and ICT and 70 per cent. in science by 2004; by 2004, as a minimum performance target at least 65 per cent. to achieve level 5 and above in English and maths, and 60 per cent. in science in each LEA; and by 2004, no more than 15 per cent. of pupils will fail to attain at least one level 5.	4. Raise standards in English, maths, ICT and science in secondary education so that: by 2004, 75 per cent. of 14-year-olds achieve level 5 or above in English, maths and ICT (70 per cent. in science) nationally and by 2007, 85 per cent. (80 per cent. in science): by 2007, the number of schools where fewer than 60 per cent. of 14-year-olds achieve level 5 or above is significantly reduced; and by 2007, 90 per cent. of pupils reach level 4 in English and maths by age 12.	4. Raise standards in English, maths, ICT and science in secondary education so that: by 2007, 85 per cent. of 14-year-olds achieve level 5 or above in English, maths and ICT (80 per cent. in science) nationally, with this level of performance sustained to 2008; and by 2008, in all schools at least 50 per cent. of pupils achieve level 5 or above in each of English, maths and science.

Annex A: Reconciliation table—DfES targets

CSR 1998 PSA Targets	*Spending Review 2000 PSA Targets*	*Spending Review 2002 PSA Targets*	*Spending Review 2004 PSA Targets*
	5. Increase the percentage of pupils obtaining five or more GCSEs at grades A*-G (or equivalent), including English and maths: by 2004, 92 per cent. of 16 year olds should reach this standard.		
	6. Complete benchmarking work for schools by December 2002 so that schools will then be able meaningfully to compare costs with one another and thus improve value for money year on year. Progress reported in Departmental Report in 2003 as being 'A framework of Consistent Financial Reporting has been established requiring all maintained schools to report their accounts in a standardised way and treated as 'Met'. This will be formally signed off in 2004.		
		5. Enhance the take-up of sporting opportunities by 5- to 16-year-olds by increasing the percentage of school children who spend a minimum of two hours each week on high quality PE and school sport within and beyond the curriculum from 25 per cent. in 2002 to 75 per cent. by 2006. Joint target with Department for Culture, Media and Sport.	5. Enhance the take-up of sporting opportunities by five to 16 year olds so that the percentage of school children in England who spend a minimum of two hours each week on high quality PE and school sport within and beyond the curriculum increases from 25 per cent. in 2002 to 75 per cent. by 2006 and to 85 per cent. by 2008, and to at least 75 per cent. in each School Sport Partnership by 2008. (Joint target with the Department for Culture, Media and Sport)

Written Answers to Questions

Monday 15 November 2004

TRANSPORT

Blue Badge Scheme

Mr. Grogan: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport if he will extend the automatic qualifying criteria for the Blue Badge scheme to include recipients of attendance allowance. [195714]

Charlotte Atkins: There was no support during the last review of the scheme to extend it to this group of people and we have no plans to do so.

The scheme is designed primarily to assist people with severe difficulty in walking which is reflected in the eligibility criteria for a badge. This includes an automatic qualifying criterion for those in receipt of the higher rate of the mobility component of disability living allowance on the basis that receipt of that benefit indicates that the applicant has considerable difficulty in walking.

Mr. Paul Burstow: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport when he will announce the publication of research into the eligibility of parents of children with severe autistic conditions for inclusion in the Blue Badge Scheme, following the Department's review of the scheme. [194051]

Charlotte Atkins: The research we will be undertaking will consider the mobility needs of a number of groups of disabled people who are currently excluded from the scheme. I can confirm that this research will include the needs of both adults and children with autistic conditions. This is one of three research projects we are taking forward as a direct result of the review of the scheme. We are finalising the work specifications and intend to go out to tender later this year for all three. On this particular project we would expect to have results and recommendations in the course of next year.

European Coastguard

Mr. Tynan: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what assessment has been made of the consequences for the Royal Navy's *(a)* search and rescue and *(b)* coastal patrol roles of the creation of a European Coastguard. [197572]

Mr. Jamieson: None, since there is no prospect of a proposal to establish a European coastguard being made or accepted.

A30 Goss Moors

Ms Atherton: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport when he expects to make an announcement on the dualling of the A30 Goss Moors in Cornwall. [195099]

Mr. Jamieson: The Department is in the process of reviewing the timing and relative priorities of all major schemes in the Highways Agency's trunk road programme in the light of this year's spending review. I hope to announce the outcome shortly.

Dartford Crossing

Mr. Fallon: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport how much of the surplus from user charges for the Dartford Crossing was spent in transport projects in Essex and Kent in 2003–04. [197543]

Mr. Jamieson: All income from charging at the Dartford Crossing is taken into account in the funding for the 10 year plan.

Departmental Press Releases

Pete Wishart: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport how many press releases have been issued by his Department in each month of 2004; and if he will make a statement. [195451]

Charlotte Atkins: I refer the hon. Member to the answer given by my hon. Friend, the Minister for the Cabinet Office on 11 November 2004, *Official Report*, column 857W.

Departmental Staff

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what percentage of the staff of the Department in *(a)* 2002 and *(b)* 2003 were people with disabilities. [196130]

Charlotte Atkins: I refer to the answer given on 9 November 2004, *Official Report*, column 620W, by my hon. Friend the Minister for the Cabinet Office.

Driving Licences (Chinese Visitors)

Mr. Robathan: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport if he will make it his policy to require Chinese visitors to the UK to have British driving licences before being allowed to drive in the UK; and if he will make a statement. [198086]

Mr. Jamieson: The requirements for driving in the UK are the same for all holders of licences issued in countries outside the European Economic Area (EEA), including China. In order to be able to drive here, all individuals must hold a valid driving licence or International Driving Permit (IDP) showing the relevant driving entitlement.

New residents may drive small vehicles for 12 months from the date they became resident. To ensure continuous driving entitlement, a British driving licence must be obtained before this period elapses.

Visitors may drive all vehicles shown on their licence for 12 months from the date they last entered the country. They cannot drive beyond that period and are unable to obtain a British licence because they are not resident.

The concessionary 12-month period in which holders of valid foreign driving licences can drive in this country is a long-standing arrangement. It was introduced for residents to allow sufficient time to become familiar with the road and traffic conditions here to take a driving test, and for visitors, in the interest of tourism and commerce.

Lighthouses

John Thurso: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what recent contracts for maintenance work the *(a)* Trinity House Lighthouse Service, *(b)* Northern Lighthouse Board and *(c)* Commissioners for Irish Lights have obtained from other bodies; and if he will list contracts (i) entered into and (ii) pending, broken down by financial value. [197335]

Mr. Jamieson: The following tables provide information on recent and pending contracts, grouped by type of customer:

(a) Trinity House Lighthouse Service

£000

	Contracts entered into since 1 April 2004	*Contract bids pending*
Local authorities	4	4
Utility companies	20	8
Other private sector	43	—
Total	67	12

(b) Northern Lighthouse Board

£000

	Contracts entered into since 1 April 2004	*Contract bids pending since 1 April 2004*
Local authorities	11	—
Utility companies	4	—
Other private sector	42	—
Total	57	0

(c) Commissioners of Irish Lights

£000

	Contracts entered into since 1 April 2004	*Contract bids pending*
Local authorities/ Government Departments	98	—
Utility companies	0	—
Other private sector	123	—
Total	221	0

M6

Paul Farrelly: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport (1) how many responses were received to the document, M6: giving motorists a choice—a consultation proposal, from *(a)* individuals, *(b)* motoring and transport lobbying groups, *(c)* businesses and commercial associations, *(d)* environmental groups, *(e)* councils, parishes and other local or regional authorities and *(f)* honourable Members; how many were received in total; and how many in each category were (i) in favour of development of the option of an M6 Expressway, (ii) against the development of such an option and (iii) neither for nor against this option; [197455]

(2) when he proposes to announce *(a)* the results of and *(b)* his response to the consultation on the document M6: giving motorists a choice; [197460]

(3) what methodology he proposes to use in giving weight to each of the responses received to the consultation M6: giving motorists a choice, before announcing his decision regarding further development of the option of an M6 expressway between Birmingham and Manchester. [197461]

Mr. Jamieson *[holding answer 11 November 2004]*: By the closing date for this consultation exercise we had received approximately 5,260 responses as well as a number of petitions amounting to around 3,000 signatures. The responses are currently being analysed. Details of the responses received will be included in our published response to the consultation. We will publish our response once we have reached our conclusion in the light of the analysis of the responses. The methodology we adopt to analyse the responses will be explained as part of this published response.

Mr. Kidney: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport if he will place in the Library a list of those responding to his consultation M6: giving motorists a choice. [197782]

Mr. Jamieson: The responses are currently being analysed. Details of the responses received will be included in our published response to the consultation.

Meetings

Mr. Stringer: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport if he will list meetings he has held with *(a)* officials and *(b)* members of (i) passenger transport authorities and (ii) passenger transport executives since 1 March. [197935]

Charlotte Atkins: The Secretary of State has met during the course of regional visits since March representatives of Nexus in Tyne and Wear, Merseytravel in Merseyside and Centro in the West Midlands.

Private Finance Initiatives

Mr. George Osborne: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport if he will list the private finance initiative arrangements in which the Department is engaged; what the total cost of each arrangement is *(a)* over its lifetime and *(b)* in each year of its operation; and how the arrangement appears in the Department's public accounts. [193976]

Charlotte Atkins: The forecast capital value of PFI contracts awarded by the Department for Transport and its Agencies are reported to Parliament on a six-monthly basis. Details are available from the HM Treasury website.

Details of the *(a)* lifetime total and *(b)* forecast annual unitary charge payments for all the PFI contracts awarded by the Department for Transport and its agencies have been placed in the Libraries of the House. The payment of the full unitary charge sum is contingent on the contractor providing a quality service in line with the project's output specification.

The Department for Transport Resource Accounts record:

(a) a list of Private Finance Initiative contracts the Department has entered into;

(b) the imputed finance lease obligations under on balance sheet PFI; and

(c) the charge to the operating cost statement for future commitments.

The information in the Resource Accounts relates to Highways Agency. Payments by the Vehicle Operator and Services Agency are not consolidated into the Department's Resource Accounts.

Railways

Mr. Yeo: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what meetings his Department has had with representatives of *(a)* Network Rail, *(b)* the train operating companies and *(c)* others in the rail industry about the changes being made to the structure of the railways. [194650]

Mr. Darling: Both my ministerial colleagues and I, as well as my officials, met and continue to meet regularly with a wide range of representatives from the rail industry following the announcement of the Rail Review in January this year and publication in July of the Rail White Paper—"The Future of Rail".

Mr. Yeo: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what discussions *(a)* he and *(b)* his Department have had with the Prime Minister on the future of the railway industry. [194651]

Mr. Darling: I meet with the Prime Minister on a regular basis to discuss a range of transport issues.

Regulatory Impact Assessments

Mr. Redwood: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport (1) what the aggregate annual cost obtained by adding the costs in each regulatory impact assessment is of regulations imposed by his Department since 1997; [196561]

(2) what his latest estimate is of the costs to *(a)* Government and *(b)* regulators of transport regulation in a year; [196562]

(3) what his latest estimate is of the compliance cost to business of transport regulation in a year. [196563]

Charlotte Atkins: All proposals which impact on business, charities or the voluntary sector require a regulatory impact assessment (RIA) which includes details of the costs, benefits and risks of the proposal. RIAs are subject to public consultation and copies of final RIAs are available from the House Libraries and on the departmental website at http://www.dft.gov.uk/.

Remote Regional Airports

John Thurso: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport if he will introduce a compulsory scheme of six months' notice of intention before withdrawal of flights serving remote regional airports. [197341]

Charlotte Atkins: There is presently no legal basis on which compulsory notification of withdrawal from a route could be required. However, the Department recently consulted on a voluntary scheme where an airline operating regional air services to London airports, would give four months notice of any intention to withdraw from, or reduce services on, regional routes. The consultation closed on 8 November and we will be considering the responses carefully.

John Thurso: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what research he has commissioned on the role frequency of flights plays in the *(a)* economic and *(b)* social wellbeing of remote rural areas. [197342]

Charlotte Atkins: The Department for Transport has not commissioned any analysis to be carried out on the role frequency of flights plays in the economic and social wellbeing of remote rural areas.

Rotherwas Access Road

Mr. Keetch: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what representations he has received concerning the proposed Rotherwas access road; and if he will make a statement. [191365]

Charlotte Atkins: The Secretary of State for Transport has received 19 representations about the proposed Rotherwas access road. In March this year, the then Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State (Tony McNulty) met with Herefordshire council to discuss the scheme and other transport matters. I also met with my hon. Friend and Hertfordshire council recently to discuss the Rotherwas access road.

The proposed road was initially submitted to DfT for approval in July 2003. The scheme was not approved and the council were informed that further consideration was required as to whether the scheme provides value for money for the benefits to be gained, the extent of the potential employment benefits and whether the scheme proposed is the best option for improving access to the estate. The scheme was re-submitted in July 2004. The Secretary of State for Transport will make an announcement about this and other schemes later this year as part of the Local Transport Settlement.

South East Trains

Clive Efford: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport (1) what steps he will take to ensure the public gets value for money from the future operators of the South East Trains franchise; [196869]

(2) what discussions he has had with South East Trains about the future of its franchise; [196870]

(3) if he will list the performance against each target set for South East Trains for each month since it took over from Connex; what the performance figures were for the same periods in the previous five years; and if he will make a statement; [196871]

(4) what measures he will put in place to ensure that train services do not deteriorate if the South East Trains franchise is put back into the private sector. [196873]

Mr. McNulty: South East Trains (SET) is being operated as a subsidiary of the Strategic Rail Authority under s.30 of the Railways Act 1993 pending its re-franchising as part of the new Integrated Kent Franchise (IKF). The Department has frequent discussions with the SRA on a variety of issues.

We expect the new operator for IKF franchise to be in place late 2005. The operator will be chosen by a process of competitive tendering. The winner of the competition will be the bidder that offers best value for money for passengers and taxpayers throughout the life of the franchise. The franchise agreement will specify performance and service standards that the operator will need to meet otherwise be in breach of the franchise agreement.

SET's passengers' charter sets targets for punctuality and reliability. If the moving annual average falls below the relevant threshold it will trigger compensation payments to season tickets holders. The targets for punctuality and reliability on their main line services are 82 per cent. and 98 per cent. respectively. The targets for punctuality and reliability on their Metro services are 86.5 per cent. and 98 per cent. respectively. A table showing SET's passengers charter performance per four-week period over the last five years has been placed in the Library of the House.

The Strategic Rail Authority (SRA) measures train operator performance using the public performance measure (PPM) which combines punctuality and reliability. PPM is published in the SRA's National Rail Trends, copies of which are available in the Libraries of the House.

Traffic Management Act

Mr. Stringer: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport when he will publish the new regulatory impact assessment for the Traffic Management Act 2004. [196387]

Charlotte Atkins: We have no plans to produce a new Regulatory Impact Assessment covering the Traffic Management Act as a whole. However, many of the provisions in the Act will need to be brought into force by way of secondary legislation. Where this is the case we will publish separate assessments covering each of these. We expect to publish the first of these assessments next year.

Mr. Stringer: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what targets he has set for improvement in performance for *(a)* utility companies and *(b)* highway authorities over the next three years under the Traffic Management Act 2004. [196389]

Charlotte Atkins: We are not proposing to set overall targets for improvement in performance under the Traffic Management Act 2004. We intend activating key powers and duties under the Act over the coming year. We will be devising a monitoring regime to measure the impact of the Act, covering both utilities and highway authorities.

Victoria Embankmnet (Closure)

Miss McIntosh: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport for what reasons Victoria Embankment was closed to traffic on the evening of 19 September; and for what reasons diversion notices were not put in place. [197679]

Mr. McNulty: Victoria Embankment was closed to traffic in the evening of 19 September for the Mayor's Thames Festival. I understand that the Festival organisers arranged for diversion notices to be put out 10 days before the event; and that Transport for London also put diversion notices on the dot matrix displays on their road network.

CABINET OFFICE

Departmental Responsibilities

Dr. Julian Lewis: To ask the Minister for the Cabinet Office pursuant to her answer of 3 November 2004, *Official Report*, columns 268–69W, on departmental responsibilities, what estimate has been made of the sum from within her Department's budget to be used to meet the cost of appointing a separate Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster. [198006]

Ruth Kelly: I refer the hon. Member to the response I gave him on 10 November 2004, *Official Report*, column 769W.

Draft Civil Service Bill

Tony Wright: To ask the Minister for the Cabinet Office when the Government will publish a draft Civil Service Bill for consultation. [198927]

Ruth Kelly: The Government are today publishing its proposals for legislation for the Civil Service. This fulfils the Government's commitment, given in its response to the ninth report of the Committee on Standards in Public Life, to publish a draft Bill as a basis for further consultation following the publication of the Public Administration Select Committee's proposal for a Civil Service Act.

Copies of the consultation paper and the draft Bill have been placed in the Libraries of the House, and can be accessed at www.cabinet-office.gov.uk.

We would welcome comments on the consultation paper and the draft Bill by 28 February 2005.

Engagements

Dr. Julian Lewis: To ask the Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster if he will list his public engagements individually for the week beginning 8 November. [198005]

Mr. Milburn: I refer the hon. Member to my answer to him on 2 November 2004, *Official Report*, columns 223–24W.

High Sheriffs (CPOs)

Mr. Dismore: To ask the Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster if he will make a statement on the liability of High Sheriffs in the case of improper enforcement of compulsory purchase orders. [198135]

Keith Hill: I have been asked to reply.

Where the owner or occupier of land which an authority has been authorised to acquire under the terms of a compulsory purchase order refuses to give up possession of it, the authority may issue a warrant to the Sheriff who is then authorised to take possession of the land using sufficient force to enable this to be achieved. The Sheriff is also responsible for settling the costs accruing as a result of the issuing and execution of the warrant. These powers are provided in section 13 of the Compulsory Purchase Act 1965, with similar powers in section 91 of the Lands Consolidation Act 1845 for compulsory purchase orders to which the provisions of that Act apply.

INTERNATIONAL DEVELOPMENT

Africa/Caribbean/Pacific

Mr. Tynan: To ask the Secretary of State for International Development if he will make a statement on EU FLEX financial support to the African, Caribbean and Pacific regions to smooth export earnings. [197632]

Mr. Gareth Thomas: The FLEX mechanism is a compensatory financing mechanism provided from the EU's European Development Fund under the Cotonou Agreement for African, Caribbean and Pacific (ACP) countries. It has been in place since 2000. Its objectives are:

> to provide support in the case of short-term fluctuations in export earnings in order to safeguard reforms and policies at risk as a result of a fall in revenue; and
>
> to remedy the adverse effects of instability of export earnings in particular from agricultural and mining products.

Until June of this year there were two eligibility criteria to receive funding from FLEX:

> (i) A 10 per cent. (2 per cent. in the case of least developed countries) loss of export earnings compared with the arithmetical average of earnings in the first three years of the four years preceding the application; and
>
> (ii) A 10 per cent. worsening in the programmed public deficit programmed for the year in question or forecast for the following year.

Between its inception in 2000 and March 2004 only €35million was disbursed. Of the 51 applications, only nine met both eligibility criteria. In March 2004, the EC proposed revisions to relax FLEX's eligibility criteria, in order to ensure that it responded more effectively to its stated objectives.

In July, the EU and the African, Caribbean and Pacific (ACP) States agreed to modify the eligibility criteria as follows:

> *(a)* To criteria 1: Extension to landlocked and island ACP states of the more favourable provision of having to only have suffered a 2 per cent. loss of export earnings (rather than 10 per cent.); and
>
> *(b)* Reduction of the second criteria from a 10 per cent. to a 2 per cent. worsening of programmed public deficit.

The European Commission has agreed to undertake a review of FLEX by the beginning of 2005 at the latest, and annually thereafter. The evaluation will provide an initial assessment of the impact of these modifications. It is expected that they will result in an increase in the number of successful applicants, and the overall level of FLEX assistance provided.

AIDS

Mr. Wills: To ask the Secretary of State for International Development how much the Department spent on support for people in sub-Saharan Africa with AIDS and their families *(a)* directly and *(b)* through the EU in the last year for which figures are available. [196371]

Hilary Benn: Sub-Saharan Africa is home to 24 of the 25 countries with the highest levels of HIV prevalence: between 25 and 28 million people are infected with HIV in Africa. The Joint United Nations Programme on HIV/AIDS (UNAIDS) estimate that in 2003 alone, 2.3 million Africans died of AIDS. Despite high death rates, the number of people infected continues to rise. The Department for International Development attaches significant importance to addressing the epidemic globally, but most particularly in Africa. Our response needs to be comprehensive and broad if we are to have impact.

DFID spent over £270 million globally on HIV/AIDS programmes in 200–03. About two-thirds of this support was targeted at sub-Saharan Africa. DFID is one of the leading bilateral donors in support for HIV/AIDS. In addition, since 1997, DFID has provided over £1 billion of assistance to the development of the health sector.

In this financial year the Prime Minister launched our new AIDS strategy, which commits us to spending £1.5 billion over the next three years, with £50 million per year of this to be spent on support for orphans and vulnerable children. We are also on course to achieve overall development assistance levels of £1 billion per annum for Africa by the end of 2005 and will use the Presidency of both the G8 and the European Union in 2005 to concentrate upon both Africa and HIV and AIDS.

European Union (EU) activities to combat AIDS in developing countries is carried out within the framework of the European Commission's Programme for Action (PfA), entitled: "Accelerated action on HIV/AIDS, malaria and TB in the context of poverty reduction". The PfA aims to increase the impact of existing interventions to combat HIV/AIDS; increase the affordability of pharmaceuticals; and encourage investment in research for the development of global public goods to tackle HIV/AIDS, tuberculosis (TB) and Malaria.

The Commission's average annual expenditure on the HIV/AIDS, TB and malaria, which is mainly through the Global Fund for AIDS, TB and Malaria (GFATM) is currently €269 million per year. About 70 per cent. of GFATM expenditure goes to HIV/AIDS, while 60 per cent. of the total is spent in Africa (tentatively translating into €113 million per year for Africa). In addition to this direct expenditure, average annual EC global financing for the health sector is estimated as €565 million per year. Finally, HIV/AIDS prevalence rates are used as an important indicator in all countries where the EC is providing budget support.

The UK's significant contributions to the European Commission Development Budget and the European Development Fund however can not be tracked back specifically to use on HIV/AIDS in Africa. Most EC resources are allocated by region or country in response to country government's own priorities, and details of the proportion of UK support for HIV and AIDS are not available centrally. However, the UK has been working hard within the EU to protect the principles agreed at the International Conference on Population and Development (ICPD) in Cairo in 1994, which redefined sexual and reproductive health and rights.

Commission for Africa

Dr. Tonge: To ask the Secretary of State for International Development if he will make a statement on the Commission for Africa. [197191]

Hilary Benn *[pursuant to my reply, 9 November 2004, Official Report, c. 557W]:* There was a slight delay in putting the Commission for Africa consultation document on the commission website. I can now confirm that it was placed on the website on 11 November 2004.

EU Development Aid

Mr. Tynan: To ask the Secretary of State for International Development if he will make a statement on the untying of EU development aid. [197583]

Mr. Gareth Thomas: DFID welcomes the agreement of the Council to untie all the development programmes managed by the European Commission. This is consistent with our White Paper commitment to work for multilateral untying. DFID wants the agreement to be put into practice as soon as possible. A draft implementing Regulation, which must be agreed by both the Council and the European Parliament, is under discussion.

EU aid contracts will be open to non-EU donors on a reciprocal basis as well as to suppliers from developing countries. By untying aid in this way, Europe is giving an international lead and a practical example for other donors to consider as the basis for further untying by members of the Development Assistance Committee (DAC) of the Organisation for Economic Co-Operation and Development (OECD).

Mr. Tynan: To ask the Secretary of State for International Development what assessment has been made of the response of *(a)* recipients and *(b)* other donors to the EU decision to untie its development aid. [197584]

Mr. Gareth Thomas: The draft Regulation requires the consent of a recipient to the untying of its aid from the EU. I am confident recipients will welcome the benefits offered by this further untying of the Community's development assistance. Other donors are continuing to discuss further untying in the Development Assistance Committee (DAC) of the Organisation for Economic Co-Operation and Development (OECD).

Goats

Harry Cohen: To ask the Secretary of State for International Development what assessment his Department has made of aid programmes involving providing goats to women and families in the developing world; what support the Department is giving to such programmes; and if he will make a statement. [197556]

Mr. Gareth Thomas: DFID has made no formal assessment, but has funded a range of non-governmental organisations such as ActionAid and Farm Africa in programmes whose primary goal has been the provision of goats directly to women and families in the developing world. Since 1990, DFID has spent or committed in excess of £3 million on such programmes. DFID has also supported many broader rural development programmes within which the provision of goats has played an important role.

Sierra Leone

Mr. Wiggin: To ask the Secretary of State for International Development if he will make a statement on UK development aid in Sierra Leone. [197801]

Hilary Benn: The UK Government programme to Sierra Leone is managed through a 10 year Agreement that commits the Government of Sierra Leone (GoSL) to reforms in exchange for DFID support. The main areas of our programme are security sector reform, governance reform including public administration reform, decentralisation, public financial management, diamond sector reform, anti corruption measures and budgetary support. DFID has committed £120 million to the first three years of the Agreement, which was signed in November 2002.

A particular feature of the Agreement is the inclusion of performance benchmarks agreed between the UK Government and the GoSL. Quarterly reviews of progress against the performance benchmarks are held with Sierra Leone authorities. DFID is arranging a joint review of the Agreement with the GoSL.

Sri Lanka

Mr. Dismore: To ask the Secretary of State for International Development how much development aid to Sri Lanka has been channelled through *(a)* the Sri Lanka Government and *(b)* non-governmental organisations in each of the last three years; and if he will make a statement. [197594]

Mr. Gareth Thomas: Figures for DFID bilateral aid to Sri Lanka, in each of the last three financial years, are as follows:

£ million

	2001–02	*2002–03*	*2003–04*
Sri Lanka	1.391	1.051	0.502
Government Expenditure in partnership with International Organisations (e.g. United Nations or World Bank)	0.820	1.566	4.833
NGOs	1.740	1.895	2.068
Others	0.788	1.219	0.696
Total	4.739	5.731	8.099

In addition DFID contributes to programmes financed from the Global Conflict Prevention Pool (GCPP). This is a pooled fund to which DFID, the Foreign and Commonwealth Office and the Ministry of Defence contribute. GCPP expenditure is £153,000 in 2003–04 and an estimated £178,000 in 2004–05. Most of this is channelled through NGOs.

The United Kingdom also contributes a proportion of the cost of European Community development expenditure in Sri Lanka and core programmes by multilateral organisations. Expenditure details for these are available only up to 2002, and are set out in the following table:

£ million

	2000	*2001*	*2002*
European Community	0.9	0.8	1.0
United Nations	0.6	0.7	0.6
World Bank	1.3	1.1	0.0
Other	1.9	0.2	0.0
Total	4.7	2.8	1.6

The withdrawal of the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE) from the peace talks in 2003, and the subsequent stalling of the peace process, has prevented implementation of a number of initiatives. This has resulted in an underspend of the agreed allocations of development aid to Sri Lanka.

Mr. Dismore: To ask the Secretary of State for International Development what steps are taken to ensure that development aid in Sri Lanka is not diverted to illegal or corrupt purposes. [197595]

Mr. Gareth Thomas: DFID takes careful precautions to prevent development aid funds being misused. We demand annual audited reports from all programmes we finance and reserve the right to commission independent audits should we deem necessary.

The bulk of our funds are channelled through international organisations such as the United Nations and the World Bank. Financial management systems and audit in these organisations are thorough and regularly reviewed.

Where we provide support through non-government organisations, such as OXFAM and Save the Children, DFID has reviewed their financial control and audit systems and confirmed that they are of high standard.

Our programmes with the Sri Lankan Government are managed by reputable UK based consultants. Again DFID has reviewed their financial control and audit processes to confirm that they meet required standards.

Mr. Dismore: To ask the Secretary of State for International Development how much UK bilateral aid has been allocated to Sri Lanka in each of the last three years; how much is projected for the next two years; how much has been spent in the Tamil areas of Sri Lanka; and if he will make a statement. [197596]

Mr. Gareth Thomas: UK aid allocations to Sri Lanka from 2002–03 to 2004–05 are:

£ million

	Amount	*Approximate amount spent in the North East of Sri Lanka:*
2002–03	5.5	1.6
2003–04	15	0.3
2004–05	14	[1]0.749

[1] Estimate.

The planned allocation for 2005–06 is £4 million, which will be reviewed as part of DFID's annual resource allocation exercise that will conclude in the new year. Figures for 2006–07 and beyond have not yet been agreed.

Most DFID programmes support initiatives that cover the whole of Sri Lanka. A breakdown of expenditure in the North East under these programmes is not readily available. The figures provided for expenditure in the North East relate to programmes, such as de-mining, that focus solely upon the needs of communities directly affected by the conflict.

Uganda

Angus Robertson: To ask the Secretary of State for International Development what assessment his Department has made of the humanitarian impact of the Lord's Resistance Army in northern Uganda; and if he will make a statement. [196666]

Hilary Benn: I refer the hon. Member for Moray to the statement I made in the House on 10 November 2004, *Official Report*, column 832.

TREASURY

Teenage Pregnancy Rates

Mr. Wiggin: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what the teenage pregnancy rates in *(a)* Wales and *(b)* England were in each year since 1996. [197410]

Mr. Timms: The information requested falls within the responsibility of the National Statistician, who has been asked to reply.

Letter from John Pullinger to Mr. Bill Wiggin, dated 15 November 2004:

The National Statistician has been asked to reply to your recent question asking what the teenage pregnancy rates in *(a)* Wales and *(b)* England were in each year since 1996. I am replying in his absence. (197410)

The most recent year for which conception statistics are available is 2002 and figures for this year are provisional.

The data requested are given in the table.

Under 18 conception numbers and rates 1996–2002

	England		*Wales*	
	Number	*Rate*	*Number*	*Rate*
1996	40.557	45.9	2,932	53.5
1997	40,463	45.5	2,895	52.2
1998	41,089	46.6	3,030	55.0
1999	39,247	44.8	2,781	51.1
2000	38,700	43.6	2,649	48.0
2001	38,461	42.5	2,529	45.5
2002[1]	39,350	42.6	2,601	45.9

[1] provisional

Child Tax Credit

Mr. Webb: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer (1) how many child tax credit claimants he has written to with details about the process of finalising their 2003–04 claim and renewing a claim for 2004–05 reassessments; and how many have responded; [134687]

(2) what the *(a)* total and *(b)* average value is of tax credits (i) overpayments and (ii) underpayments that (A) have been repaid and (B) are outstanding; [185062]

(3) how many tax credits awards for 2003–04 have been finalised; of these, how many families have had their subsequent rewards *(a)* reduced and *(b)* increased

because of overpayments or underpayments; and what the value was of (i) overpayments and (ii) underpayments of (A) child tax credit and (B) working tax credit. [185063]

Mr. Laws: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer how many tax credit renewal forms were received back for the 2004–05 year by 30 September; and if he will make a statement. [191780]

Dawn Primarolo: Tax credit awards are initially set using latest circumstances and previous year income. Families are encouraged to report changes in both income and circumstances in year; any changes not notified in year will be picked up at the end of the year when tax credit awards are finalised. In this way the tax credits strike a balance between a system that provides certainty of support, and a system that responds to changes in family need. Furthermore, the first £2,500 of any income rise is ignored.

As I announced on 19 November 2003, *Official Report*, columns 1099–1100W, in a written answer to the hon. Member for Birmingham Northfield (Richard Burden) from April, Inland Revenue wrote to all families who had had a 2003–04 tax credit award to explain the action they needed to take to finalise their 2003–04 award and to renew their award for 2004–05. Families were sent reminder letters and as the 30 September deadline approached, those that had not returned their annual declaration were telephoned as a further reminder. Many families contacted the helpline, both for help and to provide the information necessary to finalise and renew their awards. All of this activity was supported by an extensive publicity campaign involving television, radio and newspaper advertisements which began in April and ran across the summer.

Families benefiting from the Child Tax Credit through IS/JSA continue to receive their support in this way and are not part of the renewals process. And families receiving the family element only were told that they needed to contact the Inland Revenue only if their income had changed significantly or their circumstances had changed. This has meant that 1.3 million families did not need to contact the Inland Revenue and these families will have their awards renewed automatically. A further 3.7 million have returned their annual declaration enabling their 2003–04 award to be finalised and their initial award for 2004–05 to be set. At the start of October, around 200,000 families had neither renewed their award nor contacted the Inland Revenue and stood to have their awards cut off.

For 2003–04 tax credit awards were set using 2001–02 income. As set out in "The Child and Working Tax Credits. The Modernisation of Britain's Tax and Benefit System Number Ten April 2002", the first £2,500 rise in income will be disregarded for tax credits. This disregard means that many families will not see their tax credits reduced as their incomes rise. The Code of Practice 26 sets out what happens when tax credits have been over or under paid. Analysis of the numbers of families with over or underpayments and the values of these will only be available once all awards have been finalised. This will only be after the deadline of 31 January for reporting of final 2003–04 income for those families only able to provide an estimate by the 30 September deadline. Statistics on over and underpayments will be published in Spring 2005 under National Statistics.

Mr. Keith Bradley: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer, how many families in Manchester, Withington have received child tax credits. [197884]

John Healey: I refer my hon. Friend to the reply given by my right hon. friend the Paymaster General to the hon. Member for Wansdyke (Dan Norris) on 12 July 2004, *Official Report*, columns 992–23W.

Figures for early December 2004 will be published on 23 December.

Chronic Pain

Mrs. Iris Robinson: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what estimate has been made of the number of days lost from work as the result of chronic pain in each of the last 10 years. [197611]

Mr. Timms: The information requested falls within the responsibility of the National Statistician, who has been asked to reply.

Letter from Colin Mowl to Mrs. Iris Robinson, dated 15 November 2004:

The National Statistician has been asked to reply to your Parliamentary Question about the number of working days lost because of chronic pain. I am replying in his absence. (197611)

The Labour Force Survey (LFS) gives estimates of the number of working days lost due to sickness or injury during the reference week. However, the LFS does not collect information about the types of illnesses or injuries which cause sickness absence. Therefore, information about the number of working days lost because of chronic pain is not available.

The attached table gives estimates of the total number of working days lost due to sickness or injury in the United Kingdom for the twelve-month periods ending in August each year from 2002 to 2004. This information is not available for previous years due to a change in the LFS questions on sickness absence.

Number of working days lost due to sickness or injury United Kingdom 12 months ending in August each year from 2002 to 2004

thousand

	Number
2002	111,741
2003	103,743
2004	104,801

Source:
ONS Labour Force Survey

Civil Service Jobs

Mr. Best: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what recent assessment he has made of the impact on public services resulting from the proposals to reduce the number of civil service jobs. [197418]

Mr. Boateng: Civil Service workforce reductions are an integral part of the efficiency programme that will generate over £20 billion of savings to invest in essential, frontline services. The programme is based on rigorous and detailed evidence as set out in releasing resources to the front line—Independent Review of Public Sector Efficiency published by Sir Peter Gershon in July 2004.

Correspondence

Tony Cunningham: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer when the Chair of the Inland Revenue expects to reply to the letter dated 24 August from the hon. Member for Workington regarding Mr. and Mrs. S. Hully. [197758]

John Healey: I understand that the Inland Revenue has made a thorough investigation of Mr. and Mrs. Hully's case and wrote to the hon. Member on 11 November 2004.

Departmental Offices

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what the cost of *(a)* decoration and *(b)* refurbishment of the London offices of the Department was in each of the last four years. [196146]

Mr. Timms: In April 2001 the Inland Revenue (including Valuation Office Agency) and HM Customs and Excise outsourced the management and maintenance of all of their offices to Mapeley under the STEPS contract. Costs of decoration and refurbishment are included in a single unitary price that the departments pay to Mapeley on a site-by-site basis. Separate costs specific to London offices are therefore not available for the years since 2001–02.

For 2000–01 the data available for the Inland Revenue and HM Customs and Excise includes amounts for refurbishment, decoration, maintenance, service charges and other accommodation costs. To extract this information would entail disproportionate cost.

In the summer of 2002, the Treasury moved into 1 Horse Guards Road under a PFI agreement. The total costs of refurbishment of that building were given in answer to the hon. Member for South Norfolk, (Mr. Bacon) on 5 February 2002 (*Official Report*, column 837W). Under the terms of the PFI agreement, ongoing decoration and refurbishment costs are met by Exchequer Partnership.

Departmental Staff

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what percentage of the staff in his Department in *(a)* 2002 and *(b)* 2003 were people with disabilities. [196120]

Mr. Timms: I refer the hon. Member to the answer given by the Minister for the Cabinet Office (Ruth Kelly) on 9 November 2004, *Official Report*, columns 619–20W.

Drug-related Deaths (Wales)

Mr. Wiggin: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer how many drug-related deaths there have been in Wales in each year since 1996. [197409]

Mr. Timms: The information requested falls within the responsibility of the National Statistician, who has been asked to reply.

Letter from John Pullinger to Mr. Bill Wiggin, dated 15 November 2004:

The National Statistician has been asked to reply to your recent Parliamentary Question asking how many drug-related deaths there were in Wales in each year since 1996. I am replying in his absence. (197409)

Available figures relate to deaths from drug poisoning, not the total number that were drug-related. The most recently available information is for deaths in 2002. Figures are shown in the table below for the calendar years 1996 to 2002.

Number of deaths from drug-related poisoning[1], Wales, 1996 to 2002[2]

	Number of deaths
1996	126
1997	132
1998	150
1999	139
2000	173
2001	175
2002	152

[1] Cause of death was defined using the International Classification of Diseases, Ninth Revision (ICD-9) codes 292, 304, 305.2–305.9, E850-E858, E950.0-E950.5, E962.0 andE980.0-E980.5 for 1996 to 2000, and the International Classification of Diseases, Tenth Revision (ICD-10) codes F11-F16, F18-F19, X40-X44, X60-X64, X85 and Y10-Y14from 2001 onwards.

[2] Data are for deaths occurring in each calendar year.

Economic Growth

Mr. Hoban: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what assessment he has made of the rate of economic growth in *(a)* Hampshire and *(b)* the area covered by Portsmouth, Southampton, Fareham, Gosport, Havant and Eastleigh local authorities for the most recent period for which data are available. [198048]

Mr. Timms: HM Treasury monitors economic progress across the UK, down to the county, local authority and constituency level. Economic activity rates in Hampshire are now higher, and unemployment rates now lower, than the national average. Since 1997 we have seen reductions in unemployment of over 50 per cent. in each of the Portsmouth, Southampton, Fareham, Gosport, Havant, and Eastleigh local authorities and the lowest unemployment in Hampshire since records began.

Mr. Hoban: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what assessment he has made of the relationship between increase in housing stock and economic growth. [198051]

Mr. Timms: The interim and final reports of the Barker Review of Housing Supply, published in December 2003 and March 2004, respectively, contain an assessment of the UK housing stock and housing supply and their relationship with the wider economy. These can be found on HM Treasury's website at:

www.hm-treasury.gov.uk/pre_budget_report/prebud_pbr03/prebud_pbr03_index

and

www.hm-treasury.gov.uk/budget/budget_04/bud_bud04_index.cfm

Fraud

Mr. Tynan: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he will make a statement on cross-border cooperation *(a)* within the EU and *(b)* with states outside the EU to tackle (i) VAT fraud and (ii) fraud arising from manipulation of transfer pricing. [197574]

John Healey: Officials work very closely with their counterparts both within and outside the EU to tackle all types of tax fraud.

Green Ministers

Mr. Horam: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer how many Green Ministers his Department has had since 1997. [197673]

John Healey: The Treasury has had five Green Ministers since 1997.

Gross Domestic Product

Mr. Wiggin: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what the gross domestic product of *(a)* England, *(b)* Wales and *(c)* the UK was in 2003. [197411]

Mr. Timms: The information requested falls within the responsibility of the National Statistician, who has been asked to reply.

Letter from Colin Mowl to Mr. Bill Wiggin, dated 15 November 2004:

The National Statistician has been asked to reply to your recent Parliamentary Question about GDP in England, Wales and the UK in 2003. I am replying in his absence. (197411)

Figures for 2003 are not yet available. The latest published information is for 2002.

The estimates in the table below are based on the regional Gross Value Added[1] (GVA) estimates published in April 2004. These are available on the National Statistics website at http://www.statistics.gov.uk/StatBase/Product.asp?vlnk = 7359

GVA England, Wales and United Kingdom (£ million)

Year	*Total GVA England*	*Total GVA Wales*	*Total GVA UK less Extra-Regio*[2]
1997	600,123	28,590	705,553
1998	639,746	29,747	749,692
1999	669,847	30,721	783,395
2000	699,768	31,865	817,292
2001	737,727	33,351	860,116
2002	775,266	35,084	903,836

[1] Information presented here is Gross Value Added (GVA) which is Gross Domestic Product (GDP) less taxes (plus subsidies) on products.

[2] Extra Regio is that part of the UK's economic territory which cannot be allocated to any specific region.

Interest Rates (Eltham)

Clive Efford: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what assessment he has made of the impact of interest rates on the constituency of Eltham over the last 15 years; and if he will make a statement. [197628]

Mr. Timms: Interest rates are set by the Bank of England's Monetary Policy Committee (MPC) to meet the inflation target set by the Government, which is currently a 2 per cent. annual rise in the Consumer Prices Index (CPI). The MPC was set up in 1997 as a body independent of government and political influence. This reform has worked well—it has brought stability and transparency to monetary policy, resulted in low and stable inflation and interest rates and has anchored inflation expectations to the inflation target. Today, interest rates are at their lowest level for 40 years. Since May 1997, interest rates have averaged 5.3 per cent. This compares to an average rate of 10.5 per cent. between 1979 and 1997.

The Bank of England Act requires the MPC to collect the necessary regional information when making interest rate decisions and this requirement is enforced by the court of directors of the Bank.

NUTS 2

Mr. Moore: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer when he expects the review by the Office of National Statistics and Eurostat of NUTS 2 statistical areas to *(a)* begin and *(b)* be completed. [198043]

Mr. Timms: The information requested falls within the responsibility of the National Statistician, who has been asked to reply.

Letter from Colin Mowl to Mr. Michael Moore, dated 15 November 2004:

The National Statistician has been asked to reply to your recent Parliamentary Question on when the review by the Office for National Statistics and Eurostat of NUTS2 statistical areas is expected to *(a)* begin and *(b)* be completed. I am replying in his absence. (198043)

There is scheduled to be a general review of NUTS (Nomenclature of Territorial Units for Statistics) by Eurostat in the second half of 2006 with its implementation planned for 1st January 2008. The ONS will consult widely as it did in 1998 before submitting a UK response.

NUTS is the statistical geography that is used across the 15 "old" EU member states. There is also a proposal COM (2004) 592 dated 15 September 2004 before the European Council and the European Parliament to amend Regulation (EC) No 1059/2003 to extend NUTS to the 10 "new" EU member states. This regulation formalised a 3 level hierarchy (NUTS levels 1 to 3) through its publication in the Official Journal of the European Communities on 21 June 2003.

Personal and Retirement Savings

Mr. Rosindell: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what assessment he has made of the impact of Government policy on *(a)* personal and *(b)* retirement saving. [197486]

Mr. Timms: The Government provides tax support of £2 billion every year for savers through Individual Savings Accounts (ISAs) and other products, resulting in increased take-up of ISAs for both the low-income and the young. The Government also provides generous tax relief for pension saving worth over £11 billion in net terms to individuals and employers and is simplifying the pensions regime by replacing eight regimes with just one, providing greater choice and flexibility to 15 million pension savers.

The Government's wide-ranging support for savings and pensions includes empowering individuals with financial information, improved access to advice, and savings products that are simple and easy to understand. With ISAs, pensions simplification and by implementing the recommendations of the Sandler review, the Government is delivering new incentives, greater choice and simpler products for all savers and pensioners. In addition, the pension credit provides for the first time a reward for saving for people with modest savings and small occupational pensions.

Redundancies (West Midlands)

Mr. Jim Cunningham: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he will make a statement on the latest figures for the number of redundancies in the West Midlands. [197468]

Mr. Timms: The information requested falls within the responsibility of the National Statistician, who has been asked to reply.

Letter from Colin Mowl to Mr. Jim Cunningham, dated 15 November 2004:

The National Statistician has been asked to reply to your Parliamentary Question about redundancy. I am replying in his absence. (197468)

Based upon Labour Force Survey interviews carried out during the three months ending August 2004, it is estimated that 11,000 people resident in the West Midlands had been made redundant in the past three months.

These estimates from the Labour Force Survey are, as with any sample survey, subject to sampling variability.

Tax Credit Office (Preston)

David Winnick: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer how long the Director of the Tax Credit Office in Preston has been in his post. [197881]

John Healey: The Director of the Tax Credit Office was appointed to the post on 6 May 2002.

David Winnick: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer pursuant to the answer of 9 November 2004, *Official Report*, columns 655–56W, on correspondence, what percentage of replies to hon. Members from the tax credit office in Preston in the 12 months prior to 1 April went out within 15 working days. [197882]

John Healey: The information requested is not available.

David Winnick: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer how many Inland Revenue officials are employed in the Tax Credit Office in Preston; and if he will list the names of *(a)* the director, *(b)* the deputy director and *(c)* the four next most senior officials in the office. [197936]

John Healey: The Inland Revenue employs the equivalent of around 2,700 full-time staff in the Tax Credit Office, which is based in Preston and Liverpool.

My right hon. Friend the Paymaster General has asked the Director of the Tax Credit Office to write to the hon. Member separately explaining the structure of the Tax Credit Office and their processes for dealing with correspondence from hon. Members.

David Winnick: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer pursuant to the answer of 9 November 2004, *Official Report*, columns 655–56W, on correspondence, for what reasons it would not be practical for the Director of the Tax Credit Office to reply personally to hon. Members writing on behalf of constituents. [197937]

John Healey: The Director of Child Benefit and Tax Credit Operations has overall responsibility for the Tax Credit Office and the Child Benefit Office. Taking into account all the other duties of the Director it is not practical for him to reply personally to all of these letters and his Customer Relations Manager usually replies on his behalf. This is normal departmental practice, and the Director remains responsible for the replies sent out by his office.

Tax Credits

Vera Baird: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer how many people claimed the new deal for 50-plus employment credit between April 2002 and March 2003; and how many people claimed the working tax credit 50-plus element between April 2003 and March 2004. [197381]

John Healey: I understand from the Department for Work and Pensions that about 31,000 people in the United Kingdom aged 50 or more received the New Deal 50-plus employment credit after returning to work between April 2002 and March 2003.

For the number finally benefiting from the 50-plus return to work element in working tax credit, I refer my hon. Friend to the reply given by my right honourable Friend the Paymaster General to the hon. Member for Havant (Mr. Willetts) on 28 October 2004, *Official Report*, column 1382W.

Mr. Frank Field: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what guidance has been offered on how long a claimant should be waiting after submitting a completed tax credit application form before they are advised of *(a)* the outcome of their claim and *(b)* their first payment; and if he will publish that guidance. [197788]

John Healey: The Inland Revenue aim to decide 55 per cent. of all tax credit claims and change of circumstances in five working days and 95 per cent. in 30 working days. These targets were published in the Inland Revenue Spring Departmental Report May 2004.

The Department is currently on track to achieve these targets.

Mr. Frank Field: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer how many applications for tax credits have been awaiting a decision on the outcome of their claim for *(a)* one month, *(b)* two months, *(c)* three months, *(d)* four months, *(e)* five months and *(f)* six months or more. [197789]

John Healey: Payments are made automatically on the first scheduled payment date after a claim is decided.

Tobacco Duty

Mr. Baron: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what estimate he has made of the total amount of duty on tobacco products evaded and avoided since 2000, broken down by *(a)* revenue lost through cross-border shopping and *(b)* revenue lost through smuggling and fraud. [196979]

John Healey: Estimates of tobacco revenue lost through legitimate cross-border shopping and through smuggling and fraud, for the last three financial years, are contained in HM Customs and Excise's paper Measuring and Tackling Tax Losses published alongside the pre Budget report in December 2003, a copy of which is available in the House of Commons Library.

Voluntary Sector

Mrs. Helen Clark: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer whether all publicly regulated funding schemes are required to apply the Spending Review 2002 principle of fully supporting the relevant overhead costs of the voluntary sector. [197423]

Mr. Boateng: All departments are expected to incorporate the principle of including the relevant overhead costs into the price for contracts with the voluntary sector. The Home Office are working with departments to ensure that they incorporate this recommendation into their procurement policies and the National Audit Office expects to publish an examination of departmental progress in implementing the recommendations in the spring of 2005.

PRIME MINISTER

Cabinet Meetings

Mr. Gordon Prentice: To ask the Prime Minister pursuant to Lord Butler's evidence to the Select Committee on Public Administration on 21 October 2004, what assessment he has made of Lord Butler's statement on the number of Cabinet meetings which take place in the absence of tabled papers. [196771]

The Prime Minister: The Cabinet receives substantive oral presentations at most of its meetings. In addition, it considers papers as necessary. Cabinet Committees transact a very large amount of business on the basis of tabled papers.

Departmental Events (Funding)

Charles Hendry: To ask the Prime Minister if he will list the *(a)* conferences, *(b)* publications, *(c)* initiatives, *(d)* projects and *(e)* receptions organised by his Department which have received funding from outside commercial bodies since May 1997, broken down by (i) funding body and (ii) amount paid. [196605]

The Prime Minister: For accounting purposes my office forms part of the Cabinet Office. The information requested cannot be provided without incurring disproportionate costs.

European Constitution

Mr. Hayes: To ask the Prime Minister what discussions the Government have had with other EU Governments about the timing of referendums on the European Constitution; and if he will make a statement. [197919]

The Prime Minister: The timing of referenda on the EU Constitution was discussed by Ministers at the General Affairs and External Relations Council on 12 July 2004. EU Governments confirmed then that ratification of the treaty establishing a Constitution for Europe including the timing of any referenda is entirely a matter for each individual member state.

India/Pakistan

Mr. Wiggin: To ask the Prime Minister what recent negotiations he has had with representatives of the *(a)* Indian and *(b)* Pakistani Governments concerning (i) the future of Kashmir and (ii) nuclear weapons proliferation. [197797]

The Prime Minister: Whenever suitable opportunities have arisen, I have discussed the composite dialogue between those Governments, and the issue of nuclear weapons proliferation. In respect of India, I refer the hon. Member to the press conference I held with the Indian Prime Minister on 20 September 2004, and to the joint India-United Kingdom declaration, both of which are available on the No. 10 website.

Libya

Mr. Wiggin: To ask the Prime Minister what recent information he has received from the Libyan Government that can assist in tackling terrorism. [197798]

The Prime Minister: The threat of terrorism is under constant review. The Government take the appropriate action on any information received.

Youth Parliament

Andrew Selous: To ask the Prime Minister pursuant to his oral answer to the honourable Member for South West Bedfordshire of 20 October, *Official Report*, column 888, if he will meet a group of members of the Youth Parliament to discuss the youth service. [198199]

The Prime Minister: I met the UK Youth Parliament on 29 January 2003 and a number of issues were discussed. I welcome the contribution made by the UK Youth Parliament to the democratic process. I am happy to consider any requests from the UK Youth Parliament for further meetings.

SOLICITOR-GENERAL

Antisocial Behaviour

Mr. Kenneth Clarke: To ask the Solicitor-General whether the Crown Prosecution Service (CPS) has established the national team of CPS anti-social behaviour prosecutors as described in the Home Office Action Plan, "Together Tackling Anti-Social Behaviour", published in 2003; how many specialist prosecutors are working full-time in the national team; how many are working in the county of Nottinghamshire; and how many prosecutions have so far been brought by the national team *(a)* in England and *(b)* in Nottinghamshire. [191619]

The Solicitor-General: The Crown Prosecution Service (CPS) has established a team of 13 anti-social behaviour expert prosecutors as described in the Home Office Action Plan. None of these is currently working in Nottinghamshire.

Available figures indicate that 457 post conviction orders have been made nationally as a result of CPS applications. No figures are available for Nottinghamshire.

Appeals Process

Mr. Allen: To ask the Solicitor-General if the Law Officers will take steps to re-assess the appeals process, following the court of appeal decision relating to those convicted of the assault on Mr. Derek Senior; and if she will make a statement. [196228]

The Solicitor-General: There is no plan to take any steps to re-assess the appeals process.

Charging Initiative

Mr. Allen: To ask the Solicitor-General if she will conduct a pilot project to locate Crown Prosecution Service prosecutors in police stations to provide a 24-hour on-site charging capability. [196230]

The Solicitor-General: Crown prosecutors are already located in police stations in the 13 areas where most recorded crime takes place, along with Cleveland. They are available between 9am and 5pm. Out of hours cover for all areas with a statutory charging scheme is provided by CPS Direct, a centralised telephone advice service staffed by experienced prosecutors, operating from 5pm to 9am Monday to Friday, and 24 hours at weekends and bank holidays.

While there are no current plans to provide 24 hour presence in police stations, the CPS and ACPO are working together to consider the introduction of more face-to-face-charging advice locally at weekends and during the evenings.

Nigerian LNG Plant/Serious Fraud Office

Malcolm Bruce: To ask the Solicitor-General (1) whether the Serious Fraud Office is assisting *(a)* the French authorities and *(b)* the Nigerian authorities with their investigation into allegations of bribery relating to a Nigerian LNG plant; [197262]

(2) on what date the Serious Fraud Office began providing assistance to the US authorities with their investigation into allegations of bribery relating to a Nigerian LNG plant. [197263]

The Solicitor-General: For operational reasons the SFO cannot confirm or deny whether a specific matter has been referred to it, or is under investigation. However due to exceptional approval obtained from the US authorities, the SFO can confirm that a request for mutual legal assistance from the USA in relation to the Bonny Island LNG plant, was acceded to on 28 October 2004.

Mr. Hancock: To ask the Solicitor-General how many overseas jurisdictions the Serious Fraud Office is assisting with overseas corruption cases; and if she will list the jurisdictions. [197172]

The Solicitor-General: The Mutual Legal Assistance Unit of the Serious Fraud Office is currently assisting in eight overseas cases concerning offences involving bribery and corruption as specified by the referring jurisdiction.

As these investigations are ongoing, the SFO cannot disclose details of these investigations or the individual referring jurisdictions.

Mr. Hancock: To ask the Solicitor-General how many cases of overseas corruption the Serious Fraud Office is *(a)* investigating and *(b)* vetting; and if she will make a statement. [197173]

The Solicitor-General: The Serious Fraud Office is currently conducting two investigations where allegations of overseas corruption constitute an element of the case.

A further 11 referrals where allegations of overseas corruption may constitute an element of the referral are currently subject to the SFO's vetting process. It is not known at present which, or if any, of these cases will be accepted for investigation by the SFO.

The SFO is committed to investigating such allegations where the acceptance criteria of the SFO are met. In such cases the SFO will prosecute the offence or offences that are best supported evidentially, and best represent the conduct of the suspects.

LEADER OF THE HOUSE

Parliamentary Questions

Mr. Dismore: To ask the Leader of the House if he will bring forward proposals for parliamentary questions which have not been answered by the end of a parliamentary session to be carried over to the next session; and if he will make a statement. [198173]

Mr. Hain: No. I refer my hon. Friend to the written ministerial statement I made on 21 July 2004, *Official Report*, column 35WS, on "I will write replies".

CULTURE, MEDIA AND SPORT

Advertising Standards

Mr. Don Foster: To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport when her Department expects to receive from the Broadcast Committee on Advertising Practices a draft of the interpretative guidance for the Advertising Standards Authority's final amendment to the Advertising Standards Code; and if she will make a statement. [196765]

Estelle Morris: The Department expects to receive the draft guidance at the time of the public consultation which is due to begin in early 2005. Ofcom published their revised rules on alcohol advertising on 1 November. These were their final amendments to the Advertising Standards Code before responsibility passed to the Broadcasting Committee of Advertising Practice (BCAP) of the Advertising Standards Authority under the new co-regulatory arrangements. The new rules take effect from 1 January 2005 with temporary exemptions for campaigns already made. Full implementation for all broadcast advertising will be from 1 October 2005. BCAP plan to begin a public consultation on draft guidance notes for interpreting and implementing the new rules in early 2005 and will submit the guidance to Ofcom for final approval before publication.

Crossrail

Mr. Rosindell: To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport if she will reply to e-mail correspondence from the Romford Crossrail Action Group regarding the impact of the proposed Crossrail depot on local playing fields. [197489]

Mr. Caborn: There is no record of this e-mail correspondence having been received by the Department. A copy of the letter has been requested and a response will be sent in due course.

The address for e-mail correspondence to the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport is: tessa.jowell@culture.gsi.gov.uk

Governing Bodies (Sport)

Mr. Reed: To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport what steps she is taking to assist the modernisation of national governing bodies for sports; and if she will make a statement. [197425]

Mr. Caborn: Since 2001 UK Sport has administered a modernisation programme designed to help national governing bodies (NGBs) of sport to become more efficient and effective. Further to this, Game Plan, the joint DCMS-Strategy Unit report published in December 2002, recommended the implementation of a new approach to NGB funding and planning to further promote independent, modernised NGBs. As a result, from April 2005 modernisation will be mainstreamed into the One Stop Plans agreed between UK Sport and the NGBs of UK-wide priority sports. From April 2005, Sport England will operate Whole Sport Plans with the NGBs of England-wide priority sports. Whole Sport Plans will provide a blueprint for the sport from grass roots right through to the elite level.

Horse Racing

Peter Bottomley: To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport if she will make a statement on her policy on funding of horse racing. [197904]

Mr. Caborn: Parliament has just enacted the Horserace Betting and Olympic Lottery Act on the expectation that horseracing should be able to finance itself without the need for a statutory levy.

Libraries

Mr. Rosindell: To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport (1) how many libraries she will visit in her official capacity in each of the next 12 months; [192668]

(2) how many libraries she has visited in her official capacity since 2001. [192672]

Tessa Jowell: In the last 12 months, in my official capacity, I have visited the Ideastore in Bow, the central library in Bournemouth, the Swiss Cottage library and the British Library. I have also visited the Carnegie library and Norwood library in my constituency.

My diary is currently being planned for next year.

Information for 2001–03 could be provided only at disproportionate cost.

Licensing Act

Mr. Reed: To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport what assessment she has made of the likely impact on community and amateur sports clubs of the licensing charges announced on 4 November; and if she will make a statement. [197449]

Mr. Caborn: The fee levels to be set by the Secretary of State under the terms of the Licensing Act 2003 have not been finalised. On 4 November, we announced the publication of a consultation on fee levels. We welcome the views of sports clubs as part of that public consultation, which ends on 23 December. All responses will be carefully considered before the fees are finalised. The proposal is that fees for grant of a club premises certificate will range between £80 and £500 and annual charges between £40 and £225. These fee levels have been proposed to ensure that licensing authorities are able to recover fully their costs of administration, inspection and enforcement under the terms of the Act and no more. In proposing fee levels and the allocation of premises to a band based on its non-domestic rateable value we have considered the impact of the approach on clubs, including community and amateur sports clubs. We do not therefore consider that the impact on such clubs would be significant. The Licensing Review that preceded the White Paper on licensing reform showed that alcohol licensing fees have been set too low for many years, and it would be wholly wrong for central or local taxation to continue to subsidise the consumption of alcohol. Consequently, we do not believe that the best way to promote sport is through Government subsidy of sports club bars. The Government's commitment to amateur sport is illustrated by the introduction in 2002 of a scheme which gives registered Community Amateur Sports Clubs mandatory rate relief at 80 per cent. and tax relief through Gift Aid on donations from individuals. So far the scheme has given amateur sports clubs an extra £5 million.

This is in addition to the £60 million we have put into the Community Club Development Programme.

Kate Hoey: To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport (1) whether a regulatory impact assessment was carried out on the voluntary sports clubs sector in respect of increased charges arising from the Licensing Act 2003; [198052]

(2) whether a regulatory impact assessment was carried out on the voluntary sports clubs sector in respect of the increased charges from the Licensing Act 2003. [198310]

Mr. Caborn: Yes. Our estimates of fee levels were first publicised in the White Paper "Time for Reform: Proposals for the Modernisation of Our Licensing Laws" (CM 4696) on 10 April 2000, which included a regulatory impact assessment. A regulatory impact assessment, which also included estimates relating to fee levels, was also presented to Parliament with the Licensing Bill in November 2002, and was revised when the Bill entered the House of Commons in March 2003. In September 2004 a draft regulatory impact assessment was published with a consultation document on regulations to be made under the Licensing Act 2003. All of these documents are available in the Library of the House. For the purpose of the regulatory impact assessments, sports clubs are treated as members' clubs holding registration certificates under the Licensing Act 1964 and which expect to hold club premises certificates under the 2003 Act. Such clubs include as well as sports clubs, political clubs, working men's clubs, ex-services clubs, social clubs and others. There are approximately 20,000 such clubs. A further regulatory impact assessment will be presented with regulations relating to fee levels when they are made following the public consultation which began on 4 November. The consultation document enables any individual club to calculate precisely the fees it could expect to pay, under the proposals in the document, in respect of applications made for the grant and variation of a club premises certificate under the 2003 Act.

Minimum Pricing Scheme

Mr. Don Foster: To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport what advice she has received from the Office of Fair Trading regarding advice for local authorities on minimum pricing schemes in licensed premises; and if she will make a statement. [196767]

Mr. Caborn: Advice was taken from the Office of Fair Trading (OFT) in the preparation of the guidance issued under section 182 of the Licensing Act 2003 to licensing authorities, which was published in July 2003. Their advice was reflected in paragraph 7.79 of the guidance (available at www.culture.gov.uk <http://www.culture.gov.uk>) and includes "The promotion of price fixing or the creation of cartels is unlawful, and there would also be serious risks of breaching competition law." We understand that the Prime Minister's Strategy Unit and the Home Office have also consulted the OFT about this issue in connection with the Alcohol Harm Reduction Strategy.

Mr. John Peel

Ms Atherton: To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport if she will hold discussions with national lottery distributors on the purchase of the late Mr. John Peel's music collection. [196342]

Estelle Morris: Lottery distributors work independently of Government and so we do not ask them to fund individual projects or ideas. However, it is open to anyone or any organisation to discuss ideas like this with the Heritage Lottery Fund or the Arts Council England.

Olympic Athletes

Hugh Robertson: To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport pursuant to her answer of 4 November 2004, *Official Report*, column 379W, on Olympic athletes, what the names were of the competitors from Northern Ireland who competed for the Republic of Ireland at the *(a)* Sydney 2000 and *(b)* Athens 2004 Olympics; in which sports they competed; and how much Lottery funding each received. [197462]

Mr. Caborn *[holding answer 11 November 2004]*: The following table provides the names, sports and funding awarded, through the governing body, to those Northern Ireland athletes who competed for the Republic of Ireland at the last two summer Olympics.

Sydney 2000

£

Name	*Sport*	*Amount awarded*
David McCann	Cycling	10,000
T. Smith	Equestrian	[1]—
Andrew Bree	Swimming	5,200
Emma Robinson	Swimming	3,000

[1] No individual award was made to T. Smith, although an award of £81,709 was provided to the Equestrian Squad as part of their 4-year plan.

Athens 2004

£

Name	*Sport*	*Amount awarded*
Paul Brizzell	Athletics	7,520
Sasha Harrison	Eventing	6,000
Richard Archibald	Rowing	3,050
Fraser Brown	Sailing	9,000
Michael Williamson	Swimming	2,717
Emma Robinson	Swimming	7,428
Jessica Kurten[1]	Show jumping	0

[1] Jessica Kurten received an award but did not draw any funding.

Olympic Games

Pete Wishart: To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport whether training camps for the proposed London Olympics will be sited *(a)* in Scotland and *(b)* outside London. [194173]

Tessa Jowell: Decisions on the location of training camps will be taken by those National Olympic Committees choosing to hold them. As far as we are aware, no decisions have yet been taken about the location of training camps for a 2012 Olympics. We certainly hope, however, that venues across the UK will be chosen as training camps, should the London bid succeed. In promoting the bid, London 2012 are assembling information on the UK's facilities, and a UK Opportunities Conference on 17 January is designed to help all parts of the UK prepare to maximise the benefits a London games would bring them.

Pete Wishart: To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport whether she has made an assessment of the level of support for the proposed London Olympics in *(a)* each country and *(b)* each region of the UK. [194210]

Tessa Jowell: London 2012 undertake regular polls, using a nationally representative sample of 1,040 12 to 65-year-olds, to gauge the levels of support for the bid, which are broken down by region. These suggest that support for the bid is least strong in Scotland.

Paralympic Games

Mr. Caton: To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport what action the Government *(a)* has taken and *(b)* intends to take to influence the outcome of the International Paralympic Committee Extraordinary General Meeting to be held on 25 November, in Cairo, to prevent a permanent ban on the participation of learning disabled athletes in the Paralympic Games. [198017]

Mr. Caborn: The exclusion of athletes with a learning disability from the Paralympic Games is entirely a matter for the International Paralympic Committee (IPC).

The IPC has charged the international community of learning disability sporting organisations to come up with a satisfactory system of classification.

This Government are hopeful that a solution can be found that will secure a future for learning disability sport in the international sporting arena.

Mr. Caton: To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport what discussions the Government had held with *(a)* the International Paralympic Committee and *(b)* the International Sports Federation for People with Intellectual Disability about the future eligibility of learning disabled athletes to participate in the Paralympic Games. [198018]

Mr. Caborn: The future of learning disability sport within the Paralympics can only be decided by the International Paralympic Committee (IPC). The international community of learning disability sporting organisations has to provide a satisfactory response to the request from the IPC for an international system of classification.

I sincerely hope that the IPC discussions at the meeting in November prove satisfactory to the International Sports Federation for People with Intellectual Disability.

DCMS officials are in regular contact with the English Federation for Disability Sport and I have every confidence in the EFDS (EPDS) continuing to do everything it can to improve sporting opportunities for people with learning disabilities.

Mr. Caton: To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport what action the Government has taken to seek to ensure that learning disabled athletes will be able to participate in future Paralympic Games. [198019]

Mr. Caborn: This Government are committed to ensuring that everyone has the opportunity to participate in sport and physical activity and we fully support all efforts to involve people with disabilities.

The Government is also aware of the complex issues of classification within disability sport and the need for the international community of learning disability sporting organisations to provide the International Paralympic Committee with a satisfactory international classification system.

Mr. Caton: To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport if she will make a statement on reports she has received on progress in negotiations between the International Paralympic Committee and the International Sports Federation for People with Intellectual Disability on the future participation of learning-disabled athletes in the Paralympic Games. [198020]

Mr. Caborn: The future participation of people with learning disabilities within the Paralympics is strictly a matter for the International Paralympic Committee and the international community of learning disability sporting organisations.

This Government are hopeful that a system of classification will be found that will see athletes with a learning disability return to compete in the international sporting arena.

Mr. Caton: To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport whether it is her policy to ensure that learning disabled athletes would be eligible to take part in Paralympic Games if they were to be held in London in 2012. [198021]

Mr. Caborn: The participation of athletes with a learning disability at the Paralympics can only be decided by the International Paralympic Committee and not by the Government of the host nation of the Games.

Sports Clubs (Licensing Fees)

Hugh Robertson: To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport what assessment has been made of the effect of the new fees for licensing on sports clubs. [197459]

Mr. Caborn *[holding answer 11 November 2004]:* The fee levels to be set by my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State under the terms of the Licensing Act 2003 have not been finalised. On 4 November, we announced the publication of a consultation on fee levels. We welcome the views of sports clubs as part of that public consultation, which ends on 23 December. All responses will be carefully considered before the fees are finalised. The proposal is that fees for grant of a club premises certificate will range between £80 and £500 and annual charges between £40 and £225. These fee levels have been proposed to ensure that licensing authorities are able to recover fully their costs of administration, inspection and enforcement under the terms of the Act and no more. In proposing fee levels and the allocation of premises to a band based on its non-domestic rateable value we have considered the impact of the approach on clubs, including sports clubs. We do not therefore consider that the impact on such clubs would be significant.

The Government's commitment to amateur sport is further illustrated by the introduction in 2002 of a scheme which gives registered Community Amateur Sports Clubs mandatory rate relief at 80 per cent. and tax relief through Gift Aid on donations from individuals. So far the scheme has given amateur sports clubs an extra £5 million. This is in addition to the £60 million we have put into the Community Club Development Programme.

Sports Participation

Hugh Robertson: To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport what estimate she has made of the number of people in England who participated in sport in each of the past 10 years. [197458]

Mr. Caborn *[holding answer 11 November 2004]:* Year-on-year figures for the number of people who participated in sport in England in the past 10 years are not available.

Figures taken from the General Household Survey (CHS) for 2002 show that 43 per cent. of adults participated in at least one activity, excluding walking in the four weeks before interview compared to 46 per cent. in 1996. The figure, including walking, was 58 per cent. in 2002 and 64 per cent. in 1996. The apparent drop in participation may, in part, have resulted from a change in the wording of the question in relation to walking between the 1996 and 2002 surveys. Although in both surveys walks of two miles or more were asked about, the 2002 survey only asked for 'recreational walks.'

Figures taken from Sport England's Young People and Sport in England Survey (2002) shows that 86 per cent. of young people between the ages of 6 and 16 participated in at least one sport at least 10 times outside of school lessons in a year, compared with 87 per cent. in 1994.

EDUCATION AND SKILLS

Directors of Children's Services

Mrs. Curtis-Thomas: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills what the responsibilities are of Directors of Children's services. [195490]

Margaret Hodge: Directors of Children's Services will be crucial to creating the clear line of accountability for services for children called for by Lord Laming, and will lead transformational change in the delivery of these services at the local level. The Director's responsibilities are set out in clause 18 of the Children Bill. These are: the local authority's education and social services functions for children, functions in relation to young persons leaving care, any functions relating to children delegated to the local authority by an NHS body under section 31 of the Health Act 1999, and some new functions conferred on authorities under the Bill, for example preparing a Children and Young People's Plan, and making arrangements to promote co-operation among local agencies to improve children's well-being. Formal consultation on statutory guidance on the role and responsibilities of the Director will begin shortly.

Admission Procedures

Mr. Chaytor: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills what his policy is on the use of pre-11-plus tests by the parents' associations of wholly selective state secondary schools; how many such parents' associations have held such tests following the introduction of co-ordinated admissions procedures for secondary schools; and if he will make a statement. [195109]

Mr. Miliband: It is for individual parents to decide what assessments they wish to make of their child's ability in order to inform later decisions on school choice and suitability for entry into the 11-plus. We do not have data on the number of parents' associations initiating such tests. However, pre-11-plus tests are not a requirement of coordinated admission schemes.

CAFCASS

Mr. Clappison: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills whether *(a)* business managers, *(b)* regional managers and *(c)* frontline staff in the Children and Family Court Advisory and Support Service were awarded extra payments for duties during 2003–04. [194215]

Margaret Hodge: Regional managers, business managers and frontline staff were given additional payments during 2003–04.

These additional payments are termed 'Additional Responsibility Payments'.

Payments were made for two main reasons:

1. To individuals who transferred to CAFCASS with honoraria; and

2. To staff who undertook additional responsibilities: temporary promotion or providing cover for short/long term vacant posts.

Additional responsibility payments continue to be paid to staff who have taken on higher grade or additional responsibilities.

A total number of 35 CAFCASS staff members were awarded Additional Responsibility Payments during the period 1April 2003 to 31March 2004. The total sum paid by CAFCASS is £27,480.

CAFCASS is currently integrating terms and conditions for all staff transferred from the 117 predecessor organisations. During 2003–04, CAFCASS completed the harmonisation of frontline, administrative and first tier management staff.

All other posts, including Business Managers and Regional Managers who were employed on a fixed salary (not related to a pay scale) in 2001 were made an extra payment, pending the outcome of harmonisation.

Mr. Clappison: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills what percentage of separation and divorce cases involving children aged under 16 years were resolved without a court hearing during *(a)* 2001–02 and *(b)* 2002–03. [194216]

Margaret Hodge: Statistics are not available to show the percentage of separation and divorce cases involving children aged under 16 years that were resolved without a court hearing during *(a)* 2001–02 and *(b)* 2002–03.

The Office for National Statistics publication, Population Trends, shows that the numbers of divorcing couples with children under 16 were 79,277 in 2001; 80,997 in 2002 and 83,809 in 2003. However, there is no corresponding data for cohabiting couples who separate, nor is there any information about the ending of relationships of unmarried parents who are not cohabiting.

Mr. Clappison: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills what estimate he has made of the level of staff sickness in the Children and Family Court Advisory and Support Service during 2003–04. [194217]

Margaret Hodge: I understand from the Children and Family Court Advisory and Support Service that the level of staff sickness absence for 2003–04 is estimated to be 3.6 per cent. CAFCASS is undertaking a review of the sickness levels to establish a more accurate figure for 2004–05.

Mr. Clappison: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills how many *(a)* public and *(b)* private cases had been unallocated in each of the Children and Family Court Advisory and Support Service regions as at 31 August. [194223]

Margaret Hodge: CAFCASS' foremost priority is to reduce further the number of unallocated cases, and the service is currently developing a strategy across England and Wales to do so. The information requested for the Regions and Wales is as follows:

Public Law unallocated at 31 August 2004:

East Midlands—2
Eastern—6
Greater London—117
North East—31
North West—92
South East—17
South West—14
West Midlands—34
Yorkshire and Humberside—54
Wales—1
Total: 368 (3.2 per cent. of total workload)

The number of public law live (allocated and on-going) cases at the end of August 2004 was 11,136.

Private Law unallocated less than 10 weeks before filing date at 31 August 2004:

East Midlands—0
Eastern—0
Greater London—82
North East—27
North West—24
South East—37
South West—98
West Midlands—55
Yorkshire and Humberside—45
Wales—1
Total: 369 (4.2 per cent. of total workload)

The number of private law live (allocated and on-going) cases at the end of August 2004 was 6,952.

Mrs. Gillan: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills what the period of delay was in allocating public law cases in the Children and Family Court Advisory Support Service in each of the last three financial years. [197072]

Margaret Hodge: CAFCASS does not collect information in the form requested. CAFCASS was set six key objectives when it was established in 2001. Key performance indicators (KPIs) were subsequently devised to measure CAFCASS' performance against these objectives.

For 2002-03 and 2003-04, the public law allocations KPI was as follows:

> In public law no less that 80 per cent. of cases should be allocated within seven days.

In 2002-2003, 69 per cent. of cases were allocated within seven days, and in 2003-04, 65.5 per cent. of cases were allocated within seven days.

For 2004-05, the CAFCASS objectives and KPIs were revised, as follows:

> By March 2005, 70 per cent. of allocations during the month for section 31 (care and supervision) cases should be within two days from receipt of request.

For the first six months of 2004-05, the average achievement was 52.7 per cent.

> At least 98 per cent. of all public law allocations each month for all case types should be within 28 days from receipt of request.

For the first six months of 2004-05, the average achievement was 92.3 per cent.

> No more than 3 per cent. of the public law workload should remain unallocated at month end.

For the first six months of 2004-05, the average achievement was 2.3 per cent.

CAFCASS has made progress in reducing the backlog of public law cases. In July 2003 there were 718 unallocated cases (5.7 per cent. of the workload); in September 2004 there were 281 unallocated cases (2.3 per cent. of the workload). A new board was appointed in April 2004 and a new chief executive was appointed on 1 September. CAFCASS has been given an additional £12 million this year and we expect to see improvements in performance.

Mrs. Gillan: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills what progress the Children and Family Court Advisory Support Service is making in preparing guidelines on contact; and when they will be published. [197073

Margaret Hodge: A draft version of CAFCASS guidelines, entitled "Contact Principles, Practice Guidelines and Procedure", was issued on 16 August 2004 for public consultation. This consultation period ends on 22 November 2004. CAFCASS will then consider the responses to the draft document and it expects to publish a final version in the first half of 2005

Mrs. Gillan: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills how many weeks it was taking to complete private law cases in each CAFCASS region on 31 July *(a)* 2001, *(b)* 2002, *(c)* 2003 and *(d)* 2004. [197135

Margaret Hodge: Prior to 2004/05 CAFCASS did not collect data about the time taken to complete particular cases. However, there is now an expectation that private law reports are completed within 10-12 weeks of the request date to CAFCASS. In general CAFCASS teams that are unable to meet this requirement make arrangements with their courts to extend the timetable for preparing reports in specific cases.

At regional level and for Wales the times taken to complete reports, for the period 1 April to 31 June 2004 were as follows:

> East Midlands—four teams met the 10-12 week standard and one team met the extended 13-14 weeks timetable;
>
> Eastern—three teams met the 10-12 week standard and two teams met the extended 15-16 weeks timetable;

Greater London—four teams met the 10–12 week standard, one team met the extended 13–14 weeks timetable, one team met the extended 15–16 weeks timetable, one team met the extended over 17 weeks timetable;

North East—one team met the 10–12 week standard, two teams met the extended 13–14 weeks timetable and one team met the extended over 17 weeks timetable;

North West—two teams met the 10–12 week standard, four teams met the extended 13–14 weeks timetable, four teams met the extended 15–16 weeks timetable and one team met the extended over 17 weeks timetable;

South East—five teams met the 10–12 week standard, one team met the extended 13–14 weeks timetable and six teams met the extended 15–16 weeks timetable;

South West—two teams met the 10–12 week standard, three teams met the extended 13–14 weeks timetable, one team met the extended 15–16 weeks timetable, two teams met the agreed extended over 17 weeks timetable;

West Midlands—three teams met the 10–12 week standard, two teams met the extended 13–14 weeks timetable and three teams met the extended 15–16 weeks timetable;

Yorkshire and Humberside—10 teams met the 10–12 week standard and two teams met the extended 13–14 weeks timetable;

Wales—nine teams met the 10–12 week standard.

On a case-by-case basis timescales may be extended by the courts where the needs of the case require it. This approach would apply across all regions and is not related to resource issues.

CAFCASS has been given an additional £12 million this year to improve performance. A new Board was appointed in April 2004 and a new Chief Executive was appointed on 1 September. They are committed to driving forward improvements in the Service.

Mrs. Gillan: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills what the total costs for the running of CAFCASS were in each financial year for which figures are available since 2000. [197137]

Margaret Hodge: The total costs for the running of CAFCASS in each financial year for which figures are available since 2000 are as follows:

	£ million
2001–02	81
2002–03	89
2003–04	99

We have increased CAFCASS's budget to £107 million for the financial year 2004–05.

Child Care

Jon Cruddas: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills how many child care places there have been in the Dagenham constituency in each year since 1997. [196449]

Margaret Hodge: The information is not available in the form requested.

Figures for 2003 and 2004 are shown in Table 1.

Table 1 Number of registered child care places[1,2] by type of provider Barking and Dagenham local authority 2003 and 2004 Position at 31 March each year

	2003	*2004*
Full day care	700	700
Sessional day care	700	700
Childminders	800	900
Out of school day care	500	600
Crèche day care	200	200

[1] The figures have been rounded to the nearest 100 places.

[2] Data Source: Ofsted

Figures for 1997–2001 are shown in Table 2.

Table 2 Number of day care places[1,2] by type of provider Barking and Dagenham local authority 1997–2001 Position at 31 March each year

	1997	*1998*	*1999*	*2000*	*2001*
Day nurseries	360	[3]—	430	440	450
Playgroups and pre-schools	860	750	740	700	1,100
Childminders	650	630	720	660	680
Out of school clubs	170	210	260	260	340
Holiday schemes[4]	1,210	1,510	3,600	[5]4,500	5,300

[1] The figures have been rounded to the nearest 10 places.

[2] Data-Source: Children's Day Care Facilities Survey.

[3] Not available

[4] From 1999, places were counted once for each school holiday. Before 1999, places were counted once each year.

[5] Includes schemes that were exempt from registration.

The figures for 2003 and 2004 are not directly comparable with the figures for 1997–2001 because the figures for 2003 and 2004 were derived from the Ofsted database of registered child care providers and the figures for 1997–2001 were derived from the Children's Day Care Facilities Survey, which was discontinued in 2001. There are no figures for 2002.

With the introduction of the National Day Care Standards and the transfer of responsibilities for registration and inspection of child care providers from local authority social service departments to Ofsted in September 2001, child care places were classified according the type of day care provided: full day care, sessional day care, childminder, out of school day care or crèche day care. Ofsted have produced figures based on this classification on a quarterly basis from March 2003. Their latest figures were published on 21 October 2004 in their report "Registered Childcare Providers and Places, 30 September 2004", which is available on their website, www.ofsted.gov.uk/publications.

Up until March 2001, child care providers were classified according to the type of provider: day nurseries, playgroups and pre-schools, childminders, out of school clubs and holiday schemes. Figures based on this classification were published in a series of statistical bulletins, which are available from the Department's website, www.dfes.gov.uk/statistics.

Mr. Gordon Prentice: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills how many child care places there have been in Pendle in each year since 1997. [197033]

Margaret Hodge: The information is not available in the form requested.

Figures for 2003 and 2004 for Lancashire local authority are shown in Table 1.

Table 1 Number of registered child care places[1,2] by type of provider
Lancashire local authority 2003 and 2004
Position at 31 March each year

	2003	*2004*
Full day care	10,800	13,200
Sessional day care	4,900	4,900
Childminders	5,600	5,900
Out of school day care	6,100	7,400
Crèche day care	300	200

[1] The figures have been rounded to the nearest 100.

[2] Data Source: Ofsted

Figures for 1997–2001 are shown in Table 2.

Table 2 Number of day care places available[1,2] by type of provider
Lancashire local authority 1997–2001
Position at 31 March each year

	1997	*1998*	*1999*	*2000*	*2001*
Day nurseries	9,900	[3]—	8,800	9,600	10,900
Playgroups and pre-schools	8,200	[3]—	6,600	6,600	6,500
Childminders	8,800	[3]—	6,000	5,800	5,900
Out of school clubs	1,100	[3]—	1,600	1,900	2,200
Holiday schemes[4]	1,500	[3]—	900	[5]670	640

[1] The figures have been rounded to the nearest 10 and 100 where appropriate.

[2] Data Source: Children's Day Care Facilities Survey.

[3] Not available

[4] From 1999, places were counted once for each school holiday. Before 1999, places were counted once each year.

[5] Includes schemes that were exempt from registration.

The figures for 2003 and 2004 are not directly comparable with the figures for 1997–2001 because the figures for 2003 and 2004 were derived from the Ofsted database of registered child care providers and the figures for 1997–2001 were derived from the Children's Day Care Facilities Survey, which was discontinued in 2001. There are no figures for 2002.

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Consultants

Pete Wishart: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills how much expenditure his Department has incurred in each year since 2002 on employing external consultants to deal with the press and public relations of his Department; and if he will make a statement. [195455]

Mr. Charles Clarke: The spend on Public Relations activity the Department since 2002 is as follows:

	£ million
2002–03	1,944,457
2003–04	2,699,280
2004–05	year to date (as at 4 Nov) 760,946

The Department has not incurred expenditure on press relations consultants in this period.

Departmental Publications (Access)

Mr. Goodman: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills how many and what proportion of publications issued by his Department are available in *(a)* Braille, *(b)* autoprint, *(c)* large print and *(d)* easy read format. [194286]

Mr. Stephen Twigg: The Department follows the advice given by Her Majesty's Stationery Office in their Guidance Note number 16 "Official Publications and Extending Availability for Disabled People".

The Department will respond to any request for access to publications in alternative formats and will in principle make all publications available in the formats mentioned. It is not possible, without disproportionate cost, to give the details requested of numbers and proportions of the numbers produced of each format for each publication.

The Department does not have a standard formula for the numbers or proportion of alternative formats to produce for its publications. A large number of publications are produced, to a wide range of target audiences, and requirements are considered on an individual basis according to the subject topic, target audience and potential demand.

Departmental Salaries

Tim Loughton: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills how many people in his Department earn more than a whole-time equivalent salary of £57,485 per year. [195333]

Mr. Charles Clarke: I would refer the right hon. Member to the reply given by Cabinet Office on Thursday 11 November 2004, *Official Report*, column 856W.

Free School Meals

Mr. Hoban: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills what assessment he has made of the take-up rate of free school meals. [196994]

Mr. Timms: The information requested is shown in the following table.

Maintained nursery, primary and secondary schools[1]*: school meal arrangements*[2,3]

January 2004 England

	Maintained nursery and primary	*Maintained secondary*
Number on roll	4,293,180	3,326,800
Number of pupils taking free school meals	608,760	351,380
Percentage taking free school meals	14.2	10.6
Number of pupils known to be eligible for free school meals	741,150	477,290
Percentage known to be eligible for free school meals	17.3	14.3

[1] Includes middle schools as deemed.

[2] Includes dually registered pupils and boarding pupils.

[3] Figures have been rounded to the nearest 10.

Source:
Annual Schools' Census

Free School Transport

Mr. Fallon: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills whether the School Transport Bill will allow local authorities to introduce free or concessionary fares for pupils over 16 years old remaining in full-time education. [196966]

Mr. Stephen Twigg: All pilot schemes must aim to cut car use on the home to school journey. Beyond that, they should be designed to meet local priorities. This might, for example, include a trial which creates closer links with post-16 transport policies leading to more consistent provision for older pupils.

Mr. Keith Bradley: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills how many children in the City of Manchester receive free transport to school provided by Manchester city council. [196908]

Mr. Stephen Twigg: We do not routinely collect that information. However a joint survey of school transport policies, expenditure and pupil numbers transported, conducted in 2003 by DfES and the Confederation of Education Service Managers (ConfEd), reported the following for Manchester local education authority.

Number of pupils receiving free or assisted home-to-school transport by category—Manchester local education authority

Type of school setting	*Compulsory school age*	*"Sixth formers"*	*All pupils*
Primary	84	—	84
Secondary	1,248	—	1,248
Special	1,395	—	1,395
Other	—	—	—
Totals	2,727	—	2,727

Source:
DfES/ConfEd "Home to School Transport Survey" 2003

Graffiti

Mr. Byrne: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills what assessment his Department has made of the role to be played by schools in tackling graffiti; and if he will list examples of best practice in this area. [197243]

Mr. Stephen Twigg: Teaching honesty, respect for the individual and social responsibility is part of school life and in every curriculum particularly in the citizenship education curriculum. Allowing pupils to help manage a part of the budget earmarked for combating vandalism can encourage a sense of responsibility and produce a reduction in criminal damage. This may be done through a school council or youth action group. Various agencies can help. For example, most police forces have a school liaison officer. The success of this approach depends on it being sustained over the full age range. Intermittent, one-off projects, however attractive or successful they appear, will have little effect over the longer term. DfES has not carried out an assessment of the role schools can play in tackling graffiti but has produced guidance on graffiti in Managing School Facilities Guide 4 "Improving Security in Schools", and in Design Note 48 "Removal and Control of Graffiti", see www.teachernet.gov.uk/schoolbuildings. We do not know of examples of best practice in this area.

Integrated Children's Register/System

Tim Loughton: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills how many hours' training each social care practitioner will receive before they can use the Integrated Children's Register. [195319]

Margaret Hodge: The Department for Education and Skills has developed a training pack for Councils to use when training staff on the Integrated Children's System. Each Council will need to do an audit of their staff's training needs and decide on the nature and duration of their training before providing it.

Tim Loughton: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills what training will be made available to *(a)* social workers and *(b)* others expected to use the Integrated Children's Register. [195320]

Margaret Hodge: The Integrated Children's System training pack is available on the Integrated Children's System website, which can be found at www.dfes.gov.uk/integratedchildrenssystem

However, it is for local authorities and partner agencies do an audit of their staffs training needs and decide on the nature and duration of their training before providing it.

Tim Loughton: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills how much money each local authority will be given to run the Integrated Children's System in the first year of operation. [195324]

Margaret Hodge: The LASSL(2003)7 Children's Social Services Funding 2004/05 set out the main aspects of the 2004/05 local government finance settlement which is relevant to the funding provided for children's social services. It announced a capital grant of £10 million to support the development of information technology systems for children's social services. The £10 million is the first tranche of a total grant of £30 million payable in 2004/5 and 2005/6.

LAC(2004)22 provided more detailed guidance. It required the grant to be spent on building the information technology systems required to support the implementation of the Integrated Children's System (ICS). This grant is therefore primarily concerned with enabling staff to record and manage electronically case record information about children being served in the context of the Children Act 1989.

The grant is allocated in a way that reflects the size of local children's social services operation. The FSS formula is used for this purpose. This grant is in addition to the Capital Grant for Improving Information Management supporting Information for Social Care described in Local Authority Circular LAC(2003)17. £25 million was paid in 2003/04 to local authorities with social services responsibilities for the purposes of the developmental, improvement or acquisition of systems for improving information management.

In total, we provided an extra £90 million this year to support councils in improving their services to safeguard children including responding to the recommendations made in Lord Laming's report and the Joint Chief Inspectors' report "Safeguarding Children". No conditions have been attached to this money to enable councils the freedom to choose how to target the extra resources so that they can maximise the outcome for children's services in their area.

It is for local authorities to decide how best to provide support and services for all children in need in its area. There is no current specific earmarked funding for services, instead, Government funding is allocated to councils with social services responsibilities on the basis of the needs of their populations. A weighted capitation formula is used to determine each body's target fair share of available resources. It is, therefore, for councils, working in partnership with relevant local stakeholders, to determine their spending priorities on the basis of local needs.

Tim Loughton: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills in which year planning for the Integrated Children's System began. [195339]

Margaret Hodge: Planning began in 2000. The development of the Integrated Children's System was first signalled in 'Learning the Lessons' (Department of Health, 2000) the Government's response to the Waterhouse report, 'Lost in Care'.

Tim Loughton: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills who has been involved in the planning of the Integrated Children's System. [195341]

Margaret Hodge: The Department of Health and the Welsh Assembly Government developed the system. The Department for Education and Skills is now responsible for the project together with the Welsh Assembly Government. There was extensive public consultation on the Integrated Children's System during the winter of 2002/03, and further discussion at regional seminars held early in 2004. Feedback from children and families is also informing the development of the system. A full list of participants in the planning and development of the Integrated Children's System can be found in the consultation document, "Integrated Children's System—Working with Children in Need and Their Families" published in December 2002. The list of participants includes relevant Other Government Departments, the Association of Directors of Social Services, the Local Government Association, the relevant royal colleges, academics, researchers, practitioners and managers.

Nursery Inspections

Ms Shipley: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills if he will introduce random unannounced inspections of nurseries. [197317]

Margaret Hodge: Following consultation, the Office for Standards in Education (Ofsted) has announced its plans to introduce unannounced inspections for group day care providers from April 2005. I have asked HM Chief Inspector for Schools, David Bell, to write to my hon. Friend with any further information he may wish to add, and place a copy of his letter in the Library.

Nursery Places

Claire Ward: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills if he will make a statement on the availability of nursery places for *(a)* three-year-olds and *(b)* four-year-olds in (i) 1997 and (ii) 2004. [196572]

Margaret Hodge: Prior to 1997 the availability of nursery education was largely dependent upon geographical location and figures were not available. We have since invested more than £11 billion as part of an unprecedented expansion of early years provision. All four-year-olds have been entitled to a free part-time early education place since 1998. From April 2004 this entitlement was extended to all three-year-olds. Currently 93 per cent. of three-year-olds and virtually all four-year-olds are benefiting from free provision in the private, voluntary, independent and maintained sectors in England compared with 44 per cent. of three-year-olds and 98 per cent. of four-year-olds in 2000, the earliest year for which figures for all sectors are available.

School Absenteeism

Hugh Bayley: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills what the school absence rate was in *(a)* primary and *(b)* secondary schools in (i) York, (ii) Yorkshire and Humber and (iii) England (A) in 1997 and (B) at the most recent date for which figures are available. [191164]

Mr. Stephen Twigg: The information requested is as follows:

Percentage of half days missed due to total absence in primary schools

	Academic year (September to May)	
	1998	*2004*
York	5.28	4.78
Yorkshire and Humber	6.30	5.38
England	6.21	5.49

Percentage of half days missed due to total absence in secondary schools

	Academic year (September to May) 1998	2004
York	7.37	7.98
Yorkshire and Humber	9.80	8.39
England	9.01	8.07

Note:

The PQ shows information for 1998 and 2004 as the 1997 figures are unavailable.

School Exclusions (Managed Moves)

Mr. Willis: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills what steps he has taken to monitor the *(a)* number and *(b)* effectiveness of managed moves of children between institutions. [196944]

Mr. Stephen Twigg: This information is not available centrally. The Department's exclusions guidance encourages the use of managed moves as a positive alternative to exclusion and evidence from regional exclusions workshops shows that they are most effective when support is provided to the pupil during their first few weeks at the new school.

Mr. Willis: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills how many local education authorities in England have a policy of using managed moves as an alternative to permanent exclusion. [196945]

Mr. Stephen Twigg: This information is not held centrally. I do know, however, that many local education authorities have adopted this policy, and find it most successful for pupils when appropriate support, both financial and otherwise, is provided.

Mr. Willis: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills what his policy is on managed moves for children threatened with permanent exclusion. [196946]

Mr. Stephen Twigg: We encourage the use of managed moves as a positive alternative to exclusion. However, we have made it clear in our guidance that parents should not be pressured into removing their child from school under the threat of permanent exclusion.

Schools (Fire Safety)

Jim Knight: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills when he will issue guidance on fire safety in schools. [R] [197633]

Mr. Stephen Twigg: Managing School Facilities Guide 6, "Fire Safety", is the Department's current guidance to schools on fire safety issues. This was published by the Stationery Office in 2000 and can be viewed on www.teachernet.gov.uk/fire.

The Department is now in the process of producing new guidance for fire safety in schools. Building Bulletin 100, with the working title "Designing Against the Risk of Fire in Schools", will give guidance on the design of new schools as well as the refurbishment of existing schools to at least the current standards of the Building Regulations. The guide is comprehensive and stresses the value of using risk assessments as the basis for determining, for example, the types of fire alarm and detection systems needed in particular school buildings. It will be aimed at schools, local education authorities, design consultants, building control bodies and the fire and rescue service. We will shortly be going out to public consultation on it and expect to be able to publish the final, agreed guidance before the middle of next year.

Sixth Forms

Mr. Hopkins: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills when he plans to issue the guidance on the establishment of new school sixth forms proposed in the Five Year Plan; what account this guidance will take of the effect of the establishment of new school sixth forms on *(a)* further education colleges and *(b)* sixth form colleges in the area; and if he will make a statement. [197316]

Mr. Miliband: We are currently consulting on the regulations and guidance for the Schools Organisation Committee that relate to this issue. Later this month we will issue to representative organisations non-statutory contextual guidance. This will set out how we envisage that partners, including the LSC, LEAs and providers will work together to ensure that the pattern of provision in their area provides real learner choice of learner programmes and learning setting.

Teaching Software

Helen Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills what steps he is taking to encourage the development of appropriate software to assist teachers in monitoring and evaluating pupils' progress; and what advice he has given to *(a)* schools and *(b)* local authorities on the use of such software. [197639]

Mr. Miliband: My Department produces the Pupil Achievement Tracker software which schools can use to review their overall performance and that of individual pupils, identify their strengths and weaknesses and set targets for future progress. Commercial software suppliers are encouraged to develop similar features in their own products. The Department provides schools and LEAs with information about the Pupil Achievement Tracker and encourages them to use this and other software where it facilitates analysis of pupils' progress. General guidance, details of packages that provide assessment capability, together with some "good practice" case studies are also available on the British Educational Communications and Technology Agency (Becta) website.

University Funding

Mr. Clappison: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills pursuant to the answer of 26 October, *Official Report*, column 1158W, on university funding, how much funding has been made available to universities from the Aimhigher programme in each year since its inception. [194831]

Dr. Howells: The information for the years 2001–04 is provided in the table.

Financial year	*Amount £million*
2001–02	10
2002–03	10
2003–04	19
2004–05	6.6

Notes:
From August 2004, Aimhigher merged with Partnerships for Progression, a university outreach programme funded by the Higher Education Funding Council for England (HEFCE) and the Learning and Skills Council (LSC). In academic year 2004/05, a further £71.7million is being distributed to local partnerships. It is not possible to say how much of this is being spent by universities.

ENVIRONMENT, FOOD AND RURAL AFFAIRS

Abandoned Vehicles

Geraldine Smith: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs who is responsible for recovering abandoned vehicles left out on the sands of Morecambe Bay. [196499]

Mr. Morley *[holding answer 8 November 2004]:* Under Section 3(1) of the Refuse Disposal Amenity Act 1978, local authorities are under a duty to remove vehicles that are abandoned in their area on any land in the open air or on any other land forming part of a highway. However, under Section 3(3) of the same Act, local authorities are dissolved of this duty regarding vehicles that are situated otherwise than on a carriageway if it appears to them that the cost of removing them to the nearest convenient carriageway would be unreasonably high.

Instances of vehicles abandoned on sands and in some cases swept out into the sea will no doubt fall under Section (3)3 of the Act.

Aircraft Emissions

Mrs. May: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what discussions she has had with the Department for Transport regarding the reduction of emissions around Heathrow. [195089]

Mr. Morley: Officials in the Department are playing an active role and are in continuous contact with officials in the Department for Transport (DfT) as part of the DfT work under the Project for the Sustainable Development of Heathrow. This project takes forward the commitment made in the Government's White Paper "The Future of Air Transport" to examine how to make best use of Heathrow's existing two runways, and whether a third runway could be added after a new runway at Stansted, while complying with strict conditions on air quality, noise and improved public transport access (paragraph 11.63 of the The Future of Air Transport White Paper).

Mrs. May: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what assessment her Department has made of the effects on emissions of mixed-mode runway operation at Heathrow. [195091]

Mr. Morley: The Department has not commissioned any work on the effect on emissions of air pollutants from mixed-mode runway operation at Heathrow.

The Future of Air Transport White Paper mentioned mixed mode as a possible way of making best use of Heathrow's existing runways, and included some preliminary assessment of the air quality impacts. However, it acknowledged that the issue would require detailed study and that full public consultation would be necessary before any decisions were reached. My officials will be working with officials in the Department for Transport to consider the issues, in the context of the work on the Project for the Sustainable Development of Heathrow.

Albatross

Mr. Swayne: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what estimate has been made of the impact of long-line fishing nets on albatross populations; and what progress she has made in eliminating these nets. [193671]

Mr. Morley: It is estimated by Birdlife International that 270,000 albatrosses and petrels die annually from long-line fishing. We are working with our international partners to address the threats these birds face from it. For example, the Food and Agriculture Organisation (FAO) has an international action plan on seabirds which contains measures to reduce the incidental catch from this type of fishing.

The Agreement on the Conservation of Albatrosses and Petrels (ACAP), which came into force in February this year, requires its parties to support the FAO plan. The first meeting of parties is taking place this month and we will play an active part. We are also keen to encourage other range states to follow our example by ratifying the agreement.

The FAO also has another international plan, which the UK was instrumental in negotiating, to tackle threats from pirate fishing; and we lead an international taskforce, drawn up under the auspices of OECD, looking at how best to take this forward.

The Convention on the Conservation of Antarctic Marine Living Resources (CCAMLR), to which we are a party, supplements these international efforts, requiring all vessels operating in the Antarctic seas to attach a bird "scarers" to their fishing lines, sink their lines, and fish at night, as most birds fish during daylight hours. The vessels also have an observer on board to monitor compliance.

Arable Area Payments

Paddy Tipping: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs how much has been paid out under the Arable Area Payments Scheme in each county in England in 2003–04; and if she will make a statement. [193515]

Alun Michael: After allowing for modulation and other adjustments the following payments have been sent to addresses in English counties in respect of claims made in 2003 under the Arable Area Payments Scheme (AAPS).

County	*Payment (£)*
Avon	4,495,056
Bedfordshire	16,700,325
Berkshire	10,475,642
Buckinghamshire	14,179,308
Cambridgeshire	50,521,681
Cheshire	7,332,649
Cleveland	3,586,360
Cornwall	11,769,296
Cumbria	6,400,085
Derbyshire	8,397,207
Devonshire	18,933,104
Dorset	16,024,764
Durham	11,171,783
Essex	49,070,236
Gloucestershire	21,349,171
Greater London	1,094,642
Greater Manchester	1,347,715
Hampshire	29,414,868
Hereford and Worcester	25,922,440
Hertfordshire	17,789,399
Humberside	50,426,973
Isle of Wight	2,386,338
Kent	29,894,148
Lancashire	4,566,930
Leicestershire	27,921,568
Lincolnshire	88,075,155
Merseyside	2,213,356
Norfolk	59,511,949
Northamptonshire	30,009,355
Northumberland	23,399,447
Nottinghamshire	24,605,907
Oxfordshire	30,905,216
Shropshire	22,925,473
Somerset	12,597,967
Staffordshire	12,787,076
Suffolk	48,889,561
Surrey	3,964,111
Sussex, East	7,505,715
Sussex, West	11,771,394
Tyne and Wear	2,174,018
Warwickshire	20,232,260
West Midlands	1,575,935
Wiltshire	31,743,734
Yorkshire, North	55,370,557
Yorkshire, South	10,647,164
Yorkshire, West	6,087,891

Payments in respect of AAPS claims made in 2004 are due to start being issued on 16 November. As indicated in Defra News Release 368/04, priority will be given to farmers in the areas worst affected by wet weather during the summer harvest.

Beak Trimming

Mr. Drew: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs if she will make a statement on the readiness of the poultry and egg industries for the ending of beak trimming in 2010. [196113]

Mr. Bradshaw: Defra set up the Beak Trimming Action Plan Group to monitor progress on the issue of beak trimming. Defra is working with industry, breeders and animal welfare groups to discuss alternatives to enable industry to adapt to the ban without comprising bird welfare. This work is ongoing.

Biodiesel

Mr. Rosindell: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs whether the Government plans to promote *(a)* the wider use of and *(b)* research into the benefits of biodiesel. [195989]

Mr. Morley: The Government are promoting the use of biofuels through cuts of 20 pence per litre in the duty rate for biodiesel and bioethanol. The Government are currently considering the UK's indicative targets for the use of biofuels under the EU Biofuels Directive. Measures being considered to help meet these targets include a renewable transport fuel obligation, input-based taxation for biofuels and enhanced capital allowances for production plants. Regional support grants for capital investment in production plants are already available through the Regional Development Agencies.

The Government have sponsored promotional leaflets, such as "Drive cleaner, drive cheaper" and "The facts on biodiesel and bioethanol". The locations of filling stations retailing biodiesel are available on the Energy Saving Trust's website at: http://www.cleaner-drive.co.uk/transportenergy.

A number of Government-funded research projects have established the benefits of biodiesel in terms of reducing carbon dioxide emissions. Cambridge University has recently been commissioned to review the economics of energy crops, including those used for biodiesel. The benefits of biodiesel will also be considered as part of the current review of the UK Climate Change Programme.

Birds of Prey

Huw Irranca-Davies: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs under what circumstances birds of prey may be impounded; and what facilities are available for keeping impounded birds. [193153]

Mr. Morley: A court shall order the forfeiture of any bird belonging to a person convicted of an offence under section 7 of the Wildlife and Countryside Act 1981 or Regulation 8 of the Control of Trade in Endangered Species (Enforcement) Regulations 1997. In certain other circumstances, birds may be seized if they were illegally imported or for the protection of evidence.

Furthermore, there are powers under the Police and Criminal Evidence Act 1984 for police to seize animals where they consider that they have been subject to unnecessary suffering (an offence under section 1 of the Protection of Animals Act 1911).

As regards suitable facilities, neither the police nor HM Customs and Excise have their own, but they ensure that suitable accommodation that can hold the animals is found.

Bovine Subsidy

Mr. Drew: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs how many errors were found in bovine subsidy claims in 2003–04; and if she will break down by proportion the types of errors. [196111]

Alun Michael: Information can be provided on the number of producers, claims and animals with 2003 bovine scheme year errors that have resulted in the application of an administrative penalty. This is given as follows for all bovine schemes.

A breakdown by type of error is only available at animal level covering the Beef Special Premium Scheme (BSPS), Suckler Cow Premium Scheme (SCPS) and the Slaughter Premium Scheme (SPS). Such figures for the Extensification Payment Scheme (EPS) are not available.

Scheme	*Claims with errors*	*Percentage of total claims*
BSPS	452	0.5
SCPS	591	3.5
SPS	805	0.8
EPS	2,472	9.4

Notes:

Percentages have been rounded to one decimal place.

Figures do not include errors that have not resulted in the application of administrative penalties e.g. notified errors and obvious errors.

Information for the 2004 scheme year will not be available until August 2005 when the scheme year has officially closed, post payment checks are complete and data is compiled for submission to the European Commission.

Bovine TB

Mr. Drew: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs if she will list the farmers who have agreed to take part in the gamma interferon TB test, broken down by area. [194284]

Mr. Bradshaw: It is not our practice to publish the details of herds affected with TB. To publish a list of the individual farmers who have agreed to take part in the gamma-interferon policy pilot could disadvantage those helping Defra with its research. However, summary figures are available. On 31 October 2004, 125 herds were actively taking part in the pilot. A breakdown by State Veterinary Service (SVS) Division is given in the table:

SVS animal health divisional office area	*Number of herds recruited pilot*
Stafford	14
Worcester	46
Caernarfon	8
Cardiff	18
Carmarthen	39
Total	125

In addition to the pilot, since November 2003 the SVS has used the gamma-interferon test in parallel with the skin test:

to resolve severe or prolonged confirmed TB breakdowns

to assess the need for whole herd slaughter, and

as a confirmatory test for non-specific skin test reactors and inconclusive reactors.

A breakdown of ad-hoc use of gamma-interferon by SVS Division is given in the following table.

Ad hoc use of the gamma-interferon TB test by SVS Division

SVS animal health divisional office area	*Number of herds in which gamma-interferon used*
Exeter	4
Taunton	5
Gloucester	3
Worcester	1
Carlisle	4
Leeds	1
Stafford	4
Leicester	1
Reigate	1
Reading	1
Carmarthen	8
Caernarfon	1
Cardiff	2
Ayr	1
Inverurie	1
Total	38

Andrew George: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs which authority in the UK is responsible for maintaining a register of *(a)* farmed deer herds and *(b)* park or estate deer. [197323]

Mr. Bradshaw: Keepers of deer in England are not required to register their herd with any central authority. Deer must, however, be identified in accordance with the Tuberculosis (Deer) Order 1989, as amended, before they move. Movement of deer must be notified to the appropriate local authority within three days. The official identification mark required for the purposes of deer identification is either a Defra mark or a mark issued by the British Deer Farmers Association. Keepers can obtain the official Defra mark only through registration with Defra.

Brewing Industry

Mr. Salmond: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs (1) what assistance she offers to overseas brewers with manufacturing bases in the UK to encourage their use of UK-grown raw ingredients; [193718]

(2) what recent discussions her Department has had with overseas brewers with manufacturing bases in the UK to encourage the use of UK-grown raw ingredients. [193717]

Alun Michael: There is no financial assistance available for this purpose since this would be contrary to the principles of the EU single market and the WTO. We have had no discussions with overseas brewers on this issue.

British Overseas Territories

Mr. Lazarowicz: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs how much the Joint Nature Conservation Committee spent on work in *(a)* 2001–02, *(b)* 2002–03 and *(c)* 2003–04 in (i) each of the UK overseas territories and (ii) the UK overseas territories collectively. [196306]

Mr. Bradshaw: The Joint Nature Conservation Committee spent the following sums on work relating directly to the UK Overseas Territories for the years in question. JNCC accounting does not enable the sums to be divided between the individual Overseas Territories nor, for the years before 2003–04, is it possible to separate all of the expenditure on Overseas Territories from expenditure in other programme areas. In those years, advice relating to Overseas Territories was generally supported from budgets for wider programmes of work, for example, those on Multi-lateral Environmental Agreements, rather than specifically on the Territories themselves. Accordingly, the figures in the following table should be seen to be indicative rather than definitive. However, to give a feel for JNCC activities relating to Overseas Territories, some key areas of work by the JNCC which relate to specific Territories, or to them all collectively, are summarised in Annex 1.

	Spend[1] (£000)
2003–04	39
2002–03	40
2001–02	43

[1] Including staff costs and associated overheads.

Annex 1: JNCC activities relating to Overseas Territories from 2001–04

2003–04

JNCC contributed to the development of priorities for, and the panel assessing bids to, the Overseas Territories Environment Programme.

We commissioned a review of invasive/non-native species in all UK Overseas Territories (completed in 2004) and held a UK workshop on the same.

We commented on management plans for Chagos Archipelago (British Indian Ocean Territory) and Henderson Island (Pitcairn).

We participated in a Cayman Islands workshop on green turtle management in the wider Caribbean.

We contributed to training, in Anguilla, of enforcement officials at the UK Caribbean Overseas Territories Wildlife and Trade Law Enforcement Workshop.

We supported Defra and FCO in development of an Overseas Territories CITES web-based network.

We continued to support a PhD studentship assessing the impacts of climate change in UK Overseas Territories.

We represented the UK at the 2nd meeting of the Parties to the Memorandum of Understanding on the Conservation and Management of Marine Turtles and their Habitats of the Indian Ocean and South East Asia.

We participated in the steering group for the review of the Ramsar site series in the Overseas Territories and Crown Dependencies.

We contributed to the review at the CITES Animals Committee of trade in queen conch Strombus gigas, a species of significant economic importance to the Caribbean Overseas Territories.

We represented the UK at the 2nd Meeting of the Scientific and Technical Advisory Committee of the Protocol concerning Specially Protected Areas and Wildlife in the Wider Caribbean region (SPAW) and contributed to the revision of the SPAW listing criteria.

2002–03

We continued to provide advice and support to FCO and other Government Departments on nature conservation issues in the Overseas Territories, including advising on sources of advice for Environmental Impact Assessments in the Falklands, on applications to the FCO Environment Fund, and on draft Overseas Territories legislation.

We provided advice and support concerning the Cayman Island's proposal to register the Cayman Turtle Farm as a captive breeding facility under CITES at the 12th Conference of the parties.

We participated in the conference on conservation in UK Overseas Territories and other small island communities in Bermuda.

We supported the UK delegation to the 2nd meeting of the CITES hawksbill turtle dialogue meeting for the wider Caribbean, held in the Cayman Islands.

We supported the UK delegation to the 2nd meeting of the CITES hawksbill turtle dialogue meeting for the wider Caribbean, held in the Cayman Islands.

We supported the UK delegation to the 7th Conference of the Cartagena Convention and the 10th meeting of the Caribbean Environment Programme.

We continued to provide consultancy advice to Falklands Conservation on seabirds.

2001–02

We supported the UK delegation to the 1st meeting of the CITES hawksbill turtle dialogue meeting for the wider Caribbean in Mexico.

We commented on draft CITES and other legislation for the Cayman Islands and others.

We supported the UK delegation at meetings (in South Africa and Australia) negotiating the Agreement on the Conservation of Albatrosses and Petrels, directly relevant to the South Atlantic Overseas Territories.

We provided assistance to Defra into the specification and commissioning of research into exploitation of marine turtles in UK Caribbean Overseas Territories.

We supported the UK delegation to the 1st Conference of the parties to the SPAW Protocol and its Scientific and Technical Advisory Committee in Cuba.

We provided support to the UK delegation to a meeting on the Conservation and Management of Marine Turtles of the Indian Ocean held in the Philippines (prior to a formal memorandum of understanding being signed).

We concluded our work on Seabirds at Sea in the South West Atlantic (under contract to Falklands Conservation) with the publication of "Vulnerable Concentrations of Seabirds in Falkland Islands Waters", but continued to provide consultancy advice to Falklands Conservation on seabirds.

Mr. Lazarowicz: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what the sources of the funding is for the work carried out in the UK overseas territories by the Joint Nature Conservation Committee. [196309]

Mr. Bradshaw: The source of funding for the JNCC's work on UK overseas territories is predominantly through grant in aid received via the three GB country nature conservation agencies (English Nature, Scottish Natural Heritage and the Countryside Council for Wales). This is in line with the funding arrangements for the JNCC set out in the Environmental Protection Act 1990.

Exceptions to this have been where the JNCC has provided advice on seabirds and cetaceans around the Falkland Islands in a consultancy role to Falklands Conservation (£3,000 in 2001–02 and £2,500 in 2002–03). In addition, small contributions to travel and subsistence costs (but not staff time) have occasionally been made by FCO to support attendance of JNCC officials at meetings relating to the overseas territories (e.g. CITES and wildlife law enforcement seminar for Caribbean overseas territories in Anguilla, 2003; hawksbill turtle range state dialogue meeting in Mexico, 2001).

BSE

Mr. Drew: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs if she will make a statement on the recent Food Standards Agency findings on shortcomings in the Meat Hygiene Service in relation to BSE controls. [193294]

Mr. Bradshaw: Defra accepts the conclusions of the FSA's independent inquiry into failure by the Meat Hygiene Service to test some 24–30 month casualty animals. We are addressing those recommendations that fall to Defra. The FSA Board agreed on 14 October that the FSA would work closely with all the parties concerned on an action plan to prevent further failures.

CITES Import Permits

Norman Baker: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs how many Convention on International Trade in Endangered Species import permits have been granted for *(a)* wild-caught and *(b)* captive-bred primates from outside the EU in the last five years, broken down by (i) species and (ii) purpose of import. [196811]

Mr. Morley: The following table shows the numbers and species of primates imported from 2000 to date.

Species and origin	*Number*	*Purpose*	*Number*
Callicebus cupreus			
(Red Titi)			
Wild caught	13	Zoos	11
Captive bred	0	Bio-medical research	2
Callithrix argentata			
(Black-tailed Marmoset)			
Wild caught	2	Zoos	1
Captive bred	0	Bio-medical research	1
Callithrix geoffroyi			
(White-fronted Marmoset)			
Wild caught	18	Zoos	23
Captive bred	5		
Cebus apella			
(Tufted Capuchin)			
Wild caught	0		
Captive bred	1	Zoos	1
Chlorocebus aethiops			
(Vervet monkey)			
Wild caught	2	Zoos	1
Captive bred	0	Personal	1
Daubentonia madagascriensis			
(Aye-aye)			
Wild caught	1	Zoos	1
Captive bred	0		
Halpaiemur griseus			
(Grey Gentle Lemur)			
Wild caught	3	Zoos	4
Captive bred	1		
Leontopithecus chrysomela			
(Golden-headed Lion Tamarin)			
Wild caught	0	Zoos	1
Captive bred	1		
Leontopithecus rosalia			
(Golden Lion Tamarin)			
Wild caught	0	Biomedical research	1
Captive bred	1		
Macaca fascicularis			
(Crab eating macaque)			
Wild caught	6,361	Bio-medical research	7,347
Captive bred	1,710	Scientific	423
		Commercial	241
		Breeding in captivity	60
Macaca mulatta			
(Rhesus monkey)			
Wild caught	0	Bio-medical research	93
Captive bred	275	Commercial	182
Macaca nigra			
(Celebes Crested macaque)			
Wild caught	0	Zoos	6
Captive bred	6		
Mandrillus sphinx			
(Mandrill)			
Wild caught	0	Zoos	1
Captive bred	1		
Pan troglodytes			
(Chimpanzee)			
Wild caught	1	Zoos	2
Captive bred	1		
Pitheca pitheca			
(White-faced Saki)			
Wild caught	0	Zoos	1
Captive bred	1		
Pongo pygmaeus			
(Orang-utan)			
Wild caught	0	Zoos	1
Captive bred	1		
Saguinus bicolour			
(Pied Tamarin)			
Wild caught	0	Zoos	1
Captive bred	1		
Saguinus imerator			
(Emperor Tamarin)			
Wild caught	0	Zoos	1
Captive bred	1		
Varecia variegata			
(Ruffed Lemur)			
Wild caught	0	Zoos	2
Captive bred	2		

Climate Change

Llew Smith: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs if she will examine the report, "Up In Smoke?", on the impact of global warming on human development, by the Working Group on Climate Change and Development. [196495]

Mr. Morley: The Department welcome the report "Up In Smoke?". The report, put together by leading environmental and development organisations, highlights how the impacts of climate change could undermine achievement of the UN Millennium Development Goals (MDGS) and that climate change could even reverse human development achievements. It reinforces the need for developed countries to take the lead in actions to mitigate climate change and calls for the provision of greater financial assistance to help developing countries to adapt to the impacts of climate change. It also identifies the need for nature conservation and development models that are both climate proof and climate friendly.

Climate change is already happening. Because of past and recent emissions of greenhouse gases, we are already locked in some degree of climate change. As stated in the report, it is the poor and vulnerable communities that are going to suffer the most. The report calls for urgent action from governments. We recognise the need to act now to effectively combat climate change. We fully recognise the need to work with developing countries to help them assess their vulnerability to climate change and adapt to the inevitable changes.

One of the recommendations of the report is to "work toward a better understanding of the threat". The Department works with developing countries to help them improve their understanding of the effects of climate change. Defra has undertaken collaborative research projects with India and China to help these countries assess the likely impacts of climate change. This work involved the development of new approaches to assessment of vulnerability as well as capacity building. New bilateral research projects with China and India are currently being developed.

As highlighted in the report, Africa is one of the most vulnerable countries to the adverse effects of climate change. The report reads: "Africa already has a highly variable and unpredictable climate and climate change is making it worse". The Department and the Department for International Development, DFID, have commissioned a joint study on climate and climate change issues relevant to Africa. The study will identify information gaps, key priorities for further research and options for collective international action for Africa. The results of this study will be made available to the Commission for Africa.

Climate change threatens livelihoods of poor people with long-term pernicious effects on development. The report calls for development models based on risk reduction and incorporating adaptation strategies. The Department is actively involved in the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) Working Party on Global and Sustainable Policies, which aims to identify the linkages between climate change and development. This work will also be useful in informing the UK's G8 focus on both climate change and Africa.

DFID is supporting developing country efforts to integrate climate change into mainstream poverty reduction agendas. DFID is working with other donors, NGOs, developing country partners and the disaster risk reduction community to better understand how climate risks can be managed. For example, DFID is engaged in a multi-agency effort to identify linkages, complementarities and areas of divergence between disaster prevention and climate change adaptation.

Coastal Defences

Mr. Gummer: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs whether she has discussed the weighting given to heritage in the calculation of need for coastal defences with her counterpart in the Dutch Government. [193487]

Mr. Morley: I have had informal discussions with ministerial colleagues in the Netherlands on matters relating to coastal defences but have not discussed this specific point with them.

Officials from our two countries meet on a regular basis. Recognising the benefits to be gained by shared experiences both in respect of policy and engineering solutions, officials from the Netherlands, Germany, Belgium, Denmark and England agreed to meet on an annual basis more than five years ago and so formed the North Sea Coastal Managers Group. The English delegation is led by my Chief Engineer.

Meetings of the group have proved an invaluable forum for the exchange of information. However, it is important to recognise that there are differences between the Netherlands and England both in terms of the geography of the coastline and the proportion of the economic wealth at risk of flooding.

Commercial Fishing Licences

Mr. Quentin Davies: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs how many UK commercial fishing licences are on issue. [196613]

Mr. Bradshaw *[holding answer 11 November 2004]:* The number of UK commercial fishing licences on issue at 1 November 2004 was 6,406.

Mr. Quentin Davies: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs how many UK commercial fishing licences are held by nationals of other EU member states. [196614]

Mr. Bradshaw *[holding answer 11 November 2004]:* The number of vessels with UK licences owned by nationals of other EU member states at 1 November 2004 was 107.

Common Agricultural Policy

Mr. Wills: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what estimate she has made of the cost per person per week of the Common Agricultural Policy in the United Kingdom in the most recent year for which figures are available. [196376]

Alun Michael: Using figures from 2002, we estimate that the Common Agricultural Policy costs around £8 per week for a family of four. This includes the cost of increased food prices and a notional estimate of the taxpayer cost of financing the policy, though in practice the UK contributes to the whole EU budget rather than specific components. It remains the Government's objective to bring the down the cost of the Common Agricultural Policy and secure better value from it.

Community Energy

Malcolm Bruce: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs which schemes have been awarded *(a)* capital grants and *(b)* development grants under the Community Energy Programme. [195944]

Mr. Morley: To date we have awarded capital grants totalling £47,422,329 and development grants totalling £1,776,253. The following tables provide a full list of both. Of the capital grants, 5,762,382 will be re-allocated to new schemes in a further bidding round due to the withdrawal of some schemes.

Community energy capital grants awarded

Scheme	*Grant (£)*	*Withdrawn (£)*
Norwich city council	300,000	—
University of Warwick	650,000	—
University of Edinburgh	250,000	—
Shetland Heat Energy and Power Ltd.	500,000	—
Aberdeen city council	659,716	—
Southampton city council	101,000	—
Midlothian	—	114,774
Kirklees MBC	—	708,422
London borough of Croydon	535,805	—
Midlothian council	449,200	—
Edinburgh University	1,630,948	—
University of Dundee	50,000	—
Woking borough council	545,000	—
Portsmouth county council	435,263	—
Royal Southampton hospital	93,222	—
Rotherham borough council	80,835	—
Chesterfield BC	—	880,000
UMIST	—	533,499
University of East Anglia	210,000	—
Westminster city council	1,200,000	—
London borough of Lambeth	956,052	—
Warwick University	500,000	—
Perthshire HA	39,798	—
Cloch HA	27,520	—
Southampton University	830,545	—
Plymouth city council	2,150,000	—
University of Plymouth	—	55,000
Kirklees MBC	—	613,795
Angus Com Care Trust	42,009	—
Hjaltland HA	393,502	—
Llanwddyn/Powys CC	47,459	—
UCL		898,242
Barking NHS Trust	536,000	—
Leicester	5,100,000	—
Shetland Charitable Trust	318,000	—
Kilburn Square	—	113,488
Watmos	500,000	—
Edinburgh University	2,691,780	—
Midlothian council	562,052	—
Aberdeen University	1,753,000	—
Clydebank HA	775,760	—
Buckinghamshire council	13,991	—
University of Southampton	30,000	—
Family HA	—	35,000
Ceridigion CC	193,107	—
Stockton on Tees BC	85,000	—
Barnsley MBC	202,366	—
Nth Glasgow University Hospital NHS Trust	304,591	—
Lanarkshire Housing Association	35,000	—
Dundee University	65,000	—
London Borough of Southwark	4,350,000	—
Walbrook Housing Group	12,500	—
Nottingham city council	26,775	—
Birmingham city council	700,000	—
University of Warwick	78,000	—
Newcastle city council	1,996,824	—
Southampton city council	3,577,916	—
Highland council	1,545,000	—
Aberdeen Heat and Power	1,334,190	—
Aberdeen Heat and Power	613,052	—
Fife council	374,326	—
Loughborough University	230,000	—
Isle of Anglesey county council	—	1,810,162
Genesis Housing Group	450,000	—
Swan Housing Group	122,000	—
Southampton CC	3,279,000	—
Bracknell Forest MBC	1,850,000	—
Royal Shrewsbury Hospitals NHS Trust	546,925	—
Sanctuary HA	290,000	—
Western Education and Library Board—St. Ronans	38,000	—
Western Education and Library Board—St. Aidans	25,800	—
Western Education and Library Board—St. Eugenes	29,500	—
Aberdeenshire council	109,000	—
Total	47,422,329	5,762,382

Community energy development grants awarded

Scheme	*Grant (£)*
Cloch Housing Association	3,150.00
City West Homes	8,750.00
Southampton city council	3,750.00
Southampton city council	3,750.00
Perthshire Housing Association	1,856.00
Stockport metropolitan borough council	3,300.00
Perthshire Housing Association	2,325.00
Stockport Metropolitan borough council	3,439.00
South Ayrshire council	6,600.00
Stockport metropolitan borough council	3,176.00
Stockport metropolitan borough council	3,071.00
Kilburn Square Housing Co-operative	3,750.00
Glasgow University	6,250.00
South Ayrshire council	6,350.00
Hampshire county council	6,000.00
Oldham metropolitan borough council	6,250.00
Isle of Anglesey county council	9,250.00
The University of Glasgow	9,900.00
Milton Keynes council	10,000.00
Poolsbrook Heating Development Ltd.	9,700.00
Sheffield council	3,963.00
High Weald Housing Association	10,000.00
Barnsley MBC	3,750.00
Police Service of Northern Ireland	10,000.00
Police Service of Northern Ireland	10,000.00
London borough of Lambeth	10,000.00
Highland council	10,000.00
Caerphilly county borough council	9,800.00
University of Surrey	10,000.00
Clydebank Housing Association	5,305.00
WATMOS Housing Co-Operative Limited	18,500.00
Newcastle city council	49,812.50
Falkirk council	8,500.00
Sheffield city council	6,900.00
Bedfordshire Pilgrims Housing Association	2,750.00
City of Edinburgh council	2,300.00
Watmos Housing Co-Operative Limited	10,000.00
Fyne Homes	6,650.00
London borough of Tower Hamlets	11,500.00
Spelthorne borough council	18,450.00
Shropshire county council	13,950.00
Bristol city council	9,575.00
Leicester city council	25,000.00
Linx Homes	8,000.00
Sandwell MBC	2,910.00
Dorset county council	4,900.00
Edinburgh University	49,025.00
Bracknell DC	59,650.00
Birmingham city council	9,000.00
London borough of Tower Hamlets	11,175.00
Highland council	14,329.00
Pimlico District Heating Scheme	6,370.00
London Borough of Tower Hamlets	10,000.00
Nottingham city council	4,500.00
New Lanarkshire Conservation Trust	1,425.00
London Metropolitan University	14,025.00
Birmingham city council	9,000.00
Northern Counties Housing Association	3,380.00
Fife council	29,487.00

Community energy development grants awarded

Scheme	*Grant (£)*
Fife council	24,989.00
Birmingham city council	11,000.00
Oldham metropolitan borough council	15,000.00
Bristol city council	7,650.00
Newcastle city council	15,000.00
Bristol city council	10,000.00
Western Education and Library Board	10,800.00
Department for Constitutional Affairs	3,125.00
Falkirk council	25,000.00
Aberdeenshire council	2,375.00
The Royal Shrewsbury Hospitals NHS Trust	28,641.00
Greater London authority	97,549.00
London borough of Islington	42,336.00
Sanctuary Housing Association	3,000.00
Stockport MBC	1,600.00
Stockport MBC	1,600.00
Albyn Housing Association	9,675.00
Aberdeen Heat and Power	6,765.00
Forestry Commission	14,580.00
Cumbernauld Housing Partnership	13,750.00
City of Westminster council	23,600.00
Kings College London	4,750.00
Birmingham Heartlands NHS Trust	24,448.00
Lanarkshire HA	4,595.00
Walbrook Housing Association	11,500.00
Basildon and Thurrock General Hospitals NHS Trust	13,100.00
City of Westminster	37,950.00
South Bedfordshire DC	3,750.00
Bath University	7,817.50
Winchester city council	7,900.00
Weymouth and Portland Housing	7,342.00
Bristol University	23,900.00
Swan Housing Group	5,500.00
Somer Community Housing Trust	10,800.00
Reidvale HA Stock	9,850.00
Home HA	9,100.00
Cardiff CC	16,000.00
Awel Amen Tawe	12,253.00
Westlea HA	7,200.00
Barnsley MBC	3,750.00
Peterborough CC	22,150.00
Genesis Housing Group	9,300.00
Reigate and Banstead BC	24,500.00
Somerset county council	11,700.00
Birmingham Heartlands NHS	14,065.00
Mansfield DC	5,000.00
Manchester CC	8,250.00
Sheffield University	10,600.00
Eastlands Homes	4,100.00
LB Enfield	13,000.00
QM University College	24,750.00
United Lincs Hospitals NHS Trust	21,400.00
Hermitage HA	15,000.00
Leicester CC	35,365.00
Spelthorne BC	24,550.00
London South Bank University	14,925.00
East Lothian HA	4,980.00
DFPOBD	19,598.00
Home HA Ltd.	5,150.00
District of Bolsover council	16,550.00
Cookstown DC	7,000.00
Down Lisburn HSS Trust	36,075.00
Loughborough University	34,450.00
Somerset CC	35,800.00
Carrick DC	38,575.00
English Partnerships	23,999.00
Perthshire HA	18,700.00
North Glasgow HA	12,500.00
Salford CC	13,900.00
Southern Education and Library Board	8,432.00
Gwent Healthcare	14,100.00
Dungannon and District HA	4,000.00
Berwickshire HA Ltd.	2,500.00
Old Ford HA	13,000.00
University of Wales	4,250.00
Total	1,776,253.00

Composting

Norman Baker: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs whether organic material derived from the mechanical biological treatment of compost qualifies as suitable for composting for the purposes of local authority targets. [196812]

Mr. Morley: Only the production of compost which meets the definition stated in Government guidance can count towards Best Value Performance Indicator 82b. This is available from the Defra website at www.defra.gov.uk/environment/waste/management/guidance/mwms/10.htm. With the standard of current technology it is unlikely that the product of a Mechanical and Biological Treatment process will meet that definition, in which case it would not be permissible for local authorities to count it towards meeting their recycling targets.

Norman Baker: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what criteria are used to determine whether material produced for composting constitutes controllable waste. [196813]

Mr. Morley: The definition of waste in force in the United Kingdom is the definition in Article 1*(a)* of the Waste Framework Directive (as amended). Whether or not a substance is discarded as waste, and when waste ceases to be waste, are matters which must be determined on the facts of the case and the interpretation of the law is a matter for the Courts. The European Court of Justice (ECJ) has issued several judgments on the definition of waste which are binding on member states and their "competent authorities".

Composting is classified as a waste recovery operation under the Directive. This means that, in England and Wales, composting must be carried out under the terms of a licence issued by or a licensing exemption registered with the Environment Agency.

The ECJ has ruled that

> "..whether [a substance] is waste, must be determined in the light of all the circumstances, regard being had to the aim of the Directive and the need to ensure that its effectiveness is not undermined."

In practice, this means that waste does not cease to be waste until it has been fully recovered within the meaning of the Directive and there is certainty of its use as a product without undergoing a further recovery operation. The Environment Agency considers that *(a)* source-segregated waste which, after composting, meets a recognised and suitable quality standard (e.g. BSI PAS 100) is likely to meet the first criterion; and *(b)* mixed waste which is composted is likely to remain waste until it is used in a further recovery operation (e.g. land treatment resulting in agricultural benefit or ecological improvement) subject to control by the Agency under a licence or registered licensing exemption.

Consultants/Advisers

Norman Baker: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs if she will list the top 20 consultancy firms by contract value used by her Department in each of the last five years. [196883]

Alun Michael: Consultancy expenditure is part of the Department's expenditure on professional services. As part of its preparations for and implementation of the Gershon value for money agenda in Defra, a detailed analysis of departmental expenditure on professional services is being undertaken currently, and I will place a copy of the analysis in the House of Commons Library in due course.

Pete Wishart: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs how much expenditure her Department has incurred in *(a)* 2002, *(b)* 2003 and *(c)* 2004 to date on employing external consultants; and if she will make a statement. [196386]

Alun Michael: Consultancy expenditure is part of the Department's expenditure on professional services. As part of its preparations for and implementation of the Gershon value for money agenda in Defra, a detailed analysis of departmental expenditure on professional services is being undertaken and I will place a copy of the analysis in the House of Commons Library in due course.

Andrew George: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs if she will list the contracts awarded by her Department to external consultants in each of the last seven years, stating in each case *(a)* the name of the consulting company, *(b)* the value of the contract, *(c)* the purpose for which the contract was awarded and *(d)* whether the contract was completed. [196690]

Alun Michael: Defra came into being in June 2001. The information requested is not held centrally.

nsultancy expenditure is part of the Department's expenditure on professional services. As part of its preparations for and implementation of the Gershon value for money agenda in Defra, a detailed analysis of departmental expenditure on professional services is being undertaken currently, and I will place a copy of the analysis in the Library of the House in due course.

Miss McIntosh: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what the *(a)* maximum rate per day paid to private sector consultants and professional advisers employed within her Department, *(b)* average rate per day paid to consultants and professional advisers employed within her Department and *(c)* average rate per day paid to civil servants employed by her Department is in 2004–05. [197188]

Alun Michael: The average rate per day paid to civil servants employed by the Department is £75 per day if the average salary is divided by 365 days. The rate is £105 if the average salary is divided by the number of working days (including leave and public holidays for which civil servants are paid). These figures refer to permanent staff in core Defra.

The maximum rate and average rate per day paid fo externally provided professional services within th Department are being calculated currently as part of detailed analysis of expenditure on professional service of which consultancy is a part.

Comparing rates for externally provided professiona services with rates per day* paid to civil servants misleading as the professional services rates include variety of overheads including the need to make commercial return. Overheads for directly-employed sta are allowed for elsewhere in the Department's budget.

Mr. Yeo: To ask the Secretary of State fo Environment, Food and Rural Affairs whether the us of private sector consultants and professional adviser employed by her Department are subject to extern audit. [19722

Alun Michael: All public expenditure on goods, servic and works are subject to audit by departmental auditor the National Audit Office, the European Commission auditors and various other Government and public bodi having regulatory and investigative functions connect with the probity and propriety of public expenditure.

Information given to auditors would be available Ministers if required subject only to consideration Defra's Audit and Risk Committee, which is chaired the Permanent Secretary as Defra's Accounting Officer.

Convention on International Trade in Endangered Species

Mr. Amess: To ask the Secretary of State f Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what the avera cost of processing *(a)* a Convention on Internation Trade in Endangered Species jmport licence, *(b)* Article 10 certificate, *(c)* a licence under the Ba Directive and *(d)* a Dangerous Wild Animals licence w in the last year for which figures are available; and if s will make a statement. [1964

Mr. Morley: The average cost of processing CITES a Article 10 certificate applications in the financial ye 2002–03 was £120 (this figure includes import, export a re-export applications).

Approval of a premises under the Balai Directive dealt with on an individual basis. The average cost to t Department for an approval is £500.

The Department does not hold detailed information the cost of processing Dangerous Wild Animal A licences as this licensing function is carried out at lo authority level. Licence fees are set by each local author at a level sufficient to cover its costs.

Countryside Agency

Mr. Gummer: To ask the Secretary of State Environment, Food and Rural Affairs whether, appointing a new head of the Countryside Agen shortlisted candidates were asked their views on *(a)* fi sports and *(b)* hunting. [1933

Alun Michael: The interviews of shortlisted candida for appointment to the Chair of the Countryside Agen were based on the advertised criteria. These included strong grasp of the challenges facing rural England a the English countryside and evidence of a stro commitment to the English countryside and the social and economic well-being of rural society, as well as the ability and experience to lead an organisation such as the Countryside Agency. Candidates were not asked their views on field sports and hunting because these matters are nothing to do with the Agency's core business.

Dangerous Wild Animal Licences

Mr. Hancock: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs how many dangerous wild animal licences have been granted for primates in the last five years, broken down by species. [197185]

Mr. Morley: Licensing keeping of dangerous wild animals in England and Wales is carried out at local authority level and so there is no central record of the number of licences granted.

However, a review of the Dangerous Wild Animal Act, published by my Department in 2001, provides some relevant information. This reported that a total of 375 dangerous wild animal licences were granted in England and Wales in 2000, covering 11,878 animals. Of these, 655 of the animals licensed were primates (the figures were not broken down by species or by the number of animals held under each licence).

Mr. Hancock: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs how many Article 10 certificates have been granted for primates in the last five years, broken down by *(a)* species and *(b)* purpose of import. [197186]

Mr. Morley: The following table shows the number of Article 10 certificates issued on a species by species basis for the period in question. Details concerning the purpose of import are not recorded. Not all of the specimens were imported into the UK.

Scientific name and year of issue	*Common name and number issued*
Callimico goeldi	Goeldi's Tamarin
2000	2
2003	3
2004	1
Cercopithecus diana	Diana Monkey
2001	1
2002	1
2004	3
Colobus polykomos	Western back-and-white colobus
2003	1
Eulemurfulvus	Brown lemur
2000	2
2002	4
2003	6
2004	6
Eulemur macaco	Black lemur
2000	2
2001	3
Gorilla gorilla	Gorilla
2002	1
2003	2
Hylobates lar	White-handed gibbon
2000	4
2003	2
2004	4
Hylobates moloch	Silvery gibbon
2003	1
Hylobates syndactylus	Siamang
2002	1
2003	2
Lemur catta	Ring-tailed lemur
2000	16
2002	21
2003	9
2004	12
Leontopithecus rosalia	Golden Lion Tamarin
2000	1
2003	1
Macaca silenus	Long-tailed macaque
2001	2
2003	2
2004	3
Pan troglodytes	Chimpanzee
2002	2
Pongo pygmaeus	Orang-utan
2002	1
2004	1
Procolobus pennantii	Eastern red colobus
2003	2
Saguinus oedipus	Cotton-headed Tamarin
2000	1
2001	2
2002	8
2003	13
2004	7
Tarsius spectrum	Spectral Tarsier
2002	2
Trachypithecus francoisi	Tonkin Leaf monkey
2000	1
2002	1
Varecia variegata	Ruffed lemur
2000	18
2001	7
2002	15
2003	7
2004	14
Total	221

Departmental Offices/Staff

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what the cost of *(a)* decoration and *(b)* refurbishment of the London offices of the Department was in each of the last four years. [196149]

Alun Michael: The information requested is as follows.

(a) Decoration work carried out to the Department's London offices in each of the last four years was as follows.

		£000
2001-02	Nil	—
2002-03	Eastbury House—External	200
2003-04	Nil	—
2004-05	Nobel House—Fine Rooms[1, 2]	200
	55 Whitehall—External[1]	300

[1] Work still in progress

[2] Rooms affected by the Grade II listing of the building

(b) Refurbishment work carried out in the Department's London offices in each of the last four years was:

2001-02	Ergon House	3.75
	Cromwell House	1.3
2002-03	9 Millbank	2.5
2003-04	3-8 Whitehall	1.3
	Nobel House	6.0
2004-05	Nobel House[1]	13.0
	55 Whitehall[1]	3.3

[1] Work still in progress

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what percentage of the staff in her Department in *(a)* 2002 and *(b)* 2003 were people with disabilities. [196123]

Alun Michael: I refer the hon. Member to the answer given by my hon. Friend the Minister of State for the Cabinet Office (Ruth Kelly), on 9 November, *Official Report*, column 619W.

Disposable Nappies

Mrs. Iris Robinson: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what estimate she has made of *(a)* the number of disposable nappies used in each of the last five years, and *(b)* the costs in each of those years of disposing of those nappies. [193832]

Mr. Morley: We do not collect information on the number of disposable nappies used. Nor of the costs associated with their disposal.

A number of Waste Disposal Authorities have estimated the costs are incurred from the disposal of disposable nappies, which range from £500,000 to over £1 million per year.

Dogs

Mark Tami: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what guidance her Department gives to local authorities regarding the implementation of effective penalties against individuals whose dogs foul public highways, pavements and parks. [196855]

Alun Michael: We do not provide guidance to local authorities for implementation of effective penalties for dog fouling offences but do offer advice wherever consulted.

Mark Tami: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what guidance her Department gives to local authorities regarding the provision of dog waste bins. [196856]

Alun Michael: We do not provide local authorities with guidance on the provision of dog waste bins. Local authorities decide on the placing and quantity of dog waste bins in light of local circumstances.

Mark Tami: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what initiatives her Department is promoting to local authorities for combating dog fouling on public highways, pavements and parks. [196857]

Alun Michael: On our behalf ENCAMS run campaigns to raise awareness of local environmental issues, including dog fouling. The 2002/03 Local Environmental Quality Survey of England recorded a 27 per cent. drop in dog fouling, which followed a successful campaign in the summer of 2002. This trend has continued and figures from the survey indicate that fouling is less socially acceptable than has previously been the case.

We are looking at several measures relating to dog fouling, including allowing local authorities to set the level of fixed penalty for dog fouling offences, and we will look to take them forward into legislation at the earliest available opportunity.

Shona McIsaac: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs how many puppies were imported into the UK from the Republic of Ireland in each of the past 10 years, broken down by breed; and if she will make a statement. [193516]

Mr. Bradshaw *[holding answer 27 October 2004]*: Under Single Market rules no records are kept of the number of puppies imported into the UK from the Republic of Ireland. There are no rules that restrict the trade in accompanied pet animals.

Eels

Mr. Drew: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs if she will make a statement on the numbers of eels in England; and what assessment she has made of the impact of recent changes in numbers on *(a)* rivers and *(b)* the Severn, with specific reference to elvering. [192331]

Mr. Bradshaw *[holding answer 18 October 2004]*: There is no comprehensive monitoring of the numbers of eels in England, but surveys on three rivers and catch data for a number of other rivers indicate no significant decline in stocks of yellow eels or changes in population structure over the last 20 years. However, elver recruitment in England and Wales has declined from peak values in the late 1970s, mirroring the changes seen elsewhere in Europe.

There is no evidence for a large change in eel numbers in the Severn over the last 20 years, though there is a significant reduction (approximately 50 per cent.) in the proportion of small eels (under 150 mm) in the lower Severn which reflects the decline in recruitment of glass eel. The elver catch over recent years in the Severn is around 30 per cent. of the 1980/84 average.

The decline in eel stocks is problem across the European Community and we support the need for a Community-wide rebuilding plan, and for the introduction, as soon as possible, of a coordinated framework of international management measures. We are actively involved with the Commission, and other Member States, in drawing up proposals to improve the conservation of eel stocks.

In recognition of the poor state of stocks in England and Wales, new Environment Agency byelaws will soon be passed, introducing a new licensing system, and other controls on fishing for eels, other than by rod and line.

Elephants

Ms Keeble: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what progress is being made internationally on improving the protection for African elephants. [197791]

Mr. Morley: The African elephant is protected under the Convention on International Trade in Endangered Species (CITES) and all trade in raw ivory is currently suspended. Some elephant populations have recovered sufficiently to allow a one-off sale of existing ivory stocks but this will not take place until we are satisfied that the trade can be properly regulated and that the baseline data for monitoring the impact of such sales on the illegal killing of elephants (MIKE) are in place. The Elephant Trade Information System (ETIS), which is funded by Defra, is also helping to monitor the number of ivory seizures and identify the patterns of illegal trade. In addition, the CITES Secretariat has been directed to develop an action plan for dealing with the global market in ivory, focusing in particular on the unregulated domestic markets in Africa. It will also look at the markets in South East Asia, where the increased demand for ivory is thought to be fuelling the illegal killing of elephants.

Endangered Species

Ms Keeble: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what progress is being made in increasing protection for endangered species internationally. [197603]

Mr. Morley: Endangered species are protected internationally under the Convention on International Trade in Endangered Species of Wild Fauna and Flora (CITES). Proposals to increase the protection afforded to a number of different plant and animal species were adopted at the 13th Conference of CITES Parties, which was held in Bangkok, Thailand, at the beginning of October.

Endangered species such as the Irrawaddy dolphin, sulphur-crested cockatoo and spider tortoise were added to Appendix I of CITES, which means that all commercial trade in them is now prohibited. Others such as the great white shark, humphead wrasse and Chinese yew were added to Appendix II, which means that trade in these species will now be more strictly regulated than was the case before. Proposals to improve the enforcement of, and compliance with, CITES were also adopted, as were initiatives to address the illegal trade in great apes, Asian big cats and bushmeat.

Energy Efficiency (Newcastle)

Mr. Cousins: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs how many people have benefited from the Home Energy Efficiency and Warm Front Scheme in the city of Newcastle upon Tyne since 1997. [194751]

Mr. Morley: Since the beginning of Warm Front in June 2000, approximately 2,100 households have been assisted in the constituency of Newcastle-upon-Tyne Central.

Under the Home Energy Efficiency Scheme information was not collected on at constituency level. However it is estimated that from April 1997 to May 2000 around 5,000 households in Newcastle-upon-Tyne Central were assisted by the Scheme.

Environment Council

Mr. Hood: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what the outcome was of the Environment Council on 14 October; what the Government's stance was on the issues discussed, including its voting records; and if she will make a statement. [192659]

Mr. Morley: My right hon. Friend, the Secretary of State, represented the United Kingdom at the meeting of the Environment Council held in Luxembourg on 14 October. No Ministers from the devolved administrations were present.

Council reached political agreement on two dossiers, involving three legal measures. Each represented a successful outcome for the UK.

On the proposed Directive on the Management of Waste from the Extractive Industries, discussion was primarily on the scope of the proposal. Hungary wanted the requirement for a financial guarantee to extend to land surrounding a waste facility. The UK argued that such a move would be impractical, overlap unhelpfully with the Environmental Liability Directive, and place unwarranted burdens on the extractive industries. Council reached agreement by a qualified majority which included the UK, on the basis of the compromise text tabled by the Presidency for the meeting, with Austria and Hungary abstaining.

The proposed Regulation on Certain Fluorinated Greenhouse Gases aims to make a contribution to our Kyoto Protocol target by introducing mitigation measures in relation to these gases, developed to replace the much more damaging (to the ozone layer) CFCs and HCFCs. Some of these fluorinated gases have a high global warming potential and therefore action is needed, across the EU. This measure is intended to deliver reductions in emissions equivalent to some 20 million tonnes of CO_2 per year by 2012.

The original proposal for a Regulation has been split into two parts, with a separate Directive relating to mobile air conditioning systems (MACs) fitted to cars and car-derived vans. Both were considered at Council, and much of the discussion related to the legal base. Austria and Denmark were particularly concerned that the environmental legal base provided in Article 175 should be used for the Regulation, allowing them to maintain tighter existing standards of their own without having to notify them to the Commission. Sweden also supported this view, wishing to preserve the flexibility to go further in future. For the UK, the Secretary of State put the view, also supported by the Commission and several other member states, that a dual legal base was the best means to avoid possible undermining of the single market, while achieving important environmental gains across the EU. The Directive includes a ban on the use of fluorinated gases with high global warming potential in MACs from 2011 (new vehicle types) and 2017 (all new vehicles). Both the Regulation and the Directive had additional text added providing for a future neutral review of the Community provisions (in the Regulation and Directive) concerning global warming potential of fluorinated gases.

Political agreement on both the Regulation and the Directive was reached by qualified majority which included the UK, with Denmark and Austria voting against, and Belgium, Sweden and Portugal abstaining.

Council adopted Conclusions relating to the Commission's communication on flood prevention, protection and mitigation, and following on from discussions held at an informal meeting of environment Ministers in July. The Conclusions agreed to increase information sharing and co-operation in this field.

Council also adopted Conclusions entitled 'Clean, Clever, Competitive', noting the opportunities that environmentally efficient innovation offers within the Lisbon process, and the importance of working with stakeholders to realise these opportunities.

A third set of Conclusions, adopted without discussion in Council, related to the Commission's communication on its work on the thematic strategy on the Urban Environment. While welcoming the communication, Council urged the Commission to review the justification for some of its emerging proposals in the light of the principle of subsidiarity and current legislation and procedures in member states.

The final set of Conclusions adopted was in preparation for the 10th Conference of the Parties to the UN Framework Convention on Climate Change, in which Council welcomed President Putin's decision to refer the Kyoto protocol to the Russian Duma for ratification, and reaffirmed our commitment both to maintain EU leadership internationally on climate change, and to engage constructively with others.

Council held an exchange of views on sustainable road transport, during which there was widespread support for encouraging production of cleaner and more efficient vehicles, with significant reductions in emissions of both particulates and nitrous oxide (NOx).

There was also a lengthy exchange of views on the future financing of the Natura 2000 network of protected natural sites. Some 10 member states, with Spain and Portugal in the lead, submitted a joint statement focused on their desire to establish a system of comprehensive community co-financing for these sites. The Secretary of State spoke in support of the Commission's approach in its recent communication, which is to focus on providing for the financing of these sites through the principal existing community financial instruments where they are applicable. She also noted that the Habitats Directive which established Natura 2000 sites is clear in giving primary responsibility for financing them to member states, and stating that co-financing should be in exceptional circumstances. Overall decisions on financing would be taken in other Council formations, and our decisions must be taken in the light of those. The Presidency noted general support for the idea of integrating Natura 2000 funding into other community instruments, but that there was widespread concern to ensure that these provided sufficient coverage.

There was a short exchange of views on the EECCA environment Ministers conference ('Kiev + 1') to be held in Tblisi on 21–22 October. The Secretary of State spoke to stress the importance we put on this in taking forward delivery of the EU and UNECE's commitments from the Johannesburg World Summit on Sustainable Development.

Under Other Business, Council noted information items on progress on the Aarhus dossiers, the forthcoming conference of the parties to the Basel Convention and the report from a German conference on impact assessment. Finally, the environment Ministers expressed their thanks to Margot Wallstrom, who was attending her last Council as Environment Commissioner.

Environmental Protection Policies/Specialists

Norman Baker: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what mechanisms are in place to ensure policies she assesses as vital for environmental protection purposes cannot be overruled by *(a)* the Department for Trade and Industry and *(b)* the Department for Transport. [196846]

Mr. Morley: There are frequent discussions between Ministers and officials of the relevant Departments about issues with a bearing on the environment. All Departments are committed to the vision of sustainable development set out in our strategy, "A Better Quality of Life" (Cm 4345), and therefore to the appraisal of their policies for environmental, social and economic impacts.

Miss McIntosh: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs how much of her Department's annual budget was spent on the payment of external environmental specialists in each year since June 2001. [197189]

Alun Michael: The information requested is not held centrally. Expenditure on external environmental specialists is part of the Department's expenditure on professional services. As part of its preparations for and implementation of the Gershon value for money agenda in Defra, a detailed analysis of departmental expenditure on professional services is being undertaken currently. I will place a copy of the analysis in the House of Commons Library in due course.

EU Committees

Angus Robertson: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs how many times during the Greek Presidency of the EU the committee *(a)* on implementation of the Directive establishing a Community policy regarding water, *(b)* for the adaptation to scientific and technical progress of the Directive on water intended for human consumption and *(c)* for the adaptation to technical and scientific progress of the directive on methods of measurement and frequencies of sampling and analysis of surface water intended for the abstraction of drinking water in the member states met; when and where these meetings took place; which UK Government expert was present at each meeting; what (i) technical and (ii) financial issues were raised by the UK Government expert at each meeting; what recommendations the Committee produced during that period; what actions were (A) proposed and (B) taken by (1) the EU and (2) the UK Government as a result of the Committee's recommendations; and if she will make a statement. [193397]

Mr. Morley: The information is as follows:

(a) The Committee on implementation of the Directive establishing a Community policy regarding water

The EU Committee on the implementation of the Directive establishing a Community policy regarding water met in Brussels on 6 May 2003 during the Greek Presidency. A representative from Water Quality Division, Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs attended the meeting on behalf of the UK. Issues discussed at the Committee included work priorities for 2003 and 2004, and implementation of Directive 2000/60/EC. The EU used the outcome of the meeting to take forward the Common Implementation Strategy including intercalibration. The UK used the outcome of the meeting to aid its implementation of the Directive.

(b) The EU Committee for the adaptation to scientific and technical progress of the Directive on water intended for human consumption

The Drinking Water Directive Management Committee met in Brussels on 8 May 2003 during the Greek Presidency. Representatives from the Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs and the Drinking Water Inspectorate and an observer from the Northern Ireland Drinking Water Inspectorate were present.

Technical issues considered included sampling and monitoring for radioactivity, lead, copper and nickel, and studies on drinking water. The outcome of the meeting was an agreed text of a draft Common Decision to amend technical Annexes to the Directive. Interim guidance for water companies issued by the Drinking Water Inspectorate already includes advice on these issues.

(c) The Committee for the adaptation to technical and scientific progress of the Directive on methods of measurement and frequencies of sampling and analysis of surface water intended for the abstraction of drinking water in the member states

The Committee did not meet during the Greek Presidency.

Angus Robertson: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs how many times during the Greek presidency of the EU the Scientific Review Group for the protection of species of wild fauna and flora by regulating trade met; when and where these meetings took place; which UK Government expert was present at each meeting; what (i) technical and (ii) financial issues were raised by the UK Government expert at each meeting; what recommendations the Committee produced during that period; what actions were (A) proposed and (B) taken by (1) the EU and (2) the UK Government as a result of the Committee's recommendations; and if she will make a statement. [193399]

Mr. Morley: The Scientific Review Group (SRG) met twice during the period of the Greek Presidency, on 30 January 2003 and 22 May 2003, on both occasions in Brussels.

UK representation normally comprises a representative from each of the two independent Scientific Authorities: the Joint Nature Conservation Committee (for animals), and the Royal Botanic Gardens, Kew (for plants). Government officials do not attend these meetings. The two independent Scientific Authorities both act in relation to each of their specialisms as single voices representing the wider UK scientific perspective in meeting responsibilities to examine scientific questions relating to the application of Council Regulation 338/97. The SRG examines scientific questions relating to the application of Council Regulation 338/97 and introduction of species to the EU. The decisions of the SRG are referred to as opinions.

The UK representatives raised the following technical issues at the meeting on 30 January 2003: application of Article 4 in relation to Pulsatrix melanota from Peru, and the inclusion of Oxyura jamaicensis on Annex B under the provisions of Article 3.2.d. At the meeting of 22 May 2003 the UK raised the following issues: Psittacus erithacus from Cote d'Ivoire; Geochelone pardalis from Zambia; the Article 4.6.c Working Group, and the listing of Gonystylus spp. on Annex B to Council Regulation 338/97. No financial issues were raised by the UK at either meeting.

The following opinions were agreed by the SRG at the respective meetings:

30 January 2003

Positive opinions for import of specimens from the following species/countries combinations:

Tridacna maxima Vietnam

Negative opinions for import of specimens of the following species/countries combinations

Canis lupus Belarus (hunting trophies)

Ursus arctos Slovenia (hunting trophies)

Geochelone pardalis Uganda

Blastomussa wellsi Indonesia

Tridacna crocea Vietnam

Tridacna squamosa Vietnam

No opinion for import of specimens of the following species/countries combinations

Panthera leo Ethiopia species.

The SRG concluded that the Commission should consider adding the following species to Annex D of Council Regulation 338/97:

Bird species:

Amandava amandava

Carduelis ambigua

Carduelis atrata

Cosmopsaurus regius

Cryptospiza reichenovii

Estrilda quartinia (often traded as Estrilda melanotis)

Hypargos niveoguttatus

Lonchura griseicapilla
Lonchura punctulata
Mino dumontii
Pyrrhula erythaca
Serinus canicollis
Serinus hypostictus (often traded as Serinus citrinelloides)
Sitta yunnanensis
Reptile species:
Melanochelys trijuga
Teratoscincus microlepis
Teratoscincus scincus
Carettochelys insculpta
Chinemys nigricans
Geomyda spengleri.

The SRG recommended that the Commission should delete the following species from Annex D:

Casuarius bennetti
Casuarius casuarius
Pelecanus philippensis
Mycteria leucocephala
Stictonetta naevosa
Chrysolophus amherstiae
Chrysolophus pictus
Tragopan temminckii
Treron sieboldii
Eubucco tucinkae
Megalaima rafflesii
Andigena cucullata
Andigena hypoglauca
Andigena nigrirostris
Zoothera monticola
Anthreptes reichenowi
Arachnothera clarae
Zosterops palpebrosus
Latoucheornis siemsseni
Tangara varia
Pitta angolensis
Pitta brachyura
Pitta moluccensis
Pitta oatesi
Pitta sordida
Pycnonotus jocosus
Cinclidium frontale
Copsychus malabaricus
Cyanoptila cyanomelana
Garrulax milleti
Luscinia pectardens
Paradoxornis heudei
Terpsiphone atrocaudata
Turdus mupinensis
Lonchura nevermanni
Euplectes jacksoni
Sturnus sericeus
Cissa thalassina
Platysmurus leucopterus.

The SRG concluded that the Commission should consider adding the following species to Annex B of Council Regulation 338/97 on the basis of Article 3.2*(d)*:

Oxyura jamaicensis
Chrysemys picta.

22 May 2003

Negative opinions were formed for import of specimens from the following species/countries combinations:

Balearica pavonina Guinea
Paleosuchus trigonatus Guyana
Ramphastos toco Paraguay
Amazona aestiva Paraguay
Caiman yacare Paraguay
Psittacus erithacus Congo DR
Acipenser schrenckii Russian Federation
Huso dauricus Russian Federation
Blastomussa wellsi Indonesia, Fiji
Hydnophora microconos Indonesia
Nemenzophyllia turbida (Plerogyra turbida) Indonesia
Scolymia vitiensis Indonesia, Fiji
Trachyphyllia geoffroyi Indonesia
Hippopus hippopus Tonga, Vanuatu, Vietnam
Tridacna crocea Fiji, Tonga, Vanuatu
Tridacna derasa Fiji, New Caledonia, Vanuatu
Tridacna gigas Tonga, Vietnam
Tridacna maxima F.S. of Micronesia, Fiji, Marshall Islands, Mozambique, New Caledonia, Tonga, Vanuatu, Vietnam
Tridacna rosewateri Mozambique
Tridacna squamosa Fiji, Mozambique, Vanuatu
Tridacna tevoroa Tonga
Wellsophyllia radiata Indonesia
Goniopora lobata Indonesia—(SRG recommended that the Commission should consider an import suspension of this species under article 4.6*(c)* of Council Regulation 338/97)
Catalaphyllia jardinei Fiji
Euphyllia yaeyamaensis Fiji
Hydnophora rigida Fiji
Plerogyra simplex Fiji
Plerogyra sinuosa Fiji
Trachyphyllia geoffroyi Fiji
Geochelone pardalis Zambia (source "F" and "R")

Negative opinions for import of specimens of the following species/countries combinations confirmed after 3rd countries' consultation to be formalised in the Suspensions regulation:

Poicephalus gulielmi Ivory Coast
Trigonoceps occipitalis Ivory Coast
Phelsuma dubia Comores
Phelsuma laticauda Comores
Psittacus erithacus Guinea
Agapornis pullarius Guinea
Phelsuma comorensis Comores
Phelsuma v-nigra Comores
Hippopotamus amphibius Togo

Negative opinions changed to positive:

Guaiacum sanctum Mexico (this opinion only applies to applications relating to already felled stocks)

Positive opinions:

Corythaeola cristata Congo

Psittacus erithacus erithacus Ivory Coast

Psittacus erithacus timneh Ivory Coast

Positive opinions changed to negative:

Chamaeleo senegalensis Togo (source "W" and "R")

No opinion for import of specimens of the following species/countries combinations

Tridacna derasa Papua New Guinea (Any application to be brought to the Group)

Tridacna maxima Papua New Guinea

Tridacna squamosa Papua New Guinea

Tridacna gigas Papua New Guinea

Tridacna tevoroa Papua New Guinea

With reference to Testudo graeca terrestris, member states are requested to refer any import applications from Lebanon for captive bred or ranched reptile species (source "F", "R" or "C") back to the SRG.

All import applications for Leucocephalon yuwonoi from Indonesia are to be considered by the SRG.

The SRG decided to maintain the positive opinion on the hunting trophies of Ursos arctos from British Columbia subject to evidence of adequate progress with the implementation of the recommendations made by the BC Government's second Independent Scientific Panel in time for the 2004 hunting season.

The SRG concluded that the Commission should consider deleting the following reptile species from Annex D of Council Regulation 338/97:

Geckolepis maculate

Acanthosaura armata

Zonosaurus laticaudatus

Zonosaurus madagascariensis

Tiliqua gerrardii

Tiliqua gigas.

The SRG requested the Commission to list Harpagophytum spp on Annex D of Council Regulation 338/97.

Action of the European Commission and UK Government

As a result of the opinions taken, negative opinions for several species were formalised (as recommended above) by the European Commission by their inclusion in Commission Regulation 776/2004 of 26 April 2004 suspending the introduction into the Community of specimens of certain species of wild fauna and flora.

Changes to the Annexes of Regulation 338/97 were made by the European Commission (in line with recommendations above) through Commission Regulation (EC) No 1497/2003 subsequently superseded by Commission Regulation (EC) 834/2004 amending Council Regulation 338/97 on the protection of species of wild fauna and flora by regulating trade therein.

The UK Government approved these changes and implements the recommendations of the Scientific Review Group by taking account of this advice when considering applications for import permits for any of the species/country combinations referred to above.

Angus Robertson: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs how many times during the Greek Presidency of the EU the committee *(a)* for the adaptation to technical and scientific progress and implementation of the Directive on urban waste-water treatment and *(b)* protection of water against pollution caused by nitrates from agricultural sources met; when and where these meetings took place; which UK Government expert was present at each meeting; what (i) technical and (ii) financial issues were raised by the UK Government expert at each meeting; what recommendations the Committee produced during that period; what actions were (A) proposed and (B) taken by (1) the EU and (2) the UK Government as a result of the Committee's recommendations; and if she will make a statement. [193402]

Mr. Morley: The information is as follows:

(a) The Committee for the adaptation to technical and scientific progress and implementation of the Directive on urban waste-water treatment

There was no technical and adaptive Committee of the Urban Waste Water Treatment Directive held during the Greek Presidency.

(b) The Committee for the adaptation to technical and scientific progress and implementation of the Directive for the protection of water against pollution caused by nitrates from agricultural sources

The technical and adaptive Committee for the Nitrates Directive met in Brussels on one occasion during the Greek Presidency on 27 March 2003. Representatives from the Scottish Executive and Water Quality Division, Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs were present at the meeting on behalf of the UK.

Issues discussed at the Committee included grassland fertilisation and nitrates, potential techniques for tracing the origin of nitrate, draft monitoring guidelines for groundwater and surface waters, and the linkages between good farming practice and support for rural development from the European Agricultural Guidance and Guarantee Fund.

The EU proposed to use the outcomes of the meeting to advise its consideration of member states' requests for a grassland derogation, and to further develop the draft monitoring guidelines. The EU requested written comments on each item discussed. The UK Government provided written comments as requested.

Angus Robertson: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs how many times during the Greek presidency of the EU the Committee for the adaptation to technical progress of the directive on *(a)* bathing water and *(b)* the quality of fresh water needing protection or improvement in order to support fish life met; when and where these meetings took place; which UK Government expert was present at each meeting; what (i) technical and (ii) financial issues were raised by the UK Government expert at each meeting; what recommendations the Committee produced during that period; what actions were (A) proposed and (B) taken by (1) the EU and (2) the UK Government as a result of the Committee's recommendations; and if she will make a statement. [193403]

Mr. Morley: The information is as follows:

(a) The Committee for the adaptation to technical progress of the directive on bathing water

This Committee did not meet during the Greek presidency. Therefore neither the question of current UK representation on the Committee nor that of actions proposed or taken as consequences of Committee recommendations arose.

(b) The Committee for the adaptation to technical progress of the directive on the quality of fresh water needing protection or improvement in order to support fish life

This Committee did not meet during the Greek presidency. Therefore neither the question of current UK representation on the Committee, nor that of actions proposed or taken as consequences of Committee recommendations arose.

Angus Robertson: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs how many times during the Greek Presidency of the EU the Committee for the adaptation to technical progress of the decision establishing a common procedure for the exchange of information on the quality of surface fresh water in the Community met; when and where these meetings took place; which UK Government expert was present at each meeting; what *(a)* technical and *(b)* financial issues were raised by the UK Government expert at each meeting; what recommendations the Committee produced during that period; what actions were (i) proposed and (ii) taken by (A) the EU and (B) the UK Government as a result of the Committee's recommendations; and if she will make a statement. [193404]

Mr. Morley: This Committee did not meet during the Greek presidency and has not met for more than seven years. Therefore, during this time, neither the question of current UK representation on the Committee nor that of actions proposed or taken as consequences of Committee recommendations has arisen.

Falconry

Huw Irranca-Davies: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what recent discussions the Department has held with non-governmental organisations in respect of falconry. [193150]

Mr. Morley: Discussions concerning falconry occur with English Nature on a case-by-case basis, prior to, and throughout the open season. The most recent discussions took place this October.

Huw Irranca-Davies: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what recent discussions she has held with the Joint Nature Conservation Committee on falconry. [193151]

Mr. Morley: Defra officials liaise with the JNCC on a daily basis, as they are the UK's scientific advisors on fauna.

However, JNCC advice on falconry matters is generally related to the trade in the falcon species concerned. Advice on other falconry matters is provided by English Nature.

Huw Irranca-Davies: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs if she will make a statement on the Government's policy on falconry; and what assessment has been made of the effects of falconry on conservation. [193152]

Mr. Morley: The use of birds of prey for the purposes of falconry against protected species is permitted under various legislation.

All wild birds in Britain are protected by the 1981 Wildlife and Countryside Act, but the Act does enable the issue of licences to take small numbers of birds for various purposes including falconry. The Department consults fully with its statutory scientific advisers before any licences are issued, on the species, and number of each species, that falconers should be permitted to hunt each season. These procedures ensure that the number of birds allowed to be killed by falconers is limited strictly to small numbers and only to species whose populations can sustain such slight losses.

English Nature monitors the population numbers of various species. The small number of birds taken under licences granted under section 16 of the Wildlife and Countryside Act 1981 does not affect the conservation status of the species concerned.

Fallen Stock

Mr. Gray: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs if she will list postcodes in which there is no coverage for the collection of fallen stock under the Animal By-Products Regulation. [190725]

Mr. Bradshaw: Although information regarding the location of Animal By-Product Regulation approved premises is available (such as those which collect fallen stock), the Department does not record the extent of the areas in which they operate.

However, as part of the tender process for collectors for the National Fallen Stock Scheme the National Fallen Stock Company requested information from collectors about the geographical area in which they intend to operate. The information provided indicates that the scheme should have full nationwide coverage, other than for those areas where no service was either expected and/or required i.e. remote areas and urban conurbations.

This does not necessarily mean that those areas, which are not covered by the scheme, have no fallen stock service. There may be collectors in those areas which have chosen not to participate in the scheme.

Mr. Llwyd: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs when it is expected that the subsidy provided for farmers to dispose of fallen stock will be discontinued; and if she will make a statement. [192210]

Mr. Bradshaw: The Government are making available £20 million over the first three years of the National Fallen Stock Scheme.

Fisheries

Mr. Tynan: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what assessment she has made of the likely changes in United Kingdom fisheries management which will result from the introduction of the Community Fisheries Control Agency. [197576]

Mr. Bradshaw: The proposals for creation of a Community Fisheries Control Agency are still subject to negotiation. However, they will not alter the responsibilities of the United Kingdom or other member states to ensure effective policing of fisheries activity: we will want to be satisfied that the final regulation is compatible with our national arrangements.

The creation of an agency is intended to assist in, for example, joint planning for the deployment of inspection resources. This might involve member states contributing resources to agreed monitoring programmes for specific fisheries. In many respects this would be little different from ad hoc arrangements for joint working in which the UK has participated over recent years.

Flood Defence/Management

Mr. Michael Foster: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs if she will list the flood defence projects started since May 1997 in England; and what the cost of each was to the Department. [195852]

Mr. Morley: Defra provides grant aid to the flood and coastal defence operating authorities to support their improvement projects (works and related studies) to reduce flood risk. These improvement projects must meet specified criteria and an appropriate priority score to attract Defra funding but decisions regarding which projects to promote and their timing rest with these authorities. The principal operating authority for flood risk is the Environment Agency but local authorities and, in areas with special drainage needs, internal drainage boards also carry out works on a much smaller scale overall.

I will be placing in the House Library a list of flood defence (including flood warning) projects approved for Defra grant aid, which have started since 1 May 1997.

The approved cost for each project is shown—an estimated £840 million in total. For local authorities and drainage boards, and for the Environment Agency up until March 2004, Defra grant-aided these projects at rates of between 15 per cent. and 80 per cent. of the approved cost with the balance being met by a variety of funding streams according to the type of body. From April 2004, Defra has grant-aided the full cost of Environment Agency projects.

Projects carried out by local authorities to reduce risk of coastal erosion often also have significant flood defence benefits but I have not included these projects in the list.

Mr. Key: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what *(a)* flood warning and *(b)* post-flood management systems are in place in the Wiltshire section of the Hampshire Avon catchment; and if she will make a statement. [196021]

Mr. Morley: The Government are committed to ensuring a seamless, integrated and continuous service of flood forecasting, warning and response delivered by the Environment Agency. Defra has recently approved the Agency's new £226 million flood warning strategy.

For Wiltshire, the Agency's regional flood forecasting and monitoring team in Exeter works with the Meteorological Office to provide the Flood Warning team at Blandford with information on weather conditions. The Blandford team considers this against the condition of the catchment and monitored river levels. When river trigger levels are exceeded, warnings are sent from Agency area office to the media, civil authorities, emergency services and those at risk of flooding who have chosen to be on the Agency's Automated Voice Messaging (AVM) system. The Agency has also written to those identified from flood maps as being at risk of flooding. Both the maps and those on the AVM are reviewed regularly taking account of any new information.

Due to the characteristics of the chalk geology in the Salisbury catchment, groundwater can be a source of flooding and the Agency aims to provide an accessible, self-help groundwater flood warning service to all of the affected local parishes.

The Agency has a comprehensive post-flood management system which reviews their response to events, the impact and sources of flooding. The Agency addresses issues within its responsibility and provides review information to all responsible organisations as a starting point for future work. Solutions, such as improvements to flood warning, enforcement, development control, maintenance of main rivers, improvement works and possible new defences, are prioritised within the Agency's work programmes.

Mr. Rosindell: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what plans are in place to help areas, which suffer from flooding during the next year. [195979]

Mr. Morley: Local authorities and emergency services have contingency plans in place to cope with the range of emergencies in their areas, including flooding. These plans operate alongside those of the Environment Agency who provide flood warnings to both the public, local authorities and other emergency services. The Environment Agency and the other operating authorities also monitor stretches of watercourses when flooding is likely. Should national level response be required, Defra maintains contingency arrangements in a Lead Department Plan for flooding from rivers or the sea, which foresees coordination of the central Government response, including by Cabinet Office.

Local authorities are also responsible for responding to the effects of flooding. In addition, where applicable, the Bellwin Scheme is available to local authorities as a means of obtaining financial assistance in clearing up and recovery immediately after a local disaster or emergency. This scheme is administered by the Office of the Deputy Prime Minister.

Fly Tipping

Andrew Selous: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs if she will make a statement on police duties in respect of fly tipping. [197743]

Mr. Morley: The Environment Agency and local authorities are currently responsible for preventing, detecting and enforcing offences involving the illegal disposal of waste, or fly tipping. Under a voluntary agreement between the Agency and the Local Government Association, the Agency deals with fly tips of large amounts or hazardous waste and local authorities deal with smaller, local incidents of mainly household waste. The police have no formal duties with respect to fly tipping, although they do sometimes participate in joint investigations of offenders, for example, where organised crime is involved. The police are also frequently involved in stop and search operations as only a police constable in uniform is empowered to stop a vehicle on a road.

Foot and Mouth

Mr. Paterson: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs (1) what steps she is taking to establish the original source of the 2001 foot and mouth epidemic; [196521]

(2) if she will hold a further public inquiry into the sources and cause of the 2001 foot and mouth disease epidemic. [196587]

Mr. Bradshaw: Defra considers that the origin of the FMD outbreaks in 2001 was the unprocessed waste food fed to pigs on Burnside Farm run by Robert Waugh and he was convicted of this offence. The Lessons to be Learned Inquiry carried out by Dr. Iain Anderson supported this conclusion, which was based on a thorough epidemiological investigation. The Origins of FMD report submitted by Defra to the inquiry was based on wide-ranging evidence and rigorous investigation and was published by Dr. Anderson. There is no new evidence that indicates that the disease was present anywhere else earlier than at Burnside Farm.

Mr. Paterson: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what assessment she has made of the reports from James Dring that some of the evidence of foot and mouth disease discovered on Burnside Farm constituted old lesions. [196531]

Mr. Bradshaw: Mr. Dring, accompanied by an Animal Health Officer, visited the farm on 22 February 2001, as part of the investigation into the cause of the outbreak in Essex and saw the presence of FMD, clearly well established with old lesions in many pigs. Disease was confirmed on these premises on 23 February 2001. On 24 February the experts' opinion was that some pigs had 12 day-old lesions. This implies that disease was probably present on 12 February 2001 and with an incubation period of two-14 days it could have been present from as early as 29 January 2001.

Jim Dring's previous visit before 22 February was on 24 January, on which date he closely inspected the herd and found no visible signs of FMD.

This is all set out in the report on the Origins of FMD submitted to and published by Dr. Anderson.

Mr. Paterson: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what tests were made on the dead sheep shown in the Burnside Farm video taken by trading standards officials on 24 February 2001 to determine their cause of death; and what the results were of those tests. [196532]

Mr. Bradshaw: Defra found no dead sheep on Burnside Farm either on 24 February or on any other date in 2001.

Andrew George: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what criteria were used by *(a)* the Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food and *(b)* her Department when deciding which documents and evidence should be made available to Dr. Iain Anderson for the inquiry he chaired into the 2001 foot and mouth disease outbreak. [196681]

Mr. Bradshaw: The Department's approach was that Dr. Anderson's inquiry should be granted access to all relevant papers.

Mrs. Browning: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs how many farmers have been asked to sign the Official Secrets Act 1989 in respect of matters connected with the 2001 foot and mouth disease outbreak. [197500]

Mr. Bradshaw *[holding answer 11 November 2004]*: To the best of our knowledge no farmers were asked to sign the Official Secrets Act in connection with the 2001 foot and mouth outbreak.

However, farmers undertaking a range of services on behalf of the Department, such as the provision of secondary cleansing and disinfection (C&D), may have been asked to sign a contract based on the Department's standard terms and conditions at the time, which included reference to the Official Secrets Act.

Due to concerns over the applicability of such clauses, contracts for farmers undertaking C&D on their own premises were subsequently amended to remove any reference to the Official Secrets Act.

Mrs. Browning: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs whether the foot and mouth disease virus was in the national sheep flock prior to 20 February 2001. [197638]

Mr. Bradshaw *[holding answer 11 November 2004]*: A group of 26 sheep at Prestwick Hall Farm, Pontiland, Northumberland are believed to be the first sheep in the national flock to have become infected with foot and mouth disease in the 2001 epidemic. They most likely became infected sometime between the 2 and 14 February 2001 as a result of windborne spread from diseased pigs at Burnside Farm. There is no evidence of FMD predating the outbreak at Burnside Farm in the vicinity of the farm or on the premises that supplied it with pigs, or for that matter, anywhere in the UK.

Fuel Poverty

Malcolm Bruce: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what measures her Department has assessed as the most effective in addressing fuel poverty in homes in tower blocks. [195940]

Mr. Morley: There is no single solution to tackle such properties, which can prove challenging due to structural issues. We continue to explore the most effective solution for individual households and community solutions such as providing district heating with combined heat and power.

Alan Simpson: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what the reasons are for the delay in publishing the Fuel Poverty Implementation Plan; and when it will be published. [196492]

Mr. Morley: The final version of the Fuel Poverty Plan will be published before the end of the year. A decision was taken to delay publication until announcements on fuel poverty spending as part of the Spending Review 2004.

Glass Industry (Emissions Limits)

Mr. Illsley: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what the emission levels permitted under Integrated Pollution Prevention and Control regulations are for newly constructed glass factories. [197005]

Mr. Morley: New glass factories which are listed for control under the Pollution Prevention and Control (England and Wales) Regulations are subject to two general principles. That they should be operated in such a way that all appropriate measures are taken against pollution, in particular through application of the best available techniques, and that no significant pollution is caused. My right hon. Friend the Secretary of State has issued statutory guidance to assist local authority regulators in determining what those measures should be, which can be found at www.defra.gov.uk/environment/ppc/laippc/laippc.htm

Table 3 in the document contains guidance on emission limits, including limit values for nitrogen oxides (annual average 500mg/m3—milligrams per cubic metre—daily average 700mg/m3) and particulate matter (30mg/m3). The guidance was drawn up in consultation with a technical working group, comprising among others representatives of the trade association (British Glass), and of various glass-making firms (Pilkingtons, Rockware and United Glass).

Mr. Illsley: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs (1) what assessment she has made of the cost to the glass container industry of new emission limits applicable from January 2005; [197037]

(2) what assessment she has made of the increased cost of energy to the glass container industry as a consequence of new emissions limits. [197038]

Mr. Morley: The limit values contained in the guidance referred to in answer to PQ UIN 197005 are derived from the Best Available Techniques Reference document produced by the European Commission's 'European Integrated Pollution Prevention and Control Bureau', which can be found at: http://eippcb.jrc.es/pages/FActivities.htm This document, which contains a review of costs and energy impacts, includes emission limit values similar to those contained in the guidance we published: for example, the BAT emission level associated with specified techniques is given as between 5 and 30mg/m3 (milligrams per cubic metre) and that for nitrogen oxides as 500–70mg/m3. As regards energy, it states on page 134 that the use of an electrostatic precipitator to tackle particulate matter emissions involves an increase in energy consumption, but the increase is low in relation to the consumption of the glass furnace (less than 1 per cent.).

Greyhound Racing

Ms Dari Taylor: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs for what reasons the regulations for greyhound racing in the draft Animal Welfare Bill are not proposed to be brought in until 2010. [196984]

Mr. Bradshaw: No final decision has been taken concerning the date when I anticipate introducing regulations for greyhound racing. I am currently consulting the industry on the extent and timing of proposed internal reforms. I will review the proposed regulation under the Bill in the light of the response from the industry.

The duty of care (welfare) and cruelty provision of the draft Bill will apply to greyhounds irrespective of the timing of secondary legislation on regulations.

Green Ministers

Mr. Horam: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs how many Green Ministers her Department and its predecessors has had since 1997. [197676]

Mr. Morley: Defra was created in June 2001 from the then Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food (MAFF) and from the environmental and countryside business areas of the then Department of the Environment, Transport and the Regions (DETR).

There have been two Green Ministers in Defra since its formation and there were two Green Ministers from 1997 in both the DETR and MAFF as detailed in the table:

Department	*Green Ministers*
MAFF	Jeff Rooker, Elliot Morley
DETR	Glenda Jackson, Beverley Hughes
Defra (since 2001)	Alun Michael, Lord Whitty

Hazardous Waste (Substitute Fuels)

Sue Doughty: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs if she will make a statement on the safety of burning hazardous waste in cement kilns. [196437]

Mr. Morley *[holding answer 8 November 2004]:* Cement kilns in England and Wales are regulated for environmental purposes by the Environment Agency under the Pollution Prevention and Control (PPC) system. Cement kilns that burn hazardous waste are subject to additional regulatory controls under the Hazardous Waste Incineration Directive and the new Waste Incineration Directive. Any PPC permit granted by the Agency includes conditions designed to ensure that the installation is operated in such a way that all the appropriate preventative measures are taken against pollution, in particular through the application of the best available techniques, and that no significant pollution is caused.

The Environment Agency's Substitute Fuels Protocol, originally published in 1999, sets out detailed consultation requirements for PPC permit applications by cement kiln operators wishing to use waste as substitute fuels. It also sets out detailed monitoring requirements and controls on the constituents of the substitute fuel.

The Environment Agency recently conducted a three-month public consultation on proposed revisions to the Substitute Fuels Protocol. The outcome was discussed at a meeting of the Environment Agency Board on 13 October and the Agency issued a News Release on the matter on 15 October.

Sue Doughty: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs if she will list hazardous wastes that will newly qualify as substitute fuels for use in cement kilns following the changes to the Substitute Fuels Protocol approved by the Board of the Environment Agency on 13 October; and if she will list for each emissions level whether the listed wastes were disposed of in *(a)* cement kilns and *(b)* high temperature incinerators designed for hazardous waste disposal. [196438]

Mr. Morley *[holding answer 8 November 2004]*: Under the revised Substitute Fuels Protocol, the Environment Agency will no longer exclude pentachlorophenol or wastes derived from the manufacture of pharmaceuticals, biocides, pesticides and explosives from being incorporated into substitute fuel. In addition, any new waste, including hazardous waste, proposed as a substitute fuel in cement kilns will have to comply with the following criteria:

(i) the main purpose of its use is the generation of heat;

(ii) the amount of heat generated, recovered and effectively used is greater than the amount of heat consumed in its use; and

(iii) the principal use of the waste is as fuel.

Given that the Agency's Board has only recently made its decision, the revised policy has not yet had an impact on the quantity of hazardous wastes recovered as fuel in cement kilns.

At present emission limit values for cement kilns that burn hazardous waste are calculated in accordance with a formula given in Annex II of Council Directive 94/67/EC of 16 December 1994 on the incineration of hazardous waste . The formula ensures that the fraction of gas produced by the incineration of hazardous waste in a cement kiln has the same emission limit values applied to it as it would have done had it been incinerated in a merchant waste incinerator. These emission limits are given in Article 7 of that Directive. However, the final emission limit values for a cement kiln also take into account the concentration of pollutants derived from the combustion of conventional fuels (e.g. coal, petroleum coke) and raw materials (e.g. limestone, clay) in the cement kiln.

From 28 December 2005, Directive 94/67/EC will be superseded by Directive 2000/76/EC on the incineration of waste. Emission limit values for cement kilns burning hazardous waste will, as a minimum, be set according to Annex II of that Directive.

Sue Doughty: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs if she will make a statement on the application of recent European Court of Justice judgements on trans-frontier shipment of wastes and criteria for waste recovery with regard to minimum calorific values for wastes that are incinerated as substitute fuels. [196439]

Mr. Morley *[holding answer 8 November 2004]*: Judgments by the European Court of Justice are binding on Member States and their "competent authorities". Recent judgments which impact on the transfrontier shipment of wastes and the classification of operations as recovery or disposal under waste legislation include the following cases: C-6/00, C-228/00, C-458/00 and C-116/01. In relation to the criteria to determine recovery or disposal status, the Court ruled in case C-116/01 that:

> "The calorific value of waste which is to be combusted is not a relevant criterion for the purpose of determining whether that operation constitutes a disposal operation as referred to in point D10 of Annex MA to Directive 75/442, as amended . . . or a recovery operation as referred to in point R1 of Annex MB thereof. Member States may establish distinguishing criteria for that purpose provided that those criteria comply with those laid down in the Directive."

The Environment Agency are in the process of revising the substitute fuels protocol which will take account of the recent ECJ cases.

Hydrofluorocarbons

Mr. Stringer: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs whether her policy on HFC emissions remains as set out in paragraph 19, Section Two, Chapter One of Climate Change—the UK Programme, of November 2000. [196256]

Mr. Morley: Yes, HFCs should only be used where other safe, technically feasible, cost effective and more environmentally acceptable alternatives do not exist.

Good progress has been made in developing effective measures to reduce HFC emissions. Political agreement to an EC Regulation on certain fluorinated greenhouse gases, and a Directive amending Existing Vehicle Type Approval in relation to Mobile Air Conditioning (MAC) in cars was reached in October 2004.

The Regulation includes measures on: containment through responsible handling during use, recycling and end-of-life recovery; reporting on quantities produced, supplied, used and emitted; certain application specific bans on use and placing on the market. The Directive includes a ban on the use of fluorinated gases with high Global Warming Potential (GWP) in MACs from 2011 (new vehicle types), and 2017 (all new vehicles).

Norman Baker: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what the estimated volume of emissions of hydrofluorocarbons has been in each year since 1990; and what projections she has made for future years. [196817]

Mr. Morley: This information is provided in the following table:

Total UK emissions of HFC, RFC and SF_6
(ktonnes CO_2 equivalent)

	HFC	*PFC*	*SF_6*	*Total*
1990	11,375	1,394	1,082	13,851
1995	15,491	457	1,291	17,240
2000	9,081	541	1,852	11,475
2005	11,200	327	1,715	13,242
2010	9,912	267	1,300	11,480
2015	9,637	292	1,265	11,194
2020	9,072	314	1,262	10,648
2025	8,755	337	1,277	10,369

These figures are based on an AEA Technology report, Emissions and Projections of HFCs, PFCs and SF_6 in the UK and constituent countries 2nd Edition, June 2004. Defra has also commissioned from AEA a general review of any new information that may significantly affect the projected emissions for HFC, PFC and SF_6 to 2025.

Norman Baker: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what her policy is on the phase-out of hydrofluorocarbons. [196818]

Mr. Morley: The UK policy on hydrofluorocarbons is set out in chapter one of "Climate Change, the UK Programme" (November 2000).

In addition, political agreement to an EC Regulation on certain fluorinated greenhouse gases, and a Directive amending Existing Vehicle Type Approval in relation to Mobile Air Conditioning (MAC) in cars was reached in October 2004.

The Regulation introduces provisions for: containment through responsible handling during use, recycling and end-of-life recovery; reporting on quantities produced, supplied, used and emitted; and certain application specific bans on use and placing on the market.

The Directive will amend existing Vehicle Type Approval legislation in relation to Mobile-Air-Conditioning (MACs) in cars (and car derived vans). The proposal includes a ban on the use of fluorinated gases with a high Global Warming Potential in MACs from 2011 (new vehicle types), and 2017 (all new vehicles).

Norman Baker: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what steps she is taking to discourage the fitting of hydrofluorocarbons in *(a)* domestic refrigeration and *(b)* air conditioning. [196819]

Mr. Morley: Hydrofluorocarbon technology in domestic refrigerators has already largely been phased out in the EU. All major UK manufacturers of domestic refrigerators now use hydrocarbon based refrigerants. A small amount of imported domestic refrigeration equipment uses hydrofluorocarbons.

Political agreement to an EC Regulation on certain fluorinated greenhouse gases, and a Directive amending Existing Vehicle Type Approval in relation to Mobile Air Conditioning (MAC) in cars was reached in October 2004.

The Regulation includes provisions for: containment through responsible handling during use, recycling and end-of-life recovery; reporting on quantities produced, supplied, used and emitted; and certain application specific bans on use and placing on the market. This requirement will cover the commercial refrigeration and air conditioning sectors.

The Directive will amend existing Vehicle Type Approval legislation in relation to Mobile Air Conditioning (MACs) in cars (and car derived vans). This proposal includes a ban on the use of fluorinated gases with high a Global Warming Potential in MACs from 2011 (new vehicle types), and 2017 (all new vehicles).

Incineration

Mr. Rosindell: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what assessment she has made of the effects of an increase in waste incineration upon the environment. [195990]

Mr. Morley: In May 2004 Defra published a Review of the Environmental and Health Effects of Waste Management which brings together the available evidence of the health and environmental effects of the main types of waste management facility.

The review concluded that incineration, along with landfill, is the waste disposal option with the greatest potential for environmental effects. Compared with other waste management technologies, it produces the largest emissions of oxides of nitrogen and hydrogen chloride per tonne of municipal solid waste. However the potential negative effects, such as dust, poor air quality and effects on flora/fauna, soils and water quality can be controlled under normal operating conditions.

The present generation of incinerators release much smaller amounts of dioxin that was the case five or 10 years ago and the report noted that less than 1 per cent. of emissions of oxides of nitrogen, which reduce air quality, come from municipal solid waste management, while 42 per cent. come from road traffic.

Incinerators are normally operated with energy recovery, resulting in the generation of electricity, which can reduce the need to generate electricity from other sources. Any increase in the overall environmental burden caused by emissions from new incinerators should be set against both the reduction in the requirement for electricity to be generated elsewhere and the reduction of emissions to air and groundwater from the waste being deposited in landfills.

Mr. Rosindell: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what assessment the Government have made of the benefits of waste incinerators. [195991]

Mr. Morley: The principal benefits of incineration are reduction in the volume of waste landfilled, the generation of electricity or heat from combustion and the production of ash which can be recovered as a construction material.

The Review of the Environmental and Health Effects of Waste Management enables comparison of the environmental effects of all waste management options including incineration and landfill. It also sets out the energy generated by incinerators and the reduction in the requirement for electricity to be generated elsewhere.

Industrial Fisheries

Mr. Paterson: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what steps she is taking to improve management of industrial fisheries within UK waters. [197209]

Mr. Bradshaw: Industrial fisheries are managed under the Common Fisheries Policy. In the light of recent scientific advice that Norway Pout and sandeels in the North Sea are outside safe limits, the UK will support measures to recover these stocks at the December Fisheries Council.

Landfill

Mr. Rosindell: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what the Government's policy is on the use of landfill sites for the disposal of waste. [195971]

Mr. Morley: The Government are committed to reducing the UK's reliance on landfill for the disposal of waste, in order to reduce its environmental impact and because landfilling is a missed opportunity to recover value from waste. This is part of the UK's commitment to more sustainable waste management in line with the objectives and policies set out in Waste Strategy 2000.

Miss McIntosh: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs how many new waste facilities she estimates will be required in the UK to fulfil the requirements of the EU landfill directive. [190377]

Mr. Morley: The Strategy Unit Report, "Waste not, Want not", quotes from the Ernst and Young Local Authority Waste Management Survey, 2001. It says that "Ernst and Young have estimated that additional investment of £600–700 million per annum over the next 10 years will be required to reduce the volume of waste sent to landfill, sufficient to meet the Article 5 targets of the EU landfill directive."

The exact number of facilities will depend on the size and mix of facilities chosen by each local authority.

Estimates on available capacity of existing hazardous waste treatment infrastructure were prepared for the Hazardous Waste Forum in September 2003 and posted on the forum's website: http://www.defra.gov.uk/environment/waste/hazforum/031021/enviros.pdf

The forum continues to keep this information under review as it becomes aware of changes to waste industry plans.

Miss McIntosh: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs how many new waste disposal facilities will be required in the UK by 2010 to fulfil the requirements of the EU landfill directive. [197683]

Mr. Morley: The Strategy Unit Report, "Waste not, Want not", quotes from the Ernst and Young Local Authority Waste Management Survey, 2001. It says that

> "Ernst and Young have estimated that additional investment of £600–700 million per annum over the next 10 years will be required to reduce the volume of waste sent to landfill, sufficient to meet the Article 5 targets of the EU landfill directive."

The exact number of facilities will depend on the size and mix of facilities chosen by each local authority.

Tom Cox: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs if she will list the landfill sites in the Greater London area that are able to accept hazardous waste. [197128]

Mr. Morley: There are no landfill sites in the Greater London area that are licensed/permitted to accept hazardous waste. The names and locations of all hazardous waste landfills are available on the Environment Agency website (www.environment-agency.gov.uk).

LFA Support Scheme

Paddy Tipping: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs how much has been paid out under the Less Favoured Areas Support Scheme in each county in England in 2003–04; and if she will make a statement. [196198]

Alun Michael: The figures for payments under the Hill Farm Allowance in 2004, by counties in England, are listed in the following table:

County	*Amount paid (£)*
Avon	0.00
Bedfordshire	0.00
Berkshire	0.00
Buckinghamshire	0.00
Cambridgeshire	1,211.96
Cheshire	317,183.33
Cleveland	59,745.22
Cornwall	862,476.25
Cumbria	7,842,506.03
Derbyshire	1,826,631.70
Devonshire	3,156,434.11
Dorset	0.00
Durham	2,221,647.96
East Sussex	0.00
Essex	0.00
Gloucestershire	0.00
Greater London (ER)	0.00
Greater London (SER)	0.00
Greater Manchester	271,437.07
Hampshire	24,028.20
Hereford and Worcester	637,817.91
Hertfordshire	0.00
Humberside	11,690.22
Isle of Wight	0.00
Kent	0.00
Lancashire	2,109,409.80
Leicestershire	0.00
Lincolnshire	0.00
Merseyside	0.00
Norfolk	0.00
North Yorkshire (N)	5,986,107.08
North Yorkshire (S)	6,648.12
Northamptonshire	0.00
Northumberland	4,888,666.49

County	Amount paid (£)
Nottinghamshire	7,436.61
Oxfordshire	0.00
Scilly Isles	2,154.30
Shropshire	1,341,014.14
Somerset	1,114,547.63
South Yorkshire	278,073.24
Staffordshire	547,001.18
Suffolk	0.00
Surrey	0.00
Tyne and Wear	42,042.53
Warwickshire	0.00
West Midlands	0.00
West Sussex	0.00
West Yorkshire	957,773.40
Wiltshire	0.00

Livestock Auction Markets

Andrew George: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs which livestock auction markets *(a)* operated in 1997, *(b)* operated before the foot and mouth outbreak in 2001 and *(c)* operate now. [196687]

Mr. Bradshaw: The list of livestock auction markets operating in 1997 is not readily available. However, based on information provided by the Livestock Auctioneers Association the lists of livestock auction markets for England and Wales which operate currently and the closures between 1997 and 2001 and those closed since 2001 are as follows:

Currently operational—England

Acklington
Andoversford
Ashford
Axminster
Bakewell
Barnard Castle
Beeston
Bellingham
Bentham
Bideford
Bishop's Castle
Blackmoor Gate
Bridgnorth
Bristol
Broughton-in-Furness
Carlisle
Chagford
Chelford
Chippenham
Cirencester
Claughton-on-Brock
Clitheroe
Cockermouth
Colchester
Cutcombe
Darlington
Derby
Exeter
Frome
Gisburn
Hailsham
Hallworthy
Hatherleigh
Hawes
Hereford
Hexham
Highbridge
Holsworthy
Honiton
Hull
Kendal
Kington
Kirkby Stephen
Kirkby Thore
Lancaster
Lazonby
Leek
Liskeard
Leyburn
Leominster
Longtown
Louth
Ludlow
Maidstone
Malton
Market Drayton
Market Harborough
Masham
Melton Mowbray
Middleton-in-Teesdale
Newark
Newton Abbot
Northallerton
Norwich
Oswestry
Otley (Wharfedale)
Ponteland
Rothbury
Ross-on-Wye
Reading
Rugby
Ruswarp, Nr. Whitby
Penrith, Cumbria
St. Johns Chapel
Salisbury
Scots Gap, Morpeth
Sedbergh
Selby
Shaftesbury
Shrewsbury
Skipton
South Molton
Stratford-upon-Avon
Taunton
Tavistock
Tenbury Wells
Thame

Thirsk
Thrapston
Tow Law
Truro
Ulverston
Uttoxeter
Wigton
Winslow
Three Horses
Wooler
Worcester
Yeovil
York

Currently operational—Wales

Abergavenny
Aberystwyth
Bala
Brecon
Bryncir
Builth Wells
Cardigan
Carmarthen
Corwen
Cowbridge
Crymmych
Dolgellau
Gaerwen
Haverfordwest
Hay-on-Wye
Knighton
Lampeter
Llandeilo
Llandovery
Llandysul
Llanrwst
Llanybydder
Machynlleth
Mold
Neath
Newcastle
Newport
Newtown
Penybont
Rhayader
Emlyn Ruthin
Sarn
St. Asaph
Sennybridge
Synod Inn
Talgarth
Talybont-on-Usk
Tregaron
Welshpool
Whitland
Royal Welsh Show Ground

Closures between 1997–2001

England

Ashbourne
Ashburton
Banbury
Beccles
Beverley
Bridgewater
Cambourne
Canterbury
Chelmsford
Crewe
Goole
Guildford
Haslingden
Hellifield
Kidderminster
Kingsbridge
Lichfield
Newport (Salop)
Oakham
Otley
Penkridge
Penzance
Plympton
Sevenoaks
Sturminster
Tetbury
Wadebridge
Wetherby
Wickham

Wales

Llangefni
Llanidloes
Llangadog

Closures since 2001

England

Avon
Barnstaple
Bishop Auckland
Brickfields
Bury St. Edmunds
Chester
Congleton
Corby Glen
Craven Arms
Driffield
Gloucester
Grantham
Helston
Hope
Ledbury
Northampton
Penistone
Preston
Ripon
Rye

Stamford
Stokesley
St. Austell
Rothbury
Stamford

Wales

Blackmill
Gowerton
Kinnerton
Llanfair Caereinion
Llanwrtyd Wells
Monmouth
Pembroke

Source:
Livestock Auctioneers Association, 5 November 2004

Milk (Farmgate Prices)

Mr. Hoyle: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what the farmgate price of milk in Lancashire was at the most recent date for which information is available. [194761]

Alun Michael: The average price for milk delivered in August 2004 (the most recent month for which figures are available) is 18.43 pence per litre. This figure is for the whole of the UK as we do not hold milk price information for specific areas of the UK.

Nappies

Mr. Curry: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what estimate she has made of the tonnage of disposable nappies used in England in each of the last five years; and whether disposable nappies will be eligible to be disposed of in landfill sites when EU restrictions on landfill use are introduced. [196967]

Mr. Morley *[holding answer 8 November 2004]:* Defra does not collect information on the amount of disposable nappies used.

The Strategy Unit report, "Waste Not Want Not", estimated that in 2000–01 nappies comprised around 2 per cent. of household waste, equivalent to 350,000 tonnes.

Nappies are considered to be bio-degradable waste so can still be disposed of in landfill. The Landfill Directive requires progressive reductions in the amount of biodegradable municipal waste landfilled until 2020—in the UK.

New Forest

Mr. Swayne: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what assessment she has made of the impact on *(a)* commoning in the New Forest and *(b)* the character and landscape of the New Forest of the single farm payment regime; and if she will make a statement. [194673]

Alun Michael: In discussing how best to apply the new single payment scheme on commons, we have been mindful of the effects on commoning and environmental effects in general and on the specific situation of the New Forest.

Mr. Swayne: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs (1) what account she plans to take of the inspector's recommendation for specific safeguards for verderers when she publishes her circular on the New Forest National Park; and whether this circular will be published before the park authority begins work; [197815]

(2) when she will publish a circular specific to the New Forest National Park in accordance with the recommendations of the inspector's report; whether the guidance in the circular will inform the process by which appointments are made to the park authority; and if she will make a statement. [197817]

Alun Michael: I intend to write to the New Forest National Park Authority, giving guidance on the way it might approach its responsibilities in good time for the formal commencement of its role in April. My letter will be made public and will be and sent to local organisations.

Local authorities and parish council nominations will be sought shortly, while the recruitment process for Secretary of State members of the Authority is already under way.

Night Flights

Mrs. May: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what discussions *(a)* she and *(b)* her Department has held with counterparts overseas on the environmental effects of night flight arrangements at airports overseas; and if she will make a statement. [196033]

Mr. Morley: Neither my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State, nor Defra officials have held discussions with counterparts overseas on the environmental effects of night flight arrangements at overseas airports.

The specific environmental impacts of air transport fall under the remit of my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Transport. The DfT are currently reviewing the night flight restrictions at airports designated under s.78 of the Civil Aviation Act 1982 (Heathrow, Gatwick and Stansted) and this review will no doubt consider the wider implications of such restrictions.

The DfT's stage 1 consultation on night restrictions from 30 October 2005 closed on 29 October and the second stage of this consultation process will be undertaken in due course.

Nitrates Directive

Mr. Paice: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs when her Department or its predecessor applied to the EU Commission for a derogation from the Nitrates Directive to allow applications of 210 kg/ha on arable land and 250 kg/ha on grass land. [193442]

Mr. Morley: The Nitrates Directive permits member states to allow applications of 21 kgN/ha for the first four-year action programme. Member states do not have to submit an application to the EU Commission in this regard.

Member states may allow a different application limit than the baseline of 170 kgN/ha set by the Nitrates Directive, though they must justify that decision to the Commission. As a result of earlier discussions with the Commission, the Department has initiated research to support the UK justification for the inclusion of a higher application limit within its action programmes.

Organic Fertiliser

Annabelle Ewing: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs for what reasons the Government did not apply for a derogation on the spreading of organic fertiliser in nitrate vulnerable zones within the deadline specified; and what the implications are of not applying within the specified deadline. [193461]

Mr. Morley: Directive 91/676/EEC concerning the protection of waters against water pollution caused by nitrates from agricultural sources does not specify a deadline within which member states are required to submit any application for a derogation on the spreading of organic fertiliser in nitrate vulnerable zones.

Pesticide Residues

Mr. Laxton: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what steps the Department takes to ensure that pesticide residue levels on fruits are within *(a)* UK and *(b)* EU standards. [196907]

Alun Michael: We undertake an extensive programme of surveillance for pesticide residues in food. The programme involves the collection of 4,000 samples from retailers or other points in the distribution chain and their analysis for up to 149 different pesticides, at a cost of approximately £2.2 million a year. The programme covers around 40 different commodities each year. In 2003, 25 different fruits were surveyed.

The surveillance programme is overseen by an independent advisory committee—the Pesticide Residues Committee (PRC). The results are all published each quarter on the PRC website, at www.prc-uk.org, along with the names of the suppliers of the relevant produce. The UK surveillance programme contributes to a wider EU residues surveillance programme.

If residues are found above statutory maximum residue levels (MRLs), then a scientific risk assessment is carried out to check that there is no concern for consumers. These risk assessments are also published by the PRC. The supplier is informed and, for imported produce, the relevant authorities in the exporting country.

In cases where there are persistent exceedances of the MRL, or evidence of the use of non-approved products, an enforcement programme is undertaken, involving the collection of samples with a view to prosecution if breaches of the regulations are found.

Pet Shops

Tom Cox: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what legislation governs the inspection of pet shops in the United Kingdom; and if she will make a statement. [192616]

Mr. Bradshaw: Under the Pet Animals Act 1951 all pet shops in Great Britain have to be licensed by the local authority. The Act provides local authority officers with powers of inspection. Pet shops in Northern Ireland are similarly regulated under the Welfare of Animals Act (Northern Ireland) 1972.

The draft Animal Welfare Bill would allow for secondary legislation to be introduced, to update the 1951 Act.

Radiation Risks

Llew Smith: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what assessment she has made of the minority report of two members of the Committee Examining Radiation Risks of Internal Emitters; and if she will make a statement. [196497]

Mr. Morley: I am aware of a report published by two members of the Committee Examining Radiation Risks from Internal Emitters (CERRIE), although a copy has not been provided to the Department. I understand that those two members attended all of the meetings of CERRIE; that their views, which they have subsequently published separately, were discussed extensively during those meetings; and that the CERRIE report addresses the points that they have raised. CERRIE was set up jointly by Defra and the Department of Health under the auspices of the Committee on Medical Aspects of Radiation in the Environment (COMARE), which is the Government's independent expert advisory committee in this area. CERRIE published its report on 20 October, and on the same day COMARE published its own report endorsing CERRIE's conclusions. We are currently considering with the Department of Health, COMARE, the National Radiological Protection Board and the Environment Agency how CERRIE's conclusions should be accounted for in future decisions on radiological protection.

Llew Smith: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs when she received the final report on the hazards of radiation from the Committee Examining Radiation Risks of Internal Emitters; what plans she has to take action on its recommendations; and if she will make a statement. [194911]

Mr. Morley: Ministers received copies of the Committee Examining Radiation Risks of Internal Emitters' final report on 20 October, along with advice on it from the Committee on Medical Aspects of Radiation in the Environment, whose report was also published on 20 October. These are complex reports on important technical issues, which we are currently considering in conjunction with colleagues in the Department of Health, the National Radiological Protection Board and the Environment Agency to ensure that the points made by CERRIE are fully taken into account in future assessments of radiation risks from internal emitters.

Raptors

Huw Irranca-Davies: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what steps the Department takes to promote the captive breeding of raptors in the UK. [193159]

Mr. Morley: My right hon. Friend the Secretary of State is very aware of the beneficial conservation effects of captive breeding of raptors. The increase in numbers of non-hybrid captive bred specimens helps lessen the threat to the wild populations of those species. Her officials carry out a constructive dialogue with UK breeders over a range of issues which effect captive breeding operations within the UK, including the streamlining of procedures to aid them in complying with their registration obligations.

Recycling (Barking and Dagenham)

Jon Cruddas: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs how much Government money has been provided to Barking and Dagenham council since 1997 to help pay for waste recycling. [196455]

Mr. Morley: The main source of funding for Barking and Dagenham council, as for all local authorities, is through the Environmental, Protective, and Cultural Services (EPCS) block of annual Government grant. It is for the local authority to decide what proportion of the block is invested in waste management services, including recycling.

The London borough of Barking and Dagenham is a constituent authority of the East London Waste Authority (ELWA), which was awarded £47 million in PFI credits for its integrated waste management service (IWMS) contract which was signed in the 2002–03 financial year.

As part of ELWA Barking and Dagenham council have also benefited from two joint kerbside collection projects which together were allocated a total of £1,030,000 from the London Recycling Fund for 2002–03 and 2003–04. The London Recycling Fund has approved three further projects to support Barking and Dagenham council for 2004–05 and 2005–06:

A multi material collection scheme allocated £600,000

An awareness campaign allocated £100,000

A green waste project allocated £80,000.

Barking and Dagenham council has also been allocated the following additional funding and support:

£46,700 from Defra to relieve spending pressures in the waste area for 2004–05;

As a member of ELWA, £74,453 in direct consultancy support in 2004–05 through Defra's Waste Implementation Programme to review ELWA's strategic planning for waste management.

Sodium Azid (Airbags)

Dr. Pugh: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what regulations apply to the disposal of sodium azid present in airbags when cars are scrapped. [196720]

Mr. Morley: The End-of-Life Vehicles Regulations 2003 require the removal or neutralisation of all potentially explosive components, including airbags, when waste motor vehicles are treated.

Sugar Regime

Miss McIntosh: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs when she expects the new EU sugar regime to be agreed. [195948]

Alun Michael: The current EU sugar regime is clearly unsustainable and the UK Government has consistently called for early decisions on reform to give all concerned time to adjust to the substantial changes needed to bring the arrangements into line with other parts of the Common Agricultural Policy and the EU's international obligations. The European Commission has tabled a Communication setting out its preferred approach to reform, but has not yet made formal legislative proposals for a new regime. It is for the Commission to decide when to put such proposals to the Council and for the presidency in office to bring discussions to a successful conclusion.

Miss McIntosh: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs which agencies will be inspecting UK sugar farms under the new EU sugar regime. [195983]

Alun Michael: The requirements of a new EU sugar regime have still to be determined. If the regime is brought into line with other reformed CAP sectors, farmers growing sugar beet can expect to be subject to similar conditions to those growing other crops, for which inspections will be co-ordinated by the Rural Payments Agency.

Miss McIntosh: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what the impact will be of the reform of the EU Sugar Regime on the UK quota; and whether there will be quota cuts for the UK. [195984]

Alun Michael: The European Commission's preferred approach to sugar reform envisages both price and quota cuts for all EU producers. In the absence of detailed legislative proposals it is not clear how quota cuts will be made or what their impact in the UK will be.

Miss McIntosh: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs if she will make a statement on how UK sugar growers will be affected by compensation arrangements under the EU Sugar Regime. [195985]

Alun Michael: The European Commission's preferred approach to sugar reform envisages decoupled direct income support for all EU sugar producers on a similar basis to payments under the June 2003 CAP reform arrangements. In the absence of detailed legislative proposals it is not clear how these arrangements will work or what their impact in the UK may be.

Terrorism

Patrick Mercer: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs (1) how many people are employed in the UK to protect reservoirs from terrorist attack; and what measures have been taken to protect reservoirs since 2001; [196294]

(2) how many people are employed in the UK to provide security for dams; and what measures have been taken to ensure dams are protected since 2001. [196307]

Mr. Morley: The safety and protection of dams and reservoirs is a matter for the dam owner or reservoir undertaker. The Reservoir Act 1975 provides a safety regime for large raised reservoirs and their dams and reservoir undertakers are required to engage specialist engineers to monitor and inspect them. The Department does not keep information about the people employed at these sites.

Veterinary Service

Ann Winterton: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what her policy is on ensuring access by farmers to professional advice and prescriptions from those veterinary surgeons collaborating with veterinary pharmacists who are not providing an emergency clinical service; and if she will make a statement. [193880]

Mr. Bradshaw: A veterinary surgeon must operate within the terms of the Royal College of Veterinary Surgeons' Code of Professional Conduct. The Animal Health and Welfare Strategy recognises the importance of access by farmers to professional veterinary advice and to veterinary medicines that are necessary for the health and welfare of their animals. We also recognise the need to ensure that medicines are used safely and responsibly. That is why the supply of veterinary medicines is controlled by legislation. Some veterinary medicines may be supplied only in accordance with a prescription issued by a veterinary surgeon. For such medicines it is important that the prescribing veterinary surgeon has sufficient knowledge of the animals concerned and of the conditions under which they are kept to ensure that the medicine prescribed is appropriate and that it will be used safely and effectively.

It is lawful for a pharmacist to dispense a veterinary medicinal product as directed in a prescription issued by a veterinary surgeon.

Following a major review of the European veterinary medicines legislation, the Veterinary Medicines Directorate (VMD) is revising the UK legislation. The UK's policy in the negotiations was to seek to replicate our current distribution arrangements. After a round of informal consultation with interested parties the VMD has published a concept note setting out a proposal for revising the current veterinary medicine distribution categories to both comply with the changes to European legislation and allow the current distribution controls in the UK to continue. Comments on the concept note are still welcome and I am placing a copy in the Library. It is also available on the VMD's website (www.vmd.gov.uk) under Publications, Review 2001.

Waste Transport

Bob Spink: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what proportion of London's waste was transported on the river Thames in the last year for which figures are available; and if she will make a statement. [194914]

Mr. Morley: The Government does not hold this information.

NORTHERN IRELAND

Alzheimer's

Mr. McGrady: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland for what reasons Alzheimer's Disease is not included as a terminal illness in respect of claims for benefit; and if he will make a statement. [197792]

Mr. Spellar: The disability living allowance and attendance allowance "special rules" provisions for terminally ill people are not linked to specific diseases or illnesses. For the purposes of the "special rules", a person is considered to be terminally ill if they suffer from a progressive disease and their death, in consequence of that disease, can reasonably be expected within six months.

Autism (Teacher Training)

Mr. Dodds: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland what money has been ringfenced for the purpose of training classroom assistants and teachers dealing with children with autism in the Belfast Education and Library Board area. [197108]

Mr. Gardiner: Children with Autism represent one of the largest growth areas in special educational needs (SEN) in recent years.

In response to this, and following the publication of the report of the NI Task Group on Autism, the Department of Education (DE) has made several specific additional earmarked allocations to the Education and Library Boards (ELBs):

DE made £54,000 available in 2003–04 and £111,000 from 2004–05 onwards to each ELB to enable the establishment of an Inter-board Autistic Spectrum Disorder (ASD) Training Group, which will develop training needs and support measures in this area. This includes the development of cross-Board training for ELB and school staff in a range of ASD strategies ands interventions;

£100,000 was provided in 2003–04 to enable each ELB to provide training, related specifically to Autism, within the pre-school sector, to teachers, classroom assistants, playgroup leaders and assistants, qualified early years specialists and relevant Board staff.

An additional £80,000 has been provided to each ELB in 2004–05 to enhance provision for children with Challenging Behaviour and ASD.

DE has produced ASD-specific resource materials to support teachers, classroom assistants and parents. The Department is also supporting a 2-year project to develop and implement a programme of training and development for classroom assistants who are appointed to support pupils with statements of special educational needs, and to enhance the skills of teachers in deploying and managing classroom assistance. I will write to the hon. Member with additional information, which the BELB will supply, on other training organised through its education department, including courses offered to schools and also those which are specific to individual pupils. This information could not be provided in the time available.

Belfast Education and Library Board

Mr. Dodds: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland what timetable he has set for the Belfast Education and Library Board to produce a recovery plan. [197114]

Mr. Gardiner: It remains my intention to seek recovery of the amount overspent last year but I have not yet set a timetable for the Board to produce a recovery plan. My priority in dealing with the overspend in the Belfast Education and Library Board has been to seek confirmation that the Board has quantified the precise scale and scope of the overspend in 2003–04; is tackling the systems and other weaknesses that contributed to its occurrence and late discovery; and has plans in place to contain expenditure within budget in the current year. Once I am satisfied that these plans are in place and are working, I will want to address the issue of recovery.

Civil Service

Mr. Beggs: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland what estimate he has made of the number of civil service jobs which will be lost in East Antrim as a result of efficiency savings announced on 12 July; and what assistance will be provided to redundant civil service employees to help them find alternative employment. [196519]

Mr. Pearson: The details of where the reductions will take place is the subject of ongoing planning within individual Departments and will not be available until business plans for 2005–06 and subsequent years are finalised.

It is expected that the reductions and other workforce changes will be achieved through natural wastage and redeployment, without the need for redundancy schemes. Plans are being developed to support staff in moving to new posts.

Consultants

Dr. Julian Lewis: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland how many consultancy firms or companies have been retained by the Department since June 2001; what the projects are for which each has been retained; and what the total is of the fees paid or incurred in each case. [193422]

Mr. Pearson: Information about all consultancy contracts entered into by Departments in Northern Ireland is not held centrally and could only be obtained from individual Departments at disproportionate cost. Information on consultancy contracts awarded by the Central Procurement Directorate on behalf of Northern Ireland Departments in the last three financial years is held by that Directorate and a table listing these has been placed in the Library. These contracts were awarded to 166 consultancy firms or companies.

Pete Wishart: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland how much his Department has spent in each year since 2002 on employing external consultants to deal with the press and public relations of his Department; and if he will make a statement. [195447]

Mr. Pearson: The 11 Departments of the Northern Ireland Administration and the Northern Ireland Office have spent a total of £24,259.20 and £76,686.96 in the financial years 2002–03 and 2003–04 respectively on employing external consultants to deal with press and public relations. A figure for the current financial year is not yet available. Figures are in respect of core Departments only.

Disabled Pupils

Mr. Dodds: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland what measures he is taking to prepare teachers and classroom assistants for the task of including children with disabilities in mainstream schools. [197109]

Mr. Gardiner: At present 60 per cent. of children with statements are already educated in mainstream schools or units. As part of the implementation of the proposed Special Educational Needs and Disability Order (NI) the Department will develop a range of information giving measures to support teachers and classroom assistants in making provision for children with disabilities in mainstream schools, including a revision of the Code of Practice on the Identification and Assessment of Special Educational Needs. The Equality Commission will also produce two Codes of Practice on Disability Discrimination. These codes will provide practical advice to teachers and classroom assistants.

The Department is also continuing to develop programmes and materials to support teachers and classroom assistants in relation to specific areas of Special Education Need, and is working with the Education and Training Inspectorate (ETI), the Regional Training Unit (RTU) and the Education and Library Boards to develop a strategic approach to the co-ordination of a comprehensive training agenda over a wide range of areas associated to inclusion.

Teacher education provision is also currently under review, the intention of which is to develop approaches that match more closely the needs of teachers entering the profession. In particular, the five teacher training providers in NI are reviewing their current practice in the light of the proposed Special Educational Needs and Disability Order.

Early Release

Lady Hermon: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland how many prisoners set free under the Belfast Agreement early release schemes are in *(a)* full-time and *(b)* part-time employment. [198293]

Mr. Pearson: The information requested is unavailable as the Northern Ireland Prison Service does not hold the employment details of former inmates.

Economic Output Statistics

Mr. Trimble: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland whether a recent review of the reliability of GDP and Gross Value Added (GVA) output figures for Northern Ireland has been made by the Department of Enterprise, Trade and Investment and Northern Ireland Statistics Research Agency; and what discussions he has had with the *(a)* Chancellor of the Exchequer, *(b)* Secretary of State for Scotland and *(c)* Secretary of State for Wales regarding the reliability of the GDP and GVA output date for other regions of the United Kingdom. [196863]

Mr. Gardiner: The Office for National Statistics (ONS) is responsible for producing the estimates of Gross Value Added (GVA) for the regions of the UK, including Northern Ireland. Statisticians in the Northern Ireland Statistics Research Agency (NISRA) work on an ongoing basis with the ONS to quality assure these and, with their colleagues in the Department of Enterprise Trade and Investment (DETI), have contributed to the recent Allsopp Review of Statistics for Economic Policymaking.

The Review recommended that the ONS develop new methods to produce estimates of GVA for the countries and regions of the UK. This will include the introduction of annual baseline data for GVA derived according to the production process in addition to the current income based measure of Regional GVA.

No specific discussions have taken place between the Secretary of State and Ministerial colleagues on this topic. However, both DETI and NISRA will work with ONS to implement the Allsopp recommendations as appropriate.

Education Action Zones

Mr. Dodds: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland what the timetable is for the introduction of education action zones; and for what reasons the previously published schedule for their introduction has not been met. [197101]

Mr. Gardiner: In late 2003 the Department announced plans to introduce Education Action Zones (EAZs), aimed at tackling the root causes of social deprivation and educational underachievement on a multi-agency basis, and at that time it was indicated that the first EAZs might come into operation in September 2004. However, the introduction of the programme involved significant inter-Departmental and multi-agency working, and in summer 2004 the Department wrote to the education and library boards setting out the criteria for EAZs and inviting Stage 1 bids. These bids are currently being considered and it is now expected that the first Education Action Zones could come on stream by spring 2005.

Education Initiatives

Mr. Dodds: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland what the reasons are for the rejection of the proposals to the Integrated Development Fund relating to education in Greater Shankill. [197102]

Mr. Gardiner: The Joint Working Group's bid to the Integrated Development Fund for resources to the address the educational recommendations made in the West Belfast and Greater Shankill task force reports has not been rejected. The level of funding available to the Integrated Development Fund is finite and in the light of the number and scale of other bids to the Fund, it was not possible to provide funds to meet the education bid in full. The Joint Working Group has been invited therefore to prepare a revised bid and the Department is meeting shortly with the two sponsoring education and library boards to take the bid forward.

Fair Trade Products

Mr. Burstow: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland whether it is his policy to ensure that hospitality within his Department is sourced from fair trade producers wherever possible within the boundaries set by the public procurement rules. [197059]

Mr. Pearson: It is for each department to decide how best to meet its catering needs, taking account of any fair or ethical trading objectives. In so far as public procurement of catering services or supplies is involved the requirement must be consistent with best value for money and the EC Procurement Directives.

Genito-urinary Medicine

Mrs. Iris Robinson: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland if he will make a statement on recruitment to non-consultant grade posts in genito-urinary medicine. [196355]

Angela Smith: The Department has recently become aware of recruitment difficulties in the area of genito-urinary medicine. The Department understands that the trust which provides this service regionally to the people of Northern Ireland only received a limited response to a recent advertisement for medical appointments within this speciality.

In seeking to improve service delivery in this area, additional junior doctor training positions have been created within this speciality in recent years which will help over the course of time to increase the number of consultant grade doctors working in this area. In the interim, further consideration is being given to measures which might be taken to improve the recruitment position.

Medical Schools

Mrs. Iris Robinson: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland what plans there are to increase the number of medical school places in the Province. [196353]

Angela Smith: I can confirm that it is my intention to increase the annual intake of medical students to 250, as soon as it is feasible to do so.

In the meantime the Department explored with Queen's University Belfast the possibility of a small increase in the medical student intake on a "one-off" basis in the 2004–05 academic year, in advance of completion of the formal process for the full expansion. As a result 33 additional places were awarded this year.

Midazolam/Oxygen Therapy

Mrs. Iris Robinson: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland what guidance he has issued regarding whether staff can administer *(a)* midazolam and *(b)* oxygen therapy at schools for children with special needs in the Province. [196955]

Mr. Gardiner: No such guidance has been issued by the Department of Education, (DE). DE, in partnership with Department of Health, Social Services and Public Safety, (DHSS&PS), is currently preparing guidance to assist schools in the administration of medication to pupils, once such medication has been prescribed by a medical practitioner.

Should a child require midazolam, procedures would be established on an individual basis, through a dedicated Care Plan, to ensure safe practice in its administration.

The provision of oxygen therapy for children in Northern Ireland takes place on the basis of a protocol specifying the circumstances under which the oxygen can be administered which is signed by the senior clinical officer. The primary purpose in administering oxygen therapy is for post seizure management.

Milk

Mr. Beggs: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland what percentage of Northern Ireland dairy farmers received a milk price that failed to meet its cost of production in each of the last three years; and what support he provides to Northern Ireland dairy farmers. [197928]

Mr. Pearson: An estimate of the number of Northern Ireland dairy farmers who receive a milk price that does not cover the costs of production is not determined on an annual basis by DARD. The most recent estimate for milk production costs is for the year ended March 2002. Using the information from that analysis, it is estimated that the milk price received on 24 per cent. of dairy farmers would not cover the economic costs of milk production in that year.

DARD provides a range of educational courses at the College of Agriculture, Food and Rural Enterprise (CAFRE) including modules on dairy farming. Also, advice and information is available from locally based development advisors and technology teams based at CAFRE. This localised support is in addition to that provided under the Common Agricultural Policy of the EU.

Mr. Beggs: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland what plans he has to *(a)* make the Retailer Code of Practice more effective in protecting dairy farmers in Northern Ireland from price cuts imposed by retailers on their milk suppliers and *(b)* extend the Retailer Code of Practice to cover farmers who supply supermarkets via an intermediary; and if he will make a statement. [197929]

Mr. Pearson: Under the Northern Ireland Act 1998 the regulation of anti-competition practices and agreements and the abuse of dominant position in the market are reserved matters. Responsibility for the Supermarkets' Code of Practice therefore rests with the Office of Fair Trading (OFT) and my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry.

Neutral Working Environments

Mr. Dodds: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland what his policy is on a neutral working environment for Northern Ireland Government departments. [197104]

Mr. Pearson: The Northern Ireland Civil Service's Equal Opportunities Policy Statement asserts that

> "Everyone has a right to equality of opportunity and to a good and harmonious working environment and atmosphere in which all workers are encouraged to apply their diverse talents and in which no worker feels under threat or intimidated".

Pre-school Education

Mr. Dodds: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland how many responses have been received relating to the review of pre-school education. [197099]

Mr. Gardiner: A total of 7,250 responses were received by the time the public consultation closed on 15 October.

School Leavers

Mr. Rosindell: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland what percentage of pupils left full time education at the age of 16 in Northern Ireland in the last year for which figures are available. [196163]

Mr. Gardiner: The latest available figure relates to those aged 16 at 1 July 2002. In autumn 2002, 22 per cent. of these young people were not in full-time education.

DEFENCE

1st Battalion the King's Regiment

Mr. Soames: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what postings the 1st Battalion the King's Regiment will receive in the next 12 months. [197886]

Mr. Hoon: The 1st Battalion The Kings Regiment (1 Kings) is due to remain in Catterick for the next 12 months, conducting a full training programme in preparation for a NATO standby commitment in 2006.

Army Annual Operating Costs

Mr. Keith Simpson: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence (1) what the average annual operating cost, broken down into direct Resource Departmental Expenditure Limit and indirect Resource Departmental Expenditure Limit was for *(a)* an armoured regiment, *(b)* an armoured reconnaissance regiment, *(c)* a yeomanry regiment and *(d)* an army air corps regiment in financial year 2002–03; [196405]

(2) what the average annual operating cost, broken down into direct Resource Departmental Expenditure Limit and indirect Resource Departmental Expenditure Limit was for *(a)* an armoured infantry battalion, *(b)* a mechanised battalion, *(c)* an air assault battalion and *(d)* a light role battalion in financial year 2002–03; [196406]

(3) what the average annual operating cost, broken down into direct Resource Departmental Expenditure Limit and indirect Resource Departmental Expenditure Limit was for *(a)* a Northern Ireland battalion, *(b)* a Gurkha battalion, *(c)* a home service battalion, *(d)* a training centre battalion, *(e)* a medical regiment and *(f)* a military hospital in financial year 2002–03; [196407]

(4) what the average annual operating cost, broken down into direct Resource Departmental Expenditure Limit and indirect Resource Departmental Expenditure Limit was for *(a)* an artillery field regiment, *(b)* an air defence regiment, *(c)* a MLRS regiment, *(d)* surveillance and target acquisitions and *(e)* a commando regiment in financial year 2002–03; [196408]

(5) what the average annual operating cost, broken down into direct Resource Departmental Expenditure Limit and indirect Resource Departmental Expenditure Limit was for *(a)* an engineer regiment, *(b)* a signal regiment, *(c)* an EW regiment, *(d)* an equipment support battalion and *(e)* a logistics regiment in financial year 2002–03; [196409]

(6) what the average annual operating cost, broken down into direct Resource Departmental Expenditure Limit and indirect Resource Departmental Expenditure Limit of the *(a)* engineer regiment, *(b)* signal regiment, *(c)* EW regiment, *(d)* equipment support battalion and *(e)* logistic regiment regular units were for financial year 2002–03; [196485]

(7) what the average annual operating cost, broken down into direct Resource Departmental Expenditure Limit and indirect Resource Departmental Expenditure Limit of the *(a)* artillery field regiment, *(b)* air defence regiment, *(c)* MLRS regiment, *(d)* surveillance and target acquisition and *(e)* commando regiment regular units were for financial year 2002–03; [196484]

(8) what the average annual operating cost, broken down into direct Resource Departmental Expenditure Limit and indirect Resource Departmental Expenditure Limit of the *(a)* Northern Ireland battalion, *(b)* Gurkha battalion, *(c)* home service battalion, *(d)* training centre battalion, *(e)* medical regiment and *(f)* hospital regular units were for financial year 2002–03; [196483]

(9) what the average annual operating cost, broken down into direct Resource Departmental Expenditure Limit and indirect Resource Departmental Expenditure Limit of the *(a)* armoured infantry battalion, *(b)* mechanised battalion, *(c)* air assault battalion and *(d)* light role battalion regular units were for financial year 2002–03; [196482]

(10) what the average annual operating cost, broken down into direct Resource Departmental Expenditure Limit and indirect Resource Departmental Expenditure Limit of the *(a)* armoured regiment, *(b)* armoured recce regiment, *(c)* yeomanry regiment and *(d)* army air corps regiment regular units were for financial year 2002–03. [196481]

Mr. Ingram: This information is not held centrally in the format requested and could be provided only at disproportionate cost. I am therefore withholding it under Exemption 9 of Part II of the Code of Practice on Access to Government Information.

Army Deployment

Ann Winterton: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence whether other sections of the Army are expected to be deployed to undertake roles usually undertaken by the infantry. [191867]

Mr. Ingram: It is not unusual for the Royal Artillery and Royal Armoured Corps to deploy units in the infantry role. In addition, other parts of the Army, such as the Royal Corps of Signals and Royal Logistics Corps, undertake general infantry tasks as part of routine operations. This is made possible by the fact that every soldier in the Army is trained as an infantryman first, and as a specialist second.

On larger operations, such as that in Iraq, a complete brigade is usually deployed as an entity, including infantry, armoured and artillery units. This reflects the fact that the whole brigade will have trained together for a range of operations, and will be capable of switching rapidly between different roles as part of routine business in Iraq. For example, in Iraq, armoured regiments regularly switch between operating with their tanks, and operating in the infantry role. These flexible arrangements are expected to continue for the foreseeable future.

Basic Level Budget Holders

Mr. Keith Simpson: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence (1) if he will list the basic level budget holders subordinate to the *(a)* Fleet, *(b)* General Officer Commanding (Northern Ireland), *(c)* Commander-in-Chief Land Command, *(d)* Field Army (Theatre Troops), *(e)* 1st (UK) Armoured Division, *(f)* 2nd Division, *(g)* UK Support Command (Germany), *(h)* 3rd Division, *(i)* Joint Helicopter Command, *(j)* 4th Division, *(k)* Land Support and *(l)* 5th Division management groups for financial year 2002–03; [196469]

(2) if he will list the basic level budget holders subordinate to the *(a)* 1 Group, *(b)* 3 Group, *(c)* 2 Group, *(d)* Deputy Commander-in-Chief, *(e)* British Forces Cyprus, *(f)* British Forces Gibraltar, *(g)* Permanent Joint Headquarters, *(h)* Sovereign Base Areas Administration and *(i)* British Forces Falkland Islands management groups for financial year 2002–03; [196470]

(3) if he will list the basic level budget holders subordinate to the *(a)* Defence Fuels Group, *(b)* Deputy Chief of Defence Logistics, *(c)* Defence Communication Services Agency, *(d)* Defence Logistics Support HQ, *(e)* Defence Clothing and Textiles Agency, *(f)* DG Equipment Support (Land), *(g)* Warship Support Agency, *(h)* DG Equipment Support (Air), *(i)* Defence Storage and Distribution Agency, *(j)* Director Land Service Ammunition, *(k)* Defence Transport and Movements Agency and *(l)* British Forces Post Office management groups for financial year 2002–03; [196471]

(4) if he will list the basic level budget holders subordinate to the *(a)* Flag Officer Training and Recruiting, *(b)* HQ, *(c)* Naval Secretary, *(d)* Adjutant General, *(e)* Army Personnel Centre, *(f)* Adjutant General, *(g)* Army Training and Recruiting Agency, *(h)* Army Programme, *(i)* Service Children's Education and *(j)* General Staff management groups for financial year 2002–03; [196472]

(5) if he will list the basic level budget holders subordinate to the *(a)* Personnel Management Agency, *(b)* Core HQ, *(c)* Training Group Defence Agency, *(d)* Internal Costs, *(e)* Programme Account and *(f)* Nuclear management groups for financial year 2002–03; [196473]

(6) if he will list the basic level budget holders subordinate to the *(a)* Personnel Director, *(b)* War Pensions Agency, *(c)* Pay and Personnel Agency, *(d)* Surgeon General, *(e)* Defence Vetting Agency, *(f)* Deputy Chief Defence Staff (Personnel), *(g)* Defence Export Services Org, *(h)* Defence

Secondary Care Agency, *(i)* Finance Director, *(j)* Defence Dental Agency, *(k)* Defence Analytical Services Agency, *(l)* Defence Housing Executive and *(m)* Defence Bills Agency management groups for financial year 2002–03; [196474]

(7) if he will list the basic level budget holders subordinate to the *(a)* Defence Medical Training Organisation, *(b)* Chief Constable MOD Police, *(c)* Armed Forces Personnel Administration Agency, *(d)* Chief Scientific Adviser, *(e)* Defence Estates, *(f)* Policy Director, *(g)* Deputy Chief Defence Staff (Commitments), *(h)* Deputy Chief Defence Staff (Equipment Capability), *(i)* Director Special Forces, *(j)* Chief of Defence Intelligence, *(k)* Defence Geographic and Imaging Intelligence Agency and *(l)* Defence Intelligence and Security Centre management groups for financial year 2002–03. [196475]

Mr. Ingram: I will write to the hon. Member and place a copy of my letter in the Library of the House.

Black Watch

Mr. Soames: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what the composition is of the Black Watch Battlegroup serving in Iraq. [197548]

Mr. Ingram *[holding answer 11 November 2004]:* The 1 Black Watch Battlegroup comprises:

1 Battalion Headquarters (1 Black Watch);

3 Rifle Companies (1 Black Watch);

a mortar and infantry Platoon (40 Commando (RM));

an Armoured Reconnaissance Squadron (Queen's Dragoon Guards);

associated Combat Support and Combat Service Support Elements, including appropriate medical facilities.

Two Puma helicopters and one Lynx helicopter are supporting the Battlegroup specifically for this operation.

Mr. Soames: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence to what duties 1 Black Watch will be returning in the UK. [197887]

Mr. Hoon: On return to the United Kingdom, the 1st Battalion The Black Watch (The Highland Regiment) will have a period of post operational tour leave before resuming its commitment as the Land Warfare Centre Battle group, providing support to the training of units and individuals across the Army.

Bowman Radios

Mr. Dhanda: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will make a statement on the testing of the Bowman radios being used by the Royal Anglian Regiment; and what action he is taking to ensure the radios are compatible with other equipment used by the armed forces. [196733]

Mr. Ingram: The Bowman tactical communications and information system is being delivered incrementally and is subject to a comprehensive test and trials programme, ranging from laboratory integration and analysis to operational field trials by the eventual users. 1 Royal Anglian is a significant constituent element of these trials. Successful integration with in-service equipment is part of the Bowman requirement and is being evaluated.

Within the team that is developing and introducing Bowman, there is a dedicated group pioneering a System of Systems management approach to ensure that the capability delivered by Bowman will develop over time as new platforms, communications and information systems, and battlefield applications are delivered over the coming years.

Cadet Transport

Mr. Robathan: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what regulations govern the type of transport which may be used for transporting cadets *(a)* to training areas and *(b)* within training areas. [197899]

Mr. Caplin: The regulations governing the type and use of transport systems used in transporting cadets both to training areas and within those training areas, are found in "JSP(Joint Service Publication) 341, Defence Road Transport Regulations, Chapter 3, Article 3.052—"Vehicles to be used by Cadets".

The decisions reflecting the choice and suitability of transport of cadets both to and within training areas is based on a full "duty of care" risk assessment of the operation required. The regulations for producing the latter are contained in "JSP 375, the MOD Health and Safety Handbook", which contains within it, separate leaflets relating to all relevant "duty of care" health and safety situations.

Decommissioning

Mr. Gordon Prentice: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence which 10 *(a)* ships and *(b)* submarines have spent the shortest period of time in service since 1974 with the Royal Navy before decommissioning. [197481]

Mr. Ingram: The information requested will take some time to collate. I will write to my hon. Friend and a copy of my letter will be placed in the Library of the House.

Defence Crisis Management Organisation

Mr. Keith Simpson: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence (1) who the members were of the Defence Crisis Management Organisation in the lead up to the conflict in Iraq in 2003; [197197]

(2) on what date and for what reasons the Defence Crisis Management Organisation ruled that mobilisation of forces for Iraq could not begin before the political process had run its course. [197196]

Mr. Hoon *[holding answer 9 November 2004]:* The Defence Crisis Management Organisation (DCMO) is responsible for the strategic level planning and execution of military operations, including operations in Iraq, and acts as a channel for operational briefing to Ministers and Chiefs of Staff. The DCMO comprises both civilian and military personnel and is made up of elements of Ministry of Defence Central Staff, the Permanent Joint Headquarters (PJHQ), single-Service front-line commands and other relevant Departments.

We do not release names of officials under Exemption 12 of the Code of Practice on Access to Government Information (privacy of an individual).

The DCMO provides advice to the Chiefs of Staff and Ministers on a range of issues, including mobilisation and other military preparatory measures. Final decisions on these issues are made by Ministers. The Prime Minister stated on 24 September 2002 that there had to be genuine preparedness and planning to take action against Iraq if diplomacy failed and it proved impossible to bring Iraq into compliance with UN Security Council Resolutions by diplomatic means. It was made clear in a Commons Debate on 25 November 2002 and Defence Questions on 9 December 2002 that the Government was undertaking prudent preparations and planning in the event that military action was required. The decision to start mobilising reserves was made by Ministers in early January once it became appropriate to do so in order to further military preparations, and a call-out order under the Reserve Forces Act 1996 was put before Parliament.

The decision on the participation of UK forces in military action against Iraq was made following the Parliamentary debate on the 18 March 2003 on Iraq's continued non-compliance with UN Security Council Resolution 1441 and the Parliamentary vote in favour of military action to enforce the UN Resolutions.

Defence Exports/Imports

Mr. David Marshall: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what the value of defence *(a)* exports from the UK to the United States of America and *(b)* imports from the United States was in each of the last five years. [197651]

Mr. Ingram: The values of the physical export of defence equipment from the United Kingdom to the United States of America are reported in the Annual Reports on the United Kingdom Strategic Export Controls. The figures are derived by Her Majesty's Customs and Excise using specific tariff codes (see Annex C of Cm 6173, the Annual Report 2003, for further details).

The HMCE figures for equipment imports to the UK from the USA have been derived using similar tariff codes: they are provided in the following table.

£ million

	Export	Import
1999	86.9	660.4
2000	138.9	837.7
2001	349.8	1473.7
2002	162.2	867.1
2003	116.3	[1]272.7

[1] Changes to the HMCE quality assurance methodology may have contributed to the drop in this figure from that recorded in the previous year. HMCE have set up a review team to address issues concerning the provision of defence data. The 2003 figure is, therefore, provisional.

EU Defence White Paper

Mr. Gerald Howarth: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence (1) if he will make a statement on the EU White Paper, "New Frontier for an Expanding Union"; and what effect he expects the action plan for implementing the European Space Policy will have on UK defence policy; [190055]

(2) what implications the EU White Paper "New Frontier for an Expanding Union" published in June has on the European Security and Defence Policy. [190076]

Mr. Hoon: The European Commission's White Paper proposes, amongst other things, a number of space-related initiatives aimed at improving the EU's crisis management capability. Whilst space-based assets and applications could play an important role in helping to meet the EU's security and defence needs, the provision of military capability remains a member state responsibility under the European Security and Defence Policy (ESDP). This will not be changed by the White Paper, and the White Paper does not therefore determine the priorities for UK Defence policy. The EU's future requirements for military space capabilities are being examined through the ESDP's European Capability Action Plan process.

EU member states, including the UK, are fully engaged in the development of the EU Space Policy that will follow on from the White Paper. The UK has emphasised that decisions on the defence and military aspects must be taken on an intergovernmental basis, where member states have a veto, and that implementation of the Space Policy must be driven by actual—rather than assumed—requirements.

EU Satellite Navigation Resources

Mr. Gerald Howarth: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what decisions were taken on integration of EU member states' civil and military satellite navigation resources at the meeting of the Council of the European Union's politico-military group on 8 September; and what action has been taken as a result. [190053]

Mr. Hoon: None.

Fishery Protection

Tom Cox: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence how many fishery protection vessels are in service; and if he will list the areas in which these vessels are being used. [196728]

Mr. Ingram: I refer the hon. Member to the answer that I gave on 28 June 2004, *Official Report*, column 141W, to the hon. Member for Chorley (Mr. Hoyle).

HMCS Chicoutimi

Mr. Gordon Prentice: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence whether *(a)* he and *(b)* his ministerial colleagues have been invited to give evidence to the inquiry into the fire on board HMCS Chicoutimi set up by the Canadian House of Commons. [196868]

Mr. Ingram: Two members of the United Kingdom project team working in support of the lease to sell four submarines to the Government of Canada have been interviewed by the Board of Inquiry convened by the Canadian Navy into the fire on 5 October on board HMCS Chicoutimi. The RN officer who was invited to observe as Royal Navy Special Adviser continues to be available to the inquiry in that capacity. UK Defence Ministers have not been asked to give evidence.

Infantry Regiments

Mr. Drew: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what consultation arrangements *(a)* he and *(b)* the Army Board have put in place to allow representations to be made opposing plans to amalgamate regiments. [197915]

Mr. Hoon: Both I and my Army Board colleagues are very aware of the level of interest in, and the strength of feeling aroused by, the decision to adjust the structure of the infantry. Following my announcement on 21 July, the Executive Committee of the Army Board (ECAB) tasked the Divisions of Infantry to consider how best to restructure themselves on the basis of large regiments of two or more battalions, with a view to putting forward recommendations. This process has involved a great deal of consultation both within the ranks of those serving and within the wider Army community. Ultimately, proposals will be put before the Army Board and Ministers for the final decision, but we have made it clear that we want a future infantry structure that takes full account of the considered response of those affected.

Mr. Drew: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will publish the proposals that he is considering on the amalgamation of English regiments in advance of further discussions at the Army Board. [197916]

Mr. Hoon: I am currently awaiting advice from the Executive Committee of the Army Board on how best to take forward the restructuring of the infantry.

Iraq

Sir Menzies Campbell: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what the estimated monthly cost to the UK of military operations in Iraq was in the last month for which figures are available; and what the estimated cost to the UK of military operations in Iraq over *(a)* the next three months and *(b)* the next six months is. [197264]

Mr. Ingram: Figures for the costs of operations, in Iraq and elsewhere, are published annually to take account of the need for physical stocktakes to establish accurate figures for some aspects of consumption and to allow for audit by the NAO. The annual cost of operations in Iraq in 2003–04, including some elements of the warfighting phase, was £1,311 million. Monthly expenditure within this figure would vary depending on troop numbers and activity, but it is not possible to break down the total by month. It is too early to provide firm figures for the costs of operations in Iraq in this financial year, but Parliament will be asked to vote the necessary funds in Supplementary Estimates.

Llew Smith: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what discussions he has had with his United States counterpart on the use of depleted uranium munitions by US forces against Iraqis in urban areas. [189756]

Mr. Ingram: None.

Adam Price: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence pursuant to his reply of 4 October 2004, *Official Report*, column 1879W, to the hon. Member for Hull North, on Iraq, when the decision to print the aide memoire was made; when it was printed; and when it was first issued to UK service personnel on active duty. [194023]

Mr. Ingram *[holding answer 26 October 2004]:* The decision to print the aide memoire card on the law of armed conflict was taken by 1 Division Legal Command. The cards were printed and issued between February and early March 2003, prior to the commencement of combat operations in Iraq.

Dr. Tonge: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what costs have been incurred by his Department in the employment of private security firms and personnel in Iraq since March 2003. [196377]

Mr. Ingram: The Ministry of Defence has not incurred any costs in the employment of private security firms in Iraq.

Manning Control Points

Mr. Keetch: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence on how many occasions units have received lists of names for manning control point reviews in the last 18 months. [197082]

Mr. Caplin: Individual units may have received lists of names for manning control point reviews on up to 10 occasions in the last 18 months.

Mr. Keetch: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what plans he has to conduct manning control point reviews in the next 12 months. [197083]

Mr. Caplin: The answer I gave to the hon. Member on 19 January 2004, *Official Report*, column 919W, is still applicable today.

Mr. Keetch: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what plans he has to conduct discharges at manning control point reviews in the next 12 months. [197084]

Mr. Caplin: There will be no discharges under Queens Regulations for the Army 1975 Paragraph 9.413 in the next 12 months.

Nuclear Accident Response Group

Patrick Mercer: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence (1) how many *(a)* civil servants and *(b)* members of the armed forces are employed within the Nuclear Accident Response Group; [196296]

(2) what plans he has to expand the membership of the Nuclear Accident Response Group. [196303]

Mr. Ingram: The numbers of civil servants and members of the armed forces employed within the Ministry of Defence's nuclear accident response organisation will vary depending on the type, location and circumstances of any defence nuclear accident. It is therefore not possible to give precise numbers of civil servants and members of the armed forces employed.

Press Releases

Pete Wishart: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence how many press releases have been issued by his Department in each month of 2004; and if he will make a statement. [195465]

Mr. Caplin: I refer the hon. Member to the answer given by my hon. Friend the Minister for the Cabinet Office on 11 November 2004, *Official Report*, column 857W.

Procurement

Keith Vaz: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what percentage of military equipment contracts are held by British companies. [196584]

Mr. Ingram: Taking British companies as entities employing workers in Great Britain and undertaking at least 25 per cent. of the relevant task, the percentages of Ministry of Defence military equipment contracts currently held by British companies are estimated by number to be some 96 per cent. and by value some 88 per cent.

RAF Kinloss/Lossiemouth

Angus Robertson: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence how many flying days were lost due to bad weather at *(a)* RAF Kinloss and *(b)* RAF Lossiemouth in each month since January 1997; and if he will make a statement. [194893]

Mr. Ingram: The Ministry of Defence does not hold records of whole flying days lost owing to bad weather, which are very rare. The following table presents the total number of lost flying hours by month since January 1997 at RAF Kinloss and RAF Lossiemouth when conditions were assessed as red. Red conditions are defined as when visibility is less than 800 metres or the cloud base is less than 200 ft above ground level. In these conditions, flying is unlikely to take place. Other weather conditions, for example high winds, might also preclude flying but their incidence is not recorded.

Month	*RAF Lossiemouth*	*RAF Kinloss*
	Red conditions (hours)	
1997		
January	—	1:00
February	—	1:00
March	—	0:00
April	—	0:00
May	—	12:00
June	—	3:00
July	—	31:00
August	0:48	22:00
September	0.26	0:00
October	0:00	0:00
November	2:43	8:00
December	0:00	3:00
1998		
January	0:33	0:00
February	0:08	0:00
March	0:24	0:00
April	0:00	5:00
May	3:04	13:00
June	3:00	14:00
July	0:00	3:00
August	0:10	12:00
September	2:30	20:00
October	0:41	0:00
November	0:30	4:00
December	0:00	0:00
1999		
January	0:00	2:00
February	1:49	2:00
March	0:00	1:00
April	10:59	30:00
May	0:23	13:00
June	0:24	1:00
July	2:13	13:00
August	0:00	10:00
September	10:18	3:00
October	0:00	1:00
November	0:00	2:00
December	0:00	0:00
2000		
January	0:00	0:00
February	0:00	0:00
March	1:02	0:00
April	2:56	8:00
May	3:31	4:00
June	0:00	0:00
July	0:00	25:00
August	0:00	1:00
September	0:00	1:00
October	0:00	1:00
November	0:06	1:00
December	0:00	16:00
2001		
January	3:55	17:00
February	2:04	7:00
March	0:00	1:00
April	0:00	1:00
May	6:39	17:00
June	0:00	2:00
July	0:53	21:00
August	0:00	0:00
September	0:00	0:00
October	1:31	4:00
November	2:38	7:00
December	1:19	21:00
2002		
January	1:41	5:00
February	1:46	1:00
March	0:00	0:00
April	1:13	0:00
May	0:00	1:00
June	0:00	6:00
July	9:08	20:00
August	2:27	17:00
September	1:11	15:00
October	0:00	0:00
November	0:00	1:00
December	0:08	0:00
2003		
January	0:30	1:00
February	1:36	6:00
March	11:09	33:00
April	1:44	8:00
May	0:00	6:00
June	0:00	8:00
July	3:16	7:00
August	5:58	19:00
September	0:00	0:00
October	2:57	2:00
November	0:00	0:00
December	9:30	13:00

Month	*RAF Lossiemouth*	*RAF Kinloss*
	Red conditions (hours)	
2004		
January	7:11	3:00
February	1:39	4:00
March	0:00	2:00
April	2:15	8:00
May	0:00	0:00
June	0:00	0:00
July	0:00	4:00
August	8:15	27:00
September	1:45	3:00

Notes:

1. Owing to the different nature of their flying operations, RAF Lossiemouth records colour states on a minute by minute basis while RAF Kinloss records the situation hourly.

2. The RAF Lossiemouth figures have been recorded over the time period 0750 to 2150 daily, which is the time period within which the majority of the flying programme takes place. The RAF Kinloss figures have been recorded over a full 24 hour period because the station remains open round the clock.

3. No records are available for January to July 1997 for RAF Lossiemouth.

RAF Menwith Hill

Mr. Best: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what the purpose is of the expansion and upgrade of RAF Menwith Hill. [196862]

Mr. Caplin: The current programme of works at RAF Menwith Hill is to upgrade and refurbish existing facilities to ensure that the base retains the highest level of technological capabilities available. The mission of the base remains unchanged.

Mr. Best: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will undertake a public consultation exercise into the effect upon the local population of work being undertaken at RAF Menwith Hill. [197414]

Mr. Hoon: The Ministry of Defence fully recognises the importance of working alongside local communities at all of its establishments, including RAF Menwith Hill, and encourages regular liaison and consultation with the local communities on a wide range of issues. There is therefore no reason to conduct a specific public consultation exercise.

Royal Navy

Mr. Hancock: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will make a statement on his plans to strengthen the frontline of the Royal Navy in the next 10 years. [197372]

Mr. Ingram: To ensure that it will be capable of delivering and contributing to future joint effects-based operations, the Royal Navy will develop a versatile maritime force that will be expeditionary in focus, and sufficiently agile to meet the lull spectrum of future operational tasks. It must therefore be responsive, robust, flexible and adaptable. In addition to procuring the ships, submarines and equipment that will deliver a range of effects to ensure mission success, and which were described in last summer's supplement to the December 2003 White Paper, the Royal Navy will take other measures to enhance its frontline capability, including continued improvements to individual and collective training, and improvements in global logistic sustainability. Structural improvements are also planned which will focus on the delivery of front-line military effect, in particular to take advantage of network enabled capability.

Mr. Hancock: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what the expected decommissioning dates are of the *(a)* destroyers, *(b)* frigates, *(c)* submarines and *(d)* minehunters identified in Delivering Security; when the (i) Chief of the Naval Staff and (ii) Commander in Chief Fleet agreed these decommissionings; and if he will make a statement. [197373]

Mr. Ingram: In addition to HMS Bridport, a Sandown class Mine Counter Measure Vessel (MCMV) which was withdrawn from service earlier this year, the planned decommissioning dates are listed. These decisions were taken following thorough examination as part of the department's planning process, including consideration by the Defence Management Board.

Type	*Vessel*	*Decommissioning date*
Type 42 Batch 1 Destroyers	HMS Cardiff	2005
	HMS Glasgow	2005
	HMS Newcastle	2005
Type 23 Frigates	HMS Norfolk	2005
	HMS Marlborough	2005
	HMS Grafton	2006
Attack Submarines	HMS Superb	2008
	HMS Trafalgar	2008
Sandown Class MCMV	HMS Sandown	2005
	HMS Inverness	2005
Northern Ireland Patrol Vessels	HMS Cottesmore	2006
	HMS Brecon	2007
	HMS Dulverton	2007

S-type Contracts

Mr. Keetch: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence how many soldiers have been employed in the last six months on an S-Type contract that was signed within a week of the termination of an open engagement contract relating to the same soldier. [197218]

Mr. Caplin: None.

Sea Skua Missile

Mr. Hancock: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what plans he has to develop a successor to the Sea Skua missile. [189754]

Mr. Ingram: Sea Skua is currently planned progressively to leave service from around the 2012 to 2014 period. It is intended to be replaced by the Future Anti-Surface Guided Weapon.

Service Delivery Agreements

Mr. Keith Simpson: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will place in the Library copies of the service delivery agreements between his Department's top level budget holders and head office for financial years 1999–2000 to 2003–04. [196579]

Mr. Ingram: I will write to the hon. Member and place a copy of my letter in the Library of the House.

Skydive Ranch

Rev. Ian Paisley: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what assessment the Department has made of the safety record of parachutes used at Skydive Ranch in Canada; and whether Skydive Ranch complies with all the Department's requirements for *(a)* safety and *(b)* instructor training levels. [194998]

Mr. Ingram: The Skydive Ranch in Canada is subject to an annual no-notice safety audit by the Ministry of Defence Joint Service Parachute Centre (JSPC) during which a thorough check of equipment and procedures is undertaken. During the inspection, an advanced instructor/examiner from the British Parachute Association assesses instructor performance and teaching ability at the Skydive Ranch.

The Ministry of Defence is satisfied that the Skydive Ranch is operating safely, and the risks to British military personnel are as low as reasonably practical.

Sonic Boom (North Norfolk)

Norman Lamb: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will make a statement on the results of his Department's investigation into the cause of the sonic boom heard in North Norfolk on 8 November. [197947]

Mr. Caplin: The investigation into this reported sonic event is still ongoing; however, indications are that the aircraft that caused the event was a French Air Force Mirage operating in a military air-range over the North sea. It is believed that the aircraft was approximately 18 miles off the coast when the event occurred.

Submarines

Mr. Gordon Prentice: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what information the Government have been asked to supply to the Canadian Parliament concerning its inquiry into the purchase of four Upholder Class submarines from the UK. [194344]

Mr. Ingram: The Ministry of Defence has been asked for some background information to inform the Standing Committee on National Defence and Veterans Affairs of the Canadian Parliament, which is currently conducting a study on the acquisition of submarines for the Canadian forces.

Separately, the Canadian Board of Inquiry (BOI) convened to investigate the fire on board HMCS Chicoutimi on 4 October has sought and received documentation from MOD and BAE Systems.

Mr. Gordon Prentice: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence who was responsible for signing off HMCS Chicoutimi as seaworthy prior to its handover to the Canadian Government. [194393]

Mr. Ingram: The submarine's clearance for sea was endorsed by the Royal Navy using the Royal Navy's acceptance procedures.

Mr. Gordon Prentice: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence whether the refurbishment of the Upholder Class submarines sold to Canada had qualifications attached to the sale indicating they should not be operated in accordance with their original design specification. [194441]

Mr. Ingram: At the time of handover to and acceptance by Canada of each of the four reactivated Upholder Class submarines, none had any qualifications indicating that they should not be operated in accordance with their original design specification.

Mr. Gordon Prentice: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence whether HMCS Chicoutimi is to be refitted and made seaworthy in the UK; and if he will make a statement. [194442]

Mr. Ingram: Any decision with regard to the future of HMCS Chicoutimi is a matter for the Canadian Government.

Mr. Gordon Prentice: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence how many days each of the four Upholder class submarines spent *(a)* in service and *(b)* at sea with the Royal Navy before their decommissioning. [197480]

Mr. Ingram: The four Upholder Class submarines were taken out of service with the Royal Navy in 1994. Times spent in service and at sea with the Royal Navy are shown as follows.

Submarine	*Service with the RN*	*Days at sea*
HMS Upholder	December 1990 to July 1994	370
HMS Unseen	July 1991 to July 1994	269
HMS Ursula	January 1993 to July 1994	199
HMS Unicorn	November 1993 to October 1994	239

Unexploded Ordnance

Mr. Keetch: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence how many unexploded cluster munitions deployed by UK forces there are worldwide; and if he will make a statement. [152747]

Mr. Ingram *[holding answer 3 February 2004]*: It is not possible to quantify how many unexploded cluster munitions deployed by UK forces there might be worldwide. Air-delivered cluster munitions have been used in a number of recent conflicts. Their rates of failing to explode as designed can vary considerably depending on a variety of factors, including the terrain conditions on impact. By contrast, the modern artillery-delivered cluster munitions used in Iraq have secondary fuses that ensure a far smaller proportion is left unexploded. The quantity of unexploded munitions has also been greatly reduced by extensive clearance efforts in, for example, Kosovo and Iraq.

US Interceptor Missiles

Alan Simpson: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence which of the existing US-UK agreements allow for the siting of US interceptor missiles in Britain. [198035]

Mr. Hoon: None. United States/United Kingdom basing agreements are a matter for joint decision making between the two Governments, and any new proposals for basing would be the subject of negotiation before any agreement was made.

Warrior-equipped Battalions

Mr. Soames: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence which Warrior-equipped battalions will be deploying on operations in the next three months; and to where. [197885]

Mr. Hoon: We have no plans to deploy any further Warrior-equipped battalions on operations in the next three months.

Weapons of Mass Destruction

Mr. Flook: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence whether *(a)* civil servants and *(b)* military personnel requested an impact assessment of the effect of weapons of mass destruction on (i) the physical well-being of allied troops and (ii) the morale of British troops. [191151]

Mr. Ingram: There is no universally accepted definition of the phrase "weapons of mass destruction", but it is generally held to refer to nuclear, chemical and biological weapons.

Planning for operations takes account of all relevant factors, including the weaponry that may be used against United Kingdom forces.

FOREIGN AND COMMONWEALTH AFFAIRS

Afghanistan

Mr. Simmonds: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what assessment has been made of the viability of aerial crop spraying on areas of poppy cultivation in Afghanistan; and what impact this is likely to have on *(a)* the environment, *(b)* human health and *(c)* animal health. [196425]

Mr. Rammell: The UK supports the Afghan Government's National Drug Control Strategy. The viability of aerial eradication of the opium poppy crop is a matter for the Afghan Government. There are a number of issues to consider before a country decides to go down this path.

Harry Cohen: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs when he next expects to publish figures for the poppy harvest in Afghanistan; and if he will make a statement. [197619]

Mr. Rammell: We understand that the United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime is planning to publish the results of its 2003–04 Afghan Opium Survey on 18 November.

Anguilla

Mr. Rosindell: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will make a statement on Anguilla's draft constitution. [197492]

Mr. Rammell: A Constitutional and Electoral Reform Committee in Anguilla was appointed and the review formally launched in February 2002. Public consultation was extensive but work is now on hold pending the general election due in March 2005.

Athens 2004

Mr. Wyatt: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs whether the UK ambassador to Greece has been commissioned to write a report on the strengths and weaknesses of the Athens 2004 Olympic and Paralympic games. [196959]

Mr. MacShane: Her Majesty's ambassador to Greece has, over recent months and years, reported in detail on aspects of the 2004 Olympics relevant to the Government.

Bahá'i Community

Mr. Hancock: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what recent representations he has made to the Government of Iran on the treatment of the Bahá'i community; and if he will make a statement. [197368]

Mr. Rammell: We have serious concerns about the situation of the Bahá'i community in Iran, and have raised these concerns with the Iranian authorities on many occasions. With our strong support, the rights of Iran's religious minorities including the Bahá'is have been an important theme of the EU/Iran human rights dialogue, including the most recent round in June.

Colombia

Mr. David Stewart: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what recent assessment he has made of the human rights situation in Colombia; and if he will make a statement. [198079]

Mr. Rammell: Human rights form an integral part of our policy towards Colombia. We keep the human rights situation in the country under constant review. We recognise that there have been some improvements but much still needs to be done. We work closely with the Colombian Government, EU and other partners, including civil society, to try to achieve this further improvement. We regularly urge the Colombian Government to meet UN recommendations on human rights and are working with them to achieve this goal. As part of this co-operation, we were pleased to host the meeting of international support for Colombia held in London in July 2003. This resulted in the London Declaration, a key text that guides international support. We are working with the Colombians and other partners in the run-up to the follow-up meeting to the London meeting to be held in Colombia in February 2005.

Mr. David Stewart: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs how many units of the Colombian military receive British training; and whether this training includes *(a)* education in respecting human rights and *(b)* training in humanitarian policing. [198080]

Mr. Rammell: British military training is predominantly provided to selected individuals from the Colombian military. However, we do provide explosive ordnance disposal (EOD) training to Colombian EOD units.

Professional training provided to Colombian officers routinely incorporates human rights education. Under the Foreign and Commonwealth Office's Human Rights

Project Fund, we recently had a project to raise awareness of the armed forces on their role in the prevention of displacement and the protection of the rights of the internally displaced population. We also have an ongoing project on human rights training for the military through the Colombian military justice school.

The Colombian military receives no direct policing training from the UK although two Colombian officers attended a UK International Peace Support Briefing Programme which included humanitarian policing issues.

Correspondence

Mr. Lidington: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs for what reasons his Department has not replied to the letter of 7 July to UKvisas from the hon. Member for Aylesbury about the case of Mr. S. M., husband of Mrs. S. K. of Aylesbury (reference numbers M1232921/3 and PO 4649/04); and when he expects to send a substantive reply. [198083]

Mr. Mullin: UKvisas replied to the hon. Member on 11 November.

Departmental Advertising/Estate

Charles Hendry: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what the cost of *(a)* creative work, *(b)* media spend and *(c)* administration for his Department's advertising activity has been in each financial year since 1997–98, broken down by contractor. [197291]

Mr. Straw: As set out in my reply to the right hon. and learned Member for Devizes (Mr. Ancram) on 20 July 2004, *Official Report*, column 171W, in FY 2002–03—the most recent year for which audited figures are available—separately identifiable expenditure by the Foreign and Commonwealth Office (FCO) on UK advertising totalled £743,783. Of this, £716,234 related to media spend on advertising for recruitment purposes. The balance related to consular media advertisements, which aimed to raise awareness among the British public of the importance of being properly prepared before travelling overseas and to advertising of the FCO's public open days.

The FCO does not maintain separate records of expenditure for the creative, media, and administration components of its advertising activity. The FCO's overseas posts and its non-departmental public bodies also incur advertising costs. Information about these costs could be obtained only at disproportionate cost.

The FCO's records of expenditure on advertising for the financial years from FY 1997–98 are not held centrally. Figures for these years could be obtained only at disproportionate cost.

Mr. Andrew Turner: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will list the properties occupied by *(a)* his Department and *(b)* its agencies in (i) 1997 and (ii) 2004, showing (A) for each and (B) in aggregate the area; and what in aggregate the annual rental value was. [196369]

Mr. Rammell: The details given relate only to the Foreign and Commonwealth Office (FCO) estate in the UK. The work involved in assembling similar data for all the properties that our posts lease overseas would incur disproportionate costs.

UK properties occupied by FCO in 1997

	m² letting area	Rent per annum £
Old Admiralty Building (vacant, being refurbished)[1]	13,933	—
Main Building (King Charles Street)[1]	39,104	—
1 Palace Street, SW1	17,186	4,462,500
20 Victoria Street, SW1	1,281	250,000
Cromwell House, Dean Stanley Street, SW1	2,500	1,020,000
8 Cleveland Row, SW1	394	205,280
Apollo House, Croydon	3,116	395,811
1 Carlton Gardens, SW1	2,483	15,255
Hanslope Park, Milton Keynes[1]	24,406	—
Lancaster House, Stable Yard, SW1	3,412	479,583
Clive House, Petty France, SW1	[1]—	122,180
2–4 Central Buildings, Matthew Parker Street, SW1	7,005	868,400
Total	114,820	7,818,979

[1] Owned properties.

[2] Unavailable.

UK properties occupied by FCO in 2004

	m² letting area	Rent per annum £
Old Admiralty Building[1]	13,933	—
Main Building[1]	39,104	—
Hanslope Park[1]	24,406	—
Lancaster House	3,412	490,000
89 Albert Embankment	1,259	233,250
Apollo House	3,116	438,083
Carlton Gardens	2,483	162,000
Total	87,713	1,323,333

[1] Owned properties.

(b)

	m² letting area	Rent per annum £
(i) Properties occupied by agencies in 1997:		
Wiston House	[1]1,696	[2]62,500
(ii) Properties occupied by agencies in 2004:		
Wiston House	[1]1,696	[2]80,000

[1] Figure used for non-domestic rating purposes.

[2] Excluding VAT.

Embassy Costs

Mr. Gordon Prentice: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will list the running costs of each British high commission and embassy in the latest year for which figures are available. [196866]

Mr. Rammell: The net running costs of each British high commission and embassy, for the latest years for which figures are available, are listed in the following tables together with the year to which they relate.

	High commission name	£ million
2003–04	Abuja	8.3
2003–04	Accra	4.8
2003–04	Bandar Seri Begawan	1.3
2003–04	Banjul	.7
2003–04	Belmopan	2.5
2003–04	Bridgetown	2.6
2003–04	Canberra	.1
2002–03	Castries	.3

	High commission name	*£ million*
2002-03	Colombo	2.1
2003-04	Dar es Salaam	1.6
2002-03	Dhaka	2.8
2003-04	Freetown	1.8
2003-04	Gaborone	.8
2002-03	Georgetown	1.0
2003-04	Harare	2.3
2003-04	Honiara	.5
2002-03	Islamabad	6.3
2003-04	Kampala	2.4
002-03	Kingston	2.9
002-03	Kingstown	.3
003-04	Kuala Lumpur	4.2
003-04	Lilongwe	1.4
003-04	Lusaka	1.7
003-04	Maputo	5.1
003-04	Mbabane	.7
003-04	Nairobi	3.7
003-04	Nassau	.9
002-03	New Delhi	8.1
003-04	Nicosia	3.0
003-04	Nuku'Alofa	.3
003-04	Ottawa	2.1
003-04	Port Louis	.9
003-04	Port Moresby	.8
002-03	Port of Spain	1.6
003-04	Pretoria	1.6
003-04	Singapore	4.7
002-03	St. Georges	.4
003-04	St. Johns	1.4
003-04	Suva	1.2
003-04	Valletta	1.9
003-04	Victoria	.7
003-04	Wellington	1.2
03-04	Windhoek	.6
03-04	Yaounde	1.5

	Embassy name	*£ million*
03-04	Abidjan	2.9
03-04	Abu Dhabi	1.4
03-04	Addis Ababa	4.8
03-04	Algiers	1.3
03-04	Almaty	1.6
03-04	Amman	2.9
03-04	Ankara	4.9
03-04	Antanarivo	.7
02-03	Ascuncion	.5
03-04	Ashgabat	1.3
03-04	Asmara	.4
03-04	Athens	6.4
03-04	Baghdad	5.6
03-04	Bahrain	1.4
03-04	Baku	2.4
03-04	Bangkok	2.3
03-04	Beijing	11.4
03-04	Beirut	3.3
03-04	Belgrade	4.6
03-04	Berlin	11.3
03-04	Berne	3.5
03-04	Bishkek	.2
2-03	Bogota	3.7
03-04	Brasilia	4.3
03-04	Bratislava	1.2
3-04	Brussels	6.1
3-04	Bucharest	1.7
3-04	Budapest	4.0
3-04	Buenos Aires	3.8
3-04	Cairo	3.8
2-03	Caracas	2.9
3-04	Chisinau	1.0
3-04	Conakry	.1
3-04	Copenhagen	3.7
3-04	Dakar	1.2
2003-04	Damascus	2.2
2003-04	Dili	.0
2003-04	Doha	1.4
2003-04	Dubai	1.0
2003-04	Dublin	3.9
2003-04	Dushanbe	1.3
2002-03	Guatemala City	1.6
2003-04	Hanoi	2.0
2002-03	Havana	1.8
2003-04	Helsinki	3.6
2003-04	Holy See	.3
2003-04	Jakarta	5.7
2002-03	Kathmandu	1.3
2003-04	Khartoum	2.6
2002-03	Kiev	3.1
2003-04	Kigali	1.0
2003-04	Kinshasa	1.4
2003-04	Kuwait	.8
2003-04	LaPaz	1.0
2002-03	Lima	3.2
2003-04	Lisbon	4.2
2003-04	Ljubljana	1.5
2003-04	Luanda	2.2
2003-04	Luxembourg	1.1
2003-04	Madrid	9.5
2003-04	Manila	1.5
2003-04	Maseru	.9
2002-03	Mexico City	4.1
2003-04	Minsk	.7
2003-04	Monrovia	.4
2002-03	Montevideo	1.3
2003-04	Moscow	10.5
2003-04	Muscat	2.0
2003-04	Oslo	3.1
2002-03	Panama City	.9
2003-04	Paris	17.8
2003-04	Phnom Penh	1.1
2003-04	Prague	2.7
2003-04	Pyongyang	1.1
2002-03	Quito	1.3
2003-04	Rabat	1.9
2003-04	Rangoon	1.3
2003-04	Reykjavik	.7
2003-04	Riga	1.4
2003-04	Riyadh	2.9
2003-04	Rome	8.7
2002-03	San Jose	.6
2002-03	San Salvador	.8
2003-04	Sana'A	2.0
2002-03	Santiago	2.7
2002-03	Santo Domingo	.6
2003-04	Sarajevo	3.1
2003-04	Seoul	5.6
2003-04	Skopje	3.3
2003-04	Sofia	1.6
2003-04	Stockholm	3.8
2003-04	Tallinn	1.3
2003-04	Tashkent	1.8
2003-04	Tehran	2.5
2003-04	Tel Aviv	4.1
2003-04	The Hague	4.5
2003-04	Tokyo	17.0
2003-04	Tripoli	2.3
2003-04	Tunis	1.6
2003-04	Tunis	1.6
2003-04	Ulaanbaatar	.6
2003-04	Vienna	5.4
2003-04	Vientiane	.1
2003-04	Vilnius	1.2
2003-04	Warsaw	4.8
2003-04	Washington	9.7
2003-04	Yerevan	1.1
2003-04	Zagreb	2.4

Green Ministers

Mr. Horam: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs how many Green Ministers his Department has had since 1997. [197674]

Mr. Rammell: There have been four Green Ministers in the Foreign and Commonwealth Office since 1997.

Iraq

Glenda Jackson: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs pursuant to his reply of 26 October 2004, *Official Report*, column 1177W, reference 191798, if he will list the UN sanctions that had collapsed by August 2001, referred to in paragraph 3, page 3 of ISG Regime Finance and Procurement. [195198]

Mr. Rammell: The former Iraqi regime worked hard to bring about an end to sanctions, and claims about their failure were part of the former regime's strategy to influence UN member states. The former Iraqi regime undoubtedly undermined sanctions, including by corrupting the Oil for Food Programme to generate illicit revenue, and by smuggling goods to and from Iraq. Such practices are being investigated by the independent inquiry appointed by the UN Secretary General in April 2004.

The UN Security Council lifted sanctions against Iraq under resolution 1483 of 22 May 2003, with the exception of the arms embargo and certain financial restrictions against individuals and entities of the former Iraqi regime.

Israel/Palestine

Richard Burden: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what assessment has been made by the European Union of the cost of damage to EU-funded projects in the Palestinian Territories resulting from Israeli military action. [196575]

Mr. Rammell: The European Commission (EC) maintain an audit of damage to EC and member state financed projects as a result of Israeli security measures during the intifada. The value of damaged projects funded by the European Union (either bilaterally by member states or by the EC) is €26.5 million.

We have made representations to the Israeli authorities at the highest level expressing our grave concern at the damage sustained by Palestinian civilians and institutions as a result of Israel Defence Forces activity. The EU has also made representations to the Israeli authorities and has reserved the right to demand compensation from Israel for damage to EU financed projects.

Lisbon Agenda

John Robertson: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what discussions he has had with Mr. Wim Kok in connection with his progress report on the Lisbon agenda. [197475]

Mr. MacShane: My right hon. Friend the Foreign Secretary saw Mr. Kok at the European Council on 4 November, where Mr. Kok's progress report on the Lisbon agenda was discussed. My right hon. Friends the Deputy Prime Minister and Secretary of State for Work and Pensions attended the Tripartite Social Summit earlier that day, where the report was also discussed. My right hon. Friend the Prime Minister met with Mr. Kok on 26 August and at the European Council on 4–5 November.

John Robertson: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will make a statement on progress towards the Lisbon agenda. [197477]

Mr. MacShane: I refer my hon. Friend to my right hon. Friend the Prime Minister's Statement to the House on 8 November 2004, *Official Report*, column 570, following Wim Kok's presentation to the European Council on progress on the Lisbon agenda. The Government set out their priorities for European economic reform in their progress report in February and their vision for a more focussed, results-oriented Lisbon process in a paper submitted to Mr. Kok and EU partners in June. Copies are available in the Library of the House.

London 2012

Mr. Wyatt: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what plans there are to publicise the London 2012 Olympic bid in *(a)* UK embassies, high commissions and consulate offices and *(b)* the offices of the British Council after 15 November. [196960]

Mr. Rammell: My hon. Friend the Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State at the Foreign and Commonwealth Office (Mr. Rammell) wrote to all British Heads of Mission whose host countries have nationals on the International Olympic Committee (IOC) on 27 September 2004 asking them to provide detailed action plans on how they intend to support and publicise the bid locally. These plans are currently being assessed and will be implemented on 16 November once the IOC rules of international promotion are relaxed. As a minimum posts will conduct public awareness campaigns using local media, post websites and displays of publicity material provided by London 2012.

Sir David Green, Director General of the British Council, will have written by 16 November to all British Council offices in countries with an IOC member to outline how they can support and publicise the bid. British Council offices will liaise with our posts on this issue to ensure our plans complement each other.

Mr. Wyatt: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what briefing papers have been made available to UK ambassadors and high commissioners about the London 2012 Olympic bid; and if he will place all such papers in the Library. [196961]

Mr. Rammell: Foreign and Commonwealth Office missions whose host governments have nationals on the International Olympic Committee (IOC) have been provided with briefing papers on London's bid. These papers have been placed in the Library of the House.

Mr. Wyatt: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs whether a specific member of the Diplomatic Service has been earmarked in each of the bidding cities for the 2012 Olympics to follow the progress of their bids. [196962]

Mr. Rammell: Following the short listing of candidate cities on 18 May 2004 Paris, Madrid, Moscow and New York appointed a dedicated point of contact to follow progress on rival city bids. British diplomatic missions in countries with nationals on the International Olympic Committee, each have appointed a member of staff to monitor local perceptions of both London's and rival city bids.

Select Committee Recommendations

Mr. Allen: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs how many recommendations by parliamentary select committees have been adopted by his Department since June 2001. [197766]

Mr. Straw: Officials, Ministers and I all take seriously the recommendations of all relevant Select Committee reports, and seek to implement them whenever we can. No response to any such recommendations is made to Parliament without scrutiny by Ministers, normally me. However, the information requested by my hon. Friend is not held centrally and the cost of compiling such information would incur disproportionate costs.

Southern Thailand

Mr. Simmonds: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what assessment has been made of *(a)* the extent of Islamic fundamentalism in southern Thailand, *(b)* the threat hat Islamic fundamentalism may pose to the security and stability of Thailand and *(c)* the possible mplications of Thai instability for British interests in he wider region. [197131]

Mr. Alexander: We are concerned by the separatist iolence and related deaths in southern Thailand. We emain in close contact with the Thai Government bout the situation.

The vast majority of Thailand's Muslims are opposed o extremism and terrorism. We believe, however, that here are a number of small domestic extremist groups nvolved in terrorist activity in southern Thailand. errorism is a challenge to the peace and security of hailand.

We believe that separatist violence is unlikely to move eyond the borders of Thailand. Our travel advice for hailand reflects our assessment of the implications r the security of British nationals. We currently commend against all but essential travel to the far uthern provinces of Pattani, Yala, Nathariwat and ongkhla. The travel advice is regularly reviewed.

Spain

Ms Atherton: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign d Commonwealth Affairs what representations has made to the Spanish authorities in relation to) Mr. Peter Devlin and *(b)* other Cornish divers aiting trial in Galicia. [195132]

Mr. Alexander: Peter Devlin and three other divers m Force 9 Salvage were arrested on 20 June 2002 and eased the same day. The Spanish investigation is continuing and the divers have not yet been formally charged. On 9 September 2002, our Honorary Consul in Vigo made representations on behalf of Peter Devlin and the other divers to the Court in La Coruna about the return of some of the company's diving equipment. The court agreed to release equipment not related to the investigation, but we understand not all the requested equipment has been returned. Our Honorary Consul in Vigo has also made enquiries, most recently on 5 November 2004, to the Spanish Navy Commander in Galicia and the President of the Supreme Court in Galicia. Consular officials will continue to monitor the case and provide all proper consular assistance.

Sudan

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what representations he has made to the Government of Sudan about the alleged torture of five men belonging to the Missairiyah tribe by Musa Easa, Salah Eldin Shukry, Mounas Bashar and Tigany in July 2003. [185573]

Mr. Mullin: In the absence of the names of the alleged victims, neither we nor Sudanese human rights organisations, with whom we work closely, are able to trace these cases.

However, we make regular representations to the Government of Sudan about the need for them to respect the human rights of all prisoners held in its jails. During my visit to Sudan in September, I pressed Sudanese Justice Minister Yassin on the need to ratify the UN Convention Against Torture as soon as possible. I understand that a draft law is currently before the Council of Ministers.

Angus Robertson: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what assessment his Department has made of the effects of the delay in deployment of additional ceasefire monitors by the African Union to Darfur; and if he will make a statement. [194827]

Mr. Mullin: On 20 October the African Union (AU) Peace and Security Council endorsed a plan to expand the current mission from less than 500 troops to more than 3,000 over the next four months. This deployment has been expedited, and in recent days a significant number of Rwandan and Nigerian troops have arrived in Darfur.

As my right hon. Friend the Prime Minister announced in Addis Ababa on 7 October, the UK will provide £12 million to support the rapid deployment of the expanded mission. We are working closely with the AU and other donors to ensure that the infrastructure is in place to ensure these personnel can be fully deployed on arrival in Addis Ababa.

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what evidence he has received that African Union monitors are present in every administrative unit in Darfur. [196081]

Mr. Mullin: African Union (AU) ceasefire monitors are currently deployed across six sectors of operation (out of a total of 20) in all three states of Darfur.

Following expansion of the African Union force in Sudan, over 3,000 troops will be deployed across eight sectors covering the whole of Darfur. This substantial increase in troop numbers will allow the AU to carry out a more proactive monitoring role.

Terrorism

Mr. Win Griffiths: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what assessment he has made of the agreement signed between residents at Camp Ashraf and the multi-national forces in Iraq rejecting participation in, or support for, terrorism; and whether signatories to it are still proscribed under the Terrorism Act 2000. [197504]

Mr. Rammell: The US authorities, who provide security at the Mojahedin-e Khalq (MeK) base at Camp Ashraf, have informed us that most residents of Ashraf have signed a statement renouncing terrorism and pledging not to take up arms illegally. We have noted this. But it does not change our assessment of the MeK, which takes into account all the evidence, including the MeK's long history of brutal terrorist violence, and the fact that it did not disarm voluntarily.

Under the Terrorism Act 2000, it is organisations, not individuals, which may be proscribed. The MeK continues to be so proscribed. Among other provisions of the Act, a person commits an offence if s/he belongs to, professes to belong to, or invites support for a proscribed organisation.

Thailand

Mr. Steen: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will make representations to the Prime Minister of Thailand concerning the release on bail of Somchai Wisetsingha, who has admitted shooting Vanessa Arscott of Ashburton, Devon; and if he will make a statement. [198171]

Mr. Mullin: Our ambassador in Thailand raised our concern at the release on bail of Somchai Wisetsingh with the Thai Foreign Minister on 11 November.

Vanessa Arscott and Adam Lloyd were victims of a senseless murder and our sympathy remains with their families and friends. We hope the judicial process will proceed swiftly and that justice will be served. We remain in contact with the Thais on this case.

UK Detainees (United States)

Tom Cox: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs how frequently on average members of the United Kingdom diplomatic staff visited British citizens detained by the United States Administration in the last year for which figures are available; and if he will make a statement. [197360]

Mr. Mullin: We do not keep statistics for the average frequency of visits carried out by our diplomatic staff to British nationals detained by the US authorities. Our prison visiting policy for the US obliges staff to make contact with detained British nationals in the US within 48-hours of notification of an arrest. Detainees are also visited—by both diplomatic and locally engaged staff—usually after sentencing and thereafter if a particular need arises.

British officials have also made nine welfare visits to the British nationals detained by the US authorities at Guantanamo Bay since January 2002.

Tom Cox: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs how many United Kingdom citizens are detained by the United States authorities *(a)* in the United States and *(b)* in another country; and if he will make a statement. [197361]

Mr. Mullin: The number of British nationals detained by the United States authorities in the US as at 30 June 2004 (the latest date for which figures are available) was 717.

There are also four British nationals detained by the US administration at Guantanamo Bay, Cuba.

Venezuela

John Robertson: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what assessment his Department has made of human rights in Venezuela since the recall referendum in August. [197474]

Mr. Rammell: We constantly monitor the human rights situation in Venezuela and have continued to do so following the presidential referendum in August. Our ambassador in Caracas has regular meetings with his EU counterparts and human rights frequently form a significant part of the discussions. In common with EU partners, we are following carefully the potential human rights implications of the Venezuelan Government's proposals to adopt new legislation on the media, and to increase the number of judges in the Supreme Court. We work with the Venezuelan authorities, NGOs and other donors on human rights issues. More information on our in-country activities can be found on the British embassy Caracas web-site, http://www.britain.org.ve/. These pages contain summaries of recent human rights projects supported by the embassy.

Voting Rights

Dame Marion Roe: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs which Commonwealth countries grant rights to British citizens to vote in elections in their country equivalent to the rights available to Commonwealth citizens in the UK. [196398]

Mr. Mullin *[holding answer 11 November 2004]:* The Foreign and Commonwealth Office has no information on the voting rights of British nationals in other Commonwealth countries. The voting rights of overseas nationals in Commonwealth countries are a matter for the country concerned.

War on Terrorism

Mr. Jim Cunningham: To ask the Secretary of State r Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will make statement on discussions with G8 members on a rategy to fight terrorism. [196775]

Mr. MacShane *[holding answer 10 November 2004]*: ork on counter-terrorism will form an important ement of the UK's forthcoming G8 presidency. This ill include implementing commitments the G8 has ade at past summits, notably the Secure and acilitated Travel Initiative agreed at Sea Island in ne 2004.

Zimbabwe

Norman Lamb: To ask the Secretary of State for oreign and Commonwealth Affairs what his assessment of the political situation in Zimbabwe. [197963]

Mr. Mullin: The political situation in Zimbabwe ntinues to deteriorate in the run up to the March 2005 rliamentary elections. Opposition, independent media d civil society are subject to political intimidation and olence and are targeted by repressive legislation. We ll together with our international partners continue to ess the Government of Zimbabwe to end these olations and restore democracy and the rule of law.

Norman Lamb: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what plan he has to *(a)* strengthen and *(b)* extend sanctions in respect of named individuals associated with President Mugabe. [197964]

Mr. Mullin: We and our EU partners increased from 79 to 95 the number of Zimbabweans subject to targeted EU measures in February 2004. We continue to keep these measures and those subject to them under constant review.

Norman Lamb: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what discussions *(a)* he and *(b)* other Ministers have had over the last three months with African leaders in respect of the situation in Zimbabwe. [197965]

Mr. Mullin: We regularly make our concerns about Zimbabwe clear to African leaders. My right hon. Friend the Foreign Secretary discussed Zimbabwe with President Mbeki of South Africa at the UN General Assembly in September and during his visit to South Africa in August. The Foreign Secretary discussed Zimbabwe with the Mauritian Foreign Minister, Cutteree, on 9 October. I discussed Zimbabwe with the Zambian Finance Minister, Magande, and with President Mutharika of Malawi on 20 September.

CONSTITUTIONAL AFFAIRS

Consultants

Dr. Julian Lewis: To ask the Parliamentary Secretary, Department for Constitutional Affairs how many consultancy firms or companies have been retained by the Department or its predecessors since June 2001; what the projects are for which each has been retained; and what the total is of the fees paid or incurred in each case. [193414]

Mr. Lammy: I refer the hon. Member to my reply to the hon. Member for Stratford-on-Avon (Mr. Maples), 11 November 2004, *Official Report*, column 852W.

Criminal Offences (Convictions)

Hugh Bayley: To ask the Parliamentary Secretary, Department for Constitutional Affairs how many convictions for criminal offences were determined by *(a)* magistrates and *(b)* other courts in York in each year since 1997. [192409]

Paul Goggins: I have been asked to reply.

The information collected centrally via the Home Office Court Proceedings database on the number of offenders convicted of criminal offences by magistrates and other courts in York is contained in the table.

The number of offenders convicted of criminal offences by courts in York 1997–2002[1]

	Magistrates court	*Crown court*
1997	3,771	480
1998	3,957	466
1999	4,454	459
2000	3,195	510
2001	2,919	497
2002	2,425	509

[1] These data are on the principal offence basis.

Statistics for 2003 will be available in November.

Departmental Offices

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Parliamentary Secretary, Department for Constitutional Affairs what the cost of *(a)* decoration and *(b)* refurbishment of the London offices of the Department was in each of the last four years. [196141]

Mr. Lammy: In the last four years, my Department has spent the following amounts on *(a)* decoration and *(b)* refurbishment of our London offices.

£

	(a) Decoration	*(b) Refurbishment*
2000–01	79,610	234,640
2001–02	102,334	601,616
2002–03	165,870	488,880
2003–04	274,482	1,205,358

The response above covers the London offices of the DCA HQ, Court Service, PGO and DCA associated offices. It does not cover specialist Court buildings nor the House of Lords, which will be covered by the response from the Parliamentary Works Committee. The offices referred to are:

Selborne House, Southside (part), 81 Chancery Lane, Conquest House, Millbank Tower (part), 30 Millbank (5th Floor), Steel House, Clive House, Archway Tower, Roger Street, Red Lion Street, Grays Inn Road, Farringdon Road, Maltravers Street and New Cavendish House.

Departmental Staff

Tim Loughton: To ask the Parliamentary Secretary, Department for Constitutional Affairs how many people in his Department earn more than a whole-time equivalent salary of £57,485 per year. [195331]

Mr. Lammy: I refer the hon. Member for East Worthing and Shoreham to the answer given by my right hon. Friend the Minister for the Cabinet Office on 11 November 2004, *Official Report*, column 856W.

Legal Aid

Mr. David Marshall: To ask the Parliamentary Secretary, Department for Constitutional Affairs what the total cost of legal aid was in each of the last 10 years. [197648]

Mr. Lammy: Net legal aid expenditure in the United Kingdom (England and Wales, Scotland and Northern Ireland) over the last ten years was:

	£ million
1994–95	1,443
1995–96	1,542
1996–97	1,636
1997–98	1,691
1998–99	1,783
1999–2000	1,706
2000–01	1,823
2001–02	1,886
2002–03	2,089
2003–04	2,282

Note:
These figures are in cash.

Press Releases

Pete Wishart: To ask the Parliamentary Secretary, Department for Constitutional Affairs how many press releases have been issued by his Department in each month of 2004; and if he will make a statement. [195458]

Mr. Lammy: I refer the hon. Member to the answer given by my right hon. Friend, the Minister for the Cabinet Office on the 11 November 2004, *Official Report*, column 857W.

TV Licences (Search Warrants)

Mr. Blizzard: To ask the Parliamentary Secretary, Department for Constitutional Affairs what standard of evidence is required for a magistrates court to issue a search warrant relating to television licensing under section 366 of the Communications Act 2003. [197834]

Mr. Leslie: A search warrant to allow authorised officials to enter a person's home or vehicle is issued by a Justice of the Peace on the basis of written information and where necessary verbal information provided to the court on oath. This written information must disclose reasonable grounds that an offence is being or has been committed under section 363 of the Communications Act 2003. The court also needs to be satisfied that the European Convention on Human Rights has been met.

The issue of a search warrant is a judicial decision made on a case by case basis on information presented to the court under oath. Justices of the Peace have discretion to grant or refuse the application.

Witness Intimidation

Mr. Allen: To ask the Parliamentary Secretary, Department for Constitutional Affairs how many persons were convicted of offences of intimidation or harming of witnesses in each year since 2001; and how many of those received a custodial sentence. [193613]

Paul Goggins *[holding answer 26 October 2004]*: I have been asked to reply.

Statistics of persons *(a)* convicted and *(b)* given a custodial sentence for offences of intimidation or harming of witnesses are contained in the table.

Statistics for 2003 will be published in November.

Number of persons found guilty and sentenced to custody at all courts for offences of Attempting to Pervert the Course of Public Justice England and Wales 2001 to 2002[1]

Offence description	*Statute*	*Year*	*Found guilty*	*Custodial sentence*
Attempting to Pervert the Course of Public Justice (Fabrication of false evidence, cause person to be wrongly convicted, interference with witness, etc.)	Common Law	2001	1,798	924
		2002	1,549	737
Intimidating a juror or witness or person assisting in investigation of offenders	Criminal Justice and Public Order Act 1994 section 51(1)	2001	348	174
		2002	415	187
Harming or threatening to harm a juror, witness or person assisting in investigation of offences	Criminal Justice and Public Order Act 1994 section 51(2)	2001	76	30
		2002	65	34
Intimidating or intending to intimidate a witness	Criminal Justice and Police Act 2001 section 39	2001	—	—
		2002	3	2
Harming or intending to harm a witness	Criminal Justice and Police Act 2001 section 40	2001	—	—
		2002	1	—

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[1] These data are on the principal offence basis.

TRADE AND INDUSTRY

Employment Rights

Mr. Sarwar: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what plans she has to bring forward legislation to establish employment rights for migrant workers. [197685]

Mr. Sutcliffe: Migrant workers, working legally in the UK, have access to the same employment rights as equivalent indigenous workers.

Oil rigs

Mr. Weir: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry if she will list the oil rigs which fall under UK jurisdiction; which police authority is responsible for each; and if she will make a statement. [194224]

Mr. Mike O'Brien: Oil drilling rigs are active on the UK continental shelf (UKCS)—but by their nature are mobile. In addition to the drilling rigs there were 268 production installations in the UKCS as of October 2004. A full list is available and updated regularly on my Department's Oil and Gas website, www.og.dti.gov.uk. A copy has also been placed in the Library of the House. For the purposes of oil and gas activities all of these platforms and installations fall under UK jurisdiction. In the interests of security, the policing arrangements for the UK's offshore installations are not disclosed.

Binge Drinking

Ross Cranston: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what representations she has received about the amendment of competition legislation to allow binge drinking to be curbed by the imposition of minimum alcohol prices. [197559]

Mr. Sutcliffe: In the context of inter-departmental discussions about tackling problems associated with excessive alcohol consumption, the Home Office has consulted the Department of Trade and Industry (DTI) at both official and Ministerial level about competition law issues, including whether agreements on minimum prices for alcoholic drinks could be excluded from prohibition under Chapter One of the Competition Act 1998. DTI has received no separate representations on this issue.

ECGD (Anti-corruption)

Malcolm Bruce: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry which companies *(a)* she, *(b)* her Ministers, *(c)* her Department's staff and *(d)* Export Credits Guarantee Department (ECGD) staff have met since January to discuss the anti-corruption procedures brought into force by the ECGD on 1 May; and on how many occasions meetings have been held in each case. [195937]

Mr. Alexander *[holding answer 8 November 2004]*: I refer the hon. Member to the answer I gave on 27 October 2004, *Official Report*, column 1241W. During the period in question representatives of BAES and Rolls-Royce were present at six such meetings; Airbus were present at five.

EU Presidency (Greece)

Angus Robertson: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry how many times during the Greek presidency of the EU *(a)* the Committee for the implementation of projects, actions and measures for the interoperability of trans-European networks for the interchange of data between administration and *(b)* the Standing Committee for veterinary medicinal products met; when and where each meeting took place; which UK Government expert was present at each meeting; what (i) technical and (ii) financial issues were raised by the UK Government expert at each meeting; what recommendations the Committee produced during that period; what actions were (A) proposed and (B) taken by (1) the EU and (2) the UK Government as a result of the Committee's recommendations; and if she will make a statement. [194345]

Mr. Bradshaw: I have been asked to reply.

The first committee referred to appears to relate to the European Commission's Interchange of Data between Administrations (IDA) programme, to which the Department has no direct input. This programme funds projects allowing Member State Governments to exchange data electronically in specified policy areas as required by European legislation and develops infrastructure to allow this. The Telematics between Administrations Committee (TAG) is the management committee for IDA. Advice for the TAG is prepared by the Working Group for Horizontal Actions and Measures, which meets on average six times each year and is not a decision-making body. The UK is represented by officials from the e-Government Unit, formerly the Office of the e-Envoy. As IDA is a Commission programme, the rotating Council Presidency bears no relevance to IDA work. Minutes are taken by the Commission's IDA unit within DG Enterprise. However, my Department has long been a key beneficiary of IDA projects and user of IDA services as EU member states are required to share information with each other relating to agricultural issues such as animal medicines and diseases.

The Standing Committee on Veterinary Medicinal Products for the Adaptation to Technical Progress on the Removal of Technical Barriers to Trade in the Veterinary Medicinal Products Sector is a regulatory committee and does not, therefore, make recommendations. It met three times during the Greek Presidency. Meetings were held in Brussels on 10 February 2003, 3 April 2003 and 9 April 2003 and were attended by officials from the Veterinary Medicines Directorate.

At the meeting on 10 February a proposed increase to the fees charged by the European Medicines Evaluation Agency for work related to European marketing authorisations was considered and approved. A Commission proposal to add entries to Annex III of Council Regulation (EEC) No. 2377/90, establishing maximum residue limits (MRLs) for three hormonal substances was considered. The UK argued that setting MRLs was not an appropriate way of controlling illicit use of the hormones but, in the circumstances, could accept the proposed entries for the synthetic hormones flugestone acetate and norgestomet as a one-off decision. However, the UK argued that it could not accept the proposed entry for progesterone as the proposal was not based on sound science and the proposed limit was below the level that could occur naturally. The Commission withdrew the proposal for progesterone. The proposals for flugestone acetate and norgestomet were approved and entries were subsequently added to Annex III to the Regulation.

The meeting of 3 April considered two proposed Commission Regulations intended to revoke and replace two Regulations setting out procedures for variations to marketing authorisations for veterinary medicinal products issued under the European centralised and decentralised authorisation procedures respectively. The UK argued for several textual amendments to the proposed Regulations, most of which were accepted. The Regulations, as modified, were approved by the Committee and were published in the *Official Journal* on 27 June 2003 as Commission Regulation (EC) No. 1084/2003 and No. 1085/2003. They took effect on 1 October 2003.

The meeting of 9 April considered a Commission proposal that member states should suspend all national marketing authorisations for veterinary medicinal products in the EU containing benzathine penicillin. This issue was triggered following suspension action by the UK because of safety concerns about residues of the substance at injection sites in food-producing animals. The UK supported the Commission proposal, which was approved by the Committee.

European Union (Economic Effect)

Hugh Bayley: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry how many jobs in *(a)* Yorkshire and the Humber and *(b)* York she estimates are dependent on exports to or investment from other EU states. [192429]

Mr. Alexander: Information is not held in the form requested. However, international trade in goods accounts for 20 per cent. of the Yorkshire and Humber region's GDP, representing £9.1 billion per annum.

There are approximately 164,000 businesses in the Yorkshire and Humber region, of which 8,000–10,000 are estimated to export goods and services.

Gas

Mr. Stephen O'Brien: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what the wholesale price of gas was in each month during the last two years. [196026]

Mr. Mike O'Brien: The majority of gas is traded under individual commercially confidential contracts. However, National Grid Transco (NGT) publishes System Average Price data, which is the price set by all NGT and shipper trades on the wholesale gas on-the-day commodity market (OCM) on a given day. Monthly averages for the last two years are recorded in the table. Individual contracts may reflect factors other than this spot price.

Monthly average of System Average Price (SAP) from November 2002 to October 2004

p/therm

	2002–03	*2003–04*
November	17.46	27.05
December	19.23	29.60
January	21.73	25.85
February	21.93	23.16
March	17.77	21.71
April	17.82	20.52
May	18.72	20.62
June	15.17	19.40
July	16.85	19.09
August	13.38	23.60
September	14.14	27.71
October	22.80	22.80

Mr. David Stewart: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what procedures are used to assess the risk of terrorist attack to the *(a)* Bacton to Zeebrugge and *(b)* St Fergus to Frigg gas interconnectors. [195067]

Mr. Mike O'Brien: The assessment of the threat posed by terrorists to the UK is kept under constant review by her Majesty's Government. The review applies to the whole of the critical national infrastructure. The security of gas interconnectors and other pipelines is a key part of that work. It would not be appropriate for me to comment in further detail.

Internet Access

Mr. Tynan: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what assessment she has made of changes in UK productivity as a result of increased *(a)* dial-up and *(b)* broadband internet access. [197600]

Mr. Mike O'Brien: The economic impact of increased internet access is difficult to separate from the impact of adoption of the full range of information and communication technologies (ICT). Indeed, there is a consensus both that the use of ICT has been and will continue to be a major contributor to productivity growth, and that its full value is realised by using a mix of the technologies to transform the way that organisations perform their business.

An assessment of the increase in business productivity associated with increased use of a range of ICTs was published in DTI Economics Paper No. 8: "Raising UK productivity—developing the evidence base for policy". This found that in 1995–2000 the growth in labour productivity in ICT-using industries was 3.72 per cent. p.a. compared with 0.20 per cent. p.a. for non-ICT industries. This study also showed that, based on results of DTI s "International Benchmarking Study: Business in the Information Age" and controlling for other variables, the average sales per employee was significantly and positively related to the intensity of use of connectivity technologies (including internet access).

The most recent International Benchmarking Study (2004) found that businesses that have upgraded their internet connection over the last two years reported a range of benefits. These included time savings through faster connection (79 per cent.), improved real time communication (17 per cent.), ability to use more applications (9 per cent.) and increased reliability (9 per cent.).

These results are consistent with a range of research and surveys conducted by other organisations over the past few years. For example, the recent survey by the Institute of Directors ("Broadband: its impact on British Business") found that 84.3 per cent. of respondents who used broadband saw a quantifiable increase in productivity and about two thirds felt able to predict an increase in profit.

Job Creation (Lancashire)

Geraldine Smith: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry how many jobs have been created by the *(a)* Heysham Business Park, *(b)* Mellishaw North and *(c)* Luneside West developments; how many jobs have been created by each development to be taken up by residents of communities in need; and what the estimated cost per job created by each development is. [192936]

Jacqui Smith: Heysham Business Park, Mellishaw North and Luneside West are sites with development potential located within the Lancaster and Morecambe economic development zone. Lancaster city council has encouraged the private sector site owners of each site to come forward with the appropriate development proposals that will lead to job creation. To date no suitable proposals have emerged and consequently there has been no recent job creation on these sites.

The NWDA have maintained a regular dialogue with the site owners regarding the development of the sites. These discussions will continue, but much will hinge on the support of the private sector owners.

Until such time as a development proposal crystallizes and the public sector contribution (if any) is identified and compared to the anticipated job creation for that proposal it is not possible to estimate costs per job.

All sites identified are privately owned. With regards to Heysham Business Park, the NWDA, contacted the site owners about selling the site but this was not feasible. The owners of Luneside West are currently seeking to develop a planning application for housing which is not support by the NWDA. The owners of Mellingshaw North have expressed a wish to develop the site for alternate uses.

The NWDA will continue to discuss the development of these sites with the owners. However the final decision will firmly lie with private sector owners.

Loan Debts

Mr. Allen: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what assessment the Government has made of the judgment at Liverpool county court in the case of Meadows *v.* London North Securities; and if she will make a statement. [195771]

Mr. Sutcliffe: As the hon. Member is aware I am unable to intervene in individual cases such as this, which must be resolved by agreement between the parties or by recourse to the courts.

We have been paying close attention to this case and I have written to John Vickers, Chair of the Office of Fair Trading, alerting him to the complaints made to me about this lender by a number of hon. Members.

In order to ensure that in the future consumers are not faced with this situation we will be introducing the Consumer Credit Bill, once Parliamentary time permits. The Bill would widen consumer protections by replacing the current extortionate credit test with one of unfairness and introducing a compulsory Alternative Dispute Resolution scheme.

Mr. Allen: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what steps her Department has taken since 1997 to restrict unscrupulous lending. [195773]

Mr. Sutcliffe: Under Section 21 of the Consumer Credit Act 1974, a license is required to conduct consumer credit business or consumer hire business. To get a licence, applicants must satisfy the Office of Fair Trading (OFT) that they are fit persons to carry on licensed activities. If a licensee does not continue to act in a fit manner, OFT can revoke the licence.

A 2001 Labour manifesto commitment to 'toughen the laws on rogue traders, unfair terms in contracts, and loan sharks', prompted the Department of Trade and Industry to launch a full scale review of the Consumer Credit Act.

Following an extensive period of consultation with stakeholders—business, consumer groups and enforcement agencies, the Government produced a White Paper outlining proposals for reform.

I laid four Statutory Instruments in June 2003, aimed at increasing transparency in the credit sector, enabling empowered consumers to make informed lending decisions.

Manufacturing

Mr. Jim Cunningham: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry how much *(a)* was spent on business support by her Department in the most recent year for which figures are available, *(b)* spent on manufacturing support by her Department in the most recent year for which figures are available and *(c)* invested by the Government in manufacturing since 1997. [192570]

Jacqui Smith *[holding answer 21 October 2004]*: The information requested is as follows:

(a) The DTI spent approximately £0.5 billion on business support programmes in the year ending April 2004.

(b) In addition to amount spent on business support, detailed above, the Department supports business through a number of different mechanisms such as regional selective assistance and initiatives on, for example, innovation, technology and best practice, for example SR 2004 allocated £320 million to the Technology Strategy. Whilst we will have aggregate data for each, collating how much was spent on manufacturing in total could be provided only at a disproportionate cost not least because of the complexity of the SIC codes.

(c) RSA grants worth £2.2 billion were offered in the period April 1997 to April 2004, approximately 80 per cent. to manufacturing companies, securing £19.2 billion investment and safeguarding/creating 378,000 jobs. There are no figures available for the Government as a whole.

Palantype Reporting Machines

Mr. Hancock: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry if he will make it his policy to promote the continued manufacture of Palantype speech to text reporting machines; and if he will make a statement. [191146]

Mr. Mike O'Brien: The future of UK manufacturing depends on raising investment and applying science and innovation, best practice and skills to create even better products. In 2002 DTI published the Government's Manufacturing Strategy. In July this year we published "Competing in the Global Economy: The Manufacturing Strategy Two Years On"—an update on progress made against the key pillars that support manufacturing. We have provided strong macroeconomic stability; supported investment through changes to corporation tax, capital gains tax, Regional Selective Assistance, Small Firms Loan Guarantee Scheme and Regional Venture Capital Funds; launched the Manufacturing Advisory Service to ensure that manufacturers in every region have local access to practical advice from manufacturing experts; strengthened the UK's world class science base with the largest sustained increase in the Science Budget for over a decade, and enhanced knowledge transfer, so that manufacturers can capitalise upon the innovations it produces; implemented an innovation agenda extending the R&D tax credit to all companies, overwhelmingly benefiting manufacturers; put in place the Sector Skills Councils to lead the drive to significantly improved skills in industry, and strengthened the Modern Apprenticeship network; extended the Industry Forum best practice programme to new sectors—printing, process industries, general engineering, metals and food processing—increasing the reach of lean-manufacturing and world-class practices and set up Innovation and Growth Teams across key industries (including the automotive, aerospace, biosciences, and electronics sectors) to examine the factors affecting specific sectors, identify the challenges, and take action to respond to these challenges.

It is clearly Government policy to support manufacturing. Individual companies, however, must make decisions based on business criteria. It is not for the Government to determine that a particular product must be made here.

Post Office

Mr. Paterson: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry how much it cost to set up the Post Office Card Account scheme. [192574]

Mr. Sutcliffe: These are commercial matters for Post Office Ltd.

Mr. Sanders: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry how many post offices were recommended for closure under the reinvention programme in the South West region; how many were opposed by Postwatch; and for how many the recommendation for closure was dropped. [197511]

Mr. Sutcliffe: Implementation of the urban post office network reinvention programme is an operational matter for Post Office Ltd. I have therefore asked the Chief Executive to respond direct to the hon. Member.

Bob Spink: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry which Crown Post Offices in Essex have been selected for possible closure. [197634]

Mr. Sutcliffe: The Government has no such list. Decisions on individual Post Office closures and conversions are operational and commercial matters for Post Office Ltd.

Post Office Ltd has clarified in a letter of 3 November to all Members of Parliament that the company is working with the trade unions to develop proposals that will help address the significant losses generated by the network of directly d directly managed branches are expected to be closed in 2005/06 throughout the UK. The company will continue to seek to transfer operation of Directly Managed post offices to franchise partners where suitable opportunities arise, whilst ensuring that products and services for customers remain unchanged.

Royal Mail

Mr. Dismore: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry (1) what estimate she has made of the cost to businesses of adapting or purchasing new franking machines to cope with the proposals of the Royal Mail to move to size-based pricing; [197520]

(2) what plans she has to inform consumers of the likely impact of the move to size-based pricing proposed by the Royal Mail; [197521]

(3) what estimate she has made of the cost to Royal Mail business customers of adapting to size-based pricing; and if she will make a statement; [197523]

(4) if she will assess the compliance of the Royal Mail's proposals for size-based pricing with paragraph 13, condition 19 of the Royal Mail's licence, with particular reference to the requirement that any alteration in pricing avoids unreasonable changes for users of the service; and if she will make a statement; [197525]

(5) what discussions she has had with Royal Mail concerning its proposals for size-based pricing; and if she will make a statement; [197526]

(6) what representations she has received concerning the Royal Mail's proposal to move to size-based pricing; and if she will make a statement. [197528]

Mr. Sutcliffe: Royal Mail's application to introduce size-based pricing is currently being considered by the postal regulator, Postcomm. The progress made in considering the application and the assessment of the effect of size-based pricing are matters for Royal Mail and Postcomm.

Postcomm is considering the large number of responses they received to their consultation on Royal Mail's proposals. In view of the complexity of the issues involved and the significant implications for many Royal Mail customers, Postcomm and Royal Mail have agreed that more time is required to assess the size-based pricing proposal. Accordingly, the earliest implementation date, if the application is allowed to proceed, will be April 2006.

Postcomm will assess Royal Mail's proposals against the criteria in Paragraph 13 of Condition 19 of its licence, and take account of its regulatory duties under the Postal Services Act 2000, and Royal Mail's other licence requirements.

Wind Farms

Miss McIntosh: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what means will be used to connect wind farms constructed in North Yorkshire to the National Grid. [196747]

Mr. Mike O'Brien: Applications to connect wind farm projects to the grid are treated in exactly the same way as any other form of electricity generation. Wind farm developers make applications to connect to either their local distribution network operator or to the transmission network operator and offers are made dependent on sufficient capacity being available on the grid.

HOME DEPARTMENT

Voluntary Sector (Hartlepool)

11. **Iain Wright:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how much Government funding has been provided to the voluntary sector in Hartlepool since 1997; and if he will make a statement. [197739]

Fiona Mactaggart: Information on Government funding of individual organisations within a local authority is not held centrally.

The Home Office's report, on Central Government Funding to Voluntary and Community Organisations, 1982–83 to 2001–02, which is published on Wednesday 17 November, shows that from the most recent figures available, the North East Region received £111,593,938 in funding. This is equivalent to £44.30 per person.

Drug Dealing (Bassetlaw)

12. **John Mann:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many arrests for drug dealing offences were made in Bassetlaw in the last three years for which figures are available. [197740]

Caroline Flint: Details of the number of arrests for drug dealing in Bassetlaw are not available.

International Students (Visas)

13 **Alan Howarth:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what assessment he has made of the impact of increased visa extension charges on the number of applications by international students to study in the UK. [197741]

Mr. Browne: The Home Office has been conducting a review of charges for non-asylum immigration applications. We are currently consulting on new proposals to extend the principles of full cost recovery charging. The consultation document is available on the Home Office website and the deadline for responses is Wednesday 8 December 2004.

In addition, I have asked a joint project team—comprising representatives from the Department for Education and Skills, the Home Office and the British Council—to produce an impact assessment. Work is currently underway to improve the evidence base and our understanding of the factors which influence international students' decisions to study in the UK.

The outcome of the consultation and this work will be made available in the new year.

Knife Offences

14. **Syd Rapson:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what plans his Department has to undertake a review of the offence of carrying a knife without due cause. [197742]

Caroline Flint: The Crime Reduction Delivery Board has been tasked with undertaking a speedy review of action needed to tackle crime committed with knives. Legislative restrictions on knives and other pointed instruments forms part of that work. This will include the effectiveness of Section 139 of the Criminal Justice Act 1988 which creates an offence of possessing an article with blade or point in public without good reason or lawful authority, with the exception of a folding pocket-knife with a blade not exceeding three inches.

Crime Reduction

15. **Jeff Ennis:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what impact Local Police Teams are having on reducing crime. [197744]

Ms Blears: We are committed to implement a neighbourhood policing approach in all forces by 2008. In those areas where neighbourhood policing is already in place, such as Merseyside, Surrey and parts of London, the presence of local teams is having a positive impact on reported crime levels.

Immigration

16. **Mr. Luff:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will make a statement on co-ordination of activity between the immigration and nationality directorate and local police forces on effective enforcement of immigration law. [197745]

Mr. Browne: The relationship is governed by a joint protocol between the Immigration Service and the Association of Chief Police Officers. Currently there are 111 police officers across the country, funded by the Immigration Service, dedicated to supporting immigration enforcement operations.

While the Immigration Service are responsible for operational deployment, and the identification and removal of immigration offenders, the police retain primacy for maintaining and increasing the trust and confidence of local communities, including the right to veto operations if necessary.

Operational detail is discussed and agreed at a local level to reflect the particular requirements of individual police forces and the needs of local communities.

Road Accidents

17. **Kevin Brennan:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will bring forward proposals to create an offence of failing to identify the driver of a vehicle involved in a road traffic accident. [197746]

Caroline Flint: The Government have no plans to introduce an offence of failing to identify the driver of a vehicle in a road traffic accident.

The key to unlocking cases where persons refuse to identify who was driving is through effective evidence gathering at the scene.

Charging two or more people could lead to convicting an innocent person as well as a guilty one.

Prisoners (Suicide)

18. **Bob Russell:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many prisoners have committed suicide in the past 12 months; and how many were in safe cells. [197747]

Paul Goggins: In the 12 month period, 1 November 2003 to 31 October 2004, there were 107 apparently self-inflicted deaths of prisoners in English and Welsh prisons. Of these, one occurred in a safe cell.

Police Malpractice

19. **Mr. Roger Williams:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will make a statement on the Independent Police Complaint Commission's ability to *(a)* carry out and *(b)* oversee independent inquiries into complaints of police malpractice. [197748]

Ms Blears: I am very pleased with the start made by the Independent Police Complaint Commission which has launched 17 independent investigations since it became operational on 1 April 2004. I have every confidence in them and I am satisfied that their funding for the first year, which has enabled them to recruit 72 independent investigative staff, is at an appropriate level.

Children (Exploitation)

20. **Ross Cranston:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what steps he is taking to combat the trafficking and sexual exploitation of children within the UK; and if he will make a statement. [197749]

Paul Goggins: The Sexual Offences Act 2003, which came into force on 1 May, includes offences which criminalise trafficking into, within and out of the country for the purpose of sexual exploitation. The offences carry a maximum penalty of 14 years' imprisonment. The Act also introduces comprehensive offences covering the sexual exploitation of children.

These offences extend to England, Wales and Northern Ireland.

Prisoners (Skills Awards)

21. **Mr. Pike:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many work and basic skills awards have been made to prisoners in the last 12 months. [197750]

Paul Goggins: The number of skills awards made to prisoners for the period 1 October 2003 to 30 September 2004 were:

53,152 for basic skills

140,907 for work skills

Identity Parades

22. **Mr. Allan:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what assessment he has made of the impact of the VIPER system for identity parades on police efficiency. [197752]

Ms Blears: We have continuously monitored the impact of video identification since its inception.

I am pleased to report that it has been an outstanding success and video identification systems now exist in all police forces in England and Wales.

The average time to conduct a parade has fallen from four and a half weeks to a matter of hours. The number of video identification parades is continuing to increase and is already three times the 2001–02 figure for live parades. In 2001–02, figure for live parades.

An average live parade cost £540 compared with £100 for a VIPER parade. This equate to a saving of £18.48 million in 2004–05.

Terrorism

23. **Jeremy Corbyn:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many foreign nationals are detained on his order under anti-terrorist legislation. [197753]

Mr. Blunkett: Using Part IV of the Anti Terrorism Crime and Security Act 17 non British nationals have been certified as being a terrorist risk.

One of those is now being held under other powers; two have left the country; one has been judged, while having terrorist links, not to have associated with Al Qaeda so their appeal was upheld; one is being held under strict bail conditions; one has been released as no longer posing a serious threat; thus 12 remain in detention.

These powers have been used sparingly and remain necessary and proportionate to the threat that we face.

Parliament has always been kept informed by written ministerial statement where a certification has been made or revoked.

Adoption and Children Act

Sir Gerald Kaufman: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department when he intends to set a Government commencement date for those parts of the Adoption and Children Act 2002 which have not yet been brought into commencement, with special reference to section 112. [187980]

Paul Goggins: My right hon. Friend the Minister for Children, Young People and Families indicated in a written answer on 23 February 2004 that we planned to finalise the regulations, court rules and guidance required to implement the core of the Adoption and Children Act 2002 by the end of 2004 and expected the legislation to come fully into force in September 2005 after a period of preparation and training. Section 112 would be brought into force at the same time as the rest of the Act's main provisions.

During 2004 we have consulted extensively on a range of draft regulations, court rules and guidance. We are reviewing the consultation drafts and the implementation timetable in the light of the comments received. The proposed court rules will shortly be put before the new Family Procedure Rule Committee for consideration. We will announce the specific commencement date later this year when we have finalised our detailed plans for preparation and training on the Act.

Ammonium Nitrate

Patrick Mercer: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many thefts of ammonium nitrate were recorded *(a)* in the United Kingdom and *(b)* from farms in (i) 2003, (ii) 2002 and (iii) 2001. [172744]

Mr. Blunkett: In England and Wales, numbers of thefts of ammonium nitrate are not collected separately from other thefts.

Information relating to Scotland and Northern Ireland are matters for my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Scotland and my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland.

I refer the hon. Member to the statement made by my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs on 27 April 2004, *Official Report*, column 857W

Patrick Mercer: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many tonnes of ammonium nitrate fertiliser were recorded by the police as having been stolen from farms in *(a)* 2001, *(b)* 2002 and *(c)* 2003. [172746]

Mr. Blunkett: In England and Wales, numbers of thefts of ammonium nitrate are not collected separately from other thefts.

Information relating to Scotland and Northern Ireland are matters for my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Scotland and my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland.

I refer the hon. Member to the statement made by my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs on 27 April 2004, *Official Report*, column 857W

Anti-Terrorism, Crime and Security Act

David Taylor: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what procedures are in place to assess the mental health condition of people detained within the Prison Service under provisions of the Anti-terrorism, Crime and Security Act 2001. [193661]

Paul Goggins: Those detained under the Anti-terrorism, Crime and Security Act are currently held either at Belmarsh or Woodhill prisons.

All new arrivals receive a mental health assessment. Should this assessment give rise to any cause for concern, the prisoner is referred to mental health services. At any time, a prisoner may be referred to the prison mental health services. Any member of staff or the prisoner himself can make a referral.

ASBOs

Ross Cranston: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what representations he has received about the need for a full rehearing at circuit court level when an antisocial behaviour order is made in the magistrates court; and if he will make a statement. [197558]

Mr. Leslie: I have been asked to reply,

Under section 79(3) of the Supreme Court Act 1981 appeals against antisocial behaviour orders made in the magistrates court are by way of re-hearing in the Crown court. We have received no representations on this matter. My Department is however considering the implications of the Brent judgment.

Asylum and Immigration (Treatment of Claimants) Act

Mr. Gerrard: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many people have been prosecuted under section 35 of the Asylum and Immigration (Treatment of Claimants) Act 2004. [192790]

Mr. Browne: To date there have been no prosecutions under section 35 of the Asylum and Immigration (Treatment of Claimants) Act 2004, which came into force on 22 September 2004. This is because the offence is not committed until a person has first been required to take specific action under section 35, and then has failed to comply with that request without reasonable excuse. As a result, the time period is too short for any cases to have reached the prosecution stage.

Information on Prosecutions is published annually in "Criminal Statistics, England and Wales", copies of which are available from the Library of the House and on the Home Office Research Development and Statistics Directorate web site at http://www.homeoffice.gov.uk/rds.html.

Asylum Seekers

Mr. Rosindell: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what proportion of those who have been granted asylum in England and Wales received criminal convictions in 2003; and what proportion of the population of England and Wales received criminal convictions in 2003. [191271]

Mr. Browne: No data are available on the proportion of those granted asylum who have received a criminal conviction in 2003. However, under section 72 of the Nationality, Immigration and Asylum Act 2002 individuals who have committed a 'particularly serious crime' and pose 'a danger to the community' will lose their ability to rely on the Refugee Convention to remain in this country.

It is estimated that a maximum of 1 per cent. of the population of England and Wales (over the age of 10) received a criminal conviction in 2003 for a Standard List offence.

Tom Cox: To ask the Secretary of State for The Home Department how many asylum seekers are living in each borough in the greater London area. [191956]

Mr. Browne: Figures for asylum seekers (including dependants) supported in National Asylum Support Service (NASS) accommodation and those in receipt of subsistence only support from NASS in each local authority area in greater London as at the end of June 2004 are presented in the following tables. Corresponding figures for those not in receipt of NASS support are not available.

Numbers of asylum seekers placed in NASS accommodation and numbers who are in receipt of subsistence only support from NASS, are published on a quarterly and annual basis. The next publication covering the third quarter of 2004 (July to September) will be available on 16 November on the Home Office Research Development and Statistics Directorate web site at http://www.homeoffice.gov.uk/rds/immigration1.html.

Table showing asylum seekers in receipt of subsistence only support from NASS[1,2,3] *by local authority in greater London as at end of June 2004*

Greater London local authority[4]	*Total*
Barking and Dagenham	370
Barnet	575
Bexley	70
Brent	1,275
Bromley	70
Camden	385
Croydon	605
Ealing	1,205
Enfield	1,120
Greenwich	430
Hackney	945

Table showing asylum seekers in receipt of subsistence only support from NASS[1,2,3] by local authority in greater London as at end of June 2004

Greater London local authority[4]	*Total*
Hammersmith and Fulham	270
Haringey	1,675
Harrow	490
Havering	35
Hillingdon	430
Hounslow	570
Islington	555
Kensington and Chelsea	175
Kingston upon Thames	105
Lambeth	815
Lewisham	585
Merton	380
Newham	1,650
Redbridge	560
Richmond upon Thames	60
Southwark	760
Sutton	100
Tower Hamlets	270
Waltham Forest	900
Wandsworth	565
Westminster	305
Other	—
Total	18,295

[1] Figures have been rounded to the nearest 5 and are provisional.

[2] Excludes cases where support has been ceased by the National Asylum Support Service.

[3] Asylum seekers receiving subsistence only support from the National Asylum Support Service. These asylum seekers live in their own accommodation.

[4] Local authorities with fewer than 20 cases are grouped by region as "other".

Table showing asylum seekers supported in NASS accommodation[1,2,3] by local authority in greater London as at end of June 2004

Greater London local authority[4]	*Dispersed*	*Disbenifited*[5]	*Total*
Barking and Dagenham	5	15	20
Barnet	20	50	70
Bexley	—	5	5
Brent	—	45	45
Bromley	—	10	10
Camden	15	20	35
Croydon	—	80	80
Ealing	—	75	75
Enfield	140	115	255
Greenwich	—	25	25
Hackney	45	65	115
Hammersmith and Fulham	—	75	75
Haringey	310	160	470
Harrow	—	50	50
Havering	—	5	5
Hillingdon	—	15	15
Hounslow	—	15	15
Islington	40	80	120
Kensington and Chelsea	—	5	5
Kingston upon Thames	—	10	10
Lambeth	—	45	45
Lewisham	—	55	55
Merton	—	15	15
Newham	30	115	145
Redbridge	10	45	55
Richmond upon Thames	—	5	5
Southwark	—	50	50
Sutton	—	5	5
Tower Hamlets	—	15	15
Waltham Forest	45	75	120
Wandsworth	—	10	10
Westminster	—	20	20
Total	660	1,375	2,035

[1] Figures have been rounded to nearest 5, with '*' = 1 or 2, and are provisional.

[2] Asylum seekers that have been allocated NASS accommodation and have been confirmed as having arrived in that accommodation.

[3] Excludes cases where support has been ceased by the National Asylum Support Service.

[4] Only those local authorities where NASS dispersed or disbenefitted cases are resident are shown.

[5] Disbenefited cases are cases which were previously supported under the main UK benefits system and have been moved onto NASS support. Some of these cases have remained in the original social services accommodation.

Tom Cox: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department from which European countries asylum seekers entering the UK during the last 12 months originated. [193160]

Mr. Browne: Information on the date of entry into the UK, travel route, or the country of origin of asylum seekers is not available. Some applicants may travel clandestinely. The information available relates to numbers of applications made during the last 12 months and the nationalities of these applicants, and is given in the table.

Applications[1] received for asylum in the United Kingdom, excluding dependants, by nationality[2]

	Quarter				
Nationality	*Q3 2003*	*Q4 2003*	*Q1 2004*	*Q2 2004*	*Total (July 2003-June 2004)*
Europe					
Albania	130	105	115	60	410
Czech Republic	25	10	15	*	50
Macedonia	10	5	10	0	25
Moldova	70	50	55	45	215
Poland	10	25	15	5	50
Romania	120	90	75	55	345
Russia	60	80	50	55	245
SAM[3]	180	115	85	80	460
Turkey	530	635	460	255	1,875
Ukraine	90	40	40	25	200
Other Former USSR	170	140	120	90	520
Other Former Yugo.	5	5	5	10	25
Europe other	15	30	10	5	60
Europe total[7]	1,415	1,330	1,055	685	4,485

[1] Figures have been rounded to the nearest five with * = one or two.

[2] Provisional figures.

[3] Serbia and Montenegro (SAM) replaced Federal Republic of Yugoslavia (FRY) from 5 February 2003. SAM comprises the Republic of Serbia, the Republic of Montenegro, and the Province of Kosovo (administered by the UN on an interim basis since 1999).

Information on asylum applications by nationality is published in quarterly web pages and in the annual statistical bulletin "Asylum Statistics United Kingdom", copies of which are available from the Library of the House and from the Home Office Research Development and Statistics Directorate website at http://www.homeoffice.gov.uk/rds/immigration1.html.

Mr. Malins: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what the *(a)* starting salary for and *(b)* period of training given to Home Office initial decision makers in asylum applications are. [193262]

Mr. Browne: Initial decision makers of asylum applications in Croydon generally receive a starting salary of £18,011 plus £1,470 London Location Allowance (£19,481).

Initial training for asylum caseworkers consists of an 11 day training course which covers all aspects of asylum casework and how to deal with human rights allegations raised by asylum seekers. Immediately following this training, caseworkers move directly to a Mentoring Unit where they remain for at least another 11 days to develop their casework skills through the consideration of 'dummy' and subsequently 'live' cases.

After formal training and mentoring, caseworkers will continue to receive support (eg from more experienced colleagues and senior officers).

Badgers

Adam Price: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what records he has of the number of incidents of mistreatment of badgers in England and Wales for each of the last 10 years. [193729]

Ms Blears: No records are collected centrally on the number of incidents of mistreatment of badgers.

Belmarsh Prison

Helen Jackson: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what arrangements are in place to monitor the mental health of prisoners held at Belmarsh Prison under anti-terrorism legislation; and on what dates he has received reports in the past two years. [193178]

Paul Goggins *[holding answer 27 October 2004]:* All prisoners arriving at Belmarsh prison, for whatever reason, receive a mental health assessment. Should this assessment give rise to any cause for concern, the prisoner is referred to mental health services. At any time while at Belmarsh, a prisoner may be referred to mental health services. Any member of staff or the prisoner himself can make a referral.

Mental health services were reviewed as part of the Commission for Health Improvement programme in February 2003.

The deputy director general recently commissioned the Department of Health to review the health care systems (including mental health) available to the detainees at Belmarsh prison. A team of independent health professionals undertook the review and concluded that the health care services available to the detainees were satisfactory and equitable to those available to other prisoners.

Mental health services are provided at Belmarsh by Oxleas NHS trust. These services have been awarded Beacon status as recognition of excellence.

Helen Jackson: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will accede to the requests of prisoners being held at Belmarsh under anti-terrorism legislation for closer contact with their families. [193179]

Paul Goggins *[holding answer 27 October 2004]:* Detainees held under the Anti-terrorism, Crime and Security Act 2001, in common with other persons held at Belmarsh prison, are able to receive regular visits from their families and friends, in addition to being able to contact them by telephone and through correspondence. While any request received for additional contact will always be considered, this has to be in the context of the operational requirements of the prison and prison rules. All those detained under part 4 of the ATCSA 2001 are free to leave the UK at any time.

Helen Jackson: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what recent representations he has received about the mental health of prisoners at Belmarsh Prison under anti-terrorism legislation; and if he will meet the medical advisers appointed by their solicitor. [193180]

Paul Goggins *[holding answer 27 October 2004]:* None. All prisoners at Belmarsh, including those detained under anti-terrorism legislation, have access to a full range of mental health facilities. Any concerns raised about the mental health of a particular person at Belmarsh should be directed to the health care staff, who will then be able to consider the matter and take appropriate action as necessary.

Bogus Colleges

Mr. Malins: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many reports of bogus colleges have been made to him in the last 24 months; and how many such colleges have been closed. [193250]

Mr. Browne: Details of the number of bogus colleges reported, or the number closed, are not currently collated centrally. The DfES Register of Educational Establishments will be launched in January 2005. Immigration and Nationality Directorate officials have visited over 1,150 establishments of concern so far this year, of which about a quarter have been found to be bogus. All applications for leave to enter or remain as a student are checked against this information, and applications relating to colleges known to be bogus are refused.

Category A Prisoners

Mr. Gordon Prentice: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many category *(a)* A, *(b)* B and *(c)* C prisoners there were in England (i) in 1990, (ii) in 1995, (iii) in 2000 and (iv) at the latest date for which figures are available. [196462]

Paul Goggins: Information on the number of Category A, B and C prisoners, as recorded on the central prison IT system, is provided in the table. Information is not available for 1990 or 1995.

Population of category A, B and C prisoners at prison establishments in England

	Category A[1]	*Category B*	*Category C*
30 June 2000	925	7,700	26,100
30 September 2004	903	8,000	32,000

[1] Figures for category A prisoners have been supplied by NOMS colleagues, and comprise all prisoners with a category A classification, including those on remand or awaiting extradition. The 2004 figure is for 1 October

Child Pornography

Tom Cox: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many convictions for the *(a)* production and *(b)* distribution of child pornography there have been during the last 12 months. [195378]

Paul Goggins: Prosecutions for producing or distributing pornography are not directly identifiable on the Home Office Court Proceedings database. Prosecutions for distribution, possessing with a view to distribution, taking or making indecent photographs or pseudo-photographs of children under the Protection of Children Act 1978 are recorded together in the Court Statistics. Simple possession is an offence under the Criminal Justice Act 1988, and possessing obscene material for gain is an offence under the Obscene Publications Act 1959.

The available information relating to England and Wales in 2002 is shown in the table. Statistics for 2003 will be available later in November.

The number of defendants prosecuted at the magistrates court and convicted at all courts for offences relating to child pornography England and Wales 2002[1]

Offence	*Statute*	*Total prosecuted*	*Total convicted*
Possessing obscene material for gain	Obscene Publications Act 1959 S. 2 as amended by the Obscene Publications Act, 1964 Sec. 1	52	42
Taking or making indecent photographs, or pseudo-photographs, of children	Protection of Children Act 1978 Sections 1, 6 as amended by the Criminal Justice and Public Order Act 1994 Sec. 84	582	434
Possession of an indecent photograph, or pseudo-photograph, of a child	Criminal Justice Act 1988 Sec. 160 as amended by the Criminal Justice and Court Services Act 2000[1]	117	75

[1] These data are on the principal offence basis

Children (Court Appearances)

Mrs. Curtis-Thomas: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what special measures are available to support children who give evidence in court. [196636]

Paul Goggins: Witnesses aged under 17 at the time of hearing ("child witnesses") are eligible for special measures assistance to give their best evidence under the provisions of the Youth Justice and Criminal Evidence Act 1999.

A primary rule in the Act provides that child witnesses in certain categories of offence, including violence and sexual offences, ("child witnesses in need of special protection") are entitled to have a video recording admitted as their evidence in chief and otherwise to give their evidence via a live link unless the court decides that this would be against the interests of justice. For child witnesses in cases not involving one of these types of offence there is a presumption that these measures will be provided unless the court is satisfied that they would not maximise the quality of their evidence.

The introduction of special measures is being phased to enable evaluation of how they are working and to provide time for agencies to prepare for full implementation. The range of special measures which are currently available to child witnesses in criminal proceedings across England and Wales is summarised as follows:

Screens—to ensure that the witness does not see the defendant—available to child witnesses in the Crown Court and magistrates' courts.

Live link—allowing a witness to give evidence from outside the courtroom—available to child witnesses in the Crown Court and to child witnesses in need of special protection in magistrates' courts.

Evidence in private—clearing the court of most people (legal representatives and certain others must be allowed to stay)—available to child witnesses in the Crown Court and magistrates' courts

Removal of wigs and gowns—by judges, advocates etc—available to child witnesses in the Crown Court (not applicable to magistrates' courts).

Video recorded evidence in chief—allowing an interview with the witness, which has been video recorded before the trial, to be shown as the witness's evidence in chief—available to child witnesses in the Crown Court and child witnesses in need of special protection in magistrates' courts.

Intermediaries—allowing an approved intermediary to help a witness communicate with the police, legal representatives and the court—available to child witnesses in Crown Court and magistrates' courts in pilot areas, currently Merseyside, Thames Valley and West Midlands.

Aids to communication—allowing a witness to use communication aids such as a symbol book or alphabet boards—available to child witnesses in the Crown Court and magistrates' courts.

Mrs. Curtis-Thomas: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many and what percentage of children were offered the choice of giving evidence outside court in each year since 1997; and how many and what percentage accepted this offer. [196637]

The Solicitor-General: I have been asked to reply on behalf of the Secretary of State for the Home Department.

A Home Office Research study "Are special measures working? " published in June 2004 found that the offer of live link away from the courtroom for children had almost doubled since implementation of the section from 43 per cent. to 83 per cent. in 2004. It would therefore only be in exceptional circumstances or where the statutory criteria was not met that a child would give their evidence in a courtroom.

In July 2004, Baroness Scotland announced a review of the way in which children's evidence is taken and presented in criminal courts with the aim of enabling measures to be more tailored to the individual witnesses' needs. A multi agency steering group led by the Home Office is taking this forward.

Mrs. Curtis-Thomas: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many intermediaries whose job is to rephrase the court's questions to child-friendly language are employed within the criminal justice system. [196638]

Paul Goggins: The function of an intermediary in criminal proceedings is defined by section 29 of the Youth Justice and Criminal Evidence Act 1999.

The use of intermediaries is currently being piloted to identify best practice in advance of full implementation. An Intermediary Register of trained experts has been established for the pilot. The Register currently contains details of 25 individuals whose area of expertise is mainly or wholly with children. An exercise to increase the number of registered intermediaries will be completed shortly.

Corporate Manslaughter Bill

Annabelle Ewing: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department whether the draft Bill on corporate manslaughter will extend to Scotland. [196393]

Paul Goggins *[holding answer 8 November 2004]*: The Government are currently developing proposals for reforming the law on corporate manslaughter and intend to publish a draft Bill this autumn. We are in close contact with counterparts in Scotland about this, where criminal law is a devolved matter.

Correspondence

Sir Gerald Kaufman: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department when he will reply to the letter to him dated 13 September from the right hon. Member for Manchester, Gorton, with regard to Alphonse Ngolo. [192040]

Mr. Blunkett: I wrote to my right hon. Friend on 13 October 2004.

Sir Gerald Kaufman: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department when he will answer the letter to him dated 14 September from the right hon. Member for Manchester, Gorton, with regard to Mr. Kevin Andre Dunn. [193940]

Mr. Blunkett: I replied to my right hon. Friend on 21 October 2004.

Sir Gerald Kaufman: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department (1) when he will reply to the letter to him dated 14 September from the right hon. Member for Manchester, Gorton with regard to Hanif Attiya; [197213]

(2) when he will reply to the letter to him dated 22 September from the right hon. Member for Manchester, Gorton with regard to Mrs. R. Faiz. [197214]

Mr. Blunkett: I wrote to my right hon. Friend on 4 November, 2004.

Countryside Alliance (Demonstration)

Mr. Robathan: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many complaints were received by the Independent Police Complaints Commission following the Countryside Alliance demonstration in Parliament Square on 15 September; and how many of these complaints were related to police violence. [196010]

Ms Blears: The Independent Police Complaints Commission (IPCC) informs me that, as of 3 November, there were 402 complaints or issues of concern raised by individuals. The investigation has not concluded and at this stage it is not possible to give a specific breakdown regarding the total number that relate to police violence. However, 45 of the complaints are from individuals alleging assault upon them personally. The IPCC will be releasing further figures as they become available.

Crime/Sentencing Statistics

Hugh Bayley: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what assessment he has made of the effectiveness of drug treatment and testing orders in reducing re-offending in York. [191245]

Paul Goggins: There has been no independently evaluated assessment of the effectiveness of drug treatment and testing orders (DTTOs) in reducing re-offending in either York or North Yorkshire since the order was made available to courts in England and Wales in October 2000.

David Davis: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many people were bailed before trial in each year since 1995, broken down by *(a)* gender, *(b)* age and *(c)* type of offence. [190888]

Paul Goggins: The following table gives information relating to the number of people who were bailed before trial by *(a)* magistrates' courts and *(b)* the Crown court in England and Wales. The figures include estimates for missing data.

Due to the poor quality of the data we receive we are not able to provide figures for the number of people bailed before trial broken down by gender or age.

Persons remanded on bail at magistrates courts or the Crown court, 1995–2002. England and Wales

Thousands of persons

	1995	*1996*	*1997*	*1998*	*1999*	*2000*	*2001*	*2002*
Magistrates court:								
ndictable	349.1	277.8	319.5	335.1	320.3	337.1	334.0	325.6
Summary (other than motoring)	86.4	96.6	114.4	145.2	125.0	112.2	127.8	125.6
Summary motoring	92.9	84.4	101.1	99.6	93.0	78.2	81.4	81.1
Total	528.4	458.8	535.0	579.9	538.3	527.5	543.2	532.3
Crown court:								
Indictable	n/a	61.3	64.4	58.1	53.4	53.4	53.3	51.2
Summary (other than motoring)	n/a	1.6	1.7	1.8	1.6	1.7	1.8	1.7
Summary motoring	n/a	0.5	0.4	0.4	0.4	0.4	0.4	0.4
All courts:								
Total	n/a	63.4	66.5	60.3	55.4	55.5	55.5	53.2
Indictable	n/a	339.1	383.9	393.2	373.7	390.5	387.3	376.8
Summary (other than motoring)	n/a	98.2	116.1	147.0	126.6	113.9	129.6	127.3
Summary motoring	n/a	84.9	101.5	100.0	93.4	78.6	81.8	81.5
Total	n/a	522.2	601.5	640.2	593.7	583.0	598.7	585.5

n/a = data not available

Note:

Figures include those also held in custody at some stage.

David Davis: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what the average sentence length for people found guilty in each key offence area, as identified by Crime in England and Wales 2003–04, was in each year since 1997. [190939]

Paul Goggins: Information relating to the average custodial sentence length imposed on persons sentenced for the key offences is published as part of 'Crime in England and Wales, 2003–04'. A copy is held in the Library.

Criminal Cases Review Commission

Mrs. Curtis-Thomas: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what links the Criminal Cases Review Commission has with other agencies; and how it uses these links to commission work which provides an understanding of the issues involved in historical sex abuse cases. [191291]

Paul Goggins: The Criminal Cases Review Commission has many links with other agencies in the criminal justice system because of the need to access information from public bodies under s17 of the Criminal Appeal Act 1995. It has not used any of these links within the criminal justice system to commission work on the issues involved in historical sex abuse cases. The Commission's working group on Child Sexual Abuse Cases did, however, request a report from a leading psychologist to identify research, good practice and guidance on the application of scientific methodology to the investigation of contemporary and historical allegations of abuse. This provided a helpful wider overview of the topic.

Mrs. Curtis-Thomas: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department on how many occasions the Criminal Cases Review Commission has commissioned research on historical sex abuse cases from other agencies. [191292]

Paul Goggins: The Commission has not commissioned any research on historical sex abuse cases from other agencies.

Criminal Justice Act

Mr. Allen: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department when he plans to bring into force section 174 of the Criminal Justice Act 2003 requiring judges to give reasons for, and explains the effect of, sentences in ordinary language; and if he will make a statement. [193932]

Paul Goggins: Subsection (4) of section 174, which provides an order making power for the Secretary of State to disapply the need to give reasons in some cases, such as where a defendant is absent, was commenced on 1 April 2004. We expect to bring the remainder of the section into force in the first half of 2005.

Custody Plus/Minus

Mrs. Gillan: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department who will manage the introduction of Custody Plus and Minus under the reorganisation of the Prison and probation services. [180971]

Paul Goggins: Implementation of the Custody Plus Order, the Suspended Sentence Order (Custody Minus) and the other sentencing provisions in the Criminal Justice Act 2003 is being managed within the Home Office by the Sentence Implementation Programme. Mr. Stephen Murphy, the director general of the National Probation Service, is the senior responsible officer for the programme, reporting to Mr. Martin Narey, the chief executive of the National Offender Management Service.

Ross Cranston: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department when *(a)* Custody Plus and *(b)* Custody Minus will be implemented; and how many additional (i) probation and (ii) prison staff will be recruited to administer it. [168465]

Paul Goggins: The Suspended Sentence Order (Custody Minus) will be implemented next year. We currently plan to implement the Custody Plus Order in 2006. The Prison Service does not require additional staff to implement these sentences.

Between 2001 and 2004 the number of probation staff increased by 21.2 per cent. Further increases will provide a total of 22,400 staff by 2005–06. This will be sufficient to deliver the Suspended Sentence Order and the other provisions in the 2003 Criminal Justice Act that will be implemented at the same time.

Cyber Crime

Mr. David Stewart: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many cyber criminals have been prosecuted in the past five years; and if he will make a statement. [198061]

Paul Goggins: The available information, taken from the Home Office Court Proceedings Database, relates to England and Wales for the years 1998 to 2002 and is shown in the table. It covers defendants proceeded against under the Computer Misuse Act 1990.

It is not possible, from the data held centrally, to identify any other offences that may be connected with internet or computer crime, because the circumstances of any such offences are not collected.

Statistics on court proceedings for 2003 will be published on the 18 November.

Number of defendants proceeded against at the magistrates courts for offences under the Computer Misuse Act 1990, England and Wales 1998 to 2002[1]

Offence description	*Statute*	*1998*	*1999*	*2000*	*2001*	*2002*
Unauthorised access to computer material	Computer Misuse Act 1990, Sec.1	6	6	8	9	4
Unauthorised access with intent to commit or facilitate commission of further offences	Computer Misuse Act 1990, Sec.2	6	3	3	4	6
Unauthorised modification of computer material	Computer Misuse Act 1990, Sec.3	4	4	8	12	8
Total		16	13	19	25	18

[1] These data are on the principal offence basis

Dalit People

Tom Brake: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department whether his Department recognises British South Asians who have their roots in the Dalit caste as an ethnic minority in their own right. [192594]

Fiona Mactaggart: The Race Relations Act 1976 prohibits discrimination on the grounds of colour, race, nationality national or ethnic origins in specified fields. It is for the courts, not the Government, to decide whether any particular group meets these criteria. We are not aware of any case law which would establish whether or not Dalits are an ethnic group within the meaning of the Race Relations Act.

Dangerous Offenders

Ms Stuart: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what steps he is taking to ensure that hon. Members receive notification of a release of a dangerous offender before the release takes place. [192509]

Paul Goggins: Probation areas are required to notify the Public Protection and Courts Unit (PPCU) when dangerous offenders Critical Public Protection Cases (CPPC) are released into the community. When a release address of a CPPC is confirmed, the PPCU identify whether the local MP has indicated that they wish to be advised in confidence about the release of such a dangerous offender into their constituency. If so, I then write to the MP advising about the release with details of statutory supervision and licence conditions.

The purpose of this arrangement is to ensure the MP is aware of the arrangements to manage the offender's risk. It also enables the MP, if they wish, to make further inquiries of local police and probation services, as well as Ministers.

Departmental Database

Mrs. Curtis-Thomas: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what information is contained on his Department's court proceedings database. [191524]

Paul Goggins: The Home Office Court Proceedings database contains records of all defendants prosecuted for at least one criminal offence in the magistrates' courts or the Crown Court, England and Wales.

In each case, the defendant's gender and age are recorded along with some limited information on ethnicity. The database holds a record of each offence for which each individual is prosecuted, indicating the nature of the offence and the outcome of the prosecution. For those offenders found guilty details are recorded of the sentence(s) they have received as well as a measure of the length or value of each sentence. Information about where the case was dealt with, covering court name, type of court and police force area is available.

The database also contains fields covering remand status and, in Crown Court cases, the type of plea.

Aggregate data from the Court Proceedings database are published in the annual command paper "Criminal Statistics, England and Wales" along with four supplementary volumes. These give further breakdowns of the data in relation to offence, age, court, police force area and petty sessional area. The next editions of these publications covering the calendar year 2003 are due to be published in November.

Detection Rates

Mrs. Curtis-Thomas: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what measures the Department will take to improve detection rates; and what assessment has been made of the reasons for changes in detection rates. [194943]

Mr. Blunkett: The Home Office Police Standards Unit is working with Her Majesty's Inspectorate of Constabulary, the Association of Chief Police Officers, the Association of Police Authorities, the Office for

Criminal Justice Reform and the Prime Minister's Delivery Unit, on a programme of work to improve performance on sanction detections.

Several schemes to improve detection rates are being developed and disseminated. These include efficient use of forensic techniques, Automatic Number Plate Recognition and studies on initial response (call-handling), screening and attrition in volume crime investigations. The Police Standards Unit will also issue shortly national good practice guidance on enhancing sanction detections performance.

Those factors that have contributed to recent changes in the detection rate have been explored by the Home Office Research Development and Statistics (RDS) Directorate. A summary of these issues can be found in chapter 7 of the RDS publication "Crime in England and Wales 2003/2004" published in July 2004.

Drugs in Prisons

Tom Cox: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what steps have been taken to reduce the amount of illegal drugs in prisons in England and Wales. [193155]

Paul Goggins: A comprehensive framework of measures is in place to reduce the amount of illegal drugs in prisons. Passive drug dogs are used to detect traces of drugs on visitors, and other dogs are used actively to search for drugs within prisons, as part of a general drug search strategy. Closed circuit television systems are installed in all visits areas to monitor behaviour, and fixed and low-level furniture is used in visits areas to make it difficult to pass drugs undetected. Sanctions are taken against visitors suspected of smuggling drugs, including visit bans and closed visits. Where there is adequate evidence they are prosecuted. Prisons and police share intelligence about drug routes into prisons.

A random sample of prisoners (5 or 10 per cent. depending on prison capacity) each month is required to submit to a drug test, and a positive test result will lead to disciplinary proceedings. All establishments use and contribute to a Drug Supply Reduction Good Practice Guide and a monthly security bulletin, both of which share information on ways of protecting against drugs.

The Prison Service works with the Police Scientific Development Branch to strengthen physical and technical barriers, particularly in prisons, such as those in city centres, where public spaces are close to the perimeter walls. The Prison Service has a Professional Standards Unit to help to identify staff who may be involved in or at risk of corruption. It will provide relevant information to facilitate investigations.

Electronic Tagging

Mr. Oaten: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what the value is of each of the new contracts for the electronic monitoring of offenders awarded by his Department to *(a)* Securicor Justice Services Ltd and *(b)* Premier Monitoring Services Ltd; and what the basis is of the estimate of savings to the Home Office of around 35 per cent. arising from the new contracts. [193993]

Paul Goggins: The value of the electronic monitoring contracts, based on a contract life of five years and assuming substantial volume growth over that timeframe, is approximately £500 million (excluding VAT). The electronic monitoring service has been divided into five geographical areas with roughly equal volumes of business, so the contract value for each area is approximately £100 million (excluding VAT) over five years. Premier Monitoring Services Ltd has been awarded two areas, and Securicor Justice Services Ltd has been awarded three areas.

The charges under the new contracts were applied to the workload under the existing contracts for the Financial Year 2003/04. The result indicated a saving of about 35 per cent. on the actual amounts paid in that year under the existing contracts.

Fines

John McDonnell: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department in what percentage of cases where individuals were fined following a criminal conviction in England and Wales a means inquiry was commissioned in *(a)* 2002–03 and *(b)* 2003–04. [192728]

Paul Goggins *[holding answer 25 October 2004]:* Information on the number of means inquiries commissioned in England and Wales is not recorded centrally.

John McDonnell: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what plans he has to link the ability to pay to the size of fine imposed following a criminal conviction in England and Wales. [192729]

Paul Goggins *[holding answer 25 October 2004]:* I refer my hon. Friend to the reply I gave him on 7 June 2004, *Official Report*, column 178W.

Fireworks

Mr. Dismore: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what steps he is taking to ensure the police service enforces the new regulations on fireworks. [196344]

Ms Blears: We have a comprehensive and robust package in place to tackle the misuse of fireworks. The Fireworks Regulations 2004 came into force in August, and in October we extended the Penalty Notices for Disorder Scheme (PND) to include three new firework offences. The new PNDs allow police to punish offenders immediately by issuing on-the-spot fines and offer an additional disposal that has been widely welcomed by police forces across the country.

I was keen to ensure all relevant agencies were aware of the new arrangements. In early October I wrote to all chief constables to provide guidance ahead of the fireworks season and to ensure the new arrangements were made an integral part of their fireworks strategies. We have published a TOGETHER factsheet on the misuse of fireworks and this has been widely distributed to practitioners. DTI are also in regular contact with individual police forces and other enforcement agencies, such as Trading Standards, to provide advice on the Fireworks Regulations 2004. They expect to publish comprehensive guidance shortly.

Early indications show that the new powers are being used effectively to tackle the misuse of fireworks.

Gang Rapes

Mr. Pike: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department (1) what discussions he has had with the police and community groups over changes in the incidence of gang rapes; and if he will make a statement; [186385]

(2) what representations he has received on reported cases of gang rapes involving minors which have not resulted in convictions; and if he will make a statement; [186386]

(3) what discussions he has had on reported incidents of gang rapes involving minors where the case has not been brought to trial; and if he will make a statement; [186387]

(4) *(a)* what representations he has received and *(b)* what discussions he has had regarding suspected incidents of gang rapes involving minors where no official report has been made; and if he will make a statement. [186388]

Paul Goggins: Rape is a dreadful crime that deeply affects the lives of victims and their families, and which inspires fear in our communities. We are working to reduce the number of sexual offences occurring, to improve services to victims, and to increase confidence in the Criminal Justice System.

My right hon. Friend the Home Secretary has not received formal representations on this issue. However, officials have met with representatives from the Metropolitan Police Service to discuss group rape, and are considering how to take forward action in this area in the context of wider work on rape and sexual assault.

Recorded crime statistics do not include data on group rape. A self-completion questionnaire included in the 2001 British Crime Survey revealed that in six per cent. of serious sexual assaults suffered by women since the age of 16, more than one perpetrator was involved. Research to be published in the near future is expected to throw more light on the prevalence and nature of group rape.

The Crown Prosecution Service (CPS) does not have statistics on the number of reported cases of group rape involving minors that resulted in acquittals, or the number of cases that have not been brought to trial.

Since 2002 Her Majesty's Inspectorate of Constabulary (HMIC)/Her Majesty's Crown Prosecution Service Inspectorate (HMCPSI) inspection into the investigation and prosecution of cases involving allegations of rape, a great deal of work has been done to increase the number of cases both brought to trial and ending in conviction. On 30 June this year the CPS launched its public policy statement on rape which sets out what the CPS is doing to improve the way all rape cases are handled, including specialist rape prosecutors in all areas.

Furthermore, the Sexual Offences Act, which came into force in May this year, puts in place a number of measures to increase confidence in the prosecution of all rapes and sexual offences, including group rape. These include:

a new definition of 'consent';

the introduction of an objective element into the belief a defendant has in that consent; a set of circumstances in which it is presumed that the complainant did not consent unless it can be demonstrated otherwise, for example if the complainant was subject to violence; and

a new category of offence to deal with sexual assault of children under the age of 13.

The Government take all sexual crime extremely seriously and are committed to tackling all types of sexual assault and improving services to victims. Over this current and the next financial year, the Government will provide £4 million of proceeds of crime money for services to victims of sex offending.

Gun Crime

Mrs. Curtis-Thomas: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will make a statement on the operations which have been introduced in areas with high levels of gun crime. [197175]

Caroline Flint: The Government supports the work of dedicated, intelligence-led gun crime operations in police forces around the country: Operations Trident and Trafalgar (Metropolitan police), Operation Ventara (West Midlands), Operation Stealth (Nottinghamshire) and Operation Xcalibre (Greater Manchester). These operations are producing excellent results:

Operation Trident

Trident was set up in 1999 to investigate shootings and murders in the black community in London, and also carries out pro-active, intelligence-led operations. From April to end October 2004, the number of Trident gun crime incidents is reported to be down 21 per cent.

Trafalgar was set up in January 2004 to investigate non-fatal shootings in London's other communities (mainly Asian and Turkish) following concerns expressed by those communities and also by the Metropolitan Police Authority. From April, Trafalgar-related gun crime incidents are reported to be down 18 per cent.

Operation Ventara

Ventara has been running in its current form for three years with a strategic focus of community intelligence, enforcement and partnership working. From April to September 2004, gang-related shootings have been reduced by 50 per cent., compared to the same period in 2003.

Operation Stealth

Operation Stealth was launched in 2002 by Nottinghamshire police to tackle drug-fuelled gun crime. Similar to Operation Trident, it has an Independent Advisory Group that monitors and observes the activity of this police operation. Since it was set up there have been over 900 arrests and the seizure of almost 300 firearms.

Operation Xcalibre

Xcalibre was launched in July this year and is a centralised investigative, focused approach to GMP's attack on the criminal use of firearms. It responds to intelligence of firearms-related incidents by actively targeting known offenders by disrupting their daily lives and investigating all confirmed incidents. As a result, in the year to date from April, the number of recorded crimes where a firearm has been discharged has fallen by one third compared to the same period last year.

These operations have helped to contribute to the reduction in the number of fatal shootings which, according to figures published on 21 October, fell from 82 in the 12 months to June 2003, to 70 in the same period to June 2004.

HMP Littlehey

Mr. Djanogly: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what criteria were used to determine whether HMP Littlehey should be granted a local pay allowance. [195856]

Paul Goggins *[holding answer 4 November 2004]*: Local pay is determined following consideration of applications received from the establishment. The primary consideration is whether cost of living factors (predominantly housing and travel) provide an obstacle to the establishment being able to recruit and retain staff. It was determined by the Prison Service that Littlehay did not require the benefit of local pay to attract and retain staff at this particular time.

Inspectorates Merger

Mrs. Curtis-Thomas: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what assessment has been made of the possible merits of a merger between the inspectorates of constabulary, prisons and probation. [194908]

Paul Goggins: The Government will consult early in the new year on more coherent arrangements for the end to end inspection of the criminal justice system. There is recognition of the need for inspection to better reflect the way services are delivered and to ensure a user perspective is properly built into the process.

Juvenile Offenders

Mr. Dhanda: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many juveniles held in custody are receiving education and training. [191368]

Paul Goggins: The Youth Justice Board commission and purchase custodial places for juveniles. The numbers receiving education are not collected centrally. However the board do require establishments to provide education, training and personal development for all trainees and they monitor compliance under the relevant contracts and service level agreement.

Kashmir

Mr. Goodman: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what representations he has received concerning the identification of Kashmiris as a separate group from Pakistanis in publications, information and statistics issued by his Department; and if he will make a statement. [192626]

Fiona Mactaggart *[holding answer 19 October 2004]*: I wrote to the Kashmir National Identity Campaign on 24 May explaining that the Home Office follows Cabinet Office guidance and uses the Census categories for monitoring purposes and when using statistics in our publications. I advised them that the Office for National Statistics has responsibility for Census categories.

Licence Conditions (Non-compliance)

Mr. Stinchcombe: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many offenders have been returned to custody for non-compliance with licence conditions *(a)* in each of the last 24 months and *(b)* in each year since 1992. [190144]

Paul Goggins: The information requested is provided in the table.

Information on recall of Automatic Conditional Release and Non-Parole prisoners was not recorded centrally on the prison establishment IT system until 1999. Information on the reasons why life licensees have had their life licences revoked is only available from October 2002.

Offenders returned to custody on account of non-compliance with licence conditions, by type of licence England and Wales, 1992–2004

	Automatic conditional release	*Discretionary conditional release*		
		Paroled	*Not paroled*	*Life licence*
1992		983		
1993		773		
1994		300		
1995–96		205		
1996–97		233		
1997–98		190		
1998–99		233		
1999–2000	38	250	427	
2000–01	1,637	267	524	
2001–02	3,439	329	655	
2002–03	4,950	420	907	
2003–04	6,415	590	1,123	
September 2002	474	35	69	
October 2002	568	38	92	1
November 2002	443	39	83	1
December 2002	438	28	79	—
January 2003	544	37	95	1
February 2003	542	42	91	—
March 2003	556	45	85	2
April 2003	499	35	94	1
May 2003	562	41	91	—
June 2003	565	52	106	—
July 2003	598	53	97	2
August 2003	527	39	94	—
September 2003	500	51	74	1
October 2003	619	47	100	3
November 2003	487	53	82	5
December 2003	536	55	100	1
January 2004	612	61	91	1
February 2004	670	45	76	—
March 2004	627	58	118	1
April 2004	509	57	76	—
May 2004	518	56	73	—
June 2004	583	73	105	2
July 2004	578	73	90	1
August 2004	503	56	81	2

Literacy/Numeracy

Mr. Spring: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what steps his Department is taking to improve literacy and numeracy among offenders; and if he will make a statement. [196698]

Paul Goggins: Since April 2001 over 130,000 nationally accredited literacy, numeracy and English for Speakers of Other Languages (ESOL) qualifications from entry level to level 2 have been achieved by offenders in custody in England—a major contribution to the Government's targets for improving basic skills. We have appointed Heads of Learning and Skills in all prisons to drive up standards for improving literacy and numeracy.

We are working closely with key partners to develop a new model for delivering a better and more integrated service for offenders, both in prison and in the community. The new service will be informed by development work in the north east, north west and south west regions, which will try out new models. To support this we are providing substantial additional investment to improve the quality and quantity of offender learning.

Lockouts

Mr. Oaten: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department pursuant to his answer of 8 June 2004, *Official Report*, column 333W, what final figure for the cost of lockouts is in 2003–04, and what the *(a)* total cost and *(b)* number of lockouts was in each area in each of the last five years. [190060]

Paul Goggins: As explained in my answer of 8 June 2004, *Official Report*, column 333W, to question 172412, there were 791 lockouts in 2003–04.

The total expenditure on lockouts in 2003–04 was £188,353. This includes a proportion of lockout costs incurred in previous years.

Details of the number of lockouts and total costs for the financial years 1998–99 to 2002–03 are set out in the tables.

Total lockouts 2003–04

		1 April 2003	*1 May 2003*	*1 June 2003*	*1 July 2003*
Area 1	S. Wales and West	9	3	2	25
Area 2	South and South East	2	2	0	5
Area 3	Met.Police district	6	3	0	0
Area 4	East Anglia	42	21	13	23
Area 5	West Midlands and Mid Wales	0	0	1	5
Area 6	Merseyside and North Wales	15	7	19	12
Area 7	East Midlands and Humberside	24	20	28	51
Area 8	The North	13	13	20	30
Total		111	69	83	151

		1 August 2003	*1 September 2003*	*1 October 2003*	*1 November 2003*
Area 1	S. Wales and West	4	0	5	1
Area 2	South and South East	2	0	0	1
Area 3	Met.Police district	0	0	0	0
Area 4	East Anglia	4	6	4	1
Area 5	West Midlands and Mid Wales	0	6	0	0
Area 6	Merseyside and North Wales	1	6	5	3
Area 7	East Midlands and Humberside	9	17	3	3
Area 8	The North	5	10	8	11
Total		25	45	25	20

		1 December 2003	*1 January 2004*	*1 February 2004*	*1 March 2004*	*Total*
Area 1	S. Wales and West	0	0	0	2	51
Area 2	South and South East	0	0	0	0	12
Area 3	Met.Police district	0	1	0	0	10
Area 4	East Anglia	0	15	15	9	153
Area 5	West Midlands and Mid Wales	0	13	20	0	45
Area 6	Merseyside and North Wales	1	0	7	4	73
Area 7	East Midlands and Humberside	6	20	66	16	263
Area 8	The North	1	6	63	4	184
Total		8	55	171	35	791

Money Payment Supervision Orders

John McDonnell: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many money payment supervision orders were made in each of the last 10 years. [192727]

Paul Goggins *[holding answer 27 October 2004]:* The numbers of persons starting supervision by the probation service under a Money Payment Supervision Order in England and Wales are given in the table. The figures are for the last available 10 years.

	Number
1993	4,258
1994	3,928
1995	3,318
1996	6,447
1997	4,563
1998	3,016
1999	2,270
2000	1,689
2001	1,250
2002	1,322

Mountain Rescue Teams

Mr. Gordon Prentice: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many prosecutions have been brought against people who have assaulted members of a mountain rescue team sent out to rescue them in the last five years. [196872]

Paul Goggins: The information requested is not collected centrally.

Ms Maliheh Sadeghi Bourojerdi

Mr. Byers: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department on what grounds he is seeking to appeal against the determination of the Immigration Adjudicator promulgated on 17 September in the case of Ms Maliheh Sadeghi Bourojerdi; and if he will make a statement. [192684]

Mr. Browne *[holding answer 26 October 2004]*: A copy of the Immigration and Nationality Directorate's grounds of appeal to the Immigration Appeal Tribunal in this case were sent to my right hon. Friend on 19 October.

Multi-agency Public Protection Arrangements

Mr. Oaten: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many *(a)* police officers and *(b)* probation officers are employed in monitoring high-risk offenders under the multi-agency public protection arrangements; and how many are engaged (i) full-time and (ii) part-time in these duties. [143393]

Paul Goggins: The Criminal Justice Act 2003 strengthened and extended the statutory responsibilities of the police, probation and the prison service in each of the 42 areas of England and Wales in respect of multi-agency public protection operational demands of this work there is no centrally collated information that allows arrangements (MAPPA). While police and probation areas are responding to the us to determine precisely how many staff from each agency are currently deployed. Within the national probation service there are currently 4,770 trained probation officers able to supervise high-risk offenders, though it is not possible to establish how many are specifically engaged in this activity at any one time.

Murder Law Review

Mr. Savidge: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what plans he has to change the law on murder, with particular reference to the partial defence of provocation in domestic homicide. [195300]

Paul Goggins: My right hon. Friend the Home Secretary announced in a statement to the House on 28 October that the Government is setting up a review into the law on murder. This follows publication in August of the Law Commission report 'Partial Defences to Murder' (Law Com No 290) in which they identified the need for a fundamental review. Full terms of reference will be announced in due course.

Annabelle Ewing: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department whether the proposed review on the law of murder announced on 28 October will apply to Scots criminal law. [196248]

Paul Goggins *[holding answer 4 November 2004]*: Yes. The review will look at the law in England and Wales. The criminal law in Scotland is devolved. But we are, and will remain, in touch with the Scottish Executive to ensure they are fully aware of the review.

Murder/Manslaughter Charges

Mr. Dodds: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many people have been charged with *(a)* murder, *(b)* attempted murder and *(c)* manslaughter in England and Wales this year. [193566]

Paul Goggins *[holding answer 26 October 2004]*: Statistics on the number of defendants charged with an offence are not collected centrally.

However, the latest available information on the number of defendants[1] proceeded against at magistrates' courts, England and Wales, 2002 is:

Murder	713
Attempted murder	465
Manslaughter	112

Statistics for 2003 will be published in November.

National Offender Management Service

Mr. Drew: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what additional resources will be made available to the Probation Service in the event of its incorporation within the National Offender Management Service. [172841]

Paul Goggins: Under the National Offender Management Service, the allocation of additional resources to the Probation Service remains subject to the normal Spending Review and Home Office departmental planning round processes. My right hon. Friend the Home Secretary recently announced that the total number of probation staff would be increased by 1,800 over the next two years.

Mr. Gerrard: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department when he will convene job specific selection boards for the posts of *(a)* human resources director and *(b)* director of standards for the National Offender Management Service. [175829]

Paul Goggins: Both Director posts have been filled, in accordance with Civil Service procedures, by Home Office officials who are in the equivalent grade.

Mrs. Gillan: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many people will be employed by each regional offender manager during *(a)* 2004–05 and *(b)* 2005–06; and what the overall cost of those staff will be. [190118]

Paul Goggins: The number of staff to be employed by the Regional Offender Management Service (ROMS) have yet to be determined. Offender managers, currently employed by probation areas, will support the ROM for their region.

John McDonnell: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department when the business case on the creation of the National Offender Management Service will be published. [194741]

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[1] These data are on the principal offence basis.

Paul Goggins *[holding answer 8 November 2004]*: The draft detailed business case is currently being prepared and will be completed shortly.

John McDonnell: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department whether there has been a Gateway Zero Review in respect of the National Offender Management Service. [194742]

Paul Goggins *[holding answer 8 November 2004]*: The pre Gateway Review was carried out during the summer and the Office of Government Commerce have been asked to perform a "Gateway Review 0-Strategic Assessment". We are still considering the most appropriate timing for this.

John McDonnell: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many responses to the National Offender Management Service consultation documents issued in *(a)* January and *(b)* May favour the concept of contestability. [194743]

Paul Goggins *[holding answer 8 November 2004]*: There have been two formal written consultation documents issued on the National Offender Management Service (NOMS) since January 2004. Over 400 responses were received in total. These responses have given very strong support for the vision behind the establishment of NOMS—namely the bringing together of prisons and probation to enable more effective management of offenders.

Respondents were not asked to express their support or otherwise for contestability and indeed many did not do so. More detailed analysis of this issue is included in the Government's response, announced to Parliament on Tuesday 26 October.

John McDonnell: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what steps he will take to increase the *(a)* confidence and *(b)* morale of (i) Probation and (ii) Prison staff in the National Offender Management Service. [194744]

Paul Goggins *[holding answer 8 November 2004]*: The National Offender Management Board recognises the importance of engaging prison and probation staff in the introduction of the National Offender Management Service (NOMS). The Government's two consultation exercises on NOMS, the responses to which were announced to the House on 26 October, demonstrate a commitment to open and inclusive dialogue.

A Joint Consultative Council, to which all recognised prison and probation unions and staff associations have been invited, will provide a forum for consultation on NOMS-related issues affecting members of staff. The JCC will meet for the first time in November.

The NOMS Change Programme includes a Human Resources and Organisational Development Sub-Programme, specifically intended to create a sustainable organisation and culture at the heart of NOMS.

Paul Holmes: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department when job descriptions for Regional Offender Managers under the National Offender Management Service arrangements will be published; and if he will make a statement. [194776]

Paul Goggins: I set out the key roles to be undertaken by the Regional Offender Managers in my written ministerial statement of 20 July 2004. It is not current practise to publish individual job descriptions.

Paul Holmes: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department who will *(a)* be responsible for and *(b)* speak on behalf of the National Probation Service under the National Offender Management Service arrangements. [194777]

Paul Goggins: Martin Narey, Chief Executive of the National Offender Management Service, is responsible for the National Probation Service. Appropriate officials will speak on behalf of the National Probation Service depending on the issues involved.

Mrs. Curtis-Thomas: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department whether a business plan has been drawn up for the National Offender Management Service. [196703]

Paul Goggins: The case for the establishment of the National Offender Management Service is outlined in Patrick Carter's independent report "Managing Offenders—Reducing Crime" published along with the Government response "Reducing Crime—Changing Lives" on 6 January 2004. A draft business case is currently being prepared.

Mrs. Curtis-Thomas: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what mechanisms will be put in place to measure the effectiveness of the National Offender Management Service. [196706]

Paul Goggins: The main aim of the National Offender Management Service is to reduce re-offending. There is a rolling programme of research to evaluate the impact of individual programmes. In addition, specific targets are set for the individual services within the National Offender Management Service, for example on the rate of escapes from prisons and escorts. These are published in the services' Business Plans and progress against the targets is published in their Annual Reports.

John McDonnell: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department (1) what risk assessment has been carried out on the consequences of *(a)* workers from across the Home Office, Prison and Probation Services and *(b)* stakeholders, with particular reference to (i) unions and (ii) hon. Members not being fully engaged and committed to the implementation of the National Offender Management Service; and what the results were; [197170]

(2) what risk assessment has been carried out on *(a)* the possibility of staff numbers and competencies falling below acceptable levels in front line services in the National Offender Management Service, *(b)* the complexity and scale and scope of the overall change programme of the National Offender Management Service and *(c)* the possibility of a high profile incident or industrial action in the National Offender Management Service; and what the results were in each case. [197171]

Paul Goggins: As part of the process of setting up the National Offender Management Service (NOMS), a comprehensive risk management strategy has been established, providing for the assessment, monitoring and managing of risks across the Change Programme.

Risk assessments have been carried out in detail and at strategic level across the Programme. The results have been agreed with the NOMS directors and reported to the NOMS board and to other governance bodies within the Home Office. In keeping with normal practice across Government, it is not intended to publish the findings of these assessments.

The assessments cover all aspects of the Programme, including policy, implementation, people and process issues. The risk registers are continually updated as the Programme evolves and the risks change.

Mr. Jim Cunningham: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will make a statement on the role of the market in the work of the National Offender Management Service. [162831]

Paul Goggins *[holding answer 24 March 2004]*: The role of the market in the work of the National Offender Management Service is based on the principle that best quality and best value for money in the supervision, punishment and care of offenders will be achieved by ensuring that services are opened up through competition to all potential providers.

Mr. Drew: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department when the job description for regional offender mangers in the National Offender Management Service will be published. [198027]

Paul Goggins: I set out the key roles to be undertaken by the Regional Offender Managers in my written ministerial statement of 20 July 2004, *Official Report*, column 17WS. It is not current practice to publish individual job descriptions.

Alan Simpson: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what plans there are for the public sector prison service to become self financing under the new National Offender Management Service structure. [168835]

Paul Goggins: The public sector prison service is financed from funds voted by Parliament and delegated to the Director General by the chief executive of the National Offender Management Service. It also receives funds for education, health care and juvenile establishments from Department for Education and Skills (DfES), Department of Health (DoH) and the Youth Justice Board (YJB) respectively. Plans to introduce commissioning of places in public sector prisons are currently being developed as part of the Correctional Services reforms.

Mrs. Ann Cryer: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department who will be responsible for setting the categorisation of prison establishments under the National Offender Management Service. [168782]

Paul Goggins: The National Offender Management Service (NOMS) has responsibility for monitoring the size and composition of the prison population, and for planning to meet overall need. Security arrangements for the categorisation of prisoners are being managed within the Prison Service on behalf of NOMS.

Security related decisions about the use of prisons include input from operational and security staff, property managers, estate planners and the senior management of NOMS. If a significant change in the function of a prison is proposed the good practice described in the Prison Services' Agency framework is followed and ministers are advised.

Through the changes brought about by the implementation of the Criminal Justice Act 2003 and NOMS the focus on public safety and security will be maintained.

Non-custodial Sentences

Mrs. Curtis-Thomas: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what assessment has been made of the criteria used by magistrates and judges when deciding between a custodial or community penalty. [191684]

Paul Goggins: The current statute which bears on the use of custodial and community penalties by sentencers is the Powers of Criminal Courts Sentencing Act 2000. This states that any penalty must reflect the seriousness of the offence for which it is imposed and the personal circumstances of the offender.

To impose a custodial penalty, the offence must be so serious that only such a sentence can be justified; or where the offence is violent or sexual, that only such a sentence would be adequate to protect the public from serious harm.

Seriousness and risk will remain the basis of sentencing decisions under the Criminal Justice Act 2003 provisions.

This legislation established the Sentencing Guidelines Council, which is responsible for issuing detailed sentencing guidelines to all courts. They have recently published draft guidelines on the assessment of seriousness. These are currently the subject of consultation and can be found at www.sentencing-guidelines.gov.uk/draftguidelines/index.

Overseas Corruption Offences

Mr. Hancock: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many meetings officials in his Department have recently held with *(a)* companies and *(b)* industry bodies to discuss (i) legislation and (ii) enforcement relating to overseas bribery; and if he will list the companies or industry bodies with which officials from his Department met. [194719]

Paul Goggins: The most recent meeting involving the Confederation of British Industry and Home Office officials at which legislation on overseas bribery was discussed was on 27 October 2004. Home Office officials have not recently discussed this issue with any individual company. Enforcement of the legislation is a matter for law enforcement agencies.

Paddy Dixon

Mr. Laurence Robertson: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what assistance he is giving to the Police Service of Northern Ireland in locating Paddy Dixon for interview. [192978]

Mr. Pearson: I have been asked to reply.

I am advised that the Police Service of Northern Ireland has not sought assistance from my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for the Home Department with regard to this matter.

Police

Mr. Denham: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how he intends to distribute the £50 million Neighbourhood Policing Fund. [190306]

Ms Blears: The £50 million which launches the Neighbourhood Policing Fund will allow police forces in England and Wales to increase the number of Community Support Officers (CSOs) to 5,500 by the end of March, 2005 and will be available to forces from January 2005. Forces have made bids under the fund and will be notified of their allocations shortly. In making distributions under the first round of funding we will consider a number of factors including current CSO numbers in each force.

Brian White: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many police officers have been employed by Thames Valley Police in each of the last 10 years, broken down by *(a)* local authority and *(b)* basic command unit. [195608]

Ms Blears: A table of police personnel strength for the Thames Valley police since March 1994 is set out in the table.

Year (as at 31 March)	*Number of police officers*	*Number of police (support) staff*
1994	3,908	1,522
1995	3,854	1,706
1996	3,674	1,738
1997	3,695	1,825
1998	3,776	1,827
1999	3,748	1,799
2000	3,740	1,786
2001	3,703	1,891
2002	3,762	2,061
2003	3,833	2,398
2004	4,034	2,589
2004 (31 August)	4,139	Not available

Information on strength at Basic Command Unit (BCU) level is collected annually and reflects the position at the end of March. Information on BCU strength is only available from 2002. BCU strength between March 2002 and March 2004 is set out in the table.

BCU	*March 2002*	*March 2003*	*March 2004*
Aylesbury Vale	177	194	196
Chiltern Vale	298	293	321
Milton Keynes	342	346	371
Northern Oxfordshire	281	301	296
Oxford	316	317	336
Reading and Wokingham	369	387	434
Slough and District	254	264	297
Southern Oxfordshire	253	255	267
Thames Forest	309	307	339
West Berkshire	160	159	185
Total BCU Strength	2,759	2,823	3,042

It is not possible to provide police numbers at local authority level.

The deployment of officers to BCUs is a matter for the Chief Constable (Mr. Peter Neyroud QPM) and within the Thames Valley Police Basic Command Units deployment of officers is a matter for divisional commanders.

Mr. Wiggin: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will encourage police forces to have cheaper alternatives to alloy wheels fitted to police vehicles. [195770]

Ms Blears: Decisions regarding procurement are operational matters for the chief constable within policing plans set by the Police Authority.

Since 1992 the Police Information Technology Organisation, with the support of the National Association of Police Fleet Managers, has put in place a number of national frameworks for the purchase of vehicles by the police service, on which police authorities may draw. They deliver significant discounts on manufacturers prices.

Prison (Racial Incidents)

Mrs. Curtis-Thomas: To ask the Secretary of State for The Home Department what improvements have been made in procedures for investigations of racial incidents and complaints in prison. [191898]

Paul Goggins: Following a review of the racist incidents reporting system, a dedicated form for registering racist incidents is now available across the whole of the prison estate. This form can be completed by anyone who is a victim or a witness to an incident within the prison. The purpose of the revised form is to improve: the recording of racist incidents; the response to individual reports, thereby increasing the confidence of victims; the monitoring of the information available so that prisons can make improvements in race.

The form has a tear-off slip, which must be given to the person reporting the incident (victim or witness) as proof that a report has been submitted. This is intended to increase confidence in the system and to form part of an audit trail. The form also requires that any decision by a complainant or witness to withdraw a complaint is thoroughly explored and any possibility of intimidation is explicitly examined and ruled out.

The responsibility of ensuring that investigations are carried out effectively rests with the Governing Governor of each establishment, or the Head of Group for Headquarters units. As part of their responsibilities the Race Relations Management Teams in each establishment are required to monitor the investigation of racist complaints and their outcomes.

The training course for those carrying out investigations was revised and improved at the beginning of 2004. The course includes specific training on dealing with race related complaints.

The joint Prison Service/Commission for Racial Equality Race Equality Action Plan recognises that further improvements need to be made with regard to the quality and thoroughness of the investigations of racial incidents. The Service has begun to develop a rogramme of work to assess the feasibility of having xternal bodies such as Race Equality Councils, review he adequacy of racist incident investigations.

Prison and Probation Funding

Paul Holmes: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department (1) how much of the increase in prison and probation funding announced on 29 September had ot previously been announced; [194778]

(2) how much of the uplift for correctional services nnounced in September is funding which had not reviously been announced. [194779]

Paul Goggins: Of the £312 million resource uplift for orrectional services referred to by the Home Secretary on 29 September, £72 million had not been announced reviously.

Prison Education Programmes

Mr. Oaten: To ask the Secretary of State for the Iome Department how many offenders were moved luring part of their NVQ course in 2003–04; and how nany of those were able to continue their courses in heir next prison. [198042]

Paul Goggins: The information requested is not ollated centrally and could be collected from individual stablishments only at a disproportionate cost.

Prison Population

Mr. Drew: To ask the Secretary of State for the Iome Department what contingency plans are in place f the expected reductions in the prison population utlined in Reducing Crime—Changing Lives are not ealised. [163983]

Paul Goggins: The impact of population pressures is ept under careful review. The National Offender anagement Service will continue to investigate ptions for further increases in capacity over the oming years.

In addition to the extra 2,400 places already planned, unding of around £100 million has now been provided or a new programme to create a further 1,300 prison laces. This will increase the total operating capacity of he prison estate to around 80,800 places by 2006–07.

The National Offender Management Service also has ptions and plans in place for the development of new rison sites, if required.

Prison Service

John Cryer: To ask the Secretary of State for ne Home Department what technical qualifications ere held by the fire safety specialists who carried out ne in-house review of the Prison Service fire safety dvisers. [196707]

Paul Goggins: The review of fire safety in prisons was ocused primarily on organisational efficiency. As such, echnically qualified fire personnel were not required to ake part. The fire safety work was reviewed in the light f the needs of the Prison Service and appropriate legal dvice was received from Treasury solicitors.

John Cryer: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what estimate he has made of the cost in the Prison Service of staff sickness due to smoke inhalation caused by fires in Prison Service buildings in each of the past five years. [196709]

Paul Goggins: Information on levels of sickness by Prison Service staff due to smoke inhalation caused by fires is not available. Any staff that had suffered illness due to smoke inhalation are included within overall statistics of staff injured at work. The proportion of staff experiencing the effects of smoke inhalation is not known.

While staff may be affected during local incidents, Prison Service Health and Safety managers consider that the impact of smoke inhalation caused by fires on overall staff sickness rates is minimal.

John Cryer: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will make a statement on the *(a)* policy on and *(b)* levels of automatic fire suppression systems in prisons in England and Wales. [196713]

Paul Goggins: Automatic fire suppression systems are in place in the high fire risk areas of prisons, such as parts of kitchens and workshops, and at HMP Weare.

The Prison Service has recently commissioned a team from the Building Research Establishment (Fire) to carry out an independent survey into all aspects of fire safety in both the public and private prisons.

Mr. Wyatt: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department on what basis a further Prison Service inquiry is taking place into the case of Gary Rowland, Malcolm Watkins and Shaun Kerry of Elmley prison. [193014]

Paul Goggins: Gary Rowland, Malcolm Watkins and Shaun Kerry have been subject to a Prison Service disciplinary investigation into a number of alleged breaches of the Prison Service Code of Conduct and Discipline. That investigation recommended that disciplinary charges should be laid against all three men and their cases have been referred to a disciplinary hearing.

The nature of the work of the Prison Service demands that all members of the service observe appropriate standards of conduct. Where it is believed they may have failed to do so, the disciplinary process may be invoked, as in this case.

The Code of Conduct and Discipline encompasses but is not exclusive to criminal offences, accordingly members of staff who are cleared of criminal offences may still find themselves subject to disciplinary investigation.

Prison Volunteers

Mr. Oaten: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many hours of service were provided by volunteers from the community working in prisons in the last year. [182092]

Paul Goggins: Information on the number of hours of service provided by volunteers from the community working in prisons is not collected centrally. There are 1,800 volunteers who are members of Independent Monitoring Boards and 1,400 Prison Visitors. In addition nearly 3,600 volunteers offer a wide range of support to prisoners and their families including: helping to run Visitor Centres and play facilities in prisons; providing refreshments in visits halls; training and supporting Listeners; one to one basic skills support; individual counselling and group work; language and cultural support. In addition a recent survey carried out by the Centre for Crime and Justice Studies has shown over 4,000 volunteers support the work of prison chaplaincies giving 11,450 hours per month.

Prisoner Rehabilitation

Mrs. Curtis-Thomas: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will make a statement on steps to encourage the rehabilitation of prisoners. [196620]

Paul Goggins: The Government set out its plans to reduce re-offending through more effective rehabilitation, in an action plan published on 19 July. Over 60 action points have been agreed across Government covering a number of key areas, including accommodation, employment, and drug treatment. The policy is set within the context of our plans to develop the National Offender Management Service and implement the new sentencing framework, both of which will radically improve the scope for rehabilitation of offenders. Copies of the Reducing Re-offending National Action Plan have been placed in the Library of the House.

Prisoner Visits

Mr. Chaytor: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will make a statement on the arrangements for long serving prisoners to receive escorted visits to terminally ill relatives; and what plans he has to review the criteria for such visits. [193688]

Paul Goggins *[holding answer 4 November 2004]*: Under the Temporary Release Policy, there are provisions for a governor to allow accompanied compassionate release for eligible prisoners to visit terminally ill relatives. The following are ineligible for compassionate release: prisoners who are in category A or on the escape list; unconvicted and convicted unsentenced prisoners; prisoners who are subject to extradition proceedings; sentenced prisoners who are remanded on further charges and those who are awaiting sentence following further convictions. The role of the member of staff accompanying the prisoner is to provide guidance and support to the prisoner, not to be a security escort. The prisoner has sole responsibility for compliance with the temporary release licence conditions and return to the establishment. Prisoners serving any length of sentence may apply for compassionate temporary release providing they are not listed in the excluded categories. Any temporary release may only be authorised following a successful risk assessment. A review of all temporary release policy is currently taking place. However, it is not proposed to change the arrangements for compassionate release.

In the case of prisoners who are ineligible for release on temporary compassionate licence, governors can authorise a visit to a terminally ill relative under security escort. In such instances the prisoner remains in legal custody and the escorting officer(s) have the power to physically detain them in the event of an escape attempt.

Prisoners

Tom Cox: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department on how many occasions a prisoner has failed to return when on temporary licence from prison during each of the last three years. [193144]

Paul Goggins: The number of temporary release failures reported by the Prison Service Incident Reporting System for the last three calendar years are set out in the following table. The incidents reported include breaches of other licence conditions such as committing an offence while on temporary release or returning to the prison under the influence of alcohol. Data relating specifically to failure to return are not collated. The number of failures represents 0.1 per cent. of the total number of licences issued each year.

Calendar year	*Number or reported temporary release failures*
2001	278
2002	319
2003	367

Mr. Oaten: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what the reason is for the difference in the public and private sector targets for the percentage of prisoners held in accommodation units intended for fewer prisoners in 2004–05. [181493]

Paul Goggins *[holding answer 29 June 2004]*: The difference in these targets reflects a number of differences between publicly and privately operated prisons. Prisons operated by the private sector are generally of newer design and construction and have larger cells that can accommodate extra beds: many older public sector prisons have smaller cells that cannot accommodate extra beds. Some privately operated prisons were designed with scope to increase regime facilities in case of overcrowding while many public sector prisons have limited capacity to increase regime services. The private sector has, proportionately, more local prisons, which have traditionally been more overcrowded than other types of prison.

Prisons

Lynne Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will make a statement on the reasons for the change in the female prison population between 1998 and October 2003; and what assessment he has made of the effect of the change on community safety. [146020]

Paul Goggins: The female prison population increased from 3,157 on 31 October 1998 to 4,462 on 31 October 2003, with the remand population increasing by 289 (42 per cent.) and the sentenced population by 1,004 (41 per cent.). A major factor in the increase in the sentenced population has been the increase in those sentenced for drugs offences, with the population under immediate custodial sentence for drugs offences increasing from 794 in June[1] 1998 to 1,277 in October

03. Other factors influencing the increase in the male prison population are increases in the number of males received into prison on remand, increases in the mber of females received into prison under sentence, d increases in average sentence lengths for some fence groups.

There has been no specific research regarding the ects of changes in the female prison population on mmunity safety. We are concerned, though, about the der impact of women's imprisonment, in particular families and children who are separated from their others, and are therefore taking forward the Women's fending Reduction Programme to tackle women's fending specifically and reduce the numbers ending up custody.

igures for October 1998 are not available

Mrs. Curtis-Thomas: To ask the Secretary of State for Home Department when vocational training will come a fully integrated part of the Sentence Planning ocess. [164394]

Paul Goggins: The Government is committed to proving offenders' learning and skills. A key element the new service we are developing in partnership with Learning and Skills Council will be an integrated proach to education and training where learning is bedded across regimes. The focus will be on meeting lividual needs through effective assessment as part of lividual Learning Plans. The new service will be roduced progressively from September 2005.

Enabling prisoners to gain skills and qualifications ich will help them secure employment on release is eady an important aspect of sentence management, d we expect individual needs and training objectives be reflected in the sentence planning process.

Mr. McNamara: To ask the Secretary of State for the me Department what measures he has taken to event further violent incidents at HMP Wormwood ubs; and if he will make a statement on the merits of tiating a public inquiry. [190235]

Paul Goggins: Wormwood Scrubs prison is a much proved prison. Recent management teams at ormwood Scrubs have worked hard to develop and plement wide reaching reforms that have radically ered its culture. Robust systems are now in place to ure that all complaints and, in particular, allegations unprofessional conduct by staff towards prisoners are oroughly investigated.

The most recent visit by Her Majesty's Chief pector in November 2003 confirms this progress. The ief Inspector found 'a greatly improved prison, dually implementing and consolidating fundamental anges'. Most noticeable of all was 'the change in itude and approach of Prison Officers". I am fident that such fundamental changes will prevent a urn to the kind of violent incidents witnessed in the 0s.

We are currently considering the request for a public quiry.

Tom Cox: To ask the Secretary of State for the me Department what the education budget for sons in England and Wales was in each of the last ee years. [190256]

Paul Goggins: Funding for the delivery of learning and skills to offenders rests in the request for resources of the Department for Education and Skills, and is administered jointly by DfES and the Home Office through the Offenders' Learning and Skills Unit. Prisons are allocated a total education budget and have flexibility to use this to purchase education to meet their learners' needs. Core funding for prisoners' education for the last three years was:

Financial year	*Education expenditure (£ million)*
2001–02	52.6
2002–03	59.4
2003–04	70.9

Mrs. Gillan: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what pay and job comparison has been carried out between prison officers employed in the Prison Service and administrative staff of his Department since 1997; and if he will publish the findings. [190288]

Paul Goggins *[holding answer 13 October 2004]:* There has been no direct comparison made between the pay and jobs of prison officers and administrative staff since 1997. Job Evaluations of Prison Service staff carried out in this period have all been in connection with the development, implementation and maintenance of its pay and grading review. Sample evaluations have been made of the jobs of almost all disciplines of staff, including prison officers and administrative grades, but none has been made for the purpose of direct comparison between different disciplines.

Mr. Greg Knight: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what proposals he has *(a)* to expand the Full Sutton prison site in East Yorkshire and *(b)* to develop land adjoining this site; and if he will make a statement. [190920]

Paul Goggins *[holding answer 14 October 2004]:* There are no plans to expand the site at Full Sutton prison at this stage. The Prison Service owns a site adjacent to Full Sutton, and the possible development of this site has been under consideration, as an option for providing additional capacity as and when it may be needed. No final decision has been made on whether or not to proceed.

Mrs. Curtis-Thomas: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department whether prison video-link equipment has been used for the recording of an interview between a police officer and a prisoner. [191331]

Paul Goggins: Prison video-link equipment does not have the facility to record interviews.

Mrs. Curtis-Thomas: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many and what percentage of prisons have a visitors' centre. [191688]

Paul Goggins: On the latest information available, 112 prisons have access to a visitors' centre. This equates to 79 per cent. of the prison estate.

Tom Cox: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many strip searches have taken place in prisons in England and Wales during the last 12 months. [192673]

Paul Goggins: This information is not collated centrally and cannot be provided except at a disproportionate cost.

Tom Cox: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many *(a)* state-run and *(b)* privately-run prisons there are in the UK. [193471]

Paul Goggins: There are 136 prisons in England and Wales (including young offenders institutions), excluding Dover and Haslar, which are managed by the Prison Service on behalf of Immigration and Nationality Directorate. 10 of the 136 prisons in England and Wales are run by the private sector.

Prisons in Scotland and Northern Ireland are the responsibility of the Scottish Executive and the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland respectively. There are 16 prisons in Scotland, one of which is operated by the private sector. Northern Ireland has three prisons, all of which are in the public sector.

Tom Cox: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will make a statement on his Department's policy on the establishment of new prisons in England and Wales; and if he will list the proposed sites of these prisons. [193474]

Paul Goggins: HMP Peterborough, a new purpose-built prison, is expected to open in March 2005. This will provide a further 840 places. No decisions have yet been made regarding the construction of any other new prison establishments, but the National Offender Management Service (NOMS) keeps capacity within the prison estate under review. NOMS owns two sites, one in Merseyside and one in London, with outline planning consent to build two 600-place prisons.

The Budget 2003 settlement also provided funds to acquire at least two more sites in 2004–05 for the future development of large multi-function 1,500-place prisons. A search programme to identify suitable sites for purchase is currently taking place. It is not possible to list sites being considered for purchase, due to commercial considerations.

Mrs. Curtis-Thomas: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will make a statement on the progress of the intermittent custody pilots which have been taking place in two purpose-built prison units since January. [193927]

Paul Goggins: Intermittent custody (IC) originates from the Government's determination to avoid some of the negative outcomes (loss of employment, accommodation and family breakdown) which can accompany even relatively short periods of full-time custody.

An IC order is imposed by a court only on the basis of a stringent risk assessment by the national probation service and only those offenders assessed as being of lower risk to the public are suitable for IC.

Under the terms of the sentence, custody is served intermittently, either at weekends or on weekdays, for a number of days each week. Offenders spend non-custodial days under the supervision of the national probation service. This enables them to maintain their existing employment or caring responsibilities or to look for work.

IC pilots based at Kirkham, in Lancashire, for male offenders, and at Morton Hall, in Lincolnshire, for females, have been running since 26 January 2004. Up to 22 October, a total of 120 IC orders had been imposed, 82 on male offenders and 38 on females. There are currently 39 extant custody cases, 30 at Kirkham and nine at Morton Hall.

We are continuing to learn from the pilots, but the early indications are that IC is regarded as a valuable addition to the range of sentencing options, both by sentencers and offenders. This positive reaction to IC among offenders has translated into a high level of compliance, despite the onerous nature of the sentence.

It is already clear that there is a significant group of offenders for whom Weekend IC is an appropriate option. However, the take-up for Weekday IC has been relatively low. The disparity between the number of Weekend and Weekday IC orders was exacerbated by the need to clarify the benefit entitlements of IC offenders. This matter has been largely resolved and we are now seeking to promote the option of Weekday IC among probation officers and sentencers.

IC has been successful in enabling offenders to maintain their employment, accommodation and family ties. This has been particularly important for female offenders with caring responsibilities for dependant children. Male IC offenders have been able to retain their jobs and, in two cases, offenders operating small businesses were able to preserve the jobs of their employees.

On 29 September, the Home Secretary announced his intention to expand the use of IC and we are now working on the most effective ways of achieving this.

Tom Cox: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many category A prisoners who were *(a)* men and *(b)* women were detained in prisons in England and Wales on 1 October. [193968]

Paul Goggins: On 1 October there were 897 men and six women in prisons in England and Wales, with a category A classification.

Tom Cox: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many prison inmates who were *(a)* men under the age of 21 years and *(b)* women under the age of 21 years were serving a prison sentence in England and Wales on 1 March 2003. [193970]

Paul Goggins: On 28 February 2003, there were 8,111 male young offenders and 439 female young offenders in prison under sentence in England and Wales.

The figures include fine defaulters and young offenders who have turned 21 but who have not been reclassified as adults.

Tom Cox: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department whether all prisons in England and Wales have education facilities for inmates; and if he will make a statement. [194748]

Paul Goggins: All prisons in England and Wales have education facilities for offenders. Funding for offender learning in 2004–05 is £127 million and includes £10 million for the delivery of learning and skills to offenders under supervision in the community. In addition, offender learning and skills has benefited from investment of £20 million from the Treasury's Capital Modernisation Fund, £4.4 million in 2002–03 and 15.6 million in 2003–04.

John McDonnell: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what the *(a)* total and *(b)* average number of hours owed were for (i) principal officers, ii) senior officers, (iii) prison officers and (iv) operational support grades for each Prison Service establishment on the last Saturday of each of the last 12 nonths as shown on each establishment's SPAR F form. [194821]

Paul Goggins: The information requested is no onger collated centrally and has been devolved to stablishments to monitor and manage on an individual asis. The information requested could be collected only t a disproportionate cost.

Alistair Burt: To ask the Secretary of State for the Iome Department whether he plans further studies into ne relationship between diet and behaviour in prisons nd young offender institutions; and if he will make a atement. [195721]

Paul Goggins: Research into the possible link between utrition and offending behaviour in young offenders is urrently being considered by the Home Office. We are xploring the possibility of conducting research within a ommunity setting, both in relation to sentences served the community and to re-offending rates post-ustody. In addition the Prison Service has offered ccess to Natural Justice for research on the impact of et on behaviour.

Interest has been generated by an earlier 1996 study diet and behaviour at Aylesbury young offender stitution. The results appeared to show a positive fect on behaviour, although the number of prisoners volved was too small to make the drawing of wider nclusions possible. The study did not follow up the ung offenders once they had been released, so it was t possible to measure the impact on re-offending.

Alistair Burt: To ask the Secretary of State for the ome Department what analysis he has made of the dy at Her Majesty's Young Offender Institution lesbury of connections between diet and behaviour; d if he will make a statement. [195769]

Paul Goggins: In 1996 the charity "Natural Justice", h the support of the Prison Service, conducted earch into the effects of diet on behaviour at lesbury young offender institution. This work was iewed by Home Office researchers who concluded t, while the results appeared to show a positive effect behaviour, the number of prisoners involved were small to make the drawing of wider conclusions ssible.

he study did not follow up the young offenders once y had been released so it has not been possible to asure the impact on re-offending.

Mr. Stinchcombe: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department (1) how many prisoners who began intensive drug treatment programmes in 2003–04 *(a)* completed and *(b)* dropped out of the programme; [196273]

(2) if he will list the prisons which run internal drug treatment programmes, broken down by type of programme. [196274]

Paul Goggins: In 2003–04, of the 4,703 prisoners entering intensive drug treatment programmes, there were 2,418 completions. The list of prisons that run internal drug treatment programmes is given in the following table. External contractors also run drug programmes in some of these and other prisons.

Drug treatment programmes run internally

Accredited programmes

PASRO[1]

Ashwell—East Midlands South
Chelmsford—Eastern
Elmley—Kent, Surrey and Sussex
Glen Parva—East Midlands South
Haverigg—North West
Lancaster Castle—North West
Leeds—Yorkshire and Humberside
Liverpool—North West
Low Newton—North East
Maidstone—Kent, Surrey and Sussex
Moorlands—Yorkshire and Humberside
Parc—Wales
Risley—North West
Rochester—Kent, Surrey and Sussex
Stafford—West Midlands
Swinfen Hall—West Midlands
Wayland—Eastern
Ranby—East Midlands North

STOP[2]

Gartree—East Midlands South
Stocken—East Midlands South

Other programmes

Validated[3]

Ashfield—Juveniles
Bristol—South West
Nottingham—East Midlands
Reading—Thames Valley

Short duration programme[4]

Bedford—Eastern
Exeter—South West
New Hall—Female Estate
Nottingham—East Midlands
Wormwood Scrubs—London
Manchester—North West
Blakenhurst—West Midlands
Glen Parva—East Midlands South
Pentonville—London
Birmingham—West Midlands
Swansea—Wales.

[1] PASRO—Prisons Addressing Substance Related Offending.

[2] STOP—Substance, Treatment and Offending Programme.

[3] Area Manager Validated sites. Framework fully adheres to the NTA definition within tier 3.

[4] Cognitive Behavioural Therapy for short-term and remand prisoners, which provides a suitable platform for release into the community.

Mr. Stinchcombe: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department whether the Prison Service's review of the Counselling, Assessment, Referral, Advice and Through-care Services (CARATs) for prisoners with drug misuse problems has been completed; and if he will make a statement. [196275]

Paul Goggins: The review of Counselling, Assessment, Referral, Advice and Through-care (CARATs) services has been completed. A new CARAT Practice Manual, based on the review, is now in preparation and will be published on the Prison Service website (www.hmprisonservice.gov.uk).

Mr. Wiggin: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what the latest figures are for *(a)* capacity and *(b)* unused capacity in each prison in Wales. [197413]

Paul Goggins: The figures in the table show the operational capacity and the population of all prisons in Wales as at November 2005.

Establishment	*Operational capacity*	*Population*	*Operational capacity—population*
Cardiff	724	732	8
Parc	1,036	998	38
Prescoed	170	167	3
Swansea	348	321	27
Usk	250	245	5

Mrs. Gillan: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many foreign nationals were held in prisons in England and Wales on 28 October, broken down by nationality; and how many are held in each prison. [195803]

Paul Goggins: The most recent information available is for 30 September 2004, and is provided in the tables.

Population in prison, by nationality[1]—England and Wales, 30 September 2004

	Number
All nationalities	74,646
UK nationals	64,452
Foreign nationals	9,010
Not recorded	1,184
Total Africa	2,049
Algeria	153
Angola	71
Benin	3
Botswana	2
Burundi	7
Cameroon, United Republic	14
Central African Republic	11
Chad	3
Congo, Democratic Republic of the	51
Congo, Republic of the	86
Cote D Ivoire (Ivory Coast)	24
Egypt	23
Equatorial Guinea	1
Ethiopia	30
French Guiana	2
Gabon	1
Gambia	36
Ghana	159
Guinea	13
Guinea-Bissau	1
Kenya	54
Liberia	33
Libya	21
Madagascar	1
Total Europe	2,564
Albania	82
Andorra	2
Armenia	4
Austria	8
Azerbijan	1
Belgium	44
Bosnia-Herzegovina	3
Bulgaria	6
Croatia	6
Cyprus	60
Czech Republic	14
Denmark	8
Estonia	2
Finland	3
France	130
Georgia	8
Germany	115
Gibraltar	3
Greece	23
Hungary	21
Irish Republic	708
Italy	135
Kyrgyzstan	1
Latvia	20
Malawi	14
Mali	1
Mauritania	1
Mauritius	10
Morocco	39
Mozambique	1
Niger	1
Nigeria	504
Rwanda	12
Sao Tome and Principe	1
Senegal	5
Seychelles	2
Sierra Leone	57
Somalia	230
South Africa	132
Sudan	21
Swaziland	2
Tanzania	12
Togo	11
Tunisia	13
Uganda	63
Zambia	21
Zimbabwe	96
Total Asia	1,144
Bangladesh	137
Bhutan	1
Burma	2
China	152
Hong Kong	11
India	218
Indonesia	3
Japan	1
Korea, Republic of (South)	6
Malaysia	19
Maldives	1

Population in prison, by nationality[1]—England and Wales, 30 September 2004

	Number
Mongolia	3
Lithuania	72
Macedonia	9
Malta	8
Moldova	33
Netherlands	167
Norway	2
Poland	52
Portugal	151
Romania	135
Russia	85
Serbia and Montenegro	96
Slovakia	4
Slovenia	2
Spain	89
Sweden	13
Switzerland	7
Turkey	233
Total Middle East	465
Afghanistan	67
Bahrain	2
Iran	108
Iraq	196
Israel	16
Jordan	6
Kuwait	8
Lebanon	16
Republic of Yemen	11
Saudi Arabia	11
Syrian Arab Republic	18
United Arab Emirates	5
Total North America	125
Canada	33
United States of America	92
Total Oceania	34
Australia	18
Fiji	4
Nepal	5
Pakistan	388
Philippines	12
Singapore	3
Sri Lanka	130
Surinam	7
Thailand	5
Vietnam	39
Total Central or South America	289
Argentina	7
Belize	5
Bolivia	6
Brazil	41
Chile	12
Columbia	124
Costa Rica	4
Ecuador	9
Guatemala	1
Honduras	1
Mexico	8
Nicaragua	3
Panama	3
Paraguay	11
Peru	5
Venezuela	60
French Southern Territories	1
Kiribati	1
New Zealand	7
Papua New Guinea	1
Samoa	1
Solomon Islands	1

Population in prison, by nationality[1]—England and Wales, 30 September 2004

	Number
Total other	7
Total West Indies	2,334
Anguilla	2
Aruba	2
Bahamas	5
Barbados	32
Bermuda	2
Cuba	1
Dominica	6
Dominican Republic	7
Grenada	19
Guyana	25
Haiti	1
Jamaica	2,039
Montserrat	9
Netherlands Antilles	22
St. Kitts and Nevis	6
St. Lucia	18
St. Vincent and the Grenadines	7
Trinidad and Tobago	131
Virgin Islands	1

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[1] Figures include persons held in immigration removal centres at Dover, Haslar and Lindholme

Probation Boards

Mrs. Helen Clark: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what plans he has to change the statutory requirements for probation boards in England and Wales in relation to *(a)* appointing a treasurer and *(b)* the Audit Commission's external audit of accounts. [193185]

Paul Goggins: We have no plan to change the statutory requirements for the Probation Boards in England and Wales in relation to the appointment of treasurers. The audit of probation Boards and the role of the Audit Commission is being discussed as we work to ensure that the audit arrangements are as efficient and effective as possible.

Probation Service

Mrs. Curtis-Thomas: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will make a statement on future funding of the Probation Service. [196704]

Paul Goggins: Future funding of the Probation Service remains subject to the normal spending review and the Home Office departmental planning round processes.

Lynne Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what plans he has to introduce regional pay scales for the probation service; and whether he intends to consult the relevant trade unions on the issue. [196998]

Paul Goggins: I have no plans at present to introduce regional pay scales in the national probation service (NPS). Region pay may be one of the issues covered in the ongoing discussions between the Employers' and Side of the NPS National Negotiating Committee (NNC) the trade unions in relation to new pay and grading arrangements.

We already pay allowances to staff working in high cost areas such as central London and the south east of England.

Lynne Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department whether the 2004 pay offer to probation service staff includes *(a)* pay progression and *(b)* increments; and whether (i) pay progression and (ii) increments have been included in previous annual pay settlements. [196999]

Paul Goggins: At a meeting of the National Negotiating Council (NNC) for the national probation service on 5 October 2004 the employers made a formal offer of a 2.7 per cent. revalorisation of salaries to all staff covered by NNC terms and conditions of service. Separately, on 1 April 2004, incremental progression of up to 3 per cent. was paid to the majority of staff in the service.

The total cost, including the incremental progression element, is 4.2 per cent. which, if accepted by the trade union side, would be one of the highest public sector pay awards this year.

This two-stage approach follows the same pattern as in previous years.

Public Service Agreement 3

Mrs. Curtis-Thomas: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what measures he will introduce to fulfil Public Service Agreement 3 which aims to increase the number of crimes for which an offender is brought to justice by 1.25 million by 2007–08. [196592]

Paul Goggins: The Public Service Agreement (PSA) target is to bring 1.25 million offences to justice in the year to April 2008. A range of actions is being taken to improve the performance of the criminal justice agencies in order to meet this target, in particular by:

improving the rate of police detection of crime;

making the charging process more effective;

reducing the proportion of ineffective trials;

giving better support to witnesses.

We aim to increase the sanction detection rate from 19 per cent. to at least 25 per cent. by 2008. All police forces have been made aware of the detection rate improvement required by their Local Criminal Justice Board's current target for offences brought to justice.

The initiative to put Crown Prosecutors into police stations in order to provide early advice and guidance to the police on charging is being extended. By September, the charging initiative was operating in 361 of 373 sites, and the more extensive Statutory Charging Scheme arrangements were operating in 118 of those 361 sites. The new charging arrangements are already delivering considerable benefits, with prosecutors working closely with police to build robust cases for prosecution and helping to narrow the justice gap.

The Effective Trial Management Programme (ETMP) case management changes have already had a demonstrable impact on reducing ineffective trial rates in the Crown court and magistrates courts. We aim to reduce ineffective trials from 24 per cent. to 17per cent. in the Crown courts, and from 31 per cent. to 23 per cent. in the magistrates courts by March 2006. Latest performance information shows that we are on course to meet these targets.

Early indications are that the five pilot sites for the 'No Witness No Justice' programme (Gwent, North Wales, Essex, South Yorkshire and the West Midlands) are continuing to show improvements in the number of witnesses attending court.

Finally, a Performance Action Team has been set up, comprising central Performance Advisors, local practitioners, consultants and central PSA delivery teams. It is providing co-ordinated assistance across the Criminal Justice System targets to areas in need of support.

Rape Support Centres

Sue Doughty: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many Rape and Sexual Abuse Support Centres have closed in *(a)* each of the last three years and *(b)* this year. [191878]

Paul Goggins: The Home Office does not collect this information. We are aware of reports that some centres have had to close or reduce service availability due to financial constraints. We are making available £4 million of additional funding over two years to support and develop a range of services for victims of sexual crime, including those provided by rape and sexual assault crisis/support centres.

Sue Doughty: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what his plans are for setting up the National Rape Crisis Helpline. [191879]

Paul Goggins: We have considered the findings and recommendations of an independent scoping study which looked at options for establishing a helpline service and involved key stakeholder groups. We have recently approved proposals for the helpline structure, service scope, and recommended core client groups. We are looking further at what information services may be required to support the helpline and will be developing a procurement strategy to enable us to select an appropriate service provider. While preparatory work on the helpline continues, our immediate priority is to support the development of a range of good quality, sustainable local services which will support the helpline and are critical to its success.

Sue Doughty: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what plans he has to ensure that abuse survivor groups and sexual abuse support centres are in place to provide counselling to clients referred to them by the National Rape Crisis Helpline. [191880]

Paul Goggins: We are providing an additional £4 million over two years to support the development of services for victims of sexual crime. Many of the services will support the helpline when it is opened. Some of the extra funding is being used to extend the network of Sexual Assault Referral Centres (SARCs) and some will be made available to develop a range of sustainable local services—often provided by voluntary and community sector organisations. We will be publishing further information and inviting applications shortly.

Sue Doughty: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what discussions he has had with colleagues in the Department of Health on the problems and needs of survivors of rape and sexual abuse. [191881]

Paul Goggins: We have established good links between the two Departments on these issues. A joint working group of Home Office and Department of Health officials has been set up to oversee the strengthening and extension of the Sexual Assault Referral Centre (SARCs) network in England and Wales. The development of SARCs has been discussed by the Interdepartmental Ministerial Group on Sexual Offending, which is chaired by the Home Office and includes a representative from the Department of Health. Officials are also working closely with Department of Health colleagues on plans to map and further develop non-statutory community-based services and to produce service guidelines in this area.

Sue Doughty: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department whether the planned National Rape Crisis Helpline will be available to adult survivors of childhood sexual abuse. [191882]

Paul Goggins: Yes. Although we have used the working title of a National Rape Helpline, evidence from the scoping study suggests very strongly that the helpline will need to cater for a wider group of core service users, including adult survivors of childhood sexual abuse.

Sue Doughty: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what investigations he has made into possible links between adult survivors of childhood sexual abuse and the victims of rape. [191883]

Paul Goggins: The Home Office has not commissioned any work in this area.

Rapiscan Secure Apparatus

Norman Baker: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what air kerma rate has been used to assess radiation doses associated with the use of the Rapiscan Secure 1000 apparatus. [188057]

Mr. Blunkett: The information sought is not in the public domain.

Reoffending

Mrs. Curtis-Thomas: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what targets have been set for reducing reoffending. [196705]

Paul Goggins: The Home Office targets are as follows.

To reduce the rate of reconvictions by 5 per cent. for adult and young offenders by 2003–04 compared to a 1997 baseline (Home Office Public Service Agreement, 'Spending Review 2000: Public Service Agreements 2001–2004', published in July 2000 (CM4808)).

To reduce re-offending by 5 per cent. for young offenders and for adults sentenced to imprisonment or sentenced to community sentences by 2005–06 compared to a 2000 baseline (Home Office Public Service Agreement, published in the White Paper '2002 Spending Review, Public Service Agreements 2003–2006' in July 2002 (CM 5571)).

The Home Office Strategic Plan for 2004–2008: Confident Communities in a Secure Britain, published in July 2004 (CM 6287), gives a commitment that re-offending rates will have fallen by 5 per cent. by 2007–08 working towards 10 per cent. by the end of the decade against a baseline of 2002–03.

Repeat Offenders

Mr. Laws: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what his latest estimate is of the proportion of overall crime committed by the core group of repeat offenders; and if he will make a statement. [191311]

Paul Goggins: Analysis based on data from the Offenders Index suggests that 10 per cent. of active offenders accumulate at least 50 per cent. of standard list offences. This figure was published in "Criminal Justice: The Way Ahead" (2001).

Secure Training Centres

Ms Keeble: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department on how many occasions young people have been admitted to hospital from secure training centres in each of the last three years. [190310]

Paul Goggins: The figures supplied by secure training centre operators are as follows:

	Admissions to hospital for any reason		
Secure training centre	*2001*	*2002*	*2003*
Medway	2	2	2
Rainsbrook	2	4	3
Hassockfield	0	0	1
Oakhill	n/a	n/a	n/a

Sentencing Guidelines Council

Mr. Djanogly: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what the Department's target is for the timescale from issue of draft guidelines by the Sentencing Guidelines Council to issue of the final guidelines to be taken into consideration by the courts. [195857]

Paul Goggins *[holding answer 4 November 2004]:* Once the Sentencing Guidelines Council issues a final guideline the courts must then have regard to it when sentencing offenders. Where the guideline deals with new legislation it will become applicable on commencement of the relevant provisions.

Mr. Djanogly: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what factors will be taken into consideration during scrutiny of *(a)* draft guidelines issued by the Sentencing Guidelines Council in September 2004 and *(b)* future draft guidelines. [195859]

Paul Goggins *[holding answer 4 November 2004]:* In considering draft guidelines issued by the Sentencing Guidelines Council we will have regard to our stated goal of reducing reoffending and our policy that custody should be used for the most serious, dangerous and seriously persistent offenders. Most other offenders will normally be punished more effectively in the community.

Mr. Djanogly: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what process of parliamentary scrutiny will occur prior to the issue of final guidelines by the Sentencing Guidelines Council. [195913]

Paul Goggins *[holding answer 4 November 2004]:* Parliamentary scrutiny of the draft guidelines issued by the Sentencing Guidelines Council is undertaken by the Home Affairs Select Committee.

Sentencing Policy

Mrs. Curtis-Thomas: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what measures *(a)* are in place and *(b)* will be introduced to encourage sentencers to make more use of fines. [196618]

Paul Goggins: The Government are committed to reinvigorating the fine to ensure it is a credible and effective penalty.

DCA is leading a major initiative to improve fine enforcement. This includes new enforcement powers in the Courts Act 2003, currently being piloted in six areas. Fine payments rates are already improving as a result of this effort. Performance in the first quarter of 2004 was 81 per cent. of monies due collected, up from 76 per cent. in the last quarter of 2003–04 and a significant improvement on the 69 per cent. baseline.

The Government have also accepted the proposal made in the Carter Report, "Managing Offenders, Reducing Crime", that there should be a day fine scheme. Such a scheme would link fines more closely to an offender's ability to pay so that fines should bear more equally on offenders of differing means. We are currently developing proposals, which will require primary legislation.

Mrs. Curtis-Thomas: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will make a statement on the conditional cautioning pilots. [196619]

Ms Blears: The Conditional Caution is a statutory disposal for offenders aged 18 and over and can be given only on the authority of the relevant prosecutor. The scheme was introduced by the Criminal Justice Act, 2003, and the relevant provisions commenced on 3 July 2004. The use of Conditional Cautions is governed by a Code of Practice (SI 2004/1683).

Although the provisions of the Act have been commenced for England and Wales, use of the Conditional Caution is limited to the areas specified in the schedule to the Director of Public Prosecution's Guidance on the Administration of Conditional Cautions. This guidance will be issued shortly under section 37A of the Police and Criminal Evidence Act, 1984. Custody Officers must comply with this guidance when deciding how to deal with an individual.

Implementation of the new provision will be phased and initially limited to the following areas:

Thames Valley;
Northumbria;
South Yorkshire;
Lancashire;
West Mercia; and
Avon and Somerset

It is also anticipated that Conditional Cautions will be used in the Community Justice Centre in North Liverpool.

A significant amount of planning has already taken place in these areas and we expect the first schemes to be launched in November and December of this year. The use of Conditional Cautioning in these areas will be subject to a full evaluation, and all the documentation relating to Conditional Cautions will be reviewed prior to commencing national roll-out of the scheme, later in 2005.

Sex Abuse Cases/Investigations

Mrs. Curtis-Thomas: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will make a statement on the changes to the operation instructions on disclosure in sex abuse cases. [191293]

Paul Goggins: As part of the implementation of the Criminal Justice Act 2003, the Government are currently consulting on two codes of practice which are required to implement Part 5 of the Act on Disclosure. Full details of this consultation exercise may be found on the Home Office website at: http://www.homeoffice.gov.uk/docs3/cja_consultation.html.
Changes to other operational guidance, the Attorney General's Guidelines on Disclosure and the CPS/ACPO Joint Operational Instructions on disclosure, will be made as appropriate to reflect the provisions of the 2003 Act. None of this guidance relates specifically to sex abuse cases.

Mrs. Curtis-Thomas: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what guidelines are in place to regulate trawling by the police in historical sex abuse investigations. [197442]

Paul Goggins: Guidance for police on appropriate techniques for investigating allegations of historical child abuse such as dip sampling is contained in "The Investigation of Historical/Institutional Child Abuse—Senior Investigating Officer's Handbook" produced by the Association of Chief Police Officers. This is currently being reviewed to ensure the guidance is kept up to date and includes lessons to be learnt from more recent cases.

Sex Offender Escape (HMP Prescoed)

Mr. Edwards: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will make a statement on the incident on 6 October when a convicted sex offender absconded from open conditions at HMP Prescoed near Usk; what assessment of risk was made of the prisoner *(a)* when he was transferred to HMP Prescoed and *(b)* after he absconded from HMP Prescoed; and what advice was given to local schools following the incident. [192865]

Paul Goggins: It is not the Government's policy to comment on individual prisoners. I can confirm that a prisoner did abscond from Prescoed prison 6 October. He was apprehended the following evening a short distance from the prison. Prior to his transfer from Usk prison to Prescoed he was assessed by a multi-agency public protection panel as presenting a low risk of re-offending. That assessment remained valid after his abscond and there is no evidence that he offended while at large. The police revised their assessment once he was at large and said, as is usual, that he should not be approached. The local education authority decided to advise schools to ensure that children were escorted to and from schools in the area. All the relevant agencies are in discussions to ensure that, should a further abscond of a sex offender take place, the local community receives appropriate advice.

Sex Offenders

Alistair Burt: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department whether it is his policy to apply for full planning permission from local authorities in relation to the location of new sex offender treatment centres; and if he will make a statement. [195748]

Paul Goggins: The provision of any new residential sex offender treatment centres will comply with planning law. It is anticipated that applications will be submitted to the appropriate local authority before any final decision is taken.

Mrs. Curtis-Thomas: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what assessment has been made of the reasons why convicted sex offenders choose not to participate in the Sex Offender Treatment Programme. [191685]

Paul Goggins: To inform policy and practice research has been undertaken into the reasons why offenders choose not to participate in the Sex Offender Treatment Programme in prison. Reasons for non-participation are complex but by far the most common reason is denial of guilt. Other reasons include a fear of disclosing the offence to other prisoners, the reaction of the family, concerns about what the treatment programme entails, the relationship with staff, and the prison environment. The Prison Service is implementing a strategy to address the issues identified by the research, with the aim of reducing significantly the numbers refusing treatment.

Mr. Edwards: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what advice was sought from the Children's Commissioner for Wales about the decision to transfer sex offenders to open conditions at HMP Prescoed; and if he will request an assessment of the risk to children from the Children's Commissioner. [195311]

Paul Goggins: All Sex Offenders who are transferred to HMP Prescoed are subject to a thorough risk assessment and have been judged suitable for open conditions by the Parole Board. The Children's Commissioner for Wales has been invited to visit HMP Prescoed. Should he take up that offer I would be happy to receive and consider his comments on the risk assessment process.

Mrs. Curtis-Thomas: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what the legal definition is of a sex offender. [195495]

Paul Goggins: The term 'sex offender' is used in a variety of contexts—legal and otherwise—and there is not one legal definition.

Part 2 of the Sexual Offences Act 2003 sets out 'relevant offenders' for the purposes of the notification requirements (section 80). The notification requirements are often known as the 'sex offenders register' but the term does not appear in the legislation.

'Relevant offenders' for the purposes of the notification requirements are:

> offenders who have received a conviction, caution or finding for one of the offences listed in Schedule 3 to the Act,
>
> offenders who have received a conviction, caution or finding overseas for an offence equivalent to those listed in Schedule 3 to the Act and who have been made subject to a notification order,
>
> offenders who have received a conviction, caution or finding for one the offences listed in Schedule 3 or Schedule 5 to the Act and have been made subject to a sexual offences prevention order,
>
> offenders who have received a conviction, caution or finding for breach of a risk of sexual harm order.

Section 327 of the Criminal Justice Act 2003 sets out the 'relevant sexual or violent offenders' to whom the Multi-Agency Public Protection Arrangements in section 325 apply. These include all of the 'registered sex offenders' and also all offenders who have received a conviction or finding for an offence listed in Schedule 15 to the Act and received a disposal to a certain threshold.

Mrs. Curtis-Thomas: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what the terms of reference are for the interdepartmental ministerial group on sex offending. [191523]

Paul Goggins: My right hon. Friend the Home Secretary announced his intention to establish the Inter-Departmental Ministerial Group on Sexual Offending in July 2003. The Group has been set up to ensure that the implementation of the Sexual Offences Act 2003 is incorporated into wider work in tackling sexual offending. The Group's terms of reference are:

> To co-ordinate and promote action to reduce sex offending and improve services for victims of it.
>
> To send out clear messages about this to the general public and key target groups.
>
> To identify deliverable outcomes and monitor progress in achieving them.
>
> To co-ordinate financial resources so that these can have the maximum impact.

Mrs. Curtis-Thomas: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what recommendations have been made by the interdepartmental ministerial group on sex offending as a result of their monitoring of the Press Complaints Commission regulations. [191525]

Paul Goggins: The Inter-Departmental Ministerial Group on Sexual Offending has not made any recommendations relating to the Press Complaints Commission regulations. The Group has considered preliminary arrangements for monitoring the impact of the Sexual Offences Act 2003 and decided to assess the situation after a full year of operation, that is after May 2005. Among the matters it will be considering at that point will be the impact of the Press Complaints Commission regulations.

Sexual Offences

Mrs. Curtis-Thomas: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what percentage of sex offence cases brought to court resulted in a conviction in each of the last five years. [196634]

Paul Goggins: The available information, relating to defendants proceeded against and found guilty at all courts for sexual offences, England and Wales 1998 to 2002 is shown in the table. The conviction rate for all five years has also been provided.

Number of defendants proceeded against at magistrates' courts and found guilty at all courts for sexual offences, England and Wales 1998 to 2002[1]

	Proceeded against	*Found guilty*	*Conviction rate*[2]
1998	7,763	4,567	59
1999	7,817	4,304	55
2000	7,263	3,943	54
2001	8,424	4,043	48
2002	9,102	4,384	48

[1] These data are on the principal offence basis.

[2] The proportion of defendants proceeded against who were found guilty.

Statistics on court proceedings for 2003 will be published on the 18 November.

Mrs. Curtis-Thomas: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department whether an assessment has been made of how suggestive interviewing, or the use of the recovered memories can lead to false allegations of sex offences against individuals. [196640]

Paul Goggins: The Home Office has not made a formal assessment of, or conducted research into whether suggestive interviewing or the use of recovered memories can lead to false allegations of sexual offences.

The Association of Chief Police Officers (ACPO) National Investigative Interviewing Strategic Steering Group has developed and delivered a dynamic interview strategy which includes a Practical Guide to Investigative Interviewing 2004. Amongst other things, this highlights the dangers of suggestive interviewing. The Investigative Interviewing Strategy underpins training on effective interviewing for police of all levels, including specialist interviewers who are employed in cases involving traumatised victims or witnesses.

Complementary guidance on interviewing vulnerable or intimidated witnesses, which includes victims of sexual offences, is contained in "Achieving Best Evidence in Criminal Proceedings: Guidance for Vulnerable or Intimidated Witnesses, including Children" issued in January 2002. This guidance became operational in May 2002 when it superseded "Memorandum of Good Practice on Video Recorded Interviews with Child Witnesses for Criminal Proceedings". Achieving Best Evidence contains comprehensive guidance on planning and conducting interviews with vulnerable or intimidated witnesses and includes sections on style, content and types of questions.

This guidance document was produced as a result of a wider assessment by an interdepartmental working group of the treatment of vulnerable or intimidated witnesses, including the victims of sexual offences, in the criminal justice system. The working group's findings and recommendations were published in the Speaking Up For Justice report (Home Office, 1998).

Mrs. Curtis-Thomas: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what guidelines have been issued on best practice in interviewing techniques for sex offence victims; what checks are in place to ensure that these techniques are used; and what estimate has been made of the percentage of interviews which deviate from this standard. [196641]

Paul Goggins: Guidance on interviewing vulnerable or intimidated witnesses, which includes victims of sexual offences, is contained in "Achieving Best Evidence in Criminal Proceedings: Guidance for Vulnerable or Intimidated Witnesses, including Children" issued in January 2002. This guidance became operational in May 2002 when it superseded "Memorandum of Good Practice on Video Recorded Interviews with Child Witnesses for Criminal Proceedings".

While this guidance is advisory and does not constitute a legally enforceable code of conduct, it warns that significant departures from the guidance may have to be justified in the courts.

It is a responsibility of statutory agencies involved in the interviewing of witnesses in criminal proceedings to ensure that appropriate techniques are used.

Information about the percentage of interviews which deviate from standard is not held centrally and this information could be obtained only at disproportionate cost.

Mrs. Curtis-Thomas: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what steps are being taken to encourage sex offence victims to *(a)* report their abuse and *(b)* act as a witness in court. [196644]

Paul Goggins: The Government have implemented a range of measures with a view to encouraging sex offence victims to report abuse and to act as a witness in court.

In 2002, the Government published their Rape Action Plan including steps to improve the investigation and prosecution of rape cases and the treatment of victims and witnesses. The intention is that these measures will help to bring more cases to justice, increase public confidence and consequently encourage victims to report their abuse. Key elements of the RAP include:

specialist training of Sexual Offence Liaison Officers and Rape Victim Chaperones.

Specialist rape prosecutors, and rape co-ordinators in each of the 42 CPS areas.

Guidance on special measures such as allowing victims to give their evidence from behind a screen, or on video, helping to sustain cases which would otherwise stand no chance of getting to court, and encourage victims to act as witnesses.

An important recommendation from the Rape Action Plan is that forces support the development of Sexual Assault Referral Centres (SARCs)—integrated services where victims of rape and sexual assault can have their various medical, forensic, counselling and support needs met quickly and sympathetically, in one location, by properly trained staff. A recent evaluation of SARCs (Home Office Research Study 285: Lovett, J., Regan, L. and Kelly, L. (2004),) reported high levels of victim satisfaction. While victims may use the services of a SARC without reporting to the police, they are encouraged to do so, and if they do not wish to report immediately, they are still able to undergo a forensic examination in case they decide to report at a later date.

There are now 13 SARCs across England, with more under development. Over this and the next financial year, a proportion of the £4 million set aside from the Victims Fund for services to victims of sexual offending will help to extend and strengthen the SARCs network. Work is also underway to raise awareness about SARCs. If people who have been raped are confident that they will be treated with respect and dignity, they may be more likely to report to the police.

The remainder of the £4 million will be used to develop voluntary and community sector based services for victims of sexual offending. The services will be available regardless of whether a victim chooses to report the offence or testify in court but we hope more victims of sexual crime will have the confidence to report the offences and that more victims can be supported as their cases go through the criminal justice process.

Vulnerable or intimidated witnesses (VIWs) are being encouraged to testify by the range of special measures available to them under the Youth Justice and Criminal Evidence Act 1999. Home Office Research Study 283, "Are special measures working? Evidence from surveys of vulnerable and intimidated witnesses" (Home Office, June 2004) shows that:

> Around half of witnesses who did not have the opportunity to give evidence with the aid of special measures said that they would have found special measures helpful.
>
> Witnesses who used special measures were significantly more confident that the criminal justice system was effective in bringing those who commit crimes to justice and effective in meeting the needs of victims.
>
> 44 per cent. of victims of sexual offences said they would not have given evidence without special measures.

Additional steps have been taken to ensure that victims and witnesses, more generally, are willing to give evidence in court. In 2003, the National Criminal Justice Board asked each Local Criminal Justice Board to undertake work to increase public confidence in the Criminal Justice System—one of the key issues being victim and witness satisfaction. This work continues and on Monday 18 October the Office of Criminal Justice Reform published the Victim and Witness Delivery Plan "Improving Services for Victims and Witnesses", setting out the Government's seven priorities for victims and witnesses.

Local Criminal Justice Boards are also delivering the Criminal Case Management Programme which will ensure that charges are more appropriately brought, that trials are more effectively managed and that witnesses and victims receive proper care and information.

Increased public confidence and better criminal case management will encourage more victims and witnesses to come forward and give evidence in court.

Mrs. Curtis-Thomas: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what alternatives to court attendance are available for witnesses in sex offence cases. [196645]

Paul Goggins: The Youth Justice and Criminal Evidence Act 1999 provides a range of measures to assist vulnerable or intimidated witnesses to give their best evidence. The special measures include video-recorded evidence in chief and live links. These provisions enable a witness to give their evidence from outside the courtroom and, in some cases, the witness may not have to attend the court building at all.

Sections 16 and 17 of the 1990 Act define the categories of witness eligible for special measures. Complainants in sexual offence proceedings are automatically eligible witnesses by virtue of section 17 unless they say that they do not want to be. All witnesses aged under 17 at the time of the hearing are automatically eligible witnesses by virtue of section 16. Other witnesses will be eligible for assistance if the court determines that the quality of their evidence would be diminished by reason of a mental disorder, or a learning disability or a physical disability or disorder (under section 16) or because of their fear and distress at testifying (section 17).

All child witnesses in sexual offence cases are entitled to have a video recording admitted as their evidence in chief and otherwise give their evidence via a live link unless the court decides that this would be against the interests of justice. For adults the court needs to be satisfied that the provision of special measures would improve the quality of the witness' evidence.

The introduction of special measures is being phased to enable evaluation of how they are working and to provide time for agencies to prepare for full implementation.

Video recorded evidence in chief is available in all cases in the Crown Court to all witnesses eligible under section 16, which includes all child witnesses. It is also available to child witnesses in sexual offence cases heard in magistrates' courts. Additionally, this measure is available to witnesses eligible under section 17 in a limited number of pilot courts.

Live links are available to all section 16 or section 17 witnesses in the Crown Court and to child witnesses in sexual offence cases in magistrates' courts. Live links are also available to adult witnesses as a pilot in West London Magistrates' Court.

Mrs. Curtis-Thomas: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what assessment has been made of *(a)* interviewing and *(b)* therapeutic techniques used with sex offence victims. [196646]

Paul Goggins: Guidance on interviewing vulnerable or intimidated witnesses, including victims of sexual offences, is contained in "Achieving Best Evidence in Criminal Proceedings: Guidance for Vulnerable or Intimidated Witnesses, including Children" issued in January 2002. This guidance became operational in May 2002 when it superseded "Memorandum of Good Practice on Video Recorded Interviews with Child Witnesses for Criminal Proceedings".

Guidance on therapy is provided in "Provision of Therapy for Child Witnesses Prior to a Criminal Trial: Practice Guidance" and "Provision of Therapy for Vulnerable or Intimidated Adult Witnesses Prior to a Criminal Trial: Practice Guidance" issued in 2001 and 2002, respectively. This guidance took effect immediately.

These guidance documents were produced as a result of a wider assessment by an interdepartmental working group into the treatment of vulnerable or intimidated witnesses, including the victims of sexual offences, in the criminal justice system. The working group's findings and recommendations were published in the Speaking Up For Justice report (Home Office, 1998).

Mrs. Curtis-Thomas: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what estimate has been made of the number of unreported sex offences. [196648]

Paul Goggins: The British Crime Survey (BCS) systematically collects information on rape, although due to the sensitivity of such questions in a face-to-face crime survey it is recognised that the subsequent results may provide an unreliable indicator. For this reason, they are not routinely published. However, self-completion modules on sexual victimisation put to respondents aged 16 to 59 have been included in the 1998, 2000, 2001 and currently in the 2004/05 BCS.

The 2001 results are published in Home Office research study 276 'Domestic violence, sexual victimisation and stalking: findings from the British Crime Survey'. This report showed that in only 12 per cent. of worst incidents of female serious sexual assault suffered since the age of 16 did the police come to know about it.

Mrs. Curtis-Thomas: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what *(a)* support and *(b)* treatment is available for prisoners who disclose information to the police about historical sex abuse against them. [196649]

Paul Goggins: Prisons assist the police in making facilities available when investigating offences. Any information about historical sex abuse disclosed in these circumstances by prisoners to the police will be treated in confidence and not shared with prison staff. However, prisoners may choose to disclose such information to staff.

The support and treatment available for prisoners who have been sexually abused in the past varies between prison establishments, reflecting local circumstances. Prison psychologists, for example, may be able to offer one-to-one help in some cases, although the psychological and therapeutic work done with victims of sexual abuse can be a long slow process. Help may be limited to information or advice or referral to appropriate agencies in their local communities on release. Some prison programmes, such as anger management, may address the impact of abuse indirectly. Prisoners who have a history of sexual abuse are at a greater risk of suicide or self-harm and guidance to staff on managing prisoners who self-harm has been circulated to establishments.

Similar Fact Evidence

Mrs. Curtis-Thomas: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will make a statement on the use of similar fact evidence. [197441]

Paul Goggins: At present, evidence of a defendant's bad character is generally inadmissible in criminal proceedings but the common law "similar fact" rule allows the prosecution to rely on a defendant's previous misconduct in certain circumstances. However the bad character provisions of the Criminal Justice Act 2003, to be implemented in December 2004, will abolish this and other common law rules governing the admissibility of such evidence in criminal proceedings. In their place the Act adopts an inclusionary approach to a defendant's previous convictions and sets out a number of "gateways" through which evidence of a defendant's bad character may be admissible, where relevant and probative. One of these is where such evidence is "relevant to an important matter in issue between the defendant and the prosecution". The Act makes clear that such

"matters in issue between the defendant and the prosecution"

include the question of whether the defendant has a propensity to commit offences of the kind with which he is charged. Evidence of propensity could include similar fact evidence.

Spray Paints

Mrs. Curtis-Thomas: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department on how many occasions a person has received a level four fine for selling spray paints to someone under the age of 16 years on Merseyside. [191326]

Paul Goggins: Selling spray paints to someone under the age of 16 years is an offence under section 54 of the Anti-social Behaviour Act 2003 which came into force on 31 March 2004.

Court proceedings statistics for 2004 will be published around November 2005.

Support Services (Funding)

Sue Doughty: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what assessment he has made of the impact of the recent changes in central funding for *(a)* survivor organisations and *(b)* rape and sexual abuse support centres on their ability to continue to provide services. [191977]

Paul Goggins: We have made no formal assessment but recognise that financial stability for local service providers and survivor groups is critical to ensuring their ability to deliver services to victims. We are making available £4 million additional funding over two years as a contribution to the development of services for victims, although we do not believe that central Government should bear sole responsibility for supporting local service delivery organisations. Local ownership and support—including financial support—is vital to ensuring the future of local provision.

Victim Support

Nick Harvey: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what support he will provide to victims in North Devon following the closure of the Victim Support office in Barnstaple. [193962]

Paul Goggins: The Home Office has provided funding to Victim Support since 1979. Over the last few years this funding has nearly trebled, from £11.7 million at the start of 1997–98 to £30 million in 2004–05.

The Home Office-Victim Support Grant-in-Aid memorandum sets out the services that Victim Support are expected to deliver to victims and witnesses. However, decisions regarding the management of these services in Devon are the responsibility of the Victim Support Devon Board of Trustees.

Mrs. Curtis-Thomas: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what types of support and therapy are available to victims in sex abuse cases as their case advances through the criminal justice system. [195484]

Paul Goggins: Victim Support is the main organisation in England and Wales that provides support to victims and witnesses of crime, including victims of sexual offending. This year Victim Support have been offered £30 million grant-in-aid funding from the Home Office to enable them to provide this support.

All Victim Support volunteers complete a core training programme. Additional training is provided for those volunteers working with victims of sexual offending.

A number of specialist organisations exist to offer support and other services to victims of sexual offending. The Home Office has allocated an additional £4 million funding over two years to develop services for victims of sexual crime. Part of this funding will be used to support the development of local services, provided in many cases by the voluntary and community sector.

Mrs. Curtis-Thomas: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department whether there are victim advocates to support victims in sex abuse cases. [195485]

Paul Goggins: Victim Support is the main organisation in England and Wales that provides support and practical help to victims and witnesses of crime, including victims of sexual offending. This year Victim Support has been offered £30 million grant-in-aid funding from the Home Office to enable them to provide this support.

Victim Support offers free and confidential support regardless of whether the crime has been reported to the police. Victim Support can help in dealing with other organisations and provide links to additional sources of help. If a victim attends court then Victim Support's Witness Service can provide support before, during and after a hearing.

A number of specialist organisations exist to offer support and other services to victims of sexual offending. The Home Office has allocated an additional £4 million funding over two years to develop services for victims of sexual crime. Part of this funding will be used to support the development of local services, provided in many cases by the voluntary and community sector.

Mrs. Curtis-Thomas: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what percentage of known child sex abuse victims received help from *(a)* sexual assault referral centres, *(b)* the National Association for People Abused in Childhood, *(c)* Family Matters, *(d)* Lifeline and *(e)* other victim support groups in each of the last seven years. [195727]

Paul Goggins: The Home Office does not routinely collect data on the percentage of known child sex abuse victims receiving help from these organisations, and has not carried out any specific research on this issue.

Witnesses (Video Recording)

Mrs. Curtis-Thomas: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department whether the video recording of witnesses under section 17 of the Youth Justice and Criminal Evidence Act 1999 is at the discretion of the individual. [191294]

Paul Goggins: Witnesses who fall within the scope of section 17 of the Youth Justice and Criminal Evidence Act 1999 are those who because of age, personal circumstances and the nature of the alleged offence may qualify for Special Measures if the court is satisfied that the quality of their evidence is likely to be diminished by reason of their fear or distress.

In reaching a decision on whether Special Measures should be invoked, in this instance section 27—video recorded evidence in chief, the courts must take account of the wishes of the individual witness. It is imperative therefore that investigators establish at an early stage whether the section 17 witness is likely to qualify for a Special Measures Direction under the 1999 Act.

If so this will need to be discussed with the witness to ascertain their views. It is essential that the police, social workers, the prosecution and defence and also court officials take account of the individual circumstances of each witness, together with their expressed needs and wishes, in order to provide support sufficient to enable all witnesses to give their best evidence. The guidance "Achieving Best Evidence in Criminal Proceedings" makes this clear to practitioners.

The Implementation of Special Measures is being phased to enable evaluation of how they are working before full roll out. Video recorded evidence in chief is not currently available to witnesses who would only be eligible by virtue of section 17 of the 1999 Act. Subject to the success of pilots currently under way this will be extended to these witnesses in May 2005.

Work Permits

Mr. Soley: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what the average time taken from point of application to issue of a work permit was in 2003; and if he will make a statement. [193346]

Mr. Browne: The average length of time taken to issue a work permit from receipt of the application at Work Permits (UK) in 2003 was four days. This includes time spent gaining further information and checking references with posts overseas, where necessary.

Young Offender Institutions

Tom Cox: To ask the Secretary of State for The Home Department what action he is taking to stop bullying and violence among inmates in young offender institutions; and if he will make a statement. [191957]

Paul Goggins: Reducing violence, in all its forms, is fundamental to the objectives of the Prison Service. By constructively and consistently taking action to prevent violence and promote fairness and decency, prisons can offer a structured environment in which to influence future behaviour, encourage positive communication and develop social skills that assist offenders with rehabilitation. Further, maintaining a safe environment reduces stress and anxiety, and promotes individual, organisational and public confidence.

All Prison Service establishments, including young offender institutions, are required by Prison Service Order 2,750 to have (by November 2004) a strategy to reduce violence. The Prison Service's definition of violence is 'any incident in which a person is, abused, threatened, or assaulted. This includes an explicit or implicit challenge to their safety, well-being or health. The resulting harm may be physical, emotional or psychological.' Moreover all prison establishments are required to have an anti-bullying strategy in place, under the umbrella of violence reduction. The Prison Service's desired approach to perpetrators is one where:

> Personal responsibility for incidents is based on an understanding of the causes, rather than allocating blame;
>
> Wherever possible, a responsive rather than a reactive approach from the organisation is taken; and
>
> While an assailant is left in no doubt that the behaviour is unacceptable and will not be tolerated, sustained, reasoned change in behaviour rather than retribution is sought.

Miss McIntosh: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department on what grounds it has been proposed to privatise Her Majesty's Young Offenders Institution at Wetherby; what consultation with the *(a)* governors, *(b)* staff and *(c)* Board of Visitors (i) there has been and (ii) is proposed for this proposal; and if he will make a statement. [192232]

Paul Goggins: There are no plans to privatise any public sector prisons or Young Offender Institutions.

We are considering how to take forward market within the National Offender Management Service. No decision has yet been taken.

HEALTH

Agency Temporary Staff

Dr. Julian Lewis: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many agency temporary staff have been working for his Department in each of the last five years, excluding those working for agencies for which no data are kept centrally. [195248]

Ms Rosie Winterton *[holding answer 1 November 2004]:* The number of temporary staff employed through employment agencies can be provided only at disproportionate cost. The Department does not keep a central record of the number of temporary staff employed through employment agencies.

Alzheimer's

Sir Nicholas Winterton: To ask the Secretary of State for Health (1) what assessment he has made of the clinical effectiveness of anti-dementia drugs; [196931]

(2) when he expects the National Institute for Clinical Excellence to complete its review of drug treatments for Alzheimer's disease. [196932]

Dr. Ladyman: The National Institute for Clinical Excellence (NICE) issued guidance on the clinical and cost effectiveness of donepezil, rivastigmine and galantamine for the treatment of mild to moderate Alzheimer's disease in January 2001. It is conducting a review of its guidance and expects to publish revised guidance in May 2005. Memantine (for the treatment of moderate to severe Alzheimer's disease) is currently being appraised by NICE and the Institute's recommendations on the drug's use will be included in the review of the earlier appraisal. Full details are available on the website for NICE at www.nice.org.uk

Sir Nicholas Winterton: To ask the Secretary of State for Health (1) when he last met representatives of the Alzheimer's Society; and what issues were discussed; [196933]

(2) what steps his Department is taking to improve the treatment and care of Alzheimer's patients; and what steps his Department is taking to support Alzheimer's patients' carers; [196934]

(3) what steps his Department is taking to increase public awareness of dementia; and if he will make a statement. [196935]

Dr. Ladyman: Ministers and officials at the Department have regular meetings with the Alzheimer's Society. I recently met with them on 10 November. They raised several issues associated with the development of a vision for adult social care.

The national service framework (NSF) for older people, which we published in March 2001, sets out a range of national standards and service models of care across health and social services. Standard seven of the NSF aims to promote good mental health in older people, and to treat and support people of all ages with dementia, including Alzheimer's disease.

In addition, the National Institute for Clinical Excellence (NICE) has appraised the use of anti-dementia drugs. NICE is also appraising the use of non-Alzheimer's dementia drugs. Finally, NICE is developing a comprehensive guideline on the management and treatment of older people with dementia, which will build on the medication appraisals. This will be available early in 2007.

It is essential that awareness of the needs of people with Alzheimer's disease, and of their carers is raised to help ensure that those needs are met. Through grants to the Alzheimer's Society, the Department has funded a range of projects to increase awareness and understanding of Alzheimer's disease. In 2004–05 the Society received £32,000 to support a project to promote awareness of vascular dementia.

Barnet and Chase Farm NHS Trust

Mr. Dismore: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what assessment he has made of the effects on *(a)* costs and *(b)* services of the merger of Barnet and Chase Farm hospitals; and if he will make a statement. [197515]

Dr. Ladyman: The creation of a single trust in 1999 will have led to savings in management costs from the merger of the two organisations for reinvestment in patient services. Service developments and changes since the merger will have been the result of normal National Health Service management action, including the involvement of patients and the public.

Barnet Hospital

Mr. Dismore: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many patients from Barnet had NHS operations and other treatment *(a)* overseas and *(b)* outside London in each of the last two years; and if he will make a statement. [197519]

Dr. Ladyman: The number of patients from Barnet and Chase Farm Hospital National Health Service Trust waiting for treatment who went on to receive treatment overseas under the London patient choice project is:

	Number
2004–05	13
2003–04	49

The information requested on the number of patients from Barnet who had NHS treatment outside London is shown in the table.

Primary care trust (PCT) of residence: 5A9 Barnet PCT count of finished admission episodes in strategic health authorities outside London—NHS hospitals, England 2001–02 and 2002–03

	Finished admission episodes
2001–02	1,325
2002–03	1,210

Mr. Dismore: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what the average waiting time for accident and emergency treatment for Barnet patients was *(a)* at 1 May 1997 and *(b)* at the latest date for which figures are available; how many people were waiting for (i) elective orthopaedic treatment, (ii) elective cataract treatment and (iii) elective heart surgery at each date; what the (A) longest and (B) average waiting times were in each case; and if he will make a statement. [197622]

Dr. Ladyman: The information requested is shown in the tables.

Barnet and Chase Farm National Health Service Trust

	Quarter 2 2002–03	*Quarter 2 2004–05*
Number of attendances	30,305	34,022
Attendances waiting over four hours	11,457	3,491
Percentage waiting under four hours	62.20	89.70

Source:
Department of Health form QMAE.

Patients waiting for elective in-patient admission: position at month-end

Month-end/NHS trust	*Specialty*	*Total number of patients waiting*	*Median waiting time in weeks*	*Longest waiting time*
March 1997				
Wellhouse NHS Trust	Trauma and orthopaedic	1,123	19.4	No patient waited longer than 21 months
Wellhouse NHS Trust	Ophthalmology	755	20.0	No patient waited longer than 15 months
Wellhouse NHS Trust	Cardiothoracic surgery	2	9.8	No patient waited longer than 3 months
Chase Farm Hospitals NHS Trust	Trauma and orthopaedic	1,351	24.3	No patient waited longer than 18 months
September 2004				
Barnet and Chase Farm Hospitals NHS Trust	Trauma and orthopaedic	2,151	15.9	No patient waited longer than 9 months

Source:
Department of Health form KH07.

Bed Occupancy Rates

Mr. Lansley: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will list the trusts operating with bed occupancy levels higher than the Department of Health's target of 82 per cent. [193455]

Mr. Hutton: The Department does not have a target for bed occupancy. National health service organisation data including bed occupancy rates for 2000–01 to 2003–04, are available on the Department's website at www.performance.doh.gov.uk/hospitalactivity/index.htm.

Birmingham Heartlands Hospital

Mr. Godsiff: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will ask the management of Birmingham Heartlands Hospital to carry out an urgent investigation into levels of cleanliness and hygiene and to publish its findings. [193777]

Miss Melanie Johnson: There were 106 reported methycillin-resistant Staphylococcus aureus (MRSA) blood stream infections at the Birmingham Heartlands and Solihull National Health Service Trust (Teaching) during 2003–04. This equates to 0.26 incidences per 1,000 bed days[1].

We are committed to reducing healthcare associated infections and we have set a new national target of year-on-year reductions in MRSA infection rates.

Birmingham and The Black Country Strategic Health Authority (SHA) is currently reviewing implementation in its area of the guidance contained in "Winning ways: working together to reduce healthcare associated infection in England", which was issued by the Chief Medical Officer in December 2003.

The SHA reports that the trust has a robust infection control plan, in line with the guidance, and has passed external inspections by the patient environment action team. The trust is also conducting its own inquiry, involving an independent investigator, into cleanliness and hygiene at the trust.

The findings of this inquiry will be made available once it is completed.

[1] *Source:*
Department of Health Mandatory Bacteraemia Surveillance Scheme.

Bullying

Mrs. Iris Robinson: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what estimate he has made of the financial cost resulting from bullying in the NHS in the last year for which figures are available. [196257]

Mr. Hutton: This information is not collected and held centrally, although it may be available from individual national health service employing organisations. The Government has made it clear that no form of bullying or harassment will be tolerated in the NHS. NHS employers are expected to take proactive action to prevent such behaviour and to take effective action to tackle it when it occurs.

Cancer

Jon Trickett: To ask the Secretary of State for Health hat actions his Department has taken to improve the rly diagnosis of cancer since the publication by e National Audit Office of its report, "Tackling cancer England: saving more lives", HC 364, Session 03–04. [197217]

Miss Melanie Johnson: The cancer policy team within e Department is currently developing a programme of ork to raise public awareness of symptoms which ight result in the diagnosis of cancer and to encourage people with those symptoms to seek medical advice as early as possible.

This work is being undertaken in conjunction with a variety of key stakeholders, including clinicians, researchers, charities and patient representatives.

Mr. Skinner: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many operations for cancer were carried out in hospitals covering the constituency of Bolsover in *(a)* 1997, *(b)* 2000 and *(c)* 2003. [197094]

Dr. Ladyman: Information relating to those national health service trusts most likely to treat patients from the Bolsover constituency is shown in the table.

All cancer (neoplasms) operations—count of finished consultant episodes (FCEs)

rust	1997–98	2000–01	2002–03
ottingham City Hospital NHS Trust	15,023	17,134	15,322
ueen's Medical Centre, Nottingham University Hospital NHS Trust	7,583	7,928	7,823
hesterfield & North Derbyshire Royal Hospital NHS Trust	3,303	4,430	4,672
he Kings Mill Centre for Healthcare NHS Trust	5,653	5,688	5,820
outhern Derbyshire Acute Hospitals NHS Trust	Not available	11,986	12,208

Notes:
Finished consultant episode (FCE)—A FCE is defined as a period of admitted patient care under one consultant within one healthcare provider. Please note that the figures do not represent the number of patients, as a person may have more than one episode of care within the year.
All operations count of episodes—These figures represent a count of all FCE's where the procedure was mentioned in any of the 12 (four prior to 2002–03) operation fields in a HES record. A record is only included once in each count, even if an operation is mentioned in more than one operation field of the record.
Diagnosis (primary diagnosis)—The primary diagnosis is the first of up to 14 (seven prior to 2002–03) diagnosis fields in the Hospital Episode Statistics (HES) data set and provides the main reason why the patient was in hospital.
Ungrossed data—Figures have not been adjusted for shortfalls in data (i.e. the data are ungrossed).
Source:
Hospital Episode Statistics (HES), Department of Health.

Cardiac Rehabilitation

Mr. Swayne: To ask the Secretary of State for Health in what circumstances the provision of cardiac rehabilitation is a mandatory requirement for NHS trusts; and if he will make a statement. [196879]

Miss Melanie Johnson: Provision for cardiac rehabilitation is addressed in standard 12 of the national service framework (NSF) for coronary heart disease. Standards are quality requirements which describe the care that clinicians and others will use to guide their practice. Standard 12 states:

> "NHS Trusts should put in place agreed protocols/systems of care so that, prior to leaving hospital, people admitted to hospital suffering from coronary heart disease have been invited to participate in a multidisciplinary programme of secondary prevention and cardiac rehabilitation. The aim of the programme will be to reduce their risk of subsequent cardiac problems and to promote their return to a full and normal life."

Service models for the delivery of this standard are set out in the NSF.

Care Homes

Mr. Hepburn: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many people in *(a)* the Jarrow constituency, *(b)* South Tyneside, *(c)* Tyne and Wear and *(d)* England have been in (i) voluntary sector, (ii) local authority and (iii) private sector care homes in each year since 1997. [193606]

Dr. Ladyman: Information about the number of places in care homes is collected but information about the number of people in those places is not centrally available.

The number of care home places in Gateshead and South Tyneside, Newcastle and North Tyneside, Northumberland, and England at 31 March for the years 1997 to 2001 is shown in the table.

I understand from the chair of the Commission for Social Care Inspection (CSCI) that figures for later years were collected by the National Care Standards Commission and now CSCI, but that comparable details are not available.

Number of care home places in Gateshead and South Tyneside, Newcastle and North Tyneside, Northumberland and England, 1997–2001[1]

Rounded numbers

	Residential			Nursing[2]	
	Local authority	Private	Voluntary	Independent	Total
England					
1997	65,820	213,140	59,170	196,270	534,410
1998	63,980	223,130	60,790	205,590	553,490
1999	59,030	226,290	58,720	202,150	546,190
2000	55,460	229,720	60,720	193,330	539,240
2001	50,860	228,340	61,970	186,830	528,000
Gateshead and South Tyneside					
1997	890	1,490	310	1,460	4,150
1998	860	1,560	310	1,720	4,460
1999	830	1,590	300	1,500	4,220
2000	770	1,630	330	1,480	4,210
2001	760	1,670	300	1,360	4,090

Number of care home places in Gateshead and South Tyneside, Newcastle and North Tyneside, Northumberland and England, 1997–2001[1]

Rounded numbers

	Residential			*Nursing*[2]	
	Local authority	*Private*	*Voluntary*	*Independent*	*Total*
Newcastle and North Tyneside					
1997	630	2,150	540	1,750	5,070
1998	540	2,810	470	1,810	5,610
1999	460	2,570	450	1,740	5,220
2000	520	2,970	510	1,630	5,630
2001	470	2,490	570	1,700	5,220
Northumberland					
1997	620	1,680	340	830	3,470
1998	500	1,790	400	1,030	3,720
1999	520	1,900	380	990	3,790
2000	530	1,970	380	980	3,870
2001	480	1,990	390	990	3,840

[1] Nursing relates to Gateshead and South Tyneside health authority, Newcastle and North Tyneside HA, and Northumberland HA; Residential care relates to Gateshead Council with Social Services Responsibilities (CSSR), South Tyneside CSSR, Newcastle CSSR, North Tyneside CSSR and Northumberland CSSR.

[2] Nursing home figures include places in general nursing homes, mental nursing homes and private hospitals and clinics.

Source:

RA and RH(N) form A.

Mr. Hepburn: To ask the Secretary of State for Health (1) how many new care homes have been built by local authorities in *(a)* the Jarrow constituency, *(b)* South Tyneside, *(c)* Tyne and Wear and *(d)* England in each year since 1997; [193607]

(2) how many new care homes are being built in the private sector in *(a)* the Jarrow constituency, *(b)* South Tyneside, *(c)* Tyne and Wear and *(d)* England in each year since 1997; [193608]

(3) how many new care homes have been built in the voluntary sector in *(a)* the Jarrow constituency, *(b)* South Tyneside, *(c)* Tyne and Wear and *(d)* England in each year since 1997; [193610]

(4) how many care homes have closed in *(a)* Jarrow constituency, *(b)* South Tyneside, *(c)* Tyne and Wear and *(d)* England in each year since 1997. [193633]

Dr. Ladyman: Information about the total number of care homes is collected, but information about the number of care homes opening and closing is not centrally available.

Data are not available for the areas requested. The table shows the number of care homes for the nearest equivalent areas at 31 March for the years 1997 to 2001.

I understand from the chair of the Commission for Social Care Inspection (CSCI) that figures for later years were collected by the National Care Standards Commission and now CSCI, but that comparable details are not available.

The number of care homes in Gateshead and South Tyneside, Newcastle and North Tyneside, Northumberland, and England, 1997–2001[1]

Rounded numbers

	Residential Homes			*Nursing Homes*[2]	
	Local authority	*Private*	*Voluntary*	*Independent*	*Total*
England					
1997	2,260	16,830	3,850	5,920	28,850
1998	2,230	16,610	3,930	6,180	28,950
1999	2,070	16.640	3,860	6,110	28,680
2000	2,030	16,460	3,950	5,880	28,320
2001	1,870	15,980	3,940	5,680	27,480
Gateshead and South Tyneside					
1997	30	60	50	40	170
1998	40	90	30	40	190
1999	40	100	20	40	190
2000	30	90	30	30	180
2001	30	100	30	30	190
Newcastle and North Tyneside					
1997	30	130	30	60	240
1998	20	130	30	50	240
1999	20	140	40	60	250
2000	20	160	40	60	280
2001	20	120	40	60	250
Northumberland					
1997	20	100	30	20	170
1998	20	100	20	30	170
1999	20	110	30	30	180
2000	20	110	30	30	180
2001	10	100	30	30	170

[1] Nursing relates to Gateshead and South Tyneside Health Authority, Newcastle and North Tyneside HA, and Northumberland HA; Residential care relates to Gateshead Council with Social Services Responsibilities (CSSR), South Tyneside CSSR, Newcastle CSSR, North Tyneside CSSR, and Northumberland CSSR.

[2] Nursing home figures include places in general nursing homes, mental nursing homes and private hospitals and clinics.

Source:

RA and RH(N) form A.

Care Records

Mr. Burstow: To ask the Secretary of State for Health (1) what provision there will be for the care record system to be shared with private sector providers undertaking NHS work; [197281]

(2) what safeguards will be put in place by the national programme for IT to ensure information cannot be shared with organisations outside the NHS. [197282]

Mr. Hutton: The NHS Care Records Service (NHS CRS) will incorporate stringent security controls and safeguards to prevent unrestricted or uncontrolled access to personal information. Access will only be available to authorised national health service healthcare professionals who must be registered and authenticated users of the NHS CRS. They must have a legitimate relationship with the patient, that is they must be directly involved with the delivery of their care and have a 'need to know' relevant to that role. A record will be kept of everyone who accesses a patient's record and alerts will be raised if anyone tries to access a record in contravention of predetermined system rules.

Breaches of confidence by staff working within or under contract to NHS organisations, or inappropriate use of health records or abuse of computer systems, may lead to disciplinary measures, bring into question professional registration, and possibly result in legal proceedings.

Where an NHS patient is referred for treatment to a private sector healthcare provider, or in another European Union state, relevant information will be made available where appropriate through the existing request mechanisms, but access to the information on the NHS CRS will be under exactly the same stringent conditions.

Mr. Burstow: To ask the Secretary of State for Health (1) whether a patient's right to opt out of having personal information on the care record system will include all information on the care record; [197283]

(2) what plans his Department has to notify individual patients of their right to opt out of having personal information on their care record shared within the NHS. [197284]

Mr. Hutton: I refer the hon. Member to the answers I gave to the hon. Member for Westbury (Dr. Murrison) on 2 November 2004, *Official Report*, column 176W, and on 8 November 2004, *Official Report*, column 538W.

Community Health Councils

Peter Bottomley: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what the running costs of *(a)* community health councils in the last year of operation and *(b)* the replacement systems have been to date. [188237]

Ms Rosie Winterton *[pursuant to her reply, 4 October 2004, Official Report, c. 1956–57W]:* I regret my previous reply was incorrect. It should read as follows:

In 2002–03, the last year of the operation of community health councils (CHCs), the total running costs for CHCs was £13.981 million. By the end of 2004–05, the total running and set up costs of the Commission for Patient and Public Involvement in Health (CPPIH) will be £66.76 million. This figure includes all costs associated with patients' forums. It also includes CPPIH set up costs of around £2.5 million in 2002–03.

Decontamination

Mr. Burstow: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many contaminated medical devices were submitted to the Medicines and Healthcare Products Regulatory Agency without having been suitably cleaned prior to decontamination in each year since 1997; and if he will make a statement. [197288]

Ms Rosie Winterton: As part of the Medicines and Healthcare products Regulatory Agency's (MHRA) investigation of an adverse incident it may be necessary to request submission of the device involved for examination by the Agency's medical device specialists. Where such a devices are submitted without sufficient evidence of adequate decontamination, those devices will, for the safety and protection of the Agency staff who may handle them, be decontaminated prior to examination.

Advice and warnings about the submission of contaminated items is clearly provided in MHRA printed publications and guidance. In particular, a special medical device alert on adverse incident reporting is updated and re-issued at the beginning of each year. The advice is also repeated on medical device adverse incident report forms, on the MHRA's website and on the MHRA on-line reporting system.

Devices submitted to the MHRA requiring decontamination by the MHRA

	number of devices received	*number requiring decontamination*	*percentage requiring decontamination*
1998	548	63	11.5
1999	419	22	5.2
2000	861	38	4.4
2001	1026	48	4.7
2002	827	254	30.7
2003	394	70	17.8

Dentistry

Dr. Murrison: To ask the Secretary of State for Health pursuant to the answer to the hon. Member for Pendle (Mr. Prentice) of 14 September 2004, *Official Report*, columns 1122–1123, on dental schools, what system of commissioning is in place to report the dental work force figures. [195118]

Ms Rosie Winterton: Next year we plan to check the assumptions upon which our expansion of the dental work force is based using data from the Dental Practice Board on dentists receiving remuneration under the national health service, from the General Dental Council on the registration of dentists and from NHS trusts on the number of salaried dentists.

Mr. Gordon Prentice: To ask the Secretary of State for Health when he expects to agree the new NHS dental contract. [192510]

Ms Rosie Winterton: We are to implement the new contractual arrangements from October 2005 and are confident that there is sufficient time to complete the necessary preparatory work.

Dr. Murrison: To ask the Secretary of State for Health pursuant to the answer to the hon. Member for Altrincham and Sale, West (Mr. Brady) of 1 September 2004, *Official Report*, column 888W, on dentistry, when the Chief Dental Officer expects to report back on the findings of the working group on extra training places; who the members of the working group will be; and whether the remit will include assessment of the requirement for a new dental school. [195034]

Ms Rosie Winterton: The Chief Dental Officer is due to report in January 2005. The working group, which is considering all the options for the allocation of the additional training places, comprises the following.

Member	
Professor Raman Bedi	Chief Dental Officer, Chair
Mr. Gareth Cruddace	Chief Executive, Hampshire and Isle of Wight Strategic Health Authority (SHA)
Mr. Denis Gibson	Chief Executive, Hampshire and Isle of Wight NHS Workforce Development Confederation (WDC)
Professor Bill Hume	Higher Education Funding Council for England
Ms Rosemary Grant	Director of Education Commissioning Avon, Gloucestershire and Wiltshire WDC
Professor Malcolm Jones	Dean, University of Wales Dental School
Professor John Murray	Former Dean of Newcastle Dental School and Co-Chair of General Dental Council Visiting Panel
Mr. David Noyce	Higher Education Funding Council for England
Mr. David Sissling	Chief Executive, Leicestershire, Northamptonshire and Rutland SHA
Mr. Derek Sprague	Commissioning Manager, Avon, Gloucestershire and Wiltshire SHA
Mr. Martin Sturges	Department of Health
Mr. Martin Williams	Department for Education and Skills

Mr. Best: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what plans he has to change the guidance issued on the number of recommended visits by NHS patients to their dentists; and if he will make a statement. [195502]

Ms Rosie Winterton *[holding answer 2 November 2004]:* We are taking account of the recent guideline from the National Institute for Clinical Excellence on recall interval between routine dental examinations in preparing for new contractual arrangements for national health service dentistry to be introduced from October 2005.

Sandra Gidley: To ask the Secretary of State for Health (1) what his Department's policy is on access to dentures on the NHS; [195524]

(2) what plans his Department has to ensure that older people can obtain dentures on the NHS; and if he will make a statement; [195527]

(3) what fees patients are charged on the NHS for dentures. [195594]

Ms Rosie Winterton: The national health service statement of dental remuneration makes the following provision:

Dentures

£

	Full upper and lower	*Upper or lower only*
Patient's Charge	122.32	76.32
Dentist's fee	152.90	95.40
Total sum received by dentist	275.22	171.72

We are aware of problems with NHS dentistry in some areas and, as a result, some people may have difficulties in obtaining new or replacement dentures. We are undertaking the most wide-ranging reforms since the service began in 1948. Not only do the reforms include the recruitment of more dentists, but we are collaborating with the General Dental Council to provide for the registration of a new class of dental technician—the clinical dental technician—who would be able both to supply and fit dentures.

Sandra Gidley: To ask the Secretary of State for Health (1) which staff are permitted to take impressions to make and fit dentures; which regulations apply to this; and if he will make a statement; [195532]

(2) what estimate he has made of the number of dentures provided illegally in each year since 1997. [195533]

Ms Rosie Winterton: Taking impressions and fitting dentures are part of the practice of dentistry which, under section 38 of the Dentists Act 1984, may only be carried out by a registered dentist or, in the case of taking impression, by a registered dental hygienist or dental therapist working under the direction of a dentist. We will shortly be laying regulations before the House which would empower the General Dental Council to register a new class of dental technician, the clinical dental technician, who would be able both to supply and fit dentures.

Currently a dental technician who fits dentures is practising illegally. We do not have information on which to base an estimate of the number of dentures provided illegally. I understand that the General Dental Council has records of 41 cases it has prosecuted since 1997 involving dental technicians undertaking the practice of dentistry.

Departmental Contracts

Pete Wishart: To ask the Secretary of State for Health (1) if he will list the 30 largest contracts awarded by his Department from *(a)* May 2001 to April 2002, *(b)* May 2002 to April 2003, *(c)* May 2003 to April 2004 and *(d)* May 2004 to the latest date for which information is available, indicating in each case (i) the values of the contracts and (ii) the companies with which the contracts were placed; [196896]

(2) which non-accounting and non-information technology external organisations which previously held contracts with his Department *(a)* won new contracts at the culmination of the existing contracts and *(b)* won new contracts after a period of inactivity with his Department in each of the past four years; [196897]

(3) which non-accounting and non-information technology external organisations have won new contracts with *(a)* his Department and *(b)* executive agencies for which he is responsible in each of the past three years. [196898]

Ms Rosie Winterton: The Department does not hold centrally a record of individual contracts nor does it have similar details for its agencies. To secure such details could only obtained at disproportionate cost.

Diet

Richard Younger-Ross: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what dietary guidance his Department gives to the section of the population who are *(a)* overweight and *(b)* clinically obese; and whether he plans to publish a consumer reference resource identifying different weight loss strategies and products. [196277]

Miss Melanie Johnson: The Government's advice is that people, including those who are overweight and obese and who wish to attain and maintain a healthy weight, should consume a balanced diet and become more physically active. Guidance covering different weight loss strategies and products can be sought from local general practitioners and health professionals. The White Paper on improving health, which is due out later this year, will contain the Government's strategy for tackling obesity.

Richard Younger-Ross: To ask the Secretary of State for Health (1) what guidance his Department gives on carbohydrate-controlled diets; what plans he has to review that guidance in the light of recent research on the effectiveness of carbohydrate controlled diets; and if he will make a statement; [196278]

(2) what assessment his Department has made of carbohydrate-controlled diets; what studies his Department has conducted into the effects of carbohydrate controlled diets; and if he will make a statement. [196279]

Miss Melanie Johnson: The Government provide consumers with a wide range of information on nutrition aimed at improving their diet and health, which includes advice on consuming carbohydrates as part of a healthy balanced diet. Dietary advice, including the role of low-fat, low-carbohydrate and very low-energy diets will be considered in the forthcoming National Institute for Clinical Excellence guidance on the prevention, identification, assessment and management of overweight and obesity in adults and children, where there is good evidence of effectiveness.

Green Ministers

Mr. Horam: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many meetings of the Ministerial Sub-Committee of Green Ministers were attended by the Department's Green Minister in *(a)* 2002–03 and *(b)* 2003–04. [190855]

Miss Melanie Johnson: It has been established practice under successive Governments not to disclose information relating to the proceedings of Cabinet Committees. This practice is now formalised by Exemption 2 of Part II of the Code of Practice on Access to Government Information.

Health Services (Bury, North)

Mr. Chaytor: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what the current waiting times are for patients in Bury, North for each of the 10 most frequent surgical procedures in elective admissions; and if he will make a statement. [195347]

Miss Melanie Johnson *[holding answer 9 November 2004]:* The information is not available in the requested format. However, information relating to waiting times per surgical specialty at the Pennine Acute Hospitals National Health Service Trust are shown in the tables.

Current waiting times for surgical specialties for Pennine Acute Trust: June 2004–05

		Months					
Specialty name	*Total waiting*	*0-<1*	*1-<2*	*2-<3*	*3-<4*	*4-<5*	*5-<6*
General surgery	3,416	1,028	699	421	420	333	233
Urology	1,494	412	265	201	170	129	73
Trauma and orthopaedics	2,971	525	582	406	425	346	293
Ear, nose and throat	1,356	392	265	194	175	122	82
Ophthalmology	1,169	379	181	193	189	79	70
Oral surgery	473	200	137	51	35	18	13
Plastic surgery	12	12	0	0	0	0	0
Cardiothoracic surgery	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Paediatric surgery	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Obstetrics and gynaecology (gynaecology)	1,040	455	272	123	84	56	44

	Months						
Speciality name	*6-<7*	*7-<8*	*8-<9*	*9-<10*	*10-<11*	*11-<12*	*12 plus*
General surgery	143	94	45	0	0	0	0
Urology	71	102	71	0	0	0	0
Trauma and orthopaedics	153	193	48	0	0	0	0
Ear, nose and throat	38	74	14	0	0	0	0
Ophthalmology	39	35	4	0	0	0	0
Oral surgery	5	12	2	0	0	0	0
Plastic surgery	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Cardiothoracic surgery	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Paediatric surgery	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Obstetrics and gynaecology (gynaecology)	3	2	1	0	0	0	0

Source:

Department of Health form KH.

Hospital Infections

Mr. John Taylor: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will make a statement on *(a)* the incidence of MRSA at Birmingham Heartlands and Solihull NHS hospitals and *(b)* the remedial action which is being taken. [193597]

Miss Melanie Johnson: I refer the hon. Member to the reply I gave to my hon. Friend the Member for Birmingham, Sparkbrook and Small Heath (Mr. Godsiff), today.

Hospital Trusts (Press Releases)

Mr. Hoyle: To ask the Secretary of State for Health who is responsible for the content of press releases issued by hospital trusts. [190772]

Ms Rosie Winterton: Hospital trusts are themselves responsible for the releases they issue.

Independent Regulator of Foundation Trusts

Mr. Burstow: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what the budget is for the Independent Regulator of Foundation Trusts for 2004–05; and what it is projected to be for *(a)* 2005–06, *(b)* 2006–07, *(c)* 2007–08 and *(d)* 2009–10. [196197]

Mr. Hutton: Monitor, the statutory name of which is the independent regulator of national health service foundation trusts, is an independent corporate body established under the Health and Social Care (Community Health and Standards) Act 2003. The memorandum of understanding between Monitor and the Department, a copy of which is available in the Library, details Monitor's funding arrangements.

I am informed by the Chairman of Monitor that the budget for 2004–05 is £16.01 million. He has advised me that proposals for 2005–06 have yet to be fully developed, but that the budget is likely to be similar to that for the current financial year.

Mental Health Services

Mr. Streeter: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many people are employed in the delivery of mental health services in Plymouth. [198094]

Ms Rosie Winterton: The information requested is not available centrally.

MRSA

Mr. Dismore: To ask the Secretary [illegible] State for Health if he will make a statement on rates of MRSA at *(a)* Barnet, *(b)* Chase Farm, *(c)* Northwick Park, *(d)* Royal Free and *(e)* Edgware Hospitals in each of the last three years. [197629]

Dr. Ladyman: Information on the rates of methicillin resistant *Staphylococcus aureus* (MRSA) blood stream infections is only available for acute national health service trusts and these data are shown in the table.

Data are not collected centrally for Barnet, Enfield and Haringey Mental Health NHS Trust, of which Edgware Hospital is a part.

	Barnet and Chase Farm Hospitals NHS Trust	*North West London Hospitals NHS Trust*	*Royal Free Hampstead NHS Trust*
Number of MRSA bacteraemia reports April 2001-March 2002	62	59	122
MRSA rate per 1,000 bed-days April 2001-March 2002	0.20	0.23	0.41
Number of MRSA bacteraemia reports April 2002-March 2003	94	44	101
MRSA rate per 1,000 bed-days April 2002-March 2003	0.28	0.16	0.39
Number of MRSA bacteraemia reports April 2003-March 2004	94	55	98
MRSA rate per 1,000 bed-days April 2003-March 2004	0.27	0.20	0.34

National Blood Service

Mr. Burstow: To ask the Secretary of State for Health (1) how much donated blood was disposed of by the National Blood Service as the result of false reactions to blood tests in each year since 1997; [193407]

(2) how many people were informed by the National Blood Service in each year since 1997 of a false reaction to a blood test; and if he will make a statement; [193408]

(3) for what reasons the donation of blood which has given a false reaction to a blood test but has proved safe in subsequent tests is not permitted; and why a further test after an interval of several months is required before the person can donate blood. [193409]

Miss Melanie Johnson: The table shows the total number of donated units of blood that were disposed of by the National Blood Service (NBS) as a result of false positive results on blood screening tests.

Since 2000, it has been national policy to inform donors of false reactions in order to take a small blood sample for repeat testing of the donor. This avoids collecting full donations from this group of donors in a situation where the donations will not be used. The table shows from 2000 onwards the number of donors who were informed, which is the same number as the number of units disposed.

	Total units disposed (all markers)	*Total donations tested*
1997	6,161	2,553,387
1998	6,304	2,387,793
1999	6,861	2,442,122
2000	7,807	2,427,919
2001	5,372	23,379,521
2002	5,996	2,381,402
2003	3652	2,345,183
2004[1]	3,627	1,162,954

[1] January to June.

The matter of a false reaction on a blood donation which is subsequently determined to be safe is a matter of good manufacturing practice, with which NBS must comply because it produces components which are transfused in humans.

The interval of several months before the person can donate is a precautionary measure. It allows time to establish that there is not a true infection in the donor. This time is required because of the varying incubation periods of the infections for which screening is undertaken.

NHS and Departmental Salaries

Tim Loughton: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many people in *(a)* the NHS and *(b)* his Department earn a whole-time equivalent salary of £57,485 or more. [195326]

Ms Rosie Winterton: 297 people in the Department of Health were earning a whole-time equivalent salary of £57,845 on 1 March 2004.

An estimated 3 to 4 per cent. of staff were on contracts on national pay scales in the national health service (excluding GPs) with a full time annualised salary of more than £57,485 in August 2003.

NHS Dentistry

Mr. Gordon Prentice: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many and what percentage of dentists in each county in England undertake NHS work. [197031]

Ms Rosie Winterton: The numbers of general and personal dental service dentists in each county and in each local authority areas not defined as a county England are shown in the following tables.

Information is only available on national health service dentists and therefore the percentage of dentists in each county undertaking NHS work cannot be given. Relatively few dentists practise totally privately.

Number of general and personal dental service dentists in each county in England at 31 October 2004

County	*Number of dentists*
Bedfordshire	134
Buckinghamshire	234
Cambridgeshire	229
Cheshire	240
Cornwall and Isles of Scilly	144
Cumbria	188
Derbyshire	310
Devon	216
Dorset	162
Durham	178
East Sussex	238
Essex	532
Gloucestershire	249
Hampshire	526
Hertfordshire	651
Kent	551
Lancashire	387
Leicestershire	214
Lincolnshire	171
Norfolk	361
North Yorkshire	236
Northamptonshire	212
Northumberland	112
Nottinghamshire	292
Oxfordshire	304
Shropshire	109
Somerset	204
Staffordshire	272
Suffolk	277
Surrey	618
Warwickshire	241
West Sussex	462
Wiltshire	156
Worcestershire	220

Some areas do not have county status even though they may lie within county boundaries.

For such areas, the number of general and personal dental service dentists is given by local authority area.

Number of general and personal dental service dentists in local authority areas not defined by county at 31 October 2004

Local authority	*Number of dentists*
Barking and Dagenham	58
Barnet	206
Barnsley	62
Bath and North East Somerset	94
Bexley	99
Birmingham	411
Blackburn with Darwen	53
Blackpool	48
Bolton	101
Bournemouth	87
Bracknell Forest	55
Bradford	149
Brent	173
Brighton and Hove	144
Bristol, City of	194
Bromley	164
Bury	72
Calderdale	74
Camden	168
City of London	12
Coventry	126
Croydon	198
Darlington	48
Derby	98
Doncaster	95
Dudley	119
Ealing	155
East Riding of Yorkshire	82
Enfield	156
Gateshead	83
Greenwich	113
Hackney	82
Halton	15
Hammersmith and Fulham	139
Haringey	137
Harrow	132
Hartlepool	24
Havering	119
Herefordshire, County of	68
Hillingdon	130
Hounslow	115
Isle of Wight	38
Islington	119
Kensington and Chelsea	90
Kingston upon Hull, City of	81
Kingston upon Thames	80
Kirklees	138
Knowsley	48
Lambeth	136
Leeds	265
Leicester	123
Lewisham	124
Liverpool	164
Luton	72
Manchester	168
Medway	113

Number of general and personal dental service dentists in local authority areas not defined by county at 31 October 2004

Local authority	*Number of dentists*
Merton	100
Middlesbrough	78
Milton Keynes	92
Newcastle upon Tyne	159
Newham	99
North East Lincolnshire	41
North Lincolnshire	17
North Somerset	109
North Tyneside	72
Nottingham	143
Oldham	57
Peterborough	74
Plymouth	83
Poole	87
Portsmouth	76
Reading	92
Redbridge	150
Redcar and Cleveland	55
Richmond upon Thames	113
Rochdale	55
Rotherham	51
Rutland	15
Salford	80
Sandwell	117
Sefton	40
Sheffield	151
Slough	66
Solihull	86
South Gloucestershire	89
South Tyneside	48
Southampton	61
Southend-on-Sea	60
Southwark	102
St. Helens	48
Stockport	90
Stockton-on-Tees	100
Stoke-on-Trent	68
Sunderland	115
Sutton	109
Swindon	71
Tameside	57
Telford and Wrekin	58
Thurrock	45
Torbay	54
Tower Hamlets	96
Trafford	104
Wakefield	94
Walsall	71
Waltham Forest	105
Wandsworth	157
Warrington	43
West Berkshire	62
Westminster	193
Wigan	117
Windsor and Maidenhead	85
Wirral	33
Wokingham	64
Wolverhampton	95
York	82

Dentists have been included by either county or local authority on the basis of their practice postcode. They have been counted in each county or local authority in which they practise.

Mr. Hancock: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what recent estimate he has made of the number of people in the Portsmouth area who are unable to access an NHS dentist. [197367]

Ms Rosie Winterton: The Department does not collect information on the numbers of people who are unable to access a National Health Service dentist. However, the latest information from NHS Direct shows that, in March 2004, there were 296 calls from people in the Portsmouth city area, all of whom were referred to dentists accepting patients within local distance standards. The Department has allocated £1.5 million to the Hampshire and Isle of Wight Strategic Health Authority to improve access, choice and quality in NHS dentistry.

Mr. Hancock: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how much has been allocated to each NHS trust in Hampshire and the Isle of Wight to improve access to dentistry in the last five years; and what criteria are used in allocating such funding. [197369]

Ms Rosie Winterton: From 1999 to 2003, the Department funded three schemes—Investing in Dentistry, Dental Care Development Fund and Modernising Dentistry. Their common purpose was to make grants to health authorities (HAs), which were furthest from the Government's targets for improving access to National Health Service dentistry, for extending dental practices or purchasing new equipment to enable them to treat more patients. Responsibility for administering the scheme was delegated to the HAs with advice that they imposed conditions on the use of the funds to benefit NHS patients. Information is not held centrally on which dental practices benefited from this scheme.

In 2004–05, the Department has allocated a total of £50 million to strategic health authorities (SHAs) to support access in 2004–05. Of this sum, £1.5 million has been allocated to the Hampshire and Isle of Wight SHA to improve access, choice and quality in NHS dentistry.

The criteria for distribution from the centre to the SHAs was based on weighted capitation reflecting population and deprivation. From then on, it is up to individual SHAs to decide how to distribute these funds at a local level.

In addition to this funding, Fareham and Gosport primary care trust (PCT), Isle of Wight PCT and New Forest PCT are also receiving support from the NHS dentistry support team, which is backed by a fund of £9 million, the break down of which is shown in the table.

(£000)

PCT	*Recurrent*	*Non-recurrent*
Fareham and Gosport	310,000	26,000
Isle of Wight	600,000	—
New Forest	490,000	—

The criteria for selecting the most challenged PCTs by the support team are:

severe access situation in absolute terms;

instability of the present situation;

lack of confidence in the local capacity to put convincing plans for improvement in place.

Mr. Hancock: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what recent research his Department has *(a)* commissioned and *(b)* evaluated on (i) dental decay and (ii) requirement for dental services in each of the NHS trust areas in Hampshire and the Isle of Wight; and if he will make a statement. [197371]

Ms Rosie Winterton: The Department has not commissioned any research or evaluation on dental decay or requirements for dental services in Hampshire and the Isle of Wight, but, as we move towards the delegation of contracting for National Health Service dentistry, primary care trusts are becoming increasingly involved in assessing the oral health needs of their populations.

At a national level, the National Institute for Clinical Excellence issued guidelines in October on recall interval between routine dental examinations. We are taking account of the guideline in preparing for the new contractual arrangements for NHS dentistry to be introduced from October 2005. A significant number of dentists are entering the new arrangements early, through the personal dental schemes.

In addition, dental epidemiological surveys of the dental health of children have been carried out annually since 1986, co-ordinated for the NHS by the British Association for the Study of Community Dentistry. This programme seeks to monitor the dental health of children and contributes to the national monitoring of service provision and targets, while providing data locally to aid in service planning and evaluation of oral health strategies.

NHS Direct

Mr. Burstow: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what assessment he has made of *(a)* whether NHS Direct is providing advice to people who would not have otherwise sought medical attention and *(b)* the extent to which NHS Direct is diverting people away from their general practitioners. [196989]

Ms Rosie Winterton: Information on whether NHS Direct is providing advice to people who would not have otherwise sought medical attention is not collected centrally.

The National Audit Office found the best estimate that can be generated from available data suggests that NHS Direct is off-setting around half of its running costs by encouraging more appropriate use of NHS services. This includes advising a significant number of callers who would otherwise have visited their general practitioner on how to care for themselves instead.

NHS Foundation Trusts

Mr. Dobson: To ask the Secretary of State for Health (1) how much each of the first round of foundation hospital trusts spent on preparing its application for foundation status; and how much of this was paid to outside consultants; [194175]

(2) how much each of the first round of foundation hospital trusts spent on preparing for foundation status after they had been given the go-ahead to do so. [194176]

Mr. Hutton: The Department provides a centrally-provided programme of support and direct financial support to applicants preparing for national health service foundation trust status. It does not, however, hold information on the level of resources or the way in which resources are used by applicants in preparing for foundation status, as it is for each trust to determine how resources are best spent. Costs vary from trust to trust, depending on the individual circumstances of the organisation and its state of readiness.

Mr. Dobson: To ask the Secretary of State for Health (1) how much money, and to which organisations, each Foundation Hospital Trust paid in fees to outside bodies for help *(a)* with compiling registers of electors and *(b)* in the conduct of elections for boards of governors; [194178]

(2) how much each of the first round of Foundation Hospital Trusts spent on *(a)* compiling its register of electors for governors and *(b)* the conduct of their elections. [194180]

Mr. Hutton: I refer my right hon. Friend to the reply I gave to my hon. Friend the Member for Pendle (Mr. Prentice) on 15 June 2004, *Official Report*, column 896W.

Mr. Burstow: To ask the Secretary of State for Health pursuant to the written ministerial statement of 11 October 2004, *Official Report*, column 4WS, on ministerial accountability for NHS foundation trusts, in what circumstances a Minister from his Department will comment *(a)* in the House and *(b)* in the press on issues arising within an NHS foundation trust. [194364]

Mr. Hutton: As my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State said on 30 March 2004, *Official Report*, column 83WS, because of the independent status and separate and local route of accountability of national health service foundation trusts (NHSFTs), Ministers are not in a position to comment on the details of operational management within these organisations. The statement of 11 October 2004, *Official Report*, column 4WS, confirmed that copies of replies by NHSFTs to such questions would be placed in the Library. Media inquiries on operational matters are treated in a similar fashion, being directed to the NHSFT in question.

The new arrangements also stem directly from the limits on information gathering set out in the Health and Social Care (Community Health and Standards) Act 2003. The Department holds only that information about NHSFTs that the Act (s19(1)*(a)*) allows. This precludes the collection of routine operational data and, where the Department does not hold information, replies based on such information cannot be given. Conversely, if the information is held centrally, then a substantive reply will be given in the usual way. Ministers will also continue to be responsible for answering questions on general policy for provision of NHS services where provision is through NHSFTs. Notwithstanding the advent of NHSFTS, matters of national policy, including the statutory framework for the NHS and its resources, standards and targets remain the responsibility of Ministers.

NHS Pay

Mr. Baron: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what pay band he anticipates the majority of *(a)* radiographers and *(b)* physiotherapists will be placed in under Agenda for Change. [196429]

Mr. Hutton: We anticipate that the majority of qualified radiographers and qualified physiotherapists will be placed on pay bands six and seven.

Mr. Baron: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what effect Agenda for Change is likely to have on the hourly rate of pay of radiographers. [196430]

Mr. Hutton: We anticipate that for the majority of existing radiographers there will be an increase in the hourly rate of pay, both in the short term when hours will be unchanged and in the longer run when hours are increased.

NHS Professionals

Mr. Burstow: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many NHS acute trusts had signed up to use NHS Professionals on the latest date for which figures are available; and what proportion of acute trusts this represents. [196117]

Mr. Hutton: NHS Professionals has advised that, with effect from 1 November, a total of 76 national health service trusts have signed up to use its services. This is made up of 37 acute trusts, 30 primary care trusts and nine mental health trusts.

76 trusts represents 30 per cent. of NHS acute/specialist and mental health trusts.

NHS Staff

Mr. Burstow: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many *(a)* nurses, *(b)* doctors and *(c)* professions allied to medicine he expects there will be in the NHS in England in (i) 2005–06, (ii) 2006–7, (iii) 2007–08, (iv) 2008–09 and (v) 2009–10. [197279]

Mr. Hutton: Delivering the NHS Plan included expectations for increases in the National Health Service workforce. By 2008 we expect there to be 35,000 more nurses, midwives and health visitors, 30,000 more therapists and scientists and 15,000 more doctors (consultants and general practitioners) employed in the NHS than there were in 2001. The expectation for increasing the nursing workforce has been met already, there are almost 46,000 more nurses than in 2001, and we are making considerable progress towards the others, as at June 2004, there were 6,719 more doctors and by September 2003, there were 11,825 more therapists and scientists than in 2001.

It is for local NHS organisations to determine the workforce it needs to meet service objectives and we are supporting the NHS in developing new and innovative ways of working, enabling organisations to develop the skill mix appropriate to local need.

The expectations for increasing the NHS workforce by 2008 have not been broken down by year.

Paediatric Care

Charles Hendry: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many *(a)* paediatric beds and *(b)* paediatric wards there were in each strategic health authority area for each of the past five years. [195276]

Dr. Ladyman *[holding answer 1 November 2004]*: Data for strategic health authorities (SHAs) can only be provided from 2002–03, the year SHAs were introduced. These are shown in the tables. Data on paediatric beds in wards open overnight are collected by ward classification. The data in the table on overnight admissions include all ward classifications that involve children. Data on paediatric beds available during the day only are contained in the table on day beds.

Data on the number of exclusively paediatric wards are not collected centrally.

Average daily number of available paediatric beds for specified ward classifications, SHAs in England (beds open overnight)

	2002–03	*2003–04*
England	13,032	12,641
SHAs		
Norfolk, Suffolk and Cambridgeshire HA	497	490
Bedfordshire and Hertfordshire HA	263	234
Essex HA	325	276
North West London HA	410	408
North Central London HA	717	715
North East London HA	346	354
South East London HA	479	478
South West London HA	325	321
Northumberland, Tyne and Wear HA	478	473
County Durham and Tees Valley HA	331	316
North and East Yorkshire and Northern Lincolnshire HA	323	319
West Yorkshire HA	631	607
Cumbria and Lancashire HA	465	453
Greater Manchester HA	917	928
Cheshire and Merseyside HA	686	665
Thames Valley HA	529	516
Hampshire and Isle of Wight HA	421	392
Kent and Medway HA	324	304
Surrey and Sussex HA	559	547
Avon, Gloucestershire and Wiltshire HA	594	587
South West Peninsula HA	331	356
Somerset and Dorset HA	239	230
South Yorkshire HA	485	406
Trent HA	561	549
Leicestershire, Northamptonshire and Rutland HA	356	354
Shropshire and Staffordshire HA	288	291
Birmingham and the Black Country HA	824	750
West Midlands HA	326	323

Note:
The specified ward classifications used in the above table are those that involve children.
Source:
Department of Health Form KH03.

Average daily number of available beds in wards open day only (neonates and children), SHAs in England

	2002–03	*2003–04*
England	589	688
SHAs		
Norfolk, Suffolk and Cambridgeshire HA	6	8
Bedfordshire and Hertfordshire HA	33	84
Essex HA	16	11
North West London HA	37	31
North Central London HA	34	36
North East London HA	30	31
South East London HA	20	21
South West London HA	32	34
Northumberland, Tyne and Wear HA	41	41
County Durham and Tees Valley HA	18	17
North and East Yorkshire and Northern Lincolnshire HA	6	6
West Yorkshire HA	17	17
Cumbria and Lancashire HA	31	31
Greater Manchester HA	21	32
Cheshire and Merseyside HA	51	52
Thames Valley HA	20	55
Hampshire and Isle of Wight HA	14	22

Average daily number of available beds in wards open day only (neonates and children), SHAs in England

	2002-03	*2003-04*
Kent and Medway HA	—	—
Surrey and Sussex HA	16	16
Avon, Gloucestershire and Wiltshire HA	21	25
South West Peninsula HA	11	11
Somerset and Dorset HA	7	7
South Yorkshire HA	26	26
Trent HA	24	25
Leicestershire, Northamptonshire and Rutland HA	5	4
Shropshire and Staffordshire HA	7	9
Birmingham and the Black Country HA	42	32
West Midlands HA	4	4

Source:
Department of Health Form KH03.

Patient Choice

Mr. Burstow: To ask the Secretary of State for Health (1) what assessment has been made by his Department of the costs to the NHS of *(a)* general practitioner time and *(b)* advocacy support to implement the patient choice initiative; [197285]

(2) what provision has been made by his Department for advocacy support for patients under the new proposals for patient choice; [197286]

(3) what estimate has been made by his Department of the time needed per general practitioner consultation to make a choose and book referral. [197287]

Mr. Hutton: The level and targeting of patient support will be considered by primary care trusts (PCTs) as part of their implementation planning for choose and book. To support this we are developing best practice guidelines for PCTs on contracting with voluntary and community sector groups to provide advocacy and support to patients making a choice of hospital.

The Dr Foster research study on the implications of choice at referral, which was published in April 2004, found no significant difference in consultation time when offering choice (against a non-choice consultation leading to a referral). Extensive demonstrations and testing of the choose and book service have shown that booking an appointment with the patient takes approximately one minute to complete. Additional research has indicated that GPs make, on average, fewer than five referrals per week.

Local health communities are currently reporting on their state of readiness for the delivery of choice.

Patient Support Networks

Mr. Burstow: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what steps his Department is taking to support the development of voluntary sector support networks for patients. [197280]

Dr. Ladyman: A successful partnership with the Voluntary and Community Sector (VCS) is integral to the delivery of user centred health and social services. Community and voluntary groups already play important roles in the delivery of health and social care—they support service users and carers, acting as advocates and providing specialist information and advice as well as providing a range of health and support services directly to users. The Department supports this in a variety of ways including:

The Section 64 General Scheme of grants which is the Department's main support for national voluntary organisations working in the health and social care fields. Applications for funding are invited annually from the voluntary and community sector.

"Making Partnership Work for Patients, Carers and Service Users: A Strategic Partnership Agreement Between the Department of Health, the NHS and the Voluntary and Community Sector", published in September 2004, is the first Agreement exclusively between the Department of Health, the NHS and the Voluntary and Community Sector (VCS). It will benefit patients, carers and service users by providing them with real alternatives so that they can choose services that best suit their needs.

Pharmaceuticals

Mr. Burstow: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what estimate he has made of the *(a)* expected change in the NHS drugs bill in England, *(b)* expected change in the Government allowance to the pharmaceutical industry for research and development and *(c)* net change in Government spending resulting from the new Pharmaceutical Price Regulation Scheme in each of the next five years. [197274]

Ms Rosie Winterton: A price reduction of 7 per cent. in the prices of branded prescription medicines as part of the new Pharmaceutical Price Regulation Scheme (PPRS) will save an estimated £370 million a year for the national health service in the community in England. This is more than £1.8 billion over the five years of the agreement. Additional savings are expected in hospitals.

The new PPRS includes greater incentives for the research and development (R&D) of new medicines, including those for children, with an increased R&D allowance, up to 28 per cent. of NHS sales. Under the current scheme it is up to 23 per cent. of NHS sales.

The net change in Government spending resulting from the new Pharmaceutical Price Regulation Scheme taken as a whole, including the price reduction, changes to R&D allowances and other changes to the PPRS agreement, is expected to be at least £1.8 billion over the next five years.

Prescriptions

Mr. Burstow: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what the average number of prescriptions dispensed per person in the NHS was in England in the last year for which figures are available. [197275]

Ms Rosie Winterton: In 2003, there were on average 13.1 prescription items dispensed in the community in England per head of population.

This information is included in "Prescriptions Dispensed in the Community Statistics for 1993 to 2003: England". This bulletin is available in the Library and on the Department's website at: http://www.publications.doh.gov.uk/prescriptionstatistics/index.htm.

Mr. Burstow: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what estimate he has made of the proportion of patients paying prescription charges who had chronic diseases in the last year for which figures are available. [197276]

Ms Rosie Winterton: No such estimate has been made. Information is recorded about the number of chargeable items dispensed and about the medication dispensed. Information is not recorded about the number of individuals who pay charges nor the condition for which they are being treated.

Mr. Burstow: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what the criteria are for eligibility for a prescription charge pre-payment certificate. [197277]

Ms Rosie Winterton: Anyone who has to pay prescription charges can purchase prescription charge pre-payment certificates. These are available at a cost of £33.40 and £91.80, covering four and 12 months respectively. People who have to pay for more than five prescription items in four months, or 14 items in 12 months, can save money by buying a pre-payment certificate.

Mr. Burstow: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many people had prescription charge pre-payment certificates in each year since 1997. [197278]

Ms Rosie Winterton: The estimated numbers of people holding pre-payment certificates over the years 1997–98 to 2002–03 are shown in the table.

Estimated average number of holders of pre-payment certificates over the year, in thousands

	Pre-payment certificates		
	4 month	*12 month*	*Total*
1997–98	170	300	470
1998–99	160	300	460
1999–2000	180	310	490
2000–01	190	350	540
2001–02	200	400	600
2002–03	210	450	660

Press Releases

Pete Wishart: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many press releases have been issued by his Department in each month of 2004; and if he will make a statement. [195444]

Ms Rosie Winterton: I refer the hon. Member to the reply given by my hon. Friend the Minister for the Cabinet Office on 11 November 2004, *Official Report*, column 857W.

Primary Care Trusts

Mr. Burstow: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what the total administration budget of primary care trusts is in real terms in each of the next three years. [191749]

Mr. Hutton: We do not set separate administration budgets for primary care trusts (PCTs). PCTs decide levels of investment in administration locally but are required to agree proposals with their professional executive committees and strategic health authority.

The latest round of revenue allocations to PCTs covered the period 2003–04 to 2005–06 and totalled in cash terms £148 billion. Allocations beyond 2005–06 have not yet been set.

Social Services

Mr. Baron: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what steps he is taking to encourage the use of direct payments among clients of social services departments. [196978]

Dr. Ladyman: We have changed the law so that there is now a duty on councils to make a direct payment to individuals who can consent to have them. We have also strengthened the performance indicator to monitor the take up of direct payments in each local council. In addition, we are investing £9 million over three years to develop local support services, which are critical to the success of direct payment schemes.

We have produced a range of information, including, "A guide to receiving direct payments from your local council", which is also available in Braille and audio formats. We have produced material to encourage people with learning disabilities, parents of disabled children and people from black and minority ethnic communities to take up direct payments. We are also funding the production of a video targeted at older people.

Local councils should supplement this with local appropriate information.

Stem Cell Research

Mr. Skinner: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what funding was given to stem cell research in the United Kingdom in the last year for which figures are available. [197098]

Ms Rosie Winterton: In the 2002 Spending Review, the Government allocated £40 million for a major cross council investment in stem cell research. This is being made available in 2004–05 and 2005–06, with the allocations listed in the table:

	£ million
MRC	26
Economic and Social Research Council (ESRC)	1.8
Engineering and Physical Sciences Research Council (EPSRC)	1.2
Council for the Central Laboratory of Research Councils (CCLRC)	0.4
Biotechnology and Biological Sciences Research Council (BBSRC)	10.6

Student Grants Unit

Jon Trickett: To ask the Secretary of State for Health (1) when the NHS Student Grants Unit will be able to receive email correspondence; [196538]

(2) how many claims were handled by the NHS Student Grants Unit in Blackpool in each of the last three years; [196539]

(3) what targets have been set for payments of NHS bursaries; [196540]

(4) what the average grant for a final year medical student from the NHS Bursaries Unit was in the last year for which figures are available; [196541]

(5) how many staff are employed in the NHS Student Grants Unit in Blackpool; and if he will make a statement; [196542]

(6) whether there is a dedicated helpline for hon. Members to contact the NHS Bursary Unit in Blackpool; and if he will make a statement; [196543]

(7) what the target response time by telephone is for the NHS Student Grants Unit in Blackpool. [196980]

Mr. Hutton: Email inquiries to the national health service student grants unit can be sent to nhs-sgu@ukonline.co.uk. A technical problem resulted in the email account going off-line for a short period in the week commencing 1 November, but this issue has now been resolved.

NHS bursaries awards in each of the last three financial years are shown in the table.

	Number of cases
2002–03	80,260
2003–04	85,685
2004–05[1]	75,684

[1] Figure to date.

The target for bursary payments for first year students is six working days following course enrolment and correct completion of application form. The average NHS bursary awarded to medical and dental students in academic year 2003–04, the last year for which a figure is available, was £1,825. The student grants unit currently employs 73 staff on permanent or fixed term contracts. An additional 10 staff are employed on a casual basis. Hon. and right hon. Members can contact the student grants unit management team on telephone number 01253 393459. This separate British Telecom line has been set up specifically to deal with hon. and right hon. Member's constituent inquiries.

There is no specific target response time for telephone calls. The student grants unit telephone system can deal with 30 calls (in and out) simultaneously and 24 of the unit's staff routinely deal with these inquiries on a rota basis. If no officer is immediately available to deal with an inquiry, the caller is placed in a queuing system until one becomes available. Between January and September 2004, the unit has successfully dealt with 77,038 calls.

Timesheet Fraud

Mr. Baron: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many prosecutions the Counter Fraud and Security Management Service and its predecessor the NHS Counter Fraud Service brought against bank and agency nursing staff for timesheet fraud since September 1998. [196435]

Mr. Hutton *[holding answer 8 November 2004]:* Since 1998, we have investigated a number of cases of suspected timesheet fraud by both bank and agency staff. These investigations have resulted in 39 criminal prosecutions. Additionally, during the same period there have been two prosecutions for false identity by a bank member of staff and for obtaining a pecuniary advantage by an agency member of staff.

Voluntary Sector Compensation

Tony Wright: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what plans he has to compensate the voluntary sector if statutory agencies do not meet the full cost of their public service provision by the 2006 deadline set by the Treasury's Crosscutting Review. [195287]

Dr. Ladyman: The Department is fully committed to the recommendations in the "Treasury's Cross Cutting Review on the Voluntary and Community Sector in Service Delivery". The recommendation that Departments should ensure by April 2006 that their procurement policies recognise and reflect the full cost of services, including a legitimate portion of overhead costs, in the price of contracts for voluntary and community sector contractors is already reflected in the Department's procurement policies and practice.

The introduction of payment by results in the national health service will radically change the arrangements for funding providers of care. Comprising a national tariff for the majority of secondary care services, including services provided by voluntary providers when fully implemented, payment by results could in effect provide full cost recovery (FCR) for any contractor. FCR will take time to implement fully with contracts being assessed as they are agreed or renewed up to 2008. In achieving this, the emphasis is on effective negotiation between contracting partners rather than through compensation of one party by another.

Waiting Times

David Davis: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many people were waiting for a referral to a specialist from their general practitioner at the latest date for which figures are available, broken down by *(a)* clinical area and *(b)* length of wait. [194959]

Mr. Hutton: Information on waiting times for general practitioner (GP) referrals is not collected. However, information on waiting times from GP referral to first out-patient appointment can be found on the Department's website at www.performance.doh.gov.uk/waitingtimes/2004/q1/index.html

Mrs. Curtis-Thomas: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many trusts have maintained maximum nine months wait for in-patient/day case admissions in *(a)* England and *(b)* Crosby since July 2003. [195492]

Mr. Hutton: Since the end of March 2004, when a maximum nine month wait for elective in-patient or day case admission became a standard national health service performance requirement, 144 NHS trusts (out of a total of 181) have achieved this standard in each of the reporting periods. Since the end of June 2003, before the standard applied, 22 NHS trusts have achieved a maximum nine month wait in each reporting period.

Since the end of March 2004, both trusts that cover Crosby (Aintree Hospitals NHS Trust and Southport and Ormskirk Hospital NHS Trust) have achieved the standard of a maximum nine month wait for elective in-patient or day care admission in each of the reporting periods. Between July 2003 and March 2004, both trusts reported some waits above nine months.

Mrs. Curtis-Thomas: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many trusts have maintained the maximum 17-week wait for general practitioner referrals to see a consultant in *(a)* the UK and *(b)* Crosby since July 2003. [195494]

Mr. Hutton: Since the end of March 2004, when a maximum 17-week wait for a first out-patient appointment following general practitioner referral became the standard national health service performance requirement, 207 NHS trusts have maintained a maximum 17-week out-patient wait in each reporting period.

Since the end of March 2004, both trusts that cover Crosby (Aintree Hospitals NHS Trust and Southport and Ormskirk Hospital NHS Trust) have achieved the standard of a maximum 17-week out-patient wait in each of the reporting periods. Between July 1003 and March 2004, both trusts reported some waits above 17 weeks.

WORK AND PENSIONS

Pensioners

Mr. Jenkins: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions (1) what the Department's estimate is of the amount paid in rent rebate to pensioners in 2003–04; [197541]

(2) what the Department's estimate is of the amount paid in council tax benefit to pensioners in 2003–04. [197542]

Mr. Pond: The Department's estimate of the amount paid out in rent rebate to pensioners in 2003–04 is £2.316 billion in nominal terms.

The Department's estimate of the amount paid out in Council Tax Benefit to pensioners in 2003–04 is £1.684 billion in nominal terms.

These figures are consistent with data published at Spending Review 2004.

Benefit expenditure tables in relation to the Spending Review 2004 are published on the internet at: http://www.dwp.gov.uk/asd/asd4/expenditure.asp, table 7.

Mr. Dismore: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions how many pensioners in receipt of *(a)* old age pensions and *(b)* pension credit are from black and minority ethnic backgrounds, (i) in total and (ii) broken down by ethnic group; and if he will make a statement. [198177]

Malcolm Wicks: The information is not available. Departmental records do not record a person's ethnic origin as this is not relevant to the benefit entitlement.

Benefit Claimants (Coventry)

Mr. Jim Cunningham: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions how many people are claiming a working age benefit in Coventry. [197465]

Mr. Pond: As at May 2004, there were 29,600 working-age claimants of key benefits in the Coventry city council area.

Benefit Entitlement (Newcastle-under-Lyme)

Paul Farrelly: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions (1) how many pensioners have benefited from the winter fuel payment in Newcastle-under-Lyme in each year since it was introduced; [198536]

(2) how many pensioners in Newcastle-under-Lyme will be eligible for the winter fuel allowance in 2004–05. [198599]

Malcolm Wicks: The number of pensioners in the Newcastle-under-Lyme constituency who have benefited from the winter fuel payment in each year since 1999–2000 is in the table. Information relating to the 1997–98 and 1998–99 winters is not available.

It is not possible to provide an estimate of the number of people in the Newcastle-under-Lyme constituency who are eligible to receive a winter fuel payment for winter 2004–05 as DWP administrative data do not contain complete information on household circumstances and payments are based on household composition. We expect the figure to be similar to that of winter 2003–04.

	Payments made
1999–2000	16,720
2000–01	18,450
2001–02	18,480
2002–03	18,630
2003–04	18,815

Note:

Numbers are rounded to the nearest 5.

Source:

IAD Information Centre, 100 per cent. samples.

Benefit Fraud

Mr. Webb: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions whether his future spending projections on principal benefits are net of projected savings from his Department's targets to reduce fraud and error in income support, jobseeker's allowance and housing benefit. [197080]

Mr. Pond: Future spending projections are in part based upon the trends of spending in the past. These past expenditures are directly affected by, among other things, our success in detecting fraud and error and therefore future projections are influenced by this success.

Mr. Laws: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions what the cost of *(a)* operating and *(b)* advertising the benefit fraud hotline was in 2003; and how many people have been successfully prosecuted for fraud as a result of evidence from the hotline since its inception. [196851]

Mr. Pond: The operational cost of the national benefit fraud hotline (NBFH) for year ending 2002–03 (April-March) was £959,277, and for year ending 2003–04 was £1,038,505. The cost of advertising is not separately assessed.

Notes:

1. Since the Targeting Benefit Fraud advertising campaign started in 2003, the NBFH has been included in the campaign advertising and has not been the subject of its own advertising.
2. Operational costs include staffing and goods and service costs.
3. The operational costs of administering the NBFH include the costs of administering report-a-cheat-online. These costs cannot be separated.

Source:

National Benefit Fraud Hotline

The available information on the number of successful prosecutions as a result of evidence from the NBFH is in the table.

National benefit fraud hotline successful prosecutions

	Prosecutions	*Convictions*
April 1999-March 2000	376	335
April 2000-March 2001	542	492
April 2001-March 2002	768	703
April 2002-March 2003	780	706
April 2003-March 2004	672	619

Notes:

1. Full information on the number of successful prosecutions resulting from calls to the NBFH is available only from April 1999

Source:

Fraud Information By Sector (FIBS).

Benefit Processing (Workington)

Tony Cunningham: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions whether the proposals for the ending of processing benefit claims in Workington have been subject to rural proofing. [196383]

Jane Kennedy: The administration of Jobcentre Plus is a matter for the chief executive of Jobcentre Plus, David Anderson. He will write to the hon. Member.

Letter from David Anderson to Tony Cunningham, dated 15 November 2004:

The Secretary of State has asked me to reply to your question about whether proposals to end the processing of benefit claims in Workington have been subject to rural proofing. This is something which falls within the responsibilities delegated to me as Chief Executive of Jobcentre Plus.

We are committed to ensuring that everyone is able to access our services, whether they live in urban or rural areas. Increased accessibility is one of our key objectives in modernising welfare delivery. This modernisation is helping us to deliver the commitment made in the Rural White Paper to ensure access to 'high quality public services—services often delivered in new ways, and through new outlets'.

The centralisation of benefit processing is part of the drive within Jobcentre Plus to modernise and improve services and meet the Government's efficiency challenge.

Benefit processing is one of the largest and most important business areas within Jobcentre Plus and for some time the Agency has been exploring ways of making it more efficient. Rationalising the number of sites from which benefits are processed will improve service to customers by bringing greater consistency to processes, allow staff to develop more in-depth benefit knowledge and experience, reduce costs (for example in management and overheads) and make better use of the estate.

In the case of Workington, the existing estate would not support an enlarged processing facility. The proposed move to Carlisle will allow us to capitalise on the facilities available at the former Social Security Office at Rufus House which is capable of being developed into a benefit processing centre housing up to 180 people. Rural considerations have been taken into account when making these planning proposals.

We hope that many of those currently employed at Workington will transfer with the work to Carlisle. Others may be re-deployed to alternative roles within the Department of Work and Pensions in West Cumbria. Carlisle is an accessible location for many residents in Allerdale and Copeland as well as being the centre for the large rural catchment area of Eden and Dumfries and Galloway. Centralising work in Carlisle should not mean an overall loss of employment opportunities in rural communities.

The decisions we make about where and how we deliver services are based upon consultation with our partners. These include local authorities and Regional Development Agencies, and reflect local circumstances and most importantly, the needs of the local community. The consideration of rural issues is an integral part of the consultation process. It should also be remembered that unchanged access to a full range of Jobcentre Plus services will still be available to the public through the Workington Jobcentre Plus office.

The Rural Proofing checklist produced by the Countryside Agency forms part of the initial planning process and, where appropriate, the Countryside Agency itself is consulted as a stakeholder. We produce an internal annual Rural Proofing Report for the Countryside Agency; this includes examples of how the department has addressed service delivery issues in rural areas. We also regularly discuss policy development and implementation with DEFRA (Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs) and the Countryside Agency.

I have asked the District Manager for Cumbria to keep you updated on developments and he can be contacted on 01539 795550.

I hope this is helpful.

Benefit Take-up (Hendon)

Mr. Dismore: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions how many people in Hendon aged 18 to 25 years had been unemployed for six months or longer *(a)* in May 1997 and *(b)* on the latest date for which figures are available; how many people living in Hendon have benefitted from the New Deal for Young People since 1997; and if he will make a statement. [197517]

Jane Kennedy: The available information is in the tables.

Numbers of people aged 18–24 unemployed for six months or longer in Hendon

Period	Number
May 1997	310
September 1997	225
May 2004	155
September 2004	140

Notes:

1. Information for the age group 18–25 is not available and could only be obtained at disproportionate cost.
2. All figures are seasonally unadjusted. To take account of any seasonal fluctuation in the figures, latest data should be compared with the same month in 1997.
3. Data provided are claimant count figures.
4. All figures are rounded to the nearest 5.

Source:

Office of National Statistics

New Deal for Young People in Hendon

	Number of individuals
Starting the programme	1,730
Gaining a job	810

Notes:

1. Data are from the start of the programme in January 1998 to June 2004 which is the latest date for which information is available.
2. All figures are rounded to the nearest 10.

Source:

DWP Information and Analysis Directorate

Carer's Allowance

Mr. Sanders: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions if he will make it his policy to end the treatment of carers allowance as earnings in the assessment of claimants of income support; and if he will make a statement. [196906]

Maria Eagle: Carer's allowance is not treated as earnings. However it is treated as an income in determining a customer's entitlement to income support. There are no plans to change this.

Carer's allowance is an income-maintenance benefit rather than a payment for services provided by the carer. Income support is also a benefit which is intended to provide for a person's day-to-day living expenses. For this reason, carer's allowance has always been taken fully into account in income support. To do otherwise would mean that provision would be made twice over from public funds for the same needs.

However, people in receipt of income support who are also receiving carer's allowance or who have an underlying entitlement to carer's allowance, are awarded a carer premium with their income support. The premium is paid in addition to other premiums, and, where both the claimant and their partner satisfy the conditions, two carer premiums are paid. The carer premium is currently £25.55 per week.

Child Maintenance

Helen Jackson: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions pursuant to his written statement of 28 October 2004, *Official Report*, columns 55–57WS, on the New Child Support Scheme: Progress Report, what assessment he has made of the reasons for the fall in the number of applications for child maintenance received by the Child Support Agency in the second quarter of 2004. [197355]

Mr. Pond: The administration of the Child Support Agency is a matter for the Chief Executive, Mr. Doug Smith. He will write to my hon. Friend with the information requested.

Letter from Mike Isaac to Helen Jackson, dated 15 November 2004:

In reply to your recent Parliamentary Question about the Child Support Agency the Secretary of State promised a substantive reply from the Chief Executive. As he is currently on leave I am replying on his behalf.

You asked the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions, pursuant to his Written Statement of 28th October Official Report columns 55–57WS on the New Child Support Scheme: Progress Report what assessment he has made for the reasons for the fall in the number of applications for child maintenance received by the Child Support Agency in the second quarter of 2004.

I am unaware of any specific factors to explain the decrease in the reported number of new applications received by the Agency during the second quarter of 2004/05.

Child Poverty

Mr. Jim Cunningham: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions what strategy he has put in place to tackle child poverty. [197466]

Mr. Pond: The Government's strategy for tackling child poverty is set out in "Opportunity for all: Sixth Annual Report 2004" (Cm6239) which we published in September 2004 and further explored in the "Child Poverty Review", published in July 2004 by The Treasury. Both documents are available in the Library.

Child Support Agency

Mr. Webb: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions if he will estimate the average weekly maintenance *(a)* assessments and *(b)* payments for (i) one qualifying child, (ii) two qualifying children and (iii) three or more qualifying children for Child Support Agency cases on the (A) old and (B) new system. [193665]

Mr. Pond: The administration of the Child Support Agency is a matter for the Chief Executive, Mr. Doug Smith. He will write to the hon. Member with the information requested.

Letter from Doug Smith to Mr. Steve Webb, dated 15 November 2004:

In reply to your recent Parliamentary Question about the Child Support Agency the Secretary of State promised a substantive reply from the Chief Executive.

You asked the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions, if he will estimate the average weekly maintenance *(a)* assessments and *(b)* payments for (i) one qualifying child, (ii) two qualifying children and (iii) three or more qualifying children for cases on the (A) old and (B) new system.

The information requested is set out in the following tables. I should, however, say that the information is not directly comparable because of discrepancies in the way it is collected and collated for the different schemes—which are, of course, based on different computer systems. Our current best view of the position is:

Average weekly amount assessed	*One qualifying child*	*Two qualifying children*	*Three or more qualifying children*
New scheme	24	37	41
Old scheme	40	50	53

The above figures exclude cases with a nil assessment but include those cases were the non-resident parent is on benefit, and on which maintenance would consequently be collected on behalf of the Secretary of State.

The differences between the average weekly assessments for the old and new scheme was anticipated in the Government's White Paper, "A new contract for welfare: Children's Rights and Parent's responsibilities", published in July 1999.

Average weekly payments	*One qualifying child*	*Two qualifying children*	*Three or more qualifying children*
New scheme	34	47	56
Old scheme	37	46	50

Mr. Frank Field: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions how many Child Support Agency cases are waiting to be calculated and paid on the *(a)* old scheme calculation and old IT system, *(b)* old scheme calculation and new IT system and *(c)* new scheme calculation and new IT system. [194270]

Mr. Pond: The administration of the Child Support Agency is a matter for the Chief Executive, Mr. Doug Smith. He will write to the hon. Member with the information requested.

Letter from Mike Isaac to Mr. Frank Field, dated 15 November 2004:

In reply to your recent Parliamentary Question about the Child Support Agency the Secretary of State promised a substantive reply from the Chief Executive.

You asked the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions, how many Child Support Agency cases are waiting to be calculated and paid on the *(a)* old scheme calculation and old IT system *(b)* old scheme calculation and new IT system and *(c)* new scheme calculation and new IT system.

As at 30 September 2004, there were around 288,000 applications awaiting a decision to be made—these may or may not result in a maintenance assessment. Of these applications:

(a) 12,000 are awaiting decision under the 'old scheme' on the old IT system

(b) 14,000 are awaiting decision under the 'old scheme' on the new IT system

(c) 262,000 are awaiting a decision under the 'new scheme' on the new IT system

Of the work in hand we are trying to trace the non-resident parent in approximately 20,000 cases, which cannot be progressed until we have an address. There is also an element of new intake that has not had sufficient time since the application was made to have progressed.

Typically around 40% of the cases will be closed before reaching the assessment stage. Applications close for a variety of reasons. The main reasons are that the parent with care withdraws the application, perhaps due to a reconciliation, or having agreed private arrangements with the non-resident parent.

The reference to the new IT system includes cases that, in the normal course of events would be held on that system but are instead being processed clerically.

Mr. Webb: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions pursuant to the answer of 13 October 2004, *Official Report*, column 289W, on the Child Support Agency, for what reasons referrals for information to the Driver and Vehicle Licensing Agency were unsuccessful in gaining the information sought. [194657]

Mr. Pond: The administration of the Child Support Agency is a matter for the Chief Executive, Mr. Doug Smith. He will write to the hon. Member with the information requested.

Letter from Doug Smith to Mr. Steve Webb, dated 15 November 2004:

In reply to your recent Parliamentary Question about the Child Support Agency the Secretary of State promised a substantive reply from the Chief Executive.

You asked the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions, pursuant to his Answer of the 13 October, Official Report, column 289W, on the Child Support Agency, for what reasons referrals for information to the DVLA were unsuccessful in gaining the information sort.

The reason that the balance of referrals were unsuccessful is that there was no matching client and vehicular details held on the Driving and Vehicle Licensing Agency's database.

Mr. Goodman: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions what assessment he has made of the effect of change requests made by Ministers in relation to the CS2 computer system on the operations of the Child Support Agency. [195809]

Mr. Pond: The administration of the Child Support Agency is a matter for the Chief Executive, Mr. Doug Smith. He will write to the hon. Member with the information requested.

Letter from Mike Isaac to Mr. Paul Goodman, dated 15 November 2004:

In reply to your recent Parliamentary Question about the Child Support Agency the Secretary of State promised a substantive reply from the Chief Executive. As he is currently on leave I am replying on his behalf.

You asked the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions, what assessment he has made of the effect of change requests made by Ministers in relation to the CS2 computer system on the operation of the Childs Support Agency.

All requests for change go through a rigorous process intended to give assurance that they are genuinely needed to permit the service provided by EDS to meet the original requirement in terms of reliability and functionality.

Mr. Goodman: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions what estimate he has made of the average number of Child Support Agency staff who deal with each case brought to the Agency by parents with care. [195815]

Mr. Pond: The administration of the Child Support Agency is a matter for the Chief Executive, Mr. Doug Smith. He will write to the hon. Member with the information requested.

Letter from Mike Isaac to Mr. Paul Goodman, dated 15 November 2004:

In reply to your recent Parliamentary Question about the Child Support Agency the Secretary of State promised a substantive reply from the Chief Executive. As he is currently on leave I am replying on his behalf.

You asked the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions, what estimate he has made of the average number of Child Support Agency staff who deal with each case brought to them by parents with care.

I am unable to answer this question as we do not record information on the numbers of staff who deal with each case.

Mr. Goodman: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions what the *(a)* absence rates due to sickness and *(b)* turnover rates for Child Support Agency staff were for each month of the last calendar year. [195821]

Mr. Pond: The administration of the Child Support Agency is a matter for the Chief Executive, Mr. Doug Smith. He will write to the hon. Member with the information requested.

Letter from Mike Isaac to Mr. Paul Goodman, dated 15 November 2004:

In reply to your recent Parliamentary Question about the Child Support Agency the Secretary of State promised a substantive reply from the Chief Executive. As he is currently on leave I am replying on his behalf.

You asked the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions, what the *(a)* absence rates due to sickness and *(b)* turnover rates for CSA staff were for each month of the last calendar year.

(a) Absence rates due to sickness for CSA staff for each month of the last calendar year are as follows:

2003	*Sickness percentage rate (in month)*
January	5.9
February	5.2
March	4.9
April	5.4

2003	*Sickness percentage rate (in month)*
May	5.3
June	5.7
July	6.2
August	6.3
September	6.5
October	6.8
November	7.1
December	6.5

(b) Turnover rates for CSA staff for each month of the last calendar year are as follows:

2003	*Leavers excluding (temporary) contract end and transfers to other parts of DWP—Percentage*[1]
January	0.6
February	0.5
March	0.4
April	0.5
May	0.6
June	0.7
July	1.0
August	1.3
September	1.0
October	1.0
November	1.0
December	0.7

[1] Monthly leavers shown as a percentage of the staff in post for that calendar month.

Anne Picking: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions how many non-resident parents are losing money as a result of not being transferred to the new Child Support Agency computing system. [195889]

Mr. Pond: I refer the hon. Member to the written answer I gave the hon. Member for Wycombe (Mr. Goodman) on 18 December 2003, *Official Report*, columns 1089–90W.

Anne Picking: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions how much maintenance in total was received through the Child Support Agency by the child and resident parent in the financial years *(a)* 2001–02 and *(b)* 2002–03. [195890]

Mr. Pond: The administration of the Child Support Agency is a matter for the Chief Executive, Mr. Doug Smith. He will write to my hon. Friend with the information requested.

Letter from Mike Isaac to Anne Picking, dated 15 November 2004:

In reply to your recent Parliamentary Question about the Child Support Agency the Secretary of State promised a substantive reply from the Chief Executive. As he is currently on leave I am replying on his behalf.

You asked the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions, how much maintenance was received through the Child Support Agency by the child and resident parent in the financial years *(a)* 2001–02 and *(b)* 2002–03.

The total maintenance received through the Child Support Agency's Collection Service was:

£000

	2001–02	*2002–03*
Paid to the Parent with Care	375,199	423,680
Recovered for the Secretary of State	153,251	148,861
Was received in Total	528,450	572,541

Sources:
The Total received is published in the Child Support Agency, Annual Report and Accounts.
The amount paid to the Parent with Care and the amount recovered for the Secretary of State is sourced from the Agency's General Ledger.

Anne Picking: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions what the administrative cost of running the Child Support Agency was in financial years *(a)* 2001–02 and *(b)* 2002–03. [195891]

Mr. Pond: The administration of the Child Support Agency is a matter for the chief executive, Mr. Doug Smith. He will write to the hon. Member with the information requested.

Letter from Mike Isaac to Anne Picking, dated 15 November 2004:

In reply to your recent Parliamentary Question about the Child Support Agency the Secretary of State promised a substantive reply from the Chief Executive. As he is currently on leave I am replying on his behalf.

You asked the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions, what the administrative cost of running the Child Support Agency was in the financial years *(a)* 2001–02 and *(b)* 2002–03.

The net administration costs as detailed in the 2002–03 Child Support Agency Annual accounts were:

£294.286m for the year ended 31st March 2003

£290.413m for the year ended 31st March 2002

Annabelle Ewing: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions pursuant to his written ministerial statement of 28 October 2004, *Official Report*, columns 55–57WS, on the new child support scheme progress report, what the average weekly child support maintenance payment to parents with care for the month of October is; how many new scheme cases were not able to be progressed under the new system with respect to Quarter 4 2003–04 onwards and schemes to date; if he will list the reasons for the closure of applications; when the Child Support Agency (CSA) will start properly to manage performance in the area of compliance; and what the fundamentals of the special exercise to be employed to determine the CSA's achievement of its accuracy target at the end of March 2005 are. [196267]

Mr. Pond: The administration of the Child Support Agency is a matter for the Chief Executive, Mr. Doug Smith. He will write to the hon. Member with the information requested.

Letter from Mike Isaac to Ms Annabelle Ewing, dated 15 November 2004:

In reply to your recent Parliamentary Question about the Child Support Agency the Secretary of State promised a substantive reply from the Chief Executive. As he is currently on leave I am replying on his behalf.

You asked the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions, pursuant to his Written Ministerial Statement of 28th October Official Report columns 55–57WS on the new child support scheme progress report what the average weekly child support maintenance payment to parents with care for the month of October is; how many new scheme cases were not able to be progressed under the new system with respect to Quarter 4 2003–04 onwards and schemes to date; if he will list the reasons for the closure of applications; when the Child Support Agency (CSA) will start properly to manage performance In the area of compliance; and what the fundamentals of the special exercise to be employed to determine the CSA's achievement of its accuracy target at the end of March 2005 are.

The headings below provide a summary of your questions.

Average weekly child support maintenance payment:

I am unable to provide the average weekly child support maintenance for October at this present time. However, I can provide the figures for September:

Average weekly payment: September 2004 (£)

One qualifying child	33.72
Two qualifying children	46.76
Three qualifying children	55.67

New Scheme cases that have not been progressed:

The information below shows the number of stuck cases that relate to our top ten most problematic classifications:

	Number
29 December 2003	63,746
26 January 2004	75,337
23 February 2004	47,725
22 March 2004	52,538
19 March 2004	39,126
17 May 2004	34,143
14 June 2004	34,614
12 July 2004	36,031
9 August 2004	37,703
6 September 2004	38,941
4 October 2004	40,009
1 November 2004	41,985

These figures are collated on a weekly basis not calendar month so, they are shown four weekly.

The reasons for closure of applications:

Applications close for a variety of reasons the main reason being that the parent with care withdraws the application, perhaps due to reconciliation, or having agreed private arrangements with the non-resident parent. Other reasons are if the parent with care moves off benefit and no longer wishes to pursue the application, or if the parent with care is unable to provide sufficient information to establish the identity of the non resident patent.

Management of Compliance:

The Agency now has the management information available from its new computer system to monitor its performance in respect of case and cash compliance on the 'new scheme'. We have developed our own payment tracking tool which will enable us to better manage our performance in this area. We are already seeing emerging evidence that performance is improving as a result of these initiatives.

Accuracy target:

In February and March 2005 a special exercise will measure a statistically valid sample of cases. This will determine the extent to which the last decision for all maintenance calculations is correct to the nearest penny.

Tony Cunningham: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions whether the proposed changes to the Child Support Agency service in Workington have been subject to rural proofing. [196382]

Mr. Pond: The administration of the Child Support Agency is a matter for the Chief Executive, Mr. Doug Smith. He will write to the hon. Member with the information requested.

Letter from Mike Isaac to Mr. Tony Cunningham dated 15 November 2004:

In reply to your recent Parliamentary Question about the Child Support Agency the Secretary of State promised a substantive reply from the Chief Executive. I am providing this in Mr. Smith's absence.

You asked the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions whether the proposed changes to the Child Support Agency service in Workington have been subject to rural proofing.

The Agency has considered the rural proofing checklist and is content that the proposed changes to our service in Workington meet the challenges listed. Although we will no longer have face to face staff actually based in Workington we will continue to deliver equivalent levels of service to the rest of the country by staff based elsewhere.

I hope that this is helpful.

Consultants

Mr. Willetts: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions how much has been spent by his Department on *(a)* advertising and *(b)* public relations consultants in (i) 1996–97 and (ii) the latest year for which figures are available. [185532]

Jane Kennedy: The Department for Work and Pensions was formed in June 2001 and does not employ advertising or public relations consultants.

I also refer my right hon. Friend to PQ152855 of 24 May 2004, *Official Report*, column 1464W, and PQ191736 of 3 November 2004, *Official Report*, column 341W.

Departmental IT

Brian White: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions what percentage of the Department's *(a)* implemented and *(b)* planned computer systems use open source software; and what plans are in place to raise this level. [195662]

Jane Kennedy: The Department for Work and Pensions does not currently use open source software in any of its current computer systems.

However, we have taken part in the recent Office of Government Commerce 'Proof of Concept' trials of open source software. As a result we are working on an IT strategy and enterprise IT architecture which will take into account the reducing risk in the marketplace and allow us to take advantage of open source software in the future.

Our procurement of software solutions follows Government OSS policy, which does not require the raising of levels of OSS usage in Government, rather that Government considers OSS solutions alongside proprietary ones in IT procurements and that contracts should be awarded on a value for money, case by case basis. The policy can be viewed at www.govtalk.gov.uk.

Departmental Staff

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions what percentage of the staff of the Department in *(a)* 2002 and *(b)* 2003 were people with disabilities. [196135]

Maria Eagle: I refer the hon. Member to the reply given by my hon. Friend the Minister for the Cabinet Office, on 9 November 2004, *Official Report*, column 620w.

EU Commissions

Angus Robertson: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions how many times during the Greek

Presidency of the EU *(a)* the Technical Committee on information processing, *(b)* the Committee for implementation of the action programme to promote gender equality and *(c)* the Committee for implementation of the action programme to tackle discrimination met; when and where these meetings took place; which UK Government expert was present at each meeting; what (i) technical and (ii) financial issues were raised by the UK Government expert at each meeting; what recommendations each Committee produced during that period; what actions were (A) proposed and (B) taken by (1) the EU and (2) the UK Government as a result of the Committee's recommendations; and if he will make a statement. [194349]

Mr. Pond: There were two meetings of the Technical Commission on Data Processing during the Greek Presidency. The Technical Commission is created under Regulation (EEC) 574/72 Article 117c and is charged with modernising the exchange of data between social security institutions for the purposes of implementing Regulation (EEC) 1408/71. This Regulation, founded on Article 42 of the EC Treaty co-ordinates national social security schemes so as to protect the rights of migrant workers. Please note that "social security" in this context includes access to health care.

The two meetings were held in Brussels on 4 and 5 March and 3 and 4 June respectively. Officials from DWP attended both meetings and an official from the Department Health also attended the second meeting.

At the first meeting the agenda was dominated by issues concerning pension claims, in particular steps to accelerate awards where the pensioner had been insured in more than one EU state in the course of his or her working life via implementation of a long standing procedure (Administrative Commission Decision 118) providing for the early exchange of insurance records. This is in the process of migration from paper or magnetic tape format to electronic interchange. The UK has supported this change while at the same time minimising any consequences for national computer applications.

Other matters discussed included (1) the first draft of the Technical Commission's forthcoming work programme for 2004–08 (2) progress on the Co-webs project which aims to link national social security websites so as to provide a coherent and consistent information source for migrant workers, and (3) a report and discussion on pension clearance times reported by all member states. The UK has taken a particularly active part in this last mentioned as a means both of identifying bottle necks in the present processes and also so as to inform targets against which performance can be measured.

The second meeting covered progress on these issues but also certain technical matters concerning the (then) proposed introduction of the European Health Insurance Card (E-HIC). Specifically the meeting addressed the issue and maintenance of code lists for institutions which exchange data. The proposals adopted do not create any problems or issues for the UK.

Neither meeting addressed financial issues, any such question being outside its remit.

Angus Robertson: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions how many times during the Greek Presidency of the EU the Administrative Commission on Social Security for Migrant Workers met; how many working parties exist of the Administrative Commission on Social Security for Migrant Workers; how many times each of those working parties met; when and where these meetings took place; which UK Government expert was present at each meeting; what (i) technical and (ii) financial issues were raised by the UK Government expert at each meeting; what recommendations the Committee produced during that period; what actions were (A) proposed and (B) taken by (1) the EU and (2) the UK Government as a result of the Committee's recommendations; and if he will make a statement. [196101]

Mr. Pond: The Administrative Commission on Social Security for Migrant Workers met twice during the Greek Presidency, on 26–27 March and 17–18 June 2003. Officials from the Department for Work and Pensions attended the meetings together with officials from the Department of Health and the Inland Revenue.

The Administrative Commission deals with all administrative questions and questions of interpretation arising from the provisions of Regulation (EC) 1408/71 on the application of social security schemes to employed and self-employed persons and to members of their families moving within the Community.

The Administrative Commission has one working party. It met on two occasions during the Greek Presidency, on 12 February when an official from the Inland Revenue attended, and on 9 April when an official from the Department of Health attended. The meetings of the Administrative Commission and its working party were all held in Brussels.

During the Greek Presidency the Administrative Commission agreed on decisions concerning: the introduction of the European Health Insurance Card; a uniform interpretation of the European Court of Justice judgment in the case of Elide Gottardo *v.* INPS; and on a revision of Administrative Commission Decision 118 of 20 April 1983 concerning the conditions for the early exchange of insurance records, following up work carried out by the Technical Commission on Data Processing. The Administrative Commission discussed several other matters, which required further deliberation at subsequent meetings.

UK officials raised issues relating to the need for a transitional period for the European Health Insurance Card during which the current E111 paper form and the new card would both be in circulation; requested clarification of the legal basis for the proposed Decision concerning the Gottardo case; informed the other delegations of the UK's new tax credit for children; and supported the European Commission proposal for better monitoring of the application of Community law. No specific financial issues were raised.

For general information on the Greek Presidency, I refer the hon. Member to 'Developments in the European Union, January to June 2003, the Greek Presidency' Cm6097, which was laid before Parliament in January 2004.

EU Committees

Angus Robertson: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions how many times during the Greek presidency of the EU *(a)* the Advisory Committee on the implementation of the Community action programme to combat social exclusion, *(b)* the Advisory Committee on the free movement of workers and *(c)* the Technical Committee for the implementation of regulations concerning the free movement and employment of workers met; when and where these meetings took place; which UK Government expert was present at each meeting; what (i) technical and (ii) financial issues were raised by the UK Government expert at each meeting; what recommendations each Committee produced during that period; what actions were (A) proposed and (B) taken by (1) the EU and (2) the UK Government as a result of each Committee's recommendations; and if he will make a statement. [196677]

Mr. Pond: There were two meetings of the Advisory Committee on the implementation of the Community action programme to combat social exclusion during the Greek Presidency—on 5 February and 3 April 2003. Both took place in Brussels: the first was attended by a DWP official, the second by two DWP officials. At both meetings the main points raised by UK Government experts were on the Commission's proposals for an international peer review process. The UK sought to make the process more flexible in order to maximise the ability of this programme to meet its objectives—mutual learning on social inclusion matters. Points raised were largely technical but also impacted on the way that funds were to be spent.

Other matters on which UK representatives intervened included proposals for the development of new indicators of social exclusion; a suggested series of seminars on the future of social inclusion after enlargement; and the tendering process for the second round of transnational exchange programmes. Interventions on these matters covered both technical and financial issues.

During the Greek Presidency, the EU provided financial support to a range of projects and studies as a result of the deliberations of the Advisory Committee on the implementation of the Community action programme to combat social exclusion. During this period, the UK Government took no direct action as a result of the Committee's recommendations but it did begin preparations for a peer review supported by the action programme.

There was one meeting of the Advisory Committee on Freedom of Movement for Workers—on 9 January in Brussels. The Committee consists of representatives of Governments, employers and trade unions of each EU Member State. An official of the Department for Work and Pensions attended. The following matters were discussed on that occasion:

Enlargement of the EU, including transitional arrangement for free movement of workers from the new Member States.

The "SOLVIT" system of solving problems in the Internal Market.

The EURES (EURopean Employment Services) network, including the EURES charter.

European Commission proposals concerning the rights of third-country nationals.

Recent judgements of the European Court of Justice concerning freedom of movement.

A Communication from the European Commission: "Free movement of workers-achieving the full benefits and potential" (COM(2002)694 final).

The UK representative did not raise specific technical or financial issues at the meeting.

The Committee did not agree recommendations during the period of the Greek Presidency. The European Commission took into account the comments of individual members of the Advisory Committee on the matters discussed above.

There was one meeting of the Technical Committee on Freedom of Movement for Workers—on 8 January 2003 in Brussels. An official of the Department for Work and Pensions attended.

The same matters were discussed as at the Advisory Committee on 9 January, with the exception of European Commission proposals concerning the rights of third-country nationals, and with the addition of a proposed Directive on the rights of citizens of the Union and their family members to move and reside freely within the territory of the EU.

The UK representative did not raise specific technical or financial issues at the meeting.

The Committee did not agree recommendations during the period of the Greek Presidency. The European Commission took into account the comments of individual members of the Technical Committee on the matters discussed at the meeting and, at the suggestion of the UK Government representative, sought further written comments on the EURES Charter because a number of other Member States were not represented at the meeting.

For general information on the Greek Presidency I refer the hon. Member to 'Developments in the European Union, January to June 2003, the Greek Presidency' Cm6097 which was laid before Parliament in January 2004.

Angus Robertson: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions how many times during the Greek presidency of the EU the Advisory Committee on incentives in the field of employment met; when and where these meetings took place; which UK Government expert was present at each meeting; what *(a)* technical and *(b)* financial issues were raised by the UK Government expert at each meeting; what recommendations the Committee produced during that period; what actions were (i) proposed and (ii) taken by (A) the EU and (B) the UK Government as a result of the Committee's recommendations; and if he will make a statement. [194878]

Mr. Pond: There was one meeting of the Committee on Community incentive measures in the field of employment during the Greek Presidency, on 12 June 2003 in Brussels. An official from the Department for Work and Pensions represented the UK. The standard approach of the United Kingdom Government to the work of this Committee is to seek assurances that all the action being supported are in line with the agreed aims of the programme set out at Decision No 1145/2002/EC of 10 June 2002 and to contribute to the Lisbon reform agenda.

During the Greek Presidency the Committee provided an opinion on the implementation of activities under the 2003 work programme on incentive measures in the field of employment and on revision of the general guidelines for the implementation of the activities and the work programme for 2003. The European Commission carried forwards the implementation of the detailed measures within the work programme. Whilst the UK Government did not take any specific, significant action in response to the matters considered by the Committee, the work of the programme supports understanding of the effectiveness of a variety of measures that may support strategies to promote employment and employability.

For general information on the Greek Presidency I refer the hon. Member to 'Developments in the European Union, January to June 2003, the Greek Presidency' Cm6097 which was laid before Parliament in January 2004.

Angus Robertson: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions how many times during the Greek Presidency of the EU the Committee of the European Social Fund met; when and where these meetings took place; which UK Government expert was present at each meeting; what *(a)* technical and *(b)* financial issues were raised by the UK Government expert at each meeting; what recommendations the Committee produced during that period; what actions were (i) proposed and (ii) taken by (A) the EU and (B) the UK Government as a result of the Committee's recommendations; and if he will make a statement. [194879]

Mr. Pond: The European Social Fund Advisory Committee met twice during the Greek Presidency. The meetings were held in Brussels on 21 March 2003 and 18 June 2003. At both meetings the UK Government representative raised a number of technical issues related to improving the effectiveness of European Social Fund programme management. No financial issues were raised. The Committee did not produce any recommendations.

For general information on the Greek Presidency I refer the hon. Member to 'Developments in the European Union, January to June 2003, the Greek Presidency' Cm6097, which was laid before Parliament in January 2004.

Angus Robertson: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions how many times during the Greek presidency of the EU the Technical Adaptation Committee on *(a)* the introduction of measures to encourage improvements in the safety and health of workers at work, *(b)* the minimum safety and health requirements for improved medical treatment on board vessels and *(c)* the protection of workers from the risks related to exposure to chemical, physical and biological agents at work met; when and where these meetings took place; which UK Government expert was present at each meeting; what (i) technical and (ii) financial issues were raised by the UK Government expert at each meeting; what recommendations the Committee produced during that period; what actions were (A) proposed and (B) taken by (x) the EU and *(y)* the UK Government as a result of the Committee's recommendations; and if he will make a statement. [195571]

Mr. Pond: None of the bodies listed met during the currency of the Greek presidency of the EU.

Fair Trade

Mr. Burstow: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions whether it is his policy to ensure that hospitality within his Department is sourced from fair trade producers wherever possible within the boundaries set by the public procurement rules. [197056]

Jane Kennedy: The Department for Work and Pensions policy is always to ensure that hospitality is sourced from fair trade producers wherever possible and within the boundaries set by the public procurement rules. In making commercial decisions, ethical and fair trade issues are considered across the whole supply chain.

Free Television Licences (Rhondda)

Chris Bryant: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions how many households in each ward of the Rhondda are *(a)* entitled to free television licences and *(b)* have claimed free television licences. [198302]

Malcolm Wicks: The information is not available in the format requested.

The latest data giving the numbers of those aged 75 or over in each ward of Rhondda is shown in the following table. The number of over 75s in a ward will not match the number of free TV licences issued, since television licences cover households rather than individuals.

Ward name	*Claimants aged 75 or over*
Cwm Clydach	245
Cymmer	430
Ferndale	375
Llwyn-y-pia	195
Maerdy	245
Pentre	475
Pen-y-graig	480
Porth	450
Tonypandy	310
Trealaw	355
Treherbert	570
Treorchy	725
Tylorstown	295
Ynyshir	325
Ystrad	550

Notes:

1. The figures are based on recipients of winter fuel payments.
2. Data is the latest currently available, winter 2003–04.
3. All benefit counts at ward level are rounded to a multiple of five.

Source:

IAD Information Centre

Fuel Poverty

Linda Perham: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions what discussions he has had with colleagues at the *(a)* Department of Trade and Industry, *(b)* Department for Environment, Food and

Rural Affairs and *(c)* Office of the Deputy Prime Minister on the case for the welfare benefits system to assist fuel-poor households who cannot be removed from fuel poverty by energy efficiency improvements; and if he will make a statement. [196772]

Mr. Pond: We are working closely with colleagues across Government, particularly the Department of Trade and Industry, the Department for Environment and Regional Affairs and the Office of the Deputy Prime Minister, to establish how the Department for Work and Pensions can best contribute to the eradication of fuel poverty. The Department for Environment and Regional Affairs will be publishing the Fuel Poverty Action Plan before the end of the year which will set out the Government's strategy on fuel poverty for 2005 and beyond.

We have already seen good progress in reducing fuel poverty through the assistance provided by Warm Front. The Department for Environment and Regional Affairs has introduced Benefit Entitlement Checks for those who, at the time of application, do not qualify for assistance from Warm Front. These checks provide both the potential of increasing household income and enabling households to benefit from measures under Warm Front.

Incapacity Benefit

Mr. Keith Bradley: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions how many people are claiming incapacity benefit in *(a)* the city of Manchester and *(b)* Manchester, Withington constituency. [196909]

Maria Eagle: The information is in the table.

Numbers of incapacity benefits claimants at May 2004

City of Manchester	37,200
Manchester Withington parliamentary constituency	4,500

Notes:

1. Figures are rounded to the nearest hundred.

2. Figures include all incapacity benefit (IB) and severe disablement allowance claims (including IB credits only cases).

Source:

IAD Information Centre, 5 per cent. sample

Incapacity/Severe Disablement Benefit

Mr. Goodman: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions how many claimants who relinquished incapacity benefit and severe disablement allowances in each year from 1997 *(a)* entered training and employment programmes other than Access to Work, Work Preparation and Workstep, *(b)* moved on to other benefits and *(c)* reached pensionable age. [191690]

Maria Eagle: The information is in the table.

IB/SDA terminations[1] in a period, by whether entering a training/employment programme[2], another benefit[3] is claimed, or State Pension age is imminent

Period in which IB/SDA claim terminates:	*All Terminations*[15]	*Entered training/ employment programme*[16,2,4,5,6,7,8]	*Moved to another benefit*[15,3,9,10,11]	*Terminated claim within six months of state pension age*[15,12,13,14]
1 March 1996 to 28 February 1997	951,700	—	252,100	95,100
1 March 1997 to 28 February 1998	936,400	—	236,300	104,200
1 March 1998 to 28 February 1999	858,400	3,500	216,000	94,300
1 March 1999 to 29 February 2000	829,200	4,100	197,700	107,300
1 March 2000 to 28 February 2001	707,300	4,500	176,100	102,500
1 March 2001 to 28 February 2002	702,400	11,900	171,800	110,000
1 March 2002 to 28 February 2003	692,300	18,200	168,000	117,100
1 March 2003 to 29 February 2004	690,800	19,600	173,700	120,600

[1] Figures are based on persons claiming severe disablement allowance, long-term or short-term incapacity benefit, credits only cases, and those persons claiming IB but who have their benefit extinguished for reasons such as an overlap with another benefit, or because of hospitalisation.

[2] Training/employment programmes in this case are: New Deal for Young People (NDYP), New Deal for Long Term Unemployed (NDLTU), New Deal for Lone Parents (NDLP), New Deal for Partners Unemployed (NDPU), New Deal for Musicians (NDfM), New Deal Innovation Fund (NDIF), New Deal Disabled People (NDDP), Basic Skills, Joint Claims, Work Based Learning for Adults (WBLA), Employment Zones (EZs) and Action Teams. Data for employment/training programmes prior to 1998 is not available.

[3] Other benefits in this instance are income support (IS), jobseeker's allowance (JSA) and pension credit (Guarantee credit only/Guarantee and savings credit). Family credit and disability working allowance are excluded as "other benefits" as they were replaced in October 1999 by working families tax credit and disabled persons tax credit (subsequently replaced by new tax credits).

[4] Data for New Deal 50-Plus (ND50) is not included as the database for this programme is still under development.

[5] Movements to a training/employment programme include some people who have been on a programme at the same time as IB/SDA, but whose participation in the programme continues after the IB/SDA claim ceases.

[6] Only cases, which move to one of the listed training/employment programmes within 91 days from the end of their IB/SDA claim, will be counted. Some cases will move to training/employment programmes after 91 days: Such cases will not be counted as a move to a training/employment programme.

[7] Claimants shown as starting an employment/training programme may also appear in the 'Move to another benefit' column. For example they may have moved onto JSA and then almost immediately begun an employment/training programme.

[8] There will be some additional IB/SDA claimants who undertake training/employment programmes (e.g. New Deal for Disabled People) while remaining on IB/SDA for the whole period. These cases are not covered in the table, which only covers those who have ceased to claim IB/SDA.

[9] Movements to another benefit includes some people who have claimed IS/PC at the same time as IB/SDA but whose IS/PC claim continues after the IB/SDA claim ceases.

[10] Only cases that move to one of the other listed benefits within 91 days from the end of their IB/SDA claim will be counted. Some cases will move to other benefits after 91 days: Such cases will not be counted as a move to another benefit.

[11] Some of the cases shown as having moved to another benefit may have now terminated.

[12] State pension age is currently 60 years for women and 65 years for men.

[13] Claimants shown as terminating a claim within 6 months of state pension age may also appear in the "moved to another benefit" column, as they may have subsequently been awarded either IS or PC.

[14] IB/SDA claimant data is held on a computer system called INCAP; RP (and WB and BB) data is held on a computer system called PSCS; INCAP and PSCS are linked because both cover contributory benefits and require information on the claimant's NI contributions history. Once an IB claimant gets within six months of SPA, their RP award can start to be built on PSCS i.e. PSCS and its operators begin calculating how much RP will be payable once SPA is reached. At that point, the claimant disappears from the INCAP side of the system and appears on the PSCS side (though obviously they continue to be paid the relevant rate of IB via PSCS until they reach SPA when RP kicks in). Since our IB/SDA data obviously comes from INCAP, these claimants reaching SPA can effectively disappear from our IB/SDA data (from INCAP) any time in the six months before they reach SPA.

Notes:

1. Caseload figures have been rounded to the nearest hundred. Totals may not sum due to rounding.
2. Figures based on a 5 per cent. sample, are subject to a degree of sampling variation.
3. Some IB/SDA end dates will have been estimated at the end of a quarter, where the true end date is not known.
4. A person is counted only once in each period, regardless of the number of times they claim and subsequently leave each benefit.
5. SDA is not available to new claimants from 6 April 2001. From this point, disabled people, whose period of incapacity begins before the age of 20 (or 25 if in education or training before the age of 20), may be able to receive incapacity benefit without having to satisfy the National Insurance contribution conditions. SDA recipients aged below 20 at the cut-off point will transfer on to IB at the long-term rate in April 2002. Existing recipients can continue to receive the benefit for as long as they satisfy the conditions of entitlement for the benefit.

Sources:

[15] IAD Information Centre, 5 per cent. samples.

[16] IAD Master Index, 100 per cent. database.

Interim Benefit Payments

Mr. Willetts: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions what estimate he has made of *(a)* the number of interim benefit payments and *(b)* gross public expenditure on those payments in each year since 1997 to cover delays in payments of social security benefits and tax credits. [194845]

Mr. Pond: Information on interim benefit payments to cover delays is not collected centrally and could be obtained only at disproportionate cost. Interim payments are not benefit as such but are converted into benefit when a substantive benefit decision is made.

With regard to tax credits, interim payments are made when the usual payment methods have broken down and are part of the annual entitlement. Interim payments to tax credit claimants are explained more fully in the Comptroller and Auditor General's Standard Report 2003–04 [at paragraph 2.14] which was published on 26 October 2004

Jobcentre Plus Offices

David Taylor: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions what plans there are to increase the number of services available to people from Jobcentre Plus offices. [194500]

Jane Kennedy: The administration of Jobcentre Plus is a matter for the Chief Executive of Jobcentre Plus, David Anderson. He will write to my hon. Friend.

Letter from David Anderson to David Taylor, dated 15 November 2004:

The Secretary of State has asked me to reply to your question concerning the number of services available to people from Jobcentre Plus offices. This is something which falls within the responsibilities delegated to me as Chief Executive of Jobcentre Plus.

Jobcentre Plus is continuously modernising and improving the services it provides to its customers. In the course of a four year programme, social security offices and Jobcentres are being replaced by Jobcentre Plus offices in which customers can make enquiries about their benefits and job opportunities in one place. The programme has currently rolled out a total of 537 sites, which is over half the eventual total.

In terms of office design and customer service, our emphasis has been on reducing waiting times and eliminating referrals between offices. New measures include increased telephone contact facilities, a new appointments system and nominated Personal Advisers offering advice and support on job readiness and benefit matters. As part of our modernisation programme, we are reinvesting in front line, customer facing services.

We are also providing improved customer access through telephone contact centres and the Internet. The staff at telephone contact centres are able to take applications for benefit over the telephone and deal with customer enquiries.

I hope this is helpful.

Natural Gas Infrastructure

Mr. Francois: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions what targets have been set for the Health and Safety Executive in respect of time elapsing from application for approval of large scale natural gas infrastructure to the completion of assessment; what the performance against target has been in each of the last five years; and what steps he is taking to ensure timely assessments are carried out. [197637]

Jane Kennedy *[holding answer 11 November 2004]*: A large scale natural gas infrastructure project would be subject to the Control of Major Accident Hazard Regulations 1999 (COMAH) which are enforced by the Health and Safety Executive and the Environment Agency acting jointly as the competent authority. These regulations require the operator to submit a "pre-construction safety report" to the competent authority for assessment three to six months before construction starts. Construction cannot begin until the competent authority has advised the operator of its conclusions and the operator is then required to produce a pre-operational safety report.

The competent authority's publicly available safety report assessment manual gives the timescale for completion of the assessment of the pre-operational safety reports as twelve months, but notes that there may be reasons where this cannot be achieved. There are no timescales for pre-construction safety reports.

The competent authority can confirm that no large scale natural gas infrastructure projects have been delayed, in the last five years, due to a failure to make timely assessments.

New Deal

John Barrett: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions (1) what targets have been set for the numbers of lone parents taking advantage of the *(a)* lone parent work premium and *(b)* in work credit (i) in each of the pilot areas and (ii) as a whole; [194991]

(2) for how long the proposed pilots of *(a)* lone parent work premium and *(b)* in work credit will last; [194992]

(3) what estimate he has made of the number of lone parents who will benefit from the *(a)* lone parent work premium and *(b)* in work credit in each of the pilot areas; [194993]

(4) what steps he will be taking to make those lone parents living in selected pilot areas aware of the *(a)* lone parent work premium and *(b)* in work credit; [194994]

(5) in which districts the *(a)* lone parent work premium and *(b)* in work credit will be piloted. [194995]

Jane Kennedy: On 25 October 2004, the Department launched pilots of two new financial incentives to help lone parents. The incentives are a Work Search Premium (WSP) of £20 a week, on top of benefits, to assist lone parents during the search for work, and an In Work Credit (IWC) of £40 a week, on top of wages and tax credits, helping work pay during their first year back in full-time work.

The pilots are testing the effectiveness of the IWC in twelve districts across the country. In eight of these areas the credit is being tested alongside the WSP.

The aim of the pilot is to gather evidence about the proportion of lone parents taking up the credit and premium and the impact in terms of supporting more lone parents to move off benefit and into work. There is strong evidence, from the evaluation of New Deal for Lone Parents (NDLP), that nearly all lone parents would be more positive about considering work if the gains were over £40 per week. We have, therefore, not made prior assumptions about the impact of the IWC or WSP and have not set targets for take up of either the IWC or WSP in the pilot areas.

The table provides estimates of the number of lone parents in the pilot districts who meet the eligibility criteria for participating in the pilot.

Jobcentre plus districts	*WSP and IWC*	*IWC only*	*Income support lone parents eligible*
Bradford	Yes	—	6,000
Cardiff and Vale	Yes	—	5,000
Dudley and Sandwell	Yes	—	7,000
Edinburgh Lothian and Borders	Yes	—	7,000
Lancashire West	Yes	—	7,000
Leicestershire	Yes	—	7,000
South East London	Yes	—	14,000
West London	Yes	—	11,000
Central London	—	Yes	13,000
Leeds	—	Yes	8,000
North London	—	Yes	16,000
Staffordshire	—	Yes	7,000
Total	—	Yes	108,000

Notes:

1. Lone parents who have claimed income support for 12 months or longer are eligible for the pilot.

2. Lone parents who have claimed jobseeker's allowance for 12 months or longer are also eligible for the pilot, though there are very few lone parents with children under 16 on jobseeker's allowance in relation to those on income support.

Source:

Estimates based on DWP administrative data from the Working Age Statistical Database (Benefits), April 2004

Whilst we anticipate that many lone parents will take up the offer of this new financial help, we recognise that not all eligible lone parents will choose to do so. Payment of the work search premium is dependent upon them working closely with NDLP personal advisers and adhering to an action plan. Currently less than nine per cent. of lone parents claiming income support are on NDLP. Whilst our expectation is that the new incentives will encourage greater participation in NDLP, this will remain a voluntary programme and we accept that many lone parents will not yet feel that worksearch or full time employment are the right options for them.

The level of improved job entries as a result of the new incentives will not be measurable until the pilots have been running for some time. Independent experts will carefully evaluate detailed management information from the pilots and their findings will be published.

In all districts the pilots are planned to continue until October 2006 but payments to lone parents who join the pilot before that date will continue for some time beyond that; until the end of the payment period (26 weeks for WSP, 12 months for IWC).

Eligible lone parents will be made aware of these measures at interviews with NDLP personal advisors. The entire eligible population will be invited for interview at least once during the length of the pilot. In addition leaflets, posters and local publicity will be available from the selected pilot areas.

Mr. Keith Bradley: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions how many lone parents in Manchester, Withington have gained work through the New Deal Programme. [197883]

Jane Kennedy: 500 lone parents in Manchester Withington have gained work through the New Deal for lone parents since the start of the programme in October 1998. Figures for lone parents who have gained work through other New Deal Programmes are not available.

Offender Rehabilitation

Mr. Jim Cunningham: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions what strategy his Department uses to re-introduce offenders into the work force. [197467]

Jane Kennedy: We are committed to providing help and advice to those likely to encounter barriers to getting back into work, including ex-offenders.

We work closely with the Criminal Justice Agencies to ensure, where possible, rehabilitation within the sentence connects to our employment support.

Through Jobcentre Plus, we provide 'Employment and Benefit Surgeries' in prison for pre-release prisoners and, where possible, we also work closely with the National Probation Service in assisting those supervised in the community.

Offenders released from prison without work who wish to claim Jobseeker's Allowance are offered appointments with their local Jobcentre as soon as possible after release. Ex-offenders can have early access to Jobcentre Plus help, including the New Deals. The help available covers a range of employability needs including: jobsearch and jobsearch techniques; basic skills and soft skills; through to some types of occupational and vocational skills. In addition, specialist progress2work provision helps those recovering from drugs mis-use, many of whom have an offending background, to get back to work.

We are also continually strengthening our existing employer links to encourage the employment of customers who have disclosed their criminal record. In doing so, we promote the wider gains to society in reducing re-offending.

Parliamentary Questions

Mr. Frank Field: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions when he will reply to the questions from the right hon. Member for Birkenhead *(a)* references 194278 and 194277 tabled on 25 October and *(b)* reference 193907 tabled on 22 October. [196889]

Mr. Pond: Replies were given to my right hon. Friend on 4 November.

Pension Service

Nick Harvey: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions whether the Pension Service can refuse direct payment at certain post office branches when a pensioner has designated that branch as their preferred account; and if he will make a statement. [197443]

Mr. Pond: The Pensions Service cannot refuse pensioners direct payment at certain post office branches.

If a customer chooses to have their benefit or pension paid direct into a post office card account they do not need to designate a branch, as payments through card accounts can be accessed at any post office branch during opening hours.

The Post Office also has arrangements with a wide variety of banks and building societies and depending on the account held, customers are able to withdraw money across the counter without being charged at any post office branch.

Primary Biliary Cirrhosis

Mr. Drew: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions whether primary biliary cirrhosis is a condition for which disability living allowance can be awarded. [197971]

Maria Eagle: Entitlement to disability living allowance is not linked to particular disabling conditions, but on the extent to which a severely disabled person has personal care needs and/or walking difficulties as a result of their disability. People with primary biliary cirrhosis can qualify for the allowance if they satisfy the rules which govern entitlement.

Regulatory Impact Assessments

Mr. Redwood: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions (1) what the aggregate annual cost to *(a)* business and *(b)* others obtained by adding up costs recorded in regulatory impact assessments is of the regulations introduced by his Department since 1997; [196564]

(2) what his latest estimate is of the cost in a year of compliance with regulations imposed by his Department. [196565]

Malcolm Wicks: All proposals which impact on business, charities or the voluntary sector require a regulatory impact assessment (RIA) which includes details of the costs, benefits and risks of the proposals. RIAs are subject to public consultation. Copies of final RIAs are available in the Library and on the Department's website.

Somalian Nationals

Dr. Gibson: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions what publicly-funded English language courses aimed at providing the language skills needed to gain employment in the UK are available to Somalian nationals. [195304]

Jane Kennedy: As part of our commitment to improving the employment rate of ethnic minority people, we offer up to 26 weeks of full time work-focused support through ESOL (English for Speakers of Other Languages). This support is available to eligible customers including Somali nationals, through the New Deal and Work Based Learning for Adults programmes. It aims to help participants move as far as possible towards Level 1 of the new national Skills for Life standards.

In addition, those who have difficulty with the English language, including Somali nationals, can access ESOL college provision funded through the Learning and Skills Council—as long as it does not conflict with the terms of their Jobseeker's Agreement.

People with basic skills needs—English for Speakers of Other Languages—have early entry to training and employment programmes.

Responsibility for government funded training in Wales and Scotland is devolved to the Welsh Assembly and the Scottish Parliament respectively and in Northern Ireland to the Northern Ireland Office.

Winter Fuel Allowance

Mr. Keith Bradley: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions how many pensioners in Manchester, Withington have benefited from the winter fuel allowance in each year since its introduction. [197876]

Malcolm Wicks: The number of pensioners in the Manchester Withington constituency who have benefited from a Winter Fuel Payment in each year since 1999–2000 is in the table.

Information relating to the 1997–98 and 1998–99 winters is not available.

	payments made
1999–2000	12,220
2000–01	12,860
2001–02	12,705
2002–03	12,465
2003–04	12,340

Notes:

1. Numbers are rounded to the nearest 5.

Source:

IAD Information Centre, 100 per cent. samples.

Mr. Cummings: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions how many people of pensionable age have received the winter fuel allowance in the Easington constituency since its introduction. [198129]

Malcolm Wicks: The number of people in the Easington constituency who have received a winter fuel payment in each year since 1999–2000 is in the table. Information relating to the 1997–98 and 1998–99 winters is not available.

	Payments made
1999–2000	14,785
2000–01	16,625
2001–02	16,710
2002–03	16,805
2003–04	16,785

Note:

Numbers are rounded to the nearest 5.

Source:

IAD Information Centre, 100 per cent. samples.

Mr. Denis Murphy: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions how many people received the winter fuel allowance in the Wansbeck constituency in the last year for which figures are available. [198693]

Malcolm Wicks: The number of people in the Wansbeck constituency who received a winter fuel payment in winter 2003–04 was 18,210.

Notes:

Numbers are rounded to the nearest 5.

Source:

IAD Information Centre, 100 per cent. samples

John Thurso: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions if he will estimate the number of people in Scotland who need to make a claim to receive the 2004–05 winter fuel payment; and how many claims were received on or before 24 September. [197343]

Malcolm Wicks: We estimate around 60,000 people in Scotland will turn 60 and become newly entitled to receive a winter fuel payment for 2004–05. In 2003–04 around 35,000 people in Scotland aged 60 received an automatic payment. We would expect the number to be similar in 2004–05. Those people who are not in receipt of certain benefits and therefore do not receive an automatic payment, will need to claim.

On 24 September, 37,705 completed claim forms for a winter fuel payment had been received from people in Scotland. Some of these were probably from people who would have been paid a winter fuel payment automatically.

The Government have publicised the availability of winter fuel payments and how to obtain a claim form. It is up to an individual, where a claim is necessary, to decide whether or not to make that claim. They have until 30 March 2005 to make a claim for this winter.

Mr. Berry: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions if he will extend eligibility for winter fuel payments to non-pensioner households who qualify for social fund cold weather payments; what estimate he has made of the likely cost of this policy; and if he will make a statement. [197538]

Malcolm Wicks: We have no plans to extend winter fuel payments to non-pensioner households which qualify for a cold weather payment. Winter fuel payments are made to pensioners because they are more vulnerable to the effects of cold weather during the winter months than other groups.

We estimate that the cost of extending winter fuel payments to non-pensioner households that qualify for the social fund cold weather payments would be £300 million in 2004–05.

Note:

Actual receipt of a cold weather payment depends on local temperatures as well as meeting qualification conditions. Here it is assumed that all eligible cases would receive a payment of £200.

Work-related Illness

Mr. Burstow: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions if he will estimate the cost to the economy of work-related illness in *(a)* England and *(b)* each region in each year since 1997; and if he will make a statement. [196244]

Jane Kennedy: The information is not available in the format requested. The latest available figures for England are for the year 1995/96 and are presented in the table.

However, more up-to-date information does exist for 2001–02 but for Great Britain only. Estimates of the costs to the GB economy of work related illness for 2001–02 are £7.6 billion to £11.6 billion in 2001–02 prices[1]. The statistical data that supported the analysis of the 2001–02 costs provided insufficient detail to yield regional cost breakdowns.

[1] *Source:*

Interim update of the 'Costs to Britain of Workplace Accidents and Work-Related Ill Health' Health and Safety Executive 2004

Cost to the economy of work related illness—1995 to 1996

	£billion
England	5.65 to 5.73
South East	1.44 to 1.52
East Anglia	0.06 to 0.08
South West	0.35 to 0.17
West Midlands	0.77 to 0.79
East Midlands	0.2 to 0.24
Yorkshire and Humberside	0.18 to 0.22
North West	0.81 to .85
North	0.33 to 0.34
London	1.51 to 1.52

The costs in the table are extracted from: "The costs to Britain of workplace accidents and work-related ill health in 1995–96", Health and Safety Executive, 1999 ISBN 07176 1709 2.

The cost to the economy is defined as the sum of the following costs: loss of output, administration costs, recruitment costs, medical treatment, and investigation costs to HSE and local authorities. This information relates only to 1995–96 and is in 1995–96 prices.

Youth Unemployment

Mr. Skinner: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions what change there has been in youth unemployment in the constituency of Bolsover since 1997. [197095]

Mr. Timms: The information requested falls within the responsibility of the National Statistician, who has been asked to reply.

Letter from Colin Mowl to Mr. Skinner, dated 15 November 2004:

The National Statistician has been asked to reply to your Parliamentary Question about youth unemployment in Bolsover. I am replying in his absence. (197095)

Between the twelve-month periods ending February 1997 and February 2003, the latest data for which information is available, the number of unemployed people aged 16–24 resident in the Bolsover Parliamentary Constituency fell from 2,000 to 1,000. The figures from the Labour Force Survey are rounded to the nearest thousand and are, as with any sample survey, subject to sampling variability.

The Office for National Statistics also compiles statistics of those claiming Jobseeker's Allowance for local areas including Parliamentary Constituencies. The number of people aged 18–24 resident in the Bolsover Parliamentary Constituency claiming Jobseeker's Allowance fell from 660 in May 1997 to 385 in September 2004. The data are not seasonally adjusted.

DEPUTY PRIME MINISTER

Contingency Planning

Mr. Paul Marsden: To ask the Deputy Prime Minister what contingency plans have been produced for the evacuation of London following a terrorist attack. [195846]

Mr. Raynsford: A basic plan has been developed for the mass evacuation of any part of greater London. The plan is scalable and flexible and any response will depend on the nature of an event. It has been developed in conjunction with the relevant emergency services, local authorities, transport operators, and other organisations in London and the surrounding regions. Mass evacuation will be the last resort and is most unlikely to be required. In most circumstances the generic advice would be to go indoors and listen to the media for further advice. It would not be appropriate to disclose the operational details of emergency planning.

Mr. Paul Marsden: To ask the Deputy Prime Minister if he will place in the Library contingency plans for evacuating London in the case of a major terrorist attack. [195855]

Mr. Raynsford: I am unable to place the contingency plan for the evacuation of London in the Library as it contains confidential and sensitive operational details. It is standard policy that we do not place these types of plan in the Library.

Nottingham (Boundary Commission)

Mr. Allen: To ask the Deputy Prime Minister when he expects the Parliamentary Boundary Commissioner's proposals for Nottingham to be submitted to the Department. [197897]

Mr. Raynsford: The Boundary Commission for England will put their proposal for Nottingham to the Government as part of the report of the fifth general review. The Boundary Commission for England is required to submit its final report by 12 April 2007. It is a matter for the Commission when, within that time scale, they do so.

Affordable Homes

Tom Cox: To ask the Deputy Prime Minister how many affordable homes have been built in the London borough of Wandsworth in each of the last five years by *(a)* Wandsworth council, *(b)* the Housing Corporation and *(c)* housing associations; and if he will make a statement. [196725]

Keith Hill: The numbers are of new build local authority and registered social landlord social dwellings for rent as reported in building control completions in Wandsworth are as follows:

	Number of dwellings for rent
1999–2000	76
2000–01	3
2001–02	0
2002–03	0
2003–04	51

The figures exclude low cost home ownership schemes and acquisition of existing dwellings by registered social landlords.

Mr. Dhanda: To ask the Deputy Prime Minister what measures are in place to assist key workers to obtain affordable housing in Gloucester; and what discussions he has had with *(a)* local authorities and *(b)* housing associations in Gloucestershire on this. [198257]

Keith Hill: Housing assistance for key workers within the South West region is available through the key worker Challenge Fund scheme identified by the South West Regional Housing Board. The £10 million scheme will provide affordable housing for rent or home ownership by key workers.

The Housing Corporation invited bids from housing associations for proposals to assist key public sector workers in the region in sectors experiencing recruitment and retention difficulties. No bid for Gloucester was successful, but within Gloucestershire £809,000 has been allocated to provide 24 units for key workers and in South Gloucestershire £716,000 has been provided for a further 27 dwellings. These dwellings are being provided by Gloucestershire Housing Partnership and Sovereign Housing Association.

Key workers may also benefit from other shared ownership and homebuy programmes funded by the Housing Corporation to help existing social tenants and those on waiting lists into home ownership.

Building Regulations (Fuel Conservation)

Sue Doughty: To ask the Deputy Prime Minister what studies he has made of the extent to which the minimum standards for the conservation of fuel and power required under the building regulations are adhered to. [197540]

Phil Hope: The current provisions for the conservation of fuel and power came into effect on 1 April 2002 and, in accordance with normal procedures, the Office of the Deputy Prime Minister has carried out tests on new dwellings, inspected applications received by a number of building control bodies for approval of proposed works covering all types of buildings, and interviewed contractors. The results are being taken into account in the further review announced in the Energy White Paper.

Census Data

Miss McIntosh: To ask the Deputy Prime Minister (1) when the Local Government Finance Settlement will include updated census data; [197039]

(2) if he will make a statement on the inclusion of updated census data in the Local Government Financial Settlement. [197040]

Mr. Raynsford: Government are working towards incorporating the 2001 Census data into the Local Government Finance Settlement for 2006–07.

Commercial Property Leases

Mr. Win Griffiths: To ask the Deputy Prime Minister if he will list those consulted regarding Commercial Property Leases: options for determining or outlawing the use of upward-only rent review clauses; and if he will place copies of the responses in the Library. [197487]

Keith Hill: The consultation on Commercial Property Leases: options for deterring or outlawing the use of upward only rent review clauses ended on 30 September. The Office of the Deputy Prime Minister specifically consulted the following organisations and bodies:

Property Interests

Association of British Insurers
Association of Property Bankers
British Council for Offices
British Property Federation
CoreNet Global UK
Council of Mortgage Lenders
House Builders Federation
Investment Property Forum
National Association of Pension Funds
Property Managers Association

Professional/legal bodies

Chancery Bar Association
City of London Law Society
General Council of the Bar
Law Commission
Law Society
Royal Institute of British Architects
Royal Institution of Chartered Surveyors

Other business interests

Alliance of Independent Retailers
British Chambers of Commerce
British Retail Consortium
Confederation of British Industry
Federation of Small Businesses
Forum of Private Business
Institute of Directors
National Association of Pension Funds
Small Business Bureau

Devolved bodies

National Assembly for Wales
Northern Ireland Executive
Scottish Executive
Greater London Assembly

Other Government bodies

Countryside Agency
Small Business Service

Local Authority Associations

Association of Chief Estates Officers
Local Government Association
Improvement and Development Agency
Society of Local Authority Chief Executives
Welsh Local Government Association

Consumer bodies

Consumer Congress Secretariat
National Association of Citizens Advice Bureaux
National Consumer Council
Welsh Consumer Council

Environmental bodies

Entrust
Environment Council
Friends of the Earth
Greenpeace

Trades Unions

Trades Union Congress

The Office of the Deputy Prime Minister has also staged a series of well-attended seminars. A copy of the responses will be made available in the Library of the House in due course.

Community Hospital (Leighton Buzzard)

Andrew Selous: To ask the Deputy Prime Minister if he will ensure that a community hospital is provided in Leighton Buzzard and Linslade as part of the infrastructure supplied under the Sustainable Communities Plan. [198201]

Keith Hill: Additional hospital capacity in the Milton Keynes and South Midlands growth area is one of the issues that the Office of the Deputy Prime Minister's funded "Planning for future of health and social care needs in the MKSM sub region" study is looking at. This study is due to report in summer 2005.

The Office of the Deputy Prime Minister is working closely with other Government Departments to ensure that funding allocations for major services, such as health, respond effectively to growth. In March 2004, the Department of Health announced a funding package for the growth areas which includes: a commitment to including a growth area funding adjustment in future allocations; additional capital funding of £20 million for 2005–06; and additional revenue funding of £20 million for 2004–05 and 2005–06 for primary care trusts (PCTs) in the growth areas. £2.244 million of this revenue funding went to PCTs in Bedfordshire and Hertfordshire.

Departmental Staff

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Deputy Prime Minister what percentage of the staff in his Department in *(a)* 2002 and *(b)* 2003 were people with disabilities. [196119]

Phil Hope: I refer the hon. Member to the answer given by my hon. Friend the Member for Bolton West on 9 November 2004, *Official Report*, column 619W.

Mr. Jenkin: To ask the Deputy Prime Minister what the consequences will be for the staffing of his Department of the rejection of proposals for an elected regional assembly in the North East. [198215]

Mr. Raynsford: Staff who had been working on the Regional Assemblies Bill and other preparations for elected regional assemblies are being transferred to other priority work within the Office of the Deputy Prime Minister.

Education Authorities

Mr. Hoban: To ask the Deputy Prime Minister how each local education authority performed in *(a)* 2002–03 and *(b)* 2003–04 against best value performance indicators 159 *(a)* to *(d)* , as defined in 2002–03. [196993]

Mr. Raynsford: Information on the performance of local education authorities against Best Value Performance Indicator (BVPI) 159 *(a)–(d)* for 2002–03 can be found on the BVPI website www.bvpi.gov.uk. The data for 2003–04 is currently being audited and will be posted on the website in mid-December.

Electrical Standards

Mr. Drew: To ask the Deputy Prime Minister what the time scale is for the harmonisation of electrical standards under part P of the building regulations; what the reasons are for the requirement for electricians to pay a registration fee; what that fee is expected to be; and who will determine the level of the fee. [197857]

Phil Hope: Part P of the Building Regulations (Electrical safety in dwellings) will come into force on 1 January 2005. The Government have introduced part P to reduce the number of deaths, injuries and fires caused by defective fixed electrical installations. The regulatory impact assessment showed that it would be both practicable and cost-effective to take this step.

From 1 January anyone carrying out notifiable electrical installation work in dwellings will need to demonstrate that such work meets the requirements in part P. There are two ways in which this can be done.

First, those with sufficient qualifications, knowledge and experience can choose to join a competent person self-certification scheme authorised under the Building Act 1984. Members of such schemes will be able to self-certify that their work complies with part P. There will be an annual fee to belong to such schemes, the fee level being determined by the scheme operator. For schemes already authorised the fee range is from £300 to £1,000. Fees can be set only to cover running and development costs of the scheme.

Electrical contractors who choose not to join a scheme and all carrying out notifiable work on a DIY basis will need to submit a building notice to a building control body for each job. In this case there will be a building control fee to be paid. The building control body will then be responsible for inspecting and testing the work to ensure that it is safe.

English Regions Network

Mr. Jenkin: To ask the Deputy Prime Minister what the functions are of the English Regions Network; what guidance has been issued governing its activities; and to whom it reports. [198157]

Mr. Raynsford: The English Regions Network (ERN) is the co-ordinating body for the eight regional chambers in England, co-ordinating policy responses and commissioning research relevant to all regional chambers.

The ERN submits its business plan and reports against agreed objectives direct to the Office of the Deputy Prime Minister.

Fire Authorities

Mr. Gordon Marsden: To ask the Deputy Prime Minister what guidance his Department has given fire authorities on *(a)* minimum levels of provision and *(b)* response times in drawing up integrated risk management plans. [197689]

Mr. Raynsford: The old, national standards of fire cover, which set out the speed and weight of response to fire depending on building density, were insufficiently flexible to allow Fire and Rescue Authorities (FRA) to respond to the needs of their communities. Integrated Risk Management Planning allows each FRA to set its own local standards for provision and response in the light of local risk.

The Office of the Deputy Prime Minister produced guidance in 2003 on the development of Integrated Risk Management Planning to help FRAs determine the most effective and efficient use of their resources.

Mr. Gordon Marsden: To ask the Deputy Prime Minister what assessment his Department has made of the effectiveness of fire authorities consultations on integrated risk management plans. [197691]

Mr. Raynsford: Under Integrated Risk Management Planning (IRMP) it is for each Fire and Rescue Authority (FRA) to assess the needs of its local communities. The Office of the Deputy Prime Minister is one of the consultees on the annual IRMPs. The Implementation Support Team, drawn from Her Majesty's Fire Service Inspectorate (HMFSI), provided guidance to FRAs throughout the year.

Mr. Gordon Marsden: To ask the Deputy Prime Minister what guidance his Department has issued to fire authorities on *(a)* minimum provision and *(b)* response times for specialist equipment carried on incident support units. [197692]

Mr. Raynsford: The minimum provision and response times for specialist equipment carried on incident support units is a matter for each individual Fire and Rescue Authority (FRA). Any change it proposes in its Integrated Risk Management Planning (IRMP) should form part of the consultation on their action plan. The Office of the Deputy Prime Minister has issued formal guidance on IRMPs and further guidance is planned.

Mr. Gordon Marsden: To ask the Deputy Prime Minister whether projected cost savings from integrated risk management plans for fire authorities include the cost of meeting *(a)* minimum levels of provision and *(b)* response times. [197693]

Mr. Raynsford: Under Integrated Risk Management Planning it is for each Fire and Rescue Authorities to carry out a full risk assessment of its area and decide on the appropriate levels of provision and response times. Any cost savings will reflect those decisions. Any changes to existing provision will be the subject of consultation.

Mr. Gordon Marsden: To ask the Deputy Prime Minister (1) what provision his Department has made for monitoring and assessment of performance against fire authorities' projected risk assessments following the introduction of integrated risk management plans; [197694]

(2) what provision his Department has made for external audit of fire authorities' projected risk assessments based on integrated risk management plans. [197695]

Mr. Raynsford: Fire and Rescue Authorities have been and will continue to be subject to an annual external audit.

Fire Safety

Mrs. Helen Clark: To ask the Deputy Prime Minister what changes are planned in the size of the fire safety sector in England and Wales; what estimate he has made of the effects on the funding requirement; whether he has undertaken a risk assessment in respect of such plans; and if he will make a statement. [193186]

Paul Goggins: I have been asked to reply.

Prison Service Fire Safety Section has been reorganised. Officials have taken full advice on the statutory implications of the restructure and provision of the service. This advice confirms that arrangements following reorganisation will not result in an increased risk to the service.

Reorganisation will reduce the size of the section, through early retirement, from five staff to three resulting in annual savings of approximately £150,000 a year.

Fire Service

Mr Mackay: To ask the Deputy Prime Minister what the *(a)* staff and *(b)* consultancy costs were of the (i) Fire Research Department and (ii) HM Fire Service Inspectorate in each quarter since January 2002. [196079]

Mr. Raynsford: The costs are shown in the following table.

£000

	(a) Staff pay costs		*(b) Consultancy cost*	
	(i) FRD	*(ii) HMFSI*	*(i) FRD*	*(ii) HMFSI*
April to June 2003	174	757	5	0
July to September 2003	131	533	39	0
October to December 2003	154	674	135	0
January to March 2004[1]	169	619	273	0
April to June 2004	348	451	62	0
July to September 2004	351	472	86	0

[1] FRD staff pay costs includes staff from fire statistics section from April 2004.

Figures for January 2002 to March 2003 are not available in the form requested. Staff in these divisions were paid partly from the Department for Transport, Local Government and the Regions and partly from the Home Office payroll. As a result of machinery of Government changes, complete data is not available and could only be provided at disproportionate cost.

Patrick Mercer: To ask the Deputy Prime Minister what plans he has for a regional fire control centre for Nottinghamshire and the East Midlands. [197421]

Mr. Raynsford: The Office of the Deputy Prime Minister plans to have a national network of resilient fire control centres with one in each Government office region. East Midlands is in the first tranche of the implementation plan and its regional fire control centre should become fully operational early in 2007. A procurement exercise is currently under way for the location of the regional fire control centre and an announcement of the site should be made in the first quarter of 2005.

Green Ministers

Mr. Horam: To ask the Deputy Prime Minister how many Green Ministers his Office and its predecessors have had since 1997. [197672]

Phil Hope: The Office of the Deputy Prime Minister was created in May 2002. Since then there have been two Green Ministers. Between 1997 and the creation of the Office of the Deputy Prime Minister there were three Green Ministers; two in the Department for

Environment, Transport and the Regions, and one in the Department for Transport, Local Government and the Regions.

Department	*Green Ministers*
DETR	Glenda Jackson, Beverley Hughes
DTLR	Alan Whitehead
ODPM	Chris Leslie; Phil Hope

High Hedges

Mrs. Brooke: To ask the Deputy Prime Minister when he expects local authorities to begin to accept applications relating to high hedges. [196963]

Phil Hope: The Office of the Deputy Prime Minister is now finalising Regulations and guidance and expects the system to be fully operational in early 2005, at which point local authorities will be able to process complaints about high hedges.

House Building (Growth)

Mr. Hoban: To ask the Deputy Prime Minister what guidance has been issued to local authorities about assumptions for the rate of growth of house building above the level set out in Regional Planning Guidance 9. [198049]

Keith Hill: The Office of the Deputy Prime Minister has issued no formal guidance to local authorities about assumptions for the rate of growth of house building above the level set out in Regional Planning Guidance 9, other than that already set out in RPG9. Officials do have regular discussions with the Regional Assembly's officers and committees, which include local authorities, covering the interpretation of Government policy and guidance.

Mr. Hoban: To ask the Deputy Prime Minister what discussions his Department has had with local authorities in South East England about the infrastructure funds that will be available if house building targets exceed those set out in Regional Planning Guidance 9. [198050]

Keith Hill: As part of the Regional Assembly's process of developing the regional spatial strategy for the South East that will replace the Regional Planning Guidance for the South East (RPG9), officials from the Government Office for the South East and the Office of the Deputy Prime Minister are involved in a range of discussions with the Assembly and local authorities relevant to that process. They have also worked with the Regional Assembly and local authorities in piloting a new approach on investment in transport infrastructure through the Regional Transport Board.

Housing (Disabled People)

Gregory Barker: To ask the Deputy Prime Minister (1) what representations he has received on the draft consultation on the guidance to local authorities on best practice in the organisation and delivery of a housing adaptations service for disabled people; [197587]

(2) what plans he has for legislation to simplify the way in which grant aid for disabled adaptations are managed; [197588]

(3) what plans he has for legislation to end means testing as an instrument to assess applications for grant aid for disabled adaptations; [197589]

(4) how much was spent on disabled facilities grants in each of the last 10 years; [197590]

(5) what the average waiting time between assessment and completion has been in each local authority for people requesting disabled adaptations in their homes in the last 10 years. [197591]

Keith Hill: The consultation period for the delivering adaptations consultation documents ended in May 2003, 69 responses were received. The final version of the document "Delivering Housing Adaptations for Disabled People: A Good Practice Guide" was published on 3 November and copies are available in the Library of the House.

The Office of the Deputy Prime Minister, jointly with the Department of Health and the Department for Education and Skills is undertaking a comprehensive review of the DFG programme. The review will look the operation and outcomes of the Disabled Facilities Grant (DFG) Programme and make proposals to improve its efficiency and fairness. This will include a review of the DFG means test. The review will report to Ministers in May 2005.

The Regulatory Reform (Housing Assistance) (England & Wales) Order 2002 came into force on 18 July 2002, and provides local housing authorities with wide discretionary powers to provide assistance for the repair, improvement or adaptations of housing. These powers can be used to provide additional help with adaptations over and above the mandatory entitlements under the DFG legislation.

Total Disabled Facilities Grant payments to local authorities in England by the Government over the last ten years are:

	£ million
1994–95	54
1995–96	59
1996–97	55
1997–98	66
1998–99	64
1999–2000	66
2000–01	77
2001–02	88
2002–03	95
2003–04	112

The Government does not collect data on the average waiting time for a DFG.

Landfill Allowance Trading Scheme

Dr. Starkey: To ask the Deputy Prime Minister pursuant to the Answer of 28 October 2004, *Official Report*, column 1323W, on the Landfill Allowance Trading Scheme, if he will list the range of measures in place to support local authorities with above average population growth in meeting the Landfill Allowance Trading Scheme targets; and which local authorities are involved in meetings with officials from his Department and the Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs about the Landfill Allowance Trading Scheme. [195830]

Mr. Morley: I have been asked to reply.

Defra's Waste Implementation Programme Local Authority Support Unit has identified a number of common waste management issues where support is needed. Support includes guidance on waste composition analysis; a report of Household Waste Recycling Centre sites in England; an assessment of these sites as a resource and the infrastructure requirements for compliance with the WEEE Directive; good practice guidance on bulky waste management; procurement and bulky waste toolkits; good practice case studies on waste collection and bring systems; and the new recyclables capture toolkit. This information can be found on the Local Authority Support website address http://lasupport.defra.gov.uk/.

In addition the Local Authority Support Unit invited all local authorities to apply for targeted support to help them deal with specific local barriers to improved recycling performance. The scheme has had an excellent response and the Local Authority Support Unit and WRAP's ROTATE programme are providing consultancy support to 317 authorities in England. This support places considerable emphasis on strategic partnerships but also includes help with providing procurement expertise and waste composition analysis, tackling bulky goods, developing estates schemes and increasing diversion rates at Household Waste Recycling Centres.

The Spending Review 2004 included an overall increase in EPCS of £1.2 billion over 2006–07 and 2007–08 reflecting in part increased costs of waste management arising from EU obligations. Local authorities will also benefit from an extra £275 million of PFI credits over the same period for long term investment. And funds available through the waste Performance Reward Grant will rise from £45 million to £105 million in 2006–07 and £110 million in 2007–08.

This support, although not directly targeted at authorities planning for above average population growth, will help those authorities move towards more sustainable waste management practices.

The Authorities involved in the meeting with officials from ODPM and Defra are—Milton Keynes city council, Buckinghamshire county council and the East London Waste Authority. Officials from Defra also meet local authority representative bodies to discuss the operation of the Landfill Allowances Trading Scheme on a regular basis through the scheme's Stakeholder Group.

Local Authority Settlements

Phil Sawford: To ask the Deputy Prime Minister what steps he is taking to ensure that local authorities in the growth areas will receive a settlement for 2005–06 in line with the funding formula. [197855]

Mr. Raynsford: I refer my hon. Friend to the answer given to the right hon. Member for Sleaford and North Hykeham on 11 November 2004, *Official Report*, column 848W.

Local Government Finance

Mr. Hogg: To ask the Deputy Prime Minister if he will give local authorities more flexibility on how they spend grant support. [197498]

Mr. Raynsford: In 2004–05 the Government reduced the proportion of ring-fenced grant by a further 2 percentage points to 11.1 per cent., by "unfencing" seven grants, worth some £750 million. For non-schools areas of spending, we continue to seek to give local authorities as much freedom and flexibility as we can.

Education is a key national priority and the Office of the Deputy Prime Minister aims to give schools as much stability, freedom and flexibility in their funding as possible. We have already announced our proposals to provide, from 2006–07, funding for schools through a grant from the Department for Education and Skills to local authorities.

Details of the proposed funding allocations to each local authority will be announced as part of the provisional local government finance settlement.

Policy Changes (Worcester)

Mr. Michael Foster: To ask the Deputy Prime Minister if he will set out, with statistical evidence relating as closely to the Worcester constituency, the effects of changes to his Department's policy since 1997 on the Worcester constituency. [197969]

Phil Hope: The Office of the Deputy Prime Minister is determined to develop policies to improve the lives of people across the UK, including the West Midlands.

In the local government finance settlements since the Office of the Deputy Prime Minister took office we have been able to increase the amount of Government grant given to local authorities by £19.1 billion. This is a 30 per cent. increase in real terms and compares with a 7 per cent. cut in the previous four years before 1997–98.

Worcester city council has received an average annual increase in formula grant since 1997 of 3.4 per cent. Residents of Worcester have also benefited from Worcestershire county council's average increase in grant of 4.6 per cent. each year over this time.

The transfer of local authority stock to Registered Social Landlords is one of the options for delivering the decent homes programme. Since 1997, Worcester city council has transferred its total stock of 4703 dwellings, of which 2034 were non-decent, to Worcester Community Housing, an RSL. Similarly, since 1997, within Worcestershire county council, Bromsgrove transferred its total stock of 3096 dwellings, of which 255 were non-decent, to Bromsgrove District Housing Trust Ltd, an RSL; and Wyre Forest transferred its total stock of 6056 dwellings to Wyre Forest Community Housing, an RSL.

This year the Office of the Deputy Prime Minister has provided £15.9 million in Supporting People grant to Worcestershire county council, to enable it to deliver housing-related support services to vulnerable people in the area. Currently this provides over 17,000 dwellings of support to a range of people, including homeless families, older people, people with learning disabilities, and young people at risk.

The Worcestershire Partnership was awarded a Liveability Fund grant worth a total of £3.4 million in March 2004. The Liveability Fund grant for Worcestershire includes funding for environmental service improvements and several park improvements in Worcester City.

The Neighbourhood Statistics Service provides a wide range of statistical information at parliamentary constituency level, taken from the 2001 Census and other sources. This service is available on the National Statistics website at http://neighbourhood.statistics.gov.uk./.

Post Office

Mr. Brady: To ask the Deputy Prime Minister if he will list the post office branches that have benefited from grants from the Urban Deprived Fund, broken down by *(a)* parliamentary constituency and *(b)* local authority area, giving the amount of grant awarded in each case. [197482]

Phil Hope: The information requested has been made available in the Library of the House.

Mr. Brady: To ask the Deputy Prime Minister by what criteria applications from Post Office branches for grant funding from the Urban Deprived Fund are assessed. [197483]

Phil Hope: Post offices must be located within the 10 per cent. most deprived wards as measured by the Indexes of Multiple Deprivation 2000. The application must demonstrate that:

> The post office is at risk of closure (due to financial and/or security issues) within two years without the support of the grant.
>
> The proposed work under the grant will have a significant beneficial impact upon the viability of the business within two years.

Clive Efford: To ask the Deputy Prime Minister pursuant to his answer of 8 November 2004, *Official Report*, column 455W, on sub-post offices, whether Neighbourhood Renewal areas *(a)* are included in his Department's definition of the most deprived urban areas and *(b)* meet the criteria for the Most Deprived Urban Post Office Fund. [197627]

Phil Hope: The information requested is as follows:

(a) The Indices of Deprivation 2000 (ID 2000) were used to determine eligibility for the Neighbourhood Renewal Fund (NRF). The ID 2000 aggregates ward level scores up to district level, using six different ways of measuring deprivation in different types of local authority districts. This includes deprivation in both urban and rural areas. Local authorities that fell within the top 50 most deprived on any of the six measures were eligible for NRF.

(b) Urban post offices in the 10 per cent. most deprived wards are eligible to apply for the Deprived Urban Post Office Fund (DUPOF). Not all of the 10 per cent. most deprived wards fall in NRF areas.

According to the ID 2000, two of the 88 most deprived local authorities do not contain wards that are in the 10 per cent. most deprived. Although many of the 10 per cent. most deprived wards fall into the NRF areas, there are some in other local authorities.

Red Ash

Ms Walley: To ask the Deputy Prime Minister what recent representations he has received on the use of red ash from pit waste as hardcore in house building. [197696]

Phil Hope: It is believed that no recent representations has been received by my right hon. Friend the Deputy Prime Minister concerning the use of the pit waste known as red ash for use as hardcore in house building.

However, it is known that problems have been encountered when red ash material has become saturated and consequently expanded. Technical guidance is available of how to deal with this material when it is discovered. If the red ash fill remains in a dry condition then there are few difficulties with the material. Regretfully some individuals have been ill-advised and have suffered unnecessary disruption and expense when the material has been discovered in their dwellings.

Due to the high concentrations of sulphates in red ash, it is no longer recommended as a construction material under buildings.

Ms Walley: To ask the Deputy Prime Minister what plans he has to alter guidance in respect of the use of red ash; and if he will make a statement on BRE 3613. [197697]

Phil Hope: The recently published Building Regulations Approved Document Part C—Site preparation and resistance to contamination and moisture—which comes into effect on the 1 December 2004 gives guidance where sulphates are encountered from natural sources, hardcore or other compacted fill material. Practical guidance on construction methods to avoid future problems are included in the document. It is intended to review the document at regular intervals to reflect any future research and investigations into the problem of building where high concentrations of sulphates are known.

Technical guidance material has also been published by the Building Research Establishment in various reports, namely; BR 424 Building on fill: geotechnical aspects, Digest 472 Optimising ground investigations, and particular reference should be made to Special Digest 1 Concrete in aggressive ground—parts 1 to 4.

Referendums

Mr. Gummer: To ask the Deputy Prime Minister how much the recent referendum in the North East cost in *(a)* expenditure by (i) national and (ii) local government, *(b)* civil service time and *(c)* local government officers' time. [197893]

Mr. Raynsford: The information is a follows:

(a) (i) The following expenditure was incurred by the Office of the Deputy Prime Minister:

	£million
Information Campaign	1.22
Costs incurred by the counting officers in running the referendum	[1]2.9
Delivery of Yes and No campaign literature	0.5

[1] Approximately

In addition to this the Electoral Commission incurred some costs, in particular grants of £100,000 each to the Yes and No campaigns and the costs of their information campaign.

(a) (ii) Any expenditure by local government is a matter for local government.

(b) The Chief Counting Officer and his staff were responsible for the organisation and operation of the regional referendums. The costs incurred by counting officers are set out above.

The Office of the Deputy Prime Minister's staff time was spent on developing policy and preparing Statutory Instruments related to the referendum, and on the Information Campaign. Detailed information about staff time could only be provided at disproportionate cost.

(c) Local government officers' time is a matter for local government.

Mr. Gummer: To ask the Deputy Prime Minister how much the proposed referendum in *(a)* the North West and *(b)* Yorkshire and Humber cost before the decision to abort them was made in (i) expenditure by (A) national and (B) local government, (ii) civil service time and (iii) local government officers' time. [197894]

Mr. Raynsford: The information is a follows:

(a)(i) The only expenditure by the Office of the Deputy Prime Minister on the proposed referendums in the North West and Yorkshire and the Humber was £2.02 million through the Information Campaign.

(a)(ii) Any expenditure by local government is a matter for local government.

(b) The Office of the Deputy Prime Minister's staff time was spent on developing policy and preparing Statutory Instruments related to the referendums, and on the information campaign. Detailed information about staff time could only be provided at disproportionate cost.

(c) Local government officers' time is a matter for local government.

Mr. Hayes: To ask the Deputy Prime Minister what the cost has been of holding the north east referendum; how much has been spent on information products; what proportion of the total was spent by *(a)* the Government and *(b)* individuals and groups on either side of the campaign. [197927]

Mr. Raynsford: The Government spent £1.22 million on the Information Campaign in the north east.

By law, the designated organisations (the Yes and No campaigns) are entitled to a referendum mailing to electors. The delivery costs of this at £0.5 million, are met by Government. The Yes and No campaigns also received a grant of £100,000 each from the Electoral Commission.

The Electoral Commission also ran an information campaign. The costs of this are a matter for them.

Expenditure by the campaigners must be within limits prescribed by law. This expenditure is monitored by the Electoral Commission.

Mr. Gummer: To ask the Deputy Prime Minister what plans he has to ask the people of the Eastern Region whether they want an *(a)* unelected regional assembly and *(b)* voluntary co-operation between elected councils. [198073]

Mr. Raynsford: The East of England Region Assembly is a voluntary body recognised by Government for certain purposes. There are no plans to alter that position.

Voluntary co-operation between elected councils using well-being powers does not require formal public support.

Mr. Jenkin: To ask the Deputy Prime Minister what representations the Government have received concerning the conduct of the referendum in the north-east. [198165]

Mr. Raynsford: There have been a small number of complaints about the administration of the poll, which was generally seen to have been conducted with great efficiency.

Regional Assemblies

Mr. Jenkin: To ask the Deputy Prime Minister pursuant to the answer of 26 October 2004, *Official Report*, columns 1112–1113W, on regional assemblies, what estimate he has made of the total cost of *(a)* the free mailing and *(b)* the free television broadcasts. [198270]

Mr. Raynsford: The delivery costs of the referendum mailing will be paid for by Government and cost £0.5 million. Other costs associated with the mailing were paid by the "Yes" and "No" campaigns.

Airtime for the TV broadcasts was provided without fee by the broadcaster. The "Yes" and "No" campaigns met the production costs from their campaign funds.

Regional Chambers

Mr. Jenkin: To ask the Deputy Prime Minister if he will list the grants made to each of the regional chambers in the financial year 2003–04 by non-governmental organisations funded from public funds. [198155]

Mr. Raynsford: The information requested is not held centrally and could be provided only at disproportionate cost. Any grants received from non-governmental organisations are a matter for individual regional chambers.

Mr. Jenkin: To ask the Deputy Prime Minister what reports have been made by regional chambers to his Department *(a)* directly and *(b)* through the Government offices for the regions accounting for the expenditure of central Government funding. [198158]

Mr. Raynsford: Regional chambers are required to prepare and submit to the relevant Government office an annual business plan containing objectives and targets to be met with the aid of Government grant. They are subsequently required to provide reports against those objectives on agreed dates throughout the year.

Mr. Jenkin: To ask the Deputy Prime Minister if he will place in the Library a copy of the most recent guidance issued to regional chambers on the expenditure of central Government funds. [198159]

Mr. Raynsford: Updated business planning guidance for regional chambers is being finalised. A copy will be made available in the Library of the House shortly.

Mr. Jenkin: To ask the Deputy Prime Minister what the *(a)* powers, *(b)* functions and *(c)* responsibilities are of each of the regional chambers; and which organisations held those powers, functions and responsibilities prior to the creation of regional chambers. [198160]

Mr. Raynsford: The voluntary regional chambers undertake a number of functions and responsibilities on behalf of their regions. The main ones are scrutiny of the work of the regional development agencies (RDAs), responsibilities as regional planning bodies, and acting as a regional voice or focal point on key issues of regional interest, such as integrating regional strategies.

Regional chambers were first designated in 1999 to provide scrutiny of the newly-created RDAs and had no predecessors in that role.

Regional chambers became the regional planning bodies in all regions in April 2003 with responsibility for preparing draft regional planning guidance. Previously this was the responsibility of non-statutory regional bodies known as regional planning conferences.

No recognised regional body or organisation provided a single regional voice or provided a regional focal point prior to the existence of regional chambers, though there were informal arrangements in some regions.

Regional Fire Control Rooms

Richard Younger-Ross: To ask the Deputy Prime Minister whether existing fire control room staff will be employed in the new fire control centre for the south west; and whether the centre will be located outside the south west. [197357]

Mr. Raynsford: It is expected that staff in the new regional control rooms will be drawn from existing fire control room staff.

The Office of the Deputy Prime Minister plans to have a national network of resilient fire control centres with one in each Government Office region.

Regional Government

Mr. Andrew Mitchell: To ask the Deputy Prime Minister how many staff were employed by the West Midlands Regional Chamber in each of the last two years; and what the total staff costs were in each year. [197531]

Mr. Raynsford: At the end of the 2003–04 financial year the West Midlands Regional Assembly (WMRA) employed 11 staff. It currently employs 19 staff.

Salary costs during the 2002–03 financial year were £167,712. Salary costs during the 2003–04 financial year were £499,418.

Mr. Andrew Mitchell: To ask the Deputy Prime Minister what the budget of the West Midlands Regional Chamber was in each of the last two years; and what its source was. [197533]

Mr. Raynsford: The West Midlands Regional Assembly was awarded Government grant of £1,062,500 in 2002–03, and £1,676,050 in 2003–04.

Mr. Andrew Mitchell: To ask the Deputy Prime Minister (1) how many members the West Midlands Regional Chamber has; and how much members are paid, including expenses; [197534]

(2) how many unelected representatives there are in the West Midlands Regional Chamber; and who appointed each unelected representative. [197532]

Mr. Raynsford: The West Midlands Regional Chamber has a total of 100 members of which 68 are councillors nominated by the 38 local authorities in the region and 32 are regional social and economic stakeholders. Members do not receive any remuneration in respect of their role in the West Midlands Regional Assembly. The total amount of expenses paid in 2003–04 and 2004–05 to date is £765.

The full list of bodies that nominate stakeholders to the chamber is as follows.

EMBRACE (ethnic minority black regional action for community empowerment)
Disability West Midlands
WM Sustainability Network
WM Faiths Forum Aston
WM Health Federation
WM Federation of Housing Associations
WM Association of Parish Councils
WM Trades' Union Council
Regional Action West Midlands
Regional Action West Midlands (through UK Youth Parliament)
WM Life (Cultural Consortium)
Heart of England Tourism
Engineering Employers Federation
Federation of Small Businesses
West Midlands Higher Education Association
West Midlands Business Council Chairman
National Farmers Union
Confederation of West Midlands Chambers of Commerce
Institute of Directors
Chartered Institute of Building
Royal Institution of Charter Surveyors
West Midlands Co-operative and Mutual Council Ltd.
Business in the Community (Regional Assembly Business Sector)
Institute of Chartered Accountants in England and Wales
Asian Business Forum
Country Land and Business Association
Institute of Chartered Secretaries and Administrators.

Peter Bottomley: To ask the Deputy Prime Minister what plans he has to transfer *(a)* power, *(b)* responsibility and *(c)* resources to a regional assembly from West Sussex county council. [197659]

Mr. Raynsford: There are no plans to transfer any powers, responsibilities or resources to a regional assembly from West Sussex county council.

Mr. Jenkin: To ask the Deputy Prime Minister pursuant to the press release of 5 November on regional government, what plans he has to strengthen *(a)* the regional chamber and *(b)* the Government office in the north-east. [198271]

Mr. Raynsford: The Office of the Deputy Prime Minister will continue to take forward the proposals we set out in "Your Region—Your Choice" for devolving greater responsibility to the existing bodies in the regions and encouraging them to work closely together.

Regulatory Compliance Costs

Mr. Redwood: To ask the Deputy Prime Minister (1) what his latest estimate is of the cost in a year of compliance with the regulations introduced by his Department; [196557]

(2) what is the aggregate annual cost as measured by regulatory impact assessments is of compliance with regulations introduced by his Department since 1997. [196558]

Phil Hope: All proposals which impact on business, charities or the voluntary sector require a regulatory impact assessment (RIA) which includes details of the costs, benefits and risks of the proposal. RIAs are subject to public consultation and copies of final RIAs are available from the Library of the Houses and on the Office of the Deputy Prime Minister's website.

Rushenden Link Road

Mr. Wyatt: To ask the Deputy Prime Minister what the proposed timetable is for the building of the Rushenden Link Road on the Isle of Sheppey. [197728]

Keith Hill: It is for Kent county council, as the Local Highway Authority, to bring forward any proposals for the Rushenden Link Road scheme. It has not been set out as a priority for the council during their current Local Transport Plan (LTP) period (to 2005–06). If the scheme is progressed it will be through developer funding and as such the time scale is dependent on the private sector.

Solar Electricity

Mr. Sheerman: To ask the Deputy Prime Minister if his Department will introduce new building regulations obliging each new development to include solar electricity. [198229]

Phil Hope: The building regulations requirements are functional rather than prescriptive to enable compliance in practical and cost-effective ways, and to leave open the possibilities for innovation. It would therefore be inconsistent to prescribe particular technologies such as solar electricity. The Office of the Deputy Prime Minister is reviewing the energy efficiency requirements however and amendment proposals were published for consultation in July. The proposals include setting minimum overall building performance standards at levels much higher than at present and providing new technical guidance on low and zero carbon systems.

Victims Fund

Mr Battle: To ask the Deputy Prime Minister how the victims' fund set up by the Domestic Violence, Crime and Victims Bill will be administered. [192631]

Paul Goggins: I have been asked to reply.

The Victims' Fund will be funded by a new surcharge on criminal convictions and fixed penalty notices for criminal offences. The Fund will be used to support new and improved services for victims of crime at both local and national level. Criteria for making application to the Fund and the arrangements for administering the Fund are still being developed.

Written Answers to Questions

Tuesday 16 November 2004

TRANSPORT

King's Cross

11. **Simon Hughes:** To ask the Secretary of State for Transport when he will publish the comprehensive review of phase 2 of the London Underground Limited and CTRL redevelopment of King's Cross St. Pancras station. [198112]

Mr. McNulty: I have been carefully considering the review report, which raises a number of complex engineering, operational and funding issues. I hope to make an announcement on the way forward shortly, and expect to publish the report at the same time.

Uninsured/Unlicensed Drivers

12. **Mr. Donohoe:** To ask the Secretary of State for Transport if he will make a statement on the measures his Department is taking to ensure that *(a)* uninsured and *(b)* unlicensed drivers are kept off the road. [198113]

Mr. Jamieson: The Department commissioned Professor David Greenaway of Nottingham University to carry out a review of motor insurance arrangements in the UK, publication of the report was on 11 August and we set up an implementation board in September to see that action follows.

Working jointly with the insurance industry we now plan to introduce legislation, improve procedures and design education, publicity and enforcement programmes to drive down uninsured driving.

These build on measures we announced last year to tighten the vehicle registration and licensing system.

Public Transport Accidents

13. **Mr. Jim Cunningham:** To ask the Secretary of State for Transport how many accidents involving public transport occurred in *(a)* Coventry and *(b)* the West Midlands in the last year for which figures are available. [198114]

Charlotte Atkins: Figures are available in this form for bus accidents in 2003.

In Coventry there were 64 injury accidents involving buses, of which two were fatal and three serious. In the West Midlands region there were 844, of which six were fatal and 86 serious.

Comparable figures for rail are not available but in 2003 there were no passenger fatalities related to rail incidents anywhere in Great Britain.

A30

14. **Matthew Taylor:** To ask the Secretary of State for Transport when he will make an announcement on the decision on dualling the A30 Goss Moor section following the public inquiry. [198115]

Mr. Jamieson: We have received the Inspector's report of the local inquiry and I hope to make an announcement on the outcome shortly.

Railways

15. **John Barrett:** To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what steps he is taking to reduce costs within the railway industry. [198116]

Mr. McNulty: The White Paper "The Future of Rail", published in July 2004 sets out a comprehensive package of reforms to provide a coherent and effective management structure for the railway and an effective control of costs.

Road Safety

16. **Mr. Miller:** To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what his plans are to improve road safety. [198117]

Mr. Jamieson: We will continue to develop and implement our wide ranging and successful road safety strategy which has already cut the number of people killed or seriously injured to 22 per cent. below the 1994–98 average and child deaths and serious injuries by 40 per cent.

Public Transport

17. **Tom Brake:** To ask the Secretary of State for Transport if he will make a statement on Government policy towards vulnerable public transport users. [198118]

Charlotte Atkins: Our aim is transport that works for everyone. We sponsor a wide programme of research and consultation on issues such as people's mobility needs and personal security. We have developed legislation and issued good practice guidance to assist planners and providers to deliver services that meet peoples' needs, including those of the most vulnerable.

Rail Estate Disposals

18. **Mr. Heath:** To ask the Secretary of State for Transport if he will make a statement on the disposal of land ancillary to railway stations. [198119]

Mr. McNulty: Network Rail is regulated by the Office of Rail Regulation. Condition 26 of Network Rail's network licence prevents the disposal of land, including that ancillary to railway stations, by Network Rail unless the Office of Rail Regulation consents to the disposal. Where consent is given the decisions on whether, when and how land should be disposed are commercial ones for Network Rail.

A303 (Stonehenge)

Mr. Terry Lewis: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport when he expects to publish his response to the public inquiry into the planned A303 road scheme at Stonehenge. [198013]

Mr. Jamieson: The Secretary of State will issue a decision after the Inspector's report has been received and the Inspector's recommendations given proper consideration.

A555 Submission Documents

Mrs. Calton: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what progress he has made in evaluating the A555 submission documents received by his Department earlier this year; and when he expects to report his findings. [197891]

Mr. Jamieson: Ministers will make a decision on the A555 submission in time for the 2005–06 Local Transport Capital Expenditure Settlement.

Bus Services

Mr. Gordon Marsden: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what assessment his Department has made of improvements to accessibility to bus services for disabled people in the last 12 months. [198111]

Charlotte Atkins: Approximately 30 per cent. of full size buses operating in Great Britain as public service vehicles are low floor wheelchair accessible vehicles. The percentage operating in any given area will vary but in major cities it is likely to be considerably higher.

This increase in the accessibility of the fleet is delivering real benefits to disabled people.

Mr. Yeo: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport whether the Government is on course to meet its target for an increase in bus usage by 10 per cent. by 2010. [197222]

Mr. Darling: Local bus patronage grew by 6.0 per cent. from 2000–01 to 2003–04, ahead of the straight-line trajectory for 10 per cent. growth over ten years.

Compulsory Purchase Orders

Andrew Selous: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport (1) if he will list the transport projects in the last 10 years in which a single local authority has compulsorily purchased land outside its own boundaries; [198205]

(2) on how many occasions in the last 10 years a local authority has been granted power compulsory to purchase land outside its own boundaries. [198508]

Charlotte Atkins: In respect of compulsory purchase orders granted to local authorities by the Secretary of State for Transport, information is not held in that form.

Departmental Salaries

Tim Loughton: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport how many people in his Department earn more than a whole-time equivalent salary of £57,485 per year. [195286]

Charlotte Atkins: I refer my hon. Friend to the answer given by my hon. Friend, the Minister for the Cabinet Office on 11 November 2004, *Official Report*, column 856W. In addition, at 1 April 2004 the number of whole-time staff at the Maritime and Coastguard Agency (MCA) whose salary exceeded £57,485 was eight.

Galileo Project

Mr. Reed: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what representations he has received about the location of the EU Galileo Project in the UK; and if he will make a statement. [197429]

Mr. Jamieson: The Welsh Assembly and the East Midlands Development Agency have submitted proposals for locating the Galileo Supervisory Authority (GSA) in their region.

Green Ministers

Mr. Horam: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport how many departmental Green Ministers there have been since 1997. [197839]

Charlotte Atkins: I have been the Department's Green Minister since September 2004. I am the Department for Transport's third Green Minister since its formation in May 2002.

Level crossings

Norman Baker: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport how many level crossings are in operation; and at how many, and at what percentage of these collisions occurred between rail and road traffic in each year from 1975 to date. [197890]

Mr. McNulty: The Health and Safety Executive's HM Railway Inspectorate (HMRI) have produced the following table detailing the information requested from 1 January 1990 onwards. The data are based on incidents reported under accident reporting regulations to HMRI.

	Number of crossings	*Number of collisions*	*Percentage collisions per crossings*
1990	9231	34	0.37
1991–92	9213	35	0.38
1992–93	9091	27	0.30
1993–94	8966	29	0.32
1994–95	8813	19	0.22
1995–96	8731	21	0.24
1996–97	8552	20	0.23
1997–98	8379	19	0.22
1998–99	8323	21	0.25
1999–00	8228	19	0.23
2000–01	8106	16	0.20
2001–02	8128	14	0.17
2002–03	8188	18	0.21
2003–04	7937	18	0.22

Information for the period 1975 to 1989 is not available in the format requested, however published copies of HM Chief Inspector of Railways Annual Reports on Railway Safety for the period do give details of all accidents at level crossings. These include trains striking level crossing barriers and gates, animals on the line and injuries to motorists and pedestrians. Copies of these reports are in the Libraries of the House.

Road Traffic Accidents

Norman Baker: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport how many persons *(a)* died and *(b)* were seriously injured in road traffic accidents on 6 November. [197889]

Mr. Jamieson: Figures for 2004 will not be available until the summer of 2005. This is because there is typically a 12-week delay in receiving information from the police and a much longer delay if they are having any difficulties in collating the information. Once all data have been finalised they are made available for publication.

Roads (Lorry Bans)

Andrew Selous: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport whether on the completion of the Dunstable and Houghton Regis northern bypass, the extension of the A505 to the M1, there will be a ban on the use of the A5 through Dunstable by lorries not having business in the town. [198202]

Mr. Jamieson: The development of the proposed A5-M1 link (Dunstable northern bypass) is at an early stage and responsibility for the A5 through Dunstable on completion of the bypass has not yet been agreed. However, if the route were to be de-trunked, responsibility would pass to Bedfordshire county council, who could consider such a lorry ban.

Andrew Selous: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport when he expects to institute a ban in Leighton Buzzard and Linslade on lorries not having business in the town. [198203]

Mr. Jamieson: This is a matter for Bedfordshire county council.

School Buses

Mr. Best: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what measures the Government will put in place to ensure that high standards are maintained by companies charged with running yellow school buses. [198109]

Mr. Jamieson: We want all buses—including yellow school buses—to be safe and secure for their users. A range of safeguards is already in place to ensure that vehicles are safe and drivers are adequately trained.

Translink Guided Busway

Andrew Selous: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what the latest estimated cost is of the Translink guided busway for Luton, Dunstable, Houghton Regis and the surrounding area. [198204]

Charlotte Atkins: The latest estimated cost of the Translink guided busway is £85.436 million.

Vehicle Licensing

Mr. Wiggin: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what plans he has to reduce the costs of vehicle licensing. [197831]

Mr. Jamieson: The regime for vehicle taxation, i.e. vehicle licensing, is determined by HM Treasury and DVLA collect the vehicle excise duty on behalf of HM Treasury through a service level agreement held by the Department of Transport.

DVLA have efficiency targets set for their operations on an annual basis to ensure that productivity gains are made consistently. They have a good record in this, having returned efficiency gains of 21 per cent. over the last six years, and have challenging targets agreed as part of the Gershon review for the period up to 2007–08.

CABINET

Ministerial Responsibilities

22. **Mr. Swayne:** To ask the Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster how many hours on average he has spent per week on his Duchy of Lancaster responsibilities. [198123]

Mr. Milburn: I have regular meetings on Duchy business. The Chairman and CEO regularly brief me on current issues.

Strategy Unit

23. **Andy Burnham:** To ask the Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster if he will make a statement on the work programme of the Strategy Unit. [198124]

Mr. Milburn: The Strategy Unit undertakes projects on a wide range of issues, as well as working across Government to improve strategic capability, and providing leadership for Government social research. Projects may culminate either in a published report (including statements of future policy) or confidential advice to Ministers.

The five main current public Strategy Unit projects cover:

Countries at Risk of Instability
Deprived Areas
Improving the Life Chances of Disabled People.
Legal Aid
Engagement in Public Institutions

Parliamentary Ombudsman

24. **Tony Wright:** To ask the Minister for the Cabinet Office what plans she has to bring forward legislation to enable citizens to have direct access to the parliamentary ombudsman. [198126]

Ruth Kelly: I refer my hon. Friend to the answer provided by my predecessor to the hon. Member for Milton Keynes, North East, (Brian White) on Tuesday 9 March 2004, *Official Report*, columns 1377–1378.

Civil Service

25. **Mrs. Curtis-Thomas:** To ask the Minister for the Cabinet Office what action is being taken to increase the number of women in the senior civil service. [198127]

Ruth Kelly: The Government are committed to increasing the representation of women in the Senior Civil Service. Some 27.8 per cent. of the Senior Civil Service are women, up from 17.6 per cent. in 1998.

Action in departments includes targeted development schemes for women with the potential to reach the SCS.

Attitude Surveys

Mr. Andrew Turner: To ask the Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster whether he receives copies of departmental attitude surveys in connection with his responsibilities for co-ordination of Government policy. [198762]

Mr. Milburn: I receive departmental papers as necessary, in order to undertake my cross-Government role in the co-ordination of Government policy, my responsibilities for the work of the Strategy Unit and my membership of Cabinet and Cabinet Committees.

Cabinet Committees

Mr. Rosindell: To ask the Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster which Cabinet Committees he *(a)* chairs and *(b)* attends in his capacity as the Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster. [195977]

Dr. Julian Lewis: To ask the Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster if he will list the Cabinet Committees of which he is a member. [197312]

Mr. Milburn *[holding answer 9 November 2004]*: An announcement on the membership of Cabinet Committees will be made shortly.

Civil Servants (Pensions)

Mrs. Lait: To ask the Minister for the Cabinet Office what the latest figure is for the average length of pension payout of the civil service direct benefit pension. [197795]

Ruth Kelly: I refer the hon. Member to the response I gave her on 8 November 2004, *Official Report*, column 515W.

Civil Service Sports Council

Dr. Whitehead: To ask the Minister for the Cabinet Office under what authority the Civil Service Sports Council operates land belonging to the civil service for sporting purposes. [197854]

Ruth Kelly: The Civil Service Sports Council Ltd, a company registered under the Industrial and Provident Society Acts, encourages and co-ordinates the pursuit of sport and recreation throughout the civil service.

CSSC either owns or leases the sites it operates. Of 37 sports clubs, 21 are owned freehold by CSSC and 16 are leasehold. Five sites are leased from the Ministry of Defence. Rents are paid at a commercial rate.

Departmental Budget

Mr. Allan: To ask the Minister for the Cabinet Office what the budget for the *(a)* Delivery Unit, *(b)* Office of Public Sector Reform, *(c)* Charter Mark Unit, *(d)* Beacon Unit, *(e)* Media Monitoring Team, *(f)* Corporate Communications Team and *(g)* Strategy Unit (i) was for each year since 1997–98, (ii) is for 2004–05 and (iii) will be for 2005–06; and if she will make a statement. [197645]

Ruth Kelly: Resource Budgets for the Delivery Unit, Office of Public Service Reform and the Strategy Unit since their inception are as follows.

Unit	*Delivery unit*	*Office of public service reform*	*Strategy unit*
2001–02	1.4	1.4	n/a
2002–03	3.8	5.4	6.3
2003–04	3.8	3.8	4.8
2004–05	3.9	2.3	3.7

Notes:

1. All figures shown in £ million.

2. The figures for the Office of Public Service Reform (OPSR) from 2002–03 onwards include the budget for the Charter Mark and Beacon Scheme which was merged with OPSR in 2002.

Budgetary information for the Charter Mark Unit and the Beacon Unit for 2001–02 and or the Corporate Communications Team for the period 2001–02 to 2004–05 is not readily identifiable from the Cabinet Office's accounting system and could be provided only at disproportionate cost.

The Media Monitoring Unit (MMU) has a nil budget and operates on a cost-recovery basis. The Unit's running costs are recovered in total through contributions from each of the departments and agencies that use MMU's services.

Budgets for 2005–06 will be finalised following completion of the Cabinet Office's business planning round.

Departmental Expenditure

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Minister for the Cabinet Office what the cost of *(a)* decoration and *(b)* refurbishment of the London offices of the Department was in each of the last four years. [196140]

Ruth Kelly: Costs of decoration are not held separately from overall maintenance costs and could only be provided at disproportionate cost. The costs of refurbishment of London offices of the Cabinet Office are shown in the table.

	£000
2000–01	15,653,991
2001–02	21,177,067
2002–03	14,255,364
2003–04	3,720,380

Figures Include fees, furniture/office equipment and VAT.

E-Government

Jon Trickett: To ask the Minister for the Cabinet Office what assessment she has made of access to e-Government services for people living in disadvantaged areas of the UK. [198756]

Ruth Kelly: The Government are committed to providing access to their services in a way that best meets citizens needs and e-Government provides a range of delivery options to complement traditional channels.

The Government realise the internet is a key access technology for e-Government services and have invested in over 6,000 UK online centres which provide free or low cost access particularly in disadvantaged areas.

An assessment of internet availability, across England, found that that 99 per cent. of households are within 10 kilometres of a public internet access point. The full results can be found on page eight of the 2003 UK Online report at www.e- government.cabinetoffice.gov.uk/MediaCentre/NewOnSiteArticle/fs/en?CONTENT_ID=4006060&chk=rlWVHj.

EU Civil Protection Monitoring and Information Centre

Mr. Tynan: To ask the Minister for the Cabinet Office if she will make a statement on the role of the EU Civil Protection Monitoring and Information Centre; how many requests for assistance the UK *(a)* has made and *(b)* has responded to; and what UK assets have been made available to the centre's database. [197570]

Ruth Kelly: The Monitoring and Information Centre is a unit within the European Commission's Directorate General for Environment in Brussels. It was set up in 2002 as part of the European Union's Civil Protection Mechanism to act as a centre for collecting and distributing information on emergencies; to receive requests for assistance from any country; and to pass the requests on to member states that participate in the Mechanism. The countries participating in the mechanism are the 25 EU member states, the three European Economic Area countries (Iceland, Liechtenstein, Norway) and the two candidate countries (Bulgaria and Romania).

The United Kingdom has not submitted any requests for assistance to the Monitoring and Information Centre. A total of 15 requests for assistance have been sent out by the Monitoring and Information Centre. The UK responded to all of them and in eight cases offered assistance either bi-laterally or through international organisations. Where the UK did not offer help that was either because the UK did not have the specialised resource required (for example, in responding to forest fires) or another country closer to the incident was able to assist.

The UK has offered the following assets to the Monitoring and Information Centre's database (subject to them being available at the time):

Type of asset sought	*Asset offered*
Staffed field hospitals	Medical assistance teams, clinical expertise, intensive care and burns beds
Experts, specialists and laboratory support	Medical assistance evaluation experts and doctors
Pharmaceutical stocks	Resources including antibiotics, vaccines, antidotes, laboratory facilities
Transportation, evacuation and shelter facilities	Airhead operations staff with air cargo handling skills. Drivers for large goods vehicles
Fire fighting capability	Staff with land and marine fire fighting capability
Urban search and rescue	Modular teams available with a range of search and rescue equipment.
Logistics support	Airhead operations staff with air cargo handling skills. Drivers for large goods vehicles

Freedom of Information Act

Dr. Julian Lewis: To ask the Minister for the Cabinet Office what assessment she has made of the likely costs to her Department in the first quarter of 2005 of compliance with the provisions of the Freedom of Information Act 2000; and if she will make a statement. [198766]

Ruth Kelly: The cost of compliance with the provisions of the Freedom of Information Act 2000 (FOIA) will depend on the number and complexity of the requests received. The resources of the Cabinet Office Openness Team have, however, been strengthened to cope with the anticipated demands of the FOIA and contingency arrangements are in place to further augment the team should the need arise. These additional costs are being met from within the existing Cabinet Office resource budget.

Frontline Civil Servants

Mr. Ben Chapman: To ask the Minister for the Cabinet Office if she will make a statement on the methodology used to determine whether civil servants are classified as frontline. [198939]

Ruth Kelly: Frontline staff are usually defined as those who interact directly with the public or other customers for example, in jobcentres or tax offices. There is no centrally agreed civil service methodology to determine whether a post is designated as frontline it is for individual departments and agencies to decide on their own classification to meet their individual business needs.

Government Websites

Paul Holmes: To ask the Minister for the Cabinet Office pursuant to her answer of 28 October, *Official Report*, column 1379W, on Government websites, whether it is the office's policy to deem Government websites to be covered by Part III of the Disability Discrimination Act 1995. [198010]

Ruth Kelly: The Cabinet Office considers that the Disability Discrimination Act 1995 Part III, as explained in the Disability Rights Commission's supporting Code of Practice on Rights of Access—Goods, Facilities, Services and Premises (published in 2002) applies equally to all websites accessible to the public and therefore includes those owned and managed by or on behalf of the Government.

Paul Holmes: To ask the Minister for the Cabinet Office pursuant to her answer of 28 October, *Official Report*, column 1379W, on Government websites, what steps she has taken to ensure that all .gov.uk websites meet the World Wide Web Consortium's Web Content Accessibility Guidelines adopted by the Government in 2001. [198011]

Ruth Kelly: The Guidelines for UK Government websites (published in 2002) contains an extensive interpretation on the application of the Web Content Accessibility Guidelines. The Cabinet Office uses every opportunity available through public and private conferences and workshops to promote the Guidelines and raise awareness of web accessibility within both the Government web manager and web developer communities. We have recently updated the terms and conditions for the use of .gov.uk domain names to require all new websites to maintain the high level of accessibility detailed in the Guidelines for UK Government websites.

It is the responsibility of individual Government departments and agencies to ensure that their public facing websites are built and maintained to comply with the accessibility guidelines.

Internet

Mr. Allan: To ask the Minister for the Cabinet Office (1) how much her Department has spent on the Delivering on the Promise internet content management system; and how much it plans to spend in the financial year 2005–06; [193266]

(2) which Government departments and agencies have made a commitment to use the Delivering on the Promise internet content management system; [193267]

(3) which Government departments and agencies have evaluated the Delivering on the Promise internet content management system against alternatives and decided not to use it; [193268]

(4) what standards for access by disabled people are incorporated in the Delivering on the Promise internet content management system. [193269]

Ruth Kelly: Since its inception, the Cabinet Office has spent the following on Delivering on the Promise (DotP) internet content management systems; £5.5 million in 2002–03, £18.3 million in 2003–04 and expects to spend £11.3 million in 2004–05. This includes development, implementation, hosting and operating costs of the system.

Planned expenditure for 2005–06 is not available as Cabinet Office is currently reviewing its budgets and plans for that year.

As at 1 October 2004 the following departments and agencies have committed to use the content management system Department of Health, Healthcare Commission, HM Revenue and Customs (specifically Child Trust Fund), Cabinet Office (specifically e-Government Unit and Directgov).

The use of DotP was evaluated against alternatives and not selected for four Departmental applications (Northern Ireland Departments, Department of Environment Food and Rural Affairs, Department of Trade and Industry (Businesslink). In addition DotP did not meet the particular technology requirements of four other Departmental applications (National Patient Safety Agency, Medicines and Healthcare Products Regulatory Agency, Foreign Office EU Presidency Unit, ODPM Regional Co-ordination Unit) and HM Revenue and Customs (introductory overarching website), and alternatives have subsequently been sought.

The world wide web consortium develops and publishes internet standards by making recommendations, which were adopted by the Government in 2001. The design of DotP allows each individual website to meet its compliant obligations for accessibility under the Web Accessibility Initiative guidelines published by the world wide web consortium at www.w3c.org.

PCS Strike

Mr. Gordon Prentice: To ask the Minister for the Cabinet Office what assessment she has made of the impact on the provision of Government services of the PCS strike on 5 November. [197892]

Ruth Kelly: The strike by members of the Public and Commercial Services union caused some inconvenience to the public but did not cause significant disruption to most Government services. This was partly because departments and agencies had effective contingency arrangements in place to protect services, particularly those essential to security or welfare, and partly because of low levels of support for the strike in a number of areas.

Public Service Agreements

Brian White: To ask the Minister for the Cabinet Office which senior civil servant has responsibility for each of her Department's public service agreements. [195181]

Ruth Kelly: Six Public Service Agreement (PSA) targets were agreed in the course of the 2002 Spending Review for the period to 2005–06. Details of the PSA targets can be found in the Departmental Report (Cm 6226), copies of which are available in the Library.

The Minister for the Cabinet Office is ultimately responsible for the delivery of the PSA. The Managing Director and Permanent Head of the Department, Colin Balmer, is responsible for assuring the delivery of each target.

My right hon. Friend the Chancellor of the Exchequer is jointly responsible for the delivery of target 2.

ENVIRONMENT, FOOD AND RURAL AFFAIRS

Balai Directive 92/65/EEC

Mr. Banks: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs how many premises in the UK are *(a)* registered and *(b)* approved under the Balai Directive 92/65/EEC. [197042]

Mr. Bradshaw *[holding answer 8 November 2004]*: In the UK, there are 544 premises that are registered under the Balai Directive (Directive 92/65/EEC), of which 40 premises have the higher status of being approved.

Bees

Mr. Curry: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what plans she has to consult the beekeeping industry on her proposals concerning future levels of support for the industry. [196970]

Alun Michael: My officials are already in touch with beekeeping associations on our future plans for the bee health programme. A meeting is taking place later this month.

Mr. Curry: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what estimate she has made of the incidence of European foul brood in the bee population in England and Wales. [196971]

Alun Michael: The inspection programme is targeted towards areas and apiaries which are thought to be at greatest risk from European foul brood and other notifiable diseases. In 2004 the disease was confirmed in 691 colonies, 2.7 per cent. of the 26,000 inspected by the National Bee Unit's inspectors. Most of these cases were found in the Midlands and in southern areas of England and Wales.

Mr. Curry: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what programme of inspection of bee colonies for *(a)* European foul brood and *(b)* American foul brood is planned following the proposed removal of statutory control on European foul brood. [196972]

Alun Michael: Following a firm decision to remove statutory controls on European foul brood inspections would no longer be targeted on this disease, although inspectors would continue to offer advice on its control as they do at present for other serious but non-statutory diseases. The inspection programme would be planned to maximise control of American foul brood which is more serious, less widespread and unlike European foul brood does not lend itself to control through husbandry techniques.

Mr. Curry: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs how much money has been allocated to the proposed Central Science Laboratory Training Scheme on identification of bee diseases. [196973]

Alun Michael: Training is an integral part of the National Bee Unit's work . Some £164,000 was spent in 2004 on 736 talks, demonstrations, lectures and apiary tours, benefiting more than 15,600 beekeepers in England.

Mr. Curry: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs if she will commission an independent assessment of the effectiveness of *(a)* shock swarming as a means of controlling foulbrood and *(b)* the proposed test kits for the diagnosis of European foulbrood. [196974]

Alun Michael: The National Bee Unit studies on the shook swarm technique have already been subject to independent scientific peer review, as will be the data on effectiveness of test kits for diagnosis of European foul brood.

Mr. Curry: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what assessment she has made of the effectiveness of measures to combat European foulbrood since the change in the policy of compulsory destruction to one of treatment with antibiotics. [197181]

Alun Michael: The effectiveness of measures to control European foul brood is subject to continuous assessment by the National Bee Unit and details of the incidence and treatment of the disease are published annually on its website. The use of antibiotic treatment has proved successful in many circumstances and colonies have recovered which would previously have been destroyed. Experimental use of the "shook swarm" technique, which does not use antibiotics, shows considerable promise for future control.

Bird Populations

Mr. Llwyd: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what research is being undertaken on the population of ground-laying birds in moorlands and heaths; and if she will make a statement. [192207]

Mr. Bradshaw: A wide range of survey and monitoring is being undertaken on ground nesting birds in upland areas. The Breeding Bird Survey (jointly funded by British Trust for Ornithology, the Joint Nature Conservation Committee and the Royal Society for the Protection of Birds) monitors annual trends of a number of upland species, while more detailed research on the ecology of grouse species being undertaken by the Game Conservancy Trust. Several studies on the ecology of upland breeding waders have been undertaken in recent years by RSPB and some universities.

Bovine TB (Deer)

Andrew George: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs how many comparative intra-dermal TB tests were carried out on *(a)* farmed and *(b)* park deer herds under the Deer Health Scheme in the last five years. [197319]

Mr. Bradshaw: To be eligible to join the Deer Health Scheme, applicants' deer herds must test negative to the tuberculin test and, to retain their membership, the herds must test negatively at 24 monthly intervals. Over the last five years, members' herds have been tested six times. The three deer herds currently in the Deer Health Scheme are all farmed.

Andrew George: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs how many *(a)* farmed and *(b)* park deer herds were (i) registered and (ii) not registered in the Deer Health Scheme in each of the last five years for which records are available. [197320]

Mr. Bradshaw: Over the last five years, membership of the Deer Health Scheme has declined from five members to three. Currently there are two members in Scotland and one in England. There are approximately 263 deer farms in England, 67 in Scotland and 33 in Wales. All the deer herds currently in the scheme are farmed.

Andrew George: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what regulations apply to the import into the UK of cervine embryos in relation to bovine TB; and what enforcement measures her Department has put in place. [197324]

Mr. Bradshaw: In England, cervine embryos are imported by licences made under the Animal and Animal Products (Import and Export) Regulations 2004 or the Products of Animal Origin (Third Country Imports) (England) Regulations 2004 and the Importation of Embryos, Ova and Semen Order (as amended) 1984. There is equivalent legislation applied to other parts of the UK.

The licence conditions include a request that the donor animals originate from a premises which, immediately prior to isolation at an approved collection centre, no clinical or other evidence has been recorded which leads to the conclusion that TB has occurred within the previous three years. Also, embryos intended for export to the UK must originate from a collection centre approved by an authorised veterinary officer of the competent authority of the exporting country.

In addition, all genetic material imported from a third country must enter the European Community via an approved border inspection post where the consignments undergo a series of veterinary checks.

The above statutory instruments are enforced by local authorities.

The likelihood of semen or ova from donor animals of domestic species being infected with TB is minimal. The World Organisation for Animal Health has published a "Categorisation of Diseases and Pathogenic Agents" by the International Embryo Transfer Society (IETS). The IETS has categorised *Mycobacterium paratuberculosis* (cattle) as a category 4 disease on which preliminary work has been conducted or is in progress. Category 4 is made up of diseases/pathogenic agents for which transmission is considered a low risk.

Centre for Environment Fisheries and Aquaculture Science

John McDonnell: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what hourly rate of pay is payable to new employees under the pay offer being made by the Centre for Environment Fisheries and Aquaculture Science. [193177]

Mr. Bradshaw *[holding answer 27 October 2004]*: Under the April 2004 pay offer for CEFAS, the new hourly rates of pay (for existing as well as new employees) will depend on the grade of individual members of staff, and their position in the pay band associated with their grade. These range from £4.85 per hour to £25.78 per hour.

The pay bands, before and after implementation of the offer, are as follows.

A further change was made to the minimum of pay band 1 in October, to reflect the change to the national minimum wage. Five members of staff were affected. They were notified of the change in writing, and the new rates were paid in their October salaries.

£

	Entry range minimum	*Main range minimum*	*Main range maximum*	*Top range maximum*
1 April 2003—pay ranges				
PB1	10,000	10,350	11,479	12,177
PB2	11,249	11,935	13,720	14,762
PB3	12,838	14,513	17,975	19,970
PB4	14,867	16,995	20,899	23,650
PB5	19,607	21,528	25,788	28,048
PB6	25,090	26,952	32,939	35,438
PB7	33,546	35,338	41,914	45,831
PB8	39,832	42,745	51,586	56,307
1 April 2004—pay ranges				
PB1	10,200	10,500	11,479	12,177
PB2	11,474	11,935	13,720	14,762
PB3	13,095	14,513	17,975	19,970
PB4	15,164	16,995	20,899	23,650
PB5	20,000	21,928	25,788	28,048
PB6	25,592	27,352	32,939	35,438
PB7	34,217	35,338	41,914	45,831
PB8	40,629	42,745	51,586	56,307
1 October 2004—pay ranges (adjusted)				
PB1	—	10,593	11,479	12,177
PB2	11,474	11,935	13,720	14,762
PB3	13,095	14,513	17,975	19,970
PB4	15,164	16,995	20,899	23,650
PB5	20,000	21,928	25,788	28,048
PB6	25,592	27,352	32,939	35,438
PB7	34,217	35,338	41,914	45,831
PB8	40,629	42,745	51,586	56,307

Cervine Embryos

Andrew George: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs how many cervine embryos were *(a)* exported by and *(b)* imported to the UK in each of the past five years; and what the value was of the cervine embryo export industry in each of those years. [197325]

Mr. Bradshaw: Available information for the number of ampules/vials of cervine embryos exported from the UK is as follows:

	Number
1999	43
2000	306
2001	0
2002	2
2003	3

The available information for the number of ampules/vials of cervine embryos imported into the UK is as follows:

	Number
1999	0
2000	0
2001	0
2002	0
2003	37

These figures are derived from computer based systems relating to import notifications and export health certification. The figures are subject to updating and amendment.

It is not possible to gauge the exact number of embryos involved as a ampule/vial may contain more than one embryo collected from the same donor animal.

Information on the value of cervine embryo exports is not available.

Chewing Gum

Miss McIntosh: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what action she is planning to tackle the problem of people dropping chewing gum. [197655]

Alun Michael: The experience of local government and other public bodies, working with the Government, has demonstrated that there is no simple and immediate solution to this problem. That is why we have taken a joined-up approach to making a real difference. Last year I established a Chewing Gum Action Group which brought together chewing gum manufacturers, the Local Government Association, the Chartered Institution of Wastes Management, ENCAMS (Environmental Campaigns—formerly the Tidy Britain Group), the Department for Education and Skills, the Improvement and Development Agency (IDeA) and others.

The remit of the group is to tackle the irresponsible disposal of chewing gum using an integrated approach based on new research which we commissioned and concentrating on campaign activity, education, dissemination of good practice and more effective enforcement.

We will launch a public awareness campaign in the coming year with the aim of delivering the behavioural change needed to prevent gum being dropped in the first place. The group commissioned an extensive round of market research in order to understand 'gum droppers' and to enable the campaign to be as targeted as possible. The research was published on 1 November and can be viewed at http://www.defra.gov.uk/environment/localenv/litter/index.htm.

The group is disseminating proven good practice, including innovative approaches to prevention and information sharing on tools and techniques for its removal, through the Improvement and Development Agency for local government website (IDeA).

Miss McIntosh: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs if she will penalise those councils who fail to implement the powers they have to clean up chewing gum. [197656]

Alun Michael: Chewing gum differs from normal litter in that it is very difficult and time consuming to remove once it becomes impacted onto a surface. Many authorities are doing an excellent job at finding innovative ways to remove gum and prevent its irresponsible disposal.

Under the current Code of Practice for Litter and Refuse, local authorities are under a duty to keep their land clear of litter and refuse. While chewing gum is included within this responsibility, it is clear that the difficulty and cost of removal is considerably higher in respect of gum that has been trodden in and has become a "stain".

The Government are looking at a variety of options to help local authorities tackle this problem. These include a public awareness campaign to be launched next year, and proposals in Defra's 'Clean Neighbourhoods' consultation to improve and streamline enforcement powers on chewing gum disposal.

CHP

Brian White: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what steps her Department will take to stimulate the market for micro-combined heat and power and domestic heat pumps as a result of the recent field trials. [195184]

Mr. Morley: In our Energy White Paper, we made a commitment to support field trials to evaluate the benefits of micro-CHP. The field trials are currently ongoing and are expected to produce meaningful results sometime in 2006. The results will help us determine the appropriateness of any further measures, if any, that might be necessary to support the development of micro-CHP.

Brian White: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what the results were of the field trials on micro-combined heat and power that her Department has been supporting. [195190]

Mr. Morley: In our Energy White Paper, we made a commitment to support field trials to evaluate the benefits of micro-CHP. The field trials are on-going and the earliest date we expect meaningful results to be available is sometime in 2006.

Community Councils (Wales)

Mr. Simon Thomas: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what discussions she has held with community councils in Wales on the proposals to extend the scope of on-the-spot fines. [197751]

Alun Michael: The Prime Minister announced on the 28 October 2004, in his speech on antisocial behaviour, that the law would be changed as soon as possible to allow parish and town councils to levy fixed penalty notices for litter, graffiti or for noise nuisance. We hope to bring legislation forward at the earliest possible opportunity to enable parish and town councils to levy such penalties. It will be for the National Assembly for Wales to decide whether these powers will be made available to community councils in Wales and therefore any discussions should take place between them on this subject.

Compost

Dr. Whitehead: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs at what point in the processing cycle her Department ceases to define compost as waste. [197852]

Mr. Morley: The definition of waste in force in the United Kingdom is the definition in Article 1*(a)* of the Waste Framework Directive (as amended). Whether or not a substance is discarded as waste, and when waste ceases to be waste, are matters which must be determined on the facts of the case and the interpretation of the law is a matter for the Courts. The European Court of Justice (ECJ) has issued several judgments on the definition of waste which are binding on member states and their "competent authorities".

The ECJ has ruled that

> "... whether [a substance] is..waste..must be determined in the light of all the circumstances, regard being had to the aim of the Directive and the need to ensure that its effectiveness is not undermined."

In practice, this means that waste does not cease to be waste until it has been fully recovered within the meaning of the Directive and there is certainty of its use as a product without undergoing a further recovery operation. The Environment Agency considers that *(a)* source-segregated waste which, after composting, meets a recognised and suitable quality standard (e.g. BSI PAS 100) is likely to meet the first criterion; and *(b)* mixed waste which is composted is likely to remain waste until it is used in a further recovery operation (e.g. land treatment resulting in agricultural benefit or ecological improvement) subject to control by the Agency under a licence or registered licensing exemption.

Consultants/Advisers

Miss McIntosh: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs whether her Department maintains a list of the number of *(a)* private sector consultants and *(b)* professional advisers employed by her Department (i) at present and (ii) in the past. [197187]

Alun Michael: The Department do not have a single list of consultants and professional advisers employed because such lists can be classed as discriminatory under the public procurement rules. The public procurement rules, as well as general treaty principles, lay down both the criteria which may be used to select suppliers and the evidence which may be required for this process.

As part of its preparations for and implementation of the Gershon value for money agenda in Defra, detailed analysis of expenditure on professional services providers is being undertaken currently and I will place a copy of the analysis in the House of Common Library in due course.

Cross-compliance Arrangements (Fields)

Mr. Drew: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what exemptions are being put in place to the new cross compliance arrangements for two-metre uncultivated field margins. [197907]

Alun Michael: Fields of two hectares and under will not need to have protective buffer zones around hedges and ditches as part of cross compliance measures. Hedges planted on or after 1 January 2005 will also be exempted from the requirement under cross compliance to have a buffer for the first five years of their existence.

Cuckmere Valley

Norman Baker: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs how much has been spent to date by the Environment Agency on its plans to alter the nature of the Cuckmere Valley; what the budget for the preparatory stage of this project is; and if she will make a statement. [196834]

Mr. Morley: The Environment Agency confirms that the budget for specialist advice during the preparatory stage of this project is £284,000, of which approximately £200,000 has been spent to date. The Environment Agency also makes allowance for internal staff costs and has budgeted £84,000 for the completion of the preparatory work, £49,000 of which has been spent to date. This figure includes costs from previous years.

The work to date has involved undertaking baseline ecological surveys, landscape archaeology studies, fluvial/coastal geomorphology modelling, prediction of habitat losses and gains and recreation surveys. Much work has been completed for the western side of the valley and work is now underway for the eastern side, concluding with a preferred option. The current assessment considers the impact of any proposal on the upper reaches of the tidal Cuckmere River and follows the Government's current economic, technical and environmental appraisal guidance. Costs for the implementation phase will be established once the option which provides the most appropriate long-term solution has been identified.

The natural processes within the valley are complex and need to be understood so that, when changes occur, the consequences are known and the most appropriate solution identified. Since 1998, extensive work has been undertaken with relevant local authorities, key stakeholder groups and the general public. This is due to report in the summer of 2005.

Existing flood defences are reaching the end of their life and are increasingly ineffective against sea level rise. The Environment Agency spends between £30,000 and £50,000 per annum maintaining the defences in this area and ensuring that the river can adequately discharge into the sea. This is spent on recycling material from the river (carried by longshore drift) back to the western beach, and in maintaining a small number of groynes and breastwork which aim to prevent total blockage of the river.

Dairy Farmers

Mark Tami: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs if she will make a statement on her Department's support for dairy farmers. [196852]

Alun Michael: UK dairy farmers benefit from aid under the CAP worth around £2 billion for the EU. From this year, for the first time this includes direct payments to dairy farmers in addition to market support measures.

The Government are also taking action in line with its Strategy for Sustainable Farming and Food to facilitate industry action to address the causes of low farmgate prices and to adapt to the new conditions created by the reformed CAP. For example,

> My noble Friend, the Lord Whitty, has been chairing meetings of a Dairy Supply Chain Forum, which has been looking at collaborative solutions to improve supply chain efficiency, as well as other issues.
>
> The Government have made a grant of nearly £0.5 million to the Food Chain Centre to examine how to improve dairy supply chain efficiency; and

we have supported the establishment of English Food and Farming Partnerships to encourage co-operation and collaboration across all agricultural sectors.

Departmental Salaries

Tim Loughton: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs how many people in her Department earn more than a whole-time equivalent salary of £57,485 per year. [195328]

Alun Michael: I refer the hon. Member to the answer given by my hon. Friend the Minister for the Cabinet Office on 11 November 2004, *Official Report*, column 856W.

Eastern Irish Sea Fishery

Mr. Paterson: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs if she will make representations to the EU Commission *(a)* to close the sole fishery in the Eastern Irish Sea and *(b)* to make a minimum 110 mesh size for cod ends mandatory. [192941]

Mr. Bradshaw: No. UK fishermen land significant quantities of sole from the Eastern Irish Sea. There is no reason why they should not continue to do so. Mesh sizes in the Irish Sea—as elsewhere—vary between fisheries from small meshes used to catch shrimps to 100mm or more used to catch cod. I have no plans to make 110mm mesh mandatory in all these fisheries.

Mr. Paterson: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what assessment she has made of the sustainability of the plaice fishery in the Eastern Irish Sea. [192945]

Mr. Bradshaw: Assessments of plaice stocks around the UK are undertaken by the International Council for the Exploration of the Sea (ICES). The latest assessment, published on 22 October 2004, is that the Irish Sea plaice has full reproductive capacity and is harvested sustainably.

Mr. Paterson: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what reports she has received from the Centre for Environment, Fisheries and Aquaculture Science this year on *(a)* the operation of the Cod Recovery Plan and *(b)* the effects of the Cod Recovery Plan on the plaice fishery in the Eastern Irish Sea; and what action she has taken in response. [192952]

Mr. Bradshaw: Ongoing research and analysis on various aspects of the operation of the cod recovery programme, as undertaken by CEFAS, has been incorporated directly into this year's ICES advice process. The Fisheries Science Partnership has undertaken specific work on the level of bycatch and discards linked to the use of particular mesh sizes in the Eastern Irish Sea trawl fisheries. A full report on this work is expected later this year.

Mr. Paterson: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what discussions she has had within the Fisheries Council on introducing selective gear to reduce discards in the Eastern Irish Sea. [192958]

Mr. Bradshaw: A number of measures to introduce more selective gear into the Irish Sea have already been agreed as part of the cod recovery plan. These include a requirement to use square mesh panels in demersal trawls using 80–99 mm mesh and headline panels in nets with meshes of 70–99 mm. We expect the Commission to bring forward a further technical conservation proposal next year.

Departmental Expenditure

Miss McIntosh: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs how much of the Environment Agency's annual budget was spent on *(a)* international conferences, *(b)* summits and *(c)* fact-finding missions outside the UK in each year since June 2001. [197190]

Mr. Morley: Figures for expenditure on *(a)* international conferences, *(b)* summits and *(c)* fact-finding missions outside the UK are not collected by the Environment Agency and could be established only at disproportionate cost.

However, the Environment Agency's expenditure on all business visits outside the UK in the last three financial years (net of recoverable travel costs) was as follows:

	£
2001–02	285,888
2002–03	298,046
2003–04	389,556

Andrew George: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs if she will break down the budget set by her Department for public expenditure on *(a)* the Rural Development Service and *(b)* Rural Policy programmes and schemes for the financial years (i) 2004–05 and (ii) 2005–06 by programme. [196691]

Alun Michael: The information is as follows:

(a) The Department's plans for public expenditure on the running costs of the Rural Development Service are £37.6 million for both 2004–05 and 2005–06.

(b) The Department's plans for public expenditure on Rural Policy for the two years 2004–05 and 2005–06 consist of the following programmes:

£million

Programme	*2004–05*	*2005–06*
Payments to Regional Development Agencies	46.6	76.9
Sponsorship of the Countryside Agency	93.9	72.6
Rural economy development schemes	31.5	32.5
Total	172.0	182.0

Mr. Yeo: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs how much of her annual departmental budget was spent on international conferences, summits or fact-finding missions outside the UK in each year since June 2001. [197225]

Margaret Beckett: This information could only be provided at disproportionate costs as expenditure is not summarised by the Department under the categories requested.

Environmental Schemes (Payments)

Paddy Tipping: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs how much has been paid out under *(a)* Countryside Stewardship, *(b)* Organic Conversion Scheme, *(c)* Environmentally Sensitive Areas Scheme, *(d)* Woodland Scheme and *(e)* Moorland and Habitat Scheme in each county in England in 2004; and if she will make a statement. [196302]

Alun Michael: Payments made under these schemes are administered by the Rural Payments Agency. In the current financial year to the end of October, payments made in England totalled:

	£ million
Countryside Stewardship Scheme[1]	28.863
Organic Farming Scheme	4.145
Environmentally Sensitive Areas Scheme	35.385
Farm Woodland Scheme	1.526
Farm Woodland Premium Scheme	7.067

[1] The Moorland and Habitat schemes are closed to new applicants and residual payments are included in the total for Countryside Stewardship

The RPA is amending its database to enable expenditure on these schemes to be broken down by county, and I shall write to my hon. Friend with the details he has requested as soon as they are available.

Foxes

Michael Fabricant: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what assessment her Department has made of the prevalence of catching urban foxes and transporting and releasing them into rural areas; and if she will make a statement. [191138]

Mr. Bradshaw: The Department has made no assessment of this.

It is not unlawful to trap foxes in live capture cage traps and to release them at the same or a different location as long as this is done humanely and as long as the fox is not abandoned in circumstances likely to cause unnecessary suffering.

However, I should point out, that my Department advises against relocating foxes on welfare grounds, mainly due to their territorial nature.

Free Fruit (Primary Schools)

Mr. Lidington: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs if she will make a statement on the rural proofing by her Department of the Government's scheme to provide free fruit to children in primary schools. [190664]

Alun Michael *[pursuant to his reply, 21 October 2004, Official Report, c. 834W]:* My answer contained the word "rival" three times in the final sentence. This was incorrect and should have stated "rural". The rest of the answer remains correct and is detailed in full as follows.

The National Free Fruit Scheme was launched in November 2000 and has been expanded upon since then. The scheme pre-dates the introduction of rural proofing, which was launched in the Rural White Paper, also of November 2000. It was not initially subject to rural proofing, but all new policy is subject to regulatory impact assessment, which includes an element of rural proofing. This would normally be done by the Department introducing the policy, in this case, the Department of Health. Clearly, the policy applies to both rural and urban schools and as well as providing health benefits it uses produce from rural areas and promotes consumption which is likely to help the rural economy in the long term.

Heating

Malcolm Bruce: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what assessment she has made of the potential for *(a)* combined heat and power and *(b)* community heating in the UK in the (i) residential, (ii) public and (iii) commercial sectors; and if she will make a statement on the amount of each which is being realised. [195943]

Mr. Morley: The Government's Strategy for Combined Heat and Power to 2010, which we published earlier this year, mentions several studies on the potential for CHP. None of the recent reports give a split against sectors. The Digest of UK Energy Statistics (DUKES) 2004 shows that installed CHP electrical capacity stood at 4,879 megawatts at the end of 2003. This figure attributes 128 megawatts to the commercial sector, 195 megawatts to the public sector, with the balance covering all other sectors, predominantly industry. There is no separate figure for the residential sector.

A study published as part of the Community Energy programme in 2003 estimated the cost-effective potential of community heating in the UK to be around 17,100 gigawatt hours of heat per annum (GWh/yr) by 2010. The figure is split: 3,300 GWh/yr in the domestic/residential sector; 2,500 GWh/yr in the public sector; and 11,300 GWh/yr in the commercial sector. We do not have figures for the current level of installed community heating.

Horse Exports

Tom Cox: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs how many live horses have been exported for meat consumption into Europe in each of the last three years; and if she will make a statement. [196723]

Alun Michael: According to HM Custom and Excise, official overseas trade statistics show that there were no recorded exports of live horses for consumption during this period.

Horse Industry

Mr. Gray: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what discussions the Minister of State for Rural Affairs had with the Henley Centre about the terms of reference for the recent report on research in the horse industry in Great Britain; and whether the impact on the horse industry of the abolition of hunting formed part of the terms of reference. [193483]

Alun Michael: The terms of reference for the Henley Centre research were set by Defra officials, in consultation with myself. They are set out in full in appendix G to the published report. The scope of the research was to map the horse industry, to address requirements for baseline data on it, and to identify the key issues to be considered in the preparation of the strategy for the industry. The terms of reference did not themselves identify these issues.

Landfill

Mr. Evans: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what steps she is taking to ensure that wood otherwise destined for landfill is used in co-fired and non-coal burning power stations. [195799]

Mr. Morley: The Government are committed to reducing the UK's reliance on landfill, in order to reduce its environmental impact and because landfilling is a missed opportunity to recover value from waste. This commitment applies to waste wood as it does to any other waste material. Using wood as a fuel in power stations is one alternative to disposal in landfills and, under the forthcoming review of the Renewables Obligation, the case for amending eligibility rules regarding electricity generated from mixed wastes, including wood, will be considered. More details are available at: http://www.dti.gov.uk/energy/renewables/policy/terms_of_reference.shtml]

There are other ways of diverting wood from landfill, such as re-using or recycling it as a raw material in construction or for manufacturing wood based products. To encourage this, wood is one of the priority materials under the Government-funded Waste and Resources Action Programme (WRAP), which was established to create markets for recycled materials. By 2006 WRAP are aiming for a 150,000 tonne increase in the recycling of waste wood into added-value end markets.

Mr. Evans: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what estimate she has made of the amount of wood going into landfill; and what action she plans to take to reduce this amount. [195800]

Mr. Morley: The Government have no basis for estimating the amount of wood being disposed of in landfills. However, it is committed to reducing the UK's reliance on landfill, in order to reduce its environmental impact and because landfilling is a missed opportunity to recover value from waste. This commitment applies to wood as it does to any other waste material. As a result, the Government encourages the re-use or recycling of wood as a raw material in construction or in manufacturing wood based products or used as a fuel, rather than being sent to landfill. In particular, wood is one of the priority materials under the Government-funded Waste and Resources Action Programme (WRAP), which was established to create markets for recycled materials. By 2006 WRAP are aiming for a 150,000 tonne increase in the recycling of waste wood into added-value end markets.

Miss McIntosh: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs if she will make a statement on her Department's preparations to meet the requirements of the EU Landfill Directive. [197682]

Mr. Morley: The Government role in preparing for the requirements of the EU Landfill Directive is to ensure as far as possible that the legislative provisions are in place and that waste producers, the waste management industry and local authorities are aware of their respective obligations.

Since the terms of the directive came into force in July 2001, the Government have introduced a number of legislative instruments to implement the requirements, including:

The Landfill (England and Wales) Regulations 2002

The Landfill (England and Wales) Amendment Regulations 2004

The Waste and Emissions Trading Act 2003

The Landfill (Scheme Year and Maximum Landfill Amount) Regulations 2004

Legislation covering similar ground in Scotland and Northern Ireland.

In addition, the Landfill Allowances and Trading Scheme Regulations 2004 have been laid before Parliament and there will shortly be a consultation on the Landfill (England and Wales) Regulations 2005.

For over 10 years, representatives of waste producers and the waste management industry, among others, have been members of a landfill directive stakeholders group. Initially, this was to help develop the waste acceptance criteria and other aspects of the then draft directive and subsequently to advise on implementation issues. Also, the Hazardous Waste Forum was established by the Government in December 2002, to bring together key stakeholders, including waste producers, the waste management industry and local authorities, to advise on the way forward on the management of hazardous waste.

In addition, there has been six consultation exercises on different aspects of the Landfill Directive, with, as mentioned above, a seventh about to start. Ministers and Government officials have also spoken at many events, some organised by industry groups, some by independent organisations like the Parliamentary Sustainable Waste Group and Envirowise.

The Environment Agency, which is responsible for regulating this legislation, has issued a number of guidance notes covering many aspects of the various provisions.

Milk

Mr. Streeter: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what the total milk quota was for *(a)* 1994–95 and *(b)* 2003–04 for (i) the United Kingdom and (ii) England. [195206]

Alun Michael: The information is as follows:

Total milk quota (litres)

	United Kingdom	*England*
1994–95	14,164,477,065	10,194,162,140
2003–04	14,186,064,337	9,660,415,381

Mr. Streeter: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what assessment she has made of the impact of the rules relating to the transfer of milk quota from one year to the next on farmers who marginally exceed their quota; and if she will make a statement. [195207]

Alun Michael: We consider the milk quota system to be an unnecessary burden on farmers and one which adds considerably to their costs. As a result we make the trading of quota as simple as possible in order to minimise that burden. For example, we have broken the link between quotas and land in order to simplify the system further for milk producers. Further reform of the dairy sector, including the removal of the quota system, remains our long-term aim.

National Parks

Mr. Gray: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what assessment she has made of the economic impact of the Single Farm Payment on National Parks *(a)* individually and *(b)* collectively. [197416]

Alun Michael: An assessment of the economic impact of the Single Payment Scheme in England has been placed in the House of Commons' Library (and is available on the Defra website). While data are not available to enable specifically on impacts within the National Parks, the report contains analysis relating to cattle and sheep farms in the less favoured areas, which is the predominant farm type in National Parks.

Orchards

Mr. Wiggin: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs when her Department will confirm the definition of orchards. [197451]

Alun Michael: Commercial orchards remain ineligible for the Single Payment Scheme as permanent crops. In August this year we commissioned the Central Science Laboratory to research possible criteria for inclusion of traditional (dual use) orchards in the Single Payment Scheme. On 2 November the report was published and the results are now available on the Defra website www.defra.gov.uk.

Based on this report we are drawing up simple criteria in conjunction with EN, RPA and RDS and we plan to share them shortly with interested parties. These criteria will need to be shown to the Commission before being finalised.

Mr. Wiggin: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs whether a committee has been set up to determine the appropriate definition of a traditional orchard. [197452]

Alun Michael: In August this year we commissioned the Central Science Laboratory to research possible criteria for inclusion of traditional (dual use) orchards in the Single Payment Scheme. On 2 November the report was published and the results are now available on the Defra website www.defra.gov.uk.

Based on this report we are drawing up simple criteria in conjunction with EN, RPA and RDS and we plan to share them shortly with interested parties. These criteria will need to be shown to the Commission before being finalised.

Organic Farming

Hugh Bayley: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs (1) how much has been paid to farmers in Yorkshire and the Humber to convert to organic farming since 1997; [192422]

(2) how many acres of land were farmed organically in Yorkshire and the Humber in 1997; and how many are now. [192423]

Mr. Bradshaw: The information requested for the years from 2000 to 2003 is set out in the following table. Information for earlier years is not available in the form requested.

	2000		*2001*		*2002*		*2003*	
	Hectares	*Claim value (£)*	*Hectares*	*Claim value (£)*	*Hectares*	*Claim value (£)*	*Hectares*	*Claim value (£)*
Humberside	595	85,126	915	92,017	1,153	80,297	1,263	69,575
North Yorkshire	2,431	285,335	4,089	431,894	4,885	405,880	5,067	297,754
South Yorkshire	268	41,612	246	18,014	302	19,991	329	18,628
West Yorkshire	261	30,239	406	39,200	388	20,744	388	11,606
Total	3,555	442,311	5,657	581,125	6,727	526,912	7,047	397,563

Pesticides

Mr. Tynan: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs how many *(a)* reported cases of and *(b)* successful prosecutions for breaches of maximum residue levels from pesticides there have been in each of the last five years. [197581]

Alun Michael: The UK's surveillance programme for pesticide residues in food is overseen by the independent Pesticide Residues Committee (PRC). In 2003, 4,071 samples of imported or UK-produced food were tested for up to 149 different pesticide residues. The Maximum Residue Level (MRL) was exceeded in 27 (0.7 per cent.) samples. For previous years, the percentage of exceedances is similar, at around 1 per cent. All the results are available on the PRC's website at www.prc.org.

MRLs are not safety limits. Statutory Maximum Residue Levels (MRLs) have been established for many thousands of individual pesticides in individual crops. The purpose of MRLs is to regulate trade in treated food. They indicate that any pesticide was applied to crops or foodstuffs in accordance with the conditions of use set by the UK regulator, the Pesticides Safety Directorate, or equivalent organisations overseas. They are always set below, often far below, safety limits. The safety limit depends on many factors, which include the properties of the pesticide, the amount of residue, amount of food being consumed and whether this is in a single meal or over a longer period, and the body weight of the consumer (e.g. adult, child, infant).

In all cases where an MRL is exceeded, a risk assessment is carried out. The conclusion was that none of the exceedances in 2003 was likely to be of concern for consumer health.

Where there is evidence of repeated exceedances of an MRL or the use of a pesticide on a crop for which the pesticide is not approved, a targeted enforcement campaign is carried out. An enforcement campaign has been carried out for the last three years testing for

MRL's on winter lettuce. Winter lettuce grown in the UK under glass is particularly prone to fungal attack during the cool damp winter months and there are only a limited number of products approved for disease control.

Over the last three years, the enforcement campaign has revealed that there have been 57 samples of lettuce containing pesticide residues over the MRL. This is made up of;

27 samples (18 per cent. of the total samples taken) in 2001–02,

16 (10.8 per cent.) in 2002–03, and

14 (8.7 per cent.) in 2003–04.

Although a number of enforcement actions have been taken including warning letters, educational visits and the issuing of enforcement notices, the evidence obtained (and in particular the risk to human health), has not supported any prosecution.

Press Officers

Mr. Ruffley: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs how many press officers are employed in her Department; and how many were employed in each year since 1996–97. [195359]

Alun Michael: Defra was set up in June 2001. Figures relating to numbers of press officers employed by the organisations whose functions were subsumed into the new department would not correspond accurately to the distribution and scope of the present work areas. Year-on-year comparisons since that date are as follows:

As at June:	*Press officers*
001	22
002	22
003	22
004	18

The numbers do vary within any year, and for nstance at 1 November 2004 the number was 23.

Public Bodies

Andrew George: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what assessment he has made of the implications for *(a)* the number of obs, *(b)* costs and *(c)* savings of integrating executive gencies and non-departmental public bodies within her Department. [196684]

Alun Michael: Our current focus in this area is on ringing together three bodies to create a new rganisation as a major element of Defra's Modernising Rural Delivery programme. This will lead to the stablishment of a new independent Integrated Agency hich will bring together English Nature, parts of the Countryside Agency and much of the Rural Development Service which is a part of core Defra.

This intention was set out by the Secretary of State in er statement in July on the Rural Strategy 2004. Work urrently in hand includes:

(a) development of a future profile of headcounts,

(b) work to refine initial estimates that put the total main investment costs required to implement the programme at approximately £40 million in total,

(c) preparation of detailed plans to realise the efficiency gains set out in the Department's recently published Efficiency Technical Note. These are planned to rise to £13 million per year by 2007–08.

Radioactive Waste

Mr. Tynan: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what assessment she has made of the current EURATOM discussions on methods of disposal of radioactive waste in respect of its implications for the work of the Committee on Radioactive Waste Management. [197577]

Mr. Morley: The European Commission's draft directive on radioactive waste management is not currently under active discussion. The Government opposed the draft directive principally because it could have prejudiced the work of the Committee on Radioactive Waste Management which will make recommendations on the most appropriate long-term radioactive waste management option for the United Kingdom. A number of other member states also oppose the directive with the result that it does not command the necessary qualified majority.

Departmental Policy Announcements

Mr. Drew: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs when she expects further announcements to be made on *(a)* cross compliance, *(b)* use of the national reserve, *(c)* cross-border holdings, *(d)* common land, *(e)* SPS appeals procedures, *(f)* lost and delayed Rural Payments Agency information statements, *(g)* ex-gratia payments and historical claims, *(h)* the LWDS and Slaughter Premium Scheme, *(i)* EPS co-efficient in 2001 with reference to foot and mouth disease, *(j)* countryside stewardship and set aside and *(k)* detailed non-food crop and general set aside rules for 2005. [191109]

Alun Michael: Announcements on cross compliance and the use of the national reserve were made on 2 November. We will be making announcements on the other issues as soon as they are resolved, which in some cases is expected to be quite soon.

Rural Services Review

Mr. Andrew Turner: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs how many copies of Rural Services Review 2004 were printed; what the cost was of the *(a)* printing and *(b)* preparation, including design and writing of the review; how many copies were distributed (i) unsolicited and (ii) otherwise; at what cost in each case; and how many earlier editions of the review have been produced. [197724]

Alun Michael: The Rural Services Review, published on 1 November 2004, continues the commitment from the Rural White Paper "Our Countryside: the future" to inform rural people how they can ensure fair access to public services for their community. The Rural Services Review replaces the Rural Services Standard, a more formal and "official" document that was published in 2002 and 2003. It has already resulted in considerable positive responses at regional and local level, often in respect of examples quoted in the text which show how policies are often being delivered very successfully in rural areas. Our purpose is to spread good practice about "what works" and to stimulate innovation in rural areas.

The total cost of production and distribution of the Rural Services Review is set out in the following table:

Cost of Rural Services Review

	Supplier	£ *Final Spend (+ vat)*
Design	Stairway Communications	9,814 plus 383 Total = 10,197
Print (50,000 run)		17,800 (no vat charged)
Distribution RSR	Solicited—90 Unsolicited—30, 136	[1]14,000
Copywriting	COI	15,540
Photography	Various	[1]3,315
Proof reading	COI	324
Staff costs		[2]22,864
Total		[1]84,040

[1] These costs are based upon estimates as final invoices have not yet been received.

[2] Defra staff costs for this project were £22,864. This figure is based upon average pay rates, by grade and location and includes accommodation overheads.

The total production, distribution and staff costs give a unit cost for the Rural Services Review of £1.68 a copy.

The Rural Services Review came about as a consequence of the evaluation of the Rural Services Standard, which took place during 2003. The review builds upon the recommendations of the independent evaluation report produced by the University of Gloucester. A copy of this report is available on the Defra website at www.defra.gov.uk/rural/pdfs/rss_review.pdf.

The Rural Services Review identifies key standards that affect people living and working in the countryside and illustrates the difference the standards can make, through the use of case studies. Copies of the review are available through Defra publications (08459 556000) or online at www.defra.gov.uk/rural/services.

Salisbury plain

Mr. Key: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs when funding for the Salisbury Plain Life Project will cease; and what funding streams and programmes will succeed it. [196023]

Mr. Bradshaw: The project formally finishes 30 September 2005. All partner costs are paid in full at the time expenditure is incurred while match funding provided under the LIFE Nature regulation is paid in instalments, the final instalment (approximately 30 per cent. of the total funding) being paid following submission to the Commission of final project reports and audited accounts.

Future management work on the Salisbury Plain project may be eligible for funding under a number of funding streams and programmes, and although no specific funding has so far been secured discussions between English Nature and the relevant partners and agencies is on-going.

Mr. Key: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what the expected annual expenditure by each of the partners is in each year of the planned life of the Salisbury Plain Life Project; and if she will make a statement. [196024]

Mr. Bradshaw: The following table shows the official project budget sheet figures derived from the life project bid document. Totals for each partner contribution have been divided by four to give an estimated figures for annual spend. The exchange rate when these figures were submitted was €1.69/£1.

Partner	*Estimated annual costs per annum per partner (€)*
1. Applicant's share of project costs (English Nature)	63,439
2. Community contribution requested	435,340
3. Defence Estates	298,354
4. Defence Evaluation Research Agency	51,154
5. Royal Society for the Protection of Birds	15,708
6. Centre for Ecology and Hydrology	1,600
7. Butterfly Conservation	5,085

Single Farm Payments

Miss McIntosh: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what the expected payment date is for the single farm payments in May 2005; and under what circumstances this payment would be delayed until April 2006. [R] [193776]

Alun Michael: The European Regulations designate May 2005 as the deadline for receipt of claims, not as a payment day. The regulations provide for the single payments for 2005 to be made between December 2005 and June 2006. Our objective is to make payments as early as possible within that period.

Mr. Swayne: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs when she will make a decision about how the benefit of common rights will be allocated when calculating single farm payments to commoners; what further consultation she plans with *(a)* verderers and *(b)* commoners; and if she will make a statement. [197816]

Alun Michael: There is ongoing consideration of this complex issue and an announcement will be made as soon as possible. In August a meeting was held with commons interests, including representations from the New Forest, and those present were invited to submit further observations. No further formal consultation is planned.

Departmental Policies (South Dorset)

Jim Knight: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs if she will set out, with statistical evidence relating as closely as possible to the South Dorset constituency, the effects of changes to departmental policy since 1997 on the South Dorset constituency. [194969]

Alun Michael: Since its establishment in 2001 Defra has put in place a comprehensive programme of action on issues including sustainable development, climate change and energy, sustainable consumption and production, natural resource protection, sustainable rural communities, and a sustainable farming and food sector. A summary of some our achievements to date can be found at http://defra/corporate/achievements.htm. I am confident that the South Dorset constituency will have benefited from these. For example, we are committed, through our national strategy for waste, to delivering a step change to more sustainable waste management, including tough national targets to recycle or compost 17 per cent. of household waste by 2003–04, and 25 per cent. by 2005–06. The county of Dorset, one of the early high performers on recycling, continues to make a substantial contribution to achieving national recycling targets. The county's recycling performance in 2002–03, the most recent year for which data are available, was 27 per cent., against the national average for that year of 14.5 per cent.

Bathing water quality has improved along the Purbeck and Weymouth/Portland coast over the last seven years. In 1997, only nine of the 14 identified bathing waters, stretching from Shell Bay in the east to Portland in the west, met the most stringent standards of the EC Bathing Water Directive. By 2004, all bar one passed these standards, which are necessary to fulfil the water quality criteria of the international Blue Flag award. These improvements reflect Defra's policy to improve coastal water and raise compliance with the EC Bathing Water Directive.

Last month I announced that Dorset would be one of seven rural pathfinders in England. The rural pathfinder initiative is a key part of the Government's Rural Strategy and reflects the Government's commitment to devolve decision-making and resources to the local level. The Dorset rural pathfinder will ensure greater co-ordination of rural delivery programmes as well as testing new and innovative methods to bring about improvements in the delivery of services to rural communities and businesses.

Defra provides comprehensive statistical information. The following web address will take my hon. Friend directly to the service: http://statistics.defra.gov.uk/esg/default.asp.

Special Advisers

Matthew Taylor: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs how many unpaid special advisers the Department has; what their names are; and which Government *(a)* bodies, *(b)* committees and *(c)* strategy groups each unpaid adviser (i) belongs to, (ii) advises and (iii) works alongside. [194063]

Alun Michael: I refer the hon. Member to the answer given by my hon. Friend the Minister of State, Cabinet Office (Ruth Kelly) on 28 October 2004, *Official Report*, column 1380W.

Sugar Regime

Miss McIntosh: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what measures she is taking to ensure that UK sugar producers will not be disadvantaged by the reform of the EU Sugar Regime. [195982]

Alun Michael: The Government's aim is to secure a more economically rational and market-based sugar regime consistent with our international trade and development obligations and our wider sustainability objectives. A sugar reform which meets these conditions ought to be to the advantage of everyone.

Sustainable Agriculture

Andrew George: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs if she will break down by programme the budget set by her Department for public expenditure on sustainable agriculture and livestock products for financial years *(a)* 2004–05 and *(b)* 2005–06. [196651]

Alun Michael: The Department's spend on sustainable agriculture forms part of the Government's Strategy for Sustainable Farming and Food, which includes the co-ordination of the programme to implement the Single Farm Payment in England.

A wide range of departmental activities contribute to the outcomes of the Sustainable Farming and Food Strategy. I refer the hon. Member to the answer given on 3 November 2004, *Official Report*, column 255W, which provided a breakdown of the new funding for this strategy.

Budgets have not yet been confirmed for 2005–06. For 2004–05, the programme budget directly focussed on the co-ordination of sustainable agriculture and livestock products is as follows:

Programme budgets	*2004–05 (£000)*
Livestock Industry Forums (Red Meat Industry Forum and Dairy Supply Chain Forum)	[1]2,228
Fertilisers and Nutrient Management Programmes	428
School Milk Top Up Scheme	[2]500
Meat and Livestock Commission (includes Commissioners' expenses and information provision)	465
Livestock Projects Support (for example Consultancy)	322
SFFS Regional Implementation	[3]1,670
CAP Reform Implementation (Single Farm Payment)	1,650
Sustainable Agriculture Policy/ Projects Support (for example Consultancy)	235
Total for Directorate	7,498

[1] This includes the Department of Trade and Industry contribution to the funding of the Red Meat Industry Forum. In 2004–05 this is £524,000.

[2] The School Milk Top Up Scheme is equally funded by Defra, Department of Health and Department for Education and Skills. This funding is the Defra element only.

[3] An additional £1,500,000 (outside the single pot) has been made available to the Regional Development Agencies during 2004–05. The other £170,000 provides top up funding for the Government Offices in the Regions.

Water Framework Directive

Mr. Wiggin: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what assessment she has made of the likely effects of the Water Framework Directive on the rural economy [197814]

Mr. Morley: The costs and benefits of the Water Framework Directive and likely effects on different sectors are examined in the updated partial regulatory impact assessment which was published in Defra's "Third Consultation Paper on the Implementation of the EC Water Framework Directive (2000/60/EC)" in August 2003. The assessment covers analysis of impacts on key sectors which contribute to the rural economy.

This partial regulatory impact assessment includes the current estimates of costs and benefits. However, the Water Framework Directive introduces a long term strategic planning process and many of the details are yet to be worked out. Monitoring of current water status and economic analysis on cost-effective measures to meet objectives will provide further information, and Defra will assess the scope for updating this RIA from 2005.

ELECTORAL COMMISSION COMMITTEE

Regional Referendum

Mr. Jenkin: To ask the hon. Member for Gosport, representing the Speaker's Committee on the Electoral Commission what complaints the Electoral Commission have received concerning the conduct of the regional referendum. [198161]

Mr. Viggers: The Chairman informs me that the Electoral Commission has received representations on a range of matters relating to the north-east referendums. These include the role of the Commission in commenting on the questions and designating lead campaigners, and the activities of local and central government in the referendum campaigns. The Commission's statutory reports on the administration of the regional and local referendums will take into account the comments it has received.

Mr. Jenkin: To ask the hon. Member for Gosport, representing the Speaker's Committee on the Electoral Commission when the Electoral Commission intends to report on the conduct of the referendum in the north-east. [198162]

Mr. Viggers: The Chairman informs me that the Electoral Commission intends to publish the reports required by section 5 of the Political Parties, Elections and Referendums Act 2000 on the administration of the regional and local referendums held in the north-east earlier this month in summer 2005.

TREASURY

Civil Service Job Cuts

Norman Lamb: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he will make a statement on proposed job cuts in the civil service. [198125]

Mr. Boateng: There will be an overall gross reduction in posts of 84,150 by 2008 and Departments will pursue these reductions in line with business need. Departments are currently developing their plans.

Departmental advertising costs

Charles Hendry: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer (1) what the cost of *(a)* creative work, *(b)* media spend and *(c)* administration for his Department's advertising activity has been in each financial year since 1997–98, broken down by contractor; [197290]

Mr. Francois: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer (2) what the total expenditure on advertising by his Department was in 2003–04. [198194]

Mr. Timms: In relation to the years up to 2001–02, I refer the hon. Gentleman to the answer given to the hon. Member for Buckingham (Mr. Bercow) on 7 May 2002, *Official Report*, column 36W. In the last two financial years, HM Treasury's only spending on advertising has been for the purpose of recruitment. Detailed costs of advertising, as distinct from other recruitment expenses, or analysis by advertising contractor, could be provided only at disproportionate cost.

Departmental Events (Funding)

Charles Hendry: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he will list the *(a)* conferences, *(b)* publications, *(c)* initiatives, *(d)* projects and *(e)* receptions organised by his Department which have received funding from outside commercial bodies since May 1997, broken down by (i) funding body and (ii) amount paid. [196607]

Mr. Timms: The Treasury, the Inland Revenue and HM Customs and Excise do not receive significant commercial funding for activities in the five categories to which the question refers. A review of accounting records indicates that, across the three departments, total income from outside commercial bodies in the five categories was less than £50,000 in each of the last two financial years. The detailed analysis sought could be provided only at disproportionate cost.

Earnings

Mr. Moore: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what the distribution of earnings is for those earning *(a)* under the point below which 10 per cent. of earners fall and *(b)* the point above which 10 per cent. of earners exceed in (i) Scotland and (ii) each of the unitary local authority areas in Scotland, broken down by (A) male, (B) female and (C) all workers. [198285]

Mr. Timms: The information requested falls within the responsibility of the National Statistician, who has been asked to reply.

Letter from Colin Mowl to Mr. Michael Moore, dated 16 November 2004:

The National Statistician has been asked to reply to your recent Parliamentary Question asking what the distribution of earnings is for those earning *(a)* under the point below which 10 per cent. of earners fall and *(b)* the point above which 10 per cent. of earners exceed in (i) Scotland (ii) each of the unitary local authority areas in Scotland, broken down by (A) male, (B) female and (C) all workers. I am replying in his absence. (198285).

Average earnings are estimated from the Annual Survey of Hours and Earnings and are provided for employees on adult rates of pay whose pay was unaffected by absence during the pay period, by their place of work. This is the standard definition used for Annual Survey of Hours and Earnings tables. The Annual Survey of Hours and Earnings does not collect data on the self employed and people who do unpaid work.

These data are available on the National Statistics web site:

http://www.statistics.gov.uk/downloads/theme_labour/ASHE_2004_inc/2004_work_LA.pdf

We recommend that you use data supplied for full time employees.

The Annual Survey of Hours and Earnings, carried out in April of each year, is the most comprehensive source of earnings information in the United Kingdom. It is a one per cent sample of all employees who are members of pay-as-you-earn schemes, but because of its sampling frame, it has difficulty capturing data on people with very low pay. It is therefore likely to under-represent relatively low paid staff earning below the tax threshold.

The Annual Survey of Hours and Earnings publication criteria ensures that all estimates are undisclosive. A number of estimates have been removed from the published tables for these reasons.

Mr. Moore: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what the *(a)* average and *(b)* median (i) weekly and (ii) hourly gross earnings (A) including and (B) excluding overtime is of (1) Managers and Senior, (2) Professional, (3) Associate Professional and Technical, (4) Administrative and Secretarial, (5) Skilled Trades, (6) Personal Service, (7) Sales and Customer Service, (8) Process, Plant and Machine Operatives and (9) Elementary occupational groups, broken down by (x) male, *(y)* female and *(z)* all workers. [198286]

Mr. Timms: The information requested falls within the responsibility of the National Statistician, who has been asked to reply.

Letter from Colin Mowl to Mr. Michael Moore, dated 16 November 2004:

The National Statistician has been asked to reply to your recent Parliamentary Question what the *(a)* average and *(b)* median (i) weekly and (ii) hourly gross earnings (A) including and (B) excluding overtime is of the occupational groups (1) Managers and Senior, (2) Professional, (3) Associate Professional and Technical, (4) Administrative and Secretarial, (5) Skilled Trades, (6) Personal Service, (7) Sales and Customer Service, (8) Process, Plant and Machine Operatives and (9) Elementary, broken down by (x) male, *(y)* female and *(z)* all workers. I am replying in his absence. (198286).

Average earnings are estimated from the Annual Survey of Hours and Earnings and are provided for employees on adult rates of pay whose pay was unaffected by absence during the pay period, by their place of work. This is the standard definition used for Annual Survey of Hours and Earning tables. The Annual Survey of Hours and Earnings does not collect data on the self employed and people who do unpaid work.

These data are available on the statistics web site: http://www.statistics.gov.uk/downloads/theme_labour/ASHE_2004 inc/2004_occupation.pdf

We recommend that you use data for full time employees.

The Annual Survey of Hours and Earnings, carried out in April of each year, is the most comprehensive source of earnings information in the United Kingdom. It is a one per cent sample of all employees who are members of pay-as-you-earn schemes, but because of its sampling frame, it has difficulty capturing data on people with very low pay. It is therefore likely to under-represent relatively low paid staff earning below the tax threshold.

The Annual Survey of Hours and Earnings publication criteria ensures that all estimates are undisclosive. A number of estimates have been removed from the published tables for these reasons.

European Union

Mr. Hayes: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he will make a statement on the research undertaken by his officials on the cost-benefit analysis of European Union membership; in which sections of his Department the officials concerned work; and if he will make a statement. [197918]

Mr. Timms: There is a broad consensus among academics that UK membership of the European Union promotes growth, competitiveness and employment through the operation of the internal market. The Government continually consider the direct and indirect costs and benefits of specific legislative proposals, in the context of European policy development.

Mr. Wiggin: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what discussions he has had with his colleagues in the European Union concerning the future of the UK rebate. [197794]

Mr. Timms: Discussion of EU economic and financial matters, including the EU Budget, formally occurs at ECOFIN meetings. The first discussion on the Commission's own resources report and proposals for revising the Own Resources Decision will be discussed at the ECOFIN meeting of Tuesday 16 November. The Government's position on this has already been made clear in the Explanatory Memorandum presented to the House on the Commission's proposals.

Financial Services Authority

Mr. Kidney: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what assessment he has made of the discharge by the Financial Services Authority of its statutory objective of promoting financial literacy. [198183]

Mr. Timms: The FSA has been undertaking work to promote public understanding of the financial system since its inception and a number of resources have been developed and distributed, to contribute to this statutory objective.

Building on this, in November 2003 the FSA set up the Financial Capability Steering Group to oversee the development and implementation of a national strategy to improve financial capability. The Minister for Pensions and I are members of that group, along with representatives from the financial services industry, the consumer, voluntary and education sectors, employers and the media. The strategy is being taken forward through a series of seven priority projects, each of which is supported by a Working Group. To date, proposals for pilot work have been brought forward by three groups (Schools, Workplace and Borrowing), three are to make proposals to the Steering Group next month (Families, Young Adults and Retirement) and the final group (Generic Advice) will submit proposals early in 2005.

Fuel Duty

Mr. Alan Reid: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer how much unrebated fuel duty was paid on fuel sold in each of the islands within the United Kingdom during the latest year for which figures are available. [198767]

John Healey: Hydrocarbon oils duty revenue figures are published by HM Customs and Excise in the Hydrocarbon Oils Bulletin, a copy of which can be found on the UK Trade Information website www.uktradeinfo.com. Figures are collected for the UK as a whole and are not available by region.

Guaranteed Minimum Pension

Mr. Luff: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what estimate he has made of the costs of indexing a guaranteed minimum pension for public sector schemes to the National Insurance Fund. [197998]

Mr. Timms: None—the National Insurance Fund has no liability for indexing Guaranteed Minimum Pensions (GMPs).

Incomes

Keith Vaz: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer how many *(a)* women and *(b)* men are in the top five per cent. of income earners in the UK. [196017]

Mr. Timms: The information requested falls within the responsibility of the National Statistician, who has been asked to reply.

Letter from Colin Mowl to Mr. Keith Vaz, dated 16 November 2004:

The National Statistician has been asked to reply to your recent Parliamentary Question asking how many *(a)* women and *(b)* men are currently in the top five per cent of income earners in the UK. I am replying in his absence. (196017)

Average earnings are estimated from the Annual Survey of Hours and Earnings (ASHE) and are provided for full-time employees on adult rates of pay whose pay was unaffected by absence during the pay period, by their place of work. This is the standard definition used for ASHE tables. The ASHE does not collect data on the self employed and people who do unpaid work.

There are 822,000 people in the top five per cent of gross weekly earners, of which 689,000 are males and 133,000 are females. The 95th percentile of gross weekly earnings in 2004 is £1060.7.

IT consultants (Southend)

Mr. Amess: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer pursuant to the answer of 2 November 2004, *Official Report*, column 153W, on Customs and Excise, how long the contracts in place for IT consultants contracted to work for Her Majesty's Customs and Excise at Alexander House, Southend-on-Sea are; how much the IT consultants are paid; and if he will make a statement. [196919]

Dawn Primarolo: The average length of contract for IT consultants currently contracted to work for Her Majesty's Customs and Excise at Alexander House, Southend-on-Sea is four months. The average daily rate for these consultants is £551.

Life Expectancy (Pendle)

Mr. Gordon Prentice: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what the life expectancy *(a)* was in (i) 1987 and (ii) 1997 and *(b)* is of (A) men and (B) women in Pendle. [197757]

Mr. Timms: The information requested falls within the responsibility of the National Statistician, who has been asked to reply.

Letter from John Pullinger to Mr. Gordon Prentice, dated 16 November 2004:

The National Statistician has been asked to reply to your recent question asking what the life expectancy *(a)* was in (i) 1987 and (ii) 1997 and *(b)* is of (A) men and (B) women in Pendle. I am replying in his absence. (197757)

Figures for life expectancy at birth for the United Kingdom and its constituent countries are published annually by the Government Actuary's Department. Figures for life expectancy at birth for English local authorities are published annually by ONS. Both sets of figures are based on three-year rolling averages and are calculated separately for males and females. The most recent available figures are for 2001–2003. Figures covering the years requested are given in the attached table.

Life expectancy at birth by sex, for England and Wales[1] and Pendle local authority[2]

	Life expectancy in years	
Males	*England and Wales*	*Pendle*
1986–1988	72.37	71.2
1996–1998	74.73	74.1
2001–2003	76.17	74.9
Females		
1986–1988	78.09	77.0
1996–1998	79.73	78.4
2001–2003	80.67	79.7

[1] Including non-residents.

[2] Usual residents of this area.

Lisbon Strategy

Keith Vaz: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he will make a statement on the UK's progress in the implementation of the Lisbon Strategy. [197760]

Mr. Timms: The Government are committed to economic reform at home and in Europe, and my recent answers on 4 October 2004, *Official Report*, columns 1790–1791W) and on 21 October 2004 *Official Report*, columns 884–885W, summarised the measures the Government are taking to increase employment and productivity in Europe. These issues were also debated on the Floor of the House on 13 September 2004.

As set out during that debate, the UK Government remains a strong advocate of economic reform in Europe, and continues to work closely with other Member States and the European Commission to promote structural reform, including by taking forward the January 2004 Four Presidencies initiative on regulatory reform and the principal recommendations contained in the spring 2004 joint statements with France and Germany on promoting enterprise and innovation.

The Government produces a report each year summarising the progress made in reforming product and capital markets over the preceding 12 months, as part of the "Cardiff" process. Copies of the latest UK report "Report on Progress on Reform of Product and Capital Markets: United Kingdom 2003–04" were deposited in the Libraries of both Houses on 18 October this year.

The Government also produce an annual Progress Report on the UK's economic reform priorities, which sets out the measures and reforms the Government believe are required to deliver greater economic prosperity across Europe and deliver the aims of the Lisbon agenda. The latest version of this document is also available in the House Libraries.

Departmental Expenditure

Mr. Prisk: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer how much the Department spent on *(a)* maintenance, *(b)* renovation, *(c)* council tax and *(d)* running costs of residential properties used by Ministers and officials in each year since 1997. [191408]

Mr. Timms: I refer the hon. Gentleman to the answer given by the former Financial Secretary to the Treasury (Ruth Kelly) on 19 November 2003, *Official Report*, column 1097W, giving the costs of residential properties used by Ministers and officials for the years 1997–98 to 2002–03. The costs for 2003–4 were £570 council tax and £162,858 running costs. 2003–04 running costs include £69,383 of rent paid to the Cabinet Office, based on capital charging which replaced Property Service assessed rents as the methods of accounting for Crown Freehold properties on 1 April 1998. There were no separate charges for maintenance and renovation.

New Jobs (Wandsworth)

Tom Cox: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer how many new jobs have been created in the London borough of Wandsworth since 1997. [198189]

Mr. Timms: The information requested falls within the responsibility of the National Statistician, who has been asked to reply.

Letter from Colin Mowl to Mr. Tom Cox, dated 16 November 2004:

The National Statistician has been asked to reply to your recent Parliamentary Question about jobs created in Wandsworth. I am replying in his absence. (198189)

While statistics of new jobs created are not available explicitly, statistics from surveys enable comparisons to be made of net changes, in numbers of jobs, from year to year.

The attached table shows the information requested, relating to jobs in Wandsworth, for 1997 and the latest year available, 2002.

Number of employee jobs[1] with workplace in Wandsworth local authority: 1997 and 2002

	Total
Number of employee jobs	
1997	91,800
2002	105,600
Change from 1997 to 2002[2]	13,800

[1] Excludes self-employed jobs.

[2] The 1997 to 2002 change has been rounded to the nearest hundred separately from rounded levels for 1997 and 2002.

Source:

1997: Annual Employment Survey, rescaled 2002: Annual Business Inquiry.

Stamp Duty

Sue Doughty: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer pursuant to the answer of 2 November 2004, *Official Report*, column 154W, on stamp duty, how many residential property transactions between £60,000 and £150,000 have qualified for disadvantaged area relief in each year since the relief was introduced. [198614]

Mr. Timms: The number of residential property transactions that have qualified for disadvantaged area relief in England and Wales are given in the following table.

Period	*Number of residential transactions (thousand)*
November 2001-March 2002	14
April 2002-March 2003	60
April 2003-March 2004	78

Tax Credits

Mr. Roy: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he will extend the tax credit system to parents of special needs young adults who move from five day a week schooling to two day a week college courses. [197767]

Dawn Primarolo: The child tax credit regulations do not impose any requirements regarding full-time education for children under the age of 16. Young people between the ages of 16–19 are required to engage in full-time education. The rules require a person to undertake on average at least 12 hours structured tuition during a week in normal term-time—there is no requirement to attend college for a specific number of days a week. There are no plans at present to review the rules defining full-time education for child tax credit purposes.

Mr. Lidington: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what the average time between HM Inland Revenue receiving and responding to an appeal against a notice of decision on *(a)* child tax credit, *(b)* working tax credit and *(c)* pension tax credit has been in 2004; and if he will make a statement. [198084]

John Healey: The Inland Revenue usually acknowledges tax credits appeals within two working days of receipt.

Matters relating to pension credit are for the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions.

Tripartite Social Summit

Keith Vaz: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what the conclusions were of the Tripartite Social Summit. [197759]

Mr. Pond: I have been asked to reply.

The Tripartite Social Summit—co-chaired by Mr. Jan Peter Balkenende, President of the European Council and Mr. Romano Prodi, President of the Commission—was attended by the Deputy Prime Minister and the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions, along with ministerial colleagues from Luxembourg and the Netherlands and representatives of the European Social Partners and the European Commissioner for Employment and Social Affairs. Wim Kok gave a presentation of key points from the recent report of the high level group he chaired, which was set up to identify priorities for action to meet the Lisbon targets for employment and economic reform. While there were no formal conclusions from the summit, the exchanges of views included agreement on the need to add a new impetus to the implementation of the Lisbon strategy, in line with the recommendations of the Kok report.

UK Competitiveness

Mr. Jim Cunningham: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer how his Department plans to promote UK competitiveness in the EU. [197822]

John Healey: The Government are committed to raising the rate of UK productivity growth over the economic cycle, improving competitiveness and narrowing the productivity gap with our major industrial competitors. Historically these have included the US, France and Germany, although on the output per worker measure, the gap with Germany has now closed. The Government's approach to achieving this target is set out in Productivity in the UK: The Evidence and the Government's Approach, which was published alongside the 2000 Pre-Budget Report.

The Government report on steps to increase productivity in every Budget and Pre-Budget Report.

VAT (Sports)

Mr. Reed: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what representations he has received about the VAT liabilities of national governing bodies of sports; and if he will make a statement. [197432]

Dawn Primarolo: In the last year a small number of letters from hon. Members have been received by Treasury Ministers about the liability of affiliation fees paid by sports clubs to their governing body.

Supplies of services closely linked with, and essential to sport are exempt from VAT where these services are supplied by a non-profit making body to individuals. Subject to these same conditions, VAT exemption also applies to sports governing bodies and the services they supply in return for the affiliation fees they charge to their members.

Where membership of a sports governing body consists of sports clubs, affiliation fees are exempt where the individual sportsman or woman is the most direct beneficiary of the affiliation, and where this is reflected in the basis on which the affiliation fee is calculated by the governing body. When this is not the case the affiliation fee is taxable at the standard rate of VAT.

Working Parents

Mr. Wills: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what estimate he has made of the percentage of people who are in employment who are parents of children aged *(a)* under five and *(b)* over five. [196029]

Mr. Timms: The information requested falls within the responsibility of the National Statistician, who has been asked to reply.

Letter from Colin Mowl to Mr Michael Wills, dated 16 November 2004:

The National Statistician has been asked to reply to your Parliamentary Question about parents in employment. I am replying in his absence. (196029)

Of the total population in employment in the three months ending May 2004: 12.3% had one or more children aged under five resident with them; 23.5% had one or more children over five; and among these two groups 5.2% of the total in employment had one or more children in both age groups.

Dependent children are those aged under 16 and those aged 16–18 who are in full-time education and have never married.

These estimates from the Labour Force Survey are, as with any sample survey, subject to sampling variability.

SCOTLAND

Asylum Seekers

Mrs. Spelman: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland (1) if he will list local authority net current expenditure on asylum seekers for each local authority in Scotland in each year since 1991–92; [197230]

(2) if he will make a statement on how local authorities in Scotland have been compensated for expenditure on asylum since 1998. [197231]

Mr. Browne: I have been asked to reply.

The information is not available in the format requested. The Home Office took responsibility for payment of grants to local authorities supporting asylum seekers on 1 April 1999. Local authorities are able to claim grant from the Home Office within specified criteria to meet their costs of supporting asylum seekers.

Consultants

Pete Wishart: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland how much expenditure his Department has incurred in each year since 2002 on employing external consultants to deal with the press and public relations of his Department; and if he will make a statement. [195457]

Mrs. McGuire: The Scotland Office has not employed any external consultants to deal with the press and public relations in the Scotland Office since 2002.

Mr. Weir: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland how much his Department spent in each year since 2002 on employing *(a)* external management consultants and *(b)* external human resources consultants; and if he will make a statement. [195761]

Mrs. McGuire: The Scotland Office has not employed any external management or external human resources consultants since 2002. However, one company was employed in 2003–04 to organise a Senior Civil Service Assessment Centre, at a cost of £10,044.

Departmental Contracts

Pete Wishart: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland if he will list the 30 largest contracts awarded by his Department from *(a)* May 2001 to April 2002, *(b)* May 2002 to April 2003, *(c)* May 2003 to April 2004 and *(d)* May 2004 to the latest date for which information is available, indicating in each case (i) the values of the contracts and (ii) the companies with which the contracts were placed. [196950]

Mrs. McGuire: The following contracts have been awarded by the Scotland Office:

	Company	*Function*
2001–02	Serco	Cleaning
2002–03	Tradition	Cleaning
2003–04	Group 4	Security

The value of these contracts is commercially confidential. No new contracts have been awarded in the current financial year.

Pete Wishart: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland which non-accounting and non-information technology external organisations which previously held contracts with his Department won new contracts *(a)* at the culmination of the existing contracts and *(b)* after a period of inactivity with his Department in each of the past four years. [196951]

Mrs. McGuire: Two organisations were awarded new contracts at the culmination of their existing contract:

Group 4—Security: contract awarded in February 2004

Serco—Cleaning: contract awarded in March 2002

No new contracts have been awarded to organisations after a period of inactivity.

Pete Wishart: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland which non-accounting and non-information technology external organisations have won new contracts with his Department in each of the past three years. [196952]

Mrs. McGuire: The following new contracts have been awarded in each of the past three years:

	Company	*Function*
2001–02	Nil	—
2002–03	Tradition	Cleaning
2003–04	Nil	—

No new contracts have been awarded in the current financial year.

Departmental IT

Brian White: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what percentage of the Department's *(a)* implemented and *(b)* planned computer systems use open source software; and what plans are in place to raise this level. [195664]

Mrs. McGuire: The Scotland Office has no Open Source Software (OSS) systems in operation at present.

The procurement of software solutions follows the 'level playing field' Government OSS Policy. This does not require the raising of levels of OSS usage in Government, rather that Government considers OSS solutions alongside proprietary ones in IT procurements; and that contracts should be awarded on a value for money, case-by-case basis. Version 2 of this policy was published on 28 October 2004 and can be viewed at www.govtalk.gov.uk

WALES

Asylum Seekers

Mrs. Spelman: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales (1) if he will list local authority net current expenditure on asylum seekers for each local authority in Wales in each year since 1991–92; [197228]

(2) if he will make a statement on how local authorities in Wales are compensated for expenditure on asylum. [197229]

Mr. Browne: I have been asked to reply.

The information is not available in the format requested. The Home Office took responsibility for payment of grants to local authorities supporting asylum seekers on 1 April 1999. Local authorities are able to claim grant from the Home Office within specified criteria to meet their costs of supporting asylum seekers.

Call Centres

Mr. Wiggin: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what assessment he has made of the effects on the Welsh economy of companies moving call centres from Wales; and what discussions he has had on this with Ministers in the Welsh Assembly. [197812]

Mr. Touhig: The Welsh economy remains in a healthy state with the employment rate at an historically high level and unemployment at its lowest for a generation. Around 24,000 people are employed in call centres in Wales, representing one of the largest employment groups in Wales. To help improve the competitive position of this important sector, the Wales Contact Centre Forum has been established with Assembly funding.

Departmental Contracts

Pete Wishart: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales if he will list the 30 largest contracts awarded by his Department between *(a)* May 2001 and April 2002, *(b)* May 2002 and April 2003, *(c)* May 2003 and April 2004, *(d)* May 2004, and the latest date for which figures are available, indicating in each case (i) the values of the contracts and (ii) the companies with which the contracts were placed. [196937]

Mr. Touhig: The Wales Office has no executive functions. The National Assembly for Wales provided support service functions to the Wales Office until 31 March 2004, and DCA has provided these services since then. Accordingly, up to 31 March 2004 the Assembly awarded any required contracts on behalf of the Wales Office, and since then, DCA has done so. These contracts have been for works such as office cleaning, maintenance and minor building works.

Pete Wishart: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales which non-accounting and non-information technology external organisations which previously held contracts with his Department *(a)* won new contracts at the culmination of the existing contracts and *(b)* won new contracts after a period of inactivity with his Department in each of the past four years. [196938]

Mr. Touhig: The Wales Office has no executive functions. The National Assembly for Wales provided support service functions to the Wales Office until 31 March 2004, and DCA has provided these services since then. Accordingly, up to 31 March 2004 the Assembly awarded any required contracts on behalf of the Wales Office, and since, the DCA has done so. These contracts have been for work such as office cleaning, maintenance and minor building works.

Pete Wishart: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales which non-accounting and non-information technology external organisations have won new contracts with his Department in each of the past three years. [196939]

Mr. Touhig: The Wales Office has no executive functions. The National Assembly for Wales provided support service functions to the Wales Office until 31 March 2004, and DCA has provided these services since then. Accordingly, up to 31 March 2004 the Assembly awarded any required contracts on behalf of the Wales Office, and since the, DCA has done so. These contracts have been for work such as office cleaning, maintenance and minor building works.

Equine Passports

Mr. Llwyd: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what discussions he has had with colleagues in the Department of the Environment, Food and Rural Affairs on equine passports and the effect of the regulation on the population of wild Welsh cob ponies; and if he will make a statement. [195730]

Mr. Touhig: My right hon. Friend and I have regular discussions with ministerial colleagues in the Department of the Environment, Food and Rural Affairs.

Implementation of the European Commission Decision on passports for equines is a matter for Defra in England. In Wales, this Decision will be implemented by the National Assembly for Wales.

I am advised that the ponies living on the hills and commons in Wales are semi-feral and are owned by individuals. It will be the responsibility of owners to ensure that they hold a passport for each of their ponies.

EU Maps

Mr. Wiggin: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales if he will make representations to the European Commission on ensuring that Wales is included in all relevant maps produced by the Commission. [197830]

Mr. Touhig: Wales Office Ministers, in our dealings with the European Commission, always ensure that European legislation and policies reflect the needs of Wales, as evidenced by the fact that Wales is currently benefiting from the largest ever package of support under the European Structural Funds Programme.

Public Relations (Expenditure)

Mr. Rosindell: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales how much money his Department has spent on public relations in each of the last three years; and how much is projected to be spent in each of the next three years. [197987]

Mr. Touhig: The Wales Office runs no publicity campaigns and hence has spent nothing on public relations in the last three years. This is also expected to be the case in the next three years.

St. David's Day

Mr. Rosindell: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what discussions he has had with the United States Administration regarding next year's St. David's Day celebrations. [197988]

Mr. Touhig: None. The former US ambassador has generously hosted a St. David's Day reception in London, which has been very well received since its inception.

Wales Office

Lembit Öpik: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what changes in expenditure led to the changes in the total cost of the Wales Office between April 1999 and April 2004; and if he will make a statement. [196842]

Mr. Touhig: Detailed information about the cost of the Office since 1999 can be found in the Wales Office Annual Report 2004 (Cm 6228).

HOUSE OF COMMONS COMMISSION

Computer Workstations

Mike Gapes: To ask the hon. Member for Roxburgh and Berwickshire, representing the House of Commons Commission how many computer workstations for staff there were in the Serjeant at Arms Department in each of the last three years for which figures are available. [198758]

Sir Archy Kirkwood: Departmental records show that at the end of the 2003–04 financial year the Serjeant at Arms Department had 379 personal computers and 45 laptops. These figures exclude the number of personal computers and laptops used in the Parliamentary Communications Directorate (PCD) which is the main IT Directorate for both Houses of Parliament. Due to the nature of their work, some PCD staff have more than one personal computer or laptop and others are not allocated to specific individuals since they are either shared or used for system administration, management and testing purposes. Figures for years prior to 2003–04 are unavailable.

Mr. Hogg: To ask the hon. Member for Roxburgh and Berwickshire, representing the House of Commons Commission what cost benefit analysis has been carried out on the use of computer workstations by staff in the Library of the House. [198398]

Sir Archy Kirkwood: Staff of the House of Commons Library have relied on the use of computer workstations since the introduction of on-line information retrieval systems in the late 1970s. Personal computers are now essential to all aspects of the work of Library staff, including information retrieval, preparation of written and on-line material for Library users, and for communicating with Library users as well as colleagues inside and outside Parliament. The Library's investment in the development and use of IS/IT systems is subject to formal appraisal.

A recent study of computer desktops in all House of Commons departments recommended that their life could be extended from three years to four years and the Board of Management has accepted this recommendation. Future spending on IT desktop equipment will reflect this decision.

Mr. Key: To ask the hon. Member for Roxburgh and Berwickshire, representing the House of Commons Commission what cost-benefit analysis has been carried out on the use of computer workstations by staff in the Finance and Administration Department. [198492]

Sir Archy Kirkwood: Computer workstations are a vital part of the work of staff of the Department of Finance and Administration in connection with electronic processing, storage and retrieval of data on the House Administrative Information System (HAIS). This forms the core of the House's financial and human resource management, running payments, payroll and producing management accounts, for example.

A recent study of computer desktops in all House of Commons departments recommended that their life could be extended from three years to four years and the Board of Management has accepted this recommendation. Future spending on IT desktop equipment will reflect this decision.

Mr. Amess: To ask the hon. Member for Roxburgh and Berwickshire, representing the House of Commons Commission whether value for money studies are planned in respect of computer workstation procurement for the use of staff of the House. [198829]

Sir Archy Kirkwood: Personal computers and other IT equipment are currently purchased using one of two Government procurement frameworks which have been prepared to ensure value for money. As part of our plans for the future renewal of IT equipment, the House recently began an EU procurement project for the provision of computers to Members, their staff and staff of the House, to ensure that value for money continues to be achieved. Only those staff of the House requiring computer access to undertake their work are provided with one.

Department of Finance and Administration

Mr. Hogg: To ask the hon. Member for Roxburgh and Berwickshire, representing the House of Commons Commission how many staff in the Department of Finance and Administration work from home. [198396]

Sir Archy Kirkwood: The Department of Finance and Administration has seven members of staff whose working arrangements involve an element of working from home, under flexible working arrangements introduced from 6 April 2003 under the Employment Act 2002. No staff work from home full-time, as most tasks involve handling confidential information and/or providing services to those based on the Parliamentary Estate.

Peter Bottomley: To ask the hon. Member for Roxburgh and Berwickshire, representing the House of Commons Commission what plans there are to relocate staff in the Finance and Administration Department outside London. [198700]

Sir Archy Kirkwood: The Commission has no plans to relocate the Department of Finance and Administration outside London. Such a move would inconvenience those who rely on the services provided by the Department, including Members and their staff.

Mr. Pound: To ask the hon. Member for Roxburgh and Berwickshire, representing the House of Commons Commission how many computer workstations for staff there were in the Finance and Administration Department in each of the last three years for which figures are available. [198830]

Sir Archy Kirkwood: 207 computer workstations are currently in use by the Department of Finance and Administration: the figures in each of the two previous years are not readily available but will have been similar. This includes workstations for full-time and part-time staff based in the Department's offices, and additional workstations for training, development projects, contractors, auditors and the trade union office.

Mr. Amess: To ask the hon. Member for Roxburgh and Berwickshire, representing the House of Commons Commission if he will make an estimate of the potential savings of relocating staff in the Finance and Administration Department outside London. [198831]

Sir Archy Kirkwood: There are too many variables to be able to make a realistic estimate of the potential savings of relocating staff in the Department outside London; costs, such as loss of staff, recruitment of new staff and travel costs, and savings would depend heavily on the location. The House of Commons Accommodation Strategy includes an assessment of occupancy by administrative departments of space on the parliamentary estate, and usage of office space is kept under review.

Mike Gapes: To ask the hon. Member for Roxburgh and Berwickshire, representing the House of Commons Commission how many staff were employed in the Finance and Administration Department and its predecessor in *(a)* 1974, *(b)* 2000 and *(c)* at the latest date for which figures are available. [198759]

Sir Archy Kirkwood: Numbers of staff employed in the Department of Finance and Administration have been as follows:

1979[1]	60 (complement)
2000	131 (complement)
2004	147 (average full-time equivalent)

[1] No published data is available before this date. This figure is taken from the first Annual Report of the Commission, and refers to the then Administration Department.

Department of the Clerk

Peter Bottomley: To ask the hon. Member for Roxburgh and Berwickshire, representing the House of Commons Commission how many staff in the Department of the Clerk of the House were directly recruited from the private sector. [198701]

Sir Archy Kirkwood: No records are kept of the previous employment of staff of the Department. Staff are recruited through open competition and national advertisement. Recruitment of committee specialists, for example, who typically serve from two to four years, reflects diverse experience and backgrounds, with such staff coming from the academic, public service, voluntary and private sectors.

Mr. Pound: To ask the hon. Member for Roxburgh and Berwickshire, representing the House of Commons Commission how many staff were employed in the Clerk's Department in *(a)* 1974, *(b)* 2000 and *(c)* at the latest date for which figures are available. [198732]

Sir Archy Kirkwood: Numbers of staff employed in the Department of the Clerk of the House have been as follows:

	Number of staff
1979[1]	[2,3]137
2000	[3]272
2004	[4]311

[1] No published data is available before this date. This figure is taken from the first Annual Report of the Commission.

[2] Includes 28 staff in the Vote and Sales Office, at that time part of the Library, but since transferred to the Department of the Clerk of the House.

[3] Complement

[4] Average full-time equivalent

Mr. Amess: To ask the hon. Member for Roxburgh and Berwickshire, representing the House of Commons Commission whether an assessment has been made of the potential for hot desking in the Clerks' Department. [198832]

Sir Archy Kirkwood: The pattern and nature of work activity in the Clerk's Department does not generally lend itself to hot desking. In those areas of activity where a hot desking style of working is appropriate, some provision is already made.

Dame Marion Roe: To ask the hon. Member for Roxburgh and Berwickshire, representing the House of Commons Commission how many and what proportion of staff in the Clerk's Department work from home. [198424]

Sir Archy Kirkwood: Tasks carried out by members of the Department normally require presence on the estate: as staff of the House of Commons Service, they are in the business of providing corporate services to all Members and to the House as a whole. No staff of the Department are employed on the basis of home-working. Staff may occasionally work at home on particular tasks, such as drafting.

Department of the Serjeant at Arms

Mr. Hogg: To ask the hon. Member for Roxburgh and Berwickshire, representing the House of Commons Commission how many staff in the Department of the Serjeant at Arms work from home. [198397]

Sir Archy Kirkwood: Some staff work from home on occasional days on particular tasks or by local agreement, with remote access to the parliamentary network. Tasks carried out by members of the Serjeant at Arms Department normally require a presence on the estate; as staff of the House of Commons Service, they provide corporate services to all Members and to the House as a whole.

INTERNATIONAL DEVELOPMENT

Developing Countries

Mr. David Stewart: To ask the Secretary of State for International Development what assessment he makes of the role of public services privatisation conditionalities in the provision of aid to developing countries; and if he will make a statement. [198055]

Mr. Gareth Thomas: The UK has recently published a draft policy paper for consultation on the issue of aid conditionality, "Partnerships for poverty reduction: changing aid conditionality." This paper (produced jointly by DFID, HM Treasury, and the Foreign and Commonwealth Office) makes a commitment to reducing the burden of conditionality while recognising the continuing relevance of conditions. After a period of consultation, DFID plans to finalise this policy statement in the first quarter of 2005.

DFID supports a range of reforms to improve the way that public money is spent and accounted for, and the way that public services are provided, especially to poor people. We recognise the sensitivity and contested nature of many policy reforms, including the privatisation of public services. This highlights the need for careful country-specific analysis to ensure that reforms are appropriately designed, as well as strong country ownership of any such initiative. DFID's draft policy suggests that in future we should only support reforms where partner governments have had space to debate—including where appropriate in Parliament—the full range of policy options, and have made their own decision informed by clear evidence of the benefits to poor people. As the UK policy paper makes clear, aid terms and conditions must support, not "buy" reform.

To improve the quality of policy design and implementation around issues such as privatisation, DFID continues to press for increased use of analytical tools such as Poverty and Social Impact Assessment (PSIA). By mid-2004 some 150 PSIA activities were being carried out. The results of this work are already indicating the need for a more careful use of policies such as privatisation: both in the nature of the reform of organisations, and in the need to ensure that the social protection functions of these organisations are taken into account. DFID recognises that there is a need to increase the number, and to improve the quality of PSIA, and to ensure that the results of PSIA are used effectively in the policy process. The World Bank has committed to more careful consideration of the significant distributional consequences of policies that they support. This will include greater use of PSIA to inform the policy choice. The Bank has also committed to report at the next annual meetings in 2005 on progress in the use of PSIA.

Iraq

Mr. Hayes: To ask the Secretary of State for International Development what steps he has taken to encourage partner governments operating in Iraq to employ more local contractors. [197910]

Mr. Gareth Thomas: DFID has regular contact with other donors operating in Iraq, through the Iraqi Interim Government's donor co-ordination mechanisms, meetings of the Donor Committee of the International Reconstruction Fund Facility for Iraq, monthly teleconferences with major donors and direct contacts with other donors in Baghdad, Basra, Amman and elsewhere. DFID technical experts work closely to support the work of the US Project Contracting Office in south-eastern Iraq. Through all these contacts, DIFD stresses the importance of Iraqi leadership of the reconstruction process, and the benefits of employing Iraqi contractors to implement programmes where appropriate and feasible.

Mr. Hayes: To ask the Secretary of State for International Development what representations he has received regarding delays in fulfilling contracts in Iraq due to operating restrictions under health and safety legislation; what his policy is in this regard; and if he will make a statement on the quantity of potable drinking water delivered to Basra in this context. [197917]

Mr. Gareth Thomas: DFID is not aware of any representations made about delays in fulfilling contracts in Iraq due to operating restrictions under health and safety legislation.

Individuals and consultancy organisations contracted by DFID to work in Iraq are responsible for their own well-being and security arrangements. They are strongly advised to follow the same rules and procedures as DFID does for its own staff. This includes detailed security briefings prior to departure and upon arrival, the provision of body armour, and hostile environment training. DFID will take all reasonable steps to ensure that consultants are provided with secure accommodation in Iraq, and will provide them with suitable transport and close protection. DFID also aims to provide practical assistance on request.

A recent survey in April/May 2004, indicated that in the Basra Governorate, 97 per cent. of households have access to safe drinking water supplies but for 22 per cent. of households this access is unstable. This compares with national average figures of 91 per cent. and 30 per cent. respectively.

Mr. Hayes: To ask the Secretary of State for International Development what study his Department has made of whether extra costs have been incurred in Iraq by donor countries through employment of non-local workers; and whether workers employed locally by UK and EU contractors are subject to European Union Health and Safety regulations. [197967]

Mr. Gareth Thomas: DFID has not undertaken an assessment of whether other donor countries have incurred extra costs through the employment by donors of non-local workers in Iraq. DFID does, however, encourage other donors and contractors to employ Iraqis to help implement programmes where appropriate and feasible.

Local law and employment regulations normally take precedence over international regulations with regard to workers employed locally by the UK and EU contractors. Most international companies apply a corporate code, which tends to reflect EU/US standards of health and safety.

Llew Smith: To ask the Secretary of State for International Development what assistance he proposes to offer to the interim Iraqi Government to restore the *(a)* water, *(b)* sewage, *(c)* power and *(d)* telephone infrastructure, following recent military action against Falluja. [198012]

Mr. Gareth Thomas: The Interim Iraqi Government (IIG) is leading on reconstruction work in Falluja following the recent military action. A ministerial level co-ordinator has been appointed and significant funds from the Iraqi Government budget have already been set aside for this work. An Iraqi Ministry of Health assessment team visited Falluja hospital on 11 November and further assessments are planned, security permitting. The IIG is being supported by the Multi-National Force-Iraq, which also has considerable resources for immediate post-conflict reconstruction work including clearing rubble and the restoration of water, sewerage and electricity services.

DFID is in close contact with the Interim Iraqi Government and is ready to respond positively to requests from them for help or advice. DFID is also keen to see independent assessments of the situation once it is safe for agencies to enter Falluja.

Ivory Coast

Mr. Drew: To ask the Secretary of State for International Development what contribution the UK is making to the humanitarian needs of the people of the Ivory Coast. [198320]

Mr. Gareth Thomas: During 2004, DFID has provided £1.55 million for the following humanitarian assistance in Cote d'Ivoire:

£500,000 to the International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC) for protection and tracing activities, water and sanitation, and basic health services;

£500,000 to the United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF) for basic healthcare and immunisation activities;

£300,000 to Medecins Sans Frontieres—Holland (MSF-H) for support to both primary and secondary healthcare;

£250,000 to the UN Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA) for regional coordination of humanitarian activities.

DFID is in close contact with agencies working in Cote d'Ivoire. Their current concerns are principally for the security of their staff. DFID will consider any proposals they put to us as the situation develops.

Sudan

Mr. Drew: To ask the Secretary of State for International Development what assessment he has made of the condition of refugees from Sudan, resident in Chad, with particular reference to *(a)* security and *(b)* access to water and sanitation. [198319]

Mr. Gareth Thomas: The UN estimates that there are approximately 200,000 Sudanese refugees in and around 11 camps within eastern Chad. The UN High Commission for Refugees (UNHCR) reports that conditions for these refugees in and around these camps continue to improve, and that the security situation is relatively calm. Security around the camps has recently been reinforced by the deployment of gendarmes from Chad. The UNHCR has complemented this deployment by providing appropriate training.

Access to water remains a problem for some refugees and host communities particularly in the north-eastern camps. In October, the UNHCR and the World Food Programme (WFP) concluded that the nutritional health of Sudanese refugees in eastern Chad has stabilised and that malnutrition levels among refugee children have declined since the start of a supplementary feeding programme in August, which DFID is supporting.

Since September 2003, DFID has committed and spent over £8.5 million to the UNHCR, the WFP, the WHO, and NGOs working in Chad for a variety of programmes. In addition, we have agreed over £1 million for provision of water and sanitation in the north-east of Chad.

ACP-EU Water Facility

Mr. Tynan: To ask the Secretary of State for International Development what his policy is in respect of the use of funds from the ACP-EU Water Facility to fund or support the *(a)* privatisation of water facilities and *(b)* private sector water projects. [197571]

Mr. Gareth Thomas: The ACP-EU Water Facility is part of the 9th European Development Fund (EDF) and is managed by the European Commission. The EDF has specific rules about how its funds can be used, in particular how the private sector can use or benefit from such funds and the need for transparent public procurement. The ACP-EU Water Facility supports pro-poor, country supported initiatives to improve water and sanitation services and manage water resources. The funds for the ACP-EU Water Facility are to be used for increasing access to water and sanitation by the poor in Africa, the Caribbean and the Pacific.

The first call for proposals was issued on 12 November, and can be accessed through www.euwi.net or http://europa.eu.int/comm/europeaid/cgi/frame12.pl, and will provide further detailed information on how it can and cannot be used for the involvement of the private sector.

Mr. Tynan: To ask the Secretary of State for International Development what proposals are being *(a)* assessed and *(b)* discussed in respect of spending funds remaining in the ACP-EU Water Facility budget. [197573]

Mr. Gareth Thomas: The preparation of the ACP-EU Water Facility by the European Commission as part of the 9th European Development Fund (EDF) has involved consultation with member states, NGOs and other interested parties. The EDF has specific rules about how its funds can be used, which have influenced the mechanisms elaborated for spending the ACP-EU Water Facility funds. The first call for proposals is currently being undertaken. Detailed information on how the funds can be spent is available on www.euwi.net or http://europa.eu.int/comm/europeaid/cgi/frame12.pl. It is too early to know the details of any specific proposals.

Zimbabwe

Mr. Wiggin: To ask the Secretary of State for International Development what measures he has proposed to alleviate the humanitarian situation in Zimbabwe. [197805]

Mr. Gareth Thomas: In 2003–04, DFID provided £25 million for humanitarian programmes, under the auspices of the Consolidated Humanitarian Action Plan co-ordinated by the United Nations. The Government of Zimbabwe have declared that the country will not need international food aid in the period up to the next grain harvest. However, independent surveys do not support the Government's assessment that Zimbabwe enjoyed a bumper harvest this year. Although recent nutritional surveys by non-governmental organisations do not indicate a current crisis, food prices appear to be escalating in some parts of Zimbabwe, pointing to the possibility of food insecurity in coming months. Donors remain concerned and will continue to the monitor the situation closely.

While there is no apparent need for general food distribution at this time, DFID continues to provide funds to international NGO's and the UN to provide direct help targeted at approximately 1.5 million of the poorest and most vulnerable people in Zimbabwe. This Protracted Relief Programme, costing £18 million over the next two years, will include provision of seed, fertilisers and food (particularly to AIDS affected households).

CULTURE, MEDIA AND SPORT

Compact Advocacy Programme

Mr. Sanders: To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport if she will make a statement on the Compact Advocacy Programme. [197859]

Estelle Morris: The Compact Advocacy Programme, carries out good work in supporting and offering advice to voluntary organisations on using the Compact in their dealings with Government, and helping them where they think the Compact has not been implemented.

Mr. Sanders: To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport (1) if she will publish her response to the Compact Advocacy Programme's criticisms of the merger of the Community Fund and the New Opportunities Fund; [R] [197860]

(2) if she will publish her response to the recommendations of the Compact Advocacy Programme as they relate to her departmental responsibilities. [R] [197861]

Estelle Morris: We will learn from the recent Compact Advocacy Programme report, but we do not intend to publish a response to it. The Compact is important for DCMS. We value and support third sector initiative and volunteering, and a high proportion of our expenditure programmes goes to support voluntary sector activity. We are disappointed that the report has little to say about the many areas in which there has been fruitful cooperation and good practice.

English Heritage

Tim Loughton: To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport what her plans are for long-term funding for English Heritage. [198421]

Mr. Caborn: No decisions have yet been taken within DCMS on individual funding allocations following the 2004 Spending Review.

Football Stadia Improvement Fund

Mr. Grogan: To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport how much money has been granted by the Football Foundation in total under the Football Stadia Improvement Fund; how much each grant was worth; and what the name of the recipient was in each case. [198785]

Mr. Caborn: The Football Foundation's non-charitable arm The Football Stadia Improvement Fund (FSIF) provides grant aid to clubs in the Football League, the Conference and the National League system, that wish to improve their facilities for players, officials and for spectators.

£70 million has been invested by the Football Stadia Improvement Fund, in projects worth more than £100 million in the non-league and professional game.

In total 732 projects have received grants and there are a further 49 projects currently under consideration.

The Government monitors the decisions of the Football Stadia Improvement Fund and the Football Foundation through their representative on the Boards of these bodies. The annual accounts of the Fund and the Football Foundation are subject to internal and external audit, and are submitted to the Audit Commission.

Details of all stadium improvement grants made to individual clubs by the Fund together with details of all grants made since July 2000 by the Football Foundation from its grass roots and community/education funds, are deposited regularly in the Library of the House.

This information is also published in the Football Stadia Improvement Fund Annual Reports which can be accessed via www.footballfoundation.org.uk.

Gambling Bill (Hospice Lotteries)

Mr. Jenkins: To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport what impact assessment she has carried out on the implications of the Gambling Bill for society lotteries, with particular reference to lotteries run by the hospice movement. [197699]

Mr. Caborn: I refer my hon. Friend to chapter 7 of the Regulatory Impact Assessment (RIA) published with the Bill. Copies of the RIA were deposited in the Libraries of both Houses on 18 October 2004.

Listed Buildings

Tim Loughton: To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport if she will make a statement on plans to merge bodies that manage, fund and police the protection of listed buildings and sites. [198420]

Mr. Caborn: There are no plans to merge any of the bodies that manage, fund and police the protection of listed buildings and sites.

Lottery Funding/Grant Bodies

Paul Farrelly: To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport what projects have benefited from *(a)* the New Opportunities Fund, *(b)* the Community Fund and *(c)* other National Lottery funding sources in Newcastle-under-Lyme in each year since 1997; and how much each project received. [198688]

Estelle Morris: 162 projects have benefited from Lottery money in Newcastle-under-Lyme since 1997. I am arranging for a list giving their names and the value of each award received to be placed in the Libraries of both Houses.

This information is freely available from the Department's searchable Lottery award database at www.lottery.culture.gsi.gov.uk, which uses information supplied by the Lottery distributors.

Mr. Sanders: To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport if she will make a statement on the merger of the Community Fund and the New Opportunities Fund. [197858]

Estelle Morris: The New Opportunities Fund and the Community Fund have undergone an administrative merger and are now operating as the Big Lottery Fund. We intend to bring forward legislation to establish one new body which will replace the two existing Funds and the Millennium Commission and have responsibility for distributing out half the money from good causes from the National Lottery. A public consultation is currently taking place which will be used to help determine the direction and future funding policy of the Big Lottery Fund.

Video Games

Tim Loughton: To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport what recent discussions she has held with *(a)* manufacturers, *(b)* distributers and *(c)* retailers of violent video games about accessibility to such games by children. [197978]

Estelle Morris: DCMS officials have had discussions with ELSPA, the video games industry trade association, and with the Video Standards Council, about recent concerns relating to violent video games. I understand that both these bodies have expressed a willingness to consider what might be done to help ensure that the relevant provisions of the Video Recordings Act 1984 are complied with, thus restricting access to these games to people of the legally specified age.

Tim Loughton: To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport what proposals she has for restricting the availability to minors of video and computer games containing gross violence towards humans. [198423]

Estelle Morris: I refer the hon. Member to the answer I gave to my hon. Friend the Member for Leicester East (Keith Vaz) on 21 October, *Official Report*, columns 992–93W.

Tim Loughton: To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport how many successful prosecutions have been made since 1997 under the Video Recordings Act 1984 regarding video and computer games. [198422]

Estelle Morris: The number of successful prosecutions brought under the Video Records Act 1984 in 2002 (the latest year for which figures are available) was 139. However, it is not possible to identify separately those offences which relate to computer games.

Tim Loughton: To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport what plans she has to redefine the criteria for classification of violent video games. [198624]

Estelle Morris: Under the Video Recordings Act 1984, the British Board of Film Classification (BBFC) is the body designated to classify those video games that come within the scope of the Act, including those which depict, to any significant extent, acts of gross violence towards humans or animals. The BBFC has established guidelines, which it uses in carrying out its duty under the Act. These guidelines take into account the law and public opinion and are revised periodically to ensure that they continue to reflect public concerns. Games that are exempted from the Act are rated under the voluntary PEGI industry scheme. The Government have no plans to amend the Video Recording Act 1984.

DEFENCE

Combat Clothing

Mr. Watts: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what company has won the contract to supply combat clothing. [195599]

Mr. Ingram: It is assumed that my hon. Friend is referring to Contract DC4BES/1002 for cut and sewn garments, which has been awarded to Cooneen Watts & Stone Ltd.

Mr. Watts: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence where the company who won the contract to supply combat clothing is based. [195600]

Mr. Ingram: In view of his earlier Questions tabled on this day, it is assumed my hon. Friend is referring to Contract DC4BES/1002 for cut and sewn garments which has been awarded to Cooneen Watts & Stone Ltd., a United Kingdom company based in Northern Ireland.

Mr. Pike: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence how many *(a)* UK-based and *(b)* overseas companies his Department contract with for the production of (i) combat, (ii) operational and (iii) other clothing; how many it contracted with (A) five, (B) 10 and *(c)* 20 years ago; and if he will make a statement. [197663]

Mr. Ingram: Records are not maintained for contracts placed for clothing over the last 10 and 20 years. Combat and operational descriptions cover the same items and figures are provided as one category; footwear is separated, but could be added into "Other" category. The following table shows the available information held for the last five years:

	Number of clothing contractors	*5 years*
UK	Combat and Operational	109
	Other[1]	199
	Footwear[2]	25
Overseas	Combat and Operational	9
	Other[3]	14
	Footwear	6

[1] 26 of this total also supply combat and operational clothing.

[2] 3 of this total also supply to combat and operational clothing

[3] 4 of these contractors also supply to combat and operational clothing and 2 other types.

Defence Crisis Management Organisation

Mr. Keith Simpson: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will place in the Library the minutes of the meetings of the Defence Crisis Management Organisation. [198425]

Mr. Hoon: The Defence Crisis Management Organisation comprises elements of Ministry of Defence Central Staff, the Permanent Joint Headquarters, single-Service front-line commands and other relevant Departments. Where records of meetings are produced they fall under Exemption 1 (Defence, security and international relations) of the Code of Practice on Access to Government Information.

Mr. Keith Simpson: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence who the members of the Defence Crisis Management Organisation are; and what positions they hold in the Organisation. [198426]

Mr. Hoon: The Defence Crisis Management Organisation comprises both civilian and military personnel and is made up of elements of Ministry of Defence Central Staff, the Permanent Joint Headquarters, single-Service front-line commands and other relevant Departments. It meets in a variety of configurations, and participation is not defined by positions held in the Organisation. We do not release names of officials under Exemption 12 of the Code of Practice on access to Government Information (privacy of an individual).

Fishery Protection

Syd Rapson: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence whether it is his policy that the Royal Navy should continue to provide the fishery protection service in the waters around England and Wales once the Department's existing agreement with the Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs comes to an end. [198430]

Mr. Ingram: The requirement for a fishery protection service beyond 2008 has yet to be discussed in detail with the Department of the Environment, Food and Rural Affairs.

Iraq

Keith Vaz: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence how many reservists have been called up for duty in Iraq; and what percentage of the reserve force this represents. [196581]

Mr. Ingram: There have been some 10,840 successful mobilisations for service in Iraq. This figure includes members of the Volunteer Reserve, the Regular Reserve and Sponsored Reserves. As some individuals have been mobilised for service in Iraq more than once, it is not possible to derive from this figure the number or percentage of the reserve forces that have deployed.

Mr. Drew: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what assessment he has made of the numbers and condition of conventional and improvised weaponry held by insurrectionist forces in Iraq. [196586]

Mr. Ingram *[holding answer 8 November 2004]*: Insurrectionist forces in Iraq hold a wide variety of improvised and conventional weaponry, including improvised explosive devices and various light weapons. Age, maintenance and serviceability of such weapons varies greatly.

Missile Defence

Mr. Hancock: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what recent discussions he has held with *(a)* the US Administration and *(b)* others concerning the placing of US interceptor batteries in (i) the UK and (ii) Europe; and if he will make a statement. [190184]

Mr. Hoon: None.

Mr. Hancock: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence how much has been spent on missile defence in each of the last three years; and what the spending plans are for future years. [190185]

Mr. Hoon: For the period up to 31 March 2004 I refer the hon. Member to the reply I gave on 19 January 2004, *Official Report*, column 920W, to the hon. Member for Hereford (Mr. Keetch). For financial year 2004–05 expenditure on research specific to ballistic missile defence technology will be in the order of £6 million. The Ministry of Defence plans to spend similar sums in the following four years.

Mr. Hancock: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will make it his policy to brief Parliament on decisions by NATO to move forward on missile defence architecture; and if he will make a statement. [190186]

Mr. Hoon: Major decisions by NATO, which would include decisions on the acquisition of missile defences, are published in the form of communiques issued by meetings of Heads of State and Government and Ministers of Foreign Affairs and Defence. Such decisions are open to parliamentary scrutiny and debate in the normal way, and any significant decision affecting the United Kingdom would be notified to Parliament.

Mr. Hancock: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what plans he has to allow the US to base interceptor batteries in the UK; and if he will make a statement. [191348]

Mr. Hoon: I refer the hon. Member to the answer I gave on 28 October 2004, *Official Report*, column 1372W, to the right hon. and learned Member for North-East Fife (Sir Menzies Campbell).

Alan Simpson: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence whether parliamentary approval is required before a proposal for the siting of US interceptor missiles in the UK can be authorised. [198036]

Mr. Hoon: Any decision on the siting of interceptor missiles in the United Kingdom would be open to scrutiny and debate in the normal way. Specific parliamentary approval would not be required.

Naval Navigational Aids

John Thurso: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence (1) what the outcome was of the Assessment Phase undertaken for a long-term public/private partnership or private finance initiative acquisition programme for the future provision of marine services; [197354]

(2) what research he has commissioned into the provision of naval navigational aids for *(a)* military ports and *(b)* other Ministry of Defence maritime installations in the UK; [197351]

(3) what discussions he has had with *(a)* other Departments and *(b)* Trinity House on the provision of naval navigational aids by providers other than his Department; [197352]

(4) what discussions he has had with *(a)* public and *(b)* private sector bodies on the provision of navigational aids for military ports by providers outside the UK; [197353]

(5) what plans he has to review the provision of navigational aids at naval installations in UK waters. [197350]

Mr. Ingram: The Assessment Phase for the future provision of marine services has not yet concluded. Discussions on the provision of naval navigational aids has centred on the UK companies. Two proposals from UK registered bidders, plus one from the MOD's Royal Maritime Auxiliary Service (RMAS) who, together with Serco Denholm, are responsible for the current services through a Government Owned-Contractor Operated (GOCO) arrangement, are due by the end of the year. It is planned that the design authority for navigational buoys, as well as the supply of related mooring materials, will be transferred to the successful bidder who will have commissioned their own research to determine a solution that offers best value for money. Provision for this forms part of the range of services included in the Invitation to Negotiate. Separate discussions have been held with the General Lighthouse Authorities (Trinity House, Northern Lights and Irish Lights), non-departmental public bodies sponsored by the DfT, to determine whether they could take over the maintenance and upkeep of navigational buoys but it was concluded that such an arrangement offered little benefit to the MOD.

Sustainable Energy (CHP Provisions) Order

Mr. Stunell: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what measures his Department *(a)* has undertaken and *(b)* plans to undertake to comply with the Sustainable Energy (CHP Provisions) Order 2003. [194424]

Mr. Caplin: The Ministry of Defence is pursuing options for buying Combined Heat and Power (CHP) generated power from the electricity market. From April 2005 bids will be sought from licensed electricity suppliers that include a percentage of electricity sourced from good quality CHP. In line with Government targets, the percentage will start at 2.5 per cent. rising to 15 per cent. by 2010, subject to the market being able to supply the electricity at competitive rates.

The MOD's usage and occupation of its estate limit the options for the steady heat and power loads required to make CHP viable for self-generation. Nevertheless, the MOD intends to undertake a study, in partnership with the Carbon Trust, to examine the costs and viability of the use of on site CHP (in all its forms, sizes, and fuel types) on the Army Estate.

EDUCATION AND SKILLS

Free School Milk

Mr. Kidney: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills if he will ensure that milk is available in schools for all those pupils entitled to receive free school milk. [197780]

Mr. Stephen Twigg: There is no statutory requirement for milk to be provided in schools, but local education authorities (LEAs) and schools may decide to do so. The Government encourage LEAs and schools to make milk available for those pupils who want it. Where milk is provided, it must be made available free of charge to children eligible for free school meals.

Adoption Cases

Vera Baird: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills pursuant to the answer of 5 July 2004, *Official Report*, column 460W, on adoption cases, when the Association of Directors of Social Services survey on past family cases concerning children and expert medical evidence will be placed in the Library. [194996]

Margaret Hodge *[holding answer 2 November 2004]*: The Association of Directors of Social Services (ADSS) has now completed its survey, and I have today placed a copy of the results in the Library.

This is the second stage of the survey of family court cases concerning children and expert medical evidence, conducted by the ADSS this year following the judgment in the case of R *v.* Cannings. The first stage of the survey, the results of which are already in the Library, looked at the cases of children who were the subject of current care proceedings. Across the 130 local authorities who responded to first stage of the survey, disputed medical evidence featured, or was anticipated to feature, in only 47 out of 5,175 cases. Where the impact of this evidence was known, there was a change to the local authority's care plan in one case. The first stage of the survey did not consider children who were already the subject of a care or related order, which has been the subject of the second stage survey.

Across the 127 local authorities that responded to the second stage survey, which was conducted during July and August 2004, 28,867 children were the subject of care orders or freeing orders on 31 March 2004. 26 cases involved a serious disagreement between medical expert witnesses. Of these, five cases involved a serious disagreement between medical expert witnesses in which any doubt has been expressed about reliability of the evidence following the judgment in R *v.* Cannings. Of these five cases, the care plan remains unchanged in three cases. In one case the plan had been changed already in light of new information reviewed in 2003 and in one case further consideration of medical evidence by the court is being awaited.

The figures collected in this survey will not include any care orders which have previously been discharged through the courts on the basis that it is safe for the child to do so, quite independently of any specific review being undertaken by the local authority. Approximately 1,000 applications for discharge of current care orders are made each year, of which around 80 per cent. are granted. This survey only includes children who are currently under the care of the local authority—not cases where the care order has been discharged.

Expert witnesses' medical evidence is only one of the many factors in the complex and difficult decision-making process that surrounds the safeguarding of children through the courts. As the survey shows, very few cases where children are currently being looked after by local authorities depend on the evidence of medical expert witnesses.

The courts must have access to the best possible expert witnesses, and the Chief Medical Officer is currently leading a programme of work, expected to be completed by early 2005, to ensure the availability of competent, quality-assured medical expert resources to the family courts.

In addition, as I indicated in my statement to the House on 17 June, I am also now issuing a Local Authority Social Services Letter setting out key aspects of the recent Appeal Court cases of Re LB and Re LU, which make clear the implications of the criminal court judgment in R *v.* Cannings on family proceedings, and also details the case of Dr. Colin Paterson, currently suspended by the General Medical Council, pending an appeal, as a result of his activities as an expert witness.

Adult Literacy/Numeracy

Mr. Wiggin: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills what research his Department has commissioned regarding *(a)* adult literacy and *(b)* adult numeracy in England. [197811]

Mr. Ivan Lewis: The Department for Education and Skills (DfES) has conducted a range of research on adult literacy and numeracy in England. This includes its own in-house research and analysis activities, and also a continuous programme of research led by the DfES funded National Research and Development Centre for Adult Literacy and Numeracy (NRDC).

Research undertaken by the Department has included "The Skills for Life Survey: A national needs and impact survey of literacy, numeracy and ICT skills" (DfES, October 2003). This research provides an up-to-date assessment of the level of basic skills need for literacy, numeracy and ICT among adults aged 16–65 years old in England. A copy of this survey has been placed in the House of Commons Library.

In addition the Department is currently undertaking a longitudinal panel survey of adult basic skills learners, tracking a sample of learners and non-learners with a view to identifying the returns to basic skills learning (early findings from this study will be published in 2005). The Department has also conducted evaluations of the literacy and numeracy pathfinders that were established to test the new Skills for Life learning infrastructure. This included a survey of learners who had received training in the pathfinder areas to explore their experiences of literacy and numeracy learning. More details of DfES research are available through our website: www.dfes.gov.uk/research.

The DfES also collects regular information on the number of basic skills qualifications that are achieved and count towards the Skills for Life PSA targets. We are confident that we are on track to achieve the 2004 target of 750,000 learner achievements.

Finally, the DfES funded NRDC was created in spring 2002 to lead a continuous programme of research and development activities to ensure that implementation and future development of the Skills for Life Strategy are based firmly on evidence. The NRDC have conducted a range of research on literacy and numeracy and a series of research reports are available from their website: www.nrdc.org.uk.

Crossrail

Mr. Rosindell: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills if he will reply to the e-mail correspondence from the Romford Crossrail Action Group regarding the impact of the proposed Crossrail depot on local schools. [197490]

Mr. Stephen Twigg: Mr. Diebelius, a member of the Crossrail Action Group, sent me an e-mail on 18 October about the impact of the proposed Crossrail depot on Westlands Playing Fields in Romford. I replied to Mr. Diebelius in a letter dated 1 November. We have no record of any other correspondence from the Crossrail Action Group.

EU Committees

Angus Robertson: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills how many times during the Greek presidency of the EU the Advisory Committee on the training of *(a)* midwives, *(b)* dental practitioners and *(c)* chemists met; when and where these meetings took place; which UK Government expert was present at each meeting; what (i) technical and (ii) financial issues were raised by the UK Government expert at each meeting; what recommendations each Committee produced during that period; what actions were (A) proposed and (B) taken by (1) the EU and (2) the UK Government as a result of each Committee's recommendations; and if he will make a statement. [196099]

Mr. Hutton: I have been asked to reply.

The advisory committees on midwifery, medical, dental, nursing and pharmaceutical training were set up to advise the European Commission and member states on matters relating to the training of workers whose professions come under sectoral directives guaranteeing free movement and automatic recognition of qualifications.

The advisory committees did not meet during the Greek presidency, have not met since and are unlikely to do so again.

The advisory committees were composed of representatives from each member state drawn from the relevant profession, the education establishments and the competent authority. Government officials did not attend.

Latchmere House

Mr. Oaten: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills what the reason was for Reed Education losing the contract to provide education services at HM Prison Latchmere House; and whether there are plans to remove their contract to provide education at *(a)* HM Prison Blakenhurst and *(b)* HM Prison Brixton. [193994]

Paul Goggins: I have been asked to reply.

Reed Education provided the education services at HMP Latchmere House from 1 July 2003 to 31 August 2004 as a variation to their education contract at HMP Brixton.

When Reed were offered an extension to the Latchmere House contract for the period 1 September 2004 to 30 June 2005 agreement on prices could not be reached and the contract was ended on 30 September 2004. This was in line with Reed's own condition that 30 days notice should be given if prices could not be agreed.

There are no plans to terminate the contracts for Blakenhurst or Brixton prisons.

Learndirect

Paul Holmes: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills how many venues responsible for the delivery of Learndirect have closed in *(a)* England and *(b)* each county in each month in the past year; and if he will make a statement. [196976]

Mr. Miliband: 422 Learndirect centres closed in England between November 2003 and November 2004. Over the same period 485 new centres have opened. The following table shows closures by individual county.

Learndirect makes an important contribution to the Government's targets of widening participation and meeting employers' skills needs through its use of new technologies and e-learning. Learndirect is successfully attracting 10,000 new learners each week and Ufi is responsible for ensuring its Learndirect network of over 2,000 centres is best placed to meet their needs. I fully support its approach of closing centres which consistently fail to meet quality standards or attract sufficient learners to be viable and of opening new centres to meet new or changing demand.

	2003				*2004*			
County	*November*	*December*	*January*	*February*	*March*	*April*	*May*	*June*
Bedfordshire	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—
Blackburn with Darwen UA	—	1	—	—	—	—	—	—
Blackpool UA	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—
Brighton and Hove UA	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	1
Bristol UA	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—
Buckinghamshire	—	—	1	—	—	—	1	—
Cambridgeshire	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—
Cheshire	1	—	—	1	—	1	—	—
Cornwall	—	—	—	—	11	—	—	—
County Durham	3	2	—	—	—	1	—	—
Cumbria	6	—	1	—	1	—	—	—
Derbyshire	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—
Devon	—	—	—	—	1	—	—	—
Dorset	—	—	—	4	—	—	2	—
East Riding of Yorkshire	—	—	—	—	1	—	—	—
East Sussex	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	2
Essex	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	2
Gloucestershire	—	—	—	—	—	1	—	—
Greater London	14	8	—	—	1	6	3	1
Greater Manchester	—	—	1	—	—	—	—	—
Hampshire	2	—	—	—	—	2	—	—
Herefordshire	—	—	—	2	—	—	—	—
Hertfordshire	2	—	1	—	5	1	—	—
Isle of Wight	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—
Jersey	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—
Kent	—	—	—	—	2	1	—	—
Kingston upon Hull UA	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—
Lancashire	7	—	—	—	—	—	1	—
Leicestershire	—	—	—	—	—	—	2	—
Lincolnshire	1	—	3	—	—	—	—	1
Medway UA	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—
Merseyside	1	—	—	2	—	—	—	—
Middlesbrough UA	—	—	—	—	—	—	1	—
Milton Keynes UA	—	—	—	—	1	—	—	—
Norfolk	—	—	—	—	—	—	3	—
North Lincolnshire	—	—	—	—	1	—	—	—
North Yorkshire	1	—	—	—	—	—	—	—
Northamptonshire	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—
Northumberland	—	—	—	1	—	—	—	—
Nottinghamshire	6	—	—	—	—	—	—	—
Oxfordshire	—	—	—	—	2	—	—	—
Portsmouth UA	—	—	—	—	—	1	—	—
Reading UA	1	—	—	—	—	—	—	—
Redcar and Cleveland UA	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—
Rutland	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—
Shropshire	1	—	—	1	—	—	—	—
Slough UA	3	—	—	—	—	—	—	—
South Gloucestershire	1	—	—	—	—	—	—	—
South Yorkshire	—	—	—	1	—	1	—	—
Southampton UA	—	—	—	—	2	—	—	—
Staffordshire	—	—	—	—	1	—	—	—
Stoke on Trent UA	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—
Suffolk	—	—	2	—	—	—	—	—
Surrey	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—
Tyne and Wear	8	—	—	—	—	—	1	—
Warwickshire	—	2	—	—	—	—	—	—
West Midlands UA	—	1	1	—	—	—	1	1
West Sussex	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	3
West Yorkshire	1	—	—	1	3	—	—	2
Wiltshire	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—
Worcestershire	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—
England total	59	14	10	14	32	15	15	13

			2004			*Since*	
County	*July*	*August*	*September*	*October*	*November*	*November 2003*	*August 2004*
Bedfordshire	2	—	—	—	—	2	0
Blackburn with Darwen UA	2	—	—	—	—	3	0
Blackpool UA	—	1	—	—	—	1	1
Brighton and Hove UA	1	—	—	—	—	2	0
Bristol UA	1	—	—	—	—	1	0
Buckinghamshire	2	1	—	3	—	8	4
Cambridgeshire	—	1	—	—	—	1	1
Cheshire	3	—	—	—	—	6	0
Cornwall	4	—	—	—	—	15	0
County Durham	1	—	—	—	—	7	0

County	*July*	*August*	*2004* *September*	*October*	*November*	*Since November 2003*	*August 2004*
Cumbria	5	—	—	1	—	14	1
Derbyshire	3	—	—	—	—	3	0
Devon	1	—	—	—	—	2	0
Dorset	4	—	—	—	—	10	0
East Riding of Yorkshire	3	1	—	—	—	5	1
East Sussex	1	—	—	2	—	5	2
Essex	3	—	—	—	—	5	0
Gloucestershire	—	—	—	—	—	1	0
Greater London	12	2	1	1	1	50	5
Greater Manchester	15	—	—	—	—	16	0
Hampshire	5	—	—	1	—	10	1
Herefordshire	1	—	—	—	—	3	0
Hertfordshire	2	—	—	—	—	11	0
Isle of Wight	1	—	—	—	1	2	1
Jersey	3	—	—	—	—	3	0
Kent	3	1	—	3	—	10	4
Kingston upon Hull UA	2	—	—	—	—	2	0
Lancashire	3	2	—	—	—	13	2
Leicestershire	7	1	—	—	—	10	1
Lincolnshire	12	15	—	—	1	33	16
Medway UA	—	1	—	—	—	1	1
Merseyside	4	—	—	6	—	13	6
Middlesbrough UA	1	—	—	—	—	2	0
Milton Keynes UA	2	—	—	1	—	4	1
Norfolk	—	—	6	—	—	9	6
North Lincolnshire	2	—	—	—	—	3	0
North Yorkshire	1	3	—	—	—	5	3
Northamptonshire	2	—	1	1	—	4	2
Northumberland	1	—	—	—	—	2	0
Nottinghamshire	3	—	2	—	—	11	2
Oxfordshire	2	—	—	1	—	5	1
Portsmouth UA	3	—	—	—	—	4	0
Reading UA	1	—	—	—	—	2	0
Redcar and Cleveland UA	1	—	—	—	—	1	0
Rutland	—	1	—	—	—	1	1
Shropshire	5	—	—	—	—	7	0
Slough UA	—	—	—	—	—	3	0
South Gloucestershire	—	—	—	—	—	1	0
South Yorkshire	—	5	—	1	—	8	6
Southampton UA	—	—	—	1	—	3	1
Staffordshire	—	1	—	—	—	2	1
Stoke on Trent UA	1	—	—	—	—	1	0
Suffolk	—	—	—	—	—	2	0
Surrey	4	—	—	—	—	4	0
Tyne and Wear	1	—	—	—	—	10	0
Warwickshire	3	—	5	—	—	10	5
West Midlands UA	16	—	1	2	—	23	3
West Sussex	—	—	—	1	—	4	1
West Yorkshire	4	1	2	—	—	14	3
Wiltshire	3	—	—	—	—	3	0
Worcestershire	4	1	—	—	—	6	1
England total	166	38	18	25	3	422	84

Pupil Referral Units

Mr. Hoban: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills what percentage of excluded children, broken down by key stage, have *(a)* received education in pupil referral units and *(b)* had one-to-one home tuition in each of the last five years. [196995]

Mr. Stephen Twigg: Information on the provision made for permanently excluded pupils was first collected in March 2001 via the Education of Permanently Excluded Pupils (EPEP) Survey. There were two further updates in September 2001 and March 2002 before the survey was discontinued. However, figures from the most recent collection of this survey were incomplete and not sufficiently robust to provide a breakdown of the type of educational provision received by excluded pupils. The available information is given in the table.

Distribution of mode of provision of education for excluded pupils—England, March and September 2001

March 2001[1] *Key Stages 1*	*Key Stages 1 and 2*	*Key Stage 3*	*Key Stage 4*
PRU	40.8	45.1	39.1
Home tuition	32.3	24.0	11.0
Voluntary Sector	0.2	0.1	0.8
FE college	—	0.4	9.8
Work related	—	0.1	3.3
Mixed provision	4.3	5.6	16.7
Other provision	9.6	8.7	8.8
No provision	12.7	16.1	10.4
Total	100.0	100.0	100.0
September 2001[2]			
PRU	44.7	51.0	46.6
Home tuition	30.8	20.3	9.6
Voluntary Sector	0.0	0.8	1.5
FE college	—	0.1	12.8

Distribution of mode of provision of education for excluded pupils—England, March and September 2001

March 2001 [1] *Key Stages 1*	*Key Stages 1 and 2*	*Key Stage 3*	*Key Stage 4*
Work related	—	0.1	5.1
Mixed provision	5.1	4.8	7.5
Other provision	11.1	9.0	7.6
No provision	8.2	13.9	9.3
Total	100.0	100.0	100.0

[1] Based on replies from 144 out of 150 LEAs.

[2] Based on replies from 146 out of 150 LEAs.

Source:
EPEP survey

In 1999 the Government gained a commitment from LEAs to provide a full-time education for all permanently excluded pupils by September 2002. Findings from the EPEP survey indicated that on 30 September 2002, 143 LEAs were offering full-time education to pupils permanently excluded from school, and seven LEAs were not. Since this survey, better systems have been put in place to track pupils. Currently two LEAs are not providing full-time education for all their pupils. The Department continues to work through the Children's Services Improvement Advisers to support LEAs to sustain this commitment and provide high quality, full-time educational provision for all permanently excluded pupils.

School Meals

Tim Loughton: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills how many children of *(a)* primary and *(b)* secondary school age were eating hot school meals in the latest period for which figures are available. [197931]

Mr. Stephen Twigg: The Department for Education and Skills does not collect this information.

Tim Loughton: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills what guidance he has issued to schools to encourage *(a)* healthier option school meals and *(b)* healthier packed lunches to be brought into schools. [197932]

Mr. Stephen Twigg: We introduced regulations setting minimum nutritional standards for school lunches on 1 April 2001. They allow children to choose healthy and enjoyable school meals. We also produced guidance entitled "Healthy School Lunches" for school caterers on implementing these standards. The guidance can be viewed on the website: www.dfes.gov.uk/schoollunches.

We are taking forward a number of projects following the recent publication of the findings of the Department for Education and Skills and Food Standards Agency (FSA) evaluation of secondary school meals and to help achieve the objectives outlined within the Healthy Living Blueprint which was launched on 6 September 2004. These projects aim to improve school food and reinforce healthy-eating messages taught in the classroom. The Blueprint and supporting website can be viewed at: www.teachernet.gov.uk/healthyliving.

This Department, together with the Department of Health (DoH), is jointly funding a Food in Schools (FiS) programme. The DoH strand comprises eight pilot projects one of which addresses healthier packed lunches. Good practice identified through FiS will help schools promote a clear and consistent message about diet and nutrition.

The FSA in September 2003 provided suggestions on healthy packed lunches. This can be viewed on their website: www.food.gov.uk/news/newsarchive/2003/sep/lunchbox.

Special Advisers

Matthew Taylor: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills how many unpaid special advisers the Department has; what their names are; and which Government *(a)* bodies, *(b)* committees and *(c)* strategy groups each unpaid adviser (i) belongs to, (ii) advises and (iii) works alongside. [194054]

Mr. Charles Clarke: I refer the hon. Member to the answer given by my hon. Friend the Minister of State at the Cabinet Office on 28 October 2004, *Official Report*, column 1380W. Hannah Pawlby has replaced Lisa Tremble.

TRADE AND INDUSTRY

Advantage West Midlands

Ross Cranston: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry which projects and investments undertaken by Advantage West Midlands, including sale and leaseback, involving property and land *(a)* have incurred losses and *(b)* are projected to incur losses; and what the extent of those losses is. [198304]

Jacqui Smith: In 2003–04 Advantage West Midlands (AWM) had in excess of 50 active projects where it held an investment or interest in land and property to assemble sites, overcome market failure and bring sites back into productive use, which the private sector would otherwise neglect. As a result of these projects, AWM incurred £16.2 million of revaluation losses and £12.9 million of revaluation profits; though, since AWM was able to account for this on a portfolio basis, this produced an audited net property loss of £3.3 million. AWM is not able to provide a breakdown of losses on individual projects, as this information is commercially sensitive.

AWM values its property portfolio on an annual basis and is currently undertaking this exercise. Until this task is completed, AWM is unable to project potential revaluation losses for the current year. However, taking into account the fact that AWM now has to account for losses on an individual basis, rather than on portfolio basis, AWM has made a provision of £10 million to cover any valuation losses when they arise.

Ross Cranston: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what the *(a)* target time is and *(b)* average time actually achieved in 2003–04 was for Advantage West Midlands approving new projects (i) in general, (ii) as regional cluster projects, (iii) as regeneration zone projects, (iv) as technology corridor projects and (v) as single regeneration budget projects. [198309]

Jacqui Smith: Advantage West Midlands (AWM) has a general target of 30 working days for decisions on new, fully completed, applications; this target includes Regional Cluster projects, Regeneration Zone projects, High-Technology Corridor projects, legacy SRB projects and Selective Finance for Investment (SFI) projects. Any time taken for the applicant to provide missing or supplementary information will be added to the target time.

Land and property applications are technically more complex and demanding, require more detailed scrutiny and development, and are therefore excluded from these time scales. However in such instances the AWM works closely with the applicant to overcome any issues that may arise and cause delay to the application.

AWM is not able to give a breakdown of the average time actually achieved by type of project. However, AWM has surveyed a number of projects received in 2003–04 and has identified that this process has on average taken a period of 10 weeks, though this time includes all types of projects and also includes time taken to seek additional information from applicants.

Business Angels

Mr. Bellingham: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry how many business angel deals have been concluded through the National Business Angel Network in each year since 1998; and what the total value of the deals was. [195169]

Nigel Griffiths: The National Business Angels Network was established to act as a national conduit through which any company seeking investment could be put in touch with investors. Each business angels network was responsible for progressing any potential deals.

Mr. Bellingham: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what plans she has to promote the business angel concept. [195170]

Nigel Griffiths: We are supporting the National Business Angels Network in its objectives of promoting the concept of business angels and, working through local businesses angels networks, improving the operation of the business angels market. We also operate the Enterprise Investment Scheme to provide tax incentives to encourage business angel investment.

Business Support

Malcolm Bruce: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what provision has been made for funding the business support products of *(a)* Access to Best Business Practice and *(b)* Support to Implement Best Business Practice in the current financial year. [197248]

Nigel Griffiths: For this financial year a total of £14 million has been allocated to the "Achieving Best Practice in Your Business" theme within the DTI's business support product portfolio. We expect to spend £6 million on Access to Business Practice, and £8 million on Support to Implement Best Business practice.

Malcolm Bruce: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what provision has been made for funding the business support products of *(a)* Knowledge Transfer Networks, *(b)* Collaborative Research and Development, *(c)* Grants for Investigating an Innovative Idea, *(d)* Grants for Research and Development and *(e)* Knowledge Transfer Partnerships in the current financial year. [197249]

Nigel Griffiths: Provision for funding business support products in the current financial year (2004–05) (which includes funding for legacy schemes associated with the new products) is as follows:

	£ million
(a) Knowledge Transfer Networks	18.9
(b) Collaborative Research and Development	2.1
(c) Grant for Investigating an Innovative Idea	1
(d) Grant for Research and Development	36
(e) Knowledge Transfer Partnerships	19.2

Malcolm Bruce: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry if she will break down spending on *(a)* business support products and *(b)* administration related to Small Business Service Investment in each year since 1997. [197255]

Nigel Griffiths: The Small Business Service was formed as an executive agency of the DTI in April 2000.

The expenditure on business support products and the administration costs of the Small Business Service's Investment and SME Finance Directorate, which covers the Small Firm Loan Guarantee as well as venture capital investments, is represented as follows (staffing levels have also been included as the corresponding expenditure in 2000–01 and 2001–02 could be obtained only at disproportionate cost):

	Business support (£ million)	*Staffing*	*Administration (£ million)*
2000–01	45.8	39	n/a
2001–02	39.2	45	n/a
2002–03	74.7	47	1.5
2003–04	83.759	49	1.6

Compensation Claims

Mr. Skinner: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry how many claims for *(a)* chronic bronchitis and emphysema and *(b)* vibration white finger were concluded for the constituency of Bolsover in (i) 2000, (ii) 2001, (iii) 2002 and (iv) 2003. [197092]

Nigel Griffiths: The information is as follows:

	Settlements	
	COPD	*VWF*
2000	196	121
2001	416	322
2002	757	535
2003	1,646	898
2004	1,485	783

Note:

1. Settlements represent claims settled by payment and by denial/withdrawn.
2. Figures for 2004 reflect the position to 31 October 2004.

Counterfeiting (Pharmaceuticals)

John Robertson: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what steps her Department is taking to tackle counterfeiting in the pharmaceutical industry. [197472]

Ms Rosie Winterton: I have been asked to reply.

The Medicines and Healthcare products Regulatory Agency (MHRA) investigates all allegations of counterfeit medicines in the United Kingdom, the vast majority of which are not associated with the tightly regulated legitimate supply chain. Action, in the form of legal proceedings, is taken when appropriate.

The MHRA's inspection and enforcement division continually reviews its counterfeit strategy in order to remain proactive in this area. Some of the key initiatives are:

> The MHRA, in association with the Royal Pharmaceutical Society of Great Britain, routinely carries out market surveillance by sampling and testing 'off the shelf' medicines on the UK market for authentication. The target products for this surveillance are based on intelligence and risk assessments. To date, none of the tests has identified a counterfeit product.
>
> Due to the global nature of the problem of counterfeit medicines, the MHRA continues to liaise closely with international regulatory partners, the pharmaceutical industry and international law enforcement agencies to ensure that the tackling of counterfeiting medicines remains a prioritised and co-ordinated activity.
>
> The MHRA is actively consulting with the pharmaceutical industry and technology the providers in the area of its work on technical developments in product security, which are aimed to further safeguard the integrity of the medicines supply chain. This includes work with the National Patient Safety Agency and the NHS Patient and Supply Agency on the potential use of bar-coding medicines and blood products to increase patient safety. In addition, work is being done with the United States Food and Drug Administration in the use of sophisticated 'fingerprinting' to identify active pharmaceutical ingredients as a means of product verification.
>
> The MHRA is developing an educational program for the public and other stakeholders on the dangers of counterfeit medicines and purchasing drugs on the internet.

Digital Standards

Mr. Tynan: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what assessment she has made of *(a)* the differences between the MHP and MHEG digital standards and *(b)* the implications of one being preferred for use in the UK. [198260]

Mr. Mike O'Brien: MHEG-5 and MHP are closely related open API (application programming interface) standards for interactive digital television.

MHP is a more advanced, complex and capable API which was developed several years after MHEG-5 was chosen by the UK free-to-air terrestrial TV broadcasters for the launch of their digital TV services. To enable the kinds of advanced interactive service which MHP can offer (but MHEG-5 cannot), the TV set needs to be connected to a telephone line, or other telecoms network.

MHP receivers are more expensive than MHEG-5 receivers; the MHP suite of standards is not yet complete or stable. To date, very few MHP applications have been developed and interoperability problems are beginning to surface in countries (eg Italy) which are early adopters of MHP.

MHEG-5 is much more mature. Almost all digital terrestrial TV receivers in the UK incorporate MHEG-5, whereas other countries are seeing their market split between relatively expensive MHP receivers and simple "zapper boxes" without any API at all.

A DTI-commissioned study on the technical issues of coexistence of MHEG-5 and MHP based services and on migration to MHP was completed in May 2002. Since then, further investigations, supported by DTI, have led to demonstrations of interactive services receivable on both MHEG-5 and MHP receivers. Work to align the two standards more closely is nearing completion. Manufacturers can now easily produce receivers supporting both standards. This MHP/MHEG capability is expected to be incorporated in "baseline" MHP receivers available across Europe.

The UK is well-placed to switch over to digital terrestrial TV, with MHEG-5 in the vast majority of receivers providing support for a raft of desirable interactive services. As MHP matures and becomes established in other markets, there is the prospect of the widespread adoption of MHP/MHEG-capable receivers in UK, particularly when the "main" TV comes up for replacement. This would open the way to an organic extension of simple interactive services based on MHEG-5 to advanced applications using MHP, taking advantage of a telecomms connection which users may well be persuaded to extend to their main receiver over the next few years.

East of England Development Agency

Bob Spink: To ask the Deputy Prime Minister what assessment he has made of the accountability of the East of England Development Agency to the people of the East of England. [190962]

Jacqui Smith: Section 18 of the Regional Development Agencies Act 1998 requires RDAs to be accountable to Regional Chambers. The East of England Regional Assembly (EERA) has been designated by the Secretary of State for this purpose. EERA members are drawn from elected local authority councillors, and the social, economic and environmental sectors in the region.

In developing the Regional Economic Strategy the East of England Development Agency (EEDA) consults widely within the region. It takes into account the views of EERA and of other regional and local stakeholders in drawing up the Strategy and its own Corporate Plan. These documents are published, as are EEDA's targets and its performance against these. The Agency publishes an Annual Report on its activities and holds a public meeting after publication of the Report.

Employment Tribunals

Helen Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what assessment she has made of the merits of giving employment tribunals power to enforce awards they make; and if she will make a statement. [194353]

Mr. Leslie: I have been asked to reply.

The White Paper "Transforming Public Services:Complaints Redress and Tribunals", published in July, contains a commitment that the current unsatisfactory arrangements for enforcing these awards will be reformed. A review between the Department for Constitutional Affairs and the Department of Trade and Industry is already under way, and we hope to make an announcement early in 2005.

Mr. McLoughlin: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry how many employment tribunal cases there were in *(a)* West Derbyshire, *(b)* the East Midlands and *(c)* the UK in each year since 1997. [198353]

Mr. Sutcliffe: The following table shows the number of tribunal applications registered by the Employment Tribunals Service in the United Kingdom (excluding Northern Ireland) since 1997. We are unable to supply separate statistical information for the geographical areas of West Derbyshire and East Midlands.

	Registered tribunal applications
2003–04	115,042
2002–03	98,617
2001–02	112,227
2000–01	130,408
1999–2000	103,935
1998–99	91,913
1997–98	80,435
1996–97	88,910

Mr. McLoughlin: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what the average amount of an employment tribunal cost award was in *(a)* West Derbyshire, *(b)* the East Midlands and *(c)* the UK in each year since 1997. [198354]

Mr. Sutcliffe: The following table shows the average amount of an Employment Tribunal cost award in the UK (excluding Northern Ireland) since 1997. We are unable to supply the average amount of an Employment Tribunal cost award for West Derbyshire and East Midlands.

	Average cost award (£)
2003–04	1,859
2002–03	1,524
2001–02	983
2000–01	295
1999–2000	1,155
1998–99	743
1997–98	546

Mr. McLoughlin: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what the average award for compensation in employment tribunal cases has been in *(a)* West Derbyshire, *(b)* the East Midlands and *(c)* the UK in each year since 1997. [198355]

Mr. Sutcliffe: The Employment Tribunals Service only collects compensation statistics for tribunal cases covering the jurisdictions of Unfair Dismissal, Race Discrimination, Sex Discrimination and Disability Discrimination. Therefore, the figures quoted in the table illustrate the average award for compensation in Employment Tribunal cases for the UK (excluding Northern Ireland) since 1997 in relation to the aforementioned complaints. We are unable to supply separate information for West Derbyshire and East Midlands.

	Average compensation award (£)
2003–04	8,361
2002–03	7,598
2001–02	7,306
2000–01	5,764
1999–2000	5,734
1998–99	4,449
1997–98	4,894

Mr. McLoughlin: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry how many employment tribunal cost awards have been made against *(a)* respondents and *(b)* applicants in (i) West Derbyshire, (ii) the East Midlands and (iii) the UK in each year since 1997. [198356]

Mr. Sutcliffe: The following table illustrates how many Employment Tribunal cost awards have been made against respondents and applicants in the UK (excluding Northern Ireland) in the last two financial years. The Employment Tribunals Service did not breakdown the statistics for applicants and respondents prior to 2001–02. We are unable to supply information for West Derbyshire and East Midlands.

	Costs awards against respondent	*Costs awards against applicant*
2003–04	332	644
2002–03	307	691
2001–02	169	467

Enron

Mr. Austin Mitchell: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what investigation has been carried out on the British arms and subsidiaries of Enron; and what action has been taken as a result. [195124]

Mr. Sutcliffe: The Department does not comment on the affairs of individual companies.

Gas

Mr. Stephen O'Brien: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what comparative assessment she has made of the wholesale gas price in *(a)* the UK and *(b)* other major EU economies. [196037]

Mr. Mike O'Brien: Because gas markets in other EU economies are less liberalised and competitive than those in the UK, there is not much open trading in wholesale markets and it is difficult to make meaningful price comparisons with those in the UK. On the Continent wholesale prices tend to be set through contract and linked to oil. However, unofficial data indicates that UK wholesale gas prices in October 2004 were comparable with wholesale prices at Zeebrugge in Belgium and the TTF trading hub in the Netherlands.

Jaguar

Mr. Jim Cunningham: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what public funds Jaguar has received in each year since 1989; and for what purpose. [196442]

Jacqui Smith *[holding answer 9 November 2004]*: I can confirm that Jaguar cars has received the following assistance from national and regional bodies since 1989:

1994

National Regional Selective Assistance scheme payment:

Grant paid: £7.87 million (offered in 1994, actually paid in 1997)

Plant: Browns Lane (to support introduction of new XK sports car)

Note:

All conditions of the offer have been met. Case is now closed.

1997

National Regional Selective Assistance scheme payment:

Grant paid: £40 million

Plant: Castle Bromwich (to support introduction of X200/S-Type saloon car)

Note:

Monitoring of offer conditions is ongoing.

Regional grants to promote and support Learning and Training from Birmingham TEC and Birmingham city council:

Combined total grant paid: £852,000

Plant: Castle Bromwich (to support introduction of X200/S-Type saloon car)

1998

Regional grants to promote and support Learning, Training and Enterprise from Birmingham TEC, Birmingham city council Coventry city council and Coventry and Warwickshire CCTE:

Combined total grant paid: £983,642

Plant: Castle Bromwich (to support introduction of X200/S-Type saloon car)

1999

National Regional Selective Assistance scheme payment:

Grant paid: £30 million (from a total of £40 million available)

Plant: Halewood (to support introduction of X400/X-Type saloon car project)

Note:

Grant payment process is 75 per cent. complete, hence payment of £30 million to date, with monitoring of offer conditions ongoing.

Regional grant to facilitate Skills Enhancement and Learning from Merseyside TEC:

Total grant paid: £2 million

Plant: Halewood (to support introduction of X400/X-Type saloon car project)

Regional grants to promote Training and Inward Investment Support from Birmingham city council and Birmingham TEC:

Combined total grant paid: £1.46 million

Plant: Castle Bromwich (to support introduction of X200/S-Type saloon car)

2000

Regional grants to promote Training and Inward Investment Support from Birmingham TEC, Birmingham city council and Coventry city council:

Combined total grant paid: £1.3 million

Plant: Castle Bromwich (to support introduction of X200/S-Type saloon car)

2001

Regional grant to facilitate Training from Birmingham city council:

Total grant paid: £200,000

Plant: Castle Bromwich (to support introduction of X200/S-Type saloon car)

In addition to these discrete national and regional packages, Jaguar Cars has also received support across a number of years for specific company research efforts under the auspices of the SMMT-led Foresight Vehicle programme. These have included the following specific initiatives:

	£
Advanced Protection of Vulnerable Road Users (APVRU)	18,800
Road Origin and Direction Attained by Radar (ROADAR)	250,000
Short Range Sensors for Automotive Applications (SHORSEN)	202,500
Probe Vehicle Information for Traffic Management and Road Network Operations (PROBE-IT)	270,000
Controlled Homogenous Auto-ignition Reformed Gas Engine (CHARGE)	252,000
Controlled Homogenous Auto-ignition Supercharged Engine (CHASE)	260,000

Liquid Gas

Mr. Clapham: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry how much liquid gas was used in the UK in the last year for which figures are available; how much was imported and from where; how much was used for domestic and industrial heating; and what her latest estimate is of the number of vehicles running on liquid gas. [195701]

Mr. Mike O'Brien *[holding answer 4 November 2004]*: There are two types of liquid gas, liquid natural gas (LNG) and liquid petroleum gas (LPG). Natural gas is liquefied for storage or long distance transportation purposes. Currently there is little LNG used in the UK and its usage cannot be separately disaggregated from natural gas data. The latest annual figures for UK consumption of liquid petroleum gases (butane and propane) in 2003 were published in table 3.4 of the 2004 edition of the Digest of UK Energy Statistics. In 2003 UK consumption of LPG was 2.9 million tonnes of which 0.84 million tonnes were used by industry and 0.34 million tonnes by households. It is not possible to split this usage between heating and other energy uses such as cooking.

Total UK imports of LPG in 2003 were 0.36 million tonnes with 0.18 million tonnes from EU countries, 0.1 million tonnes from Norway, 0.06 million tonnes from Russia and 0.02 million tonnes from other countries.

Miners' Pensions

Mr. Grogan: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry whether the transfer of pension rights and benefits under TUPE for members of the Mineworkers Pension Scheme into the Industry-Wide Mineworkers Pension Scheme complied fully with Article 3 of the EU Acquired Rights Directive; and if she will make a statement. [192554]

Nigel Griffiths: I am advised that the transfer was in full compliance with the Directive.

Mobile Post Offices

Sue Doughty: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry how many mobile post offices there are in the United Kingdom; and what areas they serve. [198865]

Mr. Sutcliffe: Information on mobile post offices is an operational matter for Post Office Ltd. I have therefore asked David Mills, the Chief Executive, to reply to the hon. Member direct.

Oil Usage

Mr. Clapham: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry how much oil was used in the UK in the last year for which figures are available; how much was imported and from where; how much was burned in power stations; how much was used for domestic and industrial heating; and how much was used by industry for purposes other than heating. [195699]

Mr. Mike O'Brien *[holding answer 4 November 2004]:* The latest annual figures for UK consumption of petroleum products in 2003 were published in table 3.4 of the 2004 edition of the Digest of UK Energy Statistics. In 2003 UK consumption of petroleum products was 77.8 million tonnes of which 0.6 million tonnes was used in power stations, 6.7 million tonnes were used by industry and 3.1 million tonnes by domestic households. It is not possible to split the industrial usage between heating and other energy uses such as cooking. However recent studies by the Building Research Establishment show that around three-quarters of domestic oil consumption is used for space heating. Previous studies have suggested that less than five percent of industrial use of oil is for space heating purposes.

Total UK imports of petroleum products in 2003 were 17.3 million tonnes with 8.6 million tonnes from European countries, 3 million tonnes from the former Soviet Union, 4.5 million tonnes from the Middle East and 1.1 million tonnes from other countries.

Postal Services (Hendon)

Mr. Dismore: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry if she will make a statement on the standard of Royal Mail deliveries in Hendon. [198736]

Mr. Sutcliffe: Improving the quality of postal services throughout the country is an operational matter for the Royal Mail Board. Ministers have been assured that this is the Board's top priority and Adam Crozier, Chief Executive of Royal Mail, has taken personal responsibility for this improvement. I have written to him and asked him to respond to my hon. Friend's specific question about Hendon.

Premium Rate Dialler Programmes

Mr. Stringer: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry how many complaints she has received in the last three years about the operation of the regulatory bodies for premium rate telephone companies; and if she will make a statement. [198175]

Mr. Mike O'Brien *[holding answer 15 November 2004]:* The Department has received about 120 complaints about Premium Rate Services (PRS) in the past year of which about 100 have referred to the operation of the premium rate regulator the Independent Committee for the Supervision of Telephone Information Services (ICSTIS). None complaining about ICSTIS was received in the previous two years. The Government have asked Ofcom to carry out a review of PRS regulation which will include an assessment of ICSTIS' remif and whether ICSTIS has the right tools and resources to regulate the PRS industry. The review is expected to report later in November.

Mr. Stringer: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what information she has received of the number of complaints received over the last three years by the regulatory bodies for premium rate telephone calls. [198176]

Mr. Mike O'Brien *[holding answer 15 November 2004]:* The Independent Committee for the Supervision of Standards of Telephone Information Services (ICSTIS) regulates premium rate telephone calls and has the following figures about complaints it has received about Premium Rate Services:

	Number
2002	11,572
2003	27,501
2004	[1]63,945
2004	[2]79,000

[1] January to October only.

[2] Estimated total for 2004.

Part of the increase in complaints is explicable by growth in the size of the market (services based on the premium rate charging mechanism are estimated to now be worth £1 billion a year in the UK) and by new and innovative technologies in the marketplace, but clearly not all. The 2004 growth is largely accounted for by PRS internet diallers.

DTI, Ofcom and ICSTIS all appreciate that the current level of complaints is not acceptable. This is why the Department has called on Ofcom to conduct a review of the regulation of premium rate services, with ICSTIS, to strengthen consumer protection.

Mr. Ben Chapman: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry if she will make a statement on the role of ICTSIS; and when she last met ICTSIS to discuss strengthening their role in consumer protection. [195567]

Mr. Mike O'Brien: We recognise that the regulatory system for premium rate services enforced by ICSTIS is currently being stretched by the current problems around the abuse of Internet diallers. This is why the Government have asked Ofcom to carry out a review of Premium Rate Services (PRS) regulation which will include an assessment of ICSTIS' remit and whether ICSTIS has the right tools and resources to regulate the PRS industry. The review is expected to report later in November. Ministers and officials regularly meet with ICSTIS to discuss consumer protection issues.

Productivity

John Robertson: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what estimate her Department has made of the changes in *(a)* labour and *(b)* multi-factor productivity in British industry in the course of (i) 2002–03 and (ii) 2003–04. [197473]

Jacqui Smith: Productivity growth is essential for long-term economic growth and prosperity. The Government focus on two main measures of labour productivity—output per worker and output per hour worked.

On an output per worker basis, labour productivity improved by 0.8 per cent. in the second quarter of 2003 compared with the same quarter in 2002, and by 2.9 per cent. in the second quarter of 2004 compared with the same quarter in 2003.

On an output per hour basis, it improved by 0.8 per cent. in the second quarter of 2003 compared with the same quarter in 2002, and by 3.5 per cent. in the second quarter of 2004 compared with the same quarter in 2003.

The Government do not produce estimates of Multi Factor Productivity (MFP) growth. MFP—or as it is sometimes called Total Factor Productivity—is a measure of how the economy combines its inputs—such as labour and capital—to produce output. In practice MFP is calculated as a residual and is therefore subject to significant measurement error. For example MFP can be influenced by the mis-measurement of inputs, especially of the capital stock. Consequently, estimates of MFP are subject to substantial variation.

Nevertheless, the Government do recognise the value of critically evaluating estimates of MFP when undertaking productivity analysis, and considers estimates produced by a range of bodies including the National Institute of Economic and Social Research, the University of Groningen and the US' National Bureau of Economic Research. This MFP data are used to provide contextual information to support the analysis of labour productivity growth.

Regional Selective Assistance

Mr. Jim Cunningham: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry how many regional selective assistance grants have been made since 1997; what their value is; and how many jobs it is estimated they have *(a)* created and *(b)* safeguarded. [192571]

Nigel Griffiths *[holding answer 21 October 2004]*: Between April 1997 and 31 March 2004, 3,611 offers of RSA grant totalling £949 million were accepted by firms in support of projects in England. It is estimated that these projects will create 122,000 jobs and safeguard a further 76,000.

Further information can be found in the Industrial Development Act Annual Report, published by the Stationery Office and placed in the Library of the House.

Solar Power

Mr. Sheerman: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry (1) how much solar power the UK generated in the last period for which figures are available; [198278]

(2) what targets there have been for the installation of solar power in domestic properties in the last 10 years; [198279]

(3) what target has been set for the installation of solar panels. [198280]

Mr. Mike O'Brien: Solar power is used for generating electricity using photovoltaic panels (solar PV). It is estimated that at the end December 2003 there was 5,903 kWp of installed PV in the UK (Source: International Energy Authority—National Statistics).

The current target for installation of solar PV under the DTI's Major PV Demonstration Programme launched in 2003 is 1,000 domestic/individual systems (2 MW) and at least 140 medium and large-scale non-domestic systems (5 MW). The budget for the Major PV Demonstration Programme has been increased from £20 million to £31 million this year and the targets will be reviewed.

EU State Aid

Mr. Tynan: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what assessment is made of the EU state aid scoreboards in decisions about the making of grants of aid to UK industry; and whether the scoreboards are regularly monitored to assess grounds for disputing state aid awards by other member states. [197602]

Mr. Alexander: The EU state aid scoreboard is published twice yearly and provides data on the levels of state aid granted by member states. The data presented in the scoreboards are at an aggregated level for the EU and individual member states; for example, total aid granted as a proportion of GDP, total aid granted by aid instrument (grant, loan, tax exemption etc.), total aid granted for particular activities (SME business support, environmental protection, training, regional development etc.). Therefore, it does not provide information that can be used for making decisions on granting aid to UK industry or disputing individual awards by other member states.

However, the Government do monitor other sources of information on other member state aid awards, particularly the information on aid approvals and investigations published in the *Official Journal* of the European Communities and makes representations to the Commission on cases where this is deemed to be appropriate.

Utilities

Jon Trickett: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what assessment she has made of the effects of the provision of utilities by means of prepaid meters on communities at risk of social exclusion; and if she will make a statement. [198757]

Mr. Mike O'Brien: Although the use of prepayment meters is concentrated among lower income customers, it is not synonymous with vulnerability or the risk of social exclusion. Prepayment meters enable customers to monitor and control expenditure on energy electricity supply, and are, in some cases, a valuable alternative to disconnection for non-payment of bills. Because of the additional cost of the meter and the administrative infrastructure that supports it, prepayment tariffs are customarily higher than those of other payment methods, although the differential will vary from company to company. Prepayment meter users may, therefore, be able to reduce their energy bills by switching supplier, as well as by seeking a cheaper, simpler payment method, which will, for most customers, be direct debit.

Business Women

Chris Ruane: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry how many and what percentage of businesses were run by women in each of the last 10 years. [190832]

Nigel Griffiths: Data are not available on the number and percentage of all businesses run by women. The number of businesses owned by women, in England, in small and medium sized enterprises (SMEs) with less than 250 employees, can be estimated from business surveys conducted in 2001, 2002 and 2004 on behalf of the Small Business Service (SBC). SMEs account for 99.8 per cent. of the total business population. There are no data prior to 2001. The proportion and estimated number of women owned SMES is as follows:

Women-owned[1] SMEs 2001 to 2003, England only

	Percentage of all SMEs owned by women[2]	*Estimated number of SMEs in England*[3]	*Estimated number of SMEs owned by women*
2001	13	3,258,925	436,000
2002	14	3,258,925	452,000
2003	16	3,258,925	516,000

[1] Women-owned refers to SMEs where women make up the majority of the owners.

[2] Source: SBS Omnibus Survey Waves 1–3 (2001), the SBS Omnibus Survey Waves 4 and 5 (2002) and the SBS Annual Small Business Survey 2003 (2003).

[3] Estimates of the number of SMEs in England are only available for the start of 2001.

Source:

SBS SME Statistics for the UK, 2001

The number and percentage of self-employed people who are women can be measured using the Office for National Statistics' (ONS) Labour Force Survey. Female self-employment is not the same as business ownership as one self-employed woman could run several businesses or be involved in running a business where the majority of owners are men. Also, women working as directors of companies will be classed as employees in the Labour Force Survey.

The number of self-employed women and women self-employment as a proportion of all self-employed people is as follows.

Number of self-employed women and women as a percentage of all self-employed people aged 16 and over—UK, all persons, not seasonally adjusted

	Self-employed women (Thousand)	*Women as a percentage of all self- employed*
1995	915	26
1996	914	26
1997	926	27
1998	918	27
1999	869	26
2000	903	28
2001	873	27
2002	885	27
2003	955	27
2004	962	27

Source:

ONS Quarterly Labour Force Survey, spring of each year (March to May)

CONSTITUTIONAL AFFAIRS

Political Parties, Elections and Referendums Act

Mr. Jenkin: To ask the Parliamentary Secretary, Department for Constitutional Affairs (1) who is responsible for the enforcement of section 125 of the Political Parties, Elections and Referendums Act 2000; [198164]

(2) what the consequences are of breaching Section 125 of the Political Parties, Elections and Referendums Act 2000; and what measures are in place to prevent such a breach. [198163]

Mr. Leslie: It is the responsibility of those to whom section 125 of the Political Parties, Elections and Referendums Act 2000 applies to ensure that they comply with the requirements of that provision. A person alleging a breach of section 125 could seek to bring a judicial review. It would be for the courts to decide the consequences of a breach according to the circumstances of the challenge.

WORK AND PENSIONS

Benefit Debts

Mr. Willetts: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions if he will place in the Library copies of the contracts given to four debt collection companies to collect benefit debts from people no longer in receipt of benefit. [196509]

Mr. Pond: The generic contract has been placed in the Library. The schedules have not been included as they contain information that is commercial in confidence. This is in line with paragraph 13 of part 2 of the Code of Practice on Access to Government Information.

Mr. Willetts: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions how much the Government expect to receive in repayments of overpaid benefits as a result of the exercise launched with four debt collection agencies in March. [196545]

Mr. Pond: It is early in the pilot to forecast accurately the return on the contracts with the four private sector suppliers. The agreement with Treasury is that recoveries to costs ratio should exceed 2:1 and we are confident that this will be achieved.

Benefit Entitlement (Newcastle-under-Lyme)

Paul Farrelly: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions how many incapacity benefit claimants there are in Newcastle-under-Lyme, broken down by *(a)* local authority ward and *(b)* sex. [198576]

Maria Eagle: The information is in the table.

Total numbers claiming incapacity benefit and severe disablement allowance: Wards within Newcastle-Under-Lyme parliamentary constituency.

Ward name	*Total Number of IB/ SDA Claimants*	*Male claimants*	*Female claimants*
Audley and Bignall End	295	155	140
Bradwell	415	240	180
Chesterton	445	250	195
Clayton	195	110	85
Cross Heath	565	330	235
Halmerend	155	100	60
Holditch	390	245	150
Keele	20	5	10
Knutton and Silverdale	360	215	145
May Bank	280	165	110
Porthill	165	95	70
Seabridge	245	140	105
Silverdale and Parksite	270	170	95
Thistleberry	305	185	125
Town	305	210	100
Westlands	180	105	75
Wolstanton	270	170	95

Notes:

1. The figures are a snapshot of all claimants of Incapacity Benefit (including credits only cases) and Severe Disablement Allowance at August 2003.

2. Wards are based on 2003 ward boundaries.

3. All benefit counts have been rounded to a multiple of five to protect the confidentiality of individual claimants, therefore gender breakdown may not sum to the total shown.

Source:

IAD Information Centre, 100 per cent. Data.

Benefit Take-up (Hendon)

Mr. Dismore: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions how many pensioners in Hendon are in receipt of *(a)* pension credit and *(b)* pension savings credit; what he estimates the take-up rate of each benefit in Hendon to be; what the (i) highest and (ii) average amount awarded is; and if he will make a statement. [197512]

Malcolm Wicks: Information on numbers of pension credit recipients in Hendon and the level of awards at 30 September, where available, is given in the table. The average award of the savings element in Hendon at the end of May 2004, the latest date for which this figure is available, was 7.44.

Information on the number of people likely to be eligible for pension credit is not available at constituency level. However, we estimate that approximately 450,000 households in the London Government Office Region (GOR), corresponding to approximately 500,000 individuals (rounded to the nearest 50,000), are likely to be eligible for pension credit in 2004–05. At 30 September 277,740 households in the London GOR, comprising 33,230 individuals, were receiving pension credit.

Pension credit recipients, Hendon constituency, 30 September 2004

	Pension credit	*Savings element of pension credit*
Households	4,070	1,960
Individuals	4,840	2,280
Highest award	£249.25	[1]—
Average award	£61.38	[1]—

[1] Not available.

Notes:

1. Numbers of recipients are rounded to the nearest five.

2. Individual recipients include a small number of partners under age 60.

3. The numbers of households and individuals in receipt of the savings element include those who were receiving the savings element only and those who were receiving both the savings and guarantee elements.

4. The maximum possible award for the savings element is £20.22.

Carers (Respite Leave)

Paul Farrelly: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions what support is given to enable carers to take respite leave. [198717]

Dr. Ladyman: I have been asked to reply.

The Carers and Disabled Children Act 2000 strengthens the rights of carers to an assessment of their own needs as carers. It gives local councils mandatory duties to support carers by providing them with services and short breaks, as well as providing direct payments for carers' services.

Breaks can be provided directly by the council or independent sector providers or through short-term break voucher schemes or direct payments.

The carers' grant was introduced in 1999 to support councils in providing breaks and services for carers in England. The grant has increased annually from £20 million in the first year and has provided an extra £325 million over the past five years. It is worth £125 million in 2004–05 and will be worth £185 million in 2005–06.

Child Support Agency

Annabelle Ewing: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions pursuant to his written ministerial statement of 28 October 2004, *Official Report*, columns 55–57W, on the new child support scheme progress report, upon what date the contract between EDS and the Government with respect to the new child support scheme entered into force; if he will list the sums retained by way of payments due to EDS in each year of operation of the contract; what percentage of the sums retained prior to the period 3 March 2003 to 19 September 2004 have since been paid to EDS; what the total estimated value of the contract between EDS and the Government with respect to the new child support scheme is; and what actions or omission on the part of EDS would amount to material breach of the contract between EDS and the Government. [196265]

Mr. Pond: The administration of the Child Support Agency is a matter for the Chief Executive, Mr. Doug Smith. He will write to the hon. Member with the information requested.

Letter from Mike Isaac to Ms Annabelle Ewing, dated 16 November 2004:

In reply to your recent Parliamentary Question about the Child Support Agency the Secretary of State promised a substantive reply from the Chief Executive. As he is currently on leave I am replying on his behalf.

You asked the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions, pursuant to his Written Ministerial Statement of 28th October Official Report columns 55–57W on the new child support scheme progress report upon what date the contract between EDS and the Government with respect to the new child support scheme entered into force; if he will list the sums retained by way of payments due to EDS in each year of operation of the contract; what percentage of the sums retained prior to the period 3rd March 2003 to 19th September 2004 have since been paid to EDS; what the total estimated value of the contract between EDS and the Government with respect to the new child support scheme is; and what actions of omission on the part of EDS would amount to material breach of the contract as between EBS and the United Kingdom Government.

The Child Support Reform (CSR) contract was agreed with EDS on 8 August 2000. Its provisions subsumed an interim contract, for early EDS development work, first signed in December 1999.

All costs of design, development and implementation of the new IT system fall initially to EDS who provide this as a managed service to the Agency. The cost of the service is expected to be £456 million payable over the period to the completion of the contract in 2010. The payment due each year is determined by the contract. It is linked to service levels and to the degree of functionality delivered. Between 3rd March 2003 and 19th September 2004, EDS were paid £62.08 million in service charges. In that period the Agency retained £12.1 million because of performance problems.

As is usual with any contract, a major failure of delivery or performance can potentially constitute material breach of that contract. Ultimately, such matters may be subject to legal challenge.

Council Tax Benefit

Mrs. Spelman: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions if he will make a statement on how the eligibility requirements for council tax benefit differ from those for housing benefit. [198487]

Mr. Pond: The entitlement conditions for the award of housing benefit to those with a rental liability and council tax benefit to those with a liability to pay council tax are broadly the same. However the rate at which these benefits are reduced if a person's income exceeds their applicable amount are different. For housing benefit the taper is 65 per cent. and for council tax benefit 20 per cent.

Ethnic Minorities

Dr. Gibson: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions what grants are available to local authorities to promote training, employment and housing for ethnic minorities. [195314]

Jane Kennedy: The Department for Work and Pensions does not have the power to give grants to other organisations, including local authorities and the voluntary and community sector.

Gas Safety

Jon Trickett: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions how much was spent by the Health and Safety Executive in the past seven years on improvements to gas safety. [198236]

Jane Kennedy: The Health and Safety Executive (HSE) does not routinely collect information that would provide a basis for establishing the resources spent on gas safety.

Jon Trickett: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions how many fatalities arising from gas explosions are estimated to have occurred in each year since 2000. [198240]

Jane Kennedy: The number of fatalities arising from gas explosions and/or fire from 1999–2000 to 2002–03 were as follows (commencing 1 April 1999):

1999–2000	10
2000–2001	8
2001–2002	4
2002–2003	5

Figures are not yet available for 2003–4.

Jon Trickett: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions when it was decided that a fundamental review of the gas safety regime was necessary. [198266]

Jane Kennedy: The Health and Safety Commission agreed in July 1998 that the review should be undertaken. HSE initiated the review process through a public discussion document in November 1999.

Jon Trickett: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions how many gas explosions are estimated to have occurred in the home in *(a)* 2000, *(b)* 2001, *(c)* 2002 and *(d)* 2003. [198267]

Jane Kennedy: The number of gas-related fire and explosion incidents reported to HSE for the years 2000–01 to the present is as follows (commencing 1 April 1999):

Number of gas-related fire and explosion incidents

1999–2000	56
2000–2001	38
2001–2002	43
2002–2003	32

Figures are not yet available for 2003–4.

Gas Supplies

Mr. Tynan: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions what assessment the Health and Safety Executive has made of implications of the Ghislenghien gas explosion for the safety of gas transmission and distribution systems in the UK. [198259]

Jane Kennedy: The Health and Safety Executive (HSE) has assessed the information available on the Ghislenghien explosion, which appears to have occurred as a result of third party damage to a high pressure gas pipeline. HSE is working in partnership with the United Kingdom Onshore Pipeline Operators' Association (UKOPA) to raise the awareness of risks from major accident hazard pipelines with construction contractors and utility companies. This work will form part of HSE's Major Hazards strategic programme for 2005–06.

Green Ministers

Mr. Horam: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions how many departmental Green Ministers there have been since 1997. [197838]

Mr. Pond: The Department for Work and Pensions was formed in June 2001 from the former Department of Social Security (DSS) and parts of the former Department for Education and Employment (DfEE) including the Employment Service (ES). Since that date there has been one Green Minister—my noble friend the right hon. Baroness Hollis of Heigham.

Health and Safety

John Thurso: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions how many Health and Safety Executive *(a)* regulatory contacts and *(b)* investigations were carried out in Scotland in each of the last seven years. [197337]

Jane Kennedy: Tables 1 and 2 show the number of regulatory contacts and the number of investigations in Scotland respectively. The data includes all operating divisions of HSE, and figures are given for both accident and complaint investigations.

Table 1—HSE regulatory contacts in Scotland

	Total HSE contacts
1997–98	25,319
1998–99	22,951
1999–2000	24,505
2000–01	29,841
2001–02	28,095
2002–03	26,687
2003–04	29,365

Table 2—HSE investigations in Scotland

	Accidents and incidents	*Complaints*	*Total*
1997–98	1,187	1,862	4,236
1998–99	1,199	1,973	4,371
1999–2000	1,403	2,553	5,359
2000–01	2,152	2,894	7,199
2001–02	2,196	2,221	6,613
2002–03	1,339	1,169	3,847
2003–04	1,308	1,093	3,710

John Thurso: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions how many health and safety inspectors there are in *(a)* England, *(b)* Scotland and *(c)* Wales; and how many there were in each year since 1998. [197338]

Jane Kennedy: The following table shows the total number of inspectors that are employed by the Health and Safety Executive in Great Britain. Information on the number of inspectors in England, Scotland and Wales is not routinely maintained.

At 1 April	*Number of inspectors*[1]
1998	1,437
1999	1,497
2000	1,507
2001	1,534
2002	1,625
2003	1,651
2004	1,605

Note:

The figures eq[illegible] full time equivalents and have been rounded to the nearest whole number

John Thurso: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions how many cases of information being laid by the Health and Safety Executive to support a prosecution there have been in each of the last seven years, broken down by region. [197339]

Jane Kennedy: In the last seven years, information has been laid following Health and Safety Executive (HSE) investigations, as follows:

HSE region	*1996–97*	*1997–98*	*1998–99*	*1999–2000*	*2000–01*
Wales and West	239	358	366	378	303
Home Counties	166	220	253	321	300
London and South East	219	223	223	204	210
Midlands	258	271	188	303	438
Yorkshire and North East	271	193	239	314	233
North West	142	148	230	234	224
Scotland	171	132	137	181	173

HSE region	*2001–02*	*2002–03*	*2003–04*[1]
Wales and South West	323	223	191
East and South East	351	239	364
London	93	130	68
Midlands	379	362	343
Yorkshire and North East	297	178	258
North West	178	229	164
Scotland	233	197	255

[1] Provisional

Notes:

1. The annual basis is the planning year from 1 April to 31 March.
2. The number of cases where information was laid in respect of separate offences by HSE in England and Wales and those approved by the Procurator Fiscal in Scotland.
3. The figures for Information laid are those heard in court, based on date of hearing.

John Thurso: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions how many *(a)* enforcement notices have been served and *(b)* prosecutions have been initiated by health and safety inspectors under Health and Safety at Work legislation in Scotland in each of the last 12 months. [197340]

Jane Kennedy: In Scotland, in each of the last twelve months for which figures are available, Health and Safety Executive (HSE) inspectors issued enforcement notices and initiated prosecutions as follows:

2003–04[1]	*Notices issued*	*Prosecutions initiated*
April	91	4
May	146	4
June	191	8
July	102	5
August	157	3
September	164	5
October	148	7
November	117	14
December	41	10
January	68	12
February	62	6
March	65	8

[1] Provisional

Note:

The annual basis is the planning year from 1 April to 31 March. Figures for enforcement action by local authority health and safety enforcing officers is not available on a monthly basis. Overall figures for local authority health and safety enforcement activity for 2003–04 will be available in autumn 2005.

Health Projects

Paul Holmes: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions what feedback his Department has received from general practitioners in the Pathways to Work pilot areas, regarding the desk aid and educational DVDs that have been distributed; and if he will make a statement. [193258]

Maria Eagle: A range of initiatives to engage with local GPs were developed for the Incapacity Benefit 'Pathways to work' pilot areas and included an online learning module, a desk aid and two educational DVDs.

The Department has commissioned some qualitative studies with GPs in the Pathways to Work pilot areas.

A study, to be published in spring 2005 investigates whether GPs engage with patients in 'return to work' discussions/how and when this happens, what the drivers and barriers are and GPs' knowledge and use of rehabilitation health services.

In spring 2005 we will also publish findings from a project undertaken to evaluate the 'Engaging Physicians Benefiting Patients' pilot which included asking GPs about their knowledge of the ways in which DWP communicate with them. This evaluation covered guidance, desk aids and DVDs on medical evidence gathering for sickness certification and return to work advice for patients.

In addition the Department has commissioned research with GPs who have registered on the DWP website to evaluate the online training, desk aid and DVD we provide to improve training for GPs in patient interaction on issues such as sickness certification and return to work. Findings from this research will be available in autumn 2005.

Holiday Caravan Parks

Mark Tami: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions what discussions his Department has had with local authorities regarding the safety of holiday caravan parks. [198068]

Jane Kennedy: HSE has had no central discussions with LAs regarding safety at holiday caravan parks. The Department for Work and Pensions is unable to categorically state that no discussions have taken place at the local operational level between HSE and LAs regarding safety at holiday caravan parks, especially as routine liaison meetings take place, but the information we have suggests this has not happened or is very unlikely.

Jobcentre Plus Offices (Argyll and Bute)

Mr. Alan Reid: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions what his plans are for each of the Jobcentre Plus offices in the Argyll and Bute constituency. [198518]

Jane Kennedy: The administration of Jobcentre Plus is a matter for the Chief Executive of Jobcentre Plus, David Anderson. He will write to the hon. Member.

Letter from David Anderson to Mr. Alan Reid, dated 16 November 2004:

The Secretary of State has asked me to reply to your question concerning the plans for each of the Jobcentre Plus offices in the Argyll and Bute constituency. This is something which falls within the responsibilities delegated to me as Chief Executive of Jobcentre Plus.

All four offices in your constituency have already been rolled out to offer the new Jobcentre Plus services. It is planned that these offices will remain open and continue to deliver an integrated customer facing service, providing a single access point to job vacancies and benefits for all people of working age.

It may be helpful if I explain that Jobcentre Plus has reviewed the way in which all our benefit processing is delivered and we have been exploring ways of improving efficiency for some time. We currently process benefits in all the offices within your constituency. The processing teams in each of these offices operate with 8 staff or less and we have concluded that we should consolidate the benefit processing work into a larger site. The move to a centralised operation will concentrate expertise and experience, ensure consistency of decision-making and bring continuity of service, thereby improving customer service. It will also deliver the necessary economies of scale.

Our plans for the roll out of the Benefit Processing Centres, including Clydebank Benefit Processing Centre are at an early stage and you will be kept informed of progress as these develop.

I hope this is helpful.

Incapacity/Severe Disablement Benefit

Mr. Berry: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions how many new incapacity benefit beneficiaries there were, broken down by *(a)* Government office region and *(b)* gender in each year since 1995; and how many were (i) new entrants on to benefit and (ii) existing beneficiaries in each case. [190901]

Maria Eagle: The information has been placed in the Library.

Mr. Goodman: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions what previous employment new incapacity benefit claimants had before making their claims in each year since 1997, broken down by *(a)* age and *(b)* region. [191696]

Maria Eagle: The information has been placed in the Library.

Incapacity Benefit

Mr. Goodman: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions what percentage of people making a fresh claim for incapacity benefit in each year since 2000 had been in receipt of incapacity benefit during the previous 12 months. [195808]

Maria Eagle: The information is in the table.

Period	*All IB/SDA commencements*	*Number of commencements with previous IB/SDA claim in last 12 months*	*Percentage of commencements with previous IB/SDA claim in last 12 months*
1 June 1999–31May2000	763,000	153,000	20.0
1 June 2000–31 May 2001	750,900	151,700	20.2
1 June 2001–31May2002	697,800	134,800	19.3
1 June 2002–31May2003	691,000	132,000	19.1
1 June 2003–31May2004	640,100	126,300	19.7

Notes:

1. Case load figures have been rounded to the nearest hundred. Totals may not sum due to rounding.
2. Figures are based on a 5 per cent. sample, and are therefore subject to a degree of sampling variation.
3. Figures are based on persons claiming severe disablement allowance, long term or short term incapacity benefit, credits only cases, and those persons claiming IB but who have their benefit extinguished for reasons such as an overlap with another benefit, or because of hospitalisation.
4. Some IB/SDA end dates will have been estimated at the end of a quarter, where the true end date is not known.
5. A person is counted only once in each year, regardless of the number of times they claim and subsequently leave each benefit. If however a claimant makes a claim to IB/SDA in more than one year shown then they will appear in each year's figures.
6. SDA is not available to new claimants from 6 April 2001. From this point, disabled people, whose period of incapacity begins before the age of 20 (or 25 if in education or training before the age of 20), may be able to receive incapacity benefit without having to satisfy the national insurance contribution conditions. SDA recipients aged below 20 at the cut-off point will transfer on to IB at the long-term rate in April 2002. Existing recipients can continue to receive the benefit for as long as they satisfy the conditions of entitlement for the benefit.
7. Figures for the latest period (2003–04) will increase in due course because of late notifications not yet recorded on the computer system.
8. Commencements include all benefit recipients and national insurance credits only cases.

Source:

IAD Information Centre, 5 per cent. samples.

Tom Cox: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions how many people living in the London borough of Wandsworth have claimed incapacity benefit in each of the last three years. [197124]

Maria Eagle: The information is in the table.

Incapacity benefits claimants in London borough of Wandsworth at dates shown

	Number
May 2002	8,100
May 2003	8,400
May 2004	8,400

Notes:

1. Figures are rounded to the nearest hundred.
2. Figures include all incapacity benefit (IB) and severe disablement allowance claims (including IB credits only cases).

Source:

IAD Information Centre, 5 per cent. sample.

Tim Loughton: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions how many people have claimed incapacity benefit on the grounds of poor mental health in each year since 1997. [197968]

Maria Eagle: The information is in the following table.

Incapacity benefit and severe disablement allowance claimants whose primary diagnosis is categorised as a mental or behavioural disorder

As at May:	*Number*
1997	706,600
1998	760,100
1999	801,500
2000	840,200
2001	900,400
2002	947,200
2003	990,200
2004	1,028,300

Notes:

1. Figures are rounded to the nearest 100.
2. Figures include national insurance credits only cases.
3. Great Britain totals include a small number of claimants temporarily overseas.
4. All diagnoses are coded using the International Classification of Diseases, 10th Edition, published by the World Health Organisation.

Source:

IAD Information Centre, 5 per cent. samples.

Mr. Goodman: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions what the overall expenditure on incapacity benefits including severe disablement allowance and income support on the grounds of incapacity *(a)* on the grounds of mental and behavioural disorders and *(b)* in total were in each year since 1997. [195823]

Maria Eagle: Details of the primary diagnosis of income support recipients whose benefit is paid on the grounds of ill health are not recorded centrally and could be obtained only at disproportionate cost.

The available information is in the table.

Expenditure on incapacity benefit (IB) and severe disablement allowance (SDA)

£ million

Year	*Total IB*	*IB mental and behavioural disorders*	*Total SDA*	*SDA mental and behavioural disorders*
1997–98	8,786	1,669	1,184	415
1998–99	8,354	1,755	1,134	419
1999–2000	7,656	1,761	1,135	419
2000–01	7,542	1,810	1,130	429
2001–02	7,336	1,919	1,130	426
2002–03	7,113	1,992	1,008	415
2003–04	6,870	2,072	953	415

Notes:

1. Expenditure figures are rounded to the nearest £ million and are in real terms at 2004–05 prices.
2. Figures for mental and behavioural disorders are based on average amounts and caseloads at August of each year.

Source:

DWP benefit expenditure tables and 5 per cent. sample of incapacity benefit/severe disablement allowance cases from the Quarterly Statistical Enquiry.

Pension Payments

Mr. Webb: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions with what frequency pensioners who receive a pension through a weekly order book at post offices and switch to direct payment will receive their payments; and whether they will be paid in arrears. [198047]

Mr. Pond *[holding answer 15 November 2004]:* When a customer converts to Direct Payment from order book, payments into their chosen account are made to match the frequency and payday of their current order book payments. Payment of state pension is made in advance if paid weekly and in arrears if paid monthly or less frequently.

Pensioners

Mr. David Marshall: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions at what age *(a)* men and *(b)* women become eligible to receive an old age pension in each of the European Union states. [197653]

Mr. Pond: The information is in the table.

Pensionable age in EU member states (as at 1 May 2004)

Country	*Men*	*Women*	*Notes*
Austria	65	60	Equalisation of women's retirement age to 65. To be phased in between 2024–33
Belgium	65	63	Equalisation of women's retirement age to 65. Being phased in between 1997–2009
Cyprus	65	65	—
Czech Republic	61 years 4 months	55 to 59 years 4 months	Women's age dependent on number of children raised. Retirement ages rising gradually to 63 for men and between 59 and 63 for women, depending on number of children raised
Denmark	65	65	—
Estonia	63	59	Equalisation of women's retirement age to 63. Being phased in by 2016
Finland	65	65	—
France	60	60	—
Germany	65	65	—
Greece	65	65	—
Hungary	62	59	Equalisation of women's retirement age to 62. Being phased in by 2009
Ireland	65	65	—
Italy	65	60	—
Latvia	62	59 years 6 months	Equalisation of women's retirement age to 62. Being

Pensionable age in EU member states (as at 1 May 2004)

Country	*Men*	*Women*	*Notes*
			phased in by 2008
Lithuania	62 years 6 months	59	Women's retirement age gradually rising to 60 by 2006
Luxembourg	65	65	—
Malta	61	60	—
Netherlands	65	65	—
Poland	65	60	—
Portugal	65	65	—
Slovakia	62	62	—
Slovenia	63	61	—
Spain	65	65	—
Sweden	61	61	Flexible pensionable age up to 67
UK	65	60	Equalisation of women's retirement age to 65. To be phased in between 2010–20

Source:

European Commission (2004) Mutual Information System on Social Protection (MISSOC).

Mr. Dismore: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions how many UK pensioners in receipt of basic state pensions are resident overseas, in *(a)* Commonwealth countries, *(b)* in EU countries and *(c)* elsewhere; and if he will make a statement. [198169]

Malcolm Wicks: The total number of people receiving a UK state pension outside GB is 970,300, of whom: 534,200 reside in a country which is a member of the Commonwealth alone; 274,500 reside in a country which is an EU member state alone; 150,400 reside in countries outside both the EU and the Commonwealth; 8,100 reside in Cyprus and 3,100 reside in Malta, countries which are in both the EU and the Commonwealth.

Note:

1. Caseloads are rounded to the nearest hundred.

2. Figures are obtained from a 5 per cent. sample of cases and are therefore subject to a high degree of sampling variation.

Source:

IAD Information Centre, 5 per cent. sample based on DWP administrative data as at 31 March 2004.

Mr. Dismore: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions how many and what percentage of pensioners retire on incomes higher than the average weekly wage in the last period for which figures are available; and if he will make a statement. [198172]

Malcolm Wicks: The information available is set out in the table.

Number of recently retired pensioner units with net income above mean and median gross weekly earnings in 2002–03

	Number of recently retired pensioner units	*Percentage of recently retired pensioner units*
Above the mean gross weekly earnings, 2002	167,000	13
Above the median gross weekly earnings, 2002	222,000	18

Notes:

1. Mean and median gross weekly earnings are based on the New Earnings Survey 2002 for employees in full-time work.

2. Recently retired pensioner units are those pensioners where the head is less than five years over state pension age, excluding pensioners reporting earnings.

3. Net income is income from all sources deducting income tax and council tax.

Source:

Pensioners' Incomes Series 2002–03, based upon data from the Family Resources Survey (FRS).

Mr. Dismore: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions what he estimates the cost would be of raising the basic state pension to £105.45 per week; what the annual cost is of the pension guarantee credit at the current rate; what the cost would be of the pension guarantee credit if the maximum basic state pension were raised to £105.45 per week; and if he will make a statement. [198207]

Malcolm Wicks: It is estimated that the cost of increasing the full rate of the basic state pension to the level of the guarantee credit in 2005–06 would be £13.5 billion (gross) and £7.3 billion (net). The current forecast for spending on pension credit in 2005–06 is £5.7 billion which, it is estimated, would reduce to £2.1 billion if the rate of the full basic state pension was increased to the level of the guarantee credit.

Notes:

1. Figures are for Great Britain and overseas in 2004–05 price terms, using the Gross Domestic Product deflator index, rounded to the nearest £100 million.

2. It is assumed that the full rate of basic state pension is increased to the level of the individual guarantee credit in 2005–06 and that both are increased in line with earnings. The married woman's (60 per cent.) rate of Category B basic state pension and rates of pension paid to people entitled to less than the full rate of basic state pension are increased by the same proportion.

3. Gross basic state pension costs are estimated by the Government Actuary's Department, are consistent with Budget 2004 assumptions and use 2002-based population projections. Basic state pension costs refer to the additional costs after allowing for consequential changes to national insurance fund benefits and non-income-vote benefits.

4. Costs net of income related benefits (savings credit, guarantee credit, housing benefit and council tax benefit) and income tax are calculated using the Department's policy simulation model for 2005–06. It is assumed that the savings credit is abolished.

5. Some people who are without full contribution records, or who qualify for premiums in pension credit (such as severe disability premium), may continue to receive guarantee credit. It should also be noted that pension credit is paid to those over 60, and men aged 60–64 are not be entitled to basic state pension.

6. Estimates for pension credit spending under current policies taken from published DWP forecasts.

Somalian Nationals

Dr. Gibson: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions (1) what action he has taken to raise awareness among Somalian residents of training opportunities provided by his Department; [195312

(2) what steps he has taken to increase employment opportunities for resident Somalian nationals. [195313]

(3) if he will meet representatives of Somalian nationals to discuss integration into the UK employment market. [195315]

Jane Kennedy: We are committed to providing a fair and equal service to all our customers, irrespective of their race or cultural background. At a local level, we consult widely with communities to raise awareness of the opportunities available, and to identify the most appropriate provision. Somali nationals resident in the UK have access to the full range of Jobcentre Plus services.

People with basic skills needs, including English for Speakers of Other Languages (ESOL), can, at their personal adviser's discretion, have early entry to training and employment programmes to support them into employment. These include the New Deal, which has already helped more than 111,000 ethnic minority people into work; as well as Work Based Learning for Adults, which offers people a range of occupational skills and gives them the opportunity of working towards a recognised qualification that will increase their chances of finding work.

We also have a range of initiatives specifically aimed at increasing employment among ethnic minority groups. These include setting stretching job entry targets for areas with high ethnic minority populations; Ethnic Minority Outreach, which operates in similar areas and aims to help ethnic minority people with little or no contact with Jobcentre Plus to engage with our services and with the wider labour market; and the Ethnic Minority Flexible Fund, which provides funding for Jobcentre Plus at a local level to initiate innovative measures to help more ethnic minority people find work.

I would be happy to arrange, in the first instance, a meeting between my officials and representatives of Somalian nationals to discuss their employment needs.

Winter Fuel Allowance

Mr. Chaytor: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions how many senior citizens in Bury, North were in receipt of the winter fuel allowance in each of the last seven years. [198321]

Malcolm Wicks: The number of senior citizens in Bury, North constituency who have received a winter fuel payment in each year since 1999–2000 is in the table. Information relating to the 1997–98 and 1998–99 winters is not available.

	Payments made
1999–2000	15,295
2000–01	17,180
2001–02	17,385
2002–03	17,480
2003–04	17,825

Note:

Numbers are rounded to the nearest 5.

Source:

IAD Information Centre, 100 per cent. samples.

FOREIGN AND COMMONWEALTH AFFAIRS

European Union

Mr. Wiggin: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs how many pages of the acquis communautaire are in operation in the United Kingdom. [197796]

Mr. MacShane: The acquis communautaire is not a document. The term, translated as 'Community Patrimony', stands for the wide-ranging principles, practices, policies, obligations, objectives and laws that have been agreed or have developed in the European Union. These include, most noticeably, the Treaties in their entirety, as well as all existing EU legislation and Court of Justice judgements.

In principle, all of the acquis communautaire applies to the UK (indeed to all EU Member States) with the exception of opt-outs and legislation yet to be implemented.

Keith Vaz: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what action the Government are taking to increase awareness among UK citizens of the work of the European Union. [197762]

Mr. MacShane: The Foreign and Commonwealth Office is leading a programme of activities to raise awareness of the EU. We are producing and distributing a range of materials to communicate the facts about the EU, including the Guide to the European Union, which was launched on 1 November.

Additionally, I am leading a programme of ministerial visits around the country to discuss European issues with the public. These include business seminars, cultural events, radio-phone-ins and public debates. We are also developing our e-communications and have a dedicated EU website. I also provide interviews and articles for a wide range of publications.

Asylum Seekers

Mr. McNamara: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what research has been undertaken to monitor the treatment of asylum seekers deported from Britain; and what proportion of failed asylum seekers suffered imprisonment, torture or death within 12 months of their deportation from the UK in the last period for which figures are available. [193468]

Mr. Browne: I have been asked to reply.

Each asylum claim is considered on its own merits taking account of relevant country information, caselaw and factors specific to the individual claim. Where a decision has been taken that an individual would not be at risk if returned to their country and that decision has been upheld by the independent appellate authorities we consider that it is safe for that individual to be removed.

We do not consider it necessary to research the treatment of failed asylum seekers who have been removed in accordance with the proper procedures. However, any reliable information about the treatment of returned asylum seekers in a particular country will be referred to in the appropriate country information materials produced by the Immigration and Nationality Directorate and will therefore form part of the individual assessment of asylum claims made by nationals of that country.

Belarus

Mr. Rosindell: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what the primary *(a)* import and *(b)* export goods and services are between the United Kingdom and the Republic of Belarus. [196158]

Mr. Alexander: The latest figures are found in the following table, which show the top 10 commodities imported from and exported to Belarus in pounds sterling in 2003 and in the first eight months of 2004. The figures for trade in services between the UK and Belarus could be provided only at disproportionate cost.

UK top 10 exports and imports of goods from Belarus: 2003

Rank	*SITC*[1]	*Description*	*£000*
Total UK exports			39,182
1.	71	Power generating machinery and equipment	13,916
2.	72	Machinery specialised for particular industries	2,929
3.	74	General industrial machinery and machine parts nes	2,542
4.	69	Manufactures of metal nes	2,453
5.	77	Electrical machinery, apparatus and appliances nes	1,821
6.	64	Paper, paperboard, and articles of paper pulp; etc.	1,647
7.	59	Chemical materials and products nes	1,321
8.	26	Textile fibres	1,320
9.	89	Miscellaneous manufactured articles nes	1,119
10.	55	Essential oils and resinoids and perfume materials	1,065
Total UK imports			22,672
1.	84	Articles of apparel and clothing accessories	7,619
2.	33	Petroleum, petroleum products and related materials	6,033
3.	67	Iron and steel	5,903
4.	56	Fertilisers (other than those of group 272)	799
5.	87	Professional, scientific and controlling instruments nes	498
6.	63	Cork and wood manufactures (excluding furniture)	334
7.	78	Road vehicles (including air-cushion vehicles)	288
8.	62	Rubber manufactures nes	228
9.	52	Inorganic chemicals	126
10.	89	Miscellaneous manufactured articles nes	123

UK top 10 exports and imports of goods from Belarus: January to August 2004

Rank	*SITC*[1]	*Description*	*£000*
Total UK exports			30,591
1.	71	Power generating machinery and equipment	12,008
2.	69	Manufactures of metal nes	1,971
3.	26	Textile fibres	1,482
4.	12	Tobacco and tobacco manufactures	1,472
5.	74	General industrial machinery and machine parts nes	1,379
6.	64	Paper, paperboard, and articles of paper pulp; etc.	1,286
7.	89	Miscellaneous manufactured articles nes	1,046
8.	72	Machinery specialised for particular industries	1,043
9.	77	Electrical machinery, apparatus and appliances nes	1,010
10.	75	Office machines and ADP machines	909
Total UK imports			35,029
1.	33	Petroleum, petroleum products and related materials	20,394
2.	84	Articles of apparel and clothing accessories	5,821
3.	67	Iron and steel	4,821
4.	24	Cork and wood	1,285
5.	78	Road vehicles (including air-cushion vehicles)	758
6.	62	Rubber manufactures nes	549
7.	63	Cork and wood manufactures (excluding furniture)	396
8.	89	Miscellaneous manufactured articles nes	242
9.	87	Professional, scientific and controlling instruments nes	221
10.	72	Machinery specialised for particular industries	104

nes = not elsewhere specified

[1] Standard International Trade Classification

Source:

HM Customs and Excise

Chairman Arafat

Mr. Jim Cunningham: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what discussions his Department has had with the Palestinian authorities regarding the condition of Chairman Arafat. [197821]

Mr. Rammell: During President Arafat's illness officials remained in close touch with members of the Palestinian Authority in Jerusalem and Paris. President Arafat died in the early hours of Thursday 11 November. My right hon. Friends the Prime Minister and Foreign Secretary issued statements on the 11th following President Arafat's death.

Palestinian basic law stipulates that presidential elections should be held within 60 days. It is for the Palestinian people to elect any future president. The UK Government will continue to support the Palestinian people and the transitional Palestinian leadership.

China

Mr. Drew: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what discussions he has had with the Chinese Government on the subject of the arrest of church leaders in Xinjiang Autonomous Region on 12 July. [198070]

Mr. Rammell: Foreign and Commonwealth Office Officials raised the mass arrests of religious practitioners in Xinjiang Autonomous Region with Deputy Director General of the State Administration for Religious Affairs, Wang Zuo'an during the latter's visit to the UK in September.

We are deeply concerned about religious freedom in China. We use the biannual UK/China Human Rights Dialogue to raise our concerns about these and other human rights issues with the Chinese Government. At the last round, held in May, we noted our concern that the prohibition of some religious groups and the legal restrictions placed upon members of others were tantamount to a denial of their members' freedom of religious belief.

Mr. Drew: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what recent representations he has made to the Chinese authorities on the situation of Pastor Gong Shengliang of the South China Church and Mr. Zhang Yinan. [198071]

Mr. Rammell: We are aware of the cases of both Pastor Gong Shengliang and Zhang Yinan.

UK officials raised our concerns about Pastor Gong with the Chinese Government in May 2004. We also supported an EU demarche on his, and other cases, on 17 June.

We are deeply concerned about religious freedom in China, including the treatment of Christians, and monitor the situation closely. We raise religious freedom, the issue of torture and other human rights issues regularly with the Chinese Government, including during our biannual UK/China Human Rights Dialogue. We are also funding projects in China, which aim to reduce the incidence of torture.

Colombia

Mr. David Stewart: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs how much military aid has been given to Colombia since 1994. [198081]

Mr. Rammell *[holding answer 15 November 2004]:* In financial years 2003–04 and 2004–05 the cost of military assistance provided by the UK to the Colombian armed forces was around £120,000 per year. This assistance focused primarily on Explosive Ordnance Disposal (EOD) and provision of training courses to members of the Colombian armed forces both in Colombia and in the UK. It aims to reduce the number of deaths, both civilian and military, from explosive devices, and at introducing Colombian military personnel to British defence concepts in key areas such as Rules of Engagement and democratic and accountable control of the armed forces. We have also trained elements of the Colombian Authorities engaged in Counter-Narcotics work.

We anticipate a similar programme in the financial year 2005–06.

The information for previous years is not held centrally and could be provided only at disproportionate cost.

Croatia

Keith Vaz: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs when Croatia is expected to start accession negotiations with the European Union. [197763]

Mr. MacShane: The European Council of 17–18 June 2004 decided that Croatia is a candidate country for membership and that the accession process should be launched. It also emphasised that Croatia needs to maintain full co-operation with the International Criminal Tribunal on Yugoslavia (ICTY) and take all necessary steps to ensure that the remaining indictee, Ante Gotovina, is located and transferred to the Hague. This Government strongly supports Croatia's EU candidacy but Croatia must continue to comply with its ICTY obligations.

Cyprus

Mr. Tynan: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what monitoring of *(a)* imports and *(b)* immigration to the Turkish Republic of Northern Cyprus is being carried out following the EU decision to treat the Green Line as not being a border of the EU for importation and immigration purposes. [197586]

Mr. MacShane: The entire island of Cyprus acceded to the EU in May this year. Pending a settlement to the current division of the island, the application of the acquis communautaire has been suspended in the north. This means that the line between the areas in which the Government of the Republic of Cyprus exercises effective control and the areas where it does not is not an external border of the EU. A special regulation (8208/04) has been passed setting out rules concerning the crossing of goods, services and persons to ensure an equivalent standard of protection while facilitating intra island trade and other links. A copy of the Green Line Regulation is available in the Library of the House.

Departmental Staff (Upper Age Limits)

Mr. Andrew Turner: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs whether *(a)* his Department and *(b)* agencies for which it is responsible (i) have a set retirement age which applies to all or most personnel and (ii) have a maximum age beyond which applications for employment will not be considered; and what the age is in each case. [186085]

Mr. Alexander *[pursuant to his reply, 11 October 2004, Official Report, c. 31W]:* There was an error in my answer of 11 October to the hon. Member. The correct answer should read as follows:

In the Foreign and Commonwealth Office, including its Wilton Park agency, all officers have a set retirement age of 60 years. However, if band A (clerical) officers wish to postpone their retirement they may do so up to 65 years and band B (junior management), band C (middle management) and band D (senior management) may do so up to 63 years.

Members of the Diplomatic Service are recruited up to 52 years to allow time for training and tours of duty at home and abroad before retirement. Members of the FCO Home Civil Service cadre are recruited up to 57 years to allow time for a normal tour of duty in a home job before retirement.

EU Constitution

Mr. Brady: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs whether equal status will be awarded to the *(a)* UK Parliament, *(b)* Scottish Parliament and *(c)* National Assembly for Wales in the consultation process for proposed legislation stipulated in the EU constitution. [197484]

Mr. MacShane: The Protocol on the Role of National Parliaments in the European Union and the Protocol on the Application of the Principles of Subsidiarity and Proportionality provide for the transmission of draft European legislative Acts to national Parliaments—in our case, the United Kingdom Parliament. Article 6 of the Protocol on subsidiarity and proportionality, which provides reasoned opinions to be submitted on compliance with the principle of subsidiarity, also states that

> "it will be for each national Parliament or each chamber of a national Parliament to consult, where appropriate, regional parliaments with legislative powers".

Mr. Austin Mitchell: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will list the areas of European Union legislation, together with their current relevant bases in constitutional treaties in force, for which the coming into force of the proposed constitutional treaty will change the requirement for unanimity. [197539]

Mr. MacShane: In the EU constitution signed by Heads of State and Government at the European Council on 18 June 2004, 15 Articles (or sub-paragraphs) would move from a unanimous voting mechanism to Qualified Majority Voting. These are: Articles I-37(3) (Article 202 TEC), I-54(4) (Article 269 TEC), III-136 (Article 42 TEC), III-141.1b (Article 27 TEC), III-187(3a) (Article 107 TEC), III-236 Article 71 TEC), III-270 (Article 31(1) TEU), III-273 (Article 31(2) TEU), III-275 (Article 30(1) TEU), III-276 (Article 30(2) TEU), III-280 (Article 151 TEC), III-359 (Article 225a TEC), III-364 (Article 229a TEC), III-381 (Article 245 TEC) and III-382 (Article 112 TEC). One of these Articles (III-136) has an emergency brake mechanism which allows a member state an effective veto. Article (III-270) has an emergency brake mechanism which can lead to enhanced co-operation, allowing a member state not to participate in the action concerned.

Under the EU constitution, the UK would retain its existing 'Protocol on the position of the United Kingdom and Ireland on policies in respect of border controls, asylum and immigration, and on judicial co-operation in civil matters' and therefore retains the right to take part in such measures on a case by case basis. Articles III-265 (Article 62 TEC), 266 (Article 63(1) and (2) and 64(2) TEC), and 267 (Article 63(3) and (4) TEC), covered by this protocol, now provide for decisions by QMV under the new treaty, but the treaty of Amsterdam provided anyway for a potential move to QMV from 1 May 2004. A council decision to endorse this move is currently being negotiated. Of the articles mentioned above, the protocol also covers Articles III-260 (under certain circumstances), and III-275(2a). The above references use the revised article numbering as it appears in the final text. I have made available a table summarising these changes in the Library of the House.

EU Enlargement

Mr. Wiggin: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what discussions he has had with representatives of other European Union countries regarding the prospects of new member countries joining the European Union; and if he will make a statement. [197799]

Mr. MacShane: My right hon. Friend the Foreign Secretary and I have regular discussions with EU partners about EU enlargement, most recently at the European Council on 4–5 November when the Commission presented its latest progress reports on the enlargement candidates. The Foreign Secretary discussed Turkey's bid for EU membership with the Belgian Foreign Minister, Karel de Gucht, on 9 November. I discussed Turkey's membership with fellow Europe Ministers in Brussels on 4 November and Croatia's bid with the Hungarian Foreign Minister, Ferenc Somogyi on 11 November. On these and other occasions, we reaffirmed the support of the UK Government for the membership prospects of all EU candidates, provided they fulfil the necessary criteria for membership.

Mr. Tynan: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what further expansion of the EU he supports; and what the largest geographical extent of the EU is that the UK would support. [197565]

Mr. MacShane: There are four existing EU candidates—Bulgaria, Romania, Turkey and Croatia. In addition, the European Council agreed at Thessaloniki in June 2003 that the countries of the Western Balkans (Serbia and Montenegro, Bosnia and Herzegovina, former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia and Albania) are all potential future EU candidates. The UK strongly supports each country's EU aspirations provided they meet the appropriate criteria.

Article 49 of the Treaty on European Union states that any European state, which respects fundamental European values, may apply to become a member of the Union. No decision has yet been taken whether to offer the prospect of EU membership to other countries.

EU/UK Law

Mr. Tynan: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs whether *(a)* additional scrutiny safeguards are applied and *(b)* minimum negotiating positions are strengthened by the UK Government in respect of EU proposals where UK primary legislation relating to a proposal has been passed in the last three years. [197567]

Mr. MacShane: If the UK Parliament had recently agreed primary legislation in a particular area, this would be reflected in the Explanatory Memorandum which accompanies all draft European laws deposited with Parliament for scrutiny. The Government would of course take this into account during any relevant European negotiations.

European Court of Justice

Mr. Tynan: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will list cases which the UK has referred to the European Court of Justice in relation to *(a)* legal base and *(b)* the principle of subsidiarity in each of the last five years; and what the outcome was in each case. [197635]

Mr. MacShane: In the last five years the UK has made two applications to the ECJ in relation to legal base and they are:

ECJ Case C-61/04 UK *v.* EP & Council: application for annulment of Regulation 2065/2003 on smoke flavourings used or intended for use in or on foods; and

ECJ Case C-217/04 UK *v.* EP & Council: application for annulment of Regulation 460/2004 establishing the European Network and Information Security Agency.

Both challenges are on the basis that Article 95 is not an appropriate legal base for the Community to establish centralised EU procedures and bodies. Article 95 allows for the harmonisation of national laws and provisions and requires qualified majority voting. HMG believes that such measures should only be adopted unanimously and that Article 308 (which requires unanimity) is the correct legal basis for such measures. We have not been given a hearing date for either case yet.

No applications have been made in relation to the principle of subsidiarity.

Freedom of Information Act 2000

Dr. Julian Lewis: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what assessment he has made of the likely costs to his Department in the first quarter of 2005 of compliance with the provisions of the Freedom of Information Act 2000; and if he will make a statement. [198763]

Mr. Straw: The cost of compliance with the provisions of the Freedom of Information Act 2000 (FOIA) will depend on the number and complexity of the requests received. The resources of the Foreign and Commonwealth Office's (FCO) central unit dealing with FOI have been strengthened to cope with the anticipated demands of the FOIA and contingency arrangements are in place to augment the unit further should need arise. These additional costs are being met from within the existing FCO budget.

Iran

Andrew Mackinlay: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what representations the Government have made to the government of Iran about the sentence of death by stoning given to 13 year old Zhila Izadi; and if he will make a statement. [193061]

Mr. Rammell *[holding answer 25 October 2004]*: We have made clear to the Iranian authorities, including by my noble Friend the Baroness Symons of Vernham Dean to the Iranian Ambassador in London, our deep concern at media reports that Ms Izadi has been sentenced to death by stoning. The Iranian authorities have indicated to us that Ms Izadi will not be executed, and that she, and her brother, have been transferred to a welfare organisation.

With our strong support, the use of the death penalty has been an important theme of the EU/Iran Human Rights Dialogue, including the most recent round in June.

Iraq

Harry Cohen: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will make a statement on the reasons for the continued detention of Amir Hamudi Hasan Al Sadi by coalition forces in Iraq; what the conditions of his detention are; what access *(a)* the International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC) and *(b)* his family has to him; what views the ICRC has expressed on his detention; and whether a date has been set for his trial. [197537]

Mr. Rammell: I am not in a position to provide details on individuals held by the US. Mr. Al Sadi's case will be reviewed by the detainee review committee in the same way as all other cases. I am aware that the ICRC has visited Mr. Al Sadi. I cannot comment on ICRC observations, since the ICRC reports confidentially to the detaining authority, in this case the US.

Mr. Jim Cunningham: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what decisions have been made as to which regiments will be sent to Iraq when the Black Watch forces return to the UK in December. [197819]

Mr. Hoon: I have been asked to reply.

We have no plans to replace the one Black Watch Battlegroup when it returns to the United Kingdom in December.

Adam Price: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs pursuant to his Answer of 11 October 2004, *Official Report*, columns 755–6W, on Iraq, whom the British officials, told by Mr. Turki about his concerns in September 2003, informed about his representations; if he will list the British officials concerned; and whether Mr. Turki mentioned specific detention facilities. [194494]

Mr. Rammell *[holding answer 28 October 2004]*: Mr. Turki raised some general concerns in Baghdad in a meeting with my right hon. Friend the Prime Minister's Special Envoy on Human Rights to Iraq, my right hon. Friend the Member for Cynon Valley (Ann Clwyd) and a British official, in September 2003. On her return to the UK, Ms Clwyd reported these concerns to the Prime Minister, in a meeting on 15 October 2003. Foreign and Commonwealth Office officials followed up these concerns with the US. In the afore mentioned meeting, Mr. Turki said that a number of individual complaints of poor conditions had been raised with him, but he did not go into detail about specific complaints or facilities.

Ivory Coast

Mr. Drew: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will make representations to the government of France on bringing about *(a)* an immediate cease-fire in and *(b)* an early withdrawal of French troops from the Ivory Coast. [198317]

Mr. Mullin: The International Community, including France and the United Kingdom, has urged all sides in the Ivorian conflict to respect the cease-fire of May 2003. We will continue to do so.

The French peacekeepers in Côte d'Ivoire operate under a UN mandate. Their presence is a result of an agreement between the French and Ivorian governments. We will review the position of all foreign troops in Côte d'Ivoire with France and other members of the UN Security Council once the security and political situation in Côte d'Ivoire has clarified.

Mr. Drew: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what monitoring he is undertaking of the situation in the Ivory Coast, with particular reference to *(a)* civilian casualties and *(b)* the role of French troops. [198318]

Mr. Mullin: We have continually monitored the situation in Côte d'Ivoire, including the role of French troops, through our Embassy, the UN, the media and humanitarian organisations on the ground such as Human Rights Watch and the International Committee for the Red Cross. However, this coverage is now reduced following the departure of our British diplomatic staff on 13 November.

Kidnapping (Britons)

Mr. David Stewart: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs how many British citizens have been kidnapped in foreign countries in the past five years. [198078]

Mr. MacShane *[holding answer 15 November 2004]*: According to our records, 74 British nationals have been reported kidnapped overseas in the last five years. However, not all kidnaps are notified to us. Some incidents are over very quickly and without any HMG involvement.

North Korea

Mr. Wiggin: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what discussions he has had regarding North Korea's nuclear weapons programme; and what research he has commissioned concerning the possible threats that North Korea's nuclear weapons programme poses to international security. [197808]

Mr. MacShane: My right hon. Friend the Foreign Secretary and other Foreign and Commonwealth Office Ministers have discussions with a wide range of interlocutors on counter-proliferation including the Democratic People's Republic of Korea's (DPRK) nuclear aspirations. Most recently my hon. Friend the Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State at the Foreign and Commonwealth Office, (Mr. Rammell) visited DPRK from 11–14 September, where the issue of DPRK's nuclear aspirations was an important element of his discussions. A statement about this visit was made to the House on 16 September 2004, *Official Report*, columns 186–88WS.

Information on the DPRK nuclear weapons programme is also available to FCO officials from a number of other sources both within and outside Government. It is evaluated continually by them and by experts in other Departments to determine, among other things, the level of threat posed to the UK and internationally. The Foreign Secretary has not asked for other specific research on the DPRK nuclear weapons threat to be undertaken.

Nuclear Disarmament

Llew Smith: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what proposals to strengthen nuclear non-proliferation were put by the United Kingdom to the most recent session of the United Nations General Assembly's (UNGA) Committee on Disarmament; which proposals on non-proliferation put forward by other states the UK *(a)* supported and *(b)* abstained on; if he will list the resolutions debated during this session of the Committee; what the reasons were for the way the United Kingdom voted in each case; and if he will make a statement. [197616]

Mr. MacShane: At the most recent session of the UN General Assembly First Committee on Disarmament (4 October—5 November) the United Kingdom co-sponsored a number of resolutions on non-proliferation. These included: L31 measures to prevent terrorists from acquiring weapons of mass destruction, L49 prevention of the illicit transfer and unauthorised access to and use of man-portable air defence systems, and L50 Hague Code of Conduct against ballistic missiles.

The UK also joined consensus on L5 national legislation on the transfer of arms, military equipment, dual use goods and technology, and supported L37 risk of nuclear proliferation in the Middle East.

A full list of all 57 resolutions tabled at this year's First Committee with the United Kingdom's voting record and copies of the explanations of vote offered by the United Kingdom to the Committee will shortly be published on the Foreign and Commonwealth Office website at www.fco.gov.uk/ukdis.

Sri Lanka

Mr. Dismore: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what steps he is taking to promote the peace process in Sri Lanka; and if he will make a statement. [197599]

Mr. Alexander: We welcome the progress that has been made in the peace process since the ceasefire came into effect in February 2002. We are however concerned that there have been no direct peace talks between the Government of Sri Lanka and the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam since April 2003. We are working closely with international partners to encourage all parties to return to the negotiating table. My right hon. Friend the Foreign Secretary, explained our concern that peace negotiations need to be resumed quickly in meetings with the Sri Lankan President in June, and the Sri Lankan Foreign Minister in July. We are supporting small-scale peacebuilding activities in Sri Lanka with funding from the Global Conflict Prevention Pool and the Department for International Development. The details of a final peace settlement in Sri Lanka will, of course, be for the Sri Lankans to decide. We are keen that any settlement should be one that takes account of the legitimate demands of all communities within a democratic and stable Sri Lanka.

Subsidiarity

Mr. Tynan: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs at what point in the EU decision-making process it is the policy of the UK to refer disputes over subsidiarity to the European Court of Justice. [197564]

Mr. MacShane: The Government takes a view on subsidiarity in respect of all draft European laws and communicates this view to the UK Parliament through an Explanatory Memorandum. If the Government felt that a particular draft law breached the subsidiarity principle then it would seek to address this during negotiations and if necessary oppose adoption of the measure. In the event that a measure was adopted which we felt constituted a breach of the subsidiarity principle then, in line with other challenges on procedural issues, we would consider referring a case to the European Court of Justice at that point.

Sudan

Mr. Drew: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what discussions he has had with the regime in Khartoum on the forced movement of internally displaced people in the camps in Darfur; and what discussions he has had with the UN on this. [198075]

Mr. Mullin: We are gravely concerned by the forced relocations of people in camps in Darfur. This appears to be a breach of international humanitarian law, as well as the established mechanisms on relocations. We have repeatedly made clear to the Government of Sudan that all returns must be voluntary and appropriate and carried out with full and prior consultation with the international community, as agreed in the Memorandum of Understanding between the Government of Sudan and the International Organisation for Migration.

During our respective visits to Sudan, both my right hon. Friend the Foreign Secretary and I met the UN Special Representative to Sudan, Jan Pronk. We discussed the need for a co-ordinated international response on the protection of civilians, including displaced persons, in Darfur.

Mr. Drew: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs when he last met representatives of the Sudan Liberation Army. [198076]

Mr. Mullin: I met the leadership of the Sudan Liberation Movement/Army when they visited London on 13 October. I pressed them on the need to abide by the ceasefire, to sign the Humanitarian Protocol, and to engage fully on negotiating a Security Protocol. We welcome the signing of both Protocols in Abuja on 9 November.

Trafficking/Illegal Weapons Export

Mr. David Stewart: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs how many countries have taken up the UK's offer of help in meeting the 28 October deadline for making a report to the UN on *(a)* trafficking prevention and export controls of illicit weapons trade and *(b)* how dangerous weapons-related materials are secured; and if he will make a statement. [198058]

Mr. MacShane: The UK was approached by a number of states seeking advice on the structure and scope of national reports under United Nations Security Council Resolution 1540. In response to these approaches, the UK circulated widely its own draft report on 13 August in order to provide a possible model for others to follow. The UK formally submitted its national report to the 1540 Committee on 29 September, and my right honourable Friend the Foreign Secretary made a written statement on 11 October *Official Report*, column 3WS.

We remain fully committed to the work of the 1540 Committee in ensuring global implementation of this resolution, including—where appropriate—through providing assistance or advice to others.

Turkey

Mr. Dismore: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs pursuant to the Answer of 8 November 2004, *Official Report*, column 523W, on Turkey (Penal Code), whether the introductory paper to the new Turkish penal codes refers to the withdrawal of Turkish troops from Cyprus and the Armenian Genocide in its explanatory notes on Article 305; and if he will make a statement. [198617]

Mr. MacShane: Article 305 concerns Turkish citizens acting against national interests in return for material benefits from a foreign individual or organisation. The wording of this article only refers to such national interests as independence, territorial integrity and national security. There is no mention of Cyprus or the Armenian genocide.

The explanatory note to this Article, designed as guidance to the judiciary, remains unchanged from the guidance drafted under the previous government. It states that in this context (of receiving material benefits from a foreign individual or organisation) "a citizen who demands the withdrawal of troops from Cyprus, or declares that the Armenian genocide took place during the First World War, can be pursued by virtue of this article."

This explanatory note, however, does not have the same legal status as the Penal Code and is not legally binding.

The Commission has made it clear to Turkey that they expect the language not to be taken into consideration when interpreting Article 305. The Commission, with our support, will monitor implementation of the law closely to ensure Turkey meets its international legal obligations, including those concerning freedom of expression under the European Convention for the Protection of Human Rights.

Ukraine

John Robertson: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what steps his Department has taken to monitor the presidential election in Ukraine. [197476]

Mr. MacShane: The United Kingdom made the largest contribution to the OSCE's Election Observer Mission to the first round of Ukraine's presidential election on 31 October. The Foreign and Commonwealth Office funded 60 short-term observers and five long-term observers together with the OSCE's Deputy Head of Mission. We shall repeat this for the second round scheduled for 21 November.

DEPUTY PRIME MINISTER

Regional Referendum

Mr. Gordon Prentice: To ask the Deputy Prime Minister how many cases of electoral fraud are being investigated arising from the North East Regional Assembly referendum. [198374]

Mr. Raynsford: The Chief Counting Officer is not aware of any cases of electoral fraud that are being investigated arising from the North East Regional Assembly referendum.

Buildings (TV Reception)

Paul Farrelly: To ask the Deputy Prime Minister what remedies are available to residents when building developments interfere with the quality of television reception. [198690]

Keith Hill: There are essentially two types of interference: electromagnetic interference, usually caused by a radio transmitter or other electrical equipment; and physical interference, due to some obstruction or reflection of the signal by a building or other large object, such as a crane.

While the wireless telegraphy legislation is in place to avoid creating undue radio interference with other users (including domestic television sets), the second type of interference—physical interference—cannot be dealt with under radio legislation.

There are, of course, a number of electronic ways to boost a weakened television signal, which is the result of interference from another building, many of which are inexpensive and widely available.

In addition, digital television signals are generally more robust than analogue in terms of signal strength and are becoming accessible in an increasing number of areas. Thus, as viewers change to digital television, such problems as interference caused by reflections from structures can be expected to diminish over time.

Circular 1/94

Mr. Horam: To ask the Deputy Prime Minister when he expects to publish a revised Circular 1/94. [198464]

Keith Hill: The Office of the Deputy Prime Minister intends to publish a revised draft of Circular 1/94 (Gypsy Sites and Planning) for consultation before the end of the year.

Community Housing Task Force

Mr. Austin Mitchell: To ask the Deputy Prime Minister if he will take steps to ensure that the private financial and consultancy sectors involved in the operations of the Community Housing Task Force contribute financially to its work. [197783]

Keith Hill: There are no private financial and consultancy sectors involved in the operations of the Community Housing Task Force (CHTF).

Compulsory purchase

Geraldine Smith: To ask the Deputy Prime Minister under what circumstances a house can be compulsorily purchased; and whether compensation is paid. [198861]

Keith Hill: Many enactments provide powers for the compulsory acquisition of land, including houses. These are usually expressed in terms appropriate to the functions of the particular acquiring authority concerned rather than the existing use of the land being acquired. The principle underlying the exercise of all such compulsory purchase powers is that there must be a compelling case in the public interest.

The Land Compensation Act 1961 establishes that compensation is payable where an interest in land is compulsorily acquired. The principle underlying the level of compensation payable is that persons with an interest in the land should be left no worse off and no better off in monetary terms after the acquisition than before. The amount claimable will depend on the circumstances of the individual case.

Consultancy Projects

Dr. Julian Lewis: To ask the Deputy Prime Minister how many consultancy firms or companies have been retained by the Department since June 2001; what the projects are for which each has been retained; and what the total is of the fees paid or incurred in each case. [193430]

Phil Hope: The information requested is not held centrally and could be provided only at disproportionate cost.

Consultants

Mr. Maples: To ask the Deputy Prime Minister if he will list the contracts awarded by his Department to consultants in each of the last five years, stating in each case *(a)* the name of the consulting company, *(b)* the value of the contract and *(c)* the purpose for which the contract was awarded; and if he will make a statement. [191728]

Phil Hope: The information requested is not held centrally and could be provided only at disproportionate cost.

Contaminated Land

Mrs. Calton: To ask the Deputy Prime Minister what recent discussions he has had with the Secretaries of State for *(a)* Health and *(b)* Environment, Food and Rural Affairs about the development of contaminated land. [198607]

Keith Hill: My right hon. Friends the Secretary of State for Health, the right hon. Member for Hamilton, North and Bellshill (Dr. Reid) and the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs, the right hon. Member for Derby, South (Margaret Beckett) were consulted by my right hon. Friend the Deputy Prime Minister on the preparation of "Planning Policy Statement 23: Planning and Pollution Control". This incorporates an Annex on the development of land affected by contamination. It was published on 3 November 2004.

Copyrighted Material

Michael Fabricant: To ask the Deputy Prime Minister what guidance his Department has issued to local authorities about the reproduction of local authority-owned copyrighted material by political parties; and if he will make a statement. [198022]

Mr. Raynsford: The Office of the Deputy Prime Minister has not issued guidance to local authorities about the reproduction of local authority-owned copyrighted material by political parties.

Decent Homes Standard

Tim Loughton: To ask the Deputy Prime Minister if he will list the independent companies appointed to conduct consultations into achieving the Government's Decent Homes Standard; and how much they are being paid. [198341]

Keith Hill: The Office of the Deputy Prime Minister has not employed any independent companies to conduct consultations into achieving the Decent Homes Standard.

It is for individual local authorities to determine their need for consultations conducted by independent companies, and how much they are prepared to pay them.

Tim Loughton: To ask the Deputy Prime Minister what steps he is taking to achieve compliance with the Decent Homes Standard. [198342]

Keith Hill: The Office of the Deputy Prime Minister has increased spending on social housing, through a mix of public and private money. Since 1997 spending by local authorities has increased by 13 per cent. in real terms amounting to £13 billion. On top of this we have made around £4 billion available for Arms Length Management Organisations and £2.6 billion for Private Finance Initiative (PFI), with £5.3 billion levered in through stock transfer. Local authorities should have Options Appraisals, which select their route to delivery, signed off by Government Offices by July 2005.

Departmental Advertising Costs

Charles Hendry: To ask the Deputy Prime Minister what the cost of *(a)* creative work, *(b)* media spend and *(c)* administration for his Department's advertising activity has been in each financial year since 1997–98, broken down by contractor. [197289]

Phil Hope: The Office of the Deputy Prime Minister was created on 29 May 2002. In the financial year 2002–03 the cost of creative work was covered by a commission of 8.5 per cent. on the total media spend. This equates to £284,750 spent through the agency Euro RSCG. The total media spend came to £3.35 million spent through the media agency CARAT Communications.

In 2003–04 the cost of creative work was covered by a commission of 7.5 per cent. on the total media spend. This equates to £307,500 spent through the agency Euro RSCG. The total media spend was £4.1 million through the media agency CARAT Communications.

In 2004–05 the estimated cost of creative work on fire safety advertising will be 8.5 per cent. on an estimated media spend of £2.9 million. This equates to £246,500 spent through Euro RSCG. The cost of creative work on the elected regional assembly advertising campaign was £465,000 spent through Robson Brown. The total estimated media spend for 2004–05 is £4.4 million spent through CARAT communications.

Costs for administration are not held centrally and could be provided only at disproportionate cost.

East of England Assembly

Mr. Amess: To ask the Deputy Prime Minister what the cost has been of *(a)* setting up and *(b)* running the East of England assembly since its inception. [197872]

Mr. Raynsford: Between April 2001 and March 2004 the East of England regional assembly was awarded a Government grant of £2,974,000.

Fire Authorities

Mr. Gordon Marsden: To ask the Deputy Prime Minister what estimate his Department has made of projected cost savings in each fire authority resulting from integrated risk management plans. [197690]

Mr. Raynsford: Under Integrated Risk Management Planning (IRMP) it is up to each Fire and Rescue

Authority (FRA) to assess the risks faced by its communities and to consider how best to use resources to meet its area's needs. Savings in some areas may allow increased provision in others where there is greater scope for saving lives. Fire and rescue authorities are also expected to pursue best value for local council taxpayers.

Fire Service

Patrick Mercer: To ask the Deputy Prime Minister what plans he has to remove rescue tenders from the fire and rescue stations in *(a)* Retford and *(b)* Newark. [197422]

Mr. Raynsford: None. The deployment of rescue tenders in Retford and Newark is a matter for the local fire authority.

Each fire and rescue authority (FRA) is requested to develop its own Integrated Risk Management Plan (IRMP) and action plan.

IRMPs provide the strategic overview that is used by fire authorities to determine immediate and future policy decisions.

Any proposals to change its IRMP should form part of the consultation on their action plan which all fire and rescue authorities are required to undertake.

Home Ownership

Mr. Cash: To ask the Deputy Prime Minister if he will make a statement on large scale voluntary transfer of housing in Staffordshire. [198467]

Keith Hill: Stafford borough council were given a place on the 2004 transfer programme. They are proposing a whole stock transfer, a total of 6,091 properties, to a new Registered Social Landlords (RSL), Stafford and Rural Homes. The council are currently drafting their offer document. The stage one notice informing tenants of the transfer proposal and likely consequences is set to go out in January 2005, with the stage 2 letter following in February or March. A ballot is scheduled to start in March 2005, although no date has been set. If the council receives a yes vote they will have until March 2006 to complete the transfer.

Mr. Cash: To ask the Deputy Prime Minister how many local authorities are planning to ballot their tenants on possible large scale voluntary housing transfer. [198468]

Keith Hill: Seventeen local authorities on the 2003 and 2004 transfer programme are currently planning to ballot their tenants.

Homelessness

Mrs. Spelman: To ask the Deputy Prime Minister what the level of priority homelessness was in *(a)* England and *(b)* Greater London in each year since 1993. [190615]

Phil Hope: Estimates of the number of homeless households accepted by local authorities in England and London as eligible for assistance, unintentionally homeless and in priority need under homelessness legislation in each year since 1993, is in the table.

	England	*London*
1993	127,630	31,570
1994	118,490	28,690
1995	117,490	26,690
1996	113,590	25,730
1997	102,000	24,370
1998	104,630	26,310
1999	105,370	28,380
2000	111,340	28,230
2001	118,610	31,370
2002	125,330	30,320
2003	137,440	32,330

Source:

ODPM P1E homelessness returns (quarterly)

After being accepted as homeless, a household will be placed in some form of accommodation. They may be placed in temporary accommodation, until a settled solution becomes available, or they may be given a settled solution straight away depending on the accommodation available to the local authority. Alternatively, if possible, the household may remain in their current accommodation (homeless at home). In addition to estimates of statutory homeless households, the Office of the Deputy Prime Minister publishes annual estimates of the number of people sleeping rough.

The priority need groups include households with dependent children or a pregnant woman and people who are vulnerable in some way, e.g. because of mental illness or physical disability. An Order made under the 1996 Act, brought into force in July 2002, extended the priority need categories to include, additionally: applicants aged 16 or 17; applicants aged 18 to 20 who were previously in care; applicants vulnerable as a result of time spent in care, in custody, or in HM Forces, and applicants vulnerable as a result of having to flee their home because of violence. This widening of priority need has contributed to recent increases but means more vulnerable people are receiving help when they need it.

Low-cost Housing (Islington)

Jeremy Corbyn: To ask the Deputy Prime Minister how many shared ownership properties were sold in Islington in each year since 1997; and how many of those properties were purchased by a person *(a)* already in social housing in that area, *(b)* on the single housing register in that area and *(c)* a key worker. [198618]

Keith Hill: Estimates of annual shared ownership sales in Islington from 1997–98 to 2003–04 are in the table.

	Total shared ownership sales in Islington	*Shared ownership sales to people who were previously social tenants in Islington*	*Shared ownership sales to purchasers who were registered on a local authority waiting list/common housing register*
1997–98	28	10	16
1998–99	67	6	31
1999–2000	48	8	36
2000–01	35	7	23

	Total shared ownership sales in Islington	*Shared ownership sales to people who were previously social tenants in Islington*	*Shared ownership sales to purchasers who were registered on a local authority waiting list/common housing register*
2001–02	42	16	25
2002–03	137	22	68
2003–04	82	13	40

Note:

The occupation of purchasers was not collected as part of CORE Sales during the period 1997–98 to 2003–04. Consequently it is not possible to provide figures on the number of key workers that bought shared ownership properties in Islington during this period.

Source:

Housing Corporation: CORE Sales

Jeremy Corbyn: To ask the Deputy Prime Minister (1) if he will break down the low cost homeownership units planned for Islington in the Housing Corporation's 2004–06 Approved Development Programme by *(a)* conventional shared ownership, *(b)* Do-It-Yourself shared ownership and *(c)* Homebuy; [198619]

(2) if he will break down the low cost homeownership units planned for Islington in the Housing Corporation's 2004–06 Approved Development Programme by *(a)* one-bed, *(b)* two-bed, *(c)* three-bed and *(d)* four-bed or more units. [198620]

Keith Hill: The Housing Corporation have so far allocated resources to fund a total of 299 shared ownership dwellings and 342 Homebuy dwellings in Islington over the years 2004–06. In 1999, Homebuy was introduced into the Housing Corporation Approved Development Programme to replace the Do-It-Yourself shared ownership scheme.

The following table shows the split of low cost homeownership schemes by one, two, three and four or more bedrooms. The figure for Homebuy Market Purchase cannot be broken down until the individual properties are purchased.

Low cost homeownership in Islington

	Dwellings	*One bed*	*Two bed*	*Three bed*	*Four bed*
Homebuy Market Purchase (for North London, including Islington)	342	[1]—	[1]—	[1]—	[1]—
Conventional shared ownership—keyworker	260	138	114	8	0
Conventional shared ownership—other	39	7	32	0	0
Total	641	145	146	8	0

Mobile Phone Masts

Miss McIntosh: To ask the Deputy Prime Minister if he will make a statement on his planning policy for mobile phone masts. [198644]

Keith Hill: Current planning guidance on telecommunications is set out in the revised Planning Policy Guidance Note 8: Telecommunications. The general policy is to facilitate the growth of telecommunications systems while protecting the environment.

I refer the hon. Member to the debate given by my hon. Friend the Member for Corby (Phil Hope) on 18 October 2004, *Official Report*, column 739.

North West Development Agency

Keith Vaz: To ask the Deputy Prime Minister how many new members of the North West Development Agency are *(a)* women and *(b)* black or Asian. [198024]

Mr. Raynsford: The North West Development Agency staff recruitment during the period 1 May 2004 to 31 October 2004 included:

(a) 20 women

(b) three black or Asian women (included in the figure at *(a)*) and no black or Asian men were recruited.

Overcrowded Housing (Children)

Jon Trickett: To ask the Deputy Prime Minister if he will make a statement on the number of children living in overcrowded housing in the UK. [198755]

Keith Hill: The Office of the Deputy Prime Minister estimates on the basis of the "bedroom standard" used in the Survey of English Housing, that there were 770,000 children under 16 living in overcrowded households in England in 2003–04. That figure represented 8 per cent. of all children.

Police Authority Budgets

Phil Sawford: To ask the Deputy Prime Minister what plans he has to cap police authority budgets for 2005–06; and what criteria will be used. [197856]

Mr. Raynsford: No decisions on capping in 2005–06 and beyond have been made. But the Office of the Deputy Prime Minister has made it clear that we expect to see significantly lower council tax increases next year and will take even tougher capping action in 2005–06 if that proves necessary. This applies to all authorities, including police and fire authorities.

PPG3

Mr. Key: To ask the Deputy Prime Minister when he will announce his conclusions on his Consultation Paper of July 2003 on a Proposed Change to Planning Policy Guidance Note 3, Housing. [198493]

Keith Hill: The intention is to publish the proposed changes to Planning Policy Guidance Note 3: "Housing" by the end of the year.

Mr. Hancock: To ask the Deputy Prime Minister what plans he has to publish a revised version of Planning Policy Guidance 3; and if he will make a statement. [198809]

Keith Hill: The Office of the Deputy Prime Minister consulted on proposed updates to Planning Policy Guidance Note 3: "Housing" (PPG3) last year entitled 'Influencing the Size, Type and Affordability of Housing', and 'Supporting the Delivery of New Housing'. We are considering responses to the consultation exercises undertaken last year and intend to publish the updates to PPG3 by the end of this year. Any further revisions to PPG3 to take account of the recommendations of the Barker review of housing supply will be completed in 2005.

Private Finance Initiatives

Mr. George Osborne: To ask the Deputy Prime Minister if he will list the private finance initiative arrangements in which the Department is engaged; what the total cost of each arrangement is *(a)* over its lifetime and *(b)* in each year of its operation; and how the arrangement appears in the Department's public accounts. [193984]

Phil Hope: The following table shows the private finance initiative arrangements in which the Office of the Deputy Prime Minister is engaged. The information sought on the cost of each arrangement is not held centrally, and could be provided only at disproportionate cost.

All private finance initiative arrangements in which the Office of the Deputy Prime Minister is engaged in are procured by and through local authorities or its agencies and do not therefore appear on the Office of the Deputy Prime Minister's resource accounting.

The Office of the Deputy Prime Minister—List of private finance initiative arrangements

Office of the Deputy Prime Minister	*Signed*	*Operational*
LB Islington: Depot/Vehicles—LON	Yes	Yes
LB Lambeth: Depot/Vehicles—LON	Yes	Yes
Fire Service		
Avon, Somerset and Gloucester: Fire Training Facility—SW	Yes	Yes
Cornwall CC: Fire Stations—SW	Yes	Yes
Greater Manchester Fire and Civil Defence Authority: Stretford Divisional Headquarters and Fire Station—NW	Yes	Yes
Lancashire CC: Fire Stations—NW	Yes	Yes
London Fire Authority (GLA): Fire Vehicles and Equipment—LON	Yes	Yes
North Yorkshire CC: Fire Training Facility and Fire Station—YH	Yes	Yes
Tyne and Wear Fire and Civil Defence Authority: Fire Stations and other facilities—NE	Yes	—
South Wales Fire Authority: Training Centre for South Wales Fire and Rescue Service	Yes	—
Housing		
Derby City Council: Social Housing—EM	Yes	Yes
LB Islington: HRA Pathfinder—Mainly Victorian Street Properties—LON	Yes	Yes
Manchester City Council: HRA Pathfinder, Plymouth Grove/Stockport Road Estate—NW	Yes	Yes
North East Derbyshire DC: Social Housing—EM	Yes	Yes
Oldham MBC: Sheltered Housing—NW	—	—
Reading DC: HRA Pathfinder, North Whitley—SE	Yes	Yes
Selby DC: 250 New Homes—YH	Yes	Yes
Warrington BC: Anson and Blenheim Close (Non HRA)—NW	Yes	—
Information and Communication Technology		
Cambridge CC: "Cambridge Community Network"—E	Yes	Yes
LB Croydon: "Delivering Customer Focus"—LON	Yes	Yes
Derby City Council: Revenues and Benefits—EM	Yes	Yes
LB Harrow: Revenues and Benefits—LON	Yes	Yes
Kent CC: Strategic IT—SE	Yes	Yes
Norwich City Council: "Connect" Electronic Network—E	Yes	Yes
Leisure		
Sefton MBC: Crosby Leisure Centre—NW	Yes	Yes
Uttlesford DC: Three New Sports and Leisure Centres—E	Yes	Yes
Property and Regeneration		
Bournemouth BC: Library—SW	Yes	Yes
Brighton DC: Library—SE	Yes	—
Copeland BC: Office Rationalisation—NW	Yes	—
LB Hackney: Technology Learning Centre—LON	Yes	Yes
Norfolk CC: Salt Barns—E	Yes	Yes
North Wiltshire DC: Property Rationalisation—SW	Yes	Yes
Redcar and Cleveland BC: Office Accommodation—NE	Yes	Yes
Sheffield City Council: "Heart of the City" Offices—YH	Yes	Yes
Trafford MBC: Sale New Civic Centre Office Accommodation—NW	Yes	Yes
Department for Education and Skills/Office of the Deputy Prime Minister		
Joint schools and community facilities		
LB Barking and Dagenham: Joint Service Centre—LON	Yes	—
Bolton MBC: Primary School, Library and Community Facilities—NW	Yes	Yes
Brighton and Hove City Council: 4 Secondary Schools plus Community Library—SE	Yes	Yes
Cheshire CC: Ellesmere Port and Neston Schools and Community Facilities—NW	Yes	Yes
Essex CC: Clacton Joint Service Centre—E	Yes	Yes
Liverpool MDC: Speke/Garston Forward Learning Centre—NW	Yes	Yes
Sunderland City Council: Secondary School and Community Facilities—NE	Yes	Yes
LB Tower Hamlets: Mulberry School, Secondary School and Sports Hall—LON	Yes	Yes
Department of Health/Office of the Deputy Prime Minister		
Joint Housing and social services		

The Office of the Deputy Prime Minister—List of private finance initiative arrangements

Office of the Deputy Prime Minister	*Signed*	*Operational*
LB Hammersmith and Fulham: Care and Housing for Older People—LON	Yes	Yes
Queen Elizabeth II Conference Centre (Executive Agency)		
Executive Agencies		
QEII Conference Centre: Catering Services	Yes	Yes

Referendums

Mr. Gummer: To ask the Deputy Prime Minister what *(a)* focus groups, *(b)* opinion polling and *(c)* local government sources he consulted before going ahead with a referendum in the North East on a directly elected regional assembly. [197903]

Mr. Raynsford: The decision to proceed with the North East referendum was made in July, when Orders were laid before Parliament. I refer the right hon. Member to the answer given to the hon. Member for Worthing West on 7 September 2004, *Official Report*, column 1167W.

Mr. Gummer: To ask the Deputy Prime Minister what plans he has made to address the differentiated application of the powers of honourable Members in the constituent parts of the United Kingdom since the decision was taken not to take forward further referendums for regional assemblies. [.98074]

Mr. Raynsford: None.

Regional Assembly Referendums

Mr. Gummer: To ask the Deputy Prime Minister what *(a)* focus groups, *(b)* opinion polling and *(c)* local government sources he consulted before aborting the referenda in (i) the North West and (ii) Yorkshire and the Humber on directly elected regional assemblies. [197902]

Mr. Raynsford: The reasons for the Government's decision not to proceed with the referendums in the North West and Yorkshire and the Humber were set out in the statement my right hon. Friend the Deputy Prime Minister made on 8 November, *Official Report*, columns 587–606W.

Regional Fire Control Centres

Mr. Swire: To ask the Deputy Prime Minister what redundancy package will be offered to control staff who lose their jobs as a result of the relocation of fire brigades to a regional control centre. [196490]

Mr. Raynsford: There is no plan to relocate fire brigades, only to rationalise control services at a regional level. The Office of the Deputy Prime Minister recognises that this will have implications for existing fire control staff. However, the skills of these staff are generally transferable, so there will be a premium on ensuring both that people who are not going to find jobs under the new arrangements are helped to relocate and secure other jobs and that the service will continue to operate in the most effective way. If staff were to lose their jobs, the redundancy package would be a matter for negotiation between staff representatives and the employers. At a minimum such staff would be eligible for the statutory redundancy payment, as dictated by their length of service with the fire and rescue service.

Right to Buy

Mrs. Spelman: To ask the Deputy Prime Minister what the average purchase price of a right to buy *(a)* flat and *(b)* house in England was in (i) 1997 and (ii) the last year for which figures are available. [197087]

Keith Hill: Average right-to-buy selling price figures (net of discount) for England are tabled as follows. The higher average price for flats in 2003–04 results from the sale of large numbers of relatively expensive flats in London, whereas the average house price is lowered by sales of cheaper houses in the north and midlands.

£000

	1997–98	*2003–04*
(a) Flat	17.7	57.3
(b) House	22.2	39.3
All dwellings	21.5	43.5

Mrs. Spelman: To ask the Deputy Prime Minister what the average discount applied to a right to buy *(a)* flat and *(b)* house in England was in (i) 1997 and (ii) the last year for which figures are available. [197088]

Keith Hill: Average right-to-buy discount figures for England are tabled as follows:

£000

	1997–98	*2003–04*
(a) Flat	26.5	32.9
(b) House	20.5	22.5
All dwellings	21.4	25.0

NORTHERN IRELAND

Ambulance Services

Mrs. Iris Robinson: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland how much has been spent on ambulance services in the Province in each of the last five years. [198141]

Angela Smith: The information in respect of the expenditure on ambulance services in the Province in each of the last five years is detailed in the table.

Expenditure on ambulance services from 1999–2000 to 2003–04

	£000
1999–2000	22,707
2000–01	23,978
2001–02	26,532
2002–03	28,763
2003–04	32,653

These figures represent the operating expenses of the Northern Ireland Ambulance Service HSS Trust for each of the last five years.

Area Plans

Lady Hermon: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland what his assessment is of progress with each of Northern Ireland's area plans; and what steps are being taken to ensure that the timetables for the plans are being adhered to. [197020]

Angela Smith: For some time, the Department of the Environment's (NI) Planning Service has had an ambitious programme to update the current Area Plan coverage. Good progress has been made to implement this challenging programme: in the past two years the Planning Service has published two adopted plans and two draft Plans, and it is scheduled to publish the Draft Belfast Metropolitan Plan 2015 later in November 2004. Collectively this covers 11 of the 26 council areas in Northern Ireland. Draft plans for a further 12 council areas are under preparation.

In recent months, however, the Planning Service has been forced to review the rapidly increasing, and unprecedented, workload pressures being faced by the Planning Service. After very careful consideration, it has been decided to concentrate as many resources as possible for a period of time on dealing with operational matters—i.e. planning applications. This reallocation of resources will have some short-term implications for the Area Plan programme. Despite this, every effort is being made to ensure that any delay is kept to a minimum.

ASSIs

Mr. McGrady: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland which proposed Area of Special Scientific Interest sites have yet to be declared in order to complete the ASSI programme. [197793]

Angela Smith: There are currently 212 Areas of Special Scientific Interest [ASSI] in Northern Ireland covering over 92,000 hectares.

An additional 15 sites are currently proposed, having been endorsed by the Council for Nature Conservation and the Countryside, the Department of the Environment's statutory adviser in such matters.

They are:

Site name	*Nearest town*	*County*
Ballymacombs More	Bellaghy	Londonderry
Ballypalady	Templepatrick	Antrim
Banagher	Enniskillen	Fermanagh
Edenaclogh Wood	Kesh	Fermanagh
Errigal Glen	Garvagh	Londonderry
Feystown	Glenarm	Antrim
Lemnalary	Carnlough	Antrim
Lenaghan Wood	Derrygonnelly	Fermanagh
Lough Aleater	Garrison	Fermanagh
Lough Corry	Rosslea	Fermanagh
Lough Scolban	Beleek	Fermanagh
Lurgan River Wood	Belcoo	Fermanagh
Murrins	Omagh	Tyrone
Rehaghy Wood	Aughnacloy	Tyrone
Shimna River	Newcastle	Down

These sites will cover less than 1,000 hectares. Even when they have been declared, the ASSI programme will still be far from complete.

A forward programme for the declaration of ASSIs was published in March 2003. The programme is a framework for completing the main phase of ASSI declarations by 2015. It is predicted that an additional 40,000 hectares of land will be found to merit ASSI status.

Although the general location of many more potential ASSIs is known, their description and exact definition requires further survey, assessment and mapping.

At-risk Children

Mrs. Iris Robinson: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland what steps are being taken by the Department of Health, Social Services and Public Safety with *(a)* other Government departments and *(b)* NHS trusts in Northern Ireland to develop an information-sharing database between professional agencies on children who are at risk or in need; and what plans he has to bring forward legislation paralleling the provisions in the Children Bill [Lords] to facilitate information sharing. [197624]

Angela Smith: The creation of a database for sharing information on children who are at risk or in need will be considered by the Department of Health, Social Services and Public Safety as a part of work on a forthcoming Strategy for Children and Young People in Need.

This strategy will be developed in conjunction with representatives of the HPSS and other stakeholders including other Departments. Dependent on the outcomes of the strategy, the Department will consider enacting legislation allowing it to take powers similar to those proposed in the Children Bill.

The Children Bill provisions for facilitating information sharing build on structures which do not exist in Northern Ireland. Obviously, any cross-cutting database will require close co-operation between the Department of Health, Social Services and Public Safety and other Government Departments.

Chemotherapy

Mrs. Iris Robinson: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland how much was spent on chemotherapy drugs in the Province in each of the last five years; and what the proposed spending is in the next 12 months. [198150]

Angela Smith: Approximately £6.3 million was spent on chemotherapy drugs in 2002–03 and approximately £7.9 million in 2003–04. Approximately £13.8 million of chemotherapy drugs demand is currently anticipated for 2004–05.

Further information is not available

Community Care

Mrs. Iris Robinson: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland how many community care packages have been provided in the Province in each of the last 10 years. [198144]

Angela Smith: The number of community care packages in effect in each of the last 10 years is detailed in the following table.

	Number of community care packages in effect
2004	19,015
2003	19,003
2002	17,359
2001	16,587
2000	15,485
1999	14,756
1998	13,942
1997	13,491
1996	12,180
1995	9,385

Note:

Figures show a snapshot at 31 March for each year, and refer to care managed packages. Data for 2004 is provisional and may be subject to change.

Mrs. Iris Robinson: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland what change in the number of community care packages required in the Province he expects in the next decade. [198145]

Angela Smith: On the basis of current trends, it is estimated that the need for community care packages would grow by approximately 5,000 to 24,000 over the next decade.

Crosshill Quarry, Crumlin

David Burnside: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland what discussions have taken place with Belfast International Airport on the impact on its business of the proximity of asbestos storage and destruction at Crosshill Quarry, Crumlin. [196085]

Angela Smith: The Belfast International Airport was consulted in relation to the asbestos storage application and was content with the proposal.

David Burnside: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland under what authority and regulatory provision, railway carriages containing blue asbestos were crushed and buried at Crosshill Quarry, Crumlin by Eastwood Environment Waste Company. [196086]

Angela Smith: Approval for the repositioning and burial of 18 railway carriages at Crosshill Quarry, was given to Eastwood Limited by the then waste disposal regulator, Antrim borough council. The council was the regulating authority under the Pollution Control and Local Government (Northern Ireland) Order 1978 for Waste Disposal Licences. Eastwood Limited held a Waste Disposal Licence for the deposit of controlled waste at Crosshill Quarry.

A Method Statement was prepared by the company and the carriages were relocated and encapsulated in clay to the satisfaction of the council and the Health and Safety Executive. Environment and Heritage Service (EHS) was consulted about the relocation proposals and was also content.

The Waste Management Licensing Regulations (Northern Ireland) 2003 came into operation on 19 December 2003 and the regulatory powers for waste licensing were transferred from the district councils to the EHS.

Under the transitional arrangements a Waste Disposal Licence is deemed to be a Waste Management Licence and this would apply to the licence for Crosshill Quarry.

The 18 carriages were repositioned within the Crosshill Quarry site immediately before EHS became the regulator under these provisions.

David Burnside: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland what environmental impact assessment has been made of *(a)* the storage and *(b)* the destruction of asbestos at Crosshill Quarry, Crumlin in the last five years. [196087]

Angela Smith: *(a)* The consideration of the need for a formal environmental impact assessment is triggered by a planning application. In this case the storage application fell outside the regulations and no formal determination was necessary. Environmental issues were dealt with through the normal expert consultees who were content with the proposal. No destruction of asbestos has occurred on site.

(b) A Method Statement was prepared by Eastwood Limited for the repositioning of 18 railway carriages within their licensed facility at Crosshill Quarry, Crumlin. The carriages were relocated and encapsulated in clay to the satisfaction of the council and the Health and Safety Executive. This work was undertaken in the latter part of 2003. The Environment and Heritage Service is not aware of any destruction of asbestos having taken place at the Crosshill Quarry site.

David Burnside: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland what tourism impact assessment has been made of the effect of the storage and destruction of asbestos at Crosshill Quarry, Crumlin on the local area. [196088]

Angela Smith: The tourism authority was not consulted on the matter. The expert consultees consulted on the asbestos storage planning application are satisfied that there are no environmental effects that cannot be satisfactorily mitigated.

District Councils

David Burnside: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland what *(a)* the total cost and *(b)* cost per elector of the 26 district councils in the provinces was in each of the last three years. [197668]

Angela Smith: The total cost, expressed in terms of net expenditure, and cost per elector for the last three years of each of the 26 district councils, is set out in the following table.

		2001-02	
District council	*Number of electors*	*Net expenditure £*	*Cost per elector £*
Antrim	33,025	8,332,999	252.32
Ards	54,708	10,503,734	192.00
Armagh	39,567	9,244,560	233.64
Ballymena	44,466	9,605,185	216.01
Ballymoney	19,755	3,952,736	200.09
Banbridge	30,604	6,459,239	211.06

		2001-02	
District council	*Number of electors*	*Net expenditure £*	*Cost per elector £*
Belfast	185,922	67,872,998	365.06
Carrickfergus	27,307	6,839,948	250.48
Castlereagh	48,714	8,605,620	176.66
Coleraine	39,216	9,111,853	232.35
Cookstown	23,531	4,631,867	196.84
Craigavon	57,388	13,440,755	234.21
Derry	71,252	19,407,404	272.38
Down	45,616	10,478,325	229.71
Dungannon and South Tyrone	35,617	6,055,611	170.02
Fermanagh	42,698	7,341,967	171.95
Larne	22,972	5,228,747	227.61
Limavady	21,705	5,297,986	244.09
Lisburn	75,757	15,576,155	205.61
Magherafelt	28,490	5,251,743	184.34
Moyle	11,414	3,360,189	294.39
Newry and Mourne	62,913	18,076,375	287.32
Newtownabbey	58,339	15,009,428	257.28
North Down	56,381	12,643,357	224.25
Omagh	33,689	7,485,365	222.19
Strabane	27,458	5,891,894	214.58
Total	1,198,504	295,706,040	246.73

		2002-03	
District council	*Number of electors*	*Net expenditure £*	*Cost per elector £*
Antrim	28,661	8,839,064	308.40
Ards	49,507	11,945,691	241.29
Armagh	36,657	10,056,670	274.35
Ballymena	40,789	10,802,858	264.85
Ballymoney	18,510	4,213,120	227.61
Banbridge	28,447	7,232,425	254.24
Belfast	155,882	75,545,590	484.63
Carrickfergus	24,286	6,834,342	281.41
Castlereagh	43,377	10,193,848	235.01
Coleraine	35,497	9,469,727	266.78
Cookstown	22,051	4,857,416	220.28
Craigavon	52,796	14,661,737	277.71
Derry	62,801	19,564,474	311.53
Down	41,607	11,200,924	269.21
Dungannon and South Tyrone	32,867	6,741,314	205.11
Fermanagh	39,833	8,175,620	205.25
Larne	20,547	5,294,445	257.67
Limavady	19,969	4,836,395	242.20
Lisburn	66,759	16,980,608	254.36
Magherafelt	27,069	5,577,995	206.07
Moyle	10,429	3,195,234	306.38
Newry and Mourne	56,185	16,939,179	301.49
Newtownabbey	51,378	15,525,813	302.19
North Down	50,014	13,576,124	271.45
Omagh	31,399	7,859,541	250.31
Strabane	25,108	6,222,951	247.85
Total	1,072,425	316,343,105	294.98

		2003-04	
District council	*Number of electors*	*Net expenditure £*	*Cost per elector £*
Antrim	29,149	9,431,111	323.55
Ards	48,977	12,877,397	262.93
Armagh	36,849	10,588,776	287.36
Ballymena	40,774	10,063,412	246.81
Ballymoney	18,604	4,457,450	239.60
Banbridge	28,707	7,307,126	254.54
Belfast	154,179	80,615,320	522.87
Carrickfergus	24,483	7,438,357	303.82
Castlereagh	42,685	10,155,518	237.92
Coleraine	35,166	9,965,780	283.39
Cookstown	21,960	5,743,746	261.55
Craigavon	52,846	16,141,665	305.45
Derry	62,404	21,669,100	347.24
Down	41,668	11,707,205	280.96
Dungannon and South Tyrone	32,754	7,550,774	230.53

		2003–04	
District council	*Number of electors*	*Net expenditure £*	*Cost per elector £*
Fermanagh	39,986	8,416,926	210.50
Larne	20,410	5,910,097	289.57
Limavady	20,094	6,096,731	303.41
Lisburn	65,855	18,685,254	283.73
Magherafelt	27,243	5,830,867	214.03
Moyle	10,564	3,221,441	304.95
Newry and Mourne	56,634	17,340,593	306.19
Newtownabbey	51,511	16,815,096	326.44
North Down	49,698	14,439,672	290.55
Omagh	30,993	8,923,604	287.92
Strabane	24,967	6,786,465	271.82
Total	1,069,160	338,179,483	316.30

Domestic Rates

Mrs. Iris Robinson: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland how domestic rates in Northern Ireland are calculated; and what this revenue is used for. [190179]

Mr. Pearson: The rate bill for individual domestic properties is calculated by multiplying the property's Net Annual Value (NAV) by the overall domestic poundage, which encompasses two elements. These are the Regional Rate poundage, which is uniform across Northern Ireland, and the District Rate poundage, which is dependant upon the district council that the property is located in.

Regional Rate revenue is not allocated to specific areas of expenditure, but instead contributes to the overall amount of money available to the Secretary of State to allocate to regional public services in Northern Ireland. Regional Rate revenue accounts for around 6 per cent. of total planned spend on public services.

The level of District Domestic Rates is determined by each of the 26 district councils, with all revenue generated being used by the relevant council.

Education Initiatives

Mr. Dodds: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland what measures he is taking to provide help to parents in *(a)* Greater Shankhill and *(b)* north Belfast to return to full-time education. [197100]

Mr. Gardiner: The Department for Employment and Learning has a number of measures in place to help parents in Greater Shankill and north Belfast to return to full-time education including:

the Spring vale Community Outreach Initiative, which aims to improve educational standards in these areas;

the Essential Skills for Living strategy, in which parents are included as a priority group;

a number of Peace II projects, specifically targeted at family learning, to improve levels of Essential Skills;

a marked expansion in higher education provision, with a significant growth in HE provision delivered in the further education sector, to widen access for mature students; and

a wide range of support for students entering higher education, including allowances, bursaries, loans and grants and non repayable support grants for students in specific circumstances.

Additionally, Belfast Institute, East Antrim Institute and the Workers' Educational Association offer a wide range of family learning provision, including Essential Skills, in the north Belfast and Greater Shankill areas. Plans are also in place to establish a Family Literacy and Numeracy Innovation Fund to further promote family-based adult Essential Skills learning.

Family Health Services

Mrs. Iris Robinson: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland how much was spent on family health services in the Province in the last year for which figures are available. [198142]

Angela Smith: The total spent on family health services in the 2003–04 financial year was £563,740,000.

Fertility Treatment

Mrs. Iris Robinson: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland how many patients are awaiting *(a)* initial outpatient assessment and *(b)* treatment for sub-fertility in the Province. [198652]

Angela Smith: The information requested is not collected centrally and could be obtained only at disproportionate cost.

Mrs. Iris Robinson: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland if he will make a statement on recent changes in waiting lists for those seeking sub-fertility treatment in the Province. [198653]

Angela Smith: The interim fertility service in Northern Ireland started in December 2001, at the Regional Fertility Centre, Royal Group of Hospitals. Access to publicly funded fertility services is regulated by eligibility criteria and these criteria have been in operation from this date. There are currently 201 patients waiting for treatment on the NHS waiting list. A patient referred to this waiting list in November 2004, could expect to wait between 18 and 24 months for treatment. The publicly funded waiting list continues to accept people for treatment in line with the referral date from their GP. There have been no significant recent changes to the NHS waiting list for fertility treatment.

Mrs. Iris Robinson: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland when he expects to announce proposals for the further development of fertility services in the Province. [198656]

Angela Smith: To inform decisions on the longer-term provision of fertility services in Northern Ireland I issued the document "From People to Parents" for public consultation in October 2003. The consultation process has now closed and officials are preparing options for my consideration.

Any enhancement to fertility services will have to be considered within the resource limits set out in the draft Priorities and Budget document issued for consultation on 12 October 2004. Consultation on this draft Budget ends on 7 December and I hope to be in a position to announce my proposals for the future development of fertility services in Northern Ireland when the revised Budget is finalised.

Fire Services

Mrs. Iris Robinson: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland how much has been spent on fire services in each of the last five years in the Province. [198143]

Angela Smith: The information in respect of expenditure on fire services in Northern Ireland in relation to each of the previous five years is detailed in the table.

	£000
1999–2000	49,616
2000–01	51,307
2001–02	52,275
2002–03	59,346
2003–04	60,673

From 2001–02 onwards the figures are derived from the relevant Resource Accounts, prepared on an accruals basis. Prior to this the figures are taken from the former cash-based Appropriation Accounts, and these are therefore not directly comparable.

Firearms (Retired Police)

Lady Hermon: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland what plans he has to remove the requirement for retired prison officers to carry a firearms certificate and replace it with an authorisation card. [198294]

Mr. Pearson: It is a fundamental requirement of the firearms legislation that, save for a number of specified exemptions, all firearms must be held on firearm certificates. I have no plans to change that.

Lady Hermon: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland how many retired police officers in Northern Ireland have been issued with a firearms authorisation card. [198295]

Mr. Pearson: There is no legislative provision for a firearms authorisation card. Retired police officers wishing to hold firearms must do so on the authority of a firearm certificate.

Lady Hermon: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland how many retired police officers in Northern Ireland have been issued with a firearms certificate. [198296]

Mr. Pearson: The PSNI firearms licensing computer system is not programmed to provide this information in the format requested and it can only be provided manually at disproportionate cost.

Lady Hermon: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland for what reason *(a)* retired prison officers are required to carry a firearms certificate and *(b)* retired police officers carry an authorisation card. [198297]

Mr. Pearson: No distinction is made between a retired prison officer and a retired police officer in respect of the holding of firearms. Both are required to have a firearm certificate.

Fruit-growing Land

Mrs. Iris Robinson: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland what the overall area of *(a)* apple orchards and *(b)* other fruit-growing land was in the Province (i) in 1974, (ii) in 1984, (iii) in 1994 and (iv) on the latest date for which figures are available. [198838]

Mr. Pearson: Information on the area of land devoted to commercial fruit growing in Northern Ireland is collected each year as part of the Agricultural and Horticultural Census conducted by the Department of Agriculture and Rural Development.

The information requested is as follows.

		hectares
	Area of apple orchards	*Area of other fruit growing land*
1974	2,515	97
1984	2,064	91
1994	1,701	72
2003	1,545	57

2003 is the most recent year for which data is available.

GP Contract

Mrs. Iris Robinson: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland what assessment he has made of the effects on morale of general practitioners in the Province of the implementation of the new General Medical Services contract. [198147]

Angela Smith: No assessment has been made of the effects on morale of general practitioners in Northern Ireland following the implementation of the new General Medical Services contract. It is, of course, part of the aims of the new contract to boost the morale of the profession and to make general practice a more attractive career option for qualifying doctors by, for example, offering GPs improved remuneration prospects, a better work/life balance through the ability to opt out of providing out-of-hours care, and, through the Quality and Outcomes Framework, financial rewards for meeting clinical and other specified quality standards. Implementation of the new contract is being supported in Northern Ireland by the investment of new monies in excess of £44 million over 3 years. The contract has, however, only been in operation a matter of months and it may take a longer period before the benefits it offers GPs are fully realised.

Green Ministers

Mr. Horam: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland how many departmental Green Ministers there have been since 1997. [197836]

Angela Smith: Since May 1997, there have been two Northern Ireland Office 'Green' Ministers.

Inquiry (Child Deaths)

Mr. John Hume: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland if he will ensure that the families of the children whose deaths are the subject of Mr. John O'Hara QC's independent inquiry have access to independent legal representation; and what the *(a)* terms of reference and *(b)* scope of the inquiry are. [198497]

Angela Smith: I refer the hon. Gentleman to the answer I have given today to the hon. Member for Strangford (Mrs. Robinson).

Lucy Crawford

Mrs. Iris Robinson: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland (1) whether medical expertise for the inquiry into the death in April 2000 of Lucy Crawford will be sought from *(a)* outside Northern Ireland and *(b)* from doctors within the Province; [197850]

(2) whether the proceedings of the inquiry into the death in April 2000 of Lucy Crawford will be conducted in public; [198014]

(3) whether the inquiry into the death in April 2000 of Lucy Crawford will have the power to compel witnesses, with particular reference to doctors, to provide evidence; when he expects the inquiry will commence; and whether the actions of the *(a)* Sperrin Lakeland Trust and *(b)* Department of Health Social Services and Personal Safety in response to the death of Lucy Crawford will be investigated by the inquiry. [197848]

Angela Smith: Officials are currently finalising the detailed arrangements for the conduct of the inquiry with Mr. John O'Hara QC and I hope to make an announcement shortly. These arrangements will take account of Cabinet Office guidance on inquiries and a copy of the Terms of Reference will be placed in the House Library.

Mediboxes

Mrs. Iris Robinson: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland pursuant to the answer of 2 November 2004, *Official Report*, column 239W, on GP prescribing, whether Mediboxes have been available in Northern Ireland through the NHS. [198146]

Angela Smith: Mediboxes have never been available on health service prescription.

MRSA

Mrs. Iris Robinson: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland what assessment he has made of the effectiveness of new drugs to combat MRSA. [197849]

Angela Smith: There are no new drugs licensed to combat MRSA. Licenses for use indicate a drug's range and spectrum not specific diseases or ailments. Clinicians assisted by Trust guidelines and aided by local laboratory appraisals of efficacy make assessments as to the effectiveness of particular licensed drugs.

Museums

Mr. Gregory Campbell: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland if he will list the publicly funded museums in Northern Ireland; how many visitors there were to each in the last year for which figures are available; and what the net cost of each facility was in 2003–04. [191629]

Angela Smith: Publicly funded Museums in Northern Ireland may receive funding from Northern Ireland Government Departments, District Councils, NIO, and the Ministry of Defence and, in some cases, a combination of sources. The following table lists museums in Northern Ireland which received public funding towards their operating costs in 2003–04, the most recent annual visitor numbers available, and the net cost of each in 2003–04.

Museum	*Net Cost (total operating costs less self generated income) 2003–04 (£000)*	*Visitor Numbers 2003–04*	*Calendar (c) or Financial (f) Year*	*Comments*
Andrew Jackson and US Rangers Centre	35.3	971	7 months	Open April to October.
Ballycastle Museum	16.9	2,400	2 months	Open July to August.
Ballymena Museum	120.8	11,793	f	
Ballymoney Museum	45	2, 982	c	
Barn Museum	2	7,419	c	
Down County Museum	753	44,653	c	
Downpatrick Railway Museum	12.2	5,512	Open 4 months in year	Open June to September. The net annual cost shown relates to 2002–03 as the figures for 2003–04 are not available.
Fermanagh County Museum	260.9	19,246	f	
Flame—The Gasworks Museum of Ireland	15.4	756	Open 7 months in year	Closed November to March.
Foyle Valley Railway Museum	68.8	0	Closed to public	
Garvagh Museum Ltd	1	972	f	
Gray Printers Museum	55.3	3,484	c	
Green Lane Museum	6.9	7,500	Open 32 days	Open weekends in May, June and September and 7 days in July and August
Harbour Museum	272.4	11,000	c	
Heritage Building	149.2	205	c	
Irish Linen Centre and Lisburn Museum	608.2	44,630	c	The costs and visitor numbers provided by Lisburn BC relate to the overall footfall to the facility including shop and cafe with total visitor numbers of 302,536 in 2003–04 of which 44,630 visited the Museum.

Museum	*Net Cost (total operating costs less self generated income) 2003–04 (£000)*	*Visitor Numbers 2003–04*	*Calendar (c) or Financial (f) Year*	*Comments*
Larne Museum	67	0	Closed to public	Closed for refurbishment
Newry and Mourne Museum	75	10,000	c	
North Down Heritage Centre	303	50,725	c	
MAGNI (incorporating the Ulster Museum, the Ulster Folk and Transport Museum, the Ulster American Folk Park and Armagh County Museum)	11,686	523,951	f	
Pogues Entry [Childhood home - Alexander Irvine]	n/a	700	Open 4 months in year	Open June to September. The total operating costs for Pogues Entry only available from the Museum itself which is currently closed for the off-season.
Ministry of Defence	249			Regimental Museums funded by Ministry of Defence. Due to the set up of their budget it is not possible to split down the cots for the individual museums.
Royal Iniskilling Fusiliers		19,094	c	
Royal Irish Fusiliers Museum		4,521	c	
Royal Irish Regimental Museum		15,000		
Royal Ulster Rifles Museum		12,000	c	
Somme Heritage Centre	30.3	19,474	f	
Tower Museum	318.1	21,851	c	

Notes:

The museums listed are those museums that have received public funding towards their operating costs in the financial year 2003–04. Where it has proved impossible to obtain the relevant information to date this has been shown on the table as n/a (not available).

Neurosurgery

Mrs. Iris Robinson: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland what intensive rehabilitation facilities are available in the Province for patients following neurosurgery. [198098]

Angela Smith: Various levels of rehabilitation are provided for patients following neurosurgery, depending on their individual needs. These include initial in-patient rehabilitation until medically fit for discharge; specialist in-patient rehabilitation facilities; hospital out-patient services, and specialist community teams, which have links with voluntary sector organisations providing vocational rehabilitation.

A regional acquired brain injury rehabilitation unit, with 25 beds, is due to open at Musgrave Park Hospital in 2006.

Mrs. Iris Robinson: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland if he will make a statement on neurosurgery provision for children in the Province. [198152]

Angela Smith: All paediatric neurosurgery is carried out at the Royal Group of Hospitals. There are two neurosurgeons with an interest in paediatric surgery and the hospital runs four clinics per month. The current waiting time for an outpatient appointment is four weeks. Children requiring inpatient treatment are generally treated as urgent cases and therefore experience little or no waiting time.

Night Flights

Lady Hermon: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland how many breaches of the late night flight curfew at Belfast City Airport there have been in each of the past five years; and which airlines were involved in each case. [197314]

Angela Smith: The total number of delayed late night flights after 21.30 hours during each of the last five years, is as follows:—

	Number
1999	350
2000	334
2001	340
2002	520
2003	648

The current Planning Agreement is between the Department of the Environment and Belfast City Airport, not individual airlines. Consequently, my Department does not hold information on individual airlines delayed and late night flights.

Lady Hermon: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland what enforcement action has been taken against *(a)* airlines and *(b)* the operators of Belfast City Airport for breaches of the late-night flight curfew (i) in each of the last four years and (ii) to date in 2004; and if he will make a statement. [197315]

Angela Smith: No enforcement action has been taken in relation to flights which have been delayed after 21.30 hours. However, officials have been working with the airport operators to reduce the number of flight movements after 21.30, as part of an agreed Action Plan. The target is to achieve a 10 per cent. reduction in the total number of flights operating after 21.30, including a 90 per cent. reduction in flights after 23.00.

To date, during 2004, there is an overall 15 per cent. reduction in the number of flights operating after 21.30 during the extended hours period, when compared to 2003. During 2004, one late flight occurred after midnight.

This is a significant reduction, against the background that the total number of late flights (648) during 2003 represents less than 2 per cent. of the total air traffic movements.

Parades

Mr. McGrady: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland, what the total policing cost of parades was from 1 April to 14 August; and what the figure was for the same period last year. [187889]

Mr. Pearson: Further to my earlier reply, I am now in a position to provide the information you requested. The policing cost for the period in question for 2004 was £5,552,544, compared with £5,217,215 for the previous year.

Rivers Agency

Mr. Donaldson: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland what the religious composition is of the technical staff in the Western Regional Office of the Rivers Agency. [198510]

Mr. Pearson: The confidentiality of monitoring information and the categories of statistical analyses, which are published, is governed by statutory requirements and a Code of Practice agreed with the trade unions. In addition, under fair employment legislation, NICS is treated as a single entity for the purposes of monitoring. Equality of opportunity and fair participation is assessed by examining the compositional profile of the NICS at occupational groups and grade levels. It is information at this level, not the composition of particular offices or locations, which is used to inform the development of policies, practices and procedures which promote equality of opportunity and fair participation across the NICS as a whole.

I am sorry that my response cannot be more forthcoming, but I hope you will appreciate that we have to have proper regard to statutory requirements and the Code of Practice agreed with Trade Unions.

Mr. Donaldson: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland how many internal transfers have taken place in the Western Regional Area of the Rivers Agency involving *(a)* industrial staff and *(b)* technical staff in each year since 2000. [198511]

Mr. Pearson: The number of internal transfers in the Western Region of the Rivers Agency is as follows:

	Industrial staff	*Professional and technical staff*
2000	1	1
2001	0	3
2002	4	1
2003	1	0
2004	1	0

Students

Mr. Donaldson: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland how many students ordinarily resident in Northern Ireland are taking courses *(a)* at Northern Ireland universities and *(b)* at universities outside Northern Ireland. [198505]

Mr. Gardiner: *(a)* In 2002–03, 44,137 NI domiciled students were enrolled at the four locally established NI higher education institutions and 3,481 were enrolled at the Open University.

(b) In 2002–03, 15,260 NI domiciled students were enrolled at higher education institutions in Great Britain and the Republic of Ireland.

The Department for Employment and Learning does not hold information on students enrolled at higher education institutions outside the United Kingdom and Republic of Ireland.

The Department publishes annual statistical bulletins on higher education enrolments which are available to download from: http://www.delni.gov.uk/index.cfm/area/information/page/SRHEEnrolments

Sure Start

Lady Hermon: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland if he will ensure that a multi-agency approach in service delivery is central to the proposed new Sure Start model. [198288]

Angela Smith: Sure Start promotes and adopts a partnership approach to providing co-ordinated services for families with young children. The programme is both designed and delivered at a local level through a network of local statutory agencies and community-based voluntary organisations working in the fields of health, early education and family/parenting support. Thus, in each local area, different programmes are set up according to the range of existing services and the particular needs of the community.

Tyrone County Hospital

Mr. McGrady: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland if he will make a statement on acute services provision at Tyrone County Hospital. [198272]

Angela Smith: "Developing Better Services" and the Western Board's subsequent strategic context document "Planning for Change" detail how the Tyrone County Hospital will evolve into a local hospital, in parallel with the development of the new South West Hospital in Enniskillen. The implementation of "Developing Better Services" will provide a network of fully integrated services across Northern Ireland and the new local hospital in Omagh will play a key role in that network of services. It will continue to provide some 70 per cent. of the services that people require in hospital settings, including a local assessment and treatment unit, diagnostics including X-ray and CT scanning, a mobile coronary care service, renal dialysis, in-patient beds for rehabilitation and palliative care, and a wide range of out-patient and day case surgery services, all in modern, state of the art facilities.

During the transition to the new service model set out in "Developing Better Services", I will do everything I can to ensure that standards are maintained and that no services are removed from Tyrone County Hospital until appropriate alternative provision has been put in place.

HEALTH

Accident and Emergency Services

Paul Farrelly: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what additional investments have been made in accident and emergency services in North Staffordshire since 1997. [198569]

Dr. Ladyman: During the period 1999–2001, the former North Staffordshire Hospital National Health Service Trust—now the University Hospital of North Staffordshire NHS Trust—received the following amounts from the capital modernisation fund for accident and emergency.

(£000)

Wave of scheme	*Details of scheme*	*Cost*
First wave	To upgrade and modernise the A and E department	700
Second wave	To improve responsiveness, efficiency and quality of A and E services	150

The Trust has also received the following capital payments from the Department's accident and emergency incentive scheme.

(£000)

Period of incentive scheme	*Qualification for payment*	*Payment received*
March 2004	At least 94 per cent. of all patients spending under four hours in A and E during March 2004	100
First quarter 2004–05	At least 95 per cent. of all patients spending under four hours in A and E during first quarter of 2004–05	100

Alzheimer's

Sir Nicholas Winterton: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will make it his policy to make anti-dementia drugs freely available on the NHS for all Alzheimer's disease sufferers; and if he will make a statement. [196929]

Dr. Ladyman: In 2000, the National Institute for Clinical Excellence (NICE) recommended to the national health service that the three drugs: donepezil, rivastigmine and galantamine should be made available in the NHS as one part of the management of some people with mild and moderate Alzheimer's disease. Not all people taking one of these drugs will benefit from them. For those who do not show improvement, or a slowing down of the disease in the first few months, it is unlikely that they would show any benefit later on.

NICE is currently reviewing the original appraisal and recommendations, including looking at whether a fourth drug, memantine, should also be made generally available.

Tim Loughton: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what estimate he has made of the number of people suffering from Alzheimer's disease under the age of 65. [197924]

Dr. Ladyman: The Alzheimer's Society estimate that around 750,000 people in the United Kingdom have dementia and more than half have Alzheimer's disease. They further estimate that around 18,500 people under the age of 65 have dementia.

Tim Loughton: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what plans he has to include early onset Alzheimer's disease in the forthcoming Green Paper on Adult Social Care. [197925]

Dr. Ladyman: Our vision for adult social care is for services that are tailored to individual circumstances, enabling adults of all ages, whatever their circumstances, to live more fulfilled and independent lives.

Barnet and Chase Farm NHS Trust

Mr. Dismore: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will make a statement on the financial position of Barnet and Chase Farm NHS Trust. [197513]

Dr. Ladyman: The retained deficit reported by Barnet and Chase Farm Hospitals National Health Service Trust in its annual accounts for the year ended March 2004 was £4,398,000.

The trust is currently forecasting that it will break even in 2004–05.

Barnet Hospital

Mr. Dismore: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many *(a)* nurses, *(b)* junior doctors, *(c)* registrars, *(d)* consultants and *(e)* managers were employed at Barnet hospital on (i) 1 May 1997 and (ii) the latest date for which figures are available; and if he will make a statement. [197516]

Dr. Ladyman: The information requested is shown in the table.

Hospital, public health medicine and community health services (HCHS): medical and dental consultants, and doctors in training within Barnet and Chase Farm Hospitals National Health Service Trust[1]

Numbers (headcount)

As at 30 September each year	*Total of all organisations*	*RDC Wellhouse NHS Trust*	*RG9 Chase Farm Hospital NHS Trust*	*RVL Barnet and Chase Farm Hospitals NHS Trust*
1997				
Consultant	130	73	57	[2]—
All doctors in Training	213	121	92	[2]—
of which				
Registrar group	65	36	29	[2]—
Qualified nurses	1,560	837	723	[2]—
Managers and senior managers	60	36	24	[2]—
2003				
Consultant	158	[2]—	[2]—	158
All Doctors in Training	252	[2]—	[2]—	252

Hospital, public health medicine and community health services (HCHS): medical and dental consultants, and doctors in training within Barnet and Chase Farm Hospitals National Health Service Trust[1]

Numbers (headcount)

As at 30 September each year	*Total of all organisations*	*RDC Wellhouse NHS Trust*	*RG9 Chase Farm Hospital NHS Trust*	*RVL Barnet and Chase Farm Hospitals NHS Trust*
of which				
Registrar Group	73	[2]—	[2]—	73
Qualified nurses	1,740	[2]—	[2]—	1,740
Managers and senior managers	94	[2]—	[2]—	94

[1] In 1999 Wellhouse NHS Trust (RDC) merged with Chase Farm Hospital NHS Trust (RG9) to become Barnet and Chase Farm Hospitals NHS Trust (RVL).

[2] Not applicable.

Source:

Department of Health medical and dental workforce census

Mr. Dismore: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many patients from Barnet had *(a)* elective surgery, *(b)* emergency surgery and *(c)* out-patient appointments in (i) 1996–97 and (ii) 2003–04; and if he will make a statement. [197518]

Dr. Ladyman: Information requested for elective surgery and emergency surgery is shown in the table. Information on out-patient appointments is not collected centrally. 2003–04 figures are not yet available. 2002–03 figures are shown instead.

Primary care trust (PCT) of residence: 5A9 Barnet PCT
All operations, count of finished admission episodes
Operative procedure (OPCS-4 AGO-X59)
National health service hospitals, England 1996–97 and 2002–03

	Finished admission episodes	
Admission type	*1996–97*	*2002–03*
Elective	16,080	21,499
Emergency	3,750	4,391
Babies	31	25
Other	3,257	3,940

Finished admission episodes

A finished admission episode is the first period of in-patient care under one consultant within one healthcare provider. Please note that admissions do not represent the number of in-patients, as a person may have more than one admission within the year. *All Operations count of Episodes*

These figures represent a count of all FCE's where the procedure was mentioned in any of the 12 (4 prior to 2002–03) operation fields in a HES record. A record is only included once in each count, even if an operation is mentioned in more than one operation field of the record.

Ungrossed Data

Figures have not been adjusted for shortfalls in data (i.e. the data are ungrossed). *Source:*

Hospital Episode Statistics (HES), Department of Health

Charnwood and North West Leicestershire PCT

Mr. Reed: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what funding Charnwood and North West Leicestershire Primary Care Trust has received in each year since 2001. [197428]

Mr. Hutton: The information requested is shown in the following table.

£000

	Leicester health authority (HA)	*Charnwood and North West Leicestershire primary care trust (PCT)*
2000–01	570,686	n/a
2001–02	615,919	n/a
2002–03	682,748	n/a
2003–04	n/a	183,850
2004–05	n/a	200,628
2005–06	n/a	218,365

Note:

The Department has only made direct allocations to PCTs since 2003–04. Prior to this, allocations were made directly to HAs. Therefore allocations information from the relevant HA is also included.

Children's Hospices

Tom Cox: To ask the Secretary of State for Health when he last met interested groups in the Greater London area to discuss core funding for hospices for children; and if he will make a statement. [197717]

Dr. Ladyman: I have not met with any groups in Greater London to discuss funding for hospices. I did however meet with representatives of the Association of Children's Hospices and the Association for Children with Life Threatening Illnesses on 21 July 2004.

The principles governing sources of funding for children's hospice services are the same in Greater London as in any other part of the country. Primary care trusts (PCTs) may commission services according to their assessment of the needs of their child population and their priorities. It is for children's hospices to enter into a dialogue with their local PCT, or the lead commissioning PCT where a hospice serves a wide area, who may seek to place a child with them and so establish the level of demand for their services.

The disabled child module of the children's national service framework (published on 15 September) acknowledges the importance of palliative care services for children and recommends that high quality palliative care services should be available for all children and young people who need them.

Dentistry

Tom Cox: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how much funding has been allocated by his Department for the development of dentistry services provided by the national health service in England in the last 12 months. [195928]

Ms Rosie Winterton: In July, we announced that, over the period to 2010, an extra £368 million has been allocated to recruiting 1,000 more dentists, funding an extra 170 training places for undergraduates in dental schools and increasing the overall expenditure on primary care national health services by 19 per cent. from £1.33 billion in 2003–04 to £1.58 billion in 2005–06. In addition, for the current year, we have allocated a total of £59 million; comprising £35 million for grants to dentists to improve facilities to increase access to NHS dentistry, £15 million to primary care trusts (PCTs) for local access initiatives and £9 million for use by the NHS support team to target assistance to the 16 PCTs with some of the most pressing access problems.

Diagnostic Testing

Mr. Burstow: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many bed days related to diagnostic testing there were in the last year for which figures are available. [198241]

Mr. Hutton: Data on the number of bed days relating to diagnostic testing is not collected centrally.

Dorset Hospitals

Tim Loughton: To ask the Secretary of State for Health which departments in Dorset hospitals are unable to provide hospital staff to lift wheelchair-bound patients. [197996]

Ms Rosie Winterton: The information requested is not collected centrally. However, Dorset and Somerset Strategic Health Authority advises that there are no departments in acute national health service trusts in Dorset that do not have staff available to lift an individual who uses a wheelchair.

Tim Loughton: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what facilities are available in accident and emergency departments in Dorset hospitals to lift wheelchair-bound patients. [197997]

Ms Rosie Winterton: Requested information is not centrally collected. However, Dorset and Somerset Strategic Health Authority advises that all accident and emergency departments in Dorset have access to a full range of manual handling equipment to assist the moving and lifting of individual patients who use a wheelchair.

E111 Forms

Mr. Don Foster: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what estimate his Department has made of the number of British citizens in possession of E111 forms issued *(a)* before and *(b)* after August; and if he will make a statement. [195073]

Mr. Hutton: About 1.5 million new E111s have been issued since August 2004. Precise numbers of old E111s still held by the public are not known but annual issue rates have been between three and four million in each of the last five years.

Mr. Don Foster: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what estimate he has made of the number of British citizens who required medical treatment while on holiday in the EU in each year from 1997, broken down by those *(a)* in possession and *(b)* not in possession of an E111 form; and if he will make a statement. [195074]

Mr. Hutton: I refer the hon. Member to the reply I gave to the hon. Member for Esher and Walton (Mr. Taylor) on 1 September 2004, *Official Report*, columns 926–27W. United Kingdom residents not in possession of Form E111 when treatment abroad is needed may apply for one from abroad. Numbers of such applications are shown in the table.

	Number
1999–2000	5,447
2000–01	5,302
2001–02	5,675
2002–03	6,932
2003–04	7,137

Electronic Patient Records

Mr. Tynan: To ask the Secretary of State for Health whether IT contracts for the provision of electronic patient records in England and Wales will ensure integration with systems to be adopted in *(a)* Scotland, *(b)* Northern Ireland and *(c)* the EU under the e-Health initiative. [197569]

Mr. Hutton: The National Health Service Care Records Service (NHS CRS) is the core component of the National Programme for IT in England (NPfIT). Through the United Kingdom Information Management and Technology Forum, and the NHS information standards board, NPfIT officials work closely with officials in the Scottish Executive, the National Assembly for Wales, and the Northern Ireland Office to ensure common standards and interoperability of clinical information systems.

The NHS CRS is being designed and developed in accordance with international and European Union-wide standards which have been adopted by the UK e-Government interoperability framework. NPfIT also works with European and international standards bodies to ensure interoperability subject to strict security and confidentiality safeguards. However, it is not currently envisaged that non-UK health providers will have direct access to the NHS CRS.

Emergency Readmissions

Mr. Lansley: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many emergency re-admissions to NHS hospitals there were in each quarter since January 2003. [198481

Dr. Ladyman: The information requested is shown in the following table.

	Quarter	*Number re-admitted as an emergency within 28 days of discharge (patients of all ages)*	*Rate of people admitted as an emergency within 28 days of discharge (as a percentage of all discharges*
2002–03	4	138,773	5.
2003–04	1	135,153	5.
	2	136,701	5.
	3	143,187	5.

	Quarter	Number re-admitted as an emergency within 28 days of discharge (patients of all ages)	Rate of people admitted as an emergency within 28 days of discharge (as a percentage of all discharges)
	4	146,703	5.7
2004-05	1	148,714	5.9
	2	152,607	5.9

Epsom Hospital

Chris Grayling: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many patients have been admitted to accident and emergency at Epsom Hospital in each of the past 12 months. [197806]

Ms Rosie Winterton: Figures are not available at individual hospital level.

Figures are collected quarterly and figures for accident and emergency attendances at Epsom and St. Helier University Hospitals National Health Service Trust are shown in the table.

	Quarter	First attendances	Follow-up attendances	Total attendances
2003-04	3	30,716	2,036	32,752
2003-04	4	29,778	2,255	32,033
2004-05	1	33,164	1,164	34,328
2004-05	2	32,408	1,369	33,777

Fair Trade

Mr. Burstow: To ask the Secretary of State for Health whether it is his policy to ensure that hospitality within his Department is sourced from fair trade producers wherever possible within the boundaries set by the public procurement rules. [197061]

Ms Rosie Winterton: I can confirm that it is the Department's policy to pursue through our catering company the use of Fairtrade goods wherever possible.

Foot Operations

Mr. Baron: To ask the Secretary of State for Health (1) what representations he has received on the standardisation of the monitoring of foot operations carried out by orthopaedic surgeons and podiatric surgeons; [198615]

(2) what plans he has to standardise the monitoring of foot operations carried out by orthopaedic surgeons and podiatric surgeons. [198616]

Dr. Ladyman: I refer the hon. Member to the reply given by my hon. Friend the Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Health (Miss Melanie Johnson) on 20 October 2004, *Official Report*, column 790W.

General Practitioner Contracts

Dr. Murrison: To ask the Secretary of State for Health whether health checks, as proposed in the forthcoming Health White Paper, will be *(a)* enhanced and *(b)* additional services under the new general practitioner contract; and what payments he plans for the service. [197510]

Miss Melanie Johnson: The Government published "Choosing health, making healthy choices easier", its White Paper on public health, today. National health service patients already have the right to request a health check-up from their general practitioner if they have not been seen by their GP in the previous three years. People aged 75 or over can request a check-up if they have not been seen by their GP in the previous year.

General Practitioners

Mrs. Iris Robinson: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many general practitioners there are per head of population in England. [197609]

Mr. Hutton: There are 63.8 general practitioners, excluding GP retainers, GP Registrars and locums, per 100,000 weighted population in England.

Mrs. Iris Robinson: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what the average list size is of a general practitioner in England. [197610]

Mr. Hutton: The average general practitioner list size in England, as at 30 September 2003, was 1,845.

Mr. Burstow: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many general practitioner surgeries have closed in *(a)* England, *(b)* each strategic health authority and *(c)* each primary care trust in each year since 1997. [196194]

Mr. Hutton: This information is not collected centrally.

In 2003, there were more than 8,800 general practitioner practices, some of which had one main surgery, while others may have one or more branch surgeries.

Between July 2000 and September 2004, 734 GP premises have been replaced and 1,737 premises refurbished. The Government have embarked on one of the most sustained programmes of primary care modernisation in the history of the national health service and that work is on-going to ensure a primary care infrastructure that is fit for purpose and suitable for the twenty-first century.

Tim Loughton: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what funding has been made available under the local investment finance trust scheme for improvements to general practitioner surgeries in West Sussex. [198000]

Ms Rosie Winterton: No funding has been made available through the local improvement finance trust for improvements to general practitioner surgeries in West Sussex.

Mr. Gill: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many general practitioners there were per head of population in *(a)* Leicester South, *(b)* Leicester West Primary Care Trust area, *(c)* Leicester East Primary Care Trust area and *(d)* England on the latest date for which figures are available. [198661]

Dr. Ladyman: The information requested is shown in the table.

General medical practitioners (GMPs) excluding retainers, registrars and locums[1] for Leicester primary care trusts (PCTs) per 100,000 weighted population

As at June 2004			Numbers (headcount)
	GMPs (excluding retainers registrars and locums)	Weighted population	GMPs (excluding retainers, registrars and locums) per 100,000 weighted population
South Leicestershire PCT	96	132,282	72.6
Leicester City West PCT	89	133,156	66.8
Eastern Leicester PCT	99	165,639	59.8
England	31,215	48,962,969	63.8

[1] All practitioners (excluding retainers, registrars and locums) include general medical service (QMS) unrestricted principals, personal medical service (PMS) contracted GPs, PMS salaried GPs, restricted principals, assistants, salaried doctors, PMS other and flexible career scheme GPs and GP returners.

Sources:

Department of Health CMS and PMS statistics.

Department of Health populations adjusted for age and need using the GMS non-cash-limited component of the weighted capitation formula.

Mr. Gill: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many general practitioner surgeries there are in the Leicester South constituency. [198664]

Dr. Ladyman: The information requested is shown in the following table.

Partnerships of unrestricted principals and equivalents (UPEs)[1] for Eastern Leicester and South Leicestershire primary care trusts (PCTs) as at 30 June 2004

	Partnerships of UPEs
Eastern Leicester PCT	33
South Leicestershire PCT	20

[1] UPEs include general medical service (GMS) unrestricted principals, personal medical service (PMS) contracted general practitioners and PMS salaried GPs.

Source:

Department of Health GMS and PMS statistics.

Green Ministers

Mr. Horam: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many departmental Green Ministers there have been since 1997. [197835]

Miss Melanie Johnson: Four.

Health Access Card

Mr. Tynan: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what assessment he has made of how the proposed EU health access card might be integrated with other proposed UK entitlement and identity cards. [197568]

Mr. Hutton: The United Kingdom is required under European law to introduce the European health insurance card by 31 December 2005. Meeting our treaty obligations so as to ensure that UK citizens continue to receive the health care to which they are entitled when travelling in other European Economic Area countries is a top priority. At the same time, the Department is contributing to the Home Office-led identity cards programme, as well as considering the development of a national health service card, which could, 'support smart access to personal data and speed confirmation of access to appropriate care', as promised in the NHS Improvement Plan. The Department is considering how in the medium term this work programme can best be integrated, so as to maximise the benefits for patients and frontline services.

Health Centre (Birmingham)

Mr. Byrne: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if his Department will direct Birmingham and Solihull Solutions to accelerate its acquisition of the Leyland Club on Alum Rock Road for the development of a new health centre. [198179]

Mr. Hutton: My right hon. Friend, the Secretary of State, does not have the statutory power to intervene directly in this matter. Birmingham and Solihull Solutions (BASS) is a limited company and it is a matter for their shareholders, which include East Birmingham Primary Care Trust (PCT).

East Birmingham PCT is a shareholder in BASS and has been working closely with Birmingham city council to establish ownership of the site in question, in order to facilitate its acquisition at the earliest possible opportunity.

Hospital Budgets

Paul Farrelly: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what the budget of *(a)* the University Hospital of North Staffordshire (formerly the North Staffordshire Hospital), *(b)* North Staffordshire Combined Healthcare and *(c)* the Staffordshire Ambulance service has been in each year since 1997. [198573]

Dr. Ladyman: National health service trusts receive income for service provision from health authorities and primary care trusts. The figures shown in the table are the total income, including all income from activities and all other operating income, of each of the trusts.

	University Hospital of North Staffordshire NHS Trust[1]	*North Staffordshire Combined Healthcare NHS Trust*	*Staffordshire Ambulance Service NHS Trust*
1997–98	152,393	79,839	14,179
1998–99	165,535	82,860	14,541
1999–2000	186,236	89,042	15,545
2000–01	193,823	93,214	16,561
2001–02	212,576	101,827	18,093
2002–03	235,801	77,976	19,535
2003–04	257,641	80,119	20,945

[1] Formerly North Staffordshire Hospital NHS Trust.

Note:

Data for 2003–2004 remains provisional.

Source:

Audited summarisation schedules of the NHS Trusts.

Hospital Funding

Mr. Wilshire: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how much additional funding was given to the Ashford and St. Peter's Hospitals NHS Trust to enable them to implement their 2002 franchise plan. [196522]

Ms Rosie Winterton *[holding answer 8 November 2004]:* The Department has not provided additional funding to Ashford and St. Peter's Hospitals National Health Service Trust to implement its 2002 franchise plan. Information about the local budget identified to support the implementation of the trust franchise plan can be obtained from the trust.

Hospital Transport

Mr. Drew: To ask the Secretary of State for Health (1) if he will make a statement on the effect of changes in *(a)* insurance specifications and *(b)* the level of monitoring required of drivers on the number of volunteer drivers who use their own vehicles to transport patients to and from hospital or other medical facilities; [191024]

(2) what complaints he has received about the operation of hospital transport of patients where volunteer drivers are concerned. [191035]

Ms Rosie Winterton: Arrangements for providing volunteer driver schemes for non-emergency transport are a matter for the local national health service or other organisation that is providing the transport. The Department does not collect information centrally on complaints received about volunteer drivers.

Infection Control

Mr. Burstow: To ask the Secretary of State for Health whether all staff not covered by "Agenda for Change" will receive training on infection control *(a)* during initial training or induction and *(b)* periodically during their career. [198248]

Mr. Hutton: Staff not covered by "Agenda for Change" are doctors, dentists and senior managers. For doctors and dentists, the medical royal colleges will lead and influence the development of the education curriculums. All national health service doctors will be subject to annual appraisal which will help them reflect on their development needs. Training for senior managers will be determined locally by their employer. The Department issued guidance and training materials on cross-infection control to all dental practices in May. Primary care trusts include compliance with this guidance in the inspections they make of dental practices.

Journey Times (Derbyshire)

Mr. McLoughlin: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what the average journey time is for patients to the nearest *(a)* general practitioner surgery, *(b)* dentist and *(c)* accident and emergency unit in West Derbyshire. [198364]

Dr. Ladyman: This information is not collected centrally.

Keele University Medical School

Paul Farrelly: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how much has been invested in the new medical school at Keele University and the University Hospital of North Staffordshire. [198564]

Dr. Ladyman: Departmental funding for medical schools takes the form of the Service Increment for Teaching (SIFT). This reimburses national health service organisations for the extra costs they incur by providing clinical placements for medical and dental undergraduates. Capital SIFT helps pay for the extra premises needed to accommodate medical and dental undergraduates, both in hospital and primary care settings. Revenue SIFT pays for other infrastructure, including staff time, needed to provide clinical placements for undergraduates.

Extra SIFT has been provided to support expansion at the Manchester/Keele medical school since 2000–01. Most undergraduates from Keele undertake their clinical placements at the University Hospital of North Staffordshire NHS Trust which is not a medical school as such but has an education department for Keele medical undergraduates.

Information on how SIFT capital funding was distributed between Manchester and Keele prior to 2002–03 is not available centrally. Since 2002–03 SIFT funding has been managed by strategic health authorities and while a split can now be provided for capital this is not so for revenue. The available information is given in the table.

	Keele (£000)	*Manchester (£000)*	*Total (£000)*
Capital			
2000–01	Not known	Not known	2,524
2001–02	Not known	Not known	792
2002–03	1,077	1,077	2,154

	Keele (£000)	*Manchester (£000)*	*Total (£000)*
2003–04	1,778	662	2,440
2004–05	8,187	0	8,187
Revenue			
2000–01	Not known	Not known	115
2001–02	Not known	Not known	115
2002–03	Not known	Not known	1,824
2003–04	Not known	Not known	3,018
2004–05	Not known	Not known	2,644

Notes:

Figures represent the additional funding provided each year to support expansion at the Manchester/Keele medical school. In the case of revenue the new money is added to baseline provision for the following year. Revenue baseline provision, to support the cohort of students prior to 2000–01, is not shown. Capital payments are one-off each year.

In addition, University of North Staffordshire Hospitals NHS trust has received NHS research and development funding as follows:

£2 million during 2000–03 to provide facilities for research;

£146,000 in 2002–03 to mobilise and support research at the school.

This is in addition to the annual allocation of NHS research and development support funding to the trust to meet the research priorities and needs of the NHS and to provide the NHS base for high quality science. The trust's support funding in 2004–05 will be £2,014,000.

LIFT Programme

Paul Farrelly: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how much has been allocated through the LIFT programme to improve primary care in *(a)* Newcastle-under-Lyme and *(b)* North Staffordshire. [198575]

Dr. Ladyman: The North Staffordshire National Health Service Local Improvement Financial Trust (LIFT) project covers the whole of the North Staffordshire area, including Newcastle-Under-Lyme. The Department of Health has allocated capital enabling funding of £5.37 million to the end of 2004–05 to support LIFT developments across the North Staffordshire area.

Mental Health

Mrs. Iris Robinson: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what percentage of spending on health and personal social services in each of the last five years was spent on mental health. [197614]

Ms Rosie Winterton: The proportion of mental health spend within the hospital and community health services and personal social services budgets over the past five years for which data are available are shown in the following table. The data exclude expenditure concerning people treated in primary care, for whom a specific diagnosis has not been reached. The figures therefore underestimate the total mental health expenditure.

percentages

	Hospital and community health services	*Personal social services*
1998–99	11.97	5.20
1999–2000	12.34	5.25
2000–01	12.71	5.27
2001–02	12.70	5.30
2002–03	13.11	5.36

Tim Loughton: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many *(a)* adults and *(b)* children have been diagnosed as suffering from depression in each year since 1997. [197977]

Ms Rosie Winterton: Information is not available in the requested format.

The Department provides hospital episode statistics data which relate to diagnostic information for in-patients in national health service hospitals. During their course of treatment over a period of time, patients may have a number of episodes of care, which are counted each time they have a stay in hospital. Information relating to diagnosis where a patient is still under the care of a hospital consultant is not recorded. Information on finished consultant episodes with a primary diagnosis of depression is shown in the table.

Finished consultant episodes for patients with a primary diagnosis of depression F32 and recurrent depression F33 broken down by age in NHS hospitals in England

	1996–97	*1997–98*	*1998–99*	*1999–2000*	*2000–01*	*2001–02*	*2002–03*[1]
Children (0–15)	220	262	245	257	214	243	248
Adolescents (16–18)	669	706	542	559	523	512	505
Adult (over 18)	50,261	49,634	46,994	44,546	42,529	41,233	33,572
Not known	549	51	148	33	93	75	51
Total	51,699	50,653	47,929	45,395	43,359	42,063	34,376

[1] Figures are grossed for both coverage and missing/invalid clinical data, except for 2002–03, which has not yet been adjusted for shortfalls in data.

Finished consultant episode (FCE)

An FCE is defined as a period of admitted patient care under one consultant within one healthcare. The figures do not represent the number of patients as a person may have more than one episode of care within the year.

Diagnosis (primary diagnosis)

The primary diagnosis is the first of up to 14 (seven prior to 2002–03) diagnosis fields in the hospital episode statistics (HES) dataset and provides the main reason why the patient was in hospital.

Mental Health (Plymouth)

Mr. Streeter: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what the total budget is for the delivery of mental health services in Plymouth for this financial year, including relevant primary care trust, acute hospital trust and social services provision. [197948]

Ms Rosie Winterton: The Department allocates revenue funding to primary care trusts (PCTs) on the basis of the relative needs of their populations. In the allocations for 2003–04 to 2005–06 none of the growth money has been identified for specific purposes.

It is for PCTs in partnership with strategic health authorities and other local stakeholders to determine how best to use these funds to meet national and local priorities for improving health, tackling health inequalities and modernising services.

Plymouth local authority was allocated £629,000 for adult mental health services, and £322,000 for children and adolescent mental health services, as part of the overall social services provision made by the Department in 2004–05.

Mr. Streeter: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many secure units there are for mental health patients in Plymouth; and if he will make a statement. [197949]

Ms Rosie Winterton: The information requested is not collected centrally. In line with our policy of shifting the balance of power, responsibility for the provision of local health services, including mental health services, now rest with primary care trusts (PCTs). It is for PCTs, in conjunction with strategic health authorities to plan and develop services according to the needs of their local communities.

Mr. Streeter: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many bed spaces for mental health patients there are in Plymouth. [197950]

Ms Rosie Winterton: The Department collects beds data as the average daily number of available beds in each financial year. The latest available figures for 2003–04 show that Plymouth Primary Care Trust has 166 mental illness beds and Plymouth Hospitals National Health Service Trust has five beds.

Mr. Streeter: To ask the Secretary of State for Health who is primarily responsible for the delivery of mental health services in Plymouth. [197951]

Ms Rosie Winterton: National health services adult mental health services are provided by Plymouth Primary Care Trust, and child and adolescent mental health services are provided by Plymouth Hospitals NHS Trust.

Microsoft

Dr. Murrison: To ask the Secretary of State for Health pursuant to the Department of Health's press release dated 3 November, if he will make a statement on the extent to which *(a)* products provided to the NHS free by Microsoft will be customised and *(b)* users have been consulted in drawing up plans with Microsoft; and what assessment has been made of the benefits to Microsoft from the arrangement. [196965]

Mr. Hutton: Work has begun, and is still ongoing, to determine the extent to which the relevant Microsoft products will need to be customised. The work is being informed by very wide-scale consultation involving individual expert clinical systems users covering a variety of disciplines and fields; representatives of appropriate professional bodies including the royal colleges; the National Patient Safety Agency; the British Computer Society's primary care group; the national health service information standards board; and an action team of expert front-line practitioners commissioned by the care record development board. Consultation will be an interactive process and will include arrangements for sign-off of any interface intended for deployment across the NHS.

Assessment of the benefits to Microsoft from the agreement is a matter for the company.

Mixed Sex Wards

Mr. Reed: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what progress he has made in ending mixed sex wards in Leicestershire; and if he will make a statement. [197426]

Mr. Hutton: The Department has set three objectives to support the delivery of single-sex accommodation, designed to deliver single-sex sleeping accommodation, segregated bathroom and washing facilities and to safeguard the mentally ill. The objectives apply to all national health service organisations providing inpatient accommodation.

All inpatient hospital accommodation provided within Leicestershire is fully compliant with the standards which the Department has set.

National Institute for Clinical Excellence

Mr. Tynan: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what criteria are used in selecting locations for National Institute for Clinical Excellence meetings. [197636]

Ms Rosie Winterton: The selection criteria used by the National Institute for Clinical Excellence (NICE) for choosing meeting venues are an internal matter for NICE.

National Programme for IT

Tim Loughton: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what consultation with general practitioners has taken place on the National Programme for IT. [197975]

Mr. Hutton: I refer the hon. Member to the reply I gave to my hon. Friend the Member for Leicester, East (Keith Vaz) on 20 October 2004, *Official Report*, columns 797–99W.

NHS Care for the Elderly

Paul Farrelly: To ask the Secretary of State for Health (1) what recent estimate he has made of the cost of providing free personal care for the elderly; [198743]

(2) how many people aged over 65 years in England and Wales are receiving a pension; and what estimate he has made of the cost of providing them with free personal care. [198745]

Dr. Ladyman: The number of people over 65 in England in 2003 was 7,946,933, the majority of whom will be receiving a state pension, personal pension or some other form of pension.

We estimate that free personal care for those requiring it in England and drawn from all age groups would cost some £1.5 billion. It is not possible to break this estimate down by age grouping.

Information relating to Wales is a matter for the Welsh Assembly.

Paul Farrelly: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what estimates he has received on *(a)* the total cost of providing free personal care for the elderly in Scotland and *(b)* the number of elderly people receiving free personal care in Scotland. [198744]

Dr. Ladyman: This is a matter for the Scottish Executive and my hon. Friend may wish to write to them about this issue.

NHS Expenditure

Paul Farrelly: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how much has been spent on the NHS in North Staffordshire in each year since 1997. [198574]

Dr. Ladyman: The information is not available in the format requested.

Expenditure in the Shropshire and Staffordshire Strategic Health Authority (SHA) area, which includes North Staffordshire, increased from £831,797,000 in 1997–98 to £1,292,573,000 in 2002–03.

This does not represent the total expenditure, as some elements of health expenditure cannot be identified by SHA area.

Sources:

1. Audited summarisation forms of the Shropshire and Staffordshire SHA and of predecessor health authorities.
2. Audited summarisation schedules of primary care trusts within the Shropshire and Staffordshire SHA area.

NHS Foundation Trusts

Mr. Dobson: To ask the Secretary of State for Health (1) pursuant to the written statement of 11 October 2004, *Official Report*, column 4WS, on ministerial accountability for NHS foundation trusts, whether the chairs of NHS foundation trusts will be expected to meet the deadlines which apply to Ministers when answering hon. Members' questions; [194177]

(2) if he will ensure that the requirements set out in guidance to Ministers on answering parliamentary questions apply equally to answers given by chairs of NHS foundation trusts, with particular reference to the requirement that answers should not be misleading. [195130]

Mr. Hutton: Individual national health service foundation trusts (NHSFTs) are responsible for replying to hon. and right hon. Members' questions or correspondence referred on to them by Ministers, where they specifically relate to operational matters of the organisations. These trusts' terms of authorisation, that is, their "licence" to operate, will include the requirement that they comply with the same standards expected of Ministers in responding to parliamentary questions. This means that a NHSFT that fails to comply with this requirement will be in breach of its terms of authorisation and that Monitor, the statutory name of which is the independent regulator of NHSFTs, can intervene to put this right. I expect, however, that NHSFTs will continue to respond promptly, helpfully and accurately to hon. and right hon. Members' queries.

NHSFTs are asked to copy their responses to parliamentary questions to Monitor. They are also asked to copy responses to the Department so that they may be placed in the Library.

NHS Staff

Mr. Denis Murphy: To ask the Secretary of State for Health (1) how many NHS nurses qualified in each year since 2002; and how many nurses specialising in paediatrics there were in each year since 2002; [198184]

(2) how many *(a)* consultants and *(b)* paediatric consultants there were in the NHS in each year since 2002. [198185]

Mr. Hutton: Information on the number of consultants, paediatric consultants, nurses and paediatric nurse employed in the national health service since 2002 is shown in the table.

Information is not collected centrally on the number of nurses qualifying each year. The Nursing and Midwifery Council (NMC) holds information on the number of nurses and midwives initially entering the register, a pre-requisite for employment in the NHS and other sectors in the UK. This information can be found on the NMC website at www.nmc-uk.org.

Hospital, public health medicine and community health services medical and dental consultants, consultants within paediatric specialties, all qualified nurses (including practice nurses) and qualified nurses employed in paediatrics

	England: numbers (headcount)		
	2002[1]	*2003*[1]	*Latest data*[2]
All consultants	27,070	28,750	30,171
of which:			
Paediatric dentistry	22	30	33
Paediatric surgery	105	100	106
Paediatric group	1,695	1,807	1,893
of which:			
Paediatric cardiology	1,631	1,738	1,827
Paediatrics	64	69	66
All qualified nurses, midwives and health visitors	367,520	386,359	396,359
Of which:			
Nurses working in paediatrics	18,014	18,437	n/a

[1] Data as at 30 September

[2] Data for consultants as at June 2004 and March 2004 for nurses.

Note:

n/a not available

Source:

Department of Health medical and dental workforce census

Between September 2002 and September 2003, the number of consultants increased by 1,680, or 6.2 per cent., and the number of paediatric consultants, comprising paediatric dentistry, paediatric surgery, paediatric cardiology and paediatrics, increased by 115, or 6.3 per cent.

Between September 2002 and June 2004, the number of consultants increased by 3,101, or 11.5 per cent., and the number of paediatric consultants, comprising paediatric dentistry, paediatric surgery, paediatric cardiology and paediatrics, increased by 210, or 11.5 per cent.

Between September 2002 and March 2004, the number of nurses employed in the NHS has increased by 28,839, or 7.8 per cent., and between September 200 and September 2003, the number of nurses employed in the paediatrics area of work has increased by 423, or 2.3 per cent.

Paul Farrelly: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what steps have been taken to attract more doctors and nurses into the NHS since 1997. [19856

Mr. Hutton: A range of recruitment and retention initiatives are in place to help expand the national health service workforce. These include improving pay and conditions, encouraging the NHS to become a better, more flexible and diverse employer, help with accessing childcare, increasing training, attracting back returners and running national and international recruitment campaigns. As a result of these measures, between September 1997 and March 2004, the number of nurses employed in the NHS has increased by 77,500. Between September 1997 and September 2003, the number of doctors, excluding retainers, employed in the NHS has increased by 19,374.

Paul Farrelly: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how the number of nurses employed in North Staffordshire has changed since 1997. [198566]

Dr. Ladyman: The information requested is shown in the table.

All National Health Service qualified nursing, midwifery and health visiting staff, including practice nurses employed by unrestricted principles and equivalents (UPEs)[1], in the specified organisations as at 30 September[2] 1997 and 2003

	headcount	
	1997	2003
Total qualified nursing, midwifery and health visiting staff (including practice nurses)[3]	3,492	4,211
Staffordshire Moorlands Primary Care Trust	n/a	259
Newcastle-Under-Lyme Primary Care Trust	n/a	243
North Stoke Primary Care Trust n/a	n/a	406
South Stoke Primary Care Trust n/a	n/a	364
North Staffordshire Health Authority	2	n/a
North Staffordshire Hospital NHS Trust	1,883	2,148
North Staffordshire Combined Healthcare NHS Trust	1,264	791

Notes:

[1] UPEs include general medical service unrestricted principals, personal medical service (PMS) contracted general practitioners and PMS salaried GPs.

[2] Practice nurse figures are as at 1 October for 1997.

[3] The 1997 total is not a sum of component parts as a breakdown of the 343 practice nurses for 1997 is not available at organisation level.

n/a = not applicable.

Sources:

Department of Health non-medical workforce census.

Department of Health general and personal medical services statistics.

Overseas Nurses

Mr. Burstow: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what his Department's rules are on overseas nurses coming into the UK receiving *(a)* student visas and *(b)* work permits. [187854]

Mr. Browne: I have been asked to reply.

(a) A person seeking leave to enter the United Kingdom as a student nurse must meet the definition of a student nurse in paragraph 63 of the Immigration Rules and must have been accepted for a course in a recognised nursing educational establishment offering nursing training, which meets the requirements of the United Kingdom Central Council for Nursing, Midwifery and Health Visiting. The applicant needs to show that they did not obtain acceptance by misrepresentation; that they are able and intend to follow the course of study and that they do not intend to engage in business or take employment except in connection with the course. They also need to demonstrate that they intend to leave the United Kingdom at the end of the course and that they have sufficient funds to accommodate and maintain themselves and any dependants without engaging in business or taking employment (except in connection with the course), or having recourse to public funds. Those student nurses who successfully complete their course and are offered employment as a nurse can apply to switch into work permit employment. This will be granted provided all the requirements for switching into work permit employment at paragraph 131B of the Rules are met. Most importantly they must hold a valid immigration employment document for employment as a nurse.

(b) Nurses coming into the UK to take up employment must hold a valid work permit and, in most cases, entry clearance in this capacity. Their employer applies for the work permit on their behalf, and must show that the vacancy meets the work permit requirements. On entering the UK, nurses must show that they are capable of undertaking the employment for which they hold the work permit, and that they do not intend to take any other employment. They must also be able to maintain and accommodate themselves and any dependants without recourse to public funds.

The Government is committed to managing the impact of international recruitment on source countries. The Department of Health, in consultation with the Department for International Development, has published a Code of Practice for NHS employers involved in the international recruitment of healthcare professionals. This seeks to ensure that countries suffering significant skill shortages of their own are not targeted. On 25 August the Department of Health published proposals to strengthen the code of practice to bring the private sector in line with the NHS.

Work Permits UK ensure that establishments recruiting overseas nurses are registered with the Nursing and Midwifery Council (NMC) and are accredited to provide supervised training to nurses undergoing supervised practice. They also check that the number of authorised supervised practice places allocated to the establishment is not exceeded and that the Personal Identification Number (PIN) is valid.

The Work Permits UK Intelligence Team investigate all allegations of abuse relating to nurses and disseminate their findings as appropriate. The Work Permits UK Compliance and Validation Team also undertake visits based on a random sample to establishments to ensure that overseas nationals are working where the permit was issued for and receiving the training and pay that was stated on the initial application form. This team also conduct visits on behalf of the Intelligence Team, following allegations of abuse.

Paediatric Services

Mr. Burstow: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what targets exist for the recruitment of doctors working in paediatric specialities. [194244]

Mr. Hutton: There are no national targets for the recruitment of doctors working in paediatric services. Since 1997, the number of consultants working in paediatric specialties rose from 1,321 to 2,032 by June 2004, an increase of 54 per cent.

Pain Relief

Mrs. Iris Robinson: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many people are registered in England to attend *(a)* pain clinics and *(b)* appointments with consultants for pain relief on a regular basis. [197833]

Mr. Hutton: Information is collected centrally on the number of attendances at consultant out-patient clinics for pain management, including both first and follow-up appointments. The latest information available is for the first quarter of 2004–05, when there were 66,079 attendances in England.

Source:

Department of Health form QMOP.

Prescription Charges

Mr. Wiggin: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what plans he has to change the prescription charge. [197803]

Ms Rosie Winterton: Prescription charge costs in England are reviewed annually and any changes introduced in April. In recent years, increases in charge costs have been below the rate of inflation. Currently, 86 per cent. of prescription items are dispensed in the community free of charge.

Primary Care Trust (Newcastle-under-Lyme)

Paul Farrelly: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what the budget of Newcastle-under-Lyme Primary Care Trust has been in each year since its establishment. [198572]

Dr. Ladyman: The table shows the allocations and cash increases to Newcastle-Under-Lyme Primary Care Trust for each year since its establishment in 2002.

	Allocation (£ million)	*Cash increase (percentage)*
2002–03	83.1	9.5
2003–04	91.3	8.6
2004–05	99.8	9.3
2005–06	108.8	9.0

Psychiatric Care

Tom Cox: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many full-time equivalent *(a)* psychiatrists and *(b)* psychiatric nurses are employed in each of the primary care trusts that cover the Geater London area. [197702]

Dr. Ladyman: The information requested is shown in the tables.

NHS hospital and community health services: qualified psychiatric nurses employed in the London Government office region, by strategic health authority and primary care trust as at 30 September 2003

				whole-time equivalent
		Total psychiatric nurses	*Community psychiatry*	*Other psychiatry*
	London total	260	63	197
Q04	*North West London SHA*			
5HX	Ealing PCT	1	1	0
5AT	Hillingdon PCT	221	52	169
5LA	Kensington and Chelsea PCT	1	1	0
Q05	*North Central London SHA*			
5A9	Barnet PCT	6	0	6
5K7	Camden PCT	8	1	7
5C9	Haringey PCT	2	1	1
5K8	Islington PCT	8	2	6
Q06	*North East London SHA*			
5C5	Newham PCT	2	1	1
5NC	Waltham Forest PCT	2	0	2
Q07	*South East London SHA*			
5A7	Bromley PCT	4	4	0
5A8	Greenwich PCT	3	0	3
Q08	*South West London SNA*			
5A5	Kingston PCT	2	0	2
5LG	Wandsworth PCT	1	0	1

Source:

Department of Health non-medical workforce census.

Hospital, public health medicine and community health services: medical and dental staff within the psychiatry group of specialties, by strategic health authority and primary care trust (PCT) within the London Government office region

				Whole-time equivalents
			September 2003	*June 2004*
		All staff—of which	*Consultant*	*Consultant*
London		48	23	27
North Central London	Q05			
Enfield PCT	5C1	4	1	2
Haringey PCT	5C9	1	—	—

Hospital, public health medicine and community health services: medical and dental staff within the psychiatry group of specialties, by strategic health authority and primary care trust (PCT) within the London Government office region

			Whole-time equivalents	
			September 2003	*June 2004*
		All staff—of which	*Consultant*	*Consultant*
Islington PCT	5K8	5	5	7
North West London	Q04			
Brent PCT	5K5	4	1	1
Ealing PCT	5HX	1	1	1
Hammersmith and Fulham PCT	5H1	2	1	1
Harrow PCT	5K6	2	1	1
Hillingdon PCT	5AT	19	9	9
Hounslow PCT	5HY	1	1	1
Westminster PCT	5LC	1	[1]—	[1]—
South East London	Q07			
Bromley PCT	5A7	2	1	1
South West London	Q08			
Kingston PCT	5A5	6	2	2
Sutton and Merton PCT	5M7	[2]0	[1]—	[1]—

[1] Denotes zero.

[2] Denotes more than zero, less than one.

Note:

Data for June 2004 is taken from the medical and dental workforce mini census, which collected consultants only.

Source:

Department of Health medical and dental workforce census.

Residential Homes

Tom Cox: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what plans he has to review the cost of care in residential homes that is paid for by residents of homes. [195901]

Dr. Ladyman: Care homes are private businesses and the fees residents pay are negotiated between the care home and the person or organisation that pays the fees. Residents with less than £20,000 in savings are entitled to help with these costs and residents with less than £12,250 have their care paid for by social services.

In assessing a resident's ability to pay, local authority social services use the National Assistance Act (Assessment of Resources) Regulations 1992.

The next set of amendments to the National Assistance (Assessment of Resources) Regulations will come into force in April 2005. We will be consulting on changes to the Regulations and the accompanying Charging for Residential Accommodation Guide, the guidance to local authorities which helps them to apply the regulations, later this year.

School Nurses

Tim Loughton: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many school nurses are employed in each primary care trust area. [197958]

Dr. Ladyman: The information requested is not available. Information on the number of school nurses employed in the national health service will be collected in the September 2004 non-medical work force census, and we intend to publish the data in February 2005.

Tim Loughton: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what services are offered by school nurses. [197992]

Dr. Ladyman: School nurses provide health services to school aged children with a particular emphasis on health improvement. The role includes monitoring the health of children and young people, delivering health promotion and immunisation programmes, providing one to one health advice and contributing to the curriculum. School nurses also provide nursing care to support pupils with medical needs in school. The service varies according to local priorities and needs and the contribution of other practitioners.

Tim Loughton: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many school nurses there are per school age pupil. [197993]

Dr. Ladyman: The information requested is not available. Information on the number of school nurses employed in the national health service will be collected in the September 2004 non-medical work force census and we intend to publish the data in February 2005.

Smoking

Tom Cox: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what recent measures his Department has taken to increase the awareness in schools in the Greater London area of the dangers of smoking. [195366]

Mr. Stephen Twigg: I have been asked to reply.

All pupils learn about the dangers of smoking as a statutory part of the National Curriculum Science Order and the non-statutory framework for Personal, Social and Health Education (PSHE).

In 2003–04 we rolled out a programme of certification for PSHE teachers to improve their knowledge and expertise, including a specialist module for drug, alcohol and tobacco education. Already over 600 teachers have participated and there is funding for up to 3,000 teachers in 2004–05. The National Healthy Schools Standard (NHSS) supports the teaching of drug, alcohol and tobacco education and currently over 14,000 schools are participating. We aim to recruit all schools with a 20 per cent. or more free school meals entitlement to the NHSS by 2006.

Although there is currently no pan-London project specifically on smoking, many of the local NHS Stop

Smoking Services are working with schools in their area to provide support and information to teachers, pupils, and school nurses.

Waiting Times

Mr. Burstow: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what milestones have been set for delivering the planning framework target of maximum 18 week waits by 2008; and what changes have been made to data collection to support *(a)* the measurement of the target and *(b)* the monitoring of the milestones. [197818]

Mr. Hutton *[holding answer 15 November 2004]*: Strategic health authorities (SHAs) will need to agree primary care trusts' annual plans to ensure delivery of all national targets.

Central working assumptions have been shared with SHAs to test the robustness of these plans and are available on the Department's website at http://www.dh.gov.uk/assetRoot/04/08/83/44/04088344.pdf. Copies have been placed in the Library.

Officials are working with national health service colleagues to ensure the necessary amendments are made to existing collections in order to monitor progress against these assumptions and measurement of the target.

Mr. McLoughlin: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will list the clinical areas where the NHS in West Derbyshire has longer *(a)* waiting lists and *(b)* waiting times than the national average. [198368]

Dr. Ladyman: The information requested is shown in the following tables.

Patients waiting for elective inpatient admission per 1,000 population: Position at 30 September 2004

	England	*Derbyshire Dales and South Derbyshire primary care trust (PCT)*	*High Peak and Dales PCT*
General surgery	2.934	—	3.295
Trauma and orthopaedics	4.725	4.811	5.382
Ear, nose and throat	1.552	—	1.657
Oral surgery	0.784	0.921	—
Paediatric dentistry	0.037	—	0.050
General medicine	0.334	—	1.448
Gastroenterology	0.233	0.428	0.519
Clinical haematology	0.009	—	0.020
Dermatology	0.063	0.065	—
Nephrology	0.015	—	0.030
Rheumatology	0.033	0.047	—
Paediatrics	0.022	0.028	0.030
Paediatric neurology	0.005	—	0.010
Obstetrics and gynaecology (gynaecology)	1.455	—	1.747
Radiology	0.006	—	0.010

Sources:
Department of Health form QF01 and Office for National Statistics.

Average (median) waiting times for elective inpatient admissions in weeks: position at 30 September 2004

	England	*Derbyshire Dales and South Derbyshire PCT*	*High Peak and Dales PCT*
Trauma and orthopaedics	12.59	13.16	11.87
Ear, nose and throat	10.41	6.42	13.72
Oral surgery	8.57	11.65	7.80
Paediatric dentistry	10.37	—	13.00
Neurosurgery	11.63	14.08	12.28
Cardiothoracic surgery	8.05	11.70	5.42
General medicine	5.67	2.89	8.55
Gastroenterology	5.16	6.50	3.70
Clinical haematology	3.20	—	15.17
Cardiology	8.49	3.76	8.82
Dermatology	5.19	5.78	—
Rheumatology	3.93	8.67	—
Paediatrics	3.99	2.89	4.33
Obstetrics and gynaecology (gynaecology)	7.68	5.80	9.67

Source:
Department of Health form QF01.

Paul Farrelly: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what changes there have been to NHS waiting list times for *(a)* inpatients, *(b)* outpatients and *(c)* accident and emergency cases in North Staffordshire since 1997. [198570]

Dr. Ladyman: At the University Hospital of North Staffordshire National Health Service Trust (formerly North Staffordshire Hospital NHS Trust) in March 1997 there were 93 patients waiting more than 12 months for inpatient treatment and 382 waiting 9–11 months. Latest figures show no one is waiting more than nine months.

In March 1997, there were 3,966 patients waiting more than 13 weeks for outpatient treatment at the trust. Latest figures show 1,282 waiting more than 13 weeks.

Latest figures show that 89 per cent, of patients spend less than four hours in the major accident and emergency departments of the trust. In September 2002 the figure was 35.9 per cent. This data was not collected centrally before 2002.

Worcester

Mr. Michael Foster: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will set out, with statistical evidence relating as closely as possible to Worcester constituency, the effects of changes to departmental policy since 1997 on Worcester constituency. [198034]

Dr. Ladyman: The Government have put in place a programme of national health service investment and reform since 1997 to improve service delivery in all parts of the United Kingdom. There is significant evidence that these policies have yielded considerable benefits for the Worcester constituency.

For example:

At the end of June 2004, the number of people waiting more than nine months for in-patient treatment within South Worcestershire Primary Care Trust (PCT) has fallen to 0, from 752 in June 2002.

At the end of June 2004, the number of patients waiting over 13 weeks for out-patient treatment within South Worcestershire PCT has fallen to 445, from 743 in June 2002.

In September 2002, at Worcestershire Acute Hospitals NHS Trust, 85.3 per cent. of patients spent less than four hours in accident and emergency from arrival to admission, transfer or discharge. Figures for June 2004 show an improvement to 90.8 per cent.

Between September 2000 and June 2004 the number of consultants at the Worcestershire Acute Hospitals NHS Trust has increased from 144 to 181. Between September 2000 and September 2003 the number of nurses has increased from 1,485 to 1,875.

Between September 2001 and June 2004 the number of General Medical Practitioners within South Worcestershire PCT has increased from 172 to 208.

Figures for September 2004 show that all patients within South Worcestershire PCT are able to be offered an appointment with a general practitioner within two working days and a primary care professional within one working day.

Worcestershire Royal Hospital, part of Worcestershire Acute Hospitals NHS Trust, is a new £87 million hospital with the latest facilities and equipment. The hospital, which opened in March 2002 has 550 beds and incorporates nine operating theatres, a large accident and emergency department, a medical assessment unit, and a critical care unit.

HOME

Advertising

Dr. Cable: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what the salary costs to the Department were for employees working in public relations and publicity in each year since 1997. [183854]

Fiona Mactaggart: Within the Home Office, the Marketing and Strategic Communication Unit (MSCU) is responsible for public relations and publicity. The salary costs of staff involved in this area of work since 1997 are as follows:

Financial year	*MSCU*
1997–98	367,340
1998–99	391,703
1999–2000	607,327
2000–01	705,086
2001–02	760,373
2002–03	1,002,436
2003–04	1,371,718

Notes:

1. 2002–03 Communications Strategy and Co-ordination Unit merged with MSCU.

2. 2003–04 These figures do not include the salary costs of the Web Services team, which transferred to MSCU in September 2003.

In 2003–04 this cost was 0.045 per cent. of the overall salary bill for Home Office.

The Marketing and Strategic Communication Unit develop communication campaigns which support the delivery of Home Office objectives. Recent campaigns have helped recruit record numbers of police officers, reduce vehicle crime, warn children and their parents about the dangers of paedophiles on the internet, and provide a source of help and advice on drug misuse. Expenditure on communication staff has risen as the Home Office has become increasingly engaged with the public to help deliver real social change.

Details of expenditure on staff outside of this unit who may have been involved in any related exercises is not held centrally and could be collected only at disproportionate cost.

Annual Report

Dr. Cable: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many copies of his Department's annual report were printed in each year since 1997; how many were sold in each year; and what the *(a)* publication costs and *(b)* sales revenue were. [183886]

Fiona Mactaggart: The Home Office Departmental Report is the main vehicle by which the Home Office explains its aims and performance for 2003–04, and how it organised itself to deliver. As such it plays an important part in maintaining accountability to both Parliament and the public. It also provides key external stakeholders with an overview of the Department's activities as a whole. The annual report can be downloaded free of charge on the Home Office website.

The Report's publication was handled by The Stationery Office (TSO). Under the terms of the contract with TSO, that company generally meets the costs of printing and publication and uses its commercial judgement as to the number of copies which it prints and the sale price. TSO are not obliged to provide such information as these are costs which they meet themselves and are not charged to Departments.

TSO have provided details of the number of copies of the Annual Report which they have sold since 1998 (those for previous years are not available). These figures do not include those copies ordered by the Home Office for distribution to senior staff and key stakeholders.

Edition	*Copies issued by TSO*
1998	728
1999	551
2000	509
2001	560

Edition	*Copies issued by TSO*
2002	506
2003	506
2004[1]	333

[1] To date.

The Publisher retains the revenues which they earn from sales and which are aimed at ensuring the recovery of their costs.

The direct costs of production borne by the Home Office and the printing costs of those copies ordered by the Department for senior staff and key stakeholders are shown in the table.

These costs exclude VAT (where applicable). They also exclude the costs of staff time within the Department as obtaining estimates would involve disproportionate cost.

Year of publishing	*Quantity ordered by the Home Office*	*Direct costs incurred by Home Office £*
1997	Not known	Not known
1998	Not known	Not Known
1999	1,000	43,320.37
2000	900	35,320.46
2001	1,050	80,537.66
2002	1,200	48,379.33
2003	1,203	34,126.65
2004	1,150	65,281.50

Asylum Seekers

David Davis: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what funding was provided to local authorities to deal with the costs associated with asylum seekers and their dependants in each year since 1997, broken down by *(a)* local authority and *(b)* funding stream. [190934]

Mr. Browne: Information for the financial years 1997–98 and 1998–99 is not available and could be produced only at disproportionate cost.

Payments made to local authorities on the basis of normal funding grants and special circumstances grants in 1999–2000, 2000–01 and 2001–02 are presented in the following table by authority and funding stream and a copy will be placed in the Library. These payments are made from within the overall National Asylum Support Service budget.

Payments for 2002–03 and 2003–04 are subject to audit.

David Davis: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many *(a)* asylum seekers and *(b)* asylum seeker dependants reside in the UK, broken down by local authority area. [190938]

Mr. Browne: Figures for asylum seekers (including dependants) supported in National Asylum Support Service (NASS) accommodation and those in receipt of subsistence only support from NASS in each local authority area as at the end of June 2004 are presented in the following tables. Corresponding figures for those not in receipt of NASS support are not available.

Numbers of asylum seekers placed in NASS accommodation and numbers who are in receipt of subsistence only support from NASS, are published on a quarterly and annual basis. Information covering the third quarter of 2004 (July to September) was published on 16 November on the Home Office Research Development and Statistics Directorate website at http://www.homeoffice.gov.uk/rds/immigration1.html.

Asylum seekers in receipt of subsistence only support from NASS, by local authority and UK Government Office Region as at the end of June 2004

England		*Number of applicants (including dependants*	*Percentage*
North East	Gateshead	30	—
	Middlesbrough	40	—
	Newcastle upon Tyne	50	—
	Stockton-on-Tees	20	—
	Other	35	—
	Total	175	1
North West	Bolton	40	—
	Liverpool	105	—
	Manchester	395	—
	Oldham	25	—
	Pendle	20	—
	Preston	25	—
	Salford	60	—
	Sefton	20	—
	Stockport	25	—
	Trafford	25	—
	Other	130	—
	Total	865	3
Yorkshire and the Humber	Bradford	140	—
	Doncaster	30	—
	Kingston upon Hull	60	—
	Kirklees	40	—
	Leeds	245	—
	Rotherham	25	—
	Sheffield	120	—
	Wakefield	25	—
	Other	70	—

Asylum seekers in receipt of subsistence only support from NASS, by local authority and UK Government Office Region as at the end of June 2004

England		*Number of applicants (including dependants*	*Percentage*
	Total	760	3
East Midlands	**Corby**	20	—
	Derby	70	—
	Leicester	400	—
	Northampton	140	—
	Nottingham	140	—
	Other	105	—
	Total	870	3
West Midlands	**Birmingham**	650	—
	Coventry	215	—
	Dudley	30	—
	Sandwell	120	—
	Stoke-on-Trent	30	—
	Walsall	30	—
	Wolverhampton	95	—
	Other	80	—
	Total	1,255	5
East of England	**Bedford**	70	—
	Ipswich	35	—
	King's Lynn and West Norfolk	25	—
	Luton	230	—
	Norwich	20	—
	Peterborough	165	—
	South Cambridgeshire	35	—
	Southend-on-Sea	80	—
	Thurrock	40	—
	Watford	45	—
	Other	205	—
	Total	955	4
Greater London	**Barking and Dagenham**	370	—
	Barnet	575	—
	Bexley	70	—
	Brent	1,275	—
	Bromley	70	—
	Camden	385	—
	Croydon	605	—
	Ealing	1,205	—
	Enfield	1,120	—
	Greenwich	430	—
	Hackney	945	—
	Hammersmith and Fulham	270	—
	Haringey	1,675	—
	Harrow	490	—
	Havering	35	—
	Hillingdon	430	—
	Hounslow	570	—
	Islington	555	—
	Kingston upon Thames	105	—
	Lambeth	815	—
	Lewisham	585	—
	Merton	380	—
	Newham	1,650	—
	Redbridge	560	—
	Richmond upon Thames	60	—
	Southward	760	—
	Button	100	—
	Tower Hamlets	270	—
	Waltham Forest	900	—
	Wandsworth	565	—
	Westminster	305	—
	Other	*	—
	Total	18,295	72
South East	**Ashford**	30	—
	Brighton and Hove	80	—
	Crawley	70	—
	Dartford	20	—
	Eastbourne	20	—

Asylum seekers in receipt of subsistence only support from NASS, by local authority and UK Government Office Region as at the end of June 2004

England		*Number of applicants (including dependants*	*Percentage*
	Gravesham	30	—
	Hastings	65	—
	Maidstone	25	—
	Medway	50	—
	Milton Keynes	125	—
	Oxford	105	—
	Portsmouth	30	—
	Reading	115	—
	Rushmoor	40	—
	Slough	285	—
	Southampton	105	—
	Thanet	35	—
	Other	315	—
	Total	1,550	6
South West	Bournemouth	35	—
	Bristol	175	—
	Gloucester	25	—
	Plymouth	20	—
	Swindon	40	—
	Other	65	—
	Total	355	1
	Total (England)	25,085	99
Wales	Cardiff	50	—
	Newport	30	—
	Swansea	30	—
	Other	40	—
	Total	155	1
Scotland	Edinburgh	65	—
	Glasgow City	80	—
	Other	55	
	Total	200	1
Northern Ireland	Other	20	—
	Total	20	0
	Total (United Kingdom)	25,465	—

* = 1 or 2. Figures (other than percentages) are rounded to the nearest 5 and may not sum due to rounding.

Note:

Local authorities with fewer than 20 cases are grouped by region as "Other".

Asylum seekers supported in NASS accommodation, by local authority and UK Government Office Region, as at the end of June 2004

		Number of applicants (including dependants)		
Region	*Local authority*	*Dispersed*	*Disbenefited*	*Total*
England				
North East	Darlington	30	—	30
	Gateshead	450	5	455
	Hartlepool	30	—	30
	Middlesbrough	610	5	615
	Newcastle upon Tyne	1,565	10	1,575
	North Tyneside	340	—	340
	Redcar and Cleveland	335	—	335
	South Tyneside	145	—	145
	Stock-on-Tees	525	—	525
	Sunderland	565	—	565
	Total	4,600	25	4,620
North West	Blackburn with Darwen	335	15	350
	Bolton	765	—	765
	Burnley	30	—	30
	Bury	490	—	490
	Crewe and Nantwich	5	—	5
	Hyndburn	*	—	*
	Liverpool	1,055	—	1,055

Asylum seekers supported in NASS accommodation, by local authority and UK Government Office Region, as at the end of June 2004

Region	*Local authority*	*Number of applicants (including dependants)* *Dispersed*	*Disbenefited*	*Total*
	Manchester	1,325	15	1,340
	Oldham	565	—	565
	Pendle	25	—	25
	Preston	—	*	*
	Rochdale	435	—	435
	Salford	920	5	920
	Sefton	50	—	50
	Stockport	235	—	235
	Tameside	265	—	265
	Trafford	100	10	105
	Wigan	685	—	685
	Wirral	—	5	5
	Total	7,280	45	7,325
Yorkshire and the Humber	Barnsley	510	—	510
	Bradford	1,235	10	1,245
	Calderdale	265	—	265
	Doncaster	985	—	985
	Kingston upon Hull, City of	785	—	785
	Kirklees	1,070	—	1,070
	Leeds	1,995	5	2,000
	North East Lincolnshire	175	—	175
	Rotherham	695	—	695
	Sheffield	1,330	5	1,340
	Wakefield	485	—	485
	York	—	5	5
	Total	9,530	25	9,555
East Midlands	Charnwood	15	—	15
	Derby	805	—	805
	Gedling	15	—	15
	Leicester	935	5	940
	Lincoln	35	—	35
	Northampton	—	5	5
	Nottingham	1,030	—	1,030
	Rushcliffe	5	—	5
	Total	2,840	10	2,850
West Midlands	Birmingham	2,845	30	2,875
	Coventry	955	—	955
	Dudley	655	—	655
	Herefordshire	—	5	5
	Newcastle-under-Lyme	35	—	35
	Nuneaton and Bedworth	—	5	5
	Sandwell	845	15	860
	Solihull	100	—	100
	Stoke-on-Trent	885	5	895
	Walsall	555	—	555
	Wolverhampton	875	—	875
	Wychavon	—	5	5
	Total	7,760	65	7,820
East of England	Bedford	—	10	10
	Broadland	5	—	5
	Epping Forest	20	—	20
	Ipswich	55	5	60
	Luton	—	10	10
	Norwich	130	*	130
	Peterborough	415	*	415
	Southend-on-Sea	—	15	15
	Stevenage	—	*	*
	Watford	—	5	5
	Total	620	55	670
Greater London	Camden	15	20	35
	Croydon	—	80	80
	Ealing	—	75	75

Asylum seekers supported in NASS accommodation, by local authority and UK Government Office Region, as at the end of June 2004

		Number of applicants (including dependants)		
Region	*Local authority*	*Dispersed*	*Disbenefited*	*Total*
	Enfield	140	115	255
	Greenwich	—	25	25
	Hackney	45	65	115
	Hammersmith and Fulham	—	75	75
	Haringey	310	160	470
	Harrow	—	50	50
	Havering	—	5	5
	Hillingdon	—	15	15
	Hounslow	—	15	15
	Islington	40	80	120
	Kensington and Chelsea	—	5	5
	Kingston upon Thames	—	10	10
	Lambeth	—	45	45
	Lewisham	—	55	55
	Merton	—	15	15
	Newham	30	115	145
	Redbridge	10	45	55
	Richmond upon Thames	—	5	5
	Southwark	—	50	50
	Sutton	—	5	5
	Tower Hamlets	—	15	15
	Waltham Forest	45	75	120
	Wandsworth	—	10	10
	Westminster	—	20	20
	Total	660	1,375	2,035
South East	Brighton and Hove	40	15	55
	Dartford	—	5	5
	Hastings	145	—	145
	Medway	—	10	10
	Milton Keynes	—	*	*
	Oxford	—	15	15
	Portsmouth	440	—	440
	Slough	—	10	10
	Southampton	250	5	255
	Total	880	60	940
South West	Bristol	420	—	420
	Exeter	45	—	45
	Gloucester	80	30	110
	Plymouth	445	—	445
	South Gloucestershire	85	—	85
	Swindon	130	10	145
	Weymouth and Portland	—	*	*
	Total	1,210	45	1,255
	Total (England)	35,375	1,695	37,070
Wales	Cardiff	1,060	—	1,060
	Neath Port Talbot	*	—	*
	Newport	355	5	360
	Swansea	900	—	900
	Wrexham	55		55
	Total	2,370	5	2,375
Scotland	Glasgow City	5,580	—	5,580
	Total	5,580	—	5,580
Northern Ireland	Belfast	100	—	100
	Coleraine	*	—	*
	Newry and Mourne	*	—	*
	Newtownabbey	5	—	5
	Total	110	—	110
	Total (United Kingdom)	43,435	1,700	45,135

* = 1 or 2. Figures (other than percentages) are rounded to the nearest 5 and may not sum due to rounding.

Notes:

Disbenefited cases are cases which were previously supported under the main UK benefits system and have been moved onto NASS support. Some of these cases have remained in the original social services accommodation.

Bob Spink: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how much was spent in each year since 1996 from all public funded sources in support of asylum seekers and their families. [190971]

Mr. Browne: The Immigration and Nationality Directorate of the Home Office assumed responsibility for the direct costs of supporting asylum seekers from April 1999. The costs include payments made to local authorities for accommodation, as well as those made to the private sector. Prior to this, costs fell to the Departments of Health and Social Security. The following amounts have been spent directly on asylum seeker support.

	£million
1996-97	413
1997-98	375
1998-99	475
1999-00	590
2000-01	747
2001-02	1,046
2002-03	1,070
2003-04	[1]—

[1] The actual Asylum Support costs for 2003-04 are yet to be audited and published.

Further information on any other costs to local or central Government, specifically related to the support of asylum seekers is not currently available.

Ms Oona King: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many failed Palestinian asylum seekers have been removed in the last 12 months. [192885]

Mr. Browne: It is not possible to say how many asylum seekers of Palestinian origin have been removed from the United Kingdom in the last 12 months. Information is collated only on the nationality of asylum seekers; Palestine is an occupied territory rather than an independent country.

Mr. Malins: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what the average time is between initial decision in asylum cases and the hearing of an appeal before an adjudicator. [193252]

Mr. Browne: Information on the average time between an initial decision in asylum cases and the hearing of an appeal before an Adjudicator is unavailable and could be obtained only at disproportionate cost by examination of individual case records.

However, the Home Office and the Department for Constitutional Affairs (DCA) set a jointly owned Public Service Agreement target for 2003–04 that 60 per cent. of substantive asylum applications received from 1 April 2003 should have a decision, up to and including appeal at the Immigration Appeal Tribunal, within six months. The latest published data shows that the Home Office and DCA are exceeding this target. 63 per cent. of substantive applications[1,2], received in the period April to December 2003, were decided within six months[3]. This compares to an average of 20 months for a decision in 1997.

Information on the timeliness of case processing, up to and including appeals, is published quarterly on the Home Office website at http://www.homeoffice.gov.uk/rds/immigration1.html.

[1] A-CID as at 12 July 2004.

[2] Excludes withdrawals and 3rd country cases, which may be the responsibility of other EU member states under the Dublin Convention. Home Office's Public Service Agreement target for 2003-04 is 60 per cent. Details of the targets are given in the 2000 Spending Review Public Service Agreements White Paper at http://www.treasury.gov.uk/. Excludes asylum applications lodged by Iraqis between 1 February and 31 May 2003.

[3] "Six months" is defined as 182 days.

Mr. Malins: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will estimate how many failed asylum seekers remain in the UK. [193253]

Mr. Browne: Information on the total number of asylum seekers currently in the UK, including failed asylum seekers, is not available. Some applicants may leave the United Kingdom without informing the Immigration Service.

The number of cases (principal applicants) awaiting initial decision or awaiting appeal determinations continues to fall as the level of applications falls, initial decisions continue to outstrip the number of applications, and record numbers of appeals are determined by the Immigration Appellate Authority (IAA). The latest published figures show that as at the end of June 2004 there were:

> 13,300 cases awaiting an initial decision (of this total, 4,900 cases were work in progress, ie the application had been outstanding for six months or less), the lowest level for a decade
>
> an estimated 9,000 appeals lodged with the Home Office which had not been sent to the IAA (a proportion of appeals lodged do not result in appeal bundles being sent to the IAA); and
>
> 22,600 asylum cases work in progress in the IAA (9,900 at the adjudicator tier, 7,300 applications for permission to appeal to the tribunal, and 5,400 tribunal appeals).

Information on asylum applications are published on a quarterly and annual basis. The next publication covering the third quarter of 2004 (July to September) will be available on 16 November 2004 on the Home Office Research Development and Statistics Directorate website at http://www.homeoffice.gov.uk/rds/immigration1.html.

Mr. Malins: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what access to *(a)* the benefit system, *(b)* local authority housing and *(c)* medical care failed asylum seekers have. [193254]

Mr. Browne: Failed asylum seekers are not able to access mainstream benefits or social housing. The National Asylum Support Service (NASS) provides support to eligible asylum seekers until a final decision is made on their claim. With the exception of families including dependants under 18, support must end no later than 21 days after the receipt of a final negative decision. Failed asylum seekers unable to leave immediately due to circumstances entirely beyond their control may be eligible for accommodation under section 4 of the Immigration and Asylum Act 1999. The criteria are published on the Immigration and Nationality Directorate website www.ind.homeoffice.gov.uk.

No one requiring immediately necessary medical treatment will ever be denied it, irrespective of their immigration status. However, under the provisions of the National Health Service (Charges to Overseas Visitors) Regulations 1989, as amended, failed asylum seekers will be expected to pay for NHS hospital treatment in certain circumstances, just like anyone else without a legal basis of stay in this country. Failed asylum seekers are not normally eligible for NHS primary medical services.

Tom Cox: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many failed asylum seekers were removed from the UK during the last 12 months. [193472]

Mr. Browne: Between July 2003 and June 2004 (the latest date for which data are available) 13,495 principal asylum applicants were removed from the UK; 17,020 including dependants. This includes people who departed 'voluntarily' after enforcement action has been initiated against them and those who departed under the Assisted Voluntary Returns scheme organised by the International Organisation for Migration.

Information on asylum seekers who were removed from the UK between July and September 2004 will be published on 16 November on the Home Office Research Development and Statistics Directorate website at http://www.homeoffice.gov.uk/rds/immigration1.html

Mr. Sheerman: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what *(a)* services and *(b)* assistance are available to asylum seekers who have been refused asylum but are unable to return home, with particular reference to those who have no means of income or independent support; and what plans his Department has to improve services and assistance for such people. [194044]

Mr. Browne: There is nothing to prevent the majority of failed asylum seekers from leaving the UK voluntarily. Failed asylum seekers are provided with details on assistance for those wishing to depart voluntarily. Those failed asylum seekers who are destitute and unable to leave immediately for reasons entirely beyond their control can seek the provision of accommodation under section 4 of the Immigration and Asylum Act 1999. The criteria for accessing section 4 support are tight since the provision of accommodation is restricted to those who cannot rather than will not leave.

In addition, the National Asylum Support Service grant funds voluntary sector organisations to provide one stop services for asylum seekers in each region of the UK. The grant agreements with the voluntary sector have recently been expanded to require the one stop services to give impartial advice about and assistance with the options open to failed asylum seekers including the Voluntary Assisted Returns and Reintegration Programme (VARRP), support under section 4 and other voluntary sector support.

Mr. Sheerman: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will make it his policy to permit failed asylum seekers who cannot be returned home the right to work in this country. [194045]

Mr. Browne: It would be wrong to allow failed asylum seekers to work because it would undermine their incentive to comply with the removal process. It also runs counter to the Government's policy of protecting the asylum system from being exploited by people who are in fact illegal economic migrants. Failed asylum seekers who are genuinely unable to return home due to circumstances beyond their control can, providing they are complying with efforts to return them, seek accommodation under section 4 of the Immigration and Asylum Act 1999. There is no need for them to become homeless or destitute.

Asylum/Immigration

Mr. Lilley: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what the average time taken to reach a final decision on an asylum application was in the last period for which figures are available. [193299]

Mr. Browne *[holding answer 25 October 2004]*: Information on the average time taken to reach a final decision on an asylum application is not available and could be produced only at disproportionate cost by examination of individual case files. Some cases do not result in such decisions, for example if the application is withdrawn.

However, the Home Office and the Department for Constitutional Affairs (DCA) set a jointly owned public service agreement target for 2003–04 that 60 per cent. of substantive asylum applications received from 1 April 2003 should have a decision, up to and including appeal at the Immigration Appeal Tribunal, within six months. The latest published data show that the Home Office and DCA are exceeding this target. 63 per cent. of substantive applications[1,2], received in the period April to December 2003, were decided within six months[3]. This compares to an average of 20 months for a decision in 1997.

Information on the timeliness of case processing, up to and including appeals, is published quarterly on the Home Office website at http://www.homeoffice.gov.uk/rds/immigration1.html.

[1] Source: A-CID as at 12 July 2004.

[2] Excludes withdrawals and third country cases, which may be the responsibility of other EU member states under the Dublin convention. Home Office's public service agreement target for 2003–04 is 60 per cent. Details of the targets are given in the 2000 Spending Review Public Service Agreements White Paper at http://www.treasury.gov.uk/. Excludes asylum applications lodged by Iraqis between 1 February and 31 May 2003.

[3] "Six months" is defined as 182 days.

Bribery

Malcolm Bruce: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department on what date the UK Central Authority received a request from the *(a)* US authorities, *(b)* French authorities and *(c)* Nigerian authorities for assistance with their investigation into allegations of bribery relating to a Nigerian LNG plant. [196427]

Caroline Flint: Letters of request for assistance in criminal matters from foreign governments are treated confidentially, as communications between two countries. In accordance with this practice, we are unable to confirm or deny that we have received requests in this matter.

Burglary

Mr. Oaten: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many people were jailed in *(a)* 2001, *(b)* 2002 and *(c)* 2003 under section 111 of the Criminal Courts (Sentencing) Act 2000 for a third offence of burglary. [193991]

Paul Goggins: Information reported to the Home Office shows that six people were sentenced under section 111 of the Criminal Courts (Sentencing) Act 2000 (previously section 4 of the Crime (Sentences) Act 1997) in England and Wales for a third offence of burglary in 2001 and two in 2002.

Information for 2003 is due for publication in November.

Cannabis

Mr. Amess: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many convictions there have been for possession of cannabis in each of the last 10 years. [148604]

Caroline Flint: Details of the number of convictions for possession of cannabis in each of the years between 1992 and 2002 are in the Home Office Statistical Bulletin on Drug Seizure and Offender Statistics 2001 and 2002 (Table S2.29 of the Supplementary tables). The information is analysed from the Home Office Drug Seizures Database.

The Bulletin is available on the RDS website and in the Library http://uk.sitestat.com/homeoffice/homeoffice/s?rds.hosb0804pdf&n s_type=pdf&ns_url=%5Bhttp://www.homeoffice.gov.uk/rds/pdfs04/ hosb0804.pdf%5D http://uk.sitestat.com/homeoffice/homeoffice/s?rds.hosb0804areap df&ns_type=pdf&ns_url=%5Bhttp://www.homeoffice.gov.uk/rds/pdf s04/hosb0804area.pdf%5D.

Charities Bill

Mrs. Lait: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department why service non-public funds are no longer to be excepted charities in the draft Charities Bill. [194453]

Fiona Mactaggart: The Charity Commission's register was created in the 1960s to provide public information about the existence and status of individual charities. Some classes of charity, including service charitable funds, were excepted from the registration requirement because either the relevant information about them was provided by some other means or there was no public interest in them. Excepted charities continued to be regulated by the Commission even if they were not registered with it.

The Government believes that, to enhance the accountability of charities and to promote public confidence in the regulatory arrangements, all charities that are regulated by the Charity Commission should appear on its public register. The Government have included a provision in the draft Charities Bill to achieve this by ending the system of exceptions from registration. The Government have set the initial income threshold for registration at £100,000 per annum in order to provide for a manageable process of registration over time.

There is a public interest in service charitable funds. They benefit from the tax reliefs available to charities generally, and they can make use of the Gift Aid scheme which allows them to receive donations in a tax efficient way.

Mrs. Lait: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department whether heritage assets are to be included in the balance sheets of service non-public funds under the draft Charities Bill. [194454]

Fiona Mactaggart: The Charities Bill will make no change to the existing rules on the content of the accounts of non-public funds belonging to service charities. This is a matter for the Charity Commission as the Government department responsible for the regulation of charities in England and Wales. The Director of Policy and Strategy at the Charity Commission will write to the hon. Member and a copy of her letter will be placed in the Library.

Citizenship Requirements

Mr. Malins: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what plans he has to modify the language requirement for citizenship applications for people from countries where English is either an official language or is the sole official language. [195473]

Mr. Browne *[holding answer 2 November 2004]:* We have no plans to discriminate between nationalities in this way. The requirement to demonstrate knowledge of English applies to all applicants. The fact that someone comes from a country where English is an official language does not guarantee that they can speak it to the standard required for naturalisation as a British citizen.

The Home Office website explains how fluent English speakers can most easily demonstrate their knowledge of the language.

Community Punishment (London)

Mr. Oaten: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many hours of community punishment were awarded by the courts in the London area in each of the last three years. [143395]

Paul Goggins: The available information, from the Home Office Court Proceedings Database is as follows:

Total number of hours of community punishment[1] imposed by all courts in London, 2000 to 2002

	Total number of hours
2000	768,445
2001	770,256
2002	878,510

[1] Total hours of community punishment orders and community punishment within community punishment and rehabilitation orders. Data are on the principal offence basis.

Statistics for 2003 will be published later in November.

Convicted Criminals (EU Nationals)

Mr. Malins: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many nationals of the new EU accession states have been convicted of crimes in magistrates courts in England and Wales since May. [198092]

Paul Goggins *[holding answer 15 November 2004]:* Information held on the Home Office court proceedings database does not include the nationality of the defendant.

Crime

Mr. Pike: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what powers preventing racial harassment have been introduced since 1997; and how many times these powers have been used in Burnley. [168316]

Fiona Mactaggart: The Crime and Disorder Act 1998 created new and separate offences where the offences of causing fear and violence or of causing harassment, alarm or distress under the Public Order Act 1985, or the offences of harassment or putting in fear of violence under the Protection from Harassment Act 1997 were racially aggravated.

Figures for the number of prosecutions in Burnley for this type of offence are not centrally available. Over the period 1999–2000 to 2002–03, Lancashire police recorded a total of 1,122 racially- or religiously-aggravated harassment offences.

Prior to 1997, the Race Relations Act (RRA) 1976 prohibited discrimination on racial grounds. The RRA did not specifically refer to harassment, but it was clear from case law that racial harassment was a type of detriment capable of amounting to the kind of treatment prohibited by the Act.

As part of its fulfilment of its obligations under the EC Race Directive, the UK amended the Race Relations Act 1976 (by virtue of the Race Relations Act 1976 (Amendment) Regulations 2003) so as to make it unlawful to harass a person, on grounds of race or ethnic or national origins, in the areas of activity covered by the 1976 Act.

Mr. McLoughlin: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many crimes were committed by juvenile offenders in *(a)* West Derbyshire and *(b)* the East Midlands in each of the last two quarters for which figures are available; and how many cautions were issued. [198370]

Paul Goggins: The information contained in the table gives the number of juveniles (persons aged 10–17) convicted of all offences and those given reprimands and final warnings, during the last two quarters of 2002 in the East Midlands. It also contains data for the Derbyshire police force area, and, for persons found guilty, in the petty sessional areas of Derby and South Derbyshire and North East Derbyshire which cover the area of the West Derbyshire constituency.

The information collected centrally does not enable cautions in the West Derbyshire constituency to be identified. Neither is it possible to give the number of crimes committed by juveniles, only the number of juveniles who are found guilty of all offences.

Statistics for 2003 will be published on 18 November.

Number of juveniles found guilty at all courts, and those given reprimands and final warnings[1] for all offences, East Midlands, 3rd and 4th quarter 2002

Area, age and disposal etc.	*3rd Quarter 2002*	*4th Quarter 2002*
East Midlands[2]		
Juveniles aged 10–17 receiving a reprimand	1,243	1,138
Juveniles aged 10–17 receiving a final warning	451	404
Juveniles aged 10–17 found guilty	1,781	1,669
of which:		
Derbyshire police force area		
Juveniles aged 10–17 receiving a reprimand[3]	250	224
Juveniles aged 10–17 receiving a final warning[3]	139	141
Juveniles aged 10–17 found guilty		
of which:		
found guilty in the Derby and South Derbyshire PSA	172	150
found guilty in the North East Derbyshire and Dales PSA	116	100

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[1] Cautions were replaced by reprimands and final warnings for persons under 18 from June 2000.

[2] Police force areas of Derbyshire, Leicestershire, Lincolnshire, Northamptonshire and Nottinghamshire.

[3] Not available by petty sessional area.

Criminal Justice

Lady Hermon: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what discussions have taken place between his Department and his colleagues at the Northern Ireland Office about the Draft Treaty on Co-operation on Criminal Justice issues between the Republic of Ireland and the United Kingdom; and if he will make a statement. [192342]

Caroline Flint *[holding answer 19 October 2004]:* There have been official-level contacts between the Home Office and the Northern Ireland Office during the year with respect to co-operation on criminal justice issues between the UK and the Republic of Ireland. These have included reference to the proposed draft Intergovernmental Agreement on Criminal Justice Co-operation as set out in the Updated Criminal Justice Review Implementation Plan published by the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland in June 2003.

Northern Ireland Office officials have been in touch with officials in the Performance and Delivery Unit, Judicial Co-operation Unit, Criminal Law Policy Unit and the European and International Unit of the Home Office, and through them also with officials involved in road crime and drugs policy, as well as the Secretary of State's private office. I am satisfied that the Department is being kept fully apprised of relevant developments in this area.

Custodial Sentencing Statistics

David Davis: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many people were given custodial sentences of *(a)* less than 12 months, *(b)* between one and four years and *(c)* more than four years in Crown Courts in each year since 1995, broken down by (i) gender, (ii) age and (iii) type of offence. [190890]

Paul Goggins: The information requested is contained in the table and relates to England and Wales for the years 1995 to 2002 and a copy will be placed in the Library.

Statistics on court proceedings for 2003 will be published in the autumn.

Cyber Crime

Mr. Wiggin: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what measures his Department is taking to prevent financial fraud originating on the world wide web. [197809]

Caroline Flint: The Government take the issue of fraud on the world wide web very seriously and have taken a number of steps to tackle this kind of crime.

The Home Office website provides advice on avoiding internet fraud, while the Department of Trade and Industry has advice on scams and rip-offs, including internet scams, on its Consumer Direct website.

The Home Office has created, and maintains the 'e-tailing mini site', which forms part of the crime reduction website. The mini site provides information to help both businesses and consumers protect themselves specifically when using the internet.

We have published, jointly with the Association for Payment Clearing Services (APACS) a leaflet on card safety which includes a section on using cards safely over the internet. The leaflet has been sent to all police forces in England and Wales, and to Crime and Disorder Reduction Partnerships. It is also available on the Home Office website and the e-tailing mini site, and APACS members (banks) will be sending a version of the leaflet to their cardholders.

The Home Office is represented on an industry-led steering group which aims to tackle 'Card Not Present' (CNP) fraud (which includes fraud over the internet). We support practical measures being introduced by the industry to increase levels of security for internet transactions. These include Address Verification Services (AVS) and Card Security Code (CSC), along with Mastercard Secure Code and Verified by Visa which require password verification for internet transactions. These initiatives are already making a significant impact on CNP fraud.

The work of the CNP steering group has also led to the production of a manual (Spot and Stop Card Fraud Retailer Pack) which aims to educate merchants on the dangers of CNP fraud and the steps which can be taken to prevent it.

Government are also involved in the development of Project Endurance, an initiative aimed at launching an internet security awareness campaign in 2005. The project brings together a number of UK Government Departments and law enforcement organisations with a number of high-profile private sector companies. This campaign is to be targeted at micro businesses and consumers, primarily aimed at helping these users gain confidence in using the internet.

Dangerous Driving

Mr. Laurence Robertson: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will make a statement on the steps he has taken to strengthen the punishments available to courts when dealing with people who have caused death by bad driving. [192977]

Paul Goggins *[holding answer 21 October 2004]:* We have increased the maximum penalties for causing death by dangerous driving and causing death by careless driving while under the influence of alcohol or drugs from 10 to 14 years imprisonment, and for aggravated vehicle taking where a death occurs from five years to 14 years imprisonment. The new maximum penalties for these offences were introduced in the Criminal Justice Act 2003 and apply to all offences committed on or after 27 February 2004.

Departmental Estate

Mr. Andrew Turner: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will list the properties occupied by *(a)* his Department and *(b)* its agencies in (i) 1997 and (ii) 2004; and what the (A) area and (B) annual rental value (1) in aggregate and (2) in each case was in each year. [196069]

Fiona Mactaggart *[holding answer 4 November 2004]:* The addresses of Home Office properties are not disclosed for national and personal security reasons.

The non-agency part of my Department currently occupies 1,498 properties which have a combined floor area of 773,357 square metres. Home Office agencies occupy 605 properties which have a combined floor area of 3,606,948 square metres.

The figures exclude premises that are held under service agreements and those where costs are shared with other Government Departments where the other Department pays the rent. The total number of properties figure includes leased residential accommodation but as the floor areas of this type of property are not known residential floor area figures have been excluded.

A rental valuation of the estate has not been undertaken. Historic records in respect of earlier years are not kept.

Departmental IT

Brian White: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what percentage of the Department's *(a)* implemented and *(b)* planned computer systems use open source software; and what plans are in place to raise this level. [195654]

Fiona Mactaggart: The choice of software to meet the business needs of the Home Office largely rests with our contracted strategic ISIT suppliers who include the consideration of open source solutions on a level basis with proprietary software in accordance with the Governments open source software police, which would include a test to ensure value for money. The Governments policy on open source is available on www.govtalk.gov.uk.

Current suppliers to the Home Office are not known to extensively use, or have plans for implementing, open source software. None of the major non-PFI delivered projects utilise open source software.

However within parts of the Home Office, where they no longer operate under PFI arrangements for IT there is a greater degree of choice over the software used e.g. The Immigration and Nationality Directorate intend to trial Linux solutions in a research and development area, as well as such things as Open Office, Apache, Tomcat, Mozilla.

Departmental Offices

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what the cost of *(a)* decoration and *(b)* refurbishment of the London offices of the Department was in each of the last four years. [196151]

Fiona Mactaggart: I refer the hon. Member to the answer given to the right hon. Member for Haltemprice and Howden (David Davis) on 15 July 2004, *Official Report*, column 583W.

Departmental Publications

Mr. Bellingham: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what his Department's target is for the interval between publication of *(a)* departmental announcements and documents and *(b)* material published by public bodies for which his Department has oversight and their posting online; and what the average interval was in the latest year for which figures are available. [195393]

Fiona Mactaggart: The Home Office seeks, wherever possible, to ensure that publication on the internet is simultaneous with publication in other media.

In doing so, the Department follows guidance contained in section 2.2 of the "Guidance for UK Government Websites" available at www.cabinet office.gov.uk/e-government/webguidelines.

The Department does not keep statistics on typical intervals between publication and posting online, nor do we hold information about the operation of agency and non-departmental public body websites.

Departmental Publications (Access)

Mr. Goodman: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many and what proportion of publications issued by his Department are available in *(a)* Braille, *(b)* autoprint, *(c)* large print and *(d)* easy read format. [194287]

Fiona Mactaggart: All Publications produced by the Home Office are readily made available in these formats on request as this has proved to be the most cost-effective approach.

If publications relate directly to people with disabilities then these formats would be produced as a matter of course.

Publications produced this year in alternative formats:

	Number
Braille	15
Large print	4
Audio tape/CD	4
Easy read format[1]	—

[1] All publications are produced in plain English.

4.25 per cent. of publications are currently produced in these formats (demand is low).

The Home Office follows the good practice guidelines included in a range of central guidance including: "Let's Make it Accessible" (improving government information for disabled people); The Informability Manual, and Guidelines for UK Government Websites (illustrated handbook for web management teams).

Departmental Staff

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what percentage of the staff of the Department in *(a)* 2002 and *(b)* 2003 were people with disabilities. [196136]

Fiona Mactaggart: I refer the hon. Member to the answer given to him by my hon. Friend the Minister for the Cabinet Office on 9 November 2004, *Official Report*, column 619W.

Detention Centres

Tom Cox: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will list the detention centres in England and Wales. [194138]

Mr. Browne: Section 66 of the Nationality, Immigration and Asylum Act 2002 changed the name of detention centres to removal centres. There are nine immigration removal centres in England and one in Scotland. There are no immigration removal centres in Wales. The following table lists immigration removal centres and indicates their location:

Centre	*Location*
Campsfield	Oxfordshire
Colnbrook	Heathrow
Dover	Dover
Dungavel	Strathaven, South Lanarkshire
Harmondsworth	Heathrow
Haslar	Gosport, Hampshire
Lindholme	Doncaster
Oakington	Cambridgeshire
Tinsley House	Gatwick
Yarl's Wood	Bedfordshire

Domestic Violence

Hugh Bayley: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what measures the Government are taking to tackle domestic violence in North Yorkshire; and how many convictions for domestic violence there have been in each year since 1997. [192403]

Paul Goggins: As part of a three-year funding package from November 2003 to March 2006, the Home Office has allocated £230,000 to North Yorkshire, spread evenly between the eight Crime and Disorder Reduction Partnerships (CDRPs), to improve local responses to tackling domestic violence.

The eight CDRPs in North Yorkshire work closely with each other and with North Yorkshire police and have formed the North Yorkshire Domestic Abuse Initiative which employs four full-time domestic abuse co-ordinators. In addition, the North Yorkshire Domestic Abuse Strategy has just completed its initial consultation stage.

There is no specific offence of domestic violence, but we are currently working with the Crown Prosecution Service to develop a new performance indicator for tracking domestic violence cases.

Sandra Gidley: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how long it has taken, on average, to reach the first positive decision for applications under the domestic violence rule. [195649]

Mr. Browne: The Immigration and Nationality Directorate is responsible for considering applications for indefinite leave to remain from victims of domestic violence using special provisions under the Immigration Rules. Information on the average length of time to reach the first positive decision in these applications is not currently available.

Information on immigration applications is published annually in the Command Paper "Control of Immigration: Statistics United Kingdom". The next publication covering 2003 was published on 16 November 2004 on the Home Office Research and Development and Statistics Directorate website at http://www.homeoffice.gov.uk/rds/immigration1.html.

Drunk Driving

Tom Cox: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many convictions for drunk driving resulted in a custodial sentence by courts in the Greater London area in each of the last five years. [197706]

Caroline Flint: Information taken from the Home Office Court Proceedings Database on convictions and custodial sentences for offences of driving etc. after consuming alcohol or taking drugs 1998 to 2002 is given in the table. Data for 2003 will be available early in 2005.

Findings of guilt and immediate custodial sentences at all courts for offences of driving etc. after consuming alcohol or taking drugs within Greater London[1] 1998–2002

	Findings of guilt	Number of offences Immediate custody[2]
1998	14,190	1,059
1999	12,650	843
2000	11,963	895
2001	11,422	938
2002	13,126	939

[1] Metropolitan and City of London police force areas combined.

[2] Immediate custody includes sentences of secure training order, detention and training order, young offender institution and unsuspended sentence of imprisonment.

Driving Offences

Tom Cox: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many drivers convicted of driving while under the influence of alcohol or drugs in each of the last five year had a previous conviction for the same offence. [197720]

Caroline Flint: I would refer my hon. Friend to the reply given to a question from the hon. Member for Caithness, Sutherland and Easter Ross (John Thurso) on 14 October 2004.

Drug Abuse Treatment

Adam Price: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how much money has been allocated to the treatment of drug abuse among offenders in each of the last five years. [196805]

Caroline Flint: Total community treatment budgets, comprising ring-fenced and local funds, that benefit problematic drug users with a history of offending are estimated as follows:

£ million

	Allocation
2001–02	287
2002–03	322
2003–04	436
2004–05	[1]457
2005–06	[1]508

[1] Estimated

Drug Treatment and Testing Orders (DTTOs), which are community sentences with a drug treatment requirement, have been allocated the following funding:

£ million

	Allocation
2000–01[1]	20
2001–02	40
2002–03	36
2003–04	53.7
2004–05	76

[1] Six months only

In addition, Her Majesty's Prison Services also fund the treatment of drug misusers in prison.

Of further note, the Drug Intervention Programme (formerly known as the Criminal Justice Interventions Programme) provides improved access to treatment for drug misusing offenders, as well as supporting their positive reintegration into society. The following table shows the estimated annual central funding figures for the programme:

Criminal Justice Interventions Programme: Funding

£ million	
2003–04[1]	55
2004–05[2]	188
2005–06[3]	250

[1] Estimated out-turn

[2] Estimated figure

[3] Provisional allocation

Note:

This does not include some of the resources used by local partnerships to assist in delivering the programme.

EU Visitors (Northern Ireland)

Mrs. Iris Robinson: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will estimate the change in number of citizens from EU accession countries travelling to Northern Ireland since the expansion of the European Union in May. [197612]

Mr. Timms: The information requested falls within the responsibility of the National Statistician, who has been asked to reply.

Letter from Colin Mowl to Mrs. Iris Robinson, dated 16 November 2004:

The National Statistician has been asked to reply to your recent Parliamentary Question asking about the change in number of citizens from EU Accession Countries travelling to Northern Ireland since the expansion of the EU in May. I am replying in his absence. (197612)

Visits to the UK by overseas residents are estimated from data collected on the International Passenger Survey (IPS). The survey is conducted at major airports, and on major sea and tunnel routes, and the data collected is weighted up to national passenger figures provided by the Civil Aviation Authority, British Airports Authority, Department for Transport, Eurotunnel and Eurostar. Although this provides estimates of visits to the UK, it should be noted that interviewing is not carried out in Northern Ireland.

Because of the small number of interviews carried out with nationals of the EU Accession Countries, as well as the factor that interviewing is not carried out in Northern Ireland, the IPS is unable to provide reliable information for visits to Northern Ireland by nationals of the EU Accession Countries.

Drug Seizures

Hugh Bayley: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what quantity of illegal drugs were seized by the police in *(a)* 1997 and *(b)* the most recent year for which figures are available. [191246]

Caroline Flint: The quantity of illegal drugs seized by the police in 1997 and 2002 is detailed in the table. The 2002 data is currently the latest published data.

Table 1: Seizures of controlled drugs made by the police and other authority[1] by drug type and amount seized.
United Kingdom

	1997		*2002*	
Drug type	*Total number of weighed seizures*	*Total (kgs)*	*Total number of weighed seizures*	*Total (kgs)*
Total seizures	733, 150	—	131,600	—
Class A drugs (weighed)				
Cocaine	3,068	279	5,240	222
Crack	1,738	31	4,230	44
Heroin	12,311	489	15,270	1,689
Methadone	1,564	116	850	60
Morphine	131	0	130	2
Class B drugs (weighed)				
Amphetamines	18,429	2,361	6,920	818
Cannabis (herbal)	25,703	8,290	38,360	3,964
Cannabis resin	77,111	64,824	61,690	11,234
Class C drugs (weighed)	2,508	13	3,030	28
Class A drugs (unweighed)				
LSD[2]	831	[2]162	50	[2]5
Ecstasy-type[2]	4,996	[2]464	8,210	[2]1,062
Class B drugs (unweighed)				
Cannabis plants[3]	3,783	[3]114,948	2,440	[3]57,049

[1] Seizures from joint operations involving H M Customs and Excise and the police are generally recorded against H M Customs and Excise.

[2] Seizures of LSD and Ecstasy-type are in thousands of doses. These include dots, tablets and squares.

[3] Number of plants.

Note:
Quantity seized divided by the number of seizures where the quantity seized was not unknown.

Source:
Home Office Statistical Bulletins on Drug Seizures and Offender statistics

Extradition

Tom Cox: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many requests are pending for extradition of United Kingdom citizens *(a)* to the United States and *(b)* from the United States to the United Kingdom. [194225]

Caroline Flint: As at 25 October 2004, there are 21 British citizens who are the subject of US requests for their extradition from the UK to the US, whose cases have been placed before the courts. These figures include some British citizens who are dual nationals. We do not have complete information on nationality for outgoing requests but there are eight UK requests pending for extradition of persons from the US to the UK.

Tom Cox: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department (1) how many requests for extradition of United Kingdom citizens were made by the Government to the United States Administration in *(a)* 2001, *(b)* 2002, *(c)* 2003 and *(d)* 2004 to date; for what reason the extradition was sought; how many of these requests have been granted to date; and if he will make a statement; [194226]

(2) how many requests for extradition of United Kingdom citizens were made by the United States to the United Kingdom in *(a)* 2001, *(b)* 2002, *(c)* 2003 and *(d)* 2004 to date; how many of these requests for extradition have been granted to date; and if he will make a statement. [194227]

Caroline Flint: We do not retain records of nationality or of the types of offences after cases are closed. I therefore set out, for those years, the total number of requests made by the US which resulted in arrests for extradition from the UK to the US, as follows:

	Individuals
2001	14
2002	8
2003	9
2004 (to date)	18

Because extradition cases are of varying duration, those returned to the US in those years are not necessarily the same individuals as those who were the subjects of the above requests. The total numbers returned, of all nationalities, are as follows:

	Individuals
2001	8
2002	12
2003	6
2004 (to date)	6

Tom Cox: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many requests have been made by the United States Administration to the United Kingdom for extradition of British citizens since the Government introduced the existing extradition laws; and if he will make a statement. [194228]

Caroline Flint: Since the introduction of the Extradition Act 2003 the US has requested the extradition of 12 British citizens, whose cases have been placed before the courts.

Tom Cox: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many United Kingdom citizens who are subject to extradition orders have consented to their removal to the United States; and how many of these requests have been granted in each of the last four years. [194229]

Caroline Flint: We do not retain records of nationality after cases are closed, two individuals have consented to their extradition to the US in the last four years.

Tom Cox: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what discussions he has had with the United States Administration on ensuring that British citizens extradited to the United States are not subject to the death penalty; and if he will make a statement. [194747]

Caroline Flint: Whenever the UK receives an extradition request from the United States, or any other country, where the subject of the request has been, will be, or could be sentenced to death, extradition will not be ordered unless the Secretary of State receives strict written assurances from the requesting state that the death sentence, if imposed, would not be carried out.

Failed Asylum Seekers

Mr. Battle: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many failed asylum seekers are receiving sector 4 support; and if he will make a statement. [189958]

Mr. Browne: The most recent information shows that 869 unsuccessful asylum seekers are in receipt of section 4 support.

Falun Gong

John Barrett: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many known members of the Falun Gong movement have applied for asylum in each of the last four years; how many of these have had their application rejected; and how many are still awaiting a decision. [193616]

Mr. Browne: Applications for asylum in the UK are collated and published by nationality, and are made in the UK rather than from abroad. The available data do not include breakdowns by religion or membership of specific groups, which would not necessarily be reliable even if such information were collated.

Information on asylum applications is published in quarterly web pages and in the annual statistical bulletin "Asylum Statistics United Kingdom". Copies of these publications and others relating to general immigration to the UK are available from the Library of the House and from the Home Office Research Development and Statistics Directorate website at http://www.homeoffice.gov.uk/rds/immigration1.html

Foreign Agencies

John McDonnell: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department whether foreign agencies are entitled to raid UK premises *(a)* with and *(b)* without his Department's authorisation. [195834]

Caroline Flint: No foreign agencies are entitled to act in the UK without prior authorisation from the appropriate Government Department. Any acts requiring search of premises and seizure of property in connection with a foreign enquiry could only be carried out by UK law enforcement agencies under strict legal criteria pursuant to the Crime (International Co-operation) Act 2003 and the Police and Criminal Evidence Act 1984.

Gurkhas

Mr. David Atkinson: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will make a statement on UK citizenship for the Gurkhas. [195535]

Mr. Browne: My right hon. Friends the Prime Minister and the Home Secretary announced on 30 September a change in policy for Gurkhas and other non-British members of the British Armed Forces which will enable them to apply for settlement in the UK on discharge from the Armed Forces. This will in turn provide an avenue for naturalisation as a British citizen. This new policy on settlement was implemented by an amendment to the Immigration Rules which took effect on 25 October. Officials are now considering citizenship applications made by people granted settlement under the new rules.

Horse Passports

Mr. Gray: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what instructions he has issued to police forces with reference to the enforcement of the horse passport regulations. [193484]

Alun Michael: I have been asked to reply.

The Food Standards Agency will be responsible for enforcing the checks carried out at slaughterhouses, while local authorities (in particular trading standards departments) will be responsible for enforcing the law elsewhere. We have not issued any instructions to police forces regarding enforcement of the horse passport regulations.

Identity Cards

Mr. Challen: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what the estimated costs are of introducing a national identity card, broken down by *(a)* installing computer systems and software, *(b)* issuing cards and *(c)* running costs. [191139]

Mr. Browne: Set up costs for the first three years have been estimated at £186 million. Costs thereafter will be covered by charges. It would not be appropriate to publish more detailed information while we prepare options for procurement and implementation of the identity cards scheme.

Mrs. Curtis-Thomas: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what safeguards will be put in place to ensure that legislation to provide for identity cards will give primacy to the privacy provisions of the Gender Recognition Bill. [191892]

Mr. Browne: Section 22 of the Gender Recognition Act 2004 sets out how information relating to a person's application for a gender recognition certificate or about the gender history of a successful applicant, is to be protected. Subsection (4) sets out the exceptions to the general prohibition on disclosure of such information, including where this information is disclosed in accordance with any provision of an enactment "other than this section".

The draft Identity Cards Bill establishes to whom information may be disclosed and creates a specific offence of unauthorised disclosure of information (at clause 29). Clause 24 of the draft Bill sets out the rules to be followed when information is disclosed from the National Identity Register. During the consultation on the draft Bill, we have discussed this clause and other provisions of the Bill with interested parties and it is our view that these rules are consistent with the provisions of the Gender Recognition Act.

Mrs. Curtis-Thomas: To ask the Secretary of State for The Home Department what consultation he has undertaken regarding the right of privacy in relation to the identity card scheme. [191946]

Mr. Browne: The Government have undertaken two formal consultations on its proposals for an identity cards scheme, and on draft legislation. In addition officials have had several meetings with officials from the Office of the Information Commissioner and with other interested parties.

The identity cards scheme will be covered by the Data Protection Act 1998 and will comply with the data protection principles set out at Schedule 1 of that Act. This will include the right of people to check the information recorded about them subject to exemptions set out in the Data Protection Act eg in cases of national security. The draft Bill sets clear limitations on the information which can be held on the scheme and requires the consent of a card holder before a check is made except in limited, specified circumstances such as checks by the police when a person has been arrested.

Mr. Kidney: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what discussions he has had with IT companies on providing services for the identity card project. [193386]

Mr. Browne: The Identity Cards Programme has met a range of companies, including those in the IT sector, as part of its market sounding activities. Market sounding is the process of assessing the reaction of the market (that is, all potential suppliers considered collectively) to a proposed requirement and procurement approach , and is recognised as best practice in Government procurement.

Priority for market sounding to date has been given particularly to the smartcard and biometric sectors where the technology is developing quickly, standards are evolving and there is uncertainty about future trends. Seminars targeted at the IT sector have been run in conjunction with Intellect, the trade body for the UK based information technology, telecommunications and electronics industry and other events are being planned to address the wider requirements of the programme.

Market sounding focuses on suppliers as a whole, rather than the merits of individual suppliers. It includes no element of supplier selection (choosing suitable suppliers) or bid evaluation (looking at proposals, technical solutions or prices). There is no commitment of any kind involved—on either side nor any advantage to be gained by a supplier by getting involved. Further it is stressed that there is no formal procurement underway at the moment.

Mr. Oaten: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many passports were recorded as *(a)* lost and *(b)* stolen in the London area in the last 12 months for which figures are available. [143394]

Mr. Browne: On 8 December 2003 the UK Passport Service implemented a new reporting procedure and database for passports which are lost and stolen, and for those which are subsequently recovered.

The total number of passports recorded as lost or stolen for the period 8 December 2003 to date is 277,421 and the recovered total is 25,456. Of these 25,898 were reported as lost and stolen in the London area and 4,398 as recovered.

Illegal Immigration

Mr. Rosindell: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will make a statement on the numbers of illegal entries to the UK by *(a)* rail, *(b)* sea and *(c)* air in each of the last three years. [191268]

Mr. Browne: Information on the ports at which illegal entry is detected is not held centrally and would only be available by examination of individual case-files at disproportionate cost.

Keith Vaz: To ask the Secretary of State for The Home Department what the Government's policy is on how the EU can further develop its policy to fight illegal immigration. [192141]

Mr. Browne: The Government supports work that adds value to the efforts of member states in tackling illegal immigration, an approach we have advocated throughout the on-going negotiations of the new five-year work programme on Justice and Home Affairs.

In the context of these negotiations the UK wants to see: effective exchange of information between all member states; the incorporation of biometrics into visas and EU nationals' passports; and the establishment of the European Border Agency which will take forward high quality risk analysis and co-ordination of member states joint action at the EU external borders. Together these different work strands will enable the EU to adopt a more intelligence-led, outcome focused policy towards managing the external border and combating illegal immigration.

The UK supports the continuing need to work in partnership with third countries to improve the management of migratory flows, addressing the factors that encourage or force people to leave their countries and preventing illegal immigration, including people smuggling and trafficking. This requires a coherent and comprehensive approach, working with source and transit countries and EU and bilateral action.

While we are largely supportive of the way in which EU illegal immigration policy is developing, we do not believe that a case has been made for the need for a European Border Guard. We believe that member states should remain responsible for managing their own borders.

Keith Vaz: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what use the UK makes of the secure web-based platform set up by the EU Commission to assist member states' migration management and to exchange strategic, tactical and operational information concerning illegal migration. [192142]

Mr. Browne: The UK has participated actively in the development of the secure web-based platform set up by the EU Commission to assist member states' migration management and to exchange strategic, tactical and operational information concerning illegal migration—commonly known as the "ICONet". The Immigration and Nationality Directorate Intelligence Service, among others, was asked by the Commission to trial the system. At the moment it cannot handle classified material but the development anticipates that eventually messages up to a "Restricted" level of classification will be handled.

The system allows member states (MS) to notify events such as large scale migration, movements of suspect ships and other information to combat illegal immigration. The system does not permit the exchange of nominal data. Once the information is received it is assessed for intelligence value and then handled according to the Association of Chief Police Officers' standards for intelligence material and disseminated if appropriate. The UK is working with the Commission and other MS to fully develop the "ICONet" as an important resource to combat abuse.

Immigration

Mr. Malins: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many suspected sham marriages have been reported to his Department by registrars in each of the last 24 months; how many prosecutions have been brought; how many convictions have been obtained; and what penalties have been imposed. [193265]

Mr. Browne: The Immigration and Nationality Directorate has received the following notifications of alleged sham marriages from Register Offices in the last 24 months:

	2004	*2003*	*2002*
Jan	364	110	
Feb	420	159	
Mar	458	210	
Apr	386	201	
May	329	176	
Jun	317	195	
Jul	239	242	
Aug	212	172	
Sep	249	260	
Oct		259	171
Nov		323	140
Dec		377	127

It is not possible to provide a monthly breakdown of results for previous activity to counter marriage abuse as such information has only recently started to be recorded in an easily collated format. However, since April 2002, enforcement teams in London have undertaken a number of operations in respect of marriage abuse with over 240 arrests and over 110 individuals charged with a range of offences, including perjury, deception and conspiracy to defraud the Secretary of State. Sentences passed on individuals taking part in sham marriages have ranged from six to 24 months. In addition, those criminals responsible for organising these marriages have received sentences in excess of 18 months.

The Government are introducing a number of additional measures to protect the integrity of UK marriage ceremonies. These include establishing a joint team of caseworkers and immigration officers to analyse intelligence and follow up reports from Registrars more effectively. In addition, a joint working group between the Home Office and Registrars has been established to share intelligence and enable enforcement efforts to be better targeted.

Legislation has also been introduced to restrict the capacity to authorise marriage involving non-EEA nationals to designated register offices, which will enable us to focus our enforcement efforts into a more concentrated area, and also allow intelligence and expertise on marriage abuse to be built up in these dedicated centres. In addition, a new pre-marriage lawful status eligibility requirement will be introduced for marriages involving non-EEA foreign nationals to further deal with those seeking to circumvent immigration controls by entering into sham marriages. This would give registrars the power to refuse to accept notification of marriage in the absence of a document from the Home Office or an entry clearance for marriage.

Annabelle Ewing: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department when he plans to publish the amended eligibility criteria in relation to the one-off exercise to allow families who have been here for at least three years to stay launched in 2003; and whether he plans to extend the deadline for applications beyond 31 December. [193460]

Mr. Browne: I wrote to right hon. and hon. Members on 19 August and the eligibility criteria are published on the Immigration and Nationality Directorate website (www.ind.homeoffice.gov.uk). I will place a copy of the criteria in the Libraries of the House. I have no plans to extend the closing date for applications beyond 31 December 2004. Anyone who thinks they may be eligible should contact the Home Office at PO Box 1541, Croydon CR9 2YS as soon as possible and no later than that date.

Immigration and Nationality Directorate

Keith Vaz: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many people are employed at the Immigration and Nationality Directorate. [194375]

Mr. Browne: As of 30 June 2004, there were 14,501 full-time equivalent staff employed at the Immigration and Nationality Directorate.

Immigration Controls

Mr. Liddell-Grainger: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what plans he has to reintroduce embarkation controls from non-EU countries. [186552]

Mr. Browne: The Government announced on 28 September that as part of its ambitious long-term e-Borders programme Project Semaphore, the first stage, would be under way by the end of this year. This pilot scheme will use on-line technology and advance passenger information provided by airlines to screen and record individuals as they enter and leave the UK. It is proposed that the e-Borders programme will provide a modern, high-tech replacement for the outdated paper embarkation controls.

Immigration Detention Centres (Chaplaincy Services)

Mr. Grieve: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what provision has been made to provide full chaplaincy services at immigration detention centres; and if he will make a statement. [194034]

Mr. Browne *[holding answer 26 October 2004]*: In accordance with the detention centre rules 2001 every immigration removal centre must appoint a manager of religious affairs. The religious affairs manager's task is to facilitate religious observance and the provision of pastoral care for detained persons with the assistance of suitably qualified staff, including ministers of religion. An operating standard on religion, which sets out the minimum requirements expected of removal centres in relation to religious affairs, was issued to all removal centre operators in December 2002. The performance of the religious affairs office in each removal centre is monitored continually.

Immigration Officers

Mr. Rosindell: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many immigration officers were recruited in each of the last 10 years. [191451]

Mr. Browne: The number of immigration officers recruited in each of the last 10 years is:

	Number
1995	95
1996	31
1997	2
1998	1
1999	50
2000	257
2001	417
2002	417
2003	289
2004[1]	135

[1] To 26 May only.

These figures do not include serving staff who moved into the IO grade as a result of transfer or promotion.

Indefinite Leave to Enter

Keith Vaz: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many times he has exercised his discretion on compassionate grounds and granted indefinite leave to enter in 2004. [194376]

Mr. Browne: Data on the number of persons granted indefinite leave to enter the UK on compassionate grounds is not available.

Since December 2003 persons seeking leave to enter at a port for stays of more than six months are required to hold a United Kingdom Residence Permit. It is not possible to say how many of those were granted on compassionate grounds.

There is no power of discretion to grant leave to enter for more than six months at a port of entry.

John Lennon Airport

Dr. Pugh: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what assessment he has made of the effectiveness of immigration controls at John Lennon airport, Liverpool. [191485]

Mr. Browne: Since Liverpool airport has been in operation immigration officers have routinely attended all flights. All arriving passengers are examined by an immigration officer and those subject to control will have their details checked against the Warnings Index (a database of known immigration offenders). Local managers monitor flight schedules on a regular basis and adjust staffing rotas to ensure adequate coverage at all times and in accordance with risk assessment.

Furthermore there are a range of measures in place to stop inadequately documented passengers arriving in the UK. These include an informed and robust visa strategy; a network of airline liaison officers posted abroad; close co-operation with carriers, port authorities and our EU colleagues.

Knife Crimes

Keith Vaz: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what steps the Government is taking to prevent under-aged children from purchasing knives on the internet. [193069]

Caroline Flint: It in an offence to sell a knife to a person under the age of 16. It is the responsibility of the company selling the knife to ensure that the person is over 16. It is for the police to prosecute those companies who breach the law.

Lord Chief Justice

Keith Vaz: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department when he last met the Lord Chief Justice; and if he will make a statement. [194377]

Paul Goggins: My right hon. Friend, the Home Secretary has regular meetings with the Lord Chief Justice. He last met the Lord Chief Justice on 5 May 2004, and has spoken to him on a number of occasions since then.

Mobile Phones

Mr. Prisk: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many mobile phones were used by *(a)* Ministers and special advisers and *(b)* officials in his Department in each year since 1997; how many were (i) lost and (ii) stolen; and what their cost was. [191445]

Fiona Mactaggart: Records on mobile telephony are not held centrally and in order to obtain information would incur disproportionate costs. I can, however, provide information on mobile phones and associated equipment purchased via our Central Procurement unit since 1997, which is as follows:

	£
1997	175.00
1998	5,516.16
1999	163,933.83
2000	146,201.48
2002	64,750.00
2003	78,018.22

Information is not held centrally on call and line rental charges and could be provided, again, only at disproportionate cost.

NGOs

Mr. Paterson: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what steps are taken to ensure that where a non-governmental organisation is supported by a charitable trust there is a clear separation between the two organisations. [194842]

Fiona Mactaggart: This is a matter for the Charity Commission as the Government Department responsible for the regulation of charities in England and Wales. The Director of Policy and Strategy at the Charity Commission will write to the hon. Member and a copy of her reply will be placed in the Library.

Mr. Paterson: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department (1) what guidance is given to non-governmental organisations on creating clear separation between charitable trust and campaigning activity; [194843]

(2) how the Charity Commission ensures that non-governmental organisations with charitable status comply with the relevant regulations. [194844]

Fiona Mactaggart: This is a matter for the Charity Commission as the Government Department responsible for the regulation of charities in England and Wales. The director of policy and strategy at the Charity Commission will write to the hon. Member and a copy of her reply will be placed in the Library.

Night Clubs

Mr. Amess: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what the criteria are for the granting of licences to night clubs; and whether the location of CCTV cameras are taken into account by licensing authorities. [197874]

Mr. Caborn: I have been asked to reply.

For a nightclub to trade under current law, a licence for the provision of alcohol and a special hours certificate must be obtained from the licensing justices and a music and dancing certificate of suitability from the local authority. For a club to be granted a liquor licence and a special hours certificate, the justices must be satisfied that the applicant is a "fit and proper" person, and that the whole or any part of the premises is structurally adapted, and bona fide used or intended to be used, for providing members with music and dancing and substantial refreshment to which the supply of intoxicating liquor is ancillary. Conditions may be attached to these permissions in appropriate circumstances, including those which require the use of CCTV cameras on or outside the premises, by either the licensing justices or the local authority.

Offender Management

Alan Simpson: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what estimate has been made of the number of *(a)* male high security, *(b)* male category B, *(c)* male category C, *(d)* male category D, *(e)* male local, *(f)* male remand, *(g)* female local, *(h)* female closed, *(i)* female open, *(j)* male closed young offender institutions and *(k)* male open young offender institutions juvenile places that will be required in each of the 10 areas under the new National Offender Management Service structure in each of the next five years. [168836]

Paul Goggins: The National Offender Management Service (NOMS) will, in the immediate future, continue to plan its requirement for prison capacity for all categories of prisoner on a national basis, taking account of suitable regimes and factors such as closeness to home.

In due course NOMS will move towards a regional framework, with Regional Offender Managers commissioning places according to local need. Planning for some aspects of the prison estate, such as the accommodation for high security category A prisoners will, however, remain co-ordinated centrally.

Offender Assessment

Mrs. Gillan: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what progress has been made in encouraging the Prison Service and Probation Service to share data relating to the Offender Assessment System needs assessment. [197678]

Paul Goggins: The Offender Assessment System (OASys) was developed for use in both the National Probation Service and the Prison Service. There are clear benefits in having a common tool.

When the two services' OASys IT systems are connected to one another next year it will be possible to pass completed assessments electronically between them, quickly and securely. Until then staff are expected to send assessments in hard copy and have been reminded of this by the National Probation Directorate and Prison Service Headquarters.

Overseas Corruption

Mr. Hancock: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many allegations of overseas corruption on the register held by the National Criminal Intelligence Service relate to offences that occurred prior to February 2002. [197960]

Caroline Flint: There were eight allegations of overseas corruption on the register held by the National Criminal Intelligence Service that related to offences that occurred prior to February 2002.

Overseas Corruption Offences

Mr. Hancock: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many allegations there are on the register of allegations of overseas corruption offences. [194684]

Caroline Flint: The National Criminal Intelligence Service has 37 allegations

on the register of allegations of overseas corruption offences.

Mr. Mike Hancock: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many of the allegations on the register of allegations of overseas corruption offences have come from *(a)* Africa, *(b)* Central and South America, *(c)* North America, *(d)* Asia, *(e)* Western Europe, *(f)* Eastern Europe, *(g)* Russia and the former Soviet Republics and *(h)* the Middle East. [illegible]

Caroline Flint: The information requested is as follows:

(a) Africa	14
(b) Central and South America	4
(c) North America	2
(d) Asia	3
(e) Western Europe	8
(f) Eastern Europe	1
(g) Russia and the former Soviet Republics	0
(h) Middle East	4

Passport Control

Mr. Wiggin: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will make a statement on the current time taken for British passport holders to pass through passport control at Heathrow Terminal One. [195534]

Mr. Browne: The UK Immigration Service is committed to clearing bona fide passengers with minimal delay while ensuring immigration controls remain robust. It has set standards for passenger processing times, which comply with international standards, although there is no specific measurement of the time take to clear British passport holders of Heathrow Terminal 1. These standards are embedded in the UK Immigration Service's annual business objectives, and are kept under regular review.

The UK Immigration Service's performance is also measured independently by the British Airports Authority, which includes queuing times. The Immigration Service including Terminal 1 continues to score well against this measure and performance is at a comparable level compared to 12 months ago.

Mr. Wiggin: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what steps are taken to ensure that British passport holders returning to the UK are dealt with *(a)* effectively and *(b)* efficiently at passport control points. [195537]

Mr. Browne: The passports of British nationals are subject to examination at ports of entry. While we are committed to fulfilling our obligations to process British nationals without delay, the security of our borders is a priority and it is imperative that effective controls are in place so that criminality and illegal migration are identified and appropriate action taken.

The majority of international travellers will understand the benefits of the examination of British passports. To reduce impact on queuing times we are negotiating with port operators to develop flexible queuing systems wherever possible. Ports managers have been advised to respond quickly by deploying additional staff if significant queues develop and to make themselves accessible to passengers to explain why such levels of examination are necessary.

Passports

John Cryer: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what measures are in place to ensure that, where it is known to the Passport Agency that passport applications and accompanying documents are lost or stolen, these are not used to make false applications or acquire false identities. [194732]

Mr. Browne: If the UK Passport Service (UKPS) becomes aware of the loss or theft of a passport application and supporting documents, the details of the passport application and documents submitted are recorded. For each application this record is checked as part of the systems the UKPS has in place to authenticate a passport applicant's identity. These arrangements should ensure that false applications are identified, and that passports are not issued in false identities.

Police

Mrs. Curtis-Thomas: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many police forces have case custody computer systems; and what steps are being taken to increase this number. [191288]

Caroline Flint: Custody and case preparation systems are designed to reduce bureaucracy and improve efficiency in police forces in the processing and handling of arrests. The case preparation system provides other criminal justice organisations with accurate, timely, data that meets the needs of victims, witnesses and other criminal justice organisations. Once implemented the system has the ability to deliver business benefit to both the police service and other criminal justice organisations.

Currently nine police forces are using the National Strategy for Police Information Systems (NSPIS) developed custody application and 11 are using the case preparation application. A number of other forces are using in-house legacy or off-the-shelf systems for one or both these functions.

The Police Information Technology Organisation plans to have at least 20 forces working operationally with NSPIS custody and a further 20 with NSPIS case preparation this financial year. Other forces should have custody and case applications in place by 31 March 2006.

Forces are being encouraged to take these applications by a number of means and we are working closely with the Association of Chief Police Officers to ensure that the police service has systems that will join up with the rest of the criminal justice system.

Mrs. Curtis-Thomas: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what mechanisms are in place to monitor the revised guidance issued by the *(a)* Press Complaints Commission and *(b)* Association of Chief Police Officers' guidelines on anonymity for individuals who are under investigation but have not been charged. [197437]

Paul Goggins: The Interdepartmental Ministerial Group on Sexual Offending will examine the impact of the revised guidance after May 2005, when the Sexual Offences Act 2003 will have been in operation for 12 months.

Mr. Allen: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what his policy is on the use of arresting officers in progressing arrests to charge; and if he will make a statement. [196234]

Ms Blears: The processing of an arrest can result in a significant amount of administrative paperwork for the arresting officer, leading to their abstraction from front line duties.

We are determined to reduce unnecessary paperwork and bureaucracy in the police service. There are a number of projects under way to assist and encourage forces to release police officers from tasks where their powers and training are not required, to increase the time spent on the frontline, and specifically on patrol by police officers.

As part of a range of work funded by the Workforce Modernisation Implementation Fund, Northumbria, Wiltshire and Lincolnshire police are actively piloting models utilising police staff investigators, case builders and other supporting roles. These pilots will support police officers as part of integrated criminal justice management process, following arrests being made.

The processing of an arrest, and the associated functions of criminal justice units within forces, including prisoner handling, case building and investigation, are areas which can be effectively undertaken by police staff and other members of the extended police family.

Polygamous Marriages

Mr. Malins: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what steps his Department is taking to tackle the problem of unregistered polygamous marriages; and if he will make a statement. [195466]

Mr. Browne: Government policy is to prevent the formation of polygamous households in this country.

The Immigration Rules do not allow entry clearance to be granted to the wife of a man if:

the marriage is polygamous; and

there is another woman already living as the wife of the man in the UK.

Prison Service

Mrs. Curtis-Thomas: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will make a statement on the results of the DORE Achievement Centres and dyslexia, dyspraxia and attention deficit treatment programme with the Prison Service in Stafford; and what plans he has to extend the programme to other prisons. [146170]

Paul Goggins: The results of the programme run at Stafford prison are encouraging, albeit on the basis of a very small sample.

The research raises some complex issues and needs a co-ordinated approach to further development involving health, physical education and education providers. I have asked those responsible for the DORE programme to discuss their work further with the Prison Service.

Mr. Maude: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what the real terms change in total spending for the Prison Service was in each of the last 10 years. [169092]

Paul Goggins: The real term changes in total spending for the Prison Service over the last 10 years are given in the following table.

Prison service budget

	£ million	Real terms £ million 2003–04 prices	Year on year increase (percentage)	Deflators: Index 2003–04 = 100
1994–95	1,597.900	2,019.463	—	79.125
1995–96	1,666.900	2,047.311	1.4	81.419
1996–97	1,608.600	1,911.655	-6.6	84.147
1997–98	1,740.800	2,016.986	5.5	86.307
1998–99	1,812.100	2,040.791	1.2	88.794
1999–2000	1,846.400	2,035.049	-0.3	90.730
2000–01	1,909.360	2,080.298	2.2	91.783
2001–02	2,452.783	2,606.017	25.3	94.120
2002–03	2,636.572	2,710.097	4.0	97.287
2003–04	2,361.573	2,361.573	-12.9	100.000
2004–05	2,486.074	2,429.990	2.9	102.308

Notes:

1. These are figures for the Prison Service.
2. Please note that from 2001–02 onwards figures are on accruals basis. Figures are cash prior to that.
3. Note also that from 2003–04 onwards the figures reflect transfers of functions and funding to Correctional Services/NOMS, including private prisons.

John McDonnell: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department when he intends to publish a business case in respect of contestability plans for the probation and prison services. [192730]

Paul Goggins *[holding answer 25 October 2004]*: The case for the establishment of the National Offender Management Service (NOMS) is outlined in Patrick Carter's independent report "Managing Offenders—Reducing Crime". The draft detailed business case will be presented to the NOMS Programme Board shortly.

Prisoners (Employment)

Tom Cox: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what his latest estimate is of how many hours on average per week a prisoner serving a sentence in a London prison spends in employment; and if he will make a statement. [197715]

Paul Goggins: Prisoners in London establishments spend an average of 9.7 hours a week engaged in work related purposeful activity. The Prison Service continues to provide work opportunities for as many prisoners as possible. The figure is an average for all prisoners in London establishments. These establishments are mainly local prisons which serve the courts, and contain a high proportion of remand prisoners. As remand prisoners are not obliged to undertake work, their numbers bring down the overall average of work related hours. Additionally, local prisons are most likely to experience high levels of overcrowding and the amount of work available for each prisoner will naturally diminish as the population increases.

Prisons

Mrs. Curtis-Thomas: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many and what percentage of *(a)* male and *(b)* female prisoners have (i) self-harmed, (ii) attempted suicide and (iii) committed suicide while in prison in each of the last five years. [191332]

Paul Goggins: The numbers and percentages of individuals who self-harmed or apparently took their own lives in prisons (1999–2003), are included in the following tables. While the new self-harm reporting system which started in 2003 has improved the consistency with which such incidents are reported, and improved the detail and quality of the information collected, it makes meaningful comparisons across time more difficult.

Table 1: Numbers and proportions of male self-inflicted deaths and self-harm

	Male Prison population	Numbers of male self-inflicted deaths	Percentage of males who killed themselves	Numbers of males who harmed themselves	Percentage of males who harmed themselves
1999	61,523	86	0.14	2,569	4
2000	61,252	73	0.12	2,922	5
2001	62,560	67	0.11	3,510	6
2002	66,479	86	0.13	3,485	5
2003	68,612	80	0.12	—	—

Table 2: Numbers and proportions of female self-inflicted deaths and self- harm

	Female prison population	*Number of female self-inflicted deaths*	*Percentage of females who killed themselves*	*Number of females who harmed themselves*	*Percentage of females who harmed themselves*
1999	3,247	5	0.15	296	9
2000	3,350	8	0.24	413	12
2001	3,740	6	0.16	632	17
2002	4,299	9	0.21	904	21
2003	4,425	14	0.32	—	—

Note: A new form for reporting self injury (the F213sh) was introduced across the prison estate in December 2002.

Alistair Burt: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what plans he has to change diets in *(a)* prisons and *(b)* young offender institutions, following recent studies on the effects of diet on behaviour. [195768]

Paul Goggins: In 1996, a study was conducted at Her Majesty's Young Offender Institution (HMYOI) Aylesbury by 'Natural Justice', a research charity investigating the relationship between nutrition and criminal behaviour. They reported a significant reduction in offending behaviour amongst young offenders who had taken nutritional supplements.

Half of the young men participating received pills containing vitamins, minerals and essential fatty acids. The other half received placebo or dummy pills. The researchers recorded the number and type of offences each of the prisoners committed in the nine months before they received the pills and in the nine months during the trial. They found that the group that received the supplements committed 25 per cent. fewer offences than those who had been given the placebo.

The results were independently reviewed by the Research, Development and Statistics Directorate (RDS) at the Home Office. RDS acknowledged that the results of the study showed a positive effect on behaviour. However, the number of participants involved was small and the study did not follow through to see whether re-offending reduced or continued once the trainees had left the establishment. This made it very difficult to validate wider implications from the results.

Natural Justice have plans to replicate the project on a much broader scale. Approval was given in October 2002 for Natural Justice to have access to Warren Hill and Stoke Heath if they could satisfy ethical requirements and obtain funding for the research. On similar grounds, the Scottish Prison Service approved access to Polmont.

Beyond this research, other work is taking place to ensure that individual prisoners are encouraged to eat healthily, and that the food provided is nutritious. A partnership between the catering, education and physical education departments in prisons encourages the promotion of high-starch, fibre-rich foods rather than sugary or processed ones, or those which contain too much salt or sugar.

Catering staff are provided with training information and the skills required to produce healthy food. The Prison Service runs nutrition-training courses at intermediate level for prison caterers, which lead to a formal qualification from the Royal Institute of Public Health. Some establishments involve the local hospital dietician in their menu planning and some have obtained Healthy Eating Awards (Heartbeat) from their local authorities.

The content of meals provided in prisons and young offender institutions is constantly evolving with prison caterers being aware of and trained to provide nutritious and healthy diets. Prisoners and young offenders are increasingly being educated and made aware of the importance of healthy eating.

Mrs. Curtis-Thomas: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many and what percentage of prisons offer a 24 hour counselling service; and what the most common reasons are for prisoners using counselling services. [196650]

Paul Goggins: The specific information requested is not available. A wide range of counselling and support mechanisms are available to prisoners. Counselling in drug and substance misuse is provided in every prison establishment as part of the Counselling, Assessment, Referral and Treatment (CARAT) programme. Individual establishments also have arrangements for the provision of professional counselling services through both primary care trusts and local voluntary sector providers. Referrals to outside counselling services can be made through psychology, health care, the chaplaincy and mental health in-reach teams.

In common with arrangements in the community, counselling services are generally provided during normal working hours and not on a 24 hour basis. 24-hour support is, however, normally available to prisoners through listener schemes, whereby prisoners who have been trained by the Samaritans are available to provide emotional support to other prisoners. Prisoners also have access to the Samaritans by telephone.

By their very nature many counselling and support services operate on a strictly confidential basis. While comprehensive information about the reasons for seeking counselling is not available, the areas covered include physical, emotional and sexual abuse; family issues and relationship problems; suicidal and self-harm tendencies; substance abuse; and offending behaviour.

Mrs. Curtis-Thomas: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what assessment he has made of the impact of transferring the prison health service to the national health service on prisoners reporting historical sex abuse. [197438]

Paul Goggins: No such assessment has been made. We expect all prisoners to benefit from the transfer of responsibility for prison health services to the national health service (NHS). When completed in 2006, this change will represent another significant step towards giving prisoners access to the same range and quality of health services as the general public receives from the NHS.

Bob Russell: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department whether prison regulations permit visits by the visually impaired to be accompanied by guide dogs. [197508]

Paul Goggins: As a service provider, the Prison Service is fully aware of its obligations under the Disability Discrimination Act and seeks to ensure it meets the needs of all visitors, including those with disabilities. Visitors accompanied by an assistance dog are welcome at prison establishments and certainly would not be excluded on this basis. However, a reasonable adjustment may need to be made to accommodate the dog and to ensure there is no distraction to patrol or passive drug dogs on site. For this reason, it is advisable that the prison is notified of any special requirements in advance of the visit.

Mr. Andrew Turner: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what proportion of inmates of each *(a)* prison and *(b)* young offenders institution are detained within 50 miles of their homes, broken down by category of prisoners; and what the average (i) stay of inmates and (ii) length of time served by prison officers in each establishment is. [198200]

Paul Goggins: The proportion of each prison's population with a home address or committal court address within 50 miles of the establishment is as follows:

Prison	*Proportion of prison's population held under 50 miles from home area (Percentage)*	*Main prisoner category accommodated at prison*
Acklington	53	C
Albany	18	B
Altcourse	75	A
Ashfield	45	Young Offenders
Ashwell	35	C
Askham Grange	27	Women
Aylesbury	60	Young Offenders
Bedford	85	B
Belmarsh	93	B
Birmingham	94	B
Blakenhurst	93	B
Blantyre House	47	Women
Blundeston	11	C
Brinsford	92	Young Offenders
Bristol	85	B
Brixton	94	B
Brockhill	81	Women
Bronzefield	65	Women
Buckley Hall	39	Women
Bullingdon	66	B
Bullwood Hall	45	Women
Camp Hill	27	C
Canterbury	55	C
Cardiff	84	B
Castington	51	Young Offenders
Channings Wood	21	C
Chelmsford	92	B
Coldingley	82	C
Cookham Wood	70	Women
Dartmoor	25	C
Deerbolt	24	Young Offenders
Doncaster	95	B
Dorchester	72	B
Dovegate	32	B
Downview	79	Women
Drake Hall	40	Women
Durham	69	B
East Sutton Park	77	Women
Eastwood Park	43	Women
Edmunds Hill	36	Women
Elmley	72	B
Erlestoke	37	C
Everthorpe	63	C
Exeter	63	B
Featherstone	89	C
Feltham	86	Young Offenders
Ford	31	D
Forest Bank	93	B
Foston Hall	39	Women
Frankland	26	A
Full Sutton	12	A
Garth	59	B
Gartree	21	B
Glen Parva	74	Young Offenders
Gloucester	89	B
Grendon/Spring Hill	32	B
Guys Marsh	35	C
Haverigg	9	C
Hewell Grange	91	D
Highdown	93	B
Highpoint	17	C
Hindley	94	Young Offenders
Hollesley Bay	16	D
Holloway	88	Women
Holme House	88	B
Hull	74	B
Huntercombe	60	Young Offenders
Kingston	10	B
Kirkham	82	D
Kirklevington Grange	45	D
Lancaster	68	C
Lancaster Farms	47	Young Offenders
Latchmere House	85	D
Leeds	94	B
Leicester	80	B
Lewes	79	B
Leyhill	31	D
Lincoln	84	B
Lindholme	62	C
Littlehey	29	C
Liverpool	76	B
Long Lartin	20	A
Low Newton	44	Women
Lowdham Grange	17	Women
Maidstone	83	C
Manchester	91	B
Moorland	71	C
Moorland Open	68	D
Morton Hall	11	Women
Mount	84	C
New Hall	50	Women
North Sea Camp	16	D
Northallerton	36	Young Offenders
Norwich	63	B
Nottingham	91	B
Onley	50	Young Offenders
Parc	72	B
Parkhurst	13	B
Pentonville	96	B
Portland	5	Young Offenders
Preston	90	B
Ranby	72	C
Reading	72	Young Offenders
Risley	80	C
Rochester	88	Young Offenders
Rye Hill	28	B

Prison	*Proportion of prison's population held under 50 miles from home area (Percentage)*	*Main prisoner category accommodated at prison*
Send	66	Women
Shepton Mallet	8	C
Shrewsbury	90	B
Stafford	74	C
Standford Hill	43	D
Stocken	61	C
Stoke Heath	70	Young Offenders
Styal	81	Women
Sudbury	50	D
Swaleside	20	B
Swansea	83	B
Swinfen Hall	59	Young Offenders
Thorn Cross	62	Young Offenders
Usk/Prescoed	50	C
Verne	7	C
Wakefield	25	B
Wandsworth	93	B
Warren Hill	14	Young Offenders
Wayland	18	C
Wealstun	56	C
Weare	4	C
Wellingborough	54	C
Werrington	80	Young Offenders
Wetherby	74	Young Offenders
Whatton	40	C
Whitemoor	4	B
Winchester	84	B
Wolds	64	C
Woodhill	84	B
Wormwood Scrubs	91	B
Wymott	74	C

Information on the length of time a prisoner spends at each establishment is not recorded centrally and could be obtained only at a disproportionate cost.

The average length of time Officer Grade staff spend working at each establishment is given in the following table. Information about prison custody officers at contracted prisons is not held centrally.

Establishment	*Average length of service of staff at establishment (years)*
Acklington	8.3
Albany	8.3
Ashwell	6.0
Askham Grange	3.0
Aylesbury	4.7
Bedford	5.4
Belmarsh	5.7
Birmingham	5.1
Blakenhurst	5.2
Blantyre House	8.1
Blundeston	7.3
Brinsford	7.1
Bristol	7.0
Brixton	6.8
Brockhill	6.2
Buckley Hall	5.8
Bullingdon	4.6
Bullwood Hall	4.6
Camp Hill	7.6
Canterbury	8.1
Cardiff	5.2
Castington	6.5
Channings Wood	5.6
Chelmsford	5.9
Coldingley	5.1
Cookham Wood	5.1
Dartmoor	6.0
Deerbolt	6.4
Dorchester	4.5
Dover	6.7
Downview	5.0
Drake Hall	3.8
Durham	4.3
East Sutton Park	5.1
Eastwood Park	5.0
Edmunds Hill	1.1
Elmley	5.5
Erlestoke	5.9
Everthorpe	8.2
Exeter	5.1
Featherstone	7.9
Feltham	4.8
Ford	7.8
Foston Hall	3.6
Frankland	7.5
Full Sutton	7.1
Garth	6.9
Gartree	6.7
Glen Parva	9.0
Gloucester	4.8
Grendon	5.5
Guys Marsh	6.3
Haslar	6.5
Haverigg	6.5
Hewell Grange	7.2
High Down	4.6
Highpoint	5.5
Hindley	5.2
Hollesley Bay	6.6
Holloway	4.9
Holme House	8.3
Hull	4.9
Huntercombe	4.0
Kingston	7.9
Kirkham	6.7
Kirklevington Grange	6.4
Lancaster	3.5
Lancaster Farms	7.1
Latch mere House	5.5
Leeds	4.9
Leicester	5.4
Lewes	6.5
Leyhill	2.9
Lincoln	5.0
Lindholme	8.5
Littlehey	6.5
Liverpool	6.4
Long Lartin	5.7
Low Newton	7.0
Maidstone	5.2
Manchester	5.8
Moorland	6.0
Morton Hall	3.6
New Hall	6.2
North Sea Camp	7.3
Northallerton	6.3
Norwich	6.4
Nottingham	3.8
Onley	6.9
Parkhurst	8.2
Pentonville	5.1
Portland	7.3
Preston	5.7
Ranby	6.1
Reading	6.2
Risley	5.5
Rochester	4.9

Establishment	*Average length of service of staff at establishment (years)*
Send	4.0
Shepton Mallet	6.7
Shrewsbury	6.7
Stafford	3.7
Standford Hill	6.0
Stocken	6.8
Stoke Heath	6.9
Styal	4.8
Sudbury	10.2
Swaleside	4.5
Swansea	4.7
Swinfen Hall	5.5
The Mount	4.8
The Verne	9.4
Thorn Cross	8.9
Usk/Prescoed	8.5
Wakefield	4.4
Wandsworth	5.1
Warren Hill	1.2
Wayland	7.0
Wealstun	7.3
Weare	4.3
Wellingborough	4.3
Werrington	5.3
Wetherby	4.5
Whatton	6.6
Whitemoor	6.2
Winchester	4.1
Woodhill	5.1
Wormwood Scrubs	6.7
Wymott	7.6

Mrs. Cheryl Gillan: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will list prison refurbishment projects by establishment that have been undertaken since April 2000; and what the *(a)* date of completion or projected completion date, *(b)* cost of the refurbishment and *(c)* number of places added was in each case. [198473]

Paul Goggins: The projects in the following table are those that have been classified as major refurbishment work. Projects classified as maintenance are not included.

The primary objective of refurbishment projects is to modernise buildings and keep them fit for purpose; they are not as a general rule intended to produce additional places. A small number of places may have been created or taken out of use by individual projects but the net effect on number of places is broadly neutral.

Refurbishment. since April 2000	*Project*	*Cost (£000)*	*Completion Date*
Ashwell	replace buildings—Phase 1	2,980	Sep-00
Ashwell	replace buildings—Phase 2	1,859	Oct-01
Ashwell	replace buildings—Phase 3	721	Aug-02
Ashwell	replace buildings—Phase 4	1,411	Aug-03
Aylesbury	refurb/repair B and C Wings	9,337	Mar-05
Camp Hill	Ss Edward and Patrick Wings	2,336	Sep-00
Camp Hill	Bs.Thomas and James Wings	4,639	Nov-03
Cardiff	repairs to F and A Wings	5,876	Jul-04
Durham	refurbish B Wing	6,477	Mar-03
Durham	refurbish D and E Wings	8,017	Aug-05
Gartree	refurbish A Wing/Gate entry	3,215	May-02
Gartree	C Wing—Phase 1 /Phase 2	2,884	Oct-03
Gartree	E Wing refurbishment	1,043	May-04
Kingston/Portsmouth	refurbish C Wing/CPIG[1]	1,987	Mar-05
Kirkham	replace living units	4,094	May-03
Lincoln	refurbish B Wing	5,067	Nov-02
Long Lartin	upgrade C and D Wings	5,072	May-04
Portland	care and custody unit	1,659	Aug-03
Portland	refurbish living accommodation	14,471	Nov-06
Preston	refurbish D Wing	3,357	May-04
Preston	refurbish C Wing	5,147	May-06
Swansea	refurbish B Wing	2,207	Dec-04
Wakefield	refurbish C Wing/New education	9,330	Aug-01
Wakefield	refurbish B Wing	9,726	Dec-04
Wealstun	replace accommodation-Phase 2	9,193	May-05

[1] CPIG Crown Premises Inspection Group (Fire)

The information supplied has been collected within the Property Services Group of Her Majesty's Prison Service, which does not deal directly with refurbishments carried out within the Private Estate. As the establishments within the Private Estate have not been running long enough for the need to modernise, it is unlikely that any large scale refurbishments have been planned so far, although some upgrading work may have been carried out at local level.

Tom Cox: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department whether all prisons in England and Wales have a race relations officer in service; and what action he is taking to promote such a position. [197718]

Paul Goggins: All establishments must appoint a race relations liaison officer to provide information to staff and prisoners on national and local policies and to monitor race relations within the establishment. Race relations liaison officers are allocated a core minimum of eight hours a week, with additional hours dependent on the nature of the establishment. An increasing number of establishments have also appointed full-time diversity officers. These are usually prisons that are large, have a large minority ethnic prisoner population, or are in an isolated location making community links difficult to organise.

The name and role of the race relations liaison officer s widely publicised to staff and prisoners. Many establishments display photographs of the race relation liaison officer and also members of the establishment's race relations management team.

Proceeds of Crime Act

Mr. Byrne: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what the value was of assets *(a)* seized and *(b)* frozen under the Proceeds of Crime Act 2002 in (i) 2002 and (ii) 2003, broken down by region. [197625]

Caroline Flint: The total value of criminal assets recovered under all proceeds of crime legislation was £47 million in 2002–03 and £54.5 million in 2003–04. The £47 million comprises £41 million in confiscation orders and £6 million in cash forfeitures. The £54.5 million comprises £38.9 million in confiscation orders and £15.6 million in cash forfeitures.

The confiscation and restraint powers in the Proceeds of Crime Act 2002 are triggered by offences committed after the provisions were brought into force on 24 March 2003.

The total value of receipts recovered under the Act in 2003–04 was just over £5 million comprising £4.7 million in cash forfeitures and £343,671 in confiscation order receipts. Information on the value of cash forfeitures broken down by region is not available. Table A shows the value of confiscation order receipts under proceeds of crime legislation broken down by magistrates courts committee areas in 2002–03 and 2003–04.

Table B shows the value of restraint orders made in 2003–04 under the Proceeds of Crime Act 2002 by the Crown Prosecution Service broken down by area. Information on the value of restraint orders made by HM Customs and Excise is not available. In 2003–04 the Assets Recovery Agency had 24 civil recovery cases subject to freezing orders with a total value of £14.1 million.

Table A: Summary of total receipts remitted to the Secretary of State by legislation and MCC area, 2002–03 and 2003–04

£

	2002–03	2003–04		
MCC area	*Total*	*Pre-POCA*	*POCA*	*Total*
Avon and Somerset	284,115.70	640,304.89	0.00	640,304.89
Bedfordshire	65,321.02	229,846.45	0.00	229,846.45
Cambridgeshire	193,497.68	370,588.65	12,523.94	383,112.59
Cheshire	50,926.99	106,589.47	0.00	106,589.47
Cleveland	24,110.29	346,485.27	0.00	346,485.27
Cumbria	50,564.58	90,662.25	270.00	90,932.25
Derbyshire	334,352.50	95,612.92	0.00	95,612.92
Devon and Cornwall	176,686.75	765,092.18	0.00	765,092.18
Dorset	203,615.78	187,149.28	8,991.83	196,141.11
Durham	23,252.78	231,314.25	0.00	231,314.25
Essex	920,701.63	596,219.38	61,915.30	658,134.68
Gloucestershire	727,753.72	37,840.12	0.00	37,840.12
Greater London (GLMCA)	20,851,102.35	12,550,941.58	102,892.82	12,653,834.40
Greater Manchester	1,614,785.00	1,654,899.81	[1]65,119.51	[1]1,720,019.32
Hampshire and Isle of Wight	626,592.79	360,893.16	8,858.96	369,752.12
Hertfordshire	494,871.53	287,797.90	0.00	287,797.90
Humberside	343,107.88	767,476.56	0.00	767,476.56
Kent	1,537,885.81	2,249,555.73	9,635.83	2,259,191.56
Lancashire	253,096.85	1,003,473.83	117.00	1,003,590.83
Leicestershire[2]	219,295.30	0.00	0.00	0.00
Lincolnshire	223,300.13	133,482.19	670.00	134,152.19
Merseyside	560,093.54	980,907.40	0.00	980,907.40
Norfolk	265,989.78	323,890.64	0.00	323,890.64
North Yorkshire[2]	112,724.76	0.00	0.00	0.00
Northamptonshire	112,832.51	239,973.04	0.00	239,973.04
Northumbria	57,869.23	505,291.22	0.00	505,291.22
Nottinghamshire	527,948.83	941,697.98	650.00	942,347.98
South Yorkshire	55,659.00	433,345.30	420.00	433,765.30
Staffordshire	253,614.60	952,932.01	0.00	952,932.01
Suffolk	880,304.39	52,091.68	3,228.42	55,320.10
Surrey	1,683,278.27	527,494.48	7,700.00	535,194.48
Sussex	1,801,592.26	2,905,899.70	3,619.75	2,909,519.45
Thames Valley	1,023,789.75	726,864.09	41,733.35	768,597.44
Warwickshire	626,758.00	285,330.00	0.00	285,330.00
West Mercia	4,241.43	345,176.40	0.00	345,176.40
West Midlands	2,967,853.21	1,302,619.38	5,724.25	1,308,343.63
West Yorkshire	387,089.70	2,820,648.45	0.00	2,820,648.45
Wiltshire[2]	193,557.00	22,915.24	0.00	22,915.24
England	40,734,133.32	36,073,302.88	[1]268,951.45	[1]36,407,373.84
Dyfed-Powys	36,170.45	411,312.92	0.00	411,312.92
Gwent	82,011.63	71,119.13	0.00	71,119.13

Table A: Summary of total receipts remitted to the Secretary of State by legislation and MCC area, 2002–03 and 2003–04

£

	2002–03	2003–04		
MCC area	*Total*	*Pre-POCA*	*POCA*	*Total*
North Wales	122,514.88	1,774,595.21	0.00	1,774,595.21
South Wales	32,905.55	182,825.15	9,600.00	192,425.15
Wales	273,602.51	2,439,852.41	9,600.00	2,449,452.41
England and Wales	41,007,735.83	38,513,155.29	[1]343,670.96	[1]38,856,826.25

[1] Greater Manchester MCC only able to supply data for total POCA offences (offence category not separately identifiable) for Q3 and Q4.

[2] Data from MCC area not received for all or part of 2003–04.

Table B: Value of POCA restraint orders 2003–04

42 areas	£ *Value*
P01—Avon and Somerset	409,804.99
P02—Bedfordshire	—
P03—Cambridgeshire	—
P04—Cheshire	—
P06—Cleveland	75,251.88
P07—Cumbria	293,983.00
P08—Derbyshire	—
P09—Devon and Cornwall	—
P10—Dorset	124,635.18
P11—Durham	100,000.00
P12—Dyfed Powys	—
P13—Essex	15,313.36
P14—Gloucestershire	—
P15—Greater Manchester	250,000.00
P16—Gwent	1,295,000.00
P17—Hampshire	—
P18—Hertfordshire	1,570,000.00
P19—Humberside	—
P20—Kent	—
P21—Lancashire	1,570,000.00
P22—Leicestershire	—
P23—Lincolnshire	—
P24—Merseyside	—
P25—Metropolitan and City	1,372,268.68
P26—Norfolk	—
P27—Northamptonshire	—
P28—Northumbria	100,000.00
P29—North Wales	—
P30—North Yorkshire	—
P31—Nottinghamshire	70,256.57
P32—South Wales	1,913,638.65
P33—South Yorkshire	540.00
P34—Staffordshire	1,153,000.00
P35—Suffolk	1,751,172.50
P36—Surrey	183,150.00
P37—Sussex	1,934,322.50
P38—Thames Valley	—
P39—Warwickshire	—
P40—West Mercia	21,000.00
P41—West Midlands	275,320.19
P42—West Yorkshire	—
P43—Wiltshire	—
Casework D Ludgate	736,661.46
Casework D York	71,000.00
Casework D Birmingham	—
RART Wales	60,000.00
RART West Midlands	—
RART North East	—
RART North West	—
CCB RO figures	—

Mr. Byrne: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what the value of assets *(a)* seized and *(b)* frozen under the Proceeds of Crime Act 2002 in (i) the West Midlands, (ii) Birmingham and (iii) Hodge Hill was in (A) 2002, (B) 2003 and (C) 2004. [197626]

Caroline Flint: The confiscation and restraint powers in the Proceeds of Crime Act 2002 are triggered by offences committed after the provisions were brought into force on 24 March 2003.

The information available relates to confiscation order receipts received by the West Midlands magistrates courts committee area. The total value of confiscation order receipts recovered in the West Midlands under proceeds of crime legislation was £2,967,853 in 2002–03, and £1,308,343 in 2003–04. The total value of confiscation order receipts recovered in the West Midlands under the Proceeds of Crime Act 2002 in 2003–04 was £5,724 and £66,631 at the end of the second quarter in 2004–05.

The value of restraint orders obtained under the Act by the Crown Prosecution Service in the West Midlands was £275,320 in 2003–04 and £1,085,000 by the end of the second quarter in 2004–05. Information on the value of restraint orders obtained by HM Customs and Excise is not available. As at the end of September 2004 the Assets Recovery Agency had 40 civil recovery cases subject to freezing orders with a total value of £19.8 million.

Prostitution

Tom Cox: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what action is being taken by *(a)* his Department, *(b)* the police authorities and *(c)* immigration officials to seek to prevent women from overseas countries seeking residency in the United Kingdom to become self-employed prostitutes; and if he will make a statement. [193470]

Caroline Flint: The immigration rules do not allow residency in this country on the basis of self employment as a prostitute.

We also have strong measures in place to tackle those looking to come into the country illegally. Organised immigration crime is being addressed by Reflex, a multi-agency taskforce involving the police and immigration service and led by the National Crime Squad. Last year (April 2003–04) Reflex resulted in the disruption of 38 criminal gangs involved in organised immigration crime.

In July this year the Home Office published "Paying the Price: a consultation paper on prostitution". Part of this consultation exercise focuses on the legal framework relating to prostitution. The consultation period runs until the 26 November.

Rackspace

Mr. Austin Mitchell: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what correspondence his Department had with foreign government agencies prior to the seizure of web servers from the office of Rackspace on 7 October. [197784]

Caroline Flint: Home Office officials did not enter into any correspondence with foreign government agencies in this matter prior to 7 October.

Sex Abuse Investigations

Mrs. Curtis-Thomas: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what assessment has been made of the implications of offering anonymity to teachers accused of sexual abuse until a decision has been made by the court. [197446]

Paul Goggins: I refer my hon. Friend to the answer that I gave her on 1 July 2004, *Official Report*, column 394W.

Speeding Fines

Tom Cox: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what the average revenue received by the Metropolitan police for speeding fines imposed by them was in each of the last three years. [197719]

Caroline Flint: Fines are imposed by courts, not by the police, and the police receive no revenue from them.

Speeding offences are also dealt with by fixed penalty notice. Fixed penalty income usually goes to the Consolidated Fund. Under the provisions of the national safety camera programme, however, local partnerships of police, magistrates courts and local authorities can net off as much income from fixed penalties resulting from camera enforcement as is needed to meet the approved costs of such enforcement. Income cannot be netted off for other purposes. The London Partnership, of which the Metropolitan police are part, was established in 2002. In its first year, it netted off approved costs of £4,549,380.

Street Crime

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what use has been made of the power of courts in 10 street crime force areas to remand young offenders aged 12 to 16 years into secure accommodation. [193582]

Paul Goggins: Between 22 April 2002 (when the relevant powers were extended to include those with a repeat offending history) and 22 October 2004 1,133 young defendants aged 12–16 were remanded to local authority secure accommodation in the 10 street crime areas.

Student Visas

Tom Cox: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will extend the number of hours a student from overseas in the United Kingdom on a visa is able to work; and if he will make a statement. [193491]

Mr. Browne: No. Overseas students are already allowed to take part-time employment during term time up to a maximum of 20 hours per week. They are also allowed to work full-time during vacation periods. This follows the general principle which traditionally allows students to take employment that is incidental to study and to supplement their income. It strikes a sensible balance between the permitted number of working hours and the minimum of 15 hours of organised daytime study required by the Immigration Rules. There are no plans to change this.

Styal Prison Deaths

Mrs. Gillan: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department when he will publish the report by the Prisons and Probation Ombudsman into deaths at Styal Prison. [150724]

Paul Goggins *[holding answer 26 January 2004]*: I commissioned the Prison and Probation Ombudsman (PPO) to investigate the circumstances and events of the death of Julie Walsh at Her Majesty's Prison Styal on 12 August 2003 and to examine the death in the context of five previous deaths. On 23 January I issued a statement summarising the main findings of the report and the action that the Prison Service is taking to prevent a recurrence.

I have asked the PRO to prepare an abridged version of the report for publication omitting personal and sensitive information which, if published, would add unnecessarily to the distress of the bereaved families. In recognition of the public interest in the report I intend to seek the agreement of the Coroner before publication in order to ensure that he is content that the five outstanding inquests will not be prejudiced.

Sustainable Energy (CHP Provisions) Order

Mr. Stunell: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what measures his Department *(a)* has undertaken and *(b)* plans to undertake to comply with the Sustainable Energy (CHP Provisions) Order 2003. [194435]

Fiona Mactaggart: At present the Home Office has no Combined Heat and Power (CHP) plants on its office estate. There is one pilot CHP unit at a Young Offender's Institute.

We are working towards the target set under the Framework for Sustainable Development of sourcing at least 15 per cent. of electricity from good quality CHP by 2010. As an initial step we will look at setting up a procurement standard for CHP in conjunction with the Office for Government Commerce. Work has also been commissioned to explore the possibility of introducing more CHP units within the Prison Service estate.

Tampere Agenda/Outcomes

Keith Vaz: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what the main targets for the Tampere 2 Agenda are. [193131]

Caroline Flint: The main objectives for the Tampere 2 Agenda, now to be called the "The Hague Programme", is to add value to the efforts of member states to tackle cross-border crime, asylum abuse and illegal immigration. We aim to do this through development of practical measures aimed at improving co-operation between member states on access to justice, strengthening external borders, fighting organised cross-border crime and combating terrorism. We welcome measures to; improve intelligence-led policing; strengthen the EU's border controls; develop minimum security standards in passports/ID cards including use of biometric identifiers; and incorporation of JHA issues into the European Union's external priorities, in particular re-admission and returns.

Keith Vaz: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what assessment he has made of *(a)* the reaction to the outcome of Tampere 1 in (i) Poland, (ii) Hungary, (iii) Slovenia, (iv) Slovakia, (v) Czech Republic, (vi) Estonia, (vii) Latvia, (viii) Lithuania, (ix) Cyprus and (x) Malta; and *(b)* how Tampere 2 has been received in each country. [193132]

Caroline Flint: The Secretary of State for the Home Department has noted that the 10 member states have applied those measures adopted under the Tampere 1 agenda (the Tampere Programme) as part of their accession to the European Union acquis.

These 10 member states have been full participants in discussions on the Tampere 2 programme (The Hague Programme) but it has not yet been agreed. The Government has kept in contact with all member states, including the 10 referred to, during discussions on the Hague Programme. Like other member states they have key interests in The Hague proposals, which in many cases align with those of the UK.

TETRA Radiation

Mr. Spring: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department whether the Government plans to commission further research programmes on the effects on human health of exposure to TETRA radiation modulated at approximately 16Hz, using human volunteer studies. [192891]

Caroline Flint: We have commissioned a number of research projects to study the effects of TETRA emissions on human health, some of which use human volunteers. Earlier this year, as part of the Mobile Telecommunications and Health Research Programme, we commissioned the University of Bradford to carry out a study into possible non-linear and demodulation mechanisms in biological tissue. We will commission further studies as necessary as part of our ongoing research programme.

Mr. Spring: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what consultation exercises have taken place with police officers regarding the use of TETRA headsets. [192892]

Caroline Flint: The police service has been fully involved in the review of radio communications that lead to the adoption of the new TETRA Airwave radio system. Deployment of police equipment is for individual forces to decide on.

The Police Federation supports the new system, and is keen to see realised the benefits to officer safety from the clearer signals, better coverage and enhanced safety features that Airwave offers.

Mr. Oaten: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what recent research his Department has commissioned on the health issues surrounding the TETRA system. [196067]

Caroline Flint *[holding answer 4 November 2004]*: We have a wide programme of research in place on the health and safety aspects of TETRA. Recently we have, as part of the Mobile Telecommunications and Health Research Programme, commissioned the University of Bradford to carry out a study into possible non-linear and demodulation mechanisms in biological tissue.

Further research is under consideration. Details of any additional research will be placed on the Home Office website as soon as they are available.

Mr. Oaten: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what consultation he has had with the Police Federation on the use of radios linked to the TETRA system by police officers. [196068]

Caroline Flint *[holding answer 4 November 2004]*: The police service was involved in the decision to adopt Airwave, the new police radio system that uses TETRA technology.

The Police Federation supports the introduction of Airwave, and is keen to realise the benefits to officer safety from the clearer signals, fuller coverage and enhanced security features Airwave provides.

The Police Federation has been, and continues to be, involved in the implementation of the Home Office's programme of research into the health and safety aspects of TETRA technology.

Theft/Criminal Damage

Mr. Andrew Mitchell: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will require offenders who have committed offences of theft or criminal damage and who are required to pay an on-the-spot fine to be registered in such a way as to enable their victims to seek compensation from the offender. [196114]

Ms Blears: Penalty notices for theft and criminal damage will be targeted at low level offences, normally those committed by first time offenders. The operational guidance issued to the police advises that the value should not exceed £200 for theft with values over £100 deemed exceptional, and over £500 for criminal damage with values above £300 deemed exceptional. Where an officer considers an offence suitable for a fixed penalty notice he is required to consult the victim and advise that this will remove the possibility of a criminal court awarding a compensation order. However, compensation may still be pursued through the civil courts.

If a victim wished to seek compensation he would be able to cite the issue of a penalty notice for the offence as evidence and the police would provide details of the offence and offender to facilitate this process.

It is expected that fixed penalty notices will be issued for offences usually involving low values where the victim is likely to benefit by not having to attend court and give evidence, but can see the offender punished by receiving an on the spot fine of £80.

Visas

Lady Hermon: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department for what reasons visa applicants are asked not to contact the Immigration and Nationality Directorate about their applications. [193551]

Mr. Browne *[holding answer 25 October 2004]:* A person applying for a visa or entry clearance must be outside the UK or Islands at the time of making their application and must apply to a diplomatic post designated for that purpose. The majority of these applications are decided locally by Entry Clearance Officers, to whom this function is delegated, without any reference to the Immigration and Nationality Directorate (IND). In such cases, there would be no need for the individual concerned to contact the Immigration and Nationality Directorate about their application.

Visa applications may be referred to the Immigration and Nationality Directorate for a final decision if discretion outside of the Immigration Rules is to be considered or deferred for further inquiries to be made in the United Kingdom. When this happens there would be no objection to the applicant making contact with IND direct.

Work Permits

Mr. Andrew Turner: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many applications were submitted for work permits under the *(a)* seasonal agricultural workers scheme and *(b)* sector based schemes since May 2003; how many were approved; and to which countries' citizens they were issued. [194121]

Mr. Browne: The Immigration Employment Document used under the Seasonal Agricultural Workers' Scheme (SAWS) is known as a work card. The scheme is run on behalf of the Home Office by Operators who are not required to maintain information on the numbers of applications made for work cards.

The numbers of applications that were approved, and for which a SAWS work card was issued, in 2003 was 23,329.

Between 30 May 2003 (the date SBS was launched) to 30 June 2004 28,102 Sectors Based Scheme (SBS) applications have been submitted, and 18,725 SBS permits have been approved.

Mr. Andrew Turner: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many applications were submitted for the Highly Skilled Migrant Programme between January 2002 and October 2003; how many were approved; from which countries applicants came; how many *(a)* applications and *(b)* approvals there have been since November 2003; and from which countries applicants came. [194122]

Mr. Browne: The latest available information on the top 10 nationalities for the Highly Skilled Migrant's Programme is shown in the table.

Data on applications approved for the period November 2003—June 2004 is incomplete as a number of these applications have not yet been decided.

Highly Skilled Migrant Programme—received and approved based on 1^{st} applications only—period 1 January 2002 to 30 June 2004[1]

Nationality	*Received*	*Approved*	*Approved (%)*
	January 2002 to October 2003		
India	1,150	641	56
Pakistan	606	236	39
Nigeria	697	151	22
United States of America	892	728	82
Australia	373	258	69
South Africa	469	333	71
New Zealand	133	97	73
Zimbabwe	239	76	32
China	2	1	50
Russian Federation	148	105	71
Others	2,500	1,239	50
Total	7,209	3,865	54
	November 2003 to June 2004		
India	3,833	600	16
Pakistan	2,339	245	10
Nigeria	920	133	14
United States of America	571	193	34
Australia	823	217	26
South Africa	725	219	30
New Zealand	416	108	26
Zimbabwe	158	51	32
China	370	65	18
Russian Federation	203	46	23
Others	2,428	621	26
Total	12,786	2,498	20

[1] In line with IRSS Guidelines—stats may only be provided to 30 June 2004

Young Offenders

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will list the offences for which young offenders have been remanded in secure accommodation under section 130 of the Criminal Justice and Police Act 2001. [193583]

Paul Goggins: The information provided by the Youth Justice Board does not distinguish between remands to local authorities and those to other accommodation. It is not possible to provide a breakdown by offences.

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many young offenders have been subject to the Intensive Supervision and Surveillance Programme since its launch; and what the recidivism rate has been of those who participated in it. [193584]

Paul Goggins: Between the start of the scheme in July 2001 and the end of August 2004, 10,831 young people have been subject to the Intensive Supervision and Surveillance Programme . The recently published initial evaluation report showed a re-offending rate of 85 per cent. but a 43 per cent. reduction in the frequency of offending and a 16 per cent. reduction in the seriousness of offending.

Written Answers to Questions

Wednesday 17 November 2004

DEPUTY PRIME MINISTER

Barker Review

7. **Mr. Mackay:** To ask the Deputy Prime Minister if he will make a statement on the Barker review on housing. [198438]

Keith Hill: Kate Barker's review on housing reinforced the Government's strategy for more growth and we have accepted her central recommendation in favour of a step change in housing supply.

In responding to the specific proposals in her report, the Office of the Deputy Prime Minister will adopt the principles set out in our Sustainable Communities Plan, published last year. We want to create sustainable communities—thriving and vibrant places where people want to live and work, and which will stand the test of time.

E-Government

8. **Mr. Wyatt:** To ask the Deputy Prime Minister what guidance he issues to local authorities on how e-government can contribute to efficiency savings in the provision of services. [198439]

Phil Hope: Business transformation, including efficiency gains, has always been part of the local e-Government strategy. The latest Implementing Electronic Government return incorporates guidance on how e-government will help deliver efficiency gains. Last week the Office of the Deputy Prime Minister published an information pack for councils on the efficiency target which includes reference to e-government. Further guidance will be issued as required.

Miss McIntosh: To ask the Deputy Prime Minister if he will make a statement on e-delivery of government services in rural North Yorkshire. [198646]

Phil Hope: All local authorities in North Yorkshire are required to e-enable their services by December 2005. The ability to access services by phone or over the web will bring considerable benefits to users of local services, especially in rural areas served by councils in North Yorkshire. The North Yorkshire ICT Partnership was set up to e-enable services on behalf of councils in the area, but now comprises only two of the original nine councils which could delay planned improvements to local services. The Office of the Deputy Prime Minister is currently working with all councils involved to identify possible remedial action.

Economic Regeneration

9. **Linda Perham:** To ask the Deputy Prime Minister what role he plans for local government in furthering economic regeneration. [198440]

Phil Hope: The Local Government Act 2000 reinforced the powers of local authorities to promote the economic well-being of their area. Community Strategies are bringing together local partners to support jobs and growth. The Government are also taking forward the Local Authorities Business Growth Incentives scheme, which will create new incentives and directly benefit communities.

Street Wardens (Wandsworth)

10. **Martin Linton:** To ask the Deputy Prime Minister what guidance he has given to Wandsworth council on the funding of street wardens when departmental funding ceases in 2005. [198441]

Phil Hope: Guidance has been issued to all street warden schemes whose funding ends in March 2005. This includes information on how other schemes achieved continued funding, a list of funding sources and guidance for schemes on how they can contribute to Government floor targets. A sustainability event for London was organised in July.

Travellers' Sites

11. **Mr. Heath:** To ask the Deputy Prime Minister if he will make a statement on enforcement action by local authorities in respect of unauthorised Travellers' sites. [198442]

Keith Hill: Local authorities have a wide range of discretionary enforcement powers to enable them to deal with unauthorised Travellers' sites.

The temporary stop notice has been introduced in the Planning and Compulsory Purchase Act 2004 to give local authorities greater ability to respond quickly to inappropriate developments of all kinds.

Mrs. Spelman: To ask the Deputy Prime Minister how many Traveller caravans were on *(a)* authorised and *(b)* unauthorised sites in each local authority in England in each year since 1997. [198180]

Keith Hill: The information requested has been made available in the Library of the House.

Local Government Reform

12. **Mr. Borrow:** To ask the Deputy Prime Minister what plans he has to re-examine local government structures. [198443]

Mr. Raynsford: Following the decision of voters in the North East referendum on an Elected Regional Assembly, the Office of the Deputy Prime Minister has no plans, at present, to introduce changes to the structure of local government.

Affordable Rural Housing

13. **Norman Lamb:** To ask the Deputy Prime Minister if he will make a statement on planning policies relating to the provision of affordable housing in rural areas. [198444]

Keith Hill: The Government's draft changes to Planning Policy Guidance Note 3: "Housing" aims to increase affordable housing for local communities and key workers. The Office of the Deputy Prime Minister proposes to build on existing rural exception policy by enabling local authorities to allocate sites solely for affordable housing. We are considering responses and intend to publish the update by the end of the year.

Thames Gateway South Essex Partnership

14. **Sir Teddy Taylor:** To ask the Deputy Prime Minister if he will make a statement on the future of the Thames Gateway South Essex partnership. [198445]

Keith Hill: The Thames Gateway South Essex Partnership was established by the local authorities in South Essex to facilitate continued strategic leadership and collaboration on behalf of its partners in the East of England part of the Thames Gateway. The Office of the Deputy Prime Minister intends to continue working with the Partnership in taking forward the Thames Gateway programme in South Essex and I will be meeting with them at their Board meeting in January.

Housebuilding (West Sussex)

15. **Tim Loughton:** To ask the Deputy Prime Minister what assessment he has made of the effects of housebuilding levels in West Sussex on Areas of Outstanding Natural Beauty. [198446]

Keith Hill: It is the responsibility of regional planning bodies to prepare regional spatial strategies for their areas, which will include providing housing figures for districts. In distributing housing, they will need to have regard to national guidance that the conservation of the natural beauty of the landscape and countryside should be given great weight in planning policies for Areas of Outstanding Natural Beauty.

Affordable Housing (London)

Simon Hughes: To ask the Deputy Prime Minister how many shared ownership properties were sold in Southwark in each year since 1997; and how many of those properties were purchased by *(a)* someone already in social housing in that area, *(b)* someone on the single housing register in that area and *(c)* a key worker. [199043]

Keith Hill: Estimates of annual shared ownership sales in Southwark from 1997–98 to 2003–04 are tabled as follows:

	Total shared ownership sales in Southwark	*Shared ownership sales to people who were previously social tenants in Southwark*	*Shared ownership sales in Southwark to purchasers who were registered on a local authority waiting list/ common housing register*
1997–98	4	1	2
1998–99	64	21	14
1999–2000	21	4	9
2000–01	10	5	6
2001–02	61	31	19
2002–03	44	26	18
2003–04	76	15	35

Note:

The occupation of purchasers was not collected as part of CORE Sales during the period 1997–98 to 2003–04. Consequently it is not possible to provide figures on the number of key workers that bought shared ownership properties in Southwark during this period.

Source:

Housing Corporation: CORE Sales.

Kate Hoey: To ask the Deputy Prime Minister how many shared ownership properties were sold in Lambeth in each year since 1997; and how many of those properties were purchased by *(a)* someone already in social housing in that area, *(b)* someone on the single housing register in that area and *(c)* a key worker. [199070]

Keith Hill: Estimates of annual shared ownership sales in Lambeth from 1997–98 to 2003–04 are tabled as follows:

	Total shared ownership sales in Lambeth	*Shared ownership sales to people who were previously social tenants in Lambeth*	*Shared ownership sales in Lambeth to purchasers who were registered on a local authority waiting list/ common housing register*
1997–98	43	19	13
1998–99	68	19	20
1999–2000	49	11	10
2000–01	41	8	23
2001–02	20	2	10
2002–03	48	8	29
2003–04	55	5	41

Note:

The occupation of purchasers was not collected as part of CORE Sales during the period 1997–98 to 2003–04. Consequently it is not possible to provide figures on the number of key workers that bought shared ownership properties in Lambeth during this period.

Source:

Housing Corporation: CORE Sales.

Commencement of Legislation

Brian White: To ask the Deputy Prime Minister what pieces of legislation passed in the last 30 years that the Department is responsible for remain to be brought into force, broken down by year of enactment. [195614]

Phil Hope: The information requested is not held centrally, and could only be provided at disproportionate cost.

Decent Homes Standard

Tim Loughton: To ask the Deputy Prime Minister how much has been spent on promoting the Decent Homes Standard. [198340]

Keith Hill: This financial year the Office of the Deputy Prime Minister has spent just under £8,000 promoting the Decent Homes Programme. This money was spent on the Decent Homes Event held on 5 May 2004. This event was to announce policy changes to the financing of the programme, the success of local authority bids for additional funding and the achievement of a 1 million reduction in the number of non-decent homes.

It is up to individual local authorities to decide how they wish to promote the standard, as they will need to take into account the situation in their authority, i.e. size of area, distribution of stock. This will determine any amount they spend.

Departmental Archaeologists

Tim Loughton: To ask the Deputy Prime Minister how many professional archaeologists are employed in his Department. [198848]

Phil Hope: The Office of the Deputy Prime Minister does not employ archaeologists.

Departmental Events (Funding)

Charles Hendry: To ask the Deputy Prime Minister if he will list the *(a)* conferences, *(b)* publications, *(c)* initiatives, *(d)* projects and *(e)* receptions organised by his Department which have received funding from outside commercial bodies since May 1997, broken down by (i) funding body and (ii) amount paid. [196606]

Phil Hope: The Office of the Deputy Prime Minister was created on 29 May 2002.

Details of individual amounts of sponsorship valued at more than £5,000 are published in the Office of the Deputy Prime Minister's Annual Report for 2003 published on 13 May 2003 and the Annual Report for 2004 published on 30 April 2004.

Copies are available in the Library of the House.

Freedom of Information Act

Dr. Julian Lewis: To ask the Deputy Prime Minister what assessment he has made of the likely costs to his Department in the first quarter of 2005 of compliance with the provisions of the Freedom of Information Act 2000; and if he will make a statement. [198765]

Phil Hope: The Office of the Deputy Prime Minister already deals with requests for information under the Open Government Code of Practice on Access to Government Information and the Environmental Information Regulations. The Office of the Deputy Prime Minister has made an assessment, through internal research, and estimates that the introduction of the Freedom of Information (FOI) Act will generate additional requests for information above and beyond the volumes that the Office of the Deputy Prime Minister is currently handling, but this research suggests that it is not possible to quantify the additional volumes reliably.

The Office of the Deputy Prime Minister has implemented a variety of measures aimed at keeping down the costs of responding to FOI requests which include general awareness raising for staff, more detailed training for inquiry handlers in the handling of FOI requests and the introduction of efficient standardised request handling procedures and systems. In so doing, the Office of the Deputy Prime Minister has made full use of central guidance from the Department for Constitutional Affairs. The efficiency and effectiveness of the Office of the Deputy Prime Minister's procedures and systems is currently being tested in the run up to full implementation of FOI access rights on 1 January 2005.

Gambling

Mr. Don Foster: To ask the Deputy Prime Minister if he will list the occasions on which *(a)* he and *(b)* other Ministers in his Department have met representatives of (i) US casino operators, (ii) British casino operators and (iii) casino operators from other countries to discuss gambling issues, broken down by date of meeting. [195069]

Phil Hope: Since the publication of the report of the Gambling Review Body (Cm 5206) in July 2001, the Department has undertaken a very extensive programme of consultations with interested bodies about options and proposals for changes to gambling law in Great Britain. There have been two formal public consultations, the first on the Review Body's report and the second on the draft clauses published for pre-legislative scrutiny in November 2003. In addition to these consultations the relevant Government Departments have corresponded with and met individual companies, trade associations, charities and other bodies concerned with problem gambling or who benefit from lotteries, local authorities, trade unions, law enforcement agencies, academics and many other bodies and individuals, including member of the public, with an interest. These contacts, designed to ensure that the Government's policy proposals are sound and take full account of all relevant benefits, costs and risks, have involved both Ministers and officials. All such contacts are conducted in accordance with the Ministerial Code and the Civil Service Code.

Government Offices for the Regions

Mrs. Spelman: To ask the Deputy Prime Minister if he will list the responsibilities of the Government Offices for the Regions; and if he will break down the components of their estimated programme expenditure in the current financial year by main budget heading. [190612]

Phil Hope: The responsibilities of the Government Offices for the Regions are set out in the Regional Co-ordination Unit and Government Office Network Corporate Plan 2004–05. A copy of which will be made available in the Library of the House.

Details of the programme expenditure of the Government Office for the Region (GO) are given in their published annual reports. A copy of each GO's most recent report will be made available in the Library of the House. Two GOs are still to publish their reports for the year 2003–04 and those will also be made available in the Library of the House in due course.

Mr. Pickles: To ask the Deputy Prime Minister if he will break down the programme expenditure of each Government Office for the Regions in *(a)* 1997 and *(b)* the current year by main budget heading. [194331]

Phil Hope: Details of the programme expenditure of the Government Office for the Region (GO) are given in their published annual reports. A copy of each GO's most recent report will be made available in the Library of the House. Two GOs are still to publish their reports for the year 2003/04 and those will also be made available in the Library of the House in due course.

Home Ownership

Mr. Cash: To ask the Deputy Prime Minister (1) how many homes have been transferred in large scale voluntary transfers by local authorities since 1 May 1997; [198465]

(2) how many local authorities have completed a large scale voluntary transfer since 1 May 1997. [198469]

Keith Hill: Since 1 May 1997, 100 local authorities have completed large scale voluntary transfers (LSVTs) and as a result 604,158 dwellings have been transferred.

Mr. Cash: To ask the Deputy Prime Minister how many homes are in the ownership of local authorities. [198466]

Keith Hill: The latest data returns to the Office of the Deputy Prime Minister from local authorities in England record a stock of 2,309,948 at April 1 2004. Since then there has been some loss of stock resulting from transfers to Registered Social Landlords (RSLs) and from the exercise of Right To Buy.

Housing (Leicester)

Mr. Gill: To ask the Deputy Prime Minister how many people are on the housing list waiting to be rehoused in Leicester. [198639]

Keith Hill: The Office of the Deputy Prime Minister is advised by Leicester city council that there are currently 13,000 people on their housing waiting list.

Housing Directorate

Mr. Hayes: To ask the Deputy Prime Minister what the total number of employees was within the Housing Directorate and its predecessor for each year since 1997. [197926]

Phil Hope: The Office of the Deputy Prime Minister was established in May 2002.

The Housing Directorate currently employs 125 staff but this is only part of the Office of the Deputy Prime Minister's work on housing, which is integrated into the work of a number of directorates across the Office. Owing to changes in the structure of the Office of the Deputy Prime Minister since May 2002 it is not possible to give meaningful equivalent figures for previous years.

Key Worker Scheme

Mr. McWalter: To ask the Deputy Prime Minister what plans he has to expand the key worker scheme; and if he will include in the scheme essential personnel such as mental health support workers. [198851]

Keith Hill: The Key Worker Living programme aims to keep the skills needed in frontline public services, in areas where there are significant recruitment and retention needs.

The Office of the Deputy Prime Minister recognises that all key worker groups provide a valuable service, however resources are finite and decisions prioritising those eligible for assistance from the scheme have been made following discussions with key worker sponsor departments to set the key worker groups and areas where the assistance will be targeted. Based on current evidence, we have no plans to extend the scheme.

Key workers who are not eligible for the Key Worker Living programme may benefit from shared ownership and Homebuy programmes funded by the Housing Corporation to help existing social tenants and those on waiting lists into home ownership.

Ministerial Meetings

Miss Kirkbride: To ask the Deputy Prime Minister (1) what meetings *(a)* he, *(b)* his departmental Ministers and *(c)* advisers and officials have held with representatives of (i) Sun City International, (ii) MGM Mirage, (iii) Mandalay Resort Group, (iv) Kerzner International, (v) Las Vegas Sands, Inc.,(vi) Harrah's Entertainment, (vii) Caesar's Entertainment and (viii) other foreign casino firms; what the (A) dates and (B) venues of the meetings were; and which individuals were present; [193764]

(2) how many recent meetings *(a)* officials and *(b)* special advisers of his Department have had with representatives of *(a)* Sun International, *(b)* MGM Mirage, *(c)* Kerzner International, *(d)* Caesar's Entertainment and *(e)* the British Casino Association. [193899]

Mr. Gray: To ask the Deputy Prime Minister (1) how many recent meetings he has had with representatives of *(a)* Sun International, *(b)* MGM Mirage, *(c)* Kerzner International, *(d)* Caesar's Entertainment and *(e)* the British Casino Association; when those meetings took place; and if he will list the representatives whom he met from each organisation; [193898]

(2) which *(a)* UK and *(b)* international organisations have submitted written representations to the Department concerning the Government's proposals for changes to legislation on gambling; and on what dates each representation (i) was received and (ii) was given a substantive response; [194511]

(3) what dates *(a)* Ministers and *(b)* officials in the Department have held meetings with representatives of the UK gambling industry to discuss proposed changes to legislation on gambling; [194518]

(4) if he will list the overseas visits made by *(a)* Ministers and *(b)* officials in the Department in relation to proposed changes to legislation on gambling; what the itinerary was for each visit; how long each visit lasted; which hotels were used; what the cost was in each case; and how each visit was funded. [194542]

Phil Hope: Since the publication of the report of the Gambling Review Body (Cm 5206) in July 2001, the Department has undertaken a very extensive programme of consultations with interested bodies about options and proposals for changes to gambling law in Great Britain. There have been two formal public consultations, the first on the Review Body's report and the second on the draft clauses published for pre-legislative scrutiny in November 2003. In addition to these consultations the relevant Government Departments have corresponded with and met individual companies, trade associations, charities and other bodies concerned with problem gambling or who benefit from lotteries, local authorities, trade unions, law enforcement agencies, academics and many other bodies and individuals, including members of the public, with an interest. These contacts, designed to ensure that the Government's policy proposals are sound and take full account of all relevant benefits, costs and risks, have involved both Ministers and officials. All such contacts are conducted in accordance with the Ministerial Code and the Civil Service Code.

Ministerial Visits

Mr. Gray: To ask the Deputy Prime Minister whether he has visited *(a)* Las Vegas and *(b)* Atlantic City in his official capacity. [193900]

Phil Hope: Since 1999 this Government has published an annual list of all visits overseas undertaken by Cabinet Ministers costing £500 or more during each financial year. The Government has also published on an annual basis the cost of all Ministers' visits overseas. Copies of the lists are available in the Library of the House.

Information on travel by officials is not held centrally and could only be provided at disproportionate costs.

All travel is undertaken fully in accordance with the rules set out in the Ministerial Code, Travel by Ministers and the Civil Service Management Code copies of which are available in the Library of the House.

New Deal for Communities

Mr. McLoughlin: To ask the Deputy Prime Minister what assessment he has made of the impact of the New Deal for Communities in *(a)* West Derbyshire and *(b)* the east midlands on (i) reducing crime, (ii) creating jobs and (iii) raising standards in education since 1998. [198357]

Phil Hope: The information is as follows:

(a) There are no New Deal for Communities (NDC) partnerships in West Derbyshire so there is no direct benefit to West Derbyshire from New Deal for Communities programme.

(b) In the east midlands, there are three NDC partnerships, in Leicester (Braunstone), Derby (Derwent) and Nottingham (Radford and Hyson Green).

The NDC programme is scrutinised and reviewed using two, complementary and linked streams of work:

a performance management system. which drives annual and mid-year reviews, lead by the Government Offices for the Regions. Partnerships reviewed their own performance and the results that they are starting to achieve.

the NDC National Evaluation, providing external assessment at partnership, programme and theme level, lead by Sheffield Hallam University.

The evidence provided in these reviews by the NDC partnerships show that partnerships in the east midlands are beginning to make an impact in reducing crime, creating jobs and raising standards in education. For example:

In Nottingham the NDC has recruited and trained local residents to act as teaching assistants;

In the Derby NDC area, GCSE results are up 30 per cent. in the first three years of the programme;

In Braunstone, 89 jobs have been created and 350 residents have accessed employment.

Nottingham NDC's achievements on reducing crime include target hardening, street lighting, extra policing and neighbourhood wardens;

In the Braunstone area of Leicester, burglary has fallen by 40.6 per cent. and theft of and from vehicles reduced by 48.6 per cent.

A national evaluation has been commissioned to examine the impact and effectiveness of the New Deal for Communities. A number of reports have already been published and a full interim report will be made available in autumn 2005.

Mr. McLoughlin: To ask the Deputy Prime Minister what plans he has to *(a)* continue and *(b)* develop New Deal for Communities schemes in (i) West Derbyshire and (ii) the East Midlands. [198358]

Phil Hope: The information is as follows:

(i) There are no New Deal for Communities (NDC) schemes in West Derbyshire. There are no plans to develop any NDC schemes in West Derbyshire.

(ii) In the East Midlands, there are three NDC schemes, in Leicester (Braunstone), Derby (Derwent) and Nottingham (Radford and Hyson Green). The Leicester programme is scheduled to complete in seven years (in 2006–07), the Nottingham programme is scheduled to run over 10 years and will continue until 2009–10 and the Derby Partnership, also over 10 years, until 2010–11. There are no plans to develop any further rounds of NDC.

Mr. McLoughlin: To ask the Deputy Prime Minister if he will list the *(a)* schemes and *(b)* funding made available to West Derbyshire since 1998 under the New Deal for Communities. [198359]

Phil Hope: There are no New Deal for Communities (NDC) schemes in the West Derbyshire district and so no funding has been made available in the area under the NDC scheme.

Public Conveniences

Mr. Grogan: To ask the Deputy Prime Minister whether he plans to amend section 87 of the Public Health Act 1936 in order to make it mandatory for local authorities to provide public conveniences. [198787]

Phil Hope: The Government have no plans to amend section 87 of the Public Health Act 1936 to make it mandatory for local authorities to provide public conveniences.

Regional Co-ordination Unit

Mr. Jenkin: To ask the Deputy Prime Minister what the functions are of the Regional Co-ordination Unit; what guidelines have been issued governing its activities; and to whom it reports. [198156]

Phil Hope: The unit's current responsibilities are set out in the Regional Co-ordination Unit and Government Office Network Corporate Plan 2004–05. A copy of this has been made available in the Library of the House.

Fire Service

Richard Younger-Ross: To ask the Deputy Prime Minister what the terms of the tender for the regional fire control centre for the South West were; how many bids were received; how many were shortlisted; and what shortlisting process was used for the tenders. [197356]

Mr. Raynsford: The tender for the control centre was for a private developer scheme using the "Restricted" procedure of the EU Services Directive, advertised in the Official Journal of the European Union on 21 April 2004. In parallel, submissions were invited from the public sector to be put forward with the endorsement of the relevant Regional Management Board. In the South West 31 sites were put forward in 28 submissions, including regional submissions. The criteria for the evaluation were determined by the Office of the Deputy Prime Minister's Corporate Procurement. A financial evaluation was undertaken of the private sector submissions. A technical evaluation was undertaken on a like for like basis of private sector and regionally submitted sites, including site visits by local property advisors. Those that passed the criteria were then visited by the full technical team. Each stage of the process concluded with a moderation meeting. The meeting at the final stage was attended by a representative from the Local Government Association.

Mrs. Spelman: To ask the Deputy Prime Minister what role regional chambers *(a)* have and *(b)* will have in relation to fire and rescue services. [198486]

Mr. Raynsford: The regional chambers have no role in relation to fire and rescue services. There are no plans to change this.

Regional Housing Boards

Mrs. Spelman: To ask the Deputy Prime Minister (1) which regions have established regional housing boards; [198482]

(2) how regional housing boards are funded; and what their estimated budgets are in the forthcoming financial year; [198483]

(3) if he will make a statement on the relationship between regional housing boards and regional chambers. [198484]

Keith Hill: The Communities Plan, published in March 2003, introduced a regional housing board in each of the nine English regions, chaired by the regional director of the Government Office. The boards receive no direct funding: secretariat costs are met from within existing Government Office budgets. The regional chamber (in London the GLA) is a key member of each board. The Office of the Deputy Prime Minister is currently consulting on our proposal that to achieve greater integration at the regional level between housing and planning responsibility for the work of the regional housing boards (i.e. production of a regional housing strategy and making recommendations to Ministers on allocations for housing capital investment) should pass to the regional chamber, which, in each region, is already the regional planning body.

Select Committee Recommendations

Mr. Allen: To ask the Deputy Prime Minister how many recommendations by parliamentary select committees have been adopted by his Department since June 2001. [197771]

Phil Hope: Select committee reports are given very careful consideration by the Ministers in the Office of the Deputy Prime Minister. Since June 2001, several committees of both Houses have made recommendations on matters for which the Office of the Deputy Prime Minister is responsible. Select Committee reports and their responses are a matter of public record.

South East England Regional Assembly

Mr. Viggers: To ask the Deputy Prime Minister what the cost will be of the south east England regional assembly sending a questionnaire to households to gauge their views on housebuilding. [198338]

Keith Hill: The regional assembly currently estimate it will cost in the order of £175,000 to provide leaflets with a brief questionnaire to all households and to local authorities for wider distribution, in order to gauge views on spatial options for future development in the south east.

PRIME MINISTER

Butler Report

Mr. Gordon Prentice: To ask the Prime Minister pursuant to his answer of 3 November, *Official Report*, column 250W, whether he has a timescale for completing the implementation of the Butler recommendations. [198348]

The Prime Minister: I have nothing further to add to my answer of 3 November, *Official Report*, column 250W.

Honours System

Mr. Gordon Prentice: To ask the Prime Minister what changes he plans to make to the Honours system. [198335]

The Prime Minister: I shall respond to the reviews carried out by the Public Administration Select Committee and Sir Hayden Phillips shortly.

Iraq

Glenda Jackson: To ask the Prime Minister (1) if he will publish the evidence on the basis of which he disputed the findings, published in The Lancet, estimating the number of Iraqi civilians killed as a result of military actions since 20 March 2003; [196013]

(2) what bodies are *(a)* funded and *(b)* supported by the British Government to gather, collate and publish the number of Iraqi civilians (i) killed and (ii) injured by the military actions of coalition forces; [196014]

(3) pursuant to his oral answer of 3 November 2004, *Official Report*, column 301, to the hon. Member for Newry and Armagh (Mr. Mallon) if he will request the Iraqi Ministry of Health to furnish him with a breakdown of the 3,000 deaths by *(a)* gender, *(b)* age, *(c)* location and *(d)* cause; [197271]

(4) what action he plans to take to ensure independent assessment of civilian casualties in Falluja as a result of the recent military activities; and if he will make a statement. [199140]

The Prime Minister: I refer my hon. Friend to the written ministerial statement "Iraq: Casualty Estimates: Lancet Study" made by my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs (Mr. Straw) today.

Glenda Jackson: To ask the Prime Minister pursuant to his oral answer to the hon. Member for Newry and Armagh (Mr. Mallon) of 3 November 2004, *Official Report*, column 301, if he will request the Iraqi Ministry of Health to furnish him with the number of civilian deaths in the six months from November 2003 to April 2004, broken down by *(a)* gender, *(b)* age, *(c)* location and *(d)* cause. [197270]

The Prime Minister: The Iraqi Ministry of Health only began collating figures for civilian casualties in April 2004. They are unable to provide figures for periods before that.

Glenda Jackson: To ask the Prime Minister pursuant to his oral answer to the hon. Member for Newry and Armagh (Mr. Mallon) of 3 November 2004, *Official Report*, column 301, if he will list the sources other than the figures provided by the Iraqi Minister of Health which caused him not to accept figures of civilian deaths reported by The Lancet. [197334]

The Prime Minister: As I made clear in my answer to the hon. Member for Newry and Armagh (Mr. Mallon) on 3 November, *Official Report*, column 301, the figures to which I referred were from the Iraqi Ministry of Health.

Mr. Gordon Prentice: To ask the Prime Minister when he expects Saddam Hussein to be brought to trial; and if he will make a statement. [198375]

The Prime Minister: Saddam Hussein was arraigned by an Iraqi court on 1 July and appeared before the court again last month. It is for the Iraqi courts to determine the timing of Saddam Hussein's trial.

Parliamentary Questions

Llew Smith: To ask the Prime Minister what his policy is on making corrections in the *Official Report* of parliamentary answers which turn out to be inaccurate. [198677]

The Prime Minister: I act in accordance with the Ministerial Code.

ENVIRONMENT, FOOD AND RURAL AFFAIRS

Abattoirs

Andrew George: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs which *(a)* abattoirs and *(b)* low-throughput abattoirs (i) operated in 1997, (ii) operated in 2001 and (iii) operate now. [196683]

Miss Melanie Johnson: I have been asked to reply.

The number of licensed abattoirs in the United Kingdom in the years 1997, 2001 and currently is shown in the table.

	Full throughput	*Low throughput*
Red meat abattoirs		
1997	473[1]	
2001	238	156
2004[2]	225	130
Poultry meat abattoirs		
1997	172[1]	
2001	97	54
2004[2]	87	50

[1] No separate figures for low throughput category available.

[2] To 1 October.

Lists of the names and addresses of these abattoirs in the years requested are only partially available. The following have been placed in the Library:

1997—no available lists.

1998—list of full throughput and low throughput abattoirs in England (lists for Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland are not available).

2001—lists of full throughput and low throughput abattoirs in England and Scotland (lists for Wales and Northern Ireland are not available).

2004—lists of full throughput and low throughput abattoirs in the United Kingdom.

Archaeology

Tim Loughton: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs how many professional archaeologists are employed in her Department. [198849]

Alun Michael: There are no posts within the Department that require qualified archaeologists.

Chewing Gum

Miss McIntosh: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs how much it cost to fund the Chewing Gum Action Group chewing gum segmentation survey. [197654]

Alun Michael: The chewing gum segmentation study, commissioned by the Chewing Gum Action Group cost £60,170. It has provided valuable information about the different ways in which gum chewers dispose of gum after use and will assist by informing campaigns to change behaviour.

Miss McIntosh: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what powers she plans to give to local authorities to tackle the problem of chewing gum. [197681]

Alun Michael: Under the Environmental Protection Act 1990, local authorities and police community support officers already have the power to issue fixed penalty notices to those who drop chewing gum. The current level of fixed penalty is £50. The Government are working with local authorities and with business to promote action to tackle problems arising from the dropping of chewing gum.

Convention on International Trade in Endangered Species

Harry Cohen: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what assessment she has made, in relation to the Convention on International Trade in Endangered Species, of the effect on tiger and leopard populations of the trade in animal skins between India, Nepal, Tibet and China; if she will make representations to the authorities in those countries on the matter; and if she will make a statement. [197506]

Mr. Morley: The Government have not made a formal assessment, but we are concerned that the poaching and illegal trade in Asian big cats is a serious problem. Since the 1990s the evidence suggested that use for traditional medicine was the major factor behind much of the poaching that was taking place but more recently the demand for big cat skins has re-emerged as a key issue. The impact of this illegal trade is difficult to assess because there is so little information on the scale of the trade and the population data for some of the species concerned is scarce and unreliable.

The CITES Secretariat did some research into this illegal trade as part of their enforcement missions to Bhutan and China (including Tibet) that were carried out in the summer of 2003 with funding from the UK. The Government are aware that large seizures that have been made by the authorities in China, India and Nepal and have provided the CITES Secretariat with some £15,000 to help fund a meeting of the Tiger Enforcement Task Force to look into this trade. This is planned to take place in the spring of 2005 and aims to help the countries concerned set up appropriate mechanisms for the exchange of relevant intelligence that will enable them to work together to crack down on this illegal trade.

Deer /Bovine TB

Andrew George: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs (1) how many *(a)* farmed and *(b)* park deer were slaughtered at abattoirs in the last five years; [197322]

(2) how many *(a)* farmed, *(b)* park and *(c)* wild deer entered the human food chain in the UK in each of the past five years; and what percentage of the carcases were subject to inspection by the Meat Hygiene Service. [197331]

Miss Melanie Johnson: I have been asked to reply.

The Food Standards Agency (FSA) have advised that it is not possible to determine the percentage of deer carcases in the United Kingdom which have been subject to inspection by the Meat Hygiene Service (MHS) in Great Britain and Department for Agriculture and Rural Development (DARD) in Northern Ireland. This is because only meat from wild deer destined for the export market is required to be processed in licensed premises and inspected by the MHS or DARD. However, operators of licensed wild game processing facilities producing wild deer intended for the domestic market can choose to have their wild deer inspected and health-marked for commercial reasons.

Premises which only supply wild game to the domestic market are not licensed and are under local authority control. The number of wild deer processed in unlicensed premises or supplied directly to the final consumer are not recorded centrally.

The table shows the number of deer in Great Britain that are recorded as having been slaughtered and/or processed in licensed farmed game handling facilities (the deer farm), farmed game processing facilities, red meat slaughterhouses and wild game processing facilities, and inspected by the MHS. The data for wild deer comprises carcases either for export, the domestic market (when requested by the producer) or exported in fur. Park deer are those living within an enclosed area under conditions of freedom similar to those enjoyed by wild deer. They are shot and handled as if they were wild.

Information on the number of deer in Northern Ireland processed in licensed premises and inspected by DARD is not currently collected centrally.

	2000	*2001*	*2002*	*2003*	*2004*[1]
Farmed game handling and processing facilities	4,296	3,605	3,464	3,153	2,175
Red meat slaughterhouses	1,425	1,644	2,241	649	496
Wild game processing facilities	84,403	49,452	73,308	81,826	56,524
GB total	90,124	54,701	79,013	85,628	59,195

[1] Covers 1 January 2004 to 30 September 2004

Andrew George: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what assessment she has made of the risk posed to human health by the consumption of deer in relation to bovine TB; and what discussions she has had with the Food Standards Agency on this issue. [197332]

Miss Melanie Johnson: I have been asked to reply.

The Food Standards Agency has advised that bacteria are killed by proper cooking and there are no recorded instances of humans catching bovine TB from the consumption of meat.

Domestic Water Bills

Lembit Öpik: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what the average percentage increase in domestic water bills has been since May 1997; and if she will make a statement. [194646]

Mr. Morley: The average increase in domestic water bills in England and Wales since 1997–98 has been 11 per cent. for water and 8 per cent. for sewerage (a reduction of 7 per cent. for water and 9 per cent. for sewerage in real terms). A company by company breakdown of the average domestic water and sewerage bills for each company in England and Wales for each financial year since 1996–97 is set out in the following tables in both cash and real terms.

Nominal average household water bill

£

	Total water				
	1997–98	*1998–99*	*1999–2000*	*2000–01*	*2001–02*
Water and sewerage companies					
Anglian	124.84	124.09	121.36	108.16	112.13
Dwr Cymru	133.14	133.58	134.67	125.73	124.81
North West	98.94	100.63	103.95	104.51	105.35
Northumbrian (including Essex and Suffolk)	105.65	102.33	108.17	95.59	97.00
Northumbrian	98.37	102.60	100.50	102.87	88.23
Essex and Suffolk	116.62	101.93	119.70	103.93	109.99
Severn Trent	95.45	101.49	112.14	105.86	108.01
South West	126.83	122.02	118.15	108.65	110.12
Southern	100.52	104.76	111.78	91.10	90.73
Thames	92.10	99.62	104.12	99.04	103.85
Wessex	116.92	120.99	126.55	109.99	111.00
Yorkshire (including York)	101.65	109.10	116.21	100.34	103.39
Yorkshire	102.09	109.72	117.04	100.79	103.96
York	90.72	93.79	95.88	89.25	89.58
Water only companies					
Bournemouth and West Hampshire	96.19	97.83	100.03	98.85	98.32
Bristol	103.49	108.01	111.77	101.32	104.84

Nominal average household water bill

£

					Total water					
	1997–98		*1998–99*		*1999–2000*		*2000–01*		*2001–02*	
Cambridge	103.40		102.14		94.60		89.44		92.58	
Dee Valley	119.93		120.23		119.95		106.49		106.37	
Folkestone and Dover	109.41		113.57		116.12		117.00		122.28	
Mid Kent	135.92		142.68		147.49		114.73		121.72	
Portsmouth	72.76		74.29		75.44		73.95		75.11	
South East	134.93		137.28		136.80		117.62		124.19	
South Staffs	79.33		80.96		83.52		85.33		87.02	
Sutton and East Surrey	138.21		138.35		133.62		115.01		119.60	
Tendring Hundred	143.57		146.38		147.90		132.20		138.73	
Three Valleys (including North Surrey)	111.37		116.68		123.67		106.44		109.02	
Three Valleys	111.17		116.10		123.44		88.18		110.23	
North Surrey	112.39		119.65		124.82		106.65		102.68	
Industry	105.34		108.67		113.03		103.69		106.13	
RPI		153.9		159.6		164.4		166.7		172.1

			Total water				
	2002–03		*2003–041*		*2004–052*		*Percentage increase 1997–98 to 2004–05*
Water and sewerage companies							
Anglian	109.82		115.08		119.90		−4
Dwr Cymru	124.39		122.25		123.49		−7
North West	108.47		116.23		132.92		34
Northumbrian (including Essex and Suffolk)	97.37		100.26		112.53		7
Northumbrian	88.18		90.19		101.19		3
Essex and Suffolk	111.07		115.44		129.55		11
Severn Trent	107.27		112.09		116.26		22
South West	115.15		120.78		127.72		1
Southern	89.37		90.87		91.91		−9
Thames	104.68		106.52		111.58		21
Wessex	112.10		119.55		125.27		7
Yorkshire (including York)	104.57		110.48		116.02		14
Yorkshire	105.18		111.12		117.29		15
York	89.84		95.06		85.22		−6
Water only companies							
Bournemouth and West Hampshire	98.15		99.70		104.29		8
Bristol	107.05		109.26		109.48		6
Cambridge	90.65		92.93		94.37		−9
Dee Valley	104.86		105.24		106.85		−11
Folkestone and Dover	128.91		137.63		142.57		30
Mid Kent	125.53		127.72		130.30		−4
Portsmouth	74.39		75.63		77.08		6
South East	122.62		125.86		129.62		−4
South Staffs	86.22		88.17		92.14		16
Sutton and East Surrey	123.42		123.14		125.38		−9
Tendring Hundred	143.41		153.72		161.91		13
Three Valleys (including North Surrey)	110.85		114.71		116.32		4
Three Valleys	111.73		115.15		117.73		6
North Surrey	106.32		112.41		109.02		−3
Industry	106.77		110.67		116.92		11
RPI		173.6		178.2		182.7	19

Average household water bill (£) in 2004–05

			Total water		
	1997–98	*1998–99*	*1999–2000*	*2000–01*	*2001–02*
Water and sewerage companies					
Anglian	148.20	142.05	134.87	118.54	119.04
Dwr Cymru	158.06	152.91	149.66	137.80	132.49
North West	117.46	115.19	115.52	114.54	111.84
Northumbrian (including Essex and Suffolk)	125.42	117.14	120.21	104.77	102.97
Northumbrian	116.78	117.45	111.69	112.74	93.67
Essex and Suffolk	138.44	116.68	133.02	113.90	116.77
Severn Trent	113.31	116.18	124.62	116.02	114.66
South West	150.56	139.68	131.30	119.08	116.90
Southern	119.33	119.92	124.22	99.84	96.32
Thames	109.34	114.04	115.71	108.55	110.24

Average household water bill (£) in 2004–05

	Total water				
	1997–98	*1998–99*	*1999–2000*	*2000–01*	*2001–02*
Wessex	138.80	138.50	140.64	120.55	117.83
Yorkshire (including York)	120.67	124.89	129.15	109.97	109.76
Yorkshire	121.20	125.60	130.07	110.46	110.37
York	107.70	107.37	106.55	97.81	95.10
Water only companies					
Bournemouth and West Hampshire	114.19	111.99	111.16	108.33	104.38
Bristol	122.86	123.64	124.21	111.05	111.30
Cambridge	122.75	116.92	105.13	98.03	98.28
Dee Valley	142.37	137.63	133.30	116.71	112.93
Folkestone and Dover	129.88	130.01	129.05	128.22	129.81
Mid Kent	161.36	163.33	163.91	125.74	129.22
Portsmouth	86.38	85.04	83.84	81.05	79.74
South East	160.18	157.15	152.03	128.91	131.83
South Staffs	94.18	92.68	92.82	93.52	92.38
Sutton and East Surrey	164.07	158.37	148.49	126.05	126.96
Tendring Hundred	170.44	167.57	164.36	144.89	147.27
Three Valleys (including North Surrey)	132.21	133.56	137.44	116.66	115.74
Three Valleys	131.98	132.90	137.18	96.64	117.02
North Surrey	133.42	136.97	138.71	116.88	109.00
Industry	125.05	124.40	125.61	113.64	112.67

	Total water			
	2002–03	*2003–04*[1]	*2004–05*[2]	*Percentage increase 1997–98 to 2004–05*
Water and sewerage companies				
Anglian	115.58	117.99	119.90	−19
Dwr Cymru	130.91	125.34	123.49	−22
North West	114.15	119.16	132.92	13
Northumbrian (including Essex and Suffolk)	102.47	102.80	112.53	−10
Northumbrian	92.80	92.47	101.19	−13
Essex and Suffolk	116.89	118.35	129.55	−6
Severn Trent	112.89	114.92	116.26	3
South West	121.19	123.83	127.72	−15
Southern	94.05	93.17	91.91	−23
Thames	110.17	109.21	111.58	2
Wessex	117.97	122.57	125.27	−10
Yorkshire (including York)	110.05	113.27	116.02	−4
Yorkshire	110.69	113.93	117.29	−3
York	94.55	97.46	85.22	−21
Water only companies				
Bournemouth and West Hampshire	103.30	102.22	104.29	−9
Bristol	112.66	112.01	109.48	−11
Cambridge	95.40	95.27	94.37	−23
Dee Valley	110.36	107.89	106.85	−25
Folkestone and Dover	135.66	141.10	142.57	10
Mid Kent	132.11	130.94	130.30	−19
Portsmouth	78.29	77.54	77.08	−11
South East	129.05	129.04	129.62	−19
South Staffs	90.74	90.40	92.14	−2
Sutton and East Surrey	129.89	126.24	125.38	−24
Tendring Hundred	150.93	157.60	161.91	−5
Three Valleys (including North Surrey)	116.66	117.60	116.32	−12
Three Valleys	117.58	118.06	117.73	−11
North Surrey	111.89	115.25	109.02	−18
Industry	112.36	113.46	116.92	−7

Nominal average household water bill

£

	Total sewerage				
	1997–98	*1998–99*	*1999–2000*	*2000–01*	*2001–02*
Water and sewerage companies					
Anglian	156	162	158	146	150
Dwr Cymru	145	155	166	140	147
North West	122	130	141	120	119

Nominal average household water bill

£

	Total sewerage									
	1997–98		*1998–99*		*1999–2000*		*2000–01*		*2001–02*	
Northumbrian (including Essex and Suffolk)	118		126		142		110		112	
Severn Trent	110		112		115		93		97	
South West	208		220		236		204		202	
Southern	143		151		162		146		151	
Thames	97		101		103		91		94	
Wessex	134		140		148		132		133	
Yorkshire (including York)	111		119		126		109		112	
Industry	122.40		128.59		134.45		116.37		119.11	
RPI		153.9		159.6		164.4		166.7		172.1

	Total sewerage						
	2002-03		*2003-04[1]*		*2004-05[2]*		*Percentage increase 1997–98 to 2004-05*
Water and sewerage companies							
Anglian	154		162		169		9
Dwr Cymru	152		156		163		12
North West	121		124		139		13
Northumbrian (including Essex and Suffolk)	113		117		131		12
Severn Trent	96		101		105		-5
South West	212		222		233		12
Southern	154		161		167		17
Thames	94		95		97		0
Wessex	134		143		150		12
Yorkshire (including York)	114		119		125		13
Industry	120.60		125.17		132.02		8
RPI		173.6		178.2		182.7	19

Average household water bill (£) in 2004–05 prices

	Total sewerage				
	1997–98	*1998–99*	*1999–2000*	*2000–01*	*2001–02*
Water and sewerage companies					
Anglian	185	186	176	160	159
Dwr Cymru	172	177	184	154	156
North West	145	149	157	132	127
Northumbrian (including Essex and Suffolk)	140	144	158	121	119
Severn Trent	131	128	128	102	103
South West	247	252	262	223	215
Southern	169	173	180	160	160
Thames	115	116	115	100	99
Wessex	160	161	164	145	141
Yorkshire (including York)	131	136	140	120	119
Industry	145	147	149	128	126

	Total sewerage			
	2002-03	*2003-04[1]*	*2004-05[2]*	*Percentage increase 1997–98 to 2004-05*
Water and sewerage companies				
Anglian	162	166	169	-9
Dwr Cymru	160	160	163	-5
North West	127	128	139	-5
Northumbrian (including Essex and Suffolk)	119	120	131	-6
Severn Trent	101	103	105	-20
South West	224	227	233	-5
Southern	162	165	167	-1
Thames	99	98	97	-16
Wessex	141	146	150	-6
Yorkshire (including York)	119	122	125	-5
Industry	127	128	132	-9

[1] Provisional bill

[2] Forecast bill

Fisheries

Mr. Paterson: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what the cod by-catch from hauls using *(a)* 80 mm and *(b)* 110 mm mesh in cod ends deployed by the Fleetwood over 10 metre fishing fleet in the Eastern Irish Sea were in the last 10 years for which figures are available. [192947]

Mr. Bradshaw: Information is only available on the proportion that cod made up of total landings of fish caught in the Irish Sea, as opposed to total catches of fish, and this is given in the following table. This excludes any fish that may have been caught and then discarded before landing. There are several different types of fishing gear that have been used with the mesh sizes quoted, depending on the species of fish being targeted. Only those involving otter trawl in any form have been included. In addition, the 110 mm mesh size was not used significantly in the Irish Sea by the over 10 metre vessels based in Fleetwood until 2003, when it made up a sixth of the trips carried out. Prior to that year, 100 mm and 80 mm gear represented the most frequently used mesh sizes. The figures represent averages, and there is considerable variability seen between individual vessels and individual months of the year.

Average percentage of cod in landings from the Irish Sea caught using otter trawl type gears with cod-ends of mesh sizes

	80 mm	*100 mm*	*110 mm*
1993	20	n/a	n/a
1994	8	41	n/a
1995	15	38	n/a
1996	9	25	n/a
1997	10	25	n/a
1998	17	26	4
1999	10	25	n/a
2000	4	18	n/a
2001	6	14	n/a
2002	4	19	0
2003	4	12	4

n/a = Not applicable as mesh size not used by any Fleetwood based over 10 metre vessels during the year on fishing in the Irish Sea

Emissions Trading

Miss McIntosh: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs if she will make a statement on how the European Emissions Trading Scheme will apply to non-EU companies operating in the UK. [198471]

Mr. Morley *[holding answer 15 November 2004]:* The EU Emissions Trading Scheme will apply to all installations operating in the UK regardless of whether they are owned by EU or non-EU companies. Operators must comply with the obligations set out in the regulations implementing the scheme in the UK. These include requirements to hold an emissions permit, and to monitor and report emissions of carbon dioxide.

Energy Efficiency

Norman Baker: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs if she will arrange an international conference on energy efficiency objectives as part of the forthcoming UK presidency of the European Union. [197867]

Mr. Morley: There are no plans as yet to hold an event specifically focused on energy efficiency under the auspice of the UK's presidency of the European Union. The Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs recognises the key role that energy efficiency will play in tackling climate change, which in addition is itself one of the two priorities for our G8 presidency. However ministers have not yet approved the programme of events, conferences and seminars that will be held next year.

Energy Recovery

Mr. Meale: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs to which organisation and for which projects her Department is providing funding to develop demonstration units in the UK for new technologies involved in energy recovery processes. [183556]

Mr. Morley: The Department funds the Carbon Trust to support the development of a low carbon economy in the UK. The Carbon Trust are contributing £150,000 to a project costing £430,000 to recover waste heat from industrial processes. In this case the Carbon Trust have defined "energy recovery" as recovering useful energy from a waste stream. Heat pumps would not come into this definition.

As a private company provision of support and funding by the Carbon Trust is a matter for the Carbon Trust board. Defra does not provide direct funding to support the development of energy recovery processes.

Flood Prevention

Paddy Tipping: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what flood prevention schemes have been implemented since 1997; and what the cost of such schemes has been, broken down by county. [198530]

Mr. Morley: We do not currently hold the information in the form requested. I refer my hon. Friend to the answer I gave to my hon. Friend the Member for Worcester (Mr. Foster) on 15 November 2004, *Official Report*, column 1013W. This included a list of flood defence (including flood warning) projects approved for Defra grant aid which started after 1 May 1997 and gave the Operating Authority, the date the scheme started and the approved cost.

Officials have been asked to consider whether the data currently held can be analysed by county but this cannot be completed in the time available.

GM Crops

Mr. Drew: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what discussions she has had with the Dutch Government on the publication of national proposals for GM co-measures; and what discussions she has had with the IFOAM EU Group on the proposals. [198478]

Mr. Morley *[holding answer 16 November 2004]:* Each EU member state is responsible for developing its own proposals to ensure the co-existence of GM and non-GM crops. We are aware of the recent announcement that a commission has presented a national co-existence plan to the Dutch Government. We have not discussed this development with either the Dutch authorities or the IFOAM EU Group.

Mr. Drew: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs which EU countries have already put in place proposals for a compensation fund for farmers affected by GM contamination. [198077]

Mr. Morley: We are aware of three EU member states which have prepared definite proposals covering this issue. Denmark is proposing a levy per hectare of a GM crop to finance a compensation fund. Germany is proposing to amend its code of civil law to clarify liability in cases where a non-GM farmer suffers an economic loss as a result of a GM presence. Finally, Luxembourg is proposing that each GM grower will be required to take out a civil liability insurance contract.

We understand that other member states are in the process of developing proposals but the details of these are not yet confirmed.

Home Energy Efficiency Scheme

Mr. Chaytor: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs how many homes in Bury Metropolitan borough council area have benefited from the home energy efficiency scheme in each of the last three years. [198322]

Mr. Morley *[holding answer 16 November 2004]:* The Home Energy Efficiency Scheme is now marketed as Warm Front. Between the launch of the scheme in June 2000 and the end of September 2004 approximately 4,000 households in Bury Metropolitan borough council, received assistance from the scheme.

This includes in the past three years:

	Approximate number of households
2002	1,000
2003	1,000
January–September 2004	800

Kyoto Protocol

Mr. David Stewart: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what estimate she has made of the level of emissions reduction that will be needed after the ratification of the Kyoto Protocol. [198060]

Mr. Morley: The EU Environment Council has stated that to prevent dangerous anthropogenic interference with the climate system, overall global temperatures should not exceed 2 degrees C above pre-industrial levels, with a carbon dioxide stabilisation level below 550ppm. To be on track for this goal, the UK considers that developed countries will need to make a reduction in carbon dioxide emissions of approximately 20 per cent. by 2020 and 60 per cent. by 2050 (compared to 1990 levels), as outlined in the Government's Energy White Paper of 2003. The UK has therefore set itself on a path to achieve these reductions domestically.

Making Space for Water Consultation

Mr. Kidney: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs how many responses her Department has received to its consultation Making Space for Water. [197781]

Mr. Morley: There have been 275 responses to the consultation.

Press Releases

Pete Wishart: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs how many press releases have been issued by her Department in each month of 2004; and if she will make a statement. [195365]

Alun Michael: I refer the hon. Member to the answer given by my hon. Friend, the Minister of State for the Cabinet Office (Ruth Kelly), on 11 November 2004, *Official Report*, column 855W.

Select Committees

Mr. Allen: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs how many recommen~~dations~~ by parliamentary select committees have been adopted by her Department since June 2001. [197768]

Alun Michael: Since 2001, several committees of both Houses have made recommendations on matters for which Defra is responsible and all have been given careful consideration by the Department's Ministers. Select Committee reports and their responses are a matter of public record.

Waste (Efficiency)

Mr. Amess: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what steps her Department will be taking to assist local authorities deliver efficiency gains in waste services. [198796]

Mr. Morley: I refer the hon. Gentleman to the answer I gave on 4 October 2004, *Official Report*, column 1946W.

Waste Disposal

Dr. Whitehead: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs pursuant to her answer of 4 February 2004, *Official Report*, column 903W, on waste disposal, whether she intends to publish the results of her Department's investigation of the feasibility of variable charging for waste before the end of the year. [198009]

Mr. Morley: The Department's work on variable household charging and household incentives for waste recycling and reduction is based on the body of existing, publicly available, research, supplemented by investigation into specific examples of such activity and by specially commissioned research.

It is my intention to publish this new research once the Government have reached a decision on how best to proceed.

Waste Electrical and Electronic Equipment Directive

Miss McIntosh: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs when her Department will issue the *(a)* consultation document for Waste Electrical and Electronic Equipment Permitting, *(b)* revised refrigerator guidance and *(c)* Environment Agency audit report; and if she will make representations to the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry to extend the deadline for responses to the consultation beyond 29 October. [197004]

Mr. Morley: As regards *(a)*, the Department will consult on changes to waste management licensing in line with the waste electrical and electronic equipment directive as soon as practicable. The documents referred to at *(b)* and *(c)* are matters for the Environment Agency. As regards *(b)*, the agency and industry are working together to identify reasonable levels for ozone depleting substances and revised guidance on the recovery and disposal of controlled substances contained in refrigerators and freezers will be produced once these levels have been agreed; it is anticipated that this will be in the New Year. As regards *(c)*, the findings of an audit of fridge treatment facilities have been discussed with the site operators and the agency expects to publish the key findings shortly.

Waste Management

Mr. Sheerman: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what research her Department is conducting into *(a)* differential and *(b)* variable rate charging schemes for waste management. [198281]

Mr. Morley: The Department's work on variable household charging and household incentives for waste recycling and reduction is based on the body of existing, publicly available, research, supplemented by investigation into specific examples of such activity and by specially commissioned research into household incentives in England.

Mr. Sheerman: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what assessment her Department has made of the suitability of private finance initiatives as a funding option for waste management facilities and services in the UK. [198230]

Mr. Morley: Defra's Waste Implementation has commissioned a monitoring and evaluation study from The Public Private Partnerships Programme ("The 4Ps") to obtain a clearer picture of the contribution of the Private Finance Initiative (PFI) to the sustainable management of household waste in England. This was completed in January 2004.

The study, which was based on the experience of the majority of all operational PFI projects to date, found that the contribution of PFI towards the achievement of national recycling targets and EU Landfill Directive targets was significant and growing. Existing operational and currently planned projects should reduce dependency on landfill by 14 per cent. of present levels if they delivered their contract objectives. The overwhelming majority of waste PFI projects were designed to achieve or exceed Landfill Directive targets for the procuring authorities.

The report also found that quality management requirements and standards were consistently being met in PFI projects. There had been no significant failures in the quality of service provision. And there was no evidence that waste PFI projects took longer or cost more to procure than comparable projects in other sectors or large-scale, conventional procurements in the waste sector.

Wildlife Crime

Mr. Hancock: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs if she will make a statement on her plans to increase resources to tackle wildlife crime. [197712]

Mr. Morley: In recent years, the Department has made an important contribution to promoting and enhancing wildlife law enforcement activity, through, for example, the Partnership for Action Against Wildlife Crime and also by providing over £0.5 million towards the establishment and maintenance of the National Wildlife Crime Intelligence Unit.

However, responsibility for tackling wildlife crime rests primarily with the police service and HM Customs and Excise, and we have no plans to increase significantly resources in this area.

TRANSPORT

A38

Mr. Steen: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport when he expects the section of the A38 between Ashburton and Buckfastleigh to be resurfaced with a noise-reducing surface; and if he will make a statement. [198527]

Mr. Jamieson: Most of the section of the A38 between Ashburton and Buckfastleigh already has quieter surfacing. As parts of the carriageway are now worn out, this surfacing is due to be replaced, again with quieter materials, during a carriageway reconstruction and bridge repair scheme planned for autumn 2005, subject to the availability of finance.

The other parts of the Buckfastleigh and Ashburton Bypasses, which currently have conventional surfacing, are in good condition and are not expected to require maintenance in the foreseeable future. Lower noise surfacing would be used when maintenance becomes necessary.

Aeroplane Collision

Mr. Greg Knight: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what the cause was of two aeroplanes colliding at Manchester airport on 4 November; what assessment he has made of precautions in place to prevent such collisions; and if he will make a statement. [198331]

Charlotte Atkins: The accident is being investigated by the Air Accident Investigation Branch. As part of the investigation process the AAIB may make safety recommendations aimed at preventing similar accidents from occurring in the future. A report of the accident investigation and any safety recommendations will be published once the investigation has been completed.

Air Accident Investigation Branch

Mr. Hancock: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what plans he has for the relocation of the Air Accident Investigation Branch from Farnborough; and if he will make a statement. [198775]

Charlotte Atkins: The Department for Transport has no plans for the relocation of the Air Accident Investigation Branch from Farnborough.

Car Servicing Industry

Chris Ruane: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what discussions he has held with stakeholders in the car servicing industry on improving standards. [198858]

Mr. Jamieson *[holding answer 16 November 2004]:* None. This is a consumer issue so primary responsibility lies with the Department for Trade and Industry.

Commercial Drivers (Time Regulations)

Mr. Jim Cunningham: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport how the Government plan to enforce the new time regulations for commercial drivers and crew. [198330]

Mr. Jamieson: Inspectors from the Vehicle and Operator Services Agency (VOSA) will enforce the new working time regulations for commercial drivers; mainly, in response to complaints they receive.

Data Protection

Michael Fabricant: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport pursuant to the answer of 2 November 2004, *Official Report*, columns 155–56W, on data protection, if he will make a statement on the conviction of Barry Dickinson, formerly employed by the Driver and Vehicle Licensing Agency. [197453]

Charlotte Atkins: Mr. Barry Dickinson was dismissed from the Driver and Vehicle Licensing Agency with effect from 14 October 2004. This followed a police investigation leading to a court case where he pleaded guilty to the charges against him. He was dismissed from the Agency for gross misconduct in connection with the release of information in contravention of the data protection rules.

Departmental Contracts

Pete Wishart: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport which non-accounting and non-information technology external organisations which previously held contracts with his Department *(a)* won new contracts at the culmination of the existing contracts and *(b)* won new contracts after a period of inactivity with his Department in each of the past four years. [196903]

Charlotte Atkins: The information is not held centrally and could only be provided at disproportionate cost.

Departmental IT

Brian White: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what percentage of the Department's *(a)* implemented and *(b)* planned computer systems use open source software; and what plans are in place to raise this level. [195665]

Charlotte Atkins: At present, it is estimated that less than 1 per cent. of the Department's current or planned computer systems use open source software. The Department's procurement of software solutions follows the 'level playing field' Government OSS policy, which does not require the raising of levels of OSS usage in Government, rather that Government considers OSS solutions alongside proprietary ones in IT procurements and that contracts should be awarded on a value for money, case by case basis. The Government's OSS Policy can be viewed at www.govtalk.gov.uk.

Departmental Offices

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what the cost of *(a)* decoration and *(b)* refurbishment of the London offices of the Department was in each of the last four years. [196138]

Charlotte Atkins: Since the Department's inception in May 2002 expenditure on its London offices has been:

(£000) plus VAT

	2002-03	*2003-04*
(a) decoration:	nil	6,082
(b) refurbishment works	298,233	99,807

In 2003–04 the Department also paid £1,203,362 plus VAT towards the fit out works for two floors that it has leased in a building in the Victoria area.

Departmental Policies (South Dorset)

Jim Knight: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport if he will set out, with statistical evidence relating as closely as possible to the South Dorset constituency, the effects of changes to departmental policy since 1997 on the South Dorset constituency. [194965]

Charlotte Atkins: The Department for Transport has put in place a considerable programme of improvements across a wide range of transport policy areas since 1997. The South Dorset constituency will have benefited from these. For example, the injury totals for all road causalities in Great Britain fell from 327,803 in 1997 to 290,607 in 2003, and the numbers of children aged under 16 years killed or seriously injured on our roads fell from 6,452 in 1997 to 4,100 in 2003. On our railways, passenger kilometres have increased from 32.1 billion in 1996–7 to 40.9 billion in 2003–4, a rise of 27 per cent. In terms of improvements to air quality, emissions of the UK's two main pollutants—nitrous oxides and particles—fell by 31 per cent. and 27 per cent. respectively between 1997 and 2002.

The funding provided direct to Dorset county council, which includes the South Dorset area, for local transport over the past five years is set out in the following table. It has been for Dorset county council to determine how that allocation has been spent, in line with their local transport plan and their priorities.

£million

Dorset	*2000-01*	*2001-02*	*2002-03*	*2003-04*	*2004-05*
Block	0.952	2.628	3.257	3.247	3.016
Maintenance	1.645	5.807	6.218	6.444	7.437
Total	2.597	8.435	9.475	9.691	10.453

The Neighbourhood Statistics Service provides a wide range of statistical information at parliamentary constituency level, taken from the 2001 census and other sources. This service is available on the National Statistics website at http://neighbourhood.statistics.gov.uk./.

Departmental Publications

Mr. Bellingham: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what his Department's target is for the interval between publication of *(a)* departmental announcements and documents and *(b)* material published by public bodies for which his Department has oversight and their posting online; and what the average interval was in the latest year for which figures are available. [195394]

Charlotte Atkins: The Department aims to publish statements, announcements and associated materials to the DfT website (www.dft.gov.uk) within 30 minutes of their release into the public domain. We achieve this in the majority of cases (over 95 per cent.) and this target is frequently exceeded. Press notices are published automatically as they are released.

Where documents are not embargoed under a timed release, the aim is to publish the documents to the DfT website on the same day as they are released into the public domain. Practice across the Department's Executive Agencies generally mirrors the Departments although most aim for same day rather than 30-minute publishing.

It is not possible to provide figures, which demonstrate the average interval between documents being published and appearing online, as not all publications are published centrally and not all are associated with identified statements and announcements.

Lighthouses

John Thurso: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport how many people were employed by *(a)* the Northern Lighthouse Board, *(b)* Trinity House and *(c)* the Commissioners of Irish Lights in each of the last 10 financial years; what the (i) role and (ii) terms of reference of each body are; and what the expenditure of each body was in each year. [197346]

Mr. Jamieson: The information requested is set out below:

Financial year	*Average employees (including part-time)*	*Operating costs (£ millions)*
(a) Northern Lighthouse Board		
1994–95	447	19.1
1995–96	430	18.7
1996–97	416	18.7
1997–98	405	18.4
1998–09	402	18.9
1999–2000	393	20.4
2000–01	379	21.9
2001–02	373	23.8
2002–03	355	19.9
2003–04	357	21.1
(b) Trinity House Lighthouse Service		
1994–95	687	29.8
1995–96	643	28.9
1996–97	602	29.6
1997–98	555	27.7
1998–09	499	27.2
1999–2000	466	26.7
2000–01	450	28
2001–02	439	29.6
2002–03	438	26
2003–04	421	27.9
(c) Commissioners of Irish Lights		
1994–95	646	15.5
1995–96	624	16.2
1996–97	573	16.0
1997–98	546	16.7
1998–09	501	15.4
1999–2000	511	15.7
2000–01	529	16.8
2001–02	515	16.4
2002–03	453	15.9
2003–04	419	17.1

All the figures in the table are cash prices

The role and terms of reference of the General Lighthouse Authorities is to provide and maintain aids to navigation around the coastline of the UK, Ireland, the Channel Islands and Gibraltar and to deliver a reliable, efficient and cost effective service for the benefit and safety of all mariners. The Trinity House Lighthouse Service provides the service for coastlines of England and Wales, the Northern Lighthouse Board for Scotland and the Isle of Man, and the Commissioners of Irish Lights for the whole of Ireland as an all Ireland body.

Road Accidents

Mr. Robathan: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport how many fatal road accidents in each year between 2000 and 2004 involved drivers that were foreign visitors, broken down by nationality of driver concerned. [198561]

Mr. Jamieson: The information requested is not available.

Road Safety

Mr. Ben Chapman: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport if he will make a statement on road safety in Wirral, South. [198938]

Mr. Jamieson: The Government are committed to helping local highway authorities play their part in delivering the national casualty reduction targets by 2010. The local highway authority has invested £1.1 million in road safety initiatives in Wirral, including £150,000 on traffic signal improvements in Wirral, South.

Roads

Mr. Marshall: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what plans he has to improve *(a)* maintenance, *(b)* signage and *(c)* markings on (i) trunk roads and (ii) motorways; and if he will make a statement. [197649]

Mr. Jamieson: This Government have made the maintenance of trunk roads and motorways in England their first investment priority for strategic roads. The Highways Agency aims to carry out the right maintenance treatment at the right time in order to minimise costs and delays to traffic. Signage and markings are maintained in accordance with the Highways Agency's standards and guidance, which are kept under review.

Select Committee Recommendations

Mr. Allen: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport how many recommendations by parliamentary select committees have been adopted by his Department since June 2001. [197777]

Charlotte Atkins: Select committee reports are given very careful consideration by the Department's Ministers. Since 29 May 2002, when this Department was formed, several committees of both Houses have made recommendations on matters for which the Department for Transport is responsible. Select committee reports and their responses are a matter of public record.

South West Trains

Mr. Hancock: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport pursuant to the answer of 21 October 2004, *Official Report*, columns 871–74W, on South West Trains, what information the Strategic Rail Authority received from South West Trains concerning *(a)* the dates of the consultation exercise and *(b)* details of the representations they received; and if he will make a statement. [197684]

Mr. McNulty: South West Trains (SWT) was not required to advise the Strategic Rail Authority (SRA) of the dates of its consultation. SWT provided the SRA with a summary of the responses to its consultation between April and May 2004 and a copy has been placed in the Libraries of the House.

Thameslink 2000

Mr. Dismore: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport if he will make a statement on the future of the Thameslink 2000 project. [198136]

Mr. McNulty: This project requires a number of different statutory approvals from the Department and from the Office of the Deputy Prime Minister. Following a public inquiry between June 2000 and May 2001 decisions were deferred pending the resolution of three issues identified by the Inspector relating to deficiencies in the design of the scheme in central London.

Now that Network Rail has submitted further planning and listed building consent applications to address those issues, we are considering with ODPM whether to re-open the earlier inquiry and, if so, what its scope should be.

Train Operating Companies

Mr. Marshall: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport how much compensation has been paid to each train operating company in each of the last five years. [197650]

Mr. McNulty: The payments that are made to train operating companies (TOCs) are franchise payments in accordance with their contracts. Net franchise payments to TOCs are published in the Strategic Rail Authority's annual reports, copies of which are in the Libraries of the House.

TransPennine Express

Mr. Grogan: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport how much public subsidy was provided to the operator of the TransPennine Express franchise in each year since it was originally granted; and what the *(a)* punctuality and *(b)* reliability figures were for the operator of the TransPennine Express franchise in each of these years. [198786]

Mr. McNulty: The TransPennine Express franchise commenced on 1 February 2004. Details of the subsidy payments made and due to be made to each train operating company are presented in the Strategic Rail Authority's (SRA's) Annual Reports. Punctuality and reliability figures are presented in the SRA's Quarterly National Rail Trends. Copies of both documents are in the Libraries of the House.

Unstaffed Stations

Mr. Grogan: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what requirements on franchisees to communicate information on delays to trains to passengers waiting at unstaffed train stations are planned. [198782]

Mr. McNulty: All franchised train operators are required by their franchise agreements to provide passengers with accurate and timely information about delays, cancellations and disruptions. Most have installed public address systems to enable this information to be provided to passengers waiting at unstaffed stations. Where these are not provided, telephone information points are available at the stations which enable passengers to ask the nearest control centre for information about train running.

TREASURY

Cancer

Mr. Hoyle: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer how many people are suffering from cancer in *(a)* Chorley and *(b)* the North West. [198936]

Mr. Timms: The information requested falls within the responsibility of the National Statistician, who has been asked to reply.

Letter from Len Cook to Mr. Lindsay Hoyle, dated 17 November 2004:

As National Statistician, I have been asked to reply to your recent question concerning how many people are suffering from cancer in *(a)* Chorley and *(b)* North West. (198936)

Figures on the number of people suffering from cancer at any point in time are not routinely calculated for England as a whole, or for areas within England. Available figures relate to newly diagnosed cases in each year and are for England and Government Office Regions only. The latest available figures are for the year 2001. These were published in "Cancer statistics: registrations, England 2001. Series MB1 no.32. London: The Stationery Office, 2004" on the National Statistics website at: http://www.statistics.gov.uk/downloads/theme_health/MB1_32.pdf

There were 32,533 newly diagnosed cases of cancer in the North West in 2001 (based on International Classification of Diseases Tenth Revision codes C00-C97 excluding C44).

European Social Chapter

Keith Vaz: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what the breakdown is by sector of the change in numbers of jobs in the United Kingdom since the UK adopted the European Social Chapter. [198855]

Mr. Timms: The information requested falls within the responsibility of the National Statistician, who has been asked to reply.

Letter from Len Cook to Mr. Keith Vaz, dated 17 November 2004:

As National Statistician, I have been asked to reply to your recent Parliamentary Question about change in numbers of jobs in the UK since the UK adoption of the social chapter, by sector. (198855)

The UK signed-up to the social chapter on 2nd October 1997, following its endorsement of the Treaty of Amsterdam. On 1st May 1999, it came into force having been ratified by all the member States.

The attached table shows the information requested, relating to change in jobs by sector, between the closest data reference points to these dates, September 1997 and June 1999, and the latest data reference point, June 2004.

Change in numbers of jobs by sector: September 1997 to June 2004

United Kingdom (Thousand) seasonally adjusted

SIC 92 sections	*All jobs A-O*	*Agriculture and Fishing A-B*	*Energy and Water C, E*	*Manufacturing D*	*Construction F*
September 1997	28,428	583	224	4,490	1,779
June 1999	29,032	516	212	4,374	1,835
June 2004	30,324	420	203	3,648	2,117
Change from September 1997 to June 2004	1,896	−163	−21	−842	338
Change from June 1999 to June 2004	1,292	−96	−9	−726	282

United Kingdom (Thousand) seasonally adjusted

SIC 92 sections	*Distribution, Hotels and Restaurants G, H*	*Transport and Comms. I*	*Finance and Business Services J-K*	*Admin. Education and Health L, N*	*Other Services O*
September 1997	6,621	1,603	5,023	6,492	1,613
June 1999	6,683	1,692	5,345	6,670	1,704
June 2004	7,004	1,796	5,849	7,398	1,890
Change from September 1997 to June 2004	383	193	826	906	277
Change from June 1999 to June 2004	321	104	504	728	186

Source:
Workforce jobs

Influenza Deaths

Mr. McLoughlin: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer how many people aged 65 years or over died of influenza in *(a)* West Derbyshire, *(b)* the East Midlands and *(c)* the UK in each year since 1997. [198366]

Mr. Timms: The information requested falls within the responsibility of the National Statistician, who has been asked to reply.

Letter from Len Cook to Mr. Patrick McLoughlin, dated 17 November 2004:

As National Statistician, I have been asked to reply to your recent question asking how many people aged 65 years or over have died of influenza in *(a)* West Derbyshire, *(b)* East Midlands, *(c)* the UK in each year since 1997. (198366)

The most recent year for which figures are available is 2003. Figures for East Midlands Government Office Region and the United Kingdom are provided in the attached table. There were fewer than five deaths from influenza in each year from 1997 to 2003 in West Derbyshire Parliamentary Constituency and in each of the local authorities in which it is located (Amber Valley and

Derbyshire Dales). There were a total of 8 deaths in Amber Valley and 6 deaths in Derbyshire Dales between 1997 and 2003. Figures cannot be provided for individual years or for the parliamentary constituency because of the risk of disclosure.

Deaths from influenza[1] for those aged 65 and over, East Midlands Government Office Region[2] and the United Kingdom, 1997 to 2003[3]

Number of deaths	*East Midlands*	*United Kingdom*
1997	21	413
1998	13	129
1999	60	598
2000	43	630
2001	5	27
2002	*	34
2003	*	64

* = Fewer than five deaths.

[1] Deaths with an underlying cause of influenza defined using the International Classification of Diseases, Ninth Revision (ICD-9) code 487 for the years 1997 to 2000 and, for the years 2001 to 2003, the International Classification of Diseases, Tenth Revision (ICD-10) codes J10 and J11.

[2] Deaths of usual residents of this area.

[3] Figures are for deaths occurring in each calendar year, except for data for Scotland and Northern Ireland included in the United Kingdom totals. These are deaths registered in each calendar year.

National Lottery

Kate Hoey: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what the annual tax revenue to the Treasury from the National Lottery has been in each year since 1994. [198333]

Mr. Timms: Details of tax revenue from the National Lottery can be obtained from the Betting and Gaming Bulletin, published monthly by HM Customs and Excise, which provides a full historic series of data on the revenues collected from betting, gaming and lottery duties. The Bulletin is available on application to Customs and Excise or online from www.uktradeinfo.com

Unemployment

Paul Farrelly: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what changes have taken place in the numbers of people classified as long-term unemployed in Newcastle-under-Lyme since 1997. [198581]

Mr. Timms: The information requested falls within the responsibility of the National Statistician, who has been asked to reply.

Letter from Len Cook to Mr. Paul Farrelly, dated 17 November 2004:

As National Statistician, I have been asked to reply to your Parliamentary Question about unemployment. (198581)

The Office for National Statistics compiles statistics of unemployment from the Labour Force Survey following International Labour Organisation definitions. However, the Labour Force Survey sample size is too small to give reliable estimates of long-term unemployment in the Newcastle-under-Lyme Constituency.

The Office for National Statistics also compiles statistics of those claiming Jobseeker's Allowance for local areas including parliamentary constituencies.

The attached table gives the annual average number of people resident in the Newcastle-under-Lyme constituency claiming Jobseeker's Allowance benefits for over 12 months for each year from 1997 to 2003.

JSA claimants resident in the Newcastle-Under-Lyme parliamentary constituency claiming for over 12 months

Annual averages	*Claiming over 12 months*
1997	435
1998	165
1999	180
2000	140
2001	120
2002	115
2003	95

Source:

Jobcentre Plus administrative system

Tom Cox: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer how many people living in the London borough of Wandsworth were unemployed in each of the last three years; how many were *(a)* long-term unemployed and *(b)* youth unemployed; and if he will make a statement. [198887]

Mr. Timms: The information requested falls within the responsibility of the National Statistician, who has been asked to reply.

Letter from Len Cook to Mr. Tom Cox, dated 17 November 2004:

As National Statistician, I have been asked to reply to your recent Parliamentary Question asking how many people living in the London Borough of Wandsworth were unemployed in each of the last three years; of these figures how many were *(a)* long-term unemployed and *(b)* youth unemployed. (198887)

Table 1 overleaf provides the information requested for the London Borough of Wandsworth, for the twelve-month periods ending in February each year from 2001 to 2003.

These estimates from the Labour Force Survey (LFS) are, as with any sample survey, subject to sampling variability.

The Office for National Statistics also compiles statistics of those claiming Jobseeker's Allowance (JSA) for local areas. Table 2 overleaf gives the total number of all JSA claimants resident, the total claiming for over 12 months and claimants aged 18 to 24 years old annual averages in the London Borough of Wandsworth, for each year since 2001 to 2003.

Table 1—Unemployment in the London borough of Wandsworth

Thousand

12 months ending in February each year	*Total*	*Long term unemployed [1]*	*Unemployed people aged 16–24*
2001	9	3	2
2002	10	2	2
2003	11	2	4

[1] People unemployed for over 12 months

Note:

Estimates are based on small sample sizes and are therefore subject to a higher than usual degree of sampling variability. They should therefore be treated with caution and, in particular, changes from year-to-year should not be used in isolation from the figures from a run of years.

Source:

ONS Labour Force Survey

Table 2—JSA claimants resident in the London borough of Wandsworth—Annual averages

	All Claimants	Claimants over 12 months[1]	Claimants aged 18–24 years[1]
2001	5,180	1,175	925
2002	5,685	1,135	1,115
2003	5,650	1,095	1,175

[1] Computerised claims only

Source:

Jobcentre Plus administrative system

Tom Cox: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what the level of unemployment in the London borough of Wandsworth has been in each year since 1997. [198190]

Mr. Timms: The information requested falls within the responsibility of the National Statistician, who has been asked to reply.

Letter from Len Cook to Mr. Tom Cox, dated 17 November 2004:

As National Statistician, I have been asked to reply to your recent Parliamentary Question about unemployment in the London Borough of Wandsworth in each year since 1997.(198190)

Table 1 overleaf gives estimates of the number of unemployed people resident in the Wandsworth Local Authority area for the 12 month periods ending in February each year from 1997 to 2003.

These estimates from the Labour Force Survey (LFS) are, as with any sample survey, subject to sampling variability. In particular, year to year changes should be treated with great caution.

The Office for National Statistics also compiles statistics of those claiming Jobseeker's Allowance (JSA) for local areas. Table 2 overleaf gives the annual average number of people resident in the Wandsworth Local Authority area claiming Jobseeker's Allowance benefits for each year from 1997 to 2003.

Table 1: Unemployment in the London borough of Wandsworth—12 months ending in February each year, 1997–2003

Thousand

	Number
1997	15
1998	10
1999	7
2000	7
2001	9
2002	10
2003	11

Source:

ONS: Labour Force Survey

Table 2: JSA claimants in the London borough of Wandsworth, 1997–2003

	Annual averages
1997	10,210
1998	7,896
1999	6,524
2000	5,555
2001	5,268
2002	5,795
2003	5,733

Source:

Jobcentre Plus administrative system

Paul Farrelly: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what the peak year was for the unemployment rate in Newcastle-under-Lyme since 1979; and how many people were unemployed there in that year. [198534]

Mr. Timms: The information requested falls within the responsibility of the National Statistician, who has been asked to reply.

Letter from Len Cook to Mr. Paul Farrelly, dated 17 November 2004:

As National Statistician, I have been asked to reply to your recent Parliamentary Question about unemployment in the Newcastle-under-Lyme Parliamentary Constituency. (198534)

Statistics of unemployment for Newcastle-under-Lyme Parliamentary Constituency extend back only to 1992. However, figures for claimants of Jobseeker's Allowance (JSA) in the constituency, which extend back to 1983 on a consistent basis, show that the highest level was recorded in September 1984, when there were 4,449 claimants. This compares with the most recent figure of 711 claimants in October 2004. Comparisons over this period for JSA claimants expressed as rates are not available.

Average Earnings

Paul Farrelly: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what estimates he has made of *(a)* changes in the level of average earnings of full-time employees in Newcastle-under-Lyme and *(b)* the proportion of national average earnings which these levels represented in each year since 1997. [198712]

Mr. Timms: The information requested falls within the responsibility of the National Statistician, who has been asked to reply.

Letter from Len Cook to Mr. Paul Farrelly, dated 17 November 2004:

As National Statistician, I have been asked to reply to your recent Parliamentary Question asking what estimates have been made of *(a)* changes in level of average earnings of full-time employees in Newcastle-under-Lyme and *(b)* the percentage of national average earnings which these levels represent in each year since 1997. (198712)

Average earnings are estimated from the Annual Survey of Hours and Earnings (ASHE) and are provided for full-time employees on adult rates of pay whose pay was unaffected by absence during the pay period, by their place of work. This is the standard definition used for ASHE tables. The ASHE does not collect data on the self employed and people who do unpaid work.

I attach a table showing the average gross weekly wage for full time employees in the Newcastle-under-Lyme area for 1998 to 2004. Data for 1997 is not available yet.

The ASHE, carried out in April of each year, is the most comprehensive source of earnings information in the United Kingdom. It is a one per cent sample of all employees who are members of pay-as-you-earn (PAYE) schemes, but because of its sampling frame, it has difficulty capturing data on people with very low pay. It is therefore likely to under-represent relatively low paid staff earning below the tax threshold.

The Annual Survey of Hours and Earnings publication criteria ensures that all estimates are undisclosive. A number of estimates have been removed from the published tables for these reasons.

Average gross weekly earnings for Newcastle-under-Lyme and the United Kingdom

	Median	CV%	% change	Mean	CV%	% change
Newcastle-under-Lyme						
1998	315.3	[1]9.4	—	352.1	[1]4.3	—
1999	292.9	[1]6.1	−7.1	334.1	[1]4.2	−5.1
2000	310.3	[1]7.4	5.9	356.3	[1]5.7	6.7
2001	302.9	[1]8.3	−2.4	356.3	[1]5.4	0.0
2002	320.7	[1]8.0	5.9	366.2	[1]4.5	2.8
2003	334.8	[1]7.2	4.4	384.3	[1]4.3	4.9
2004 2	362.5	[1]8.7	8.3	416.3	[1]4.1	8.3
2004 3	363.9	[1]8.7	—	414.9	[1]4.1	—
United Kingdom						
1998	334.9	[1]0.2	—	392.5	[1]0.3	—
1999	345.5	[1]0.1	3.2	407.8	[1]0.2	3.9
2000	359.0	[1]0.3	3.9	425.1	[1]0.2	4.2
2001	375.9	[1]0.3	4.7	449.7	[1]0.2	5.8
2002	390.9	[1]0.3	4.0	472.1	[1]0.3	5.0
2003	404.0	[1]0.2	3.3	487.1	[1]0.3	3.2
2004[2]	423.0	[1]0.2	4.7	506.9	[1]0.3	4.1
2004[3]	422.1	[1]0.2	—	504.9	[1]0.3	—

Newcastle-under-Lyme gross weekly earnings as a percentage of UK gross weekly earnings

	Median	Mean
1998	94.1	89.7
1999	84.8	81.9
2000	86.4	83.8
2001	80.6	79.2
2002	82.0	77.6
2003	82.9	78.9
2004[2]	85.7	82.1
2004[3]	86.2	82.2

[1] Key to quality:
Precise: CV < = 5%
Reasonably precise: CV > 5% and < = 10%
Acceptable: CV > 10% and < = 20%

[2] Data for 2004 excluding supplementary surveys for comparison with 2003.

[3] Data for 2004 including supplementary surveys.

Note:

Data for 1997 is currently only available from a different survey, which is discontinuous with the Annual Survey of Hours and Earnings (ASHE). Data from ASHE will not be available until later 2004 following a quality assurance process.

Source:

Annual Survey of Hours and Earnings, ONS.

The tables provide data on the average gross weekly earnings for full-time employees on adult rates of pay whose pay for the pay period was unaffected by absence, who worked in Newcastle-under-Lyme and for the United Kingdom, for the years 1998 to 2004.

Notes:

(a) The Annual Survey of Hours and Earnings, (ASHE), carried out in April of each year, is the most comprehensive source of earnings information in the United Kingdom. It is a 1 per cent. sample of all employees who are members of pay-as-you-earn (PAYE) schemes.

(b) The ASHE replaces the New Earnings Survey (NES) from October 2004. The main difference between the ASHE and NES being that estimates are weighted to population totals from the Labour Force Survey.

(c) In addition the 2004 ASHE included supplementary information to improve its coverage. This means that the results for the 2004 ASHE are discontinuous with earlier results. However, in order to compare results a second set of results have been given for 2004 that exclude these supplementary information.

(d) Average gross weekly earnings for Adult Full-Time Employees whose pay for the survey period was not affected by absence.

Bank Accounts

Jon Trickett: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what proportion of the population of *(a)* Hemsworth constituency, *(b)* the Yorkshire and Humber area and *(c)* England have no bank account. [198735]

Mr. Timms: Estimates from the 2002–03 Family Resources Survey show that 9 per cent. of households in the Yorkshire and Humber area have no account and 7 per cent. of households in England have no account. There is no data available at constituency level.

Central Government Administration

Mr. Amess: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what discussions he has had with Cabinet colleagues regarding levels of central Government administration. [198799]

Mr. Boateng: As part of the 2004 Spending Review the Chancellor had discussions with Cabinet colleagues about the scope for releasing resources in their departments to invest in essential, frontline services, including through real terms reductions in administration budgets.

Child Trust Fund

Paul Farrelly: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer how many families he estimates will benefit from the Child Trust Fund in *(a)* Newcastle-under-Lyme and *(b)* the country as a whole when it is introduced. [198709]

Mr. Timms: All children born since 1 September 2002 in families awarded child benefit will receive a Child Trust Fund. In 2005–06 around 700,000 families will benefit from the Child Trust Fund across the country as a whole. No estimate is available of the number of families benefiting in Newcastle-under-Lyme. However, there were around 8,000 new births across Staffordshire in 2002.

The CTF is intended to encourage parents and children to develop the savings habit. It will ensure that every child, whatever their family background, will have access to a stock of assets from the age of 18, so they can invest in their future.

It will also help children and their parents to understand the benefits of saving and investment and how to engage with financial institutions.

Children (North Somerset)

Brian Cotter: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer how many children between the ages of (i) birth and four years and (ii) five and seven years live in *(a)* the constituency of Weston-Super-Mare and *(b)* North Somerset local education authority. [198089]

Mr. Timms: The information requested falls within the responsibility of the National Statistician, who has been asked to reply.

Letter from John Pullinger to Mr. Brian Cotter, dated 17 November 2004:

The National Statistician has been asked to reply to your question concerning how many children live in the constituency of Weston-Super-Mare and North Somerset Local Education Authority between the ages of birth and four years and between five and seven years. I am replying in his absence. (198089)

In the Weston-Super-Mare Parliamentary Constituency, there were an estimated 5,554 children aged 0 to 4 years old and 3,393 children aged 5 to 7 years old on Census day 29 April 2001. Annual mid-year estimates are not currently estimated for parliamentary constituencies.

In the North Somerset Local Education Authority there were an estimated 10,300 children aged between 0 and 4 years old and 6,800 children aged 5 to 7 years old in mid 2003.

Commencement of Legislation

Brian White: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what pieces of legislation passed in the last 30 years that the Department is responsible for remain to be brought into force, broken down by year of enactment. [195615]

Mr. Timms: The available information is as follows:

1979

Sections 59 (Restrictions on putting export goods alongside for loading) and 62(2) (Information, documentation etc as to export goods) Customs and Excise Management Act

1994

Section 51A (Co-owners etc of buildings and land) Value Added Tax Act

2000

Section 104 (Control of business transfers) Financial Services and Markets Act insofar as it relates to banks

2003

Section 189 (CHP exemption based on current efficiency) Finance Act

2004

Section 4 (Duty stamps for spirits etc) Finance Act

There are likely to be other legislative provisions passed in the last 30 years that the Chancellor's Departments are responsible for and which remain to be brought into force. However, comprehensive information could be provided only at disproportionate cost. In the case of the Inland Revenue, legislative provisions dealing with revenue matters are normally only included in Finance Acts where it is necessary. But, rarely, provisions may be included in anticipation that particular events will happen and until they do the legislation may not yet have come into force.

Consultants

Mr. Weir: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer how much his Department spent in each year since 2002 on employing *(a)* external management consultants and *(b)* external human resources consultants; and if he will make a statement. [195759]

Mr. Timms: I refer the hon. Member to the answer I gave on 25 October 2004, *Official Report*, columns 1055–56W to the Member for New Forest, East (Dr. Lewis).

Earnings

Denzil Davies: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what his estimate is of the number of *(a)* full-time and *(b)* part-time employees in the United Kingdom in each of the last five available years. [198170]

Mr. Timms: The information requested falls within the responsibility of the National Statistician, who has been asked to reply.

Letter from Len Cook to Mr. Denzil Davies, dated 17 November 2004:

As National Statistician, I have been asked to reply to your Parliamentary Question about employment. (198170)

The attached table gives estimates of the number of full-time and part-time employees resident in the United Kingdom for the three months ending in August each year from 2000 to 2004.

These estimates from the Labour Force Survey are, as with any sample survey, subject to sampling variability.

Full-time and part-time employees[1] United Kingdom—Three months ending in August each year from 2000 to 2004 seasonally adjusted

Thousand

	Full-time	*Part-time*
2000	17,912	6,123
2001	18,096	6,096
2002	18,115	6,250
2003	18,058	6,312
2004	18,176	6,384

[1] Full-time and part-time is based on self-classification by survey respondents.

Source:

ONS Labour Force Survey.

Mr. Moore: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer how many and what proportion of full-time workers in *(a)* Scotland, *(b)* each of the unitary local authority areas in Scotland and *(c)*, the United Kingdom have gross hourly earnings (i) including and (ii) excluding overtime below (A) £7.44, (B) £5.59 and (C) £4.50, broken down by (1) male, (2) female and (3) all workers. [198284]

Mr. Timms: The information requested falls within the responsibility of the National Statistician, who has been asked to reply.

Letter from Len Cook to Mr. Michael Moore, dated 17 November 2004:

As National Statistician, I have been asked to reply to your recent Parliamentary Question asking how many and what proportion of full-time workers in *(a)* Scotland, *(b)* each of the unitary authority areas in Scotland and *(c)* the United Kingdom, have gross hourly earnings (i) including and (ii) excluding overtime below (A) 7.44, (B) 5.59 and (C) 4.50, broken down by (1) male, (2) female and (3) all workers . (198284)

Average earnings are estimated from the Annual Survey of Hours and Earnings and are provided for full-time employees on adult rates of pay whose pay was unaffected by absence during the pay period, by their place of work. This is the standard definition used for Annual Survey of Hours and Earnings tables. The Annual Survey of Hours and Earnings does not collect data on the self employed and people who do unpaid work.

I am placing in the House of Commons Library, tables showing the counts and proportion of full-time workers for the United Kingdom, Scotland and Scottish local authorities earning below the stated hourly pay bands.

The Annual Survey of Hours and Earnings, carried out in April of each year, is the most comprehensive source of earnings information in the United Kingdom. It is a one per cent. sample of all employees who are members of pay-as-you-earn schemes, but because of its sampling frame, it has difficulty capturing data on people with very low pay. It is therefore likely to under-represent relatively low paid staff earning below the tax threshold.

The Annual Survey of Hours and Earnings publication criteria ensures that all estimates are undisclosive. A number of estimates have been removed from the published tables for these reasons.

Electoral Register

Mr. Evans: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer (1) how many people living abroad at the last General Election were eligible to vote in the Election; and how many of these voted; [198641]

(2) how many people between the ages of 18 and 24 years in the United Kingdom are expected to be eligible to vote at the next General Election. [198642]

Mr. Timms: The information requested falls within the responsibility of the National Statistician, who has been asked to reply.

Letter Len Cook to Mr. Nigel Evans, dated 17 November 2004:

As National Statistician I have been asked to reply to your questions concerning how many people living abroad at the last General Election were eligible to vote in the British General Election and how many of those voted; and how many people between the ages of 18 and 24 years in the United Kingdom are eligible to vote at the next General Election. (198641, 198642)

There were 11,506 registered overseas electors as at 10 October 2000, the last date that figures were collated before the most recent General Election on 7 June 2001. Details of who voted are not available, consequently we are not able to say what proportion of the overseas electorate voted.

Data are not available on how many people aged between 18 to 24 will be eligible to vote in the next General Election. Age information for those registered to vote is not recorded, other than information on the number of "attainers", that is those that will reach the voting age of 18 within two years. The estimated population aged between 18 and 24 in the United Kingdom as at 30 June 2003 was 5,245,300. However this does not represent the number of people aged 18 to 24 that are eligible to vote for various reasons, including non-registration.

Employment (Rhondda)

Chris Bryant: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer how many people in each ward of the Rhondda are *(a)* employed and *(b)* unemployed. [198299]

Mr. Timms: The information requested falls within the responsibility of the National Statistician, who has been asked to reply.

Letter from Len Cook to Mr. Chris Bryant, dated 17 November 2004:

As National Statistician, I have been asked to reply to your Parliamentary Question about employment and unemployment in each ward of the Rhondda Parliamentary Constituency. (198299)

The data, from the 2001 Population Census for people aged 16 to 74, are shown in the attached table.

As the ward level information requested is not available from the Labour Force Survey, information from the Census has been given in the reply.

The figures have been extracted from table KS09a on the 2001 Census Key Statistics for Output Areas in England and Wales CD, which is available in the House of Commons library.

Employment and unemployment among people aged 16–74 resident in wards of the Rhondda parliamentary constituency

Thousand

	All people	*Employment*	*Unemployment*
Rhondda; Cynon; Taff/ Rhondda; Cynon; Taf	165,822	85,380	5,927
Rhondda parliamentary constituency	50,993	24,125	1,983
Cwm Clydach	2,163	1,031	86
Cymmer	4,185	1,992	185
Ferndale	3,154	1,528	124
Llwyn-y-pia	1,590	722	59
Maerdy	2,483	937	124
Pentre	3,905	1,994	115
Pen-y-graig	4,069	1,935	157
Forth	4,252	2,193	152
Tonypandy	2,498	1,308	92
Trealaw	2,758	1,232	117
Treherbert	4,150	1,786	170
Treorchy	5,656	2,853	206
Tylorstown	3,310	1,333	157
Ynyshir	2,418	1,121	89
Ystrad	4,402	2,160	150

Source:
2001 Census of Population: April 2001.

Foreign Debt

Mr. Dismore: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer which countries have had 100 per cent. of debt to the UK written off. [198408]

Mr. Timms: The UK is committed to provide 100 per cent. debt relief for all 42 HIPCs to support a sustainable exit from debt. This is done by writing off or holding in trust their debts. Under the Enhanced HIPC Initiative, at Completion Point the UK offers 100 per cent. stock relief on all bilateral debt owed by eligible HIPCs. 15 countries have reached Completion Point, receiving a total debt write-off of £989 million from the UK. A further 12 have reached Decision Point and will receive 100 per cent. flow relief until such time as they reach Completion Point.

The UK's hold-in-trust policy means that any debt service payments received from indebted countries yet to enter the Initiative will be returned to the countries once they reach Decision Point. The UK will not benefit financially from their payments.

Details of debt forgiveness by the UK through the Export Credits Guarantee Department (ECGD) can be found at: http://www.ecgd.gov.uk/index/susdev_home/susdev_debt.htm

Iraq

Dr. Cable: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what the Government's most recent estimate is of the cost of the British occupation of Iraq in each month since the start of the conflict, broken down by *(a)* military and *(b)* reconstruction costs. [197247]

Harry Cohen: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer (1) how much of the £3.8 billion in special reserve to cover the cost of operations in Iraq has been spent to date; when he expects it to be fully expended; what plans he has to increase the sum; for what period he plans to allocate further funds; whether it will be maintained and accounted for under budget heads which will enable the extra costs incurred to be clearly discernible; and if he will make a statement; [197618]

(2) what the *(a)* total cost to date and *(b)* cost in each year since the start of the war to the Exchequer has been of the war and subsequent activity in Iraq, separately identifying costs which would have been expended on other purposes but have been redirected to purposes in connection with Iraq; and if he will make a statement. [197620]

Mr. Boateng: In Budget 2003 the Chancellor set aside £3 billion as a Special Reserve to cover the cost of operations in Iraq. £1 billion was drawn down by the Ministry of Defence in the Spring Supplementary Estimate for 2002–03.

The remaining £2 billion of this Special Reserve was carried forward to 2003–04. The Ministry of Defence drew down £1,539 million in the 2003–04 Winter and Spring Supplementary Estimates.

In the PBR 2003 the Chancellor announced a further £500 million for the Special Reserve in the financial year 2003–04 and a further £300 million for 2004–05 as a prudent allowance to cover Iraq and our continuing international commitment to the war on terrorism.

At the Madrid Donors' Conference in October 2003, the Government announced a total UK pledge of £544 million towards the reconstruction effort in Iraq up to March 2006.

Job Creation (Stroud)

Mr. Drew: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer how many jobs have been created in the Stroud constituency since *(a)* 1997 and *(b)* 2001. [198499]

Mr. Timms: The information requested falls within the responsibility of the National Statistician, who has been asked to reply.

Letter from Len Cook to Mr. David Drew, dated 17 November 2004:

As National Statistician, I have been asked to reply to your Parliamentary Question about jobs created in Stroud. (198499)

While statistics of new jobs created are not available explicitly, statistics from surveys enable comparisons to be made of net changes in numbers of jobs from year to year.

The attached table shows the information requested, relating to jobs in Stroud, for 1997 and 2001.

Number of employee jobs[1] with workplace in Stroud parliamentary constituency: 1997 and 2001

Number of employee jobs	*Total*
1997	33,700
2001	34,400
Change from 1997 to 2001[2]	700

[1] Excludes self-employed jobs.

[2] The 1997 to 2001 change has been rounded to the nearest hundred separately from rounded levels for 1997 and 2001.

Source:

1997; Annual Employment Survey, rescaled 2001; Annual Business Inquiry (ABI)

Manufacturing

Adam Price: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer how many jobs have been lost in the manufacturing sector in each component part of the UK in each month since the beginning of 2001. [198984]

Mr. Timms: The information requested falls within the responsibility of the National Statistician, who has been asked to reply.

Letter from Len Cook to Mr. Adam Price, dated 17 November 2004:

As National Statistician, I have been asked to reply to your recent Parliamentary Question about numbers of jobs in the manufacturing sector in each component part of the UK. (198984)

While statistics of jobs lost are not available explicitly, statistics from surveys enable comparisons to be made of net changes, in numbers of jobs.

The attached table shows quarterly changes in manufacturing jobs, between March 2001 and June 2004, for each country within the UK. Similar figures showing monthly changes are not available.

Change in numbers of manufacturing jobs[1] in the UK, by country: March 2001 to June 2004

Not seasonally adjusted (Thousand)

	United Kingdom	*England*	*Northern Ireland*	*Scotland*	*Wales*
Number of employee jobs					
March 2001	3,852	3,255	103	297	197
June 2001	3,802	3,210	102	295	195
September 2001	3,756	3,171	100	292	193
December 2001	3,696	3,121	99	285	191
March 2002	3,644	3,082	98	277	188
June 2002	3,599	3,041	97	275	186
September 2002	3,559	3,006	97	270	186
December 2002	3,510	2,966	96	264	185
March 2003	3,485	2,947	94	260	184
June 2003	3,455	2,921	93	258	183
September 2003	3,435	2,904	92	256	183
December 2003	3,410	2,883	91	256	180
March 2004	3,378	2,859	90	251	178
June 2004	3,362	2,841	89	252	179
Change2: quarter on previous quarter					
June 2001	−50	−45	−1	−1	−2
September 2001	−46	−39	−2	−4	−2
December 2001	−60	−50	−1	−7	−3
March 2002	−52	−40	−1	−8	−3
June 2002	−45	−41	0	−2	−2
September 2002	−40	−34	−1	−5	0

Change in numbers of manufacturing jobs[1] in the UK, by country: March 2001 to June 2004

Not seasonally adjusted (Thousand)

	United Kingdom	England	Northern Ireland	Scotland	Wales
December 2002	−48	−40	−1	−6	−1
March 2003	−25	−19	−2	−3	−1
June 2003	−30	−27	−1	−2	−1
September 2003	−20	−17	−1	−2	0
December 2003	−25	−21	−1	0	−3
March 2004	−32	−24	−1	−5	−2
June 2004	−17	−17	−1	1	1

[1] Excludes self-employed jobs.

[2] The 2001 to 2004 change has been rounded to the nearest thousand separately from rounded levels.

Source:

Employee jobs.

National Debt

Mr. Jenkins: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer (1) what the United Kingdom's national debt was *(a)* in total and *(b)* per capita in (i) 1996 and (ii) 2003; [198392]

(2) how much was spent on interest payments for the national debt in *(a)* 1996 and *(b)* 2003 (i) in total amount and (ii) per capita. [198393]

Mr. Timms: Figures for public sector net debt and central government debt interest payments in current prices are available on the Office for National Statistics website: http://www.statistics.gov.uk/StatBase/tsdtables1.asp?vlnk=fsf

Table 1.1 A: Public Sector Finances (series RUTN and RUTO) shows figures for public sector net debt in £ billion and as a percentage of GDP. Table 1.1C: Central Government (series NMFX) shows debt interest payments in £ billions.

Figures for mid-year population estimates are also available on the Office for National Statistics website: Mid-1996 population estimates are available on http://www.statistics.gov.uk/statbase/Expodata/Spreadsheets/D8588.xls Mid-2003 population estimates are available on http://www.statistics.gov.uk/statbase/Expodata/Spreadsheets/D8548.xls

Income Tax

Mr. Dismore: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer how much tax would be raised by introducing a new 50 per cent. tax band for those with incomes over £100,000 per annum; and if he will make a statement. [198168]

John Healey: Comprehensive information on additional full year yield/cost on income tax is available in the Library of the House. The information is based upon the Survey of Personal Incomes and excludes any estimate of behavioural response to the tax change.

Pension Funds (Dividend Taxation)

Tim Loughton: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer how much tax has been collected since 1997 from taxation of dividends from UK pension fund holdings. [198339]

Mr. Timms: None. Pension funds are exempt from tax and have never been liable to pay tax on the dividends that they receive.

Pensioners

Mr. Dismore: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer how many pensioners are paying income tax at *(a)* the basic rate and *(b)* the higher rate; and if he will make a statement. [198166]

John Healey: I refer my hon. Friend to the answer given by my right hon. Friend the Paymaster General to the hon. Member for Meriden (Mrs. Spelman) on 4 November 2004, *Official Report*, column 413W.

Private Finance Initiative

Mr. George Osborne: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he will list the private finance initiative arrangements in which the Department is engaged; what the total cost of each arrangement is *(a)* over its lifetime and *(b)* in each year of its operation; and how the arrangement appears in the Department's public accounts. [193975]

Mr. Boateng: Office accommodation at 1 Horse Guards Road was refurbished under a PFI scheme by Exchequer Partnership plc. For details of costs, I refer the hon. Gentleman to the answer given by the former Financial Secretary (Ruth Kelly) on 5 February 2002, *Official Report*, column 837W.

Road Traffic Accidents

Chris Ruane: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer how many *(a)* deaths and *(b)* serious injuries occurred in the UK as a result of incorrect servicing and repair of motor vehicles in each of the last 30 years. [198816]

Mr. Jamieson: I have been asked to reply.

The information requested is not available.

Tax Credits

Mr. Flight: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer how many individuals had not returned their tax credit renewal forms by the 30 September deadline; and what percentage this is of tax credit renewal forms sent out. [192800]

John Healey *[holding answer 21 October 2004]:* I refer the hon. Member to the answer given by my right hon. Friend the Paymaster General on 15 November 2004, *Official Report*, columns 946–48W to the hon. Members for Northavon (Mr. Webb) and for Yeovil (Mr. Laws).

Mr. Webb: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he will estimate the number of families claiming new tax credits that *(a)* needed to provide details for finalising a 2003–04 award, and if appropriate renewing a claim for 2004–05, *(b)* responded on, or before the 30 September deadline and *(c)* had awards stopped as a result of not responding by the 30 September deadline. [193663]

John Healey: I refer the hon. Member to the reply given to him by my right hon. Friend the Paymaster General on 15 November 2004, *Official Report*, columns 946–48W.

Mr. Webb: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer how many calls were made to the child and working tax credit helpline in each month since August 2003; and how many and what percentage of calls *(a)* were handled within 20 seconds, *(b)* were handled in more than 20 seconds, *(c)* reached an engaged tone and *(d)* were abandoned. [193924]

John Healey: The following figures cover the tax credit contact centres in Great Britain.

Table 1—Number of calls

Thousand

	Received[1]	*Handled within 20 seconds*[2]	*Handled in more than 20 seconds*	*Reaching engaged tone*	*Abandoned*[3]
September 2003	1,259	875	321	9	63
October 2003	1.139	983	121	4	35
November 2003	1,158	852	250	11	56
December 2003	902	728	150	9	24
January 2004	1,132	962	145	4	25
February 2004	1,087	1,004	61	5	21
March 2004	1,475	1,406	48	4	22
April 2004	1,869	1,662	162	13	44
May 2004	2,101	1,825	239	5	37
June 2004	2,321	1,956	330	6	34
July 2004	2,149	1,747	362	4	41
August 2004	1,936	1,755	158	4	23
September 2004	2,774	1,897	723	8	153

[1] Where the caller selected an option for the call steering menu and was put on a queue to speak to an adviser.

[2] Where the caller selected an option from the call steering menu, was put in a queue to speak to an adviser, and spoke to an adviser within 20 seconds of being put in that queue

[3] Where the caller selected an option from the call steering menu and was put in a queue to speak to an adviser but the call was terminated before the caller spoke to an adviser.

[4] As these calls did not reach a queue to speak to an adviser, it is not appropriate to express the numbers as a percentage of calls received.

Table 2—Percentage of calls received[1]

	Handled within 20 seconds[2]	*Handled in more than 20 seconds*	*Abandoned*[3]
September 2003	69	25	5
October 2003	86	11	3
November 2003	74	22	5
December 2003	81	17	3
January 2004	85	13	2
February 2004	92	6	2
March 2004	95	3	1
April 2004	89	9	2
May 2004	87	11	2
June 2004	84	14	1
July 2004	81	17	2
August 2004	91	8	1
September 2004	68	26	6

[1] Where the caller selected an option for the call steering menu and was put in a queue to speak to an adviser.

[2] Where the caller selected an option from the call steering menu, was put in a queue to speak to an adviser and spoke to an adviser within 20 seconds of being put in that queue.

[3] Where the caller selected an option from the call steering menu and was put in a queue to speak to an adviser but the call was terminated before the caller spoke to an adviser.

Anne Picking: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer how many overpayments of working families tax credit have been made; and how many of these payments the Tax Credit Office has admitted liability for. [195909]

John Healey: I refer my hon. Friend to the reply given by my right hon. Friend the Paymaster General on 15 November 2004, *Official Report*, columns 946–48W to the hon. Members for Northavon (Mr. Webb) and for Yeovil (Mr. Laws)

Mr. Frank Field: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer how long the period was, on average, between a claimant submitting a completed tax credit application form and their *(a)* being advised of the outcome of their claim and *(b)* receiving their first payment, in the latest period for which figures are available. [198085]

John Healey: The Inland Revenue aim to decide 55 per cent. of all tax credit claims and change of circumstances in five working days and 95 per cent. in 30 working days.

The Inland Revenue published its progress against Public Service Agreement (PSA) targets in the Inland Revenue Spring Departmental Report May 2004 which is available on the Internet at http://www.inlandrevenue.gov.uk/about.dept-report04.pdf.

Payments are made automatically on the first scheduled payment date after a claim is decided.

Mr. Frank Field: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer (1) how many cases involving the overpayment of tax credits have been due to errors by the Inland Revenue *(a)* in 2004–05 and *(b)* in total since the start of the scheme. [199131]

(2) how many people were overpaid tax credits in the most recent year for which awards have been finalised; what proportion of these were due to error by the Inland Revenue; and in what proportion of the cases the Inland Revenue has attempted to recover overpayments. [197545]

John Healey: I refer my right hon. Friend to the reply given by the Paymaster General to the hon. Members for Northavon (Mr. Webb) and for Yeovil (Mr. Laws) on 15 November 2004, *Official Report*, columns 946–948W.

Chris Bryant: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer how many people in each ward of the Rhondda claim *(a)* pension credit and *(b)* working tax credit. [198300]

John Healey: I understand from the Department for Work and Pensions that the numbers of recipients of pension credit at 30 September 2004 were as follows:

Ward	*Households in receipt of pension credit*
Cwm Clydach	215
Cymmer	455
Ferndale	275
Llwyn-y-pia	185
Maerdy	270
Pentre	375
Pen-y-graig	455
Porth	300
Tonypandy	245
Trealaw	320
Treherbert	490
Treorchy	500
Tylorstown	320
Ynyshir	265
Ystrad	495
Rhondda constituency total	5,180

Note:

Figures are separately rounded to the nearest 5, so the ward figures as shown do not sum to the total.

Source:

IAD Information Centre, Department for Work and Pensions.

Estimates of the number of in-work families in each constituency receiving tax credits are published in "Child and Working Tax Credit Statistics. Geographical analyses. January 2004". This can be found on the Inland Revenue website, at www.inlandrevenue.gov.uk/stats/personal-tax-credits/menu.htm.

Estimates for December 2004 will be published on 23 December 2004. Estimates for smaller areas are not currently available.

Unemployment

Paul Farrelly: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer (1) what the unemployment rate in Newcastle-under-Lyme was in each year since 1997; [198533]

(2) how many unemployed people there have been in Newcastle-under-Lyme in each year since 1997. [198582]

Mr. Timms: The information requested falls within the responsibility of the National Statistician, who has been asked to reply.

Letter from Len Cook to Mr. Paul Farrelly, dated 17 November 2004:

As National Statistician, I have been asked to reply to your Parliamentary Questions about unemployment in the Newcastle-under-Lyme Parliamentary Constituency since 1997. (198533, 198582)

Table 1 provides the information requested in the Newcastle-under-Lyme Parliamentary Constituency for the twelve-month periods ending in February each year from 1997 to 2004.

These estimates from the Labour Force Survey are, as with any sample survey, subject to sampling variability.

The Office for National Statistics also compiles statistics of those claiming Jobseeker's Allowance for local areas including parliamentary constituencies. Table 2 gives the annual average number of people resident in the Newcastle-under-Lyme constituency claiming Jobseeker's Allowance benefits for each year from 1997 to 2003, together with the proportion of the resident working age population this represents.

Table 1: Unemployment Newcastle-under-Lyme 12 months ending February each year—total unemployment

	Level (000s)	*Rate (percentage)*[1]
1997	2	5.7
1998	3	6.2
1999	2	5.5
2000	2	4.8
2001	2	4.2
2002	1	2.2
2003	1	2.2

[1] Unemployed people as percentage of economically active population (i.e. employed plus unemployed).

Note:

Estimates are based on small sample sizes and are therefore subject to a higher than usual degree of sampling variability. They should therefore be treated with caution and, in particular, changes from year to year should not be used in isolation from the figures for a run of years.

Table 2: JSA claimants resident in the Newcastle-under-Lyme parliamentary constituency—annual averages

	Level	*Percentage of population*[1]
1997	1,624	3.0
1998	1,334	2.5
1999	1,359	2.5
2000	1,155	2.2
2001	1,107	2.1
2002	1,088	2.0
2003	960	1.8

[1] Claimant count figures as the percentage of the resident population.

Source:

Jobcentre Plus administrative system

Yasser Arafat

Michael Fabricant: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer if his Department will identify whether bank and other accounts held by the late Yasser Arafat in the United Kingdom are holding overseas aid money; and if he will make a statement. [199033]

Mr. Timms: The late Yasser Arafat's banking arrangements are a matter between his executors and his bankers who would be expected to comply with all legal requirements to ensure proper receipt and administration of any public money.

SOLICITOR-GENERAL

Charging Initiative

Mr. Allen: To ask the Solicitor-General if she will make it her policy to encourage local Crown Prosecution Service prosecutors to meet local police officers informally to improve the working of the charging initiative. [196231]

The Solicitor-General: The policy of the charging scheme is early consultation between police officers and duty prosecutors, encouraging a prosecution team approach towards the common goal of bringing offenders to justice.

Information about local performance and effectiveness is available from the central ACPO/Crown Prosecution service team, and is shared with the local Crown Prosecution Service and police teams. This information is then jointly discussed so that lessons can be learned and issues and training needs identified. This process of constant review enables the local prosecution team to consider together whether changes need to be made to their local systems and arrangements.

HOUSE OF COMMONS

Franked Envelopes

Mr. Allen: To ask the Chairman of the Administration Committee if she will take steps to arrange for second class franked parliamentary envelopes in formats other than window envelopes to be made available to hon. Members. [197846]

Dame Marion Roe: Second class post-paid envelopes were introduced in 1998, in addition to the first class post-paid envelopes available to Members, following a decision of the Administration Committee. I have asked the Serjeant at Arms to contact the hon. Member on the specific issue of the format of envelopes.

HOUSE OF COMMONS COMMISSION

House of Commons Library

Mr. Wilkinson: To ask the hon. Member for Roxburgh and Berwickshire, representing the House of Commons Commission how many staff were employed in the Library *(a)* in 1974, *(b)* in 2000 and *(c)* at the latest date for which figures are available. [198879]

Sir Archy Kirkwood: Numbers of staff employed in the Department of the Library have been as follows:

	Number
1979[1]	[2,3]90
2000	[3]200.5
2004	[4]219

[1] No published data is available before this date. The figure is taken from the first Annual Report of the Commission.

[2] Excludes 26 staff in the Vote and Sales Office, which has since transferred to the Department of the Clerk of the House.

[3] Complement.

[4] Average full-time equivalent.

Official Report

Norman Baker: To ask the hon. Member for Roxburgh and Berwickshire, representing the House of Commons Commission (1) how many hardback copies of the *Official Report* have been *(a)* produced and *(b)* distributed to hon. Members in each year since 1980; [197868]

(2) how many hardback copies of the *Official Report* have been returned by hon. Members to the House authorities for disposal in each year since 1980; and what percentage of these have been disposed of by *(a)* burial in landfill site, *(b)* incineration and *(c)* recycling; [197869]

(3) what the total cost per day is of producing hardback copies of the *Official Report*, broken down by cost *(a)* per copy, *(b)* per hundred, *(c)* per thousand and *(d)* in total; [197870]

(4) where hardback copies of the House of Commons *Official Report* are produced; what method is used for their transportation from the publisher to the parliamentary estate; and how many deliveries this necessitates per *(a)* month and *(b)* year. [197871]

Sir Archy Kirkwood: Bound volume text of the *Official Report* is the corrected text of debates (including Westminster Hall debates), Ministerial Statements and Written Answers produced for record purposes. Each issue now covers three sitting weeks. Hon. Members who have asked to receive them continue to do so for the duration of their membership of the House or until they request that supply should cease.

Information about production and distribution is not available for the period, or in the form, requested. The following data about production quantities, which include copies produced for sale, have been extracted from the printer's records.

Period	*Number of copies per issue*
1996 to June 1999	785
July 1999 to October 2000	680
November 2000 to April 2002	650
May 2002 to November 2002	600
December 2002 to present	540

In financial year 2003–04, 249 copies of each issue were distributed to hon. Members.

The House of Commons Commission is only responsible for meeting the cost of producing up to 350 bound volume copies for use by hon. Members and House Departments. For the last complete financial year, 2003–04, the total spent on printing and binding bound volume copies (18 issues) was approximately £895,000. This is equivalent to approximately £50,000 per issue, and £140 per copy. Internal staff and other costs are not associated with individual documents and are not included.

Bound volume copies of the *Official Report* are printed at the Parliamentary press in Southwark, case bound by the printer's sub-contractors in Stevenage and returned by road transport to the distributor's warehouse in Nine Elms. Copies are subsequently despatched by Royal Mail or courier to individual recipients except for a small number of copies carried directly to the Parliamentary Estate by the distributor's routine daily delivery van service.

The House of Commons Commission has no responsibility for disposal of bound volume copies of the *Official Report*, which belong to hon. Members to whom they have been supplied.

Temporary Secondments

Mr. Wilkinson: To ask the hon. Member for Roxburgh and Berwickshire, representing the House of Commons Commission what plans there are for temporary secondments of staff of the House to work in the offices of hon. Members. [198880]

Sir Archy Kirkwood: There are no plans for temporary secondments of staff of the House to work in the offices of hon. Members.

INTERNATIONAL DEVELOPMENT

Iraq

Glenda Jackson: To ask the Secretary of State for International Development pursuant to his reply of 8 November to the right hon. and learned Member for Folkstone and Hythe (Mr. Howard), *Official Report*, column 572, if he will list reconstruction programmes in *(a)* Samarra and *(b)* Najaf, broken down by (i) type and (ii) amount; how many (A) Iraqi and (B) foreign workers are expected to participate; and what the source of funding will be in each case. [197898]

Mr. Gareth Thomas: In and around Samarra, the interim Iraqi Government (IIG) is carrying out 75 projects worth $25 million, in the sectors of healthcare, education, and infrastructure. The main activities include: building new primary and secondary schools; rehabilitating hospitals; restoring historical sites and recreational areas; expanding the telephone network; and repairing the water and sewage system.

United States agencies (the Project and Contracting Office, USAID and military reconstruction teams) report that they have 48 construction projects and three non-construction projects in progress in Samarra worth $8.9 million, broken down by sector into: civil sector (14), education (14), electricity (3), health (4), transport (5), water and sanitation (9), governance (1), and agriculture (1). Plans and activities include reconstructing 43 primary and secondary schools and 11 mosques, improvements to a local veterinary clinic, and the donation of medical books. Most of these projects will generate jobs for local Iraqis. The US reports that a further 51 projects are scheduled to take place over December 2004 and January 2005, totalling $5 million.

In Najaf, the interim Iraqi Government is undertaking an extensive programme of reconstruction. The Ministry of Municipalities and Public Works has reported that it will spend nearly $650 million on water and sanitation, especially in the old part of the city. Other IIG announcements include plans to spend $55 million on Government buildings in the area, and the Ministry of Telecommunications has signed a contract with a foreign company to build a new communications centre and supply equipment. Plans are also underway to assist hotel owners as the city is visited by thousands of pilgrims monthly and this is central to the local economy.

United States agencies, working with the Iraqi Ministry of Planning and Development Cooperation and other central Ministries, report that they have 171 construction projects and 22 non-construction projects in progress in Najaf, totalling around $30 million. These projects can be broken down by sector into: education (110), electricity (3), health (10), humanitarian assistance (24), governance (23), transport (2), water and sanitation (10), agriculture (2), civil society (15), and economy (4). US funded activities include: the rehabilitation of Najaf main market; sewer and waterline repair; the installation of electrical poles; the purchase of garbage and street cleaning trucks; and the rehabilitation of health clinics.

It is not possible to list the numbers of foreign and Iraqi contractors participating in these projects, as there is currently no comprehensive database of information available. It is understood that the need for more extensive reporting of projects and contractors will be discussed at a forthcoming IIG/donor coordination meeting.

Afghanistan

Mr. Wiggin: To ask the Secretary of State for International Development what recent discussions he has had with the *(a)* Government of Afghanistan and *(b)* the United Nations on the production of heroin in Afghanistan. [197802]

Mr. Gareth Thomas: Opium poppy cultivation is a growing and complex problem in Afghanistan. It is widely expected that the United Nations Office of Drug Control and Crime (UNODC) 2004 poppy survey will show a substantial increase in poppy cultivation and opium production from the previous year. Many Afghan farmers are locked into growing opium poppy as the only means of repaying debts, accessing land, earning cash income and providing security for themselves and their families. To promote the availability of alternative livelihoods and rural development in Afghanistan, DFID is supporting a number of initiatives through individual funded projects and support for Afghan Government and United Nations programmes.

The UK is lead nation on counter-narcotics and we provide significant support to the Afghan National Drug Control Strategy. DFID has lead responsibility for the alternative livelihoods component and plan to increase our commitment from the current level of £5.5 million per year to £20 million in 2005–06. The support of the international community and strong ownership and lead from the Afghan Government will be crucial to achieving future reductions in opium poppy cultivation.

DFID continues to participate in discussions with the Government of Afghanistan on the institutional arrangements for implementing the National Drug Control Strategy, including the establishment of a Counter-narcotics Ministry, an accelerated programme to pilot comprehensive development and counter-narcotics law enforcement in key provinces, tackling the opium debt problem and on how to make national development more effective in creating sustainable and attractive alternative livelihood opportunities.

An example of the key role DFID is playing is the way we are working with the Afghan Government and International donor community to help communities develop their own livelihoods through the Afghan National Solidarity Programme. To date, the programme has provided US$36 million to 3,775 village development projects. In the Yakdharu village in the Badakhshan province, for example, democratically elected development councils agreed to spend the grant provided through the National Solidarity Programme on establishing micro-hydro electric power from the village stream. As a result the villagers now have an asset that provides sustainable electricity to the whole community and a surplus to supply surrounding villages, generating an additional income for the community. The success of this project has encouraged the community to invest their own money into other infrastructure projects and a seed bank using the community development council mechanism. DFID has committed £13 million to the National Solidarity Programme, which is planned to cover all 20,000 villages in Afghanistan by 2007.

To ensure the Afghan Government can effectively manage development in the province, DFID has provided £20 million funding to the Afghanistan Stabilisation Programme, which is developing links between the central Government and the provinces as well as strengthening the capacity of provincial and district public administration.

We are in regular contact with the United Nations Office of Drug Control and Crime, who are also engaged in discussions on ensuring that counter-narcotics issues are addressed in Afghan Government and donor programmes and provincial piloting. DFID has recently approved an Alternative Agricultural Livelihoods Programme with the UN Food and Agriculture Organisation (FAO) budgeted at £3.8 million over 2.5 years, and we are also in regular dialogue with the FAO on the implementation of this programme. DFID is also in contact with the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP), the United Nations Office of Project Services (UNOPS), and the International Labour Organisation (ILO), all of which have programmes related to alternative livelihoods, for example through labour-intensive public works or private sector development. DFID has regular contacts with the United Nations Assistance Mission to Afghanistan (UNAMA) on a number of issues, including drug production.

Aid Programmes

Harry Cohen: To ask the Secretary of State for International Development what assessment his Department has made of aid programmes involving the supply of animals and the infrastructure to support them for transport and trading produce purposes in remote areas of the developing world; what support the Department is giving to such programmes; and if he will make a statement. [197555]

Mr. Gareth Thomas: DFID is currently supporting initiatives in excess of £500,000 to improve the marketing of food crops through appropriate transport for poor farmers in Uganda and Kenya. Local forms of transport that are distributed to farmers' groups include oxen, ox-carts, donkeys, donkey-carts and bicycles.

In 2002, DFID funded an assessment of local transport solutions for the rural poor that highlighted lessons arising from the World Bank's experience in Sub-Saharan Africa. A key conclusion of the assessment is the need to place greater emphasis on local transport solutions, which have wider benefits for the poor living in remote rural areas, particularly those based on animal traction.

DFID has continued to fund programmes associated with this study; for example the International Forum for Rural Transport and Development, which promotes improvements in mobility and accessibility for poor people. I have arranged for a copy of the document entitled 'Local Transport Solutions for Rural Development' to be placed in the Library of the House of Commons.

Commencement of Legislation

Brian White: To ask the Secretary of State for International Development what pieces of legislation passed in the last 30 years that the Department is responsible for remain to be brought into force, broken down by year of enactment. [195620]

Mr. Gareth Thomas: None.

Conditional Aid

Mr. Jim Cunningham: To ask the Secretary of State for International Development if he will make a statement on his Department's recent discussions with the World Bank on the reassessment of conditional aid to third world countries. [198329]

Mr. Gareth Thomas: At this year's annual meetings in October 2004, the World Bank agreed it would review its policy and practice on lending conditions and report back at next year's annual meetings. The UK also launched its own draft policy paper on aid conditions at the meetings in order to begin a period of consultation with the World Bank and a range of other stakeholders.

DFID is now in discussion with the World Bank on how best to take its review forward. DFID believes the review should result in a comprehensive policy statement on the Bank's use of conditions, followed by clear guidelines to staff on the implications of the new policy for day-to-day World Bank operations. DFID considers that the review represents a good opportunity to explore challenging issues central to the debate over Bank conditions, particularly in relation to sensitive policy reforms such as privatisation and trade liberalisation.

DFID and World Bank staff have been exchanging views on the review at a number of levels. The UK is continuing to consult a range of stakeholders regarding its own policy paper on effective partnerships and aid conditions and will finalise this paper in early 2005.

Consultants

Pete Wishart: To ask the Secretary of State for International Development how much expenditure his Department has incurred in *(a)* 2002, *(b)* 2003 and *(c)* 2004 to date on employing external consultants; and if he will make a statement. [196385]

Mr. Gareth Thomas: Expenditure in the last three financial years on all contracted experts including consultants was as follows.

	£ million
2001-02	364.100
2002-03	406.490
2003-04	414.913

Côte d'Ivoire

Mr. Martyn Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for International Development what assessment he has made of the humanitarian situation in Côte d'Ivoire. [198778]

Mr. Gareth Thomas: DFID is in close contact with agencies monitoring the humanitarian situation on the ground in Cote d'Ivoire. Their current concerns are principally for the security of their staff. DFID will consider any proposals they put to us as the situation develops. During 2004, we have provided £1.55 million in humanitarian assistance.

Departmental Advertising Costs

Charles Hendry: To ask the Secretary of State for International Development what the cost of *(a)* creative work, *(b)* media spend and *(c)* administration for his Department's advertising activity has been in each financial year since 1997–98, broken down by contractor. [197305]

Mr. Gareth Thomas: It is not possible to separate the costs of *(a)* creative work or *(b)* media spend from overall advertising costs as records are not held centrally. Advertising costs over the last three years was as follows:

Year ended	*£000*
31-3-02	910,942
31-3-03	973,443
31-3-04	559,295

The cost of administering advertising activity was as follows:

Year ended	*£000*
31-3-02	13,400
31-3-03	13,900
31-3-04	14,400

The advertising contractor for all three years was Barkers.

Information prior to 2001–2 could only be supplied at disproportionate cost.

Renewable Energy

Mr. David Stewart: To ask the Secretary of State for International Development how much of his Department's budget is spent on providing renewable energy projects in the developing world; and if he will make a statement. [198056]

Mr. Gareth Thomas: Since 1997, DFID has commissioned and completed about £2.25 million of applied-research on renewable energy, covering all the main renewable energy technologies.

As was recognised at the 2002 World Summit on Sustainable Development (WSSD), access to affordable and reliable energy services is important to economic growth and social development. In promoting improved access to services, we encourage consideration of the full range of appropriate technologies, including renewable energy.

As a follow-up to the WSSD, DFID is working with several international networks to promote improved access to energy services, including the Global Village Energy Partnership and the EU Energy Initiative. These networks involve dialogue with developing countries about their energy needs in support of their poverty reduction objectives. Most countries possess a range of indigenous natural resources that may help meet requirements such cooking, heating, lighting and water pumping. Where they are practical and financially feasible, renewable energy resources may have an important role to play.

In addition, we are participating in an international financing and policy study with the World Bank about increasing the role of renewable energy in meeting the energy needs of developing countries. This is expected to report its findings in March 2005.

Debt Relief

Mr. David Stewart: To ask the Secretary of State for International Development how the increased funding provided to writing off debt in the developing world will affect other projects under his Department's remit. [198057]

Mr. Gareth Thomas: The increased funding provided to writing off debt will be additional to funding provided for DFID's other projects. The UK Government's recent 2004 Spending Review announced that total UK aid would rise to nearly £6.5 billion a year in 2007–08, a real terms increase of 140 per cent. since 1997. Part of the increase announced in the 2004 Spending Review was earmarked for the provision of further debt relief.

Land Mine Clearance

Brian Cotter: To ask the Secretary of State for International Development what funding has been made available to help countries that are affected by landmines to meet their mine clearance obligations under the Ottawa Treaty. [198802]

Mr. Gareth Thomas: During the last three complete financial years (2001–03), in support of our obligations under the Mine Ban Treaty, DFID has provided a total sum of £39.7 million for global humanitarian demining.

Select Committee Recommendations

Mr. Allen: To ask the Secretary of State for International Development how many recommendations by parliamentary select committees have been adopted by his Department since June 2001. [197778]

Mr. Gareth Thomas: Select committee reports are given very careful consideration by the Department's Ministers. Since June 2001 several committees of both Houses have made recommendations on matters for which the Department of International Development is responsible. Select committee reports and their responses are a matter of public record.

Water Facilities

Mr. Tynan: To ask the Secretary of State for International Development what steps are being taken to co-ordinate his Department's Water Action Plan with the ACP-EU Water Facility. [197575]

Mr. Gareth Thomas: The preparation of the ACP-EU Water Facility by the European Commission as part of the 9th European Development Fund (EOF) has involved consultation with member states, NGOs and other interested parties. The Department for International Development has been involved in this consultation process and has taken the lead on the Finance Working Group that has raised issues related to the regulations for spending the ACP-EU Water Facility corresponding to the criteria set out in the UK's Water Action Plan. These include ensuring a fundamental focus on the needs of the poor and the sustainability of the programme funded. The first call for proposals can be accessed through www.euwi.net or http://europa.eu.int/comm/europeaid/cqi/frame12.pl and provides detailed information on how such funds are to be spent.

EDUCATION AND SKILLS

CAFCASS

Mrs. Gillan: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills how many *(a)* full-time and *(b)* part-time staff were employed in each CAFCASS region on 1 April (i) 2001, (ii) 2002, (iii) 2003 and (iv) 2004. [197136]

Margaret Hodge: CAFCASS was established on 1 April 2001. Before 1 April 2003, CAFCASS collected data on the total numbers of staff, but they were not broken down between full-time and part-time staff or between each region and Wales. The total numbers of staff (full-time and part-time) employed at 1 April 2001 and 1 April 2002 were as follows:

(i) 1 April 2001

	Number
Employed staff in post	1257
Self-employed practitioners	695
Total staff	1952

(ii) 1 April 2002

	Number
Employed staff in post	1699
Self-employed practitioners	340
Total staff	2039

The number of full-time and part-time staff employed at 1 April 2003 and 1 April 2004, in the regions and Wales, were as follows:

(iii) 1 April 2003

Region	*Status*	*Staff number*
East Midlands	Full-time	94
	Part-time	42
East Midlands Total		136
Eastern	Full-time	72
	Part-time	51
Eastern Total		123
Headquarters	Full-time	53
	Part-time	—
Headquarters Total		53
Legal	Full-time	14
	Part-time	1
Legal Total		15
London	Full-time	141
	Part-time	58
London Total		199
North East	Full-time	97
	Part-time	23
North East Total		120
North West	Full-time	218
	Part-time	77
North West Total		295
South East	Full-time	102
	Part-time	83
South East Total		185
South West	Full-time	105

(iii) 1 April 2003

Region	*Status*	*Staff number*
South West Total	Part-time	165
Wales	Full-time	108
	Part-time	38
Wales Total		146
West Midlands	Full-time	139
	Part-time	65
West Midlands Total		204
Yorks and Humberside	Full-time	163
	Part-time	80
Yorks and Humberside Total		243
Total staff		1884

(iv) 1 April 2004

Region	*Status*	*Staff number*
East Midlands	Full-time	102
	Part-time	33
East Midlands Total		135
Eastern	Full-time	70
	Part-time	45
Eastern Total		115
Headquarters	Full-time	61
	Part-time	5
Headquarters Total	Full-time	66
Legal		23
Legal Total		23
London	Full-time	147
	Part-time	56
London Total		203
North East	Full-time	103
	Part-time	32
North East Total		135
North West	Full-time	222
	Part-time	77
North West Total		299
South East	Full-time	104
	Part-time	78
South East Total		182
South West	Full-time	106
	Part-time	52
South West Total		158
Wales	Full-time	103
	Part-time	35
Wales Total		138
West Midlands	Full-time	136
	Part-time	68
West Midlands Total		204
Yorks and Humberside	Full-time	183
	Part-time	77
Yorks and Humberside Total		260
Total staff		1918

In addition, there were 441 self-employed CAFCASS practitioners on 1 April 2004. This figure cannot be broken down by region and Wales.

Note:

The discrepancy between the total figures given here (1884 and 1918) and those quoted in the CAFCASS 2003–04 Annual Report (1879 and 1932) is because CAFCASS subsequently undertook a data cleansing exercise of its management information systems and redefined the criteria used for employed staff. Furthermore, CAFCASS had included Board members and agency staff in its historical data.

Tim Loughton: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills how many staff skilled in mediation are employed by CAFCASS. [198345]

Margaret Hodge: CAFCASS does not collect information that identifies which of its practitioners are skilled in mediation. However, CAFCASS practitioners are skilled and qualified social workers, and many of them will have undertaken further training in dispute resolution and conflict resolution. CAFCASS is aware that some of its practitioners will have undertaken specific training in order to become accredited mediators.

In addition, CAFCASS refers families who might benefit from mediation services to an accredited mediation scheme.

CAFCASS practitioners also receive appropriate training to enable them to undertake dispute resolution work. Dispute resolution is one of the training modules that CAFCASS has commissioned for its practitioners from Royal Holloway College.

Education Provision (Easington)

Mr. Cummings: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills what the level of public funding per pupil in the Easington constituency was in the last seven years. [198131]

Mr. Miliband: The information is produced according to local education authority areas rather than districts within an area. Easington is a district of Durham Local Education Authority. The following table shows total funding per pupil aged 3 to 19 in Durham since 1997–98 in real terms.

Durham Local Education Authority

	£ per pupil
1997–98	2,730
1998–99	2,810
1999–2000	2,950
2000–01	3,210
2001–02	3,410
2002–03	3,470
2003–04	3,590
2004–05	3,710

Notes:

1. Price base: Real terms at 2003–04 prices GDP deflators as at 30 June 2004.
2. The 2004–05 figures are provisional as some grants have not yet been finalised/audited.
3. Figures include formula funding and grants within the DfES Departmental Expenditure Limit.
4. They exclude EMAs and grants not allocated at LEA level, and also exclude the pensions transfer to EPS and LSC in 2003–04 and 2004–05.
5. The pupil numbers used to convert £ million figures to per pupil are those underlying the SSA/EFS settlement calculations plus PLASC 3-year-old maintained pupils and estimated 3 to 4-year-olds funded through state support in maintained and other educational institutions where these are not included in the SSA pupil numbers.
6. Figures are rounded to the nearest 10.

Mr. Cummings: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills what the average class size of *(a)* primary and *(b)* secondary schools in the Easington constituency was in each of the last five years. [198132]

Mr. Miliband: The information requested is shown in the table.

Maintained primary and secondary schools[1]*: average size of classes taught by one teacher*[2]*—January 2004*
Easington parliamentary constituency[3]

	Primary Number of pupils	Secondary Number of classes	Average class size	Number of pupils	Number of classes	Average class size
2000	7,720	290	26.9	4,710	200	23.6
2001	7,660	290	26.8	4,610	200	23.0
2002	6,940	270	26.2	4,560	200	22.5
2003	6,940	270	25.3	4,720	220	21.5
2004	6,790	270	25.6	4,710	200	23.1

[1] Includes middle schools as deemed.

[2] Classes as taught during one selected period in each school on the day of the census in January.

[3] Figures have been rounded to the nearest 10.

Source:
Annual Schools' Census

Education Finance (Staffordshire)

Paul Farrelly: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills if he will make a statement on changes to the level of funding for *(a)* primary and *(b)* secondary schools in (i) Staffordshire and (ii) Newcastle-under-Lyme since 1997. [198669]

Mr. Miliband: The information requested is produced according to local education authority areas rather than districts within an area. Newcastle-under-Lyme is a district of Staffordshire Local Education Authority. The following table shows how the level of funding in Staffordshire, on a per pupil basis, has increased since 1997–98 in primary and secondary schools.

Total funding per primary and secondary pupil aged 3–10 and 11–15 in real terms in 1997–98 and 2004–05 for Staffordshire

	Funding per pupil aged 3 to 10	*Funding per pupil aged 11 to 15*
1997–98	£2,120	£2,960
2004–05	£2,990	£3,740
Monetary increase from 1997–98 to 2004–05	£870	£780
Percentage increase from 1997–98 to 2004–05	41%	26%

Notes:

1. Price Base: Real terms at 2003–04 prices, based on GDP deflators as at 30 June 2004.
2. Figures reflect relevant sub-blocks of education SSA/EFS settlements and exclude the pensions transfer to EFS and LSC.
3. Total funding also includes all revenue grants in DfES Departmental Expenditure Limits relevant to pupils aged 3–10 and 11–15 and exclude EMAs and grants not allocated at LEA level.
4. The pupil numbers used to convert £ million figures to per pupil are those underlying the SSA/EFS settlement calculations plus PLASC 3-year-old maintained pupils and estimated 3 to 4-year-olds funded through state support in maintained and other educational institutions where these are not included in the SSA pupil numbers.
5. Figures are rounded to the nearest 10.
6. Status: 2004–05 figures are provisional as some grants have not yet been finalised/audited.
7. 1997–98 figures for LEAs subject to Local Government Reorganisation in that year have been estimated, pro-rata to their post LGR figures.

Paul Farrelly: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills how the total funding for schools has changed in *(a)* Staffordshire and *(b)* Newcastle-under-Lyme since 1997. [198678]

Mr. Miliband: :The information requested is produced according to local education authority areas rather than districts within an area. Newcastle-under-Lyme is a district of Staffordshire local education authority. Total funding for all pupils aged 3–19 in Staffordshire was £338.4 million in 1997–98 and £459.0 million in 2004–05 in real terms—an increase of 36 per cent. This includes funding via Education Formula Spending/Standard Spending Assessment and Grants, and excludes the pensions transfer to EPS and the Learning and Skills Council. Total funding per pupil aged 3–19 for schools in Staffordshire has increased from £2,600 in 1997–98 to £3,410 in 2004–05, an increase of 31 per cent. in real terms.

Notes:

Price Base: Real terms at 2003–04 prices, based on GDP deflators as at 30 June 2004.

Figures reflect relevant sub-blocks of education SSA/EFS settlements and exclude the pensions transfers to EFS and LSC made in 2003–04 and 2004–05.

Total funding also includes all revenue grants in DfES Departmental Expenditure Limits and exclude EMAs and grants not allocated at LEA level.

Rounding: Figures are rounded to the nearest £0.1 million or £10 for per pupil figures.

Status: 2004–05 figures are provisional as some grants have not yet been finalised/audited.

1997–98 figures for LEAs subject to Local Government Reorganisation in that year have been estimated, pro-rata to their post

Education Finance (Selby)

Mr. Grogan: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills what funding per head for secondary school pupils in the Selby constituency *(a)* was in 1997 and *(b)* is in 2004. [198790]

Mr. Miliband: The information requested is produced according to local education authority areas rather than districts within an area. The Selby constituency includes parts of both York and North Yorkshire local education authorities. The following table sets out the figures.

	1997–98(£)	*2004–05(£)*	*Percentage increase from 1997–98 to 2004–05*
York	3,020	3,850	27
North Yorkshire	3,050	3,820	25

Notes:

1. Price Base: Real terms at 2003–04 prices, based on GDP deflators as at 30 June 2004
2. Figures reflect relevant sub-blocks of education SSA/EFS settlements and exclude the pensions transfer to EFS and LSC.

3. Total funding also includes all revenue grants in DfES Departmental Expenditure Limits relevant to pupils aged 11–15 and exclude EMAs and grants not allocated at LEA level.
4. The pupil numbers used to convert £ million figures to £10 per pupil are those underlying the SSA/EFS settlement calculations.
5. Rounding: Figures are rounded to the nearest £10.
6. Status: 2004–05 figures are provisional as some grants have not yet been finalised/audited.
7. 1997–98 figures for LEAs subject to Local Government Reorganisation in that year have been estimated, pro-rata to their post LGR figures.

Class Sizes (Wandsworth)

Tom Cox: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills what the class sizes are in *(a)* primary and *(b)* secondary schools in the London borough of Wandsworth; and if he will make a statement. [197716]

Mr. Miliband: The information requested is shown in the table.

Maintained primary and secondary schools [1] average size of classes taught by one teacher [2]

Wandsworth local education authority[3]	*Number of pupils*	*Number of classes*	*Average class size*
	January 2004		
Primary	14,770	570	25.9
Secondary	9,280	420	22.1

[1] Includes middle schools as deemed.
[2] Classes as taught during one selected period in each school on the day of the census in January.
[3] Figures have been rounded to the nearest 10.
Source:
Annual Schools' Census

Computers

John Cryer: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills what the computer to pupil ratio in *(a)* primary and *(b)* secondary schools was in Greater London in 1997. [196711]

Mr. Miliband: The information is not available in the form requested.

Figures for England, which were derived from a sample of schools, are shown in the table. Figures at sub-national level are not available as the sample was not large enough to provide reliable estimates.

Average number of pupils[1] per computer (used solely or mainly for teaching and learning purposes) by type of school

	England	
Year end March	*Maintained primary*	*Maintained secondary*
1997	n/a	n/a
1998	17.6	8.7
2004[2]	7.5	4.9

[1] Full-time equivalent numbers of pupils
[2] Provisional data.
n/a = not available
Note:
Figures for 1997 are not available as the survey was biennial until 1998.

The latest information on ICT in schools was published in the Statistical First Release "Survey of Information and Communications Technology in Schools 2004", which is available on the Department's website www.dfes.gov.uk/rsgateway/.

Family Law Cases

Vera Baird: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills in how many of the family law cases in which it was unclear, at the time of the Association of Directors of Social Services survey in July, whether there was serious disagreement between medical practitioners as to the causes of harm to children, it is now clear that such disagreement is present. [195175]

Margaret Hodge: We do not have this information, in the form that is requested. However I am confident that the courts and local social services will have regard to the recent court judgments in their consideration of cases. Where courts have made recent determinations in cases, these will have reflected the advice given to civil courts in the family Appeal Court cases of Re LB and Re LU, following the judgment in the criminal Appeal Court case of R. *v.* Cannings , on how to approach the evidence given by medical expert witnesses in family proceedings.

I would like also to draw my hon. and learned Friend's attention to my reply to her question 194996, and to the completion of the second stage survey of the review of children's cases, who were already the subject of a care or related order. The results of this further survey, carried out by the Association of Directors of Social Services, have been placed in the Library.

Integrated Children's System

Tim Loughton: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills what the relationship will be between the proposed Integrated Children's System and the databases proposed in the Children Bill. [195290]

Margaret Hodge: The Integrated Children's System (ICS) will be quite different from the information database(s). The ICS is a national framework for Councils with Social Services Responsibilities (CSSRs) to support their work with children in need and their families. It provides a single approach for assessment, planning, intervention and reviewing based on an understanding of children's developmental needs in the context of their families and communities. It is designed to improve outcomes for children in need. The information gathered in the course of working with children and their families is recorded by social services. These records have traditionally been paper-based although a growing number of councils have electronic record keeping systems in place. As part of implementing the Integrated Children's System, social service records will all be kept electronically, replacing paper-based systems. This will provide a more effective way of keeping and accessing records relating to social services work with children and families than exists at present.

The information database(s) provided for by the Children Bill will not contain detailed case information such as this. The information sharing databases will be broader in their coverage than the ICS (they will cover all children in England, whereas the Integrated Children's System will record information about the 4 per cent. of children in need known to social services at any one time), but narrower in terms of the information they will hold about the child. They will contain basic information about all children and the contact details of practitioners working with them across the board. This will be a valuable tool in aiding a wide range of practitioners in working together to meet children's needs.

There is no explicit relationship between the IT system which supports the use of the Integrated Children's System and the information databases. The IT system for the Integrated Children's System is designed to hold information about children in need and their families, who are in receipt of services from social services. It is, therefore, a specialist system for holding case based data.

Tim Loughton: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills what provisions are being made to allow children who would not be on the Child Protection Register to be placed on the Integrated Children's System. [195321]

Margaret Hodge: By December 2005, information on all children referred to local authorities with social services responsibilities as potential children in need, regardless of whether their names are on the child protection register, will be being recorded on the IT system which supports use of the Integrated Children's System.

Tim Loughton: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills (1) which children will be listed on the Integrated Children's Register; [195322]

(2) when the Integrated Children's System will be implemented. [195336]

Margaret Hodge: By December 2005, information on all children referred to local authorities with social services responsibilities will be being recorded on the IT system which supports use of the Integrated Children's System.

The Integrated Children's System (ICS) will be quite different from the information database(s). The ICS is a framework for Councils with Social Services Responsibilities (CSSRs) to help in their work with children in need and their families. It provides a single approach for assessment, planning, intervention and reviewing based on an understanding of children's developmental needs in the context of their families and communities. It is designed to improve outcomes for children in need. The information gathered in the course of working with children and their families must be recorded by social services. These records have traditionally been paper-based although a growing number of councils have electronic record keeping systems in place. As part of implementing the integrated children's system, social service records will all be kept electronically, replacing paper-based systems. The ICS is simply a better way to maintain and meet existing record keeping requirements and, therefore, requires no legislative provision.

The ICS will provide a more effective way of keeping and accessing records relating to social services work with children and families than exists at present. This will help improve standards of service to children and families.

The information database(s) provided for by the Children Bill will not contain detailed case information such as this. The information sharing databases will be broader in their coverage than the ICS (they will cover all children in England, whereas the ICS will record information about the 4 per cent. of children in need known to social services at any one time), but narrower in terms of the information they will hold about the child. They will contain basic information about all children and the contact details of practitioners working with them across the board. This will be a new and valuable tool in aiding a wide range of practitioners in working together to meet children's needs.

There is no explicit relationship between the IT system which supports the use of the ICS and the information databases. The IT system which CSSRs purchase for the ICS are designed to hold information about children in need and their families, who are in receipt of services from social services. It is, therefore, a specialist system for holding case based data.

Tim Loughton: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills in what ways the Integrated Children's Register is different from the Child Protection Register. [195323]

Margaret Hodge: A child protection register is a central register which is maintained for each area covered by a social services department. The register should list all the children resident in the area (including those who have been placed there by another local authority or agency) who are considered to be at continuing risk of significant harm, and for whom there is a child protection plan.

Working Together to Safeguard Children (1999) sets out that the principal purpose of the register is to make agencies and professionals aware of those children who are judged to be at continuing risk of significant harm and in need of active safeguarding. Agencies and professionals who have concerns about a child are able to make inquiries of the register. It is essential, therefore, that both police and health professionals have access to the register through the custodian of the register both in and outside office hours.

The Integrated Children's System provides a single approach to undertaking the key processes of assessment, planning, intervention and review based on an understanding of children's developmental needs in the context of their families and communities. The Integrated Children's System is for use by social services, in collaboration with other agencies with responsibility for children in need under the Children Act 1989.

The Government explained, in Keeping Children Safe (2003), its response to the Victoria Climbié report that we will phase out the child protection register as the ICS is introduced. The ICS will hold all the necessary information about the child, including whether any child protection inquires under section 47 of the Children Act 1989 have ever been undertaken about the child, whether they are considered to be in ongoing need of protection, and whether they have a child protection plan. As a result, the child protection register will become unnecessary.

Tim Loughton: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills what the purpose is of the Integrated Children's System. [195338]

Margaret Hodge: The Integrated Children's System is intended to improve outcomes for children in need. The ICS is a national framework for Councils with Social Services Responsibilities (CSSRs) to support their work with children in need and their families that provides a single approach for assessment, planning, intervention and reviewing based on an understanding of children's developmental needs in the context of their families and communities. The information gathered in the course of working with children and their families is recorded by social services. These records have traditionally been paper-based although a growing number of councils have electronic record keeping systems in place. As part of implementing the integrated children's system, social service records will all be kept electronically, replacing paper-based systems. The ability to record, retrieve and analyse information contained within electronic social services records will enable better assessments and more effective interventions for children in need than exists at present. It will also ensure consistent and comprehensive case records kept on individual children.

Education Funding (Manchester)

Mr. Keith Bradley: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills how much public funding was spent per pupil in Manchester, Withington in each of the last seven years. [197877]

Mr. Miliband: The information requested is submitted to the Department according to local education authority areas, rather than districts within an LEA. The figures provided are for Manchester LEA and are shown in the following table:

Combined LEA and school based expenditure[1,2] per pupil[3] (1996–97 to 2002–03)[4,5]

	Combined LEA and school based expenditure per pupil in Manchester LEA (£)
1996–97	2,850
1997–98	2,810
1998–99	3,020
1999–2000	3,090
2000–01	3,360
2001–02	3,840
2002–03	3,820

Notes:

1. The combined LEA and school based expenditure includes all expenditure on the education of children in LEA maintained establishments and pupils educated by the LEA other than in maintained establishments. This includes both school based expenditure and all elements of central LEA expenditure except youth and community and capital expenditure from revenue (CERA).
2. 1999–2000 saw a change in data source when the data collection moved from the RO1 form collected by the ODPM to the Section 52 form from the DfES. 2002–03 saw a further break in the time series following the introduction of Consistent Financial Reporting (CFR) and the associated restructuring of the outturn tables. The change in sources is shown by the dotted line. In 2002–03 the combined LEA and school based expenditure is calculated by Section 52 Outturn Table A line 51 net current expenditure (NCE) plus line 60 NCE (with adjustments to income to take account of School Standards Grant and Standards Fund scored here) plus lines 61 to 74 NCE. For 2001–02 and earlier years the expenditure is calculated as line 27 NCE after recharges for columns *(b)* to *(f)* and *(h)* plus line 15 from the remaining continuing education columns (g, i and j). This is taken from Section 52 Outturn Table 3 for 1999–2000 to 2001–02 and from the RO1 form previously.
3. Pupil figures include all pre-primary pupils, including those under 5s funded by the LEA and being educated in private settings, pupils educated in maintained mainstream schools and other LEA maintained pupils. The pupil data for pupils attending maintained nursery, primary, secondary and special schools are taken from the DfES Annual Schools Census. Private voluntary and independent (PVI) under 5 pupil numbers are taken from the Early Years census but are only included for 1999–2000 onwards. Other LEA maintained pupils are also included in the pupil count and this includes all pupils attending schools not maintained by the Authority for whom the Authority is paying full tuition fees, or educated otherwise than in schools and pupil referral units under arrangements made by the Authority drawn from the Form 8b submitted to the DfES. Also included as other LEA maintained pupils are all pupils attending pupil referral units who are not registered at a maintained mainstream school drawn from the DfES Annual Schools Census. All pupil numbers are adjusted to be on a financial year basis.
4. Spending in 1997–98 reflects the transfer of moneys from local government to central government for the nursery vouchers scheme. These were returned to local government from 1998–99. The 1999–2000 figures reflect the return of GM schools to local authority maintenance.
5. In 2002–03 the combined LEA and school based unit cost for England showed a cash terms increase of 5 per cent. compared with a 10 per cent. increase in 2001–02. This is in part due to known misreporting of funding by some LEAs which had the estimated effect of reducing the 2002–03 England unit cost by around 50 per pupil (in cash terms). Manchester was one of the LEAs who had suspected funding in their income column and consequently it is likely that the true figure for 2002–03 will be higher than the £3,820 quoted here.
6. Figures are rounded to the nearest 10.
7. Data are a reported in cash terms as submitted by the LEA on their section 52 statement.

Schools (Hendon)

Mr. Dismore: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills how many schools in Hendon *(a)* had outside toilets, *(b)* did not have computer suites and *(c)* did not have interactive whiteboards (i) at 1 May 1997 and (ii) at the latest date for which figures are available; and if he will make a statement. [197597]

Mr. Miliband: The only available information relates to interactive whiteboards and is shown in the table.

Percentage of schools with electronic interactive whiteboards in England—Position at 31 March each year

	2002	*2003*	*[1]2004*
Maintained primary schools	28	48	63
Maintained secondary schools	65	82	92
Maintained special schools	35	53	71

[1] Provisional.

Source:

ICT in Schools Survey

The increased numbers of schools with interactive whiteboards demonstrate the priority that schools are giving to this technology, which research shows can improve the pace of lessons and increase pupil motivation.

The latest information on information and communications technology in schools was published in Statistical First Release 27/2004 "Survey of Information and Communications Technology in Schools 2004", which is available on the Department's website www.dfes.gov.uk/rsgateway/.

My Department does not keep records of the numbers of outside toilets in schools. However, the Department ran a capital programme bidding round under New Deal for Schools to remove outdoor toilets and improve energy management over two years, 1998–99 and 1999–2000, at a cost of about £70 million. The programme replaced a large proportion of the outside toilets in England. It is our understanding that the majority of outside toilets in English schools were replaced by indoor provision as a result of this bidding round.

DEFENCE

Iraq

Llew Smith: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what condolences he has offered to the surviving family members of Iraqi civilians killed as a result of military action taken by British forces in Iraq since 19 March 2003; what estimate has been made of the number of orphans created by civilian adults killed by British forces in Iraq; and what economic assistance has been offered by the United Kingdom to Iraqi families who have suffered the *(a)* loss of their main income earner and *(b)* long-term disablement of the main income earner as a result of United Kingdom military action in Iraq. [197617]

Mr. Hoon: There are no reliable or comprehensive figures for civilian fatalities. United Kingdom forces report all confirmed fatalities of which they are aware arising from incidents in which they are involved. During military engagements in Iraq however, civilian casualties are often taken away before British forces can determine numbers or identities.

Iraqi civilians alleging negligence against the Ministry of Defence may submit a compensation claim to the Department's Area Claims Officer based at Basra. When such claims are submitted, they are considered on the basis of whether or not the Ministry of Defence has a legal liability to pay compensation. Where there is a legal liability to pay compensation, we do so. Any amount payable is determined case by case, taking into account the specific circumstances of the injured party.

Lynne Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence pursuant to his answer of 10 November 2004, *Official Report*, column 716W, on Iraq, what criteria were used to determine which of the 3,000 pages of supporting documents were of potential weapons of mass destruction significance. [199036]

Mr. Hoon: A team of translators and a team of weapons of mass destruction experts worked alongside each other full-time to translate the Iraqi Declaration. Each page was reviewed by a translator and a WMD expert working together. Any page containing words or phrases that might have had relevance to WMD programmes was translated for comprehensive analysis.

Mr. Salmond: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what estimate his Department has made of the number of civilian casualties in Iraq since the invasion of Iraq in 2003. [195954]

Mr. Rammell: I have been asked to reply.

There are no figures for Iraqi civilian casualties that are wholly reliable and cover the whole period since military action began. The Iraqi Ministry of Health has been collating figures from hospital admissions since April 2004, which show that just under 4,000 civilians have been killed in the last six months. We regard this figure as the most reliable available.

Mr. Salmond: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what measures are in place to monitor civilian casualties in Iraq. [195986]

Mr. Rammell: I have been asked to reply.

The Iraqi Ministry of Health began collating figures from hospital admissions in April 2004. These figures show that just under 4,000 civilians have been killed in the last six months.

Mr. Keith Simpson: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence (1) when the armed forces first sought authority from the Defence Crisis Management Organisation to initiate mobilisation measures for deployment to Iraq; [198427]

(2) when the armed forces first sought authority to initiate training for reservists for deployment to Iraq. [198428]

Mr. Hoon *[holding answer 16 November 2004]:* Authority to mobilise reserves and commence preparatory training for deployment to Iraq was formally sought on 2 January and granted by Ministers on 7 January 2003 once it became appropriate to do so in order to further military preparations.

Bribery

Malcolm Bruce: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence from which *(a)* companies and *(b)* organisations the Ministry of Defence has requested (i) information and (ii) co-operation with regard to investigations relating to the enforcement of anti-bribery legislation since 2000. [184167]

Mr. Ingram *[holding answer 15 July 2004]:* This information is not held centrally and could be provided only at disproportionate cost.

Contractors

Mr. Pike: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what procedures are in place for reviewing contracts with a sole supplier for fabric and garments; and if he will make a statement. [197660]

Mr. Ingram: All clothing contracts placed by the Ministry of Defence are continually reviewed to ensure contractors' delivery and quality performance is satisfactory.

Mr. Pike: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence under what criteria his Department's recent tender process for the provision of cloth, fabric and garments was decided; for what reason past experience of contracting with his Department was eliminated as a criteria from the tender process; and if he will make a statement. [197661]

Mr. Ingram: Under EU public procurement regulations we may only consider factors directly relevant to the nature of the items or services to be supplied in order to apply the principles of most economically advantageous tender.

The published award criteria in accordance with the public procurement regulations were technical compliance, cost of acquisition, soft issues (to determine partnering capability), and delivery.

Contractors' past performance was included in the pre-contract award evaluation process.

Mr. Pike: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what estimate his Department has made of the number of UK-based companies contracted by his Department to provide garments and clothing in the last 10 years whose primary source of contractual work is with his Department; and if he will make a statement. [197665]

Mr. Ingram: Records are not maintained of companies whose primary source of contractual work has been with the Ministry of Defence in the last 10 years. It is estimated that the number is small and mainly in niche areas of the clothing range, particularly ceremonial items. The MOD encourages its contractors to have a diverse customer base to preclude dependency on one source of business.

Fishery Protection Squadron

Mr. Hancock: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what the HQ role of the Fishery Protection Squadron is; and what plans he has to change this role. [197708]

Mr. Ingram: The HQ role of the Fishery Protection Squadron is the provision of clear guidance, leadership, support and direction to units under its authority.

There are currently no plans to change the role of the Fishery Protection Squadron.

HMCS Chicoutimi

Mr. Hayes: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what his Department's contribution will be to the investigation by the Defence Committee of the Canadian House of Commons into HMCS Chicoutimi. [197906]

Mr. Ingram: The Ministry of Defence has been asked for some background information to be used to inform the Standing Committee on National Defence and Veterans Affairs of the Canadian Parliament with respect to a study on the Acquisition of Submarines for the Canadian Forces. We understand the Committee's inquiry continues and no further requests for assistance have been received.

Naval Navigational Aids

John Thurso: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what his Department's expenditure on naval navigational aids was in each of the last 10 years for *(a)* Northern Ireland, *(b)* England and Wales, *(c)* Scotland and *(d)* each military port in the UK. [197349]

Mr. Ingram: The future provision of Marine Services is the subject of a PPP/PFI acquisition programme. Work relating to the provision of naval navigation aids forms part of the range of services, which is included in the invitation to negotiate. To divulge details of current expenditure could prejudice the fairness of the competition, and the potential for gaining best value for money, by giving industry the advantage of knowing part of the current the Ministry of Defence costs. It would also disadvantage the current in-house provider, the Royal Maritime Auxiliary Service, who are also competing for this part of the future work. I am therefore withholding this information under Exemption 7 (effective management and operations of the public service) of the Code of Practice on Access to Government Information.

RAF St. Mawgan

Ms Atherton: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what discussions he has had with *(a)* individuals and *(b)* organisations from Cornwall relating to the continuing use of RAF St. Mawgan for civilian aviation use. [197469]

Mr. Ingram: Ministry of Defence officials have written to Cornwall county council and will be meeting local authority officers shortly. I have also agreed that officials should brief the hon. Member for North Cornwall (Mr. Tyler). I would be happy for them to brief my hon. Friend.

Submarines

Mr. Hayes: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what assessment his Department made of the level of maintenance required for Upholder Class submarines to maintain their seaworthiness prior to their sale to the Canadian Government; what recommendations were made to increase spending to maintain seaworthiness; and if he will make a statement. [197909]

Mr. Ingram: After the Upholder Class submarines were taken out of Royal Navy service, the vessels were maintained to a standard to ensure that reactivation remained a cost-effective option. Following the agreement with the Canadian Government, on the lease to buy of the submarines, the Ministry of Defence identified the scope of the work required to meet the acceptance standards of the Royal Navy and made provision to fund a contract with BAE Systems for this work, including additional maintenance, to be undertaken.

Mr. Hancock: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what the cost was of employing the US General Dynamics Electric Boat Division to assist with the construction of the Astute class submarines; and what the reasons were for their involvement in the construction process. [197962]

Mr. Ingram: General Dynamics Electric Boat is employed on the Astute programme to bring proven expertise notably from its current Virginia Class attack submarine programme. The United States Department of Defense has facilitated this via a Government to Government Foreign Military Sale. Electric Boat support takes the form of specialist draughtsman support and management assistance to BAE Systems at

Barrow. This assistance is ongoing and the Foreign Military Sale allows for up to $98 million on this facility. This assistance is aimed at reducing risk and ensuring good value for the taxpayer.

HMS Grafton

Mr. Hancock: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what estimates were received for the refit of HMS Grafton prior to the decision to decommission her. [197709]

Mr. Ingram: No estimates were sought or received for the next refit of HMS Grafton, which was due in mid 2006 and would have been the subject of competition nearer the time.

Territorial Army

Mr. Keith Simpson: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence (1) whether Territorial Army soldiers deployed to Iraq were required to achieve a skilled grade in their weapon test; [196885]

(2) how many Territorial Army soldiers deployed in Iraq since March 2003 have accidentally discharged weapons; [196880]

(3) whether his Department has received notifications of concern from military units deployed in Iraq about inadequate training in personal weapons by members of the Territorial Army who had been passed as average by the Reserve Training and Mobilisation Centre; [196881]

(4) how many Territorial Army soldiers deployed to Iraq since March 2003 arrived with notes cautioning the receiving unit that they were a high safety risk due to having been passed as average by the Reserve Training and Mobilisation Centre; [196882]

(5) whether his Department has been notified of concerns by the staff at the Reserve Training and Mobilisation Centre about the deployment of reservists to Iraq since March 2003 who had been graded average in their weapons test; [196884]

(6) what measures his Department is taking to rectify the failures in training for reservists identified at the court martial of Lance Corporal Ian Blaymire; [197194]

(7) who within his Department was responsible for the failures identified at the Reserve Training and Mobilisation Centre in the trial of Lance Corporal Ian Blaymire; [197195]

(8) if he will make a statement on the allegation by Mr. Paul Camp, Assistant Judge Advocate, that the Army had lied in an attempt to prevent the exposure of the very poor training and very poor leadership to which reservists who had been sent to Iraq received. [197198]

Mr. Ingram *[holding answer 8 November 2004]:* A clear policy on the standards required of reservists before deployment on operations was and is in place. This policy directs that all Territorial Army (TA) soldiers deployed on operations to Iraq are required to achieve an overall skilled pass in their Individual Training Directive (ITD1(A))—weapons handling test (WHT)—for their personal weapon prior to their deployment. ITD1(A) comprises seven components. Component 1 is the safety assessment and is marked at pass or fail. The other components relate primarily to skill at arms and can be assessed as skilled, average or fail.

Analysis of our records has so far established that three individuals who have failed the safety test have deployed to Iraq, but none was equipped with a weapon. All three were employed in a field hospital: one a surgeon; one a chef; and one a medical technician.

Evidence given at the recent court martial of Lance Corporal Blaymire suggests that during the mobilisation for earlier deployments to Iraq a decision was taken at the Reserve Training and Mobilisation Centre (RTMC) that for two elements of the ITD(A) (loading a magazine and wind tables—neither of which is related to safety) performance at average would be sufficient for the then operational requirement. While this did not accord strictly with the stated standards required, this decision reflected professional military judgment at the time.

Since 4 October 2004 RTMC has directed that stated policy be followed. We are identifying those deployed in Iraq who passed the two modules at average and will judge the need, if any, for additional in-theatre training. I am assured that, at no time, has safety been compromised. This is borne out by our Operation Telic "Lessons Identified" records which contain no comments from operational commanders about safety deficiency with regard to personal weapon handling among deployed TA personnel.

The media have reported a number of allegations in relation to the evidence given at the court martial. We take all these allegations seriously and when we have received the transcript of the court's proceedings we will examine the evidence in detail. In the meantime, we have set up a Learning Account and an Army Board of Inquiry has been convened. We shall be as open as possible in making the findings of both public.

Information on the number of TA soldiers who have negligently discharged their weapon is not held centrally. Neither are we able to differentiate between regular and reservist personnel once deployed on operations. I shall in due course provide details of the number of cases where disciplinary action has been taken as a result of a Royal Military Police investigation into such incidents.

Since the start of operations in Iraq we have mobilised over 9,000 Army Reservists who have performed with distinction and great professionalism. As reported by the House of Commons Defence Committee, the vast majority of demobilising reservists who responded to a questionnaire in September 2003 believed that they had been either "very well" or "well" prepared for their deployment.

MINISTER FOR WOMEN

Equal Pay

Miss McIntosh: To ask the Minister for Women what representations she has received from women's organisations on equal pay for equal work. [197078]

Ms Hewitt: I host regular meetings with the Trades Union Congress (TUC) Women's Committee, at which the subject of equal pay is discussed. Recently, I announced the funding by the Government of the Equal Pay Panel of Experts, developed by the TUC, which will give free advice/guidance sessions to organisations looking to investigate or undertake an equal pay review in partnership with unions

We are working with the Equal Opportunities Commission (EOC), Opportunity Now, trade unions and employers to meet our target of 45 per cent. of organisations having conducted equal pay reviews by 2008. Recently, I announced the Government's Plan to tackle occupational segregation, which grew out of the EOC's timely investigation into occupational segregation, one of the causes of the gender pay gap

WALES

Departmental IT

Brian White: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what percentage of the Department's *(a)* implemented and *(b)* planned computer systems use open source software; and what plans are in place to raise this level. [195663]

Mr. Touhig: There is minimal use of Open Source Software (OSS) within the Wales Office.

There are no immediate plans to increase usage of OSS in the Wales Office at present.

Our future use of open source software will follow the Government's open source software policy published on 28 October 2004. The draft policy document is available to view at www.govtalk.gov.uk

Departmental Staff

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what percentage of the staff in his Department in *(a)* 2002 and *(b)* 2003 were people with disabilities. [196124]

Mr. Touhig: The figures are as follows:

(a) 5 per cent.

(b) 4 per cent.

Health Services

Miss McIntosh: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what discussions he has had with the National Assembly regarding the delivery of health services in rural areas in Wales. [197077]

Mr. Touhig: The National Assembly has responsibility for managing the National Health Service across Wales. At a local level, Local Health Boards (LHBs) are responsible for commissioning health services based on the needs of the people who live in their area, including rural communities. Powys LHB has the largest rural area and also provides community services to its population.

I regularly meet the National Assembly's Health Minister to discuss the provision of healthcare in Wales, including services provided in rural areas.

Mobile Phones

Mr. Prisk: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales how many mobile phones were used by *(a)* Ministers and special advisers and *(b)* officials in his Department in each year since 1997; how many were (i) lost and (ii) stolen; and what their cost was. [191439]

Mr. Touhig: The Wales Office was established from 1 July 1999, and information before April 2000 would only be available at disproportionate cost.

The Wales Office provided:

4 mobile phones for Ministers and Special Advisers and 11 for officials in 2000–01;

4 mobile phones for Ministers and Special Advisers and 13 for officials in 2001–02;

4 mobile phones for Ministers and Special Advisers and 14 for officials in 2002–03

4 mobile phones for Ministers and Special Advisers and 15 for officials in 2003–04

I refer the hon. Member to the answer previously given to the hon. Member for Arundel and South Downs (Mr. Flight) on 16 July 2003, *Official Report*, column 323W. The total cost of providing mobile phones in 2003–04 was £7,259. This includes the costs of rental and calls. Records indicate that only one handset was reported lost and there was no cost.

Quangos

Mr. Wiggin: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what recent discussions he has had with his Welsh Assembly colleagues on the role of quangos in Wales; and if he will make a statement. [197813]

Mr. Touhig: My right hon. Friend and I have regular discussions with Assembly Ministers on a wide range of issues of mutual interest, including the work of the various assembly sponsored public bodies.

CULTURE, MEDIA AND SPORT

Departmental Archaeologists

Tim Loughton: To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport how many professional archaeologists are employed *(a)* directly in her Department and *(b)* in agencies for which her Department is responsible. [198847]

Mr. Caborn: The Department does not directly employ any archaeologists. Our statutory advisers on archaeological matters are English Heritage, and they employ a total of 306 archaeologists.

Free TV Licences

Paul Farrelly: To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport how many pensioners in Newcastle-under-Lyme receive a free television licence. [198686]

Malcolm Wicks: I have been asked to reply.

The information on the numbers of households in receipt of free TV licences is not available by constituency. The number of households with at least one resident aged 75 or over in the Newcastle-under-Lyme constituency in each year since 2002–03 is in the table. Each of these households would therefore be eligible for a free TV licence. Household information relating to earlier years is not available.

	Households with someone aged 75 or over
2002–03	5,565
2003–04	5,640

Notes:

1. Figures are rounded to the nearest five.
2. Winter fuel payment data 2002–03 and 2003–04.
3. Any residence found to have four or more occupants aged 60 and over is not included in the household figures as it is assumed to be RCNH (Residential Care/Nursing Home).
4. Parliamentary constituencies are assigned by matching postcodes against the relevant ONS postcode directory.

Source:

IAD Information Centre, 100 per cent. sample.

Mr. Denis Murphy: To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport how many households are in receipt of a free television licence in the Wansbeck constituency. [198694]

Malcolm Wicks: I have been asked to reply.

The information on the numbers of households in receipt of free television licences is not available by constituency. The number of households with at least one resident aged 75 or over in the Wansbeck constituency is 5,265. Each of these households would therefore be eligible for a free TV licence.

Notes:

1. Figures are rounded to the nearest five.
2. Winter fuel payment data 2003–04.
3. Any residence found to have four or more occupants aged 60 and over is not included in the household figures as it is assumed to be RCNH (Residential Care/Nursing Home).
4. Parliamentary constituencies are assigned by matching postcodes against the relevant ONS postcode directory.

Source:

IAD Information Centre, 100 per cent. sample.

Lottery Funding

Mr. Marshall: To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport if she will make a statement on the contribution of the National Lottery to reducing poverty in deprived areas of the UK. [198671]

Estelle Morris: Since its launch in November 1994 the National Lottery has raised more than £16 billion for the good causes, with over 180,000 projects benefiting from awards across the UK. Although it can be difficult to determine precisely the extent of their contribution to reducing poverty, a significant number of Lottery-funded projects have helped to regenerate inner cities, create employment and strengthen communities.

This is supported by the conclusions of an independent report commissioned by Camelot and published in November 2004 by the Henley Centre. It concluded that there was "consistent and clear evidence" of improved economic and/or social outcomes; and that "the vast majority of awards are inclusive in their effort". Henley Centre comments that this trend has become marked since 1998, when Lottery distributing bodies were required to address more strongly social and regional projects.

Sri Guru Granth Sahab ji

Sandra Gidley: To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport what *(a)* direction and *(b)* advice she has given to (i) libraries and (ii) the British Library, about the treatment of Sri Guru Granth Sahab ji. [198850]

Estelle Morris: My right hon. Friend Secretary of State has not given any direction or advice to public libraries and the British Library about the treatment of the Sri Guru Granth Sahab ji. Public libraries and the British Library operate independently from Government and are responsible for seeking advice on the treatment of their manuscripts from appropriate sources.

CABINET OFFICE

Civil Service Sports Council

Dr. Whitehead: To ask the Minister for the Cabinet Office what the relationship of the Civil Service Sports Council is to the UK Civil Service. [197853]

Ruth Kelly: The Civil Service Sports Council Limited is a company registered under the Industrial and Provident Society Acts. It is owned by its members who pay a membership subscription. Membership is open to employees in Civil Service Departments or Agencies, Royal Mail, British Telecommunications and other public bodies such as museums, research councils or companies carrying out ex-civil service work.

CSSC Ltd. receives an annual grant from the Cabinet Office to encourage and co-ordinate the pursuit of all forms of sport and recreation throughout the Civil Service.

The range of activities organised by CSSC can be seen on their website at www.cssc.co.uk. Most activities are run by volunteers.

Contingency plans

Mr. Paul Marsden: To ask the Minister for the Cabinet Office what advice has been issued regarding stockpiling provisions in the case of an enforced quarantine following a terrorist attack. [195854]

Ms Blears: I have been asked to reply.

We advise that people are prepared for emergencies including making sure they have some provisions available in case of power loss or if services were disrupted—whatever the cause.

This advice can be found at: http://www.homeoffice.gov.uk/terrorism/

We do not advise stockpiling provisions. If people did need to be kept away from others because they had an infectious disease, or had not been decontaminated they would have to be cared for and supplied with provisions as necessary.

Copyright

Michael Fabricant: To ask the Minister for the Cabinet Office (1) if she will make a statement on the reproduction of items which are copyright of HMSO by political parties; [198065]

(2) what permissions have been granted to political parties by *(a)* the Controller of HMSO, *(b)* the Queen's Printer for Scotland and *(c)* for Crown copyright material to be reproduced, since 1997; [198066]

(3) what guidance has been issued to the Government Information Service about the reproduction of Central Office of Information material by political parties; and if she will make a statement. [198067]

Ruth Kelly: The responsibility for the management of Crown copyright material produced by Government Departments in England, Wales and Northern Ireland rests with the Controller of Her Majesty's Stationery Office (HMSO). The Queen's Printer for Scotland is an office holder within the Scottish Administration and so is not answerable to the UK Parliament. The Controller of HMSO is not responsible for copyrights owned by the Stationery Office Limited or any other private sector company.

Most Crown copyright material can be re-used under an on-line licence known as the Click-Use Licence. Under the Click-Use Licence holders may re-use a range of core Government information without needing to obtain specific permission for each item. Details of licence holders, including political parties that hold licences, can be found on HMSOnline at: http://www.click-use.hmso.gov.uk/online/pLogin.asp.

The terms of the Click-Use Licence, which can also be viewed on HMSOnline at: http://www.hmso.gov.uk/copyright/licences/core/c_terms.htm, sets out the conditions of re-use. Political parties are treated in the same way as any other re-user.

External Consultants

Pete Wishart: To ask the Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster (1) how much his office has spent on external consultants to deal with press and media affairs since he took office; and if he will make a statement; [199203]

(2) pursuant to his Answer of 11 November 2004, *Official Report*, column 855W, on consultants, how much his office has spent on external consultants excluding press and media since he took office. [199204]

Mr. Milburn: I refer the hon. Member to the response given by my hon. Friend the Minister for the Cabinet Office (Ruth Kelly) to the hon. Member on 11 November 2004, *Official Report*, column 855W.

IT costs

Mr. Rosindell: To ask the Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster how much has been spent on information technology in his office in this financial year. [195950]

Mr. Milburn: The costs of appointing a separate Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster will be met from the existing Cabinet Office budget, and will be accounted for in the 2004–05 Cabinet Office Annual Report and Resource Accounts, which will include the spend on information technology for my office.

Ministerial Press Releases

Pete Wishart: To ask the Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster how many press releases he has issued in his ministerial capacity since he took office. [199202]

Mr. Milburn: I have issued one press release, dated 10 November 2004, since my appointment.

Ministerial Responsibilities

Matthew Taylor: To ask the Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster if he will list the meetings with *(a)* individuals and *(b)* organisations external to the Government that he has attended in his official capacity as Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster since his appointment to the post, broken down by (i) date and (ii) subject of the meeting. [197530]

Mr. Milburn: I refer the hon. Member to the answer I gave on 20 October 2004, *Official Report*, column 720W to the hon. and learned Member for Harborough (Mr. Garnier) and on 9 November 2004, *Official Report*, column 620W, to the hon. Member for Romford (Mr. Rosindell).

Strategy Unit

Mr. Rosindell: To ask the Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster if he will make a statement on the Strategy Unit's progress with the Countries at Risk of Instability project. [195976]

Mr. Milburn: The Strategy Unit's Countries at Risk of Instability programme was launched in January 2004. Work on the project is still continuing.

FOREIGN AND COMMONWEALTH AFFAIRS

Armenian Genocide

Mr. Dismore: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what the Government's policy is towards the *(a)* scale of, *(b)* responsibility for and *(c)* recognition of the Armenian genocide. [198403]

Mr. MacShane: The Government understands the strength of feeling about this terrible episode of history. The massacres of 1915–16 were condemned in explicit terms by the British Government of the day. We fully endorse that view. Historians disagree as to whether the Armenian massacres constitute genocide as defined by the 1948 UN Convention on Genocide.

Mr. Dismore: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs whether recognition of the Armenian genocide is one of the political criteria that Turkey will be required to meet before EU accession. [198404]

Mr. MacShane: No.

Burma

Mr. Ancram: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs (1) what criteria were applied for a state-owned enterprise's inclusion in Annex II of the Council Common Position on Burma 2004/730/CFSP and Annex IV of Council Regulation (EC) 798/2004, as inserted by Article 1(3) of Council Regulation (EC) No 1853/2004; [198383]

(2) for what reason Myanmar Oil and Gas Enterprise was excluded from Annex II of the Council Common Position on Burma 2004/730/CFSP and Annex IV of Council Regulation (EC) 798/2004, as inserted by Article 1(3) of Council Regulation (EC) No 1853/2004. [198384]

Mr. Straw: The UK worked hard to get the strongest possible measures in the EU Common Position on Burma with the aim of highlighting the role of the military in continuing human rights abuses and political stalemate in Burma, while targeting the measures to minimise that impact on the poor.

The EU therefore chose to target the two military owned companies. Union of Myanmar Economic Holdings Ltd. (UMEHL) and the Myanmar Economic Corporation (MEC), their subsidiaries and joint ventures. UMEHL and MEC have sought in recent years to monopolise foreign investment. The profits directly benefit the military.

Myanmar Oil and Gas Enterprise is not a military owned company.

The decision amending the EU Common Position was made by unanimity.

China

Mr. Drew: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what recent discussions he has had with the Chinese Government on the subject of discrimination against religious minorities, with particular reference to Christians. [198069]

Mr. Rammell: I raised the ratification of the International Covenant of Civil and Political Rights with the Foreign Minister Zhang Yesui during my visit to China in July. We have made clear that harassment of religious groups is unacceptable and not in keeping with the provisions of the International Covenant.

Foreign and Commonwealth Office officials raised several concerns about religious freedom in China with Wang Zuo'an, Deputy Director General for the State Administration for Religious Affairs, during the latter's visit to the UK in September.

We also discuss human rights issues in depth during our biannual UK/China Human Rights Dialogue.

Mr. Drew: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what representations he has made to the Chinese authorities on their policy of repatriating North Korean refugees; and if he will urge them to admit the UNHCR to the border area between the two countries. [198072]

Mr. Rammell: I personally raised this issue with Vice Foreign Minister Zhang Yesui during my visit to China in July.

We also raise the issue of North Korean asylum seekers in China during our biannual UK/China Human Rights Dialogue, the last round of which was held in May. We continue to urge the Chinese to observe their obligations under the 1951 convention and allow the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees access to the China/North Korea border region.

Mr. Wilkinson: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will make representations to the Foreign Ministers of other European Union countries for the maintaining of the EU's embargo on the sale of armaments to the People's Republic of China. [198881]

Mr. Rammell: The Government supports the decision of the European Council in December 2003 to review the EU Arms Embargo on China. This review is on-going—it was last discussed by EU Foreign Ministers at the 11 October General Affairs and External Relations Council. The Government does not wish to exclude any options for the review, nor to pre-empt the conclusion of the review.

The Government continues to implement the Arms Embargo as set out by the then Minister of State at the Foreign and Commonwealth Office, the late Derek Fatchett, in his reply to my hon. Friend the Member for Gedling (Vernon Coaker) on 3 June 1998, *Official Report*, columns 240–41.

Correspondence

Mr. McNamara: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs when he will reply to correspondence from the hon. Member for Hull, North regarding Mr. Ken Bigley. [197129]

Mr. Rammell: My right hon. Friend the Baroness Symons of Vernham Dean replied on 5 November 2004.

Côte d'Ivoire

Mr. Martyn Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what assessment he has made of recent progress in delivering peace and political stability in Côte d'Ivoire. [198777]

Mr. Mullin: The situation in Côte d'Ivoire remains volatile and the immediate future is uncertain.

We remain convinced that a political solution remains the best way forward for the country. We therefore welcome the efforts of the African Union to bring about a political settlement at the Abuja summit of 14 November. We also welcome the unanimous adoption of UN Security Council 1572 on 15 November, which, among other things, urges all sides including President Gbagbo to begin implementing immediately all the commitments they have made.

Dr. Amer Al-Saddi

Llew Smith: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what information he has received in respect of the detention of Dr. Amer Al-Saddi, the former scientific adviser to the Iraqi Government, by the United States; and whether he has asked his United States counterpart why former Iraqi officials held in detention by the United States have not been charged or released. [194874]

Mr. Rammell: I cannot provide details on individuals held by the United States. Dr. Amer Al-Saddi's case will be reviewed by the Detainee Review Committee in the same way as all other cases.

Equatorial Guinea

Mr Ancram: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs (1) what contingency plans were drawn up by his Department *(a)* unilaterally, *(b)* with other Government departments and *(c)* with other foreign countries, for the evacuation of British nationals and others from Equatorial Guinea immediately prior to the attempted coup earlier this year; [198219]

(2) pursuant to his answer of 9 November 2004, *Official Report*, column 631W, when his Department informed the authorities in Equatorial Guinea of the alleged coup plot; [198227]

(3) pursuant to his answer of 9 November 2004, *Official Report*, column 631W, what information on the attempted coup plot was made available to his Department; and if he will make a statement. [198228]

Mr. Straw: In late January 2004 reports of a coup plot were circulating in the media. The first media report of which officials were aware was in the Spanish newspaper El Mundo on 30 January. At the same time similar allegations were contained in confidential information received by the Government. In accordance with exemption 1*(c)* of Part 2 of the Code of Practice on Access to Government Information, we do not provide details of confidential diplomatic exchanges.

We were sceptical about the reports, as there had been a number of coup rumours in the media previously, including October 2003. In so far as we could, given the sources of our report, we attempted to establish whether there was any more truth to this particular allegation. We took action to try to establish whether any UK companies were involved and to underline our opposition to involvement by any UK company in such activities. As we were not able to establish any definitive evidence which could add significantly to the reports which had already appeared in the media we took no further action with other African governments. But we did review and update our civil contingency plan.

It has been the consistent policy of Her Majesty's Government never to condone or to support the actions of those who seek to overthrow sovereign governments by military coup or any other undemocratic means.

EU (Applicant States)

Mr. Brady: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs whether it is his Department's policy that all applicant countries for EU membership should recognise all existing member states. [198632]

Mr. MacShane: Article 49 of the Treaty on European Union provides that any European state which respects the EU's fundamental principles can apply for membership. The European Council set out the criteria for membership at its meeting in Copenhagen in 1993 Of these, the political criteria must be met befor starting negotiations. There is no requirement or applicant countries which relates to recognition, but it i inconceivable that an applicant country could becom an EU member state without normal diplomatic relations with other EU member states.

European Court of Justice

Mr. Brady: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what the procedure is for resolution of disputes regarding EU association agreements; and what the role of the European Court of Justice is. [198631]

Mr. MacShane: Disputes regarding association agreements may arise in several ways. Disputes between the EC and its member states on the one hand and the other party or parties to the agreement on the other will typically be addressed within the institutional framework established by the agreement. This will usually include an Association Council and a Committee of Ministers.

Disputes among the EC member states or between them and the Commission will usually be addressed within the Council at working group level, at the Permanent Representatives Council (COREPER) or if necessary in the Council itself.

The European Court of Justice may have jurisdiction in relation to a dispute concerning an association agreement. This will depend on the nature of the dispute and the parties involved. In the past the Court has, for example, often been asked to interpret provisions of association agreements under the procedure in Article 234 TEC (Treaty establishing the European Community). Article 234 TEC states that "The Court of Justice shall have jurisdiction to give preliminary rulings concerning:

> (a) the interpretation of this Treaty;
>
> (b) the validity and interpretation of acts of the institutions of the Community and of the European Central Bank;
>
> (c) the interpretation of the statutes of bodies established by an act of the Council, where those statutes so provide.

Where such a question is raised by any court or tribunal of a member state, that court or tribunal may, if it considers that a question is necessary to enable it to give judgement, request the Court of Justice to give a ruling thereon."

Georgia

Mr. Amess: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will make a statement on the political situation in Georgia. [198740]

Mr. Rammell: Since he came to power following elections in January 2004, President Saakashvili has put priority on reform, the fight against corruption and the re-establishment of Georgian authority over all of Georgia's regions. We have welcomed the reform measures so far undertaken, and maintain a bilateral assistance programme in support of further reform. We aim to spend £15 million over the next three years, mainly focused on poverty reduction, governance and capacity building.

The situation in Georgia's two separatist regions is tense. Relative calm has been restored in South Ossetia since the crisis over the summer, but there are still regular occurrences of sniping. In Abkhazia, a stand-off persists between the two main candidates for the 'presidential' elections held on 3 October, with the losing candidate refusing to accept the judgment of the Abkhaz Supreme Court. With supporters of both candidates taking to the streets the situation is threatening to turn violent.

Through our membership of the Friends of the United Nations Secretary General, the OSCE and the work of the UK's Special Representative for the South Caucasus, Sir Brian Fall, we are active in urging all involved parties to work co-operatively and prudently towards resolution of the issues. In this context we have consistently made clear our concern that the territorial integrity of Georgia should be respected.

Indonesia

Mr. Hancock: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what plans he has to propose that the UN review the Act of Free Choice in West Papua; and if he will make a statement. [197710]

Mr. Alexander: The UK has no plans to make such a proposal. In November 1969 the UN General Assembly discussed the report of the special representative who oversaw the implementation of the Act of Free Choice. A resolution was adopted to take note of the report and the fulfilment of the responsibilities of the Secretary-General under the 1962 Dutch/Indonesian agreement. 84 member states voted in favour, none against and 30 abstained. Any re-evaluation of the status of Papua is a matter to be resolved peacefully between the Indonesian Government and the people of Papua.

The British Government, together with other members of the international community, stress to the Indonesian authorities the need to fully implement the 2001 Special Autonomy law for Papua. This law allows for the establishment of a Truth and Reconciliation Committee to look at the incorporation of Papua into Indonesia in the 1960s.

Mr. Hancock: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what recent representations he has made to the Government of Indonesia concerning their treatment of the people of West Papua; and if he will make a statement. [197711]

Mr. Alexander: Together with our European partners, we regularly raise our concerns about the situation in Papua. On 28 October EU ministerial representatives visited Indonesia and met with the newly elected President Susilo Bambang Yudhoyono and the Minister for Foreign Affairs, Hasan Wirayuda. Both expressed their belief that the full implementation of special autonomy would help resolve the problems in Papua. In his inaugural speech on 20 October, President Yudhoyono identified the resolution of the problems in Papua as one of his key concerns.

Iran

Mr. Grogan: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what discussions he has had with the Iranian Government regarding the arrest of Ms Mahboobeh Abbasgholizadeh on 1 November. [198779]

Mr. Rammell: Official Iranian media have recently reported the arrest of several journalists and NGO staff, including Ms Mahboobeh Abbasgholizadeh. We have serious concerns about the increasing harassment of journalists and NGO staff in Iran. With our full support, the EU Presidency intends to raise the issue with the Iranian authorities soon.

Mr. Streeter: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what provisions for verification are contained in the draft agreement between the Governments of the USA, France, Germany and the United Kingdom with the Government of Iran. [197952]

Mr. MacShane *[holding answer 16 November 2004]:* The agreement between the Governments of France, Germany and the UK, with the support of the High Representative of the European Union, on the one hand, and the Government of Iran, on the other, was published on 15 November. It commits Iran to suspend work on the enrichment of uranium and on the reprocessing of nuclear fuel; to meet all its obligations under the Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty and to allow full and unrestricted access by International Atomic Energy Agency inspectors to its nuclear facilities in accordance with its nuclear safeguards agreement with the Agency. This latter requirement will enable independent verification of the extent of Iran's nuclear activities.

The Government of the United States is not a party to the agreement.

Iraq

Harry Cohen: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs on what date his Department *(a)* completed its analysis of Iraq's declaration to the United Nations of December 2002 and *(b)* communicated to the UN its view that there were omissions in the declaration; what omissions were indicated; whether such omissions are considered to be the case now; and if he will make a statement. [190229]

Mr. MacShane: The analysis of the text of the Iraqi declaration was completed on 21 December 2002 and our observations on the declaration were passed to the United Nations at that time. The declaration was compared against previous declarations made by Iraq, and against the outstanding disarmament questions raised by the final report of UNSCOM, produced in 1999. Any discrepancies uncovered in this process were indicated to the United Nations. The Government continues to believe that there were omissions in the Iraqi declaration, and this has been borne out by reports from UNMOVIC at the time of the resumption of inspections in 2002–03 and, subsequently by the Iraq Survey Group.

Mr. Amess: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will make a statement on the new Iraqi constitution. [198753]

Mr. Rammell: According to the Transitional Administrative Law, the Transitional National Assembly, which will be elected in January next year, shall write a draft of the permanent constitution by no later than 15 August 2005. UN Security Council Resolution 1546 envisages a leading role for the UN in promoting national discussion and consensus building on the drafts of the constitution. The draft shall be presented to the Iraqi people for approval in a general referendum to be held no later than 15 October 2005. The general referendum will be successful and the draft constitution ratified if a majority of the voters in Iraq approve and if two-thirds of the voters in three or more governorates do not reject it.

Glenda Jackson: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will ask the US authorities in Iraq to provide immediate assistance to the International Committee of the Red Cross to enable it to have full and free access to Falluja. [199136]

Mr. Rammell: The Iraqi Interim Government are in the lead in improving the humanitarian situation in Fallujah. We understand that the Iraq Ministry of Health, supported by the Multi-National Force, is currently doing all it can to facilitate Red Cross and Red Crescent assistance to Falluja and the surrounding areas.

Lynne Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs pursuant to his answer of 20 October 2004, *Official Report*, column 756W, on the Iraq Survey Group, if he will list the source references for the material now made public to which the Prime Minister referred on 28 January 2004, *Official Report*, column 304, as unpublished pending the Iraq Survey Group report. [197045]

Mr. MacShane: All the relevant information was submitted either to the Iraq Survey Group or to the Butler review or, in some cases, to both. Their respective reports published as much information as it was possible to do without prejudice to national security.

Mr. Gordon Prentice: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what representations he has made to the interim Government of Iraq about attacks on Iraqi Christians and their places of worship; and if he will make a statement. [197754]

Mr. Rammell: British officials in Iraq regularly meet with members of the Christian communities. We have raised concerns about attacks by extremists on Iraqi Christians and their places of worship with the Iraqi authorities, who, I should stress, share our concerns and remain committed to the protection of minorities as set out in the Transitional Administrative Law. Our missions in Iraq will continue to monitor the situation and make representations as appropriate.

Lynne Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs pursuant to the answer of 8 November 2004, *Official Report*, column 520W, on Iraq, on the basis of what criteria the Government decided whether to share the intelligence on the claim that Iraq sought to procure uranium from Africa with the *(a)* Iraq Survey Group and *(b)* Butler Committee. [198833]

Mr. Straw: All relevant material was passed to the Butler review. In the case of the Iraq Survey Group, the normal rule applied which requires that information received from allied intelligence and security agencies cannot be disseminated further without the consent of the originator.

Ivory Coast

Mr. Simmonds: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what discussions have taken place between the Government and *(a)* France and *(b)* the UN regarding hostilities within Ivory Coast between northern rebels and government forces. [198254]

Mr. Mullin: We have been in constant contact with both the French and the UN about the situation in the Ivory Coast.

On 15 November the UN Security Council unanimously adopted Resolution 1572. This condemns the Government of Côte d'Ivoire's air-strikes; reiterates support for French and UN action on the ground; emphasises the need for a political solution; and imposes an arms embargo on Côte d'Ivoire with immediate effect. It also agrees to impose a travel ban and assets freeze on those blocking the peace process in Côte d'Ivoire should there have been no progress on implementing the Accra III Peace Agreement by 15 December.

Jamaica

Mr. Simmonds: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what steps the Government have taken to assist Jamaica in fighting gun and drug culture, with particular reference to *(a)* funding and *(b)* counter narcotics and weapons expertise; and if he will make a statement. [198274]

Mr. Rammell: We continue to support Jamaica's efforts to counter drugs and crime problems.

Included in our assistance is support worth around £3.6 million for the Caribbean Security Sector in 2003–04. Of this, at least £850,000 was spent on projects in Jamaica tackling gun and drugs crime.

We are working closely with the Jamaican Constabulary Force (JCF) on targeting individuals trying to smuggle drugs through airports. We are funding courses to train the JCF in using firearms safely and properly, and providing assistance in investigating high profile crimes. The Department for International Development is assisting in the reform and modernisation of the JCF. Our police officers in the UK are working closely with the Jamaicans while dealing with drugs and crime problems in the UK, and supporting their new anti-crime operation "Kingfish". We have conducted joint operations with the Jamaican Defence Force and other international parties, and a number of Royal Navy and Auxiliary fleet ships have been in the region supporting the efforts being made on maritime interdiction.

Legal Base (EU)

Mr. Tynan: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what his policy is in respect of choice of legal base for EU measures; whether preference is given to bases requiring unanimity rather than qualified majority voting; and at what point in the decision-making process it is the policy of the UK to refer disputes over legal base and voting method to the European Court of Justice. [198128]

Mr. MacShane: The legal basis of a proposed measure is not a question of member state preference. It has to be determined by an analysis of the aim and content of the measure in question in the light of the provisions of the EC Treaty establishing the Community's power to act in the relevant area. The point at which the Government would consider referring a dispute about the legal basis of a measure to the ECJ similarly is determined by the relevant provisions of the Treaty, in particular. Article 230 TEC and the Statute and rules of Procedure of the Court.

Libya

Mr. George Osborne: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs whether he has raised the case of Mr. Fathi al Jehmi and his treatment by the Libyan Government with the Libyan Government. [198154]

Mr. Rammell: The Government are aware of the case of Fathi al Jehmi and is monitoring developments. The Government continue to have and to raise concerns about Libya's human rights record, including restrictions on freedom of expression and assembly, the treatment of political prisoners, arbitrary detention and on conditions in Libyan prisons.

The Government welcomed Amnesty International's visit to Libya in February—the first since 1988—and their report "Time to Make Human Rights a Reality". The report included the case of Fathi al Jehmi. The Government have been speaking to the Libyan authorities about this report and will continue to look for ways in which we can work with the Libyan authorities to improve the human rights situation there. This has included a number of visits to the United Kingdom by Libyan human rights groups, and a Foreign and Commonwealth Office-funded project to work with the Libyan authorities to improve the management of their prisons.

Macedonia

Mr. Simmonds: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what plans the Government have to recognise the Former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia as The Republic of Macedonia in international fora. [198269]

Mr. MacShane: The Government uses the constitutional name "Republic of Macedonia" in bilateral relations. Along with the majority of our partners and allies, we use the designation 'the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia' in certain international fora.

Somalia

Mr. Simmonds: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what steps the Government are taking in conjunction with the international community to foster political stability in Somalia. [198265]

Mr. Mullin: The UK is fully committed to the establishment of a Transitional Federal Government for Somalia which represents an important opportunity to build political stability. We are supporting this process politically, working with other international partners, and providing financial assistance bilaterally and through the EU.

Student Visas

Chris Grayling: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs for what reasons student visas issued to overseas nationals coming to the UK do not cover the full length of their courses. [198843]

Mr. Mullin: Overseas students who have been issued entry clearance to the United Kingdom to pursue a course of longer than twelve months are issued with a visa for the full duration of their course. If the course finishes in summer they are granted leave to enter until 31 October in the year in which they complete their course. For courses that do not follow the standard autumn to summer pattern an additional two months leave is added to the end of the course date. Postgraduate students are given four months beyond the end of their course irrespective of when it finishes. This allows postgraduate students the necessary time to make any corrections or redrafts to their thesis.

Sudan

Mr. Simmonds: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will make a statement regarding the progress of the Inter-governmental Authority on Development talks in Sudan. [198264]

Mr. Mullin: At the latest round of the IGAD-led talks on the comprehensive peace agreement, which took place in Kenya from 7–30 October, steady progress was made, including on permanent ceasefire arrangements and implementation modalities for the agreement. These talks are due to resume at the technical level on 26 November, and the principals, First Vice President Taha and Sudan People's Liberation Movement (SPLM) Chairman Garang, will reconvene on 11 December to address any remaining political issues. We continue to press both the Government of Sudan and the SPLM to fulfil their commitment to conclude the talks by the end of the year.

Mr. Simmonds: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what assistance the Government have provided to the African Union troops in the Darfur region of Sudan, in terms of *(a)* funding, *(b)* equipment, *(c)* training and *(d)* transportation logistics. [198263]

Mr. Mullin: In May the UK contributed £2 million to help jump-start the African Union (AU) mission in Darfur. In August we helped fund the airlift of 150 Nigerian troops into Darfur, and, through the British Peace Support Team in Kenya, we provided logistics advice for the 150 Rwandan troops that joined the mission. We have also donated rations packs and maps, and provided technical planning expertise for the AU, as well as seconding a British monitor to the mission.

As my right hon. Friend the Prime Minister announced in Addis Ababa on 7 October, we will also play our part in supporting the expansion of the AU force. We have set aside a further £12 million for this purpose. We are working hard to ensure that the extra troops can be deployed quickly, including by providing vehicles. We have informed the AU that we will consider requests for additional support as required, including training.

China

Lady Hermon: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what recent discussions he has had with his Chinese counterpart about the imprisonment of Tenzin Deleg Rinpoche. [198289]

Mr. Rammell: We and our EU partners have raised in a series of demarches with the Chinese authorities our serious concerns about the way in which the trial of Tenzin Deleg Rinpoche was conducted and the lack of transparency. The most recent EU demarche took place on 4 February 2004. I raised the case bilaterally with Assistant Foreign Minister Zhang Yesui in December 2003.

I raised general Tibet issues with Assistant Foreign Minister Li Hui during my visit to China in October. We raised the case most recently during the UK China Human Rights Dialogue in May, when FCO officials asked for confirmation that the authorities would not carry out the death sentence. We also expressed concern at the judicial process and requested a re-trial. This case has also been included on our list of individual cases of concern for the November 2004 UK China Human Rights Dialogue round.

UK Detainees (United States)

Tom Cox: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs how many United Kingdom citizens detained by the United States authorities in each of the last five years have subsequently been released from custody. [197362]

Mr. Mullin: We have kept records of the number of British nationals detained and subsequently released (including those detained for short periods without charge) by the US authorities since 2002. The relevant statistics are:

	Number
2002	[1]948
2003	1364
2004	[2]1044

[1] Excludes last quarter of the year for which figures are not available.

[2] Up to 30 June.

In addition, five British nationals who were detained by the US authorities at Guantanamo Bay were released in March 2004.

UN Reform

Mr. Amess: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what discussions he has had with UN Secretary General Kofi Annan on reforming the UN with particular reference to processes for dealing with international terrorism. [198739]

Mr. MacShane: The Government at all levels, including my right hon. Friend the Foreign Secretary, frequently discusses the international effort to combat terrorism with the UN and other member states. At present there are numerous initiatives under way at the UN, including the Secretary General's High Level Panel, the follow up to Security Council Resolutions 1535 and 1566 and negotiations on resolutions and conventions in the General Assembly.

British Indian Ocean Territory

Mr. Grogan: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what financial arrangement exists with the United States with regard to its presence on *(a)* Diego Garcia and *(b)* other parts of the British Indian Ocean Territory; and when each arrangement is due to expire. [198784]

Mr. Rammell: There is no lease of Diego Garcia or any other part of the British Indian Ocean Territory (BIOT) to the United States, and they make no payment in respect of their presence there. Under the initial agreement of December 1966 between the UK and the US on the use of BIOT, the whole territory is to remain available for the defence needs of the two countries for an initial period of 50 years from 1966, and thereafter for a further period of 20 years unless either party has given prior notice to terminate it. A further agreement concluded in 1976, which has been supplemented by various other agreements, regulates the establishment and functioning of a United States Defence Facility in Diego Garcia and related matters.

Visa Costs

Tom Cox: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what the charge in pounds sterling is for a visitor's visa to the UK in *(a)* India, *(b)* Pakistan, *(c)* Sri Lanka and *(d)* Bangladesh; and if he will make a statement. [198188]

Mr. Mullin: Our visa fees are set on a worldwide basis and are the same irrespective of the country in which an application is made. Our standard visit visa is valid for multiple entries for a six-month period. The fee is currently set at £36 payable in local currency. Longer visit visas are available allowing multiple entries providing no one visit exceeds a six-month duration. One, two, five and 10 year visit visa fees are £60, £70, £88 and £150 respectively.

Visa fees are set at a level to ensure that the full cost of providing the entry clearance service worldwide is met from fee income and that the UK taxpayer does not have to meet any of the costs. Visa fees are non-refundable. This information is on the UKvisas website www.ukvisas.gov.uk. Further information on the fees in local currency for the countries in question can be obtained from the Foreign and Commonwealth Office website www.fco.gov.uk.

Western Sahara

Mr. Drew: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will make a statement on the extension of the UN Mission for the Referendum on Western Sahara (MINURSO) plan for the Western Sahara until 30 April 2005; and what support the British Government are giving to MINURSO. [197911]

Mr. Rammell: The UK supported UN Security Council resolution 1570 adopted on 28 October, which extended the mandate of the UN Mission for the Referendum in Western Sahara (MINURSO) until 30 April 2005. By doing so, we reaffirmed our commitment to assist the parties in achieving a just, lasting and mutually acceptable political solution to the dispute, that provides for the self-determination of the people of the Western Sahara. The UK contributed over £1.5 million to MINURSO in 2003–04, and expects to contribute over £1.4 million in 2004–05.

Mr. Drew: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what discussions he has had with Saharwi activists on their appeal to the UN to enforce Chapter 7 of the UN Charter, with reference to fulfilling UN resolutions on Western Sahara. [197912]

Mr. Rammell: My right hon. Friend the Foreign Secretary has had no discussions with Saharan activists on their appeal to the UN to enforce Chapter 7 of the UN Charter. Foreign and Commonwealth Office officials met representatives of the Polisario Front in London in September 2004, when UN enforcement of Chapter 7 of the UN Charter in relation to the Western Sahara dispute was discussed.

UK policy is to support UN efforts to resolve the conflict in the Western Sahara and we urge all parties to work towards a mutually acceptable solution that provides the people of the Western Sahara with an opportunity to exercise their right to self-determination.

Mr. Simmonds: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what assessment has been made of the political situation in Western Sahara since June. [198275]

Mr. Rammell: United Nations Security Council resolution 1570, which was adopted unanimously on 28 October 2004, extended the mandate of the United Nations Mission for the Referendum in Western Sahara (MINURSO) until 30 April 2005. The resolution calls upon the parties and States of the region to continue to co-operate fully with the United Nations (UN) to end the current impasse and to achieve progress towards a political solution.

The Government continues to seek a just, lasting and mutually acceptable solution to the Western Sahara dispute that provides the people of the Western Sahara with an opportunity to exercise their right to self-determination. The Government believes UN efforts to find a solution to the dispute should be maintained.

Zimbabwe

Mr. Simmonds: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what discussions have taken place between the Government and Botswana regarding the political situation in Zimbabwe; and if he will make a statement. [198261]

Mr. Mullin: We remain in regular contact with Botswana and other countries in the region, about Zimbabwe, through our diplomatic missions and high-level visits.

I discussed the matter with President Mogae during the Commonwealth Heads of Government Meeting in December 2003.

CONSTITUTIONAL AFFAIRS

Commencement of Legislation

Brian White: To ask the Parliamentary Secretary, Department for Constitutional Affairs what pieces of legislation passed in the last 30 years that the Department is responsible for remain to be brought into force, broken down by year of enactment. [195628]

Mr. Lammy: The information requested is as follows:

1985

Administration of Justice Act, sections 34 (in part) and 67 (in part); Schedules 7 (in part) and 8 (in part)

Representation of the People Act. Schedules 1 (in part) and 5 (in part)

1990

Contracts (Applicable Law) Act, sections 2 (in part) and 3 (in part) Courts and Legal Services Act, sections 13, 36 to 39, 41 to 52, 53 (in part), 54, 55, 63 (in part), 70 (in part), 81, 104 to 107 and 125 (in part); Schedules 6 to 9, 13, 17 (in part), 18 (in part) and 20 (in part)

1995

Civil Evidence Act, sections 10 and 16 (in part)

1996

Family Law Act, sections 2 to 15, 18 to 21, 23 to 25, 60, 64, 66 (in part); Schedules 1 to 3, 8 (in part), 9 (in part) and 10 (in part) 1998

Data Protection Act, section 56 (in part)

Statute Law (Repeals) Act, section 1 (in part); Schedule 1 (in part)

1999

Access to Justice Act, sections 28, 77, 80 and 106 (in part);

Schedule 15 (in part)

2000

Freedom of Information Act, sections 1, 2, 9 (in part), 10 (in part), 11, 12 (in part), 13 (in part), 14 to 17, 19 (in part), 21 to 44, 48 (in part), 50 to 66, 67 (in part), 68, 69 (in part), 70, 71, 73 (in part), 77, 86 (in part), Schedules 3 (in part), 4 (in part), 5 (in part), 6 (in part) and 8 (in part) Political Parties, Elections and Referendums Act sections 6 (in part), 14 (in part), 16 (in part) and 17; Schedules 3, 21 (in part) and 22 (in part)

2002

Adoption and Children Act, sections 112 to 114

2003

Courts Act, sections 1 to 3, 5 to 41, 43 to 61, 65, 66 (in part), 75, 76, 79, 80, 85, 88 to 92, 98 (in part), 100, 101, 105 and 109 (in part), Schedules 3, 4, 8 (in part), 9 (in part), 10 (in part)

2004

Asylum and Immigration (Treatment of Claimants, etc) Act, section 26

Community Legal Services

Mr. Djanogly: To ask the Parliamentary Secretary, Department for Constitutional Affairs what proportion of calls received by Community Legal Services in the last period for which figures are available were attributable to each of the areas of advice covered by the service. [198522]

Mr. Lammy: Since the launch of Community Legal Service Direct advisers have answered calls in the following proportions:

	Percentage
Debt	53
Welfare Benefits	24
Education	13
Employment	4
Housing	4

The remaining 2 per cent. of calls went to lines which take in more than one category of law, and so it is not possible to determine which category each call concerned.

Debt, Education and Welfare Benefits law advice is available across England and Wales. Housing and Employment advice is available only in selected regions at present.

Mr. Djanogly: To ask the Parliamentary Secretary, Department for Constitutional Affairs how many advisers work for Community Legal Service Direct. [198523]

Mr. Lammy: As at 11 November 2004, the total number of full-time equivalent advisers working for Community Legal Service Direct was 53.

Mr. Djanogly: To ask the Parliamentary Secretary, Department for Constitutional Affairs how many callers have been eligible for legal aid and have received free telephone advice since the launch of Community Legal Services Direct in July. [198524]

Mr. Lammy: For the period 1 July 2004 to 30 September 2004, 4,972 cases have been reported by Community Legal Service Direct advice contractors. Of these, 1,325 (27 per cent.) were matters for clients who passed an eligibility test for legal aid, whilst 489 (10 per cent.) were for clients shown to be ineligible.

Any caller to Community Legal Service Direct can receive up to 30 minutes of advice and/or help finding an alternative source of advice.

The majority of matters reported so far have been cases in which the eligibility of the client was not tested (3,159 or 63 per cent.) because the problem could be dealt within the 30 minute time frame.

Mr. Djanogly: To ask the Parliamentary Secretary, Department for Constitutional Affairs how many calls have been handled by telephone advisers since the launch of Community Legal Services Direct in July. [198526]

Mr. Lammy: As at 11 November 2004, the total number of calls answered by Community Legal Service Direct specialist advisers since the service was launched on 14 July was 15,142.

Compensation Culture

Mr. Dismore: To ask the Parliamentary Secretary, Department for Constitutional Affairs what the evidential basis is for his statement on 10 November that there is a compensation culture in the UK; and if he will make a statement. [198411]

Mr. Lammy: The contents of the Government's statement reflected the evidence presented in the Better Regulation Task Force report "Better Routes to Redress", and the report's key finding that, despite widespread perceptions, it is a myth that society has suddenly become far more litigious and that claims for compensation are spiralling out of control. But the report also recognised that it is a damaging myth and it needs to be tackled. The Government's statement sets out how we intend to tackle it.

Departmental Advertising Costs

Charles Hendry: To ask the Parliamentary Secretary, Department for Constitutional Affairs what the cost of *(a)* creative work, *(b)* media spend and *(c)* administration for his Department's advertising activity has been in each financial year since 1997–98, broken down by contractor. [197304]

Mr. Lammy: The Department for Constitutional Affairs was created in June 2003. Since its inception, my Department has conducted two advertising campaigns:

(i) poster advertising on buses to promote the recruitment of magistrates;

(ii) radio and press and ambient-media advertising targeting court fine defaulters (code-named Operation Payback 1 and 2)

Total spending on these campaigns was £966,000.

The creative and administration costs incurred by advertising agencies cannot be itemised separately as agencies do not charge separately for this work.

Similarly, my Department cannot separately identify its own administrative costs associated with advertising, as departmental administrative staff do not work exclusively on such campaigns.

Department for Constitutional Affairs advertising spend, 2003–04 to 2004–05

	Campaign	*Contractor*	*Spend £*
2003–04	Magistrates recruitment	Viacom Outdoor	342,000
	Fine defaulters	Barkers	230,000
2004–05	Magistrates recruitment	Viacom Outdoor	102,000
	Fine defaulters	Barkers	292,000
Total spend	—	—	966,000

Departmental Events (Funding)

Charles Hendry: To ask the Parliamentary Secretary, Department for Constitutional Affairs if he will list the *(a)* conferences, *(b)* publications, *(c)* initiatives, *(d)* projects and *(e)* receptions organised by his Department which have received funding from outside commercial bodies since May 1997, broken down by (i) funding body and (ii) amount paid. [196601]

Mr. Lammy: The Government made a commitment to disclose details of individual amounts of sponsorship valued at more than £5,000 in Departmental Annual

Reports. My Department's 2004 Annual Report was published on 30 April 2004. Copies are available in the Library of the House. However, no funding was received from outside commercial bodies for the threshold mentioned.

Jury Verdicts

Mr. Gordon Prentice: To ask the Parliamentary Secretary, Department for Constitutional Affairs if he will seek to amend section 8 of the Contempt of Court Act 1981 to allow parallel juries to facilitate research into the reasons behind jury verdicts. [198378]

Mr. Leslie: Section 8 of the Contempt of Court Act does not prohibit the use of parallel juries to facilitate research. On 11 September 2003 the Secretary of State for Constitutional Affairs and Lord Chancellor announced that he would be publishing a consultation paper on research into real jury deliberations. We intend to publish the paper later this year.

Legal Aid

Mr. Djanogly: To ask the Parliamentary Secretary, Department for Constitutional Affairs what percentage of the population was entitled to civil legal aid in each of the last seven calendar years. [198521]

Mr. Lammy: We do not have precise annual data. Given the complex rules for assessing financial eligibility for civil legal aid and changing income levels (including from state benefits and tax credits), individual analysis would need to be undertaken to identify the eligible percentage of the population, depending on whether the eligibility is being calculated of adults, children or households.

In an analysis of eligibility in 2000 we estimated that in 1997 about 52 per cent. of the adult population in England and Wales were financially eligible for civil legal aid (either on a "free" or contributory basis). This fell to about 51 per cent. in 1999 and 50 per cent. in 2000. A separate analysis by the Legal Services Research Centre estimated that about 48 per cent. of "benefit units" were eligible in 1997–98, compared with 47 per cent. in 2001–02. Given that financial eligibility is assessed on income and capital, the percentage of children eligible will be very much higher.

Mr. Djanogly: To ask the Parliamentary Secretary, Department for Constitutional Affairs what plans the Department has to exclude ownership of property from the means testing for eligibility for *(a)* civil and *(b)* criminal legal aid. [198896]

Mr. Lammy: Consultation recently closed on a package of reforms to the civil legal aid scheme, including the removal of the current rule which disregards 100k of equity in an applicant's home, when assessing financial eligibility for legal aid. There will of course be exemptions in place for those on passported benefits or on the lowest incomes. We will announce the way forward in due course.

The draft Criminal Defence Service Bill, transfers the grant of criminal public funding from the courts to the Legal Services Commission and re-introduces the means test for criminal public funding. The three models proposed in the original consultation paper took account of income alone. Revised proposals will be published shortly.

Mr. Djanogly: To ask the Parliamentary Secretary, Department for Constitutional Affairs what the current financial threshold is for eligibility for civil legal aid. [198897]

Mr. Lammy: Those in receipt of Income support, income based Jobseeker's Allowance, or guaranteed state pension credit, automatically qualify financially for legal representation. Legal representation is available on a "free" or non-contributory basis, for people with a gross monthly income of less than £2,288, a disposable monthly income below £267 and disposable capital of £3,000 or less. If their monthly disposable income is between £267 and £707, or disposable capital between £3,000 and £8,000, they will be offered funding on the basis that they agree to pay contributions towards their legal costs.

Legal Help, which provides for basic advice and assistance, is available free for anyone in receipt of the above benefits or for those with a gross monthly income of less than £2,288, a disposable monthly income of less than £621, and disposable capital of £3,000 or less.

Mr. Djanogly: To ask the Parliamentary Secretary, Department for Constitutional Affairs (1) what plans the Department has to reduce the *(a)* criminal and *(b)* civil legal aid budget; [198898]

(2) what plans the Department has to reduce the overspend on the criminal legal aid budget. [198951]

Mr. Lammy: The information is as follows:

Civil Legal Aid

Consultation has recently closed on a package of changes to the scope and eligibility of civil legal aid. The proposals included measure to: remove legal aid from cases where private money might be used; avoid unnecessary litigation; and encourage early resolution of disputes. The package is designed to focus expenditure on areas where it is most needed. We will announce the way forward in due course.

Criminal Legal Aid

A scheme to introduce individual case contracts in very high cost criminal cases (VHCCCs) should provide significant savings over the next three years.

In addition, the Criminal Defence Service Bill is being prepared for introduction in the next session of Parliament. The Bill will re-introduce the means test for criminal public funding in order to help bring the cost of legal aid under better control and focus the limited resources available for funding more closely on the people who need them most.

Mr. Djanogly: To ask the Parliamentary Secretary, Department for Constitutional Affairs what the change has been in the civil legal aid budget over the last four years; and what the reasons are for the change. [198952]

Mr. Lammy: Prior to 2000–01 no formal budget was set for civil legal aid. Funding for civil legal aid was available from the total legal aid budget. However, under section 5(6) of the Access to Justice Act 1999, the Lord Chancellor is required to set an overall budget for the Community Legal Service Fund (civil legal aid). This is done by direction at the start of each financial year and by subsequent amendment to meet changing priorities. For the last four years the final budgets set were:

	£million
2000–01	810
2001–02	740
2002–03	782
2003–04	912

These budgets were set to accommodate the demand for civil legal aid in each year. For example, the initial budget for 2000–01 was increased to accommodate the rise in asylum applications, the faster processing of initial decisions and legal aid becoming available for representation in asylum appeals.

The figures given are stated in cash terms and represent budgets set rather than expenditure in each year.

Magistrates Court (Newcastle-under-Lyme)

Paul Farrelly: To ask the Parliamentary Secretary, Department for Constitutional Affairs what discussions are taking place to safeguard the future of the magistrates court in Newcastle-under-Lyme. [198609]

Mr. Leslie: The future of Newcastle-under-Lyme magistrates court has been the subject of a detailed consultation by the Staffordshire Magistrates' Courts Committee (MCC). On 29 October 2003, the MCC determined that the Courthouse should be closed when a new Courthouse is established to serve the whole of North Staffordshire.

The Staffordshire county council lodged an appeal against the determination on 21 November 2003, and discussions are currently ongoing, between the Staffordshire county council, the Stoke-on-Trent city council, my Department and the MCC with the view to considering suitable alternative sites for a new replacement Courthouse.

Payments into Court

Mr. Waterson: To ask the Parliamentary Secretary, Department for Constitutional Affairs what the value of unclaimed payments into court was in each of the last 10 years. [196110]

Mr. Lammy: The Court Funds Office (CFO) only receives unclaimed moneys into Court by way of statutory deposits under various Acts such as the Trustee Act 1925. However funds already in court can be transferred to the Unclaimed Balances Account if they meet certain criteria and attempts to trace the beneficiaries prove unsuccessful. The balance held on the UB account for the previous 10 years is as follows:

Unclaimed balances figure for financial years 1994–95 to 2003–04

Financial year	*Year ended February:*	*Amount*
1994–95	1995	31,500,000.00
1995–96	1996	32,000,000.00
1996–97	1997	31,433,000.00
1997–98	1998	33,130,000.00
1998–99	1999	32,864,990.00
1999–2000	2000	32,302,053.00
2000–01	2001	32,072,993.00
2001–02	2002	32,028,577.00
2002–03	2003	34,746,873.00
2003–04	2004	40,994,967.00

Note:
The above figures are net of payments to and from the account.

Personal Injury Claims

Mr. Dismore: To ask the Parliamentary Secretary, Department for Constitutional Affairs what assessment he has made of the impact of conditional fees in personal injury cases on *(a)* the setting-up of specialist personal injury solicitors firms to pursue claims and *(b)* the willingness of claims-handling businesses to pursue claims; and if he will make a statement. [198410]

Mr. Lammy: In 1998 we commissioned KPMG to construct a business case showing whether a move from legal aid to Conditional Fee Agreements (CFAs) in a range of personal injury cases could result over a 10 year period in financial viability. The work suggested all law firms could maintain their business using CFAs subject to their management skills and that firms might do well if they specialised. Since then we have focused our research on the outcome for consumers of using CFAs as a form of litigation funding and a new report by Professor Fenn, Dr. Gray and Dr. Rickman is due in early 2005.

Mr. Dismore: To ask the Parliamentary Secretary, Department for Constitutional Affairs what discussions he has had with *(a)* the Law Society, *(b)* the Association of Personal Injury Lawyers, *(c)* the Bar, *(d)* the Association of British Insurers and *(e)* others over the pursuit of unmeritorious personal injury claims; and if he will make a statement. [198412]

Mr. Lammy: Discussions have taken place with a range of bodies in formulating the Government's response to the Better Regulations Task Force (BRTF) report, and will continue as work is taken forward.

Mr. Dismore: To ask the Parliamentary Secretary, Department for Constitutional Affairs what the evidential basis was for his statement on 10 November that *(a)* personal injury solicitors and *(b)* claims-handling businesses are improperly pursuing personal injury cases lacking in merit; and if he will make a statement. [198413]

Mr. Lammy: The contents of the Government's statement reflected the evidence presented in the Better Regulation Task Force (BRTF) report.

Mr. Dismore: To ask the Parliamentary Secretary, Department for Constitutional Affairs what consideration he has given to regulating advertising for personal injury cases by *(a)* claims-handling businesses and *(b)* solicitors; and if he will make a statement. [198414]

Mr. Lammy: The Government believes that there is no place for advertising that raises false expectations or promotes the bringing of frivolous claims. We believe that the Advertising Standards Authority and OFCOM advertising codes and the Law Society publicity code must be adhered to rigorously and will support any further action needed to help achieve this.

Mr. Dismore: To ask the Parliamentary Secretary, Department for Constitutional Affairs what consideration he has given to regulating claims-handling businesses, in relation to personal injury claims; and if he will make a statement. [198415]

Mr. Lammy: The Government wants to see the claims management sector regulated properly, and the sector has a last opportunity to do so itself. If it does not do this, the Government will consider how new formal regulation could be introduced, taking into account the recommendations of Sir David Clementi's review of the legal services regulatory framework.

Mr. Dismore: To ask the Parliamentary Secretary, Department for Constitutional Affairs what steps he proposes to take to inform the public on the correct legal principles behind personal injury claims; and if he will make a statement. [198416]

Mr. Lammy: How best to provide information of this sort will be taken forward in consultation with the various sectors, and is an issue which we will be asking the proposed Action Group of stakeholders to consider.

HOME DEPARTMENT

Graffiti Removal Notices

Mr. Byrne: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department (1) how many graffiti removal notices have been served under the Anti-social Behaviour Act 2003; [197240]

(2) what assessment he has made of the efficacy of graffiti removal notices; [197241]

(3) what duties are incumbent on local authorities to remove graffiti from local authority owned premises and facilities; and what steps local communities can take to enforce such action. [197242]

Ms Blears: Graffiti is a serious issue that makes areas look run down and can often lead to an increase in crime and the fear of crime.

That is why we introduced Graffiti Removal Notices in the Anti-social Behaviour Act 2003 to ensure rapid removal of graffiti on street furniture, educational institutes and statutory undertakers' property. These provisions are being piloted in 12 sites in England. No notices have been served to date since strong and effective partnership arrangements have been established between local authorities and the telecommunications industry and others making the sanction of notices unnecessary to date. We are currently undertaking a Regulatory Impact Assessment to determine the impact and cost of improved graffiti removal arrangements with the partners in the pilots and are seeking comments up until 31 December 2004. After that date we will determine the efficacy of the scheme.

There is no specific duty on local authorities to remove graffiti from all of their properties. However, many already remove it speedily because of the negative messages uncleaned graffiti sends out to a community. Local authorities typically require the removal of graffiti through their cleansing contracts and normally respond to racist, homophobic and other offensive graffiti within 24 hours of reports being received.

Local communities have a vital role to play in ensuring local authorities respond to a range of antisocial behaviour priorities. However, since there is currently no requirement on local authorities to remove graffiti, active engagement with the local Crime and Disorder Reduction Partnership and relevant functions at the local authority is the best way for local communities to register concerns about graffiti.

Anglia Water

Mr. Llwyd: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many complaints have been received from probation areas in respect of Anglia Water Group's contract for approved premises over the past 18 months. [194320]

Fiona Mactaggart *[holding answer 28 October 2004]*: There have been 1,853 complaints in the 18 months between April 2003 and September 2004. This averages just over one complaint per month per premise. However, the level of complaints has been falling consistently following the introduction of an improvement plan.

Animal Experiments

Norman Baker: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what estimate he makes of the percentage of animals bred for possible experimentation purposes which are subsequently not used for these purposes. [197888]

Caroline Flint *[holding answer 16 November 2004]*: The Home Office does not collect this information centrally.

However, the Animal Procedures Committee has recently investigated the production of conventional animals for use in scientific procedures, focussing specifically on rats, mice, dogs, cats and non-human primates, all of which are listed in schedule two of the Animals (Scientific Procedures) Act 1986 and are required to be obtained from designated breeding or supplying establishments. The Committee published its report in September 2004 as Annex G to its Annual Report for 2003 (HC 1017). Their review was based on surveys carried out by the Laboratory Animals Science Association. The Committee concluded that overbreeding of conventional animals is not a significant problem. This conclusion is supported by the observations of Home Office Inspectors who visit designated breeding establishments.

Anti-crime Measures (Newcastle-under-Lyme)

Paul Farrelly: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many *(a)* community support officers and *(b)* street wardens have been introduced in Newcastle-under-Lyme. [198585]

Ms Blears: I am informed by the Chief Constable of Staffordshire Police that there are six Community Support Officers and two street wardens currently deployed in Newcastle-under-Lyme.

Paul Farrelly: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what steps are being taken to increase the numbers of special constables assisting the police. [198587]

Ms Blears: The White Paper "Building Communities, Beating Crime" reaffirms the Government's commitment to increasing the number and the effectiveness of special constables.

The Home Office announced in December 2003 the provision of funding of up to £70,000 for each of the 43 police forces in England and Wales under the Special Constabulary Capacity Building Scheme for dedicated staff and/or initiatives. The funding will assist forces implement good practice, improving the recruitment, management and deployment of specials.

In addition, the Home Office and the Association of Chief Police Officers (ACPO) have brought out Good Practice Guidance designed to help all forces attract and hold on to specials, ensuring their time and skills are properly valued and used to best effect.

In February this year we launched the "Could You Volunteer?" advertising campaign to raise awareness of the Special Constabulary and generate interest in their voluntary work. There followed a significant increase in expressions of interest in the specials.

The campaign was timed to coincide with the second annual "National Specials Weekend" held on 28–29 February 2004, with all 43 Forces in England and Wales working to raise the profile of the Special Constabulary. We are planning to hold another such weekend in 2005.

We are working with businesses to encourage their support for specials in their employment and establish crime reduction partnerships with the police. For instance, the Shopwatch scheme originally launched by the Metropolitan police in Camden was recently extended to include Oxford Street and Regent Street.

Paul Farrelly: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what steps the Government have taken to *(a)* punish and *(b)* rehabilitate persistent offenders in Newcastle-under-Lyme since 1997. [198589]

Paul Goggins: The Newcastle-under-Lyme Prolific Offenders project was set up in 1997 and was one of the first such projects in the country. It focused on those offenders known or believed to be committing large amounts of crime, and in particular burglary, in order to fund Class A drug dependencies. The project team comprises both police and probation officers and has access to an NHS specialist drugs nurse. The supervision by the probation officer includes home visits, support with finding accommodation or employment, developing support networks and drug testing.

An evaluation undertaken by Keele University praised the strong multi-agency working arrangements which had developed and were a very strong factor in the success of the project. The project represented the UK at the European Crime Prevention Awards in 2001, where it finished runner-up.

The project is one of many that contributed to the Government's national Persistent Offender Scheme in 2003–04 and the Prolific and other Priority Offender (PPO) Strategy that succeeded it in September 2004. The aims of these initiatives included a strong focus on catching and convicting persistent and prolific offenders and applying multi-agency interventions to rehabilitate them. The PPO strategy also includes a "Prevent and Deter" strand aimed to prevent young people at risk from developing into the prolific offenders of the future.

Antisocial Behaviour

Mr. Clappison: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department pursuant to the answer of 2 November 2004, *Official Report*, column 187W, how many of the persons given a custodial sentence for breach of an antisocial behaviour order (ASBO) *(a)* received a custodial sentence for other offences on the same appearance, *(b)* received a consecutive sentence of custody for breach of an ASBO when being dealt with for other offences on the same court appearance and *(c)* were being dealt with for breach of an ASBO alone. [196603]

Ms Blears: Information held on the Home Office Court Proceedings Database shows that, of the 152 persons given a custodial sentence for breach of an antisocial behaviour order (ASBO); *(a)* the number of custodial sentences given for other offences on the same court appearance is 88, *(b)* the number of consecutive sentences of custody for breach of an ASBO when being dealt with for other offences on the same court appearance is 76, and *(c)* the number of cases which were dealt with for breach of an ASBO alone is 44. In 56 cases the defendant received a consecutive custodial sentence for breach of an ASBO and a custodial sentence for one or more other offences on the same court appearance. Hence these cases are counted under both *(a)* and *(b)*.

Armley Prison

Mr. Battle: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what his latest estimate is of the percentage of prisoners in Armley Prison with *(a)* drug-related problems, *(b)* alcohol-related problems and *(c)* mental illness. [189944]

Paul Goggins: Routine data collection at Leeds prison states that 72 per cent. of prisoners report drug related problems at reception. A needs analysis undertaken by the Prison Service in April 2004 estimates that in Leeds prison 25 per cent. of prisoners have alcohol related problems. On 12 October 2004, 14 per cent. of prisoners in Leeds prison had a diagnosed mental health problem.

Asylum Seekers

Mr. Malins: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many asylum applications have been awaiting an initial decision for more than *(a)* three and *(b)* six months. [193251]

Mr. Browne: The level of initial decisions has continued to exceed the level of applications in recent quarters, hence the number of cases awaiting initial decision has continued to fall, to 13,300 at the end of June 2004 (compared with 31,400 at the end of June 2003) and the lowest level for a decade. Of this total, 4,900 cases were work in progress (i.e. the application had been outstanding for six months or less), so a total of 8,900 cases had been awaiting an initial decision for more than six months. Similarly 9,200 cases had been awaiting an initial decision for more than three months.

Eighty-two per cent. of new substantive applications received in 2003–04 had initial decisions reached and served within two months compared with 75 per cent. in 2002–03. For applications received in 2002–03, the figures were 85 per cent. within four months and 88 per cent. within six months. For April to December 2003, the corresponding figures were 90 per cent. within four months and 93 per cent. within six months.

Information on the number of cases awaiting initial decisions, and on the timeliness of case processing, is published quarterly on the Home Office website at http://www.homeoffice.gov.uk/rds/immigration1.html.

Mr. Malins: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many people have arrived at UK *(a)* airports and *(b)* ports without any or any proper documentation and subsequently claimed asylum in each of the last 12 months. [195469]

Mr. Browne: Precise information on how many people have arrived at UK airports or ports undocumented and subsequently claimed asylum is unavailable. However, management information indicates that, during July 2003 and June 2004, undocumented arrivals (which may include dependants) was equivalent to around 70 per cent. of the number of port principal asylum applicants. A breakdown by type of port, and on how many subsequently claimed asylum, is not available and could be produced only at disproportionate cost.

Information on asylum applications is published on a quarterly and annual basis. The publication covering the third quarter of 2004 (July to September) was published on 16 November on the Home Office Research Development and Statistics Directorate website at http://www.homeoffice.gov.uk/rds/immigration1.html

Mr. John Taylor: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will take steps to ensure that local authorities are fully reimbursed by the Government for *(a)* costs arising from the discharge of their responsibilities towards the children of asylum seekers and *(b)* consequent resource costs borne by local authorities; and if he will make a statement. [196095]

Mr. Browne *[holding answer 4 November 2004]*: Local authorities have a wide range of responsibilities towards children in their area. This applies to children of asylum seekers in the same way as to other children, and the funding mechanisms in place reflect this.

Mr. Malins: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many and what percentage of asylum seekers arriving at UK ports did not have an immigration document establishing identity and nationality or citizenship since section 2 of the Asylum and Immigration (Treatment of Claimants, etc.) Act 2004 came into force; how many such people have been prosecuted; how many of those *(a)* pleaded guilty, *(b)* were convicted after pleading not guilty, *(c)* were legally represented and *(d)* were given a custodial sentence; how many received a custodial sentence in excess of three months; and what estimate he has made of the average cost to public funds per month per person of keeping them in custody. [196858]

Mr. Browne: Precise information on how many people have arrived at UK airports or ports undocumented and subsequently claimed asylum is unavailable. However, management information indicates that, between July 2003 and June 2004, undocumented arrivals (which may include dependants) was equivalent to around 70 per cent. of the number of port principal asylum applicants. A breakdown by type of port, and on how many subsequently claimed asylum, is not available and could be produced only at disproportionate cost.

Since section 2 of the Asylum and Immigration (Treatment of Claimants, etc.) Act 2004 came into force on 22 September 2004.

> Eighty-two people have been charged under this section
>
> Of these 24 pleaded guilty and 58 pleaded not guilty. There has been insufficient time for any of those pleading not guilty to have their cases heard at a Crown court.
>
> All charged are entitled to legal representation, however there are no figures collated regarding how many were represented.
>
> There have been 19 custodial sentences and all of these were in excess of three months. Five other pleading guilty are awaiting sentencing.

These figures represent the position as at the close of the courts on Wednesday 3 November.

All figures are locally collated management information and are therefore subject to change.

Mrs. Spelman: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will list local authority net current expenditure on asylum seekers for each local authority in England in each year since 1991–92. [197246]

Mr. Browne: The information is not available in the format requested. The Home Office took responsibility for payment of grants to local authorities supporting asylum seekers on 1 April 1999. Local authorities are able to claim grant from the Home Office within specified criteria to meet their costs of supporting asylum seekers.

Mr. Wiggin: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many asylum seekers there are in Wales, broken down by local authority area. [197420]

Mr. Browne: Information on the number of asylum seekers (including dependants) supported by the National Asylum Support Service (NASS) in Wales, as at the end of June 2004, is presented in the following table. Corresponding figures for those not in receipt of NASS support are not available.

Asylum seekers in receipt of NASS support, as at end of June 2004

	Number of applicants (including dependants)		
Local authority	*Subsistence only support*	*Accommodation support*	*Total*
Blaenau Gwent	5	0	5
Bridgend	5	0	5
Caerphilly	*	0	*
Cardiff	50	1,060	1,110
Carmarthenshire	*	0	
Ceredigion	*	0	

Asylum seekers in receipt of NASS support, as at end of June 2004

	Number of applicants (including dependants)		
Local authority	*Subsistence only support*	*Accommodation support*	*Total*
Conwy	5	0	5
Denbighshire	*	0	
Flintshire	*	0	
Gwynedd	*	0	
Merthyr Tydfil	*	0	
Monmouthshire	*	0	
Neath Port Talbot	5	*	5
Newport	30	350	390
Pembrokeshire	*	0	*
Powys	*	0	*
Rhondda	5	0	5
Swansea	30	900	930
Torfaen	*	0	*
Wrexham	5	55	55
Total	155	2,375	2,525

Figures are rounded to the nearest five and therefore may not sum due to rounding.

* equals 1 or 2. Figures are provisional.

Accommodation support includes those receiving "accommodation only" support and those receiving "accommodation and subsistence" support.

Information on the number of asylum seekers supported by NASS is published quarterly. The publication covering the third quarter of 2004 (July to September) was published on 16 November 2004 on the Home Office Research Development and Statistics Directorate web site at http://www.homeoffice.gov.uk/rds/immigration1.html

Mr. Salter: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what proportion of the costs of support for asylum seekers in Reading was borne by the local authority in the last financial year. [197549]

Mr. Browne *[holding answer 11 November 2004]:* The information is not available. Local authorities are able to claim grant from the Home Office within specified criteria to meet their costs of supporting asylum seekers.

Mr. Hayes: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many vehicles have been supplied to asylum seekers to facilitate their transport; at what cost; what the nationalities were of those concerned; what checks were made on the driving permits of those concerned; whether nationals of the countries of origin concerned in possession of these permits have an automatic right to drive in the UK; whether the asylum applications of the individuals involved was delayed by the lack of other documents; and if he will make a statement. [197920]

Mr. Browne: The National Asylum Support Service does not provide cars to asylum seekers it is supporting. Asylum seekers, like any other person from abroad are expected to meet the requirements laid down by the Driver and Vehicle Licensing Agency if they wish to drive here.

Tom Cox: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will list the London local authorities which are supporting asylum seekers; and if he will make a statement. [198186]

Mr. Browne: The following London boroughs are providing support to asylum seekers:

Barking and Dagenham, Barnet, Bexley, Brent, Bromley, Camden, Corporation of London, Croydon, Ealing, Enfield, Greenwich, Hackney, Hammersmith and Fulham, Haringey, Harrow, Havering, Hillingdon, Hounslow, Islington, Kensington and Chelsea, Kingston-upon-Thames, Lambeth, Lewisham, Merton, Newham, Redbridge, Richmond-upon-Thames, Southwark, Sutton, Tower Hamlets, Waltham Forest, Wandsworth and Westminster.

Dr. Pugh: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many entrants to the country who have arrived at John Lennon Airport, Liverpool in the last three years and been asked to report to immigration control have subsequently absconded or not reported back. [193866]

Mr. Browne: Information on the number of entrants at individual ports who have absconded or not reported back is only available by examination of individual case files at disproportionate cost.

Biometrics

Mrs. Curtis-Thomas: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department when the results from the UK Passport Service trial of biometrics will be published. [196629]

Mr. Browne: The enrolment of volunteers on the UK Passport Service Biometrics Trial is reaching its conclusion. To ensure engagement with a wide cross-section of the public, the trial will continue working with the disabled community into December. This will be followed by evaluation and quality assurance of the results, with the findings being released as soon as possible thereafter.

Charities Bill

Sir Sydney Chapman: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will make a statement on the draft Charities Bill; and when the Government plan to introduce the Charities Bill. [196301]

Fiona Mactaggart *[holding answer 8 November 2004]:* The draft Charities Bill was published on 27 May 2004 and has undergone pre-legislative scrutiny by a Joint Committee. The Joint Committee reported on 30 September. The Government are considering their response to that report.

The Government plan to introduce the Bill as soon as parliamentary time allows.

Charnwood Cohesion Project

Mr. Reed: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what funding has been given to the Charnwood Community Cohesion Pathfinder project in each of the last three years; and what plans he has for future funding. [197430]

Fiona Mactaggart: A total of £285,000 was provided to the Charnwood Community Cohesion Pathfinder between February 2003 and September 2004. Of this, a total of £150,000 was allocated to Charnwood borough council, £90,000 to the Community and Voluntary Sector (CVS) and £45,000 to fund Young Community Champions (YCC), a programme targeting young people. In the financial year 2002–03 a total of £90,000 was allocated to the programme, in the financial year 2003–04 £135,000 was allocated and the figure in the financial year 2004–05 was £60,000.

The Pathfinder Programme was developed to provide local authorities with an opportunity to explore what works in building community cohesion over an 18 month period. Local authorities are then expected to mainstream the findings of what works into their core service delivery functions. No further funding will be allocated under the provisions of this programme.

Mr. Reed: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what assessment he has made of the Charnwood Community Cohesion Pathfinder project; and if he will make a statement. [197431]

Fiona Mactaggart: The Charnwood Community Cohesion Pathfinder is currently completing a self assessment process that will inform the Home Office about the impact of the programme in Charnwood and what the key measures in building community cohesion in Charnwood have been. In addition, Charnwood borough council will be conducting their own evaluation of their programme in January 2005 and will be advising the Home Office of the results of this evaluation in February 2005.

Child Abuse

Mrs. Curtis-Thomas: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what assessment has been made of the proportion of *(a)* sex offenders and *(b)* the general population who have been victims of sexual or physical abuse as children. [195482]

Paul Goggins: The information requested is not available from the Home Office Court Proceedings Database. No information on the circumstances of individual cases or the histories of those appearing before the courts is collected.

A Home Office Police Research Series Paper published in 1998 ("Sex offending against children: Understanding the risk"—number 99) reviewed a number of studies in relation to sex offending against children and found differing percentages of sex offenders who had experienced childhood sexual abuse. There is no known source of this information in relation to the general population.

The information requested in relation to the general population is not available centrally.

Citizenship Applications

Keith Vaz: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many applications for citizenship were rejected in 2003. [196360]

Mr. Browne: 10,680 applications for citizenship were refused in 2003.

Further information on all areas of citizenship can be found in the statistical bulletin "Persons Granted British Citizenship United Kingdom, 2003". This publication can be found on the Home Office website at www.homeoffice.gov.uk/rds/immigration1.html

Civil Servants

Mr. Jenkins: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what the average length of continuous service for civil servants within the Department is. [194409]

Fiona Mactaggart: The latest figures for the average length of continuous service for civil servants in the department and its agencies (where known) as at 1 April 2004 have been placed in the Library.

Community Safety Wardens

Mr. Byrne: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will set out the terms under which police authorities may access additional resources to fund police community safety wardens; and what the timetable is for implementation of the process. [197234]

Ms Blears: Our target is to deliver 24,000 Community Support Officers (CSOs) by 2008 as a key part of our strategy to boost neighbourhood policing and tackle antisocial behaviour. The first phase of the Neighbourhood Policing Fund (NPF) will provide £50 million to enable police forces to recruit an additional 1,500 CSOs by the end of March 2005 and to support salary and related costs in 2005–06. Forces will be notified shortly of their allocations under this round of the NPF.

We will shortly begin discussions with the Association of Chief Police Officers and with the Association of Police Authorities on how the NPF will achieve the next phase of growth in CSO numbers.

Coroner/Death Certification Services

Mrs. Curtis-Thomas: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what progress has been made in the reform of the coroner and death certification services. [196632]

Paul Goggins: The timetable for reform of the coroner service was set out in the position paper "Reforming the Coroner and Death Certification Service" which was published in March 2004.

Work on reform is progressing well and I expect a White Paper to be published, as promised, in spring 2005.

Counter-terrorism

Harry Cohen: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department when he expects the *(a)* Metropolitan Police and *(b)* British Transport Police to take delivery of high standard chemical and biological suits for counter-terrorism duties; when he expects each force to have similar standard suits available for joint operations; and if he will make a statement. [196487]

Mr. Blunkett: UK police forces are equipped with military-style police personal protective equipment. To meet civilian requirements UK police forces including the Metropolitan Police are being trained and equipped in the new generation personal protective equipment, the CR1 suit. This began in April this year and is due to finish in April 2006.

British Transport Police are trained and equipped with the military-style police personal protective equipment and they have developed an additional capability for specialist staff to use gastight suits and self-contained breathing apparatus to provide a response to incidents in the London underground and elsewhere.

Joint exercises using the respective personal protective equipment take place routinely.

Crime/Sentencing Statistics

Mr. Dismore: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what the ratio of crimes committed to police officer numbers is in Barnet; what the ratio in *(a)* outer London boroughs and *(b)* England and Wales is; and if he will make a statement. [196410]

Ms Blears: The information is set out in the following table.

Area	*Number of crimes per officer*[1]
Barnet	27.6
Outer London (2)	21.0
England and Wales	17.5

[1] Calculation is based on the number of crimes for the six key offence groups: violence against the person, sexual offences, robbery, burglary, theft of a motor vehicle and theft from a motor vehicle. It does not include fraud and forgery, criminal damage or drugs and other offences categories of crime.

[2] The Metropolitan Police advise that the outer London boroughs are, Barking and Dagenham, Barnet, Bexley, Bromley, Croydon, Enfield, Havering, Harrow, Hillingdon, Kingston-upon-Thames, Redbridge, Richmond-upon-Thames and Sutton.

The deployment of police officers to Barnet Operational Command Units (OCU) and the other London borough OCUs is a matter for the Commissioner of Police of the Metropolis (Sir John Stevens).

I understand that the London borough of Barnet Operational Command Unit had 541 police officers at the end of March 2004. Only one of the 13 outer London boroughs had a higher number of police officers.

David Davis: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many offenders placed on the home detention curfew scheme were *(a)* cautioned and *(b)* convicted in each year since 1999; and how many are awaiting prosecution. [190930]

Paul Goggins: As of 30 September 2004, 100,345 prisoners have been placed on the home detention curfew scheme since the scheme was introduced in January 1999. Up to 30 September 2004, 2,075 of those prisoners have been reported to the Home Office as having been cautioned, convicted or awaiting prosecution for an offence committed whilst they were subject to the scheme. This represents 2 per cent. of the offenders placed on the scheme.

Criminal Justice Act

Harry Cohen: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department whether he has determined the date for the commencement for sections 145 and 146 of the Criminal Justice Act 2003 to come into force; and if he will make a statement. [196384]

Paul Goggins: Sections 145 and 146 of the Criminal Justice Act 2003 relate to hate crime; these provide for courts to treat motivation by racial or religious prejudice, or prejudice related to disability or sexual orientation, as an aggravating factor for any criminal offence. These sections are not yet in force, but section 145 is a re-enactment of existing legislation contained in section 153 of the Powers of Criminal Courts (Sentencing) Act 2000 that is in force. The commencement date for these sections of the 2003 Act is currently under consideration and will be announced in due course.

Criminal Penalties Harmonisation

Mr. Tynan: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what his policy is in respect of EU proposals to harmonise criminal penalties. [197601]

Caroline Flint: The Government do not believe that there is any justification for general harmonisation of criminal penalties. We support some agreement on criminal penalty levels but only where it focuses on tackling common threats posed by serious cross border and organised crime, for example in respect of trafficking in drugs and human beings and sexual exploitation of children. This view is reflected in the Hague Programme on Strengthening Freedom, Security and Justice in the European Union.

Criminal Record Checks

Michael Fabricant: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what procedures are in place *(a)* to check the criminal records of civil servants in his Department and agencies responsible to his Department who have access to computer databases containing confidential information on the public and *(b)* to ensure that there can be no improper use of computer databases containing confidential information on the public; and if he will make a statement. [194601]

Mr. Blunkett: On recruitment to the Home Office and its agencies all civil servants are subject to the satisfactory completion of a criminal records check before they are allowed access to computer databases containing confidential information on the public. All serving staff are also required to report any conviction for a criminal offence (except a traffic offence with a non-official vehicle for which the penalty has not included imprisonment or the suspension of their driving licence). All IT systems containing protectively marked information have security operating procedures which set out clear requirements for the secure handling of data. On a regular basis these are brought to the attention of staff and they are required to read them.

Cyber Crime

Mr. David Stewart: To ask the Secretary of State fo the Home Department what steps the Government ar taking to combat *(a)* cyber crime and *(b)* cybe terrorism, with particular reference to (i) credit car fraud and (ii) identity theft. [19806

Caroline Flint: The Government takes very seriousl the issue of cyber attack. It has in place a number o organisations to ensure that the electronic fabric o society is not under attack. Advice, from a variety o sources, is also available to the general public and computer users. There is a fine line between criminal acts against information systems (so called "e-crime") and what could be called a terrorist act. The damage or disruption to an electrical system can be the same irrespective of whether an attack is caused for "criminal" or "terrorist" reasons. Whatever the reason for an attack, action will be taken wherever possible against those responsible.

Despite the investigative challenges posed by the internet, law enforcement seeks to take effective action against fraud whatever mechanism is used to commit it. Where cases involve serious and organised computer enabled criminality at national and international levels the case may be dealt with by the National Hi-Tech Crime Unit (NHTCU) which we have set up within the National Crime Squad.

The internet provides criminals with new opportunities to commit a range of financial frauds including credit card fraud and identity fraud. Credit card fraud takes various forms including phishing (the practice of sending e-mails claiming to originate from banks which ask customers to re-register at a replica bank website with the aim of using that information to transfer money out of these accounts), and card not present (CNP) fraud where genuine card details are stolen and used to make purchases through a remote medium such as the internet. Identity fraud usually occurs when someone's personal information such as name, address or date of birth is captured without their knowledge and used by someone else to support criminal activity, which could involve deception, financial gain or obtaining other benefits and services.

The Home Office has established a cross public-private sector work programme to tackle identity theft and identity fraud. The programme co-ordinates existing activity in the public and private sectors and identifies new projects and initiatives to reduce identity fraud. On 14 July 2004 my hon. Friend Des Browne announced a website www.identitytheft.org.uk, which offers advice to consumers on how to protect themselves against identity theft and what to do if they think they have been victims of identity fraud.

Education is a key factor in dealing with fraud over the internet. A large amount of internet fraud can be prevented if organisations have proper fraud prevention measures in place. The public must also be educated about the dangers of internet fraud and how to avoid falling victim to it.

Government takes an active role in educating computer users about the risks of fraud committed by using the internet and the Home Office website provides advice on avoiding internet fraud. The Home Office has also created, and maintains the "e-tailing mini site", which forms part of the crime reduction website. The mini site provides information to help both businesses and consumers protect themselves specifically when using the internet.

We have published, jointly with the Association for Payment Clearing Services (APACS) a leaflet on card safety which includes a section on using cards safely over the internet. The leaflet has been sent to all police forces in England and Wales, and to Crime and Disorder Reduction Partnerships. It is also available on the Home Office website and the e-tailing mini site, and APACS members (banks) will be sending a version of the leaflet to their cardholders.

The Home Office is represented on an industry-led Steering Group which aims to tackle CNP fraud. We support practical measures being introduced by the industry to increase levels of security for internet transactions: These include Address Verification Services (AVS) and Card Security Code (CSC), along with Mastercard Secure Code and Verified by Visa which require password verification for internet transactions. These initiatives are already making a significant impact on CNP Fraud. The work of the CNP Steering Group has also led to the production of a manual (Spot and Stop Card Fraud Retailer Pack) which aims to educate merchants on the dangers of CNP fraud and the steps which can be taken to prevent it.

Departmental Contracts

Pete Wishart: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will list the 30 largest contracts awarded by his Department from *(a)* May 2001 to April 2002, *(b)* May 2002 to April 2003, *(c)* May 2003 to April 2004 and *(d)* May 2004 to the latest date for which information is available, indicating in each case (i) the values of the contracts and (ii) the companies with which the contracts were placed. [196893]

Fiona Mactaggart: The Home Department is unable to provide the level of detailed information sought on contracts. Records are not held centrally and to collate and to provide this information for the Home Office and its Executive Agencies would incur disproportionate costs. The Home Office is currently addressing the absence of centrally held information of this type through the implementation of new IT systems.

Pete Wishart: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department which non-accounting and non-information technology external organisations have won new contracts with *(a)* his Department and *(b)* executive agencies for which he is responsible in each of the past three years. [196895]

Fiona Mactaggart: The Home Department is unable to provide the level of detailed information sought on contracts. Records are not held centrally and to provide this information for the Home Office and its executive agencies would incur disproportionate costs. The Home Office is currently addressing the absence of centrally held information of this type through the implementation of new IT systems.

Departmental Efficiency

Mrs. Curtis-Thomas: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department whether his Department's spending plans are based on a continuing reduction in the number of asylum applications. [196589]

Mr. Browne: The Department's spending plans are based on an assessment of the likely future costs of the immigration and asylum system. We have more than halved the number of asylum applications since October 2002.

Fixed Penalty Notices issued in respect of parking offences

DCU	*2001*	*2002*	*2003*	*2004 (to 11 November 2004)*
Down	366	353	1,095	690
Dungannon	723	743	1,017	904
Fermanagh	801	897	1,213	1,226
Foyle	4,924	[illegible],966	5,254	5,028
Larne	142	232	149	145
Limavady	64	133	124	49
Lisburn	3,066	2,887	3,489	3,053
Magherafelt	306	502	419	502
Moyle	0	90	200	267
Newry and Mourne	755	1,821	1,613	1,344
Newtownabbey	153	284	1,114	737
Newtownards	604	861	1,259	946
North Down	686	1,131	1,114	1,176
Omagh	822	1,209	912	1,214
Strabane	588	303	322	330

It is not possible to provide information for the 2000 as the District Command Unit structure was not established until 2001. Figures for Belfast South DCU are higher as it covers the main retail areas of Belfast City Centre.

Passive Smoking

Mrs. Iris Robinson: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland what information he collects regarding the number of people each year in the Province whose death is partly or wholly attributable to passive smoking. [198837]

Mr. Pearson: It is not possible to give figures on the number of deaths partly or wholly attributable to passive smoking from routinely collected mortality data.

Patient Death Investigations

Mrs. Iris Robinson: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland what steps he plans to take to ensure that concerns raised by doctors regarding the deaths of patients are investigated. [198023]

Angela Smith: A Safety in Health and Social Care Steering Group established by the Department issued interim guidance (HSS (PPM) 06/04) to the HPSS and special agencies in July 2004 on the reporting and management of serious adverse incidents, including the death of patients.

The Department has also established a multi-agency group comprising departmental officials and representatives from the Police Service of Northern Ireland, the Health and Safety Executive (HSE), and the coroner service to develop a memorandum of understanding for the investigation of death and serious incidents in hospitals. This will take account of a recent memorandum of understanding issued for consultation in England and Wales: "Investigating patient safety incidents (unexpected death or serious untoward harm): a protocol for liaison and effective communications between the NHS, Association of Chief Police Officers and HSE". Work is also under way to reform the coroner and death certification service in Northern Ireland.

Police Ombudsman

Lady Hermon: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland how many investigations carried out by the Police Ombudsman for Northern Ireland have resulted in *(a)* successful prosecutions and *(b)* disciplinary charges being brought in each year of its operation. [188642]

Mr. Pearson: The Police Ombudsman has advised that as a result of her investigations:

(a) 28 recommendations have been made to the DPP for prosecution since 6 November 2000. DPP has directed prosecutions in 13 cases, no prosecutions in 10 cases and five cases await direction. DPP also directed prosecutions in three cases where Ombudsman had not recommended prosecution. Arising from those cases which have been through the courts there have been four convictions, all in 2004.

(b) the following disciplinary matters have been referred to the Chief Constable:

	Formal	*Informal*[1]
Nov 2000 to March 2001	nil	nil
April 2001 to March 2002	2	5
April 2002 to March 2003	8	37
April 2003 to March 2004	16	95
April 2004 to date	2	7

[1] refers to disciplinary processes such as Superintendent's warning, advice and guidance to be given, or procedural issues to be addressed.

Police Service of Northern Ireland

Lady Hermon: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland whether a Police Service of Northern Ireland officer holds the post of wildlife officer. [191824]

Mr. Pearson: The post of Wildlife Liaison Officer was trawled within the Police Service of Northern Ireland, but none of the applicants was found suitable. As an interim measure, an officer within the Operational support Department has been appointed temporarily to carry out the functions of the Wildlife Liaison Officer.

The post will be re-advertised within the Police Service of Northern Ireland in the near future.

Police Station Security

Lady Hermon: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland which police stations in Northern Ireland are due to have fortifications removed in the next 12 months; and if he will make a statement. [197017]

Mr. Pearson: It is planned that the following stations will be subject to softening works during the next 12 months:

Castlereagh
Holywood
Strandtown
Grosvenor Road
Comber
Magherafelt
Cookstown
Portglenone
Aughnacloy
Carrickfergus
Dungannon
Newtownabbey
Randalstown
Tennent Street
Newcastle
Strabane
Tandragee
Donemana
Banbridge
Portaferry
Dromore
York Road
Cushendall
Maghera

Policing

Mr. McGrady: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland what overlap there is between the work of the district policing partnerships and that of the community safety partnerships. [194947]

Mr. Pearson: The Police (Northern Ireland) Act 2000 as amended by the Police (Northern Ireland) Act 2003 sets out the statutory basis for the establishment and functions of district policing partnerships.

Section 71 of the Justice (Northern Ireland) Act 2002 makes provision for the establishment of a community safety strategy. The NIO Community Safety Strategy launched in 2003 recommended the formation of community safety partnerships in each district council area. Their main purpose is to bring together, at a local level, statutory bodies, service providers, voluntary and community organisations and public representatives with the aim of combining resources and views to enhance community safety in their districts.

The functions and membership of CSPs and DPPs therefore differ significantly, and their relationship is complementary rather than overlapping. The Government see no case for change at present. However, both partnership groupings are still at a relatively early stage of their development. The Northern Ireland Policing Board is currently undertaking a review of district policing partnerships, and community safety partnerships will also be subject to evaluation next year. The results of those reviews will of course be fully considered.

Racism

Mr. Dodds: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland what assessment he has made of the involvement of paramilitary organisations in racist attacks in Northern Ireland. [187416]

Mr. Pearson: Individual members and localised groupings affiliated to Loyalist paramilitary groups are believed to have been involved in attacks against ethnic minorities. However, these attacks do not appear to have been sanctioned by the leaderships of Loyalist paramilitary organisations.

Restorative Justice

Lady Hermon: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland what progress has been made by the Northern Ireland Office towards completion of protocols governing restorative justice schemes; and if he will make a statement. [198489]

Mr. Spellar: Government are continuing to work with criminal justice agencies in developing guidelines for the operation of schemes in dealing with low level crime, in line with the recommendations in the criminal justice review. This work is at an advanced stage.

Government recognise that schemes can have a part to play in helping to secure a normal society. As a condition for this, schemes need to work actively to uphold the human rights of all, be prepared to work with statutory agencies including the police, be willing to be accredited and to adhere to standards in all key areas.

Smoke Alarms

Mr. Gregory Campbell: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland how many deaths have been caused by fire in Northern Ireland in 2004; and in how many instances *(a)* no smoke alarm being fitted and *(b)* a faulty or non-working smoke alarm was a contributory factor. [198637]

Angela Smith: In the year to date (to 15 November 2004) there have been a total of 11 fire deaths in dwellings. Eight of these deaths have been deemed to be accidental. The cause of the remaining three is currently under investigation. Of the 11 dwelling fires, a total of six were fitted with a working smoke alarm. There was no functioning smoke alarm in the remaining five.

Speaker of the Northern Ireland Assembly

Lady Hermon: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland if he will make a statement on the current *(a)* status and *(b)* role of the Speaker of the Northern Ireland Assembly. [197014]

Mr. Paul Murphy: The Office of the Speaker of the Northern Ireland Assembly has been vacant since the retirement of Lord Alderdice earlier this year. Any functions required to be exercised by the Speaker under the Northern Ireland Act 1998 may, in his absence, be exercised by a Deputy Speaker.

Lady Hermon: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland whether a special adviser is assigned to the Office of Speaker of the Northern Ireland Assembly. [197015]

Mr. Paul Murphy: An adviser, recruited as a full time member of Assembly staff is still assigned to the Office of the Speaker. He is currently carrying out work for other public sector organisations.

Special Needs

Mrs. Iris Robinson: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland if he will make a statement on nursing provision in schools for children with special needs in the Province. [198153]

Angela Smith: Various arrangements are in place to provide nursing support in schools for children with special educational needs. School health services coordinate the health surveillance programme provided to school children. Community children's nursing and learning disability nursing also provide support to children, their families and school staff to enable individual needs to be met during the school day. In some instances, nurses are based within the special schools whereas in other cases nurses provide support through school visits.

An interdepartmental group for children with special needs has been established between the Departments of Health and Education. This group plans to review the outcome of the project assessing the health and care needs of children attending school, which was undertaken by the southern education and library board in collaboration with the southern health and social services board.

Stormont

David Burnside: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland what the cost has been of the Stormont Assembly in the last two years; and what the expected cost is in the next year if the Assembly does not sit and the Executive is not operational. [197667]

Mr. Paul Murphy: The cost of maintaining the Northern Ireland Assembly since suspension in October 2002 until 31 October this year has been £49.6 million. This comprises £21.6 million for costs relating to Members and political parties; £18.5 million for costs relating to Assembly secretariat wages; and £9.5 million for property, accommodation and business services costs.

Expected costs in the next year will be determined in light of the outcome of current political discussions aimed at securing a lasting settlement and restoration of the institutions.

Surveillance

Jeremy Corbyn: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland how many authorisations he has given for intercepting *(a)* mail and *(b)* telephone calls of (i) members of the public and (ii) hon. Members in the past year. [199105]

Mr. Pearson: It is Government policy not to comment on intelligence matters and to neither confirm nor deny the existence of any covert operations.

Sustainable Energy

Mr. McGrady: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland what discussions the Department of the Environment has had with the Energy Saving Trust on the establishment of a sustainable energy pilot centre in Northern Ireland. [199285]

Angela Smith: It has not been possible to answer the hon. Gentleman's question in this parliamentary session.

Tax Discs

Mr. Dodds: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland on how many occasions in each year since 2000 the non-display of vehicle tax discs has been detected, broken down by district command unit. [199254]

Angela Smith: It has not been possible to answer the hon. Gentleman's question in this parliamentary session.

Terrorist Victims

Lady Hermon: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland what plans he has to meet locally elected representatives to discuss the problems facing victims of terrorism. [197022]

Angela Smith: I have been consulting with victims and survivors and their representative groups and have recently issued to them a summary of the views I gathered. My next step will be to draw up proposals for improvements in the arrangements for the planning, coordination and delivery of the services provided to victims to help address the problems they face. At the appropriate time I will consult with the locally elected representatives.

During this consultation process, many views were expressed to me on the matter of dealing with the past. These views, which I shared with my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland, will help inform the work he is doing in this area.

Traffic Wardens

Lady Hermon: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland (1) what discussions he has had with the Chief Constable of the Police Service of Northern Ireland about the future role of traffic wardens in Northern Ireland; and if he will make a statement; [199296]

(2) how many traffic wardens have been recruited in Northern Ireland in each year since 2000; and if he will make a statement on the recruitment policy for traffic wardens. [199297]

Mr. Pearson: It has not been possible to answer the hon. Lady's questions in this parliamentary session.

Victoria Square, Belfast

Mr. Dodds: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland what progress is being made on redeveloping Victoria Square, Belfast. [199258]

Mr. Spellar: The redevelopment of Victoria Square by AM Development is well under way. Another major step will be taken on 21 November 2004, when Churchill House, the former headquarters of the Department for Social Development is demolished in a controlled explosion. The 17-storey office block is the last building left on the site and its clearance means that major construction can begin. The new retail-led development is expected to open in 2007.

Walk-in Centre

Mrs. Iris Robinson: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland what plans he has to establish a new NHS walk-in centre in the Province. [198650]

Angela Smith: The functions of NHS walk-in Centres, as established in Great Britain, will be provided in Northern Ireland by health and care centres, which bring together a range of primary and community-based care services into a 'one stop shop', and local hospitals, as defined in "Developing Better Services". Work is currently in progress on the building of two of these centres in Belfast. Plans for a network of similar centres across Northern Ireland are currently being developed by HSS boards and trusts.

Waste Directives

Mr. Beggs: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland what assessment he has made of the change in costs to Northern Ireland's farming industry as a result of the implementation of recent EU environmental and waste control directives. [197930]

Angela Smith: A mandatory part of the consultation process for the implementation of European Directives in the UK is the preparation of Regulatory Impact Assessments (RIAs) setting out the costs and benefits of implementation. RIAs are published as an integral part of consultation papers. All consultation papers produced by the Department of the Environment on the implementation of EU environmental Directives are made available on the DOE website at www.doeni.gov.uk.

The most recent consultation papers to be published by my Department which impact on agriculture concern implementation of the Nitrates Directive and the Water Framework Directive. Copies of these have been placed in the Library. A further consultation paper on implementation of the Nitrates Directive will issue shortly as will a paper containing proposals to extend existing waste management controls to agricultural waste. I will arrange for copies of these two papers to be placed in the Library.

West Tyrone

Lady Hermon: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland when the West Tyrone area plan will be published. [198282]

Angela Smith: In recent months the Planning Service has been reviewing the rapidly increasing and unprecedented workload pressures being faced by the Agency. After careful consideration of the available options, it has been decided to concentrate as much of the Agencies resources as possible for a period of time, initially for six months, on the operational side of the business, where there are clear legal obligations to meet.

The reallocation of staff will, however, have a knock-on effect on emerging area plans. Resources are available to permit continued work on those plans which are at an advanced stage in the preparation process. However, progress on the remaining area plans, including West Tyrone, will be slower then previously programmed

The importance of delivering full area plan coverage is recognised and the Planning Service will move forward with the area plan programme as quickly as is feasible. At this point in time it is not possible to say precisely when this will be. Much will depend on how quickly the pressure on the operational side can be reduced. An announcement on revised timescales for the Area Plan programme, including the West Tyrone Area Plan, will be made in due course.

Mr. Trimble: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland when the West Tyrone Area Plan will be published. [199217]

Angela Smith: It has not been possible to answer the hon. Member's question in this parliamentary Session.

Wheel-clamping

Mr. Dodds: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland what plans he has to review the law relating to private operators of wheel-clamping in Northern Ireland. [199253]

Angela Smith: It has not been possible to answer the hon. Gentleman's question in this parliamentary session.

Working Time Directive

Mrs. Iris Robinson: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland if he will estimate the costs resulting from the implementation of the European Working Time Directive on the working hours of *(a)* junior doctors, *(b)* senior doctors and *(c)* other health service personnel. [198649]

Angela Smith: The information requested is not available.

FOREIGN AND COMMONWEALTH AFFAIRS

Afghanistan

Mr. Simmonds: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs how many poppy fields have been *(a)* identified and *(b)* destroyed by UK forces in Afghanistan since the fall of the Taliban. [196426]

Mr. Rammell: Eradication of opium poppy is not a task for UK or other international military forces in Afghanistan.

Eradication has been carried out by the Afghan Government in the three years (2002–04) since the fall of the Taliban. The Afghan authorities estimated that 17,300 hectares were destroyed in 2002 and 21,000 hectares in 2003, although there was no independent verification of these figures and we cannot therefore be satisfied as to their accuracy. Eradication in 2004 was carried out by the Afghan Government and the US-supported Central Poppy Eradication Force, where independent verification estimated that less than 4,000 hectares were eradicated.

The UK, as lead nation on Counter Narcotics in Afghanistan, is providing support to the Afghan Government on eradication, principally through the Central Eradication Planning Cell.

Al-Qaeda

Mr. Simmonds: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what discussions have taken place between the Government and West African countries regarding Islamic fundamentalism; and what assessment has been made of the number of Al-Qaeda cells operating in the region. [198273]

Mr. MacShane: We have had a number of discussions with Governments in the region about fundamentalism. We believe that some Al-Qaeda-related individuals may be present in West Africa.

Azerbaijan

Mr. David Atkinson: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs whether it is the Government's policy to support *(a)* the territorial integrity of Azerbaijan as including the former autonomous region of Nagorno Karabakh and *(b)* Azerbaijan's right to control its own borders; and if he will make a statement. [199104]

Mr. Rammell: We will support any mechanism for the resolution of the Nagorno Karabakh dispute that both parties can accept and which has a realistic chance of delivering a lasting political settlement. The framework for discussing such mechanisms is the OSCE Minsk Group, co-chaired by Russia, the US and France. While the UK is not a member of the Minsk Group, we support its work and remain in close touch through the UK Special Representative to the South Caucasus, Sir Brian Fall.

Bahá'í Community (Iran)

Mr. Edwards: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what recent reports he has received on the rights of the Bahá'í community in Iran to conduct social, educational and collective religious activities; and if he will make a statement. [199103]

Mr. Rammell: We continue to have serious concerns about the situation of the Bahái community in Iran. We are monitoring the situation, and are in close contact with Bahái representatives in the UK. They report that their co-religionists face increasing discrimination, including arbitrary arrest and detention, the denial of free worship, the disregard of property rights, the destruction of sites of religious importance, the closure of institutes of higher learning, the suspension of social, educational and community-related activities and the denial of employment, pensions and other benefits. Our EU partners and we have raised our concerns with the Iranian authorities on many occasions, and have urged them to respect and protect the human rights of Iran's religious minorities. Along with all other EU partners, we have co-sponsored a Canadian draft UN General Assembly resolution on the situation of human rights in Iran, including the rights of members of the Bahái community.

Burma

Mr. Ancram: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs (1) whether Article 8a of Council Regulation (EC) 798/2004, as inserted by Article 1 of Council Regulation (EC) No 1853/2004, will prevent persons resident in, or companies registered in, the EU from entering into joint venture partnerships with Burmese state-owned enterprises listed in Annex IV; [198385]

(2) whether Article 8a of Council Regulation (EC) 798/2004 will apply to Burmese-registered subsidiary companies, wholly-owned or otherwise, of companies registered in the EU; [198386]

(3) what is meant by the phrase 'the acquisition of a participation' in a Burmese state-owned enterprise within Article 8a(1)*(b)*, of Council Regulation (EC) 798/2004. [198387]

Mr. Straw: I refer the hon. Gentleman to Articles 8a*(l)*, 8a(2) and 14 of the Council Regulation (EC) 798/2004 (Official Journal, L 125, 28.4.2004, p.4), as amended by Council Regulation (EC) No. 1853/2004 (Official Journal, L 323, 26.10.2004, p.11).

Paragraph 1 of Article 8a prohibits:

> "*(a)* the granting of any financial loan to Burmese state-owned enterprises as listed in Annex IV, or the acquisition of bonds, certificates of deposit, warrants or debentures, issued by these enterprises.
>
> (b) the acquisition or extension of a participation in Burmese state-owned enterprises as listed in Annex IV, including the acquisition in full of such enterprises and the acquisition of shares and securities of a participating nature."

Paragraph 2 of Article 8a provides that:

> "The participation, knowing and intentionally, in activities, the object or effect of which is, directly or indirectly, to circumvent the provisions of paragraph 1 shall be prohibited."

Article 14 provides that the Regulation shall apply:

> "*(a)* within the territory of the Community, including its airspace;
>
> (b) on board any aircraft or any vessel under the jurisdiction of a member state;
>
> (c) to any person inside or outside the territory of the Community who is a national of a member state;
>
> (d) to any legal person, group or entity which is incorporated or constituted under the law of a member state;
>
> (e) to any legal person, group or entity doing business within the Community."

The application of these and the other provisions of Council Regulation (EC) No. 798/2004 in any given case will depend on all the facts and circumstances, and persons who think they may be affected should seek independent legal advice. It would not be appropriate for the Government to attempt to interpret the EC legislation on their behalf.

Colombia

Jeremy Corbyn: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what meetings United Kingdom representatives in Colombia have had recently with *(a)* trade unions, *(b)* human rights groups, *(c)* universities and *(d)* opposition parties; and if he will make a statement. [157709]

Mr. Rammell: Our embassy in Bogota maintains regular contact with a wide range of organisations and individuals in Colombia, including representatives from the categories highlighted by my hon. Friend. These contacts encompass governmental and non-governmental figures, academics, trade unionists, NGOs, and other representatives of civil society, and a broad range of political parties both in government and opposition. For my part, I met representatives from these categories on 21 and 22 June during my second visit to Colombia, this time with Mr. Rory Murphy of the TUC. During my first visit in May 2003 I also met a wide range of Colombian NGOs, including representatives from a number of the categories mentioned. In addition I frequently meet Colombian visitors in London—both governmental and non-governmental—to brief me on the situation in their country. On 16 September I met a representative from a Colombian trade union in London. I also saw a Church representative on 18 October. Finally I hold regular meetings with British trades unionists about Colombia, most recently on 18 October. A further meeting with them is planned for 23 November. All the meetings are an important means of enhancing our understanding of the situation in Colombia.

Lynne Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will make a statement in relation to UK military aid to Colombia. [159607]

Mr. Rammell: We have always made it clear that we do provide, from time to time, military and security advice and assistance to the Colombian Government. UK military assistance focuses on Explosive Ordnance Disposal (EOD) training and British military education.

Mines and other explosive devices are responsible for a significant proportion of deaths among the Colombian armed forces, and also have a devastating effect on the civilian population. Bomb disposal training, which forms the core of our military assistance programme, directly helps the Colombian armed forces to save civilian and military lives. We have also trained elements of the Colombian Authorities engaged in Counter-Narcotics work.

We have also assisted the Colombian military on human rights issues. For example, under the Foreign and Commonwealth Office's Human Rights Project Fund we recently ran a project to raise awareness of the armed forces on their role in prevention of displacement and protection of the rights of internally displaced persons. We also have an ongoing project on human rights training for the military through the Colombian military justice school.

British military training and education introduces personnel to British defence concepts, including the importance of accountable and democratic control of the armed forces, and the use of Rules of Engagement. It improves the ability of the Colombian armed forces to provide security for the Colombian people in a professional manner that preserves democracy and respects human rights.

Cuba

Mr. Wilkinson: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will make enhanced intergovernmental contracts with Cuba contingent upon an improvement in human rights in that country. [199119]

Mr. Rammell: UK policy on Cuba is governed by the EU Common Position, which has human rights enshrined as one of its key principles. The EU regularly issues statements condemning the imprisonment of human rights activists and other political prisoners in Cuba. I have also raised our concerns on human rights with the Cuban ambassador in London, and the Cuban Deputy Foreign Minister at the UN General Assembly.

Cyprus

Andrew Mackinlay: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will make it a condition of the United Kingdom's support for opening sea ports in northern Cyprus to EU trade that such ports adhere to *(a)* all existing and future European ports directives and *(b)* health and safety requirements; and how he expects such rules will be enforced. [199351]

Mr. MacShane: It has not proved possible to respond to my hon. Friend in the time available before Prorogation, for which I apologise.

Ditchley Park

Richard Burden: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what criteria he applies to the use of Ditchley Park by outside organisations for conferences, seminars and meetings concerned with international issues. [196721]

Mr. Straw: Ditchley Park is an independent organisation. Neither the Foreign and Commonwealth Office nor any other Government Department is responsible for setting its criteria. Further information on Ditchley Park can be found at their website: www.ditchley.co.uk.

Equatorial Guinea

Mr. Simmonds: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs pursuant to his answer of 9 November 2004, *Official Report*, column 631W, on Equatorial Guinea, from what source his Department learned of the attempted coup plot in Equatorial Guinea; to which foreign security agencies this information was passed, and when; and whether his Department informed authorities in Zimbabwe about the plot. [198323]

Mr. Mullin *[holding answer 16 November 2004]*: I refer the hon. Member to the reply my right hon. Friend the Foreign Secretary gave to the right hon. and learned Member for Devizes (Mr. Ancram) on 17 November 2004 (UINs 198219, 198227 and 198228).

EU Arms Embargoes

Mr. Tynan: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs (1) what plans there are for future EU arms embargoes to include provisions to turn off or degrade the Galileo positioning system signal to those subject to the embargo if the signal is used for military purposes; [197592]

(2) what assessment he has made of whether provision of Galileo positioning signals by the EU to a warring party would constitute a breach of neutrality in that armed conflict. [197593]

Mr. MacShane: Galileo is a civilian system under civilian control, as confirmed by successive EU Transport Councils.

As is currently the case with GPS, the Galileo Open Service will be freely available.

A decision to develop or use specific military applications for Galileo would, under the terms of the EU treaty, have to be taken by unanimous decision by all member states. The UK is opposed to the development of military applications for Galileo.

The Galileo Management Structures will be responsible for ensuring compliance of Galileo with international arms control regimes, acting on the guidance of member states through the Council.

EU Committees

Angus Robertson: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs how many times during the Greek presidency of the EU the Committee for protection against the effects of the extra-territorial application of legislation adopted by a third country, and actions based thereon or resulting therefrom (anti-boycott) met; when and where these meetings took place; which UK Government expert was present at each meeting; what issues were discussed; which of those were brought to the Committee's attention by the UK Government expert; what recommendations were made by the Committee; what actions were *(a)* proposed and *(b)* taken by the EU as a result of the Committee's recommendations; and if he will make a statement. [192492]

Mr. Alexander: It was intended that a Committee for Protection Against the Effects of the Extraterritorial Application of Legislation Adopted by a Third Country and Actions Based Thereon or Resulting Therefrom (anti-boycott) would be established in Brussels to assist EU companies affected by extraterritorial jurisdiction by third countries, and in particular those affected by the extraterritorial aspects of the US trade sanctions against Cuba, Iran and Libya.

Thus far, the Committee has not been convened. UK companies are obliged to inform HMG and the European Commission of any extraterritorial action taken against them, but whilst it is clear who would be responsible for representing the UK at any meeting of the Committee, in these times of improved electronic communication, it has not been necessary in practice for it to meet.

In addition, as part of the 1997 Understanding between the EU and the US, the US undertook to exempt European individuals and companies from the extraterritorial aspects of US legislation drastically reducing the number of cases occurring, thus further reducing the need for the Committee to meet. In this case, the other questions about the Committee do not apply.

European Constitution

Mr. Austin Mitchell: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what commitments were entered into by the Government of the United Kingdom in respect of the Solemn Declaration on European Union of 1983; by whom the declaration was signed on behalf of the Government; and which of those commitments *(a)* have already been fulfilled or discharged by existing treaties, and by which treaty provisions in each case, *(b)* will be implemented by the proposed European Constitution as published by the Government as CM 6289 and *(c)* remain for future action. [199284]

Mr. MacShane: The Solemn Declaration on European Union of 1983 was signed by the then Prime Minister Margaret Thatcher in the name of the UK Government. It was a non-binding commitment of the then 10 member states to reform the Community's institutions and to develop its policies in many areas. Much of it has since been implemented through the successive stages of evolution of the EU, through three further waves of accession, the Single European Act, the Maastricht Treaty on European Union, the Treaty of Amsterdam and the Treaty of Nice. The EU Constitutional Treaty would consolidate this process of reform.

Falkland Islands

Mr. Simmonds: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what recent discussions have taken place with the governments of *(a)* Argentina, *(b)* Chile, *(c)* Brazil and *(d)* Uruguay regarding flights to and from the Falkland Islands over their airspace; and if he will make a statement. [193466]

Mr. Rammell: The issue of flights to and from the Falkland Islands has been discussed recently between the UK and Argentina. It was mentioned briefly during the meeting between my right hon. Friend the Foreign Secretary and the Argentine Foreign Minister Bielsa during the United Nations General Assembly on 22 September. It has also been discussed in on-going contacts at official level. The UK would like to see an arrangement reached with the Argentine Government that would allow charter flights to the Falkland Islands to resume. Any such agreement would have to be acceptable to the Falkland Islanders.

Discussions with the governments of Chile, Brazil and Uruguay take place as necessary.

Falluja (Journalists)

Mr. Jim Cunningham: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what precautions are in place to protect journalists reporting on the front line with troops in Falluja. [197820]

Mr. Rammell *[holding answer 16 November 2004]*: It has not proved possible to respond to my hon. Friend in the time available before Prorogation, for which I apologise.

Foreign Prisons (UK Minors)

Mr. Oaten: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs how many United Kingdom minors are held in foreign prisons. [198915]

Mr. Mullin: We record the number of British nationals detained overseas who request consular assistance on a quarterly and annual basis. The age of the detainee is not recorded. But our consular staff are alerted quickly when a minor is arrested. We provide consular assistance with all due care and consideration to their age.

The information requested could be provided only at disproportionate cost.

G8 Summit

Annabelle Ewing: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what support, including financial support, is to be provided to Perth and Kinross council to prepare for the G8 summit. [195120]

Mr. Alexander: The Foreign and Commonwealth Office (FCO) does not have financial responsibilities for supporting Perth and Kinross council, as local authority funding in Scotland is a matter for the Scottish Executive, but is supporting them in other ways to maximise the benefits of the summit for the local area. The FCO is helping them to respond to residents' concerns about the summit's possible impact, for example by taking part in their key public meetings, and is working with them to help involve local people and businesses in the summit where possible.

Government Buildings (Disabled Access)

Tom Cox: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs whether all Government buildings in his Department within the Greater London area are fully accessible to disabled people; and if he will make a statement. [199318]

Mr. Rammell: The Foreign and Commonwealth Office (FCO) has taken steps to ensure that FCO buildings within the Greater London area are as fully accessible to disabled people as is reasonably practicable, in line with the principals of the Disability Discrimination Act 1996. Where it has been found that access to certain areas is restricted, measures are in place to address these issues.

Grenada/Cayman Islands

Mr. Foulkes: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs when the Governments of *(a)* Grenada and *(b)* the Cayman Islands formally asked his Department for financial and other help following the recent hurricanes. [199024]

Mr. Rammell: Sadly, Hurricane Ivan caused widespread damage in Grenada and in the Cayman Islands, making communications very difficult. We were, nevertheless, in very regular touch, in whatever ways were possible, with officials in Grenada and the Cayman Islands prior to and after Hurricane Ivan hit and so discussed their needs and requests for help as the situation developed.

As my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for International Development set out in his statement of 12 October 2004, *Official Report*, columns 14–20WS, we responded quickly to immediate needs including by sending two Royal Navy vessels to Grenada and the Cayman Islands immediately following the hurricane. Our assistance to the region following the hurricanes and storms in September amounts to almost £9.75 million.

Guantanamo Bay

Ms Abbott: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs which *(a)* British nationals and *(b)* former British residents are detained by the US Administration in Guantanamo Bay; where each was first taken into custody by US forces; how long each has been detained; what efforts the Government have made to obtain visitation rights for the detainees' families; how many letters each has been allowed to send in the last 12 months; and whether detainees had been tortured. [198863]

Mr. Mullin: It has not proved possible to respond to my hon. Friend in the time available before Prorogation, for which I apologise.

Iran

Mr. Drew: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will publish the evidence received from the International Atomic Energy Authority that Iran has *(a)* breached nuclear safeguards obligations and *(b)* failed to meet suspension commitments; where these breaches and failures occurred; and what plans the International Atomic Energy Authority has to pursue the issue. [198704]

Mr. MacShane: The latest report by the Director-General of the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA) will be discussed by the IAEA's Board of Governors at their next meeting which is due to begin on 25 November. Until then, it remains confidential. Once the Board of Governors meeting is concluded, we expect the board to decide to release the report for publication, as has been the case with previous reports. The IAEA is continuing to investigate all unresolved issues relating to Iran's nuclear programme.

The Government are planning to produce a Command Paper containing the key documents on Iran's nuclear programme. This Command Paper will include all the reports of the Director-General and Resolutions on Iran adopted by the Board of Governors over the past two years.

Mr. Foulkes: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what assessment he has made of the implications of Iran's nuclear programme for *(a)* regional stability and *(b)* the Middle East peace process. [199023]

Mr. Rammell: The proliferation of nuclear weapons in the Middle East would pose a significant threat to stability and efforts to establish peace in the region. The

UK, working closely with France and Germany and the Office of the EU High Representative, has encouraged Iran to take steps that would reassure the international community that its nuclear programme is exclusively for peaceful purposes. We welcome the agreement reached with Iran on 15 November.

Iraq

Glenda Jackson: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs (1) if he will make a statement on Iraq, with particular reference to the situation in Falluja. [199264]

(2) what emergency *(a)* medical supplies, *(b)* personnel and *(c)* equipment will be provided by the UK to assist those injured by coalition forces attacks upon Fallujah. [199265]

Mr. Mullin: It has not proved possible to respond to my hon. Friend in the time available before Prorogation, for which I apologise.

Glenda Jackson: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what methods are being used to examine the report in *The Lancet* on Iraqi civilian deaths; which personnel have been assigned to conduct the examination; and when the examination began. [197211]

Mr. Mullin: My right hon. Friend the Foreign Secretary made a written statement on *The Lancet* report on 17 November 2004, *Official Report*, columns 92–95WS). The estimate made in *The Lancet* article is at marked variance with the civilian death rate shown in figures compiled by Iraqi hospital staff since April. These figures, which report just under 4,000 Iraqi civilian casualties for the last 6 months, come from admissions to 182 hospitals.

Mr. Swire: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs whose control the main hospital in Fallujah is under. [199089]

Mr. Rammell: The Iraqi Security Forces recaptured Fallujah General Hospital on 7 November. The hospital remains under Iraqi Interim Government control.

Lynne Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs whether, in respect of information set out at paragraphs 91 and 92 of the Intelligence and Security Committee Report, Cm 5972, the Government have been informed as to when the US Federal Bureau of Intelligence investigation ordered by Senator Rockefeller in March 2003 into the source of the forged documents on an Iraq-Niger uranium deal is due to report. [183544]

Mr. MacShane: The investigation requested by Senator Rockefeller is continuing. The Federal Bureau of Investigation has not yet given an indication of when the investigation will be completed.

Mr. McNamara: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what the Government's policy is with regard to the handing over to the Iraqi authorities of Iraqi detainees who could face the death penalty. [189326]

Mr. Rammell *[holding answer 16 September 2004]*: Under CPA Memorandum 3, which applies to UK forces post 28 June, we are required to hand over apprehended persons suspected of having committed criminal acts to the Iraqi criminal justice system as soon as practically possible.

We have lobbied and will continue to lobby the Iraqi Government against the application of the death penalty in all cases.

Adam Price: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs when British officials first became aware of allegations of mistreatment of detainees at Abu Ghraib. [189800]

Mr. Rammell: It has not proved possible to respond to the hon. Member in the time available before Prorogation, for which I apologise.

Ivory Coast

Mr. Simmonds: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what assessment has been made of the possibility of conflict in the Ivory Coast spreading to neighbouring West African countries; and what discussions have taken place with the African Union on preventing regional instability. [199041]

Mr. Mullin: We remain concerned at the possibility of the conflict spreading, and recent reports of refugees fleeing to Liberia. We have called on neighbouring countries in UN Security Council Resolutions 1528 and 1572, to co-operate on regional stability. We welcome the efforts of the African Union to end the violence and bring about a political settlement based on the Linas-Marcoussis Agreement.

Mr. Simmonds: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what steps the Government are taking to help prevent a full-scale conflict within the Ivory Coast between government forces and northern rebels; and what discussions have taken place between the Government and *(a)* the UN, *(b)* the Government of France and *(c)* the Cote D'Ivoire Government on resolving the situation. [199042]

Mr. Mullin: We have strongly condemned in the UN the resumption of violence in Cote d'Ivoire. The UN delivered a strong message to all the parties including the Government of the Cote d'Ivoire, through UN Security Council Resolution 1572, that they must implement immediately the Linas-Marcoussis Agreement. The Resolution also imposes an immediate arms embargo, and a travel ban and assets freeze on those who block the peace process. We fully support the action undertaken by French forces and the UN operation in Cote d'Ivoire. We remain in close contact with the Government of France on next steps.

Loos Battlefield

Mr. Swayne: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what recent representations have been made by Her Majesty's Government to the Government of France regarding the preservation of Loos battlefield; and if he will make a statement. [198532]

Mr. MacShane: Her Majesty's consul general at Lille, and the Commonwealth War Graves Commission (CWGC) Director for Information, visited an area of the Loos Battlefields on 12 November and met the Mayor of Auchy les Mines and the landowner of a local landfill site. The consul general highlighted strong public concern in the UK following media reports that waste material was being deposited in an area where British soldiers fell during the 1915 Battle of Loos. At the end of the First World War, British authorities cleared the battlefield and soldiers' remains were interred in local CWGC cemeteries. The consul general reminded the local authorities of their obligation to treat any further remains of British and Commonwealth soldiers, should they be discovered, with dignity and respect, and CWGC have followed up in writing. The French authorities decided to cease this particular landfill operation from 17 November 2004. We will remain fully engaged with all British and Commonwealth War Grave issues throughout France and around the world.

Malaysia

Angus Robertson: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what discussions his Department has had with members of the Malaysian Government concerning their policy on illegal immigrants and the impact of that policy on the Rohingya refugees; and if he will make a statement. [199165]

Mr. Alexander: The British high commission in Kuala Lumpur continues to raise our concerns with the Malaysian Government over the issue of illegal immigrants and the status of Rohingya refugees.

We therefore welcome the recent announcement from the Prime Minister's office with regard to the status of the Rohingyas. The Malaysian Government have indicated that those Rohingyas who have been documented and given refugee status by the UN High Commission for Refugees will be issued with ID cards. This will entitle them to legal status in Malaysia, enabling them to find work and giving their children access to education.

Maldives

Mr. Hancock: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will make representations on the need to ensure the Maldives Government general election campaign is conducted to internationally accepted standards; and if he will make a statement. [198554]

Mr. Alexander: The parliamentary elections due in the Maldives on 31 December come at an important moment in the country's democratic reform process. We have already welcomed many of the reform proposals outlined by President Gayoom in June and his stated commitment to an open and inclusive reform process. The elections will enable the international community to judge whether President Gayoom and the Maldives Government are genuinely committed to reform. We look to the Government of the Maldives to ensure that the election process is free and fair and in accordance with international standards; that all who wish to stand for election are allowed to stand and campaign freely; that the electorate and the media are allowed to engage in open debate; and that state resources are not used to favour some candidates more than others. Without a free and fair election, the Maldives long-term stability and prosperity will be at risk. My officials and I will be raising these points with representatives of the Government. We welcome the Government of the Maldives invitation to the Commonwealth Secretariat to send an observer team.

Middle East

Mr. Streeter: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what representations he has made to the *(a)* Egyptian Government and *(b)* Palestinian Authority concerning freedom of religion in Gaza after the Israeli withdrawal; and if he will make a statement. [199106]

Mr. Mullin: We have not made any representations to the Egyptian Government or the Palestinian Authority concerning freedom of religion in Gaza after the Israeli withdrawal.

We will continue to press the Palestinian Authority to ensure they can demonstrate a commitment to the human rights of both Israelis and Palestinians.

Mr. Streeter: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what representations he has made to the *(a)* Egyptian Government and *(b)* Palestinian Authority concerning women's rights in Gaza after the Israeli withdrawal; and if he will make a statement. [199107]

Mr. Mullin: We have not made any representations to the Egyptian Government or the Palestinian Authority concerning women's rights in Gaza after the Israeli withdrawal.

We will continue to press the Palestinian Authority to ensure they can demonstrate a commitment to the human rights of both Israelis and Palestinians.

Musilimot Adelodun Seriki-Rogers

Ian Lucas: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs when appeal number LAG/488597 relating to Musilimot Adelodun Seriki-Rogers will be heard. [191216]

Mr. Lammy: I have been asked to reply.

The appeal of Miss Musilimot Adelodum Seriki-Rogers is listed for a preliminary hearing at the Immigration Appellate Authority hearing centre in Stoke-on-Trent on the 9 December 2004, with the substantive oral hearing listed at the same venue for the 4 January 2005.

Nuclear Accidents

Mr. David Stewart: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what assessment he has made of the current threat of nuclear accidents worldwide; and if he will make a statement. [198082]

Mr. Mike O'Brien *[holding answer 15 November 2004]*: It has not proved possible to respond to the hon. Member in the time available before Prorogation.

Overseas Voters

Mr. Evans: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what the date was of the last meeting between the Foreign and Commonwealth Office and the Electoral Commission to discuss the registration of overseas voters. [198864]

Mr. Mullin: The Foreign and Commonwealth Office (FCO) and the Electoral Commission last met on 10 November 2004. In the meeting we discussed how the FCO could further assist the Electoral Commission in its efforts to publicise overseas voter registration.

Palestinian Territories

Mr. Foulkes: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what progress has been made in policing in Palestinian Territories to maintain the rule of law and prevent violence as set out in the Road Map. [199022]

Mr. Mullin: Some progress has been made in policing the Occupied Territories, including the establishment of a Central Operations Room in Ramallah, which has resulted in a number of suicide bombings being prevented by the Palestinian Authority. A second Central Operations Room is due to be set up in Gaza.The UK is supporting the Palestinians in their efforts to improve security. We have offered advice, equipment and mentoring, through a senior UK police adviser in the Occupied Territories. We are also working with EU partners to prepare an assistance project for Palestinian civil policing.

We stand ready to work with the new Palestinian leadership to continue this work. There is much they still have to do. We look forward to a renewed effort to make the most of the changed landscape in the Middle East.

Peru

Mr. Gordon Marsden: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what his Department's assessment is of the human rights situation in Peru; and what action his Department is taking to improve the situation. [198986]

Mr. Rammell: We constantly monitor the human rights situation in Peru. We have actively supported the efforts of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission, set up to analyse, investigate and ascribe responsibility for past human rights abuses. This support has helped develop institutional capacity within the Commission in the regions most affected by the violence. With the mandate of the Commission now concluded, the Peruvian authorities are now in the process of implementing its recommendations. We are currently supporting the work of the Human Rights Ombudsman's Office and the National Co-ordinator for Human Rights in this aim. We continue to make representations to the Peruvian authorities in support of human rights and our embassy in Lima maintains close contact with the main organisations that promote and defend human rights in Peru.

Redundant Soldiers (Sierra Leone/Liberia)

Mr. Simmonds: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what estimate has been made of the number of redundant fighters in *(a)* Sierra Leone and *(b)* Liberia; what assessment has been made of the possibility that these fighters may travel to the Ivory Coast to fight there; and what steps the Government have taken to facilitate alternative employment for soldiers in (i) Liberia and (ii) Sierra Leone. [199037]

Mr. Mullin: Estimates of numbers of ex-combatants in the region vary. However, 72,000 people in Sierra Leone, and 95,000 in Liberia, have participated in disarmament, demobilisation programmes. We remain concerned about the possibility of fighters moving to different conflicts; we have supported rehabilitation and reintegration programmes in both countries. I shall be visiting Sierra Leone and Liberia later this month to see the situation for myself.

Safety of Maritime Navigation Convention

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what amendments his Department has proposed to the Convention for the Suppression of Unlawful Acts Against the Safety of Maritime Navigation 1988. [189862]

Mr. Rammell: The UK has not proposed any amendments to this Convention. The US initiated the amendments in 2002. Our officials have been working with other International Maritime Organisation (IMO) Member States, and non-governmental organisations to achieve consensus on the draft texts. The amendments will provide a legal framework, based on the principal of prior flag state consent, for interdiction of ships on the high seas suspected of being involved in terrorism, including the illegal transportation of WMD. Good progress has been made in respect of the new terrorist offences, and general consensus has been achieved on many of the provisions of the boarding regime.

The IMO has met six times to exchange views on the draft texts. Further progress was made at the October meeting of the IMO Committee, and an IMO Diplomatic Conference to adopt the amendments is now scheduled for October 2005.

Sudan

Mr. Alan Duncan: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs pursuant to the answer of 9 November 2004 by the Under-Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs, *Official Report*, column 696, on rebel attacks in Darfur on civilians and aid convoys, what the evidential basis is for the statement that the rebels are making more such attacks. [199216]

Mr. Mullin: The UN Secretary-General's report to the Security Council of 2 November states that:

> "Ceasefire violations continued throughout the month (of October). In fact, they increased on both sides . . . From African Union Ceasefire Commission and other reports it seems that the Sudan Liberation Movement/Army (SLM/A) was responsible for the greater number of violations in October".

This report goes on to say that

> "the SLM/A are seeking to claim a wider area of Darfur as being under their control and have taken action leading to the closure of several routes of strategic importance. In what appears to be a deliberate campaign to strengthen their logistical and fighting capacity, SLM/A forces attacked a large number of police positions and so-called soft targets, capturing weapons and ammunition. They have captured vehicles from the police, but also taken them at gunpoint from humanitarian agencies."

We are pressing both the Government of Sudan and the rebels to respect the ceasefire and to abide by the terms of the Humanitarian and Security Protocols which they signed on 9 November.

Turkmenistan

Mr. Simmonds: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what recent discussions have taken place between the Government and the Russian Federation on the regime in Turkmenistan. [199039]

Mr. Rammell: We have periodic consultations on all aspects of the situation in Turkmenistan with Russian officials in both Ashgabat and Moscow.

Mr. Simmonds: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what recent assessment has been made of the *(a)* political and *(b)* economic situation in Turkmenistan. [199040]

Mr. Rammell: We remain seriously concerned by the absence of democracy in Turkmenistan. Parliamentary elections have been scheduled for 19 December. However, although the Turkmen authorities have announced each seat will be contested by more than one candidate, Turkmenistan remains a one-party state. We believe that there is no prospect that the December elections will meet even minimal democratic standards. Parliament in any case has few genuine responsibilities in a country in which power is firmly held by President Niyazov.

We supported the tabling of resolutions at the 59th and 60th sessions of the United Nations Commission on Human Rights in 2003 and spring 2004 and also at the Third Committee of the UN General Assembly in 2003. We are doing so again at this year's UN General Assembly. These have noted the limited positive steps by the Turkmen Government and have raised serious concerns about the human rights situation and the absence of democracy in Turkmenistan.

Turkmenistan has substantial reserves of natural gas and oil deposits. However, there are reasons to doubt whether this will underpin successful long-term economic development. Firstly, most of its gas exports have traditionally gone to countries in the former Soviet Union like Ukraine which pay well below world market prices. Secondly, there is little evidence that the revenues generated by the energy sector are effectively invested in areas—such as health and education—which would provide a basis for continuing growth prospects in the future. The distribution of wealth is very uneven; poverty is rife while the large profits of the energy sector are shared between a relatively small section of the population.

There has been little economic reform and no agreement concluded with the IMF. The Turkmen economy is highly reliant on the production of energy and cotton. Any hopes of significant diversification are hindered by the failure of the Turkmen Government's economic policies to promote a business environment which stimulates new investment.

United Nations Reform

Mr. Wiggin: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what research he has commissioned regarding reform of the United Nations; and if he will make a statement. [197807]

Mr. Rammell: The Foreign and Commonwealth Office has not commissioned any recent research on the reform of the United Nations. Ministers and officials are, however, in close touch with many academics and practitioners who are engaged in the international debate on this subject. For example, I hosted a seminar on UN reform involving leading UK academics in June 2003 and followed this up with a round-table with academics in July 2003 on the same subject. I have also held a number of meetings with New York based academics during my regular visits to the United Nations.

We have been closely involved in discussions surrounding the work of the High Level Panel set up by the UN Secretary-General to make recommendations on improving the UN's work on peace and security. The Government's position on this and other aspects of UN reform was set out in the Command Paper "The United Kingdom in the United Nations" (Cm 6325) published in October.

West Papua

Mr. Drew: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what recent discussions he has had with the Government of Indonesia on the future of West Papua, with particular reference to the role of the security forces within the area. [198613]

Mr. Alexander: Together with our European partners, we regularly raise our concerns about the situation in Papua. On 28 October, EU ministerial representatives visited Indonesia and met with the newly elected President, Susilo Bambang Yudhoyono and the Minister for Foreign Affairs, Hasan Wirayuda. Both expressed their view that two of the key issues for the new Indonesia Government were a resolution to the problems in Papua and the promotion and protection of human rights throughout Indonesia. We hope that this will lead to a peaceful and negotiated solution to the situation in Papua.

CULTURE, MEDIA AND SPORT

Children's Broadcasting

Mr. Chris Smith: To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport what assessment she has made of the impact on children's broadcasting funded wholly or partly through advertising of the proposals set out in the Government's Public Health White Paper. [199235]

Estelle Morris: The Government's Public Health White Paper sets out a range of options for tightening the rules on broadcast advertising, sponsorship and promotion of foods to children. We recognise that some of these could have an impact on the funding of children's broadcasting and this is referred to in the Partial Regulatory Impact Assessment associated with the White Paper and on which comments are sought.

As the White Paper makes clear, the options to be pursued by Ofcom will be dependent on the nutritional profiling scheme being developed by the Department of Health and the Food Standards Agency. Ofcom will consult on proposed rule changes in due course and will, if they are likely to have a significant impact, undertake a full Regulatory Impact Assessment as required under the Communications Act 2003.

Departmental Events (Funding)

Charles Hendry: To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport if she will list the *(a)* conferences, *(b)* publications, *(c)* initiatives, *(d)* projects and *(e)* receptions organised by her Department which have received funding from outside commercial bodies since May 1997, broken down by (i) funding body and (ii) amount paid. [196599]

Mr. Caborn: It has not proved possible to respond to the hon. Member in the time available before Prorogation.

Digital Television

Paul Farrelly: To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport what steps she is taking to improve the reception of digital television signals in Newcastle-under-Lyme. [198689]

Estelle Morris: The Government are committed to ensuring that at Digital Switchover everyone who can currently get the main public service broadcasting channels in analogue form (BBC1 and 2, ITV, Channel 4/S4C and Five) can receive them on digital systems.

At present around 73 per cent. of UK households can access Digital Terrestrial Television services. In Newcastle-under-Lyme as in other areas, the transmitters that broadcast the digital services have to be limited to avoid interference with the analogue signal. This situation will not change until switchover.

The 22 July statement made to the House by my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State—indicated that while the broadcasters have not reached a full consensus on the optimum timetable, some—including the BBC—have suggested that 2012 may be the most appropriate date for the completion of switchover. This was reflected in the draft Digital Replacement Licences for commercial Public Service Broadcasters on which Ofcom recently consulted. A final decision on the timetable will be made in due course.

English Heritage

Tim Loughton: To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport what plans English Heritage have to retain the post of chief archaeologist; and if she will make a statement. [198846]

Mr. Caborn: As part of its modernisation programme, English Heritage has integrated its Archaeology and Historic Buildings and Areas departments. This will ensure a more holistic approach to the study and conservation of the historic environment. In this context, the chief archaeologist post has been replaced with a new post of Archaeological Adviser.

European Commission (Audiovisual Services)

Mr. Whittingdale: To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport what representations she has received about the changes in responsibility for audiovisual services within the European Commission; and if she will make a statement. [198394]

Estelle Morris: None.

Football

Mr. Whittingdale: To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport if she will investigate the BBC's acquisition of national radio rights to Premier League and FA Cup football matches to be broadcast on Five Live Sports Extra; whether this is in breach of the conditions laid down by the Secretary of State for the operation of the station; and whether the BBC requested that these rights be excluded from the packages of the rights that they acquired. [198390]

Estelle Morris: It has not proved possible to respond to the hon. Member in the time available before Prorogation.

Free TV Licences

Mr. Gordon Prentice: To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport how many households in Pendle receive the free television licence for the over 75s. [197034]

Estelle Morris: It has not proved possible to respond to my hon. Friend in the time available before Prorogation.

Freedom of Information Act

Mr. Clifton-Brown: To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport what assessment she has made of the likely costs to her Department in the first quarter of 2005 of compliance with the provisions of the Freedom of Information Act 2000; and if she will make a statement. [199083]

Mr. Caborn: It has not proved possible to respond to the hon. Member in the time available before Prorogation.

Gambling

Miss Kirkbride: To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport if she will list the overseas visits made by *(a)* Ministers and *(b)* officials in the Department in relation to proposed changes to legislation on gambling; what the itinerary was for each visit; how long each visit lasted; which hotels were used; what the cost was in each case; and how each visit was funded. [194540]

Mr. Gray: To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport (1) what contacts Mr. Elliot Grant of her Department has had with companies involved in the *(a)* British and *(b)* US gaming industry in the past 24 months; and whether he has undertaken fact-finding visits in the United States in the company of employees of the (i) British and (ii) US gaming industry; [195316]

(2) what contacts Mr. Gideon Hoffman of her Department has had with companies involved in the *(a)* British and *(b)* US gaming industry in the past 24 months; what contacts he has had with representatives of (i) Ladbrokes and (ii) the Hilton Group; what contacts he has had with Mr. Alan Ross, Managing

Director of Ladbrokes; and whether he has undertaken fact-finding visits in the United States in the company of employees of the (A) British and (B) US gaming industry; [195317]

(3) whether she has visited *(a)* Las Vegas and *(b)* Atlantic City in her official capacity; [193903]

(4) what contacts Mr. Nicholas Bent in her Department has had with companies involved in the *(a)* British and *(b)* US gaming industry in the past 24 months; and whether he has undertaken fact-finding visits in the United States in the company of employees of the British or US gaming industry. [195318]

Tessa Jowell *[holding answer 1 November 2004]:* Since 1999 this Government have published an annual list of all visits overseas undertaken by Cabinet Ministers costing £500 or more during each financial year. The Government have also published on an annual basis the cost of all Ministers' visits overseas. Copies of the lists are available in the Library. Information on travel by officials is not held centrally and could be provided only at disproportionate costs.

All travel is undertaken fully in accordance with the rules set out in the Ministerial Code, Travel by Ministers and the Civil Service Management Code, copies of which are available in the Library.

I can confirm that I have visited neither Las Vegas nor Atlantic City in an official capacity, although my right hon. Friend the Minister for Media and Heritage has visited a number of places in the United States as well as South Africa with a view to ensuring that regulatory judgments are well founded.

Mr. Don Foster: To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport if she will list the occasions on which *(a)* she, and *(b)* other ministers in her Department have met representatives of (i) US casino operators, (ii) British casino operators and (iii) casino operators from other countries to discuss gambling issues, broken down by date of meeting. [195076]

Mr. Gray: To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport (1) how many recent meetings she has had with representatives of *(a)* Sun International, *(b)* MGM Mirage, *(c)* Kerzner International, *(d)* Caesar's Entertainment and *(e)* the British Casino Association; when those meetings took place; and if she will list the representatives whom she met from each organisation; [193901]

(2) how many recent meetings *(a)* officials and *(b)* special advisers of her Department have had with representatives of (i) Sun International, (ii) MGM Mirage, (iii) Kerzner International, (iv) Caesar's Entertainment and (v) the British Casino Association. [193902]

Mr. Dobson: To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport what meetings *(a)* she, *(b)* other Ministers in her Department and *(c)* officials have had in the last six months with (i) representatives of the gambling industry and (ii) organisations concerned about the possible harmful effects of increased gambling. [194113]

Miss Kirkbride: To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport (1) which *(a)* UK and *(b)* international organisations have submitted written representations to the Department concerning the Government's proposals for changes to legislation on gambling; and on what dates each representation was (i) received and (ii) given a substantive response; [194510]

(2) on what dates *(a)* Ministers and *(b)* officials in the Department have held meetings with representatives of the UK gambling industry to discuss proposed changes to legislation on gambling; [194514]

(3) what meetings *(a)* she, *(b)* her departmental Ministers and *(c)* advisers and officials have held with representatives of (i) Sun City International, (ii) MGM Mirage, (iii) Mandalay Resort Group, (iv) Kerzner International, (v) Las Vegas Sands, Inc., (vi) Harrah's Entertainment, (vii) Caesar's Entertainment and (viii) other foreign casino firms; what the (A) dates and (B) venues of the meetings were; and which individuals were present. [193798]

Tessa Jowell: Since the publication of the report of the Gambling Review Body (Cm 5206) in July 2001, the Department has undertaken a very extensive programme of consultations with interested bodies about options and proposals for changes to gambling law in Great Britain. There have been two formal public consultations, the first on the Review Body's report and the second on the draft clauses published for pre-legislative scrutiny in November 2003.

In addition to these consultations the relevant Government Departments have corresponded with and met individual companies (including those who have expressed an interest in trading in Great Britain as well as those already doing so), trade associations, charities and other bodies concerned with problem gambling or who benefit from lotteries, local authorities, trade unions, law enforcement agencies, academics and many other bodies and individuals, including members of the public, with an interest. These contacts, designed to ensure that the Government's policy proposals are sound and take full account of all relevant benefits, costs and risks, have involved both Ministers and officials. All such contacts are conducted in accordance with the Ministerial Code and the Civil Service Code.

Government Buildings (Disabled Access)

Tom Cox: To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport whether all Government buildings in her Department within the Greater London area are fully accessible to disabled people; and if she will make a statement. [199310]

Mr. Caborn: All DCMS buildings are fully accessible to disabled people. A full accessibility audit for the Disability Discrimination Act was carried out during the spring of 2004 and all reasonable alterations made to comply with the requirements of the Act. Access was already possible for wheelchairs and further work has been carried out to make plate glass doors more obvious, to add induction loops, fire warnings for the hearing impaired, to limit door pressures and improve and add tactile signage.

Green Ministers

Mr. Horam: To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport how many departmental Green Ministers there have been since 1997. [198312]

Estelle Morris: There have been five DCMS Green Ministers.

Horseracing

Hugh Robertson: To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport (1) whether she has received any representations to extend the life of the Horserace Betting Levy Board; [199050]

(2) what discussions she has had with the British Horseracing Board about the recent European Court of Justice decision concerning modernisation of British horseracing; and what the conclusions were; [199051]

(3) what assessment she has made of the impact the recent European Court of Justice ruling will have on the implementation of the Horserace Betting and Olympic Lottery Act 2004; [199052]

(4) what assessment she has made of the impact of the recent European Court of Justice ruling on the modernisation of British horseracing. [199053]

Mr. Caborn: Following the recent ruling of the European Court of Justice in relaxation to database rights the British Horseracing Board asked the Government to extend the Horserace Betting Levy. The Government is not currently persuaded that the ruling provides sufficient reason to suspend the planned timetable for the implementation of the Horserace Betting and Olympic Lottery Act; but I met the Chairman of the Board on 15 November to discuss the implications of the ruling. We agreed to meet again to discuss this issue further in the light of the full assessment, which the Board will now be undertaking.

Legislation

Brian White: To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport what pieces of legislation passed in the last 30 years that the Department is responsible for remain to be brought into force, broken down by year of enactment. [195627]

Mr. Caborn: It has not proved possible to respond to my hon. Friend in the time available before Prorogation.

Lottery Funding

Kate Hoey: To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport how much the annual Sports Lottery has distributed in grants since 1994. [198334]

Mr. Caborn: Information on Lottery distribution, in terms of the amounts authorised for payment out of the National Lottery Distribution Fund (NLDF) to the distributing bodies for payments to grant recipients, can be obtained from the National Lottery Distribution Fund Annual Accounts for the years 1994–95 to 2002–03 inclusive. In each year's Accounts, a table headed "Reconciliation of amounts available to distributing bodies" gives the amounts "Authorised for payment to distributing bodies". This equals the amount drawn down from the NLDF by the distributors. The aggregate amounts drawn down by the sports distributors in each financial year from 1994–95 are given in the following table. Copies of the full NLDF accounts are available in the House of Commons Library.

Total drawn down from the NLDF by sports Lottery distributing bodies

	£
1994–95	1,830,056
1995–96	40,079,523
1996–97	104,059,408
1997–98	188,291,343
1998–99	397,379,272
1999–2000	316,688,360
2000–01	292,540,885
2001–02	359,233,902
2002–03	377,493,781

The NLDF Annual Accounts for 2003–04 are currently being audited prior to publication.

Mr. Chris Smith: To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport pursuant to the answer of 8 November, *Official Report*, column 513W, on the Heritage Lottery Fund (HLF), if she will issue general guidelines to the HLF to permit the trustees to support projects relating to the heritage of the UK but located overseas. [198337]

Mr. Caborn: The National Heritage Acts 1980 and 1997 do not exclude applications to the Heritage Lottery Fund from applicants incorporated abroad, or which relate to projects based abroad, nor do existing policy directions from the Secretary of State do so. However Trustees of the Fund have decided that, because of difficulties of public access and involvement in projects based abroad, these projects will continue to be a low priority.

Mr. Gill: To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport how much Heritage Lottery funding has been awarded on average to each unitary authority in England in each year since 1997. [198665]

Mr. Caborn: The information is in the following table:

Heritage Lottery Fund awards awarded to unitary authorities in England in each year since 1997

Sum of net decision value (£)

	Calendar year						
Local authority	*1997*	*1998*	*1999*	*2000*	*2001*	*2002*	*2003*
Bath and North East Somerset	1,286,700	483,900	1,476,000	157,400	0	2,931,412	284,600
Blackburn with Darwen	0	25,900	622,500	29,035	2,679,400	18,090	1,625,785
Blackpool	13,700	0	0	0	407,000	208,400	4,896,700
Bournemouth	2,060,125	15,000	178,000	0	943,100	0	211,000
Bracknell Forest	101,000	0	0	0	1,077,000	0	50,000
Brighton and Hove	8,390,575	1,257,344	0	1,273,700	44,550	277,400	798,400
Bristol, City of	328,300	4,822,600	2,784,000	10,029,850	5,399,500	3,153,309	928,200
County of Herefordshire	684,770	600,200	723,500	83,600	1,758,800	810,500	1,442,999

Heritage Lottery Fund awards awarded to unitary authorities in England in each year since 1997

Sum of net decision value (£)

Local authority	*1997*	*1998*	*1999*	*Calendar year* *2000*	*2001*	*2002*	*2003*
Darlington	15,300	20,100	99,000	2,835,000	0	113,283	45,700
Derby	9,250	3,457,000	34,300	779,950	1,946,000	153,061	1,024,800
East Riding of Yorkshire	645,391	565,600	192,379	3,487,000	164,550	1,594,732	351,600
Halton	0	105,000	19,800	49,000	45,200	0	2,626,800
Hartlepool	5,532,750	75,000	71,400	1,002,000	80,000	32,900	34,600
Isle of Wight	0	139,500	4,729	591,000	3,186,500	1,027,670	1,076,856
Kingston upon Hull, City of	3,500,000	625,400	0	0	5,251,769	1,288,050	115,100
Leicester	159,900	96,800	1,413,100	150,679	422,900	131,682	1,912,450
Luton	0	0	457,500	0	1,022,000	60,200	69,100
Medway	1,574,300	3,165,481	2,650,200	2,474,527	1,135,313	4,309,607	267,155
Middlesbrough	132,730	0	4,093,000	770,000	463,300	878,450	113,300
Milton Keynes	0	0	346,600	0	49,900	40,881	124,400
North East Lincolnshire	25,996	0	0	55,800	299,000	48,668	44,300
North Lincolnshire	43,600	0	54,900	928	361,300	49,280	436,300
North Somerset	133,800	1,715,825	4,627,171	132,860	1,108,655	426,350	106,500
Nottingham	554,900	913,933	970,200	222,160	68,000	1,016,438	5,346,900
Peterborough	500,910	54,000	659,000	290,000	0	1,356,200	69,100
Plymouth	4,642,150	0	540,848	407,000	0	2,487,300	228,000
Poole	0	436,700	16,000	89,600	75,600	16,547	0
Portsmouth	272,200	512,200	50,200	1,081,850	499,200	4,274,800	127,021
Reading	3,862,825	188,750	8,400	1,568,500	179,000	49,900	932,800
Redcar and Cleveland	40,500	24,624	1,152,600	870,900	0	24,000	50,000
Rutland	16,600	0	67,500	0	20,700	370,685	0
Slough	0	0	0	58,200	0	56,000	126,978
South Gloucestershire	140,000	0	772,000	181,100	3,458	64,610	0
Southampton	3,542,575	0	1,054,578	692,709	0	476,900	668,000
Southend-on-Sea	0	120,000	1,530,000	0	0	0	49,300
Stockton-on-Tees	0	0	14,100	0	2,633,900	5,000	236,200
Stoke-on-Trent	135,300	2,543,880	2,222,504	1,320,800	206,600	631,300	178,792
Swindon	8,047,900	496,400	3,148,350	0	0	500,000	5,074,300
Telford and Wrekin	52,600	-134,427	5,993,500	16,800	250,000	90,000	99,935
Thurrock	88,800	0	0	0	65,700	110,500	142,006
Torbay	26,400	104,300	420,500	4,814,100	0	38,934	680,800
Warrington	99,900	86,000	0	0	0	716,250	41,100
West Berkshire	707,700	0	0	0	0	4,384,583	149,500
Windsor and Maidenhead	27,000	234,000	0	21,900	0	0	0
Wokingham	60,000	0	0	77,600	5,170,000	104,508	0
York	2,328,612	2,697,570	173,400	431,700	4,836,800	433,684	1,026,644
Grand Total	49,785,059	25,717,434	38,641,759	36,047,248	41,854,695	34,762,062	33,814,021

Ministerial Visits

Mr. Don Foster: To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport what ministerial visits are planned for each Minister in her Department in the next six months; and if she will make a statement. [195077]

Mr. Caborn: The following ministerial visits have been planned:

	Planned visits
Secretary of State—2005	
19 January	East Midlands
26 January	Yorks and Humber
8–9 February	North West
20–26 February	South Africa
1–2 March	North East
8–9 March	South West
Richard Caborn—2005	
31 January	North West
1 February	East Midlands
9 February	South East
15 February	Essex
22 February	Yorks and Humberside
17 March	North West
Estelle Morris	
2004	
25 November	North East
7 December	North West
16 December	West Midlands
2005	
21 January	West Midlands
26 January	South West
4 February	West Midlands
11 February	West Midlands
15 March	South East
Andrew McIntosh	
2004	
3 December	North East
2005	
21 January	South East
2 March	South East

National Lottery

Dr. Starkey: To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport how much funding the Heritage Lottery Fund has given to museums in each of the last three years; and what proportion of total Heritage Lottery Funding this constituted in each year. [R][199144]

Mr. Caborn: The information is in the following table:

Funding by the Heritage Lottery Fund for Museums and Galleries

	Amount (£million)	*Proportion of total HLF funding*
2001–02	107,419,163	34.7
2002–03	103,529,510	31.8
2003–04	73,831,797	25

Hugh Robertson: To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport how much money was distributed to sport through the lottery in each of the last 10 years. [197457]

Estelle Morris *[pursuant to her reply, 11 November 2004, Official Report, c. 838W]*: The information given in the table contained in my answer was not correct. In fact, the closest approximation of the amount of lottery funding distributed to sport is the amount drawn down from the National Lottery Distribution Fund by the sports lottery distributing bodies to make grant payments to successful applicants. These figures, aggregating draw-down by the individual distributors, for each financial year since the inception of the national lottery, appear in the following table.

	Total drawn down from the NLDF by sports lottery distributing bodies (£)
1994–95	1,830,056
1995–96	40,079,523
1996–97	104,059,408
1997–98	188,291,343
1998–99	397,379,272
1999–2000	316,688,360
2000–01	292,540,885
2001–02	359,233,902
2002–03	377,493,781

The NLDF annual accounts for 2003–04, which are currently being audited prior to publication, will give the figure for that year.

Tony Wright: To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport if she will assess the merits of establishing a designated lottery fund for the maintenance of war memorials. [197269]

Mr. Caborn: My right hon. Friend the Secretary of State has no such plans. However, the Heritage Lottery Fund will consider applications for the restoration of war memorials provided that they fulfil their criteria, and to date the HLF has awarded over £618,000 to 21 projects renovating war memorials. The Grants for War Memorials scheme co-funded by English Heritage and the Wolfson Foundation, but administered by the charity the Friends of War Memorials, also provides grants of up £10,000 to undertake any necessary restoration, essential maintenance or repair of war memorials.

Ms Walley: To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport pursuant to the answer of 14 October 2004, *Official Report*, column 328W, on Lottery grants, what monitoring has been carried out to ensure that timber used in Lottery-funded projects is from legal and sustainable sources; and what sanctions can be applied where this is found not to be the case. [199221]

Estelle Morris: It has not proved possible to respond to my hon. Friend in the time available before Prorogation.

Sports Councils

Kate Hoey: To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport pursuant to the answer of 28 October 2004, *Official Report*, column 1307W, on sports councils, what the annual Exchequer grants to the national governing bodies of sport were in each year from 1974 to 1996. [198332]

Mr. Caborn: As I stated in my answer of 27 October 2004, *Official Report*, column 1233W, to my hon. Friend the Department does not hold this information. We have contacted Sport England to see if they hold this information and they are currently checking to see if printed copies of the old Great Britain Sports Council's Annual Report and Accounts are available. I will write to my hon. Friend when it is determined whether the information is available.

Television

Brian White: To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport what steps she is taking to ensure that there is a competitive market in the provision of cable television to residential customers. [199205]

Estelle Morris: There is a competitive market in the provision of digital television services through the three platforms of digital terrestrial television, satellite and cable. It is a commercial decision for cable companies whether to provide a service to a geographic area, and there is no restriction on companies wishing to enter the market.

Brian White: To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport what steps she is taking to ensure that analogue cable television networks are converted to digital provision. [199207]

Estelle Morris: None. Analogue cable television is not affected by digital switchover and the extent to which operators convert their networks to digital is a commercial decision for them. We are however in regular contact with the cable companies to encourage digital provision. About 72 per cent. of cable TV customers use digital services.

Theatre

Dr. Starkey: To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport how much funding the Arts Council has given to theatre, in each of the last three years; and what proportion of total Arts Council funding this constituted in each year. [R] [199142]

Estelle Morris: It has not proved possible to respond to my hon. Friend in the time available before Prorogation.

TV Licence Payments

Jon Trickett: To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport whether *(a)* her Department and *(b)* agencies responsible to her Department have conducted a recent analysis of the socio-economic groups which are more likely to pay for their television licence by direct debit. [198749]

Estelle Morris: Neither the Department for Culture, Media and Sport nor any agency responsible to the Department have carried out such an analysis recently.

Jon Trickett: To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport what estimate she has made of the number of people in *(a)* Hemsworth constituency and *(b)* the UK who pay for their television licence in a single instalment. [198750]

Estelle Morris: TV Licensing, who administer the television licensing system as agents for the BBC, do not record the number of television licences issued by constituency. For the United Kingdom as a whole, approximately nine million licence payers currently pay for their licence in a single instalment.

VisitBritain Website

Nick Harvey: To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport what assessment she has made of the likely impact of the proposed VisitBritain online accommodation booking system on existing commercial accommodation booking agencies. [198978]

Mr. Caborn: The Government expects the impact of the EnglandNet information and booking system to be market-neutral. EnglandNet will carry a wide variety of information about attractions and events, as well as details of quality-graded accommodation. It is not designed to replicate the role performed by existing commercial booking agencies. Rather, it will provide such agencies with access to new online marketing opportunities, and make bookings much easier to receive and fulfil. In this, EnglandNet will provide commercial operators with access to the 11 million potential customers who visit VisitBritain's websites each year—a figure set to rise to 20 million by 2007.

Nick Harvey: To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport what guidance she has given to VisitBritain on standards for property which will be made available for booking on the VisitBritain website. [198979]

Mr. Caborn: The EnglandNet tourism information and e-commerce system is being developed by Networks for Tourism, a company owned by VisitBritain and all the Regional Tourist Boards in England. VisitBritain's shareholding was formerly held by the English Tourism Council.

Under an agreement between the Council and the Boards on the formation of the company, it is intended that EnglandNet will offer access to the providers of accommodation which has been subject to inspection under a recognised grading scheme. My Department supports that intention, as it will encourage the fullest possible co-ordination of the new marketing opportunities which EnglandNet will provide, with the consumer benefits of grading inspection—particularly in the light of the in-principle agreement to the adoption of common grading standards in England, announced by VisitBritain, the Automobile Association and the Royal Automobile Club in May 2004.

Visually Impaired

John Robertson: To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport (1) what recent discussions her Department has had with Ofcom on the needs of the blind and the visually impaired; [198251]

(2) if she will make it her policy to ensure that Ofcom consults widely with the visually impaired. [198252]

Estelle Morris: The Department is in contact with Ofcom on these issues as necessary.

In particular, we recently asked Ofcom to review the statutory target for audio description on television and consider whether the 10 per cent. target should be raised. It will be doing this as part of the first review of the code setting out the requirements on broadcasters.

In drawing up this code, Ofcom has a specific statutory obligation to consult those representing the interests of persons who are blind or partially sighted.

More generally, Ofcom has statutory duties to establish and maintain effective arrangements for consultation; to have regard to the needs of persons with disabilities; to include among appointees to the Consumer Panel persons who are able to give informed advice about the interests of persons with disabilities; and to establish an advisory committee on elderly and disabled persons.

DEFENCE

Defence Industry Jobs

Mr. Keetch: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence how many jobs in the UK are *(a)* directly and *(b)* indirectly dependent on the UK defence industry, broken down by constituency. [198037]

Mr. Ingram: The latest estimate is that in 2002–03 there were 165,000 full-time equivalent jobs in the United Kingdom in those companies that receive contracts directly from the Ministry of Defence or for defence exports dependent on those contracts, and 140,000 indirectly dependent in the supply chain. More detailed figures separating those involved with employment on MOD equipment, MOD non-equipment, and defence exports are produced by the Defence Analytical Services Agency (DASA) in Table 1.9, UK Defence Statistics 2004: this is available in the Library of the House. Figures are not available broken down by constituency and could be provided only at disproportionate cost.

Northern Ireland

Mr. Donaldson: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence how many soldiers, excluding the Royal Irish Regiment, are serving in Northern Ireland. [198513]

Mr. Ingram *[holding answer 16 November 2004]*: The number of Army personnel, excluding from the Royal Irish Regiment (Home Service), stationed in Northern Ireland at the 30 September 2004 was 6,710.

The GOC NI also has under his command troops that are rear based in Great Britain that can be called forward to the Province as and when required. In addition, other troops can be made available to the GOC NI from Land Command if required, for example, during the marching season.

Redress Procedures

Mr. Keetch: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence with respect to *(a)* the Army, *(b)* the Naval Service and *(c)* the Royal Air Force how many personnel have initiated redress procedures since 1997; and in how many cases in (i) the Army, (ii) the Naval Service and (iii) the Royal Air Force the complainant has been successful. [198038]

Mr. Caplin: Information is not held in the form requested. The Services only maintain centrally statistics for the number of complaints considered by their Service Board. The Naval Service considered 50 complaints between 2001 and 2003, of which seven were upheld and three were partially upheld. The Army considered 197 complaints between 1999 and 2003, of which 49 were upheld and 14 were partially upheld. The RAF considered 349 complaints between 1997 and 2003 (230 of which arose in 2002 concerning the introduction of Pay 2000) and upheld 16; eight were partially upheld.

Royal Irish Regiment

Mr. Donaldson: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence how many *(a)* part-time and *(b)* full-time soldiers are serving with each of the home service battalions of the Royal Irish Regiment. [198512]

Mr. Ingram *[holding answer 16 November 2004]*: As at 1 October 2004 the number of part-time and full-time trained officers and soldiers serving with the home service battalions of the Royal Irish Regiment was:

	(a) Part-time	*(b) Full-time*
2nd Royal Irish Battalion	410	570
3rd Royal Irish Battalion	390	590
4th Royal Irish Battalion	440	540

Note:

All figures have been rounded to the nearest 10.

In addition to those personnel serving in the Home Service (HS) Battalions, there are less than 10 part-time and 380 full-time Royal Irish personnel serving with other units in Northern Ireland.

2-4-5-T

Harry Cohen: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what representations he has received from former servicemen who served in Malaysia concerning the long-term health effects of exposure to chemical 2–4-5-T; and if he will make a statement. [181167]

Mr. Caplin: I will write to my hon. Friend and place a copy of my letter in the Library of the House.

40 Commando

Mr. Flook: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence how much notice 40 Commando would need to be deployed to the US controlled zone in Iraq. [193883]

Mr. Ingram: I will write to the hon. Member and place a copy of my letter in the Library of the House.

Advisers/Consultants

Bob Spink: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence how much his Department and its agencies and non-departmental public bodies spent on *(a)* external consultants and *(b)* special advisers in each of the last three years. [172514]

Mr. Ingram: I will write to the hon. Member and place a copy of my letter in the Library of the House.

Armed Forces (Costs)

Mr. Wills: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what the *(a)* personnel and *(b)* equipment and maintenance costs of (i) an Armoured Infantry (Warrior) Battalion, (ii) an Airportable Infantry Battalion, (iii) a

Parachute Regiment Battalion and (iv) a Gurkha Regiment Battalion were in the last period for which figures are available. [198987]

Mr. Ingram: It has not proved possible to respond to my hon. Friend in the time available before Prorogation.

Mr. Wills: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what the projected costs between 2008 and 2013 are of a *(a)* Heavy (Warrior) Battalion, with high-tech upgrade, *(b)* Medium (FRES) Battalion, with heavy-lift aircraft capability and *(c)* Light (Airportable) Battalion, with high-tech network-capable upgrade. [198988]

Mr. Ingram: It has not proved possible to respond to my hon. Friend in the time available before Prorogation.

Mr. Wills: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what estimate the Department has made of the financial effects of the proposed restructuring process between 2008 and 2013. [198989]

Mr. Ingram: It has not proved possible to respond to my hon. Friend in the time available before Prorogation.

Armed Forces (Procurement)

Mr. Rosindell: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will make a statement on planned procurement for the *(a)* Army, *(b)* Royal Air Force and *(c)* Royal Navy. [191742]

Mr. Ingram: I will write to the hon. Member and place a copy of my letter in the Library of the House.

Armed Services (Voter Registration)

Mr. Viggers: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence how many service personnel are registered to vote. [196096]

Mr. Caplin *[holding answer 8 November 2004]:* I refer the hon. Member to the answer I gave on 4 November 2004, *Official Report*, column 374W, to the hon. Member for Chichester (Mr. Tyrie).

Army

Ann Winterton: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what the cost of *(a)* an armoured infantry (warrior) battalion, *(b)* an air-portable infantry battalion, *(c)* a parachute regiment battalion and *(d)* a Gurkha regiment battalion was in the last year for which figures are available, broken down by (i) personnel and (ii) equipment and maintenance. [199160]

Mr. Ingram: It has not proved possible to respond to the hon. Member in the time available before Prorogation.

Ann Winterton: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will estimate the projected costs per annum of the proposed new *(a)* heavy (warrior) battalion with high-tech upgrade, *(b)* medium (future rapid effect system) battalion with heavy-lift aircraft capability and *(c)* light (air-portable) battalion with high-tech network capable upgrade; and what estimate the Department has made of possible savings to be made from the proposed restructuring process. [199161]

Mr. Ingram: It has not proved possible to respond to the hon. Member in the time available before Prorogation.

Mr. Keetch: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence how many *(a)* soldiers and *(b)* officers have been (i) charged and (ii) disciplined for (A) bullying offences and (B) failing to investigate allegations of bullying since 1997; and if he will make a statement. [179877]

Mr. Caplin: There is no specific charge under the Army Act 1955 for bullying or failing to investigate allegations of bullying.

Army Medal Office

Mr. Chope: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence how many staff are employed in the Army Medal Office; whether they are working overtime to clear the backlog of cases; and what the standard of service laid down for applicants is. [197051]

Mr. Caplin: I will write to the hon. Member and place a copy of my letter in the Library of the House.

Mr. Chope: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence how many applications have been received for General Service Medals in each of the last 12 months; and how long it is taking to process them on average. [197052]

Mr. Caplin: I will write to the hon. Member and place a copy of my letter in the Library of the House.

Mr. Chope: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence when Mr. A. Fairclough of Verwood, Dorset will receive the General Service Medal for his service in the Suez Canal Zone; and if he will make a statement. [197054]

Mr. Caplin: I will write to the hon. Member and place a copy of my letter in the Library of the House.

Army Strength

Ann Winterton: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what period between operational tours is expected when there are 36 infantry battalions. [194390]

Mr. Ingram: I will write to the hon. Member and place a copy of my letter in the Library of the House.

Ann Winterton: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence how many *(a)* Army personnel and *(b)* civilians were working for the Army in July; and what the current total is. [196221]

Mr. Ingram: I will write to the hon. Member and place a copy of my letter in the Library of the House.

Asbestos Contamination

Mr. Gerald Howarth: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will list the principal areas covered by departmental files contaminated by asbestos. [199009]

Mr. Caplin: It has not proved possible to respond to the hon. Member in the time available before Prorogation.

Mr. Gerald Howarth: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence how many files contaminated with asbestos he estimates to be accessible to the public under the Freedom of Information Act 2000. [199010]

Mr. Caplin: It has not proved possible to respond to the hon. Member in the time available before Prorogation.

Mr. Gerald Howarth: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what effects asbestos contamination of his Department's files will have on access to those files under the Freedom of Information Act 2000. [199011]

Mr. Caplin: It has not proved possible to respond to the hon. Member in the time available before Prorogation.

Mr. Gerald Howarth: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence when his Department discovered that certain of its files had become contaminated by asbestos; and what action was taken in response to enable those files to be used. [199012]

Mr. Caplin: It has not proved possible to respond to the hon. Member in the time available before Prorogation.

Mr. Gerald Howarth: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what plans he has to decontaminate those of his Department's files which have become contaminated by asbestos; and what he estimates the cost of such decontamination to be. [199013]

Mr. Caplin: It has not proved possible to respond to the hon. Member in the time available before Prorogation.

Beer (Official Functions)

Mr. Grogan: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will make a statement on his Department's policy on the serving of beer at official functions. [145779]

Mr. Caplin: I will write to my hon. Friend and place a copy of my letter in the Library of the House.

Black Watch

Annabelle Ewing: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence how many soldiers in 1st Battalion Black Watch have been fined by the Army since July; and on what grounds. [195042]

Mr. Caplin: I will write to the hon. Member and place a copy of my letter in the Library of the House.

Annabelle Ewing: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence whether the level of pay for soldiers of 1st Battalion Black Watch involved in the redeployment in Iraq will be *(a)* higher and *(b)* lower than the level of pay before the redeployment. [195043]

Mr. Caplin: I will write to the hon. Member and place a copy of my letter in the Library of the House.

Mr. Keith Simpson: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence which media outlets are attached to the Black Watch battle group in Iraq; and what security arrangements have been made for them. [198429]

Mr. Ingram *[holding answer 16 November 2004]:* The media groups attached to the Black Watch Battle Group include BBC News, Sky News, ITV News and Channel 4 News. The journalists are embedded with the Battle Group and remain with armed service personnel at all times. All embedded media personnel are required to wear helmets and body-armour, which are provided for them if they are unable to bring their own.

Harry Cohen: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence whether a senior officer of the Black Watch expressed his concern in advance about the recent deployment of the regiment; and if he will make a statement. [198940]

Mr. Hoon: It has not proved possible to respond to my hon. Friend in the time available before Prorogation.

Bullying

Mr. McNamara: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what statistics are retained by the Special Investigation Branch of the Royal Military Police on completed investigations of allegations of bullying in the Army. [183381]

Mr. Caplin: I will write to my hon. Friend and place a copy of my letter in the Library of the House.

Mr. McNamara: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will list the barracks at which allegations of bullying have been investigated in the last year for which figures are available; and how many of these complaints *(a)* were unfounded, *(b)* were founded and *(c)* led to disciplinary or other action. [183382]

Mr. Caplin: I will write to my hon. Friend and place a copy of my letter in the Library of the House.

Cadet Units (Remembrance Sunday)

Mr. Waterson: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what guidance was given to cadet units in the South East of England on carrying firearms on Remembrance Sunday; what role Ministers had in issuing guidance; and if he will make a statement. [199019]

Mr. Caplin: It has not proved possible to respond to the hon. Member in the time available before Prorogation.

Cheshire/QLR Regiments

Helen Southworth: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence how many people were recruited to *(a)* the Cheshire Regiment and *(b)* the Queen's Lancashire Regiment in the last 10 years. [188595]

Mr. Caplin: The following table shows the numbers of soldiers who joined the Cheshire Regiment and the Queens Lancashire Regiment on the completion of their training for the last four financial years (April to March). Statistics prior to this period are not available.

Financial year	*Cheshire Regiment*	*Queen's Lancashire Regiment*
2000–01	64	92
2001–02	75	78
2002–03	56	117
2003–04	72	104

Chinook Helicopters

Mr. Dhanda: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what testing procedures were carried out on the eight Chinook helicopters ordered in 1995 after they were received by his Department and prior to their active use by the armed forces. [174987]

Mr. Ingram: We have a complex and wide-ranging acceptance procedure, which includes independent third party advice, to ensure that the platform meets the performance standards contracted for and complies with United Kingdom safety standards. The Ministry of Defence has contracted with our independent advisers QinetiQ Boscombe Down to undertake this work.

Civilian/Enemy Deaths

Mr. Mark Field: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what mechanisms the Army has in place to calculate the numbers of *(a)* civilian and *(b)* enemy dead in a prolonged conflict situation. [197366]

Mr. Hoon: I will write to the hon. Member and place a copy of my letter in the Library of the House.

Colombian Army

Mr. Hancock: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what recent UK military aid has been given to *(a)* the 1st Division of the Colombian Army and *(b)* the brigades and battalions that comprise that division; and which programmes this aid is funding. [192524]

Mr. Ingram: The Colombian Army 1st Division has recently received no specific British military assistance. UK military assistance provided to the Colombian Army is focused on specialist Explosive Ordnance Disposal units and the provision of British military education to selected individuals, such as at the Royal College of Defence Studies, which introduces British defence concepts, including human rights and democratic accountability of armed forces.

Tom Brake: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence which Colombian army units have received military *(a)* training and *(b)* assistance in each of the last five years; and what the financial value of each was in each year. [197631]

Mr. Ingram: United Kingdom military assistance provided to the Colombian army is focused on specialist Explosive Ordnance Disposal units and the provision of British military education to selected individuals, such as at the Royal College of Defence Studies, which introduces British Defence concepts, including human rights and democratic accountability of armed forces.

In financial years 2003–04 and 2004–05 the cost of military assistance provided by the UK to the Colombian armed forces was around £120,000 per year.

This information for previous years is not held centrally and could be provided only at disproportionate cost.

Colonel Terrington

Adam Price: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence whether United States authorities have sought to interview Colonel Terrington. [193376]

Mr. Ingram: I will write to the hon. Member and place a copy of my letter in the Library of the House.

Combat Wear

Mr. Gordon Prentice: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what penalties apply to companies awarded contracts to supply combat wear to his Department where the specifications are not met. [198380]

Mr. Ingram: The Ministry of Defence has the right to reject any items, which do not meet the requirements of the specification. Should the contractor fail to rectify this failure the Department has the right to claim damages as allowable under law, purchase the items in default from an alternative source with the contractor paying any additional cost incurred by MOD and ultimately, should this failure continue, to terminate the contract.

Commencement of Legislation

Brian White: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what pieces of legislation passed in the last 30 years that the Department is responsible for remain to be brought into force, broken down by year of enactment. [195626]

Mr. Ingram: I will write to my hon. Friend and place a copy of my letter in the Library of the House.

Complaints

Mr. McNamara: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what obstacles prevent the Army from *(a)* maintaining a central record of internal complaints and *(b)* establishing a database or other system of categorisation that would assist an annual audit of the (i) exercise of the duty of care and (ii) working of the disciplinary system. [183384]

Mr. Caplin: I will write to my hon. Friend and place a copy of my letter in the Library of the House.

Conferences

Mr. Swayne: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence how many *(a)* non-Ministerial staff and *(b)* special advisers in his Department attended conferences (i) in the UK and (ii) abroad in the year to 29 February; and what the cost of attending these conferences was, broken down by (A) travel costs, (B) food and drink, (C) accommodation and (D) miscellaneous costs. [161143]

Mr. Caplin *[holding answer 18 March 2004]*: This information is not held centrally in the form requested and could be provided only at disproportionate cost. All staff travel and attendance at conferences is undertaken in accordance with Service and civilian regulations.

Mr. Swayne: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence how many conferences were hosted by his Department in the year to 29 February; and what the cost of these conferences was, broken down by *(a)* travel costs, *(b)* food and drink, *(c)* accommodation and *(d)* miscellaneous costs. [161144]

Mr. Caplin *[holding answer 18 March 2004]*: This information is not held centrally in the form requested and could be provided only at disproportionate cost. Conferences and their associated costs are organised in accordance with departmental regulations.

Mr. Swayne: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence how many conferences *(a)* he and *(b)* other Ministers in his Department attended (i) in the UK and (ii) abroad in the year to 29 February; and what the cost of attending these conferences was, broken down by (A) travel costs, (B) food and drink, (C) accommodation and (D) miscellaneous costs. [161145]

Mr. Caplin *[holding answer 18 March 2004]*: The information requested is not held centrally and could be provided only at disproportionate cost. However, since 1999 the Government have published an annual list of all visits overseas undertaken by Cabinet Ministers costing £500 or more during each financial year. The Government have also published on an annual basis the cost of all Ministers' visits overseas. Copies of the lists are available in the Libraries of the House. I refer the hon. Member to the answer given by my right hon. Friend the Prime Minister on 22 July 2004, *Official Report*, column 466W, which covers ministerial travel overseas for 2003–04, to my hon. Friend the Member for West Bromwich East (Mr. Watson). All ministerial travel is undertaken in accordance with the rules set out in the Ministerial Code and Travel by Ministers, copies of which are available in the Libraries of the House.

Mr. Gerald Howarth: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will place in the Library a copy of *(a)* Major J.A. Kennedy's presentation, Real-time exchange of battlefield digital information, given at the SMI Conference Joint Battlespace Digitization on 20 May 2003, *(b)* Wing Commander Mike Longstaff and Squadron Leader R.K. Dyson's presentation, Flying Training, given at the SMI Conference Fighter Trainer on 2 June 2003, *(c)* Sym Taylor's presentation, Effective Management of Spares, given at the SMI Conference Military Spares and Inventory Management on 16 June 2003, *(d)* Lieutenant Colonel Chris Barkes and Wing Commander Chris Otley-Doe's presentation, Effective and Efficient Control of Material Flow, given at the SMI Conference Military Spares and Inventory Management on 16 June 2003 and *(e)* Lieutenant Commander Charles Jewitt's presentation on the Joint Modular Storage Concept given at the SMI Conference Military Spares and Inventory Management on 17 June 2003. [170425]

Mr. Ingram: I will write to the hon. Member and place a copy of my letter in the Library of the House.

Consultants

Pete Wishart: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence how much expenditure his Department has incurred in each year since 2002 on employing external consultants to deal with the press and public relations of his Department; and if he will make a statement. [195464]

Mr. Caplin: I will write to the hon. Member and place a copy of my letter in the Library of the House.

Contractors

Mr. Pike: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what discussions he had with *(a)* trade union representatives, *(b)* hon. Members and *(c)* others relating to the recently completed tender process for single procurement of fabric and garments (i) relating specifically to the tender which Cookson and Clegg were part of and (ii) relating to the tender process in general; and if he will make a statement. [197662]

Mr. Ingram: My right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Defence has had discussions with Members of both Houses of Parliament, trades unions, industry and the Department for Trade and Industry in relation to the recent contract award for Cut and Sewn Garments. The discussions have covered both the specific tender referred to and the tender process in general.

Mr. Pike: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what representations he has received *(a)* in the last 18 months and *(b)* since his Department's implementation of smart procurement from UK-based companies with which his Ministry has contracted for the provision of garments and clothing; and if he will make a statement. [197664]

Mr. Ingram: My right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Defence has received letters from UK-based companies, either direct or through Members of both Houses of Parliament, regarding the provision of garments and clothing in the last 18 months. The letters have been related, in particular, to the recent contract award for Cut and Sewn Garments.

There has been similar correspondence since the implementation of smart procurement covering a range of clothing issues and items procured.

Mr. Pike: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what recent discussions he has had with *(a)* interested parties and *(b)* other Departments on the allocation of contracts for clothing and other garments; and if he will make a statement. [197666]

Mr. Ingram: My right hon. Friend has had discussions with a wide range of interested parties and other Departments regarding contracts for clothing and other garments, including members of both Houses of Parliament, trades unions, industry and the Department for Trade and Industry.

Sir Nicholas Winterton: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence which elements of the Department's cut and sew contract with Cooneen, Watts and Stone Ltd. have been satisfied to date. [199147]

Mr. Ingram: It has not proved possible to respond to the hon. Member in the time available before Prorogation.

Sir Nicholas Winterton: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will make a statement on his Department's policy on operating penalties on contractors which fail to deliver on contracts due to *(a)* quality and *(b)* time. [199168]

Mr. Ingram: It has not proved possible to respond to the hon. Member in the time available before Prorogation.

Correspondence

Mr. Keetch: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence when he will answer the letter from the hon. Member for Hereford dated 2 April, MC number 1674. [184837]

Mr. Ingram: I wrote to the hon. Member on 20 July 2004.

Criminal Trials

Mr. Gordon Prentice: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence how many soldiers have been tried in the civilian courts since 1980 on criminal charges which have been previously dismissed as unfounded by military authorities. [194396]

Mr. Ingram: Records are not kept in such a way as to enable ready identification of specific instances where a civil trial has followed the dismissal of charges against a soldier by the chain of command. Although there is one such case currently directed for trial, I am not aware of this having occurred on any previous occasion in any Service.

Cyprus

Mr. Tynan: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what additional duties have been placed upon UK forces serving *(a)* with the UN Peacekeeping Force in Cyprus and *(b)* along the border between the Turkish Republic of Northern Cyprus and the Eastern Sovereign Base Area as a result of changes to the treatment of the Green Line caused by the accession of Cyprus to the EU. [197585]

Mr. Ingram: There have been no additional security duties placed upon the UN Peacekeeping Force in Cyprus due to the accession of Cyprus to the EU. Nor have there been any additional duties placed upon UK forces other than occasional patrols in support of Sovereign Base Area police and customs.

D Notices

Harry Cohen: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence how many D notices have been issued to the press requesting restriction of reporting on matters relating to Iraq in each of the last five years; and if he will make a statement. [197514]

Mr. Hoon: I will write to my hon. Friend and place a copy of my letter in the Library of the House.

Data Protection

Michael Fabricant: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what procedures are in place *(a)* to check the criminal records of civil servants in his Department and agencies responsible to his Department who have access to computer databases containing confidential information on the public and *(b)* to ensure that there can be no improper use of computer databases containing confidential information on the public; and if he will make a statement. [194606]

Mr. Caplin: I will write to the hon. Member and place a copy of my letter in the Library of the House.

Databases

Mr. Gerald Howarth: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will list the fields of the *(a)* Force Structure database, *(b)* Procurement Plans database and *(c)* Defence Bills Authority databases. [176387]

Mr. Ingram: I will write to the hon. Member and place a copy of my letter in the Library of the House.

Defence Attachés

Malcolm Bruce: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence pursuant to the answer of 30 June 2004, *Official Report*, column 350W, on Defence Attachés, what the reasons are for the change in the amount of time devoted by Defence Attaches to supporting military exports from the 40 per cent. estimated in 1989 by the National Audit Office. [189485]

Mr. Ingram: I will write to the hon. Member and place a copy of my letter in the Library of the House.

Defence Crisis Management Organisation

Mr. Drew: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what assessment he has made of Human Rights Watch reports that British forces failed to secure containers filled with weapons near to the old airport in Basra in May 2003. [196585]

Mr. Ingram *[holding answer 8 November 2004]:* The alleged incident occurred less than one week after the end of the war-fighting phase of Operation Telic. It would have been reasonable at that time for the Commanding Officer concerned to make the decision that his current operational commitments did not allow him to release forces for guarding Iraqi ammunition stores. Human Rights Watch reported at the time that the International Committee of the Red Cross had found at least 30 locations in Basrah, which contained abandoned munitions. It would not have been possible to provide site protection for all of these sites while carrying out all the other urgent tasks allocated to British forces at that time.

After the end of the conflict, British forces in south-eastern Iraq instituted information campaigns to educate the local population about the dangers of handling unexploded munitions. Explosive Ordnance Disposal teams also began the enormous task of clearing stockpiles such as the one reported by Human Rights Watch.

Defence Logistics

Mr. Gerald Howarth: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what progress has been made in establishing a system of asset tracking for Defence logistics. [192369]

Mr. Ingram: I will write to the hon. Member and place a copy of my letter in the Library of the House.

Defence Procurement Agency

Dr. Iddon: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what mechanisms are in place in the Defence Procurement Agency for the passing of information and expertise between support groups and the integrated projects teams responsible for equipment procurement. [198930]

Mr. Ingram: There are 20 Support Groups within the Defence Procurement Agency (DPA) who are responsible for providing technical, financial and commercial policy advice to the Agency's Integrated Project Teams (IPTs). In addition to supporting the DPA IPTs, many Support Groups provide support to the wider Department and to industry.

Support Groups promulgate their advice and policy through the Department's Acquisition Management System (AMS) in the first instance. The AMS is a web-based system that provides a framework for more detailed guidance, often in the form of Joint Service

Publications or Defence Standards. The AMS is available via the internet and is used extensively by industry.

The individual Support Groups employ a variety of means for providing information and support directly to IPTs; these include bulletin boards, helplines, seminars and guidebooks. Where appropriate, individual Support Group personnel may become 'associate members' of IPTs.

Support Group personnel are involved in the delivery of training to IPTs and participate in a number of courses. Support Groups and IPTs also contribute to a process called 'Learning From Experience' where lessons learned are captured in a database for others to draw from.

Finally, the best way of sharing expertise between Support Groups and IPTs is for staff to move between them during their career. This assists in the development of policy and guidance that is aligned to the needs of IPTs.

Defence Projects

Mr. Gerald Howarth: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will list the *(a)* category A, *(b)* category B and *(c)* category C projects of his Department that have received (i) initial gate and (ii) main gate approval since 31 March 1997; and when approval was achieved. [170561]

Mr. Ingram: I will write to the hon. Member and place a copy of my letter in the Library of the House.

Defence Science and Technology Laboratories

Mr. Key: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what assessment he has made of the impact of the European Commission's REACH chemical regulations on the work of the Defence Science and Technology Laboratories at Porton Down; and what representations he has made to the Commission. [153397]

Mr. Caplin: I will write to the hon. Member and place a copy of my letter in the Library of the House.

Dentists

Mr. Gordon Prentice: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence how many non-UK Commonwealth citizens practice as dentists in the *(a)* Army, *(b)* RAF and *(c)* Royal Navy. [198376]

Mr. Ingram: I will write to my hon. Friend and place a copy of my letter in the Library of the House.

Department Account Codes

Mr. Gerald Howarth: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will place in the Library a copy of his Department's account codes. [176383]

Mr. Ingram: I will write to the hon. Member and place a copy of my letter in the Library of the House.

Departmental Advertising

Charles Hendry: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what the cost of *(a)* creative work, *(b)* media spend and *(c)* administration for his Department's advertising activity has been in each financial year since 1997–98, broken down by contractor. [197298]

Mr. Caplin: I will write to my hon. Friend and place a copy of my letter in the Library of the House.

Departmental Consultants

Mr. Jenkins: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence how much the Department spent on outside information technology and communication specialists, consultants and engineers in the 2003–04 financial year. [192760]

Mr. Caplin: I will write to my hon. Friend and place a copy of my letter in the Library of the House.

Departmental Events (Funding)

Charles Hendry: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will list the *(a)* conferences, *(b)* publications, *(c)* initiatives, *(d)* projects and *(e)* receptions organised by his Department which have received funding from outside commercial bodies, since May 1997, broken down by (i) funding body and (ii) amount paid. [196595]

Mr. Caplin: I will write to the hon. Member and place a copy of my letter in the Library of the House.

Departmental Expenditure Limit

Mr. Keith Simpson: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence (1) pursuant to paragraph 65 of his Department's Annual Report and Accounts 2003–04, HC 1080, when his Department was first subject to a cash Departmental Expenditure Limit; and what that limit was; [196463]

(2) if he will list the cash demanding activities referred to in paragraph 65 of his Department's Annual Report and Accounts 2003–04, HC 1080, that were constrained in financial year 2003–04. [196465]

Mr. Ingram: I will write to the hon. Member and place a copy of my letter in the Library of the House.

Departmental Heating

Norman Baker: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what the *(a)* total energy use and *(b)* total cost has been of heating his Department's headquarters in Whitehall in each year since 1990. [192244]

Mr. Caplin: I will write to the hon. Member and place a copy of my letter in the Library of the House.

Norman Baker: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what steps he has taken to cut heat loss in his Department's headquarters in Whitehall; and if he will make a statement. [192245]

Mr. Caplin: I will write to the hon. Member and place a copy of my letter in the Library of the House.

Norman Baker: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what steps he takes to ensure that the buildings comprising his Department's headquarters in Whitehall are heated according to occupancy and climatic conditions rather than a standard date and time. [192246]

Mr. Caplin: I will write to the hon. Member and place a copy of my letter in the Library of the House.

Departmental IT

Brian White: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what percentage of the Department's *(a)* implemented and *(b)* planned computer systems use open source software; and what plans are in place to raise this level. [195659]

Mr. Ingram: I will write to my hon. Friend and place a copy of my letter in the Library of the House.

Departmental Lighting

Norman Baker: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what the total cost of providing lighting for his Department's headquarters in Whitehall has been for each year since 1990. [192247]

Mr. Caplin: I will write to the hon. Member and place a copy of my letter in the Library of the House.

Norman Baker: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence whether it is his policy that lights within his Department's headquarters in Whitehall should remain on, irrespective of room occupancy. [192248]

Mr. Caplin: I will write to the hon. Member and place a copy of my letter in the Library of the House.

Departmental Offices

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what the cost of *(a)* decoration and *(b)* refurbishment of the London offices of the Department was in each of the last four years. [196152]

Mr. Caplin: I will write to the hon. Member and place a copy of my letter in the Library of the House.

Departmental Staff

Tim Loughton: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence how many people in his Department earn more than a whole-time equivalent salary of £57,485 per year. [195329]

Mr. Caplin: I refer the hon. Member to the answer given on 11 November 2004, *Official Report*, column 856W, by my hon. Friend the Minister for the Cabinet Office (Ruth Kelly).

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what percentage of the staff of the Department in *(a)* 2002 and *(b)* 2003 were people with disabilities. [196134]

Mr. Caplin: I refer the hon. Member to the answer given on 9 November 2004, *Official Report*, column 619W by my hon. Friend the Minister for the Cabinet Office (Ruth Kelly).

E-business Strategy

Mr. Heald: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence when he expects to produce his Department's e-business strategy. [162813]

Mr. Ingram: I will write to the hon. Member and place a copy of my letter in the Library of the House.

Employment Costs

Mr. Keith Simpson: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will estimate the average employment cost of *(a)* an officer, *(b)* a member of other ranks, *(c)* a non-industrial civil servant and *(d)* an industrial civil servant in 2004–05. [181742]

Mr. Ingram: I will write to the hon. Member and place a copy of my letter in the Library of the House.

Enhanced Combat Body Armour

Mr. Hancock: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence when he will write to the hon. Member for Portsmouth, South as promised in his answer of 1 April 2004, *Official Report*, column 11W, on enhanced combat body armour. [189385]

Mr. Ingram: I will write to the hon. Member and place a copy of my letter in the Library of the House.

Equatorial Guinea

Mr. Ancram: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence (1) when officials in his Department were first informed of the attempted coup plot in Equatorial Guinea; [198221]

(2) what contingency plans were drawn up by his Department *(a)* unilaterally and *(b)* in conjunction with other countries for the evacuation of British nationals and others from Equatorial Guinea immediately prior to the attempted coup earlier this year; [198218]

(3) which United Kingdom forces were within *(a)* 500 miles and *(b)* 1,000 miles of Equatorial Guinea (i) before and (ii) during the attempted coup earlier this year. [198220]

Mr. Ingram: I refer the right hon. Member to the answer given today by my right hon. Friend the Foreign Secretary about when the Government became aware of the alleged coup in Equatorial Guinea.

In this case no contingency planning was considered necessary because the majority of Entitled Personnel were covered by commercial evacuations plans, and the remainder would have been evacuated by the French under the updated civil contingency plan.

Throughout the period there were no operational UK forces in the Gulf of Guinea area other than British Military Training Teams in Ghana and Nigeria, and Defence Advisers/Attaches in Ghana, Nigeria and the Democratic Republic of Congo.

Equipment Contracts

Mr. Gerald Howarth: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what the date of contract signature for the *(a)* Support Vehicle, *(b)* Light Forces Anti-Tank Guided Weapon Systems, *(c)* Next Generation Anti-Armour Weapon and *(d)* Terrier projects are. [170554]

Mr. Ingram: I will write to the hon. Member and place a copy of my letter in the Library of the House.

Falkland Islands (Landmines)

Brian Cotter: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what progress the Government is making towards meeting its obligation under the Ottawa Treaty to clear landmines from the Falkland Islands by 2009. [198803]

Mr. Ingram: I refer the hon. Member to the answer given on 3 November 2004, *Official Report*, column 343W by the Secretary of State for the Foreign and Commonwealth Office.

Family Liaison

Mr. McNamara: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what measures he has taken in the past year to improve communications between the Army and bereaved relatives of soldiers who have died while serving; and how many persons, of what rank, are employed in family liaison. [183383]

Mr. Caplin: We constantly review our procedures to ensure that they are sensitive to families' needs. A number of measures have been taken recently, including the formation of the Army Widows Association, to provide a focus for widows to share a common understanding of their circumstances, and the issue of a Guidance in Bereavement booklet, which offers help and guidance for families of servicemen or women who die while in Service. Also, much more robust arrangements for long-term contact through the Casualty Visiting Officer have been introduced.

A wide range of personnel are employed on family liaison but details are not held centrally and could be provided only at disproportionate cost.

Freedom of Information Act

Dr. Julian Lewis: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what assessment he has made of the likely costs to his Department in the first quarter of 2005 of compliance with the provisions of the Freedom of Information Act 2000; and if he will make a statement. [198764]

Mr. Caplin *[holding answer 16 November 2004]:* The Ministry of Defence has made wide-ranging preparations for the full implementation of the Freedom of Information Act. The cost of compliance is being met from existing resources, and there has been no requirement to identify anticipated costs or to collate them centrally. To collect the necessary information now would involve disproportionate cost, and the final part of Exemption 9 (voluminous or vexatious requests) of the Code of Practice on Access to Government Information therefore applies.

Implementation of the Act principally involves staff who also have other duties. The effort which they devote to Freedom of Information issues in the first quarter of 2005 will depend on a range of factors, including the number of requests for information received in each area, the complexity of those requests, the ease with which it can be established whether relevant information is held, and the number of appeals lodged by dissatisfied requesters.

Funded Liability

Mr. Keetch: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence, what the funded liability is for *(a)* officers and *(b)* other ranks in the Army in (i) each year since 1997, (ii) 2004–05 and (iii) 2005–06; and if he will make a statement. [183344]

Mr. Caplin: I will write to the hon. Member and place a copy of my letter in the Library of the House.

General Election (Overseas Voters)

Mr. Evans: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what action he is taking to ensure that the armed forces serving abroad are able to vote in a general election. [196736]

Mr. Caplin: The Ministry of Defence issues a Defence Council Instruction explaining the procedures for electoral registration and notifies personnel of election announcements. Those overseas, or absent from their normal place of duty or home in the United Kingdom, have the option to appoint a proxy or elect for a postal vote.

General Security of Information Agreement

Llew Smith: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence on what date each amendment made in the last 30 years to the General Security of Information Agreement between the United Kingdom and United States, dated 14 April 1961, was made; and through which designated security authorities information under this agreement is channelled. [195409]

Mr. Hoon: The 1961 United Kingdom/United States General Security Agreement concerns the protection of any classified information exchanged between the parties and not just defence information. As the UK National Security Authority the Cabinet Office is the ultimate UK authority for this Agreement. Amendments were made to this Agreement on 5 July and 19 December 1983. In April 1984 the Ministry of Defence (MOD) and the US Department of Defense (DoD) negotiated a supplement to the Agreement covering an industrial security annex. This annex was reviewed and replaced last year when a new Security Implementing Arrangement for operations between the MoD and the DoD was signed on 27 January 2003. Information received by UK Government Departments under the 1961 Agreement is normally transmitted through Government channels and falls under the responsibility of the respective departmental security officer. Each UK Government Department has available to it guidance governing the handling of sensitive material generally, including that which is issued by international organisations or governed by international Agreements.

Geneva Convention

Mr. Gordon Prentice: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will list those practices which are not specifically prohibited by the Geneva Convention but which he classifies as unacceptable and not to be followed by United Kingdom service personnel. [173002]

Mr. Ingram: I will write to my hon. Friend and place a copy of my letter in the Library of the House.

Government Buildings (Disabled Access)

Tom Cox: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence whether all government buildings in his Department within the Greater London area are fully accessible to disabled people; and if he will make a statement. [199313]

Mr. Caplin: It has not proved possible to respond to my hon. Friend in the time available before Prorogation.

Green Ministers

Mr. Horam: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence how many departmental Green Ministers there have been since 1997. [197837]

Mr. Caplin *[holding answer 16 November 2004]:* Four.

Guantanamo Bay

Mr. McNamara: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence on what dates representatives of his Department visited British nationals detained at Guantanamo Bay; whether he has received adverse reports on the welfare of detainees or allegations of ill-treatment; what representations he made on behalf of the prisoners; and what action he took to make his concerns known to relatives or legal representatives of those detained. [179815]

Mr. Ingram: I will write to my hon. Friend and place a copy of my letter in the Library of the House.

Gurkha Soldiers

Tom Cox: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence how many Gurkha soldiers are serving in the British Army. [196724]

Mr. Caplin: I will write to my hon. Friend and place a copy of my letter in the Library of the House.

Mr. Dismore: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence how many payments under the ex gratia compensation scheme for former Far East prisoners of the Japanese have been made to former Gurkhas. [188576]

Mr. Caplin: I will write to my hon. Friend and place a copy of my letter in the Library of the House.

Harrier Aircraft

Mr. John Smith: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will undertake an independent investigation into *(a)* delays and *(b)* difficulties encountered in repairing ZD402, ZD376, ZD470, ZD472, ZD408, ZD404 and ZD466 at RAF Cottesmore. [199352]

Mr. Ingram: It has not proved possible to respond to my hon. Friend in the time available before Prorogation.

Hooding

Norman Baker: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence how many hoods *(a)* have been ordered by his Department and *(b)* are available to British troops for use after arrest and during detention of military combatants in Iraq. [178710]

Mr. Ingram: I will write to the hon. Member and place a copy of my letter in the Library of the House.

Human Rights Abusers

Tom Brake: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what mechanisms are used to ensure that known human rights abusers do not receive military training or assistance from the UK Government. [197630]

Mr. Ingram: Where there have been concerns about a country's armed forces' human rights record, UK military defence assistance and training normally includes targeted security sector reform activity aimed at helping to ensure that the relevant armed forces operate in an accountable manner fully respecting human rights.

Hurricane Ivan

Mr. Foulkes: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what assistance his Department has offered to islands affected by Hurricane Ivan in the Caribbean; and what plans he has for providing further assistance. [190273]

Mr. Ingram: I will write to my right hon. Friend and place a copy of my letter in the Library of the House.

India

Mr. Godsiff: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what the *(a)* dates and *(b)* purpose of his recent visit to India were; who accompanied him; and how much the visit cost. [194111]

Mr. Hoon: I visited India and Pakistan from 4–8 October 2004. The primary purpose of the visit to India was to meet the new Indian Defence Minister, Shri Pranab Mukherjee. As set out in the Prime Ministers' Declaration of 20 September 2004, the United Kingdom has an important relationship with India; maintaining high-level contacts is a key strand of the defence element of the relationship.

I was accompanied to India by my wife, three Ministry of Defence officials (a Private Secretary, a policy official, and a telecommunications specialist), my special adviser and Metropolitan Police protection officers.

The total cost to the MOD of the visit was £78,503.

Infantry

Ann Winterton: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence whether there has been *(a)* a cap and *(b)* a restriction on recruitment for the infantry in the last three years. [196217]

Mr. Caplin: There have been control measures placed on all levels of the Army, including the infantry, over the last three years to meet adjustments to funding allocations. However, recruiting has not ceased.

Mr. Alan Reid: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what percentage of infantry recruits from Scotland failed to complete their training courses in *(a)* each of the last five years during which Scottish infantry recruits were trained at Glencorse and *(b)* each year since their training has been carried out at Catterick. [198515]

Mr. Caplin *[holding answer 16 November 2004]:* Data is not held centrally on the historical percentages of infantry recruits from Scotland who failed to complete their training courses and will need to be collated from various sources. I will write to the hon. Member when the information has been collated and place a copy in the Library of the House.

Mr. Alan Reid: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence how many Scottish infantry recruits committed suicide during their training *(a)* during the last 20 years during which their training was carried out at Glencorse and *(b)* during each year since their training has been carried out at Catterick. [198621]

Mr. Caplin: I will write to the hon. Member and place a copy of my letter in the Library of the House.

Mr. Drew: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what the *(a)* expected enrolment, *(b)* actual enrolment, *(c)* recruitment and *(d)* lost strength was for each infantry regiment in the latest year for which figures are available. [197914]

Mr. Caplin: The following table shows the numbers of soldiers enlisted, the enlistment target and phase 2 trained output for the three career employment groups (CEG) for the Infantry; the Guards, Line and Para and the corresponding outflow figure from the Field Army for financial year 2003–04, the last full year that figures are available.

Soldiers

Infantry	*Enlistment target*	*Enlisted*	*Phase 2 trained output to the field army*	*Outflow from field army*
Guards	530	700	530	470
Line	2,510	3,600	2,510	2,430
Para	190	450	190	300

Figures for officers for the corresponding period are as follows.

Officers

Infantry	*RMAS output to the field army*	*Outflow from field army*
Guards	35	20
Line	158	120
Para	14	20

Information on targets and enlistments for soldiers to Infantry Regiments is not available in the format requested. The Army Training and Recruiting Agency is tasked to recruit to the three Infantry CEGs and not to Regiments, as capbadges for soldiers are only allocated by the Field Army on completion of training. For officers, the Royal Military Academy Sandhurst (RMAS) is given a target for commissioned officers to the Army generally and not to specific regiments. Officers are only allocated a capbadge in their third term.

Notes:

1. Figures include regular Army personnel only.
2. Outflow figures include absence without leave.
3. Figures do not include transfers from the Infantry into other arms/services.
4. Figures have been rounded to the nearest 10 for presentational purposes.
5. For officers, the outflow figures exclude colonels and above.

Iran

Dr. Julian Lewis: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence pursuant to the written ministerial statement on the Shatt Al Arab incident, of 30 June 2004, *Official Report,* columns 12–13WS, whether ill-treatment, other than blindfolding, has been reported by British servicemen seized by the Iranian authorities. [182464]

Mr. Hoon: I will write to the hon. Member and place a copy of my letter in the Library of the House.

Dr. Julian Lewis: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence pursuant to the written ministerial statement on the Shatt Al Arab incident, of 30 June 2004, *Official Report*, columns 12–13WS, what assessment he has made of the likelihood of determining the position of the three boats at the time of seizure if the global positioning equipment on board is not returned. [182467]

Mr. Hoon: I will write to the hon. Member and place a copy of my letter in the Library of the House.

Iraq

Sir Teddy Taylor: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence how many British soldiers have been *(a)* killed and *(b)* injured in Iraq since the beginning of the conflict; and how many of these injuries were caused (i) by friendly fire, (ii) in accidents and (iii) in combat. [198095]

Mr. Hoon *[holding answer 15 November 2004]*: 74 British service personnel have died while deployed in Iraq. This includes 49 who have been killed in action, of which seven were the result of blue-on-blue incidents. The remaining 25 died from other causes, including accidents, natural causes and incidents which are still under investigation.

Prior to August 2004, we did not hold centrally figures for the total number of injuries sustained by service personnel, or the causes of those injuries. Minor injuries or illnesses suffered by personnel who were treated in theatre and then returned to duty were not recorded other than on individual service records. Since August 2004, 65 injuries have been sustained as a result of hostile action. Statistics are not collected for injuries sustained for other reasons.

Mr. Swire: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what the maximum possible blast radius is of bombs available for use by United Kingdom troops in Iraq. [199088]

Mr. Ingram: It has not proved possible to respond to the hon. Member in the time available before Prorogation.

Julie Morgan: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what roles Iraqi troops are undertaking in Iraq. [199330]

Mr. Ingram: It has not proved possible to respond to my hon. Friend in the time available before Prorogation.

Mr. Goodman: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence when he will reply to the question, ref 148636, on sick pay in his Department, tabled by the hon. Member for Wycombe on 13 January 2004. [163710]

Mr. Caplin: I will write to the hon. Member and place a copy of my letter in the Library of the House.

Llew Smith: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what papers he has submitted to Lord Butler's inquiry into intelligence on Iraq; and whether *(a)* officials and *(b)* Ministers have given oral evidence to the inquiry. [177068]

Mr. Hoon: I will write to my hon. Friend and place a copy of my letter in the Library of the House.

Mr. Soames: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will make a statement on the progress that the NATO Training Implementation Mission in Iraq has made in the training of Iraqi security forces *(a)* inside and *(b)* outside Iraq. [189375]

Mr. Ingram: I will write to the hon. Member and place a copy of my letter in the Library of the House.

Adam Price: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence pursuant to his reply of 14 September 2004, *Official Report*, column 1542W, whether the United Kingdom officer participated in the drafting of Combined Joint Task Force 7's counter-resistance and interrogation policy. [189797]

Mr. Ingram: I will write to the hon. Member and place a copy of my letter in the Library of the House.

Adam Price: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence pursuant to his reply of 14 September 2004, *Official Report*, column 1543W, whether Colonel Terrington and Colonel Campbell-James were second in command to Major General Barbara Fast. [189798]

Mr. Ingram: I will write to the hon. Member and place a copy of my letter in the Library of the House.

Adam Price: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence whether *(a)* Colonel Chris Terrington and *(b)* Colonel Campbell-James embedded within US military intelligence saw Interrogation and Counter-Resistance Policy documents produced by Combined Joint Task Force 7 (i) before and (ii) after it was issued. [189799]

Mr. Ingram: I will write to the hon. Member and place a copy of my letter in the Library of the House.

Adam Price: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence when British service personnel first became aware of allegations of mistreatment of detainees at Abu Ghraib. [189801]

Mr. Ingram: I will write to the hon. Member and place a copy of my letter in the Library of the House.

Adam Price: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence whether any British officer or official has been interviewed as part of the Taguba or Fay inquiries into detainee abuse. [189802]

Mr. Ingram: I will write to the hon. Member and place a copy of my letter in the Library of the House.

Adam Price: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence pursuant to his answer of 14 September 2004, *Official Report*, column 1542W, on Iraq, what specific tasks the United Kingdom officer referred to undertook as part of Colonel Warren's team. [189872]

Mr. Ingram: I will write to the hon. Member and place a copy of my letter in the Library of the House.

Adam Price: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence pursuant to his answer of 14 September 2004, *Official Report*, column 1542W, on Iraq, for how long the UK officer worked with Colonel Warren. [189875]

Mr. Ingram: I will write to the hon. Member and place a copy of my letter in the Library of the House.

Adam Price: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence pursuant to his answer of 14 September 2004, *Official Report*, column 1542W, on Iraq, if he will give the name and rank of the UK officer who worked with Colonel Warren. [189877]

Mr. Ingram: I will write to the hon. Member and place a copy of my letter in the Library of the House.

Llew Smith: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what discussions he has had with *(a)* his United States counterpart and *(b)* the Chief of British Defence Forces in Iraq in respect of the need (i) to protect Iraqi nuclear sites from looters and (ii) to stop components from Iraqi nuclear sites being removed illegally from Iraq. [191665]

Mr. Hoon: I will write to my hon. Friend and place a copy of my letter in the Library of the House.

Mr. Hogg: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence on how many occasions in each month since March 2003 British forces in Iraq *(a)* opened fire, *(b)* were fired upon and *(c)* were the subject of bomb attacks; how many casualties British forces (i) inflicted and (ii) sustained; and how many rounds of ammunition, including ammunition of a heavy calibre, British forces, including air units, expended in each month. [193164]

Mr. Ingram: I will write to the right hon. and learned Member and place a copy of my letter in the Library of the House.

Adam Price: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence pursuant to his reply of 11 October 2004, *Official Report*, column 64W, on Iraq, whether Colonel Terrington was aware that the investigation was of a disciplinary nature involving the conduct of US troops. [193433]

Mr. Ingram: I will write to the hon. Member and place a copy of my letter in the Library of the House.

Adam Price: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence pursuant to his reply of 11 October 2004, *Official Report*, column 64W, on Iraq, whether Colonel Terrington discussed the investigation with LTC Jordan. [193434]

Mr. Ingram: I will write to the hon. Member and place a copy of my letter in the Library of the House.

Adam Price: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence pursuant to his reply of 11 October 2004, *Official Report*, column 64W, on Iraq, whom Colonel Terrington informed about the investigation; and on what dates. [193435]

Mr. Ingram: I will write to the hon. Member and place a copy of my letter in the Library of the House.

Adam Price: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence pursuant to his reply of 11 October 2004, *Official Report*, column 64W, on Iraq, when Colonel Terrington was made aware of the investigation; and by whom. [193436]

Mr. Ingram: I will write to the hon. Member and place a copy of my letter in the Library of the House.

Adam Price: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence how many UK service personnel have seen active service in Iraq since the beginning of hostilities; and how many have been issued with the aide memoire referred to in the answer to the hon. Member for Hull North (Mr. McNamara) on 4 October, *Official Report*, column 1879W. [194024]

Mr. Ingram *[holding answer 26 October 2004]*: Around 87,000 service personnel were deployed in support of Operation Telic between 18 January 2003 and 31 August 2004. This figure includes sailors and airmen, many of whom were not directly involved in combat, around 54,500 soldiers were deployed during that time. During the first phase of Operation Telic from 18 January 2003 to 2 May 2003, which included the major combat operations, around 48,500 service personnel were deployed, of which around 29,000 were from the Army. A significant number of these would not have been directly involved in combat.

20,000 aide memoire cards were produced in the original print run between February and early March 2003. These were distributed as a priority to ground troops who were expected to be involved in combat, but were available to other units as well.

Since the end of the war-fighting phase of Operation Telic the responsibility for printing and distributing the cards has passed to individual units. Information on how many have been printed and distributed since the initial print run is not held centrally, and could be collected only at disproportionate cost.

Adam Price: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence when Ministers were first provided with United States plans for the invasion of Iraq which contained references to P-day, A-day and G-day. [195303]

Mr. Hoon: I will write to the hon. Member and place a copy of my letter in the Library of the House.

Mr. Drew: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will make a statement on UK troops liability to the Ottawa Treaty on landmines when acting *(a)* alone and *(b)* in association with US forces, with specific reference to Iraq. [198703]

Mr. Ingram: I will write to my hon. Friend and place a copy of my letter in the Library of the House.

Glenda Jackson: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence pursuant to his oral statement of 27 May, on Iraq, whether the Royal Military Police personnel assisting in training the Iraqi Police Service will assist in the training of the Iraqi Prison Service. [177503]

Mr. Ingram: I will write to my hon. Friend and place a copy of my letter in the Library of the House.

Glenda Jackson: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will ask the US Administration to furnish him with information on the *(a)* numbers and *(b)* type of aerial attacks on Falluja between 1 and 15 November. [199135]

Mr. Hoon: It has not proved possible to respond to my hon. Friend in the time available before Prorogation.

Mr. Salmond: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what assessment he has made of the recent reports in *The Lancet* concerning the number of civilians killed since the invasion of Iraq. [195981]

Mr. Mullin: I have been asked to reply.

My right hon. Friend the Foreign Secretary issued a written statement on 17 November 2004, *Official Report*, columns 92–95WS, concerning the report in *The Lancet*.

Lynne Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what definition of cause is used in assessing whether deaths and injuries of Iraqi civilians are caused by UK service personnel. [197345]

Mr. Hoon: I will write to my hon. Friend and place a copy of my letter in the Library of the House.

Harry Cohen: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what arrangements will be put in place to protect refugees from the Fallujah area in the event of conflict there; how civilians will be distinguished from insurgents; what the role of the Black Watch will be in respect of *(a)* civilian refugees and *(b)* escaping insurgents; and if he will make a statement. [197378]

Mr. Hoon: I will write to my hon. Friend and place a copy of my letter in the Library of the House.

Harry Cohen: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence whether Coalition forces plan to keep a count of casualties arising from the possible conflict in the Falluja area of Iraq; and if he will make a statement. [197383]

Mr. Hoon: I will write to my hon. Friend and place a copy of my letter in the Library of the House.

Mr. Dalyell: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence how many prisoners in British military custody have been transferred to US custody since September 2001, including those transferred under the auspices of the Coalition Provisional Authority in Iraq; and what assurances about their rights and treatment were sought from the US authorities. [184549]

Mr. Ingram *[holding reply 19 July 2004]*: 341 Prisoners of War taken by United Kingdom forces in Iraq were handed over to the US in April 2003. All but three were subsequently released. The cases of the remaining three are being considered by the Central Criminal Court of Iraq. We have also detained around 2,000 security internees since the end of the conflict. Between April 2003 and December 2003, they were held by the US. All but one of those individuals were either returned to UK custody or released.

The UK Government takes its responsibilities to safeguard individuals taken into custody by UK forces very seriously. In March 2003, the UK and US Governments agreed a Memorandum of Understanding which contains mutual assurances on the treatment of all transferred persons in Iraq and confirms that such persons are entitled to the full protection of the Geneva Conventions.

During the period from April 2003 to December 2003, when large numbers of UK-held persons were in US custody at Camp Bucca, their treatment was monitored continuously by a UK Prisoner Monitoring Team and Prisoner of War Registration Unit. The UK team were not aware of any incidents of deliberate detainee mistreatment at the Camp.

Tom Cox: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence how many reports have been prepared on British-run military and civilian prisons in Iraq; how many have been sent to him; how many he has read and commented on; and if he will make a statement. [177240]

Mr. Ingram: I will write to my hon. Friend and place a copy of my letter in the Library of the House.

Mr. Swayne: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what requests were made by his Department to the Department for International Development for staff to assist with the planning for post-conflict Iraq; and what the response was in each case. [150221]

Mr. Ingram: The Ministry of Defence and the Department for International Development staff have worked closely together at all levels since before the Iraq conflict on the range of post-conflict planning issues.

Mr. Swayne: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what security clearance was given to civilians with expertise in infrastucture to enable them to attend military planning meetings, prior to the commencement of military operations in Iraq. [150224]

Mr. Ingram: All civilians involved in planning for Operation Telic possessed security clearances appropriate to their level of access to information.

Harry Cohen: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence pursuant to the statement of 7 January, *Official Report*, column 138WH, on post-war Iraq, if he will list each unit involved in incidents of alleged or possible fatalities, broken down by *(a)* the number of cases recorded and *(b)* the state of investigation; how long the investigation has taken in each case; and what the outcome was of each completed investigation. [171624]

Mr. Ingram: I will write to my hon. Friend and place a copy of my letter in the Library of the House.

Mr. Redwood: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what representations the Government has made to the US Administration about treatment of Iraqi prisoners. [172997]

Mr. Hoon: I will write to the right hon. Member and place a copy of my letter in the Library of the House.

Harry Cohen: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what reports he has received about abuses of Iraqi prisoners at Umm Qasr prison; what part was played by UK armed forces, including interrogators; over what period these abuses took place; over what period UK forces were operating at the prison; when reports of abuses were *(a)* first and *(b)* subsequently communicated to UK personnel; how such reports of abuses at the prison were dealt with; how the political officer of the British Armed Forces dealt with this matter when it was reported to him on 1 April 2004; how his report on this was dealt with; when Ministers received (i) first and (ii) subsequent reports of abuse; and if he will make a statement. [173025]

Mr. Hoon: I will write to my hon Friend and place a copy of my letter in the Library of the House.

Tom Cox: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence how many cases being made by Iraqi men or women against British military forces serving in Iraq are of alleged *(a)* deaths, *(b)* physical abuse and *(c)* unacceptable behaviour; how many of these complaints (i) have been investigated and (ii) are still under investigation; and if he will make a statement. [173076]

Mr. Ingram: I will write to my hon. Friend and place a copy of my letter in the Library of the House.

Mr. Jim Cunningham: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what communications his Department has had with other Arab nations regarding the allegations of abuse of Iraqi prisoners. [173228]

Mr. Hoon: I will write to my hon. Friend and place a copy of my letter in the Library of the House.

Mr. Jim Cunningham: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what strategy his Department will use to deal with the anti-Coalition sentiment stemming from the allegations of abuses of Iraqi prisoners. [173229]

Mr. Hoon: I will write to my hon. Friend and place a copy of my letter in the Library of the House.

Glenda Jackson: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence pursuant to his statement in reply to the hon. Member for Mid-Sussex, of 10 May 2004, *Official Report*, column 27, what prompted ministerial instructions that investigations should take place. [173259]

Mr. Hoon: I will write to my hon. Friend and place a copy of my letter in the Library of the House.

Mr. Soames: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence on what dates the International Committee of the Red Cross approached the Coalition Provisional Authority in Iraq regarding the treatment of prisoners of war by Coalition forces in Iraq. [173901]

Mr. Hoon: I will write to the hon. Member and place a copy of my letter in the Library of the House.

Joint Personnel Administration System

Mr. Hancock: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence how many companies were invited to tender for the introduction of the Joint Personnel Administration system; on what basis the winner was chosen; how much weight was given to their previous record; what the original estimate was of the *(a)* cost and *(b)* expected in-service delivery date; what the current estimate is of each; and if he will make a statement. [197775]

Mr. Caplin: The Joint Personnel Administration (JPA) system is being introduced through an amendment to the service personnel administration contract won competitively by EDS Defence in 1997 that expires in 2009, when it will be re-competed.

The decision to introduce JPA via an amendment to the existing contract with EDS was made in February 2004 and took account of EDS's satisfactory performance to date on service personnel administration. The amended contract was subject to EDS completing £15 million of risk reduction work and to a satisfactory commercial agreement.

The estimated cost for EDS for build and transition to JPA was £122 million (from contract amendment onwards) with a full in-service date of April 2007.

The current estimate is that EDS costs for JPA build and transition will be around £112 million, with a full in-service date of November 2006. This cost to bring in JPA is in addition to the ongoing cost of providing personnel administration services.

Lance Corporal Ian Blaymire

Mr. Soames: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence when the transcript will be available of the court martial proceedings against Lance Corporal Ian Blaymire; and if he will place a copy in the Library. [197547]

Mr. Ingram *[holding answer 11 November 2004]*: It has not proved possible to respond to the hon. Member in the time available before Prorogation.

Management Groups

Mr. Keith Simpson: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will list the responsibilities of the *(a)* Defence Estates, *(b)* Deputy Chief Defence Staff (Commitments), *(c)* Director Special Forces, *(d)* Defence Geographic and Imagery Intelligence Agency, *(e)* Veterans Agency, *(f)* Surgeon General, *(g)* Deputy Chief Defence Staff (Personnel), *(h)* Defence Secondary Care Agency and *(i)* Defence Dental Agency management groups. [181746]

Mr. Caplin: Most defence activity takes place outside the Ministry of Defence Head Office and is managed through 12 Top Level Budget (TLB) holders and five Trading Funds. The Permanent Secretary grants each TLB-holder extensive delegated powers over his/her resources of cash, personnel and infrastructure. Each TLB holder has a 'contract' with the MOD head office, known as a Service Delivery Agreement, which specifies the outputs required of that TLB, the resources they are given to deliver these outputs, and the underpinning performance management regime. The responsibilities of the management groupings you requested are listed as follows:

(a) Defence Estates has a mandate to deliver estate solutions to meet the armed forces' requirements for an estate of the right size and quality. The Defence Housing Executive merged with Defence Estates on 1 April 2004, thus including defence housing in Defence Estate's responsibilities.

(b) The Main duties of Deputy Chief Defence Staff (Commitments) are to provide Strategic Military policy and advice to Ministers/Chiefs of Staff, formulate and issue Operational Guidance, including resourcing of available capability, Own and Development of the Joint Enablers and use and develop the defence Crisis Management Organisation.

(c) The command and management of UK Special Forces.

(d) The Defence Geographic and Imagery Intelligence Agency is responsible for providing the imagery intelligence and geographic support to Defence policy, planning, operations and training.

(e) The Veterans Agency is responsible for providing financial and welfare support to war disabled pensioners and to war widow(er)s.

(f) The Surgeon General is responsible for setting the overall direction and policy on all clinical matters relating to the practice of medicine within the military. He is the most senior serving professional medical officer and is accountable for the overall performance of all Defence Medical Services personnel. The Surgeon General is authorised to direct the single services on the development of medical policies and common standards within their areas of responsibility, and for auditing compliance across the Defence Medical Services.

(g) The Deputy Chief of Defence Staff (Personnel) is the principal departmental military adviser on Service Personnel policy, including training and education, for all Regular Service personnel.

(h) This organisation ceased operating on 31 March 2003 following the formation of the Defence Medical Education and Training Agency.

(i) The Defence Dental Agency is responsible for the delivery of quality dental care for the armed forces and entitled civilians on operations and during peacetime.

Further information on individual defence agencies is available in the Library of the House of Commons.

Mr. Keith Simpson: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will list the responsibilities of the *(a)* Defence Fuels Group, *(b)* Deputy Chief of Defence Logistics, *(c)* Defence Communications Services Agency, *(d)* Defence Logistics Support HQ, *(e)* Defence Clothing and Textiles Agency, *(f)* DG Equipment Support (Land), *(g)* DG Equipment Support Air, *(h)* Warship Support Agency, *(i)* Defence Storage and Distribution Agency, *(j)* Director Land Service Ammunition, *(k)* Defence Transport and Movement Agency and *(l)* British Forces Post Office management groups. [181781]

Mr. Caplin: Most defence activity takes place outside the Ministry of Defence Head Office and is managed through 12 Top Level Budget (TLB) holders and five Trading Funds. The Permanent Secretary grants each TLB-holder extensive delegated powers over his/her resources of cash, personnel and infrastructure. Each TLB holder has a "contract" with the MOD head office, known as a Service Delivery Agreement, which specifies the outputs required of that TLB, the resources they are given to deliver these outputs, and the underpinning performance management regime. The responsibilities of the management groupings you requested are listed below:

(a) The Defence Fuels Group is responsible for the supply and management of fuels, lubrieants and gases in support of all three Services.

(b) The Deputy Chief of Defence Logistics is a person and not an organisation. He assists the Chief of Defence Logistics in managing the Defence Logistics Organisation, in particular chairing its Executive Board.

(c) The Defence Communication Services Agency maximises Defence operational effectiveness by providing information and assuring the delivery of information solutions within the deployed and fixed environments.

(d) This organisation is not recognised.

(e) The Defence Clothing and Textiles Agency is now the Defence Clothing Integrated Project Team. It is the organisation responsible for the development, procurement, and supply management of clothing for the UK armed forces and civilians.

(f) DG Equipment Support (Land) and *(g)* DG Equipment Support (Air) have not existed as management groups since 1 April 2004.

(h) The Warship Support Agency (WSA) exists to provide logistic support to the Royal Navy Fleet and other maritime elements of the UK armed forces that have been passed into service from the Defence Procurement Agency.

(i) The Defence Storage and Distribution Agency is responsible for providing material distribution, processing and storage service to sustain the fighting power of UK armed forces worldwide.

(j) The Director Land Service Ammunition ceased as an organisation in April 2000 when it merged with Project Management Ammunition from the Defence Procurement Agency to form the Defence General Munitions (DGM)

Integrated Project Team (IPT). The DGM IPT is responsible for the acquisition, supply, management and disposal of all in-service munitions to the three Services.

(k) The Defence Transport and Movement Agency provides transport and movements services worldwide in peace, crisis and war in order to support UK military capability.

(l) The British Forces Post Office receives, collects, sorts, secures and delivers classified items to MOD establishments, other Government Departments, List X companies, HM ships and theatres worldwide.

Further information on individual defence agencies is available in the Library of the House of Commons.

Manning Controls

Mr. Keetch: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what assessment he has made of the conformity of the practice of administrative discharge through manning controls with *(a)* European Union legislation, *(b)* the European Convention on Human Rights and *(c)* the Employment Rights Act 1966. [197219]

Mr. Caplin: It has not proved possible to respond to the hon. Member in the time available before Prorogation.

Military Afloat Reach and Sustainability

Mr. Gerald Howarth: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence when he expects the Military Afloat Reach and Sustainability (MARS) Project to complete its concept phase. [193128]

Mr. Ingram: I will write to the hon. Member and place a copy of my letter in the Library of the House.

Military Equipment

Tom Cox: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence how much used military *(a)* clothing, *(b)* footwear and *(c)* other personal equipment was reissued to serving personnel in the last year for which figures are available; and if he will make a statement. [191968]

Mr. Ingram: I will write to my hon. Friend and place a copy of my letter in the Library of the House.

Ministerial Air Travel

Mr. Beggs: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what the total cost of air travel between Northern Ireland and Great Britain was for *(a)* ministers and *(b)* officials in his Department in the latest year for which figures are available. [182131]

Mr. Caplin: I will write to the hon. Member and place a copy of my letter in the Library of the House.

Ministerial Expenses

Mr. Prisk: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence how much the Department spent on *(a)* maintenance, *(b)* renovation, *(c)* council tax and *(d)* running costs of residential properties used by Ministers and officials in each year since 1997. [191401]

Mr. Ingram: I refer the hon. Member to the answer given by my right hon. Friend, the Secretary of State for Defence, to the hon. Member for Arundel and South Downs (Mr. Flight) on 20 November 2003, *Official Report*, column 1272. I will write to the hon. Member regarding the costs for financial year 2003–04 and place a copy of my letter in the Library of the House.

Ministerial Visits

Matthew Taylor: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will list visits made by each Minister in the Department between December 2003 and April 2004, broken down by *(a)* date, *(b)* constituency visited and *(c)* cost. [171562]

Mr. Caplin: I will write to the hon. Member and place a copy of my letter in the Library of the House.

David Davis: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence (1) if he will list the travel costs incurred *(a)* by his Department and *(b)* by each Minister within his Department, for each of the last 10 years; [175644]

(2) how much his Department spent on ministerial travel by *(a)* car, *(b)* train, *(c)* aeroplane and *(d)* helicopter, in each of the last 10 years; [175667]

(3) how many journeys were made by helicopter by each Minister in his Department in each of the last 10 years; and what the journey length was in each case. [175744]

Mr. Caplin: The information requested is not held centrally and could be provided only at disproportionate cost. However, I refer the right hon. Member to the answer I gave to the hon. Member for New Forest, West (Mr. Swayne) today.

Ministers' Private Offices

Mr. Prisk: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what the running costs of Ministers' private offices in his Department have been in each year since 1997. [191378]

Mr. Ingram: The total cost to the Private Office Budget of the Ministry of Defence Ministers' private offices in financial year 2003–04 was £2,965,159.10. Data prior to this is no longer centrally held.

Mobile Phones

Mr. Prisk: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence how many mobile phones were used by *(a)* Ministers and special advisers and *(b)* officials in his Department in each year since 1997; how many were (i) lost and (ii) stolen; and what their cost was. [191442]

Mr. Ingram: I will write to the hon. Member and place a copy of my letter in the Library of the House.

MOD Land

Angus Robertson: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will list the land over which his Department acquired rights in Scotland between *(a)* 1980 and 1990, *(b)* 1990 and 2000 and *(c)* 2000 to the present, including areas of foreshore; and if he will make a statement. [173438]

Mr. Caplin: I will write to the hon. Member and place a copy of my letter in the Library of the House.

Mount Bay and Cardigan Bay Vessels

Mr. Hancock: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what *(a)* contracted price and *(b)* in-service date was originally agreed with BAe Systems for the building of the Mount Bay and Cardigan Bay vessels at Govan; what the latest forecasts are; what the reasons for the changes are; and if he will make a statement. [198804]

Mr. Ingram: It has not proved possible to respond to the hon. Member in the time available before Prorogation.

Mutual Defence Agreement

Jeremy Corbyn: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what plans he has to renew the Mutual Defence Agreement with the USA. [192718]

Mr. Ingram: I will write to my hon. Friend and place a copy of my letter in the Library of the House.

Naval Procurement

Mr. Nicholas Brown: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence (1) whether his Department's Military Afloat Research and Sustainability programme is covered by his commitment that warships for the Royal Navy will be built in the UK; [194450]

(2) whether the *(a)* renewal and *(b)* replacement of fleet auxiliaries is covered by his commitment that warships for the Royal Navy will be built in the UK. [194451]

Mr. Ingram: It is Government policy that the fabrication and assembly of new Royal Navy warship hulls should be undertaken in the United Kingdom. Though current Royal Fleet auxiliary ships are not warships they are classed as 'warlike' and options for replacing these ships are being examined. The Military Afloat Reach and Sustainability (MARS) project is at an early stage and no decision has been taken as to what will be procured; however, we expect that MARS ships will probably be 'warlike'.

New Deal

Dr. Julian Lewis: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence how many personnel the Department has recruited under the New Deal in each of the past five years. [194852]

Mr. Caplin: I will write to the hon. Member and place a copy of my letter in the Library of the House.

Operation Telic

Mr. Soames: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence how many rounds of 7.62 ammunition were issued to *(a)* Challenger II, *(b)* Warrior and *(c)* CVRT crews for their vehicle armament during Operation Telic. [153048]

Mr. Ingram: I will write to the hon. Member and place a copy of my letter in the Library of the House.

Operational Tours

Mr. Soames: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what the interval between operational tours since 1999–2000 has been for the *(a)* Royal Armoured Corps, *(b)* Royal Artillery, *(c)* Royal Engineers, *(d)* Royal Signals and *(e)* Infantry. [195050]

Mr. Ingram: The details of operational tour intervals for the *(a)* Royal Armoured Corps (RAC), *(b)* Royal Artillery (RA), *(c)* Royal Engineers (RE), *(d)* Royal Signals (R Signals) and *(e)* Infantry since 1999 are not held centrally and can be provided only at disproportionate cost. The equivalent details for the RAC, RA and Infantry for the period July 2001 to October 2004 are, however, provided in the tables which have been placed in the Library. It has not been possible to provide the actual tour intervals for RE and R Signals primarily due to the nature of their deployments, which tend to be at sub unit level or below, rather than unit level.

Deployments have been defined as unaccompanied unit level operational tours.

Paper Recycling

Mr. Breed: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will list the Department's main suppliers of *(a)* copier paper, *(b)* stationery, *(c)* envelopes and *(d)* paper for reports; and what the (i) name of each paper used and the (ii) recycled and post consumer recycled content is in each case. [171821]

Mr. Caplin: I will write to the hon. Member and place a copy of my letter in the Library of the House.

Parachute Accidents

Mr. Chope: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence how many servicemen have been killed in parachute accidents in each of the last two years; and when the last such incident was. [198090]

Mr. Caplin *[holding answer 15 November 2004]*: Between 1 January 2002 and 11 November 2004, six Service personnel have died in parachuting incidents (two in 2002, two in 2003 and two in 2004). Three of these deaths occurred while on duty and three occurred while off duty. The date of the last parachuting death was 12 June 2004.

Parliamentary Questions

Mr. Hancock: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence when he will answer the question from the hon. Member for Portsmouth South, ref 169408, of 28 April, about compensation paid to Iraqi civilians. [185179]

Mr. Ingram: I will write to the hon. Member and place a copy of my letter in the Library of the House.

Mr. Hancock: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence when he will answer the question from the hon. Member for Portsmouth South, ref 166998, tabled on 16 April, about the treatment of prisoners in Iraq. [185180]

Mr. Ingram: I will write to the hon. Member and place a copy of my letter in the Library of the House.

Mr. Hancock: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence when he will answer question 174196, tabled on 17 May, on the anthrax and pertussis vaccine. [189386]

Mr. Ingram: I will write to the hon. Member and place a copy of my letter in the Library of the House.

Pensions

Mr. Dhanda: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will make a statement on pensions for veterans of the Royal Army Ordnance Corps (RAOC); and if he will increase pensions for RAOC veterans who retired on or after 1 April 1969. [195547]

Mr. Caplin: I will write to my hon. Friend and place a copy of my letter in the Library of the House.

PFI/PPP Contracts (Financial Advice)

Matthew Taylor: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence how many contracts his Department had with *(a)* Barclays, *(b)* the Royal Bank of Scotland, *(c)* UBS Warburg and *(d)* the Bank of Scotland for advice on private finance initiative and public private partnership contracts in each financial year since 2001–02; and what fees were paid in each case. [186692]

Mr. Ingram: I will write to the hon. Member and place a copy of my letter in the Library of the House.

Princess of Wales's Royal Regiment

Patrick Mercer: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence where *(a)* battalion headquarters, *(b)* A, B and C Companies, *(c)* Support Company and *(d)* Headquarters Company of Second Battalion of The Princess of Wales's Royal Regiment will be located on (i) 18 November and (ii) 30 November. [199046]

Mr. Ingram: On current plans The Second Battalion of The Princess of Wales' Royal Regiment (2PWRR) will be located in their barracks in Tern Hill on 18 and 30 November, but will be held at very high readiness for operations in Iraq.

Procurement

Mr. Paul Burstow: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence whether it is his policy to ensure that hospitality within his Department is sourced from fair trade producers wherever possible within the boundaries set by the public procurement rules. [197065]

Mr. Caplin: I will write to the hon. Member and place a copy of my letter in the Library of the House.

Productivity

Bob Spink: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what his policy is for *(a)* increasing the productivity and *(b)* cutting the costs of (i) his Department and (ii) its agencies and non-departmental public bodies. [172187]

Mr. Ingram: I will write to the hon. Member and place a copy of my letter in the Library of the House.

Project ISOLUS

Mr. Alan Reid: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will list his Department's sites that were investigated as part of Project Isolus but were rejected as unsuitable; and what the reasons for their rejection were in each case. [198498]

Mr. Ingram: I will write to my hon. Friend and place a copy of my letter in the Library of the House.

Radiation Regulations

Llew Smith: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will place in the Library a copy of the report prepared by the Defence Science and Technology Laboratory at Porton Down entitled Skating on Thin Ice, concerning compliance with radiation regulations by Defence establishments. [196420]

Mr. Ingram: I will write to my hon. Friend and place a copy of my letter in the Library of the House.

RAF Attacks (Civilian Casualties)

Mr. Flook: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence whether RAF planes have been involved in air to ground attacks that have resulted in civilian *(a)* deaths and *(b)* casualties since 4 May 2003. [197623]

Mr. Ingram *[holding answer 11 November 2004]:* No RAF aircraft have launched any air to ground attacks that have resulted in the death or injury of civilians since May 2003.

RAFT Project

Mr. Hancock: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence (1) how much had been spent on the RAFT project at the date of its cancellation; whether an environmental assessment was carried out prior to commencement of the project; and if he will make a statement; [197382]

(2) what environmental assessments *(a)* were carried out before and *(b)* have been carried out during the lifetime of the RAFT project. [197704]

Mr. Ingram: I will write to the hon. Member and place a copy of my letter in the Library of the House.

Recycling Targets

Richard Ottaway: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence whether he plans to have statutory recycling targets beyond 2005–06. [193129]

Mr. Caplin: I will write to the hon. Member and place a copy of my letter in the Library of the House.

Regimental Strengths

Mr. Wiggin: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence how many regiments are *(a)* at full strength and *(b)* over strength. [189709]

Mr. Caplin: I will write to the hon. Member and a copy of my letter will be placed in the Library of the House.

Request for Resources 1

Mr. Keith Simpson: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence whether he has an agreement with the Treasury to reimburse his Department for additional wear and tear on equipment bought under Request for Resources 1, owing to exceptional operational use. [196467]

Mr. Ingram: I will write to the hon. Member and place a copy of my letter in the Library of the House.

Rota/Gibraltar Naval Bases

Mr. Rosindell: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence how many Royal Navy vessels used *(a)* the Rota naval base and *(b)* the Gibraltar naval base in the past six months. [187499]

Mr. Ingram: During the period 1 January until 31 August 2004 Royal Navy vessels have undertaken four visits to Rota Naval Base and 13 visits to Gibraltar Naval Base. The visits to Rota were all undertaken by units allocated to NATO Standing Naval Deployments and programmed directly by NATO. Inclusion of Royal Fleet Auxiliary vessels for completeness brings the total of visits to Gibraltar to 20 while the figure for Rota remains unchanged.

Royal Navy

Tom Cox: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence how many serving personnel there are in the Royal Navy; and what the corresponding figures were in each of the last three years. [197126]

Mr. Ingram: The strength of the Naval Service is published monthly in the Defence Analytical Services Agency publication TSP3, "UK Armed Forces Trained Strengths and Requirements", the last published edition of which was as at 1 September 2004.

As of 1 September 2004, the total strength of the Naval Service was 41,280. The corresponding figures for the previous years were:

	Strength of naval service
1 September 2003	42,220
1 September 2002	42,060
1 September 2001	42,210

These figures are for full time UK regular forces (including both trained and untrained personnel) and full time reserve service personnel (FTRS) and exclude naval activated reservists. Naval Service includes Royal Marines.

Satanism

Andrew Selous: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what assessment he has made of the compatibility of the practice of Satanism in the armed services with the oath of allegiance sworn by service men and women. [197721]

Mr. Caplin: The armed forces make no provision for the practice of Satanism. The beliefs of Service personnel are regarded as a private matter.

Science and Technology Laboratory

Dr. Iddon: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what mechanisms are employed by the Defence Scientific and Technology Laboratory for consulting the Defence Scientific Advisory Council and its subsidiary boards. [198929]

Mr. Ingram: The Defence Science and Technology Laboratory (Dstl) maintains a very close working relationship with the Defence Scientific Advisory Council (DSAC).

The Chief Executive of Dstl is a member of DSAC and each subsidiary board has a Dstl member of staff; the Dstl Technical Director is a member of the DSAC Technology sub board. Additionally, nominated members of Dstl staff are seconded to DSAC working groups which investigate and advise on various areas of the Ministry of Defence technical programme. The reports of the DSAC working groups are circulated to Dstl.

Members of DSAC attend Dstl technical programme reviews and advise on both the technical programme selection and progress.

Scientific Activities

Dr. Iddon: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence how his Department's chief scientific adviser has ensured that the Department's scientific activities are well directed, as recommended in paragraph 7.11 of the Government's science strategy, Investing in Innovation, published in July 2002. [162485]

Mr. Ingram: I will write to my hon. Friend and place a copy of my letter in the Library of the House.

Second World War Anniversary

Mr. Hancock: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence when the application forms for local authorities to apply for funding for next year's Second World War celebrations will be available. [189101]

Mr. Caplin: I will write to the hon. Member and place a copy of my letter in the Library of the House.

Select Committee Recommendations

Mr. Allen: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence how many recommendations by parliamentary select committees have been adopted by his Department since June 2001. [197774]

Mr. Ingram: The recommendations set out in all relevant Select Committee reports are given very careful consideration by Defence Ministers and Ministry of Defence officials and we seek to implement them when we can. However the information requested by my hon. Friend is not held centrally and could be provided only at disproportionate cost.

Service Personnel (Royal Drivers)

Mr. Alan Williams: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence how many servicemen and women act as drivers to members of the Royal Family; to which members; and from what source they receive remuneration for their service as drivers. [188565]

Mr. Caplin: I will write to my right hon. Friend and place a copy of my letter in the Library of the House.

Service Strengths

Mr. Soames: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what the *(a)* actual manning and *(b)* establishment levels of the (i) Royal Navy (excluding the Royal Marines), (ii) Army, (iii) Royal Air force and (iv) Royal Marines were on 31 March. [194955]

Mr. Ingram: I will write to the hon. Member and place a copy of my letter in the Library of the House.

Ship Sales (Chile)

Mr. Robathan: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what discussion there has been with the Chilean Government about the sale of HMS Norfolk, Marlborough and Grafton. [198559]

Mr. Ingram: The Ministry of Defence's Disposal Sales Agency has had, and continues to have, exploratory discussions with the Government of Chile relating to the possible sale of three surplus Type 23 frigates, HMS Norfolk, HMS Marlborough and HMS Grafton.

Smallpox Vaccine

Patrick Mercer: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence how many full, undiluted, tonnes of the smallpox vaccine his Department holds. [196305]

Mr. Caplin: The Ministry of Defence holds a strategic stock of vaccine, jointly procured with the Department of Health. We hold sufficient doses to meet our operational requirements.

Special Advisers

Matthew Taylor: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence how many unpaid special advisers the Department has; what their names are; and which Government *(a)* bodies, *(b)* committees and *(c)* strategy groups each unpaid adviser (i) belongs to, (ii) advises and (iii) works alongside. [194058]

Mr. Ingram: I refer the hon. Member to the answer given on 28 October 2004, *Official Report*, column 1380W, by my hon. Friend the Minister for the Cabinet Office (Ruth Kelly).

Special Investigations Branch

Mr. McNamara: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what the *(a)* UK and *(b)* overseas postings are of officers and soldiers of the Special Investigations Branch of the Royal Military Police. [176017]

Mr. Ingram: Officers and soldiers of the Royal Military Police Special Investigation Branch can routinely be posted to the following locations in the UK and overseas: Edinburgh, Catterick, York, Preston, Donnington, Chilwell, Chichester, Preston, Brecon, Colchester, Bulford, Aldershot, Hounslow, Stonehouse, Lisburn, Portadown, Ballykelly, Rheindahlen, Bielefeld, Gütersloh, Hohne, Osnabrück, Sennelager, Cyprus, Canada. In addition, RMP SIB detachments exist in operational theatre such as the Falkland Islands, Gibraltar, Bosnia, Kosovo, Afghanistan, and Iraq.

Mr. McNamara: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will break down the *(a)* UK and *(b)* overseas investigations undertaken in each of the past five years by the Special Investigations Branch by the nature of the incident under investigation. [176018]

Mr. Ingram: I will write to my hon. Friend and place a copy of my letter in the Library of the House.

Mr. McNamara: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what his policy is on the attendance of the Special Investigations Branch of the Royal Military Police at coroners' inquests into deaths it has investigated. [176019]

Mr. Ingram: A member of the Royal Military Police Special Investigation Branch will appear as a witness at an inquest held by Her Majesty's Coroner if called upon to do so by the Coroner.

Statutory Sick Pay

Mr. Goodman: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence how many people employed in his Department have claimed statutory sick pay for *(a)* less than one week, *(b)* one to three weeks, *(c)* four to six weeks, *(d)* seven to 12 weeks, *(e)* 13 to 20 weeks and *(f)* 21 to 28 weeks in each year since 1997. [148636]

Mr. Caplin: I will write to the hon. Member and place a copy of my letter in the Library of the House.

Steven Jordan

Adam Price: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence whether UK *(a)* service personnel and *(b)* officials have sought to question Mr. Steven Jordan during the last three months. [193385]

Mr. Ingram: I will write to the hon. Member and place a copy of my letter in the Library of the House.

Submarines

Mr. Gordon Prentice: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what the cost was of refitting each of the four submarines sold to Canada to make them fit to put to sea. [193236]

Mr. Ingram: I will write to my hon. Friend and place a copy of my letter in the Library of the House.

Mr. Gordon Prentice: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence how many fires there have been on *(a)* Upholder Class submarines and *(b)* other types of submarines in service with the Royal Navy since 1980 which did not arise in the course of combat. [194395]

Mr. Ingram: Centralised records of fires on RN submarines are only available from 1988. These records indicate that there were four fires on Upholder Class submarines during the in-service life of that class and 184 on other classes of submarines. The overwhelming majority of these were minor in nature. The figures include fires that arose during refit, repair and maintenance work in port as well as those that occurred on operational submarines at sea. No fires have occurred on the Upholder submarines since they were taken out of service or during reactivation prior to handover. The records do not specifically indicate which fires, if any, arose in the course of combat.

Mr. Hayes: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what representations he has received concerning the standard of maintenance of the Upholder/Victoria Class submarines. [197908]

Mr. Ingram: Following the agreement with the Canadian Government on the lease to buy four Upholder Class submarines, regular discussions have taken place between Ministry of Defence officials and their Canadian counterparts on a range of issues connected with the reactivation programme, which includes maintenance. We remain in close touch with the Canadian authorities, and are assisting them with their inquiry into the fire on board HMCS Chicoutimi on 5 October.

Mr. Hancock: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what the original *(a)* estimated cost and *(b)* in-service delivery date was of the first three Astute class submarines; what the latest estimate is; and if he will make a statement. [197966]

Mr. Ingram: It has not proved possible to respond to the hon. Member in the time available before Prorogation.

Supplementary Manning Assistance

Mr. Keetch: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence on how many occasions *(a)* battalions and *(b)* regiments have provided supplementary manning assistance to other battalions or regiments in the last six years; and in each case (i) when the assistance was provided, (ii) which battalions or regiments were involved, (iii) how many personnel were provided and (iv) for what period of time the assistance was provided. [197085]

Mr. Caplin: Information is not held centrally in the detail requested and could be obtained only at disproportionate cost.

Surface Ships/Submarines (Refits)

Mr. Hancock: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence with reference to the annex to Cm 6269, how many surface ships and submarines are likely to be undergoing refit at anytime during a *(a)* medium/small/small, *(b)* medium/medium/small and *(c)* large scale concurrency; whether those numbers are reflected in the published tables; and if he will make a statement. [197707]

Mr. Ingram: The Annex to the Defence paper 'Delivering Security in a Changing World: Future Capabilities' (CM6269) fully reflects the requirements for ships and submarines at various levels of concurrency. The units in refit and those being prepared to replace ships and submarines deployed on enduring tasks are shown in the "factors" column of the force structure tables. Thus, at some stage in a medium/medium/small concurrency, (which is the most demanding concurrency requirement for most surface ships and submarines) up to fifteen ships and four submarines may go through a period of low operational readiness, which may include refit.

Swan Hunter

Mr. Hancock: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what factors underlay the decision not to assist Swan Hunter with the overrun in budget to build the Largs Bay and Lyme Bay vessels at its Wallsend yard; and if he will make a statement. [197959]

Mr. Ingram: It has not proved possible to respond to the hon. Member in the time available before Prorogation.

Theft and Fraud

Mr. Prisk: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what his estimate is of the cost of theft and fraud to *(a)* his Department, *(b)* its agencies and *(c)* non-departmental public bodies in each year since 1997. [191411]

Mr. Ingram: I will write to the hon. Member and place a copy of my letter in the Library of the House.

Tornado

Mr. Gerald Howarth: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what priorities the Royal Air Force has for maintaining and improving the Tornado's strike and self-protection capabilities over the next decade; and whether there is a budget and delivery schedule for these priorities. [183407]

Mr. Ingram: I will write to the hon. Member and place a copy of my letter in the Library of the House.

Troop Deployment (Northern Ireland)

Mr. McNamara: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence pursuant to his answer of 10 February 2004, *Official Report*, column 959W, on the armed forces, when he will place a copy of his letter in the Library. [184448]

Mr. Caplin: I will write to my hon. Friend and place a copy of my letter in the Library of the House.

Two-can Rule

Mr. McNamara: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence how many soldiers have been subject to disciplinary action for breaching the two-can rule in each of the past two years for which figures are available; and what sanctions have been taken *(a)* against those in breach of the rule and *(b)* officers and others responsible for its non-enforcement. [176027]

Mr. Hoon: I will write to my hon. Friend and place a copy of my letter in the Library of the House.

UK Military Engagements

Keith Vaz: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will list UK military engagements overseas, in addition to Iraq; and how many *(a)* Army, *(b)* Royal Navy and *(c)* RAF personnel are involved in each. [196583]

Mr. Ingram: The list of UK military personnel deployed on operations overseas and the numbers of *(a)* Army, *(b)* Navy and *(c)* RAF personnel who are involved in each, is as follows:

Operations	*Army*	*Royal Navy*	*RAF*	*Total*
Balkans (Op Oculus)	1,035	75	90	1,200
Afghanistan (Op Herrick)	585	20	255	880
Gulf Region (Op Telic)	6,855	1,265	1,365	9,485
UN Operations				
Cyprus (Op Tosca)	415	0	0	415
Georgia (Op Baronet)	5	5	5	10
Sierra Leone (Op Turner)	15	5	5	20
Sudan (Op Dalmin)	0	0	5	5
Dem Rep of Congo (Op Percival)	5	5	0	5
Liberia (Op Sequesta)	5	5	5	5

Notes:

1. The table does not include personnel serving in loan/diplomatic posts, in permanent garrisons, personnel stationed on British overseas territories or on training detachments.
2. The figures are as reported in early November 2004 and are rounded up to the nearest 5.
3. Totals may not therefore match the sum of the three individual parts.

Warships

Mr. Hancock: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence when replacements for *(a)* HMS Leeds Castle and *(b)* HMS Dumbarton Castle will be ordered. [194472]

Mr. Ingram: I will write to the hon. Member and place a copy of my letter in the Library of the House.

Young Service Personnel

Mr. Stinchcombe: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence how many 16 and 17-year-olds are serving in *(a)* the Royal Navy, *(b)* the Army and *(c)* the Royal Air Force. [196271]

Mr. Caplin: I will write to my hon. Friend and place a copy of my letter in the Library of the House.

Mr. Stinchcombe: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence how many under 18-year-olds have died while *(a)* in service and *(b)* in training in each of the armed forces for the last 10 years; and if he will list the causes of death in each case. [196272]

Mr. Caplin: I will write to my hon. Friend and place a copy of my letter in the Library of the House.

TRANSPORT

Airports

John Barrett: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what discussions he has had with airport operators since the publication of the Future of Air Transport White Paper regarding compensation packages for properties close to expanding airports. [198920]

Charlotte Atkins: Officials in the Department held discussions with several airport operators where new runway development options were under consideration during the period leading up to publication of the White Paper, including BAA plc. Those discussions contributed to the views and conclusions set out in paragraphs 12.13 to 12.17 of the White Paper.

John Barrett: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what steps he is taking in conjunction with the Department of Environment, Food and Rural Affairs regarding the mitigation of damage to local environments around expanding UK airports. [198921]

Charlotte Atkins: The Future of Air Transport White Paper set out in broad terms the measures which the Government expect to see taken by airports and others, and itself intends to take, in order to mitigate environmental disbenefits arising from airport development.

Work is now in hand on the programme of action summarised on p146 of the White Paper, including the preparation by airports of master plans and noise mitigation schemes, and a structured programme of work specifically on the possible future development of Heathrow Airport in keeping with noise and local emissions constraints. Detailed airport proposals for mitigation measures will fall to be considered through the planning system in due course.

John Barrett: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what assessment he has made of the *(a)* noise levels and *(b)* other environmental effects around Edinburgh Airport that would be consequent on the expansion of the airport as set out in the Future of Air Transport White Paper. [198922]

Charlotte Atkins: This information is set out in the Scottish Consultation Document and supporting technical reports. These estimate the number of people who would be affected by different levels of noise under a range of runway options at Edinburgh Airport including maximum use of the existing main runway, greater use of the existing crosswind runway and development of a new close parallel runway. Our analysis suggests that by 2030, the development of a new close parallel runway, assuming a -14 dBA technology improvement, would reduce the number of people affected within the 63 dBA 16 hour Leq contour by 300 with an increase of 200 people affected at the 69 dBA 16 hour Leq contour.

Full dispersion modelling was undertaken for a number of runway options at Edinburgh Airport which showed that, in terms of exceedance standards and properties affected, no local air quality problems were likely to arise.

John Barrett: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what representations he has received regarding the suitability of the compensation packages provided by airport operators for properties close to expanding UK airports; and if he will make a statement. [198923]

Charlotte Atkins: Representations have been received from three hon. Members. Others have been received from Uttlesford district council and from the Harmondsworth and Sipson Residents' Association. I answered a question from the hon. Member for Solihull (Mr. Taylor) on 26 October 2004, *Official Report*, column 1114W.

Blue Badge Scheme

David Taylor: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport (1) what advice was taken from the Department of Health on the status of myalgic encephalitis sufferers when formulating the eligibility criteria for the Blue Badge scheme; [199273]

(2) how many of those people in England eligible for a Blue Badge are suffering from myalgic encephalitis. [199291]

Charlotte Atkins: The Blue Badge Scheme is designed primarily to assist disabled people who are unable or have severe difficulty in walking, regardless of the nature of their disability. Local authorities, who are responsible for administering the Scheme, will decide on an individual's eligibility on the basis of these criteria. People with myalgic encephalitis will be eligible for a badge if their walking ability is seriously affected.

The Department does not hold data on the disabilities of individual blue badge holders.

We have had no separate discussions with the Department of Health (DH) on myalgic encephalitis. We have, however, worked very closely with that Department in taking forward the recommendations of the Disabled Persons Transport Advisory Committee following the comprehensive review of the Blue Badge Scheme which we undertook.

Buses

Mr. Meacher: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what assessment he has made of the effects of quality contracts for buses on joint working between passenger transport executives and bus operating companies in providing bus services that meet the needs of the community they serve. [199218]

Charlotte Atkins: To date no authority has submitted a scheme for approval and therefore no assessment has been made of the effects of a quality contract on joint working between Passenger Transport Executives and bus operating companies.

Mr. Meacher: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport whether he is encouraging local authorities to run Quality Contracts for buses pilot schemes; and if he will *(a)* commission and *(b)* publish studies of such pilot schemes. [199219]

Charlotte Atkins: The Transport Act 2000 gave local authorities the power to introduce Quality Contracts. To date no authority has submitted a scheme to the Secretary of State for approval. Approval will not be on a pilot basis, although any scheme that is approved will be monitored closely by the Department. We are currently taking a number of steps to make the process less formidable. The Department will shortly be reducing the minimum period between making the approved scheme and implementing it from twenty-one to six months. Following consultation during the summer, the Department will also be publishing guidance to local authorities on how to apply for approval of a quality contract scheme.

As announced in "The Future of Transport", the Department is particularly encouraging local authorities to consider a Quality Contract, where it is linked to a wider strategy to tackle congestion and where PTEs are deciding a new balance between rail and bus.

Departmental Advertising Costs

Charles Hendry: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what the cost of *(a)* creative work, *(b)* media spend and *(c)* administration for his Department's advertising activity has been in each financial year since 1997–98, broken down by contractor. [197294]

Charlotte Atkins: The Department for Transport was created in May 2002 and costs for years prior to this can be produced only at disproportionate cost.

The majority of the Department's media spend is on the THINK! road safety campaign with adverts produced covering a range of subjects such as drink drive, speed, seatbelts, mobile phones, plus specific creative work targeted at children and teenagers.

2002–03

(a) the cost of producing creative work was £1,142,798,

(b) the media spend was £10,446,000.

2003–04

(a) the cost of producing creative work was £1,082,278,

(b) the media spend was £10,427,000.

The cost of administration for the Department's advertising activity can be produced only at disproportionate cost.

Departmental Contracts

Pete Wishart: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport if he will list the 30 largest contracts awarded by his Department between *(a)* May 2001 and April 2002, *(b)* May 2002 and April 2003, *(c)* May 2003 and April 2004 and *(d)* May 2004 and the latest date for which figures are available, indicating in each case (i) the values of the contracts and (ii) the companies with which the contracts were placed. [196902]

Charlotte Atkins: The Department was formed on 29 May 2002. Three tables showing the information requested has been placed in the Libraries of the House. Separate figures for 2001–02 are not held centrally and could be provided only at disproportionate cost.

Pete Wishart: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport which non-accounting and non-information technology external organisations have won new contracts with *(a)* his Department and *(b)* executive agencies for which he is responsible in each of the past three years. [196904]

Charlotte Atkins: The Department was formed on 29 May 2002. Separate figures for 2001–02 are not held centrally and could be provided only at disproportionate cost. However these figures are available for the Department's executive agencies. Information relating to all organisations across the Department and its agencies could be provided only at disproportionate cost due to the level of detail it would entail. However, a table has been placed in the Libraries of the House showing this information in respect of the top 30 suppliers.

Departmental Events (Funding)

Charles Hendry: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport if he will list the *(a)* conferences, *(b)* publications, *(c)* initiatives, *(d)* projects and *(e)* receptions organised by his Department which have received funding from outside commercial bodies since May 1997, broken down by (i) funding body and (ii) amount paid. [196611]

Charlotte Atkins: The Department has not received any cash sponsorship. However, many third parties have worked with THINK!, the Department's road safety campaign and carried road safety messages in their own activities. The Department is grateful for this "in kind" support, but has not put a cash value on it. Examples are in the Department's annual reports for 2003 and 2004 which are in the House Libraries.

Information for the financial years 1997–2002, when transport policy formed part of the remit of the former Departments of Environment, Transport and the Regions and Transport, Local Government and the Regions (respectively) is not available centrally and can be provided only at disproportionate cost.

Freedom of Information Act

Andrew Selous: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what assessment he has made of the likely costs to his Department in the first quarter of 2005 of compliance with the provisions of the Freedom of Information Act 2000; and if he will make a statement. [199073]

Charlotte Atkins: The Department has made an assessment of the likely costs of compliance with the Freedom of Information Act and estimates that the new access rights will result in additional requests for information above and beyond the volumes presently handled but this research suggests that it is not possible to quantify the additional volumes reliably.

The Department has implemented a number of measures which we believe will help to keep down the costs of meeting the requirements of the Act. These include general awareness training for all staff, specialist training sessions for case handlers and new, standardised procedures and systems are being introduced. To test the efficiency and effectiveness of our preparations, managers have been assessing their readiness using a self-diagnostic model and have also used a series of dummy requests. We have followed the Department of Constitutional Affairs model action plan and are making full use of their central guidance to produce material for use by staff in the central department and the Agencies. We have also been looking to publish information that we would expect to be requested and will be doing so routinely in future.

Government Buildings (Disabled Access)

Tom Cox: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport whether all Government buildings in his Department within the Greater London area are fully accessible to disabled people; and if he will make a statement. [199315]

Charlotte Atkins: The Department is taking all reasonable steps to improve accessibility in its London headquarters estate in accordance with Disability Discrimination Act legislation. For example, last year at Great Minster House a project to refurbish the main reception at GMH incorporated some important accessibility improvements, while a start was made on a programme of works to improve accessibility within the building. This included application of non-reflective film to lift doors; improvements to tea points and accessible toilets and alterations to the heavy corridor doors to reduce their weight. The programme of works has continued this year with a trial exercise to hold the corridor doors open on magnetic retainers during the day in certain areas, prior to decisions being taken on rolling out the works to the rest of GMH. In addition work is about to commence on improving the accessibility of all the passenger and goods lifts serving the building. Particular attention was also paid last year to DDA compliance in the fitting out of the Department's new accommodation at Southside.

High Speed Trains (Kent)

Mr. Laxton: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport (1) if his Department will invite open tenders for the Kent route high speed trains on the revised business plan and delivery time scale; [195528]

(2) when his Department first published as part of the initial tendering process details of the original *(a)* business case and *(b)* delivery time scale for the Kent route high speed trains; and how many (i) expressions of interest and (ii) actual bids they received; [195529]

(3) when his Department decided to alter the business case and delivery time scale for the Kent route high speed trains; whether they subsequently approached companies that had expressed an interest in the initial bid; and how many *(a)* expressions of interests and *(b)* bids they finally received for this revised proposal. [195596]

Mr. McNulty: A business case was not published as part of the tendering process. The OJEU notice placed by the Strategic Rail Authority in January 2003 was for the procurement and financing of rolling stock for delivery from January 2007 onwards. HSBC were appointed as financiers as a result of this competition.

The management of the rolling stock competition was a matter for HSBC, who offered the SRA vehicles from a choice of three manufacturers. It was open to bidders to put in variant bids.

Restarting a competition for the rolling stock or financier would put the planned launch date of the high-speed Kent services in 2009 under severe risk.

Legislation

Brian White: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what pieces of legislation passed in the last 30 years that the Department is responsible for remain to be brought into force, broken down by year of enactment. [195617]

Charlotte Atkins: I have placed in the Libraries of the House a list of the provisions of Acts passed in the last 30 years for which the Department for Transport has lead responsibility which remain to be brought into force.

M1

Andrew Selous: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport how many incidents on the M1 have resulted in the A5 through *(a)* Dunstable and *(b)* Hockliffe being used as a relief road in the last three years, broken down by type of incident. [197454]

Mr. Jamieson: The question cannot be answered in absolute terms from records held by the Highways Agency.

The Highways Agency has agreed diversion routes in place for when the M1 in Bedfordshire is closed due to a major incident. However, police officers may, for operational reasons at the time of the incident, choose to depart from the designated diversion route. Drivers with local knowledge of the area may opt to use another route of their own choosing rather than follow the designated diversion route.

In the period 1 January 2002 to 10 November 2004, the Highways Agency has records of 17 major incidents occurring on the M1 motorway in Bedfordshire between Junctions 9 (Markyate) and 13 (Bedford). In all of these recorded cases, a diversion route was put in place and traffic is likely to have been diverted along the A5 trunk road at Dunstable on 10 occasions. This is because the A5 High Street South at Dunstable is used as a designated diversion route. By contrast, however, it is less likely that the A5 through Hockliffe was used as a diversion route since the A5 at this location is not part of any designated diversion route.

M25

Richard Ottaway: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport if he will make a statement on the closure of the M25 from Saturday 13 to Monday 15 November. [199096]

Mr. Jamieson: There were severe delays and inconvenience caused to motorists as a result of the fatal accident that occurred on the M25 involving an overturned petrol tanker between Junctions 5 and 6 on the evening of Friday 12 November. As the result of spillage of highly combustible fuel, the emergency services imposed a closure for safety reasons until the necessary extensive remedial works were completed.

The Highways Agency, Environment Agency and the emergency services are urgently carrying out a thorough investigation into this incident and its management. As soon as the findings are known, the relevant information will be forwarded to the hon. Member and copies placed in the Libraries of the House.

M4

Mr. Flook: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what the *(a)* purpose and *(b)* cost are of the road works on the side of both carriageways of the M4, east of junction 18. [199167]

Mr. Jamieson: The works on the M4 east of junction 18 are part of a series of works being carried out to provide better information to the travelling public. The works will allow for better use of the motorway network and will enable the provision of live traffic information to the Regional Control Centres that are being introduced.

This phase comprises the installation of fibre optic cables along the verges of the carriageway to allow the erection of variable message signs, CCTV cameras and vehicle queuing detection equipment. The variable message signs will be used to keep drivers informed about what is happening ahead of them on the motorway network, for example, to give warnings and advice about accidents, congestion and road works.

The current phase of the works is costing £4.5 million.

New Rail Services

Mr. Denis Murphy: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport how many new passenger rail services were introduced in each of the last seven years. [198695]

Mr. McNulty: A table produced by ATOC showing the number of timetabled services run on a normal weekday since May 1995 has been placed in the Libraries of the House.

Privatised Rail Companies

Judy Mallaber: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport how many passenger complaints have been made to each of the privatised rail companies in the last year; and how many were made in the previous year. [199197]

Mr. McNulty: Complaints rate per 100,000 passenger journeys data is published in the Strategic Rail Authority's "National Rail Trends Yearbook 2003–2004", a copy of which is held in the Library of the House.

Judy Mallaber: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what refunds each of the privatised rail companies have given for poor punctuality and service in each of the last three years. [199198]

Mr. McNulty: Train operating companies (TOCs) provide compensation to passengers in accordance with their Passenger's Charters. TOCs are not required to provide information to Government on the amounts of compensation given.

Judy Mallaber: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what penalties are imposed on the privatised rail companies for poor service; and on what criteria these penalties are based. [199199]

Mr. McNulty: The Strategic Rail Authority operates a number of regimes which make incentive payments or impose penalties to train operating companies (TOCs). These regimes are for punctuality/reliability of services, provision of rolling stock formations as timetabled to meet demand and changes to planned timetables.

For punctuality/reliability the punctuality incentive payment (PIP) regime measures performance of peak London commuter services and regional and rural services against an historical benchmark of annual average performance. For the provision of rolling stock, the short formation incentive payment (SFEP) applies to operators providing peak services into London and some other cities where penalties are applied if the operator does not deliver the train plan for capacity. For changes to the planned timetable, the timetable change incentive payment (TCDP) provides an incentive for provision of timely notification of timetable changes to minimise the disruption to passengers. Net payments/penalties to TOCs are shown in the SRA's National Rail Trends Yearbook, which has been placed in the Library of the House.

Passenger transport executives have separate incentive regimes.

Railway Stations

Mr. Rosindell: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what the Government's policy is on the improvement of railway stations. [191461]

Mr. McNulty: Major station improvements are currently specified by the Strategic Rail Authority and delivered by Network Rail. Over the past five years significant station developments have been delivered at many stations including Paddington, Manchester Piccadilly and Leeds; works to complete the CTRL terminus at St. Pancras station are due for completion by early 2007 and proposals are being developed for improvements to be made to a number of further stations including Edinburgh Waverley, Birmingham New Street and London Bridge.

The SRA's Modern Facilities at Stations Programme will provide improvements at 68 other stations by March 2005. Numerous other small station improvements are continually being delivered by Network Rail and train companies where they consider it appropriate, to do so.

Rescue Services (Morecambe Bay)

Mr. Pickthall: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport how many times the lifeboat and inshore rescue services have been called out to rescue cocklers in Morecambe Bay in the past 12 months. [199153]

Mr. Jamieson: During 2003, nine incidents involving cocklers or cockling craft were recorded at Liverpool Maritime Rescue Sub-Centre (MRSC), five of which occurred in or around Morecambe Bay. Three of the incidents involved RNLI and Coastguard resources. Two were resolved prior to the launch of any waterborne assets.

During 2004 to date, 22 incidents involving cocklers or cockling craft have been recorded at Liverpool MRSC, all of which have occurred in Morecambe Bay. Four of the incidents have involved cocklers being rescued by a Search and Rescue (SAR) asset. One incident involved 'self help' where the cocklers made shore safely by means of their inflatable dinghy, when their tractor broke down out in the bay. On 13 occasions, the cocklers made shore safely unaided or prior to the launch or arrival of SAR resources. Three occasions were false alarms with good intent where members of the public reported somebody or something in difficulty, but all persons were accounted for and nothing else untoward was sighted. One occasion was to check a vehicle on the beach for occupancy. On arrival of SAR units the vehicle was found to be abandoned.

Road Traffic Deaths

Chris Ruane: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport if he will introduce procedures to record the number of fatal car accidents that occur as a result of poor servicing of cars. [199246]

Mr. Jamieson: It has not proved possible to respond to my hon. Friend in the time available before Prorogation.

Rural Railways (North Yorkshire)

Miss McIntosh: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport if he will make a statement on his proposals for rural railways in North Yorkshire. [198645]

Mr. McNulty: The Strategic Rail Authority (SRA) has consulted on proposals for the development of local and rural railways, including those in North Yorkshire and a strategy based on this consultation will be published shortly.

Safety Cameras

Mr. Greg Knight: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport how many persons were employed by safety camera partnerships in England and Wales at the latest date for which figures are available; and how many were employed by safety camera partnerships at their inception. [196957]

Mr. Jamieson *[holding answer 10 November 2004]:* Safety camera partnerships comprise area police authorities, local highway authorities and magistrates court authorities. Some staff only spend part of their time with the partnership and the rest on duties with their parent authorities—hence the figures are expressed in terms of 'full time equivalents'.

The Safety Camera Programme began in 2000, involving seven local partnerships in England and Wales, which had a total of 210 full-time equivalent posts at the end of the programme's trial year 2000–01. There are now 35 partnerships in England and Wales, covering the whole of Wales and virtually all of England, with 1,692 full-time equivalent posts, on the latest available data.

Of these 1,692 full time equivalent posts:

1,160 are employed by police authorities, dealing with detecting offences, processing fixed penalty tickets and dealing with inquiries;

312 are employed by magistrates court authorities, dealing with collecting payments, dealing with inquiries and driving licence issues;

91 are employed by local authorities, dealing with communications, establishing and monitoring sites including signing issues;

129 are employed by either police or local authorities, dealing with running the partnerships and other project management issues.

The independent review of the first three years of the programme's operation, 2000–02 to 2002–03, which the Government published on 15 June showed that cameras were saving over 100 road deaths and over 750 serious injuries a year for the 24 partnerships then in operation—a 40 per cent. reduction in the number of people killed or seriously injured at camera sites over and above the general downward trend in UK road casualties, with a financial benefit to society of over four times the resource cost of the programme including staff.

The annual number of avoided deaths and injuries will now be considerably more, with 35 partnerships now in operation. We have commissioned an update of the independent review of the programme's operation. This will be published in the spring.

The partnerships will shortly submit their proposals for 2005–06 including staffing numbers, and the Department will scrutinise these in detail, to ensure that the programme is delivering its valuable benefits in reduced road deaths and casualties as efficiently as possible.

Suicides (Railways)

Mr. Steen: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport how many *(a)* suicides and *(b)* attempted suicides on railways there were in each of the last five years, broken down by region; and if he will make a statement. [198528]

Mr. McNulty *[holding answer 17 November 2004]:* The information requested is as follows:

(a) The number of suicides and attempted suicides on Network Rail's controlled infrastructure is given in the following table. The data are taken from the Health and Safety Executive's annual reports on rail safety, copies of which are in the House Library. Fatality data are

based on HM Coroners' reports. The HSE "attempted suicide" data are based on information supplied by railway companies to HSE and is defined as those taken to hospital following attempted suicide incidents. The HSE reports do not break the figures down by region.

	Suicides	*Attempted suicides*
2003–04	73	14
2002–03	113	11
2001–02	115	19
2000–01	128	14
1999–2000	134	21

(b) In addition the Rail Safety and Standards Board (RSSB) produces separate data on suicides and suspected suicides, broken down by Network Rail region. The following table is extracted from the RSSB annual safety performance report for 2003 which is not published in hard copy but is on the RSSB website at: www.rssb.co.uk The RSSB data record suicides and suspected suicides as a single figure and are for calendar years not financial years.

Number of suicides and suspected suicides

Region	*1999*	*2000*	*2001*	*2002*	*2003*
East Anglia	17	24	18	25	17
Great Western	30	33	31	28	20
London NE	27	25	31	27	36
Midland	43	38	39	41	24
North Western	39	31	21	26	31
Scotland	20	17	13	13	17
Southern	25	35	32	41	34
Total	201	203	185	201	179

Traffic Management Act

Mr. Stringer: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport how he will measure the impact on congestion of the congestion-reducing measures in the Traffic Management Act 2004. [196388]

Charlotte Atkins: The Department is working with local traffic authorities and local stakeholders to develop indicators of delays to journey time and journey time reliability which will help measure changes in congestion.

The Highways Agency already has measures in place for monitoring congestion on the motorway network. These will include indicators such as the response times of the HA traffic officers to incidents, clearance of the carriageway and the number of times traffic is stopped or redirected.

Vehicle Licensing

Mr. Chaytor: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport how many vehicles are licensed; and what the total licence revenue was for each emission rating band in the private and light goods vehicle licensing category in the last year for which figures are available. [199251]

Mr. Jamieson: The information requested, for 2003–04, is as follows.

Emission band	*Number of vehicles*	*Licence revenue (£)*
AAA (up to 100g/km)	368	26,093
AA (101to120g/km)	159,777	13,369,527
A (121 to 150g/km)	2,159,268	237,544,419
B (151 to 165g/km)	1,815,274	234,366,251
C (166 to 185g/km)	1,650,206	244,833,163
D (over 185g/km)	2,306,518	375,021,734
Other	20,272,868	3,337,564,452
Total	28,364,279	4,442,725,639

Virgin Trains

Brian White: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what the passenger numbers on trains operated by Virgin Trains into London Euston were during *(a)* peak hours and *(b)* off-peak hours in each month from May 2003 to October 2004. [199211]

Mr. McNulty: This information is not held centrally and could not be readily obtained. However, I have asked Virgin Trains to write to my hon. Friend with the information.

WORK AND PENSIONS

Automated Payments

Mr. George Howarth: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions what assessment he has made of the impact of transferring all benefits and credits to bank automated credit systems on *(a)* the time taken for payments to be made to clients, *(b)* numbers of staff required within his Department and *(c)* the cost of payments to (i) the post office, (ii) banks and (iii) other organisations for administering BACS. [199158]

Mr. Pond: At the outset of the Payment Modernisation Programme, 43 per cent. of DWP customers were already being paid by Direct Payment into an account. The current proportion of DWP customers being paid some or all of their benefits by Direct Payment into an account is 77 per cent. This is a positive step towards meeting the Public Service Agreement target of 85 per cent. of customers being paid directly into an account by 2005.

The increase in the number of customers who are now paid by Direct Payment has not affected the frequency of payments made to customers, and customers continue to receive their payment by the due date. If the customer has chosen Direct Payment into an account, the overall time scale to process payments through the BACS system is three working days.

During the course of the conversion process the Department has deployed a Customer Conversion Centre to ease the burden on its front line operations. It is normal business practice for the Department to manage this sort of large-scale but temporary operation in this way. The cost of payments to organisations including banks and the post office for administering BACS, is commercial in confidence. Throughout the planning and migration process detailed consultation has been undertaken with BACS Ltd. (now named Voca Ltd.).

Mr. George Howarth: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions what advice the Government has given to claimants about the transfer of benefits and credits to claimants to bank automated credit systems. [199159]

Mr. Pond: Direct Payment increases choice, reduces fraud and assures a safe, convenient, more modern and efficient way of paying benefits.

The Department's Direct Payment information campaign provides customers with factual information on all account options, including information on the Post Office card account. It will be up to customers themselves to decide which type of account they wish to have their money paid into.

Independent research for DWP has shown that nearly all customers found the information that they had received to be at least fairly clear with two thirds considering it to be very clear.

Basic State Pension

Sir Archy Kirkwood: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions what the average amount of *(a)* basic state pension and *(b)* SERPS received by (i) men and (ii) women in (A) the Scottish Borders, (B) Scotland and (C) the UK was in the last period for which figures are available. [198193]

Malcolm Wicks: The available information is in the tables.

(a) Weekly average amounts of basic state pension

£

Area	*Men*	*Women*
Scottish Borders	76.32	62.88
Scotland	76.41	63.32
Great Britain	75.82	61.96

(b) Weekly average amounts of additional state pension

£

Area	*Men*	*Women*
Scottish Borders	18.29	8.03
Scotland	18.52	8.48
Great Britain	19.36	8.11

Notes:

1. Figures are taken from a 5 per cent. sample and are subject to a high degree of sampling variation.
2. Basic state pension is made up of Category A pensions and pensions derived from spouses' contributions.
3. Additional state pension is made up of SERPS and state second pension.
4. Local authorities are assigned by matching postcodes against the relevant Office for National Statistics postcode directory.

Source:

IAD Information Centre, 5 per cent. sample as at 31 March 2004.

Benefit Entitlement (Newcastle-under-Lyme)

Paul Farrelly: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions (1) how many people are being paid disability living allowance in Newcastle-under-Lyme; [198579]

(2) how many pensioners have received the attendance allowance in Newcastle-under-Lyme in each year since 1997; [198604]

(3) what the cost of administering the carer's allowance was in each of the last three years. [198715]

Maria Eagle: The administration of the Disability and Carers Service is a matter for the Chief Executive, Mr. Terry Moran. He will write to the hon. Member with the information requested.

Letter from Terry Moran to Mr. Paul Farrelly, dated 17 November 2004:

In reply to three of your recent Parliamentary Questions about the Disability and Carers Service, the Minister for Disabled People, Maria Eagle MP, on behalf of the Secretary of State, promised a substantive reply from the Chief Executive.

You asked the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions, how many people are being paid Disability Living allowance (DLA) in Newcastle-under-Lyme.

In May 2004 there were 4,400 people (to the nearest hundred) in receipt of DLA in the Newcastle-under-Lyme constituency area.

You also asked the Secretary of State how many pensioners have received the Attendance Allowance in the constituency of Newcastle-under-Lyme in each year since 1997. The figures (rounded to the nearest hundred), are outlined below:

	Number
1997	2,500
1998	2,600
1999	2,500
2000	2,900
2001	2,700
2002	2,600
2003	2,400
2004	2,500

In addition, you also asked the Secretary of State what the cost of administering the Carers Allowance was in each of the last three years. This information, which relates to staff costs only, is outlined below:

	£
2001–02	13,890,753
2002-/03	16,551,014
2003-	16,858,598

The increase in costs between 01/02 and 02/03 was due to the recruitment of additional staff to deal with an increase in CA claims as a consequence of the introduction of the Carers Package in October 2002. This allowed carers over the age of 65 to make a claim.

I hope this is helpful.

Paul Farrelly: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions how many pensioners receive assistance from the Warm Front Scheme in Newcastle-under-Lyme. [198603]

Mr. Morley: I have been asked to reply.

It has not proved possible to respond to the hon. Member in the time available before Prorogation.

Benefit Overpayment (Recovery)

Mr. Willetts: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions how many past overpayments of benefits have been recovered by his Department's debt management office in each year since 1997; and if he will place in the Library a copy of the letter being sent to people with repayments of overpaid benefit outstanding. [194846]

Mr. Pond: The available information is in the table. A draft copy of the letter sent to people with repayments of overpaid benefit outstanding, has been placed in the Library.

Year end overpayment data

	Number of new recoverable overpayments	*Number of cases where recovery in progress*	*Number of overpayments fully recovered*
2000–01	626,039	424,283	537,965
2001–02	563,315	420,876	451,699
2002–03	504,100	404,505	420,247
2003–04	380,452	379,102	330,947

Notes:

1. This type of data was not captured prior to 2000.
2. A recovery of an overpayment can commence in a previous year before the overpayment was marked as fully recovered in the relevant financial year.

Source:

Management Information returns.

Benefit Payments

Vera Baird: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions (1) what protection is provided to families receiving income support who will be worse off after the migration to child tax credit and who cannot apply for a local authority discretionary housing payment because they do not qualify for council tax or housing benefit; [193949]

(2) what protection is provided to families receiving income support who will be worse off after the migration to child tax credit and who are refused discretionary housing payment by their local authority; [193950]

(3) what help is proposed for families receiving income support who will be worse off after the migration to child tax credit and who are awarded a discretionary housing payment for a fixed period and are then refused further payment; [193951]

(4) whether transitional protection will be put in place to protect from a sudden drop in income families receiving income support who will be worse off after the migration to child tax credit. [193952]

Mr. Pond *[holding answer 26 October 2004]:* The Department has no plans to put a transitional protection scheme into place for this group of families at this time. Our latest estimate is that with 900,000 families remaining to be transferred to child tax credit, fewer than 200 will see a net reduction in their overall income as a result of the interaction with council tax benefit, mostly by no more than a few pence per week. In contrast, more than 75 per cent. of families who move off benefit as a result of claiming CTC will gain by £20 a week or more. Nevertheless, we have issued a reminder to local authorities of their powers to consider an award of a discretionary housing payment to affected families where appropriate. Discretionary housing payments are designed for circumstances where there is a shortfall between HB/CTB entitlement and liability.

Paul Farrelly: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions how many people have received the *(a)* carer's allowance and *(b)* invalidity allowance since 1997. [198643]

Maria Eagle: The available information is in the table. Until April 2003, carer's allowance was known as invalid care allowance.

Number in receipt of carer's allowance

	Number
1997	367,445
1998	373,105
1999	373,515
2000[1]	384,860
2001[2]	419,785
2002	390,485
2003	408,115
2004	425,455

[1] Figures for 2003 and 2004 are as at 31 May. For all other years as at 30 June.

[2] Due to the introduction of a new CA computer system in November 1999, some estimation was necessary. The figure for 2000 was estimated based on trends in earlier years. For 2001, numbers "in payment" were not available and for that year only, the number "entitled" was used.

Source:

100 per cent. count.

Caravan Parks

Mark Tami: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions how many children *(a)* died and *(b)* suffered injury as a result of accidents at holiday caravan parks in each of the last five years. [196854]

Jane Kennedy: There have been no fatal injuries to children reported to HSE or local authorities in holiday caravan parks during the period 1998–99 to 2004[1].

The reported non-fatal injuries to children are shown in the two age bands in the following table.

	Age band	
	1–15	*16–19*
1998–99	11	1
1999–2000	26	—
2000–01	14	1
2001–02[2]	47	3
2002–03	48	3

[1] Provisional

[2] From 2001–02 the reported accident data was collected using revised coding arrangements. In the same year reporting was made easier through the setting up of the HSE Incident Contact Centre (ICC) which encouraged more telephoned reports. HSE do not interpret the increase in the figures as a growing accident trend, but welcome the easier collection of data.

Note:

The annual basis is the planning year from 1 April to 31 March

Carer's Allowance/Premium

Paul Farrelly: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions how many claimants were receiving the carer's premium in *(a)* Newcastle-under-Lyme and *(b)* the UK on the latest date for which figures are available. [198742]

Maria Eagle: The available information is in the table.

Claimants in receipt of a carer premium in May 2003

	Number
Newcastle-under-Lyme	300
Great Britain	290,000

Notes:

1. Newcastle-under-Lyme figures are from the 5 per cent. income support and jobseeker's allowance samples rounded to the nearest hundred.
2. Great Britain figures are from the income support and jobseeker's allowance 5 per cent. sample combined with housing benefit and council tax benefit 1 per cent. sample, rounded to the nearest 10,000 with overlapping benefits removed.
3. As the figures are based on 5 per cent. samples they are subject to a degree of sampling variation.
4. The data refer to benefit units, which may be a single person or a couple.
5. The administration of benefits in Northern Ireland is a matter for the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland.

Source:

Department for Work and Pensions

Paul Farrelly: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions (1) what plans he has to develop the carer's allowance; [198713]

(2) what estimate he has made of the costs of increasing the carer's allowance to the level of the minimum wage per hour spent caring; [198714]

(3) how many pensioners entitled to the carer's allowance have benefited from the abolition of the upper age limit. [198716]

Maria Eagle: Following the report of the National Strategy for Carers we have already made substantial improvements to carer's allowance, and to the extra money available to carers on a low income through the carer premium in the income related benefits and the carer's additional amount in pension credit. These improvements include the removal of the upper age limit on claims to the allowance, and substantial increases in the amount recipients can earn from part-time work, as well as in the extra money available to carers in the income related benefits and pension credit. We have no plans for further change beyond our commitment to increase carer's allowance each year in line with RPI.

Carer's allowance (CA) is not a carers' wage, and we have made no estimate of the cost of increasing it in line with the national Minimum Wage.

The latest available figures show that at 31 May 2004 some 23,500 pension age carers, including around 9,500 aged 65 and over, were receiving carers allowance. About 114,500 carers aged 60 or over, including over 83,000 aged 65 or over were getting the carer's additional amount in pension credit.

Child Poverty

Paul Farrelly: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions how many children *(a)* are defined as living below the poverty line and *(b)* have moved above the poverty line in each year in (i) Newcastle-under-Lyme and (ii) England since 1997. [198706]

Mr. Pond: Poverty is about more than low income, it also impacts on the way people live—their health, housing and the quality of their environment. The sixth annual 'Opportunity for all' report (Cm 6239) sets out the Government's strategy for tackling poverty and social exclusion and presents information on the indicators used to measure progress against this strategy. In December 2003, we published 'Measuring child poverty' which outlines the Government's new measure of child poverty which will be used from 2004–05. Both of these documents are available in the Library.

There is not a measure which sets out the numbers of children in poverty for the years since 1997 and we do not produce yearly estimates of the number of children leaving low income. However, data on the number of children living in low income households is available. The threshold of below 60 per cent. contemporary median income is the most commonly used in reporting absolute and relative trends in low income.

The number of children in England below 60 per cent. contemporary median income from 1997–98 is in the table. Figures are not available below Government Office Region level. Specific information regarding low income at Government Office Region level is available in 'Households Below Average Income 1994/95–2002/03', which is available in the Library.

Number of children in England below 60 per cent. contemporary median income

Million

	Before housing costs	*After housing costs*
1997–98	2.7	3.7
1998–99	2.6	3.7
1999–2000	2.6	3.6
2000–01	2.3	3.4
2001–02	2.2	3.3
2002–03	2.2	3.1

Note:

Figures are rounded to the nearest 100,000.

Source:

Households Below Average Income.

Child Support Agency

Chris Ruane: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions how long the longest CSA enforcement case in respect of a self-employed non-resident parent has been outstanding. [190272]

Mr. Pond: The administration of the Child Support Agency is a matter for the Chief Executive, Mr. Doug Smith. He will write to my hon. Friend with the information requested.

Letter from Mike Isaac to Mr. Chris Ruane, dated 18 November 2004:

In reply to your recent Parliamentary Question about the Child Support Agency the Secretary of State promised a substantive reply from the Chief Executive. As he is currently on leave I am replying on his behalf.

You asked the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions, how long the longest Child Support Agency enforcement case in respect of a self-employed non-resident parent has been outstanding.

The case that has been with our enforcement teams for the longest period of time was first referred around 10 years ago. The non-resident parents main source of income is derived from self-employment. The case is currently being taken forward for committal proceedings.

The average length of time a case remains with enforcement before it is cleared is 1 year 5 months. This represents the time taken from acceptance until the liability order is paid in full or the non-resident parent has proved that he is meeting his maintenance liability.

Sandra Gidley: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions what investigations he has made into the Child Support Agency computer system being unable to process payments into banks with a sort code commencing with 0; and what assessment he has made of the number of people affected by this problem. [193494]

Mr. Pond: The administration of the Child Support Agency is a matter for the Chief Executive, Mr. Doug Smith. He will write to the hon. Member with the information requested.

Letter from Doug Smith to Sandra Gidley, dated 18 November 2004:

In reply to your recent Parliamentary Question about the Child Support Agency the Secretary of State promised a substantive reply from the Chief Executive.

You asked the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions, what investigations he has made to the Child Support Agency computer system being unable to process payments into bank accounts with a sort code commencing with 0; and what assessment he has made of the number of people affected by this problem?

The Child Support Agency computer system is able to automatically process payments into bank accounts with a sort code commencing with a "0".

The computer system does however have a cosmetic display error, which means that the leading "0" of the bank sort code is not correctly displayed to the caseworker. This may have resulted in some clients being incorrectly advised, that the Agency was unable to process payments into that bank account. Guidance has been issued to caseworkers to ensure that when dealing with clients, they are aware that the bank sort code whilst not correctly displayed, is able to be processed correctly, enabling payment to those bank accounts.

Mr. Webb: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions when figures on the Child Support Agency new system *(a)* compliance and *(b)* throughput will be available; and what estimates have so far been made. [193618]

Mr. Pond: The administration of the Child Support Agency is a matter for the Chief Executive, Mr. Doug Smith. He will write to the hon. Member with the information requested.

Letter from Doug Smith to Mr. Steve Webb, dated 18 November 2004:

In reply to your recent Parliamentary Question about the Child Support Agency the Secretary of State promised a substantive reply from the Chief Executive.

You asked the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions, when figures on the CSA new system *(a)* compliance and *(b)* throughput will be available; and what estimates have so far been made.

The issue of compliance was addressed in the most recent quarterly report that was made available in the House of Commons Library on 28 October 2004. The management information provided by EDS does not yet permit us to provide a reliable estimate of throughput.

Mr. Kidney: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions what assessment he has made of the effectiveness of each method of enforcement of payment of child support used by the Child Support Agency. [193836]

Mr. Pond: The administration of the Child Support Agency is a matter for the Chief Executive, Mr. Doug Smith. He will write to the hon. Member with the information requested.

Letter from Doug Smith to Mr. David Kidney, dated 18 November 2004:

In reply to your recent Parliamentary Question about the Child Support Agency the Secretary of State promised a substantive reply from the Chief Executive.

You asked the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions, what assessment he has made of the effectiveness of each method of enforcement of payment of child support used by the Child Support Agency.

The recent review of enforcement concluded that changes were necessary in a number of areas. These included the need for better management information. This is being taken forward and we are progressively gaining a broad picture of the effectiveness of each method of enforcement. This knowledge base needs to be developed further before reliable conclusions can be drawn from this.

Mr. Webb: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions which Child Support Agency senior managers received performance related bonuses in 2003–04; and what the value of each of those bonuses was. [193925]

Mr. Pond: The administration of the Child Support Agency is a matter for the Chief Executive, Mr. Doug Smith. He will write to the hon. Member with the information requested.

Letter from Doug Smith to Mr. Steve Webb, dated 18 November 2004:

In reply to your recent Parliamentary Question about the Child Support Agency the Secretary of State promised a substantive reply from the Chief Executive.

You asked the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions, which Child Support Agency senior managers received performance related bonuses in 2003–04; and what the value of each of those bonuses was.

In accordance with the requirements of Government Accounting, a full disclosure of the remuneration of Child Support Agency Directors is included with the Agency accounts for the year to 31 March 2004.

Mr. Goodman: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions what contingency plans he has prepared in relation to computer systems used by the Child Support Agency. [195811]

Mr. Pond: The administration of the Child Support Agency is a matter for the chief executive, Mr. Doug Smith. He will write to the hon. Member with the information requested.

Letter from Mike Isaac to Mr. Paul Goodman, dated 18 November 2004:

In reply to your recent Parliamentary Question about the Child Support Agency the Secretary of State promised a substantive reply from the Chief Executive. As he is currently on leave I am replying on his behalf.

You asked the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions, what contingency he has prepared in relation to computer systems currently used by the Child Support Agency.

The new computer and telephony service provided by EDS contains a number of defects. The Child Support Agency is working closely with EDS to resolve these and they are progressively being remedied. Where we are unable to use the IT to progress cases, we use a series of manual workarounds. Exceptionally, where these prove unsuccessful, a small number of cases are progressed entirely clerically.

Mr. Goodman: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions how many complaints the Child Support Agency has received from members of the public in relation to the computer systems used by the agency since their introduction. [195812]

Mr. Pond: The administration of the Child Support Agency is a matter for the Chief Executive, Mr. Doug Smith. He will write to the hon. Member with the information requested.

Letter from Mike Isaac to Mr. Paul Goodman, dated 18 November 2004:

In reply to your recent Parliamentary Question about the Child Support Agency the Secretary of State promised a substantive reply from the Chief Executive. As he is currently on leave I am replying on his behalf.

You asked the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions, how many complaints the Child Support Agency has received from members of the public in relation to the computer systems currently used by the agency since their introduction.

Statistical data on complaints received in relation to the computer systems used by the Agency has only been collected since June 2003. Since then there have been 2196 complaints.

The breakdown of complaints in relation to computer system error and delay since June 2003 is as follows:

883 Old scheme complaints; and

1313 New scheme complaints

In order to put the above figures into context the Agency's current caseload is over 1.3million.

Mr. Goodman: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions how many complaints the Child Support Agency has received from members of the public in relation to the telephone systems used by the Child Support Agency since their introduction. [195814]

Mr. Pond: The administration of the Child Support Agency is a matter for the Chief Executive, Mr. Doug Smith. He will write to the hon. Member with the information requested.

Letter from Mike Isaac to Mr. Paul Goodman dated 18 November 2004:

In reply to your recent Parliament Question about the Child Support Agency the Secretary of State promised a substantive reply from the Chief Executive. As he is currently on leave I am replying on his behalf.

You asked the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions, how many complaints the Child Support Agency has received from members of the public in relation to the telephone systems currently used by the Child Support Agency since their introduction.

The Agency did not maintain a record of complaints received from members of the public in relation to the telephone systems used until April 2004. Since then there have been 1240 complaints received.

The breakdown of telephony complaints since April 2004 is as follows:

667 CSCS complaints for Old Scheme cases

573 CS2 complaints for New Scheme cases

In order to put the above figures into context the Agency's current caseload is over 1.3 million.

Mr. Goodman: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions what his latest estimate is of the backlog of new claims held by the Child Support Agency. [195816]

Mr. Pond: The administration of the Child Support Agency is a matter for the chief executive, Mr. Doug Smith. He will write to the hon. Member with the information requested.

Letter from Mike Isaac to Mr. Paul Goodman, dated 18 November 2004:

In reply to your recent Parliamentary Question about the Child Support Agency the Secretary of State promised a substantive reply from the Chief Executive. I am providing this in his absence

You asked the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions what his latest estimate is of the backlog of new claims held by the Child Support Agency.

At the end of September 2004 there were around 240,000 new applications recorded on the new IT system awaiting a decision under the new scheme legislation. Typically 40% of cases will close before reaching assessment. Applications close for a variety of reasons, for example if the parents reconcile.

Mr. Goodman: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions what his latest estimate is of the average time it takes the Child Support Agency to bring cases from first application to assessment. [195817]

Mr. Pond: The administration of the Child Support Agency is a matter for the Chief Executive, Mr. Doug Smith. He will write to the hon. Member with the information requested.

Letter from Mike Isaac to Mr. Paul Goodman, dated 18 November 2004:

In reply to your recent Parliamentary Question about the Child Support Agency the Secretary of State promised a substantive reply from the Chief Executive. As he is currently on leave I am replying on his behalf.

You asked the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions, what his latest estimate is of the average time it takes the Child Support Agency to bring cases from first application to assessment.

The management information provided by EDS does not yet permit us to provide a reliable estimate of throughput.

Mr. Goodman: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions how many stuck cases were held by the Child Support Agency during the last calendar year, broken down by month. [195818]

Mr. Pond: The administration of the Child Support Agency is a matter for the Chief Executive, Mr. Doug Smith. He will write to the hon. Member with the information requested.

Letter from Mike Isaac to Mr. Paul Goodman dated 18 November 2004:

You asked the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions, how many stuck cases were held by the Child Support Agency during the last calendar year broken down by month.

The management information is not available for the calendar year 2003, however, I can provide figures for 2004.

The information in the table shows the number of stuck cases that relate to our most problematic classifications:

Four weekly	*Number*
26 January 2004	75,337
23 February 2004	47,725
22 March 2004	52,538
19 April 2004	39,126
17 May 2004	34,143

Four weekly	*Number*
14 June 2004	34,614
12 July 2004	36,031
9 August 2004	37,703
6 September 2004	38,941
4 October 2004	40,009
1 November 2004	41,985

These figures are collaged on a weekly basis not calendar month so, they are shown four weekly.

Mr. Goodman: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions how many and what proportion of eligible parents received their first payment from the Child Support Agency within the time limit of six weeks during the last calendar year, broken down by month. [195819]

Mr. Pond: The administration of the Child Support Agency is a matter for the chief executive, Mr. Doug Smith. He will write to the hon. Member with the information requested.

Letter from Mike Isaac to Mr. Paul Goodman, dated 18 November 2004:

In reply to your recent Parliamentary Question about the Child Support Agency the Secretary of State promised a substantive reply from the Chief Executive. I am providing this in Mr. Smith's absence.

You asked the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions how many parents and what proportion of eligible parents received their first payment from the Child Support Agency within the time limit of six weeks during the last calendar year broken down by month.

I am unable to provide the information that you have requested because of the current limitations with management information provided by EDS.

Annabelle Ewing: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions pursuant to his written ministerial statement of 28 October 2004, *Official Report*, columns 55–57WS, on the new child support scheme progress report, what percentage the sum of £12.1 million retained by the Child Support Agency (CSA) represents with respect to the total payments *(a)* due to and *(b)* paid to EDS between 3 March 2003 and 19 September 2004; what percentage of the total number of clearances, calculations and closures the current achievement rate of over 238,000 for the new child support scheme represents; upon what criteria reasonable assessments of compliance are to be based; what the definition of (i) cash compliance and (ii) case compliance is; and upon what criteria the estimate of the number of parents who receive child maintenance premium payments by way of a disregard to their income support/ income-based jobseeker's allowance is based. [196268]

Mr. Pond: The administration of the Child Support Agency is a matter for the Chief Executive, Mr. Doug Smith. He will write to the hon. Member with the information requested.

Letter from Mike Isaac to Ms Annabelle Ewing, dated 18 November 2004:

In reply to your recent Parliamentary Question about the Child Support Agency the Secretary of State promised a substantive reply from the Chief Executive. As he is currently on leave I am replying on his behalf.

You asked the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions, pursuant to his Written Ministerial Statement of 28th October Official Report columns 55–57WS on the new child support scheme progress report what percentage the sum of 12.1 million retained by the Child Support Agency (CSA) represents with respect to the total payments *(a)* due to and *(b)* paid to EDS between 3rd March 2003 and 19th September 2004; what percentage of the total number of clearances calculations and closures the current achievement rate of over 238,000 for the new child support scheme represents; upon what criteria reasonable assessments of compliance are to be based; what the definition of (i) cash compliance and (ii) case compliance is; and upon what criteria the estimate of the number of parents who receive child maintenance premium payments by way of a disregard to their income support/ income-based jobseeker's allowance is based.

The headings below provide a summary of your questions.

EDS Contract:

Payments under the CSR contract to EDS between 3 March 2003 and 19 September 2004 amount to £62.08million. During the same period the Department has retained £12.1m for performance issues, representing just over 16% of the sum invoiced.

'New scheme' caseload:

As at September 2004 the Agency processed 238,000 cases, equivalent to 50% of its 478,000 intake. Of the cases processed, 140,000 (59%) resulted in a calculation of maintenance and 98,000 (41%) were closed. We know that historically 40% of 'new scheme' intake has resulted in a closure and we expect the same to be true for those applications waiting to be processed.

Compliance:

Cash compliance compares the amount of regular maintenance and/or arrears collected through the Agency's collection service against the amount due in the period. Case compliance compares the number of cases on which regular maintenance and/or arrears is paid against the number of cases for which maintenance is due in the period.

We are now receiving the necessary management information on the number of cases where payment is being made and the number of cases where payment is due to enable us to make accurate assessments of the compliance levels we are achieving.

Child Maintenance Premium:

The number of Child Maintenance Premium payments made includes those first payments made by the Agency to the parents with care who are in receipt of the qualifying benefits, together with an estimate of those parents with care who will be receiving the payment directly as a disregard to their Income Support/ income-based Jobseekers Allowance.

Tony Cunningham: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions what the reasons are for the proposed reduction in the Child Support Agency service in Workington. [196381]

Mr. Pond: The administration of the Child Support Agency is a matter for the Chief Executive, Mr. Doug Smith. He will write to the hon. Member with the information requested.

Letter from Mike Isaac to Mr. Tony Cunningham, dated 18 November 2004:

In reply to your recent Parliamentary Question about the Child Support Agency the Secretary of State promised a substantive reply from the Chief Executive. I am providing this in Mr Smith's absence.

You asked the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions what the reasons are for the proposed reduction in the Child Support Agency service in Workington.

Child support services in Workington are delivered by our Wales and North West England Business Unit with its headquarters based in Birkenhead. Those services include a face to face interviewing service which is currently delivered by two staff based in Workington. The demand for our face to face service nationally has changed over the past two years which resulted in our subjecting it to an internal review. As a result we are replacing the existing service with two new services:

a customer service which provides office interviews/home visits to deal with enquiries from our customers which cannot be cleared by telephone;

a compliance service which will provide inspectoral visits to non-compliant employers and clients and which will present enforcement cases in local courts.

We are reducing the number of staff and the locations where they are based. Whilst Workington will receive an equivalent level of service to the rest of the country we will no longer be basing our staff there.

Mr. Frank Field: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions pursuant to his answers of 28 October 2004, *Official Report*, column 1373W, and 4 November, to the hon. Member for Northavon (Mr. Webb), *Official Report*, column 417W, on the Child Support Agency, if he will now provide the information requested by the right hon. Member for Birkenhead. [199110]

Mr. Pond: The administration of the Child Support Agency is a matter for the Chief Executive, Mr Doug Smith. He will write to the hon. Member with the information requested.

Letter from Doug Smith to Mr. Frank Field, dated 18 November 12004:

In reply to your recent Parliamentary Question about the Child Support Agency the Secretary of State promised a substantive reply from the Chief Executive.

You asked the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions, pursuant to his answers of 28 October, Official Report, column 1373W, and 4 November, to the honourable Member for Northavon, Official Report, column 417W, on the Child Support Agency, if he will now provide the information requested by the right hon. Member for Birkenhead.

I remain unable to provide the information you require. I can however provide an update on the number of cases that have successfully transferred from the 'old scheme' to the 'new scheme'. Since March 2003 these amount to around 20,000 cases.

Bob Spink: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions what the reasons were for the delay in rolling out the new Child Support Agency assessment rules to all absent parents; and what steps he is taking to resolve the problems in rolling out the new scheme. [195738]

Mr. Pond: The administration of the Child Support Agency is a matter for the Chief Executive, Mr. Doug Smith. He will write to the hon. Member with the information requested.

Letter from Mike Isaac to Mr. Bob Spink, dated 18 November 2004:

In reply to your recent Parliamentary Question about the Child Support Agency the Secretary of State promised a substantive reply from the Chief Executive. As he is currently on leave I am replying on his behalf.

You asked the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions, what the reasons were for the delay in rolling out the new Child Support Agency assessment rules to all absent parents; and what steps he is taking to resolve the problems in rolling out the new scheme.

The new computer and telephony service provided by EDS contains a number of defects. The Child Support Agency is working closely with EDS and the defects are progressively being remedied. EDS will then be in a position to provide the software changes needed to support the migration of cases from the old to the new computer system and to convert existing maintenance assessments into new calculations. In the meantime, maintenance is still flowing under the old scheme and we do not want to jeopardise this by transferring cases too early. Ministers will want to be satisfied that the new arrangements are working well for new applications before making any decisions about migration and conversion.

Civil Servants (Criminal Records)

Michael Fabricant: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions what procedures are in place *(a)* to check the criminal records of civil servants in his Department and agencies responsible to his Department, including the Benefits Agency, who have access to computer databases containing confidential information on the public and *(b)* to ensure that there can be no improper use of computer databases containing confidential information on the public; and if he will make a statement. [194596]

Maria Eagle: All prospective employees of the Department and it's agencies are required to provide information about their eligibility to be employed, which include the requirement to declare any criminal convictions.

If anyone in the Department is charged with or convicted of a criminal offence they are required to inform their manager straight away.

When an offence comes to light consideration is given to establish whether restriction of duties, transfer or suspension from duty is appropriate and what disciplinary action is required. Failure to report a criminal caution can of itself be treated as a disciplinary offence.

As civil servants all Department for Work and Pensions (DWP) staff are subject to the provisions of the Civil Service Code and the Department's Standards of Behaviour statement is based on it.

Staff standards of behaviour require that computers or computer systems must only be used to access or process information people need to do their job. They must not access (or attempt to access) their own or other people's records, systems or information without authorisation.

There are also system generated access controls and auditing mechanisms. Staff are made aware of these measures during their training and consolidated by central guidance. Access to systems is approved by line managers and controlled by the local IT specialist.

Council Tax Benefit

Mrs. Spelman: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions what the estimated expenditure on council tax benefit in England *(a)* was in 2003–04 and *(b)* will be in 2004–05 across (i) all council tax benefit recipients and (ii) pensioner recipients. [198488]

Mr. Pond: The information is in the following table.

Estimated expenditure on council tax benefit in England

£ million, nominal terms

	2003–04	*2004–05*
All council tax benefit recipients	2,811	3,085
Pensioner recipients	1,431	1,625

Notes:

1. All figures have been rounded to the nearest million pounds.
2. All pensioner figures quoted relate to people aged 60 and over.

Source:

The estimated costs shown are consistent with data published at Spending Review 2004.

Data Sharing

Jon Trickett: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions what assessment he has made of data sharing practices between executive bodies of his Department. [196544]

Jane Kennedy: The Department's IT systems currently allow the sharing of limited customer information between its Agencies. As part of the modernising delivery programme, we are implementing systems that will allow Agency IT systems to increase data sharing across the Department. It is envisaged that this IT will be operational from the middle of 2005 and will be subject to the limitations set out in the relevant data protection legislation.

These improvements will enable a more consistent and consolidated approach when interacting with our customers.

Departmental Advertising Costs

Charles Hendry: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions what the cost of *(a)* creative work, *(b)* media spend and *(c)* administration for his Department's advertising activity has been in each financial year since 1997–98, broken down by contractor. [197299]

Jane Kennedy: I refer the hon. Member to the answer I gave to the hon. Member for Northavon (Mr. Webb) on 24 May 2004 *Official Report*, columns 1463–64W.

Using the figures for advertising expenditure from that answer, which referred to media spend by campaign, the following table adds the creative costs for those campaigns where creative costs can be separately identified. Therefore advertising media spend and creative work for 2003–04 broken down by campaign are as follows:

£

2003–04 campaign	*Advertising expenditure*	*Creative costs*
Pension credit	11,100,000	2,068,720
The Pension Service	570,000	71,354
Direct Payment	11,044,000	1,206,890
Direct Payment road show	51,000	850
Fraud	8,383,000	860,493
Winter fuel	637,000	38,418
Council tax benefit	500,000	32,688
New Deal	5,800,000	1,152,038
Jobseeker Direct help-line	1,700,000	347,928
Age Positive	46,000	11,388
DDA awareness and disability rights	47,000	2,583
Totals	39,878,000	5,793,350

The Department for Work and Pensions was formed in June 2001. Further details of creative spend, including for previous years, could be provided only at disproportionate cost.

We are unable to identify administrative costs separately as departmental administrative staff do not work solely on advertising campaigns and agencies do not charge separately for administrative support.

All these figures are net of VAT.

Departmental Changes

Mr. Hancock: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions what assessment he has made under race relations regulations of the effect on ethnic minorities of the organisational changes to his Department in the South East region. [152147]

Maria Eagle: We are committed to securing equality of opportunity for all our customers. This commitment is delivered through the implementation of our Race Equality Scheme and through the range of measures highlighted in our ethnic minority business delivery plan. The Department is proactive in seeking advice and guidance on the impact of all policies, including organisational change, on ethnic minorities. Plans are subject to consultation with our staff and their representatives and where these organisational changes have an impact on the services provided to customers they are subject to public consultation with local community groups.

Departmental Events (Funding)

Charles Hendry: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions if he will list the *(a)* conferences, *(b)* publications, *(c)* initiatives, *(d)* projects and *(e)* receptions organised by his Department which have received funding from outside commercial bodies, since May 1997, broken down by (i) funding body and (ii) amount paid. [196596]

Maria Eagle: The information requested is not available centrally in the format requested and could be collected only at disproportionate cost.

Departmental Policies

Jim Knight: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions if he will set out, with statistical evidence relating as closely as possible to the south Dorset constituency, the effects of changes to departmental policy since 1997 on the south Dorset constituency. [194963]

Jane Kennedy: We have undertaken a fundamental overhaul of the welfare system, transforming it from a passive to an active system that fights poverty, creates opportunity and helps people become self-sufficient and independent.

Through Jobcentre Plus, we are promoting work as the best form of welfare for people of working age. The number of people in work is at historically high levels of over 28.39 million; in south Dorset, the proportion in employment has risen to 81.1 per cent.

Our New Deals have helped lone parents, the young unemployed, the long-term unemployed, disabled people, the over 50s and partners of unemployed people to move from benefit into work. Nationally over 1.1 million people have been helped into work by the New Deals, with over 1,400 in south Dorset alone.

Significant progress has been made in eradicating child poverty, and the latest figures for 2002–03 show that there were over half a million fewer children in relative low income than there were in 1996–97. Child benefit is now worth £16.50 a week for the eldest child, compared to only £11.40 in 1997, benefiting 9,875 families in south Dorset.

We want all pensioners to have a decent and secure income in retirement and to share fairly in the rising prosperity of the country, and our first priority has been to help the poorest pensioners. The Government will be spending nearly £10 billion more in 2004–05 (in 2004–05 prices) on pensioners as a result of measures introduced since 1997, with around half going to the poorest third.

Our reforms include the state second pension, which helps more of tomorrow's pensioners build up better pensions. Pension credit, introduced from October 2003, provides a contribution to a guaranteed minimum income for those aged 60 and over and, for the first time, those over aged 65 and over may be rewarded for modest savings and income. Around 3,980 pensioners in south Dorset are receiving pension credit, with an average award of £37.47 per week.

We know that older people are disproportionately affected by fuel poverty. This winter (2004–05) we have again made available a winter fuel payment of £200 for each eligible household with someone aged 60 or over to help with their fuel bills. The additional 80+ Annual Payment gives an extra £100 to eligible households where there is someone aged 80 or over. Last winter there were 15,595 households in south Dorset which received the winter fuel payment and, of those 4,220 households received the additional Annual Payment. We expect numbers to be similar for this winter (2004–05).

Additionally for this year eligible households with someone aged 70 or over will receive the One-off 70+ Payment of £100 to help with living expenses including council tax bills. It will be paid with the winter fuel payment and last winter there were 9,825 households in south Dorset with someone aged 70 or over which received a winter fuel payment. We expect a similar number to receive the One-off 70+ Payment this winter (2004–05).

Some 20,540 pensioners in south Dorset benefited from the above inflation increase in the rate of basic state pension from April 2003. Those over 75, of whom we estimate there are about 6,890 in south Dorset, may also qualify for free TV licences.

In 2002–03 we estimate there were around 10 million adults (22 per cent.) and 0.7 million children (5 per cent.) in GB likely to be covered by the provisions of the Disability Discrimination Act (DDA).

The figures can be broken down to regional level which shows that 22 per cent. of adults and 6 per cent. of children in the south-west of England are likely to be covered by the provisions of the DDA.

Information on the numbers of customers in the south-west who are in receipt of disability living allowance (DLA) and attendance allowance (AA) is in the following table. This information is not available at constituency level.

Operational year	*DLA/AA allowances recipients (Thousand)*
South-west	
2004	312.5
2003	296.8
2002	279.2
2001	271.6
2000	259.6
1999	257.9
1998	247.1
1997	230.3

Source:
Information Centre. Figures taken from a 5 per cent. sample at 31 May each year.

Departmental Property/Staff

Mr. Andrew Turner: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions if he will list the properties occupied *(a)* by his Department and *(b)* by its agencies in (i) 1997 and (ii) 2004, showing (1) for each and (2) in aggregate (A) the area and (B) the annual rental value. [195431]

Maria Eagle: The information requested is not available for 1997.

Such information that is available for 2004 is in the table. A separate list providing details of the floor area for all 1,743 DWP properties, grouped by region and DWP major occupying business, has been placed in the Library.

Size and cost of the DWP estate at April 2004

DWP[1]	*Figures*
PRIME sq m[2]	2,481,539.62
Non PRIME sq m[3]	108,000.00
Total size (million sq m rounded)[4]	2.590
Overall annual facilities price (£ million)[5]	529.3

[1] Information about the size of the DWP estate is available only from April 2004 subsequent to a detailed measuring exercise undertaken when the PRIME PFI contract was expanded to include the former Employment Service estate. Information about the former ES estate prior to this date is not available.

[2] PRIME space is occupied under the terms of the PRIME PFI contract and includes space occupied by other Government Departments (OGDs) within DWP buildings.

[3] Non PRIME space is where DWP has a part occupation in the building of an other Government Department (OGD).

[4] Information about floor area is held at departmental level only. Information about the space occupied (not net internal area of buildings) by each of the Department's agencies is currently being gathered and should be available early in the new year.

[5] The overall facilities price (FP) paid is shown. Details of annual rental value are not available as the PRIME PFI procured serviced accommodation as a global price, customised by building, and it is not possible now to extract a separate price for each traditional element covered by the FP. Rent in Non PRIME space is paid directly by the Department's businesses to OGDs and the information is not recorded centrally, although the overall FP recorded above does include the cost of facilities management services delivered through the PRIME contract to Non PRIME building occupants.

Mr. Cousins: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions if he will list the *(a)* location and *(b)* numbers of staff employed in each benefit processing centre. [188985]

Maria Eagle: Benefit processing is carried out by Jobcentre Plus, the Disability and Carers Service and the Pension Service.

Currently, Jobcentre Plus has about 21,000 staff involved in benefit processing, spread across 633 sites. The majority of these sites are primarily involved in delivering our Welfare to Work programmes and have very few staff processing benefits. Currently there are three benefit centres, the primary function of which is processing benefits. Jobcentre Plus benefits processing will be centralised in 81 sites by 2008.

The former Secretary of State made an announcement to the House on 29 June 2004, *Official Report*, columns 8–9WS, regarding the future of Pension Service centres. The Secretary of State announced on 16 September 2004, *Official Report*, columns 178–80WS, details of the 81 sites which will carry out benefit processing by 2008.

~~The information for the three Jobcentre Plus benefit~~ centres, Disability and Carers Service centres and the Pension Service centres are in the tables.

Jobcentre Plus benefit centres (August 2004)

Benefit centre	*Number of staff*
Belfast	323
Glasgow	503
Makerfield	287

Disability and Carers Service processing centres (August 2004)

Processing centre	*Number of staff*
Birmingham	495
Bootle	210
Bristol	210
Cardiff	195
Edinburgh	150
Fylde	[1]3,020
Glasgow	165
Leeds	253
Manchester	173
Newcastle	154
Preston	1,157
Sutton	328
Wembley	358

[1] Fylde coast has approximately 600 staff involved in functions outside benefit processing. A small number of staff at each of the other sites are not directly involved in benefit processing.

Pension Service centres (August 2004)

Pension centre	*Number of staff*
Bath PC	400
Birmingham PC	366
Blackpool PC	187
Burnley PC	506
Cwmbran PC	238
Dearne Valley PC	372
Derby PC	290
Dundee PC	494
London PC (Glasgow)	484
Leicester PC	280
Liverpool PC	253
Motherwell PC	499
London PC (Newcastle)	584
Norwich BH PC	255
Norwich KH PC	308
Nottingham PC	238
Plymouth PC	360
Seaham PC	371
Stockport PC	688
Stockton PC	317
Swansea PC	529
Walsall PC	253
Warrington PC	483
Wolverhampton PC	378
Wrexham PC	382
York PC	285
IPC—Newcastle	997
NPC—Newcastle	986
NPFTC—Newcastle	700

Note:
The table shows the number of core processing and management and support staff in post at the end of August 2004. Staff working on local services, projects and central functions are not included.

Mr. Willetts: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions if he will place in the Library a copy of his Department's guidance on activities that may be undertaken by staff in redeployment units. [196508]

Maria Eagle: The Pension Service redeployment unit is currently the only redeployment unit within the Department. When an individual transfers to the Redeployment Unit, they will spend the majority of their time looking for a new job. They may be asked to undertake temporary projects or tasks whilst assigned to the Redeployment Unit, but the duration of these projects and tasks will not exceed 2 months and therefore do not affect an individual's surplus status.

Specific guidance on activities that may be undertaken by staff in the unit has been placed in the Library.

Disability Living Allowance

Lady Hermon: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions what research his Department has undertaken into the cost involved in removing the bar on disabled people over the age of 65 years from claiming disability living allowance. [198290]

Maria Eagle: None, because there is no reliable data available on which research could be properly based.

Entitlement to disability living allowance can only be reliably established after a claim has been made and the mobility and care needs of the customer assessed.

Ethnicity

Ms Buck: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions what assessment he has made of the effect of a person's ethnicity on their access to public services within the responsibilities of his Department. [143573]

Maria Eagle: DWP has a range of measures in place to assess the effect of ethnicity on access to public services.

We are looking towards improving the way we assess the impact of our services on ethnic minorities, and for this reason have worked in partnership with Home Office and Commission for Racial Equality to develop a system which will help us to achieve this.

There is a corporate monitoring project being undertaken in the Department to identify the gaps in information we have on the ethnicity of our customers.

Jobcentre Plus currently monitor the ethnicity of all customers who attend work focused interviews.

Customer satisfaction surveys are carried out by Jobcentre Plus, Pensions Service, Child Support Agency, Disability and Carers Directorate and Appeals Service which include questions on ethnicity. The results of these surveys help us to assess our services and act on any shortcomings.

Ethnic minority outreach programmes are in place across the Department and feedback from customers involved in these can help to inform us whether our services are accessible to ethnic minority groups.

The Department has set up the Ethnic Minority Working Party, with which we consult regularly on issues which affect ethnic minority groups. We also meet regularly with the Black and Minority Ethnic Elders Group.

A range of research has been commissioned to explore the question of ethnicity and barriers to take up of various benefits and services. Full assessments have not yet been made on the results of these, but action is being taken in response to some of the findings. These include:

Research into experiences of lone parents from ethnic minority communities.

Opportunities and barriers in employment and training for refugees.

Diversity in disability.

Delivering benefits and services to black and minority ethnic older people.

Research into the languages currently used by the Department, to determine whether these are appropriate for our changing customer base.

Copies of the research publications are available in the Library.

Freedom of Information Act

Andrew Selous: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions what assessment he has made of the likely costs to his Department in the first quarter of 2005 of compliance with the provisions of the Freedom of Information Act 2000; and if he will make a statement. [199076]

Mr. Pond: A major function of my Department is to provide information about a wide range of benefits, child support and back to work services to a variety of customers and others who use or are interested in using our services. This means that large amounts of information are regularly provided routinely and without question.

Implementation of the provisions of the Freedom of Information Act 2000 will build on the Department's existing mechanisms for responding to written requests for information, although there is no reliable way of forecasting the volume of additional requests we may receive. Accordingly, we have made no assessment of the likely additional costs of implementing the Freedom of Information Act 2000 within the Department for Work and Pensions for the first quarter of 2005.

Government Buildings (Disabled Access)

Tom Cox: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions whether all Government buildings in his Department within the Greater London area are fully accessible to disabled people; and if he will make a statement. [199312]

Maria Eagle: The Department for Work and Pensions has, with its estates services provider LandSecurities Trillium, implemented a national programme of building works to its premises, facilities and services to improve access for disabled, people.

Of the 164 DWP buildings within the London Government Region, there are only 45 sites where works are not fully completed but programmes of work have been agreed to provide access to disabled people by the end of January 2005.

Health and Safety at Work

Paul Farrelly: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions what steps the Government have taken to improve health and safety at work in Newcastle-under-Lyme since 1997. [198547]

Jane Kennedy: Regulatory responsibility for health and safety is shared between the Health and Safety Executive (HSE) and Local Authorities (LAs). HSE adopts a national approach to improving health and safety at work, focusing its efforts to those work activities presenting the greatest risk to workers and members of the public. To achieve this HSE's inspectors inspect workplaces, investigate incidents and complaints and take enforcement action where necessary. In addition, Health and Safety Awareness Officers provide advice and guidance to small firms during workplace visits, events and initiatives.

HSE has an office in Newcastle-under-Lyme, covering Staffordshire, Shropshire and parts of Cheshire. Work is carried out according to national priorities but guided by local circumstances.

In April 2002 HSE introduced 'topic-based inspections' in response to the Revitalising Health and Safety initiative. Inspectors judge management of health and safety by inspecting a small number of topics and issues that are most likely to cause serious harm.

In February 2004 the Health and Safety Commission (HSC) published their new strategy for workplace health and safety to 2010 and beyond. In September 2004 HSC issued a consultative document to explore which techniques HSE and LAs can use to best influence workplace health and safety standards.

Identity Cards

Mr. Oaten: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions what the *(a)* time scale and *(b)* anticipated publication date is for the feasibility study being undertaken by his Department to establish the full impact, costs and benefits of the introduction of identity cards. [198908]

Mr. Pond: We have conducted and completed an initial feasibility study into the impact Identity Cards will have on DWP business. The results have been forwarded to the Home Office and will help inform the next stage of the Identity Cards programme. For commercial and security reasons the results will not be published separately.

Incapacity/Severe Disablement Benefit

Mr. Goodman: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions how many people have had their claims for incapacity benefit terminated because their claims were found to be fraudulent in each year since 1997, broken down by *(a)* region and *(b)* age. [191719]

Maria Eagle: The information is not available. Information is not collected on how many people identified as making fraudulent claims to incapacity benefit had their claims terminated as a result.

Mr. Wills: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions what recent estimate he has made of the number of *(a)* males and *(b)* females aged (i) 18 to 29, (ii) 30 to 39, (iii) 40 to 49 and (iv) 50 to 59 claiming incapacity benefit; and what estimate he has made of the number of males aged 60 to 65 claiming incapacity benefit. [196031]

Maria Eagle: The information is in the table.

Incapacity benefit (IB) and severe disablement allowance (SDA) claimants by age and gender, at May 2004

	All	*Men*	*Women*
All	2,708,700	1,590,200	1,118,600
Under 18	9,800	4,600	5,200
18 to 29	304,300	171,800	132,500
30 to 39	475,900	276,000	199,900
40 to 49	630,700	338,000	292,700
50 to 59	929,600	477,600	452,100
60 to 64	329,000	315,200	13,900
65 and over	29,400	7,100	22,300

Notes:

1. Figures have been rounded to the nearest hundred. Totals may not sum due to rounding.

2. Figures are based on a 5 per cent. sample, and are therefore subject to a degree of sampling variation.

3. SDA has not been available to new claimants since April 2001.

Source:

IAD Information Centre, 5 per cent. sample

Mr. Goodman: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions how many people aged *(a)* under 25, *(b)* 25 to 40, *(c)* 40 to 49, *(d)* 50 to 59 and *(e)* over 60 years have claimed incapacity benefit or severe disablement allowance in each year since 1997, broken down by region. [191672]

Maria Eagle: The information has been placed in the Library.

Mr. Goodman: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions (1) how many people have made a new claim for incapacity benefit or severe disablement allowance in each year since 1997, broken down by *(a)* age and *(b)* region; [191673]

(2) how many applications for incapacity benefit and severe disablement allowance were rejected in each year since 1997; and what percentage this was of all applications for each benefit, broken down by *(a)* age and *(b)* region; [191675]

(3) what categories of reasons are given for the rejection of applications for incapacity benefit and severe disablement allowance; and how many applications for incapacity benefit and severe disablement allowance were rejected for each of these reasons in each year since 1997, broken down by *(a)* age and *(b)* region. [191676]

Maria Eagle: The information is not available in the format requested.

The available information has been placed in the Library.

Incapacity Benefit

Mr. Goodman: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions how many and what percentage of new claimants of incapacity benefit or severe disablement allowance in each year since 1997 have been in receipt of incapacity benefit at some point *(a)* during the previous two years; *(b)* during the previous five years and *(c)* since the introduction of incapacity benefit broken down by age and region. [191674]

Maria Eagle: The available information has been placed in the Library.

Case-level Incapacity Benefit/Severe Disablement Allowance data are available only from May 1995.

ME

David Taylor: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions what recent discussions he has had with officials from the Department of Health on the clinical definition of myalgic encephalomyelitis. [199274]

Maria Eagle: The Department's Chief Medical Adviser keeps up to date with the latest developments in the understanding and treatment of myalgic encephalomyelitis/chronic fatigue syndrome. He does this by review of literature, discussion with experts in the field and liaison with the Department of Health. There have been no recent discussions with Department of Health officials specifically on this subject.

Mrs. Elizabeth Langmead

Mr. Steen: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions when Mrs. Elizabeth Langmead of Galmpton, Devon, will be refunded the sum in retirement pension owed to her by the Pension Service; and if he will make a statement. [198520]

Malcolm Wicks *[holding answer 16 November 2004]*: Information about individual pension payments is confidential and I will write privately to the hon. Member. This is in line with paragraph 12, Part 2, of the Code of Practice on Access to Government Information.

National Insurance Credits

Mr. Tynan: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions if he will extend the scope of national insurance credits for those in training for further employment to *(a)* those remaining in education aged 16 to 18 years and *(b)* those in higher education. [198697]

Mr. Pond: All young people may be credited with Class 3 contributions for the tax years in which they reach age 16 and the two following years.

Those over 18 may pay voluntary contributions to the extent these are required to qualify for a full basic state pension. These may be paid up to six years after a period of education or training ends. It is not always necessary to pay these since it is possible to achieve full basic state pension with up to five non-qualifying years in the working life.

We have no plans to further extend the availability of credits in these circumstances.

New Deal (Newcastle-under-Lyme)

Paul Farrelly: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions (1) how many people in Newcastle-under-Lyme have benefited from *(a)* New Deal for Lone Parents and *(b)* the New Deal for Partners; [198577]

(2) how many people in Newcastle-under-Lyme have benefited from the New Deal since 1997. [198580]

Jane Kennedy: The available information is in the table.

New Deal in Newcastle-under-Lyme

	Number of individuals	
Programme	*Starting the programme*	*Into jobs*
New Deal for Lone Parents	570	350
New Deal for Young People	990	610
New Deal 25 plus	380	160
New Deal 50 plus	—	110
Total	1,930	1,230

Notes:

1. Information is not available at constituency level for New Deal for Partners and New Deal for Disabled People.
2. New Deal for Young People data are from January 1998 to June 2004.
3. New Deal 25 plus information is from July 1998 to June 2004.
4. New Deal for Lone Parents information is from October 1998 to June 2004.
5. New Deal 50 plus information is from April 2000 to March 2003 and relates to people who have started work through New Deal 50 plus and received the 50 plus employment credit.
6. New Deal 50 plus information is not available at a constituency level after March 2003.
7. Figures have been rounded to the nearest 10.
8. Components may not sum to totals due to rounding.

Source:

DWP Information and Analysis Directorate.

Paul Farrelly: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions how many people have been through *(a)* the New Deal for the over-50s, *(b)* New Deal for Partners, *(c)* New Deal for Disabled People, *(d)* New Deal for Lone Parents, *(e)* New Deal 25 plus and *(f)* New Deal for Young People (18 to 24) in each year in Newcastle-under-Lyme since their introduction; and how many have then obtained permanent employment. [198708]

Jane Kennedy: The available information is in the table.

New Deal in Newcastle-under-Lyme

	New Deal for Young People[1]		*New Deal 25 plus*[2]		*New Deal for Lone Parents*[3]		*New Deal 50 plus*[4]
	Total leavers	*Leavers into sustained jobs*[5]	*Total leavers*	*Leavers into sustained jobs*[5]	*Total leavers*	*Leavers into jobs*	*Jobs*
1998	90	40	10	0	0	0	—
1999	190	80	50	10	50	30	—
2000	200	80	80	10	120	70	20
2001	210	80	70	20	210	110	50
2002	210	80	100	20	160	70	40
2003	190	70	100	30	80	40	10
2004	100	30	30	10	40	30	—
Total	1,200	470	440	90	670	350	110

[1] New Deal for Young People information is from January 1998 to June 2004.

[2] New Deal 25 plus information is from July 1998 to June 2004.

[3] New Deal for Lone Parents information is from October 1998 to June 2004. There is no current measure of sustainability for New Deal for Lone Parents. Information provided is for number of leavers into jobs.

[4] New Deal 50 plus information is from April 2000 to March 2003. There is no measure of sustainability for New Deal 50 plus. Information provided is the number of people starting work through the programme with the help of the 50 plus employment credit.

[5] For the purposes of New Deal for Young People and New Deal 25 plus, a job is regarded as sustained if no new claim is made for jobseeker's allowance within 13 weeks of leaving New Deal.

Notes:

1. Information is not available at constituency level for New Deal for Disabled People and New Deal for Partners.
2. Information is not available at constituency level for New Deal 50 plus after March 2003.
3. Data for New Deal for Young People, New Deal 25 plus and New Deal for Lone Parents may include people who have been through the programmes more than once, and gained sustained jobs more than once.
4. Totals may not sum as figures for each year are rounded to the nearest 10.

Source:

DWP Information and Analysis Directorate.

New Deal for Disabled People

Mr. Goodman: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions how much has been spent on the New Deal for Disabled People in each year since 2001, broken down by region. [191703]

Jane Kennedy: The information is not available at regional level. The available information is in the table.

New Deal for Disabled People

	Total expenditure (£ million)
2000–01	14
2001–02	10
2002–03	31
2003–04	42

Source:

DWP Departmental Report 2004

Mr. Goodman: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions how many people have entered a New Deal for Disabled People programme in each year since 2001, broken down by *(a)* region and *(b)* age. [191704]

Jane Kennedy: The information is in the tables.

Number of people registering with a New Deal for Disabled People job broker in each year since July 2001

	Total
July 2001 to March 2002	11,800
April 2002 to March 2003	30,750
April 2003 to March 2004	36,410
April 2004 to June 2004	13,390

Breakdown by age of the total number of people who registered with a New Deal for Disabled People job broker in each year since July 2001

Age	*July 2001 to March 2002*	*April 2002 to March 2003*	*April 2003 to March 2004*	*April 2004 to June 2004*
18–24	520	1,600	2,790	1,250
25–34	2,250	5,520	7,050	2,670
35–49	4,880	12,490	15,100	5,650
50 +	4,040	10,660	10,850	3,600

Breakdown by region of the total number of people who registered with a New Deal for Disabled People job broker in each year since July 2001

Region	*July 2001 to March 2002*	*April 2002 to March 2003*	*April 2003 to March 2004*	*April 2004 to June 2004*
Scotland	670	3,110	3,720	1,460
North East	1,500	3,530	4,660	1,660
North West	1,800	4,370	4,580	1,770
Yorkshire and Humberside	650	1,850	1,880	1,020
Wales	1,710	3,760	5,550	1,820
West Midlands	620	1,860	2,450	890
East Midlands	760	1,750	1,540	630
East of England	620	1,480	1,660	430
South East	690	2,230	2,630	810
London	900	2,980	2,660	1,150
South West	1,770	3,360	4,470	1,570

Notes: -

1. The total number of registrations includes those for whom age and/or region are not recorded. For this reason and because of rounding, components will not necessarily sum to totals.
2. Data is only available since the introduction of New Deal for Disabled People (NDDP) nationally in July 2001.
3. Figures relate to the number of individuals registering with a NDDP job broker, not all registrations with job brokers. For example, an individual registering two times or more with a job broker will only be included once in the figures.

Source:

DWP Information and Analysis Directorate

Mr. Goodman: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions what estimate he has made of the average cost per person who has entered a New Deal for Disabled People programme since 2001. [191705]

Jane Kennedy: The information is in the table.

Average cost of registrations on New Deal for Disabled People (NDDP)

	Total NDDP expenditure (£ million)	*Total participants*[1]	*Total registrations*[2]	*Average cost per participant (£)*	*Average cost per registration (£)*
2001–02[3]	10	11,800	13,410	847	745
2002–03	31	30,750	34,030	1,008	911
2003–04	42	36,410	38,140	1,154	1,101

[1] All figures relate to individuals who have started each programme.

[2] An individual may have registered more than once over the period. The figures here relate to the total number of registrations.

[3] NDDP was introduced nationally in July 2001. The expenditure shown for this year only covers the period July 2001 to March 2002.

Source:

DWP Departmental Report 2003 and New Deal Evaluation Database, Information and Analysis Directorate, DWP

Mr. Goodman: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions what estimate he has made of the cost per person of getting a person who has entered a New Deal for Disabled People programme into sustained employment; and if he will make a statement. [191706]

Jane Kennedy: The information is not available. The planned implementation of a unit costing system alongside the Department's Resource Management system will provide such information in the future. Implementation in Jobcentre Plus is due to begin in autumn 2005.

Mr. Goodman: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions how many people who have entered a New Deal for Disabled People programme in each year since 2001 have gone on to enter sustained employment, broken down by *(a)* age and *(b)* region. [191707]

Jane Kennedy: The information is in the tables.

People who have registered with a New Deal for Disabled People Job Broker each year since July 2001 who have gone on to gain sustained employment

	Number
July 2001 to March 2002	270
April 2002 to March 2003	3,620
April 2003 to March 2004	10,110
April 2004 to June 2004	2,670

Breakdown by age of the total number of people who have registered with a New Deal for Disabled People Job Broker each year since July 2001 who have gone on to gain sustained employment

Age	*July 2001 to March 2002*	*April 2002 to March 2003*	*April 2003 to March 2004*	*April 2004 to June 2004*
18 to 24	10	140	500	160
25 to 34	50	590	1,760	450
35 to 49	120	1,520	4,180	1,180
50+	90	1,340	3,560	850

Breakdown by region of the total number of people who have registered with a New Deal for Disabled People Job Broker each year since July 2001 who have gone on to gain sustained employment

Region	*July 2001 to March 2002*	*April 2002 to March 2003*	*April 2003 to March 2004*	*April 2004 to June 2004*
Scotland	10	260	1,270	320
North East	10	570	1,530	310
North West	60	390	1,230	330
Yorkshire and Humberside	0	170	500	120
Wales	60	740	1,430	460
West Midlands	0	130	560	220
East Midlands	0	190	520	90
East of England	10	110	430	140
South East	0	200	550	160
London	20	160	530	110
South West	90	680	1,450	380

Notes:

1. The total number of registrations includes those for whom age and/or region are not recorded. For this reason and because of rounding, components will not necessarily sum to totals.

2. Data are available only since the introduction of New Deal for Disabled People (NDDP) nationally in July 2001.

3. A sustained job for NDDP is counted when a customer, placed in work through a Job Broker, remains in work for a 13-week period.

Source:

DWP Information and Analysis Directorate.

Mr. Goodman: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions how many people who have entered a New Deal for Disabled People programme in each year since 2001 have re-entered the programme later, broken down by *(a)* age and *(b)* region. [191709]

Jane Kennedy: The information is in the tables.

Individuals who have registered and subsequently re-registered with a New Deal for Disabled People Job Broker each year since July 2001

	Number
July 2001 to March 2002	1,470
April 2002 to March 2003	2,940
April 2003 to March 2004	1,640
April 2004 to June 2004	230

Breakdown by age of the total number of individuals who have registered and subsequently re-registered with a New Deal for Disabled People Job Broker each year since July 2001

Age	*July 2001 to March 2002*	*April 2002 to March 2003*	*April 2003 to March 2004*	*April 2004 to June 2004*
18–24	50	120	120	20
25–34	270	470	310	50
35–49	640	1,220	720	100
50+	510	1,120	480	70

Breakdown by region of the total number of individuals who have registered and subsequently re-registered with a New Deal for Disabled People Job Broker each year since July 2001

Region	*July 2001 to March 2002*	*April 2002 to March 2003*	*April 2003 to March 2004*	*April 2004 to June 2004*
Scotland	110	280	170	20
North East	180	380	170	20
North West	220	390	210	40
Yorkshire and Humberside	100	180	110	20
Wales	190	340	240	20
West Midlands	70	180	110	60
East Midlands	90	160	80	10
East of England	80	120	70	10
South East	160	350	160	20
London	100	280	120	20
South West	170	250	160	10

Notes:

1. The total number of registrations includes those for whom age and/or region are not recorded. For this reason, and because of rounding, components will not necessarily sum to totals.

2. Data is only available since the introduction of New Deal for Disabled People (NDDP) nationally in July 2001.

3. Figures refer to the number of individuals who registered with an NDDP Job Broker in the time period and subsequently re-registered at a later date. Individuals may be recorded in more than one period.

Source:

DWP Information and Analysis Directorate

Mr. Goodman: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions whether providers of the New Deal for Disabled People have been asked to change their timetable for job-placing activities under the scheme; and if he will make a statement. [192157]

Jane Kennedy: Jobcentre Plus is actively reviewing current performance with all New Deal for Disabled People contractors/providers against their contract to March 2006. Any variations to those contracts would be subject to agreement on an individual basis through contract re-negotiation.

In some cases, where Job Brokers have higher than expected conversion rates (i.e. registrations to job entries, and job entries to sustained jobs), we are discussing with them the option of re-profiling performance to maintain ongoing provision to March 2006 within their Maximum Indicative Contract Value.

New Deal for Young People

Mr. Willetts: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions what the latest figures are for *(a)* the number of starts on each of the New Deal for Young People options and *(b)* the number of the starts that have led to sustained unsubsidised employment. [194839]

Jane Kennedy: Young people starting the New Deal for Young People programme face significant disadvantage in the workplace as they will already have been unemployed for six months. Participants enter a "Gateway" lasting up to four months in which a personal adviser gives them intensive job search to improve their job prospects. Of the 595,270 people who have already left the Gateway, 254,610 (43 per cent.) have entered unsubsidised, sustained work.

Those who haven't found work at the end of the Gateway period enter the New Deal for Young People Options. These customers often have the most difficult barriers to work of the 18 to 24 age group. The Options help young people by giving them the skills, work experience and confidence they need to make them more job ready. Young people can access more than one option during a spell on New Deal for Young People, allowing them to find the support that is most likely to lead them to employment.

Information on starts to the Options, and jobs gained, is in the table.

New Deal for Young People Options

Option	*Total starts*[1]	*Total unsubsidised, sustained*[2] *jobs gained*[3]
Employment	82,960	32,920
Full-time education and training	187,710	42,430
Voluntary sector	112,370	26,680
Environmental task force	110,990	24,520

[1] Includes people who may have started more than one Option during a single spell on New Deal for Young People.

[2] For the purposes of New Deal for Young People, employment is regarded as sustained if no new claim is made for jobseeker's allowance within 13 weeks of leaving New Deal.

[3] Includes jobs gained directly from the option, and from the Follow-Through stage of New Deal for Young People after completing the option.

Notes:

1. Data is from the national launch of New Deal for Young People in January 1998 to the end of June 2004.
2. Figures are rounded to the nearest [illegible]

Source:

Information and Analysis Directorate, Department for Work and Pensions.

Parliamentary Questions

Mr. Hancock: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions pursuant to the answer from the Secretary of State for Home Department dated 29 June, ref 173275, when he will respond to the Question asked by the hon. Member dated 29 January, ref 152147; and if he will explain the reasons for the delay. [192166]

Maria Eagle: A reply has been given today. I regret the delay, which was caused by a number of administrative errors.

Pathways to Work Pilots

Mr. Webb: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions if he will place in the Library a copy of the Pathways to Work pilot scheme evaluation referred to on page 17 of his Department's publication UK National Action Plan for Employment. [194695]

Maria Eagle: A report on interviews carried out with Personal Advisers and Incapacity Benefit customers in the first three Pathways to Work pilots was published in September 2004. A copy has been placed in the Library. [W202 'Incapacity Benefit reforms: Early Findings from Qualitative Research'.]

A further report, which looks in detail at the role and practices of Personal Advisers across all seven pilot districts, will be published in late November. These studies are part of a wide-ranging evaluation of all aspects of the Pathways pilots. Reports on different elements of the evaluation will be placed in the Library as they are published.

Part of the UK National Action Plan for Employment also referred to the improved job entry performance in pilot areas. This was derived from early internal analysis of Jobcentre Plus recorded job entries in the pilot areas. Since that report was written, there is now further emerging evidence showing that Pathways areas are achieving double the level of improvement in the number of recorded job entries compared to other areas. They are also getting about six times as many people to take up further help to get back to work, and there are positive and encouraging indications of an increase in flows off incapacity benefit in comparison to both last year and to non-pilot areas.

Vera Baird: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions how many people eligible for support under the Pathways to Work pilots are aged *(a)* 16 to 49 and *(b)* over 50 years; and how many people who have found work under the Pathways to Work pilots are aged (i) 16 to 49 and (ii) over 50 years. [197380]

Maria Eagle: The information is in the table.

Pathways to Work pilots

Age at entry to Pathways to Work pilot	*Number of starts to Pathways to Work pilots*	*Number of job entries*
16 to 49	41,100	4,200
50 and over	16,700	1,300
Date of birth not known	500	100
Total	58,300	5,600

Notes:

1. Includes those identified as new incapacity benefit customers for whom pilot participation is mandatory; new customers for whom a work focused interview is not mandatory because of their age (males aged 60 to 65) and may or may not have volunteered to participate; and existing customers who have volunteered to take part.
2. Includes all recorded job entries plus return to work credit (RTWC) awards for which no Jobcentre Plus job entry is yet recorded (by definition, an RTWC award means that a job entry has occurred).
3. Figures for job entries include New Deal for Disabled People (NDDP) job starts.
4. Figures are rounded to the nearest 100.
5. Information is up to the end of August 2004.

Source:

DWP Family and Disability Division, Incapacity Benefit Reforms Database.

Pensioner Poverty

Tom Cox: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions how many pensioners were living in poverty in the London borough of Wandsworth in each of the last three years. [197125]

Mr. Pond: Poverty and social exclusion are complex and multi-dimensional issues, affecting many aspects of peoples' lives—including their living standards, health, housing, the quality of their environment and not just low income. The sixth annual 'Opportunity for all' report (Cm 6239) sets out the Government's strategy for tackling poverty and social exclusion and reports progress against a range of measures.

8,500 pensioner households in Wandsworth were benefiting from the pension credit in May 2004.

Information on the number of pensioners in low incomes in individual local authorities is not available.

Pensioners

Mrs. Spelman: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions how many pensioners received council tax benefit in 1997–98; what the council tax benefit take-up rate was; and what the figures are for 2004–05. [195266]

Mr. Pond: The available information is in the table. Information is not available for 2004–05.

Council tax benefit (CTB) beneficiaries aged 60 and over, Great Britain: May 1998 and 2003

	Thousand
May 1998	3,169,000
May 2003	2,815,000

Notes:

1. The figure is based on a 1 per cent. sample and subject to a degree of sampling variation.
2. Council tax benefit totals exclude any Second Adult Rebate cases.
3. "Beneficiaries" are all claimants and partners aged 60 or over.
4. The figure is rounded to the nearest thousand.
5. No information is available after May 2003.

Source:

1. Housing Benefit and Council Tax Benefit Management Information System, annual 1 per cent. sample, taken in May 1998 and May 2003.

Estimates of the number of pensioners in receipt of council tax benefit—averaged over 1997–98—along with revised estimates of the rate of take-up are published in the DSS report entitled "Income Related Benefits Estimates of Take-up in 1998/99" (December 2000). Copies of the report can be found in the Library.

Mr. Dismore: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions how many pensioners are in receipt of *(a)* housing benefit and *(b)* council tax benefit; what the total cost of the benefit is; and if he will make a statement. [198167]

Mr. Pond: The number of pensioners in receipt of housing benefit and council tax benefit, and the total cost of the benefits to pensioners are in the following tables.

Housing benefit and council tax benefit recipients aged 60 and over at May 2003

	Number
Housing benefit	1,873
Council tax benefit	2,815

Notes:

1. Caseload figures are based on a 1 per cent. sample and subject to a degree of sampling variation.
2. Caseloads are in millions and rounded to the nearest thousand.
3. Council tax benefit totals exclude any second adult rebate cases.
4. "Beneficiaries" are all claimants and partners aged 60 or over.
5. Housing benefit totals exclude any extended payments.

Source:

Housing Benefit and Council Tax Benefit Management Information System, Annual 1 per cent. sample, taken in May 2003.

Total cost of housing benefit and council tax benefit to recipients aged 60 and over

£

	Nominal terms	*2004–05 prices*
Housing benefit	4,596	4,702
Council tax benefit	1,684	1,723

Notes:

1. All figures are in millions and have been rounded to the nearest million pounds.
2. The costs shown are the estimated outturn for 2003–04 and are consistent with data published at Spending Review 2004.
3. This information is also published in the Medium Term Forecast (table 7) on the Internet at http://www.dwp.gov.uk/asd/asd4/expenditure.asp

Source:

Department for Work and Pensions Information and Analysis Division.

Pensions Protection Fund

Mr. Waterson: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions pursuant to the written ministerial statement on the Pensions Protection Fund, of 8 November 2004, *Official Report*, column 20WS, what estimate he has made of the amount of liability that would not be borne by the Pension Protection Fund if schemes which had had an insolvency event before the Pension Protection Fund is launched were to be excluded. [198059]

Malcolm Wicks: The Pensions Bill has always made it clear that in order for a Pension Protection Fund (PPF) assessment period to start, an eligible pension scheme must not have commenced wind-up prior to the introduction of the PPF. The sponsoring employer of the scheme must also have a qualifying insolvency event after the introduction of the PPF.

This position has not changed. The statement on 8 November simply made it clear that if the sponsoring employer had experienced any insolvency events prior to the introduction of the PPF this would not in itself disqualify the scheme from entering the PPF.

It is not possible to calculate the amount of liability that would not be borne by the PPF if the PPF were to exclude schemes whose sponsoring employers had an insolvency event before the PPF is launched. This is because we cannot second-guess what will happen in the complicated insolvency proceedings which will ultimately determine both whether the PPF eligibility criteria will be met, and the level of liabilities which will fall to the PPF.

Private Finance Initiatives

Mr. George Osborne: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions if he will list the private finance initiative arrangements in which the Department is engaged; what the total cost of each arrangement is *(a)* over its lifetime and *(b)* in each year of its operation; and how the arrangement appears in the Department's public accounts. [193974]

Jane Kennedy: The Department for Work and Pensions is currently engaged in nine PFI initiatives. These are a combination of: (i) those let to April 2001 by the former Department for Social Security and the former Employment Service, which were executive agency's of the then Department for Education and Employment; and (ii) those let subsequently by the DWP. Contract costs for IS/IT initiatives are not provided because of commercial confidentiality. This is in line with paragraph 13, part 2 of the code of practice of Access to Government Information.

The Department's PFI initiatives and annual expenditure are all disclosed in the Department's Resource Accounts. This information is recorded in the operating cost statement. There is also a section "Commitments under PFI Contracts" that lists all the PFI contracts and discloses the total payments to which the Department is committed in the next financial year.

Where a PFI deal is specific to an Executive Agency it is also disclosed within the Agency accounts.

The Department's Resource Account can be accessed at: http://www.dwp.gov.uk/publications/dwp/2004/res_acc/report.pdf

The Agencies Annual Reports can be accessed at: http://www.dwp.gov.uk/resourcecentre/index.asp

All documents are available in the Library.

The Department does not have any on-balance sheet PFI contracts.

Public Awareness Campaigns

Mr. Willetts: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions pursuant to the answer of 22 July 2004, *Official Report*, columns 452–54W, on public awareness campaigns, on what evidence his assessment is based in each case; and if he will place the relevant research in the Library. [196653]

Maria Eagle: The following table sets out a summary of campaigns and the evidence used to assess effectiveness. Copies of the reports on the Targeting Fraud Campaign, Disability Discrimination Act research and Pension Credit research are available in the Library. However, information on smaller campaigns is not generally collated into a single document and so could be provided only at disproportionate cost.

Advertising campaign	*Campaign result*	*Evidence*
Minimum Income Guarantee	Awareness and take up levels increased	Market research Number of claims
Winter Fuel	Awareness levels increased Number of new claims increasing	Market research Number of claims
Pensions Education Campaign	Number of guides, visitors to website and calls increased	Number of guides issued Number of visitors to website Number of calls to helpline
Targeting Benefit Fraud	Increase in awareness and progress towards key attitude changes	Market research
New Deal for Lone Parents	Awareness level and number of calls to helpline increased	Market research Number of calls to helpline
New Deal for Disabled People	Awareness level and number of calls to helpline increased	Market research Number of calls to helpline
New Deal 25 Plus	Awareness level increased	Market research
Disability Discrimination Act	Awareness levels increased	Market research
Pension Credit	Awareness and take up levels increased Progress on caseload in line to meet PSA target	Market research Number of claims
State Second Pension	Number of guides issued and awareness increased	Number of guides issued Market research
Inherited SERPS	Awareness level increased	Market research
Direct Payment	Awareness and understanding increased	Market research
Age Positive	Awareness of code and website increased	Market research
The Pension Service	Number of visitors and attendance at	Number of visitors

Advertising campaign	Campaign result	Evidence
	surgeries increased	
Council Tax Benefit	Awareness level increased	Market research
Jobseeker Direct	Awareness level increased	Market research
Jobcentre Plus Employer Marketing	Number of vacancies increased	Number of vacancies
New Deal	Awareness and number of responses increased	Market research Number of replies

Public Health Act

Norman Baker: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs if she will estimate the number of disused petrol stations which do not meet the requirements of the Public Health Act 1961; how many improvement notices have been issued under the Health and Safety at Work Act 1974; and what further steps are planned to deal with the potential detrimental effects to the environment of disused petrol stations. [192308]

Jane Kennedy: I have been asked to reply.

The local Petroleum Licensing Authority enforces the safety of disused petrol stations. There is no statutory obligation on them to keep records of how many sites do not meet the requirements of the Public Health Act 1961. There is also no statutory obligation on them to keep records on how many improvement notices they have issued under the Health and Safety at Work Act 1974 in relation to disused petrol stations. As such, it is not possible to provide the statistics requested.

The DEFRA groundwater protection code on filling stations contains advice on decommissioning underground storage tanks and the Environment Agency has powers to enforce the code. In general, the Agency expects risks to groundwater from decommissioned tanks to be lower than from active tanks since, at worst, only residual fuel would be likely to remain. The Environment Agency's risk-based approach to groundwater protection and improvement will be taken forward under the Water Framework Directive. Local authorities also have duties under Part IIA of the Environmental Protection Act to identify contaminated land and secure remediation which may involve the Environment Agency.

Public Relations

Mr. Meale: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions how much was spent by his Department on public relations in each of the past three years. [186208]

Maria Eagle: The Department for Work and Pensions was formed in June 2001 from the former Department of Social Security and parts of the former Department for Education and Employment including the Employment Service. Information on costs prior to June 2001 is not held centrally and could be obtained only at disproportionate cost. The available information is in the table.

	Press office/Public relations (£)
2001–02 (from June 2001)	816,725
2002–03	1,739,935
2003–04	1,482,811

Notes:

1. Figures represent the salary costs for press officers.

2. The increase between 2001–02 and 2002–03 coincided with the creation of the regional press office network, which was drawn from existing Employment Service and Benefits Agency communications staff.

Retirement Age

Mr. Andrew Turner: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions what the *(a)* set retirement age applying to all or most personnel and *(b)* maximum age beyond which applications for employment will not be considered is in (i) his Department and (ii) its agencies. [186373]

Maria Eagle: The current retirement age for the Department for Work and Pensions (DWP) is 65. Staff can retire at the minimum civil service pension age of 60 if they so wish but can opt to stay until 65. At present DWP also has interim arrangements in place to enable staff who are approaching 65 the opportunity to stay beyond that if they so wish. These arrangements are for grades AA—G6. They do not apply to the senior civil service (SCS) as they are governed by Cabinet Office and have a retirement age of 60. Any changes to the SCS position would have to be implemented by the Cabinet Office and applied to the whole of the SCS within the civil service. These interim arrangements are in place until 31 March 2005 and were developed within the wider context of the Pensions Green Paper and impending age legislation.

As the current retirement age for DWP is 65 we do not recruit individuals over the age of 64 years and 6 months.

These arrangements apply across DWP and its delivery businesses but in the Health and Safety Executive the retirement age for staff differs for different grades. The retirement age varies from 60–62 and depends on length of service when that age is reached.

Stakeholder Pensions

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions how many people have taken out stakeholder pensions, broken down by county. [191084]

Malcolm Wicks: Figures from the Association of British Insurers state that 2,042,864 stakeholder pensions have been sold up to the end of June 2004.

The official distributional breakdown of sales for the 2003–04 tax year will not be available until July 2005.

Such information as is available is in the following table.

Stakeholder pensions: Official figures 2001–02 and 2002–03 tax years—number of individuals contributing by country and region

Number of individuals (Thousand)

Country/region	*2001–02*	*2002–03*
United Kingdom	840	1,060
England		
North East	40	50
North West	100	110
Yorkshire and the Humber	80	100
East Midlands	70	80
West Midlands	70	90
East of England	80	110
London	90	110
South East	110	160
South West	70	90
Total	710	900
Wales	40	40
Scotland	80	100
Northern Ireland	10	10

Notes:

1. Table compiled from Inland Revenue Statistics (table 7.12)
2. Components may not sum to total due to rounding (figures rounded to the nearest 10,000)
3. The data are derived from a sample of annual returns of information submitted to the Inland Revenue by stakeholder pension providers
4. Tables can be accessed by the public via www.inlandrevenue.gov.uk/stats/pensions/menu-by-year.htm#3

Terminal Illness (Benefit Payments)

Sir Nicholas Winterton: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions (1) what steps his Department is taking to ensure that cancer patients are offered specialist benefits advice at diagnosis; and if he will make a statement; [198208]

(2) how many cancer sufferers who have subsequently died from their illness did not receive *(a)* disability living allowance and *(b)* attendance allowance in each of the last five years for which figures are available; [198209]

(3) how many cancer sufferers without terminal diagnosis are not receiving *(a)* disability living allowance and *(b)* attendance allowance; [198210]

(4) if he will make a statement on the *(a)* operation and *(b)* take-up of the special rules gateway governing eligibility for higher rates of (i) disability living allowance and (ii) attendance allowance for patients with terminal illness; [198211]

(5) what steps his Department is taking to publicise the entitlement link between *(a)* disability living allowance and *(b)* attendance allowance and (i) carer's allowance and (ii) income support; [198212]

(6) if he will make it his Department's policy *(a)* to waive the three to six month qualifying period for cancer patients claiming disability living allowance and attendance allowance and *(b)* to permit hospital in-patients to keep their (i) disability living allowance and (ii) attendance allowance for 52 weeks; [198213]

(7) if he will revoke the 28-day linking rule for *(a)* disability living allowance and *(b)* attendance allowance claimants who are hospitalised; and if he will change the definition of terminal illness from six to 12 months. [198214]

Maria Eagle: The Department has special arrangements that recognise the particular difficulties faced by people who have only a short time to live, whether due to cancer or any other progressive disease. People in these circumstances are awarded attendance allowance or the highest rate of the care component of disability living allowance automatically without having to satisfy a qualifying period, and without having to complete a claim form to demonstrate their care needs. These arrangements ensure that claims are dealt with quickly and sensitively.

In the year ending 31 May 2004 15,800 new claims were awarded under special rules and at the 31 may 2004 88,200 people were receiving either disability living allowance or attendance allowance under the Special Rules. On average it takes less than six days to make an award in these cases.

Advice about benefits is widely available from a range of sources including social security or Jobcentre Plus offices, post offices, doctors' surgeries and other advice agencies to ensure that people who are disabled can make informed decisions about whether or not to claim disability benefits.

Additionally, leaflets explaining the links between disability benefits and carers allowance and income support are sent directly to customers when they are notified about their award of benefit.

Officials have met with Macmillan cancer relief to discuss their report and will be holding further discussions with them about the scope for measures that will help people with cancer to receive benefits advice at the earliest opportunity.

Information is not available on how many people with cancer who subsequently died from that illness did not receive disability living allowance or attendance allowance nor is information available as to how many people with cancer who do not have a terminal diagnosis are not receiving these benefits.

There are no plans to change the definition of terminal illness or the rules governing the payment of disability living allowance and attendance allowance to people in hospital.

Third Party Deduction Schemes

Mr. Grogan: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions (1) whether he plans to extend the range of qualifying benefits for third party deductions schemes; and if he will make a statement; [198793]

(2) what representations he has received concerning the modernisation of the third party deductions schemes; and if he will make a statement. [198794]

Mr. Pond: Third party deductions can be made from income support, jobseeker's allowance and pension credit where people are in specified arrears with their gas, electricity and water bills, and also where they are in arrears with their housing costs and court imposed fines. There are no current plans to extend the range of benefits from which these deductions can be made.

We have recently received representation from The Office of Gas and Electricity Markets (OFGEM) concerning the fuel elements of the third party deduction scheme and we will be meeting with them to discuss the issues raised.

Unemployment (Eltham)

Clive Efford: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions what steps his Department has taken to reduce unemployment in the constituency of Eltham since 1997; and if he will make a statement. [197643]

Jane Kennedy: As a result of a combination of economic stability and our radical labour market policies, unemployment in Eltham has reduced by 45 per cent. since 1997 and now stands at 1,417, and long-term unemployment by 75 per cent. to stand at 200.

Our New Deal programmes administered by Jobcentre Plus have been a great success, helping 1,780 people in Eltham to find work. We are building on this success, opening up more opportunities for people to find work.

The development of Jobcentre Plus is building on the high quality service already provided by social security offices and Jobcentres by delivering a single, integrated service to all people of working age, with a clear focus on work.

In addition to the New Deal programmes, which are common to Jobcentre Plus, there have been ongoing activities specific to Eltham and the borough of Greenwich, to help local people in to work. Local initiatives have included jobs fairs, recruitment for local stores and employer open days.

Eltham also benefits from the Government's Welfare to Work agenda's 'Action Team initiative' that provides tailored support to disadvantaged customers within the community through an outreach advisory approach.

Webster House

Mr. George Howarth: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions (1) where crisis loans will be paid when Webster House in Kirkby is closed; [199156]

(2) how much his Department has allocated to the WIN scheme for Kirkby; which parts of the town are covered by the scheme; how many people have taken part in it; what the scheme's targets are; what its results against targets are to date; how many staff work on the scheme; and from where it will be administered when Webster House closes. [199157]

Jane Kennedy: The administration of Jobcentre Plus is a matter for the chief executive of Jobcentre Plus, David Anderson. He will write to the hon. Member.

Letter from David Anderson to Mr. George Howarth, dated 18 November 2004:

The Secretary of State has asked me to reply to your questions concerning the delivery of the Working Neighbourhoods pilot in Knowsley and the issue of Crisis Loan processing. This is something which falls within the responsibilities delegated to me as Chief Executive of Jobcentre Plus.

It may be helpful if I explain how the overall funding has been distributed for the pilot. The Employment Development & Modernisation Fund provided £77m for the 12 pilot sites operating in some of the most deprived neighbourhoods in the country for the period 2004/05 to 2005/06. Of this, £5m was allocated for set up and evaluation costs. Of the remaining £72m, each pilot site will receive £3m per year of which £1m is discretionary funding to allow personal advisers, working with Local Strategic Partnerships, the flexibility to meet individual and community needs.

The Working Neighbourhood pilot for Knowsley delivers to selected parts of the Northwood and Towerhill wards. The postcode boundary for the site contains around 6,000 residents, with approximately 2,000 in receipt of working age benefits.

The most recent statistics produced for 31 October 2004 indicate the Knowsley pilot has engaged with 879 customers of which 188 are volunteers to the programme.

With regard to the pilot's targets, there will be overall monitoring of performance and objectives which will then be evaluated. The evaluation of the objectives aims to test the extent to which the programme of local intensive work focussed action is effective in addressing long-standing barriers to work experienced by residents of deprived areas; the number of individuals moving into work and by how much it decreases the overall workless rate within the pilot area.

Whilst Jobcentre Plus job entry targets relate to movement into full time employment all who enter full time, part time and voluntary employment will count as successes for evaluation of the pilot. Retention figures will be gathered for those residents remaining in full time employment for 4, 13 and 26 weeks.

Turning to the results the Knowsley pilot has achieved to date I am able to inform you as of 31 October 2004 229 residents from the pilot have moved into employment. To clarify this further the table below gives a breakdown of the benefit groups involved.

	Number
Incapacity benefit	30
Invalid care allowance	0
Income support	63
Jobseekers' allowance	133
Other benefits	1
None	2

Twenty staff have been allocated to deliver the Knowsley pilot. The majority of them are personal advisers.

The intended closure of Webster House should have no impact on the Working Neighbourhoods pilot as it has never been delivered from Webster House. The pilot and associated mandatory work focussed interviews have been conducted form the Jobcentre Plus office at St. Chads House, Kirkby. It is also being delivered in the community to voluntary customers from partner's premises and most recently from a Working Neighbourhoods portakabin sited in Northwood.

With regard to the issue of Crisis Loan processing currently undertaken in Webster House, I can confirm that we are looking at the delivery of all of the services in Webster House and the future delivery of Crisis Loans will be included in this. We will consult on our proposals with our staff, trade unions and local partners as soon as plans are fully developed.

I have asked the District Manager for Greater Mersey to keep you updated on all developments. She can be contacted on 01704 306078.

I hope this is helpful.

Work Focused Interviews

Paul Holmes: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions how many people have attended one or more Work Focused Interviews in each of the three incapacity benefit pilot areas; how many of these individuals have *(a)* secured employment, *(b)* been referred to condition management and *(c)* been referred to a New Deal for Disabled People broker; and if he will make a statement. [186226]

Maria Eagle: In total, there have been 5,600 jo entries in the Pathways to Work pilots to the end o August 2004. Of these, 4,200 were in the first three pilo districts which have been up and running since the en of October 2003 The following table sets out the detail requested solely in relation to those who have had a initial work-focused interview:

Outcomes in the first three pathways to work pilots to August 2004

	Initial work focused interviews attended	*Job entries*	*Referred to condition management programme*	*Referred to ne deal for disable peopl*
Renfrewshire, Inverclyde, Argyll and Bute	2,818	449	174	21
Bridgend and Rhondda, Cynon, Taf	2,923	417	125	55
Derbyshire	3,211	411	235	27

Notes:

1. The first three Pathways to Work pilots commenced on 27 October 2003.

2. Work Focused Interviews should take place at around eight weeks after the start of the benefit claim. This means that majority benefits starts in July and August will not be included in the data.

3. Initial Work Focused Interviews attended refers to the actual number of Work Focused Interviews that have taken place. Som individuals will have attended more than one Work Focused Interview. These will be people who have started more than one benefit spe since 27 October 2003.

4. Job starts: This includes all recorded job entries plus Return to Work Credit (RTWC) awards for which no job entry is yet recorde (By definition, an RTWC award must indicate that a job entry has occurred).

5. The total number of job entries in the first three pilot areas is higher than that recorded in the table. This table excludes job entri achieved with existing clients who had already started to claim benefit before 27 October 2003 and those not required to have a work focused interview.

6. Job starts figures include job starts achieved through referral to New Deal for Disabled People (NDDP) job brokers.

7. The job starts figures represent all job starts that have occurred subsequent to an initial Work Focused Interview within the sam benefit spell.

8. Referred to Condition Management Programme: this represents all Condition Management Programme referrals that have occurre subsequent to an initial Work Focused Interview within the same benefit spell.

9. New Deal for Disabled People referrals: The data provided is all NDDP broker registrations plus referrals to NDDP brokers that hav not yet resulted in a registration. This represents all NDDP referrals that have occurred subsequent to an initial Work Focused Intervie within the same benefit spell.

Work Preparation Programmes

Mr. Goodman: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions (1) what estimate he has made of the cost per person of getting a person who has entered *(a)* an Access to Work programme, *(b)* a Work Preparation programme and *(c)* Workstep into sustained employment; and if he will make a statement; [191700]

(2) how much has been spent on *(a)* Access to Work, *(b)* Work Preparation and *(c)* Workstep in each year since 2001, broken down by region; [191710]

(3) what estimate he has made of the average cost per person who has entered *(a)* an Access to Work programme, *(b)* a Work Preparation programme and *(c)* Workstep since 2001. [191712]

Maria Eagle: Information on the costs associated with getting a person into sustained employment through the Access to Work and Work Preparation programmes is not available.

Access to Work helps disabled people who are already employed, or about to start a job by providing a grant to help overcome barriers in the workplace associated with disability. Since the programme began in June 1994, the average Access to Work spend per person is £1,346. The available information on the spend on the Access to Work programme, broken down by region, is in Table 1.

Work Preparation is an individually tailore programme designed to help people with healt conditions or a disability return to work following long period of sickness or unemployment. It can als help people who are at risk of losing their job because their disability by helping them to overcome difficulti that are affecting their work. The available informatio on spend on the Work Preparation programme is Table 2. The average spend per person entering Wor Preparation since 2001 is £1,144.

Workstep provides tailored support to find, secu and retain jobs for disabled people who have mo complex barriers to finding and keeping work. While Workstep, participants who are able to progress in unsupported jobs are given the support to do so, a Workstep continues to help those who cannot. Sin 2001, when Workstep was introduced, an average 1,900 people a year have progressed into unsupport jobs of which Remploy Limited has contributed average of 1,400 progressions per year and no Remploy providers have contributed an average of 5 progressions per year. When a progressed participant in employment six months after the date of progressio and has been in employment for a minimum of 22 wee in a 26-week period, this is deemed to be sustain progression. An outcome payment of £500 per person paid to Workstep providers (except Remploy) wh sustained progression is achieved. The total average spend per person on Workstep (including Remploy) is approximately £6,700.

Information on how much has been spent on Workstep in each year since 2001 broken down by region is not available. Information on national costs in each year is in Table 3.

Table 1: Access to Work programme—National and regional spend since 2002

£ million

Region	*2002–03*	*2003–04*	*Total*
Yorkshire and the Humber	2.705	3.393	6.098
North East	2.396	2.579	4.975
North West	4.957	5.563	10.520
Scotland	4.470	3.999	8.469
Wales	1.691	1.923	3.614
West Midlands	4.689	4.522	9.212
East Midlands	3.286	3.700	6.986
East of England	4.445	5.815	10.260
South West	4.647	4.785	9.432
London	7.986	8.964	16.950
South East	4.933	6.509	11.442
Central Spend[1]	4.998	4.093	9.090
Total	51.203	55.845	107.048

[1] Spend is not available broken down by region.

Note:

A regional breakdown is not available for 2001–02. National spend for the year was £42.492 million.

Source:

Disability and Rehabilitation Division

Table 2: Work Preparation Programme—National spend since 2001

	£ million
2001–02	7.466
2002–03	7.821
2003–04	10.049
Total	25.336

Notes:

1. Spend is not available broken down by region.
2. Figures for 2001–02 are for the predecessor programme to Work Preparation, the Employment Rehabilitation Programme.

Source:

Disability and Rehabilitation Division.

Table 3: Workstep—National spend since 2001

£ million

	Workstep spend	*Remploy Ltd.*	*Total spend*
2001–02	60.056	98.561	158.617
2002–03	59.339	119.162	178.501
2003–04	74.175	115.000	189.175
Total	193.570	332.723	526.293

Note:

Spend is not available broken down by region.

Source:

Disability and Rehabilitation Division.

Mr. Goodman: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions how many people who have entered *(a)* an Access to Work programme, *(b)* a Work Preparation programme and *(c)* Workstep in each year since 2001 have gone on to enter sustained employment, broken down by (i) age and (ii) region. [191702]

Maria Eagle: Access to Work is a specialist disability programme, which provides practical advice and support to help disabled people enter or stay in paid employment. The support is aimed at overcoming work related obstacles resulting from disability. It does this through a system of grants towards the cost of providing support.

Types of help available include the additional costs in travelling to work, providing human intervention support in the workplace, adapting work premises and providing special aids and equipment in the workplace.

Access to Work is open to those who are employed as well as people moving out of unemployment and is a highly effective job retention measure.

There are many disabled people, who with the right amount of support are perfectly capable of working if they wish to do so. Access to Work can help provide that support.

Information as requested in the question is not available as customers are already in work or have a job to start.

Work Preparation is an individually tailored, work-focused programme that enables disabled people to address barriers associated with their disability and prepare for working with the confidence necessary to achieve and sustain their job goal.

Although each customer has specific needs, the broad areas, which are addressed during the Work Preparation programmes are the need to develop in one or more of the following areas:

Occupational decision-making

Job-finding behaviours

Job-keeping behaviours

Work-related Illness

Mr. Burstow: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions if he will estimate the percentage of people who attributed heart disease to work-related stress in the last year for which figures are available; and if he will make a statement. [196246]

Jane Kennedy: A survey of work-related ill-health in 2001–02 estimated that 80,000 people believed their heart disease, heart attack or circulatory problem was caused or made worse by their work. Information does exist on the number of people in the UK suffering from heart disease but the numbers are not directly comparable with estimates of ill-health and so it is not possible to provide a percentage figure.

Basic State Pension

Sir Archy Kirkwood: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions how many *(a)* men and *(b)* women in (i) the Scottish Borders, (ii) Scotland and (iii) the UK are entitled to the full basic State Pension. [198192]

Malcolm Wicks: The information is not available in the format requested. The information that is available is in the table.

Area	*Men*	*Women*
Great Britain	3,486,000	3,162,500
Scotland	305,500	307,100
Scottish Borders	7,900	7,700

Notes

1. Figures are taken from a 5 per cent. sample and are therefore subject to a high degree of sampling variation.

2. Data is rounded to the nearest hundred. Totals may not sum due to rounding.

3. Local authorities are assigned by matching postcodes against the relevant Office for National Statistics postcode directory.

4. A full basic State Pension, £77.45 in 2003–04, is paid to those who fully satisfy the contribution conditions either in their own right or where applicable, on the basis of their late or former spouse's contributions.

Source:

IAD Information Centre, 5 per cent. sample as at 31 March 2004.

TRADE AND INDUSTRY

Advantage West Midlands

Ross Cranston: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry when Advantage West Midlands was first informed of the possibility that they might no longer be able to account for assets on a portfolio basis but should value and account for assets on an individual basis. [198303]

Jacqui Smith: The National Audit Office first told Advantage West Midlands (AWM) along with all other RDAs of this issue in February 2004. However, the RDAs and the National Audit Office agreed that there should be no change in accounting treatment for the 2003–04 financial year, but that this change in accounting treatment should take effect from 1 April 2004.

Ross Cranston: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry (1) whether the projects and investments undertaken by Advantage West Midlands meet European state aid requirements; [198305]

(2) how much Advantage West Midlands will make available for revenue funding on new projects in *(a)* 2004–05 and *(b)* 2005–06 in (i) regeneration zones and (ii) elsewhere in the region; [198306]

(3) whether Advantage West Midlands is expected to meet key performance targets on *(a)* learning opportunities created, *(b)* jobs created and safeguarded, *(c)* new business created and attracted and *(d)* other areas in (i) 2004–05 and (ii) 2005–06; [198307]

(4) to which projects Advantage West Midlands has issued letters imposing claw-back requirements so that funding may be withheld or withdrawn even if schemes reach output performance targets. [198308]

Jacqui Smith: It has not proved possible to respond to my hon. and learned Friend in the time available before Prorogation.

Appointments

Gregory Barker: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what appointments her Department has made to *(a)* British Energy plc, *(b)* BNFL plc, *(c)* the Export Credits Guarantee Department, *(d)* Royal Mail plc and *(e)* the United Kingdom Atomic Energy Authority since June. [199173]

Ms Hewitt: It has not proved possible to respond to the hon. Member in the time available before Prorogation.

Batteries

Mr. Caton: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what assessment her Department has made of the impact of a total ban on the sale and use of nickel-cadmium batteries on employment in the United Kingdom. [199279]

Mr. Mike O'Brien: It has not proved possible to respond to the hon. Member in the time available before Prorogation.

Mr. Caton: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what assessment her Department has made of alternatives to nickel-cadmium batteries for uses that *(a)* require reliability and high discharge and charge rates and *(b)* need to operate at low temperatures. [199280]

Mr. Mike O'Brien: It has not proved possible to respond to the hon. Member in the time available before Prorogation.

Battery Directive

Mr. Martin Caton: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry if she will make a statement on the UK Government's position on the proposed new EU Battery Directive [COM(2003)723 final]. [199278]

Mr. Mike O'Brien: It has not proved possible to respond to the hon. Member in the time available before Prorogation.

BT

Linda Perham: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what action she will take to ensure that BT fulfils its obligation to provide an improved IPStream to DataStream migration process in the broadband market. [198016]

Mr. Mike O'Brien: It has not proved possible to respond to the hon. Member in the time available before Prorogation.

Business Angels

Mr. Bellingham: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry how much has been spent on promoting the business angel concept in each year since 1998 through *(a)* grants and *(b)* business angel networks. [195171]

Nigel Griffiths: The information is as follows:

(a) The Department has provided the following grant funding to the National Business Angels Network to help promote the business angel concept.

	Grant funding (£)
1998	50,000
1999	50,000
2000	340,000
2001	250,000
2002	147,000
2003	165,000
2004	140,500

(b) The Department has not provided any funding to business angels networks. These receive their funding from a variety of sources, including Regional Development Agencies, enterprise agencies and Business Links. We do not hold any information on how much has been spent by the business angels networks on promoting the business angel concept.

Business Regulation

Mr. Stephen O'Brien: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry pursuant to the answer of 26 October 2004, *Official Report*, column 1148W, on business regulation, which of the reviews were conducted by her Department; and what changes to legislation were proposed as a result of each review. [195578]

Nigel Griffiths: It has not proved possible to respond to the hon. Member in the time available before Prorogation.

Business Start-ups

Paul Farrelly: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what rules apply to *(a)* eligibility for and *(b)* payment of the Seed Corn Grant scheme; and whether the scheme is available to start-up businesses in (i) Newcastle-under-Lyme and (ii) Stoke-on-Trent. [195704]

Nigel Griffiths: The Business Innovation Centre in Stafford is in receipt of European Regional Development Funds to operate its Seed Corn Grant Scheme, which is available to start-up small businesses in the Objective 2 area of North Staffordshire. This includes both Newcastle-under-Lyme and Stoke-on-Trent. Basic eligibility is determined by the presence or proposed presence of a business in the qualifying area. Detailed criteria and advice on how to apply are available from the Business Innovation Centre.

Business Support

Malcolm Bruce: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry if she will list spending on *(a)* business support products and *(b)* administration by (i) the Small Business Service, (ii) other departmental support for small business and (iii) innovation within the departmental activity of commercial best practice and enterprise in each year since 1997. [197256]

Nigel Griffiths: It has not proved possible to respond to the hon. Member in the time available before Prorogation.

Malcolm Bruce: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry pursuant to the answer of 11 November 2004, *Official Report*, column 828W, on business support, what financial provisions her Department has made for subsidised consultancy in *(a)* Grant for Investigating an Innovative Idea and *(b)* Support to Implement Best Business Practice. [199220]

Nigel Griffiths: Financial provision to help small and medium enterprises to undertake subsidised consultancy projects to improve their competitiveness in the current financial year (2004–05) is:

(a) Grant for Investigating an Innovative Idea is—£1 million; and

(b) Support to Implement Best Business Practice—£8 million.

In both cases this includes the cost of a diagnostic process which helps the business develop its strategy and to formulate the right project.

Malcolm Bruce: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what financial provision her Department has made for funding *(a)* grants for research and development and *(b)* collaborative research and development business support products. [199230]

Nigel Griffiths: It has not proved possible to respond to the hon. Member in the time available before Prorogation.

Malcolm Bruce: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what funding each of the Knowledge Transfer Partner sponsors provided in the last year for which figures are available; and what each sponsor's criteria for funding are. [199231]

Nigel Griffiths: I have placed details of the funding of each of the Knowledge Transfer Partnership sponsors, together with the criteria, in the Libraries of both Houses.

Malcolm Bruce: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what *(a)* services and *(b)* products her Department offers to businesses to enable them to access best business practice; and what financial provision her Department has made for this in the current financial year. [199232]

Nigel Griffiths: Services to encourage and enable businesses to access and adopt best business practice are delivered through DTI business support products and the award winning website www.dti.gov.uk/bestpractice

The Access to Best Business Practice product raises awareness of best practice through the provision of best practice material including: hard copy and on-line publications; fact sheets; case studies; guides; and events promoting best practice. The Support to Implement Best Business Practice product provides SMEs with practical, tailored help to implement specific best practice solutions. It includes an in-depth diagnostic undertaken with a Business Link adviser that assess a company's performance.

We expect to spend £6 million on Access to Best Business Practice, and £8 million on Support to Implement Best Business practice in the current financial year.

Malcolm Bruce: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry how many Knowledge Transfer Partnerships have been part-funded by Government grant; and what the total cost of these grants was. [199233]

Nigel Griffiths: It has not proved possible to respond to the hon. Member in the time available before Prorogation.

Malcolm Bruce: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what Knowledge Transfer networks have been established; how much has been allocated for grants to support Knowledge Transfer networks; to which organisations; and what financial provision her Department has made for funding Knowledge Transfer networks in the current financial year. [199234]

Nigel Griffiths: Knowledge Transfer Networks were established as one of the ten DTI Business Support products at the launch of the Technology Strategy in April 2004. The assessment process of bids submitted for this call was completed on the 7 November.

Malcolm Bruce: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry how many loans have been guaranteed through the Small Firms Loan Guarantee Scheme since 1995 broken down by *(a)* region and *(b)* sector; and what the value of grants was in each case in each year. [199237]

Nigel Griffiths: It has not proved possible to respond to the hon. Member in the time available before Prorogation.

Keith Vaz: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry which businesses are involved in the Business Volunteer Mentoring Scheme; and what assessment she has made of the scheme's contribution to British enterprise. [199304]

Nigel Griffiths: It has not proved possible to respond to the hon. Member in the time available before Prorogation.

Mr. Stephen O'Brien: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what the *(a)* role, *(b)* membership, *(c)* date of inception and *(d)* resource budget are of the (i) Small Business Investment Task Force, (ii) Regional Industrial Development Board and (iii) DTI Business Board. [197970]

Nigel Griffiths: It has not proved possible to respond to the hon. Member in the time available before Prorogation.

Car Wise Scheme

Chris Ruane: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what assessment she has made of the Car Wise scheme; and if she will make a statement. [194678]

Jacqui Smith *[holding answer 1 November 2004]:* It has not proved possible to respond to the hon. Member in the time available before Prorogation.

Carbon Emissions

Mr. Bailey: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what the carbon dioxide emission levels were *(a)* in the UK and *(b)* in other EU member states at the latest date for which figures are available. [198197]

Mr. Mike O'Brien: It has not proved possible to respond to the hon. Member in the time available before Prorogation.

Norman Baker: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry when she will publish the latest revisions to her Department's forecasts for energy consumption and carbon emission levels for the UK in *(a)* 2010 and *(b)* 2020; and if she will make a statement. [197866]

Mr. Mike O'Brien: It has not proved possible to respond to the hon. Member in the time available before Prorogation.

Casinos

Miss Kirkbride: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what meetings *(a)* she, *(b)* her departmental Ministers and *(c)* departmental advisers and officials have held with representatives of (i) Sun City International, (ii) MGM Mirage, (iii) the Mandalay Resort Group, (iv) Kerzner International, (v) Las Vegas Sands Inc.,(vi) Harrah's Entertainment, (vii) Caesar's Entertainment and (viii) other foreign casino firms; what the (A) dates and (B) venues were of the meetings; and which individuals were present. [193721]

Ms Hewitt: It has not been possible to respond to the hon. Member in the time available before Prorogation.

Civil Partnership Bill

Mr. Donaldson: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry how many letters have been received by her Department since 5 March which oppose implementing the Civil Partnership Bill in Northern Ireland. [196441]

Ms Hewitt *[holding answer 9 November 2004]:* It has not proved possible to respond to the hon. Member in the time available before Prorogation.

Clear Skies Initiative

Mr. Weir: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry (1) how many grants were paid to Scottish-based companies under the Clear Skies Initiative in the last financial year; and what the value was; [194144]

(2) how many grants were paid under the Clear Skies Initiative in the last financial year; [194145]

(3) how many employees of Scottish based companies have been seconded to other companies under the Clear Skies Initiative in the last calendar year; [194146]

(4) how many Scottish based companies are taking part in the mentoring scheme under the Clear Skies Initiative; [194147]

(5) how many Scottish based companies are registered under the Clear Skies Initiative. [194148]

Mr. Mike O'Brien: The Clear Skies Initiative provides grants for homeowners and community groups in England, Wales and Northern Ireland. Grants for homeowners and community groups in Scotland are provided through a parallel scheme, the Scottish Community and Householder Renewables Initiative, which is the responsibility of the Scottish Executive.

In the financial year 2003–04, the Clear Skies Initiative offered 2,556 grants worth £1,541,750 under the householder stream and paid out on 1,923 grants worth £1,101,850. Under the community stream, the initiative offered 167 grants worth £3,365,057 and paid out on 27 worth £306,964.

The Clear Skies Initiative manages installer registration for the UK, including Scotland. There are currently (based on data available at 31 August 2004) 17 organisations in Scotland that are installer registered. It is the installer organisations that are registered and not individual employees or sub-contractors. The DTI does not monitor the secondment of individual employees from these installer organisations.

Based on data available at 31 August 2004, there are currently no Scottish based organisations being mentored. There are four organisations in Scotland that are approved to undertake a mentoring role (although this is voluntary). Other organisations from across England, Wales and Northern Ireland may also undertake a mentoring role for Scottish based organisations.

Coal

Mr. Clapham: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry how much solid fuel was provided to beneficiaries under the National Concessionary Fuel Agreement in the last year for which figures are available; what the cost was; how many beneficiaries were in receipt of cash in lieu of solid fuel under the Agreement; and what the cost was. [195703]

Mr. Mike O'Brien: It has not proved possible to respond to the hon. Member in the time available before Prorogation.

Collieries

Paddy Tipping: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what financial assistance has been made available to companies operating the Harworth and Welbeck collieries in the past five years; whether all such finance has been paid; what recent discussions she has held about the collieries' future; and if she will make a statement. [198529]

Mr. Mike O'Brien *[holding answer 17 November 2004]:* The following table sets out payments to UK Coal plc since 2000:

	UK coal operating aid scheme			*Coal investment aid*		
	Tranche 1	*Tranche 2*	*Total paid*	*Period 1*	*Period 2*	*Paid to date*
Total	52,988,500	22,011,500	75,000,000	37,464,853	13,985,116	5,072,407
Of which:						
Harworth	13,609,000	—	13,609,000	4,648,000	1,717,800	1,085,508
Welbeck	—	—	—	5,244,000	2,541,989	918,493

No substantive discussions have been held recently about the collieries' futures. UK Coal have advised us that both are "in review" following operationally difficult periods but hope that this will lead to the development of revised mining plans which will secure the future of both pits.

Companies Act

Mr. Stephen O'Brien: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what estimate she has made of the amount paid into court pursuant to the provision of section 430 (11) of the Companies Act 1985 in the last year; and what use the Government have made of these funds. [195645]

Jacqui Smith: Between November 2003 and the end of October 2004 there were approximately 25 cases where payments were made into court under the provisions of section 430 (11) of the Companies Act 1985. Payments into court involved approximately 7,550 individual dissentient shareholdings with an approximate total value of £1.5 million.

The funds are invested with the National Debt Commissioners as directed by the Administration of Justice Act 1982.

Mr. Stephen O'Brien: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what estimate she has made of the financial sum that has been paid into court pursuant to the provision of section 431 (11) of the Companies Act 1985 in the last year; and what use the Government have made of these funds. [195646]

Nigel Griffiths: It has not proved possible to respond to the hon. Member in the time available before Prorogation.

Construction Industry

Mr. Todd: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what assessment she has made of the frequency of Health and Safety inspection in the construction industry and the *(a)* choice and *(b)* sanctions against enforcement of breaches reported; and if she will make a statement. [195718]

Nigel Griffiths: It has not proved possible to respond to the hon. Member in the time available before Prorogation.

Consultants

Pete Wishart: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry how much expenditure her Department has incurred in each year since 2002 on employing external consultants to deal with the press and public relations of her Department; and if she will make a statement. [195462]

Ms Hewitt: It has not proved possible to respond to the hon. Member in the time available before Prorogation.

Corporate Sponsorship

Charles Hendry: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry if she will list the *(a)* conferences, *(b)* publications, *(c)* initiatives, *(d)* projects and *(e)* receptions organised by her Department which have received funding from outside commercial bodies, since May 1997, broken down by (i) funding body and (ii) amount paid. [196597]

Ms Hewitt: It has not proved possible to respond to the hon. Member in the time available before Prorogation.

COT3 Settlements

Helen Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what assessment she has made of the merits of amending the law so that unpaid COT3 settlements accrue interest on the same basis as awards made by an employment tribunal; and if she will make a statement. [194354]

Mr. Sutcliffe *[holding answer 28 October 2004]:* It has not proved possible to respond to the hon. Member in the time available before Prorogation.

Helen Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry (1) what estimate she has made of *(a)* the number of employment tribunal awards which remain unpaid and *(b)* the number of COT3 settlements which remain unpaid; and what the monetary value of awards was in the last three years; [194355]

(2) what estimate she has made of the cost to public funds of employment tribunal processes which resulted in an award which was not paid in the last three years. [194356]

Mr. Sutcliffe *[holding answer 28 October 2004]:* No statistics are available on the number of unpaid employment tribunal awards and COT3 settlements, and it is therefore not possible to estimate any contingent costs. However, DTI officials are working with DCA colleagues towards delivery of the DCA White Paper ('Transforming Public Services: Complaints redress and Tribunals') commitment to improve the enforceability of awards.

Departmental Advertising

Charles Hendry: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what the cost of *(a)* creative work, *(b)* media spend and *(c)* administration for her Department's advertising activity has been in each financial year since 1997–98, broken down by contractor. [197300]

Ms Hewitt: It has not proved possible to respond to the hon. Member in the time available before Prorogation.

Mr. Bellingham: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry how much her Department has spent on advertising posts in *(a)* 2002 and *(b)* 2003. [198733]

Ms Hewitt: When running recruitment campaigns, my Department uses the services of advertising agencies to place our advertisements and to seek appropriate media advice, depending on the nature of the post to be filled.

The recruiting management unit generally meet recruitment costs from their own delegated budgets and there are no centrally held records for advertising costs.

Departmental Contracts

Pete Wishart: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry which non-accounting and non-information technology external organisations which previously held contracts with her Department *(a)* won new contracts at the culmination of the existing contracts and *(b)* won new contracts after a period of inactivity with her Department in each of the past four years. [196900]

Ms Hewitt: This information is not held centrally and can be provided only at disproportionate cost.

Departmental IT

Brian White: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what percentage of the Department's *(a)* implemented and *(b)* planned computer systems use open source software; and what plans are in place to raise this level. [195666]

Ms Hewitt: It has not proved possible to respond to the hon. Member in the time available before Prorogation.

Departmental Policies

Jim Knight: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry if she will set out, with statistical evidence relating as closely as possible to the South Dorset constituency, the effects of changes to departmental policy since 1997 on the South Dorset constituency. [194966]

Jacqui Smith: It has not proved possible to respond to the hon. Member in the time available before Prorogation.

Drinking Water

Mr. Kidney: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what the position of the UK Government is in determining the European Union's policy regarding whether to include drinking water in the World Trade Organisation's negotiations on global trade. [192360]

Mr. Alexander: The European Union has requested a number of members of the World Trade Organisation to offer commitments under the General Agreement on Trade in Services (GATS) that provide for market access in relation to the provision of services related to the supply of water for human use.

Many people in developing countries lack access to clean drinking water and it is a Millennium Development Target to halve the number of people in this position by 2015. Many of these countries need assistance to provide the infrastructure required to meet this target. It is widely recognised that the private sector can have a role to play in this regard.

The EU's requests give developing countries the opportunity to consider whether guarantees of market access may enhance private sector participation. It is for governments to choose for themselves whether or not to open their water services to foreign suppliers. Nothing in GATS forces them to privatise or prevents them regulating appropriately.

The EU's requests reflect the collective interests of the EU and member states. The UK has not itself requested the inclusion of water services.

Economic Initiatives (Newcastle-under-Lyme)

Paul Farrelly: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry (1) what steps the Government have taken to help small businesses in Newcastle-under-Lyme since 1997; [198540]

(2) how many new businesses have *(a)* started up in and *(b)* relocated to Newcastle-under-Lyme since 1997. [198541]

Nigel Griffiths: It has not proved possible to respond to the hon. Member in the time available before Prorogation.

Paul Farrelly: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry (1) how many businesses have benefited from Regional Selective Assistance in Newcastle-under-Lyme since 1997; [198542]

(2) how much Regional Selective Assistance has been invested in Newcastle-under-Lyme since 1997. [198543]

Jacqui Smith: It has not proved possible to respond to the hon. Member in the time available before Prorogation.

Paul Farrelly: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry how much Newcastle-under-Lyme has received by way of European Objective 2 funding since 1997; and which projects have benefited there from such funding. [198544]

Mr. Alexander: It has not proved possible to respond to the hon. Member in the time available before Prorogation.

Electricity Supply

Mr. David Stewart: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what assessment she has made of the possibility of electricity blackouts due to lack of gas this winter. [199305]

Mr. Mike O'Brien: It has not proved possible to respond to the hon. Member in the time available before Prorogation.

Employment

Keith Vaz: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what estimate she has made of the number of jobs which *(a)* moved abroad from the UK and *(b)* were created in the UK in 2004. [197578]

Ms Hewitt: It has not proved possible to respond to the hon. Member in the time available before Prorogation.

Mr. Laws: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what her estimate is of the number of people in *(a)* Yeovil constituency, *(b)* South Somerset and *(c)* Somerset in work who are earning less than (i) the minimum wage, (ii) £5 per hour, (iii) £5.50 per hour, (iv) £6 per hour, (v) £6.50 per hour, (vi) £7.50 per hour and (vii) £10 per hour; and if she will make a statement. [191313]

Mr. Sutcliffe: It has not proved possible to respond to the hon. Member in the time available before Prorogation.

Employment Tribunals

David Taylor: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what measures are in place to ensure that companies make payments to former employees that are agreed by an employment tribunal. [199145]

Mr. Sutcliffe: It has not proved possible to respond to the hon. Member in the time available before Prorogation.

David Taylor: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what plans the Department has to ensure that employees given awards at employment tribunals against former employers who are subsequently declared bankrupt receive an award. [199240]

Mr. Sutcliffe: Former employees of insolvent employers can claim employment tribunal awards of redundancy payments, basic awards for unfair dismissal, protective awards and awards of other contractual debts such as unpaid wages, notice pay and outstanding holiday pay from Redundancy Payments Offices. All payments are subject to statutory limits. Amounts over the statutory limits can be lodged as debts in the insolvency.

Energy

Malcolm Bruce: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what Government programmes involve incentives for the use of heat generated from renewable sources; and what funding the Government have given to these programmes. [195939]

Mr. Mike O'Brien: It has not proved possible to respond to the hon. Member in the time available before Prorogation.

Malcolm Bruce: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry if she will develop a heat efficiency strategy for England and Wales. [195946]

Mr. Mike O'Brien: My right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs is responsible for matters relating to the efficient use of energy, including heat.

With respect to the generation of heat from renewable or low carbon sources, my Department is commissioning a study to assess the size and costs of the available resource.

Energy Supplies (Africa)

Mike Gapes: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what her assessment is of the potential development of energy supplies from sub-Saharan Africa. [R] [192609]

Mr. Mike O'Brien: According to BP's Statistical Review of World Energy 2004, sub-Saharan Africa has significant potential energy reserves, with around 4.2 per cent. of world oil reserves, 3.5 per cent. of world gas reserves and 5 per cent. of world coal reserves.

Energy Use (Public Sector)

Mr. Tynan: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry if she will make a statement on *(a)* trends in public sector energy usage over the last five years and *(b)* proposed trends in public sector energy usage over the next (i) five and (ii) 10 years. [197579]

Mr. Mike O'Brien: Use of energy within the public sector fell by 16 per cent. between 1998 and 2003. Projections for energy consumption in this sector indicate further reductions over the next 10 years.

Part E of the Sustainable Development Framework, published in February 2004, sets out the Government's aims for dealing with energy use in the Government Estate. The targets agreed for the central Government Estate are:

> to reduce absolute carbon, from reductions in fuel and electricity used in buildings on their estate, by 12.5 per cent. by 2010–11, relative to 1999–2000;
>
> to increase the energy efficiency of the buildings on their estate, measured in terms of kWh of (1) fuel and (2) electricity use per square metre of buildings floor area, or estate area, by 15 per cent. by 2010–11, relative to 1999–2000;
>
> to source at least 10 per cent. of electricity from renewable sources by 31 March 2008;
>
> to source at least 15 per cent. of electricity from Good Quality Combined Heat and Power by 2010;
>
> to include clauses to ensure opportunities are identified and measures taken for reducing carbon emissions and collecting energy data (by fuel type), as far as practical, in all estate management contracts initiated from August 2004;
>
> by March 2006 Government will develop a long-term strategy, up to 2020, for sourcing renewable energy on the Government Estate.

For the purposes of meeting the first target on absolute carbon reductions, all bought-in electricity—including from renewables and CHP—will be converted to carbon at the standard "grid" factor. (Carbon savings from renewables are attributed to the generators, so this procedure avoids double counting these savings.)

Additionally, there are targets for NHS bodies within England to reduce their level of primary energy consumption by 15 per cent. from March 2000 to March 2010.

Energy White Paper 2003

Llew Smith: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry if she will *(a)* list and *(b)* place copies in the Library of each paper on nuclear power officials of her Department prepared as part of the contribution to the Energy White Paper 2003. [198648]

Mr. Mike O'Brien: It has not proved possible to respond to the hon. Member in the time available before Prorogation.

EU Committees

Angus Robertson: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry (1) how many times during the Greek presidency of the EU the Advisory Committee on protection against dumped imports met; when and where these meetings took place; what UK Government expert was present; and if she will make a statement; [191592]

(2) how many times during the Greek presidency of the EU the Advisory Committee on protection against subsidised imports met; when and where these meetings took place; what UK Government expert was present; and if she will make a statement; [191593]

(3) how many times during the Greek presidency of the EU the Advisory Committee on common rules for exports of products met; when and where these meetings took place; what UK Government expert was present; and if she will make a statement; [191594]

(4) how many times during the Greek presidency of the EU the Quota Administration Committee met; when and where these meetings took place; what UK Government expert was present; and if she will make a statement; [191595]

(5) how many times during the Greek presidency of the EU the Advisory Committee on common rules for imports from certain third world countries met; when and where these meetings took place; what UK Government expert was present; and if she will make a statement; [191612]

(6) how many times during the Greek presidency of the EU the Committee on defence against obstacles to trade which affect the market of the Community or a non-member country met; when and where these meetings took place; what UK Government expert was present; and if she will make a statement; [191613]

(7) how many times during the Greek presidency of the EU the Textile Committee (conventional regime) met; when and where these meetings took place; what UK Government expert was present; and if she will make a statement; [191614]

(8) how many times during the Greek presidency of the EU the Committee on common rules for imports of textile products from certain third world countries (autonomous regime) met; when and where these meetings took place; what UK Government expert was present; and if she will make a statement; [191615]

(9) how many times during the Greek presidency of the EU the Advisory Committee for implementation of the Community market-access strategy met; when and where these meetings took place; what UK Government expert was present; and if she will make a statement; [191616]

(10) how many times during the Greek presidency of the EU the Advisory Committee on common rules for imports of products from third countries met; when and where these meetings took place; what UK Government expert was present; and if she will make a statement. [191596]

Mr. Alexander: The number of times that these Committees met is a matter for the EU Commission but if meetings had been called, these Committees would have met in Brussels and a UK Government representative would have attended. No statement is necessary on the workings or running of these Committees.

Angus Robertson: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry how many times during the Greek presidency of the EU the Committee for the harmonisation of credit insurance provisions for transactions with medium and long-term cover met;

when and where these meetings took place; what UK Government expert was present; and if she will make a statement. [191602]

Mr. Alexander: The Committee referred to meets only to consider a limited, number of issues. It did not meet during the Greek presidency.

During the Greek presidency, the European Council Working Group on Export Credits met five times in Brussels. Officials from ECGD were present.

Angus Robertson: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry (1) how many times during the Greek presidency of the EU the Advisory Committee on *(a)* State aid for the applications of Articles 92 and 93 of the EC Treaty to certain categories of horizontal State aid (exemption) and *(b)* State aid on the arrangements for applying Article 93 of the EC Treaty (procedure), met; when and where these meetings took place; which UK Government expert was present at each meeting; what (i) technical and (ii) financial issues were raised by the UK Government expert at each meeting; what recommendations each Committee produced during that period; what actions were (A) proposed and (B) taken by (1) the EU and (2) the UK Government as a result of each Committee's recommendations; and if she will make a statement; [196104]

(2) how many times during the Greek Presidency of the EU the Committee on the implementation of projects promoting co-operation and commercial relations between the European Union and the industrialised countries in North America, the Far East and Australasia met; when and where these meetings took place; what UK Government expert was present; and if she will make a statement; [191600]

(3) how many times during the Greek presidency of the EU the Standing Committee on technical rules and standards, including rules relating to information society services, met; when and where these meetings took place; which UK Government expert was present at each meeting; what *(a)* technical and *(b)* financial issues were raised by the UK Government expert at each meeting; what recommendations each Committee produced during that period; what actions were (i) proposed and (ii) taken by (A) the EU and (B) the UK Government as a result of each Committee's recommendations; and if she will make a statement; [194880]

(4) how many times during the Greek presidency of the EU the Management Committee on horizontal questions concerning trade in processed agricultural products not listed in Annex I met; when and where these meetings took place; which UK Government expert was present at each meeting; what *(a)* technical and *(b)* financial issues were raised by the UK Government expert at each meeting; what recommendations the Committee produced during that period; what actions were (i) proposed and (ii) taken by (A) the EU and (B) the UK Government as a result of the Committee's recommendations; and if she will make a statement; [194881]

(5) how many times during the Greek presidency of the EU the Committee for the adaption to technical progress of Directives on the removal of technical barriers to trade in the sector of detergents met; when and where these meetings took place; which UK Government expert was present at each meeting; what *(a)* technical and *(b)* financial issues were raised by the UK Government expert at each meeting; what recommendations the Committee produced during that period; what actions were (i) proposed and (ii) taken by (A) the EU and (B) the UK Government as a result of the Committee's recommendations; and if she will make a statement; [194882]

(6) how many times during the Greek presidency of the EU the Committee for the adaption to technical progress of Directives on the removal of technical barriers to trade in the sector of fertilisers met; when and where these meetings took place; which UK Government expert was present at each meeting; what *(a)* technical and *(b)* financial issues were raised by the UK Government expert at each meeting; what recommendations the Committee produced during that period; what actions were (i) proposed and (ii) taken by (A) the EU and (B) the UK Government as a result of the Committee's recommendations; and if she will make a statement; [194883]

(7) how many times during the Greek presidency of the EU the Committee for the adaptation to technical progress of directives on the removal of technical barriers to trade in the sector of lifting and mechanical handling appliances met; when and where these meetings took place; which UK Government expert was present at each meeting; what *(a)* technical and *(b)* financial issues were raised by the UK Government expert at each meeting; what recommendations the Committee produced during that period; what actions were (i) proposed and (ii) taken by the (A) EU and (B) UK Government as a result of the Committee's recommendations; and if she will make a statement; [194891]

(8) how many times during the Greek presidency of the EU the EC-China RTD Co-operation Steering Committee met; when and where these meetings took place; which UK Government expert was present at each meeting; what *(a)* technical and *(b)* financial issues were raised by the UK Government expert at each meeting; what recommendations the Committee produced during that period; what actions were (i) proposed and (ii) taken by (1) the EU and (2) the UK Government as a result of the Committee's recommendations; and if she will make a statement; [194901]

(9) how many times during the Greek presidency of the EU the EC-India RTD Co-operation Steering Committee met; when and where these meetings took place; which UK Government expert was present at each meeting; what *(a)* technical and *(b)* financial issues were raised by the UK Government expert at each meeting; what recommendations the Committee produced during that period; what actions were (i) proposed and (ii) taken by (1) the EU and (2) the UK Government as a result of the Committee's recommendations; and if she will make a statement. [194902]

Mr. Alexander: It has not proved possible to respond to the hon. Member in the time available before Prorogation.

EU Presidency (Greece)

Angus Robertson: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry how many times during the Greek presidency of the EU *(a)* the EC-Canada Joint Committee on scientific and technological co-operation, *(b)* the EC-Russia Joint Committee on scientific and technological co-operation and *(c)* the EC-Argentina RTD Co-operation Steering Committee met; when and where each meeting took place; which UK Government expert was present at each meeting; what (i) technical and (ii) financial issues were raised by the UK Government expert at each meeting; what recommendations the Committee produced during that period; what actions were (A) proposed and (B) taken by (1) the EU and (2) the UK Government as a result of the Committee's recommendations; and if she will make a statement. [194348]

Ms Hewitt: It has not proved possible to respond to the hon. Member in the time available before Prorogation.

Angus Robertson: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry how many times during the Greek presidency of the EU *(a)* the Advisory Committee for co-operation in the field of tourism, *(b)* the Committee on conformity assessment and surveillance of the telecommunications market and *(c)* the Advisory Committee for the transparency of measures governing the pricing of medicinal products for human use met; when and where each meeting took place; which UK Government expert was present at each meeting; what (i) technical and (ii) financial issues were raised by the UK Government expert at each meeting; what recommendations each Committee produced during that period; what actions were (A) proposed and (B) taken by (1) the EU and (2) the UK Government as a result of each Committee's recommendations; and if she will make a statement. [194351]

Ms Hewitt: The Telecommunication Conformity Assessment and Market Surveillance Committee established under Article 13 of the Radio Equipment and Telecommunications Terminal Equipment Directive (1999/5/EC) met once during the Greek presidency on 12 and 13 March 2003 in Brussels. The UK was represented by three officials from the Department of Trade and Industry and one from the Office of Telecommunications. At this meeting UK officials were involved in discussions on several different technical issues concerning the scope for regulation under the directive and free movement of compliant apparatus. No financial matters were discussed. The outcome of the meeting influenced application of the directive across member states.

EU Social Chapter

Mr. Stephen O'Brien: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry pursuant to her answer of 3 November 2004, *Official Report*, column 274W, on the EU Social Chapter, what method was used for calculating the *(a)* policy costs and *(b)* administrative costs to employers of providing rights under the Social Chapter. [198008]

Mr. Sutcliffe: It has not proved possible to respond to the hon. Member in the time available before Prorogation.

Export Credits Guarantee Department

Mr. Stunell: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what measures *(a)* her Department and *(b)* the Export Credits Guarantee Department (i) has undertaken and (ii) plans to undertake to comply with the Sustainable Energy (CHP Provisions) Order 2003. [194423]

Mr. Alexander: It has not proved possible to respond to the hon. Member in the time available before Prorogation

Mr. Arbuthnot: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry when she expects to announce revised anti-bribery guidelines within the rules which came into force on 1 May to be followed by the Export Credits Guarantee Department. [193443]

Mr. Alexander: Discussions with ECGD's customers and their representative bodies concerning the final form of these procedures are nearing their conclusion. Revised application forms will come into force thereafter.

Mr. Arbuthnot: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry (1) which companies and organisations her Department consulted in drawing up the original anti-bribery guidelines to be followed by the Export Credits Guarantee Department; [193444]

(2) what the results were of the consultation her Department conducted with interested organisations and companies to ascertain their views on the anti-bribery guidelines which came into force on 1 May. [193445]

Mr. Alexander: ECGD's original measures to combat bribery and corruption were the subject of formal consultation with a range of customers' trade associations prior to coming into force in September 2000. Customers and other organisations were informed of subsequent changes to the procedures on four occasions since then, most recently on 4 March 2004.

Following the introduction of revised procedures on 1 May 2004, ECGD and DTI officials have held discussions with interested parties who made representations about their implementation, with a view to resolving issues surrounding the details and practical application of aspects of its existing bribery and corruption procedures.

Mr. Arbuthnot: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry (1) what new forecasts she is conducting on the monetary impact of her revised anti-bribery guidelines on the volume of business supported by the Export Credits Guarantee Department; and when the results of those new forecasts will be made available; [193447]

(2) what forecasts *(a)* her Department and *(b)* the Treasury conducted which estimated the monetary impact of the anti-bribery guidelines which came into force on 1 May 2004 on the volume of business supported by the Export Credits Guarantee Department; and what the results of those forecasts were. [193446]

Mr. Alexander: No forecasts were made into the possible impact of ECGD's anti-bribery and corruption procedures on its future business volumes. These procedures were designed to further the Government's efforts to combat bribery and corruption without placing any undue burden on customers seeking ECGD's support. The current discussions with customers and their trade organisations are aimed at resolving issues surrounding the details and practical application of aspects of the existing anti-bribery and corruption procedures announced on 4 March 2004. The revised procedures emerging from this process will require customers applying for ECGD cover to provide information from sources, which should be readily available to them. They should thus have no material adverse impact on ECGD's future business volumes.

Mr. Godsiff: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry pursuant to the answer of 5 July 2004, *Official Report*, column 512W, to the hon. Member for Newcastle-upon-Tyne Central, on the Export Credits Guarantee Department, how much was paid under the Export Credits Guarantee Department to *(a)* Indonesia and *(b)* Zimbabwe; when the money was paid in each case; to which company; and for what project. [194124]

Mr. Alexander: A table, which will be placed in the Library, lists the amounts of defence claims authorised for payment and the financial year in which they were authorised for both Indonesia and Zimbabwe. It is not possible to provide a further breakdown of this information on a company or project basis as to do so could prejudice negotiations ECGD is having or will have about recovering debt.

Malcolm Bruce: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what assessment she has made of the impact of the revised anti-corruption procedures announced by the Export Credits Guarantee Department on 8 November on its capacity to combat bribery and corruption; and what the purpose of the revised procedure is. [198325]

Mr. Alexander *[holding answer 17 November 2004]*: ECGD has undertaken a detailed confidential comparison of its revised anti-bribery and corruption procedures with G7 counterparts. These confirm that the procedures announced by ECGD on 8 November are among the most rigorous and effective in use by any of the world's leading Export Credit Agencies.

The revised procedures are designed to:

Deter illegal payments, corrupt practices and money laundering by applicants for ECGD's support;

Ensure, as far as is practicable, that all transactions that ECGD supports are in compliance with all applicable laws, regulations and international agreements to which the UK is a party; and

In the event that wrongdoing arises, protect the UK taxpayer's financial interests.

Malcolm Bruce: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry how many applications for cover from MW Kellogg the Export Credits Guarantee Department has considered since October 2003. [198044]

Mr. Alexander: It has not proved possible to respond to the hon. Member in the time available before Prorogation.

Malcolm Bruce: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry (1) if she will list the guarantees issued to subsidiaries of Halliburton by the Export Credits Guarantee Department since 1 January 2003; and on what dates they were issued; [198045]

(2) how many applications for cover from Kellogg. Brown and Root the Export Credits Guarantee Department has considered since October 2003. [198046]

Mr. Alexander *[holding answers 15 November 2004]*: It has not proved possible to respond to the hon. Member in the time available before Prorogation.

Malcolm Bruce: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry which companies have made representations to her Department regarding the anti-corruption procedures brought into force by the Export Credits Guarantee Department on 1 May; and if she will place these representations in the Library. [195936]

Mr. Alexander *[holding answer 8 November 2004]*: It has not proved possible to respond to the hon. Member in the time available before Prorogation.

Export Support

Mr. Arbuthnot: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry pursuant to the answer of 16 September 2004, *Official Report*, column 1724W, on Export Support, on what date she raised the PSA indicator to 40 per cent.; and whether this announcement appears in the 2004 Spending Review. [195797]

Mr. Alexander: The current formulation for the PSA indicator related to new to export companies is

> "At least 30% of new-to-export firms assisted by UK Trade & Investment improve their business performance within 2 years."

The SR2004 settlement sets a suite of new performance indicators for the period 2005–06 to 2007–08. The figure of 30 per cent. will therefore increase to 40 per cent. with effect from 1 April 2005.

Mr. Arbuthnot: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry pursuant to the answer of 16 September 2004, *Official Report*, column 1724W, on Export Support, what level of trade development resources is focused on new-to-export firms. [195798]

Mr. Alexander: The level of identifiable trade development resource currently focused on new to export firms is in the order of 30 per cent. New to export firms also benefit from resources such as the UK Trade and Investment portal website, other forms of information giving services (such as the export market research scheme) and other schemes where there is currently no management information available to identify usage by new exporters rather than all exporters.

Fast Patrol Vessel Defender

Mr. Arbuthnot: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry (1) if her Department will investigate the circumstances surrounding the acquisition of the Fast Patrol Vessel Defender, which was donated by the Sultan of Oman to Lowestoft to support regional redevelopment; [194189]

(2) what efforts her Department has made to ascertain the *(a)* whereabouts and *(b)* condition of the Fast Patrol Vessel Defender from the time of its voyage from Oman; [194190]

(3) how much *(a)* EU and *(b)* Government funding has been made available for the Fast Patrol Vessel Defender since its donation to Lowestoft by the Sultan of Oman; and to whom these funds were made payable; [194191]

(4) what report her Department has received on the whereabouts of the Fast Patrol Vessel Defender. [194192]

Mr. Alexander *[holding answer 28 October 2004]*: EU funding of £58,728 was made available for a project to restore the vessel, from the European Regional Development Fund. The ERDF grant was paid to the Maritime Defence Museum (Lowestoft) Ltd. and to its successor company, Lowestoft Maritime Defence Museum Ltd. No Government funding has been made available.

The Government office for the East of England, in conjunction with my Department, is currently investigating the acquisition, whereabouts and condition of the vessel. Government office officials received progress reports during the project to restore the vessel and inspected it at the Isle of Wight in October 2001, and after arrival in Lowestoft in August 2002.

Fluorochemicals

Mr. George Osborne: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what assessment she has made of the impact of the rise in UK gas prices on UK manufacturers of fluorochemicals. [199171]

Mr. Mike O'Brien: It has not proved possible to respond to the hon. Member in the time available before Prorogation.

Freedom of Information Act

Mr. Randall: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what assessment she has made of the likely costs to her Department in the first quarter of 2005 of compliance with the provisions of the Freedom of Information Act 2000; and if she will make a statement. [199077]

Ms Hewitt: It has not proved possible to respond to the hon. Member in the time available before Prorogation.

Gambling

Miss Kirkbride: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what protocols are in place governing the attendance of her departmental officials at trade conventions promoting the interests of the foreign gaming industry. [193722]

Ms Hewitt: It has not been possible to respond to the hon. Member in the time available before Prorogation.

Miss Kirkbride: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry on what dates *(a)* Ministers and *(b)* officials in the Department have held meetings with representatives of the UK gambling industry to discuss proposed changes to legislation on gambling. [194515]

Ms Hewitt: It has not been possible to respond to the hon. Member in the time available before Prorogation.

Miss Kirkbride: To ask the Secretary of State fo Trade and Industry if she will list the overseas visi made by *(a)* Ministers and *(b)* officials in th Department in relation to proposed changes t legislation on gambling; what the itinerary was for eac visit; how long each visit lasted; which hotels were use what the cost was in each case; and how each visit wa funded. [19454

Ms Hewitt *[holding answer 1 November 2004]*: It ha not been possible to respond to the hon. Member in th time available before Prorogation.

Gas/Electricity Supplies

Malcolm Bruce: To ask the Secretary of State fo Trade and Industry if she will make a statement on th adequacy of gas supplies to meet peak gas deman during a *(a)* one in 20 winter day and *(b)* period o sustained cold weather in winter 2004–05. [19273

Mr. Mike O'Brien: In its Winter Outlook report published recently, National Grid Transco (NGT forecast that expected beach gas supplies, combine with supplies from the interconnector, LNG an storage, would be sufficient to meet demand in a average winter. If worse than average weather i experienced, or there are supply difficulties, then a effective demand side response would be needed from the market to balance any supply shortfall.

In the unlikely event of a prolonged, severe winter (one in 50 winter), NGT forecast that they would need a increased demand reduction to balance any suppl shortfall.

Gender Pay Gap

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what the average gap between men and women's pay is in *(a)* England and *(b)* the Buckingham constituency. [191059]

Mr. Sutcliffe: The information requested is as follows:

(a) In April 2004, women's mean hourly pay was 81.0 per cent. of men's hourly pay and median hourly pay for women was 85.2 per cent. of men's median hourly pay in England.

(b) In April 2004, women's mean hourly pay was 88.9 per cent. of men's mean hourly pay in the Buckingham constituency. Reliable median figures for the Buckingham constituency are not available.

Government Buildings (Disabled Access)

Tom Cox: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry whether all Government buildings in her Department within the Greater London area are fully accessible to disabled people; and if she will make a statement. [199311]

Ms Hewitt: It has not proved possible to respond to the hon. Member in the time available before Prorogation.

Hunterston A (Contaminated Soil)

Llew Smith: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry if she will estimate the volume of radioactively contaminated soil within the perimeter fence at the Hunterston A Nuclear Power Plant; what the identity of the contamination is and what its average activity is per cubic meter; what the source of the contamination was; when *(a)* the operator and *(b)* her Department first learned about the contamination; whether details about and volumes of the contaminated soil are to be included in the 2004 edition of the National Radioactive Waste Inventory; what plans have been made for the removal of the contaminated material; and what the estimated cost is for dealing with the contamination. [195737]

Mr. Mike O'Brien: It has not proved possible to respond to the hon. Member in the time available before Prorogation.

IAEA Conference

Mr. Key: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry (1) whether the Government was represented at the conference of the International Atomic Energy Agency in Beijing on 18 to 22 October; and if she will place in the Library the text of Government statements and submissions to the conference; [197786]

(2) whether the Government was represented at the conference of the International Atomic Energy Agency in Moscow in June; and if she will place in the Library the text of Government statements and submissions to the conference. [197787]

Mr. Mike O'Brien: It has not proved possible to respond to the hon. Member in the time available before Prorogation.

Industry

Mr. Wills: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what Government resources for support to industry, with particular reference to *(a)* staff and *(b)* direct financial investment, are invested in (i) the manufacturing sector, (ii) the services sector and (iii) agriculture. [196027]

Jacqui Smith: It has not been possible to respond to the hon. Member in the time available before Prorogation.

Inward Investment

Mr. Wiggin: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what research her Department has commissioned on projected foreign investment in the UK for 2005–06; and if she will make a statement. [197800]

Mr. Alexander: It has not proved possible to respond to the hon. Member in the time available before Prorogation.

IT Skills

Michael Fabricant: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what measures she proposes to take to ensure that the number of students who graduate from information technology courses reaches the levels that are needed by the IT industry as stated by the E-Skills UK and Gartner Consulting research published on 1s November. [197049]

Ms Hewitt: It has not proved possible to respond to the hon. Member in the time available before Prorogation.

Jaguar

Mr. Jim Cunningham: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what action is being taken to ensure that Ford's transfer pricing policies do not distort the financial position of Jaguar, with particular reference to the Browns Lane plant. [196498]

Jacqui Smith *[holding answer 9 November 2004]*: It has not proved possible to respond to my hon. Friend in the time available before Prorogation.

Legislation

Brian White: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what pieces of legislation passed in the last 30 years that the Department is responsible for remain to be brought into force, broken down by year of enactment. [195618]

Ms Hewitt: The information requested is shown in the following table.

Act	*Sections not yet in force*
Unsolicited Goods and Services (Amendment) Act1975	2(1)
Patents Act 1977	53(1) 60(4) 86 87
Estate Agents Act 1979	16 17 22
British Steel Act 1988	Schedule 2, Part II
Companies Act 1989	46 47(2)-(6) 48(3) 65(2) 92–107 128 133 138 140(7), (8) 142

Act	*Sections not yet in force*
	Schedule 13 Schedule 15 Schedule 16 Schedule 19, para 13
British Technology Group Act 1991	Schedule 2, Pt 1
Competition and Service (Utilities) Act 1992	17 23 36
Coal Industry Act 1994	22(2) Schedules, para 7, 29, 30, 45 Schedule 11, Pt IV
Arbitration Act 1996	85 86 87
Employment Rights Act 1996	Schedule 2, Pt II, para 16(1), 17(1), 18(1)
Competition Act 1998	1*(a)* Schedule 5, para 7 Schedule 6, para 7 Schedule 13, para 11 (except for the purpose of prescribing modifications to the Restrictive Trade Practices Act 1976)
Employment Rights (Dispute Resolution) Act 1998	4
National Minimum Wage Act 1998	2(1) (except so far as confers power to make subordinate legislation) 2(2)-(5), (7), (8) 3(1) 3(2) (except so far as confers power to make subordinate legislation) 3(3), (4) 4(1) (except so far as confers power to make subordinate legislation), (2) 9 41 42 49(9), (10) 51 Schedule 2, para 26
Petroleum Act 1998	Schedule 4 para 8, 11, 13, 34, 40 Para 11 Para 13
Employment Relations Act 1999	17 Schedule 7, para 4(6) Schedule 9, Pt 1 Schedule 8 Schedule 9, Pt 1,3 (repeal of Trade Union and Labour Relations(Consolidation) Act 1992, Schedule A1, para 163), 10 (repeals of or in Employment Rights Act 1996, Section 236, Schedule 1)
Electronic Communications Act 2000	1-6
Utilities Act 2000	20(7) 75
Employment Act 2002	28(2) 30(1), (2), (4) 44 47(3)
Enterprise Act 2002	70 Schedule 5, para 2*(c)* Schedule 6

Act	*Sections not yet in force*
	Schedule 9, para 8*(a)*
	Schedule 17, para 14, 59
	Schedule 19, para 8
Fireworks Act 2003	10
	14
	Schedule
Communications Act 2003	231(1), (2)*(c)*
	265
	266
	267
	268
	269
	270
	272
	273
	274
	299(1), (3), (4)
	300
	401
	409
	Schedule 6
	Schedule 12, para 5, 6
	Schedule 17, para 133(2)
Employment Relations Act 2004	1–28
	33–36
	39–41
	44–55
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Lending

Chris Ruane: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what plans she has to introduce legislation to prevent irresponsible lending by loan sharks; and if she will make a statement. [199244]

Mr. Sutcliffe: The Government will introduce the Consumer Credit Bill, when parliamentary time permits, to create a fair, clear competitive market which provides comprehensive protection for consumers.

It will do this, in part, by enhancing consumer rights and redress, replacing the current extortionate credit test with a more appropriate one of fairness. In addition, we will improve regulation of consumer credit businesses by strengthening the current licensing regime to keep rogue traders out of the market.

Manufacturing Industry

Mr. Bailey: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what the representation from manufacturing industry is on *(a)* the Health and Safety Commission and *(b)* the Better Regulation Task Force. [198196]

Nigel Griffiths: It has not proved possible to respond to the hon. Member in the time available before Prorogation.

Marine Energy Extraction

Nick Harvey: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry if she will place a copy of the Marine Currents Energy Extraction: Resource Assessment, Final Report, EU-Joule contract JOU2-CT93-00355 (1994-95) in the Library. [191987]

Mr. Mike O'Brien: The report originally identified in response to an earlier question was never published. However, we have arranged for the hon. Member to receive a more recent report[1] which sets out the conclusions and results of the earlier study.

A copy will also been placed in the Libraries of the House.

[1] Non Nuclear Energy Joule II Wave Energy Project Results.
The Exploitation of Tidal and Marine Currents
ISBN 92-827-5658-0

Maternity Leave (Yorkshire)

Hugh Bayley: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry how many women received paid maternity leave in *(a)* Yorkshire and the Humber and *(b)* the City of York in (i) 1997 and (ii) the latest year for which figures are available; and how much on average was paid in each year. [191173]

Jacqui Smith: It has not proved possible to respond to the hon. Member in the time available before Prorogation

Mersey Docks and Harbour Company

Mr. Kilfoyle: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry (1) whether the Government retains a golden share in the Mersey Docks and Harbour Company; [199262]

(2) what prerogatives of the Mersey Docks and Harbour Board over the Mersey littoral were transferred to the Mersey Docks and Harbour Company upon privatisation. [199263]

Ms Hewitt: It has not proved possible to respond to the hon. Member in the time available before Prorogation.

Midland Hotel, Morecambe

Geraldine Smith: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what progress has been made with the bid for funding for the Midland Hotel, Morecambe. [196433]

Jacqui Smith *[holding answer 8 November 2004]*: It has not proved possible to respond to the hon. Member in the time available before Prorogation.

Migrant Workers

Mr. Jenkin: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what the budget is for the Working Lives Institute's research project on migrant workers commissioned by the East of England Development Agency; what demand there has been for such research; and for what purpose the research results will be used. [195209]

Jacqui Smith: It has not proved possible to respond to the hon. Member in the time available before Prorogation.

Minimum Wage

Mr. Keith Bradley: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry how many people in Manchester, Withington have benefited from the National Minimum Wage since its introduction. [197875]

Mr. Sutcliffe: It has not proved possible to respond to the hon. Member in the time available before Prorogation.

Paul Farrelly: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry how many workers in Newcastle-under-Lyme she estimates to have benefited from the minimum wage. [198629]

Mr. Sutcliffe: It has not proved possible to respond to the hon. Member in the time available before Prorogation.

Mobile Phone Companies

Tim Loughton: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry which mobile phone companies have signed up to the 10 commitments; and what discussions she has held with those which have not. [197989]

Mr. Mike O'Brien: It has not proved possible to respond to the hon. Member in the time available before Prorogation.

Motor Mechanics

Chris Ruane: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what her assessment is of the procedures for *(a)* recruitment, *(b)* development and *(c)* assessment of mechanics in the UK motor servicing industry; and what measures are being taken to improve them. [199247]

Jacqui Smith: It is the responsibility of the UK retail motor industry sector's professional bodies, that is, the Retail Motor Industry Federation (RMIF) and Institute of the Motor Industry (IMI), amongst others, to lead in the development, training and assessment of mechanics and other technicians.

However, the Government are playing their part too. The DFES has funded a new sector skills council, Automotive Skills Limited (ASL), who are undertaking a strategic assessment of the strengths and weaknesses of both management and technician skills within the retail motor industry, and working with the RMIF and IMI and the other professional bodies within the sector in developing a strategy to raise standards in the industry and spread best practice.

Motorsport Industry

Brian White: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what discussions she has had to ensure that the high technological manufacturing associated with the motorsport industry remains in the UK. [195602]

Mr. Sutcliffe: It has not proved possible to respond to the hon. Member in the time available before Prorogation.

Nanotechnology

Mr. Tynan: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what steps she is taking to encourage nanotechnology research and development in the UK; and how such steps relate to EU support for nanotechnology research and development within the EU. [197566]

Ms Hewitt: It has not been possible to respond to the hon. Member in the time available before Prorogation.

Nuclear Fusion Reactor (France)

Mr. Drew: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what discussions she has held with her counterparts in the *(a)* French, *(b)* Russian and *(c)* Chinese Governments about the proposal to site a nuclear fusion reactor in the South of France; and what assessment she has made of the opportunities that such a proposal would afford to the British nuclear industry. [198731]

Mr. Mike O'Brien: The European Commission is negotiating with the international partners on behalf the member states. Official level discussions have taken place with the international fusion community on what the ITER (International Tokamak Experimental Reactor) programme might entail.

UKAEA, which manages the UK fusion programme, facilitates links between UK industry and ITER. This includes raising awareness of potential opportunities and informing the ITER design engineers of UK companies whose goods and services may be useful.

Offshore Licensing Regime (Gas)

Mr. Grogan: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what plans she has to review the offshore licensing regime for gas producers operating on the UK continental shelf with a view to bringing them within the regulatory remit of Ofgem. [198780]

Mr. Mike O'Brien: It has not proved possible to respond to the hon. Member in the time available before Prorogation.

Offshoring

Annabelle Ewing: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry pursuant to the answer of 19 October 2004, *Official Report*, column 649W, to the hon. Member for Glasgow, Anniesland (John Robertson), on offshoring, if she will place a copy of the evidence referred to in the Library. [193462]

Mr. Alexander: It has not proved possible to respond to the hon. Member in the time available before Prorogation.

Older Workers

Mr. Willetts: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what estimates she has made of the proportion of British firms that have no employees aged *(a)* over 60 years and *(b)* state pension age. [194819]

Jacqui Smith: The information is as follows:

(a) The Department of Work and Pensions (DWP) undertook an evaluation of the Code of Practice on Age Diversity in Employment. As part of the study, they asked employers for the age profile of their workforce, with emphasis on those aged 50 or over. The results of the survey, which was carried out three waves during the years 1999 to 2000, showed that about 43 per cent. of employers in Great Britain had no employees of 60 years and over.

(b) Although DWP did not report on the numbers of employers who had no employees aged over the state pension age, ONS figures show in September 2004 988,000 people in employment were over the state pension age. This represents a 24.7 per cent. rise on the April 1997 figure.

Outsourcing

John Robertson: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what estimate her Department has made of the financial benefits to the UK of outsourcing *(a)* manufacturing and *(b)* service sector jobs overseas. [197557]

Ms Hewitt: It has not proved possible to respond to my hon. Friend in the time available before Prorogation.

Parental Leave

Malcolm Bruce: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what estimate she has made of the value in terms of *(a)* wages and *(b)* saved childcare costs of statutory (i) paid maternity leave and (ii) paid paternity leave to workers in (A) the UK and (B) each region in the last year for which figures are available. [185322]

Mr. Sutcliffe: It has not proved possible to respond to the hon. Member in the time available before Prorogation

Parliamentary Questions

Paul Farrelly: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry when she expects to answer the Questions *(a)* 195698 and *(b)* 195704 tabled by the hon. Member for Newcastle-under-Lyme for named day answer on 4 November. [198514]

Nigel Griffiths *[holding answer 16 November 2004]:* I refer the hon. Member to the answer I gave on 17 November 2004, *Official Report,* columns 1615–16W, and UIN195704 which has been answered today.

Performance Targets

Mr. Stephen O'Brien: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what measurable progress her Department has made towards meeting its Public Service Agreement target *(a)* to raise the rate of UK productivity growth over the economic cycle, *(b)* to improve UK competitiveness and *(c)* to narrow the productivity gap with the US, France and Germany. [198509]

Ms Hewitt: HM Treasury estimates set out in Budget 2004 show that the trend rate of underlying productivity growth has increased from 2.22 per cent. per annum between 1986 Q2 and 1997H1 to 2.65 per cent. per annum between 1997H1 and 2001 Q3. Trend productivity growth is projected to be 2.35 per cent. per annum between 2001 Q4 and 2006 Q4.

Data from the Office of National Statistics (ONS) published in autumn 2004 shows that, on the output per hour worked measure, the UK has narrowed the gap with Germany since 2000 but a sizeable productivity gap with the US, France and Germany remains. On the output per worker measure, the UK's productivity gap with the US, France and Germany is broadly unchanged, though the UK is as productive as Germany on this measure. Comparisons are relative to a 2000 base year when all four countries were at a similar point in their economic cycles.

However, it takes time to raise competitiveness and increase productivity. Consequently, in assessing progress towards raising productivity, it is reasonable to look for changes in the drivers of productivity. The Government have identified "five drivers" of productivity—investment, innovation, skills, enterprise and competition— and has monitored performance on a range of productivity and competitiveness indicators underlying these drivers since 1999. Some progress has been made on all five of these "high-level" drivers. In particular, there have been improvements in the competition regime, evidence of rising skills levels across the workforce and improvements in the UK's world-class science base. The Government are continuing to invest in these areas through the Skills Strategy, the Innovation Report and DTI's Five Year Programme.

Photofinishing

Mr. Dismore: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what estimate she has made of how many people are employed *(a)* permanently and *(b)* seasonally in the mail order photofinishing industry. [197524]

Mr. Sutcliffe: It has not proved possible to respond to the hon. Member in the time available before Prorogation.

Plutonium Transport Ships

Norman Baker: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry whether the transport ships, Pacific Teal and Pacific Pintail were operating on Government service in the recent movement of plutonium from the US to France. [197862]

Mr. Mike O'Brien: It has not proved possible to respond to the hon. Member in the time available before Prorogation.

Norman Baker: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what the cost was in *(a)* investigations and *(b)* administration to the UK Government in preparation for the transport of plutonium from the United States to France aboard the Pacific Teal and Pacific Pintail. [197863]

Mr. Mike O'Brien: It has not proved possible to respond to the hon. Member in the time available before Prorogation.

Norman Baker: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what role the UK Government played in *(a)* reviewing and *(b)* approving the security arrangements provided by the United States and France for the transport of plutonium from the United States to France aboard the Pacific Teal and Pacific Pintail. [197864]

Mr. Mike O'Brien: It has not proved possible to respond to the hon. Member in the time available before Prorogation.

Norman Baker: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what liability was agreed by the Office of Civil Nuclear Security in respect of the shipment of plutonium from the United States to France aboard the Pacific Teal and Pacific Pintail. [197865]

Mr. Mike O'Brien: It has not proved possible to respond to the hon. Member in the time available before Prorogation.

Polluter Pays Policy

Geraldine Smith: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry whether the polluter pays policy has been applied to the Luneside East development in Lancashire. [196432]

Jacqui Smith *[holding answer 8 November 2004]:* It has not proved possible to respond to the hon. Member in the time available before Prorogation.

Post Office

Annabelle Ewing: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what timetable has been established to draw down the balance of £24.6 million in respect of improvement investment grants to Post Office Limited. [193292]

Mr. Sutcliffe: It has not been possible to respond to the hon. Member in the time available before Prorogation.

Malcolm Bruce: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry (1) how many post offices have received payments under the Urban Investment Programme; and what the average payment has been to each post office; [198890]

(2) what the average compensation payment has been to sub-postmasters leaving the business in *(a)* each constituency and *(b)* each region under the Urban Reinvention Programme; [198891]

(3) what proportion of the urban population lived within one mile of a post office or sub-post office in *(a)* the United Kingdom, *(b)* each constituency and *(c)* each region at the most recent date for which information is available; [198893]

(4) how many post offices in *(a)* each constituency and *(b)* each region were recommended for closure under the Urban Reinvention Programme; how many were (i) opposed by and (ii) approved by Postwatch; how many (A) closed and (B) remained open after public consultation; and how many were saved from closure on appeal by Postwatch. [198894]

Mr. Sutcliffe: Implementation of the urban post office network programme is an operational matter for Post Office Ltd. I have therefore asked the Chief Executive to respond direct to the hon. Member.

Malcolm Bruce: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry how much funding under the Urban Investment Programme for post offices remains to be spent; and what timetable has been established to draw down the balance in respect of improvement investment grants to Post Office Ltd. [198892]

Mr. Sutcliffe: Operation of the urban reinvention programme, including consideration of applications from subpostmasters for investment grant funding, is a matter for Post Office Ltd. The Department has not imposed a timetable for the use of this funding. It was always anticipated that there would be some time lag between closure decisions being announced and take up of investment grant funding. Post Office Ltd is now beginning to see take up of this increase and expects further increases as the restructuring of the network continues and subpostmasters become more confident about their future prospects. Post Office Ltd has devoted additional resources to establish a separate team dedicated to promoting and supervising the implementation of investment required to upgrade remaining offices and fully expects to utilise the £30 million available. To date, the DTI has paid £5,448,897 to Post Office Ltd under the urban reinvention programme for investment grant funding.

Mr. Drew: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what discussions she has had with the Post Office on its definition of rurality. [198972]

Mr. Sutcliffe: Ministers and officials of the Department meet frequently with Post Office Ltd to discuss a wide range of post office issues. The classification of a post office branch as urban or rural is an operational matter for Post Office Ltd. The broad definition of 'rural' used by the Post Office applies to communities of up to 10,000 people, the Countryside Agency definition. The company has carried out detailed planning to establish which of its branches serve either rural or urban areas and has specially developed a sophisticated geographical mapping computer model, which measures population in terms of contiguous or very close agglomeration. Thus where a number of villages or small communities adjoin each other or adjoin a larger town, and the aggregate population of the area exceeds 10,000, the model reflects that fact and classifies it as urban. Post Office Ltd has adopted a consistent approach nationally to classifying the entire post office network.

Malcolm Bruce: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry how much of the subsidy to the rural post office network has been allocated to *(a)* Post Office Ltd. infrastructure, *(b)* fixed payments to sub-postmasters and *(c)* the development of new methods of delivering post office services in rural areas since the subsidy was introduced. [199238]

Mr. Sutcliffe: Of the £450 million a year made available for the financial years 2003–04, 2004–05 and 2005–06, £198 million has been allocated to fund fixed payments to sub-postmasters, £227 million has been allocated to fund the costs incurred by Post Office Ltd. in providing the support services that underpin sub-post offices, and £25 million has been allocated to a flexible fund to meet the cost of pilot activity to test new and innovative ways of delivering services in a more sustainable way.

Details of the allocations for the £300 million extended funding announced on 16 September (covering 2006–07 and 2007–08) have not yet been decided.

Malcolm Bruce: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what new methods of delivering Post Office services have been funded from the subsidy paid to support the rural post office network. [199239]

Mr. Sutcliffe: A wide range of pilot activities has been funded by Post Office Ltd. from the flexible fund element of the subsidy paid to support the rural post office network.

The business has focused its attention on three broad issues in its pilot work to date. These are network shape (getting the right type of outlet in the right location), infrastructure (adapting IT, communication and other systems to make them flexible enough to cater for new ways of delivering services), and developing new revenue streams for rural sub-postmasters.

The work on network shape includes trials of "hub and spoke" solutions involving a sub-postmaster visiting a number of locations at set times each week, partnerships to make part-time post office services available from pubs, tourist information centres and libraries, and a community bus initiative to take people to a post office in a nearby village.

The work on infrastructure includes trials of new ways to connect the Horizon IT equipment used by sub-postmasters to the network, including the connection of mobile post offices, testing of "weigh and vend" equipment for postal services, and testing mobile solutions for banking services and cash points.

The work on increasing revenue for rural sub-postmasters has includes the-pro vision of "A-Frames" for advertising the presence of the branch, special marketing packs to promote new banking, financial and travel services, and partnerships with the police to make some police services accessible through rural post offices establishing an additional income stream for sub-postmasters.

Postal Services (Blind People)

Mr. Laurence Robertson: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what discussions she has had with the Post Office about the continuance of the free postal service for people who are blind; and if she will make a statement. [195504]

Mr. Sutcliffe *[holding answer 2 November 2004]:* It has not proved possible to respond to the hon. Member in the time available before Prorogation.

Premium Rate Dialler Programmes

Mr. Stringer: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what measures she intends to take to protect the public from the unwanted installation of premium rate dialler programmes on computers connected to the internet; and if she will make a statement. [197934]

Mr. Mike O'Brien *[holding answer 15 November 2004]:* It has not proved possible to respond to the hon. Member in the time available before Prorogation.

Premium Rate Phone Industry

Linda Perham: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what plans she has to *(a)* review and *(b)* amend the regulation of the premium rate telephone industry. [197843]

Mr. Mike O'Brien: It has not proved possible to respond to the hon. Member in the time available before Prorogation.

Product Safety

Malcolm Bruce: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry pursuant to the answer of 19 October 2004, *Official Report*, column 644W, on product safety, what the issues are which have given rise to the delay in the transposition of the General Product Safety Directive 2001/95/EC. [197119]

Mr. Sutcliffe: It has not proved possible to respond to the hon. Member in the time available before Prorogation.

Publishing

Paul Holmes: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what plans the Government have to make available funds for pilot projects to assess the best method by which publishers and the voluntary sector can share resources and expertise to make more titles available in accessible formats more promptly for people with reading disabilities. [198015]

Jacqui Smith: It has not proved possible to respond to the hon. Member in the time available before Prorogation.

PV Technology

Mr. David Stewart: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what assessment she has made of the future of photovoltaic (PV) technology within the UK energy market; and what plans she has to promote the use of PV technology. [198063]

Mr. Mike O'Brien: It has not proved possible to respond to the hon. Member in the time available before Prorogation.

Radioactive Waste

Llew Smith: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what information she has received from the Committee on Radioactive Waste Management in respect of its work in compiling a national inventory of radioactive waste. [197208]

Mr. Mike O'Brien: It has not proved possible to respond to the hon. Member in the time available before Prorogation.

Regulations

Mr. Redwood: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry (1) what her latesf estimate is of the costs to business in a year of compliance with all the regulations imposed by her Department; [196567]

(2) what the aggregate annual cost to business is of regulations imposed by her Department, using the figures in the relevant regulatory impact assessments, since 1997; [196566]

(3) which regulations have to be complied with to set up a small company running a restaurant, where the buildings need to be adapted; [196568]

(4) which regulations need to be satisfied by a small business setting up new premises to trade as a financial adviser. [196569]

Nigel Griffiths: It has not proved possible to respond to the right hon. Member in the time available before Prorogation.

Regulatory Impact Assessments

Mr. Stephen O'Brien: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what the reference numbers are for the regulatory impact assessments for the major pieces of legislation affecting business introduced by her Department since 1997. [197880]

Nigel Griffiths: It has not proved possible to respond to the hon. Member in the time available before Prorogation.

Renewable Energy

Mr. David Stewart: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry how much money the UK

Government has spent on *(a)* solar and *(b)* wind powered forms of renewable energy since 2001; and if she will make a statement. [198064]

Mr. Mike O'Brien: It has not proved possible to respond to the hon. Member in the time available before Prorogation.

Renewables Obligation

Mr. Drew: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry if, in her review of the Renewables Obligation, she will take account of the impact on Renewable Obligation Certificate trading of companies which have defaulted on their payments because of *(a)* insolvency and *(b)* other factors; and what additional (i) incentives and (ii) sanctions are being considered to make the scheme more effective. [197900]

Mr. Mike O'Brien: It has not proved possible to respond to the hon. Member in the time available before Prorogation.

Mr. Drew: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry if she will publish the submissions made *(a)* to her in advance of her review of the Renewables Obligation and *(b)* to the review. [197901]

Mr. Mike O'Brien: It has not proved possible to respond to the hon. Member in the time available before Prorogation.

Research

Mr. Dawson: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry how the *(a)* impact and *(b)* success of basic research in the UK is being assessed; and how it will be assessed in the future. [195505]

Ms Hewitt: It has not proved possible to respond to the hon. Member in the time available before Prorogation.

Mr. Dawson: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what measures are being taken *(a)* to prevent the best young scientists from leaving (i) research and (ii) the UK and *(b)* to attract young scientific talent from abroad. [195506]

Ms Hewitt *[holding answer 3 November 2004]*: It has not proved possible to respond to the hon. Member in the time available before Prorogation.

Royal Mail

Mr. Dismore: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what assessment she has made of the impact on the greetings card industry of the Royal Mail's proposals to move to size-based pricing. [197522]

Mr. Sutcliffe: It has not proved possible to respond to the hon. Member in the time available before Prorogation.

Mr. Dismore: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what assessment she has made of the impact of the Royal Mail's proposals for size-based pricing on the mail order photofinishing industry. [197527]

Mr. Sutcliffe: It has not proved possible to respond to the hon. Member in the time available before Prorogation.

Second-hand Clothing Exports (Africa)

Mr. Simmonds: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what discussions have taken place with UK charities regarding the future of second-hand clothing exports to Africa; and what assessment has been made of the impact of this trade on clothing manufacture in Africa. [198262]

Mr. Alexander: Neither UK Trade and Investment nor DTI Clothing and Textiles team are aware of any discussions having taken place with UK charities regarding the future of second-hand clothing exports to Africa, neither are we aware of any assessment having been made of this impact on clothing manufacture.

Select Committee Recommendations

Mr. Allen: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry how many recommendations by parliamentary Select Committees have been adopted by her Department since June 2001. [197770]

Ms Hewitt: Select Committee reports are given very careful consideration by the Department's Ministers. Since June 2001, several committees of both Houses have made recommendations on matters for which the Department of Trade and Industry is responsible. Select Committee reports and their responses are a matter of public record.

Sellafield Mox Plant

Mr. Chaytor: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what the output is to date of the Sellafield Mox Plant in terms of *(a)* quantity of mox fuel produced, *(b)* the number of mox pellets produced, *(c)* the number of fuel rods produced and *(d)* the number of fuel assemblies produced; what percentage of the total capacity of the plant this output represents; what the planned output is for each of the next five years; and if she will make a statement on the future operating arrangements of the plant. [199282]

Mr. Mike O'Brien: It has not proved possible to respond to the hon. Member in the time available before Prorogation.

Shareholder Executive

Gregory Barker: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry pursuant to her reply of 26 October 2004, *Official Report*, column 1152W, on the Shareholder Executive, if she will list the organisations with which the Shareholder Executive consults on a regular basis. [199172]

Ms Hewitt: It has not proved possible to respond to the hon. Member in the time available before Prorogation.

Gregory Barker: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what bonus scheme applies to the directors of the Shareholder Executive. [199174]

Ms Hewitt: It has not proved possible to respond to the hon. Member in the time available before Prorogation.

Gregory Barker: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry when the contract of the chief executive of the Shareholder Executive expires; and what contractual agreement applies to an early departure. [199175]

Ms Hewitt: It has not proved possible to respond to the hon. Member in the time available before Prorogation.

Gregory Barker: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry pursuant to her reply of 26 October 2004, *Official Report*, column 1150W, on the Shareholder Executive, if she will make a statement on the nature of the clearly defined policy framework by which she will assess the Shareholder Executive. [199176]

Ms Hewitt: It has not proved possible to respond to the hon. Member in the time available before Prorogation.

Gregory Barker: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry if the Shareholder Executive will publish an annual report of its performance. [199177]

Ms Hewitt: It has not proved possible to respond to the hon. Member in the time available before Prorogation.

Gregory Barker: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what steps she has taken to provide the Shareholder Executive with appropriate policies regarding *(a)* working practices and *(b)* conflict of interest management; and what plans she has to develop the Shareholder Executive's corporate governance structure incorporating (i) public sector monitoring, (ii) mission oversight and (iii) procedural auditing. [199178]

Ms Hewitt: It has not proved possible to respond to the hon. Member in the time available before Prorogation.

Tariffs (USA)

John Robertson: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what discussions she has had with the US Administration in connection with reductions in tariffs and other trade barriers. [197479]

Mr. Alexander: It has not proved possible to respond to my hon. Friend in the time available before Prorogation.

Telecommunications

Mr. Allan: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry whether her Department has held recent discussions with the Office of the Deputy Prime Minister on the impact of non-domestic rates on the Government's policy for a competitive market in telecommunications. [195850]

Mr. Mike O'Brien: The independent rates review on the impact of non-domestic rating on the telecommunications sector, which is being held by the Broadband Stakeholders Group (BSG), includes representatives from DTI and the Valuation Office Agency (VGA), the latter representing the interests of the agency and ODPM.

Mr. Allan: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry whether her Department has carried out analysis of the impact of the non-domestic propert rating system on the development of a competitive telecommunications market. [195851]

Mr. Mike O'Brien: It has not proved possible to respond to the hon. Member in the time available before Prorogation.

Television

Brian White: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what steps she is taking to ensure there is a competitive market in television provision to residential customers *(a)* between infrastructure providers and *(b)* within each infrastructure provision. [199206]

Mr. Mike O'Brien: It has not proved possible to respond to the hon. Member in the time available before Prorogation.

Utilities

Mr. Weir: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what steps she will take to protect those on lower incomes from the effects of recent increases in gas and electricity prices; and if she will make a statement. [199212]

Mr. Mike O'Brien: I am working with the industry, Ofgem, Energywatch and the caring and voluntary organisations to ensure that customers on lower income are aware, and take advantage, of the significant reductions that can be made to energy bills by transferring supplier, using the cheapest and simplest payment methods, installing energy efficiency measures and accessing social programmes, such as Warm Front.

Wind Farms

Mr. David Stewart: To ask the Secretary of State fo Trade and Industry what steps she is taking in respect o charges for connecting major wind farm projects to th national grid; and if she will make a statement. [198054

Mr. Mike O'Brien: It has not proved possible t respond to the hon. Member in the time availabl before Prorogation.

HEALTH

Cold Weather Mortality

Mr. Hepburn: To ask the Secretary of State for Healt what action is being taken to reduce the number of winte deaths of pensioners due to cold weather. [19922

Dr. Ladyman: There are four main strands to th efforts nationally to reduce avoidable winter deaths:

Immunisation of older people against influenza an pneumococcal disease.

Increasing awareness among older people of the risks of co weather, and the benefits and other help available to ke homes warm.

The national fuel poverty strategy.

Improving our ability to link the forecasting of cold weather with measures designed to prevent people from becoming ill, as well as to improve the ability of the health service to plan for surges in demand, especially for hospital admission.

Winter fuel payments are significant, well-timed payments that are part of the Government's strategy on eradicating fuel poverty. They provide help for older households towards their winter fuel bills. Households with someone aged 60 or over receive £200 and those with someone aged 80 or over receive £300. They provide help for older people to heat their homes adequately during the coldest months without being fearful of the ability to meet the extra cost. The majority of payments are made by Christmas.

In addition to the winter fuel payment, customers receiving pension credit, who are not in a care home, are eligible to receive cold weather payments. Cold weather payments are made when the average temperature at a particular weather station is recorded as, or is forecast to be, zero degrees Celsius or below over seven consecutive days. Every residential postcode in the country is linked to one of the 73 weather stations used in the scheme. When a period of cold weather occurs, or is forecast, then payments to qualifying customers in receipt of pension credit are made automatically. The amount paid is £8.50 for each period of cold weather.

A target for influenza vaccination in those aged 65 and over has been set since the change in policy in 2000–01.

In 2000–01, the target was 60 per cent., in 2001–02 65 per cent, and in 2002–03; and 2003–04, 70 per cent. Uptake achieved has been 65 per cent., 68 per cent., 69 per cent, and 71 percent. respectively.

The number of people aged 65 and over receiving their flu immunisation this year was 5,781,440—over 295,000 more people than last year. This year's result is an excellent achievement and exceeds our target of 70 per cent. set at the start of the campaign.

The joint committee on vaccination and immunisation (JCVI) has recommended extending pneumococcal immunisation to all aged 65 years and over.

The new policy is to offer immunisation with pneumococcal polysaccharide vaccine to all people aged 65 years and over. However, we are introducing the policy in stages. To start with, people aged 80 and over, who are most at risk from pneumococcal disease, will be offered the vaccine in 2003–04. They will be followed by all those aged 75 and over in 2004–05. By 2005–06, all those aged 65 and over should routinely be offered pneumococcal vaccine.

People under these ages who are at higher risk from pneumococcal disease are already recommended to receive the vaccine. This includes people who have a heart condition, chronic lung disease, diabetes mellitus, a weakened immune system due to disease or treatment, a damaged spleen or no spleen.

We will be collecting data on the number of people receiving their pneumococcal vaccination, but this will not be available until after April 2004.

A "Keep Warm, Keep Well" campaign operates in England each winter. This provides free booklets for the public and special literature for health professionals; a telephone helpline, and advice on how those most in need may apply for grants, such as the Warm Front grant—a scheme providing grant for comprehensive packages of insulation and heating improvements for those on low incomes most vulnerable to cold-related ill health; advice on benefit payments, as well as the health benefits of keeping warm.

The relationship between indoor temperatures and ill health is complex, with other factors such as outside exposure and behavioural factors involved. However, the likelihood of ill health is increased by cold damp homes. Illnesses such as influenza, heart disease and strokes are all exacerbated by the cold and older people are especially vulnerable.

The Department is working together with other Government Departments to reduce the number of households in fuel poverty. Good progress has already been made, with the number of fuel-poor households falling from approximately 5.5 million in 1996 to about 3 million in 2001, with predictions of a further reduction of 0.5 million for 2002.

Health professionals within the national health service have been made fully aware of fuel poverty as a potential health determinant and have been widely encouraged to identify and advise patients for whom cold, damp home conditions might be a health risk.

At the local level, fuel poverty is on the agenda of many health professionals in delivering fuel poverty initiatives and fuel poverty has been identified as a key priority within the health inequalities programme for action.

Her Majesty's Treasury funding was made available up to April 2003 to allow some exploratory work, led by the Meteorological Office, to develop models to forecast workload for primary and secondary care, built in part on weather forecasting. The evaluation of this exploratory work was inconclusive. Preliminary discussions are currently under way between the NHS, the Department and the Meteorological Office to determine next steps and in particular whether it is possible to:

Refine the approaches taken to preventative interventions, targeted in time and place so as to gain maximum benefit for patients before they fall ill.

Manage NHS workload more proactively than at present, so that services, including hospitals, are better placed to manage surges in demand, particularly for hospital admission.

Mobile Telephones

Chris Ruane: To ask the Secretary of State for Health when the Mobile Telephone Health Research Programme will report; whether there are interim findings; and if he will make a statement. [199301]

Miss Melanie Johnson: 29 projects have received support either directly under the mobile telecommunication and health research (MTHR) programme or its adjunct funding arrangements. Six of these have been completed and were announced at the MTHR research seminar in London on 10 November. The programme encourages publication in open peer-reviewed scientific journals.

Published papers and brief summaries of the individual projects are routinely posted on the MTHR we site at www.mthr.org.uk.

Residential Drug Treatment

Dr. Iddon: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what the average waiting time is between someone requesting residential drug treatment and *(a)* funding becoming available and *(b)* a bed becoming available if the treatment is privately funded was in the latest period for which figures are available. [198942]

Miss Melanie Johnson: Information on waiting times for residential drug treatment funded privately is not collected centrally.

As far as residential drug treatment funded publicly, the average waiting time between assessment as being in need of residential rehabilitation and entering residential rehabilitation is three weeks[1].

[1] At June 2004.

Dr. Iddon: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what proportion of people accessing residential drug treatment do so *(a)* as part of a community order, *(b)* through the criminal justice system and *(c)* voluntarily. [198933]

Miss Melanie Johnson: The total percentage of people accessing all drug treatment through criminal justice referral routes—arrest referral, drug treatment and testing orders, youth offending teams, probation and counselling, assessment, referral and throughcare—was 17 per cent. in 2003–04[1].

The remaining 83 per cent. accessed treatment by non-criminal justice system roots, including: other drug services (national health service and non-statutory agencies); general practitioners; self-referral; accident and emergency; needle/syringe exchange; psychiatry; community care assessment and employment services.

However, the figure of 83 per cent. may contain some people referred through criminal justice sources who have presented at a treatment service without indicating that they have come into treatment through a criminal justice referral.

[1] Source—National drug treatment monitoring system data.

Dr. Iddon: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many residential drug treatment centres are specifically for young people; and if he will make a statement on what steps his Department is taking to tackle young people misusing drugs, with particular reference to those in contact with the criminal justice system. [198934]

Miss Melanie Johnson: It has not been possible to respond to the hon. Member in the time available before Prorogation.

Dr. Iddon: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what proportion of people in residential drug treatment are funded *(a)* privately, *(b)* by primary care trusts and *(c)* with a combination of private funds and primary care trust funds. [198935]

Miss Melanie Johnson: This information is not collected centrally.

Abortions

Jim Dobbin: To ask the Secretary of State for Healt for what reasons the 2003 abortion statistics do nc specify the nature of the disabilities giving rise t abortion under ground E, risk that the child would b born handicapped. [18904

Miss Melanie Johnson: As stated in the Statistica Bulletin Summary Abortion Statistics, England an Wales: 2003, the format of tables changed to reflec concerns over issues of privacy and confidentiality These issues are now being considered in more detail.

Administration

Mr. Burstow: To ask the Secretary of State for Healt what the *(a)* total budget and *(b)* administratio budget was for each (i) NHS region in each year fron 1997 to 2002 and (ii) strategic health authority in eacl year since they were established. [19727

Mr. Hutton: It has not proved possible to respon to the hon. Member in the time available befor Prorogation.

Air Ambulances

Mr. Chaytor: To ask the Secretary of State fo Health what the total operating budget is of each ai ambulance service in England; and what proportion o these budgets is grant-aided by the national healt service. [19925

Ms Rosie Winterton: This information is not hel centrally as air ambulances are provided throug charitable organisations.

The Department informed ambulance services an their commissioners in January 2002 that the cost o clinical staff on air ambulances should from 1 Apri 2002 be met by the national health service on continuing basis.

Alzheimer's

Mr. Skinner: To ask the Secretary of State for Healt what the total amount of Government funding fo research on Alzheimer's disease was in *(a)* 1997 *(b)* 2000 and *(c)* 2003. [19709

Miss Melanie Johnson: The main agency throug which the Government support medical and clinica research is the Medical Research Council (MRC) The MRC is an independent body funded by th Department of Trade and Industry via the Office o Science and Technology. MRC expenditure on researc into Alzheimer's disease and general dementia in th years in question was as follows.

	£ millio
1997–98	5.
2000–01	8.
2002–03	6.
2003–04	[1]

[1] Not yet available.

The Department funds research to support policy an to provide the evidence needed to underpin qualit improvement and service development in the nationa health service. National research programme expenditure on projects related to Alzheimer's disease and dementia was as follows.

	£ million
1997–98	0.4
2000–2001	4.7
2002–03	1.6
2003–04	1.1

Anaemia

Mr. Laxton: To ask the Secretary of State for Health when the Scientific Advisory Committee on Nutrition will report on iron deficiency anaemia. [199138]

Miss Melanie Johnson: The report on iron and health by the Scientific Advisory Committee on Nutrition's Working Group on Iron is expected to be available for comment in summer 2005, with finalisation in spring 2006.

Mr. Laxton: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what steps his Department is taking to encourage the iron intake of children to prevent childhood anaemia; and what assessment it has made of the incidence of childhood anaemia in the UK over the last 20 years. [199139]

Miss Melanie Johnson: It has not been possible to respond the hon. Member in the time available before Prorogation.

Cancer

Jon Trickett: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what recent assessment he has made of health inequalities between socio-economic groups in terms of cancer *(a)* treatments and *(b)* outcomes; and if he will make a statement. [197257]

Miss Melanie Johnson *[holding answer 9 November 2004]:* We know there are differences in health outcomes for different socio-economic groups. However, we are aware that people diagnosed with cancer in deprived areas suffer from higher mortality rates than those in wealthier areas. We have recently announced a new public service agreement which includes a target from April 2005 to achieve a reduction in the inequalities gap of at least 6 per cent. in cancer mortality between the fifth of areas with the worst health and deprivation indicators and the population as a whole by 2010. We will work with organisations in deprived areas to see what interventions can help reduce inequalities in treatments and outcomes. We envisage this will probably be achieved through a range of measures including reducing smoking prevalence, tackling obesity, improving screening coverage, including bowel cancer screening, and ensuring that patients with symptoms that could be cancer present earlier to their general practitioner.

Care Homes

Mr. McLoughlin: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many *(a)* residential care home and *(b)* nursing home places were available in West Derbyshire in each year since 1997, broken down into places available at (i) local authority-run homes, (ii) independent private homes and (iii) homes run by independent charities and other not-for-profit organisations. [198365]

Dr. Ladyman: Data are not available for the area requested. The table shows the number of care home places available for adults aged 18 and over by type of home in Derbyshire at 31 March for the years 1997 to 2001.

I understand from the Chair of the Commission for Social Care Inspection (CSCI) that figures for later years were collected by the National Care Standards Commission, and now CSCI, but comparable details are not available.

The number of care home places in Derbyshire[1] 1997–2001

Rounded numbers

	Residential			*Nursing[2]*	
Derbyshire	*Local authority*	*Private*	*Voluntary*	*Independent*	*Total*
1997	1,780	3,790	700	4,600	10,860
1998	1,490	3,780	690	4,500	10,400
1999	1,380	4,460	770	4,590	11,200
2000	1,470	4,230	630	4,310	10,630
2001	1,470	4,190	590	4,260	10,510

[1] Nursing care relates to North Derbyshire and South Derbyshire Health Authorities; residential care relates to Derbyshire council with social services responsibilities (CSSR) and Derby CSSR.

[2] Nursing home figures include places in general nursing homes, mental nursing homes and private hospitals and clinics.

Source:

RA and RH(N) form A.

Cervical Cancer

Mrs. Calton: To ask the Secretary of State for Health (1) what assessment he has made of the benefits of liquid cytology testing for cervical cancer since the roll-out of the technique started; [198917]

(2) how many women in each strategic health authority have been enrolled on human papilloma virus testing pilots; how many have taken up liquid cytology testing for cervical cancer; and if he will make a statement; [198828]

(3) what progress has been made with the introduction of human papilloma virus testing and liquid cytology testing; and what plans he has for future roll-out. [198862]

Miss Melanie Johnson *[holding answers 17 November 2004]:* Following the evaluation of a Government-funded pilot study of liquid based cytology (LBC), the National Institute for Clinical Excellence (NICE) concluded in October 2003 that this new technology should be rolled out across the national health service cervical screening programme. It will take five years to implement LBC across England, as all staff who read the tests or take the tests will have to be retrained. The Department is providing £7.2 million over the next two years to kick-start this process. We are starting by converting the 10 regional cytology training schools, which will then be able to train the rest of the programme. As at November 2004, nine out of the 10 training schools had been trained or had a specific date to begin their retraining. The tenth is awaiting a local decision on which system they will use. As LBC is rolled out, it will be subject to the same rigorous quality assurance procedures as the current programme, along with an annual statistical return.

The NICE decision followed successful piloting of LBC for a 12 month period between 2001 and 2002 at three sites: North Bristol, Newcastle, and Norfolk and Norwich. The pilot sites have continued to use LBC, and latest figures for 2002–03 are shown in the table.

Pilot site	*Eligible population*	*Number of women screened using LBC in 2002–03*	*Coverage for 2002–03[1] (percentage)*
North Bristol Avon; Gloucestershire and Wiltshire Strategic Health Authority (SHA)	54,100	10,300	75.8
Newcastle Northumberland, Tyne and Wear SHA	62,800	16,800	81.6
Norfolk and Norwich Norfolk, Suffolk and Cambridgeshire SHA	31,500	7,100	78.7

[1] Coverage for 2002–03 is defined as the percentage of eligible women in a population who have a screening test recorded in the last five years. In England, women aged 20 to 64 are invited for cervical screening every three to five years.

Source:

Statistical bulletin—cervical screening programme, England: 2002–03.

As part of the LBC pilot, we also piloted the use of HPV testing as triage for women with mild or borderline test results.

According to the official evaluation of the pilot, a total of 3,681 women received HPV tests across the three pilot sites. The advisory committee on cervical screening is now considering how best to take forward HPV testing in England, following consideration of the draft final report of the evaluation of the pilot.

Cholesterol

Mr. Best: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what steps the Government are taking to reduce cholesterol levels in the adult population. [195481]

Miss Melanie Johnson: High intakes of saturated fat can raise cholesterol levels. The Government provide practical guidance on how consumers can reduce the saturated fat in their diets through healthy eating advice. As part of a balanced diet, foods rich in saturated fat need to be replaced with unsaturated fats such as oil rich fish and foods containing oils such as sunflower, rapeseed and olive oils.

The Government have also conducted a major consultation exercise on improving public health, covering a range of lifestyle issues, including diet and physical activity. Responses to the consultation have informed the development of a White Paper on improving health, due later this year. The Department of Health also funds a range of non-governmental organisations to increase awareness of the benefits of eating a healthy diet and active lifestyles.

High cholesterol is a significant risk factor for coronary heart disease (CHD), stroke and related diseases. The Department's National Service Framework (NSF) for CHD sets out modern standards and service models for the NHS for the prevention and treatment of CHD.

Judy Mallaber: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what progress has been made in developing a national cholesterol awareness campaign. [199196]

Miss Melanie Johnson: Although there are no specific commitments to a national cholesterol awareness campaign in "Choosing Health": making healthy choices easier, the Government have committed to bring together messages that raise awareness of health risks with information about action that people can take themselves to address those risks for example by changing their diet, taking more exercise or seeking advice through telephone help lines, local health improvement services. Early focus will be on a new cross-Government campaign to raise awareness of the health risks of obesity, and the steps people can take through diet and physical activity to prevent obesity.

Choose and Book Work

Dr. Murrison: To ask the Secretary of State for Health when general practitioners will be paid for Choose and Book work. [197509]

Mr. Hutton: Choose and Book will give patients greater involvement in the choices and decisions about their treatment. It should not increase the overall workload for GP practices, whilst allowing general practice to offer patients a more personal and convenient service.

The Department is in an ongoing process of engagement with stakeholders regarding Choose and Book and general practice.

Chronic Illness

Mr. Wills: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what estimate he has made of the cost to the NHS o chronic illness in 2003–04. [195997

Dr. Ladyman: It has not proved possible to respond to the hon. Member in the time available befor Prorogation.

Community Matrons

Mr. Burstow: To ask the Secretary of State for Healt if he will estimate the cost of introducing 3,00 community matrons in the NHS. [19147

Mr. Hutton: It is not possible at this time to estimate the total cost of introducing 3,000 community matrons at this stage. Detailed work is ongoing to determine the level of training required and appropriate grade for this new staff group.

Sandra Gidley: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what duties community matrons will undertake that are not already carried out by other health professionals. [196297]

Mr. Hutton: Many patients with complex and high intensity needs do not benefit from a case management approach within current services. In their role as case managers, community matrons will be responsible for assessing physical, emotional and social needs and ensuring these needs are addressed through nursing and other local services. This will thereby improve the quality of life for this group of patients and prevent unnecessary admission to hospital.

Community Transport

Miss Kirkbride: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how much money was given to community transport schemes by each primary care trust in the last year for which figures are available. [196379]

Mr. Hutton: The information is not collected by the Department.

Complaints Procedure

Tim Loughton: To ask the Secretary of State for Health (1) what the recognised complaints procedure is for NHS patients treated by private treatment centres; [197954]

(2) whether his Department has received complaints about the standard of treatment provided to NHS patients by Netcare treatment centres. [197957]

Mr. Hutton: The responsibility for handling complaints rests with the appropriate national health service primary care trust or acute trust that referred the patients to the independent treatment centre. Such complaints are handled through the NHS complaints process. The Department is not involved in the resolution of such complaints.

Under contract terms, the Department is required to be notified by an independent treatment centre of any complaints in relation to treatment they provide to NHS patients. To date, the Department has been notified of seven such cases.

Consultants

Pete Wishart: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how much his Department has spent in each year since 2002 on employing external consultants to deal with the press and public relations of his Department; and if he will make a statement. [195445]

Ms Rosie Winterton: I regret it is not possible to identify separately costs for work carried out by external consultants to deal with press and public relations. This information can be supplied only at disproportionate cost.

Contraception

Sarah Teather: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what proportion of the NHS budget was spent providing free contraception in the last year for which figures are available; and what proportion of NHS spending that represented. [198980]

Miss Melanie Johnson: The cost of contraceptives and contraceptive devices dispensed in the community in England in 2003–04 is shown in the table. This does not include items issued in family planning clinics, for which data is not held centrally. It is not, therefore, possible to calculate the figure for spending on contraception, as a proportion of total national health service spend.

Prescription cost analysis data: Number of prescription items (in million) and net ingredient cost (NIC) in £ million, for contraceptives and contraceptive devices—British National Formulary (BNF) 7.3 and 21.4—dispensed in the community in England, 2003–04

	BNF chapter	*BNF section*	*BNF section name*	*Items (million)*	*NIC (£ million)*
2003–04	7	3	Contraceptives	8.66	60.69
2003–04	21	4	Contraceptive devices	0.06	0.63
Total				8.72	61.32

Dementia

Mr. Wills: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what estimate he has made of the cost to the NHS of care for dementia in 2003–04. [195998]

Ms Rosie Winterton: It has not proved possible to respond to the hon. Member in the time available before Prorogation.

Dentistry

Dr. Murrison: To ask the Secretary of State for Health pursuant to the answer of 1 September 2004, *Official Report*, columns 886–87W, on dentistry, how many inquiries the returning to dentistry response line received; how many application forms were sent out; and how many have been returned indicating a willingness to return to work in NHS dentistry. [195033]

Ms Rosie Winterton: Up to the start of October the dentistry response line had received 288 calls. Literature was sent to 222 people. 37 people have so far registered with the Keeping in Touch with dentistry (KITs) scheme.

Mr. Burstow: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what funding his Department makes available to encourage dentists to join the NHS; and whether there are conditions attached to the funding to encourage dentists to remain within the NHS. [198245]

Ms Rosie Winterton: It has not been possible to respond the hon. Member in the time available before Prorogation

Paul Farrelly: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what steps the Government are taking to improve access to NHS dentistry in Newcastle-under-Lyme. [198565]

Ms Rosie Winterton: Figures for the number of dentists are not available for Newcastle-under-Lyme Primary Care Trust (PCT) prior to 2002, when the PCT was established. The number of dentists within the Shropshire and Staffordshire Strategic Health Authority (SHA) area has increased from 392 in September 1997 to 449 in June 2004; this is an increase of 14.5 per cent. Of the £35 million additional funding announced in September 2003 to improve access, choice and quality for patients in areas that have problems, Newcastle-under-Lyme PCT has received £69,000. Of the further £15 million announced in November 2003 to develop easier access and improve quality further, Newcastle-under-Lyme PCT received £30,000. The PCT has also received an additional £10,000 modernisation funding for salaried primary care dental services, which is to be shared across North Staffordshire.

Newcastle-under-Lyme PCT has a target of increasing dental registrations by 1,375 by 2005. Shropshire and Staffordshire SHA reports that the PCT is on the way to achieving this.

In addition, Newcastle-under-Lyme PCT is involved in the Department of Health's latest round of international recruitment. Two practices are planning to interview prospective new dentists during early December.

Shropshire and Staffordshire SHA reports that the PCT will be setting up, and directly managing, a salaried dental suite at Cross Heath. This will provide additional registrations primarily for the local population.

Provisions in the Health and Social Care (Community Health and Standards) Act 2003 will underpin a modernised, high-quality primary dental service. A new contract for dentists will be introduced from October 2005, based on Personal Dental Services (PDS) pilots that encourage a more preventative, oral health focus.

Under the new arrangements, PCTs will have a duty to secure the provision of primary dental services either through contracts with individual practices, or by providing services themselves. With these new responsibilities will go nearly £1.3 billion of financial resources currently held centrally.

Nationally, PCT funding for dentistry will increase by 19.3 per cent. over two years (2005–06 over 2003–04). This means that by 2005–06 we will be providing over £250 million a year extra for dentistry.

The national health service workforce will be increased by the equivalent of 1,000 dentists by October 2005, allowing up to an extra two million people to be treated.

An NHS support team has been created to work with those PCTs having the most difficulty with access, and this is supported by £9 million of funding in the run-up to local commissioning. Forty-seven Dental Access Centres have been set up to help tackle access problems in areas with particular difficulties.

Additional funding of £65.2 million was announced in September 2003 to support change and help improv access, quality and choice for patients.

Andy Burnham: To ask the Secretary of State fo Health what the total spending on *(a)* general denta services and *(b)* secondary dental services was in each strategic health authority area in each of the last fiv years. [19916

Ms Rosie Winterton: It has not proved possible t respond to the hon. Member in the time availabl before Prorogation.

Tim Loughton: To ask the Secretary of State fo Health (1) what arrangements have been made fo dental visits to care homes in Dorset; [19799

(2) how many dentists in Dorset offer a visiting servic to care homes in Dorset. [19799

Ms Rosie Winterton: Information about number o dentists offering a visiting service to care homes i Dorset is not centrally held.

However, all general dental practitioners providin national health service services are obliged to visit the NHS patients at home if those patients are housebound and live within five miles of their general dental practic

Dorset and Somerset strategic health authority advis that there are general dental practitioners across Dors who specialise in domiciliary visits and, will trav further than five miles to visit housebound patients.

The East and West Dorset community dental servic provides a domiciliary service for patients not register with an NHS dentist.

Departmental Advertising Costs

Charles Hendry: To ask the Secretary of State fo Health what the cost of *(a)* creative work, *(b)* med spend and *(c)* administration for his Departmen advertising activity has been in each financial year sin 1997–98, broken down by contractor. [1972

Ms Rosie Winterton: The Department's advertisi is commissioned through the Central Office Information. Expenditure for 2002–04 and 2003–04 shown in the table. Figures for previous years can on be provided at a disproportionate cost.

Creative Agency	*Strategic Media Agency*	*Campaign Description*	*Amount Billed (ex VAT) £million*	*Media (ex VAT) £million*	*Production and F only £mill*
B Hodes	n/a	Dept of Health Directories Advertising 2003–04	123,609	123,505	
Mother	PHD	Drugs Advertising Campaign 2003–04	1,936,457	1,276,009	660,
DLKW	Naked	Teenage Pregnancy 2003–04	1,484,533	1,347,107	137,
AMV	PHD	Tobacco Information Campaign 2003–04	14,349,980	14,027,512	322,
Leo Burnett	Mediavest	Social Care Recruitment 2003–04	973,014	799,971	173,
EURO	Naked	NHS Direct 2003–04	480,533	423,407	57,
Leo Burnett	Mediavest	NHS Professionals 2003–04	389,396	368,799	20,
Barkers	n/a	Global Recruitment 2003–04	127,648	123,211	4,
BMP	n/a	HIB Vaccination Campaign 2003–04	369,699	379,135	17,

Creative Agency	*Strategic Media Agency*	*Campaign Description*	*Amount Billed (ex VAT) £million*	*Media (ex VAT) £million*	*Production and Fees only £million*
Barkers	n/a	NHS Modernisation Agency Recruitment 2003–04	66,728	60,555	6,173
Leo Burnett	Mediavest	NHS Careers 2003–04	4,244,604	3,490,075	754,529
EURO	Naked	Wider Access 2003–04	1,704,765	1,538,140	166,625
EURO	Naked	Get the Right Treatment 2003–04	435	—	435
n/a	n/a	Asian Tobacco Campaign 2003–04	42,582	—	42,582
EURO	Optimedia	Flu Jabs 2003–04	1,525,345	1,398,639	126,706
DLKW	Naked	Adult Sexual Health 2003–04	1,200,741	1,040,435	160,306
BMP	n/a	Child Immunisation 2003–04	1,576,434	1,472,563	103,871
n/a	n/a	Local Job Shop Avon, Glocs and Wilts 2003–04	804	768	36
n/a	n/a	Local Job Shop—Trent 2003–04	3,585	3,428	157
BMP	n/a	MMR Campaign 2003–04	139,526	129,638	9,888
Leo Burnett	n/a	GP's & Consultants Recruitment 2003–04	240,577	234,594	5,983
n/a	n/a	Thames Valley WDC Job Shop 2003–04	424	405	19
n/a	n/a	Birmingham WDC—GP Returners 2003–04	2,982	2,853	129
n/a	n/a	West Midlands WDC—GP Returners 2003–04	15,934	15,244	690
n/a	n/a	Staffs and Shropshire WDC—GP Returner's 2003–04	16,256	15,546	710
Leo Burnett	Mediavest	NHS Careers Job Shops 2003–04	252,981	209,350	43,631
O and M	n/a	Antibiotics Campaign 2003–04	542,645	517,843	24,802
Leo Burnett	Mediavest	Social Care Recruitment Campaign 2003–04	3,485,084	2,813,766	671,318
Barkers	n/a	London Patient Choice Programme 2003–04	78,243	76,897	1,346
n/a	n/a	East Midlands—Anti Smoking 2003–04	15,705	15,297	408
Total			35,418,249	31,904,692	3,513,557

Departmental Events (Funding)

Charles Hendry: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will list the *(a)* conferences, *(b)* publications, *(c)* initiatives, *(d)* projects and *(e)* receptions organised by his Department which have received funding from outside commercial bodies, since May 1997, broken down by (i) funding body and (ii) amount paid. [196593]

Ms Rosie Winterton: Details of individual amounts of sponsorship valued at more than £5,000 are published in the Department's annual report. The 2004 annual report was published on 29 April 2004. Copies are available in the Library.

Departmental Research

Mr. Kevin Hughes: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how much his Department has spent on research into *(a)* Alzheimer's disease, *(b)* Parkinson's disease, *(c)* Huntingdon's disease, *(d)* multiple sclerosis and *(e)* motor neurone disease in the last three years. [198224]

Miss Melanie Johnson: The main agency through which the Government supports medical and clinical research is the Medical Research Council (MRC). The MRC is an independent body funded by the Department of Trade and Industry via the Office of Science and Technology.

The Department funds research to support policy and to provide the evidence needed to underpin quality improvement and service development in the national health service. Spend by the Department's national research programmes in the three years to 2003–04 on projects related to the diseases listed was as follows:

	£ million
2001–02	1.4
2002–03	1.6
2003–04	2.3

Over 75 per cent., of the Department's total expenditure on health research is devolved to and managed by NHS organisations. From this funding, the NHS reported spending in support of research related to older people and on neurological conditions as follows:

£ million

	Older people	*Neurological conditions*
2001–02	37	not available
2002–03	34	28
2003–04	39	30

Details of individual projects can be found on the national research register at www.dh.gov.uk/research

Mr. Kevin Hughes: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what recent research his Department has commissioned on degenerative neurological disorders. [198225]

Miss Melanie Johnson: Projects commissioned in the national research programmes over the last three years cover a wide variety of neurological disorders and include:

investigation of the characteristics of certain conditions and of those experiencing them, for example:

- monitoring the rates and characteristics of children with cerebral palsy;
- describing the neuropathological features of CJD and other atypical dementias;
- exploring the natural history and epidemiology of multiple sclerosis

research on the efficacy of various treatments, for example:

- the effectiveness of treatment for motor neurone disease;
- the cost-effectiveness of new drugs for epilepsy and Alzheimer's;
- the value of education in promoting health and independence for people with a range of progressive neurological diseases

studies of the quality and accessibility of health and social care, for example:

- the access to care of people with dementia from minority communities and their carers;
- community care for older people with dementia;
- improving the training of GPs in recognising dementia.

In addition the Department has funded a major new research initiative costing approximately £2 million long-term neurological conditions. This will underpin and assess the implementation of the national service framework on long-term conditions.

Over 75 per cent. of the Department's total research and development expenditure is devolved to and managed locally by national health service organisations.

Dermatology

Mr. Burstow: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what estimate he has made of the percentage of general practitioner consultations which concerned skin diseases in each year since 1997. [196190]

Dr. Ladyman: Detailed data on consultations with general practitioners are not collected.

Data from the general household survey suggest that there were approximately 241 million consultations in 2002–03, and the British Association of Dermatologists estimate that about 15 per cent. of all patients who see a general practitioner are seeking help with a skin problem.

Mr. Burstow: To ask the Secretary of State for Health (1) how many dermatology referrals there were to secondary care in each year since 1997; [196191]

(2) how many dermatology outpatient appointments there were in each year since 1997; [196192]

(3) how many finished consultant episodes dermatology has accounted for in each year since 1997. [196238]

Dr. Ladyman: No separate count of referrals is available, but the information available on finished consultant episodes and numbers of in-year admissions, is in the table. Information on outpatient appointments is not available.

Primary Diagnosis (ICD-10 L00-L99) Diseases of the skin and subcutaneous tissue: counts of finished consultant episodes (FCEs), finished in-year admission episodes and all elective (waiting list, booked and planned) finished in-year admission episodes—NHS hospitals, England 1997–98 to 2002–03

	FCEs	Finished in-year admissions	of which: elective
1997–98	239,174	222,625	138,835
1998–99	257,265	242,590	152,906
1999–2000	266,193	248,550	152,922
2000–01	279,458	258,213	155,302
2001–02	277,832	254,556	151,489
2002–03	284,366	259,143	154,062

Notes:

1. *Finished Consultant Episode (FCE)*

An FCE is defined as a period of admitted patient care under one consultant within one healthcare provider. Please note that the figures do not represent the number of patients, as a person may have more than one episode of care within the year.

2. *Finished in-year admissions*

A finished in-year admission is the first period of in-patient care under one consultant within one healthcare provider, excluding admissions beginning before 1 April at the start of the datayear. Please note that admissions do not represent the number of in-patients, as a person may have more than one admission within the year.

3. *Diagnosis (Primary Diagnosis)*

The primary diagnosis is the first of up to 14 (seven prior to 2002–03) diagnosis fields in the Hospital Episode Statistics (HES) data set and provides the main reason why the patient was in hospital.

4. *Grossing*

Figures are grossed for both coverage and missing/invalid clinical data, except for 2002–03, which are not yet adjusted for shortfalls.

Source:

Hospital Episode Statistics (HES), Department of Health.

Mr. Burstow: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what percentage of the population are affected by skin diseases; and if he will make a statement. [196196]

Dr. Ladyman: This information is not held centrally. The Skin Care Campaign, which is the umbrella organisation representing the interests of all people with skin diseases in the UK estimates that up to 25 per cent. of the population will have a skin disease that warrants medical attention at some point in their life.

Mr. Burstow: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what the *(a)* average and *(b)* maximum time was that a patient waited for a first dermatology out-patient appointment in the last year for which figures are available; and if he will make a statement. [196232]

Dr. Ladyman: It has not proved possible to respond to the hon. Member in the time available before Prorogation.

Diabetes

Tim Loughton: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what research he has received on possible links between the use of insulin by type 2 diabetes patients and an increased risk of cancer. [197986]

Ms Rosie Winterton: The Department is not aware of any United Kingdom funded research in this area.

A summary of the results of a single study into insulin therapy and colorectal cancer risk among type 2 diabetes patients conducted at the University of Pennsylvania School of Medicine can be found at http://www.ncbi.nih.gov/Database.

Details of a small number of current American studies, including research Investigating whether insulin-like growth factor-1 is associated with an increased risk of colorectal, breast and endometrial cancer, can be found on the International Cancer Research Portfolio website at http://www.cancerportfolio.org.

Drug Misuse Treatment

Mr. Streeter: To ask the Secretary of State for Health (1) what assessment he has made of the impact of the closure of the Harbour Drug and Alcohol Service in Plymouth to new clients until April 2005 on the treatment of patients with addiction problems; [199108]

(2) what the waiting time is in Plymouth for a person suffering from drug or alcohol addiction to receive treatment; and if he will make a statement. [199109]

Ms Rosie Winterton: The Department has not made an assessment of the impact of the changes to the Harbour Drug and Alcohol Service. It is the responsibility of primary care trusts, working with the local drug and alcohol action teams, to plan and develop local drug and alcohol services and ensure that these meet local needs. The Harbour Drug and Alcohol Service is not closing, but I understand that a decision was made recently to temporarily suspend the specialist prescribing service on the ground of clinical safety.

The latest available information on waiting times for drug treatment in Plymouth is shown in the table. The Department does not hold information on waiting times for alcohol services.

	Waiting time (weeks)
Inpatient	12
Residential rehabilitation	2
Specialist prescribing	0.2
General practitioner prescribing	0.8
Day care	1
Structured counselling	0.2

Source:
National Treatment Agency.

Mr. Keith Bradley: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many people in Manchester, Withington were receiving treatment for drug misuse on the latest date for which figures are available. [199125]

Miss Melanie Johnson: In 2003–04, the number of people in Manchester receiving treatment from the Manchester Drug Action Team was 2,695. These are the latest data available, published by the National Treatment Agency on 30 September.

Drug Purchasing

Mr. David Stewart: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what bulk discounts the national health service receives from drug companies. [199289]

Ms Rosie Winterton: In the case of branded medicines (that are generally patent protected) suppliers may or may not offer discount to the national health service trusts against their list prices. Where discounts are offered for these products, they may be available simply as a discount, or as a discount for bulk purchases or commitment to purchase specific volumes. Where discounts are not offered, more often than not, NHS trusts will have access to wholesaler discounts.

NHS Purchasing and Supply Agency aggregates NHS trust business for the supply of licensed medicinal products, competitively tenders this business and awards framework agreements on behalf of the NHS in England. It also awards commitment contracts on behalf of the Department.

Drug Treatment Centres

Tom Cox: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will make a statement on provision for residential drug treatment centres in England. [195789]

Miss Melanie Johnson: The current residential drug treatment sector consists of two main treatment types—in-patient treatment and residential rehabilitation. The extent of current provision is as follows:

> The National Treatment Agency (NTA)'s residential service directory lists 111 residential rehabilitation units.
>
> The recently completed review of in-patient treatment estimated that there are 133 in-patient treatment units.

Specific work to improve the efficiency of the system to access residential treatment, which includes: a national online database of current vacancies in residential rehab units (Bedvacs) to enable more efficient client placements; and guidance on regional commissioning models for residential drug treatment has been developed, to enable better commissioning of residential treatment places.

The NTA monitors waiting times for residential treatment. The waiting times for residential drug treatment have been reducing as shown in the following table.

Average waiting times in weeks: December 2001 to September 2004

	In-patient treatment	*Residential rehabilitation*
NTA target	2	3
December 2001	12.1	9.1
September 2003	3.8	4.5
June 2004	2.8	2.8
September 2004	3.8	2.7

The intensive drug interventions programme (DIP) is now in place in 66 areas with highest levels on drug-related crime. Waiting times for clients in DIP are less than the national average.

Average weighted waiting time in weeks: September 2004

	NTA target	*September 2004*
In-patient treatment	2	2.73
Residential rehabilitation	3	2.0

Dyspraxia

Mrs. Iris Robinson: To ask the Secretary of State for Health (1) what steps are being taken to improve *(a)* awareness of and *(b)* training on dyspraxia for health professionals; [190582]

(2) what research he has evaluated on the relationship between dyspraxia and *(a)* diet, *(b)* crime, *(c)* drug and alcohol abuse, *(d)* suicide and *(e)* homelessness; and if he will make a statement. [190597]

Ms Rosie Winterton: None. The main agency through which the Government support medical and clinical research is the Medical Research Council (MRC). The MRC is an independent body funded by the Department of Trade and Industry via the Office of Science and Technology.

The MRC does not directly commission research projects or earmark funds for particular research areas. Projects are normally funded on a competitive basis in response to proposals submitted across all areas of research relevant to human health. In addition, the MRC identifies priorities for medical research in a number of ways, including strategic reviews of specific areas of science and by responding to the Department's priorities.

We have no specific plans to raise awareness of dyspraxia among health professionals. The Department is not responsible for setting curricula for health professional training; that is the responsibility of the statutory and professional bodies. However, we do share a commitment with those bodies that all health professionals are trained so that they have the skills and knowledge to deliver a high quality health service to all groups of the population with whom they deal.

Fitness Trainers

Miss McIntosh: To ask the Secretary of State for Health whether those who currently pay membership of private health clubs will qualify for a fitness trainer on the national health service. [199256]

Miss Melanie Johnson: It has not proved possible to respond to the hon. Member in the time available before Prorogation.

Flu Vaccine

Tim Loughton: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what assessment he has made of the effects on funding for general practitioners shortages in supply of influenza vaccine. [197979]

Mr. Hutton: There is no shortage in the supply of the influenza vaccine. The Department purchased stock of the vaccine as part of its contingency measures and has over 19,000 doses available, and over 750,000 doses are still available.

Foundation Hospitals

Mrs. Lait: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what the total population is from which public and patient membership can be drawn for each of the foundation hospitals where ballots have been held; how many were registered to vote; and how many voted. [197417]

Mr. Hutton: Figures for the local resident population of the first wave of national health service foundation trusts are not collected centrally due to the nature of the commissioning of healthcare. The information provided would be duplicated for other local NHS trusts and would therefore be inaccurate.

Information on elections to the board of governors of NHS foundation trusts is a matter for Monitor, the statutory name of which is the independent regulator of NHS foundation trusts. I am informed by the Chairman of Monitor that information on membership and turnout is contained in its publication: "NHS Foundation Trusts: Report on Elections and Membership (August 2004)" (IRREP 01/04), which is available on Monitor's website at www.monitor-nhsft.gov.uk. Copies are available in the Library.

Freedom of Information Act

Mr. Clifton-Brown: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what assessment he has made of the likely costs to his Department in the first quarter of 2005 of compliance with the provisions of the Freedom of Information Act 2000; and if he will make a statement. [199086]

Ms Rosie Winterton: The Department has not found it practicable to assess the likely costs of compliance with the Freedom of Information (FOI) Act.

Our strategy has been to prepare staff and provide guidance that will help them to minimise costs. Apart from a small team of FOI specialists, and development of a new correspondence system that will improve overall efficiency as well as helping to monitor FOI requests, costs will be widely distributed within the Department, as responding to FOI requests will be integrated with ordinary departmental business.

General Practitioners

Mr. Graham Allen: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many people he estimates *(a)* reside and *(b)* are registered with a general practitioner in the area served by Nottingham primary care trust. [199047]

Dr. Ladyman: The information is shown in the following table. It is based on patient registrations and is constrained to Office of National Statistics (ONS) estimates as at mid-year 2002. This is the latest available validated data for both figures.

	Number[1] (head count)
Resident population	269,814
Registered with a general practitioner[2]	287,809

[1] Excludes armed forces and prisoners.

[2] The number of patients registered with GPs responsible to this primary care trust (PCT), is higher due to some of the patients living in neighbouring PCTs' areas. Conversely, some of the patients living in Nottingham's geographic area may be registered with GPs responsible to a neighbouring PCT.

Source:

Department of Health—shadow health and social care information centre.

Mr. Jenkins: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what the difference will be in *(a)* funding and *(b)* service provision between the practice based commissioning structure for general practitioner practices and the former GP Fund Holding structure. [197700]

Mr. Hutton: The Department of Health is currently finalising guidance on practice based commissioning and this will be published shortly.

In terms of funding, under general practitioner fund holding, fund holding practices received a management allowance to administer the scheme. Under practice based commissioning, there will be no management allowance—the costs of the scheme will be funded out of savings made by the practice.

In terms of service provision both schemes strive to engage clinicians, stimulate innovation and provide patient-centred care.

Under practiced based commissioning, primary care trusts will retain legal responsibility for the contracting process and the single national tariff will prevent competition based on price. Practiced based commissioning will instead focus on quality and efficiency.

Government Buildings (Disabled Access)

Tom Cox: To ask the Secretary of State for Health whether all Government buildings in his Department within the Greater London area are fully accessible to disabled people; and if he will make a statement. [199314]

Dr. Ladyman: It has not proved possible to respond to the hon. Member in the time available before Prorogation.

GP Surgeries

Tim Loughton: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will list the general practitioner surgeries which will benefit in the *(a)* Adur, *(b)* Arun and *(c)* Worthing Primary Care Trust areas from funding allocations to improve or renew premises in the current financial year; by how much each will benefit; and for what improvements each allocation was made. [198001]

Ms Rosie Winterton: It has not proved possible to respond to the hon. Member in the time available before Prorogation.

Tim Loughton: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what funding has been made available in each primary care trust area for upgrading or rebuilding general practitioner surgeries in each of the last five years. [198419]

Mr. Hutton *[holding answer 16 November 2004]:* Personal medical services (PMS) allocations to primary care trusts (PCTs) do not identify primary care premises funding separately to other PMS services provision elements. Owing to this it is not possible to identify primary care premises allocations separately at a PCT level.

However under the new primary care medical services contracting arrangements introduced from 2004–05 it is possible to estimate these resources from 2003–04 at a national level. From 2003–04 the total resources made available to PCTs for primary care premises purposes was as follows.

	£ million
2003–04	599
2004–05	640

Health Care Acquired Infections

Mr. Burstow: To ask the Secretary of State for Health when he or a member of his ministerial team was informed of the National Audit Office's planned publication date for the report on health care acquired infections. [191483]

Miss Melanie Johnson: We knew in April that publication was expected in July. It was not until late June that a particular date was included in departmental documents but it was still not clear that this was a firm rather than a provisional date.

Health Services (York)

Hugh Bayley: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how much capital has been invested in York district hospital in each of the last 20 years. [191178]

Miss Melanie Johnson: The information is shown in the following table.

York hospitals NHS trust, net book value of purchased capital additions for each year

£000

	Cash terms
1986–87	1,506
1987–88	1,663
1988–89	4,300
1989–90	5,207
1990–91	6,844
1991–92	5,972
1992–93	5,791
1993–94	6,028
1994–95	7,456
1995–96	8,841
1996–97	2,708
1997–98	1,457
1998–99	3,185
1999–2000	2,778
2000–01	6,571
2001–02	4,159
2002–03	10,232

Sources:

1. 1986–87—1991–92 York hospitals NHS trust
2. 1992–93—2002–03 York hospitals NHS trust audited summarisation schedules 1992–1993 to 2002–03.

Hospital Infections

Mr. Lansley: To ask the Secretary of State for Health whether he has instructed commissioners to include information on infection rates of methicillin resistant *staphylococcus aureus* in the information provided under Patient Choice. [193453]

Mr. Hutton: Information on methicillin resistant *staphylococcus aureus* (MRSA) bloodstream infections is currently available to commissioners and others on the Department's website at: http://www.dh.gov.uk/assetRoot/04/08/58/93/04085893.pdf Mandatory national surveillance has been in place since April 2001 and information for the last three years is available for all acute trusts in England. As patient choice increases, information and support will be provided locally by primary care trusts to help patients choose.

Mr. Lansley: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what assessment he has made of the consistency across NHS trusts in methods of monitoring MRSA bloodstream infections under the mandatory surveillance system; and what steps he is taking to ensure consistency. [198181]

Miss Melanie Johnson: The Health Protection Agency recently carried out a survey of data collection methods for the mandatory scheme and will be assessing current practice in the light of this.

Mr. Havard: To ask the Secretary of State for Health whether it is his policy to maximise the use of new medical technologies in hospitals in tackling MRSA. [198494]

Miss Melanie Johnson: We encourage the use of effective technologies to prevent and control all healthcare associated infections, including methicillin resistant "Staphylococcus aureus" (MRSA) infections. To help the national health service identify suitable products and processes, the Health Protection Agency has convened a rapid review panel to review information and evidence relating to claims concerning prevention or control of such infections.

Mr. Havard: To ask the Secretary of State for Health whether hospitals are encouraged to discharge patients for treatment in the community as soon as clinically possible as part of the programme to reduce the number of cases of MRSA in hospitals; and what guidance he has given to primary care teams on funding the treatment of patients once they leave hospital. [198496]

Miss Melanie Johnson: It has not been possible to respond to the hon. Member in the time available before Prorogation

Mr. Dismore: To ask the Secretary of State for Health, if he will make a statement on rates of MSRA at *(a)* Barnet, *(b)* Chase Farm, *(c)* Northwich Park, *(d)* Royal Free and *(e)* Edgware Hospitals in each of the last three years. [197629]

Dr. Ladyman *[pursuant to his reply, 15 November 2004, c. 1163–64W]*: I regret my previous reply was incorrect. It should read as follows:

Information on the rates of methicillin resistant Staphylococcus aureus (MRSA) blood stream infections is only available for acute National Health Service trusts and these data are shown in the table.

Data is not collected centrally for Barnet Primary Care Trust, of which Edgware Hospital is a part.

Name of NHS trust	*Number of MRSA bacteraemia reports April 2001–March 2002*	*MRSA rate per 1000 bed-days April 2001–March 2002*	*Number of MRSA bacteraemia reports April 2002–March 2003*	*MRSA rate per 1,000 bed-days April 2002–March 2003*	*MRSA bacteraemia reports April 2003–March 2004*	*MRSA rate per 1,000 bed-days April 2003–March 2004*
Barnet and Chase Farm Hospitals NHS Trust	62	0.20	94	0.28	94	0.27
North West London Hospitals NHS Trust	59	0.23	44	0.16	55	0.20
Royal Free Hampstead NHS Trust	122	0.41	101	0.39	98	0.34

Dr. Iddon: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many patients contracted MRSA last year following a visit to a NHS hospital; and what plans he has to combat the spread of this disease. [198932]

Miss Melanie Johnson: Information on all methicillin resistant *Staphylococcus aureus* (MRSA) infections is not available but 7,657 blood stream infections were reported in 2003–04. We have an on-going programme of work to prevent and control MRSA and other healthcare associated infections. Recent measures include the launch of a national hand hygiene campaign and a new target to halve MRSA blood stream infections by 2008.

Hospital Radio

Ms Atherton: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what plans he has *(a)* to promote and *(b)* to develop hospital radio. [198495]

Ms Rosie Winterton: Hospital radio stations have provided an invaluable service to patients for many years. It is up to each individual national health service trust as to how hospital radio stations are promoted and developed locally.

Influenza Vaccine

Mr. Burns: To ask the Secretary of State for Health when he was informed of the problem with influenza vaccines at Chiron; and if he will make a statement. [190813]

Miss Melanie Johnson *[holding answer 14 October 2004]:* Chiron Vaccines notified the Medicines and Healthcare products Regulatory Agency inspector responsible for the Speke site, of a potential problem with influenza vaccine on 27 August 2004. The MHRA carried out an initial inspection and informed Ministers there was a problem on 15 September 2004.

Learning Disability

Paul Holmes: To ask the Secretary of State for Health which long-stay hospitals provide accommodation for people with a learning disability; how many people with a learning disability remain in each of these; and whether each hospital will meet its agreed closure date. [197845]

Dr. Ladyman: In March 2001, when Valuing People was published, approximately 1,500 people with learning disabilities were living in long-stay hospitals. On 1 April 2004, the number was 668.

This table shows the remaining long-stay hospitals providing accommodation, the number of people in each.

Name of Hospital	*Number of people at 1 April 2004*
Aston Hall	54
Chase Farm	10
Earls House	6
Fieldhead	35
Gloucester Centre	20
Gorse Hill	53
Highbury	30
Lea Castle	10
Little Highwood	48
Little Plumstead	20
Long Leys Court	1
Monkton Hall	35
Northgate	74
Oak House	2
Orchard Hill	104
Princess Marina	16
Prudhoe	30
Ridge Hill	36
St. Catherine's	34
St. Ebba's	50
Total	668

Closure dates have been agreed for all but three establishments and the responsible strategic health authorities have given assurances that these dates will be met. The remaining three dates are being negotiated within the whole closure programme of April 2006.

Legislation

Brian White: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what pieces of legislation passed in the last 30 years that the Department is responsible for remain to be brought into force, broken down by year of enactment. [195623]

Ms Rosie Winterton: Providing information for the period requested will incur disproportionate costs.

Leukaemia (Power Lines)

Mr. Andrew Mitchell: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what estimate he has made of the number of children under 15 years of age who *(a)* died and *(b)* suffered from leukaemia in each of the last three years who lived (i) within 100 metres of and (ii) over 100 metres away from high voltage power lines. [197550]

Dr. Ladyman: It has not proved possible to respond to the hon. Member in the time available before Prorogation.

Maldon and South Chelmsford PCT

Mr. Francois: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what progress has been made in the appointment of an official within the Maldon and South Chelmsford primary care trust with responsibility for co-ordinating healthcare policy in South Woodham Ferrers. [199121]

Dr. Ladyman: In line with "Shifting the Balance of Power" and the NHS Plan, it is now for primary care trusts (PCTs), in partnership with strategic health authorities and other local stakeholders, to determine how best to use the funds allocated to them to meet national and local priorities for improving health, tackling health inequalities and modernising services.

I understand that Maldon and South Chelmsford PCT advertised the position of project manager on 15 October, with a closing date of 29 October. The advert has attracted four applicants, and interviews are scheduled to take place on 29 November. The PCT hopes to be able to announce the successful candidate in December.

Mr. Francois: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what the public relations budget of the Maldon and South Chelmsford primary care trust was in the first six months of the current financial year. [199123]

Dr. Ladyman: The Department allocates revenue funding to primary care trusts (PCTs) on the basis of the relative needs of their populations. In the allocations for 2003–04 to 2005–06 none of the growth money has been identified for specific purposes.

It is for PCTs, in partnership with strategic health authorities and other local stakeholders, to determine how best to use these funds to meet national and local priorities for improving health, tackling health inequalities and modernising services.

I understand that Maldon and South Chelmsford PCT has contracted out its public relations function, at a cost of £900 per month, plus value added tax, since 2001. The contract is open ended and is not subject to inflationary increase.

Mr. Francois: To ask the Secretary of State for Health when the new hospital planned for Maldon will open; what the estimated cost of the project is; and if he will make a statement. [199122]

Dr. Ladyman: In line with "Shifting the Balance of Power" and the NHS Plan, it is now for primary care trusts (PCTs), in partnership with strategic health authorities and other local stakeholders, to determine how best to use the funds allocated to them to meet national and local priorities for improving health, tackling health inequalities and modernising services.

I understand that Maldon and South Chelmsford PCT is at a critical stage in negotiating the purchase of a suitable parcel of land within the Maldon area on which it wishes to site the new community hospital. Subject to the negotiations reaching a successful conclusion, the PCT is planning to open the new hospital in early 2008. The estimated costs of the new community hospital under the private finance initiative is approximately £27 million.

Male Circumcision

Lynne Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what assessment he has made of the health effects of circumcision of male infants. [198754]

Dr. Ladyman: Circumcision in male infants has a number of potential complications. It is largely performed for cultural or religious reasons in neonates and the postulated health benefits are contentious. Beyond the neonatal period it may be performed for medical conditions, but there is a growing view among paediatric urologists that the majority of these are better dealt with by more conservative treatment. I understand guidelines have been issued by the General Medical Council, and that the British Medical Association has advised doctors performing circumcisions on male infants to ensure that those giving consent consider all the risks and benefits associated with the procedure.

ME

David Taylor: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what recent discussions he has had with the Chief Medical Officer on *(a)* the clinical definition of and *(b)* the available treatments for sufferers of myalgic encephalitis. [199290]

Dr. Ladyman: Ministers and the Chief Medical Officer meet on a regular basis to discuss a variety of issues relating to myalgic encephalitis, the most recent meeting being with me and Lord Warner on 8 November.

Mental Health

Mr. Brady: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will list the acute NHS trusts in England that do not have a designated place of safety as defined by the Mental Health Act 1983. [199062]

Ms Rosie Winterton: The Mental Health Act 1983 provides for people who appear to be suffering from mental disorder to be removed to a place of safety in certain circumstances. For these purposes, a place of safety includes residential accommodation provided by a local social services authority, a hospital, a police station, an independent hospital or care home for mentally disordered persons, or any other suitable place whose occupier is willing temporarily to receive the patient. The identification of preferred places of safety is a matter for local agreement. The Department does not maintain records of these places.

Mr. Key: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what the cost is in this financial year of mental health services provided by the Salisbury NHS mental health team; how many mental health patients from *(a)* Devizes, *(b)* West Wiltshire, *(c)* the New Forest and *(d)* elsewhere outside Salisbury have been treated by the team in each of the last five years; and if he will make a statement. [197825]

Ms Rosie Winterton: The information requested is not held centrally.

Mr. Key: To ask the Secretary of State for Health (1) what the construction cost was of the Grovely in-patient ward at the Fountain Way facility of the Avon and Wiltshire Mental Health Partnership NHS Trust in Salisbury; what the running costs have been in each of the last five years; and what the options are for the use of the Grovely facility if the decision is taken to close it; [197826]

(2) for what reasons it is proposed to cut funding for mental health services in Salisbury by £2.5 million; and if he will make a statement; [197828]

(3) for what reasons the Avon and Wiltshire Mental Health Partnership NHS Trust proposes to close Grovely House; what alternative facilities will be available to patients if this facility closes; whether it is proposed to disband the local outreach team; whether additional funds will be made available to *(a)* general practitioners and *(b)* Wiltshire County Council to provide alternative care in the event that the trust reduces in-patient facilities in Salisbury; and if he will make a statement. [197829]

Ms Rosie Winterton: The information requested on construction and running costs is not collected centrally.

It is for primary care trusts (PCTs), in partnership with other national health service bodies and stakeholders, to plan and commission appropriate levels of service for their populations. PCTs have been given increased funding to enable them to do this and South Wiltshire PCT's allocation for 2004–05 is £108.5 million, an increase in cash terms of 8.9 per cent.

Public consultation on proposals for mental health services locally is being undertaken by the NHS in South Wiltshire before any final decisions are taken.

Mr. Key: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many elderly inpatient and acute beds at the Avon and Wiltshire Mental Health Partnership NHS Trust's Salisbury facility are blocked; how many have been blocked for *(a)* three months or more, *(b)* six months or more and *(c)* one year or more; and what the length of stay is of the patient who has been at the hospital for the longest time. [197827]

Ms Rosie Winterton: Data is collected centrally on delayed discharges from acute beds only. The Avon and Wiltshire Mental Health Partnership National Health Service Trust does not have acute beds and therefore no information is available.

Tim Loughton: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what instructions have been issued to staff of the National Institute for Mental Health concerning comments by them on the draft Mental Health Bill. [197982]

Ms Rosie Winterton: The Department has not given any instructions to staff of the National Institute for Mental Health in England (NIMHE) concerning their comments on the draft Mental Health Bill.

MRI/CT Scanners

Mr. Burstow: To ask the Secretary of State for Health (1) how many people have been *(a)* killed and *(b)* injured in adverse incidents involving scanners in the NHS in (i) England and (ii) each strategic health authority in each year since 1997; and if he will make a statement; [198239]

(2) how many adverse incidents involving *(a)* MRI and *(b)* CT scanners there have been in (i) England and (ii) each strategic health authority in each year since 1997; and if he will estimate the costs of these incidents. [198250]

Ms Rosie Winterton: Since 1997 a total of 147 incidents involving computer tomography (CT) and magnetic resonance imaging (MRI) scanners have been reported to the Medicines and Healthcare Products Regulatory Agency (MHRA).

110 of these involved MRI and 37 CT procedures.

Number of incidents reported to MHRA

	CT	MR	Total
1997	0	0	0
1998	0	0	0
1999	0	5	5
2000	0	4	4
2001	0	22	22
2002	4	29	33
2003	16	22	38
2004 to date	17	28	45
Total	37	110	147

The identification of strategic health authorities where these incidents occurred is only available following a more detailed interrogation of the MHRA's adverse incident database.

The costs of these incidents is not known, as this information was not reported to the MHRA at the time.

Of the 37 incidents relating to CT scanning, three have resulted in injuries to patients. These have been classified as "minor" injuries, resulting from software problems, which led to slightly more radiation than expected being delivered to the patients. These were not deemed statistically significant.

Forty-seven of the 110 incidents relating to MRI scanning have resulted in minor injuries, and there has been one fatality.

This fatality occurred when a patient who had a cardiac pacemaker in situ underwent a MRI procedure.

Cardiac pacemakers are an absolute contra-indication to undertaking MRI scans and there was a breakdown in local policies and procedures which led to this patient being scanned. Local scanning procedures and policies have been considerably revised to prevent any re-occurrence.

The MHRA attended a meeting of EUCOMED (European medical technologies industry body) in September 2004 where the issue of the compatibility of implants with MRI scanners was discussed. This meeting recommended that a further meeting dedicated entirely to this problem involving EUCOMED, COCIR (European coordination committee of the radiological and electromedical industry), representatives of major implant manufacturers, and representatives of MRI manufacturers should take place in Brussels early next year (February 2005).

The remaining injuries have mainly resulted in skin reddening, or minor burns, caused by the heating effect of the coils used in MRI scanning. Most of these appear to have been due to user error in placing the coils. Work is on-going to improve both manufacturers' information on coil usage and to ensure that operators of this equipment are fully aware of the potential for injury to patients if this advice is not followed.

Where equipment has been found to be faulty this has been addressed with the manufacturers and changes implemented.

No injuries to patients were reported prior to 2000.

Injuries caused by CT and MRI scanners reported to MHRA

	Fatality	Injury
2000	—	2
2001	—	11
2002	1	14
2003	—	13
2004 to date	—	10
Total	1	50

Mr. Burstow: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what proportion of *(a)* MRI scans and *(b)* CT scans were conducted as outpatient procedures in the latest period for which figures are available. [198242]

Miss Melanie Johnson: Data outlining how many outpatient procedures took place for magnetic resonance imaging (MRI) scans and computer tomography (CT) scans is not currently collected centrally.

However, a count of imaging and radiodiagnostic examinations or tests by imaging modality is collected on the Department's KH12 return. Data on MRI and CT scans is given in the table.

Total number of imaging and radiodiagnostic examinations or tests, CT and MRI, England, 1995–96 to 2002–03

	CT	MRI
1995–96	1,709,244	347,817
1996–97	1,056,365	394,940
1997–98	1,172,656	473,074
1998–99	1,254,474	522,138
1999–2000	1,359,852	585,797
2000–01	1,488,752	632,594
2001–02	1,625,304	705,706
2002–03	1,767,791	786,646

Source:

Department of Health form KH12

MS Nurses

Mr. Gray: To ask the Secretary of State for Health (1) what assessment he has made of the effects on local services of his Department's scheme for centrally-funded multiple sclerosis specialist nurses; [195910]

(2) which primary care trusts have received funding under his Department's scheme for centrally-funded multiple sclerosis specialist nurses, broken down by amount; [195911]

(3) which primary care trusts are awaiting confirmation of funding under his Department's scheme for centrally-funded multiple sclerosis specialist nurses; and when he expects them to receive confirmation of funding. [195912]

Dr. Ladyman: There are no outstanding applications and all successful bids have been funded. Details of the allocations have been placed in the Library.

Professor Tom Walley of Liverpool University has been commissioned to undertake a review of the scheme.

NHS Care for the Elderly

Paul Farrelly: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what steps are being taken to improve *(a)* intermediate care, *(b)* rehabilitation, *(c)* stroke services and *(d)* community care for the elderly in North Staffordshire. [198595]

Dr. Ladyman: The national service framework for older people was published on 27 March 2001. It set national standards to improve services for older people, whether they are at home, in residential care or in hospital.

Decisions on how these services are developed to meet national standards are taken locally. Shropshire and Staffordshire Strategic Health Authority (SHA) reports that:

Over 1.5 million has now been invested in developing intermediate care in North Staffordshire with additional investment to come as part of the "Fit for the Future" project. The hospital discharge teams have, been amalgamated.

In 2003–04 1,813 patients received national health service funded intermediate care with the numbers increasing each month. There are now two community intermediate care teams, one for the city and one for the county and both are working very closely with social services. A total of £0.75 million has now been transferred from the health community to the two social services departments to further support community developments.

Intermediate care is being developed by both health and social services through in-patient and community service provision. While primary care trusts (PCTs) are leading on the majority of elderly care developments, North Staffordshire Combined Healthcare NHS Trust is working with them to pilot intermediate care in-patient provision for older people with mental health needs.

Rehabilitation at Bucknall Hospital has recently undertaken a modernisation programme with the twin intentions of improving standards of care and reducing length of stay.

A review of the total stroke care pathway across primary and secondary care is in progress taking on board the latest evidence based clinical practice.

Planning has commenced to further develop the stroke rehabilitation facility at Bucknall Hospital in line with the public consultation on post acute intermediate care linked to the "Fit for the Future" project. Interserve were appointed in the middle of June as the preferred supply chain partner to work with all stakeholders to deliver this facility.

In close collaboration with the University Hospital of North Staffordshire NHS Trust, North Staffordshire Combined Healthcare NHS Trust and Stoke and Staffordshire Social Services Departments, improvements have been made in using the community hospital beds to support step down care from acute beds primarily for older people.

NHS Direct

Mr. Burstow: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what assessment he has made of NHS Direct; and if he will make a statement. [196988]

Ms Rosie Winterton: NHS Direct was set up to help callers access the right service at the right time and to give people reassuring clinical advice so that they can look after themselves, if that is the appropriate thing to do. NHS Direct has grown from a small pilot project to a substantial national service handling over 500,000 telephone calls and 500,000 internet visitor sessions every month. As such, it is the world's largest and most successful service of its type, empowering patients to exercise better informed choices about their own healthcare.

The National Audit Office's report on NHS Direct, published in January 2002, highlighted that NHS Direct is a very safe service and that adverse clinical outcomes associated with the service are likely to be rare. This confirmed the findings of earlier independent research by Sheffield University.

We are committed to the further development of NHS Direct, including the expansion of its call-taking capacity and the development of various channels through which patients can access the services it provides.

NHS Estate (Maintenance)

Mr. Burstow: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what the maintenance backlog to reach estate code condition B was in *(a)* England and *(b)* each strategic health authority in each year since 1997. [192785]

Mr. Hutton: I refer the hon. Member to the reply I gave on 9 February 2004, *Official Report*, columns 1205–06W.

NHS Facilities

Mr. Allen: To ask the Secretary of State for Health pursuant to his answer of 28 October 2004, *Official Report*, column 1340W, on NHS facilities, what the cost of each of the additional facilities listed was. [199170]

Dr. Ladyman: The information requested is shown in the table.

Facility	*Cost*
Trent Access and Choice Pilot (TRAC)	£10.8 million in 2003–04 and £1.8 million in 2004–05. This covers all 19 primary care trusts (PCTs) in the Trent Strategic Health Authority (SHA) area. Nottingham PCTs received £1,890,234 in 2003–04 and £541,000 in 2004–05
Queens Medical Centre, Nottingham University Hospital National Health Service Trust	
Ear nose and throat/ophthalmology unit (£ million)	18.5
Accident and emergency department (expansion and modernisation) (£ million)	6.3
Maternity unit (modernisation and refurbishment) (£ million)	1.45
Set up of patient advice and liaison service (PALS) (£)	100,000

Facility	*Cost*
PALS staffing (£)	74,500
Simulation and clinical skills centre (£ million)	2.48
Magnetic resonance imaging scanner (£ million)	1
Nottingham City Hospital NHS Trust	
Extension of cardiac surgery unit (£)	250,000
High dependency unit (£)	980,00
Re-provision of endoscopy unit (£ million)	3.1
New orthopaedic pre-operative assessment suite (£)	500,000
Re-provision of breast unit (£ million)	5.2
New clinical haematology wards (£ million)	1.8
Walk-in centre	
Nottingham walk-in centre	£1.2 million annual budget (includes all staffing and service provision costs and patient care)
Dental centre	
Dental access centre	This cost comes under the walk-in centre figure above
Personal dental services	£142,000. This cost includes a total of six pilot sites in Rushcliffe
Dental field site in Chilwell	£3,000 of Modernisation Agency funding for information technology
Independent sector treatment centre (ISTC)	
ISTC	£90 million over a five year contract period
Pharmacy	
Pharmacy openings	Local information at this level is not available centrally

NHS Finance

Miss McIntosh: To ask the Secretary of State for Health whether his Department makes up the shortfall where there is a deficit in *(a)* ambulance service and *(b)* primary care trusts' budgets. [19[illegible]257]

Mr. Hutton: The national health service must live within the funding made available and all organisations are expected to plan for and deliver financial balance to achieve this. Any deficits by NHS organisations need to be matched by underspends by other NHS bodies each year to ensure the NHS as a whole remains within the funding available. In the next year, NHS organisations that overspent should make a surplus in order to ensure that other bodies can utilise the underspends from the previous year.

NHS Procurement

Paul Farrelly: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what steps have been taken to improve efficiency in NHS procurement in North Staffordshire. [198597]

Mr. Hutton: North Staffordshire is actively involved in the national supply chain excellence programme as part of a pathfinding collaborative procurement hub project. The hub will coordinate all purchasing activity in Shropshire and Staffordshire to improve performance, efficiency and generate substantial savings and benefits for all national health service trusts in the area.

NHS Professionals

Tim Loughton: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many placements have been secured through NHS professionals to date. [197922]

Mr. Hutton: NHS Professionals was established as a Special Health Authority from 1 April 2004. Since that time it has been responsible for filling a total of 935,110 placements for doctors, nurses, allied health professionals and administrative and clerical staff.

NHS Staff

Mr. Burstow: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many reported violent incidents against NHS staff there were in *(a)* England, *(b)* each strategic health authority and *(c)* each primary care trust in each year since 1997. [198246]

Mr. Hutton: The information requested was not collated centrally until 2000–01 and since then the statistics from different areas are incomplete. The available statistics on reported violent incidents, including both physical and non-physical assaults, against NHS staff for 2000–01, 2001–02 and 2002–03 in England; strategic health authorities (SHA): and primary care trusts (PCT) are summarised in the table.

Estimated number of reported violent or abusive incidents for 2000–01, 2001–02, 2002–03 in (a) England, (b) SHA, (c) PCT

	2000–01	*2001–02*	*2002–03*
England	84,214	112,000	116,000
SHA	45	20	11
PCT	1,156	5,802	20,767

In November 2003 the NHS Security Management Service launched a new national reporting system for physical assaults. Statistics on physical assaults against staff in the NHS will be available from 2004–05, with statistics on non-physical assault available from 2005–06.

Tim Loughton: To ask the Secretary of State for Health (1) how many nursing posts in the NHS are funded by pharmaceutical companies, broken down by trust; [198626]

(2) what his policy is on hospitals employing nurses and doctors funded for wholly or in part by pharmaceutical companies. [198627]

Ms Rosie Winterton: It has not been possible to respond to the hon. Member in the time available before Prorogation.

Nottingham Services

Mr. Allen: To ask the Secretary of State for Health pursuant to his answer of 28 October, *Official Report*, column 1334W, on services in Nottingham, how many *(a)* doctors and *(b)* nurses were employed by trusts which fall wholly within the City of Nottingham local government boundary (i) in 1997 and (ii) on the latest date for which figures are available. [197895]

Dr. Ladyman: The information is shown in the table.

Nottingham City Primary Care Trust (PCT), Nottingham City Trust Hospital and the Queens Medical Centre National Health Service Trust have been identified by Trent Strategic Health Authority as those trusts which fall within the City of Nottingham local government boundary. PCTs did not come into existence until 1 April 2000. Therefore there is no direct comparison to 1997. Nottingham Health Authority is the closest match, but this includes staff working in a significantly larger geographical area.

Numbers of doctors and nurses employed in Nottingham (latest available information)

1997	*Doctors*[1]	*Nurses*[2]
Nottingham Health Authority	1,471	4,695
Total	1,471	4,695

2003	*Doctors*[1]	*Nurses*[2]
Nottingham City PCT	190	853
Nottingham City Hospital NHS Trust	421	1,170
Queen's Medical Centre NHS Trust	724	2,040
Total	1,335	4,063

Notes:

[1] These figures include hospital and community health services doctors and general medical practitioners.

[2] These figures include qualified nursing, midwifery and health visiting staff and GP nurses.

Sources:

Department of Health general and personal medial services statistics.

Department of Health medical and dental workforce census.

Department of Health non-medical workforce census.

Offender Rehabilitation

Miss McIntosh: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will make a statement on the siting of rehabilitation facilities for offenders with learning difficulties; and what discussions he has had with the Home Secretary on the location of such facilities. [199097]

Dr. Ladyman: Local primary care trusts are responsible for commissioning health services for their local communities including those for adults with learning disabilities. This involves securing the provision of services but also the broader tasks of improving the health of the local community and integrating health and social care.

This is a matter solely for the Secretary of State for Health.

Parliamentary Questions

Mr. Don Foster: To ask the Secretary of State for Health when he will reply to the Question tabled by the hon. Member for Bath on 22 July, ref 187176; and if he will make a statement. [197309]

Miss Melanie Johnson: I replied to the hon. Member today.

Patient Choice

Mr. Burstow: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what his policy is on requiring primary care trusts to offer patients the choice of an independent sector provider at the point of referral. [191720]

Mr. Hutton: The Government are committed to the expansion of the national health service to offer patients greater choice. Independent sector providers are supplementing this expansion and helping to deliver the increased capacity and choice to NHS patients.

By December 2005, primary care trusts will commission four to five service providers to offer their patients choice at the point of referral. The range of providers commissioned could include NHS trusts, foundations trusts, NHS and independent sector treatment centres, independent sector hospitals and general practitioners with a special interest or other extended primary care treatment services.

Mr. Burstow: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will publish the guidance given to primary care trusts on the implementation of his Department's policy to offer a choice of four or five providers to patients at the point of referral. [191721]

Mr. Hutton: The "Choose and Book—Patients Choice of Hospital and Booked Appointment" policy guidance was published on 23 August 2004. The guidance can be found on the Department's website at: www.dh.gov.uk/assetRoot/04/08/83/52/04088352.pdf Copies have been placed in the Library.

Patient Numbers

Mr. Kevin Hughes: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what estimate he has made of the number of people who are suffering from *(a)* Alzheimer's disease, *(b)* Parkinson's disease, *(c)* Huntingdon's disease, *(d)* multiple sclerosis and *(e)* motor neurone disease. [198226]

Dr. Ladyman: Although the Department does not routinely collect information on the number of people diagnosed with specific conditions, estimates for the United Kingdom are given in the table.

Condition	*Number*
Alzheimer's disease	400,000
Parkinson's disease	120,000
Huntingdon's disease	4,800
Multiple Sclerosis	85,000
Motor Neurone disease	5,000

The Department provides hospital episode statistics data, which relates to diagnostic information for in-patients in national health service hospitals. The data refers to the number of finished admission episodes and are shown in the table.

Finished admission episodes for selected diagnoses NHS hospitals 2002–03

Diagnosis	*Finished admission episodes*
Alzheimer's Disease	6,816
Parkinson's Disease	7,074
Huntingdon's Disease	386
Multiple Sclerosis	14,594
Motor Neurone Disease	2,240

A finished admission episode is the first period of in-patient care under one consultant within one healthcare provider. Admissions do not represent the number of in-patients, as a person may have more than one admission within the year. During their course of treatment over a period of time, patients may have a number of episodes of care, which are counted each time they have a stay in hospital.

Prescriptions

Mr. Burstow: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will estimate the income to be received by his Department from pre-payment certificates for prescription charges in real terms in *(a)* 2005–06, *(b)* 2006–07, *(c)* 2007–08, *(d)* 2008–09 and *(e)* 2009–10. [198233]

Ms Rosie Winterton: It has not been possible to respond the hon. Member in the time available before Prorogation.

Press Officers

Tim Loughton: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how much his Department spent in *(a)* 1996–97 and *(b)* the last year for which figures are available on press officers, broken down by grade. [184540]

Mr. Ruffley: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many press officers are employed in his Department; and how many were employed in each year since 1996–97. [195357]

Dr. Julian Lewis: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many press officers the Department has employed in each of the past five years. [196049]

Ms Rosie Winterton *[holding answers 16 July 2004, 1 November 2004 and 4 November 2004]:* The Department does not use the term "press officer" in the data recorded for management purposes about staff in its media centre. These data are instead recorded by civil service pay grade, and not by any functional attribute. In the absence of such a definition, there is no reliable record of the number of staff within the media centre, which comprises staff at a variety of grades performing a range of tasks, including administrative and managerial ones, to whom the term "press officer" could have been applicable. As a result of this uncertainty, over the course of several years, answers to Parliamentary Questions about press officer numbers have been based on "ad hoc" definitions and methodologies, giving rise to further variations in handling other contributory factors, such as:

in-year leavers and joiners;

full- and part-time posts;

vacancies;

degree of direct contact with the media by administrative and by managerial staff.

Robust data on the number of press officers employed by the Department during the financial years 1996–99 were provided in Appendix II of the report "The Government Information and Communications Service" (HC 770) published by the Select Committee on Public Administration (29 July 1998). Using the same methodology, information on media centre costs and numbers of press officers for the period 1997–98 to 2003–04 is shown in the following tables.

Cost of media centre staff, 1997–98 to 2003–04

	Cost (£ million)
1997–98	1.062
1998–99	1.122
1999–2000	1.253
2000–01	1.233
2001–02	1.279
2002–03	1.077
2003–04	1.284

Number of press officers, 1997–98 to 2003–04

	Number of staff
1997–98	15
1998–99	15
1999–2000	21
2000–01	22
2001–02	22
2002–03	24
2003–04	26

I regret that attempts to be helpful in providing substantive responses to Members' Questions have led to an unsatisfactory level of consistency with the data reported. Mechanisms are now in place to record this data on a consistent basis. We will, as a matter of routine, be carrying out an audit at the end of each financial year, on both costs and numbers of staff, the results of which will be placed in the Library.

Primary Care Trusts

Mr. Francois: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what the standard notice period is for the chief executive of an NHS primary care trust. [199124]

Mr. Hutton: There is currently no standard national contract for national health service primary care trust chief executives. The period of notice is, therefore, defined in law by the terms of each individual's contract of employment with their employer. The precise terms of a contract may vary from individual to individual. Details of individual contracts are not held centrally by the Department.

Public Health

Mr. Don Foster: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what plans he has to publish a delivery plan on physical activity in relation to the Public Health White Paper. [197363]

Miss Melanie Johnson: We will publish a physical activity plan, including those commitments identified in the White Paper and other relevant departmental plans, in the spring.

Mr. Don Foster: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will place in the Library a copy of the report his Department commissioned on Promoting Physical Activity—Selected International Activity. [197364]

Miss Melanie Johnson: The report has been placed in the Library. It is also available on the Department's website at www.dh.gov.uk/assetRoot/04/09/46/56/04094656.pdf.

Mr. Chris Smith: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what discussions he has had with broadcasters in preparing the proposals set out in his Public Health White Paper on restrictions on broadcast advertising. [R] [199236]

Miss Melanie Johnson: It has not proved possible to respond to the right hon. Member in the time available before Prorogation.

Radio-diagnostic Equipment

Mr. Steen: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will meet manufacturers of radio-diagnostic equipment to discuss increasing the weight limit of 21 to 22 stones for use of such equipment. [195914]

Ms Rosie Winterton: A review of current weight limits for the major manufacturer's X-ray couches has shown that most are substantially above 22 stones. Some couches have limits of just over 21 stones when tilted, but are above 23 stones in the horizontal position. Earlier models still in service may have lower weight limits.

Nuclear medicine, where the patient is injected with a radioactive substance and then scanned to image regions of interest, becomes less effective as the patient's weight increases. In the interests of patient safety maximum doses are set by the Administration of Radioactive Substances Advisory Committee, which is part of the Department. This will limit the amount of radiation available to produce an image in heavier patients. However, these maximum doses can be exceeded on a named patient basis in special circumstances.

It is not necessary for a Minister to meet with manufacturers at this time.

Renal Dialysis

Helen Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what assessment he has made of the amount of renal dialysis provision which will be required in Warrington over the next five years if all patients requiring dialysis are to be treated locally. [197642]

Ms Rosie Winterton *[holding answer 11 November 2004]:* In January 2004, the Department published the national service framework for renal services, part one. This identifies various steps that primary care trusts and national health service trusts can make to take forward delivery.

From 2000–01 to 2005–06, up to £60 million central capital funding will be provided to support the expansion of centre-based haemodialysis to meet increasing local demand for dialysis. This includes £9 million in 2004–05 and £14 million in 2005–06.

The Cheshire and Merseyside Strategic Health Authority received £504,000 in 2004–05.

Radiographers

Dr. Tonge: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what assessment he has made of the effects of Agenda for Change on the *(a)* remuneration and *(b)* working hours of radiographers in the NHS. [199326]

Mr. Hutton: We anticipate that for the majority of existing radiographers the effect of "Agenda for Change" will be an increase in their rate of pay. Under "Agenda for Change", there will be a phased move to a standard working week for all full-time national health service staff of 37.5 hours per week. In the case of radiographers, this will mean an increase in their current weekly hours from 35 to 37.5. The changes for radiographers will be phased in over seven years, with no change at all for the first four years.

Dr. Tonge: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what recent discussions he has had with representatives of professional groups on increasing the number of radiographers available to the NHS. [199327]

Mr. Hutton: I have regular meetings with professional bodies, including the Society of Radiographers, to discuss a wide range of topics, for example increasing the number of radiographers in the national health service.

Dr. Tonge: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many vacancies there are in the NHS for *(a)* radiographers and *(b)* radiotherapy technicians. [199328]

Mr. Hutton: Specific information on the number of vacancies for radiotherapy technicians is not collected centrally. The tables show the number and rate of vacancies lasting three months or more for radiographers and radiotherapy physicists.

Department of Health Vacancies Survey, March 2004. NHS 3 month vacancies by Government Office Region and Strategic Health Authority area for qualified radiography staff

3 month vacancy rates, numbers and staff in post

		Diagnostic radiographers			
		March 2004		September 2003	
		3 month vacancy rate (%)	3 month vacancy (No.)	Staff in post (wte)	Staff in post (headcount)
	England	4.8	488	9,642	11,687
A	*North East Government Office Region*	1.8	11	579	681
Q09	Northumberland, Tyne and Wear SHA	2.1	8	327	386
Q10	County Durham and Tees Valley SHA	1.2	3	252	295
B	*North West Government Office Region*	3.9	66	1,636	2,023
Q13	Cumbria and Lancashire SHA	3.1	13	405	505
Q14	Greater Manchester SHA	4.8	31	605	723
Q15	Cheshire and Merseyside SHA	3.6	23	626	795
D	*Yorkshire and the Humber Government Office Region*	1.4	16	1,156	1,393
Q11	North and East Yorkshire and Northern Lincolnshire SHA	2.4	7	293	367
Q12	West Yorkshire SHA	1.6	9	588	706
Q23	South Yorkshire SHA	0.0	—	275	320
E	*East Midlands Government Office Region*	2.3	16	658	819
Q24	Trent SHA	1.8	7	407	502
Q25	Leicestershire, Northamptonshire and Rutland SHA	3.1	8	251	317
F	*West Midlands Government Office Region*	3.9	39	946	1,198
Q26	Shropshire and Staffordshire SHA	1.7	5	268	352
Q27	Birmingham and The Black Country SHA	4.3	21	432	519
Q28	West Midlands South SHA	5.5	14	246	327
G	*East of England Government Office Region*	4.9	47	934	1,135
Q01	Norfolk, Suffolk and Cambridgeshire SHA	5.7	29	489	595
Q02	Bedfordshire and Hertfordshire SHA	3.3	8	221	272
Q03	Essex SHA	4.7	10	224	268
H	*London Government Office Region*	10.3	167	1,466	1,814
Q04	North West London SHA	9.5	35	332	358
Q05	North Central London SHA	12.6	47	323	353
Q06	North East London SHA	14.3	43	269	283
Q07	South East London SHA	9.0	29	293	322
Q08	South West London SHA	5.1	14	249	298
J	*South East Government Office Region*	7.6	104	1,268	1607
Q16	Thames Valley SHA	1.6	5	301	403
Q17	Hampshire and Isle Of Wight SHA	10.4	34	317	414
Q18	Kent and Medway SHA	7.4	21	260	314
Q19	Surrey and Sussex SHA	9.7	45	390	476
K	*South West Government Office Region*	2.0	21	1,000	1217
D20	Avon, Gloucestershire and Wiltshire SHA	0.8	4	482	582
Q21	South West Peninsula SHA	3.3	10	287	352
Q22	Dorset and Somerset SHA	2.8	7	231	283

3 month vacancy rates, numbers and staff in post

		Therapeutic radiographers			
		March 2004	September 2003		
		3 month vacancy rate (%)	3 month vacancy (No.)	Staff in post (wte)	Staff in post (headcount)
	England	8.8	144	1,469	1,657
A	North East Government Office Region	4.1	3	72	87
Q09	Northumberland, Tyne and Wear SHA	6.1	3	47	54
Q10	County Durham and Tees Valley SHA	0.0	—	25	33
B	*North West Government Office Region*	11.5	23	181	197
Q13	Cumbria and Lancashire SHA	22.0	12	42	44
Q14	Greater Manchester SHA	12.3	8	63	70
Q15	Cheshire and Merseyside SHA	3.8	3	76	83
D	*Yorkshire and the Humber Government Office Region*	1.1	2	133	154
Q11	North and East Yorkshire and Northern Lincolnshire SHA	7.2	2	20	21
Q12	West Yorkshire SHA	0.0	—	64	74
Q23	South Yorkshire SHA	0.0	—	50	59

3 month vacancy rates, numbers and staff in post

		Therapeutic radiographers			
		March 2004 3 month vacancy rate (%)	*September 2003 3 month vacancy (No.)*	*Staff in post (wte)*	*Staff in post (headcount)*
E	*East Midlands Government Office Region*	2.3	3	147	168
Q24	Trent SHA	0.0		99	111
Q25	Leicestershire, Northamptonshire and Rutland SHA	6.5	3	49	57
F	*West Midlands Government Office Region*	14.1	20	128	141
Q26	Shropshire and Staffordshire SHA	14.2	6	31	35
Q27	Birmingham and The Black Country SHA	13.4	10	68	74
Q28	West Midlands South SHA	15.5	5	29	32
G	*East of England Government Office Region*	6.8	12	165	193
Q01	Norfolk, Suffolk and Cambridgeshire SHA	0.0	—	91	105
Q02	Bedfordshire and Hertfordshire SHA	20.7	9	35	43
Q03	Essex SHA	7.4	3	39	45
H	*London Government Office Region*	13.4	39	249	265
Q04	North West London SHA	33.7	15	31	31
Q05	North Central London SHA	10.8	8	58	61
Q06	North East London SHA	8.0	4	47	50
Q07	South East London SHA	17.6	12	61	64
Q08	South West London SHA	0.0	—	53	59
J	*South East Government Office Region*	12.5	34	218	256
Q16	Thames Valley SHA	11.5	6	46	54
Q17	Hampshire and Isle Of Wight SHA	4.3	3	72	83
Q18	Kent and Medway SHA	15.4	11	45	53
Q19	Surrey and Sussex SHA	17.8	14	55	66
K	*South West Government Office Region*	4.6	8	175	196
D20	Avon, Gloucestershire and Wiltshire SHA	6.0	5	84	96
Q21	South West Peninsula SHA	4.7	3	62	68
Q22	Dorset and Somerset SHA	0.0	—	29	32

3 month vacancy rates, numbers and staff in post

		Radiotherapy physicists	
		3 month vacancy rate (%)	*3 month vacancy (No.)*
	England	2.2	15
A	*North East Government Office Region*	3.8	1
Q09	Northumberland, Tyne and Wear SHA	3.8	1
Q10	County Durham and Tees Valley SHA	—	—
B	*North West Government Office Region*	—	—
Q13	Cumbria and Lancashire SHA	—	—
Q14	Greater Manchester SHA	—	—
Q15	Cheshire and Merseyside SHA	—	—
D	*Yorkshire and the Humber Government Office Region*	0.0	—
Q11	North and East Yorkshire and Northern Lincolnshire SHA	—	—
Q12	West Yorkshire SHA	0.0	—
Q23	South Yorkshire SHA	0.0	—
E	*East Midlands Government Office Region*	2.9	2
Q24	Trent SHA	2.1	1
Q25	Leicestershire, Northamptonshire and Rutland SHA	4.5	1
F	*West Midlands Government Office Region*	1.2	1
Q26	Shropshire and Staffordshire SHA	0.0	—
Q27	Birmingham and The Black Country SHA	2.2	1
Q28	West Midlands South SHA	0.0	—
G	*East of England Government Office Region*	0.0	—
Q01	Norfolk, Suffolk and Cambridgeshire SHA	0.0	—
Q02	Bedfordshire and Hertfordshire SHA	0.0	—
Q03	Essex SHA	0.0	—
H	*London Government Office Region*	3.1	5
Q04	North West London SHA	8.5	3
Q05	North Central London SHA	9.0	2
Q06	North East London SHA	0.0	—

3 month vacancy rates, numbers and staff in post

		Radiotherapy physicists	
		3 month vacancy rate (%)	*3 month vacancy (No.)*
Q07	South East London SHA	—	—
Q08	South West London SHA	0.0	—
J	*South East Government Office Region*	4.5	6
Q16	Thames Valley SHA	2.5	1
Q17	Hampshire and Isle Of Wight SHA	0.0	—
Q18	Kent and Medway SHA	14.4	4
Q19	Surrey and Sussex SHA	2.2	1
K	*South West Government Office Region*	1.6	1
D20	Avon, Gloucestershire and Wiltshire SHA	0.0	—
Q21	South West Peninsula SHA	0.0	—
Q22	Dorset and Somerset SHA	7.9	1

wte = Whole-time equivalent.

3 month vacancy notes:

1. Three month vacancy information is as at 31 March 2004.
2. Three month vacancies are vacancies which Trusts are actively trying to fill, which had lasted for three months or more (whole-time equivalents).
3. Three month Vacancy Rates are three month vacancies expressed as a percentage of 3 month vacancies plus staff in post.
4. 3 month Vacancy Rates are calculated using staff in post from the Vacancy Survey, March 2004.
5. Percentages are rounded to one decimal place.
6. — = zero.

Staff in post notes:

1. Staff in post data is from the Non-Medical Workforce Census, September 2003.
2. — = zero.
3. September 2003 staff in post data is not available for radiotherapy physicists.

General notes:

1. Vacancy and staff in post numbers are rounded to the nearest whole number.
2. Calculating the vacancy rates using the above data may not equal the actual vacancy rates.
3. Due to rounding, totals may not equal the sum of component parts.
4. Strategic HA figures are based on Trusts, and do not necessarily reflect the geographical provision of healthcare.

Sources:

Department of Health Vacancies Survey, March 2004.

Department of Health Non-Medical Workforce Census, September 2003.

Rheumatoid Arthritis

Mr. John Taylor: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will make additional resources available to primary care trusts for anti-TNF prescribing for patients with rheumatoid arthritis *(a)* in Solihull and *(b)* elsewhere; and if he will make a statement. [199093]

Dr. Ladyman: In line with our policy to Shift the Balance of Power, responsibility for the funding and delivery of health services now rests with primary care trusts (PCTs) and funding to implement the guidance and recommendations of the National Institute for Clinical Excellence are included within their general allocations.

The national health service is currently receiving the largest sustained increase in funding in its history. The total of PCT allocations is £49.3 billion for 2004–05 and £53.9 billion for 2005–06. Over the three years 2003–04 to 2005–06 funding will increase by £12.7 billion, or 30.8 per cent.

Royal Berkshire Hospital

Mr. Salter: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what plans there are to increase the number of intensive care beds in the Royal Berkshire hospital. [198985]

Ms Rosie Winterton: In line with our policy of "Shifting the Balance of Power", it is now for primary care trusts (PCTs) in partnership with strategic health authorities and other local stakeholders to plan, develop and improve services for local people. We recognise that health services are better when management is devolved to the frontline. Within the framework set out in the NHS Plan and other policy documents, PCTs, with their specialised knowledge of the local community are effectively able to manage and improve local services.

I understand that the West Berkshire commissioners approved the addition of one additional intensive care unit bed (ICU) at the Royal Berkshire Hospital on 11 November 2004, with effect from April 2005. This will bring the total number of ICU beds available to nine.

Sexual Health

Sarah Teather: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what assessment he has made of the effect of the cost of over-the-counter contraceptives on the sexual health of the population. [198991]

Miss Melanie Johnson: As part of the White Paper on Public Health, published on 16 November, we will carry out an audit of contraceptive service provision in early 2005 and invest centrally to meet gaps in local services in particular to ensure that the full range of contraceptive services is available, good practice is spread and services modernised. People can choose to purchase some methods of contraception over the counter, namely emergency hormonal contraception; male and female condoms; other female barrier methods; spermicides and fertility devices, but the price charged is a matter for individual pharmacists.

Sexually Transmitted Diseases

Sarah Teather: To ask the Secretary of State for Health (1) pursuant to the answer of 15 October 2004, *Official Report*, column 404W, on sexually transmitted diseases, if he will break down the number of cases by disease diagnosed; [192925]

(2) how many were sexually transmitted diseases diagnosed in each primary care trust in each year since 1997; and how many patients sought advice, diagnosis or treatment for suspected sexually transmitted diseases in each primary care trust in each year since 1997. [198990]

Miss Melanie Johnson: Information showing the number of new diagnoses made at genito-urinary medicine clinics of each sexually transmitted diseases reported for each of the London primary care trusts between 1997 and 2003 has been placed in the Library.

Data on the patients seeking advice, diagnoses or treatment for suspected sexually transmitted diseases in each primary care trust are not held centrally.

Silzone Heart Valves

Mr. Hunter: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will place in the Library information collated by the UK Heart Valve Registry concerning adverse incidents involving the St. Jude Silzone heart valve. [193089]

Miss Melanie Johnson: This information is not held by the Department.

Social Services

Paul Farrelly: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what steps have been taken to improve joint working between the NHS and Social Services in North Staffordshire in respect of care for the elderly. [198598]

Dr. Ladyman: Health Act partnership arrangements have been introduced to help break down the barriers between the national health services and local authority services by removing existing constraints in the system and increasing flexibility in the provision and commissioning of services.

Decisions on how best to improve joint working are taken locally, in response to local conditions.

Shropshire and Staffordshire Strategic Health Authority reports that two older people's partnership boards have been established to ensure joint working arrangements are robust in North Staffordshire.

Specialist Service Payments

Mr. Burstow: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what safeguards have been put in place by his Department to ensure that specialist services not paid for under Payment by Results will be protected in the eventuality of overspends on services which are covered by the national tariff. [195401]

Mr. Hutton: I refer the hon. Member to the answer given on 3 November 2004, *Official Report*, column 326W.

Steri-X System

Mr. Nicholas Brown: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what assessment he has made of the effectiveness of the Steri-X system in killing pathogenic bacteria, including *(a)* MRSA, *(b)* E coli, *(c)* *Legionella pneumophilia Salmonella enteritidis* and *(d)* *Pseudomonas aeruginosa;* and when the Steri-X system was first added to the NHS list of approved products. [194785]

Miss Melanie Johnson: The Department does not assess the efficacy of such products, but we have convened a rapid review panel to review information and evidence relating to claims concerning prevention or control of such infections. The manufacturers/suppliers of Steri-X have been invited to submit their products to the panel.

The National Health Service Purchasing and Supplies Agency does not have an approved list of products.

Theft and Fraud

Mr. Prisk: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what his estimate is of the cost of theft and fraud to *(a)* his Department, *(b)* its agencies and *(c)* non-departmental public bodies in each year since 1997. [191426]

Ms Rosie Winterton: The Department and its agencies have recorded losses, including thefts, to the value of £429,667 in financial years 1997–2004 to date. The Department takes the protection of its information technology systems and assets very seriously and the its security policy and procedures are kept under constant review. Table 1 shows a breakdown of individual years for the Department and the totals for the Medicines and Healthcare Products Regulatory Agency (MRHA) and the National Health Service Purchasing and Supply Agency.

Table 1

Financial Year	*Total losses (£)*
1997–98	48,485.00
1998–99	55,148.00
1999–2000	45,094.00
2000–01	56,832.00
2001–02	70,500.00
2002–03	66,004.00
2003–04	56,917.00
2004–05 to date	25,857.00
PASA—2002–03	2,177.00
PASA—2003–04	2,453.00
MHRA—2003–04	200.00
Total losses	429,667.00

Table 2 shows figures for fraud, provided by the NHS counter fraud and security management service.

Table 2

£

Year	*Department*	*Agencies*	*Non-departmental public bodies*	*Total*
1997–98	61,415	1,461	10,458	73,334
1998–99	66,897	0	6,903	73,800
1999–2000	48,148	3,493	2,739	54,380
2000–01	56,831	0	6,582	63,413
2001–02	34,862	1,706	12,131	48,699
2002–03	73,892	0	0	73,892
2003–04	29,082	[1]168,307	22,259	219,648

[1] From MHRA—this includes a stolen cheque for £162,000, which should be reimbursed by the bank. The case is in the hands of their lawyers. This was included in the 2003–04 Her Majesty's Treasury fraud return.

Tier 2 System

Mr. Lansley: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many patients are in the Tier 2 system. [195807]

Miss Melanie Johnson: This information is not collected by the Department.

Waiting Times

Mr. McLoughlin: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will list the average waiting time for a first consultant appointment in West Derbyshire in each year since 1997. [198367]

Dr. Ladyman: The information requested is shown in the table.

Median waiting times for first consultant out-patient appointments following general practitioner referral

Health authority (HA) or primary care trust (PCT)	*Median wait (weeks)*
1997–98	
North Derbyshire HA	4.96
Southern Derbyshire HA	6.44
1998–99	
North Derbyshire HA	5.29
Southern Derbyshire HA	6.40
1999–2000	
North Derbyshire HA	5.93
Southern Derbyshire HA	6.93
2000–01	
North Derbyshire HA	5.97
Southern Derbyshire HA	6.85
2001–02	
North Derbyshire HA	6.12
Southern Derbyshire HA	7.07
2002–03	
Derbyshire Dales and South Derbyshire PCT	7.59
High Peak and Dales PCT	5.77
2003–04	
Derbyshire Dales and South Derbyshire PCT	7.52
High Peak and Dales PCT	5.54

Source:
Department of Health form QM08R.

Wanless Report

Mr. Don Foster: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will place in the Library copies of correspondence relating to the Government's activity target to get 70 per cent. of the population reasonably active by 2020, between his Department and the team responsible for the Wanless Report on "Securing Good Health for the Whole Population"; and if he will make a statement. [187176]

Miss Melanie Johnson: There was a close working relationship between the Department and the team responsible for assisting Derek Wanless to produce his report, "Securing Good Health for the Whole Population". I cannot, however, make public information, the disclosure of which would harm the frankness and candour of internal discussion between Government officials and independent review teams commissioned by Government, such as that led by Derek Wanless. Exemption 2 (internal discussion and advice) of the open Government code of practice applies.

ENVIRONMENT, FOOD AND RURAL AFFAIRS

Renewable Energy Strategy

1. **Mr. Mackay:** To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what recent discussions she has held with the Department for Trade and Industry on the Government's renewable energy strategy. [198953]

Mr. Morley: My right hon. Friend, the Secretary State for Trade and Industry, has the lead responsibility for renewables and our two Departments are in close contact on this issue.

Organic Fruit Production

16. **Mr. Liddell-Grainger:** To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what financial help her Department provides to organic fruit producers. [198968]

Mr. Bradshaw: The Department's Organic Farming Scheme (OFS) provides financial assistance to fruit producers to convert to organic production, deliver the environmental benefits organic farming produces and help meet consumer demand for organic food.

Carbon Dioxide Emissions (Target)

17. **Mr. Allen:** To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs if she will set a target for UK carbon dioxide emissions for 2020. [198969]

Mr. Morley: The Government set out their longer-term goal in the Energy White Paper to make real progress by 2020 towards reducing the UK's carbon dioxide emissions by some 60 per cent. by 2050.

Fruit Farming

18. **Mr. Heath:** To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs if she will make a statement on the application of single farm payments to orchards. [198970]

Alun Michael: Traditional orchards, which are generally those with greatest amenity and environmental value, will be eligible for the new CAP Single Payment subject to eligibility criteria that are currently being defined. Commercial orchards will not be eligible for the Single Payment anywhere in the European Union, nor have they ever been eligible for CAP subsidy.

Pesticides and Herbicides

19. **Mr. Win Griffiths:** To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what assessment she has made of residue levels of pesticides and herbicides in fruit and vegetables. [198971]

Alun Michael: I am satisfied that our current controls on pesticide residues provide a high level of protection for all consumers.

Waste Management

20. **Chris Grayling:** To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what steps her Department is taking to reduce waste. [198973]

Mr. Morley: Defra is taking a number of steps to reduce waste. These include initiatives by the Waste and Resources Action Programme; additional funding for local authorities through the waste minimisation and recycling fund; and the Envirowise programme of advice to businesses on waste issues.

Dairy Industry

21. **Mr. Luff:** To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs when she last met representatives of the dairy industry to discuss the price of milk. [198974]

Alun Michael: Price negotiations are a private commercial matter in which the Government cannot and should not get involved, provided competition rules are respected. However, Ministers frequently meet representatives from all parts of the dairy supply chain and are therefore aware of the issues.

Air Pollution

22. **Andy Burnham:** To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what steps her Department is taking to improve air quality. [198975]

Alun Michael: The Government policies to improve air quality are set out in the Air Quality Strategy for England, Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland, published in January 2000 and the Addendum to the Air Quality Strategy published in February 2003.

Water Customers (Benefit Payments)

23. **Mr. Heyes:** To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs if she will ensure that water customers who are in receipt of benefit who have direct payments deducted from their benefit are eligible for direct debit discounts. [198976]

Mr. Morley: If companies were to propose a discount for customers using the direct deductions scheme and could demonstrate that it reflected a cost saving, Ofwat would consider whether to approve this discount.

Single Farm Payments

24. **Norman Lamb:** To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs if she will make a statement on proposals for cross-compliance in relation to single farm payments. [198977]

Alun Michael: My right hon. Friend, the Secretary of State, announced the key policy decisions on cross compliance by written statement to the House on 22 July 2004, *Official Report*, column 69WS.

Animal Cruelty

Hugh Bayley: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs how many cases of animal cruelty have been prosecuted in the courts *(a)* in England and Wales, *(b)* in Yorkshire and the Humber and *(c)* in the City of York in each year since 1994. [192421]

Paul Goggins: I have been asked to reply.

Defendants proceeded against for various offences connected with animal cruelty are shown in the table for England and Wales, Yorkshire and the Humber region and York magistrates court, 1994 to 2002.

Statistics on court proceedings for 2003 will be published on the 18 November.

Number of defendants[1] proceeded against at magistrates courts for offences relating to animal cruelty, England and Wales 1994 to 2000

Number of defendants

Statute	*1994*	*1995*	*1996*	*1997*	*1998*
Protection of Animals Act, 1 91 1 (as amended)	908	927	967	1,051	1,107
Wildlife and Countryside Act, 1981 Sec 8	—	3	2	8	2
Performing Animals (Regulation) Act 1925	—	—	—	—	—
Protection of Animals Act, 1934	4	2	3	6	4
Docking and Nicking of Horses Act, 1949	—				
Pet Animals Act, 1951	13	7	5	4	7
Cockfighting Act, 1952	—	—	—	—	—
Protection of Animals (Amendment) Act, 1954	33	18	18	34	23
Animal Health Act, 1981, Secs 40–42, 46 and 49 and Orders made under Secs 8, 9, 37, 38, 39 and 43	37	49	58	76	87
Slaughterhouses Act, 1 974	3	—	1	—	3
Abandonment of Animals Act, 1960, Sec 1	21	18	25	26	36
Animal & Animal Products (Import & Export) Regulations 1988	—	—	—	—	—
Animals (Cruel Poisons) Act, 1962	1	—	—	1	1
Animal Boarding Establishments Act, 1963	—	5	4	2	7
Riding Establishments Acts, 1964 and 1970	—	5	6	1	1
Slaughter of Poultry Act, 1967	4	5	5	6	18
Secs 1 , 2 and 6	32	18	23	10	5
Protection of Badgers Act, 1992 (except Sec 13)	39	41	31	44	19
Wildlife and Countryside Act, 1981 Sec 9	7	—	6	5	—
Wildlife and Countryside Act, 1981 Sec 1 1	3	6	1	2	3
Wild Mammals (Protection) Act 1996	*	*	—	7	8
Breeding of Dogs Acts 1973 and 1991	2	2	4	5	5
Breeding and Sale of Dogs (Welfare) Act 1999	*	*	*	*	*
Diseases of Animals Act	56	48	53	97	103
Wildlife and Countryside Act 1981, Secs 1, 3, 5, 6, 7 and 17	119	126	203	84	68
Total	1,282	1,280	1,415	1,469	1,507

Number of defendants

	1999	*2000*[2]	*2001*	*2002*
Protection of Animals Act, 1 91 1 (as amended)	1,050	1,074	975	1,006
Wildlife and Countryside Act, 1981 Sec 8	1	6	3	2
Performing Animals (Regulation) Act 1925	—	—	—	—
Protection of Animals Act, 1934	—	1	—	2
Docking and Nicking of Horses Act, 1949	2	2	—	—
Pet Animals Act, 1951	10	19	11	10
Cockfighting Act, 1952	—	—	—	—
Protection of Animals (Amendment) Act, 1954	25	24	15	15
Animal Health Act, 1981, Secs 40–42, 46 and 49 and Orders made under Secs 8, 9, 37, 38, 39 and 43	56	31	32	39
Slaughterhouses Act, 1 974	4	—	1	1
Abandonment of Animals Act, 1960, Sec 1	17	26	25	23
Animal and Animal Products (Import and Export) Regulations 1988	—	4	1	4
Animals (Cruel Poisons) Act, 1962	—	—	1	—
Animal Boarding Establishments Act, 1963	8	11	13	6
Riding Establishments Acts, 1964 and 1970	—	3	1	1
Slaughter of Poultry Act, 1967	8	—	—	—
Agriculture (Miscellaneous Provisions) Act, 1968, Secs 1 , 2 and 6	15	16	17	5
Protection of Badgers Act, 1992 (except Sec 13)	30	21	9	18
Wildlife and Countryside Act, 1981 Sec 9	3	—	4	4
Wildlife and Countryside Act, 1981 Sec 11	4	—	2	2
Wild Mammals (Protection) Act 1996	—	5	10	5
Breeding of Dogs Acts 1973 and 1991	5	3	1	2
Breeding and Sale of Dogs (Welfare) Act 1999	*	—	—	—
Diseases of Animals Act	72	26	201	113
Wildlife and Countryside Act 1981, Secs 1, 3, 5, 6, 7 and 17	157	96	67	61
Total	1,467	1,368	1,389	1,319

n/a = not applicable

[1] Principal offence basis.

[2] Staffordshire Police were only able to submit sample data for persons proceeded against and convicted in the magistrates' courts in 2000. Although sufficient to estimate higher orders of data these data are not robust at a detailed level and have been excluded from this table.

Animal Transportation

Chris Ruane: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what plans she has to introduce legislation to *(a)* stop animal abuse and *(b)* improve the conditions in which animals are transported. [199245]

Mr. Bradshaw: It has not proved possible to respond to the hon. Member in the time available before Prorogation.

Animal Welfare Bill

Richard Burden: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what the planned timetable is for the introduction of the Animal Welfare Bill. [197053]

Mr. Bradshaw: It has not proved possible to respond to the hon. Member in the time available before Prorogation.

Mr. Dismore: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs if she will make a statement on progress in consultation on the draft Animal Welfare Bill. [198407]

Mr. Bradshaw: It has not proved possible to respond to the hon. Member in the time available before Prorogation.

Bees

Mr. Steen: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs pursuant to the answer of 9 November, *Official Report*, column 576W, on bees, how much funding the National Bee Unit will receive for the next financial year. [198519]

Alun Michael: Defra and Welsh Assembly Government funding to the National Bee Unit in 2005–06 is expected to be at the same level as the preceding year.

Bovine TB

Mr. Gray: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs how many positive reactor cattle subsequently proved to be free of tuberculosis; how their carcass was subsequently disposed of; and how many of them entered the human food chain. [188490]

Mr. Bradshaw: It has not proved possible to respond to the hon. Member in the time available before Prorogation.

Andrew George: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what studies her Department has commissioned into the effectiveness of the examination of deer by *(a)* stalkers and *(b)* butchers in identifying cases of bovine TB in culled deer intended for human consumption. [197832]

Mr. Bradshaw: It has not proved possible to respond to the hon. Member in the time available before Prorogation.

Mr. McLoughlin: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs how many cattle were slaughtered because of bovine tuberculosis in each year since 1997 in *(a)* West Derbyshire and *(b)* Derbyshire. [198417]

Mr. Bradshaw: It has not proved possible to respond to the hon. Member in the time available before Prorogation.

Mr. McLoughlin: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs how many confirmed cases of bovine tuberculosis in cattle there have been in the last five years; and what the geographical spread of the disease has been. [198418]

Mr. Bradshaw: It has not proved possible to respond to the hon. Member in the time available before Prorogation.

Andrew George: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs how many *(a)* farmed and *(b)* park deer herds have tested positive for bovine TB in each of the last five years; and how many of those were confirmed by culture or post mortem examination. [197318]

Mr. Bradshaw: It has not proved possible to respond to the hon. Member in the time available before Prorogation.

Andrew George: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what research her Department has commissioned into the effectiveness of the examination of deer at abattoirs in identifying cases of bovine TB infection in venison intended for human consumption. [197321]

Mr. Bradshaw: It has not proved possible to respond to the hon. Member in the time available before Prorogation.

Andrew George: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what prevalence of bovine TB has been detected in culled deer in studies undertaken during the last 20 years. [197330]

Mr. Bradshaw: It has not proved possible to respond to the hon. Member in the time available before Prorogation.

Andrew George: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs how many incidents of bovine TB in *(a)* farmed and *(b)* park deer have been notified as a result of identification at abattoirs in each of the past five years. [197326]

Mr. Bradshaw: It has not proved possible to respond to the hon. Member in the time available before Prorogation.

Andrew George: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what assessment she has made of the proportion of bovine TB infection in *(a)* farmed, *(b)* park and *(c)* wild deer entering the human food chain that remains undetected by the current statutory reporting procedures. [197327]

Mr. Bradshaw: It has not proved possible to respond to the hon. Member in the time available before Prorogation.

Andrew George: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what discussions she has had regarding bovine TB in deer with her counterparts in the Devolved Administrations. [197328]

Mr. Bradshaw: It has not proved possible to respond to the hon. Member in the time available before Prorogation.

Burnside Farm

Mr. Paice: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs when her Department was first informed of the existence of a video of Burnside Farm taken by Northumberland Trading Standards officers on 23 February 2001; and when her Department first obtained a copy of the video. [194308]

Mr. Bradshaw *[pursuant to his reply, 9 November 2004, Official Report, c. 577W]:* This stated that Defra recently obtained copies of the video when it was referred to in correspondence received by Defra officials on 30 September 2004. Further investigations have revealed that this date was incorrect and Defra first acquired a copy of the video at the beginning of February 2003. Copies of the video were distributed and broadcast publicly at the time of the Waugh trial in May 2002. The rest of the answer remains correct.

Mr. Paice: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs on what date a government minister was first informed of the existence of the video of Burnside Farm taken by Northumberland Trading Standards on 24 February 2001. [198004]

Mr. Bradshaw *[holding answer 15 November 2004]:* It has not proved possible to respond to the hon. Member in the time available before Prorogation.

CAP

Mr. Wills: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs (1) what estimate she has made of the percentage of total income constituted by payments under the Common Agricultural Policy for farmers in the UK who receive *(a)* more than and *(b)* less than 50,000 euros a year under the Common Agricultural Policy; [195993]

(2) what estimate she has made of the percentage of farmers in the UK who both receive more than 50,000 euros a year under the Common Agricultural Policy and earn more than 50,000 euros a year from other sources of income. [195994]

Alun Michael: As the information requested will take some time to compile, I will write to my hon. Friend with the information shortly. I will place a copy of my letter and the information in the House Library.

Mr. Paice: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what further plans she has to advise farmers and land managers on how to adjust to the mid-term review of the common agricultural policy. [197502]

Alun Michael *[holding answer 15 November 2004]:* Officials are in the process of putting in place a £2.7 million contract to support farmers, land managers and advisers in understanding and implementing land-oriented cross compliance measures through the targeted delivery of advice on Statutory Management Requirements and Good Agricultural and Environmental Condition (GAEC). This contract will dovetail with separate advice contracts addressing pollution minimisation and conservation management. In addition, a new Challenge Fund project in 2004–05, piloting farmer self-help groups to enable them to take ownership of sustainable agriculture issues, will use cross compliance as one of its initial themes. We envisage that the cross compliance advice, which has a delivery window of 2004–07, will build towards the Farm Advisory System introduced from 2007.

A new brochure on the scheme, along with a handbook on cross compliance and set-aside rules, is to be distributed in early December.

We are also currently considering the extent to which the mainstream business advice that can be accessed through the Business Link network may need to be supplemented by specialist advice to assist farm businesses explore the implications of the introduction of the single payment. We will make an announcement as soon as possible.

Carbon Trust

Mr. Stephen O'Brien: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs if she will make a statement on collaboration between the Carbon Trust and the Clean Energy Group. [196043]

Mr. Morley: It has not proved possible to respond to the hon. Member in the time available before Prorogation.

Mr. Stephen O'Brien: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what the *(a)* resource budget, *(b)* staff numbers and *(c)* running costs were of the Carbon Trust in 2003–04. [196044]

Mr. Morley: It has not proved possible to respond to the hon. Member in the time available before Prorogation.

Climate Change

Mr. Drew: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs if she will make a statement on the level of detail which she expects from those wishing to take up climate change discounts. [191094]

Mr. Morley: Companies forming climate change agreements (CCAs) with the Secretary of State are entitled to receive up to an 80 per cent. rebate on the amount of climate change levy they are required to pay on their energy supplies.

In order to obtain a CCA, businesses are required to supply information relating to both their production processes, and energy consumption. This information is necessary to determine the scope of the facility and to enable officials to set company specific targets for energy efficiency improvements.

Small businesses may find that the level of information required in order to join and operate an agreement is such that the associated costs outweigh the financial benefits of participation. However, it is vital that compliance is verifiable, and that the environmental benefits are measurable.

Dr. Iddon: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what action she plans to undertake in response to the report from the Energy Saving Trust and the UK Climate Impact Programme, Forecasting the Future. [198944]

Mr. Morley: The joint launch of the report Forecasting the Future and Energy Efficiency Week 2004 highlighted the link between climate change and sustainable energy to consumers and those who construct and manage housing in the UK. Our Energy White Paper last year identified energy efficiency as the safest and most cost-effective way to meet our energy policy goals. A clear framework for improving energy efficiency at an unprecedented level was set out in the Energy Efficiency Action Plan, published in April.

My Department funds the UK Climate Impacts Programme to help public and private sector organisations understand their vulnerability to the impacts of climate change so that they can develop their own adaptation responses. The report, Forecasting the Future, alongside other publications from this Programme will add to the evidence base available both to stakeholders and to inform policy-making on adaptation.

Cockling

Mr. Pickthall: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs (1) what plans she has to introduce a licensing system for cockling *(a)* in Morecambe Bay and *(b)* elsewhere; [199151]

(2) what assistance is being offered by her Department to the Lancashire and Cumbria police in their efforts to police organised cockling in Morecambe Bay; [199154]

(3) what measures her Department has put in place to prevent further deaths of cocklers in Morecambe Bay. [199169]

Mr. Bradshaw: It has not proved possible to respond to the hon. Member in the time available before Prorogation.

Mr. Pickthall: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what estimate she has made of the tonnage of cockles exported from England in the past 12 months; and what estimate she has made of the number of cocklers operating in Morecambe Bay. [199152]

Mr. Bradshaw: It has not proved possible to respond to the hon. Member in the time available before Prorogation.

Combined Heat and Power

Malcolm Bruce: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs if she will make a statement on the member states' national allocation plans and the treatment of combined heat and power. [193823]

Mr. Morley: All member states with the exception of Greece have now submitted their National Allocation Plans (NAPs) to the European Commission. Eight of the NAPs, including the UK NAP, were approved in July 2004. A further eight were approved in October

2004. Five of these decisions (including the decision with respect to the UK) were conditional on member states providing additional information. The commission is expected to issue decisions on the remaining eight submitted NAPs by the end of the year or early in the new year.

The allocation to existing combined heat and power (CHP) installations will be done on the same basis as for other installations. All new and extended CHP installations which come online from 1 January 2004 onwards will be eligible to apply for allowances from the new entry reserve (NER). In addition, the Government have now decided to seek the commission's agreement to extending eligibility to apply to the NER to include significant increases in 'Good Quality' capacity of CHP schemes.

Commencement of Legislation

Brian White: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what pieces of legislation passed in the last 30 years that the Department is responsible for remain to be brought into force, broken down by year of enactment. [195625]

Alun Michael: Defra came into being on the 8 June 2001. A comprehensive and exhaustive list of Acts of Parliament enacted since November 1974 but not yet brought wholly into in force could be provided only at disproportionate cost.

In relation to any particular Act of Parliament such information is readily available in standard legal texts such as "Is it in force?" (March 2004) which form part of the "Halsbury's Statutes" service. This publication is available in the House of Commons Library.

However I am able to provide the following information which happens to be readily available:

1991—Certain amendments to the Water Resources Act 1991 made by the Environment Act 1995 have not yet come into force.

2000—Parts of the Countryside and Rights of Way Act 2000 including paragraphs 1–5 of Schedule 7 have not yet come into force.

2003—Those parts of the Water Act 2003 not covered by the commencement Order No. 1 2003 SI No. 641 are not yet in force.

Common Agricultural Policy

Paul Flynn: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what new proposals she has to aid the economies of developing nations in Africa and Asia through reforms of the Common Agricultural Policy; and if she will make a statement. [194269]

Alun Michael: It has not proved possible to respond to the hon. Member in the time available before Prorogation.

Mr. Wills: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what the cost of the Common Agricultural Policy was in the United Kingdom to *(a)* consumers and *(b)* taxpayers, broken down by agricultural commodity supported by the Common Agricultural Policy in the most recent year for which figures are available. [196375]

Alun Michael: The UK makes its contributions to the EC Budget as a whole and not to individual categories within it. There is no specific UK contribution to CAP expenditure. The latest EC Budget for 2004 estimates expenditure on CAP to be some €45.7 billion (£32.2 billion). After taking account of the UK abatement, the UK share of financing the 2004 EC Budget is around 11.9 per cent.

Mr. Tynan: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what definition her Department uses of *(a)* fair standard of living and *(b)* agricultural community in respect of the aims of the common agricultural policy. [197582]

Alun Michael: I will write to my hon. Friend with the information requested.

Community Energy

Malcolm Bruce: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs whether the Community Energy Programme will be extended beyond April 2005. [195945]

Mr. Morley: It has not proved possible to respond to the hon. Member in the time available before Prorogation.

Contaminated Chocolate

Norman Baker: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs if she will make a statement on the storage of chocolate radioactively contaminated following the 1957 Windscale fire. [196981]

Mr. Morley: This is not a matter for this Department.

Dairy Farms

Mr. McLoughlin: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs how many dairy farms there were in 1997 in West Derbyshire; how many of them have closed since; and how many there were on the latest date for which figures are available. [198372]

Alun Michael: The following figures show the number of holdings in West Derbyshire parliamentary constituency where dairy is the predominant activity. They reflect the position in the June of each year and therefore show only the net change.

	Dairy holdings
1997	423
2003	330

Note:

Figures for 1997 show main holdings only, in 2003 minor holdings are also included.

Source:

June Agricultural Census.

Deer Management

Andrew George: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what assessment she has made of the report, "Current and Future Deer Management Options", published in December 2003. [197329]

Mr. Bradshaw: It has not proved possible to respond to the hon. Member in the time available before Prorogation.

Definitions (Energy)

Miss McIntosh: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what definitions her Department uses of *(a)* incinerators, *(b)* thermal treatment plant, *(c)* combined heat and power and *(d)* energy from waste. [198737]

Mr. Morley: The Waste Framework Directive (WFD) (75/442/EEC as amended by 91/156/EEC and Council Decision 96/350/EC) requires anyone carrying out the waste disposal and recovery operations listed in annexes MA and MB of the directive to do so under the terms of a permit issued by the competent authority. The WFD classifies "Incineration on land" (D10) as a waste disposal operation; and "Use [of waste] principally as a fuel or other means to generate energy" (R1) as a waste recovery operation. The distinction between waste disposal and recovery operations is the subject of case law by the European Court of Justice.

The WFD is supplemented by other legislation, including the Waste Incineration Directive (WID) (2000/76/EC). Article 3(4) of the WID defines "incineration plant" and in doing so refers to "the thermal treatment of wastes" and "other thermal treatment processes". Draft guidance concerning this definition is to be found in my Department's publication "Guidance on Directive 2000/76/EC on the incineration of waste", edition 2, August 2004 which is available on my Department's website.

Combined heat and power (CHP) is defined as the simultaneous generation of heat and power in a single process. The power output is usually electricity, but may include mechanical power. Heat outputs can include steam, hot water or hot air for process heating, space heating or absorption chilling.

Energy from waste (EfW) is the general term for all processes that generate energy from the fraction of waste that has calorific value.

Departmental Advertising Costs

Charles Hendry: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what the cost of *(a)* creative work, *(b)* media spend and *(c)* administration for her Department's advertising activity has been in each financial year since 1997–98, broken down by contractor. [197293]

Alun Michael: The Department does not maintain separate records of its expenditure for advertising. The expenditure for publicity by Defra's Communications Directorate includes marketing, advertising, publications, events, shows and direct mailings and is recorded for the financial years since Defra's creation in June 2001 as follows:

	£ million
2001–02	6.6
2002–03	4.7
2003–04	2.5

This includes communications on a wide range of matters, much of it necessary or beneficial to the public and the wide range of industries in which Defra has an interest, together with local government, voluntary organisations and other bodies.

Departmental Consultants

Mr. Jenkins: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs how much the Department spent on outside information technology and communication specialists, consultants and engineers in the 2003–04 financial year. [192764]

Alun Michael: This information is not held centrally within the Department and it has not been possible to obtain this on the grounds of disproportionate cost.

Departmental Estate

Mr. Andrew Turner: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs if she will list the properties occupied by *(a)* her Department and *(b)* its agencies in (i) 1997 and (ii) 2004; and what the (A) area and (B) annual rental value (1) in aggregate and (2) in each case was in each year. [196070]

Alun Michael: Defra was not created until 2001. A list of properties for 2004, as requested is tabled as follows.

Occupied core Defra and Defra agencies sites (including mixed)—showing area and rent

Address 1	*Address 2*	*Address 3*	*Town*	*County*	*Postcode*
Fish Lab Stores	Units 7–12	Pinbush Drive	Lowestoft	Suffolk	NR33 7NL
Vic Kendal Road	Harlescott		Shrewsbury	Shropshire	SY1 4HD
Vic The Elms	College Road	Sutton Bonnington	Loughborough	Notts	LE12 5RB
The Nothe	Barrack Road		Weymouth	Dorset	DT4 8UB
Vic Langford House	Langford Road		Langford	Bristol	BS40 5HY
Badger Research Unit	1 Easter Park Cottage		Nympsfield	Gloucestershire	GL10 3UJ
Staplake Mount	Starcross		Exeter	Devon	EX6 8PE
Fish Laboratories	Remembrance Avenue		Burnham-On-Crouch	Essex	CMO 8HA
Fisheries Laboratory	Pakefield Road		Lowestoft	Suffolk	NR33 0HT
North Quay	Lowestoft Docks	Commercial Road	Lowestoft	Suffolk	NR32 2TD
Fish Quay Portakabin	Fish Quay	Battery Green Road	Lowestoft	Suffolk	NR32 1DD
Victhirsk	West House	Station Road	Thirsk	N Yorks	YO7 1PZ
Radiobiological Lab	The Harbour	West Pier	Whitehaven	Cumbria	CA28 7LY
VLA Merrythought	Penrith		Calthwaite	Cumbria	CA11 9RR
46 Fore Street	Newlyn		Penzance	Cornwall	TR18 5JR
Vic Longbenton	Whitley Road	Longbenton	Newcastle	Tyne and Wear	NE12 9SE
Vic Rougham Hill			Bury St Edmunds	Suffolk	IP33 2RX
Central Science Lab	Sand Hutton		York	N Yorks	YO41 1LZ
Elvet House	Halgarth Street		Durham	Durham	DH1 3AT

Occupied core Defra and Defra agencies sites (including mixed)—showing area and rent

Address 1	*Address 2*	*Address 3*	*Town*	*County*	*Postcode*
The Elms	(Cat III Unit)	College Road	Loughborough	Notts	LE12 5RB
Manor Farm Cottages	Luddington Vic		Stratford Upon Avon	Warwick	CV37 9SJ
Chorley West Business i	Unit 6	Ackhurst Road	Chorley	Lancs	PR7 1NL
Vic Jobs Well Lane			Carmarthen	Carmarthen	
Vic Buarth Rd			Aberystwyth	Cereidgion	SY23 1ND
Chapel Bank Works	Curwen Road		Workington	Cumbria	CA14
Coniston Buildings	55 Adams Road		Workington	Cumbria	CA14 3YS
Sea Life Centre	Lodmoor Country Park		Weymouth	Dorset	DT4 7SX
Unit 7	West Cumbria Business Pk		Workington	Cumbria	
Thistledown Farm	Nympsfield Road	Nympsfield	Gloucester	Gloucestershire	GL10 3UL
Westmoreland Lane Farm	Crooklands		Milnthorpe	Cumbria	LA7 7NH
Springfield Nursery	Unit 10 Site 13	Springfield Ind Est	Burnham On Crouch	Essex	CMO 8TE
Kings House	33 Kings Road		Reading	Berkshire	RG1 3AR
40 Caversham Road			Reading	Berkshire	RG1 7BJ
North Gate House	21–23 Valpy Street		Reading	Berkshire	RG1 1RN
Lancaster House	Hampshire Court		Newcastle-upon-Tyne	Tyne and Wear	NE4 7YE
Paddock Road	Unit 4D	Industrial Estate	Reading	Berkshire	RG4 0BY
St John's House	St. John's Square		Wolverhampton	W Midlands	WV2 4AX
Suite 11	Derwentside	25 Town Street	Duffield	Derby	DE56 4EH
62a The Strand			Newlyn	Cornwall	TR18 5HW
Stockbridge Tech Centre			Cawood	N Yorks	YO8 0NU
2a Market Street			Carlisle	Cumbria	CA3 8QJ
Hyperion House	First Floor Unit 2	The Oaks	Newmarket	Suffolk	CB8 7LG
15 West Pier			Scarborough	N Yorks	YO11 1PD
24 West Pier			Scarborough	N Yorks	YO11 1PD
132 Warkworth Woods	Gosforth		Newcastle	Tyne And Wea	NE3 5RD
Polwhele	Workshop		Truro	Cornwall	TR4 9AD
North Pier	The Harbour		Newlyn	Cornwall	TR18 5JR
Unit161/4b	Willowtree Ind Est		Alnwick	Northumberland	NE66 2PF
Mac Stoneleigh	Stoneleigh		Kenilworth	Warwick	CV8 2LZ
New Fish Quay	The Quay		Brixham	Devon	TQ5 8AW
The Custom House	3rd Floor (Rooms 10–13)	1 Old Market Place	Whitby	N Yorks	YO21 3BT
Harbour Commis Office	Warkworth Harbour	Quayside	Amble	Northumberland	NE65 0AP
Government Buildings	Cop Lane	Penwortham	Preston	Lancs	PR1 0SZ
Woodthorne	Wergs Road		Wolverhampton	W Midlands	WV6 8TQ
Princess House	Queen Street	2nd Floor	Barnstaple	Devon	EX32 8HJ
Block A Reading Rsc	Government Buildings	Coley Park	Reading	Berkshire	RG1 6OS
100 Southgate Street	Government Buildings		Bury St Edmunds	Suffolk	IP33 2AF
Chequers Court	St Germaine Street		Huntingdon	Cambridge	PE18 6LT
Vancouver House	County Court Road		Kings Lynn	Norfolk	PE30 5EJ
Middlecott House	22–24 Willington Road	Kirton	Boston	Lincolnshire	PE20 1EH
Wrest Park	Mech and Farm Waste Unit		Silsoe	Bedfordshire	MK45 4DP
Windsor House	Cornwall Road		Harrogate	N Yorks	HG1 2PW
Government Buildgs Lee	Otley Road	Lawnswood	Leeds	W Yorks	LS16 5PY
10 Whitehall Place Wpe	(East Block)		Westminster	London Hq	SW1A 2HD
Eastbury House	30/34 Albert Embankment		Lambeth	London Hq	SE1 7TL
Nobel House	17 Smith Square		Westminster	London Hq	SW1P 3HX
Ergon House	17 Smith Square		Westminster	London Hq	SW1P 3JR
Smithfield Market	Units D1 and D2	Openshaw	Manchester	Gt Manchester	M11 2JW
Stanley Market	Edge Lane		Liverpool	Merseyside	L13 2EB
26 London Street	Bradley Chambers		Fleetwood	Lancs	FY7 6JG
Wyre Dock Portakabin			Fleetwood	Lancs	FY7 6NN
Svs Poole	Inspectors Office	Ferry Terminal	Poole	Dorset	
Svs Wildlife Unit	Aston Down		Stroud	Gloucestershire	GL6 8HT
Bristol Fruit Centre	Admin Block	Albert Crescent	St Phillips Marsh	Bristol	BS2 0YQ
Allen House	14/19 Allen House	23 Sherrin Rd	Leyton	London Hq	E10 5SQ
Western Intntnal Mrkt	Unit 1C Mkt Centre	Hayes Road	Southall	Gtr London	UB2 5XJ
Building 333	Timberham House (Rm 121)	Gatwick Airport	Crawley	West Sussex	RH6 0NN
Merevale House	42–46 London Road		Tunbridge Wells	Kent	TN1 1DN
Baltic Chambers	2 Waveney Road		Lowestoft	Suffolk	NR32 1BN
Whitehouse Lane	Huntingdon Road		Cambridge	Cambridge	CB3 0LF
The Portakabin	St. James Market	Essex Street	Bradford	W Yorks	BD4 7PG
103 Northgate	The Headland		Hartlepool	N Yorkshire	TS24 0JX
19/20/28 West Pier			Scarborough	N Yorks	YO11 1PD
NE WH Fruit Veg Market	Admin Block	Team Valley Trad Est	Gateshead	Tyne & Wear	NE11 0RG
Tamar Business Park	Pennygillam Ind Estate	Unit 3&4	Launceston	Cornwall	PL157NX
19–29 Woburn Place	3 & 4th Floors		Bloomsbury	London Hq	WC1H 0LU
Building 104	Second Floor	Port of Sheerness	Sheerness	Kent	ME12 1RS
Room 11	Building 305	Cargo Centre	Manchester	Manchester	M90 5PY
3rd Floor, Trinity Court	Trinity Court	37 Southernhay East	Exeter	Devon	EX1
Fish Market	Rock A Nore Road		Hastings	East Sussex	TN34 5OW
Units	Thornfield Business Park	Standard Way Ind Estate	Northallerton	N Yorks	DL6 2XQ
Eastern Docks	Freight Services Bldg		Dover	Kent	CT16 1JA
Kings Pool	Foss House	1–2 Peasholme Green	York	N Yorks	Y01 7PX
Lumford Mill	Riverside Walk		Bakewell	Derby	DE45 1DA
Sutton Harbour	Fisheries Office	Fish Quay	Plymouth	Devon	PL4 0LH
Piplers Building	Fisheries Office	The Quay	Poole	Dorset	BH15 1HP
Neville House	Liddell Street		North Shields	Tyne and Wear	NE30 1HN
St Clare House	Princes Street	Greyfriars	Ipswich	Suffolk	IP1 1LW
Hadrian House	6 Wavell Drive	Rosehill Business Park	Carlisle	Cumbria	CA1 2ST

Occupied core Defra and Defra agencies sites (including mixed)—showing area and rent

Address 1	*Address 2*	*Address 3*	*Town*	*County*	*Postcode*
Copthall House	Station Square		Coventry	W Midlands	CV1 2FA
Office Suite 3	St Andrews House	Opposite 22 Berth	Tilbury	Essex	RM18 7HX
Liberty House	105 Bell Street		Reigate	Surrey	RH2 TAN
Llanishen	Govt. Buildings	Tyglas	Cardiff	Cardiff	CF14 5ZB
Cathays Park	Crown Buildings		Cardiff	Cardiff	CF1 3NQ
Caernarfon	Crown Buildings	North Penrallt	Caernarfon	Gwynedd	LL55 1EP
Picton Terrace	Crown Buildings		Carmarthen	Carmarthenshire	SA31 3BT
Llandrindod	Crown Buildings	Spa Road East	Llandrindod Wells	Powys	LD1 5HA
Macon Court	1 Macon Court	Macon Way	Crewe	Cheshire	CW1 6DG
Continental Ferry Port	Porta Cabin	George Byng Way	Portsmouth	Hampshire	P02 8SP
Tileworks Office Block	Suite B	Whitestone Business	Withington	Herefordshire	HR1 3RY
Estuary House	Wharncliffe Road		Grimsby	Lincolnshire	DN31 3QL
1a Page Street			Westminister	London Hq	SW1P 4PQ
Building 46	Channel Tunnel Terminal	Coquelles	Coquelles	France	
King George Dock	Albert Dock		Hull	Yorks E R	HU1 2ND
Room 516	Trelawny House	The Dock	Felixstowe	Suffolk	IP11 8SB
46 Ponton Road	Vauxhall		Lambeth	London Hq	SW8 5AX
City Business Centre	Basin Road		Chichester	West Sussex	PO19 8DU
Unit 12	St Georges Business Cen'	St Georges Square	Portsmouth	Hampshire	PO1 3EZ
Unit 3	The Barn Centre	Alexandra Road	Aberystwyth	Cereidgion	SY23 1LF
Units 3, 4 and 5	Hanover Court	Manaton Close	Exeter	Devon	EX2 8QJ
Unit 1 Epps Building	Epps Building	Bridge Road	Ashford	Kent	TN23 1QA
First Floor	Unit 2	Manor Grove Business	Peterborough	Cambridge	PE1 5UH
Alexandra House	Lawnswood Park		Leeds	W Yorks	LS16 6QY
Animal Reception	The Residence	749 Beacon Road	Heathrow	London Hq	TW6 3JF
Part First Floor	Richmond House	Walkern Road	Stevenage Old Town	Hertford	SG1 3QP
Pembroke Ferry Terming	Portacabin	The Dockyard	Pembroke	Pembrokeshire	SA73 3AN
The Palace Building	Second Floor	The Palace Building	Truro	Cornwall	TR1 2HE
Unit 2 Thornfield Bus Pk	Standard Way Ind Estate		Northallerton	N Yorks	DL6 2XQ
Riverside Chambers	Castle Street		Taunton	Somerset	TA1 4AP
Hamilton House	Parkeston Quay	Rooms G8 & G9	Harwich	Essex	C012 4QA
The Seaways	Commercial Road		Penryn	Cornwall	TR10 8AQ
Millbay Docks	Portacabin		Plymouth	Devon	PL1 3EF
Town Quay	Unit 6 Town Quay	Medina Chambers	Southampton	Hampshire	SO14 2AQ
Cromwell House	Dean Stanley Street		Westminster	London Hq	SW1P 3JG
Jordan House East	Hall Court	Hall Park Way	Telford	Shropshire	TF3 4NF
Estuary House	Peninsula Park	Rydon Lane	Exeter	Devon	EX2 7XB
Barnwood Park	Unit 1	Saw Mills End	Barnwood	Gloucestershire	GL4 3DE
9 Millbank			Westminster	London Hq	SW1P 3JA
Beacon House	Unit G University Court	Plots D & E	Stafford	Staffordshire	ST18 0GU
3 Lower House Farm Bar	Long Lane		Throckmorton	Worcs	WR10 2JX
Fish Hall	Office 8 and 9	North Harbour	Whitehaven	Cumbria	CA28 7XY
Temple Quay House	2 The Square	Temple Quay	Bristol	Bristol	BS1 6EB
Ashdown House	123 Victoria Street		Victoria	London Hq	SW1E 6DE
Quadrant House	Newburn Riverside		Newcastle	Tyne and Wear	NE15 8NZ
Quadrant House	Newburn Riverside		Newcastle	Tyne and Wear	NE15 8NZ
Crimscott Street	Unit 2 Rich Ind. Est.	Crimscott Street	Southwark	London Hq	SE1 5TE
Pilots Watch House	Basin Road South		Portslade	East Sussex	BN41 1WD
Heysham	Sea Link	Sea Terminal	Morecambe	Lancs	LA3 2XF
Eastbrook	Shaftesbury Road		Cambridge	Cambridge	CB2 2DU
4-5 Waterloo Crescent	First Floor Offices		Dover	Kent	CT16 1LA
Western Intntnal Mrkt	Unit 9a Mrkt Centre	Hayes Road	Uxbridge	Gtr London	UB2 5XJ
Unit B2 The Waterfront	Newburn Riverside		Newcastle	Tyne and Wear	NE15 8NZ
AONB	The Old Post Office	Shrewsbury Road	Craven Arms	Shropshire	LA7 7NH
40/41 The Fish Quay	Unit 2		North Shields	Tyne and Wear	NE30 1JA
Vic Barton Hall	Barton Hall	Garstang Road	Preston	Lancs	PR3 SHE
Vic Truro	Truro Road	Polwhele	Truro	Cornwall	TR4 9AD
Cvl Woodham Lane	Woodham Lane	New Haw	Addlestone	Surrey	KT15 3NB
Blocks 6 and 7	Government Buildings	Chalfont Drive	Nottingham	Notts	NG8 3SN
Whitehall	Monkmoor Road		Shrewsbury	Shropshire	SY2 5AJ
Government Buildings	Whittington Road		Worcester	Worcestershire	WR5 2LQ
Government Buildings	Burghill Road		Westbury On Trym	Bristol	BS10 6NJ
Prince of Wales Road			Dorchester	Dorset	DT1 1PY
Quantock House	Paul Street		Taunton	Somerset	TA1 3PF
Pydar House	Pydar Street		Truro	Cornwall	TR1 2XD
Medwyn House	Mountfield Road		Lewes	East Sussex	BN7 2XP
Cromwell House	15 Andover Road		Winchester	Hampshire	SO23 7EN
Beeches Road	Government Buildings		Chelmsford	Essex	CM1 2RU
Ceres House	2 Searby Road		Lincoln	Lincolnshire	LN2 4DW
122A Thorpe Road			Norwich	Norfolk	NR1 1RT
Lion House	Willowburn Trading Esta		Alnwick	Northumberland	NE6 62PF
Crosskill House	Mill Lane		Beverley	E R of York	HU17 9JB
Edenbridge House	Lowther Street		Carlisle	Cumbria	CA3 8DX
Alverton Court	Crosby Road		Northallerton	N Yorks	DL6 1AD
Agricola House	Gilwilly Trading Estate		Penrith	Cumbria	CA11 9BU
Longacre House	Frome Road		Trowbridge	Wiltshire	BA14 0DQ
Vic Itchen Abbas	Itchen Abbas		Winchester	Hampshire	S021 1BX
Olantigh Road	Wye		Ashford	Kent	TN25 SEW
Government Buildings	Beaumont House		Cliftonville	Northampton	NN1 5BE
Clyst House	Winslade Park	Clyst House	Exeter	Devon	EX5 1DY

Occupied core Defra and Defra agencies sites (including mixed)—showing area and rent

Address 1	*Address 2*	*Address 3*	*Town*	*County*	*Postcode*
Crewe Business Park	Electra Way		Crewe	Cheshire	CW1 6GJ
Saffron House	Tigers Road	Off Saffron Road	South Wigston	Leicestershire	LE18 4UY
Albion Place	2nd Floor	6–8 Albion Place	Maidstone	Kent	ME14 5DY
Blenheim Office Park	Unit 11		Long Hanborough	Oxfordshire	OX29 8RZ

Address 1	*Total area Sq.I*	*Rent (£)*	*Core/ Agency*
Fish Lab Stores	1,903.5	67,500	A
Vic Kendal Road	1,425.8	—	A
Vic The Elms	1,632	33,000	A
The Nothe	2,609	20	A
Vic Langford House	593	4	A
Badger Research Unit	14.9	4,000	A
Staplake Mount	4,383.4	—	A
Fish Laboratories	1,707.2	173	A
Fisheries Laboratory	9,556.4	1,450	A
North Quay	136.6	9,000	A
Fish Quay Portakabin	24.7	1,605	A
Victhirsk	857.5	—	A
Radiobiological Lab	95.8	540	A
VLA Merrythought	742.4	5,730	A
46 Fore Street	71.6	1,702.13	A
Vic Longbenton	1,354.6	—	A
Vic Rougham Hill	1,535	—	A
Central Science Lab	29,100	10	A
Elvet House	37.11	1,388.88	A
The Elms	236	4,000	A
Manor Farm Cottages	1,587	—	A
Chorley West Business 1	185.8	18,000	A
Vic Jobs Well Lane	865.7	0	A
Vic Buarth Rd	618.3	5	A
Chapel Bank Works	4,034	—	A
Coniston Buildings	267.83	8,652	A
Sea Life Centre	580	5,000	A
Unit 7	957.8	28,500	A
Thistledown Farm	385	10,000	A
Westmoreland Lane Farm	22.3	2,600	A
Springfield Nursery	130	4,200	A
Kings House	6,679.47	1,275,000	A
40 Caversham Road	2,034.6	286,288	A
North Gate House	5,959.45	1,397,500	A
Lancaster House	5,340.2	663,140	A
Paddock Road	876.08	40,000	A
St. John's House	272.03	13,400	A
Suite 11	—	3,600	A
62a The Strand	—	5,199.96	A
Stockbridge Tech Centre	36	3,950	A
2a Market Street	113.37	5,500	A
Hyperion House	450.86	72,795	A
15 West Pier	17.19	1,225	A
24 West Pier	72.89	720	A
132 Warkworth Woods	85	—	A
	89,587.38	3,975,397.97	Subtotal
Polwhele	256.9	—	C
North Pier	5.6	200	C
Unit161/4b	130.4	5,700	C
Mac Stoneleigh	612	24,100	C
New Fish Quay	100.1	6,800	C
The Custom House	48.4	1,200	C
Harbour Commis Office	31.7	1,900	C
Government Buildings	53.6	6,944.81	C
Woodthorne	1,112.33	56,379.16	C
Princess House	45.1	9,241.34	C
Block A Reading Rsc	4,559.1	2,922.36	C
100 Southgate Street	2,678.71	—	C
Chequers Court	2,945.7	136,400	C
Vancouver House	278.3	15,753.88	C
Middlecott House	786.32	12,000	C
Wrest Park	15.25	1,845	C
Windsor House	234.9	35,500	C
Government Buildgs Lee	3,317.33	331,320.12	C
10 Whitehall Place Wpe	7,189.7	2,740	C
Eastbury House	3,289	675,000	C
Nobel House	13,513	4,548,000	C
Ergon House	8,286.63	2,809,762	C
Smithfield Market	43.8	2,019.5	C
Stanley Market	55.7	550	C
26 London Street	139.2	6,500	C
Wyre Dock Portakabin	11.9	1,295	C
Svs Poole	18.7	250	C
Svs Wildlife Unit	650	—	C
Bristol Fruit Centre	16.8	6,000	C
Allen House	42	5,874	C
Western Intntnal Mrkt	18.7	2,230	C
Building 333	27.22	2,208	C
Merevale House	209.61	30,505.68	C
Baltic Chambers	132.9	8,000	C
Whitehouse Lane	766	1	C
The Portakabin	7.9	100	C
103 Northgate	36.4	2,800	C
19/20/28 West Pier	72.89	2,730	C
NE WH Fruit Veg Market	31.4	2,250	C
Tamar Business Park	259	10,480	C
19–29 Woburn Place	2,227.7	841,932.35	C
Building 104	40.7	4,349	C
Room 11	37.5	2,550	C
3rd Floor, Trinity Court	142.3	18,800	C
Fish Market	146	8,125	C
Units	170	15,000	C
Eastern Docks	28	3,325	C
Kings Pool	13,214	728,000	C
Lumford Mill	49.5	8,500	C
Sutton Harbour	196	18,375	C
Piplers Building	155.05	12,950	C
Neville House	102.47	13,250	C
St. Clare House	93.1	7,862.8	C
Hadrian House	792	79,460	C
Copthall House	252.66	11,687	C
Office Suite 3	30.19	4,250	C
Liberty House	971.93	225,000	C
Llanishen	607.7	42,021.28	C
Cathays Park	129.6	7,416.64	C
Caernarfon	291.75	0	C
Picton Terrace	362.26	—	C
Llandrindod	119.98	28,540.32	C
Macon Court	111.88	12,250	C
Continental Ferry Port	12.3	—	C
Tileworks Office Block	68.97	4,500	C
Estuary House	321	7,350	C
1a Page Street	11,183	2,335,020	C
Building 46	47.9	—	C
King George Dock	12.5	1,712	C
Room 516	24.34	2,850	C
46 Ponton Road	1,062	88,125	C
City Business Centre	112	11,600	C
Unit 12	65	—	C
Unit 3	92.05	8,000	C
Units 3, 4 and 5	761	34,650	C
Unit 1 Epps Building	100.12	7,007	C
First Floor	21.24	1,624.12	C
Alexandra House	28.98	5,678.63	C
Animal Reception	62.71	9,500	C
Part First Floor	234.58	27,775	C
Pembroke Ferry Terming	11.52	591.1	C
The Palace Building	328.69	18,000	C
Unit 2 Thornfield Bus Pk	170	15,000	C
Riverside Chambers	859.38	53,230	C
Hamilton House	41.8	3,600	C
The Seaways	130.06	4,750	C
Millbay Docks	25	1,000	C
Town Quay	87.05	13,500	C
Cromwell House	2,472.6	1,020,000	C
Jordan House East	267	28,750	C
Estuary House	747	84,420	C
Barnwood Park	2,011.8	262,000	C
9 Millbank	4,911.51	—	C
Beacon House	974.9	130,004	C
3 Lower House Farm Bar	130	—	C
Fish Hall	45	3,500	C
Temple Quay House	2,211.2	660,618	C

Address l	*Total area Sq.l*	*Rent (£)*	*Core/ Agency*
Ashdown House	9,776.62	3,736,600	C
Quadrant House	2,431	346,536	C
Quadrant House	2,431	346,536	C
Crimscott Street	1,254	74,250	C
Pilots Watch House	41	9,000	C
Heysham	18.1	—	C
Eastbrook	12,374	—	C
4-5 Waterloo Crescent	143	23,000	C
Western Intntnal Mrkt	17	2,985	C
Unit B2 The Waterfront	311	16,126.25	C
AONB	—	—	C
40/41 The Fish Quay	34	1,000	C
	130,767.38	20,261,534.3	Subtotal
Vic Barton Hall	2,122.16	—	C/A
Vic Truro	1,197.43	—	C/A
Cvl Woodham Lane	2,8128.1	—	C/A
Blocks 6 And 7	4,099.65	137,831	C/A
Whitehall	478.6	73,409.47	C/A
Government Buildings	9,957.3	1,370.2	C/A
Government Buildings	12,367.84	362.5	C/A
Prince of Wales Road	1,654.7	25	C/A
Quantock House	4,516.98	—	C/A
Pydar House	3,561.8	—	C/A
Medwyn House	24	4,651.78	C/A
Cromwell House	150.9	18,683.8	C/A
Beeches Road	881.3	0	C/A
Ceres House	2,484.5	4,725	C/A
122athorperoad	2,433.2	315,000	C/A
Lion House	1,606.4	—	C/A
Crosskill House	2,137.77	—	C/A
Edenbridge House	3,354.27	—	C/A
Alverton Court	5,050.91	141,161	C/A
Agricola House	339.28	1,800	C/A
Longacre House	325.11	—	C/A
Vic Itchen Abbas	1,676	—	C/A
Olantigh Road	555.1	34,500	C/A
Government Buildings	222.6	28,540.3	C/A
Clyst House	6,366.01	650,000	C/A
Crewe Business Park	3,896.6	—	C/A
Saffron House	786.82	—	C/A
Albion Place	171.6	15,700	C/A
Blenheim Office Park	335.37	46,930	C/A
	100,882.3	1,474,690.05	Subtotal
	3,212,327.06	25,711,622.3	Total

Departmental Events (Funding)

Charles Hendry: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs if she will list the *(a)* conferences, *(b)* publications, *(c)* initiatives, *(d)* projects and *(e)* receptions organised by her Department which have received funding from outside commercial bodies since May 1997, broken down by (i) funding body and (ii) amount paid. [196610]

Alun Michael: The Communications Directorate of the Department undertakes publications, events, and shows for communication on a wide range of matters, much of it necessary or beneficial to the public and the wide range of industries in which Defra has an interest, together with local government, voluntary organisations and other bodies. We currently do not have a system for recording any funding or sponsorship from commercial bodies centrally but we are considering how this can be done.

Dog Fouling

Mark Tami: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs how many people were fined for offences involving dog fouling in the last year. [198025]

Alun Michael: Last year local authorities issued 2,742 fixed penalties for dog fouling offences.

Eastern Irish Sea Fishery

Mr. Rosindell: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs if she will make a statement on the European Commission's recovery plan to save cod from extinction in the North sea and other fishing grounds around the UK. [191579]

Mr. Bradshaw: The International Council for the Exploration of the Seas has published its advice to the European Commission on the current state of the cod stocks around the UK, taking into account of the EU measures already taken to restore the stocks.

The Commission is now considering what regulations to propose for 2005 under the EU cod recovery plan, covering limits on both permitted landings of cod, and the permitted time at sea by vessels which catch cod.

Mr. Paterson: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what the cod by-catch from beam trawlers fishing for sole in the Eastern Irish Sea was in the last 10 years for which figures are available. [192948]

Mr. Bradshaw: Information is only available on the proportion that cod made up of total landings by UK fishing vessels of fish caught in the Irish sea, as opposed to total catches of fish, and this is given as follows. The figures relate to activity by UK fishing vessels over 10 m in length. They represent the average levels over the year, and there is considerable variability seen between individual vessels and individual months of the year.

The information does not include any fish that may have been caught and then discarded before landing. Research was carried out in 2000 looking at the level of catches using beam trawl gear, which showed that cod made up on average 6 to 13 per cent. of catches using beam trawl gear in the Irish sea.

	Average percentage of cod in landings by UK over 10 m long vessels caught using beam trawl when fishing in the Irish sea on trips landing sole
1993	7
1994	4
1995	4
1996	3
1997	6
1998	7
1999	6
2000	1
2001	4
2002	4
2003	3

Mr. Paterson: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what the *(a)* quota allocations and *(b)* landings for cod for the (i) Belgian, (ii) French and (iii) Irish fleets operating in the Eastern Irish Sea were for the last 10 years for which figures are available. [192950]

Mr. Bradshaw: It has not proved possible to respond to the hon. Member in the time available before Prorogation.

Mr. Paterson: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs (1) what the estimated level of discards were from the beam trawler fleet operating in the Eastern Irish Sea for the last 10 years for which figures are available; [192951]

(2) what assessment she has made of the effects of the use of 80mm mesh cod ends on the level of by-catch of other species in a mixed fishery in the Eastern Irish Sea, with particular reference to cod and plaice. [192959]

Mr. Bradshaw: It has not proved possible to respond to the hon. Member in the time available before Prorogation.

Emissions Trading

Miss McIntosh: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs if she will make a statement on how the European Emissions Trading Scheme will apply to *(a)* aviation and *(b)* shipping. [198470]

Mr. Morley: Phase 1 of the EU Emissions Trading Scheme, due to commence in January 2005, will not cover emissions from aviation or shipping. The Government is currently considering options for increasing the scope of the scheme for Phase 2 including, for example, emissions from other transport sectors. As outlined in the 2003 Air Transport White Paper, The Future of Air Transport, the Government is actively pursuing the inclusion of intra-EU aviation in the EU ETS, and this will be a priority for the UK presidency of the EU in 2005. If the UK is successful, it is hoped that intra-EU aviation could be included within the second phase of the EU ETS, beginning in 2008.

Mr. Drew: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what the Government's emissions target level is, in terms of the National Allocation Plan for EU emissions trading; and what plans she has to change the target. [198479]

Mr. Morley: The Government announced on 27 October that, subject to European Commission approval, the total quantity of allowances to be issued to UK installations in Phase 1 of the EU Emissions Trading Scheme, which will run from 2005–07, will be set at 756.1 million tonnes CO_2 or 'allowances'. Subject to Commission approval, there are no further plans to change the figures for Phase 1, as these figures have now been finalised. The total quantity for the second phase (2008–12) will be considered as part of the Climate Change Programme Review.

Environmental Offences

Norman Baker: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs how many prosecutions resulted in *(a)* convictions and *(b)* custodial sentences in each year since 1999 for offences related to (i) water resources (ii) flood defences, (iii) fisheries, (iv) navigation, (v) process industry regulation, (vi) radioactive substances, (vii) waste and (viii) water quality as recorded in the National Enforcement Database; and what the average fines were where custodial sentences were awarded (A) in total and (B) broken down by region. [192317]

Alun Michael: The information available is given in the following table.

Environment Agency
Successful Prosecutions, Calendar Years 1999–2004
Date of report: 17 November 2004

	1999 (April to December)	*2000*	*2001*	*2002*	*2003*	*2004 (January to October)*
Fisheries	0	27	22	48	34	28
Flood defence	2	1	2	1	5	9
Navigation	3	6	3	15	32	20
PIR	6	12	7	3	5	1
RAS	3	3	11	1	3	2
Water quality	177	219	234	220	167	154
Water Resources	6	21	10	11	6	15
Waste	246	408	471	498	406	374

Norman Baker: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs how many *(a)* prosecutions, *(b)* cautions and *(c)* enforcement notices there have been in each year since 1995 brought by the Drinking Water Inspectorate (i) in total and (ii) broken down by region. [192318]

Mr. Morley: It has not proved possible to respond to the hon. Member in the time available before Prorogation.

Energy Efficiency

Sandra Gidley: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs when she expects to publish the study funded by her Department into health improvements for families and individuals whose homes have benefited from energy efficiency improvements under the Warm Front. [196403]

Mr. Morley: It has not proved possible to respond to the hon. Member in the time available before Prorogation.

Mr. Keith Bradley: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs how many homes in Manchester, Withington have benefited from the Home Energy Efficiency and Warm Front Schemes. [197879]

Mr. Morley: It has not proved possible to respond to the hon. Member in the time available before Prorogation.

EU Committees

Angus Robertson: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs how many times during the Greek presidency of the EU the Management Committee on application of the Directive on the standardisation and rationalisation of reports on the implementation of certain Directives relating to the environment met; when and where these meetings took place; which UK Government expert was present at each meeting; what (i) technical and (ii) financial issues were raised by the UK Government expert at each meeting; what recommendations the Committee produced during that period; what actions were (A) proposed and (B) taken by (1) the EU and (2) the UK Government as a result of the Committee's recommendations; and if she will make a statement. [193400]

Mr. Morley: There were no Management Committee meetings on this issue during the Greek presidency. The Management Committee on the application of the 'Standardised Reporting' Directive (91/692/EEC) last met in 1997. In 2002 the commission started work on a new framework for environmental reporting in response to the 6th Environment Action Programme. An Expert Group was set up to discuss commission proposals for a Directive. This group last met in October 2002. There is as yet no formal proposal for a Directive, and no management committee has been convened. In the event of any meeting being scheduled, officials will, as a matter of course, liaise with their counterparts in the Scottish Executive and the other Devolved Administrations.

Angus Robertson: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs how many times during the Greek Presidency of the EU the Committee *(a)* for the adaptation to technical and scientific progress of the Directive on conservation of wild birds and *(b)* on the Community action programme in the field of civil protection met; when and where these meetings took place; which UK Government expert was present at each meeting; what (i) technical and (ii) financial issues were raised by the UK Government expert at each meeting; what recommendations the Committee produced during that period; what actions were (A) proposed and (B) taken by (1) the EU and (2) the UK Government as a result of the Committee's recommendations; and if she will make a statement. [193401]

Mr. Bradshaw: The information requested is as follows:

(a) The Committee for the adaptation to technical and scientific progress of the Directive on conservation of wild birds (the ORNIS Committee) met once during the Greek Presidency, on 26 June 2003 in Brussels. UK representation comprised one official from my Department and one official from the Scottish Executive, together with a scientific adviser from the Joint Nature Conservation Committee. The main agenda items considered were:

> Commission's Sustainable Hunting Initiative: the Commission presented its draft guidance document on interpretation of the Birds Directive, pending further consideration of a key chapter.
>
> Article 4 (Special Protection Areas): member states provided updates on completing the Special Protection Area network and were updated by the Commission on progress regarding action plans for Annex I species.
>
> Update on EU enlargement preparations: including agreement that future Annexes to the Directive should comprise scientific names only (given the difficulty of including common names in the increasing numbers of languages), and on timeframes for implementation of the Directive as well as monitoring and peer review exercise for Accession countries.
>
> Other information points, including reporting by member states under Articles 9 and 12 of the Directive, management of the cormorant, information systems for NATURA 2000 and collaboration with the African Eurasian Waterbird Agreement (AEWA). The UK also highlighted recent work in relation to the ruddy duck and sought supportive action in other member states.

As a consequence of discussions at the meeting, the EU has subsequently published its guidance document on hunting on its website and, with the Government of the Netherlands, is organising a major conference in November to celebrate 25 years of the Birds Directive. The Conference will confirm the extent and coherence of the network of Special Protection Areas for Birds and further develop work on bird monitoring, indicators and reporting. The Commission has also recently invited the Council to consider its proposal to ratify the African-Eurasian Waterbird Agreement.

(b) The Committee on the Community Action Programme met twice during the Greek Presidency, on 27 February and 16 June 2003 in Brussels. UK representation comprised one official from the Cabinet Office at the February meeting. The main agenda items considered were:

27 February 2003

> The state of progress of the implementation of the Community Mechanism: the Commission reported on ongoing and planned activities in training, the CECIS communication system and the common rules for the implementation of the mechanism.
>
> Mid-Term Evaluation of the Action Programme: consultants reported on the programme and the recommendations were considered by the Commission in future calls for proposals.
>
> Draft Commission decision on the rolling plan 2000–04 of the Action Programme: members agreed unanimously on the plan to implement the programme.
>
> Other business included: a Commission presentation on the disaster medicine project, a report that the expert exchange system was now launched and information on other civil protection exercises and future meetings.

16 June 2003

> State of implementation of the Community Mechanism: the Commission reported on progress with the database of resources, standard operating procedures for the response centre, the mock up of CESIS, expert missions, training curriculum, and the EU Handbook on assistance interventions.
>
> Status of the Joint declaration by the Council and Commission on the use of the Community Civil Protection Mechanism in Crisis Management: delegates decided to wait for the adoption of this declaration before voting on the common rules. This would be by written procedure.
>
> Other business included: Commission services need to follow strict financial rules in place since 1 January 2003. There are still issues of co-financing of exercises and assistance to be solved.

As a consequence of discussions at these meetings, the EU adopted a decision on 29 December 2003 on common rules for the implementation of the Mechanism. The Commission has proposed an extension of the Community Action Programme to the end of 2006.

Farm Business Advisory Service

Mr. Paice: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what plans she has for the future of the Farm Business Advisory Service. [197503]

Alun Michael: I will write to the hon. Member with the information as soon as possible.

Fish Processing

Lawrie Quinn: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what plans she has to promote increased use of *(a)* by-products and trimmings from the commercial fish-processing sector and *(b)* discarded by-catch in the manufacture of fish meal and oil. [199228]

Mr. Bradshaw: It has not proved possible to respond to the hon. Member in the time available before Prorogation.

Fish Quota

Andrew George: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what estimate she has made of the total value in *(a)* sterling and *(b)* euros of UK fish quota entitlements held by (i) fishing licence holders, (ii) fish producer organisations and (iii) others, broken down by (A) species and (B) fishing sector areas, in each of the last five years for which records are available. [199214]

Mr. Bradshaw: It has not proved possible to respond to the hon. Member in the time available before Prorogation.

Flood Control

Dr. Iddon: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what consultations she has undertaken in the last 12 months and with whom, concerning flood control and prevention measures, with particular reference to the recent flooding of Boscastle. [198945]

Mr. Morley: The Department regularly consults on proposed policy changes, both publicly and in more focused ways through, for example, our Flood Management Stakeholder Forum. The most recent public consultation, to inform development of the Government's new Strategy for Flood and Coastal Erosion Risk Management, completed on 1 November.

The Environment Agency is the principle flood defence operating authority in England and Wales responsible for delivering the flood defence service.

Since the severe flooding in Boscastle, the Agency has consulted with individual residents and landowners, North Cornwall District Council (NCDC), the National Trust (who are major landowners in Boscastle and the Valency catchment), the Parish Council and the local County Councillor.

This consultation included meetings with residents in the village hall, the use of a drop-in centre to collect flood information, off-site meetings with the National Trust and attendance at the Regeneration Group established by NCDC. In addition, on-site meetings have been held with individual residents and landowners where required. All discussions were confirmed in writing and plans/drawings of proposed work have been produced.

Newsletters have also been produced and information has been placed on the NCDC website.

The Environment Agency used its emergency powers at Marine Terrace (on the River Jordan) where it is necessary to progress the most urgent work without delay. In doing so, the Agency has worked closely with residents and the local planning authority.

Elsewhere in Boscastle, work is being done in accordance with normal consultation and procedures.

The Agency will continue to consult as appropriate, aiming to meet the challenging target set by the community of certain elements of work being completed before the 2005 holiday season.

Foot and Mouth

Mr. Paterson: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs who in her Department has seen the video of Burnside Farm, taken by trading standards officials on 24 February 2001; and if she will make a statement. [196530]

Mr. Bradshaw: It has not proved possible to respond to the hon. Member in the time available before Prorogation.

Andrew George: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs (1) whether *(a)* Ministers and *(b)* officials in the (i) Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food and (ii) her Department had been informed of the existence of the (A) James Dring Report, (B) Northumberland Trading Standards video and report, (C) scientific test samples sent to Pirbright and (D) results of those test samples, all in respect of the Burnside Farm, Heddon-on-the-Wall, foot and mouth disease outbreak in 2001, (1) prior to and (2) during the period of the Dr. Iain Anderson FMD Inquiry in 2001–02; [196678]

(2) whether the *(a)* James Dring report, *(b)* Northumberland Trading Standards video and report, *(c)* scientific test samples sent to Pirbright and *(d)* results of those test samples, in respect of the Burnside Farm, Heddon-on-the-Wall, foot and mouth disease outbreak in 2001, were (i) supplied to the Chairman of the Lessons to be Learned Inquiry in 2001 and (ii) the subject of minuted informal meetings in (A) the Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food and (B) her Department in (1) 2001 and (2) 2002; [196679]

(3) what assessment was made of the suitability of the *(a)* James Dring report, *(b)* Northumberland Trading Standards video and report, *(c)* scientific test samples sent to Pirbright and *(d)* results of those test samples, in respect of the Burnside Farm, Heddon-on-the-Wall, foot and mouth disease outbreak in 2001, to be forwarded to Dr. Iain Anderson for his inquiry in 2001–02. [196680]

Mr. Bradshaw: It has not proved possible to respond to the hon. Member in the time available before Prorogation.

Andrew George: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs when her Department first received *(a)* a video and *(b)* other documentary evidence from Northumberland Trading Standards Department in respect of the 2001 foot and mouth disease outbreak at Heddon-on-the-Wall. [196682]

Mr. Bradshaw: It has not proved possible to respond to the hon. Member in the time available before prorogation.

Mrs. Browning: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs for what reason the Northumberland Trading Standards video of Burnside Farm at the time of the 2001 foot and mouth disease outbreak was not submitted to the Anderson Inquiry. [197501]

Mr. Bradshaw: It has not proved possible to respond to the hon. Member in the time available before Prorogation.

Mr. Paterson: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs (1) whether samples were taken from feed destined for consumption by pigs at Burnside Farm, Heddon on the Wall in 2001 and subjected to a compositional analysis; [198822]

(2) whether samples or parts of samples taken from feed destined for consumption by pigs at Burnside Farm, Heddon on the Wall in 2001 have been retained; [198823]

(3) whether samples were taken from feed destined for consumption by pigs at Burnside Farm, Heddon on the Wall in 2001 and tested for the presence of *(a)* animal proteins that had not been modified by heat and *(b)* sheep proteins. [198825]

Mr. Bradshaw: It has not proved possible to respond to the hon. Member in the time available before Prorogation.

Mr. Paterson: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs whether there was an internal inquiry conducted by her Department and its predecessor into the conduct of Senior Veterinary Officer, Mr. Jim Dring, with regard to inspections at Burnside Farm, Heddon on the Wall, prior to the outbreak of foot and mouth disease in 2001; and if she will make a statement. [198824]

Mr. Bradshaw *[holding answer 16 November 2004]:* It has not proved possible to respond to the hon. Member in the time available before Prorogation.

Mr. Paterson: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs on which farms which were registered swill feeders animals succumbed to the 2001 epidemic of foot and mouth disease. [198826]

Mr. Bradshaw *[holding answer 16 November 2004]:* It has not proved possible to respond to the hon. Member in the time available before Prorogation.

Freedom of Information

Mr. Clifton-Brown: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what assessment she has made of the likely costs to her Department in the first quarter of 2005 of compliance with the provisions of the Freedom of Information Act 2000; and if she will make a statement. [199085]

Alun Michael: Defra has not made an assessment of the likely cost of complying with the Freedom of Information Act during the first quarter of 2005 because it is not possible at this stage to predict with any assurance the volume of requests that the Department is likely to receive. The Department has been working actively to ensure that our staff are aware of the Act's requirements and have the support they need to deal efficiently with any requests they receive.

Government Buildings (Disabled Access)

Tom Cox: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs whether all Government buildings in her Department within the Greater London area are fully accessible to disabled people; and if she will make a statement. [199316]

Alun Michael: I am assured that all Defra buildings within the Greater London area offer reasonable access facilities to disabled employees and visiting members of the public.

Greenhouse Gases

Mr. Drew: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what assessment she has made of the effects on levels of *(a)* carbon dioxide and *(b)* other greenhouse gases achieved through use of an organic system of agriculture and of a biogas plant to recycle animal manures. [198746]

Mr. Morley: A 2003 Defra-funded study OF0405, entitled "An assessment of the environmental impacts of organic farming", reviewed the impacts of organic farming on levels of carbon dioxide (in terms of both carbon dioxide emissions and carbon sequestration), and the other greenhouse gases nitrous oxide, methane and (the indirect greenhouse gas) ammonia. The review report can be found at http://www.defra.gov.uk/science/project data/DocumentLibrary/OF0405/OF 0405 909 TRP.doc

The EC MIDAIR project focuses on mitigation options for organic and conventional dairy production at a system and region specific level. Details of a Defra-funded study (CC0250) forming part of the project can be found at http://www2.defra.gov.uk/research/proiect data/More.asp?l = CC0255&M = KWS&V = cc0255&SCOPE = 0

Proceedings of the International Conference "Greenhouse Gas Emissions from Agriculture—Mitigation Options and Strategies", held in February 2004 in Germany, is part of the MIDAIR project and contains reports of numerous, relevant assessments.

Defra has funded two recent projects to assess the effects of anaerobic digestion (biogas plant) on carbon dioxide (via the use of methane generated in the plant as a replacement for non-renewable fossil fuel) and on other greenhouse gases (primarily via the capture and combustion to carbon dioxide of methane which might otherwise be released to the atmosphere—methane having a global warming potential many times that of carbon dioxide). Details of these studies can be found at http://www2.defra.gov.uk/research/project data/projects.asp?M = KWS&V = cc0222&SCOPE = 0 and at http://www2.defra.gov.uk/research/project data/projects.asp?M = KWS&V = c c0240&SCOPE = 0

Anaerobic treatment options for animal manures (including biogas plants) and their effects on levels of carbon dioxide and other greenhouse gases were recently reviewed by C.H.Burton and C.Turner (2003) in "Manure Management" second Edition, Chapter 7, pp 273–320, ISBN: 09531282 6 1, Silsoe Research Institute, as part of the EU Accompanying Measure project, MATRESA.

Home Composting

Simon Hughes: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what plans she has to measure the contribution of home composting towards recycling targets. [199054]

Mr. Morley: The Government is working with expert bodies, including the Waste and Resources Action Programme, to develop a robust methodology to calculate the amount of waste diverted from the household waste stream through home composting schemes. If a workable and auditable methodology is found, the Government will then review whether and how home composting can be incorporated into future local and national recycling and composting figures.

The impact of home composting on waste reduction is already reflected at local level by Best Value Performance Indicator 84, which measures kilograms of household waste collected per head of population. Home composting activity will also be reflected in local and national progress towards meeting targets under the Landfill Directive to reduce the amount of biodegradable municipal waste sent to landfill.

Hunting

Mr. Drew: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what assessment she has undertaken of the impact of a ban on hunting on those who live in tied housing; and what steps will be taken to protect existing tied tenants. [198531]

Alun Michael: Tied housing is a private arrangement between landlord and tenant, but any tenants evicted by their landlords as a result of a ban on hunting will have the same recourse to their local services as any other evicted citizen. No assessment has been made by Defra of the effect of a ban on hunting on those living in tied housing as this issue is not covered in Lord Burns' comprehensive report and did not feature significantly in the evidence given to the Portcullis House hearings.

Industrial Fisheries

Mr. Paterson: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs if she will take steps to support a reduction in the use of fish meal and oil in aquaculture and agriculture; and what steps are being taken to promote the development of vegetable substitutes for these products. [197210]

Mr. Bradshaw: The Government are concerned to protect vulnerable stocks of fish in the production of fishmeal and fish oil and we support measures that may be needed to help stock recovery and sustainability.

Within the EU, the use of fishmeal in the agriculture sector is currently restricted to monogastric animals (eg pigs and poultry). Fishmeal and fish oil are used widely throughout the aquaculture industry and any reduction in usage would have implications for product quality. The issues are complex and are being considered in the context of the EU strategy for the sustainable development of European Aquaculture (Com. (2002) 511 final).

Defra is helping to fund collaborative cod trials which are designed to test different levels of fishmeal replacement with vegetable proteins. Defra has also invested in highly strategic research to transfer the genes in marine algae responsible for the health beneficial components of fish oil to oilseed rape. This research at the Centre for Novel Agricultural Products at the University of York has just been completed. It could lead eventually to the development of oilseed rape varieties providing a vegetable oil based supply which incorporates the key components of fish oil.

Insect Population

Norman Baker: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs if she will estimate the UK *(a)* fly, *(b)* mosquito and *(c)* cockroach population; and what the predicted numbers are in the event of a (i) 1 per cent. (ii) two per cent. and (iii) three per cent. increase on current average temperatures due to climate changes. [192304]

Mr. Bradshaw: It has not proved possible to respond to the hon. Member in the time available before Prorogation.

Kyoto Protocol

Mr. Drew: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs if she will make a statement on the decision of the Russian Government to sign the Kyoto Protocol. [191123]

Mr. Morley: We are delighted that President Putin has signed the Kyoto Protocol, and eagerly anticipate its deposition at the United Nations shortly. The Protocol will come into force ninety days after its deposition, and we look forward to working with Russia both in achieving our Kyoto goals and at the forthcoming Tenth Conference of Parties to the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change.

Mr. Drew: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs if she will make a statement on progress with ratification of the Kyoto Protocol; which countries have yet to ratify; and what recent discussions she has had with them. [191128]

Mr. Morley: In order for the Kyoto Protocol to enter into force it must be ratified by 55 countries including developed countries accounting for 55 per cent. of this group's carbon dioxide emissions from 1990. With these criteria satisfied, the Protocol would come into force 90 days after the last required ratified instrument was deposited at the United Nations.

127 countries have, at present, ratified the Protocol, and in the absence of ratification by the US, Russia—which in 1990 produced 17 per cent. of the world's CO_2 emissions—will provide the final signature to bring Kyoto into force. The Federation Council and Duma (Russia's upper and lower Houses of Parliament) approved the Protocol in late October this year, and President Putin put his signature to the document on the 5 November. We now await the document's deposition at the UN, and its eventual coming into force.

My officials and I have regular discussions with our counterparts in other countries, including the US and Australia, about the urgent need for serious action to tackle climate change. The 10th Conference of the Parties to the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change in December in Buenos Aires will provide a further opportunity to exchange views.

Land Management

Mr. Kidney: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs if she will ensure that conditions are attached to future stewardship schemes to secure land management practices that reduce the risk of flooding. [198182]

Alun Michael: We hope to launch our new Environmental Stewardship scheme, which is currently awaiting EU approval, early next year. Details of the scheme options and conditions will be released nearer the time.

It is our intention that the scheme will include some measures designed to reduce soil erosion and run-off in high risk areas. It will also include options that may contribute to flood management in both river and coastal situations.

Defra has completed initial research to establish current knowledge of the extent to which changes in land management practices impact on flood events. This has shown that there is great uncertainty about the impacts at other than local scales. Future research in the next few years will consider these impacts upon wider catchment areas. Further conditions or options may be included in future scheme revisions once the scientific evidence is clearer.

Landfill

Mr. Amess: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what recent representations she has received regarding the measurement of waste disposal by landfill by volume rather than weight. [198795]

Mr. Morley: This issue is raised occasionally in debates and parliamentary Questions in this House and in correspondence from members of the public. In the main, however, it is recognised that developing an effective system of measuring waste by volume is not straightforward (for example, waste tends to be compacted at various stages during the disposal process). Moreover, as all EU legislation measures waste by weight, a robust and acceptable method of conversion from volume to weight would also be needed.

League Against Cruel Sports

Kate Hoey: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs when *(a)* she and *(b)* Ministers in her Department last met representatives of the League Against Cruel Sports; and if she will make a statement. [199190]

Alun Michael: It has not proved possible to respond to the hon. Member in the time available before Prorogation.

Milk Prices

Mr. McLoughlin: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what discussions she has entered into with supermarkets and co-operatives regarding the farm-gate price of liquid milk; and what the responses of those companies have been. [198373]

Alun Michael: Price negotiations between producers and processors, or processors and supermarkets are private commercial matters in which the Government cannot and should not get involved, provided competition rules are respected. However, Ministers frequently meet representatives from all parts of the dairy supply chain and are therefore aware of the issues.

Mobile Telephones

Mr. Prisk: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs how many mobile phones were used by *(a)* Ministers and special advisers and *(b)* officials in her Department in each year since 1997; how many were (i) lost and (ii) stolen; and what their cost was. [191436]

Margaret Beckett: The number of mobile phones held by the Department as at October 2004 is 3,398, of which 46 are the responsibility of the Department's Secretariat. No information is held centrally on the number of phones which have been lost or stolen.

The total payment made to our primary mobile phone contractors for the 12 months to October 2004 is £498,350.46. This includes rental, call charges, mobile phones and accessories. All contracts in place comply with the OGC negotiated contract.

Centralised records were not established until last year, so no details are available for earlier years.

Nickel-cadmium Batteries

Mr. Caton: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what plans she has to improve collection and recycling rates for nickel-cadmium batteries. [199281]

Mr. Morley: This is a matter for the Department of Trade and Industry.

Organic Farming

Bob Spink: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs how much was spent in support of organic farming in each of the last three years. [197644]

Mr. Bradshaw: The following table shows Defra's spending in the last three financial years on support for organic farming:

	2001–02	*2002–03*	*2003–04*
Financial support			
Under the Organic Farming Scheme (OFS)[1], which is part of the England Rural Development Programme (ERDP) (£ million)	13.6	14.7	10.4
Other support			
Organic Conversion Information (OCIS)(£)	330,293	300,975	237,998
Defra funding for organic farming research projects (£ million)	2.1	1.8	1.9

In the 2004–05 year, payments to the end of October, were as follows:

	2004–05
Financial support	
Under the Organic Farming Scheme (OFS)[1], which is part of the England Rural Development Programme (ERDP) (£ million)	4.1
Other support	
Organic Conversion Information (OCIS)(£)	106,206
Defra funding for organic farming research projects (£ million)	1.9

[1] Payments made under this scheme are administered by the Rural Payments Agency (RPA).

Over-thirty-month Scheme

Mr. Salmond: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what recent discussions her Department has had with the Scottish Executive regarding the Over-30-month scheme; and if she will make a statement. [193716]

Alun Michael: It has not proved possible to respond to the hon. Member in the time available before Prorogation.

Parliamentary Questions

Miss McIntosh: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs when she will reply to the question, reference 198471, from the hon. Member for Vale of York. [199350]

Mr. Morley: I replied to the hon. Member's question on 17 November 2004.

Peat Bogs

Mr. Webb: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs pursuant to her letter of 10 October (her ref: 203663/JF) regarding peat bogs, when she expects the consultation on the designation of *(a)* Bolton Fell Moss and *(b)* Solway Moss as special areas of conservation to be concluded. [197081]

Mr. Bradshaw: It has not proved possible to respond to the hon. Member in the time available before Prorogation.

Peregrine Falcons

Mr. Spring: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what estimate she has made of the size of the peregrine falcon population in the UK *(a)* at present, *(b)* 10 years ago, *(c)* 20 years ago and *(d)* 30 years. [198389]

Mr. Bradshaw: It has not proved possible to respond to the hon. Member in the time available before Prorogation.

Public Telephones

Andrew George: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what assessment she has made of coverage of public telephone kiosks in rural areas; and what discussions she has had with British Telecommunications and other telephone suppliers on this matter. [190063]

Alun Michael: I have not made an assessment or had discussions with telephone suppliers. The Government takes access to all public services in rural areas seriously and all telephone providers are subject to the universal service obligation.

Universal service is a concept fundamental to the regulation of telecommunications in the UK. It means that basic telephone services should be available to everybody upon reasonable request and at an affordable price. This includes the provision of public call boxes and call box services in the UK.

This is a matter for the Office of Communications (Ofcom), which took over responsibility for telecommunications regulation in December 2003. The universal service conditions and directions applying to public call boxes can be found on Ofcom's website. Ofcom is currently reviewing the universal service obligation and intends to publish a document for consultation later this year.

Publications

Mr. Andrew Turner: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs if she will list the Department's publications, copies of which have been mailed unsolicited in the most recent 12 months for which information is available; and how many copies of each publication were printed. [197723]

Alun Michael: The Department's Communication Directorate issued some 109 mailings during the most recent 12 months. These mainly consist of forms and guidance to farmers dealing with Common Agricultural Policy issues and consultation documents targeted at stakeholders and other interested parties.

The number of copies printed is determined by the number of addresses on the appropriate mailing list; this could range from a few hundred for some consultations to 200,000 for a circulation to all farmers.

During the period we issued 33 mailings to farmers; 27 consultation documents and 49 containing general information to regional and specialist groups.

Raptors

Mr. Spring: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what legislation is in force to protect raptor bird populations; and whether she has plans to amend the legislation. [198377]

Mr. Bradshaw: It has not proved possible to respond to the hon. Member in the time available before Prorogation.

Mr. Spring: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what effect the existing legislation to protect raptor birds has had on their population in the UK. [198388]

Mr. Bradshaw: All birds of prey are strictly protected under UK law. The Wildlife and Countryside Act 1981 (for Great Britain) and the 1985 Wildlife (Northern Ireland) Order, as amended by other legislation such as the Countryside and Rights of Way Act 2000 and the Nature Conservation (Scotland) Act 2004, establish the legal basis for the protection of these and other bird species.

Illegal persecution constrains populations sizes and distribution. The population of hen harrier is now at a level which jeopardises the continued existence of the species in England. However other species are in the process of recovering former distribution and population size, apparently as a consequence of recent lessening of levels of illegal persecution directed at them. Thus the Buzzard currently appears to be re-establishing its former range in lowland Britain.

The population status of birds of prey is affected not only by their legal status, but also by a range of other factors some of which are under different forms of legislative or policy regulation. Thus in recent decades the populations of Peregrine and Sparrowhawk have been recovering their former distributions and numbers as a consequence of progressive legal restrictions on the use of persistent organo-chlorine pesticides formerly used in agriculture, leading to the ultimate banning of the use of DDT in 1986.

Land-use changes (many of which are under legislative or policy control), such as open-ground afforestation, have affected UK raptor populations in a range of ways—and have had different impacts consequent on species' different ecological requirements. Meanwhile species such as White-tailed Eagle and Red Kite have been the subject of active re-establishment programmes. Information on the main drivers of population change for each species of UK raptor is summarised in Annex 4 of the 2000 report to Ministers of the UK Raptor Working Group, a copy of which is in the House of Commons Library.

Recycling

Mr. Gill: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what percentage of *(a)* domestic refuse, *(b)* commercial refuse and *(c)* industrial refuse was recycled in (i) Leicester and (ii) England in the last year for which figures are available. [198662]

Mr. Morley: Results from the Defra Municipal Waste Management Survey 2002–03 show Leicester with a household recycling rate of 11.5 per cent. The household recycling rate for England over the same period was 14.5 per cent.

The latest results available for industrial and commercial waste, reused or recycled are from the Environment Agency, National Waste Production Survey, 1998–99. Results for England show a commercial recycling rate of 24.2 per cent. and an industrial recycling rate of 42.2 per cent. The corresponding recycling rates for Leicester are not available.

Regulatory Impact Assessments

Mr. Redwood: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what the aggregate annual cost measured by the regulatory impact assessments is of compliance with all the regulations introduced by her Department since 1997. [196560]

Alun Michael: All proposals which impact on business, charities or the voluntary sector require a regulatory impact assessment (RIA) which includes details of the costs, benefits and risks of the proposal. RIAs are subject to public consultation and copies of final RIAs are available from the House Libraries and on departmental websites.

River Thames (Sewage)

Mr. Grieve: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what steps the Government are taking to avoid a repetition of the flooding of the River Thames with raw sewage in August; and if she will make a statement. [199155]

Mr. Morley: The sewage collection system serving London is comprised largely of combined systems which collect and transport for treatment both domestic and industrial waste water, and rainwater run-off. As sewers and sewage treatment works have a maximum capacity, it is a design feature of combined systems to have overflows which discharge in some wet weather conditions to prevent sewers from flooding, and sewage treatment works from being overloaded. Therefore, although we hope the environmental effects of the sewage discharge in early August aren't repeated, the overflows will continue to operate during some wet weather conditions.

As agreed in the last Periodic Review of water company price limits for 2000–05, Thames Water, the Environment Agency, Defra and the Office of Water Services (Ofwat) have been involved in a Strategic Study of the environmental impact of intermittent storm sewage discharges to the Thames Tideway. The remit of the study was to identify objectives for improvement, and to propose potential solutions, having regard to costs and benefits.

As a result of the study, the Final Guidance by the Secretary of State to the Director-General of OfWat, published on 4 October 2004, and the draft price limits published by Ofwat on 5 August 2004, include provision for further measures to address sewage discharges to the Thames Tideway.

In the medium term this will result in improvements to the capacity and quality of treated effluent from three sewage treatment works (Beckton, Crossness, and Mogden) which discharge to the Thames Tideway. These improvements are also to include reducing the frequency of intermittent discharges from the storm water storage tanks at Mogden, which made a significant contribution to the pollution in August.

In addition a scheme to improve the treated effluent at Riverside sewage treatment works, is identified to improve water quality in the river and protect fish.

Also, as set out in the Final Guidance, we have asked Thames Water and the Environment Agency to undertake further work on a long-term solution proposed by the Strategic Study group, and on other smaller-scalemeasures that could bring earlier improvements on intermittent discharges.

Sand Eels

Lawrie Quinn: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs if she will make a statement on the advice by the International Council for the Exploration of the Sea recommending a reduction in fishing for North Sea sand eels; and if she will support lower catch limits for industrial feed fisheries within EU waters at the next EU Fisheries Council. [199229]

Mr. Bradshaw: It has not proved possible to respond to the hon. Member in the time available before Prorogation.

School Milk

Mr. Kidney: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs if she will ensure that milk is available under the school milk scheme to pupils in all schools. [197779]

Alun Michael: Member states are required to make the EU school milk subsidy scheme available to primary and nursery schools wishing to participate; participation is, a matter for the school or local education authority.

Set-aside Rules

Sir Michael Spicer: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs when she expects to publish details of the new set-aside rules. [199298]

Alun Michael: It has not proved possible to respond to the hon. Member in the time available before Prorogation.

Single Farm Payment Scheme

Andrew George: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs how different types of tenanted farms are to be treated in respect of their eligibility for National Reserve payments under the proposed Single Farm Payment system. [198820]

Alun Michael: The precise way in which the national reserve will operate in certain circumstances is still being considered. I anticipate a further announcement soon.

Andrew George: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs whether tenancies secured under the provisions of the Agriculture (Miscellaneous Provisions) Act 1986 will be treated as entitled to payments from the National Reserve under the proposed Single Farm Payment system. [198821]

Alun Michael: In applying the provisions of the national reserve, leases of six years or more (five in some circumstances) may be considered as equivalent to purchase and lead to an award under the "investors" category. The 1986 Act Tenancies are essentially one-year renewable tenancies. We are still considering whether they can be considered as long-term tenancies for this purpose.

Sugar

Andrew George: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what *(a)* discussions she has had and *(b)* agreements she has reached with her colleagues in the (i) Department for Trade and Industry and (ii) Department for International Development in respect of the UK position on the future of the EU Sugar Regime. [198760]

Alun Michael: Reform of the EU sugar regime has been the subject of normal inter-departmental consultation. The welcome which my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State gave to the European Commission's latest Communication at the July Agriculture Council, as an important step in the right direction, reflected these discussions.

Andrew George: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what decisions the Government have taken in respect of European Council negotiations on the future of the EU Sugar Regime. [198761]

Alun Michael: The Government have welcomed the European Commission's July Communication on sugar reform as an important step in the right direction and continues to urge the need for early progress, including on an Action Plan to address the concerns of existing preferential suppliers to the EU market.

Formal negotiations will not begin until the Commission comes forward with detailed legislative proposals.

Andrew George: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what assessment she has made of *(a)* the timetable for (i) future negotiations and (ii) decisions and *(b)* future entitlement to quota ownership in respect of the EU Sugar Regime. [198827]

Alun Michael: The European Commission has tabled a Communication setting out their preferred approach to sugar reform, but have not yet made formal legislative proposals for a new regime. It is for the Commission to decide when to put such proposals to the Council and for the Presidency in office to bring discussions to a successful conclusion.

We do not have a view on future entitlement to quota ownership at this stage of discussion.

Timber

Ms Walley: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what policy directions on procurement of legal and sustainably sourced timber she has issued applying to *(a)* Lottery funded bodies and *(b)* private finance initiative contracts; and if she will make a statement. [198222]

Alun Michael: Lottery distributors who are responsible for issuing instructions to Lottery funded bodies, are intended to be, independent of Government, but they are obliged to take into account policy directions from the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport. These directions set out the framework for the wider aims of Lottery funding, and include the need for the distributing bodies to further the objectives of sustainable development when awarding Lottery grants. The Lottery distributing bodies are strongly committed to sustainable development, including the procurement of timber from legal and sustainable sources.

Advice on implementing sustainable development policy through public private partnership contracts can be viewed in the Guide at www.hm- treasury.gov.uk/media/851/A5/PPP_GreenPublicPrivatePart.pdf. This advice contains a number of references and links to the Government's timber procurement policy, including a specific reminder of the commitment in Annex A under the heading Materials.

The OGC first issued guidance to departments on the procurement of legal and sustainable timber in their construction projects, including through PFI contracts, in an Information Note (IN 9/2002) in December 2002. That Note included the following text. "Departments must review their existing arrangements for the purchase of legal and sustainably-produced timber and timber products, such as joinery, fittings, furniture and veneers. To help ensure that suppliers are fully aware of the Government's commitment and what it means to them, the Minister for the Environment wrote to Green Ministers on 13 May 2002 asking them, inter alia, to review their procurement of timber and timber products. The letter enclosed a model specification clause for use in Government contracts. Anyone who is developing or managing a public private partnership, including PFI projects involving capital investment should take account of this latest letter to Green Ministers when writing their output specification. The Green Public Private Partnerships guide gives advice on writing the output specification as well as issues for contractors to consider when drawing up their tender."

The OGC issued further advice in the light of Defra's January 2004 guidance and revised model contract specification clause on timber procurement, in a subsequent Information Note (IN 5/2004) in May 2004 to update that given in IN 9/2002.

Tobacco-growing Industry

Bob Spink: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what level of financial support has been given to the tobacco-growing industry in the EU in each of the last five years. [193507]

Alun Michael: The level of financial support (premiums) for the tobacco-growing industry in the EU in each of the last five years is shown in the table.

Under the agreement reached by the Council of Ministers in Luxembourg in April of this year, direct support for tobacco will be brought to an end by 2010. Between 2006 and 2010 producer member states will have the option of retaining up to 60 per cent. of the tobacco premium as a coupled payment. From 2010, aid will be completely decoupled from production with 50 per cent. being transferred to the single farm payment and the remaining 50 per cent. to be used for restructuring programmes under the rural development programme.

Cost of premia paid under the tobacco regime

	Million euro	*£ Million*[1]
1999	910	628
2000	984	679
2001	964	665
2002	952	657
2003	[1]956	660

[1] Appropriations 2003

Note:

Exchange rate based on the rate for 21 October 2004: 1 euro = 0.69005

Source:

Official Journal of the European Union

Toxic Waste

Mr. Amess: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs if she will make a statement on the disposal of toxic waste. [199064]

Mr. Morley: Significant changes in the management of hazardous waste are being brought about by implementation of the Landfill and Hazardous Waste Directives. Earlier concerns that the UK would have insufficient landfill capacity to deal with arisings of hazardous waste following the end of co-disposal on 16 July 2004 have not materialised. There is sufficient landfill capacity to meet demand at present and fly tipping has not increased.

The Government and the Agency are working together to prepare for the full implementation of the Landfill Directive waste acceptance criteria (WAC) in July 2005. The WAG set leachate limits on waste going to landfill, and will require some hazardous waste to have additional treatment prior to landfill. It is important that producers of hazardous waste in particular, are aware of their obligations, and that they are liaising with the waste management industry as necessary. To that end Defra has organised a seminar on the issue next month. In addition, a comprehensive web portal www.hazardouswaste.org.uk, has been established to provide links to advice, guidance and details of regulatory requirements.

The Hazardous Waste Forum also meets regularly to discuss a variety of issues, including disposal.

Warm Front

Mr. Bill O'Brien: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs how many households in England are eligible for assistance under the *(a)* Warm Front and *(b)* Warm Front Plus programmes; how many additional households become eligible for Warm Front Plus as a result of pension credit being added to the range of qualifying benefits; and if she will make a statement. [196953]

Mr. Morley: It has not proved possible to respond to the hon. Member in the time available before Prorogation.

Brian White: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs (1) what discretion her Department allows Warm Front scheme managers to *(a)* repeat grants for households which have already benefited from Warm Front and *(b)* fast-track exceptionally vulnerable households; [199209]

(2) what mechanisms are in place to monitor private landlords' compliance with the requirement to freeze rents for a one or two year period after a Warm Front improvement. [199210]

Mr. Morley: It has not proved possible to respond to my hon. Friend in the time available before Prorogation.

Waste Management (PFI)

Mr. Sheerman: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what plans she has to establish a taskforce to help local authorities which may use private finance initiatives to develop waste management infrastructure and facilities. [198231]

Mr. Morley: The private finance initiative is one of the main mechanisms through which local government funds investment in value for money waste services.

In 2003, Defra set up a Waste Implementation Programme (WIP) to facilitate improved local authority performance, boost the take up of wider options for waste management and to co-ordinate funding more effectively. Action taken by WIP has already led to an increase in the number of waste PFI projects coming forward, including through close working with local authorities, the waste industry and the public-private partnerships programme (the 4Ps).

A new Waste Management Procurement Pack has been developed by the 4Ps to provide specific assistance to local authorities in England with the procurement of waste management projects through the PFI—strongly supported by Defra, Partnerships UK and the Waste and Resources Action Programme. This guidance, which all local authorities can use, will enable the initial delivery of projects to a higher standard, reduce the time taken for them to reach contract signature, and act as a guide and invaluable tool throughout the whole procurement process.

The WIP programme is committed to ensuring that ongoing support is made available to local authorities to maintain the healthy levels of good quality potential waste PFI projects that we are currently seeing. The need for further specific support measures is currently under consideration.

Mr. Drew: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what plans she has put in place to permit waste disposal authorities, which will be introducing new private finance initiative waste management contracts, to suspend any fines prior to the full introduction of the contract under the Landfill Allowance Trading Scheme. [198480]

Mr. Morley: None; under Section 9(2) of the Waste and Emissions Trading Act 2003 a waste disposal authority (WDA) automatically becomes liable for a (financial) penalty if the amount of biodegradable municipal waste it sends to landfill in any one scheme year exceeds the amount authorised by the number of landfill allowances it holds for that year. Before that position is reached, however, a WDA will be able to trade or borrow allowances in a six month reconciliation period that follows the end of a scheme year, in order to balance its books. Alternatively, a WDA can make a case to the Secretary of State for her to use her powers to waive a penalty if the reason for the breach was beyond its control.

Water Bills/Metering

Mr. Cameron: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what steps the Government are taking in accordance with the Water Act 1999 to ensure that metered customers of water companies have the choice of remaining on a metered bill or changing to a rateable value bill; and if she will make a statement. [198268]

Mr. Morley: The Water Industry Act 1999 provides that household customers charged for their water on an unmeasured basis have the right to continue to pay on that basis in their current home. They also have the right to change to a measured basis free of charge and have the corresponding right to revert to an unmeasured charge within the first year.

It is the responsibility of Ofwat to ensure that companies charge fairly and keep their customers well-informed of their rights and the choices open to them.

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what the net change in the number of household customers charged for water on the basis of metering was in *(a)* 2001–02, *(b)* 2002–03 and *(c)* 2003–04. [191045]

Mr. Morley: The following table shows the change in the number of households with a metered supply for the years *(a)* 2001–02, *(b)* 2002–03 and *(c)* 2003–04. The figures take account of households who have requested a metered supply, households who have been metered at the water company's initiative and new household properties that are almost all metered. The numbers reported in the table include the effect of any reduction in the number of measured households during the year.

Period	*Increase in number of measured household properties over this period*
31 March 2001 to 31 March 2002	387,478
31 March 2002 to 31 March 2003	384,782
31 March 2003 to 31 March 2004	427,447

Jon Trickett: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs how many people in *(a)* Hemsworth constituency and *(b)* England use water meters. [198747]

Mr. Morley: It has not proved possible to respond to the hon. Member in the time available before Prorogation.

Windfall Tax (Oil and Gas)

Alan Simpson: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what discussions her Department has had with HM Treasury on *(a)* the case for a windfall tax on excessive profits made by oil and gas producers and *(b)* the use of revenues from such a tax to fund a domestic energy efficiency programme; and if she will make a statement. [198503]

Mr. Morley: It has not proved possible to respond to my hon. Friend in the time available before Prorogation.

Worcester

Mr. Michael Foster: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs if she will set out, with statistical evidence relating as closely as possible to the Worcester constituency, the effect of changes to departmental policies since 1997, on the Worcester constituency. [198382]

Alun Michael: It has not proved possible to respond to the hon. Member in the time available before Prorogation.

I will write to my hon. Friend with the information as soon as possible.

HOME DEPARTMENT

"Reducing Crime, Changing Lives"

Mr. Martyn Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what consultations he had prior to the publication of his response to the Carter report. [155611]

Paul Goggins: It has not proved possible to respond to my hon. Friend in the time available before Prorogation.

Mr. Oaten: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department for what reason the proposals set out in, Reducing Crime, Changing Lives, on 6 January, were not subject to the Cabinet Office Code of Practice on Written Consultations in relation to *(a)* prior consultation with stakeholders and *(b)* the minimum 12-week consultation period. [155957]

Paul Goggins: It has not proved possible to respond to the hon. Member in the time available before Prorogation.

Accession State Worker Registration Scheme

Mr. Oaten: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many applications for the Accession State Worker Registration Scheme have been received since 1 May; what the latest figures are for the average times taken between the receipt of an application and *(a)* the return of the applicant's passport and *(b)* the issue of a registration certificate; and what the target time is for processing applications. [193990]

Mr. Browne: It has not proved possible to respond to the hon. Member in the time available before Prorogation.

Alcohol Industry

Mr. Oaten: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what progress has been made in securing voluntary contributions towards the cost of policing disorder from the alcohol industry. [198909]

Ms Blears: It has not proved possible to respond to the hon. Member in the time available before Prorogation.

Anglia Water

Mr. Llwyd: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what assessment he has made of the *(a)* level of customer service and *(b)* effectiveness of sub-contractor management provided by the Anglia Water Group in respect of approved premises contracts over the past 18 months. [194319]

Fiona Mactaggart *[holding answer 28 October 2004]*: It has not proved possible to respond to the hon. Member in the time available before Prorogation.

Anguilla

Mr. Rosindell: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many UK and EU passports have been *(a)* applied for and *(b)* obtained by Anguillan citizens in each of the last 10 years; and if he will make a statement on levels of immigration from Anguilla. [197491]

Mr. Browne: British passports are issued to British nationals in accordance with the Nationality Act 1981. Anguilla is an overseas territory of the United Kingdom and on 21 May 2002, the British Overseas Territories Act 2002 came into force.

British Overseas Territory Citizens (previously British Dependent Territory citizens) with a connection with Anguilla will have become a British citizen with the introduction of this Act. They are eligible to apply for a British passport in one of two designs; a EU style passport showing them as a British citizen or a non-EU passport showing their national status as British Overseas Territory Citizen Anguilla.

Unfortunately, we are unable to provide details of non-EU passports issued broken down into different categories nor do we have the facility to establish how many passports are issued showing a specific country of birth. There are also no figures available for the number of British Dependant Territory citizens who have obtained British citizenship before 2002 and then applied for a British passport.

It is not possible to say from centrally held information what the levels of immigration from Anguilla are.

Animal Experimentation

Mr. Hancock: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what the evidential basis was for point one of the Home Office response to twelve questions raised by Dan Lyons, uncaged campaigns, about Imutran Xenotransplantation research licensed under the Animals (Scientific Procedures) Act 1986. [198553]

Caroline Flint: It has not proved possible to respond to the hon. Member in the time available before Prorogation.

Mr. Hancock: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department whether lethal endpoints were expected in *(a)* project licence authorities and *(b)* other communications between the Home Office, the Animal Procedures Committee and Imutran in relation to Imutran xenotransplantation procedures with a moderate severity limit. [198557]

Caroline Flint: It has not proved possible to respond to the hon. Member in the time available before Prorogation.

Mr. Hancock: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department pursuant to the answer of 4 October 2004, *Official Report*, column 1895W, on animal experimentation, on what date the Animal Procedures Committee was informed that Imutran primates on moderate procedures had been found dead; and what form the communication took. [198558]

Caroline Flint: It has not proved possible to respond to the hon. Member in the time available before Prorogation.

Mr. Hancock: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what infringement action has been taken under section 6(6) of the Animals (Scientific Procedures) Act 1986 against, *(a)* named day-to-day care persons and *(b)* named veterinary surgeons employed by Huntingdon Life Sciences, in respect of failures to make arrangements for the care or destruction of primates in Imutran xenotransplantation procedures where breaches of the moderate severity limit occurred as identified at paragraph 5.14 of the chief inspector's compliance review. [198560]

Caroline Flint: It has not proved possible to respond to the hon. Member in the time available before Prorogation.

Antisocial Behaviour

Paul Farrelly: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what steps have been taken to tackle antisocial behaviour in Newcastle-under-Lyme since 1997. [198588]

Ms Blears: The Anti-social Behaviour Act 2003 is the single biggest package of measures tackling antisocial behaviour. It was introduced after widespread consultation with communities and practitioners. These powers are part of the Government's TOGETHER campaign to help local people and agencies tackle the menace of yob behaviour. The Act and Together apply across all of England and Wales including the hon. Member's Constituency.

To achieve this there has been the provision of centrally funded Anti-Social Behaviour Co-ordinators and for which Newcastle-under-Lyme have received £10,000 in 2003–04 and £25,000 in 2004–05.

An audit of crime and disorder within the borough of Newcastle identified antisocial behaviour as one of the priority issues. The Newcastle Community Safety Partnership has responded by developing an Antisocial Behaviour Strategy that seeks to develop a co-ordinated approach to tackling antisocial behaviour. The strategy focuses on three key work areas:

Continual review of hotspots via consultation.

Supporting local people who have been the victim of antisocial behaviour and raising awareness and understanding of hard to reach groups, who are vulnerable to antisocial behaviour.

Focused intelligence gathering on, and challenging of prolific offenders. This includes identifying persons responsible for antisocial behaviour and targeting positive interventions and enforcement.

Paul Farrelly: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what steps the Government have taken to promote stronger and safer communities in Newcastle-under-Lyme since 1997. [198590]

Ms Blears: It has not proved possible to respond to my hon. Friend in the time available before Prorogation.

Paul Farrelly: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how much has been spent on tackling drugs misuse in Newcastle-under-Lyme since 1997. [198591]

Caroline Flint: It has not proved possible to respond to my hon. Friend in the time available before Prorogation.

Paul Farrelly: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many antisocial behaviour orders have been issued in Newcastle-under-Lyme. [198592]

Ms Blears: The number of notifications received by the Home office of antisocial behaviour orders issued, up to 30 June 2004 (latest available), where the restrictions imposed are specific to Newcastle-under-Lyme, is 13.

Miss McIntosh: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will make a statement on the number of antisocial behaviour orders issued in the Vale of York in each of the last three years. [198647]

Ms Blears: The number of notifications received by the Home Office of antisocial behaviour orders issued in each of the last three years within the North Yorkshire magistrates courts committee (MCC) area, which includes the Vale of York, is given in the table.

The number of ASBOs issued in North Yorkshire, as reported to the Home Office, by period

	Number
1 January to 31 December 2001	7
1 January to 31 December 2002	0
1 January to 31 December 2003	8
Total	15

Asylum

Mr. Win Griffiths: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will list the meetings in his diary for the rest of 2004 on delivering the Government's strategy on asylum. [192008]

Mr. Blunkett: It has not proved possible to respond to my hon. Friend in the time available before Prorogation.

Asylum and Immigration (Treatment of Claimants) Act

Mr. Gerrard: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many prosecutions have taken place under section 2 of the Asylum and Immigration (Treatment of Claimants) Act 2004; how many of these are being dealt with in magistrates courts; and how many have been referred to Crown courts. [192789]

Mr. Browne: It has not proved possible to respond to my hon. Friend in the time available before Prorogation.

Asylum and Immigration Act

Mr. Oaten: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what the total cost was of enforcing section 8 of the Asylum and Immigration Act 1996 in each year since 1997. [198903]

Mr. Browne: It has not proved possible to respond to the hon. Member in the time available before Prorogation.

Asylum Appeals

Tom Cox: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many appeals against refusal of political asylum were waiting to be heard on 1 October. [198885]

Mr. Browne: It has not proved possible to respond to my hon. Friend in the time available before Prorogation.

Asylum Seekers

Mr. Malins: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department when he expects the building of the proposed asylum accommodation centre at Bicester to *(a)* commence and *(b)* be completed; when he expects the building to be ready to accept asylum seekers; what plans have been made for the build-up of occupation of the centre by asylum seekers; and if he will make a statement. [199030]

Mr. Browne: It is expected that construction of the accommodation centre near Bicester will commence in early 2005.

Mr. Rosindell: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what procedures he has in place to keep track of people waiting for asylum applications to be processed. [191270]

Mr. Browne: It has not proved possible to respond to the hon. Member in the time available before Prorogation.

Mr. Rosindell: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many applications for asylum there were per month in each of the last 10 years. [191450]

Mr. Browne: The table shows the number of asylum applications (principal applicants) received in the UK from January 1994 to December 2004.

Information on asylum applications are published on a quarterly and annual basis. The publication covering the third quarter of 2004 (July to September) was published on 16 November on the Home Office Research Development and Statistics Directorate website at http://www.homeoffice.gov.uk/rds/immigration1.html.

The Prime Minister's pledge to reduce by a half the number of applications by September 2003 (using a baseline of October 2002) has been achieved. A range of initiatives has contributed to this success, including the introduction of juxtaposed controls, the deployment of New Detection Technology in France and Belgium, an informed and robust visa strategy, a network of airline liaison officers and close co-operation with carriers, port authorities and our EU colleagues.

Applications received for asylum in the United Kingdom, excluding dependants, by month [1]

	1994	*1995*	*1996*	*1997*	*1998*	*1999* [2]	*2000* [2]	*2001*	*2002*	*2003* [3]
January	2,350	3,570	3,310	2,715	2,860	4,700	6,110	6,880	6,575	7,210
February	2,000	3,030	2,850	2,475	2,650	4,185	6,110	5,955	6,325	4,215
March	2,755	3,310	3,145	2,160	3,200	5,060	6,680	6,175	6,355	4,430
April	2,505	2,810	2,070	2,665	3,135	4,905	6,855	5,045	6,475	3,690
May	2,650	3,450	1,755	2,590	3,110	5,370	6,725	5,300	7,380	3,365
June	2,465	3,630	1,730	2,585	3,575	6,130	6,545	5,340	6,235	3,615
July	2,645	3,415	2,515	3,070	4,215	6,440	6,870	6,005	7,510	3,990
August	2,695	3,890	2,140	2,930	4,420	7,120	6,770	6,545	6,895	3,795
September	3,695	4,020	2,185	2,850	4,455	7,355	6,790	6,070	7,630	4,270
October	2,995	4,595	2,810	2,990	5,010	6,295	7,230	6,435	8,770	4,025
November	3,125	4,715	2,450	2,345	4,620	6,420	7,500	5,795	7,545	3,275
December	2,940	3,540	2,685	3,120	4,770	7,180	6,125	5,490	6,445	3,525
Total	32,830	43,965	29,640	32,500	46,015	71,160	80,315	71,025	84,130	49,405

[1] Figures rounded to the nearest 5 with * = 1 or 2.

[2] May exclude some cases lodged at Local Enforcement Offices between January 1999 and March 2000.

[3] Provisional figures.

Mr. Malins: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many failed asylum seekers he expects to remove in the next 12 months. [193255]

Mr. Browne: It has not proved possible to respond to the hon. Member in the time available before Prorogation.

Mr. Malins: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will make a statement on his proposals to decide asylum applications offshore. [193257]

Mr. Browne: It has not proved possible to respond to the hon. Member in the time available before Prorogation.

Mr. Malins: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many Home Office initial decision-makers in relation to asylum applications were in the post on 1 September in each of the last seven years. [193311]

Mr. Browne *[holding answer 25 October 2004]*: It has not proved possible to respond to the hon. Member in the time available before Prorogation.

Mr. Malins: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many accommodation centres for asylum seekers are operational; and if he will make a statement. [193312]

Mr. Browne *[holding answer 25 October 2004]*: None. A contractor has been appointed to design, build and operate the first centre near Bicester; now that the local authority's legal challenge of the planning process has concluded we expect construction on this centre to begin in early 2005.

Mr. Malins: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many staff are currently processing the exceptional indefinite leave to remain exercise applications; whether there is a backlog; and if he will make a statement. [195470]

Mr. Browne: It has not proved possible to respond to the hon. Member in the time available before Prorogation.

Mr. Malins: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what percentage of initial decisions on asylum applications have been successfully appealed in the last 12 months. [195471]

Mr. Browne: It has not proved possible to respond to the hon. Member in the time available before Prorogation.

Julie Morgan: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what the status is of *(a)* an asylum seeker, *(b)* a failed asylum seeker and *(c)* their dependants in each case if a spouse is granted the right to work in the UK as an EU citizen under the Workers Registration Scheme. [195895]

Mr. Browne: It has not proved possible to respond to my hon. Friend in the time available before Prorogation.

Mrs. Curtis-Thomas: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what change there has been in the rate of removals of failed asylum seekers in each of the last five years. [196621]

Mr. Browne: The latest available information on the number of asylum seekers removed is shown in the table.

Removals, voluntary departures[1], assisted returns, of asylum applicants, January 1999 to June 2004[2]

Number of persons

	Principal asylum applicants removed	*Dependants removed[3]*	*Total removed[3]*
1999[4]	7,665	—	—
2000[4]	8,980	—	—
2001[4]	9,285	1,495	10,780
2002	10,740	3,170	13,910
2003[5]	13,005	4,890	17,895
Q1 2004[5]	3,320	765	4,085
Q2 2004[5]	3,130	595	3,725

[1] Includes enforced removals, persons departing 'voluntarily' following enforcement action being initiated against them, persons leaving under Assisted Voluntary Return Programmes run by the International Organisation for Migration.

[2] Figures rounded to the nearest 5, and may not sum due to rounding.

[3] Data on dependants removed not available before April 2001.

[4] Figures may include a small number of dependents leaving under Assisted Voluntary Return Programmes

[5] Provisional figures

Provisional statistics for the number of persons removed during the third quarter of 2004 was published on 16 November, on the Home Office Research, Development and Statistics website at http://www.homeoffice.gov.uk/rds/immigration1.html.

David Davis: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department pursuant to the answer of 19 October 2004, *Official Report*, column 601W, on asylum seekers, for what reasons some local authorities in certain years have negative net expenditure on asylum. [199008]

Mr. Browne: It has not proved possible to respond to the right hon. Member in the time available before Prorogation.

Sarah Teather: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what the estimated number of asylum seekers residing in each parliamentary constituency is. [199015]

Mr. Browne: It has not proved possible to respond to the right hon. Member in the time available before Prorogation.

Mr. Frank Field: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many asylum seekers have been dispersed to each parliamentary constituency in *(a)* the two years up to the end of 2003 and *(b)* the latest two-year period for which data is available. [199128]

Mr. Browne: It has not proved possible to respond to my right hon. Friend in the time available before Prorogation.

Mr. Lilley: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department for *(a)* which countries of origin and *(b)* what periods since 1997 it has been the policy of his Department not to enforce the return of failed asylum seekers. [193308]

Mr. Browne *[holding answer 25 October 2004]*: Since 1997, the Home Office has had a policy of not enforcing the return of failed asylum seekers to the countries listed below, for the periods specified.

Prior to October 2002, Exceptional Leave to Remain (ELR) was granted to asylum applicants from particular countries on a country basis. The blanket use of ELR for certain countries ended in October 2002 and since then the issue of return has been considered solely in terms of the individual circumstances of each case.

Since the end of blanket ELR policies the only country for which there has been a general policy not to enforce the return of failed asylum seekers has been Zimbabwe. Enforced returns of failed asylum seekers to Zimbabwe were temporarily suspended between 15 January 2002 and 16 November 2004.

Country	*Period Specified*
Afghanistan	January 1995—October 2002
Angola	August 1998—May 1999
Burundi[1]	January 1997—October 2002
Congo	November 1997—August 1998
(Congo-Brazzaville)	July 1999—July 2000
Cote d'Ivoire	October 2000—9 April 2001
Democratic Republic of Congo	May 1997—May 1998
	August 1998—May 1999
	January 2001—February 2001
Iraq[2]	January 1997—September 2000
Kosovo	June 1999—April 2000
Liberia	October 1990—October 2002
Libya	April 2000—October 2002
Rwanda[1]	January 1997—August 2002
Sierra Leone	June 1999—September 2001
Somalia[2]	January 1997—October 2002
Turkey	July 1999—December 2000
Zimbabwe	January 2002 -16 November 2004

[1] policy in place since 1994

[2] policy in place since late 1980s

Mr. Lilley: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many people originally granted exceptional leave to remain have been *(a)* refused and *(b)* granted indefinite leave to remain in each of the last five years. [193309]

Mr. Browne *[holding answer 25 October 2004]:* It has not proved possible to respond to the hon. Member in the time available before Prorogation.

Mr. Stringer: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what plans he has to change the grant regime to local authorities for funding unaccompanied asylum seeking children; and if he will make a statement. [198174]

Mr. Browne *[holding answer 15 November 2004]:* The instructions for payment of grant in this financial year 2004–05 to local authorities supporting unaccompanied asylum seeking children (UASCs) were issued to local government organisations on 10 November 2004. The grant regime is broadly similar to that applying in previous years and allowed a 2.5 per cent. uplift for inflation.

Badger Baiting

Mr. Nigel Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what assessment he has made of the number of badgers killed illegally by badger baiters in each of the last five years. [195349]

Caroline Flint: It has not proved possible to respond to the hon. Member in the time available before Prorogation.

Binge Drinking

Judy Mallaber: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what assessment he has made of the steps that have been taken by the brewing and licensed trade industry to combat binge drinking. [199192]

Caroline Flint: It has not proved possible to respond to my hon. Friend in the time available before Prorogation.

British Crime Survey

Mrs. Curtis-Thomas: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what assessment he has made of the *(a)* usefulness and *(b)* accuracy of the British Crime Survey. [196701]

Ms Blears: The British Crime Survey (BCS), is the most authoritative source for assessing crime levels. It measures the crimes most people experience most of the time and measures peoples' direct experiences of crime. It is not affected by reporting or recording changes and has consistently measured crime the same way since it started in 1981.

Within Government it is used to inform and monitor policy and to assess performance. Police forces use BCS results to measure statutory performance indicators and target performance. They also compare their local data with BCS findings and use the survey as a tool for designing their own surveys.

The BCS is an internationally renowned reference work that is used in academia.

The Home Office has ensured that the survey data are available through the ESRC data archive, and it has also awarded grants for analysis by external academics.

About 50 external academics have published articles based on BCS data, and more have used it without leading to peer-reviewed publications.

Statistics from the BCS are released quarterly under the national statistics protocol which means they are assured for quality, timeliness and freedom from political interference. The BCS was reviewed in 2000 (Lynn and Elliot) and all recommendations from the review have been implemented.

Burglaries (London)

Sarah Teather: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many burglaries there were in each London borough in *(a)* each year since 2001 and *(b)* each month to date in 2004. [199241]

Ms Blears: It has not proved possible to respond to the hon. Member in the time available before Prorogation.

Business Case Assessments

Mr. Oaten: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what guidance his Department has received from the Cabinet Office on the timing of business case assessments in respect of major projects. [198870]

Fiona Mactaggart: It has not proved possible to respond to the hon. Member in the time available before Prorogation.

Car Thefts (London)

Sarah Teather: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many car thefts there were in each London borough in *(a)* each year since 2001 and *(b)* each month to date in 2004. [199242]

Ms Blears: It has not proved possible to respond to the hon. Member in the time available before Prorogation.

Child Pornography

Judy Mallaber: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what assessment he has made of the steps that have been taken by credit card companies to combat the purchasing of child pornography on the internet. [199194]

Paul Goggins: It has not proved possible to respond to my hon. Friend in the time available before *Prorogation.*

Judy Mallaber: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what further steps his Department intends to take to ensure that credit card companies do all they can to combat the purchasing of child pornography on the internet. [199195]

Paul Goggins: It has not proved possible to respond to my hon. Friend in the time available before Prorogation.

Church of England Charities

Mrs. Lait: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department for how long he expects Church of England charities to remain excepted charities. [199114]

Fiona Mactaggart: The draft Charities Bill would end the system of exceptions from the requirement to register. Initially, excepted charities with an annual income above £100,000 would be required to register. Any decision to lower that threshold would be made only after further consultation with key stakeholders, including the Church of England. Before any plans are drawn up to lower the registration threshold for excepted charities the Government intend to monitor and report on the actual costs and benefits of the registration of those charities with an annual income above £100,000.

Civil Servants (Yorkshire)

Hugh Bayley: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many full-time equivalent jobs *(a)* his Department and *(b)* its executive agencies had in (i) Yorkshire and the Humber and (ii) the City of York in (A) 1997 and (B) the latest year for which figures are available. [191852]

Fiona Mactaggart: It has not proved possible to respond to my hon. Friend in the time available before Prorogation.

Closed Circuit Television

Paul Farrelly: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what schemes exist to provide financial assistance for the extension of closed circuit television in town centres. [198610]

Ms Blears: It has not proved possible to respond to my hon. Friend in the time available before Prorogation.

Mr. David Atkinson: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what the level of funding for CCTV security cameras was in Bournemouth in each year since 1997; and how many CCTV security cameras were switched off in Bournemouth in each year since 1997. [197973]

Ms Blears: Between 1997 and 2001 the Home Office provided Bournemouth with £100,463 for Closed Circuit Television systems. Between 2001 and 2004, they received an additional £255,000 for crime reduction initiatives from miscellaneous Home Office funding streams, providing for 176 CCTV cameras.

The operation of CCTV cameras is a matter for Bournemouth borough council and Dorset police.

Commencement of Legislation

Brian White: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what pieces of legislation passed in the last 30 years that the Department is responsible for remain to be brought into force, broken down by year of enactment. [195621]

Fiona Mactaggart: It has not proved possible to respond to my hon. Friend in the time available before Prorogation.

Community Support Officers

Mr. Dismore: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what account the maximum funded cost for a community support officer takes of higher police pay in London. [192536]

Ms Blears: It has not proved possible to respond to my hon. Friend in the time available before Prorogation.

Simon Hughes: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department pursuant to his answer of 2 November 2004, *Official Report*, column 188W, on community support officers, for what reasons each of the 31 detentions under the detention power pilot resulted in release after the arrival of a police officer; and if he will make a statement. [199056]

Ms Blears: It has not proved possible to respond to the hon. Member in the time available before Prorogation.

Consultancy Projects

Dr. Julian Lewis: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many consultancy firms or companies have been retained by the Department since June 2001; what the projects are for which each has been retained; and what the total is of the fees paid or incurred in each case. [193429]

Fiona Mactaggart *[holding answer 25 October 2004]*: It has not proved possible to respond to the hon. Member in the time available before Prorogation.

Consultants

Pete Wishart: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how much expenditure his Department has incurred in each year since 2002 on employing external consultants to deal with the press and public relations of his Department; and if he will make a statement. [195382]

Fiona Mactaggart: It has not proved possible to respond to the hon. Member in the time available before Prorogation.

Mr. Weir: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how much his Department spent in each year since 2002 on employing *(a)* external management consultants and *(b)* external human resources consultants; and if he will make a statement. [195763]

Fiona Mactaggart: It has not proved possible to respond to the hon. Member in the time available before Prorogation.

Correspondence

Mr. Bill O'Brien: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will ask the director of Ofcom to reply to the letters of 28 June and 11 September from the hon. Member for Normanton relating to correspondence with the Home Secretary. [196964]

Mr. Blunkett: It has not proved possible to respond to my hon. Friend in the time available before Prorogation.

Sir Gerald Kaufman: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department when he will reply to the letter to him dated 10 October from the right hon. Member for Manchester, Gorton with regard to Mrs. Guy-Blackburn. [199090]

Mr. Blunkett: It has not proved possible to respond to my right hon. Friend in the time available before Prorogation.

Sir Gerald Kaufman: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department when he will reply to the letter to him dated 11 October from the right hon. Member for Manchester, Gorton with regard to Mrs. S. Ahmed. [199091]

Mr. Blunkett: It has not proved possible to respond to my right hon. Friend in the time available before Prorogation.

Crime

Hugh Bayley: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department pursuant to the Answers of 2 November 2004, *Official Report*, columns 191–2W, on crime, what the figures were for each year between 1997 and 2003–04. [197974]

Ms Blears: It has not proved possible to respond to my hon. Friend in the time available before Prorogation.

Paddy Tipping: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many crimes were committed *(a)* per head of population and *(b)* per police officer in each police force area in England and Wales in (i) 2002–03 and (ii) 2003–04. [198324]

Ms Blears *[holding answer 17 November 2004]:* It has not proved possible to respond to my hon. Friend in the time available before Prorogation.

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many *(a)* violent crimes and *(b)* burglaries were (i) reported to and (ii) detected by the Aylesbury Vale Basic Command Unit in (A) 2001–02, (B) 2002–03 and (C) 2003–04. [189976]

Ms Blears: The available information relates to offences recorded and detected in the Aylesbury Vale Basic Command Unit and is given in the tables:

Recorded crime in the Aylesbury Vale Basic Command Unit 2001–02[1]

Period 2001–02	*Number of offences*	*Number of detections*
Violent crime	1,174	754
All burglary	1,503	223

[1] The data in this table is prior to the introduction of the National Crime Recording Standard in April 2002. These figures are not directly comparable with those for later years.

Recorded crime in the Aylesbury Vale Basic Command Unit 2002–03 and 2003–04

	Number of offences	*Number of detections*
2002–03		
Violent crime	1,730	976
All burglary	1,616	222
2003–04		
Violent crime	2,136	1,156
All burglary	1,932	259

Note:

1. The data in this table takes account of the introduction of the National Crime Recording Standard in April 2002. These figures are not directly comparable with those for earlier years.

Crime Statistics

Hugh Bayley: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department pursuant to the answer of 2 November 2004, *Official Report*, columns 191–92W, on crime, how many *(a)* crimes, *(b)* burglaries, *(c)* thefts and *(d)* vehicle related crimes were reported to the police (i) in Yorkshire and the Humber and (ii) in North Yorkshire in each year since 1999. [197272]

Ms Blears: It has not proved possible to respond to my hon. Friend in the time available before Prorogation.

Mr. McLoughlin: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many crimes were committed per head of population in West Derbyshire police force areas in the last five years for which figures are available. [198369]

Ms Blears; It has not proved possible to respond to the hon. Member in the time available before Prorogation.

Mr. Dhanda: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will provide figures relating as closely as possible to the Gloucester constituency for changes in *(a)* crime and *(b)* police numbers since 1997. [195546]

Ms Blears: It has not proved possible to respond to my hon. Friend in the time available before Prorogation.

Crime/Sentencing Statistics

David Davis: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many persons were recalled to custody having been released on home detention curfew in *(a)* each of the last 12 months and *(b)* each of the last five years. [190891]

Paul Goggins: It has not proved possible to respond to the right hon. Member in the time available before Prorogation.

Criminal Behaviour

Mrs. Curtis-Thomas: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how the fear of being caught is used as a deterrent to would-be offenders. [150351]

Paul Goggins: It has not proved possible to respond to my hon. Friend in the time available before Prorogation.

Criminal Cases Review Commission

Peter Bottomley: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what the waiting time for consideration of *(a)* urgent and *(b)* non-urgent cases by the Criminal Cases Review Commission (CCRC) was in the last period for which figures are available; what estimate he has made of the budget the CCRC would require to have the same capacity in 2005–06 as in 2004–05; and what estimate he has made of the resources the CCRC would require to consider (i) priority cases urgently and (ii) non-priority cases within a year. [197658]

Paul Goggins: The Criminal Cases Review Commission has always sought ways of minimising its case waiting times and this remains one of its key targets.

The Commission does not divide applications into urgent and non-urgent. Applications that require no more than five days case work are allocated for review as soon as all the necessary papers are to hand and these account for 51 per cent. of applications. A further 31 per cent. of applications are dealt with on a largely administrative basis, usually because the applicant has yet to exhaust the normal appeals process.

The remaining applications (18 per cent.) are placed in a queue, distinguishing between those in custody, which have priority and those at liberty. Within those cases awaiting allocation, a small number are accorded priority over others for particular reasons such as age, state of health, deterioration of evidence, witness availability and public interest. Such cases are allocated without delay. This practice continues. At 31 March 2004, the maximum delay before allocation to a caseworker was one year for in custody cases and two years for those at liberty.

My estimate is that to enable the Commission to achieve the same performance next year as this I would need to provide a broadly similar level of resources for 2005–06 as I have for 2004–05. The budgets for 2005–06 have yet to be delegated and that for the Commission will have to be set in the light of competing priorities.

Criminal Injuries Compensation Authority

Richard Ottaway: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will make a statement on manning levels at the Criminal Injuries Compensation Authority. [199094]

Paul Goggins: It has not proved possible to respond to the hon. Member in the time available before Prorogation.

Criminal Records Bureau

Bob Spink: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what the Criminal Records Bureau *(a)* average and *(b)* maximum response time is in (i) Essex and (ii) England. [190729]

Ms Blears: It has not proved possible to respond to the hon. Member in the time available before Prorogation.

Deaths (Driving)

Mr. McLoughlin: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many deaths have been caused by *(a)* dangerous driving, *(b)* driving under the influence of illegal drugs and *(c)* driving under the influence of alcohol in (i) west Derbyshire and (ii) the East Midlands in each year since 2001. [198371]

Mr. Jamieson: I have been asked to reply.

The information requested is not available.

Departmental Advertising Costs

Charles Hendry: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what the cost of *(a)* creative work, *(b)* media spend and *(c)* administration for his Department's advertising activity has been in each financial year since 1997–98, broken down by contractor. [197292]

Fiona Mactaggart: It has not proved possible to respond to the hon. Member in the time available before Prorogation.

Departmental Budget Allocations

Mr. Oaten: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how much has been allocated under his Department's budget for central services in *(a)* 2003–04, *(b)* 2004–05 and *(c)* 2005–06 for (i) private offices, (ii) the central Secretariat providing support to Ministers and the Permanent Secretary, (iii) the Corporate Resources Directorate, (iv) the Planning and Finance Directorate, (v) the Communications Directorate, (vi) Legal Advisers Branch, (vii) the Prisons Ombudsman's Office and (viii) HM Inspectorate of Prisons; and if he will make a statement. [198943]

Fiona Mactaggart: It has not proved possible to respond to the hon. Member in the time available before Prorogation.

Departmental Contracts

Pete Wishart: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department which non-accounting and non-information technology external organisations which previously held contracts with his Department *(a)* won new contracts at the culmination of the existing contracts and *(b)* won new contracts after a period of inactivity with his Department in each of the past four years. [196894]

Fiona Mactaggart: It has not proved possible to respond to the hon. Member in the time available before Prorogation.

Departmental Efficiency

Mrs. Curtis-Thomas: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what the reasons are for the change in the number of civil servants in his Department between 1998–99 and 2003–04. [196591]

Fiona Mactaggart: It has not proved possible to respond to my hon. Friend in the time available before Prorogation.

Departmental Events (Funding)

Charles Hendry: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will list the *(a)* conferences, *(b)* publications, *(c)* initiatives, *(d)* projects and *(e)* receptions organised by his Department which have received funding from outside commercial bodies since May 1997, broken down by (i) funding body and (ii) amount paid. [196609]

Fiona Mactaggart: It has not proved possible to respond to the hon. Member in the time available before Prorogation.

Departmental Expenditure

David Davis: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will list the items that his Department has reported lost or stolen to the police from its buildings and property since 2001. [185384]

Fiona Mactaggart *[holding answer 20 July 2004]*: It has not proved possible to respond to the right hon. Member in the time available before Prorogation.

Departmental Opinion Polls

Mr. Djanogly: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department in what areas his Department conducted opinion polling in each of the last three years. [198462]

Fiona Mactaggart: It has not proved possible to respond to the hon. Member in the time available before Prorogation.

Mr. Djanogly: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what plans he has to make available in the Library, the results of the opinion polling carried out by his Department in the last three years. [198463]

Fiona Mactaggart: It has not proved possible to respond to the hon. Member in the time available before Prorogation.

Departmental Policies (South Dorset)

Jim Knight: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will set out, with statistical evidence relating as closely as possible to the south Dorset constituency, the effects of changes to departmental policy since 1997 on the south Dorset constituency. [194967]

Fiona Mactaggart: It has not proved possible to respond to my hon. Friend in the time available before Prorogation.

Departmental Press Officers

David Davis: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how much was spent by his Department on press officers in each of the past eight years, broken down by grade. [184804]

Fiona Mactaggart: It has not proved possible to respond to the right hon. Member in the time available before Prorogation.

Departmental Staff

Tim Loughton: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many people in his Department earn more than a whole-time equivalent salary of £57,485 per year. [195325]

Fiona Mactaggart: It has not proved possible to respond to the hon. Member in the time available before Prorogation.

Dispersal Orders

Stephen Hesford: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many dispersal orders have been used in the last year. [198937]

Paul Goggins: It has not proved possible to respond to my hon. Friend in the time available before Prorogation.

Domestic Violence

Sandra Gidley: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what plans he has to introduce a general fund for victims of domestic violence. [195641]

Paul Goggins: It has not proved possible to respond to the hon. Member in the time available before Prorogation.

Sandra Gidley: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will change the immigration and benefits rules to exempt victims of domestic violence subject to immigration control from the no recourse to public funds requirement. [195642]

Mr. Browne: It has not proved possible to respond to the hon. Member in the time available before Prorogation.

Judy Mallaber: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what measures the Government are taking to tackle domestic violence in Amber Valley; and how many convictions have been reached in the last year. [199193]

Paul Goggins: It has not proved possible to respond to my hon. Friend in the time available before Prorogation.

Door Staff

Mr. Andrew Turner: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what plans he has to introduce further penalties for individuals and organisations who fail to comply with Security Industry Authority requirements for the licensing of door staff. [196991]

Ms Blears *[holding answer 10 November 2004]*: It has not proved possible to respond to the hon. Member in the time available before Prorogation.

Mr. Andrew Turner: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many *(a)* organisations and *(b)* individuals have had action taken against them for failure to comply with Security Industry Authority requirements for the licensing of door staff. [196992]

Ms Blears *[holding answer 10 November 2004]*: Prosecution of organisations or individuals who have failed to comply with the door supervisor requirements of the Private Security Industry Act 2001 is the responsibility of individual police forces and this information is not held centrally.

Drink Spiking/Drug Rape

Sandra Gidley: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what assessment he has made of drink spiking detection or prevention devices; and if he will make a statement. [198550]

Caroline Flint: It has not proved possible to respond to the hon. Member in the time available before Prorogation.

Sandra Gidley: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what estimate he has made of the percentage of drug assisted sex attacks that go unreported. [198551]

Caroline Flint: It has not proved possible to respond to the hon. Member in the time available before Prorogation.

Sandra Gidley: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what assessment he has made of the prevalence of *(a)* drink spiking and *(b)* drug rape following drink spiking. [198552]

Caroline Flint: It has not proved possible to respond to the hon. Member in the time available before prorogation.

Sandra Gidley: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what plans he has to fund a campaign in the run up to the Christmas party season to alert women to the dangers of leaving drinks unattended. [198555]

Caroline Flint: It has not proved possible to respond to the hon. Member in the time available before Prorogation.

Sandra Gidley: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department which police forces are using the early evidence kits for detection of drugs that may have been used to assist a rape. [198556]

Ms Blears: It has not proved possible to respond to the hon. Member in the time available before Prorogation.

Drugs Workers

Mrs. Gillan: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how long it has taken on average since January for the Criminal Records Bureau to process an application from a drugs service relating to an individual who wishes to work in a jail in England and Wales. [181823]

Paul Goggins: It has not proved possible to respond to the hon. Member in the time available before Prorogation.

Exclusion Orders (Licensed Premises)

Mr. Grogan: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many exclusion orders from licensed premises have been granted in England in each of the last 10 years. [198792]

Ms Blears: It has not proved possible to respond to my hon. Friend in the time available before Prorogation.

Fair Trade

Mr. Burstow: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department whether it is his policy to ensure that hospitality within his Department is sourced from fair trade producers wherever possible within the boundaries set by the public procurement rules. [197055]

Fiona Mactaggart: It has not proved possible to respond to the hon. Member in the time available before Prorogation.

Fines/Fixed Penalties

Mr. Oaten: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what percentage of *(a)* fixed penalties and *(b)* fines imposed by the courts were collected in full in England and Wales in (i) 2001–02, (ii) 2002–03 and (iii) 2003–04. [198878]

Paul Goggins: It has not proved possible to respond to the hon. Member in the time available before Prorogation.

Mr. Malins: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many fixed penalties have been issued to persons by police, other than in motoring cases, in the last year for which figures are available; what the total financial value of fixed penalties is; how much has been paid; and how much remains outstanding. [193310]

Ms Blears *[holding answer 25 October 2004]*: It has not proved possible to respond to the hon. Member in the time available before Prorogation.

David Davis: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many people were issued with a fixed penalty notice in each year since their introduction; and what proportion of those notices was paid in each year, broken down by *(a)* police force area and *(b)* type of offence for which the notice was issued. [199269]

Ms Blears: It has not proved possible to respond to the right hon. Member in the time available before Prorogation.

Freedom of Information Act

Dr. Julian Lewis: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what assessment he has made of the likely costs to his Department in the first quarter of 2005 of compliance with the provisions of the Freedom of Information Act 2000; and if he will make a statement. [198768]

Fiona Mactaggart *[holding answer 16 November 2004]:* It has not proved possible to respond to the hon. Member in the time available before Prorogation.

Gambling

Mr. Don Foster: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will list the occasions on which *(a)* he, and *(b)* other Ministers in his Department have met representatives of *(a)* US casino operators, *(b)* British casino operators and *(c)* casino operators from other countries to discuss gambling issues, broken down by date of meeting. [195070]

Mr. Blunkett: It has not proved possible to respond to the hon. Member in the time available before Prorogation.

Gateway Zero

Mr. Oaten: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what guidance his Department has received from the Office of Government Commerce on the timing of Gateway Zero consultations. [198874]

Paul Goggins: It has not proved possible to respond to the hon. Member in the time available before Prorogation.

Mr. Oaten: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department when the Gateway Zero inquiry into the National Offender Management Service will be completed. [198875]

Paul Goggins: It has not proved possible to respond to the hon. Member in the time available before Prorogation.

Government Buildings (Disabled Access)

Tom Cox: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department whether all government buildings in his Department within the Greater London area are fully accessible to disabled people; and if he will make a statement. [199317]

Fiona Mactaggart: It has not proved possible to respond to my hon. Friend in the time available before Prorogation.

Green Ministers

Mr. Horam: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many Green Ministers his Department has had since 1997. [197675]

Fiona Mactaggart *[holding answer 15 November 2004]:* It has not proved possible to respond to the hon. Member in the time available before Prorogation.

Hate Crime

Mr. Woodward: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what the Government's policy is on the prevention of hate crime; and if he will make a statement. [186888]

Paul Goggins: It has not proved possible to respond to my hon. Friend in the time available before Prorogation.

Mr. Woodward: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what *(a)* support and *(b)* resources the Government are providing to the police to tackle hate crimes. [186889]

Ms Blears: It has not proved possible to respond to my hon. Friend in the time available before Prorogation.

Mr. Woodward: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what the Government's policy is on the collection of data on hate crimes; and if he will make a statement. [186911]

Ms Blears: It has not proved possible to respond to my hon. Friend in the time available before Prorogation.

Hertfordshire Police Authority

Mr. Prisk: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what representations he has received concerning the funding settlement for Hertfordshire police authority for 2005–06. [198088]

Ms Blears: Correspondence has been received from a number of Hertfordshire MPs, on behalf of Hertfordshire police authority, explaining financial pressures on the authority, in advance of the announcement of the provisional funding settlement for 2005–06.

Hizb at Tahrir

Mr. Dismore: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will make a statement on the activities of Hizb at Tahrir. [198409]

Mr. Blunkett: It has not proved possible to respond to my hon. Friend in the time available before Prorogation.

Home Detention Curfew Scheme

Mr. Alan Duncan: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department (1) if he will list offences committed by those released on the Home Detention Curfew Scheme since its inception; [185079]

(2) what the original offence was of each person released under the Home Detention Curfew Scheme since its inception; and what the average sentence *(a)* imposed and *(b)* served was, broken down by original offence. [185080]

Paul Goggins *[holding answer 19 July 2004]:* It has not proved possible to respond to the hon. Member in the time available before Prorogation.

David Davis: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many offences were committed by prisoners while released on the home detention curfew scheme since January 1999; what the category of each offence was; and on how many occasions the offence committed was similar in character to that for which the prisoner had originally been sentenced. [199271]

Paul Goggins: It has not proved possible to respond to the right hon. Member in the time available before Prorogation.

David Davis: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many prisoners have been released on the home detention curfew scheme since January 1999; what the categories of offences were for which they had been sentenced; how many such prisoners were released in each category; and what the average sentence received was in relation to each category. [199272]

Paul Goggins: It has not proved possible to respond to the right hon. Member in the time available before Prorogation.

Homeland Security

Mr. Oaten: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what measures he is planning to enhance UK resilience and homeland security over the next *(a)* two and *(b)* five years. [190861]

Mr. Blunkett *[holding answer 14 October 2004]*: It has not proved possible to respond to the hon. Member in the time available before Prorogation.

Hospital Admissions (Excessive Alcohol)

Mr. Grogan: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what percentage of hospital admissions in the accident and emergency departments surveyed in the summer alcohol enforcement campaign were connected with excessive alcohol consumption. [198781]

Caroline Flint: It has not proved possible to respond to my hon. Friend in the time available before Prorogation.

Housing

Ms Keeble: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what assessment he has made of the impact on police funding of the Government's proposals for housing growth in the South Midlands and Milton Keynes area. [197604]

Keith Hill: I have been asked to reply.

The Office of the Deputy Prime Minister and the Home Office are working together to assist police authorities in planning future needs in the Milton Keynes-South Midlands (MKSM) Growth Area.

Funding for policing is based on an assessment of the relative need for police resources across the 43 police areas in England and Wales. That assessment is based on the police funding formula, which takes account of population data and socio-demographic factors including density, sparsity and deprivation.

In addition, the three relevant police forces (Thames Valley, Northamptonshire and Bedfordshire) have recently commenced a joint project to consider the implications for policing of the proposals contained within the revised draft MKSM sub-regional strategy. This includes community safety (as understood in the context of section 17 of the Crime and Disorder Act 1998 and subsequently by Crime and Disorder Reduction Partnerships) particularly in relation to the physical design of neighbourhoods and infrastructure, but also the wider context of crime, disorder and accident reduction.

Identity Cards

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many full-time equivalent consultants from PA Consulting are advising his Department on the design of the National Identity Card Programme; what the average annual cost per consultant is; what the total cost of the consultants is; and if he will make a statement. [195696]

Mr. Browne: It has not proved possible to respond to the hon. Member in the time available before Prorogation.

Mr. Oaten: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department (1) what estimate he has made of the unit cost of a biometric identity card reader; [198901]

(2) what estimate he has made of the potential savings in identity fraud costs that may be consequent on development of the identity card scheme; [198902]

(3) which *(a)* employers and *(b)* interested groups are being consulted about the design of the identity card verification service; [198905]

(4) if he will publish the conclusions of his Department's Science and Technology Reference Group's examination of the identity card programme; [198906]

(5) through which stages of the Office of Government Commerce's Gateway process the identity cards project has passed; [198900]

(6) what research he has commissioned into the effects of identity cards in reducing terrorism. [198904]

Mr. Browne: It has not proved possible to respond to the hon. Member in the time available before Prorogation.

Mr. Oaten: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will publish the cost estimates for identity card readers which have been incorporated into work with stakeholders on benefits. [198946]

Mr. Browne: It has not proved possible to respond to the hon. Member in the time available before Prorogation.

Mr. Oaten: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what assessment his Department has made of whether cost savings are associated with the issue of a free-standing identity card compared to a combined passport and identity card. [198947]

Mr. Browne: It has not proved possible to respond to the hon. Member in the time available before Prorogation.

Mr. Oaten: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department whether the annual cost of the identity card scheme announced by his Department on 2 November includes the cost of adding visual verification features to the face of the card; and what visual verification options are under consideration. [198949]

Mr. Browne: It has not proved possible to respond to the hon. Member in the time available before Prorogation.

Harry Cohen: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what steps, over what timescale, are being taken to have barcodes in place in UK passports; what information the barcode would represent; and if he will make a statement. [147540]

Mr. Browne: At present, the UK Passport Service does not plan to include barcodes in British passports. All British passports incorporate a machine readable zone containing essential passport holder details in compliance with IACO standards.

Illegal Workers

Mr. Oaten: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what the five most common nationalities of individuals found to be working illegally in the UK were in the last period for which figures are available. [198948]

Mr. Browne: It has not proved possible to respond to the hon. Member in the time available before Prorogation.

Immigration

Mr. Malins: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many illegal entrants have been *(a)* discovered in vehicles at Dover, *(b)* detained at Eurostar at Waterloo and *(c)* discovered within the area surrounding Dover in each of the last 12 months. [193248]

Mr. Browne: It has not proved possible to respond to the hon. Member in the time available before Prorogation.

Mr. Malins: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many prosecutions have been brought in the last 24 months against employers for employing an illegal immigrant; and what penalties were imposed. [193249]

Mr. Browne: It has not proved possible to respond to the hon. Member in the time available before Prorogation.

Mr. Malins: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what proportion of vehicles arriving at Dover are searched with a view to discovering illegal immigrants. [193264]

Mr. Browne: It has not proved possible to respond to the hon. Member in the time available before Prorogation.

David Davis: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what use has been made of mobile task-forces as part of an intelligence-led control of immigration. [198999]

Mr. Browne: It has not proved possible to respond to the right hon. Member in the time available before Prorogation.

David Davis: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many *(a)* airline liaison officers and *(b)* immigration officials have been stationed abroad in each year since 1997, broken down by country. [199000]

Mr. Browne: It has not proved possible to respond to the right hon. Member in the time available before Prorogation.

Sarah Teather: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many referrals of *(a)* immigration, *(b)* asylum and *(c)* naturalisation cases to the Immigration and Nationality Directorate by hon. Members there have been in each year since 2001, broken down by constituency. [199016]

Mr. Browne: It has not proved possible to respond to the right hon. Member in the time available before Prorogation.

Immigration Service

Mr. Oaten: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many individuals were *(a)* arrested and *(b)* removed from the country as a result of enforcement operations conducted by the Immigration Service in 2003–04. [198907]

Mr. Browne: It has not proved possible to respond to the hon. Member in the time available before Prorogation.

Index of Multiple Deprivation

Ms Buck: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department which funding streams have been allocated by his Department using a funding formula which includes rankings or scores on the Index of Multiple Deprivation 2000; and if he will list the amount of funding allocated in such a way *(a)* nationally by the Department or *(b)* to all Government sponsored bodies reporting to the Department. [191528]

Fiona Mactaggart: It has not proved possible to respond to my hon. Friend in the time available before Prorogation.

Indymedia

Lynne Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department pursuant to the answer of 11 November 2004, *Official Report*, column 892W, on Indymedia, under what legal provisions seizure of private property in the UK by foreign law enforcement agencies without authorisation from UK law enforcement can be carried out. [198941]

Paul Goggins: It has not proved possible to respond to my hon. Friend in the time available before Prorogation.

Infection Training

Mr. Lansley: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what plans he has to make infection control induction training mandatory for all NHS medical staff; when this training will begin; and what the estimated cost of this training will be per year. [193452]

Mr. Hutton: National health service medical staff already receive training on infection control and trusts should provide suitable induction training for all staff.

Justice and Home Affairs Council

Mr. Hood: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what the outcome was of the Justice and Home Affairs Council held on 25 to 26 October; what the Government's stance was on the issues discussed, including its voting record; and if he will make a statement. [194504]

Caroline Flint: It has not proved possible to respond to my hon. Friend in the time available before Prorogation.

Juvenile Offenders

David Davis: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many crimes were committed by juvenile offenders in *(a)* Haltemprice and Howden, *(b)* the East Riding of Yorkshire and *(c)* the Humberside police authority area in each of the last four quarters for which figures are available; and how many cautions were issued. [194980]

Paul Goggins: It has not proved possible to respond to the right hon. Member in the time available before Prorogation.

Knives

Dr. Jenny Tonge: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what discussions he has had with *(a)* police and *(b)* local authorities regarding people carrying knives. [198889]

Caroline Flint: It has not proved possible to respond to the hon. Member in the time available before Prorogation.

Mental Health Act

Mr. Brady: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will take steps to ensure that each police division has access to a designated place of safety as defined by the Mental Health Act 1983. [199061]

Ms Blears: It has not proved possible to respond to the hon. Member in the time available before Prorogation.

Methadone (Prisons)

David Davis: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many methadone-related suicides there have been in prisons in each year since 1997. [199020]

Paul Goggins: It has not proved possible to respond to the right hon. Member in the time available before Prorogation.

Migrant Workers

Mr. Drew: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department into how many languages the leaflets produced for migrant workers, resulting from recommendations from the Operation Gangmaster, have been translated. [196757]

Mr. Browne: Operation Gangmaster is a Government initiative designed to bring different Departments and agencies together to tackle abuses by rogue labour providers. This initiative has not produced any specific recommendations to translate information for migrant workers. However, the Government have been active in making translated information available and has had regard to recommendations previously made on this issue by the Environment, Food and Rural Affairs Committee, of which my hon. Friend is a member.

Earlier this year, the Home Office produced a leaflet and guidance notes for applicants to the accession worker registration scheme in relevant languages. These outlined the details of the scheme and gave advice to workers rights. The Trades Union Congress also produced their own leaflet on workers' rights and the Home Office met the cost of producing translations of this leaflet in Hungarian, Estonian, Czech, Latvian, Slovak and Polish.

In response to specific concerns about the mistreatment of workers, the Department for Trade and Industry (DTI) and the Foreign and Commonwealth Office have worked with the Portuguese community and the TUC to produce leaflets explaining the rights of workers in Portuguese. The DTI has also worked with the Polish and Lithuanian Governments to produce bilingual leaflets on employment rights for their nationals. These were launched in June.

Mr. Drew: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what discussions he has had with the National Association of Citizen Advice Bureaux on the issuing of advice to migrant workers. [196758]

Mr. Browne: It has not proved possible to respond to my hon. Friend in the time available before Prorogation.

Ministerial Expenses

Mr. Prisk: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how much the Department spent on *(a)* maintenance, *(b)* renovation, *(c)* council tax and *(d)* running costs of residential properties used by Ministers and officials in each year since 1997. [191409]

Fiona Mactaggart: It has not proved possible to respond to the hon. Member in the time available before Prorogation.

Mobile Phones

Mr. Drew: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what action members of the public who see drivers using mobile phones whilst driving should take. [198500]

Caroline Flint: It has not proved possible to respond to the hon. Member in the time available before Prorogation.

Mr. Drew: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will set up a free phone number that members of the public can ring in to give the car registration numbers of those drivers who break the law on using mobile phones while driving. [198501]

Caroline Flint: It has not proved possible to respond to my hon. Friend in the time available before Prorogation.

Mr. Drew: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what action the appropriate authorities should take when a member of the public makes a complaint against a driver who was using a mobile phone while driving. [198502]

Caroline Flint: It has not proved possible to respond to my hon. Friend in the time available before Prorogation.

Motoring Offence Fines

David Davis: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many people were issued fines for motoring offences in each year since 1997; and what proportion of those fines were paid in each year. [199270]

Caroline Flint: It has not proved possible to respond to the right hon. Member in the time available before Prorogation.

Multiculturalism

Keith Vaz: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what the Government's strategy is further to improve integration and boost multiculturalism among young British citizens. [190134]

Mr. Browne: It has not proved possible to respond to my hon. Friend in the time available before Prorogation.

National Offender Management Service

Mrs. Cheryl Gillan: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what the reasons are for the introduction of the concept of contestability within the National Offender Management Service. [190117]

Paul Goggins: It has not proved possible to respond to the hon. Member in the time available before Prorogation.

Mrs. Gillan: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will place in the Library a copy of the risk assessment that has been carried out in respect of the implementation of National Offender Management Service. [198475]

Paul Goggins *[holding answer 16 November 2004]*: As part of the setting up of the National Offender Management Service, a comprehensive risk management strategy has been established, providing for the assessment, monitoring and managing of risks across the change programme. In keeping with normal practice across Government, it is not intended to publish the findings from these assessments.

Mrs. Gillan: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what risk assessment he has carried out on *(a)* prison capacity and *(b)* workload at the National Offender Management Service; and what the outcome was. [198476]

Paul Goggins: As part of the setting up of the National Offender Management Service (NOMS), a comprehensive risk management strategy has been established, providing for the assessment, monitoring and managing of risks across the change programme. The results have been agreed with the NOMS directors and reported to the NOMS board and to other governance bodies within the Home Office.

The assessments cover all aspects of the programme, including policy, implementation, people and process issues. The registers are continually updated as the programme evolves and the risks change.

Mr. Oaten: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department when the business case in respect of the National Offender Management Service will be published. [198873]

Paul Goggins: It has not proved possible to respond to the hon. Member in the time available before Prorogation.

National Probation Service

Mr. Drew: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what the reasons were for the delay in completing the National Probation Service Pay and Reward Review. [198026]

Paul Goggins: The Employers' Side of the National Probation Service (NPS) National Negotiating Committee (NNC) has been meeting with the Trade Union Side about the introduction of new pay and grading arrangements. The discussions have been wide-ranging and complex. Until very recently it was expected, by both sides, that the 2004-05 annual pay settlement would be subsumed within any agreement reached. This has not proved possible. Discussions will continue.

Nationality Applications

Tom Cox: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many applications for the granting of British nationality are waiting to be dealt with by his Department. [194137]

Mr. Browne: It has not proved possible to respond to my hon. Friend in the time available before Prorogation.

New EU Members

Mr. Hogg: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many citizens from the new members of the European Union have registered for work in Britain in each of the last five months; and how many have registered under contractors' arrangements. [193077]

Mr. Browne: It has not proved possible to respond to the hon. Member in the time available before Prorogation.

OASys

Mr. Oaten: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what progress has been made in rolling out the OASys offender assessment tool in *(a)* prisons and *(b)* probation; how many prisons have access to the system; when roll-out will be complete; and if he will make a statement. [198911]

Paul Goggins: It has not proved possible to respond to the hon. Member in the time available before Prorogation.

Offences Statistics

Mr. Grieve: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many people were charged with offences in each month since 1 July 2003. [199150]

Paul Goggins: It has not proved possible to respond to the hon. Member in the time available before Prorogation.

Open Prisons

Mr. McLoughlin: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many open prisons there are in the United Kingdom; and how many prisoners have absconded from open prisons in the last year. [198351]

Paul Goggins: On 31 October 2004, there were 15 establishments in England and Wales designated as open prisons: Askham Grange, East Sutton Park, Ford, Grendon/Spring Hill, Hewell Grange, Hollesley Bay, Kirkham, Leyhill, Moorland Open, North Sea Camp, Standford Hill, Sudbury, Thorn Cross, Usk/Prescoed and Wealstun. In the 12 months to 31 October 2004 1,002 absconds were reported from open prisons.

Those prisoners who choose to abuse the trust placed in them, leaving the prison without authority, are considered to have absconded rather than escaped, because they have not had to breach significant security measures.

Information about prisons in Scotland and Northern Ireland is available from the Scottish Executive and Northern Ireland Office respectively.

David Davis: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many offences were committed by prisoners who escaped from open prisons in the last three years. [199004]

Paul Goggins: It has not proved possible to respond to the right hon. Member in the time available before Prorogation.

David Davis: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many prisoner escapes there have been from open prisons in England and Wales in the last three years. [199005]

Paul Goggins: It has not proved possible to respond to the right hon. Member in the time available before Prorogation.

David Davis: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many prisoners are absent without authorisation from prisons in England and Wales; and how many were in open prisons when they absconded. [199006]

Paul Goggins: It has not proved possible to respond to the right hon. Member in the time available before Prorogation.

Paedophiles

Tom Cox: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what steps he is taking to protect children from paedophiles operating on the internet. [198191]

Paul Goggins: The Government is determined to ensure that children are protected from the insidious use of the internet by paedophiles.

In 2001 The Home Secretary's Task Force on Child Protection on the Internet was established, with the aim of making the UK the best and safest place in the world for children to use the internet, and to help protect children the world over from abuse fuelled by criminal misuse of new technologies. Much good work has been initiated through the Task Force to assist in working towards these objectives.

The Task Force has recently launched its fourth national awareness campaign to help keep children safe on the internet, and Government has spent over £3 million on the development of these campaigns. We have also provided guidance for young people, as well as parents and carers. In 2003 the Task Force developed and published models of good practice for providers of chat, instant messaging and web services, the first of their kind in the world. These encourage clear and accessible safety messages, advice and user-friendly ways of reporting abuse. The Task Force is currently reviewing these models. This year, following discussions with the Task Force, the UK mobile operators published a self-regulatory Code of Practice for new forms of content on mobile phone services, and furthermore a Code of Practice has also been developed by the mobile operators on passive location based services. We have also been working with industry to look at the issues which are raised by moderation in interactive services (such as chat rooms), and a draft good practice model for companies offering such moderation is nearing completion. These are just some of the examples of the work of the Task Force in seeking to protect children online.

The Government is also ensuring that legislation provides an adequate deterrent to those who might consider doing harm to children. The Sexual Offences Act introduced a new criminal offence, developed by the Task Force, to tackle the "grooming" of children by paedophiles online or offline. The Act also included the creation of a Risk of Sexual Harm Order which relates to behaviour towards a child for an illegal or harmful sexual purpose.

Law enforcement agencies in the UK are at the cutting edge of developing new techniques to detect and combat paedophile activity on the internet. We fully support effective intelligence-led policing to help forces effectively investigate paedophiles using the internet. In addition the Home Office is also considering with the Association of Chief Police Officers as part of the police reform agenda, how crimes which by their nature are not confined to geographical force areas, such as online paedophilia, are best dealt with within force structures.

The Government is also aware that child abuse on line is an international problem that can only be combated through effective international co-operation. We continue to work within international fora to encourage practical and other measures to remove images of child abuse wherever they are hosted, and to increase child safety online.

Parliamentary Questions

Sir Gerald Kaufman: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department for what reason he has not yet answered the question tabled on 7 September by the right hon. Member for Manchester, Gorton, ref 187980.

with regard to the commencement of the remainder of the Adoption and Children Act 2002, with particular reference to section 112. [190618]

Mr. Blunkett: I replied to my right hon. Friend on 15 November 2004, *Official Report*, column 1084W.

Mrs. Anne Campbell: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department when he expects to make a substantive response to the question tabled by the hon. Member for Cambridge for named day answer on 22 July, reference 184736. [195544]

Mr. Blunkett: It has not proved possible to respond to my hon. Friend in the time available before Prorogation.

Mr. Hancock: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department when he will answer the question from the hon. Member dated 28 June, ref. 181105. [192167]

Paul Goggins: It has not proved possible to respond to the hon. Member in the time available before Prorogation.

Mr. Malins: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department when he will reply to the written question tabled by the hon. Member for Woking for answer on 2 November 2004, reference 195473. [199115]

Mr. Browne: It has not proved possible to respond to the hon. Member in the time available before Prorogation.

Mr. Malins: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department when he will reply to the written questions with references *(a)* 195466, *(b)* 195467 and *(c)* 195469 to 195472, tabled by the hon. Member for Woking for answer on 1 November 2004. [199116]

Mr. Browne: It has not proved possible to respond to the hon. Member in the time available before Prorogation.

Mr. Malins: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department when he will reply to the written questions tabled by the hon. Member for Woking for answer on 25 October 2004, references 193310 to 193312. [199117]

Mr. Browne: It has not proved possible to respond to the hon. Member in the time available before Prorogation.

Mr. Malins: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department when he will reply to the written questions tabled by the hon. Member for Woking for answer on 21 October 2004, references *(a)* 193248 to 193255, *(b)* 193257, *(c)* 193262, *(d)* 193264 and *(e)* 193265. [199118]

Mr. Browne: It has not proved possible to respond to the hon. Member in the time available before Prorogation.

Parole Board

Mrs. Curtis-Thomas: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department where the video showing the Parole Board at work, produced during 2002–03, is available. [150193]

Paul Goggins: Extracts of the Parole Board video can be found on the Parole Board website, which is www.paroleboard.gov.uk. Alternatively, copies of the video are available from the Parole Board, for a fee of £5.00.

Mrs. Curtis-Thomas: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what assessment he has made of the reasons for the difference between the number of prisoners eligible for parole and the number of those who have applied since 2000. [150194]

Paul Goggins: The table sets out the number of prisoners each year since 2000–01 who have been eligible to apply for parole and who have declined to do so. No analysis has been made of the reasons why prisoners decline to apply for parole.

	2000–01	*2001–02*	*2002–03*
Total number of prisoners eligible for parole	6,662	6,640	7,032
Number of prisoners who decline to apply for parole	1,086	1,126	1,020
Percentage of prisoners who decline to apply for parole	16.3	17	14.5

Passport Checks

Mr. Gummer: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what change there has been in the average time UK and other EU arriving passengers have to wait to pass through immigration compared with 12 months ago. [185394]

Mr. Browne: It has not proved possible to respond to the hon. Member in the time available before Prorogation.

Police

Mr. Oaten: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many police Basic Command Units there were in each of the last six years; and how many BCUs he estimates there will be in *(a)* 2003–04, *(b)* 2004–05 and *(c)* 2005–06. [155049]

Ms Blears: It has not proved possible to respond to the hon. Member in the time available before Prorogation.

Mr. Damian Green: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what assessment he has made of the effect of the changes in the regime for local authority funding on the ability of Kent police to meet their crime reduction target; and if he will make a statement. [193911]

Ms Blears: It has not proved possible to respond to the hon. Member in the time available before Prorogation.

Mrs. Curtis-Thomas: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department whether an assessment has been made of the extent of racist attitudes within the police service. [194865]

Ms Blears: It has not proved possible to respond to my hon. Friend in the time available before Prorogation.

Mrs. Curtis-Thomas: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what progress has been made in the integration of police IT systems. [194920]

Caroline Flint: It has not proved possible to respond to my hon. Friend in the time available before Prorogation.

Mrs. Curtis-Thomas: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what response the police service has made to the review of the special priority payments; and if he will make a statement. [194922]

Ms Blears: It has not proved possible to respond to my hon. Friend in the time available before Prorogation.

Mrs. Curtis-Thomas: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what progress has been made towards reaching the target of seven per cent. ethnic minority police officers by 2009; and what measures *(a)* are in place and *(b)* will be introduced to reach the target. [194924]

Ms Blears: It has not proved possible to respond to my hon. Friend in the time available before Prorogation.

Mr. Reed: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what representations he has received about pension payments for Leicestershire police authority for the year 2005–06; and if he will make a statement. [197427]

Ms Blears: It has not proved possible to respond to hon. Member in the time available before Prorogation.

Mrs. Curtis-Thomas: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what guidance is available to the police on appropriate interviewing methods for *(a)* prisoners who are witnesses in historical sex abuse cases and *(b)* vulnerable or intimidated witnesses. [197435]

Ms Blears: Guidance for police on appropriate techniques for investigating allegations of historical child abuse is included in the Senior Investigating Officer's Handbook—the Investigation of Historical institutional Child Abuse produced by the Association of Chief Police Officers. This includes prisoners. This is currently being reviewed to ensure the guidance is kept up to date and includes lessons to be learnt from more recent cases.

Guidance on interviewing vulnerable or intimidated witnesses is contained in "Achieving Best Evidence in Criminal Proceedings: Guidance for Vulnerable or Intimidated Witnesses, including Children", issued in January 2002. This guidance became operational in May 2002 when it superseded "Memorandum of Good Practice on Video Recorded Interviews with Child Witnesses for Criminal Proceedings". Victims in sexual offence proceedings are considered to be vulnerable. Other witnesses in these cases—but not the accused—may also be treated as vulnerable.

Mrs. Curtis-Thomas: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department whether his Department has conducted an audit of police compliance with guidelines for the interviewing of prisoners in historical sex abuse cases. [197436]

Paul Goggins: It has not proved possible to respond to my hon. Friend in the time available before Prorogation.

Mr. Oaten: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how much money was spent on policing per head of population in each police force in England and Wales in each year since 1997. [198910]

Ms Blears: It has not proved possible to respond to the hon. Member in the time available before Prorogation.

Mr. Anthony D. Wright: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how police numbers in Great Yarmouth have changed in each year since 1997. [186702]

Ms Blears: It has not proved possible to respond to my hon. Friend in the time available before Prorogation.

Mr. Chaytor: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many *(a)* recorded crimes, *(b)* violent crimes, *(c)* burglaries and *(d)* vehicle thefts there were in each of the last 10 years in the Bury division of the Greater Manchester police. [197265]

Ms Blears: It has not proved possible to respond to my hon. Friend in the time available before Prorogation.

Paul Farrelly: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what change there has been in the funding of Staffordshire police since 1997. [198586]

Ms Blears: It has not proved possible to respond to my hon. Friend in the time available before Prorogation.

Police Complaints Commission

Lady Hermon: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what the total cost of *(a)* salaries and *(b)* travel expenses for those employed in the office of the Police Complaints Commission for England and Wales has been in each of the last three years. [188651]

Ms Blears: It is assumed that the question refers to the Independent Police Complaints Commission (IPCC) which was established under the Police Reform Act 2002 and commenced operations on 1 April 2004. It replaced the Police Complaints Authority (PCA) which ceased operations on 31 March 2004.

Figures on salaries for the PCA from 2000–01 to 2002–03 are in the table. Information on travel expenses for those years is not available.

PCA salary costs	£
2002–03	2,985,859
2001–02	2,589,239
2000–01	2,106,788

Police Funding

Mr. Drew: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what additional funding is available to police authorities from central funds to implement *(a)* the Regulation of Investigatory Powers Act 2000 and *(b)* the Freedom of Information Act 2000. [195295]

Ms Blears: It has not proved possible to respond to the hon. Member in the time available before Prorogation.

Mr. Drew: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what proportion of police funding in each local police authority area was provided by *(a)* the Government and *(b)* council tax in each of the last four years. [195297]

Ms Blears: I refer the hon. Member to the reply I gave to the right hon. Member for Haltemprice and Howden (David Davis) on 15 June 2004, *Official Report*, column 870W.

Mr. Drew: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what the estimated cost to police authorities is in this financial year of increased British Medical Association recommended charges for police surgeons. [195299]

Ms Blears: It has not proved possible to respond to the hon. Member in the time available before Prorogation.

Mrs. Curtis-Thomas: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how much the police received in funding from the Government in *(a)* 1997 and *(b)* 2003. [195551]

Ms Blears: It has not proved possible to respond to my hon. Friend in the time available before Prorogation.

Adam Price: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how much has been allocated to police funding in each year since 2001. [196814]

Ms Blears: It has not proved possible to respond to the hon. Member in the time available before Prorogation.

Police Recruits

Bob Russell: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what provision is made in the training schedule for new police recruits for dealing with domestic violence; whether the schedule has been changed in terms of *(a)* time allocation and *(b)* content during the past two years; and if he will make a statement. [187976]

Ms Blears: It has not proved possible to respond to the hon. Member in the time available before Prorogation.

Police Training

Mr. Willis: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what the level of budget change for the Centrex Training Centre in Harrogate is for 2004–05; and what proposed changes in staffing and recruitment will result from the changes. [179208]

Ms Blears *[holding answer 17 June 2004]*: CENTREX's overall resource budget for 2004–05 is £74.8 million. Last year the budget was £91.0 million, and CENTREX are also liable to pay VAT in this year, which they did not have to pay last year. The Home Office does not provide grant-in-aid by individual centre. I understand that, in order to realise efficiency savings and cost reductions, staff numbers in Harrogate have been reduced by approximately 18, primarily through redeployment.

Helen Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will make a statement on the future of the police training centre at Bruche, Warrington. [183044]

Ms Blears: It has not proved possible to respond to my hon. Friend in the time available before Prorogation.

Policing

Helen Southworth: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what the *(a)* level of police grant, *(b)* total police budget, including itemised special project funding and *(c)* the number of police officers and community support officers in Cheshire was in each of the last seven years. [193627]

Ms Blears: It has not proved possible to respond to my hon. Friend in the time available before Prorogation.

Mr. Allen: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many *(a)* police officers and *(b)* community support officers have been employed by Nottinghamshire Constabulary in each year since 1997 for which figures are available. [196503]

Ms Blears: It has not proved possible to respond to my hon. Friend in the time available before Prorogation.

Ports

David Davis: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many weapons have been seized at ports of entry to the United Kingdom in each year since 1997, broken down by *(a)* type of weapon and *(b)* location of seizure. [198995]

Caroline Flint: It has not proved possible to respond to the right hon. Member in the time available before Prorogation.

David Davis: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how much has been spent on providing security at ports in each year since 1997, broken down by location. [198997]

Mr. Browne: It has not proved possible to respond to the right hon. Member in the time available before Prorogation.

David Davis: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many *(a)* immigration and *(b)* security officials have been based at each major port of entry to the United Kingdom, broken down by location, in each year since 1997. [198998]

Mr. Browne: It has not proved possible to respond to the right hon. Member in the time available before Prorogation.

Press Officers

Mr. Ruffley: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many press officers are employed in his Department; and how many were employed in each year since 1996–97. [195356]

Fiona Mactaggart *[holding answer 1 November 2004]*: It has not proved possible to respond to the hon. Member in the time available before Prorogation.

Dr. Julian Lewis: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many press officers the Department has employed in each of the past five years. [196048]

Fiona Mactaggart *[holding answer 4 November 2004]*: It has not proved possible to respond to the hon. Member in the time available before Prorogation.

Press Releases

Pete Wishart: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many press releases have been issued by his Department in each month of 2004; and if he will make a statement. [195381]

Fiona Mactaggart: It has not proved possible to respond to the hon. Member in the time available before Prorogation.

Prison Building Programme

Mrs. Gillan: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department on what grounds he will not publish the case he is making to the Treasury to close smaller prisons and build larger prisons. [153952]

Paul Goggins: It has not proved possible to respond to the hon. Member in the time available before Prorogation.

Prison Education Programmes

Mr. Andrew Turner: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many hours per week on average *(a)* basic skills training and *(b)* purposeful activity are undertaken per inmate at each (i) prison and (ii) young offenders institution; and what his targets are for each establishment. [198277]

Paul Goggins: The average number of weekly hours spent by prisoners on basic skills and overall purposeful activity is shown in the table.

While prisons are not allocated targets for the number of basic skills hours per prisoner, each establishment's target for purposeful activity is shown.

A number of establishments listed have not recorded their basic skills hours. This is because the activities involved may be counted differently at local level under other categories of purposeful activity, and their inclusion would skew the representation of the table. These non-recording establishments are still delivering basic skills awards.

The way the Prison Service measures progress in prisoner education has changed from the hours of education-related purposeful activity, to achievements which reflect positive outcomes for prisoners prior to release. In recent years Key Performance Indicators have been introduced to measure the number of prisoners achieving basic skills qualifications and also the number leaving prison with an education, training or employment place arranged.

Establishment	*Function*	*Basic and key skills up*	*Purposeful activity*	*Target*
Acklington	Category C	1.2	25.1	26.0
Albany	Category B	4.6	20.7	21.0
Altcourse	Male local	[1]—	36.5	32.0
Ashfield	Male juvenile	[1]—	30.8	27.0
Ashwell	Category C	0.6	31.5	33.0
Askham Grange	Female open	2.6	41.9	41.0
Aylesbury	Male closed young offender	[1]—	18.8	19.0
Bedford	Male local	0.6	19.3	18.5
Belmarsh	Male local	[1]—	16.2	16.5
Birmingham	Male local	1.4	18.0	20.0
Blakenhurst	Male local	0.9	18.8	18.5
Blantyre House	Semi open	1.1	45.5	40.0
Blundeston	Category C	[1]—	24.8	25.0
Brinsford	Male closed young offender	7.8	29.0	28.0
Bristol	Male local	1.7	22.1	22.0
Brixton	Male local	0.4	14.6	17.0
Brockhill	Female local	5.0	24.2	18.0
Buckley Hall	Female closed	2.0	31.1	32.5
Bullingdon	Male local	1.3	18.9	18.0
Bullwood Hall	Female closed	[1]—	28.2	28.0
Camp Hill	Category C	[1]—	21.8	22.0
Canterbury	Category C	[1]—	21.5	22.0
Cardiff	Male local	0.5	23.7	20.0
Castington	Male closed young offender	6.6	27.2	21.7
Channings Wood	Category C	3.0	22.3	33.0
Chelmsford	Male local	[1]—	19.6	18.0
Coldingley	Category C	0.6	31.1	37.0
Cookham Wood	Female closed	[1]—	24.9	24.0
Dartmoor	Category C	0.9	24.5	25.0
Deerbolt	Male closed young offender	4.0	23.0	24.0
Doncaster	Male local	1.4	20.5	22.0

Establishment	*Function*	*Basic and key skills up*	*Purposeful activity*	*Target*
Dorchester	Male local	0.9	16.3	19.0
Dovegate	Category B	[1]—	25.1	35.0
Downview	Female closed	1.5	29.3	26.0
Drake Hall	Semi open	2.4	34.5	33.5
Durham	Male local	0.9	17.5	20.0
East Sutton Park	Female open	[1]—	46.6	45.0
Eastwood Park	Female local	0.5	18.6	22.0
Elmley	Male local	2.7	18.6	19.0
Erlestoke	Category C	1.4	26.6	27.0
Everthorpe	Category C	0.6	26.7	27.0
Exeter	Male local	1.4	23.5	22.5
Featherstone	Category C	[1]—	22.4	25.0
Feltham	Male closed young offender	1.0	28.7	26.0
Ford	Male open	0.8	37.7	40.0
Forest Bank	Male local	1.9	19.7	24.0
Foston Hall	Female closed	[1]—	25.4	26.0
Frankland	Dispersal	3.9	22.3	22.5
Full Sutton	Dispersal	[1]—	16.0	18.0
Garth	Category B	0.7	23.1	24.0
Gartree	Category B	[1]—	28.7	30.0
Glen Parva	Male closed young offender	2.0	17.5	20.0
Gloucester	Male local	[1]—	20.3	21.0
Grendon	Category B	0.4	32.0	25.0
Guys Marsh	Category C	0.9	24.4	23.0
Haverigg	Category C	0.4	31.1	31.0
Hewell Grange	Male open	0.1	41.8	42.5
Edmunds Hill	Female local	1.9	28.4	24.0
High down	Category B	0.7	13.9	18.1
Highpoint	Category C	1.6	21.9	21.0
Hindley	Male closed young offender	3.7	32.0	34.0
Hollesley Bay	Male open	[1]—	40.7	38.0
Holloway	Female local	0.8	19.7	20.0
Holme House	Male local	3.0	15.7	17.0
Hull	Male local	1.0	15.8	17.0
Huntercombe	Male juvenile	2.7	30.1	30.0
Kingston	Category B	0.4	26.8	26.0
Kirkham	Male open	[1]—	41.9	41.0
Kirklevington	Semi open	[1]—	53.0	52.0
Lancaster	Category C	1.4	25.6	25.0
Lancaster Farms	Male closed young offender	2.2	26.1	27.0
Latchmere House	Semi open	0.1	57.9	60.0
Leeds	Male local	0.7	20.0	20.0
Leicester	Male local	1.5	15.8	23.0
Lewes	Male local	2.2	22.2	20.5
Leyhill	Male open	2.2	37.7	38.0
Lincoln	Male local	2.5	21.2	20.0
Lindholme	Category C	1.5	22.4	27.0
Littlehey	Category C	0.7	20.5	23.0
Liverpool	Male local	0.9	23.1	20.0
Long Lartin	Dispersal	0.5	19.6	18.0
Low Newton	Female local	1.7	25.0	24.5
Lowdham Grange	Category B	0.4	26.8	28.0
Maidstone	Category C	[1]—	21.9	21.0
Manchester	Male local	1.0	19.0	20.0
Moorland	Category C	0.3	27.9	30.0
Morton Hall	Semi open	[1]—	30.7	32.0
New Hall	Female local	1.2	25.6	24.0
North Sea Camp	Male open	2.6	39.9	39.0
Northallerton	Male closed young offender	3.3	23.4	26.0
Norwich	Male local	0.7	21.4	20.0
Nottingham	Male local	0.6	20.3	19.0
Onley	Category C	0.3	25.9	25.0
Parc	Male local	[1]—	30.3	32.0
Parkhurst	Category B	1.7	21.3	21.0
Pentonville	Male local	0.3	12.8	17.0
Portland	Male closed young offender	3.0	20.1	23.1
Preston	Male local	0.6	21.7	21.0
Ranby	Category C	[1]—	24.6	26.0
Reading	Male closed young offender	[1]—	19.8	20.0
Risley	Category C	3.2	24.0	25.0
Rochester	Male closed young offender	[1]—	21.6	25.0

Establishment	*Function*	*Basic and key skills up*	*Purposeful activity*	*Target*
Wealstun	Category C	1.8	31.8	29.0
Rye Hill	Category B	3.1	23.2	30.0
Send	Female closed	[1]—	31.4	30.0
Shepton Mallet	Category C	[1]—	24.7	26.0
Shrewsbury	Male local	[1]—	19.6	20.0
Stafford	Category C	1.2	25.9	26.0
Standford Hill	Male open	0.4	36.1	40.0
Stocken	Category C	1.3	25.7	26.0
Stoke Heath	Male closed young offender	4.5	17.5	26.0
Styal	Female local	[1]—	24.0	22.5
Sudbury	Male open	0.9	20.7	39.0
Swaleside	Category B	1.4	26.5	26.0
Swansea	Male local	[1]—	23.1	21.0
Swinfen Hall	Male closed young offender	5.8	25.2	26.0
Mount	Category C	2.0	20.4	22.0
Verne	Category C	[1]—	31.6	29.0
Thorn Cross	Male open young offender	2.3	42.5	42.0
Usk	Category C	1.8	36.6	36.0
Wakefield	Dispersal	2.0	16.4	19.0
Wandsworth	Male local	[1]—	15.7	21.0
Warren Hill	Male juvenile	0.3	25.9	25.0
Wayland	Category C	[1]—	26.2	25.0
Weare	Category C	1.1	19.2	20.0
Wellingborough	Category C	[1]—	18.9	29.0
Werrington	Male juvenile	[1]—	30.5	30.0
Wetherby	Male juvenile	6.6	29.0	30.0
Whatton	Category C	[1]—	26.5	30.0
Whitemoor	Dispersal	2.0	21.3	20.5
Winchester	Male local	0.6	21.8	20.0
Wolds	Category C	1.0	29.4	30.0
Wormwood Scrubs	Male local	2.0	23.5	22.0
Wymott	Category C	0.7	28.3	30.0

[1] Not recorded.

Prison Population

Mr. Drew: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many reports his Department has commissioned regarding *(a)* sentencing and *(b)* the management of offenders since 1997; on what dates these reports were commissioned; who carried out the reviews; at what cost; and when his Department received each report. [163985]

Paul Goggins: It has not proved possible to respond to the hon. Member in the time available before Prorogation.

Prison Service Advertisements

Sandra Gidley: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what criteria were used to allow advertisements in prison catering by HM Prison Service; what revenue was raised from advertising; and what the total cost was of the publication. [198593]

Paul Goggins: It has not proved possible to respond to the hon. Member in the time available before Prorogation.

Prisoners

David Davis: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many prisoners there are, broken down by category of offence. [199003]

Paul Goggins: It has not proved possible to respond to the right hon. Member in the time available before Prorogation.

Prisons

Mrs. Curtis-Thomas: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department for what reasons the number of prisoners serving short sentences has increased. [148889]

Paul Goggins: Changes in the number of prisoners serving short sentences are affected by custody rates, average sentence lengths, the number of people sentenced, and seasonal factors such as the reduction in the number of court sitting days over bank holiday periods.

Mr. Llwyd: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what *(a)* the sick arrangements and *(b)* holiday entitlements are for staff at each privately run prison establishment. [187100]

Paul Goggins: There are currently four contractors operating privately run prison establishments.

Each contractor has different sick management arrangements and holiday entitlements for their staff in the various grades they employ.

Staff terms and conditions are a matter between each Contractor and its staff. There are no minimum requirements set down in any contract.

Detailed information can be found in the following tables.

(a) Sick arrangements at each privately run prison

Establishment	*Period of service*	*Sick arrangements (paid in any 12 month period)*
HMP Parc	*Management*	
	First year	12 weeks
	After 1 year	18 weeks
	After 2 years	18 weeks
	After 5 years	26 weeks
	PCO	
	First year	6 weeks
	After 1 year	12 weeks
	After 2 years	12 weeks
	After 5 years	18 weeks
HMP Bronzefield, HMP Peterborough	Less than 6 months	Nil days paid
	6 months—1 year	5 days
	1–2 years	40 days
	2–5 years	80 days
	5 years plus	130 days
HMP Forest Bank	Less than 1 year service	20 days
	1–2 years	40 days
	2–5 years	80 days
	5 years or more	26 weeks
HMPAshfield, HMP Dovegate, HMP and YOI Doncaster, HMP Lowdham Grange	First year	30 days limited to 10 days in the first 6 months
	After 1 year	30 days
	After 2 years	40 days
	After 5 years	50 days
HMP Altcourse, HMP Rye Hill, HMP Wolds	First year	6 weeks
	After 2 years	8 weeks
	After 5 years	10 weeks
	After 10 years	12 weeks

(b) Holiday entitlements at each privately run prison

Establishment	*Grade*	*Holiday entitlements*
HMP Parc	PCO grades	20 days + bank holidays
	Management	25 days + bank holidays
HMP Bronzefield, HMP Peterborough, HMP Forest Bank	Directors	25 days + bank holidays
	Management	23 days + bank holidays
	PCO grades	20 increasing by 2 days for every five years served. + bank holidays
HMP Ashfield	PCO grades	20 + bank holidays
	Management	25 + bank holidays
HMP Dovegate	PCO grades	17 + bank holidays in year 1 19 + bank holidays after 1 year
	Management	25 + bank holidays
HMP and YOI Doncaster	PCO grades	18 + bank holidays
	Management	25 + bank holidays
HMP Lowdham Grange	PCO grades	20 + bank holidays
	Management	22 + bank holidays
HMP Altcourse, HMP Rye Hill, HMP Wolds	PCO grades	4 weeks and 2 days rising to 5 weeks and 2 days after 5 years
	Management	4 weeks and 2 days rising to 5 weeks and 2 days after 5 years

Mr. Denham: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he has set a target for the maximum and average times to access drug treatment for a prisoner leaving prison when they have been receiving drug treatment in prison; and if he will make a statement. [190307]

Caroline Flint: It has not proved possible to respond to my right. hon. Friend in the time available before Prorogation.

Tom Cox: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what assessment he has made of the prevalence of drug abuse in prisons in the Greater London area. [197127]

Caroline Flint: It has not proved possible to respond to my hon. Friend in the time available before Prorogation.

Mrs. Curtis-Thomas: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many and what percentage of prisoners interviewed by the police in relation to historical sex abuse cases were taken to *(a)* an external location and *(b)* a specially equipped suite for their interview in each of the last five years. [197440]

Paul Goggins: It has not proved possible to respond to my hon. Friend in the time available before Prorogation.

Mrs. Gillan: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will list *(a)* the running costs for each establishment in the prison service and *(b)* the average number of prisoners held at that establishment in each of the last three financial years for which figures are available. [198477]

Paul Goggins *[holding answer 16 November 2004]*: It has not proved possible to respond to the hon. Member in the time available before Prorogation.

Mr. Oaten: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department (1) what proportion of prisoners who entered drug rehabilitation programmes in the last 12 months for which figures are available went on to complete those programmes; and what proportion failed to complete; [198913]

(2) what proportion of prisoners who were given detoxification in the last 12 months for which figures are available entered one of the Prison Service's drug rehabilitation programmes. [198912]

Paul Goggins: It has not proved possible to respond to the hon. Member in the time available before Prorogation.

Mrs. Gillan: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many fires there were in prisons between 1 January and the end of October, broken down by prison; and whether *(a)* prison staff and *(b)* prisoners were hurt in each case. [199337]

Paul Goggins: It has not proved possible to respond to the hon. Member in the time available before Prorogation.

Mrs. Gillan: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many prisons are fitted with sprinkler equipment; and which areas of each prison are protected by the sprinkler system. [199338]

Paul Goggins: It has not proved possible to respond to the hon. Member in the time available before Prorogation.

Mrs. Gillan: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what criteria are used to determine whether sprinkler equipment should be installed in prisons and detention centres. [199339]

Paul Goggins: It has not proved possible to respond to the hon. Member in the time available before Prorogation.

Mrs. Gillan: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what criteria are used to determine which fire authority is responsible for each prison and detention centre. [199341]

Paul Goggins: It has not proved possible to respond to the hon. Member in the time available before Prorogation.

Mrs. Gillan: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will commission an independent review of the Prison Service fire advisers. [199344]

Paul Goggins: It has not proved possible to respond to the hon. Member in the time available before Prorogation.

Mrs. Gillan: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how the Fire Safety Section of the Prison Service has been restructured; and if he will make a statement. [199345]

Paul Goggins: It has not proved possible to respond to the hon. Member in the time available before Prorogation.

Mrs. Gillan: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department pursuant to his answer to the hon. Member for Peterborough (Mrs. Clark) of 2 November 2004, *Official Report*, column 196W, on prisons, what criteria are used to determine which fire fighting equipment is available in each prison; and what assessment he makes of *(a)* the materials used in the construction of, *(b)* the location of and *(c)* the water pressure available in the vicinity of prisons and detention centres in making such decisions. [199346]

Paul Goggins: It has not proved possible to respond to the hon. Member in the time available before Prorogation.

Mrs. Gillan: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what estimate he has made of *(a)* how much it would cost and *(b)* how long it would take to install sprinkler equipment in all prisons and detention centres. [199347]

Paul Goggins: It has not proved possible to respond to the hon. Member in the time available before Prorogation.

Prisons (Fire Safety)

Mr. Llwyd: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department (1) how many prisons have been inspected under the Fire Precautions (Workplace) Regulations in each of the last five years; and how many were found to be fully compliant; [188586]

(2) how many prison inspections under the Fire Precautions (Workplace) Regulations are planned for 2004–05. [188587]

Paul Goggins: The number of inspections of prisons in England and Wales under the Fire Precautions (Workplace) (FP(WP)) Regulations in each if the last five years was as follows:

	Number of Inspections
1999–2000	17
2000–01	34
2001–02	27
2002–03	5
2003–04	5

It is only possible to say that a premise is compliant at the time of the inspection. The FP(WP) regulations place a duty on the responsible person to review the risk assessment whenever there is a change in conditions.

The prisons to be inspected in 2004–05 are:

Haslar[1]
Haverigg
Castington
Acklington
Dover[1]
Leeds
Askham Grange
Durham
Garth
Wymott
Northallerton

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[1] Indicates an immigration removal centre operated by the Prison Service on behalf of the Immigration and Nationality Directorate.

Private Finance Initiatives

Mr. George Osborne: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will list the private finance initiative arrangements in which the Department is engaged; what the total cost of each arrangement is *(a)* over its lifetime and *(b)* in each year of its operation; and how the arrangement appears in the Department's public accounts. [193979]

Fiona Mactaggart: It has not proved possible to respond to the hon. Member in the time available before Prorogation.

Probation Hostels

Mr. Oaten: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what plans he has to ensure that probation hostel resources are targeted at *(a)* very high risk and *(b)* high risk offenders. [198876]

Paul Goggins: It has not proved possible to respond to the hon. Member in the time available before Prorogation.

Mr. Oaten: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many places were available in probation hostels in England and Wales on the latest date for which figures are available; and how many were occupied by high-risk offenders. [198877]

Paul Goggins: It has not proved possible to respond to the hon. Member in the time available before Prorogation.

Probation Service

Mr. Drew: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department whether a business case has been prepared in respect of the Probation Service Workload Management Tool. [198028]

Paul Goggins: An initial business case for the development and piloting of the Work Measurement Tool (WMT) was agreed in August 2002. Since that time the tool has been developed by a user group comprising representatives from eight probation areas, Napo, Unison and the Probation Boards Association. The Tool was then formally piloted within five areas.

A full meeting, involving the National Offender Manager, National Probation Directors, Chief Officers, the trade unions and members of the user group took place on 15 October 2004 and identified the next steps for the WMT. As a result of this meeting the Office of Government Commerce has been invited to carry out a health check of the WMT and review the business case for its future development and use. This work is currently being undertaken.

Mr. Drew: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department for what reasons the Probation Service Pay and Reward Review was not implemented in April. [198029]

Paul Goggins: It has not proved possible to respond to my hon. Friend in the time available before Prorogation.

Proceeds of Crime Act

Chris Ruane: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how much money has been recovered under the Proceeds of Crime Act 2002; and if he will introduce further legislation to increase the powers of the *(a)* police and *(b)* courts to seize all (i) property and (ii) money gained from illegal activities. [199243]

Ms Blears: It has not proved possible to respond to my hon. Friend in the time available before Prorogation.

Racial Offences

Tom Cox: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many racially aggravated offences have taken place in the Greater London area in each of the last three years. [198886]

Fiona Mactaggart: It has not proved possible to respond to my hon. Friend in the time available before Prorogation.

Re-offending

Adam Price: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will make a statement on Government funding for initiatives to reduce re-offending by individuals in custody. [196874]

Paul Goggins: The Government are committed to reducing re-offending and, since 1997 have invested significant new funding to support offenders' rehabilitation and resettlement.

Offenders in custody have achieved over 130,000 basic skills awards since April 2001. Funding for this activity is £82 million in 2004–05. Since April 2003 over £14 million per year has been invested in the Custody to Work initiative, which aims to increase the number of prisoners who have education, training or employment places and stable accommodation on release. Additional new prison funding to deal with drugs has also risen to nearly £70 million this year. A further £55 million has also been made available for throughcare and aftercare as part of the drug interventions programme to all DAT partnerships in England and Wales from April 2004.

Recorded Offences (Knives)

Mr. Hancock: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many recorded offences were committed, in each of the last five years, in which knives were used. [198807]

Caroline Flint: It has not proved possible to respond to the hon. Member in the time available before Prorogation.

Mr. Hancock: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department whether he plans to *(a)* increase the penalties for carrying knives in public and *(b)* bring forward proposals for revising the sentencing guidelines to magistrates and judges in such cases; and if he will make a statement. [198808]

Caroline Flint: It has not proved possible to respond to the hon. Member in the time available before Prorogation.

Refugees

Sarah Teather: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what estimate he has made of the number of refugees residing in each parliamentary constituency. [198981]

Mr. Browne: It has not proved possible to respond to the hon. Member in the time available before Prorogation.

Regional Offender Managers

Mr. Oaten: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department when the regional offender manager job descriptions will be made public. [198871]

Paul Goggins: It has not proved possible to respond to the hon. Member in the time available before Prorogation.

Mr. Oaten: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what the duties are of the regional offender managers in the National Offender Management Service for each region in England and Wales. [198899]

Paul Goggins: It has not proved possible to respond to the hon. Member in the time available before Prorogation.

Retail Sector

Mr. Stephen O'Brien: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department (1) what the average cost per incident of theft was to the retail industry in *(a)* 2001, *(b)* 2002 and *(c)* 2003; and if he will make a statement; [196039]

(2) what the average loss per completed burglary was to the retail sector in *(a)* 2001, *(b)* 2002 and *(c)* 2003; and if he will make a statement; [196040]

(3) what the level of incidence of completed robbery in the retail sector was in *(a)* 2001, *(b)* 2002 and *(c)* 2003; what the average loss per completed robbery to the retail sector was in (i) 2001, (ii) 2002 and (iii) 2003; and if he will make a statement; [196041]

(4) what the level of incidence of violence against staff in the retail sector was in *(a)* 2001, *(b)* 2002 and *(c)* 2003; and if he will make a statement. [196042]

Ms Blears: It has not proved possible to respond to the hon. Member in the time available before Prorogation.

Richard Watson

Andrew Mackinlay: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department (1) what action has been taken by Sussex police consequent on their meeting with Linda Henderson and Amanda Williams-Gater on Friday 24 January 2003; and if he will make a statement; [190587]

(2) if he will make a statement on the progress of the re-investigation into the murder of Mr. Richard Watson; and by whom it is being conducted; [190589]

(3) on what grounds the chief constable of Sussex rejected the complaint of Mrs. Linda Henderson and declined to record it under section 69 (1) of the Police Act 1996; and if he will review this decision under his powers as Home Secretary; [190601]

(4) what apology was given by Sussex police to Linda Henderson and Amanda Williams-Gater; to whom in the press it was made available; and when; [190602]

(5) whether the full report of the Metropolitan police investigation into the Sussex police investigation of the murder of Mr. Richard Watson has been published; and if he will place a copy in the Library; [190603]

(6) whether disciplinary action against the senior investigating officer responsible for the investigation into the murder of Mr. Richard Watson was considered by Sussex police following the investigation by the Metropolitan police into Sussex police's handling of the case; and if he will make a statement; [190606]

(7) when detective chief inspector S. Dennis of Sussex police formally referred to the Crown Prosecution Service papers relating to the murder of Mr. Richard Watson; [190608]

(8) on what date the senior investigating police officer overseeing the inquiry into the murder of Mr. Richard Watson retired from Sussex police; and if he will make a statement; [190620]

(9) on what date Sussex police received the report of the investigation by the Metropolitan police into the conduct of the investigation by the Sussex police into the murder of Mr. Richard Watson; and if he will make a statement. [190621]

Ms Blears: It has not proved possible to respond to my hon. Friend in the time available before Prorogation.

Secure Training Centres

Ms Keeble: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department pursuant to the answer of 15 November 2004, *Official Report*, column 1134W, on secure training centres, how many of the hospital admissions were as a result of non-accidental injuries. [199348]

Paul Goggins: It has not proved possible to respond to my hon. Friend in the time available before Prorogation.

Select Committee Recommendations

Mr. Allen: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many recommendations by parliamentary select committees have been adopted by his Department since June 2001. [197773]

Mr. Blunkett: It has not proved possible to respond to my hon. Friend in the time available before Prorogation.

Serious and Organised Crime Agency

Mrs. Lait: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department when he expects to finalise the functions of the Serious and Organised Crime Agency; and what the functions will be. [190714]

Ms Blears: It has not proved possible to respond to the hon. Member in the time available before Prorogation.

Sex Abuse

Mrs. Curtis-Thomas: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what changes have been made to the Association of Chief Police Officers' guidelines on safeguards for those subject to accusations of sex abuse before they are charged. [191522]

Ms Blears: It has not proved possible to respond to my hon. Friend in the time available before Prorogation.

Mrs. Curtis-Thomas: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department whether policing trends have been identified as problematic by the Criminal Cases Review Commission in their review of historical sex abuse cases. [195496]

Paul Goggins: It has not proved possible to respond to my hon. Friend in the time available before Prorogation.

Mrs. Curtis-Thomas: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what research has been conducted on the public's perception of the level of sex abuse against children. [197447]

Paul Goggins: It has not proved possible to respond to my hon. Friend in the time available before Prorogation.

Mrs. Curtis-Thomas: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will make a statement on the findings of the pilots on suspect interviews. [197448]

Ms Blears: The pilot study on the introduction of visual recording of police interviews with suspects was carried out in five police force areas between May 2002 and September 2003.

Evaluation of the scheme was carried out by independent researchers aimed at identifying the implications of the recording technology and the benefits to the criminal justice system.

The evaluation followed the progress of over 6,000 interviews subject to visual recording of interviews with suspects and compared results with progress on 2,000 audio-only recorded interviews. The research found no discernible difference in terms of criminal justice outcomes.

The report is being assessed by independent external reviewers, potentially with a view to publication on the RDS website in spring 2005.

Sex Offenders/Offences

David Davis: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many sex offenders are absent without authorisation from prisons in England and Wales. [199001]

Paul Goggins: It has not proved possible to respond to the right hon. Member in the time available before Prorogation.

David Davis: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many prisoners convicted of sex offences escaped from open prisons in the last three years; and if he will make a statement. [199002]

Paul Goggins: It has not proved possible to respond to the right hon. Member in the time available before Prorogation.

Mr. Andrew Turner: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department pursuant to his answer to Question 182382, on sexual offences, if he will make a statement on the differences between the number of recorded offences and the number of successful prosecutions; and what his policy is on the prosecution of such offences. [187718]

Ms Blears: It has not proved possible to respond to the hon. Member in the time available before Prorogation.

Mrs. Curtis-Thomas: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many people reported being the victim of a sex offence in each of the past five years. [196642]

Ms Blears: It has not proved possible to respond to my hon. Friend in the time available before Prorogation.

Mrs. Curtis-Thomas: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what research has been conducted on the effects sex offences have on victims; and what the findings were. [196647]

Paul Goggins: The 2001 British Crime Survey (BCS) included a self- completion module which looked at both the extent and nature of sexual victimisation.

Full results from the module are published in Home Office Research Study 276 'Domestic violence, sexual victimisation and stalking: findings from the British Crime Survey'.

Additionally, Chapter 6 of Home Office Research Study 237 'Rape and sexual assault of women: the extent and nature of the problem—findings from the British Crime Survey' provides further information from the 1998 and 2000 BCS on the impact of sexual victimisation. Copies have been placed in the House Library.

Soham Murders

Mr. Austin Mitchell: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department whether the independent inquiry he has announced into the effectiveness of police intelligence in the Soham case will *(a)* include an assessment of the provisions of the Data Protection Act 1998 which request the deletion of records on cases which do not lead to a prosecution and *(b)* examine the compatibility of these provisions with the need to carry out checks for employment purposes. [145386]

Paul Goggins *[holding answer 5 January 2004]*: It has not proved possible to respond to my hon. Friend in the time available before Prorogation.

Special Constabulary

Mr. Andrew Mitchell: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how much money was spent on recruitment programmes for the Special Constabulary over the last five years; and how much of this was spent on advertising. [193893]

Ms Blears: Home Office expenditure over the past five years on advertising to support recruitment activity for the Special Constabulary is as follows:

	£
1999–2000	900,000
2000–01	0
2001–02	500,000
2003–04	2,700,000

The expenditure in 2003–04 was to support the 'Could You Volunteer?' media campaign.

In addition since 2000 the Home Office has spent £95,000 on publications and other materials to support recruitment activity for the Special Constabulary.

Expenditure by individual forces on recruitment activity is not collated centrally.

We announced in December 2003 the provision of funding of up to £70,000 for each of the 43 police forces in England and Wales under the Special Constabulary Capacity Building Scheme. The funding is to assist forces implement good practice, improving the recruitment, management and deployment of Specials.

Stop and Search

Mrs. Curtis-Thomas: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will make a statement on the change in the rate of stop and searches of people of Asian origin since 2001. [196626]

Ms Blears: It has not proved possible to respond to my hon. Friend in the time available before Prorogation.

Street Crime Operations

Mr. Oaten: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department pursuant to his answer of 13 September 2004, *Official Report*, column 1408W, on immigration, if he will make it his policy to collect data on the ethnic background of those who are *(a)* stopped and *(b)* arrested under joint multi-agency street crime operations. [198914]

Mr. Browne: It has not proved possible to respond to the hon. Member in the time available before Prorogation.

Sudbury Prison

Mr. McLoughlin: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many prisoners at HMP Sudbury absconded during *(a)* 2003 and *(b)* 2002; and how many in each case had been convicted of (i) murder, (ii) grievous bodily harm and (iii) sexual offences. [198350]

Paul Goggins: Sudbury is an open prison, which holds around 550 prisoners. Prisoners are only sent to open prisons following a thorough risk assessment. Only those who have been assessed as presenting a low risk to the public should they abscond are placed in open prisons.

65 absconds were reported from Sudbury in 2002 and 75 in 2003.

Two of those absconding in 2002 and five of those absconding in 2003 had been convicted of murder.

None of the absconders had been convicted of grievous bodily harm, and Sudbury does not take sex offenders.

Open prisons hold prisoners who have been assessed as being of low risk to the public, and who can be trusted to spend time outside of prison, released on temporary license. The purpose of open prisons is to prepare prisoners for permanent release, and the emphasis is upon resettlement activity, which includes gaining local work placements. Open prisons give prisoners the opportunity to find permanent employment, reintegrate into the community, restore family ties, and find suitable long-term accommodation where necessary.

Terrorism

Mrs. Curtis-Thomas: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will make a statement on co-operation of EU states against terrorism. [196625]

Mr. Blunkett: It has not proved possible to respond to my hon. Friend in the time available before Prorogation.

Dr. Julian Lewis: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department for what reason the number of instances of stop-and-search under section 44 of the Terrorism Act 2000 has risen in Hampshire between 2001–02 and 2002–03; and how many *(a)* arrests, *(b)* charges and *(c)* convictions have resulted from these in connection with (i) terrorist-related and (ii) non-terrorist-related suspected offences. [177982]

Ms Blears *[holding answer 17 June 2004]*: The following table shows the statistics for section 44(1) and 44(2) stop and searches in Hampshire in 2001–02 and 2002–03.

	2001–02	*2002–03*
Vehicles/occupants	10	256
Pedestrians	2	38
Arrests	0	8

The statistics for charges and convictions are not cross-referenced with the searches and arrests for individual forces in this way and could be collated and verified only at disproportionate cost. Hampshire police force is best placed to supply operational analysis.

Stop and searches increased across the country following 11 September 2001 as police forces tightened security around key sites.

Terrorist Suspects (Belmarsh)

Mrs. Anne Campbell: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department (1) if he will make a statement on the detention of the terrorist suspects at Belmarsh prison held under the Anti-terrorism, Crime and Security Act 2001; [184736]

(2) what plans there are to charge the remaining 12 terrorist suspects detained at Belmarsh prison under the Anti-terrorism, Crime and Security Act 2001; and if he will make a statement. [185021]

Mr. Blunkett: It has not proved possible to respond to my hon. Friend in the time available before Prorogation.

Tetra Mast Signals

Tim Loughton: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what research he has evaluated on the possible effects of Tetra mast signals on *(a)* breathalysers, *(b)* speed cameras, *(c)* lawnmowers, *(d)* computers and *(e)* pacemakers. [198630]

Caroline Flint: It has not proved possible to respond to the hon. Member in the time available before Prorogation.

Transsexual People

Lynne Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department pursuant to the answer of 14 September, *Official Report*, column 1560W, on transsexual people, if he will make it his policy to record the number of incidents reported to the police in which hatred of transsexual individuals is involved. [190298]

Ms Blears: There are no plans to record transphobic crimes as a distinct category within hate crime reporting.

Under-age Drinking

John Cryer: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what powers are available to *(a)* the police and *(b)* licensing authorities to persuade shops selling alcohol to refrain from selling to those whom they know or suspect intend to supply it to a young person. [194733]

Ms Blears: It has not proved possible to respond to my hon. Friend in the time available before Prorogation.

Uninsured Drivers

Chris Ruane: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many people were prosecuted for driving cars while uninsured in each police authority area. [198834]

Caroline Flint: Available 2002 data taken from the Home Office Court Proceedings Database for the offence of using a motor vehicle uninsured against third party risks is given in the table. Data for 2003 will be available early in 2005.

Prosecutions at magistrates courts for the offence of using a motor vehicle uninsured against third party risks[1], total offences by persons[2], England and Wales.

Number of defendants

Police force area	*2002*
Avon and Somerset	8,295
Bedfordshire	2,872
Cambridgeshire	1,518
Cheshire	3,435
Cleveland	1,823
Cumbria	3,392
Derbyshire	1,777
Devon and Cornwall	3,216
Dorset	5,735
Durham	2,875
Essex	3,241
Gloucestershire	5,152
Greater Manchester	2,249
Hampshire	23,113
Hertfordshire	6,102
Humberside	4,678
Kent	2,377
Lancashire	8,169
Leicestershire	10,559
Lincolnshire	5,942
London, City of	2,338
Merseyside	6,624
Metropolitan police	22,121
Norfolk	3,168
Northamptonshire	1,507
Northumbria	666
North Yorkshire	7,045
Nottinghamshire	3,432
South Yorkshire	7,400
Staffordshire	4,215
Suffolk	2,596
Surrey	3,122
Sussex	3,943
Thames Valley	8,057
Warwickshire	1,855
West Mercia	5,325
West Midlands	19,539
West Yorkshire	13,639
Wiltshire	2,985
Dyfed-Powys	2,057
Gwent	2,673
North Wales	2,402
South Wales	9,046
England and Wales	242,275

[1] An offence under the Road Traffic Act 1988 s. 143(2).

[2] Excludes companies, local authorities etc. One person may be proceeded against more than once on the same occasion.

Chris Ruane: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many and what percentage of drivers involved in fatal traffic accidents were *(a)* uninsured and *(b)* were driving a car that did not have a valid MOT. [198845]

Caroline Flint: The information is not collected centrally by my Department.

Victim Support

Mrs. Curtis-Thomas: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what support is available for victims in sex abuse cases after they give their testimony; and what percentage of victims make use of this support. [195483]

Paul Goggins: There are a number of specialist groups providing support and other services to victims of sexual offending. We are providing £4 million over two years to support the development of such services. This will include increasing the number of Sexual Assault Referral Centres (SARCs) and developing a range of complimentary services to address short and longer-term individual need—many of which are provided by voluntary and community sector organisations. Information about the funding can be viewed on the Government funding web site.

Victim Support is a national organisation that provides support to victims and witnesses of crime, including victims of sexual offending. This year Victim Support have been offered £30 million grant-in-aid funding from the Home Office to enable them to provide this support.

If a victim of a sexual offence gives their express consent then the police will refer their details to Victim Support. The British Crime Survey and Victim Support data indicates that in 2003–04, approximately 31 per cent. of victims of reported sexual offences were referred to Victim Support.

Mrs. Curtis-Thomas: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what treatment and support is available for child victims of physical abuse; and what percentage of known victims made use of this help, in each of the last five years. [195728]

Margaret Hodge: I have been asked to reply.

Local authorities have a statutory duty, under Section 47 of the Children Act 1989, to make inquiries where they have reasonable cause for concern that a child may need protection. The Government's guidance, "Working Together to Safeguard Children" (1999), sets out the inter-agency processes to be followed where there are concerns about a child's welfare.

All referrals and allegations, whatever their origin, must be taken seriously. The main objectives of such inquiries are to establish the facts about the circumstances giving rise to the concern; decide if there are grounds for concern; identify sources and level of risk and decide protective or other action in relation to the child and any others.

If, following these inquiries, the child is considered to be at continuing risk of significant harm, a child protection conference should be convened to decide what future action is needed to safeguard the child and promote his or her welfare, how that action will be taken forward, and with what intended outcomes. If a child is considered to be at continuing risk of significant harm and all agencies decide that the child requires a child protection plan, the child's name should be placed on the child protection register, a key worker should be appointed and a child protection plan drawn up.

Children should be registered under one or more of the categories of physical, emotional, or sexual abuse or neglect, according to a decision by the chair of the child protection conference. Where a child's name is placed on the child protection register, social services have lead responsibility in providing support and services, together with other agencies, in accordance with the child protection plan. Provision could include services from social services, health services, education and voluntary agencies according to the assessed needs of the child and family.

The national health service (NHS) provides physical treatments for physical injuries sustained as a result of abuse. The NHS within child and adult mental health services (CAMHS) also provides treatment for children who suffer mental health problems and disorders as a result of abuse.

Information relating to the number of known child victims of physical abuse over each of the last five years is not collected centrally. We do, however, collect information relating to the number of children named on the child protection register. Statistics for the last three years are as follows:

Children and young people on child protection registers in England who had been classified under the "physical abuse" category.

At 31 March 2002—4,200 children and young people listed.

(This compared with an overall total of 25,700 children and young people on child protection registers at that time.)

At 31 March 2003—4,300 children and young people.

(This compares with an overall total of 26,600 children and young people on child protection registers.)

At 31 March 2004—4,100 children and young people.

(This compares with an overall total of 26,300 children and young people on child protection registers.)

We are unable to provide statistics from child protection registers in England relating specifically to physical abuse for the last five years as, prior to 2002, local authorities were asked for data relating to physical abuse which was categorised as "neglect, physical injury and sexual abuse", "neglect and physical injury", "physical injury and sexual abuse" and "physical injury alone".

Violent Crime

Mrs. Curtis-Thomas: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what measures *(a)* are in place and *(b)* he plans to introduce to reduce the level of violent crime. [196699]

Paul Goggins: It has not proved possible to respond to my hon. Friend in the time available before Prorogation.

West London CCP Programme

Mr. Randall: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department (1) what the costs are of each project funded by the West London Community Cohesion Pathfinder programme in the last 18 months; [167995]

(2) what budget has been allocated to the West London Community Cohesion Pathfinder programme in each year since it was initiated; and how much in each year has been *(a)* spent and *(b)* allocated. [167996]

Fiona Mactaggart: It has not proved possible to respond to the hon. Member in the time available before Prorogation.

Wildlife Crime

Mr. Hancock: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what recent discussions he has had with *(a)* the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs and *(b)* others concerning wildlife crime; and if he will make a statement. [197713]

Ms Blears: It has not proved possible to respond to the hon. Member in the time available before Prorogation.

Mr. Hancock: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many police officers in each police authority area in England and Wales are assigned to tackling wildlife crime. [197714]

Ms Blears: It has not proved possible to respond to the hon. Member in the time available before Prorogation.

Mr. Hancock: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what recent research he has *(a)* commissioned and *(b)* evaluated on links between wildlife crime and serious and organised crime; and if he will make a statement. [197722]

Ms Blears: It has not proved possible to respond to the hon. Member in the time available before Prorogation.

Work Permits

Mr. Andrew Turner: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what percentage of work permits issued in 2003 were long-term permits. [194123]

Mr. Browne: It has not proved possible to respond to the hon. Member in the time available before Prorogation.

Yarl's Wood

Alistair Burt: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department when he expects the report by Stephen Shaw on the fire at Yarl's Wood in February 2002 to be published; and if he will make a statement. [186150]

Mr. Browne: It has not proved possible to respond to the hon. Member in the time available before Prorogation.

Alistair Burt: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department when he expects to publish the report by the prisons and probation ombudsman on the incident at Yarl's Wood detention centre in February 2003; and if he will make a statement. [195706]

Mr. Browne: The report by the prisons and probation ombudsman, Stephen Shaw, of the investigation into the serious disturbance at Yarl's Wood immigration removal centre was published on 16 November 2004.

My right hon. Friend, the Home Secretary announced this, by way of a written ministerial statement to the house.

Mrs. Gillan: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what steps he will take to implement the report by the Prisons and Probation Ombudsman into the disturbance and fire at the Yarl's Wood Removal Centre. [199340]

Paul Goggins: It has not proved possible to respond to the hon. Member in the time available before Prorogation.

EDUCATION AND SKILLS

Academies

Mr. Frank Field: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills whether schools which *(a)* have already gained specialist status and *(b)* are involved in private finance initiative projects may apply for academy status. [199164]

Mr. Miliband: The Academies Programme is not governed by an application process, nor does it involve a simple change of status for existing schools. Academies are a completely different type of institution—independent charitable companies—which replace poorly performing schools in disadvantaged areas. This process involves the statutory closure of any predecessor schools and the creation of a completely new school, with a new ethos, governance and organisational structure and, in most cases, new buildings.

It is, therefore, possible for any school which meets these criteria to be closed and for an academy to open in its place. However, there are some technical issues around the closure of PFI schools, particularly those which are part of a larger PFI package, which may make their replacement by an academy impractical.

Adoption and Children Act

Sir Gerald Kaufman: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills when he intends to bring in the commencement of those parts of the Adoption and Children Act 2002 not yet commenced, with particular reference to section 112. [199092]

Margaret Hodge: I refer my right hon. Friend to the response given by my hon. Friend the Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for the Home Office on 15 November 2004, *Official Report*, column 1086W.

Agency Temporary Staff

Mr. Blunt: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills how many agency temporary staff have been working for the Department in each of the last five years, excluding those working for agencies for which no data is kept centrally. [196054]

Mr. Charles Clarke: My Department was established in June 2001. Statistics for temporary agency staff are recorded by days worked and the information, detailed in the following table, is available from November 2001 to March 2002, the financial years 2002–03, 2003–04 and April to September 2004.

Financial year	*Days worked*
2001–02	11,448
2002–03	30,353
2003–04	23,458
April to September 2004	8,565

CAFCASS

Mr. Cousins: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills how many *(a)* cancelled appointments and *(b)* non-attendances there were at each Children and Family Court Advisory and Support

Service contact centre in the last year for which figures are available; and what percentage of appointments made this represents in each case. [194750]

Margaret Hodge: CAFCASS does not consistently collect statistics in relation to non-attendance or cancelled appointments at Child Contact Centres. The National Association of Child Contact Centres takes responsibility for the collection of national statistics, so as to develop a national perspective. It is not a mandatory requirement at the present time that NACCC member contact centres keep such statistics.

CAFCASS has a broadly purchaser-provider relationship with 180 contact centres through a variety of partnership agreements. In addition, CAFCASS is aware of more than 100 contact centres, which though not directly funded by CAFCASS, also provide services to families. This may include providing services to families in cases where CAFCASS has prepared reports under section 7 of the Children Act 1989. CAFCASS is significantly involved in the running of nine contact centres through the direct employment of staff, and in some cases, the provision of premises.

Mr. Clappison: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills what the waiting times are for the completion of private law cases in each of the Children and Family Court Advisory and Support Service regions. [194214]

Margaret Hodge: There is an expectation that private law reports are completed within 10 to 12 weeks of the request date to CAFCASS. Teams that are unable to meet this requirement generally make arrangements with their courts to extend the timetable for preparing reports.

At regional level and for Wales the times taken to complete reports, for the period 1 April to 30 June 2004, were as follows:

East Midlands—four teams met the 10 to 12 week standard and one team met the extended 13 to 14 weeks timetable;

Eastern—three teams met the 10 to 12 week standard and two teams met the extended 15 to 16 weeks timetable;

Greater London—four teams met the 10 to 12 week standard, one team met the extended 13 to 14 weeks timetable, one team met the extended 15 to 16 weeks timetable, one team met the extended over 17 weeks timetable;

North East—one team met the 10 to 12 week standard, two teams met the extended 13 to 14 weeks timetable and one team met the extended over 17 weeks timetable;

North West—two teams met the 10 to 12 week standard, four teams met the extended 13 to 14 weeks timetable, four teams met the extended 15 to 16 weeks timetable and one team met the extended over 17 weeks timetable;

South East—five teams met the 10 to 12 week standard, one team met the extended 13 to 14 weeks timetable and six teams met the extended 15 to 16 weeks timetable;

South West—two teams met the 10 to 12 week standard, three teams met the extended 13 to 14 weeks timetable, one team met the extended 15 to 16 weeks timetable, two teams met the extended over 17 weeks timetable;

West Midlands—three teams met the 10 to 12 week standard, two teams met the extended 13 to 14 weeks timetable and three teams met the extended 15 to 16 weeks timetable;

Yorkshire and Humberside—10 teams met the 10 to 12 week standard and two teams met the extended 13 to 14 weeks timetable;

Wales—nine teams met the 10 to 12 week standard.

On a case by case basis timescales may be extended by the courts where the needs of the case require it. This would apply across all regions and is not related to resource issues.

CAFCASS has been given an additional £12 million this year to improve performance. A new Board was appointed in April 2004 and a new Chief Executive was appointed on 1 September. They are committed to driving forward improvements in the service.

Mr. Clappison: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills, what proportion of families involved in separation and divorce cases were referred to the Children and Family Court Advisory and Support Service in *(a)* 2001–02, *(b)* 2002–03 and *(c)* 2003–04. [194218]

Margaret Hodge *[pursuant to her reply, 1 November 2004, Official Report, c. 29W]:* I wish to clarify that the number of private law referrals to the Children and Family Court Advisory and Support Service (CAFCASS) for 2001–02 was not collected or reported until October 2001. The number of referrals shown in my earlier reply (17352) is the number of referrals reported from 1 October 2001 to 31 March 2002.

Mrs. Gillan: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills how many guardians are employed by the Children and Family Court Advisory Support Service; and what their principal responsibilities are. [197074]

Margaret Hodge: At 1 November 2004, CAFCASS employed 1,292 (full-time and part-time) guardians. In addition, there were 424 self-employed guardians contracted to CAFCASS during August 2004 (the latest month for which figures are available).

Under the Children Act 1989, CAFCASS provides a children's guardian in specified public law proceedings. These include applications for care or supervision orders and applications for contact or residence orders (in public law cases). Children's guardians are also appointed in those adoption and freeing (for adoption) cases where the courts may have to dispense with parental consent.

Guardians are appointed by family courts in order to represent the interests of children and inform the court of the child's wishes and feelings. They are qualified and experienced in social work, and they are independent of social services, parents and other parties involved in the case.

In particular, guardians will:

appoint a solicitor for the child;

investigate and inform the court about the circumstances of the application; and

prepare reports for the court. These reports are informed by time spent with the children, relatives, teachers, social workers and health visitors. Guardians attend meetings on behalf of the child; check records and read reports and statements and they may recommend that other professionals be asked to assist (such as paediatricians or psychologists). The reports must provide advice to the court about the child's wishes and feelings.

Guardians also critically appraise a child's care plan, drawn up by the local authority.

Careers Guidance

Mr. Willis: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills if he will make a statement on the End to End Review of Careers Education and Guidance. [199215]

Margaret Hodge: The findings of the Careers Education and Guidance (CEG) End to End Review are being used to inform the development of the Youth Green Paper.

Commencement of Legislation

Brian White: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills what pieces of legislation passed in the last 30 years that the Department is responsible for remain to be brought into force, broken down by year of enactment. [195622]

Mr. Charles Clarke: Providing the information for the period requested would incur disproportionate costs. The following table, therefore, sets out a broad overview of primary legislation from 1997 for which the Department for Education and Skills is responsible and parts of which remain to be brought into force. The table does not include provisions which have never been in force and are now repealed or spent.

Act of Parliament	*Provisions*
Teaching and Higher Education Act 1998	Schedule 4
School Standards and Framework Act 1998	Section 39(1)
	Section 112(3)
	Section 128
	Schedule 28, Part I, paragraph 5
	Schedule 28, Part I, paragraph 70
	Schedule 28, Part I, paragraph 109
	Schedule 28, Part I, paragraph 114
	Schedule 28, Part I, paragraph 116
	Schedule 28, Part I, paragraph 138
	Schedule 28, Part I, paragraph 185
	Schedule 31
Adoption (Inter-country) Act 1999	Section 2(3)
	Section 11
	Section 15
	Section 16
Care Standards Act 2000	Section 10(2)-6
	Section 64(1)(a)
	Section 64(3)-(5)
	Section 80(2)(b)
	Section 80(6)(c)
	Section 80(7)(c)
	Section 80(7)(d)
Learning and Skills Act 2000	Section 103(1)
	Section 103(2)
	Section 103(3)
	Schedule 9, paragraph 27
	Schedule 9, paragraph 28
Education Act 2002	Sections 6–10
	Section 18(1)
	Section 31
	Section 38(3)
	Section 41(2)
	Section 134(2)
	Section 134(3)
	Sections 136–138
	Section 140
	Section 146
	Section 148
	Section 152
	Section 201(1)
	Schedule 2
	Schedule 12, paragraph 3(5)
	Schedule 12, paragraph 4(2)
	Schedule 12, paragraph 5
	Schedule 12, paragraph 7
	Schedule 13, paragraph 7(2)
	Schedule 21, paragraphs 5–6
	Schedule 21, paragraph 10
	Schedule 21, paragraph 15
	Schedule 21, paragraph 55
	Schedule 21, paragraph 79
	Schedule 21, paragraph 110(3)(b)
	Schedule 21, paragraph 110(3)(c)
	Schedule 22, Part 3
Adoption and Children Act 2002	Section 1
	Section 2(1)-(5)
	Section 3
	Section 4(1)(a)
	Section 4(2)-(4)
	Section 4(8)
	Sections 5–11
	Section 12(4)-(8)
	Sections 13–15
	Sections 17–26
	Section 27(1)
	Section 27(2)
	Sections 28–52
	Section 53(4)-(6)
	Section 55
	Section 56(2)
	Section 57(1)-(4)
	Section 58(1)
	Section 59
	Section 60(1)
	Section 60(3)
	Section 60(5)
	Section 61(1)-(6)
	Sections 62–110
	Sections 112–115
	Section 117
	Sections 120–134
	Sections 137
	Section 138
	Schedule 1
	Schedule 2
Higher Education Act 2004	Sections 1–10
	Section 20
	Section 23
	Section 24(1)-(6)
	Section 25
	Sections 27, 28
	Section 30(2), (3)
	Section 32(4)
	Section 38
	Sections 43-46
	Schedule 6, paragraphs 2–10
	Schedule
Carers (Equal Opportunities) Act 2004	Sections 1–5

Commercial Sponsorship

Charles Hendry: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills if he will list the *(a)* conferences, *(b)* publications, *(c)* initiatives, *(d)* projects and *(e)* receptions organised by his Department which have received funding from outside commercial bodies since May 1997, broken down by (i) funding body and (ii) amount paid. [196598]

Mr. Stephen Twigg: Details of individual amounts of sponsorship valued at more than £5,000 have been published in my Department's Annual Reports since 2002. Copies of the Annual Reports are available in the Library of the House.

Details of individual amounts of sponsorship were not held centrally prior to 2001–02 and could be obtained only at disproportionate cost.

Details of sponsorship in the current financial year to date, valued at more than £5,000 in cash or kind, are given in the following table.

Sponsor	*Project*	*Value (£)*
ACM	Music Manifesto	2,000,000
Adobe	Write Here Write Now writing awards	14,383
Adobe and MTV	Music Manifesto	800,000
Britannia	Number Partners	10,000
BT	Citizenship	2,600,000
Caterpillar	National Academy for Gifted and Talented Youth	15,700
Epson	Write Here Write Now writing awards	6,211
Gatsby	National Academy for Gifted and Talented Youth	220,000
Gatsby	London element of Gifted and Talented Youth strategy	28,000
Granada Learning	Write Here Write Now writing awards	7,822
HP Invent	Parents Online	30,425
Jack Petchey	London Talent	15,000
John Lewis	Anne Frank	7,308
KPMG, Microsoft, GSK	14–19 Reform Interim report	24,796
National Grid	National Academy for Gifted and Talented Youth	20,000
Nordoff Robbins	Music Manifesto	10,000
Oracle	Specialist Schools	3,996,608
OUP	Write Here Write Now writing awards	41,000
Plato Learning	National Network for Science Learning Centres	1,709,100
Rolls Royce	National Network for Science Learning Centres	1,000,000
Sibelius Software	Music Manifesto	300,000
Stabifo	Write Here Write Now writing awards	10,729
Tesco's/RM	Parents Online	136,000
Tesco's/RM	Parents Online	20,000
Various Businesses	14–19 Reform employer workshops	53,005
WOMAD	Music Manifesto	19,175

Correspondence

Mr. Keith Bradley: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills when he expects to reply to correspondence from the right hon. Member for Manchester, Withington, dated 21 June, 29 July and 26 August, on behalf of a constituent, Mrs. Rebecca Clark, of Chorlton, Manchester. [199126]

Mr. Stephen Twigg: The Department has records of correspondence from the right hon. Member on behalf of his constituent Mrs. Rebecca Clark of Chorlton, Manchester, dated 21 June and 9 July. My right hon. Friend Margaret Hodge replied to both letters on 1 August.

Departmental Advertising Costs

Charles Hendry: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills what the cost of *(a)* creative work, *(b)* media spend and *(c)* administration for his Department's advertising activity has been in each financial year since 1997–98, broken down by contractor. [197301]

Mr. Charles Clarke: Expenditure for creative and media activities by DfES is identified for the previous two years. Information prior to 2002–03 can be provided only at disproportionate cost. Expenditure information provided is net of VAT:

£ million

	Media spend	*Creative work*
2002–03	11.3	2.5
2003–04	16.9	3.2

A breakdown of media and creative work provided by COI communications, for the last two years is identified as follows.

£ million

	Media spend	*Creative work*
2003–04		
Barkers	0.0	0.0
DLKW	0.0	1.6
Leo Burnett	0.0	0.5
St. Lukes	0.0	1.1
Mediavest	5.1	0.0
Key Stage 3 Booster Campaign	—	—
Childcare Recruitment Campaign	—	—
MGM	5.6	0.0
Adult Basic Skills Campaign	—	—
Naked	5.4	0.0
Aim Higher Campaign	—	—
Foundation Degrees Campaign	—	—
n/a[1]	0.4	0.1
2002–03		
DFGW	0.0	0.6
DMB and B	0.0	0.7
St. Lukes	0.0	1.1
WCRS	0.0	0.1
WTCS	0.0	0.1
Mediavest	3.4	0.0
Childcare Recruitment Campaign	—	—
Connexions Campaign	—	—
SATS Campaign	—	—
14–19 Paper Campaigns Campaign	—	—
MGM	4.4	0.0
Adult Basic Skills Campaign	—	—
PHD	2.1	0.0
Aim Higher Campaign	—	—
Zenith	0.5	0.0
Foundation Degrees Campaign	—	—
n/a[1]	0.8	0.0

[1] Information could be provided only at disproportionate cost.

It is not possible to provide expenditure information on administration of the Department's advertising activity as information is not retained at this level.

Departmental Estate

Mr. Andrew Turner: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills if he will list the properties occupied by *(a)* his Department and *(b)* its agencies in (i) 1997 and (ii) 2004, showing (A) for each and (B) in aggregate the area; and what in aggregate the annual rental value was. [196368]

Mr. Stephen Twigg: The list of properties occupied by my Department and its agencies in 1997 and 2004 including area and aggregate annual rental value is as follows:

	2004		*1997*	
Properties	*Area in square feet*	*Rental value (£)*	*Area in square feet*	*Rental value (£)*
Caxton House (leasehold)	19,504	8,174,500	19,504	6,510,000
Castle View House (freehold)	9,552	741,250	9,552	723,000
East Lane House (freehold)	—	—	10,512	480,000
Globe Works (leasehold)	543	21,000	—	—
Moorfoot (ground lease)	28,032	2,580,000	28,032	2,000,000
Mowden Hall (freehold)	10,080	437,000	10.080	435,000
Nursery (freehold)	750	15,500	750	10,500
Ranmoor (freehold)	—	—	6,642	210,000
Sanctuary Buildings (leasehold)	21,908	8,671,221	21,908	8,671,221
Vincent House (leasehold)	—	—	1,836	104,000
Wales Bar (freehold)	1,817	33,000	1,817	50,500

Notes:

1. Where information is not provided, this indicates that the Department did not occupy/own the property.
2. The rental value for freehold properties has been assessed using the rateable values as set by the Valuation Office. To obtain an accurate figure would result in disproportionate costs.

The Department for Education and Skills did have an agency in 1997, Employment Service, who had approximately 1,300 properties. Data is not held centrally and this would require a departmental trawl at disproportionate costs.

Disabled Pupils

Mr. Boswell: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills what action he is taking to *(a)* monitor and *(b)* improve provision of facilities for sports and physical recreation for pupils with disabilities who attend mainstream schools. [197765]

Margaret Hodge: All schools have a duty under Part 4 of the Disability Discrimination Act (DDA)1995 prepare an accessibility plan for increasing over time the accessibility of schools to disabled pupils. The plan is expected to cover increasing access to the curriculum (including PE and sport) and the physical environment of the school, so that disabled pupils can take advantage of education and associated services. Ofsted monitors how schools are carrying out the planning duties as part of their ongoing inspections of schools. In the first planning period 1 April 2003 to 31 March 2006, some £300 million is being made available to local education authorities in England through the Schools Access Initiative for projects to improve the accessibility of mainstream schools to disabled pupils.

In 2003, DfES published a training CD-ROM "Success For All". This features a series of filmed case studies showing how teachers in mainstream and special schools include pupils with a range of disabilities in PE and sport. The disc offers lesson plans and points users to relevant resources. Our PE, School Sport and Club Links Strategy aims to increase the numbers of 5 to 16-year-olds who spend a minimum of two hours each week on high quality PE and school sport and makes clear that all children, including disabled children should be able to participate.

Early Years Education

Mr. Chaytor: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills how many pre-school places for *(a)* under 3-year-olds, *(b)* 3-year-olds and *(c)* 4-year-olds, were available in Bury, North in each of the last seven years. [198327]

Margaret Hodge: The information is not available in the form requested.

Figures on the number of free early education places taken up by 3 and 4-year-olds in Bury local education authority area are shown in the table.

Number of free early education places[1, 2] taken up by 3 and 4-year-old children in maintained nursery and primary schools and private, voluntary and independent providers, Bury local education authority area, 1998 to 2004

Position in January each year	*3-year-olds*	*4-year-olds*
1998	1,100	2,300
1999	1,000	2,300
2000	1,000	2,100
2001	1,100	2,200
2002	1,300	2,100
2003	1,500	2,300
2004	1,500	2,200

[1] Part-time equivalent number of free early education places taken up by 3 and 4-year-old children.

[2] A free early education place comprises five two and a half hour sessions of early years education per week, for 33 weeks of the year, usually three terms of 11 weeks.

The latest figures on provision for 3 and 4-year-olds in England were published in a Statistical First Release "Provision for children under five years of age in England-January 2004" which is available on the Department's website www.dfes.gov.uk/rsgateway/.

From April 2004, six months ahead of our original target, all 3-year-olds in England whose parents want one, are eligible for a free, part-time early education place.

Education (Staffordshire)

Paul Farrelly: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills what the surplus or deficit was of each school in Newcastle-under-Lyme at the end of the financial year 2003–04. [198667]

Mr. Miliband: The information requested is submitted to the Department according to local education authority areas, rather than districts within an LEA. Newcastle-under-Lyme forms part of Staffordshire LEA. Staffordshire LEA has yet to submit its full section 52 statement and a complete Consistent Financial Reporting return for 2003–04. I will write to my hon. Friend once this information has been received and validated.

Paul Farrelly: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills what changes there have been in *(a)* GCSE and *(b)* A level results achieved by students in Newcastle-under-Lyme since 1997. [198668]

Mr. Miliband: The results shown in the following tables are for schools and colleges in the parliamentary constituency of Newcastle-under-Lyme.

(a) GCSE/GNVQ achievement of 15-year-old pupils 1997 to 2003

	Percentage of 15-year-olds achieving	
	5+A-C at GCSE/GNVQ*	*1+A*-G at GCSE/GNVQ*
2003	48.5	95.4
2002	46.7	94.7
2001	45.2	95.1
2000	43.0	94.4
1999	41.1	94.7
1998	37.5	92.6
1997	38.1	91.6

(b) A level and vocational equivalent achievement 1997 to 2003

	Average point score per	
	A level candidate	*examination entry*
2003	168.2	66.7
2002	207.5	68.9
2001	12.4	4.3
2000	12.8	4.3
1999	12.0	4.1
1998	11.7	3.9
1997	11.3	4.1

A new point scoring tariff was adopted by UCAS in 2002. The School and College Achievement and Attainment Tables changed to reflect this. The change is illustrated below.

Grade at A level	*Points 1997 to 2001*	*Points 2002 to 2003*
A	10	120
B	8	100
C	6	80
D	4	60
E	2	40

Note:
AS levels count as half an A level and VCE Double Awards count as 2 A levels.

Paul Farrelly: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills how much has been spent on improving *(a)* science and *(b)* sports facilities in schools in Newcastle-under-Lyme since 1997. [198673]

Mr. Miliband: This information is not held centrally.

Paul Farrelly: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills how much has been invested in improving school buildings in *(a)* primary and *(b)* secondary schools in Newcastle-under-Lyme in each year since 1997. [198674]

Mr. Miliband: Information on capital funding invested in improving school buildings broken down by primary and secondary schools is not held centrally. Decisions on how resources should be invested in schools are taken locally in accordance with locally prepared asset management plans. The Department does not hold details of capital allocation by constituency. The following table shows capital resources allocated to schools in Staffordshire local education authority and its schools, since 1997.

Staffordshire LEA

	£000
1997–98	7,421
1998–99	25,935
1999–2000	15,549
2000–01	31,145
2001–02	22,996
2002–03	26,601
2003–04	35,529
2004–05	41,071

Paul Farrelly: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills what measures have been taken to improve basic literacy and numeracy for *(a)* children and *(b)* adults in Newcastle-under-Lyme since 1997. [198675]

Mr. Miliband: Since 1997 raising attainment in literacy and numeracy, for both children and adults, has been a key priority.

The Primary National and Key Stage 3 Strategies are the chief means by which we support schools to improve standards of teaching and learning in literacy and numeracy. The National Strategies work with and through LEAs to provide high quality lesson planning and continuing professional development materials, training for headteachers, teachers, and support staff, and hands-on support through a network of consultants. We also offer tailored support to individual LEAs. Staffordshire LEA is currently participating in programmes to improve the quality of leadership and to address low attainment in its schools.

National curriculum test results tell us that this focus is paying dividends. In Newcastle-under-Lyme, the percentage of 11-year-olds achieving the expected level (level 4) in maths has risen from 62 per cent. in 1997 to 75 per cent. in 2003, and from 66 per cent. to 76 per cent. in English. At KS3 the percentage of pupils achieving the expected level for their age (level 5) between 1997 and 2003 has increased from 57 per cent. to 69 per cent. in maths and from 61 per cent. to 71 per cent. in English. 2004 constituency level data will be published in the new year.

We are similarly working hard to improve levels of literacy and numeracy for adults. Since the launch of the Skills for Life Strategy in 2001, Staffordshire Learning and Skills Council (LSC) has had responsibility for addressing the literacy and numeracy skills of adults in Newcastle-under-Lyme. According to information provided by the LSC, an estimated 10,800 young people and adults participated in the Staffordshire Local LSC Skills for Life programmes in the last year (2003–04). Of these learners, an estimated 4,200 will achieve at least one qualification counting towards the Skills for Life target.

Newcastle-under-Lyme College has been active in developing provision in the area, for example by supporting an E Learning bus, which provides state of the art ICT equipment to support adult learners. It offers users the chance to gain nationally recognised qualifications in literacy and numeracy using on-line facilities. Newcastle-under-Lyme is also one of the Region's Testbed Learning Communities and support to improve levels of literacy, numeracy and language skills will be a key strand of this development.

Paul Farrelly: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills what steps have been taken to reduce class sizes in *(a)* infant and *(b)* junior schools in Newcastle-under-Lyme since 1997. [198676]

Mr. Miliband: The infant class size limit was introduced in the School Standards and Framework Act 1998. This required all 5, 6 and 7 years from the 2001/02 school year to be taught in classes of no more than 30 with one qualified teacher. The Government have fully funded the implementation of the infant class size limit by making £775 million available between 1998–99 and 2002–03. This is enough for 6,000 new teachers and 2,000 additional classrooms. Between 1997 and 2004, the pupil teacher ratio in primary schools in Newcastle-under-Lyme fell from 26.3 to 25 in Key Stage 1 and from 28.9 to 26.9 in Key Stage 2.

Paul Farrelly: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills how the average pay of teachers has changed in Newcastle-under-Lyme since 1997. [198679]

Mr. Miliband: Information on the average pay of teachers is not available at constituency level.

The average salary of full-time regular qualified teachers in the maintained sector schools in Staffordshire local education authority in March 1997 was £24,200. By March 2003 the latest date for which information is available, this had risen to £29,900 (provisional).

The figures include all allowances and cover all grades.

Paul Farrelly: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills (1) how many families have benefited from Sure Start in Newcastle-under-Lyme; [198682]

(2) how much has been invested in Sure Start in Newcastle-under-Lyme. [198684]

Margaret Hodge: Sure Start provision in Newcastle-under-Lyme consists of a children's centre, based on a former Sure Start local programme and a neighbourhood nursery. The centre was designated a children's centre in October 2004 and offers services to 580 families.

The total capital funding available for the children's centre is £2,269,000. Funding comes from a number of sources, including the Sure Start local programme and neighbourhood nursery funding, Staffordshire local education authority and the European Regional Development Fund. The Sure Start capital investment totals £830,000. The Sure Start local programme revenue allocation for 2004–05 is £727,750.

Paul Farrelly: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills (1) how many free nursery or pre-reception class places have been created for *(a)* five, *(b)* four and *(c)* three-year-olds in Newcastle-under-Lyme since 1997; [198683]

(2) how many free part-time nursery places have been created in Newcastle-under-Lyme since 1997; and at which locations. [198685]

Margaret Hodge: All 4-year-olds in England have been entitled to a free part-time early education place since September 1998. All 3-year-olds in England have been entitled to a free part-time early education place since April 2004.

The available information on the numbers of free part-time early education places taken up by 3 and 4-year-olds in Newcastle-under-Lyme parliamentary constituency and Staffordshire local education authority area is shown in the tables. Information for private and voluntary providers is available for Staffordshire but not for Newcastle-under-Lyme.

Number of free nursery education places taken up by 3 and 4-year-olds in Staffordshire local education authority area, 1997 and 2004

	3-year-olds			4-year-olds		
Position in January each year	Maintained nursery and primary schools[1]	Other maintained and private, voluntary and independent providers	Total	Maintained nursery and primary schools[2]	Other maintained and private, voluntary and independent providers[3]	Total
1997	2,600	0	2,600	n/a	n/a	[4]9,600
2004	2,200	[5]4,540	6,740	7,930	860	8,780

[1] Headcount of children aged three at 31 December in the previous calendar year from the Annual Schools Census.

[2] Headcount of children aged four at 31 December in the previous calendar year from the Annual Schools Census.

[3] Part-time equivalent number of children aged four at 31 December in the previous calendar year from the Early Years Census data collection exercise and the Annual Schools Census.

[4] Part-time equivalent number of children aged four at 31 December in the previous calendar year from the Nursery Education Grant data collection exercise.

[5] Part-time equivalent number of children aged three at 31 December in the previous calendar year from the Early Years census data collection exercise and the Annual Schools' census.

n/a = not available.

Number of free nursery education places[1, 2] taken up by 3 and 4-year-olds in maintained nursery and primary schools, Newcastle-under-Lyme parliamentary constituency area, 1997 and 2004

	3-year-olds				4-year-olds			
		Maintained primary schools				Maintained primary schools		
Position in January each year	Maintained nursery schools	Nursery classes	Other classes[3]	Total	Maintained nursery schools	Nursery classes	Other classes[3]	Total
1997	150	190	0	340	100	130	700	910
2004	100	250	0	340	50	130	640	820

[1] Headcount of children aged three and four at 31 December in the previous calendar year.

[2] Figures are rounded to the nearest 10 places.

[3] Includes reception classes and classes not designated as nursery classes.

Source:

Annual Schools Census.

The latest figures on early education places for 3 and 4-year-olds in England were published in Statistical First Release 39/2004, "Provision for Children Under Five Years of Age in England—January 2004 (final)", which is available on the Department's website: www.dfes.gov.uk/rsgateway/

Paul Farrelly: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills (1) what changes there have been to the level of funding for further education in *(a)* North Staffordshire and *(b)* Newcastle-under-Lyme since 1997; [198720]

(2) how much expenditure is planned for investment in the new further education college in Newcastle-under-Lyme; [198721]

(3) what changes have taken place to the funding of Staffordshire Learning and Skills Council since its establishment. [198728]

Dr. Howells: The Department allocates funds for education and training in the post-16 learning and skills sector to the Learning and Skills Council (LSC). The LSC decides on allocations at individual college and local LSC level. Information about these allocations is not collected by the Department. This is a matter for the LSC. Mark Haysom, the council's chief executive, will write to the hon. Gentleman with this information and a copy of his reply will be placed in the House Library.

Paul Farrelly: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills what changes there have been to the number of *(a)* 16 to 18-year-olds and *(b)* adults taking vocational qualifications in Newcastle-under-Lyme since 1997. [198722]

Mr. Miliband: Information is only available on those achieving, rather than taking, national vocational qualifications (NVQs) and vocationally related qualifications (VRQs); and at local education authority (LEA) level. Therefore the following figures apply to Staffordshire LEA.

Awards of NVQs and VRQs in Staffordshire LEA: 1997/98 to 2002/03—(Awards made between 1 October and 30 September in each year)

Thousand

	Age[1]			
	NVQs		VRQs	
Academic year	16–18	19–75	16–18	19–75
1997/98	[2]—	[2]—	—	—
1998/99	[2]—	2.8	—	—
1999/2000	1.7	6.1	—	—
2000/01	1.2	4.2	—	—
2001/02	1.1	3.7	[2]—	[2]—
2002/03	1.4	3.4	[2]—	2.6

[1] Age at start of academic year i.e. 31 August.

[2] Less than 1,000.

Note:

Accreditation of VRQs commenced in April 2000, reliable figures only available from 2001/02.

Source:

NISVQ

Paul Farrelly: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills (1) what estimate he has made of the number of students who have received the education maintenance allowance in Stoke-on-Trent; [198723]

(2) what estimate he has made of the effect of the education maintenance allowance upon post-16 staying-on rates in Stoke-on-Trent. [198724]

Mr. Ivan Lewis: Since the start of this academic year and up to the end of October, 1,050 16-year-olds entering year 12 had received at least one EMA payment in the Stoke-on-Trent LEA area.

Based on extensive piloting, the projection is that EMA will increase participation in education at Y12 by 3.8 percentage points, and by 4.1 percentage points among Y13s. This will be the biggest impact of any single initiative on participation levels since the introduction of GCSEs in 1987. However, the impact will vary depending on the area, and pilot areas such as Stoke-on-Trent will have experienced much of this impact already. We estimate that around 1,400 16-year-olds in full time education in Stoke-on-Trent are eligible on income grounds for EMA. This estimate is based on a range of assumptions around participation and income profiles and is therefore subject to some uncertainty.

Paul Farrelly: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills what estimate he has made of the number of students who have benefited from the introduction of the Newcastle Achievement Scheme in further education in Newcastle-under-Lyme. [198725]

Mr. Ivan Lewis: This is a matter for the Learning and Skills Council. Mark Haysom, the Council's Chief Executive, will write to the hon. Member with this information and a copy of his reply will be placed in the House Library.

Paul Farrelly: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills what estimate he has made of changes to staying-on rates following the introduction of the Newcastle Achievement Scheme in further education in Newcastle-under-Lyme. [198726]

Mr. Ivan Lewis: This is a matter for the Learning and Skills Council. Mark Haysom, the Council's Chief Executive, will write to the hon. Member with this information and a copy of his reply will be placed in the House Library.

Paul Farrelly: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills what steps have been taken to improve training and skills in Newcastle-under-Lyme since 1997; and if he will list the relevant initiatives. [198727]

Mr. Ivan Lewis: The Skills Strategy White Paper (published July 2003) introduced a range of policies to meet shortfalls in skills—especially at Level 2, and in some sector-specific areas at Level 3. These include mechanisms to identify and address sectoral and regional skill priorities, to engage employers better in training and enable providers to be more responsive to employers.

The strategy set out our intention to introduce a new entitlement for any adult in the labour force to have access to free tuition for their first full Level 2 qualification. We started trialling the entitlement in the North East and South East regions in September 2004, and will start national roll-out from next year.

In September 2003, we started piloting the new Adult Learning Grant (ALG), offering up to £30 per week to adults on low incomes studying full time for a first full Level 2 qualification, and for first Level 3 qualifications for those under 30. We have now extended the ALG trials from 10 pilot regions into the SE and NE regions as part of linked trials of key initiatives announced in the Skills Strategy

18 Employer Training Pilots (ETPs) are testing new financial support measures to improve access to training and enable employees to attain basic and Level 2 skills. As at the end of October 2004, 13,474 employers and 92,987 learners had registered for ETP.

Trade unions and their Union Learning Representatives (ULRs) are making a major contribution to the Skills Strategy. After seven years of the Union Learning Fund, a further 46 new projects in 27 unions have been approved to start from April this year. These projects are in both small and large unions and in both public and private sectors. They will provide new learning opportunities for thousands of workers. In the last year alone, the fund helped to encourage over 25,000 workers back into learning.

For the economically inactive, we will improve the support to the low-skilled through the New Deal for Skills (NDfS) by creating a new intensive skills guidance service, co-located with Jobcentre Plus where possible, and improving mechanisms of financial support for those for whom training provides a route back to work.

Skills for Life, the national strategy for improving adult literacy, language and numeracy skills, was launched in March 2001. It aims to help create a society where adults have the basic skills they need to find and keep work and participate fully in society, thereby increasing the economic performance and social cohesion of the country. So far we estimate that 550,000 adults achieved a qualification in literacy, language or numeracy and current projections show that we are on track to meet the target of 750,000 achievements by July 2004. In terms of participation, it is estimated that 2.3 million learners will have taken up 4.7 million learning opportunities between April 2001 and July 2004. Staffordshire has a Basic Skills Strategy Group with representation from all key partners including colleges, work-base learning providers, Job Centre Plus, probation, voluntary and community sector and the LSC. The partnership is working to improve levels of literacy, numeracy and language across the area.

The growing network of UK-wide, employer-led Sector Skills Councils (SSCs) has a key part to play in taking forward these national skills strategies. Each SSC has a key goal of increasing opportunities to boost the skills and productivity of everyone in the sector's work force, including taking action on equal opportunities.

We recognise that there are variations in the skills base of different regions. This is being addressed by Regional Skills Partnerships which are being established in each region, co-ordinated by Regional Development Agencies and involving LSC, Jobcentre Plus, Small Business Service and Skills for Business Network. They are bringing together skills and work force development with support for innovation and business development and labour market services in an integrated approach to deliver Regional Economic Strategies. The Regional Skills Partnership in the West Midlands will be launched in January 2005.

On 10 May the Government announced their intention to put in place a family of apprenticeship programmes to suit a variety of needs from aged 14 upwards. These will include: Junior Apprenticeships for 14 to 16-year-olds, a pre-apprenticeship route within the existing Entry to Employment programme, Apprenticeships at NVQ Level 2, Advanced Apprenticeships at NVQ Level 3 and a strengthened progression route into higher education, including vocational Foundation Degrees. In addition we are developing Apprenticeships for Adults in those sectors with the greatest need.

Since April 2001 the Learning and Skills Council has been responsible for the planning and funding of all post-16 learning outside Higher Education. Mark Haysom, the council's chief executive, will write to my hon. Friend with information about learning and skills in Newcastle-under-Lyme and a copy of his reply will be placed in the Library.

Paul Farrelly: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills what changes have taken place to *(a)* the funding of and *(b)* the numbers of students attending (i) Keele University and (ii) Staffordshire University since 1997. [198729]

Dr. Howells: The following table shows the changes in funding and associated student numbers for Keele and Staffordshire Universities. The figures do not include Teacher Training Agency (TTA) or national health service (NHS) funded provision. Overseas students have also been excluded.

HEFCE funding for teaching and HEFCE funded student numbers

	Keele University		Staffordshire University	
	Funding (£000)	Student FTE	Funding (£000)	Student FTE
1997–98	10,518	4,970	27,832	12,105
1998–99	10,596	4,913	32,189	11,806
1999–2000	11,432	4,719	33,182	11,570
2000–01	11,603	4,685	35,481	12,085
2001–02	11,819	4,880	37,256	12,168
2002–03	13,163	4,911	38,123	11,116
2003–04	14,443	5,082	39,232	10,285
2004–05	17,408	N/a	40,512	n/a

Sources:

HEFCE Final Grant Announcement Circulars.

HESES student number returns (columns 4 and 4a).

Education Funding (Bury)

Mr. Chaytor: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills what the total allocation of capital expenditure to *(a)* primary and *(b)* secondary schools in Bury Metropolitan borough council area was in each of the last seven years. [198326]

Mr. Charles Clarke: The following table shows capital resources allocated to Bury local education authority and its schools, since 1997. Information on the split between primary and secondary schools is not held centrally. Decisions on how resources should be invested in schools are taken locally in accordance with the locally prepared asset management plans.

Bury LEA

	£000
1997–98	941
1998–99	2,311
1999–2000	3,317
2000–01	5,183
2001–02	4,736
2002–03	5,785
2003–04	7,556
2004–05	10,833

Education Maintenance Allowance

Mr. Grogan: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills how many students in the Selby constituency are receiving the education maintenance allowance. [198783]

Mr. Ivan Lewis: Since the start of the academic year, as of 31 October, 1,579 young people in the North Yorkshire area had received payments under the national EMA scheme. The number is increasing at a steady rate and we expect it to continue to do so. The EMA scheme has proved its effectiveness in the pilots we have run, and it will allow young people from lower income households to succeed in a wide variety of vocational and academic courses.

We are unable to provide numbers down to constituency level.

Rob Marris: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills if he will list institutions with students aged 16 to 18 years who are in receipt of an education maintenance allowance, broken down by number of students. [197505]

Mr. Ivan Lewis: There are currently around 2,875 schools and colleges across England with students enrolled on the EMA system (EMASYS). Over 200,000 young people have received EMA payments so far.

The following information lists the schools and colleges in the Black Country and the number of students enrolled on EMASYS in each up to 31 October. A copy of the full list, including an electronic version, will be placed in the Library.

October census data

URN	School name	Number of enrolled students (at 31 October)
SCL_ID	SCL_Description	Total
104404	Aldersley High School	40
104263	Aldridge School	38
104008	Alexandra High School and Sixth Form Centre	88
104246	Alumwell Business Enterprise College	56
104264	Barr Beacon Language College	69
103888	Batmans Hill Unit	3
103868	Bishop Milner Catholic School	29
104254	Blue Coat Church of England Comprehensive School A Performing Arts Specialist Co	55
104248	Brownhills Community Technology College	52
104269	Castle School	10
130484	City of Wolverhampton College	616
104395	Colton Hills Community School	74
104390	Coppice Performing Arts School	52
104249	Darlaston Community Science College	79
104005	Dartmouth High School	32
104387	Deansfield High School	31
130475	Dudley College of Technology	652
103876	Elmfield Rudolf Steiner School Limited	3

October census data

URN	*School name*	*Number of enrolled students (at 31 October)*
SCL_ID	*SCL_Description*	*Total*
104245	Frank F Harrison Community School	56
NSI021	Glasshouse College	8
116994	Hagley Roman Catholic High School	33
130476	Halesowen College	867
116933	Haybridge High School and Sixth Form	51
104396	Heath Park High School	74
104386	Highfields Science Specialist School	91
104271	Jane Lane School	5
104243	Joseph Leckie Community Technology College	93
130478	King Edward VI College Stourbridge	257
104021	Manor High School (Foundation)	34
104272	Mary Elliot School	10
104003	Menzies High School	114
104397	Moreton Community School	46
104403	Moseley Park School	58
103870	Old Swinford Hospital	15
104401	Our Lady and St Chad Catholic School	47
104393	Parkfield High School	42
104391	*Pendyford High School*	*35*
104417	Penn Hall School	5
104251	Pool Hayes Community School	51
104262	Queen Mary's Grammar School	27
104261	Queen Mary's High School	50
104405	Royal Wolverhampton School	2
130479	Sandwell College	259
104247	Sheffield Sports and Community College	43
104260	Shire Oak School (a Science college)	58
104013	Shireland Language College	60
104389	Smestow School	45
104252	Sneyd Community School	60
104400	St. Edmund's Catholic School	28
104255	St. Francis of Assisi Catholic School	28
104399	St. Peter's Collegiate Church of England School	55
104259	St. Thomas More Catholic School Willenhall	124
130477	Stourbridge College	275
104020	Stuart Bathurst Catholic High School	22
117033	Sunfield School	3
104407	Tettenhall College Incorporated	1
104414	Tettenhall Wood School	2
103871	The Ellowes Hall School	9
104022	The Heathfield Foundation Technology College	113
131547	The King's Church of England School	35
132231	The Meadows School	12
104385	The Northicote School	63
103880	The Old Park School	5
104258	The Streetly School	29
132233	The Westminster School	12
104270	Three Crowns School	8
104014	Tividale High School and Community College	21
133697	Wallsall Academy	60
130483	Walsall College of Arts and Technology	661
104392	Wednesfield High School	65
104250	Willenhall School Sports College	71
104006	Wodensborough Community Technology College	11
104402	Wolverhampton Girls' High School	31
104411	Wolverhampton Grammar School	25
104007	Wood Green High School College of Sport	79

Ms Oona King: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills (1) how many 16-year-olds in full-time education in Tower Hamlets are eligible for an education maintenance allowance; [198866]

(2) how many and what percentage of young people starting post-16 education in Tower Hamlets in 2004 have been awarded education maintenance allowance; and what percentage of those have received a *(a)* £30, *(b)* £20 and *(c)* £10 award. [198867]

Mr. Ivan Lewis: We estimate that around 1,400 16-year-olds entering Year 12 in Tower Hamlets are eligible for EMA on income grounds.

Since the start of the academic year, as of 31 October, 1,416 young people in the Tower Hamlets LEA area had received payments under the national EMA scheme. The number is increasing at a steady rate and we expect it to continue to do so. We are unable to breakdown the figures at LEA level to show specifically how many young people are receiving £10, £20 and £30 payments.

Education/Training (West Derbyshire)

Mr. McLoughlin: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills what percentage of *(a)* GCSE and *(b)* sixth form students have continued to higher education in (i) West Derbyshire, (ii) the East Midlands of England and (iii) England in each year since 1990. [198362]

Dr. Howells: The available information on participation rates by region shows the proportion of 18-year-olds entering full-time undergraduate courses in the UK via the Universities and Colleges Admissions Service (UCAS), and is given in the table. Comparable *figures for the years prior to 1994 are not available* centrally.

It should be noted that the proportions in the table are based only on the number of 18-year-olds entering full-time HE. This is a different definition to the Department's main measures of HE participation: the Age Participation Index (API), which measures the proportion of UK domiciled students who enter full-time HE by the age of 20, and the Higher Education Initial Participation Rate (HEIPR) which measures the proportion of 17–30 year old English domiciled first time entrants to full or part-time HE. Neither the API nor the HEIPR are calculated for each LEA, because of the lack of detailed data at local authority level.

Proportion of 18-year-olds entering full-time undergraduate courses via UCAS

	Students from:		
Year of entry	*Derbyshire*[1]	*East Midlands*[2]	*England*
1994	16.1	17	17.9
1995	16.2	19	19.5
1996	17.6	19	19.9
1997	19.1	20	20.5
1998	19.9	19	20.0
1999	19.9	19	20.0
2000	20.4	20	20.6
2001	21.9	21	21.5
2002	22.5	21	22.0
2003	21.9	21	21.4

[1] Derbyshire excludes Derby LEA from 1997.

[2] Covers the local education authorities of Derby, Derbyshire, Leicester, Leicestershire, Lincolnshire, Northamptonshire, Nottingham, Nottinghamshire and Rutland.

Mr. McLoughlin: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills how many young people in *(a)* West Derbyshire and *(b)* the East Midlands have entered (i) an advanced modern apprenticeship and (ii) a foundation modern apprenticeship since the schemes' inception. [198363]

Mr. Ivan Lewis: The information is not available for West Derbyshire as requested by the hon. Gentleman. However, information is available for old Training and Enterprise Council (TEC) areas and new Learning and Skills Council (LSC) areas. The following table shows the number of starts on Apprenticeships in Derbyshire Learning and Skills Council (LSC) between the 26 March 2001 and the end of July 2004, as well as the number of starts from the inception of the programmes until 25 March 2001 in the three TEC areas that became part of Derbyshire LSC area. The table also shows the number of starts in the East Midlands region in these periods.

Time period	*TEC/LSC*	*Advanced Apprenticeships (formerly AMA)*	*Apprenticeships at level 2 (formerly FMA)*
Inception to March 2001	North Derbyshire	2,500	1,300
	Southern Derbyshire	5,600	2,000
	Stockport and High Peak[1]	3,800	1,900
	East Midlands Region	37,800	19,500
March 2001 to July 2004	Derbyshire LSC	3,000	7,500
	East Midlands LSC region	12,600	32,000

[1] Some of the Stockport and High Peak TEC area became part of Derbyshire LSC, but some of the old TEC area also became part of Greater Manchester LSC

Entry to Employment

Mr. Drew: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills what representations he has received on funding reduction in Entry to Employment courses and training opportunities. [197938]

Mr. Ivan Lewis: I have received correspondence from MPs, training providers, and members of the public about the reduction in funding to the E2E programme. However, there is no reduction in the funding allocated by the LSC for 2004/05: £238 million, the same level as last year.

Phil Sawford: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills what the total budget was for the Entry to Employment programme for the year 2003–04; and what funding will be available for the programme for the year 2004–05. [196478]

Mr. Ivan Lewis: This is a matter for the Learning and Skills Council. Mark Haysom, the council's chief executive, will write to my hon. Friend with this information and a copy of his reply will be placed in the House Library.

Examination Results

Mr. Chaytor: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills what the average A-level points score was for *(a)* school sixth forms, *(b)* sixth form colleges and *(c)* general further education colleges in each of the last three years; and if he will make a statement. [197267]

Mr. Miliband: I refer the hon. Member to the answer given on 4 November 2004, *Official Report*, column 368W.

Mr. Chaytor: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills how many *(a)* individual students were awarded level three qualifications and *(b)* level three qualifications were awarded in English further education colleges in each of the last 10 years; and if he will make a statement. [197824]

Mr. Miliband: Figures are only available on a broadly consistent basis from 1994/95 onwards. The following tables show particular qualification types and combinations which equate to a full level 3 qualification. The information in the tables comes from a variety of data systems over time and it is not possible to match data across these sources for individual students. Therefore, it is possible that some individual students appear in more than one column.

Table 1: Number of Level 3 awards, England

Thousand

	Two or more GCEA Levels	*Four AS Levels*	*Advanced GNVQ/ VCE*	*NVQ Level 3*	*Full VRQ Level 3*
1994/95	165	—	11	43	—
1995/96	169	—	30	56	—
1996/97	183	—	32	79	—
1997/98	188	—	39	90	—
1998/99	188	—	42	89	—
1999/2000	186	—	44	97	—
2000/01	193	86	42	90	—
2001/02	195	85	41	85	1
2002/03	207	90	36	85	6

Table 2: Number of Level 3 awards in Further Education and Sixth Form Colleges, England

Thousand

	Two or more GCEA Levels	*Four AS Levels*	*Advanced GNVQ/ VCE*	*NVQ Level 3*	*Full VRQ Level 3*
1994/95	56	—	7	n/a	—
1995/96	57	—	19	n/a	—
1996/97	61	—	19	n/a	—
1997/98	60	—	29	40	—
1998/99	59	—	30	36	—
1999/2000	57	—	30	39	—
2000/01	59	27	28	36	—
2001/02	59	29	27	36	1
2002/03	64	31	24	35	5

n/a = Not available.

Notes:

1. The number of GNVQs are not fully consistent over time, figures from 2000/01 onwards are taken from the Secondary School and College Performance Tables Database, figures for earlier years are taken from NISVQ.

2. The figures for two or more GCE A Levels includes those gaining a combination of one GCE A Level and 2+ GCE AS Levels in the same year. Those gaining four AS Levels within the year are excluded and shown separately given they will be double counted when they complete their full A Level course. For this reason, it is not appropriate to add across the rows to form a total figure.

3. The Full VRQ Level 3 figure is for Vocationally Related Qualifications accredited by QCA as having 80 to 100 per cent. width.

4. Advanced GNVQ/VCE includes Advanced GNVQs, VCE 12 Unit, 2 VCE 6 Unit qualifications or equivalent combinations of VCE 6 unit and 3 unit qualifications.

Source:

Secondary School and College Performance Tables Database and National Information System for Vocational Qualifications (NISVQ)

Foster Carers

Annabelle Ewing: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills what measures he plans to take to address the shortage of foster carers. [195086]

Margaret Hodge: In February this year we produced a Fostering Publicity Pack designed to help local authorities to run targeted local campaigns to recruit new foster carers for looked after children. We have also awarded a 3-year grant of £180,000 to the Fostering Network to support Foster Care Fortnight, which has a particular focus on recruitment.

In addition, the Choice Protects grant, which provides funding of £113 million over three years, has a specific emphasis on fostering services. £1.5 million of the funding available through the grant in the current financial year is being used to develop a number of new initiatives to improve the status, support and training of foster carers. These include the development of a national award ceremony, a national advice line, measures to improve the support given to foster carers who are subject to allegations and new training resources for foster carers.

Most recently, the Government have tabled amendments to the Children Bill which would enable regulations to be made prescribing a national minimum allowance to foster carers in England and Wales.

Free School Meals

Mr. Drew: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills what plans he has to assess alternatives to eligibility to free school meals as the trigger point to other benefits, with particular reference to free transport. [198548]

Mr. Stephen Twigg: We are investigating with the Department for Work and Pensions the increase in family income that results from a move from unemployment into work on the minimum wage and above. In doing so we must consider what can be done for the many low income working and non-working families who are not eligible for school transport, as many are paying commercial bus fares for their children to travel to school. Our aim is to develop a system that helps as many low income families as possible to have access to affordable transport on the home to school journey, where walking or cycling is impractical.

Mr. Drew: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills what plans he has to improve take-up of free school meals, with specific reference to rural areas; and what measures he plans to take to reduce the stigma attached to take-up of free school meals. [198549]

Mr. Stephen Twigg: We are currently in discussion with the Inland Revenue and the Department of Work and Pensions about ways in which the system for checking free school meal entitlement might be streamlined. Key to these discussions is the need to agree a system that will be easy for parents to access and to remove the need for specific details of Government support payments to be shown to school or local authority staff in order to have their child's free school meal eligibility assessed.

A DfES sponsored research report, commissioned by the Child Poverty Action Group, entitled "Improving the Take-up of Free School Meals" was published in May 2001. The findings of the research suggested that a major factor in poor take-up was parents' perception that school meals were of poor quality. We are revising secondary school lunch standards to reduce sugar, salt and fat content and are considering if primary school meals require similar changes. Changes when implemented will improve quality and, therefore, will encourage greater take up of free as well as paid for school lunches in both rural and urban areas.

Mr. Gill: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills how many children in *(a)* Leicester South and *(b)* each unitary authority in England claim free school meals; and what estimate he has made of those eligible to claim free school meals in each case. [198657]

Mr. Stephen Twigg: The information requested is shown in the table.

Maintained primary and secondary schools[1]: school meal arrangements[2,3] January 2004. Leicester South parliamentary constituency and each unitary authority in England

	Primary				
	Number on roll	*Number of pupils taking free school meals*	*Percentage of pupils taking free school meals*	*Number of pupils known to be eligible for free school meals*	*Percentage of pupils known to be eligible for free school meals*
Leicester South parliamentary constituency	9,840	2,200	22.4	2,530	25.7
Unitary Authorities					
Bath and North East Somerset	12,580	1,120	8.9	1,340	10.6
Blackburn with Darwen	14,890	3,380	22.7	3,940	26.5
Blackpool*	12,230	2,220	18.2	2,850	23.3
Bournemouth	10,980	1,060	9.6	1,230	11.2
Bracknell Forest	8,930	460	5.1	600	6.7
Brighton and Hove	17,430	2,330	13.3	3,190	18.3
Bristol, City of	30,230	6,020	19.9	7,400	24.5
Darlington	8,990	1,520	16.8	1,780	19.7
Derby	21,990	3,690	16.8	4,310	19.6
East Riding of Yorkshire	26,710	2,000	7.5	2,530	9.5
Halton	10,700	2,400	22.5	2,880	26.9
Hartlepool	9,550	2,000	20.9	2,180	22.9
Herefordshire	13,630	900	6.6	1,000	7.3
Isle of Wight	7,250	1,020	14.0	1,320	18.3
Isles of Scilly	270	10	1.9	10	2.3
Kingston Upon Hull, City of	23,520	4,700	20.0	6,110	26.0
Leicester	28,850	6,350	22.0	7,450	25.8
Luton	18,680	3,670	19.7	4,390	23.5
Medway	23,360	2,420	10.3	3,050	13.1
Middlesbrough	14,400	3,820	26.5	4,360	30.3
Milton Keynes	22,700	1,920	8.4	2,990	13.2
North East Lincolnshire	14,850	2,210	14.9	3,230	21.7
North Lincolnshire	14,120	1,710	12.1	2,090	14.8
North Somerset	14,950	1,350	9.0	1,710	11.4
Nottingham	24,670	6,170	25.0	7,680	31.2
Peterborough	15,520	2,590	16.7	3,050	19.6
Plymouth	20,100	3,060	15.2	3,750	18.7
Poole	10,720	500	4.6	520	4.9
Portsmouth	14,710	2,210	15.0	2,760	18.8
Reading	10,170	1,420	14.0	1,770	17.4
Redcar and Cleveland	14,000	2,860	20.5	3,240	23.1
Rutland	2,610	110	4.1	140	5.5
Slough	11,280	1,620	14.4	1,970	17.5
South Gloucestershire	23,000	1,540	6.7	1,900	8.3
Southampton	16,570	3,010	18.2	3,650	22.1
Southend-on-Sea	14,500	2,050	14.1	2,650	18.3
Stockton-on-Tees	18,050	3,090	17,1	3,450	19.1
Stoke-on-Trent	21,480	5,130	23.9	6,190	28.8
Swindon	17,250	1,640	9.5	2,130	12.4
Telford and Wrekin	15,700	2,760	17.6	3,200	20.4
Thurrock	14,120	1,640	11.6	2,120	15.0
Torbay	10,310	1,520	14.8	1,960	19.0
Warrington	18,090	1,480	8.2	1,820	10.1
West Berkshire	12,160	730	6.0	940	7.7
Windsor and Maidenhead	8,320	490	5.9	620	7.4
Wokingham	12,360	430	3.5	550	4.4
York	13,710	1,150	8.4	1,380	10.1

	Secondary				
	Number on roll	*Number of pupils taking free school meals*	*Percentage of pupils taking free school meals*	*Number of pupils known to be eligible for free school meals*	*Percentage of pupils known to be eligible for free school meals*
Leicester South parliamentary constituency	4,650	980	21.1	1,190	25.6
Unitary authorities					
Bath and North East Somerset	12,430	600	4.8	730	5.8
Blackburn with Darwen	9,610	1,840	19.1	2,440	25.4
Blackpool	8,740	1,380	15.7	1,800	20.6
Bournemouth	10,000	720	7.2	1,050	10.5
Bracknell Forest	6,110	250	4.1	330	5.5
Brighton and Hove	12,440	1,510	12.1	2,150	17.3
Bristol, City of	16,660	2,290	13.8	3,170	19.0
Darlington	6,350	670	10.5	1,020	16.1
Derby	15,540	2,010	12.9	2,820	18.1
East Riding of Yorkshire	23,490	1,260	5.4	1,860	7.9
Halton	8,320	1,430	17.1	1,980	23.8
Hartlepool	6,660	1,050	15.8	1,360	20.4
Herefordshire	10,490	530	5.1	750	7.2
Isle of Wight	12,160	1,410	11.6	2,000	16.4
Isles of Scilly	[4]—	[4]—	[4]—	[4]—	[4]—
Kingston Upon Hull, City of	16,220	2,620	16.2	3,840	23.7
Leicester	18,260	3,290	18.0	4,200	23.0
Luton	12,430	2,220	17.9	2,960	23.8
Medway	20,760	1,510	7.3	1,970	9.5
Middlesbrough	5,810	1,180	20.3	1,910	32.9
Milton Keynes	12,870	1,060	8.2	1,360	10.6
North East Lincolnshire	11,730	1,460	12.4	2,130	18.2
North Lincolnshire	10,920	1,080	9.9	1,370	12.5
North Somerset	12,930	780	6.0	1,060	8.2
Nottingham	13,920	3,140	22.5	4,440	31.9
Peterborough	12,760	1,540	12.0	2,050	16.1
Plymouth	19,080	1,710	9.0	2,310	12.1
Poole	8,570	390	4.5	480	5.6
Portsmouth	10,160	1,080	10.7	1,540	15.1
Reading	6,200	570	9.2	850	13.7
Redcar and Cleveland	10,340	1,500	14.5	2,120	20.5
Rutland	2,360	60	2.5	80	3.3
Slough	8,450	890	10.5	1,310	15.5
South Gloucestershire	16,950	740	4.4	1,060	6.3
Southampton	12,250	1,560	12.7	2,090	17.1
Southend-on-Sea	12,210	970	7.9	1,430	11.7
Stockton-on-Tees	12,910	1,410	10.9	2,360	18.3
Stoke-on-Trent	15,220	2,490	16.3	3,180	20.9
Swindon	11,580	800	6.9	1,120	9.7
Telford and Wrekin	10,650	1,420	13.3	1,890	17.7
Thurrock	8,570	840	9.8	1,220	14.3
Torbay	9,210	950	10.3	1,270	13.8
Warrington	14,150	880	6.2	1,240	8.8
West Berkshire	12,180	420	3.4	570	4.6
Windsor and Maidenhead	10,490	420	4.0	550	5.3
Wokingham	11,030	450	4.1	540	4.9
York	10,490	570	5.4	820	7.9

[1] Includes middle schools as deemed.

[2] Includes dually registered pupils and boarding pupils.

[3] Figures have been rounded to the nearest 10.

[4] Not applicable. No schools of this type.

Source:

Annual Schools' Census

Pupils are recorded as being eligible for free school meals if a claim has been made by them or on their behalf by parents and either the relevant authority has confirmed their eligibility or the school or LEA have seen the necessary documentation. Eligibility requires the parent (or pupil) to be in receipt of either income support, or income-based jobseekers allowance, or support under the Immigration and Asylum Act 1999, or child tax credit but not working tax credit and have an annual income (as assessed by the Inland Revenue) that which for when the above information was collected in the tax year 2003/04, would have been £13,280.

Tom Cox: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills how many children living in the London borough of Wandsworth were entitled to free school meals during the last 12 months. [198883]

Mr. Stephen Twigg: The information requested is shown in the following table.

Number and percentage of pupils resident in Wandsworth LEA eligible for free school meals—January 2004

	Total number of resident pupils	Number of pupils eligible for free school meals	Percentage of pupils eligible for free school meals
Total	26,069	7,437	28.5
Primary[1]	16,065	4,782	18.3
Secondary[1, 2]	9,529	2,445	9.4
Special[3]	475	213	0.8

[1] Includes middle schools as deemed.

[2] Includes City Technology Colleges.

[3] Includes maintained and non-maintained special schools.

Source:

Annual Schools Census.

Freedom of Information Act

Mr. Clifton-Brown: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills what assessment he has made of the likely costs to his Department in the first quarter of 2005 of compliance with the provisions of the Freedom of Information Act 2000; and if he will make a statement. [199084]

Mr. Charles Clarke: Based on the anticipated additional volume of requests for information, it is estimated that the cost of compliance with the Freedom of Information Act during the period January to March 2005 will cost around £606,000, an average of £152 per request.

Further Education

Mr. Gill: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills what the level of funding per pupil in further education was in *(a)* Leicester South, *(b)* the Unitary Authority of Leicester City and *(c)* England in each year since 1997. [198666]

Dr. Howells: The Department allocates funds for education and training in the post-16 learning and skills sector to the Learning and Skills Council (LSC). The LSC decides on allocations at individual college and local LSC level. Information about these allocations is not collected by the Department. This is a matter for the LSC. Mark Haysom the Learning and Skills Council's Chief Executive will write to the hon. Member with details of further education spend per pupil in *(a)* Leicester South, *(b)* the Unitary Authority of Leicester City. A copy of his letter will be placed in the House Library.

The following table shows funding per full-time equivalent student in further education in England from 1997–98 to 2004–05. These are cash figures that show total funding for the further education (FE) sector. The figures include monies provided for participation and certain funding for earmarked purposes, including capital, the Standards Fund and other special grants to colleges. These figures are consistent with those published in the 'Departmental Annual Report 2004'.

Funding per full-time equivalent student in further education 1997–98 to 2004–05

	Total funding (£)
1997–98[1]	3,070
1998–99[1]	3,090
1999–2000[1]	3,380
2000–01[1]	3,640
2001–02[1]	4,050
2002–03[2]	4,120
2003–04[3]	4,240
2004–05[3]	4,460

[1] Actual.

[2] Provisional.

[3] Planned.

GCSE Results

Mr. Wills: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills how many *(a)* males and *(b)* females achieved five A*-C grades at GCSE in 2004; and how many (i) males and (ii) females achieved 5 A*-C grades at GCSE in the (A) 10 per cent. most deprived wards and (B) 10 per cent. least deprived wards in 2004. [196374]

Mr. Miliband: The information provided is the latest available and is shown in the following tables. The information has been provided on two bases—one showing the information based on the location of schools, the other based on the residency of the pupil.

(i) Numbers of males and females achieving 5 or more A–C Grades at GCSE and equivalents: 2004 (provisional)*

	All pupils	Males		Females	
	Percentage	Number	Percentage	Number	Percentage
Based on school location:					
All	53.4	158,753	48.4	185,068	58.8
10 per cent. most deprived areas[1]	37.9	8,887	32.9	11,368	43.0
10 per cent. least deprived areas[1]	63.1	26,296	57.6	26,456	68.8

(ii) Numbers of males and females achieving 5 or more A–C Grades at GCSE and equivalents: 2003 (final)*

	All pupils	Males		Females	
	Percentage	Number	Percentage	Number	Percentage
Based on pupil residency:					
All	52.9	152,026	48.0	177,278	58.1
10 per cent. most deprived areas[1]	28.9	8,400	24.2	11,676	33.7
10 per cent. least deprived areas[1]	73.3	19,341	68.2	21,340	78.5

[1] The measure of deprivation used is the 2004 Index of Multiple Deprivation based on Super Output Areas (SOAs), rather than the 2000 Index of Multiple Deprivation based on Wards. The SOAs are a new geography designed by the Office for National Statistics for the collection and publication of small area statistics. They have been designed to provide an improved basis for comparison across the country because the units are more similar in population size.

Green Ministers

Mr. Horam: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills how many departmental Green Ministers there have been since 1997. [198311]

Mr. Stephen Twigg: There have been four Green Minister appointments in the Department for Education and Skills and its predecessor, the Department for Education and Employment, since 1997.

Higher Education

Mr. Chaytor: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills how many entrants to higher education there were from *(a)* sixth form colleges and *(b)* further education colleges in each of the last 10 years. [197823]

Dr. Howells: The latest available information is shown in the table.

UK domiciled acceptances[1] to UK HE institutions—Full-time and sandwich undergraduate courses

	Acceptances who came from:							
	Sixth Form Colleges		*FE/HE colleges*		*Other[2]*		*Total[3]*	
Year of entry	*Number*	*Percentage*	*Number*	*Percentage*	*Number*	*Percentage*	*Number*	*Percentage*
1994	22,400	10.4	65,200	30.4	127,000	59.2	214,700	100.0
1995	23,800	10.6	72,500	32.2	128,600	57.2	224,900	100.0
1996	25,200	11.0	68,900	30.2	134,100	58.8	228,200	100.0
1997	30,000	11.9	81,800	32.4	140,600	55.7	252,400	100.0
1998	29,400	11.9	80,200	32.4	138,000	55.7	247,600	100.0
1999	29,700	11.9	78,400	31.5	140,700	56.5	248,900	100.0
2000	30,300	12.0	78,800	31.3	143,000	56.7	252,000	100.0
2001	31,800	12.2	80,500	30.9	148,500	56.9	260,800	100.0
2002	32,100	12.2	78,000	29.6	153,700	58.3	263,800	100.0
2003	33,500	12.5	78,200	29.2	156,300	58.3	268,000	100.0

[1] Figures cover only those students who provided details of their previous educational establishment. Over the last 10 years the proportion of acceptances who did not provide this data varied between 15 per cent. and 20 per cent.. In 1998, the categorisation of individual schools/colleges was updated to take account of changes in school/college status; as a result, the figures for 1998 and later years are not directly comparable with those for earlier years. Numbers have been rounded to the nearest hundred.

[2] Covers maintained schools, independent schools and a small number of miscellaneous establishments.

[3] Figures may not sum to totals because of rounding.

Source:

Universities and Colleges Admissions Service (UCAS).

Higher Education Funding Council

Brian White: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills when the Higher Education Funding Council will report on its proposals to secure the financial position of the Open University. [195607]

Dr. Howells: The board of the Higher Education Funding Council for England (HEFCE) has convened a panel to consider submissions from the Open University and Birkbeck College. The HEFCE panel has been asked to respond to the HEFCE board by the end of January 2005 at the latest.

Information Technology (Schools)

Dan Norris: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills how many and what proportion of *(a)* primary and *(b)* secondary schools in (i) Wansdyke and (ii) Bath and North East Somerset are equipped with (A) interactive whiteboards and (B) broadband technology. [196760]

Mr. Charles Clarke: The available information is as follows:

For England, my Department estimates that 63 per cent. of primary schools and 92 per cent. of secondary schools were equipped with electronic interactive whiteboards in 2004. The latest figures were published in SFR 27/2004 "Survey of Information and Communications Technology in Schools 2004", which is available on my Department's website: www.dfes.gov.uk/rsgateway/

31 per cent. of primary schools and 91 per cent. of secondary schools were equipped with broadband technology in 2003; the latest figures were published in the Statistical Bulletin "Survey of Information and Communications Technology in Schools 2003", which is available on my Department's website: www.dfes.gov.uk/rsgateway/

Both sets of figures were derived from a sample of schools.

The British Educational Communications and Technology Agency (BECTA) compile figures on broadband connectivity as reported by local education authorities. South Gloucestershire LEA reported that all of its maintained schools were equipped with broadband technology and Bath and North East Somerset LEA reported that 53 per cent. of its maintained schools were equipped with broadband technology.

Integrated Children's System

Tim Loughton: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills how much money it will cost to implement the Integrated Children's System. [195334]

Margaret Hodge: The Integrated Children's System (ICS) is derived from the social services functions under the Children Act 1989 and the Children (Leaving Care) Act 2000. It provides a national framework for social services to undertake their functions in a systematic manner. It does not impose any additional duties or responsibilities on them. Funding has been provided to assist local authorities upgrade their IT systems to help them perform their functions effectively. We do not gather information on the detailed costs for individual local authorities of developing and running the ICS or existing systems which support their social services functions.

The LASSL(2003)7 "Children's Social Services Funding 2004–05" set out the main aspects of the 2004–05 local government finance settlement which is relevant to the funding provided for children's social services. It announced a capital grant of £10 million to support the development of information technology systems for children's social services. The £10 million is the first tranche of a total grant of £30 million payable in 2004/05 and 2005/06.

LAC(2004)22 provided more detailed guidance. It required the grant to be spent on building the information technology systems required to support the implementation of the Integrated Children's System (ICS). This grant is therefore primarily concerned with enabling staff to record and manage electronically case record information about children being served in the context of the Children Act 1989. The Integrated Children's System (ICS) will be quite different from the information database(s). The ICS is a national framework for Councils with Social Services Responsibilities' (CSSRs') to help them work with children in need and their families. It provides a single approach for assessment, planning, intervention and reviewing based on an understanding of children's developmental needs in the context of their families and communities. It is signed to improve outcomes for children in need. The information gathered in the course of working with children and their families must be recorded by social services. These records have traditionally been paper-based but a growing number of councils have electronic record keeping systems in place. As part of implementing the integrated children's system, social service records will all be kept electronically, replacing paper-based systems. The ICS is simply a better way to maintain and meet existing record keeping requirements and, therefore, requires no legislative provision.

The ICS will provide a more effective way of keeping and accessing records relating to social services work with children and families than exists at present. This will help improve standards of service to children and families.

The grant, which was announced in LASSL(2003)7 "Children's Social Services Funding 2004–05", is allocated in a way that reflects the size of local children's social services operation. The FSS formula is used for this purpose. This grant is in addition to the Capital Grant for Improving Information Management supporting Information for Social Care described in Local Authority Circular LAC(2003)17. £25 million was paid in 2003–04 to CSSRs for the purposes of the developmental, improvement or acquisition of systems for improving information management.

In total, we have provided an extra £90 million this year to support councils in improving their services to safeguard children including responding to the recommendations made in Lord Laming's report and the Joint Chief Inspectors' Report, "Safeguarding Children". No conditions have been attached to this money to enable councils the freedom to choose how to target the extra resources so that they can maximise the outcome for children's services in their area. It is open to local authorities to use some of these resources to improving their IT and recording system, as well as for training their staff.

It is for local authorities to decide how best to provide support and services for all children in need in its area. There is no current specific earmarked funding for services; instead, Government funding is allocated to councils with social services responsibilities on the basis of the needs of their populations. A weighted capitation formula is used to determine each body's target fair share of available resources. It is, therefore, for councils, working in partnership with relevant local stakeholders, to determine their spending priorities on the basis of local needs.

Tim Loughton: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills what data the Integrated Children's System will hold; and who will have access to it. [195335]

Margaret Hodge: The IT system, to support the use of Integrated Children's System (ICS), will enable councils with social services responsibilities to hold information electronically about children in need who are in receipt of their services. It will contain information gathered in the course of working with children and their families, which has been recorded by social services. These records have traditionally been paper-based but a growing number of councils have electronic record keeping systems in place. As part of implementing the ICS, social service records will all be kept electronically, replacing paper-based systems.

The legislation on access to personal information held by social services departments is the same for paper-based and electronically kept case records.

The Access to Personal Files Act 1987 gave people the general right to see social work records which related to them produced after 1987. The Data Protection Act (DPA) 1998, which came into force on 1 March 2000, enhances these rights and abolishes the time limit. Any living person, who is the subject of personal information held and processed by a social services authority, has the right of access to those records. The right of access only extends to the person who is the subject of those records, or someone acting on their behalf.

A person does not have the right to know what is recorded about someone else, even someone who is a member of the same family, without that person's consent. Requests from parents to see records relating to a child can be dealt with under these arrangements only where they are acting in the interests of a child who is unable to act for himself, rather than on their own behalf.

The right of access extends to children and young people under 18 who understand what it means to exercise that right. If they do not have sufficient understanding to make the request, a person with parental responsibility can make the request on their behalf.

Local authorities have a general duty in common law to safeguard the confidentiality of personal information, which they hold in connection with their social services functions.

However, there are circumstances in which personal information can be disclosed. For example, an authority may disclose information to social services staff directly involved in a case, or to anyone who cares for one of their clients, such as a voluntary body or foster carers. An authority will also need to disclose personal information to various bodies with the power to order disclosure, when ordered to do so, such as the police, the courts and statutory inquiries.

Tim Loughton: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills what plans there are to pilot the Integrated Children's System. [195340]

Margaret Hodge: Following the publication of the consultation document, "Integrated Children's System—Working with Children in Need and Their Families", in December 2002, a programme of work was set up in partnership with local authorities with social services responsibilities to pilot its introduction and test the integrity of the Integrated Children's System (ICS). This will allow the components of the system to be amended and revised before full introduction.

Pilot Studies

There are two separate but inter-related pilot studies funded by the Government in England and Wales:

> The first study is to assess the development of a multi-agency and integrated approach to implementing the ICS for children in need and their families. It is a two-year study ending in March 2005. There are four pilot sites: York, London borough of Richmond-upon-Thames and Lancashire county council in England and Neath Port Talbot in Wales.
>
> A second study aims to investigate how the ICS operates within local authorities with social services responsibilities. It is a two-year study which commenced in April 2004. It has a particular focus on piloting the system with disabled children and black and minority ethnic children and their families. There are four pilot sites: West Sussex and Newcastle in England, and Flintshire and Wrexham in Wales.

Key Stage 1 Results

Mr. Wills: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills how many *(a)* males and *(b)* females achieved level 2 or above at Key Stage 1 in (i) English, (ii) mathematics and (iii) science in the (A) 10 per cent. most deprived wards and (B) 10 per cent. least deprived wards in 2004. [196400]

Mr. Miliband: The information provided is the latest available and is shown in the tables. The information has been provided on two bases—one showing the information based on the location of the school, the other based on the residency of the pupil.

Number of males and females achieving level 2 or above at Key Stage 1: 2004 (provisional)—Based on school location

		Males					Females				
	All pupils	All males	10% most deprived areas[1]		10% least deprived areas[1]		All females	10% most deprived areas[1]		10% least deprived areas[1]	
Subject	%	%	No.	%	No.	%	%	No.	%	No.	%
English reading	85	81	23,750	70	26,265	89	89	25,952	81	26,528	94
English writing	82	76	21,875	65	25,372	85	87	25,211	78	26,330	93
Maths	90	89	27,674	82	27,882	94	92	27,499	86	26,959	95
Science	90	88	26,657	79	27,955	94	91	26,800	83	27,019	96

Number of males and females achieving level 2 or above at Key Stage 1: 2003 (final)—Based on pupil residency

		Males					Females				
	All pupils	All males	10% most deprived areas[1]		10% least deprived areas[1]		All females	10% most deprived areas[1]		10% least deprived areas[1]	
Subject	%	%	No.	%	No.	%	%	No.	%	No.	%
English reading	84	80	26,051	68	25,239	90	88	29,056	79	24,967	95
English writing	81	76	24,178	63	24,352	87	87	28,343	77	24,698	94
Maths	90	89	31,147	81	26,632	95	91	31,106	85	25,271	96
Science	89	88	29,989	78	26,618	95	91	30,175	82	25,329	97

[1] The measure of deprivation used is the 2004 Index of Multiple Deprivation based on Super Output Area (SOAs), rather than the 2000 Index of Multiple Deprivation based on Wards. The SOAs are a new geography designed by the Office for National Statistics for the collection and publication of small area statistics. They have been designed to provide an improved basis for comparison across the country because the units are more similar in population size.

Key Stage 2 Results

Mr. Wills: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills how many *(a)* males and *(b)* females achieved level 4 or above at Key Stage 2 in (i) English, (ii) mathematics and (iii) science in the (A) 10 per cent. most deprived wards and (B) 10 per cent. least deprived wards in 2004. [196399]

Mr. Miliband: The information provided is the latest available and is shown in the following tables. The information has been provided on two bases—one showing the information based on the location of the school, the other based on the residency of the pupil.

Number of males and females achieving level 4 or above at Key Stage 2: 2004 (provisional)—Based on school location

		Males					Females				
	All pupils	All males	10% most deprived areas[1]		10% least deprived areas[1]		All females	10% most deprived areas[1]		10% least deprived areas[1]	
Subject	%	%	No.	%	No.	%	%	No.	%	No.	%
English	77	72	18,226	59	27,077	82	83	21,545	72	28,465	90
Maths	74	74	19,402	62	27,418	83	74	18,684	63	26,050	83
Science	86	86	23,547	76	30,315	92	86	22,789	76	29,054	92

Number of males and females achieving level 4 or above at Key Stage 2: 2003 (final)—Based on pupil residency

		Males					Females				
	All pupils	All males	10% most deprived areas[1]		10% least deprived areas[1]		All females	10% most deprived areas[1]		10% least deprived areas[1]	
Subject	%	%	No.	%	No.	%	%	No.	%	No.	%
English	75	70	21,112	54	25,404	84	81	24,891	67	25,981	91
Maths	73	73	23,478	60	25,640	85	72	21,801	58	23,833	84
Science	87	86	29,633	75	28,426	94	87	28,602	76	26,944	95

[1] The measure of deprivation used is the 2004 Index of Multiple Deprivation based on Super Output Areas (SOAs), rather than the 2000 Index of Multiple Deprivation based on Wards. The SOAs are a new geography designed by the Office for National Statistics for the collection and publication of small area statistics. They have been designed to provide an improved basis for comparison across the country because the units are more similar in population size.

Key Stage 3 Results

Mr. Wills: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills how many *(a)* males and *(b)* females achieved level 5 or above at Key Stage 3 in (i) English, (ii) mathematics and (iii) science in the (A) 10 per cent. most deprived wards and (B) 10 per cent. least deprived wards in 2004. [196373]

Mr. Miliband: The latest available information are shown in the following tables. The information supplied has been provided on two bases—one showing the information based on the location of schools, the other based on the residency of the pupil.

Number of males achieving level 5 or above at Key Stage 3: 20042

			Males			
	All pupils	All males	10 per cent. most deprived areas[1]		10 per cent. least deprived areas[1]	
Subject	Percentage	Percentage	Number	Percentage	Number	Percentage
(i) Based on school location:						
English	71	64	13,517	48	24,902	76
Maths	73	72	15,988	57	26,704	82
Science	66	65	13,276	47	25,355	77

Number of females achieving level 5 or above at Key Stage 3: 2004[2]

	Females				
	All females	10 per cent. most deprived areas[1]		10 per cent. least deprived areas[1]	
	Percentage	Number	Percentage	Number	Percentage
(i) Based on school location:					
English	77	17,501	65	27.512	86
Maths	74	16,468	61	26,481	83
Science	67	13,900	51	25,365	79

Number of males achieving level 5 or above at Key Stage 3: 2004[2]

			Males			
	All pupils	All males	10 per cent. most deprived areas[1]		10 per cent. least deprived areas[1]	
Subject	Percentage	Percentage	Number	Percentage	Number	Percentage
(ii) Based on pupil residency:						
English	69	62	15,072	41	23,730	81
Maths	71	70	17,989	50	25,236	86
Science	69	68	16,575	45	25,380	87

Number of females achieving level 5 or above at Key Stage 3: 2004[2]

	Females				
	All females	*10 per cent. most deprived areas*[1]		*10 per cent. least deprived areas*[1]	
	Percentage	*Number*	*Percentage*	*Number*	*Percentage*
(ii) Based on pupil residency:					
English	76	20,366	57	24,697	90
Maths	72	18,484	52	23,922	88
Science	69	16,311	45	23,689	87

[1] The measure of deprivation used is the 2004 Index of Multiple Deprivation based on Super Output Areas (SOAs), rather than the 2000 Index of Multiple Deprivation based on Wards. The SOAs are a new geography designed by the Office for National Statistics for the collection and publication of small area statistics. They have been designed to provide an improved basis for comparison across the country because the units are more similar in population size.

[2] Provisional

Labour Market Participation

Mr. Gordon Prentice: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills what recent assessment he has made of the participation of Muslim women in the labour market. [198379]

Jane Kennedy: I have been asked to reply.

Labour Force Survey Spring 2004[1] data shows 34 per cent. of Muslim women are active in the labour market compared with 73 per cent. of all women. We have a strategy in place to help disadvantaged ethnic minority groups improve their access to employment, including those from Muslim communities, and this is being taken forward by the Ethnic Minority Employment Task Force.

Muslim women have access to the full range of help offered by Jobcentre Plus both mainstream programmes and specific measures, such as Ethnic Minority Outreach, to help attract and support those facing significant barriers to work.

We are undertaking research to improve our understanding of the problems faced by ethnic minorities in getting jobs. Current research projects include a survey of the barriers faced by inactive and unemployed Pakistani and Bangladeshi people, both men and women.

[1] Labour Force Survey four quarter average to spring 2004.

Learning and Skills Council

Mr. Oaten: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills (1) if he will require the Learning and Skills Council to make payments to higher education colleges to cover the costs of interest and bank charges arising from late payments of Learning and Skills Council funds; [198516]

(2) what assurance he has sought from the Learning and Skills Council that higher education college funding will be allocated on time for financial year 2005–06. [198517]

Mr. Ivan Lewis: The Learning and Skills Council (LSC) is responsible for the planning and funding of post-16 learning and it is for the LSC to agree funding arrangements with higher education colleges. As the information requested relates to the LSC's operational responsibilities, the LSC's chief executive, Mark Haysom, will write to the hon. Member with the information requested and a copy of his reply will be placed in the Library.

We are in regular dialogue with the LSC as it progresses its planning and funding arrangements with colleges and providers. As planning and funding allocations are the operational responsibilities of the LSC, Mark Haysom, will write to the hon. Member with information on the timetable and a copy of his reply will be placed in the Library.

Literacy

Jon Trickett: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills what recent discussions he has held with the Chancellor on improving financial literacy in areas of economic deprivation; and if he will make a statement. [198748]

Mr. Ivan Lewis: There have been no recent discussions between the Chancellor and the Secretary of State on improving financial literacy in areas of economic deprivation.

However DfES has been working with HM Treasury on the Community Finance and Learning Initiative (CFLI) and Savings Gateway pilots. The outcomes of the CFLI pilots will be published shortly. The Savings Gateway pilot will finish shortly, with the evaluation due in spring 2005.

The Department is also funding a financial literacy project as part of "Skills for Life", the national strategy to improve adult literacy and numeracy skills. This has included the development of a range of financial literacy teaching and learning resources and guides, as well as trialling innovative methods of delivery and developing local partnerships between tutors and the advice sector. The Department is working closely with the Financial Services Authority to ensure its work supports the National Financial Capability Strategy.

In addition, personal finance education is covered in the national curriculum as part of personal, social and health education (PSHE) and citizenship education. The curriculum for citizenship (introduced as a statutory subject in secondary schools in 2002) provides the opportunity for teaching about the economy, business and enterprise. The Department published guidance for teachers, "Financial Capability through Personal Financial Education", in 2000.

Local Government Finance

Mr. Blizzard: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills if he will ensure that the sparsity factor in local education authority grant funding for 2005–06 will take account of *(a)* the costs to schools of the workforce reform agenda, *(b)* the number of small schools in a local education authority, *(c)* broadband connection costs and *(d)* the cost of school transport. [199120]

Mr. Miliband: The calculation of Education Formula Spending Share includes a factor for sparsity in both the primary sub-block, recognising the higher costs of maintaining small schools, and in the LEA block, recognising the higher costs of transport in sparse areas.

We intend that the sparsity factor in the primary sub-block be enhanced in 2005–06 to reflect the slightly higher costs faced by small schools due to workforce reform (although the smallest School Standards Grant band has been increased in 2005–06 as the main way of dealing with the higher costs of workforce reform for small schools).

The sparsity factor is already designed to take into account the fact that sparse areas have a greater proportion of small primary schools and that these small schools will face higher running costs, including broadband connection costs, and that sparse areas face higher transport costs.

Medicine

Mr. Clappison: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills how many students have been admitted to university to read medicine on courses which lead to registration as doctors with *(a)* less than three Bs at A level and *(b)* less than three Cs at A level as a result of widening participation schemes in each of the last five years. [198255]

Dr. Howells: Admission of students to medical, and other, courses is a matter for individual institutions. The main scheme for widening participation is Aimhigher which aims to raise the attainment levels of young people, their aspirations towards university, and improve progression. Most activities are not subject-specific, although some locally arranged activities are designed to raise awareness of and encourage progression to specific subjects such as medicine. Aimhigher does not include the delivery of degree or other higher education programmes. Information on the pre-entry qualifications of students entering first-degree courses in medicine is, however, provided in the following table.

Students from England entering first degree courses in medicine

		Of which, those with scores equivalent to:	
Year of entry	*All entrants with A levels*	*Less than 3 Bs*[1]	*Less than 3 Cs*
1998/99	2,920	75	30
1999/00	2,835	135	40
2000/01	3,155	160	30
2001/02	3,420	235	60
2002/03	3,950	205	90

[1] Including students with less than 3 Cs.

Source:

Higher Education Statistics Agency (HESA). Figures have been rounded to the nearest 5.

Mr. Clappison: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills (1) how many schools are taking part in widening participation schemes for entry to university to read medicine; [198256]

(2) what estimate he has made of the cost of programmes for widening participation in the study of medicine at university; [198400]

(3) which universities *(a)* offer and *(b)* plan to offer extended medical degree programmes or their equivalent for students seeking to study medicine with a view to registration as a doctor under the Government's widening participation schemes; [198401]

(4) how many students have been admitted to universities this year to read medicine under widening participation schemes; and what estimate he has made of the number of students who will be admitted in each of the next five years. [198402]

Dr. Howells: The Government's aim is that everyone with the potential to benefit from higher education should have an opportunity to do so. The main scheme for widening participation is Aimhigher, a programme jointly funded by the Department for Education and Skills, the Learning and Skills Council and the Higher Education Funding Council for England. Since August 2004, Aimhigher has been a national programme, operating most intensively in disadvantaged areas.

Aimhigher aims to raise the attainment levels of young people, their aspirations towards university, and improve progression. Most activities are not subject specific, although some locally arranged activities are designed to raise awareness of and encourage progression to specific subjects such as medicine. The Department does not collect information on the exact nature of locally arranged activities, their cost, or the number of schools involved. Aimhigher does not include the delivery of degree or other higher education programmes.

Foundation Years may contribute to the widening participation activities undertaken by universities. Foundation Years in medicine are designed to assist potential students to gain the knowledge and learning skills needed for degree study, including allowing students with good grades in non-science subjects to study the basic science needed to start a medical degree course. Information on the number of students who have entered a degree programme in medicine having completed a foundation year is not available.

Ministerial Visits (Wandsworth)

Tom Cox: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills how many Ministers from his Department have visited the London borough of Wandsworth in each of the last five years; and what the purpose was of each visit. [197123]

Mr. Stephen Twigg: From the information available, the following visits to the London borough of Wandsworth have been undertaken by Ministers in this Department and its predecessor, the Department for Education and Employment, in the last five years.

	Number of visits by Ministers	*Purpose*
1999	0	
2000	1	South Thames College/Wandsworth Adult College—for the opening ceremony of the Millennium Centre
2001	0	—
2002	4	Actors' Graduation Ceremony BP Modern Apprenticeship Event HE/FE Community Partnership Conference Visit to Sir James Barrie School
2003	3	Visit to Chestnut Grove School Visit to Battersea Technology College, and Southfields Community School. Ravenstone Primary School, opening of school grounds
2004	5	Visit to South Thames College Southfields Secondary School (Launch of Chartered London Teacher Scheme) Elliot School (Modern Foreign Languages related visit). Allfarthing Primary School (Modern Foreign Languages related visit) Visit to a family in Wandsworth during Share the Care week

Modern Apprenticeships

Mr. McWalter: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills what progress has been made by the Modern Apprenticeships Task Force in encouraging businesses to participate in the Modern Apprenticeship scheme. [198852]

Mr. Ivan Lewis: The Apprenticeships Task Force chaired by Sir Roy Gardner, Chief Executive of Centrica plc, was asked to focus on increasing the number of employers taking on apprentices. A significant part of the Task Force's work has involved members championing Apprenticeships within their sector and the wider business community through identifying and promoting the business benefits their companies enjoy from employing apprentices. In addition members are leading by example by increasing the number of apprentices recruited by their companies. The Task Force has also played a key role in supporting the Learning and Skills Council in its ongoing marketing campaign aimed at employers, such as a recent series of articles in the business section of *The Mail on Sunday*. More information about the work of the Task Force is available on their website www.employersforapprentices.gov.uk and in its Interim Report, which is due to be published shortly.

Mr. McWalter: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills (1) how many young people aged 16 to 25 years have successfully completed a modern apprenticeship in Hertfordshire within the last five years; and what the figures are in Lancashire; [198854]

(2) what proportion of places on the Modern Apprenticeship scheme are in electrical engineering. [198853]

Mr. Ivan Lewis: This is a matter for the Learning and Skills Council. Mark Haysom, the Council's Chief Executive, will write to the hon. Member with this information and a copy of his reply will be placed in the House Library.

Chris Ruane: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills how many Modern Apprenticeships have been *(a)* started and *(b)* finished since their inception, broken down by trade. [198856]

Mr. Ivan Lewis *[holding answer 16 November 2004]:* The total numbers of government supported Apprenticeships to have been *(a)* started and *(b)* finished, up until the end of July 2003 are shown in the table.

Thousand

	Starts[1]	*Leavers*[2]
Advanced Apprenticeship	477.6	446.6
Apprenticeships (at level 2)	469.3	347.2

[1] Excludes transfers between programmes.

[2] Includes those who completed the Apprenticeship framework, those who achieved the NVQ component, but did not complete the framework and those who left early without achieving the NVQ.

Sources:

DfES Statistical First Release (SFR) "Government-Supported, Work-based Learning for Young People in England: 2001/02" Reference: SFR27/2002

LSC SFR "Further Education and Work Based Learning for Young People—Learner Numbers in England: 2002/03" Reference: ILR/SFR02

LSC SFR "Further Education and Work Based Learning for Young People—Learner Outcomes in England: 2002/03" Reference: ILR/SFR04

Training and Enterprise Council (TEC) management information

Because of learners transferring between programmes, it is not possible to estimate the number in learning from the starts and leavers figures given in the table.

It is not possible to break these figures down by trade. However, the more recent data are broken down by sector framework and published on the Learning and Skills Council (LSC) Apprenticeship Frameworks website: http://maframeworks.lsc.qov.uk/.

Motor Servicing/Vehicle Industry

Chris Ruane: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills what estimate he has made of the number of skilled technicians entering the motor servicing industry in the last year for which figures are available; and if he will make a statement. [198857]

Mr. Ivan Lewis: The Department does not collect overall data on the number of skilled technicians entering the motor servicing industry. However a major route for entry is via a Motor Industry apprenticeship.

In 2002/03 there were 3,471 people who completed a Motor Industry apprenticeship and gained a full framework or NVQ achievement (source http://maframeworks.lsc.gov.uk).

Automotive Skills, the Sector Skills Council for the automotive industry, will be undertaking research into skills shortages and skills gaps affecting the sector in the future.

Chris Ruane: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills how many fully qualified motor mechanics there have been in each of the last 30 years. [198859]

Mr. Ivan Lewis: The Department does not collect data on the number of fully qualified motor mechanics.

Automotive Skills, the Sector Skills Council for the automotive industry, will be undertaking research into skills shortages and skills gaps affecting the sector in the future.

Chris Ruane: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills what provision is in place to train motor mechanics in new computerised automated motor vehicle technologies. [198860]

Mr. Ivan Lewis: The LSC has, in the last three years, recognised 10 Centres of Vocational Excellence (CoVEs) in motor vehicle technology, resulting in a significant increase in the capacity to support the delivery of training in this specialist area. This investment will have a continuous effect through the key role of the CoVEs as disseminators of good practice and quality improvement across the whole college network.

On-going developments in this area will be taken forward through the joint working between the LSC and Automotive Skills, the Sector Skills Council for the industry within the Sector Skills Agreement Process. Additionally, manufacturers and equipment suppliers also provide training in this area.

Chris Ruane: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills what plans he has to introduce nationally-recognised qualifications for the UK motor vehicle industry. [198810]

Mr. Ivan Lewis: There are a range of National Vocational Qualifications and Vocationally Related Qualifications available for both motor vehicle manufacture and retail service. These qualifications are nationally accredited by the Qualifications Curriculum Authority for England, and Awdurdod Cymwysterau, Cwricwlwm ac Asesu Cymru (ACCAC) for Wales.

Chris Ruane: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills what the average amount of training delivered per technician given by the motor manufacturing industry was in England in 2003–04; and which motor vehicle manufacturers provided levels of training *(a)* above and *(b)* below the average. [198811]

Mr. Ivan Lewis: The statistics collected on training in the motor manufacturing sector do not separate technician training from training for other employees such as managers. However People Skills Scoreboard, which is a joint Engineering Employers Federation/Science, Engineering and Manufacturing Technologies publication provides information on general training in the sector. Participation in the Scoreboard, which is used for benchmarking purposes, is voluntary. For more information on People Skills Scoreboard see website www.peopleskillsscoreboard.com

Of the larger companies (over 200 employees) taking part in the People Skills Scoreboard, the following firms provide five days per person or more off-the-job training for their employees:

Nissan Motor Manufacturing (UK) Ltd

TKA Talent

Delphi Diesel Systems

Glacier Vandervell Inc

Ryobi Aluminium Casting (UK) Ltd

A P Hydraulics Ltd

Plaxton

Siebe Automotive (UK) Ltd

The companies with below average off-the-job training days per employee, tend to be small companies (there are no companies in the "bottom 10" with more than 50 employees).

Chris Ruane: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills (1) what plans he has to publicise best practice in the motor vehicle maintenance trade in the UK; [198812]

(2) what assessment he has made of the robustness of methods for assessing technical competence in the UK motor vehicle maintenance industry. [198815]

Mr. Ivan Lewis: The DFES has licensed and funded a new Sector Skills Council, Automotive Skills, who are working with the sector's professional bodies and trade associations—the Retail Motor Industry Federation (RMIF), the Institute of the Motor Industry (IMI) and the Society of Motor Manufacturers and Traders (SMMT) amongst others—to explore the scope for a coherent response to raising skill levels across the industry.

Chris Ruane: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills if he will introduce ongoing effective technician competence assessment in the UK motor industry. [198813]

Mr. Ivan Lewis: The UK Motor Industry is considering this issue at present. The Institute of the Motor Industry are currently piloting off-the-job competence testing of technicians and keeping other key partners, including the DTI, the Automotive Skills SSC and the Consumer Association, informed of progress.

Chris Ruane: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills what financial assistance is available to the UK motor vehicle maintenance industry to improve standards of training and competence. [198814]

Mr. Ivan Lewis: Automotive Skills, the recently approved SSC for the automotive sector, will be responsible for establishing the requirements for the sector and developing the responses to these. Automotive Skills will be eligible for up to £5 million of assistance from the Sector Skills Development Agency over the next three years for carrying out its work.

Employers are eligible for financial assistance towards training for a wide range of employer developed schemes/qualifications. These include National Vocational Qualifications Level 2 (through the Employer Training Pilots, currently operating in 20 of the 47 LSC areas) and Apprenticeship training.

Nursery Classes

Mr. Gordon Prentice: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills how many *(a)* three and *(b)* four-year-olds in Pendle attended nursery classes in (i) 1997 and (ii) 2003. [197032]

Margaret Hodge: All four-year-olds in England have been entitled to a free part-time early education place since September 1998. All three-year-olds in England have been entitled to a free part-time early education place since April 2004.

The available information on the numbers of free part-time early education places taken up by three and four-year-olds in Pendle parliamentary constituency and Lancashire local education authority area is shown in the tables. Information for private and voluntary providers is available for Lancashire but not for Pendle.

Number of free nursery education places taken up 3 and 4-year-olds in Lancashire local education authority area, 1997 and 2003

	3-year-olds			4-year-olds		
Position in January each year	*Maintained nursery and primary schools*[1]	*Other maintained and private, voluntary and independent providers*[2]	*Total 3-year-olds*	*Maintained nursery and primary schools*[3]	*Other maintained and private, voluntary and independent providers*[4]	*Total 4-year-olds*
1997	4,400	0	4,400	n/a	n/a	[5]12,400
2003	3,900	6,200	10,100	10,200	2,500	12,700

n/a = not available.

[1] Headcount of children aged three at 31 December in the previous calendar year from the Annual Schools' Census.

[2] Part-time equivalent number of children aged three at 31 December in the previous calendar year from the Nursery Education Grant data collection exercise.

[3] Headcount of children aged four at 31 December in the previous calendar year from the Annual Schools' Census.

[4] Part-time equivalent number of children aged four at 31 December in the previous calendar year from the Early Years Census Supplementary data collection exercise [illegible] the Annual Schools' Census.

[5] Part-time equivalent number of children aged four at 31 December in the previous calendar year from the Nursery Education Grant data collection exercise.

Number of free nursery education places[1, 2] taken up 3 and 4-year-olds in maintained nursery and primary schools, Pendle parliamentary constituency area, 1997 and 2003

	3-year-olds				4-year-olds			
		Maintained primary schools				Maintained primary schools		
Position in January each year	*Maintained nursery schools*	*Nursery classes*	*Other classes*[3]	*Total 3-year-olds*	*Maintained nursery schools*	*Nursery classes*	*Other classes*[3]	*Total 4-year-olds*
1997	370	170	0	540	160	60	800	1,020
2003	370	150	0	520	140	50	740	940

[1] Headcount of children aged three and four at 31 December in the previous calendar year.

[2] Figures are rounded to the nearest 10 places.

[3] Includes reception classes and classes not designated as nursery classes.

Source:

Annual Schools' Census.

The latest figures on early education places for three and four-year-olds in England were published in Statistical First Release 39/2004, "Provision for Children Under Five Years of Age in England—January 2004 (final)", which is available on the Department's website: www.dfes.gov.uk/rsgateway/

Shona McIsaac: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills how many *(a)* 3-year-olds and *(b)* 4-year-olds attended nursery classes in (i) 1997 and (ii) 2003. [194615]

Margaret Hodge: All 4-year-olds in England have been entitled to a free part-time early education place since September 1998. All 3-year-olds in England have been entitled to a free part-time early education place since April 2004.

The available information on the numbers of free part-time early education places taken up by 3 and 4-year-olds in England is shown in the table.

Number[1] of free nursery education places taken up by 3 and 4-year-olds, England, 1997 and 2003

	Maintained nursery and primary schools[2,3]					
		Primary schools				
Position in January each year	*Nursery schools*	*Nursery classes*[4]	*Other classes*[5]	*Total*	*Other maintained and private, voluntary and independent providers*	*Total*
3-year-olds						
1997	30,800	182,500	900	214,200	0	214,200
2003	27,900	188,300	2,500	218,700	[5]226,100	444,800

Number[1] of free nursery education places taken up by 3 and 4-year-olds, England, 1997 and 2003

	Maintained nursery and primary schools[2,3]					
		Primary schools				
Position in January each year	*Nursery schools*	*Nursery classes*	*Other classes[4]*	*Total*	*Other maintained and private, voluntary and independent providers*	*Total*
4-year-olds						
1997	20,000	134,200	345,200	499,300	[6]76,900	[7]576,200
2003	12,600	102,600	357,000	472,200	[8]109,600	581,800

[1] Rounded to the nearest 100 places.

[2] Headcount of children aged 3 at 31 December in the previous calendar year from the Annual Schools Census.

[3] Headcount of children aged 4 at 31 December in the previous calendar year from the ASC.

[4] Includes reception classes and other classes not designated as nursery classes.

[5] Part-time equivalent number of children aged 3 at 31 December in the previous calendar year from the NEG data collection exercise.

[6] Part-time equivalent number of children aged 4 at 31 December in the previous calendar year derived from the Nursery Education Grant (NEG) data collection exercise and the ASC.

[7] Part-time equivalent number of children aged 4 at 31 December in the previous calendar year from the NEG data collection exercise.

[8] Part-time equivalent number of children aged 4 at 31 December in the previous calendar year from the Early Years Census Supplementary data collection exercise and the ASC.

The latest figures on early education places for 3 and 4-year-olds in England were published in Statistical First Release 39/2004 "Provision for children under five years of age in England-January 2004 (final)", which is available on the Department's website www.dfes.gov.uk/rsgateway/.

Jon Cruddas: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills how many *(a)* three and *(b)* four-year-olds in Dagenham attended nursery classes in (i) 1997 and (ii) 2003. [196450]

Margaret Hodge: All four-year-olds in England have been entitled to a free part-time early education place since September 1998. All three-year-olds in England have been entitled to a free part-time early education place since April 2004.

The available information on the numbers of free part-time early education places taken up by three and four-year-olds in Dagenham Parliamentary Constituency and Barking and Dagenham local education authority area is shown in the tables. Information for private and voluntary providers is available for Barking and Dagenham local education authority area but not for Dagenham.

Number of free nursery education places taken up 3 and 4-year-olds—Barking and Dagenham local education authority area, 1997 and 2003

	3-year-olds				
		Maintained primary schools[1]			
Position in January each year:	*Maintained nursery schools[1]*	*Nursery classes*	*Other classes*	*Other maintained and private, voluntary and independent providers[2]*	*Total 3-year-olds*
1997	[5]—	1,330	0	0	1,330
2003	[5]—	1,310	0	360	1,660

	4-year-olds				
		Maintained primary schools[3]			
Position in January each year:	*Maintained nursery schools[3]*	*Nursery classes*	*Other classes*	*Other maintained and private, voluntary and independent providers[4]*	*Total 4-year-olds*
1997	[5]—	n/a	n/a	n/a	[6]2,400
2003	[5]—	740	1,580	70	2,390

n/a—not available

[1] Head-count of children aged three at 31 December in the previous calendar year from the Annual Schools' Census.

[2] Part-time equivalent number of children aged three at 31 December in the previous calendar year from the Nursery Education Grant data collection exercise.

[3] Head-count of children aged four at 31 December in the previous calendar year from the Annual Schools' Census.

[4] Part-time equivalent number of children aged four at 31 December in the previous calendar year from the Early Years Census Supplementary data collection exercise and the Annual Schools' Census.

[5] Not applicable (no schools of this type)

[6] Part-time equivalent number of children aged four at 31 December in the previous calendar year from the Nursery Education Grant data collection exercise.

Number of free nursery education places 12 taken up 3 and 4-year-olds in maintained nursery and primary schools—Dagenham parliamentary constituency area, 1997 and 2003

		3-year-olds		
		Maintained primary schools		
Position in January each year:	*Maintained nursery schools*	*Nursery classes*	*Other classes*[3]	*Total 3-year-olds*
1997	[4]—	730	0	730
2003	[4]—	660	0	660

		4-year-olds		
		Maintained primary schools		
Position in January each year:	*Maintained nursery schools*	*Nursery classes*	*Other classes*[3]	*Total 4-year-olds*
1997	[4]—	380	850	1,230
2003	[4]—	360	720	1,080

[1] Headcount of children aged three and four at 31 December in the previous calendar year

[2] Figures are rounded to the nearest 10 places.

[3] Includes reception classes and classes not designated as nursery classes

[4] Not applicable (no schools of this type)

Source:

Annual Schools' Census

The latest figures on early education places for three and four-year-olds in England were published in Statistical First Release 39/2004 "Provision for children under five years of age in England—January 2004 (final)", which is available on the Department's website www.dfes.gov.uk/rsgateway/.

Office of Fair Access

Mr. Clappison: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills what plans he has to issue his final guidance to the director of the Office of Fair Access. [197847]

Dr. Howells: The Secretary of State's letter of guidance to the Director of Fair Access, Sir Martin Harris, was placed in the House of Commons Library on 25 October.

Physical Education

Mr. Amess: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills what the average amount of time allocated for physical activity in *(a)* primary and *(b)* secondary schools is; and if he will make a statement. [196505]

Mr. Stephen Twigg: This information is not collected in the format requested. However, data on the amount of time 5 to 16-year-olds from school sport partnership schools spend on high quality physical education (PE) and school sport is collected through the annual PE, School Sport and Club Links survey. The results of the 2003–04 survey, in which 6,500 schools took part, were published on 29 April and copies were placed in the Libraries of both Houses.

The 2003–04 survey found that, on average, primary schools within a school sport partnership devote 96 minutes curriculum time each week to PE, and that secondary schools, on average, devote 110 minutes per week.

In addition, the survey found that, overall, 62 per cent. of pupils in schools within a school sport partnership were spending at least two hours in a typical week on high quality PE and school sport. 44 per cent. received this entirely within curriculum time.

Playing Fields

Mr. Byrne: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills whether, under new guidance restricting the sale of school playing fields, 100 per cent. of the proceeds from such land sales must be spent in the local community; and what definition of 'local community he uses in such guidance. [197268]

Mr. Stephen Twigg: The new Guidance restricting the sale of school playing fields sets out the criteria against which applications for consent to dispose, or change the use, of school playing fields are assessed. The three main criteria are:

> schools' needs: that playing field provision and curriculum requirements at the school making the disposal, and at other schools in the local area, are met;
>
> Community use: that community use of a school's playing fields is taken into account, with alternative facilities made available if necessary; and
>
> finance: that any sale proceeds must be used to improve outdoor sports provision wherever possible, so that local authorities will have to provide first class outdoor facilities for schools before introducing new indoor sports or other educational buildings;

There is no requirement to use proceeds from the sale of school land to provide local community facilities. We encourage all schools, wherever possible, to open up on site facilities to help them become the centre of the communities that they serve.

Pre-School Learning

Mr. Andrew Turner: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills (1) what guidelines he issues to pre-school settings to ensure that pupils are ready to be taught in English in year R; [199162]

(2) what proportion of pupils in each local education authority are not able to be taught in English in year R. [199163]

Margaret Hodge: All providers in receipt of Government funding to deliver early education are under a statutory obligation to deliver the Foundation Stage Curriculum—the first stage of the National Curriculum. The Foundation Stage is a distinct phase of education, to meet the needs of children aged from three to the end of the reception year in primary schools. There will be children in Foundation Stage settings who will have a home language other than English. Practitioners plan to meet the needs of all children, including those from diverse linguistic backgrounds. The curriculum states that learning opportunities should be planned to help children develop their English by, for example, providing a range of opportunities for children to engage in speaking and listening activities in English with peers and adults.

Information on the proportion of children not able to be taught in English in the reception year is not collected centrally.

Prison Education

Mr. Oaten: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills who has responsibility for providing the *(a)* funding and *(b)* management of diplomas and higher education courses for prisoners. [198041]

Mr. Ivan Lewis: The information requested is as follows:

(a) Policy responsibility for the learning of offenders in prisons rests with the Department for Education and Skills, working closely with Prison and Probation Services. My Department provides funding to the Prison Service in support of the range of learning needs.

Since 2002, we have provided £728,000, working with the Prisoners' Education Trust to support undergraduate students on Open University courses and to support the introduction of new "Openings" courses, which provide access to HE courses for those without suitable prior qualifications. Other charitable bodies such as the Franklin Trust, also support some distance learning and higher education.

(b) The management of particular programmes within prison is the responsibility of establishments themselves. Almost all prisons now have a Head of Learning and Skills to lead and manage the service. Provision is provided according to a needs analysis which takes into account factors such as the individual's needs, the priorities of the prison and labour market needs.

Pupil Exclusions

Tom Cox: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills how many young people have been excluded by each local education authority in Greater London in each of the last three years. [198884]

Mr. Stephen Twigg: The information requested is shown in the table.

Maintained primary and secondary schools[1] and special schools[2]: number of permanent exclusions, Academic years 2000/01, 2001/02 and 2002/03, each local education authority in London

	2000/01[3]		*2001/02*		*2002/03*	
	Number of permanent exclusions	*Percentage of the school population[4]*	*Number of permanent exclusions*	*Percentage of the school population[4]*	*Number of permanent exclusions*	*Percentage of the school population[4]*
London	1,448	0.14	1,456	0.14	1,473	0.14
Inner London	538	0.15	489	0.13	465	0.13
Camden	34	0.15	28	0.12	33	0.15
City of London	0	0.00	0	0.00	0	0.00
Hackney	34	0.13	33	0.12	27	0.10
Hammersmith and Fulham	40	0.24	37	0.22	32	0.19
Haringey	30	0.09	32	0.09	32	0.10
Islington	19	0.08	12	0.05	18	0.08
Kensington and Chelsea	17	0.16	13	0.12	16	0.15
Lambeth	41	0.15	38	0.14	33	0.12
Lewisham	83	0.24	66	0.19	44	0.13
Newham	36	0.07	50	0.10	64	0.13
Southwark	63	0.18	50	0.14	47	0.13
Tower Hamlets	46	0.13	38	0.10	43	0.12
Wandsworth	66	0.23	65	0.23	41	0.15
Westminster	29	0.16	27	0.14	35	0.18
Outer London	910	0.13	967	0.14	1,008	0.14
Barking and Dagenham	19	0.06	24	0.08	30	0.10
Barnet	55	0.11	54	0.11	50	0.11
Bexley	79	0.20	60	0.15	71	0.18
Brent	49	0.13	38	0.10	54	0.14
Bromley	61	0.13	85	0.18	80	0.17
Croydon	118	0.24	145	0.29	124	0.25
Ealing	33	0.08	64	0.15	56	0.13
Enfield	72	0.15	72	0.15	56	0.12
Greenwich	39	0.11	51	0.14	46	0.13
Harrow	68	0.23	68	0.24	68	0.24
Havering	32	0.09	45	0.12	35	0.09
Hillingdon	65	0.16	43	0.10	50	0.12
Hounslow	48	0.13	59	0.16	77	0.21
Kingston upon Thames	8	0.04	3	0.01	5	0.02
Merton	32	0.14	23	0.10	39	0.17
Redbridge	28	0.06	32	0.07	65	0.15
Richmond upon Thames	31	0.15	31	0.16	49	0.25
Sutton	24	0.08	35	0.12	14	0.04
Waltham Forest	49	0.14	35	0.10	39	0.11

[1] Includes middle schools as deemed.

[2] Includes Maintained and Non-Maintained Special Schools.

[3] Permanent exclusions for 2000/01 are estimated as a number of local education authorities did not confirm the data for their schools.

[4] The number of permanent exclusions expressed as a percentage of the number (headcount) pupils in Primary, Secondary and Special schools, excluding dually registered pupils in special schools.

Source:

Annual Schools' Census.

Mr. Gill: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills how many pupils have been expelled from *(a)* primary and *(b)* secondary schools in Leicester in each year since 1997. [198658]

Mr. Stephen Twigg: The information requested is shown in the table.

Maintained primary and secondary schools[1]: number of permanent exclusions, academic years 1997/1998 to 2002/2003, Leicester local education authority

	Primary		Secondary	
	Number of permanent exclusions	*Percentage of the school population[2]*	*Number of permanent exclusions*	*Percentage of the school population[2]*
1997/98	18	0.06	80	0.44
1998/99	15	0.05	52	0.29
1999/2000	22	0.07	77	0.43
2000/01	30	0.10	80	0.44
2001/02	20	0.07	87	0.48
2002/03	19	0.07	59	0.32

[1] Includes middle schools as deemed.

[2] The number of permanent exclusions expressed as a percentage of the number (headcount) of pupils in primary and secondary schools, excluding dually registered pupils.

Source:
Annual Schools' Census

Pupil Referral Units

Mr. Hoban: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills what assessment he has made of the level of attainment at Key Stage 4 of pupils in Pupil Referral units. [194764]

Mr. Miliband: Through the pupil level annual school census (taken in January of each year) it is possible to identify which pupils are recorded on the roll of a school. Pupils in Pupil Referral Units can also be recorded on the roll of a mainstream school. In these cases the pupil is counted at the mainstream school, leaving only those pupils solely registered at a PRU contributing towards results for PRUs. The majority of pupils should only be in Pupil Referral Units (PRUs) for a short time, as the focus should be primarily on getting them back in to a mainstream school as soon as possible.

Levels of attainment by pupils solely registered in PRUs are variable. Provisional figures for 2004 indicate that 0.4 per cent. of 15-year-old pupils in Pupil Referral Units in England achieved 5 or more grades A*-C at GCSE and Equivalent, 4.7 per cent. achieved 5 or more grades A*-G and 48.6 per cent. achieved at least one pass in an approved qualification.

The attainment by pupils, who are solely-registered at a PRU at the time of the Pupil Level Annual School Census, over the last 3 years is shown within the table:

	Number of 15-year-old pupils in PRUs	*Proportion of 15-year-old pupils in PRUs achieving:*			*Proportion of 15-year-old pupils Nationally achieving:*		
		5+ A-C*	*5+ A*-G*	*Any passes*	*5+ A*-C*	*5+ A*-G*	*Any passes*
2004[1]	4,727	0.4	4.7	48.6	53.4	88.6	4.2
2003	3,999	0.4	4.4	36.5	52.9	88.8	5.2
2002	2,960	1.5	8.6	63.0	51.6	88.9	5.4

[1] Provisional.

The 2004 figures quoted within the table relate to results in GCSEs and a wide range of other qualifications approved for use pre-16 which are being reported for the first time this year. Figures shown for 2002 and 2003 are based on results on GCSEs and GNVQs only.

Mr. Hoban: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills for what reasons data on pupil attendance are not published for pupil referral units. [196996]

Mr. Stephen Twigg: While providers of alternative provision have a common law duty of care to ensure the health, safety and welfare of a pupil, there is no legislation requiring them to keep attendance records. As a result, the Department can neither collect nor publish data on pupil attendance at pupil referral units or other alternative provision.

School Finance

Mr. Evans: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills what the cost per pupil of education in *(a)* primary and *(b)* secondary schools was in the latest year for which figures are available. [198839]

Mr. Miliband: The information requested is contained within the following table.

Unit cost per pupil in primary and secondary schools in England

	2002–03 (£)
School based expenditure[1,2] per pupil	
Primary education	2,530
Secondary education	3,230
Combined LEA and school expenditure[3,4,5] per pupil	
Total expenditure	3,440

[1] School based expenditure includes only expenditure incurred directly by the schools. This includes the pay of teachers and school-based support staff, school premises costs, books and equipment, and certain other supplies and services, less any capital items funded from recurrent spending and income from sales, fees and charges and rents and rates. This excludes the central cost of support services such as home to school transport, local authority administration and the financing of capital expenditure.

[2] Pupil numbers include only those pupils attending maintained establishments within each sector and are drawn from the DfES Annual Schools Census adjusted to be on a financial year basis.

[3] The combined LEA and school based expenditure includes all expenditure on the education of children in LEA maintained establishments and pupils educated by the LEA other than in maintained establishments. This includes both school based expenditure and all elements of central LEA expenditure except youth and community and capital expenditure from revenue (CERA).

[4] In 2002–03 the combined LEA and school based expenditure is calculated by Section 52 Outturn Table A line 51 net current expenditure (NCE) plus line 60 NCE (with adjustments to income to take account of School Standards Grant and Standards Fund scored here) plus lines 61 to 74 NCE.

[1] Pupil figures include all pre-primary pupils, including those under 5s funded by the LEA and being educated in private settings, pupils educated in maintained mainstream schools and other LEA maintained pupils. The pupil data for pupils attending maintained nursery, primary, secondary and special schools are taken from the DfES Annual Schools Census. Private voluntary and independent (PVI) under 5 pupil numbers are taken from the Early Years census but are only included for 1999–2000 onwards. Other LEA maintained pupils are also included in the pupil count and this includes all pupils attending schools not maintained by the authority for whom the authority is paying full tuition fees, or educated otherwise than in schools and pupil referral units under arrangements made by the authority drawn from the Form 8b submitted to the DfES. Also included as other LEA maintained pupils are all pupils attending pupil referral units who are not registered at a maintained mainstream school drawn from the DfES Annual Schools Census. All pupil numbers are adjusted to be on a financial year basis.

Note

Figures are rounded to the nearest 10 as reported by the LEA (as at 10 November 2004).

School Meals

Simon Hughes: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills what support his Department gave to National School Meals week; and if he will make a statement. [199055]

Mr. Stephen Twigg: We were not asked to support National School Meals Week this year. However, in past years we have provided messages of support, and in 2001, Jacqui Smith attended the official launch.

Schools (Newcastle)

Mr. Cousins: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills whether Building Schools for the Future investment in Newcastle-upon-Tyne depends upon the acceptance of a city academy proposal. [199032]

Mr. Miliband: It is an absolute requirement for Building Schools for the Future (BSF) proposals that local education authorities (LEAs) come forward with hard-edged proposals for how the significant investment we are making through BSF will raise standards in all secondary schools in the area. In doing that, we require all LEAs to give serious consideration to whether the establishment of an Academy would benefit one or more schools.

Schools Admission Policies

Mr. Brady: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills whether it remains his policy that secondary schools should be given no notification of the ranking awarded to the school by parents applying for a school place, as set out by the Minister for School Standards in the 8th Standing Committee on Delegated Legislation on 12 March 2003, column 15. [199087]

Mr. Miliband: Under co-ordinated admissions, individual admission authorities—LEAs and governing bodies—retain the right and duty to set and apply their own admission arrangements for their schools. Some admission authorities give priority in their school's oversubscription criteria to applicants who name the school as their first preference and for these schools this ranking is made available.

Mr. Willis: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills what plans he has to require *(a)* specialist schools, *(b)* voluntary aided schools, *(c)* city technology colleges, *(d)* academies and *(e)* foundation schools to accept (i) looked after children, (ii) permanently excluded children and (iii) children with statements of special educational needs as part of their overall admission policies; and if he will make a statement. [196943]

Mr. Miliband: All maintained schools and academies must have regard to the School Admissions Code of Practice. The code encourages all admission authorities to give top priority in admission arrangements to looked after children. LEAs and others may object to the independent Schools Adjudicator if they do not. So far all such cases referred have been upheld.

Permanently excluded children must be treated in the same way as all other applicants unless they have been twice excluded. In that case parental preference rights are reduced. In October 2004, we issued guidance on the exclusion of pupils from schools, including guidance on the admission and re-integration of excluded pupils.

Children whose statements of SEN name a particular school must be admitted to that school.

CTCs are not subject to the same provisions and codes. However, we want all CTCs to become academies and some are already doing so; one has already converted and a further five are expected to convert by September 2005 with others seriously considering conversion. We believe that this is the best route to ensuring CTCs come within the same admissions framework as academies and maintained schools.

Admission forums, which include representatives of all parties interested in admissions, have a duty to promote arrangements for looked after children, children with special educational needs, and excluded children. They must also monitor arrangements for all children who arrive outside the normal admissions round—with a view to developing protocols for the admission of such children. The Secretary of State is making a speech to new headteachers on 18 November, at which he will talk about managing behaviour, and also about the need to develop local protocols to ensure that all schools play an equal part in the admission of permanently excluded and other "hard to place" pupils. Following that, we shall issue guidance to forums on how to develop and reach agreement on such protocols.

LEAs must invite CTCs to participate in the forum and the Admissions Code of Practice encourages them to do so.

Science Courses

Dr. Iddon: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills if he will make a statement on the changes in the numbers of students taking up science courses at *(a)* university and *(b)* A level in the last 10 years; and what steps the Government are taking to increase the number of students studying science. [198931]

Dr. Howells: The Government's "Science and Innovation Investment Framework 2004–2014", published in July sets out very clearly the challenge we face in securing an increase in the number of students taking A levels and enrolling on undergraduate science courses. The Framework builds on and takes forward progress made in response to earlier reviews of this subject, most notably the review carried out by Sir Gareth Roberts in 2002 and published as "SET for Success". Compared with 10 years ago, the proportion of A level and undergraduate students taking science courses has decreased (5.8 per cent. between 1994 and 2004 for A level entries in England; 6.7 per cent. between 1992 and 2002 for undergraduates enrolled in higher education institutions in Great Britain). The Framework sets out a raft of measures to ensure that every stage of the education system, from primary schools to universities, can play its part in producing the excellent supply of highly skilled scientists and engineers which we need for the economy.

Scientists in Higher Education

Mr. Denham: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills what assessment he has made of the career paths open to scientists in higher education; and what plans he has to improve the career opportunities for scientists in higher education. [195635]

Dr. Howells: The Roberts' Review, SET for Success (2002) investigated in detail the supply of people with science, technology, engineering and mathematics skills including researchers. The Government are implementing the recommendations of this review, which includes: funding transferable skills training for Research Council-supported PhD students and postdoctoral researchers; increasing the minimum PhD stipend to £12,000 by 2005–06; raising the average for postdoctoral salaries by £4,000 between 2002 and 2005; and the development of the academic fellowship scheme, which guarantees permanent employment on successful completion. The recently formed Research Careers Committee, chaired by Sir Gareth Roberts will monitor trends, share and promote good practice and review the Concordat for research staff, originally signed in 1996.

Select Committee Recommendations

Mr. Allen: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills how many recommendations by parliamentary select committees have been adopted by his Department since June 2001. [197769]

Mr. Stephen Twigg: Select committee reports are given very careful consideration by the Department's Ministers. Since June 2001, several committees of both Houses have made recommendations on matters for which the Department for Education and Skills is responsible. Select committee reports and their responses are a matter of public record.

Sure Start

Tim Loughton: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills if he will make a statement on future funding of Sure Start. [198346]

Margaret Hodge: Increasing support for young children and families is a key priority for the Government. Sure Start funding was increased in the 2004 Budget and Spending review. The budget will rise by nearly 20 per cent. a year in real terms between 2005 and 2008.

Detailed plans will be published in a 10-year childcare strategy in December.

Tim Loughton: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills what arrangements are proposed for ring-fencing funding of Sure Start programmes through local authorities. [198347]

Margaret Hodge: As proposed in the "Every Child Matters" Green Paper, the Government are seeking to provide increased autonomy for local planning and decision-making. We are planning to merge the various child care funding streams into one allocation to give flexibility to help local authorities implement our child care agenda. Next year, we want to work with the 21 authorities who are piloting Local Area Agreements to see how a 'money for outcomes' funding system might work best.

Mr. Denis Murphy: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills how many children in the Wansbeck constituency registered with Sure Start in each of the last three years. [198692]

Margaret Hodge: There are two Sure Start local programmes whose catchment areas fall within the Wansbeck constituency. The following table shows the number of children registered with these Sure Start local programmes at the end of March in each of the last three years.

	Number of children registered with Sure Start local programmes
2002	655
2003	894
2004	1,712

There is one Mini Sure Start Local Programme in Wansbeck constituency, Newbiggin-by-the-Sea, which has 197 children under the age of four in its catchment area. The Department does not collect information on the number of children registered at or seen by Mini Sure Starts.

Northumberland local authority has opened 17 neighbourhood nurseries creating 579 new child care places. Of these, five projects delivering 179 new child care places are within the Wansbeck constituency. Neighbourhood nursery monitoring data is collected by local authority. Figures for September 2004 indicate that 819 children are currently registered with neighbourhood nurseries in Northumberland.

Teacher Numbers

Paul Farrelly: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills (1) how the number of *(a)* teachers and *(b)* teaching assistants has changed in Newcastle-under-Lyme since 1997; [198680]

(2) how many extra *(a)* nursery teachers, *(b)* nursery nurses and *(c)* nursery assistants have been employed in Newcastle-under-Lyme since 1997. [198681]

Mr. Miliband: The available information is provided in the table. Information is not collected on nursery nurses.

All schools: Full-time equivalent number of staff—Newcastle-under-Lyme parliamentary constituency

	Maintained nursery schools[1]	*All other maintained schools*[2]
January 1997		
Teachers	3	617
Teaching Assistants[3]	8	120
January 2004		
Teachers	2	632
Teaching Assistants[3]	4	186

[1] The number of nursery schools has reduced from three to two in the period shown.

[2] Includes maintained primary and secondary schools, pupil referral units and both maintained and non-maintained special schools.

[3] Includes nursery assistants, special needs support staff, minority ethnic support staff.

Source:

Annual School Census. The census includes teachers normally employed within schools in the survey week. Teachers absent for long periods are excluded, their replacements (provided they are qualified teachers) are included.

Teachers (Early Retirement)

Mr. Gill: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills how many teaching staff have taken early retirement in *(a)* primary and *(b)* secondary schools in each unitary authority in each year since 1997; and what the average figures for a local education authority in England were in each year. [198660]

Mr. Miliband: The following tables give the number of full-time and part-time regular teachers in maintained nursery and primary and secondary schools in each unitary local education authority awarded premature retirement benefits under the Teachers' Pensions Scheme in each year from 1997/98 to 2003/04 and the average number of these retirements for all local education authorities in England.

Nursery and primary schools

	1997/98	*1998/99*	*1999/2000*	*2000/01*	*2001/02*	*2002/03*	*2003/04*
Bath and NE Somerset	30	[1]—	10	10	[1]—	10	10
Blackburn and Darwen	[2]—	0	[1]—	10	[1]—	[1]—	10
Blackpool	[2]—	0	0	10	[1]—	10	10
Bournemouth	[2]—	[2]—	[1]—	0	[1]—	[1]—	10
Bracknell Forest	[2]—	0	[1]—	[2]—	[1]—	0	[1]—
Brighton and Hove	[2]—	10	10	[1]—	[1]—	10	0
City of Bristol	60	30	20	20	10	10	20
Darlington	[2]—	0	0	[1]—	[1]—	10	10
Derby	[2]—	0	0	0	0	0	0
East Riding of Yorkshire	40	0	0	0	10	[1]—	10
Halton	[2]—	0	[1]—	[1]—	10	10	10
Hartlepool	20	[1]—	[1]—	[1]—	[1]—	[1]—	10
Herefordshire	[2]—	0	0	10	10	10	10
Isle of Wight	10	[2]—	[1]—	[1]—	[1]—	[1]—	10
Isles of Scilly	[1]—	0	[1]—	0	0	0	0
City of Kingston-Upon-Hull	40	10	[1]—	10	10	10	20
Leicester	[2]—	0	0	0	0	0	0
Luton	[2]—	10	10	10	[2]—	10	[1]—
Medway	[2]—	0	10	10	10	10	10
Middlesbrough	20	10	[1]—	[1]—	10	10	[1]—
Milton Keynes	[1]—	10	10	10	10	[1]—	10
North East Lincolnshire	50	[1]—	[1]—	10	10	10	10
North Lincolnshire	20	0	[1]—	10	10	10	10
North Somerset	20	[1]—	[2]—	[2]—	[2]—	20	10
City of Nottingham	[2]—	0	10	10	10	20	20
City of Peterborough	[2]—	0	[1]—	10	[1]—	[1]—	10
Plymouth	[2]—	0	0	0	0	0	0
Poole	[2]—	[2]—	[1]—	0	[1]—	[1]—	[1]—
Portsmouth	[2]—	[1]—	[1]—	10	10	10	10
Reading	[2]—	0	10	10	[1]—	[1]—	0
Redcar and Cleveland	20	[2]—	10	10	10	10	10
Rutland	[2]—	[1]—	0	[1]—	[1]—	10	[2]—
Slough	[2]—	0	[1]—	[1]—	[2]—	[1]—	[1]—
South Gloucestershire	30	10	10	[1]—	20	10	10
Southampton	[1]—	20	10	20	10	10	10
Southend-on-Sea	[2]—	0	0	0	0	0	0
Stockton on Tees	20	[1]—	[2]—	[1]—	10	10	10
Stoke-on-Trent	[2]—	[2]—	10	20	10	10	20
Swindon	[2]—	[2]—	[2]—	10	10	[2]—	[1]—
Telford and Wrekin	[2]—	0	[1]—	10	10	[1]—	10
Thurrock	[2]—	0	0	10	[2]—	10	10
Torbay	[2]—	0	[2]—	[1]—	[1]—	[1]—	[2]—
Warrington	[2]—	0	10	10	10	10	10
West Berkshire	[2]—	0	[2]—	10	[2]—	[2]—	[2]—
Windsor and Maidenhead	[2]—	0	0	0	[1]—	[1]—	[1]—
Wokingham	[2]—	0	0	[1]—	[2]—	10	10
York	10	[1]—	0	[1]—	[1]—	10	20
Average for all LEAs	40	10	10	10	10	10	10

[1] Figures of less than 5 except those that are 0. Other figures are rounded to the nearest 10.

[2] Not applicable. LEA created 1 April 1998.

Source:

Database or Teachers' Records and Pensioner Statistical System

Secondary schools

	1997/98	*1998/99*	*1999/2000*	*2000/01*	*2001/02*	*2002/03*	*2003/04*
Bath and NE Somerset	40	[1]—	[1]—	[1]—	[1]—	10	20
Blackburn and Darwen	[2]—	0	[1]—	[1]—	[1]—	[1]—	[1]—
Blackpool	[2]—	0	0	[1]—	[1]—	[1]—	[1]—
Bournemouth	[2]—	10	10	[1]—	[1]—	10	10
Bracknell Forest	[2]—	0	0	[1]—	10	0	[1]—
Brighton and Hove	[2]—	[1]—	10	[1]—	10	[1]—	10
City of Bristol	70	20	50	30	10	40	20
Darlington	[2]—	0	0	0	[1]—	[1]—	10
Derby	[2]—	0	0	0	0	0	0
East Riding of Yorkshire	60	[1]—	0	[1]—	10	10	20
Halton	[2]—	0	[1]—	[1]—	[1]—	10	[1]—
Hartlepool	10	[1]—	[1]—	[1]—	10	10	[1]—
Herefordshire	[2]—	0	0	[1]—	10	10	10
Isle of Wight	30	[1]—	[1]—	10	10	10	10
Isles of Scilly	[1]—	0	0	[1]—	0	0	0
City of Kingston-Upon-Hull	40	[1]—	10	[1]—	30	10	10
Leicester	[2]—	0	0	0	0	0	0
Luton	[2]—	[2]—	10	[1]—	[1]—	[1]—	10
Medway	[2]—	0	[1]—	[1]—	10	10	20
Middlesbrough	20	10	10	10	10	10	10
Milton Keynes	[2]—	10	[1]—	10	10	[1]—	10
North East Lincolnshire	40	[1]—	[1]—	[1]—	[1]—	10	10
North Lincolnshire	30	10	10	10	[1]—	10	10
North Somerset	40	10	[1]—	[1]—	[1]—	10	10
City of Nottingham	[2]—	0	10	10	20	10	10
City of Peterborough	[2]—	0	[1]—	10	10	[1]—	10
Plymouth	[2]—	0	0	0	0	0	0
Poole	[2]—	10	[1]—	[1]—	10	0	10
Portsmouth	[2]—	[2]—	[2]—	[1]—	10	[1]—	[1]—
Reading	[2]—	0	10	[1]—	[1]—	[1]—	[1]—
Redcar and Cleveland	20	10	10	10	10	[1]—	10
Rutland	[2]—	[2]—	[1]—	0	[1]—	10	[1]—
Slough	[2]—	0	10	[1]—	[1]—	[1]—	[1]—
South Gloucestershire	30	10	[1]—	[1]—	[1]—	10	20
Southampton	[1]—	10	[1]—	10	[1]—	10	10
Southend-on-Sea	[2]—	0	0	0	0	0	0
Stockton on Tees	10	10	[2]—	10	[1]—	10	20
Stoke-on-Trent	[2]—	[1]—	[1]—	10	10	10	10
Swindon	[2]—	10	[1]—	20	10	10	10
Telford and Wrekin	[2]—	0	[1]—	[1]—	[1]—	10	10
Thurrock	[2]—	0	[1]—	[1]—	[1]—	10	10
Torbay	[2]—	0	[1]—	[1]—	10	10	10
Warrington	[2]—	0	10	[1]—	10	10	[1]—
West Berkshire	[2]—	0	10	[1]—	[1]—	[1]—	10
Windsor and Maidenhead	[2]—	0	0	[1]—	[1]—	[1]—	[1]—
Wokingham	[2]—	0	0	[1]—	[1]—	10	10
York	20	0	[1]—	10	10	[1]—	10
Average for all LEAs	40	10	10	10	10	10	20

[1] Figures of less than 5 except those that are 0. Other figures are rounded to the nearest 10.

[2] Not applicable, LEA created 1 April 1998.

Source:

Database or Teachers' Records and Pensioner Statistical System

Individual local education authority figures include those teachers who were employed in the authority in March of the preceding financial year who retired prematurely on the grounds of efficiency, redundancy or with actuarially reduced pension benefits. Teachers who retired on ill health grounds are excluded.

Changes in the Teachers' Pensions Scheme regulations that became effective from 1 September 1997 led to many more early retirements than normal in the 1997–98 financial year.

The average number of retirements is based on a total of 132 local education authorities in existence in 1997–98 and 150 for 1998–99 onwards.

Teachers' Pay

Paul Farrelly: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills (1) what steps the Government are taking to reduce the disparity in pay between teachers in schools and further education colleges; [198718]

(2) what steps the Government are taking to increase the pay of teachers in further education. [198719]

Mr. Miliband: Further education colleges are run by independent corporations established under the Further and Higher Education Act 1992. Individual further education colleges determine their own staff pay polices.

There are no national pay structures in place. Pay levels will therefore vary from institution to institution. Teachers in maintained schools are subject to national school teachers' pay and conditions.

On 16 September we announced that total funding for the post-16 learning and skills sector, excluding higher education, will rise to £11 billion by 2007–08. From this year, most colleges will have three year funding deals allowing them to plan on a longer term basis.

Universities

Mr. Wiggin: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills what research his Department has commissioned on the existing capacity of universities; and if he will make a statement. [197804]

Dr. Howells: The Department has not commissioned any research on the capacity of universities nor is this information available on a systematic or comprehensive basis. Information on the number of students expected to register with each university in the current academic year, and the actual number of students in previous years is available from the Higher Education Funding Council for England (HEFCE).

Information on funded expansion of students numbers in forthcoming academic year is also available from HEFCE. However, institutions also have the discretion to vary their total student population and mix of students without any change to HEFCE grant provided they remain within certain financial constraints.

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PARLIAMENTARY DEBATES

OFFICIAL REPORT

SIXTH SERIES **VOLUME 426**

SESSION 2003–2004

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Printed indexes to Hansard

The volume index is one of three printed indexes to Commons Hansard produced from the House of Commons Library's Parliamentary On-Line Indexing Service (POLIS). It contains references to material in the bound volume of Hansard. The other indexes produced are:

- The index to the daily parts of Hansard. This covers the same date range as the volume index but references may be different as a result of changes to the text and column numbering.
- The sessional index to Hansard. This contains references to material in the bound volumes for a whole session.

Indexes on the Parliamentary website

Daily part and volume indexes covering material from the beginning of the 1999/2000 session will also appear on the Parliamentary website at http://www.parliament.uk with links to the full text of Hansard.

SCOPE

The indexes include entries covering:

- The content of all material recorded in Hansard, including debates, procedural motions and questions.
- The names of all Members contributing to the Parliamentary business recorded in Hansard.
- The names of some types of Parliamentary business whenever they occur in Hansard. These are 'Ministerial statements', 'Business statements', 'Opposition days' and 'Estimates days'.

ARRANGEMENT

- All headings are in one word-by-word alphabetical sequence, with Members' contribution entries distinguished from other entries by italics.
- Where a Member contributes to Parliamentary business and is the subject of Parliamentary business there are separate contribution and subject entries, the subject entry coming first.
- Entries beginning 'Mac' and 'Mc' are sorted in one sequence as 'Mac'.
- 'St', when abbreviated for Saint, is filed as 'Saint'.
- Numbers are filed as if spelt out, e.g. '10 Downing Street' as if 'Ten Downing Street'.

HEADINGS

Choice of headings

- *Specificity*—Entries summarise the overall content of a debate or question as specifically as the vario POLIS thesauruses allow. For example, Education, Higher education, Universities or the name of particular university is used depending on the breadth of the item.
- *Name headings*—Specific entries are included for the names of people, places, institutions, organisatio committees, programmes, initiatives, publications and legislation when these constitute the overall subj of an item.
- *Organisations and subjects*—Organisation entries are preferred for material about the general performan administration and staffing of an organisation (for example, United Kingdom Passports Agen Standards). Subject entries are preferred for what organisations do as part of their duties (for examp Passports, Fees and charges).

Geographical coverage

- *Subject headings*—Subject headings are assumed to refer to the whole of England, Great Britain or United Kingdom unless otherwise stated.
- *Scotland, Northern Ireland and Wales*—Material relating to the whole of Scotland, Northern Ireland a Wales is indexed under these headings.
- *Places within the UK*—Material about specific towns, areas and institutions is entered under the name the specific town, area or institution.
- *Foreign countries*—Most material relating to foreign countries is collected under the name of that coun Some additional material may be found under the names of—groups of countries, areas within countr geographical features, place names associated with particular issues, politicians and heads of st international bodies, and institutions and companies operating in those countries.
- *EC/EU material*—General material about the European Communities and European institutions as bo is entered under 'European Communities' and 'EC institutions'. Organisational material about spe communities and institutions is entered under the name of the body, for example 'European Coal and S Community' or 'European Parliament'. Material about what the Communities and institutions are doin propose to do is entered under various subject headings beginning 'EC' such as 'EC environmental pol

Parliamentary material and business

- *Material about Parliament*—This is indexed under 'Parliament', the names of the two Houses, the 'Pa of Westminster' and parts of the Parliamentary estate (such as 'Portcullis House').
- *Committees*—Material about committees is indexed under 'Committees', types of committee (such as 'S committees') and the names of individual committees (such as 'Home Affairs Select Committee').
- *Parliamentary proceedings/procedures*—Material discussing these is indexed under the specific typ proceeding (such as 'Parliamentary questions' or 'Oral questions'), procedure (such as 'Calling of Memb or issue (such as 'Unparliamentary expressions').
- *Legislation*—Entries for Parliamentary proceedings on bills and statutory instruments are entered u their titles. Where the lead word of the bill or statutory instrument does not provide a full or clear indica of the subject there are additional subject entries when the bill or instrument is debated. For exam debates on the 'Child Support Pensions and Social Security Bill' have entries under 'Pensions' and 'S security benefits' as well as under the title of the Bill.
- *Members' names*—These are given in the form by which the Member prefers to be known.
- *Speaker and Chair*—Contributions by the Speaker and deputies are brought together under the hea 'Speaker and deputies'. Contributions from the chair during Committees of the Whole House are bro together under 'Chairman of Committee of the Whole House'. Significant rulings and statement opposed to routine comments) are indicated by the sub-heading 'Rulings and statements' in both cas

Guidance on headings

- *Cross references*—'See' references indicate all the material has been entered under another hea 'See also' references indicate that additional information may be found under another heading.
- *Concept thesaurus*—A copy of the subject thesaurus to POLIS, listing the concept entries used in the i is available on the Parliamentary website. A hard copy is available from the Head of the POLIS Unit, H of Commons Library, 1 Derby Gate, London, SW1A 2DG (020 7219 6456).

REFERENCES

- References in the indexes are to columns rather than pages.
- References to debates, but not questions, are accompanied by the date of the item.
- There are separate sequences in Hansard for the material taken on the floor of the House, Westminster Hall sittings, written statements and written questions:
    - References consisting of a number by itself indicate material taken on the floor of the House.
    - References ending in 'wh' indicate Westminster Hall sittings.
    - References ending in 'ws' indicate written statements.
    - References ending in 'w' indicate written questions.
- References under all headings except the names of Members contributing to Parliamentary business and the titles of legislation are listed in one numerical sequence irrespective of whether the material is taken on the floor of the House, is discussed at a Westminster Hall sitting, is a written statement or is a written question.
- References under the names of Members contributing to Parliamentary business and the titles of legislation are listed in numerical sequence under the following headings:
    - *Chamber Debates* (which includes interventions and points of order as well as significant contributions to debates);
    - *Westminster Hall Debates* (covering all debates held as part of the Westminster Hall sittings);
    - *Written Statements* (consisting of ministerial statements issued in writing); and
    - *Questions* (which includes all written, oral and urgent questions).

ABBREVIATIONS

The following abbreviations are used in connection with the progress of bills:

- 1R = First reading
- 2R = Second reading
- Com = Committee stage
- Rep = Report stage
- 3R = Third reading
- res = resolution
- amendt(s) = amendment(s)
- * = matter taken formally without debate or division
- (HL) = Bill starting in House of Lords
- (SP) = Bill in Scottish Parliament.

Parliamentary background

- The Parliamentary website at http://www.parliament.uk contains a range of information about Parliament and the full text of some Parliamentary papers and proceedings including Hansard.
- Information on current Parliamentary business is provided in the House of Commons Information Office *Weekly Information Bulletin*, available on the website and from The Stationery Office (020 7873 8499).
- Further information on Parliamentary proceedings and procedures is available from the House of Commons Information Office (020 7219 4272).

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